

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Wittgenstein, Loos, and the Critique of Ornament

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Adolf Loos is one of the few figures that Wittgenstein explicitly named as an influence on his thought. Loos's influence has been debated in the context of determining Wittgenstein's relation to modernism, as well as in attempts to come to terms with his work as an architect. This paper looks in a different direction, examining a remark in which Wittgenstein responded to Heidegger's notorious pronouncement that 'the Nothing noths' by reference to Loos's critique of ornamentation. Wittgenstein draws a parallel between the requirement to start philosophy with an inarticulate sound and the need, in certain cultural periods, to highlight the borders of tablecloths using lace. Paying heed to Wittgenstein's remark sheds further light on a Loosian influence at work in his thinking about modern civilization, both in his well-known 'Lectures on Aesthetics' and in the earlier notes from his 1930 lectures at Cambridge.

Keywords: Ludwig Wittgenstein; Adolf Loos; Martin Heidegger; modernism

I. Introduction

Adolf Loos is one of the few thinkers that Wittgenstein explicitly mentioned as an influence on his work (CV, p. 16).¹ The extent to which Loos's work influenced Wittgenstein has been the subject of debate primarily among scholars aiming to understand Wittgenstein's concern

¹ Works by Wittgenstein are abbreviated as follows: *Culture and Value*, 2nd ed., ed. Georg Henrik von Wright and Alois Pichler, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), abbreviated as CV; *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), abbreviated as PI; *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), abbreviated as LC; *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), abbreviated as PR; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1995), abbreviated as TLP; *Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1933; From the Notes of G. E. Moore*, ed. David G. Stern, Brian Rogers, and Gabriel Citron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), abbreviated as M; *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970), abbreviated as Z; Ludwig Wittgenstein and Friedrich Waismann, *The Voices of Wittgenstein: The Vienna Circle*, ed. Gordon Baker, trans. Gordon Baker et al. (London: Routledge, 2003), abbreviated as VW; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 1, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), abbreviated as RPP.

with modernism,² but also those addressing his seemingly modernist work in architecture.³ Scholarship studying Wittgenstein's relation to Loos has stemmed primarily from a single direct remark, made by Wittgenstein in 1931, acknowledging his debt to Loos (alongside a handful of other influences).⁴ Wittgenstein says:

I think there is some truth in my idea that I am really only reproductive in my thinking. I think I have never invented a line of thinking but that it was always provided for me by someone else & I have done no more than passionately take it up for my work of clarification. That is how Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa have influenced me [...]. What I invent are new comparisons. (CV, p. 16)

If we take Wittgenstein's word for it, then we should expect him to have 'reproduced' some element of Loos's work (either as a designer or as a cultural critic) in his philosophical 'work of clarification'. But what form should such 'reproduction' take? In 1939, Wittgenstein employed a different metaphor to describe the relation outlined above, that of cultivation: 'My originality (if that is the right word) is, I believe, an originality that belongs to the soil, not the seed. (Perhaps I have no seed of my own.) Sow a seed in my soil, & it will grow differently than it would in any other soil' (CV, p. 42). Wittgenstein here clarifies that, when claiming that he has been influenced by someone, he means that he has somehow 'cultivated', in a transformative manner, a line of their thinking. This implies a certain degree of difficulty in recognizing the use to which such influences are put in Wittgenstein's work.

Relying primarily on the mention of his name, the scholarly debate over Loos's influence on Wittgenstein has tended to focus on straightforward ways in which Wittgenstein simply *adopted* some of Loos's attitudes. Wittgenstein has been seen as following Loos in rejecting non-functional ornamentation in his everyday life.⁵ Illustrative examples are his refusal to buy ornamented furniture and designing his own instead,⁶ or his use of chemical beakers for drinking tea.⁷ Loos's influence has also been seen at work in Wittgenstein's discussions of aesthetics, for example in his choice of examples concerning the design of doors, clothes,

² See Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973); Peter Galison, 'Aufbau/Bauhaus: Logical Positivism and Architectural Modernism', *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 709–52; Ben Ware, *Dialectic of the Ladder: Wittgenstein, the 'Tractatus' and Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Allan Janik, 'Wittgenstein, Loos, and Critical Modernism: Style and Idea in Architecture and Philosophy', in *Wittgenstein and Modernism*, ed. Michael LeMahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 71–88.

³ See Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*; Colin St John Wilson, *Architectural Reflections: Studies in the Philosophy and Practice of Architecture* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1992), 55–64; David Olson Pook, 'Working on Oneself: Wittgenstein's Architecture, Ethics, and Aesthetics', *symplokē* 2 (1994): 49–52, 53–54; David Macarthur, 'Working on Oneself in Philosophy and Architecture: A Perfectionist Reading of the Wittgenstein House', *Architectural Theory Review* 19 (2014): 124–40; John Hyman, 'The Urn and the Chamber Pot', in *Wittgenstein and the Creativity of Language*, ed. Sebastian Sunday Grève and Jakub Mächa (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 198–215, hereafter abbreviated as UCP; August Sarnitz, 'Wittgenstein's Architectural Idiosyncrasy', *Architecture Philosophy* 2 (2017): 141–68.

⁴ UCP (pp. 205–6) also lists a number of passages in which Wittgenstein seems to allude to Loos.

⁵ See Brian McGuinness, 'Asceticism and Ornament', in *Approaches to Wittgenstein: Collected Papers* (London: Routledge, 2002), 17–26.

⁶ Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 56. Loos did not think that ornamentation is defined by reference to whether or not it is part of the construction; see Adolf Loos, *Neues Bauen in der Welt* (Vienna: Schroll, 1931), 19.

