

Romantic worldview as a narcissistic construct¹

Branko Mitrović

...men of greatest genius, where they relinquish by principle the use of their reason, are only enabled by their vigor of the mind to work themselves the deeper into error and absurdity.²

Richard Rorty once defined Romanticism as the thesis that 'what is most important for human life is not what propositions we believe but what vocabulary we use'.³ His is one of many possible definitions and not very different from the understanding of Romanticism that I rely on in this article. Historical accounts relate Romanticism to the rejection of the Enlightenment worldview that started with Herder. Romantics, the common explanation goes, protested against the Enlightenment faith in the capacity of logical thinking, ultimately reason, to improve the human lot. They rejected the belief that rationality was shared by humans as members of the same species and argued that human reasoning capacities derive from membership of various collectives such as ethnicity, race or culture. A version of this view, already present in Herder, is the claim that all human thinking is verbal and in a language; such a position precludes the possibility that one could have any ideas which cannot be named within one's linguistic community.

The rejection of universal human rationality goes hand in hand with the rejection of the idea that human values could be shared independently of one's membership of a community. It is the community, Romantics argued, that generates all human values. The culture of a nation (*Nationalbildung*) determines one's taste for pleasant and beautiful, Herder claimed, and it is a waste of time to talk about European ceremonies with a Chinese or Italian music with a Turk.⁴ He was not saying that different individuals find different things pleasant or beautiful, but rather that such views are uniform within a group and differ between groups. Ultimately, this suggests that human groups are comparable to animal species, some of which are attracted to certain types of smell or food and others which are not. The same is meant to apply to other kinds of values. It includes the rejection of the view that some rights, for instance the right to life, may belong to individuals independently of the context in which they live. Rather, the idea is that individuals

¹ I should like to express my gratitude to Louise de Lambert, Ranko Boljević, Nick Zangwill and Ian Verstegen for insightful discussions about the topic of this article; to Unitec Institute of Technology and Harvard Center for Renaissance Studies 'I Tatti' for the support they provided to the project and to Karen Wise for her help with written English.

² David Hume, *The History of England*, vol. 5, Philadelphia: Porter & Coats, 1875, 85.

³ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, 142.

⁴ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Kalligone*, Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1955, 175.

conceive of having certain rights *because* they live in a certain context. Consider the Samurai belief that the best way to try a new sword is to behead with it the first unknown stranger one happens to meet.⁵ (A known person, friend or foe, could not be used for the purpose because the judgment would not be disinterested.) Within such an ethical code, individuals obviously do not have the right to life if they happen to encounter an unknown Samurai who has just purchased a new sword. Assuming that all norms are context-generated, it is impossible to say anything against this particular custom. In his 1814 *Vom Beruf unserer Zeit*, Friedrich Carl von Savigny argued that legality reflects the specific character of a nation, like its language and morals.⁶ As Frederic Beiser describes it, Savigny denied that human beings can have their nature before they start participating in society.⁷ From such a position, Cortes' abolition of human sacrifices during his conquest of Mexico was just another act of oppression that he inflicted on the Aztecs.

Defining Romanticism

For the purposes of this paper, I propose to define the Romantic worldview as the thesis that human intellectual capacities result exclusively from membership of a collective, such as culture, ethnicity, linguistic group or similar—in other words, that no aspect of human reasoning, deciding, values or intellectual lives belongs to humans as humans, but is always derived from a group. The definition requires some fine-tuning. Contextualization is an important tool of historical understanding in general, but one needs to differentiate between contextualization and Romantic stereotyping. There is nothing particularly Romantic about the view that available contacts and intellectual exchange in a specific context may *enable* or *delimit* the thoughts and beliefs of individuals. Hardly anyone could deny that. Tycho Brache's astronomical observations enabled Kepler to describe mathematically the movements of planets; the lack of available mathematical and physical knowledge prevented Archimedes from developing quantum physics. In such cases it is possible to stipulate the specific knowledge (contacts, books available in a specific community and so on) that *enabled* or whose lack *prevented* specific intellectual creativity. The Romantic thesis, however, would be that human reasoning capacities are constitutionally *determined* by collective membership in such a way that individual interaction cannot change anything—just as no amount of training can help dogs see the colour red. The young Panofsky thus claimed that Polygnotus could not have conceived of nor painted a naturalistic landscape, because his mental

⁵ Mary Midgley, 'On Trying Out One's New Sword', in Mary Midgley, *Heart and Mind: the varieties of moral experience*, Brighton: Harvester, 1981, 69-75.

⁶ Friedrich Carl von Savigny, *Vom Beruf unserer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft*, Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1814, 8.

⁷ Frederic Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 222. Beiser's chapters about Justus Möser (63-96) and Savigny (214-252) contain very good descriptions of this position.

capacities were predetermined that way.⁸ Panofsky did not state the specific skills or knowledge that Polygnotus lacked in order to paint a naturalistic landscape; we do not even know whether Polygnotus possibly made a landscape painting that has not been preserved. Rather, presumably because no ancient Greek landscape paintings are known of, Panofsky assumed that as an ancient Greek painter Polygnotus was incapable of conceiving of a naturalistic landscape. Similar claims that certain ideas were inconceivable to the individuals belonging to certain groups simply because they belonged to those groups, proliferate, for instance, in Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*.⁹ Spengler's central thesis is that individuals' reasoning capacities are mere manifestations of their roles within specific cultures. Russian culture, for instance, is based on horizontality, and since the vertical dimension is inconceivable to Russians, no Russian can be an astronomer. (259, 921) Similarly, a real Russian cannot understand Darwin's theory of evolution. (31) Both Panofsky and Spengler thus argued that members of certain groups cannot form certain ideas because they are members of those groups, even when it is impossible to stipulate any specific reasons (e.g. the knowledge they lack) for this alleged incapacity.

It is fair to say that it is impossible to conceive of Romanticism in independence of the thesis that membership of a collective determines individuals' reasoning capacities. Nevertheless, the definition of the Romantic worldview proposed here will be reproached for including too much that does not belong to actual historical Romanticism. It lacks historical specificity: historically, Romanticism was a particular, mainly German, cultural phenomenon at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Romantic worldview as defined here would include Spengler and the young Panofsky as well as even more modern articulations of the same positions. It would include, for instance, the view that dominated much of English-speaking scholarship in the final decades of the twentieth century, that culture or linguistic community slice and structure one's reality so that even the most elementary perceptions are always already predetermined by one's cultural background.

The answer to this reproach is that this is precisely the wider perspective that I want to examine in this paper. My analysis pertains to such a wider picture. The phenomenon that interests me here are scholarly claims about the collective determination of individuals' reasoning capacities when such determination (limitations) cannot be proved, justified or documented. I call such positions Romantic in order to recognise their original historical articulation—but the paper analyses the general form of the argument and its conclusions are intended to have wider significance. With some exceptions, most of my examples, indeed, do not come from the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century but derive from German (art) historiography between 1890 and 1950, the era between Bismarck and Adenauer. I could have chosen examples from a different period—such as American scholarship of the 1990s—but the chosen era is well suited since it abounds in

⁸ Erwin Panofsky, 'Der Begriff des Kunstwillens', in Erwin Panofsky, *Deutschsprachige Aufsätze*, vol. 2, 1019-1034, 1023: 'weil er—kraft einer sein psychologisches Willen vorherbestimmenden Notwendigkeit—nichts anders als eine unnaturalistische Landschaft *wollen konnte*'.

⁹ Oswald Spengler, *Untergang des Abendlandes*, Munich: DTV 2003.

examples of the kind of argument I want to analyse. The 1890s was the period of the rise of the collectivist worldview in the intellectual life of German-speaking countries. In historiography, Karl Lamprecht's polemics brought about the replacement of the Rankean faith in Providence by a faith in human collectives as the determining force of historical processes.¹⁰ Lamprecht believed that he could describe the cultural stages of social development using a method resembling statistical induction, but without statistical surveys: the method was supposed to rely merely on the historian's impression about general trends.¹¹ About the same time, Alois Riegl introduced the concept of (collective) artistic will, *Kunstwollen*, that motivated artistic creativity and was assumed to belong to a group.¹² Heinrich Ritter von Srbik observed that in the 1890s the population of the Reich came into a state of search for a new order that 'included a comprehensive rejection of the liberal bourgeois worldview ... there arose populist nationalism deprived of the humanist spirit of the era of liberalism ... fear of life led to an escape in the demonism of power, while Christianity lost its force'.¹³ Vice versa, after 1945 the collectivist worldview lost its original appeal to the German intelligentsia: if the totality of human creativity and mental processes were always already predetermined by the nature of the group one belongs to, then this would apply to political systems as well. The undesirable implication in that case would be that the Third Reich was a spontaneous manifestation of the nature of German people.¹⁴

¹⁰ See Karl Lamprecht, *Alte und Neue Richtungen in der Geisteswissenschaft*, Berlin: Gaerther, 1896.

¹¹ Karl Lamprecht, 'Was ist Kulturgeschichte? Beitrag zu einer empirischen Historik', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1:1, 1896/7, 75-150, section vii.

¹² It is possible to argue that in his 1893 *Stilfragen. Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, Berlin: Richard Carl Schmidt 1923, he still assumed that *Kunstwollen* belongs to individuals. As Karl Swoboda and Otto Pächt pointed out (see their Introduction to Riegl's 1897/1898 *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*, Karl Swoboda and Otto Pächt, (eds, Graz: Herman Böhlhaus Nachfolge, 1966, 9-16, 12) in the *Historische Grammatik* he talks about ethnic groups as bearers of *Kunstwollen*. In his *Spätromische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn*, 2 vols, Vienna: K-K Hof-und-Staatsdruckerei, 1901, an era can be the bearer of *Kunstwollen* (vol. 1, 24).

¹³ Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, *Geist und Geschichte vom deutschen Humanismus bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich: Verlag F. Bruckmann, 1950, 245-246: 'Von etwa 1890 an, ... trat das deutsche Reichsvolk ... unter Zeichen eines nervösen Hastens, das reich war an dem Gefühl einer Zeitenwende, an der Sehnsucht nach einer neuen Ordnung, einer weitreichenden Abkehr und Überwindung der bürgerlichen liberalen Weltbilder, des nur naturwissenschaftlichen sowohl wie des idealistischen, des Positivismus und der neukantischen Philosophie. ... Zugleich erwächst ein Nationalismus, der frei ist vom Humanitätsgeist der liberalen Ära, 'völkisch' gesinnt, mit starkem rassischen Selbstbewußtsein und fern dem alten Europa- und Abendlandgedanken. ... Der Sinn für die Wirklichkeit des Metaphysischen ging vielen Deutschen verloren, die Lebensangst führte zu einem Sichflüchten in die Dämonie der Macht, das Christentum verlor weithin an seelenleitender Kraft'.

