Decoration and Durability

Ornaments and their “appropriateness” from fashion and design to architecture

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the scales of design there has been an exploding interest in the ornament that seems to be fuelled by different kinds of digital technology and media from CAD to digital printing in both 2D and 3D. In architecture and industrial design, it is discussed as a “return of ornament” because the aesthetics of Modernism banned ornamentation as “inappropriate” to materiality, construction, and function. In this article we wish to renegotiate this highly normative notion of appropriateness with special regard to sustainable design where the “right” kind of ornaments can mediate attention to more aesthetic and cultural dimensions and open for stronger individual attachments to consumer goods that might prolong their lifespan. Adolf Loos, who led the fight against ornament in the early 20th century, based his critique on an assumption of relation between ornamentation and durability that makes ornaments appropriate or not. This leads us to suggest an array of parameters that point out different situations and meanings of ornamentation: Product categories, Durability of materials, Styles, Aesthetic experience, Emotional attachment and Historical references. We discuss these parameters in cases from fashion and tableware to architecture and link ornamentation to the aesthetics of durability.

Keywords: ornament, appropriateness, durability, digital print, fashion, textile, tableware, architecture, historical value

INTRODUCTION

Today, the question of ornament and its “appropriate” use has gained renewed topicality due to the crucial dissemination of digital technology, and the “return of ornament” is clear across scales from products to architecture. Digital technology is part of this evolution introducing flexible production and customized items entailing an artistic and manufacturing freedom, which is revolutionary relative to

the standards of mass production. Thus new perspectives are opening both to the industry and the independent designer. For this reason the possible potential of ornament to accelerate or decelerate consumption is raised along with a discussion of its ability to create meaning in people’s lives. Can ornamentation differentiate and determine the lifespan of products between the strong forces of shifting life style identities and the “Good Taste” of Minimalism?

We will look at contemporary use of ornament in different scales and contexts—from fashion textiles and interior objects to architecture. The lifespan of a building is different from that of a fashion dress or a plate, but with the digital era it seems like the concern of appropriateness in ornament is no longer an issue. We are so used to the copy/paste of visual elements on any surface. To insist on the topicality of “appropriateness” here is highly problematic because it belongs to the most normative elements of the modernist rhetoric. But this normativity reoccurs in the discourse on sustainability among designers and critics as a mix of environmental concern for accelerated consumption and old, modernist rage against fashion. Instead of avoiding the notion we try to split it from inside and show how many different parameters condition the effect or experience of ornaments. We can renegotiate this appropriateness even with Adolf Loos in discussing the lasting values in ornamental play with technology, materials and historical references.

This renegotiation of values and our survey throughout the scales of design cannot estimate the impact of ornaments on actual consumers in the shopping situation or the use phase, as this depends on personal experiences, education, market conditions and media influences. Economic, sociological and anthropological surveys would be needed to evaluate ornament as a value parameter and potential element to further more sustainable consumption.

Such surveys alone, though, without the aesthetic, cultural and historical understanding would not be able to explain the very different impacts of ornaments. French architectural historian Antoine Picon has made one of the most elaborated discussions of the return of ornament in architecture, and he turns this question around. Before we can address such issues as sustainability in architecture, we have to consider how architecture makes sense to us, and understand how ornaments articulate collective meanings.

[...] the return of ornament is both about the new type of subjectivity characteristic of the digital age and about the possible contribution of architecture to emerging collective meanings and values. Thus, through the ornamental dimension, we propose here a reflection on the political and social agency of the architectural discipline beyond its much-discussed contributions to issues such as sustainability. (Picon 2013, p. 12)

ORNAMENT

The terms ornament and decoration are often used interchangeably referring to the embellishment of architecture, the environment, objects and the human body - including fashion textiles. The use of ornament is as old as mankind and according to the design historian David Brett decoration is an expression of a deep human need for visual pleasure. He finds that decoration is:

