

Louis Sullivan's Veils

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Introduction

Where Modern Movement historians like Lewis Mumford and Sigfried Giedion used carefully framed photographs of Louis Sullivan's steel-framed buildings to establish a rationalised genealogy of modernism,¹ more recent work has explored the decorative and otherwise "anti-Modern" themes in Sullivan's work,² grounding his architecture in mid-nineteenth century discourse.³ At present, more might be said about the discrepancies between these two interpretations of Sullivan's work, particularly with respect to the steel frame and its covering. Although not interested in the metallic skeleton as a vehicle of structural rationalism, Sullivan considered its potential for architectural expression of paramount importance.⁴ He first described the significance of the steel-framed building in 1903: "As to my buildings: Those that interest me date from the Wainwright Building...It was a very sudden and volcanic design (made literally in three minutes) and marks the beginning of a logical and poetic expression of the metallic frame construction."⁵

Sullivan's use of the terms 'logical' and 'poetic'⁶ at once suggest the nature of his solution to the problem set by this new building type, and delineate an ongoing theme of his architecture: a rational method combined with philosophical and poetic aesthetic values drawn from American Transcendentalism.⁷ This theme emerged in Sullivan's ornament, which combined biomorphic motifs within a strict geometrical frame,⁸ and throughout his overall building design—explicitly rational construction tattooed with elaborate biomorphic and geometric decorative motifs on a thin terracotta or metal skin. One might designate Sullivan's tall buildings, built and unbuilt from the Wainwright on, as 'bio-constructive' creations endowed with an evolutionary, pseudo-biological character. While not proposing an organic image for architecture, as Expressionist architects would—he was instead suggesting a set of 'natural' laws for construction, to be elucidated by the architect.

In this context, the term 'cladding' is particularly appropriate for the surfacing of Sullivan's skyscrapers, suggesting both an applied skin and a biological one. Anthropomorphic metaphors for the steel skeleton and its skin recur in his written work. More important for the present discussion, his descriptions of cladding also used terminology related to textile. In "Ornament in Architecture" (1892), for example, Sullivan wrote about cladding and frame: "We feel intuitively that our strong, athletic, and simple forms will carry with natural ease the raiment 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, will appeal with redoubled power, like a sonorous melody overlaid with harmonious voices."⁹ The end is variously identified as melodic, harmonious, poetic, dreamlike; the means, however, is raiment, garment, cladding—consistent language describing a particular architectural phenomenon.

Sullivan's textile metaphor is particularly applicable to the systems of cladding he used at the Schlesinger and Mayer Department Store (subsequently Carson Pirie Scott), the subject of

this paper. The same constructional paradigm took two different forms there: one in the form of a close-fitting glazed-terracotta skin above the second floor; and the other in a taut metal-and-glass curtain that sheathes the building's two-story streetfront. Both were integrated with ornamental programs referring to a textile tradition. This, together with the building's overwhelmingly female clientele, suggest a reading of the building through Sullivan's theories of ornament and gender, one fostered by numerous references to a "veil of appearance" in his writings. Carson Pirie Scott in fact provided Sullivan with an opportunity to explore theories of gender in built form, as related to his own intellectual/spiritualist interests. In this context, the architect's appropriation of the procreative act in *Democracy: A Man-Search*, and elsewhere, his depiction of the architect as bearer of the building-progeny, resonates with and against his most overtly gendered building. The paper thus has a dual focus: to examine the material artifact of Carson Pirie Scott, in the particular details of its execution; and to relate this treatment to Sullivan's written theorization on gender. An examination of the disjunction between base and superstructure¹⁰ will then be related to Sullivan's gender theory, as derived from Transcendental and Swedenborgian discourse. The paper uses Joseph Siry's thorough discussion of the Carson Pirie Scott Building in his eponymous 1988 book extensively. Not at this stage a political commentary (which would entail a discussion of the reception of Sullivan's theories of gender, and his increasing professional marginalization), the paper instead seeks to address a relation that has been treated as either self-evident or self-condemning, but whose terms remain unclear—that between gender (precisely issues of maleness versus femaleness) and architecture.

