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SHIFTING THE STONES OF LITTLE MAGAZINES: THE TRANSLATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF OTTO WAGNER’S MODERNE ARCHITEKTUR

Proceeding from Manfredo Tafuri’s discussion of historical writing as a process of shifting stones, this paper perceives all revisionist architectural criticism as an act of mining, to unearth the implications of both the verbal and visual discourse founded on the modern concept of architecture as language. This mining is particularly evident in the surge of European to English translations published within post-modern architectural little magazines. For the purposes of this essay, I examine the case study 9H journal, produced between 1980 and 1995 by a voluntary editorial team of Master of Science students at the Bartlett School at University College, London (UCL). 9H was one of the first British little magazines to mine Eurocentric revisionist theory to form international relationships with theorists and practitioners. In 1983, 9H translated Otto Wagner’s nineteenth-century manifesto ‘Modern Architecture’. A comparison of Wagner’s original and 9H's post-modern publication reveal no shifts in verbal language, yet significant transformations in visual language through the editorials selection of images. Through a historic framework constructed from the writings of Kenneth Frampton, Roland Barthes and Beatriz Colomina, identifying both the text and the rhetoric of the image as transmitting linguistic and cultural meaning, this paper seeks to address the following: to what extent does the interaction of language and images in architectural publication influence the reading of the text? What post-modern interests did this translation serve through the ways the 9H editorial transformed Wagner’s visual language? Finally, what is obscured from Wagner’s language through 9H’s visual transformation? This investigation proposes mining within architectural historiography as a critical method to navigate the discursive formations that emerged within the counter-culture of mainstream post-modernism, and in a current milieu where the image dominates, it encourages theorists and practitioners to understand the important connoted meanings embedded in photography and drawing.
Architectural History and Criticism as Mining

Introducing his seminal text *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, Manfredo Tafuri examines the challenges for the historian that arise from the relationship between architecture, language, and historical space. In order to theorise historical work, Tafuri believes the historian must acknowledge firstly that his language of criticism will “move and break up stones,” and secondly that his own language “is itself a stone.” Tafuri concludes that the critical historian can only “shift the stones” by shifting around its own stones. Proceeding from Tafuri, this investigation conceives all architectural criticism as a form of mining, and constructs a critical framework that “shifts around its own stones” to analyse an historic example of mining in post-modern theory.

The concept that architecture is a form of language is a cornerstone of modern architectural theory. With its roots in eighteenth-century discourse, this tripartite relationship between architecture, society, and language witnessed a revival within post-modernism as a counterattack to arguments conceptualising architecture as stylistic exploration. Many post-modern little magazines conducted an operative ‘moving of stones’ of history in their aim to practice a revisionist modernism, and these linguistic and visual spaces provide excellent sites in which to analyse the production and representation of mined architectural discourse.

Within this post-modern discourse of architecture as language, many English and American journals employed a key historiographic device, the European to English translation. This tendency of theorists to mine historic writings in order to forge discursive relations between England, Europe and America, was evident in the outcomes of the Enlightenment. Translation theory analysing this earlier pan-European movement, for example, focuses on the Continental reception of Anglophone authors. In the late 20th century, this exchange reversed and many texts were translated to English in many cases for the first time. This essay demonstrates that the postmodern condition John Rajchman defined as “translation without a master” entails a transformation in two ways: first, linguistically, and second, culturally, the latter resulting from a relativist assessment of a text’s reception. Tafuri’s mining metaphor enables an examination of the representation of a translation within *9H* journal, as one example of this post-modern transatlantic trend, and on which there has been a paucity of critique.

Any publication acts as a “critical mirror” of the editorial who produced it. The act of translation is an act of analogy, and presupposes the author and translator share a position. However, the ‘stone’ of the post-modern published translation was twofold; it cited analogous ideas, whilst maintaining a critical distance by attributing the text to the author without contributing an original critique. This thesis proposes that the discursive device of the Continental to Anglophone translation was a post-modern act of operative criticism that “plans past history by projecting it towards the future.”

