

Fritz Novotny and the new Vienna school of art history – an ambiguous relation

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When Christopher Wood compiled his Vienna School Reader with the aim of introducing the Viennese scholarly tradition to the Anglo-American public, he not only included works by the most famous exponents, Alois Riegl, Otto Pächt and Hans Sedlmayr, but also an excerpt from Fritz Novotny's postdoctoral thesis, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*,¹ published in 1938. In his introduction, Wood described Novotny as the member of the New Vienna School least strange to a contemporary reader,² especially in comparison with publications by Hans Sedlmayr, because Novotny's texts seem to be free of ideological positions. Additionally, Wood saw *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive* as the purest example of structural analysis, the only criterion he used to judge about a scholar's belonging to the New Vienna School. Since then, other authors dealing with the historiography of this period also suggested that Novotny had been a member of this scholarly tradition.³ In my paper, I will attempt to show that, in opposition to the opinion expressed in these texts, Novotny's position in relation to the Vienna School of art history is not so clear. Furthermore, I will argue that the scholarly traditions in which Novotny's texts are analyzed play a decisive role in answering the question whether or not he can be addressed as a member of this group. To do so, I will discuss aspects Novotny shared with authors of the Vienna School as well as important differences which touch fundamental convictions about the theoretical and methodological foundations of art history as an academic discipline.

It was Novotny's affinity for structural analysis that led Wood to declare Novotny a member of the Vienna School, an affinity which can easily be discerned by comparing some of his early texts on Cézanne with Otto Pächt's 'Design principles of Western painting'.⁴ In this text, Pächt investigated the structure of Dutch, Flemish and French fifteenth-century painting by discussing chosen works by the Master of Flemalle, Jan van Eyck, Hugo van der Goes, Rogier van der Weyden and Dirk Bouts as well as by the Limburg Brothers and Jean Fouquet. One characteristic feature he found in Dutch paintings of the period was especially important to Pächt: the occurrence of breaks within linear perspective. Against the usual way in which this phenomenon had been explained before, Pächt argued that this specific way of dealing with perspective

¹ Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, Vienna: Schroll, 1938.

² Christopher Wood, ed, *The Vienna School Reader*, New York: Zone Books, 2000, 22.

³ See e. g. Roger Kimball. Introduction to the transaction edition, in: Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis. The Lost Center*, Edison (N. J.): Transaction Publishers, 2006, as well as Anthony Vidler. *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism, 1930-1975*. PhD Dissertation: University of Delft, 2005, 23.

⁴ Otto Pächt, 'Gestaltungsprinzipien der westlichen Malerei', *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, 2, 1933. An English translation is in Christopher Wood, ed., *The Vienna School Reader*, 243-321.

was not a fault due to unrefined skills in applying the rules of perspective. Instead, he tried to find an imminent reason for the way space was constructed, assuming that it was the result of a specific artistic intention. He argued that breaks in linear perspective were the only way for painters of the epoch not only to depict space but also to take the surface of the picture into account. He therefore explained the different angles of view that he found in paintings by the Master of Flemalle as being the result of the priority given to the filling of the surface (in the sense of a *horror vacui*) over perspectival space, which served to enhance the inner cohesion of the pictures in a similar way to the ornamental, hierarchic structure of pictures by Jean Fouquet.

In Novotny's texts on Cézanne, the relation between pictorial space and surface as well as modifications of scientific perspective resulting from the specific character of pictorial surface played a central role as well. The way that Novotny described Cézanne's formation of space in a book on Cézanne published in 1937 with Phaidon press⁵ and in his postdoctoral thesis shows striking parallels to Pächt's explanation of the use that fifteenth-century Dutch painters made of perspective. Novotny described Cézanne's formation of space as the result of a conflict between illusionistic space and surface which lead to a novel character of the picture as an independent formal object. At the beginning of the second large part of *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, Novotny discussed the role of colour for the formation of space. He claimed that the structure of the picture had offered some resistance against the application of the laws of scientific perspective and that typical deformations that can be found in numerous paintings by Cézanne: the flattening of angles or the inclination of objects were caused by this resistance. The underlying reason could be found in the relation between surface and illusionistic space which he found fundamentally influenced by Cézanne's use of coloured patches for the formation of objects. In the first part of his thesis Novotny had deduced that the way colour was used and the lack of linear tension led to an enhanced homogeneity of the picture's general appearance. The crucial point that allowed Novotny to explain the specific relation of surface and space can be found in his description of their strong interdependence: 'Individual spatial objects seem to grow from the surface; they are, while endowed with the intensity of depth of their volumes, not independent objects of an illusionistic space lacking a direct effect of the picture plane but forever bound to the plane.'⁶

Novotny was convinced that Cézanne's formation of pictorial space was a deliberate compromise between a representation of nature and a pure surface pattern. He characterized the quality of the contours of objects as forming a link rather than a separation between them. Novotny observed that colour often concentrates in the area of the contours, which made him describe these areas as points of concentration in the relation between space and surface: 'In this formation of contours, the isolating effect of contours is radically reduced, whereas a link between objects and a link between spatial formation and pictorial surface is attained.'⁷ The resulting optical impression

⁵ Fritz Novotny, *Paul Cézanne*, Vienna and New York: Phaidon, 1937.