Carson Pirie Scott

The Schlesinger and Mayer Department Store was built on the most expensive piece of real estate in downtown Chicago¹¹ between 1899 and 1904,¹² replacing an older assemblage of buildings.¹³ One of the most insistent features of the publicity and discussion surrounding the building concerns the representation of femininity there.¹⁴ Contemporary advertising featured women and floral motifs amid arabesque-like ornamentation, emphasizing departments in the store that served women's needs. Similarly, nearly every critic has discussed the gender associations of the building.¹⁵ From the earliest commentary, it was seen as Sullivan's elaboration of a 'feminine' aesthetic for a feminine clientele—although no writer (other than Sullivan himself) has adequately explored the meaning of such a construct.¹⁶

The "feminization" of architecture at Carson Pirie Scott would appear to reside in the application of ornament. Ornament was most elaborated on the street level, which stands out from the rest of the building by virtue of a projecting cornice, a change in material, and a totally worked surface. In early photographs,

the streetfront was a composite plane of plate glass, Luxfer prismatic glass and worked cast-iron stretched across the façade, encrusted with ornamental iron wreaths along State Street and large iron cartouches along the Madison street canopy, each resembling a large brooch or medallion.¹⁷ The profusion of the metal front contrasts with the cladding above, white-glazed terracotta tiles with thin bands of ornament running along corners and edges. The disjunction between bottom and top highlights two contrasting motifs, one dominated by an organizing geometrical structure (the grid of the structural skeleton) to which a fireproof skin clings, the other by biomorphic intertwining motifs, elaborate cartouches, free organic forms rendered in a metal curtain, itself gently registering the same underlying organizing grid.¹⁸

The windows along the streetfront of Carson Pirie Scott had a conventionally theatrical character. Each display window functioned as a separate cell in a streetfront stage framed by a thin curtain of figured metal and glass;¹⁹ this zone belonged visually to the space of the street, but physically to the building proper.²⁰ For the public it was a sealed box of purely visual accessibility. Also, as the barrier between buyer and product was reduced by glass, it was reinstated by frame, keeping desired objects just beyond reach.²¹ The nature of this space was partly determined by the bounding plane of the building facade; at Carson Pirie Scott textile references in this facade—in its figured metal, the patterning of its Luxfer glass, and the sheetlike nature of plate glass itself—add to the seductive, heterodox nature of this zone and its necklace of sealed spaces. The combination of spatial zone and veiling façade delineate an architecture that has little to do with structural expression or the clear acknowledgment of rational construction.

Frame and Insertion

The picture frame reference for the Carson Pirie Scott façade²² is intertwined with the other kind of framing—structural framing—addressed by Sullivan there. In the Kindergarten Chat entitled, “The Department Store,” he says of a building he admired, “This time, it is evident, my son, that we are looking at a department store....it is not triggered out in the guise of a Roman temple. Its purpose is clearly set forth in its general aspect and the form follows function in a simple, straightforward way. The structure is a logical, though somewhat bald, statement of its purpose, and an unmistakable though not wholly gratifying index of the business conducted within its walls.”²³ However, the streetfront of Carson Pirie Scott, framing particular views into the virtual space of the vitrine, does not emphasize didactic structural clarity, although technically it meets Sullivan’s requirement. There is in fact a contrast between the explicit structural clarity of the building above and the less explicit structure below. The streetfront facade, slightly offset, obscures the constructional system, covering it, veiling it like a petticoat or a skirt, concealing both the building contents (other than those explicitly set out for view) and the means of support—the

building’s structural “legs”. The building’s streetfront camouflage does not reinforce the impression of an upright skeleton, or of a grid of individual cells emphasizing horizontal extension, as is often claimed. Rather, it disengages the base from the structure above, inserting a space between sidewalk and building ‘proper’.

In working drawings, structural members in the first two stories appear to disappear, emerging again in the basement, carrying their seemingly interrupted loads to the caisson foundations below.²⁴ The drawing simply reflects correct architectural drafting convention: the columns would not be visible in elevation, nor in this particular section, blocked as they are by the wall between vitrines and the prismatic glass above. Nevertheless, it also accurately reflects one of the conceptual realities of the building; that a clear reading of its structural frame is disturbed by the shopfront zone and its metal wrapping, whose intricate, textile-like ornament appears indeed “of the material, not on it.”²⁵

