

Hans Sedlmayr, 'History and the History of Art'¹

Translated by Karl Johns

In the same year of 1934 as Julius von Schlosser celebrated the eightieth anniversary of the Österreichisches Institut für Geschichtsforschung with his essay 'Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte',² Eberhard Hempel in his essay, 'Ist 'eine strenge Kunstwissenschaft' möglich?' claimed that the younger generation of the Vienna School had relaxed the connection to historical studies and that a volte-face had occurred.³

Since Hempel has named me as one of the leaders of the 'younger generation of the Vienna School', I am justified in refuting his claim. To avoid giving rise to any new misunderstandings, I speak only for myself as an individual and in the indefinite plural only for those who agree with my views.

Hempel, who treats his opponents honourably, believes that in his sentences just cited, he was referring only to my opinion alone. Yet this is certainly not the case. All of my previous essays have in a very definite sense – as I intend to make clear here – originated in the desire to make the history of art more 'historical' than it now is.⁴ I consider myself from the very beginning to have been aligned with the traditional general historical trend of the entire Vienna School. There has definitely not been a 'volte-face'. The goals are the same, only the paths and the means are some of them different. As I shall presently demonstrate, the method of 'structural analysis', which Hempel correctly identifies as characteristic for our conception of the problems but incorrectly viewing it as 'psychological' – is a truly art historical method. Guido von Kaschnitz-Weinberg was correct to identify Alois Riegl as the

¹ [Originally published as 'Geschichte und Kunstgeschichte', *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, vol. 50, 1936, 185-199.]

² [Translated in this journal, 1, Dec 2009, Karl Johns, 'Julius von Schlosser, 'The Vienna school of the history of art (1934)' [1-K1/2](#).]

³ Eberhard Hempel, 'Ist 'eine strenge Kunstwissenschaft' möglich?' *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1934, 155-163. I shall not deal with the question which Hempel addresses in the title of his essay. The answer would necessarily run approximately as follows: Hempel stresses 'remaining close to the work of art.' We are in complete agreement on this principle. However, to remain close to the work of art it is also necessary to have come close to it in the first place. When Hempel establishes criteria according to which one might judge whether or not this has been achieved in an individual case (about which statements are to be made), then this would finally create the basis for a discussion. By this point Hempel would have admitted that a rigorous study of art is possible. For only that and nothing else can be the connotation of 'rigor' in this context.

⁴ Cf. my first publication, 'Gestaltetes Sehen', *Belvedere*, vol. 8, no. 10, 1925, 65-73, esp. 73.

actual pioneer of structural analysis.⁵ This is not merely the view of those who have themselves been trained in the tradition of the 'Vienna School', but it has also been recognized by others more distant.⁶

It is not simple to understand how Hempel could have arrived at his odd conception. I believe that a judgment expressed in such apodictic and unconditional terms as his about my views should not be based on a single early essay which was expressly described as an 'initial approach' to the subject, and manifestly stated that a study of the historical action would remain for a 'second approach.'⁷ The 'theoretical program' which Hempel criticizes can provide no support for his claims. Anticipating similar misunderstandings, I had expressly stated there in 1931 'That in the current stage of things, there is a delay in the actual art historical studies which is due neither to a contempt of history, nor does it indicate that the new views are fruitless in dealing with art historical problems. This measure is instead based on the fact that there is a particular difficulty in researching historical actions, which must be carefully prepared, etc.'⁸

The manner in which we refer here to art historical research might include a certain vagueness, as if the work being done in the interim does not itself have a historical character. This lack of clarity results from the fact that the injunction that art historians think 'in historical terms' (and the criticism that they have no relation 'to history') means a variety of things. Since such a misunderstanding as that voiced by Hempel has become possible, it has become necessary to clarify the essential aspects of our concepts, hopefully for the last time. Ultimately, I am only repeating things here – perhaps in an all too abstract way – which I have previously articulated more thoroughly.

