

History of Architecture and Culture – 5

Lecture - 19

Works of Adolf Loos

So Adolf Loos, Adolf Franz Karl Viktor Maria Loos was an Austrian and Czechoslovak architect

He was very influential in modern European architecture. Why was he influential, what we see as modern architecture later in the century was all possible because he paved the way for it in a way

In his essay which is titled ornament crime he abandons all aesthetic principles that the secessionist people had brought in. The Vienna secession just like we saw in previous lectures brought in aesthetic principles form a beauty in nature. So Adolf Loos says that in ornament crime, he says that ornamentation is not something that needs to be done. So he had variety of works, he wrote lot of essays and he published lot of papers

And in 1900 when Vienna secession was at its peak, he wrote a paper which is titled, spoken into the void, it was published in 1900 where he attacked the key members and key principles of the Vienna secession calling them people who follow ornamentation and calling them the not so proper way to do architecture.

He further dwelt into the idea that if a culture of a particular place has to process, it has to get disassociated with the ornaments that is what he had in mind. If I am so attached to ornamentation I cannot progress with my culture that was his idea of what a progressive culture must look like. So according to him, it was big crime, if you say that, if you are a craftsman on a building or if you call a craftsman on a building and if you ask them to work on a ornamentations façade or an element in architecture so it is a crime to force a craftsman to do something which would become obsolete in future. His only argument was, if you are doing any ornamentation, it doesn't have any specific use that ornamentation, say if you are drawing a floral motive on the wall of an elevation of a house and if the floral motive does not make any sense, does not give any functional requirement, and then why put it in the first place. His claim was that at some point of time, these ornamentation will become obsolete, at that time it will look like a joke. So abandon it. So that was his argument. So if you look at all his buildings, he stripped down all the influences of any craft work or ornamentation work in his building, he stripped off to his minimal massing which is very very characteristic

of modern architecture and he created a lot of controversy by doing this. But surprisingly even though he says ornament is crime and everything, some of his architectural work has elaborately decorated, but none of them are decorated on the exterior all of them are decorated on the interior of the house. He says that even in the interior ornamentation of the house, he features abstract lines, planes and shapes which is composed of richly figured materials like marble, wood and leather which means which looks simple and at the same time as well rich. So that was his idea of decoration. An element which is intricately carved is not a great element according to him. Nice leather element itself which is strictly undecorated itself is an ornamentation for him. The visual disparity between the exterior and the interior is not something which is simple on the exterior and complicated on the interior, it's nothing like that. It is simple between what he saw things as organic and he saw the exterior ornamentation as superfluous which is unnecessary. More than what is necessary that is unnecessary is superfluous but what he did on the interiors are organic ornamentation not overdoing it. Adolf Loos was also interested in decorative arts so what he did was collecting silver wear, sterling silver, good quality leather goods and he was also very motivated and enjoyed doing fashion and men's clothing. He designed men's clothing, apparel range for the knize of Vienna, it was a haberdashery actually there in Vienna. He designed the interiors, and everything for the knize. He also had the admiration for the fashion which was developing parallel in America's and England. He even endorsed them and he even started a publication the Andre. The Andre even though it was published only twice, after that it was lost in the movements. It included advertisements for English clothing and he advocated fashion apparel from the American's from their English traditions. In one of his essays, he calls for passion towards smooth and precious surfaces he says that if a surface is smooth, it is precious and it's priceless. According to him surface which has no ups and downs, which has no superfluous ornamentation or carving detail he says that is what the most sophisticated of elements. In his philosophy, he says that anything that is carved or cut out or anything that is embossed will go out of style very soon. He usually talks about the immortality of an ornament which means if I am doing a particular ornamentation work, it has to stand the test of time. Even after 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, 30 years the life of the building, the ornamentation will also be in fashion. If am doing an ornamentation, which is not going to be of any use, it's how the total trend of entire architecture was moving at that particular point of time. He saw that lets say, 15, 20 years, this will go out of fashion and people will start looking it as degenerate architecture. He totally compares this whole

decorative thing with the tattooing of the Papuan. Tattooing of the Papuan looks something like this, here is the culture or tribe of people, who do tattooing on their complete body every square inch of the body is completely tattooed with tribal art patterns and other things. He goes on to say that the western culture has not accepted this Papuan way of doing tattoos on their body. He says that the western civilization has not evolved to what we have or the Papuan man or the Papuan civilization has not evolved to the range of unmoral and uncivilized tricks and practices of modern man. So he compares that, if I am going to do ornamentation in my building, it is going to look like this. So if I am looking this, in this particular era I will either be called as a criminal or degenerate, that is what exactly your building is. So if you keep on doing, ornamentation in your building, building will either become a crime or building will become a degenerate. So that is why his paper is also titled, ornament and crime.

Works of Adolf Loos – Raumplan

Now let us take a look at the interesting concept called Raumplan.

