4-2. As the essay by Wohlfarth tried to suggest, the key crisis faced by architects and aesthetes in the 19th century was not a function of technology but of the aesthetic. Architects and aesthetes were both at a loss when faced with the effects of technology and mass reproduction. What are the kinds of problems that we are talking about here?

Disenchantment and (Dis)Honesty

Elizabeth Nguyen

In his essay "'Construction has the Role of the Subconscious': Phantasmagorias of the Master Builder (with Constant Reference to Giedion, Weber, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Benjamin)", Irving Wohlfarth constructs a narrative of the aesthetic implications of technology and mass reproduction in 19th century Europe.(1)
Weber's theory of the disenchantment of the world (from his 1919 lecture Wissenschaft als Beruf) and Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project provide the underpinning of Wohlfarth's study.(2) Both Weber and Benjamin locate the aesthetic crisis of the 19th century in a loss of sublime meaning and monumentality precipitated by the dislocation of the value of the original, hand-wrought object as craft became mechanized and the technology of construction overtook the art of design.

In the case of architecture and aesthetics, the loss of the value of the original object (Benjamin's loss of aura, or Baudelaire's halo) came from a transition from craftsmanship to machine-produced kits-of-parts. The steel and concrete buildings of the 19th century seemed to lack of the labor-intensive craft traditionally associated with beauty, a fact that was often covered up with the 'phantasmagorias' of Wohlfarth's title. As Wohlfarth notes, "architecture was beginning to emancipate itself from art in its use of iron construction" and the separation of building from art presented an aesthetic challenge.(3)

One early response to this challenge was the covering up of this substitution of the location of value from man to machine. The bourgeoisie's (as Wohlfarth cites Giedion's phrase) "historicizing masks", result in a denial of the substructure and thus the new technology through various ornamental devices, but also through a cultural fixation upon inwardness and interiority. Wohlfarth attributes the interiority to Weber, Baudelaire, Marx and Benjamin's warning that "[T]he failure to acknowledge this basic world-historical fact of "disenchantment" is likely to result in a surrogate re-enchantment of the world."(4) Wohlfarth notes that for Weber and Baudelaire, "phony spirituality is equated with reified materiality" as the traces of dwelling are systematically erased from the public sphere and the home becomes a shrine for the signs of occupation.(5) This interior coziness masks a discomfort with the cold structure that underlies the interior, be it the Freudian subconscious, or literally steel girders. What would become recognized later as this "dishonest relation" between façade and substructure can be witnessed, for example, in Gustave Eiffel's Statue of Liberty, wherein the "art" is a superstructural envelope hiding the technology that made it possible.

By examining early modern writings on architecture and aesthetics, Wohlfarth connects the underpinnings of modernism with the its critiques of the 19th century architecture, which were in turn based upon 19th century philosophical ideas about the aesthetic imperatives of the industrial revolution and the alienation of labor. The legacies of "honesty", of uniting substructure and superstructure, of exposing the interior to transparency, and of creating works representative of the age of their production stem from the critiques that Wohlfarth assembles for us.

1. Wohlfarth, Irving. "'Construction has the Role of the Subconcious': Phantasmagorias of the Master Builder (with Constant Reference to Giedion, Weber, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Benjamin)," in Wohlfarth, Irving, and Kostka, Irving (eds.). Nietzsche and "An Architecture of Our Minds." Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute.
2. Benjamin, Walter. The Arcades Project. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999.
Weber, Max. "Science as Vocation," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, ed. and trans. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958.)
3. Wohlfarth, p.145.
4. Wohlfarth, p.146.
5. Wohlfarth, p. 147.

Catherine Fowlkes response

The "crisis" faced by architects and aesthetes in the 19th century was not solely a function of the aesthetic, but a function of the aesthetic as a result of new technology and the modern age.