⁵ Guido von Kaschnitz-Weinberg, 'Bemerkungen zur Struktur der ägyptischen Plastik', *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 2, 1933, 7-24, 8 note 2 [Kaschnitz-Weinberg, *Kleine Schriften zur Struktur Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1, Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1965, 15-37 Available in English translation by Brian Fuchs and Amy C. Smith as 'Remarks on the Structure of Egyptian Sculpture (1933)', *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, ed. Christopher S. Wood, New York: Zone, 2000, 199-241].

⁶ Such as Alfred Neumeyer in his review of the second volume of the *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, in *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 28, 1934, 285-286, especially 286 below and toward the conclusion. We can thank Neumeyer that in the future, structural analysis will no longer be explained as a form of compositional analysis going under a different name.

⁷ Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Architektur Borrominis* was begun in 1925 and completed in 1929, two years before the first volume of the *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen* appeared.

⁸ [Hans Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft'] *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 1, 1931, 21. (On this, cf. the introduction to Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Augsburg: Filser, 1929, xxii). Hempel has also simply ignored the passage below on p. 26 where I fend off the misunderstanding that this should render the history of art 'naturalistic'.

To say it in a very 'plastic' manner, we imagine the ideal art historian to be an alloy of the 'pure' art historian, an historian of the auxiliary sciences and a 'real' historian. I use the term 'alloy' since a mere personal union of these three historical fields would be insufficient. Other alloys in this metal are desirable, but these are indispensable. The primary element of this alloy is the art-historian. They are an historian in their own way, and in a different way than the other two.

At first glance, this thesis might seem very different from the open door which has been broken down. Upon closer examination it can be seen to include an implication not whatsoever admitted by all, a demand not fulfilled in each case.

This is also clear in Hempel. If one might express it in this way, his example reveals the art historian as an historian applying himself to art. His methods are no different than 'those' of historians. This is the only reason I can imagine why his extensive arguments do not include a single word specific to an art historical method.

1. The Art Historian and the Historical Auxiliary Sciences.

It goes without saying that inside of the art historian there must be an historian of the auxiliary sciences and that the work of an art historian would be baseless without a thorough training in the historical auxiliary sciences. It would be a shame to waste many words about this. In this, we do not differ from Hempel or from the earlier generations of the Vienna School. We also take the narrow relationship with the Österreichisches Institut für Geschichtsforschung for granted. For the very reason that the individual work of art assumes an unprecedented place in our work, a mastery of the historical auxiliary sciences is particularly important to us.⁹ It would be absurd to construct a structural monograph which might be based on a mistaken reading of a written source.

The extent to which this admitted demand is fulfilled in practice by art historians of all stripes is another question which need not detain us here.

The fact that the art historian must have a command of the historical auxiliary sciences and develop historical techniques and has done so – such as reconstructing the original state of a given work similarly and yet differently from historical textual criticism – might arouse the mistaken impression that this itself constitutes the uniquely art historical 'method'. Yet as paradoxical as this might appear to the outsider, one who applies the most minute comparative procedures to reconstruct the form of an art work 'exactly as it originally was' might still not understand anything of its artistic content.

⁹ I have already stressed this clearly in 1931, *Kunsthistorische Forschungen*, vol. 1, 1931, 30. [Sedlmayr, *Kunst und Wahrheit*, Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958, 67, ed. Mittenwald: Mäander, 1978, 77.]

What makes somebody educated in the historical auxiliary sciences an art historian? A common assumption is that the only thing needed in addition to this is a 'feeling for art'. I do not believe that this ever accounts for a true art historian, since the feeling for art, as imperative as it is for the art historian, does not necessarily include the sense of history, and that alone would not provide for historical method (*historisches Verfahren*).