Adolf Loos has been developing this sort of an idea throughout his life, almost throughout his career and in this particular approach which he termed Raumplan or in conversion to English translation it means spatial planning. So it is his own engineer way of spatial planning in which what he thought was, he wrote himself about a Raumplan, what he wrote is the only great revolution that is happening in field of architecture so far is the freeing of ground floor plan in space. Before Immanuel Kant is a person who revolutionized space planning architecture, Before Immanuel Kant humanity could not even think in space. He says that before Immanuel Kant architects always were compelled to make the toilet as high as the hall because hall and the toilet were in the same area. Since they are not divided, so the toilet also has to be high as the hall. Only by dividing the rooms into spaces, we are able to get the right height for the right space. For example, 4 meter height would be ideal for a hall where there are lots of people who are going to be congregating and talking but for a toilet a height of 2.7 mts or 33 meters is good enough, what about the remaining 1.3 meters. Which is actually a waste of space and if that kind of place, people will feel a little lost in that space. So previous architects did not have this idea of space planning, so they had to go for previous, now that revolution has taken place, freeing of the ground floor place, and people started looking individual spaces as separate 3 dimensional entities not as one

unified thing. This is a picture from the famous movie star trek where spark is trying to play a 3dimensional chess with his opponent. Loos says that as a man will one day succeed in playing chess on a 3 dimensional board, so too other architects will solve the problem of the 3 dimensional plan. Loos was a very provocative writer and it was typical of him to do things like this. What he says is, he reduces complex ideas, to the level of toilet. But nevertheless the idea is in place. He simply says that look at spaces as separate entities functionally rather than looking at it as one individual spaceship entity. So according to his raumplan, his planning method is based on discreet room and dynamic sections. It places great emphasis on the scale of individual rooms and it often requires steps to go into each rooms or cluster of rooms. The concept totally almost belongs to Adolf loos and since he had lot of structural awareness in his mind in his mind he was able to invent such a plan, if someone tries to attempt a wrong plan that person should also have a high level of structural awareness and understanding. Otherwise attempting the wrong plan will become catastrophic. Generally what happens is the use of columns building determines the spaces. Previously what they used to do is, they used to put columns and columns divide the whole space into different rooms. But in raumplan what they have done is, they have tried to partition the space which follow space logic rather than the structure grid logic. So in his effort to free the plan away from the column, the column no longer plays a role in determining the size of the room but columns are also sometimes used along the walls, sometimes the columns are also placed as a separate entity like a sculptural role and creating different passage zones, redefining certain zones as sub zones, these were certain things which created the raumplan. Here the open span is left largely unplanned, as in typical office towers where you place only the left cores and the columns are there so that thing is totally up to that particular interior decorator or the office, whose so ever is going to occupy, they will do the interiors according to their requirement. According to that what he does is, he comes with an open plan, this kind of plan, where there are always rooms, even if they are not completely closed or completely sealed off, there is always one room, another room and another room. Whereas you look different functions at this type of architecture, where clearly there is nothing called room there is only outer perimeter and people can clearly move around different rooms, assign them different places and different functions for it. According to Adolf loos a building can look like this but it has to work like this. He says that he does not design ground floor, first floor separately. He does not decide the façade, he does not decide the section. He designs spaces. For Adolf loos spaces look like cubes and cuboids in space and it's not 2 dimensional

drawing like these. He does not draw 2 dimensional drawing like these instead he draws in 3 dimension like this. One of his project is the villa Muller, villa Muller is a very defining modern era house , but this type of building will be only suitable for those kind of individuals who are industrialists at the same time, they are progressive industrialized who want modernist kind of outlook in their houses. So those are the kind of people who gave them work. In this case loos was a part of advantage because the client was an owner of re-enforce concrete company which means that he needs to showcase as a reinforce concrete capabilities to the world . So this kind of architecture or this kind of way in which this works for best in this particular project. So this is how loos took, there is a strong contrast between the exterior and the interior. The exterior is almost hermetic with very minimal openings and no ornamentation but whereas the interiors is highly rich complex and clad in marble, wood and leather. The floor planning is based on raumplan again. Raumplan is not something which he started in this project but it was something which he started earlier in 1907 when he applied the same concept for ministry of war building. This is not something which he designed for this building, the concept had been placed already, he already had placed in 1907, and he used the same concept in this building also. So in this building what he tried to do is he separated the different floors of the building and different rooms of the buildings I different levels where in if you look at this, there is 1 level over here, there is short flight of steps, which leads to this level and another short flight of steps which lead to this level and there are rooms over here. Another little flight of steps which leads to another set of rooms on the inside over here and another level of steps where it can again reach this area and reach this area also. So critically if you see, it looks like one mass and which is connected by circulation of elements. Typically what Adolf loos does is, he designs 2 types of staircase. One staircase that goes all the way from down floor to the top floor which is used completely to transport from vertical to horizontal between all the levels. He also designs another set of vertical transport elements where the staircase itself is disintegrated one level of building slowly transits into another level. So your circulation element itself is a series of spaces, where you will slowly start feeling that the stair case is nonexistent any more. You will start getting a feeling that you longer see the staircase at all in the building. You just see one space being getting connected to another space by means of small steps which are again functional in nature. In sense, the staircase is completely eliminated, lost psychologically.

