

The origins of Hans Sedlmayr's methodology and its relation to his politics: a disregarded approach

Nuria Jetter

Introduction¹

Hans Sedlmayr – a central figure of the Second Vienna School of Art History – is highly debated, mostly for the following reasons: the problematic scholarly character of his interpretation theory and practice, moreover his condemnation of modernity, and, last but not least, his approval of Nazism. Despite this high level of attention within art historiography, important questions remain. One of them derives from the fact that Sedlmayr's methodological writings of the 1920s – in contrast to his later ones – have been appreciated as sound (especially by Ian Verstegen) and are generally separated from the method of 'structural analysis' as he developed it in the early 1930s.² Scholars have repeatedly described a shift in Sedlmayr's writings of the 1930s. E.g. Verstegen even wrote of 'two Sedlmayr's, a short-lived, cosmopolitan Sedlmayr, and a later, diagnostic and hermeneutic Sedlmayr';³ and according to Frederick J. Schwartz Sedlmayr falls 'from phenomenology into farce'.⁴ On the other hand the earliest decade of Sedlmayr's existence as an art historian, that is the 1920s, has been described as a 'grey area'.⁵ An important question thus is: How do Sedlmayr's early writings relate to the later ones? Apart from that it has been stated that Sedlmayr's adherence to Nazism stood in contrast with his Catholicism. While Hans Aurenhammer has tried to solve this problem by relating him to a group of Catholic Nationals active in Austria at the

¹ In the following text titles of German publications by the historical authors discussed here are translated to English, even if no translation of the texts has been published. Original wordings of German titles are given in footnotes. Translations of titles and quotations are by the author, unless they are quoted from published translations. Thanks to Katharina Vnoucek for her English language proofreading and valuable advice on where I could clarify my points. Thanks also to Richard Woodfield for a helpful hint on translatability. Of course, any remaining errors are mine.

² Especially Ian Verstegen, 'Materializing *Strukturforschung*' in Mitchell B. Frank and Daniel Adler, eds, *German Art History and Scientific Thought. Beyond Formalism*, Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2012, 141, 144. And recently Ian Verstegen, *The New Vienna School of Art History. Fulfilling the Promise of Analytic Holism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023, 6–7. Thanks to Ian Verstegen for giving me access to the book before it was available via libraries or trade to me.

³ Verstegen, *The New Vienna School*, 45.

⁴ Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots. Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany*, New Haven (Conn.): Yale University Press, 2005, 162.

⁵ Evonne Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond, 1930–1935', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 59: 1, December 2010, (235–263) 236.

time,⁶ this short classification seems too rough to be satisfactory. Moreover, Aurenhammer himself noted that there is still a discrepancy here. Evonne Levy highlighted that it was 'still not entirely clear to what extent pre-1938 Sedlmayr was driving a political agenda'⁷. By concluding with the statement 'to continue to pose these questions is the main point'⁸, she also insisted on a desideratum. Ian Verstegen came to the belief that Sedlmayr adhered to 'a Leninized "dictatorship of the proletariat"'⁹ and could be classified as a 'National Bolshevist'.¹⁰ However, this classification is mainly based on Ernst Gombrich's late retrospective recording of a hearsay that Sedlmayr had shown leftist tendencies when he returned from the First World War,¹¹ and on the fact that Sedlmayr apparently was not wealthy and therefore 'needed to make a living'.¹² This seems rather unspecific. The second and third questions that currently still arise, are hence: What is the exact nature of his political orientation? And: Are his art historical writings driven by a political agenda? The paper at hand proposes answers that are gained from a comparison of writings by Sedlmayr and the authors suggested here as his sources. Its focus are philosophical premises that these authors as well as Sedlmayr need to presuppose in order to maintain their theories.

In what follows it is argued that Sedlmayr's political orientation and his art historical writings cannot be separated from one another, as they both are closely linked to an unnamed, yet identifiable source, even from their beginnings.¹³ This source is, as this article tries to show, the Viennese professor Othmar Spann, along with his own source Franz von Baader and his pupil Johannes Sauter. In the 1920s and 1930s, Spann gathered a politically influential group of pupils and followers.¹⁴ He tried to use Nazism as a vehicle for the realization of his ideas of a proper state, which he had published in 1921 in his most well-known book *The True State*.¹⁵ But

⁶ Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Zäsur oder Kontinuität? Das Wiener Kunsthistorische Institut im Ständestaat und im Nationalsozialismus', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 53: 1, December 2004, (11–54) 20–21.

⁷ Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond', 258.

⁸ Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond', 259.

⁹ Ian Verstegen, 'Obscene History. The Two Sedlmayrs', *Studia austriaca*, XXIV, 2016, (73–93) 78.

¹⁰ Verstegen, 'Obscene History', 73, 78.

¹¹ Verstegen, 'Obscene History', 77–78. Verstegen quotes an interview that Richard Woodfield had with Ernst Gombrich in March 1988, in which Gombrich recorded: 'on his return from Russia, so they say, he was rather very left wing if not communist Marxist'. Quoted from and dated according to Richard Woodfield, 'Preface' in Verstegen, *The New Vienna School*, (xv–xxv) xvii–xix.

¹² Verstegen, 'Obscene History', 80.

¹³ This is contrary to Verstegen's belief, 'that it is impossible to link tightly Sedlmayr's historical pronouncements with his politics.' Verstegen, 'Obscene History', 73.

¹⁴ On Spann see especially: Janek Wasserman, *Black Vienna, The radical right in the red city, 1918–1938*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014, 74–105; Klaus-Jörg Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus. Zur historischen Wirksamkeit und politischen Funktion der universalistischen Gesellschaftslehre und Ständestaatskonzeption Othmar Spanns*, Marburg an der Lahn: Europa-Verlag, 1973.

¹⁵ *Der wahre Staat*.

Spann was not only a sociologist, he was also a philosopher, who wished to provide a new epistemological foundation for the humanities that he saw endangered by empiricism. The antidote which he proposed against this opponent is a kind of ontological metaphysics, which he called universalism. It can be specified as a certain holism. As this paper aims to make plausible, it is this theory from which Sedlmayr drew his confidence in his own ability to found a rigorous study of art as expressed in his well-known essay 'Toward a Rigorous Study of Art',¹⁶ published in 1931. This means, to say that clearly, that his proclaimed rigorous study, which has been appreciated as connected to his reception of Gestalt psychology and phenomenology, is actually based on a theory that is completely at odds with basic standards of modern science. This contradiction between stated rigour and its actual circumvention is considered a conscious opposition that Sedlmayr, however, does not state openly.

However, if Spann is indeed a central source of Sedlmayr's thinking, the question arises how it could happen that he was overlooked so far. The answer is: He was not completely overlooked, yet the idea of his potential influence on Sedlmayr was dismissed quite quickly. Norbert Schneider repeatedly mentioned a connection of Sedlmayr's political thinking to Othmar Spann in essays dating from 1990 to 2000.¹⁷ But in his probably most-read essay, his entry on Hans Sedlmayr in Heinrich Dilly's book *Altmeister moderner Kunstgeschichte*,¹⁸ he did not make this observation more plausible, as he could have done e.g. by showing specific analogies. This made it easy for Hans Aurenhammer to dismiss this connection in 2003 by mentioning the fact that Spann was repudiated by the Nazis, thereby suggesting an incongruence with Sedlmayr's membership in the party.¹⁹ Since then Spann has hardly ever been discussed in reflections on Sedlmayr.²⁰ Yet as early as

¹⁶ 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft'.

¹⁷ Norbert Schneider, 'Hans Sedlmayr (1896-1984)' in Heinrich Dilly, ed, *Altmeister moderner Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin: Reimer, 1990; Norbert Schneider, 'Revolutionskritik und Kritik der Moderne bei Hans Sedlmayr', *L'art et les révolutions. Section 5. Révolution et évolution de l'histoire de l'art de Warburg à nos jours*, Strasbourg, 1992; Norbert Schneider, 'Hans Sedlmayrs Verlust der Mitte als bundesrepublikanisches Politikum' in Olaf Schwencke and Caroline Y. Robertson, eds, *50 Jahre Bundesrepublik Deutschland aus Sicht der Wissenschaftsdisziplinen*, Karlsruhe: IAK, 2000, 61–64.

¹⁸ Schneider in Dilly *Altmeister*.

¹⁹ Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Hans Sedlmayr und die Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Wien 1938–1945' in Jutta Held and Martin Papenbrock, eds, *Kunstgeschichte an den Universitäten im Nationalsozialismus*, Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2003, 164.

²⁰ Compare e.g. the two PhD theses on Sedlmayr, in which Spann is not mentioned: Maria Männig, *Hans Sedlmayrs Kunstgeschichte. Eine kritische Studie*, Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2017. Simon Morgenthaler, *Formationen einer Kunstwissenschaft. Text- und Archivstudien zu Hans Sedlmayr*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020. Spann was named by Jutta Held, who worked closely with Schneider: Jutta Held, 'Hans Sedlmayr in München', *Kunst und Politik*, 8, 2006, (121-169) 145. And Evonne Levy shortly stated that there was much in Sedlmayr's work that pointed to his support for the idea of a corporative state, which the Austrian Ständestaat had roughly taken from Spann. Evonne Levy, *Baroque and the Political Language of Formalism (1845-1945)*. Burckhardt, Wölfflin, Gurlitt, Brinkmann, Sedlmayr, Basel: Schwabe, 2015, 331–332.

