

NATURAL METAPHORS, ANCIENT SYMBOLS, AND CLASSICAL ALLUSIONS: JOŽE PLEČNIK AND THE INFLUENCE OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY STYLISTIC THEORY

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Jože Plečnik's prominence within recent examinations of modern architecture is due in large part to his work's perceived relationship with the postmodern critique of certain rationalist principles associated with early twentieth-century design.¹ Plečnik's exceptional ability to create new and significant metaphors, symbols, and allusions from historical devices throughout the early stages of modern architecture's development would seem to share an important conceptual position with the reevaluation of the power of signs in the aftermath of that movement. In interpreting these metaphors, symbols, and allusions in a way that will lend coherency to Plečnik's relationship to modernism, it becomes clear that the association is not a simple one. At the heart of his projects we find a particular understanding of modern architecture that is seemingly critical, if not outright resistant. Undoubtedly, the complexity of Plečnik's singular style must be attributed to a number of personal, theoretical, and cultural factors. This article explores one facet of Plečnik's long and productive career—specifically, the influence of late nineteenth-century stylistic theories—and from this perspective examines how many of the fundamental precepts of modern design were absorbed, translated, and projected in his work in a manner that locates modern architecture within a long lineage of both classical and vernacular building ideas.

The arguments opposing and favoring Plečnik's placement in the modernist camp are well-worn. On the one side are those who fault him for his reliance on a traditional vocabulary of historical devices while ignoring references to supporting structure and to scientific

¹ In particular, see Friedrich Achleitner, "A Slavic Gaudi," 2–5, and François Burckhardt, "Modern or Postmodern: A Question of Ethics," 108–18, in ed. François Burckhardt et al., *Jože Plečnik Architect; 1872–1957* (Cambridge: MIT, 1989).

methods of construction.² On the other hand, Plečnik has been championed as a modern architect for less clearly defined reasons. Critics frequently note the theoretical lessons he absorbed in Otto Wagner's Vienna studio during the last years of the nineteenth century, taught in the School of Applied Arts in Prague (1911–20) and at the University of Ljubljana (1921–57), but did not necessarily exhibit in his own writing or work.³ Plečnik's dependence on a historical vocabulary and the influence of current aesthetic and architectural theories are typically used to argue opposite interpretations of his stylistic position. Hence, the two concepts have been kept relatively separate in examinations of the architect's life and work. I would argue, however, that Plečnik's rich and inventive idiom was indebted to nineteenth-century stylistic theories that sought to reinterpret ancient evidence to present a more accurate history of artistic development as well as to engender more meaningful styles in the future. Located within the ornate surface patterns and sculptural supports, and the imaginative capital, column, and arch designs that Plečnik employed lays evidence of the structural, functional, and perceptual ideas developed in late nineteenth-century theories of style and at the foundation of modern aesthetics.

Others—most recently and forcefully, Damjan Prelovšek—have argued the powerful effect that nineteenth-century theorists such as the German architect Gottfried Semper had on Plečnik's creative achievements.⁴ While further exploring Semper's influence, the present study enlarges the scope of Plečnik's theoretical foundations to include prominent ideas derived from the nineteenth-century British arts reform movement and the writings of contemporary Austrian art historian Alois Riegl. The evolution of a modern, yet culturally significant architecture resulted from the ability to recast Western classical elements to suit new materials and the most current technical means. Understanding how properly to direct such transformations required an appreciation of the true nature of classical forms. This, as contemporary theorists demonstrated, could only be achieved through recognition of the process through which Western classical art and

² Achleitner 4.

³ Burckhardt 109.

⁴ Damjan Prelovšek, *Jože Plečnik 1872–1957*, trans. Patricia Crampton and Eileen Marten (1992; New Haven: Yale UP, 1997) 7–14.

architecture had evolved from archaic and Eastern roots. While his contemporaries and colleagues quickly absorbed current theoretical concepts and applied them in new visual and structural solutions, we can assume that the vast array of historical styles from remote cultures and periods examined in British reform theory and in the writings of Semper and Riegl proved particularly significant to Plečnik. Disposing of the historicism embalmed in major European urban centers, and embracing a more functional or truthful aesthetic were, in principle, important aims of late nineteenth-century artists, architects, and theorists. Yet it was precisely within a more discriminating study of tradition and a keener observation of historical devices that architects such as Jože Plečnik forged a unique style that both retained references to his Central European roots and challenged many of the constraints imposed by Modernism proper.

Owen Jones and the British Arts Reform Movement

One of the earliest forces attempting to rescue the applied arts from a dependence on natural imitation and to separate architecture from stylistic replication in the latter half of the nineteenth century emerged from the British arts reform movement. With the foundation of the School of Design in London in 1837 (and, subsequently, a series of design schools throughout the provinces), exuberant supporters of design reform hoped to delineate a style that resisted naturalistic qualities and that could be uniquely identified with English products. British authors of design theory devised principles of style that advanced the formal *rules* rather than the *appearance* of natural beauty and advocated careful study (though, not the replication) of historical models exhibiting the same intent.⁵

Architect and designer Owen Jones encapsulated the philosophical position of the Schools of Design in his principle text of

⁵ The principle was first put into print in William Dyce's *Drawing-book of the School of Design*, published in 1842–43. While conceding that nature must be held up as the source for all forms of beauty, he asserted that it should provide inspiration rather than the model for direct imitation. William Dyce, "Lectures on Ornament Delivered to the Students of the London School of Design," *Journal of Design and Manufacture* I (March–May 1849): 65.

1856, *The Grammar of Ornament*.⁶ The study surveys a thousand examples of ornament drawn from the “Savage Tribes” of the Pacific Islands and the ornamental traditions of the European West and the Near, Middle, and Far East.⁷ Among the array of decorative motifs and patterns, Jones gave particular attention to those earliest or “archaic” styles that most successfully conventionalized natural form by transforming vegetal and floral motifs into non-representational designs composed from geometric fragments. He asserted that ornamental compositions constructed from abstract particles and arranged according to the formal laws of nature (that is symmetry, rhythm, repetition, and proportion among parts) could more effectively attend to architecture by defining surface planes and articulating structural parts without the distraction of natural appearances.

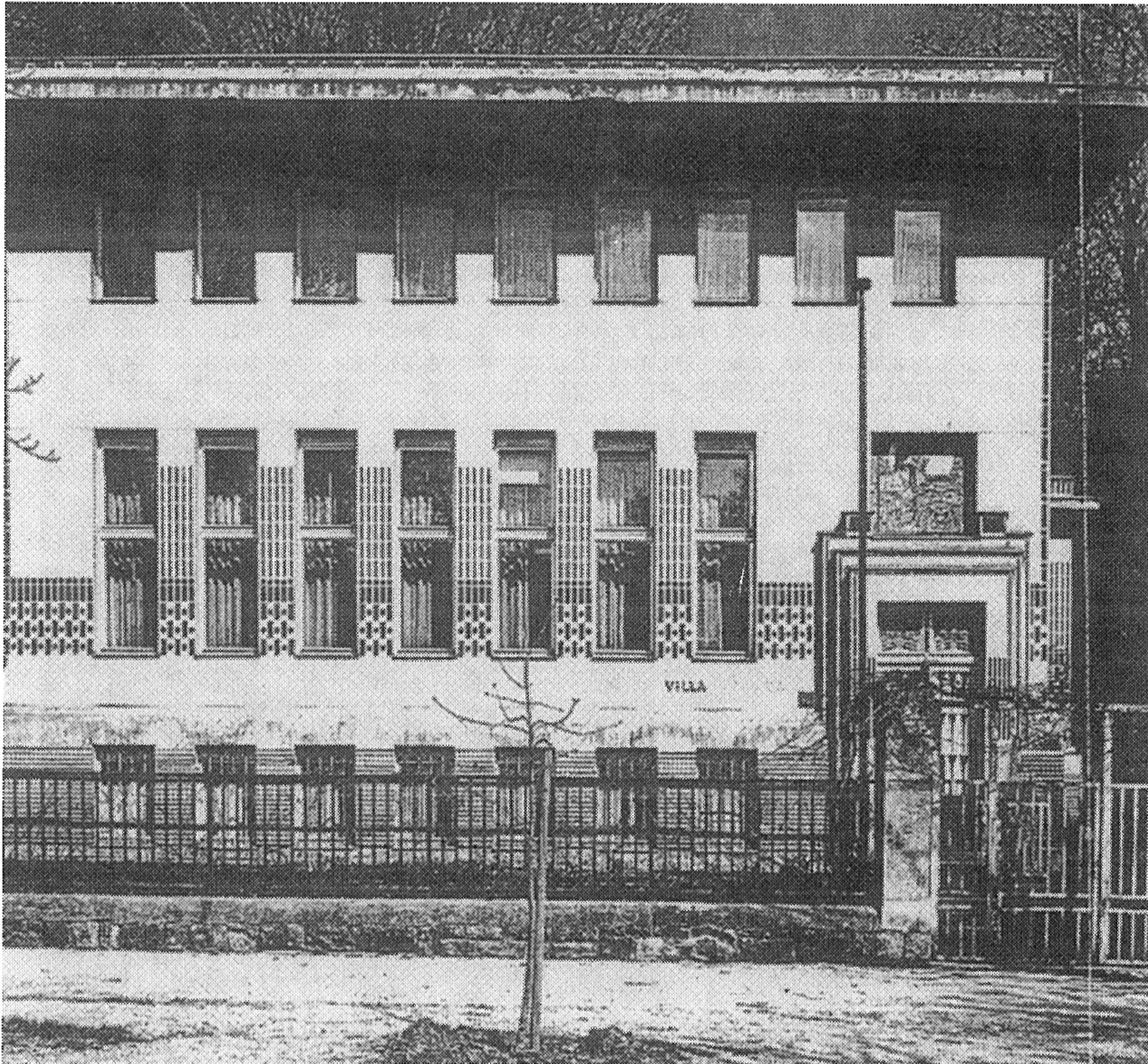
The influence of the British reformers was strongly felt in the applied and technical arts produced in Vienna just prior to the turn of the century. The German translation of *The Grammar of Ornament* became a standard text of the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, the very progressive applied arts school associated with the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna.⁸ As Viennese artists and architects within the

⁶ Although never actually a member of London’s School of Design (later, the Department of Practical Arts), Owen Jones maintained a close affiliation with the institution and lectured frequently to its students.

⁷ Jones’s survey of the “phases of Ornamental art” begins with “Savage Tribes” and continues through Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arabian, Turkish, Moorish, Persian, Indian, Hindoo, Chinese, Celtic, Medieval, Renaissance, Elizabethan, and “Italian” (a mixture of Mannerism and Baroque).

⁸ Kossatz asserts that *Kunstgewerbeschule* students drew designs directly from the “historical ornament” provided in *The Grammar of Ornament*. See Horst-Herbert Kossatz, “The Viennese Secession and its Early Relations with Great Britain,” *Studio International* (January 1971): 10. The Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie (Austrian Museum for Art and Industry), founded in 1864, and its affiliated *Kunstgewerbeschule*, established in 1868, were modeled after London’s Normal Training School of Art, attached to the innovative South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). For a background history of the Österreichisches Museum and the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, see Jane Kallir, *Viennese Design and the Wiener Werkstätte* (New York: Galerie St. Etienne, 1986) 19; and, Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna* (New York: Knopf, 1961; reprint ed. 1980) 66–67.