⁷ Quoted in Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 79.

and haircuts.⁸ Finally, the extent to which Wittgenstein incorporated elements of Loos's modernist approach to design into his own architectural work has been the subject of ongoing debate.⁹

By contrast to previous scholarship, this paper examines the only passage in which Wittgenstein directly referred to Loos's critique of ornamentation. After briefly summarizing Loos's critique of ornament, this paper will discuss how the remarks on Loos appear in the context of Wittgenstein's commentary on foundationalism, disquietude, and its therapy, in response to a series of statements made by Heidegger (VW, pp. 69–77). In light of these remarks, I will specifically identify Loos's influence as pertaining to Wittgenstein's approach to Heidegger's statements, and to his conception of philosophy's relation to culture.

II. Loos against Ornament

As scholarship has already highlighted, although Wittgenstein most certainly knew of Loos's work, it is difficult to firmly establish the extent of Wittgenstein's knowledge (UCP, p. 205).¹⁰ Wittgenstein met Loos on various occasions between 1914 and 1919, though the content of their discussions remains unknown.¹¹ The scattered articles Loos published in various newspapers and magazines were republished in two anthologies in 1921 and 1931.¹² Gordon Baker estimated that Wittgenstein's comments on Loos were dictated to Waismann in December 1932 (VW, p. xvi),¹³ so it may be that Wittgenstein was responding to parts of the 1931 collection, on which I will focus. Loos is not a systematic thinker, and his writings respond to particular cultural phenomena, from clothing and haircuts to furniture and architecture. Wittgenstein's closely related discussions of similar examples in the 'Lectures on Aesthetics' may indicate that he knew of Loos's concern with clothing and hairstyles (UCP, pp. 205–6). But, when directly referring to him, it was Loos's overall critique of ornamentation that Wittgenstein had in mind, and it is this broader aspect of Loos's thought that I now briefly turn to.

Among various other essays, *Trotzdem* included Loos's 'Ornament and Crime', which is his most famous (and misunderstood) sustained polemic against ornament. The underlying presupposition of the essay is a narrative of continual progress, according to which 'the

⁸ See UCP, 205–6. Loos wrote a number of critical texts on the design of clothing and hairstyles; see Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, ed. Adolf Opel, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998), chaps. 5, 13–17, and 34.

⁹ See Benedetto Gravagnuolo, *Adolf Loos, Theory and Works* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), 82; Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life; Young Ludwig 1889–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 48; Paul Wijdeveld, 'Paul Engelmann und die "Kundmannngasse"', in *Wittgenstein*, vol. 1, *Biographie, Philosophie, Praxis*, exhibition catalogue (Vienna: Wiener Secession, 1989), 198–212; Otto Kapfinger, 'Kein Haus der Moderne', in *Wittgenstein*, exhibition catalogue, 214–51; Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture* (New Haven, CA: Yale University Press, 1993), 131–38; Olson Pook, 'Working on Oneself'; Roger Paden, *Mysticism and Architecture: Wittgenstein and the Meanings of the Palais Stonborough* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Nana Last, *Wittgenstein's House: Language, Space, and Architecture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 84–86; Christopher Long, review of *Wittgenstein's House: Language, Space, and Architecture*, by Nana Last, *Estetika* 45 (2009): 230–33; Macarthur, 'Working on Oneself'; Sarnitz, 'Wittgenstein's Architectural Idiosyncrasy'.

¹⁰ Sarnitz, 'Wittgenstein's Architectural Idiosyncrasy', 142–43.

¹¹ Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein, with a Memoir*, ed. B. McGuinness, trans. L. Furtmüller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 127.

¹² Adolf Loos, 'Ins Leere Gesprochen', in *Sämtliche Schriften in Zwei Bänden* (Vienna: Herold, 1962), 8–209; 'Trotzdem', in *Sämtliche Schriften*, 212–444.

¹³ It is possible they are from 1933–34; see Mathieu Marion, 'Wittgenstein on Heidegger and Cosmic Emotions', in *Mind, Values, and Metaphysics: Philosophical Essays in Honor of Kevin Mulligan*, ed. Anne Reboul, vol. 1 (Cham: Springer, 2014), 439.

evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects'.¹⁴ Loos thus defined ornamentation historically, always in terms of a relation an object bears to some particular cultural context in which it is used. In his own *modern* cultural context, Loos approached ornamentation in terms of the non-functional embellishment of objects of everyday utility. Everyday utilitarian objects fulfil a function to which the specific vestigial forms of ornamentation Loos had in mind no longer (within a modern culture) contribute anything. Championing craftsmanship, Loos fervently opposed 'applied art' (as practised, for example, in Hoffmann's *Wiener Werkstätte*), in which he saw artists – and architects who think of themselves as artists – as meddling in craftsmen's work, needlessly imposing ornamentation onto everyday objects.¹⁵ A thoughtless imitation of parts of earlier cultures in which it has been functional, such vestigial ornamentation no longer has a function to fulfil within the sphere of the design of objects for everyday use.¹⁶ It is, to use an image Wittgenstein employs, like an 'idle wheel' not attached to a mechanism, giving us only the illusion of functionality (VW, p. 73; see PI, §§ 270–71).

