

Riegl on the Baroque

Review of:

Alois Riegl: *The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome*. Edited and Translated by Andrew Hopkins and Arnold Witte. Essays by Alina Payne, Arnold Witte, and Andrew Hopkins, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute 2010 (Texts & Documents), 292 pages, 47 b/w illustrations, ISBN 978-1-60606-041-4, USD 50.00

Alois Riegl (1858-1905) undoubtedly belongs to the most influential and original art historians around 1900 and as such has been recognised for a long time in historiography.¹ Already in his lifetime, there was a wide-spread reaction to the three major works which Riegl published before his early death 1905, *Stilfragen. Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin 1893, translated by Evelyn Kain as *Problems of Style. Foundations for a History of Ornament*, Princeton 1992), *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn, 1. Teil* (Vienna 1901, translated by Rolf Winkes as *Late Roman Industry*, Rome 1985), and 'Das holländische Gruppenporträt', (originally in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, 23, 1902, 71-278, translated by Evelyn Kain and David Britt as *The Group Portraiture of Holland*, Los Angeles 1999). Yet Riegl's impact as a teacher seems to have been even greater, lecturing from 1889 at the University of Vienna. His many pupils felt obliged to publish Riegl's lecture notes and scattered articles after his death, starting in 1908 with the volume under discussion here, *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*, based on university lectures in the terms 1894/95, 1898/99, 1901/02 and edited by Arthur Burda and Max Dvořák. After the First World War nearly all of Riegl's texts were edited or re-edited, including a second, revised publication of *Barockkunst* in 1923, edited by Karl M. Swoboda and Johannes Wilde. This renewed interest in Riegl in the 1920s and 1930s centred on the evaluation of his prominent, yet enigmatic concept of *Kunstwollen* and the discussion of the term Mannerism as a period style related to the counter-reformation, as first argued by Riegl in his *Barockkunst* and later elaborated by Max Dvořák and many others in the 1920s.² Both debates stood at the heart of the so-called second Vienna school of art history, and émigré members of this circle, like Otto Pächt or Ernst Gombrich, inaugurated the debate and reception of Riegl's thoughts from the 1960s onwards in

¹ See lately, for example, Peter Noever, Artur Rosenauer and Georg Vasold, eds, *Alois Riegl Revisited. Beiträge zu Werk und Rezeption. Contributions to the Opus and its Reception*, Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010; and the review of this by Matthew Rampley, 'Re-reading Riegl', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 5, December 2011; Richard Woodfield, ed., *Framing Formalism: Riegl's Work*, Amsterdam, 2001; Matthew Rampley, 'Alois Riegl (1858-1905)', in Ulrich Pfisterer, ed., *Klassiker der Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 1, *Von Winckelmann bis Warburg*, München: Beck 2007, 152-162.

² On the concept of *Kunstwollen* see lately Andrea Reichenberger, *Riegl's 'Kunstwollen': Versuch einer Neubetrachtung*, Sankt Augustin: Akademia, 2003; on the term Mannerism see generally Ursula Link-Heer, 'Manier/manieristisch/Manierismus', in Karlheinz Barck et al., eds, *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, vol. 3, Stuttgart and Weimar, 2001, 790-846; on the art historical debates see Wolfgang Braungart, ed., *Manier und Manierismus*, Tübingen, 2000 with the essays by Horst Bredekamp and Hermann Hipp.

Anglo-American academia.³ This has resulted in the translation of all of Riegl's major works into English, of which the translation of *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom* by Andrew Hopkins and Arnold Witte, edited as *The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome* in the series *Texts and Documents* of the Getty Research Institute in 2010, is the most recent.

It is one of the merits of this latest Riegl translation that it does not only produce a scrupulous and sensible translation of the original German text of 1908 (89-254), but also addresses the important historiographic aspects of Riegl's ongoing importance by the inclusion of three introductory essays (1-87) and a wide-ranging bibliography of Riegl's publications and secondary sources (255-264), which take up together nearly half of this volume. Andrew Hopkins, in a well-founded essay aptly titled 'Riegl Renaissances' (60-87), enfolds the diverse responses to Riegl up to today. He differentiates convincingly between a first 'Riegl Renaissance' in the 1920s and 1930s in Austria and Germany, and a second, yet interconnected 'Riegl Renaissance' in the 1980s and 1990s. This was initiated by the re-evaluation of Riegl by Henri Zerner and Michael Podro,⁴ and followed from the late 1970s onwards by the parallel research on Riegl by Margaret Olin in Chicago and Margaret Iversen in Essex.⁵ The latter's indirect connection to the original Vienna School — as Hopkins hinted, Iversen was a doctoral student of Michael Podro, himself being Gombrich's pupil (like Richard Woodfield) — highlights the general importance of teacher-student filiations for historiography. Due to Iversen's and Olin's publications and the Riegl translations into English, this second 'Riegl Renaissance' has been concentrated in Britain and the USA and surprisingly less in the German-speaking countries.⁶