1963, Harald Olbrich had drawn the line to Spann already.²¹ In a few sentences he emphasized not only a relation to Spann's politics but also to his methodological thinking. His article is listed in Schneider's bibliography but has apparently never been read again – maybe because it was published in the GDR almost thirty years before Schneider used it and had a very general title referring to the relation of art history and philosophy in western German bourgeois study of art.²² Obviously it needed a closer look at both Sedlmayr's and Spann's political behaviour as well as a careful comparison of their theories to see what they have in common.²³ This endeavour is pursued in the detailed study which builds the base for the short extract published in the paper at hand.²⁴ Crucial for this comparison is the nature of the theories of knowledge in the humanities that Sedlmayr and Spann adhered to. But before turning to theory, first of all, an outline of their biographical relations and political behaviour is needed.

1. Who was Spann? Spann and politics

Since 1919, after the end of the First World War, Spann was a professor of economics and social studies at the University of Vienna. It was just about the same time when Sedlmayr was a student in Vienna. From 1918 onwards he did not only study architecture at the Technische Universität (Technical University), but also inscribed at the main university of Vienna where he studied mathematics, physics and law, and finally pivoted to art history in 1920; he also received his doctor's degree there in 1923.²⁵ His enrolment booklet contains some additional information: It allows the specification that he switched to the faculty of law in 1919,²⁶ which is the same year in which Spann was appointed in the same faculty. 90 percent of all law students in the time of the First Austrian Republic attended at least one course

²¹ Harald Olbrich, 'Einige Seiten im Verhältnis von Kunstwissenschaft und Philosophie in der deutschen bürgerlichen Kunstwissenschaft des 20. Jahrhunderts', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig. Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, 12: 2, 1963, (293–299) 297–299.

²² Schneider in Dilly *Altmeister*, 282. Olbrich was also the editor of a book in which one of Schneider's essays was published (Schneider in *L'art et les révolutions*). It's the proceedings of the *International congress of the history of art* that was held in Strasbourg in 1989.

²³ Thanks to Friedrich Haufe, who discussed these topics with me in an initial state of thoughts and encouraged me to take a closer look on Spann, in my quest to gain a closer understanding of Sedlmayr's epistemology.

²⁴ It is a PhD thesis, to be delivered in 2024. Another article on Sedlmayr will be published in: Julien Reitzenstein and Darren M. O'Byrne, eds, *Handbook Ideologies in National Socialism*, vol. 1, Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2023.

²⁵ Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Sedlmayr, Hans (Ps. Hans Schwarz)' in Hans Günter Hockerts, ed, *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Bd. 24, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2010, 126. Aurenhammer writes that Sedlmayr inscribed for mathematics and physics as well as law before finally switching to art history in 1920.

²⁶ To be more precise: this faculty was called Faculty of Law and Politics (Rechts- und Staatswissenschaftliche Fakultät). The enrolment booklet is depicted in: Levy, *Baroque and the Political*, 302. This enrolment booklet also documents that Sedlmayr began these studies as early as February 1918 – that is half a year before he enrolled at the Technical University in autumn 1918. The latter date is supplied by Aurenhammer in Hockerts *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 24, 126.

with Spann, so there is some probability to guess that Sedlmayr might have been among them.²⁷ But even without that information it is very unlikely that he wouldn't have known about this professor. Spann's lectures attracted hundreds of attendants²⁸ and stimulated discussion groups among students as well as public attention.²⁹ In 1920, he discussed the topic of his later book *The True State*,³⁰ which was published in 1921. And as early as 1919 his inaugural lecture as well as an essay dedicated to the general relation of wholes to its parts prepared his philosophical book *Kategorienlehre*, which was published in 1924. It is a philosophy of essences that draws a lot from Plato, but also from Romanticism. A Romantic thinker that was very important for Othmar Spann's philosophy as well as sociology is the catholic theologian Franz von Baader. As is known in literature on Sedlmayr but very rarely discussed,³¹ Sedlmayr also read and quoted Baader, although only in his later writings that were published after the Second World War.

There are also explicit traces, dating to after the Second World War: In 1956 pupils and adherents of Othmar Spann, who himself had died in 1950, founded the Gesellschaft für Ganzheitsforschung (Society for the Study of Wholes). The opening lecture took place at the main auditorium of the Viennese Hochschule für Welthandel (World Trade University).³² Spann's pupil Walter Heinrich, who initiated the founding of the society, was a professor there. According to a newspaper article that is quoted in the society's publishing organ, people even filled the corridors while trying to listen to it. This lecture was held by no other than Sedlmayr, who by that time had already become a member of the newly founded society. Now the author of the famous book *Art in Crisis. The Lost Centre*³³ lent his publicity to the goals of an organization that aimed at the distribution of Spann's ideas. The paper was published in the organ of the society and is dedicated to a central topic of Sedlmayr's art historical methodology. Its title is: 'The Unity of the Sensual and the Intellectual in the Art Work'.³⁴ Sedlmayr here defines artworks as wholes, or, to be more precise, he claims that artworks are wholes in which what is perceivable with the senses on the one hand and its content or meaning on the other hand are inseparably united in a specific way.

When he eventually died in 1984, that same organ published an obituary, in which it says – referring to his book *Art in Crisis. The Lost Centre*, that his death meant something like a 'loss of the centre'³⁵ to the Gesellschaft für Ganzheitsforschung, as he had been spiritually attached and loyal to the circle of

²⁷ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 81.

²⁸ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 77.

²⁹ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 81.

³⁰ *Der wahre Staat*.

³¹ But see: Schneider in *L'art et les révolutions*, 88–89. Schneider in Schwencke and Robertson *50 Jahre Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 63.

³² It is nowadays called *Wirtschaftsuniversität*.

³³ *Verlust der Mitte*.

³⁴ 'Die Einheit von Sinnen und Geist im Kunstwerk'.

³⁵ J. H[anns] P[ichler], 'Hans Sedlmayr zum Gedenken', *Zeitschrift für Ganzheitsforschung*, 28: 3, 1984, (140–141) 141.

that society and expressed this throughout his life.³⁶ It is worth considering what that means: It might not only refer to the society founded in 1956, but, as it literally says, to the 'circle' of that society. In fact, this organization was a late legal form of what had previously been the informal circle of Spann's pupils and adherents, which was called the Spannkreis. And 'throughout his life' might therefore not only mean its end, but really its duration as long as that circle of adherents existed, that is from the 1920s onward.

But how, one might now ask, would that fit Sedlmayr's political behaviour as it is documented? And how would it fit his reception of Gestalt psychology and his quotations from empiricist texts by members of the Vienna Circle, i.e. his apparent rigour of the 1920s? In trying to answer these questions, first of all his political behaviour will be put in context: As is well known, he was a member of the Nazi party as early as 1930–1932, when it was still legal in Austria. And in 1938, after the so-called 'Anschluss', that is the annexation of the Federal State of Austria into the German Reich on 13 March 1938, he not only was quickly accepted as a member of the party again, but also got the privilege of a pre-dated membership, which pretended that he had already become a member on the 1st January, before the events occurred.³⁷ He also hailed the annexation and famously ended his contribution to the *Festschrift* for Wilhelm Pinder with a 'Heil Hitler' in April the same year.³⁸ Moreover, as a Viennese university professor – who was also the manager of the art historical institute – he hurried ahead after the annexation to ask the rectorate whether Jewish students should now be excluded,³⁹ and he publicly called for denunciation of regime critics in his lectures.⁴⁰ All of this proves a certain closeness to Nazism. Spann, on the other hand, was arrested by the Gestapo the exact day of the annexation, imprisoned for almost five months, and prohibited from university teaching. He lived seclusively from then on.⁴¹ Back in the 1920s however, Spann was considered an intellectual leader of Nazism in Vienna,⁴² and he provided a platform for National Socialist Students in several respects.⁴³ He had also become a member of the party around 1930, just about the time when Sedlmayr first

³⁶ 'die zeit seines Lebens bekundete geistige Verbundenheit und Treue zum Kreise unserer Gesellschaft.' P[ichler], 'Hans Sedlmayr zum Gedenken', 141.

³⁷ Aurenhammer, 'Zäsur oder Kontinuität?', 23.

³⁸ Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Hans Sedlmayr (1896–1984)' in Ulrich Pfisterer, ed, *Klassiker der Kunstgeschichte. Bd. 2: Von Panofsky bis Greenberg*, München: C. H. Beck, 2008, 79. Hans Sedlmayr, 'Vermutungen und Fragen zur Bestimmung der altfranzösischen Kunst', *Festschrift für Wilhelm Pinder zum sechzigsten Geburtstag. Überreicht von Freunden und Schülern*, Leipzig: Seemann, 1938, 10.

³⁹ Aurenhammer, 'Zäsur oder Kontinuität?', 13–14. His detailed questions almost seem to be a catalogue of suggestions for excluding all sorts of groups (students from Austria/Germany, students from other countries, PhD-students). See also Aurenhammer in Held and Papenbrock *Kunstgeschichte an den Universitäten*, p. 179-180, n. 5.

