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C. F. A. Voysey: The Retrospective Career of the "Pioneer of the Modern Movement"

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Abstract
The research focus for this paper was the historiography of Charles Francis Annesley Voysey's architectural career. More specifically, the focus was on the appreciation of his work and why it did or did not change over time. Once the appreciation of Voysey's work was addressed, the focus became more specific: What was the nature of the shift in opinion of his work, and what internal or external factors caused this shift? To find answers to these questions, I read the books and articles in the paper's bibliography. In addition, I used the context of the course material of Art History 282 to shape and guide the focal argument of the paper. This allowed me to get a broader picture of the shifting field of architecture during and shortly after Voysey's fleeting popularity in the early 1900s.

Through use of these methods, I found that Voysey's career in the late 1800s and early 1900s reflects a transitional period in the field of architecture. The Arts and Crafts Movement was losing favor to the emergence of the Modern Movement and the acceptance of machine technology in building methods. Voysey's simple country houses reflect this subtle shift, as many later critics observe.

I conclude through this research assignment my position on retrospective analysis. An architect who designs a building makes a statement that can be interpreted differently by every ensuing generation. In retrospect, Voysey provides influence for countless architects and sets the tone for the Modern Movement. While Voysey himself scoffed at the idea of being named the "pioneer of the Modern Movement," his intentions are irrelevant to the magnitude of his influence. His economy of design, lack of ornament, and emphasis of geometry all precede the ideas and practices of modern architecture.

Keywords
C. F. A. Voysey, Modern Movement, Arts and Crafts, International Style, Humanities, Art History, Theodore Van Loan, Van Loan, Theodore

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Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857-1941) mastered the English country house of Arts and Crafts ideals at the turn of the twentieth century. This included truth of material and economy of design, leading to reduced ornamentation. Voysey began his career with the design of wallpaper and textiles, but thereafter focused on designing country houses as getaways for city workers.[1] Throughout Voysey's career there can be seen a progression of design due to his maturation as a designer, but his houses do not fall under different stylistic categories. The work itself exhibits recognizable characteristics of "Voysey" houses, comprised of sweeping roofs stepping down almost to the ground, a horizontal emphasis of rooflines, and roughcast exterior.[2]

The reception and interpretation of Voysey's work, however, shifts between the 1890s to the 1930s. When Voysey first began practicing, critics viewed his country houses as innovative examples of Arts and Crafts design practice. What set Voysey's wallpaper and country house designs apart from his contemporaries lay in his shift away from nineteenth century historicism. This quality led early critics to label him as an "individual."[3] Voysey also had an open-mind when it came to architecture, and he accepted the advent of the machine, resolving the problem of reconciling craftsmanship and mass production.[4] Here the advent of the machine refers to the use of mass-produced, standardized building materials, which could be assembled on the building site.

In 1912, Voysey's simple country houses fell out of style in Europe. Meanwhile, his contemporary Hermann Muthesius had published *Das Englische Haus* (1904), which took inspiration from architects like Voysey and applied it to the Werkbund in Germany. Thus, the emerging modern movement of architecture used Voysey's work as a model of

simplicity in design. When the architectural world rediscovered Voysey's significance in 1927, it deemed him the "pioneer of the Modern Movement."[5] This shift in reception, however, does not reflect a shift in Voysey's architecture, but rather a shift in the field of architecture itself. From a retrospective point of view, critics can see Voysey's open mind, acceptance of mass-produced, machine-made building materials, and slight departure from the historicism of Arts and Crafts as a precursor to the modern movement. Therefore, even though Voysey responded with disdain to his new title as the "pioneer of the modern movement," and some critics may agree that architects merely copied and twisted Voysey's designs to create modernism, the retrospective reception is still valid. Even though Voysey liked to think of himself as the "last disciple of Pugin,"[6] staying true to the English Gothic tradition, looking back at his architecture through the lens of modernism does indeed reveal his career as a predecessor of the modern movement. While Voysey's architecture remained relatively constant throughout his career, its reception changed due to the emergence of modernism in Europe between 1890 and 1930.

