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JANUS -  
THE REPUTATION AND INFLUENCE  
OF PETER BEHRENS & LOUIS SULLIVAN

by  
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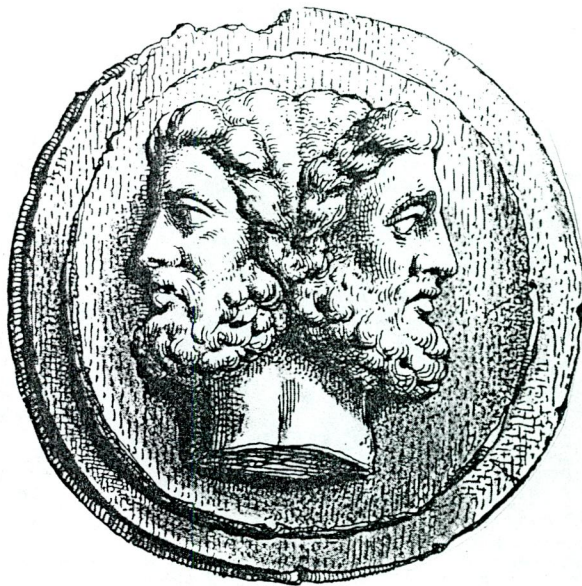
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JANUS



## JANUS

### The Reputation and Influence of Peter Behrens and Louis Sullivan.

#### INTRODUCTION

Do you want a name for this world? A solution of all its riddles? A light for you too, you who are the best concealed, the strongest, the most intrepid, the most midnightly of men? This world is the will to power and nothing else besides. And you too are that will to power, and nothing else besides.

NIETZSCHE  
(53, p.81)

Nietzsche is among the very few thinkers whose standing as 'a modern master' is undoubted, according to J.P. Stern; had Nietzsche not lived, the life of modern man would be much different. His ideas on 'will to power' and his challenging of the divisions between 'scientific' and 'imaginative', 'concept' and 'metaphor', 'abstract' and 'concrete'





had great effect on my two subjects - Peter Behrens and Louis Sullivan. But the effect in each case is quite different, as this essay will show.

In my first chapter I deal with the reputation of Peter Behrens, and the effect that reading Nietzsche had on him in 1907. By 1910 Behrens had formulated a whole new approach to design. This he summarised in his essay Art and Technology. In this essay he changes the design profession from a craft base to an industrial base. This was later to become the whole basis for the modernist movement. With the wisdom of hindsight this essay sees a much darker side of Behrens, who had very strong links with the Fascist movement in Germany. There is much evidence to support the theory that as early as 1909 he had strong nationalist tendencies.

My second chapter deals with the reputation of the American architect Louis Sullivan. In his manifesto of 1892 Ornament of Architecture he discusses the argument of form and function. Sullivan concluded that form could not follow function and were inseparable in practice. Later he was to connect these ideas to Nietzsche's. Sullivan despised the utilitarian approach to design and believed (unlike Behrens) that the designer should be a craftsman with a holistic approach to his work.

My third chapter deals with Behrens's influence on the world of design. Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier were all lectured by and worked for Behrens, and they took his ideas on art and technology to create the modern movement (or the international style). Also, I discuss creativity in the modern and in the traditional sense.





My final chapter deals with the influence that Louis Sullivan had on the world of architecture and design, or indeed the lack of such influence. The death of Sullivan's approach to design is mainly due to Le Corbusier, van de Rohe and Gropius. Ironically, they had to leave Germany because of the upsurge of fascism and when they arrived in America they had trouble getting their work accepted. To gain acceptance they went about proving that Sullivan (who was a cultural hero in the USA) was a modernist like themselves. In so doing, they put paid to Sullivan's true ideas on design. Design is now considered as an industrial profession rather than a craft.

At the present the design profession is standing at a crossroads. We can retain Behrens's theories on art and technology and hope that their continuance will get us out of the predicament we find ourselves in. Or we can try a new road where there is more difficulty but where the rewards should be greater. Indeed this thesis postulates that for design to progress we must renege on Behrens's ideas and reassess Sullivan's. Over the last decade there has been much discussion about the design profession, but unfortunately very little discourse about its roots. We may discover that many of the problems can be solved by changing our perception of the roots of design. This thesis aims to go some way towards altering that present perception.

During my discourse I deal with many dualisms which are part of man's nature. I find it necessary to use a metaphor to explain the paradoxical nature that exists in all of us. The metaphor comes from Janus, the old Roman god.



Janus, the 'God of Gods', was placed by the Romans at the head of all human enterprises. Ovid relates that Janus was called 'Chaos' at the time when earth, wind, fire and water were all a formless mass. When the elements separated, Chaos became Janus, his two faces representing the confusion of the human mind. On one face he was the God of what had gone before, and this was seen as his intuitive side. His second face controlled the Chaos and organised it into patterns, and this was seen as his rational aspect. Never could one side of his nature exist without the other, but they could not be compatible. This is why Janus's two faces looked in opposite directions. The Romans realised that the two faces were part of the whole. They saw that the only way to deal with the paradox was to accept that both faces belonged to the one head and neither one could exist without the other. But they must look in opposite directions.

A parallel to Janus can also be found in Nietzsche's characters Dionysius and Apollo. He used these to describe man's two basic traits.

Dionysius is the God of chaos, fruitfulness and ecstasy, so Apollo is the God of ordered form and of the dream seen as the silent recasting of life.

(53, p.42)

Nietzsche believed in a 'Superman', who with Dionysian spirit would rise above and control the mysteries of the world. There have been many interpretations of Nietzsche's Superman. Two of these will have a major influence on my essay - so it is necessary to explain them briefly now.





Superman could be seen as a figure who used his 'will to power' to control not only the world but also his fellow man. This is where Superman is taken as a term in the singular. But Martin Heidegger believes that Superman means not just the one man but stands for all of humanity. This definition is supported by Walter Kaufmann who translates 'Der Übermensch' into 'Overman' to try and avoid misinterpretation. ('Übermensch' could also be translated into 'man-beyond').

(16, p.XI)

My thesis centres particularly around the texts of Art and Technology by Peter Behrens and Ornament of Architecture by Louis Sullivan. The reason for this is that these texts were the basis for both men's work and describe their philosophies and ideas in design concisely.



## CHAPTER I

### Peter Behrens - His Reputation

On the way to abstraction, Peter Behrens has reached a refined regularity after his confused beginnings. This artist, who is strong, logical and consistent in his thinking, has made tremendous progress in the course of the last ten years. Now he leaves even the Viennese behind ...

Joseph August LUX (1908)  
(63, p.4)

Behrens did come from confused beginnings. Originally he trained as a painter at the academy in Karlsruhe, and later studied under Ferdinand Brutt in his native Dusseldorf. Then he started designing interior fittings and furniture and his work was shown at the Paris Exhibition of 1900 and later in the Turin Exhibition of 1902. At this stage he was drifting and showed no sign of the drive and energy that was to characterise his work in later years.

