

Art Deco

A Mode of Mobility



MICHAEL
WINDOVER

FOREWORD BY
RHODRI WINDSOR
LISCOMBE



Patrimoine urbain

Series edited by Lucie K. Morisset

Urban Heritage

Although drastically altered by an increase in mobility and cultural exchange, relations between communities and their environment remain at the heart of modern identity constructions. Urban Heritage/Patrimoine urbain, an anthology compiled by the Canada Research Chair on Urban Heritage (ESG-UQAM), proposes to explore the material foundations and imaginary configurations of this environment. From architecture to the city, and from creation to commemoration, the anthologized works examine heritage in its various manifestations to understand its processes and all its finery, learn to recognize its sudden appearances, and, when all is said and done, share and support the attachment communities feel for the world that surrounds them.

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WINDOVER

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RHODRI WINDSOR LISCOMBE

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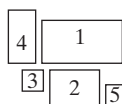
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1. *Mural by Herman Sachs at Bullock's Wilshire Department Store*, Los Angeles (CA), 1929. Photo: Michael Windover.
2. *Eros Theatre* (north façade), Mumbai (Bombay), architect Bhedwar Sorabji, 1938. Photo: Michael Windover.
3. *Philco Model 115 "Bullet" radio*, ca. 1937. Wooden cabinet (28.5 × 51.5 × 23 cm), Hammond Museum of Radio Collection, Guelph (ON). Photo: Michael Windover.
4. *Entrance to Marine Building on Hasting St.*, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, 1930. Photo: Geoffrey Carr.
5. *First Floor plan of Marine Building*, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, 1931. Photo: Vancouver Public Library, VPL 12016.

*This book is dedicated
to the memory of my father, Lloyd,
who sparked my interest in history,
and to Rebecca and Audrey,
who inspire my future.*

The sun is mirrored even in a coffee spoon.
– Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command:*
An Anonymous History, 1948

Foreword

This book represents a major contribution to our understanding of Art Deco, and of the muddled definitions of modernity, modernization, and Modernism. Rather than become submerged by any one theoretical position, Michael Windover deftly employs a series of analytical frames, chiefly those associated with lifestyle mobility. Thereby he both recognizes Deco's inherent fascination with stylism while disclosing the equally fascinating preoccupation of its purveyors with surface but also substance. For his book is built around four major commissions that demonstrate, in a novel manner, the global reach of Art Deco. These studies of Deco at work begin at the western edge of Dominion Canada, travel to the emergent populist cultural capital of

Los Angeles, the late imperial proto-independent Bombay/Mumbai, and finally to the radical re-staging of life around the radio. Windover literally tunes us into the dynamics of the Art Deco: its colonization of high-end as well as low-cost commodification, clever negotiation of contesting identities both national and individual, its visual normalization of aristocratic and archaeological precedent, plus its brilliantly elegant coating of base commercialization. He displays it as progeny of the Beaux-Arts, but cousin of its eventual nemesis, the Modern Movement. Through his study, Art Deco re-emerges as the visualization of the “democracy” of consumerism, but moulded by privileged aesthetic values and guided by cosmopolitan (as against mass) objectives.

The travel of Art Deco around the old world of empire into the new culture of consumption is mapped out in the Introduction. Windover cleverly establishes the sharp outlines of Deco’s transcontinental architecture through the metaphorical and virtual example of The Cross Roads of the World shopping precinct in Los Angeles. Its modern yet historicized articulation reflected the nearby factory of fantasy at Hollywood, where the myriad and exotic relics of disintegrating European hegemony and its imperial mythology congregated: from such historical romps as *Gunga Din* to the counter-Depression filmic novellas choreographed around Savile Row-tailored, Deco-furnished Fred Astaire. Appropriately The Cross Roads was built around the automobile since some of the most attractive modern machines were Deco-bodied grand touring cars of the 1930s, notably those crafted by Rolls Royce, Delage and Bugatti and their coach-builders. Similarly, Deco managed to combine the desperate post-World War I clutching onto privilege and tradition with the eager embrace of technocracy, functionalism, and consumption. The Cross Roads also foreshadowed the repositioning of power—economic, military, cultural—out of Northern Europe via the United States into the wider Pacific Rim. Windover’s perceptive scholarship alike holds in balance Deco’s solid design credentials in the academic tradition but also its iconographic appropriations.

The spaces of spectacular business enterprise and decorative urbanism reconfigured by Art Deco are first examined in Vancouver, British Columbia, an apt inaugural site because it demonstrates the trans-oceanic appeal of Deco for professional and public. Deco’s etymological and aesthetic origins may have resided in Paris or East Coast America but its ethos and practice resonated globally. Better yet, Windover’s site is the Marine Building, commissioned just before the fracture of post-1918 paper wealth but completed soon after the low point of the Depression. Those events both marked and enabled Art Deco, much as the Modern Movement really owed its genesis to the rupture of hierarchical convention but strange rapture for technology bequeathed by the First World War. The Marine Building, like its Deco decoration, slides between riches and poverty, conservative values and contemporary attitudes, but also between functional substance and ornamental scenery—literally a modernizing Cathedral of Commerce in the genus of such Yankee skyscrapers as the contemporary

Chrysler or Empire State buildings. In that sense Art Deco is firmly anchored in modernity, that long gestated dressing of radical new technique in the garb of tradition.

The amalgam figured in Windover's next case study, Bullock's Wilshire department store in Los Angeles. Its streamlined towers and fluted massing attained distinctive street presence amidst the capital of accessible glamour and virtual reality. Once again he reveals the hydra-headed nature of Art Deco design practice. For Bullock's was as elegant as efficient, and as influential upon everyday fashion as geared to exclusive taste. He aligns its celebration of glamorous consumption with a 1936 Hollywood cinematic cartoon, *Page Miss Glory*. The cartoon narrated the make-believe of materialist success that eluded so many people who yet so delighted in the visual appeal of Art Deco. The rift between Deco modernization and Modernism becomes especially clear when Windover moves us to the yet newer centre of late-late Modern praxis, Mumbai, or as it was still then denominated, Bombay. Specifically he examines three cinemas, two built as modern palaces of cosmopolitan entertainment by members of the Parsi business community allowed to prosper under the Raj. The cinemas paralleled the market, instead of proposals for social housing in the Back Bay Reclamation District; Deco acting as conduit of entrepreneurial activity instead of the Modernist social reconstruction Nehru would import into independent India post-1947. But the Deco cinemas fabricated a perhaps more robustly diverse and vibrant community around the glitzy pleasures of entertainment and desire.

The deeper politics of Deco resound more cohesively in Windover's final case study. His subject is the ethereal presence of radio transmission and its power to aggregate community whether aimed at commercial or national objectives. He returns us to Canada because of the tremendous expansion in mass media facilitated by Edward Rogers, a native of Ontario who developed the AC tube. Radio thereby could occupy a staggering proportion of ordinary social space. The Deco idiom colonized broadcast facility, from the world's metropolis in London to the North American prairie, and instrument, the radio cabinet, in the houses of the prosperous to the relatively poor. He reminds us also of the distinguished designers associated with what Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan termed the tribal drum, most notably Raymond Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes and Wells Coates.

So here is an admirable chart to explore deeper understandings and, yes, appreciation, of Art Deco. The chart comprises Windover's astute selection of objects for analysis, attention to prior scholarship and contextualization of Art Deco practice, architecture and society. Above all he achieves the remarkable richness of inquiry that recovers Deco's place at the crossroads between modernity and Modernism, populist technocracy and privileged taste, global aspiration and local association, and between heightened aestheticism and mere opportunism.

Rhodri Windsor Liscombe

Preface

In the very early hours of November 26, 2008, I was awakened to the sound of my cell phone. I had just arrived in Mumbai a couple of days earlier, and after two somewhat frustrating days, I was starting to feel more comfortable and confident that I would be able to handle the challenges of researching in an environment very different from what I was accustomed to. It was my wife Rebecca on the phone asking if I was okay. That is how I learned about the terrorist attacks going on around me. For the next three and a half days, I was mostly quarantined in my Art Deco hotel, a few blocks away from one of the sites under siege and from the principal sites of my research.

As an historian of architecture and visual culture I have asked myself (or have been asked), “What is at stake with this project?”—basically, “Why do what you’re doing?” Being so close to the brutality of terrorism in some ways provided for me one answer. I had already done a fair amount of work on the material related to Bombay, including some reading about the Taj Mahal Hotel. The photographs I took of that enormous structure (see fig. 3.13, p. 184) are rather unsettling for me since they are full of anticipation of what would transpire just a day later, and they blur together with the televisual images I watched constantly for three days. In asking myself what is at stake in studying places of public culture like hotels, movie theatres, department stores, train stations, etc., I saw firsthand the symbolic potency of such spaces. That the attacks on Mumbai—the financial heart and considered the most “Westernized” city in India—were aimed not at financial institutions but at sites of public culture and mobility reinforced for me the idea that these spaces carry a significant socio-political valence that is often overlooked. The Art Deco spaces I investigate in this book—spaces that might be characterized as everyday and in some cases frivolous sites of escape—likewise should be seen as socially, culturally, and politically significant.

Acknowledgments

In a way, this book began at the Royal Ontario Museum in the fall of 2003. I was visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum's travelling Art Deco exhibition with fellow graduate students and Bridget Elliott, our professor and my future MA supervisor, after a day of taking in Deco sites in Toronto. With the exception of a few items (notably a 1934 McLaughlin Buick Sport Coupe), there was little Canadian material in this global-reaching show. It was there where I decided to look more seriously at Art Deco. From a Master's thesis at the University of Western Ontario to my dissertation at the University of British Columbia

(UBC), I learned something about the interwar mode and how it fashioned public cultures, incurring a number of personal debts to those who guided and supported me along the way.

In addition to Bridget, who introduced me to the subject at Western, I would like to thank my tireless doctoral advisory committee at UBC. Rhodri Windsor Liscombe continues to be an excellent mentor, and his generosity, encouragement, and keen insights (as evidenced by his articulate and thoughtful foreword) were essential to the completion of this book. Katherine Hacker helped immensely with the material on India, opening my eyes to new literature and theoretical perspectives that shaped the entire book. Sherry McKay was likewise a crucial player in the thesis writing process, asking important questions and providing invaluable feedback. In revising my dissertation, I benefited greatly from the comments of my doctoral examiners, Richard Cavell and John O'Brian from UBC, and Rosemarie Haag Bletter from the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

This book would not have been possible without the vision and support of Luc Noppen and the Institut du patrimoine of the Université du Québec à Montréal and the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, which founded the Prix Phyllis-Lambert. I am humbled by the honour and appreciate the confidence of the jury of Marc Grignon, Pierre-Édouard Latouche, and chair Marie-Josée Therrien. I would also like to thank Lucie K. Morisset, editor of the "Patrimoine urbain" collection, for considering my thesis a worthwhile addition to this excellent series. As well, I would like to thank the staff at the Presses de l'Université du Québec, as well as Micheline Giroux-Aubin, who patiently read drafts of the text as it transformed from revised thesis to book.

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Friends and family provided the sanity and sparked some of the most important conversations. At UBC, I was very lucky to have met many talented, hardworking, and inspiring people. In particular, I am indebted to Barry Magrill, Jeffrey DeCloedt, and Geoffrey Carr, with whom I shared many a good laugh, discussion, and the odd adventure. Geoffrey’s photographs provide excellent documentation of the Marine Building, and I’m extremely grateful for use of them here. I am fortunate to have such a supportive family. Special thanks to the Windovers, the Scotts, and the Hickmans. I would especially like to thank my devoted parents: my mother, Ruth Ann, and late father, Lloyd, and my parents-in-law, Bruce and Dale, all who have been nothing but supportive throughout this entire process.

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Introduction

Art Deco at a Crossroads

The position an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgments about itself. Since these judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things. Conversely, knowledge of this state of things depends on the interpretation of these surface-level expressions. The fundamental substance of an epoch and its unheeded impulses illuminate each other reciprocally.

Siegfried Kracauer, 1927¹

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1. Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," in Thomas Y. Levin (trans., ed., and introduction), *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essay*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 75.

Contemporary style we can define only as a living, changing, pulsating, transforming energy. It is changing before our very eyes, assuming forms which seem to elude definition. Yet the spirit of the time—the Zeitgeist—enters into every one of our creations and constructions. Our very gestures, our carriage, our dancing, our pastimes, our ways of preparing food, our methods of transportation, our systems of banking or shopping, our advertisements, our restaurants, our manners—if we could only detach ourselves from their pressing immediacy—would reveal a fundamental pattern of mind which seeks expression in these disparate activities.

Paul T. Frankl, 1930²

In the years between the world wars, a modern design idiom emerged and found expression on the surfaces of everyday life. Commonly referred to as “Art Deco” today, the style transcended social, geographical, and medium lines, and while the mode has received some critical assessment, few scholars have considered how it was substantial, how it came to be adopted across the globe and adapted to different public cultures.³ In this book I take up this issue by developing a framework that situates mobility at the heart of the disparate cultural production associated with Art Deco. Mobility is present on the very surfaces of Deco objects and architecture—in iconography and general formal qualities (whether the zigzag rectilinear forms popular in the 1920s or curvilinear streamlining of the 1930s). While mobility has consistently been a significant concern for architects and designers,⁴ the interest in it during the years between the wars mirrored the near obsession with speed and movement (both physical and social) popularly held at the time. A “user-friendly” mode, Art Deco seemed to suit both the optimism indicative of skyscrapers of the 1920s and a desire for control in the disempowering days of the Depression, as evinced, for example, in the design of new appliances. By focusing on the theme of mobility as a means of tying the seemingly disparate qualities of Art Deco together, I will examine how the surface-level expressions correspond as well to underpinning systems of mobility, thus exposing some of the socio-political consequences of the style. It is precisely because Art Deco appealed to the eye and mind in a legible manner that it penetrated the practices of daily life, fashioning lifestyle. And that it frequently flirted with the fantastic or encouraged escape meant that it had serious socio-political implications and indeed was taken seriously by many at the time. The mode marked the urban landscape in dramatic yet accessible ways, from major monuments, such

2. Paul T. Frankl, *Form and Re-Form: A Practical Handbook of Modern Interiors*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1930, p. 21.

3. The most comprehensive, global studies are Dan Klein, Nancy A. McClelland, and Malcolm Haslam, *In the Deco Style*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1987; Bevis Hillier and Stephen Escritt, *Art Deco Style*, London, Phaidon Press, 1997; and Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (eds.), *Art Deco 1910–1939*, London, Bulfinch Press and AOL Time Warner Book Group, 2003—the catalogue that accompanied the vast Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition. Patricia Bayer offers an international survey of architecture with *Art Deco Architecture: Design, Decoration and Detail from the Twenties and Thirties*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1992.

4. To indicate the longevity of such interest, we might recall for example the theorization of movement in architecture by Robert Adam and James Adam, *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, [London, Academy Editions, 1773] New York, St. Martin's Press, 1975 [rev. and enl. version of the 1902 ed. published by E. Thécard Fils, Dourdan, France; edited with an introd. by Robert Oresko].

as Rockefeller Center, to the fluid forms of automobiles. In framing Art Deco as a mode of mobility, I propose a new perspective that underlines how the style was embedded in local, public culture while gesturing to other places. Art Deco was a cosmopolitan style, travelling the world while marking aspects of the everyday built environment closer to home.

The Cross Roads of the World, a unique shopping centre on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, California (fig. I.1) that opened on October 29, 1936, offers a way of introducing these ideas and establishing a kind of figure for approaching Art Deco. Resembling an ocean liner docked at some foreign port, the entire complex was based on surface appeal, framing the activity of shopping as an imaginative adventure of mobility, picking up on contemporary infatuations with speed and travel, not to mention the virtual travel of movies shot on nearby studio lots and screened in nearby picture palaces. This early shopping mall aestheticized a series of intersecting forms of mobility. Its sixty-foot high “modernistic” tower responded to an automobile consumer base. After parking, the pedestrian shopper would engage in virtual travel, strolling leisurely from shop to shop—nation to nation—assuming the role of a cosmopolitan of discerning tastes (fig. I.2). The 57 shops and 36 office suites were garbed in styles evocative of architecture from around the world. They were to bring together goods and services from foreign lands to the citizens and tourists frequenting “Hollywood’s only out-of-door department store,” as

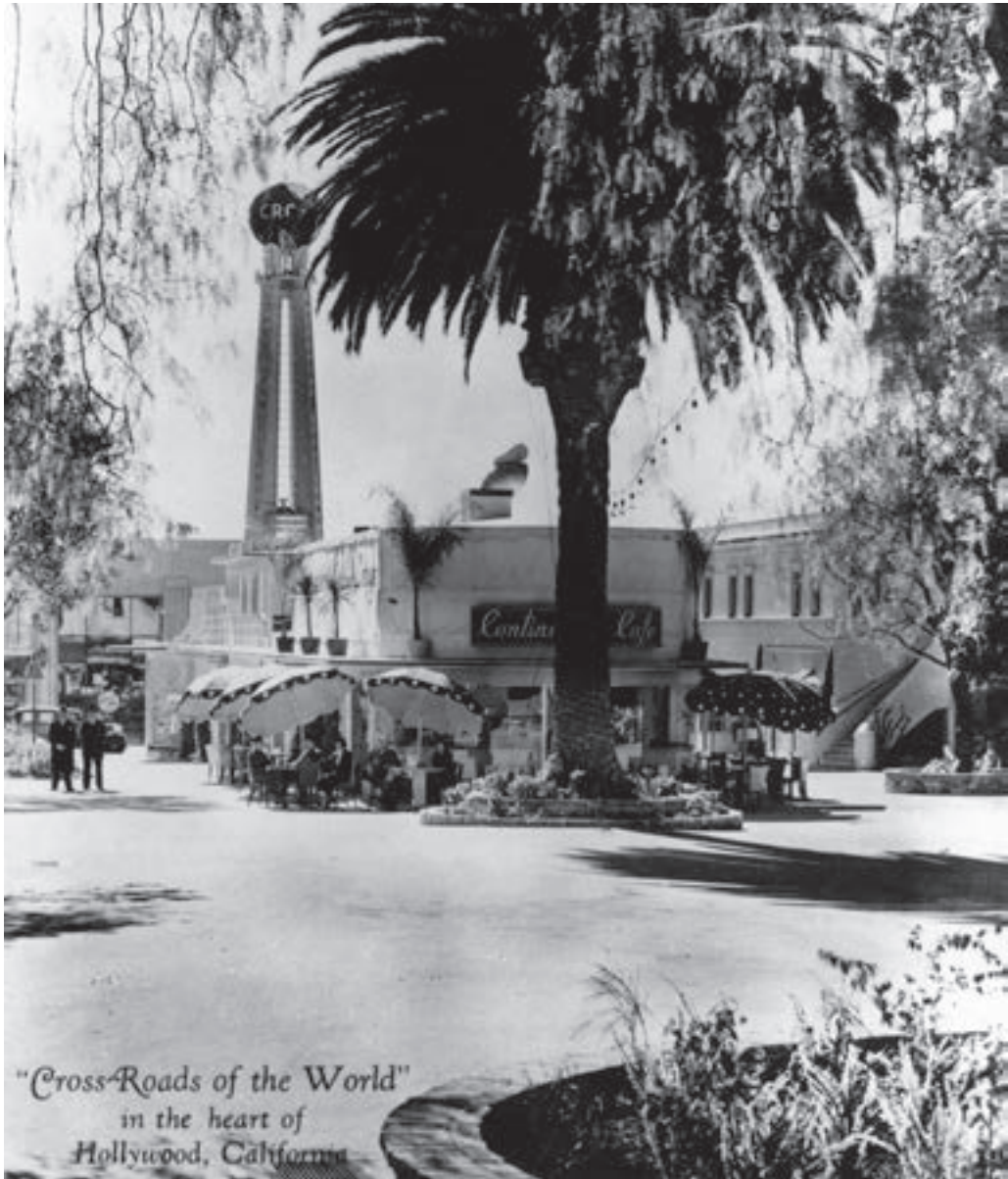
Figure I.1.
*The Cross Roads of the
World (south façade),
Los Angeles (CA),
architect Robert V.
Derrah, 1936–1937.*



Michael Windover (2008)

the shopping court was described on the occasion of its first anniversary.⁵ In this way, The Cross Roads implicated larger, international networks of commerce and trade. The centre included a wide range of fashionable shops dedicated to women's and men's apparel, arts and crafts, candy, flowers, and health food, a barber shop, and many other speciality shops. The site also provided photography and architectural studio space,

Figure 1.2.
*The Cross Roads
of the World, 1937.*



Security Pacific National Bank Collection / Los Angeles Public Library

5. Patricia Killoran, "First Anniversary Marked by Gala Fete; Special Values Offered by Cross Roads' Merchants," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, October 27, 1937.

dancing and voice schools, and offices for physicians and dentists. As well, visitors could dine in the restaurants and cafés dotting the contained yet cosmopolitan, consumerist environment.⁶

As a figure for Art Deco, The Cross Roads works stylistically, suggesting an assembly of references from different places and time periods. Developing in the late-imperial, transatlantic world, the omnivorous style consumed a wide range of sources from history and colonial worlds (from the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Americas, Louis XVI and *Directoire* era French design, European folk traditions, etc.), as well as from different contemporary movements in Western art and architecture (the Ballets Russes, Futurism, Cubism, Constructivist aesthetics, German Expressionism, etc.). To illustrate the great variety of Art Deco material and sources, we might compare a dressing table by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, with its reference to nineteenth-century models and playful allusion to linen (the *toile* from which *toilette* is derived) in inlaid ebony and ivory (fig. I.3),⁷ to a combination desk and bookcase by the Austrian-American designer Paul T. Frankl (fig. I.4), which represented the dynamic silhouette of contemporary New York skyscrapers for tenants living in those very buildings, in some cases. Or we might consider the hybridity of Charles Sargeant Jagger's patinated and cast bronze relief "Scandal" and accompanying cast-iron fire basket designed for the drawing room of Henry and Gwen Mond's Mulberry House in London (interior architect, Darcy Braddell, 1930) (fig. I.5). In a flattened mode recalling ancient Assyrian sculpture, the relief monumentalizes the theme of high-society gossip, with a naked couple standing before outraged onlookers dressed in contemporary fashions. And the similarly ancient Assyrian-inspired fire box, with snarling cats facing each other through female masks (indicating the duplicity and "cattiness" of society) flanking a macaw (mindless repetition), supports this theme, which apparently was meant to comment on the love match between the heir to the Imperial Chemical Industries fortune and his "colonial" wife (from an "unknown"

6. By the time of the first anniversary, the stores included women's fashion salons "Billie's Smart Shop," "DuLaine Bennati," and "Jeannette Distinctive Dresses"; handkerchief shops "John Macsound Kerchief Bar" and "Fashion-Fold MFG Co."; restaurants "A Bit of Sweden," "La Merienda," and "Jules Metropole Cafe"; "Ann Herbert Chocolates"; "Don's Beauty Salon"; perfume and powder shop "Marcy de Paris"; antique and modern jeweller's "Traders in Treasures"; importers "Lequia-Oliphant Staff of Expert Trade Engineers" (from Central and South America), "A.J. Mathieu Co.," "Peasant House and Garden Imports," and "Macdonald-Meyers" (from Peipang and Shanghai); "Worthwhile Hand Knitting Shop"; "Barber of Seville"; "El Fumador De Seville"; "Jax Secretarial Service"; newspaper and magazine shop "Jack B. Rohan"; "Burr McIntosh" (greeting cards); "Tobey Otto Glassware"; "The House of Gifts"; "Ryan's Religious Art"; "Brightwood Weavers"; "The Linen Closet"; "The Beacon Arts and Crafts Shop"; "La Cabana Mexican Arts"; "The Ardyce Knight Children's Shoppe"; "Mayfair Bags"; "Cal Essey Furniture and Carpets"; "Artcraft Drapery Studio"; "Millinery for Milady"; health food consultant "Marguerita Miller"; and "The Camera Center." Tenants advertised on its opening also included the "Pan-American Fellowship," which was described as "[o]rganized to promote friendship, understanding and trade between all countries of the Western Hemisphere."
7. For more on this piece, see the Victoria and Albert Museum website: <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>>, accessed December 2011.

Figure 1.3. ▶
Dressing Table,
Émile-Jacques
Ruhlmann, ca.
1919–1923. Oak,
Andaman and
purpleheart veneer,
inlaid ivory and ebony,
mahogany drawers,
silvered bronze
mirror and fittings
(119 × 76 × 52.5 cm).



Victoria and Albert Museum, London

South African family) as well as humorously referring to their *ménage à trois* with writer Gilbert Cannan.⁸ These examples emphasize the diversity of stylistic references incorporated into Deco design.

Despite the range of sources, Art Deco was self-consciously a *modern style*. While the idea of discussing style may seem outmoded in contemporary scholarship, I argue that it is essential to a consideration of Art Deco. We cannot divorce the notion of performativity from the style, especially if we are interested in its social import. Theatricality or at least emphasis on presentation was integral to the interwar mode. Art Deco

8. For more on the relief and basket, see the description and bibliography on the Victoria and Albert Museum website: <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O113323/fire-basket-the-melchett-fire-basket/>>, accessed December 2011.

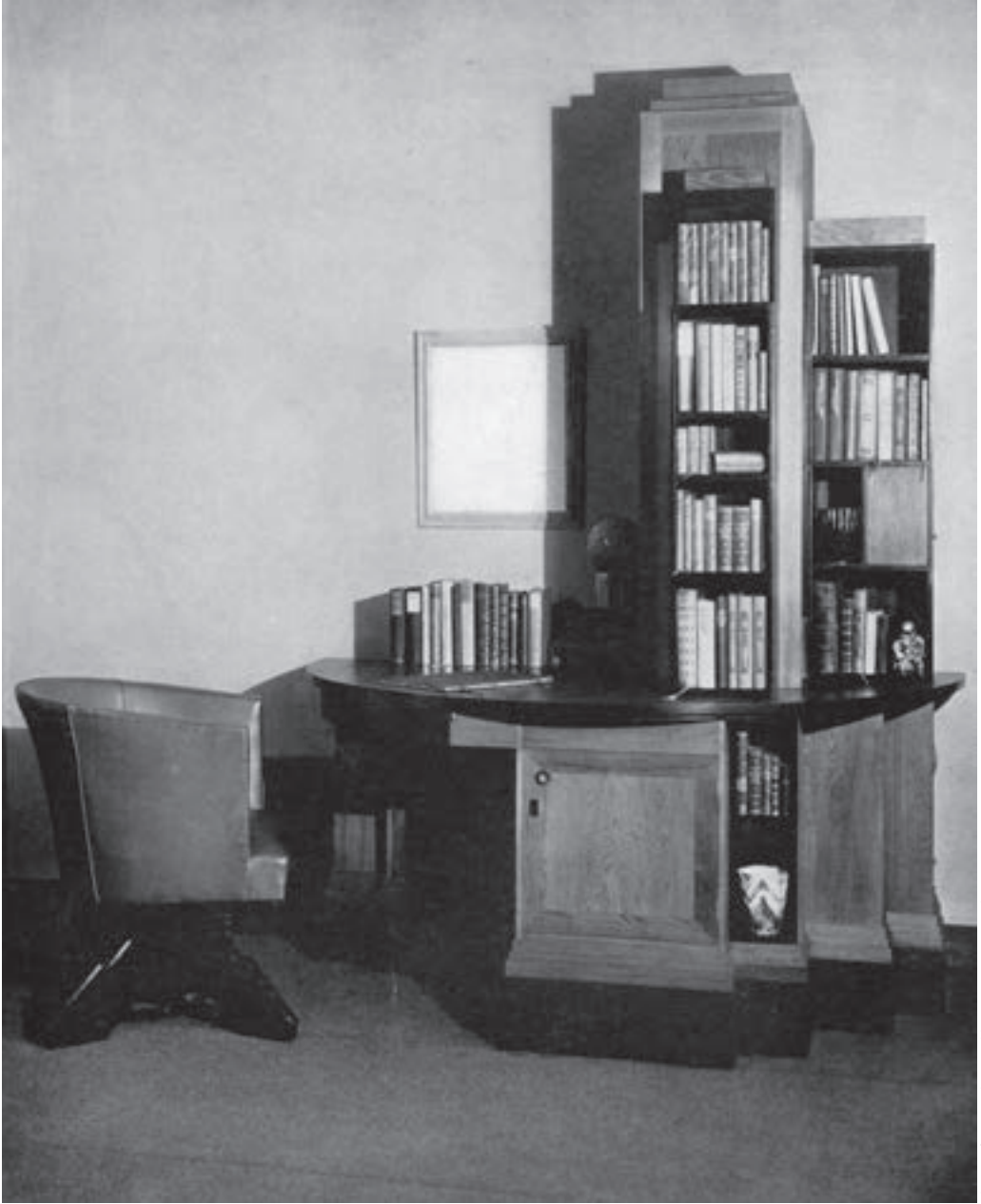


Plate 21 from Paul T. Frankl, *New Dimensions: The Decorative Art of Today in Words & Pictures*, New York, Payson & Clarke, 1928

was imbued with a particular sense of historicity, one which, as we saw in the epithet by designer Paul T. Frankl, was constantly changing, adapting to life in the fraught interwar years. Architects, designers, and their patrons were actively trying to represent what they thought modernity *should look like* based on the conditions they faced—e.g., mechanized and mass production, new technologies of transportation and communication, increasing urbanization, and heightened nationalism. We thus cannot

Figure 1.4.
Combination desk
and bookcase, Paul T.
Frankl, ca. 1927.

Figure 1.5. ▶
*Relief “Scandal” and
 the Melchett Fire Box,
 Charles Sargeant
 Jagger, 1930. Relief:
 bronze, cast and
 patinated (161.4 ×
 149 × 72.5 cm);
 fire box: cast iron
 (91.5 × 75.5 × 33 cm).
 Purchased with the
 assistance of The Art
 Fund, the National
 Heritage Memorial
 Fund, the Friends
 of the V&A, and
 Old Possum’s
 Practical Trust.*



Victoria and Albert Museum, London

approach the cultural production known today under the banner “Art Deco” without keeping in mind its “styleness” or “stylishness” and implications for *lifestyle*.

The figure of The Cross Roads also works spatially, where the style of Art Deco emerges at the intersection of the international or imperial with the local, and, in its reconfiguration at a crossroads, it often suggests a sense of the cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitanism, a term I will return to below, evokes the sense of mobility I see inherent to Art Deco as well as the global reach of the style, but does not suggest universalism, which “internationalism” calls to mind, since it is premised on mutual recognition of distinct sovereignty. This leaves room for Art Deco spaces to be read as locally produced responses to conditions of modernity, yet bound to larger interpenetrating forms of mobility.

My thinking here is influenced by recent theorizations of mobility systems, chiefly by sociologist John Urry. He argues that systems of mobility underpin the fabrication of modern societies.⁹ By mobility systems or “mobilities,” he considers not only human migration, transportation and its accompanying infrastructure, but also systems of commodity exchange, capital, labour, and communications. Mobilities include physical as well as imaginative or virtual movement, and, taken together, they form the “infrastructures of social life” and thus affect the construction of modern subjectivities.¹⁰ We can imagine how some mobilities intersect at The Cross Roads: the signifying tower solicited automobile consumers (responding to a system of automobility); as a shopping centre, it was premised on the movement of capital and commodities, not to mention that of pedestrian shoppers; themed as an amalgam of world architecture, the site engaged the consumer in a range of imaginative mobilities, positioning him/her in the role of globe-trotting tourist; as a shopping centre in the heart of Hollywood, California, the shopping court made links to the virtual mobility of the moving picture, with the architecture becoming a filmset for the everyday activity of shopping. With this short list, we can see how integrated these forms of mobility can be and how they mutually reinforce one another, perhaps intensifying the central act of consumption.

The mobilities that underscore The Cross Roads responded to local conditions. Indeed, I would argue that this shopping centre was the product of public culture. Although Urry does not discuss the notion of “public culture,” as originally conceived by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, it seems to me that the two paradigms are for the most part consonant. “Public culture” suggests a dynamic process of indigenization, one that takes into account the global flow of ideologies through human migration and especially by mass media, one that destabilizes “high-low” binaries and avoids the homogenizing terminology of “Westernization” or “Americanization.”¹¹ It is by way of systems of mobility that ideas and

9. Of course mobility systems are essential to all societies. John Urry (*Mobilities*, Cambridge [UK], Polity, 2007, p. 51) cites the examples of the road system of the Roman Empire, the medieval “horse-system” following the invention and adoption of the stirrup, and the cycle system of twentieth-century China. Urry’s argument is similar to earlier theorizations of media by Canadian economist and historian Harold Innis. See Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1951; and Harold Innis [rev. by Mary Q. Innis, foreword by Marshall McLuhan], *Empire and Communications*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1972. See also Marshall McLuhan (*The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1962), who, to some degree, extends Innis’s idea of biases of communication systems by exploring the larger sociocultural ramifications of movable type and literate (visually-biased) culture. See also the important work of Benedict Anderson, who argued that the advent of modern nations was tied to print-capitalism in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1991 [rev. ed.].

10. Urry, *Mobilities*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

11. See Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, “Why Public Culture?,” *Public Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1988, pp. 5–9. As well, see the excellent discussion of public culture in Christopher Pinney, “Introduction: Public, Popular, and Other Cultures,” in Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney (eds.), *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 1–34.

ideologies flow. When we consider Appadurai's interest in "the work of imagination" done by migrants and media to constitute unique forms of public culture in a globalized world, the link between the two paradigms becomes even stronger. It is interesting to note that Appadurai begins his influential book *Modernity at Large* by describing his experience of seeing American films at the Eros Theatre, an Art Deco cinema that I examine in chapter 3, although he does not discuss the fact that this space of cultural interaction was framed in a style that was the product of a similar cultural process of global modernity.¹²

I explore in this book how Art Deco was both a product and object of public cultures in the turbulent years between the wars, framing practices of everyday life. In conceptualizing Art Deco as a kind of cross-roads—an intersection of different things and ideas that makes something "new"—my approach complicates earlier understandings of this mode of design as a "total style." British design historian Bevis Hillier first introduced this notion in his 1968 book *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*, the text which helped to popularize the now largely agreed upon moniker "Art Deco."¹³ Contrasting his own approach with that taken by art historian Ernst Gombrich in his popular *The Story of Art*, Hillier writes: "At least it cannot be claimed that I have tried to glamorize the art of this period by showing only the best examples."¹⁴ By referring to the popular rather than scholarly writing of Gombrich, Hillier aims his text at a similarly general audience—a popular text for a historical consideration of a popular (sometimes populist) mode of design. Hillier goes on:

What is fascinating about Art Deco is not primarily its men of genius [...] The extraordinary thing is that so rigorously formulated the style should have imposed itself so universally—on hairdressers'

12. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 1. See also Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990. For more on analyzing the complexities of modernity as it relates to architecture and urbanism, see David Frisby, "Analysing Modernity: Some Issues," in Mari Hvattum and Christian Hermansen (eds.), *Tracing Modernity: Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 3–22; Iain Boyd Whyte, "Modernity and Architecture," in Mari Hvattum and Christian Hermansen (eds.), *Tracing Modernity: Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 42–55; Iain Boyd Whyte, "Introduction," in Iain Boyd Whyte (ed.), *Modernism and the Spirit of the City*, London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 1–31; and Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999.
13. Although Le Corbusier used the headline "1925 Expo: Arts Déco" for a series of articles in his journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*, largely mocking the work on display, the first use of the term as a name for the style was the 1966 exhibition "*Les années '25': Art Déco/Bauhaus/Stijl/Esprit Nouveau*" and accompanying catalogue. Scholars have not always agreed with Hillier's overarching definition of Art Deco for the period ranging from ca. 1910–1939, finding it too broad to account for the stylistic variances, and thus have attempted to use more exacting language to distinguish between different "styles" (Moderne, Stripped Classical, Modernistic, Depression Modern, Streamlined Moderne, etc.). For an excellent review of the literature on Art Deco, see Charlotte Benton and Tim Benton, "The Style and the Age," in Benton *et al.*, *Art Deco 1910–1939*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–27.
14. Bevis Hillier, *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*, London, Studio Vista and Dutton Pictureback, [1968] 1973 [reprint], p. 9. He refers to Ernst Hans Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, London, Phaidon Press, 1950.

shops, handbags, shoes, lamp-posts and letter-boxes, as well as on hotels, cinemas and liners. With justice, so far, we can describe it as the last of the total styles.¹⁵

We can detect here a reaction to art and architectural histories and methods of the time, which tended to focus on “masterpieces” rather than everyday objects and sites. And, as in many subsequent writings on Art Deco, there is a reactionary tone aimed at Modernism and the canon of Modern architecture read as a series of heroic pioneers.¹⁶ Throughout this book, I will delineate some of the differences between the Modern Movement and Art Deco.¹⁷ Despite the social-democratic objectives purported by many Modern Movement architects, Modernism is often seen as elitist and authoritative and affiliated with the interests of a privileged minority. But Art Deco likewise carries an elitism connected to taste and patterns of emulation; however, with its association with individualism and consumer culture—what we might call its “popularized elitism” (even “glamour” in some cases, as I will discuss in chapter 2)—this aspect has not been emphasized by scholars.¹⁸ The Deco vision of success was frequently based on a referencing of aristocratic luxury (e.g., department stores, cinemas, even radio were described as providing spaces of luxury and entertainment only imaginable before by nobility) and not a different system of valuation (e.g., equal distribution of wealth). For the most part it appealed to individual desires rather than totalities, even if Deco designers sought widespread appreciation. In this way, Art Deco helped to reinscribe social hierarchies while offering dreams of social mobility and visions of a more affluent society.

That the burgeoning of scholarly interest in Art Deco into the 1970s and 1980s coincided with the rise of Post-Modernism—a movement which frequently borrowed from (even celebrated) that era of design—is not surprising. Art Deco as a popular style, and indeed one of everyday life, was attractive as well to those interested in exploring popular culture, influenced by the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. It should be noted that much of the work on Art Deco continues to be led by local heritage groups, which also flourished in the 1970s in attempts to save popular Deco landmarks from the wrecking ball. Although this book continues the work of taking Art Deco seriously, my aim here is neither to locate an artist genius or definite origin of the style,¹⁹ nor to simply

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15. *Ibid.* Hillier would return to this notion of Deco as a “total style” almost thirty years later with Stephen Escritt, and would provide a wider reaching (indeed global) survey of Art Deco that stands as one of the best histories of the style (*Art Deco Style*).
 16. For a recent discussion of the discourses of Modern architecture, see Sarah Williams Goldhagen, “Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2005, pp. 144–167.
 17. We could pluralize “Modern Movement,” as we could Art Deco, given the wide range of responses associated with each, but I have chosen to keep both in the singular to suggest a set of related—if diverse—production.
 18. It should be noted that early work, and much of the interest in the Deco today, was fuelled by collectors of antiques, suggesting, in a way, the maintenance of a “popularized elitism.”
 19. Jean-Paul Bouillon (*Art Deco 1903–1940* [trans. Michael Heron], New York, Rizzoli, 1989), looks to Henri Matisse and Josef Hoffmann to provide the intellectual and artistic foundations of Art Deco.

reverse the binary by privileging the popular. Situating Art Deco at/as a crossroads accounts for the merging of diverse cultural influences as well as the local production of unique responses to conditions of modernity.

The “total style” conception of Art Deco proposed by Hillier is appealing for a number of reasons. It suggests the wide range and deep saturation of the style as it transcended geographic, class, and medium boundaries. Art Deco could be found from skyscrapers in Shanghai to modest, streamlined houses in Napier, New Zealand; from the macassar ebony furniture designed by Ruhlmann for the study in the Maharaja of Indore’s palace, Manik Bagh, to a mass-produced Bakelite radio in a flat in London; from the set of the latest Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers film to a Texaco gas station designed by Walter Dorwin Teague. While I do not agree with Hillier’s initial argument that the style was “rigorously formulated,” given the huge variety of Deco objects, I do follow his and Stephen Escritt’s later assertion that Art Deco should be read as “a decorative response to modernity.”²⁰ Envisioning Art Deco as a “total style” also suggests its incorporation into “mass culture”—its reproduction in the mass media and through mass production. In fact, I would argue that the significance of the mode lies in its diffusion and distribution, its incorporation into different public spaces. The lack of rigour or set of principles or manifesto accounted in large part for its wide adoption (and adaptation), which stands at odds with the Modern Movement in the pre-World War II era. As a result, Art Deco provided the popular “look” of the modern in the interwar years. And in looking “modern” it posed a threat to proponents of the Modern Movement who argued that it was simply another stylistic fashion draped over more traditional Beaux-Arts structure rather than a reconsideration of form.²¹ In fact, Art Deco might be considered a continuation of Beaux-Art philosophy but with interest in modern style.²² Indeed Deco designers sought to develop modern ornament to fit the tempos of modern life—a criminal offence in the eyes of some Modern Movement advocates like Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos.²³ The style in general was perceived as feminine and weak compared to the supposed masculine vigour of the Modernist production. Perhaps because of its ties to the feminine, Art Deco did not receive critical scholarly

20. Hillier and Escritt, *Art Deco Style*, *op. cit.* p. 24.

21. For a discussion of typical attacks against Art Deco, see Richard Striner, “Art Deco: Polemics and Synthesis,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1990, pp. 21–34.

22. As Reyner Banham points out, the Beaux-Arts philosophy of Julien Guadet and others was actually influential among architects of the Modern Movement (sometimes indirectly). See Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1960 [2nd ed.].

23. Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime,” in Ludwig Münz and Gustav Künstler (eds.), *Adolf Loos: Pioneer of Modern Architecture*, New York, Praeger, 1966, pp. 226–231. Le Corbusier would republish the article in his journal *L’Esprit Nouveau*. See Jules Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain, 1550–1960*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 301–312; and Hélène Furján, “Dressing Down: Adolf Loos and the Politics of Ornament,” *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2003, pp. 115–130.

attention until the influence of feminism began to inform the study of art and architectural history, critiquing the masculinist “pioneers of modernism” historiographical tradition.²⁴

“Total style” however gives the impression of homogeneity. As *The Cross Roads of the World* makes clear, with its streamlined tower juxtaposed against a mélange of different pastiched architectures, Art Deco was self-consciously a modern style, but readily accepting of the increasing plurality of modern culture and society, and only one of many competing modes. While architects and designers might have claimed that there was only one “true” style,²⁵ only one that adequately captured “the spirit of the times”—or conversely that Modern Movement architecture had no “style” per se and thus avoided historical references—these positions were in response to contemporary tastes, which included an interest in period fashions. So while Art Deco was indeed “a decorative response to modernity,” so, too, was a Tudor Style house, Colonial Williamsburg, or Edwin Lutyens’s New Delhi.

In approaching Art Deco as a product of local public cultures, as a result of intersecting forms of mobilities, we can avoid the ambiguities of the “total style” framework and find some underlying commonalities. Art Deco was not, as architectural historian David Gebhard argued, simply a “lackadaisical middle course between High Modernism and the Traditionalists.”²⁶ Rather, Art Deco was a particular response to conditions of modernity, which included colonialism, commerce, domestication of infrastructures of communication and transportation, and other forces of modernization. I argue that the response was mainly popular, but based largely on conservative concepts of society. And this was in keeping with ideologies and mobilities of capitalism—particularly consumer capitalism in urban centres.

A crucial component of urban consumer culture was fashion, and I contend that Art Deco was imbued with its logic. As French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky asserts, this logic was and is instrumental in the formation, maintenance, and evolution of modern (liberal) democracy

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24. Penny Sparke explores some of the gender implications of Modern and Art Deco design and architecture in *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*, London, Harper Collins, 1995.
 25. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2005 [rev. and expanded ed.]), in which he draws out a lineage of modernist architecture with emphasis on its moral purpose. In contrast, see how antimodernism was also taken up by some in Lynda Jessup (ed.), *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001.
 26. David Gebhard, “About Style, Not Ideology: The Art Deco Period Has Close Parallels to the Present,” *Architecture*, vol. 72, no. 12, 1983, p. 35. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., who would later help popularize the term “International style” with his and Philip Johnson’s Museum of Modern Art Show (see Terence Riley, Stephen Perrella, New York Arthur Ross Architectural Gallery, and Planning and Preservation Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, *The International Style: Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art*, New York, Rizzoli, 1992), recognized a kind of moderate modernist approach, which he called New Tradition. See his “Modern Architecture. I. The Traditionalists and the New Tradition,” *Architectural Record*, vol. 63, no. 4, 1928, pp. 337–349; and his “Modern Architecture. II. The New Pioneers,” *Architectural Record*, vol. 63, no. 5, 1928, pp. 452–460.

because of its ambivalence and promotion of individualism. For Lipovetsky, “[f]ashion is no longer an aesthetic embellishment, a decorative accessory to collective life; it is the key to the entire edifice.”²⁷ At the heart of his argument is the rationality of the fashion form: “the autonomy of a society structured by fashion, where rationality functions by way of evanescence and superficiality, where objectivity is instituted as a spectacle, where the dominion of technology is reconciled with play and the realm of politics is reconciled with seduction.”²⁸ Lipovetsky’s work highlights the important political place of this logic in the constitution of modern subjectivities, even if I do not necessarily agree with his provocative contention that the “now hegemonic” logic of fashion brings about more tolerant societies.

The significance of fashion as a cultural force was observed in the interwar period. For example, in 1928, professor of marketing Paul Nystrom argued that

[f]ashion is one of the greatest forces in present-day life. It pervades every field and reaches every class. Fashion leads business and determines its direction. It has always been a factor in human life but never more forceful, never more influential and never wider in scope than in the last decade and it gives every indication of growing still more important.²⁹

Nystrom’s conception of fashion resonates with the totality of Art Deco while highlighting its prominence in economic and social life. For him, fashion affects behaviour and social norms. It also trumps the logic of utility, privileging form (or aesthetic appeal) over function:

Fashion is a stronger factor than wear and tear in displacing automobiles, furniture, kitchen utensils, pianos, phonographs, radio instruments and bath tubs. Fashion causes all of this and at the same time makes people like it. To be out of fashion is, indeed, to be out of the world.³⁰

By this logic, to be “in the world” (socially, culturally, and even politically) meant to be ensconced in the mobility system of fashion.

Recognizing the broader, political implications of the logic of fashion evokes the subject position of a “consumer-citizen.”³¹ During the First World War, citizens were called upon as consumers to do their patriotic

27. Gilles Lipovetsky [trans. Catherine Porter, foreword by Richard Sennett], *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 6.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

29. Paul H. Nystrom (*Economics of Fashion*, New York, The Ronald Press Company, 1928, p. iii), goes on: “Fashion makes men shave every day, wear shirts with collars attached, two-button sack suits, four-in-hand ties, soft gray felt hats, trousers creased, B.V.D.’s in winter and low shoes all the year round. It makes women wear less clothing than ever before in modern times. It changes the tint of the face powder, the odor of the perfume, the wave of the hair, the position of the waist line, the length of the skirt, the color of the hose, the height of the heels.”

30. Nystrom, *ibid.*

31. See the collection of essays edited by Martin Daunt and Matthew Hilton (*The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, Oxford, Berg, 2001), especially Elizabeth Cohen, “Citizens and Consumers in the United States in the Century of Mass Consumption” (pp. 203–221), in which she charts the development of “citizen consumers” and “customer consumers.”

duty in supporting the war effort through consumptive practices, whether buying war bonds or making do with less. The role of the consumer in the health of democratic society and rights of the individual in a political sense began to coalesce and became supremely important during the global economic crisis of the 1930s. Coincidentally, as women were being more widely recognized as *the* principal consumers of households by business leaders and advertisers, they also saw enfranchisement in many places.³² Art Deco provided the stage and fashion for many New Women in that period, and thus it might be read as contributing to that complex consumer-citizen subjectivity.³³ The Deco-fashioned woman was firmly entrenched in consumer culture, a cultural space that promoted a sense of glamour through certain purchases, but which only served to reinscribe her within pre-existing social hierarchies despite proffering the “democratic” right of choice in the activities of consumption.³⁴ Some Modern Movement architects would approach the modern female subject differently, focusing more on attempting to improve the plight of working-class women. In redesigning domestic spaces along Taylorist, scientifically planned lines, as in the case of Kensal House in London (Elizabeth Denby and Maxwell Fry, 1937) for instance, women were meant to apply themselves to the public sphere with their new found leisure time and newly won political rights.³⁵

In considering the performativity of style as imbued with socio-political valence,³⁶ we approach the embodied notion of lifestyle. It is in the interwar years that Roland Marchand argues advertising strategies

32. Arthur Marwick, “The Great War, Mass Society and ‘Modernity’” (in Benton *et al.*, *Art Deco 1910–1939*, *op. cit.*), outlines some of these enfranchisements (p. 30): Britain in 1918 extended vote to all adult males and to women over 30 (with some property qualifications); women over 21 would get the vote there in 1928. The U.S. granted the vote to women in 1919 (though discrimination against Black men and women ostensibly meant universal White suffrage). Attempts to extend the vote to women in France and Italy were thwarted, despite their growing influence on the social scene. Universal male suffrage was passed into law in Japan in 1925, apparently in emulation of Britain; however, the government was largely ruled by aristocrats. “Desperate to appear modern,” according to Marwick, dictators of Brazil (in 1932) and Turkey (in 1934) granted women the vote. Women in Canada received the vote nationally in 1918, with most provinces having already passed similar legislation. The exception was Québec, which did not grant full female suffrage until 1940.
33. See Lucy Fischer, *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2003.
34. In chapter 2, I discuss William Leach’s provocative notion of a “democracy of desire,” which he develops in relation to the burgeoning of consumer culture in the United States in *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1993. For a good introduction to consumer culture studies, see Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, Cambridge (UK), Polity, 1997.
35. Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity Before Reconstruction*, London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 153–155. On Modernism and gender in general, see Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005. See also Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, “The Fe-Male Spaces of Modernism: A Western Canadian Perspective,” *Prospects*, vol. 26, 2002, pp. 667–700.
36. See Stuart Ewen, “Marketing Dreams: The Political Elements of Style,” in Alan Tomlinson (ed.), *Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketing, Meanings, and the Packaging of Pleasure*, London, Routledge, 1990, pp. 41–56. He argues that style is critical in “definitions of self,” the understanding of society, and as a form of information. As an example of style’s effect on society, he describes Le Corbusier’s approach to redesigning domestic

began to shift emphasis from selling a product to selling the *benefits* of a product, or selling lifestyle.³⁷ Lifestyle brings aesthetic together with spatial practices and attitudes.³⁸ It takes the virtual mobility inherent to desire and situates it in activities of everyday life. The term is thus crucial for considering the sociocultural and political implications of style, highlighting in some instances the contrast between the projected and/or desired and lived experience. It also links fashion to the rhythms of everyday life, and highlights the potency of style as a means of individual definition of self as well as defining (or complicating definitions of) social relationships and ideals.

Recognizing the logic of fashion in Art Deco reinforces the idea that the style was about the aestheticization of mobilities. Although Urry does not mention the mobility of fashion, this is conceptually quite significant in the formation of modern public cultures. Art Deco appeared “new” and “modern,” but not by dramatically reconfiguring social space. Instead, the mode followed the systems of mobility that underscored modern global capitalism. Like a crossroads where any number of people, ideas, objects, etc. could intersect, Art Deco indicated an element of chance and fluidity, yet fundamentally followed the established rules of the road governing the social order. In appearing new and oftentimes gesturing to the future iconographically or through streamlined forms, or even through a synthesis of ancient and modern motifs (*i.e.*, offering a vision of a new world order with the seeming weight and authority of past civilizations), Art Deco provided a sense of optimism—an optimism bound ultimately to ideologies associated with the pre-existing mobility systems of consumption. As historian Richard Striner argues, the idea of synthesis was central to Art Deco, a style “that sought to ‘locate’ itself symbolically—and by extension to offer a commentary on its times and its cultural milieu—using extremes in historical imagery as points of emotional reference.”³⁹ Art Deco was a palliative in the traumatic interwar years. Following the death of a generation of young men at the hands of advanced, military

space along Taylorist principles of efficiency as aestheticizing, ostensibly moving the look of the factory into the home, and therefore removing overt links to coercion and oppression. To some degree, Sparke extends this analysis in her chapter entitled “Letting in the Air: Women and Modernism,” in *As Long As It's Pink...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–119.

37. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 10.
38. Lifestyle, as I will develop through this work, ties together both fantasy projection (the virtual) and social practice in real space (materiality). On the mass level, it is distinctly modern and bound to consumer culture. See the important work of Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [trans. Richard Nice], Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1984. There is a growing interest around understanding lifestyle historically, that is, as connected more to the experience and practices of modernity rather than as a more recent development of advanced or late capitalism. See David Chaney (*Lifestyles (Key Ideas)*, London, Routledge, 1996), who introduces different theoretical approaches to the study of lifestyle, as well as the recent collection of essays aimed at exploring lifestyles historically: David Bell and Joanne Hollows (eds.), *Historicizing Lifestyle: Mediating Taste, Consumption and Identity from the 1900s to 1970s*, Aldershot (UK) and Burlington (VT), Ashgate, 2006. On the concept and political implications of spatial praxis, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Malden (MA), Blackwell, 1991.
39. Striner, “Art Deco: Polemics and Synthesis,” *op. cit.*, p. 22.

technology, it offered a positive spin on the use of modern technology in terms of personal mobility and communication. The machine would continue to cause anxieties, particularly during the Depression when mass production was thought to be causing mass unemployment. However, streamlined forms from trains to toasters domesticated the machine and made it less threatening in everyday life.⁴⁰ The entrance of optimistic—even fantastic—Deco forms into the everyday served a socio-political purpose, for, as Charlotte and Tim Benton argue, “[n]ever was fantasy so functionally necessary for survival, whether to industry or the individual.”⁴¹ It is also interesting to note that both Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard recognized the interwar years as instrumental in the formation of the “society of the spectacle” and the “hyperreal” respectively.⁴² Art Deco designers did not attempt to “make” modern cities, but the style did fashion modern public cultures. We might consider, for example, the difference between Robert Mallet-Stevens’s *Une Cité moderne* (1922), an album of Deco-stylized, “modern” building designs, to the urban plans of Le Corbusier.⁴³ Art Deco provided some of the garb for, as well as staged, social space. It developed within consumer cultures, and thus its spaces might be read as buttressing the logic of fashion.

The mobility of fashion also explains the variation in the style and why there has not always been consensus regarding what the term Art Deco encompasses. At the time, the objects now considered Art Deco were variously classified.⁴⁴ Charlotte and Tim Benton, in their introduction to the catalogue accompanying the 2003 Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition *Art Deco, 1910–1939*, outline the problems of categorizing Art Deco as a style. To pull together the “large and heterogeneous body of artefacts whose sole common denominator seems to lie in their contradictory characteristics,” they usefully turn to philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s explanation of the word “games” as a “family of resemblances,” “a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing.”⁴⁵ As they point out, “the polarities and dissonances that have troubled many later

40. See Jeffrey L. Meikle, “Domesticating Modernity: Ambivalence and Appropriation, 1920–1940,” in Wendy Kaplan (ed.), *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885–1945*, New York, Thames and Hudson with Wolsonian, 1995, pp. 143–167.

41. Benton and Benton, “The Style and the Age,” *op. cit.*, p. 13. For more on the relationship between modernism and “fun,” see Bruce Peter, *Form Follows Fun: Modernism and Modernity in British Pleasure Architecture 1925–1940*, London, Routledge, 2007.

42. See Rita Barnard, “Hard Times, Modern Times,” in *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 16–31 (on Baudrillard); and Kevin Hetherington, *Capitalism’s Eye: Cultural Spaces of the Commodity*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 37 (on Debord).

43. Tim Benton makes this comparison in his excellent essay, “Art Deco Architecture,” in Benton *et al.*, *Art Deco 1910–1939*, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

44. Adrian Tinniswood, in *The Art Deco House: Avant-Garde Houses of the 1920s and 1930s* (New York, Watson-Guption, 2002), lists some of the terms. In England, the style was called “modernistic,” “jazz modern(e),” or “streamlinist”; in Australia, “modern ship style”; in the U.S., “streamline modern,” “liner style,” “zigzag modern,” or “skyscraper style”; and in France, “*le style moderne*,” “*le style 25*,” or “*universalisme*” (p. 8).

45. Benton and Benton, “The Style and the Age,” *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 16.

commentators were readily visible in the [1925 Paris] exhibition displays” and “[y]et contemporaries were struck by their similarities and sense of unity.”⁴⁶ Adrian Tinniswood agrees, describing the omnivorous, perhaps pragmatic dynamism of the Deco as “an evolving network of tendencies and motifs rather than a coherent movement with a leader, a manifesto, and an ideological program.”⁴⁷ “Its greatest achievement, apart from the production of some extraordinarily beautiful objects,” he goes on, “was to mediate expertly between the avant-garde and tradition, which is a polite way of saying that it fed off other styles and movements, absorbing their most saleable features and spitting out the rest.”⁴⁸ This definition reminds us of the crucial role played by commercialism and/or the strategies of selling appearances.

The interwar years saw a particular interest in mobility, building upon much of the infrastructure of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century forms: the train, plane, automobile, and ocean liner; the rise of mass illustrated print media and film; some architectures of mobility (e.g., grand hotels, resorts, department stores).⁴⁹ All of these featured in life prior to the Great War. However, following the war, and with the growth of mass culture and the further crystallization of consumer culture in many “Westernized” urban areas, mobility became a central theme of daily life. Historian Sigfried Giedion called the interwar years “The Time of Full Mechanization,” pointing to the intensification of mechanization in those years.⁵⁰ The musical monikers for the “Machine Age” underline the upbeat tempos of the interwar years: it was the “Jazz Age” and the “Swing Era.” The period witnessed an obsession with speed records, including those associated with the construction of skyscrapers (e.g., the Empire State Building [Shreve, Lamb, and Harmon, 1931]). Transportation became a significant theme, whether following the exploits of Charles Lindberg, the Graf Zeppelin, or imagining life aboard a luxury ocean liner like the *Queen Mary* or the *Normandie*. Airlines were established. Automobile sales reached the saturation point in the United States by the

46. *Ibid.*

47. Tinniswood, *The Art Deco House...*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

48. *Ibid.*

49. For discussions of the urban architectures of mobility and their intersection with film and modern ways of seeing, see Anne Friedberg’s *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), in which she develops the idea of a “virtual mobile gaze”; and Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, New York, Verso, 2002. We might also consider Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin’s embrace of the architecture associated with rail travel as appropriate for the “Pointed or Christian” style to underline the complexities of modernity and stylistic responses to mobility systems (e.g., drawings of railway bridges in his *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England*, London, J. Weale, 1843). For different cultural histories on the impact of time-space compression around the turn of the 20th century (and beyond), see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1983; Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1941; and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry in the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford and Cambridge (MA), Blackwell, 1989.

50. Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 41–44.

mid-1920s.⁵¹ As well, the interwar years saw further electrification and the advent of radio as a common home electronic, which allowed for instant communication and transmission of power.

The surfaces of Art Deco indicated the intense interest in mobility while framing spaces that became sites of public culture, nodes in vast networks of intersecting forms of mobility (fig. I.6). This can be seen in iconography, which often referred directly to historic and modern forms of transportation and communication, as well as in the streamlined forms that characterized a good deal of design in the 1930s. Architecturally speaking, the sites most often fashioned in Art Deco were associated with



◀ **Figure I.6.**
Lobby of Aldred Building, Montréal (QC), architects Barott and Blackader, 1931. Note the grille with birds on wires, celebrating both the mundane of the urban everyday and the system of electricity powering the city. J.E. Aldred, who commissioned the building, was president of the Shawinigan Water and Power Company.

Michael Windover (2009)

51. I will discuss this further in chapter 4 in relation to Henry Ford's famous "most expensive art lesson in history."

or seen from the perspective of movement and often witnessed several different forms of mobility (lobbies and façades of office and apartment buildings, shops and department stores, gas stations, exhibition pavilions, hotels, movie theatres, newspaper buildings, stock exchanges, radio stations, etc.). Conceptually, I argue that the employment of exotic or historical sources (however fanciful) demonstrated forms of mobility both in terms of larger economies of imperial and historical knowledge and power, as well as from a temporal perspective. The idea of mobilizing history and self-consciously presenting the “now” evinces the logic of fashion. As well, the very fact that Art Deco transcended geographic, class, and medium boundaries speaks to mobility. Within many contexts, Art Deco may be seen as espousing ideas of social mobility. As I will argue in this book, department stores, movie theatres, and radio programs were all cast as democratizing, as was the style that framed the daily life activities.

The connection between Art Deco and the mobilities of modern life was noted in the period. Reviewing the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* held in Paris in 1925—the exhibition from which the name “Art Deco” derives—W. Francklyn Paris argues that a discernable style had emerged, one that “is synthetic and reflects the tempo of the day.”⁵² He points out what he sees as underscoring the new style:

In psycho-analyzing this manifestation, some writers have found the motivation in the war and others in a reaction to stimulus of two fundamental ideas; the idea of speed and the idea of function. The automobile, the aeroplane, the radio are expressions of this speed complex, while the bobbed hair and the short skirt affected by the present female generation are expressions of the idea of function.⁵³

Paris’s comments link Art Deco directly to underlying systems of mobility—travel, communication, and fashion—and put the style in the context of the aftermath of the First World War. It should be noted that the interest in mobility and the “speed complex” was also expressed quite directly in exhibits of vehicle interiors.⁵⁴ Even the more classicizing pavilions of Exposition—for instance, Pierre Patout’s *Hôtel d’un Collectionneur*—were seen to embody the “new spirit” (see fig. 2.11, p. 124). The exhibition was an inherently political event in which France was attempting to re-establish its pre-eminence on the global stage of industrial and decorative arts. As I will discuss further in chapter 2, the exhibition was largely a European fair and did not include the United States (which declined the invitation due to an apparent lack of sufficiently modern material, in the eyes of the American Government) or Germany (which was the chief rival of France and was invited only at the last minute, thus lacking time to prepare a pavilion).

52. W. Francklyn Paris, “The International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Art in Paris, I. Interior Architecture,” *Architectural Record*, vol. 58, no. 3, 1925, p. 265.

53. *Ibid.* Compare Paris’s comments on the exhibition to general observations on modern life in the United States by Edwin Avery Park, *New Backgrounds for a New Age*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1927.

54. See for instance the photographs of ocean liner and airplane cabins included in the *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes au XX^e siècle*, Furniture, vol. 4, New York, Garland, 1977 [reprint], plates XVIII and XXVIII.

World exhibitions throughout the 1920s and 1930s became dramatic sites for the creation of Art Deco spaces, linking the style to political, economic, and technological agendas. The Cross Roads of the World evinces the interest in exhibition architecture, drawing comparisons with the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition of 1933–1934.⁵⁵ But unlike the temporary world fairs, The Cross Roads was a permanent site of spectacle and commerce, mirroring the role of Hollywood in the larger public imagination.

The central pavilion of The Cross Roads—described by its architect and engineer Robert V. Derrah as a “marine-modern structure”—indicates the second major stylistic phase of Art Deco, streamlining.⁵⁶ Some design historians choose to see Art Deco and streamlining as two distinct styles; however, there is a sense of continuity between what we might better characterize as phases of Art Deco, an assertion made by Giedion in 1948.⁵⁷ Just as the angular forms reminiscent of Cubism, Futurism, or Constructivism presented a sense of mobility, the streamline was unabashedly emblematic of systems of mobility. And as Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller persuasively argue, the essential system was that of consumption.⁵⁸ Indeed, the wide incorporation of streamlined forms in the United States was in no small part due to the rise of the professional industrial designer who helped “lubricate” consumerism during the Depression. Designers, including Norman Bel Geddes, Walter Dorwin Teague, Henry Dreyfuss, and Raymond Loewy, became celebrities through their redesign of commodities to make them (appear) more functional. It is not surprising that many in the new field were associated with theatre or advertising.⁵⁹ Art Deco thus aestheticized many facets of everyday life, from buildings to vehicles to commodities. As Sheldon and Martha Cheney point out in their 1936 book *Art and the Machine*,

[e]verywhere, through the air, on rails, by land and water, there is the established point-counterpoint rhythm of smooth, gliding, mechanized travel, making its appeal to the sense as power dynamized,

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55. Richard Longstreth likens The Cross Roads to the midway at the Chicago World's fair where “the Streets of Paris, Belgian Village, Midget Village, Oriental Village, and even a mock Hollywood stage set stood in proximity to one another, visually anchored by a rambunctious Art Deco shaft, the multi-storied Havoline Thermometer.” See his *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920–1950*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1997, p. 281.
 56. Robert V. Derrah, “Unique Architectural Treatment of Hollywood Shopping Center,” *Southwest Builder and Contractor*, vol. 88, November 13, 1936, p. 13.
 57. Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 609 and 611. He argues that the origins of the streamline style lay in France and were apparent the 1925 exhibition. Nicholas P. Maffei discusses Giedion's observations in “The Search for an American Design Aesthetic: From Art Deco to Streamlining,” in Benton *et al.*, *Art Deco 1910–1939*, *op. cit.*, pp. 361–369.
 58. Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste: A Process of Elimination*, New York, Kiosk: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992.
 59. For background on a number of different designers emerging in the U.S. in the 1920s and 1930s, see Jeffrey L. Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925–1939*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, [2nd ed.] 2001, especially chap. 3, “The New Industrial Designers,” pp. 39–67. Prior to becoming well-known industrial designers, Teague had worked as an advertising illustrator, Bel Geddes and Dreyfuss were both stage designers, and Loewy was a fashion illustrator.

dramatized [...] As an aesthetic style mark, and a symbol of twentieth-century machine-age speed, precision, and efficiency, it has been borrowed from the airplane and made to compel the eye anew, with the same flash-and-gleam beauty reembodyed in all travel and transportation machines intended for fast going.⁶⁰

Here, again, Art Deco is associated with systems of mobility underpinning social relations, through transportation, but also through communication and commerce.

The imaginative potential of streamlining is invoked to great effect at The Cross Roads of the World. The streamlined form of the central pavilion conceptually ties the different world architectures together (*i.e.*, a boat to all these different places) and links the shopping centre to Los Angeles by signifying the centre in advertisements and by resonating with other contemporary streamlined buildings in the city (see fig. 1.2, p. 4).⁶¹ The image of an ocean liner to ground the thematic conception of the site as well seems particularly apt for it held a broad, popular appeal at the time and was laden with several connotations. On the one hand, the liner represented precision, speed, efficiency, even hygiene—the kind of association Derrah no doubt had in mind for his contemporaneous redesign of the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant in downtown Los Angeles (fig. 1.7). Indeed, streamlining in general, according to design historian Jeffrey Meikle, was suggestive of a desire for a frictionless society.⁶² On the other hand, the liner connoted a glamorous lifestyle, the kind associated with the *nouveaux riches* heading to fashion capitals, like Paris, or, closer to home for Angelinos, with the lifestyles seen on the big screen—for instance, in the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers films *Swing Time* (RKO [Radio-Keith-Orpheum] Pictures, 1936) and *Shall We Dance* (RKO Pictures, 1937). The liner invited the consumer to take on the subject position of affluent tourist. This was a cosmopolitan identity connected to a freedom of choice of consumer products from across the globe. Essentially, the shopper was given a sense of empowerment, which would have been welcome especially for the middle-class patrons given the hardships and insecurities caused by the Depression. Although the site was geared more toward a wealthier clientele, given the kind of luxury shops present (*e.g.*, high-end fashion, specialties, imports, etc.), it no doubt attracted white-collar workers as well.⁶³

60. Sheldon Cheney and Martha Candler Cheney, *Art and the Machine: An Account of Industrial Design in 20th-Century America*, New York, Whittlesey House, 1936, pp. 97–98.

61. David Gebhard and Harriette Von Breton (*Los Angeles in the Thirties: 1931–1941*, Los Angeles, Hennessey & Ingalls, 1989 [2nd ed., rev.]) provide an excellent survey of architecture in the city. See also Elizabeth McMillian, *Deco and Streamline Architecture in L.A.: A Moderne City Survey*, Atglen (PA), Schiffer Publishing, 2004; and Suzanne Tarbell Cooper, Amy Ronnebeck Hall, and Frank E. Cooper, Jr., *Los Angeles Art Deco (Images of America)*, Charleston (SC), Arcadia, 2005.

62. Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited...*, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

63. For a discussion of the development of Hollywood as a major commercial centre—the second largest after the downtown core—see Longstreth, “Hollywood—Los Angeles’s Other Half,” in *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–101.



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Despite the evidence of an intense interest in mobility in what German cultural commentator Siegfried Kracauer calls “surface-level expressions” of the interwar era culture, which “provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things,” scholars investigating Art Deco have failed to see systems of mobility operating at the heart of the interwar mode.⁶⁴ By employing a “mobilities” approach, I hope to offer more insight into how the style fashioned public cultures. We might envision the dissemination of Art Deco as series of surfaces rubbing up against one another in media-spaces. Here I refer to the notion of media as operating as environments that “work us over completely” and that both message and *massage* us, as proposed by Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan.⁶⁵ For McLuhan, media “are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered.”⁶⁶ The mobilities framework allows for the local construction of public cultures but highlights a cultural space’s connectivity to larger systems of mobility. And this paradigm explains the cosmopolitan quality of Art Deco.

Figure 1.7.

Coca-Cola Bottling Plant, Los Angeles (CA), architect Robert V. Derrah, 1936–1937.

64. Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” *op. cit.*, p. 75.

65. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*, New York, Bantam Books, 1967, p. 26. Richard Cavell has argued that the issue of space was of central concern for McLuhan throughout his life. See Cavell’s *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002.

66. McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message...*, *ibid.*, p. 26.

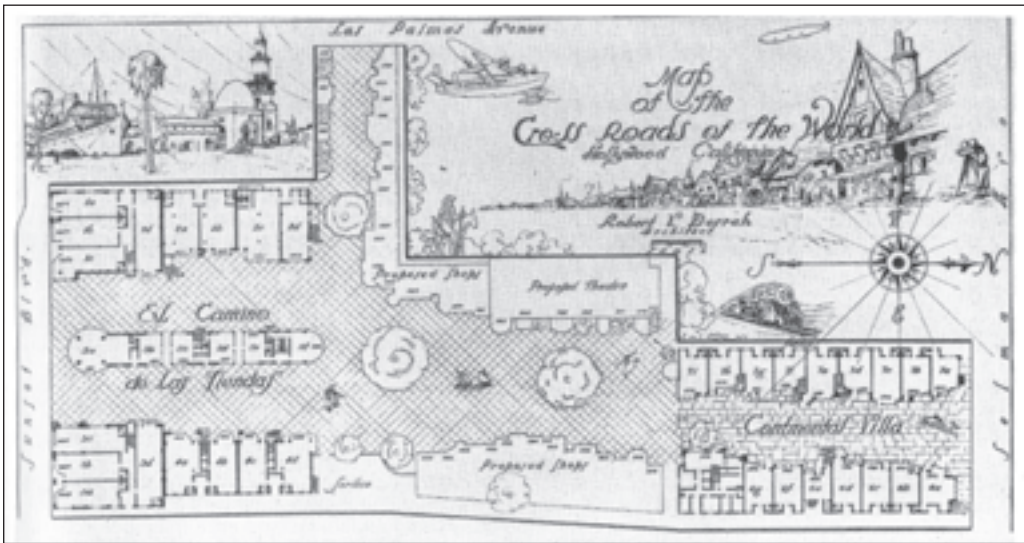
Cosmopolitanism suggests both the mobile character of Art Deco and its global reach. Although the term has been adopted more recently as a means of describing social formations and subjectivities in our contemporary era of globalization,⁶⁷ I use it to connote a global cultural knowledge or outlook, but situated in the local.⁶⁸ It evokes a sense of being “abroad at home,” linking the local to other places.⁶⁹ It also reminds us of the existence of transnational economies of cultural, economic, and technical flow prior to the post-World War II era.⁷⁰ As well, it could carry with it an element of privilege, signalling a worldliness associated with the bourgeois or elite. Given the burgeoning of mass media, cosmopolitanism could be evoked without physically travelling to distant places to acquire that cultural capital. Cosmopolitanism means different things in different contexts, as I will explore further in subsequent chapters, but ultimately is circumscribed by pre-existing social hierarchies. For some scholars, cosmopolitanism “designates an enthusiasm for customary differences, but as ethical or aesthetic material for a unified polychromatic culture—a new singularity born of blending and merging of multiple local constituents.”⁷¹ Unlike “internationalism,” which suggests agreement across nations and thus a sense of universalism, cosmopolitanism maintains a sense of singularity and locality in relation to others. It should be noted that the term was ambiguously used in the period, being adopted by some leftist critics who felt that “international” was depoliticizing the socialist agenda of some architects.⁷² Ultimately for my purposes here, the

67. Some scholars are beginning to interpret cosmopolitanism as a useful means of approaching cultural and subject formations within empires and metropolises in the past. For instance, see the essays “Middle Eastern Experiences of Cosmopolitanism” by Sami Zubaida (pp. 32–41), “Cosmopolitanism and the Social Experience of Cities” by Richard Sennett (pp. 42–47), “Four Cosmopolitan Moments” by Robert Fine and Robin Cohen (pp. 137–162), and “Colonial Cosmopolitanism” by Peter Van der Veer (pp. 165–179) in Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds.), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002. For a useful discussion of cosmopolitanism in the 1930s—here in the context of Shanghai and Hong Kong—see Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Shanghai Modern: Reflections on Urban Culture in China in the 1930s,” *Public Culture*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1999, pp. 75–107; and Ackbar Abbas, “Cosmopolitan De-scriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong,” *Public Culture*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2000, pp. 769–786.
68. As Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty point out in their introduction to a special issue of *Public Culture* dedicated to the theme of cosmopolitanism, the kinds of materials explored largely determine what “cosmopolitanism” we are talking about, and this opens up the possibility of investigating different “cosmopolitanisms” operating in different cultural economies. See Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Cosmopolitanisms,” *Public Culture*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2000, pp. 577–589.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 587.
70. For more on transnationalism within the British Empire, see Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire, and Transnationalism, c. 1880–1950*, New York, Palgrave, 2007.
71. Timothy Brennan, “Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism,” in Danielle Archibugi (ed.), *Debating Cosmopolitics*, London, Verso, 2003, p. 41.
72. See Paul Overy, “White Walls, White Skins: Cosmopolitanism and Colonialism in Interwar Modernist Architecture,” in Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, Cambridge (MA), inIVA and MIT Press, 2005, pp. 50–67. Overy cites the use of the term “cosmopolitan” by Marxist architect Hannes Meyer (director of the Bauhaus after Walter Gropius) as evidence of the ambiguity of the term’s meaning at the time (p. 55).

term not only alludes to mobility, but usefully distinguishes Art Deco from the so-called “International Style,” a label often used (problematically) to describe the Modern Movement.⁷³

The Cross Roads of the World is suggestive of “import cosmopolitanism.”⁷⁴ The pedestrian mall is situated on a T-shaped property fronting 200 feet on Sunset Boulevard, 113 feet on Selma Avenue, and 50 feet on Las Palmas Avenue (fig. I.8). Harmonizing with the style of the Blessed Sacrament Church to the west, an earlier apartment building was remodelled to suggest Spanish and Mexican architecture. Further west, on the opposite side of the central pavilion, another building was garbed in styles meant to evoke French and Italian architecture. Toward Las Palmas, Derrah designed buildings in a colonial, Cape Cod style, while the Selma Avenue entrance suggests architecture of Northern Europe (fig. I.9). The northeastern corner of the property is marked by a lighthouse, signalling to traffic on Selma Avenue the presence of this cosmopolitan port of consumerism. Between the steeped roofs of Northern Europe at the north end of the site and the Spanish and Mexican styles on the southern end, Derrah designed a building that is, in his words, “suggestive of the Moors, the Turks and the Mohammedans”⁷⁵ (fig. I.10). And tying this *mélange* together conceptually is the central, streamlined pavilion (see figs. I.1, p. 3, and I.2, p. 4). As I have discussed above, the site offered an opportunity for imaginative and virtual cosmopolitan travel,

Figure I.8.
Site plan for *The Cross Roads of the World*,
Robert V. Derrah, 1937.



From “Cross Roads of the World,” *California Arts and Architecture*, vol. 51, no. 1, January 1937, p. 24. With permission of David Travers

73. Interestingly, while Art Deco was known under many names and was not unified under one style title until the 1960s, the “International Style” was given to a number of different Modern Movement architects’ work in 1932 by way of a show and catalogue launched by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In chapter 2 I briefly discuss the show as it was exhibited at Bullock’s Wilshire department store. The use of the term “style” for this collection of work might be read as a response to the “styles” of Art Deco production at the time.

74. Pollock *et al.*, “Cosmopolitanisms,” *op. cit.*, p. 587.

75. Derrah, “Unique Architectural Treatment of Hollywood Shopping Center,” *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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Figure I.9.
The Cross Roads of the World (Continental Villa, east façade), Los Angeles (CA), architect Robert V. Derrah, 1936–1937. Selma Ave. entrance to the right.

Figure I.10. ▶
The Cross Roads of the World (“Moorish” building, west and south façades), Los Angeles (CA), architect Robert V. Derrah, 1936–1937.