The Veil of Appearances

Sullivan’s veiling of the steel frame at Carson Pirie Scott recalls his preoccupation with the “veil of appearances,” one of the recurrent themes of *Autobiography of an Idea*, expressed elsewhere in his writings as well.²⁶ Throughout the *Autobiography*, written when he was in his sixties, Sullivan made repeated references to the hidden meaning behind appearance, a meaning that he gradually searched out over the course of his life.²⁷ In class with Moses Woolson, upon learning the meaning of the word “culture,” he wrote, “...‘culture’ became for him a living word—a sheer veil through which, at first, he could but dimly see; but living word and sheer living veil had come from without to abide with him. It seemed as though Moses Woolson had passed on to him a wand of enchantment which he must learn to use to unveil the face of things.”²⁸ Soon after, upon his first experience of Wagner, he writes, “...Louis became an ardent Wagnerite. Here, indeed, had been lifted a great veil, revealing anew, refreshing as dawn, the enormous power of man to build as a mirage, the fabric of his dreams.”²⁹

While Sullivan’s rhetorical technique in deploying the symbol of the veil stems from nineteenth century Ruskinian and Transcendentalist discourse, it is also important in relation to the feminine thematics of his architecture and writings. Sullivan’s use of a traditionally feminine symbol provides the motivation for this discussion, a counterpoint to the frequently masculine overtones of his rhetoric. As an article of women’s dress used to mask the features of its wearer, the veil is a symbol of specifically feminine mystery. At Carson Pirie Scott, the veil that envelops the street facade of the building is deployed skillfully in the seduction of women themselves. In addition, the mysterious beauty and theatricality of the metal base conceals the reality of the steel frame, quite literally the veil of appearance concealing constructional fact. In his writings, the use of this gendered symbol to represent Sullivan’s sense of the mission of his art (“Could

this mystery be penetrated? He was determined it should be, soon or late—and that he would do it.”) implicates the feminine in strategies of mystery and concealment. But further examination suggests that while Sullivan’s use of the veil as symbol and architectural motif is highly ambiguous, even ambivalent, it is not necessarily polemical.

Gendering Nature

In Sullivan’s extensive writings on architectural and philosophical subjects, a number of gender-related themes emerge, generally following conventional binary divisions drawn from the doctrine of Emanuel Swedenborg. Narciso Menocal, in a book on the Transcendentalist themes in Sullivan’s work, linked Sullivan’s use of the rational and the biomorphic to the gendered ‘correspondences’ of Swedenborgianism, which proposes “...that universal rationality, or wisdom, comes into harmony with the masculine principle of the cosmos, and emotion, or love, with the feminine.”³⁰ Nature, for Sullivan, is always feminine. Procreation, however, is masculine: “Why did man wish to create? ...he simply acted out his instinct—his instinct of reproduction. He infused his bare work with the quality of his emotions and thus found in them the companionship he yearned for—because they were of himself”³¹. In a bizarre projection of his own unitary existence, Sullivan appropriated the procreative act as a way of peopling the world with built progeny. Later in the *Chats*, Sullivan went further in adopting femininity: “You have not thought deeply enough to know that the heart in you is the woman in man. You have derided your femininity, where you have suspected it; whereas, you should have known its power, cherished and utilized it, for it is the hidden well-spring of Intuition and Imagination.”³² Similarly, while the feminine characterization of nature is a conventional nineteenth-century Romantic convention, the importance of nature in Sullivan’s thought elevates it to an authoritative source of guidance for action. He says,

So I have taken you to Nature, and shall again take you to Nature, to show you how our moods parallel her moods; how her problems parallel our problems; and to bring you directly to the one unfailing source, the visible effect of creative energy, that you may find there, now and evermore, the key to solutions; to make plain to you what man may read in Nature’s book, to the end that her processes may be our processes: that we may absorb somewhat of her fertility of recourse, her admirable logic, her progression from function into form—her poetic finalities.³³

The inversion of traditional paradigms — procreation as the province of men, and the feminine as a seat of authority—confuses any attempt to simplify the components of Sullivan’s work into traditional binary relationships. We might be tempted to see Carson Pirie Scott as the assertion of a rational structure sheathed in feminine obfuscation. But Sullivan’s writing serves