¹⁴ Even a strong proponent of collectivism and historicism such as Friedrich Meinecke sought to deny such implications after 1945. In his *Deutsche Katastrophe* he endeavoured to throw exclusive blame for Hitler's rise to power on Hindenburg's decisions, thus avoiding the implications of the collectivist view that ethnicity and social context determine the thinking and decisions of individuals. Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, Wiesbaden: Eberhard Brockhaus Verlag 1946, 95, 138.

Race and ethnicity

Racial and ethnicity-based theories of human creativity are a particularly good example of the phenomenon that I want to describe here—the situations when authors cannot justify, but they nevertheless make, claims that the intellectual and creative capacities of individuals derive from the collective membership of these individuals. In art history, a classic of this kind of reasoning is Heinrich Wölfflin. ‘It is easy to see’, Wölfflin says, ‘that the same element is to be found in different [artistic] styles of a country, that originate from land and race, so that, e.g. Italian baroque is not only different from but also the same as the Renaissance, because the racial type of the Italian man that created it remained unaltered’.¹⁵ There is no sensitivity to form that is independent from the historical situation, he says; nevertheless ‘all sociological explanations remain peripheral, as long as the central issue has not been addressed, and this is the national ways of forming and representing’. (213) Questions pertaining to national sensitivity become unavoidable, in his view, as soon as taste for form is addressed in relation to spiritual-moral moments.¹⁶ A specific identity of national spirit asserted itself through all the changes that German art underwent through its history, Wölfflin says.¹⁷

Statements like these proliferate in German art historiography in the period from the 1890s through 1945. In Kurt Gerstner’s *Sondergotik*, we read that artistic style is not a matter of history but of race.¹⁸ According to Kurt Karl Eberlein in his *Was ist deutsch in der deutschen Kunst*, art is created by the soil and blood of a race.¹⁹ Albert Erich Brickmann in his *Geist der Nationen* stated that conflicts and tensions through which Western art developed and acquired its form are founded in racial biology.²⁰ Art is the pouring out of the deepest instincts of a race, he said. (20) In his *Gotik und Renaissance*, Dagobert Frey claimed that mental capacities were not merely different from individual to individual but reflect ethnic differences and the differences between eras.²¹ In his 1942 *Englisches Wesen im Spiegel seiner Kunst* Frey assumed strong causal relationship between an artist’s ethnic background and the visual properties of his artworks. This led him to a series of bizarre attempts to reconstruct the precise tribal ancestry of various artists on the basis of the visual properties of their works.²² For instance, he endeavoured to differentiate between the English and Flemish aspects of Vanbrugh’s works, and argued that Hogarth was more Celtic than Germanic. (218, 306)

¹⁵ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl*, Munich: Bruckmann 1931, 6.

¹⁶ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Munich: Münchener Verlag, 1948, 9.

¹⁷ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Das Erklären von Kunstwerken*, Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1921.

¹⁸ Gerstner, Kurt: *Deutsche Sondergotik. Eine Untersuchung über das Wesen der deutschen Baukunst im späten Mittelalter*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1969, ix, see also 133.

¹⁹ Eberlein, Kurt Karl: *Was ist deutsch in der deutschen Kunst*, Leipzig: Verlag F. A. Seemann, 1933, 9.

²⁰ Albert Erich Brickmann, *Geist der Nationen. Italiener-Franzosen-Deutsche*, Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1938, 20.

²¹ Dagobert Frey, *Gotik und Renaissance als Grundlagen der modernen Weltanschauung*, Augsburg: Dr. Benno Filser Verlag, 1929, xxviii.

²² Dagobert Frey, *Englisches Wesen im Spiegel seiner Kunst*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1942. The first page of the book has an alternative title: *Englisches Wesen in der bildenden Kunst*.

One will find many examples of such views in the historiography of the era. None of these authors can support their theses with more than a couple of examples of artworks with some similar characteristics created by artists that shared the same ethnic background. Counterexamples, that are easy to find, are suppressed and methodology behind these generalising claims is remarkably feeble. At the same time, these authors made significant efforts to be *wissenschaftlich*, they paid great attention to proper methodology and scrupulously analysed documents they dealt with. And then, in certain matters and when it comes to specific topics, the entire scholarly façade disappears and we are presented with the wildest fantasies the results of their *Forschung*. Consider, for instance, the claims that Jesus Christ was Aryan. In a very learned and scholarly article published in 1908 in *Orientalische Litteratur-Zeitung* Paul Haupt went into great length to analyse and compare various Arabic and Hebrew words only to infer, suddenly, that because there *may* have been some Aryan settlements in Galilee in the eight century BCE, Jesus, who lived there eight centuries later, *must* have been Aryan.²³ The same claim was repeated by Hans Günther in his *Rasse und Stil*.²⁴ Some people at least thus took Haupt's fallacious argument seriously at the time—including Adolf Hitler, who thought that Jesus could not have been a Jew (and who also believed that Genghis Kahn was Aryan).²⁵ A different perspective on the origin of Christianity, it should be mentioned, was proposed at the time by a Viennese art history professor Josef Strzygowski. In his view, Christianity was the original religion of the Germanic North.²⁶ It was plagiarised by Jesus, who must have lived in the Jewish diaspora in Iran in his youth, where he learnt about it, and then conveyed it to the Romans, who made the Roman Church and brought Christianity back to the North. Strzygowski is notorious for his extravagant theories, including the claim that the Acropolis belongs to Nordic art and that Michelangelo was a Viking.²⁷ Nevertheless, he should not be easily discounted—as a professor and emeritus of the Art History Department of the University of Vienna, he was certainly a prominent member of the academic establishment.

One normally assumes that people, including scholars, adopt beliefs on rational grounds. Sometimes these beliefs are false, and one can see how they were rationally derived from false assumptions that the person thought to be true. There

²³ Paul Haupt, Paul, 'Die arische Abkunft Jesu und Seiner Jünger', *Orientalische Litteratur-Zeitung*, 11:5, 1908, 237-240.

²⁴ Günther, Hans, K. F., *Rasse und Stil*, Munich: J. S. Lehmanns Verlag, 1926, 60, 113.

²⁵ Fritz Wiedemann, *Der Mann der Feldherr werden wollte: Erlebnisse un Erfahrungen des Vorgesetzten Hitlers im I. Weltkrieg un seines späteren persönlichen Adjutanten*, Hanover 1964, 205, cited according to Robert Weite: 'Adolf Hitler's Anti-Semitism: A Study in History and Psychoanalysis', in Benjamin Wolman, ed., *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History*, New York: Harper, 1971, 192-230, 194.

²⁶ Josef Strzygowski, *Das indogermanische Ahnenerbe des deutschen Volkes und die Kunstgeschichte der Zukunft*, Vienna: Deutscher Verlag für Jugend und Volk, 1941, 78. Josef Strzygowski, *Europas Machtkunst im Rahmen des Erdkreises. Eine grundlegende Auseinandersetzung über Wesen und Entwicklung des zehntausendjährigen Wahnes: Gewaltmacht von Gottes Gnaden statt völkischer Ordnung, Kirche statt Glaube, Bildung statt Begabung: vom Nordstandpunkt plabmässig in die volksdeutsche Bewegung eingestellt*, Vienna: Wiener Verlag 1943, 38, 61, 186, 558.

²⁷ Strzygowski, *Ahnenerbe*, 17-28. Josef Strzygowski, *Die Deutsche Nordsee. Das Bekenntnis eines Kunstforschers*. Vienna: Adolf Luser Verlag, 1940, 172.

are, however, situations when it is impossible to explain rationally how a belief was acquired, and in such situations it is reasonable to attempt to explore the irrational forces and psychological motivations that may have generated it.

Consider Thomas Mann's claim that all Germans, by their nature, have a spontaneous understanding of Kant's philosophy, or his claim that France created Gothic from German spirit.²⁸ The latter view is parallel to Wilhelm Worringer's claim that Germanness is *conditio sine qua non* Gothic.²⁹ Or consider the attribution of the spirit of Vikings (as something ultra-Germanic) to Copernicus by Spengler or to Van Gogh by Wilhelm Pinder.³⁰ Such remarkable claims would normally disqualify their authors as serious men of letters, which we still know they were. But the claims become perfectly comprehensible when we take into account that they are about the ethnic group that Mann, Worringer, Spengler and Pinder identify with, ultimately therefore fantasies about *themselves* and their own grandiosity. When Wilhelm Pinder stated that no Maori but only a European can paint like Gauguin, he was actually talking about *his own* identity.³¹ He did not assert that only a Frenchman (which he himself was not) could paint like Gauguin; rather, he claimed that what made Gauguin a good painter was the same essence that *he* shared with Gauguin. If we consider these claims' capacity to contribute to their authors' self-esteem regulation, the motivation to make them becomes obvious. When Wölfflin, Dvořák and Worringer thus insisted that German art was not inferior to Italian, but merely different, or when Dvořák insisted that ancient Greek and Roman (i.e. non-Germanic) art is not superior to medieval art, these statements deny a specific type of perceived inferiority that, their authors are obviously concerned, could be attributed to the art of the ethnic group they identify with.³² The statement is, ultimately, not motivated by a desire to discuss the comparative evaluation of the art of different ethnic groups, but by a motivation to deny the negative implications of such evaluation for the self-esteem of their authors as members of one of these groups.

²⁸ Mann, Thomas: *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009, 190 and 413.

²⁹ Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, Munich: R. Piper, 1920, 29.

³⁰ Spengler, *Untergang*, 425. Wilhelm Pinder, *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*, Berlin: Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt 1926, 86. For the German appropriations of Van Gogh, see Ron Manheim, 'The 'Germanic' van Gogh: A Case Study of Cultural Annexation', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 19 (1989), 277-288.

³¹ Wilhelm Pinder: *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*, Berlin: Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt 1926, 44.

³² Heinrich Wölfflin's *Italien und das Deutsche Formgefühl*, Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1931 is fully dedicated to this problem. Wilhelm Worringer, *Griechentum und Gotik. Vom Weltreich des Hellenismus*, Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1928, 8-9. For Dvořák's rejection of the Renaissance see Max Dvořák, *Das Rätsel der Brüder van Eyck*, Munich: Artur Rosenauer, 1925, 145, reprint Vienna: WUV, 1999 and also Matthew Rampley, 'Max Dvořák: Art History and the Crisis of Modernity', *Art History*, 26 (2003), 214-237, esp. 219. Max Dvořák, 'Idealismus und Naturalismus in der Gotschen Skulptur und Malerei', in Max Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, Munich: Piper, 1924, 43-147, 45-46.