Hempel's excellent maxim of 'remaining close to the work of art' cannot be seriously viewed as an historical approach. It assumes that an art historical approach (combining intuitive and rational forces) has led closer to the work of art about which one wishes to speak. This can neither be implemented by the auxiliary sciences nor by a 'feeling for art', which is after all the artistic sense of our own time. Hempel does not expend a single word on the question of how one might gain this proximity to the work of art from the past – or how to verify whether one has properly done so.

As is so frequently the case in clarifying disputes, the situation arises in which the criticism must be returned to its source, not merely for reasons of advocacy, but because the critic has misunderstood his own position. Our impression is that Hempel in particular does not sufficiently reflect in historical and art historical terms. This must be stated clearly with no intention of casting aspersion on a worthy opponent.

If one seriously applied his receipt, the history of art would diverge into two heterogeneous parts – the one being an inquiry into historical facts relative to the work of art – which can and should be rigorous, and the other in a study of the art work itself which must then be rhapsodic.¹⁰ It is striking that Hempel has completely overlooked that he is now the one wishing to implement such a dualism which I have only described as an explanatory fiction.¹¹ It is very symptomatic for such agnosticism that Hempel as historian cites du Bois-Reymond!

Hempel's image of the art historian is lacking precisely in that element which is the most important for us.

2. The Art Historian as Art Historian

The great protagonists of the historical auxiliary sciences often identical in person with the great practitioners of historical research have always known that the true art historian is different than they, and that he is an historian in his own way. This manner arises from the unique character of the subject as it presents itself; it

¹⁰ I have described this type of study in *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 1, 1931, 13. [Sedlmayr, *Kunst und Wahrheit*, Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958, 43, ed. Mittenwald: Mäander, 1978, 57.]

¹¹ Op. cit., 8

prescribes unique procedures unknown to historical auxiliary sciences or to historical research. Hempel does not refer to these.

A. The Individual Work of Art and Style

Among other things, the material of art historical research draws its unique character from the fact that 'art' does not exist in abstract terms, but is only created and survives in the form of individual works. For this reason, we consider the primary and greatest duty of the art historian is with the individual work of art as such and not that of 'historical' data, and that it is here that they prove their mettle in the historical sense. In the entire panoply of history there is nothing comparable to the individual work of art; neither in the history of religion or language is anything directly analogous. The work of art possesses a completeness and presence only remotely like the self-enclosed character of a religious system or a language, and since there is nothing to compare and for this reason the art historian cannot find a model among the historians, they must leave the historian to deal with their materials as the circumstances demand. It is a truly historical and by no means 'psychological' problem to understand how a work of art came to be as it is – as Julius Lange has designated it with an unparalleled straightforwardness. This is also the most difficult task of the art historian, their '*hic Rhodus*' [Aesop]. However difficult the following challenges might be, they will become less so when this initial one has been properly dealt with.¹²

It has been the unmatched merit of Julius von Schlosser and with him of Benedetto Croce – whose criticism of an abstract history of art he has mediated for the Vienna School – to have continually alluded to the uniqueness of the work of art, and always to have declared that 'art' is only effective through its individual examples, does not exist in some general way, and virtually only in those works produced by artists.¹³ Those of us who have come to recognize the truth of this from practice concur when we become convinced that the entire history of art must be

¹² When the individual art work becomes the center of attention here, this certainly does not indicate that it be removed from its natural context or 'reified' – as Michael Alpatov has correctly warned, 'Das Selbstbildnis Poussins im Louvre', *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 2, 1933, 121. It must be removed from the earth in which it thrives with its roots and all.

¹³ There is an incorrect appearance of a difference insofar as what Schlosser has called '*Sprachgeschichte*' we refer to with the common term of '*Stilgeschichte*' which Schlosser has in turn reserved for the true history of art. Cf. for instance his remark in the essay *Lorenzo Ghiberti, Künstlerprobleme der Frührenaissance*, no. 3, part 5, *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* vol. 215, no. 4, 1934, 71, where one of my essays is referred to as '*stilgeschichtlich*' in this affirmative sense. On the general subject, one should now cf. Julius Schlosser, *Stilgeschichte und Sprachgeschichte der bildenden Kunst*, *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 1935, no. 1, 3-39.

based on the historical understanding of the greatest possible number of individual works of art.