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while reinforcing consumption. But the space was conceived from a distinctly American point of view, and, in this instance, from an orientalist perspective. While *The Cross Roads* suggests an engagement with difference, like its descendents Disneyland and Disneyworld, this engagement was designed to meet a commercial and tourist gaze.⁷⁶

76. Disneyland in Anaheim, California, opened about twenty years after *The Cross Roads of the World*, in July 1955. It is interesting to note that the central, streamlined building of *The Cross Roads of the World* was later reproduced at Walt Disney World in what is now

Yet The Cross Roads did respond to the unique conditions of Hollywood, California, and reinforced a sense of place. In his 1946 history of Southern California, Carey McWilliams points out that in 1930 only 20 percent of Los Angeles's population was native-born, and most people were fairly recent arrivals.⁷⁷ Conceptually, especially in the interwar period, Hollywood was nearly indistinguishable from its central industry, film. This meant that the idea of Hollywood was quite cosmopolitan in itself, simultaneously a place of many spaces and a non-place of all possible spaces. That is alluded to in Derrah's ground plan for The Cross Roads (described as a map), which includes images not only of vehicles of transportation and exotic locations, but the filming of these spaces (see fig. I.8). We should keep in mind, as well, that the stage-like qualities of the architecture of the The Cross Roads would echo not only the sets produced and used on the nearby movie lots, but also the dramatic movie theatres on Hollywood Boulevard just to the north (e.g., Grauman's Egyptian and Chinese theatres). As indicated on the plan, the site was also to include a movie theatre, which was to play foreign films; however, that was never realized. The shopping centre's opening was even promoted as a kind of film premiere and was attended by Universal Studio motion picture players who were to represent foreign nations. As the *L.A. Times* reported, this included:

Cesare Romero, representing Cuba; Binnie Barnes, Wendy Barrie, Boris Karloff and Jack Dunn from England; Ella Logan from Scotland; Tala Birell from Austria; Henry Armetta from Italy; Mischa Auer from Russia, Peggy Ryan and George Murphy from Ireland, and Gertrude Nissen of Scandinavian descent.⁷⁸

The opening also featured entertainment from different parts of the world: a French chorus conducted by Raymond Richet; Czechoslovakian National Dancers under the direction of K. Grom; Michael Hafko, accordion soloist; Robert Travetian, Arabian singer; an Alpine Troubadour orchestra; Japanese dancers; a Russian Balalaika orchestra; and the Leon Rattner Starlets in a juvenile revue.⁷⁹

The Cross Roads thus was conceived as both a space of fantasy projection and real commercial enterprise, a seemingly suitable analogy for the place Hollywood: an industry as much as a concrete community. Even the mix of architectural styles had a real correspondence to the region. Nathanael West's novel *Day of the Locust* published a few years after the opening of The Cross Roads in 1939 evinces the blurring of boundaries between Hollywood pictures and the community it supported,

called Disney's Hollywood Studios in Orlando, Florida, with the addition of a Mickey Mouse statue on the globe (originally opened in 1989). There is an extensive literature on the tourist gaze, beginning with Dean MacCannell's 1976 book *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* [reprint New York, Schocken Books, 1989]. See also Ellen Strain, *Public Places, Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze*, Piscataway (NJ), Rutgers University Press, 2003.

77. Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land*, edited by Erskine Caldwell, New York, Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1946, p. 165.

78. "Stars from All Nations to Be Present at Opening," *L.A. Times*, October 29, 1936.

79. "'Crossroads of the World' Debut Near," *Hollywood Citizen News*, October 28, 1936.

even the material of which the built environment was constructed. After comparing the “pale violet light” of the sunset behind the hills to that of a neon tube, the narrator observes that

not even the soft wash of dusk could help the houses. Only dynamite would be of any use against the Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages, and every possible combination of these styles that lined the slopes of the canyon [...]

On the corner of La Huerta Road was a miniature Rhine castle with tarpaper turrets pierced for archers. Next to it was a little highly colored shack with domes and minarets out of the *Arabian Nights* [...] Both houses were comic, but he didn't laugh. Their desire to startle was so eager and guileless.⁸⁰

For West, Hollywood—both the place and the industry that built it—was an artificial space symptomatic of the greed and exploitation he sees inherent to the consumer culture it helped to fuel. His description of the houses was echoed by others. Los Angeles-based modern architect Richard Neutra blamed the movies “for many phenomena in this landscape such as: half-timbered English peasant cottages, French provincial and ‘mission-bell’ type adobes, Arabian minarets, Georgian mansions on 50 by 120 foot lots with ‘Mexican Ranchos’ adjoining them on sites of the same size.”⁸¹ To Aldous Huxley, “Hollywood always seems like a movie set. Everything is very pretty but the houses, which I think are charming, look impermanent, as though they might be torn down at any moment and something else put up.”⁸² What concerned (or amused) West, Neutra, and Huxley was the fact that the “artificial” was becoming real, presaging the later cultural critiques of Debord and Baudrillard.

Art Deco developed at a time of—and is indeed implicated in the burgeoning of—mass culture, including advertising, which had an impact on notions of place and public culture. This is apparent at The Cross Roads. Reviewing the shopping mall in 1938, J. Edward Tufft remarks that:

The international flavour of “The Cross Roads of the World” was introduced purposely so that the project could advertise itself. It can not be confused in the mind of any Los Angeles resident or in the mind of any tourist or city visitor with any other project in the city. At the end of the first year it would practically be impossible to mention the place in the city to any person who would not know what you were talking about.⁸³

An article in the *L.A. Times* on the day the pedestrian mall opened explains how the shops would not be identified with a street address but simply with the name The Cross Roads of the World, Hollywood,

80. Nathanael West (1939), “Day of the Locust,” in *Novels and Other Writings*, New York, Literary Classics of America, 1997, p. 243.

81. Quoted in McWilliams, *Southern California Country...*, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

82. Quoted in *ibid.*

83. J. Edward Tufft, “A Unique and Successful Shopping Center,” *National Real Estate Journal*, vol. 39, March, 1938, p. 46.

California.⁸⁴ The shopping centre was conceived and financed by Ella E. Crawford, and some have suggested that the impetus for the project was in part a public relations campaign to salvage the reputation of her late, millionaire husband Charles (who has been described variously as everything from prominent politician to a “model for some of Raymond Chandler’s juicier villains”).⁸⁵ In 1931, Charles Crawford and Herbert Spencer (editor of the political magazine *Critic of Critics*) were gunned down by former Deputy District Attorney David Clark in Crawford’s real estate office, located on the future site of The Cross Roads. To distance the family name from associations with organized crime, Ella Crawford’s “Cross Roads” was to suggest an idealized world held harmoniously together through real and virtual travel of shoppers and commodities.

As Deco design celebrated some forms of mobility, it screened out others. The kinds of mobilities engendered by The Cross Roads—those of automobility, purchase of luxury goods, etc.—stood in stark contrast to those faced by other Americans at the time. This is powerfully evoked in a contemporaneous photograph entitled *Toward Los Angeles, California* (March 1937) by Dorothea Lange (fig. I.11). Here two migrants walk away from the camera along the shoulder of a highway, presumably carrying all their worldly possessions in simple luggage. To the right, a billboard advertisement for Southern Pacific depicts a man reclining in a comfortable chair with the phrase: “Next Time Try the Train. *Relax.*” Lange’s photograph

Figure I.11.
Dorothea Lange,
Toward Los Angeles,
Calif., March 1937.



Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division,
FSA/OWI Collection, LC-DIG-fsa-8b31801

84. “Novel Addresses Used by Shops,” *L.A. Times*, October 29, 1936.

85. Cecilia Rasmussen, “Mall Is Legacy of ’20s Crime, Corruption,” *L.A. Times*, October 3, 1999. For more on the darker history of The Cross Roads of the World, see Lindsay William-Ross, “LAistory: The Cross Roads of the World,” *LAist*, January 10, 2009, <http://laist.com/2009/01/10/laistory_cross_roads_of_the_world.php>, accessed January 2012.

provides a kind of counterimage to Art Deco. It indicates a brutal irony of American life in the 1930s: at a time of severe economic crisis and social upheaval, Americans were faced with images of luxury on billboards, in magazine advertisements, on film, and in Deco-fashioned public spaces, such as department stores or cinemas. Scarcity was faced with visions of abundance, needs supplanted by a fuelling of desire. If Art Deco was functionally required for the individual—and indeed we might see the Deco as primarily reinforcing or responding to individual desires rather than collective or universal visions of prosperity—it was certainly necessary for elites intent on supporting the existing social order.

While the Modern Movement was also bound to ideas of mobility—particularly design ideas associated with efficiency—the aestheticization of mobilities of Art Deco points to the style's socio-political import. By aestheticizing mobilities, the mode elicited the power of movement and spectacle to smooth over disparities of wealth and social status. In an era of extremes—politically and economically—Art Deco provided an often future-oriented, optimistic vision of prosperity without hard-line radicalism. Art Deco was popular, provided a sense of empowerment in many cases, and framed spaces of public culture that were understood as “democratizing.” But as I will argue in the chapters that follow, Art Deco did little to change social values, and in fact might be seen as reinscribing pre-existing hierarchies—providing a tangible trace of aristocracy in the interwar years.⁸⁶ This was, after all, the period of late imperialism, a cultural as much as political force. We need only think of the abdication crisis of 1936, when King-Emperor Edward VIII decided to marry twice-divorced, American socialite Wallis Simpson, to recall the popular appeal of aristocracy in the period. In chapter 2, I will take up the idea of the persistence of the aristocratic in glamour. I contend that even streamlined, mass-produced forms retained an element of glamour and a cosmopolitan appeal. To some degree, Giedion concurs when he observes that in spite of “reformist tendencies” in the development and incorporation of the streamline style, “in a strange way the principles of nineteenth-century ruling taste linger on into the twentieth.”⁸⁷ Throughout this book I will indicate how the systems of mobility expressed in the Art Deco spaces masked others and sometimes contrasted with forms of immobility.

In some ways this gets to the heart of the difference between the Modern Movement and Art Deco. Visually the line between the two is rather blurry in some cases, and certainly clear-cut distinctions were not observed at the time. A prime example of this ambiguity is Paul T. Frankl, an Austrian émigré interior architect and designer working in the United

86. The aristocracy was still a major force in modernity, as Arno J. Mayer argues in *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1981. For an excellent history of the 1919 Paris peace talks, which ostensibly re-entrenched the colonial order despite “changing the world,” see Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*, New York, Random House, 2002.

87. Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command...*, *op. cit.*, p. 611.

States. Frankl, whose philosophy of design I will discuss in chapter 4, attempted to reconcile with consumer capitalism tenets often ascribed to the Modern Movement: honesty of materials, mass producibility, and modern design as a tool to improve mass taste. Frankl's work was not aiming at some middle course between "Traditionalists" and "Modernists." He was responding to and attempting to fashion public culture. And, it should be noted, he considered himself—and was considered by some of his American counterparts—a Modernist. Following the dictum, "[c]hange is the life of style,"⁸⁸ Frankl sought self-consciously to represent the spirit of the times, ultimately reinforcing the status quo within a distinctly consumerist milieu. He is perhaps best known for his skyscraper furniture, evoking the form and energy of the new metropolitan edifices in bookcases, desks, and vanities scaled to modern apartments and lifestyles (see fig. 1.4, p. 7).⁸⁹ Art Deco is frequently understood as appealing to emotion, to fantasy, and spectacle, while the Modern Movement was an intellectualized response to modern conditions with aesthetic sought as a product of function. While this is true to a large degree, Art Deco spaces, as I will show, were also often based on rationalized planning, indebted to Beaux-Arts training with its emphasis on an ordered and comprehensive plan and supporting decorative program. Frankl's work, in some ways, exemplifies the duality of some Deco material, appealing to emotion (by way of style or stylishness) and rationalized planning.

Comparing the reception of Le Corbusier's now canonical Modernist pavilion *Esprit Nouveau* from the Paris Exposition of 1925 (see fig. 2.9, p. 121) to Thomas Wallis's Art Deco Hoover Factory (1932–1938) in the London suburb of Perivale, art historian Bridget Elliott interrogates the use of terms like Modernist, modernistic, and *moderne* and indicates, through her analysis of the performativity and theatricality of the spaces, some of the contradictions and complexities inherent in such definitions. Her insistence on keeping in mind the *users* of the spaces (short-lived exposition architecture appealing to tastes of educated and likely well-heeled visitors versus factory workers "more likely to make cars and cameras than own them and [who] had less leisure time and cultural capital to help them come to terms with a more subtly embedded set of cultural references") is instructive.⁹⁰ Also helpful is her comparison of filmic references in each. While Wallis's factory appeared much like a Hollywood filmset or even ornate cinema, she argues, following Mark Wigley, that Le Corbusier's white walls were akin to a screen upon which mobility systems were projected. Wigley asserts that "[t]he whitewash dematerializes building in order to make space for these systems, a space for new spacings, new sensualities. It is a double gesture. Architecture accommodates new

88. Frankl, *Form and Re-form*..., *op. cit.*, p. 29.

89. See Christopher Long, *Paul T. Frankl and Modern American Design*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, especially chap. 7, "Skyscraper Style," pp. 65–79.

90. Bridget Elliott, "Modern, Moderne, and Modernistic: Le Corbusier, Thomas Wallis, and the Problem of Art Deco," in Pamela L. Caughie (ed.), *Disciplining Modernism*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 143.

systems and is, at the same time, accommodated within them.”⁹¹ This engagement with mobility systems in a non-representational fashion is quite at odds with the often outright celebratory and representational mode of Deco design, suggesting a very different sensuality. Art Deco was designed to reinforce and enhance views of modernity (including notions of progress and processes of modernization) but not necessarily to “make space” for critical reflection.

As Striner importantly asserts, “[i]t would be a mistake to ascribe one all-pervasive outlook to multitudes of Art deco designers,” for indeed the style was employed on the surfaces of buildings associated with extremes on the political spectrum, including the stripped-classicism of Nazi Germany and of the New Deal Works Progress Administration (WPA) program in the United States.⁹² And Elliott’s research into the practices of lesbian design couples Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher, and Eyre de Lanux and Evelyn Wyld, indicates that the hybridity of Art Deco allowed room for alternative forms of aesthetic expression.⁹³ By conceptualizing Art Deco as a locally produced crossroads, I am indicating some of the variances in the adoption and incorporation of the style in public cultures. However, I do contend that the style was ultimately socially conservative. For example, even though depictions of labouring bodies might suggest a celebration of the working class, when depicted on financial institutions the forms simply aestheticize an overarching capitalist system and attendant set of hierarchical social values (see figs. I.12 and I.13). From Montréal to Bombay (Mumbai), these figures presented an idyllic picture of labour relations at a time of great economic unrest. The frieze by Charles Comfort spanning the façade of the Toronto Stock Exchange (George and Moorhouse, S.H. Maw Associate, 1937) goes even further (fig. I.14). Comfort aestheticizes the systems of mobility that coalesce in the formation of the Canadian economy through a depiction of various sectors of the workforce from stock traders and capitalists to tradesmen and autoworkers, and from scientists and engineers to day labourers and surveyors, continuing the march of progress into new

91. Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dress: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1995, p. 31. Cited in Elliott, “Modern, Moderne, and Modernistic,” *ibid.*, p. 141.

92. Striner, “Art Deco: Polemics and Synthesis,” *op. cit.*, p. 34. See Eva Weber, “New Deal Art Programs,” in *Art Deco in America*, New York, Exeter Books, 1985, pp. 146–161. Some American artists inspired by Mexican muralists, especially Diego Rivera, were able to include socialist material; however, I would argue that for the most part these were subtle and exceptions to the rule. The New Deal programs helped to bring Art Deco to many places across the United States often in the “stripped-classical” forms. Generally, being a government initiative seeking to produce social and economic stability, the works were socially conservative. From a different perspective—namely the New Deal’s impact on the appearance of shop fronts—see Gabrielle Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street: Architecture and Consumer Culture in the New Deal*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2008.

93. Bridget Elliott, “Art Deco Hybridity, Interior Design, and Sexuality between the Wars: Two Double Acts: Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher/Eyre de Lanux and Evelyn Wyld,” in Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (eds.), *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Cultures*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 109–129.



◀ **Figure I.12.**
*Detail from New India
Assurance Building,
Mumbai, architects
Master, Sathe & Bhuta;
sculpture by N.G.
Pansare, 1935–1937.*

Michael Windover (2008)

Figure I.13. ▶
Detail from McDougall and Cowans Building, Montréal, architect J. Cecil McDougall; sculpture by Henri Hébert, 1929.



Figure I.14.
Toronto Stock Exchange (Design Exchange), Toronto (ON), architects George and Moorhouse, associate S.H. Maw, 1937.

Michael Windover (2009)



Michael Windover (2011)



Michael Windover (2011)

territories (fig. I.15).⁹⁴ The angular figures suggest movement as well as the abstraction of labour into capital, becoming cogs in the larger mechanism of the economy, rolling along with an almost militaristic intensity. The Art Deco frieze enlivens a “stripped-classical” façade that indicated a sense of security and stability in the economically uncertain days of the Depression, a reference to tradition in *moderne* dress. While the frieze suggests an equivalence between the different sectors of the workforce, each one doing its part for the betterment of the whole, it simply masked the great disparity of wealth between the different workers.

Figure I.15.
Detail of façade frieze
by Charles Comfort,
Toronto Stock
Exchange (Design
Exchange), Toronto
(ON), 1937.

What ultimately sets Art Deco apart from the Modern Movement is the idea of change. Both were intimately associated with change; however, while proponents of the Modern Movement called for structural change (physical and, in some instances by extension, social), Deco designers promoted the change of appearance (what we might call fashion change). Architects of the Modern Movement sought to redesign social space and remake public culture, while Art Deco designers aestheticized the systems of mobility that underpinned the contemporary economic and social order and fashioned public culture. Art Deco imaged modernity in the interwar years, and while it shared some aesthetic similarities with the contemporaneous Modern Movement, it ultimately reinforced the pre-existing social order.

By beginning in Hollywood—not on a filmset, but at a filmset-like shopping centre—I have tried to suggest the complex mobilities at play in the diffusion and incorporation of Art Deco into spaces of everyday life. I continue this throughout the book by moving through some illustrative cases in different types of places in different regions. Through

94. Comfort also painted four large panels depicting different industries for the trading floor of the Stock Exchange in much the same style. For a brief discussion of the panels within the context of her argument about the generally conservative artistic responses of Canadians to the traumatic years of the 1930s, see Marylin McKay, “Canadian Political Art in the 1930s: ‘A Form of Distancing,’” in Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Linden, and Jonathan Weinberg (eds.), *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, pp. 71–94.

such a mobile approach we can come to terms with Art Deco as a mode of mobility. With this strategy, I hope to suggest the reach of Art Deco both geographically and into the everyday. I aim to indicate how the mode was locally produced and yet had a cosmopolitan quality that tied these spaces to larger networks of economic, political, technological, and cultural flow and flux. In this way, I endeavour to evince some of the socio-political ramifications of these Art Deco spaces. Consequently, this is not a survey of Art Deco architecture and design; rather, I build on the existing body of general and local literatures by offering new ways of thinking about the mode and its broader impact.

I have chosen sites and objects that indicate the great range and diversity of Art Deco production and that underline the style's global diffusion and impact on public culture. I do not, for example, discuss elite luxury production to any great extent, choosing to focus more on the wider public implications of the style, for indeed the transcendence across class, geographic, and medium boundaries made the mode a unique phenomenon. My study is largely confined to the Anglo-American world, although I will reference Continental influences—notably in chapter 2 with a brief discussion of the 1925 exhibition in Paris. This decision is based in part on the fact that in the interwar years the rise of mass media was dominated by Anglo-American entities in both form and content, as Jeremy Tunstall argues.⁹⁵ I am not implying that the Americans and British formed some large, unified global regime of media dominance—for anti-British and anti-American sentiments were commonplace in that period.⁹⁶ Rather, the Anglo-American world provides a ready, if complicated, field, especially when the massive impact of Hollywood film and formation of the British Broadcasting Corporation's Empire Service are considered, both of which had truly global distribution and effects. Also, by focusing more on North America we recognize the ascendance of the U.S. in the decades following the First World War, for indeed Americanism had a profound impact on cultural production in Europe and further afield.⁹⁷ However, as I have argued, Art Deco is more a crossroads of influences, a product of public culture, rather than a straightforward sign of Americanization.

The book is organized in four chapters that correspond to key themes and are located to lesser or greater extents in four sites. The first chapter investigates the role of Art Deco in the potential production of

95. See Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media Are American*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1977; and his *The Media Were American: U.S. Mass Media in Decline*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008.

96. For a discussion on the effects of "Americanization" in Britain, see for instance: Anne Massey, *Hollywood Beyond the Screen: Design and Material Culture*, Oxford, Berg, 2000; and attitudes toward Britain in the U.S., John E. Moser, *Twisting the Lion's Tail: Anglophobia in the United States, 1921–1948*, London, MacMillan, 1999.

97. For instance, see Peter Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture*, London, Verso, 1993, especially his second chapter, "Modern Times: Cinema/Americanism/The Robot" (pp. 35–71); and Jean-Louis Cohen, *Scenes of the World to Come: European Architecture and the American Challenge, 1893–1960*, Paris and Montreal, Flammarion and Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1995.

place in relation to imperial and international networks of communication, transportation, and trade at the Marine Building in Vancouver, Canada. This skyscraper was designed to centralize the burgeoning businesses related to shipping, import, and export, as well as to provide an icon for the city and its skyline; however, this latter function was complicated by the economic realities facing the city at the time of the building's completion in 1930 as well as by the social and commercial interests that sought to privilege a particular maritime history of Vancouver while concealing the presence of First Nations culture.

The second chapter examines the concept of glamour as affiliated often uncritically with Art Deco and its impact on public culture. We travel back to Los Angeles, to the film and emerging fashion capital, to look at how glamour operates spatially, first in a 1936 Merrie Melodies cartoon, *Page Miss Glory*, then at Bullock's Wilshire department store. A correspondence is made between glamour and *ensemble*, as I discuss the impact of the Paris exhibition on the department store and, by extension, the larger public culture of Los Angeles.

Continuing the thread of film and its impact on everyday life, although now more in terms of spatial practice and effect on the built environment, the third chapter examines Art Deco in the colonial world through an analysis of two large-scale cinemas in Bombay. I emphasize here the importance of attending to local conditions in the production of public culture, as the Regal and Eros Theatres are figured as *chowks*, crossroads of interpenetrating forms of mobility and places of political import.

The final chapter turns attention toward the entrance of Art Deco into Canadian homes through the design of radio cabinets. In doing so, I underline the importance of mass production to the mass medium. I assert that Art Deco was perhaps the best mode for radio because of the similarities in the dominant social agenda of both the style and the institutions governing the medium. Even more than the cinema, department store, and skyscraper, the Art Deco radio cabinet emphasized a cosmopolitanism and engagement with the wider world but through the bounded place of home, underlining the complicated public culture of interwar radio.

The cases discussed in each chapter emphasize the dissemination of Art Deco, its local affects and effects, and, most importantly, socio-political implications. In choosing these diverse sites and objects, my aim is to see them operating as "a collide-oscope of interfaced situations," to adopt McLuhan's evocative phrase,⁹⁸ with the hope of illuminating how Art Deco emerged in different public cultures and offered different cosmopolitan experiences, yet was everywhere aestheticizing systems of mobility. In each case, we can see how Art Deco operated as a crossroads, offering broad views toward other spaces (sometimes geographically, sometimes across the spectrum of time), but all the while situating the citizen firmly in the local and in the contemporary socio-political order.

98. McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message...*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

1

Re-centring Deco

Imaging/Imagining Place at the Marine Building

It is noticeable that every American city and town that aspires to Metropolitan importance wants to have at least one skyscraper—one that can be illustrated on a picture postcard and sent far and wide as evidence of modernity and a go-ahead spirit.

Frederick A. Delano, 1926¹

Vancouver is much like stage scenery. All tinsel and glitter one side (the side the audience sees) and black and white behind the scenes.

A.J. Tomlin to R.B. Bennett, 23 October 1933²

1. Frederic A. Delano, "Skyscrapers," *American City Magazine*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1926, p. 1. Quoted in Roberta Moudry, "Introduction," in Roberta Moudry (ed.), *The American Skyscraper: Cultural Histories*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 10.
2. Quoted in Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, Toronto, James Lorimer, and the National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, 1980, p. 87.

The Marine Building, an Art Deco skyscraper built in Vancouver, British Columbia, became a crucial piece of civic stage scenery. It emblemized capital accumulation and tacitly reinforced the desires of the business community and civic boosters who projected not just a metropolitan importance onto the structure, but a cosmopolitan ideal. Vancouver, the Terminal City, was not simply the end of the national rail lines; it was a central node within a vast imperial and international network of trade, commerce, transportation, migration, and communication. Art Deco, which provided the “tinsel and glitter” of the edifice, simultaneously referenced elsewhere and yet incorporated certain elements of the local, making it a particularly potent style for the production of place. Vancouver, being both a conduit (of commerce, culture, ideas, material, etc.) and a point of departure, seems an apt place to start a consideration of Art Deco, for it offers a ready example of how the style responded to a particular place while enlarging the virtual image of the city beyond its physical boundaries. The Marine Building is instructive in that it highlights the economic polarities of the period and how the Art Deco style seems to transcend the apparent gulf in living conditions—almost suspending disbelief (like a motion picture) with its “tinsel and glitter,” screening out many “black and white” social and economic realities. The building stood as a monument to corporate prosperity garnered from the mobilities that made Vancouver a metropolitan, even cosmopolitan centre, while in its shadow thousands of unemployed and homeless converged on the city hoping to get a taste of some of that good fortune.

While the Marine Building has seen some attention by local historians,³ it has not been discussed in terms of the role it played in the production of public culture in the interwar years. Through an analysis of its social and historical context and its spatial design and decorative program, I will discuss how the Marine Building aestheticized mobilities, celebrating some while masking others. The edifice provides an apposite site from which to explore the cosmopolitanism of Art Deco, evincing the complexities of place-making within global, national, and local networks of exchange.

Although I would agree with Carol Willis that the Art Deco skyscraper (in general) did not follow distinct theories of design—the way some Modernists did—I disagree with her characterization of skyscraper (essentially Art Deco) architecture as “passive modernism.”⁴ Art Deco had serious socio-political implications, and was certainly far from “passive,” encouraging, as I will argue in this chapter, a sense of belonging and place.

3. Although it has not been the subject of any book-length study, the Marine Building is occasionally discussed in local newspaper articles. See for instance John Mackie, “Time Overtakes the Marine Building,” *Vancouver Sun*, July 10, 2004; and more recently his article, “An Art Deco Wonder,” *Vancouver Sun*, March 6, 2009. The building features briefly in Don Luxton (ed. and compiler), *Building the West: The Early Architects of British Columbia*, Vancouver, Talonbooks, 2003, as well as in Lilia D’Acres and Donald Luxton, *Lions Gate*, Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1999, pp. 42–43.

4. Carol Willis, “Skyscraper Utopias: Visionary Urbanism in the 1920s,” in Joseph J. Corn (ed.), *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1986, p. 183.

This sense of belonging, however, reinforced social and cultural hierarchies. Visitors and office workers were encouraged to imagine the Marine Building (and Vancouver) as a progressive, modern city, and to see themselves as an integral part of the picture—one that perhaps compensated for the relatively provincial character of the city at the time,⁵ and one that stood at odds with the contemporary social and economic strife brought about in large part by the financial structures represented by the building itself. The iconography of the Marine Building celebrated the systems of transportation and commerce that contributed in no small part to the boom of the 1920s. But opening as it did a year into the Great Depression, the building stood in stark contrast to the shantytown developing around False Creek, south of the downtown. The Marine Building—and indeed Art Deco in general—was the product of a culture (meaning economic no less than aesthetic aspects of social practice) oriented toward the fuelling of desire. As historian Norbert Messler contends, “Art Deco skyscrapers did not follow function alone, nor did they merely follow effect: Art Deco followed desire.”⁶ The “tinsel and glitter” of Art Deco were instrumental to the success of the building, pulling together the imaged, the imagined, and the material in a way that encouraged further desire and even optimism. The mode could reinforce the confidence of the boom years and then present ideals of hope following the 1929 Crash, and in both instances do so by appearing modern. It enhanced the visual appeal of the building and thence its commodity form (e.g., in postcards—see fig. 1.1).

For many, the interwar skyscraper epitomizes the Art Deco style. In particular, the soaring “cathedrals of commerce” of Manhattan seem to capture the energy and optimism of the heady days of ramped speculation in the closing years of the 1920s. Indeed, perhaps *the* iconic Art Deco buildings are the Chrysler Building (Van Alen, 1930) and the Empire State Building (Shreve, Lamb, and Harmon, 1931), structures that reached unheard-of heights and seemed to encapsulate the tremendous rise of New York City as the financial centre of the burgeoning American Empire. As architectural historian Thomas van Leeuwen points out,

[d]espite professing to be a democracy, America had—and still has—a perverse weakness for its role as an empire [...] And whoever invented the name Empire State for the state of New York must’ve acknowledged this ideal. Naturally, the Empire State Building was intended as the ideological capitol of its own mystic realm.⁷

5. Although Vancouver was Canada’s third city by 1929 (surpassing Winnipeg), and was certainly by 1914 the metropolitan hub of British Columbia, the youth of the city and its physical distance from the more established urban centres of Canada lent it a provincial character relative to Toronto or Montréal. For a discussion on the rise of Vancouver to metropolitan status, see Larry D. McCann, “Urban Growth in a Staple Economy: The Emergence of Vancouver as a Regional Metropolis, 1886–1914,” in Leonard J. Evenden (ed.), *Vancouver: Western Metropolis*, Victoria (BC), University of Victoria Press, 1978, pp. 17–41.

6. Norbert Messler, *The Art Deco Skyscraper in New York*, New York, Peter Lang, 1986 [rev. ed.], p. 65.

7. Thomas A.P. van Leeuwen, *The Skyward Trend of Thought: Five Essays on the Metaphysics of the American Skyscraper*, The Hague, Art History Architecture Books, 1986, p. 65.



Figure 1.1.
Postcard, Canadian,
ca. 1945.

In an era of mass production, consumption, and media, the Art Deco skyscraper interestingly becomes an index of liberal democracy of the interwar years: an image not bound to traditional notions of democracy, but to centralization. The New York skyscraper is envisioned as symbolically centring empire. The Marine Building, as I will show, referred to the “old” British Empire from the vital, young city and nation.

Indeed, it is this quality of centring—or rather re-centring—that I will explore in this chapter. Frederick Delano’s observation about the skyscrapers quoted above provides a useful way of beginning. First, he associates the skyscraper with the desires of citizens, suggesting a conflation of private enterprise and public—in this instance, civic—culture or identity. Second, and most interestingly, the skyscraper’s value for him is largely determined by its representation on a picture postcard, as an icon circulating in a larger (tourist) economy of images beyond the local. The power of the skyscraper is linked as much to its visual and virtual presence as to its material existence as a place of business and locus of everyday activities. The skyscraper—this visual object of desire—signifies a city’s (in this case, Vancouver’s) modernity. By taking up a form and visual style associated with metropolitan centres, the city announces its place within a network of intersecting forms of mobility, and evinces its prominence as a crucial node within these networks. This is particularly pronounced in figure 1.1, a postcard (ca. 1945) that features two views of the Vancouver skyline. Doubling the view of Vancouver’s active harbour, the postcard emphasizes the importance of shipping to the city’s prosperity. It also alludes to tourism with its representation of an ocean liner, great railway

hotels (most notably the third Hotel Vancouver [Archibald & Schofield, 1928–1939] seen prominently on the right side of the bottom panorama), and reference to Stanley Park.

To this is added the mobility of the iconicity of the structures themselves, especially the Marine Building. In his study on the iconicity of the Empire State Building, philosopher Mark Kingwell asserts that iconicity

is a function of desire. But of what desires exactly? They are not simple and they are not always easily available to view: part of an icon's invisibility concerns the forces that work to fashion it. And we should always recall that "icon," like "commodity," is not another word for *thing* but another word for *relationship*.⁸

Kingwell's observations remind us of the skyscraper's place at the heart of intersecting media. Tall buildings existed in multiple interpenetrating and often reinforcing visual and pecuniary economies. They were at once real places of work, actual objects in the environment, and virtual spaces of fantasy projection and desire. From this perspective, the skyscraper can serve as emblematic of re-centring outside traditional centres. Rather than turn to New York or Chicago, I argue that the Marine Building in Vancouver even more dramatically exemplifies this process. In essence, I am re-centring Art Deco, emphasizing its cosmopolitan potential as it played a role in the production of the local. For indeed Art Deco was a visually oriented (perhaps iconic) style; thus, in considering the iconicity of Deco architecture, like the Marine Building (dominating both views of the skyline in fig. 1.1), we see how the style framed social relationships in the fashioning of public cultural spaces and this highlights the style's larger socio-political implications.

This chapter begins with a consideration of the Marine Building's early life in a department store window display to show the inextricable link between the skyscraper and desire. Next, I outline Vancouver's history of boom and bust, which left the series of tall buildings illustrated on the postcard and which perhaps explains some of the foundations for building this icon of desire. Part of the analysis will consider the production of the skyline, indicating the tangible links between image, imagination, and materiality. The site and sight of the Marine Building had a significant impact on the envisioning of the city as well as on the local business community. I therefore explore the visual and spatial politics of the building before turning to the issue of cosmopolitanism in relation to the conception of both the city and the building. Already during the Edwardian period some Vancouverites were touting the city as cosmopolitan; however, the manifestation of an Art Deco skyscraper, I argue, suggests something new, something more self-conscious, by connecting place to wider systems of mobility. I turn to the theoretical work of architect Neil Leach to help elucidate how the building inculcated a sense of belonging before exploring

8. Mark Kingwell, *Nearest Thing to Heaven: The Empire State Building and American Dreams*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 36.

how the strategy of designing the public spaces of the building was consonant with similar ones employed in movie theatre lobbies, thus reminding us of the building's place within a broader discourse of consumer cultural production. Finally, I discuss how the building was conceptually re-centred within larger systems of mobility through an examination of the decorative program of the Merchants' Exchange. The building's complicated symbolic valence is also briefly explored in relation to the purchase of the structure by British Pacific Properties in 1933.

■ Framing the Marine Building, Framing Desire

Citizens of Vancouver, while shopping or perhaps strolling near the commercial heart of their city in May 1929, would likely have noticed a window display at the Hudson's Bay Company department store announcing the construction of a new office building (fig. 1.2). The window was simple in its dressing. On the left, an easel, partially draped, held a framed architectural rendering of the proposed edifice. To the right, a wooden desk with some carved floral ornament was positioned with an armchair rotated slightly so as to allow space for an imagined white-collar worker. Atop the desk, a telephone, some pens, and a lit lamp suggested activities to be performed in the future office tower. Positioned between the desk and framed drawing were three sample floor plans, outlining the building's spatial organization for prospective tenants. A series of four placards, situated nearest the window pane, completed the story, linking the virtual

Figure 1.2.
*Marine Building
plans on display
at Hudson's Bay
Company, Vancouver
(BC), May 18, 1929.*



space established in the display window with the contemporaneous construction of the Marine Building a few blocks away. The signs announced that the building was being erected by the Stimson's Canadian Development Co. Ltd., financed by the "Oldest Bond House in Canada," G.A. Stimson and Co. Ltd. Local architects McCarter and Nairne designed the structure and Vancouver's E.J. Ryan Contracting Co. Ltd. was the contractor for what would be "the highest and largest office building in Canada West of Toronto."⁹ The signs even established a timeline for construction: Dominion Bridge Co. would complete the steel framework by September and the building would be opened in March the next year, one year after the commencement of excavation.

The department store window helped reinforce the Marine Building's position within the imagination and urban fabric of the young, Canadian metropolis. The new building, garbed in the cutting-edge architectural fashion of the moment, was situated here firmly within consumer culture. Following the logic of far more ambitious and visually spectacular window displays of Paris and New York, the modest presentation established the building—its image, its experiential potential—as an object of desire. In placing the three-dimensional advertisement in the high traffic shopping area of the city, Lieutenant-Commander J.W. Hobbs, vice-president and Western director of G.A. Stimson and Company, was actively soliciting support for the structure by generating excitement for the fulfilment of what would be largely a distanced and visual pleasure, for although the building would provide an observation deck open to the public, the structure would mainly be the domain of office workers.¹⁰ The Toronto-based company was attempting with this building to secure a stronger position in the burgeoning Western economy. It had earlier purchased the Merchants' Exchange building at the corner of Hastings Street and Howe. With its new building, the company sought to centralize the

9. The firm of McCarter and Nairne Architects and Engineers was one of the principal architectural forces in Vancouver for several decades following its founding in 1921. John Young McCarter (1886–1981) and George Colvill Nairne (1884–1953) had met while working in the office of Thomas Hooper in Vancouver in the early 1910s. Each would later serve as president of the Architectural Institute of B.C., while McCarter would also serve as vice-president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and president of the Vancouver Board of Trade in 1936. Their first large commission was the Devonshire Apartments (1923–1924) on Georgia Street across from the Court House, which was followed by the Harrison Hot Springs Hotel and Bath House (with associate architects Townley & Matheson, 1925–1926), the New Westminster City Market (1926), the first Richmond High School (1927), Spencer's Department Store (1925–1926), and the Medical-Dental Building (1928–1929). For a brief biography of McCarter & Nairne, see David Monteyne, "McCarter & Nairne," in Luxton, *Building the West*, *op. cit.*, pp. 272–277. At the time of the construction of the Marine Building, E.J. Ryan Contracting Co. Ltd. (one of the leading contracting firms) was also involved in the building of the Canadian National (and later also Canadian Pacific) Hotel Vancouver.

10. Visitors could take in panoramic views of the city for 25 cents. This apparently proved too costly during the 1930s, so the observation deck was little used by the time that area in the building was converted into a two-storey suite for Alfred J.T. Taylor's family, as I will discuss below. However, the observation deck was used, as evinced in a diary entry by local teacher Charlotte Black, on October 19, 1930. See "Charlotte Black Diary, 1930–1932," SAGA Document Collection, University of British Columbia Archives, <<http://digitalcollections.library.ubc.ca/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/saga&CISOPTN=1877&CISOSHOW=1804&REC=1>>, accessed January 2012.

shipping operations in the city—thereby leaving an impressive mark on the socioeconomic and physical fabric of the city—while making important inroads into the local community through the contracting of local trades for the building's construction.¹¹

By introducing the future building to Vancouverites through a department store window,¹² Stimson's was no doubt imbuing the structure with the aura akin to the commodity fetish. Standing before the window display (shop windows being the classic medium of fashion knowledge), the citizen of Vancouver saw the city's consumer culture alive with activity and him/herself reflected onto it and projected into it (fig. 1.2). As Jean-Paul Bouillon notes, "[t]he space defined by the shop window is an unreal space, like that of a Cubist painting: it is situated both in front of the glass (due to the reflection) and beyond it (but here compressed and subject to definite constraints)."¹³ This kind of unreal space is at the heart of the experience of modernity. It highlights the self-consciousness of the modern subject, the fashioned but fashioning self. As well it indicates the mobility of both desire and life in the modern city. White-collar work, as suggested by the arrangement of the desk and chair, the automobiles and architecture reflected in the glass, the institution of the department store, and the images of the future office tower, all position the citizen in the simultaneously material and virtual, placed and placeless space of the modern city—a space of fantasy projection, community or public identification, and self-reflection. Like a commodity (and the commodities traded within), the future skyscraper would become a container and progenitor of desire, not only for the business community, but for civic boosters as well. And, as I will discuss below, the use of Art Deco only helped to fuel identification and desire by linking the strategy of the shop window to the decorative program of the office building. As a commodity, the building suggested a new level of democratic social economy, a factor which I will examine in greater detail in the next chapter.

But like the commodity fetish that promises more than it can fulfill, the Marine Building marked a rupture between the over-inflated boom of the late 1920s and the economic crisis of the 1930s, putting into

11. This was made clear in a meeting of the Building Planning Commission of the National Association of Building Owners and Managers, held at the Hotel Vancouver on March 4 and 5, 1929. The history of the company was outlined at the outset of the meeting by Hobbs, and the issue of contracting was brought up toward the end of the two-day meeting, also by Hobbs. See "Commission Meeting Minutes" made available online by the Canadian Architectural Archives, <<http://contentdm.ualgary.ca/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/marine&CISOPTR=686&REC=16>>, especially pp. 2–5 and 257 (page numbers refer to text pagination, not links to individual pages), accessed January 2012.
12. Of course, the building was also presented in newspapers. See for instance: "Marine Building to Be City's Largest," *Sunday Province*, February 24, 1929; and "Work Starts on Erection of 18-Storey Skyscraper Costing \$1,500,000," *Vancouver Sun*, March 13, 1929.
13. Jean-Paul Bouillon, "The Shop Window," in Jean Clair (ed.), *The 1920s: Age of Metropolis*, Montréal, Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, 1991, p. 163. Bouillon discusses the rise of the shop window in France and its relationship to fine arts. Tag Gronberg likewise examines the emergent artistry of the shop window in Paris of the 1920s in *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998; see in particular pp. 96–101.

high relief the contrast of abundance and scarcity. Construction on the office tower would take an additional six months beyond the proposed March opening, due in no small part to the stock market crash in New York on October 29 that year and the related financial crisis. Construction slowed and cost the Toronto bond house an additional 1.1 million dollars. A letter from Stimson's Building and Investment Co. Limited to its shareholders, dated October 1930, explained the problems faced by the company in financing the building. The project was plagued in November 1929 by sluggish investment in Marine Building securities ("less than half the average received for previous months"), which resulted in a reduction of workers and rise in expenses; then "false reports all over the Province of Ontario [...] that the building was about to fail [...] prevented [...] further sales of Marine Building securities."¹⁴ To save the project and protect investors, the management, accompanied by contractor for the Marine Building Colonel E.J. (Edward John) Ryan, negotiated a loan for \$800,000 in New York City with the Starrett Investing Company.¹⁵ Unable to pay interest during the building's construction, Stimson's decided to push forward on the project "to complete the building and commence receiving revenues for the shareholders at the earliest possible date," thereby delaying interest payments to shareholders for the first time in its history.¹⁶

The finished building opened on October 8, 1930, in the lead-up to "Prosperity Week," an initiative launched by the Vancouver Board of Trade, Vancouver Retail Merchants' Association Board of Trade, Chamber of Commerce and Retailers' Organization, and Famous Players Canadian Corporation to stimulate the local economy. Local writer David Brock remembered "Prosperity Week" as an attempt

to end the Depression as a mere state of mind. All it caused was a series of misadventures, ending with a really big one when the brand new Canadian National pier at the foot of Main Street burned down. The smoke from a big burning wharf is a heavy black, from all that creosote on the pilings. We all laughed, but not from a spirit of vandalism. No, it was the name and aim of Prosperity Week that did it, compared with the results.¹⁷

14. Letter from Stimson's Buildings and Investment Co. Limited to shareholders, PAM 1930-1998c, Vancouver City Archives.
15. This is explained in a letter from Ryan to the city archivist, Major Matthews, dated January 26, 1949 ("Marine Building," Major Matthews collection, Topical and categorical files, Add. MSS. 54, 504-F-8 file 58, Vancouver City Archives). However, Ryan claims the loan was for \$1,000,000 and that "[i]t had been arranged in the original transaction that if further moneys were required, the original loan would be extended to provide funds to complete, giving Stimson and Johnson interests two years to repay the additional loan." That might suggest that the original loan was for \$800,000—as I do not believe that F.G. Johnson would misrepresent transactions to the shareholders of the company he was presiding—and that it grew to over one million dollars in the end.
16. Letter from Stimson's Buildings and Investment Co. Limited to shareholders, PAM 1930-1998c, Vancouver City Archives.
17. David Brock, "Introduction," in Anne Kloppenborg, Alice Niwinski, Eve Johnson, with Robert Gruetter (eds.), *Vancouver's First Century: A City Album, 1860-1985*, Vancouver and Toronto, Douglas & McIntyre, 1985 [rev. ed.], p. xix.

Figure 1.3.
Burrard St. with Hotel
Vancouver no. 3,
and Egremont House
Apartments (view
from Marine Building),
Vancouver (BC), 1931.

Within months after the Marine Building opened its doors, the “Jungle” under the Georgia Viaduct—essentially a shantytown of the unemployed—was inhabited.¹⁸ Already in October 1930, desperate citizens were writing to the civic Relief Department, demanding a fair hearing, compassion, and assistance.¹⁹ Another image, that of the unfinished Canadian National Railway’s Hotel Vancouver seen from the Marine Building (fig. 1.3), summed up the end of the boom. The hotel, begun in 1928, would be completed in 1939 only with the merging of ownership with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), in time for the royal visit of



Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 5695

18. An article, “Fear Typhoid from Jungles” (*The Vancouver Sun*, September 4, 1931), described the desperate situation: “I visited the ‘Jungle’ below Georgia viaduct [...] There are about 250 men there. Grounds are filthy and covered with decaying garbage, with open toilets. Flies swarm over everything and on all open food. I consider that, with the rainy season approaching, we are in grave danger of an epidemic of typhoid or other disease. Many of the men are lying on the ground which is becoming damp, and they are certain to suffer from bronchial and rheumatic troubles” (p. 104). This is in *Vancouver’s First Century: A City Album, 1860–1985*, *ibid.*
19. See Todd McCallum, “Vancouver through the Eyes of a Hobo: Experience, Identity, and Value in the Writing of Canada’s Depression-Era Tramps,” *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 59, spring 2007, pp. 43–68. See his discussion of Harold Whyte’s letter to Vancouver’s Relief and Employment Committee, which expresses the disdain held by the homeless and poverty-stricken toward government and big businesses (pp. 43–45). His article also discusses issues of gender, race, and class, particularly as constructed by V.W.F. [Victor Wadham Forster]’s *Vancouver through the Eyes of a Hobo* (Vancouver, s.n., 1934).



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Figure 1.4.
Guest suite, Hotel
Vancouver, 1939.

King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.²⁰ By contrast, the Art Deco interiors in the hotel suggested a sense of optimism. The suite pictured in figure 1.4 is imbued with a calm elegance, even glamour, as guests relax above the streets of the city. The *moderne* furnishings assert a restful atmosphere, removed from the anxious tenor of the time with world war on the horizon. While the Art Deco radio cabinet on the right might suggest a link to the tense, outside world, its form, as I discuss in chapter 4, is more in keeping with a controlled distance marked by an aestheticized cosmopolitanism.

It seems fitting that the Art Deco Marine Building led to “Prosperity Week,” for it, like the style, stimulated desires, even if they would remain at least partially elusive. It is interesting to note as well that the Hudson’s Bay Company department store—the place where six years earlier a display introduced members of the public to the Marine Building—would be targeted by demonstrators in 1935. These men had come to the city from relief camps and marched through the warehouses of grocery

20. Despite its completion in time for the royal visit, the King and Queen did not stay at the hotel. This was the third Hotel Vancouver and was designed by John Smith Archibald and John Schofield for the CNR. After the merging of ownership, the nearby second Hotel Vancouver (owned by the CPR and discussed below) was converted into a government administration building during the war before being demolished in 1949.

wholesalers before entering the department store. When police arrived, the men proceeded to smash showcases and scatter merchandise before being driven from the store. More than an act of vandalism, attacking the space of fantasy projection was a highly symbolic strike at the fuelling of unfulfilled desires. Mayor Gerry McGeer, believing the group of unemployed that subsequently congregated at Victory Square might erupt into a Communist-led revolution, read them the *Riot Act*.²¹ Despite the desperate times evinced by the incident, the Marine Building was largely promoted in the same optimistic manner (by that time the building had been purchased by British Pacific Properties),²² although for some, no doubt, it represented the desires of an earlier time of affluence this stood in the face of basic desires for employment and economic stability.

■ The \$200,000,000 Skyline

The construction of tall buildings often goes hand in glove with the peak of an economic cycle, becoming reminders of past visions of civic prosperity.²³ It was in this context that Art Deco emerged in Vancouver. The city's history—and urban fabric—was marked by periods of boom and bust, thus I will briefly outline the economic and architecture setting of the city in order to understand how the Marine Building fits into the larger urban fabric. The Edwardian and later Deco architecture, it will be seen, was singular in nature for the most part, rather than part of comprehensive city planning, as in the case of much Modern Movement architecture.²⁴

Situated between Burrard Inlet to the north and the north arm of the Fraser River to the south, territory inhabited for hundreds (or perhaps thousands) of years by the Salish people,²⁵ the city developed out of the sawmill town site of Granville (known as “Gastown”). The future

21. For a description of the events see Eric Nicol, *Vancouver*, Toronto, Doubleday Canada, 1978, pp. 174–175.
22. Comparing the listings of tenants in the Marine Building (355 Burrard St.) in *Wrigley's British Columbia Directory* (and its successor published by Sun Directories Ltd.) shows a steady increase in tenants through the 1930s.
23. As van Leeuwen (*The Skyward Trend of Thought...*, *op. cit.*, p. 36) points out, skyscrapers were built especially at critical turns in the economy: 1875, 1929, and 1982. For him, “[t]hey seem to serve as magic totems to ward off the evil turn of the economy.”
24. For a discussion of Vancouver's history of city planning, see Graeme Wynn, “The Rise of Vancouver,” in Graeme Wynn and Timothy Oke (eds.), *Vancouver and Its Region*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1992, pp. 116–129. For more on the Modern Movement in Vancouver, see Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938–1963*, Montréal, Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1997.
25. As Robert A.J. McDonald notes in *Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863–1913* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1996), the Squamish people migrated seasonally from the north, while the Musqueam were centred at the mouth of the Fraser (p. 5). Squamish and Musqueam, he points out, were connected through webs of social and economic relations, which allowed a sharing of places. McDonald discusses how the First Nations' peoples intermingled with the white settlers, taking mainly non-skilled industrial jobs.

metropolis owed its name, early prosperity, and development largely to the CPR, which chose the site as terminus of the transcontinental railway due to the natural harbour and provincial grant of some 6,275 acres of crown land.²⁶ With the completion of the railroad in 1887, and following a disastrous fire in 1886, the city witnessed rapid growth from a population of 1,000 in 1886 to 13,709 in 1891.²⁷ The growth was accompanied by infrastructure construction, including an electric street railway line. The initial spurt was fuelled by land speculation, but the promise of the new city also saw investment in new industries, such as the B.C. Sugar Refinery—a company premised on Vancouver’s role as international port (importing raw sugar from the South Pacific) and metropolitan centre (distributing refined sugar to the hinterland).²⁸ The initial growth was interrupted by the North American Depression of the mid-1890s; however, the Klondike gold rush of 1897–1898 would see Vancouver surpass Victoria as the province’s most important commercial centre. That was due in no small part to an aggressive advertising campaign in Eastern Canadian, British, and American newspapers,²⁹ indicating the importance of communication and transportation links to the health of the city. Between 1897 and 1912, the city’s population grew from 20,000 to 122,000.³⁰ By 1900, Vancouver dominated fishing and lumbering, the two principal industries in the province, and the city’s business leaders had their eye on the mineral-rich Kootenays, fruits in the Okanagan Valley, and, further east, the wheat of the Prairie Provinces.

Once again, the Terminal City felt the effects of external economic forces and experienced a depression, its population dropping by 1916 to 96,000.³¹ As historian Robert A.J. McDonald explains, the volatile economy of the peak years produced a surplus of skilled workers. That was compounded with the loss of British confidence in Canadian investments, which sprung from “panic on European money markets, diminished security prices, and restriction of further lending abroad” due to the Balkan wars.³² Because these troubles were experienced province-wide, and not just in urban areas as was the case in the Canadian Prairie Provinces, the depression in Vancouver caused a decline in the actual economy, not just in the rate of expansion, as was the case in Winnipeg.³³

26. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, *op cit.*, p. 14. CPR Vice-President William Van Horne visited Granville in 1884 and decided the name of the settlement needed to better suggest its geographical location and apparently pronounced it “Vancouver,” despite confusion with the former Hudson Bay Fort Vancouver in Washington State and Vancouver Island.

27. Roy, *ibid.*, p. 26.

28. See Nicol, *Vancouver*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

29. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, *op cit.*, p. 51. She goes on to note the success of opening a Bureau of Information in Seattle (pp. 51–52).

30. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

31. McDonald, *Making Vancouver...*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 147. He notes that the value of building permits dropped from \$19.4 million in 1912 to \$1.6 million in 1915: “Rents for commercial properties dropped by 50 percent, and the vacancy rate for office space reached 80 percent.”

The period of prosperity (1900–1913) that had solidified Vancouver's business community along Hastings and Pender streets, as well as the north-south artery, Granville Street, left behind a series of tall buildings. These included the 14-storey Vancouver Block (Parr & Fee, 1910–1912) and 11-storey Rogers Building on Granville (Gould & Champney, 1911–1912); the 10-storey London Building on Pender (Somervell & Putnam, 1912), the 15-storey Standard Building (Russell, Babcock, and Rice, 1913) and 13-storey Dominion Building (J.S. Helyer and Son, 1908–1910) on Hastings; and the 17-storey World Building (W.T. Whiteway, 1911–1912) on Beatty Street.³⁴ As architectural historian Harold Kalman notes, the Dominion Building was promoted by the Imperial Trust Company (which would merge with the Dominion Trust Company before completion of the building) as “an object of pride to every citizen [...] advertising our city as the most prosperous go ahead commercial city on the continent.”³⁵ For a short time the building was the tallest steel-constructed edifice on the West Coast and tallest building in the British Empire, a record held later by the World Building upon its completion.

Architectural historian Geoffrey Carr has recently argued that the World Building (seen on the far left of the bottom view of Vancouver in fig. 1.1, p. 42) was instrumental in the production of place for the international port.³⁶ Vancouver continues to be characterized by terms that suggest an elsewhere, which has over time brought about responses seeking to garner a sense of place. For Carr, “the World Building produced a locus that beamed certain colonial ideals of material progress and moral rectitude, an *axis mundi*, around which a new identity for the city would circumambulate.”³⁷ The World Building and the other contemporaneous structures became advertisements for the economic development of the young city and emblematic of Edwardian urbanism. Indeed, keeping in mind the other major building projects in the city at the time, including, significantly, the Federal Post Office (1905–1910), the British Columbia Electric Railway Company Building (1911–1912), the Courthouse (1906–1912), the CPR's enormous Hotel Vancouver (1913) and railway terminal (1912–1914), as well as major department stores—Woodward's, Spencer's, and the Hudson's Bay Company—the citizens and business leaders of the city were quite consciously constructing a modern urban fabric with definite retail, wholesale, financial, and residential districts. The optimism of the building spree and the confidence as embodied in the construction of (built) place—most dramatically in the tall building—would reappear in the mid- to late 1920s, climaxing with the Marine Building.

34. See Harold Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver: Ten Tours of the City and Its Buildings*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1978 [rev. ed.], pp. 40, 83, 85, 91, 94.

35. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 94.

36. Geoffrey Carr, “Stitching Vancouver's New Clothes: The World Building, Confederation, and the Making of Place,” in Rhodri Windsor Liscombe (ed.), *Architecture and the Canadian Fabric*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2011, pp. 196–216. The World Building is now known as the Sun Tower.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

The Great War left psychological no less than economic scars on Vancouver, as it did on many parts of the world;³⁸ however, the economic benefits arising from shipbuilding contracts arrived only in 1917 and were not sustained beyond the end of the global conflict.³⁹ Although the Panama Canal had opened in 1914, Vancouver did not receive the expected boost to its economy (perhaps best symbolized by the little-used Canadian Government grain elevator known as Stevens' Folly, after the local member of Parliament who fought for its construction) until the mid-1920s. By that time, shipping had become one of the leading industries in the city.⁴⁰ The number of ocean-going ships increased by 260 percent over the 1922 total of 720, which meant further investment by the railroads in infrastructure. The CPR and Harbour Commission built new piers, and the Harbour Commission and private companies increased the grain storage capacity from 1.25 million to 6.5 million bushels between 1923 and 1924.⁴¹ Gerald G. McGeer, with the support of the Vancouver Board of Trade as well as the Alberta Government, represented the British Columbian Government before the Board of Railway Commissioners in the fight to reduce freight rates.⁴² The reduction of rates produced a rise in the volume of grain, and Vancouver gradually supplanted Winnipeg as the metropolitan commercial and distribution centre for the prairies. More than simply a metropolitan centre of distribution, however, Vancouver, given its position as a "Terminal City" connected by transportation and trade to international ports and markets, became effectively a cosmopolitan city. An article in *The Vancouver Daily World* reported:

Overnight, almost it has been recognized that the Panama Canal makes Vancouver the port of Western Canada, the Montreal of the Pacific coast, with a vaster potential trade than Montreal ever knew rapidly developing. The word has gone abroad all over the continent: "Watch Vancouver, B.C."⁴³

38. Alan Morley, in *Vancouver: From Milltown to Metropolis* (Vancouver, Mitchell Press, [2nd ed.] 1969), explains that "the impact of the First World War is difficult to convey" to those who only remember WWII. He goes on, "[t]here had been no conflict of such magnitude and menace for a century [...] [and] [t]o no man alive had its threat ever been any more than the possible collapse of a single nation; certainly to none had it meant the likely end of an entire civilization and of his own way of life. During the next five years, that threat was to come closely home to every citizen of the Western World, and Vancouver did not escape it." "There were streets in Vancouver," he notes, "where every house had a man overseas, and in which every block mourned its two or three dead before the Armistice came. For sheer grinding, continuous, merciless slaughter, the Hitler war never approached it" (p. 139).
39. Early in 1917, the Imperial Munitions Board awarded contracts for steel steamers, benefiting in particular the yards of J. Coughlan & Sons of False Creek, which became the city's largest single employer by May 1918, according to Roy (*Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, *op. cit.*, p. 88). See also Norbert MacDonald, *Distant Neighbors: A Comparative Study of Seattle and Vancouver* (Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1987), who describes how Seattle's economic and population growth outstripped Vancouver at the time (pp. 102–104).
40. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.* See also David Ricardo Williams, *Mayor Gerry: The Remarkable Gerald Grattan McGeer*, Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 1986.
43. "Time to Extend City Limits to Accommodate People Soon to Crowd In," *The Vancouver Daily World*, February 12, 1924. It is reproduced in Gruetter, *Vancouver's First Century*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

The success of shipping and related industries was made manifest on the Vancouver skyline. The title of an article, “Vancouver’s \$200,000,000 Skyline,” published in a special “Marine Building Supplement” of the *Vancouver Sun* on October 7, 1930, indicates the investment in the growing international port city (fig. 1.5).⁴⁴ The caption suggests that the “picture tells the story of Vancouver’s progress probably better than the ablest pen could do.” Then are listed the costs of the structures marking the skyline from right to left:

C.P.S.S. Empress of Asia, \$2,000,000; Woodward’s Limited, \$2,500,000; MS. Aorangi, \$3,000,000; C.P.R. Station, \$1,000,000; David Spencer Limited, \$2,500,000; C.P.R. Piers B, C, D and wharves, \$4,000,000; Royal Bank of Canada, \$2,000,000; Roger’s Building, \$1,000,000; Bank of Montreal, \$1,000,000; Marine Building, \$2,000,000; Hudson’s Bay Co. Store, \$4,000,000; Birks Building, \$1,000,000; Vancouver Block, \$1,000,000; Hotel Vancouver, \$3,500,000; Hotel Georgia, \$1,250,000; Medical Dental, \$1,000,000; C.N.R. Hotel, \$7,000,000.⁴⁵

The image and caption point to the material manifestation of wealth, particularly in the region west of Granville Street, highlighting the move of investment and status away from the older eastern financial and commercial hub around Main Street, as I will discuss below. But the picture also makes plain the iconic power of these new structures, tying together the virtual and real, aspiration and actual investment, into a multivalent image. This logic would become particularly pronounced in the spatial and decorative program of the Marine Building. Indeed and not surprisingly, given the context of the image, the Marine Building stands out as the tallest and most impressive building.

Figure 1.5.
“Vancouver’s
\$200,000,000 Skyline.”

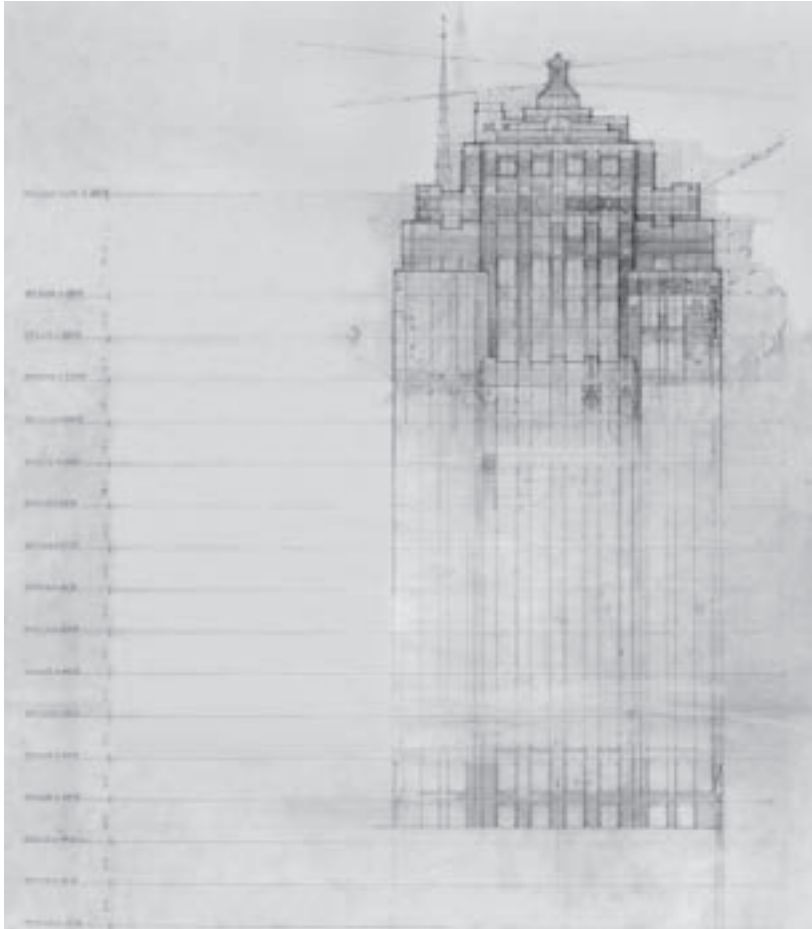


From *Vancouver Sun*, Marine Building Supplement,
October 7, 1930, p. 5

44. *Vancouver Sun*, Marine Building Supplement, October 7, 1930, p. 5. The image was also reproduced in a brochure sent to shareholders of Stimson’s Building and Investment Co. Limited (PAM 1930-1998b, Vancouver City Archives). Interestingly, \$200,000,000 would be associated with Vancouver’s skyline again in the mid-1960s with Project 200 (a plan projected to cost \$200,000,000). The plan was to redevelop eight blocks between Woodward’s Department Store and the CPR station, and from Hastings Street to the waterfront. It was to include a downtown freeway and a series of large office buildings, a hotel, and a number of residential complexes. The project failed, saving historic Gastown and Chinatown. See Robert W. Collier, “Downtown: Metropolitan Focus,” in Evenden (ed.), *Vancouver: Western Metropolis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 163–164.

45. *Ibid.*

Once constructed, the Marine Building was the tallest structure west of Toronto.⁴⁶ Though it would continue to command the city's skyline for many years,⁴⁷ figure 1.5, taken from the water, emphasizes its height. The building itself was directly associated with the harbour, built to house industries associated with the burgeoning shipping industries. In fact, at an early stage in the design of the building, McCarter and Nairne even conceptualized the structure as a lighthouse, complete with a lamp (fig. 1.6). The view from the harbour was crucial to the design of the building.



◀ **Figure 1.6.**
McCarter and Nairne,
elevation of Marine
Building, n.d.

McCarter and Nairne Fonds, Marine Building, Canadian Architectural Archives,
University of Calgary, MCA 447-12, Accession Number 160A/83.15

46. While it is commonly noted that the Marine Building joined the ranks of the Dominion Building and World Building as holding the record for the tallest building in the British Empire, it should be noted that on the occasion of the building's opening, newspapers did not make similar claims. In fact, an article in the *Province* explained: "The building, which is twenty-five storeys from the C.P.R. track, is the largest, highest and most modern office building in Western Canada, and is only exceeded by one or two buildings in the Empire." See Lt.-Col. O.F. Brothers, "New Marine Building Is Citadel of Trade and Commerce at Vancouver," *Vancouver Sunday Province*, October 5, 1930.
47. The building's height record in the city was eclipsed by the Guinness Tower (Charles Paine and Associates, 1967–1969) just to the west on Hastings. The Guinness family owned both structures. With recent construction of a hotel north of the Marine Building, the Deco-era edifice is no longer as visible from the harbour. See Mackie, "Time Overtakes the Marine Building," *op. cit.*

J.W. Hobbs, the vice-president of Stimson's, remarked in a meeting with the Building Planning Commission of the National Association of Building Owners and Managers in March 1929:

I want to say that we are very anxious to have this building have a good appearance from the harbour. We are on an empire path from Europe to the Orient and sooner or later we will be having the notables from all parts of the world going through here and we want this building to be as nice as we can make it on the harbour front.⁴⁸

Hobbs added that he was not in favour of external fire escapes that spoiled the image of the building from nearby Stanley Park.⁴⁹ His comments emphasize the importance of the building's outward appearance to the owners and suggest that visual effect was a crucial function. The building was to set the tone for the city at large for "notables" as well as tourists visiting the 1,000-acre Stanley Park, situated further west of the building (recall fig. 1.1, p. 42). As I will discuss below, the use of Art Deco for the structure would reinforce the more conservative aspect of building on the "empire path," the sense of a local re-centring of business (and emphasizing of particular businesses), and the idea of the city and the building as embodying modernity.

The Marine Building has figured prominently in the production of tourist imagery for Vancouver, both in illustrated "Views of Vancouver" and picture postcards (e.g., fig. 1.1), suggesting its presence as an iconic commodity. As historian Michael Dawson points out, tourist associations in Victoria and Vancouver sprung up in 1902,⁵⁰ interestingly not long after the term "skyline" came into common usage.⁵¹ Dawson explains that during the interwar years, strategies for tourism shifted: no longer was the prime objective garnering tourists who intended to invest in British Columbia; instead, tourists were recast as consumers.⁵² Even in Depression-stricken Vancouver, the Civic Federation of Vancouver happily reported in its *Year Book* of 1931 "an increase in the tourist traffic to British Columbia [...] as compared with 1929, the figures being: 181,798 foreign automobiles entered, and last year the number was 185,418."⁵³ The Deco style of the Marine Building—through its iconicity—would help to visualize value, reaffirming pre-existing value systems. And Vancouver, by

48. "Commission Meeting Minutes," p. 29.

49. This was a factor in the building having the first enclosed fire tower in the city.

50. Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890–1970*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2004, p. 37. Dawson's book investigates the importance of the tourist industry in the 1930s and 1940s and expertly situates tourism within the context of consumer culture. He does not, however, extend his argument to a discussion of the skyline nor particularly to architecture.

51. The term "skyline" was a modern invention, coming into common usage at the end of the nineteenth century, as David E. Nye points out in "The Sublime and the Skyline: The New York Skyscraper," in Moudry, *The American Skyscraper*, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

52. See his second chapter, "From the Investment to the Expenditure Imperative: Regional Cooperation and the Lessons of Modern Advertising, 1916–1935," in *Selling British Columbia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–79.

53. *Year Book of Vancouver, British Columbia*, Vancouver, Civic Federation of Vancouver, 1931, p. 141. That same book announced that Vancouver was the "World's Fastest Growing City."

association with the building, would appear representative of these value systems upholding notions of Empire, international commerce and trade, and even nation. Vancouver would be framed as a place worth visiting not only for its natural beauty, but also for its modernity.

The skyline—this image of modernity and success—was fuelled by local boosterism and optimism for Vancouver within international economies. The 1929 *Wrigley's British Columbia Directory* announced that “[t]he Pacific Era, destined to be the greatest in the history of world commerce, is dawning [...] and British Columbia is Canada’s gateway to the Pacific.”⁵⁴ Arthur P. Woollacott went even further in an article published in *MacLean's Magazine* in 1928. He claimed that Vancouver could become the largest city in Canada if not the capital of the English-speaking world by the middle of the twentieth century, an assertion he backed up with statistics evincing the city’s dramatic population and economic growth, its geographical position on transportation routes and near natural resources, and racial theories.⁵⁵ It should be noted that the spike in population growth in 1929, the point at which Vancouver surpassed Winnipeg as the third largest city in Canada, was the result of the amalgamation of Point Grey and South Vancouver with Vancouver. *The Beaver Canada First* reported that “[t]he huge progress that has been made by cities in Eastern Canada is going to be duplicated on the Pacific Coast within the next five years,” citing the growing mineral and lumber industries as well as the fact that “British Columbia leads all Canada in percentage of telephones—17.9 to every 100 persons.”⁵⁶ These statistics spoke to the modernity of Vancouver as the distribution centre for the resource-rich hinterland. At the opening ceremony, the successful grocer, businessman, and mayor W.H. (William Harold) Malkin claimed: “This Marine Building is a symbol of our new sea-consciousness, a trait that means much to the future of Vancouver [...] What is the future of it? A city treble and perhaps quadruple our present size in the next quarter century.”⁵⁷ The fact that Malkin referred to a “new sea-consciousness” reminds us of the projected growth of the shipping industries for the city. Lieutenant-Governor Robert Randolph Bruce, also on hand for the opening, characterized the rise of the West in these terms: “Canada is a great giant with its head in the west and its feet in the east.”⁵⁸

The Marine Building embodied the optimism of these civic boosters, expressing the modernity of the city far and wide through its representation. Art Deco, as a Janus-faced style that simultaneously borrowed from

54. *Wrigley's British Columbia Directory*, Vancouver, Wrigley Directories Ltd., 1929, p. 37.

55. Arthur P. Woollacott, F.R.G.S., “Canada’s Western Gateway,” *MacLean's Magazine*, March 15, 1928, pp. 6–7, 46–47.

56. “Vancouver, the Fastest Growing City in North America,” *The Beaver Canada First*, February 21, 1929, p. 3.

57. “Structure Shows Vancouver Spirit,” *Vancouver Sun*, October 9, 1930. Malkin was backed by the Christian Vigilance League and won the mayoral race against T.D. Taylor with the support of Vancouver’s more affluent citizens of the West End, Kitsilano, and Shaughnessy. Malkin was seen as a moral candidate who would help clean up the corruption of the municipal government. See Nicol, *Vancouver*, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

58. “Structure Shows Vancouver Spirit,” *ibid.*

the past (reinscribing the existing social order) but projected a vision of the future, became the most appropriate means with which to convey such optimism. Visually and materially, the edifice responded to desires of civic and business leaders to make Vancouver a world city, a crucial link on the Empire route to the Far East.

■ Siting/Sighting the Marine Building

The fact that the building was constructed on the edge of the natural shoreline—the area to the north which contained the CPR tracks having been reclaimed—meant that it would appear less towering when seen from other vantage points given the higher ground level elevations of the buildings further south.⁵⁹ Despite this, the building was strategically placed to convey messages not only to tourists in the park or dignitaries arriving from Coal Harbour, but also to the business and local communities. Spatially, the building continued the shift of the economic heart of the city west. As well, given its proximity to the railroads and steamship terminals, the building was situated on a nexus of international transportation and communication lines.

A 1932 aerial photograph (fig. 1.7) indicates how the situation of the building was spatially at a point of convergence. The view is from high above the West End, still a middle-class neighbourhood of Vancouver, looking east. The Marine Building was constructed on the site of the Mahon residence (purchased for \$300,000 in November 1928)—a reminder that the neighbourhood once housed some of Vancouver's elite, many of whom now resided outside the downtown core in the exclusive Shaughnessy and Point Grey neighbourhoods.⁶⁰ Outside the frame, behind the plane, would be Stanley Park. To the left is Coal Harbour, and partially visible in the photograph are the Canadian Pacific Railway's piers and some ocean-going steamships. The Marine Building is located on the natural shoreline; below it to the north on reclaimed land are seen the CPR's tracks and the Customs and Immigration Houses. At the right-hand side of the photograph is Georgia Street with the imposing Hotel Vancouver still under construction. Across the street is the Medical-Dental Building, also in the Art Deco style and built by McCarter and Nairne in 1929. Further east, blocked in the image by the Hotel Vancouver, is the Provincial Courthouse. That area was thus associated with tourism, professionals, and commerce stemming from Robson Street (located outside this shot, further south) and Granville Street further east. The proliferation of tall structures around the Marine Building indicates the financial

59. "City's Highest Building Is New Controversy," *Vancouver Province*, May 11, 1930, speaks to the issue of measuring versus appearing the tallest structure in Vancouver.

60. For a discussion of the West End's social development, see Wynn, "The Rise of Vancouver," *op. cit.*, pp. 129–134. And for more on its post-WWII transformation, see Sherry McKay, "'Urban Housekeeping' and Keeping the Modern Home," *B.C. Studies*, vol. 140, winter 2003, pp. 11–38.



Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 4488

district running along Hastings and Pender streets.⁶¹ A number of new financial buildings were erected contemporaneously with the Marine Building, including the Art Deco Stock Exchange Building (Townley & Matheson, 1928–1929) and the skyscraping Royal Bank Building (Blewitt Dodd and S.G. Davenport, 1931). Situated on the corner of Burrard and Hastings streets, the Marine Building thus marked the intersection of rail and sea, white-collar neighbourhood and business district.

The Marine Building was built to contain the Vancouver Board of Trade, Merchants' Exchange, Grain Exchange, a branch of the Bank of Montreal, and "leading merchants" in the shipping, lumber, insurance, import and export trades, thereby centralizing the business district under one roof.⁶² This was signalled most dramatically through its siting on Burrard at a jog in Hastings Street (fig. 1.8). The Marine Building extends over other office buildings and shops along Hastings Street, with its triumphal arched entryway and tower strategically centred for maximum impact. The entryway was even featured in *The Vancouver Sun* under the

Figure 1.7.
Aerial view looking east from over Pender and Georgia streets, Vancouver (BC), 1933.

61. When asked why he decided on the location, Hobbs explained that he had proposed two different sites—this one and the old Quadra Club—to the Secretary of the Merchants' Exchange and he preferred the Hastings and Burrard site. Regarding the area, Hobbs noted: "The local press describes it as transportation row. It is sometimes spoken of as financial row and not transportation row and they are all concentrating on that part of the City. It appears to me an ideal location from the response we have had from the people willing to go there." See "Commission Meeting Minutes," p. 5. The old Quadra Club was located on Hastings about a block east of Burrard Street.

62. "Marine Building Centralizes Trade of the Port of Vancouver," *Vancouver Sun*, Marine Building Supplement, October 7, 1930, p. 1.



Figure 1.8.
*Marine Building,
 Dominion Trust
 Building, and Flack
 Block, Vancouver (BC),
 1931.*

caption “Gateway to the Interior” (fig. 1.9), for the building was, through the operations of its clients, just that—a gateway to the resource-rich hinterland of British Columbia and beyond through the offices of import and export, lumber, grain, and mineral companies housed within. In 1932 the building would include amongst its tenants Price Waterhouse, Canadian Westinghouse, Bloedel Stewart and Welch Company (a prominent lumber company), and the office of architects McCarter and Nairne.⁶³ Through the 1930s the building would also host Canadian Airways, pointing to the intersection of different transportation and communication interests at the Marine Building, an issue I will return to below.⁶⁴ With so many major businesses represented in the office tower, the building might be seen as an extension of the elite space of the nearby private Vancouver and Terminal City clubs, located on Hastings Street just east of the building.⁶⁵

The Marine Building marked the continued shift away from the older economic engines of the city. This was made clear during a planning meeting for the building held in March of 1929. When discussing the issue of keeping a building of brick and terracotta clean, architect John McCarter

63. See *Wrigley's British Columbia Directory 1932*, Vancouver, Wrigley Directories Ltd., 1932.

64. See *The British Columbia and Yukon Directory 1935*, Vancouver, Wrigley Directories Ltd., 1935.

65. For more on these private clubs, see Wynn, “The Rise of Vancouver,” *op. cit.*, p. 132.



◀ **Figure 1.9.**
*Entrance to
 Marine Building
 on Hastings St.,
 Vancouver (BC),
 architects McCarter
 and Nairne,
 September 29, 1930.*

Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 12010

mentions: “we have a dirty city here, there is no doubt about that” but “[w]e are better off here than in the centre, because we are not so near the saw-mills [on the eastside] and factory plants on False Creek.”⁶⁶ The building was both further from pollution and from the physical material of the resource-based economy. In essence, the building, which housed offices and the Merchants’ Exchange, was representative of a more abstract form of capital, an advanced form of commerce associated with larger international networks of exchange. Art Deco in this context was associated with these systems of mobilities. The “new materials”—although terracotta was not new, it was used to great effect in Art Deco buildings worldwide—necessitated a move away from pollution stemming from “old” industries; thus the material conditions in this instance “place” Art Deco both in particular industries and spatially within the urban fabric.

66. “Commission Meeting Minutes,” p. 247.