Modernist functionalists, such as those associated with the Bauhaus movement, would later radicalize Loos's position, aspiring to remove *all* ornamental aesthetic attributes from functional elements, prioritizing the latter and thus downgrading or even rejecting the former. Unlike his followers, Loos explained that he did not stand against ornament *tout court*, but only against what I have called 'vestigial' ornamentation. Loos emphasized that he did not advocate a revolutionary elimination of ornamentation imposed from above:¹⁷

I maintained that the ornamentation of objects of practical use would disappear with the development of mankind [...] which was as natural a process as the atrophy of vowels in final syllables in popular speech. By that I did not mean [...] that ornament should be systematically and consistently eliminated. What I did mean was that where it had disappeared as a necessary consequence of human development, it could not be restored.¹⁸

Loos admitted that certain forms of 'classical ornament'¹⁹ remain functional even in a modern culture otherwise characterized by its aversion to needless ornament. The two are shown not to contradict each other once the elimination of ornament is not a desideratum; rather, they are both unavoidable results of progress. Hence, Loos did not decry ornamentation in all its different shapes and forms, as some modernist functionalists did. His criticism was directed instead against the insistence on retaining vestigial ornamentation within a culture in which it no longer has any use. Loos thus criticized his contemporaries' unwillingness to let go of a wheel that had once been connected to a functioning machine but is now idling.

¹⁴ Adolf Loos, 'Ornament and Crime', in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), 20.

¹⁵ See Loos, *Ornament and Crime*, chaps. 32–33. On Wittgenstein's appreciation of good craftsmanship, see Olson Pook, 'Working on Oneself', 72–73; compare with Loos's remarks on plumbing, *Ornament and Crime*, chap. 12. On the influence of Loos's conception of craftsmanship on Wittgenstein, see Janik, 'Wittgenstein, Loos, and Critical Modernism'.

¹⁶ See Janik, 'Wittgenstein, Loos, and Critical Modernism', 73–75, on Loos's critique of imitative culture in his contemporary Vienna. Wittgenstein made some similar observations about the prevalence of thoughtless imitation in certain periods of architecture; Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Lectures on Aesthetics', in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics and Religious Belief* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 7.

¹⁷ See also Loos, 'Ornament and Crime', 24.

¹⁸ Loos, *Ornament and Crime*, 187.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

Loos's critique of vestigial ornamentation is intimately connected with his strict demarcation between works of high art and utilitarian objects. Karl Kraus famously described this demarcation as follows:

Adolf Loos and I [...] have done nothing more than show that there is a distinction between an urn and a chamber pot and that it is this distinction above all that provides culture with elbow room. The others, those who fail to make this distinction, are divided into those who use the urn as a chamber pot and those who use the chamber pot as an urn.²⁰

According to Loos and Kraus, ornamentation criminally blurs the boundary between urns and chamber pots. In some cultures, this blurring may be a response to some particular need to use the chamber pot as an urn or vice versa. Yet, in modern culture, in Loos's conception, setting boundaries becomes a desideratum for those, like himself and Kraus, who see a difference between urns and chamber pots. In modern culture, art takes over some of the functions fulfilled in older cultures by ornamentation.²¹ This viewpoint allowed Loos to claim an architecture without vestigial ornamentation.²² Loos even held that architecture should no longer be considered an art.²³ According to him, modern architects should model themselves after craftsmen, their role within a broader culture being public and social instead of that of the genius artist expressing a private vision.²⁴ As I will show in Section IV, Loos's view of the transition from an older to a modern culture was 'reproduced', further developed, and applied to philosophy by Wittgenstein.

III. The Nothing, Disquietude, and Ornamentation

Apart from trying to trace Loos's influence, most attempts to deal with Wittgenstein's approach to architecture have endeavoured to make sense of the following enigmatic remark:²⁵ 'Work on philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one's own conception. On how one sees things' (CV, p. 24). For Wittgenstein, working on oneself and thus seeing the world in the right perspective has a connection to the ceasing of a set of feelings felt by those 'who suffer from philosophical problems'.²⁶ In this context, Wittgenstein's various writings often refer to such states as angst, mental discomfort, and disquiet.²⁷ This theme usually concerns the beginning of philosophical investigations.²⁸ Philosophical questions begin from a kind of linguistic confusion accompanied by disquiet or angst. Angst is, of course, a central topic not only for Kierkegaard, whom Wittgenstein had read quite early on, but also for Heidegger, especially in the 1929 'What Is Metaphysics?' from which the quotations Wittgenstein discusses are

²⁰ Quoted in UCP, pp. 200–201.

²¹ See Loos, 'Ornament and Crime', 24.

²² Adolf Loos, *On Architecture*, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2002).

²³ With two exceptions: the design of monuments and tombs; see Loos, *On Architecture*. Wittgenstein is commonly interpreted as viewing architecture as an art form, and thus as being in disagreement with Loos on this point; see UCP, pp. 205–6; Macarthur, 'Working on Oneself', 128–29.

²⁴ Loos, *Ornament and Crime*, 185–86. See also Janik, 'Wittgenstein, Loos, and Critical Modernism', 81.

²⁵ For example, Olson Pook, 'Working on Oneself'; Macarthur, 'Working on Oneself'.

²⁶ Gordon Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*, ed. Katherine J. Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 182.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 182–83.