Furthermore, any publication that acknowledges the importance of language produces semantic plays within the textual and graphic content of the artefact itself. By focusing on one translation, this investigation unearths the implications of representing the discourse of architecture as a form of language that is both verbal and visual. In the same manner linguistic choices are ideological, so too are the images, which editorial’s publish. In order to extract *9H*’s ideological ‘moving of stones’, this thesis ‘shifts around its own stones’ by constructing a historic framework utilising Kenneth Frampton’s architectural theories, Beatriz Colomina’s writings on the architecture of the image, and Roland Barthes’s semiotics of language and photography. An analysis will be conducted of *9H*’s translation and representation of Otto Wagner, in his essay entitled *Moderne Architektur* (1898), firstly through a textual comparison of Wagner’s first English translation in 1901 with *9H* in 1983, and secondly a graphic analysis employing Barthes’s concepts of “connotative meaning” through each publication’s choice of photographs, the photographer’s gaze, layout, syntax, and captions.
Otto Wagner in 9H

In the first volume of 9H, the editorial stated their intent to publish “translations of important texts within current and historic architectural discourse.” The historiographic tool of translation was central to 9H’s production of discourse, so much so that the first volume was entitled 9H: Bartlett Translations. The first English translation of Moderne Architektur occurred in The Brickbuilder, the journal of the American Institute of Architects, in 1901. Eighty-two years later in 9H 6 (1983), Wang and Diamond published a second translation of the manifesto, noting “significant errors in meaning and word order” in The Brickbuilder. Wang and Diamond claim they explicitly refer to Wagner’s second edition of Moderne Architektur published in 1898. However, a textual comparison of The Brickbuilder and 9H’s manifesto reveals no detrimental linguistic transformations as inferred by Wang and Diamond, but instead significant adjustments in the published images, that it will be demonstrated produce noteworthy cultural transformations.

In order to speculate on the journal’s cultural transformation of Wagner it is important to recognise the milieu in which 9H emerged. Observing the dates of revisionist publications and English translations within post-modernism quantifies this transatlantic trend previously mentioned. Figure 1 charts the dates of Wagnerian critique published in little magazines in Japan, America, Italy, and England, indicating a significant revival between 1976 and 1983. The choice for Anglophone publications in the height of post-modernism to ‘shift the stones’ of late-19th and early-20th century Viennese architects who were considered “philosophers of language” reflects their aim to establish an intellectual counter-movement.

Within this milieu, 9H also emerged in 1980 as a counter-culture to the mainstream post-modern movements in London - the High Tech group, the Townscape movement, and stylistic historicist tendencies - that “encouraged the reduction of architecture to scenography.” In another paper, this author has elaborated on Frampton’s implicit influence of his revisionist modernism on the 9H editorial, which here it will be summarised as his significant publication experience, his didactic relationship with two of the principal editors, and his curricula taught to Bartlett UCL students between 1980 and 1981 as the Sir Banister Fletcher Visiting Professor. The paper will now proceed to examine Frampton’s critique of Wagner published in Modern Architecture: A Critical History (1980) that provided his lecture material for Bartlett students.
Kenneth Frampton on Otto Wagner

The first mention of Wagner in Frampton’s Modern Architecture (1980) occurs in the context of the Chicago fin-de-siècle architects. Frampton draws similarities between Adler and Sullivan’s Wainwright Building and Wagner’s stereometric structures and ornamentation. In the same text, Frampton summarises Wagner’s position presented in Moderne Architektur as “between the rationalism of the Schinkelschüler and the more rhetorical manner of those last great architects of the Ringstrasse, Gottfried Semper….” For Frampton, Wagner’s work has two identifiable periods, his early historicist “engineering” work, and his modernist “mature work” after 1901.

