

Julius von Schlosser, 'Gespräch von der Bildniskunst'

Translated with introduction by Karl Johns

Julius Schlosser in 1906

The *Dialogue About the Art of Portraiture* was published by Julius Schlosser at what turned out to be the middle of his life. Aside from his curatorial work in the sculpture department of what is now the Kunsthistorisches Museum, he had been teaching at the university for approximately thirteen years. The one great nemesis of his career, Josef Strzygowski had begun publishing some of his widely noted essays and polemics and was then still professor in Graz. This 'dialogue' was published shortly after the death of his friend, colleague and opponent on a more subtle level, Alois Riegl, and one of its enduring interests is the critical attitude expressed here to Riegl.

Portraiture provided a basis for illustrating his point of view on what he occasionally called 'the prickliest problems' facing the history of art. Although the technique for taking perfect naturalistic casts of the entire human body was never lost from antiquity through the entire medieval period, it was only used in a very exceptional case such as when royalty died during remote travel and it was necessary to take a death mask.¹ The word 'pourtraicture' continued to be used in other ways than we are accustomed to.² A favorite example was the drawing of the lion in the book of Villard de Honnecourt which according to the accompanying inscription is to have been 'made from life.' Yet the same is true of the drawing in the same collection of the so-called 'Saracen Tomb' or the allusions to specific locations in the *Scenes from the Life of Saint Francis* from the school of Giotto. An approach based on formal analysis could neither account for such aspects of art, nor for the fact that the perspective into depth of a receding colonnade was also recognized and appreciated throughout the centuries of medieval wall paintings.

Riegl had become influential by deriving artistic form from other forms alone without recourse to intangible historical or psychological entities. Yet Schlosser's grand survey of wax portrait sculpture through the centuries (which was being prepared in the present *Dialogue*) provided examples of the context or surroundings in which formal influence takes place and which are lost in the

¹'Geschichte der Porträtbildnerei in Wachs Ein Versuch, *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*', 29, 1910-11, 171-258, available in an excellent English translation: Appendix: 'History of Portraiture in Wax', translated by James Michael Loughridge, in Roberta Panzanelli ed., *Ephemeral Bodies Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust 2008, 171-314.

²Portraiture, *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, Ergänzungsband 11, 1929, Oswald Redlich zugeeignet anlässlich der Feier seines siebenzigsten Geburtstages, pp. 881-894.

narrower approach of Riegl and his followers. This *Dialogue* is one of his only publications with a direct reference to Riegl (as 'your recently departed colleague'). Schlosser preferred to teach by simple examples and he left the more overt or argumentative evidence contradicting Riegl's theories to his students. In a series of closely argued essays, Ernst Garger analyzed the artistic use of the ground in Roman and Gothic relief sculpture. Josef Bodonyi did the same for the gold ground in early Christian art.³ Both began their research with mistakes, omissions, circular arguments and paradoxes in the ultimately Hegelian vision put forth by Riegl in *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie*. Some of the work of Camillo Praschniker is also likely to have been inspired by the problems of Riegl in explaining Minoan art, and among others Kurt Rathe also published examples difficult to accommodate by Riegl.⁴ For Schlosser, one of the greatest problems lay in the widespread activity of drawing unsubstantiated parallels from 'intellectual history.'

Schlosser's discussants touch on the questions of portrait likeness, idealization and reality, the limitations of the impressionist theory, naturalism and its opposites in art and the concept of beauty. While discussing a number of his favorite examples from numismatics and elsewhere, he also introduces his idea of the relatively passive receptive and not normally informed aesthetic of the public as opposed to the expressive nature of the actual artistic activity. His thoughts about the latter can be read most clearly in his writings about Lorenzo Ghiberti, that artist who became his favorite example of what he frequently called the 'torchbearers.' These were all favorite subjects he would discuss more fully and in the context of the historical development nearly two decades later in his popular manual *Die Kunstliteratur*.⁵

Here he was writing for a popular audience in the ancient dialogue form. In the tradition of rhetoric, the author thus displays his erudition and marshals a wide array of examples. While the work of Riegl and the preoccupation with the formal aspects of art ultimately led to the divorce of the subject from the academic program of the Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung, one can here see Schlosser in his attention to the history of art in its dependence on the other academic disciplines. Another criticism from opponents was that he could not conjure with the art of more recent periods. This should also be allayed here.

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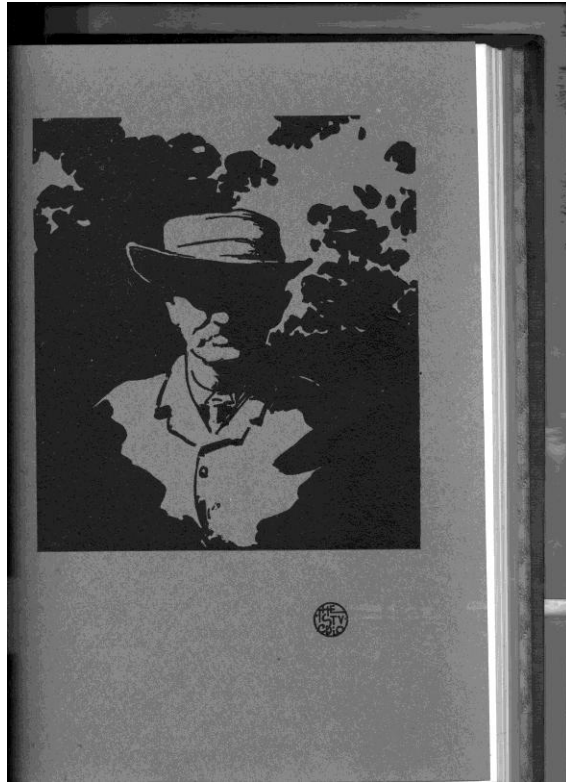
³ English translations of Garger and Bodonyi are being prepared and should be available soon.