Aside from the stylistic categorization of Voysey's work, the analysis of his houses, without historical context, portrays a constant, recognizable vocabulary of forms. Voysey's 14 South Parade (1891) represents the characteristic exterior of his innovative style. The white rough caste stucco, colored trim around the windows, and emphasized horizontality of the roofline all represent Voysey's typical country house. As Voysey also accepted the advent of the machine as well as new building technologies, he used thin, elegant metal supports under the cantilevered roof as a visible emphasis of the role of technology in craftsmanship. Voysey's Cottage (1888) also has a white rough caste

exterior and an emphasized roofline supported by thin strips of metal. The Cottage introduces the repetition of roof peaks that Voysey reproduces in many other cottage house designs. Perrycroft (1893) also exhibits elegant metal supports beneath a strong horizontal roofline spanning the entire exterior façade of the house. The rough caste exterior also represents the common choice for Voysey's designs. Lowicks (1894) shows a slight shift in Voysey's treatment of the roofline. He places the windows embedded in the roofline, disrupting its continuous horizontality. The white rough caste exterior, framed windows, and towering chimneys, however, make Lowicks a recognizable Voysey house. Voysey's Annesley Lodge (1895), an L-shaped plan, has a white roughcast exterior, an uninterrupted, unifying roof, and three rising chimneys. Voysey's Greyfriars (1896) exhibits an asymmetrical roofline; a sweeping roofline from the top to the first floor creates a peak beside a horizontal, unifying roof. Voysey creates here a white rough caste exterior punctured by more windows than in previous designs, and a more dynamic façade that protrudes out, creating more depth. Voysey's Broadleys (1898) has the characteristic white rough caste exterior and metal supports beneath a unifying roof. Once again, however, windows interrupt the horizontal unifying line. In Broadleys, three large bay windows overlook Lake Windermere. The placement of the rising chimneys also shows an asymmetrical choice of arrangement. A medium-sized country house, Voysey's Homestead (1905) has a characteristic white rough caste exterior, rising rough caste chimneys, and metal roof supports. However, here Voysey interrupts the roofline with varying roofs rather than one unifying roof over the L-shaped plan. Voysey's Lodge Style (1909), one of his last country houses before he fell into unpopularity in 1912, also does not depart from his familiar vocabulary of forms and

materials. He uses a white rough caste exterior façade, a strong horizontal roofline, and rising rough caste chimneys.

As evidenced by this formal description of Voysey's country houses from 1891-1909, his vocabulary of forms remained quite constant. While he did shift to more complicated L-shaped plans and varied rooflines, his main focus remained on the characteristic horizontal or sweeping roofline supported by thin pieces of metal above a white rough caste exterior façade. To emphasize these recognizable forms, Voysey even created a pattern design called "The House That Jack Built," which features a typical Voysey house with a triangular roof, central entrance, and large rising chimney.[7] Therefore, Voysey's architectural style did not change dramatically throughout his career.

During the years that Voysey designed the majority of his country houses, the modern movement of architecture did not yet exist. Voysey's career occurred during a time when Arts and Crafts designs dominated domestic architecture. The Arts and Crafts Movement began as a response and acceptance of A. W. N. Pugin's connection of religious morality and honesty to architectural design in his *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841). This new focus on morality encouraged asymmetry, exterior reflecting interior, and a shift away from unnecessary ornamentation. William Morris secularized Pugin's doctrine, but continued to emphasize honesty in his design of textiles, wallpaper, furniture, and other everyday items. This stress on simplicity and economy of design greatly influenced Voysey, who designed houses to fit Arts and Crafts ideals.

The Studio, a prominent architectural magazine, categorized Voysey's wallpaper and furniture designs as embodying the Arts and Crafts style in 1896. In designing a

pattern, Voysey used Nature as inspiration, finding the underlying contour lines while ignoring the unnecessary or complex details, as in his Fairyland.[17] Here the repeating figures of leaves and birds weave into one another, creating a pattern of simplicity and two-dimensional honesty. Voysey does not allow perspective distortion in his patterns in an attempt to keep the two-dimensional wallpaper truthful, a concept Pugin and Morris also supported. Also similar to Pugin and Morris' ideals, Voysey disagreed with the mindless copying of historic forms in wallpaper patterns:

> "'The revivalism of the present century, which is so analogous to this reliance on precedent, has done more to stamp out men's artistic common sense and understanding than any movement I know. The unintelligent, unappreciative use of the works of the past, which is the rule, has surrounded us at every turn with deadly dullness, that is dumb alike to the producer and the public. This imitative, revivalistic temper has brought into our midst foreign styles of decoration totally out of harmony with our national character and climate.'"[18]

Voysey's inspiration from Nature, emphasis on simplification, and disdain for mindless copying of "foreign styles" categorized his wallpaper patterns as Arts and Crafts style during the years of his early career.[19] One critic claimed that Voysey's assertion: "'Simplicity in decoration is one of the most essential qualities without which no true richness is possible'" could serve as a lesson to every architect of the time attempting to design good quality patterns or architecture.[20]

The Studio also pointed to Voysey's furniture as embodying the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The plain surfaces of wood, simple moldings, and limited decorations all emphasize the simplicity and honesty encouraged by Pugin's and Morris'

ideals and designs.[21] Voysey's furniture, however, also provided his contemporary critics with a hint of a new style: "These show elements of a new style, which may possibly be the germ of the coming Revival of Classic Art."[22] This relatively naïve reception of Voysey's furniture highlights the importance of a retrospective interpretation. This critic merely speculates that Voysey's designs represent an individualistic, innovative "new style," but does not know what to call it. Later critics, however, such as with the aid of the knowledge of history, gained the hindsight to label Voysey as the predecessor of the modern movement.

