

# Inside haptic Modernism: Alois Riegl and Anglo-American art criticism and theory

Valentina Bartalesi

The notion of haptic<sup>1</sup> vision in the thought of Alois Riegl has been extensively addressed by the specialist bibliography on the Austrian art historian.<sup>2</sup> One aspect, however, that is still partially examined in the critical literature, except the fundamental contributions of Regine Prange and Georg Vasold,<sup>3</sup> concerns the reception of Riegl's notion of haptic within the framework of 20th-century art theory, history, and criticism.

This contribution aims to shed light on such a reception from a historical-documentary point of view, attempting to define its configuration by examining the Anglo-American side. This paper tries to demonstrate how the penetration of Riegl's thought, even for strictly editorial reasons related to the late publication/translation of his works, constituted a secondary phenomenon concerning the reception, now decidedly more incisive, of the theses on haptic perception elaborated by Riegl's multifaceted compatriots Viktor Lowenfeld and Ludwig Münz, who emigrated to the United States in the last quarter of the 1930s. Starting from a brief exposition on the constitution of the notion of haptic in Riegl and its relation to the parallel science of haptics, established in the early 1890s between German-speaking and English-speaking university laboratories, the

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, 190; Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993, 43-47; Andrea Pinotti, *Il corpo dello stile. Storia dell'arte come storia dell'estetica a partire da Semper, Riegl, Wölfflin*, Milano: Mimesis, 2001, 161-167; Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch. Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, Berg: Oxford, 2007, 79-88; Georg Vasold, 'Bemerkungen zu Alois Riegls Artikel "Spätrömisch oder orientalisch?"', *Maske und Kothurn*, 60: 3-4, 2014, 27-30; Wojciech Bałus, 'Dotykanie wzrokiem. O pojęciu haptyczności w klasycznej nauce o sztuce', *Konteksty*, 4, 2019, 202-207; Marta Smolińska, *Haptyczność Poszerzona Zmysł Dotyku W Sztuce Polskiej Drugiej Połowy Xx I Początku Xxi Wieku*, Krakow: Universitas, 2020, passim; Valentina Bartalesi, 'Rethinking contact: the haptic in the viral era', *Aisthesis: pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico*, 14: 1, 2021, 23-35.

<sup>3</sup> Regine Prange, 'Konjunkturen des Optischen. Riegls Grundbegriffe und die Kanonisierung der künstlerischen Moderne', in Peter Noever, Artur Rosenauer, Georg Vasold, *Alois Riegl Revisited: Beiträge zu Werk und Rezeption; contributions to the opus and its reception*, Wien: Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Kunstgeschichte, 2010, 109-128; Regine Prange, 'Notes from the Field: Tradition', *The Art Bulletin*, 95: 4, 2013, (537-540) 538.

contribution focuses on its reception into the thought of Louis Danz, Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg.

The preference of the adjective *haptisch* over the corresponding *taktisch* in Riegl's *Kunstwissenschaft* had taken place since the second edition of the fundamental *Spättrömische Kunstindustrie*, which appeared in its first edition in 1901 for the publisher Verlag in Vienna.<sup>4</sup> This introduction represents the outcome of a series of reflections to which Riegl had dedicated himself directly and indirectly for at least fifteen years. As Laura U. Marks<sup>5</sup> and Georg Vasold<sup>6</sup> noted, Riegl's familiarity with ancient textile art specimens, the study of which could not be separated from their hand-eye exploration, was able to inspire the theorisation of that form of haptic vision which later became one of the cornerstones of Riegl's conceptual framework. A system that, from a more markedly theoretical point of view, saw a prodromal exhibition venue in the first manuscript version of *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste* of 1897, further specified in the second version dated 1897-1898.<sup>7</sup> The *Kunstindustrie*, in this sense, constitutes the applicative counterpart of the principles set out in *Historische Grammatik*, its structural incunabulum.

The haptic vision of Riegl features several well-known and specific characteristics that are summarised here. Within the framework of a history of art without names alternative to that theory of catastrophes still widely appealed to, even by Wickhoff, Riegl was elaborating a pondered aesthesiological theory.<sup>8</sup> The haptic vision embodies the *Weltanschauung* of the Paleo-Egyptian collective subject,<sup>9</sup> a feeling of the world hypostatized in a peculiar artefact: the Egyptian bas-relief.<sup>10</sup> In Rieglian exegesis, the Paleo-Egyptian individual abstractly personifies the primitive subject *par excellence* – a phobic individual who knows and experiences the surrounding space *ideally* through tactile apprehension.<sup>11</sup> The *Kunstvollen* resulting from such a *Weltanschauung* is realised in compositions formed by figures 'starkly isolated' in their material finiteness 'both in placement and in pose or gesture'.<sup>12</sup> Compositions that maintain the continuity of the tactile plane and suppress the third dimension are the first foreboding of the changing world of phenomena the Egyptian individual opposes. For the reasons above, these bas-reliefs exhibit

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<sup>4</sup> Alois Riegl, *Spättrömische Kunstindustrie* (1901), Wien: Osterr-Staatsdruckerei, 1927, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, Durham, London: Duke university Press, 2000, 168-169; Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Georg Vasold, 'Optique ou haptique: le rythme dans les études sur l'art au début du 20e siècle', *Intermedialités. Histoires et théorie des arts, des lettres, des techniques*, 17, Autumn 2010, (35-55), 51.

<sup>7</sup> Alois Riegl, *Historical grammar of the visual arts*, Zone Books: New York, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Andrea Pinotti, *Introduzione*, in Alois Riegl, *Grammatica storica delle arti figurative*, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2018, (VII-LXXXII).

<sup>9</sup> Riegl, *Historical Grammar*, 110.

<sup>10</sup> Riegl, *Historical Grammar*, 192-95.

<sup>11</sup> Riegl, *Historical Grammar*, 191.