Sixteen years later, in Studies in Tectonic Culture (1996), Frampton elaborates on Wagner’s theoretical position. Modelling his own dichotomous theory of tectonics on Semper’s symbolic and technical aspects of construction, Frampton discusses the representational aspect (the skin), and the ontological aspect (the core) that constitute tectonic form. Frampton reveals Wagner’s affinities with Bötticher’s pre-Semperian theory of tectonics based on the Kernform (core form, or kernel) and the Kunstform (artistic form, or hull), yet also states that in Schinkel’s architecture “the Kernform (core form) rather than the Kunstform (art form) predominates.” Frampton concludes both phases of Wagner’s work can be read as “a constant oscillation between the tectonic of the structure and the largely aetetonic veil of the skin.” Frampton makes explicit two tendencies within Wagner’s oeuvre, which illuminate two possible ways for the historian to ‘move the stones’; the first is a rationalist formalism similar to Schinkel’s legacy, and the second emerges through the lens of Semper’s theory of Bekleidung (dressing). The text of Wagner’s manifesto and 9H’s preface will now be compared to illuminate these two interpretations.

Wagner’s Verbal Language

Wagner published Moderne Architektur in 1896, and revised it in 1898, 1902 and 1914. The second edition consists of six subtitles: ‘The Architect’, ‘The Style’, ‘The Composition’, ‘The Construction’, ‘Practice of the Art’ and ‘Epilogue’. In the section entitled ‘The Style’, which can be suggested is a direct homage to Semper’s Der Stil (1860), Wagner states that the interior and exterior - or in Bötticher’s terms the kernel and hull - require different aesthetic expressions, where “externally, plastered construction… requires the panel and panel-like forms.” In this section, Semper’s concept of Bekleidung is explicit in Wagner’s prose in the synonyms he forges between style, taste, fashion, and clothing.

In ‘The Composition’, although not citing Schinkel directly, the architect’s rationalist legacy is evident as Wagner calls for the “prominence of reason” and the importance of programmatic arrangement “to produce the clearest and simplest solution.” Taturi has noted Wagner’s recurrent theme of centrality, which here Wagner makes explicit in that “a simple and clear arrangement of the plan generally requires symmetry.” Semper’s Bekleidung again infiltrates Wagner’s compositional ideas, stating, “it is a great error to adapt the internal structure to a favourite external motif.”

In the sub-heading ‘The Construction’, which Frampton cites as seminal within the manifesto, Wagner emphasises “necessity is the sole mistress of art.” This aphorism could be a functionalist idiom, however Wagner then elaborates “a constructive basis influences forms”, resulting in modernist architecture. He emphasises the use of new materials, in particular steel, must become apparent in architectural form, and by citing Semper again, it is clear that Wagner does not perceive modernity as a tabula rasa condition, but instead rooted in tradition and evolutionary in nature.

9H’s Verbal Language

The connection Frampton forges between Wagner and the Chicago School is evident in Lawrence Booth’s preface to 9H’s translation entitled ‘Vienna/Chicago: Wagner/Chicago School’. Booth states after Wagner wrote the manifesto that he “went on to realize his theoretical position in such master works as the Post Office Savings Bank and the Church Am Steinhof.” Booth contradicts Frampton’s categorisation of Wagner’s early and later work, and a cultural transformation, a shifting of the stones of Wagner’s concept of modern architecture begins to manifest. The second edition of Moderne Architektur (1898) explains Wagner’s position during his earlier engineering period, yet 9H clearly publish the manifesto to explain and present Wagner’s ‘mature work’ after 1901 supporting their own agenda of a revisionist modernism. Noting this linguistic shift, the paper will proceed to illuminate the cultural transformations of Moderne Architektur evident in 9H’s selection of images.
Wagner's Visual Language

In Wagner's *Moderne Architektur* (1898), one photograph of his built work accompanies each subtitle. In the prefacing text, Wagner is aware of the verbal and visual semiotics at work, revealing he photographed and selected the images as the plates “would increase the comprehension of the text.” Wagner was an excellent draughtsman and his choice to employ the photographic medium is significant. Wagner makes this clear in the section entitled “The practice of the art”; firstly, he states, “so long as architectural creations remain on paper, very little interest in them is manifested.” Photography portrays tectonic and tactile qualities of a constructed work on which the medium of drawing can only speculate. Secondly, drawing “exhibits the taste of the artist” and therefore does not demonstrate truth, which is central to his philosophy on construction and representation. For Wagner in the 19th century, photography “is more direct, correct, and therefore, more natural to place the work before the eyes of the observer.” Figure 2 shows Wagner’s six published photographs of four projects: Nussdorf dam completed in 1896, Meidlung and Gumpendorfer Strasse station both completed in 1897; and the fifth photograph consists of bathroom and bedroom furniture for an unknown design.