⁴ His best known publication is *Die Ausdrucksfunktion extrem verkürzter Figuren*, London: Warburg Institute 1938.

⁵ *Die Kunstliteratur Ein Handbuch zur Quellenkunde der neueren Kunstgeschichte*, Vienna: Schroll 1924.

Julius Schlosser, ‘A dialogue about the art of portraiture’

Translated and edited by Karl Johns¹



Portrait of Cecil Rhodes by Mortimer Menpes from *The Studio* vol. 22, 1901 [Ed.]

Characters: The Artist – The Writer

Artist: What do you think of this sheet?

Writer: Curious – I must say, this half-length Portrait of a Man sharply lit emerging from a wild bunch of leaves – but what am I saying? This does little more than to goad my imagination, since I am barely shown a third of the face of this somewhat puritanical cast! The entire right half is obscured by a heavy cast shadow from the broad rimmed floppy hat, so that the eyes are not even visible.

¹ Originally published as ‘Gespräch von der Bildniskunst’, *Österreichische Rundschau*, Volume 6, 1906, 502–516, and republished: Julius Schlosser, *Präludien Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Berlin: Bard 1927, 227–247. Translated: Donata Levi, “Julius von Schlosser, Dialogo sull’arte del ritratto 1906 con una nota di Donata Levi,” *Annali di critica d’arte* 2, 2006, pp. 27-102.

A.: Do you know who this is? It is the man who created a great commotion a few years ago: Cecil Rhodes, drawn by Mortimer Menpes, the contributor to *The Studio* in London, whom you well know.

W.: Curious, I can only reiterate once more, and with greater conviction, for this is in fact a strange artistic capriccio.

A.: Take another closer look. I believe that there is more to this than merely a bizarre *plein air* study for a portrait.

W.: I cannot disagree. One has the sense of feeling the stare from those eyes which are not even depicted, and the only visible half of the energetically pinched mouth suggests a man who has hardly been matched in a relentless pursuit of the grand plans of a conquistador.

A.: Do you not agree? And these few indications built on the contrast of the brightest light and deepest shadow are sufficient for the artist in evoking the vivid impression of an entire and complete personality. I will admit that he encourages the participation of our imagination in unusual ways. Yet this is a part of the peculiar appeal of this particular sheet, which addresses an experienced viewer.

W.: Contemplating this portrait in quotation marks, which purposefully omits the eyes as 'windows into the soul', I must confess that I do not get beyond the first impression. Such a study of a portrait would have elicited scornful laughter and outrage among the interested audience, or else appealed to common sense as a form of confirmation. In the mean time we have become more inured to this.

A.: You say this with such a personal emphasis, when not so long ago you were the king of the hill! Think of certain trends of modern drawing that have come from Impressionism, the black and white heads by Vallotton, or the line drawings by a saucy Parisian such as Forain, which we recently went to see together. Do you recall the capriccio of the chubby faced child with such a round face, completely lacking in any detail, but indicated only in profile? Or the similar satires appearing in *Simplicissimus*?

W.: What of the Balzac by Rodin? But is that not more of an exercise of free fantasy, based on an historical personality, something like the *Molière* by Houdon?

A.: Certainly, but the momentary image of this Romantic — which the artist hoped to capture with the individual traits dissolved in the enveloping light — is much closer to our draftsman than the image conceived in paint, and yet the bust is perceived as firm and clearly outlined.

W.: Yes, and of course the dramatist reserves these rights in relation to the historical subject. But here, in the portrait of a contemporary who has walked in the light among us...?

A.: This brings us to the question on which we have so often disagreed. What is in fact a portrait? What actually constitutes a portrait? What does the viewer expect from the artists? What we call resemblance is a very vague concept, and often drives us to despair — all the more so when it is combined with the demand for beauty, that most tyrannical of all concepts. We are dealing with the most advantageous depiction of an upright man or woman, as it would be seen in a particular milieu.

This has also been the traditional lament of intelligent photographers. I was only recently speaking with such an honest man — who by the way had retired from that profession because he could no longer stand slightly retouching the crude naturalism of his camera to produce those abominable gelatinous products as we see them in the shop windows of the most popular companies delighting the public.

W.: Ultimately, we are therefore facing the old canard of aesthetic speculation, purging and improving upon nature.

A.: Leaving the artist with the attractive role of cleaning lady or laundress?

W.: I realize that you and all artists react caustically, when this discipline is mentioned — yet you were among those who contributed to its origins both in theory and practice! To the authors of aesthetics, portraiture always appeared ambivalent and suspect and one always has the sense that they would be most pleased to banish it from their sacred precinct of art. There we have yet another snag!

A.: Of course the artist is often also a member of the public. Yet, as soon as he begins to work as an artist, they situate themselves and produce from the other side of things. What the public and the patron with all of their relations and connections then expect of the artist, and God knows he unfortunately relies on them for his livelihood — and I do not wish to criticize them, they are perfectly within their rights.

