

The Vienna School of Art History and (Viennese) Modern Architecture

Jindřich Vybíral

In scholarly literature on the historiography of modern architecture, the Viennese School primarily appears as the institution that had educated Emil Kaufmann (1891–1953), the author of *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier*, one of the most famous ‘genealogies’ of the Modernist movement.¹ As is well known, Kaufmann was a pupil of Max Dvořák and Josef Strzygowski – it was under Dvořák’s tuition that Kaufmann defended his 1920 PhD dissertation on ‘Ledoux’s architectonic projects and Classicist aesthetics’² – and the methodological principles of the Viennese school were pivotal for his analyses even after he left Austria and settled down in the United States.³ Modern architecture was also among the interests of another Dvořák’s student, Dagobert Frey (1883–1962), who took over the editorship of *Der Architekt* in 1919 and consequently published a number of important essays on the topic in this journal.⁴ However, the topic of my paper is the work done on modern architecture by ‘teachers’ – the classics of the ‘older Viennese school’ – rather than their pupils. And my focus will be even more limited than that. At the time when the personality of Alois Riegl shone forth at the University of Vienna and then ‘disappeared like a comet’⁵, the capital of the Hapsburg monarchy represented one of the most energetic centres of architectural modernism in Europe – primarily due to Otto Wagner (1841-1918) and his followers from the ‘special school’ of architecture at the Academy of Arts. To compare the roles of the two schools appears highly plausible even without postulating any coherence postulate a la Hegel or believing in an unconscious connection between parallel phenomena. In fact, as suggested by Hans H. Aurenhammer, Max Dvořák might well have been the first to ponder the idea.⁶ The task of my paper is to investigate the theoretical reflections devoted by the classics of the Viennese school to the paradigmatic changes of the Viennese architectonic

¹ Emil Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier: Ursprung und Entwicklung der autonomen Architektur*, Wien: Passer 1933.

² *Die Entwürfe des Architekten Ledoux und die Ästhetik des Klassizismus*. Chronologisches Verzeichnis der aus der Wiener Schule, bzw. dem Österreichischen Institut für Geschichtsforschung, hervorgegangenen oder ihr affilierten Kunsthistoriker. Bearbeitet von Hans R. Hahnloser, *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, Ergänzungs-Band 13, no. 2, [1934], 211-228, here 222.

³ Cf. Meyer Shapiro, ‘The New Viennese School’, *Art Bulletin* 18: 2, June 1936, 258-266.

⁴ Cf. esp. Dagobert Frey, Otto Wagner, *Der Architekt* 22, 1919, 1-6; ‘Das Stilproblem unserer Zeit’, *Der Architekt* 22, 1919, 85-94; Leopold Bauer, *Der Architekt* 22, 1919, 97-102; Josef Hoffmann, *Der Architekt* 23, 1920, 65-72.

⁵ (...) wie ein Komet entschwindend’. Julius von Schlosser, ‘Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte. Rückblick auf ein Säkulum deutscher Gelehrtenarbeit in Österreich’, *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, Ergänzungs-Band 13, no. 2, [1934], 145-228, here 181.

⁶ Hans H. Aurenhammer, ‘Max Dvořák und die moderne Architektur: Bemerkungen zum Vortrag Die letzte Renaissance’ (1912), *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 50, 1997, 23-39, here 29. – There are remarkable parallels with Wagner’s 1895 manifesto, *Moderne Architektur*, in Riegl’s lecture *Über Renaissance der Kunst*, published the same year in the *Mitteilungen des k. k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie*, N. F., 5, 1895, 342-350, 363-371 and 381-393. Cf. Diana Reynolds, ‘Vom Nutzen und Nachteil des Historismus für das Leben. Alois Riegls Beitrag zur Frage der kunstgewerblichen Reform’, in: Peter Noever (ed.), *Kunst und Industrie: Die Anfänge des Museums für angewandte Kunst in Wien*, Wien: Hatje Kantz, 2000, 20-29.

scene, and more specifically, their perception of Otto Wagner's innovating role. My focus of attention will be three texts, by three prominent authors, from the period of 1907–22.

Strzygowski

Both of the two *Ordinarius*-professors that shaped the Viennese school in the period around 1900 were Wagner's younger contemporaries. However, modern architecture was not among their scientific interests. Riegl, the universal historian, viewed contemporary art from a global perspective, as part of an overall evolutionary process. On the other hand, Wickhoff was a connoisseur and an *engagé* participant in the artistic developments of the day, yet for him, the medium of the most important evolutionary metamorphoses was contemporary painting.⁷ Thus, the first tenured professor to give full expression to his views on modern architecture was to be Josef Strzygowski, the *enfant terrible* among Viennese historians of art and the key opponent of the 'humanistic wing' of the Viennese school. In 1907 – that is, even before joining the University of Vienna – Strzygowski published a book on contemporary visual arts (*Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*), where two chapters were devoted to architecture. The text was based on lectures that the author had presented one year before in his area of origin.