a cautionary purpose, reminding us of the primacy of Nature in his architecture. We must re-evaluate the hierarchy of Sullivan’s process at Carson Pirie Scott. The wrapper of its cast-iron base is not there to hide the steel frame within; instead, it is brought to life by the frame. In other words, the frame exists to hold its wrap, or to be wrapped, not to express an idea of unencumbered structure. For verification of this notion, we might look to the final drawings made by Sullivan, the plates for his *A System of Architectural Ornament According with a Philosophy of Man’s Power*. In a careful exegesis of his process, Sullivan shows the geometric frame underlying his ornamental themes gradually absorbed by the efflorescence that it organizes. It would be hard to argue that this ornament is intended to reveal the structural clarity of the original diagram. The geometry exists to enable the ornament, not the other way around. This process can also be traced in early sketches for whole buildings, where ornament was integral to the building from the earliest moment in the design process.³⁴ In Sullivan’s steel-framed buildings, the clarity of the frame is a necessary organizing device. But always as a frame: the construction feature that organizes, while it barely restrains, the madness of ornament, the unruliness that occupies and threatens it.

Sullivan’s exegesis in *A System of Architectural Ornament* can be traced at different scales throughout his later work. It can be seen at Carson Pirie Scott at the scale of the individual ornamental detail, both above and below, and at the scale of the street facade, where an implicit structural frame is occupied by biomorphic ornament, prismatically fractured light, and a continually changing parade of store goods. This frame is full, completely covered by and embedded with program elements (the ornament, like the vitrines and the Luxfer glass, can be seen as such) that reflect Sullivan’s idea of the feminine. Indeed the notion of fullness, as well as that of veiling and the artifice of feminine dress, might be said to characterize the feminine within Sullivan’s Swedenborgian system. This is particularly true when considered in conjunction with the emptiness or nudity of the structural frame above. The drama of this contrast at Carson Pirie Scott illuminates similar efforts in Sullivan’s other late work, suggesting the important role that gender played in his work as architect *and* ornamentalist.

NOTES

- ¹ The most obvious example of this selective editing is found in Sigfried Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge: 1941) pp. 310-313. Giedion passes over the ornamental base of Carson Pirie Scott entirely, referring only to its upper stories. He also mistakenly identifies the ornamentation, implying that it does not occur on every floor, and that when it does, it only adorns the corner bead that runs around and between windows, not the inner face of the window frame. He says, “The windows...are sharply cut into the facade. The windows in the lower stories are connected by a narrow line of ornament pressed into the terra cotta. Too thin to be visible in the photograph, this line nevertheless helps to accentuate the horizontal organization of the front.” Lewis Mumford adopted a similar

line: "But one cannot call the roll of Sullivan's works without paying a tribute to the one outstanding building of his later years: the Schlesinger and Mayer Building, now that of Carson, Pirie and Scott....Here Sullivan used a bold system of horizontal windows and gained a legitimate accent at the corner by a rounded glass bay, a clean, logical solution for the problem, more decisive in every way, it seems to me, than his skyscrapers. In departing from this logic on the lower two storeys, to the extent of using a lacy snowflake grille, he destroyed the unity of expression and distracted attention, by his own exhibition, from the exhibitions behind the windows. Despite this weakness, the design was an expressive and salutary one..." See Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades* (New York: 1931) p.70-71.

Also see Hugh Morrison, *Louis Sullivan, Prophet of Modern Architecture* (New York: 1935), pp. 200-201.

² For example: "'Remember the seed-germ,' Sullivan repeatedly writes. Examined closely, there is something at work, especially in the ornamental designs of the years of his falling out of favor, which is not so much formal as technical. And that is a predominance of weaving, in which tendrils from the seed germ interlace each other and dip in and out of incisions in tympanic forms in a way that both recalls and writes over Vitruvius' tale of the vine-entwined basket over the burial place of the Corinthian maiden." Jennifer Bloomer, "D'Or," in Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (New York: 1992), pp. 172-3.

For a general, contemporary treatment of Sullivan's work, see Wim de Wit, ed., *Louis Sullivan: The Function of Ornament* (New York: 1986); for Sullivan's relationship to philosophical and aesthetic trends of the late nineteenth century, see the work of Lauren Weingarden in general, and in particular, "Louis H. Sullivan's Ornament and the Poetics of Architecture," in John Zukowsky, ed., *Chicago Architecture 1872-1922: Birth of a Metropolis* (Munich: 1987); "Louis Sullivan's System of Architectural Ornament," in Louis Sullivan, *A System of Architectural Ornament* (reprint, New York: 1990), *Louis H. Sullivan: The Banks* (Cambridge: 1987) and also, Narciso Menocal, *Architecture as Nature: The Transcendentalist Idea of Louis Sullivan* (Madison: 1981). For an argument about the anti-Modernist threads in Sullivan's work see Mark Wigley, "White Out: Fashioning the Modern," in Deborah Fausch, Paulette Singley, Rodolphe El-Khoury, Zvi Ephrat, eds, *Architecture in Fashion* (New York: 1994).