Like many designers at the time, Behrens suffered from an existential crisis, and this shows in his work. A typical example is the chairs he exhibited in Turin. In many ways their design is simpler in construction than those of his competitors, but they lack cohesion and direction. They have no flow and hark back to Victorian styles. They need innovation in visual terms.

After Turin, Behrens received a contract for three small factories back in Germany. Once again these designs are nothing new and he calls them 'glorified sheds similar to all the other glorified sheds'. (6, p.42)









PLATE 2- A Behrens chair as seen in Turin





In 1907 he got his major break when he won the contract for AEG, the largest semi-state company in Germany and one of the largest in the world. He got this job for two main reasons.

Firstly, Behrens was one of the main figures in setting up the German Standards Commission (Deutsche Normen Ausschuss), and also the Deutsche Werkbund. These institutions were put in place to get German industry to use standard parts, so that all parts could be interchangeable between products. The basis of this standardisation was to reduce the number of parts in production items. Behrens himself worked on standardisation of light fittings and wiring amongst other things. Many of these standards are still in use today, worldwide. The concept of standardising parts has a paradoxical nature which will be discussed in Chapter III. (Hence the 'darker side' of his career that I referred to in the opening - seven years later Germany went to war using the equipment produced by Behrens's method). As we can well imagine, he had much political push because of his role in these institutions - let us not forget that AEG was a semi-state company.

Secondly, Behrens was noted for his outstanding organisational ability. This job was an enormous undertaking. He had to design everything himself - the company logos, brochures, graphics, products and even the very factory buildings. He designed their interior layout down even to the electrical fittings. This took Behrens seven years to complete and it was the first complete corporate identity in the truest sense.

If there is a candidate for noble purity in this field, it is the much-quoted work that Peter Behrens produced as a consultant



designer/architect to the electrical goods manufacturers AEG from 1907-1914. As well as being the very first example of a thorough-going corporate identity programme, it has strong claims to being archetypal. (61, p.63)

While working at AEG Behrens was in awe at the power that industry had and he realised just how important it was going to be in the future. He could see the application it would have in furthering the interests of the German nation.

We have no choice but to make our lives more simple, more practical, more organised and wide ranging. Only through industry have we any hope of fulfilling our aims.

(59, p.6)

What Behrens advocates is that people must change to suit industry, rather than using industry to suit their needs. In his working life he passed his own test of practicality, organisation and wide-ranging lifestyle. He was politically involved, he had strong social ideas, his capacity for work was breathtaking. But the above much-quoted statement of Behrens invites the question - what aims was *he* referring to? And what goals are *we* trying to attain in our own time ?

Behrens had read Nietzsche in 1907 and was highly influenced by his writings. In particular, he was interested in Nietzsche's idea of 'will to power' and his denigration of the utilitarians. These two concepts appear in his essay of 1910, Art and Technology, which was later to become the basis of the modern movement. In it he says:

It is now particularly important for Germany, which has now achieved political power, also to win the power in artistic areas .... In this way German art and technology will work towards one goal; towards the power of the German nation.

(59, p.7)





It is clear that Behrens's aim was to work for the power of the German nation. His interpretation of the 'will to power' is to create a 'Superman' race in Germany. Behrens, who was a nationalist, had connections with political parties who had as early as 1908 put legislation through on racial hygiene and mixed marriages in Germany. Later in the 1930's Behrens had very close connections with the Nazis; he wrote two papers for Goebbels on new Italian fascist architecture and helped Albert Speer design the layout for the Grosse Platz in Berlin for Hitler. His last design before his death was the north/south axis of Berlin. With this hindsight Behrens's interpretations of Nietzsche's 'will to power' and 'Superman' take much more menacing and ominous overtones.

Behrens's architecture (as early as 1909) also has very neo-classical overtones, which later were to become the hall mark of fascism in both Italy and Germany. Typical of this style is Behrens's turbine factory for AEG (1909). Built in Berlin, it is powerfully geometric and angular. The roof of the factory is based on a sixteen sided figure showing a direct influence of Roman architecture - the Romans often used this shape for their construction, especially in their columns. Similarly, the large frontal entrance is surrounded by two large columns, another Roman trait. Behrens intended this building to be 'a statement of industry's power'.

(59, p.3)

Like Nietzsche, Behrens in Art and Technology goes out of his way to discredit the utilitarians, and Reigl in particular. Nietzsche attacks for their lack of moral sense, while Behrens abuses them for their insistence that form follows function.

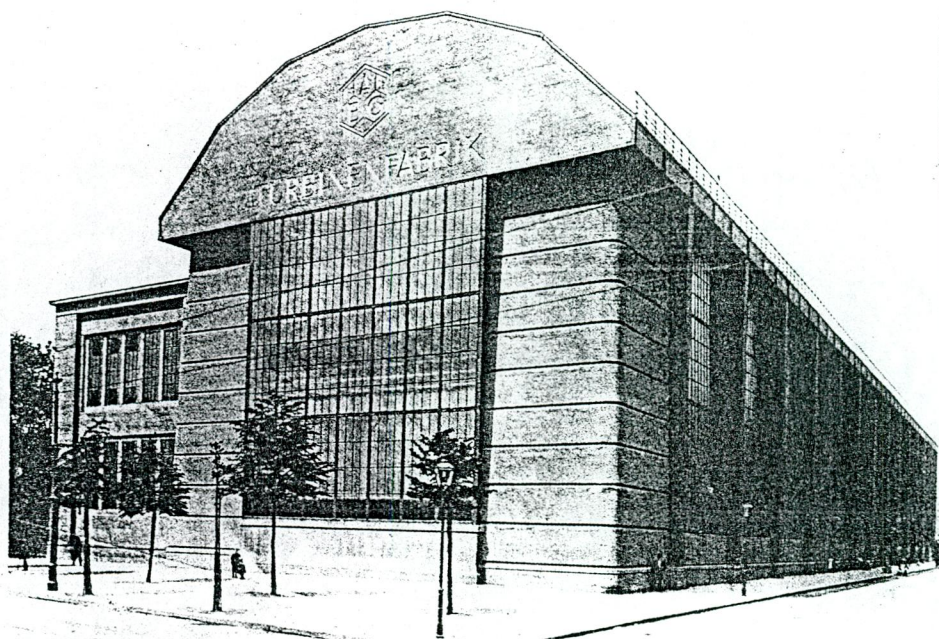


PLATE 3- AEG Turbine factory, Berlin.





A certain school of aesthetic thought has promoted this misconception by wishing to derive aesthetic form from utilitarian function and technology. This view of art stems from Gottfried Semper who defined the concept of style by demanding that the work of art should be the product first of its function and secondly of its materials and tools and procedures involved. This theory comes from the middle to the last century, and should, like many others from this period, be seen as one of the dogmas of Positivism (Reigl).