A year later, *The Studio* praised Voysey for ignoring the kind of ornamentation that distracts the viewer from poor workmanship.[8] It claimed that Voysey's architectural designs use common sense, logic, and honesty.[9] *The Studio* also interpreted Voysey's designs as focusing on function rather than aesthetics. The wall buttresses that Voysey often used in his houses serve to support the walls, allowing Voysey to build the house for less money.[10] While Voysey's houses show primary concern for economy of design, he also introduces the picturesque result of these varied wall buttresses.[11] The beauty of this subsequent arrangement also results from the structural necessity of each buttress.[12] Voysey also used Nature as a direct source of inspiration in his designs, incorporating each house with its specific site in true Arts and Crafts fashion.[13]

In regard to ornamentation, Voysey resisted the temptation to ornament his houses in an attempt to emphasize simplicity of line and contour without cheapening the design with superfluous ornamentation: "We may be sure that if a palace came from [Voysey's] hands it would be distinguished by the larger beauty which makes a Greek temple memorable rather than by the petty ornamentation that has delighted many people in

bygone ages than to-day."[14] *The Studio* went on to assert that Voysey's houses represent truthful architecture, in which personality, character, and individuality stand clearly stated without distracting, unnecessary ornamentation.[15] In Voysey's houses, he practices neither Gothic nor Classical architecture, but rather "house-building pure and simple."[16] This interpretation of Voysey's work, therefore, focuses on the honesty, simplicity, and economy of design in relation to lack of ornamentation.

By 1908, critics still referred to Voysey as an Arts and Crafts architect, but his lack of ornamentation became a main focus of their attention. M. H. Ballie Scott summed up Voysey's career thus far as "the application of serenely sane, practical and rational ideas to home making."[23] Scott refers to a historistic house in 1908 as a "tissue of absurdities," utterly irrational, superfluous, and uncomfortable.[24] Scott praises Voysey for breaking with meaningless historical forms, which form an "outward screen" to the average building.[25] Scott also focuses on the practicality and functionality of Voysey's architecture as it contrasts with nonfunctional ornamentation.[26] Scott emphasizes that Voysey's architecture embodies the premise that form follows function; his country houses use logic to "get back to the essential facts of structure, and leave the forms to develop naturally from that."[27] Scott asserts that Voysey's truthfulness, which does not hide behind a mask of imitated forms, creates a beauty evident from the inside out.[28]

By 1912, very few critics found Voysey a worthy topic of architectural discussion, as his houses had fallen out of style. By 1931, once critics revived Voysey's popularity with a newly retrospective viewpoint by discussing Voysey's career in a very different way, the "originality" noted by early critics proved to be a palpable shift from the Arts and Crafts Movement to the Modern Movement.[29] Voysey, evaluated by John

Betjeman, did not merely copy William Morris' designs, but used his own individuality to bring his buildings to a new level of simplicity.[30] Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a Scottish architect who used this sense of simplicity and functionality to influence the later simplicity of the Modern Movement, indirectly took cues from Voysey's work.[31] Mackintosh's teacher, F. H. Newberry admitted openly to using Voysey's architecture as inspiration in teaching at the Glasgow School of Art.[32] Betjeman asserts that Voysey aimed to "evolve from tradition," rather than to copy what came before him.[33] In this way, Voysey used his individuality to take his inspiration and transform it into an original architecture that could form the link between the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Modern Movement.[34]

In 1935, P. Morton Shand explained that the three factors for the design of the current modern house were "a new structural technique, complete freedom of planning, and a styleless rationalization of architectural forms," all influenced by earlier English architects.[35] Shand asserts that up until 1920, modern architecture faced two obstacles: "poetry" and the wall.[36] The issue of "poetry" includes the romantic, moral, meaningful aspects of design that architecture embodies.[37] A departure from this "poetry" can be seen in Voysey's attention to function before aesthetic. Voysey emphasized the idea that form arises out of the necessity and functionality of assembled forms.[38] The "obstacle of the wall" declared the wall an enemy to architecture; piercing the wall with as many glass openings as possible became the modern goal.[39] Voysey exhibits an early instance of this "dissolving" of the wall, as Walter Gropius, the founder of the modern Bauhaus (1919) termed it.[40] Voysey's thick buttresses, placed strategically around the facades of his country houses allow him to erect thinner walls, thereby dematerializing the façade.[41]