³ Sullivan's exploration of themes from Gottfried Semper John Ruskin, and Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc attest these roots, irrespective of documented connections to all three. Both the structural frame and the textile origins of cladding recur, as richly-developed themes in Sullivan's work and evidence of Gottfried Semper's influence. Also like Semper, Sullivan searched for a philosophical and conceptual basis by which to develop new building types in the late nineteenth century. For a discussion of Semper and Sullivan, see Wigley, "White Out: Fashioning the Modern," and of Semper and Viollet-le-Duc in relation to Sullivan, see Narciso G. Menocal, *Architecture as Nature*. Also see Theodore Turak, "A Celt Among Slavs: Louis Sullivan's Holy Trinity Cathedral," *Prairie School Review* 9 (1972): 5-23. For a discussion of the influence of German architec-

tural theory on Chicago School architects, see Roula Geraniotis, "German Architectural Theory and Practice in Chicago: 1850-1900," *Winterthur Portfolio* 21:4 (1986), 243-306. While John Root's partial translation of Semper doesn't prove Sullivan's familiarity with Semper's theory of cladding, nevertheless it is not difficult to infer some wider familiarity with Semper's ideas, at least on the part of Root, a close competitor and associate of Sullivan's. Sullivan's close friend John Edelman, another Chicagoan of German descent, provided another likely route of idea transference.

Specifically, early motifs of Sullivan's ornament can be traced to Viollet and Ruskin; like Viollet Sullivan embraced the overt articulation of the steel frame as structural skeleton. For Sullivan's relationship to John Ruskin, see Lauren S. Weingarden, "Naturalized Nationalism: A Ruskinian Discourse on the Search for an American Style of Architecture," *Winterthur Portfolio* 24 (1989), 43-68, and Lauren S. Weingarden, "Louis H. Sullivan's Ornament and the Poetics of Architecture."

⁴ Sullivan says, in his autobiography, "The steel frame form of construction had come into use. It was first applied by Holabird and Roche in the Tacoma Office Building, Chicago; and in St. Louis, it was given first authentic recognition and expression in the exterior treatment of the Wainwright Building, a nine-story office structure, by Louis Sullivan's own hand." Louis Sullivan, *Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: 1956), p. 298.

⁵ "As to my buildings: Those that interest me date from the Wainwright Building...It was a very sudden and volcanic design (made literally in three minutes) and marks the beginning of a logical and poetic expression of the metallic frame construction." Letter to Claude Bragdon, cited in William Jordy, "The Tall Buildings," in Wim de Wit, ed., *Louis Sullivan: The Function of Ornament* (New York: 1986), p.72.

Later, in his *Autobiography of an Idea*, Sullivan identified the steel frame as a vehicle for the development and transmission of new ideas: "He felt at once that the new form of engineering was revolutionary, demanding an equally revolutionary architectural mode. That masonry construction, in so far as tall buildings were concerned, was a thing of the past, to be forgotten, that the mind might be free to face and solve new problems in new functional forms. That the old ideas of superimposition must give way before the sense of vertical continuity." *Autobiography of an Idea*, p. 298.

⁶ See above, footnote x.

⁷ On links between Transcendentalism and Sullivan, see Lauren Weingarden, above, and, "Louis Sullivan's Metaphysics of Architecture (1885-1901): Sources and Correspondences with Symbolist Art Theories," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1981), and Narciso Menocal, *Architecture as Nature*.

⁸ For a close reading of Sullivan's ornamental system, and its relationship to his architectural poetics, see Weingarden, "Louis Sullivan's System of Architectural Ornament."

⁹ Louis Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats* (New York: 1947), p.187.

¹⁰ Discussion of the other textile metaphors that proliferate throughout the building is currently contained in these notes.

¹¹ The corner of Madison and State Streets.