Self-esteem regulation

It is reasonable to suspect that a scholarly claim is motivated by self-esteem regulation when it is irrational, unjustified or poorly argued in comparison with the author's usual scholarly standards, while, at the same time, it presents the author or the group he or she identifies with in a favourable (or less negative than one might have expected) light.³³ For instance, the author may make claims that he or she would have known to be false, or his or her scholarly arguments may suddenly drop below their usual standard when he or she presents a claim about the group he or she belongs to. It cannot be just an accidental omission if the author of a carefully argued scholarly article makes a serious logical blunder when he attempts to prove that Jesus Christ shared with him the same racial background. Some decades ago it was popular to argue that various cultures may operate with different logics—the beliefs of the African Azande in witches were commonly stated as an example of a different kind of rationality. But it would be hard to see in the non-standard reasoning practices of German scholars a similar manifestation of cultural diversity, since their reasoning mostly follows expected patterns and collapses only in issues that pertain to their self-esteem.

Problems with self-esteem regulation, at the same time, constitute the central aspect of narcissistic psycho-pathology. Narcissism was originally conceptualised by Freud, in the second half of the twentieth century significant breakthroughs in its study were made by Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut, and by today it is a well-researched pathology in psychiatry and experimental psychology.³⁴ The core aspect

³³ Certainly, this is not an absolute rule, in the sense that an author may have had different motivation as well. The situation is the same as in the case of any other attribution of motivation to historical figures—there is always the possibility that ultimately some alternative explanation may make more sense. When reading a report by a Venetian ambassador to the Council of Ten, elementary charity in interpretation requires one to assume that he wanted to present the events he witnessed as accurately as possible. However, the ambassador may have intentionally misrepresented the situation in order to please some powerful members of the Council, and we may learn about this from a letter to his friend. Nevertheless, as long as we do not have such a letter, the best we can do is to assume that the ambassador wrote his report in good faith. Similarly, it is always possible that some other motivation stands behind an irrational claim that appears to assuage a historian's insecurities—but as long as that other motivation cannot be documented, we have to rely on what we can justifiably infer. Otherwise historical interpretation becomes a free for all business. Strzygowski, for instance, *might* have written his works with the intention to mock Nazi propaganda, but as long as we have no documents that suggest this, and we know that he enthusiastically collaborated with Nazi publishers, we have to interpret his writings on the basis of what we can read in them.

³⁴ See Andrew Morrison, ed., *Essential Papers on Narcissism*, New York: New York University Press, 1986, for the most important papers on narcissism. See also Elsa Ronningstam, ed., *Disorders of Narcissism. Diagnostic, Clinical and Empirical Implications*, Northvale: Jason Aronson, 2000. Elsa Ronningstam, *Identifying and Understanding the Narcissistic Personality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Also, Otto Kernberg and Hans-Peter Hartmann, eds, *Narzismus. Grundlagen-Störungen-Therapie*, Stuttgart: Schattauer, 2006. For the connection between psychoanalytic, psychological and psychiatric approaches see Nicole Cain, Aaron Pincus and Emily Ansell, 'Narcissism at Crossroads: Phenotypic description of pathological narcissism across clinical theory, social/personality psychology and psychiatric diagnosis', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28 (2008) 638-656. A good summary of the difference between Kernberg's and Kohut's approaches is in Glen Gabbard, *Psychodynamic Psychiatry*, American Psychiatric Press, 2000, 463-489.

of narcissism is dysregulated, vulnerable, unstable and fragile self-esteem that is maintained by compensatory self-aggrandizement.³⁵ In simple words, individuals who need to preserve self-esteem will engage in self-esteem defensive behaviour. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* lists nine symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder; not all of them can be explicitly manifested in scholarship (for instance, exploitative behaviour or the absence of empathy) but grandiosity, the exaggeration of one's achievements, fantasies of unlimited power and envy can.³⁶ Grandiosity often has the form of self-aggrandizing attributions that enhance self-esteem. It generates fantasies that concentrate on being special, exceptional and overcompensate for the defects that one believes oneself to have.³⁷ Psychoanalytic literature describes that narcissism affects interpersonal relationships because communication with other individuals is primarily used to enhance and protect self-esteem while 'Life is a search for pseudo-status, an empty series of aspirations that serves no purpose other than self-enhancement'.³⁸ In the context of historiographical work, I will argue, this is precisely what happens with scholarship, which takes the form of an opportunity to fabricate self-esteem enhancing compensatory narratives.

I say 'takes the form' because the intention of this paper is not to diagnose individual historians as narcissists. As mentioned, a number of important symptoms of narcissism cannot even be manifested in scholarly writing. The aetiology of narcissism is unknown and no amount of study of the childhood of individuals can tell us that a person had to become narcissistic.³⁹ The introduction of research on narcissism in this context therefore does not constitute an argument *ad hominem*. Also, everyone is narcissistic to a certain degree, and establishing a narcissistic motive behind a certain specific statement or belief does not really say much more about the person whose motive it is. Rather, the point I want to make is that we are dealing with scholarly claims which cannot be understood as having been rationally generated, while the motivation to make them becomes fully comprehensible only once one takes into account their capacity to enhance their authors' self-esteem. At the same time, there exists a significant corpus of research

³⁵ A comprehensive description is in Ronningstam, *Identifying*, 69-112. A good summary is in Nancy McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis*, Guilford Press, 1994, 168-188. For the relationship between self-esteem and narcissism see also Virgil Zeigler-Hill, 'Discrepancies Between Implicit and Explicit Self-Esteem: Implications for Narcissism and Self-Esteem Instability' *Journal of Personality*, 74:1, (2006) 119-143 and Christian Jordan et al. 'Secure and Defensive High Self-Esteem' *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, 85:5, 2003, 969-978. See also general descriptions in Arnold Cooper, 'Narcissism' and Otto Kernberg, 'Factors in the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personalities' in Morrison, *Papers*, 112-143 and 213-244.

³⁶ For a discussion of the development of DSM criteria of narcissism see Theodore Millon, 'DSM narcissistic Personality Disorder. Historical Reflections and Future Directions', in Ronningstam, *Disorders*, 75-101.

³⁷ See Ronningstam, *Identifying*, 78.

³⁸ Ronningstam, *Identifying*, 69. Millon, 'DSM', 95.

³⁹ For aetiology of narcissism see Ronningstam, *Identifying* 48-69, Otto Kernberg, 'Pathological Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder' in Ronningstam, *Disorders*, 29-51, 37-41 as well as Paulina Kernberg: 'Developmental Aspects of Normal and Pathological Narcissism', in Ronningstam, *Disorders*, 103-120, 114-117.

about such motivation in psychology and psychoanalysis which suggests that we are dealing with behaviour that would normally be qualified as a symptom of narcissism. More generally, I will argue that the Romantic worldview as defined in the opening section of this paper cannot be even *articulated* without making assumptions that are normally regarded as symptoms of narcissistic personality structure. My thesis is that the general collectivist assumptions of the Romantic worldview harbour significant internal contradictions and that insofar as these contradictions were overlooked by its protagonists, they were overlooked in order to sustain the positions that enhanced these protagonists' self-esteem. In other words, scholars do not write nonsense that contributes to their self-esteem regulation accidentally, but *because* it contributes to their self-esteem regulation.

The introduction of psychohistory as a tool necessary in order to understand positions in scholarship may raise some eyebrows. Psychohistory—the psychoanalytic study of historical figures—was popular in the 1970s, but has lost much of its appeal since then.⁴⁰ The masterpiece of this type of scholarship is Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther*.⁴¹ That book presents psychoanalytic explanations of various unusual moments in Luther's life, his rage, anxieties, ravings, what Erasmus called *furor germanicus*. Some psychoanalysts have complained that Erikson overemphasized Luther's anal language and 'excremental experiences' in his explanations—but nevertheless, his book provided a valuable psychoanalytic perspective on the unusual aspects of Luther's personality that abound in his biography.⁴² The book also discusses the content of Luther's lectures side by side with psychoanalytic insights, but generally, Erikson points out that Luther's systematic theological accomplishments are outside the scope of the book. (249) Its target is the explanation of biographical facts and it is not meant to be a contribution to intellectual history. The same applies to other prominent writings on psychohistory of the era.⁴³ Their intention was not to explain psychoanalytically the factors that made scientists, philosophers or men of letters acquire certain beliefs or formulate theories, since one would normally expect that the content of these beliefs was rationally generated. The problem this paper deals with is, however, what happens when scholarly views (of historians, in this case) *could not* have been rationally generated. The interpretative contribution of research on narcissism and self-esteem regulation makes it clear that individuals make certain types of claims when they need to make them. It provides what seems to be the only available credible explanation for the type of irrational scholarly behaviour that I have described—and my more general thesis will be that without such narcissistically

⁴⁰ For psychohistory see Joan Scott, 'The Incommensurability of Psychoanalysis and History', *History and Theory*, 51:1, 2012, 63-83.

⁴¹ Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther*, New York: Norton, 1962.

⁴² Peter Loewenberg, *Decoding the Past. The Psychohistorical Approach*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983., 25; Bruce Mazlich: 'What is Psycho-history' in George Kren and Leon H. Rappoport, *Varieties of Psychohistory*, New York: Springer, 1976, 17-37, 23

⁴³ See for instance Loewenberg, *Decoding the Past*; George Kren and Leon Rappoport, eds, *Varieties of Psychohistory*, New York: Springer, 1976. Bruce Mazlich, ed., *Psychoanalysis and History*, New York: Grosslet and Dunlap, 1971. Benjamin Wolman, *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History*, New York: Harper, 1971.

motivated defence strategies, the motivation to articulate what I have called the Romantic worldview becomes incomprehensible.

Narcissism in scholarship: denial, envy and expansive cognitive style

In his *Italien und das Deutsche Formgefühl*, Wölfflin described the unease of German scholars about the fact that Dürer sought to learn from a foreign art, that of the Italian Renaissance.⁴⁴ This unease that permeates the attitudes towards the Renaissance of the German scholarship of the Wilhelmine and Weimar era finely illustrates the psychoanalytic descriptions of denial as a defence mechanism.