Fig. 1. Otto Wagner, Villa Wagner II, Vienna, 1912–13.

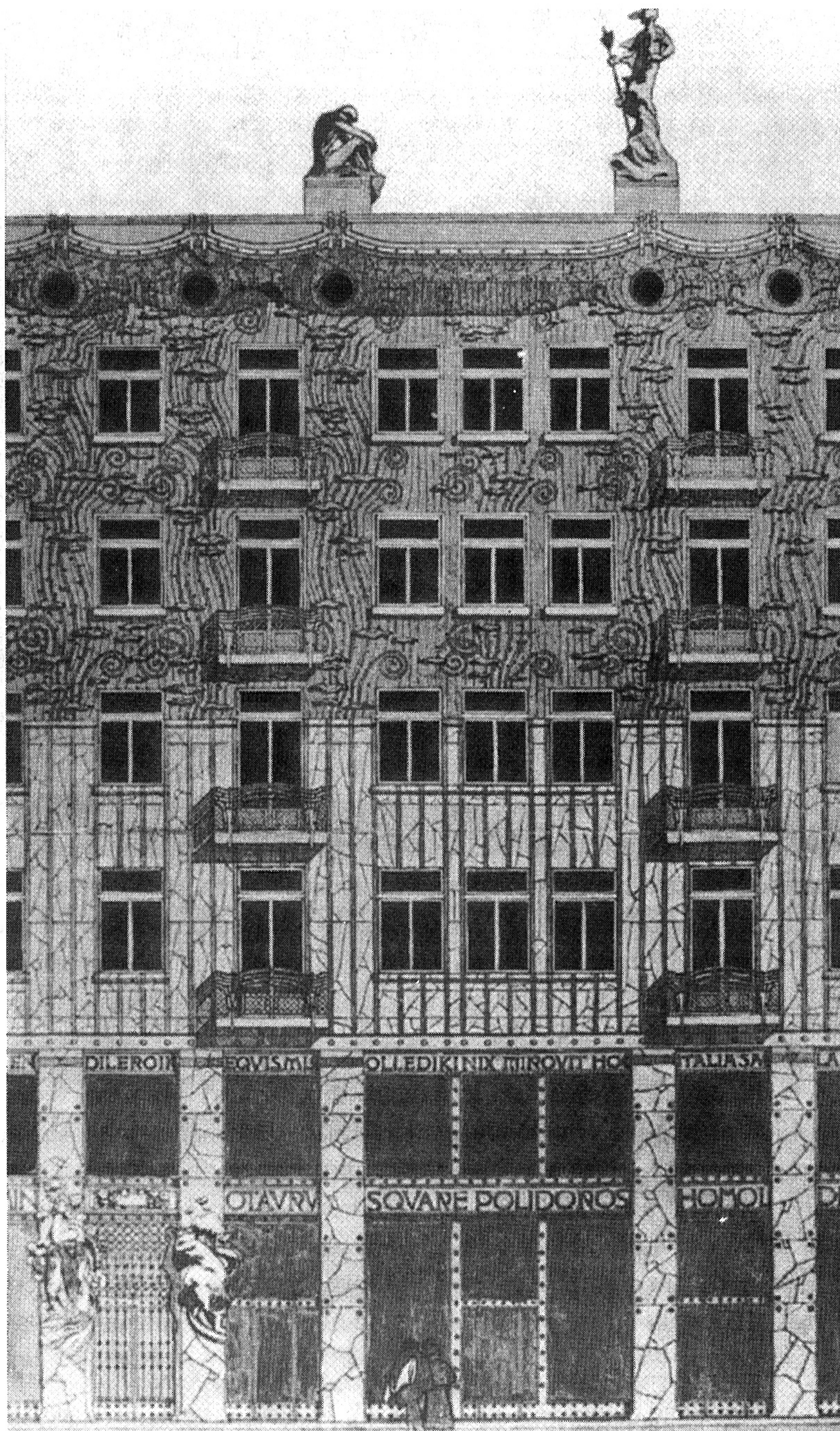


Secession, the Wiener Werkstätte, and the Wagner atelier gradually eliminated plastic decoration from the facades of their buildings and from the surface of objects, they increasingly adopted conventionalized, two-dimensional motifs (often derived from archaic sources) to emphasize exposed flat planes and underscore structural clarity (figure 1).

Plečnik's competition design for the Zacherl Haus in Vienna from 1900 presents a compendium of recent experiments with surface design (figure 2).⁹ On the first floor and mezzanine, he proposed polished marble slabs attached to the underlying columns by visible metal bolts, as Max Fabiani had recently used on his Artaria Haus on the Kohlmarkt in Vienna (1900–1). Above the next two stories, consisting of panels affixed by some undetermined means, begins a

⁹ This figure and figures 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 15 are reproduced from photographs courtesy of the Arhitekturni Muzej Ljubljana archives.

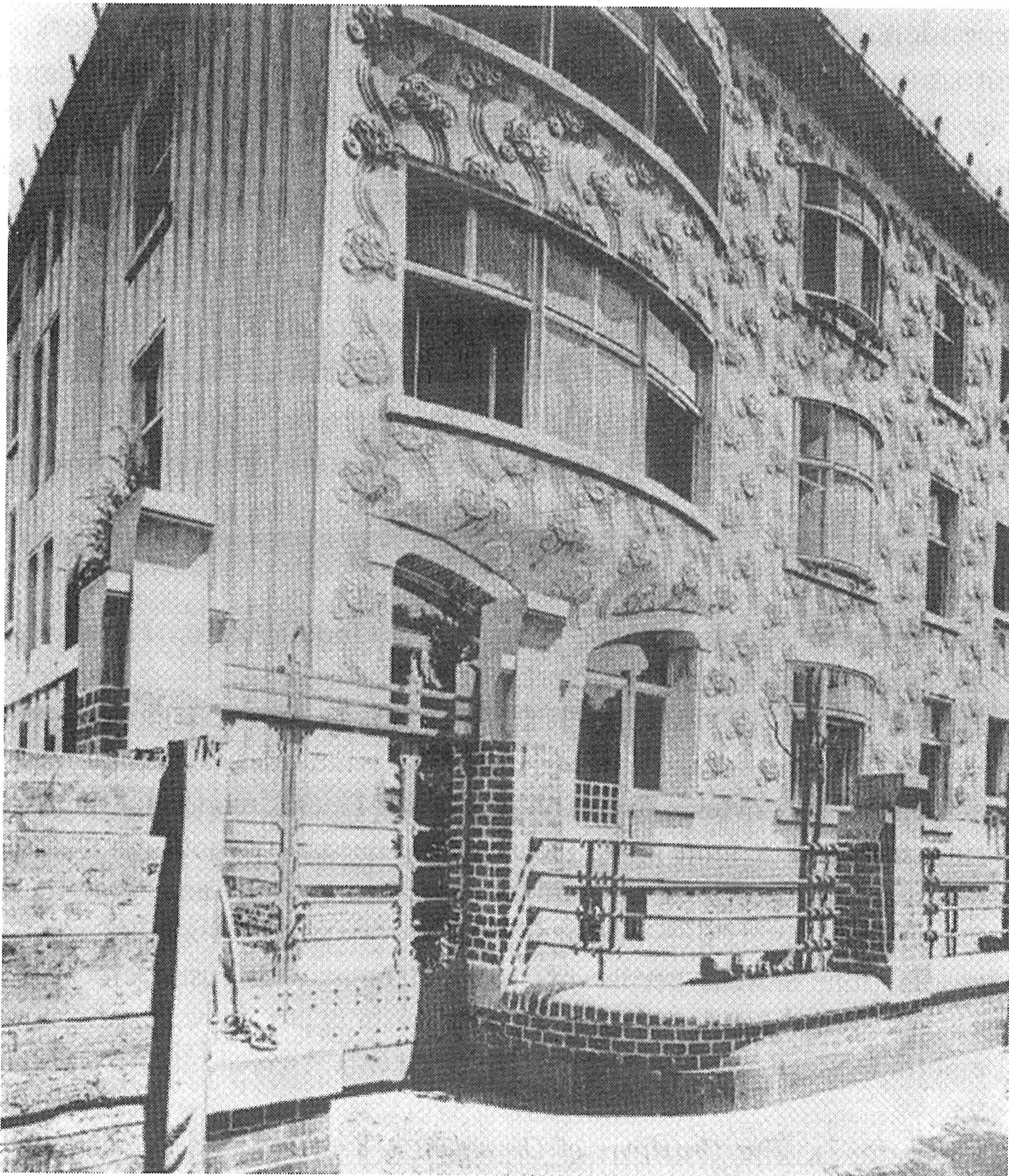
Fig. 2. Jože Plečnik, Zacherl House competition design, 1900.



serpentine floral pattern in stucco, analogous to the ornamental facade of Otto Wagner's recently completed Majolikahaus in Vienna (1898–99).

A similar ornamental application was finally realized in Plečnik's Langer Haus in the Viennese suburb of Heitzing (1900–1; figure 3) and presents the viewer with a more organized yet complex experience. The undulating front facade of the building is intensified by the uniform floral pattern in relief. Although the pliant appearance of the building is, as Prelovšek and others have suggested, attributable to Semper's principle of cladding or *Bekleidung*, its debt to the British

Fig. 3. Jože Plečnik, Langer House, Vienna, 1900–1901.



concepts of structural formalism should also be noted.¹⁰ Large roses composing the surface decoration no longer twist freely and irregularly as on the competition drawing for the Zacherl Haus, but rather have been reduced to highly conventionalized compositions as advised by Jones. The spectator is urged to grasp the unity of the building (as they would in forms of nature) through the process of observing its parts in orderly succession. At the same time, the textile metaphor at the heart of Semper's *Bekleidung* concept is conveyed more convincingly via the stylized motifs and axial regularity of the pattern. The surface design, in fact, finds one of its closest models in Central European textile designs (figure 4), rather than in the organic, unbalanced *Jugendstil* and *Art Nouveau* designs with which the building is traditionally associated.¹¹ In brief, ethnic motifs are called upon to symbolize the material fluidity of the façade in order to convey the modern concept of its structural independence. Long regarded as Plečnik's first major work of architecture in Vienna and marking his independence from the Wagner atelier, the Langer Haus already contains many of the hallmarks of the architect's extensive career. Specifically, it urges the viewer to read modern structural and functional ideas through a vocabulary of historical and vernacular signs.