⁶ 'Die einzelnen Raumbilde scheinen aus der Fläche hervorzuwachsen, sie sind, obwohl mit der Tiefenintensität ihres Volumens ausgestattet, dennoch nicht zu Gebilden eines Illusionsraumes verselbständigt, der einer unmittelbaren Wirkung der Bildebene entbehrt, sondern sie sind dieser für die Betrachtung immerwährend verbunden.' Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, 74.

⁷ 'In dieser Umrissbildung ist die isolierende Wirkung der Konturen bis aufs äußerste eingeschränkt, dagegen umgekehrt eine Bindung der Objekte untereinander und eine Bindung der

alternates between the microstructure of coloured patches on the picture surface and their assembling to become spatial objects that seem to appear at the moment the picture is viewed. At the same time, the linkage of surface and space, Novotny argued, led to characteristic deformations.⁸ As colour not only serves to create objects, but also to form space, it can be assumed that colour itself has a slight tendency to create depth. To reach a balance occasional modifications, such as the orientation of the borders of an object along orthogonal lines, became necessary.

Parallels to Novotny's application of structural analysis exist in the work of Hans Sedlmayr as well. They become obvious when Sedlmayr's text on Bruegel's *macchia*⁹ is chosen for a comparison. Sedlmayr used the term 'macchia' to describe his impression that in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's pictures persons and objects relating to human activities are composed of disconnected patches of colour. In a similar way to Novotny, Sedlmayr focused his attention on the microstructure of the picture and to the interaction of the patches of colour forming this structure with the picture plane:

Instead [of representing meaningful content] the picture itself, or, more precisely, one of the two basic components into which it falls of its own accord, shows a tendency to shed its manifest content and to appear to the viewer purely as a lively pattern of colour patches ... When this process has reached its peak, one sees instead of figures a multitude of flat, vivid patches with firmly enclosed contours and unified coloration that all seem to lie unconnected and unordered, beside and above each other in a plane at the front of the picture. These are, so to speak, the atoms of the image.¹⁰

Sedlmayr argued that this mode of representation leads to a flat impression of the displayed objects and persons. Similar to Novotny, he saw a tendency of objects to appear to grow out of space into a picture plane near the surface. Another parallel can be found in Sedlmayr's description of the influence of microstructure on the formation of space: 'Where they [the coloured patches] accumulate in this zone, the space – transformed by them – seems to become flattened towards the foreground'.¹¹

The importance of the microstructure for which Sedlmayr used the expression 'atoms of the image' is also an important part of Novotny's reflection of Cézanne's art. Instead of speaking of atoms, Novotny saw an analogy between the small elements forming the picture and molecular forces but the underlying tenor of his argument is very well comparable:

Bildraumscheinung an die Bildebene erreicht.' Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, 77.

⁸ Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, 86.

⁹ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Die "Macchia" Bruegels', in: Hans Sedlmayr, *Epochen und Werke*, tome 1, Munich: Mäander, 1985, 274-318.

¹⁰ 'Das Bild selbst, oder genauer einer der beiden Grundbestandteile, in die es von selbst, ohne unser Zutun 'zerfällt', zeigt die Tendenz, die gegenständliche Bedeutung abzustreifen und dem Betrachter rein als buntes Muster aus Farbflecken zu erscheinen ... Wenn dieser Vorgang seinen Höhepunkt erreicht, sieht man statt der Figuren eine Menge flacher bunter Flecken von fest geschlossener Kontur und einheitlicher Färbung, die unverbunden und ungeordnet neben- und übereinander in einer vordersten Schichte des Bildes zu liegen scheinen. Es sind gleichsam die Atome des Bildes.' Hans Sedlmayr, 'Die "Macchia" Bruegels', 276-277.

¹¹ 'Wo sie sich in dieser Zone häufen, scheint dann – durch sie verwandelt – der Raum nach vorne flacher zu werden.' Hans Sedlmayr, 'Die "Macchia" Bruegels', 278.