... a disposition not unlike the faculty of language and counting, immanent in our nature without which we would not be complete human beings. Just as there are no societies that do not speak or count so there are none that do not decorate, embellish or make patterns. (Brett, 2005, p. 6)

Brett sees decoration and ornament as a family of practices devoted mainly to visual pleasure. This he defines as values including social recognition, perceptual satisfaction, psychological reward and erotic delight. All these values may be present in ornamented fashion fabrics, and one might add that the use of historical reference is part of the fashion game reflected both in the garment silhouettes and the textiles. Printed fashion textiles catch the "zeitgeist" like a seismograph and have functioned as a driver for fashion change since industrialization introduced this commodity to a mass market around 1840 (Forty, 1986). David Brett has pointed out that:

Printed cotton dress fabrics provided one of the principal means of social differentiation and 'particular' choice that were available

to women in the early nineteenth century; the means by which multiple and continually changing 'norms' could be identified. (Brett, 1992, p. 10)

Today we live in a globalized image economy where "fast fashion" and ornamented textiles more than ever play a part in expressing our identity and values. This practice is problematic if garments globally are discarded at accelerating speeds (Fletcher & Grose, 2012).

The very question of lifespan could be addressed with the help of Adolf Loos. Beyond his polemic association of ornament with crime he expressed an elaborated understanding of both style and ornamentation (Munch, 2005). His answer to an enquiry in 1924 on "Ornament and Education" opens a differentiation in his understanding of the appropriateness of ornamentation in regard to the durability of materials and the lifecycle of products.

Objects of practical use survive as long as the material they are made from survives, and their value in the modern world lies in their durability. When I abuse an object by decorating it, I shorten its lifespan through the demise of the style in which it is decorated. This waste of good material can be justified only by womanly caprice and ambition, for ornament in the service of woman will live forever. Objects of limited durability such as fabrics and wallpaper remain subject to fashion, and therefore to ornamentation. (Loos, 1998, p. 187)

Loos is well known for the rhetoric of ornamentation as misuse of material. But this argumentative link to the "life" of material leads surprisingly to the legitimacy of ornaments in the relatively shorter living products such as textiles and wallpapers. Leaving a more complex discussion of the gender aspect of this argument aside, we could use this differentiation in reconsidering ornamentation and product life cycles. In products made of less durable materials, in the service of fashion and of women, ornaments are appropriate and will "live forever."

If ornaments can be appropriate in products with a shorter lifespan, then it confirms our consideration whether "an appropriate ornament" could extend the life cycle of a product. This is of course the reversed argument to the dictum of Loos that ornaments can condemn products to a shorter life cycle than their materials allow—because they go out of fashion. Further on in the text, though, Loos acknowledges the value of classical ornaments in education, and this fits perfectly with his own practice, where discrete elements of classical adornment keep popping up in both exterior and interior design as here in the Knize Gentlemen's

Outfitter (Figure 1). This means that an ornament can be appropriate—even in this modernist “logic of minimalism” (Munch, 2003); even in the realm of male values.

Figure 1. Adolf Loos, Knize Gentlemens Outfitter, Vienna 1909-13

The appropriateness of ornaments is relatively determined by the durability of materials, the conventionally expected life cycle of the decorated item and the contemporary styles (fitting to modern, urban life according to Loos). The expected life cycle differs: from longstanding buildings and urban design over interior designs and functional objects (depending more on individual life style and fashion trends) to fast-moving consumer goods like garments with short durability. All these scales have of course different solutions to a sustainable consumption—transformation to new functions, second hand use, or recycling of disassembled materials (Papanek, 1995)—but here, our question is how ornaments can be appropriate on this “time scale”. And on the basis of this appropriateness we can go on to consider other values that could even prolong the lifespan. Here we will suggest and discuss additional parameters in the use of ornaments as contemporary styles as we go through the scales of knitwear and digital printed textiles, mix and match decoration on plates and ornamentation of building facades.