W.: *Troppa bontà Sua!*

A.: *Padronissimo.* The demands in the field of portraiture seem to me to be only of secondary importance, or should I say that resemblance and idealization have a different meaning for me, which of course, I cannot express very easily.

W.: I might understand you. Allow me to attempt to play the oracle at the birth of your thought. The public demands 'resemblance' as well as 'beauty', but according to the current standards, both of those are quite variable factors. Our everyday experience shows what they are able to accept as resemblance. This might be a 'reality' often composed of superficially conceived insignificant traits of brother John or sister Margaret — or else associated with a sovereign notion derived from contemporary or ancestor. As far as beauty is concerned, the observation of Torquato Tasso applies to the artist. And its appeal, which rises from innumerable imponderables, cannot simply be reasoned away. He is not possessed by the normal layman's interest in the individual personality, this presents a problem to his art and must be dealt with by its specific means — I believe it to be one of the most dangerous analogies of all, when he is allowed to practice 'psychology'. It would certainly be to diverge from facts to interpret the visual impression as a symbol of the psyche of the sitter. It is no more than his own experience, which he can interpret, that is to say express, as his own personal property. The public is interested in the impression, while the artist, to the degree that he wishes to be an artist, must continue into the realm of expression, the manifestation of his autocratic personality — assuming that he has such a thing. But that is not always the case. The aesthetics of the public, if one can accept such a term — apt in this case, would be an aesthetic of impression, directly the opposite of that of the artist, which would be a

criticism of expression. The former covers a far wider field than the latter, since art is no more than a single chapter within it.

A.: And the critic? Is he straddling between the two, like the donkey of Jean Buridan?

W.: An impolite but correct observation. Incidentally, the artist should create art and not talk about it! – You are often enough to be found between those two stools [*zwischen beiden Krippen*].

A.: *A nos moutons*, my friend! Do you not mean that the artist depicts himself in every portrait? I would be tempted to agree.

W.: Would that not explain the fact that the same person appears quite different in portraits by various artists? An observant Florentine, even an old theorist such as Filarete had recognized that.

A.: I recall with great pleasure a small painting which I once saw by Sir Thomas Lawrence. It 'depicted' our good Emperor Francis – is there not a delicate double-entendre in that expression – and he appeared in it like an English country gentleman. But you can continue to spin your thread; you still have a good amount of flax on your spindle.

W.: Very well, but it will be your fault if I fall into lecturing! We do seem at least to have reached agreement that the artist begins with an 'external' optical impression. If and how he is able to penetrate the 'inner life' of the 'other' with his most personal workmanship, or to progress from the 'phenomenon' to the 'noumen', this presents quite a prickly problem which we are better to ignore lest we expose ourselves to metaphysical horrors. The public, and they represent the 'other', takes very little interest in the 'externals' as the artist conveys them, and desires to go beyond the 'form' to arrive at 'material' or 'content' – or however else one would like to call it. The easier this is made for them, the happier they will be. This must present one of the main reasons for the resistance to any innovations which might encumber the customary mode of viewing. They are not interested in the portrait as an expression or disclosure of an artistic personality, but rather the actual human being, one can say, looming behind it, who is known to them in a very particular way, and as such arouses a certain reaction both pro and con. Much as primitive peoples might look behind the mirror to discover the source of the image. Most are indifferent to a portrait of a Mr. X., if they have no ideas or feelings to associate with him, much as one would store clothing on a hanger. If Mr. X. is neither personally known, nor notorious through the daily news, he might arouse their interest by an attractive appearance. If nature has not smiled on him in this way, then he must either be in possession of a remarkable ugliness or else the painter must find unusually effective means to make the portrait accessible by the so-called 'enthraling truth to life'. That then is the ancient, the most primitive and most popular basis for aesthetic judgment. It has been derived in countless variations from Myron's cow and the grapes of Zeuxis through all historical periods, whether they be devoted primarily to 'idealism' or 'realism' – in the Weimar circle they were called criticism of sparrows.

A.: And the artist who stood at the beginning of the discussion has been completely submerged behind Mr. X. – but it is not the painted image of Mr. X., the work and its creator being considered, but rather the actual living Mr. X.

W.: In an atmosphere so filled with talk about art, very few are naïve or honest enough to admit that they do not see any more in a landscape than a view from a church tower, both metaphorically and not.

A.: I can tell you an amusing anecdote about that. A woman entered the office of a famous lawyer. Above the table hung a copy of the *Isle of the Dead* by Arnold Böcklin. Before leaving, she cast a long glance at the picture and with an expression of joyous memories of summer said: What a beautiful view of Helgoland! The lawyer was so perplexed that he was only able to answer mutely with a bow. After this he was visited by a banker and told him the story of what had just happened. The visitor could not contain his laughter and exclaimed: How amusing! Anybody can see that it depicts Capri!

W.: Such a story need not even be fictional! All of the visual and verbal arts originated as communication and are essentially based in this, so that there can be little wonder if the naïve sentiment would lead people to perceive the content of the communication as they understand it, and then to forget or disregard the form or source of the report. These are two points of view, and as in any true tragedy, each of them, the layman as well as the artist, is correct in their own terms. The entire history of art is basically nothing other than the conflict of these two points of view. One declares the other to be anathema and attempts to demonstrate its untruth, and since this is impossible to do consistently, it all leads to a sequence of compromises. Ultimately, the view once expressed by a significant artist – it might even have been our Grillparzer, is not overly paradoxical: only the artist can completely judge his work as art. Before the work of another, he in some sense remains a member of the 'public', a 'layman'. How strange, one is tempted almost to use the offensive word 'pathological' when the same Grillparzer passes judgment on an artist such as Weber? For this reason, I believe that the artist is always to some degree in the position of Apelles, who hides behind his work to overhear the comments being made by the viewers. From the outside, the painted canvas appears like a tablet available to accept any thoughts and opinions.