⁴⁰ Aurenhammer, 'Zäsur oder Kontinuität?', 34.

⁴¹ Sabine A. Haring, 'Spann, Othmar' in Hans Günter Hockerts, ed, *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, Bd. 24, Berlin, 2010, 630.

⁴² Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 153. Siegfried points to an article dated 16. July 1925. Comp. Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, p. 252, n. 157.

⁴³ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, p. 153f. and 253, n. 164.

was a member, too.⁴⁴ In fact Spann tried to use the National Socialist movement – which he considered to be too materialist and too populist – as a vehicle to realize his own, more elitist and spiritualist ideas (which nevertheless had very precise economic goals, too).⁴⁵ Therefore, from 1933 onwards, Spann-adherents run the Institut für Ständewesen (Institute for a corporal organization of society), founded by industrialist Fritz Thyssen in Düsseldorf, Germany. In this institute they taught about seven thousand economic leaders within two years.⁴⁶ It is not surprising from that point of view, that Spann was considered a rival to National Socialist organizations. And it fits very well to this threatening situation that Sedlmayr emphasized his loyalty to the Nazi party at that time. Gombrich also reported that fear was a central motivation of Sedlmayr's public commitment to Nazism in 1938:

'He was at that time not a Nazi. He was one of those cases ... he died recently ... he was one of those cases who was particularly frightened for not having been a Nazi. So when the Nazis came he sported a big swastika and shouted 'Heil Hitler' etc. because he was worried what would happen to him, he had so many Jewish friends, you know. [laughter] Not a very endearing attitude, [laughter] but I think that was what it was you see.'⁴⁷

However, while Gombrich believed that the reason for Sedlmayr's fear for himself were Jewish friends, other connections and political orientations might also be considered. In fact, Sedlmayr's relation to the Spann circle and its ideology is a possible reason for his personal amount of fear. A letter from 1934 shows that he pursued a strategy by then that fits very well with the strategy of Spann and his adherents. During the regime of the Fatherland Front in Austria, Sedlmayr wrote to his exiled colleague Meyer Shapiro:

Now that idea and will today is no real power, therefor their adherents if they do not resign to act in and on reality have to join other groups [sic] whose program is not theirs. They e.g. where communism is an imminent danger will have to support fascism and similar movements, while, – on the other part – they will have to fight cryptocommunist [sic], atheist and so on trends inside fascism.⁴⁸

This is a clear confession for an opportunistic use of actual majorities in order to pursue one's own true political ideas.

2. Rigour and holism

The proposition of a closeness of Sedlmayr's thinking to that of Spann necessarily must raise the question how that would fit to the goal of scholarly rigour as

⁴⁴ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 76; with concurring date: Haring in Hockerts *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 24, 629.

⁴⁵ Comp. Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 208–209.

⁴⁶ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 174–177.

⁴⁷ Ernst Gombrich in conversation with Richard Woodfield in March 1988, quoted from: Woodfield, 'Preface' in Versteegen, *The New Vienna School*, xix. Thanks to Richard Woodfield for pointing me to that interview.

⁴⁸ Quoted from Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond', 250.

proclaimed by Sedlmayr in 1931 and to his reception of Gestalt theory and other statements from different disciplines, that are incompatible with Spann's esoteric holism. However, Spann and Gestalt theory had the same opponent: empiricist approaches within the psychology of perception, according to which cognition of things is prompted by an additive combination of percepts.⁴⁹ As Spann explained the point: 'A shape [in German: 'Gestalt', NJ], a concept, or anything that is higher than the impression itself can never be the result of an aggregation of sensual impressions; thought can never rise from the sensual, it pre-exists the latter in a logical sense.'⁵⁰ And as early as 1924, he referred to recent developments in other disciplines as being proofs of a discontentment with methods relying on causal explanations.⁵¹ One of his examples is the concept of 'Gestaltqualität' as developed by 'v. Ehrenfels, Meinong and his school', but he also stated that 'the dominant psychologists almost on every field aim at overcoming mechanist methods.'⁵² This use of reference to Gestalt psychology as an argument against a common opponent fits to Sedlmayr's statement about his own use of Gestalt psychology in 1931:

The study of art at its present stage needs other fields of study primarily to provide a foundation for its own research – it is to this end that we have drawn on the epistemology of Gestalt psychology and experimental and phenomenological aesthetics, for instance; but the study of art needs them almost more in order to eliminate certain prejudices that have hindered its previous work.⁵³

⁴⁹ With respect to Gestalt psychology: Mitchell G. Ash, *Gestalt psychology in German culture, 1890-1967 Holism and the quest for objectivity*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995, 3.

⁵⁰ 'Nie kann sich durch Zusammenstellung der sinnlichen Eindrücke eine Gestalt, ein Begriff, noch irgendein Höheres als der Eindruck selbst ergeben; nie kann sich aus dem Sinnlichen der Gedanke emporringen, sondern der Gedanke ist logisch zuerst da.' Othmar Spann, 'Über die Einheit von Theorie und Geschichte', *Aus Politik und Geschichte. Gedächtnisschrift für Georg von Below*, Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1928, 325. (Emphasis in original.) Comp. Othmar Spann, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1932, 106. Spann also explicitly opposed associationism, as did Gestalt psychology. See Othmar Spann, *Der Schöpfungsgang des Geistes Die Wiederherstellung des Idealismus auf allen Gebieten der Philosophie. I. Teil: Seinslehre, Gotteslehre, Geisteslehre, Naturphilosophie, Ideenlehre*, Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1928, 225. Ash, *Gestalt Psychology*, 3.

⁵¹ Othmar Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1924, 14.

⁵² 'Ähnliche methodische Eigenschaften hat der Begriff der "Gestaltqualität" (v. Ehrenfels, Meinong und seine Schule), [...] und heute kann man sagen, daß die herrschenden Psychologen fast auf allen Gebieten bestrebt sind, die mechanistischen Verfahren zu überwinden.' All quotes Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, 15.

⁵³ The translation offered here makes use of Wood's translation, but it differs from it, mainly because the word epistemology is missing there, but also e.g. because it seems useful to keep the metaphor of a 'foundation' (instead of using 'back up') in the translation, as the context of discussion is the quest for a philosophical foundation or basis, in the sense of going to the roots of knowledge. Comp. Hans Sedlmayr, 'Toward a Rigorous Study of Art (1931)' in Christopher S. Wood, ed, *The Vienna School Reader. Politics and Art Historical Methods in the 1930s*, New York: Zone Books, 2000, 166. In German: 'In ihrem gegenwärtigen Stadium bedarf die Kunstwissenschaft anderer Wissenschaften vor allem zur Fundierung ihrer eigenen Forschungsarbeit – in diesem Sinne haben wir zum Beispiel die gestalttheoretische

Even his call for scholarly rigour in the 1920s and early 1930s does not separate Sedlmayr from Spann. In 1931, in his essay 'Toward a Rigorous Study of Art', Sedlmayr claims that he was able to show how the interpretation of art works could become a rigorous discipline with testable results. Many years earlier Spann had stated that the humanities ought to 'become just as *rigorous* as the natural sciences',⁵⁴ while at the same time emphasizing that this was not possible 'in the same *way*'^{55, 56} He claimed that he was able to provide a philosophical foundation for the humanities that would determine their methods,⁵⁷ and that he had already found a method that was 'capable of rigour'.⁵⁸ According to him, the peculiarity of the humanities consisted in the fact that what mattered in them was a 'grasp of meaning and wholeness'.⁵⁹ Wholeness, to him, was the 'foundational concept for the method of all the humanities';⁶⁰ for only a method based on this concept would allow to comprehend its object 'inwardly'.⁶¹ This method, to him, must consist of a top-down procedure: It was only reached where it 'elucidate[d] the particular from its superordinate context, spreading the knowledge from the focal point of the whole down to its parts.'⁶² This is exactly what Sedlmayr's method of structural analysis demands. In 1931 he explained that it was essential to his method of structural analysis, to start the interpretive act with 'the vividly grasped basic conception (and the hierarchically added conceptions of second and further order)', and then 'to let the concrete form of the work of art develop step by step down to all details in a visually effective progression.'⁶³ And this is, of course, also where Sedlmayr proposed a procedure that differs decisively from the definition of the hermeneutic circle as provided by Wilhelm Dilthey in his attempt to build a philosophical

Erkenntnislehre und die experimentelle und phänomenologische Ästhetik herangezogen; beinahe noch mehr bedarf sie ihrer zur Beseitigung gewisser Vorurteile, die die Arbeit bisher gehemmt haben.' Hans Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, 1, 1931, (7–32) 26.

⁵⁴ 'ebenso große *Strenge* wie die naturwissenschaftlichen Fächer aufbringen'. Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1930, X.

⁵⁵ 'nicht in gleicher *Weise*'. Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, X. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁶ Both quotes are from the preface to the second edition of the book, which was published in 1922. The first edition appeared as early as 1914.

⁵⁷ Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftsphilosophie. Mit einem Anhang über die philosophischen Voraussetzungen der Wirtschaftswissenschaften*, München: Oldenbourg, 1928, 3, 5.