■ Cosmopolitanism and the Production of a Local Mythology

The setback skyscraper form, together with common Art Deco motifs of transportation, abstracted depictions of plants and animals, and the use of diagonal lines, polychrome, and varied textures, immediately situated the structure within an international discourse of modernity. Visually the building conjured comparisons with American financial capitals—especially New York. In fact, Vancouver Harbour Commissioner Sam McClay made a direct comparison between Vancouver and New York, noting their situational similarity (in terms of harbours and rivers) and claiming, “[o]ur destiny will in time equal that of New York [...] [since] [w]e have behind this city an empire greater in extent and infinitely richer in natural wealth than that lying to the west of New York City.”⁶⁷ The building’s style was described originally as “perpendicular modified Gothic,” which no doubt alluded to the well-publicized 1922 Chicago Tribune Tower competition that influenced the design of skyscrapers not only in Chicago, but in New York and elsewhere.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the building would no doubt have resonated for Vancouverites with contemporary buildings in Canada, particularly those in Montréal and Toronto, especially since much was made of the fact that G.A. Stimson and Company represented a major investment from Toronto in the West and that the building would contain a branch of the Bank of Montreal.⁶⁹ The decorative program and the form of the building proffered a sense of cosmopolitanism and indicated the inclusion of the businesses housed within the building—as well as the city the building was purported to represent—within larger systems of national and international (even imperial) economic and cultural exchange. Although some of the earlier city landmarks were

67. “Chairman S. McClay Says Building Is a Credit to Vancouver,” *Vancouver Sunday Province*, October 5, 1930.

68. “Work Starts on Marine Skyscraper,” *Vancouver Daily Province*, March 13, 1929. The contest for the Chicago Tribune Building was widely covered in American architectural journals, including the publishing of many of the entries. John Mead Howell and Raymond Hood’s Gothic tower would win the competition, and their design was made manifest in 1925. It was the second-place entry, by Eliel Saarinen, which would have a larger impact on the production of Art Deco skyscrapers through the 1920s and into the 1930s. For more on the competition, see Katherine Solomonson, *The Chicago Tribune Tower Competition: Skyscraper Design and Cultural Change in the 1920s*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

69. Montréal, Canada’s largest city and financial capital in this period, saw the erection of many Art Deco buildings, notably the skyscraping Aldred Building (Barott and Blackader, 1929) and Architects Building (Ross and Macdonald, 1931). See Sandra Cohen-Rose, *Northern Deco: Art Deco Architecture in Montreal* (Montréal, Corona, 1996) for more on the Montréal Deco scene. Toronto, Canada’s second city at the time and an emerging financial powerhouse, given the development of mining in Northern Ontario and the opening of the West in the 1920s, saw the erection of several skyscrapers as well, including the Concourse Building (Baldwin & Greene, 1928), the Toronto Star Building (Chapman & Oxley, 1929), the Permanent Building (F. Hilton Wilkes, 1930), and the Canadian Bank of Commerce (York and Sawyer [of New York], with local associate architects Darling and Pearson, 1929–1931), which stood as the tallest building in the British Empire until 1962. See Tim Morawetz, *Art Deco Architecture in Toronto: A Guide to the City’s Buildings from the Roaring Twenties and the Depression*, Toronto, Glue Inc., 2009.

producers of place and did so through a knowledge of architectural form-making associated with and perhaps suggestive of other places, the use of Art Deco in the Marine Building signalled something different. Art Deco, a popular mode linked to consumer culture, had a broad, public appeal. And with its omnivorous range of iconographic sources, it more evocatively gestured to the cosmopolitan while referring directly to the local.

Vancouver is an apposite site for exploring the tensions of cosmopolitanism, for its modernity and place within international networks of trade and commerce made it seem to many of its citizens like a cosmopolitan place. For instance, the city's longest-serving mayor and builder of the World Building, L.D. (Louis Denison) Taylor, remarked in 1910: "I am the mayor of a cosmopolitan city—I should rather say of a city of cosmopolitans whose sense of cityhood [...] has [...] all the jealousy and [...] self-consciousness and the self-importance of youth."⁷⁰ As a young city and metropolitan port, Vancouver was (and continues to be) a place of convergence of people from different parts of the world. The cosmopolitanism of the youthful city was not based on the cultural mosaic model dependent on acceptance and the celebration of difference that it purports to be an exemplar of today. And I would argue that the cosmopolitanism described by Taylor in the Edwardian era was different from that expressed in the Marine Building—although it should be noted that the city continued to be one of "cosmopolitans," but one sharply divided along racial, cultural, and social lines.⁷¹ Taylor's World Building employed an eclectic Edwardian style, built of local timber and bricks, but visually referred to cultural economies of Empire (albeit in a parochial manner).⁷² In a way, the building emblemized the cosmopolitanism of the first decades of twentieth-century Vancouver. Prominent Vancouverites defined themselves in relation to Great Britain and saw (and modelled) their city as a reflection of British (imperial) culture.

Art Deco was likewise an eclectic style, but its cosmopolitan range of influences was more diverse. The Marine Building's decorative program, as I will discuss in greater detail below, referred to imperial systems no less than national emblems (Canadian geese, Canadian Pacific liners, etc.), while its skyscraper form referenced the new financial superpower in the post-World War I era, the United States. The building was thus even more outwardly hybrid—where the local (and even Canadian) was premised

70. Quoted in Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, *op. cit.*, p. 51. Taylor was crucial in the amalgamation of South Vancouver and Point Grey with Vancouver, although he would not serve as mayor over the unified city when it officially came into being on January 1, 1929.

71. See Wynn, "The Rise of Vancouver," *op. cit.*, pp. 134–145.

72. See Carr's analysis of the building in "Stitching Vancouver's New Clothes..." *op. cit.* For more on Edwardian architecture, see Richard Fellows, *Edwardian Civic Structures and Their Details*, Oxford, Architectural Press, 1999. For the Vancouver context, see Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, "Fabricating the Legalities of State in the Imperial West: The Social Work of the Courthouse in Late Victorian and Edwardian British Columbia," *Law Text Culture*, vol. 8, 2004, pp. 57–82; and Anthony A. Barrett and Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *Francis Rattenbury and British Columbia: Architecture and Challenge in the Imperial Age*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1983.

more on the joint influence of Britain and America. Vancouver was staged by the building not as an outpost of empire but as a bustling metropolitan centre indicative of the vigour of a more nationalistic country, a city that could compete with British and American centres. This indicates the complexity of cosmopolitanism, which could refer simultaneously to nation, the local, as well as larger sociocultural and political economies. The cosmopolitanism of Art Deco thus suggests a spirit of independence, yet one inscribed within a network of pre-existing systems of mobility.

This logic is apparent in the “\$200,000,000 Skyline” promotional image discussed above (fig. 1.5, p. 54). Included in the tabulation of the prosperity indicated by the skyline are ocean liners, the *Empress of Asia* and the *MS Aorangi*.⁷³ This reminds us of Vancouver’s positioning within a network of international ports. During the interwar period, these vessels travelled between Vancouver and the ports of East Asia (Japan, China, and Hong Kong) as well as to Australia and New Zealand. Vancouver’s physical representation (*i.e.*, its buildings as imaged in the skyline) was thus extended beyond the city’s boundaries, enlarging its virtual representation, and highlighting the interpenetration of the two in the fabrication of the city. It should be further observed that the inclusion of liners suggested an elite addition to what was still largely a frontier city. As discussed in the Introduction, the ocean liner was a prime site of Art Deco styling, and its representation through Hollywood film allowed for virtual/imaginative if not actual access to an aristocratic, leisurely lifestyle. Most important, though, is the fact that these liners were not built in the city, were not “made of Vancouver” in a material sense. By including the liners in the representation of the city’s built environment, the *Vancouver Sun* was claiming the idea of shipping and of liners for Vancouver, in a sense highlighting the revenues flowing from the liners into the port as a significant part of the city.⁷⁴

The decorative program of the Marine Building followed a similar strategy. Just as the image of the skyline was to represent the city, the iconography around the main entrance on Burrard Street was designed to naturalize a history of the city that privileged marine business (like the ones housed within the building) and, by extension, the cosmopolitan

73. The *Empress of Asia* was built in 1913 by Fairfield Shipping and Engineering in Govan, Scotland. It served in both world wars as a troop and material carrier and was owned and operated by Canadian Pacific Steamships Limited. For more on its history, see *Empress of Asia Research Group*, <<http://www.empressofasia.com>>, September 8, 2004, accessed January 2012. The *MS Aorangi* was also built by Fairfield, though in 1924. In 1925, the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand combined with the Canadian Pacific Railway to form the Canadian-Australian Line, at which point the *Aorangi* was transferred to joint ownership. It was assigned to this line in 1931. Like the *Empress of Asia*, the *Aorangi* served as a troopship beginning in September 1940 and was laid up in Sydney in May 1953. See Frederick Emmons, *Pacific Liners, 1927–1972*, Newton Abbot (UK), David & Charles, 1973, pp. 48, 50; and Robert D. Turner, *The Pacific Empresses: An Illustrated History of Canadian Pacific Railway’s Empress Liners on the Pacific Ocean*, Victoria (BC), Sono Nis Press, 1981.

74. It should also be noted that these liners were owned by the CPR, one of the major stakeholders (and landholders) in Vancouver—a company of national importance. Interestingly, much of the development celebrated in figure 1.5 was built on CPR land, west of Granville.

situation of the city within international networks of exchange. I use the term “naturalize” purposefully to invoke Roland Barthes’s semiological work on the creation of mythologies, where he argues that meanings of signs are most often culturally constructed and supportive of a particular political or at least sociocultural agenda.⁷⁵ In the case of the Marine Building, it is convenient that Greco-Roman mythology is alluded to—particularly mythological figures associated with the sea.

Above the rotating doors to the entrance, a ship emerges from an emblematic city against a backdrop of (once gilded) rays of a setting sun together with a flock of abstracted Canadian geese (fig. 1.9).⁷⁶ The cross imaged on the main sail reminds us of narratives of colonization as a Christian, “civilizing” mission as well as the relationship between Christianity and capitalism. This entranceway resonates with that of the contemporaneous Eastern Columbia Building (Claud Beelman, 1929) in downtown Los Angeles (fig. 1.10); however, at the Marine Building the image of Canadian geese would carry a local, even nationalist connotation.⁷⁷ The local is invoked even more directly through eight episodes encapsulating a history of Western discovery, exploration, and colonization of Vancouver in a narrative bound to notions of technological progress. The history is represented through a series of ships in terracotta panels in the reveals of the main entrance: on the south side are Drake’s *Golden Hind* (1577), Quadra’s *Sonora* (1775), Cook’s *Resolution* (1776), and Vancouver’s *Discovery* (1792); while on the north side a history of steam is portrayed beginning with the *Beaver* (1835)—the first steamer on the Pacific—and the *HMS Egeria* (1898), followed by CPR’s ocean liner the *Empress of Japan* (1890) and its 1930 successor of the same name (fig. 1.11).⁷⁸ The reference to the CPR’s 1930 *Empress of Japan* curiously does not include the name of the ship.⁷⁹ The Art Deco interiors of the ocean liner would have resonated with the “restricted modernistic style” of the Marine Building (as it was described in a contemporary pamphlet).⁸⁰

75. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* [trans. Annett Lavers], New York, Noonday Press, 1972; and Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* [trans. Richard Howard], Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997.
76. “Oral History: McCarter, J.Y. and Leithead, W.,” interview by Harold Kalman, interview transcript, p. 15, McCarter Nairne Fonds, Marine Building, Acc. 20A/77.69, Canadian Architectural Archives, University of Calgary. Rays of the sun were a common Art Deco trope often connoting optimism, a connection to ancient culture, and/or referring to or resonating with the recent fad of sunbathing.
77. The building is located at 849 South Broadway and was built by Adolph Sieroty to house both his Eastern Outfitting Company (which sold household goods and appliances) and his Columbia Outfitting Company (which sold clothing). See Cooper *et al.*, *Los Angeles Art Deco (Images of America)*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
78. See McCarter and Nairne’s description of the panels in their article, “The Marine Building, Vancouver, B.C.,” *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, vol. 8, no. 7, 1931, p. 259.
79. Just days before the excavation for the Marine Building, the framing of the *Empress of Japan* was completed by the Fairfield Shipbuilding Company in Govan, Scotland. “Framing of Empress of Japan Completed,” *Journal of Commerce and Building Record*, March 11, 1929, p. 2. For discussion and images of the Deco interiors of the *Empress of Japan*, see Turner, *The Pacific Empresses*, *op. cit.*, pp. 157–174.
80. A.E. Austin & Co., *Marine Building Vancouver*, Vancouver, G.A. Roedde, 1930, p. 10 (PAM 1930–1978, Vancouver City Archives).

Figure 1.10. ▶
Entrance to Eastern
Columbia Building,
Los Angeles, architect
Claud Beelman, 1929.



Michael Windover (2008)

This suggests the time-space compression of Deco design extending from spaces like the Marine Building to Yokohama, Shanghai, and Hong Kong.⁸¹ It also evokes the underlying systems of mobility that were bringing prosperity to the city, not to mention a vehicle that represented the aestheticization of these systems. Overall, the panels bring the building's narrative into the present, linking the heroic adventures of explorers with the contemporary Canadian businesses accommodated in the building.

81. For a reconsideration of the place of Art Deco (particularly French luxury Deco) in Japanese modern architectural discourse, see Peter McNeil, "Myths of Modernism: Japanese Architecture, Interior Design, and the West, c. 1920–1940," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1992, pp. 281–294. See also Anna Jackson, "Art Deco in East Asia," in Benton, *et al.*, *Art Deco 1910–1939*, *op cit.*, pp. 371–381.



Michael Windover (2009)

◀ **Figure 1.11.** Entrance to Marine Building, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, 1930. Note the panel depicting a sea plane on the left and, in the reveal to the right, the representation of the “Age of Steam,” beginning with the Beaver (1834) on the bottom and culminating with the CPR’s Empress of Japan (1930).

The instrumental use of history (and myth) effaces First Nations’ presence in the Lower Mainland and situates the building and the capitalist activities it housed within a larger narrative of often violent modernization.⁸² This is made apparent through the ground level terracotta panels depicting forms of transportation. Alongside images of ancient triremes (a theme carried into the interior) are found images of trains, seaplanes, airships, submarines, and battleships (figs. 1.11 to 1.13). While these images aestheticize the mobilities of commerce associated with Vancouver—the

82. An interesting comparison could be made with the “Old Mutual Building” in Cape Town, South Africa. See Federico Freschi, “Big Business Beauty: The Old Mutual Building, Cape Town, South Africa,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, vol. 20, 1994, pp. 38–57, although here the colonial narrative is celebrated with depictions of indigenous people.

Figure 1.12.
Terracotta panel
(airship), Marine
Building, Vancouver
(BC), architects
McCarter and
Nairne, 1930.

Figure 1.13.
Terracotta panel
(battleship), Marine
Building, Vancouver
(BC), architects
McCarter and
Nairne, 1930.

Geoffrey Carr (2007). Courtesy of photographer



Geoffrey Carr (2007). Courtesy of photographer



trains and seaplanes (which might refer to those constructed at the nearby Boeing factory) both visible from the Marine Building itself—they also allude to the militaristic maintenance and control over lines of communication and commerce. This reminds us of the glamorization of military technologies prevalent in the period—although particularly pronounced in 1930s Fascist Italy and Germany. The interest in military technology was shared with some proponents of the Modern Movement as pristine examples of functional efficiency, and was unabashedly celebrated by Italian futurists prior to the Great War.

We must keep in mind as well the presence of discharged military and naval veterans of the First World War for which the representation warfare technology would have a particular resonance, one that many associated with Canadian nationalism. Canada's presence at the 1919 peace talks and growing sense of nationalism through the interwar years were in no small part linked to the role played by Canadians during the Great War. The immense sacrifice (some 60,661 casualties and 172,000 wounded)⁸³ during the conflict, not to mention the successes on the battlefield (notably Vimy Ridge at which all four Canadian divisions fought together as a corps for the first time), fuelled a sense of nationalism, particularly in Anglo Canada. Thus, subtly, the Marine Building could be read in terms of nationalism and not simply localism.

The iconographic representation of systems of mobility at the Marine Building points to the tension between a building associated with modern, efficient business and extravagant ornament: the modern and the "modernistic." In a promotional booklet of 1930, the building is described as embodying the ultimate rental economy based on "scientific planning of office space."⁸⁴ The booklet details as well the technologically modern conveniences and benefits of the building's design for prospective tenants. Given the building's site and expert design, the booklet claims that "[no] dark corners, no unworkable spaces exist in the Marine Building"; that "special attention [was] given to the elimination of noise"; and that "[t]he latest ideas in office lighting have been introduced with the result that there will be no eye strain when night work is necessary."⁸⁵ When asked what was "modern" about the Marine Building by Kalman, McCarter explains that "it would be from the point of view of the plan, as well as the prints [*sic*] presentation. In other words, there's no second class space in this building."⁸⁶ McCarter adds: "my thinking has always been as direct and as simple as you can."⁸⁷ To that end, "[y]ou have a load to take down to a footing in as direct a manner as you can, and you don't want a lot of what was called 'groceries' on your building—because it is superfluous."⁸⁸ Ostensibly, the architects' primary goal was maximizing the profitability of rental space. Indeed, the chief tenant of the building, the Merchants' Exchange, decided to move into the new building largely because the rent would be cheaper.⁸⁹ From McCarter's interview, the Marine Building sounds like a strictly functionalist building and thus we

83. This out of a total 620,000 Canadian soldiers deployed. The population of the country at the time was about 8 million. For a concise discussion of the impact of the war socially and politically in Canada, see J.M. (Jack) Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 260–263.

84. A.E. Austin & Co., *Marine Building Vancouver*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

86. "Oral History," interview transcript, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

88. *Ibid.*

89. The minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Merchants' Exchange make this clear. The minutes do not discuss stylistic concerns, sticking largely to the monetary figures. See in particular the Minutes of an Executive Committee meeting held December 5, 1928. (Vancouver Merchants' Exchange Fonds, Add. MSS 316-532-D-7, file 10, City of Vancouver Archives. Files accessed by special permission of archivist.)

might characterize it as indicative of the Modern Movement. This reminds us that Art Deco was a visually oriented style, and while I would argue that it affected the production of cultural space, it was not inherently concerned with volumes and spaces as was the case with much Modern Movement architecture.

We might see a functional reason for Art Deco ornament in what McCarter, in his interview with Kalman, describes as

something that appeals. Now you know as well as I do, you try to get that, but you don't always get it. Sometimes, out of the unknown, you find you have something. The old Vancouver Hotel had something, you see? It's the atmosphere, they tried to get it in the new hotel, but they never did. You haven't got anything there, but the old hotel—it had atmosphere. Gives it something, really.⁹⁰

By turning to the Old Hotel Vancouver, McCarter seems to be associating “atmosphere” with a space that had a popular appeal for a larger public, which would be consonant with other semi-public spaces built in the 1920s and 1930s, including cinemas.⁹¹ In attempting to imbue the space with “atmosphere,” the Marine Building was designed to be a symbolic structure of identification for the businesses, workers, and city at large. Its design responded to the sensual or even emotional rather than the strictly intellectual, and, in this way, we might see the building resonating with contemporary approaches to advertising and window displays. A romantic appeal is evident in the architects' conception of the building, which has been duplicated in nearly every article written about the building since the time of its erection: the building “suggests some great crag rising from the sea, clinging with sea flora and fauna, tinted in sea-green, touched with gold, and at night in winter a dim silhouette piercing the sea mists.”⁹² New York journal *The Architect* describes the building as “A Poem of the Sea.”⁹³ Although this kind of approach to designing a major edifice seems rather romantic, it also speaks to the function of the building. As New York-based skyscraper architect Ralph T. Walker asks in *Pencil Points* in 1938: “Why should architects be ashamed of the fact that a poetic approach is necessary to appeal [...] to man's emotions? Why should the stress in modern thinking be continually upon the creature's comforts and so little upon the mental and spiritual stimuli which we so sorely need today?”⁹⁴ The poetic approach—if successful—enriches the space with atmosphere and can be productive of place.

90. Here, McCarter is referring to the second Hotel Vancouver (Francis S. Swales, 1916), owned by the CPR, and the third Hotel Vancouver, discussed above.

91. Some lavishly designed cinemas were even known as “atmospherics” given their allusion to outdoor spaces and representation of other spaces and landscapes. The “inventor” of atmospheric cinemas was American architect John Eberson.

92. McCarter & Nairne, “The Marine Building, Vancouver, B.C.,” *op. cit.*, pp. 256–257. See also “The Marine Building, Vancouver, B.C.,” *Architect and Engineer*, vol. 104, January 1931, pp. 61–62.

93. “The Marine Building, Vancouver, B.C.,” *The Architect*, vol. 15, no. 6, p. 307.

94. Quoted in Messler, *The Art Deco Skyscraper in New York*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

The Marine Building's poetic conception was carried into its form. The building's elevation, rising four storeys on the south façade, ten from the Burrard Street level to the north, and 25 storeys above the CPR tracks to the top of the central tower, lends the building a crag-like sensibility (fig. 1.14). This is further emphasized by the cream-coloured terracotta copings cresting the ziggurat style massing, appearing from a distance as sea foam or perhaps snow atop a mountain, like the Coast Range

Figure 1.14.
Marine Building (east
and south façades),
Vancouver (BC),
architects McCarter
and Nairne,
September 28, 1930.



Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 12009



Geoffrey Carr (2007). Courtesy of photographer

Figure 1.15.
Sculptural detail (sea life), Marine Building, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, 1930.

Mountains visible from the building.⁹⁵ Upon closer examination, the terracotta bands and details set against the buff-coloured brick imbue the edifice with life and movement (fig. 1.15). For McCarter and Nairne, the imagery throughout the building, including both marine life and various forms of transportation, together with the “modern treatment” of the building (*i.e.*, steel construction, concrete floor slabs, and curtain walls), “adequately [express] the manner of business housed within its walls, firms engaged in import and export trade, shipping, lumber, insurance, etc.”⁹⁶ The use of Art Deco was thus seen as the appropriate style to represent “modern” business, suggesting a functionalism connected to the decorative program.

Rather than simply express the efficiency of business through a strictly functionalist design, the type that would eventually predominate in the postwar era, this Art Deco skyscraper becomes emblematic of the processes of the business. It presents a heroic narrative, one participated in by the workers inside. The building’s exterior decoration suggests untamed wilderness, ruled by the Roman sea god Neptune peering down on three sides from the sixteenth floor (fig. 1.16). Here the building merges with the natural (albeit mythical) world.⁹⁷ The building was thus positioned on the edge, in a liminal region, between the urban/modern and the wild/age-old. Like the ocean liners, identity is located both in and alongside the city, involved in the movement of people and goods that constituted its economy. The narrative on the exterior of the building plays

95. The coastal mountains are mentioned by McCarter & Nairne in their article, “The Marine Building, Vancouver, B.C.,” *op. cit.*, p. 257.

96. *Ibid.*

97. Into the 1960s, histories of Vancouver still fell within the colonizing paradigm of exploring veritable Edens—effacing Aboriginal societies. For example, see the Preface to Morley’s *Vancouver: From Milltown to Metropolis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2.



◀ **Figure 1.16.**
*Sculptural details
 of south façade
 (including Neptune),
 Marine Building,
 Vancouver (BC),
 architects McCarter
 and Nairne, 1930.*

Geoffrey Carr (2007). Courtesy of photographer

with this to a certain extent for it situates modern transportation—that which connects Vancouver, the modern urban centre, to the natural world (and the other centres of “civilization”)—at the ground level, closest to the urban experience. Modern transportation becomes the foundation (literally at the ground level) of the prosperity embodied by the building. Keeping in mind the idea of iconicity as a relationship, the building

becomes an icon and link between “modern” businesses in the building and the world of natural resources that form the basis of these businesses. Importantly, as pointed out above, the Western myth of colonizing and building “civilization” in the New World looms large here: there is no depiction of Aboriginal communities; only a thriving natural world of mythological proportions ripe for development.

Besides promoting—indeed dramatizing—the local businesses associated with maritime trade and establishing them within a particular history that links them instrumentally to the development of Vancouver, the skyscraper form and Art Deco decorative program evoke place in a manner unlike earlier buildings. The skyscraper form, while connoting connections to international trade (conjuring images of New York skyscrapers that emblemized the interwar centre of finance), takes on a very specific symbolic valence in Vancouver due to its association with the nearby mountains. Its decorative program would make little sense in another situation and this suggests the power of Art Deco to evoke and produce a sense of the local, a certain mining of its cosmopolitan potential.

This strategy would be employed in the Burrard Bridge (Sharp & Thompson, 1932) located several blocks south of the Marine Building, and which in many ways complements the Marine Building (fig. 1.17). In fact, part of the justification for locating the Marine Building on Burrard Street was that this north-south thoroughfare was to have a bridge built connecting the West End to the Kitsilano and Point Grey neighbourhoods, which had recently amalgamated with Vancouver, in 1929. The bridge became one of the few material outcomes of the Harland Bartholomew Plan (1928), which called for the erection of a civic centre located in the

Figure 1.17. Burrard Bridge, Vancouver (BC), architects Sharp and Thompson, 1932. Included in the decorative program are busts on ship prows of Captain George Vancouver (left) and Sir Harry Burrard-Neale (right), an Admiral in the British Royal Navy and after whom his friend Capt. Vancouver named Burrard Inlet. This underlines the colonial history of the region and binds it to the city, the coat of arms of which is visible in the centre of the decorative gallery.



West End and for which the bridge was to be an integral part.⁹⁸ The bridge acts as a kind of gateway to the downtown. The prospective scheme of the city centre was in a Deco variant idiom, reminding us that Art Deco more than the Modern Movement extended the existing conventions of civic beautification in the interwar years by seemingly modernizing plans visually. Both the Burrard Bridge and the Marine Building employ Art Deco to recall a heroic past of exploration—a gesture toward the production of the local—and yet were understood at the time to indicate the global. In a review of the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada Exhibition in 1932, Eric Ross Arthur describes the Burrard Bridge (from photograph reproductions) in the following terms:⁹⁹

The Bridge is a huge affair and begins very well with two pylons which are large in scale and well handled. The surprise comes in the middle of the Bridge where there are two triumphal structures spanning the roadway. I cannot see the object of the well lit room overhead, nor how it is reached. It is the more mysterious because the whole thing has a faint suspicion of the east, of joss sticks and chop suey. It may be that under our very eyes we are seeing an architecture, like ancient Egypt and Assyria, influenced by trade with the Orient. Banister Fletcher becomes a much more intelligible book.¹⁰⁰

Arthur's account of this civic structure illustrates the eclecticism at play in Art Deco. As an Easterner who had not actually seen the structure, his description is tainted by his conception of Vancouver as a "Gateway to the Orient." Just as "The Cross Roads of the World," discussed in the Introduction, referenced "other" architectures on a surface level in order to produce a cosmopolitan consumerist environment, so it appears the Burrard Bridge could garner a sense of "otherness" for outsiders. While Arthur saw the influence of international trade here, neither the bridge nor the Marine Building referred to the presence of local Japanese or Chinese communities. In fact, Arthur's comments strike an unsettling orientalist note, suggesting the ethnically exclusionary character of Vancouver (and its Art Deco) in the interwar years. And, like the Marine

98. Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Plan for The City of Vancouver Including a General Plan of the Region*, 1928, Vancouver, Vancouver Town Planning Commission, 1929, pp. 239–247. Bartholomew, who was also hired by other cities, including Los Angeles (see Greg Hise and William Deverell, *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000), began work on the Vancouver plan in 1926. Besides suggesting a unified and simplified transit system, creation of more public recreational space including parks and pleasure drives, and better zoning, he spent some time discussing the significance of an aesthetically pleasing city of (Beaux-Arts) civic structures to complement monuments and ample park space. His plan also takes into account the burgeoning use of the automobile (hence his discussion of "pleasure drives" along the coast and into the mountains).

99. Eric Ross Arthur was a key player in the foundation of modern architectural training and a pioneer of Modern Movement architecture in Canada. Raised in Dunedin, New Zealand, Arthur received architectural training at the University of Liverpool, School of Architecture, following the Great War. He was employed in the office of Edwin Lutyens and Sir Aston Webb in London prior to being recruited by the University of Toronto, School of Architecture in 1923. His most prolific commission came from the Canadian Packers.

100. Eric Ross Arthur, "A Review of the R.A.I.C. Exhibition," *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, vol. 9, no. 12, 1932, p. 269.

Building's decorative program, which offers an instrumentalist history of conquest at the expense of First Nations communities, the Burrard Bridge makes no reference to Aboriginal presence, despite being built on the Kitsilano Reserve (the land was appropriated by the Provincial Government in a precedent-setting case).¹⁰¹ Just as the Marine Building aestheticized mobilities associated with processes of modernization while masking certain (im)mobilities of minority groups, so too the Burrard Bridge—a civic structure built to facilitate mobility—screened the complicated issues of land ownership, buttressing a mythology of a modern, Western city at the expense of a more complex understanding of a community of different voices.¹⁰² The cosmopolitanism of the mode thus is seen in this instance to reaffirm racial and social hierarchies.

■ “Belonging” at the Marine Building

I have argued that the Marine Building, through its form and Art Deco iconography, evoked the local, and indeed even seemed to resonate with a local cosmopolitanism. Art Deco was particularly well suited for the work of place-making, I would contend, due to the flexibility of the style to incorporate local images. But that sense of place was constructed to promote particular business and political interests. The Marine Building's easily legible—and visually entertaining—decorative program certainly appealed to a popular audience, and was consonant with commercial strategies used to sell commodities and invoke modern lifestyle(s).

Neil Leach's work is useful in considering how architecture can form “place,” where place is understood as a locus of identification and site of performance of subjectivity.¹⁰³ In “Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Place,” he explores a number of different approaches to architecture's relationship to identity, finding film theorist Christian Metz's insights into identification with cinema as a series of mirrorings particularly useful. Following Metz's scheme, “the spectator is both absent

101. See “Tolmie Explains Stand on Indian Reserve Property,” *Vancouver Daily Province*, October 3, 1930. The article describes an “agreement under which all Indian lands when they cease to be used for Indian purposes will revert to the province. In the future, large areas of very valuable land will so revert. The precedent established in the case of the Kitsilano Reserve is sure to be raised in many cases when these reverted Indian lands eventually are disposed of.” According to Wynn (“The Rise of Vancouver,” *op. cit.*, p. 108), the Kitsilano Reserve had been acquired by the province at “a fire-sale price” in 1913, with the intention of developing a large harbour on English Bay there. The harbour never materialized and the land purchased did not cover all the territory of the reserve.

102. It should be noted that the Merchants' Exchange considered the “[q]uestion of advisability of admitting Oriental firms as members” at a Board of Trustees meeting held on March 21, 1928. In another meeting (April 25, 1928), the secretary reported that “the various sections to whom the matter [of Oriental membership] had been put to had agreed in the suggestion that selected Oriental firms should be invited to become members.” See minutes of meetings of the Board of Trustees held March 21, 1928, and April 25, 1928. (Vancouver Merchants' Exchange Fonds, Add. MSS 316-532-D-7, file 10, City of Vancouver Archives. Files accessed by special permission of archivist.)

103. Neil Leach, “Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Place,” *Perspecta*, vol. 33, 2002, pp. 126–133.

from the screen as perceived, but so too present there ‘as perceiver.’”¹⁰⁴ A similar process of mirrorings takes place with architecture and “[t]his process would depend upon the introspection of the external world into the self, and the projection of the self on to the external world, so that there is an equivalence—the one reflects the other—and identification may take place.”¹⁰⁵ This relationship between film and architecture, Leach observes, was pointed out by Walter Benjamin, although for Benjamin buildings are “absorbed within the psyche not just through vision, but also through touch.”¹⁰⁶ An identification with place is produced not just through mirroring in a visual sense, but also “in ritualistic patterns of behaviour.”¹⁰⁷ This reminds us of the affective quality of architecture, how, to borrow from Marshall McLuhan, “the medium is the *massage*.”¹⁰⁸ For Leach, the relationship between architecture and cultural identity is based both on architectural forms and “the narrative and performative discourses that give them their meaning.”¹⁰⁹ “If identity is a performative construct,” he proposes, “if it is acted out like some kind of film script—then architecture can be understood as a kind of filmset.”¹¹⁰ Art Deco, I argue, was particularly potent in providing a “filmset” for the performance of modern lifestyle. Its easy legibility (and connection to traditional architectural forms) yet future orientation made it especially suggestive. And the fact that it infiltrated all manner of media, from furniture to clothing to architecture to film, meant that the style was well suited for providing both a sense of the recognizable and “newness,” same and other.

From a visual perspective, I would argue that the Marine Building’s program was open to both projection and introjection in the process of identification: Vancouverites saw something of themselves and their local experience as well as something of the building’s program in themselves. Materially, the building evidenced the local. The steel frame, bricks, wood, Venetian blinds, fire alarm system, plumbing fixtures, paint, ornamental plaster, and bronze were all supplied by local firms.¹¹¹ The elaborate wood inlaid elevator cars (fig. 1.18), which comprised several different types of wood,¹¹² even exoticized the local, I might suggest, especially when taken together with the “otherly” space-time of the grand concourse. The policy

104. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

107. *Ibid.*

108. McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage...*, *op. cit.*, p. 26. [Italics mine.]

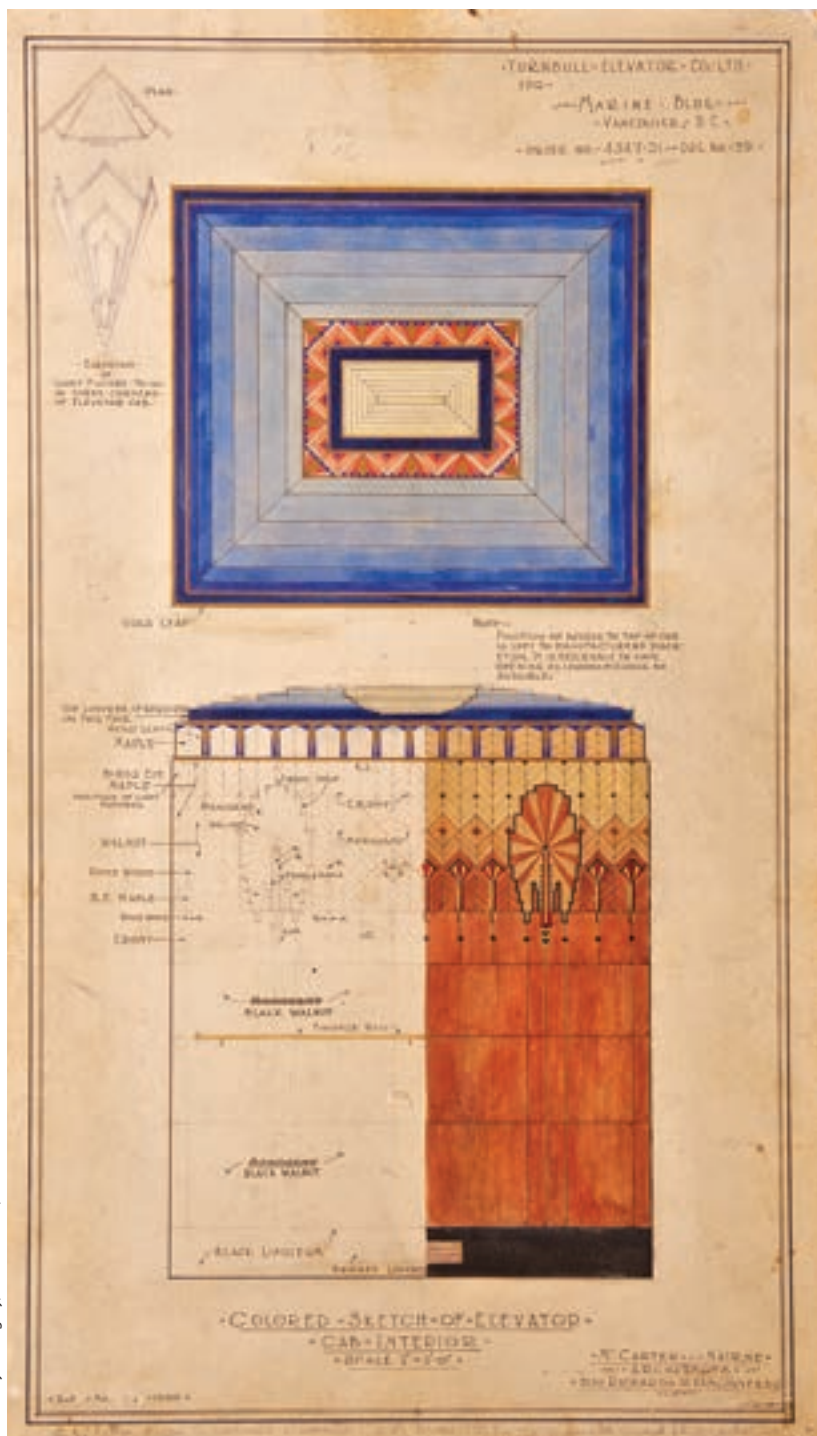
109. Leach, “Belonging,” *op. cit.*, p. 132.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

111. See *Vancouver Sun*, Marine Building Supplement, October 7, 1930, pp. 2–7; and A.E. Austin & Co., *Marine Building Vancouver*, *op. cit.*, p. 8. The bricks were from the Clayburn works, Venetian blinds by Jones Tent & Awning Limited, paint from British America Paint Co. Ltd., plumbing by Weeks & Co. Ltd., fire alarm from B.C. District Telegraph and Delivery Co. Ltd., ornamental plaster work by sculptor A. Fabri, lumber supplied by J. Hanbury & Co. Ltd., plaster material, cement and brick supplied by New Method Coal & Supplies Ltd., hollow tiles from Port Haney Brick Co. Ltd., and the steel frame was fabricated and erected by the Dominion Bridge Company.

112. Don Luxton claims there are 27 different woods represented here. See Mackie, “Time Overtakes the Marine Building,” *op. cit.*, p. C3.

Figure 1.18. ▶
 McCarter and Nairne,
 coloured sketch of
 elevator, Marine
 Building, n.d.



McCarter and Nairne Fonds, Marine Building, Canadian Architectural Archives,
 University of Calgary, MCA 447-391, Accession Number 160A/83.15

adopted by G.A. Stimson and Co., as well as contractor E.J. Ryan, was to use local materials whenever possible. The korkoid floor from Scotland, terracotta from the Gladding, McBean & Company near Seattle, and the bas-relief tiles in the interior by the Batchelder Tile Company of Los Angeles, were all designed in McCarter and Nairne's office. As architectural historian David Monteyne points out, J.F. "Doc" Watson, Cedric J.M. Young, and John Douglas Hunter executed the ornamentation and artwork for both the Medical-Dental Building and the Marine Building.¹¹³ So, the "other" materials used in the construction and ornamentation of the building bore the stamp of the local. The fact that they could be manufactured elsewhere, not to mention financed from outside the province, positions the building within international networks of economic and cultural exchange. It also reminds us of the international character of the port city and its inhabitants, and even supports the cosmopolitan quality of the Deco ornament as it aestheticized the systems underpinning these economies.

Icons of history and familiar wildlife and vegetation become readily identifiable with "here" and "same," while the international Art Deco vocabulary, that non-period, "modernistic" style suggests "there" and "other." As late as February 1929 in an address made at the Art Gallery of Toronto (later the Art Gallery of Ontario), Canadian architect John Lyle describes a new style popular in Europe and "making great strides in the United States" in terms we now attribute to Art Deco: "a simplicity of wall surface, both of exterior and interior, a use of parallel lines or concentric curves, a use of incised relief ornament with semi-flat surfaces, a daring use of modern materials," and "an altogether charming use of what might be termed sunshine colours."¹¹⁴ He gives a few examples of this largely "new" and international style in Canada, neglecting, however, McCarter and Nairne's Medical-Dental Building in Vancouver which was then under construction (fig. 1.19).¹¹⁵ Lyle's characterization of the style as from elsewhere yet useful in the production of national architectural identities speaks to the cosmopolitan quality described above. The hybridity of Art Deco lent itself to a particular expression of place in a way that spoke even more succinctly to global capitalism than the earlier eclecticism of Edwardian architecture. The cosmopolitanism of Deco design referenced

113. Monteyne, "McCarter & Nairne," *op. cit.*, p. 276.

114. John M. Lyle, "Address by John M. Lyle," *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1929, p. 135. He refers to the Toronto Star Building and Permanent Building in Toronto. See also John M. Lyle, "Canadian Decorative Forms," *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1932, pp. 65, 70; Trevor Boddy, "Regionalism, Nationalism, and Modernism: The Ideology of Decoration in the Work of John M. Lyle," *Trace*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1981, pp. 8–15; and Glenn McArthur, *A Progressive Traditionalist: John M. Lyle, Architect*, Toronto, Coach House Books, 2009.

115. The Medical-Dental Building was the first major Art Deco building constructed in Vancouver. It was a state-of-the-art facility for the medical and dental professions, and included an underground garage (interestingly, the Marine Building was also originally designed to accommodate an underground garage, although the logistics made that unfeasible and the plan was ruled out at the Planning Commission Meeting—see pp. 14–17). The building was demolished after much protest from heritage groups in 1989. For more on the building, see McCarter and Nairne, "Medical-Dental Building, Vancouver," *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, vol. 7, no. 6, 1930, pp. 206–210; and "Requiem for the Medical Dental Building," *Places*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1990, pp. 8–11.

Figure 1.19. ►
*Medical-Dental
Building, Vancouver
(BC), architects
McCarter and Nairne,
August 29, 1929.*



Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 12155

more directly the local sources of profitability that held together the larger global systems of trade and commerce. The themes of transportation and communication, which dominated much Deco iconography, reflexively indicate the local within international networks of cultural and economic trade—in a sense, to use a buzz word of today, the production of the “glocal.”

However, Leach’s theory of belonging suggests more than a visual engagement with architecture, asserting the importance of the haptic and performativity of subjectivities. Indeed, the greatest sense of belonging would be felt by the day-to-day users rather than others visiting the building once or experiencing it only through its iconic representations. Besides spatially arranging the interior of the building to maximize rental space and looking to reduce congestion in the building, particularly on the ground

floor,¹¹⁶ McCarter and Nairne kept in mind the emotional appeal of that most public of spaces, continuing the tone set on the exterior. The grand concourse was an in-between space, yet one in which all employees and visitors to the building would pass through, and thus was highlighted by McCarter and Nairne as crucial to the overall impression of the building. In fact, the spatial organization of the ground floor, which I will discuss further in the next section, was designed to lend “a metropolitan touch in the building that would sell the upper floors and also permit volume of traffic in and out of the building to the Merchants Exchange and would give to anyone the feeling of a busy building [...] [which would give] a good indication to the tenants that it was a well filled and prosperous building.”¹¹⁷ The pragmatism of such organization was enhanced by the decorative program, which I would argue suggests an attempt to “stage” the movement and activity of the lobby, making a non-place—to borrow French anthropologist Marc Augé’s term—into a self-conscious space.¹¹⁸ The Marine Building was to be a modern, metropolitan, and cosmopolitan place, and its public spaces implied a particular image of modernity that was quite different from earlier office lobbies.

Entering from Burrard Street through the ornamental brass revolving doors, one is immersed in subdued, quiet light streaming in through the stained glass on either end of the grand concourse and from sconces shaped like ship prows emerging from the walls on the gallery level (fig. 1.20). Overhead, plaster beams, alluding to the interior of a ship, run the length of the lobby. From the gallery, the beams produce an undulating movement, like waves on the ocean, enlarging the wave motif of the frieze that makes its way along the north wall (right side of fig. 1.21), mirroring the friezes on the exterior of the building (recall fig. 1.15, p. 72). The floor was originally of korkoid, a battleship linoleum produced in Inverness, Scotland.¹¹⁹ This floor was replaced with marble during the 1980s renovations by Paul Merrick.¹²⁰ According to Merrick, the architects had originally planned on using the more expensive material. Budgetary constraints also saw a redesigning of the lighting scheme from elaborate chandeliers to ornamental wall sconces and a ceiling of carved stone rather

116. This issue was discussed at length at the Building Planning Commission meeting in March 1929. See “Commission Meeting Minutes,” pp. 34–35.

117. “Commission Meeting Minutes,” p. 87.

118. See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthology of Supermodernity* [trans. John Howe], London, Verso, 1995; and Peter Wollen’s chapter “Architecture and Film: Places and Non-places” in *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film*, London, Verso, 2002, pp. 199–215.

119. Inverness was the birthplace of architect George Nairne, reminding us of imperial links tied to locality.

120. See Elizabeth Godley, “At 60, Marine Building Is Looking More like Its Old Self,” *Vancouver Sun*, October 21, 1989. The renovation was controversial from a heritage perspective. For reaction to the renovations, see letters to the editor co-authored by Valda Vidners and Donald Luxton, “Vancouver Is Losing Its Crown Jewel,” *Vancouver Sun*, November 10, 1989; and “Be More Accurate,” *The West Ender*, November 16, 1989. See also Judy Oberlander, “Renovating in a Competitive World,” *Canadian Architect*, vol. 36, no. 10, 1991, pp. 19–20; and Paul Merrick Architects, “Marine Building, Vancouver: Restoration and Renovation,” *Canadian Architect*, vol. 36, no. 10, 1991, pp. 21–23.

Figure 1.20. ▶
Interior of entrance hall, Marine Building, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, September 29, 1930.

Figure 1.21.
Interior of entrance hall (view from gallery looking west), Marine Building, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, 1930. ▼

Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 12011



Geoffrey Carr (2007). Courtesy of photographer

than plaster.¹²¹ The floor depicts signs of the zodiac, which, when considered alongside the clock above the revolving doors, suggest an eternal time-space (fig. 1.22). The day-to-day trade of contemporary business rests on the timeless history of maritime exploration, conquest, and adventure, evidenced by the playful narrative of ancient mariners (Vikings?) with a great smiling whale (fig. 1.23). We might even read the stars emblazoned



Geoffrey Carr (2007), Courtesy of photographer



Michael Windover (2007)

Figure 1.22.

Detail of entrance with clock, Marine Building, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, 1930.

Figure 1.23.

Decorative panel from lobby, Marine Building, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, 1930.

121. Godley, "At 60, Marine Building..." *ibid.* I am not so sure that the effects of the Depression necessarily caused a scaling back of expensive materials. I did not find evidence of quotes taken for marble flooring or for a carved stone ceiling in the McCarter-Nairne Fonds at the Canadian Architectural Archives (CAA). These records, however, may have been lost or never included in the material donated to the CAA. I did not find any evidence of proposed chandeliers; however, John McCarter does mention that he was planning to use Italian marbles for the building, and either marble or terrazzo for the floors. See discussion in "Commission Meeting Minutes," pp. 229–235.

on the elevator doors above abstracted sea flora as representing the North Star, guiding workers to their destination, although in this instance by way of very efficient elevators (fig. 1.24).¹²² The marine theme was taken even further with the elevator attendants—allegedly some of Vancouver's most beautiful young women dressed in sailor costumes.¹²³

Figure 1.24. ▶
Elevator doors,
Marine Building,
Vancouver (BC),
architects McCarter
and Nairne, 1930.



Geoffrey Carr (2007). Courtesy of photographer

122. Much was made of the fact that the elevators, which travelled at 700 feet per minute, were the fastest west of Toronto.

123. Mackie, "Time Overtakes the Marine Building," *op. cit.*

Such theatricality was instrumental in the design and conception of the building by the architects. Both John McCarter and George Nairne had experience designing theatres.¹²⁴ Nairne even worked for a short time in Seattle following the Great War for B. Marcus Priteca, the architect of the Pantages theatre chain in the Western United States.¹²⁵ This experience would be useful in designing hotels, including the Harrison Hot Springs Hotel and Bath House (with associate architects Townley and Matheson, 1925–1926), as well as the prominent Spencer's department store (1925–1926) in downtown Vancouver. Hotels, theatres, and department stores pointed to the growing commodification of leisure time—a central tenet of consumer culture. Decorating modern places of work in a theatrical, “modernistic” manner, akin to a Hollywood filmset, played into popular notions of the modern and may have been more appealing for workers than the highly rationalized and abstract spaces conceptualized by proponents of the Modern Movement like Le Corbusier.¹²⁶ Interestingly, John Greed, the English “constructive decorator” credited with overseeing the interior program of the Marine Building, would later move on to Hollywood to design filmsets.¹²⁷

The Vancouver Sun commented on the space-time established in the theatrical setting of the interior in an article on Greed's work: “Modernistic design’ might be the best term to use in describing the interior decoration of the Marine Building, though the art and constructive genius of the designer makes it difficult to assign any period to the whole.”¹²⁸ The ability to produce a space outside period styles, a “modernistic” space-time, is lauded. It should be noted that this positive association for the term “modernistic” was not universally held and in fact the term was used derisively by some architects now associated with the Modern Movement.¹²⁹ The title of the article, “Decoration of Interior Constructive,”

124. One of McCarter's first commissions was the Alcazar Theatre on Commercial Drive in Vancouver, as Monteyne notes in “McCarter & Nairne,” *op. cit.*, p. 273.

125. Monteyne, *ibid.*, p. 273.

126. See Elliott, “Modern, Moderne, and Modernistic...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 128–145.

127. That fact is recorded in Grant Ball, “The Million Dollar Folly,” *BC Motorist*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1974, p. 57 (though Greed's name is spelled “Gread”). It appears that, like McCarter & Nairne, John Greed had an office in the Marine Building. See *Wrigley's British Columbia Directory 1931*. Greed is credited with painting exterior fire escapes and the interior walls in a March 6, 1958 valuation of the Marine Building (McCarter Nairne Fonds, Marine Building, box 213–292, file 1405, Canadian Architectural Archives). The numerous detailed drawings in the McCarter-Nairne fonds suggest that the architects controlled the building's program down to the fine details. That said, Greed may have worked in consultation with the architects; otherwise, his being credited with the interior decoration in the *Vancouver Sun* makes little sense.

128. “Decoration of Interior Constructive,” *Vancouver Sun*, Marine Building Supplement, October 7, 1930, p. 6.

129. Donald Deskey, an architect and designer often associated with Art Deco (notably the interiors of the Rockefeller Center Music Hall in New York), discusses the term in “The Rise of American Architecture and Design,” *Studio International*, vol. 105, 1933, pp. 260–273. He argues that the term “modernistic” is “purely an Americanism. It was born out of the hysteria created by the Paris exhibition. Although it is still widely used by casual observers of this contemporary manifestation, from the start it has been used in a derogatory sense by modern writers and critics and artists. To them the term ‘modernistic’ has meant spurious modern design. The word ‘modernistic’ is a convenient one for the designation of that type of work produced during the period of 1925–1929 which actually

seems to suggest the space-making possibility of the Marine Building. And this, I assert, is due to a performative potential imbued in the building's interior decorative scheme.

The lobby of the Marine Building resonates with another type of public space associated with mobility: the lobby of a cinema, a space I will take up in chapter 3, and one which was often imbued with a filmset quality. The lobby provided a dramatic background for the non-specific and distracted time of mingling outside of work (or film viewing). This fanciful space stands in contrast to the white walls and neutral-stained mahogany of the offices (fig. 1.25). The cinema lobby and that of the Marine Building dramatically staged modern life activities, highlighting the mobility of imagination, and thus might be read as employing a similar strategy in terms of framing public space. Workers were prompted to imagine themselves in a new and modern society, even if mundane work

Figure 1.25.
Interior office, Marine Building, Vancouver (BC), architects McCarter and Nairne, October 1, 1930.



Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 12017

bore no significant relation to the more valuable contributions made prior to the Paris Exposition. For that type of work was by no means fundamentally sound. It simply substituted one group of motifs for another—substituted the ill-digested formulae of to-day for the clichés of the past.” He goes on to characterize “modernistic” work as “blindly applied ornaments to the surface of forms which were in themselves badly designed.” “Whereas the ‘modernistic’ merely touches the external aspects in surface pattern,” he goes on, “the modern solution is based on consideration of the three vital elements of design—materials, tools and purposes” (p. 268). See also Elliott, “Modern, Moderne, and Modernistic...,” *op. cit.*

routine remained essentially the same. It was a modern vision quite unlike the earlier, classicizing lobbies. And especially when the fact that Toronto-based G.A. Stimson was attempting with this building to make a meaningful connection with Vancouverites is taken into consideration, the lobby should be read as inculcating a certain agenda. The aesthetics of mobility at play here were meant to reinforce an identity for the burgeoning shipping industries, as well as for Vancouver at large. Just as a cinema lobby prepares an audience for the ephemeral desires on the screen, the Marine Building's lobby—and indeed its exterior decorative program—evoked the mobility of imagination, linking the potential of the businesses to the building and the building to the city. In this way, the Marine Building might be read as producing a sense of belonging by aestheticizing mobilities. That sense of belonging, I argue, was one associated with strategies of consumer culture and applied to the office building. This echoes the earlier, virtual and visual life of the Marine Building in the display window (fig. 1.2, p. 44).

The theatricality of the building is confined to the more public areas—the exterior, the lobby, the elevators—the places where businessmen and support workers come into contact. McCarter explained that these spaces were of top concern for him when designing.¹³⁰ In fact these spaces were highlighted in all Art Deco skyscrapers. They are the unifying areas, the places of community. An interesting tension emerges between the theatrical public spaces of performance and the offices, overlooking the harbour and urban fabric of the city. The public spaces appear self-consciously about place-making, while the offices are associated more with the non-specific space of international capitalism. The fact that Art Deco was used in the communal spaces reinforces the idea that it was a style aimed at framing public culture.

The playful manner of décor to celebrate shipping industries would stand in sharp contrast with the somewhat harsh realities faced by longshoremen working at the docks, some of whom would have been distantly visible from the Marine Building. The longshoremen union would strike on June 4, 1935, and events would reach a crisis on June 18 when some 5,000 striking longshoremen and sympathizers were tear-gassed and attacked by police, leaving at least 60 hospitalized.¹³¹ Mayor Gerry McGeer was concerned that unemployed protesters who had recently been turned back from the “Trek to Ottawa” at Regina would exacerbate the strike just as it began to quiet down. Ultimately, the strike was resolved by a federal appointed inquiry in September 1935.¹³² This incident reminds us that while the Marine Building could symbolize a larger sense of place associated with particular industries, it smoothed over the sometimes tense relationship between workers in these industries

130. “Oral History,” interview transcript, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

131. Williams, *Mayor Gerry: The Remarkable Gerald Grattan McGeer*, *op. cit.*, pp. 191–192.

132. *Ibid.*, pp. 192–193. The inquiry was headed by Supreme Court judge Henry Hague Davis who upheld the Shipping Federation's side, noting that the union had struck illegally.

and business leaders.¹³³ Unlike other (numerous) Deco buildings that aestheticize the labouring body (e.g., figs. I.12 to I.15 noted in the Introduction), the Marine Building offers no visual link to the physical labour underpinning the businesses housed within. This might be due to the tense relationship between socialist worker movements in British Columbia and the more conservative elite.

An example of the relationship between workers and the Marine Building (as a symbol of corporate power) is seen in Orville Fisher and Paul Goranson's mural based on a larger work executed for the Golden Gate Exposition, San Francisco, 1939 (fig. 1.26).¹³⁴ Here the towering Marine Building refers to a distanced power elite quite apart from the toiling bodies in the foreground. These bodies include longshoremen as well as an Asian man pushing a luggage cart. While avoiding explicit political commentary, in foregrounding the "missing" figures in the Marine

Figure 1.26.
Orville Fisher and Paul
Goranson, *Industry*,
one section of a mural
based on a larger work
for the Golden Gate
Exposition, San
Francisco, 1939.



Image PDP02286. Courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives

133. For more on the longshoremen in Vancouver and the development of welfare capitalist policies during the interwar years which were introduced to stabilize the industry, see Andrew Parnaby, *Citizen Docker: Making a New Deal on the Vancouver Waterfront, 1919–1939*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008.
134. Paul Goranson, Orville Fisher, and Edward Hughes, graduates of the Vancouver School of Art, were commissioned by the B.C. Government to produce a mural depicting industry and labour for the Western States Building at the Golden Gate Exposition. The success of the mural led to a Ministry of Tourism commission of a smaller version by Fisher and Goranson. See Lorna Farrell-Ward, "Tradition/Transition: The Keys to Change," in *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931–1983*, Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983, pp. 27–28, for more on their work and the impact of mural painting in B.C. in the 1930s, not to mention a reproduction of another section of the mural. Included in the skyline in figure 1.26 are the new City Hall, the second Hotel Vancouver, and the Royal Bank Building. For Marilyn McKay, this work is consistent with the generally non-combative and subdued (politically-speaking) art of English Canada between the wars. See her "Canadian Political Art in the 1930s: 'A Form of Distancing,'" in Anreus et al., *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s...*, op. cit., pp. 83–84.

Building's iconographical program Fisher and Goranson do suggest some of the social (and labour) tensions of the period. The image and the building itself indicate the complexities of place-making and belonging in the constitution of public culture. While some sectors of the public are left out of the overall picture, the iconicity of the building still had a power to refer to a broader community for many. Thus, for some the building signified place, potential, and prosperity, while for others it may have represented alienated labour and social injustice. Either way, the building played a significant role in the urban fabric and imaginary, as well as public culture.

■ Exchange at the Centre of the World

As discussed earlier, the Marine Building was situated at a nexus of transportation, commerce, and communication infrastructures. These systems were extended into the space of the building for the primary tenant of the building was the Merchants' Exchange, an association of business leaders involved in the trades associated with the shipping and import and export industries. A quick glance at the ground level floor plan reveals the central position of the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Telegraph, as well as the Dominion Wireless (fig. 1.27). Wireless communication was essential to the shipping trades and was also becoming visible in everyday lives in the form of home radios, which I take up in chapter 4. Also, unmarked on the plan, were two telephone booths, located near the stairs across from the bank of elevators. Internally, communication between offices was made possible with high-speed elevators as well with a paging system and intercommunicating phones.¹³⁵ As James H. Hamilton explains, the Exchange needed to provide "information regarding the grain markets of Winnipeg, Chicago, Liverpool and Buenos Aires."¹³⁶ He notes as well that "a direct wire [was] maintained between the Vancouver and Winnipeg Grain Exchanges, with continuous grain quotations." According to Hamilton, the new Exchange had a contract with the Canadian Government "under which a wireless station [was] maintained in the Exchange, giving constant and complete news of ships' movements at sea and sailings from various ports." The wireless office would operate a "new high-power long-range wireless station" located on Lulu Island, to the south of the city. Hamilton denotes the Vancouver Exchange's "[c]lose working arrangements [...] with San Francisco and Seattle Exchanges for telegraphic exchange of marine information" as well as with "outlying B.C. ports."¹³⁷

135. Details about the telephone system are outlined in "The Marine Building Specifications," McCarter Nairne Fonds, Marine Building, box 213-227, Canadian Architectural Archives, University of Calgary.

136. J.H. (James Herbert) Hamilton, "Merchants Exchange Big Factor in Development of the Port of Vancouver," *Vancouver Sun*, Marine Building Supplement, October 7, 1930, p. 3.

137. *Ibid.*

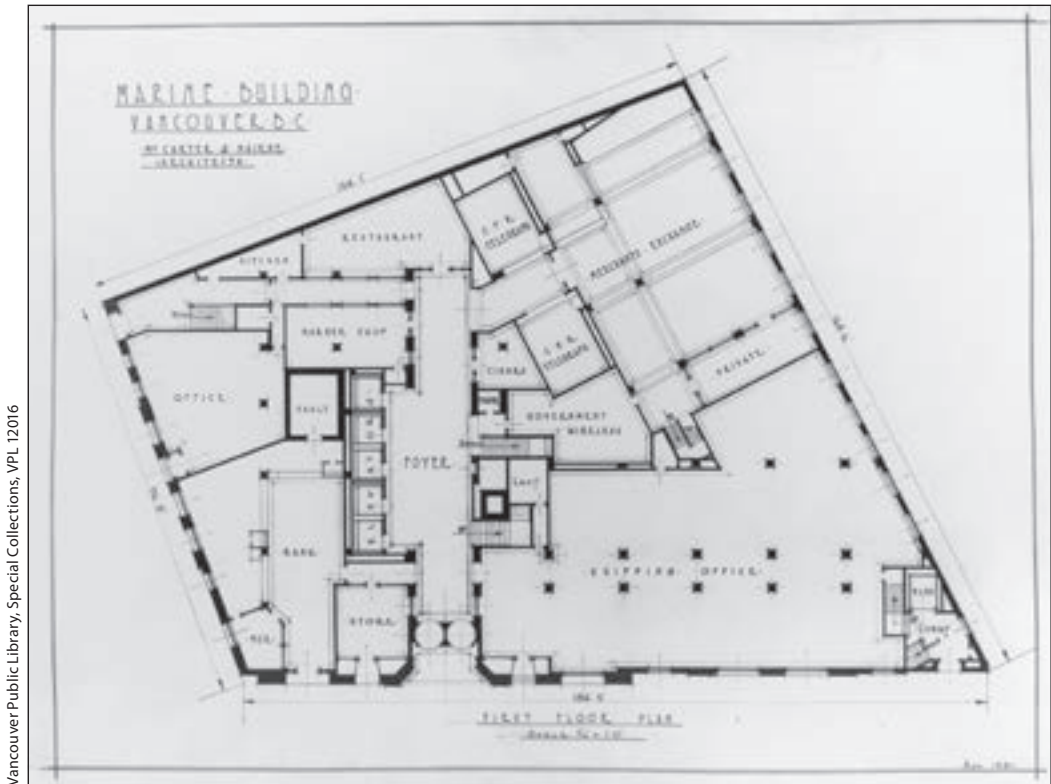


Figure 1.27.
Ground floor plan,
Marine Building,
Vancouver (BC),
architects McCarter
and Nairne, 1930.

As mentioned earlier, grain was of paramount importance to the growth of Vancouver's economy leading up to the stock market crash. In a 1936 article on the grain trade in Vancouver, Leah Stevens, after mentioning that the chief exports—wheat, lumber, and fish—are reflected in the layout of the port of Vancouver, asserts that “it is as an outlet for Canadian grain that the port has achieved international importance.”¹³⁸ The majority of wheat exported came from Western Alberta with most of the rest of the Prairie wheat sent to Montréal. Since Montréal's port closed during the winter months, Vancouver's was busiest then, and the city saw a gradual increase in volume of activity as a result. By far the United Kingdom was the largest importer of Canadian grain, with “the Orient” second, and Central and South America, Australia, and New Zealand as minor importers.¹³⁹ Wheat, thus, meant movement, as captured in the grille that encapsulates the elevator control on the second floor: movement not only of food from the Prairies to the world, but money and people through the Marine Building (fig. 1.28). The wheat motif was evident throughout the building: in the balustrades of the Merchants' Exchange, ornamental grilles, and ironwork on the gallery level.

138. Leah Stevens, “The Grain Trade of the Port of Vancouver, British Columbia,” *Economic Geography*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1936, p. 185. See the dramatic photographs and map that indicate the spatial relationship between the Marine Building and the port facilities (pp. 185–187).

139. *Ibid.*, pp. 193–196.



◀ **Figure 1.28.**
Ornamental grille,
gallery level, Marine
Building, Vancouver
(BC), architects
McCarter and
Nairne, 1930.

Geoffrey Carr (2007). Courtesy of photographer

Besides the repeating wheat motif, the building's situation within the network of ports and trading centres was illustrated in a mural depicting a map of the world, framed on one side by a portrayal of the Marine Building itself, on the eastern wall of the Merchants' Exchange (fig. 1.29). The mural by a "Mr. L.J. Trounce," together with the purchase of furniture, is the only indication of the Merchants' Exchange membership

Reproduced from McCarter & Nairne, "The Marine Building, Vancouver, B.C.,"
The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal, vol. 8, no. 7, p. 260

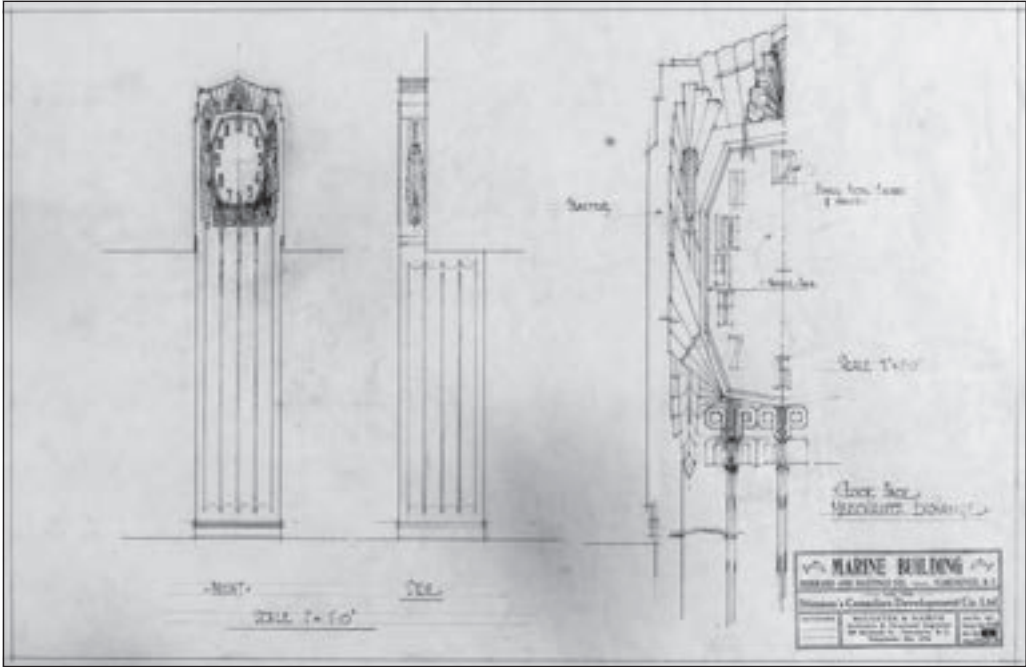


Figure 1.29.
Merchants' Exchange
 (view east), *Marine*
Building, Vancouver
 (BC), architects
 McCarter and
 Nairne, 1930.

involvement in the decorative scheme for their new premises.¹⁴⁰ The map corresponded to the international position of the Merchants' Exchange, which had recently made as honorary members the consuls of Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombo, Costa Rica, Denmark and Iceland, Ecuador, Finland, France, Greece, Guatemala, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Panama, Peru, Siam, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela.¹⁴¹ In fact, the Marine Building would house foreign consulate offices of the United States, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Uruguay, France, Costa Rica, and Japan. The map was oriented with North America in the middle, strategically marking Vancouver's central position within empires of trade and commerce. Directly below sits an Art Deco clock, the body of which corresponds to the ornament on the supporting piers seen on the right (fig. 1.30). This has two effects. First, it illustrates the time-space compression that facilitates modern commerce. Second, with the clock's visual reference to sup-

140. See minutes of a meeting of the Board of Trustees held at Exchange, June 17, 1930. (Vancouver Merchants' Exchange Fonds, Add. MSS 316-532-D-7, file 10, City of Vancouver Archives. Files accessed by special permission of archivist.) The mural was commissioned for \$150 and may have been the work of Lieutenant Louis J. Trounce.

141. This decision was made at a meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the Terminal Club, March 13, 1930. (Vancouver Merchants' Exchange Fonds, Add. MSS 316-532-D-7, file 9, City of Vancouver Archives. Files accessed by special permission of archivist.)



McCarter and Nairne Fonds, Marine Building, Canadian Architectural Archives, University of Calgary, Image number MCA 447-167, Project Number MCA 447, Accession Number 160A/83.15

Figure 1.30.

McCarter and Nairne, drawing of clock face of Merchants' Exchange, April 8, 1930.

porting piers, the Marine Building, an edifice housing the offices and institutions of Vancouver's prosperity, owes its very existence to the time-space compression necessary for efficient international trade. Vancouver, through its transportation and economic infrastructure, is no longer a periphery of nation or Empire, but at its very heart. Aestheticized here in the Art Deco style, this condition is predicated on complex and global systems of mobility.

Below the feet of traders rested another important decorative detail that deals with Vancouver's place within larger networks of mobility: the compass rose. The compass rose is a situational device, reminding merchants of their position within a history of commerce and trade in the city, as well as within contemporary networks of cultural and economic exchange. The compass as an orientation device could suggest kinship with Empire even at its very edge. Vancouver and Canada, it should be remembered, were still part of the British Empire at the time, although, culturally and economically, as evinced by the Marine Building itself, the country seemed more and more influenced by its southern neighbour. McCarter and Nairne did turn to architectural developments in the United States—consulting with a Building Planning Committee from the Association of the Building Owners and Managers, an American group centred out of Chicago. However, the floor was carried out in imported korkoid, a point that indicates a connection to Empire for the Scottish-Canadian architects.¹⁴² As Joan McCarter, daughter of the architect,

142. Nairne, as I noted above, was born in Scotland, while McCarter was a first-generation Canadian of Scottish background.

observed in an interview about her father's practice, Vancouver in the interwar period "was an outpost of empire."¹⁴³ The historical narrative at the entrance buttresses that observation, situating Vancouver within a story about the success of British colonialism and empire building.¹⁴⁴ But perhaps the most important British presence was the autographed portrait of King George V presented by Lloyds of London and unveiled at the opening ceremonies by Lieutenant-Governor Bruce (fig. 1.31).

Of course, the use of Art Deco to suggest modernity within empires was not restricted to the British and Commonwealth Dominions. For instance, the French would stage a Colonial Exposition in 1931 celebrating its empire, and Belgians would follow in a similar fashion in 1935. The capital city of the Italian colony of Eritrea, Asmara (known as "little Rome" in the 1930s), would likewise host many Deco buildings.¹⁴⁵ We might add to the list the proliferation of Art Deco buildings in Havana,

Figure 1.31.
Leonard Frank,
Men at the Merchants
Exchange, Marine
Building, Vancouver
(BC), September 10,
1936.



Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 12585

143. Interview with Joan McCarter by Ann Carol, June 18, 1986. (John Young McCarter Fonds, Add. MSS 972, 598-B-5, file 8, audio cassette, City of Vancouver Archives.)

144. Although it should be remembered that the Spaniard Quadra is also included and that the second half of the narrative follows Canadian developments in the age of steam.

145. See Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Exposition, Paris*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2000; and Edward Denison, Guang Yu Ren, and Naigzy Gebremedhin, *Asmara: Africa's Secret Modernist City*, London, Merrell, 2003.

Cuba, which was ostensibly part of an American empire until the Communist Revolution of the late 1950s, or in the Philippines, which was also under American influence in this period.¹⁴⁶

The Marine Building had socio-political implications beyond producing a sense of place and marking out a space for business leaders and boosters to conceptually re-centre the world. It is interesting to compare McCarter and Nairne's romantic conception of the Marine Building to Claude Bragdon's description of the New York skyline:

Silhouetted against the grey of dawn, the crimson of sunset, or bright with the pellucid radiance of mid-day; rain-drenched, mist-enveloped, or piercing the darkness with late-lighted windows and shining coronets of flame, these campanili of the New Feudalism, however base-born and aesthetically uninspired, are none the less the planet's most august and significant symbol of proud-spirited man, "flashing unquenched defiance to the stars."¹⁴⁷

Bragdon's comments are instructive not only in their similar evocation of the visual effect of a skyscraper within a romanticized atmosphere, but also for insight into the connection between the effect of the buildings and "New Feudal" patronage. The skyscraper (and Art Deco in general) may have been exemplary of a "post aristocratic architecture," as architectural historian Rosemarie Haag Bletter suggests, but, I argue, it is also evidence of a continuation of an existing hierarchy.¹⁴⁸ While the Marine Building's Art Deco styling would have signalled a newness—particularly with its iconographic representations of contemporary transportation—this newness did not mean a new social order. If anything, the building responded to a free-market, business-oriented political culture similar to the Republican governments of the United States through to 1932, as well as the first half of R.B. (Richard Bedford) Bennett's federal Conservative Government's term in Ottawa. At the provincial level, the Conservatives, led by Simon Fraser Tolmie, campaigned successfully on the platform of "the application of business principles to the business of government [...] the business of government is just like any other business. It calls for honesty, ability, vision, loyalty to the shareholders—who are the people."¹⁴⁹ Perhaps not surprisingly, the members of the Merchants'

146. See Alejandro G. Alonso, Pedro Contreras, and Martino Fagioli, *Havana Deco*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2007; and Lourdes R. Montinola (ed.), *Art Deco in the Philippines*, Manila, ArtPostAsia, 2010.

147. Claude Bragdon, *The Frozen Fountain: Being Essays on Architecture and the Art of Design in Space*, Essay Index Reprint Series, 1932; Freeport (NY), Books for Libraries Press, 1970 [reprint], p. 35.

148. Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Art Deco Style," in Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter (eds.), *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 39.

149. Quoted pamphlet, *British Columbia's Next Premier*, in Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871–1933*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1972, p. 229. The Tory government proved incapable of dealing with the Depression. The Kidd Commission, whose findings were not ultimately adopted, perhaps best exemplifies how the business-oriented government that made sense in the optimistic days of 1928 was out of touch with the growing economic crisis. The elite-biased Commission suggested a massive reduction in government expenditures, including cutting wages of government employees and even reducing the number of seats in the Legislature (pp. 239–243).

Exchange were supportive of the Provincial Government's controversial Kidd Commission, marking a wider gulf between businessmen and the unemployed in the desperate years of the 1930s.¹⁵⁰ Again, this was dramatically evinced in the juxtaposition of the Art Deco-styled Marine Building opening as shantytowns were developing a few kilometres away.

Probably on account of its iconographic program and siting, the Marine Building was even considered a civic structure by some. In fact, Stimson's proposed leasing a substantial portion or selling outright the building to the City of Vancouver in 1931.¹⁵¹ This might have offered an amended but stylistically unified version of the city plan. The Burrard Bridge would have led to a city centre further north pivoting on the site of the Marine Building, with the nearby Deco-styled Art Gallery (a few blocks Southwest at 1145 West Georgia Street, by Sharp and Thompson) and Medical-Dental Building (Georgia at Burrard) in the vicinity (figs. 1.17 and 1.19). The offer, however, was rejected due to the city's own precarious financial position at the time. It is not surprising though, given the effectiveness of the decorative scheme of the Marine Building to garner a sense of belonging and gesture to the cosmopolitan, while evoking the local, that the future City Hall (1935–1936) by architects Townley and Matheson would also be cloaked in Art Deco.¹⁵² Even without officially becoming a public building, the Marine Building nonetheless retained a civic presence and remained a potent reminder of the city's prosperity and future ambitions.

Perhaps the best example of the complex situation of public culture posed by the Marine Building is evidenced in this slightly later phase in its life. The building was originally endowed with an observation deck level above the nineteenth floor, which offered panoramic views of the city for the cost of a quarter, and thus provided a public and tourist function. However, with the failure of G.A. Stimson and Co., the area was transformed into a two-storey, lavish Art Deco penthouse for Alfred J.T. Taylor's family after the building was sold to British Pacific Properties for a mere \$900,000 in 1933 (fig. 1.32).¹⁵³ The symbolic structure became the flagship

150. The minutes of a special meeting of the Board of Trustees noted with regards to the Kidd Commission that "general conclusions therein [*sic*] expressed are well founded." See minutes of Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees held in Board Room, September 7, 1932. (Vancouver Merchants' Exchange Fonds, Add. MSS 316-532-D-7, file 10, City of Vancouver Archives. Files accessed by special permission of archivist.)

151. The proposal is outlined in a letter co-signed by Peter W. Coleman of Stimson's Office Buildings and A.B. Walsh of Starrett Investing Corporation addressed to Mayor Taylor and City Council, dated March 4, 1931: 40,000 square feet were offered for lease to be occupied no later than November 1931 and to be renewed five years later or the building would be sold for \$1,971,000 plus accumulated operating deficit. See Mayor's office Fonds, 33-A-6, file 6, series 483, Vancouver City Archives.

152. Parking around the Marine Building was also a problem for councillors, as David Monteyne explains in "From Canvas to Concrete in Fifty Years: The Construction of Vancouver City Hall, 1935–1936," *B.C. Studies*, no. 134 (winter 1999/2000), p. 48, footnote 9.

153. The design of the two-storey suite was carried out by an international collection of architects and designers: Mr. C. Howard of London, Mr. Dorey of Los Angeles, and Vancouver architects Palmer & Bow. The apartment was featured in an article in an English decorative periodical by Roger Smithells, "A Home in the Sky," *Decoration*, vol. 16, August 1936, pp. 8–13. The furnishings included a replica chandelier of one at Rockefeller Center (now visible in the staircase from the ground floor to the basement). British Properties had a direct connection to Rockefeller Center, leasing out the British Empire



Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 12021

for the British Pacific ventures, an international syndicate financed largely by the Guinness family, which would develop (and continues to develop) elite residential neighbourhoods in West Vancouver.¹⁵⁴ It was also responsible for the construction of the Art Deco Lions Gate Bridge in time for the Royal visit of 1939.¹⁵⁵ This chapter in the Marine Building's life again confirms its place as a highly significant locus for identity construction and serves as evidence of its place in networks of foreign investment within the British Empire. The use of Art Deco for the private penthouse reconfirms the elite or even glamorous dimension of Art Deco, a factor that I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter.

Figure 1.32.
Penthouse living room,
Marine Building,
Vancouver (BC),
interior design by
C. Howard, Dorey,
and Palmer & Bow,
March 12, 1936.