A.: The artist himself does this no less, and does this not seem to neutralize the difference?

W.: Yes and no. For the artist, his work is the projection of his own ego, yet the great difference is that the artist depicts things with sensual forms. For him, the image on the canvas is what is real and essential, because it is his deed, while the viewer dissolves and evaporates this property of his.

A.: In the cant which they sometimes choose to express themselves, the artists might be considered to assume the stand point of philosophical idealism, while the public pursues that of naïve realism (this is the term they would probably use) – which insists on the world as something outside of their own skin, which the artist has but

to 'imitate'. But be careful, in our handicraft we are all in agreement on that point that the living world out there cannot be spirited away!

W.: There are a number of comments which I might make, but I know you, and I know how incorrigible and obstinate you are. Nonetheless, and in spite of your malicious play on words – do not deny it, and may the spirit of the great Immanuel Kant forgive you, I would like to hold you to this rather bold infraction into philosophy. I recall reading a pithy essay not long ago, dealing with precisely the question we have just been discussing. Its author who exemplifies a rare case of a philosophical sensibility inherited from his father, set out to analyze the various conceptual possibilities available in a work of art. He started with a well chosen example, this being the opposition between the image worshippers and the iconoclasts. For the former, clearly, the picture is merely an image of something else, intended to convey a spiritual content. For the latter it is a representation, and to attribute anything divine or to seek an intellectual component in its dead material would be sacrilege. This antithesis is more than an isolated historical example. All of us begin life with the attitude of the image worshipper. A little boy can see a riding horse in a stick, while a piece of wood can 'represent' the swaddled child for a little girl. As the development progresses such a crude symbol then suffices as little as the wooden idols did for the later Greeks. To stem this process of 'imagination' (*Einbildung*), as our author called it, it is necessary to increase the proximity to the natural appearances of these objects. That is to say, one must intensify the resemblance.

A.: I understand. In this way the stick becomes a hobbyhorse or a rocking horse, and the piece of wood develops into a doll with movable eyes and all of those refinements of modern industrial techniques available to toy manufacturers — but our children tire of these very quickly because they allow too little room for their own imagination and joy at playing. How they like to return to the simple peasant bric-a-brac! Most recently, they have quite correctly been imitated by modern artists who have begun to occupy themselves with these questions in this way. I believe that this could provide a number of insights.

W.: All the more so since this regressive development is completely in line with our modern art. Allow me to further follow the thoughts of our philosopher and paraphrase him in my way. On the one hand we have the conception of art which characterizes entire large periods of history, generally called idealism...

A.: And on the other hand the opposite position of the iconoclasts, representing the standpoint of philosophical realism down to the final detail.

W.: Let there be no misunderstanding! What did the work of art mean to the iconoclasts? For those who reject and abominate art, it represented nothing more than dead materials given a certain shape by an artist, whose activity appears dubious and pernicious. One should however bear in mind that the artists have nearly always taken displeasure at things being read into and projected through their work. Think of the reactions against the anecdotes and stories, against all attempts to find things hidden behind the canvas. This actually already involves the

title given to a work of art, since it implicitly suggests a program to the viewer. Most of the paintings by Arnold Böcklin were given their titles by art dealers who knew their clients very well and what the market would bear. Honest old Giovanni Bologna was very good natured in allowing his learned friend Borghini to make one of his best known pieces palatable to the public with a fashionable antiquarian title. Artists have always baulked against the artificial distinction between idea and form because they had the clear sense that this was something alien to the nature of their activity – however differently they might have spoken when they wrote theoretical treatises.

A.: That would certainly also contradict the act of production. I do not run around with an 'idea' in my head which others are also familiar with and might find expressed in my picture – but which I am able to clearly realize in a given medium since I have learned that particular craft! This silly sort of distinction already annoyed me when I was studying at the Academy. I am reminded of all of the anecdotes about artists from the persistent answer given by Michelangelo to the question of his raising the divine figure of 'Night' from the stone, all the way down to the coloured pencils of our dear master Moritz von Schwind.

W.: And this brings us back to the gentleman from the public as the adversary of the artist. The one who is constantly interpreting paintings with completely extrinsic concepts (*'hinüberdeuten'*), while the other is aggravated over the fact that his most personal and intimate creations are spirited away. *'Das ist eine von den alten Sünden, sie meinen rechnen das sei Erfinden'*. [It is one of the traditional sins to confuse calculation with invention'. Goethe, *Zahme Xenien*, 5]

A.: This is all well and fine, but do not forget the thoughtful counter rhyme in the same collection: *'Und weil ihre Wissenschaft exakt, so sei keiner von ihnen vertrackt!'* [Yet the precision of their science has not made any of them particularly vexing', Goethe *Zahme Xenien*, 24] Could that not be said of your friend the philosopher? I have long lost the ability to find any pleasure in this sort of circuitous interpretation (*'hintenherumdenken'*) of living things.