In Cézanne's representational mode, in which 'molecular forces' rather than individual objects are the real building blocks of the picture's structure, the small components exercise an influence on the large elements of the pictorial structure (the partial masses of matter and space that occupy the various planes of the picture space). Those constructive elements, as they manifest themselves in individual patches of colour, are in their essence comparatively undifferentiated.¹²

In spite of these parallels, both authors came to contrary conclusions due to their ideological premises. Sedlmayr demonstrated a certain antipathy towards Brueghel's use of microstructure because he saw it as a symbol for the decline of society he associated with the time when the paintings were created. On the other hand, Novotny affirmatively interpreted the same stylistic aspects as important innovations which led to a novel existence of paintings as objects. Comparing Sedlmayr's text with a book on Brueghel written by Novotny dramatically shows the differences in valuing judgement. In his interpretation of Brueghel's painting Novotny cited Sedlmayr's description of a structure built out of coloured patches, praising the analytical dimension while harshly rejecting the moralist conclusions. Like Sedlmayr, Novotny observed a tendency to simplification of displayed persons and objects while landscapes were usually shown in a very detailed manner.¹³ The first major difference from Sedlmayr's description is that Novotny qualified his own statement by mentioning that the change in formation of persons and their environment had been reduced in the course of Brueghel's stylistic development. As an example for the existence of 'cubist simplification of pure landscape'¹⁴ he chose a corn field from Brueghel's cycle of the monthly pictures which he described as 'simplified to a homogenous yellow mass'.¹⁵ Doing so, Novotny created a more balanced picture of Brueghel's work than Sedlmayr, who did not care about the inner differences in the artist's oeuvre – maybe driven by the aim not to put his ideas about parallels between style and a social decline into danger. Instead of an attempt to interpret formal characteristics as an expression of social problems, Novotny chose to emphasise Brueghel's contribution on the 'elevation of landscape painting to a full, independent type of art'¹⁶, an explanation which indirectly links his book with his ideas on Cézanne and the role of autonomy of artworks.

Besides of their approach to the analysis of paintings, there was another point Novotny had in common with both Sedlmayr and Pächt: his profound scepticism about the use of biographical information for a scientific approach to art. Sedlmayr's

¹² 'In der Darstellungsart Cézannes als einer, in der nicht die Einzelobjekte die wirklichen Bausteine der Bildstruktur sind, sondern diese von ‚molekularen Kräften‘ geformt ist, üben die kleinen Bauelemente einen Einfluss auf die großformigen Einzelteile der Bildanlage (die Teilmassen des körperräumlichen Aufbaus in den verschiedenen ‚Plänen‘ des Bildraums) aus. Jene Aufbauelemente, wie sie in den einzelnen Farbflecken in Erscheinung treten, sind ihrem Wesen nach verhältnismäßig undifferenziert.' Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, 96.

¹³ Fritz Novotny, *Die Monatsbilder Pieter Bruegels des Älteren*, Vienna: Deuticke, 1948, 13.

¹⁴ 'kubische Vereinfachung der reinen Landschaft'. Fritz Novotny, *Die Monatsbilder*, 16.

¹⁵ 'zu einer homogenen gelben Masse vereinfacht'. Fritz Novotny, *Die Monatsbilder*, 16.

¹⁶ 'Erhöhung der Landschaftsmalerei zu einer vollwertigen, selbständigen Bildgattung'. Fritz Novotny, *Die Monatsbilder*, 1.

ideas on this point are well known because of his programmatic essay 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft'. In this text, he had introduced his concept of two levels of art history, the lower one dealing with the collection of data and materials, while the higher scientific level should aim to understand the artwork, which, following Sedlmayr would be the real duty of scientific art history.¹⁷ While Pächt was of course less radical, he was also convinced that biography was no suitable method for art historians and argued strongly against its use.¹⁸

Another argument for seeing Novotny as a member of the Vienna School can be found because of some parallels between him and Alois Riegl that Edwin Lachnit identified when he discussed the attitude of the elder generation of Vienna School scholars towards the artistic developments of their time. As Riegl himself had refused to give any statement on modern art because he feared the consequences of missing historical differences, Lachnit could not document Riegl's opinion about the art of his time. Instead, he used Novotny's analysis of Cézanne as a starting point for his attempt to construe a form of spiritual kinship between Riegl and Cézanne. Lachnit assumed that Riegl's theory of the homogenous tendencies of a historical period, which influenced the development of art history as a discipline, could also be used to discuss his own writings as well as the artistic production of his era. The same argument had been chosen by Hans Tietze when he decided to write on Riegl's relation with Art Nouveau and the Secessionist movement. With the help of Novotny's texts on Cézanne, Lachnit succeeded in demonstrating important parallels in the emphasis on structural principles between Cézanne and Riegl's 'Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste', written around 1897/98. Most important for Lachnit's line of thought was Riegl's assumption that the 'crystalline' is the most important principle of organisation in an artwork, while movement must be seen as a factor which disturbs harmony.¹⁹

In Novotny's way of describing Cézanne's painting, this classicist ideal can easily be recognized, as Lachnit showed by citing Novotny on the stiff, motionless character of Cézanne's portraits.²⁰ Nevertheless, I think that these similarities do not only exist between Cézanne and Riegl, as shown by Lachnit, but, maybe to a greater extent, between the two scholars. Due to considerable differences concerning method and focus of research between Novotny and most contemporary Cézanne scholars, most of today's standard works on this painter could not have been used for the kind of comparison aimed at by Lachnit. Obviously neither interpretations from a psychoanalytical tradition nor attempts to analyze Cézanne's early and latest works would be appropriate for such a comparison. Newer scholarly literature on formal qualities, like Lorenz Dittmann's discussion of the symbolic value of colour in Cézanne's work²¹ would not allow comparisons with Riegl's 'Historische Grammatik' either, as colour does not play a significant role in this book.