Building, with Alfred Taylor on hand at the cornerstone ceremony (D'Acres and Luxton, *Lions Gate*, *op. cit.*, p. 38). In a sense, the site of the Marine Building had come full circle, shifting from a residence for a CPR executive to an office building, to an office building with a residence for an elite business leader. Apparently the Taylor family never moved in, due to a lack of convenience (the office building was locked at night and the elevator shut off). Instead, the space was used for hosting business luncheons and out-of-town visitors, while the Taylor family lived in their West Vancouver residence, Kew House (*ibid.*, pp. 57–61).

154. The Guinness family would have been well known in Vancouver's high society given their high standing in society papers and journals like the *Tatler*.
155. The entire nineteenth floor was occupied by British Pacific Properties. See D'Acres and Luxton, *Lions Gate*, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–43, 57–59 for details on the Marine Building.

The use of Art Deco at the Marine Building reinforced a sense of cosmopolitanism, one that related to the industries housed within. The form and decorative program of the building were instrumental in the production of a sense of place for a city optimistically poised to be an important international port. The use of a popular style and the staging of the building first in a department store window situated the building firmly within a discourse of consumer culture, and its dramatic interior program, which resonated with contemporary movie palaces, only served to highlight a connection to a space of desire. Indeed, the building itself became a site/sight of desire, a place for the projection of hopes for the future. As a result the edifice, more so than earlier tall buildings, inculcated a sense of belonging and was a locus of a complex public culture that merged financial, civic, and commercial interests. The building's materiality and decorative program indicated Vancouver's place at a nexus of converging systems of mobility, at a crossroads of influences that included the United States, Britain, and an emerging Canadian nationalism, though it was firmly grounded in the local. In some ways, the building acts as an index of modernity, evincing old and new technologies and cultural influences. It also brings into high relief the economic disparities of the inter-war years, between the boom days and Depression, well-heeled business leaders and struggling unemployed.

In this chapter I have argued that skyscrapers were indicative of larger systems of mobility and that in fact, rather than seeing them simply as centralizing—which of course they did both visually and through the construction of office space—we might read Art Deco skyscrapers as re-centring. In this way, we see how Art Deco was used dramatically in the production of place and public culture and thus the style had socio-political ramifications. Approaching the style of the Marine Building in part from its place (both physical and virtual), I have tried to indicate how Art Deco responded to particular local conditions and yet referenced (and indeed aestheticized connections between) other places. I have also endeavoured to show how the aestheticization of mobilities reinforced pre-existing hierarchies, masked (im)mobilities of the underprivileged (with First Nations, unemployed, or even non-White), and proffered a sense of optimism that smoothed over some of the challenges faced by the city. In exploring some connotations of the Art Deco skyscraper in Vancouver—well outside the typical skyscraper centres of New York, Chicago, or even Toronto—we see more dramatically the socio-political implications of the style. The theme of re-centring will be taken up on a much different scale in chapter 4, where I will look at the impact of the radio cabinet.

I have argued that the Marine Building was effective in the production of a particular sense of place that upheld the agenda of the business community in the city, and that “place” was not a neutral container here, but a location that reinforced sociocultural and racial hierarchies. In some ways, this seems akin to the buildings discussed in the next two chapters; however, in the case of Bombay movie theatres, rather than

avoid confrontation of different classes, races, or cultures as at the Marine Building, the Deco-framed cinemas became complicated sites of inter-cultural exchange.

In the next chapter, I will take up the connection between the skyscraper form, mobilities, and commerce by exploring the convergence of these at Bullock's Wilshire in Los Angeles. Like Vancouver, Los Angeles was positioned by its boosters as a city of the future. I will focus even more on the critical idea of lifestyle introduced here, as well as the crucial link between imaged, imagined, and material in the production and maintenance of consumer culture. With Art Deco now re-centred (or better, re-centring), we are poised to see how the traditional centre of Art Deco (the Paris exhibition of 1925) affected the notion of glamour and consumer culture on a large scale in the United States.



Moving Glamour

Lifestyle, *Ensemble*, and Bullock's Wilshire Department Store

*Greece built temples. The middle ages built cathedrals.
But we, whose life lies not in worship, but in producing and buying and selling,
build great stores. The attainment of Bullock's-Wilshire of a high degree of taste,
of rightness, of soundness in thinking, strongly affects the quality and taste of the
merchandise shown, bought, consumed, and assimilated into the culture of a city.*

Pauline G. Schindler, 1930¹

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1. Pauline G. Schindler, "A Significant Contribution to Culture," *California Arts and Architecture*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1930, p. 23. For consistency, I will use the unhyphenated and possessive spelling, "Bullock's Wilshire," throughout.

These comments by the art and architectural critic (and wife of famed Modern Movement architect Rudolf Schindler)² joined a chorus of praise for Bullock's Wilshire department store, opened on September 26, 1929.³ Indeed, the building would continue to receive acclaim as a premier example of department store design for American as well as foreign merchants and architects.⁴ Schindler's assertion is that the department store materializes the underlying ethos of interwar American society. The store becomes the visual and physical manifestation of consumer culture, and affects through its presentation of merchandise the very activity of shopping. In essence, Bullock's Wilshire aestheticizes the mobilities of consumer culture. This includes the social praxis and the commodities framed by the store—which altogether produce lifestyle—and these become “assimilated into the culture of the city.” That is, these conceptualizations of lifestyle affect, and perhaps effect, the production of a local, urban public culture.

In this chapter I argue that central to this public culture was the notion of glamour. Glamour is a term often used in descriptions of Art Deco objects and spaces—not to mention the Golden Age of Hollywood film, which only furthered the visual impact of the style in the 1920s and 1930s⁵—but is not often critically interrogated. In many ways, Bullock's Wilshire, its tower beckoning to a mostly affluent automobile consumer driving along Los Angeles's grand boulevard, emblemized the glamorous

2. Victoria Dailey notes that Pauline Schindler, together with her husband, was at the centre of a burgeoning modern art scene in Los Angeles. Schindler was interested in typography and music, as well as childhood education, and was also affiliated with the “eccentric group of writers, artists, and spiritual seekers who made their home in the sand dunes at Oceano, just south of San Luis Obispo,” known as the Dunites. In fact, she was the associate editor of the short-lived literary magazine *Dune Forum*, which published articles by Rudolph Schindler (by 1934 her ex-husband), Richard Neutra, and John Cage. See Victoria Dailey, “Naturally Modern,” in Victoria Dailey, Natalie Shivers, and Michael Dawson, *LA's Early Moderns: Art/Architecture/Photography*, Los Angeles, Balcony Press, 2003, p. 77.
3. The chorus included Arthur Miller, “Arts Working Together,” *L.A. Times*, June 2, 1929; Alma Whitaker, “Bullock's in Debut Today,” *L.A. Times*, September 26, 1929; Olive Gray, “Store Weds Art to Beauty,” *L.A. Times*, September 26, 1929; George Douglas, “Bullock's Wilshire Store Delights City's Art Critics,” *LA Examiner*, September 26, 1929; “Bullock's Latest Enterprise,” *L.A. Times*, September 28, 1929; Arthur Miller, “Beauty Seen in Building,” October 6, 1929; Harris Allen, “A Building Designed for Today,” *California Arts and Architecture*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1930, pp. 21–22; “A Building Designed in the Style of Tomorrow,” *Through the Ages*, vol. 8, 1930, pp. 19–24.
4. For instance, see “Bullock's New Store Inspected,” *LA Times*, March 27, 1931, which describes the visit of forty executives of “twenty leading department stores in [the] United States and England which do an annual sales business of more than \$343,000,000 [who] spent all of yesterday afternoon going through Bullock's Wilshire store in an inspection that astonished the visitors at the place's stock and modernity.” Bullock's Wilshire was also highlighted as one of eight modern department stores in a special issue of *The Architectural Forum* on the “Architecture of Merchandising,” vol. 58, no. 5, 1933.
5. For a discussion of modern(e) filmsets (although he is keen to argue that the movies disseminated Modern Movement architecture), see Donald Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies*, [1986] Santa Monica, Hennessey and Ingalls, 2000 [reprint], particularly chap. 4, “Hollywood Unlimited,” pp. 75–108, and chap. 5, “The Modern Mystique,” pp. 109–166. See also Howard Mandelbaum and Eric Myers, *Screen Deco: A Celebration of High Style in Hollywood*, [1985] Santa Monica, Hennessey and Ingalls, 2000 [reprint].

lifestyle of Los Angeles (fig. 2.1). Its sumptuous interiors provided stages for the performance of modern(e) lifestyle. But that lifestyle (and public culture it embodied) only fuelled the myth of and further magnetized Los Angeles for the thousands of migrants looking for a better life in Lotusland. Just as in the case of Vancouver and Bombay (as I will discuss in the next chapter), Los Angeles was a site of economic hope and of desire for social

Figure 2.1.
View down Wilshire
Boulevard, n.d.
[ca. 1929].



Hoffman-Luckhaus Studio of Photography.
Security Pacific National Bank Collection / Los Angeles Public Library

advancement. The Deco department store stands in uncomfortable juxtaposition with Dorothy Lange's *Toward Los Angeles, California* (March 1937), discussed in the Introduction (fig. 1.11, p. 29). As Mike Davis has shown, Los Angeles was a place of stark contrasts, of "sunshine and *noir*."⁶ For boosters, the city represented the realization of the American dream (*i.e.*, a vast community of individual property owners living in a metropolis that owed its existence to the expert engineering of water and power systems); while for detractors, L.A. represented the nightmare of exploitation inherent to consumerism. A closer examination of glamour exposes some of the contradictions at the heart of the consumer culture so apparent in the urban fabric of L.A.

The kind of irony evinced in Lange's photograph is seen in a roughly contemporaneous Merrie Melodies cartoon, *Page Miss Glory* (1936), an animated short that I argue critiques the construction of glamour.⁷ I begin this chapter by defining glamour in relation to this cartoon. I will illustrate how Art Deco was associated with glamour, and how glamour operates both from an objectified third-person perspective and from a performed subject position, which places the concept in the realm of lifestyle. Glamour will be linked to mobility: associated with social mobility, with desire (itself predicated on the idea of moving toward something sought after), and, paradoxically, with a distancing from objects and persons of emulation. The pull of glamour also masks some of the inequities and immobilities of consumer culture. I will discuss how glamour resonates with or reinforces what William Leach has dubbed the "democracy of desire," a concept that bespeaks the centrality of consumerism in American society, especially by the interwar years.⁸ Most importantly, I will argue that glamour has a spatial dimension, something that most scholars concerned with the concept—with the exception of the recent work of architectural historian Alice T. Friedman—have left largely unexplored.⁹ It is the spatiality of glamour that allows for its wider incorporation across the social spectrum.

6. See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, London, Verso, 2006 [rev. ed.].
7. The animated short is included as an extra on the DVD release of the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musical comedy *Top Hat*, 1935, directed by Mark Sandrich, Burbank (CA), Warner Home Video, 2005. It is also mentioned briefly in Mandelbaum and Myers, *Screen Deco: A Celebration...*, *op. cit.*, p. 18 (with an illustration on p. 21).
8. William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1993.
9. Alice T. Friedman, *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2010. For other recent work on glamour, see Joseph Rosa (ed.), *Glamour: Fashion, Industrial Design, Architecture*, San Francisco and New Haven, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Yale University Press, 2004; Stephen Gundle and Clino T. Castelli, *The Glamour System*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2006; Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008. Even Anne Massey's excellent book, *Hollywood beyond the Screen: Design and Material Culture* (*op. cit.*), which charts "the changing representations and meanings of glamour" in the context of "the Americanization of British popular culture," though it discusses the term glamour and refers to American importation of French fashions and design, fails to adequately explain how architecture can be glamorous.

In the next section, I turn to the materialization of glamour at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* held in Paris in 1925, arguing that spaces could evoke glamour by providing stages for the performance of modern lifestyle. In fact, the whole enterprise of the exhibition might be seen as a presentation of glamour—of redefining Paris (and France) as the arbiter of taste and fashion to be imitated and admired by other nations. That Art Deco emerged as a popular style from this fair only furthers the connection between style and glamour, although I would not go so far as to argue that all Deco spaces are glamorous. The chief development at the exhibition was the concept of ensemble. It is this notion that underscores the spatial and decorative program of Bullock's Wilshire and its framing of modern lifestyles in Deco garb.

In the final section I will show how Bullock's Wilshire embodied glamour. The department store was a key site for the production of public culture, responding to and magnifying ideas of mobility and lifestyle in Southern California. For instance, it was one of the first department stores designed specifically with the automobile consumer in mind (*i.e.*, it was oriented toward a large parking lot). Like the Marine Building in Vancouver, the store evokes the optimism of the 1920s, though in Los Angeles the scale of development and optimism was even greater due in no small part to the burgeoning of the Hollywood film industry.¹⁰ Many of Hollywood's elite would become customers of Bullock's Wilshire, hence we might see the store as having wider ramifications for the conception of modern(e) architecture and lifestyle.¹¹ Lifestyles on screen or reproduced in fan magazines were, in some cases, amplifications of those lived and expressed in Los Angeles in the interwar years. Thus, the prominent place of Bullock's Wilshire in the local context most likely influenced notions of modernity for film makers, actors, and designers. And although some films featured scenes in Bullock's Wilshire—for instance, the 1937 Cary Grant and Constance Bennett comedy *Topper*—¹²my contention is that the store's larger impact was implicit; that is, the department store fit into a local cultural milieu that in turn affected the lifestyles and *moderne* architecture portrayed in Hollywood productions.

■ Defining Glamour: Paging Miss Glory

"Glamour" has a Scottish origin, with etymologists pointing to two different—if related—roots. On the one hand, the word is thought to have derived from "grammar" or "gramarye," and retained its association with "occult learning, magic, necromancy" as it passed into English

10. For more on stars and the growth and power of star fan clubs in the United States, see Samantha Barbas, *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity*, New York, Palgrave, 2001.

11. See Margaret Leslie Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, Los Angeles, Balcony Press, 1996, especially chap. 5, "In Hollywood's Embrace," pp. 69–80.

12. Hal Roach Production/MGM, directed by Norman Z. McLeod. For a list of Bullock's Wilshire's appearances on the big and small screens, see Davis, *ibid.*, p. 80.

around 1830, meaning “delusive or alluring charm.”¹³ On the other hand, “glamer” or glamour, according to an etymologist of the Scottish language in the nineteenth century, was derived from “splendour” (“glimbre” in Scottish) and meant “the supposed influence of a charm on the eye, causing it to see objects differently from what they really are. Hence to cast glamer o’er one, to cause deception of sight.”¹⁴ So the term, as Stephen Gundle and Clino T. Castelli point out, was associated with both knowledge (to bewitch or enchant) and the effects of “bedazzlement, wonderment and deception.”¹⁵ In literature, the term first appeared prominently in Sir Walter Scott’s 1805 poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.¹⁶ As Gundle argues in a subsequent text on the history and development of glamour in bourgeois consumer culture, “[g]lamour was a result of the release on to the market of the possessions, heritage, prerogatives, styles, and practices of the aristocracy and of the appropriations and manipulations of these by commercial forces and other actors in the urban environment.”¹⁷ This reuse of aristocratic aesthetics—or perhaps dreams of living an aristocratic lifestyle—within consumer culture, I argue, is essential to understanding the larger socio-political impact of glamour as well as glamorous, Art Deco spaces like Bullock’s Wilshire and imaged in *Page Miss Glory*.

For Gundle, glamour is about the construction of an aura, a fabrication of style, by the emergent bourgeoisie and thus was an inherently modern phenomenon.¹⁸ His understanding of glamour resonates, to some degree, with John Berger’s earlier discussion of the term as related to publicity.¹⁹ For Berger, glamour is fundamentally about desiring to be envied. “Being envied,” he argues, “is a solitary form of reassurance. It depends precisely upon not sharing your experience with those who envy you. You are observed with interest but you do not observe with interest—if you do, you will become less enviable.”²⁰ In essence, consumers are enticed by publicity (particularly advertisements) to reproduce the lifestyles depicted and, in a sense, become objectified themselves, advertisements for the advertisements. This conception of glamour has been critiqued by feminist scholars Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe who believe that glamour “speaks of confidence, empowerment, and, depending on its use, articulates

13. This is according to *The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage* (1996), as quoted in Gundle and Castelli, *The Glamour System*, *op. cit.*, p. 3. Gundle and Castelli go on to note that the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) likewise sees the connection with grammar, but associates glamour with magic, enchantment, and spells. Other dictionaries associate the term with “magic beauty,” a lack of seriousness, or as derived from “clamour” rather than grammar.

14. This is according to the *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1879), as quoted in Gundle and Castelli, *ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

15. Gundle and Castelli, *ibid.*, p. 4.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

18. It should be noted that by the term “modern” Gundle refers back to the eighteenth century.

19. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, New York, The Viking Press, 1972. For Berger “publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour” (see p. 131).

20. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

all that is *not* domestic, confined, suppressed.”²¹ Their argument, however, is confined to representations of female stars—particularly glamour shots of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich—and, while important in pointing to oppositional strategies and appropriations of glamour, fails to account for the role of glamour in public culture. These readings of glamour as self-consciously constructed (whether enacting capitalist hegemonic control or providing a means of individual empowerment) stand in opposition to conceptions of glamour as emanating from the individual.²² They point to a larger cultural frame (which I argue should include architecture) and provide a useful entrance into a more specific discussion of how glamour operates.

In many ways, *Page Miss Glory* is all about glamour. Produced by Leon Schlesinger and directed by Tex Avery, the animated short includes music from the 1935 feature film of the same title.²³ The feature film was the first Warner Brothers production for William Randolph Hearst’s Cosmopolitan Pictures (he had previously made films with MGM). Directed by Mervyn Leroy and based on a Broadway play of the same title, *Page Miss Glory* stars Marion Davies (who came out of retirement for the part) as Loretta Dalrymple, a country girl who moves to New York to take up a chambermaid position at the Park Regis Hotel. Click Wiley, a broke photographer played by Pat O’Brien, and his pal (Frank McHugh) are scamming their stay at the hotel, and answer a radio contest to produce a picture of the most beautiful girl in America for the Nemo Yeast Company. They do so by creating a composite image that incorporates the best physical features of Hollywood’s starlets—*i.e.*, they manufacture a glamorous star, visually.²⁴ When the voice of Dawn Glory, the imaginary beautiful girl, is required, Click enlists the help of Loretta, who, after a make-over, finally becomes Dawn Glory, and, following several twists and turns, ends up married to a famous aviator, played by Dick Powell. The musical comedy received mediocre reviews.²⁵

21. Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe, “Empowering Glamour,” *Cineaction*, vols. 26–27, winter 1992, p. 3. Their argument is also cited and discussed in Massey, *Hollywood beyond the Screen...*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
22. For instance, see Carol S. Gould, “Glamour as an Aesthetic Property of Persons,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2005, pp. 237–247.
23. To confuse matters, the feature film was based on a Broadway play, also of the same title, written by Joseph Schrank and Phillip Dunning.
24. This picks up on the Pygmalion myth and might have resonated with audiences familiar with George Bernard Shaw’s socialist play *Pygmalion* (1913), or the later adaptation for the Three Stooges, *Hoi Polloi* (1935). The play was adapted again for the big screen in 1938 (directed by Anthony Asquith and Leslie Howard, Pascal Film Productions), this time by Shaw himself (winning him an Oscar).
25. The script was written by Delmore Daves and Robert Lord. To my knowledge, the original film has not been reproduced for the home market. Information about the plot came from reading the script (dated March 14, 1935) contained in the Warner Brothers Archives, University of Southern California (USC), Folder 216A. The article “*Page Miss Glory* Mediocre: Dick Powell Its Only Virtue” (*The Hollywood Reporter*, July 3, 1935 [accessed through Warner Brothers Archives, University of Southern California, folder 2163A]) had few compliments for the film.

With the incorporation of music from the feature film and reference to Dawn Glory, the animated short is explicitly tied to the original film.²⁶ In fact, the central plot of the cartoon seems to refer to publicity suggestions made in the feature film's press kit.²⁷ These include a visit by Marion Davies (or a look-alike) to "your" small town, announcements "paging Miss Glory," which suggest the real existence of the fictional character, and even beauty contests, where local girls could measure themselves against Hollywood starlets and, in a sense, be Dawn Glory. By the mid-1930s, this was a commonplace strategy, according to fashion historian Sarah Berry, who states that advertisements and fashion guides of the period recommended women to model their "look" after contemporary celebrities who matched their "personality," a point which connoted an enlarged understanding of "fashioning oneself."²⁸ As Elizabeth Wilson points out, in the 1920s Bullock's organized sales of fashion around six personality types: the Romantic, the Statuesque, the Artistic, the Picturesque, the Modern, and the Conventional.²⁹ The development of this approach responded to the standardization of sizes with the seemingly contradictory idea of mass individualism, which remains potent today. It was reinforced at fashion shows held in Bullock's Wilshire. For example, one show dramatized the evolution of fashion, with models posing in frames. The final two included "Modern" and "Futuristic" styles (figs. 2.2 to 2.4). Edith Bristol, writing for *Western Advertising and Western Business*, explained that Bullock's diverged from standard practice:

Fashion shows, since the first style parade on record, have always been modeled on "perfect 36's"—the assumption being that all women wish to appear perfect and 36, whether they are or not.

The new silhouette, arriving last year, demanded special education and a special adaptation of the rules of art in costume design. So Bullock's-Wilshire dared present a fashion show with models chosen from among the "less-than-perfect" figures.

[...]

26. The Warner Brothers Archives at USC contain very little about the cartoon itself, yet do have a list of the songs taken from the original or added for the animated short. The music in the original was largely the work of Al Dubin and Harry Warren. Warner Brothers Archives, University of Southern California, folder 1113A – 7192 Miss Glory (Merrie Melodie).
27. Warner Brothers Archives, University of Southern California, folder 292.
28. Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 5–10. For instance, she cites Frieda Wiegand McFarland in *Good Taste in Dress* (1936) about "How to Discover Your Style": "Many girls have a style of their own, but are unconscious or indifferent to it. Are you one of these girls? If so learn about yourself. That is how movie celebrities turn into personalities. They get acquainted with their own style, and then play it" (p. 6). Berry also lists a number of fashion guides that explored personality—suggesting a sense of performativity associated with fashioning oneself after a celebrity—including *Cultivating Personality* (1930), *How to Develop Your Personality* (1932), *Building Personality* (1934), *Your Clothes and Personality* (1937), and *Designs for Personality* (1938) (p. 10).
29. Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London, Virago Press, 1985, p. 124. This was based on Paul H. Nystrom who includes a full description of each type in *Economics of Fashion* (op. cit., pp. 479–480).



Security Pacific National Bank Collection / Los Angeles Public Library

Figure 2.2.
*Fashion Show at
Bullock's Wilshire,
view 12, [ca. 1935]
[more likely ca. 1929].*



Figure 2.3.
*Fashion Show at
Bullock's Wilshire,
view 5, [ca. 1935]
[more likely ca. 1929].*

Security Pacific National Bank Collection / Los Angeles Public Library



Figure 2.4.
*Fashion Show at
 Bullock's Wilshire,
 view 9, [ca. 1935]
 [more likely ca. 1929].*

Models a bit too short, a shade too tall, a trifle too heavy or a few pounds too thin were gowned to demonstrate the possibilities and the requirements of the new silhouette for the average woman. The thing called for consummate tact. But it worked. The success of the unheard-of experiment in fashion shows was instantaneous and sensational.³⁰

The focus on “education” in transforming the “average woman” by way of the fashionable “new silhouette” suggests the constructedness (and the “grammar”) of glamour. Through this process of education, the Deco mode would become one of the leading styles of the interwar years, fitting a broad demographic. Empowered with the proper knowledge, any woman—whether too tall, too short, too heavy, too thin—could be fashionable and glamorous. The fashion shows at Bullock's Wilshire highlighted the store as a place of expert knowledge, where one could learn about and be entertained by the latest fashions. At the fashion show, the visitor is a spectator; however, I argue that the dramatic interiors of the store would also turn this around, making the visitor-spectator into a model, highlighting the dual nature of glamour as objectifying from a third-person perspective as well as embodied and self-conscious.

30. Edith Bristol, “John G. Bullock Tells Why It Pays to Spend Millions for Art in Business,” *Western Advertising and Western Business*, February 6, 1930, p. 62.

While the feature film, promotion campaign, and the Bullock's merchandizing strategies all emphasize the possibility of becoming glamorous, the animated short, *Page Miss Glory*, explores the construction of the myth. The cartoon opens in "Hicksville," a small, bumpkin town somewhere in Depression-era United States. The town readies itself for the arrival of "Miss Glory," who will be staying in the local hotel. The hotel owner tells the bellhop, Abner, to "get to his prac-ti-zing" as Miss Glory will soon be arriving. Abner looks to a cigarette advertisement for the proper posture he should take, then practices walking about the lobby (fig. 2.5). The ad, the posture, and even the tone of Abner's voice as he later shouts "Call for Miss Glory!" reference a popular contemporary campaign for Philip Morris.³¹ He also takes a moment to spray himself with some perfume. These actions indicate a couple of elements in the construction of glamour.

First, they highlight the importance of the event—that is, glamour is tied, at least in this context, to a special occasion and therefore requires particular postures and behaviours. A tension emerges when we consider the image of a glamorous lifestyle—lived as much as imagined—which supposedly rests in the everyday, and the constructedness of glamour for a particular event. The constructedness of glamour for the less affluent is more apparent, it seems, than that for the models of emulation (the enviable, from John Berger's perspective). Regardless, glamour—even as embodied by a somewhat homely bellhop—still suggests a sense of



Merrie Melodies Cartoon,
Warner Brothers Pictures

◀ **Figure 2.5.**
Still from
Page Miss Glory,
artist Leodora
Congdon, 1936.

31. Roland Marchand argues that the campaign was part of a general trend, beginning in the early 1930s, of appealing to "a public hunger for personalized communications." He explains: "After the bellhop, Johnny, created a sensation with his 'Call-l-l... for-r-r Philip Mah-ra-hiss!' paging calls on radio commercials, Philip Morris had to recruit and train a whole corps of midget Johnnies to meet the demand for 'personal appearances.'" See Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream...*, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

empowerment. While Abner may not look glamorous to others (indeed, the cartoon is no doubt critiquing the fact that bumpkins buy into glamour industry), he feels glamorous, and his poses are to provide access to the mythic realm of glamour.

Second, glamour is given a tactile quality and even olfactory sensation. This complicates Gundle and Castelli's argument that glamour is visually based.³² Although I would agree with them that the visual plays an especially significant role in the construction of the glamour, particularly as made manifest through mediatization in film and magazines, this brief episode in the animated short reminds us of the other factors that could make up a glamorous atmosphere or one's preparation for it. This issue of the sensuousness of materials will become important when discussing Bullock's Wilshire below. Finally, and most obviously, the cues for how one should act are highly influenced by media constructions—in this case through an advertisement.

As the bellhop awaits Miss Glory's arrival, he falls asleep on a bench and wakes up (in his dream) in an Art Deco hotel (fig. 2.6). This where the unique contribution of Leodora Cogdon, credited with conceiving and designing the "Art Moderne" aspects of the cartoon, emerges. Hicksville's local hotel shoots up to become a big city, luxury hotel, set against a backdrop of skyscrapers. As the tempo of the music increases, mirroring the speed and bustle of the metropolis, exaggeratedly elongated automobiles arrive at the entrance to the "Cosmopolitan Hotel," evacuating their well-heeled owners who frantically rush into the building. This

Figure 2.6. ▶
Still from
Page Miss Glory,
artist Leodora
Cogdon, 1936.



Merrie Melodies Cartoon,
Warner Brothers Pictures

32. They argue that glamour "is an enticing image, a staged and constructed version of reality that invites consumption. That is to say, it is primarily visual, it consists of a retouched or perfected version of a real person or situation and it is predicated upon the gaze of a desiring audience." Gundle and Castelli, *The Glamour System*, op. cit., p. 8.

stands in opposition to the street traffic of Hicksville, where ducks and cows imitate the horns of modern cars. Art Deco is used here to mark out an imagined space of glamour, though not elegance, given the often unruly behaviour of the rich inhabiting the place.

By dubbing the location the “Cosmopolitan Hotel,” the cartoon alluded to the cosmopolitan quality of glamour itself. Glamour was often associated with the lifestyle of the *nouveaux riches* who could travel the world to centres of fashion and taste and who would stay in luxurious hotels. Attached as well to moving pictures, cosmopolitanism and glamour were thus bound inherently to notions (and systems) of mobility and their aestheticization. This was accentuated at Bullock’s Wilshire as customers drove up to the entrance of the department store under the *porte-cochère*, finding themselves at a veritable monument to mobility, both in terms of its site and decorative scheme, as I will discuss below. The store can thus be seen as resonating with the “Cosmopolitan Hotel” of the cartoon.

The hotel was a popular site in films of the era and served as a space of potential social mobility—indeed, this is the theme of original, feature film *Page Miss Glory*, where it is only through a chance encounter at a hotel that Loretta becomes Miss Glory.³³ The glamorous hotel lobby was one of the key locations for Art Deco styling, and as a semi-public space it informed the production of public culture. As Siegfried Kracauer noted at the time, the hotel lobby reinforced a culture of anonymity by shrouding what he describes as the “nothing” that lies at the heart of modern society. Although the anonymous crowd in the hotel lobby seemed bereft of a sense of community, which he contrasts with a Church congregation, it was, nonetheless, constitutive of modern public culture, bound together more by aesthetics than fundamentally shared beliefs. For Kracauer,

[r]emnants of individuals slip into the nirvana of relaxation, faces disappear behind newspapers, and the artificial continuous light illuminates nothing but mannequins. It is the coming and going of unfamiliar people who have become empty forms because they have lost their password, and who now file by as ungraspable flat ghosts. If they possessed an interior, it would have no windows at all, and they would perish aware of their endless abandonment, instead of knowing their homeland as the congregation does. But as pure exterior, they escape themselves and express their nonbeing through the false aesthetic affirmation of the estrangement that has been installed between them.³⁴

33. We might immediately think of the Academy Award-winning film *Grand Hotel* (MGM, director Edmund Goulding, 1932), however, the hotel was quite a common site/sight in Hollywood films throughout the 1930s. For a brief discussion, see Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 138–142.

34. Siegfried Kracauer, “The Hotel Lobby,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 183. It is the depiction of the hotel lobby in detective novels that provides his jumping off point.

The non-specific function of a hotel lobby—a space designed for detached, anonymous encounters—becomes reproduced in social relations, as does its detached aesthetic, which promotes a disinterestedness without the possibility of a sublime experience.³⁵

Kracauer's negative appraisal of hotel lobby culture, one which ultimately depicts the leisure classes as distanced from larger social relations, is taken up in the cartoon. The disparity of wealth between bumpkin Hicksville and the Cosmopolitan Hotel is brutally apparent, if humorously portrayed (fig. 2.7). The visitors of the hotel are seen as over-indulgent at a time of severe economic depression, and caught up more in the hype of glamour around Miss Glory than the plight of impoverished towns like Hicksville. The cartoon thus highlights an escapist theme partaken in by both the well-heeled (avoiding the devastation faced by fellow citizens) and the less affluent (including Abner who escapes in a dream). Here glamour resonates with spectacle, aestheticizing social relations with two effects: on the one hand, glamour establishes a visual correspondence to a certain, leisured lifestyle, where to look the part provides access to an

Figure 2.7. ▶
Still from
Page Miss Glory,
artist Leodora
Congdon, 1936.



35. *Ibid.*, p. 177. He argues that “the aesthetic [is] being understood here as a category of the nonexistent type of person, the residue of that positive aesthetic which makes it possible to put this nonexistence into relief in the detective novel. The person sitting around idly is overcome by a disinterested satisfaction in the contemplation of a world creating itself, whose purposiveness is felt without being associated with any representation of a purpose. The Kantian definition of the beautiful is instantiated here in a way that takes seriously its isolation of the aesthetic and its lack of content.” He goes on to assert that “[i]n the hotel lobby, admittedly, the aesthetic—lacking all qualities of sublimity—is presented without any regard for these upward-striving intentions [of Kant’s], and the formula ‘purposiveness without purpose’ also exhausts its content. Just as the lobby is the space that does not refer beyond itself, the aesthetic condition corresponding to it constitutes itself as its own limit.”

elite stratum of society; yet on the other hand, this aestheticization involves a disinterested distancing, a withdrawal from social engagement. We might see this resonating in the spaces of Bullock's Wilshire, where customers were encouraged to project their fantasies onto commodities and imagine themselves enacting activities of modern lifestyle without thinking about broader social implications of consumer capitalism. Indeed, as I will discuss further below, the site of the building and the fact that it was designed for the automobile shopper immediately marked the space of the store out as exclusionary of lower-income citizens. In this way, the mobilities celebrated by the Art Deco palace of consumption—much like the Cosmopolitan Hotel—masked the immobilities of the working class (or unemployed). Ironically—and this is a crucial factor of glamour—these same lower-income citizens supported the spectacle of celebrity (as evidenced in the cartoon by the preparations going into the visit of Miss Glory).

Although Abner in his dream gets a taste of glamour—quite literally, when he consumes a martini with his fellow waiters—in the end, he is denied access to Miss Glory, receiving only a glimpse of her performing a Busby Berkeley-type show (fig. 2.8). He is then dramatically ejected from the top of the hotel and plunges past Deco-style skyscrapers only to land before a train, whose conductor angrily rings a bell to move him along. The conductor turns into the humble Hicksville hotel manager, who awakens Abner so that he may greet Miss Glory as she arrives in a luxurious, streamlined car. In the end, Abner collapses into the arms of a lolli-licking, Shirley Temple-esque figure, rather than the glamorous blonde starlet from his dream.



◀ **Figure 2.8.**
Still from
Page Miss Glory,
artist Leodora
Congdon, 1936.

Merrie Melodies Cartoon,
Warner Brothers Pictures

In the cartoon, glamour is associated with a modern lifestyle that only seems to work in an Art Deco context. The closest Abner and the folks of Hicksville can get to this glamorous world is through imagination (dreaming) and vicarious identification with figures in advertisements, magazines, and, of course, motion pictures.³⁶ When glamour is understood as being primarily aesthetic, viewed from a third-person perspective and therefore necessitating a distance between the subject and glamorous object or person, Kathleen Higgins suggests that it falls into the category of kitsch.³⁷ She turns to Thomas Kulka's definition of kitsch to inform her argument. Kitsch is conceptualized as highly charged with stock emotions; its themes/objects are instantly recognizable; and it does not enrich any understanding of themes or objects depicted.³⁸ She characterizes glamour as "not about one's personal uniqueness, but about one's relationship to a larger complex of fantasy, one that is intriguing in part because of its unavailability."³⁹ She goes on to describe the fictional character of atmosphere created by glamour. Spatially, we might think of some examples of small-scale, neighbourhood movie theatres that offered a sense of *faux* luxury. While they may not go so far as to place glamour in the realm of kitsch, her definition largely harmonizes with Berger as well as Gundle and Castelli, and even resonates with Kracauer's discussion of the hotel lobby discussed above. And indeed, in the animated short, the lack of fulfilment in both Abner's dream and his encounter with the "real" Miss Glory seems to support this argument.

However, I think glamour is more complicated than this. It does not sit solely in the third person, although this is unquestionably a major part of it. Glamour is also lived. Thus I would disagree with Higgins's assertion that it is simply a "voyeuristic pleasure."⁴⁰ It is bound to practices and behaviours as well as aesthetics. For instance, female movie-goers were encouraged to buy knock-off versions of Hollywood fashions in cinema shops or costume patterns, allowing Depression-struck Americans to make the glamorous fashions at home.⁴¹ One can feel glamorous in particular situations, and this suggests the importance of the material framing of glamorous activities. Abner no doubt feels this way as he prepares for the arrival of Miss Glory, and this leads him into the Art Deco

36. To this we might add the consumption of cheap, mass-produced artefacts that were often visually associated with higher-end, luxury products. I will take up this theme in chapter 4.

37. Kathleen Higgins, "Beauty and Its Kitsch Competitors," in Peg Zeglin Brand (ed.), *Beauty Matters*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000, pp. 87–111. See also Katya Mandoki, "Aesthetic Contagion: The Kitsch and Glamour Pathogens," *Dialogue and Universalism*, vols. 11–12, 2003, pp. 141–150.

38. Higgins, *ibid.*, p. 90.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Bernard Waldman established his "Cinema Fashions" label in 1930 and sold medium- to high-priced dresses in department store boutiques. Citing Charlotte Herzog and Jane Gaines, Sarah Berry argues that home sewing allowed for more personalization. This may suggest a process of emulation rather than simply imitation. See Berry, *Screen Style, Fashion and Femininity...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17 and 21–22.

“Cosmopolitan Hotel” of his dream, the glamorous environment missing in Hicksville that completes his fantasy. Although it turns out to be an unfulfilled dream, as all encounters with glamour are (*i.e.*, he only sees Miss Glory briefly from a distance and is subsequently ejected from the glamorous context), it does point to the power of built spaces (even if imagined in that instance) to provide stages for a first-person experience of glamour. In a way, it is through the built environment that glamour enters public culture in a meaningful way. Seeing images of stars and exotic or luxurious locations might promote certain ideas of lifestyle, but these are made more meaningful when one feels glamorous in such a space. This explains the advent of ornate department stores and atmospheric movie theatres—places that inspired not just a third-person identification or longing for glamour, but theatrical frameworks for feeling glamorous in a social context.

Friedman has also highlighted the glamorous dimensions of architecture, reminding us that architects and their clients were influenced by the visual culture of Hollywood and Madison Avenue, which established certain “ways of seeing” and “sensory expectations.”⁴² “Like consumer products and popular movies,” she contends, glamorous buildings “told compelling stories, offering multiple opportunities for observers to enter into their fantasy worlds, either by looking at them in photographs or films, or by literally moving through their spaces.”⁴³ Her study of post-WWII American architecture simultaneously points to the influence of popular culture on the creation of architecture as well as architecture’s crucial role in the lived and imagined staging of that culture. While her book sheds light on the power and construction of glamour in relation to mid-century modern architecture, the roots of the American glamour Friedman describes are found in the interwar years, an era of burgeoning consumer culture and mass media. Indeed, the design of Bullock’s Wilshire exemplifies the transatlantic and transcontinental exchanges that helped to forge the unique glamorous public culture of Los Angeles of the 1920s and 1930s, which, through the powerful influence of the Hollywood film industry, then affected a broader sense of American glamour.

■ Glamour and Democratizing Desire

Commercial buildings and their lobbies, nightclubs, and high-end shops gave a tangible and public face to glamour in cities, and promoted the idea of a “democratization of desire,” a concept that William Leach argues was already well entrenched in American society by the 1920s. For him, it was “a future-oriented culture of desire that confused the good life

42. Friedman, *American Glamour...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

with goods.”⁴⁴ “[T]he culture of consumer capitalism,” he goes on, “may have been among the most nonconsensual public cultures ever created.”⁴⁵ He shows how this ideology, produced by commercial groups in cooperation with other elites, was reinforced within a larger, institutional framework that included not only business leaders, investment bankers, and advertisers, but also museums, governments at all levels, and educational institutions. Dissenting voices were largely drowned out by spectacle, giving the illusion of consensus and gradually insinuating glamour into everyday life.

Glamour, it seems to me, is essential to the maintenance of a “democracy of desire,” fuelling the urges for a lifestyle that for most (and perhaps all) is visible, but, like the promise of the commodity fetish upon which it is predicated, is always just out of reach. Thus Leach’s use of the term “democracy” might seem contradictory for a logic that is ultimately not egalitarian. Democratization is most often viewed simply in positive terms; however, democracies of any sort are always shot through with contradictions. Democracies are distinguished from one another through their visions of success, and in many instances these visions become embodied in the built environment, as I will argue below in my discussion of Bullock’s Wilshire. By emphasizing the importance of fulfilling individual desires for luxury through the consumption of goods or pleasurable leisure activities, consumer cultures occlude other visions of success (e.g., equal distribution of wealth). This is how the residue of the aristocracy can continue to exert such an influence over democratic public cultures, even as taste-making became the prerogative of the *nouveaux riches*. But, as Berry argues, “that upper-class glamour is a matter of appearances rather than ‘breeding’ (and can therefore be emulated) does not imply that viewers [of Hollywood films] were interested in adopting the *values* of the upper class.”⁴⁶ She asserts that “Hollywood films and popular fashion discourses [...] emphasized the demystification of upper-class glamour in ways that underscored the economic basis, rather than inherent social superiority, of upper-class culture.”⁴⁷ While I agree with her contention that what was perhaps most appealing about characters played by Joan Crawford was a “determination not to be trapped in predetermined social roles,” and that poking fun at the upper-class (as in the cartoon *Page Miss*

44. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants...*, *op. cit.*, p. xiii. Despite discussing the use of exoticism and historicism by department store pioneer John Wanamaker, he claims that this new culture was “almost violently hostile to the past and to tradition.” This misses a crucial aspect of consumer culture and modernity in general. Although he is right to point to the importance of “newness,” such a sense of newness was often associated with a new accessibility to traditions previously unavailable. We must keep in mind as well that traditions themselves were often constructed to meet needs and desires of modern subjects, as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger point out. See their introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992. For a historiographical discussion of the issue of “the invention of tradition,” see Nezar AlSayyad, “The End of Tradition, or the Tradition of Endings?,” in Nezar AlSayyad (ed.), *The End of Tradition?*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004.

45. Leach, *ibid.*, p. xiii.

46. Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity...*, *op. cit.*, p. xix.

47. *Ibid.*

Glory) no doubt demystified glamour to a certain degree, Crawford's characters still want into this world and Abner still dreams of being in a glamorous environment (if only as a bellhop!), even if they do not stay long. This suggests a contradiction inherent in consumer culture and glamour—of presenting values as constructed and therefore dismissible, and yet, in knowing that these values are potentially attainable, they become all the more desirable. The vision of success remains a comparison of one's current state of luxury with that of the upper class, which only serves to reinscribe a traditional social order.⁴⁸

This irony is perhaps best seen in the popular advertising strategy that historian Roland Marchand calls "the parable of the Democracy of Goods," which emerged in the 1920s but continued into the Depression, emphasizing the huge disparity of wealth in the U.S. Here the allure of a product was established based on its use by members of high society or celebrities. For instance, the American Pencil Company provided the opportunity to anyone to "write like a millionaire!" for "A millionaire may ride in a sportier car, live in a richer home, and work at a bigger desk [...] but he can't write with a better pencil than *you* can [...]. And the price is ten cents, to everyone."⁴⁹ These ads attempted to cloak products of everyday life, from toothbrushes to tires, in the aura of glamour. They also pointed out that glamour affected the entire spectrum of society. This is seen in *Page Miss Glory* where the fashionable men in evening attire race to catch a glimpse of Miss Glory with the same level of frenzy as citizens of Hicksville preparing for the arrival of the starlet. The fact that all members of society could desire the glamorous meant that semi-public spaces, like Bullock's Wilshire, could have a large impact on the production of public culture. The built environment offered a tangible framework—in essence, materializing dreams. Glamour was thus not always a fleeting, ephemeral experience in modernity, but included as well a very concrete infrastructure in the form of department stores, cinemas, nightclubs, liners, etc.

48. It does not, however, negate the creativity of individual consumerist acts or the possibility of defining oneself in opposition to mainstream society, as in the case of subcultures. These allow for a sense of empowerment and indicate the complexity of identity formation in consumer culture. In my opinion, however, they do not radically alter the value system underpinning the existing social order. For an interesting discussion of the complexities of the fashion system, grappling with issues of what sparks and informs novelty, see Colin Campbell, "The Desire for the New: Its Nature and Social Location as Presented in Theories of Fashion and Modern Consumerism," in Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch (eds.), *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, London, Routledge, 1992, pp. 48–64. While I might agree with Campbell that social elites do not necessarily set all fashion trends, without their support (and/or the support of business interests) fashions could not affect the mass market.

49. Quoted in Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream...*, *op. cit.*, p. 291. Marchand points out that the gulf in rich and poor had its limits in ad campaigns of the 1930s. Mansions were compared to modest cottages or three-room apartments, but not shantytowns. "Any open acknowledgment of slums, shacks, and unemployment," he argues, "would suggest a 'gulf' of conditions that even a vacuum cleaner, let alone a pencil or a pair of underwear, might not be sufficient to bridge" (p. 295).

■ Learning from the 1925 Paris Exhibition

Before turning to the materialization of glamour in the built environment of Bullock's Wilshire, it is worth considering briefly the impact of the Paris *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, which opened in April of 1925 and closed in October of that year.⁵⁰ The exhibition was largely about spectacle and, I would argue, helped construct or reinforce an aura of glamour for the city of Paris. The exhibition was dominated by French production—two-thirds of the 23-acre site, which ran from the Porte d'Honneur, beside the Grand Palais, across the Seine to Les Invalides, was dedicated to French pavilions—and, indeed, the primary purpose of the exhibition was to reassert France's central position as the arbiter of taste and fashion.⁵¹ The exhibition thus had closely linked cultural, economic, and political motivations, and operated as a kind of palliative for deep-seated sociocultural anxieties faced by the country following the devastation of the First World War. It reinforced Paris's position at the centre of a global empire—which resonated with the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley the year before. While the *Catalogue général officiel* claimed, "We have invited all nations," the exhibition was largely a European fair but did not include Germany—which was only invited at the last minute, leaving little time to put together an exhibit.⁵² Neither did the fair include the United States—which was invited and offered a prominent site, but declined due to an apparent lack of sufficiently "modern" material in the eyes of the government. The plans for an exhibition dedicated to modern decorative arts had been discussed since 1907, always with the intention of proving superiority over German and Austrian producers, who had begun to seriously threaten France's pre-eminence in this field.⁵³ In the short term, the exhibition was successful in positioning France's *ensembliers* at the pinnacle of luxury trade;

50. There is a fair amount of good work on the Paris exhibition of 1925 including, notably, Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1991 (see chapter "Reconstructing Art Deco: Purism, the Department Store, and the Exposition of 1925," pp. 159–226); and Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting...*, *op. cit.*; not to mention the articles by Simon Dell and Charlotte Benton cited below. See also Maurice Dufrene's *Authentic Art Deco Interiors from the 1925 Paris Exhibition* (introduction by Alastair Duncan, Woodbridge, Suffolk, Antique Collector's Club, 1989), which contains excellent reproductions of the French interiors, as well as Frank Scarlett and Marjorie Townley, *Arts Décoratifs 1925: A Personal Recollection of the Paris Exhibition*, London, Academy Editions, 1975. The exhibition is covered to lesser or greater extent in all Art Deco surveys, with Victor Arwas, *Art Deco* (London, Academy Editions, 1992); and Bouillon, *Art Deco 1903–1940* (*op. cit.*), offering richly illustrated accounts.

51. This was certainly recognized by observers, including Helen Appleton Read who noted in her article, "The Exposition in Paris" (*International Studio*, vol. 82, November 1925, p. 93), that the exhibition was "[i]nternational by courtesy rather than fact," since "France alone is comprehensively represented; it is her exhibits which constitute the major interest and major part of this great dedication of a modern *décor*."

52. Quoted in Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8. See also Charlotte Benton, "The International Exhibition," in Benton *et al.*, *Art Deco 1910–1939*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–143.

53. Simon Dell outlines the early debates in "The Consumer and the Making of the 'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes,' 1907–1925," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1999, pp. 311–325.

however, as Charlotte Benton points out, even before the Wall Street Crash, the global market for French goods began to shrink, largely due to customs tariffs and “a rash of imitations of French designs from New York to Sydney, Rio de Janeiro to Shanghai.”⁵⁴

The exhibition evoked a “return to order” ethos that followed the Great War, and although organizers emphasized the importance of appearing modern, for the most part the exhibition offered little in terms of radically rethinking responses to the conditions of modernity. Reporting for *Architectural Record*, W. Francklyn Paris states: “Gauged by academic standards, the exposition has much to startle the conservative and the disciples of established rules. It is not in any sense, however, a sudden and revolutionary manifestation.”⁵⁵ Notable exceptions included Konstantin Melnikov’s Constructivist pavilion for the USSR and Le Corbusier’s “Esprit Nouveau,” which together with his book *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* (1925) was meant as a critique of the stage set–like pavilions and surface (or superficial) modernism of the exhibition (fig. 2.9).

In her reconsideration of the exhibition, Tag Gronberg has juxtaposed Le Corbusier’s vision of modernity with the collection of shop-like pavilions on the Pont Alexandre III (fig. 2.10).⁵⁶ The privileged discourse

Figure 2.9.
Pavillon de l’Esprit
Nouveau, Le Corbusier
and Pierre Jeanneret.

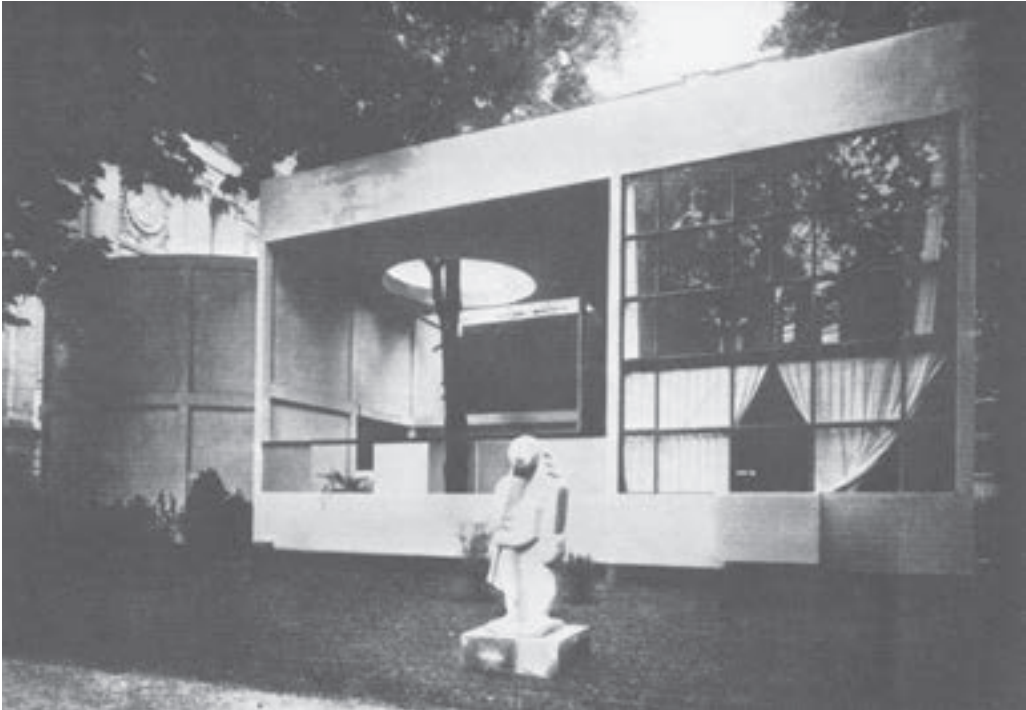


Plate LXV from *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes au XX^e siècle*, vol. 2, *Architecture*, 1925 (repr. New York, Garland, 1977)

54. Benton, “The International Exhibition,” *op. cit.*, p. 155.

55. W. Francklyn Paris, “The International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Art in Paris, II. General Features,” *Architectural Record*, vol. 58, no. 4, 1925, p. 365.

56. Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–47; and chap. 5, “Cars and Jars: *L’Esprit Nouveau* and a Geometry of the City,” pp. 114–145.

Figure 2.10. ▶
Rue des Boutiques,
 pont Alexandre-III.

Plate XI from *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes au XX^e siècle*, vol. 3, Architectural Ornament and Sculpture, 1925 (repr. New York, Garland, 1977)



around Le Corbusier's more austere and masculinist response to post-World War I modernity has overshadowed the importance of the exhibition in framing consumption. She argues that the exhibition reinforced not only the vision of Paris as the city of light (especially with spectacular evening displays on the Pont Alexandre III and the illumination of the Eiffel Tower as an advertisement for Citroën), but, more importantly, as a woman's city, as the global capital of couture—which of course had serious economic, not to mention political ramifications for the health of the country as it rebuilt following World War I. Maurice Dufrene's *Rue des Boutiques* on the Pont Alexandre III helped to reinforce the association of shopping with the city. In a way, the exhibition was like a shop window for the city of Paris, dramatically staging the city itself as a glamorous space. We might see Bullock's Wilshire likewise operating as a shop window (or even filmset) for the staging of Los Angeles, as I will discuss in the next section.

With the emphasis on spectacle (at the expense of meaningful discussions of "the question of inexpensive design for working-class homes")⁵⁷, the exhibition became, in the words of American critic Helen Appleton Read,

a cubist dream city or the projection of a possible city in Mars, arisen over night in the heart of Paris, its unlikeness to any hitherto known architecture enhanced by its proximity to such traditional structures as the venerable grey façade of the Louvre, the tarnished grandeur of Les Invalides and the fast-mellowing floridity of the Grand Palais, permanent memorial to the exposition of 1900.⁵⁸

57. Llewellyn Smith from the U.S. Department of Overseas Trade (1925), quoted in Benton, "The International Exhibition," *op. cit.*, p. 155.

58. Read, "The Exposition in Paris," *op. cit.*, p. 96. Also quoted in Benton, *ibid.*, p. 143.

Read's observations suggest at once the impermanence of the buildings (made in some cases of concrete and brick, but for the most part timber and reinforced plaster) as well as their modernity. They are seen as a fashion through their juxtaposition with city landmarks, and, cast as dream-like, they resonate with Walter Benjamin's description of capitalist society (*i.e.*, its fashions, advertising, architecture, politics) as in a collective dream state.⁵⁹ Many observers came away from the Paris exhibition believing to have seen a unified *moderne* style—thus the differences between Le Corbusier's *L'Esprit Nouveau* and, say, Pierre Patout's *Hôtel d'un Collectionneur* (which featured Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann's lavish furniture) were largely smoothed over as variations on a visual theme of simplification of form (fig. 2.11).⁶⁰ To some degree, all world exhibitions are dream cities with architecture that responds to the latest fashions. However, the Paris exhibition of 1925, framed as a consumerist spectacle in the heart of Paris, attached the aura of glamour—that constructed sense of mystique linked to fashionability and a fundamentally conservative vision of success, as argued above—not just to the often luxurious interiors of the French pavilions but to the idea of the city itself. Visitors were thrust onto *moderne* stages, providing tangible encounters with high-end furnishings and provoking images of imagined lifestyles.

The relationship between environment and lifestyle cannot be underestimated in a consideration of the Paris exhibition, for indeed I would argue that it is the process of framing—together with the more direct use of stylistic elements present at the exhibition—that proves to be the exhibition's most important legacy, especially in the case of Bullock's Wilshire. Just as the constituent elements of the Art Deco style were not introduced at the exhibition (in fact some historians have suggested that was the highpoint of the style), the *ensemblier* was not a new invention in France. However, the assemblage of the style (the style itself might be read as an ensemble of somewhat disparate elements) and the prominent role

59. This is indicated in *Das Passagen-Werk*, an unfinished history of nineteenth-century Paris arcades begun in 1927. Benjamin argued that "[t]he nineteenth century [is] a spacetime <Zeitraum> (a dreamtime <Zeit-traum>) in which the individual consciousness more and more secures itself in reflecting, while the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep. But just as the sleeper—in this respect like the madman—sets out on the macrocosmic journey through his own body, and the noises and feelings of his insides, such as blood pressure, intestinal churn, heartbeat, and muscle sensation (which for the waking and salubrious individual converge in a steady surge of health) generate, in the extravagantly heightened inner awareness of the sleeper, illusion or dream imagery which translates and accounts for them, so likewise for the dreaming collective, which, through the arcades, communes with its own insides. We must follow in its wake so as to expound the nineteenth century—in fashion and advertising, in buildings and politics—as the outcome of its dream visions." Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin], Cambridge (MA), Belknap Press, 1999, p. 389. For a recent discussion of the nature of dreaming in Benjamin, particularly as it relates to the idea of phantasmagoria and a dialectics at a standstill (evoked through the use of montage), see Hetherington, *Capitalism's Eye*, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–102.

60. The exhibition was certainly not homogenous and borrowed from a whole host of different traditions and presented a number of different inflections—particularly in the national pavilions. For discussions of the different pavilions, see the essays in Parts 2 and 3 of Benton *et al.*, *Art Deco 1910–1939*, *op. cit.*; see also Bevis Hillier and Stephen Escritt, "Strictly Modern: The 1925 Paris Exhibition and the State of European Decoration," in Hillier and Escritt, *Art Deco Style*, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–55.



Figure 2.11.
*Pavillon du
Collectionneur,
Pierre Patout
(architect); bas-relief
by Joseph Bernard.
This pavilion housed
furnishings by
Ruhlmann. The
sculptural group
À la gloire de
Jean Goujon is
by Alfred Janniot.*

of the *ensemblier* gave the impression to many visitors that there was something inherently new and modern about the exhibition. For instance, in a review of the interior architecture, Paris declares:

The new art has created a new artist. Heretofore, the interior decoration of a drawing-room or living apartment brought into play the talents of many specialists. There was not much inventiveness necessary, and the “ébéniste” made the furniture, the “tisserand” wove the hangings and the painter, sculptor, potter and ironmonger each brought some unit into the assembled whole. Today the “ensemblier” is not a technician, but a designer who has studied all the arts and all the crafts going into the composition of an interior. He will consider the structural dimensions of the room, the character of its occupant, the scale that must be preserved between the container and the contents, the color scheme and, if expressed, the preferences of the client.⁶¹

By the “new art,” Paris was no doubt referring to Art Deco. He goes on to describe the elite character of these *ensembliers*, many of whom worked for department stores including the Magasin du Louvre, the Galeries Lafayette, the Bon Marché, and the Printemps, all of which were represented with pavilions at the exhibition.⁶² To a large extent, these

61. For instance, see Paris, “The International Exposition [...], I. Interior Architecture,” *op. cit.*, p. 274.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 275. Paris lists many of the famous ones, including Maurice Dufrene (*ensemblier* for Galeries Lafayette), Paul Follot (Bon Marché), Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann (Printemps atelier), as well as André Mare, Louis Süe, and André Groult, all of whom were well represented at the Paris exhibition.

department stores would influence those of the United States, including Bullock's Wilshire. The *ensembliers* worked with exotic and expensive materials (in contrast to much of the temporary architecture of the Exhibition) and became the essential figures in the strategy of placing Paris at the epicentre of luxury goods.

Linking the role of the *ensemblier* to the notion of consumption at the Paris exhibition, art historian Simon Dell argues that objects displayed "were defined as 'expressive' of the identity of the consumer."⁶³ He asserts that the idea of ensemble changed through the period from 1907 to 1925, where prior to the war the notion of a co-ordinated ensemble was castigated by some as simply fashionable, a promotion strategy geared at the rapidly changing desires of the elite, and deficient in sacrificing "sound design in the pursuit of overall effects."⁶⁴ Following the war, manufacturers were keen to capitalize on the elite interest in modern furniture designs and thus an accord developed between artists and manufacturers.⁶⁵ Postwar France saw a reaction against extravagances in fashion in favour of a more simplified, even austere look—a characteristic noted in commentaries on the Exhibition and a quality commentators associated with the new Art Deco style.⁶⁶ According to Dell, this move toward elegance and away from extravagance facilitated "redefinition of consumption as an individual, expressive practice" where "[t]he disposition of objects was made a sign of the disposition of the consumer"⁶⁷—what I would define as the projection of lifestyle. Dell contends that "the ensemble came to be defined as a space fashioned around the consuming subject" rather than an expression of an individual artist.⁶⁸ Of course, the name of the *ensemblier* or team of *ensembliers* was promoted, but Dell's point is important and we shall see a similar strategy employed at Bullock's Wilshire.

■ From Dream City to City of Dreams

In refocusing attention around the consuming subject, the Paris exhibition of 1925 was particularly successful in producing a sense of glamour and offered a model of packaging modern lifestyle through strategies of exhibition (not to mention the styling of the objects on display), which was quickly adopted by department stores around the world.⁶⁹ Not only did objects and mannequins from the Paris exhibition travel to

63. Dell, "The Consumer and the Making [...]" *op. cit.*, p. 311.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

66. For instance, see Paris, "The International Exposition..., I. Interior Architecture," *op. cit.*, pp. 265, 269.

67. Dell, "The Consumer and the Making [...]" *op. cit.*, p. 318.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Interestingly, Longstreth points out that "[w]hile the 1925 Paris exposition had begun to affect store design in the United States several years after its closing, little attention was paid to it or other such enterprises, like the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial, in the literature of the trade." See Richard Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed, 1920–1960*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 40.

department stores,⁷⁰ but, more significantly, ideas of *ensemble* were adopted or discussed in architectural journals. For instance, John Taylor Boyd, Jr., writing in *Architectural Record*, advocates for the application of the “new art” of commercial display that focuses more on portraying a scene or picture evocative of the qualities of objects and, by extension, the kind of lifestyle on sale. “The public, passing by,” he argues, “is captivated by the picture and is impressed by the ideal of leisure, fashion and luxury there so strikingly portrayed.”⁷¹ Recalling glamour’s association with magic, Boyd contends that “[o]nce the buyer comes under the spell of the ideal picture of fashionable life he [or she] is more ready to interest himself or herself in some particular article on sale.”⁷² Part of the job of commercial display, from his perspective, was to work in concert with museums in fostering (and elevating) popular taste.⁷³ This was one of the goals of the Paris exhibition and indeed is consonant with Bullock’s Wilshire, which was often compared to a museum and a work of art in itself, not to mention instrumental to the creation of a “democracy of desire.”⁷⁴

In an article from *Western Advertising and Western Business*, John Bullock explains why he invested so much money in the decorative program of his new department store in terms that mirror Boyd’s assertions and indeed echo the lessons of the Paris exhibition.⁷⁵ He claims:

This is truly an age of applied art in merchandising. We are using a new word, these days—“ensemble”—to mean a definite application of art to industry, an assembling together of those elements which rightly belong together. In costume, in home furnishings, in automobile design, we aim for the correct ensemble. So, too, in the art scheme of a great store.

Bullock’s Wilshire, in its adaptation of the style we like to call the “classic modern,” is an ensemble in store elements. And from the results of our venture, evidenced in the praise of visitors and in our sales totals, we are convinced that money spent for art in business is well spent when it is sincere art and not eccentricity masquerading as art.⁷⁶

In reinforcing the idea of ensemble, Bullock’s comments make plain the effort to associate the “correct” look of the modern to modern lifestyle, following much the same logic as the fashion “types” strategy

70. A loan exhibition toured U.S. museums, beginning with the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1926. The following year, in conjunction with the Metropolitan Museum, Macy’s department store organized an “Art in Trade” exhibition.

71. John Taylor Boyd, Jr., “The Art of Commercial Display, Part I,” *Architectural Record*, vol. 63, no. 1, 1928, p. 59.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*, p. 60. Boyd cites the Metropolitan Museum’s exhibition of manufactured goods as a prime example of how industry and museums are working together to educate the public.

74. For a discussion of the importance of museums (notably the American Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, the Newark Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art) to the inculcation of consumerist ideology, see Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 164–173.

75. Although Bullock himself did not attend the Paris Exposition, his vice-president, Percy Glen Winnett, did.

76. Bristol, “John G. Bullock Tells Why It Pays...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 60–61.

discussed earlier. Lifestyle is not invoked as a powerful means of reconstructing society, but as a way of selling merchandise with the implicit aim of encouraging a “democracy of desire.” Referring to the style as “classic modern” seems a direct reference to the Paris exhibition, for much of the architecture and furnishings on display appear to respond simultaneously to an interest in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century periods as well as modern geometry and simplification. It should not be surprising that Bullock’s Wilshire included period rooms on the second floor—the Louis XVI Room (which displayed designer dresses in a setting meant to conjure Marie Antoinette’s boudoir, with ivory walls, gold mouldings, and crystal chandeliers), the intimate Directoire Room (which displayed formal evening wear and resembled a private drawing room with a fireplace and murals of Parisian monuments by George De Winter), and a lounge meant to evoke Josephine’s bathroom at Malmaison (fig. 2.12).⁷⁷ The rooms were not just referencing a history of French design but contemporary French interests in these periods, which influenced the production of Art Deco and thus perhaps resonated more easily with *moderne* aesthetics than other period styles in vogue. This historical association also reinforces the link made to an aristocratic tradition that I have argued was part of glamour. The instrumental use of history to frame consumption reminds us as

Figure 2.12.
Directoire Room,
second floor of
Bullock’s Wilshire
(now Southwestern
University School
of Law Library),
Los Angeles (CA),
interior design by
Eleanor LeMaire with
Feil and Paradise
(murals by George
DeWinter), 1929.



Michael Windover (2008)

77. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Davis explains that these rooms were designed by Eleanor LeMaire. The Directoire Room later became the Fur Salon. She notes that the De Winter murals were meant to simulate “early 19th century block-printed wallpaper in the directoire style.” She also points out that the lights were on dimmers so as to approximate the appearance of the gowns when they would be worn outside the store. Although articles from the time of the store’s opening consistently observe only two period rooms, Davis also describes a Rococo Louis XV room used for fine accessories. She notes that it was later changed into the Chanel Room, “guarded by Chanel’s trade-mark bronze monkeys in the doorway.”

well of the use of history at the Marine Building and the notion of a time-space compression. However, at Bullock's Wilshire, the time-space compression is indicative of fashion change, as much as with larger mobility-systems associated with commerce.

The idea of ensemble did not mean homogeneity. With the consumer at the centre of the spectacle, choice became the defining activity of the subject position, providing a sense of empowerment and ostensibly mirroring (or perhaps eclipsing) the processes of democracy. With women as the target audience for the department store, as I will discuss further below, this connection to a democratic right would have particular resonance, seeing as American female citizens won suffrage in 1920. To dramatize this element of choice, Bullock's Wilshire's interior was arrayed like a series of individual boutiques—what architect Harris Allen, in his review of the building, described as an “extended and complicated series of compositions, which constitutes a small village of specialty shops.”⁷⁸ This echoed the shops of the Pont Alexandre III at the Paris exhibition, and imbued the space of the store with a wealth of selection, yet a sense of specialization. This logic would be dramatized even more overtly at the Cross Roads of the World, as I discussed in the Introduction. At Bullock's Wilshire, the elite character of the boutique was reconciled with the pre-existing model of emporium for department stores, heightening a sense of glamour by theatrically staging the different departments.

Most significantly, though, the store framed consumption in a distinctly modern manner, as did the Paris exhibition. For *L.A. Times* art critic Arthur Miller,

[m]ost important of all is the way in which modern men and women fit into this environment. Always incongruous in the ornate Italian rooms of our hotels and isolated by their clothes and attitudes from the architecture, they are here seen to walk, act and sit in a sympathetic setting.⁷⁹

This observation points to the importance of the built environment in materializing lifestyle. The idea of one fitting into a larger ensemble, I would argue, suggests at its heart the performativity of glamour. This was the central lesson learned at the Paris exhibition, and perhaps this is what fuelled the adoption of Art Deco throughout the world. Submerged in a spectacular, *moderne* environment, the visitor of the exhibition was offered an empowering space to imagine himself/herself as knowledgeable of contemporary taste. He/she was at the centre of this glamorous world, if only briefly. Glamour was thus evoked both in the first and third persons here.

But the glamour of Paris was unique to its socio-political context. The elite character (and expense) of Ruhlmann or of French *ensembliers* Louis Süe and André Mare furnishings did not necessarily carry the same

78. Allen, “A Building Designed for Today,” *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22. This strategy was taken up elsewhere, for example on the ground floor of the T. Eaton Company's College Street Store in Toronto (Ross and Macdonald, Sproatt and Rolph, 1929).

79. Arthur Miller, “Beauty Seen in Building,” *L.A. Times*, October 6, 1929.

sense of glamour outside France, particularly with the onset of the Depression. In thinking about glamour from the first-person perspective, we can see how it was adopted and indigenized to fit into local, public cultures, allowing for the construction of multiple and competing centres of taste and fashion. These centres reinforced notions of privilege inherent to glamour, but with Art Deco they were stripped of exclusionary symbolism, particularly when it entered the mass market. Art Deco's primary importance lies in its diffusion and distribution, coinciding with developments in mass media, tourist travel, and advertising.

With Bullock's Wilshire, the idea of ensemble was extended beyond the confines of architecture into a larger mediated environment (through film, newspapers, magazines, radio, etc.). Not only did the company produce *moderne* ads that featured the lifestyles associated with the fashions in the store, but the ads were unified with a special modern type face (Stellar and Stellar Bold) used for the store's sign, "the lines of the building [were] suggested in every piece of copy by the relationships given to mass and space and line," and even colour schemes of the store were used.⁸⁰ The extension of ensemble into a wider media environment—especially into film—would only enhance the allure of Hollywood—the city of dreams—just as the exhibition dream city displayed the glamour of Paris.

At a time when Hollywood was solidifying its place at the epicentre of film production in the world, John Bullock, a native of Paris, Ontario helped to bring the glamour of Paris, France to Los Angeles, California. Part of the glamour of Paris—promoted by the exhibition—was the idea of leadership in fashion and style. With the rise of Hollywood, Los Angeles gradually became a fashion centre in its own right. And with the lessons learned at the exhibition, Americans were able to promote a slightly different sense of glamour attuned to particular Californian/American lifestyles. For while Paris could draw on a long history of taste leadership that responded to a well-established elite, Los Angeles was a very young city, which historian Carey McWilliams described in 1946 as "[l]acking socially prominent first families or deeply rooted social traditions" that might have prevented a full-scale adoption of style and taste from the movie industry.⁸¹ Paris remained, however, a kind of exotic yet accessible point of reference.

■ Localizing Glamour

Included amongst the some 16 million visitors to the Paris exhibition of 1925 was Percy Glen Winnett, vice-president of Bullock's, and Donald Parkinson, son and partner of John Parkinson.⁸² After the men

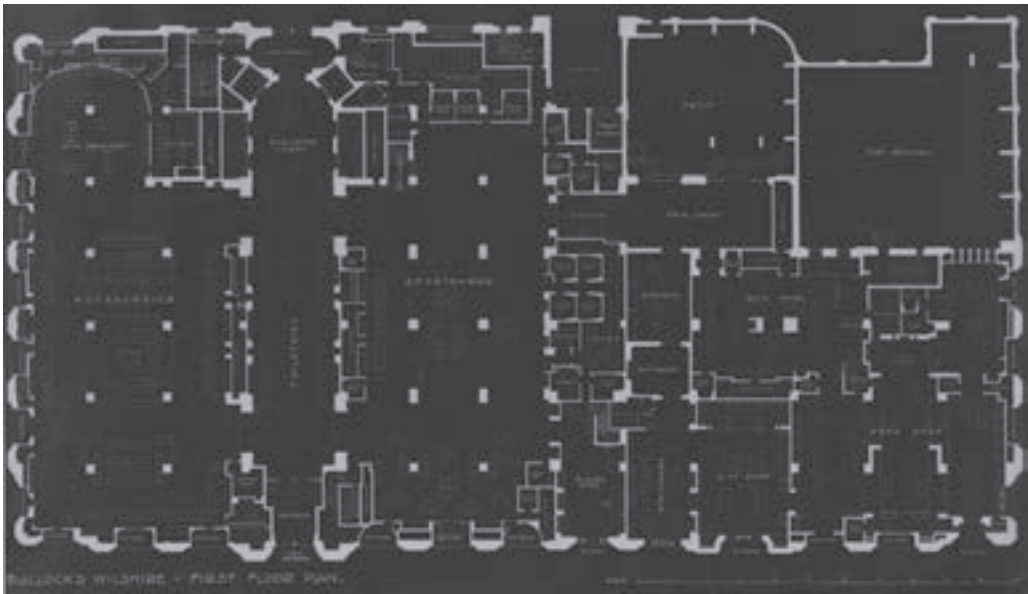
80. Bristol, "John G. Bullock Tells Why It Pays..." *op. cit.*, p. 62. She goes on to note that Bullock's Wilshire was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum in New York "as representative of the best in the modernistic mode."

81. McWilliams, *Southern California Country...*, *op. cit.*, p. 345. For more on the culture of émigrés in Hollywood, see John Russell Taylor, *Strangers in Paradise: The Hollywood Émigrés, 1933–1950*, New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1983.

82. Interestingly, Winnett, like Bullock, was also Canadian by birth.

returned to Los Angeles, an earlier, more Beaux-Arts treatment of the façade of the proposed new department store was scrapped in favour of a dynamic, skyscraping design, and, as I have argued above, the underlying logic for the store was pinned to the notion of ensemble. The influence of the exhibition was seen elsewhere in the city, most notably in the ground level display area and lobby of the James Oviatt Building (Walker and Eisen, 1927–1928) for the fashionable men's clothing store Alexandre & Oviatt, which included glasswork from René Lalique's studio.⁸³ With the exception of some rugs designed by French artist Sonia Delaunay for the Accessories Room, located east of the Perfume Hall (Toiletries) on the ground floor, Bullock's Wilshire was designed and produced by local designers and architects (fig. 2.13).⁸⁴ Of course, "local" in Los Angeles, as I pointed out in the Introduction, often meant originally from elsewhere. For instance, John Parkinson was originally from Scorton, in Lancaster County, England, but had a well-established practice in Los Angeles (dating from the mid-1890s) with his son Donald, who joined the firm in 1920 following his education at MIT.⁸⁵ Other key contributors to the building, including Jock Peters, migrated to Los Angeles only a few years before

Figure 2.13.
Jock Peters, first
floor plan, Bullock's
Wilshire, architects
John and Donald
Parkinson, 1929.



Jakob (Jock) Detlef Peters Fonds, Architecture and Design Collection,
University Art Museum, University of California at Santa Barbara

83. See Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–39. For a brief discussion and some contemporary photographs, see also McMillian, *Deco and Streamline Architecture in L.A....*, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–115. According to McMillian, construction on the Italian Romanesque-inspired tower was halted after Oviatt visited the exposition. She notes that “the shop front, marquee and interior decorative work were designed and produced in France and shipped to Los Angeles, along with five French engineers and architects to supervise the installation. Mr. Oviatt also hired the Parisian firm of Saddier et Fils to decorate his sophisticated ten-room penthouse with Art Deco furnishings and decorative arts” (p. 107).

84. Delaunay's *Boutique Simultanée* was situated on the Pont Alexandre III. See Gronberg's discussion of her work in comparison to Le Corbusier in *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–47 and 118–130.

85. See Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–39.

construction.⁸⁶ Regardless, just as the Marine Building was touted by its owners as using local materials and expertise wherever possible, so, too, Bullock's Wilshire was a thoroughly local project. In fact, I argue that the store responded to unique conditions of life in Los Angeles and is emblematic of the production of a local glamour associated with this lifestyle.

Bullock's Wilshire was built primarily to appeal to the motorized "carriage trade," which was in part fostered by the wealth created with development of the film industry. Like its downtown counterpart, the store was a very profitable venture, even during the years of the Depression.⁸⁷ This suggests a strong market for luxury goods, but might also indicate a wider consumer base. After all, the store was thronged by 300,000 visitors on its opening day, according to one report, and at least 100,000 more during its first week.⁸⁸ Reviewers of the building upon its opening occasionally mentioned the affordability of some of the merchandise, speaking to a middle-class market.⁸⁹ That the building was located in a middle-class neighbourhood would also suggest an appeal to this demographic in addition to the more affluent from further afield (fig. 2.14).

Bullock's Wilshire was also designed to appeal to female consumers. *L.A. Times* reporter Alma Whitaker even described it as a "Temple to Women." She attributed its success to the prominence of women in the design and decoration of the store—notably Eleanor LeMaire—but also in the goods on display, thanks to the eye of experienced female buyers.⁹⁰ As I will discuss further in chapter 4, women were highlighted as the target market for day-to-day consumption by businesses and advertisers. The modern activity of shopping was closely associated with women, and certainly by the 1920s, department stores were well-established places of female public culture. As Penny Sparke argues, the rise of the department store indicated a "relocation of feminine taste" away from the parlour and

86. Jock Peters was a German émigré who had trained as a stone mason before spending two years (beginning in 1913) working in Peter Behrens's office prior to the Great War. While working with Behrens, he won first prize in a competition to design an electric power plant in Hamburg. During the war, he was assigned to a munitions repair plant on the Belgian front and was exposed to orange gas; he lost a lung to tuberculosis. Before immigrating to California, due in large part to his failing health, he held the directorship of the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (State School for Applied Arts) in Altona from 1920 until leaving the country in 1923. From 1923 to 1927 he worked for Famous Players/Lasky Corporation (Paramount Pictures) as an architect and art director, before establishing in 1928 a design firm with his brother, George, called Peters Brothers Modern American Design. Peters's success would be cut short by his premature death in 1934 at age 45. See Davis, *ibid.*, pp. 39–44.

87. Bullock's Inc. posted net profits of \$536,577 after all charges and taxes for the 1931 fiscal year and, despite a 20 percent drop in sales, still posted a \$73,226 profit the next year. See "Bullock's Inc., Tells Profits," *L.A. Times*, March 24, 1932, and "Bullock's Inc., Shows Profit," *L.A. Times*, April 11, 1933.

88. See "Crowds View New Store," *L.A. Times*, September 27, 1929, and Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

89. For instance, after describing the building Whitaker ("Bullock's in Debut Today," *op. cit.*) explained: "for the economically inclined like myself, who use their charge accounts with discretion, it is confided that prices of merchandise will not exceed those obtaining at the Seventh-Street store. I peeped at a few price tags anxiously—and sighed with ecstatic relief. Which is why I have been able to write the foregoing with conscientious enthusiasm."