Riegl's *The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome* covers Italian architecture, painting and, to a lesser degree, sculpture, between c. 1520 and 1630, with a certain emphasis on the emergence of the new Baroque style in the works of Michelangelo and Correggio. The content of the book is usefully summed up and analysed in the light of Riegl's theoretical framework by Arnold Witte in his introductory essay 'Reconstructing Riegl's *Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*' (34-59). Moreover, Witte carefully outlines the editorial history of the original book, which was based on three manuscript sets of the lecture notes of 1884/85, 1898/99 and 1901/02, which are

³ Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London: Phaidon 1960; Otto Pächt, 'Art Historians and Art Critics 6: Alois Riegl', *Burlington Magazine*, 105, 1963, 188-193. This article preceded the edition of Riegl's last posthumous work by Otto Pächt and Karl M. Swoboda, eds, *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*, Graz: Böhlau, 1966 (translated by Jacqueline Jung as *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, New York 2004).

⁴ Henri Zerner, 'Alois Riegl. Art, Value, and Historicism', *Daedalus*, 105, 1976, 177-188; Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982, based on his unpublished PhD on Konrad Fiedler of 1961.

⁵ Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl. Art History and Theory*, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993; Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1992.

⁶ Yet see the important essays by Willibald Sauerländer, 'Alois Riegl und die Entstehung der autonomen Kunstgeschichte am Fin de siècle', in Roger Bauer and Eckart Heftrich, eds, *Fin de siècle. Zu Literatur und Kunst der Jahrhundertwende*, Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1977, 125-228; Wolfgang Kemp, 'Alois Riegl, 1858-1905', in Heinrich Dilly, ed., *Altmeister moderner Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin: Reimer, 1990, 37-62; and the recent works by Georg Vasold, *Alois Riegl und die Kunstgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte. Überlegungen zum Frühwerk des Wiener Gelehrten*, Freiburg: Rombach, 2004 and Andrea Reichenberger (see n. 2).

still kept at the art history department of the University of Vienna. Witte, having checked these lecture notes and illustrating an example of the collective and obviously constantly added paper sheets (Fig. 1,2 on 40f.) , can show, that Riegl originally covered a much larger material than in the posthumously published book, reaching well into the 18th century and treating northern Baroque art, too. Riegl's manuscript even indicates his plan to write a major book on the Baroque, on which he constantly worked until his death and which was obviously connected to his translation and commentary on Baldinucci's *Vita del cavaliere Giov. Lorenzo Bernini* (47f.).⁷ So the editors of Riegl's *Barockkunst* of 1908, Dvořák and Burda, made decisive cuts out of Riegl's notes, they structured the text by chapters and headings and even the title of the book itself is theirs. Witte also contextualises Riegl's *Barockkunst* book with the author's evolving ideas about the Baroque in his other texts and delineates how Riegl's notions on the Baroque shifted between the time of his first lectures of 1894/95 and the last of 1901/02. Witte especially hints at the only sporadic use of Riegl's famous term *Kunstwollen* in his *Barockkunst*, which there was applied to a broader concept of style, made up by the tension between Riegl's set of opposing artistic tendencies, the plane ('Ebene') and the deep space ('Tiefraum'), the tactile and the optical.