![Wagner's Visual Language](image)


9H’s Visual Language

In comparison to Wagner’s six photographs, 9H publish 27 photographs and 3 drawings, clearly privileging the visual over the verbal where this excessive documentation presents a “pretence of representing reality.” By ignoring the importance of connoted meaning within architectural photography, the editorial contradicts the intent to challenge post-modernism’s scenographic tendencies.
Regarding the content of the photographs, most of the projects, which 9H publish are from Wagner's mature period and completed after Wagner wrote the second edition, again contradicting the intent to publish a truthful translation. The projects in order of appearance include Wagner's Nussdorf dam and administration building of 1898, Palais Wagner of 1891, Karlsplatz station of 1899, Länderbank of 1884, Post Office Savings Bank of 1906 and furniture designed by Thonet, Rossauerlände station of 1900, and Steinhof Church of 1906. First, one must note that only one of the seven projects features in Wagner's original publication. Second, more than half of the images depict the Post Office Savings Bank (nine photos), and the Church am Steinhof (six photos), which are commonly held as modernist canons for their “purity of design... a whole architectonic expression.”

Yet where Mark Wigley claims “it is hard to think of a more polemical articulation of Semper’s theory of dressing” than in the Post Office Savings Bank, 9H’s photographs do not differentiate between kernform and kunstform. Ironically, three of the nine photographs depict the furniture Thonet designed for the Bank interior, as Semper criticised Thonet’s bentwood designs for sacrificing the material’s “intrinsic meaning.” Instead, one double-page spread includes two exterior photos (where the cladding detail is out of focus), one exterior detail, and three interior details. It appears that 9H privileges the detailing of grilles, ducts, and light fittings reminiscent of the modernist architect as total designer, over Wagner’s tectonic concerns.

Concluding on the choice of each publication’s visual language, the semiotics at work within the images will now be analysed. Barthes refers to these operations as “connoted messages” which will be demonstrates through the gaze of the photographer, the layout, the syntax produced by sequence, and the captions. These semiotics grant ‘the translator without a master’ the ability to present Wagner as historicist or modernist, and therefore, to shift the stones of his work through the frame of Semper’s theory of dressing, or through the lens of modernist formalism.

Wagner’s Visual Language

Wagner’s gaze from his eye-level photographs position the viewer either on the street or inside his projects. In the manifesto, he rejects the picturesque in favour for perspective, claiming the architect must place “correct emphasis from a single point of view.” This personified gaze emphasises on the experiential quality of architecture and illuminates the importance Wagner places on construction. Additionally, I suggest there is a shared connoted meaning within the elevation drawing and frontal photograph, and a perspective drawing and oblique photograph. The elevation and frontal photograph reveals information about the façade and is proportionally accurate, and the perspective and oblique photograph convey a subjective architectural experience. In addition to the eye-level gaze, Wagner further enhances the experiential quality by positioning his buildings or furniture at oblique angles.

Both Wagner’s and 9H’s layout are typical of modernism’s “composite photographic text” yet employ different visual language within the images. Through Wagner’s layout of one image per sub-heading, he allows the reader space to construct “meanings in the void” of the white space between plates and text as a true Viennese philosopher of language, giving the reader space to decode the rhetoric of the photographs. Furthermore, because no internal or external image may be adjacent, Wagner connotes his neo-Semperian theory. This separation of exterior and interior photographs symbolises that the requirements for external and internal form are not analogous, but rather dichotomous, demonstrating the different motivations behind his ornamental and tectonic tendencies.