90. Whitaker, *ibid.*



Figure 2.14.
 Wilshire Boulevard at
 Commonwealth Ave.,
 Los Angeles (CA), 1929.

into the public sphere, thereby “validat[ing] feminine culture.”⁹¹ Meanwhile, the domestic sphere was undergoing a kind of “masculinization” based on the application of Taylorist principles of efficiency and popular concern over hygiene and cleanliness.⁹² As I suggested earlier, the development of a “democracy of desire” coincided with female suffrage, and, I might add, the sophistication of glamour in marketing strategies. I will not rehearse the excellent work on department store history and its socio-political implications for modern women but will simply point out that we ought to keep in mind the prominent place of female consumers in the conception and life of Bullock’s Wilshire.⁹³ And indeed I would agree with Lucy Fisher that the Art Deco style appealed to female consumers, responding to the image and framing the lifestyle of the modern “New Woman” of

91. Sparke, *As Long as It’s Pink...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 91, 95.

92. See Sparke’s chapter, “Letting in the Air”: Women and Modernism,” in *ibid.*, pp. 97–119.

93. See for instance Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1981; Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982; Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1986; Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History*, London, Leicester University Press, 1995; Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 2000; Kevin Hetherington, “Memories of Capitalism,” in *Capitalism’s Eye: Cultural Spaces...*, *op. cit.*; and Richard Dennis, “Geographies of the Downtown: The Place of Shopping,” in *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840–1930*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 296–321. See also Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed...*, *op. cit.*

the interwar years.⁹⁴ The connection between Art Deco and glamour, then, might be seen to have a feminine association. However, I would not go so far as to claim that either Art Deco or glamour was *inherently* feminine.

The site of Bullock's Wilshire speaks to the spatial development of Los Angeles as well as a lifestyle bound to forms of mobility. Bullock's first store—a huge emporium located at Broadway and Seventh (Parkinson & Bergstrom, 1906–1907)—already signalled a physical shift away from the concentration of commercial activity at Fourth and Broadway, and with its targeting of a higher-class clientele also indicated a *societal* movement.⁹⁵ The Wilshire store continued this logic while meeting the needs of a growing automobile consumer base. The fact that the department store was geared toward a network of personal and mechanized mobility (*i.e.*, the automobile) in some ways corresponds with the boutiques of the Paris exhibition on the Pont Alexandre III (fig. 2.10, p. 122). As the shops were incorporated into a structure of mobility (a bridge), so Bullock's Wilshire was built as an extension of the roadway, with customers driving into a motor court decorated with a ceiling mural on the theme of mobility. Gronberg describes the Pont Alexandre III as transformed from an object of urban transport into visual display, “clearly prioritis[ing] the requirements of spectacle over efficient transport.”⁹⁶ My point here is not to suggest that the shops seen at the Paris exhibition influenced the choice of property of Bullock's Wilshire, for the company had purchased land along Wilshire as early as 1924;⁹⁷ rather, I find the connection between framing consumption atop purpose-built networks of mobility compelling

94. Fischer, *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco...*, *op. cit.* While Fischer dedicates chapter 2 to the importance of department store culture (“Counter Cultures: Art Deco, Consumerism, and the Department Store,” pp. 43–58), she does not discuss much about the architecture of the stores themselves or how they framed public culture.

95. See Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–29; and Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–27. The original store was financed by successful Broadway department store owner Arthur Letts but turned over to his employee, John Bullock, to develop as a separate enterprise aimed at the carriage trade. The downtown Bullock's store opened on the eve of a recession but managed to survive as a profitable enterprise, while other department stores opened around that time failed. Perhaps it was this experience that helped Bullock create another highly profitable store on the eve of the Great Depression, some 22 years later. The downtown store was enlarged several times—sometimes controversially—until, by 1928, it reached a colossal 739,156 square feet. Following the sudden death of Arthur Letts in 1923, Bullock went about creating Bullock's Inc. to assume the interest in Bullock's department stores held in Lett's estate. In bringing the company public in 1927 and selling \$8.5 million in Bullock's securities, Bullock had the financial resources and public reassurance to begin his new store on Wilshire Boulevard, which marked another physical shift in siting commercial activity. For more on Letts, see Davis, pp. 17–29.

96. Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

97. Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Longstreth notes that Bullock's originally purchased land at the corner of Wilshire and Vermont, two blocks east of the eventual Westmoreland site in 1924. At the time, rival department store owner Tom May purchased property across the street and Marshall Field officials also began looking into the area. Plans for the three to build height-limit department stores were abandoned, likely in lieu of investing more into their downtown stores. However, by 1928, Bullock's returned to the idea of building on the scale of the 1924 plan, perhaps spurred by the announcement of Haggerty's, a downtown clothing store, moving to Vermont and Wilshire (which never materialized) (pp. 112–113).

in their joint reinforcement of different forms of mobility (including desire), perhaps with the effect of intensifying consumption. Designed under very different circumstances, Bullock's Wilshire complemented the system of automobility, aestheticizing the activity of driving by appealing to visual display and linking the automobile lifestyle of Angelinos to the form of the store.

Bullock's Wilshire was a rare example of a "lone wolf" store in the interwar years, and was built on a unique roadway.⁹⁸ Wilshire Boulevard runs from downtown Los Angeles to Santa Monica and was originally designed as a grand residential boulevard.⁹⁹ However, with the burgeoning of automobility in the 1920s, wealthy Angelinos moved to more remote neighbourhoods, like Beverly Hills, and the streetcar-less Wilshire, besides spawning middle-class residential areas, became a site of commercial development as well as one of the busiest traffic arteries in the city.¹⁰⁰ By 1924, the Wilshire Boulevard Association—a enclave of area property owners—began to cast Wilshire as the "Fifth Avenue of the West," imagined as an avenue of towering buildings akin to midtown Manhattan or North Michigan Avenue in Chicago.¹⁰¹ Bullock's Wilshire's tapering tower and setbacks would seem to reinforce this vision, as would the contemporaneously erected E. Clem Wilson Building (Meyer & Holler, 1929–1930), the Wilshire Tower Building (Gilbert Stanley Underwood, 1928–1929), and the Dominquez-Wilshire Building (Morgan, Walls & Clements, 1930–1931) along Arthur W. Ross's "Miracle Mile" retail district a few miles west (between La Brea and Fairfax Avenues).¹⁰²

At the time Wilshire Boulevard was sometimes characterized as the Champs-Élysées of Los Angeles. The Parisian Champs-Élysées was touted by Le Corbusier as the "the only avenue which renders real services to motor traffic," but, as Gronberg points out, it was a site not only for traffic and fashionable shopping, but a prime location for presenting oneself as fashionable, with the car read as a new and essential addition to one's ensemble.¹⁰³ Bullock's Wilshire compounded the notion of the automobile as essential to *ensemble*, through its site and provisions for automobile shopper.

98. That meant that the building was not joined by major department stores or other retailers to develop a substantial business centre, but instead was situated amongst specialty shops and houses. See Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–118. Longstreth discusses the strategy of building "lone wolf" stores undertaken contemporaneously with Bullock's Wilshire by Sears, Roebuck in "Sears, Roebuck and the Remaking of the Department Store, 1924–1942," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2006, pp. 238–279.

99. The connection to the downtown was complete with the 1934 cut through Westlake (now MacArthur) Park, which joined Wilshire to Grand Avenue.

100. Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, p. 105. For more on mobility systems associated with the car, see Mike Featherstone, Nigel Thrift and John Urry (eds.), *Automobilities*, London, Sage, 2005.

101. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106.

102. For more on Ross and the development of the "Miracle Mile," see *ibid.*, pp. 127–141.

103. Quotation and discussion in Gronberg, *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting...*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

The comparison of Wilshire Boulevard to both Fifth Avenue and the Champs-Élysées suggests a sense of glamour projected onto this relatively new road, and, in an interesting way, we can see both the allure of New York and of Paris encapsulated in Bullock's Wilshire. The store's exterior recalls New York skyscrapers, while its intimate interiors inspire comparison with Parisian boutiques. However, the sense of glamour at Bullock's Wilshire was not simply constructed through visual association with these older and more established centres of taste and fashion, but through a connection to the unique lifestyle(s) of Angelinos. Of course, the links to Fifth Avenue and the Champs-Élysées also suggested an elite quality, and indeed by locating a distance outside the central business core of the city and away from streetcar lines, Bullock and Winnett were responding to lifestyles of a clientele of a particular socioeconomic standing. Celebrating the glamour of mobility, Bullock's Wilshire stood in opposition to the immobility of those who could not afford the lifestyle on offer within the store, a demographic which would only grow with the onset of the Depression.

While the automobile was important as both a means of conveyance and symbolic object (and thus a projection of lifestyle) elsewhere, nowhere was it more closely associated with everyday life than in Los Angeles. Los Angeles was in part the product of the first automotive migration.¹⁰⁴ It was also the second biggest auto manufacturer in the United States behind Detroit. In 1927, Los Angeles County had one registered automobile for every 3.2 inhabitants, with 560,136 cars and 76,000 trucks, and 450 filling stations.¹⁰⁵ In this same year, Bruce Bliven wrote that Los Angeles

is now a completely motorized civilization. Nowhere else in the world have human beings so thoroughly adapted themselves to the automobile. The advertisers' ideal, two cars to a family, has very nearly been attained, not merely among the rich, but on the average. The number of licensed drivers is just about equal to the adult population, and all the children above the age of ten are bootleg chauffeurs. Any Angeleno without his automobile is marooned, like a cowboy without his horse, and cannot stir from the spot until it has been restored to him. The highest form of popular art is found in the decoration of filling stations; one tours them as one does the chateau country of France.¹⁰⁶

Bliven's comments make apparent links between advertising and automobile consumer culture, as well as the importance of driving to lifestyle in Los Angeles. His humorous comparison of filling stations with French *châteaux* suggests the sense that the automobile marked a new age in a new world. Like the Deco style in general, which also signified a new age, the glamour of the automobile was available to "average" Americans,

104. See McWilliams, *Southern California Country...*, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

105. Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 79.

106. Bruce Bliven, "Los Angeles: The City That Is Bacchanalian—In a Nice Way," *New Republic*, July 13, 1927, p. 197. Quoted in Starr, *ibid.*, p. 80.

not just the wealthy. This was seen in the design of automobiles. While affluent Hollywood stars might parade about in custom limousines with Lalique hood ornaments, a similar “look” would be available in the standardized, mass-produced models introduced each year by the large American auto manufacturers.

Bullock’s Wilshire was a monument to the New World motorist. The department store was built at the intersection of Wilshire and Westmoreland Avenue, rather than at the major intersection of Vermont two blocks west, in order to reduce congestion. This decision stood in contrast to the downtown stores standing at high-profile corner lots.¹⁰⁷ Also distinct was the allocation of a large motor court, taking up two-thirds of the lot and providing room for 375 cars (fig. 2.15). Historian Kevin Starr describes the cars as having “arrayed themselves in reverent formation like giant black mantises praying before a copper-green altar.”¹⁰⁸ Customers would drive up to the *porte-cochère* at the south side of the building (opposite Wilshire Boulevard) and be greeted by attendants who would park their vehicles, and, with the use of a “modern broadcasting service,” would even load purchases made into them.¹⁰⁹

Like the large show windows with their cantilevered brass and bronze awnings facing Wilshire Boulevard, the 241-foot tower of Bullock’s Wilshire was designed to capture the attention of motorists (fig. 2.16).¹¹⁰

Figure 2.15.
Bullock’s Wilshire
(now Southwestern
University School
of Law Library),
view from parking
lot (looking north),
Los Angeles (CA),
architects John and
Donald Parkinson,
1929.



Michael Windover (2008)

107. Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

108. Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California...*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

109. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

110. The tower reached the absolute height limit ordinance of the city: 150 feet, plus 6 feet of roof, 35 feet of penthouse, and 50 feet of sign construction. The penthouse could only house water tanks and machinery, and the sign area was restricted to advertising. See Davis, *ibid.*, p. 66.



Dick Stagg, Dick Stagg / Los Angeles Public Library

The form of the building broke from typical planar block designs of department stores, appearing more sculptural. For art critic Arthur Miller, the modernity of the building matches that of the motorist's lifestyle: "To alight from a motor vehicle and walk into a Renaissance building would obviously be an anachronism, so the treatment of the exterior, with its strongly stressed verticals, and the interior, saving only two period rooms, is in modern modes."¹¹¹ As with the Marine Building, Bullock's Wilshire's skyscraping form was set in poetic terms, this time by Harris Allen:

In the matter of abstract beauty, and its significance as an entity, as an architectural composition, view it at sunset, silhouetted against a pale saffron sky; its tower softly luminous, crowned by an effulgent emerald; the remaining daylight disclosing the interlacing lines and surfaces of verdigris and tan, brighter above, deepening toward the base—who would not experience a shock of pleasure, the sense of seeing a vision of a dream?¹¹²

The evocation of dreaming reminds us of the experience for many of the Paris exhibition as well as an association with consumption. Like commodities on display in its show windows, the building becomes at once a vision and material. And this dream would be enhanced at night with use of floodlighting, also drawing attention to the structure for motorists.

Figure 2.16.

Bullock's Wilshire, western exterior view, Los Angeles (CA), architects John and Donald Parkinson, 1936. Note the cantilevered brass and bronze awnings over the display windows.

111. Miller, "Arts Working Together," *op. cit.*

112. Allen, "A Building Designed for Today," *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Rising five storeys, the building was designed to accommodate an additional five floors.¹¹³ The building was constructed of reinforced concrete and clad in tan terracotta with deep green copper spandrels. One reviewer read the building's exterior in local terms, where the terracotta "is the sand color of the Southwest's desert; relief and decoration are in the green of its orchards and gardens."¹¹⁴ More recently, Starr asserts that the building's "sculpted mass" was "reflective of the new City Hall downtown."¹¹⁵ The City Hall's 28-storey tower—influenced by Bertram Goodhue's Nebraska State Capitol Building (1920–1932)—dominated the downtown core as the only building to exceed the 150-foot height restriction in the city after it opened in 1928, a year before Bullock's Wilshire. It should be noted that John Parkinson worked with Albert C. Martin as associate architects with John C. Austin on this more reserved, civic structure.¹¹⁶ Bullock's Wilshire, with its multiple setbacks, evokes even more the dynamism of a frozen fountain, and its tower, as architectural historian Richard Longstreth argues, was perhaps inspired by Eliel Saarinen's railroad terminal in Helsinki.¹¹⁷ The comparison with a railroad building—a site of transportation—seems appropriate as does its visual link to the city's most emblematic civic structure, the City Hall. We can see the two merging in Bullock's Wilshire, with the structure hailing a new, modern, and highly mobile lifestyle associated with pride to Los Angeles. For while the structure of the building and provision for parking may show signs of having been influenced by contemporaneous Sears, Roebuck stores (including notably the department store and mail order building on Olympic Boulevard by George C. Nimmons & Company, 1926–1927), as Longstreth asserts, it was associated not with a national chain, but was considered "a symbol of Los Angeles itself, a mark of the city's coming of age."¹¹⁸

The connection between the city, mobility, and contemporary lifestyle is reinforced in the motor court. The ceiling of the *porte-cochère* contains a secco-fresco celebrating transportation (fig. 2.17).¹¹⁹ Centring on a depiction of the Roman deity Mercury—messenger of the gods and

113. Parkinson and Parkinson, "Bullock's Wilshire Department Store," *Architectural Record*, vol. 67, no. 1, 1930, p. 51. This would have prepared the store to grow and compete with the projected commercial towers along the "Fifth Avenue of the West," which however never materialized.

114. Bristol, "John G. Bullock Tells Why It Pays...", *op. cit.*, p. 61.

115. Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California...*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

116. David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *A Guide to Architecture in Los Angeles and Southern California*, Santa Barbara, Peregrine Smith, 1977, p. 223.

117. Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, p. 114. It seems likely that Donald Parkinson, who had recently graduated from MIT's School of Architecture in 1920 and had a penchant for modern fashion, art, and fast cars, likely had a greater hand in design of Bullock's Wilshire than his father. For more on Donald Parkinson, see Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 38. For more on the career and impact on Los Angeles of John Parkinson, see Robert Howard Tracy, "John Parkinson and the Beaux-Arts City Beautiful Moment in Downtown Los Angeles, 1894–1935," PhD dissertation, University of California in Los Angeles, 1982.

118. Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall...*, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

119. The mural was restored in by muralist Heinsbergen in 1973. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.



Mott/Merge Photograph collection, Folder # 669, Print # 564-59, Neg. # 24,288 (4" x 5"),
Acc. # 1992-4818. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento (CA)

thus associated with communication and movement, as well as commerce—émigré artist Herman Sachs portrayed a number of modes of transportation, from an ocean liner and train to a Graf Zeppelin and airplanes, set against a background of abstracted rectilinear planes and curvilinear forms that captures both the sense of movement through space and refers to water, clouds, and vegetation. This iconography of transportation reminds us of the terracotta panels on the Marine Building and likewise suggests larger systems of mobility that brought commerce and people to the city. And, like the Marine Building, the images referred to the local. The Graf Zeppelin, the massive German passenger dirigible, stopped off briefly at the future site of the Los Angeles International airport on August 26, 1929, exactly one month prior to the store's opening, before continuing its world cruise.¹²⁰ The year prior had been marked by a visit by aviator Charles Lindbergh, who, in 1927, had flown a locally-produced Ryan M-2 (modified as the N-X-22 Ryan NYP) on the first transatlantic flight. Los Angeles became the aviation capital of the United States, with Maddux airlines (depicted in the mural) offering service to

Figure 2.17.
Porte-cochère,
Bullock's Wilshire,
Los Angeles (CA),
architects John and
Donald Parkinson;
mural by Herman
Sachs, 1929.

120. For more on the Zeppelin's visit, see Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 118–119.

much of the state by early 1929.¹²¹ So the mural made direct and local connections to modern forms of mobility, framing the arrival of automobile consumers and implicitly implicating these patrons of Bullock's Wilshire in the larger systems of mobility that included not only transportation and related industries, but trade itself, as signified by the presence of Mercury. In this environment, the aestheticization of mobilities carried the allure of a glamorous, cosmopolitan lifestyle.

The mobility of modern, urban lifestyle in Los Angeles continued into the store, framed in an air of sophistication and glamour through Art Deco styling. Passing from the motor court and through the rear vestibule, visitors would have encountered elevators with doors of bronze, copper, and gunmetal (fig. 2.18). The design of the elevators picks up some of the geometric and curvilinear motifs of the mural and has been described as "Bauhaus-inspired," reminding us of the influence of Modernism as a source of imagery for Art Deco. The elevators continued a theme of machine-made movement, while their floor indicators were apparently designed to suggest—in an abstract manner—the passage of time.¹²² The elevator foyer was at the south end of the Perfume Hall (or Toiletries section), which is clad in St. Genevieve rose marble and punctuated with built-in glass cases and tall, vertical light panels (fig. 2.19). One contemporary critic described the floor as "arranged with broken lines in the most approved Champs-Élysées sprightliness"—linking the store with Paris, but also perhaps alluding to the movement and/or even to Los Angeles's own Champs-Élysées.¹²³ The critic observed that the "central foyer, with all its ultramodernity, strikes a certain note of intangible orientalism."¹²⁴ For Harris Allen, the hall was like "a great marble basilica," but one with "low glass cases, filled, apparently, with objets d'art, on rosewood stands reminiscent of the Orient."¹²⁵ These comments suggest an imaginative mobility, which we might see as associated with the constructiveness of glamour and as indicative of a sense of the popular exotic, which was both already well established in department store spectacles by the 1920s and part of the appeal of Art Deco in general.¹²⁶ The hall created an

121. See Starr, *ibid.*, pp. 116–117. See also William M. Henry, "The New Air Capital" (*L.A. Times*, January 2, 1929), who describes the history of aviation in relation to Southern California, as well as its bright future. Henry notes: "Los Angeles alone does four times more per capita air business than any city, and more than twelve times as much as New York City." "California," he goes on, "has more airplane factories than any European nation except France, and is rapidly building up a production that will put it in first place in the world." It is also interesting to observe that Jock Peters, who did much of the designing of the interiors of Bullock's Wilshire, also designed Maddux Airlines' office.

122. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

123. "A Building Designed in the Style of Tomorrow," *op. cit.*, p. 21. At some point the floor must have been replaced (perhaps in the renovations following the looting of the store during the 1992 L.A. riots), leaving a more subdued pattern than the original.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

125. Allen, "A Building Designed for Today," *op. cit.*, p. 22.

126. Leach argues that "[p]erhaps the most popular of all merchandising themes in the years before World War I was the orientalist theme, fashion from the bottom up, as it were, not, as with much of Paris couture, from the top down. If Paris fashion modes often suggested escape from the hoi polloi into the genteel elegance of class and status, then orientalism hinted at something else, something perhaps not so urbane and genteel, even at something



Michael Windover (2008)

◀ **Figure 2.18.**
Elevator, ground floor,
Bullock's Wilshire
(now Southwestern
University School
of Law Library),
Los Angeles (CA),
interior design by Jock
Peters with Feil and
Paradise, 1929.

environment of modernity, a place highly constructed yet familiar, filled with the stillness of luxury alongside the energy of a mechanized modern life. The luminous atmospheric effect of light on the rose marble evoked the soft quality of perfume, providing a tangible sense of glamour (as we remember Abner's perfume episode). Most importantly, though, as Allen

slightly impermissible—luxurious, to be sure, but also with touches of life's underside" (*Land of Desire: Merchants...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104). He goes on to note the use of exoticism in world fairs, in theatre, in popular novels, and in fashion shows held in department stores. But contrasting "orientalism" with Parisian couture is somewhat problematic, as exotic themes were influencing avant-garde artists and fashion designers in Paris and would become a key influence on Art Deco. For an excellent discussion of orientalism in Parisian culture in the early twentieth century, see Peter Wollen's chapter "Out of the Past: Fashion/Orientalism/The Body," in *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture*, London, Verso, 1993, pp. 1–34. For a discussion of the exotic and Deco in America, see Fischer's chapters "Strangers in Paradise: South Seas Films of the Art Deco Era" (pp. 151–183) as well as "Architectural Exoticism and the Art Deco Picture Palace" (pp. 187–202), in *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco...*, *op. cit.*

Figure 2.19. ▶
 Perfume Hall
 (Toiletries) with
 view to Accessories
 Room to the right,
 ground floor,
 Bullock's Wilshire
 (now Southwestern
 University School
 of Law Library),
 Los Angeles (CA),
 interior design by
 Jock Peters with Feil
 and Paradise, 1929.



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observed, “[n]one of the ordinary evidences of commerce are visible.”¹²⁷ With the paraphernalia of commercial transactions out of sight, the Perfume Hall, like the other departments in the store, became a stage for visitors. In a sense, one was entering into another, more perfectly modern world that fit with a vision of lifestyle, without the visual reminders of the temporally limited moment (*i.e.*, a cash register would remind the consumer that the lifestyle was projected and reflected in this environment, and was ultimately circumscribed by a commercial transaction). Consumption in a place that seemed like a museum or a sophisticated boutique encouraged visitors to feel empowered, as though they belonged in a glamorous world of modern taste and fashion. But, in such a consumer-centred environment, the visitor no doubt also felt like the glamorous object of emulation as well.

127. Allen, “A Building Designed for Today,” *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Visitors and critics were struck by the variation of spaces in Bullock's Wilshire, and yet its overall sense of harmony. The interior was the work of several designers and decorators, who together imbued the interior space with that notion of *ensemble* that so impressed Winnett at the Paris exhibition. Winnett hired Eleanor LeMaire, a young New York-based interior designer, to make over the interiors of the downtown Bullock's store in 1926.¹²⁸ She was next put in the role of coordinating the decorative scheme of the new Bullock's Wilshire store and commissioned thirteen artists.¹²⁹ She had recommended Jock Peters to Winnett to oversee much of the interior design.¹³⁰ Peters worked with the local design firm Feil & Paradise on the first three floors. The first two floors were arranged like intimate boutiques and included departments associated with men's and women's fashions, accessories and shoes, sportswear, a Doggery, a Saddle Shop, and a "Studio of Beauty." The third floor provided the "Collégienne Section," which, according to one critic, "expressed in every feature the free spirit of the modern girl and her surroundings."¹³¹ Winnett had developed a line of apparel aimed at young women in 1922.¹³² The fourth floor, dedicated to children's clothing, books, and toy sales, was the work of David Collins. The fifth floor was designed by John Weber and featured the public areas: the Cactus Room, the Salle Moderne, and the Tea Room; it also featured a confectionery and John Bullock's office.¹³³

Unlike emporium-style department stores, each selling space of Bullock's Wilshire was designed to respond to the qualities of the goods on offer. In a note entitled "About Bullock's Wilshire" in the Jock D. Peters Collection, Peters explains how

[m]odern interior and exterior Architecture tries to express the purpose of a house, the utility of it, and the character of the persons or merchandise going into it [...] This is the fundamental principle

128. According to Longstreth (*The American Department Store Transformed...*, *op. cit.*, p. 42), LeMaire would go on to be "arguably the most influential figure in the field [of retail interior design] prior to World War II."

129. These included George Stanley, Gjura Stojana, Herman Sachs, Jallot, Eugene Maier Kreig, Laursat, Sonia Delaunay, and George De Winter.

130. Peters wrote a letter to *L.A. Times* arts critic Arthur Miller (Jakob [Jock] Detlef Peters Fonds, Architecture and Design Collection, University Art Museum of the University of California at Santa Barbara, September 25, 1929) in which he lauded LeMaire's work and ascribed to her the selection of materials used in every department. He went on to note that she was apparently about to embark on a trip to Europe "for further study," but he was sure that she would soon "be convinced that the new Bullock's Wilshire is as great a creation as any a European building." Peters and LeMaire would work together on the interiors of the women's specialty store in New York, Hollander's. The acclaimed store was featured in *Architectural Record*, vol. 69, no. 1, 1931, pp. 2–15. By 1932, however, Hollander's was "caught in the toils of economic disaster and unfortunately [the interiors were] dismantled," as Ralph Flint noted in his article on Jock Peters: "Jock Peters," *Creative Art*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1932, pp. 30–32.

131. Gray, "Store Weds Art to Beauty," *op. cit.*

132. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–89.

133. *Ibid.*, p. 64. Davis observes that Bullock's office had oak paneled walls, a Tudor style plaster ceiling, and a balcony terrace. She goes on to note that it had a series of different uses over the years, including the display of fine porcelain and an employee's lounge.

carried throughout the Bull. [sic] Wilshire Store. The only difference is that the department store is not built for persons but for the things they will use and wear.¹³⁴

He then goes on to describe how that principle applied to the different departments of Bullock's Wilshire, including the Men's Shop, the Sportswear Section, Toiletries, the Gift Shop, Fur Salon, and Lingerie. To conclude, he argues for honesty of materials (*i.e.*, presenting marble as marble, rosewood as rosewood, avoid stains, etc.), asserting that "[t]he combination of these materials with sincerity, good taste, and skilful workmanship is the basic foundation of modern architecture."¹³⁵

The strategy of putting the commodity at the heart of the design process was extolled by Jesse Straus, former president of Macy's, in an interview in *Architectural Forum*:

A store should be planned backwards. A department store will be best planned by working from (let us say) a pressed-glass "Georgian" tumbler, price 8 cents, on the eighth floor of the store, down to the foundation piers 120 ft. into the soil of the city. For on a good day seven or eight thousand people may want that tumbler in a hurry, and they should be allowed to have it. A successful store is not a museum.¹³⁶

While the approaches of Straus and Peters were both highly rationalized, the effects produced were startlingly different. Straus put the emphasis on rapidity and quantity of sales, and on unhampered movement through the store. Peters, on the other hand, privileged a sense of atmosphere, highlighting the affective qualities and emotional appeal of goods, and recalling for us McCarter's discussion of atmosphere at the Marine Building from the last chapter. He orchestrated the sensuousness of the materials into a balance that complemented and intensified the aura around the commodities. In that way, Peters's approach—producing an *ensemble* effect—lends itself more to the creation of glamour. Each department became its own stage, its own vision of lifestyle. This was reinforced administratively through what Winnett called "unitization," where each department had its own staff of buyers, and even through the uniforms of the staff—Sportswear wore brown, Children's Department wore beige, high-fashion French Room wore black, etc.¹³⁷ Customers could create their entire *ensemble* from any one department, thereby linking the seemingly disparate units.

I would argue that the strategy of producing individual stages around commodities created a sense of glamour associated with the local, as each department was particularized to some facet of life in Southern

134. Jock Peters, "About Bullock's Wilshire," Jakob [Jock] Detlef Peters Fonds, Architecture and Design Collection, University Art Museum of the University of California at Santa Barbara, no date [ca. 1929].

135. *Ibid.*

136. Jesse I. Straus, "The Architecture of Merchandising," *Architectural Forum*, vol. 58, no. 5, 1933, p. 343.

137. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

California. For instance, upon entering the west wing of the store from the Perfume Hall, visitors would have confronted Gjura Stojana's mural "Spirit of Sports" (figs. 2.20 and 2.21).¹³⁸ The mural is of flat fresco, silvered plaster relief, and thin strips of wood veneer. It picks up and amplifies the energy of abstract geometric patterns employed in Sach's motor court mural, on the elevator, and, more subtly expressed, on the floor of the Perfume Hall. One reporter observed that "[o]ne may not know just what

Figure 2.20.

Sportswear Department, ground floor, Bullock's Wilshire, Los Angeles (CA), interior design by Jock Peters with Feil and Paradise (mural by Gjura Stojana), 1929.



Mott/Merge Photograph collection, Folder # 663, Print # 564-29, Neg. # 24,330 (4" x 5"), Acc. # 1992-4744. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento (CA)

138. Miller noted that Stojana apparently "put a cot in the room in order to live in his work" ("Beauty Seen in Building," *op. cit.*).

Stojana meant by those strange Kandinsky-like straight lines, sharp angles and speeding colors, but one gets the sense of movement and movement is the dominant note in all the designs save those inside the rooms where the visitor is invited to linger.¹³⁹ This sense of movement was to be associated with a modern, Californian lifestyle garbed in sportswear. Sports or resort wear was apparently developed by Winnett in order to meet a demand for “play” clothes for the beach, lodge, or polo grounds.¹⁴⁰ The white plaster walls and natural finished sycamore panels inlaid with copper were meant to suggest a natural setting, but one reinterpreted through the lens of modernity. The abstract ornament seen on the light-box piers (and throughout the store) encapsulates Peters’s lyrical approach to producing modern ornament, expressing the linearity of the city grid as well as organic forms (fig. 2.21). For Peters, “[t]he artist to-day still holds the mirror up to nature, but his ‘nature’ has, as it were, sold the old place in the country and has moved into town. Hence the ‘mirror’ reflects the life of the city. And that is—Modernism!”¹⁴¹ Peters’s sense of Modernism stands in contrast to the Modern Movement, which did not seek to “reflect” conditions of modernity through ornament. His use of the term “Modernism” reminds us of the ambiguity of the concept at the time, where we might now see Peters’s decorative “Modernism”—which in the context of the department store provided the backdrop for the imagining of modern lifestyle—as quite distinct from the interests of many proponents of the Modern Movement.

The Sportswear Department opened onto the Saddle Shop, continuing the theme of active, outdoor lifestyle (fig. 2.22).¹⁴² The brick-like vermilion tile, a hand-woven rug of earth-bound browns and orange-red, and white plaster walls, featuring lyrical reliefs of polo players, archers, and animals by Eugene Maier-Krieg, lent the space a rustic sensibility.¹⁴³

139. Douglas, “Bullock’s Wilshire Store Delights...,” *op. cit.*

140. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

141. Jock Peters, “What’s behind This Modernism Anyway?” *The Mohawk Rug Retailer*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1928, p. 4. Peters’s description of the city at night can be seen in his ornament: “One rectangular block of masonry stands out darkly before the other, and both are etched against the blue-black sky. Perhaps a faint thread of starlight catches a window pane. Chains of illuminated shops, dazzling balls of color; red and green traffic signals; flashing headlights, motors crawling slowly like gigantic, unreal insects; searchlights scratching at the stars; and, towering fantastically up and up into the night the naked ribs of a new skyscraper—where two months earlier stood, perhaps an isolated fruit-stand! Rectangles, bright and dark; broad and narrow lines, straight, crossing, zig-zagging; circles, sectors, cut flowers, leaves, hat shapes—a jumble of outlines and contours without end!”

“Such is the American city of 1928. Such is man’s background to-day. And such is the artist’s inspiration. Unconsciously he seizes upon this background. He weaves it into his ornament. And, if he is a good artist, he catches the very essence of it!” (p. 4).

142. Outdoor, healthful activities were a concern for many architects, not to mention governments, throughout the interwar years. Sports and healthy bodies were seen as essential to the success of nations and Empire—we might think of the British Pavilion at the 1937 Exposition, themed on sport. It was in the interwar years that professional sports became a major commercial and social phenomenon. The Deco response to sports, as seen at Bullock’s Wilshire, was the packaging of a sporty lifestyle, providing the fashions and accessories (items of symbolic capital) to frame a particular lifestyle.

143. Davis (*Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 56) notes that Winnett was a horse enthusiast and enjoyed the feature of a life-sized plaster horse, known as “Bullock’s Barney,” on which patrons could check the fit of their jodhpurs.



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However, the rectilinear geometry of the dark, red oak wall cases and checkered blue, grey, buff, and maroon ceiling pattern reasserted a sense of rationalized order. Up the stairs to the mezzanine was located the Doggery, containing the latest fashions in dog collars, sweaters, and accessories. This responded to a very particular public and lifestyle in Los Angeles at the time.¹⁴⁴ Like automobiles, dogs and horses were considered

Figure 2.21.
Sportswear Department, ground floor, Bullock's Wilshire (now Southwestern University School of Law Library), Los Angeles (CA), interior design by Jock Peters with Feil and Paradise (mural by Gjura Stojana), 1929.

144. McWilliams, in his discussion of the proliferation of “meaningless service occupations” in L.A. (*Southern California Country...*, *op. cit.*, p. 237), notes that “Los Angeles has the largest number, and the best-equipped, dog-and-cat hospitals of any city in America. It boasts dog training schools, dog rest homes, special dog-food stores, dog equipment shops, dog resorts in the mountains to which pets can be sent for a vacation, and magnificent dog-and-cat cemeteries. The Hollywood Pet Cemetery might well be regarded as a monument to the lack of industry in Los Angeles prior to 1940.”

Mott/Merge Photograph collection, Folder # 681, Print # 564-29, Neg. # 24,230 (4" x 5").
Acc. # 1992-5040. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento (CA)



Figure 2.22.
*Saddle Shop, ground
floor, Bullock's
Wilshire, Los Angeles
(CA), interior design
by Jock Peters with
Feil and Paradise, 1929.*

part of one's ensemble, a sign of one's taste. The fact that these spaces were framed in part with Art Deco suggested the modernity of the activities and of the lifestyles on offer.

The mezzanine also contained the playdeck, which originally displayed swimwear and "play" clothes.¹⁴⁵ The amount of space allocated to activewear speaks to its central position in the lifestyles of wealthy Angelinos (see fig. 2.13, p. 130). After all, the interwar period saw the rise in the popularity of suntanning—a point that reminds us of the growing influence of the local public culture of Southern California on the rest of the United States (and world) through Hollywood-related representation. We might see suntanning as indicative of a "democratization of style," for people of all strata of society could attain the same, desired effect. The image of glamour thus shifted toward an active model, and the later streamlined forms of the 1930s only reinforced this vision on a larger scale (fashioning architecture and commodities alike), providing an even broader ensemble for the glamorous subject.

The connection to a local sense of glamour went even further than responding to (by fashioning) local popular activities. For instance, the Men's Department may refer to Frank Lloyd Wright's local architecture (e.g., the Barnsdall "Hollyhock" House [1917–1920], and especially Ennis House [1924]). Arranged as a series of suites and with a separate entrance from Wilshire, the Men's Department was supposed to present a more masculine tone than most of the other spaces in the store (fig. 2.23). Peters evoked Wright's concrete block style, reminiscent of Mayan temples, with rough plastered walls and corbelled arched spaces lit through recessed light fixtures. The play of rectilinear volumes offered both a sense of intimacy and yet openness, while the patterned plaster surfaces, together with the modern chairs and uniquely designed *vitrines*, presented a variety of geometric forms to balance the squared edges and hard lines of the rooms. Like spaces dedicated to women's fashions and accessories, the customer here was staged in a distinctly modern setting, offering a vision perhaps of masculine glamour. Glamour (and indeed Art Deco in general) is most often associated with women, with fashion, and cosmetics, but men of course were also solicited with dreams of fashionability providing entry into a better life (e.g., we might think of the glamour of male Hollywood stars like Clark Gable or Fred Astaire who would be emulated by some).¹⁴⁶ In the Men's Department, male customers were framed as sophisticated moderns in rooms sympathetic to supposed masculine qualities and in materials (dark hardwood cases, leather seats, etc.) that

145. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 56. She goes on to note that when the store opened, there was an outdoor children's play area to the southwest of the building, which was removed with the expansion of the men's department in the 1940s (pp. 56–57). This again suggests an interest in outdoor activities and reminds us of the fact that many people migrated to Los Angeles to partake in the healthy lifestyles purported to be lived there.

146. Gundle (*Glamour: A History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–66) reminds us of the crucial role played by men in the development of glamour—notably George "Beau" Brummell.

Mott/Merge Photograph collection, Folder # 681, Print # 564-368, Neg. # 24,234 (4" x 5").
Acc. # 1992-5044. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento (CA)



Figure 2.23.
Menswear Department,
ground floor, Bullock's
Wilshire, Los Angeles
(CA), interior design
by Jock Peters with
Feil and Paradise, 1929.

were meant to evoke these sensibilities. The detail given to the Men's Department no doubt responded to the growth of the men's fashion industry as bound especially to leisurewear fitting a Californian lifestyle.¹⁴⁷

Local associations were made directly in the décor of the non-selling spaces of the fifth floor. Moving from the elevator foyer toward the Cactus Room, visitors would find themselves in a *moderne* environment

147. See William R. Scott, "California Casual: Lifestyle Marketing and Men's Leisurewear, 1930–1960," in Regina Lee Blaszczyk (ed.), *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, pp. 169–186.

of soft green and rose that included references to the Southwest Desert (fig. 2.24). Cacti in planters adorned with abstract designs would immediately call up the local environment while placing visitors in a distinctly modern space. This synthesis was even more apparent in the Cactus Room (located in the background of fig. 2.24), with its copper grilles depicting stylized cacti in windows separating the Cactus Room from the elevator foyer, green and tan colouring, and ceiling of painted glass by Herman Sachs, which recalls his motor court mural in form but here depicts an abstract view of the desert. The lounge led into the Tea Room, which continued the green, pink, and tan colour scheme in a “modernistic” setting (fig. 2.25). These Deco spaces framed views of the surrounding environment, just as the environment spilled into and framed the department store. As one reviewer noted, “Views from many of the windows are entrancing, and especially so from the tea-rooms and tea patios, where glimpses of far hills and mountains seem to form a setting fit to frame this gem of architectural art—Bullock’s-Wilshire.”¹⁴⁸ The tranquil fifth floor became an ideal setting for staging modern lifestyle, providing an environment that blended European with local elements and suggesting

Figure 2.24.
Elevator foyer, fifth
floor, Bullock’s
Wilshire (now
Southwestern
University School
of Law Library),
Los Angeles (CA),
interior design by
John Weber, 1929.



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148. Gray, “Store Weds Art to Beauty,” *op. cit.*



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Figure 2.25.
Tea Room, fifth floor,
Bullock's Wilshire
(now Southwestern
University School
of Law Library),
Los Angeles (CA),
interior design by
John Weber, 1929.

a cosmopolitan quality evocative of a highly mobile and “worldly” consumer base. This leisured lifestyle of course would contrast sharply with the “worldliness” of migrants to Los Angeles in search of employment in the Depression.

The cosmopolitanism of the building was evoked at the time of its opening in terms of the pedigree of architects and designers. After describing the connection between Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright to German and Austrian schools (ostensibly privileging an American origin of the movement, although, interestingly, he did not make a connection between Wright's work and the design of the Men's Department), Arthur Miller pointed out that the architects and designers “grew up in the modern school” and were “mostly trained” in Germany.¹⁴⁹ This emphasizes the cosmopolitanism of Los Angeles, a destination for so many from across the United States and the world. Just as Hollywood could at once suggest so many places and yet be a unique construction in its own right as discussed in the Introduction, so Bullock's Wilshire—located on the “Fifth Avenue” and “Champs-Élysées” of the West—could evoke both other capitals of glamour and its own, distinct version, fulfilling the vision of its cosmopolitan population of highly trained architects, designers, and entrepreneurs, not to mention fashion designers and customers. The systems of mobility aestheticized in the decorative program of Bullock's Wilshire point to an elite cosmopolitanism and remind us of the connectedness of

149. Miller, “Beauty Seen in Building,” *op. cit.*

Los Angeles to the wider world. The celebration of these forms of mobility masks the often brutal exploitation of other regions in the process of capital accumulation.¹⁵⁰

The connection with cosmopolitanism and the local goes even further, I would argue. As I have discussed, the interiors of Bullock's Wilshire seem like stage sets, meticulously designed *moderne* environments. For instance, the ceilings in each department were handled differently, adding a unity to each space but also an air of self-conscious constructedness. The idea of staging in department stores, of course, was not new, and indeed the incorporation of the period rooms would appear to support a typical department store strategy. However, I would argue that in the context of Los Angeles the *moderne* stages resonated with the film industry. After all, Jock Peters worked for Famous Players-Lasky (Paramount Pictures) from 1924 to 1927, designing sets, and would sign on with Paramount again as art director in 1932, prior to his untimely death in 1934. Some of Peters's filmset designs, together with those for the store and for an ideal art centre, were put on display at Bullock's Wilshire not long after the store's opening.¹⁵¹ Some of the "futuristic" elements of these sets indeed could be observed in the store. This linked the imaginative process of designing the store to that of film-making, both with highly constructed yet glamorous outcomes. And both were essential in the projection and maintenance of glamour. While the cinema offered visions of modern(e) lifestyle and provided figures to emulate, the department store became a place to perform some modern life activities and to purchase the materials with which to fashion oneself "modern." Visiting the various departments might not simply conjure ideas of elegance and glamour of Parisian or Fifth Avenue boutiques, but of being on a unique filmset aimed at reinforcing the ideas of particular, Californian lifestyles. The period rooms in this configuration might be read not as a concession to the history of department store design, but as filmsets, tying the virtual mobility of moving through time to the imaginative mobility of the moving picture, and ultimately to the mobility of consumption.

That Bullock's Wilshire contained such dramatic *moderne* interiors and became a space of public significance no doubt meant that the store had an effect on conceptions of modern lifestyle in California. The store's opening followed the first major use of Art Deco in

150. Philip J. Ethington describes how directly Los Angeles's oligarchy affected Mexico and East Africa during the interwar years with his discussion of Edward L. Doheny's role in the *Faja de Oro* (golden lane) oil region of Mexico; the story of Edgar Rice Burrough's implantation of Tarzan into L.A.; and MGM director W.S. (Woodbridge Strong) Van Dyke's filmmaking safari through British East Africa for the making of *Trader Horn* (1931). See his "The Global Spaces of Los Angeles, 1920s-1930s," in Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse (eds.), *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 58-98.

151. See Arthur Miller, "Art Center Outlined," *L.A. Times*, October 27, 1929. Among the drawings displayed were designs for a film about a "future city," but the film was scrapped by Famous Players after the release of *Metropolis* (director Fritz Lang, 1927). His work was shown elsewhere in the L.A. area, including a show held at UCLA that included the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, Rudolph Schindler, and Kem Weber. See Arthur Miller, "Modern Architecture Shown," *L.A. Times*, April 20, 1930.

Hollywood—namely, Cedric Gibbons's sets for the somewhat controversial film *Our Dancing Daughters* (MGM, directed by Harry Beaumont, 1928).¹⁵² Gibbons, like Winnett and Donald Parkinson, had visited the Paris exhibition, and was influenced by it, not to mention other trends in Modern Movement architecture, as Donald Albrecht discusses.¹⁵³ But we might see the continued use of Art Deco spaces in films as resonating with the public culture in Los Angeles, including places like Bullock's Wilshire. In fact, Art Deco department stores featured in a number of films.¹⁵⁴ It should also be observed that the store had an even more direct link to the film industry when in 1935 the "Irene Salon" opened on the second floor (fig. 2.26). Irene Gibbons was a successful costume designer for MGM and her salon marked the first boutique dedicated to the work of a single American designer in a large department store.¹⁵⁵ The intimate yet

152. For a discussion of the film, see Massey, *Hollywood Beyond the Screen...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–36.

153. For a discussion of MGM filmsets, see Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–108. Gibbons, who designed the Oscar statue, was the head of MGM's Art Department from its formation in 1924 until he retired in 1956. His contract stipulated that he be given sole credit for every film MGM produced in the United States. Gibbons largely oversaw the production of sets and was assisted by a team of talented designers, including Canadian-born Richard Day, whom John Hambley and Patrick Downing credit with some 48 films, including *Our Dancing Daughters*. For more on Day, see Albrecht, *ibid.*, p. 90. Gibbons designed his own house (which he shared with his wife, Dolores del Rio) with local architect Douglas Honnold in Santa Monica. The house materialized the Deco sets produced for MGM in a real-life, private environment. According to Mandelbaum and Myers, "[r]ich clients of Cedric Gibbons would ask for exact duplications of settings he had created for the screen. Gibbons also received requests for newly-weds and engaged couples for blueprints of the dream houses seen at their local Bijou" (*Screen Deco: A Celebration...*, *op. cit.*, p. 13). They go on to note that Ginger Roger's home was designed by RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Pictures Art Department architect Van Nest Polglase, and that Ramon Novarro's Lloyd Wright house was decorated by Gibbons in "all black fur and silver." For more on Gibbons, see Ralph Flint, "Cedric Gibbons," *Creative Art*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1932, pp. 116–119.

154. For instance, *Our Blushing Brides* (1930), the third part of the trilogy which began with *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928) and *Our Modern Maidens* (1929), is set in a fictional New York department store, Jardine's. The Art Deco styling highlights the modernity of the department store as a place for the New Woman. But, as Fischer points out, "despite the alleged 'modernity' of the film's subject matter (three young women alone in New York negotiating the perils of work and romance), its overall value system is quite traditional" (*Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco...*, *op. cit.*, p. 56). The down-to-earth, Gerry Marsh (Joan Crawford)—a store "mannequin" who models the latest fashions—refuses the advances of Tony Jardine (Robert Montgomery), son of the store owner, until it becomes clear that he loves her, and they are engaged to be married. Connie Blair (Anita Page) works in the perfume department and is quite naïve, agreeing to be a "kept" woman by Davey Jardine (Raymond Hackett), another son of the store owner, until she learns that he is to be engaged to a society debutante and subsequently commits suicide. The third woman, "Franky" Daniels (Dorothy Sebastian), works in the linen department and begins an affair with obvious womanizer Martin Sanderson (John Miljan). They get married and she lives the "good life" until police come looking for Sanderson as a con man (pp. 54–58).

155. Davis, *Bullocks Wilshire*, *op. cit.*, p. 72. According to Davis, a simple frock could go for \$450. Irene was most famous for her design of Lana Turner's white hot pants in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946, MGM, director Tay Garnett), although her clothes were worn by a whole host of Hollywood stars, including Marlene Dietrich, Rosalind Russell, Claudette Colbert, Loretta Young, Carole Lombard, Ingrid Bergman, Joan Crawford, Paulette Godford, June Allyson, Ginger Rogers, and Doris Day (whom Irene often shopped with at Bullock's Wilshire). Irene would open a dress shop at the University of Southern California and one in Hollywood. Her salon at Bullock's Wilshire closed in 1942. She was nominated for two Oscars for costume design (1948's *B.F.'s Daughter*, MGM, director Robert Z. Leonard; and 1960's *Midnight Lace*, Arwin Productions and Universal International Pictures, director David Miller). She committed suicide in 1962, throwing herself from the eleventh floor of the Hollywood Knickerbocker Hotel (pp. 70–71).



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theatrical space pulled together modern elements, like recessed lighting, with a more traditional, classical decorative treatment. The volute form and curvature of the wall might well have responded both to an interest in period furnishings used in Hollywood sets and the then popular aesthetics of streamlining.

The kind of leisured lifestyles propagated in the store likely affected those represented on the big screen. Thus the entrance of glamour into the local public culture of Los Angeles, in department stores, hotels, and other sites of daily life, might be read as having a larger impact on American public culture. By the early 1930s, *Vogue* could claim that fashions emanated from both Paris *and* Hollywood, and a fashion designer like Travis Banton could announce that he would no longer make seasonal journeys to Paris for inspiration.¹⁵⁶ Glamour was on the move—on the screen, on the roads, in the air, on the seas, on bodies, and in the multiple acts of virtual and material consumption that underpinned Bullock's Wilshire.

I have argued in this chapter that Bullock's Wilshire provided environments for the fashioning of modern lifestyles. The store testified to the impact of the 1925 Paris exhibition on concepts of selling or framing these lifestyles, imbuing spaces with a sense of glamour. I proposed that glamour should be read as both distanced and objectifying *and* experienced from a first-person perspective, which could be potentially empowering. I also argued that glamour could be localized and could

Figure 2.26.
Irene Salon,
second floor,
Bullock's Wilshire
(now Southwestern
University School
of Law Library),
Los Angeles (CA),
ca. 1935.

156. See Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture...*, *op. cit.*, p. 76; and Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.

affect the production of public culture. Bullock's Wilshire was described as a monument to mobilities, where the mobilities of different aspects of modern life reinforced one another. And yet these same mobilities contrasted with the immobility of those who could not lead the lifestyles projected in the spaces of Bullock's Wilshire, particularly in the Depression. Ironically, though, many Depression-weary Americans still bought into the fantasy of glamour—some actually moving to Los Angeles, others engaging the myths of the “good life” at the cinema. While cartoons like *Page Miss Glory* poked fun at the idea of glamour, it was nonetheless a vibrant and concrete factor in daily life, a central component of the “democracy of desire.” It is interesting to think that at a time of crisis of democracy—especially in interwar Europe—perhaps the strongest democracy was a virtual one associated with consumption, one ostensibly still tied to the aristocratic values within the aura of glamour.

In some ways, Bullock's Wilshire is a predecessor of later shopping centres. Besides the provisions made for motorists, the store's architectural conception seems to point to future developments: a unified exterior containing a range of distinctive shops. This promoted the idea of choice—the central “right” in a “democracy of desire.” The store might be read as adapting the notion of *ensemble*, so prevalent at the Paris exhibition, to meet an even more commercialized and mobile-oriented American culture, one reproduced on movie screens.

I have shown that the store was a highly rationalized space, but one aimed at fostering and encouraging dreams. Since the store was so functionally designed, it begs the question of whether this supposed Art Deco monument should in fact be considered an example of Modern architecture. It is interesting to note that, to coincide with Los Angeles's hosting of the tenth Olympiad in 1932, the store opened the “International Style” show organized and curated by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and sponsored on the West Coast by “[a]n impressive California committee under Rufus B. von KleinSmid.”¹⁵⁷ The show included local houses by Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra and was read at the time as dealing with the problem of producing low-cost housing and not a new “style” or fashion.¹⁵⁸ In many ways the store promulgated notions of an active lifestyle that fit well with the healthy living impetus behind much Modern architecture, including the contemporaneous Lovell Beach House (Rudolph Schindler, 1925–1926) and “The Demonstration Health House” (Richard Neutra, 1927–1929). But Bullock's Wilshire, as a department store, almost by necessity had to promote dreaming and to respond not just to ideals of modern living, but also promise more. In essence, the store had to be glamorous. And this makes the framing of the “International Style” show interesting. It provides an index of modernity, bringing different (indeed quite contradictory) ideas of the modern together, much as the earlier Paris exhibition did. On the one hand,

157. Arthur Miller, “Art ‘Boom’ in Prospect during Olympic Games,” *L.A. Times*, July 24, 1932.

158. See Arthur Miller, “New Architecture Analyzed,” *L.A. Times*, July 31, 1932.

glamorous Art Deco offered promises of the new, but ultimately reinscribed more conservative social values; while on the other, the Modern Movement presented an often utopian view of a reformulated and more egalitarian society built on rationality. Of course neither Art Deco nor the Modern Movement was so uniform, and the elite who could afford to patronize new buildings, art, and fashion, patronized both.

In considering the notion of glamour in relation to Art Deco, I have shown how the style was laden with particular sets of meanings in the context of a consumerist environment. I have tried to indicate the importance of spatial framing to the inculcation of certain lifestyles and associated social values. My argument is not that all Art Deco space is glamorous, but in many instances, particularly those associated with places of leisure, we can see glamour operating. In Los Angeles, the idea of glamour became part of public culture, but this required spaces for the enacting of that glamour. Bullock's Wilshire was one such space. In the next chapter, I will explore another space of public culture often associated with glamour—the movie theatre, the kind of place where “Abners” of the world might get their impressions of “Miss Glory.” Like the department store, the movie theatre will be seen as a key site of public culture, which, in the context of interwar Bombay, had serious socio-political ramifications.

3

Exchanging Looks

“Art Dekho” Movie Theatres in Bombay¹

Colaba Causeway was my Via Appia. Malabar and Cumballa Hills were our Capitol and Palatine, the Brabourne Stadium was our Colosseum, and as for the glittering Art Deco sweep of Marine Drive, well, that was something not even Rome could boast. I actually grew up believing Art Deco to be the “Bombay style,” a local invention, its name derived, in all probability, from the imperative of the verb “to see,” Art dekho. Lo and behold art.

Salman Rushdie²

1. An earlier version of this chapter was published as Michael Windover, “Exchanging Looks: ‘Art Dekho’ Movie Theatres in Bombay,” *Architectural History*, vol. 52, 2009, pp. 201–232.
2. Salman Rushdie, “Dekho, Dekho, Art Deco,” excerpt from *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, 1996, in Jerry Pinto and Naresh Fernandes (eds.), *Bombay, Meri Jaan: Writings on Mumbai*, New Delhi, Penguin, 2003, p. 112.

This quotation from Rai, the narrator in Salman Rushdie's novel *The Ground beneath Her Feet* (1996), provides a helpful way of approaching Art Deco in Bombay's interwar public culture. That the term may be an anachronism in Rushdie's story—owing to the fact that “Art Deco” did not come into even scholarly parlance until the late 1960s and thus could hardly be in the memory of a child growing up in the 1950s—does not detract from its value in pointing to the governing logic of Art Deco as the self-conscious (visual) display of modernity. Most importantly, though, is Rushdie's reframing of Art Deco as a local “invention”—as a “Bombay style.” Even when Rai becomes familiar with New York and realizes that this “look” was not unique to his home city (“The Americans had so much; did they have to possess our ‘style’ as well?”), he sees Manhattan as “both familiar and awe-inspiring, our little Bombay writ large.”³ The passage from Rushdie reinforces my conception of Art Deco as “re-centring,” as argued in chapter 1, with Rai comparing Bombay to imperial Rome. However, his “New Rome” neither included the Neo-Gothic structures that dominated the city's nineteenth-century skyline nor the monumental, Indo-Saracenic edifices built in the dying days of the Raj (as seen, for example, in fig. 3.2).⁴ Instead, those same Art Deco apartment buildings and hotels built along Marine Drive that architect Claude Batley, writing in 1946, describes as “giv[ing] the impression, from a distance, of a rather badly fitting set of false teeth,”⁵ surpass the imagined grandeur of ancient Rome in the narrator's mind (fig. 3.1). More significantly, by putting the emphasis on the local production and reception of Art Deco, Rushdie upsets the simplistic reading of Art Deco as an example of “Westernization” or even “Americanization.” I argue in this chapter for a more complicated understanding of Art Deco in Bombay, one that sees it as an example of “public culture,” as I discussed in the Introduction.

The Art Deco metropolis described by Rai was largely the result of a massive, decade-long building campaign in the city that began in 1933. In this same period the population grew from 1.16 million (1931 census) to 1.49 million (1941 census) inhabitants, with some 50,000 homeless.⁶ The mid-1920s had seen a trade recession in the city, which was only worsened by the global Depression of the 1930s and exacerbated by the

3. *Ibid.*

4. For more on the socio-political implications of the architecture of the Raj, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989. As he explains, the Indo-Saracenic style did not fundamentally mark Bombay's cityscape despite the city's cotton boom coinciding with the British interest in building in Indian styles following the Mutiny of 1857. Being a bridge to the West, and thus more Western-oriented, the city's wealthy patrons (many of whom were of minority Parsi and Jewish communities) sought the appearance of Western styles as a means of appearing modern. I shall return to this point below.

5. Claude Batley, *Architecture*, Oxford Pamphlets on Indian Affairs, no. 35, London, Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 29.

6. Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, Mumbai, Eminence Designs, 2001 [rev. ed.], p. 242.



◀ **Figure 3.1.**
Marine Drive
in the 1950s.

A.L. Syed. Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay/Deco*, Mumbai, Eminence Designs, 2008, p. 97

Civil Disobedience campaign.⁷ However, by the mid-1930s the city's economic fortunes began to turn and great progress was made on a number of construction projects, including suburban developments and the Backbay Reclamation.⁸ That left a district of Art Deco buildings roughly two square kilometres in area, rivalled perhaps only by South Beach in

7. For more on the political and economic situation of Bombay, see K.K. Chaudhari, *History of Bombay: Modern Period*, Bombay: Gazetteers Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987, pp. 160–256.
8. The Backbay Reclamation scheme developed in response to a severe housing shortage following the First World War. Marred by controversy from the beginning, the massive project was originally meant to reclaim 1,500 acres of land between Colaba and Backbay. While plans were developed along City Beautiful lines by William Robert Davidge, they were not followed. Instead, a series of hotels, apartments, and commercial blocks of uniform height were constructed in what amounted to half of the original area. For more, see Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, Mumbai, Eminence Designs, 2008, pp. 92–99, 104–143; for details on the other reclamation projects, see pp. 143–165. Their excellent and well-illustrated survey includes discussion of the suburbs as well (pp. 264–287), with an essay by Kamu Iyer, “Art Deco in Hindu and Parsi Colonies and Wadala,” pp. 288–299.

A.R. Haseler.
Reproduced with permission from Sharada Dwivedi (Eminence Designs)



Figure 3.2.
*Aerial view of Apollo
Bunder, mid-1930s.*

Miami, Florida.⁹ While I would argue that the Art Deco of Bombay was, like the Marine Building and Bullock's Wilshire, representative of a sense of optimism for modernity, emerging as it did in response to the end of the Depression in the fraught socio-political climate of late-Imperial India meant that the mode carried a complicated (perhaps even conflicted) socio-political valence.

For the most part, I agree with Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra, who have recently argued that Art Deco "was focussed on styling and more aristocratic in form and patronage" than the Modernism adopted in Jawaharlal Nehru's post-Independence India, and that "the opulence of 'princely India' that Art Deco perpetuated was an interesting counterpoint to the values being popularised by Gandhi, which in some ways were closer to the sensibilities of Modernism than Art Deco."¹⁰ However, more than simply seeing Art Deco as an "interesting counterpoint," I contend that we might read it as a particular political statement at a time of heightened social and political tension. Bombay was the largest city in India, the financial heart of the subcontinent, the Gateway to India, and a crucial site for the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The values reinscribed by the mode, as I have argued throughout, were fundamentally conservative, even if they were carried on surfaces of the fashionably new. And in Bombay, Art Deco was patronized largely by

9. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *ibid.*, p. 99. Navin Ramani makes this argument in his richly illustrated *Bombay Art Deco Architecture: A Visual Journey (1930–1953)*, edited by Laura Cerwinski, New Delhi, Roli Books, 2007, pp. 252–271.

10. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

princes and wealthy business leaders. It was employed mostly in new apartment blocks, office towers, and movie theatres. That these types of spaces promulgated and affected notions of modern lifestyle—including reconfiguring domestic space in reinforced cement concrete flats—did not diminish the fact that they buttressed a system that emulated aristocratic values, as I argued in the previous chapter. While Indian princes were significant patrons of Art Deco in 1930s Bombay, the key site of interaction with the style and with modern notions of lifestyle was the Art Deco cinema, and it is the cinemas—particularly the Regal (1933) and Eros (1938)—that form the focus of this chapter.¹¹ Cinemas perhaps best encapsulate the idea of a “democratization of desire” in that they were spaces of vicarious identification and escape, premised on tenets of consumer culture. While they were spaces of cultural production, as I will argue, the narratives of most films generally reinforced pre-existing social values, and this was only buttressed by Art Deco styling. That said, the space of the cinema could be one of empowerment for some; thus, I assert in this chapter that the space of Deco cinemas in Bombay was ambivalent. The buildings should thus be read perhaps as moderate political statements, and yet pragmatic responses to economic conditions for businessmen capitalizing on the popular appeal of Art Deco.

I have chosen to deal with movie theatres in Bombay for a number of reasons. First, they are sites of visual culture. As Rushdie’s story suggests, visuality and Art Deco are closely intertwined, particularly on the local level. Thus the first section of this chapter deals with the instrumental role of visuality in considering the impact of Art Deco in Bombay. In the second section, I investigate the situation of the movie theatres, these sites of modern looking. Third, I explore the cultural traditions and socio-political role of the Parsis in Bombay to gain a better understanding of the advent of Art Deco in the city and how it might be read, since of the three major Deco cinemas built during the 1930s, the Regal and Eros were both the brainchildren of Parsi entrepreneurs—a point often noted but

11. There were of course other cinemas built or renovated in the Deco style in the city. The Plaza was opened in Dadar in 1935, the Central Cinema in 1936, the Broadway Cinema in 1937 on the site of the old Dadar Police Court, and the Aurora in 1940 at King’s Circle, also in Dadar. See Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *ibid.*, p. 54. Since my study is confined to the cinemas of the 1930s, I do not consider the renovated New Empire Theatre. The name, the “New Empire,” was given to the earlier Empire Theatre (Arthur Payne, with local interior architects O’Connor & Gerald, 1908), after it changed ownership in 1937. The earlier Baroque-style theatre was remodelled by Western India Cinemas Ltd. (a film circuit owned by the Parsi Modi family) in 1948, under the supervision of British architect M.A. Riddley Abbot. According to Vinnels and Skelly, the credit for the interiors has been variously attributed to Karl Schara, Fritz von Drieberg, and Waman Moreswar Namjoshi. Still owned by the Modi family, the theatre was extensively restored in 1996. This proves to be another example of Parsi ownership and the Art Deco style. See Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces: Cinema Theatres in India*, Cambridge (UK), E & E Plumridge, 2002, pp. 84–87; and Ramani, *Bombay Art Deco Architecture...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 232–239. The other major Art Deco cinema is the Liberty, built by Habib Hoosein, also designed by M.A. Riddley Abbot (but supervised by John Berchmans Fernandes and Waman Moreswar Namjoshi after Abbot’s death in a plane crash), and inaugurated on March 21, 1949, the Parsi New Year’s Day. The construction began in 1947, the year of India’s Independence (hence the name of the cinema), and unlike the Regal, Eros, and Metro, this cinema played Indian films. For more, see Dwivedi and Mehrotra, pp. 82–91; Vinnels and Skelly, pp. 106–110; and Ramani, pp. 220–231.

little investigated in literature on movie theatres in the city.¹² (The third theatre was the Metro Cinema, opened shortly after the Eros in June 1938; it was owned and operated directly by the Metro Goldwyn Corporation.¹³) Fourth and finally, I discuss some of the socio-political implications of these cinemas. They are situated at *chowks*, intersections of several avenues. I thus envision the cinemas as an extension of this type of space—crossroads of cultural, political, and economic flow, exchange, and production. This, in a sense, reinforces the idea of Art Deco as an aestheticization of mobilities while exemplifying the notion of public culture.

■ *Art Dekho*—Visuality and Indo-Deco

The concern with appearance, or visual effect, in Art Deco takes on a particular power in India as the visual is an especially important component to Indian daily life practices and ways of being. As comparative religion and Indian studies scholar Diana Eck explains, *darshan*—the “central act of Hindu worship”—literally means “seeing” and, “from the point of view of the lay person, [it] is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one’s own eyes, to see and be seen by the deity.”¹⁴ As Indian cinema specialist Rachel Dwyer puts it, *darshan* refers to “a structure of spectation” found in some religious (Hindu), social, and political practices “in which the image authorizes the look (rather than merely being its object), thereby benefiting the beholder.”¹⁵ Here “the image rather than the person looking has power.”¹⁶ Vision has a profound impact in structuring the visiting of temples and embarking on pilgrimages, as well as interacting with saints (*sants*), “holy men” (*sādhus*), and “renouncers” (*sannyāsins*). It includes, for example, the tens of thousands who came to “take *darshan*” from Mahatma Gandhi as he travelled throughout the country in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁷ Seeing is understood in sensual terms as a form of touching and, crucially, of knowing.¹⁸ Since *darshan* can be taken from objects and images found in the everyday, its potential to structure power dynamics, even in a more secular context,

12. The theatres are discussed in Jon Alff, “Temples of Light: Bombay’s Art Deco Cinemas and the Birth of the Modern Myth,” in Pauline Rohatgi, Pheroza Godrej, and Rahul Mehrotra (eds.), *Bombay to Mumbai: Changing Perspectives*, Mumbai, Marg Publications, 1997, pp. 250–257; Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces*, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 94–105; and Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–81.

13. The Metro was designed by famed Scottish-born, New York-based Thomas W. Lamb. The associate architect in Bombay was David William Ditchburn, the senior partner of Ditchburn, Mistry & Bhedwar. The Metro is now a multiplex cinema. For more on the renovations, see Atul Desai, “Metro Cinema—A Classical Makeover,” *Journal of the India Institute of Architects*, vol. 71, no. 7, 2006, pp. 11–12.

14. Diana Eck, *Darshan: Seeing the Diving Image in India*, Chambersburg (PA), Anima Books, [2nd ed.] 1985, p. 3.

15. Rachel Dwyer, “Indian Cinema,” in Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel (eds.), *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of Hindi Film*, London, Reaktion Books, 2002, p. 33.

16. *Ibid.* As she notes, “the beholder takes *darshan* (*darshan lena*) and the object gives *darshan* (*darshan dena*).”

17. Eck, *Darshan: Seeing the Diving Image in India*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

becomes all the more apparent. *Darshan* affects, for example, the relationship between the viewer and the movie star and has had a substantial impact on the production of indigenous film production and advertising.¹⁹ With this in mind, that Rushdie's narrator associates Art Deco with the visual seems particularly significant and suggests the potential power of the style in fundamental expressions of individual and community identity.

Recent scholarship on Indian public culture highlights the pertinence of visual modes of communication to the engendering of modern communities.²⁰ For instance, historian Sandria Freitag argues that visual culture, particularly in the form of posters, photographs, cinema, and public rituals, provides a better means of exploring ideas of nation in South Asia than typical textual approaches, which are indebted to the pioneering work of Benedict Anderson.²¹ She contends that modern "ocularcentricity" arrived in India "in the train of western industrialism" and converged with pre-existing traditions of courtly culture (e.g., holding of daily *durbars*), religious practices (*darshan* and *bhakti*), and live performance.²² In exploring various traditions, including for example the Mughal adoption of earlier Hindu viewing practices that became concretized in palace architecture, she shows how the visual was not only a preoccupation of Hindu audiences, but found wider, trans-cultural appeal and appropriation.²³ This point is especially significant in the context of multi-ethnic Bombay.

Divia Patel's work on film advertising indicates the power of style in signifying notions of a modern India. Art Deco booklet covers for the films *Madam Fashion* (1936), *Jung-e-Jawani (Modern Youth)*, (1937), and *Fashionable India* (1937), she argues, "reflected the ethos of the time and the lifestyle that the new urban elite of Bombay aspired to."²⁴ Patel contends that film advertisers used stylistic, visual cues not only to indicate an awareness of international design trends, but to frame social concerns affecting modern India. She cites the example of a booklet cover for the film *Achhut Kanya (Untouchable Girl)*, directed by Franz Osten, (1936). Contextualizing the film within the moment of Gandhi's non-violent demonstrations against the British, she explains how the movie, which

19. Dwyer, "Indian Cinema," *op. cit.*, p. 33. See also Divia Patel, "Advertising and the Communication of Meaning," in Dwyer and Patel, *Cinema India...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 183–214; and Preminda Jacob, "From Co-star to Deity: Popular Representations of Jayalalitha Jayarana," in Vidya Dehejia (ed.), *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1997, pp. 140–167.

20. For a sampling, see Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney (eds.), *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics, and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001; Sumathi Ramaswamy (ed.), *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, New Delhi, Sage, 2003; Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel (eds.), *Cinema India*, *op. cit.*; and Maria Antonella Pelizzari (ed.), *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, Montréal, Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2003.

21. Sandria Freitag, "Visions of the Nation: Theorizing the Nexus between Creation, Consumption, and Participation in the Public Sphere," in Dwyer and Pinney, *Pleasure and the Nation...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–75.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–49.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

24. Patel, "The Art of Advertising," in Dwyer and Patel, *Cinema India...*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

depicts a forbidden love affair between an “untouchable” girl and a Brahmin boy in a rural setting, resonated with Gandhi’s advocacy of improving the plight of “the untouchables.”²⁵ The booklet cover depicts the principal characters in traditional settings and in a realist mode, while the typeface appears akin to the Art Deco font “Bifur” developed by French graphic artist Cassandre (Adolphe Mouron) in 1929. Patel’s reading provides a powerful example of the production of public culture in which style becomes an indicator of modernity and is recognized as carrying political valence in the visually oriented social context of India.

The preponderance of Art Deco buildings constructed during the interwar years—against the backdrop of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Salt Satyagraha and six serious riots, the 48th All-India Congress (1934), the Government of India Act (1935), and the first Indian Ministry elected in 1937, as well as the looming Second World War—²⁶needs to be understood as being politically charged, especially in places of public culture like movie theatres. It seems only fitting that a location for public looking, the Regal Cinema, was the first major architectural statement of the Art Deco style in Bombay. Freitag asserts that as the Independence Movement gained momentum into the 1920s, “consumption of an image became a political act of great import.”²⁷ These acts included anti-imperial, pro-national, or even more conflicted positions, like those of many Parsis and other minority groups who were concerned about being “cast in sub-altern roles to indigenous powerholders who attempted to dominate on the basis of regional, caste, class, or gender identities.”²⁸ Given that many important Art Deco structures were built by these minorities—notably by Parsi industrialists and entrepreneurs, wealthy princes, and members of the corporate elite (e.g., the towers of commerce in the Fort district)—and that many among them likely perceived themselves as being more financially and politically secure under British rule, the style might be seen as a kind of middle course between ardent nationalists and the imperial power. As elaborated below, the style signified a cosmopolitan sensibility and was neither read as a form of indigenous nationalism (as was the *swadeshi*-influenced Revivalist architecture)²⁹ nor an architecture of empire.

■ Siting Modernity: A Site to See Modern India

With an eye for the prestige of the Colaba area of southern Bombay, Framji Sidhwa purchased the site of the former Saluting Battery on Regal Circle (S.P. Mukherjee Chowk) across from Wellington Fountain for his Regal Cinema (fig. 3.2). The theatre stands out against the Indo-Saracenic

25. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

26. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

27. Freitag, “Visions of the Nation...,” *op. cit.*, p. 65.

28. *Ibid.*

29. See Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai, *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity—India 1880 to 1980*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, especially pp. 116–137.

monuments of late imperial Bombay—notably George Wittet’s Gateway of India (1924) seen at the top of the photograph, his Prince of Wales Museum (1923)—its gardens on the bottom left—and, on the right, his Royal Institute of Science (1920).³⁰ The “Indo-Saracenic” style was developed by the British following the so-called “Sepoy Mutiny” of 1857 (and the beginning of direct Crown governance), and was based on a mixture of traditional Hindu and Islamic Mughal (dubbed Saracenic) forms and ornament. The style was used predominantly in educational institutions (e.g., schools, colleges, museums) and was meant to be read as appropriate to the climate of India, as symbolizing the harmony of Hindu and Muslim populations under supposedly benevolent British rule, and as asserting the legitimacy of that rule by situating buildings of the Raj within the lineage of South Asian architecture.³¹ Although not a government-commissioned building, to the right of the Gateway on the water rises the Taj Mahal Hotel (1903), a luxurious structure envisioned as a location of intercultural relation by Parsi industrialist Jamsetji N. Tata. This portion of Bombay was part of the Apollo Reclamation project of the later nineteenth century and featured the prominent Neo-Gothic Royal Bombay Yacht Club, designed by John Adams and opened in 1881 (to the left of the Gateway), together with his Royal Yacht Club Chambers (directly below the Gateway). The Regal Cinema was centrally located in this upscale neighbourhood dominated by English, Anglo-Indians, Parsis,³² and wealthy Muslims. To the north lies the Fort district, the financial and commercial heart of the city (and Subcontinent), which was undergoing a major reconstruction with several new towers built in the Deco mode. To the south lies the military cantonment. The number of different architectural styles, and mixture of residential and commercial interests, lends a visual and social dynamism to the neighbourhood.

30. See Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, *op. cit.*, pp. 210–220. The authors’ generally celebratory tone is countered in Sandip Hazareesingh, “Colonial Modernism and the Flawed Paradigms of Urban Renewal: Uneven Development in Bombay, 1900–1925,” *Urban History*, vol. 28, 2001, pp. 235–255. Hazareesingh describes the government’s inability to deal with the crises of public health epidemics and a chronic shortage of housing. Essentially, the colonial government catered to urban elites, who brought great wealth into the city, allowing for the construction of these monumental structures at the expense of the growing majority of low-wage industrial workers.
31. See Thomas R. Metcalf, “Architecture and the Representation of Empire: India, 1860–1910,” *Representations*, vol. 6, spring 1984, pp. 37–65. The style was also used in office blocks, railway stations, and clock towers. Metcalf explains how buildings in the “Indo-Saracenic” style exemplify the “double claim” of colonization. The style defined the history of Indian subjects by the British: the forms were borrowed from close archaeological study of medieval Hindu and subsequent Mughal architectural sites, and the style was most often used for institutions of learning. It gave the impression of stability and maintenance of tradition, yet was part of the systemic classification and reshaping of Indian society under British rule.
32. Just off the Colaba Causeway, the Cusrow Bagh, designed by Gregson, Batley, and King in the 1930s, became the exclusive residential enclave of Parsis and also featured an *agriary* (fire temple), shops, a central garden (*bagh*), a gymnasium, a dispensary, a school, a *gymkhana* pavilion, and a building for funeral services. See Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra, *Fort Walks: Around Bombay’s Fort Area*, Bombay, Eminence Designs, 1999, p. 51; and Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–147, 150–151.

The Regal was not far from the very first location of cinema exhibition, Watson's Hotel.³³ Here (then it was known as the Esplanade Hotel) Maurice Sestier presented the Lumière Brothers' "Cinématographe" in Bombay on July 7, 1896, on his way to Australia. Consequently, the Regal might be seen as drawing from the transformative power of the site—the site that marked the beginning of a new practice of everyday life and central industry for the city was, through the Regal, effecting a correspondent aesthetic change. The nearest example of such aesthetic shift was the construction of the Dhunraj Mahal, built on the former site of Watson's Hotel Annex (fig. 3.3). Begun in 1933 and finished five years later, the "residential-cum-commercial complex" was the grandest single building scheme carried out in 1930s Bombay. Its interiors were replete with marble mosaics on the floors and dados.³⁴ The Art Deco–styled structure was built by the aristocratic Raja Dhunrajgirji Narsingirji of the princely state of Hyderabad. The local architectural firm Gregson, Batley & King prepared the initial designs, which were modified jointly with Shapoorji Chandabhoy & Company.³⁵ The edifice was among the first Art Deco

Figure 3.3.
Dhunraj Mahal
(west façade), Mumbai
(Bombay), architects
Gregson, Batley &
King with Shapoorji
Chandabhoy &
Company, 1935.



Michael Windover (2008)

33. The building, designed by Rowland Mason Ordish in 1869, has the distinction of being the first prefabricated iron framed building with brick infilling in Bombay. It was later converted into offices and renamed Mahendra Mansions. See Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
34. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
35. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Fort Walks...*, *op. cit.*, p. 40. For more illustrations see Ramani, *Bombay Art Deco Architecture...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41; and Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–160.

residential buildings conceived in the city and marked the end of building intensification in the area south of the Fort, which had begun in the early years of the century.³⁶ The complex also stood as an example of the princely patronage that helped to fuel the Art Deco-garbed building boom of the 1930s.