Releasing the evaluation of Riegl from a certain fixation on his concept of *Kunstwollen* also is the aim of Alina Payne in her introductory essay, 'Beyond *Kunstwollen*: Alois Riegl and the Baroque' (1-33). Payne widens the view from Riegl to the historiography of the Baroque at the end of the 19th century, when the Baroque had only recently been fully accepted as a stylistic category of art history by the works of Cornelius Gurlitt, Heinrich Wölfflin or August Schmarsow in the 1880s and 1890s. Payne differentiates how Riegl was building up on the achievements of these predecessors in structuring and defining his material, e.g. by focussing on Michelangelo and the emergence of the Baroque in Rome, and how Riegl's unique positions can be defined. She, in accordance with Arnold Witte in his essay, highlights two major aspects of Riegl's pioneering contribution to the historiography of the Baroque: first, Riegl's attention to the primary (Italian) sources, reviewing Vasari, Bellori, Baglioni and many other authors of the 16th and 17th centuries in the introductory part of his book (103-111); and second, Riegl's closeness to the art works themselves, his detailed formal examinations of individual objects, which do not lose sight of 'the artwork as an entity' (19) and is founded in Riegl's former experiences in the museum. This last and especially distinctive merit of Riegl's Baroque book seems to get into a certain tension, following Payne, with the author's attempts to conceive an overarching concept of the Baroque as style. Payne explains this tension with Riegl's indebtedness to Gottfried Semper and his micro- as well as 'macroeconomic concern with the arts' (3) in the influential volumes of his *Der Stil* of 1860-63.⁸ Riegl did not solve these complexities in his lectures, as they came down to us in his *Barockkunst* book, he did

⁷ This was also published posthumously by Arthur Burda and Oskar Pollak, eds, *Filippo Baldinucci's Vita des Giov. Lorenzo Bernini mit Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Vienna: Schroll, 1912.

⁸ Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten; oder, Praktische Aesthetik. Ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde*, 2 vols, Munich 1860-63 (translated by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Michael Robinson as *Style*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2004).

not smoothen the contradictions of the Baroque period, and it is precisely this quality of Riegl's 'pluralistic interpretation of what Baroque was' (Witte, 53), as argued jointly by the authors of the three informative introductory essays, which makes Riegl's Baroque book still valid today and justifies its present translation into English. Additionally, a certain directness, resulting from the original spontaneity of the lectures, makes the text still appealing to present readers.

The last aspect leads to the principles and some problems of the translation. Riegl's German text clearly echoes the situation of the lectures, the German system of *Vorlesungen*, weekly lectures of, in the case of Riegl's Baroque lectures, three to four hours per week.⁹ The traditional task of these lectures was (or is) to present an overview of the artistic production of a certain period or topic, as can be seen by the original title of Riegl's lectures, 'Art history of the Baroque age' or 'Italian art from 1550 to 1800'. So Riegl treated many different monuments in due course, which he described, analysed in detail and connected by his concept of stylistic development. His text therefore consists of short sentences, often only a sequence of key-words, which he would have elaborated on in his speech and which leave it open to the imagination of the reader (originally, the listener) to be complemented. This special situation of a book founded on lecture notes certainly is one reason, why Riegl's *Barockkunst* is based so predominately on the analysis of the art works themselves, as highlighted by the editors, and less on the evolvment of a theoretical framework, which would have been reserved for the production of a written book.

Nevertheless, the translators and editors decided, as they explain in their prefatory 'Note to the translation', not to take over the open and often unfinished structure of the German original, but to produce a fluent, 'well-formulated English text' (VIII). This certainly is a reasonable decision in the light of the present usage of the book by a contemporary readership, but it meant a fair amount of completing and even shifting of sentences. The original creative and associative freshness of the German text is lost to a certain degree, e.g. when 'Bewußte Steigerung des Schattens. Der Schatten als Verräter [= betrayer] des Tiefraumes wird künstlerisches Element' becomes 'A conscious increase of shadows and shade as a telltale characteristic of deep space becomes an artistic element' (115). On the other hand, this quotation certainly testimonies the care, with which the translators approached the text, especially when dealing with the complexities of the many neologisms and composite words, which Riegl introduced in order to transport his theoretical framework, e.g. 'Tiefraum' = 'deep space'; or 'Nahsicht' = 'proximate view' (IX), most of them listed in a useful glossary at the end of the volume (265f.). Additionally, it is facilitated to compare the English translation to the German original by the inclusion of the page numbers of the 1908 edition in square brackets.