(59, p.6)

Here Behrens specifies Reigl because of that particular Positivist's doctrine that form follows function. Among those others to follow the creed that Behrens denounces were Semper, John Stuart Mills, and Henry Cole. To agree that form follows function would mean letting Apollo control Dionysus. And this would mean that the rational and logical face of Janus would take over and stifle his creative and intuitive side. Behrens believes that art and technology are two separate entities which should be fused together. He sees that the dualism is destroying the work of his age.

It is all the more regrettable, therefore, that two such important areas such as art and technology should exist in mutual isolation. Through this dualism, our age is failing to achieve the sense of visual unity that is both precondition and testimony of a true style

(59, p.8)

Behrens believes that art and technology should be fused together into one activity. He does not believe that this is a contradiction. Indeed it is not, for, as Robert M. Pirsig points out in his book Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, art and technology are, in fact, the one thing.

The divorce of art and technology is completely unnatural. It's just that it's gone on so long you have to be an archeologist to find out where the two separated.

(38, p.161)

Martin Heidegger, in his book The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, traces this argument back to Greece. He discovered that the



root word 'Techné' was used in ancient Greece to describe both the actions of the artist and the technologist. This proves that the two faces, Technological and Artistic, are of the one head, Janus.

Behrens in his essay Art and Technology makes one other powerful statement which was to change the whole face of design in the future.

Art should no longer be regarded as a private matter that one indulges in at will.

(59, p.9)

Behrens believed that Art should be controlled by the society that surrounds us. Behrens had noted that society had changed from a craft-based into an industrial based society. So what he infers is that art should be controlled by industry. From this point in history the whole face of design changed. No longer was the designer dictating to industry but industry was allowed to dictate to the designer. Peter Behrens turned design from a craft profession into an industrial profession. His three understudies, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier went and developed this concept further and created the Modern Movement.

So we can see that in his earlier career Behrens showed a lack of direction and confusion. When he found his way his reputation grew in Germany. He was the first person to formulate set ideas on standardisation and put them into use so rigidly. When working for AEG, singlehandedly he took on a job that many consultancies would baulk at today because of its size. He had very strong political ideals (these ideals were based in fascism) which he connected to the writings of Nietzsche. Reading Nietzsche in 1907 also had a great effect on Behrens when he was formulating his theories





on a correct method of design. These theories changed the role of the designer from a craft based occupation to an industrial based profession. Many of these ideas were to have a great influence on what was to come.



## CHAPTER II

### Louis Sullivan - His Reputation

Mr. Sullivan is a pleasant gentleman, but somewhat troubled with large ideas tending to metaphysics .... He refers to that work you will see about the stage opening as the differentiation of an absolute truth having something to do with Spencer's first principles and Darwin's doctrine of evolution, with the predicate of a flower and an ordinary staircase for an hypothesis.

1882, Reporter from  
The Daily Inter Ocean.  
(60, p.145)

Louis Sullivan was born in Boston in 1856 and began his architectural career in the Massachusetts Institute at the age of sixteen. He served his apprenticeship in a number of offices, but the most important must be the office of William le Baron Jenney, an engineer/architect who helped to develop the skeleton structure of skyscrapers. Sullivan then went to Paris to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Arthur J. Pulos says:

Sullivan was never in favour of historical revival simply for its own sake and his stay in Paris was very brief.

(64, p.6)

The leading style at the time in France was that of the French neo-Grec and the leading proponent was one Joseph-Auguste Emile Vandremere. The neo-Grec style did influence Sullivan's metalwork and plasterwork but did not influence his architecture to any major degree. By now the first signs of Sullivan's feelings towards decoration were becoming evident.



Sullivan always considered the ornamental element in his architectural work to be extremely important. His mature decorative style was an intensely personal expression of organic motifs.

(64, p.10)

When he returned to Chicago, he became a full partner with Dankmar Adler in 1881. Over the next fifteen years this partnership was to design some of the most influential buildings in the history of American architecture. These include the Auditorium Building, The Getty Tomb, and the Chicago Stock Exchange. There is a broad range of buildings represented here, and they show the wide range of ability that both men had.

Sullivan's hatred for over-ornamentation forced him into writing Ornament of Architecture in 1892. This manifesto deals with the age-old question of form and function.

In this manifesto, Sullivan firstly questions the virtue of putting ornament on buildings. He suggests that we should become well-grounded in how to build purely functional buildings for a number of years and

... we should thus perforce eschew many undesirable things, and learn of contrast how effective it is to think in a natural, vigorous and wholesome way.

(65, p.1)

Sullivan suggests that after this period we would be much less likely to 'vandalise' buildings with form but realise the limitations of unadorned masses also. Sullivan says that intuitively we all need to express ourselves in our work. People, he believed, needed decoration; it is part of their very nature. The beauty of ornament makes a building inspiring or





stimulating and, therefore, makes it comfortable to live and work in. From his religious beliefs it is clear that Sullivan sees human nature as having a spiritual as well as a material dimension. The beauty that he advocates as necessary for architecture seems to reflect this belief.

We have in us romanticism, and feel a craving to express it. We feel intuitively that our strong, athletic and simple forms will carry with natural ease the ornament of which we dream, and that our buildings thus clad in a garment of poetic imagery, half hid as it were in choice products of loom and mine(sic), will appeal with redoubled power.  
(65, p.2)

Sullivan tells us that we need a far more holistic approach to our designs. This will not hinder the creativeness which he believes to be so important in our work.

... an organic singleness of idea and purpose maintained to the last. The completed work will tell of this; and if it should be designed with sufficient depth of feeling and simplicity of mind, the more intense the heat in which it is conceived, the more serene and noble it will remain forever as a monument of man's eloquence.  
(65, p.2)

At the beginning of this essay, Sullivan seemed to be suggesting that form follows function. But he makes it very clear later on that he believes no such thing and that form and function cannot be separated. Sullivan realised that man has a dualistic nature and ardently believed that each side was as important as the other. If man was to design properly he could not separate the dualism and rely on one side more than the other. Like the Romans, he believed that rather than separating the faces of Janus one should realise that they were of the one head.

To my thinking, however, the mass composition and the decorative structure such as I have hinted at should be separable from each other only in theory and for the purposes of analytical study, I believe, as I have said, that an excellent and beautiful building may be designed



that shall bear no ornament whatever; but I believe just as firmly that the decorated structure, harmonically conceived, well considered, cannot be stripped of its system of ornament without destroying its individuality.

(65, p.2)

It is said that Sullivan had a very romantic approach to design, but in actuality his approach is far more craftsmanlike. Sullivan's work reflects this thinking, for each of his buildings is unique in itself. Each one comes from a separate inspiration but each unit is treated as a whole in itself. A good example of this is Sullivan's design for the Chicago Auditorium Building, which he completed in 1889 with H. H. Richardson.

The building, which is ten floors high, features H. H. Richardson's romanesque styled windows. The construction and materials that are used are very unusual. The facade is a combination of raw, unpolished granite on the first three floors, which then supports a smooth mass concrete brick structure. He mixes both the textures and the colours of the different bricks to sensational effect. Frank Lloyd Wright, who was an understudy of Sullivan at the firm, said when he saw the original sketches of the buildings:

As he threw the 'sketch' with the first three bays outlined in pencil upon it, I sensed what had happened. In his vision, here beyond doubt was a dawn of a new day in skyscraper architecture.