Parameters for ornamentation

Scales	Values
Product categories	Aesthetic experience
Durability of materials	Emotional attachment
Style - fashion and classics	Historical references

Market value or institutional values such as nomination for awards or requisition for museums are of course also crucial parameters when it comes to the actual durability of singular goods or biography of things, but this is beyond our discussion of ornamentation. In mass-production, decoration doesn’t necessarily represent extra costs of production, but our question is, which aesthetical and historical parameters of ornamentation can make us experience ornaments as added value for long term use. These parameters are in this perspective only the first layer of consideration for the design. But the complexity of this is huge in itself if we just look at the experience of value in time, i.e., of old and new products.

Values in time

Values of the past	Present-day values
Age value	Use value
Commemorative value	Newness value
Historical value	Relative artistic value

A first distinction can be made between Age Value, Commemorative Value and Historical Value. Why do we keep, cherish and even collect old stuff? Basically, the old items can be appreciated because we experience their age in the wear of materials and ornamental styles out of fashion, i.e. Age Value. Secondly they can bring individual memories as specific items of family heritage or in stylistic resemblance, i.e. Commemorative Value. Historical Value is the educational knowledge of styles and designers that makes the connoisseur worship items—and makes us receptive to storytelling of design icons made by star designers.

This interpretation of value is a modified version of Alois Riegl’s classification in “The Modern Cult of Monuments” where he also adds the Present-day Values. Use Value is again basic,

but plays a minor role in our discussion. Newness adds value in the acquisition of items that contradict the Age Value—as well as any wish for a prolonged lifespan—but it can be combined with Commemorative or Historical Values as we will see with the digital sampling in printed textiles. This is central to our discussion together with the third Present-Day value: It is again the most advanced and depending on education or aesthetic training, the Relative Art Value. Riegl rejected the idea of absolute, ahistorical values in art. Our appreciation of older items is always based on the aesthetic horizon of our own time, hence of present-day value. New correspondences keep popping up between old form universes and new formal experiments in design. Retro styles are clear examples of this exchange across time periods as we will see just below in the dialogue between old knitting patterns and early computer game figures in Arne & Carlos' *Space Invader*. This time-relation of artistic appreciation is reversible.

"If there is no such thing as eternal artistic value but only a relative, modern one, the artistic value of a monument is no longer commemorative, but a contemporary value instead" (Riegl, 1903, p. 623). In this quasi-hermeneutic understanding, all of these aspects of our aesthetic experience in fact form present values. They map a value structure of design seen in relation to time and history that also forms a background on which we may scrutinize the appropriateness of ornaments and understand the measures of lifespan on the time-scales of different products.

EXPERIENCE OF VALUE

Arne & Carlos is a Norwegian duo, famous for their design of the *Space Invader* sweater (Figure 2). The story behind it is rooted in early computer games

and Norwegian culture; the latter with references to both traditional patterns and a film from 1953 with a famous ski idol.

Arne & Carlos designed the first *Space Invader* sweater for an advertisement campaign for Norwegian cheese in 2007, and in 2008 they were asked to rework it for the fashion house Comme des Garçons' Christmas collection Crystal Journey (Arne & Carlos, 2012).

Becoming part of high fashion added another layer of value to their design and raised the price. But the success in fashion shops has not prevented Arne & Carlos from publishing their work also for hand knitting and to go on arranging knitting workshops with ordinary people of all age groups. One may ask if buying the *Space Invader* sweater at a high fashion shop or knitting it oneself may influence the lifespan of the garment? Will the user take better care of the hand knitted item and does the craft experience create a personal relation and emotional attachment that makes the owner value the product more? When we look at specific cases, there will be singular constellations of the parameters presented above. But the Comme de Garçon-version of this sweater has already become a design icon and will surely gain historical value whereas the hand-knitted one most likely will further personal emotional attachment. As pointed out by Hazel Clark:

Referencing local cultural practices has likewise been a manifestation of a contemporary search for authenticity. [...] The current fashion for hand-knitted items reminds us how fashion not only interfaces with cultural practices at the commercial level, but is itself a cultural practice, which has been acknowledged as emerging on a local level. (Clark, 2008, p. 434)

Figure 2. Arne & Carlos *Space Invader* sweater 2008

Later on, Clark describes our relationship to hand-made items including haute couture which she states are investments “emotionally as well as economically,” and goes on referring to Juliet Ash’s remarks on clothing as related to our feelings perhaps more than “any other designed artifacts” (Clark, 2008, p. 441).