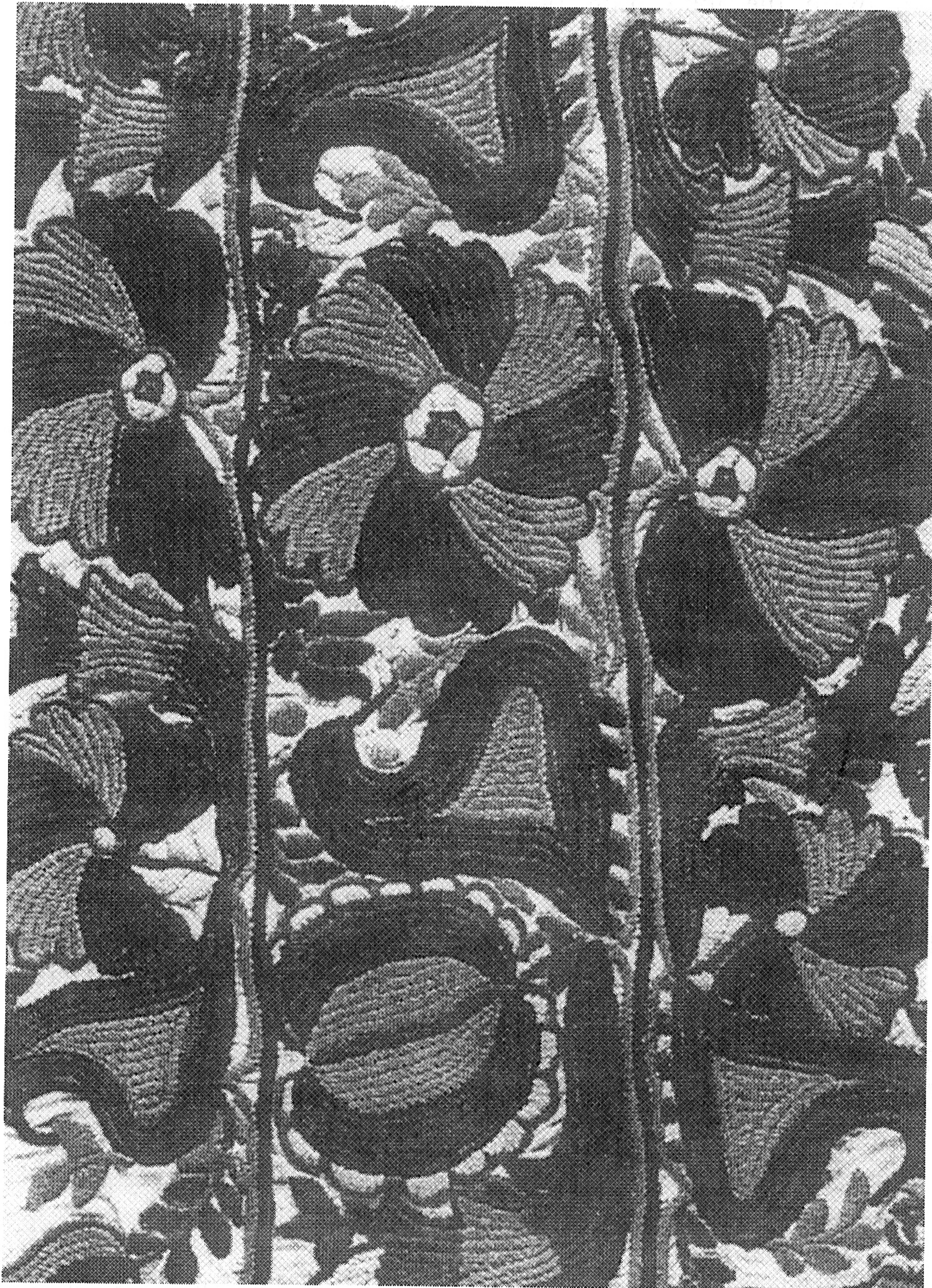
Not only did Jones claim that "the constructive idea [should be] carried out in every detail of the ornamentation of the surface,"¹² but that ornament itself, conditioned by precise laws of natural arrangement, might define a completely new style of architecture. He observed that the chief features of a building—i.e., the means of support,

¹⁰ See Prelovšek 43; and Borzi, Franco and Godoli, Ezio, *Vienna 1900: Architecture and Design*, (New York: Rizzoli: 1986) 213.

¹¹ Prelovšek contends that French and Belgian *Art Nouveau* models guided Plečnik's designs for the Langer Haus, "as he moved away from Viennese influences" (Prelovšek 43). Godoli asserts that Plečnik models for the Langer Haus facade were, more likely, the *Jugendstil* decorative motifs published in German and Austria at the turn of the century (Borsi and Godoli 213). Despite Jan Kotera's claim that Plečnik's work never "illogically borrowed motifs from Slovene needlework, peasant houses, or rustic crocks," the Langer House facade bears a striking affinity to Slovene and Slovak embroidery patterns. Jan Kotera, "Jože Plečnik," *Volné směry* 6 (1901–2): 98.

¹² Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856; reprint ed., London: B. Quaritch, 1910) 67.

Fig. 4. Traditional Slovene textile motif.



the means of spanning space between supports, and the formation of the roof—were the foundation of every system of architecture since antiquity. It followed naturally in his theory, therefore, that an innovative ornamental treatment of these structural features could generate a thoroughly modern style of construction.¹³

Throughout his career, Plečnik returned to primary concepts derived from ancient practice and advanced by Jones's theory of structural formalism. In accord with Jones's proposal for inventing a new style of architecture, Plečnik frequently generated architectural form from geometric motifs arranged according to natural laws of symmetry, rhythm and repetition. The results were structural supports (figure 5), spanning elements (figure 6), and roofing devices (figure 7), which present completely new decorative, structural, and spatial configurations. Visually, these same projects recall ancient Middle Eastern architecture and Central European monuments from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At the same time, they anticipate both the surface fragmentation presented in Czech Cubist architecture and the organic effects that cast concrete construction eventually allowed.¹⁴

Gottfried Semper

Plečnik's successive plans and final realization for the Zacherl Hans in Vienna (constructed between 1903 and 1905; figure 8) markedly demonstrate how he applied the principles of British design theory toward Semperian concepts of structural symbolism. From the organic floral pattern proposed in his competition design of 1900 (figure 2), to the concentric square composition in his 1903 elevation drawing, Plečnik experimented with various means to convey Semper's *Bekleidung* principle in new materials and with modern technical advantages.

¹³ Owens 155–56.

¹⁴ Plečnik's preliminary sketch for the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vienna has a strong affinity with the twelfth-century Friday Mosque at Isfahan in present-day Iran, as well as the intricate and geometric vaulting found in such Czech monuments as the Church of St. Peter in Soběslav (1499–1500). His study for the Weidmann Haus was surely inspired by the "Týn School" in Prague and, visually, presages the cast concrete vaulting of Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas from 1973.

Fig. 5. Jože Plečnik, study for structural supports for Zacherl House, 1904.

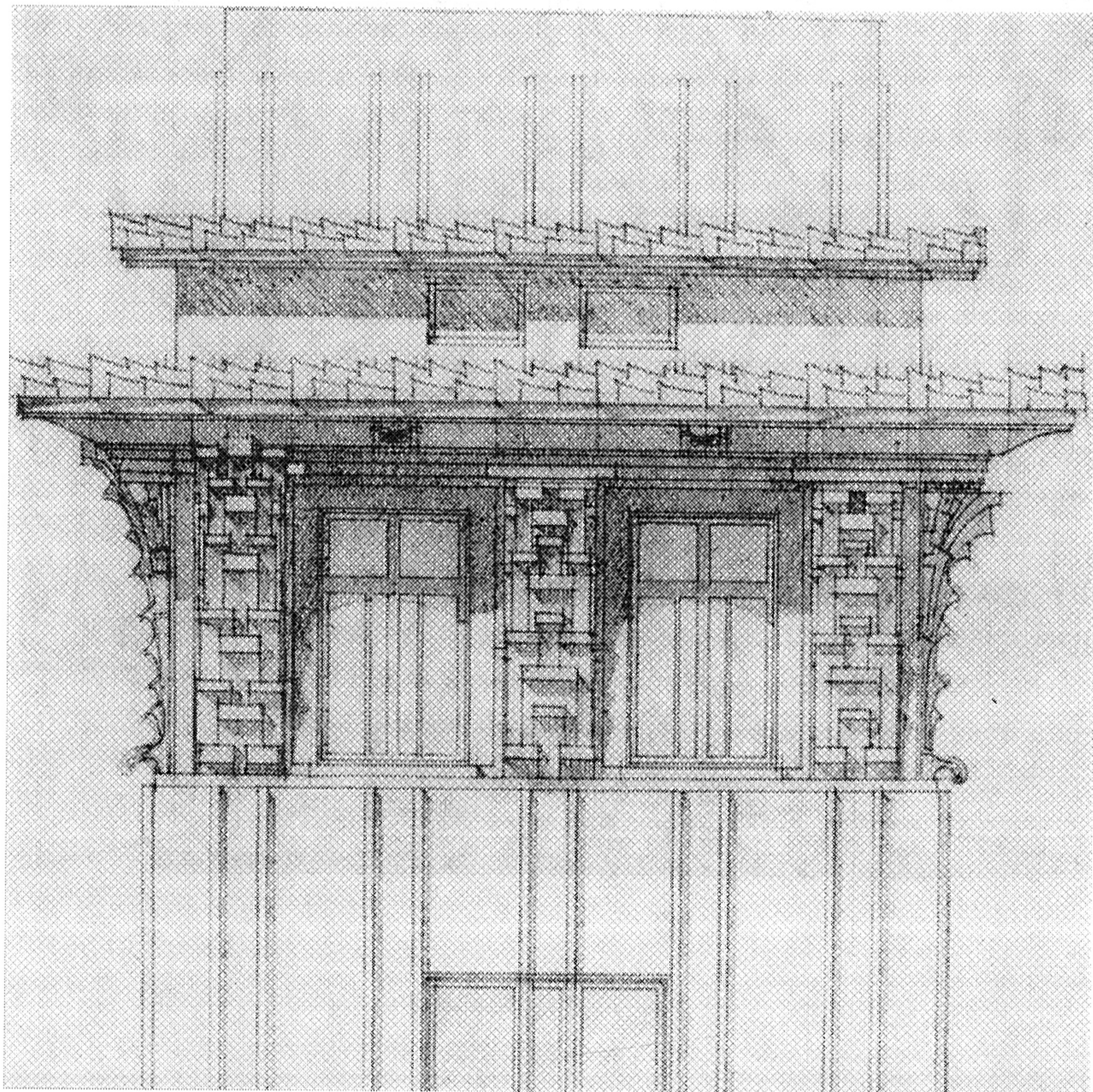


Fig. 6. Jože Plečnik, design for interior of Holy Spirit, Vienna, 1910.