<sup>12</sup> Riegl, *Historical Grammar*, 196.

shallow modelling, soft grooving, and faint shadows. Relationships, translated into plane values, are abrogated. Therefore, movement cannot exist in such a space, as Riegl notes.<sup>13</sup>

Within a framework of continuous historicism, the haptic vision of the Paleo-Egyptian subject was destined to be surpassed by the normal vision of the more advanced (in Riegl's thought) Greek subject to culminate in the distant vision of the late Roman individual, an optical and impressionistic subject not dissimilar to its twentieth-century descendant.<sup>14</sup> The subjective introspection that unites the quivering manifestations of the Constantine epoch with those of the late 19th and, in perspective, 20th century, according to Riegl's framework, conveys a form of feeling the world and experiencing the work of art which is ideologically *optical*. The haptic, therefore, stands for the adamantine perfection of the Hegelian and Goethean *Kristallinismus*,<sup>15</sup> just as the optical, on the other hand, regards the intense yearning that disrupts the universe of phenomena by dismantling the objectifying action of the silhouette: a breath of life now blows through the world of phenomena.

#### **A note: 23 April 1902**

Regarding the use of the term haptic, Riegl wrote a celebrated note on 23 April 1902 in response to a ferociously polemical article composed by Josef Strzygowski's<sup>16</sup>, published on the supplement of *Allgemeine Zeitung*.<sup>17</sup> The content of this annotation, plumed in a still essential commentary drafted by Géza Révész back in 1938<sup>18</sup> and more recently by numerous Riegl's exegetes,<sup>19</sup> provides a salient episode to the

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<sup>13</sup> Riegl, *Historical Grammar*, 123-24.

<sup>14</sup> Pinotti, *Introduzione*, XLII-XLIV.

<sup>15</sup> On the influences of Hegelian thought on Riegl see Allister Neher, 'Riegl, Hegel, Kunstwollen, and the Weltgeist', *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne*, 29: 1-2, 2004 (5-13).

<sup>16</sup> Josef Strzygowski, 'Hellas in der Umarmung des Orients', *Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 1902, 1-21.

<sup>17</sup> Alois Riegl, 'Spätromisch oder orientalisches?' (23 April 1902), *Allgemeine Zeitung* (18-19 February 1902), 133-156, 162-165; Vasold, *Bemerkungen zu Alois Riegls*, 27-30.

<sup>18</sup> Révész notes in this regard: 'The only exception is Riegl, who attributes special importance to the function of the sense of touch, when he attempts to explain the material appearance of the work of art and the so-called near-view. A closer study of his arguments, however, shows that he does not attribute to the haptic sense and to haptic concepts any direct formative faculty, but merely a higher perceptivity in regard to the individuality of the material. In his further discussions on the theory of art his notions on Haptics cease to play any relevant part. It can even be shown – and this is the most important point in this connection – that in his so-called haptic theory Riegl's starting point was not really the tactile function, but the "tactile" perception of the eye. Riegl's haptic theory is therefore not really a haptic but an optical theory, which takes into consideration the genetic theory of a "tactile" function of the sense of vision.' Géza Révész, H. A. Wolff, *Psychology and Art of the Blind*, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950, 73.

<sup>19</sup> Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, 190; Andrea Pinotti, 'Guardare o toccare? Un'incertezza herderiana', *Aesthesis: pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico*, 2: 1, 2009, (177-191), 186; David Parisi, *Archaeologies of Touch: Interfacing with Haptics from Electricity to Computing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018, 34-36; Wanda Strauven,

chronology here presented. No wonder such a note offered a concise, albeit far from linear, overview. On the one hand, as Olin, Iversen, and Pinotti have already pointed out, it may be said that even on a lexicological level, Riegl intended to eradicate any references to a concretely experienced tactility.<sup>20</sup> Which amounts to saying that, even if related to a sensual and sensitive looking [*Die sinnliche Tätigkeit des Schauens*],<sup>21</sup> haptic vision still represents a form of vision. On the other hand, Riegl partially clarified the sources from which he borrowed such a peculiar category. Interestingly, these references did not include the German-speaking authors known to Riegl which played a constitutive role in the theoretical configuration of the dyad composed of tactile vision and its counterpart mistakenly considered properly optical. Thus Herder,<sup>22</sup> Vischer,<sup>23</sup> Lindner,<sup>24</sup> Hildebrand,<sup>25</sup> Zimmermann.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, Riegl admitted to having borrowed this adjective from a field of knowledge compared to theory and history of art, namely that of applied psychology, a branch of knowledge that, precisely at that historical juncture, was attempting to gain a solid disciplinary dignity. Riegl wrote in April 1902:

It has been objected that this designation could lead to misunderstandings, since one must be inclined to take it as a loan word from the Greek, like the contrasting "optical", and it has been pointed out that physiology has long since used the more appropriate term »haptic« (from ἅπτεiv) in use. This observation seems justified to me, and I intend to use this suggested term in the future.<sup>27</sup>

This passage proves to be crucial. In theorising what, it has been said, constitutes a kind of vision ideally modelled on the tactile faculty innate to the primitive individual, Riegl appeals to one of the categories developed by the most recent, and at the time certainly advanced, psychophysiological investigations. More precisely,

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*Touchscreen Archaeology: Tracing History of Hands-On Media Practice*, Meson Press: Lüneburg, 2021, 31-33.

<sup>20</sup> Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, 190; Iversen, *Alois Riegl*, 170; Pinotti, *Guardare o toccare*, 186.

<sup>21</sup> Riegl, *Spätromisch oder orientalisches?*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Einige Wahrnehmungen über Form u. Gestalt aus Pygmalions bildendem Traume* (1778), Köln: Hegner, 1969.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Vischer, *Über das optische Formgefühl ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik*, Leipzig: Credner, 1873.

<sup>24</sup> Gustav Adolf Lindner, *Manual of empirical psychology as an inductive science*, Boston: D. C. Heath & company, 1889, 48-50.

<sup>25</sup> Adolf von Hildebrand, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*, Marburgo, 1893.

<sup>26</sup> See in this regard: Vlad Ionescu, 'Zimmermann's Aesthetics, and Riegl's Art Theory. Influences and Resistances', *Ars*, 46: 1, 2013, 86-93.