Thus both sweaters might be appreciated for their experience value—either by shopping a fashion brand or the emotional value connected to hand-knitting—as well as the relative artistic value in the retro combination of the 50s and the 80s.

Such questions about user experience are explored in the ongoing research project *Local Wisdom*. Here Kate Fletcher takes a closer look at the users’ own stories and their relationship to garments seeking to identify parameters that establish a long lifespan. Among other things, Fletcher finds it important that the right partnership is established between wearer and garment since this makes the difference between using a piece time and again or throwing it away.

Consumerist fashion is all about what is right on trend, right for uniform mass-manufacture and ultimately right for the figures on a balance sheet. Lost in the mix are a garment’s finesse, fit, appropriateness; and the space to nurture individuality, skills and confidence in a wearer to recognise and revel in the ‘rightness’ of a particular piece. (Fletcher, 2012)

Fletcher here touches the question of appropriateness, but does not mention ornament. It also seems to pass unnoticed by participants interviewed by Fletcher who are wearing bold ornamented garments as in this story of a shared dress told by a mother and her three daughters (Figure 3).

Mother: “The people who lived next door gave me this dress from Antibes which they had worn there over many seasons and they said I

could have it for our holiday. A great success. And, I can’t think how many more years I wore it...

Daughter 1: “I am one of three sisters and we were very keen to wear this dress and have shared it since we were old enough to have a grown up figure... a period of about forty years...

Mother: “We say, ‘Who’s got the dress this year?’, when they want it. And in the beginning I had sole possession of it.”

Daughter 2: “Well yeah, because we were too young to wear it.”

Mother: “Well, yes but it soon came the time...

Daughter 2: “And now there’s another generation coming up, our children, who have got their eye on that dress.” (Fletcher, 2012)

This case is thought provoking and points to the complexity of unfolding a product experience of ornament in the context of everyday life. Looking at the ornament of this dress—bold dots in two bright colours on a white ground—shows us an archetype of a geometric pattern that in different scales and colours has more or less been en vogue “for ever.” Indeed appropriate for a summer dress in a simple cut transcending fleeting shifts in fashion.

It is impossible to make a general conclusion from such an individual case, but it is a strong inspiration to consider how the biography of things, individual memories and styles from design history are intertwined to form a complex background for the experience of product values (Attfield, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Margolin, 2002). Fashion designers cannot repeat the success of this singular case with THE appropriate ornament because the special acquisition of this dress is part of the story, but the experiments with

Figure 3. Local Wisdom Shared Dress. Photo by Sean Michael

Figure 4. Dolce & Gabbana AW 2008/09

historical ornaments can be part of this complexity and must be considered for their appropriateness in this perspective. Digitally printed fashion textiles can both be lessons in classic patterns of fashion history and in aesthetic experience of ornaments through cutting, mixing and zooming in on elements.

RECYCLING CLASSICAL PATTERNS

So strong is the bond between history and decoration, that in the practice of the latter we cannot, if we would, wholly shake off the influence of past times over what we do at present. (Morris, 1877, p. 4)

Throughout his career, William Morris was inspired by the history of textiles and as it appears in many contemporary fashion collections and books on textile patterns, “recycling” of ornaments is still a common practice (Meller & Elffers, 1991; Nakamura, 2010). With the digital era, starting in the textile industry with software in the 1960s, the creative sampling of old and new ornaments became faster and easier. The introduction of large format digital printers around 2000 made it possible to print one of a kind as well as short runs. This constant development of software and hardware has revolutionized the production of high fashion fabrics (Riisberg, 2006).