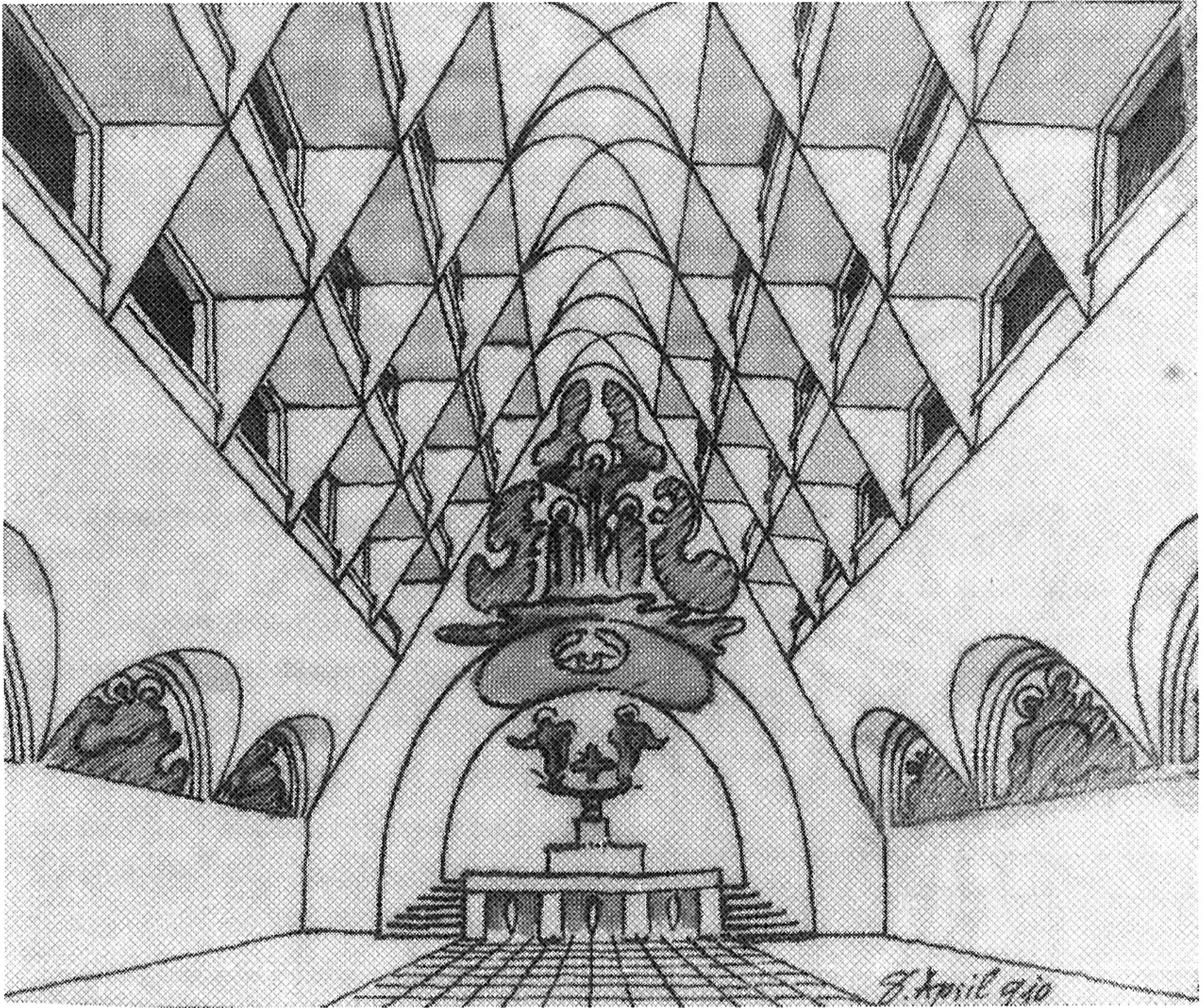


Fig. 7. Jože Plečnik, design for Weidmann Haus, Vienna, 1902.

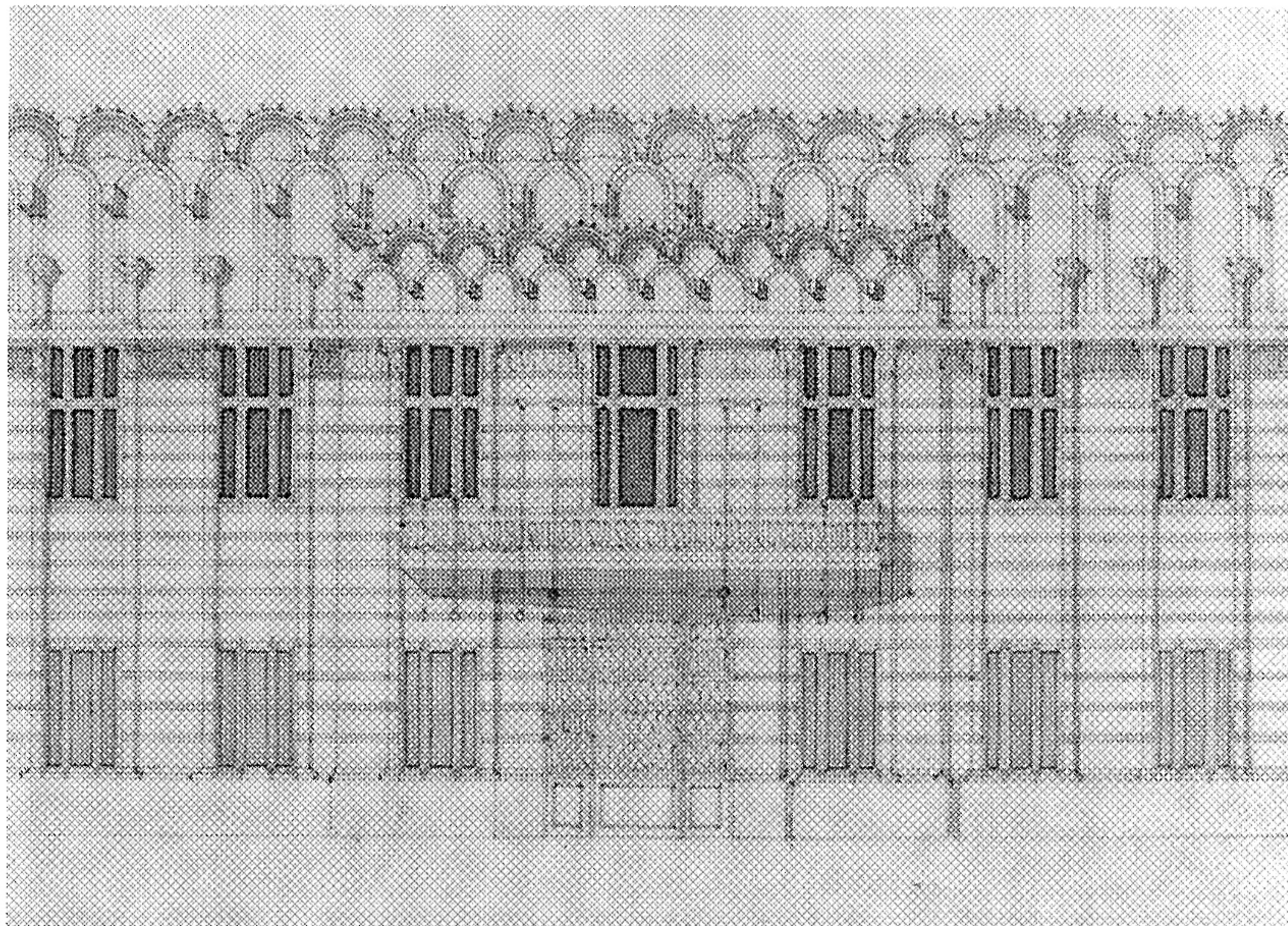
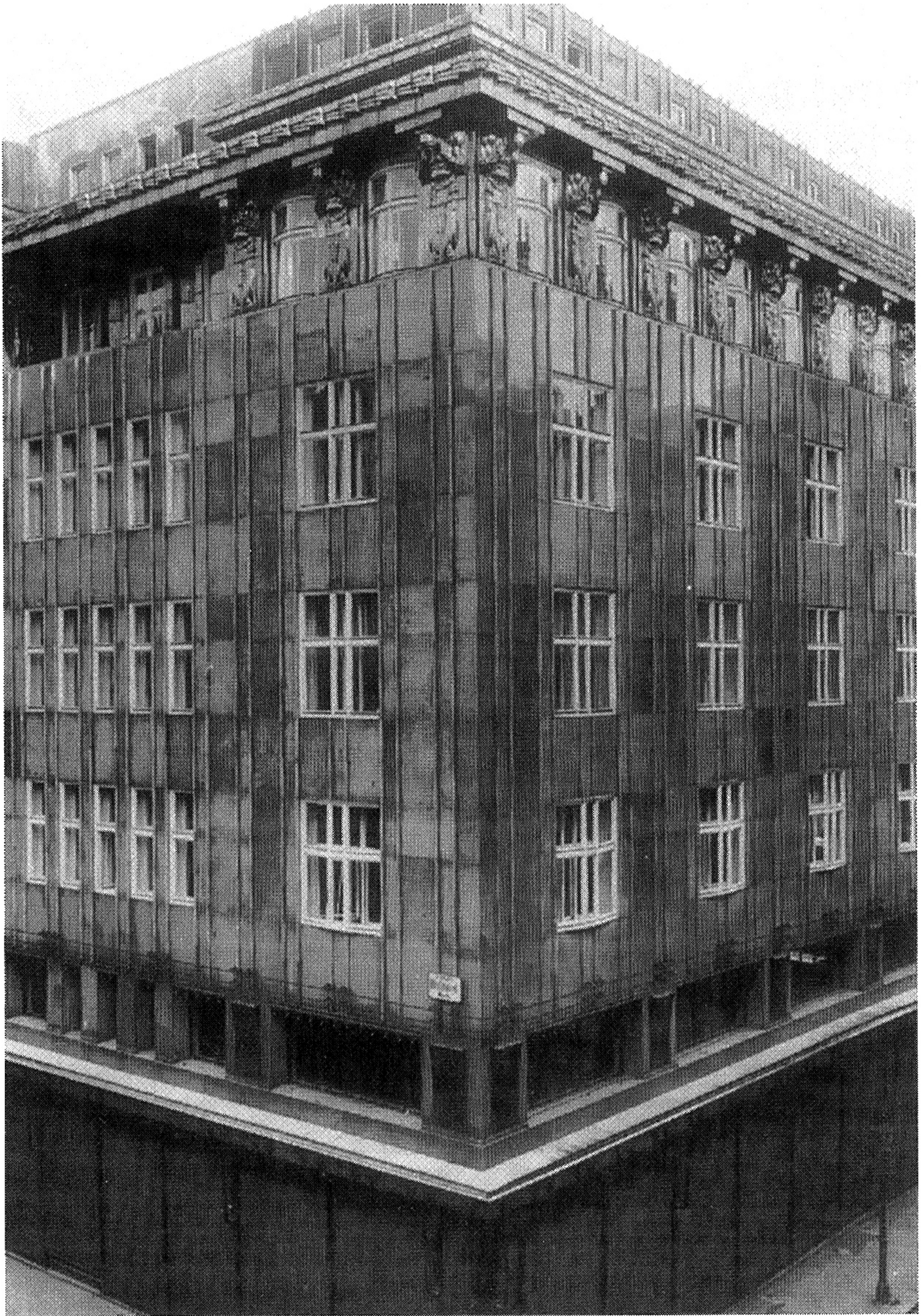


Fig. 8. Jože Plečnik, Zacherl Haus, Vienna, 1903–5.



Semper first published his concept of the prehistory of architecture in his 1851 text, *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst (The Four Elements of Architecture)*.¹⁵ He determined that the earliest dwellings, illustrated by a primitive hut (figure 9), evolved from a synthesis of four elements, consisting of the communal hearth and the various components that protected it: the wall or enclosure, the roof and the foundation. Semper traced the evolution of these fundamental elements over centuries and throughout ancient Egypt, the Near East, and the Classical West as they underwent innumerable modifications while being conditioned by various circumstances such as local customs, religious rituals, climate, location, materials, and technical execution. Despite numerous reinventions of these basic motifs, in subsequent constructions the primary function or *Kernform*, of each element was perpetually recalled in its artistic treatment or *Kunstform*, which served as a sort of symbolic residue of the original element.