The analysis of the irrational aspects of the Romantic worldview presented in this paper is *de facto* an analysis of denials. Psychoanalytic literature provides extensive descriptions of the way an encounter with an anxiety situation activates instant denial that results in the defensive distortions of perception and cognition.⁴⁵ Denial is normally classified as one of the immature defence mechanisms ('immature' because it relies on a large degree of reality distortion) and psychological studies have shown that immature defence styles are associated with self-esteem instability.⁴⁶ It is a simplistic thought process in which a negative marker (no, not) is attached to an anxiety arousing thought in order to turn it into something less threatening.⁴⁷ In his extensive presentation of the psychoanalytic theories of denial, Theodore Dorpat describes denial as 'an unconscious defense mechanism against unpleasurable ideas, affects and perceptions' which 'causes an arrest of cognition regarding something disturbing to the subject'.⁴⁸ In such situations, the cognitive process is aborted before it can become a verbal thought. (3) In Dorpat's description, the fantasy attacks on the anxiety-generating thought-content (he uses the term 'painful object') 'cause an arrest of the subject's capacities for rational thought and communication regarding the painful object'. (10) 'The cognitive arrest phase is usually followed by some form of screen behaviour whose content is often the opposite from what has just been denied. An individual's

⁴⁴ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Italien und das Deutsche Formgefühl*, Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1931, 1.

⁴⁵ Henry Krystal, 'Affect Regulation and Narcissism. Trauma Alexithmia, and Psychosomatic Illness in narcissistic Patients,' in Ronningstam, *Disorders*, 299-325, 315.

⁴⁶ Virgil Zeigler-Hill, Sumeer Chadha Lindsey Osterman: 'Psychological defense and self esteem instability: Is defense style associated with unstable self-esteem?' *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42:2, 2008, 348-364. In another interesting study Phebe Cramer compared the use of denial, IQ and ego development and found out that high levels of ego development were associated with high intelligence and low use of denial or with low intelligence and high use of denial—whereas low levels of ego development were associated with high intelligence and high use of denial, or with low intelligence and low use of denial. At average levels of IQ, denial was unrelated to ego development. Phebe Cramer 'Ego Functions and Ego Development: Defense Mechanisms and Intelligence as Predicators of Ego Level', *Journal of Personality*, 67:5, 1999, 735-760, 754.

⁴⁷ Cramer, 'Ego Functions', 736. Henry Prather Laughlin, in his *The Ego and Its Defenses*, New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1970, 57, defined denial as 'a primitive and desperate unconscious method of coping with otherwise intolerable conflict, anxiety, and emotional distress and pain'. The use of denial is opposition to the vital ego functions of perception and memory, it becomes less available as the ego matures and its operation 'is likely in general to be in inverse ratio to one's level of emotional maturity'. (57) See also Cramer 'Ego Functions' for an experimental confirmation of this view.

⁴⁸ Theodore Dorpat, *Denial and Defense in Therapeutic Situation*, Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1985, 1.

unconscious disavowal of his or her weakness, for example, may be followed and supported by a boastful assertion of strength'. (13) The subject thus strives 'to substitute a wished-for relation for the painful object relation destroyed in fantasy during the antecedent cognitive arrest phase'. (14)

The 'unpleasurable thought' for German scholars in the case of the Italian Renaissance was the recognition of someone else's, not one's own, achievement. Envy is one of the major manifestations of self-esteem disturbances and one of diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality disorder. It occurs when a person's self-esteem is threatened by someone who is perceived as better, which results in narcissistic humiliation and decreased self-esteem.⁴⁹ The manoeuvres to overcome the situation include diminishing others' accomplishments or self-aggrandizing oneself. (38) In the reactions of German scholarship to the Renaissance, one finds examples of both reactions—in the form of the denial of the Renaissance and its significance or in the form of the claim that it was a German achievement. The reactions closely follow Dorpat's descriptions of outright denial and screening behaviour.

A good example is Spengler, for whom the Renaissance was merely a rejection of the Gothic that was limited to Florence; Siena remained Gothic he says, Rome baroque, Northern Italy was Gothic with Byzantine elements. (300-303). In his view, Renaissance has purely the character of an anti-movement; it lacks true depth, both in the sense of the idea and in the sense of appearance. (300, 350) It never brought about a new architectural idea.⁵⁰ The frozen academism of Palladio's architecture one can look upon today only with scepticism (41), he says, while Palladio's architectural treatise (i.e. one of the most published architecture books in history) did not have any impact. (534) This series of straightforward denials does not prevent Spengler from engaging in screening behaviour in the form of the Germanic appropriation of the Renaissance. He asserts that the Renaissance produced no great personalities between Dante and Michelangelo (300) but then proceeds with the claim that Filippino Lippi, Ghirlandaio, Botticelli and even Leonardo are more Dutch (i.e. Germanic) than ancient,⁵¹ and that early Florentine painting as well as Alberti's and Brunelleschi's discovery of perspective belong to Northern art. (308, 310) Similarly, for Strzygowski, the humanist worldview that derives from the Renaissance is a superstition equivalent to the belief that Earth is the centre of the Universe.⁵² The Northern, Gothic, strength of form was misdirected by the Renaissance into scientific studies.⁵³ In his view, it is a mistake to attribute to Italy and the Mediterranean a strong talent for form.⁵⁴ 'Rome never achieved anything', Strzygowski says, 'not even the Italians of the Renaissance. They merely classified and scientifically organised the forms that were brought from the North'. (277) At the same time, appropriation comes in the form of the claims that

⁴⁹ Ronningstam, *Identifying*, 38 and 89-91.

⁵⁰ 'Ein neuer Baugedanke ist nicht hervorgetreten'. Spengler, *Untergang*, 303.

⁵¹ Spengler, *Untergang*, 304.

⁵² Josef Strzygowski, *Die Krisis Der Geisteswissenschaften*, Vienna: Kunstverlag Anton Schroll, 1923, 2.

⁵³ Strzygowski, *Krisis*, 198. Similarly in Strzygowski, *Europas Machtkunst*, 233.

⁵⁴ Strzygowski, *Machtkunst*, 277.

Michelangelo was a man of the North and so were Leonardo, Giorgione and Raphael.⁵⁵ Contradictory views of this kind—that the Renaissance did not happen or that its art was worthless, while at the same time it was a great achievement of the Germanic race—can only be explained following Dorpat's model in which outright denial is accompanied by screening behaviour.

There are also cases of pure screening behaviour, appropriation pure and simple. Hans Sedlmayr's proposal to redefine the Renaissance so that it could include Goethe can only be understood as such a desperate self-aggrandization manoeuvre.⁵⁶ According to Hans Jantzen, the novelty of Giotto's style came from copying Gothic precedents.⁵⁷ A particularly comprehensive project of the Germanic appropriation of the Italian Renaissance was presented by Ludwig Woltmann in his 1905 book *Die Germanen und die Renaissance*.⁵⁸ According to Woltmann, the presence of the Nordic race directly determines the cultural value of a certain population. The implication is that there must have been very little Latin or Etruscan blood in Italians by the time of the Renaissance. In order to prove this he embarks on extensive reconstructions of the Germanic origins of the names of famous Italians and asserts that the names of Dante Alighieri, Leon Battista Alberti, Arnolfo di Cambio, Filippo Brunelleschi, Donato Bramante, Michelangelo Buonarroti and Lorenzo Ghiberti are of Germanic origin.⁵⁹ His list of popes who allegedly had Germanic names takes a whole page. (38-39) Other prominent Italians, who did not have Germanic names were nevertheless said to have been blond, as we learn about Andrea Palladio, Michelozzo Michelozzi and Luca della Robbia. (71, 76)

Historiographical fantasies of this kind also illustrate what is described as the 'expensive cognitive style' that is characteristic of narcissistic personality structure.⁶⁰ Expansive cognitive style is nondelusional, but nevertheless minimally constrained with reality; it takes liberties with facts in order to redeem self-illusion. (78, 84) It is marked by 'undisciplined imagination preoccupied with self-glorifying fantasies' that takes 'liberties with facts, embellishing them and even lying to redeem their illusions about their self-worth'. (84) A particularly good example—because of his huge stature as a historian—is the father of the Germanic appropriation of the Italian Renaissance, Leopold Ranke himself. As the Nazi historian Heinrich Ritter von Srbik stated in full seriousness, it was Ranke who described how Germanic and Romanic nations during the Renaissance shared the same level of cultural development (nothing less than 'gleichgeartete Kulturhöhe') and their joint cultural achievements in various fields, including artistic creativity.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Strzygowski, *Nordseele*, for Michelangelo see the chapter 'Michelangelo als Nordmensch', 143-177; for other artists 374.

⁵⁶ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Zur Revision der Renaissance', in Sedlmayr, *Epochen und Werke*, Vienna: Mäander, 1977, 202-234

⁵⁷ Jantzen, Hans: 'Giotto und das Gotische Still,' *Das Werk des Künstlers*, 5-6 (1939), 441-454.

⁵⁸ Ludwig Woltmann, *Die Germanen und die Renaissance*, Leipzig: Thüringische Verlagsanstalt, 1905.

⁵⁹ Woltmann, *Germanen*, 69, 70, 72, 117.

⁶⁰ See in particular Theodore Millon, 'DSM narcissistic Personality Disorder. Historical Reflections and Future Directions' in Ronningstam, ed., *Disorders*, 75-101, 78, 84 and 86.

⁶¹ 'Einer Einheit mit naturhafter und geistiger Verwandtschaft, gleichgearteter Kulturhöhe und Rechtsordnung, gemenischaflichen Unternehmungen ... gleichgearteten staatlichen und

The core thesis of Ranke's *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494-1514* is that there exists deep unity of Romance and Germanic nations that separates them from Slavic, Latvian and Hungarian ethnic groups, even when they share the same Latin Christianity.⁶² The claim is particularly hard to justify: during the period Ranke's book describes the Hungarians, for instance, certainly had more interaction with Italy than the Danes; it is unclear how one can measure the nature of unity between different nations nor how to justify the claim that, for instance, the Germans are somehow more similar to the Portuguese than the Czechs. In order to defend his claim, Ranke comes up with a series of remarkable claims that he certainly knew to be false. He thus claims that during the period he is writing about Slavic and Hungarian nations did not exercise independent influence. (10) But this is simply not true; in the given period, Poland, Bohemia and Hungary were ruled by the Jagiellonian dynasty whose kings certainly were independent. He also claims that only Germanic and Romance nations participated in the 'Idea of world discovery'.⁶³ The claim may appear plausible merely because only Romance and Germanic nations have access to the Atlantic: one cannot expect landlocked countries such as Hungary or Bohemia to embark on maritime explorations. But it is nevertheless false: Russians certainly participated in the 'Idea of world discovery' through their centuries long systematic exploration of Siberia. Their first expeditions crossed Siberia and reached the Pacific in 1639 and Alaska in 1732. Ranke also asserts that only Romance and Germanic nations had heavily armoured knights — again a claim that he must have known to be wrong: heavily armoured Serbian knights fought against Timur in the battle of Ankara in 1402; famously, the Hungarian king Louis II Jagiellon fell from his horse and drowned in a river during the battle of Mohacs in 1526 because of his heavy armour.⁶⁴ The tombstones of Hungarian aristocrats often show them in knightly armour.⁶⁵ But the most bizarre of all Ranke's arguments is the claim that only Romance and Germanic nations developed cities. (14) It is impossible to conceive how this absurd claim came about — and, even more remarkably, in the very next sentence Ranke actually talks about Moscow, which is arguably a city and certainly not a Germanic or Romance one.