W.: You do him an injustice! If you take the trouble to read his short essay, you might not find his point of view any more congenial by its divergence from your 'objective' attitude, but you might judge it more approvingly – since you yourself confess a certain reluctant interest in theory. The Greek meaning of the word theory is related to viewing and does therefore belong to your profession! But enough of this, there is a field full of the most concrete imaginable life, on which we can agree for that reason, even if we arrive there from different points of origin: history! I had already wanted to remind you earlier of the medieval period, when symbolism had a greater importance which extended far beyond the mere graven image. Somewhat like an ancient Stoic, but completely in the medieval spirit, Dante proclaimed poetry and art generally to be a sort of symbolic language which might reveal a truth unavailable to the senses.

A.: I agree. But how does the artist triumph over the theorist in him! I can recall the words of his *canzone*: *'chi pinge figura, se non può esser lei, non la può porre'*, which

seem to express the spirit of the artist most directly [Dante, *Il Canzoniere*, 4, 13]. Is this not the key to our subject, that impression and personal expression are impossible to separate, and that the distinction of form and content is a mere scheme from the aesthetics of laymen?

W.: Do not delude yourself over the fact that this is a modern reading which Dante could scarcely have endorsed. We cannot understand his famous passage about the new style in the *Purgatorio* in the modern way in which Goethe would. The poet expressed his own opinion, that of a true Scholastic, and did so quite clearly in the commentary to that canzone. But this *Convito*, one of the most remarkable commentaries ever written by a poet about his own work, seems to demonstrate how the aesthetics of laymen (which in this case happens to have been that of the church) forced the artist to deny himself. Are the great decorative windows of the Gothic cathedrals not justifiably referred to as painted sermons? Is the image not overwhelmed by the inscribed banderols with their dogmatic and moralizing pretensions?

A.: And yet ultimately this can be as little mastered as Dante himself had done, when in his case the poet predominated, one is tempted to say unwillingly. How often have I not been led to ponder this while visiting the French cathedrals! Even with the best preparation and intentions, it is almost impossible to discern these edifying texts, nay even the pious images themselves. Does it not seem that these painted sermons must have failed in their original purpose when they were made? Those people would have had to have the eyes of ancient Lynkæus. I can only admire the self-abnegation of the artists among the monks. Their greatness in no way lags behind the Greek sculptors who treated the reverse sides of their pediment figures with the same detail as the front – in spite of the fact that nobody would ever see them. But what self-abnegation! Does the artist not work for himself in the first place, and only then for the public? If he does not please himself, then in his innermost recesses, he would certainly feel himself to be nothing more than a prankster. I can see that this makes you shrug. Some of your social theories have often enough irritated me. But allow us to leave that aside, and tell me what remains of your painted sermons for anybody without telescopic eyesight – presumably an overwhelming decorative impression, the enchantingly austere linearity of those colossal transparent tapestries, and surely this is purely artistic? Within Dante, the Scholastic was unable to subdue the poet, because it involves his own person, with all of its hate and its love. For this reason, whether it seems modern or not, I propose my interpretation in spite of all of his own commentaries – which in spite of all philology and grammar I have never enjoyed reading. I have also never understood how there could ever have been any doubt as to the historical existence of Beatrice. There can be no more authentic writing by a youth than the *Vita nuova* with its idealist excesses.

W.: You realize that I am in agreement with you in my admiration for that small 'golden book'. But allow us to return to the question of portraiture. Generally, the

period of Dante is denied to have produced portraits, at least in our sense of the term – and I am uncertain whether this is true or not.

A.: In spite of my vain historical interests, with which you are well familiar, I must confess that I have always been attracted to medieval art only in its decorative and artistic aspect – in the same modern sense which you find in my interpretation of Dante. And I am convinced that it is closer to the mark than those of the many myopic critics who have devoted their attentions to the Divine Comedy! What I have seen of so-called portraits in medieval art, on seals or in manuscripts, have been impressive for their fine artistic linearity, but none among them struck me to be portraits as we understand the term. They seem rather to be instructions addressed to the imagination of the viewer (to use your expression), and that the viewer is then left to fill in the details as he sees fit. It would be no mean task to read an individual out of such a stylized image of a king as one might find it on a playing card.

W.: And yet any child will do the same if called on to do so. Just recall our old example of the hobbyhorse and the doll. Is that not a completely similar emotional process?

A.: I cannot disagree. Yet I do not see what you mean.

W.: Patience please! Allow me to continue socratizing. Did the course of the 'medieval' period not also experience the same process which our philosopher has given the term 'transformation' (*Entbildung*)? For this very reason, what you disrespectfully call the king from the playing cards, does not provide a sustained satisfaction, and he is surreptitiously given individual qualities, to assimilate the image to living reality and lend life to the symbol which otherwise might lose it. Strange things occurred in this way, such as in Italy for instance, where there had always been a nostalgia for the glorious period of antiquity, and the Emperor Frederick II, the friends of Petrarch or the Carrara family in Padua all had themselves depicted in Roman masks which ill matched their costumes or their individual facial traits.

A.: Which one might equally apply to the period of Thorvaldsen.

W.: Very true, and who can guarantee that the same phenomenon might not repeat itself again tomorrow. We seem to be headed in that direction. These are interludes I did not wish to talk about. Petrarch in particular leads us into the new century, in which the realistic portrait was undeniably present – the fact that he retained much from the earlier period does nothing to change this. In standing before a Flemish portrait or a Quattrocento bust, the viewer is not called upon to apply much of any imagination. The artist has completely taken over. What had previously been a popular or primitive desire for art: immediate life-likeness now became a chapter in naturalist theory for artists, who would like to take the pictorial image to the outermost limits of art itself – do you recall how Giulio Romano became a fairy tale figure in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*?