<sup>27</sup> 'Man hat beanstandet, daß diese Bezeichnung zu Mißverständnissen führen könne, da man geneigt sein müsse, sie gleich dem dazu in Gegensatz gestellten »Optischen« als Lehnwort aus dem Griechischen zu fassen, und hat darauf aufmerksam gemacht, daß die Physiologie dafür längst die passendere Bezeichnung "haptisch" (von ἅπτεiv) in Gebrauch gesetzt hat. Diese Beobachtung scheint mir gerechtfertigt, und ich gedenke mich künftig dieses vorgeschlagenen Terminus zu bedienen', Riegl, 'Spätromisch oder orientalisches?', 18, footnote 1, translated by the author.

what did the notion of *haptisch* mean within that context? To answer this question is necessary to go back about a decade, retracing a specific disciplinary shift.

### The science of haptics: a psychophysiological genealogy

Over the last fifteen years, the so-called science of haptics has been the subject of fundamental monographic studies, among which a prodromal collection of essays edited by Martin Grunwald in 2008<sup>28</sup> and a more recent monograph by media-archaeologist David Parisi<sup>29</sup> must be mentioned. According to Martin Grunwald and Matthias John, empirical investigations into the sense of touch have been actively conducted since the 1840s.<sup>30</sup> As the outcome of such an established tradition, a first substantial moment for the foundation of haptics science occurred in 1892: that year the multifaceted Berlin psychologist, physiologist and philosopher Max Dessoir did not coin but rather rehabilitated the German adjective *haptik*, derived from the Greek etymon *haptō* and the expressions *háptein-haptikós* and possibly intersecting the Neo-Latin root *haptice*.<sup>31</sup>

The reasons for this rehabilitation were clear. Dessoir and other intellectuals strongly felt the requirement to define a category that would extend the domain of the sense of touch, wrongly or rightly considered no longer sufficient. Two distinct physiological behaviours, therefore, fell under the name of *Haptik*. *Contacsinn* was used to designate tactile impressions related to exteroception and, more precisely, epidermal sensations brought about by external stimulation.<sup>32</sup> The Greek *Pselaphesie*, translatable as feeling, was instead used to designate the muscular, vestibular, and visceral sensations more appropriately connected to interoception and thus to sensations from within the body.<sup>33</sup> A decade before Riegl's footnote, haptics science was a branch of laboratory knowledge of which *locus amenus* was the Laboratory of applied psychology. Its disciplinary tools were the protocol to be administered and its three-dimensional emanation: the machinery.<sup>34</sup> Engineers such as Hall's kinesiometer and Krohn's machine for measuring the motor force of the upper limbs responded to the desire,<sup>35</sup> at times naively conducted, to compartmentalise and penetrate the functioning of the sense of touch, to lift it, as Parisi underlines, from that condition of subalternity to which an entire philosophical tradition had unjustly relegated it.

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<sup>28</sup> Martin Grunwald, eds, *Human Haptic Perception. Basics and Application*, Basilea: Birkhäuser, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Parisi, *Archaeologies of Touch*.

<sup>30</sup> Grunwald, *Human Haptic Perception*, 15-40; 41-54; 55-66.

<sup>31</sup> Max Dessoir, *Ueber den Hautsinn*, in *Archiv für Anatomie und Physiologie*, Berlino: Physiologische Abtheilung, 1892, 242; Grunwald, *Human Haptic Perception*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Dessoir, *Ueber den Hautsinn*, 242; Grunwald, *Human Haptic Perception*, 22; Parisi, *Archaeologies of Touch*, 6, 104-105.

<sup>33</sup> Dessoir, *Ueber den Hautsinn*, 242; Grunwald, *Human Haptic Perception*, 22; Parisi, *Archaeologies of Touch*, 6, 104-105.

<sup>34</sup> Parisi, *Archaeologies of Touch*, passim.

<sup>35</sup> Hugo Münsterberg, *Psychological Laboratory of Harvard University* (1893), in C. D. Green, *Classics in the History of Psychology*, Toronto: York University, 2000.

At least in part, the science of haptics intersected with philosophical debates if one considers how some of its primary animators – Dessoir in the lead – also came from similar studies. At the same time, it was not the eminently speculative level that held sway. Historically, and the point is diriment, the haptics science was an empirical knowledge destined to draw peculiar cartographies between the New and Old World and, in this case, the Germanophile university laboratories, in Leipzig in particular – in open opposition to the Viennese circles – and their North American counterparts, among which Cornell University, John Hopkins University, and Harvard University stand out.<sup>36</sup>

According to Parisi, in configuring the historicist lemma of the haptic vision, Riegl borrowed this category ‘from physiology, where it had been taken up in the 1890s as a way of designating the extensive research being carried out on the psychophysiology of tactual perception. In borrowing the term, Riegl had substantially modified its meaning – he steered away from its scientific, doctrinal, and experimental connotations, hinting only vaguely at the new research paradigm it designated’.<sup>37</sup> To summarise: to frame the histories of the haptic, it is essential to conceive this construct as a historical document to be interpreted by dividing its temporalities and locating its disciplinary transitions. Whilst the note that Riegl wrote in April 1902 would enjoy an extraordinary critical fortune, attributing to Riegl the paternity of the notion of haptic, the very first genealogy initiated by Dessoir would encounter a complementary phenomenon of suppression or long forgetfulness, at least in the art-historical and humanistic *côté*, leading to a significant inflexion concerning the history of the reception of this construct.

### **Editorial vicissitudes: the two sides of Wien**

Since the last two decades of the 20th century, within the framework of Anglo-American Film Studies, authors such as Antonia Lant,<sup>38</sup> Noel Burch,<sup>39</sup> Laura U. Marks,<sup>40</sup> Giuliana Bruno,<sup>41</sup> and Jennifer Barker<sup>42</sup> have questioned Riegl’s legacy in a widespread and unique manner. It might be surprising to find how the objectified Paleo-Egyptian figuration, crystallised in its quiet mineral stillness, intercepted the technical animation of the moving image. A focused outline of how Anglo-American Film Studies dialogued with Riegl’s lesson can also provide a sound methodological precedent for analysing art-historical sources. In this regard, it should be emphasised that only in rare cases the reception of Riegl’s thought has represented a philological subsumption of his postulates, as the early case of

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<sup>36</sup> Münsterberg, *Psychological Laboratory of Harvard University*, n.p.

<sup>37</sup> Parisi, *Archaeologies of Touch*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Antonia Lant, ‘Haptical Cinema’, *October*, 74, Autumn 1995, 45-73.