It is fair to wonder what may have gone wrong if a series of such bizarre claims comes from a historian well-known for his scrupulous dedication to facts, a

gesellschaftlichen Institutionen und gemeinsamen geistigen Schöpfungen (... künstlerisches Schaffen)' Srbik, *Geist und Geschichte*, vol. 1, 244.

⁶² Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494-1514*, Hamburg: Standard Verlag 1957.

⁶³ For 'die Idee der Weltdeckung' he says that it would be unnecessary 'die Teilnahme unserer Völker an diesen Dingen ... zu entwickeln; unnötig weiläufig zu beweisen, daß sie ihnen ausschließend eigen sind', Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker*, 17.

⁶⁴ 'Weder an Rittertum noch an der Entwicklung der Städte haben andere Nationen teilgenommen'. Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker*, 14. The next sentence explains that under *Rittertum* he specifically means the use of heavy armour: 'Noch im Jahr 1501 baten die Russen zu Moskau, ihnen einen Ritter, einen eisernen Mann, wie sie sagten zu senden; und staunten ihn als ein Wunder an'. *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁵ I am indebted to Dora Sallay for showing me a particularly fine collection of the photographs of these tombstones collected by Gergely Buzas.

scholar who declares in the Introduction to his book that his aim is to describe ‘how things were’. It does not help to say merely that his anti-Slavic sentiments broke through, that his intention was to construct Slavs as ‘the other’ of European historiography. True, in the same book he praised the extermination [*ausrotten*] of the Slavic population west of the Odra as a ‘great achievement’ [*glänzender Erfolg*], but this does not explain his need to assert the unity of Germanic and Romance nations.⁶⁶ The motivation becomes clear only when Ranke says that in the period the book describes, the Italians developed their intellectual achievement to a level of perfection which to Germanic-Romance nations has ever since appeared to be the highest state of civilization [*Bildung*] that *they* have achieved.⁶⁷ The pronoun ‘they’ explains everything: it suddenly makes the Italian Renaissance a *German* achievement as well.

Inconceivability

Haughtiness—disdain for others—another important characteristic of narcissistic personality structure, can be seen in the Romantic worldview’s classificatory zeal and the conviction that individuals’ intellectual (in)capacities can be established as inferior to those of the historian by a simple classificatory act, purely on the basis of these individuals’ participation in their community. The act of classification enables a historian to assume a position exalted above historical figures, whose mental, intellectual and creative capacities are said to be determined by their collective. Insofar as claims about individuals’ incapacities are based on arbitrary generalisation, this is a methodological error that can only be explained by the fantasy about one’s own superiority: the historian is saying that the members of a specific collective are deprived of specific intellectual capacities that he or she has (or could have).⁶⁸ Contextualisation, which is a necessary tool of historical research thus becomes an occasion to manufacture gratification in the form of a self-aggrandizing narrative. We have thus seen, for instance, how Panofsky attributed to Polygnotus the incapacity to conceive of naturalistic landscape as well as Pinder’s claims about the inabilities of Maori as painters and Ranke’s bizarre claims about the incapacities of non-Germanic and non-Romance nations. Similarly, in Spengler’s *Decline of the West* one reads—besides the claims about Russians’ incapacities cited above—that a ‘real’ Arab cannot grasp the Copernican system (31) as well as that ancient Greek or Roman historians were unable to conceive of writing about more distant past but only about contemporary events. (13)

⁶⁶ ‘Glänzender Erfolg’. Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker*, 12.

⁶⁷ ‘...ihre geistige Kraft zu einer Vollendung zu entwickelten, welche den germanisch-romanischen Nationen immer als eine höchste Stufe Bildung erschienen ist, die sie bis jetzt erreicht haben’. Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker*, 105. Note the phrase ‘die sie’ that expresses appropriation.

⁶⁸ Consider once again Pinder’s claim that only a European, and not a Maori can paint like Gauguin. Pinder himself cannot paint like Gauguin, but he is a European, therefore he is suggesting that in some circumstances he still should be able to do it, while a Maori is supposed to be constitutionally deprived of this possibility.

Since arbitrary generalisations of this kind cannot be methodologically justified, it is important to consider the extra-theoretical motivation to generate them. In psychological literature such arbitrary assertions (prejudiced evaluations of others based on their membership of specific groups) are called stereotyping. In the context of historical research, these are crude methodological errors—but they become explainable if one takes into account the body of psychological research that relates expression of prejudices to self-esteem maintenance. Three psychological experiments carried out by Steven Fein and Steven Spencer are particularly interesting in this sense.⁶⁹ In one study they tested subjects, divided in two groups, for prejudices against homosexuals. The two groups were statistically equivalent and one could have expected to receive the same average responses from both groups. The subjects in the first (control) group showed little or no bias on average. The subjects in the second group were given a bogus and unfair IQ test in which they received disappointing results before being tested for their prejudices. As it turned out, these subjects' responses in the second test showed a significant level of prejudice.⁷⁰

In another study, the same authors examined how self-esteem regulation affects prejudices against members of an ethnic group. This time too, the participants in the experiment were divided into two groups. One (control) group clearly showed ethnic prejudices. The members of the other group underwent a 'self-affirmation procedure' before testing. This is an established procedure in psychology; the participants were given a series of values (business, art, social life) and asked to circle one value that was most important to them personally and comment on it. After this self-affirmation procedure, this group manifested almost no prejudice in the stereotyping test. The conclusion is that opportunities for self-affirmation can reduce the likelihood that individuals will derogate members of stereotyped groups.

In the third study all participants were given a bogus IQ test and after receiving a randomly generated score (in some cases low, in others high; they thought the test was genuine) they completed a questionnaire that measured their self-esteem. As expected, those participants who received low scores on the bogus IQ test scored low on the self-esteem test as well. When they were subsequently tested for their ethnic prejudices, such participants scored much higher than those participants who received good scores on the bogus IQ test. After this, self-esteem was measured once again and it turned out that it improved substantially in the case of those participants who originally had a low score on the self-esteem test and were given the chance to pass a negative judgment on the stereotyped target (ethnic minority) in the second test. The remarkable result is that negatively evaluating

⁶⁹ Steven Fein and Steven Spencer, 'Prejudice as Self-Image maintenance: Affirming the Self Through Derogating Others', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73:1, 1997, 31-44.

⁷⁰ See Gombrich's discussion similar phenomena in relation to scholarly interpretations in Ernst Gombrich (with Peter Burke), 'Ernst Gombrich discusses the concept of cultural history with Peter Burke', *The Listener*, 27th December, Vol. 90, 1973, pp.881-883.
<http://gombricharchive.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/showdoc19.pdf> accessed on 12 November, 2013.

others has the potential to restore a positive self-image. Stereotyping is thus one of several possible self-image-maintenance strategies.

It is very difficult to find an alternative explanation for (and the reception of) the scholarly claims based on stereotyping that have been described previously in this article. Fein's and Spencer's experiments present a reasonable explanation when no reasons that led scholars to adopt stereotyping beliefs can be stated, or reasons that can be stated are systematically fallacious in the stereotyping direction. A good example is Erwin Panofsky's claim that perspective could not have been discovered before the early Renaissance because space was not yet conceived as homogenous.⁷¹ The thesis had an exceptionally wide reception in twentieth century scholarship; its obvious implication is the claim that before the Renaissance (or in non-'Western' cultures) people were constitutionally incapable of comprehending perspectival drawings.⁷² Panofsky supported the thesis by asserting, on the basis of a section in Euclid's *Optics*, that Greek vision was substantially different from modern vision. He also claimed that seeing things in perspective is a product of early Renaissance cultural developments: the ability to comprehend perspectival representations cannot be a natural trait of human vision since the geometrical construction of perspectival drawings is defined for a flat plane whereas the surface of the retina is curved. All three arguments are fallacious. Considering the definition of homogeneity (that Panofsky took from Cassirer) the thesis that space was not conceived of as homogenous before the early Renaissance is absurd, since it suggests that before that time people could not figure out that distance between points A and B must be the same as between B and A — that, for instance, the length of a wall is the same regardless from which end one measures it.⁷³ Panofsky's claim that ancient Greeks' vision was differently organised from modern relied on a misunderstanding of the technical terminology of the Greek original of Euclid's *Optics*.⁷⁴ As for the curvature of the retina, we do not see the retinal image but a perspectival drawing, and such drawings are geometrically constructed to deliver to the eye a bundle of light rays equivalent to the one that would reach the eye from

⁷¹ Erwin Panofsky, 'Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'', in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1924–1925*, Fritz Saxl, ed., Leipzig: Taubner, 1927.

⁷² The idea has been subsequently defended by Samuel Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, New York: Basic Books, 1975, 161; Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750–1950*, London: Faber and Faber, 1965, 285 and James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, 24. A more radical version of the argument is the one by Hubert Damisch who argued that Brunelleschi discovered the geometrical construction of perspective without relying on the concept of homogenous space (*The Origin of Perspective*, English translation by John Goodman, Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1995, 154) and Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier, who argued that the homogeneity of space became conceivable only in the eighteenth century (*Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1997, 21, 26, 98). For a survey of this debate see Branko Mitrović, 'Leon Battista Alberti and the Homogeneity of Space', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 63:4, 2004, 424–439.

⁷³ See Mitrović, 'Alberti and Homogeneity'.