¹⁷ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft', *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, 1, 1931, 7-27.

¹⁸ Otto Pächt, 'Zur jüngsten Literatur über die gotische Tafel- und Glasmalerei Österreichs', *Kritische Berichte*, 2, 1928/29, 167.

¹⁹ Alois Riegl, *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*, Graz and Cologne: Böhlau, 1966, 80.

²⁰ Edwin Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte und die Kunst ihrer Zeit*, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2005, 63.

²¹ Lorenz Dittmann, *Die Kunst Cézannes. Farbe – Rhythmus – Symbolik*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2005.

On the other hand, there is another important parallel between Novotny and Riegl which Lachnit did not notice. To Riegl, the 'elements' of art were the most important subject for further research: 'We must not look at the single art works, neither at the single genres of art, but the elements. Through their clear distinction and understanding, a real consistent high point of the system of theories of art history will be built.'²² This statement shows a conviction about the future of the discipline which can also be found with Novotny, who tried to find a consolidating constant in the art of the nineteenth and twentieth century by postulating that all styles and schools shared a tendency to depict phenomena he subsumed in the term 'elementary'. In a speech entitled 'Über das Elementare in der Kunstgeschichte'²³, Novotny explained that this term first of all stood for artist's intensive interest in space and time, an interest he also recognized among scholars, especially with Alois Riegl. While cubism and futurism perfectly fitted his concept in their attempts to directly demonstrate the effects of time and space, nineteenth-century art was more difficult to integrate into his theory. Unfortunately, he did not think of interpreting impressionist painting as an expression of time in the sense of the demonstration of the present moment, as was suggested about fifty years later by Gottfried Boehm.²⁴ To include impressionism in his newly found epoch of elementary art he had to introduce additional ways of displaying elementary phenomena, arguing that their introduction into art had been a precursory step to the artistic interest for more abstract categories like time and space. His concept became even more complicated when he added the tendency to displaying elementary forms: objects which resemble geometric figures and therefore lead to a simplification, an effect he believed to find in Cézanne's oeuvre.

Both scholars' interest in what they called the 'elementary' cannot be reduced to a pure terminological coincidence, as can be discerned from one of Riegl's statements on the character of late antique art: 'The objects, namely the human figure, now establish open relations which are not forced by outside factors any more: the consideration of space and time in art starts. In this way, the way is paved for modern art, which is also an art of space and time.'²⁵

In spite of all those parallels, addressing Novotny as a member of the New Vienna School is problematic from a biographical point of view because of the aims Julius von Schlosser had when he first created the term Vienna School. Schlosser had developed a genealogy of great art historians, leading from the establishment of art history as an independent discipline to Alois Riegl, whom Schlosser admired most, to

²² 'Wir müssen nicht mehr die einzelnen Kunstwerke für sich, auch nicht die einzelnen Kunstgattungen für sich ins Auge fassen, sondern die Elemente mit deren klarer Scheidung und Erkenntnis sich eine wahre einheitliche Krönung des Lehrgebäudes der Kunstgeschichte aufbauen lassen wird.' Alois Riegl, *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*, 210.

²³ The speech was first published in 1945: Fritz Novotny, 'Über das Elementare in der Kunstgeschichte', *Plan*, 1: 3, 1945. Citations are given from the reprint in: Österreichische Galerie (ed). *Über das 'Elementare' in der Kunstgeschichte und andere Aufsätze von Fritz Novotny*, Vienna: Rosenbaum, 1968, 17-25.

²⁴ Gottfried Boehm. 'Bild und Zeit', in: Hannelore Paflik, ed, *Das Phänomen Zeit in Kunst und Wissenschaft*, Weinheim, Acta Humaniora, 1987, 1-24.

²⁵ 'Die Dinge, namentlich die menschliche Figur treten nun offen und nicht mehr bloß äußerlich gezwungen in Beziehung zueinander: Es beginnt die Berücksichtigung von Raum und Zeit in der Kunst. Damit ist in der Tat die moderne Kunst angebahnt, die ja auch Raum- und Zeitkunst ist.' Alois Riegl, *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*, 277-278.

unnamed art historians of the youngest generation of scholars at his time.²⁶ While Sedlmayr was not explicitly mentioned, he was obviously meant as one of the young followers Schlosser had in mind because it had been he who made Sedlmayr's appointment as an assistant at the University of Vienna possible. Additionally, Sedlmayr's methodological approach and his admiration for Riegl's use of structural analysis were well known because of his early publications. By inventing the term Vienna School, Schlosser aimed not only at emphasising the professionalism of Viennese art historians by providing them with an official account of their history but also at excluding Josef Strzygowski as well as his students and followers from this genealogy.