²⁸ See Wolfgang Kienzler, 'Will There Soon Be Skilful Philosophers?: Wittgenstein on Himself, His Work, and the State of Civilization in 1930', in *Wittgenstein in the 1930s: Between the 'Tractatus' and the 'Investigations'*, ed. Davis Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 101–2.

taken.²⁹ It is precisely this type of angst that Wittgenstein refers to when he remarks in 1929 that:

I can readily think what Heidegger means by Being and Dread [Angst]. Man has the impulse to run up against the limits of language. Think, for example, of the astonishment that anything exists.³⁰ This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, and there is also no answer to it. Everything which we feel like saying can, a priori, only be nonsense. Nevertheless, we do run up against the limits of language.³¹

The angst or disquiet that arises by such running up against limits can lead to a false start in philosophy, for example by giving rise to the attempt to answer the question 'why is there something rather than nothing?' Wittgenstein sees that insisting on going down this path will only serve to amplify disquiet rather than quell it. He draws an analogy with someone so accustomed to hunger that every time they have a stomach ache they resort to eating so as to quell their disturbance. Similarly, some forms of disquiet can be quelled by relating a proposition back to some more fundamental proposition (VW, p. 75). Having grown so accustomed, philosophers try this remedy in cases where it is inapplicable. Wittgenstein's therapy consists in showing the inapplicability of the supposed remedy. According to Wittgenstein, disquiet arises from being unable to see the world from the correct perspective (for example, Z §§ 81, 447). Wittgenstein's conception of work in philosophy is thus a therapeutic transformation of 'how one sees things' that allows disquiet to cease by realigning one's perspective.

While later discussing some specific sentences from Heidegger's 'What is Metaphysics?', Wittgenstein remarks that disquiet can result from being in the grip of a certain picture.³² His proposed therapy for disquiet 'resembles psychoanalysis' (VW, p. 69), in that one needs to discover what the picture is and to realize that it was the picture that led to the disquiet.³³ The therapeutic process recommended by Wittgenstein involves overcoming the grip of such pictures.

One example of therapy discussed by Wittgenstein is the following:

It may seem strange to us what trivial means, as it were, serve to free us from profound philosophical disquiets. It is strange that nothing more is needed in a particular case, e.g. than replacing one word by two different ones, the word 'is' by the two signs '=' and '∃', in order to get rid of the tormenting question 'To what extent is a rose identical with red?' (VW, p. 71)

In other words, Wittgenstein noted that the simple differentiation between two uses of 'is', one that concerns identity and another that concerns predication, can serve to cure certain forms of grammatical confusion. Similar considerations apply to 'the profound and [...] mysterious question of what the proposition "A = A" means'. We are relieved from disquiet once a notation 'in which this proposition cannot be formulated' is introduced (VW, p. 71). Wittgenstein's example closely resembles Carnap's application of logical analysis to Heidegger's sentences.³⁴

²⁹ Marion ('Wittgenstein on Heidegger', 440–42, 450–51) convincingly argued that this is the only work by Heidegger Wittgenstein had read.

³⁰ In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein relates this to 'the mystical' (TLP 6.44); see also Marion, 'Wittgenstein on Heidegger', 448.

³¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'On Heidegger on Being and Dread', in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Michael Murray (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 80.

³² On the relation of modernism to the critique of Heidegger by Wittgenstein and Carnap, see also Andreas Vrahimis, 'Modernism and the Vienna Circle's Critique of Heidegger', *Critical Quarterly* 54 (2012): 61–83.

³³ See Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method*, 205–22.

³⁴ See Marion, 'Wittgenstein on Heidegger', 452–53.

Yet, by contrast to Carnap, the sentence Wittgenstein analysed is *not* Heidegger's. Of course, Wittgenstein clearly thought that making this distinction between identity and predication can be useful in some cases – as he noted, the example serves to show 'how profound a confusion is when it is embodied in our language' (VW, p. 71). But Wittgenstein's analysis of the use of 'is' (in the sentence about roses and redness) *is only a preamble* to the analysis of Heidegger's sentences. Even though it could easily be misunderstood as such, he was not recommending this specific method of therapy for Heidegger's pronouncements.

Instead, Wittgenstein discusses several other examples of pictures explicitly connected to Heidegger's statements, including the following:

We would like to begin ph(ilosophy) with something which should be the foundation of everything to follow, of all the sciences, and yet at the same time it is not supposed to be a 'foundation' simply in the sense of the bottom course of bricks in a house. Here we are confusing two things in the way that can happen if we describe the foundation of a building sometimes as the bottom course of bricks and sometimes as solidity. (VW, p. 75)

Wittgenstein points out an ambiguity about which of the two metaphors is at work in Heidegger's statements. As Wittgenstein highlights, this is because architectural foundations can be seen in two different ways, namely as something positioned in a particular way (like a bottom course of bricks) or as that which provides solidity to what is built on top of it (VW, p. 75). We are thus faced with two confusedly intertwined pictures. For the sake of clarity, in what follows, I refer to the former as a 'starting point' and the latter as a 'foundation'.

As Wittgenstein explains, the dilemma involved in the confused metaphor further derails the philosopher in the grip of such a picture. He goes on to show that there are various such confusions to be diagnosed as being at work behind different types of philosophical attempts that unwittingly rely on the architectural metaphor of a foundation. One of them is the following:

This dilemma gives rise to the need to begin philosophy with, so to speak, an inarticulate sound. And a proposition such as 'The nothing noths' is in a certain sense a substitute for this sort of inarticulate sound. The proposition 'I have knowingly known something about my knowledge' is also such an inarticulate sound. (VW, p. 75)³⁵

The temptation to begin philosophy with an 'inarticulate sound' is one that reappears in various prominent places in Wittgenstein's work (PI, § 261; PR, § 68; RPP, § 721).³⁶ This temptation is a misguided, angst-ridden effort to run up against the limits of language, to try to somehow vocalize something that cannot otherwise be said. In *Philosophical Remarks*, Wittgenstein describes the attempt to begin philosophy with an inarticulate sound as an effort to 'begin before the beginning' (PR, § 68), that is, to set some pre- or proto-linguistic *foundation* for subsequent philosophical inquiry. Later, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein concedes that 'such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game' (PI, § 261), that is, once it is put to some specific use, for example, as we shall see in Wittgenstein's analysis of Heidegger's statements, to highlight some *starting point*.