⁷⁴ The crucial refutation of Panofsky's interpretation of Euclid is in C. D. Brownson, 'Euclid's *Optics* and its Compatibility with Linear Perspective', *Archive for History of Exact Sciences*, 26:1, 1982, 165–193. See also W. Knorr, 'On the principle of linear perspective in Euclid's *Optics*', *Centaurus*, 34, June–December 1991, 193–210 and Richard Tobin, 'Ancient perspective and Euclid's *Optics*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 53, 1990, 14–41.

the object represented by the drawing. While it is not unusual that scholars make mistakes like these, it has to be recognised that all three errors were made in order to support a stereotyping claim about the incapacity of pre-*quattrocento* and 'non-Western' collectives to comprehend perspectival drawings. Modern 'Westerners' supposedly have this capacity that others do not have. Panofsky made no errors in the opposite direction. It is also interesting to think that at the time these claims were made, there were plenty of scholars who could have realised that Panofsky's arguments were fallacious, but rebuttals were made only many decades later — a phenomenon that can only be explained by assuming that many scholars wanted to believe that Panofsky was right.⁷⁵

Free will

Stereotyping classificatory zeal in history writing thus reveals the historian's fantasy about his or her own grandiosity. Historical figures are assumed to be predictable and their reasoning capacities explainable using classification into ethnic, cultural or historical contexts. Self-esteem maintenance efforts of this kind must result in the dismissal of those positions that would disable such a strategy. This pertains particularly to those positions that would allow the historical figures (or anyone else, for that matter) to have reasoning capacities equivalent to those of the historian. An example of this is the Romantic tradition's rejection of (and one could sometimes say the rage caused by) the idea of cosmopolitanism. This rejection may seem bizarre if one does not understand it as directed against the idea that understanding individuals from other contexts has to be an understanding of them as humans with reasoning capacities equivalent to one's own. Already Herder rejected cosmopolitan views because of their association with the Enlightenment.⁷⁶ Julius Langbehn dismissed Lessing's cosmopolitanism; Karl Lamprecht reproached Ranke for the same reason; Spengler thought that the cosmopolitan worldview is a product of ultimate urban decadence; Hans Sedlmayr identified it with the 'terror of reason'; Wilhelm Pinder criticized nineteenth century 'madness of rootlessness'.⁷⁷ Erich

⁷⁵ As for the argument about the curvature of the retina, I am unaware of refutations published before the 1960s. Brownson's article 'Euclid's *Optics*' that pointed out that Panofsky misunderstood Euclid's *Optics* came out only in 1982 while the refutation of the view that homogenous space was inconceivable before the Renaissance came out in 2004.

⁷⁶ For Herder see Brian Whitton, 'Herder's Critique of the Enlightenment: Cultural Community versus Cosmopolitan Rationalism', *History and Theory*, 27:1, 1988, 146-168, 154-155.

⁷⁷ Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936., 246-247. Karl Lamprecht, 'Alte und neue Richtungen in Geisteswissenschaft,' in Karl Lamprecht, *Alternative zu Ranke*, Lothar Reher (ed.) Leipzig: Reclam, 1988. 143-207, 166. Spengler saw in cosmopolitanism hatred of destiny; the *Weltbürger* and dreamer of eternal piece are spiritual leaders of *Fellachentum*, the ultimate phase of civilizational decline. (*Untergang*, 780) Sedlmayr, in his *Verlust der Mitte*, Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1948, discussed Vaudoyer's project of a spherical house for a cosmopolite: 'Und in der Tat, wie könnte der 'Kosmopolit', der heimat- und bodenlose Zukunftsmensch, anders hausen als in der Bodenlosigkeit des Kugelhauses, dessen Tyrannei er sich — Anbeter der geometrischen Vernunft — freiwillig unterwirft'. (99) For a general discussion of the phenomenon, see Kurt Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung. Die deutschen intellektuellen und der Erste Weltkrieg*, Berlin: Alexander Fest Verlag, 2000, 275. Wilhelm Pinder, *Von den Künsten und der Kunst*, Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1948, 37. See similarly his critique of modern 'intellectual employees without origin, nation or history,' Wilhelm

Rothacker saw in the understanding of humans as individuals a product of the dissolution of 'organic' communities which cease to be understood as based on blood and faith.⁷⁸

The major metaphysical implication of a self-aggrandizing strategy based on classifying individuals away into collectives they belong to must be the denial of the free will of historical subjects. If human intellectual life and the ideas individuals have are predetermined by their social-historical context, then one cannot say that these individuals have free will to decide about their actions. In that case, individuals simply could not think to act differently. There is no deciding without thinking, and saying that all thinking is predetermined by the group means saying that all acting is predetermined as well. Even admitting that free will is an irresolvable metaphysical problem makes the Romantic position unsustainable. But the possession of free will *is* an irresolvable metaphysical problem. The main thesis of the Romantic worldview thus cannot be asserted without making a major metaphysical claim that its proponents cannot (and would have known that they cannot) back up. Insofar as they did assert it, they could have only done so motivated by extra-theoretical reasons. The denial of the free will of historical figures relegates them into the ranks of predictable creatures whose acting is determined and can be described by the historian from his or her elevated position.

In the case of Panofsky, the adoption of the assumption of free will of historical figures signalled his break with (and his main argument against) the Romantic worldview.⁷⁹ Those historians who tried to combine free will and the Romantic worldview systematically ran into difficulties. Ernst Troeltsch insisted that historical entities such as nations, states and epochs cannot be reduced to the sums of individual biographical humans, that they are to be studied on their own and that they possess their own originality and creativity.⁸⁰ At the same time, he wanted to attribute free will to individual humans and he admitted that its implication is the impossibility of any kind of general laws in history. (51) But if this is so, then it becomes impossible to talk about the general character of collective historical entities, such as nations, states or epochs, or to study them on their own, the way Troeltsch wanted to, because their members have free will that may change, at any time, the general character of the entity. More exactly, such entities cannot have a character of their own; the 'character' that they manifest results from interactions between the free wills of their participants. Similarly, Johann Gustav Droysen insisted that an individual is born into the situation of his nation, language and religion and that an individual human is a manifestation and mere example of his collective.⁸¹ He too wanted to combine this view with the assumption of human free will. (24) However, if they have free will, humans can opt not to act as one

Pinder, *Gesammelte Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1907-1935*, Leo Bruhns ed., Leipzig: Verlag E. A. Seemann, 1938, 50.

⁷⁸ Erich Rothacker, *Logik und Systematik der Geisteswissenschaften*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1948, 76-77.

⁷⁹ See Branko Mitrović, 'Humanist Art History and Its Enemies. Erwin Panofsky on the Individualism-Collectivism debate', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, 78:1, 2009, 57-76.

⁸⁰ Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, 33-38.

⁸¹ Johann Gustav Droysen: *Historik. Text Ausgabe von Peter Leyh*. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977, 14, 28.

would expect in accordance with their collective membership, or if they do, this is not going to be *because* they are mere examples of the members of their groups, but because *they* have decided to act in a certain way. Droysen indeed comes to recognise the incompatibility of the two views, and in order to save the situation, he changes the meaning of the term 'free will'. He states that historical determination is not opposed to free will the way water is not opposed to virtue; the real opposite of free will is coercion, he says. Thus understood, however, 'free will' merely means the absence of social coercion, and does not pertain to the capacity to make decisions about one's own actions—which is a different concept from the free will that he originally wanted to attribute to historical figures.

In both Troeltsch and Droysen we thus find attempts at preserving the possibility of the fabrication of self-aggrandizing historical narratives combined with the efforts to avoid its metaphysical implications. Other proponents of the Romantic worldview were more inclined to reject free will. For Spengler destiny, *Schicksal* is the all-determining historical force.⁸² The discoveries of Oxygen or Neptune occurred at a certain moment because they were predestined to occur, he says. (156) Similarly, Dagobert Frey rejected free will following Thomas Henry Buckle's view that the belief in free will was a metaphysical dogma, and then strove to replace it with racial and ethnic determinism.⁸³ Hans Georg Gadamer rejected free will on theological grounds. In his view faith is not an option of the human being but a result of God's grace;⁸⁴ a human being's encounter with God is similar to the way a snake and a mongoose look each other in the eye.⁸⁵ As he describes it, a snake and a mongoose do not react to each other's actions; what they do is predetermined by the situation. Everything happens instantaneously. There is no free will for Gadamer; like a snake or a mongoose, God has no more choice than the human being. Of course, Gadamer has no proof that this is so and he knows that he does not have it; but such a claim is vital in order to sustain the position that other individuals are fully explainable by their historicity, something that in his fantasy (as we shall now see) does not apply to himself.

Reflexive argument

The *reflexive argument* is a well-known counterargument to the Romantic worldview. If all human thinking, knowledge and beliefs (together with intellectual life,

⁸² Spengler, *Untergang*, 62, 69 and then esp. 152-214.

⁸³ Dagobert Frey, *Kunstwissenschaftliche Grundfragen. Prolegomena zu einer Kunstphilosophie*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992, a reprint of the Vienna: R. M. Rohrer Verlag, 1946, 60.

⁸⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Zur Problematik des Selbstverständnisses,' in Hans Georg Gadamer, *Ergänzungen*, 122-132, 129: 'Das Selbstverständnis des Glaubens ist ja ganz gewiß dadurch bestimmt, daß der Glaube, theologisch gesehen, nicht eine Möglichkeit des Menschen ist, sondern eine Gnadenat Gottes, die dem Glaubenden geschieht'.

⁸⁵ [Viktor von Weizsäcker] verdanke ich etwa auch den Hinweis, daß das spannungsvolle Verhalten, durch das ein Ichneumon und eine Schlange einander Auge in Auge in Schach halten, sich nicht als das jeweilige Reagieren des einen Partners auf den angriffsversuch des anderen beschreiben läßt, sondern es ist die einheitliche Gestalt der Bewegung im ganzen, die das Bewegungsverhalten der einzelnen in sich einformt'. Gadamer, 'Problematik', 129.

creativity and so on) derive from membership of a group, then this must be also the case with the view that all thinking, knowledge and beliefs derive from such membership as well. The thesis then cannot really be true, and it can only be regarded as 'true' in and for specific contexts—e.g. those in which the Romantic worldview is dominant. But then the central thesis of the Romantic worldview becomes mere fiction in which people believe in some periods of history. The only way for a scholar to save the central thesis of the Romantic worldview as true—to say that it is not a mere fad of his or her times—is to claim that everyone else's thinking is contextually determined except his or her own. Ian Verstegen called this strategy 'self-exempting attitude'.⁸⁶ What it *de facto* reveals is a fantasy about one's own privileged position in world history.⁸⁷

Hans Georg Gadamer's response to the reflexive argument is a particularly fine illustration of the problem. Hermeneutic and historicist traditions insisted that a human individual's thinking is a product of his or her context and environment, and that understanding is primarily (or exclusively) a procedure of contextualisation. The problem then becomes how to explain the fact that one can understand the statements of historical figures at all. On the one hand, the historian's understanding has to be determined by his or her own context as well,

⁸⁶ Ian Verstegen: *A Realist Theory of Art History*, London: Routledge 2013, 8-10.