Presented as 'a little book for everybody', Strzygowski's exposition does not bother much about precise analyses and conceptual arguments. The prevalent genres are descriptions, and sometimes personal reminiscences. The author in no way conceals his intention to promote 'wholesome trends' in the arts and to praise artists he holds for 'prophets of the future'.⁸ At the same time, however, Strzygowski sticks to his preference for systematic classification, and following the comparative systems in the natural sciences, divides the representatives of the contemporary architectonic culture into three kinds: proper architects, engineers, and decorative designers. The first group comprises academically educated artists that refuse to lay aside the traditional category of style, ignore all calls of *Zeitgeist*, and in their projects follow not rational rules, but rather inherited aesthetic principles, 'primarily from the outside towards the interior, just like before'.⁹ Their opposite are engineers, the heroes of the modern times who create not façades but rather spaces, ground their work exclusively in its set functions, and employ the new means of construction. And finally, in the third group there are innovators, produced by the applied arts: these builders fulfil the public's yearning for novelties by covering flat façades by fantastic decorative patterns, put together irrespective of the traditional tectonic principles. Only an uninformed outsider might think that the blueprint correlated with the actual pattern of the architectonic scene. In 1907, the decorative Jugendstil and its subjectivistic ideology were surviving only in second-rate architectonic productions. Strzygowski looked past this reality – be it out of ignorance or intentionally. It may be that his classification is based on Gottfried Semper's 'comparative architectural science', *Vergleichende Baulehre*: in the architecture of his day, Semper singled out three wrong-headed tendencies: that of the

⁷ Cf. Edwin Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte und die Kunst ihrer Zeit: Zum Verhältnis von Methode und Forschungsgegenstand am Beginn der Moderne*, Wien – Köln – Weimar: Böhlau, 2005.

⁸ 'Propheten der Zukunft'. Josef Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart: Ein Büchlein für jedermann*, Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1907, viii.

⁹ '(...)wie früher vorwiegend von aussen nach innen'. Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, 7.

historians, that of the materialists and that of the aestheticians.¹⁰ However, Strzygowski's scheme primarily reflects the idiosyncratic evolutionary hypotheses of this single-minded scholar. According to Strzygowski, each of the three groups is linked to one of the 'three great powers of architecture': the classical antiquity, the Gothic, and the Orient.¹¹ The criticisms heaped on the 'academic mannerisms' of the first group was a variation on Strzygowski's basic counter-classical, counter-mediterranean stance. The positive evaluation of the 'engineers', whose work Strzygowski compares to the Gothic structures, then reflects the author's sympathies for the fruits of the 'Nordic' spirit. The Islamic Orient, an equally crucial topos in Strzygowski's topography of the arts, entered his pseudo-scientific system of contemporary arts in the most awkward way: not as a real, but rather as a possible source of modern identity. With almost a sort of obsession, Strzygowski compares the productions of fin-de-siècle decorativism with examples from the Near East, put forth as a paradigm to follow.

Antiquity being the model for those who are architects and (briefly put) the Gothic for those who, among the modern builders, are engineers, the decorativists also possess a field, although so far a remarkably ignored one, for inquiry of their own kind and for attaining some legitimacy of their tendency.¹²

Strzygowski's book certainly does not excel in objectivity – and even its very tendentiousness is not supported by transparent and consistent aesthetic norms. Nor can one state unequivocally that Strzygowski firmly preferred the rationalism of the 'engineers'. True, the engineer is the vehicle of the evolutionary trends; yet, the works that leave his hands are products bare of artistic ambitions, lacking taste, and directed merely by the barbarian spirit of commerce. 'Thus it is quite frequent that purposefulness, having been achieved without art, results, in all conscientiousness, in something repulsive', claims Strzygowski with a sigh.¹³ The uncompromising rejection of American sky-scrapers and the prominent lack of positively valued examples from among utility constructions raises the question whether, perhaps, Strzygowski's advocacy of the work of the engineers is not a mere empty proclamation, only a lip-service to the dominant progressivist model. As was already noted by Erwin Lachnit,¹⁴ Strzygowski's friendly acceptance of fin-de-siècle decorativism also showed clear limits and reservations, for the belief in the cathartic power of the ornament is, for Strzygowski, merely another symptom of the disease of modern art, as it lacks the supreme value – content: 'The decorative tendency is thus a clear symptom that the imagination of our time lacks clear ideas and forms. It gropes in uncertainty and seeks to compensate all that it lacks in objects and distinct content by hunches'.¹⁵

¹⁰ Heidrun Laudel, *Gottfried Semper*, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1991, 34-35. Harry F. Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century*, New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1996, 179.

¹¹ '(...)drei Großmächten der Architektur'. Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, 11.

¹² 'Ist die Antike den Architekten, die Gotik, kurz gesagt, den Ingenieuren unter den modernen Baumeister Vorbild, so haben auch die Dekorateure einen bisher merkwürdigerweise wenig beachteten Boden, auf dem sie für ihre Art Studien machen können und der zum mindestens die Berechtigung ihrer Richtung historisch erweist'. Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, 20.

¹³ 'An unkünstlerisch durchgeführter Zweckmäßigkeit wird so nicht selten mit völliger Aufrichtigkeit das Abstoßendste geleistet.' Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, 11.

¹⁴ Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule*, 87.

¹⁵ 'Der Zug zum Dekorativen ist daher ein deutliches Merkmal dafür, daß der Phantasie unserer Zeit klare Vorstellungen, Gestalten fehlen. Sie tappt ins Ungewisse und sucht, was ihr an Gegenständen und klarem Inhalt fehlt, durch Ahnungen zu ersetzen.' Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, 93.

Strzygowski's portrayal of the 'decorators' suggests that this group is merely a sort of necessary evil, a concession to the uneducated public. The only incontrovertible evolutionary contribution of this tendency is its negating of the classicist principles. Given the proclamative reverence for the stance of the engineers, it is rather surprising when Strzygowski exhibits sympathies towards a phenomenon that transcends the schematic frontiers of an 'architectonic' perspective. The phenomenon in question is the picturesque 'patriotic' architecture, drawing its building motifs from the transalpine – rather than the classical – architecture; an example is the Leipzig town hall, built by Hugo Licht in 1899–1905. According to Strzygowski, the irregularity and the plurality of forms in buildings of this kind show a dominance of the 'principle of free rhythms', derived from the relief of the Nordic landscape.¹⁶ Strzygowski pays equal respect to the – almost grotesquely – eclectic industrial constructions of Lossow and Viehweger in Dresden (Fig. 1). Clearly, the neo-romantic movement in German architecture corresponds with his notion of a wholesome Nordic art, standing in opposition to the anthropocentric classicist tradition.