<sup>39</sup> Noel Burch, *Life to those Shadows*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

<sup>40</sup> Marks, *The Skin of the Film; Marks, Touch*.

<sup>41</sup> Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of emotions: journeys in art, architecture and film*, New York: Verso, 2002, passim; Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: matters of aesthetics, materiality, and media*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, passim.

<sup>42</sup> Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye. Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Worringer attests excellently.<sup>43</sup> More generally, the extraordinary vitality of Riegl's haptic construct in the 20th century and even in the new millennium has found its realisation in the phenomena of derivation, hybridisation, and interpolation that successive authors have brought, intertwining multiple sources. The conceptual inversion made by Benjamin in his essay on the work of art, in which Riegl's haptic-optic evolutionism was suddenly reversed, now shifting from the optical to the haptic, was followed by further subsumptions developed in the wake of French philosophical thought, from Dufrenne to Deleuze and Derrida, as has been punctually traced in an articulate critical bibliography.<sup>44</sup>

On the one hand, the reception of Riegl's haptic vision in Anglo-American Modernism certifies some peculiar criticalities. First and foremost, related to strictly editorial reasons. The first English translation of the *Kunstindustrie*, accompanied by a preface and notes, was edited by the archaeologist Rolf Winkes for the Roman publisher Giorgio Bretschneider in 1984.<sup>45</sup> It was no coincidence that the translation featured a European publisher, specifically an Italian one. An early Italian translation had already seen the light in 1953 by Sergio Bettini<sup>46</sup> and in 1959 by Licia Collobi Ragghianti, also accompanied by a special annotation apparatus and a dense preface, for the Einaudi Publisher, demonstrating an interest that had been solidly matured in the Italian area since the first quarter of the Fifties.<sup>47</sup> Celebrating the centenary of its publication, the English translation of the *Stilfragen*, edited by Evelyn Kain, was published in 1993;<sup>48</sup> finally, it was not until 2004 that the English version of the *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste* was released, with a translation by Jacqueline E. Jung and a preface by Benjamin Binstock.<sup>49</sup> In short, while the circulation of *Kunstindustrie* had been taking place since 1901, encountering an articulate network of readers between Europe and the United States, its English translation, an essential vehicle for more decisive knowledge and consultation of it, would be lacking in the Anglo-American area at least until the early 1980s.

On the other hand, a psychophysiological tradition that had taken root early in the United States was parallel to the aesthesiological studies conducted by Riegl and his sources. It should not be forgotten that, since the end of the 19th century, the

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<sup>43</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie* (1908), München: Piper, 1921, 10-11, 20-28. See in this regard: Vlad Ionescu, *Touch and See: Image Analysis and Aesthetics in the Art Theory of Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin and Wilhelm Worringer*, Doctoral Thesis, Leuven: University of Leuven, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Compare Iversen, *Alois Riegl*, passim; Marks, *Touch*, passim; Pinotti, *Il corpo dello stile*, passim; Paterson, *The Senses of Touch*, passim.

<sup>45</sup> Alois Riegl, *Late Roman Art industry*, translated by Rolf Winkes, Roma: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1984.

<sup>46</sup> Alois Riegl, *Industria artistica tardoromana*, translated by Sergio Bettini, Firenze: Sansoni, 1953.

<sup>47</sup> Alois Riegl, *Arte tardoromana*, translated by Licia Collobi, Milano: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1959.

<sup>48</sup> Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style, Foundations for a History of Ornament*, David Castriota, eds, translated by Evelyn Kain, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

<sup>49</sup> Riegl, *Historical Grammar*, 2004.

laboratories on tactile sensitivity had also become natural focal points of attraction for scholars of European origin, including Dessoir himself, his pupil Hugo Münsterberg<sup>50</sup> and the British Edward Titchener. Within such a lively framework since the end of the 1930s, several European intellectuals engaged in studying haptic perception had emigrated to American soil, contributing to tracing a psychophysiological path destined to supplant the Rieglian precedent.

In this respect, the case of Viktor Lowenfeld and Ludwig Münz appears crucial. Lowenfeld arrived on US soil as an expatriate from Nazi Austria in 1938.<sup>51</sup> Since the early 1930s, he had devoted himself to studying creativity in blind and visually impaired children. These investigations were carried out on an empirical basis, starting from his fifteen years of service at the Israelitisches Blindeninstitut Hohe Warte in Wien, culminating in the publication of the monographs *Plastische Arbeiten Blinden*, compiled with Münz and printed in 1934, and the unpublished *Entstehung der Plastik*.<sup>52</sup> Both essays explicitly addressed to investigating creative activity in blind subjects would remain available only in the German version, printed for the publisher Rudolf M. Rohrer in Brno.<sup>53</sup>

Whilst neither the haptic sensibility nor the figure of Riegl was mentioned in such dissertations, the renowned *The Nature of Human Creativity*, published in English after emigrating to the United States for the New York-based Harcourt, Brace & Company, would have fulfilled the role of theoretical incubator of such perspectives, namely the aesthetic and psychophysiological one. Alois Riegl was punctually named there, although, indicatively, not concerning haptic vision. Along with Schiller and Nietzsche, Riegl was instead summoned as a predecessor to the definition of an evolutionist thought formed of oppositional conceptual pairs, whereby, as Lowenfeld notes, 'Riegl in particular endeavoured to understand the nature of these art styles instead of subjecting them merely to aesthetic judgements. He thought very deeply about the nature of the "geometrical" style and contrasted it with the "naturalistic"'.<sup>54</sup>

In providing an experimental classification of creative activity in both the blind and visually impaired or normally sighted individuals, Lowenfeld introduced the couple of categories of 'visual type' and 'haptic type'.<sup>55</sup> Although since the early 1980s, Rudolf Arnheim would have acknowledged the pioneering role played by Lowenfeld in the American context without however concealing the flaws and

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<sup>50</sup> For an excellent introduction to Münsterberg's studies in relation to haptic see Giuliana Bruno, 'Film, Aesthetics, Science: Hugo Münsterberg's Laboratory of Moving Images', *Grey Room*, 36, 2009, 88-113.