¹² For an extended treatment of this building and the events surround-

- ing its construction, see Joseph Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott : Louis Sullivan and the Chicago Department Store* (Chicago: 1988). The Carson Pirie Scott Building was not the first department store in Chicago—the building type emerged much earlier in the century. We might, though, consider Sullivan’s attempt in light of his statements about the generation of new building types, and his own suitability as the architect who gives them form. For early retail stores, see Carl Condit, *The Chicago School of Architecture* (Chicago: 1964).
- ¹³ In order to minimize the interruption to cash flow during building construction, the new building was built on a fast track. Foundations were installed in the basement of the old buildings while retailing activities continued above; the new building was completed in record time, the corner section substantially between the months of October 1902 and March of 1903. The speed of construction is important to consider when analyzing Sullivan’s architectural decisions; the spare quality of the elevations above the two-story base may have had as much to do with the exigencies of the construction schedule as with aesthetic decisions about sparseness or abstraction. Similarly, how the base became the primary vehicle for ornamentation, and was detailed—an independent form fabricated off site and then bolted to the same skeletal structure—suggest the efficiency with which Sullivan had to design the building process, as much as the building itself. See Sullivan himself on this subject, in a letter to the Carson, Pirie and Scott Company in 1903, cited in Siry, p. 109.
- ¹⁴ As Siry notes, the vast majority of Chicago shoppers were women. *Ibid.*, pp.128-30.
- ¹⁵ Although Sullivan is not known to have written of the Schlesinger and Mayer Building in terms of its gendered character, his associate Lyndon Smith wrote of the Guaranty Building, “dominated by men and devoted to the transaction of their business...the elements of activity, ambition, and directness of purpose, are all shown thereby in the architectural form,” and of the Schlesinger and Mayer that it was “essentially appealing in its quality to femininity. It is sensitive to a high degree, delicately pleasing to the sympathetic eye and with fine feeling and movement permeating its most incidental ramification.” See Lyndon Smith, “The Schlesinger and Mayer Building,” *Architectural Record* 16 (July 1904):59. See also Morrison, *Louis Sullivan*, p.201, and Willard Connelly, *Louis Sullivan As He Lived* (New York: 1960), p. 235. Joseph Siry deals with Carson Pirie Scott’s relationship to a feminine clientele at length, and Robert Twombly discusses it in his biography, *Louis Sullivan, His Life and Work* (New York: 1986), pp. 381-382; 400-401.
- ¹⁶ Indeed, Sullivan’s theory of the relation between form and function supports a gendered interpretation. In repeated and now-familiar essays he underscores the point—one so general “as to admit of no exceptions”—that buildings take their form from their function. Sullivan intended a broad definition of function encompassing the social and aesthetic as well as the programmatic aspects of buildings.
- ¹⁷ In addition to the streetfront, Sullivan detailed specific parts of the interior to a similar degree. In a screen separating the dining room from the elevator hall on the eighth floor (fig. 10), a series of semi-circular openings were edged with “scallop” of fret-sawn wood. On the third floor, in one of the “rest, reading and writing rooms,” a mahogany screen, also fret-sawn, was composed of three layers of pattern (figs. 11 and 12), each layer elaborately detailed. Their combination in the assembled screen recalls layers of lace, each piece similarly unrelated to the others. Even the radiator grilles have a kind of laciness not found in most of Sullivan’s ornamental work (fig. 13). These details recall the advertising campaign, associating well- or richly-dressed women and elaborate graphic floral motifs (figs. 14 and 15). In a photograph of Mrs. Potter Palmer (fig. 16), the wife of an influential Chicago businessman, the same kinds of patterns appear in the scalloped edges of her collar, the repetitive, spidery lace, the overlaying of pattern.
- ¹⁸ In a discussion of Sullivan’s system of ornament and the larger significance of these two contrasting systems, Lauren Weingarden writes, “Viewed together, Sullivan’s naturalist ornament and reductionist structural elements have a symbolic function that is consonant with the subjective and objective symbolism of his ornamental designs. That is, whether juxtaposed or intermingled, the organic and tectonic images of his designs represent the generative forces of the ““Infinite Creative Spirit.” It can thus be argued that Sullivan’s ornamental compositions provided the conceptual and formal underpinnings of his complete architectural project.” “Louis Sullivan’s *System of Architectural Ornament*,” p. 26.
- ¹⁹ These small serialized stages provided one site on which Chicago retailers played out the drama of market competition. See Siry, p. 134. In buildings designed before the economical use of plate glass (during the 1870s), the semi-public zone of the shop had often extended out onto the sidewalk. See, for example, the Second Singer Building of 1878, and the Mandel Brothers Building of the same date (together with other State Street fronts) in Siry, p.23, 31.
- ²⁰ In an as-built plan of the building, the glass wall is reduced to the thinness of a light double line; the weather wall of the building would seem to be the back of the vitrines, rendered in a solid black line. See Figure 20.
- ²¹ According to Sullivan’s chief draftsman at the end of his life, George Grant Elmslie, the ornamentation of the base of Carson Pirie Scott was meant to function as a frame for the merchandise, rather like a picture frame. The fictive nature of the space contained within the window (never reachable by those visually “consuming” it) is reminiscent of the contents of a framed picture—a virtual space that cannot be physically occupied.
- ²² Sullivan’s employee George Elmslie describes the base as a series of picture frames framing the goods within the vitrines, in a response to Lewis Mumford’s critique of Sullivan in *The Brown Decades*; see Siry, p. 158 and p.267, note 99. Also see Morrison, *Louis Sullivan*, p. 201.
- ²³ *Kindergarten Chats*, p.40. In a second comment, of a building he disapproved: “Surely, if it were a department store, all masonry would be reduced to a minimum, and there would be an expanse of glass for light and display.” *Kindergarten Chats*, p. 27.
- ²⁴ While the draftsman’s pencil has traced the lines of the continuous structural member that we know lies within the cast-iron shopfront vitrine in his section, the lines are lightly traced, construction lines never properly burned in like those above and below.
- ²⁵ To look further at this wrapping, one might compare the ornamenta-