Primal symbols of construction prevail throughout the Zacherl building, but now reflect ideas associated with modern constructional theory. In the final structure, Plečnik wrapped the entire building in a single skin consisting of polished granite panels held in place by vertical stone ribs. This ingenious and experimental facing treatment represents one of the earliest examples of a cladding system fixed to an internal structural frame. As Peter Krečič has aptly noted, the surfacing solution brought Semper's theory closer to one of the central issues of the modern movement in architecture—the question of creating a dialectical connection between exterior form and internal structure and space so as to render them independent yet interrelated.¹⁶

Plečnik's debt to Semper, however, extends much further in the Zacherl building than this often noted demonstration of the *Bekleidung* principle. The continuous, vertical sweep created by the facing is offset at the top by a loggia, which furnishes an intermediate component between the central block and the heavy cornice. Composed of alternating Atlantes support figures and convex windows, the loggia provides a clear transitional treatment between *enclosure* and *roof* elements. The roof now appears to hover above the central block in a manner Semper

¹⁵ Trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).

¹⁶ Peter Krečič, *Plečnik: The Complete Works* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1993) 37.

illustrated in examples of the “primitive” hut.¹⁷ The visual separation of parts supports Semper’s assertion that in primitive constructions the roof rested only on the structural framework, or joinery element, since the enclosure served a spatial rather than a supportive function.¹⁸ In later projects, such as Plečnik’s workshop building at the Žale Cemetery (1939–40; figure 10), the same process of isolating constructional elements that was begun in the Zacherl building produced an architecture that defined space rather than mass. In terms of modern architecture, the Zacherl building points to an era of advanced structural clarity and spatial definition culminating in monuments of the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁹

In subsequent projects Plečnik brought Semper’s theories into closer alignment with his own ethnic origin. Symbolizing the functional roots of architectural elements could call attention to modern means of construction, while at the same time expressing a continuous heritage that positioned native building styles within a larger global framework. In the Church of the Sacred Heart in Prague (1928–32; figure 11), the separation of enclosure and roof elements is again clearly articulated. Indeed, the open unencumbered space created on the interior is symbolized in the exterior *Kunstform* provided by the decorative facade. Inserted gray granite stones create a uniform pattern across the continuous field of dark brown brick composing the building’s exterior. Visually, the treatment recalls the “symbolic” bolts on the facade of Wagner’s marble-clad Postparkasse in Vienna (1904–6), perhaps the most widely recognized modern example of Semper’s cladding concept. But, in the Prague church the formation has less to do with modern assemblage than with indigenous building methods as Plečnik began to explore the decorative and symbolic value of native fabrication in combined brick- and stonework. In brief, Plečnik, in a gesture remarkably similar to later postmodern design strategies, quotes one of the premier monuments of early modernism in order to reference traditional, regional construction.

¹⁷ The effect is even more emphatically stated in Plečnik’s earlier sketch where the windows have been completely eliminated; see Prelovšek fig. 22.

¹⁸ Semper 111.

¹⁹ Particularly notable here are Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s buildings from this period; compare esp. his National Gallery of Art in Berlin (1963).

Fig. 9. "Primitive hut," Gottfried Semper, *Wissenschaft, Industrie, und Kunst*, 1853.

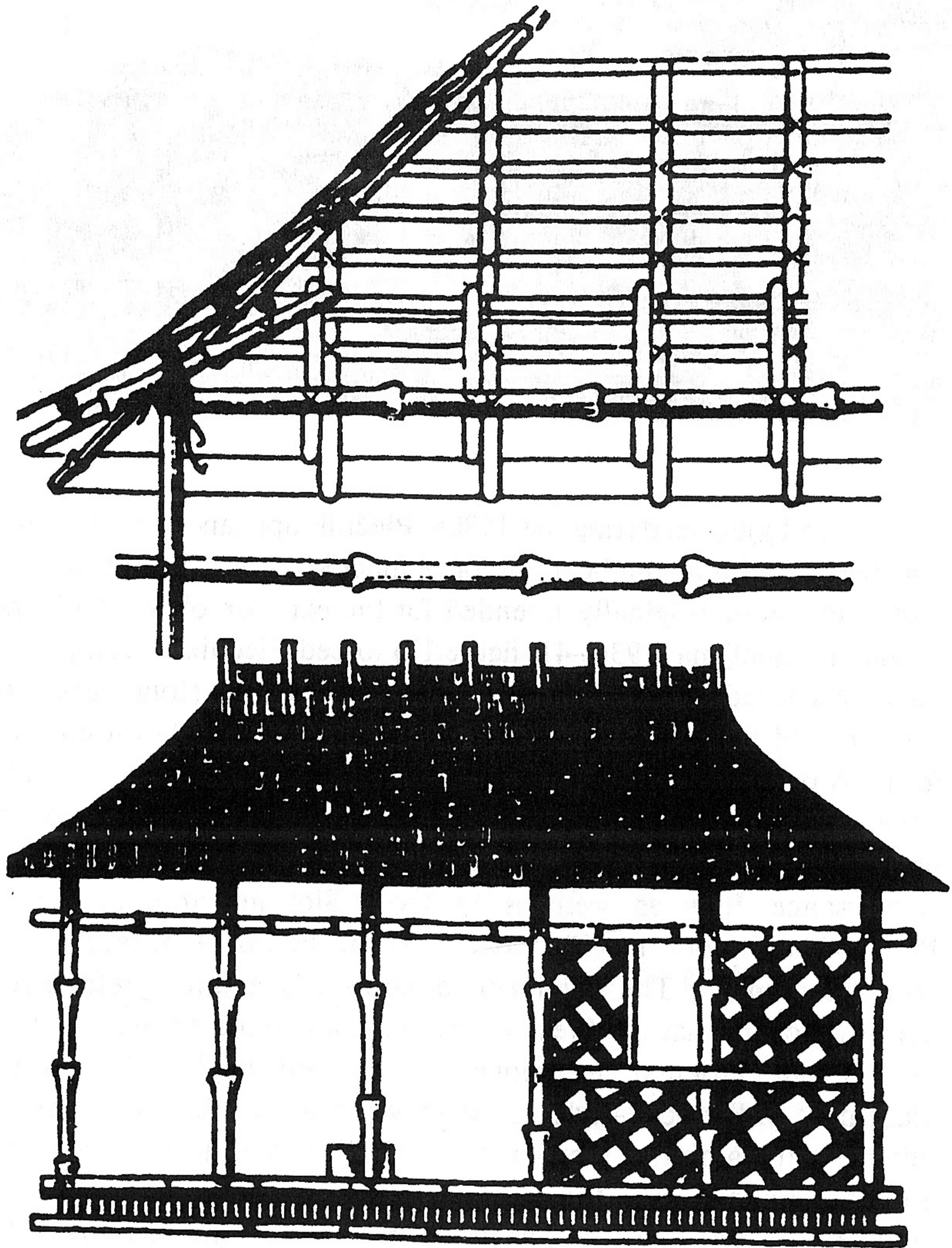
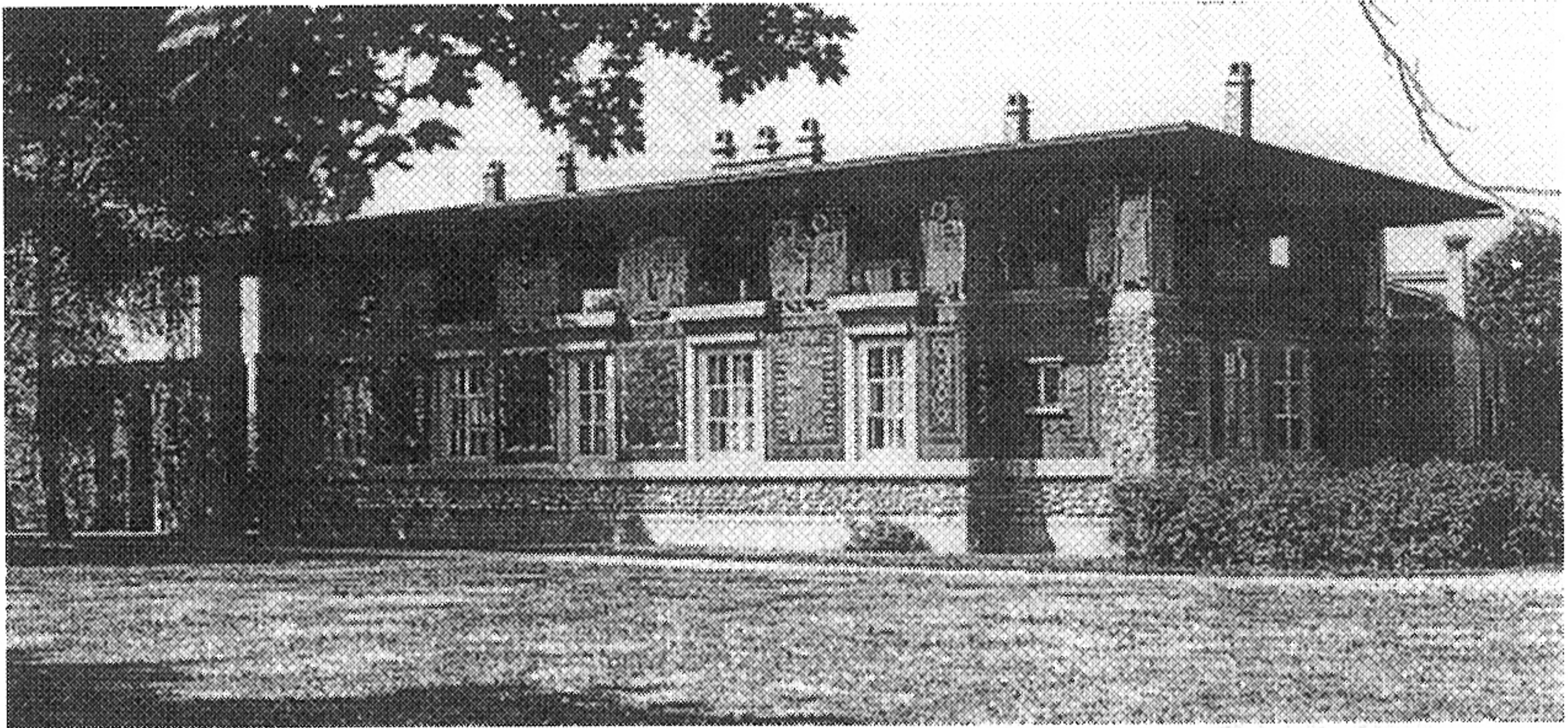


Fig. 10. Jože Plečnik, Workshop, Žale Cemetery, 1939–40.