In the AW 2008/09 collection, Italian fashion duo Dolce & Gabbana demonstrate how the classical paisley pattern once again can be updated (Figure 4). Dolce & Gabbana draw on a strong tradition of Paisley motifs, first introduced in Europe during the late eighteenth century on imported hand woven Kashmir shawls—a luxury commodity. With the invention of the jacquard loom in 1801 this ornamental style was quickly copied and elaborated to new expressions. By the 1840s the small town Paisley in Scotland had specialized in weaving shawls and piece goods in this style, which became known as Paisleys (Harris, 1993). The motif also appeared on printed fabrics and stayed in fashion without interruption for almost a hundred years. Today it is considered a classic ornament in the vocabulary of textiles.

In contrast to this rather respectful continuation of a tradition, we find the outrageous collage prints by the Brazilian and English fashion duo Basso & Brooke. One may see their designs in line with the avant-garde movement, pop art and post-modernism. The style of Basso & Brooke can be described as eclectic, since ornaments from numerous historic periods and cultures are sampled into stunning collages often including computer manipulated photographic images. Their textile designs show indeed the freedom of artistic expression offered by computer design and digital print technology.

Basso, who is in charge of the print designs, has a background in graphic design. Whether or not he is conscious of the many references to the history of textile ornament is an open question, but this is in fact what is so intriguing. The ornamented textile we will look closer at is made into a jacket and dress (Figure 5).

At first it is hard to distinguish the two parts of the ensemble that seem to merge in a total visual cacophony attracting all our attention. Yet it is possible to find an overarching reference for the composition because all patterns belong to the geometric family of designs. The fabric is a collage of at least 16 different repeat patterns, but does not display in itself any repeat - a clear sign of digital print technology. The oversized hounds-tooth pattern in black and white jumps to the eye because of the contrast, the placement and relative large amount of it on the front of the dress. This pattern has a long history starting as woven cloth in wool—we have fragments dating from the third century AD from North Jutland (Jenkins, 2003)—but the pattern is also known in many other cultures, and the hounds-tooth or pied-de-poule, as it is called in French, has for a long time been a fashion classic. As early as 1929, Coco Chanel was photographed wearing

a pied-de-poule jacket, and during her career she used the pattern in many collections. Dior was also fond of pied-de-poule, which is part of the packaging for the eau de toilette *Miss Dior*. Jacqueline Kennedy wore a hounds-tooth suit during the presidential campaign in 1959-1960, and in 1991 Jean Paul Gaultier added new layers of referential meaning to the pattern in a bodysuit covering the woman from top to toe including gloves, shoes, glasses, a handbag and cigarette holder. References to the hounds-tooth pattern in fashion are endless, so when Basso and Brooke are incorporating it in this digital print collage, it is a strong signifier.

In the Basso & Brooke design we find more imitations of woven checks and textures represented along with strong graphic stripe patterns. Three interlaced patterns are recognizable, often seen in Islamic art and architecture, and a blurred photographic motif resampling crystalline precious stone in monochrome beige and grey tones decorate the neckline and upper part of the dress. The overall impression is fragments of patterns without any logic order arranged in one composition covering the whole ensemble—like an abstract painting.

This type of pattern belongs to a category called Novelty prints that normally have a short

Figure 5. Basso & Brooke, A/W 2012

lifespan because of their loud expression (Meller & Elffers, 1991). Nevertheless, the pattern might stand a chance of a longer lifespan because of its many layers of references, and since there is probably a limited number of the ensemble, it might turn into a collector's item. The sampled use of historical references enhances the aesthetic experience, but it might demand a degree of education to get the historical and relative artistic value.