I have elsewhere attempted to demonstrate that the desire to be an equal to the historians, and to begin with statements about grand historical developments, leads to an attempt to discover a general topic on which to base such pronouncements – and this generates the abstraction of 'style' which theorists were recently still able to declare to be the true subject of the history of art.¹⁴

One should bear in mind how brief the moments are which art historians concentrating on style actually spend in contemplation of individual works. They are forced to make statements about works whose 'text' they have not read, but only skimmed to see whether certain characteristics are present or not, while being led to these by 'questionnaires'. When this becomes apparent, it is clear that a different economy of labour is necessary.

Our demand can be stated in the form of an observation and possibly be simpler to understand – we do not know any more of the art of an epoch, nation or artistic personality than we do of the art historically best-known artefact of this period, nation or artist.

These fleetingly outlined thoughts are closer to Franz Wickhoff and Julius Schlosser than to Alois Riegl. Yet in the attempt to grasp concrete works of art in historical terms we have approached the method developed by Riegl for the understanding of a 'style'. I must briefly explain how this is meant.

B. Observant and Reconstructive Analysis

The manner in which we attempt to grasp an individual work of art can express itself with varying degrees of 'historical' disposition. It can be approached 'from the aspect' of the viewer or that of the creator. In a very naive sense, the former is less historical; it runs counter to the direction of historical action. The viewer entered in later than the work itself. I do not presently wish to discuss further disadvantages of this approach.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cf. [Sedlmayr 'Zum Begriff der Strukturanalyse (Noch einmal Coudenhove-Erthals Fontana-Monographie)] *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, Dritter und vierter Jahrgang, 1930-1931 and 1931-1932, 157-160. As with many other disciplines, the difficulty here lies in distinguishing true general subjects from mere fictions which have arisen from false abstractions. I intend to discuss how this distinction should be made in the history of art at a later point.

¹⁵ The viewer remains undefined while the creator is historically most definitely defined – even when they are not personally identifiable. Beyond this, there are also works of art not intended to be viewed. Cf. Guido von Kaschnitz-Weinberg, 'Bemerkungen zur Struktur der ägyptischen Plastik', *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 2, 1933, 7-24 [Kaschnitz-Weinberg, *Kleine Schriften zur Struktur Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1, Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1965, 15-37. Available in English translation by Brian Fuchs and Amy C. Smith as 'Remarks

If it be permitted to coarsely oversimplify for the purpose of an easier understanding, one might say that the history of style as a field has been exemplified first by the approach of Heinrich Wölfflin, and then in the second instance by Alois Riegl. It does no harm to the stature of Wölfflin to recognize that his thought was less historical in this sense than that of Riegl.

When faced with this alternative we follow Riegl. It is our purpose to recreate the individual work of art in a similar way in which Riegl studied the style. We do not use his categories for this since we are remote from the speculative questions about the ultimate possibilities of artistic creation as they animated the generation of Wölfflin and Riegl.

Our 'program' for a 'reconstruction' was already expressed theoretically with great clarity by Konrad Fiedler: 'Only at the moment in which we become aware that all of these effects can be explained in terms of the work of art, but that its creation cannot, and we omit all of the questions about what they might mean to us, and concentrate on that of how it could emerge from the artistic consciousness, only then does it truly begin to come alive for us. We are directly drawn into the activity of the creative artist and grasp the result as a living process of becoming. We reproduce the artistic activity, and the degree of insight we are able to achieve depends on the productive force of our intellect in confronting the art work'.¹⁶