A.: I assume that you are referring to naturalistically painted wax sculpture with natural hair and materials – that horror that aesthetics has always placed before the artist.

W.: Whatever else it might be, panopticon effects or decoration in barber shop windows, this form of sculpture has had a very distinguished history – from the *cerae* of the ancient Romans, which seems to have lent the Romance languages their term for facial mien, all the way down to the Empire and Biedermeier styles, when the democratic daguerreotype extinguished the living candle of this ancient art form. Significant artists, anonymous as well as those with fame and great reputations were none of them above working in that medium. In any case it reveals the desire for the most naturalistic image possible, with the Renaissance centered on the concept of plastic modelling – *rilievo*!

A.: I have always found it strange that Leonardo da Vinci, who was as familiar with and studied the effects of strong sunlight as well as any other modern artist, decisively opposed its use in theory and practice. He had no interest in it because it dissolved all details and made faces appear as flat as boards.

W.: It was also incompatible with the things that were important to him, and as a true artist, seriously devoted to his activity, he could offer no other advice.

A.: This did and could not prevent the later artists from further pursuing these questions to which he had distantly alluded. Ultimately this led the Impressionists to the final step. Today, even sculpture is developing along these lines, and as quixotic the work of a Trubetzkoy or Medardo Rosso might appear, they nonetheless have their serious aspect.

W.: And this is what we observed in our example of Cecil Rhodes, where the individual, which the Renaissance had attempted to preserve so intact, came in danger of being dissolved in the universal elements of light and air. The good mayor Petersen of Hamburg had a good reason to place a curtain over his portrait painted by Max Liebermann.

A.: One moment my friend, you seem to be expressing an interest in joining the 'art critics'.

W.: Not at all. But does it not appear as if we are experiencing a reversion to an earlier stage? Are we perhaps heading into another 'medieval' period? Since the end of the Empire, the old social order is splitting apart at all seams. We are already being threatened with a new period of 'Barbarism' when the coal reserves are depleted. I recently read a remark from a representative of modern art – Schultze-Naumburg if I am not mistaken – that a portrait does not require similitude, while a widely read English art critic states that in statues lacking their head he rarely misses this, because the resulting 'over-expressiveness' bothers him.

A.: I can again tell you a story that might provide grist for your mills. Not long ago, a wealthy American commissioned a portrait of his wife from a Swiss painter living in Paris. But then he rejected the product as showing too little 'resemblance'. There was a lawsuit. Do you know what the two portraitists testified as expert witnesses for either side? Both of them arrived at the same conclusion we might ourselves

have reached – when a person is painted by ten painters, one ends up with ten separate portraits, each of them with an entirely individual character, yet in the eyes of the artists, each resembling the sitter in one way or another. In their own way, they gave the same remarkable definition, which we have also touched on in the course of our dialogue, that the similarity resides in the artistic interpretation of the individual. You can imagine how this judgment was received and discussed in that city of *blagueurs*.

W.: This does cut both ways, since according to such a canon, any artless amateur would have the excuse of falling back on his 'individuality', even if it cannot be said to exist in artistic terms! Who can blame anybody for expecting what pleases them after paying for it? The line of Schultze is not as paradoxical as it might at first appear. It represents the most radical expression of the artist's program, and the entire history revolves around the conflict between this and the 'layman's aesthetic'. But allow us to observe. Does this not justify the old platitude that the extremes converge? Are we not then agreeing with the traditional and conventional portrait which demands the viewer to complete it in their own imagination? Think of the eyes of our Sir Cecil! Does this not once more set the development of art into motion from its point of origin, in the sense of the spiral movement – which Goethe took to be the image of all development? *Le Temps revient* was the motto of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

A.: These are things that we have often been told. You know that I have always viewed your idea of the eternal recurrence with scepticism. As interested as I am in the development of the earlier periods of art, and as much as I like to see them in relation to our own, I am opposed to pronouncements of rules of history, which is where this seems to be leading.

W.: I believe that you are misunderstanding me. Types of opinions ('*Anschauung*') are not abstract rules as laid out in the natural sciences, and the 'development of art' strikes me as a very obscure and dubious concept to borrow, if it is intended in the scientific sense. Even the plant that sprouts in spring at the same spot differs from its predecessor precisely by this relation to it. I am interested in the concrete individual plant outside of my window and not in the plant *in abstracto*, which leads to completely different sequences of thoughts. Individual occurrences belong to history, and when I say that the medieval period seems to be beginning again, and then I mean this in the sense in which Goethe intended this as on a higher turn of the spiral, with the previous sequence still participating metaphorically ('*mitgedacht*'). As I recall, you once compared the medieval person with a child learning to draw. Yet this is not the child of a primitive tribe in an overwhelming jungle, but that of a developed culture, being advised by its elders from a pool of traditions extending far into the past – even if they might not be constantly standing at its side. This is the reason that the medieval period makes such a strange appearance at once old and young, like a child of aging parents.

A.: But did you not yourself say that the portrait also originated among the Greeks as an instruction to the viewer? Have you not frozen the typecast portrait within a

strange progression for reasons of a national – political ethos which is no longer accessible to us? It seems to me that all preserved portraits of famous men have been heroized and historicized to conform to historical writing.