(60, p.65)

The Chicago Auditorium Building is a fine piece of architecture in terms of both form and function. His technical knowledge of the skyscraper combined with his intuitive approach to form allowed Sullivan to build as no one before or since. As Kenneth Frampton says of this building:







PLATE 4- Chicago Auditorium

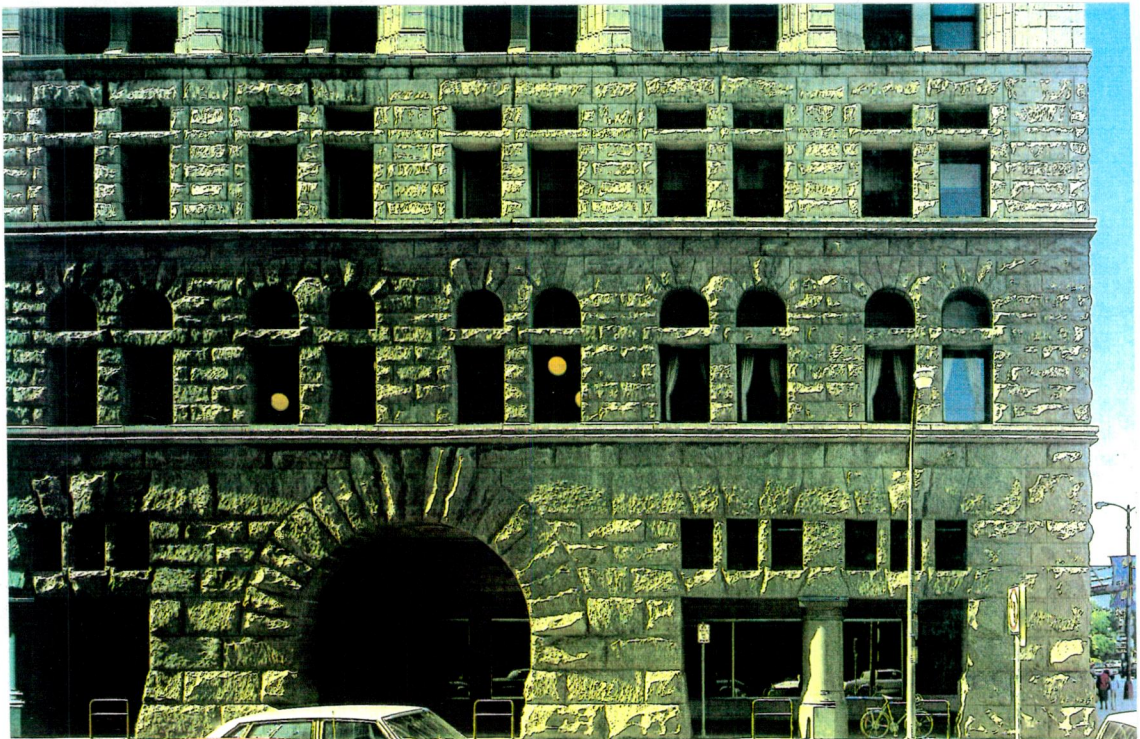
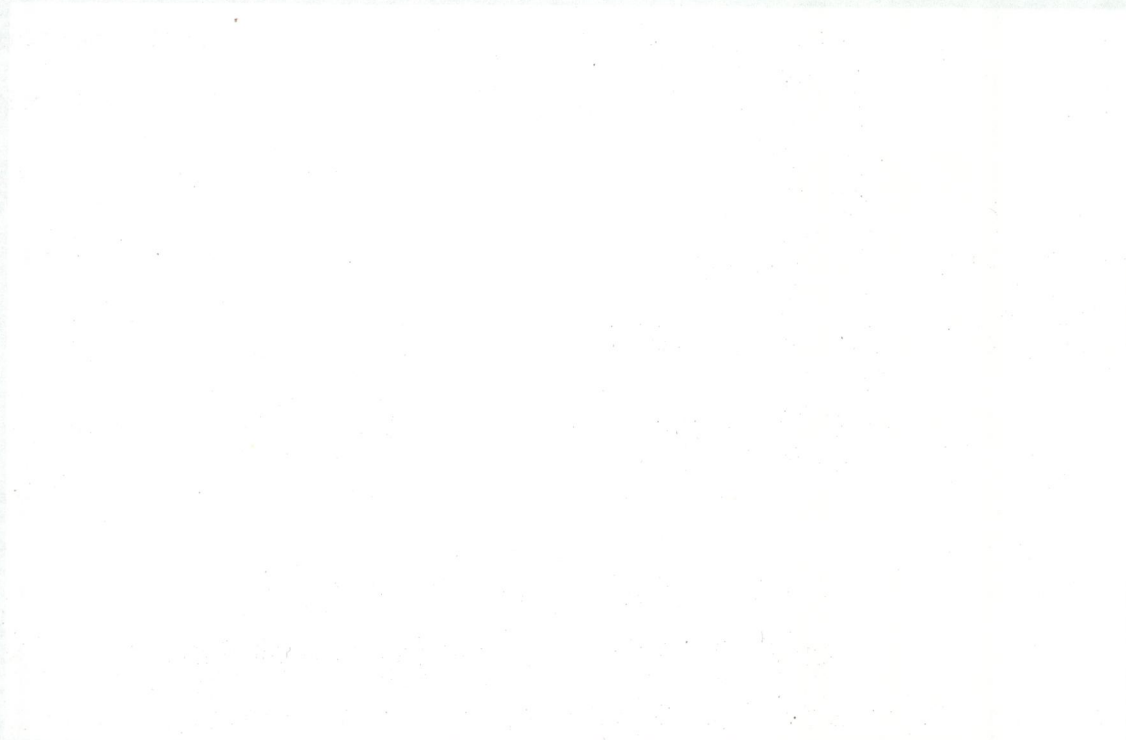


PLATE 5- Detail





A structure whose overall contribution to Chicago culture was to be as much technical as conceptual.

(13, p.69)

Sullivan's unique organisation of the brief included such innovations as locating the kitchens and dining rooms on the roof so that fumes would not disturb the residents. It becomes clear why Sullivan's reputation of the day was one of 'cultural hero', and why everything he produced at the turn of the century created a sensation.

Sullivan later got very interested in the writings of Nietzsche and did extensive reading of the German writer. But, unlike Behrens, Sullivan did not derive his own theories on design from Nietzsche. On the other hand, he fitted his own ideas into those of Nietzsche's. He wrote A System of Architectural Ornament According to Man's Powers in the year of his death. In this he reiterates the points he made in his earlier manifesto of 1892. He believed in

... an art that will live because it will be of the people, for the people, and by the people.

(60, p.67)

Sullivan believed, like Nietzsche, that man's Dionysian nature would shine through if he created the correct environment to do so.