The aesthetic in the modern age was complicated by several conditions, beginning with a clinging to the past in the face of new technologies. Benjamin describes this condition of refusing to recognize what lies ahead in reference to a painting by Paul Klee, "This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned…" (Frampton p58)

The advances in iron construction were initially simply applied to old methods of building. "The use of iron in place of stone did not immediately lead to profound changes in the general design of the building, its system of equilibrium, or even its appearance. The creative formulas of the past were not rejected. Architects did not yet envision a new type of building." (Francastel p90) Because architecture and technology were seen as separate endeavors – illustrated in architecture's inclusion in L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts rather than the Ecole Polytechnique, alliances between the two were slow in coming. Giedion further explains this lack of collaboration; "With the expansion of industry around the middle of the century, one senses how the 'artist-architect' feels his privileged position to be threatened. Out of this there gradually grew the frantic emphasis on his 'artistry'." (Wohlfarth p153)

A separate, concurrent condition, "What (Max) Weber called the 'disenchantment of the world,' Baudelaire, Marx and Benjamin described as 'the loss of the halo' or the 'decline of aura' (Wohlfarth p146) - reduced aesthetics to "more modest proportions." (Wohlfarth p143).

But just as these more modest proportions could align with and honesty and truth in architecture, "that is, with a building style that no longer masks iron girders as Pompeian columns" (Wohlfarth p144), so it was also "accompanied by a tendency to mask the new nakedness with obsolete drapery." (Wohlfarth p145)

The former seems to have remained an idea that theoretically complicated the role of architecture, "What, then, might an 'honest,' truly disenchanted architecture look like?" (Wohlfarth p144) The latter manifested itself as a concerted focus on the interior and the domestic, the result of a "surrogate re-enchantment of the world" – one example of the "phantasmagorias of nineteenth-century bourgeois society." (Wohlfarth p146)

These parallel notions of aesthetic stasis in the face of new developments and the complex notion of a 'disenchantment of the world' – along with the reactionary "historicizing masks" – contributed to a confusing and hypocritical climate for the 19th century architect and aesthete.

the aesthetic of society

Nicole Vlado

"To return to Benjamin for a moment, it is instructive to note that when he declares to Kracauer that he is in the arcades, he is in fact in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The manner in which Benjamin's own archive is produced is illuminated by flânerie."(1)

"The Arcade Project", composed by Walter Benjamin in the 1920s, displays the challenges of the transformed space of the city beginning in the 1830s. One chapter in Benjamin's book focuses primarily on the emergence of iron construction in the built environment, and acts as a catalogue of the opinions of historians over a century. This begins at a time when iron structures appear in cities like Paris; at a time when the production and proliferation of a new building material would result in the formation of parallel discourses around aesthetics and culture. Moving away from the forces of gravity and towards an era of ready-made architecture, iron construction proved to change not only the way in which buildings were made, but how the built environment at various scales (domestic, industrial, urban) was conceived.

New perceptions about the home, the factory, and the city were based on new aesthetics that grew out of changes in industry. Besides the obvious shift from stone/timber to iron construction, or the shift from handcrafted to prefabrication, was the shift in the conception of the interior and the exterior -- changes in the social fabric of 19th century Europe. An example of these changes is displayed in the work of "The Arcade Project" through Benjamin's study of the flâneur. He suggests that the emergence of new typologies in the built environment, such as the department store, reformulate social spaces within cities such as Paris. Benjamin's work depicts a loss of the arcade as an exterior social space. Benjamin implies that the interiorized form of the department store replaced the arcade at a loss to the flâneur(2) – to whom this space functioned in defining an identity and lifestyle.

The department store, the demise of the flâneur, was a new typology that rose out of advances in technology. In Paris, this new form was the Magasin au Bon Marche, designed in 1876 by L.A. Boileau and Gustave Eiffel. The building is not only a new typology responsible for a shift in lifestyle patterns (namely those affecting an upper class, as in the case of the flâneur); it was also an example of a new aesthetic growing out of the proliferation of iron construction. Here such construction is celebrated through the design of Baroque staircases, light metal catwalks, and bridges.(3)

The style in which the department store was designed presents another dilemma within the discourse of aesthetics following the use of iron in building construction, namely "honesty" as described by Irving Wohlfarth in his essay "Construction Has the Role of the Subconscious". The challenge of the use of iron is an aesthetic one, with architecture grappling for an identity between its former identity and a new machine identity of the engineer. Boileau and Eiffel do not design Weber's "iron cage" of modernity, rather they use iron to design a hybridized form of revivalist architecture (Baroque stairwells) that

masks its location in history without masking its structure with "obsolete drapery"(4) . It is both honest and dishonest in its aesthetic as a built space.