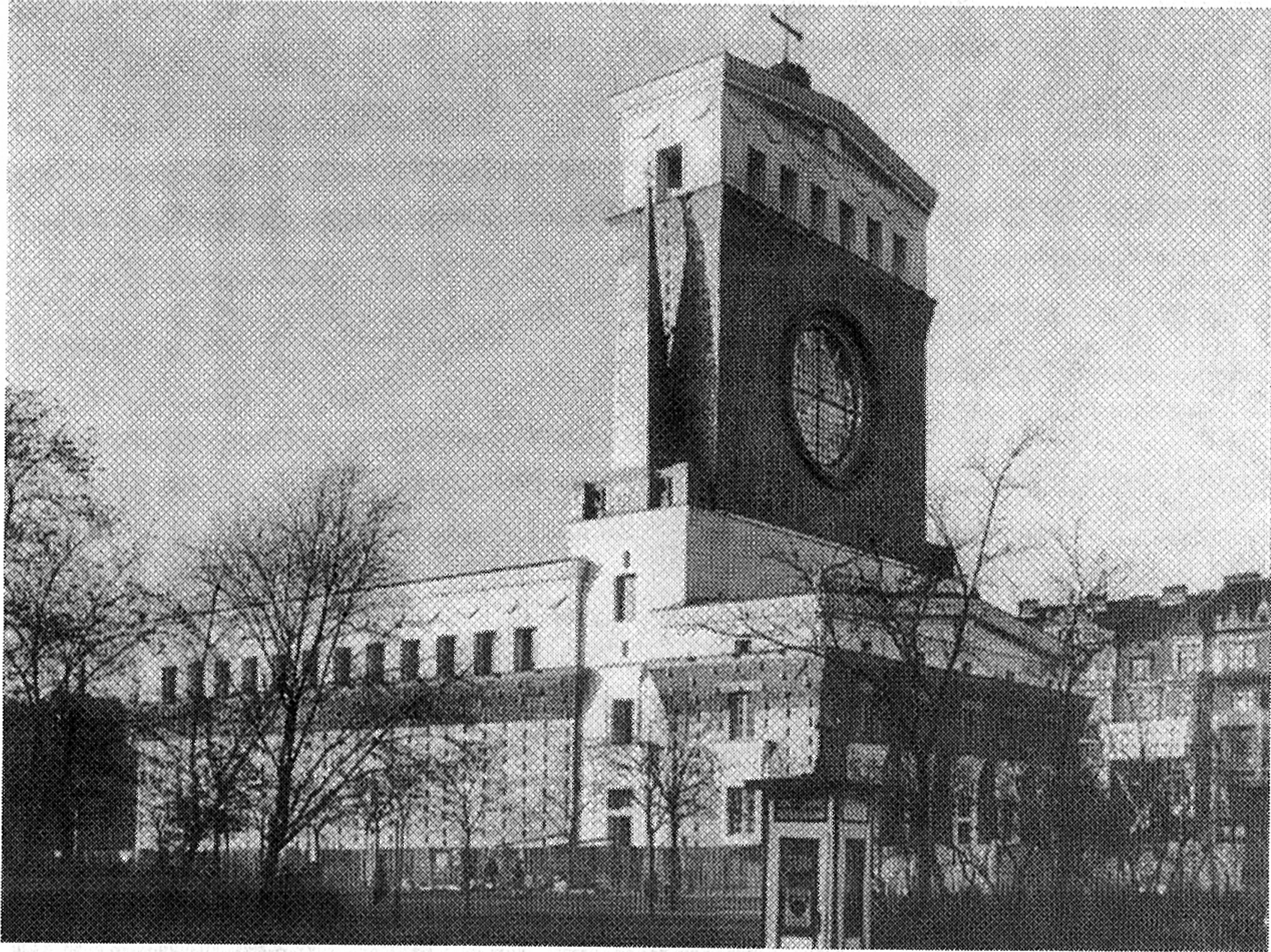
In Ljubljana during the 1930s, Plečnik appears to have grasped the deeper cultural implications of Semper's theory. The prohibitive cost of the stone originally intended for the exterior of the University Library in Ljubljana (1936–41; figure 12) forced Plečnik to compose the building's facade from brick and local gray Podpeč stone, excavated from the old Palais Auersperg and the Roman and Medieval city walls formerly occupying the site. From the combination of materials, Plečnik created a decorative arrangement that confesses to a modern division of parts, but, simultaneously, recalls the monumental palazzos of Renaissance Italy as well as to local Slovene architecture.²⁰ As Prelovšek points out, Plečnik has created in the library facade a "great Oriental carpet."²¹ The comment, of course, is a direct reference to Semper's claim that the Western architectural tradition was rooted in the ancient Oriental technique of "mat-making."²² The strategic placement of Etruscan-style concrete vases above the main entrance reiterates the architect's belief in the ancient Mediterranean roots of Slovene culture, while the colossal Aeolian-Ionic column before the reading room windows suggests the Eastern archaic foundations of both traditions. The structure as a whole negotiates a new position for modern Slovene architecture that claims a rightful kinship with the Mediterranean tradition through a rich and varied Eastern legacy.

²⁰ See Prelovšek 256.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Semper 109.

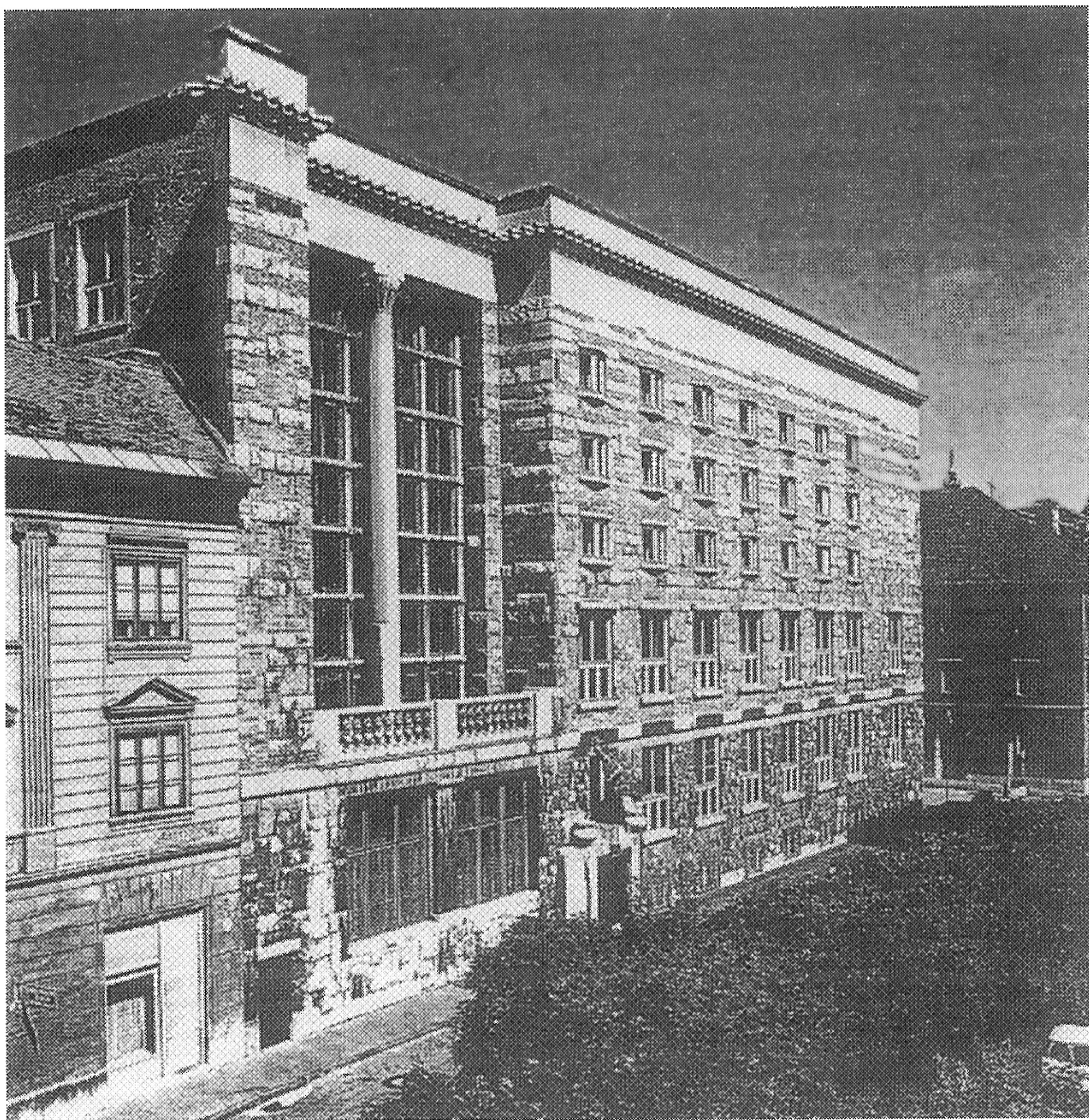
Fig. 11. Jože Plečnik, Church of the Sacred Heart, Prague, 1928–32.



Alois Riegl

Plečnik's ability to invent novel structural elements and surface treatments was often the result of his interpreting Semper's *Kernform/Kunstform* relationship in completely novel ways. While walls, roofs, and foundations maintain a close adherence to their functional primacy as defined by Semper, Plečnik's eccentric experimentation with

Fig. 12. Jože Plečnik, University Library, Ljubljana, 1936–41.



traditional historic details also demonstrate an appreciation of the psychological interpretation of style put forth by Austrian art historian Alois Riegl in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Where Semper attributed changes registered in *Kunstformen* primarily to external factors, Riegl argued in his 1893 text *Stilfragen* ("Problems of Style") that standard motifs were recast over time and from culture to culture according to "purely psychological, artistic motivations," or what he termed the *Kunstwollen*.²³ Like Semper, Riegl proposed that the entire ornamental history of the Western world developed from very few original elements, which evolved into innumerable reinventions. Rather than responding to external needs and functional roots, though, ornamental development in Riegl's theory was a result of a mental organizing process that over time transformed existing motifs into more psychologically satisfying compositions, negating any representational, symbolic, or functional reference to an earlier state. The evolution of the Egyptian *lotus* into the Greek *palmette*, and the *palmette* into the Roman *acanthus* and, finally, the Islamic *arabesque*, presented a model of ornamental development that accounted for purely artistic-conceptual operations, such as the planar projection of composite views, the psychological need for gap-filling, and perceptual shifts between graphic and sculptural dimensions (figure 13).

Evident in his endless re-inventions of capital and column designs is not only Plečnik's propensity for registering and conflating historic legacies, but pure artistic fabrications that demonstrate the conceptual operations Riegl had addressed. Traditional elements are transformed into new sculptural configurations, reduced to linear bas-reliefs, and combined into unlikely hybrids that no longer carry their original meaning, but rather extend the artistic ancestry Riegl had established back to Neolithic forms and forward into the period of high Modernism. Traditional Slovene forms no longer appear to operate on the fringes of Western art but, again by Plečnik's efforts, are located within a vast and complex Mediterranean-Near Eastern tradition.

Riegl's attempt to explain the impetus for artistic transitions and developments led him eventually to develop the *Kunstwollen*

²³ Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style*, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) 8.

concept into a perceptual theory of art in his later writings.²⁴ Close examination of artistic styles revealed that the artistic “will” resulted from pendular swings in modes of vision within a spectrum ranging from the extreme *haptical* (or tactile) to the extreme *optical*. With his description of the variable *Kunstwollen*, Riegl not only proposed a connected and continuous history of creative achievements, but offered the means to rescue the art of his own day from the threat of extreme optical subjectivity ushered in by Impressionism.

The belief that *haptical* devices could counteract the unmitigated optical experience gave rise to unprecedented design compositions within the fine and applied arts produced by members of the Viennese Secession, the Wiener Werkstätte, and the Wagnerschule. In the fine arts, visual elements perceived by tactile means were juxtaposed with illusionary devices to create new perceptual and psychological experiences.²⁵ Architects and designers began to emphasize the skeletal condition of modern construction by employing translucent and transparent planes and volumes that prompted new perceptual responses on the part of the viewer.²⁶ In both the fine and applied arts, the spectator was forced to engage *optical* and *haptical* modes of perception simultaneously as they read across and through an object concurrently, experiencing surface and space as a single unified event.