Regarding syntax, Werner Oechslin remarks that modern architecture becomes evident “from the inside out.” Therefore, it can be argued that for a photographic sequence to reflect the evolution of a modern architectural style, the syntax of images progress from the ornamented exterior to the tectonic interior. In this way, the symbolic and social role of the ornamented historical stylistic hull “fractures away,” revealing the naked kernel. This is the progression of most of Wagner’s images with the exception of the final photograph of the Nussdorf dam.

Barthes states captions work to “quicken” the readers focus and direct their rhetoric of the image. Wagner’s captions are vague, where most provide only the project name: one is captioned ‘detail of the façade’ and another ‘interior’. It can be concluded here regarding Wagner’s visual language that these connoted operations within his photographs depict his work through Semper’s theory of cladding and Wagner’s own ideas on style, and allow the reader some space to interpret a personal rhetoric of the photographs.
9H’s visual language

In comparison to Wagner’s experiential gaze, the gazes of 9H’s photographs are from many points of view at eye-level or above, and many are extreme close-ups that the human eye cannot discern. Although Wagner’s photographs are oblique, the importance of composition and symmetry stated in Moderne Architektur is evident in his framing. For example, the interior of the Meidling station shows two ornamented columns on an oblique angle, yet their symmetry is evident which would not be the case if Wagner framed an odd number of columns. (Figure 2) In contrast, 9H’s gaze and framing does not acknowledge symmetry or centrality. For its “innovative central complex,” cit critics praised Wagner’s Länderbank, yet Figure 3 indicates that interior photographs of both the Länderbank and Office Savings Bank Hall are oblique and cropped in a manner that obscures each halls’ symmetry.

In contrast to Wagner’s layout, 9H minimises white space with two columns and a minimum of two photos on each double page spread. In this layout with the parallel reading of text and image, “the verbal message seems to share in its objectivity,” and the potential of rhetoric is minimised. In 9H, syntax is difficult to discern due to the number of images, yet if one focuses on the representation of each project there is still no consistency. Unlike the modern evolution from exterior to interior in Wagner’s sequence of photographs, in 9H some projects feature only interior images and others only exterior shots. The only two projects that reveal the progression from exterior to interior are (unsurprisingly) the only two modern projects 9H perceive as modern due to their concept of modernity: the Post Office Savings Bank and the Church am Steinhof.

Unlike Wagner’s vague captions, 9H’s are highly specific. Figure 4 is a photo published of the Post Office Savings Bank captioned “detail of wall cladding with aluminium grille to staircase in the vestibule.” Through these convoluted captions, 9H draws equal attention to many elements in the manner of the Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art), rather than prioritizing Wagner’s dichotomy between exterior ornament and the tectonic interior.

To conclude an image analysis of 9H it is important to note the inclusion of three drawings. These include plans and a perspectivised façade section of the Palais Wagner (1891) and an interior perspective of the Länderbank (1884). In the same manner through which Evans has suggested translations occur between drawing and building, it is suggested that the drawing and photograph of the same architectural work, can highlight different cultural meanings. 9H’s parallel utilisation of both mediums fails to utilise that persuasive quality of “style” that the drawing possesses over photography.

FIGURE 4 Specific and convoluted captions in 9H (R. Wolff, 1906. Source: Courtesy of University of Sydney.

FIGURE 5 The two drawings and one photograph of the Palais Wagner in 9H (clockwise from top left: Wagner, 1891, H. Gerretsegger & M. Peintner, 1983, reproduced by permission from the Pictorial Archives of the Austrian National Library, and R. Wolff, 1906. Courtesy of University of Sydney.
Figure 5 shows two drawings and one photograph of the Palais Wagner published in 9H. Firstly, the plans of the house are diagrammatic indicating only the solid-void relationship. Across the page from the plans is a perspectivised façade section. Unlike other images 9H select, this section attempts to highlight the ornamented hull in Wagner’s work. However, the hull’s social significance and complex relationship to the stripped kernel is denounced through two operations. Firstly, the drawing is independent of any context or scale, and secondly the white section cut suggests - contrary to Wagner’s ideas - that the exterior surface and interior finishes are an analogous construction. This drawing presents a simplified formalistic Wagner, and furthermore, both drawings fail to introduce a new rhetoric in conversation with the façade photograph.