⁸⁷ Such narcissistic fantasies proliferated in English-speaking scholarship during the final decades of the twentieth century. Consider a statement by Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, 'Beyond History', *Rethinking History*, 5:2 (2001) 195-216, 196:

individuals do not produce ideas or cultural systems, ideas and systems are there already and individuals ... get born into them just as they are born into a language and into an entire set of assumptions about identity, conduct and How Things Work.

By asserting it she is not merely saying that this claim is an assumption that her context makes her believe that it is true. She is not saying that she is stating her belief; she is making a claim that has certain conditions of satisfaction that would make the proposition true if they were satisfied, and her claim is that they are satisfied. But if this were so, then her position would be exempted from historical determination that operates everyone else's thinking. Her theoretical work is above everyone else's. Or consider Keith Jenkins' 'Introduction' in Keith Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader*, London: Routledge, 1997, 1-35, 17:

The factulist/empiricist idea so rooted in traditional historical thinking, that if we can find 'the facts' then this will stop interpretative flux, fails because only theory can constitute what counts as a fact in the first place.

If we ask what theory ensures that what Keith Jenkins says is a fact, the answer has to be that Keith Jenkins says so. Similarly, Barry Barnes and David Bloor in 'Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge' in Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, eds, *Rationality and Relativism*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982, 21-47, 27 argue that words 'true' and 'false' provide the idiom in which evaluations are expressed and the words 'rational' and 'irrational' have the same function. Their position is to accept that these are mere statements of one's context-bound preferences—the words are comparable to the vocabulary used by two 'primitive' (as they say) tribes to judge each others different beliefs. This claim itself is meaningful only insofar as it states certain conditions of satisfaction whose fulfilment makes this proposition true, and Barnes and Bloor are asserting that these conditions as satisfied—which implies that everyone else's statements are true relative to their context, while Barnes' and Bloor's statement is true in extra-contextual sense.

and if that context is different, then understanding would have to be impossible. On the other, insofar as understanding is possible, this implies that the historian shares with historical authors some common rationality that enables it—in which case it is hard to say that this common rationality is not universal rationality, since collective rationality would differ from a group to a group. In his *Der Aufbau der Geschichtlichen Welt* Wilhelm Dilthey argued that the meaning of any thought or action is in its relation to its historical context.⁸⁸ The understanding of historical individuals is therefore the understanding of the contexts that determine them. (228) However, if the context determines individuals' thinking, then this has to be the case with the historian's thinking as well, and here too one cannot avoid the problem of explaining the historian's capacity to understand different contexts. When he faces the problem, Dilthey suddenly changes his position and states that historical understanding relies on what has the character of permanence in time and universal human validity.⁸⁹ Suddenly, and contrary to his central thesis, not all aspects of human cognition turn out to be contextually determined; some have universal validity. The same problem was resolved by Ernst Troeltsch in his *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, by referring directly to mystical, occult forces.⁹⁰ Individuals, he says, can only be understood in the context of a greater totality such as family, class or nation (33) and these totalities have their own shared spirit (*Gemeingeist*) that is constituted by a consciousness that is external to the participating individuals. (46) If we then ask how a historian can comprehend individuals from other groups in which he or she does not participate, Troeltsch answers that the explanation of the historian's procedure belongs to metaphysics (71): it is enabled by Total Consciousness (*Allbewußtsein*) which also explains the works of poets and occultist phenomena. (684) Historical understanding is thus explained as an action of an extra-human spiritual force.

It should be noted that these authors are discussing the intellectual capacities that enable interpretation, not the reflexive argument itself. Rather, their efforts are directed to sustaining a theory of interpretation that allows for the self-gratifying stereotyping of authors into their contexts, even at the price of self-contradiction or the explanation of the interpretation of text as equivalent to occult phenomena. The problem clearly indicates a major irresolvable contradiction in the Romantic worldview that should have led to its rejection because no real solution has or could have been proposed. The fact that these authors sustain Romantic intellectual collectivism, even at the cost of self-contradiction or equating historical interpretation to spiritualist phenomena, indicates that they have extra-theoretical motivation to do so. At the same time one cannot fail to notice that what they are defending is the capacity of historiography to contribute to self-esteem regulation through the fabrication of stereotyping narratives.

⁸⁸ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1981, 189.

⁸⁹ Dilthey, *Aufbau*, 196: 'Die Bedingung für diese Interpretation der historischen Reste ist, daß das, was wir in sie hieintragen, den Charakter der Beständigkeit in der Zeit und der allgemein-menschlichen Geltung hat'.

⁹⁰ Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme. Erstes Buch: Das logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1922.

In Gadamer, however, we find a fine example of grandiosity proper. In opposition to the views we have just considered, Gadamer insisted on the historicity of the historian.⁹¹ In his view, every intellectual process, including the mental processes of the historian who comprehends the ideas of historical figures, derives from the specific historical context they belong to. It is determined by the individual's horizon. Gadamer's theory of interpretation as 'the fusion of horizons' in *Wahrheit und Methode* was precisely constructed in order to avoid the problem that, as we have seen, other authors of the hermeneutic and historicist tradition had struggled with. The rub is, however, that here we run into the reflexive argument proper: a universal claim about the determination of all cognition by its historical context suggests that this claim too has validity only in its own historical context as well. And this is something that Gadamer cannot accept. The assertion that all cognition is historically relative does not allow one to ask about the historicity of the claim that all cognition is historically relative. Such reflexive reasoning, Gadamer says, does not invalidate the absolute validity of the thesis about the historicity of all knowledge but the validity of formal reasoning.⁹² In other words, if formal-logical analysis shows that Gadamer's claim is self-contradictory, then something must be wrong with formal-logical reasoning. Such an 'argument' can be used against any self-contradiction: whenever one faces self-contradiction, one can avoid the problem by simply declaring logical thinking as not valid and inapplicable. It is remarkable that a philosopher of Gadamer's stature would allow himself to fall so low as to employ this kind of argument.⁹³ Just as in the case of Ranke, when such a lapse happens, we should look for the motivation behind it. Like Ranke, Gadamer says it himself. A historian must take into account his or her own historicity, he insists.⁹⁴ But this does not apply to the philosopher, who is elevated to a higher, different level: 'It is a prejudice of reflexive philosophy ... that it understands as a relationship between sentences, what does not belong to the same level'.⁹⁵ In other words, Gadamer's own claim of universal historicity of all knowledge is not on the same level as other scholars'; together with its author, it floats aloof above history in which everyone else's thinking is submerged.

Another approach to the reflexive argument is to admit it, but nevertheless assert the universal determination of human cognitive capacities by the individual's

⁹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993, 274, 302, 304, 400.

⁹² 'sondern der Wahrheitsanspruch des formalen Argumentierens überhaupt [wird getroffen]'. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 350.

⁹³ The argument is not better than a child psychologist's interview with a four-year old:

E: Should boys get more? Why should they get more?

Ben: Because they always need more.

E: Why do they need more?

Ben: Because that's how I want it.

(Reported in Drew Weston, 'The Relations Among Narcissism, Egocentrism, Self-Concept and Self-Esteem: Experimental, Clinical and Theoretical Considerations', *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, 13:2, 1992, 183-239, 200.)

⁹⁴ 'Historisches Bewußtsein ... muß in Wahrheit die eigene Geschichtlichkeit mitdenken'. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 366.

⁹⁵ 'Es gehört zu den Vorurteilen der Reflexionsphilosophie, daß sie als ein Verhältnis von Sätzen versteht, was gar nicht auf der gleichen logischen Ebene liegt'. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 452.

membership of a group. In this case, the author admits that he or she is predetermined to think that all thinking results from membership of a group. This was Spengler's strategy. 'A thinker is a man', he says talking about himself as the author of his book, 'who has been predestined to represent the time through his own observing and understanding. He has no choice. He thinks the way he has to think, and what is true for him is the picture of the world that was born with him'.⁹⁶ However, this approach avoids the problems with the reflexive argument only provisionally. It still wants to be true: Spengler still wants to say that the processes within cultures that he describes truly determine historical events and intellectual lives. Otherwise he would be admitting that his philosophy of history is in no way different from a narration that describes drug-induced hallucinations—whereby his drug is the historical context. Consequently, insofar as he wants his philosophy of history to mean what he is saying—that human thinking is a mere manifestation of its cultural context—he has to assert that his position in his culture has a privileged world-historical status that enables him this insight. When he says that his views are historically predetermined and still assumes that they are true, the implications is that he is historically predetermined to be right.⁹⁷

Concluding rumination

The view that a human being's cognitive abilities and values are determined by his or her membership of a collective was the core thesis of Romanticism in its original, late-eighteenth century articulation. Since those days, up to the postmodernist social constructivism of the late 1900s, the Romantic tradition has passed through many phases and metamorphoses. The debate about the nature of the determining collective has split it into the left and right wing, the former emphasizing class determination, the latter ethnic and racial determination. But the core idea, that human being has neither nature nor identity beyond that which is bestowed by the community, has remained unchanged—indeed, it would be hard to find an idea that defines and individuates the Romantic tradition in a more fundamental way.

This core thesis relies on assumptions that are not only dubious, but can only be understood if one takes into account the motivation that led to its articulation in the first place. A historian who assumes that historical figures had different rationality than his or her own will never be able to understand their beliefs—and since beliefs based on a different rationality cannot be grasped nor even registered, one cannot actually know that an alternative rationality was operational some time in the past.⁹⁸ The central thesis of the Romantic worldview also implies the rejection

⁹⁶ Spengler, *Untergang*, vii.

⁹⁷ In other words: sentences have certain conditions of satisfaction and are true if these conditions are satisfied. The condition of satisfaction of 'All thinking is historically determined' is that all thinking is historically determined, and this sentence is true if this condition is fulfilled. Spengler claims that it is true and that, consequently the condition is fulfilled, which boils down to saying that he was historically predetermined to have proclaimed this truth.

⁹⁸ Consider Martin Jay's claim in his "Historical explanation and the event" *New Literary History*, 42:4, (2011) 557-571, 561: 'surely, there is no self-evident transcendental version of rationality that can be

of free will, which involves serious metaphysical claims that have never been (could not have been) properly resolved by its proponents. The idea that human thinking is a product of its context fails to deal with the reflexive argument and ends up in a paradox. For any rational thinker these reasons should be enough to reject the thesis—and if thesis is not rejected, while no successful response is provided against these objections, then one must look for extra-rational motivation to uphold it. While human rational beliefs, decisions and actions do not require additional explanation other than rationality itself, irrationality is a sign that some other motivation or weakness has been in action. Because of the elusive nature of art, art historiography is a particularly convenient field to study the irrationalities of the Romantic worldview—few other fields provide its protagonists with so much freedom to make the claims that they want to make. The scholarship of the era 1890 through 1950 is conveniently remote from the original Romanticism of the late eighteenth century and yet rich in the examples that enable the study it as a worldview. It transpires that the irrationalities manifested in scholarship of the era are not random but uniform. They consistently indicate the implicit faith in one's own grandiosity and reveal the use scholarship for the purposes of self-esteem management. More generally, the analysis shows that if one disregards the protagonists' investments in self-esteem regulation the Romantic worldview dissolves into a set of random arbitrary self-contradictions.