<sup>51</sup> Robert J. Saunders, 'The Contributions of Viktor Lowenfeld to Art Education; Part I: Early Influences on His Thought', *Studies in Art Education*, 2:1, Autumn 1960, 6-15. For an introduction to Lowenfeld's early work as an educator: Susan K. Leshnoff, 'Viktor Lowenfeld: Portrait of a Young Art Teacher in Vienna in the 1930s', *Studies in Art Education*, 54:2, November 2013, 158-170.

<sup>52</sup> Saunders, 'The Contributions of Viktor Lowenfeld to Art Education', 10.

<sup>53</sup> Ludwig Münz, Viktor Lowenfeld, *Plastische Arbeiten Blinden*, Brunn: Rohrer, 1934.

<sup>54</sup> Viktor Lowenfeld, *The Nature of Creative Activity*, New York: Harcourt, 1939, 131.

<sup>55</sup> Lowenfeld, *The Nature of Creative Activity*, 81-90.



misconceptions inherent in his proposal,<sup>56</sup> Lowenfeld's theses would have enjoyed a long-lasting critical fortune in the studies on artistic creation conducted by art historians and even as paradigms for interpreting contemporary artistic manifestations.

A year after the publication of the two volumes *Die Formenwelt des Tastsinnes* (1938) by Géza Révész, a methodical attempt to postulate the processes of haptomorphosis in the blind subject where an extensive space was reserved for the figure of Riegl, Lowenfeld's dissertation provided a chiasmic definition of the haptic type creativity and the corresponding optics, not fortuitously, one might say, based on an antithetical *Weltanschauung*. In Lowenfeld's definition, the 'visual type' designates an extroverted mode of spatial apprehension, whereby 'the visual type starts from his environment, that his concepts are developed into a perceptual whole through the fusion of partial visual experiences'.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, the haptic type introjects the same logic, resulting 'primarily concerned with his own body sensations and with the tactual space around him'.<sup>58</sup> As in the case of the paleo-Egyptian subject, in Lowenfeld's haptic type, 'everything springs from his immediate bodily experiences'<sup>59</sup> without, however, reflecting any law of the crystalline lens that denies movement. This cognitive typology was based on the physiological kinaesthesia of the body, consequently qualifying itself for the emphatic restitution of the movements perceived by the subject.

Deriving general principles from a paradigmatic example, Lowenfeld could argue:

In order to study the importance of haptic and kinaesthetic problems of form at different developmental stages, the same topic was given to a number of children whose ages varied from six to fifteen. When choosing the topic, I tried to take into account the developmental possibilities of visual as well as of haptic and kinaesthetic expressive experiences. The topic was, 'you are under an apple tree. [...] Draw

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<sup>56</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, 'Victor Lowenfeld and Tactility', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 17: 2, Summer 1983, 19-29; Rudolf Arnheim, 'Perceptual Aspects of Art for the Blind', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 24: 3, Autumn 1990, 57-65. As Arnheim noted in 1983: 'Recourse to the particular cognitive traits of tactile perception was an innovation in art theory, but it did not originate with Victor Lowenfeld. The influential Viennese art historian Alois Riegl, to whom Lowenfeld refers briefly in his principal book, had pointed to the basic duality of the two sensory modes, vision and touch, and he had done so for similar reasons. In a pioneer study which is still unavailable in English, Riegl had taken it upon himself to defend the arts and crafts of the late Roman period against the prevalent view that they were nothing better than the victims of the northern barbarians whose invasion had played havoc with the leftovers of antiquity. Riegl claimed that during the centuries between the reign of Constantine and that of Charlemagne the arts developed a genuine style of their own, which had to be judged by its own standards. Forty years later, Lowenfeld made a similar claim for the artwork of children'" (Arnheim, 'Victor Lowenfeld and Tactility', 21).

<sup>57</sup> Lowenfeld, *The Nature of Creative Activity*, 87.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

yourself as you are taking the apple off the tree'. The subject had allowed the child to be absorbed in the visual experiences of the beautiful apple hanging on one of the lower branches of the tree, as much as into the feeling of the importance attained by the apple when it is particularly desired. The haptic experience of grasping the apple could be expressed just as much as the experience of stretching the body while it was being picked. At each age group I obtained 40-50 drawings, a total of some 400, and these form the material for the following discussion. [...] At the fifth and six year the great majority of children drew a merely schematic tree. They did not, for instance, especially emphasise the importance of the apple. But in most cases the stretching of the body or the arm was expressed by strong overemphasis.<sup>60</sup>

Superseding the Rieglian haptic visuality, the haptic type postulated by Lowenfeld hinging on the individual's interoceptive and visceral sensations (the science of haptics), configured a form of representation shaped on the emphatic representation of movement. For this species of representation to move from being a psychophysiological mechanism to functioning as a factor with stylistic significance, it would be necessary to introduce it into the discourses of history, theory, and art criticism. The Rieglian precedent would then have become a point of arrival rather than departure and an instrument through which the primacy of vision over tactility could eventually be claimed.

### **Riegl and modernity: among psychology, theory, and art criticism**

The first attempt to apply Lowenfeld's perceptual categories to contemporary art in the United States dates to the early 1940s. The publication of the volume *Personal Revolution and Picasso* dates to 1941, published by the New York-based Longmans in the series *The Psychologist Looks at Art* by Louis Danz.<sup>61</sup> Danz was born in Saint Paul (Minnesota) in 1886, as an *amateur* connoisseur of modern art and psychology based in Santa Ana (California) and already the author, in the second half of the 1930s, of a volume on the relations between art and psychology<sup>62</sup> and of a contribution to a collective monograph dedicated to the work of the Russian composer Igor Stravinskij.<sup>63</sup> *Personal Revolution and Picasso*, anticipating by at least twenty years the celebrated essay *The Genesis of a Painting: Picasso's Guernica* by Rudolf Arnheim, first published in 1962, is eccentric, both for the syntax, conducted in the first person and diaristic form, and for the author's use of the term 'haptic'.<sup>64</sup>

As Lester D. Longman, one of the few reviewers of the volume, pointed out, 'the specific method employed is to re-create the mood of *Guernica* in literature of

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Louis Danz, *Personal Revolution and Picasso*, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green & Company, 1941.