Differently from Pächt and Sedlmayr, Novotny had studied with Josef Strzygowski and had become Strzygowski's assistant, a position he held until the First Institute for art history was closed after Strzygowski retired.²⁷ The importance of having a professional background in one of the formerly existing two institutes of art history becomes even more evident when considering that both Novotny and Otto Demus, another Strzygowski student, were not among the art historians listed as potential contributors of the *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen* edited by Sedlmayr and Pächt.²⁸ In Novotny's case, this biographical fact seems especially important because it was the historical background for the most important difference between Novotny and those scholars who can be seen as members of the Vienna School without any restrictions.

While orthodox followers of Riegl's tradition saw the individual artwork as the only appropriate starting point for scholarly analysis, as Schlosser also had stressed, the discussion of single works did not have much importance for Novotny. Instead, he tended to illustrate his complicated theoretical statements with some pictures which served as chosen examples for the existence of phenomena he described. For example, 'Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive' starts with a series of hypotheses he subsequently tested. Subjects of his hypotheses were the question whether a preference for specific forms of landscape can be discerned in Cézanne's choice of motifs as well as the question whether Cézanne had invented pictorial elements for reasons of composition. Novotny stated that a preference for a specific kind of landscape or a special point of view did not exist in Cézanne's oeuvre and that inventions of objects cannot be proved as Cézanne's landscape paintings, in spite of their a-naturalistic effect, have the character of a portrait of the displayed landscape. The only extraordinary feature Novotny observed in his attempt to answer the questions he started from was a tendency to choose a smaller part of the landscape for the execution of the painting than the normal human field of vision.²⁹

The fact that Novotny (with one exception) rejected all of his starting hypotheses that dealt with the possibilities of a specific attitude towards the construction of pictorial space indicates that his questions were most likely not

²⁶ Julius v. Schlosser, 'Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte. Rückblick auf ein Säkulum deutscher Gelehrtenarbeit in Österreich', *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, 13: 2, 1934, 146-228.

²⁷ For similar reasons, seeing Emil Kaufmann as a member of the Vienna School is not possible without problems. Although Kaufmann was a friend of Max Dvorak, he studied with Strzygowski. See Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, 26.

²⁸ I would like to thank Ian Verstegen for this information.

²⁹ Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, 25.

deduced from an analysis of individual paintings but were rather developed by theoreticizing on general possibilities of spatial formation which are at first independent from an artist's actual works. This kind of approach which makes use of a fixed theoretical system had been overtly rejected by Otto Pächt in his article 'Das Ende der Abbildtheorie' from 1931. Although he admitted that using such a system had the advantage of guaranteeing the scientific value of an analysis, he saw the larger distance to the individual work and the ahistorical dimension as major risks which made him renounce this possibility.³⁰ Obviously, Novotny did not share Pächt's reservations. Large parts of his book consist of observations that could not be made when analyzing a single artwork but only by comparing either a large number of different paintings or even comparing paintings with photographs of the landscape taken as a motif. Novotny himself justified the reduced importance of individual artworks while forcing on more abstract theories as follows: 'The vague impression in a single picture of an unusual perspectival formation, which resists conceptual clarification no matter how detailed the analysis, can in this way be broadened to an understanding of certain specific methods of formation in order to ascertain what this reduction of the natural appearance means in the perspective of this picture.'³¹

Furthermore, Novotny stressed the importance of conceptually distinguishing the results of his theory-based approach from the discussion of individual artworks by stating that '...the separation between the impression of a basic characteristic derived from knowledge and comparative analysis of the complete oeuvre (or a larger number of pictures) and the impression resulting from the – relatively – independent effect of a single work ...'³² seemed appropriate for the kind of study he wanted to conduct. The consequences of Novotny's methodological approach become more apparent when his book is once again compared with Pächt's ideas on Dutch fifteenth-century painting. While Pächt gave very detailed descriptions of the paintings he had chosen for his text, Novotny's descriptions of artworks he mentioned in his book were rather succinct, as he merely used them as examples to demonstrate that his theories were correct. The significance of observations made by regarding individual works was further reduced by Novotny in the context of his use of photographs that John Rewald had made of landscape motifs painted by Cézanne, an occasion he also used to take a distance from the way formal analysis was understood by other scholars: 'This way of behaviour towards the natural appearance [of landscape] which cannot be discerned from a single work, has nothing in common with the pure formalist effects of the picture.'³³

The question of whether Novotny has to be seen as a member of the Viennese School of art history can only be answered in combination with the question of specific

³⁰ Otto Pächt, 'Das Ende der Abbildtheorie', in: Otto Pächt, *Methodisches zur kunsthistorischen Praxis*, Munich: Prestel, 1986, 122-123.