³⁵ The latter proposition is quoted from Hans Driesch, and Wittgenstein repeatedly refers to it in similar discussions of beginning philosophy with an inarticulate sound (PR, § 68; RPP, § 721).

³⁶ See also Nuno Venturinha, 'Agrammaticality', in *New Essays on Frege: Between Science and Literature*, ed. Gisela Bengtsson, Simo Sätelä, and Alois Pichler (Cham: Springer, 2018), 162–63.

In these two instances, there seems to be a tension between Wittgenstein's remarks: in the former case, he implies that inarticulate sounds (qua foundations) are functionless, while in the latter case he admits that they could have some function (for example, qua starting points), though it is unclear exactly what this function is unless one looks at their use in a language game. The tension between these two approaches may be explained by Wittgenstein's question concerning Heidegger's statements: which function do such statements fulfil, (i) that of a foundation, or (ii) that of a starting point? (VW, pp. 75–77)³⁷ As I will demonstrate in the following, Wittgenstein thought that, if the statements aim to function as foundations (i), then they necessarily fail to accomplish this aim, since they illegitimately attempt to 'begin before the beginning' (or, to use Wittgenstein's analogy, to quell the stomach ache by eating). If the statements only aim at highlighting some starting point (ii), then they are merely historically contingent stylistic desiderata, like other vestigial ornaments, rendered obsolete in modern civilization.

As outlined above, Wittgenstein thinks that philosophers often begin their enterprise in the midst of grammatical confusion, which could find an expression in an inarticulate sound or in a statement such as Heidegger's. But it is unclear whether Heidegger's statement is intended to fulfil the function (i) of a foundation or (ii) of a starting point (VW, pp. 75–77).

Let us first consider the possibility that Heidegger's statements are meant to serve as foundations (i). Thus understood, Heidegger's effort to 'run up against the limits of language' is an incorrect response to disquiet. As a result of linguistic confusion, Heidegger is misled towards positing some supposedly firm foundation from which subsequent knowledge receives its solidity. Like the person accustomed to quelling their stomach ache by eating, Heidegger uses a technique that might work in other cases, namely tracing propositions back to previous propositions. If such prior propositions were demonstrable, this method might be appropriate. But in this case, as in the case of eating to cure a peptic ulcer, the method is inapplicable, since it is impossible to demonstrate the correctness of Heidegger's 'foundational' proposition. Thus, using this method will ultimately fail to remedy the relevant disquiet.

Wittgenstein shows that the correct way to dispel disquiet is instead the therapeutic one that he proposes: disquiet ceases once we articulate the linguistic spell that has given rise to it. In Wittgenstein's view, Heidegger's discussion of the Nothing unconsciously employs the metaphor of 'an island of being which is being washed by an infinite ocean of the nothing', into which all that is thrown 'will be dissolved in its water and annihilated'. This metaphor, confusedly understood as (i), is then thought to somehow be 'prior' to all 'subsequent knowledge'. For example, as Wittgenstein noted, Heidegger argued that the Nothing is prior to logical negation, and so is somehow supposed (in accordance with (i)) to play the role of a foundation for logical negation (VW, p. 71).

Wittgenstein points out that there is no way of demonstrating 'that this simile is actually the correct one', as might be expected if it is supposed to play the role of a foundation (i). Indeed, as Wittgenstein shows, the desire to *demonstrate* the metaphor can only come about so long as we are under its spell, namely so long as the metaphor itself remains somehow 'unconscious' or unarticulated. Insofar as it remains unarticulated, the metaphor will fail to quell our disquietude. It will add an 'idle wheel to the mechanisms of our language', one that, as long as it is not clear that it is idling, creates the illusion of functionality (VW, p. 71).

In order to fully articulate the metaphor, Wittgenstein thinks that we have to look to its function, or what he would later describe as its use in a language game. In seeking a

³⁷ In his 1930 discussion of the Hilbert–Frege controversy, Wittgenstein (PR, § 318) made a similar distinction between axioms conceived as either rules or starting positions in a game.

clarification of the metaphor's function, Wittgenstein states that 'I am ready to go along with anything' (VW, p. 71), even the acknowledgement that the metaphor has no function and is not attached to any other part of the mechanism of our language.³⁸ As clarified by our inability to demonstrate its correctness, the function of the metaphor cannot be that of being a foundation that offers 'solidity' to subsequent propositions (i). If it is intended as (i), then the metaphor has no function.

A second option remains. If Heidegger's statement is not meant to function as a foundation (i), it may still be intended to fulfil the function of a starting point (ii). As such, its use is 'an architectural one' (PI, § 217) – it 'merely calls attention to the beginning' (VW, p. 77). Understood in this way, Heidegger's statement can be compared to 'one of the polite formulae of the sort exchanged before discussing business', such as writing down 'With God!' at the start of a business ledger (VW, p. 75). This use of the metaphor has little to do with providing solidity to what follows after it; it is nothing more than 'a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing' (PI, § 217). Thus understood, it is something akin to a historically and culturally contingent stylistic desideratum, a vestigial ornament:³⁹

The need to preface our own enquiries with such propositions or slogans is in a sense really a requirement of style. In certain periods houses and chests of drawers are bounded with a cornice. Calling attention to boundedness is something desirable. We finish off posts of all kinds with knobs even where this is not demanded by functional considerations. A post must not simply stop. At other times there is a need not to emphasize, but rather artificially to conceal boundedness. An object must fade into its surroundings. In this style the edge of a tablecloth was given lace borders, which were originally nothing more than scallops cut into the cloth, for we did not want it to be sharply bounded. But at other times we give a border its own colour in order to call attention to it. And that is just how it is with this argument: it is a desideratum, e.g., to trace back to a creator the coming into being of the universe even though this in a certain sense explains nothing and merely calls attention to the beginning. (This last reflection is of the type of those made by the architect Loos and is certainly influenced by him.) (VW, pp. 75, 77)