Like his colleagues in Vienna and Prague, Plečnik demonstrated a keen interest in extending surface designs into three-dimensional spatial configurations in his early monuments. In numerous early designs, he applied geometric sculptural treatments to two-dimensional surfaces, creating new spatial and perceptual challenges while paving the way towards the experiments of the Czech Cubists. In subsequent work, surface patterns and spatial volumes interact. In the so-called “Plečnik Hall” of the Hrad in Prague (figure

²⁴ See Alois Riegl, *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna: Österreichische archaologischen institüt, 1901).

²⁵ This manner of conflating optically- and haptically-percieved elements is most aptly demonstrated in Viennese artist Gustav Klimt’s portraits from the first decade of the new century.

²⁶ The design approach is most clearly exhibited in the open gridwork objects, or *Gitterwerk*, produced by Josef Hoffmann, as well as in the ceiling and flooring treatment in the main lobby of the Otto Wagner’s Postparkasse building in Vienna.

14), the viewer is compelled to translate flat ceiling patterns understood by *haptical* perception into optical spatial signs in order to grasp the arrangement of the space below. In later projects, as in the bell tower ramp of the Church of the Sacred Heart (figure 15), solid flat walls and clearly circumscribed volumes are combined with translucent, transparent surfaces. The results are new spatial strategies and planar shifts suited to a modern perception now accustomed to interpreting the complex perceptual signs present in glass curtain construction and Cubism. Plečnik's ability to create oscillating signs—initially between those referencing modern constructional ideas and historical devices—was now extended to signs that vacillated between haptically- and optically-perceived stimuli.

Conclusion

Though Plečnik never acknowledged the theoretical foundations underlying his highly innovative designs and monuments, it is difficult to access his work without consideration of contemporary stylistic studies. Early artistic and architectural examples from Egypt, the ancient Near East, and early Western antiquity revealed to late nineteenth-century theorists new notions of how objects and images communicated to the viewer by way of compositional signs, functional symbols, and perceptual stimuli. More than any other architect to emerge from the *Wagnerschule*, Jože Plečnik followed the theoretical lead of Jones, Semper, and Riegl in attempting to reconcile “ancient values” with “new values.” Rather than dismiss historical examples in lieu of more functional and culturally-neutral displays, Plečnik seemed to grasp with remarkable insight that traditional styles could operate as a sort of ready-made language of signs. Stylistically, the results he achieved are often difficult to define. Structural clarity is expressed via natural metaphors, functional forces and new spatial concepts are communicated by means of ancient artistic symbols, and the classical tradition is challenged through allusions to its diverse and complex lineage.

Fig. 13. Egyptian lotus scroll, Greek palmette, Corinthian capital, and examples of arabesques in manuscripts, from Riegl, *Stilfragen*, 1893.

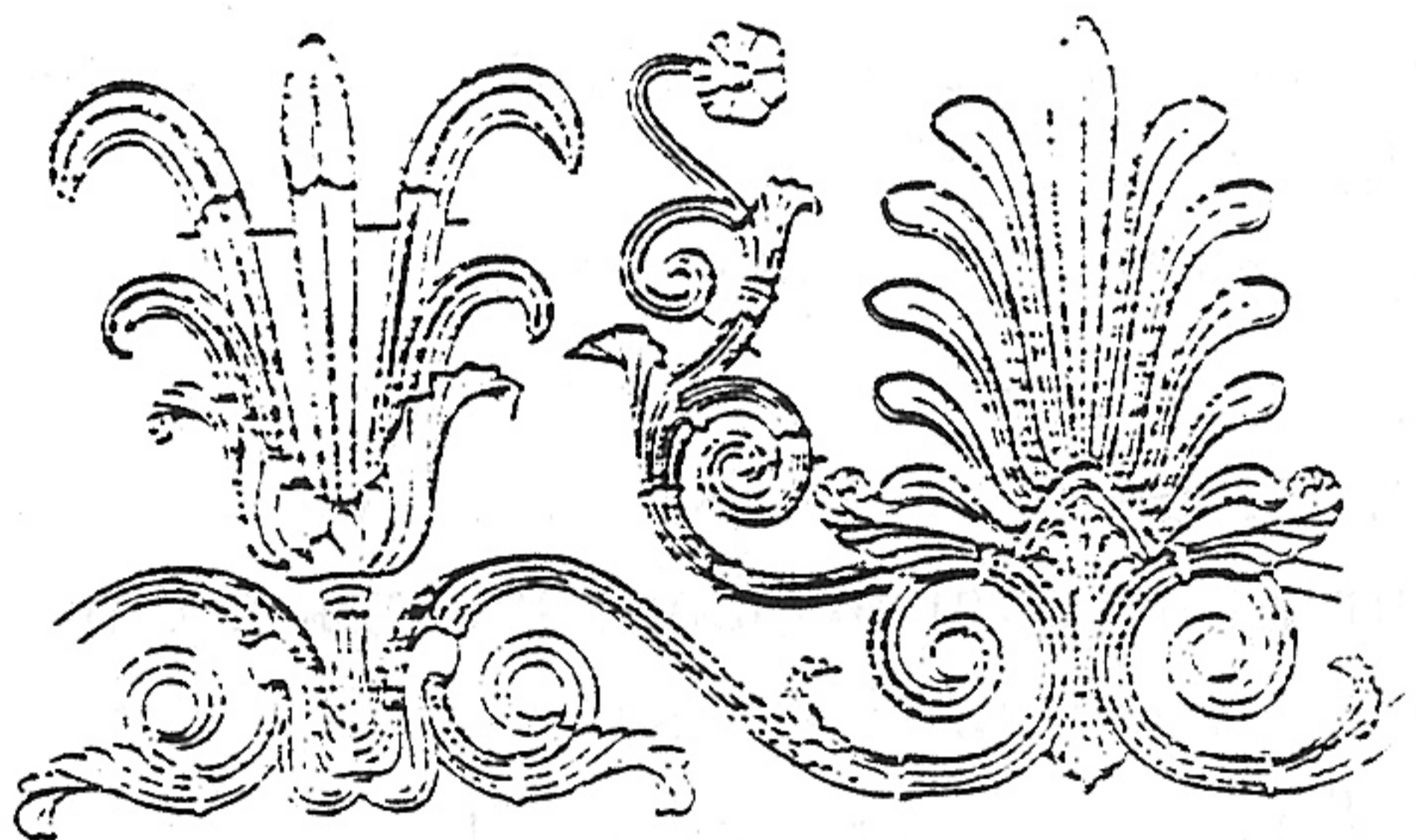
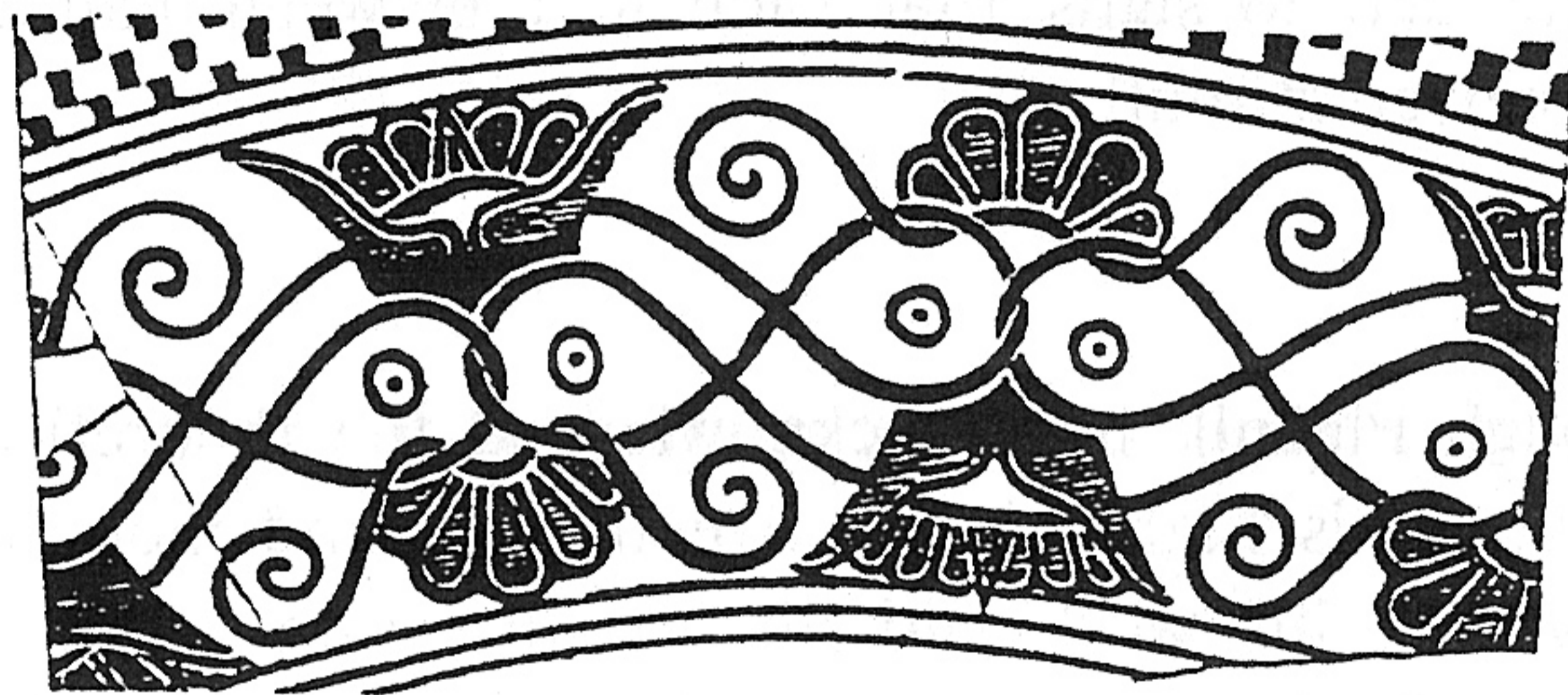
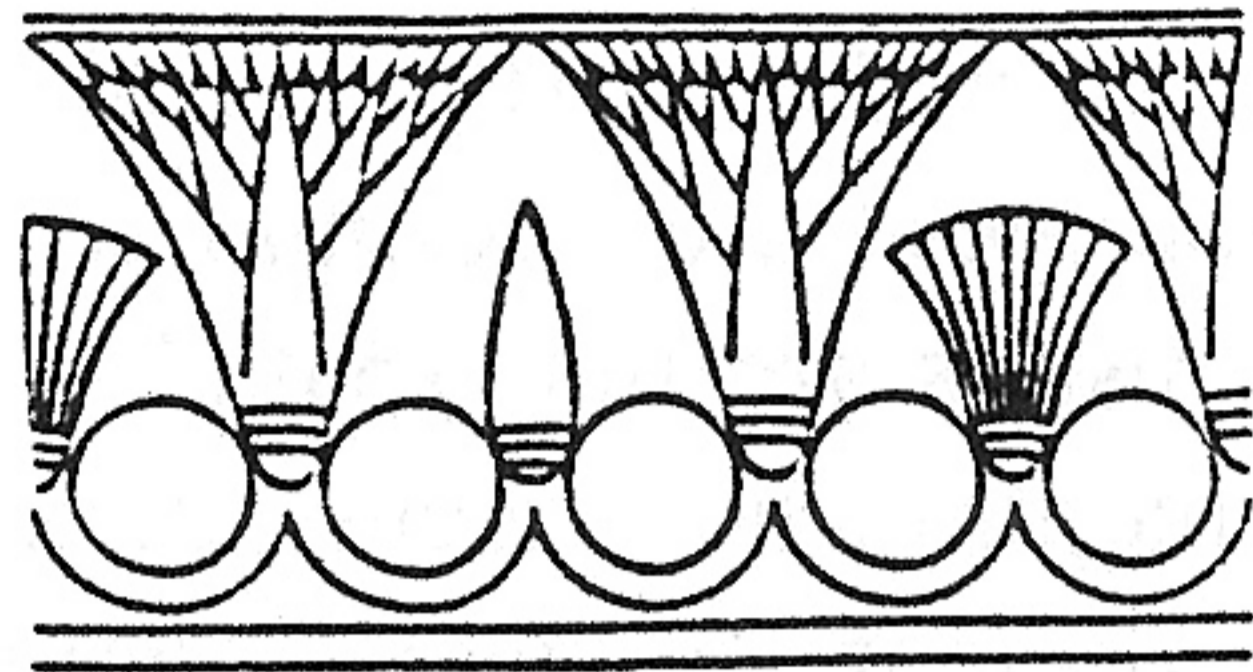


Fig. 14. "Plečnik Hall," Prague Castle, interior, 1927–30.