W.: Yes, just as they provide the examples for the types and the forms for the sciences and the humanities. In general, we are all still laboring within the Platonic theory of ideas, within Aristotelian logic, Euclidian geometry, and Alexandrian grammar. All of these are marvellous products of a refined intellectual technique, but are now being challenged by the intellectual activity of the people from India, with its different intuitional and genetic alignment. We are being assured that historical linguistics, as it developed over the previous century, received its decisive impulses from the Hindus.

A.: *Ex oriente lux*, yes, that has been an age old point of comparison. Yet how different is the Greek from true Roman portrait sculpture, which seems to compete with the Quattrocento. Last spring, I was able for the first time to see the marvellous collection belonging to the brewer Jacobsen in Copenhagen. The entire present day populace of Italy can be seen there! I was boundlessly delighted to see all of the well-known popular types, including Pulcinello and Arlecchino, the sad faced nobles from a godforsaken spot or the old guide who embarrassed me so deeply in Siena, as well as many dignified and hearty figures.

W.: Yet this was also preceded by the Greeks. Lucian related an interesting anecdote about some old condottiere of the Corinthians, whom Donatello would presumably have greeted as a kindred spirit. It is significant that the population believed this apparently very realistic image to be possessed by a daemon. The old warrior was believed to have instigated all sorts of mischief in the streets during the night, frightening people, but occasionally also acting beneficially and helpfully. In medieval Byzantium there was unrest in the vicinity of all ancient statuary. This was certainly mixed in with the Christian fear of idols. In all of these examples there is an element of the old popular superstitions of the daemonic life of the art work, which had to be fettered in the time Daedalus – and which in the presence of particularly realistic images developed into an outright fear of ghosts. This is the most extreme expression of the '*terribile*'. You know this expression from Italian artistic practice; it is a repetition of the old δεινός.

A.: To say nothing of the magi associated with the human image, which probably still goes on here and there. Or the Muslim belief that the soul of an image maker will be taken on the final day. A nice prospect for any of those who have stained themselves with such an activity here on earth! But I have long been waiting to make an observation. You know that I have inherited a coin collection from my father, and that piety and my own early interest in this small rosewood cabinet has led me to expand it according to my means. I have been struck at the tenacity with which the schematic and symbolic portraits were preserved among the coins of the Greek East. From the coins of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids to the minting of the Parthians and Sassanids, through a period of well nigh a thousand years, there was

not a single proper image of a human being. All there are to see are symbols and crowned patterns.

W.: The oddest things of all are possibly the Roman emperors rendered in the hieratic style of ancient Egypt, as they appear in certain late temple paintings. This is possibly how we should imagine the art in a state governed by the philosopher king of Plato. It is no bad joke, he himself stated what he himself preferred, and his tendency to force art into those rigid and unalterable formulae, the famous rules of style were passed on to nearly every philosopher and aesthetician since. On this point, they are *tutti quanti*, members of the 'public' in our terminology – but forgive me, I interrupted you.

A.: What struck me most was the completely new pattern that emerged after the crude, conventional and officious naturalism in the sequences of coin portraits of the third century Roman emperors after Constantine. Following the stubby heads of their predecessors the soldier emperors, these display a fine and aristocratic type. They are also certainly a type, even if containing facial traits of Constantine the Great, which were then transferred with only minor variations to the images of his successors – exactly as the heroized head of Alexander was then used by the Diadochs.

W.: There might in fact be a connection between the two. At least, I recall that late antiquity cultivated a very strange cult of Alexander.

A.: Do you also have an explanation for that *in petto*? In any case, the individual portrait disappeared from coins at that point, and I do not know of any further examples before the Renaissance.

W.: You expect too much of me. In every aspect, we are dealing with a remarkable and difficult problem, just as late antiquity presents us with one of the most obscure, but also most interesting chapters. I have thought about it many times, and discussed it with a friend recently deceased, without reaching any sort of conclusion. You knew this excellent man yourself and thought very highly of him, even if you were rarely able to accept his difficult lines of thought. He believed, and with his great knowledge and incisive observation he was able to demonstrate that we will never properly understand late antiquity on the basis of that classicistic point of view which we have grown up with. Like the Baroque, it requires its own criteria of judgment – which should actually go without saying! Astonishing things were achieved in the intellectual field – with nothing of it to be seen among the conservative epigones of antiquity, but in the literature of the future, that of Christianity! Our friend was able to show how great architectural ideas were developed to their conclusions during this period, but also that it was devoted to the latest and finest artistic trends, pursuing the painterly effects even in sculpture and still to the final stages. He sought to convince us in his amiably emphatic way, while this art contradicted the formal language of the 'classical' period – which had been the source of the famous 'rules of style' as they continue to molest us. Does this not remind you of your Leonardo, with all of his anticipations of things to come? Does this interesting period not almost seem to reflect our own, in which all of the

traditional forms are being dissolved since the Napoleonic autocracy, and transformed into others of an as yet undetermined nature? When Constantine, the successor of the great reorganizer Diocletian, used such violence to turn his residence on the banks of the Bosphorus into a museum of ancient art, does this not recall Napoleon and his European central museum in the Louvre? The sculptural naturalism of the early Roman period developed into a tendency which dissolved the individual, concrete elements into generally decorative, illusionistic, and painterly forms. Is there not a similar process at work again now, and not merely since yesterday? Are we perhaps standing at the same spot as they were in antiquity? I only pose this question and say no more, because I can see from the expression on your face that you are again making the common accusation that I am spouting ideology.