Sullivan introduces this book with a very Nietzschean statement:

The germ is the real thing, the seat of identity. Within its delicate mechanism lies the will to power.

(13, p.72)

Sullivan's hatred for over-ornamentation forced him into writing his manifesto of 1892. In this, he clearly states that form and function have to be separated for analytical study, but never in practice. It was some time



after 1892 that he did extensive reading of Nietzsche and he linked his own theories on design with the German's. His holistic approach to design is very similar to the metaphor of Janus. The \*Apolline face and Dionysian face can be separated for discussion but one cannot forget that the two faces are of the one head.

His reputation of the day was one of cultural hero. This is not surprising for he designed for people's nature. Sullivan's buildings still stand and remind us of an age that has died out, an age where Sullivan's craftsmanlike approach to design ruled the day.

*[ \* There are various versions of this term. The one I am using is from the writings of J. P. Stern. See 53, p.44]*





## CHAPTER III

### Peter Behrens - His Influence

Behrens's ideas and designs created standards that survived long after their initial realisation. Every subsequent design in the same area - for a button console, a kettle, an advertising brochure, a factory or company housing estate - is unavoidably a statement of agreement or disagreement with Behrens's prototype.

Tilman BUDDENSIEG  
(61, p.63)

Behrens's influence on the design world is prodigious. His theories on combining art and technology had a major influence on his understudies Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier. In 1918 Walter Gropius declared 'Art and Technology - a new unity' as if he had originated it. Gropius based the whole epistemology of the Bauhaus around Behrens's idea of unifying the avant garde art of the day with new manufacturing technology.

But this unity was soon to create problems in the design world that have not been solved to this day. The reason for this is quite complex and is centred in the fact that the art of the day was based on abstract geometric form.

Art from the 1840's had become scientifically based mainly due to the philosophies of the Positivists at that time. Herbert Read points out that Cézanne was the first of these artists and the influence had made his work more and more scientific.



Cézanne had been influenced by the temper of the age, his whole attitude to nature, which is analytical, and to his technique of art, which is experimental, is essentially scientific. Analysis is the key word of his whole procedure, and analysis is a scientific word.

(41, p.69)

After Cézanne came the artists who discovered the new science of the day - psychology. This new science allowed the artist to change the basis of his work. Artists were no longer dependent at all on nature, and artists such as Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky divined a new type of art - modern art.

The basis of the work of art was no longer nature, but idea - something conceptual, geometric, architectural.

(41, p.70)

Both Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky lectured at the Bauhaus, teaching basic drawing and 'abstract form'. Abstract form was an easy way to teach students how to simplify their designs. But once this 'scientific art' was combined with 'scientific technology' the result was a 'scientific design'. The whole Bauhaus was based on a scientific approach. Students did not attend lectures - they attended 'laboratories'. The students were taught to design using scientific method, thus approaching designs as a scientist would set up an experiment - objectively. Any doubt about the truth of this assertion is dispelled by their practice of wearing laboratory coats as they worked. This whole modernist approach to design tries to deny any form of individual expression.

As David Bohm points out in Science Order and Creativity, once patterns of behaviour are imposed mechanically or externally they produce a rigid structure which





....blocks the free play of thought and the free movement of awareness and attention that are necessary for creativity to act.

(5, p.231)

What this does in actuality is to stifle the Dionysian face of Janus and tries to rely totally on his Apolline face. Once a designer starts to design objectively, he reifies his work away from himself. He can no longer use or recognise the intuitive part of his nature; the work loses its character and becomes lifeless and unnatural, akin to one of Louis Sullivan's 'unadorned masses'.

When nature casts up matter, when it makes forms, that itself is the evidence for its creative intelligence.

(56, p.100)

David Bohm suggests that the evidence for man's creative intelligence is the forms he makes. The 20th century is often regarded as one of the most creative in history, an opinion I would take issue with. Rupert Sheldrake points out in The Presence of the Past that creativity has two expressions. Its first expression is creativity in the weak sense of the word.

The end-points or goals or attractors given by the fields remain the same; what are new are the ways of reaching them. This kind of creativity is commonly expressed in words such as adaptability, flexibility, ingeniousness, and resourcefulness.

(44, p.317)

Much of the creativity of this century is of this general type. We have developed a scientific system which allows us to adjust its component parts and their interrelationships, and at the end of the day we have many means for the one end. As Sheldrake puts it, we have many ingenious ways of making better mousetraps.



This form of creativity bears no relationship to Nietzsche's Dionysian creativity. Interestingly, the work done in the Bauhaus in product design never went into mass production, so therefore had limited effect at the time. But it did have a great effect on the field of design education. The course I am pursuing (Industrial Design, National College of Art and Design, 100, Thomas Street, Dublin, 8), which is similar to most design courses around the world, is based on the original principles of the Bauhaus.

This weak Apolline type of creativity also has close links to Behrens's ideas on standardisation. In industry the basic components of products are standard, and this not only affects the creating of new designs (which will have to use these parts) but also affects any improvements that can be made to existing designs.

This is not completely the fault of standardisation alone. Much of the blame must rest on the shoulders of that industry to which Behrens sacrificed our future. Rather than using industry for political goals, as Behrens did, what has happened is that industry itself has become the sorcerer's apprentice. It uses standardisation for its own purposes, that is, for making profit.

Standardisation enables industry to mass produce a single part for a number of different functions (the part may not be efficient at any of these functions). A product may be made up of six standard parts; each of these parts is made up of a number of components, which in turn increases the actual number of parts enormously compared to an item made up of 'necessary parts'. This allows industry to do large production runs of





unnecessary parts, which make the product cheaper to produce but of poorer quality.

Jeremy Rifkin (42, p.164) gives us the facts about the Sears Building in Chicago. According to him it is a monument of modernism, which uses more electricity than a city populated by 147,000 people, contains more than 80 miles of elevator cables and enough concrete to cover 78 football pitches. In terms of efficiency these modern 'smart' buildings are highly wasteful and next to impossible to maintain once a breakdown occurs anywhere in the system.

Mies van der Rohe's dictum was 'Less is more', to which he later added 'My architecture is almost nothing'. This minimalist approach to architecture has its roots in Behrens's theories on standardisation. On the Seagram Building, another typical example of modernism, a tenant could only have white blinds or shades, and there were only three intervals where they would stay put; open, closed and halfway.

'Less is a bore' retorted Robert Venturi as the effects of this kind of architecture on the tenants became clear. But on a far more serious note, the work of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier became the model for all modern architecture. The effects of this type of architecture on western society is immeasurable, as Desmond Morris points out.

In the case of the block of flats the situation is even more acute. The psychological damage done to the territorialism of the families forced by architects, planners and builders to live under these conditions is incalculable.