³¹ 'Der unbestimmte Eindruck von der Besonderheit der perspektivischen Gestaltung eines einzelnen Bildes, der sich bei noch so eingehender Analyse einer begrifflichen Klärung widersetzt, kann so zur Einsicht in bestimmte spezifische Gestaltungsmittel erweitert werden.' Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, 46.

³² 'die Trennung zwischen dem Eindruck von einem bestimmten grundlegenden Merkmal, der aus der Kenntnis und vergleichenden Betrachtung des Gesamtwerkes (einer größeren Reihe von Bildern) hervorgeht – und dem Eindruck, den die – wenigstens relativ – unabhängige Wirkung des Einzelwerkes ergibt'. Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, 45.

³³ 'Denn diese Art des Verhaltens zur Naturerscheinung, die nicht aus dem Einzelwerk für sich zu ersehen ist, hat ja keinerlei Berührungspunkte mit den rein formalen Wirkungswerten des Bildes.' Fritz Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*, 56.

traditions in the history of research. Characteristic for the Anglo-American tradition, following Meyer Schapiro, is a tendency to include a possibly large number of scholars, while in German literature, a narrower definition, recurring directly on the invention of the term Vienna School by Julius von Schlosser, is more common. For example, Anthony Vidler, who clearly favours a broad definition, suggested not only including Kaschnitz von Weinberg and Novotny, but also Emil Kaufmann, whom he addressed as 'the only important member of the so-called Vienna School of the 1920s whose work has not been re-assessed for its scholarly and methodological qualities in the last decade'.³⁴ At the same time, Vidler admitted that Kaufmann had only been loosely connected to the New Vienna School. In this point, Vidler is a true follower of Schapiro, who defined the New Vienna School on the basis of his assumption that all authors who had published in the journal 'Kritische Berichte' followed a common methodological program. Nevertheless, Schapiro admitted to not knowing whether any author (with the exception of Hans Sedlmayr) shared Sedlmayr's opinions on a 'rigorous study of art' or if they had already abandoned the concept.³⁵ It seems quite possible that the authors Schapiro discussed in his article appeared as a coherent group to him due to a maybe unconscious comparison of the European authors with his own American tradition which had a strong focus on connoisseurship while the controversies on the different institutes of art history at the University of Vienna and the concurrence between the heads of these institutes were more or less irrelevant for him.³⁶

From today's point of view, a broad definition of the Vienna School in the tradition of Schapiro (described here in a simplified short form) offers the possibility to create a more manifold picture than a more restrictive way of dealing with this scholarly tradition could ever allow. For example, Novotny's affinity for modern art, which differentiates him from the other members of the New Vienna School, would contribute to this new variety. Although Hans Sedlmayr had also published on modern art, Novotny would be the only scholar of the group who did so in an affirmative way, as Sedlmayr's approach to Modernism known from 'The Lost Centre' often lacks scholarly qualities, which are replaced by ideology and conservative polemics.

Nevertheless, addressing Novotny as a member of the Vienna school includes not only the risk of obscuring differences between him and the other scholars in question but also the risk of obscuring parallels to scholars from other traditions. The most interesting of such parallels can be found by comparing Novotny's methodological ideas with theoretical essays written by Erwin Panofsky before his turn to iconology. As Panofsky's early methodological essays have frequently been discussed,³⁷ I will confine myself to a resumé of those aspects which are most

³⁴ Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, 23.

³⁵ Meyer Schapiro, 'The New Viennese School', *Art Bulletin*, 18:2, 1936, 258-266.

³⁶ A similar phenomenon exists in contemporary texts on the subject. For example, Michael Ann Holly addressed Josef Strzygowski as a member of the Vienna School while writing about him as the most important antagonist of Max Dvořák: Michael Ann Holly, 'Spirits and Ghosts in the Historiography of Art', in: Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey, eds, *The Subjects of Art History. Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 55.

³⁷ E. g. Karlheinz Lüdeking, 'Panofskys Umweg zu Ikonographie', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, Sonderheft 8, 2007, 201-224; Allister Neher, 'The Concept of Kunstwollen, neo-Kantianism, and Erwin Panofsky's early art theoretical essays', *Word & Image*, 20: 1, January-March 2004, 41-51; Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the foundations of art history*, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 1984.

important for a comparison with Novotny's idea on the art historic method. In his essay 'Über das Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Kunsttheorie' Panofsky argued that art history had to investigate time and space as they would allow an understanding of all artistic problems and their historical solutions, as he saw them as the equivalents to matter and form as aesthetic categories relevant to artists.³⁸ Panofsky was convinced that a complete merging of objects could only be imagined as an absolute priority of undividable time, while complete separation or isolation (this is, in Panofsky's terms of categories, pure form) would only be possible within timeless space. For Panofsky, an art historian who wanted to find out how artistic problems had been solved therefore had to deal with time and space. As two opposed poles, with an imagined continuum of all possible art works between them, his system should provide art history with a structure for analysing and comparing art works from different artists and periods.