Shand expresses his important retrospective opinion on the Arts and Crafts' role in the emergence of the Modern Movement: "It was perhaps an accident, but it remains a fact, that Morris's medievally inspired crusade for a return to honesty and pride of workmanship proved the point of departure of the whole modern movement in design."[42] Shand argues that Arts and Crafts architects, such as Voysey, designed during an important historic era that lay before a changing world: "This age was quite conscious of having inaugurated a new century, of the rapid progress of science, the gathering momentum of the machine, the steady enfranchisement of the human mind, the imminence of changes without precedent."[43]

Nikolaus Pevsner, also with the advantage of retrospective analysis, names Voysey as a predecessor of the Modern Movement. Pevsner highlights Voysey's differences from Morris in order to emphasize Voysey's break with the Arts and Crafts Movement in certain respects. For Pevsner, Voysey's wallpapers and linens exhibited a shift away from nineteenth-century historicism, a break from the earlier discussed "mindless copying."[44] Voysey designed wallpaper and everyday objects with a refreshing sense of simplicity.[45] When applied to furnishing, this "new spirit" of simplicity represented an important shift towards the coming Modern Movement.[46] For example, the entrance hall to Voysey's The Orchard (1900) includes the simplicity of white and blue color as well as the simple contrast of vertical and horizontal forms.[47] Pevsner also points out that Voysey in fact was a designer, not a craftsman, which, along with his acceptance of the machine and new technologies, places him further from the Arts and Crafts Movement and closer to the Modern Movement.[48] Voysey's modern features of design include the emphatic horizontal lines and the geometric simplicity of the rising

chimneys.[49] However, Voysey manages to assemble these modern forms in traditional arrangements, which fit perfectly with the environment.[50] Because Voysey's architecture exhibited no outright anti-traditional elements, his country houses cannot represent a shift towards modernism without a retrospective analysis.

This shift in reception of Voysey's architecture reflects the shift that occurred in the field of architecture between 1890 and 1930. During Voysey's early career, Frank Lloyd Wright published "The Art and Craft of the Machine" (1901) in America, detailing his evaluation of the machination of architectural elements. Wright discusses the machine as a powerful tool with the ability to bring architecture to new heights (possibly in a literal sense) or the ability to degrade it to a lowly, poorly fashioned mode of imitation and copying.[51] The key point in Wright's essay, however, lays in his acceptance of the machine as an inevitable part of the field of architecture. Because Frank Lloyd Wright's "The Art and Craft of the Machine" acts as a watershed in the acceptance of new technology in architecture, Voysey's acceptance of the machine sets the tone for the Modern Movement.

Seven years later in Vienna, Adolf Loos published "Ornament and Crime" (1908), a vehement fight against ornamentation in architecture. Loos argues that only base, uneducated men find joy in unbecoming ornamentation, such as tattoos.[52] Only the respectable, "modern man," however, has the grace and dignity to rise above ornamentation, an unconscious human drive one must suppress.[53] Loos asserts that the simplicity of forms underscores the beauty of structural architecture. Therefore, ornamentation, whose sole purpose serves to distract the viewer from a building's structural clarity, therefore, destroys good architecture in Loos' opinion.[54] Voysey's

focus on simplicity of form and avoidance of ornamentation, in light of Loos' arguments in 1908, puts him into a new category. Therefore, once Loos publishes "Ornament and Crime," the architectural critic can no longer be intellectually honest in refusing to categorize Voysey as a predecessor of modernism.

Three years later, Hermann Muthesius published *Das Englische Haus* (1911) in Germany, listing and outlining the works of prominent English Arts and Crafts architects, including Voysey. Admiring the simplicity and rationality of these English houses, Muthesius drew inspiration for his architectural philosophy of the Deutscher Werkbund. Muthesius strongly supported the standardization of architecture, fully accepting the use of new building technologies and what it could do for the field of architecture. He believed that standardization and simplicity of form went hand in hand, and this outlook quickly spread throughout Europe. Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus in 1919, focusing on the simplicity of geometric forms in architecture. By 1922, the field of modernism turned towards nonrepresentation, or rather representation of a new "reality," a theoretical goal of De Stijl painters in Holland, such as Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg. Geometrical forms became the focus for architects, emphasizing the communicative power of unobstructed structural representation. Voysey's focus on simplicity, rationality, and geometry, therefore, establish him as an inspiration for and predecessor of modern architects.