The Regal was designed by the British-trained architect Charles Frederick Stevens, son of the acclaimed architect of the Victoria Terminus in Bombay, Frederick Williams Stevens.³⁷ In some ways, his cinema marks a generational change for the city—Art Deco supplanting the Victorian Neo-Gothic,³⁸ which clothed the nineteenth-century colonial port, while the cinema signalled the rise of new public places and an emerging, more consumerist culture than that celebrated by the Victoria Terminus, with its ties to colonial political economy and an earlier stage of industrialization. In fact, the Regal sits directly juxtaposed against the senior Stevens's Royal Alfred Sailors' Home (1874), seen on the left side of Haseler's photograph facing Regal Circle (fig. 3.2). The cinema's reinforced concrete structure is fronted with a stone façade that spoke the by then well-established international Art Deco vocabulary employed on theatre fronts both in North America and Britain (fig. 3.4). This includes dynamic yet shallow setbacks that frame the central sign, as well as flattened, geometric ornament that caps the first tier of the projecting façade and which was taken up in the interior design scheme for the auditorium. The perforated chevron ornament seen on the canted exterior wall exemplifies the vigorous energy of the international Deco style, yet would likely not have been read as drastically new given the vital history of Islamic ornamentation in the city, incorporated, for example, on the nearby Indo-Saracenic structures, including the Gateway of India (fig. 3.5). The stepped, rectilinear geometry of the façade, however, certainly does stand out against the curvilinear forms of the arches and domes of the adjacent edifices. And the hybridity of form and ornament at the Regal does not carry the outwardly political (and ideological) weight of that seen in the monumental structures of the Raj, which, as South Asian historian Thomas Metcalf argues, were conceived as "representations of empire": crucial sites for the reshaping of colonial, Indian society.³⁹

36. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay, The Cities Within*, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

37. Charles F. Stevens, born in Bombay in 1874, was educated in Bath and at Bristol University before returning to Bombay in 1892 to article with his father. He was elected a member of the Society of Architects of London in 1896 and in 1895 was made a Justice of the Peace. He assisted with some of his father's later work before establishing his own practice in 1907 with associates B.G. Triggs and Thomas Sedgwick Gregson. He received his R.I.B.A. nomination papers that same year. Besides the Regal Cinema, he is known for his designs of the offices of the Bombay City Improvement Trust (1904) and the Orient Club (1912). See Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, *op. cit.*, p. 101, note 5; and Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

38. The Gothic Revival style of Frederick Williams Stevens incorporated elements of the nascent Indo-Saracenic Style. For more on Stevens and his impact on the fabric of Bombay, see Christopher F. London, "Architect of Bombay's Hallmark Style: Stevens and the Gothic Revival," in Pauline Rohatgi, Pheroza Godrej, and Rahul Mehrotra (eds.), *Bombay to Mumbai: Changing Perspectives*, Mumbai, Marg Publications, 1997, pp. 236–249.

39. Metcalf, "Architecture and the Representation of Empire..." *op. cit.*, p. 62.



Figure 3.4.
Charles Frederick
Stevens, *Regal Cinema*,
north and west façades,
ca. 1933.

The Regal was the first building to employ neon lighting in the city, a technology that would have further distinguished the cinema from surrounding structures visually and affectively. Flanking the vertically placed letters of the illuminated sign are two long and narrow niches crowned with sculpted heads, likely derived from the masks of Classical theatre (fig. 3.4). The masks suggest a continuity between pre-existing theatrical traditions and the cinema, as will be discussed below. The building's exterior thus follows a pattern consistent with much Art Deco architecture, especially for movie houses, one that places the historical within outlines of the new.

The modernity of the building was made more apparent with the entrance to an indoor parking garage—another first in the city (fig. 3.6). The entrance to the garage was situated to the right of the main entrance (see fig. 3.4). The garage made tangible the link between moving pictures and automobility recognized by contemporary American media critic Gilbert Seldes, who argued that cars are sold, much like films, by appealing to similar desires for “elegance, comfort and a good position in society.”⁴⁰ By the time the Regal opened in 1933, motorcars had become a part of daily ritual and function for many middle- and upper-class Bombayites; thus Sidhwa appealed to the desires of the now commuting class. The 1930s saw the construction of new high-end residential areas,

40. Gilbert Seldes, *The Movies Come from America*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937; Aspects of Film Series, New York, Arno Press, 1978 [reprint], p. 9.



◀ **Figure 3.5.**
Detail of Gateway of India, Mumbai (Bombay), George Wittet, 1924.

Figure 3.6.
Garage of Regal Cinema, Bombay (Mumbai), architect Charles Frederick Stevens, ca. 1933.

villas, and holiday homes for the elite, new middle-class housing, and the development of suburbs to the north of the city.⁴¹ In fact, growing automotive congestion was a major impetus behind the Development Trust's controversial Backbay Reclamation scheme, a program that developed, piecemeal, beginning in 1929, and that saw the construction of the apartment buildings and hotels along Marine Drive.⁴² That the area is frequently compared to South Beach suggests at least a



Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), p. 51

41. See Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, op. cit., pp. 242–243.

42. Amin Jaffer, "Indo-Deco," in Benton et al., *Art Deco 1910–1939*, op. cit., p. 383.

superficial link between look and lifestyle. Reinforced in many of the Hollywood and British films played in the Regal, not to mention popular Indian “stunt” films shown in other theatres, the car signified the energy and excitement of modernity and its attendant associations with personal freedom and dreams of social mobility. Like its counterparts in North America and Britain, the Regal pulled together a number of different systems of mobility, which were aestheticized through the Deco design.

For many, the automobile and the movie industry seem the epitome of an American style of life.⁴³ In 1948, T.S. Eliot certainly saw India’s culture, first having suffered under British colonial rule, within the grips of a growing Americanization:

America has tended to impose its way of life chiefly in the course of doing business, and creating a taste for its commodities. Even the humblest material artefact, which is the product and the symbol of a particular civilisation, is an emissary of the culture out of which it comes: to particularise only by mentioning that influential and inflammable article the celluloid film; and thus American economic expansion may be also, in its way, the cause of disintegration of cultures which it touches.⁴⁴

Back in May of 1929, General Motors of America was producing one hundred cars a day in its Bombay plant, a reminder of American influence both economically and visually.⁴⁵ According to theatre historians David Vinnels and Brent Skelly, the domination of U.S. films in the Indian market made “even the best city-centre establishments [appear] dull and old-fashioned.”⁴⁶ This led to a desire among exhibitors to build more spectacular movie theatres and

[c]onsequently, a number of Hollywood Studios commissioned or were instrumental in the development of prestigious, new American-style super cinemas in the smartest locations of Bombay and Calcutta. Strongly influenced by and in some instances designed by American architects, they brought to India a glimpse of previously undreamed of luxury and chic, with the objective, no less, of replicating something of the spectacle and glamour of the great picture houses of the United States.⁴⁷

This argument seems compelling for indeed Hollywood’s Metro Goldwyn Mayer did have a contract with Sidhwa at the Regal and MGM did commission the building of large cinemas called the Metro both in Calcutta and Bombay by the end of the 1930s, designed by the renowned

43. The motorcar of course played a significant role in Britain and the European continent and was likewise tied to notions of the modern. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is seen in the writing and designs of Le Corbusier.

44. T.S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, [1948] London, Faber and Faber, 1988 [reprint], p. 92.

45. See M.D. David, *Bombay: The City of Dreams (A History of the First City in India)*, Bombay, Himalaya Publishing House, 1995, p. 248.

46. Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

47. *Ibid.*

Scottish-born, New York-based theatre architect Thomas Lamb. Not only this, but some of the fabrics as well as the aluminium balcony balustrade and exposed metalwork for Bombay's Metro were imported from the U.S.⁴⁸

We need to be wary of embracing cultural imperialist arguments too readily, however, especially in the case of Bombay. It is useful to keep in mind, for instance, that Rushdie's narrator thought that "Art Dekho" was a uniquely local invention and only later learned that Americans "possess[ed] our 'style' as well," which "only increased America's allure, made it both familiar and awe-inspiring, our little Bombay writ large."⁴⁹ The local encounter and production of Art Deco framed his view of modernity, and thus he could see Bombay in the world outside rather than forces of Americanization in Bombay. Although Hollywood and "the American way of life" had an impact on the design of the cinemas, the modernity expressed in the Art Deco buildings and cinemas was truly hybrid. The Regal, for example, was designed and engineered by a British architect, while the sumptuous interior was the work of a Czechoslovakian, Karl Schara. In fact, a number of dramatic Art Deco interiors were the work of European designers. For example, Schara also designed the tea-room and ballroom for the restaurateurs Cornaglia; Fritz von Driberg was responsible for the interior renovations of the New Empire theatre as well as the interior design of the Eros Theatre, and was one of four European designers hired in 1928 by the furniture company, John Roberts; Angelo Molle carried out the interiors of Broadway Cinema at Dadar; and E.F. Messerschmidt, who designed for Kamdar Furnishers, produced Art Deco interiors for the Taj Mahal Hotel (including the ballroom), the Governor's Pavilion in the Cricket Club of India, as well as flats for Parsi industrialists Jamsetji D. Tata, N. Saklatvala, and Dinshaw Petit.⁵⁰

Especially when keeping in mind the important contribution of Europeans to Hollywood and design culture in general in the United States, particularly as it relates to manifestations of Art Deco, the idea of Americanization as a homogenizing force becomes problematic. After all, the dramatic streamlined movie theatres of the United States, the emblem of Americanization, were highly influenced by the picture palaces of Weimar Germany.⁵¹ As British architectural critic Philip Morton Shand in his 1930 book *Modern Theatres and Cinemas* asserts, "German architects have thought out the cinema as a new and untraditional type of building" and, as a result, led the way in cinema design instead of "aping the barbarous and suffocating magnificence of London, New York and Chicago 'Palaces.'"⁵² Could the Indian builders (and renovators) of cinemas in Bombay have been tapping into a different pool of expertise, one perhaps perceived as foremost in dealing with the challenges of a new building form?

48. Alff, "Temples of Light...", *op. cit.*, p. 255.

49. Rushdie, "Dekho, Dekho, Art Deco," *op. cit.*, p. 112.

50. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

51. See Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001, particularly pp. 163–181.

52. Philip Morton Shand, *Modern Theatres and Cinemas*, The Architecture of Pleasure, London, B.T. Batsford, 1930, p. 24.

Nevertheless, America was the leader in film production and distribution and was thus the most likely model for emulation, even if Indian patrons of cinema had a more diffuse range of influences. Besides Hollywood and continental Europe, cinema building in Britain cannot be underestimated. Indeed, Britain was the principal source of Deco influence for Bombay in this period.⁵³ While the American era of super-cinemas was primarily the 1920s, with sometimes several thousand-seater (usually atmospheric and historicizing) auditoriums, the 1930s saw a decline in the size of North American movie theatres.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Britain witnessed a rise in the number of large-scale, streamlined cinemas constructed in the 1930s (e.g., Odeon Theatres), as well as the world's highest per capita attendance.⁵⁵ The more appropriate model for the dynamic is not so much Americanization as cosmopolitanism: one that resonates better in the context of Bombay, especially in terms of the history of film exhibition, as explained further below. Cosmopolitanism, as I have argued, suggests a sense of mobility. It indicates a willingness to borrow from multiple sources. The term does not foreclose the idea of indigenization—where modernity is seen as a culturally negotiated and locally produced. Yet—and importantly for this context—I understand cosmopolitanism of the interwar years as indicative of elite (even aristocratic) class associations, even in more “democratized” forums, such as movie theatres.

So, although the impact of America is important to consider—especially given the predominance of Hollywood films and the fact the United States may have stood as an example of successful independence from British imperialism and thus employing American fashions may have been read politically as an anti-imperial gesture—the role of other nationals must be considered. Not only did émigré designers from Central and Eastern Europe bring knowledge of Art Deco to Bombay, but also many of India's princes who travelled on luxury ocean liners to Europe and America and were, according to Amin Jaffer, the principal patrons of the Deco in India.⁵⁶ These princes adopted a “Western lifestyle” due partly to the political climate and partly to the government's program of instilling “Western values” through institutions of education.⁵⁷ As maharajas and nawabs no longer had to finance expensive wars, vast fortunes were

53. Dwivedi and Mehrotra also make that claim in *Bombay Deco*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

54. For more on American film-going activities in the 1930s, see James Forsher, *The Community of Cinema: How Cinema and Spectacle Transformed the American Downtown*, Westport (CT), Praeger, 2003; Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre*, Starring S. Charles Lee, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994; Margaret Farrand Thorp, *America at the Movies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1939; Gregory A. Waller's compendium of contemporary essays and primary source material, *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*, Malden (NJ), Blackwell, 2002; and Ross Melnick and Adreas Fuchs, *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theaters*, St. Paul (MN), MBI, 2004.

55. Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2002, p. 1. See also Richard Gray, *Cinemas in Britain: One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture*, London, Lund Humphries, in collaboration with the Cinema Theatre Association, 1996.

56. Jaffer, “Indo-Deco,” *op. cit.*, p. 385.

57. *Ibid.*

spent on palaces and shopping for luxuries in London and Paris.⁵⁸ The Maharajas of Indore, Baroda, Gwalior, Wankaner, Hyderabad, Rewa, and Cutch all built stately residences in the Malabar and Cumballa Hills of Bombay.⁵⁹ As Dwivedi and Mehrotra emphasize, princes began visiting Bombay frequently to shop, watch sports, and prepare for foreign travel, but most significantly, to hold informal meetings of the Chamber of Princes—the official body for negotiations with the Government of India.⁶⁰ They would meet in the Art Deco–styled Princes’ Room at the Taj Mahal Hotel (fig. 3.7).⁶¹ It was these aristocrats, together with business elites, who could afford the lifestyle pictured on the screen, a lifestyle unavailable to the vast majority, except in the lush interiors of the cinemas. Like the Parsi entrepreneurs building cinemas, the example of the princes with feet in two worlds should remind us of the nature of the modernity expressed in Bombay’s Art Deco: a local negotiation indicative of cosmopolitanism rather than simply “Westernization.” Indeed, even the incorporation of the parking

Figure 3.7.
The Princes’ Room,
Taj Mahal Hotel,
Bombay (Mumbai),
interior design by Ernst
Messerschmidt, 1930s.



Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), p. 28

58. *Ibid.*, p. 387. The duality of the lifestyle is perhaps best evinced in the pair of portraits commissioned by the Maharaja of Indore in 1930. Executed by society painter Bernard Boutet de Monvel, one portrait depicts the young prince seated cross-legged in Maratha dress, while in the other he appears in Western evening clothes. For Jaffer, the painter “captures [the prince’s] elegant and self-assured style in both worlds.”
59. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, op. cit., p. 276; Jon Alff, “Art Deco: Gateway to Indian Modernism,” *Architecture + Design*, vol. 8, no. 6, 1991, pp. 58–59.
60. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, op. cit., p. 28.
61. *Ibid.* The Deco mural and lamps were designed by Ernst Messerschmidt. The Taj continues to be a place of elite association and meeting, which contributed to it being targeted in the 2008 attacks.

garage at the Regal might be seen as an example of “Westernization,” yet was promoted in the opening brochure as “a welcome feature in the monsoon,”⁶² a point that again speaks to the local negotiation of modernity.

The dramatically sited Eros Theatre likewise highlights the sense of cosmopolitanism (fig. 3.8). The idea of cosmopolitanism was announced in an advertisement, which described the Eros as “The Rendezvous of the East” and featured a series of motorcars converging at its entrance.⁶³ The cinema had international sources of inspiration, including U.S. technical and financial support,⁶⁴ yet instantly expressed the modernity of the new middle-class neighbourhood, which included reinforced concrete, flat-style apartments cooled with electric fans. Designed by local Bombay architect Sorabji Keikhushru Bhedwar, the cinema complex is situated on a triangular site across from Churchgate railway station, at the junction of several roads and at the end of an unbroken line of Deco apartment blocks on the Backbay Reclamation (fig. 3.9).⁶⁵ Flanking wings of apartments and offices

Figure 3.8.
Eros Theatre
(north façade),
Mumbai (Bombay),
architect Bhedwar
Sorabji, 1938.



Michael Windover (2008)

62. Quoted in Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

63. The 1938 advertisement is reproduced in Vinnels and Skelly, *ibid.*, p. 99; and Ramani, *Bombay Art Deco Architecture...*, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

64. Alff, “Art Deco...,” *op. cit.*, p. 61.

65. Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 99; Alff, “Temples of Light,” *op. cit.*, p. 254.



Sham Kirloskar.
Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), p. 125

meet in a V-like formation at the canted entrance to the cinema (fig. 3.8). An extra office floor was later added with perforated *chajjas* on either side of the tower.⁶⁶ Like the Regal, decorative setbacks bring emphasis to the entrance, where the name of the cinema appears in modern lettering. Partially faced with red sandstone from Agra, the building combines an interlocking scheme of light cream and red, used to mark the mouldings and ornamental details. The rounded façade suggests the speed of a streamlined era and may allude to a docked ocean liner. The allusion to an ocean liner no doubt would conjure notions of the luxury of a cosmopolitan elite. Conceptually, it suggests a place that could take movie-goers imaginatively to other places. And yet the building is an imposing mass. Its horizontal stress is balanced with a dynamic hexagonal then circular stepped tower. The signifying tower became an instant landmark for the new neighbourhood, announcing its modernity.

This modernity or contemporaneity captures the excitement of the new. However, with its ziggurat-style massing, the tower also gestures to the ancient. The building was not simply an example of “Westernization” (imposing American skyscraper style on Bombay) but offered, rather, a more complex relationship between new technological developments and international commercial and cultural economies. This complicated relationship between the foundation of a new modern culture (even nation) and the age-old or traditional forms was even implicated in the construction of the edifice. The sweeping streamlined forms, which suggest machined

Figure 3.9.

Aerial photograph of Backbay Reclamation seen from west, 1955.

The Eros theatre is located near the centre of this image at the end of a line of Art Deco apartment buildings, which face onto the Oval Maidan. To the left of the Eros (across the street) is the Churchgate railway station. Note the presence of the Cricket Club of India, located behind the stretch of Deco apartment buildings and hotels along Marine Drive.

66. Vinnels and Skelly, *ibid.*, p. 99. *Chajjas* are thin sloping overhangs resembling cornices.

products, were in fact the result of intense manual labour.⁶⁷ The Eros, like the other streamlined Deco buildings populating the city, gave the appearance of newness and the modern, but was indebted to more traditional forms of construction. In some ways, this point exemplifies the modernity of Art Deco, of appearing modern yet masking more traditional forms of building, not to mention reinscribing pre-existing social values.

The sense of modernity is expressed as well in the interior. Passing through a small lobby, the foyer presents an air of luxury, enriched with white-veined black marble and chrome-plated metalwork (fig. 3.10).⁶⁸ Circularity is the theme of the cinema. On the floor of the foyer is depicted a sun motif surrounded by concentric circles, marking the centre of a three-storey light well. The decorative scheme of the upper three floors evokes the solar motif with chrome flares emanating from the circular light well on the ceilings at each level, culminating in a backlit orange glass ceiling (fig. 3.11). From the centre of the floor, then, the movie-goer might be seen as positioned at the heart of an imaginary universe, a complex cosmopolitan position that prepares the patron to be situated in any possible place or time. Movie-goers would then watch moving pictures (themselves the product of a circular movement of film through a projector), with their ability to suggest a transcendence of place and time.

Figure 3.10.
Entrance foyer of
Eros Theatre, Mumbai
(Bombay), interior
design by Fritz von
Driberg, 1938.



Noshir Gobhai.
Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), p. 72.

67. Alff, "Art Deco..." *op. cit.*, p. 58. As Alff explains, "Art Deco buildings picked up on the imagery of stamped, moulded and machined products but relied on extensive labour. Mechanized tools were used whenever possible. But complex, highly articulated forms and patterns, difficult to create in mass production, were also difficult to create with mechanized hand labour. The use of flat, bevelled or constant radius curved surfaces was easiest with these tools and led to design simplicity."
68. Alff, "Temples of Light," *op. cit.*, p. 255.



◀ **Figure 3.11.**
 Third-floor foyer,
 Eros Theatre,
 Mumbai (Bombay),
 interior design by
 Fritz von Drieberg,
 1938.

Noshir Gobhai.
 Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), p. 72

The foyer presents a mythical yet modern time-space conceptually, one akin to the decorative program of the Marine Building discussed in chapter 1. At the Eros, blue painted columns in the foyer depict dancing, golden nymphs, which emerge from behind flattened, stylized vegetation (fig. 3.10). The *moderne* nymphs add a sense of the exotic while referring to the Greek god of love, Eros, after whom Shrivastava named his cinema. Shrivastava was inspired by a statue of Eros that he had seen in the theatre district of London. The exotic is also evoked through murals of tropical vegetation and depictions of the Taj Mahal and Indian

temples, which are no longer extant. The frozen fountain motif—popularized at the Paris exhibition in 1925 and a stock Deco image—would be encountered by movie patrons on the doors to the elevators (see the left side of fig. 3.11) and above the auditorium exits (fig. 3.12). The building is thus imbued with a sense of exotic cosmopolitanism, the sources of which were drawn from mythical pasts and translated into a modern form. This is complicated further by the auditorium's frieze depicting filmmaking, discussed further below (fig. 3.12). Suffice it to say at this point that the Eros, like the Regal before it, encapsulates the Janus-like quality of Art

Figure 3.12. ▶
Auditorium, Eros Theatre, Mumbai (Bombay), interior design by Fritz von Drieberg, 1938.



Noshir Gobhai.
Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), p. 73

Deco (and modernity)—a sensibility that at once gestures to a historical or mythical past all the while pointing to the future, with streamlined forms and modern materials, which, altogether, frame modern daily life activities. The hybridity of the theatre is remarkable: it was inspired by a statue of the Greek god, seen in London by a Parsi entrepreneur, designed by an Indian architectural firm on the exterior and by a European émigré on the interior to show largely Western movies for an ethnically mixed audience.

The Eros altered the skyline, competing with the neighbouring Neo-Gothic structures of the university on the other side of the Oval Maidan. Like the Regal exchanging looks with the historicizing and imperial architecture from across the Regal Circle, the Eros seems to challenge the appearance of the Victorian city while being itself a place of viewing—viewing films, and thus offering glimpses into a transnational network of cultural and political flow, and viewing a changing society at home. Situated on the Backbay Reclamation, the Eros, which continues the uniform decorative sweep of Art Deco buildings (including the nearby Cricket Club of India [Gregson, Batley & King, 1933–1936]—later named after the Governor, Lord Brabourne), smoothed over the serious crisis of housing in the city (fig. 3.9).⁶⁹ The mobility of the leisure activities offered by these buildings and aestheticized by the Deco styling stood in contrast to the mobility of the homeless, some of whom were recent arrivals to the city, fleeing the crushing poverty of rural life.⁷⁰ The Backbay scheme, which could have provided affordable housing, instead became an icon of modernity for the city and locus for leisure and middle-class lifestyle.⁷¹ So while the Eros and Regal exchanged looks with their older, colonial neighbours, they did not dramatically change the social order.

■ Facilitating Intercultural Change: The Role of the Parsis

Little has been made of the fact that, of the three Art Deco super-cinemas constructed during the 1930s in Bombay, two were built by Parsis. The Regal, the first major Art Deco structure erected in the city, was developed by Calcutta-based Globe Theatres Ltd., run by Framji Sidhwa

69. For more on the Cricket Club of India, see Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, *op. cit.*, pp. 124–133.

70. Dietmar Rothermund, in *The Global Impact of the Great Depression 1929–1939* (London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 87–97), outlines the economic policy governing India during the 1930s. Economic policy was dictated out of London and was not sympathetic to the Indian economic situation. Deflationary policies, which devalued the rupee by some 40 percent between 1922 and 1938, exacerbated the debts of peasantry at a time when prices of agriculture fell (leading to a dramatic fall in income). That led to selling off of “distress gold” (the sale of gold jewellery and ornaments to richer neighbours to pay debts), especially after Britain left the gold standard in 1931. To a certain degree, the British economic policies, which so exploited the peasantry of India, helped to solidify support behind the National Congress and Gandhi.

71. As Hazareesingh argues (“Colonial Modernism and the Flawed Paradigms...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 239–244), the Backbay Reclamation Scheme did little to alleviate the housing shortage among the poorer classes.

and K.A. Kooka.⁷² Sidhwa, who included apartments for his family in the building, was born into a family of Parsi priests in rural Maharashtra.⁷³ The Eros, which opened in 1938, was the brainchild of Shiavax Cambata, who was born to a poor Parsi family in Karachi, but who developed a successful chandling business in Bombay before embarking on the construction of the remarkable cinema.⁷⁴ Although the erection of these two cinemas may be attributed simply to smart business practice, they should also be considered socio-political statements emerging from a particular community that had traditionally operated as a mediator between colonizers (and the “West” writ large) and the local Indian populace.

The Parsi community in Bombay had an impact on the social, cultural, and built fabric of the city that was entirely out of proportion compared to its numerical size. This ethnic and religious minority of Zoroastrians, which had long served as broker to European merchants trading in South Asia, played an even greater role in British India.⁷⁵ As David Willmer asserts, the British relied on Parsi shipbuilding, entrepreneurship and business acumen, their mediation between various communities, and even Parsi capital for the economic basis of their empire.⁷⁶ To his mind, Bombay “could quite reasonably be described as the city that Parsis built.”⁷⁷ The Parsis played a significant role in the development of trade and commerce, being instrumental in the foundation of Bombay as India’s central banking and financial centre, as well as industry, notably establishing cotton and later steel, not to mention film, industries.⁷⁸ Eckehard Kulke argues that the Parsis were uniquely positioned to take a leadership role under British colonialism in part because of their extreme numerical minority status (*i.e.*, a majority population would have posed a threat to British control), that their socio-religious belief system did not bar them from “acquir[ing] the linguistic and techno-organizational tools for their economic contacts in Europe,” and that many in the community

72. Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 94; Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

73. Alff, “Temples of Light,” *op. cit.*, p. 252.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

75. The Parsi community likely derived its name from the language, Farsi, or the Iranian province of Persis (modern Fars) from which they emigrated as early as 696 CE to as late as 935 CE following the collapse of the Persian Empire to Islamic conquerors. The Parsis were permitted to settle in Gujarat by the king (also described as local chieftain) of Sanjan, Jadav Rana, on the conditions that their high priest explain their religion to the king; that they give up Persian language for language of their hosts; that women must exchange traditional Persian dress for the dress of the new country; that men must lay down arms; and that wedding processions must only be performed in the dark. For more on the Parsi community’s origins in Bombay, see Eckehard Kulke, *The Parsees in India: A Minority as Agent of Social Change*, Munich, Weltforum Verlag, 1974; Nilufer E. Bharucha, “Forging Identities, Initiating Reforms: The Parsi Voice in Colonial India,” *South Asian Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2004, p. 177; and Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City*, Leiden, Brill, 2001.

76. David Willmer, “Theatricality, Mediation and Public Space: The Legacy of Parsi Theatre in South Asian Cultural History,” PhD dissertation, University of Melbourne, 1999, p. 36.

77. *Ibid.*

78. So linked to trade were the Parsis that the 1931 Census listed it as their “traditional occupation.” Kulke, *The Parsees in India...*, *op. cit.*, p. 50; for more on their role in the economy, see pp. 120–132.

admired the so-called “gentlemanly” traits of the British.⁷⁹ As a result, a great number of Parsis, especially from the middle and lower classes, availed themselves of the new educational institutions established by the British by the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁰ With this training, a growing number of Parsis were prepared for the white-collar jobs associated with Bombay’s modernization. It was also out of these schools—especially Elphinstone College—that many Parsis became involved in cultural pursuits (notably, the Parsi theatre, discussed below) and social justice campaigns that would affect the larger Bombay population.⁸¹

That the Parsis had the cultural space to play a significant role in shaping Bombay was largely due to the multi-ethnic composition of the city. Compared to the older imperial cities of Madras and Calcutta, Bombay was more ethnically and culturally diverse. Although Marathi traditions were influential, Gujarati (spoken by Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and Parsis) was also prominent. In this context, and keeping in mind the place of the minority British rulers, smaller communities could emerge as stronger cultural players.⁸² An early twentieth-century newspaper report describes the unique social quality of the city:

In most parts of India the line of demarcation between the Englishman and the Indian is sharply drawn [...] In Bombay the line is so faint that it must soon be extinguished. Englishman and Indian, Parsi and Mohomedan, Jew and Hindu, meet in daily and intimate commercial dealing. They sit side by side in the Hall of the Municipality and the Senate of the University, they foregather nightly at the Orient Club, and inter-dine frequently [...] In all these respects Bombay is nearly a generation ahead of any other part of India.⁸³

Some Parsi entrepreneurs actually facilitated and indeed might be seen as instrumental in fashioning this kind of intercultural exchange. The Taj Mahal Hotel serves as a contemporary example (fig. 3.13). The original designs for the luxury hotel were drawn up by Raosaheb Sitaram Khanderao Vaidya, but upon his death in 1900, the project was turned over to Walter Ashbridge Chambers of Gosling, Chambers & Fritchley, who made some alterations.⁸⁴ Built in 1903 on the recently reclaimed Apollo Bunder overlooking the sea, the “Orientalizing” structure, apparently

79. Kulke, *ibid.*, p. 79.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

81. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, many influential Parsis (including Dadabhai Naoroji, Naoroji Furdoonji, Sorabji Sapurji Bengali, K.N. Cama, and Ardesher Framjee Moos) attempted social and religious reforms to improve the rights of women. By the 1890s, Parsi women were “truly out of the *purdah*.” Meanwhile Behramji Malabari battled to raise the legal age of marriage for girls (regardless of religious denomination) from ten to twelve with the *Age of Consent Bill* of 1891. For more, see Bharucha, “Forging Identities, Initiating Reforms...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 183–185.

82. See Willmer’s discussion in “Theatricality, Mediation and Public Space...,” *op. cit.*, p. 48.

83. *Times* quoted in Norma Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis: A View toward the West*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 43–45. For more on the spatial politics of Bombay under the Raj, see Jim Masselos, “Appropriating Urban Space: Social Constructs of Bombay in the Time of the Raj,” *South Asia*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1991, pp. 33–63.

84. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Fort Walks...*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.



Michael Windover (2008)

Figure 3.13.
Taj Mahal Hotel,
Mumbai (Bombay),
architects Raosaheb
Sitaram Khanderao
Vaidya with W.A.
Chambers of Gosling,
Chambers & Fritchley,
1903.

modelled on Royal palaces of the Rajput kings,⁸⁵ was meant to be a place where “Indians of all castes and creeds could freely socialise amongst themselves and with Europeans on neutral ground.”⁸⁶ For his luxury hotel, Tata was appealing to Western “Orientalist” fantasies, and indeed the idea of a luxury hotel was itself imported. Although the grand hotel provided a forum for exchange across racial or religious lines, and it was, as Siegfried Kracauer described, a place that reproduced the anonymity of commodified, modern life,⁸⁷ it nevertheless reinforced distinctions of class, preventing the realization of a “mass” culture that was possible in the later cinemas. Indeed, as noted above, the Deco-styled Princes’ Room served an elite political function. However, hotels were locations of public culture, and the Taj seems a prime example of a Parsi intervention into the facilitation of intercultural discourse.

Despite the apparent power of the locals in monopolizing real estate on the land-starved island metropolis,⁸⁸ in Metcalf’s view, “Bombay sought to define itself as to some degree a European city, a trading and commercial city, not as a city that marked out Britain’s rule over India’s alien peoples.”⁸⁹ He further argues that members of the wealthy mercantile (and industrial) elite, including many Parsis and some Jews (e.g. David

85. Rajan Narayan, *The Heritage Buildings of Bombay*, Mumbai: English Edition, 2001, p. 53.

86. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

87. Kracauer, “The Hotel Lobby,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, *op. cit.*, pp. 173–185. See my earlier discussion of Kracauer in chapter 2.

88. Evenson cites contemporary British responses to issues of indigenous land ownership. See *The Indian Metropolis...*, *op. cit.*, p. 37, 45.

89. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision...*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

Sassoon), considered themselves outsiders in relation to the majority populations, and thus found a more natural alliance with the colonial rulers.⁹⁰ They took up not only the educational and cultural interests of the British, but manners of dress, interior furnishing, and European architectural forms. Essentially, the elite were implicated in the imperial system. "In some degree like India's princes," Metcalf argues, "these urban merchants sought to appear 'modern.'"⁹¹

To "appear modern" is more complicated than imitation. An important example of a more complex, intercultural sense of the modern is the Parsi theatre, what many scholars believe to be the prime predecessor of Indian cinema. Blossoming between 1850 and 1930, the Parsi theatre combined a variety of Indian and European forms of theatre, performed in English, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, and Marathi.⁹² This hybrid form of popular entertainment borrowed from European companies all manner of visual culture, from handbills and advertising to tickets and the performance in the proscenium arch theatre,⁹³ and introduced female actors in India.⁹⁴ With the decline of British amateur theatre, the Parsi theatre became a cultural (and commercial) phenomenon, as travelling companies moved within the contours of the British-controlled areas of South and South-East Asia.⁹⁵ In the Parsi theatre, according to Willmer, "conceptions of imperialism's civilizing mission [were] articulated, discussed, and sometimes contested."⁹⁶ For example, the 1854 farce *Nim Hakim* (Half-Doctor) extols the virtues of "modern" (i.e., Western) medicine and draws a connection to the charity of the Parsi community. In the play, a sick child is eventually taken to Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Hospital, only after traditional Hindu and Muslim practitioners fail.⁹⁷ Through charitable activities,

90. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

91. *Ibid.*

92. This eclectic form of theatre borrowed from Shakespeare, Georgian drama, farce, music hall, Hindu mythologicals from classical and folk traditions, courtly and secular culture of Urdu literature traditions, as well as Parsi heritage drawn from Persian history and mythology. For more on the Parsi theatre, see in particular Willmer, "Theatricality, Mediation and Public Space..." *op. cit.*, as well as Anuradha Kapur, "Love in the Time of Parsi Theatre," in Francesca Orsini (ed.), *Love in South Asia: A Cultural History*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 2006; and Somnath Gupta [trans. and ed. Kathryn Hansen], *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development*, Calcutta, Seagull Books, 2005.

93. Anuradha Kapur, "The Representation of Gods and Heroes: Parsi Mythological Drama of the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, vols. 23–24, 1993, p. 86.

94. Bharucha, "Forging Identities, Initiating Reforms..." *op. cit.*, p. 193.

95. See Willmer, "Theatricality, Mediation and Public Space..." *op. cit.*, pp. 61–64. He explains that companies were established throughout British India, with actors drawn mainly from Hindu and Muslim communities and Parsis often only in managerial roles. Many of these companies attached to their names "of Bombay" to suggest a sense of legitimacy, and, more importantly, a sense of modernity associated with urban public culture. Willmer argues that the "Parsi theatre" became less an "ethnographic" category and more a "generic" category, given its hybridity, commercialism, and easy incorporation into different cultural spaces. He notes that Parsi companies performed throughout the British Empire and inspired local theatre traditions, for instance, Wayang Parsi theatre in Malaya (which would later develop into Bangasawan) and the development of Nadagama in Sri Lanka (p. 64).

96. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 136. This form of the benefactor's name is the colonial or archaic rendering of Jamshedji Jijibhai's name, as Willmer points out.

including the foundation of many schools, research institutes, hospitals, and the Mahim causeway (which connects the main island of Bombay to the mainland by way of Salsette Island), the Parsis' influence was felt broadly throughout Bombay and even globally.⁹⁸

The Parsi theatre's most important contribution to Bombay of the interwar years, for the purpose of this chapter, was in providing a predecessor for movie-going. As Willmer contends, the shift from the Parsi theatre to film was not simply an aesthetic transfer onto the Bollywood *masala* films of the theatre's operatic structure and "hybridity of form."⁹⁹ The transfer was also economic. Willmer cites the example of Madan Theatres, centred in Calcutta but formed by Bombay native Jamshedji Framji Madan as evidence of that shift. Madan Theatres made films and distributed foreign products through its production company, Elphinstone Bioscope, all the while continuing to operate as a theatrical enterprise.¹⁰⁰ What ultimately sealed the fate of the Parsi theatre was the advent of sound film production in India, perhaps appropriately signalled by the Parsi Ardeshir M. Irani's Imperial Film Company talkie, *Alam Ara* (1931). Interestingly, despite the rise of talkies in the 1930s, the Eros was still categorized as a Parsi theatre venue by theatre historian Somnath Gupt.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the exterior ornament of the Regal, which continues to be used for theatrical events,¹⁰² gestures to a theatrical past with its inclusion of lit, classical masks (fig. 3.4). As former theatres were transformed into cinemas and new cinemas—like the Regal and Eros—were built, a certain continuity of public interaction persisted.

The Parsi theatre provided a space for the practice and formation of public culture, one that would be influential in the shaping of national film, which would have particular import in the imaging and imagining

98. See Kulke, *The Parsees in India...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–75; and Bharucha, "Forging Identities, Initiating Reforms...", *op. cit.*, pp. 182–183. Jamshedji Jijibhai's good works include the J.J. Hospital (1845), the J.J. School of Art (1857), the construction of the Mahim Causeway (1845), and the establishment of waterworks in Poona (1845). Kulke notes that six of the nine hospitals in Bombay in 1909 were built with the contribution of Parsis. He also outlines other, more global-reaching charitable activities. For example, C.N. Cama offered a prize for the best essay on the advantage of vaccinations during the smallpox epidemic of 1851 and had the essay published. Also, money was raised to assist poor Hindus in Gujarat, for textiles workers in Lancashire, earthquake victims in Japan, and cancer patients in England (pp. 74–75).

99. As Willmer ("Theatricality, Mediation and Public Space...", *op. cit.*, pp. 214–215) explains: "The term *masala* literally means a mixture of spices, and indicates the wide range of ingredients (music, dance, dramatic forms, themes, sub-plots and so on) that can (even must) be included within the typical Bollywood movie."

100. Willmer, *ibid.*, p. 229. Madan Theatres was investigated for monopolistic practices, but was cleared of allegations, largely due to its vertical integration rather than outright monopoly (pp. 237–238). The family-owned business ran into economic hardships brought on by the global Depression as well as the inauguration of sound which left it with only two theatres and no more film production. See Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, [2nd ed.] 1980, pp. 24–28, 64–67.

101. Gupt, *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

102. As Vinnels and Skelly (*Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*) note, the Regal hosted Rabindranath Tagore's poetry recitals in the 1930s, the Bombay Symphony Orchestra, and more recently Ravi Shankar. High-profile audience members included President Nasser of the United Arab Republic (1961) and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was a regular patron (p. 96).

of nation. Beyond the films themselves, the interiors of the theatres, like the Taj Mahal Hotel, provided space for cultural exchange. A night at the Parsi theatre was, according to Willmer, “an event at which social and political relationships were expressed in public and one where the audience were [*sic*] as much actors (in a social sense) as the performers on stage.”¹⁰³ With the styling of the new super-cinemas in a distinctly modern manner, the Art Deco movie theatres emphasized the modernity of the everyday activity of cinema-going by framing it as modern and cosmopolitan. So although the kind of public space opened by the Parsi theatre continued into the film era, it was altered conceptually via its visual form. Like the example of cinema booklet covers noted above, the style signified the modern, the self-consciously new, by visually framing daily life activities. This resonates with the space of Bullock’s Wilshire, described in the previous chapter, which likewise encouraged the envisioning of modern lifestyle.

The Parsi community seemed in many ways to appear a colonial elite, a group whose dominant self-imaging was borrowed largely from the colonizers;¹⁰⁴ however, we need to be careful not to characterize it in homogenizing terms. Indeed, the colonial elite was not a position solely reserved for Parsis, but was a heterogeneous group, to be sure: one that included key proponents of the Nationalist Movement such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Rabindranath Tagore.¹⁰⁵ Many high-profile Parsis were not simply collaborators with the colonial power, but were in fact instrumental in the Nationalist Movement, particularly the first, more moderate phase.¹⁰⁶ For example, Dadabhai Naorabji became the first Indian member of the British Parliament in 1892 and was a founding member of the National Congress (established in 1885).¹⁰⁷ That the Parsis played a political role—however moderate given their fears of losing identity and privilege with the exit of the British on account of their numerical inferiority—needs to be seen in concert with their sociocultural place within Bombay. Consequently, the Art Deco cinemas need likewise to be understood within the context of their long history of intercultural mediation.

Art Deco, for architectural historians Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai, “certainly had nationalist overtones to it.”¹⁰⁸ This might result from the fact that, as they point out, “Indian clients embraced Art

103. Willmer, “Theatricality, Mediation and Public Space...,” *op. cit.*, p. 187.

104. Tanya Luhmann discusses the position of the Parsis in postcolonial India as a community nostalgic for the days of elite status, when its members were key players in the creation of industrial Bombay. She interestingly explores the gender implications in the colonial relationship—how under the British many Parsis measured themselves against the masculine ideals of the colonizers (*i.e.*, of all the colonized, Parsis saw themselves as the most “white,” the most “fair” and manly), but since Independence, Parsi men in particular are characterized by their own community as feminized and lacking the drive that led to the successes of their forefathers. See Tanya M. Luhmann, *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1996.

105. Bharucha, “Forging Identities, Initiating Reforms...,” *op. cit.*, p. 179.

106. See also Palsetia, “Identity and Political Nationalism,” in *The Parsis of India*, *op. cit.*, pp. 277–319.

107. See Bharucha, “Forging Identities, Initiating Reforms...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 180–181; and Kulke, *The Parsees in India...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 217–224.

108. Lang *et al.*, *Architecture and Independence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

Deco to a much greater extent than the clients of the major Anglo-Indian firms.”¹⁰⁹ They contend that the mode “was too avant-garde to be closely identified with either the imperialists or *swarajya* ideals.”¹¹⁰ The eclecticism of the style, its flexibility to frame visually the local within the modern, echoed that of the Parsi theatre, making it likewise a moderate form of political intervention. Especially given the power of visuality in Bombay, where, to some degree, to look modern was to be modern, building Art Deco cinemas—places of modern looking—was clearly a statement of some import. But it should be added that while Art Deco might have been patronized by the individuals who expressed nationalist sentiments, the style was not overtly nationalist and indeed may have been simply read as modern. Likewise, the movie theatres patronized by Parsi entrepreneurs and others were not necessarily read as political statements, but more likely as places of modern public culture, places that nonetheless had sociopolitical implications. Audiences attending movies at the Regal or Eros may not have known that these buildings were commissioned by Parsis, just as they may not have known certain film companies were owned or operated by Parsis. This does not, however, negate the leadership some Parsis took in producing modern visions and spaces. Ultimately, the kind of political statement here was moderate—one more in line with the position of many industrialists who sought independence more in line with Dominion status, rather than a Republican break from England. Put another way, it might be seen as an independence of modernity rather than of radical Modernism.

■ The Art Deco Cinema as a *Chowk*

Chowks are crossroads, intersections of multiple avenues, locations often in the heart of a city where the market is held. They are sites that facilitate the movement of people, goods, and ideas. The Art Deco cinemas, the Regal, the Eros, and the Metro, were all positioned at major intersections, were built into the urban fabric and routines of everyday life, and thus seem well-suited to extend this logic. They were (and continue to be) avenues of cultural exchange and certainly places of commerce. They were meeting places, spaces where one could “try on” new identities, and the architecture, with its cosmopolitan, Art Deco design, reinforced this perception. As such, these theatres became incredibly powerful spaces for the imaging and performance of modern subjectivities.

Cinema-going is an embodied spatial experience, one located in public architecture and one with sociocultural and political implications.¹¹¹ Following Stuart Hall’s model of cultural production as

109. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

110. *Ibid.*

111. For a discussion of the interpenetration of architecture and film, see Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, *op. cit.* See also Michael Windover, “Picturing Modernity: Exploring the Architecture of Pleasure in 1930s North Toronto,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2007, pp. 55–68.

consumption,¹¹² and keeping in mind geographer Robert David Sack's important assertion that consumption is a "place-making activity,"¹¹³ the cinema needs to be rethought as a space of cultural production. Indeed, the cinema was not simply a societal pressure valve, redirecting the frustrations of a new "mass" audience into a fantasy land of escape; instead, the movie house was a site of social interaction, a place that encouraged imagination. It is perhaps not surprising then that Arjun Appadurai opens his influential discussion of the transnational power of imagination to effect or influence change by referring to his early childhood experiences of modernity viewing Hollywood films at the Eros.¹¹⁴

Recognizing the transformative potential of the cinema may extend or complicate Michel Foucault's classification of the movie theatre as a "heterotopia." In a 1967 lecture to a group of architects, Foucault explains that the cinema is exemplary of a heterotopia in that it is a place "capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."¹¹⁵ Just as the foyer of the Eros suggested a unique time-space that prepared viewers for the cosmopolitan activity of watching a movie, we might regard the abstract decorative scheme of the Regal as providing a different yet evocative environment for encountering other spaces. The chevron pattern, seen on the exterior (fig. 3.4, p. 170) and carried into the foyer in the railings, floor, and piers (fig. 3.14), dominated the auditorium in bold green and orange colours (fig. 3.15).¹¹⁶ The abstract decorative program, together with the modern recessed and indirect lighting, would have imbued the space with a sense of modernity quite distinct from the historicizing architecture nearby. The interiors presented the very image of being "outside" the local in an "other" world, a separation reinforced by air conditioning and soundproof walls. The effect of orange light on the cream-coloured ceiling gave the

Figure 3.14.
First floor foyer,
Regal Cinema,
Bombay (Mumbai),
interior design by
Karl Schara, 1933.



Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), p. 53

112. Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 90–103.

113. Robert David Sack, *Place, Modernity, and the Consumer's World: A Relational Framework for Geographical Analysis*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. 4.

114. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural...*, op. cit., p. 1.

115. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" [trans. Jay Miskowiec], *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, p. 25.

116. Alff, "Temples of Light," op. cit., p. 253. The Regal's interior was extensively remodelled in 1953, leaving only the marble staircase with teak panelling that leads to the balcony foyer intact. See Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, op. cit., p. 96.



Figure 3.15.
Auditorium, Regal
Cinema, Bombay
(Mumbai), interior
design by Karl Schara,
1933.

impression of a sunrise as the lights gradually brightened at intermission, in a sense placing spectators in another space and another time, somewhere between bustling Bombay and the screened world.

But the cinema was not an impermeable location and the cosmopolitan design that so evocatively gestured to an “other” space framed the local experience of this relatively new leisure activity. Everyday life flowed into the cinema as the practice of going to the pictures became routinized, first by the upper and middle classes, then, by the 1920s, by industrial workers.¹¹⁷ Audiences would not only encounter the imagined worlds on the screen, but face their neighbours as well as strangers, and maybe even come into contact with people they might not otherwise see outside that

117. This was quite the opposite of the British and North American experiences. In the West, cinema was first associated with the working classes, as a novelty and fairground attraction. As film began to be incorporated into Vaudeville, it gained greater acceptance. The picture palaces of the 1920s evince the efforts of cinema owners, distributors, and producers (and they often were often closely allied, if not the same) to frame cinema as a “respectable” activity. See for example Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980; and Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire, with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, London, British Film Institute, 2003.

crossroads of culture.¹¹⁸ After purchasing a ticket in the lobby inside the doors to the Regal, audience members might have congregated in the foyers, or up a flight of marble stairs at the soda bar before entering the darkened space of the auditorium (fig. 3.16). The *moderne* furnishings of the theatres—particularly those of the Eros and Metro cinemas, which rivalled those seen in some of the films presented—offered and made tangible certain ideas of the modern connected to wealth and luxury.¹¹⁹ These furnishings would likely have resonated for some with those displayed at the “Ideal Home Exhibition,” the first architectural exhibition held in the country by the Indian Institute of Architects at the Bombay Town Hall in November, 1937.¹²⁰ These ideas would flow outside the theatre and affect understandings of a nascent consumer culture, just as social issues and politics would flow in.



◀ **Figure 3.16.**
Soda fountain,
Regal Cinema,
Bombay (Mumbai),
interior design by
Karl Schara, 1933.

Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), p. 53

118. Annette Kuhn's ethnographic work on British cinema-going in the 1930s is useful in highlighting the affective qualities of cinema-going that ultimately framed and influenced her respondents' memory of going to the movies. See her article "Heterotopia, Heterochronia: Place and Time in Cinema Memory," *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2004, pp. 106–114.
119. See images of the furnishings of the Metro in Alff, "Temples of Light," op. cit., pp. 255–256; and Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, op. cit., pp. 78–81.
120. The exhibition was held from November 4 to 15 and featured mainly Art Deco furnishings, many of which were manufactured in Bombay. This exhibition was meant to bring Modernism to Indian homes by way of easily mass-produced forms; however the furnishings were seen more as luxury items, affordable only for the wealthy and not for the majority of the population who lived in tenements with simple (though not modernistic) furniture already. See Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, op. cit., pp. 41–45; and Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis...*, op. cit., p. 173. It should be noted that Bombay was the architectural centre of India in the period, home to the Indian Institute of Architects founded in 1929 (Evenson, p. 165).

The heterotopia, for Foucault, is not a neutral space. He defines heterotopias as places often designed to manage deviance or crisis, excess and escape; however, by their nature of presenting multiple representations of space, heterotopias are fraught sites of contestation.¹²¹ This seems especially true in the case of cinemas in Bombay. We must bear in mind, first of all, that the power of film to disrupt the delicate social balance between the British and Indians, as well as between Indians of different religious affiliations, made film censorship a necessity—a practice that continues today. In Bombay, censorship boards were established by 1920 and contained positions for Hindus, Muslims, as well as Parsis.¹²² Censorship was seen as essential by all groups as they believed that films could inflame ethnic relationships, bring about higher crime rates, demoralize Indian youth (especially kissing scenes), and undermine Indian respect for Western women.¹²³ Of course, censorship played a major factor in the United States and Great Britain as well, as fears mounted regarding the impact of the medium on the morality of citizens and especially the youth of these countries; however, in India the political implications were even more acute.¹²⁴ The British attempted to keep nationalist sentiment out of movie theatres throughout the 1930s, banning the release of a number of films that documented the activities of Mahatma Gandhi until 1937.¹²⁵ As discussed above, the traditional viewing practices of *darshan* made seeing Gandhi even more powerful than only hearing his speeches. By placing pictures of Gandhi or Nehru in films, Indian producers exploited the oppositional potential of the new medium, which had become inscribed, by that point, within the practices of everyday life for a large majority of the population and, at the super-cinemas, framed in Art Deco.

Although the local film industry in Bombay began to rival the textile business as the city's most important industry as early as the 1930s,¹²⁶ and even with the advent of sound picture production in 1931 in

121. Henry Urbach points this out in his review of the varying depoliticizing interpretations of the term by architectural historians and critics in his article "Writing Architectural Heterotopia," *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 3, winter 1998, pp. 347–354.

122. Under the 1918 *Indian Cinematograph Act*, with amendments made in 1919 and 1920, censorship was in the hands of the police; however, boards of censorship were established in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta in 1920 to assist the Police Commissioner. The work of censorship was carried out for the most part by two paid inspectors, one British and one Indian. If a problem was foreseen, the secretary of the board asked one or two of the board members to look at the film. The board in Calcutta, for example, was comprised of a Hindu member, a Muslim member, a British military member, and a British woman (thus the British always had a majority). For more on censorship, see Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–58.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

124. Sociological studies were carried out in the United States about the perceived adverse effects of film to the American youth. For example, see Henry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1935; New York, Arno Press, 1970 [reprint]. For a consideration of American films on British culture, see Massey, *Hollywood beyond the Screen...*, *op. cit.*

125. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–126. More stringent censoring returned in order to diffuse nationalist sentiments that opposed Britain's entry into the Second World War, which was seen as an imperialist war and counter to India's drive for independence.

126. Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

India, in 1935 still more than half the films shown (in India) were foreign-produced.¹²⁷ This was due more to a lack of indigenous product than preference for Hollywood or other films.¹²⁸ As Sir Frank Noyce, member for Industries and Labour in the Government of India, underlines in 1934, the shift from silent films to “talkies” adversely affected the young industry, requiring a much faster transition than the industries of Western countries and at immense expense.¹²⁹ Dewan Sharar, in an address to the East India Association in London in 1937, points to the success of indigenous “talkies” (notably *Alam Ara*, produced and directed by Ardeshir Irani) and the large market available even outside India for that product, especially should the industry see more investment from Britain. English values, Sharar goes on to argue, were more desirable to Indians; thus partnerships in local productions would be both economically and politically advantageous, promulgating values of peace and cooperation in the cause of Indian national unity.¹³⁰

The prominent place of foreign-made films provided the British with an excellent platform for imperial propaganda. Despite protectionist legislation aimed at countering the influence of Hollywood in Great Britain and the empire, beginning with the 1927 *Cinematograph Films Act*, the majority of “empire films” were actually produced in the United States. Interestingly, the production of films celebrating the British Empire and its military might seem to resonate with Hollywood producers for a number of reasons. Although some in the United States sympathized with the Indian National Movement (after all, the U.S. fought a war of independence against Great Britain) and this left space for oppositional readings of empire films, the country was an imperial power in its own right and “Hollywood cinema subscribed fully to the cultural outlook that located heroes and villains in racial stereotypes.”¹³¹ Imperial ideology, Prem Chowdhry points out, “was really transnational,” thus White audiences worldwide might identify with European nations, regardless of nationality.¹³² Empire films had support in the U.S. as well because, as Margaret Farrand Thorp asserted in 1939, audiences admired the perceived British values of loyalty, courage, and industriousness.¹³³ Commercially, empire

127. Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology, and Identity*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 15.

128. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

129. Noyce’s speech is recorded in part in S.B. Vakil and K.S. Hirlekar, *Motion Picture Society of India 2nd Annual Report for the Year ending 31st March 1934*, Bombay, Kit Mahal, 1934. In the speech he calls for further government protection against foreign competition and incentives for developing technological capacities in India.

130. Sharar also advocates the building of a first-class cinema circuit, encouraging British involvement in the field of distribution, which was recognized as primarily in the hands of Americans (especially in foreign films). Dewan Sharar, “The Cinema in India: Its Scope and Possibilities,” p. 3. (Arnold Adrian Bake Collection, India Office Select Materials, British Library, Mss Eur F191/191.)

131. *Ibid.*, p. 39. Chowdhry (*Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema...*, *op. cit.*) offers the example of the Western genre as akin to empire films.

132. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

133. *Ibid.* Chowdhry discusses Thorp’s book, *America at the Movies* (*op. cit.*). For more on the fraught reception of English culture in the United States, see Moser, *Twisting the Lion’s Tail...*, *op. cit.*

films made sense for American producers attempting to expand distribution into empire markets and prevent further tightening of foreign film quotas. *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935, Paramount Pictures, director Henry Hathaway), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936 Warner Bros. Pictures, director Michael Curtiz), *Wee Willie Winkie* (1936, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, director John Ford), and *Gunga Din* (1939, RKO Radio Pictures, director George Stevens) were all made in Hollywood and proved to be commercial successes. From the British perspective, the Hollywood-produced films appeared safer, as the British could more easily distance themselves from the products and ban or withdraw them.¹³⁴ Despite the potential of the empire films to operate as British propaganda, Chowdhry argues that they ultimately failed. They helped to open a discourse on “matters of imperialist concern,” which led to a “subversion of symbols and meaning [...] which successfully transformed the pro-British propaganda of the empire films and made them counterproductive.”¹³⁵ Cinemas that played foreign films, like the Regal and Eros, were crucial sites in the formation of public opinion and thus were of political import.

Besides empire films, cinema openings, such as that of the Regal cinema in 1933, as well as movie premieres were taken as key socio-political events, just as they were in other Western cities; however, more was at stake politically in the instance of Bombay. For example, the Governor of Bombay, Sir Frederick Sykes (1928–1933), was on hand to open the Regal as the theatre premiered the Laurel and Hardy film, *The Devil's Brother* (1933, Hal Roach Studios MGM). The Governor's scheduled attendance at upcoming premieres was often noted in advertisements,¹³⁶ a point that not only signalled the elite character of some of the audience attending, but also suggested the political dimension of these new venues of public culture. The practice of high-ranking officials visiting popular cultural events was already established with the Parsi theatre. Films depicting the coronation of monarchs buttressed the tradition of popular representations of royalty and offered links to the heart of empire, extending the spectacle of empire to an even larger audience and imbuing the space of the cinema, if only briefly, with a political dimension.¹³⁷ As well, the showing of newsreels made the cinemas important sites of propaganda while connecting audiences to global flows of information.

Giuliana Bruno's discussion of the cinema as a place of apparent mobility is instructive for the colonial experience. She suggests that the space of the cinema could be read as empowering women by providing

134. Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema...*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

135. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

136. For example, see advertisements and articles reproduced in *Flashback: Cinema in the Times of India*, compiled and annotated by Kumarapuram Narayan Subramaniam with Ratnakar Tripathy (Bombay, *Times of India*, 1990): “New Cinema for Simla Viceroy Attends Opening Show,” July 15, 1925, p. 25; Advertisement for reopening of Old Empress Theatre, November 4, 1933, p. 127; Advertisement for showing of *Mother India* at Opera House, February 24, 1939, p. 99.

137. See advertisement dated May 22, 1937, for the coronation procession playing at the Capitol and Regal as reproduced in *Flashback (ibid.)*, p. 194.

mobility (even if it was partially virtual) and thereby extending the earlier architectures of mobility (panoramas, department stores, etc.), which influenced the advent of film.¹³⁸ This idea of mobility offering a sense of empowerment likely affected movie patrons in Bombay as elsewhere. For a small fee, movie-goers were offered opportunities to see and experience (again, largely virtually) spaces that were generally unavailable to any but colonizers not too long beforehand. The fact that audiences used the cinema in ways that tacitly protested imperial power—for example, leaving the cinema before the playing of the British national anthem at the end of foreign films¹³⁹—speaks to the sense of empowerment experienced in the cinema. In essence, the cinema provided a space for audiences to “try on” new subject positions without fear of reprisal. And yet the offer of virtual mobility did little to effect social mobility. The Art Deco style only reinforced the virtuality of this mobility.

Cinemas also had a larger social impact, especially in colonial situations, as new public places of social mixing. Social interaction, of course, meant different things in different contexts.¹⁴⁰ In Bombay, cinemas were sold, just as they were in North America and elsewhere, as democratic institutions, as seen, for example, in a 1938 advertisement in *The Times of India* for the opening of the Metro Cinema (fig. 3.17). The ad depicts the bustle of pedestrians of different ethnic groups (evidenced by different garments and hats—a woman in a sari, men in formal attire, men, seen from behind, wearing what appear to be Parsi hats called *phentas*)¹⁴¹ arriving at a theatre, while the text describes “1,500 Seats In A Setting Of Modernistic Splendour—A Cinema For All Bombay!” The text goes on: “No matter where you live, we urge you to see this magnificent cinema—enjoy its atmosphere, its perfect sound, its colourful beauty, once—and it will be your cinema for life!” Even in cinemas such as the Regal, Eros, and Metro, which played predominantly Western films, there was an overlapping of different audiences across sociocultural lines due no doubt in part to industrial, blue-collar workers desiring to experience the luxury of the new super-cinemas. More than 50,000 patrons were visiting movie theatres per week,¹⁴² making the cinema perhaps the widest-reaching form of public culture. That the theatres were positioned at *chowks* and, in the case of the Eros and Metro, across from train stations, highlights the fact that many people living beyond the immediate neighbourhoods were encouraged to attend. It is suggestive as well of the wider reach of these spaces, bringing together not just cultural products and capital from international channels, but also people, physically, from further afield.

138. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion...*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

139. Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire...*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

140. For contrast, see Brian Larkin, “Colonialism and the Built Space of Cinema in Nigeria,” in Preben Kaarsholm and Maināka Biśvāsa (eds.), *City Flicks: Indian Cinema and the Urban Experience*, Kolkata, Seagull Books, 2004, pp. 183–210.

141. See Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996.

142. Alf, “Art Deco...,” *op. cit.*, p. 37.

same level as the doors to the balcony, suggesting a spatial arrangement that reinforced social class hierarchies with exclusive seats and spaces elevated over cheaper seats. At the Regal, Sidhwa recalls that

[t]he Maharajas had a strange tendency. They would book two or three rows of Balcony seats and all the boxes completely, though only eight or ten people would turn up to occupy them. This was to prevent any of the “commoners” from sitting anywhere near them and casting their eyes on the Marharanis. These Maharanis used to be in purdah.¹⁴⁴

The practice of purdah (*i.e.*, the segregation of female patrons) was not uncommon in Indian theatres prior to Independence.¹⁴⁵ So even in the “democratic” space of the cinema, different publics negotiated relationships that reinscribed traditional social distinctions and power dynamics.

Thinking through the manner in which architecture reinforces social distinctions exposes some of the limitations of the heterotopia model in approaching cinemas as examples of public culture. For Foucault, the cinema is simply “a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space.”¹⁴⁶ But Art Deco cinemas, and indeed the atmospheric cinemas and grand opera houses that preceded them, were anything but simple “rectangular rooms.” Luxuriously fitted foyers, often containing *moderne* furniture, became locations for social interaction, places to be seen. The auditorium interiors offered a feast for the eye and thus were not conceived as dark boxes. If anything, the interior decoration of the Eros theatre’s 1,024-seat auditorium made patrons aware of their place within the process of film production. The interior includes a frieze-like band in silver and blue depicting the making of a motion picture, complete with scenes of directors, cameramen, a female film star “lolling” on the desk of a producer, actors in historical and contemporary costumes, sound recording, prop and set making, and editing (figs. 3.12, 3.18, and 3.19).¹⁴⁷ The decorative frieze runs on opposite walls on the orchestra level of the auditorium, from the doors to the foyer toward the screen. By situating the figures within a frieze, von Drieberg elevates the art of film production to the status of heroism, linking the modern mass medium to precedents of a Western antique past. Like the ziggurat massing of the tower, the frieze visually proposes a new order by alluding to ancient forms. Audiences were positioned within the production process of film-making, in a sense illustrating Stuart Hall’s model of viewership. Movie-going patrons were made aware of the new industry blossoming in the city and their active role in it.

144. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 96.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 61. They describe the horrific event of a fire in a Hyderabad cinema in 1941 where many women burned to death rather than “face the ‘shame’ of escaping with the crowd.”

146. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *op. cit.*, p. 25.

147. Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 100. See also the images in Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco*, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–73.

Noshir Gobhai.
Reproduced with permission from Dwivedi and
Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), pp. 68–69



Figure 3.18.
*Detail of frieze,
auditorium of Eros
Theatre, Mumbai
(Bombay), interior
design by Fritz von
Drieberg, 1938.*

Figure 3.19.
*Detail of frieze,
auditorium of Eros
Theatre, Mumbai
(Bombay), interior
design by Fritz von
Drieberg, 1938.*

Noshir Gobhai. Reproduced with permission
from Dwivedi and Mehrotra, *Bombay Deco* (op. cit.), pp. 70–71



The frieze on the interior of the Eros, I argue, suggests the ambiguities of the space of the cinema. One of the intriguing features of the frieze is the choice of period costumes worn by some of the figures, which appear to be of the Revolutionary Period of the late eighteenth century (fig. 3.18). A politically minded audience member might read this as a statement in support of independence from the British Empire. The making of film might be read as paralleling the making of independence. And yet this theatre, like the Regal, only played Western films. The premiere and most modern-looking theatres essentially reconfirmed a system of privileging Western products over indigenous ones, despite a ready audience for the latter. Again, Art Deco is seen to reinforce the status quo, offering a vision of moderate modernity.

Most importantly, though, the Deco theatres were constructed as part of large, mixed-use commercial structures and therefore need to be seen as participating in larger economies of commerce and culture. The Regal cinema complex, for example, included, besides the 1,200-seat auditorium, soda fountains and a bar, apartments for the Sidhwa family, and retail shops.¹⁴⁸ In fact, spaces allotted for other commercial activities at

148. Alff, "Temples of Light," *op. cit.*, p. 252.

the Regal and the Eros were very substantial. The Eros, for which construction began in 1935 and ended in 1938, was a veritable community centre. Marking the end of a line of Art Deco apartment blocks, it included shops, offices, a restaurant, a ballroom that could accommodate 500 dancers, an ice rink, and Cambata's renowned modern residence on the two top floors of the tower.¹⁴⁹ Much like cinema theatres in North America, which became community centres and foci of local business (often providing rental space for offices and shops), the Art Deco cinemas in Bombay underscore that there was more to going to the cinema than simply watching the pictures. Here a whole variety of consumptive activities intermingled, making these spaces dramatic and highly active locations.

Art Deco was perhaps the best style for framing this kind of space, given its eclecticism yet visual effect of appearing new. For Jon Alff, these cinemas were influential in spreading the "Modern myth," as Deco theatres continued to be built until well after the style passed from fashion in the West.¹⁵⁰ For him, the theatres signalled a social transformation, as many travelled to Bombay in search of "the better life" presented on the screen and extended, if only briefly, in the public space of the cinema.¹⁵¹ This social transformation was marked visually, which, as discussed above, had particularly potent ramifications for the citizens of Bombay. For Alff, the new Deco theatres were "Temples of Light," an evocative metaphor that suggests the power of visuality—a point that he does not bring up. However, the theatres may be better cast as *chowks* given their implication within wider currents of social, political, and cultural economies. While under construction, the Regal was billed in an advertisement as "The Most Magnificent Theatre East of Suez," a cinema that "rivals the most modern picture houses of Europe and America."¹⁵² The reference to Suez calls to mind the imperial channels of commerce, while the comparison with theatres in Europe and America indicates the international network of cultural exchange in which the Regal—and by extension, its future patrons—participates. The very name of the Regal suggests the ambiguity of the space: a public and "democratic" place of luxury perhaps rivalling that of the kings of old, meanwhile being a commercial venture still well inscribed within the economies of Empire, which had allowed the Parsi theatre to blossom earlier. The Regal was located, after all, on the former site of the Saluting Battery "from where gun volleys thundered greetings to Royalty, Viceroys and Governors who arrived in this *Urbs Prima in Indis*."¹⁵³ Art Deco theatres were public places where traditional practices rubbed up against the modern; where democratic ideals were espoused and framed within a popular mode while segregation of caste and gender,

149. Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 99; Alff, "Temples of Light," *op. cit.*, p. 255.

150. Alff, *ibid.*, p. 257.

151. *Ibid.*

152. Advertisement from *The Times of India* reproduced in Subramaniam, *Flashback...*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

153. Golden Jubilee brochure issued in 1983 quoted in Vinnels and Skelly, *Bollywood Showplaces...*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

in some cases, and class continued; where politics were played out through censorship, actions of the audience, and in the building of this kind of space. The cosmopolitan quality of Art Deco seems appropriate for a space of technological, economic, and political flow, while the indigenization—the *Art Dekho* of Rushdie's narrator—secured these cinemas within patterns of the local.

Bombay underwent dramatic changes in appearance through the 1930s and this was signalled first in places of visual public culture—Art Deco movie theatres. The cinemas were important places of public culture, locations where capital, ideas, and people circulated and interacted. This intercultural exchange was led by local elites, epitomized by members of the Parsi community who had long served Bombay as cultural, economic, and, to some degree, political mediators. By framing these venues of public culture in the Art Deco style, these entrepreneurs were expressing more than a knowledge of international, modern fashions: they were framing the new daily life activity of cinema-going as something different, something new, and yet something that resonated strongly with a sense of the local. This visual language was not employed by and large by the British in India. As a result, it might be read as a statement of burgeoning independence, one influenced by global economies of culture. The gesture toward cosmopolitanism through the adoption of Art Deco might be seen as taking a middle course, one that would allow a continued presence in existing (imperial) channels of commerce while opening up possibilities of larger networks. Ultimately, the ambiguous space of the theatres, which encouraged a variety of subject positions, offered great potential for a growing sense of nation as well as an industry that now leads the world in output of product.

If we follow Dwivedi and Mehrotra's argument that Art Deco paved the way for the advent of Modernism following Independence, then I argue that we should see the mode as a political statement. Emerging from generally privileged, minority groups (*i.e.*, princes and Parsis) with much to lose in an independent India, Art Deco of the 1930s might be read as akin to a more moderate, constitutional model (still tradition-bound and with ties to Empire versus a republican form of government). In a way, the cinemas parallel the Marine Building in being places that simultaneously gesture to the local and broader economies of empire. While the Deco cinemas were places of mobility—of capital, of people, of film, of space, etc.—and could suggest a sense of modernity and potential for social mobility, they were nonetheless places that reinforced prevailing hierarchies and valuation systems. Neither the Regal nor the Eros showed Indian films, a point that only makes more apparent the allegiances of the Parsi entrepreneurs. The lifestyle supported by these cinemas did little to combat the serious inequities in society, or, for example, the crisis of homelessness in the city. Instead, Art Deco fashioned a public culture associated with the upper and middle classes, extended by way of cinema to the working classes.

In this chapter, as in chapter 2, I have argued that the framing of leisure activities had socio-political implications. In the case of Bombay, this was seen to resonate with national concerns. The next chapter will continue this theme to some degree, by exploring the design of radio cabinets in Canada. Cosmopolitanism will take on another (aural) dimension, but will still be seen to resonate with the “look” of modernity as presented by Art Deco design.

4

Listening To Deco Sound Design in Canada

I've often thought of this. Do you remember Jack Benny—his name always comes first because he really was good—and Fred Allen and Fibber McGee and Molly and Singing Sam and Amos and Andy and all those famous radio personalities we used to listen to as if our life depended on it? Do you recall any one of them, just once, ever mentioning the Depression, that times were tough, millions out of work, kids sleeping in ditches and barns? Can you ever recall one of them mentioning just once all these terrible things which were happening around them? Think about it. Kind of scary, isn't it? There were two worlds in those days, the real one and the fantasy world.

Anonymous interviewee¹

Essentially the radio is one of the most representative products of the modern era, an era in which the mechanistic and the aesthetic are related.

Norman Bel Geddes, 1932²

1. Recorded in Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years 1929–1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression*, Toronto, Doubleday Canada, 1973, p. 250, under the title “Two Worlds—Real and Fantasy.” Broadfoot’s book catalogues memories of the Depression by “average Canadians” based on a series of interviews carried out across the country over a nine-month period in the early 1970s. See the Preface for more on his motives and methodology (pp. iv–vii).
2. Norman Bel Geddes, *Horizons*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1932, p. 241.

Perhaps more than any other medium in the interwar years, radio altered public culture. It entered the home with ease as a friendly or familiar voice, troubling traditional conceptions of public and private space. This invisible medium, fuelled by an invisible source of energy, was often characterized as a form of modern magic. It had the power to entrance, to evoke imagined spaces in an almost tangible manner. Especially in the 1930s, radio became a potent weapon in the propagandist's arsenal, today conjuring images of Hitler or Mussolini, Franklin Delano Roosevelt or even William Lyon Mackenzie King before a microphone addressing a vast audience. But the socio-political charge of radio was dependent on a mass audience "listening in," spending hours of leisure time before a radio cabinet, yet all the while moving to other spaces—to a sporting event, a dance hall, into the narrative of a popular soap opera, etc. The radio formed dynamic acoustic spaces that reconfigured actual places, altering them as well as social behaviour. Despite its apparent invisibility, radio's success was contingent upon the physical manipulation of a new instrument in the home. In a sense, the radio cabinet was the site of the magic show, the indexical referent pointing to the disembodied, ethereal voice. The home radio domesticated this time and space—collapsing and regimenting electronic medium. And the large-scale manufacture of radios coincided with and was influenced by the design idioms now described under the umbrella of Art Deco. Indeed, the Art Deco-styled radio in particular drew attention to the modernity of the new daily life activity, aestheticizing the systems of mobility that underscored the mechanization of public culture in the home.

In spite of its seemingly omnipresent place in Canadian homes—especially from the 1930s—there has been little critical analysis of the radio cabinet.³ This chapter seeks to address this omission by exploring the use of Art Deco in fashioning spaces of Canadian public culture pro-

3. Radio emerged as a scholarly subject of concern only fairly recently (in the last twenty years or so), being eclipsed in media studies by an interest in television. Michele Hilmes, an important contributor to the discourse, outlines a historiography of radio in "Rethinking Radio," in Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (eds.), *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 1–20. This collection presents an excellent introduction to radio scholarship, offering a wide range of topics and theoretical positions, but does not include any essays on the radio cabinet. Susan Merrill Squier also provides a brief historiography of radio in her introductory essay, "Communities of the Air: Introducing the Radio World," in Susan Merrill Squier (ed.), *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 1–35. See also Michael C. Keith, "Writing about Radio: A Survey of Cultural Studies in Radio," in Michael C. Keith (ed.), *Radio Cultures: The Sound Medium in American Life*, New York, Peter Lang, 2008, pp. 305–320; and Andrew Crisell (ed.), *Radio, Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, London and New York, Routledge, 2009. Besides the work of Adrian Forty, which I discuss further below, as well as a semiological study by Artemis Yagou, "Shaping Technology for Everyday Use: The Case of Radio Set Design" (*Design Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2002, pp. 2–13), most discussions of radio cabinets are found in antique radio guides and on radio enthusiasts' websites and are geared toward collectors and restorers of radios. A notable exception to this is Michael Brian Schiffer's *The Portable Radio in American Life* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1991), which takes an archaeological approach to the portable radio through its history. In terms of the Canadian context, only a collector's guide based on similar American catalogues deals with radio consoles: Lloyd Swackhammer's *Radios of Canada*, Alma (ON), Lloyd Swackhammer, 2002.

duced by radio. I argue that understanding the aesthetic appeal of radio cabinets is essential to conceptualizing the impact of radio on public culture in the interwar years. Broadly, I assert that the Deco-styled cabinets perhaps best indicated the interpenetration of the commodity with the “public interest”—that Art Deco radio cabinets framed (perhaps even represented) the complicated space of radio. As I have argued throughout, Art Deco was often associated with the democratization of culture (and desire), given its wide incorporation into a variety of public spaces and the fact that its flexible (or omnivorous) representation strategies allowed it to inculcate a sense of belonging or place. The radio, too, was heralded as democratic, available to anyone with a receiver. But just as the mode retained its elite (and sometimes exclusionary) associations, the programs offered on air were circumscribed by corporate interests looking to maximize audience appeal (ostensibly to sell products) or by government-operated programming meant to foster a sense of nationalism or public edification. Indeed, in her comparative study of American, British, and German radio, Kate Lacey demonstrates that, despite wide-ranging and disparate intellectual, artistic, and political reactions to the cultural anxieties caused by the Depression, ultimately the responses were “profoundly conservative.”⁴ Governments and corporate forces did little to upset pre-existing social hierarchies. Thus I contend that Art Deco, which appeared modern but for the most part reinforced the status quo, became a particularly appropriate style for this public medium and cultural phenomenon. Neither scholars of design nor media studies have made the connection between radio cabinet design and larger spatial production. Drawing from social histories of the medium, of radio companies, and of modern(e) design, I assert that studying Deco radio sets exposes some of the complexities of interwar public culture in Canada.⁵ It is also worth noting that the Canadian experience—based on a hybrid national broadcasting and commercial system—is more broadly representative of the transatlantic world.⁶

Radio did have a public face or series of public presences in the form of architecture outside the home, including the Art Deco-styled Radio City Music Hall in Rockefeller Center in New York (Edward Durrell Stone, interior design by Donald Deskey, 1932), the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) Building in Los Angeles (John C. Austin, 1938–1939), the Broadcasting House in London (G. Val Myer, 1932), and the Canadian Broadcasting

4. Kate Lacey, “Radio in the Great Depression: Promotional Culture, Public Service, and Propaganda,” in Hilmes and Loviglio, *Radio Reader: Essays...*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

5. The term “radio (or wireless) set” may seem odd when we consider that most radio cabinets in the late 1920s and 1930s were sold as single units. It points to the earlier life of radio receiving sets, which were bought as components and assembled at home by radio enthusiasts. Even stand-alone consoles had a series of tubes (the more tubes, generally, the better the reception and sound quality, and the more expensive the radio) that would require replacing with frequent use of the unit. The radio, despite its outward aesthetic, was thus a thoroughly mechanistic and physically manipulated object.

6. While I turn to Canadian sources wherever possible, as will become clear, there is still much to be done on radio, especially radio design, in Canada. Since the influence of both the United States and Britain are not negligible in the Canadian experience, I look to some sources on these national traditions.