MIX AND MATCH, MONUMENTS AND MEMORY

Leaving fashion textiles and entering a field of durable consumer goods such as porcelain dinner plates should make a huge difference in the appropriateness of ornaments. There is a very strong and unbroken tradition of decoration here that the modernists seem to have fought against in vain: A factory such as Rosenthal in Germany has pure white china designed by Walter Gropius, Tapio Wirkkala and Jasper Morrison, but also strongly decorated ones by Bjørn Wiinblad and Versace. Ornaments can be very free and abstract on dinner sets, but there are crucial cultural constraints: dinner sets are expensive and can be used through generations as heritage. In this field there should certainly be a lesson to learn in the enduring lifespan of ornaments, but also the commercial problem of securing continuous demand. Here the classical parameter of appropriateness dictates that colours and ornaments should not interfere too much visually with the impression of the food. The blue-painted white

china is conventionally acknowledged for this visual quality.

However, looking at a recent set from Royal Copenhagen—*Elements* designed by Louise Campbell—shows striking links to fashion strategy. The slogan presenting this set as a new member of the family at Royal Copenhagen is “Mix and match.” It is the direct equation of the dinner room sideboard with the wardrobe closet. The plate quotes the classical ornaments of the *Blue Fluted*, the traditional core product of Royal Copenhagen, in fragments. The concept is that the new *Elements* can be used in combination with inherited or collected parts of the older sets and potentially bring new life into them as well. This concept was already introduced with Royal Copenhagen's *Mega* in 2000, designed by Karen Kjeldgård-Larsen as a digital zooming in on the brand mark heritage, but *Elements* introduces new colours and can be toned down with *White Fluted* as a more discrete set. This active use of ornaments in linking different sets and opening possibilities of combination seems certainly to be a productive parameter of appropriateness. The launching of new colours opens for both more personalized laying the table and color trends in fashion and interior design. In this case, we can study the very delicate balance between giving new life to older consumer goods and creating demands by links to color trends. This balance can both determine and prolong the lifespan.

There can be a very strong historicity in the ornaments of dinner sets. Classical ornaments like *Blue Fluted* are comparable to classical textile patterns. By heritage, collecting and new acquisitions the household service will itself turn into a very complex mix of memories and historical references. The home of the Danish designer Bjørn Wiinblad is of course an extreme example of this. But it reminds us also of how the designer links to history; here, the strong tradition of blue and white china. As a collector of both old China, Delft Faience, etc., Wiinblad writes himself into this history by adding his own blue and white ceramics (Munch, 2012). Below, the illustration of interior design from his home shows the most complex mix of values: age, memory, and historical knowledge as well as relative artistic value, Wiinblad's own appreciation, and potential inspiration of this collection (Figure 7).

ORNAMENTATION—OR “JUST DECORATION”

The fiercest critique of ornaments always seemed to arise in the field of architecture. It is therefore astonishing to see the strong return of ornament among leading architects in the last decade.

Figure 6. Royal Copenhagen, plate Midnight Blue from the *Elements* set designed by Louise Campbell, 2008.

Figure 7. Corner in the dining room in the home of Bjørn Wiinblad, Kongens Lyngby, Denmark—in this photo, only the tiled ceiling is his own design.

Especially the Swiss architects Herzog et de Meuron have been in front with both digitally engraved claddings and structural patterns. As we saw with Adolf Loos, though, the critical investigation of ornament did raise complex understandings of it in relation to style, materials and construction around 1900. Farshid Moussavi reaffirms these ideas in her foreword to a Harvard survey on the function of ornament in modern and contemporary architecture. With a classical rhetorical gesture of the modernist discourse she qualifies the appropriateness of ornaments in contrast to just decoration: "Decoration is contingent and produces 'communication' and resemblance. Ornament is necessary and produces affects and resonance" (Moussavi & Kubo, 2006, p. 8). As before, this normative distinction is a critique of decorations hiding the "real" architecture and speaking in other languages or medias foreign to the art of building. A more appropriate ornamentation grows out of the structural dynamics and materials of the building. Contemporary architects don't stick to this modernist dogma of revealing the inner structure of the building, but the facades show experiments with the means, materials and technologies related to or reflecting

architecture.