Figure 1 William Lossow - Hermann Viehweger, Heat and power station, Dresden, 1903. From: Josef Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, Leipzig 1907, 14.

¹⁶ 'Prinzip der freien Rhythmen'. Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, 10.

In order to endow his universal blueprints with an – at least apparent – aura of an objective scientific inquiry, Strzygowski attempts to ground his aprioristic verdicts in a morphological analysis of modernist façades. In the chapter devoted to private domiciles, he provides a description of the expressive means of contemporary architecture, such as the cornice, the window, the entrance door, bay windows, balconies, terraces and so on. However, he fails to present a phenomenological analysis such that it would elucidate the goals that modernist architects follow or the meaning of the evolutionary process; rather, he supplies us merely with a catalogue of extraordinary motifs that are supposed to be the vehicles of modernist ideas by themselves, stripped of all context. With the exception of Josef Hoffmann, whose studies of form – at the time almost a decade old – Strzygowski subjected to sharp criticisms, his selection includes only more or less ordinary productions of second-rate architects (Ludwig Zatzka, Paul Hoppe, Friedrich Dietz), once deserving the label ‘bizarre’ rather than ‘innovative’. It is quite symptomatic that every piece of morphological ‘analysis’ ends with a comparison with the pertinent motifs in Islamic architecture. (Fig. 2)



Figure 2 Mosque at Larenda Gate, Konia. From: Josef Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, Leipzig 1907, 53.

These parts of the book show the most clearly Strzygowski's inconsistency in thinking, vagueness of assessments, and lack of competence. All our attempts to deduce out of the text Strzygowski's criteria of 'being modern' will be in vain. The notion of 'modernity' means in his text about as much as 'being contemporary'. There is no doubt that the future of architecture is seen here in transcending the classicist tradition. However, a close reading of his book cannot fail to notice the deep grounding of Strzygowski's aesthetic assessments in stereotypical nineteenth-century notions.

The sections devoted to the work of Otto Wagner are, on the contrary, among the better portions of the book. Strzygowski classifies Wagner as an 'engineer' and values the progressive nature of Wagner's simple forms, corresponding with the purposes and constructions of modernity. Strzygowski registers here also the more traditional components of Wagner's work, all the compromises between the demands of utility and of representation, and the contradictions between the letter of Wagner's manifestos and his own production. The matador of the Viennese modern architecture is diagnosed by Strzygowski quite fittingly as a 'master of disguises' (*Verkleidungskünstler*) who first construes a space and then decorates the surface independent of the inner structure.¹⁷ While, as a creator of spaces, Wagner has no equal, his fin-de-siècle façades are slightly embarrassing. Strzygowski does not hesitate to criticize in sharp terms the advertising portal that Wagner projected for the Viennese daily *Die Zeit*: 'Such poster-façades,' says Strzygowski, 'ruin all artistic thinking'.¹⁸

Dvořák

As is well known, Max Dvořák refrained from explicit statements on contemporary art and, instead, projected his views on this point into his expositions of mannerism.¹⁹ So it happened that his lecture on modern architecture, presented in February 1912 in the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts and published in 1997 thanks to Hans H. Aurenhammer, is Dvořák's first and – together with his later essay on Oskar Kokoschka – his only contribution devoted exclusively and systematically to the development of contemporary art.²⁰ Dvořák's lecture was part of a series of seventeen talks, given in Vienna with a six-month period by prominent art-historians from Austria, Germany and Switzerland.²¹ Even though Dvořák approached the topic from a purely historical stance, his reading of near past stands no closer to its 'objective' knowledge than Strzygowski's book. One remarkable feature is that the text, in its structure, anticipates the usual argumentative pattern of later historians, linked with the Functionalist avant-garde.²² Just like Pevsner's, Kaufmann's or Giedion's works, the lecture starts from a sharp attack on nineteenth-century architecture, one whose criticisms are as vaguely universal and contradictory to Riegl's postulate of the non-existence of decadent periods in art history that it seems their author is no impartial observer but rather a tendentious participant of open ideological conflicts. The architectural culture of historicism is presented here as a counter-architecture that neglects all the rational principles of designing: it ignores the purpose of the building and the available materials, it conceals the construction, and it uses the architectonic forms of the past with no regard to their original meaning.

There is no need to point out that arguments such as these had been brought forth already by the participants of the theoretical debates of the 19th century and that, at the

¹⁷ Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, 17 and 89. – Cf. Werner Oechslin, *Stilhülse und Kern: Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos und der evolutionäre Weg zur modernen Architektur*, Zürich: gta-Verlag, 1994, 96-97.

¹⁸ 'Solche Plakatafassaden ruinieren alle künstlerische Gesinnung.' Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, 12.

¹⁹ Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule*, 96.

²⁰ Max Dvořák, 'Die letzte Renaissance. Vortrag gehalten am 22. Februar 1912 im Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie', ed. Hans H. Aurenhammer, *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 50, 1997, 9-21. – See also Aurenhammer, *Max Dvořák und die moderne Architektur*.

²¹ 'Österreichisches Museum', *Wiener Zeitung*, 11.11. 1911, 5.

²² Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture*, Cambridge, Mass. – London: MIT Press, 1999, 32-33.

beginning of the new century, they already belonged into an arsenal of well-worn ideological clichés. If, then, an erudite historian, well acquainted with the developments in modern architecture thanks to his participation in monument preservation, decided to employ them nonetheless, he must have done so intentionally and with a clear goal. Just like the latter-day advocates of modern architecture, Dvořák decided to give up the 'ideal objectivity' of a historian and to take up a polemical position from which to state one's recommendations as to the future. The target of Dvořák's objections was the 'materialist' understanding of modernity, as represented in Vienna by Otto Wagner. In my opinion, Dvořák's categorical rejection of historicism was meant to demonstrate his modernist view and to bolster his critical conclusions. Dvořák had high praise for the contribution of the reformist movement that had promoted new materials and new construction systems into vehicles of architectonic meaning. With an equal determination, Dvořák claims to be proud that it has been Viennese architects, with Wagner at the helm, who took such an active part in this process. He feels the process has brought to prominence 'a new ethical maxim' that has brought about a 'victory of verity and directness over doctrinaire rigidity and empty phrases'.²³ Yet, almost in the same breath, Dvořák expresses doubts about the long-term validity of this understanding of architecture. The new forms, applied so well in secular buildings, are impossible to employ beyond the limits of this sphere. According to Dvořák, the most pressing task of the day is to create a new monumental style, for whose birth it is not sufficient to have new functions, new constructions or new materials; rather, the key factors here are of an artistic nature. Viewed from this angle, Wagner's work presents not a new architecture, but rather 'merely a prelude to it'.²⁴ While Dvořák launched his exposition by a sharp refusal of historicism and of any stylistic imitation whatsoever, he also spoke convincingly for a productive unfolding of the classical tradition: 'It was necessary to build the new tectonic style on the ground of all that had been architectonically created since the antiquity'.²⁵ Architectonical means do not have to be invented, as the modern artist is also free to expand upon the heritage of his predecessors. Yet this maintaining of continuity was supposed to differ profoundly from the 19-century historicist reception:

Whereas the academicians wanted to establish a new style on the basis of study and imitation of older architectonic forms, here older forms are introduced into a new style as useful tectonic elements and re-interpreted as the new style requires, just like it happened in the Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles.²⁶

Historians familiar with the complex architectural theory of the nineteenth-century could raise the objection that the outlined programme of 'continuity' instead of 'imitating' was promoted already by the representatives of the historicist styles, criticized by Dvořák. However, what they had held for a programme of a future architecture, Dvořák found ready and available – in the contemporary German architecture. Among the representatives of this

²³ '(...) ein neues ethisches Prinzip... Sieg der Wahrheit und Aufrichtigkeit über Doktrin und Phrase'. Dvořák, *Die letzte Renaissance*, 14.

²⁴ '(...) nur ein Präludium dazu'. Dvořák, *Die letzte Renaissance*, 15.

²⁵ 'Es mußte der neue tektonische Stil auf all dem aufgebaut werden, was die Baukunst seit der Antike an architektonischen Werten geschaffen [hatte]'. Dvořák, *Die letzte Renaissance*, 20.

²⁶ 'Während die Akademiker durch das Studium und die Nachahmung alter Bauformen einen neuen Stil begründen wollten, werden hier alte Formen als brauchbare tektonische Elemente in einem neuen Stil eingefügt und ihm gemäß umgedeutet, wie es im romanischen, im gotischen, im Renaissance- und Barockstil geschah.' Dvořák, *Die letzte Renaissance*, 17.

new, and ultimate, Renaissance Dvořák mentioned J. M. Olbrich and claimed his Ernst-Ludwig-Haus in Darmstadt to be a fulfillment of Alberti's definition of harmony. More importantly, Dvořák listed the names of Alfred Messel (Fig. 3) and Bruno Schmitz (Fig. 4).



Figure 3 Alfred Messel, Wertheim Department store, Berlin, 1903-1906. From: *Architektonische Rundschau* 21, 1905, 90.

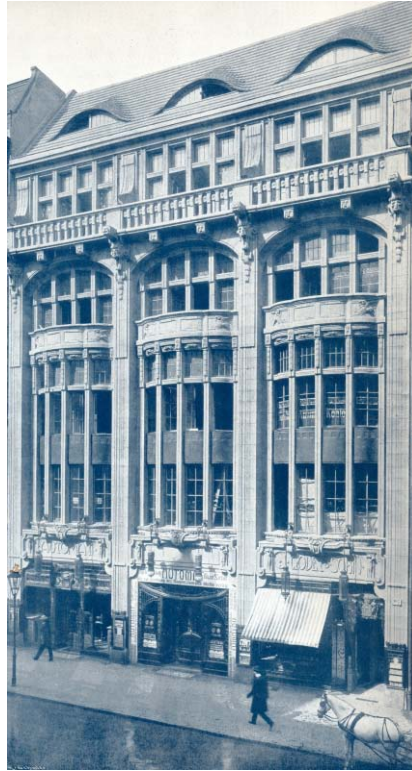


Figure 4 Bruno Schmitz, Automat Department store, Berlin, 1905. From: *Architektonische Rudschau* 22, 1906, 25.

A historian of architecture will also ask here about the reasons forcing Dvořák to refuse so adamantly any allegiance to the concept of continuity to Wagner, even though Wagner's latent classicism, the variations on the Austrian national Baroque tradition, as well as the theoretical postulate of idealizing reality in architecture would supply all the needed legitimacy. And further, why did Dvořák choose to demonstrate the failure of Wagner's approach in the field of monumental architecture on the Academy project (Fig. 5), by that time almost fifteen years old, and why did he neglect to analyze Wagner's approach to monumentality in his more recent work? The question has in part been answered by Aurenhammer who situated Dvořák's criticism of Wagner in its precise historical coordinates: the art historian belonged among the friends of the Heir Apparent, Franz Ferdinand d'Este, well-known for not liking the early Viennese avant-garde, and Dvořák's lecture took place at the time when the Academy of Arts was to decide about the person of Wagner's successor.²⁷ It is quite true that the views presented by Dvořák are remarkably close to the programme of 'tempered modernism' as followed by Leopold Bauer, who soon after – and apparently with the support of the Archduke – took over Wagner's chair. When Bauer's position was recalled in 1919, Dvořák protested in public – quite ironically together with his arch-rival Strzygowski.²⁸ All this is not to say that a serious scholar took part in power-charades. Still, it seems plausible that the situation, as outlined, induced him in 1912 to give a public talk and to state an alternative with respect to the repulsive utilitarian realism.