To reinforce this point, it will be demonstrated how a combination of drawing and photography can successfully demonstrate Wagner’s neo-Semperian theory in Frampton’s depiction of Wagner’s Post Office Savings Bank in Modern Architecture (1980). In contrast to 9H’s visual language and connoted meaning significantly shifting the stones of Wagner, Frampton conducts the work of a Tafurian critical historian through both his verbal and visual language.
Figure 6 demonstrates Frampton’s two images placed across a double-page spread. The drawing places the viewer within the urban setting obliquely viewing the hull from the street. Wagner’s drawing style creates an analogy between the detailed clothing of the people and the ornamented building, denoting his social and modern architecture as the architecture of clothing. Unlike 9H’s perspectivised façade section, the white section cut here continues to the interior, utilising the graphic juxtaposition of the detailed façade and the naked interior synonymous with Wagner’s architecture of clothing. Frampton positions the interior photograph across the page from the drawing, whereby the juxtaposition of a different medium highlights Wagner’s different motives for architecture’s hull and kernel, and further emphasised through the oblique gaze of the drawing and the central photograph emphasising Wagner’s compositional ideas. The syntax produced follows the evolution of modernism from exterior to interior, whilst each medium asserts its own autonomy, and hence Wagner’s autonomous treatment of the hull and kernel.

To conclude, by the end of the 20th century architectural language in both practice and publishing privileges the visual more than the verbal. The overlooked period of mined historiographic mining between the 1980s and end of the century provides a rich historical site within which to excavate and critically assess, and raises many questions for theorists, practitioners and publishers on the tripartite relationship between language, architecture, and society at present. This critique of 9H is not significant in itself as a seminal journal, but is rather one example, of this larger mining trend of within theory and the architectural space of post-modern publishing. This novel framework that links visual language and ideology could be utilised to unpack discursive formations evident in other post-modern little magazines, and prove to be applicable across languages, cultures and context.

Endnotes

3 Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, 12.
8 Rajchman, “Translation”, 5.
12 The relationship between Frampton and Colomina is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the afterword of Colomina’s article from the issue of 9H examined acknowledges Frampton for “the inspiration derived from the final paragraph of his book *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*”. Furthermore, passages from the chapters ‘City’ and ‘Photography’ in Colomina’s seminal text *Privacy and Publicity* (1996) featured in this article prior to its publication. See Beatriz Colomina, “On Adolf Loos and Josef Hoffmann: Architecture in the Age of its Technical Reproduction,” *9H* 6 (1983): 52-8.
the language of criticism and history. Furthermore, Barthes employs a metaphor similar to (and prior to) Tafuri’s mining metaphor, stating that to write is “to split up the world (the book) and to remake it.” See Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, trans. by Katrine P. Keuneman (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 91.


17 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 85.


21 Farrah, “On 9H”.


31 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 73.


33 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 75.

34 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 74.


36 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 76.

37 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 77.

38 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 79.


41 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 67. This is also evident in a comparison of the second and third edition that reveals Wagner edited his photographs in successive editions.


43 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 79. See also Markus and Cameron, *Words Between the Spaces*, 163.


49 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 75.
52 Colomina, Privacy and Publicity, 171.
53 Oechslin, Otto Wagner, 245.
55 Oechslin, Otto Wagner, 226.
56 Oechslin, Otto Wagner, 98.
58 Oechslin, Otto Wagner, 98.
60 Wagner, “Modern Architecture”, 76.
61 See Robin Evans, Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).
62 Barthes, like Wagner, understood the drawing as less pure than the photo, “for there is no drawing without style.” Barthes, “Rhetoric”, in A Barthes Reader, 277.
63 Pai, The Portfolio and the Diagram, 268.
64 Wigley, White Walls, Designer Dresses, 167.