Structural analysis – that which is most characteristic of our fundamental approach – is a re-creative analysis. When Guido von Kaschnitz says that Alois Riegl was the actual founder of structural analysis in the study of art, it is quite correct in this sense; it has gained currency against all predictions and will not easily be replaced by anything better. The process itself has been successful although it has not yet been completely developed, and is still applied with considerable variety. Along with Kaschnitz, we are confident that these differences will come to be equalized. Carl Nordenfalk has spoken of 'the current general shift toward structural analysis in archaeology and the history of art', while so careful a scholar in pondering opinions as Nicolai Brunov was able to state that structural analysis is the only method for the history of art.¹⁷

on the Structure of Egyptian Sculpture', *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*, ed. Christopher S. Wood, New York: Zone, 2000, 199-241]. I am also by no means overlooking the fact that the situation is far more complicated than I am able to present it here for the sake of comprehension.

¹⁶ In his essay far too little known among art historians, Konrad Fiedler, *Über die Beurteilung von Werken der bildenden Kunst* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1876!) in Hans Marbach ed. Conrad Fiedler, *Schriften zur Kunst*, Leipzig: Hirzel, 1896, 1-79. It should not be overlooked that Fiedler speaks of activity and not of consciousness. Cf. [Sedlmayr, 'Zum Begriff der Strukturanalyse' as above] *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, Dritter und vierter Jahrgang, 1930-1931 and 1931-1932, 150 note 2 second paragraph.

¹⁷ Carl Nordenfalk, *Acta Archaeologica*, vol. 5, 1933, 265. Nicolai Brunov [review of S. Guyer,

C. The Structural Analysis of the Individual Work of Art

There are structures in all fields. It is also possible to speak of the structure of an artistic epoch and to analyse it, while a 'style' also has an internal structure – this was the insight of Riegl.¹⁸ It is possible to subject the individual work of art to a structural analysis – as Croce already noted in 1910 – because the much discussed 'unity' of the art work is not simple or abstract, but complex, concrete, an 'organism', a 'whole consisting of parts'.¹⁹ This is exactly what we mean when we say that the work of art has a structure. According to Croce, this means that to understand an art work is to understand the whole in the parts and the parts in the whole, and to understand the structure.²⁰ It only remains to add that this understanding is not an intellectual process but a demonstrative understanding, a formal view ('*gestaltetes Sehen*') – a recognition we owe to Gestalt Theory.²¹

When facing works of art made in the past, it becomes an historical task to understand the whole through the parts and the parts through the whole. In normal circumstances, we perceive a different whole and different parts than did the individual who created the work of art.

Somebody viewing the higher tower of the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna will only retain an impression of chaos and a few fragmentary details (such as possibly the large pediment) which attract the eye from among the whole, yet without understanding their significance. A person hearing a symphony for the first time has a similar experience.

In attempting to clarify the relation of the parts to the whole, they will read reference works about what others have previously said, and learn to see the finials and tracery as such elements. The relation among these will still remain obscure.

'Vom Wesen der byzantinischen Kunst', *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 2nd ser., vol. 8, no. 2, 1931, 99-132], *Kritische Berichte*, Dritter und vierter Jahrgang, 1930-1931 and 1931-1932, 193. Cf. also Roberto Salvini, *La nuova Italia*, 1936, 149 below.

¹⁸ Cf. Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Augsburg: Filser, 1929, xviii f.

¹⁹ Benedetto Croce, *Problemi di estetica e contributi alla storia dell'estetica*, Bari: Laterza, 1910, 421. The quotation about the machine which I cited at the head of my essay, '*Gestaltetes Sehen*' refers to the same phenomenon. Its meaning has been completely distorted by Hempel: 'At least admit the work of art to involve a meaningfulness equivalent to a machine'. No other interpretation is possible since the Gestalt Theory which I was alluding to there is dead set against mechanical theory.

²⁰ On the so-called 'parts' or 'elements' of the art work which in truth are artistic essences in their own right, cf. Benedetto Croce, *Kleine Schriften zur Ästhetik*, translated by Julius Schlosser, Tübingen: Mohr, 1929, *passim*.