(30, p.160)





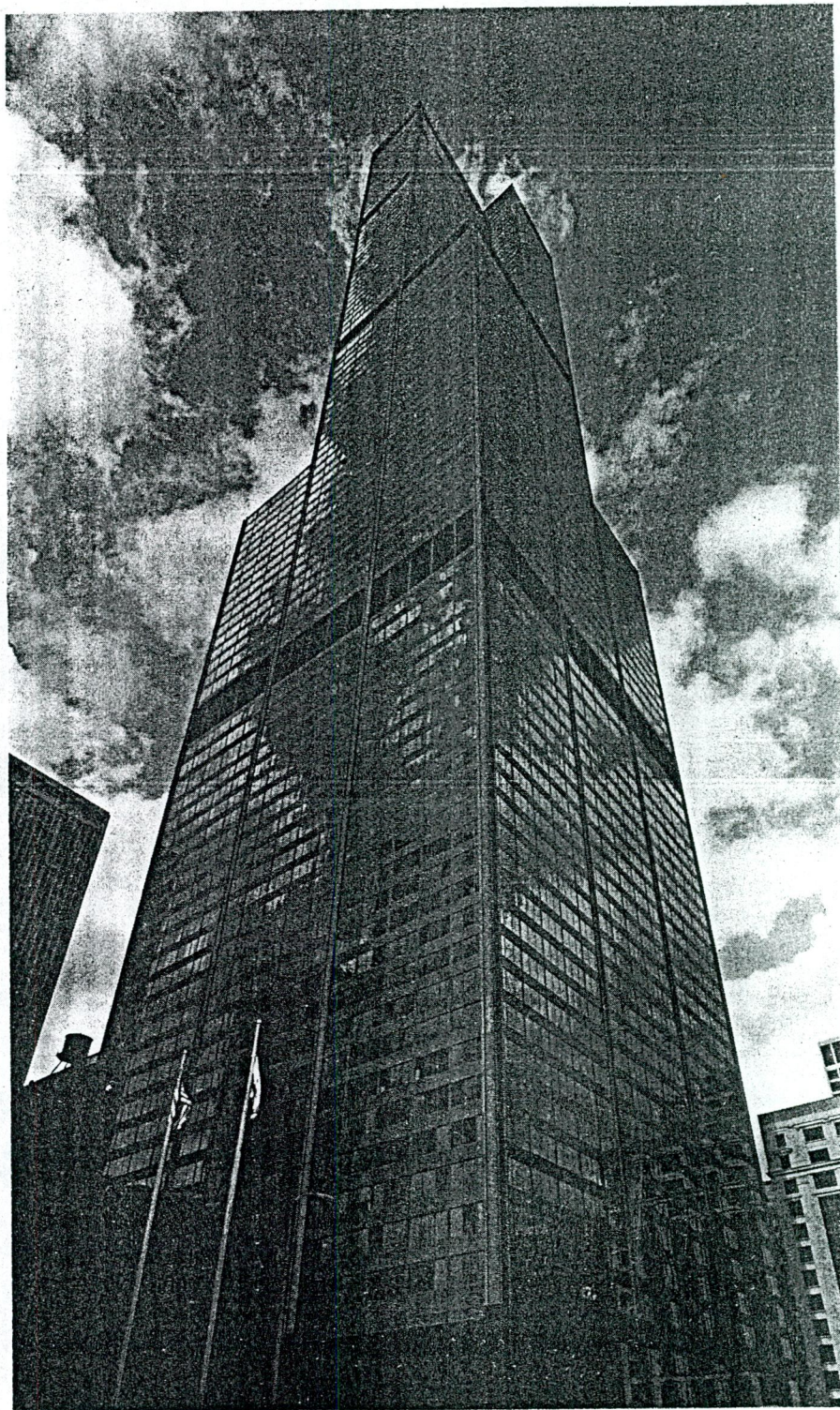


PLATE 6- Sears Tower, Chicago





Indeed all the architects whose work is based on Behrens's ideas have a lot to answer for. Henryk Skolimonski sums it up when he says:

Intoxicated by the image of technology triumphant, and with the slogan 'Form follows Function', we have made our rationality and our perception of the built environment a slave to industrial efficiency. In the process we have deluded ourselves in many ways. For example, we insisted that the modern movement was 'doing more with less', while, when we carefully look at the actual record, we may come to the surprising conclusion that WE HAVE BEEN DOING LESS WITH MORE, with more technology, more know-how, more new materials, we have created architecture which is less memorable than any created before. Having at our disposal the best means, we have created the worst architecture in history.

(47, p.164)

In reality, what the Bauhaus did was to mix the utilitarian scientific approach of the Positivists with Nietzsche's ideas on 'will to power', and then handed control of this volatile combination into the hands of an unscrupulous industry.

Industry has remained unchallenged by society ever since. The effect of the lack of creativity and industry's use of standardisation has had a detrimental effect on society and the environment in which we live.

The time has come for both society and its designers to wake up to what has happened and to try and reverse the processes that now control our lives.



## CHAPTER IV

### Louis Sullivan - His Influence.

Why then, has Louis Sullivan proven to be such an enigma? His buildings integrate burgeoning foliate ornament with rational, geometric structure. By sundering them, critics have been able to see him as progenitor of both organic and functional architecture . . . . By integrating his writing and his buildings, critics have been prone to see him as a tragic failure who aspired to create a perfect synthesis between idea and form, an aspiration so ambitious that it was doomed to founder.

R.B. ELSTEIN  
(60, p.208)

Unlike Peter Behrens, Louis Sullivan's influence on those who were to follow was to be minimal. The main reason for this was the critics' debates of the 1930's. At this time there was major disagreement on the role of Sullivan's work in the history of architecture.

On one side were the functionalists, who were very enthusiastic about the new international style coming from Europe. By 1937 Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe had gone to America because of Nazi rule in Germany. Both men were given posts in colleges; Gropius got the chair in Harvard and van der Rohe the chair in the Massachusetts Institute.

Even though architectural critics such as Philip Johnson, Siegfried Giedon and Sheldon Chaney were highly impressed by their work, the American public were not as convinced. To counter this, the critics connected the theories of Louis Sullivan (who was still a cultural hero) to the theories of





the international style. Chaney 'believed' that Sullivan had much to do with modernism's ancestry and was a man before his time.

In particular, they looked to Sullivan's manifesto of 1892. They noted that Sullivan talked about function firstly and then about form. Therefore the former must be more important than the latter. They quoted the beginning of the manifesto.

If we have then become grounded in pure and simple forms we will reverse them; we will refrain intuitively from vandalism; we will be loath to do aught that makes these forms less pure, less noble.

(65, p.1)

In text books today, historians such as <sup>K U</sup>Nicolas Pevsner, John Heskett and Kenneth Frampton say that Sullivan's dictum from his manifesto was 'Form follows function'. None of them say anything about Behrens's links with fascism, or the abuse of the systemisation that he introduced.

They also looked to Sullivan's work and saw the amount of detail in terms of rational layout and structure that Sullivan put in his buildings. They used this to support their theories. As it turned out the American public were still not impressed, and most of the work the Germans got was from the government.