⁵⁸ Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, X. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁹ Both quotations Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, X

⁶⁰ 'grundlegender Begriff für das Verfahren aller Geisteswissenschaften'. Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, 53.

⁶¹ 'innerlich'. Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, 18.

⁶² 'wo das Wissen aus dem Brennpunkt der Ganzheit, aus dem über den Teilen stehenden Zusammenhänge heraus auf das Einzelne Licht verbreitet'. Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, X.

⁶³ 'Das aber ist das Wesentliche einer *Strukturanalyse: aus der anschaulich erfaßten Grundkonzeption* (und den hierarchisch hinzutretenden Konzeptionen zweiter und weiterer Ordnung) *die konkrete Gestalt des Kunstwerks Schritt für Schritt bis in alle Einzelheiten hinab in einem anschaulichen Progreß entstehen zu lassen.*' Hans Sedlmayr, 'Zum Begriff der "Strukturanalyse" (Noch einmal Coudenhove-Erthals Fontana-Monographie)', *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, 4: 1, 1931/32, (146–160) 150.

foundation for the humanities.⁶⁴ It is notable in this context, that Spann criticized Dilthey for lacking his own concept of wholeness, arguing that this was why Dilthey's project – according to Spann – failed.⁶⁵

And it is not, as it might seem at first glance, only the later version of structural analysis, which pursues a top-down-procedure. Sedlmayr's introductory text to his method from 1925, 'Shaped Vision', describes a similar movement: 'Real concepts' of an artwork could only be found, according to him, in concepts that, starting 'from few centres, make determinable, comprehensible everything else'.⁶⁶ When he used the same phrase in 1931 he switched to the slightly different wording: 'few that is central'.⁶⁷ Sedlmayr quoted Wertheimer here, and he talked about the result of his method. However, it also fits Spann's approach. The context of Sedlmayr's use of the phrase in 1931 is important: The passage in 'Toward a Rigorous Study of Art' is captioned with the subheading: 'A New View of Understanding'.⁶⁸ There he claimed that the 'entire scholarly endeavour'⁶⁹, or, as it literally reads, the 'scientific activity'⁷⁰ of the discipline, was utterly impossible without a 'new view of investigation and understanding'.⁷¹ This 'new view' is opposed by him to another position that he declared to be outdated. He thereby turned to epistemology. He did not name any of the proponents of the 'outdated' view nor who brought about the 'new' view that he proposed as a salvation of the study of art. However, it might be possible to name them. First: One of Spann's most important books is the *Doctrine of Categories*.⁷² It was published in 1924, while he had already taught its content in university lectures dating to 1922 and 1923.⁷³ In the introduction of that book he declared that it aimed at introducing a new concept of knowledge. New about it was the fact that it founded its theory of knowledge in the belief that everything that exists is determined by a certain relation to a superordinate whole.⁷⁴ And he justified this endeavour by the goal to cure the 'hobbling of the humanities in their current state'.⁷⁵ A first conclusion thus is: Both Sedlmayr and Spann believed that the kind of humanistic disciplines they

⁶⁴ Lorenz Dittmann, *Stil, Symbol, Struktur Studien zu Kategorien der Kunstgeschichte*, München: Fink, 1967, 161–162.

⁶⁵ Spann, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, 29–30.

⁶⁶ 'Zu echten Begriffen: das heißt zu solchen, die "von wenigen Zentralen aus da übrige bestimmbar, begreifbar machen"'. Hans Sedlmayr, 'Gestaltetes Sehen', *Belvedere. Kunst und künstlerische Kultur in der Vergangenheit. Zeitschrift für Sammler und Kunstfreunde*, 8, 1925, (65–73) 73.

⁶⁷ 'von möglichst wenig Zentralem'. Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 17. In the *Vienna School Reader* the passage reads: 'concepts and interpretations that ascertain as much as possible as efficiently as possible'. Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 151.

⁶⁸ Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 150.

⁶⁹ Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 150.

⁷⁰ 'die ganze wissenschaftliche Aktivität'. Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 17.

⁷¹ Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 150.

⁷² *Kategorienlehre*.

⁷³ Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, 8.

⁷⁴ Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, 3.

⁷⁵ 'dieses Hinken in den heutigen Geisteswissenschaften'. Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, 5.

respectively had in mind, could become as rigorous as the natural sciences, by founding their methods in holism and a certain concept of understanding that was based thereon. What kind of epistemology was meant thereby can be concluded from a closer, comparative analysis of Sedlmayr's texts.

3. Epistemological presuppositions

According to Sedlmayr, the fundamental obstacle that had prevented art history from being both an interpretive as well as a 'scientifically' rigorous practice, was the fact that diverse interpreters initially view the artwork in different ways.⁷⁶ While charging his colleagues in 1931 for not even having acknowledged the urgency of this problem,⁷⁷ he as early as 1928 had left no doubt in his certainty that the problem was solved already.⁷⁸ However, in 1931 he still constrained himself to hints at the solution he actually had in mind, which means that we have somehow to read between the lines. By proposing a 'new view of investigation and understanding'⁷⁹ he claimed that the solution to the problem of diverse ways of seeing laid in a certain concept of the genesis of knowledge. And he continued: 'the contradiction between observation and understanding that has been accepted on the basis of outdated theories of knowledge does not exist.'⁸⁰ It was Othmar Spann who at about the same time and at the same place pushed in the same direction. He tried to convince his readers that conceiving is actually a form of beholding. He writes, very similar to Sedlmayr: 'The opposition of general concepts and that which is given to a beholder is not a true opposition. *Everything general is perceivable, because and as far as it is concrete.* The general is only the view of the higher level.'⁸¹

The story is more complex, however. Sedlmayr's call for a new concept of knowledge is connected with his proposition of a supposed 'visible Character'⁸² of the artwork as the key to interpretation, a theory that he fully presented in 1956 in his text 'Artwork and Art History'.⁸³ He marked the crucial function of the 'visible character' by calling it the 'centre of the artwork'.⁸⁴ The term 'centre' – referring to the essence of things as well as to the connection between the sensual and the

⁷⁶ Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 15.

⁷⁷ Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 16.

⁷⁸ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Fischer von Erlach: Gegenwärtige Erkenntnislage', *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, 1: 4, 1928, (116–128) 119.

⁷⁹ Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 150. In German: 'einer neuen Auffassung von Forschen und Begreifen.' Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 17.

⁸⁰ Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 151. In German: 'Ein solcher Gegensatz zwischen Anschauen und Begreifen, wie man ihn unter dem Einfluß veralteter Erkenntnistheorien annimmt, existiert nicht'. Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 17.

⁸¹ 'Der Gegensatz von Abstraktion und Anschaulichkeit ist kein echter Gegensatz. *Alles Allgemeine ist anschaulich, weil und sofern es konkret ist.* Das Allgemeine ist nur die Anschauung der höheren Stufe.' Spann, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, 102. Emphasis in original. Comp. Spann in *Aus Politik und Geschichte*, 323.

⁸² 'anschaulicher Charakter'. Hans Sedlmayr, *Kunstwerk und Kunstgeschichte*, München, 1956, 12–16.

⁸³ Sedlmayr, *Kunstwerk und Kunstgeschichte*.

⁸⁴ 'Mitte des Kunstwerks'. Sedlmayr, *Kunstwerk und Kunstgeschichte*, 12.

spiritual – is taken from Franz von Baader.⁸⁵ Sedlmayr used it also for his book title *Art in Crisis. The Lost Centre*. As mentioned above, Sedlmayr repeatedly quoted from Baader in his later writings.⁸⁶ However, this connection has never been subject to closer examination.⁸⁷

Franz von Baader was a catholic theologian from the early 19th century, and he was a main point of reference for Othmar Spann and his adherents.⁸⁸ One of Spann's pupils dedicated several books and essays to Baader in the 1920s: Johannes Sauter, a Viennese University teacher since 1927/28 (private lecturer by then, associate professor from 1933).⁸⁹ Sauter later became infamous for justifying the murderer of Viennese university professor Moritz Schlick, central figure of the Wiener Kreis and its empiricism: In 1936, Sauter – using the pseudonym Prof. Dr. Austriacus – shifted the blame from the perpetrator to the victim by writing that Schlick's philosophy had triggered an inner struggle of worldviews in the murderer, who was a former student of Schlick's.⁹⁰ In 1925, Sauter had edited a collection of Baader's writings on the philosophy of society, stating in its preface that his goal was to reclaim Baader for philosophy, as it had been a 'tremendous tragedy'⁹¹ for the German people to forget him and turn to naturalism instead. In the same year, he received his doctorate under the supervision of Othmar Spann, the thesis being dedicated to Baader's critical reception of Immanuel Kant. Both books were published in publication series that were edited by Spann.⁹²

In *Baader und Kant* Sauter declared that the Kantian concept of knowledge was obsolete. According to Sauter, Baader had, in his direct response to Kant's

⁸⁵ The origin of the term 'Mitte' in Franz von Baader has been noted by Schneider: Schneider in *L'art et les révolutions*, 89.