Yet in one instance, the editors' translation of a pair of especially sensitive of Riegl's terms might lead to a certain smoothing of the more problematic potential of Riegl's ideas of the Baroque: Riegl's typological, ethnical, even racial dichotomy between 'Romanen' and 'Germanen', the first of which he associated with a tactile, plastic, active, the second with an optical, incorporeal, passive attitude towards the

⁹ See the testimony in the introduction to Riegl's original publication of *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*, Vienna 1908, V.

arts. This is an important part of Riegl's theoretical framework,¹⁰ which he developed debating with Josef Strzygowski, himself being the author of a recent book on the Baroque,¹¹ which served as a point of argumentation for Riegl. In his *Barockkunst* Riegl addresses this dichotomy between 'romanischer' versus 'germanischer' or 'nordischer Kunst' right from the start in a central passage of his introduction, where he asks his basic question: "What is Baroque art?" (94). Riegl explains that the Baroque was generated when Italian art, as based on corporeal, exterior activity, aligned itself to northern or Germanic art with its emphasis on interior, psychological movements. The resulting contradictions of Baroque art provoked an irritation for 'spectators of the German race' especially (209). Certainly it was widespread around 1900 to argue with ethnic or racial categories, as also noted in the essay by Hopkins (65ff.), but Riegl was the first to transfer main elements of the powerful tradition of the so-called Germanic myth to the historiography of the Baroque.¹² In this way, he created a pattern of interpretation of Baroque art, which later writers like Wilhelm Pinder or Albert Erich Brinckmann could elaborate with increasingly nationalistic overtones. By their decision to translate Riegl's German terms 'romanisch' with 'linate', 'germanisch' with 'Germanic' (sometimes also with 'German'), 'nordisch' with 'northern' (IXf.), the editors to a some degree tone down the more radical implications of Riegl's terminology. Riegl certainly cannot be under any suspicion of nationalism, but his notion of the Baroque as a style of conflict, even struggle ('Kampf'),¹³ between the physical and psychological, the will ('Wille') and the emotion, sensation or feeling (the editors use several translations for Riegl's German term 'Empfindung'), overarched by the duality of the Roman ('romanisch') and the Germanic or Nordic ('nordisch'), left a distinctive mark in the historiography of the Baroque.

Putting these few points of critique or rather further thoughts about the difficulties of translations aside, it has finally to be stressed, that the editors produced a volume which is exemplary in its combination of a careful, scrupulous translation of one of the classic and complex texts of German art historiography around 1900 with the three well-informed, introductory essays which illuminate this text from different perspectives. It is to be hoped that the effort of Andrew Hopkins, Alina Payne, and Arnold Witte is going to contribute to a continuing 'Riegl Renaissance', which might even strengthen the bridges between the English- and German-language academia.

¹⁰ Notable, for example, in Alois Riegl: *Spätromische Kunst-Industrie, nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn*, Vienna: Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1901, reprint Darmstadt 1996, or Riegl's lecture 'Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte. Vortrag, gehalten auf der VIII. Versammlung des Verbandes deutscher Historiker in Salzburg 1904', in Karl M. Swoboda, ed., *Alois Riegl. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Augsburg: Filser 1929, 109-128, reprint Vienna 1996; see in more detail Ute Engel, *Stil und Nation. Barockforschung und deutsche Kunstgeschichte, ca. 1830-1933*, Munich/Paderborn: Fink, forthcoming.

¹¹ Josef Strzygowski, *Das Werden des Barock bei Raffael und Correggio*, Straßburg: Heitz & Mündel, 1898. Strzygowski is mentioned in the essay of Hopkins (67f.); on Strzygowski and Riegl see Georg Vasold, 'Riegl, Strzygowski and the Development of Art', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 5, December 2011.

¹² See e.g. Klaus von See, *Freiheit und Gemeinschaft. Völkisch-nationales Denken in Deutschland zwischen Französischer Revolution und Erstem Weltkrieg*, Heidelberg 2001.

¹³ E.g. 'The impression of uncertainty, tension, unrest, movement, and struggle is evoked.' (175).

Ute Engel, University of Bamberg, is assistant professor at the Institut für Archäologie, Denkmalkunde und Kunstgeschichte, and also lectures at the Institut für Kunstgeschichte, University of Mainz, since 2011 Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (FSA). Her monograph on the historiography of the Baroque in Germany is going to be published in 2013: *Stil und Nation. Barockforschung und deutsche Kunstgeschichte, ca. 1830 bis 1933*, Munich/Paderborn: Fink, forthcoming

ute.engel@uni-bamberg.de
uengel@uni-mainz.de