But the modernist movement still had a great effect on the American design profession. As Tom Wolfe says:

Within three years the course of American architecture had changed, utterly; it was not so much the buildings the Germans designed. It was more the system of institution they introduced.

(57, p.48)



The modernists attitude to Louis Sullivan is curious, for it is blatantly obvious that their treatment of his work and his texts is far from objective.

If Sullivan was the functionalist that they claimed, how, for example, could he condone his own use of ornament in the Guaranty Building in Buffalo? Sullivan designed the ornament on the facade specially to catch the dust so that the detail of the ornament stood out. A far cry from the functionalist architecture Sullivan supposedly stood for.

Some of the international style partisans changed their views on Sullivan's architecture later in the 1950's. Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's new assessments of Sullivan's work grudgingly agreed that Sullivan was a 'unique architect', but then concluded that this was only due to his 'paranoiac' attitude to ornament. Sullivan did influence Frank Lloyd Wright, his understudy, and it is interesting that Wright is referred to as enigmatic, by Johnson and Hitchcock. (60, p.203)

There were rare critics during the forties and fifties such as Henry Hope and Lewis Mumford who supported Sullivan's holistic approach to design. Henry Hope said in response to the modernists:

The proper evaluation of Sullivan's architecture will include his ornament.

(60, p.203)

Likewise

While admitting his flaws, Mumford extolled and defended Sullivan, concluding that, although Sullivan failed to achieve everything, he accomplished something so worthwhile and enduring he must be accorded a unique place in architectural history.

(60, p.203)





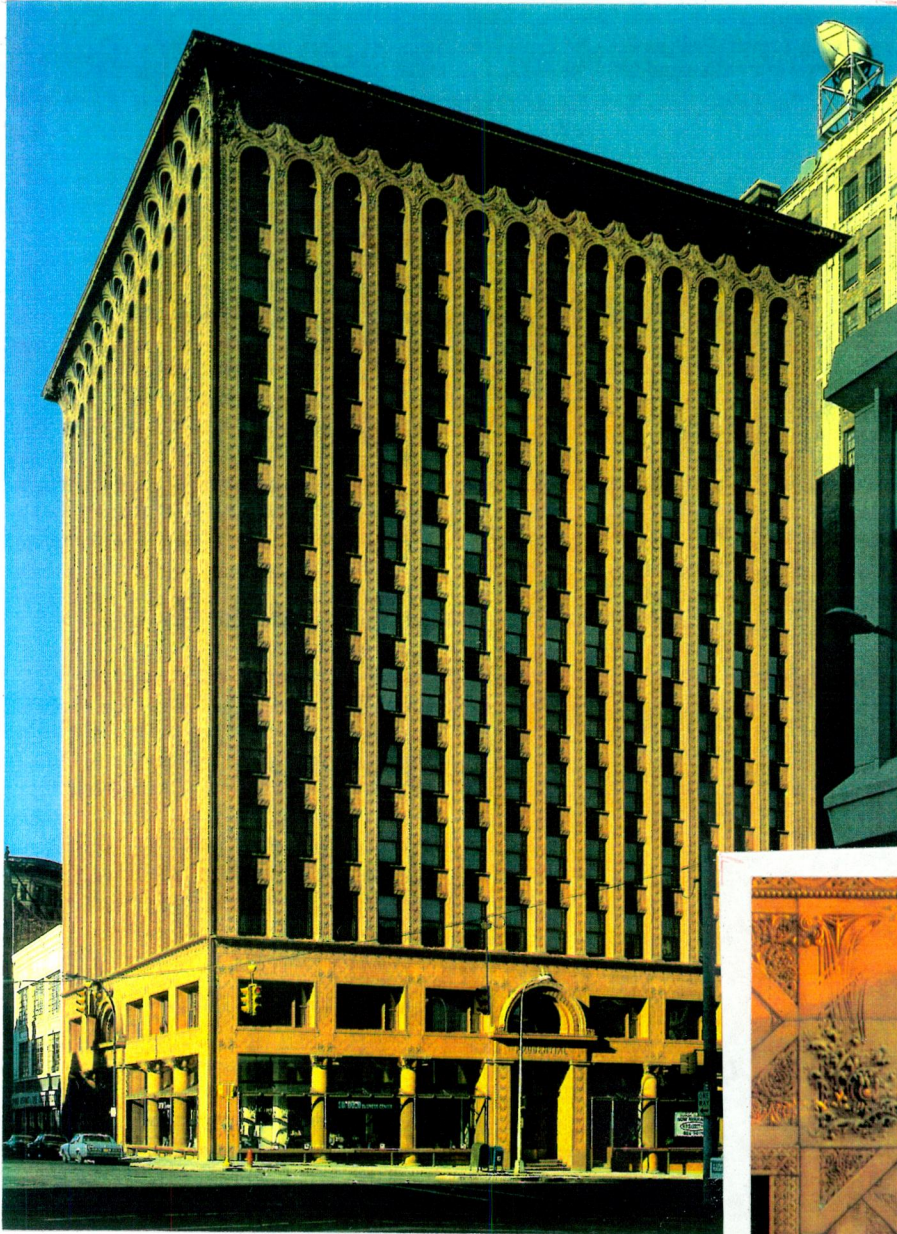
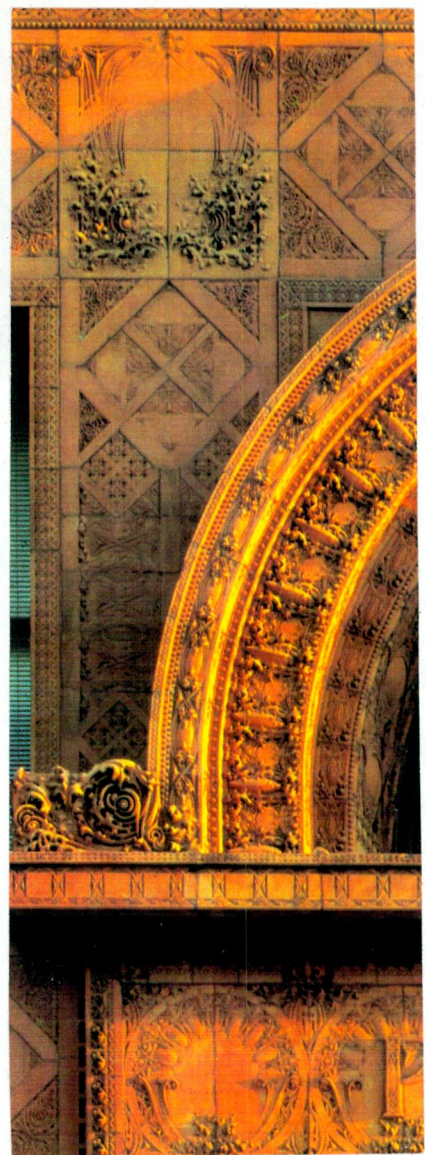


PLATE 7- Guaranty Building Buffalo

PLATE 8- Detail of ornament







It is only in the last ten years that there has been any real reassessment of Louis Sullivan's work. This is due to the partial crumbling of the modernist theories and the re-emergence of new attitudes towards minimalism by the American public.