A.: Like wanderers lost in the fog, are we not constantly returned to our example of Cecil Rhodes? How do you imagine making all of this fit? Speaking for myself, I admit that I am not completely able to abandon the classicism in which I was educated, and admit that some of those objects cannot be completely freed from the objection of decadence.

W.: Do our most modern artists not describe themselves as decadent? But you are drawing me like an Armida into a labyrinth of speculation in philosophy of history! Beware; I have not yet played out my cards! True ancient Greek culture was also no more than an oasis, an isle of the blessed, if you please, a lost paradise – I understand the trance of the 'classical' ideal and succumb to it myself. Yet the snake was not absent from this paradise either. I honestly believe that since Plato, that powerful and fateful intellectual tyrant, the tendency to spiritualism could never be overcome, and that he brought the degradation of all sensuality, corporeality and individuality – the hypostasis of all abstraction. As a state that could not persist, this internal dualism was bound to spell the end of ancient culture. The Greeks were living in a situation comparable to a small island surrounded on all sides by an ocean of Barbarian and eastern cultures. The true ancient Greeks were made to feel this quite clearly. It was not for nothing that the colonists in southern Italy entertained the strange and moving legend that the population of Paestum lamented and mourned the death of their Hellenism once each year. The old polis was well aware that philosophical speculation was its dangerous enemy. The avengers of Socrates were the divine Plato and his colleagues: precisely the eastern mystic speculation and Christianity – ultimately the most successful among them. From the other side there were the imageless Barbarians – if I am not mistaken it was Diodorus, one of the ancient authors, who stated that the images of the Greek deities struck the Galls as ridiculous. And in this way, ancient culture actually disintegrated under its own weight. Just read the strange biographies of that Semitic decadent Heliogabal and of the Germanic nature boy Maximinus in the historians of the imperial period. As bravely and honestly as it defended itself, these new powers attacked the conservative central patriciate from above and below, and had an easy game in overcoming it – seeing how senile, impotent and backward looking it had

become. One can see this in the literature of the last pagans. I believe that we cannot seek the new and fruitful art of the future among these either. It had to resolve its problems in the service of a new conception of the world which would soon accede to the status of a state religion, and obviously this did not transpire either in favor of individuality or of the traditional ideal of vivid humanity.

A.: And now, what about the present? That is after all the point at which you wished to arrive, by friend!

W.: Today? Do the extreme subjectivism, phenomenalism and so many other 'isms' not assist art in registering the finest and most minute impression? Have these not taught a mode of viewing which was either completely unknown in the past, or else considered to be aberrant? Let us see if the rupture is not also present there. Does the limitless expansion of the individual not revert into its complete opposite? Is the demand for a complete expression of individuality not matched by the ominous and implacable threat of the social aspect, where the individual, however gifted is recognized and evaluated as nothing more than a product of the whole? Is this not a claim that the individual is irretrievably lost and humanity nothing more than a stalk of ovaries, a thought that had already been expressed by that shrewd old Lichtenberg?

A.: Icarus, Icarus, return to the earth!

W.: You have called the wolf and he has come. Yet I have not yet played my last trump card. Have you my dear friend, not as an artist made a testimonial about modern art

A.: My Lord, not that I know...

W.: Then allow us to take a look into your rooms which you decorated so beautifully and sensibly with frescoes just last year.

A.: I see! This is what you mean! The woman in the flowering garden with the well shaped body which has always caused you to shake your wise head and make sharp comments! I shall not forget those so soon.

W.: Yes, fine, and what is the nature of this woman whose upper half presents itself in a beautiful corporeality, but then instead of walking solidly on the earth, loses itself below in a flat ornament of the wavy skirt? Could this not serve as a symbol of the conflict within modern art?

A.: Long live literary interpretations! – This matter is hardly new to me. But do you know what I actually had in mind with this? Nothing whatsoever, at least nothing in the manner you imagine. Yet I hope that I was not completely devoid of thought. You must at least allow me something of a philistine adherence to this flowering earth. I am irresistibly drawn to make the dress of this very real female form – the living source of which has just looked in through the door – I am drawn to make it the 'thousand-fold echo of form', and swing away in animated lines, in order to provide a transition from the figure into the landscape. And as you can see, I have conceived it in purely decorative terms. It provides an appealing view out of this space in which we have spent many happy hours together.

W.: I bow in reverence before the woman of the house, its *genius loci*. This has been no more than the discussion of a comparison, as we have lately been doing this so much. Who would ever want to shunt the artist aside, who is always correct in his own way!

A.: Bravo. You speak a wise word at a felicitous moment, for you had come perilously close to 'intellectualize your way through' the picture, much in the manner of the 'lay aesthetics' of the broader audience.

W.: Well said, but let us go, for we musn't keep the *genius loci* waiting.

The drawing by Menpes was published in *The Studio*, Volume 22, 1901. The essay by Heinrich Gomperz, 'Über einige psychologische Voraussetzungen der naturalistischen Kunst', appeared in *Beilage der Allgemeinen Zeitung* (Munich) Jahrgang 1905, Nummer 160, München Freitag 14. Juli, 89-93, Nummer 161, Samstag 15. Juli, 98-101; my translation is to be found in this volume of the journal. The question of resemblance in portraiture was discussed to some degree by Benedetto Croce in his essay reprinted in idem., *Problemi di estetica*, second edition, Bari: Laterza 1923, 258 ff.