²¹ Hempel has completely misunderstood the role of Gestalt Theory in the development of our views. I have already once discussed this so thoroughly that it would force me to repeat myself, cf. *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 1, 1931, 17-19. [Sedlmayr, *Kunst und Wahrheit*, Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958, 49-51, ed. Mittenwald: Mäander, 1978, 61-63.]

After much effort they might resign themselves to the conclusion that they present nothing more than an unruly 'decoration' of the tower with no further function than to 'enrich' its appearance. In doing so, they would have re-interpreted the forms in the manner of the 19th century, when all of the details were felt to comprise a decorative addition to the bare construction of the basic form.

A person who has succeeded in recognizing the historical 'view' (or 'attitude') will recognize and reconstruct completely other parts and the whole as they contribute to the image. For them, the construction will have changed while remaining the same. They will visually understand the interrelation of the parts and their function at a particular spot within the whole. An extrinsic but characteristic success can also be registered in the fact that they will remember the image more easily.

Somebody patiently studying only one of the buttresses of the tower of St. Stephen will incrementally learn the nature of its framework. They consist of individual small baldachins. The principle according to which they converge is completely alien to our conception of architecture – it can be studied beautifully clearly in the supports of the nave which are constructed analogously. Upon viewing, each of these finial-baldachins can be seen to be divided into smaller units along numerous smaller splintered surfaces by the tracery above its windows. The wall between the supports is completely covered with such splintered surfaces in various sizes – together with the supports they also are constructed from the same smallest motif. Before our very eyes, the baldachins emerge from their partial surfaces, the supports from their baldachins and the entire form of the three levels of the tower, rectangular below, octagonal above with the square and the octagon remarkably 'fused' in between from variations of a few simple basic motifs like a musical composition based on chords and chord sequences – a comparison more valid here than usual.

Of course, what I have sketched here is no structural analysis, not even the beginning of one, but should only give a sense of what is important. The sculpture on the tower and its 'meaning' cannot be omitted from the analysis. The tower itself is only a relatively independent part of the entirety of the cathedral.

A structural analysis would only have been achieved once the function and significance of each form has been shown concretely and graphically within the whole. This will have reproduced the image. Only a process with such a reproduction as its goal can be considered to be a structural analysis.²² Our method is most easily distinguished from similar previous approaches by the fact that it

²² cf. *Kritische Berichte*, vol. 5, 1932-1933, 19 center [Meyer Schapiro review of Jurgis Baltrušaitis, 'Über den Schematismus in der romanischen Kunst.']. It could only be out of an indifference to specifically art historical methods that Hempel has never familiarized himself with structural analysis. He has made no mention of the essay cited here.

makes the reproduction the criterion of attaining an understanding (although certainly not sufficient in itself).

Anybody who has visually comprehended an image will have gained insights valid with further examples. They will then be in a position to understand other images more easily and quickly. Those which then allow themselves to be more easily resolved might be considered related. This then would reveal to them more general relationships, not merely of an art historical, but also of a general historical nature. Every image which has been properly illuminated will cast its light over a broad circle of historical phenomena and facts.

Somebody able to visually understand the entire Cathedral of St. Stephen would gain insight into the structure not merely of the origins for the formal ideas (since they can distinguish what is related from mere extrinsic similarities) but also have a new understanding of the relationship between these ideas and historical reality. For instance, the fact that the thought of the baldachin originating in the cathedrals experienced another grand late efflorescence here can only be fully understood in relation to certain political and social developments.²³

The task of understanding even a single work in this reproductive sense is endless, and everything is involved in even approaching this goal decisively. It is not possible to emphasize enough that this is an historical task. It demands an historical 'force' of vision to make a work from the past become 'present' and therefore historical experience in order to verify whether such visualizations have been successful or not.

