



# Louis H. Sullivan and a 19th-Century Poetics of Naturalized Architecture

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For most of the twentieth century, modernist viewers dismissed the architectural ornament of Louis H. Sullivan (1856-1924) and the majority of his theoretical writings as emotional outbursts of an outmoded romanticism. In this study, Lauren Weingarden reveals Sullivan's eloquent articulation of nineteenth-century romantic practices - literary, linguistic, aesthetic, spiritual, and nationalistic - and thus rescues Sullivan and his legacy from the narrow role imposed on him as a pioneer of twentieth-century modernism. Using three interpretive models, discourse theory, poststructural semiotic analysis, and a pragmatic concept of sign-functions, she restores the integrity of Sullivan's artistic choices and his historical position as a culminating figure within nineteenth-century romanticism.

By giving equal weight to Louis Sullivan's writings and designs, Weingarden shows how he translated both Ruskin's tenets of Gothic naturalism and Whitman's poetry of the American landscape into elemental structural forms and organic ornamentation.

Viewed as a site where various romantic discourses converged, Sullivan's oeuvre demands a cross-disciplinary exploration of each discursive practice, and its "rules of accumulation, exclusion, reactivation." The overarching theme of this study is the interrogation and restitution of those Foucauldian rules that enabled Sullivan to articulate architecture as a pictorial mode of landscape art, which he considered co-equal with the spiritual and didactic functions of landscape poetry.

## Contents

Preface; Introduction: reviewing Sullivan after modernism; The romantic context and Emerson's poetic project for an American art; John Ruskin: the picturesque discourse and the language of architectural naturalism; Gothic naturalism and the Ruskinian critical tradition in America; The auditorium building: a Ruskinian reading; Ruskin's reception in the Chicago school; Sullivan's emergence as a landscape poet-architect; Naturalized technology: Sullivan's theory of skyscraper design; Ut pictura architectura: Sullivan's pictorial techniques for representing nature in architecture; The transportation building: Sullivan's manifesto of poeticized architecture; Epilogue: the problem of Sullivan's poetic legacy; Selected bibliography; Index.

## About the Author

Lauren S. Weingarden is a Professor of Art History at Florida State University whose Sullivan scholarship spans over 25 years and comprises numerous publications including two books, *Louis H. Sullivan: The Banks* and *Louis H. Sullivan: A System of Architectural Ornament*, as well as international museum exhibitions, professional awards and two documentary films.

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