²⁷ Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák und die moderne Architektur', 33-35.

²⁸ Aufruf, *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* 19. 4. 1919. – Cf. Jindřich Vybíral, 'Leopold Bauer: Apostate of Wagner's School', *Centropa* 6: 1, 2006, 43-51.



Figure 5 Otto Wagner, Project for The Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, 1897-1898. From: Otto Wagner, *Eigene Skizzen, Projekte und ausgeführte Bauten*, Wien 1897.

We would go too far, in fact, even by characterizing his words as an expression of conservative thinking. Wagner's radical view drew modernist criticisms, too. Already in 1898, the architect Richard Streiter published a polemical pamphlet that argued against the

exclusive style-creating role of function and construction.²⁹ In Vienna, the same view was advocated, even after 1910, by a numerous group of architects and critics that claimed allegiance to the idea of progress. Their main platform was the moderately modernist journal *Der Architekt* that printed contributions both from Wagner's students and from his opponents. Within the context of the *mitteleuropäisch* architectonic discourse, the editor-in-chief, Ferdinand Feldegg, represented the stance of 'imaginative idealism': he was disinclined towards both materialism and the cult of novelty in contemporary architecture, he warned against exaggerating the value of technology and science, and as their antipodes, he promoted the artist's will and imagination.³⁰ Another sharp critic of the short-breathed aesthetic experiments of the Viennese moderne was also expressed and an advocate of a restoration of the interrupted Classicist tradition was Adolf Loos.³¹ Dvořák's demand to restore the lost unity between the productive forces of a society and its humanistic erudition was quite close to these programmes. However, in Vienna, the most influential critic of materialism in architecture was Alois Riegl who rejected the mechanistic interpretation of spiritual development, based on a misreading of Semper's views, and on the contrary promoted the idea that art is born out of idealistic motives and in a constant strife against the materially given.³² Dvořák's vision of the future for architecture is grounded here, in this model of art as an autonomous organism. His vision is not to be fulfilled by 'new materials, constructions or shapes of details', but rather by 'a newly awoken feel for the architectonic function of the tectonic elements, of the artistic patterning and shaping of the building matter'.³³

However, the lecture also documents Dvořák's inquiry – already before the war – into the links between art and the spiritual forces of the times. In the 19th century, the determining content was 'that which is real, can be captured by the senses and empirically known' and it was – says Dvořák – only a question of time when 'this realism breaks forth also in opposition against architecture built on appearances and mirages'.³⁴ Dvořák compares realism in architecture with Millet's paintings or Tolstoy's novels. The demand to transcend this sober architecture by a new feeling of form can then be seen in analogy to Dvořák's later rejection of impressionism as a visual form of appearance corresponding to positivism in science. Yet the concept of an 'ultimate renaissance' also demonstrated Dvořák's humanism and his faith in the incontrovertible validity of the ideals of the classicist tradition, so detested by Strzygowski. We can read in his lecture:

Among the immortal deeds of the Greek spirit belongs the notion that architecture can be something more than utility building and that this "more" depends not, like it

²⁹ Richard Streiter, *Architektonische Zeitfragen: Eine Sammlung und Sichtung verschiedener Anschauungen mit besonderer Beziehung auf Professor Otto Wagner Moderne Architektur*, Berlin: Cosmos, 1898.

³⁰ Mitchell Schwarzer, *German Architectural Theory and the Search for Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 219-221.

³¹ Apparently it was Kokoschka who also induced Loos to project, in 1921, Dvořák's mausoleum for the Vienna Central Cemetery. Cf. Eva Frodl-Kraft, 'Das Grabmal Max Dvořák', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, 28, 1974, 144.

³² Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, Berlin: Georg Siemens, 1893, vii. – see also Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper*, 371-381. – Schwarzer, *German Architectural Theory*, 202-204.

³³ '(...) neue Materialien, Konstruktionen oder Detailformen ... ein neues Gefühl für die architektonische Funktion der baulichen Elemente, der künstlerischen Gliederung und Durchbildung der baulichen Materie'. Dvořák, *Die letzte Renaissance*, 16.

³⁴ '(...) das Reale, sinngemäß Erfassbare, empirisch Erkannte... daß dieser Realismus sich auch in einer Opposition gegen die auf Schein und Vorspiegelungen aufgebaute Architektur geltend machen mußte'. Dvořák, *Die letzte Renaissance*, 12-13.

does in ancient oriental art, on a mere heaping of materials and decorations, not on the volume and glamour of the building, measured in absolute terms, but rather on its organic patterning, shaping, and unification.³⁵

One can hardly avoid asking if Dvořák's concept of a 'new architecture' was not, in part, also a polemic with his academic rival.