⁸⁶ Writings that Sedlmayr dedicated entirely to Baader, are, among others: Hans Sedlmayr, 'Der Gedanke der Mitte bei Franz von Baader' in Johannes Tenzler, ed, *Wirklichkeit der Mitte. Beiträge zu einer Strukturanthropologie*, München: Alber, 1968. Hans Sedlmayr, 'Über Wahrheit und Erkenntnis nach Franz von Baader', in Leo Scheffczyk, Michael Schmaus and Werner Dettloff, eds, *Wahrheit und Verkündigung. Michael Schmaus zum 70. Geburtstag*, München: Schöningh, 1967.

⁸⁷ Such an examination is part of my above-mentioned larger study, from which this paper derives. Some perceptive lines concerning Baader are drawn in an essay by Schneider: Schneider in Schwencke and Robertson *50 Jahre Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 63.

⁸⁸ On Spann's reception of Romantic philosophy and Baader see: Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 86.

⁸⁹ Tamara Ehs, *Johannes Sauter*,

http://gedenkbuch.univie.ac.at/index.php?person_single_id=33757. 3.4.2021.

⁹⁰ Prof. Dr. Austriacus [d.i. Johannes Sauter], 'Der Fall des Wiener Professors Schlick - eine Mahnung zur Gewissenerforschung [1936]', in Friedrich Stadler, *Der Wiener Kreis. Ursprung, Entwicklung und Wirkung des Logischen Empirismus im Kontext*, Basel: Springer, 2015, 619.

⁹¹ Johannes Sauter, 'Vorwort' in Johannes Sauter, ed, *Franz von Baaders Schriften zur Gesellschaftsphilosophie. Mit einem Anhang von erstmaligen Veröffentlichungen: Frz. Baaders Briefe an König Ludwig I. von Bayern. Jos. Baaders Denkschriften an die bayrische Regierung*, Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1925, VI.

⁹² *Franz von Baaders Schriften zur Gesellschaftsphilosophie* were published in *Die Herdflamme. Sammlung der gesellschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker* (vol. 14), *Baader und Kant* was published in *Deutsche Beiträge zur Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftslehre* (vol. 6).

Critique of Pure Reason, overcome the latter's 'dualism between understanding and sensibility, according to which: Concepts without intuitions are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind'.⁹³ According to Kant, any cognition is dependent on both sensibility, through which objects are given, and understanding, from which the concepts arise.⁹⁴ Only sensibility 'affords us intuitions',⁹⁵ and only together with these intuitions thoughts can refer to reality. However, Kant's discrimination between receptive sensibility and spontaneous understanding was fought by Baader, who claimed that it was possible for humans to have intuitions that are not prompted by sensibility. He thereby mingled the concepts of perception and reason. As Sauter wrote, fundamental to Baader's theory of cognition was the 'discovery' that 'all "reason can never be anything else than a *perceiving* of the invisible laws [...]".'⁹⁶ In many of his writings Baader claimed that humans could have knowledge that was 'free' from space and time,⁹⁷ depending on grace in a Christian sense. Actually, he believed that cognition was brought about by two kinds of perceptions, one that was physical (he calls it 'peripheral') and another one that could grasp essences (he calls it 'central').⁹⁸ In moments when both intuitions were combined – as Baader writes and Sauter quotes – 'material sensibility becomes transparent, to let an immaterial sensibility shine through or also only *flash up* transitionally'.⁹⁹ In that sense Baader writes of a 'cognition that penetrates its object' and positively calls it a 'speculative cognition'.¹⁰⁰

This is what Sedlmayr refers to when he notes in *The true and the false Presence*¹⁰¹ that Baader does not use the word 'speculative' in a derogative sense.¹⁰² And by claiming that it was possible to experience eternity in an indirect way, as if

⁹³ 'überwindet er den kantischen Dualismus zwischen Verstand und Sinnlichkeit, demzufolge: Begriffe ohne Anschauungen leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe blind sind.' Johannes Sauter, *Baader und Kant*, Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1928, 9. Sauter in both parts of the sentence uses the two words 'Anschauungen' (content, percepts, intuitions) and 'Begriffe' (concepts, thoughts) as Kant does. – A common English translation of Kant's original sentence reads: 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.' Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi: Cambridge Univ. Press, B 75.

⁹⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 34.

⁹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 33.

⁹⁶ 'daß alle "Vernunft nichts anderes sein kann, als *Vernehmen, Wahrnehmen* der unsichtbaren Gesetze [...]". Sauter, *Baader und Kant*, 14. Comp. Franz von Baader, *Sämtliche Werke*, Leipzig: Bethmann, 1851-1860, vol. 11, p. 149. Highlights in original.

⁹⁷ See e.g. Franz von Baader, 'Unterscheidung einer centralen Sensation von einer bloß peripherischen und excentrischen, und Unabhängigkeit der ersteren von unseren materiellen Sinneswerkzeugen (1828)' in Franz Hoffmann, ed, *Gesammelte Schriften zur philosophischen Anthropologie*, Leipzig: Bethmann, 1853.

⁹⁸ Baader in *Baader Anthropologie*, 137–138.

⁹⁹ Baader, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 8, p. 247. Quoted from Sauter, *Baader und Kant*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Baader, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 8, p. 247. Both quoted from Sauter, *Baader und Kant*, 120.

¹⁰¹ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Die wahre und die falsche Gegenwart', *Merkur*, 9: 5, May 1955, (430–449). The text was later republished with the title: 'Das Problem der Zeit'.

¹⁰² Sedlmayr, 'Die wahre und die falsche Gegenwart', 439.

‘in a mirror’ and in that sense ‘speculatively’,¹⁰³ he actually adopts Baader’s concept of cognition. It even is – to him – the purpose of artworks to become a vehicle for this kind of cognition.¹⁰⁴ This is why the fact that he calls the ‘visible character’ the ‘centre’¹⁰⁵ of the artwork not simply emphasizes its importance, but is a precise, yet somewhat disguised reference to the epistemological function of the ‘visible character’ as the mediate to the meaning of the artwork: It allows a ‘central’ kind of perception in the sense of Baader, i.e. one that grasps essences and is dependent on moments of grace and revelation.¹⁰⁶ And when Sedlmayr writes of a “creative act of perceiving”¹⁰⁷ in that context this is likely a conscious opposition to Kant’s definition of perception as a necessarily receptive (not spontaneous) act. Baader’s epistemology can even be detected in seemingly random remarks:¹⁰⁸ Baader’s constant use of the word ‘flash’¹⁰⁹ and probably also its reception by Sauter and Spann when talking about recognition of truth,¹¹⁰ apparently left its trace in Sedlmayr’s afterword to *Art in Crisis. The Lost Centre*. Therein he records that Emil Kaufmann’s theses on Ledoux had prompted his insight that Kaufmann’s discoveries were crucial for the understanding of modernity, when he got to know them in 1930, ‘as in a flash’.¹¹¹

It is important in that context to notice that the concept of analogy has a central function in Baader’s as well as Sedlmayr’s theories. Sauter writes about it in 1927, in his essay ‘Symbolism in Baader’, saying that Baader, in his attempt to overcome Kant’s epistemology, came to realize, that there ought to be an inner analogy between the world of cognition and nature. Sedlmayr explicitly took up this thought in 1968 when he wrote in his essay ‘The Idea of the Centre in Franz von Baader’:¹¹² ‘Per analogiam we experience the transcendental in earthly relations. This, however, is – as already mentioned above – possible only because the transcendental permeates the empirical, and makes it transparent.’¹¹³ In this essay

¹⁰³ Sedlmayr, ‘Die wahre und die falsche Gegenwart’, 440.

¹⁰⁴ Sedlmayr, ‘Die wahre und die falsche Gegenwart’, 440.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Mitte.’ Sedlmayr, *Kunstwerk und Kunstgeschichte*, 12–15. He uses the word ‘Zentrum’ here synonymously: Sedlmayr, *Kunstwerk und Kunstgeschichte*, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Sedlmayr, ‘Die wahre und die falsche Gegenwart’, 439, 442.

¹⁰⁷ ‘schöpferischen Akt der Anschauung’. Sedlmayr, *Kunstwerk und Kunstgeschichte*, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Ironically, this is where Sedlmayr’s theory of the now meaningful detail that proves the correctness of the interpretation of the whole, seems to work – because there is a global theory in the background of his writings.

¹⁰⁹ Baader even wrote a text entitled: ‘On Flash as the Father of Light’ (Über den Blitz als Vater des Lichtes).

¹¹⁰ E.g. Othmar Spann, ‘Hauptpunkte einer ontologischen Theorie der Zeit’, *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, 1, 1927, (233–244) 237. Sauter, ‘Vorwort’ in Sauter, *Franz von Baaders Schriften zur Gesellschaftsphilosophie*, V.

¹¹¹ ‘blitzartig’. Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte. Die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symbol der Zeit*, Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1948, 252.

¹¹² ‘Der Gedanke der Mitte bei Franz von Baader’.

¹¹³ ‘Wir erfahren an irdischen Verhältnissen per analogiam Transzendentes. Was aber – wie schon oben gesagt – nur möglich ist, weil Transzendentes in das Empirische hineinragt, es transparent macht.’ Sedlmayr in Tenzler *Wirklichkeit der Mitte*, 317.