In some passages of 'Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive', Novotny's ideas came very close to Panofsky's concept when he explained the character of Cézanne's formation of space as the illustration of an elementary principle. From a point of view directed by the philosophical background of his theory, the essence of Novotny's argument was that Cézanne's pictorial space is constructed by emphasising the continuity of space, because space is depicted while movement is reduced as far as possible. In this way, an almost pure depiction of space, without temporary dimension, is achieved. Following Novotny's theory, Cézanne's formation of space could therefore be placed at one of the two extreme poles of Panofsky's schema. Generally, Novotny's use of the terms time and space is less Kantian in comparison with Panofsky's concept. Panofsky aimed at a transcendental understanding of these concepts, by understanding them as the foundations of any possible knowledge. For this reason, Panofsky's concept, which should have led to a system for research on any artwork, is far more ambitious than Novotny's methodological statements are. In terms of method, time and space were merely an alternative content of artworks which characterises modern art, as Novotny stated in his speech 'Über das Elementare in der Kunstgeschichte'.

Nevertheless, the interest in space and time as fundamental Kantian categories that Novotny shared with Panofsky is remarkable and seems to go far beyond a mere phenomenon of *zeitgeist* or a latent attachment to neo-Kantianism. Novotny's orientation at Kantian epistemology can also be seen as a clue for a tendency towards an understanding of art history closer to natural sciences than to the humanities. Unlike later art historians interested in Immanuel Kant's philosophy who focused on the third Kantian critique, which deals with aesthetics and the category of the sublime,³⁹ Novotny and Panofsky chose Kant's 'Critique of pure reason'. This principal decision is highly important because Kant's epistemology is usually associated with natural

³⁸ Erwin Panofsky, 'Über das Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Kunsttheorie. Ein Beitrag zur Erörterung über die Möglichkeit "kunstwissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe"', in: Erwin Panofsky, *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*, eds. H. Oberer, E. Verheyen, 2nd edition, Berlin: Hessling, 1974, 50.

³⁹ Examples for contemporary renewed interest in Kant's concept of the sublime are, among others, Paul Crowther, *The contemporary sublime: sensibilities of transcendence and shock*, London: St. Martins, 1995; Mark Cheetham, 'The Sublime is now (again)', *C Magazine*, 44:5, 1995, 27-39; Jeffrey Librett, ed., *Of the sublime: presence in question*, Albany (NY): Suny Press, 1993.

sciences, while his aesthetics are seen as part of the domain of the humanities.⁴⁰ Kant's deduction of possibilities to create synthetical, a priorical judgments was extremely important for the natural sciences as it served as an argument for the legitimation of 'true' science until philosophers dealing with the theory of science began to abandon Kantian epistemology in the first decades of the twentieth century. One of them was Carnap, who argued that Albert Einstein had defeated Kant by developing his theory of relativity.⁴¹

During the last decades, the status of art history as part of the humanities had become an unreflected paradigm. Discussions about the relation of art history to other disciplines used to focus on the question whether philology, history or literary studies had been most influential for the development of art history.⁴² Tendencies to bridge the gap between the approaches of the natural sciences and the humanities have only gained some relevance in art history in recent years, with a new trend towards an expansion of the discipline towards cultural studies and visual sciences and partial interest in methods of natural sciences which are most apparent in the field of neuroarthistory. Although these developments are not undisputed, they are usually not seen as alternatives to traditional art history but rather as new fields of research that only affect scholars who are actively interested in those new approaches. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when the struggle for influence between the faculties of natural sciences and humanities reached its peak,⁴³ the situation was more complicated. There were only few scholars who recognized the importance of both approaches to scholarship. One of them was Hans Tietze, who had postulated a need for a new art history understood as a history of ideas in 1925⁴⁴ but who did not deny the existence of possible links between art history and the natural sciences. Other scholars explicitly fought for a stronger orientation towards natural sciences. Most of them would not have gone as far as Karl Pichl, a student of neo-positivist philosopher Moritz Schlick, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the methodology of art history (a discipline he consequently named 'science of art'). In his thesis, Pichl argued that art history had to assimilate to physics, the discipline he saw as the archetype of natural sciences. Although Pichl cannot be seen as an important scholar, his thesis and the opinions he expressed can be seen as typical for the methodological debates of his time. His choice of art historical literature he affirmatively discussed is already striking, as he used works written by only two art historians: Josef Strzygowski and Heinrich

⁴⁰Gert Wolandt, 'Transzendente Elemente in der Kunstphilosophie und in der Kunstgeschichte', in: Lorenz Dittmann, ed, *Kategorien und Methoden der deutschen Kunstgeschichte 1900-1930. Aus den Arbeitskreisen 'Methoden der Geisteswissenschaften' der Fritz Thyssen Stiftung*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1985.