Tietze

Hans Tietze, Dvořák's collaborator and friend, got acquainted with contemporary art already before the 1914-18 war, while an investigator for the commission on preservation of Austrian monuments – which is why he was perceived, by part of the public, as a competent commentator of the current trends on the artistic scene, rather than as a monuments specialist. Yet contemporary architecture constituted an intersection of his two lines of interest, as is well shown by a 1910 essay. In this article, Tietze employs arguments advocating the continuity of the historical character of Vienna for defending Loos's modernist construction in Michaelerplatz, a building that Tietze surprisingly but plausibly valued for its links with the local classicist tradition.³⁶ Tietze's most significant contribution to the historiography of modern architecture was to become a 1922 booklet on Otto Wagner. This was, altogether, the second separate monograph on Wagner, preceded by the 1914 book by Josef August Lux.³⁷ Tietze differed from Lux in the degree of depth and precision, but primarily in adopting the neutral stance fit for a historian. With respect to these qualities, usually attributed to empiricist and positivist scholarship, Tietze's book was superior even to the presentations on Wagner supplied by Strzygowski and Dvořák – and this is certainly not due merely to the four-year period that separates the book from the architect's death.



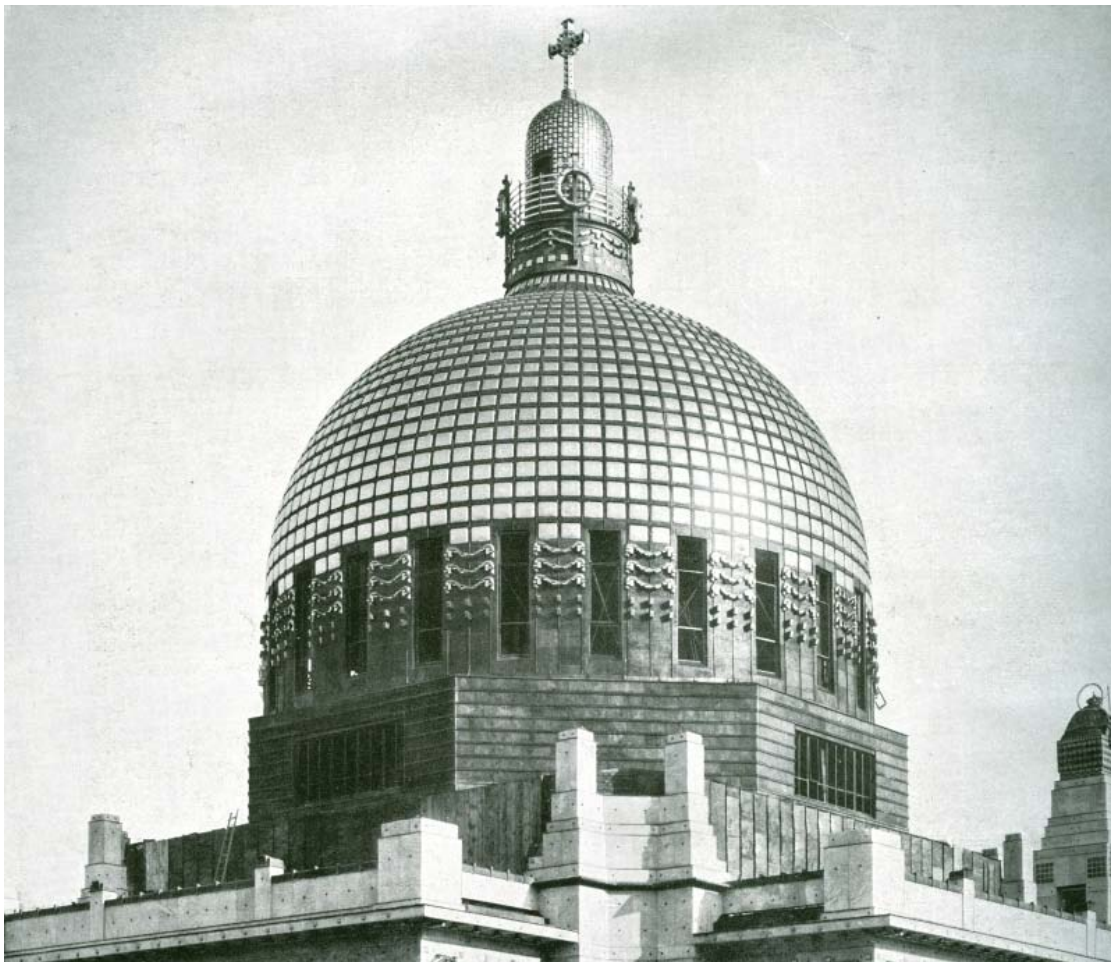
Figure 6 Otto Wagner, The Nußdorf weir and lock, Vienna, 1894-1899. From: *Der Architekt* 22, 1919, 4.

³⁵ 'Zu den unsterblichen Taten des griechischen Geistes gehört die Auffassung, daß die Architektur mehr sein kann als ein Nutzbau und [daß] dies Mehr nicht wie in der altorientalischen Kunst auf einer bloßen Anhäufung des Materials und der Dekoration, nicht auf der absoluten Größe und Pracht des Bauwerkes, sondern auf dessen organischer Gliederung und Durchbildung und Vereinheitlichung beruht.' Dvořák, *Die letzte Renaissance*, 18.

³⁶ Hans Tietze, 'Der Kampf um Alt Wien', *Kunstgeschichtliches Jahrbuch der k. k. Zentralkommission*, 4, 1910, 33-62.

³⁷ Joseph August Lux, *Otto Wagner: Eine Monographie*, München: Delphin Verlag, 1914.