Sedlmayr also quoted Sauter's text from 1927, 'Symbolism in Baader'.¹¹⁴ Even Sedlmayr's conviction that real artworks functioned as vehicles for a spiritual ascension¹¹⁵ already finds its equivalent here, as Sauter quotes Baader's conviction that art should be a kind of substitute for visions and free humankind from the bonds of physical nature.¹¹⁶

The redeeming function these authors ascribe to art, is therefore owed to the idea of analogy. But this concept is no less important to Sedlmayr's theory of interpretation. He writes: 'It is only because peculiar equivalences between the sensual and the spiritual *do exist*, that it is actually possible to interpret artworks.'¹¹⁷ It is the same topic that he rose when he held the founding lecture of the *Gesellschaft für Ganzheitsforschung* in 1956: Here he introduced to his audience the 'visible character' as the unifying moment in any artwork. According to his theory the 'visible character' functions as the intermediate between what is perceivable with the senses and its meaning, because it is a quality that can be predicated from topics as well as from artistic means (e.g. the adjective 'fiery' may be applicable not only to a colour, but also to a certain person or a speech).¹¹⁸ And he declares that any understanding of an artwork therefore must begin with a grasping of its specific visual character.¹¹⁹ This grasping, he continues, is only possible if the interpreter encounters the artwork with a certain kind of viewing – a kind of viewing that he calls physiognomic here, as well as occasionally in other texts, thereby describing interpretation as an act of conceiving the visible as an expression of a character behind the artwork (like the artist or a social group).¹²⁰ However, this term does not suffice to explain the epistemological foundations of Sedlmayr's interpretation theory. These, however, can be found in the texts by Spann, Baader and Sauter, whose philosophical topic is the fundamental conditions of cognition.

¹¹⁴ Sedlmayr in Tenzler *Wirklichkeit der Mitte*, S. 318, Anm. 13.

¹¹⁵ Comp. also Hans Sedlmayr, 'Analogie, Kunstgeschichte und Kunst', *Studium Generale*, 8: 11, December 1955, (697–703) 697.

¹¹⁶ Johannes Sauter, 'Der Symbolismus bei Baader', *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, 1, 1927, (348–366) 357. He literally speaks of the 'bonds of lower nature'.

¹¹⁷ 'Nur weil es eigentümliche Entsprechungen zwischen Sinnlichem und Geistigem gibt, ist ein Kunstwerk überhaupt interpretierbar.' Hans Sedlmayr, 'Über das Interpretieren von Werken der bildenden Kunst. Entwurf eines didaktischen Programms [zuerst 1965]', *Kunst und Wahrheit. Theorie und Methode der Kunstgeschichte*, Mittenwald: Mäander, 1978, 189.

¹¹⁸ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Die Einheit von Sinnen und Geist im Kunstwerk', *Mitteilungsblatt der Gesellschaft für Ganzheitsforschung in Wien*: 3, April 1957, (1–7) 4–5.

¹¹⁹ Sedlmayr, 'Einheit von Sinnen und Geist', 6.

¹²⁰ Sedlmayr, 'Einheit von Sinnen und Geist', 4. On the relation of Sedlmayr's interpretation theory to physiognomic traditions see: Daniela Bohde, *Kunstgeschichte als physiognomische Wissenschaft. Kritik einer Denkfigur der 1920er bis 1940er Jahre*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012, 106–113, 120–146, 151–163. Daniela Bohde, 'Pieter Bruegels Macchia und Hans Sedlmayrs physiognomisches Sehen. Psychologische Interpretationsmodelle von Hans Sedlmayr', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 57, 2008, (239–262). Daniela Bohde, 'Physiognomische Denkfiguren in Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Wissenschaften. Lavater und die Folgen', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 56: 1, 2011, (89–121) 113–121. Schwartz, *Blind Spots*, 137–253.

While the texts quoted so far prove the importance of the concept of analogy in writings by Sedlmayr that were published after the Second World War, other texts show that he developed this concept much earlier; in what follows it should become clear that it is traceable even back to the 1920s. In 'The Adventure of Art History' (1983) he retrospectively reports that he had developed his method tentatively in its beginnings and analysed only the visible 'side' of the artwork initially.¹²¹ – Here he obviously refers to his method of a formal structural analysis as he developed it in 1925 in 'Shaped Vision'.¹²² However, he writes, these beginnings were 'insufficient'.¹²³ The ambition to develop a method that enabled the interpreter to find the true meaning of the respective visual data,¹²⁴ was fulfilled only with his 'discovery' of analogies between visual qualities and a meaning that could be grasped therein: 'The keystone of this methodological building was inserted when I discovered the link between the sensual and the intellectual "side" of the artwork in those properties, which can be predicated of both sides: in the "equivalences". Its discovery is important far beyond art history.'¹²⁵ From the fact that he dates the beginnings of his structural analysis 'in the time around 1925', and the 'first ripe fruits' in the time 'around 1930',¹²⁶ it can be concluded that he dates the 'discovery' of the 'equivalences' in the late 1920s. Moreover, Simon Morgenthaler found unpublished manuscripts, in which Sedlmayr explicitly dates his development of these ideas in the timespan of 1925–31.¹²⁷ This is exactly the timespan in which Sedlmayr could first have encountered the above mentioned texts by Sauter.

However, Sauter's and Baader's writings were not the only sources Sedlmayr used for his development of the idea of the 'visible character'. Sedlmayr was an independent and creative thinker, and he did indeed also draw from texts connected to experimental Gestalt psychology, to develop his specific theory of art historical interpretation: Coincidentally the second half of the 1920s is also the timespan in which Sedlmayr started to use Gustav Johannes von Allesch's writings on the perception of aesthetic qualities.¹²⁸ Allesch, having received his doctorate with Carl Stumpf in Berlin, just as Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Köhler and later Kurt Lewin, was, as an assistant to Wolfgang Köhler, very close to the founders of the

¹²¹ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Das Abenteuer der Kunstgeschichte', *Merkur*, 37: 2, 1983, (145–157) 147.

¹²² 'Gestaltetes Sehen'.

¹²³ 'unzulänglich'. Sedlmayr, 'Das Abenteuer der Kunstgeschichte', 147.

¹²⁴ 'zu einer gegebenen anschaulichen Gestalt den gemeinten Gehalt, zu dem Sichtbaren des Kunstwerks die unsichtbare Bedeutung dazu zu finden, und beides zu integrieren'.

Sedlmayr, 'Das Abenteuer der Kunstgeschichte', 147.

¹²⁵ 'Der Schlußstein in dieses methodologische Gebäude wurde eingefügt, als ich das Band zwischen der sinnhaften und geistigen "Seite" des Kunstwerks in jenen Eigenschaften fand, die sich von beiden Seiten aussagen lassen: in den "Entsprechungen". Ihre Entdeckung hat eine Bedeutung weit über die Kunstgeschichte hinaus.' Sedlmayr, 'Das Abenteuer der Kunstgeschichte', 147.

¹²⁶ All quotes from Sedlmayr, 'Das Abenteuer der Kunstgeschichte', 147.

¹²⁷ Morgenthaler, *Formationen einer Kunstwissenschaft*, 287–292.

¹²⁸ The study this paper derives from entails a close comparison of Allesch's and Sedlmayr's positions, which by far exceeds what is presented in the paper at hand.

Berlin School of Gestalt psychology.¹²⁹ As Allesch was a psychologist as well as an art historian, Ian Verstegen has estimated him once as ‘the crucial transitional figure’, whose texts (and maybe more) mediated between the Vienna School of art history, foremost Sedlmayr, and the Berlin School of Gestalt psychology.¹³⁰ In 1931 Sedlmayr dedicated a review to Allesch’s experiments on the perception of colours, which had been published in 1924/25 as ‘The Aesthetic Appearance of Colours’.¹³¹ He actually knew Allesch’s experiments earlier than that, at least in 1928.¹³² In general, his reception of Allesch can be pursued from not later than 1926 to the time after the Second World War.¹³³ Moreover, it can be demonstrated that Sedlmayr derived his description of the qualities that formed the ‘visible character’ of the artwork from Allesch, e.g. when he declared that the ‘visible character’ was regularly destined by a main impression and modifying nuances.¹³⁴

However, from the use of Allesch’s texts it cannot be explained what Sedlmayr meant when claiming in 1931 that a ‘new view of investigation and understanding’¹³⁵ was necessary to make interpretation possible. On the contrary, this ‘new view’ of investigation and understanding can be found in the concept of intuition as described by Spann and especially Sauter on the basis of Baader. Allesch also ‘lacks’ the belief in a non-discursive grasping of the whole. Other than Sedlmayr he stated that a proper interpretation of an artwork must gain its correct view of the whole discursively by not only analysing the work itself, but also by studying the historical contexts.¹³⁶

4. Theories of time and history

As Baader, Sauter and Sedlmayr conceive of intuition as being ‘free’ from time and space, this concept is dependent on the belief in an eternity, in which the essence of

¹²⁹ Ash, *Gestalt Psychology*, 34.

¹³⁰ Ian Verstegen, ‘Art History, Gestalt and Nazism’, *Gestalt Theory*, 26: 2, June 2004, (134–150) 139–140. Comp. also the chapter ‘Gustav Johannes Allesch: An Austrian Link’, in Verstegen, *The New Vienna School*, 33–35.