Unbalanced self-esteem can thus play havoc with attempts to make historiography *wissenschaftlich*. It is also interesting to think about its impact on *the reception* of scholarly works. A good example is the long-term failure of the scholarly community to recognise the fallacies Panofsky's thesis about perspective, a phenomenon that can be only explained by suppression, understood as the unwillingness to pay attention to the weaknesses of the thesis. Books, after all, become influential because they say what people want to hear. If a scholarly work enjoys particularly good reception in a certain community in spite of its absurd character, while it argues positions that are favourable to the self-esteem of the members of the community, then it is reasonable to assume that such contribution to self-esteem contributes to its good reception. Scholarship does not exist outside its social context, while this context is largely constructed by the self-esteem problems of the individuals that make it up. From everything one knows about the German intelligentsia of the 1920s, the absurd character of Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* must have been obvious to its readers. Nevertheless, the book was an enormous success. Similarly, Strzygowski's bizarre theories were promulgated in the 1930s by the Nazi propaganda machine—and since *every* propaganda wants to be credible, the fact that his writings were endorsed by the propagandist apparatus indicates that the apparatus expected them to meet appropriate reception. The

applied historically and across cultures under all circumstances'. It is interesting to think how Jay can know that there ever existed a rationality different than his own. Certainly, if there ever existed a cultural context in which, for instance, the principle of non-contradiction did not apply, since Jay could not grasp beliefs of people from that context, he could not register them as different from his own in the sense of their rationality. So he cannot really know, or make a justified claim, that a different rationality in this sense was ever historically operational.

reception of a book always says much about the context of its reception. In another context an esteemed professor emeritus from Europe's (arguably, at the time) most prestigious art history department would be hospitalized for claiming that Michelangelo was a Viking. People would think that he needs help. It says much about the context in which Strzygowski lived, that such claims merely brought him favourable publicity.

The study of denials in intellectual history thus promises to provide wider insights into social forces that move human societies outside the world of intellect. If a book was well received by a community, while we expect that it must have been absurd to the rational members of that community, then one should consider the possible irrational motivation that contributed to its good reception. Insofar as the book has the capacity to assuage insecurities and enhance self-esteem of the members of the community, then the good reception of the book indicates that these specific insecurities and self-esteem deficiencies were widespread in its public and were likely to manifest themselves in other aspects of public life. They could ultimately become, for instance, a major political force as well. An analytic history of historiography and scholarship in general thus becomes a means to study various sinister and less sinister forces quite outside the world of intellect.

Coda. Dostoevsky's alternative perspective

The analysis of the Romantic worldview in (art) historical scholarship presented here relies on a reasonably simple conceptual apparatus: one merely needs to be aware of the forces of unconsciousness and understand denials as a tool to overcome anxieties—and ask what a certain irrational claim denies in order to grasp the painful internal self-esteem management that manifests itself externally as irrational hubris and grandiosity. Nevertheless, it is only the psychoanalytic theories developed in the second half of the twentieth century, rather than Freud's original theory of drives, that can provide the basis for this understanding. And if we ask for alternative explanations, one must notice that Jean-Paul Sartre's descriptions of false consciousness or Herbert Fingarette's analysis of self-deception are of little help, because they are too general and do not engage with the self-esteem problems that irrational behaviour struggles to resolve.

There is, however, Dostoevsky, who grasped these mechanisms before Freudians. The concept of unconsciousness is described in his *Notes from Underground*: there are some thoughts, we read there, that one shares only with close friends; some thoughts one shares with no one, and some thoughts one fears to reveal even to oneself.⁹⁹ In the opening of the *Brothers Karamazov* Fyodor Karamazov, Dostoevsky's prototype of a narcissist, arrives at a monastery with his sons to ask for a family advice from the old monk renowned for his wisdom, *starets* (monastic

⁹⁹ Fyodor Mihailovich Dostoevsky (Федор Михайлович Достоевский), *Записки из подполья* (*Notes from Underground*) St. Petersburg: Азбука-Классика, 2006, 83.

elder) Zosima.¹⁰⁰ At the very beginning of the scene he makes a slip of the tongue of the kind that would become known as the Freudian slip in the twentieth century – he calls himself a king.¹⁰¹ His conversation with the *starets* is a desperate series of attempts to impress that makes everyone present feel embarrassed.¹⁰² The old monk, who sees through it all, recommends that he avoids lying to himself. Karamazov, however, is incapable of engaging with the advice; defence mechanisms take over and his exalted praise of the wisdom of the *starets* is both an attempt to win approval and a strategy to avoid the real issue.¹⁰³ Reactions of this kind are well-known in psychoanalytic literature as a major hurdle in the treatment of narcissistic patients.

When it comes to the elaboration of his views, Dostoevsky is thus comparable to Gombrich: instead of general statements one finds a large number of examples from which the general picture needs to be derived. In our present situation his views on narcissism can also be attractive because they have substantial explanatory potential when it comes to the understanding of the rise of social constructivism and anti-realism in the final decades of the twentieth century. It is certainly tempting to see in it a Romantic fever generated by the flamboyant narcissisms of the generation of 1968. Consider, for instance, a remarkably frank statement by Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob in a collection of postmodernist *crème de la crème* articles edited by Keith Jenkins. They describe that having ‘approached academic careers as outsiders’ they have been especially sensitive to

the ways in which claims to objectivity have been used to exclude us from full participation in the nation’s public life, a fate shared by others of our sex, working-class people, and minorities. We also appreciate that for outsiders, skepticism and relativism offer modes of inquiry essential to redressing the wrongs of exclusion.¹⁰⁴

But certainly, through history, it was always objectivity and the realistic comprehension of the situation that was vital for all embattled minorities in order to combat oppression. It obviously undermines one’s claim that there is oppression if one also says that everything is relative. Scepticism and relativism are useless as tools to oppose oppression and can only serve to perpetuate it—however, they are very helpful when one has to manage a self-esteem injured by claims about rationality and objectivity. This is precisely what Dostoevsky calls *insult* that, as *starets* Zosima observes, can be generated by self-lie, without anyone’s real insulting action.¹⁰⁵ His *Notes from Underground* indeed describe the state of mind for which the

¹⁰⁰ Fyodor Mihailovich Dostoevsky (Федор Михайлович Достоевский), *Братья Карамазовы* (*Brothers Karamazov*) cited according to the Moscow: Эксмо 2006 edition, 45-85.

¹⁰¹ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 47.

¹⁰² Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 48-49.

¹⁰³ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob: ‘Telling the truth about history’, Keith Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader*, London: Routledge, 1997, 209-219, 210.

¹⁰⁵ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 51.

very possibility of objectivity is the greatest possible insult: 'Nothing has ever insulted me more than the laws of nature' says the main character of this short novel.¹⁰⁶

'Lying to oneself' is thus Dostoevsky's byword for narcissism. But Dostoevsky is a religious thinker and it is ultimately the human relationship with God that interests him. For the Orthodox monastic tradition hubris, that which we would call narcissism, is a direct sign of demonic possession.¹⁰⁷ There are no real demons in Dostoevsky's novels, but humans can *choose* to be as bad. Free will is high on Dostoevsky's agenda. One common understanding of faith in God (or also reality, rationality, truth, justice and so on) is that it provides a believer with a way to overcome anxieties by giving something firm in life. Both a believer and a non-believer may agree about this function of religious faith: the former will think that such faith is true, while the latter may see in it a mere fantasy constructed to assuage anxieties. The understanding is that *primordial fear* stands at the start of a human life as human being's original state, while rational reasoning, truth, justice, sense of reality, ultimately religious believers' faith in God are tools one develops in order to deal with it. (The use of fantasy to manage one's self-esteem problems would be a particularly desperate measure of the same kind.) Dostoevsky's view, however, is the obverse of this picture. It is not that people lie to themselves in order to overcome fear and anxiety; the *starets* in *Brothers Karamazov* explains, people have fears and anxieties *because* they lie to themselves.¹⁰⁸ Fears and anxieties, one could say, are mere results of lies in the form of the rejection of the *primordial faith* in God; they are not the causes of fall, but its symptoms. Since God is good, there can be no place for them in a worldview formed by true faith.

Not many people, not even religious believers, are likely to find this wider picture credible.¹⁰⁹ Its specific elaboration, however, relies on and describes the same phenomenon of the narcissistic fall as modern psychoanalytic theories. It is fair to admit that for the purposes of this paper, its conceptual apparatus could have done as good a job as that of modern psychoanalysis; only the implications, because of Dostoevsky's emphasis on free will, would have been more explicitly damning. His elaboration of the phenomenon speaks a different language from the one we are

¹⁰⁶ '...законы природы постоянно и более всего всю жизнь меня обижали'. Dostoevsky, *Notes from Unverground*, 58.

¹⁰⁷ See for instance John Climacus, *Scala paradisi*, according to ed. J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca) (MPG)*, 88, Paris: 1857-1866: 631-1161, 893b, 948d-980b.

¹⁰⁸ '...страх есть лишь последствие всякой лжи', Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, 65. The *starets* is transmitting the view that can be found in Climacus, *Scala*, 945a-c.

¹⁰⁹ It contradicts, for instance, any theology that postulates the original sin, following the *Vulgata* mistranslation of *Romans* 5:12 'ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον' (which suggests that everyone sinned like Adam) as 'in quo omnes peccaverunt' (which suggests that everyone sinned through Adam's first sin). Byzantines, and following them the theology of the Orthodox Church to which Dostoevsky belonged, relied on the Greek original. For the Orthodox rejection of the original sin see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, New York: Fordham University Press 1979, 143-146.

used to, but, as pointed out by Professor Voland in Mihael Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, things do not change because we name them differently.¹¹⁰

Branko Mitrović received his doctorates in architectural history and philosophy. He is the author (or co-author) of six books on architectural history and theory and has been the recipient of Humboldt Research Award.

brankomitrovic@hotmail.com

¹¹⁰ 'Мы говорим с тобой на разных языках ... но вещи, о которых мы говорим от этого не меняются', Mihael Bulgakov (Михаил Булгаков), *Мастер и Маргарита (Master and Margarita)* Moscow: Азбука Классика, 2004, 375.