tion of the base with the floors above. The discontinuities evident in structural expression are evident as well in the decorative programs of the two parts of the building. Below, ornament adorns the full front face of the cast-iron façade, unmistakably visible at a number of scales; above, it lies inside the terracotta window frames along the thickness of the wall, where it was conveniently overlooked by Modernist historians. Siry and others claim that this ornament is meant to be seen from below (Siry, *Carson Pirie Scott*, and Juan Pablo Bonta, *Architecture and Its Interpretation*). It can also be seen by someone standing inside the window looking out (fig. 19). The placement of the ornament draws a corollary for the shopper positioned in front of the streetfront vitrines one moment, who minutes later occupies the upper stories of the building. Upstairs, she has entered the space promised by the streetfront display. She now looks out past the ornament, not in through it, herself absorbed into mercantilist display. The ornament of the terra cotta skin emphasizes the thickness of the frame rather than surface planarity. It helps to distinguish the structural frame from the planarity of glass infill. In doing so, it stands in marked contrast to the fusion of glass and metal at the street, a single curtain sewing disparate elements together.

²⁶ See "Dreams" in Louis Sullivan, *Democracy: a Man-Search* (Detroit, 1961), Group Five.

²⁷ His first encounter with this mystery came upon his learning of the effect of perspective on the perception of size. The lack of correspondence between reality and appearance in this initial instance, caused in him "a raging fermentation." He writes, "It was MYSTERY—a mystery that lay behind appearances, and within appear-

ances, and in front of appearances, a mystery which if penetrated might explain and clarify all." *Autobiography of an Idea*, p.104.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.168. Later on, when beginning to work in Chicago for William LeBaron Jenney, Sullivan met John Edelmann: "One day John explained his theory of suppressed functions; and Louis, startled, saw in a flash that this meant the real clue to the mystery that lay behind the veil of appearances....Louis saw the outer and the inner world more clearly, and the world of men began to assume a semblance of form, and of function. But, alas, what he had assumed to be a single vast veil of mystery that might perhaps lift of a sudden, like a cloud, proved in experience to be a series of gossamer hangings that must slowly rise up one by one, in a grand transformation scene....Now would it be possible for him, through the...power of imagination, to cause the veils of the hidden world to rise and reveal?" *Ibid.*, p.207

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.209. Following an encounter with two new bridges, new feats of engineering, "As months passed and the years went by, as world after world unfolded before him and merged within the larger world, and veil after veil lifted, and illusion after illusion vanished, and the light grew ever steadier, Louis saw power everywhere." *Ibid.*, p.248

³⁰ Menocal, *Architecture as Nature*, p.25.

³¹ *Kindergarten Chats*, p.166.

³² Also quoted in Claude Bragdon, *Architecture and Democracy* (New York: 1918; repr. 1971), p. 154.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.159.

³⁴ Lauren Weingarden, *The Banks* (Cambridge: 1986), p. 84 and fig. 2.