As our milieu changed, as new frameworks emerge for comprehending works of architecture, art and literature, as new styles evolve for which precedents must be ascertained, new formulations of the meaning implicit in Sullivan's creations will also evolve. (60, p.208)

Sullivan, as of yet, has not really influenced the world of architecture and design. It is hoped that a full reassessment of his work will take place and that his attitudes and approach to designing will be used to come up with something new. Sullivan was not one for looking back at past styles and, in keeping with this, I hope that any reassessment will not include a 'retro' of his style. But if his theories are used properly, Sullivan could become a cultural giant of our times just as he was at the turn of the century.





## CONCLUSION

The less you understand, the more ready you are to give reverence.  
You know Hitler better than Nietzsche, Napoleon better than  
Pestalozzi."

Wilhelm Reich  
(55, p.610)

In their own day, Sullivan's and Behrens's reputations were of a high order. Sullivan was compared to such cultural giants as Walt Whitman in the USA while Behrens enjoyed high political status in Germany and created the greatest corporate identity in the history of design.

After Sullivan's death in 1922 Behrens's influence reached a still higher plane and it held sway over that of Sullivan. Through his proteges Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, Behrens's theories on design gained substantial ground in the USA, particularly in Harvard and the Chicago Institute, which were responsible for the training of America's finest architects and designers.

Behrens believed in the Superman concept and used his design skills to help in the formulation of the creation of the German Superman doctrine used to such devastating effect by Adolf Hitler and his henchmen. He has to take at least some of the responsibility for what followed in the world from this. Looking at his design dispassionately, it is clean, highly efficient, admirable. But viewed in the light of the use to which it was put



it has become tainted. In short, the man kept the worst of bad company and his reputation has suffered as a result.

Sullivan also believed in the Superman but he believed that "Übermensch" was the whole of humanity. This is why Sullivan's designs were loved by the people because they were meant for the people. In contrast, Behrens's designs are tainted by the apprehension in people's minds that they were used by his political masters for the purposes of tyranny.

In terms of actual theory Behrens's accomplishment was a political one.

In this respect he succeeded admirably, much to the world's chagrin.

From his writings I feel that his thinking was limited by his aims.

Sullivan, on the other hand, seems to me to have a much better grasp of his own theories and the theories of Nietzsche. He already knew what he was doing before he married his theories to those of Nietzsche. He understood humanity better than Behrens and his thinking is on a higher plane.

Behrens formed his theories directly from Nietzsche but his resulting theories are faulty. Either he did not understand his chosen philosopher fully or he took only those aspects which suited his own goals. It is ironic that he died while trying to escape from German occupied Vienna in 1942, after falling foul of those whom he had helped to conquer most of Europe.

A further irony is that Behrens berated the Positivists for their utilitarianism but since then, and particularly in the Bauhaus, Nietzsche's will to power has been combined with the rational ideals of the Positivists. Design has been prostituted once again. Behrens did it in the interests of





his political masters. Those he criticised did it in the interests of industry and of profit.

The control of the lethal combination of the will to power and rationalism has been handed over to industry. Designers, because they are now in an industrially based profession, are manipulated by industry for their own ends. Now it is rare that designers take note of society's wishes. Instead they design purely for the industrial god. There is at present a major design crisis. Post modernism has posed many very awkward questions but rarely, if ever, have any answers been given. Nevertheless, the questions are still valid.

We stand at a crossroads in the evolution of Western consciousness. One fork retains all the assumptions of the Industrial Revolution and would lead us to salvation through science and technology. In short it holds that the paradigm that got us into trouble can somehow get us out ... The other fork leads to a future that is yet somewhat obscure.  
(4, P.189)

Two roads now face society and its designers. The first is a continuation of Behrens's theories combined with rationalism and it asks us to return to modernism and its ideals. Many of the present designers have gone this way already and there is at present a return to 'black box aesthetics'. This form of aesthetic originated from the Uhm school of design in the 1950's and is a direct offshoot of the Bauhaus school. It relies totally on the weak creativity of which I spoke in Chapter III. This is not to say that weak creativity is not important in design but it should never be mistaken for Dionysian creativity.

More alarmingly, at the present in America there are efforts being made to put design on a completely scientific footing. For example, in Chicago



there is a concerted effort to produce a design methodology based on A.I. (artificial intelligence). There are many complex reasons for this concerted effort but the main one is that if design is put on this footing, its importance in industry will increase (and so will the amount of the money that designers earn). But if this takes place, design will be completely at the mercy of industry's 'will to power'.

This route, I believe, could result in the weakening of society's cultural framework and further damage to the environment in which we live. The designer will no longer be just a slave of industry but will be a specialist, similar to an electronic engineer. Once this specialisation takes place, designers will no longer be able to see or understand the enormous amount of damage that they can do to the world. Even if they do see it they will not feel that it is their responsibility to direct society's attention to the moral questions involved.

There is another road that we can take and indeed, a more difficult route. This road will require not just design but the whole of humanity to go through a paedomorphosis as never attempted before.

The phenomenon of paedomorphosis indicates that in certain circumstances evolution can retrace its steps, as it were, along the path that led to the dead end, and make a start in a new more promising direction.

(24, P.163)

And as Nietzsche himself summed it up:

What I attack is that economic optimism which behaves as though, with the increasing expenditure of all, the welfare of all would also necessarily increase. To me the opposite seems to be the case: the sum total of the expenditure of all amounts to a total loss: man is diminished - indeed, one no longer knows what purpose this immense





process has served in the first place. A purpose? A new purpose - that is what mankind needs!

(53, p.89)

To stop society's over-specialisation we will have to re-evaluate our whole educational system. Over the last number of years there has been a concerted move by students to study just the sciences and to forget about humanities. The rationale of this is that most of the jobs in modern industry are science related. But is the role of our educational system to educate or to employ?

In 1943, the French philosopher Jacques Maritain gave a lecture in Yale University. He was worried about the trends he saw in education at that time. He said;

With regard to the development of the human mind, neither the richest material facilities nor the richest equipment in methods, information, and erudition are the main point. The great thing is the awakening of the inner resources and creativity.

(29, p.43)

In terms of the college education system in design, a whole restructuring will have to take place. No longer can we rely on a structure which is over 80 years old and which has created many more problems than it has solved. A new approach will have to be implemented. This will have to include the humanities simply for creative reasons. Creativity cannot be measured but it can be encouraged from its students. This is not to say that design methodology is not important but it is to say that design methodology is not design. A balance needs to be achieved between the rational and the intuitive, the scientific and the creative, the Apolline and the Dionysian nature of man.



The new purpose for design must be to reassess Sullivan's theories on design and use them to create a new road for humanity. Once again the questions of form and function will have to be dealt with. The only way to deal with these issues is to realise that each face of the dualism is actually of the one head - that of Janus.





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