Longstanding buildings are of course vulnerable to "fast readings" of decorative statements that people soon grow tired of. On the other hand it is intolerable only to raise mute boxes without any dialogue with other parts of culture. We should be able to identify with them if they shall be a part of our lives. Moussavi takes a position contrary to the postmodernist use of signs, symbols and recognizable motives, because she finds them too closely bound to a cultural situation in time:

Inherited symbols remain dependent on a particular cultural moment or context and cannot survive changing conditions. If architecture is to remain convergent with culture, it needs to build mechanisms by which culture can constantly produce new images and concepts rather than recycle existing ones. (Moussavi & Kubo, 2006, p. 7)

Her alternative is in fact a step back in the aesthetic ideology of modernism. Ornaments should be more abstract, more formal and sensual than intellectually "readable" and be more "media-specific", i.e. reflecting the architectural materials and technologies. And they should be new and original without recycling! But Moussavi does point out important aesthetic parameters for architectural ornaments to be more complex and durable.

A very elaborate case from her Harvard survey is the double-layered glass facade of a Leicester department store by Foreign Office Architects, 2007 (Figure 8).

It is a classical ornament of vegetative twigs growing with seamless repeat over the whole facade and identical on the two layers. The double layer has the functional and aesthetic effect that you can more easily look out through the pattern from inside the first floor than look into the building from the street. The distance between the layers and the oblique view from street level combine with a mirror glazing of the outer pattern and the mirror-effect of the glass itself to make it practically opaque. The visual effect will be a very complex layering of patterns and reflections. Probably this decoration also has an important functional role in filtering the incoming sunlight. Aesthetically this ornamentation seems to produce a rich and lasting experience, appropriate both to a commercial brand space and to the urban space of the street. The ornamental patterns refer historically to printed textile ornaments, but does so in more complex reflection playing with glass, light, and space as architectural means of expression.

Figure 8. Foreign Office Architects, The John Lewis Department Store, Leicester, UK, 2007

We turn to a case in residential architecture, the *Grundfos Dormitory* by Cebra Architects built at the northern harbour in Aarhus, Denmark, that is transformed to a prestigious residential zone these years (Figure 9). The ornamentation is made in the prefabricated concrete slabs where one part of the elements has arbitrarily folding lines from tarpaulins thrown into the moulds. This effect is known in Denmark from the *DR Concert Hall* by Jean Nouvel and goes by the nickname “elephant skin”. The other part is made by tiny, shiny, round stainless steel plates moulded into black coloured concrete as pixels in a seemingly digitally composed pattern. The latter pattern is formed like vegetal twigs growing on the building, but seen together with the arbitrarily folding “skin,”

the two patterns seem more to reflect digital versus analogue technologies in architecture. The composition of windows in the facade is very conventional with no interference from the decoration, and it doesn’t “reveal” anything of the spaces or private life inside the building. Perhaps the effect of the ornaments is “read” too fast to last appropriately in the time-scale of architecture, but it does on the other hand—as our photos indicate—call for both the distanced “reading” and a richer close-up experience.

This case shows that even these media-specific ornamental forms rapidly begin to refer to other contemporary cases. In her manifest, Moussavi can

Figure 9. Façade elements, Grundfos-kollegiet, CEBRA architects, the North Harbour, Aarhus, Denmark, 2010-12

insist on originality and reject the “recycling” of elements, but this is only possible because of the 20th century ban on ornaments in architecture. Earlier periods have had strong ornamental languages in architecture and new ones rapidly take form.

In his book *Ornament: The politics of architecture and creativity*, Antoine Picon reassesses the role of ornament in architecture and sees the 20th century as the exception. Previously, what made a building architecture and not just construction was its ornamentation. “To this day, architecture has remained distinct from engineering and more generally from construction, like an irreducible supplement. What if the best way to think about this uncanny situation were to imagine it as a form of ornament?” (Picon, 2013, p. 55). And even the unadorned, modernist architecture might best be understood as a kind of ornament in itself.