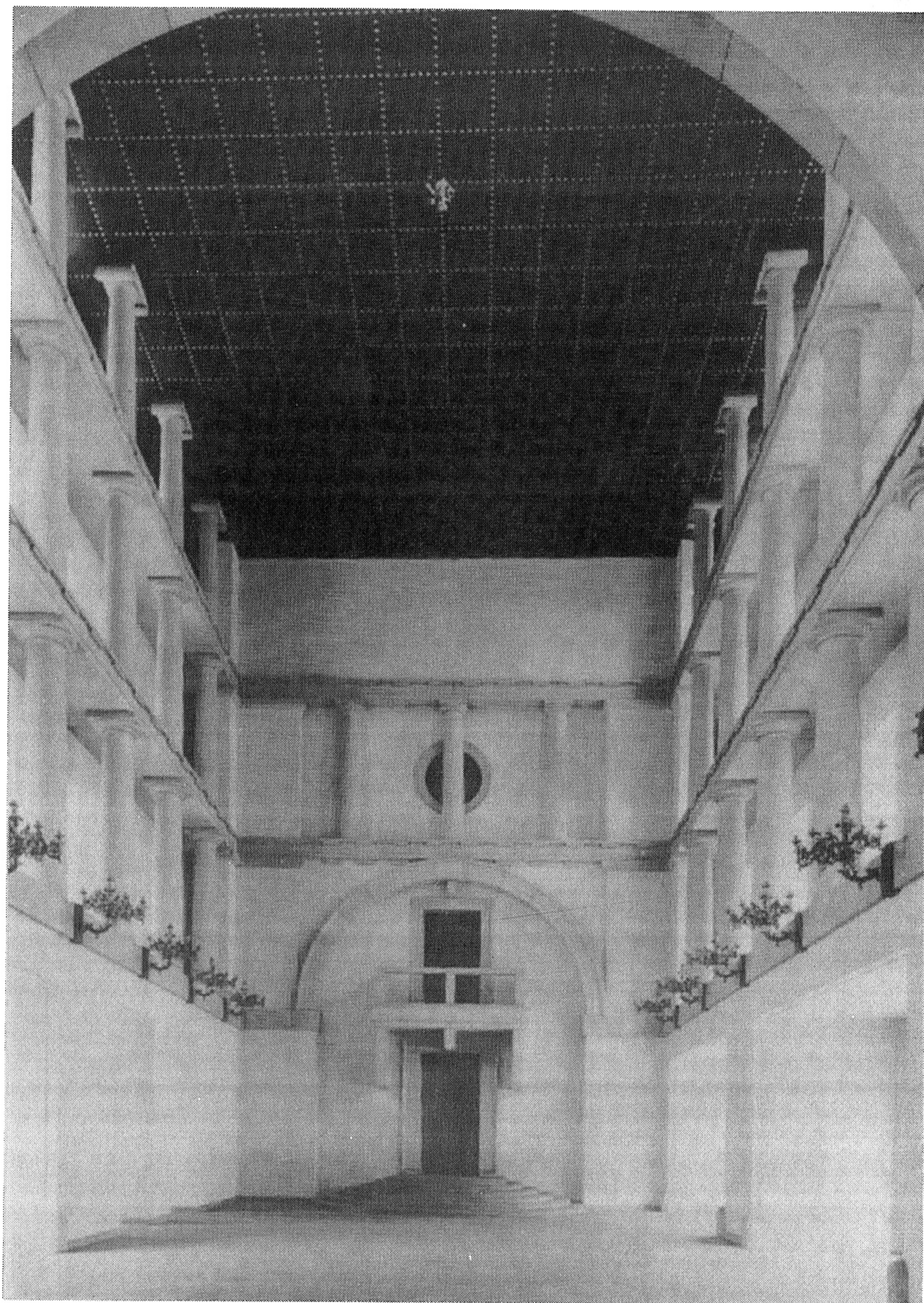
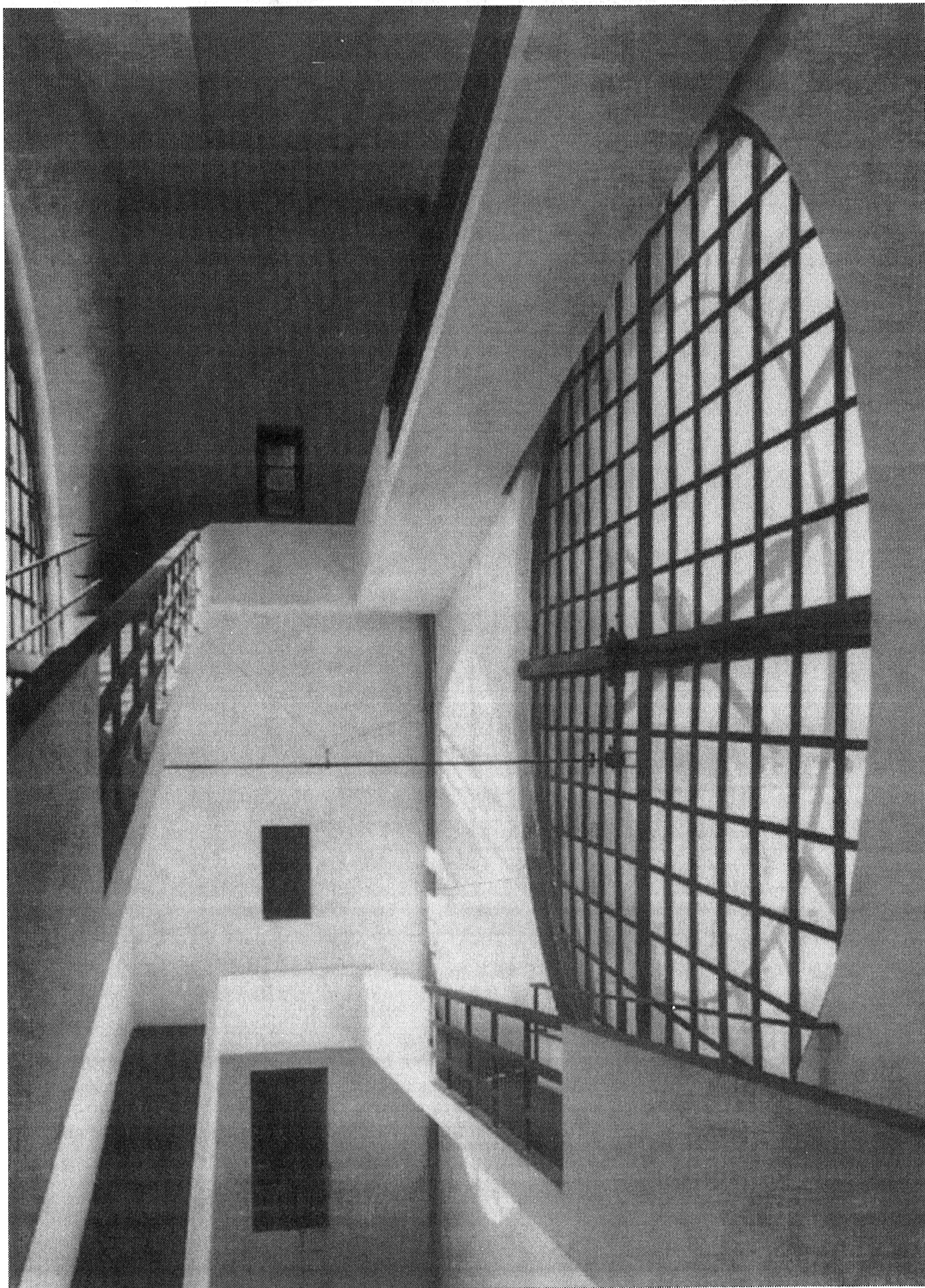


Fig. 15. Jože Plečnik, Church of the Sacred Heart, Prague, ramp of bell tower.



Plečnik's pluralistic and inventive vocabulary juxtaposes tradition with innovation in a manner we have come to associate with the postmodern attempts to collapse styles through a process of appropriation and divestiture. Indeed, like architects of the post-modern era, Plečnik did not use historical references "naturally"—that is, to establish his monuments as part of some immediately recognizable tradition—but "critically," as a means to revitalize forms through new and unexpected references. While his stylistic grammar displaced conventional symbols of architectural expression, it did not eliminate them. Instead, Plečnik reorganized those codes according to new paradigms that could allow modern concepts regarding structure, function, space, and viewer to take their place within a vast cultural, historical, and architectural heritage.

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POVZETEK**NARAVNE METAFORE, STARI SIMBOLI IN KLASIČNE ALUZIJE:
JOŽE PLEČNIK IN VPLIV STILISTIČNE TEORIJE 19. STOLETJA**

Članek raziskuje, v kolikšni meri so stilistične teorije, ki jih je Jože Plečnik prevzel v 90. letih 19. stoletja, ko je delal v ateljeju dunajskega arhitekta Otta Wagnerja, oblikovale načrte in spomenike, ki jih je ustvaril v svoji dolgi poklicni karieri. Natančneje: postavlja trditev, da je edinstveni Plečnikov slovar metafor, aluzij in simbolov izpeljan iz podobnih starih umetnostnih modelov, iz katerih so v drugi polovici 19. stoletja britanski umetnostni reformator Owen Jones, nemški arhitekt Gottfried Semper in avstrijski umetnostni zgodovinar Alois Riegl kovali nove teorije stilističnega sporočanja. Z oziranjem za ozadje akademsko potrjenih stilov umetnosti in arhitekture so bili Jones, Semper in Riegl sposobni ponovno odkriti trajni razvoj stila, ki je postavil v kot tradicionalno hierarhijo zahodne umetnosti in arhitekture in je posledično ponuditi nove funkcije oblikovnim in strukturnim elementom. Članek ponuja v premislek tezo, da so marginalni slogi, ki so jih raziskali in predstavili ti trije teoretiki--posebno pa zanemarjeni vzhodni slog--pomenili posebno pobudo slovenskemu arhitektu. Natančen pregled Plečnikov projektov v prvih štirih desetletjih 20. stoletja razkriva, da je vsrkal tako vizualno kot teoretično vsebino the doktrin in na njihovi osnovi načrtoval moderne strukturne, funkcionalne in perceptualne vrednote stila, ki so ga promovirali Jones, Semper in Riegl skozi besednjak starih in ljudskih elementov.