<sup>62</sup> Louis Danz, *The psychologist looks at art*, London: Longmans, Green, 1937.

<sup>63</sup> Louis Danz, 1936, in Merle Armitage, *Igor Stravinsky*, New York: G. Schirmer, 1936.

<sup>64</sup> Danz, *Personal Revolution and Picasso*, *passim*.

similar artistic temper and emotional tone'.<sup>65</sup> Danz's study, which mostly escaped the attention of the subsequent critical literature, began with a programmatic statement having thesis value: 'Picasso's painting *Guernica*. It is the most haptic image of modern times. It is the almost completely haptic picture in the world. This picture, from top to bottom, from side to side, is Picasso'.<sup>66</sup> In conceiving the masterpiece as a testbed for postulating an aesthetic-perceptual theorisation, Danz could state:

The word haptic it says means actual body experience. I found it in the dictionary like this.... the term pertains to the sense of touch. I broadened it out and stretched it over to include all emotive body happenings which take place inside the body.<sup>67</sup>

Although Danz had travelled in Europe and knew Italian (though presumably not German),<sup>68</sup> he made no mention, at least explicitly, of either Riegl, the German-speaking sources or the contemporary studies of Révész. At the same time, significant attention was reserved, not accidentally, for American sources, including William James (one of the primary sources of the notion of *Tactile Values* in Berenson)<sup>69</sup> and punctually for the haptic type theorised by Lowenfeld. As Danz claimed:

There is Victor Lowenfield who has done something very much with blind children and he tells a story about a child sightless from birth and who was modelling a cherry. The child who could not see anything first formed the seed and then she covered the seed with a thin skin and over this she modelled the flesh so that finally there was a cherry as it would feel to the touch. That is how the blind child did it.<sup>70</sup>

In 1941, three years after Révész's defence of Riegl, his reference disappeared from the reflections on haptic conducted in the Anglo-American literature, being destined to remain latent in the research that immediately followed.

The successful booklet *Education through Art* by Herbert Read, mainly composed on a scholarship granted by the University of London between 1940 and 1942, had come to light in a first edition in 1943 for the publisher Faber & Faber.

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<sup>65</sup> Lester D. Longman, 'Reviewed Work: Personal Revolution and Picasso by Louis Danz', *Parnassus*, 13: 5, May 1941, (182-83) 182.

<sup>66</sup> Danz, *Personal Revolution and Picasso*, 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>68</sup> Louis Danz, *It Is Still The Morning. A Novel by Louis Danz*, New York: William Morrow & Co, 1943.

<sup>69</sup> For an introduction on Berenson's sources: Alison Brown, 'Bernard Berenson and "Tactile Values" in Florence', in Joseph Connors, Louis A. Waldman, *Bernard Berenson: Formation and Heritage*, New Heaven: Villa I Tatti, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Harvard University Press, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Danz, *Personal Revolution and Picasso*, 10-11.

Amid the First World War, Read was shaping a monumental survey<sup>71</sup> destined to enjoy considerable critical acclaim. Within such a pedagogical framework, must be contextualized Read's first reflection on the notion of haptic, declined in the expressions of 'haptic perception' and 'haptic type', precursors of the best-known construct of 'haptic sensibility', elaborated in the fundamental volume devoted to the inquiry on sculpture.<sup>72</sup>

The drafting of the *Education through Art* must have been motivated by the profound sense of the endeavour, in which not only art history but, more appropriately, an education that conceives art in aesthesiological terms, is reserved the role of mediating and 'foster the growth of what is individual in each human being, at the same time harmonising the individuality thus reduced with the organic unity of the social group to which the individual belongs'.<sup>73</sup> While Max Dessoir was mentioned *en passant* among the psychologists who first suggested a correlation between aesthetic experience and perceptual type,<sup>74</sup> Ludwig Münz and Viktor Lowenfeld<sup>75</sup> – and not their compatriot Riegl – mediate the assumption of this category.

Thus, the subject of the 'haptic' and 'somatic' type, in the wake of Lowenfeld's studies, whose contents Read's volume traces, is spontaneously led to configure 'a store of images derived, not from external perception, but from muscular and nervous tensions which are internal in origin'.<sup>76</sup> Here, then, is the intersection with the *haptics*: not only does haptic sensitivity pertain to 'proprioceptive states', but it also becomes evidence of the 'purely affective'<sup>77</sup> and ideally subjective invention of the image, whereby both the blind and the sighted (and possibly 'primitive') individual hypostatise their encounter with the phenomenal world (Read's reference, in this case, is avowedly Worringer), defining 'a synthesis between his tactile perceptions of external reality and his own subjective experiences'.<sup>78</sup>

In this regard, even in the very early 1940s, Read seems to anticipate and punctually subvert what would represent Clement Greenberg's view on Abstract Expressionism, discussing a kind of 'subjective expressionism' distinctive to the haptic model, based on the 'over-emphasis'<sup>79</sup> with which the individual reifies his

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<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that the notion of haptic is never mentioned in the capital volume David Goodway, eds, *Herbert Read Reassessed*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998. More recently, in Spring 2023, the University of Leeds organized an international conference dedicated to theme such as touch and tactile imagination in Modernism with some contributions to Herbert Read's thought.

<sup>72</sup> Herbert Read, *Education through Art*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1945, 15, 18, 20, 23-25, 89, 99, 134-35, 143-44, 192.

<sup>73</sup> Read, *Education through Art*, 8.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 109-110, 113.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 18.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

relationship with space, questioning the appropriateness of a 'definite school of contemporary art which is based on haptic sensibility, but particular artists normally grouped as expressionists certainly display such an introverted attitude (Heckel, Soutine, de Smet)'.

Therefore, if the observations elaborated by Read in the early 1950s on the medium of sculpture derive from his frequentation of a similar psychophysiological genealogy, it must be highlighted the factor that, with slight modifications, it is precisely the nucleus of bodily, proprioceptive, interoceptive and kinaesthetic components that qualify the notion of 'haptic sensibility'.<sup>80</sup> Although Read mentioned Riegl on the construct of 'space shyness' of the Paleo-Egyptian subject,<sup>81</sup> an issue closely related to the haptic vision lemma, eloquently, he did not quote the Austrian art historian concerning the notion of haptic. At least until the mid-1960s, when Read presented the 'Panofskian' volume *Icon and Idea; The Function of Art in the Development of Human Consciousness*, published in 1965 as an impressive summa of the pedagogical research its author perfected over thirty years, the reference to Riegl, where present, does not pertain to the notion of haptic.