THE DOUBLE NATURE OF ORNAMENTS

The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer has some valuable considerations on ornaments in his *Truth and Method* from 1960 that he links to the role of architecture among the other arts. Contrary to the modernist rhetoric, he insists on the notion of the decorative in an expanded sense to explain the very nature of architecture as art form. A building can both be experienced as a work of art in itself and be an aesthetic framing of the functions and the life in and around it. And this is basically the principle of the decorative:

This is true of the whole span of the decorative, from municipal architecture to the individual ornament. A building should certainly be the solution to an artistic problem and thus attract the viewer’s wonder and admiration. At the same time it cannot be an end in itself. It tries to fit into this way of life by providing ornament, a background of mood, or framework. (Gadamer, 2006, p. 151)

This understanding of decoration includes all the scales we have investigated, and it adds an important parameter to the appropriateness of ornaments: They should both be able to attract attention and stand back as frame or background—a point of view also made by Gombrich in his seminal book *The Sense of Order* (Gombrich, 1994, p. 62). This balance changes of course through the different scales. Design has itself this double character of the decorative of both being able to attract aesthetic attention and just being part of an action. An unadorned object or building is often to be seen as an ornament in itself when its visual and plastic composition

attracts special attention. The ornament is the aesthetic reflection and expression of this double nature—playing and investigating form and material, surface and depth, viewpoints and scales, time and history.

We have unfolded a range of parameters relating to ornamentation that opens questions of “the aesthetics of durability.” Whether goods or buildings will actually live longer in the consumption cycle if they are adorned “appropriately” to these parameters is of course dependent on many other conditions. We discuss the array of parameters that belongs to the designer’s or architect’s aesthetic latitude and professional responsibility (Riisberg, 2006; Leerberg et al., 2010). And our mapping of these parameters according to materials, product categories, scales of time and size and experience value can help us to understand the return of ornament in contemporary architecture and to discuss, generate and criticize new decorative ornamentation.

NOTES

1. The construction of female and male patterns of action is to be regarded as a special issue in both the writings and the architecture of Loos (Colomina, 1992). In 1924 he moved to Paris, and this might have affected his considerations of both fashion and female adornment. See his 1928 sketch for a house to Josephine Baker with stripes on the whole facade.
2. Riegl has the category Deliberate Commemorative Value pointing at “intentional monuments” for specific commemoration. His theory written in 1903 was delivered as a tool for the policy of architectural preservation and doesn’t address individual memory (Riegl, 1998/1903). There are many more recent theories on product experience and value that could be considered more “appropriate” scientifically, but re-readings of Riegl have in the last decades proved very productive to architects (Arrhenius, 2012).
3. It is beyond the scope of this paper to take these considerations into a discussion on taste from a sociological perspective, but this Rieglian scheme could perhaps be a supplement to the mapping of the field of articulations.
4. *Space Invaders* is a video game designed by Tomohiro Nishikado and released in 1978 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space_Invaders)

5. In an interview, Miuccia Prada tells us how historical textiles and prints are an important part of the fabric research. Prada owns a large collection of old swatch books dating back to the 1800s and early 1900s (Betts, 2007).
6. This is a classical rhetorical topos, where ornament is regarded as meaningful in its detachment to the compositional whole in contrast to “just decoration” that is undetached. Especially Louis Sullivan expressed the idea of ornament as an organic, “living” part of the whole and its time in his 1892 essay “Ornament in Architecture” (Harries, 2000, p. 109).
7. The functional effect is in fact close to the mezzanine floor bay windows of Loos’ gentleman outfitters shop at Michaelerplatz, Vienna 1909-11, where costumers could look out into the square, but by-passers only experience the facade. That the experience at nighttime is rather different and changes throughout daytime and seasons in both cases only adds to the complexity and a lasting effect (Munch, 2005).
8. The DR Concert Hall is in fact a parallel to this, because the outer walls of that building are a “blue screen” for digital projections (Munch, 2009).

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