A significant shift has occurred here. Wittgenstein's discussion of (i) is largely ahistorical, as it invokes the necessary and universal impossibility of beginning philosophy 'before the beginning'. By contrast, Wittgenstein's discussion of (ii) involves a historical component. This is where Loos's influence most clearly enters into the picture. The above quote is unique in being the only instance in which Wittgenstein not only directly refers to Loos but also attributes to him some particular strand of thought that he took up 'in his work of clarification' (CV, p. 16). Examining Wittgenstein's claim sheds light on the debate over Loos's influence on Wittgenstein.⁴⁰ In the vein of Loos, the above remark discusses ornamentation as defined by its connections to 'functional considerations' within the context of some particular historical setting.

³⁸ In the *Philosophical Investigations* (PI, § 270), Wittgenstein makes a similar remark concerning a knob that looked as if it were connected to a machine, but when turned is discovered to be a mere ornament.

³⁹ For Loos (as for Kraus), the question of style is an ethical question; see UCP, 200–201.

⁴⁰ The debate has not taken this remark into consideration. One exception is Richter, who briefly discusses Loos in his attempt to make sense of Wittgenstein's remarks on Heidegger; see Duncan Richter, 'Did Wittgenstein Disagree with Heidegger?', *Review of Contemporary Philosophy* 6 (2007): 158–85. The passage has also been discussed in other works debating Wittgenstein's attitude towards Heidegger, for example Peter M. S. Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', *Philosophical Quarterly* 53 (2003): 18–19; Vrahimis, 'Modernism'; Marion, 'Wittgenstein on Heidegger'.

How is it that Wittgenstein ‘reproduces’ Loos’s ideas? As we have seen, Loos’s critique is directed against *vestigial* ornamentation, that is, it is relevant to those cultures in which such ornamentation no longer has a function to fulfil. Thus, it is possible for certain forms of ornamentation to serve a function within some periods and in a given culture, for example by pointing out or concealing the bounds of individual objects. The type of ornament that points to boundaries might not at first appear to be functional; for example, the lace surrounding of the tablecloth does not make it a more useful tablecloth than one that has no ornamentation outlining its boundaries. Nonetheless, this type of ornament could indeed play a specific functional role in a culture for which the fading of objects’ boundaries is somehow a practical requirement (not merely a stylistic desideratum). Without looking at the wider culture in which it is used, it is impossible to tell whether the ornament in question is functional or not.

Analogously, Wittgenstein thinks that, in certain periods in the history of philosophy, pointing to some initial ground was a stylistic custom. An example Wittgenstein mentions is that of tracing the origin of the universe back to its creator (VW, p. 77). Though Wittgenstein does not directly refer to it, consider, for example, the cosmological argument and its function in medieval scholasticism. However unlikely it was that any medieval thinker sincerely doubted God’s existence, scholastic philosophers customarily placed the question of God’s existence at the beginning of all other questioning. Though this may vary depending on the cultural context, such exercises can end up being mere stylistic desiderata. In some cases, they may be expected to function as a foundation (i) on which subsequent arguments will rely. But, in other cases, their function is not primarily explanatory – they are not first and foremost attempts to prove the existence of God to the unbeliever. Prior to proving anything, the cosmological argument may simply function as a starting point (ii), a reminder that all subsequent enquiries rest on some common and unquestioned ground. Before offering argumentative proof, its function is simply to trace the existence of the universe back to a creator. Thus, before proceeding to examine the cosmological argument itself, any medieval sceptic would first be reminded of the existence of God (which they most probably would not otherwise doubt).

Wittgenstein can be read as saying that such a reminder could not function in this manner if it were offered in the context of a culture in which atheism was the norm (analogously to theism in the Middle Ages). In that context, ornamentally highlighting a starting point by tracing the origin of the universe back to its creator could not function as a reminder of anything. Instead, it could only function as an argument, thus enhancing disquiet rather than quelling it. Whereas such theological reminders would have fulfilled a specific role in one culture, they might be completely redundant in another.

Thus, understood in terms of either (i) or (ii), Heidegger’s statements are without function. If they are understood as (i), they must fail insofar as they are (necessarily and universally) indemonstrable. If they are understood in terms of (ii), then they are, in Loos’s sense, vestigial ornaments, left over from an earlier philosophical culture in which they may have fulfilled some function different to (i). In modern civilization, they are rendered into an ‘idle wheel’ no longer fulfilling any function. In ‘reproducing it’, Wittgenstein thus took the thought much further than Loos ever could. As I will show in the remainder of this paper, this view is best understood in connection with other ways in which Wittgenstein ‘reproduced’ Loos’s thinking in his understanding of philosophy’s function in modern civilization.