By defining as 'vitalistic' the style in which the zoomorphic subject appears depicted in numerous examples of Upper Palaeolithic parietal and movable art,<sup>82</sup> Read was able to generate a short-circuit, in the form of a conceptual crisis, of the haptic and vitalistic style of the so-called haptic type postulated by Münz and Lowenfeld and the 'haptic vision' formulated by Riegl. For the first time, at least since the 1940s, Read introduces a variation to his sources on this perceptive faculty. Nevertheless, it is equally relevant to note how this inflexion, results subtly instrumental and not entirely correct. Referring to prehistoric paintings and hunting engravings from the Franco-Cantabrian area, Read stated:

Since the main concern of the artist was obviously to indicate movement, the Franco-Cantabrian style might perhaps be called "kinetic". Better still, I think, would be the word "haptic", which was invented by the Austrian art historian, Alois Riegl, to describe types of art in which the forms are dictated by inward sensations rather than by outward observation. The running limbs are lengthened because in the act of running they *feel* long. In fact, the two main prehistoric styles are determined on the one hand by the outwardly realized image, on the other hand by the inwardly felt sensation, and "imagist" and "sensational" would do very well as descriptive labels.<sup>83</sup>

Although correctly recalled as referring to a body that conceives space by material individuality and interior sensations, the Rieglian precedent only barely reflects that vitalistic, basically subjective valence assigned by Read to the notion of haptic, as well as resulting unrelated to movement, a theme, as mentioned above,

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<sup>80</sup> Herbert Read, *The Art of Sculpture*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1956, 30-31.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>82</sup> Herbert Read, *Icon and Idea; The Function of Art in the Development of Human Consciousness*, New York: Schocken Books, 1965, 22-26.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

rejected by the Paleo-Egyptian collective subject (according to the Viennese theorist). More precisely, the 'sensational' character of this perceptive faculty, to be understood in its etymological meaning of reaction to the external stimulation of the sense organs, accounts in Read for the intracorporeal mechanisms, namely muscular, barometric, and especially emotional, responsible for the configuration of the image.

In a complementary (and declaredly antagonistic) position,<sup>84</sup> Clement Greenberg's instances must be conceived, sceptical of any pedagogical derivations and latently dictatorial, as Key Larson put it.<sup>85</sup> Greenberg's writings demonstrate multiple references to the thought of Hildebrand, Wölfflin, Berenson,<sup>86</sup> Venturi, and Croce,<sup>87</sup> of whom he had been a reader since the second quarter of the 1940s. A brief review can prove how Greenberg's thought assimilates the most disparate experiences within its ideologically oculocentric<sup>88</sup> epistemic framework.<sup>89</sup> It dates to September 1953, when Greenberg wrote a commentary on the monograph *Folk Art in Europe* by the German archaeologist and art historian Helmuth Theodor Bossert,<sup>90</sup> translated by Frederick A. Praeger.<sup>91</sup> In reconstructing an extensive catalogue of

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<sup>84</sup> On the clash between Greenberg and Read with respect to the notion of haptic sensibility and, more generally, in relation to a contrasting way of conceiving art history as an aesthesiology, Read haptic and Greenberg visual see: Daniel J. Getsy, 'Tactility or Opticality, Henry Moore or David Smith: Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg on The Art of Sculpture, 1956', in Rebecca Peabody, *Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945–1975*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011, 105-121.

<sup>85</sup> Key Larson, 'The Dictatorship of Clement Greenberg', *Artforum*, 25:10, Summer 1987, 76-79.

<sup>86</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Review of Aesthetics and History in the visual Arts by Bernard Berenson* (1948), reprinted in John O'Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2. Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*, Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1986, 263-264.

<sup>87</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Recensione di Four Steps Toward Modern Art di Lionello Venturi', *Arts Magazine*, September 1956, reprinted in Giuseppe Di Salvatore, Luigi Fassi, *Clement Greenberg. L'avventura del Modernismo*, Monza: Johann & Levy, 2011, 217-219.

<sup>88</sup> According to Jay: 'If Greenberg's formalist version of the modernist privileging of the visual were the whole story, we would be confronted with the paradox that the antivisual discourse of the twentieth century was utterly at odds with the dominant artistic practice of the same era. However, recent critics of Greenberg—such as Leo Steinberg, Rosalind Krauss, Victor Burgin, Hal Foster, Thierry de Duve, and P. Adams Sitney—have reopened the question of the purity of the visual in modernism.' Martin Jay, *Downcast eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 160.

<sup>89</sup> As Jones noted: 'Greenberg's writings on art are peculiarly, one might even say uniquely, obsessed with the visual. This might seem tautological: art is visual, Greenberg writes about art, therefore.' Caroline Jones, *Eyesight alone: Clement Greenberg's modernism and the bureaucratization of the senses*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 6.

<sup>90</sup> Helmut Theodor Bossert, *Folk Art in Europe*, New York: F. A. Praeger, 1953.