In Le Corbusier's polemical collection of essays, *Towards A New Architecture* (1931), he glorifies the process of stating a problem and finding its solution. This process, Le Corbusier asserts, lies at the heart of all good, rational architecture, just as it lies at the heart of all good, rational machinery as well as industrial design practices. The car, the

airplane, and even a simple pipe all exhibit the importance of a function that dictates structure.[55] The forms that emerge from the solution of a stated problem use geometry as their guiding principle. Geometric proportion and unornamented, simple, structural forms all add to Le Corbusier's vocabulary of forms.

This modern style, spearheaded by Le Corbusier and Gropius, soon gained the title International Style. Two architectural critics, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, published their *The International Style* (1932), stemming from a preceding exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, in an attempt to document the history, philosophy, and goals of this new phenomenon. The engineering innovations of the nineteenth century, such as steel-frame and glass construction, as well as the development of architecture that breaks with the imitation of history provided the inspiration for the International Style.[56] Johnson and Hitchcock also discuss three principles of the International Style: "Architecture as Volume," "Regularity," and "The Avoidance of Applied Decoration."[57] The first principle focuses on the difference between volume and mass, and the apparent lightness that modern construction methods permit.[58] For example, the steel and glass construction of a house encloses space and volume, in contrast to brick construction.[59] The second principle refers to the "regular rhythm" of structural forms.[60] Finally, the third principle refers to the avoidance of ornamentation in architecture in an attempt to break with the past.[61] The new mechanical methods of construction, along with the acceptance of standardization, produce sub-par decorations aesthetically, and must be avoided.[62]

While Voysey's architecture matured over his career, it did not change drastically enough to change stylistic categorization. Yet the reception of his work over time reflects

a complete shift in the analysis of his style and his contribution to the field of architecture. During his career, critics regarded his work as original, innovative, and refreshingly simple and rational. Voysey's characteristic horizontal emphasis, geometric forms, simple rough-caste facades, and strategically placed wall buttresses all point to a mode of rational design. Not drastically outlandish for his time, however, Voysey's country houses stylistically fit into the mode of the Arts and Crafts Movement due to their simple, unadorned forms and focus on craft. During the years of Voysey's unpopularity, 1912-1927, the field of architecture changed drastically. The acceptance of the machine-made materials, the disdain for ornamentation, and the ideal of simplicity and functionality spread throughout the world of contemporary architecture. It is only in retrospect, therefore, that a critic can possibly appreciate Voysey's role in the development of the Modern Movement. Many shifts in philosophy about how architecture should communicate arise subtly in Voysey's simple, rational country houses.

Some critics, including Voysey himself, however, refuse to recognize these early country houses as a predecessor of modernism. John Brandon Jones, for example, analyzes carefully the development of Voysey's architecture in the hands of his contemporaries.[63] He discusses Muthesius' role in taking Voysey's forms and twisting them into something entirely different, a style and vocabulary of forms Voysey had never intended; Jones wonders if Voysey really does act as the "pioneer of the Modern Movement," or if his followers merely misunderstood his ideals.[64] Similarly, Voysey himself reacted disdainfully to his new title and assumed role in the development of modernism, asserting that he remained the "last disciple of Pugin."[65] These opinions that

Voysey did not serve as a key architect, bridging the Arts and Crafts Movement and Modern Movement, however, do not reflect intellectual honesty. In retrospect, Voysey's country houses show a break with history and focus on simplicity, geometry, rationality, and economy of design. During his early career, without the luxury of retrospective thinking, critics, quite understandably, classified Voysey simply as an original Arts and Crafts architect. With the advantage of hindsight, however, critics can take into account the development of modernism and the International Style based on the simplicity seen in Voysey's houses. The fact that Voysey did not intend to contribute to the emergence of the Modern Movement does not discredit the opinions of later critics. Rather, the intention of an architect does not dictate his historic influence or significance. Voysey's personal opinion on the matter of retrospective analysis, therefore, is negligible. In addition, Jones' stance that later architects took Voysey's architectural forms and transformed them into a new stylistic category also does not change the reality of Voysey's influence. Once again, recognizing a "pioneer" of a new movement does not ensure that the pioneer acts intentionally. From the mindset of a retrospective analysis, Voysey holds responsibility for the way he influences his contemporaries and inspires his followers. It is in this way, therefore, that Voysey serves as the key transition between the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Modern Movement.

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