A struggle for a new aesthetic would remain a struggle that contemporary architecture face today, that of the mediation between form and function. The challenged posed in the 1830s with the emergence of iron construction in Europe reflected deeper shifts in philosophy, and more practically in the (re)construction of social relationships within the city. This is made clear in the work of Wohlfarth, whose study borrows ("with constant reference") from philosophers dealing with issues not only of art, industry, and aesthetics, but of class structures (the bourgeois, the flâneur), relations, and identity.

(1) David Frisby, Cityscapes of Modernity: Critical Explorations (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001) 13.
(2) Frisby 32.
(3) Kenneth Frampton & Yukio Futagawa, Modern Architecture 1851-1945 (New York: Rizzoli, 1983) 36.
(4) Irving Wohlfarth, "Construction Has the Role of the Subconscious": Phantasmagorias of the Master Builder (with Constant Reference to Giedion, Weber, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Benjamin), in Wohlfarth, Irving and Kostka, Irving (eds.). Nietzsche and "An Architecture of Our Minds." (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1999) 145.

The Unheimlich

jimmy shen

The crisis that architects and aesthetes were presented with in the 19th century as manifest in the aesthetics resulting from the effects of technology can be examined using what Marx terms "substructure" and "superstructure." If we can consider substructure as technology representing the iron skeleton of the modern building and superstructure as what Walter Benjamin calls the "collective consciousness" of society, as represented as the façade that enclosed the skeleton, we can begin to understand that the architectural predicament of the time was two fold. Society was struggling with the secularizing effects of the scientific and industrial revolutions as well as wrestling with the technology of the time, namely the limitations that characterized mass production.

There was an inability to synthesize technology into the social structure due to the spiritual void left behind after the enlightenment. Weber refers to this as a "disenchantment of the world."(1) With power no longer held by centers of religion and dispersed to the newly formed bourgeois class, the significance of monumental structures of worship diminished. In metaphorical terms, this left the modern man without the comfort of a home. Wohlfarth asks "Could dwellings still be built for men where they could no longer be erected for the gods?"(2)

The immediate reaction to this condition by the bourgeois was to resort to symbolic elements born from the myths of the past. With the modern house and its mass produced industrial parts came the fear of losing the soul. And as a protective measure, the near sighted solution was to mask the interior with facades of ornament in order to remove the "uneasiness (Unbehagen) provoked by the idea of inhabiting steel cages – buildings held together by iron girders."(3)

With new technology came the difficulty in manipulating these industrial products. A dichotomy existed between mass-reproduction and the traditional role of the craftsman and the making of unique parts. With the lack of an appropriate socio-cultural significance there was also the rigidity mass production presented by its use of repetitive parts, further complicating the aesthetic problem of the time. Wohlfarth cites Jugendstil as an example of a failed attempt at synthesizing technology into the interior, becoming just another use of the "superstructure" to cover the "substructure." It is its inability to allow for what Benjamin calls "leaving traces" that prevents the "bourgeois room" from allowing the machine to have a soul.(4)

This superficial aesthetic in turn produces what Wohlfarth, borrowing from Freud, calls the "unhomely (unheimlich) and the uncanny;" the result of the illicit act of reaching in the past for what is already dead. It is the haunted house where one is holding onto an empty carcass of a memory, attempting to live in a deception that isn't meant to be. The danger of this is perfectly expressed by Nietzsche stating that people have "indiscriminately crammed themselves with the dead knowledge of past cultures and have thereby deprived themselves of the possibility of creating a living, organic culture of

their own." (5)

1. Wohlfarth, Irving. "'Construction has the Role of the Subconcious': Phantasmagorias of the Master Builder (with Constant Reference to Giedion, Weber, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Benjamin)," in Wohlfarth, Irving, and Kostka, Irving (eds.). Nietzsche and "An Architecture of Our Minds." Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, p. 146
2. Wohlfarth, p.145.
3. Wohlfarth, p.147.
4. Wohlfarth, p.148.
5. Wohlfarth, p. 149.