Adolf Loos says that my architecture is not conceived by drawings but by spaces. I do not draw plans, facades or sections. For me, the ground floor, first floor do not exist. They are only interconnected continual spaces, rooms, halls, terraces. Each space is connected so that ascent and descent are not only unnoticeable, but at the same time functional.

These are some of the other works of Adolf Loos wherein you can clearly see the different spaces that are clearly getting connected just like here. Very minimal ornamentation or almost no ornamentation on the exterior. Other works of Adolf Loos were practically no ornamentation on the exterior. Just the windows and window cells balcony doors and windows, everything functional, all functional elements that exist. Even this little projectional element which divides the 2 units here. Even this is functional element here. Everything here is functional element here.

Works of Peter Behrens

Now let us move across to Austria from Germany where Behrens Peter was trained as a painter but eventually he abandoned painting in favor of applied arts and graphical arts. Behrens was a legendary architect and we will be studying more about him in the rest of this lecture. In 1899 he was invited to the artist's colony at Darmstadt. He maintained a leadership position there. Afterwards he moved to Düsseldorf and from there he started stimulating and started working on the new geometric abstraction in all his work.

From 1907-1914 right before the 1st world war Peter Behrens worked as an artistic consultant, adviser to the AEG electrical company in Berlin

With the AEG, when he was in AEG, this is when he created the world's 1st corporate image. Peter Behrens corporate architect, world's first corporate architect, more than a 100 years ago, this gentleman starts to create designs for the industry. He designs typefaces. He designs logo, he designs all the way in which the company must project itself to the public. He designs everything

He is not only considered key transition figure which moved architecture in Germany from Jugendstil to industrial classicism. He also played a central role in the revolution of German modernism

While we studied art novae, we saw that in different places in different countries art novae is being termed in different names. In Germany if you could remember the previous lecture of mine you would understand that jugendstil is the art novae form in Germany. So it was Peter Behrens who was elemental in moving the architecture from jugendstil to industrial classicism which eventually went off to modernism in the later stage. So he was a pioneer in everything he did and even if that is not enough and also he had 3 very important students who would later shape the entire world as we know. Those 3 people were Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier together these 3 people shaped the entire modernist world as we know it. If these 3 people were not there the architecture that we see today might be entirely different. So they were so instrumental in changing the way, the chores of architecture in the midcentury. But it was, it should be noted that it was Peter Behrens who mentored all 3 of them. Like I was talking in previous episodes, one of the highest order, the highest philosophical purpose of human existence is to pass on the knowledge from modern organism to other organism. That is the purpose of life and Peter Behrens also has clearly understood it. He transferred all that he had learnt, all that he had experienced, to create generation of intellectuals like Gropius, Mies and Corbusier. So between 1907 and 1914 Peter Behrens was working with AEG electrical company creating corporate identity and brand image of the company. So after looking at this there was Braun in Germany, McDonald in US after post world war 2 what these companies did was and what lot of other companies do was they took instruction from AEG electrical company as the foremost corporate identity and they got inspirations from this company and they started developing their own corporate identities. Peter Behrens not only started industrial classicism in Germany but also paved way for developing German modernism. Let's take a look at some of the examples which Behrens designed. This is his own house, it was built in the outskirts of Darmstadt in 1901. It was built as a private residence but it was soon put on sale. Its only purpose being to increase its professional reputation. This is the plan of the house. The exterior of the house is purely brick and stucco with wooden interiors. The house is organized around the dining room. This is the central part of the house and it is organized around the dining room. Technically if you look at this house, this house does fall under the art novae category. Maybe you can call it later art novae or very late art novae also but it still falls under art novae category but still it had a lot of deviations from the art novae category because it has influences from local traditional German architecture and it also has his industrial classicism in place with not a lot of curves. Industrial looking

windows, its simple classicism, there are places where it looks like art novae. Eventually this comes under the category of changing the whole scenario of German architecture from judenstil to modernism. This is another famous work of peter Behrens, AEG HT High tension factory. The AEG turbine factory was built around 1909 in the berlin district of moabit, is his best known work. It is so influential in terms of construction that it features full 100 meters and 15 meter tall glass and steel wall on either side of the building. On this side as well as the opposite side. It is the bold move in architecture, it is one of the first and it would make very very durable impact on the world as we know it. This changed a lot of things. He started redefining rules in that particular time. The original building measures 25 meters plus about 12.5 meters in width and a height of 25 meter and length of 123 meter. This is the section of the building, where he uses this for the turbine hall and this for other areas. David Watkins describes it as a temple of power. What is a temple of power? This is a power factory, turbine factory and it is so beautifully designed that it looks like a temple. And people admired the efforts in which he tries to give an architectural dignity even to a factory workspace. These are some of the other things which he designs in AEG factory, look at the way he designs the column junctions, he also makes the typeface the font in which he has written here, and typeface was designed by Behrens. The logo was designed by Behrens, where he designs the IG Farben office. These are the drawings and these are the building looks.