Corporation (CBC) station in Hornby, Ontario (D.G. McKinstry, 1937).⁷ We might also recall the semi-public space of the hotel room (e.g., the suite of the Hotel Vancouver pictured in figure 1.4, p. 7 with its Deco-styled mantel model), to consider the place of radio in what I would characterize as an “idealized” domestic space. From early on hotels were sites of radio broadcasting and, expressing the modernity and luxury of some chains and individual hotels, many had guest suites outfitted with radios or speakers. In Canada, the Canadian National Railway (which was the original then co-owner of the third Hotel Vancouver) was instrumental in the formation of a public broadcasting system, linking the mobility systems of rail and hotel service to that of the radio.⁸

In this chapter, however, I will focus on the complicated public culture spatially produced in the home. As an electronic medium emerging in an increasingly electrified country, radio is indicative of a dispersed culture quite unlike the congregational spaces of the office tower, department store, or cinema, which I have discussed in the previous chapters. As Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan has argued, “[e]lectricity does not centralize, but decentralizes,”⁹ implying a completely different spatial organization of public culture. He compares the era of electricity

7. Rockefeller Center and the BBC Broadcasting House were much anticipated and widely published at the time of their openings. For Radio City Music Hall and the NBC studios in the RCA building of Rockefeller Center, see for instance: Roger Wade Sherman, “The Question of Radio City,” *Architectural Forum*, vol. 54, no. 5, 1931, pp. 601–604; Merle Crowell, “The Story of Rockefeller Center VII: A Question Answered,” *Architectural Forum*, vol. 56, no. 5, 1932, pp. 425–430; L. Andrew Reinhard, “What Is the Rockefeller Radio City?” *Architectural Record*, vol. 69, no. 4, 1931, pp. 276–281. See also Emily Thompson’s groundbreaking book on acoustic culture in the United States, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2002), which concludes with a chapter on Rockefeller Center (pp. 295–315). An entire issue of *Architectural Review* (vol. 72, no. 2, 1932) was dedicated to the BBC Broadcasting House, a building that brought together the expertise of many architects and designers. Raymond McGrath, Serge Chermayeff, Wells Coates, Edward Maufe, and Dorothy Warren Trotter all worked on the interiors, including the design of furnishings and even some equipment, a point to which I will return. A photograph of the façade and plans of the CBC Hornby station were reproduced in the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* (vol. 15, no. 10, 1938, p. 219), following an article on radio station design by Mackenzie Waters: “Broadcasting Stations,” *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal*, vol. 15, no. 10, 1938, pp. 215–218. On Canadian radio transmission sites, see Michael Windover, “Transmitting Nation: ‘Bordering’ and the Architecture of the CBC in the 1930s,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2011, pp. 5–12.
8. The development of a radio service, including broadcasting facilities, programming, and listening opportunities for passengers on trains, hotels, and those at home within the transmission range, was largely the brainchild of Canadian National Railway (CNR) President Sir Henry Thornton. A radio department was established in 1923 and service began in earnest the following year. In 1933, CNR’s broadcasting stations in Moncton, Ottawa, and Vancouver were sold to the newly established Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission for \$50,000. For more on the history of CNR’s involvement in radio, see E. Austin Weir, *The Struggle for National Broadcasting in Canada*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1965; Frank W. Peers, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting 1920–1951*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969, especially pp. 22–27; and Mary Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922–1932*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992.
9. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 36.

to that of railway: on the one hand, “[t]he railways require a uniform political and economic space. On the other hand, airplane and radio permit the utmost discontinuity and diversity in spatial organization.”¹⁰ In some ways, the spatial dispersal of Art Deco throughout the globe mirrors the advent of the electric age, not only affecting the production of public culture in cities across the globe, but also effecting the creation of spatially complex cultures in the home.

The Art Deco radio cabinet coincided with a move toward more compact living spaces (in no small part due to the increased cost of housing following widespread incorporation of electrical and internal plumbing, not to mention a generally more urban population),¹¹ and, given the economic hardships of the 1930s, the home became an important locus of leisure time and entertainment. As the first epigraph to this chapter suggests, the radio seemed to invoke other, fantastic or spectacular worlds at the expense of critical discussions of the harsh realities faced by most, acting perhaps as a kind of societal pressure valve. Yet, as I argued in the previous chapter regarding movie theatres, a productive tension can exist in the space between two worlds, and, once again, Art Deco sits at this interface. However, in this instance, the location is not a public place of social intermingling. The primary site is the home.

And home is where this chapter begins. The first section outlines the development of the electric radio in relation to the popularization of the Art Deco aesthetic. In spite of the Depression, the radio became an indispensable fixture in the home, a commodity which nonetheless reinforced cycles of fashion change that were intimately linked to technological development and notions of progress. As a result, the radio became an object of some concern for industrial designers, and in fact stands as a prime example of “styling,” which at least one modern designer (Paul T. Frankl) believed would help refashion society and contribute to ending the Depression. Thus, the second section explores debates around the design of radio cabinets, arguing that Art Deco radios helped to popularize an engagement with modern design, which in turn inculcated tenets of a technocratic consumer culture. By “technocratic consumer culture,” I am highlighting the burgeoning of a knowledge economy tied to the scientism of the “Machine Age.” As electronic (and electric) devices entered the home in greater numbers, becoming requisite items for carrying out

10. *Ibid.* Interestingly, radio would be incorporated into railroad travel and this would be instrumental in the development of a Canadian national radio system, as I note below.

11. Canada witnessed a shift from a slight rural majority (51 percent) in 1921 to an urban majority (54 percent) in 1931. The 1930s did not see any notable change in the percentage of urban dwellers. For population statistics, see K.G. Basavarajappa and Bali Ram, “Section A: Population and Migration,” *Historical Statistics of Canada, Statistics Canada*, October 22, 2008, <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516-x/sectiona/4147436-eng.htm>>, accessed January 2012. Kristina Wilson comments on the impact of smaller living spaces on design in the U.S. in *Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating and Design during the Great Depression*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, particularly in the chapter entitled “Cozy Modernism for the Living Room,” pp. 21–56.

everyday life tasks and affecting the mediation of social relations,¹² a particular technological knowledge was required to inform consumer choices and fuel further desire.

The third section deals with the sense of cosmopolitanism I see as inherent to both Art Deco and to radio listening, indicating the mobility of both the style and medium as the two reinforced one another. While in earlier chapters I discussed how the cosmopolitanism of Art Deco (retaining its elite associations even in the more democratized arenas of public culture) could be evocative of place, and indeed Vancouver, Los Angeles, and Bombay are all port cities and places of diverse cultural interaction (to greater or lesser extents), in a way, the radio made every house into a foreign port or “crossroads of the world.” The ability to “travel” the world from the confines of home had socio-political implications for Canadians, bringing into high relief the debates around the Americanization of Canadian culture on the one hand, and offering access to the global, Empire network on the other. From cosmopolitan reach to the domestic sphere, the final section explores some of the tensions of a public culture in the traditional bastion of the private—the home. Focusing more specifically on gender relations and the space of the living room, I argue that the Deco radio reminds us of some of the anxieties around agency in the interwar years and that Art Deco radios, while offering the potential for greater public engagement, did little to change social relations.

■ A Modern(e) Instrument for the Modern Home

While many eyes were fixed on the exciting developments in modern decorative and industrial design shown in Paris at the World’s Exposition of 1925, in Toronto, Ontario, Edward Samuel “Ted” Rogers was unveiling the first all-electric radio. Rogers, who had been interested in radio from an early age, had travelled to Pittsburgh in 1924 to meet American inventor Frederick S. McCulloch, who was experimenting with alternating current (AC) tubes at the Westinghouse Electronics Research Laboratory.¹³ He returned to Canada with the rights to the experimental tube, having paid a sum of \$10,000.¹⁴ By April 8, 1925, he had perfected

12. As I point out below, electric appliances were often cast as modern servants, changing middle-class relationships with working-class domestic labour. Radio, as I will argue, offered a new, more intimate engagement with the wider world and thus a new sense of social relationship to others more broadly. Another significant technological factor affecting the mediation of social relationships during the interwar period was the widespread ownership of the telephone.

13. Ian Anthony, *Radio Wizard: Edward Samuel Rogers and the Revolution of Communications*, Toronto, Gage Publishing Company for Rogers, 2000, p. 36.

14. *Ibid.* Rogers’s family originally arrived in Upper Canada in 1801, establishing the Quaker community of Newmarket. They were instrumental in the establishment of nearby Pickering as well. Ted’s grandfather, Samuel, set up an oil and fuel distribution company

the tube, which removed the distracting hum that had prevented earlier development of an electric radio, and was able to demonstrate his AC-powered model.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter, Rogers created the Standard Radio Manufacturing Corporation Limited with his father, Albert, and brother, Elsworth, and purchased ownership of all the De Forest radio patents in Canada.¹⁶ The company began mass production of batteryless Type 100 (console floor model), Type 110 (identical to 100 minus the legs), and Type 120 (a rectangular model that required a separate horn) radios (fig. 4.1).¹⁷ All-electric radios did not emerge until May 1926 in the United States or until the following year in Europe.¹⁸ By 1927, Rogers would establish the first AC-powered radio station, CFRB, in part to sell his electric radios. With the development of the all-electric radio, which did away with the hassle of messy and inconsistent batteries, the new medium gradually became the centrepiece of the living room. It was seen by many as a fine, modern instrument, one comparable to the piano.¹⁹ In one of the few scholarly discussions of radio sets, architecture and design historian Adrian Forty asserts that “[t]he radio was the first product which both incorporated the new styles in its design, and also reached a very large market, in homes in which the Modern Style would otherwise be unknown.”²⁰ So, coincidentally, the Canadian invention that would help

from Petrolia, Ontario and from Pennsylvania that held the distributorship rights for products of the Standard Oil Company of New York. In 1898, facing competition of the newly amalgamated Imperial Oil Company, Samuel Rogers & Company, as the company was called, merged with the Standard Oil to create Queen City Oil Company, only to be taken over by Imperial Oil in 1912, which Samuel's son, Albert (Ted's father), directed with his brother, Joseph. It was with this wealth that Ted was able to experiment with radios and it was his father, Albert, who became the president of Ted's company, Standard Radio Manufacturing Corporation Limited, when it was founded in 1925. This history exposes the intimate connection between systems of transportation and communication. For more on the family, see Ted Rogers, Jr.'s autobiography (with Robert Brehl), *Relentless: The True Story of the Man behind Rogers Communications*, Toronto, Harper Collins, 2008; and Anthony, *Radio Wizard: Edward Samuel Rogers...*, *op. cit.*, especially chap. 1, “Child of the Radio Age,” pp. 1–19.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

16. Lee De Forest developed a thermionic grid-triode vacuum tube called the “Audion.” For more on De Forest, see Schiffer, *The Portable Radio in American Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–24 and 45–46; Anthony, *Radio Wizard: Edward Samuel Rogers...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16; and Irving Settler, *A Pictorial History of Radio*, New York, Citadel Press, 1960, pp. 28–31. De Forest wrote an autobiography: *Father of Radio: An Autobiography of Lee de Forest*, Chicago, Wilcox and Follet, 1950.

17. Anthony, *ibid.*, p. 41. Anthony describes the Type 100 as “the crown jewel of the inaugural line, boasting a stylish design, square and elegant, complete with speaker and secured to a platform held upright by four slender legs.” He notes that Rogers also sold cheaper battery sets for homes without electricity.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

19. See notably F.L. de N. Scott, “A Place for Music,” *MacLean's Magazine*, October 15, 1930, pp. 97–98. Some radios were even designed to look like pianos. For instance, Flemming-Bell Manufacturing Co. Ltd., a short-lived Canadian radio-maker, displayed its \$400 “Baby Grand” (a radio cabinet in the guise of a piano) at the Canadian National Exhibition in 1926. The idea obviously never caught on, perhaps due to the exorbitant price. The company went out of business by 1928. See Swackhammer, *Radios of Canada*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

20. Adrian Forty, “Wireless Style: Symbolic Design and the English Radio Cabinet, 1928–1933,” *Architectural Association Quarterly*, vol. 4, spring 1974, p. 24.

Maclean's Magazine November 1, 1925

NOW—A Radio Set that operates from your Electric Light socket!

without A Batteries
without B Batteries
without Aerial







*"just plug in—
then tune in
—that's all"*



THE introduction of Radio a few years ago naturally surrounded the whole world. That part of the public with minds scientifically inclined, set to work to experimenting and building "home-made" receiving sets—the rest of the public sat by and watched for radio research and experiment to produce the finished, perfect set. It seemed to the latter class that radio was surrounded by scientific terms and technicalities that were baffling to the ordinary layman. To own a radio implied an understanding of tubes and batteries and electric paraphernalia.

Consequently a great many homes delayed in the purchase of a Radio Set. But now with the introduction of the "Rogers Batteryless" the waiting is over. Here it is a set that is simplicity itself to operate and requires the minimum of attention. The Rogers Batteryless Set gives transcendental range as loud speaker without "A" or "B" Batteries or Aerial. It operates instantly you plug into your electric light socket and connect a ground wire to radiator or water pipe. With a Rogers you do not need to understand Radio science any more than you need to be a mechanic to own a Radio-Kroyce automobile.

Models and Prices—Rogers Receiving Sets are made in multiple models and prices to suit every pocket and to every purse. Prices range from \$12.50 to \$175.00. Rogers Batteryless Set for home connecting to electric current, \$25.00 in stock.



*Just plug in
then tune in!*



STANDARD RADIO MANUFACTURING CORPORATION, LIMITED—TORONTO

M-4

Figure 4.1.
Advertisement for
Rogers Batteryless
Radio Receiving Sets.

to solidify the radio's place in the home and to popularize or domesticate modern design emerged at just the moment when Art Deco—a form of popular modernism—was reaching a larger audience.²¹

Radios did make an appearance at the Paris exhibition of 1925 (fig. 4.2); however their presence seems to have been overshadowed by other more general discussions of design and architecture.²² The cabinets were included in the French section, but the radio equipment was furnished by U.S.-based Radiola. Figure 4.2 depicts a radio displayed as part of a larger, *moderne* environment, and importantly a female listener is positioned in front of it. The modern electronic device becomes part of her *ensemble*, as natural in the living room as any of the other Deco furnishings. Like other furniture on display, no doubt this radio was well beyond the means of most visitors to the exhibition.

Despite this early association of Art Deco with the radio, the mode did not immediately affect radio cabinet design in Canada. This did not mean that there was no interest in *moderne* design, since copy in

Figure 4.2.
Radio receiver T.S.F.
by Radiola.

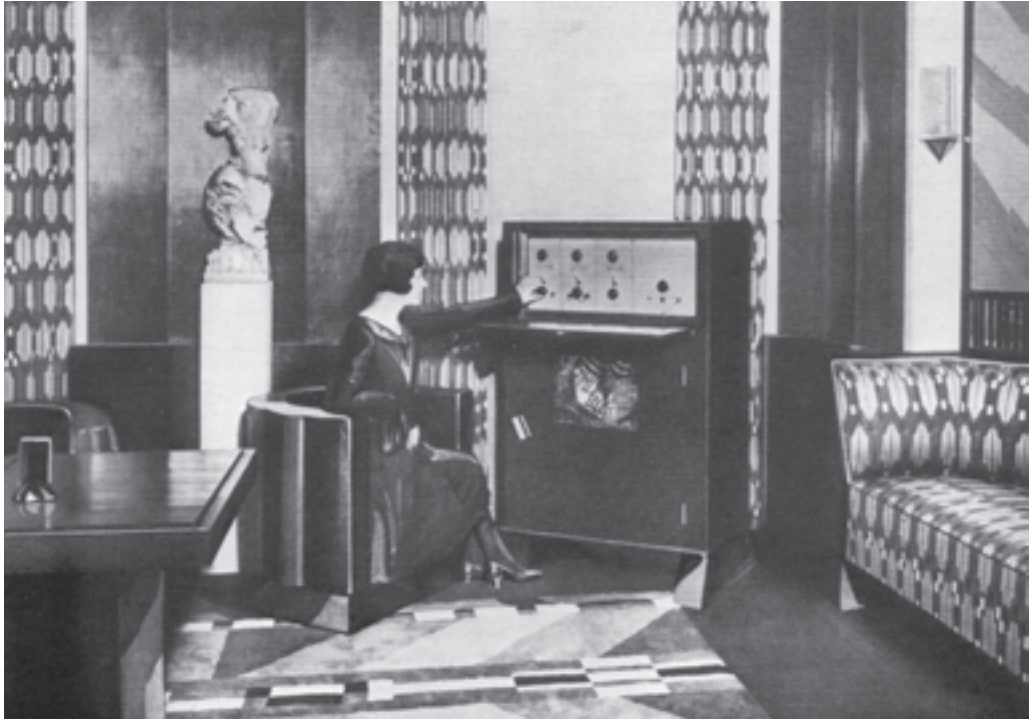


Plate XLV from *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes au XX^e siècle*, vol. 8, Toys, Scientific and Musical Instruments, Vehicles of Transportation, 1925 (repr. New York, Garland, 1977)

21. It should be noted that Canada played a particularly important role in the foundations and development of radio. For instance, Guglielmo Marconi sent the first transatlantic wireless signal from Poldhu, Cornwall, England, to a receiving station on Signal Hill in St. John's, Newfoundland, on December 13, 1901. Canadian Reginald Aubrey Fessenden sent the first wireless broadcast (including both human voice and recorded music) on December 24, 1906, from Brant Rock, Massachusetts, to some ships at sea, owned by the United Fruit Company. See Sandy Stewart, *From Coast to Coast: A Personal History of Radio in Canada*, Toronto, CBC Enterprises, 1985, pp. 1–9.
22. To my knowledge, these radios have not seen any scholarly attention.

Canadian Homes and Gardens or advertisements and displays offered by major departments, notably the T. Eaton Company and the Robert Simpson Company, suggest the opposite.²³ However, even fully “modernistic” settings, like René Cera’s “House of To-Day” displayed at Eaton’s Calgary store in 1929, did not extend Art Deco to the new medium.²⁴ The initial lack of “modernistic” radios may have been due to the fact that the market for this new design trend in the late 1920s was still rather small and aimed at a particularly wealthy clientele. All-electric radios were themselves rather expensive commodities at the time but were designed to appear more “traditional” in nature, often being incorporated into period-style cabinets. These radios would harmonize better with the generally conservative taste in furnishings of Canadian domestic interiors, where period styles were thought to carry more value, and were less of a gamble than investing in what could be perceived as a passing fad. Also, like the “horseless carriage” before it, the new technology was domesticated initially through more “conservative” containers.

Interestingly, some print advertisements included Art Deco or “cubistic” figures around an otherwise “traditional” radio set. For example, a 1928 ad for an RCA Radiola 64 presents a cubist space suggestive of the time-space compression—the instantaneity—brought about by the radio, as an up-tempo world of jazz (invoked by the shapes of musical instruments and a conductor and even noted in text) and news swirls (again presented in text) about very staid and entirely immobile wooden radio cabinets and a speaker (fig. 4.3).²⁵ This advertisement attempts to frame radio within the contours of contemporary culture and social practice, where radio listening is as exciting as (and perhaps carries the news of) popular sports like golf and baseball, skyscrapers, and airplanes, all pictured around the console. As well, the radio is also seen to be (re)producing

23. For some early examples of this interest in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, see “The Daring Spirit of Art Moderne Invades the Bedroom,” April 1928, p. 18; “The Small House Turns Modern in the Pioneering Spirit of 1928,” June 1928, pp. 2–33; Alice M. Cooper, “Characteristics of Modernism in Interior Decoration,” November 1928, pp. 17, 52, 54; Mary-Etta Macpherson, “Wanted: A Name,” November 1928, p. 20; “An Apartment Suite in the New Idiom,” November 1928, pp. 22–24; Charlotte Adam, “An Animated Line Has Reached the Dining Room,” November 1928, pp. 46, 72; “Cheerful Modernism for the Small House,” February 1929, p. 19; “Convenient Beauty in Art Moderne,” February 1929, p. 25; Mary-Etta Macpherson, “Adventures in Refurbishing,” November 1929, pp. 17, 77; “Livable Rooms for 20th Century Taste,” May 1930, p. 119; “A Miniature Room in Modern Motif,” June 1930, p. 20. See also Virginia Wright, *Modern Furniture in Canada 1920–1970*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997, chap. 1 and 2.

24. For more on Cera’s “House of Today,” see Wright, *ibid.*, p. 5; see also Mary-Etta Macpherson’s review of “The Canadian House of Today,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, June 1929, pp. 17–20, 51–52. As Rosalind Pepall (“Decorative Arts from the Twenties,” in Jean Clair [ed.], *The 1920s: Age of Metropolis*, Montréal, Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, 1991) notes, “the T. Eaton Company was the main promoter of Art Moderne (as French design was called in America) [...] maintain[ing] an office in Paris during the 1920s.” It was through this connection that they hired René Cera, a French designer who, she reports, “had worked as an assistant manager for the Atelier Martine in Paris at the time of the 1925 exhibition” (p. 198). In fact, according to his C.V. in the T. Eaton Company archives, Cera “served as general manager of the architectural and interior department of ‘Martine’s’ in Paris.” (“Biography of René Alexandre Paul Cera,” T. Eaton Company Fonds, file F229-221-0-10, box 1, Archives of Ontario.)

25. Advertisement for RCA Radiola 64, *American Home*, October 1928. Although the ad appears in an American periodical, RCA models were sold in Canada as well.

RCA

RADIOLA 64
SUPER-HETERODYNE

Musical range and fidelity of tone such as have never before been known make this new Radiola Super-Heterodyne the finest achievement of modern radio. It is a musical instrument of amazing capacity, range and realism.

Nothing has ever been designed to equal the performance of the super-selective and sensitive Super-Heterodyne—and now this wonderful receiver has been further refined. It has the new simplified A.C. electric operation, special automatic volume control, additional Radiotrons for volume, and the new RCA Dynamic Speakers—the incomparable of radio reproducing instruments.

\$550 (less Radiotrons).

See your neighborhood  where you see this sign

RCA CORPORATION OF AMERICA
New York • Chicago • San Francisco

◀ **Figure 4.3.**
Advertisement for
RCA Radiola 64.

Reproduced from *American Home*, October 1928

high culture, as indicated by the presence of a Greek mask and depiction of well-heeled figures. In this respect, the advertisement places radio within the purview of an elite class, a fact reinforced by the expensive \$550 price tag. It also suggests the process of gentrification underway in making the radio less a scientific and mechanical toy and more a culturally edifying instrument. By the early 1930s, Art Deco would not be used simply to advertise the new electronic commodity, but would frame the medium itself and would carry with it some of the glamour associated with a democratization of culture evoked in this early advertisement.

With the development of high-quality “midget” or table models and a lowered price, the number of radios sold increased dramatically.²⁶ As historian Mary Vipond notes, in 1929 the average list price for an electric radio was \$121, while in 1931 it was \$58.²⁷ As a point of comparison, Canadians could order from Eaton’s catalogue a wood-burning steel range for \$64.50 in 1928–1929, an electric “Eatonia” vacuum cleaner consistently cost \$45.00 through these years, while an electric refrigerator in 1932 could cost \$11.50 to \$31.50, depending on the model.²⁸ Seventy percent of radios cost more than \$136 in 1930, while in 1931, 70 percent cost less than that.²⁹ Despite the increase in sales, in 1932 two-thirds of Canadian homes were without a radio receiver.³⁰ We must bear in mind, however, that radio ownership in Canada in 1932 was still among the highest in the world.³¹ In that same year, according to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, radio sales declined by 53 percent in terms of number of sets sold and 63 percent in receipts from sales.³² The production of radios would hit its low point in 1933, with 112,273 made in Canada, then would increase to 188,710 in 1934, 191,293 in 1935, 253,896 in 1936, 289,247 in 1937, before dipping to 242,721 in 1938.³³ Historian Ian Anthony notes that in November 1933 Ted Rogers issued a full-page apology in *Radio and Electrical Sales* magazine for the backlog of 2,751 orders, a point which indicates that even in the slowest year of radio manufacturing in Canada, demand in some instances outstripped production.³⁴ By 1940,

26. Schiffer makes the point that “[t]he term ‘midget’ was actually applied to a range of radios, from quite small table models to majestic cathedrals and ‘tombstones,’ the majority of which—with built-in speakers—were small compared to the all-electrics of the late twenties” (*The Portable Radio in American Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 102). He notes as well that Los Angeles became a key site for production and marketing of “midget” models, although he does not explain why. Perhaps this was due to demographics, with L.A. boasting a substantial population of middle-class citizens, many originally from the Midwest, who had the disposable income for multiple radios.

27. Mary Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade...*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

28. Costs were taken from the T. Eaton Company mail order catalogues, fall–winter 1928–1929, spring–summer 1929, spring–summer 1930, and spring–summer 1932. These catalogues included some radios—highlighting the company’s house brand of the time, “Minerva.” Eaton’s also ran separate radio catalogues.

29. Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade...*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

30. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

31. Vipond notes that Canada’s average of 74.32 radios per 1,000 was behind only Denmark (119.5 per 1,000), the U.S. (98.4 per 1,000), Sweden (78.9 per 1,000), and the U.K. (77.5 per 1,000). She also importantly points to the regional differences in radio ownership: per 1,000, Ontario’s rate was 106.16, while Québec’s was only 52.35. Not surprisingly, radio ownership in urban communities was higher than rural. See Vipond *Listening In: The First Decade...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–40, especially table 7, which outlines radio ownership by region in 1931. These statistics emphasize the regionally diverse culture of Canada, which had serious implications for the founding of a national radio service. They also suggest some of the linguistic barriers inherent in radio, especially for minority populations of recent immigrants as well the substantial French-speaking populations who did not always have access to French-language broadcasts.

32. *The Radio Industry in Canada, 1932*, Ottawa, Dominion Bureau of Statistics Canada, 1933, p. 1.

33. *The Electrical Apparatus and Supplies Industries in Canada, 1938*, Ottawa, Bureau of Statistics Canada, 1939, p. 12, table 25.

34. Anthony, *Radio Wizard: Edward Samuel Rogers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 72. He also mentions that “Rogers-Majestic increased its staff to the point where production was doubled to meet the sales requests.” This meant the creation of more jobs in one of the darkest years of the Depression. Rogers was one of the most successful radio producers in Canada during the

81.1 percent of Canadian households had radios, up from only 11.1 percent in 1924.³⁵ Thus, radios became a more common sight in the home through the 1930s, especially for urban dwellers, and, although sales were not constantly increasing throughout the decade, the radio set became more firmly linked to commodity fashioning. It was in the 1930s that radio really became a mass medium and this was directly linked to the proliferation of mass-produced radio cabinets—replaced sometimes annually.³⁶

A 1933 article in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, entitled “The World at Your Door: Via the Modern Radio,” sums up the development of radio cabinets in Canada.³⁷ The article begins by reminding readers that in the early 1920s radio was considered “a scientific toy” and that at the time “bringing in stations was an occasion for boasting and jubilation.”³⁸ “The tuning devices were as baffling as a jigsaw puzzle,” the author continues, pointing out that “there were never less than three knobs to operate, and the manipulation of these knobs was full of interest to the mechanically minded, but a sore vexation to the listener who really wanted to hear a good programme.”³⁹ We might notice here the necessary physicality to radio operation at the time. The writer then lists some of the technological developments throughout the course of the 1920s that saw tuning simplified, volume increased, and sound quality improved.⁴⁰ The production of more powerful tubes, including the Rogers Model 6H7S Mystery Tube in 1934, made radios cheaper and allowed for the design of

interwar years. Its all-electric radio station in Toronto, CFRB (Canada’s First Rogers Batteryless), was one of the most popular Canadian radio stations in the era. See Anthony, chap. 4; and Bill McNeil and Morris Wolfe, *Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada*, Toronto, Doubleday Canada, 1982, pp. 74–79, 90–95. In 1928, Rogers formed an alliance with the Grigsby-Grunow Company of Chicago, which produced the Majestic Electric models in the United States (Anthony, pp. 65–67). In 1934, Rogers’s company, the Canadian Radio Corporation, acquired Consolidated Industries, which made DeForest-Crosley Radios in Canada, Norge Electric Refrigerators, and Hammond Clocks, after it had gone bankrupt. This made the Canadian Radio Corporation the largest radio manufacturer in Canada (*ibid.*, pp. 71–72).

35. Data cited in Anne F. MacLennan, “Women, Radio Broadcasting, and the Depression: A ‘Captive’ Audience from Household Hints to Story Time and Serials,” *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 37, no. 6, 2008, p. 618.
36. See Michel Filion, “Broadcasting and Cultural Identity: The Canadian Experience,” *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1996, pp. 447–467. Reporting on the contemporaneous British situation, Forty (“Wireless Style...,” *op. cit.*, p. 24) notes that “people who kept their old sets often did not do so for very long because developments in radio were so rapid that a set became obsolete within a few years, and it was common practice to replace one’s set annually.”
37. “The World at Your Door: Via the Modern Radio,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1933, p. 44, 46, 52.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 44. Cheaper radios throughout the 1920s were sold in parts to be assembled by the “radio fan.” Inexpensive crystal sets continued to be popular amongst the mechanically-inclined, providing a relatively cheap hobby during the Depression and beyond.
39. *Ibid.*
40. The author lists the 1921–1922 development of “neuterodyne [*sic*] tuned radio frequency sets,” the advent of the tuning dial a year later, AC tube in 1925, power tube in 1926 (to increase volume), dynamic speaker in 1927 (extended range from 3 to 5 octaves), automatic volume control as well as calibration and visual tuning in 1929, super-heterodyne receiver (increased sensitivity by 20 times and selectivity by 2.5 times) and pentode tubes (increased power) in 1931, and general, unspecified improvements to acoustical range, power, and selectivity up to 1933 (*ibid.*, pp. 44, 46, 52).

smaller models of high quality.⁴¹ The radio's development was described as "presenting to its owner a diversification of entertainment which a few years ago even the wealthiest citizen in the largest metropolis could not hope to enjoy."⁴² This sentiment reinforced the belief in progress connected to consumer culture, meanwhile reinforcing the idea that radio democratized culture and empowered the modern listener in a way that her/his ancestors could not have imagined. This comment also points to the development of a more diverse field of radio programming, particularly bigger-budget shows from the United States, which were by far the most popular programs. Powerful American stations were sometimes easier to tune into than Canadian counterparts, and even when citizens "listened in" to Canadian stations, they often found American content—both on private and public stations.⁴³ I will return to this point and the political implications of radio in my discussion of cosmopolitanism below.

In "The World at Your Door: Via the Modern Radio," the author's description of radio moves from a tactile-oriented and outwardly scientific device to a visually pleasing piece of furniture: "In external design, too, the radio receiving set has felt the impulse toward improvement."⁴⁴ The new radios could then be "place[d] with dignity and propriety in the living room or library." These cabinets are characterized as having "[f]inely matched veneers [...] and many types of attractive designs, some of them in simplified modern style, others following period lines and in the guise of tables, commodes, escritoirs, are now available."⁴⁵ This resonates with an advertisement for Sparton radios of the same year (fig. 4.4). The performance of the radio is compared to the beauty of the console, linking technological development to aesthetic quality and reinforcing the idea that the radio was an object not only to listen to but to look at. Just as early cinema, department store, and office tower design initially alluded to historical styles, radio is framed here in Queen Anne and Chippendale period styles, as well as the "modernistic." While public culture outside the home could indulge in flights of fantasy, especially spaces of amusement, the radio cabinets needed to rest in "happy harmony with their surroundings in the home." The logic of the advertisement evinces the

41. After producing the first AC tube, Rogers continued to develop more powerful and sensitive tubes, for instance, in 1931, the Rogers 224+ Tube, which heated up quickly and thus reduced warm-up time. In 1933, after two years of research, Rogers introduced the Seal-Shielded Tube, which protected against distortion and eliminated the need for "shielding cans," which protected tubes from excessive heat and moisture, but could cause vibration. The following year, the Model 6H7S Mystery Tube was launched. Anthony (*Radio Wizard: Edward Samuel Rogers...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–77) describes it as like a "double-yolked egg," a "Double Unit Tube that had twice the power of ordinary tubes, allowing stronger reception capabilities."

42. "The World at Your Door...", *op. cit.*, p. 52.

43. By 1928, four of Canada's most powerful radio stations were affiliates of one of the American radio networks. These were CFCF and CKAC in Montréal (owned by Canadian Marconi and *La Presse* respectively) and CKGW and CFRB (owned by Gooderham and Worts and Rogers Majestic respectively). See Robert S. Fortner, *Radio, Morality, and Culture: Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1919–1945*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 2005, p. 133.

44. *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

45. *Ibid.*

SPARTON LEADS IN BEAUTY TOO!

**"Period" cabinets that stay in style . . .
Novel ideas of surpassing interest . . .
Performance never before achieved**

RADIO RECEPTION reaches new heights of perfection in the latest Sparton . . . *Amazing Volume . . . Fine Selectivity . . . And beautifully designed Tone, made possible by placing the three Sparton Speakers in an arc of a circle . . . Every Sparton model is a Performer.*

More than ever the new Spartons are lovely pieces of Furniture, in happy harmony with their surroundings in the home . . . Sparton continually challenges comparison on the basis of Beauty as well as of Performance.

When you are comparing Sparton reception with the performance of other makes at your Radio Dealer's, be sure to see the entire line of Sparton creations . . . from the truly "royal" Queen Anne Model, with its three speakers and thirteen tubes, down to the "Country House" battery set for rural communities.

Only Sparton has the Musical Beauty of Sparton
SPARTON RADIO
"Radio's Richest Voice"

The "Queen Anne" Radios in Beauty and Performance.

A PORTANT "Tone Radio" for the Living Room or Bedroom with Rich.

Smartly Modernistic "Personal" Radio - a just size, compact, beautiful, superb built.

A SPARTON reception of comfort in radio reception in Living Room, Dining or Bedroom.

Unsurpassed "personal" radio in compact design only seen in the Radio World.

*** You should see Sparton Electric Refrigerators
You should hear the Sparton Automobile Radio**

USE THIS COUPON . . . to send for **FREE RADIO LOG**

SPARTON CO. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, 100 Pine Street, London, Ontario.
Please send to the SPARTON Log of Radio Prices.

Name . . .
Street or Rural Route . . .
City or Town . . .

◀ **Figure 4.4.**
Advertisement for
Sparton Radios.

Reproduced from Maclean's Magazine, October 15, 1933, p. 29

tensions at play in selling a new commodity, inextricably linked to modernity and appealing to a leisurely modern lifestyle (note the gentleman relaxing next to his radio), but doing so primarily with "'Period' cabinets that *stay* in style." However, just as ads for department stores were selling the idea of modern furnishings fitting together with more "traditional" pieces, the Sparton ad includes a "Smartly Modernistic 'Personal' Radio."⁴⁶ Lacking the hand-carved ornament, like that seen in the Chippendale or Queen Anne consoles, the modernistic model (Model 270) suggests the trend toward simplicity (fig. 4.5). The diagonal orientation of the more

46. Advising the use of both modern and traditional furnishings was quite common in articles promoting the idea of modern interior design. See, for example, "Going Modern in the Living Room," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1933, pp. 11–13, 44.

Figure 4.5. ▶
Sparton Model 270,
1933, Hammond
Museum of Radio
Collection, Guelph
(ON), wood (approx.
43 × 30 × 17 cm).



Michael Windover (2009)

geometric grille evokes the dynamism of radio and sound waves, self-consciously aestheticizing the activity of radio listening. As well it may be read as suggesting the power, literally at the hands of the listener tuning in to her/his radio program, to control this electronic instrument and to choose her/his form of entertainment. This was a potent symbol at a time when nearly a third of citizens in Canada were unemployed and felt a severe loss of control over their own productive capabilities.⁴⁷ Part of the

47. Bumsted (*A History of the Canadian Peoples*, *op. cit.*) argues that Depression-era “[o]fficial statistics are totally meaningless as a measure of the extent of joblessness, much less its significance. According to the publication *Historical Statistics in Canada* (1983), reflecting contemporary government data, unemployment in Canada rose from 116,000 in 1929 to 741,000 in 1932 to 826,000 in 1933, ultimately declining to 411,000 in 1937 and increasing to 529,000 in 1939. These figures, while substantial enough in a nation of only 10 million, hardly reflected the reality. No farmers or fishermen, or their families, counted among the ranks of the unemployed at this time. The government regarded them as self-employed businessmen. Women out of work did not count either. Thus unemployment in the depths of the Depression, around 1933, ran to over 27 per cent in the non-agricultural sector, but probably over 50 per cent overall. At the same time, a farmer whose expenses exceeded his income was probably better off than a jobless city dweller whose expenses similarly exceeded his income” (pp. 274–275).

appeal of Art Deco, I argue, was its association with appearing self-consciously modern and in control. Purchasing a Deco radio set would likely suggest in the mind of the buyer a sense of seeming knowledgeable about contemporary fashions and new technologies.

Significantly, the modernistic model was also the cheapest in the suite.⁴⁸ This may suggest a few things. The modernistic style for tabletop radios may have been geared toward a demographic of more modest means. Although she does not discuss the radio cabinet in particular, Kristina Wilson asserts that modern furnishings in the living room, dining room, and bedroom during the 1930s were marketed toward middle-class consumers, who certainly felt the effects of the Depression but also saw the value of their incomes rise.⁴⁹ These consumers may not have had Queen Anne or Chippendale furniture with which to harmonize their radio sets, or they may have seen the modernistic radio set as emblematic of a newer generation that lived in smaller apartments, saw movies, and listened to jazz. In both instances—period styles and the modernistic—styling might be read as appealing to consumer desires for the appearance of social advancement or performance of taste.⁵⁰

Another important point is that the modernistic radio cabinet is described as a “personal” radio. Although much larger and bulkier than the smaller (and lighter) radios of the transistor era (or indeed later tube radios), the “modernistic” Sparton 270 does include a handle for ease in movement. A contemporaneous advertisement for Eaton’s that includes this model amongst other modern, “miniature” radios claims a need for personal radios.⁵¹ With such a wide selection of programs on the air appealing to different audiences (men can tune in to the hockey game while women listen to Bach, the ad suggests),⁵² modern households could avoid disappointment and conflict by purchasing more, cheaper radios. This indicates certain social and spatial implications, for while the living room would no doubt continue to be the prime location for radio listening, personal radios allowed for other rooms to be transformed into places of leisure for even smaller, dispersed—perhaps atomized—audiences. The Sparton ad likewise suggests models for different genders with the woman’s

48. Here I employ the term “modernistic” not only in keeping with the description in the advertisement and contemporary terminology in general, but also to suggest the idea of appearing modern.

49. Wilson, *Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–14. Wilson’s work focuses on the American context; however, I think that, for the most part, her argument applies to the Canadian situation, though on a much smaller scale and without the prominence of “name” designers. I will return to her discussion of the living room below.

50. See Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique...*, *op. cit.*

51. See the Eaton’s ad, “Modern Features in Miniature Radios,” *Globe and Mail*, November 4, 1933, p. 22. It pictures “miniature” models from Philco, Sparton, The Victor, Rogers, DeForest-Crosley, and Northern Electric.

52. This era was marked by the burgeoning and further development of professional sports, including ice hockey. Radio was instrumental to the popularization of these sports. For more on radio and hockey as manifested in the building of an Art Deco arena, see Michael Windover, “Digging in the Gardens: Unearthing the Experience of Modernity in Interwar Toronto,” in Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe (ed.), *Architecture and the Canadian Fabric*. Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2011, pp. 217–245.

model, for example, being positioned in the bedroom (fig. 4.4). The introduction of modernistic radio designs in the personal or tabletop size might be seen to resonate with furniture of less public rooms, like the bedroom—spaces where individuals (especially housewives, the prime target of marketers) could experiment more freely, expressing a sense of individuality resonant with depictions of bedrooms in Hollywood films.⁵³ Although there were the odd larger *moderne* radios (e.g., the Westinghouse “Columaire” I discuss below), it is in the mid- to late 1930s that floor models began to feature modernist elements. This suggests an acceptance of Art Deco in the living room and it would be in keeping with the general trend of modern design transforming the home from the peripheries in: from the garage, kitchen, bathroom, then perhaps the bedroom or basement rumpus room, until finally transforming the sacrosanct living and dining rooms.⁵⁴ The Deco radio was thus indicative of larger systems of trend-setting/following—new characteristics of a popular economy of tastes.

Of course, not all homes went through a modernistic transformation, especially during the Depression era when a popular response to crisis was a return to colonial architecture and more “traditional” furnishings.⁵⁵ However, the appearance of Deco radio cabinets in advertisements of the period does suggest a growing interest in incorporating the *moderne* into the home. The Art Deco of the Westinghouse Air-Pilot of 1935 exemplifies a negotiated or user-friendly modernism, blending subtle streamlining, tuning knobs and dial reminiscent of a pilot’s control panel with pre-existing traditions of wooden cabinetry employed in organ, phonograph, and earlier radio design. The Deco radio marries tradition with the modern, marking the supposedly timeless space of the home as a place of modern activity and a unique public culture. And although some Canadians living primarily in rural areas did not have access to electricity, yet could still “listen in” with battery-operated radios, for most urban dwellers, the modern-looking radio sitting in the living room signalled a modern activity fuelled by a distinctly modern energy source.⁵⁶ Art Deco

53. See Wilson, *Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 111–130. Note however that her otherwise informative work does not mention radios, although she does discuss clocks, vanities, and other bedroom furniture.

54. For an engaging discussion of streamlined design in the home, see Lupton and Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste...*, *op. cit.*

55. Wilson (*Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–11) points out the interest in Colonial Revival architecture—its most notable example being the opening of Colonial Williamsburg in 1935—and how colonial nostalgia was used by modern designers to market their own, contemporary pieces. John D. Rockefeller helped patronize the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg at a moment of heightened anxieties about the future of the U.S., appealing to a sanitized history in a built form that contrasted sharply with “Hoovervilles” springing up across the country.

56. Vipond (*Listening In: The First Decade...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–43) describes the difficulties of reception and radio ownership for Canada’s rural population. Analyzing statistics published by the federal government on radio production, sales, and licensing, she writes that “[t]he principal factor affecting radio ownership in 1931 seems to have been urban versus rural residence [...] In Canada’s rural areas, the ownership rate was 45.78 per 1,000, while in the urban areas it was more than twice that, or 98.87 per 1,000. On farms, the rate was 36.09 per 1,000, while in the largest cities, with populations over 30,000, it was 107.71 per 1,000” (p. 38). She adds that this rural-urban divide is consistent with both the British and American situations at the time. As for reasons why radios did not immediately

radios also associated a modern “look” with systems of immediate communication and instant (electrical) power.⁵⁷ In essence, it linked the individual home to the socio-political world outside, not only by way of radio programming but via electricity to power-generating plants.⁵⁸ And companies like those owned by Rogers served to reinforce the interpenetrating forms of mobility associated with radio—developing and selling radio consoles alongside broadcasting operations, in essence linking on-air content to the radios themselves. This was made more apparent, I would argue, with the incorporation of Art Deco design.

■ A Look at Sound Design

The Art Deco radio linked the outside world to the home by way of its role as a commodity. Especially after a period of domestication, signalled by its incorporation into period cabinets, and technological development, which led to the production of smaller, yet powerful, radios, the wireless set became an object of concern for industrial designers. Radio design followed the pattern established in the automotive industry, following Henry Ford’s famous “most expensive art lesson in history.” In 1927 Ford finally succumbed to market pressure, halted production of his Model T, and, after an \$18-million retooling, released the more fashionable Model A.⁵⁹ Automobiles, like radios and other commodities, would be marked not only by technological developments (most often rather slight from year to year), but also aesthetic changes, ostensibly coalescing advertising, fashion, and product development.⁶⁰ The serious radio enthusiast, according to a *Canadian Homes and Gardens* commentator, “is the man [*sic*] who has adopted the same attitude toward this important piece of

reach the countryside in great numbers, Vipond argues that batteries posed a problem for the farmer without a battery charger (though many had them for other equipment), especially since there was a lag in rural electrification; cost of replacement tubes might have been prohibitive and urban households with radios in that early period were likely wealthier (although she points out that some lower income areas, such as Oshawa, Brantford, and Guelph, had higher per capita ownership than higher income areas, such as Ottawa and Moncton). Most importantly, she argues, “was the matter of access to good programming—good both technically and in terms of content.” Although “even quite weak transmitters could be heard over wide areas in the early days because of the low levels of general electrical interference, nevertheless there were many rural districts with unsatisfactory reception from Canadian stations, as innumerable contemporary comments attest” (p. 41).

57. It should be remembered that companies associated with electricity often garbed corporate offices in Art Deco (e.g., the Niagara Mohawk Building in Syracuse, New York, 1932).
58. In the U.S. this was a period of major expansion in the electrical grid, with the construction of the Boulder Dam and the Tennessee Valley Authority. For a discussion of the aesthetics of these projects, see Richard Guy Wilson, “The Machine in the Landscape,” in Richard Guy Wilson, Dianne H. Pilgrim, and Dickran Trashjian (eds.), *The Machine Age in America 1918–1941*, New York, Brooklyn Museum and Harry N. Abrams, 1986.
59. For more on the advent and development of industrial design in the U.S., see Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited...*, *op. cit.*; and Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, especially Part I and chap. 10.
60. For more on styling and marketing in the automotive industry, see Sally Clarke, “Managing Design: The Art and Colour at General Motors, 1927–1941,” *Journal of Design History*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1999, pp. 65–79.

house equipment as he has toward his motor car”; that is, she/he sees the value in keeping up-to-date with radio developments, trading in old radios and buying the stylish and more technologically advanced newer models.⁶¹ This type of comparison between radio and the automobile industry was quite common.⁶² They both became staples of the economy, changed patterns of everyday life (and thus threatened established patterns, such as church-going), promoted an engagement with new technologies, and as commodities became aesthetically representative of an ever more “advanced” modern lifestyle that saw fashion change as inextricably bound to notions of progress and mobility.⁶³

For Adrian Forty, the design of wireless sets exemplifies what he sees as the three dominant approaches to the problem of designing commodities in general. Design ultimately is “an activity that invariably disguises or changes the shape of what we take to be reality”; it “alters the ways people see commodities.”⁶⁴ After the initial period in the early to mid-1920s, when radios were outwardly mechanical, when people largely purchased radio equipment in parts and assembled their own devices, radio manufacturers presented the new medium in three ways, all of which are featured in the 1933 Sparton ad discussed above (fig. 4.4).⁶⁵ First, they housed it in imitation antique furniture, what Forty dubs the “archaic” approach. This representational strategy softens the blow and provides a semiological frame with which to understand new technologies and spaces through a process of reconciliation fuelled by familiarity. Another tactic was “the suppressive.” In this instance, manufacturers “hid” radios within a piece of furniture or object that already served another purpose, for example in a chair or lamp or in a bedside table, as seen in figure 4.4.⁶⁶ We might read this as “multifunctional,” and an approach to design that takes into account limitations of space, especially for modern, apartment-style living. The third approach, and the one that interests us most here, is what Forty calls the “Utopian.” Once consumers “became familiar with radio and found it less disturbing,” manufacturers placed radios “within a cabinet designed to suggest that it belonged to a future and better

61. “The World at Your Door...,” *op. cit.*, p. 52.

62. See for instance, Lockwood Barr, “Radio: Furniture or Specialty?” *Good Furniture and Decoration*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1931, pp. 87–91. The comparison even extended to radio stations. For example, Mackenzie Waters argues that “[i]n the past two decades there have been two opportunities for architects to step out and do something entirely different in the solution of the problems with which they were faced. These were in the design of gasoline and broadcasting stations.” See his “Broadcasting Stations,” *op. cit.*, p. 215.

63. Cars and radios also became intertwined in the 1930s with the advent of car radios, led by Motorola in the U.S. This made for complex mobile-acoustic spaces and would be worth further consideration in the Canadian context. See Jody Berland, “Locating Listening: Technological Space, Popular Music, and Canadian Mediations,” in Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revell (eds.), *The Place of Music*, New York, Guildford Press, 1998, pp. 129–150.

64. Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1986, pp. 11–12. To some degree, Forty’s work minimizes the design processes associated with the problem of designing actual technologies. Articles in the journal *Design Studies* explore the complexities of the design process and its analysis.

65. *Ibid.*; see also Forty, “Wireless Style...,” *op. cit.*

66. Forty cites the example of a radio “Easy Chair” of 1933 (*Objects of Desire, ibid.*, p. 12).

world”—the modernistic personal radio exemplifies this strategy.⁶⁷ As much as these cabinets may have suggested the future, particularly through the use of new materials (early plastics like Bakelite and Catalin, metals, etc.) as well as through formal strategies (setbacks suggestive of skyscrapers, streamlining, the incorporation of modern patterning or speed lines, etc.), I would argue that they simultaneously referenced the present, the new, the up-to-date, in a manner that tied them self-consciously (and visually) to consumer capitalism and that reinforced machine-age ideology, a point to which I will return below. Also, it should be noted that this final approach is based, in many instances, on how designers conceptualize the technology, materials, and “problem” of designing the commodity.

Forty makes the important argument that in Britain “the radio trade discovered for itself the possibility of using modern styles for cabinets, unassisted by architects or critics of design.”⁶⁸ This was most certainly the case in Canada as well.⁶⁹ He notes that “self-appointed [...] apostles of the principles of modern design,” who wrote books and launched exhibitions that appeared in 1934 and who criticized the state of design in Great Britain (where design was seen as playing a very significant moral role in public edification), “arrived after the conversion.”⁷⁰ Nikolaus Pevsner’s review of the state of industrial art in Britain outlines the brief history of radio cabinet design and is worth quoting at length:

The appearance of English Wireless cabinets was, in its first phase, dependant on the historic styles of furniture. Georgian, Queen Anne, Tudor, in all kinds of adaptations and mixtures, were popular. Then, about 1930, radio design reached the state of recognizing its own particular nature and of wanting its modernity to be expressed in the cabinet. The immediate result of this was that design went modernistic, again borrowing forms from the furniture designer. This was the time of the flamboyant sound holes. Then, about 1932, “flamboyant” was often replaced by “cubistic,” and for some time, in the cheaper and a large part of the more expensive trade, most of the cabinets were adorned with some jags and angles. But at the same time, about 1932–1933, a reaction set in, and a few manufacturers began to turn out cabinets of simple, clear, well-proportioned shape.

67. Forty, *ibid.*

68. Forty, “Wireless Style...,” *op. cit.*, p. 24.

69. In fact, it seems that in general modern design in Canada during the interwar years was largely led not by “pioneers of modernism” or industrial designers, but rather by department stores and manufacturers. Although there were some interior designers who employed modern modes, they appear to be rare cases, according to Virginia Wright, *Modern Furniture in Canada 1920–1970*, *op. cit.*, in particular chap. 2, “The Furniture Professions,” pp. 35–85.

70. *Ibid.* One of the most outspoken of these critics was Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1937. He describes that since the poorer classes have been deprived “of so much joy in life” their interest in “entertainment so vicarious as the cinema, as well as the pleasure in vulgar and boastful design,” represents an “irresistible longing for escape.” He concludes that, therefore, “the question of design is a social question, it is an integral part of the social question of our time. To fight against the shoddy design of those goods by which most of our fellow-men are surrounded becomes a moral duty” (p. 11). See also Herbert Read, *Art and Industry: The Principles of Industrial Design*, London, Faber & Faber, 1934; and Geoffrey Holme, *Industrial Design and the Future*, London and New York, The Studio Limited, 1934.

At first there were only two or three of them, then since 1935 they became more frequent, so that to-day the radio trade produces a few admirably and genuinely modern cabinets, a good many more of a sound and creditable appearance which are spoilt by unnecessary pseudo-cubistic details.⁷¹

This chronology is interesting for a number of reasons. First, rhetorically Pevsner situates the medium of radio as the agent, rather than the manufacturers, designers, or the consuming public. It is the radio that recognizes “its own particular nature” and wants “its modernity expressed in the cabinet.” Second, he establishes an evolution that begins with period styles then moves through “flamboyant” and “cubistic” confusion, before finding a “simple, clear, well-proportioned shape.” He later describes the Murphy radios, designed by Gordon Russell (and Richard Drew Russell, who would later become staff designer for Murphy), and Ekco sets, designed by Serge Chermayeff and Wells Coates, as the epitome of good radio design.⁷² The chronology is not of technological development or a significant change to the radio device, but an evolution toward a proper (from Pevsner’s perspective) aesthetic relationship between the radio and its case, toward radio finally “looking the part.” Pevsner is concerned about which modern designs were reaching the public, as, to his mind, some were more honest and morally uplifting than others; thus not just the on-air content but the look of radio was seen as having moral and therefore social implications. Proper and “honest” aesthetic environments could produce enlightened citizens.⁷³

This concept resonated with the missions of the CBC and BBC, which understood the primary role of radio to be edification, and stood in contrast to a view of radio as primarily a form of entertainment and profit. But as Lacey points out, the BBC responded to the threat of “Americanization” (read commercialism) by offering variety or “Light Entertainment,” a middlebrow culture “that was in no danger of offending any of its listeners” by appealing to the “ordinary listener,” and even borrowed programming innovations from the United States.⁷⁴ The Canadian experience of public broadcasting would likewise appeal to a middlebrow audience to some degree, no doubt given its close proximity to the U.S. and the fact

71. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

72. Pevsner, *ibid.*, pp. 103–107; see also Forty, “Wireless Style...” *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 28–30. As Pevsner notes, the E.K. Cole, Ltd. firm began producing Ekco radios in 1930. The company began experimenting with new materials, like Bakelite, by 1931, purchasing a Bakelite plant in Britain in 1932, primarily due to the rise of import duties on cabinets purchased from Germany. At first, the cost of moulding a large cabinet proved too costly, so the firm hired Chermayeff and Raymond McGrath to design new models. Of the six sketches produced by each, one by Chermayeff was chosen to be the AC 64 (1933). The following year, Chermayeff, McGrath, and Coates produced sketches, of which two of Coates’s were chosen, including the round AD 65, which I discuss below.

73. The editor of *Architectural Review* makes a connection between visual aesthetics and the moral mission of the BBC, arguing that “[t]he enlightenment which the B.B.C. employs in its programmes, it has also employed in its new building” (“The New Tower of London,” *Architectural Review*, vol. 72, no. 2, 1932, p. 43). No doubt Pevsner would have agreed, hence his pointing out designs by Coates and Chermayeff who both worked on the Broadcasting House interiors.

74. Lacey, “Radio in the Great Depression...,” *op. cit.*, p. 27.

that legislation afforded a mixed commercial and government-operated system of radio stations. Although some private stations—notably Rogers’s CFRB in Toronto—attempted to foster Canadian talent, as did the CBC (and its predecessor the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission), in both cases popular American programs were aired as well. This suggests some of the ambiguities in radio programming, which, I would argue, were borne out materially with Deco radio sets. In some ways, the Art Deco sets were probably more “honest” for the majority of listeners, given their unabashed association with consumer culture, which required a constant production of new models. That is, the radios “looked the part” for an entertainment medium. Even a government-monopolized broadcasting system was inherently indebted to the consumerist-based radio manufacturing industry.⁷⁵ The fact that the on-air content remained socially conservative—despite being a new and democratic medium—was in the end only reinforced through the popular Deco consoles of the period.

Pevsner’s concerns about the design of radio cabinets were shared, to some degree, in North America by the emerging field of industrial designers. In his 1932 book, *Horizons*, which helped to popularize both the profession of industrial designer and the hugely influential fashion of streamlining, Norman Bel Geddes spends some time discussing the design problems posed by the radio, even forecasting the use of Bakelite in future models.⁷⁶ He claims that “[r]adios [were] still in their horseless carriage days,” since they were still largely following the form of earlier phonographs (which in turn had been “an outgrowth of the music cabinet”).⁷⁷ Bel Geddes thinks that part of the problem holding up the development of good radio design was that many manufacturers were combining the radio with other pieces of furniture in an attempt “to disguise the fact that a radio is a radio.”⁷⁸ Designer Kem Weber goes even further, arguing that “[i]nstead of hiding the most beautiful part of the radio,” designers ought to “make the coils, tubes, adjusters, etc., the basis for beautification and design.”⁷⁹ For Weber, “[a] radio is not a piece of furniture [...] [but] an instrument, a mechanism, a bit of technical perfection, self-sufficient in design or expression like a telephone or automobile.”⁸⁰ Keeping with Modernist discourse about honesty of materials and form following

75. In Britain, radio set manufacturers were induced to form a single broadcast service by government legislation that barred the sale of foreign-made sets in the U.K. See Knowlton Nash, *The Microphone Wars: A History of Triumph and Betrayal at the CBC*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1994, p. 38.

76. Bel Geddes, *Horizons*, *op. cit.*, pp. 235–241.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

79. Kem Weber, untitled and unpublished paper (Kem Weber Fonds, Architecture and Design Collection, University Art Museum of the University of California at Santa Barbara, no date). David Gebhard suggests that the paper was likely written between 1930 and 1935. For more on Weber, see David Gebhard, “Kem Weber: Moderne Design in California, 1920–1940,” *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, vol. 2, summer–autumn 1986, pp. 20–31; and David Gebhard and Harriette Von Breton, *Kem Weber: The Moderne in Southern California, 1920–1941*, Santa Barbara, University Art Museum, University of California, 1969.

80. Weber, *ibid.*

function, Weber suggests that presenting a radio in period cabinets “is about equal to parading a Rolls Royce drawn by a team of well bred horses. It doesn’t make any difference how beautiful the horses are, it will always be ridiculous since it counteracts the purpose.”⁸¹ Despite his polemics, though, Weber’s actual radio designs do not suggest any revolutionary rethinking of the radio; in fact, as architecture and design historian David Gebhard puts it, Weber’s approach is “no different from the hide, seek, and discovery game of the traditionalist who placed radios and their speakers within Georgian highboys and Spanish chests.”⁸²

This contested discourse only serves to underwrite the significance of radio as a design object. It exposes the new medium’s complicated place between the ideals of modern designers and the constraints of commodity production for a consumer culture, mirroring in some ways the production of radio programs. As Forty suggests, “[t]he radio cabinet is a fruitful object for the study of design symbolism for the paradoxical reason that the radio receiver, a strange machine, has very little innate character of its own.”⁸³ This was not lost on Bel Geddes who announced: “Essentially the radio is one of the most representative products of the modern era, an era in which the mechanistic and the aesthetic are related.”⁸⁴ The visual symbolism—that is, the outward “look” of the modern—meant that even as ardent a modernist as Wells Coates would design what many design historians have characterized as an Art Deco radio.⁸⁵ As Forty notes, it was the choice of Ekco to use the material Bakelite for its radios that led to the aesthetic solutions developed by Coates as well as its unique quality.⁸⁶ Coates’s circular AD 65 (1934) took the speaker as the component deriving the overall form of the object, a form that also meant greater ease for moulding and a more machine-like appearance (fig. 4.6).⁸⁷ Stewart-Warner would design and produce in Canada a somewhat similar model, the R-192, a few years later (ca. 1936) (fig. 4.7).⁸⁸ The shape of these radios also alluded to the medium’s ability to reach out globally to pull in radio broadcasts. Unlike models that hid the radio apparatus, Coates’s

81. *Ibid.*

82. Gebhard, “Kem Weber...,” *op. cit.*, p. 26. See three examples of Weber’s radio designs reproduced in the article, pp. 29–30.

83. Forty, “Wireless Style...,” *op. cit.*, p. 30.

84. Bel Geddes, *Horizons*, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

85. For instance, Coates’s radio was featured in the 2003 Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition and catalogue as an example of a Deco radio set. See Gillian Naylor, “Conscience and Consumption: Art Deco in Britain,” in Benton *et al.*, *Art Deco 1910–1939*, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

86. Forty, “Wireless Style...,” *op. cit.*, p. 28. For a history of Bakelite, see Wiebe E. Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1995.

87. See *ibid.*, p. 30, for more.

88. This radio is featured in Swackhammer, *Radios of Canada*, *op. cit.*, p. 115. The same radio, with its metal case and chrome pillars, is pictured in Philip Collins, *Radios Redux: Listening in Style*, San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1991, p. 17, under the name “Good Companion” Model R-192 (1936). This suggests that the radio was produced for the American market as well, which is not surprising, given that Stewart Warner was a U.S.-based company.



◀ **Figure 4.6.**
Ekco Model AD-65,
designed by Wells
Coates for E.K.
Cole Ltd., 1934.
Bakelite case
(45.5 × 38 × 26.5 cm).

V&A Images/Designed by Wells Wintermute
Coates, 1932/Manufactured by E.K. Cole, 1934



◀ **Figure 4.7.**
Stewart Warner
"Good Companion"
Model R-192, 1936.
Metal cabinet,
chrome pillars.

Sam Sargent, Klaus Beckmann Collection.
Reproduced from Collins, *Radios Redux: Listening*
in Style (op. cit.), p. 17, with permission of photographer

model—much like the approach of other designers and manufacturers—accentuated the visual and sensual qualities of the spatial practice of radio listening. The engagement with the machine was an aesthetic one. The complexities of the radio's inner workings were disguised, but the use of chrome and Bakelite announced a distinctly and self-consciously modern activity. Design historian Gillian Naylor argues that the “avant-garde” radios by Chermayeff and Coates for Ekco “could be considered Modernist, Moderne or Art Deco according to use and context.”⁸⁹ From a Modernist perspective, Coates's model seems a technical solution to the production of radio design, and perhaps even an “honest” one, given the fact that the radio was given a unique form all its own. It was also designed with mass production in mind, suggesting an egalitarian approach to design—*i.e.*, high design at lower prices. But I argue that its aesthetic qualities and connection to consumer economy take precedent. High style here still retains a “high class” association, and Coates's radio, as much as any other Deco set, still seeks to visually evoke the medium primarily.⁹⁰

Paul T. Frankl's book *Machine-Made Leisure* (1932) illustrates the contradictions inherent to appearing modern, functional, and honest, yet continually producing newly designed versions of the same products.⁹¹ Like Pevsner, Frankl thinks that the development of an appropriate modern aesthetic, one that corresponds with the spirit of “Machine Age” America, could better society. However, Frankl believes that this aesthetic solution is grounded in consumer capitalism, associated with speed and dynamism, and could provide a solution to the economic Depression. He notes that

a new word has crept into the vocabulary of American business. The new word is “styling.” It denotes an original and vital factor in the industrial arts. In mass production, mass distribution, and mass consumption of machine-made merchandise, “styling” is a verb denoting style in action, style ever-changing, style functioning efficiently. Style, in brief, is a coefficient fact in modern consciousness and civilization.⁹²

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Frankl thus understood “style” in terms akin to what I have called the logic of fashion: in this instance an imbedded aesthetic response to contemporary culture that participates in the circulation of capital and consumer goods. From his

89. Naylor, “Conscience and Consumption...,” *op. cit.*, p. 237.

90. Coates would clad a radio in Perspex to allow its inner workings to be seen in his own studio home at 18 Yeoman's Row, Knightsbridge (destroyed). He explains: “I have enclosed too many beautiful radios with wood or bakelite.” See Elizabeth Darling, “Wells Coates: Maker of a Modern British Architecture,” *Architectural Review*, vol. 224, no. 1339, 2008, pp. 82–87.

91. Frankl was an Austrian-born designer who immigrated to America in the early 1910s. See my comments on Frankl in the Introduction, and for more on his career, see Long, *Paul T. Frankl and Modern American Design*, *op. cit.*

92. Paul T. Frankl, *Machine-Made Leisure*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1932, p. 80.

perspective, styling is “essentially a *problem of dramatization*.”⁹³ This dramatization leads to style consciousness, which “[f]or good or for evil [...] is related to mass production and mass production to the machine.”⁹⁴ Unlike a period cabinet that hides the device within, an Art Deco radio, like the Stewart-Warner R-192 (fig. 4.7), self-consciously stages the aestheticized radio device, reinforcing its “presentness.” Lockwood Barr, in a 1931 article discussing radio’s ambiguous space between specialty object and furniture, also emphasizes the place of style consciousness:

If given a choice between a beautiful object and one that is ugly [shoppers] will buy the beautiful object if the price is the same. Consider style and the ten-cent stores. Woolworth, while drawing buyers of Fifth Avenue class, caters mostly to people of modest means. Woolworth offers goods at ten cents which look as if they cost a dollar or more. These have all the style of the highest priced products with no claim to quality. Low cost and style sell them in huge quantities to style-conscious masses.⁹⁵

Frankl notes that “[m]oralists deplore the vast waste incurred by this new age of surplus; but who can deny that with democratization of style has come an ever wider, more varied and colorful freedom than was possible in the reign of the dismal science”?⁹⁶ A good example of cheaper, colourful options is the 1933 Air-King, one of the first plastic radio sets (Plaskon), designed by Harold Van Doren and John Gordon Rideout (fig. 4.8). Jeffrey Meikle argues that the success of this skyscraper-like model was not due so much to the design of the radio, but to its affordability. In fact, Van Doren was hired by Air-King Products Company largely because of his skill in working with plastic, and the decision to manufacture the case in Plaskon was mainly on account of reduced production costs, rather than aesthetic decisions.⁹⁷ I would argue, however, that aesthetic appeal was a significant factor in the success of these models, connoting no doubt for some consumers the modernity of radio listening. Ultimately, purchasing even a cheap radio was still an act laden with social meaning and representative, at least to some degree, of aesthetic

93. *Ibid.*, p. 105 (italics original). It is therefore not surprising that many of the industrial designers and advocates of modern design in the United States had backgrounds in theatre or advertising. As Jeffrey Meikle points out, the four leaders of industrial design in the U.S. during the 1930s “had no ties to the traditional decorative crafts. Walter Dorwin Teague had worked for more than fifteen years as an advertising illustrator, Norman Bel Geddes and Henry Dreyfuss had made successful careers as stage designers, and Raymond Loewy had become one of New York’s leading fashion illustrators” (*Twentieth Century Limited...*, *op. cit.*, p. 43). Christopher Innis’s *Designing Modern America: Broadway to Main Street* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005) likewise points out the connection between theatrical traditions and modern design, with his discussion of Joseph Urban and Norman Bel Geddes. One of the most self-conscious coalescences of advertising, design, and spectacle is Bel Geddes’s Futurama pavilion for General Motors at the New York World’s Fair of 1939. For more on it, see Innis, pp. 128–143; and Adnan Morshed, “The Aesthetics of Ascension in Norman Bel Geddes’s Futurama,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2004, pp. 76–99.

94. Frankl, *Machine-Made Leisure*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

95. Barr, “Radio: Furniture or Specialty?” *op. cit.*, p. 90.

96. Frankl, *Machine-Made Leisure*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

97. See Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 97–98.

Figure 4.8. ▶
Air King radio
 model 60-70, designed
 by John Gordon
 Rideout and Harold L.
 van Doren for Air
 King-Products Co.,
 1930–1933. Plaskon
 (plastic), metal, glass
 (29.8 × 22.5 × 19.1 cm).
 Purchased with funds
 given by The Walter
 Foundation. Decorative
 Arts Collection,
 Brooklyn Museum.

Reproduced with permission of Brooklyn Museum



interest. The skyscraper form likely signifies a sense of power, while the Egyptian-type figures suggest an association of mystery, and together the radio announces a fashionability and expression of popular tastes (*i.e.*, the skyscraper was indicative of contemporary architecture, and Egyptomania and interest in ancient Near Eastern and Central American cultures were in vogue).⁹⁸ Again, the mode appears the amalgam of elite (even aristocratic) and popular tastes. And this mirrors radio programming, which offered symphonies and jazz, Shakespeare and soap operas.⁹⁹

98. For a consideration of the influence of Egyptomania on Art Deco and Modernist visual culture, see Bridget Elliott, "Art Deco Worlds in a Tomb: Reanimating Egypt in Modern(ist) Visual Culture," *South Central Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2008, pp. 114–135.

99. For more on radio programming and listening patterns in Canada, see Anne Frances MacLennan, "Circumstances beyond Our Control: Canadian Radio Program Schedule Evolution during the 1930s," PhD dissertation, Concordia University, Montréal, 2001.

Turning to the issue of leisure, Frankl attempts to connect the style of commodities to the solution of the Depression.¹⁰⁰ For him, “[t]he most complex problem that the machine has hurled at twentieth-century civilization is that of finding an aesthetic solution for our leisure.” Americans, he argues, have been spoiled by “toys” of the “Machine Age”—“these talking pictures, these radios, these motor-cars, these electric toasters, these phonographs, which seem such utter necessities to the broad masses of the American public.” These toys, together with professional sports, newspapers, “[a]ll imply more time for enjoyment and fewer hours in factories, shops, and offices.”¹⁰¹ Just as waste is not necessarily a bad thing—indeed it is necessary for consumer culture—leisure time, which is presupposed in machine-age culture, “is not necessarily a useless, wasteful luxury.”¹⁰² In fact, “[l]eisure may be a real life necessity, and the so-called leisure activities, or enterprises undertaken to support the needs and the enjoyment of leisure, may indeed do more to bring back prosperity than the building of industrial plants and the needless proliferation of factories.”¹⁰³ Frankl proposes a twenty-four hour work week with “enforced leisure for everybody” that would “create endless new jobs for recreation purposes.”¹⁰⁴ “But this leisure,” he contends, “must be of a new and unprecedented type—not the *dolce far niente* of the Italian; not the passive contemplation of the Oriental; but an American leisure, wrapped in cellophane!”¹⁰⁵ By using the “machine as the instrument for the creation of new leisure,” he concludes, “we are re-creating our social values. We are establishing an end toward which it is desirable to work, providing, of course, that we may utilize that leisure as a method of education and developing the race, as a path, in brief, to artistic creation and aesthetic enjoyment.”¹⁰⁶ Art Deco-styled radios fit into this scheme, providing entertainment and education during (regimented) leisure time while corresponding with contemporary, consumerist values.

In fact, Frankl’s belief in a “democratization of style” seems to resonate with similar claims made about radio’s democratizing potential. As Vipond points out, in the mid-1920s, many were optimistic about the new medium, with one editor even going so far as to claim that “[t]here are no class distinctions in the air!”¹⁰⁷ However radio, like Art Deco in general, did not “re-create social values,” as Frankl had hoped. Rather, both only reinscribed class distinctions. As Frankl’s comments on “the passive contemplation of the Oriental” make clear, the new “social values” of

100. An entire issue of *Architectural Record* (vol. 75, no. 3, 1934) was dedicated to the “problem” of leisure.

101. Frankl, *Machine-Made Leisure*, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–179.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

107. Reactions are quoted and discussed in Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23. She cites reactions from *Canadian Home Journal*, *Toronto Star*, *Radio*, *Wireless and Aviation News*, and *Radio News of Canada*.

a technocratic consumer culture were still firmly based on cultural stereotypes, even prejudice. In terms of programming, we need only think of the enormous popularity of *Amos 'n' Andy*—a hit in the U.S. and Canada alike—to remember the blatant reinforcement of sociocultural norms on the air.¹⁰⁸ More generally on the issue of class, as Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno point out in their scathing analysis of the culture industry of 1944, radio

democratically makes everyone equally into listeners, in order to expose them in authoritative fashion to the same programs put out by different stations. No mechanism of reply has been developed, and private transmissions are condemned to unfreedom [...] Any trace of spontaneity in the audience of the official radio is steered and absorbed into a selection of specializations by talent-spothers, performance competitions, and sponsored events of every kind. The talents belong to the operation long before they are put on show; otherwise they would not conform so eagerly. The mentality of the public, which allegedly and actually favors the system of the culture industry, is part of the system, not an excuse for it.¹⁰⁹

Horkheimer and Adorno's work implies the hegemonic powers at work in free-market American radio, and their assertion could likely extend to areas of design to explain the popularization of Art Deco—a style that for the most part buttressed the same power base. Although rightly criticized for limiting the agency of the consumer (for indeed radio listeners can choose stations and vicariously participate in activities), their point about cultural industries keeping up with popular trends and perceptions of audiences and incorporating these tactics into strategies of dissemination and appeal should not be dismissed.¹¹⁰ Just as Art Deco spaces evoked and referenced modern privilege and the potential of a new, more affluent society, radio promised access to information and entertainment and connection to a world (likely more imagined than real) that previous generations could not have dreamt of.

Buying into that fantasy—literally by way of deferred payment—only helped to (re)create what Jean Baudrillard has dubbed the simulacrum.¹¹¹ Baudrillard argues that consumerist society (particularly post-industrial

108. Jason Loviglio discusses how radio allowed both a transcendence yet reinscription of differences in his book *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

109. Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr [trans. Edmund Jephcott], Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, Series "Cultural Memory in the Present," pp. 95–96.

110. Michel de Certeau offers a more nuanced approach in *The Practice of Everyday Life* [trans. Steven Rendall], Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984. He describes how people "make do" with tactics that provide a sense of agency, and while their tactics are no match for the strategies of larger corporate or government forces, they provide room for the expression of individualism. I believe, like Henri Lefebvre, that de Certeau sees the everyday as a site of potential for social change, although de Certeau's model suggests a more gradual change compared to that in the more Marxist writing of Lefebvre.

111. See Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in Mark Poster (ed.) [trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman], *Jean Baudrillard Selected Writings*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001 [2nd ed., rev.], pp. 169–187; as well as Mark Poster's "Introduction," pp. 1–12.

consumer society) has become hyperreal. That is, with the proliferation of mass media, images have become more “real” than objects, leaving a world of simulacra and simulations with little grounding in reality. The images precede and determine the real; thus simulations have “real” consequences, show “real” symptoms, but (and because) there is no stepping outside the simulacrum. Since modern society is fundamentally mediated through images, there is no longer any meaningful distinction between artifice and nature. While Baudrillard’s argument is aimed at post-modern culture more particularly, he does, as I noted in the Introduction, see the advent of this cultural formation in the late 1920s with the rise and sophistication of advertising and entrenchment of consumerist values. Putting aside the valid criticisms of his work—including its pessimism regarding agency and premising on a nostalgic lack of the “real”—I think it is still valuable in considering the inculcation of consumerist values. It seems to me that the fact of advertising deferred payments on machines used to escape (or defer) “reality” for a period of time is suggestive of a socio-cultural formation that, if not premised on hyperreality, is at least fundamentally grounded on highly mediated and thus abstracted relationships (by way of media and capital). As I suggested in chapter 2 with reference to the work of William Leach, I think that we might characterize the social space of consumer capitalism as governed by a “democracy of desire.” This model proposes a sense of agency (albeit circumscribed) and supports some kind of system of simulacra. Returning to the radio, the economic reality of buying on credit in order to escape reality for a while by “listening in” becomes engulfed by the image presented by the Deco radio cabinet. In other words, the radio, as a material object and visual icon, both signifies and reinforces the systems of mobility that weld the consumer/listener to a technocratic (even glamorous) consumerist culture.

A prime example of a glamorous radio that signifies mobilities is the Sparton Model 154B “Bluebird” (*ca.* 1936),¹¹² produced for the Canadian market in the Sparton Plant in London, Ontario (fig. 4.9). Just as Murphy and Ekco turned to architect-engineer-designers in Britain to submit designs for their radio cabinets, the Sparks-Withington Company of Jackson, Michigan (the makers of Sparton radios) commissioned Walter Dorwin Teague to design a series of sets. Teague was one of the most prolific industrial designers in the United States, famously working for Eastman Kodak as well as designing Texaco gas stations that were adopted across the U.S., and thus his name brought some celebrity to the new radio designs.¹¹³ Indeed, there was a good deal of anticipation leading up to the Bluebird’s unveiling at the National Electrical and Radio Exposition held

112. The American model was numbered 506. There were some subtle differences between the Canadian 154B and the 506. The Canadian model had an upward-facing speaker in a peaked cab rather than forward-facing speaker, as had the American model. Canadian safety regulations required an AC-powered chassis with a power transformer (which explains the larger, peaked cab and differently-oriented speaker). See “Sparton Model 566 ‘Bluebird’ Blue Mirror Radio (1935/1936),” TubeRadioLand.com, n.d., <http://www.tuberadioland.com/sparton566bluebird_main.html>, accessed January 2012.

113. For more on Teague, see Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–48; and on Texaco, pp. 125, 128.



Michael Windover (2008)

Figure 4.9.
Sparton Model 506
Bluebird, designed
for Sparton by Walter
Dorwin Teague and
manufactured in
London (ON), 1935
(knobs not original).
Mirror, chrome, wood
(37.5 × 37 × 30 cm).
SPARC (Society for the
Preservation of Antique
Radio in Canada)
Museum Collection,
Coquitlam (BC).

in New York's Grand Central Palace in September of 1935.¹¹⁴ The 154B features a 14.5 inch diameter, circular cobalt blue (or old rose [peach]) mirror affixed to a five-tube, AD-DC superheterodyne circuit radio covered in a black-enamelled wooden box. Promotional material describes how "[t]he beautiful circle of rich, dark midnight blue mirror surface slants backwards at an artistically correct angle, concealing a dependable five tube radio receiver of finest design and construction."¹¹⁵ A switch on the back of the radio allows access to either broadcast or shortwave reception: "The repertoire of the Bluebird embraces not only the usual broadcast programs, but interesting police, airplane and amateur events as well."¹¹⁶ Three parallel chrome "speed lines" race across the lower half of the façade, transgressing the space of two concentric circles. Three knobs (left for volume, centre for tuning, and right for tone control) sit atop the first

114. TubeRadioLand.com.

115. Cited in Doug Heimstead, "Sparton's Mirrored Radios," *Antique Radio Classified*, vol. 4, no. 12, 1987, pp. 4–5.

116. Promotional material cited in *ibid.*, p. 5.

chrome circle, which surrounds a metal mesh (even though the grille is actually on the top of the radio—a point that again reinforces the priority of visual effect over functionality). The second circle encloses a small dial that includes the silhouette of a bluebird.¹¹⁷

For historians Robert Heide and John Gilman, Teague's design "resembled automobile grilles and dashboards."¹¹⁸ Compared to period-style cabinets, the Sparton Bluebird (or other new plastic, metal, or even streamlined wooden radios) seemed like a mechanical instrument. But that machine for listening did not signal a return to the outwardly mechanistic models of the early 1920s; rather, it appeared the embodiment of Bel Geddes's appeal for a "representative product" of modernity, one which made tangible the link between the mechanistic and aesthetic, much like contemporary automobile designs.¹¹⁹ By referring to movement with the use of speed lines and circular forms—not to mention the name, which echoed that of internationally famous racer Sir Malcolm Campbell's automobile¹²⁰—the Bluebird alluded to the underlying systems of mobility that made up modern societies. Just as radio compressed the world and seemed to capture and intonate the upbeat tempos of modern lifestyle, visually the radio cabinet resonated with the designs of local movie theatres, gas stations, modern advertising, and other elements making up public culture that all seemed to sing "movement" in unison. The radio cabinet as an object and commodity thus reinforced a larger aesthetic of mobility in the home, extending the simulacrum while carrying traces of the real, both in terms of the economic and performed daily life activity.