IV. Culture and Its ‘Deterioration’

The reference to Loos’s thoughts about the inextricable relation between ornamentation and the culture in which it is produced links to broader themes in Wittgenstein. In the ‘Lectures on Aesthetics’ from 1938, Wittgenstein discusses the idea that aesthetic statements are

expressions of cultured taste, meaningful in the context of some period of a given culture.⁴¹ Like many of his Germanophone contemporaries, including Loos,⁴² Wittgenstein seems to have accepted a distinction between culture (*Kultur* – which he also sometimes refers to as ‘high culture’, and which is prominently connected to the arts) and civilization.⁴³ Wittgenstein thought that, in the Western world, nineteenth-century high culture had, broadly speaking, given way to civilization (CV, pp. 8–9). One of his examples of this shift away from a high culture, and its relation to cultured taste, involves architecture’s relation to what he calls the ‘deterioration’ of a culture:

You can get a picture of what you may call a very high culture, [...] and what happens when this deteriorates. A picture of what happens in Architecture when you get imitations, or when thousands of people are interested in the minutest details. [...] A period in which everything is fixed and extraordinary care is lavished on certain details, and a period in which everything is copied and nothing is thought about. [...] A period when a dining-room chair is in the drawing-room and no one knows where this came from or that people had once given enormous thought in order to know how to design it. (LC, I:22)

Wittgenstein’s conception of cultural periods parallels his 1932 account of Loos’s critique of decoration outlined above. In both cases, Wittgenstein talks of the appropriateness of certain aesthetic responses as contextually bound. The distinction between dining room and drawing room chairs is reminiscent of Kraus’s remarks on urns and chamber pots (UCP, pp. 200–201). Like Kraus and Loos, Wittgenstein saw that in some cultural epochs such distinctions have been central, while in others they are lost. Apart from architecture, Wittgenstein discusses the same examples as those prominently and extensively discussed by Loos, such as changes in clothing or hairdressing styles (for example, LC, I:13–22, 34; see also UCP, pp. 205–6). Wittgenstein points out that the clothing, hairdressing, and architecture preferred by his contemporaries are ‘in a way simpler than [...] in the 18th century’ (LC, I:34). The notion of simplicity here obviously runs parallel with Loos’s critique of ornamentation, and even has functionalist overtones. The simplicity in question is a product of a kind of adaptation to particular functions; for example, in the case of clothes, their simplicity is ‘adapted to certain violent activities, such as bicycling, walking, etc.’ (LC, I:34). In the recently published notes Moore recorded from Wittgenstein’s 1930 lectures, the same Loosian concern with different cultural periods is mentioned in connection to architecture and philosophy.⁴⁴ Here, Wittgenstein discusses the transition from an older to a ‘modern’ way of doing philosophy (M, 5:1). The modern way, to which it is difficult for him to get accustomed, involves a certain type of technical skill that replaces the genius required for the work of the ‘great philosophers’ of the past. As noted above, this is exactly the type of change that Loos had championed in relation to modern architecture, in which the genius of previous eras is replaced by technical skilfulness and craftsmanship. In Loos’s view, this transition further entailed that architecture should no longer be thought of as an art but rather as a kind of technical profession. Wittgenstein describes the transition to a modern technical conception of philosophy as a change in ‘the style of thinking’. The methodical skilfulness of modern philosophy does away with

⁴¹ On Wittgenstein’s conception of cultured taste, see Severin Schroeder, ‘“Too Ridiculous for Words”: Wittgenstein on Scientific Aesthetics’, in *Wittgenstein and Scientism*, ed. Jonathan Beale and Ian James Kidd (London: Routledge, 2017), 116–32.

⁴² See Janet Stewart, *Fashioning Vienna: Adolf Loos’s Cultural Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 60–61.

⁴³ See Yuval Lurie, ‘Wittgenstein on Culture and Civilization’, *Inquiry* 32 (1989): 375–97.

⁴⁴ These notes have not yet been taken into consideration by the scholarship on Wittgenstein’s relation to Loos.

what Wittgenstein calls the ‘nimbus of philosophy’ (M, 5:2).⁴⁵ The metaphor Wittgenstein employs here is rather obscure: in the history of art, the term ‘nimbus’ is used to refer to a disc of light around a saint’s head (similar to a halo).⁴⁶ Precisely what Wittgenstein has in mind here can be grasped by looking at his further discussion, as recorded by Moore’s notes. Wittgenstein talks of this metaphorical ‘nimbus’ in connection to the possibility of ‘expressing personality’ that he associates with the work of great philosophers (M, 5:2). To illustrate the point, Wittgenstein draws a parallel with the difference between architecture and engineering:

Compare Architecture – what might happen to it.

Architect has a nimbus compared to Engineer.

To some degree a house can be determined by calculation: but calculation leaves a certain margin, which architect fills in by sense of beauty etc..

In case of bicycle or locomotive there is hardly any room for personal freedom: & so there might be with a house.

In that case there would be no more architects. (M, 5:2)

Here, the thought seems to be that modern architecture, like modern philosophy, is called to cast away some of its potential for expressing something personal (its ‘nimbus’), preferring instead a method that requires skill rather than genius. In the details, Wittgenstein and Loos disagreed about the status of architecture as an art. Loos thought that modern architecture is no longer an art but continues to exist as a type of craftsmanship. Wittgenstein, in turn, radicalises Loos’s outlook, claiming that architecture simply *disappears* when replaced by calculation and technical skilfulness. Again, Wittgenstein invokes the Loosian theme of appropriateness to a period within a culture when he talks of the technical conception of philosophy and architecture as characteristic of an age: ‘General tendency of this age is to take away possibilities of expression: which is characteristic of age without a culture’ (M, 5:2).

At first glance, Wittgenstein’s pessimistic stance on the topic seems perhaps more akin to Spengler’s, and opposed to Loos’s optimistic view of cultural progress.⁴⁷ Wittgenstein’s claim that ‘the spirit of this civilization [...] is a spirit that is alien and uncongenial to the author’ (CV, p. 8) has sometimes been taken to imply that he was lamenting the loss of a previous high culture and its ‘deterioration’ to modern civilization.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Wittgenstein went on to clarify that, though he felt alien in that ‘age without culture’ (M, 5:2; comp. CV, pp. 8–9), he was not making a value-judgement about it, as ‘the disappearance of the arts does not justify a disparaging judgement on a whole segment of humanity’ (CV, p. 8). This is further substantiated in the 1930 lectures, where Wittgenstein explains that, though personal expression is lost when it is replaced by methodical technical work, ‘there’s no reason to be sorry for this’

⁴⁵ See also Kienzler, ‘Will There Soon Be Skilful Philosophers?’, 99.