On sixteen pages, Tietze describes the evolution of Wagner's career from the initial neo-Baroque historicism up to the late utilitarianism. Tietze sees the crucial break in the project of Vienna Metropolitan Railway (*Stadtbahn*) (Fig. 6): both the inherited repertory of forms and the grammar of forms failed here. As the pinnacle of Wagner's work Tietze holds the urbanicist projects whose content transcends the world of art sphere and reaches into the social sphere. Only here was fully developed the utopian romanticism, so typical for Wagner's personality. Tietze views the block volumes, as elementary units of these metropolitan visions, as the most characteristic feature of Wagner's architectonic language. Like Frey before him – who saw the most substantial contribution of modern architecture in a restoration of the classical ideal of simple geometrical forms – Tietze had also high praise for Wagner's ability 'to guide architectural beauty back to the simple basic forms'.³⁸ (Fig. 7) Similarly to Strzygowski's earlier verdict, Tietze also finds in Wagnerian buildings a tension between the constructive inner core and the decorative outer skin. The unbridled ornamental drive is explained, or rather explained away, by Wagner's anchoring in the Austrian tradition with its sensuousness and its decorative taste. Yet even so, Tietze sees the fin-de-siècle decoration as the most passing and least serious part of Wagner's work. At the end of his exposition, Tietze actually outlines the idea of an inner core freed from the insubstantial ornamental additions as a pure idea of modernity.³⁹



³⁸ '(...) die architektonische Schönheit auf die einfachen Grundformen zurückzuführen'. Hans Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, Wien - Berlin - München - Leipzig: Rikola, 1922, 10.

³⁹ Cf. Oechslin, *Stilhülse und Kern*, 97-98.

Figure 7 Otto Wagner, St. Leopold's Church of am Steinhof, Vienna, 1903-1907. From: *Der Architekt* 22, 1919, 6.

Unlike Dvořák, Tietze holds Wagner capable of monumental expression. He is also, unlike than the other two authors, better at avoiding the impact of Wagner's self-presentation, as shown by his raising a question that is crucial for any interpretation of Wagner's work: 'Is the achievement of the architect co-extensive with the achievement of the engineer?'⁴⁰ From Tietze's viewpoint, Wagner merely claims to have subordinated all the other ingredients of the work to the utility purpose. Just like we can feel there is merely a loose connection between the core and the skin, the realized works, too, are no mere illustrations of Wagner's theoretical propositions.

Rather, the high quality of Wagner's architecture is grounded in having fulfilled an artistic goal, in having impressively organized the building mass that has been subjected to control, in establishing an equivalence between force and matter such that it can be perceived by senses – an equivalence that is the source of all art of building.⁴¹

The discrepancy between theory and practice is, states Tietze, Wagner's life-saving instance. By strictly following his own doctrines he could never become a real artist. 'The purpose and the matter: these are the preliminary conditions of all building. However, it is beyond them,' claimed Tietze in Riegl's spirit, 'that first starts the irreducible and unimitable activity of the creative master, the freely ruling, by no scientific law bound art of architecture'.⁴² Even though a contemporary historian would find in Wagner's manifestos also a warning against an unhealthy overbearance of rationalist positions, it is a fact that Wagner's description of the 'idealist' factors of the architectonic profession was much vaguer than that of the 'realist' ones.



Figure 8 Otto Wagner, Villa Wagner II, Vienna, 1912. From: *Der Architekt* 22, 1919, 16.

Tietze perceived Wagner's theory primarily as a moral appeal, as a call to restore architecture at a tectonic basis. (Fig. 8) Notwithstanding all his objections against Wagner's materialism or mechanicism, he – ironically - still attributed to this doctrine a higher value than to the real form of Wagner's architecture, due to its *ethical* content. It

⁴⁰ '(...) ob die Leistung des Architekten sich mit der des Ingenieur deckt'. Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, 9.

⁴¹ Die hohe Qualität der Wagnerschen Architektur beruht vielmehr auf der Erfüllung eines künstlerischen Zwecks, auf der eindruckswollen Organisierung der bewältigten Baumasse, auf dem sinnlich erlebbaren Ausgleich von Kraft und Stoff, der die Quelle aller Baukunst ist.' Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, 9-10.

⁴² 'Zweck und Material sind die Bedingungen alles Bauschaffen, aber jenseits ihrer beginnt erst die unersetzliche und unnachahmliche Tätigkeit des schöpferischen Meisters, die frei waltende, durch kein wissenschaftliches Gesetz gebundene Kunst der Architektur.' Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, 6.

was in the doctrine, according to Tietze, that the artist presented his reply to the demands of the *Zeitgeist*. The contradiction with his Tietze's statements is, apparently, a symptom of a deeper antinomy in his thinking at the time, an antinomy that concerns the conflict between the human and the superhuman in artistic creativity – an antinomy we also know from the texts of late Dvořák.⁴³ In Tietze's study, Wagner is presented – on the one hand – as an instrument of a suprapersonal Will while 'Life strove for a new shape'.⁴⁴ Yet at the same time, the architect successfully shapes the world by his own art, and even imprints his own subjective will with an appearance of objective validity. Tietze summarizes the complicated relationship between the artist and the *Zeitgeist* as follows: 'As a theoretician, Wagner wanted to serve his time, and so obeyed its every wish; as an artist, he served it in a more genuine way – by striving to imprint it with its own, greater willing'.⁴⁵ Precisely by mixing the universal and the personal in his work was Wagner a real child of his times. However, the conflict between the personal vision and the unavoidable expression of the *Zeitgeist* was – so Tietze – eventually the cause of his fatal failure.