¹³¹ ‘Die ästhetische Erscheinungsweise der Farben’. Hans Sedlmayr, ‘G. J. von Allesch. Die ästhetische Erscheinungsweise der Farben. Berlin. Julius Springer, 1925’, *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, 4: 3, 1931/1932, (214–224).

¹³² Sedlmayr, ‘Fischer von Erlach: Gegenwärtige’, p. 118, note 1.

¹³³ E.g. Hans Sedlmayr, ‘Zum gestalteten Sehen’, *Belvedere. Kunst und künstlerische Kultur in der Vergangenheit. Zeitschrift für Sammler und Kunstfreunde*, 9/10: 3, 1926, (57–62) 57, and Hans Sedlmayr, ‘Farben - Zur Realontologie von Hedwig Conrad-Martius’, *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft*, 66 (Festschrift für Hedwig Conrad-Martius), 1958, (323–330) 325–329. – Simon Morgenthaler lately published archival material in which Sedlmayr also quotes Allesch: e.g. Morgenthaler, *Formationen einer Kunstwissenschaft*, 289–290.

¹³⁴ Comp. Sedlmayr, *Kunstwerk und Kunstgeschichte*, 28, with Sedlmayr, ‘G. J. von Allesch’, 219.

¹³⁵ Sedlmayr in *Wood Vienna School Reader*, 150. In German: ‘neuen Auffassung von Forschen und Begreifen.’ Sedlmayr, ‘Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft’, 17.

¹³⁶ Comp. e.g. Gustav Johannes von Allesch, *Wege zur Kunstbetrachtung*, Dresden: Sibyllen-Verlag, 1921, 78. Gustav Johannes von Allesch, ‘Über künstlerischen Wert’, *Psychologische Forschung*, 4, 1923, (23–32) 25. My larger study this paper derives from entails a close comparison of Sedlmayr and Allesch.

things, the wholeness as such, is kept, and which can be reached intuitively in certain circumstances. It is exactly this theory of time that Sedlmayr adheres to with reference to Baader in his 1955 essay 'The True and the False Present'.¹³⁷ It is crucial for Sedlmayr's theory of art and its interpretation as a necessary premise. 'Without a theory of time, no theory of history and society nor a theory of the artwork and of art history is possible',¹³⁸ he writes in 1955. Allesch, of course, lacked (if spoken from Sedlmayr's position) this peculiar theory of time. Spann, on the contrary, introduced Baader's theory of time – explicitly opposing Kant¹³⁹ – in a text published in 1927, which is entitled 'Main Points of an Ontological Theory of Time'. He considered this text as an introduction to the philosophy of history, and of course the latter is meant to be holistic.¹⁴⁰

Sedlmayr was also engaged with a certain philosophy of history. In 'The Quintessence of Riegl's Teachings' he distinguished between a wrong view of history that had been omitted, and a holistic one that replaced it. The paper was published in 1929, but is dated by the author below the text to 1927. In listing 'all the wrong premises that had to be omitted'¹⁴¹ in order to make certain views of Riegl common property, he includes the conviction 'that the whole movement of history is nothing but the blind interaction of singular forces, a net of diverse causal threads.'¹⁴² This premise was, according to Sedlmayr, recently replaced by '[t]he notion that real wholes of historical evolution and meaningful, self-directed motions of human mind do exist, which can be retarded, impeded, distorted or broken by the occurrences and constellations of real history, but never originated or affected in their essence.'¹⁴³

When Sedlmayr in 'Toward a Rigorous Study of Art' called for a '*clarification of our ideas about proceedings in general* – along with a clarification of related concepts such as "force" (as the source of change), achievement, "evolution"',¹⁴⁴ he at the same

¹³⁷ Sedlmayr, 'Die wahre und die falsche Gegenwart'.

¹³⁸ 'Ohne eine Theorie der Zeit ist weder eine Theorie der Geschichte und der Sozietät noch eine Theorie des Kunstwerks und der Kunstgeschichte möglich.' Sedlmayr, 'Die wahre und die falsche Gegenwart', 431.

¹³⁹ Spann, 'Hauptpunkte einer ontologischen Theorie', 233.

¹⁴⁰ Spann, 'Hauptpunkte einer ontologischen Theorie', 233.

¹⁴¹ 'was alles an falschen Voraussetzungen aufgegeben werden mußte'. Hans Sedlmayr, 'Die Quintessenz der Lehren Riegls' in Karl Maria Swoboda, ed, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Augsburg, Wien: Filser, 1929, p. XXX.

¹⁴² 'daß die ganze Bewegung der Geschichte nur die Resultierende aus blind zusammenwirkenden Einzelkräften, ein Netz diverser Kausalfäden sei.' Sedlmayr in Riegl *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, S. XXXII.

¹⁴³ 'die Auffassung, daß es echte historische Geschehensganzzheiten und sinnvolle Eigenbewegungen des menschlichen Geistes gibt, die durch die Ereignisse und Konstellationen der Realgeschichte zwar verzögert, gehemmt, beschleunigt, verzerrt oder gebrochen, aber nicht hervorgebracht oder in ihrem Wesen tangiert werden können.' Sedlmayr in Riegl *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, S. XXXII.

¹⁴⁴ The translation is mainly taken from the Vienna School Reader, but where the latter translates 'Geschehen' as 'events', it uses 'proceedings'. Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 157. (Emphasis in original.) '*Klärung unserer Vorstellungen von Geschehen überhaupt – und damit zusammenhängend von Begriffe[n] wie "Kraft" (als Ursache von*

time uttered his trust that this revision would occur, so that these 'necessary conditions'¹⁴⁵ of historical studies would unfold. When he in the same text criticizes that the word 'evolution' had 'lost its precise meaning' and was 'used indiscriminately to mean a succession of events, development in general, movement and change',¹⁴⁶ he obviously had a precise meaning in mind. These statements can be read as hints to a theory of history that he believed would be acknowledged in future but which he would not yet name. In 1958 he still anticipated that future when predicting that the discipline of art history was 'on its way toward a new, deeper and more realistic concept of history that is not possible to be gained without a new, deeper concept of time.'¹⁴⁷

However, in a text dated as early as 1926 and published in 1927, he already was quite clear about his position: Here he charged his colleague Charles de Tolnay for not having the 'concept of a true evolution',¹⁴⁸ as Tolnay's text, according to him, presupposed a theory of history the core of which was a 'mechanist theory'¹⁴⁹. While the 'dynamic historical coherence of the becoming'¹⁵⁰ was 'determined in all its points by the structure of the proceedings within the evolving whole and only intelligible therefrom'¹⁵¹, with the view of the 'mechanist' theory the coherence of becoming was 'cut, and destroyed by thinking'.¹⁵² Obviously, Sedlmayr adhered to a holist theory of history as early as 1926. This theory neglected the principle of cause and effect, and therefore was dependent on the theory of time proclaimed by Baader, which is based on the esoteric belief in an eternity in which everything is held, as described above. It can be concluded that Sedlmayr, while naming and

Veränderungen), Leistung, "Entwicklung" usw.' Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 21. Hervorhebung im Original.

¹⁴⁵ Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 157-158. In German: 'diese notwendigen Vorbedingungen historischer Arbeiten ruhig zur Entfaltung kommen zu lassen.' Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 21.

¹⁴⁶ This translation makes use of the one in the Vienna School reader, but differs in the translation of 'Ablauf' and 'Geschehen überhaupt'. Were Wood uses 'development, events in general' it uses 'succession of events, development in general', to convey the unity of the singular in 'Geschehen'. Sedlmayr in Wood *Vienna School Reader*, 157. In German: 'daß z.B. der Begriff "Entwicklung" jeden prägnanten Sinn verloren hat und unterschiedslos für Ablauf, Geschehen überhaupt, Bewegung, Veränderung gebraucht wird.' Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', 21.

¹⁴⁷ 'auf dem Wege zu einem neuen, tieferen und wirklichkeitsgemäßerem Begriff von Geschichte, der nicht ohne einen neuen tieferen Begriff der Zeit zu gewinnen sein wird'. Hans Sedlmayr, '„Kunstgeschichte als Wissenschaft“', *Kunst und Wahrheit. Theorie und Methode der Kunstgeschichte*, Mittenwald: Mäander, 1978, 24. The text was first published 1958 in the first edition of *Art and Truth*.

¹⁴⁸ 'Begriff einer echten Entwicklung'. Hans Sedlmayr, 'Rezension zu: Karl Tolnai, Die Zeichnungen Pieter Bruegels, München 1925', *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*: 1, 1927, (24-32) 32.

¹⁴⁹ 'mechanistische Theorie'. Sedlmayr, 'Rezension zu: Karl Tolnai', 32.

¹⁵⁰ 'historisch-dynamische Zusammenhang des Werdens'. Sedlmayr, 'Rezension zu: Karl Tolnai', 32.

¹⁵¹ 'in jedem Punkt durch die Struktur des Geschehens in dem sich entwickelnden Ganzen bedingt und nur aus ihm verständlich'. Sedlmayr, 'Rezension zu: Karl Tolnai', 32.

¹⁵² 'zerschnitten und zerdacht'. Sedlmayr, 'Rezension zu: Karl Tolnai', 32.

describing this theory explicitly in the 1950s, in 'The True and the False Present',¹⁵³ implicitly presupposed it already in the 1920s.