⁴⁶ Kienzler points to another discussion of ‘nimbus’ by Wittgenstein, in which he compares an age in which drinking is ritualised with one in which it is ‘just getting wasted’ (quoted in Kienzler, ‘Will There Soon Be Skilful Philosophers?’, 99). Kienzler claims that this is evidence that Wittgenstein is here, like Spengler, ‘critical of modern developments’ (ibid.). But it is not clear why Wittgenstein would think that ritualised drinking is somehow better than ‘getting wasted’.

⁴⁷ Kienzler notes that Spengler’s influence on these remarks is obvious (for example, in the reference to ‘greatness’), but takes no notice of the connection to Loos; Kienzler, ‘Will There Soon Be Skilful Philosophers?’, 98–99. Spengler’s name is mentioned on Wittgenstein’s list of influences (CV, p. 16) after Loos’s, possibly signifying that he was a later influence on his thought (see Janik, ‘Wittgenstein, Loos, and Critical Modernism’, 72). Spengler was also an influence on Loos; see ibid., 82.

⁴⁸ See Lurie, ‘Wittgenstein on Culture and Civilization’.

(M, 5:2).⁴⁹ And Wittgenstein attempts to elucidate his talk of cultural 'deterioration' by noting that

the word may be used without any affective element; you use it to describe a particular kind of thing that happened. It was more like using a technical term – possibly, though not at all necessarily, with a derogatory element in it. You may say in protest, when I talk of deterioration: 'But this was very good.' I say: 'All right. But this wasn't what I was talking about. I used it to describe a particular kind of development.' (LC, I:34)

The above partly elucidates Wittgenstein's 1932 remarks on Loos and Heidegger. By contrast to his all-too-brief and possibly ambiguous discussion of ornamentation in 1932, Wittgenstein here expressly states that his attempt to grasp the relation between a specific cultural phenomenon and the cultural period in which it arises is not aimed at some negative evaluation of the period. He is not triumphantly embracing the new technical conception of philosophy (as, for example, the Vienna Circle, to which he was at the time responding, did).⁵⁰ Nor is he lamenting the loss of philosophy's 'nimbus', or pretending that one can go back to it.

The 'nimbus' is a kind of ornament, preferred by some cultures and not by others. In some cultural periods it is appropriate to think of philosophy as having a 'nimbus', that is, as centrally involving personal expression, like other forms of cultural production. Similarly, in certain cultural periods, it is a stylistic desideratum to begin philosophy, like other activities, with reminders pointing to some starting point. In modern civilization, these are out of place – they are rendered into nothing more than vestigial ornaments. An architect who fills in the margin left by calculation through the use of ornamentation for the aim of beautifying a design is, in Wittgenstein's view, equally out of place in an age opposed to personal expression as is a philosopher aspiring to 'greatness' in an age of technical skilfulness. They may have fulfilled some function in a high culture of a previous age, but in modern civilization they are out of place, having no function to fulfil. This is at least one of the ways in which Wittgenstein, who would conceive of his own sensibility as belonging to a prior age, 'reproduced' a line of thinking that he had encountered in Adolf Loos's work.

V. Conclusion

This paper has analysed Wittgenstein's explanation of the parallel between Loos's critique of decoration and his own critical stance towards metaphysics. We have seen Wittgenstein as influenced by Loos in connecting his overall conception of what he calls a 'modern' way of doing philosophy to a kind of critique of vestigial ornamentation also at work in modern architecture.

Wittgenstein scholars have disputed over precisely what Wittgenstein is recommending as a stance towards Heidegger's statements in the remarks discussed above.⁵¹ Wittgenstein has been read as proposing that metaphysics, like functionless ornamentation, is simply to be

⁴⁹ Kienzler shows that Wittgenstein was not talking of his own approach under the banner of 'modern philosophy' but rather describing a general attitude predominant in his age (perhaps best exemplified by the Vienna Circle). Kienzler argues that Wittgenstein 'is careful to stress that he is just giving a description, and not expressing any (anti-modernist) judgments' ('Will There Soon Be Skilful Philosophers?', 99).

⁵⁰ Kienzler ('Will There Soon Be Skilful Philosophers?', 99–101) shows that, at around that time, Wittgenstein had criticized Schlick's triumphalism about the new philosophy's achievements.

⁵¹ These remarks have been invoked in a dispute (too complex to be resolved here) between conflicting interpretations of Wittgenstein; see Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap', 18–19; Marion, 'Wittgenstein on Heidegger'.

'eliminated' (to use the term later popularized by Ayer).⁵² This would make his approach more akin to that of later modernist functionalists (for example in the Bauhaus movement), who radicalized Loos's doctrines.⁵³ Loos, as we have seen, rejected the revolutionary 'elimination' of ornamentation. As I have shown above, Wittgenstein, like Loos, can be read as taking a more neutral stance. I have shown that Wittgenstein is suggesting that the correct approach would be that which articulates the function of a statement and the way it connects to other statements. This does not, of course, exhaust the ways in which Loos may be seen as influential on Wittgenstein. It simply sheds light on the specific way in which Wittgenstein himself portrays this influence.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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⁵² On the history of Ayer's use of 'elimination', see Andreas Vrahimis, *Encounters between Analytic and Continental Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 89–91.

⁵³ See Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 256–62.

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