With his older friend Dvořák, Tietze shared the conviction that the development of architecture is intertwined with the changes in the overall spiritual atmosphere of the times. Tietze borrowed from Dvořák the analogy between artistic realism and positivist science; however, he saw their opposite not in a parched 'utility style' but rather in the phenomenon of historicism, viewed by Tietze as equally a product of the same scientific spirit and of the imitative faculty. Tietze's verdict on this stylistic modality, so sharply rejected by Dvořák, is not so strict; it even seems that Tietze would allow for a degree of continuity between contemporary developments and the recent past. According to Tietze, Wagner learned his craft following the historicizing architecture of the Ringstraße, even though this happened 'by imitating and by contradicting'.⁴⁶ Like Dvořák, Tietze also acknowledged the positive influence of tradition as a possible ground and source of support for modern artists when they search for their own 'will'. With Wagner, the tradition was not supplied by the universal maxims of classicism but rather by the energetic heritage of the Austrian Baroque – whereas lack of local identity was Tietze's primary criticism raised against Wagner's predecessors from the Ringstraße period. His ideas about 'the wholesome power of the tribe' seem to stand closer to Dvořák's opponent Strzygowski rather than to Dvořák himself – yet in Tietze's text, this emphasis on domestic roots completely lacks all the ideological implications that eventually discredited Strzygowski.⁴⁷

Conclusion

It was one of the axioms of the Viennese school that art-historical knowledge is intertwined with the real process of artistic evolution. However, its representatives shared just as deeply the conviction that only by achieving temporal distance from the object of study is the historian guaranteed that his assessments be impartial. The same view was applied, quite consequently, in assigning the topics for PhD theses. In the list of successfully defended 1934 dissertations, Kaufmann's topic, mentioned above, stands out as an extraordinary focus on

⁴³ Cf. Ján Bakoš, *Štyri trasy metodológie dejin umenia*, Bratislava: VEDA, 2000, 23-39. – Bakoš, 'Max Dvořák – a neglected re-visionist', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 53, 2004, 55-71.

⁴⁴ '(...) das Leben schuf sich neue Form'. Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, 9.

⁴⁵ 'Als Theoretiker wollte Wagner seiner Zeit dienen, indem er jedem ihrer Wünsche gehorchte, als Künstler diente er ihr echter, indem er ihr sein größeres Wollen aufzuzwingen suchte.' Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, 14.

⁴⁶ '(...) durch Vorbild und durch Widerspruch'. Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, 4.

⁴⁷ '(...) gesunde Kraft eines Stammes'. Tietze, *Otto Wagner*, 3. – Cf. Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule*, 111-121.

the present.⁴⁸ In his *Methode der Kunstgeschichte*, Tietze refers to Riegl in order to acknowledge objectivity only in the third generation of an artwork's receptors. And yet, even before the Great War, Tietze meditated on the determinant role of modern art for our perception of older art.⁴⁹ He was aware of the limits of any impersonal analytical approach and he strove to achieve, with respect to both past and present works, an immediate relationship, based on distinct personal experience. Although any interpretations of modern art were supposed to be supported by a detailed comparative methodology of art history, Tietze allowed in them also for taking more one-sided positions. His book on Wagner, as well as the above-mentioned texts by Dvořák and Strzygowski, can be viewed as a fulfillment of these principles. In no way do we find here a 'transparent' empirical historiography that presents only isotropic pieces of knowledge and eliminates all and any philosophy of history; rather, these books offer a personal and time-bound interpretations, pointing out the 'correct', historically pre-determined perspective of the future development. Strzygowski's vision can be characterized as a dialectical synthesis of Orient-inspired ornament and quasi-Gothic structure; Dvořák, on the other hand, advocated neo-classicist historicism, and Tietze promoted a 'naked', purified form.

In the texts that these three representatives of Viennese art history devoted to modern architecture, we can find a good number of interesting ideas and insights but a good deal less morphological analysis, as they had been standardly used in interpreting older architecture – unless we count in the doubtful expositions of the Austrian 'Attila'. Not even Tietze, whose book is more or less objective, does not employ concepts such as space, mass, surface or light here, and it is surprising that even he fails to illustrate his presentations with blueprints, cross-sections and other architectonic plans. The interconnection between the modern forms with the rise of new constructions and new functions was accepted by the art-historians as a given that needs no demonstrations or any further analyses. On the other hand, we need to emphasize to what degree these texts – even with all their peccadilloes against the idea of a rigorous and exact science – differ from the 'operative discourse', dear to the later ideological historiographers from avant-garde circles. The difference does not concern the mode of argumentation, for both groups of commentators, older and younger, start from a description of visual elements and link them to social transformations and moral attitudes. The crucial difference is to be found in the concept of history. For historians such as Giedion and in parti also Pevsner and Kaufmann, architecture's past meant nothing but the genealogical tree of the Modern movement, understood – in a Hegelian spirit – as either the consummation of history or else a supremely original phenomenon, born without historical predecessors or in opposition to them.⁵⁰ On the contrary, the Viennese scholars viewed all present-day changes as part of a continuous history, even though not completely subject to the logic of evolution. Even Wagner's innovating achievements were supposed to be connected by many links with the Austrian Baroque or classicist tradition. Thus, our authors permanently compared the present with the past – not in order to make it its better, but rather its legitimate equal.

Translated by Martin Pokorný

⁴⁸ Hahnloser, Chronologisches Verzeichnis.

⁴⁹ Hans Tietze, *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte: Ein Versuch*, Leipzig: Seemann, 1913, 53 and 160-163.

⁵⁰ Cf. Tournikiotis, *The Historiography*, 21-49 and 226-227.

Jindřich Vybíral is professor and department chair at the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague where he teaches History and Theory of architecture. He published several books and many essays on architecture of 19th and 20th century in Central Europe, and on art historiography and theory. Main publication: *Junge Meister. Architekten aus der Schule Otto Wagners in Mähren und Schlesien*. Böhlau: Wien – Köln – Weimar 2007.

Prof. Jindřich Vybíral
VŠUP – Academy of Art, Architecture and Design
Nám. Jana Palacha 80, 116 93 Praha
Czech Republic

vybiral@vsup.cz