It is, again, Spann, who in several writings of the 1920s published statements on the concept of evolution. His *Doctrine of Categories* contains a caption, in which he opposed his concept of 'unfolding' against a mechanist 'succession'.¹⁵⁴ In a manner that is rhetorically similar to Sedlmayr's, he also listed dissatisfying uses of 'evolution' that view it as a mere 'mechanic "succession" or "process" or a mechanic "change"'.¹⁵⁵ According to him, the "mechanist" approach to history makes it appear meaningless, and ascribes it a mere external necessity. In his 'Quintessence' Sedlmayr argues in the same direction, by opposing a necessity imposed by meaning to causal necessity.¹⁵⁶ In their belief that it was possible and important to replace causality by meaning (as the source of history or, it might be added, artworks), these authors relied on a concept of wholeness that made use of Baader's concept of 'centre'. This close connection is phrased by Sauter in 1925, when he writes: 'through this basic category: centre – limb Baader has completely powered off causal thinking within social studies, and replaced it by meaningful formation.'¹⁵⁷

5. Relationships. Sedlmayr's autonomy, epistemological racism, and dishonesty

In thinking of Sedlmayr's interpretation theory and his concept of a 'visible character', it may be concluded this far: The function of the 'visible character' within Sedlmayr's theories of art and interpretation is based on the belief in artworks as wholes the essence of which can be grasped thanks to an eternity that preserves individual meanings. Therein, Sedlmayr's theoretical writings are dependent on Baader, Sauter, and Spann. It is in their texts that he found the premises which seemed to allow the kind of theories he developed. But the formal qualification of the 'visible character' is influenced by Allesch, and Sedlmayr himself combined the two. In doing this he developed his own theory of how and why artworks are wholes, and by which means and for what reason it is possible (according to him) to interpret them properly. It is actually a specific version of Spann's holism, enriched by a thorough definition of what art is in its peculiarity. It might well be that Sedlmayr considered his theory of the 'visible character' of artworks as his specific contribution to Spann's holism, as a gift that he bestowed to the public and Spann's adherents in the above-mentioned founding lecture of the Gesellschaft für Ganzheitsforschung in 1956.

¹⁵³ Sedlmayr, 'Die wahre und die falsche Gegenwart'.

¹⁵⁴ 'Entfaltung', 'Ablauf'. Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, 189.

¹⁵⁵ des 'mechanischen "Ablaufes" oder "Prozesses" oder der mechanischen "Veränderung" überhaupt'. Spann, *Kategorienlehre*, 189.

¹⁵⁶ Sedlmayr in Riegl *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, S. XIX.

¹⁵⁷ 'durch diese Urkategorie: Mitte-Glied hat Baader das kausale Denken aus der Gesellschaftslehre restlos ausgeschaltet, und die sinnvolle Gliederung an dessen Stelle gesetzt.' Johannes Sauter, 'Lebensbild Baaders und Erläuterungen zu seinen Schriften' in Sauter, *Franz von Baaders Schriften zur Gesellschaftsphilosophie* (563-870), 669.

These comparisons must suffice here. Only two more points shall be mentioned, that shed a light on Sedlmayr's anti-Semitism and on his communicative strategy: In his correspondence with Meyer Schapiro Sedlmayr stated in 1934 – in a seemingly polite, somewhat disguised way – that Shapiro as a Jew was not able to properly behold an art work:¹⁵⁸ After stating that he believed in the existence of a certain 'essence of art which can not [sic] be substituted either by taste, "form" or "expression"',¹⁵⁹ and after guessing that his opinions would be very strange to Schapiro as an 'american [sic], communist and jew [sic]',¹⁶⁰ Sedlmayr maintains that Schapiro was utterly incapable of experiencing art in its true sense: 'I cannot get rid of the suspicion that – in spite of your fine gifts in observing forms and form-differences – you must fail to grasp the true object of our studies i.e. "art" in its very peculiarity and marrow. For similar reasons why the ablest scholar will fail to grasp religion if he is a positivist: for lack of experience of a specific kind.'¹⁶¹ Before that, in 1929, in his 'The Quintessence of Riegl's Teachings', he declared against Erwin Panofsky's reading of Alois Riegl, that every attempt to understand Riegl's concept of 'artistic will' (Kunstwollen) from a Kantian point of view, was doomed to fail.¹⁶² In the same year Othmar Spann spoke in Munich in front of National Socialist students and Adolf Hitler, declaring that Ernst Cassirer – the Jewish Hamburg philosopher who was important for Panofsky – was not able to understand Kant properly as he – Cassirer – was a stranger.¹⁶³ It hence is a similar form of anti-Semitism that they adhered to, being less preoccupied with racial biology than with predetermined abilities to perceive and understand.

In 1984, only a few months before he himself passed away, Sedlmayr wrote an obituary for Taras Borodajkewycz that was read at his grave and then published in the organ of the Gesellschaft für Ganzheitsforschung – the above-mentioned periodical of Spann's adherents. Borodajkewycz was a historian who as a teacher at the Hochschule für Welthandel in Vienna had held openly anti-Semitic lectures and thereby caused a famous scandal in 1965, known as the 'Borodajkewycz-Affäre'. Borodajkewycz was, by the way, not only an adherent to Hitler, but also to Spann, which is rarely mentioned in literature.¹⁶⁴ In his obituary to him, Sedlmayr praised the courage of Borodajkewycz that had made him actually say what he believed to

¹⁵⁸ The letter is dated 1 November 1934. It is the only one in Sedlmayr's correspondence with Schapiro that is written in English. It is published in: Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond', 250–251.

¹⁵⁹ Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond', 250.

¹⁶⁰ Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond', 250

¹⁶¹ Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond', 251.

¹⁶² Sedlmayr in Riegl *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. XXXI.

¹⁶³ John Michael Krois, 'Warum fand keine Davoser Debatte zwischen Cassirer und Heidegger statt?' in Dominic Kaegi and Enno Rudolph, eds, *Cassirer - Heidegger. 70 Jahre Davoser Disputation*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2002 (234-246), 239. Thanks to Friedrich Haufe for pointing out this invective to me.

¹⁶⁴ However, a biographical website from the *Cartellverband der katholischen österreichischen Studentenverbindungen* (ÖCV) mentions that Borodajkewycz was highly influenced by Othmar Spann: Gerhard Hartmann, *Taras Borodajkewycz*, <https://oecv.at/Biolex/Detail/12509618>. 30.6.2021.

be true, without fearing the consequences.¹⁶⁵ Yet this praise also entailed a critique. Sedlmayr says, that the kind of conflict that Borodajkewycz had had within changing political systems could only be avoided by those who not only loved truth, but also added a good portion of cunning to it.¹⁶⁶ This is a confession that should be taken into account when reading Sedlmayr, especially his early texts. He disguised his true opinions with a scientific apparel, apparently in order to avoid conflict and in order to introduce his way of thinking like a Trojan horse. Apparently, Sedlmayr truly believed at the same time, that it was possible to support his method by referring to results from other disciplines, like Gestalt psychology. However, he would know, but not explain – and therein lies the dishonesty of his early texts – that these were often completely incompatible with the esoteric theory of time, which he himself presupposed within his holist theory of interpretation, art, and history.

In short, the three initial questions posed above can be answered now in the following way: First: Sedlmayr's early writings contain his later theories in a disguised way. This result is to be modified with respect to the concept of the 'visible character', the evolution of which is traceable from the late 1920s onwards. Second: Sedlmayr's political orientation is more specific than a mixture of Nazism and Catholicism. His confessions as well as his actions fit to Spann's spiritual – rather than biological – foundation of racism, as well as to Spann's attempt to use Nazism as a vehicle to materialize his own ideas. Third: Sedlmayr's art historical writings cannot be separated from his political agenda, because the general statements about the relation of wholes and their parts, about epistemology and history that his theoretical texts entail, aim at a fundamental change in worldview, and these topics were conceived as political at that time. Spann's holism supplied a recipe that was to be applied to epistemology as well as to society, connecting anti-materialism with anti-individualism. In sum, the origin of Sedlmayr's methodology is found in an epistemology that was provided by Spann and Sauter, as well as by their common source, Baader. The approach to look for connections with Spann and, additionally, Baader and Sauter, in Sedlmayr's texts, therefore proved fruitful.

Nuria Jetter has been a research associate at Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin since 2021. 2021-2022: curator of European painting of the 18th century and German painting of the 17th century (maternity leave replacement). The paper derives from a PhD project on Hans Sedlmayr's epistemology, to be delivered in 2024. 2015-2018 scholarship from the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes.

nuria.jetter@gmx.de



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

¹⁶⁵ Beide Zitate J. H[anns] P[ichler], 'Im Gedenken zweier Freunde', *Zeitschrift für Ganzheitsforschung*, 28: 1, 1984, (45–47) 46.

¹⁶⁶ 'Vermeiden hätte ihn [den Konflikt mit den sich wandelnden politischen Systemen, NJ] nur können, wer es verstanden hätte, der Liebe zur Wahrheit eine gehörige Portion Schlauheit beizumischen.' P[ichler], 'Im Gedenken zweier Freunde', 47.