The polished surface of the radio cabinet highlighted the interchange between public and private spaces. Radio programs altered the space around the radio, bringing the public into the private, and the private space was simultaneously and literally reflected on the surface of the radio, the purveyor of "outside" entertainment and news from within its aestheticized mechanical apparatus. The radio sat at a liminal position, emphasizing a blurring of boundaries. The fact that these radios were often sold with a fourteen-inch mirrored plate upon which to rest the radio only furthered this mirroring process. These surfaces would also make radio listening a conscious act, as listeners tuning in, adjusting volume or tone, or even simply looking at the radio while listening would see themselves performing these very activities. They would see themselves operating this mechanic device, controlling the flow of information. The practice of listening would resonate with other modern activities, like shopping,

117. Some models included a map instead.

118. Robert Heide and John Gilman, *Popular Art Deco: Depression Era Style and Design*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1991, p. 107.

119. Bel Geddes would design the catalin "Patriot" radio for the Emerson Radio and Phonograph Corporation of New York in 1939, available in a combination of red, white, and blue. With the American entry into the Second World War on the horizon, the radio might be read as a gesture reinforcing links of radio to American technological development and to commodity production.

120. Campbell was knighted in 1931 by George V after setting another land speed record at Daytona. He set nine land speed records between 1924 and 1935, as well as four water speed records in a boat named the *Bluebird K4*.

where one feels empowered by the right to choose, but does not have direct control over content. So, in a sense, the radio continued its life as a commodity, or at least reinforced the logic of consumption. All the while, it signalled technological mastery at a time of acute desperation for many, and operated as gateway to other worlds.

The Bluebird, like other Art Deco radios—especially those constructed from new materials—was also a glamorous object (fig. 4.10). No longer would the modernity of radio listening need to be suggested through “modernistic” ornament in advertisements, for now the object itself seems imbued with the spirit of the “Machine Age.” Indeed, styling this early electronic device might be seen to correspond with a more general glamorization of technology, including military applications. With its mirrored finish, the Bluebird expands space and suggests possibilities; in essence, it refers to an engagement with otherness within the everyday. In fact, it makes plain the contradictory forces that make up the everyday: the routine and mundane, and yet the chance encounter with the extraordinary.¹²¹ Thus radio seems to pull the very intimate into the public, which might again reinforce the medium’s inherently intimate yet profoundly public qualities. The Bluebird’s reflective surface was akin to

Figure 4.10.
Jimmy Stewart
and Virginia Bruce;
still from *Born to
Dance* (director Roy
Del Ruth, MGM, 1936).



Metro-Goldwin-Mayer Studios, 1936

121. For a good introduction to the growing body of literature around the everyday, see Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction*, London, Routledge, 2002; and Ben Highmore (ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002.

contemporary designs of vanities. In some cases, these vanities were completely mirrored, like those constructed for Hollywood bedroom sets. Interestingly, the Bluebird was prominently featured in the 1936 film *Born to Dance* (director Roy Del Ruth, MGM) when Virginia Bruce sings “I’ve Got You under My Skin” to Jimmy Stewart in a luxurious penthouse suite.¹²² In figure 4.10, we see Bruce’s face reflected in the radio (obscured partly by Stewart’s hands and drink), visually linking her voice to the apparatus. Such association with Hollywood (Bruce even plays an actress in the film) only serves to enhance the glamour of the radio, while the visual connection with bedroom furniture might suggest an extension of female public space, a point to which I will return below. Ultimately, the Bluebird, as a glamorous object, proves to be a prescient example of the repeated mirrorings inherent to a consumer culture that fetishizes the commodity. Not only were payments deferred, but so were realizations of the fantasies suggested by programs and by the object itself. Whether we consider the Deco radio designs “Utopian” or simply a style associated with optimism, as I have argued in earlier chapters, we can see how the visual form of the radio actually mirrored the positive, crisis-recovery narrative of the new program genres of serial dramas and soap operas developing in the 1930s.¹²³

■ Being Here and Elsewhere Together: Radio Cosmopolitanism

The Sparton Bluebird, even with its name, connoted freedom and travel. The visual association with an automobile and streamlining in general, which alluded to the speed and efficiency of the airplane,¹²⁴ only reinforced the idea of movement, escape, and yet control. As Meikle argues, “[s]teamlining was paradoxically a style of retreat and consolidation as well as one of penetration and forward progress.”¹²⁵ The desire for an unchanging, “frictionless society whose scientists and engineers would eliminate uncertainties and complexities” was largely due to the shock of the Depression and of rapid technological development, which some believed

122. Heide and Gilman, *Popular Art Deco...*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

123. See Lacey, “Radio in the Great Depression...,” *op. cit.*, p. 27. Her comments are based on the work of cultural historian Warren Susman. For example, see Susman’s *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1984.

124. Interestingly enough, it was the streamlining of the locomotive, a technology of the nineteenth century, which marked the explosion of enthusiasm for streamlining in American society, as Meikle points out (“From Depression to Expression,” in *Twentieth Century Limited...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 153–187).

125. Meikle, *ibid.*, p. 185. He argues that “the streamlined style expressed not only a phallic technological thrust into a limitless future. Its dominant image, the rounded, womblike teardrop egg, expressed also a desire for a passive, static society, in which social and economic frictions engendered by technological acceleration would be eliminated.” For an intriguing connection between streamlining and eugenics in the period, see Christina Cogdell, *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s*, Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia Press, 2004.

was causing unemployment.¹²⁶ The Art Deco radio, which aestheticized the activity of radio listening, thus had socio-political ramifications. Indeed, unlike other streamlined commodities, the radio cabinet had a more pronounced socio-political dimension, for not only did it contribute to an aestheticization of technology and therefore reinforced tenets of machine-age ideology, but the medium it projected was politically significant. With the radio cabinet—as with the architectural infrastructure of radio—politics often met aesthetics quite directly.

This connection is exemplified in the line of Northern Electric radios designed to commemorate the May 12, 1937, coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (fig. 4.11).¹²⁷ The models, sporting names associated with British Royalty, are advertised as tickets to attend the crowning of Canada's next head of state. This was obviously a major public event, but was even more politically significant given the earlier abdication crisis of Edward VIII in late 1936. The advertisement published in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper in Toronto compresses the space between the events in London and Canadian living rooms. A family is pictured sitting around a handsome, new receiving set, imagining the royal procession. The father of the family, relaxed at home with his pipe in hand, appears to point out the processional route to mother and son in the local newspaper, indicating the interpenetration of media and power available now for Canadian citizens, thousands of kilometres away from the epicentre of empire, to participate in the experience. Here radio is pictured as enhancing accessibility, allowing British subjects' proximity to exclusive spaces in a manner unavailable prior to the advent of radio and radio networks. And again, the radio is seen as a modernizing force but one which reinforces existing social hierarchies: new electronic media used to bring messages from the king.¹²⁸

Radio was thus thoroughly a product of modernity. On the one hand it represented the speed and immediacy of modern progress, yet, as this example shows, it buttressed tradition. In fact, as Lacey underlines, radio programming, whether in the United States, the United Kingdom, or Germany, was infused with a sense of nostalgia to engender a strong sense

126. Meikle, *ibid.*, p. 165. For a discussion of the anxieties around mechanization, see also Susan Currell, *The March of Spare Time: The Problem and Promise of Leisure in the Great Depression*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. Paul T. Frankl's *Machine-Made Leisure* calls for a domestication of the machine by aesthetic means, a point that illustrates the unease in contemporary discourse around the machine, its relation to employment, to leisure, and even to industrial design.

127. McNeil and Wolfe, *Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada*, *op. cit.*, p. 81, reproduces a Northern Electric advertisement featuring all the models of the "Coronation Series." These include: the "Buckingham" Model 721 (\$109.95), the "Windsor" Model 521 (\$67.95), the "Edinburgh" Model 420 (\$39.95), the "Glamis" Model 320 (\$24.45), the "St. James" Model 520 (\$49.25), and the "Balmoral" Model 422 (\$34.45). An ad similar to figure 4.11, although featuring the "Windsor" model, was published in the *Globe and Mail*, March 24, 1937, p. 9.

128. The first transoceanic broadcast carried King George V's Christmas message via the Empire Service in 1932. For more on the "ritualistic regularity" of programs associated with national identity (messages from the king, notably), see David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell, "Broadcasting and National Unity," in James Curran, Anthony Smith, and Pauline Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences: Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century*, London, Methuen, 1987, pp. 157–173.

Follow the CORONATION *via* Northern Electric RADIO



THE CORONATION SERIES provides your ticket to a grandstand seat at the Coronation Procession. Northern Electric designed this line of low cost, high value receivers so that the Canadian radio audience might listen to the Coronation Broadcast — and all the thrilling entertainment that will precede and follow it — and hear it as it actually is spoken into the microphone! Above is illustrated the

ST. JAMES model 520, a 5-tube long and short wave A.C. receiver featuring **MAGNA DIAL** tuning. Ask your Northern Electric dealer about this new and exclusive feature that means more foreign stations, greater ease of tuning! Sells at \$49.25 — there are other A.C. and D.C. models in the Coronation Series ranging in price from \$24.45 to \$109.95.



THE GLADIS, Model 322 — sets a new low price and new performance standards among "portable" radios. Only \$24.45



The BALMORAL, Model 412-A 4-tube A.C. Standard Wave Pyramet. Set., with edge lighted grid dial. \$34.45

Northern Electric Company Limited

Tremendous demand for the de luxe edition of "These to Your Kings," entitled the story of Britain's Monarchy over the past nine centuries, has induced Northern Electric to publish a popular edition, distributed FREE. If you would like to have one, just ask your Northern Electric dealer, your nearest Northern Electric branch, or send this coupon to Dept. 35, 1261 Shearer Street, Montreal. No. 6

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

S U P P R E M E
S O U N D

Figure 4.11.
Advertisement for Northern
Electric "Coronation Series" radios.

of community or nation.¹²⁹ That is no doubt why McLuhan characterizes the radio as a “tribal drum,” a modern medium of violent force premised on the psychically powerful orality of “traditional” cultures, a point to which I will return.¹³⁰

The advertisements offered a variety of radio consoles appealing to different budgets. With the small, three-tube, Glamis model, Canadians could connect to their local stations, which would carry the international broadcast on the new CBC network (founded in 1936, and which grew out of the earlier Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission established in 1932).¹³¹ With more expensive models featuring long- and short-wave receiving capabilities, Canadians could tune into the events in London directly. Both methods of connecting presupposed a growing and complex infrastructure of worldwide communication, concretized with the founding of the Empire Service and the erection of the Broadcasting House in London, both in 1932.¹³² The same year saw the establishment of preferential tariffs between Dominions and the Empire discussed at the Imperial Economic Conference held in Ottawa, a move which ostensibly created a privileged imperial economy. Thus, we might see radio, as a cosmopolitan medium, working in concert with economic policy to reinforce the unity of Empire. The Coronation Series, produced by a Canadian company (albeit with direct ties to the U.S.)¹³³ for a Canadian audience to mark an imperial event, further exemplifies (even materializes) the idea of radio listening as a cosmopolitan activity. The radio cabinets themselves have no outward reference to the occasion besides their names. However, they are styled in a non-

129. Lacey, “Radio in the Great Depression...,” *op. cit.*, p. 32. She builds on arguments made by Cardiff and Scannell.

130. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

131. Public radio in Canada was a hot topic throughout the interwar years. The first national network was produced to carry the celebratory events marking Canada’s sixtieth birthday on July 1, 1927, while the first transatlantic broadcast, a Thanksgiving Service from Westminster Abbey marking the recovery of King George V, was aired in 1928. These early national networks were largely the work of the Canadian National Railway, which had introduced radio into its hotels and passenger trains, as noted above. In 1929, the Aird Commission reported to Parliament, advocating the establishment of a publicly owned and regulated radio company based on the model of the BBC. With the fall of the Mackenzie King Liberal Government and the emergence of the Great Depression, action on establishing the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission was delayed until 1932, under R.B. Bennett’s Conservative Government. Mackenzie King would lead his party to government in the election of 1935 and would reorganize the CRBC as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1936. The CBC would struggle through the end of the 1930s, but would come to prominence with the outbreak of the Second World War and today continues to be a successful example of public radio. For more on these events and the early years of Canadian broadcasting in Canada, see E. Austin Weir, *The Struggle for National Broadcasting in Canada*, *op. cit.*; and Michael Nolan, *Foundations: Alan Plaunt and the Early Days of CBC Radio*, Montréal, CBC Enterprises, 1986. For an oral history, see McNeil and Wolfe, *Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada*, *op. cit.* For a useful collection of primary sources on the early days of radio and the establishment of the CBC, including legislation and contemporary debates in the press, see Roger Bird (ed.), *Documents of Canadian Broadcasting*, Ottawa, Carleton University Press, 1988.

132. The Broadcasting House was not only described as the “new Tower of London,” but also compared to a battleship at the time of its construction, given its nautical sensibilities, and no doubt alluding to the ruling of the air-waves. *Architectural Review*, vol. 72, no. 2, 1932, p. 46. The comparison was repeated in Waters, “Broadcasting Stations,” *op. cit.*, pp. 215–218.

133. Northern Electric was partly owned by Western Electric in the United States.

historical, Art Deco mode, which speaks to the modernity of the activity of seemingly participating in a royal coronation. And their Deco style may have suggested a glamorous connotation associated with aristocracy.

For countries like Australia and Canada, which had thinly dispersed populations, the radio was seen as a political and social unifier of great potential.¹³⁴ But cosmopolitanism that ignored political borders also created some anxiety for Canadians, even from the mid-1920s.¹³⁵ In a *MacLean's Magazine* article entitled "Canada's Radio Consciousness" from 1924, Elton Johnson argues that the fact

[t]hat radio will have an important influence in moulding and changing Canadian home life will be admitted. But will radio have anything to do with our national consciousness? Will it serve to unite or dis-unite the several provinces and communities in this Dominion? Will it increase or diminish our national patriotism?

Radio has a broadening influence. The man who can swing from Cleveland to New York to Montreal and to Zion City in five minutes must inevitably lose some of his narrow-minded, parochial instincts. But with our present standards of transmitting equipment in Canada, radio is doing very little to increase national unity.¹³⁶

The concerns about the power of radio to unite the country, but, simultaneously, effect a cultural colonization by the United States, were shared by many and led ultimately to the establishment of the CBC. As Robert S. Fortner has shown, radio had moralistic consequences.¹³⁷ "Canadian home life" was at stake, as lifestyles were being influenced or "moulded" by international influences in a manner unlike the effects of print capitalism or even movie-going. This passage indicates some of the complexities of radio space faced by Canadians. While radio's cosmopolitanism is seen to have a positive "broadening effect" on "narrow-minded, parochial" Canadian minds, it likewise poses a threat to a unique,

134. Douglas B. Craig, in his discussion of the politics of radio in United States, notes that the Australian and Canadian models were discussed as possibilities early on. See his *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 42-45.

135. Cultural imperialist concerns were likewise shared by Americans in radio's early days. For example, see "Radio Corporation of America," *Fortune*, February 1930, pp. 82-84, 128, 130, 142. The author suggests that the establishment of RCA was a patriotic act that benefited from President Wilson's long-term thinking about the prospects of radio at the Paris Treaty negotiations in 1919. "For years the British had been masters of world communication," reported the author, but following the acquisition of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America, "a British Goliath was now faced with a redoubtable American David" (pp. 82, 84). See also Craig, *ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

136. Elton Johnson, "Canada's Radio Consciousness," *MacLean's Magazine*, October 15, 1924, p. 52.

137. He argues that Canadians "objected not only to the American presence on Canadian airwaves, but also to the government's efforts to 'monopolize' radio." Robert S. Fortner, *Radio, Morality, and Culture: Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1919-1945*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 2005, p. 145. This in many ways indicated the position of Canada in the period. Although many of the cultural elite and government officials wanted a system extolling British values (often called Canadian values), they had to compete with the popular and powerful influence of American commercial culture. Keep in mind, for example, the opening epithet to this chapter. All of the personalities of the fantasy world in the interviewee's memory of the Depression were American. Canadian identity was expressed, and indeed legislated, as culturally negotiated.

national identity. The cultural benefits of radio are entirely dependent on technological advances and investment in transmitting infrastructure. And the central battlefield of this political and cultural struggle is squarely situated in the home.

In the end, the CBC model recognized national identity as culturally negotiated between commercial and public interests. The Deco radio cabinet with its cosmopolitan, and non-historical, look could be read perhaps as encouraging this process. In aestheticizing the forms of mobility that made radio listening possible, manufacturers highlighted the imaginative potential of the radio, even as it helped to reinforce imagined communities of nation in the often over-heated political discourse of the period. Unlike, for example, the Marine Building with its iconographic strategy of inculcating notions of locality or place, Art Deco radios, like the Northern Electric models, signalled—indeed intensified—a complex negotiation of culture based on negation. Although Canadians indulged in American entertainment and news, they did so from a removed and often critical position, which meant that, in many instances, a Canadian identity was informed in part by what it was defined against. This meant that buying automobiles or radios that were based on American designs, or from companies owned ultimately by American interests, did not necessarily suggest a cultural identity crisis, but rather pointed to the complex cultural negotiations that economically weaker countries must undertake in order to mark out individual and national senses of identity. In some ways, the use of Art Deco facilitated the process, having as it did some stylistic roots and sources from outside the country, allowing for selective borrowings/appropriations to emphasize national or local cultures in either an additive (e.g., Marine Building) or subtractive (radio) manner. Listening to an American radio (or more likely, a radio based on American designs and patents)¹³⁸ thus did not necessarily invoke an American

138. Vipond's research illustrates the enormous impact of American companies on Canadian radio manufacturing. Following the American example of the establishment of RCA, which ostensibly shut out British interests in the U.S. market and consolidated radio patents, Canadian General Electric (CGE), Canadian Marconi, Westinghouse of Canada, Bell Canada, Northern Electric, and International Western Electric (a subsidiary of Western Electric) pooled their patents with the 1923 signing of the Canadian Radio License Agreement. Manufacturing rights were allocated to Canadian Marconi, CGE, and Canadian Westinghouse. This was superseded by the Canadian Radio Patents Ltd. (CRPL), created in 1926 and which additionally included Standard Radio Manufacturing, the parent company of Rogers (and later, following a 1929 merger with the American Grigsby-Grunow Company of Canada, Rogers-Majestic). CRPL issued licences to other radio manufacturers using the patents controlled by the signatories. With the exception of Marconi (with a British parent) and Rogers-Majestic (Canadian-owned), patent rights were derivative of American parent companies. In 1927, 61 percent of radios sold in Canada were imported; however, this dropped to 36 percent in 1930, 11 percent in 1931, and 0.4 percent in 1932, due in large part to protectionist tariffs. That said, in 1932, "60.1 per cent of the capital invested in Canadian radio manufacturing was American, 33.8 per cent Canadian, 4.8 per cent British, and 1.3 percent other." In 1929 and 1930, 38 and 37 percent respectively of radios sold in Canada were actually Canadian made, while more than 50 percent were imported or assembled in Canada entirely from foreign parts. According to Vipond (*Listening In: The First Decade...*, *op. cit.*, p. 33), this implied that "Canadian radio receivers were essentially the same as American." She goes on to observe that the parent companies undertook most of the research and development, "although

cultural experience in Canada; rather, since the designs leaned toward the cosmopolitan, it merely emphasized the political nature of radio listening and the unique position of radio listening next to an emerging superpower.

It is interesting to note that the use of Art Deco for radio cabinets on a larger scale of production also coincided with the advent of all-wave radios, around 1932, a point not noticed by design historians.¹³⁹ The sense of power to “listen in” to stations all over the globe, as well as police channels closer to home, found visual form in cosmopolitan Art Deco. While some earlier brand names of radios in Canada had suggested military or political domination (e.g., The Hudson’s Bay Company “Dictator” radios), new models emerged with names associated with the conquest of time and space, including, for instance, the Sparton “Corsican” model of 1934 (an update of the earlier Sparton Model 270 seen in figs. 4.4 and 4.5), which was described in an advertisement as being “[l]ike Napoleon, small in stature, World-Wide in scope.”¹⁴⁰ Again, radio is presented here as offering a sense of power. A contemporaneous Westinghouse advertisement adopts the same strategy for its line of “World Cruisers” (fig. 4.12). Now a family of relatively modest means, pictured sitting together around a map of the world, can plan a world cruise, promoting a notion of democratized luxury.¹⁴¹ The large round dial on the front of the cabinets is suggestive of a speedometer or perhaps a dial from the cockpit of an airplane, connecting the sense of speed and movement to the relatively stationary activity of radio listening. Like the 1933 Sparton ad, only the tabletop model appears in modernistic garb, while the floor models seem a somewhat more awkward melding of technology and more “traditional” wooden cabinetry, a problem resolved, to some degree, in the following year’s Air-Pilot model.¹⁴²

The World Cruiser advertisement resonates with the Northern Electric ad of a few years later (fig. 4.11), with father, again pipe in hand, directing the family’s activity, reaffirming his position as head of the household despite the economic hardships that were seen to emasculate

minor design modifications were made in some Canadian plants to adapt to special Canadian circumstances such as more long-distance listening.” Despite the huge impact of American companies in manufacturing, they did not play a major role in broadcasting in the country, largely because most Canadians could tune in to American broadcasts already. As Vipond notes, this “meant that no organizations with large amounts of money had a compelling motive to set up strong stations” in Canada, although Rogers in Toronto and Marconi in Montréal did set up more moderately scaled stations (in comparison to the U.S. manufacturers) (p. 47).

139. Rogers, for instance, launched its first All-Wave Radio in the Christmas season of 1932. See Anthony, *Radio Wizard: Edward Samuel Rogers...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–74. Forty notes the change in style in Britain over a period, from 1928–1933, in “Wireless Style...,” *op. cit.*
140. See the advertisement for Sparton “Corsican” model, *Maclean’s Magazine*, September 15, 1934, p. 36. The notion of conquering time and space with the new technological device might have resonated as well with radio’s links to military use, both in terms of its technological development during the Great War, and its association with the mobilization of totalitarian regimes during the 1930s and early 1940s.
141. For more on the notion of luxury, see Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 1994.
142. See the advertisement for Westinghouse “Air Pilot,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1935, p. 55.

Figure 4.12.
*Advertisement for 1934
Westinghouse “World
Cruiser” model.*

the male workforce. It reads almost the same as the slightly earlier *Canadian Homes and Gardens* article discussed above, where the author lauds the 1933–1934 models:

Many of the new models are equipped with dual-wave equipment, which makes it a simple matter to “go abroad” for the dance music of Paris, London, Cuba, to receive exciting messages from ships at sea, and so on. Modern radio offers a thrilling contact with the whole world—none the less thrilling because it comes in the form of education and amusement, and because it is perhaps the most vital factor, in these times, of binding the family to the home.¹⁴³

The modern radio here is associated with centres of high culture (Paris and London) as well as the exotic (Cuba), with adventure (ships at sea), and apparently most critically with the home. At a time when many families were losing their homes and men were abandoning families in search of work, the image of a happy family embarking on a world cruise or indulging in exotic dance music together would be seen as quite vital to the success of the nation. The image of a safe and secure family stood in sharp contrast to the tent cities—called “Hoovervilles” in the U.S.—springing up across the continent. Indeed, these ads, much like radio dramas, reinforced the composition of the nuclear family. Coming into “thrilling contact with the whole world” via an Art Deco receiver was much better than coming into contact with the outside world by way of work camps or breadlines. And from a government or major employer’s perspective, experiencing the world as mediated through the radio at home was preferable than through picket lines or protests. Art Deco radio receivers, like contemporary newspaper buildings such as the Daily News Building in New York (Howells and Hood, 1929) and the Toronto Star Building in Toronto (Chapman and Oxley, 1929), typified the tensions within Art Deco to simultaneously signal the new and current and yet reinforce more conservative institutions.¹⁴⁴

Art Deco radios were thus fraught with contradictions. They might be seen as reinforcing the dominant ideologies, as inciting consumption and a distancing from traditional public spaces. Just as the radio cabinets aestheticized the movement of radio waves, visually friezing the combined movement of electricity, information, and capital—the systems that made radio listening possible—social commentators were concerned that the public was likewise becoming passive before the sets. For instance, Jay B. Nash saw radio listening as indicative of the “disease” of “spectatoritis,”

143. “The World at Your Door...,” *op. cit.*, p. 52.

144. Both buildings featured radio studios, although the *Toronto Star* would cease radio operations in the 1932. Famed broadcaster Foster Hewitt, who had worked for the *Toronto Star* radio service (CFCA), claimed to have designed the studios on the 17th floor of the new building, but that by that time Joseph E. Atkinson, owner of the *Star* and who established the service in 1922, had decided to get out of the radio business. That no doubt had something to do with the establishment of the CRBC in that year and thus the beginning of official, public broadcasting in Canada. For Hewitt’s reminiscences, see McNeil and Wolfe, *Signing On: The Birth of Radio in Canada*, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–83. See also Gil Murray, *Nothing On but the Radio: A Look Back at Radio in Canada and How It Changed the World*, Toronto, Dundurn, 2003, pp. 37–38.

a condition characterized by inactivity and inertia and caused or exacerbated by modern leisure activities, including radio listening and movie watching.¹⁴⁵ The citizen becomes a spectator and the public therefore becomes more easily manipulated. Yet the Art Deco radio provided the modern(e) backdrop for engaging with the world, reinforcing the activity of choosing which stations to listen to—which destinations to cruise to—and producing, potentially, a more informed citizenry. However, as radios became further entrenched in daily life and became design objects apparently reflective of their cosmopolitan potential, the optimism around the medium's potential to make "politics personal and interesting and therefore important," as *Collier's* magazine announced in 1928, dissipated.¹⁴⁶ As historian Douglas B. Craig notes, by 1940, radio "had only amplified, for good and ill, the essentially personal nature of electoral politics; it was a powerful tool in the hands of both saints and sinners."¹⁴⁷ Coincidental with the burgeoning of Deco sets into the mid- and late 1930s, Canadians would have been even more concerned with international affairs—with Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia, the rise of Nazism in Germany, and the Spanish Civil War, not to mention the abdication crisis noted above. The Deco receivers thus carried both a utopian sense of a frictionless, modern society and yet the speed of transmission emblemized in its cosmopolitan styling brought painful events a world away into the living room.

■ Privately Public Culture and Questions of Gender

Most Canadians encountered Art Deco first outside the home, in public spaces like office towers, department stores, cinemas, world fairs, even some civic buildings, and mainly in the home by way of advertisements and illustrated magazines, like *Maclean's*, *Mayfair*, *Chatelaine*, and *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. Especially in the 1920s, Art Deco was associated with a wealthy, elite class of people interested in appearing cosmopolitan and modern. In some cases this involved simply a subtle shift from an interest in the exotic or "Oriental" to the *moderne*, which likewise carried a sense of adventure. For the average Canadian, then, the mode was not first and foremost a style of domesticity; rather, it connoted the (fraught) glamour of modernity, and, given personal experiences with it, was likely linked to a mix of fantasy and publicness. The sense of publicness associated with Art Deco would reinforce beliefs in progress (which I have argued above was intimately tied to fashion and thus consumer culture) as well as a common mission of (re)building a modern, machine-made national culture. The Art Deco spaces of everyday life for the most part framed leisure activities, but were social and public places and thus

145. Jay B. Nash, *Spectatoritis*, New York, Holston House, Sears Publishing Company, 1932. See Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 25–26; and Craig, *Fireside Politics...*, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

146. Cited in Craig, *ibid.*, p. 168.

147. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

had political implications. In the case of radio, we need only think of Roosevelt's "fireside chats"—tuned into by Americans and Canadians alike, and adopted, to a much lesser degree, by Prime Minister R.B. Bennett. I have argued that radio, as an inherently cosmopolitan medium and a modern commodity, helped to bring the modern(e) into the home with its Art Deco styling. In essence, the use of Art Deco for radio cabinets extended the logic of public culture outside the home. It reinforced the ambivalent cosmopolitanism of radio and framed a unique and complicated public culture in the home.

Radio culture, for instance, troubled stereotypically gendered spaces. An advertisement from the weekly *Saturday Night* for R.S. Williams Co., a musical instrument and radio dealer on Yonge Street in Toronto, argues that the radio could reconcile marital problems by seizing upon the medium's cosmopolitan potential to travel beyond the home, and implicitly noting the gender differences of public and private space blurred thereby (fig. 4.13). "Don't get a divorce," the advertisement advises, "Get a Rogers-Majestic Radio." The text of the ad explains:

Few women want to go out because they hate their homes. It is because they need a change. Those wives who are in the home all day find the walls boring at night and they crave a glimpse of the outside world—but on the other hand, husbands after a hard day at the office are tired and wish to stay at home.

COMPROMISE

Come to the nearest R.S. Williams store, select a Rogers or Majestic radio and have it sent home tomorrow, and from then on bring the outside world into your home and enjoy the comforts of your easy chair too.

Pictured as a conversation between two gentlemen dressed in evening wear, the ad extols the imaginative power of radio to transform the space of the home into an exciting, other space for "bored housewives." Implicitly, the modern woman is characterized as wanting a more public life, an idea consonant with the 1920s image of the flapper and New Woman, which some historians associate with Art Deco of that decade,¹⁴⁸ and with the recent legislation guaranteeing suffrage for most women in Canada. This desire is presumed to be satiated with the entrance of public space into the home. And yet daytime programming aimed at a female listener base dealt more with domestic activities.

This ad also suggests a change in the gendering of the new technology. As early as 1922, leading American home economist Christine Frederick would characterize radio as "primarily an invention for the

148. Fischer (*Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco...*, *op. cit.*) sees Art Deco as fixated on the female form and this fixation as "a 'symptom' of societal anxieties about the emergent New Woman, a challenging figure on the American scene in the 1920s and 1930s." She goes on to argue that "as the thirties progressed, the Art Deco female in such American genres as the musical, the exotic adventure epic, and the fantasy film became progressively more muted and tamed. Clearly, this chronologically matches the decline in the movement itself (whose cutting-edge elements were gradually appropriated into the mainstream)" (p. 254).

Figure 4.13. ▶
Advertisement
for R.S. Williams Co.

DON'T GET A DIVORCE

Few women want to go out because they hate their homes. It is because they need a change. Those wives who are in the home all day find the walls boring at night and they crave a glimpse of the outside world — but on the other hand, husbands after a hard day at the office are tired and wish to stay at home.



COMPROMISE
Come to the nearest R. S. Williams store, select a Rogers or Majestic radio and have it sent home tomorrow, and from then on bring the outside world into your home and enjoy the comforts of your easy chair too.

**Get a
Rogers-Majestic
Radio**

R. S. Williams Co.
F. A. TRESTRAIL
145 Yonge St.

*Established
Since 1849*

Reproduced from *Saturday Night*, April 12, 1930, p. 14

benefit of woman. Its greatest achievement is banishing isolation. Isolation! Who better than a woman can thoroughly understand the full meaning of this dreaded word?"¹⁴⁹ However, as Craig reminds us, "[w]omen were also removed from early radio by the conventions of domestic architecture; with their wires, leaky batteries, and long antennae, amateurs' radio sets belonged more in the male domains of the shed and den than in the

149. Cited in Craig, *Fireside Politics...*, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

female-oriented living areas of houses.”¹⁵⁰ As discussed above, the advent of AC tubes and more affordable sets brought the radio into living rooms, as well as other spaces in the home (fig. 4.4). William Boddy argues that the commercialization of radio coincided with a re-gendering, and this is supported by sociologist Richard Butsch’s analysis of amateur radio magazines in the United States at the time.¹⁵¹ Once seen as an active hobby for boys and men compared with fishing (a popular metaphor for finding radio stations), throughout the 1920s radio was marketed largely to women and was characterized as a passive leisurely activity.¹⁵² In his study of advertisements for American radios from 1922 to 1932, Louis Carlat argues that ads often attempted to “maintain boundaries between domestic and outside spaces” and that “[i]n the face of apparent threats to middle-class family life radio might encourage women to stay safely inside the confines of their homes and traditional roles.”¹⁵³

With the rise of radio respectability (which coincided with the development of broadcasting), commercial broadcasters were quick to capitalize on a growing, female daytime audience.¹⁵⁴ This demographic would only grow throughout the Depression, as more Canadian homes had radios and more women were unemployed, in many cases due to employment policies that favoured married men over women and single men, and were thus home to “listen in” to soap operas and programs like *Women’s Radio Review*.¹⁵⁵ Media historian Anne F. MacLennan argues that daytime programming for women (and children) in Canada was varied and developed independently from the U.S.¹⁵⁶ However, in both the U.S. and Canada, White homemakers “represented the most valuable segment of the female radio audience, for they possessed the greatest purchasing power”; thus afternoon programming was geared toward domesticity, selling products meant to better home life.¹⁵⁷ Audience research from the

150. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

151. William Boddy, “Archaeologies of Electronic Vision and the Gendered Spectator,” *Screen*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1994, pp. 105–122, especially pp. 108–114; Richard Butsch, “Crystal Sets and Scarf-Pin Radios: Gender, Technology and the Construction of American Radio Listening in the 1920s,” *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1998, pp. 557–572.

152. See Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos ‘n’ Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern*, New York, Random House, 1999. She discusses gender implications of radio as well as patterns of listening in the United States.

153. Louis Carlat, “‘A Cleanser for the Mind’: Marketing Radio Receivers for the American Home, 1922–1932,” in Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun (eds.), *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology*, Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press, 1998, p. 116.

154. See the graph constructed from CBS data in Craig (*Fireside Politics...*, *op. cit.*, p. 244), which indicates the domination of women as listeners in 1936. The percentage of women listeners was greater than males by over 20 percent in the morning, about 5 percent in the evening, and nearly doubled the number of male listeners in the afternoon.

155. Radio guides published in daily newspapers, including the *Globe and Mail*, offer insight into daytime programming, as well as the intense interest around radio listening at the time. For an analysis of radio schedules in Canada, see MacLennan, “Women, Radio Broadcasting and the Depression,” *op. cit.*, pp. 616–633.

156. MacLennan, *ibid.*, pp. 621–622.

157. Craig, *Fireside Politics...*, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

Figure 4.14.
 "Columaire," designed
 by Raymond Loewy
 for (Canadian)
 Westinghouse, 1931.
 Hammond Museum of
 Radio Collection,
 Guelph (ON), wood,
 glass (152.4 × 30.5 ×
 30.5 cm).



Michael Windover (2009)

period indicates that women's preferences in radio did not differ much from men's, despite strongly held beliefs by broadcasters that women were not interested in economic, political, or current affairs.¹⁵⁸

An Art Deco set, like the Sparton Bluebird (fig. 4.9, p. 234), seems to evince the shift in gendering the radio. As argued above, the mirrored surface of this glamorous radio resonated with contemporary designs of vanities, a distinctly gendered piece of private, bedroom furniture. In essence, the Bluebird extends the space of the private and intimate into

the more public space of a living room, where a radio like this might sit. Besides evoking the modernity of radio listening, even highlighting the medium's cosmopolitanism, the radio was no doubt designed to appeal to the same female consumer base sought by broadcasters and advertisers. Cultural historian Lesley Johnson, in discussing the Australian experience, argues that both radio sets and programming were designed to be a companion to the housewife. She contends that radio underwent a shift from physical presence to constant companion and thence became "a full member of the household."¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, the Stewart-Warner R-192 (fig. 4.7, p. 227) was called the "Good Companion." While her points are astute, I would argue that the physical presence of the radio cabinet (especially centrally placed, expensive models that would signal social status) should not be downplayed. Her work reminds us of the mobility afforded by radio—that is, to listen without necessarily being fixed in one location—as well as the temporality of radio listening. Radio could be heard while doing housework, which would be a very different experience from sitting as a family around the box to "listen in" to a program in the evening.¹⁶⁰ With set schedules, radio regimented time in the home. This was made explicit with radios designed as clocks, like the Westinghouse "Columaire" (1931) designed by Raymond Loewy (fig. 4.14). Here the traditional, grandfather clock was updated as a setback skyscraper for the living room (akin to Frankl's earlier furniture designs – see fig. 1.4, p. 7), tying together the acoustic space-time of radio with a more familiar form of time-keeping in the home. It also brought the "outside" architectural form of a skyscraper "inside" to the centre of the domestic sphere. The schedules for Canadian radio programming were printed in daily newspapers and offered

158. *Ibid.*

159. Lesley Johnson, "Radio and Everyday Life: The Early Years of Broadcasting in Australia, 1922–1945," *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1981, p. 169.

160. Johnson describes how the Australian Broadcasting Commission began consciously to organize listening habits in 1936 (*ibid.*, p. 170). MacLennan's ("Women, Radio Broadcasting, and the Depression," *op. cit.*, p. 626) research shows that Canadian women would also be engaged in "passive listening" habits.

shows to appeal to female audiences and children during the workday, and general entertainment in the evening. Ultimately, the acoustic time-space marked by the radio (or radio clock, in this instance) reinforced larger systems that underpinned consumer culture. This served only to buttress the notion of women as scientific managers of the home, especially as they incorporated more and more “time-saving” electric appliances into daily life.¹⁶¹ The radio thus disrupted the traditional space of the home as well as that of women.

With this in mind, the Rogers-Majestic ad (fig. 4.13) points to the anxiety over the place of women in public culture. In a recent study of interwar American culture, Susan Currell contends that not only were anxieties felt about the emasculation of the American male, but “[t]he rise of consumer culture and leisure in the thirties appeared to be turning America into a matriarchy, where women, as consumers, controlled the nation’s purse strings.”¹⁶² While radio could give the sense of a democratization of culture, could give women a sense of connection to the outside world, and could even be read as reinforcing recently won political rights, ultimately, the purchase of a radio cabinet re-entrenched women in the home. Divorce rates and separations were on the rise through the interwar years and many break-ups were not reported, thus the ad’s rhetoric touched on real concerns in the period surrounding the maintenance of traditional family life.¹⁶³ The radio—especially the Art Deco-designed receiver—assisted in the reconfiguration of the home: a place now framed as a locus of modern public culture. But just as Art Deco ultimately reinscribed social hierarchies, the very fact that radio would enter the “feminine” realm of the home had an impact on radio programming. According to Lacey, part of the reason why radio did not become a forum for wider political debate in the 1930s was due to a desire to protect Depression-weary (and feminized) audiences from a combative environment, offering, instead, entry into a “mythical community founded on national rather than partisan ties.”¹⁶⁴

Although personal radios afforded the production of radio space in other areas of the home, the living room continued to be the central site of the home radio. In her recent study of what she calls “livable

161. Eustella Burke exemplifies this in “The Magic of Electricity” (*Canadian Homes and Gardens*, June 1927, pp. 44–45), when she explains: “Personally, I feel there is a parallel between the business of housekeeping and commerce. Both to be carried along successfully must ride with the tide of modern efficiency. The fact that the business world has adopted and continues to adopt the newest electrical ways is proof that we cannot have too many of these attractive and clean servants in the home. They work well and do not answer back!”

162. Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

163. As Bumsted reports, while in 1918 there were 114 divorces in all of Canada (1.4 per 100,000), in 1929 they reached 8.2 per 100,000, and in 1939 approximately 18.4 per 100,000. Such a rise was due in part to changing social attitudes toward marriage, but also to increased accessibility to divorce courts. Bumsted (*A History of the Canadian Peoples*, *op. cit.*, pp. 284–285) also points out that many dissolutions of marriages went unreported, especially desertions by husbands during the Depression.

164. Lacey, “Radio in the Great Depression...,” *op. cit.*, p. 33. Of course, popular music and programming would also improve ratings and would be a major factor in determining on-air content as well.

modernism,” Kristina Wilson reminds us that the scale of the living room was generally shrinking through the period, and that with tight budgets there was little room for extravagant expenditures (hence, the easier incorporation of the smaller radio cabinet). Despite this, she notes that the living room was recognized by designers “as the emotional center of the home” and was therefore of some concern.¹⁶⁵ In her discussion of how modern designers appealed to the notion of efficiency in the living room, she actually includes an image of a the Herman Miller Furniture Showroom that features a side table radio designed by Gilbert Rohde, yet does not explain that this showroom design appeals both to efficiency and the multi-functionality of the living room. In fact, Rohde’s design emphasizes how significant radio was to the emotional heart of the house. It should also be emphasized that Rohde’s line inspired ones produced in Canada by Andrew Malcolm Furniture, in Kincardine, and McLagan Furniture, in Stratford; so, although on a smaller scale, Canadian homes were influenced by similar modern themes.¹⁶⁶

Significantly, Wilson also explores the gender implications of the living room, which posed a problem for “livable modernists.” Wilson’s discussion of the “companionate living room,” based on the prevailing interwar concept of a “companionate marriage,” is instructive in pointing out the complexities of the now often smaller and/or more multifunctional living room. “The living room,” she argues, “was not intended to be gender-neutral, but rather would ideally welcome both.”¹⁶⁷ Supporting her position, she cites the president of the Howell Company, who described the 1933 line of steel tubular furniture as being “as graceful as a soaring airplane, as virile as a skyscraper, as fresh and intriguing as a debutante.”¹⁶⁸ The radio (especially when enclosed in an Art Deco case) only magnified the complexity of the living room, helping to mark it as a new kind of place. A streamlined, Deco radio would only enhance the sensibility of other Deco furnishings. We can imagine a Philco Model 115 “Bullet” radio (ca. 1937) (fig. 4.15), its dial marking world cities and thereby reminding us of its cosmopolitan potential, resting in harmony with the “Modern Tempos” of Snyder’s living room furniture (fig. 4.16). The Philco radio, like the “Modern Maple” furniture, was designed in the U.S. (the furniture by Russell Wright), but was made in Canada.¹⁶⁹ Despite somewhat contrasting imagery—the “Bullet” suggesting the almost violent immediacy of electronic communication, while advertisement for the furniture recalls Colonial furniture, thereby appealing to a “traditional” sense of propriety—both are designed to fit ideas of modern(e) lifestyle. Both the radio and the furniture suggest a dynamism, employing a balance of curvilinear and rectilinear forms. And both dramatize simplicity while neither

165. Wilson, *Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating...*, op. cit., p. 27.

166. Wright, *Modern Furniture in Canada 1920–1970*, op. cit., p. 60.

167. Wilson, *Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating...*, op. cit., p. 41.

168. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 42.

169. Philco’s Canadian operations were centred in Toronto, while Snyder’s production was divided between Waterloo, Ontario, and Montréal.



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appears overtly masculine nor feminine. This in some ways mirrored the implications of streamlining which was conceived in part as appealing to feminine tastes yet also invoked apparently more masculine ideas of standardization, hygiene, and efficiency. As design historian Penny Sparke asserts, the sensuous streamlined forms “straddled the worlds of masculine and feminine culture through an essentially androgynous aesthetic which allowed both sexes a space.”¹⁷⁰ Like the public sphere, which had, in essence (if not always in practice), extended full participation to both genders, the living room with its Art Deco radio cabinets framed a new form of public culture, one that needed to appeal to all.

A good illustration of the sociocultural place of radio, particularly its further entrenchment within the fabric of the home, is evident in an exhibition of decorative arts furnished by the T. Eaton Company department store (fig. 4.17). In this space, the radio is built into a streamlined electric hearth. The design decision makes plain the central place of the radio in a newly designed home (*i.e.*, those with the capital would integrate the radio into the fabric of the built environment). It also locates the radio in the living room, the place of entertainment (a piano sits on the opposite wall) or perhaps thoughtful contemplation. The economical use of space allows the radio to entertain and inform in the living room and dining room. And, by situating the radio directly beside the hearth, the

Figure 4.15.
Philco Model 115
“Bullet” radio, ca. 1937.
Hammond Museum of
Radio Collection,
Guelph (ON),
wooden cabinet
(28.5 × 51.5 × 23 cm).

170. Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink...*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

Figure 4.16. ▶
Advertisement
for Snyder's Living
Room Furniture.

The New Tempo in Modern Maple by Snyder's
Designed by Russell Wright

Modern Maple is the present incarnation of Colonial Possession. Built in solid Canadian Rock Maple, it is designed to express in the 20th century manner, the simplicity and fresh construction of Colonial furniture. Its railings of design permits of many varied uses, adding a distinctive decorative touch whenever it is used. It lends itself especially to the small apartment, where space is limited, and in the large house it may be used more extensively. It adjusts to rooms of various shapes.

Good proportions and fine finish take the place of surface ornament, with the added feature of "Cushion Edge" on every piece; these rounded corners add both beauty and firm and also prevent edge chipping.

There will be a new-found joy when it comes to choosing your covers from a wide range of new fabrics, that seem to embody all the possible color combinations.

The modern bedroom in solid Maple affords a wide scope for individual decorative schemes.

The Dining will add warmth and beauty to the breakfast room. These may be seen at the up-to-date furniture stores—or write us direct for finely illustrated booklet on Snyder's Modern Maple.

Snyder's
LIVING ROOM FURNITURE
Wholesale Out Montreal Que

Snyder's
MODERN MAPLE

Reproduced from *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, April 1936, p. 67

designer associates the symbolic heart of the home to the outside world.¹⁷¹ This move metaphorically merges the private and public, reinforcing a new (and burgeoning), modern public culture in the home, within an outwardly modern-looking environment replete with streamlined furniture, recessed lighting, and glass blocks.

171. As Shaun Moores states, "[t]he image of the fireside was common to much broadcasting literature of the time—and the hearth, the radio and the mother between them signified a focus of interior space, family pleasure and domestic life." See her article, "The Box on the Dresser: Memories of Early Radio and Everyday Life," *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1988, p. 34.



T. Eaton Company Fonds, F 229-308-0-2058, Archives of Ontario. Used with the permission of Sears Canada Inc.

The built-in radio also connects the pre-modern centre of the home with the modern medium that McLuhan describes as a “tribal drum.” Thus, the emotional heart of the home becomes fused with a medium that, from his perspective, radically reconfigures social space by acting as an extension of people’s nervous systems.¹⁷² Unlike the other examples of Art Deco radio cabinets discussed in this chapter, the radio here is almost entirely effaced. In a way, the Deco environment becomes an extension of the logic inherent to the commodity-sized models. The pre-modern is reconciled with the modern on a larger scale, in a sense placing the radio listeners inside the Deco radio but allowing them to travel beyond this setting in other acoustic spaces. The activity of radio listening is still framed as self-consciously modern, given the Art Deco environment, which would no doubt resonate with public cultural places outside the home. However, here the radio is a permanent fixture, a utility like an electrical outlet, providing an essential service.¹⁷³ No longer a luxury, the

Figure 4.17.
Eaton’s House
Furnishing
Department, view
of “Modern Room”
shown at “Architecture
of To-Day,” Toronto
Chapter of the Ontario
Association of the
Architects’ Sixth
Biennial Exhibition
of Architecture and
Allied Arts, Art
Gallery of Toronto,
February, 1937.

172. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

173. Interestingly, radios were built into the contemporary Kensal House in London (Elizabeth Denby and Maxwell Fry, 1937). See Elizabeth Darling, “‘A Citizen as Well as a Housewife’: New Spaces of Domesticity in 1930s London,” in Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 49–64.

radio was a vital part of everyday life. It regimented domestic time, affected social and gender relations (even if, for the most part, reinscribing pre-existing social values), and bound the intimacy of the private sphere to a larger public.

Most Canadian homes in the 1930s would not have a living room in this style, nor would most Canadians necessarily indulge in the Deco fantasies of the Spartron Bluebird. However, the spatial production and the inculcation of a technocratic consumer culture evinced by these examples would ring true even for more modest sets, like the Glamis. Whether built-in, or in commodity form, the radio set became the most intimate physical embodiment of the new medium, which resonated on a larger scale with architectural spaces like Radio City Music Hall. Although reinforced in other media, from print to film, the radio's tangible form was crucial to its experience and domestication, and its appearance became a central part of modern lifestyle. Radio cabinets carried a symbolic valence, one that reinforced the potential to communicate and to progress, to engage in a leisure activity inconceivable a generation earlier. And the Art Deco style in particular helped to reinforce the conceptual form of the medium, visually evoking the modern while for the most part reinforcing more conservative values.

The radios offered listeners a sense of control at a completely powerless time for many. Although the radio presented the possibility of a wider political engagement, even being heralded as a democratic medium, in the end, it largely reinforced hegemonic structures of power. The Art Deco cabinets seemed on the surface to celebrate a new world order of speed, efficiency, and the promise of a better life, aestheticizing the systems of mobility that made the new medium possible and which brought the medium to the multitudes. The sense of cosmopolitanism evoked in their form appeared to mirror the potential of the acoustic space on air. Yet these radios also masked some of the more troubling implications of machine-age ideology, including a deepening dependence on consumer commodities and the blind faith in progress supported by a growing field of scientific experts. As well, they seemed to operate hand in glove with the more conservative policies of radio broadcasting, perhaps becoming the most appropriate aesthetic for radio by alluding to a democratization of culture through an apparent democratization of style. In some ways, these cabinets extended the fantasy worlds heard on the air and smoothed over the harsh realities facing many, creating an ambivalent space that reflected the changing topography of interwar public culture in Canada. The Deco radio set indicated the spread and incorporation of Art Deco into the very patterns of everyday life, affecting public culture in a dispersed manner in the electric age.

By exploring how Art Deco fashioned public culture, I have reiterated how the style signalled a commodification of everyday life, much like the space of the department store or movie theatre. It framed and informed notions of lifestyle, adding another layer to the complexity of acoustic space in the interwar years. If indeed we read the Deco-styled cabinets as

mirroring the underlying social values of radio in that period (and of course, this is not to say that more “traditional” cabinets could not likewise be seen as operating in a similar, if less overt, manner resonant with the Deco sets), this may complicate our understanding of subsequent, postwar radio and television design. Early television receivers in the 1930s were a plaything of the elite and were often styled in the Deco mode. Unsurprising, just as Art Deco radio design borrowed from that of previous technologies (such as the gramophone), so too were early televisions encased in cabinets akin to radios. For example, the RCA TRK-12 Telereceiver (fig. 4.18),



◀ **Figure 4.18.**
RCA TRK-12
Telereceiver, 1939.

Collection of Canada Museum of Science and Technology, Ottawa

designed by John Vassos and which was introduced at the World Exhibition in New York (1939–1940), followed the Deco design idiom of existing radio floor models and even included a twelve-tube, three-band radio in addition to the five-channel television receiver.¹⁷⁴

However, following the trauma of the Second World War, in a period that saw the decay of cultural-political institutions like the British Empire and the rise of international organizations like the United Nations, radios (now even smaller and more portable, given the development of transistors) and televisions took on a more “Modernist” form. Just as the Deco radios seemed to resonate with other modern(e) spaces of public culture—including the kinds of spaces I have explored in the previous chapters—postwar televisions seemed consonant with new, “Modernist” spaces.¹⁷⁵ I suggest that the shift in design following the war coincided with a new, socio-political environment firmly centred on the Cold War struggle between East and West, and that the “Modernist” design offered a necessarily different vision of “democratized culture” than that proffered by the designers of the 1930s. While it is debatable whether the value systems changed much, a modern style that did not call up associations with elitism or aristocracy, the way Art Deco did in many of its manifestations, had a socio-political valence in the postwar era. Streamlined radio cabinets, around which families had gathered to take a world cruise during the Depression, gradually faded into the background. Attention was now directed toward the rectangular framed view of the world presented by the T.V.

174. The model on display at the fair was of transparent Lucite to dramatically demonstrate how the new technology worked. For more on Vassos and his work with RCA, see Danielle Schwartz, “Modernism for the Masses: The Industrial Design of John Vassos,” *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 46, nos. 1–2, 2006, pp. 4–23. Like Deco radio cabinets, promotional images for the early television exude a sense of glamour (see p. 18).

175. For more on television and its effect on the (social) space of the living room, see Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for T.V.: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992. On connections between Modernism and television, see her recent book, *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Conclusion

Modern as Tomorrow's Architecture

I have argued in this book that Art Deco was a mode of mobility—a style that aestheticized systems of mobility which underpinned the modern societies that adopted it. Whether we think of the mobility systems of commerce and transportation iconographically emblazoned on the walls of the Marine Building and Bullock's Wilshire department store, or the streamlined forms of the Eros Theatre and Deco radio cabinets, which alluded to the imaginative mobility of the entertainment they offered, an interest in mobility was present on the very surfaces of everyday life spaces and objects. The systems of mobility evoked on these surfaces framing daily life practices were instrumental

in the formation of social space; thus I have tried to emphasize the importance of considering these surfaces and spaces together to suggest some of the socio-political consequences of Art Deco. I examined quite distant and distinct places, from North America to South Asia, and from a 25-storey skyscraper to a living room in front of a radio to illuminate the mobility of the style itself as it fashioned public cultures. And I have characterized Art Deco as a cosmopolitan style both in terms of this reach, but also in the way that it evoked place in larger networks of commerce, transportation, and communication. To this end, I introduced Art Deco as a kind of crossroads. A crossroads is a place of activity, a space of chance encounters and thus of possibilities; yet, it is governed by existing rules and systems of maintaining order. Art Deco as a crossroads suggests a local production of place, but one which is defined and influenced by a convergence and intermixture of different sources (including historicizing design traditions) as well as an intermeshing with other places. Deco surfaces framed activities like shopping, movie going, and radio listening, even office work, as potentially cosmopolitan, offering subject positions in touch with far-flung places, yet still firmly grounded in a given locality.

In these ways, Art Deco was a mode of mobility. It offered the *look* of cosmopolitanism without necessarily taking people physically (or socially) to other places and provided the (sometimes glamorous) stage on which to be *like* a cosmopolite, and thus ultimately reinforced social values associated with consumer culture. I have argued that Art Deco imaged and provided a backdrop for modern lifestyle(s), and by aestheticizing mobilities was implicated in the commodification of everyday life. Unlike the Modern Movement, which was also supremely interested in mobility—particularly how efficient planning and ergonomics could better everyday lives by streamlining activities through careful analyses of space—Art Deco offered tangible dreamscapes of modernity without radically reforming the social order. And while, as architectural historian Beatriz Colomina has shown, Modern Movement architects such as Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe were attuned to the power of advertising and the mass media in promulgating their ideas (and furthering their careers),¹ Art Deco, with its unabashed ties to consumerism and the fashion form, was even more deeply so. In fact, I propose that we might read the mode as advertising modernity. That is, it imaged the imagined space of the future in the present. It thus seemed to close the gap inherent to desire between present and promise (or wish and fulfillment). And this might explain why, as I noted in the Introduction, Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard both saw the interwar years as crucial to the development of the hyperreal, image-saturated society of the spectacle characteristic of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

1. As she succinctly puts it: "Modern architecture is all about the mass-media image. That's what makes it modern, rather than the usual story about functionalism, new materials, and new technologies." Beatriz Colomina, "Media as Modern Architecture," in Anthony Vidler (ed.) *Architecture between Spectacle and Use*, Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008, p. 60.

The 1920s and 1930s did not see the invention of advertising, mass-circulating newspapers and magazines, film, or even radio. But the period did witness a growing “massification” of culture and a reliance more and more on consumption as crucial to modern urban subjectivities. It saw the sophistication of “public relations,” a term coined by Sigmund Freud’s nephew, the American advertising consultant Edward Bernays. Bernays worked for the United States Government during the Great War as part of its propaganda effort to convince Americans of the “justness” of the cause of the war, that the war was being fought in the interests of securing peaceful democracy. In his 1928 book *Propaganda*, he writes:

The American government and numerous patriotic agencies developed a technique which, to most persons accustomed to bidding for public acceptance, was new. They not only appealed to the individual by means of every approach—visual, graphic, and auditory—to support the national endeavor, but they also secured the coöperation of the key man in every group—persons whose mere word carried authority to hundreds or thousands or hundreds of thousands of followers. They thus automatically gained the support of fraternal, religious, commercial, patriotic, social and local groups whose members took their opinions from their accustomed leaders and spokesmen, or from the periodical publications which they were accustomed to read and believe. At the same time, the manipulators of patriotic opinion made use of the mental clichés and the emotional habits of the public to produce mass reactions against the alleged atrocities, the terror and tyranny of the enemy. It was only natural, after the war ended, that intelligent persons should ask themselves whether it was not possible to apply a similar technique to the problems of peace.²

He goes on to explain how “public relations” had evolved since the war, becoming ever more sophisticated through the use of burgeoning mass media, and argues ultimately that the new propagandist, or “public relations counsel,” acts as a benevolent force in modern society—as long as this person does not try to mislead the public—for “[t]he conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society.”³ Bernays also discusses how Freudian psychology informs public relations by tapping into suppressed desires both of individuals and the “group mind.” For instance,

[a] man buying a car may think he wants it for the purposes of locomotion, whereas the facts may be that he would really prefer not be burdened with it, and would rather walk for the sake of his health. He may really want it because it is a symbol of social position, and evidence of his success in business, or a means of pleasing his wife.

2. Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda*, New York, Liveright, 1928 [4th reprint 1933], pp. 27–28.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 9. On ethics of “public relations counsel” see pp. 45–46.

This general principle, that men are very largely actuated by motives which they conceal from themselves, is as true of mass as of individual psychology. It is evident that the successful propagandist must understand the true motives and not be content to accept the reasons which men give for what they do.⁴

Art Deco styling, by appealing to individual desires, appears the manifestation of this kind of approach, which is essential to the maintenance of consumer culture.

With the example of automobile sales in mind—perhaps the quintessential symbol of consumer culture, representative of economic, physical, and social mobility, not to mention of self-constitutional identity through consumption—I turn to a 1933 Oldsmobile advertisement (fig. C.1).⁵ “Modern as Tomorrow’s Architecture” reads the banner that bisects a colour image of a fashionably dressed couple looking at the new 1933 Oldsmobile Six and Straight Eight cylinder models. The verticality of the figures is mirrored in the futuristic, Art Deco towers, while the slender, almost streamlined quality of the woman’s green gown is picked up in the form of the two automobiles. We are given both profile and three-quarter views of the new cars, which mirror the double representation of the prospective buyers, whom we see from behind and side, admiring the new vehicles and again driving the red one toward us. Identifying with this middle-class couple, a reader of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* happening upon this ad is made to imagine her/himself in the new car. The text below the image makes explicit the connection between the Art Deco architecture—which would call to mind the contemporaneous Chicago Century of Progress Exposition—the new 1933 models, and, more implicitly, the sense of fashion embodied in the clothes of the two figures. The text explains that

[t]he very spirit of modern achievement is expressed in architectural conceptions of the buildings of the future. Simple design adds dignity: long, uninterrupted lines emphasize harmonized beauty. What more fitting than to picture before such a background the two completely modern automobiles which have won acceptance by artist and layman as style leaders for 1933!

It goes on to note that “every line and contour is new”; that the “authentic styling [...] adds so much to a car’s value today and *maintains* that value longer”; that the new Sixs and Straight Eights “are as advanced in performance as they are in appearance”; and, perhaps most importantly to Depression-stricken Canadians, that “never before in this price field has any car offered a combination of style, performance and quality so closely comparable to that of high-priced cars.”

Much can be drawn from this advertisement. It evinces just how resolutely Art Deco architecture captured the imagination of the general public such that it could be pointed to as evidence of the future, an image

4. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

5. On the question of styling and how it was managed by GM, see Clarke, “Managing Design: The Art and Colour...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 65–79.

June 1933 CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS



MODERN AS TOMORROW'S ARCHITECTURE



Oldsmobile offers a brilliantly styled Six and Straight Eight...two completely modern cars with Fisher No-Draft Ventilation

THE very spirit of modern achievement is expressed in architectural conceptions of the buildings of the future. Simple design adds dignity: long, uninterupted lines emphasize harmonized beauty. What more fitting than to picture before such a background the two completely modern automobiles which have won acceptance by artist and layman as style leaders for 1933?

No single feature of design strikes itself in these splendid Oldsmobiles, yet literally every line and contour is new. The total effect is one of brilliant modern smartness -- the authentic styling which adds so much to a car's value today and maintains that value longer. When we talk about styling, however, our engineers point out that Oldsmobile has built its proud reputation mainly on *mechanical excellence*. This always has been, and will continue to be, a fundamental Oldsmobile principle. Let us make it clear, therefore, that the 1933 Oldsmobile Six and Straight Eight are as advanced in performance as they are in appearance -- the fastest, most powerful, most dependable cars in all Oldsmobile history. Both the engines operate very quietly and without perceptible vibration. And let us say just this about price...you cannot evaluate Oldsmobile that way, because never before in this price field has any car offered a combination of style, performance and quality so closely comparable to that of high-priced cars. A sweeping statement and a large claim for Oldsmobile! -- but we make it sincerely and feel confident you will agree with us once you have seen and driven the new Oldsmobile Six or Straight Eight.

Your nearest Oldsmobile dealer will gladly place one of these cars at your disposal, in order that you may personally test it and fully appreciate the unusual qualities.

 **THE 1933 OLDSMOBILES**
Featuring Fisher No-Draft Ventilation

THE NEW SIX **THE STRAIGHT EIGHT**

◀ **Figure C.1.**
Advertisement
for 1933 Oldsmobiles.

Reproduced from *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, June 1933, p. 5

of what modernity ought to look like. This is one of the curious qualities of the mode: that it could simultaneously evoke the future *and* be present in everyday life in commodities like automobiles and in architecture. This suggests the spectacular or phantasmagoric potential of Art Deco and its link to the logic of fashion. Like in dreams, Art Deco-fashioned architecture or commodities could present (in the present) more perfect, unreal realities, spaces of fantasy projection in material form, situated, crucially, in everyday life. It might be said, then, that Art Deco advertised the potential of modernity to fulfill individual desires, and this is why I have characterized

it an optimistic style and no doubt why it became so popular. It seemed to offer spaces of hope to people shocked by the trauma of the Great War, the following economic catastrophes, and climates of political extremism that developed in the interwar years. The ad also points to the power of spatial framing—architecturally and in terms of one's relation to a commodity. This supports my argument throughout the book that the material framing of everyday life activities reinforced notions of lifestyle, provided stages for appearing modern. In many ways, to look modern—and to feel modern—was to be modern. And Art Deco provided a vision of what that “modern” looked like. This “modern” appearance was firmly rooted in urban centres.

While the text about “new lines and contours” appeals to novelty and taste for contemporary fashion, the lines about “authentic styling” indicate a desire for longer-lasting value. No doubt this was meant to alleviate concerns about the new automobiles being simply spectacle, simply a repackaging of the previous year's model. What I find most interesting in this argument is that the style itself maintains the value of the car, since it is in keeping with the architecture of tomorrow. Because the Oldsmobiles appear akin to “high-priced cars,” one's social standing would presumably improve and the cars would thus have longer-lasting value, both economically and socially. This indicates the logic of glamour and the promotion of a “democracy of desire,” as I discussed in the second chapter. Indeed, both the style and the advertisement work together to effect a popular elitism offering the quality (even if only aesthetically) of high-end objects to the lower strata of society. The viewer is enticed to desire the same features available to the wealthy and cultural elites (hence the mention of “artists” in the ad). However, the advertisement is clearly addressed to the middle class, to people who might be able to afford an automobile in the harsh economic climate of 1933.

The issues raised about retaining value and the “price field” of the car suggest an appeal to people living through a devastating Depression, but this is only slight. Instead, the mobility of the new car to take consumers figuratively to the future (and physically to the Chicago World's fair or to a major urban centre to better see what the future looks like) seems the best indication that Canadians, in that case, were desiring an escape from their present economic realities. But we must bear in mind that visions of futuristic cities were popular in the boom years of the 1920s, most evocatively portrayed in the renderings of Hugh Ferriss.⁶ What this advertisement—and I might argue Art Deco architecture and design in general—makes apparent is that even in the depths of the Great Depression, consumption was a determining factor in the formation of subject positions and social values. This is why Baudrillard provocatively chose the

6. See Hugh Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, Mineola (NY), Dover, [1929] 2005. See also Aleksandra Idzior, “Urbanotopia and the Frontier: Reaching Heights before the Crash in Moscow and New York at the End of the 1920s,” PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2004.

1929 Crash as the birth of our present sociocultural formation.⁷ If the consumer culture of the boom years of the 1920s—in which Bernays's and his fellow public relations counsels' strategies of peace-time propaganda were employed to great effect—could survive the near collapse of the financial system, it was clearly very deeply entrenched and very likely here to stay.

Perhaps Art Deco was “Tomorrow's Architecture.” In some ways it was given that Art Deco forms and the penchant for surface effect (and affect) were taken up with enthusiasm by many Post-Modernists. My point here is not to suggest that Art Deco and Post-Modernism are identical, for Deco design exhibits formal consistencies and logical sequences not always present in the eclecticism of Post-Modernism. From a different perspective, with the rise of “heritagization” movements, hotbeds of Art Deco—places like Miami's South Beach and Napier, New Zealand—have become (or are sold as) tourist destinations because of their architecture. So, the everyday architecture of the 1930s has become the interest of today's tourist, making it, in an interesting way, an architecture of tomorrow. Of course architecture of other styles and other periods become tourist attractions as well, so I would not take this point too far, but Art Deco's ties to commercialism and to the self-promotion of modernity (which generally stand in contrast to the Modern Movement) make it compelling for it is now simply a repackaging of an earlier product.

The nostalgic return to Art Deco might be thought of along the lines presented by Frederic Jameson in his discussion of the “nostalgia film” of Post-Modernism. The nostalgia film, he contends, “was never a matter of some old-fashioned ‘representation’ of historical content, but instead approached the ‘past’ through stylistic connotation, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image, and ‘1930s-ness’ or ‘1950s-ness’ by the attributes of fashion.”⁸ Jameson posits that the 1920s and 1930s

entertain a kind of semiotic binary opposition in our stereotypes of American history: the first offering a wealth of images of the modish, of high styles and fashions, nightclubs, dance music, roadsters, and art deco; while the second conventionally connotes the seamy side of the real, in the form of the Great Depression and of gangsters and their saga and characteristic raw material.

Art Deco then becomes “the formal expression of a certain synthesis between *modernization* (and the streamlined machine) and *modernism* (and stylized forms), which can be inflected [...] in either a stylish (or ‘1920s’) or a populist (or ‘1930s’) direction.”⁹ In pointing to the aestheticizations of the period (flattening out the complexities of the era by

7. Barnard, “Hard Times, Modern Times,” *op. cit.*, p. 16. Jean Baudrillard makes this claim in *The Mirror of Production*, St. Louis (MO), Telos Press, 1975, p. 144.

8. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism; Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, p. 19.

9. Frederic Jameson, “The Existence of Italy,” in *Signatures of the Visible*, New York, Routledge, 1990, p. 225. The nostalgia film, he says, “might better have been termed nostalgia-deco film, to underscore its dependency on the earlier cultural language, through which it exercises its own specific historical and political Imaginary.”

imbuing the historical with a lustre akin to the commodity), Jameson, in a sense, points to the logic of Art Deco itself. The mode was likewise interested more in style and fashion and about avoiding the problem of “content,” glossing over with its sensuous surfaces the harsh socioeconomic realities, violence, and political unrest characteristic of the period.

I have argued that Art Deco might have appeared new, and indeed framed some new daily life activities like radio listening and (respectable) cinema going, but ultimately did not significantly change the social order. The 1920s and 1930s were the high point of late imperialism, evidenced by the popular colonial world fairs (for instance, Wembley in Britain in 1924, Paris in 1931, Brussels in 1935, Glasgow in 1938) and the fact that this was the moment when the British Empire reached its apex geographically (even if its dominance as the financial centre of the world was largely supplanted by the United States).¹⁰ The celebration of jazz-like motifs in the Deco certainly did not reverse institutionalized racism in the Southern United States, nor did the incorporation of “exotic” sources from colonies suggest any dramatic re-thinking about the exploitation of imperial subjects or the brutal effect of the Depression on farmers in places like India.¹¹ Art Deco may have been taken up in Works Progress Administration art and architecture in the United States, and thus might have indicated a social-democratic appropriation, but given the simultaneous widespread adoption of the mode to advertise modernity—and reinforce tenets of consumer culture—I would argue that the effect of possible interventions or alternative models of social values as presented in the Deco style was muted. The optimism of Art Deco, the way it helped to domesticate the machine and aestheticize the mobilities that underpinned the pre-existing social order, ended up attached to dreams of lifestyle.

The values attached to lifestyle changed somewhat following the Second World War. Now the more static, rectilinear forms of the Modern Movement became more widely adopted, superseding the mobility of Art Deco. This architectural vocabulary suggested stability after another devastating war and the emergence of a new socio-political order that divided the world into two ideological camps—capitalist and communist. And it was different from the “stripped-classical” Deco buildings that still suggested a link to “tradition” while gesturing to the future. Iconographical programs on office buildings like the Marine Building appeared old-fashioned next to the Miesian glass towers, which eschewed historical references (indeed almost all surface ornament) and which came to represent international capitalism in the postwar era.¹² The cosmopolitanism

10. For a discussion of the shift from late imperialism to a more internationalist (Commonwealth) tone as exemplified in Exhibition architecture, see Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, “Refabricating the Imperial Image on the Isle of Dogs: Modernist Design, British State Exhibitions and Colonial Policy, 1924–1951,” *Architectural History*, vol. 49, 2006, pp. 317–348.

11. See Rothermund, *The Global Impact of the Great Depression...*, *op. cit.*

12. For a compelling discussion of ornament (even in iconoclastic modernism) see James Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2003.

of the mode, with its traces of aristocracy and promotion of individualist fantasies, seemed incompatible with a global political climate philosophically premised on a Universal Declaration of Human Rights (wars in Korea and Vietnam, though, would seem to undermine these principles). Art Deco, blossoming in the late imperial world, stood at odds with the decolonizing and nationalizing visual economies of places like India, which embraced the Modern Movement as both a sign of its modernity and as a distinct break from the architecture of the Raj. Even places of public culture that seemed naturally fashioned in Art Deco began to change or were threatened by new forms. Department stores gradually gave way to malls in suburban locations, while practices of movie going and radio listening were simultaneously challenged by the widespread appearance of the television in the home. While the seeds of change were sown in the interwar years, especially when the prominent place of the automobile in the design of Bullock's Wilshire or the model of cultural dispersal posed by the radio in the home is considered, the new forms did not necessarily aestheticize the mobility of the activity the way Deco-styled spaces and objects did.

To be sure, certain venues—roadside diners, gas stations, drive-in movie theatres, etc.—continued an obvious interest in mobility. But generally speaking—and indeed I am gesturing broadly—architecture and design moved away from the zigzag or streamlined idioms of the interwar years and toward more stable geometric forms.¹³ Commodities were no longer specifically meant to “look” efficient. The aestheticization of mobility of Art Deco was replaced with a non-referential economy of forms that did not aim to represent time-space compression but took this factor as a given in daily life. Mid-century Modernism suggested a sense of universalism, perhaps even egalitarianism (even though much of the hierarchical social architecture of society would remain intact), and corresponded with the advent of the welfare state. It also coincided with the further development of suburbia, a socio-geographical fabric that responded directly to the time-space of electricity and automobility. Like a rectangular television receiver, the suburbs (and suburban lifestyle) seemed a symbol of stability following traumatic decades of war and economic uncertainty, one that was crucial for the anxious years of the 1950s.

Art Deco did not disappear, but continued to mark the often mundane spaces of everyday life, providing traces of an earlier dream of modernity. It was perhaps this factor that made it so appealing to Post-Modernists seeking to upset the perceived elitism and austerity of the Modern Movement. Interestingly, the revival of fascination in Art Deco corresponded with a gradual widening of the gap between rich and poor in general, which has only been exacerbated by the recent global recession.

13. Of course, we need to keep in mind the great variety of form in mid-century Modernism, as pointed out for instance in Sarah Williams Goldhagen's "Something to Talk About..." *op. cit.*, and illuminated in Alice T. Friedman, *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture*, *op. cit.*, but generally, rectilinear forms associated with the idea of the so-called "International Style" increasingly marked the urban landscape in the postwar era.

The imaginative mobility of desire that survived the Great Depression is now firmly ensconced in daily life. Access to glamour and celebrity appears much more attainable through the sophistication of fashion (where high fashion borrows from low and seemingly blurs traditional markers of class, at least at first glance) and changing media patterns (the proliferation of reality television programming making a whole new constellation of celebrities drawn from the everyday; the enormous impact of the Internet on widening access to the means of producing and disseminating information, ostensibly creating a new space for stars, etc.). These examples suggest a “democratization of culture” in a manner quite different from the interwar years, and yet the Deco emphasis on the “look” of lifestyle remains.

While I may not completely agree with the essentializing views of Debord or Baudrillard about late-twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century society being inescapably bound to the spectacle, I think they were right to see resonance of the Deco era in our present cultural formation. There are some striking parallels, not the least of which is the current economic crisis which has been repeatedly compared to the Wall Street Crash of 1929. We continue to find ourselves watching frankly imperialist wars. And the development of increasingly personalized communication devices is remapping social relations in a way that I think might echo in potency if not effect the advent of the home radio in the interwar years. As we find ourselves within a major global recession, we are still addressed as citizen-consumers needing to do our part to boost the health of the economy through consumer purchases, and governments are poised to spend into deficits that are truly inconceivable with promises of coming out on the other side stronger, richer, and smarter (seeing as we are apparently in a “knowledge-based economy” in the “Communication Age”). Even a fascination with reproduction seems consistent—eugenics replaced by increasingly sophisticated genetic research, the Dionne Quintuplets by the “Octomom” (Nadya Suleman).

Perhaps because of these (superficial) parallels, there appears to be a surging interest in the interwar years. Some fashion houses seem to be reflecting on Art Deco in their 2012 collections, with Gucci designer Frida Giannini even dubbing her spring collection “Hard Deco.”¹⁴ On television, the mini-series *Mildred Pierce* (HBO, 2011), set in 1930s Glendale California and based on James M. Cain’s 1941 novel of the same name, and *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010), a drama set in Prohibition-era Atlantic City, have received critical praise. Meanwhile recent films, including *The King’s Speech* (2010, The Weinstein Company *et al.*, director Tom Hooper), about King George VI overcoming his speech impediment for radio addresses, and the silent film *The Artist* (2011, La Petite Reine *et al.*,

14. See Christina Binkley, “Art Deco Meets ‘Blade Runner’ at Gucci,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2011, <<http://blogs.wsj.com/runway/2011/09/21/art-deco-meets-blade-runner-at-gucci/>>, accessed January 2012. See also Eric Wilson, “A Deco Moment,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2011, <<http://runway.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/09/a-deco-moment/>>, accessed January 2012. I would like to thank Amy-Jessica Ayotte for bringing this trend to my attention.

director Michel Hazanavicius), set in 1927, have captured popular attention and industry recognition at the Academy Awards. Although the 1920s and 1930s have been a consistent source of inspiration for fashion designers, artists, writers, and filmmakers, the recent, heightened interest in the period and in the Art Deco style may have been sparked by a need to reflect critically on today's society because of its parallels with the interwar years.

While a focus on lifestyle remains entrenched in contemporary society, the values associated with it are beginning to be seriously challenged. Planned obsolescence, the cornerstone of consumerist economies, is questioned more and more with the threat of a looming ecological disaster should more sustainable economic models not be globally adopted. Contemporary society is even more bound to systems of mobility, especially with the advent of globalization. However, the answer from industry—and Government—has been the encouragement of a “green lifestyle.” Like Art Deco, this seems to project a new vision of modernity, but I wonder if it is not simply a repackaging of the status quo. Are we simply being asked to compare the latest (hybrid or electric) car to tomorrow's (sustainable) architecture?

While the logic of consumerism may seem entrenched, I believe there is reason for hope in changing lifestyles, and that architecture and design play significant roles in this process. In fact, we might tap into the optimism of Art Deco for envisioning change. If, as I have suggested, by projecting visions of modernity Art Deco helped create modern environments, perhaps aestheticizing ecological mobility systems could help effect a new vision of “tomorrow's architecture,” produce compelling stages for enacting sustainable lifestyles, and support a different ideological foundation. If fun and fantasy and appreciation for the seemingly superfluous work so well in reinscribing sociocultural and political systems, can they not also be used strategically for change?

Art Deco continues to have value today. It offers a diverse arena in which to examine the complexities of global modernity in the interwar years. By focusing on mobility as the underlying current in Art Deco, I have presented new ways of approaching and understanding some of these complexities. I have indicated the reach of the mode, as well as the vast potential for further study by bringing together such a wide range of spaces and places, and, in drawing together a number of different bodies of literature, I have illuminated how deeply rooted Art Deco was in different facets of modern, everyday life. The superficial similarities between the interwar years and our own contemporary moment may suggest that more careful consideration of Art Deco, especially from a mobilities perspective, could help us better understand the problems present on the surfaces of lifestyle. And maybe in examining the strategies at play in Art Deco, we might find a way to refashion lifestyle today.

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This book argues that mobility is the central theme of the interwar mode of design known today as Art Deco. It is present on the very surfaces of Art Deco objects and architecture – in iconography and general formal qualities (whether the zigzag rectilinear forms popular in the 1920s or curvilinear streamlining of the 1930s). By focussing on mobility as a means of tying the seemingly disparate qualities of Art Deco together, Michael Windover shows how the surface-level expressions correspond as well with underpinning systems of mobility, including those associated with migration, transportation, commodity exchange, capital, and communication.

Journeying across the globe – from a skyscraper in Vancouver, B.C., to a department store in Los Angeles, and from super-cinemas in Bombay (Mumbai) to radio cabinets in Canadian living rooms – this richly illustrated book examines the reach of Art Deco as it affected public cultures. Windover's innovative perspective exposes some of the socio-political consequences of this "mode of mobility" and offers some reasons as to how and why Art Deco was incorporated into everyday lifestyles around the world.

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