3. The Art Historian and 'Real' History

It is up to the art historian to fulfil the challenge to think in 'historical' terms in their own way and they already do so each time they face an individual work of art. Yet this requirement appears again in a third manifestation when it – quite correctly – calls for the art historian not to lose the connection to real history. (Hempel makes no reference to this requirement). This danger has been particularly great just in the latest period, which has emphasized abstract stylistic history, and the turn to structural analysis has not immediately overcome it. Very often, things have been such that the art historian never again reached the solid ground of real history once they began their flight into the sphere of spiritual and intellectual creation of the art work. When the same problems were approached by historians, they did not penetrate the intellectual reality of the work of art. Extreme examples of this situation which characteristically reached its climax in the 1920's – and each of them excellent in their own way, can be seen in the writings of Otto Pächt on Austrian panel painting of the Gothic, and Rudolf Pühringer about Romanesque architecture

²³ Cf. Hans Sedlmayr, 'Österreichs bildende Kunst', *Österreich: Erbe und Sendung im deutschen Raum*, ed. Josef Nadler and Heinrich von Srbik, Salzburg and Leipzig: Pustet, 1936, 329-346.

in Austria.²⁴ The one of these intentionally omits the connection to history, and the other a view of the works in their entirety. If both of these authors has treated the same material, it would be necessary to merge their results in order to reach the perfect alloy. Such a unification could not be achieved cold, but both of the forms would require to be heated up to make them 'fluid'.

This third requirement of thinking 'historically', is based in the simple fact that a work of art is not a simple projection of ideas from its creator into intellectually empty space but rather by the confrontation of intellectual creativity with the varying facts of a concrete historical situation which presents the visual artist with the formal commission (*ihm die 'Formgelegenheit' bietet*) – to mention only one aspect of how history affects this. This embeddedness in a reality of another sort is not accidental but an essential aspect of artistic creation; its forms change with each historical period.²⁵ The case in which an artist works 'alone for themselves' independent of the 'reality' of history and themselves setting the subject and significance of their own work is a much later phenomenon. It has been typical for art historical writing of the 1920's to discuss works of art as if this very late and rare circumstance were the norm. 'External' reality here appeared as a coefficient of friction which could be eliminated from the 'pure' intellectual process.

When structural analysis is properly understood and practiced, then this danger disappears. In a true reconstructive analysis, the confrontation of the inner and the 'outer' reality must reveal themselves in their true relationship – as it shifts from one period and from one work to another. Even the study of an individual work of art must reach the solid ground of historical reality in its grasp of the structure. In the case of the Cathedral of St. Stephen I have only quickly alluded to this.

When the connection to 'real' history is actually achieved in the context of the individual work of art, it will not be lost in the course of progressing toward increasingly greater historical coherence.

Here again, these demands are to be confronted with the practical situation – what we have called for does not yet exist. I am emboldened to claim that it will come about. Among the earlier art historians, the balance between the internal and external aspects of the history of art has been achieved most successfully in the *Geschichte der deutschen Kunst* by the truly great Georg Dehio. The challenge to the

²⁴ One should underscore that the publication of Rudolf Pühringer [*Denkmäler der früh- und hochromanischen Baukunst in Österreich*, Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien philosophisch-historische Klasse Denkschriften 70. Band, 1. Abhandlung] is no mere art historical preparation in terms of auxiliary sciences (like so many others), but does attempt to organize the art historical material according to the known facts of history ('*realhistorische Einsichten*').

²⁵ One cannot overlook the fact that a very difficult epistemological problem lurks behind the 'naive' description of this function.

present generation is to again establish this balance on a new level. If this can be done, one will see that even in Dehio the link between internal and external history was conceived too loosely.