⁴¹ Erhard Oeser, *Popper, der Wiener Kreis und die Folgen. Die Grundlagendebatte der Wissenschaftstheorie*, Vienna: WUV, 2003, 109.

⁴² The importance of philology was stressed by Joan Hart, 'Erwin Panofsky and Karl Mannheim: A dialogue on interpretation', *Critical Inquiry*, 19, 1993, 534-566. The close relation between art history and history was emphasized e. g. by Anthony Vidler, 'Art History's Posthistoire', *Art Bulletin*, 76, 3, 1994, 407-410. A focus on interdisciplinary connections to literary studies became important in American art history through the work of authors who used to work in both disciplines, as e. g. Mieke Bal or Norman Bryson.

⁴³ At the University of Vienna, not only art history was affected by this phenomenon. Similar debates on the status of psychology have been thoroughly analyzed by Gerhard Benetka, *Denkstile der Psychologie*, Vienna: WUV, 2002.

⁴⁴ Hans Tietze. 'Verlebendigung der Kunstgeschichte'. *Hochschulblatt der Frankfurter Zeitung*, 6. 3. 1925, reprinted in: *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 33, 1980, 7-12.

Wölfflin. Additionally, he referred to philosopher and psychologist Max Dessoir, who had founded the interdisciplinary 'Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft' to promote his ideas on a further development of research on art. Large parts of his discussion of these three authors were dedicated to a detailed report of the concepts developed by Strzygowski, who was a promoter of a 'science of art' himself.⁴⁵

The preference for a research of structure based upon abstract concepts that can not only be found with Strzygowski but also with Wölfflin and Dessoir can be seen as evidence for a partial orientation at a scientific ideal close to natural sciences as it was completely opposed to the ideas of scholars who favoured an art history based on structural analysis embedded in the area of humanities. Pächt, as has been shown, rejected all use of abstract concepts in 'Das Ende der Abbildtheorie'. Due to Novotny's biographical background, a certain proximity between him and Strzygowski also seems plausible in the domain of methodological orientation. In addition to his reception of Kantian epistemology, Novotny's ambiguous position towards the role of the individual artwork provides further evidence for his preference for a scientific approach to research on art. Pichl had reproached art historians following the principles of the humanities for staying on the level of contemplation and not proceeding to a more abstract level, a method which according to Pichl would hinder any real gain of knowledge. This opinion can be explained by the hierarchy between the senses and reason which Kant had introduced into epistemology when he stated that 'all our knowledge begins with sense, proceeds thence to understanding, and ends with reason, beyond which nothing higher can be discovered in the human mind for elaborating the matter of intuition and subjecting it to the highest unity of thought'.⁴⁶ Following Kant's line of thought, knowledge can only be achieved when impressions gained through the senses are synthesised by *a priori* terms of understanding and put into an order by reason. To do so, it is necessary to abstract from the particularities of the empirical individual object. For scholarly purposes this means that it is not the specific characteristics of an object, distinguishing this object, that are important but those features which identify the object as a part of a category and which link the object to a more abstract idea. On the other hand, an emphasis on the role of individual artworks can be seen as typical for the humanities because it reflects Wilhelm Dilthey's idea of objectivity. Dilthey, who wanted to develop a non-positivist method for art history on the basis of hermeneutics, understood objectivity as a possibility to elevate understanding of a singular object to a general rule. In accordance with Dilthey's concept, Hans Sedlmayr saw the creation of a new scholarly paradigm, which should consist of a foundation of art history as a discipline on the understanding of individual artworks, as his greatest personal achievement.⁴⁷

The fundamental differences concerning the orientation of art history I have sketched are maybe the most important obstacle for including Novotny into the Vienna

⁴⁵ Michael Braunsteiner, Karin Leitner, 'Die "Wiener Schule" der Kunstgeschichte. Unterrichts- und wissenschaftsmethodisch Grundzüge bis um 1920', in: Walter Höflechner, Götz Pochat, eds, *100 Jahre Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Graz, Publikationen aus dem Archiv der Universität Graz*, vol. 26, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1992, 232.

⁴⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of pure reason*, Mineola (NY): Dover, 2003, 189.

⁴⁷ Arthur Rosenauer, 'Zur neuen Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte', in: Société Alsacienne pour le Développement de l'Histoire de l'Art, ed, *L'art et les révolutions*, actes du XXVIIe congrès international d'histoire de l'art, Strasbourg 1-7 septembre 1989, section 5, 79.

School. Due to the obvious parallels in the use of structural analysis, I would nonetheless prefer to abstain from a definitive decision whether or not he might be addressed as a member of this tradition. Instead, I would plead for a differentiated discussion that might fit best the complexity of methodological discussions which took place in the first half of the twentieth century.

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