<sup>91</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Independence of Folk Art: Review of Folk Art in Europe by Helmut Bossert', *Art News*, September 1953, reprinted in John O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg. The collected essays and criticism. Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 152-155.

textile specimens of so-called 'folk art' scattered throughout Europe since the 16th century, Bossert referred to Riegl's studies, particularly the prodromal research he had conducted on the same subject in 1894.<sup>92</sup> What needs to be pointed out is how Greenberg, who seven years later would systematise in the canonical *Modernist Painting* a series of considerations pondered over more than thirty years, while questioning the culturological reasons for popular iconic manifestations, betrays the pervasiveness of his pictorial conception when it implies:

Some of the things illustrated in this book look singularly beautiful. The freshness of color and pattern in the textiles often takes one's breath away. In the wood and metal work and the ceramics, the quality is much more uneven, as if the peasant artist could not conceive large shapes or decorate irregular ones with the same unembarrassed ingenuity that he displayed when patterning rectangular pieces of cloth.<sup>93</sup>

The chromatic saturation and flatness exhibited by photographs of textile artefacts, of which Greenberg notes how watercolour tends to 'actually enhance the originals', delineates a significant overlap between distinctive characteristics of Greenberghian modernist painting and those exhibited in these textile pieces. It could be assumed that according to Greenberg's reading, the plates dedicated to Russian embroideries prefigure the painting of the Americans Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland.<sup>94</sup> In their tendency to allow the support threading to seep through, these painters had been able to free the pictorial medium from 'tactile associations' under the literal identification, achieved operatively, between colour and background.<sup>95</sup> That is, in 'adapting the watercolour technique to oil and using thin paint on an absorbent surface'.<sup>96</sup> In this way, the comment on Bossert's reproductions could foreshadow, or at least reinvigorate, one of the cornerstones of the Greenberghian art theory that he would fully elaborate on over a five-year period to follow. From the warp of textile art artefacts to the dampened weft of a duck cotton canvas, the bare weaving, for Clement Greenberg, represents the force field of an absolute visuality.

Moreover, the evidence of a possible revisitation of Riegl's thought can be glimpsed from the analysis of a renowned contribution dedicated to abstract art published in the pages of *The Nation* in September 1944,<sup>97</sup> in which Greenberg seems

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<sup>92</sup> Alois Riegl, *Volkskunst, Hausfleiss und Hausindustrie; Nachdruck der Ausgabe Berlin 1894.* (= *Kunstwissenschaftliche Studientexte, Band VI*), Mittenwald: Mäander, 1978.

<sup>93</sup> Greenberg, *Independence of Folk Art*, 154.

<sup>94</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Louis and Noland', *Art international*, May 1960, reprinted in John O'Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 4, Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, (94-100).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Abstract Art', *The Nation*, 15 April 1944, reprinted in John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg. The collected essays and criticism. Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1986, 99-203.

to give evidence of his frequentation of the German *Kunstwissenschaft*, even though he does not make explicit mention of any of its prominent interpreters. While the evolutionary development from haptic seeing to optical seeing postulated by Riegl – who does not fortuitously look, as Greenberg would do some forty years later, at the Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist experiments of his time – finds a significant echo in the instances elaborated by Greenberg, it is also proper that Greenberg's arrangement provides yet another reversal, potentially unintentional, of his predecessor's thesis. In this regard, it should be recalled how the preservation of the continuity of the tactile plane, together with the predilection for suitably grazing modelling, which expels any illusion of depth from its perimeter – that is, the elements that notably define Greenberg's Modernist painting – constitutes the opposite of what Riegl and Wölfflin were indicating with the category of pictorial, intersecting instead with the device of close haptic vision. In this regard, the incipit of the article betrays a curiously Rieglian structuring of the discourse:

The previous great revolution in Western painting led from the hieratic flatness of Gothic and Byzantine to the three-dimensionality of the Renaissance. Its stimulus was a fresh awareness of space provoked by expanding economic and by the growing conviction that man's chief mission on earth is the conquest of his environment. The immediate problem in painting was to fit the new perception of depth and volume into the flatness of the picture surface, the less obvious though more difficult and crucial problem was to synthesize depth, volume, and surface in both dramatic and decorative unity.<sup>98</sup>

The flatness to which Greenbergian exegesis refers must be conceived as literally coinciding with the mineral surface of Egyptian bas-relief and the pictorial one of Modernist canvas. In that case, the reversal of the Rieglian precedent implemented by its eventual American reader pertains to the functioning of the categories systematised by its predecessor. Explicitly, the theoretical operation developed by Greenberg aims at the definition of a flatness purged of those connotative attributes of the pictorial style as both Riegl and Wölfflin had formulated it in a moreover intermedial direction.

What would seem to unite Riegl's Paleo-Egyptian collective subject, Worringer's Cisalpine one, together with a host of illustrious descendants, including the exponents of the 'Fauves', 'Cézanne', 'Picasso, Braque, Gris', lies rather in recognition of a shared purpose: that of 'annihilating the third dimension'. The last, but no less crucial, twisting of the construct of the tactile plane operated by Greenberg pertains to the content (in Greenberg, synonymous with form) that that same plane exposes. Recognising as early as 1944 how 'Byzantine art was abstract in tendency because it subordinated exterior reality to a dogma',<sup>99</sup> Greenberg identifies the collective subject of early twentieth-century painting with a suddenly introspective Egyptian ancestor:

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 203.



Instead of being aroused, the modern imagination is numbed by visual representation. Unable to represent the exterior world suggestively enough, pictorial art is driven to express as directly as possible only what goes on inside the self – or at most the ineluctable *modes* by which that which is outside the self is perceived (Mondrian).<sup>100</sup>

In endorsing such a turn to the subjective, a subjectivism not dissimilar to the constitutive objectivity of the tactile plane, Greenberg has adhered since 1944 to the already Lockian, Hildebrandian and Berensonian creed whereby tactile stimuli appear translated into retinal impressions, ultimately tipping the scales in favour of the visual. Rieglian haptic visuality could finally culminate, following the prerogatives of its American exegete, in a purely and eminently optical way of perceiving.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, within the framework of Anglo-American Modernism, Alois Riegl's haptic vision constitutes a secondary source. The reasons for this subalternity, quite singular if one considers how Riegl represents the most mentioned source concerning the notion of haptic in the humanistic field, are several and articulated. First, they should be related to the editorial vicissitudes, which must have led American scholars and the public to develop a greater familiarity with other German-speaking intellectuals, including Lowenfeld and Münz. Secondly, a more specifically pedagogical and psychological, rather than strictly formalist, orientation seems to have directed the research at the turn of the 20th century on the notion of haptic. A pure opticality, incorporating the references to tactility and corporeality (the so-called haptic visuality), would have taken root in the most oculocentric of all modernists: Clement Greenberg. Otherwise, an empirical and 'laboratory' orientation would have definitively challenged the teleological development of the Rieglian, restoring to the body's feeling an emotional and intellectual depth having critical value: no longer a haptic vision but a *haptic feeling and sensibility*.

brtlsvalentina@gmail.com



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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.