4. The Vienna School of Art History

This gives a crude image of our position in regard to 'history' and refutes Hempel's claim at a number of points. As we have developed them here, our lines of thought are rooted in a field with highly difficult epistemological problems on the one hand, and reaches into an immeasurable number of technical difficulties of scholarship on the other. In the section under review here, the 'roots' should have appeared clearly and simply if my depiction of things has been felicitous. This also reveals our relationship to the earlier Vienna School, however schematically. We have described it here precisely in terms of the process which we would not like to see applied to works of art – by pairs of oppositions, a technique which is justified in those cases seeking first bearings or a quick basic understanding. Facing the alternative between 'the individual work of art or the style as the primary preoccupation for the history of art' we stand with Wickhoff and Schlosser, while on the question of 'contemplation or reconstruction as the historical method' we hold with Riegl. Our position is one of mediation, but I believe not eclectic.

These oppositions do not clarify our relation to Max Dvořák; a few words are necessary here. It cannot be denied that Dvořák, that marvellous person who will never be forgotten, has had the least influence among the more recent generation of the Vienna School. His theoretical attitudes have been sharply criticized.²⁶ In seminars which I myself attended, he himself called for this. I believe that there is a grand and simple idea behind everything contestable, a question which will again arise later with a primal force when the history of art has finally been consolidated. As I would phrase it intentionally one-sidedly, the essential question in his essays is that as to what lends a particular period its power of artistic creation in a given way or demands from it. This was a question which could not even be posed clearly during the period of abstract stylistic history in which he confronted it. Its answer in the admonishment to an intellectual history of style was not something which led art. Yet it is something very important to the history of art even if the history of art could not provide the answer. As certainly as art is indeed

²⁶ Guido von Kaschnitz-Weinberg, 'Alois Riegl, Spätromische Kunstindustrie', *Gnomon*, vol. 5, 1929, 195-213 [reprinted *Hefte des Kunsthistorischen Seminars der Universität München*, no. 4, 1959, 25-39 and Kaschnitz-Weinberg, *Kleine Schriften zur Struktur Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1, Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1965, 1-13. Sedlmayr's criticisms of Dvořák are discussed more broadly in H. S. 'Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte', Sedlmayr, *Kunst und Wahrheit*, Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958, 71-86, ed. Mittrenwald: Mäander, 1978, 81-95].

art, it is always meaningful to study the roots of how this is possible.²⁷ This question is also historical in nature.

Our relation to Dvořák strikes me objectively as our recognizing this question as fundamentally significant for the history of art, but that we postpone it because in the current state of research there is no satisfying answer to be found.

This also objectively defines the tendency of our relationship to the entire earlier Vienna School.²⁸ One can state with certainty that whatever their ultimate effect might be, our essays and innovations could never have arisen elsewhere than within that which has been attempted, begun, and achieved by the Vienna School. There is a personal side to this objective statement. In his pessimistic survey of the intellectual situation of our time, Karl Jaspers has lamented: 'What humanity is able to achieve occurs in the short term. We are faced with problems but no continuity of being. Our achievements are functional and then complete. They are repeated for a certain length of time identically, but they cannot be repeated so as to generate any greater depth with their agent taking possession of their action'.²⁹ In studying with them and having grown up within it, our experience of the Vienna School has shown us that those very things which Jaspers laments as having been lost do indeed still exist. This experience has become decisive for our entire scholarly being. This acknowledgment of it should be understood as a supplement from the 'younger generation' to the review given by Julius Schlosser of the previous development of 'The Vienna School of the History of Art'.

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²⁷ On this cf. the important observations by Alfred Bäumker in his introduction to Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Der Mythos von Orient und Okzident: Eine Metaphysik der alten Welt*, Munich: Beck, 1926, passim.

²⁸ After these lines have been written, a very incisive sketch of the goals of the 'younger Vienna School' has appeared, Karl Maria Swoboda, 'Neue Aufgaben der Kunstgeschichte', Swoboda, *Neue Aufgaben der Kunstgeschichte*, Brno: Rohrer, 1935, 9-23.

²⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, Sammlung Göschen, vol. 1000, Berlin and Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1931, 40.