

From Ringbom to Ringbom: The art of art history of Lars-Ivar Ringbom and Sixten Ringbom: A mythmaker and a myth-breaker in Åbo, Finland

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In 1935 Ludwig Klages, a renowned German graphologist and a *Seelenforscher*¹ made a lecture tour in the Scandinavian countries. During this trip he visited the Finnish city of Åbo, where he met for the first time Lars-Ivar Ringbom, art historian and docent at the Åbo Akademi University.² Ringbom showed him around the city. Later, Klages remembered the visit with warmth.³ Over three decades later, in September 1969, E.H. Gombrich, the director of Warburg Institute, visited the same city. This time the host was the art historian Sixten Ringbom, who was soon going to succeed his father, Lars-Ivar Ringbom, as professor at the Åbo Akademi University. In a letter from the same year, Gombrich thanks his host for the lovely time he spent in Finland.⁴

I find the image of these two visits very intriguing. The father, Lars-Ivar Ringbom, found his mentor in Ludwig Klages, whereas the son, Sixten Ringbom, in Ernst Gombrich. During the thirty four years between the two visits, a profound transformation had indeed happened in the epistemological foundations of art history – at least in the Åbo Akademi University. Ludwig Klages is often introduced as an advocate of irrationalism, speculative metaphysics, anti-Semitism and as a precursor of National Socialism; Gombrich as a proponent and an ardent defender of rationalism. The choice of theme of their lectures is telling: Klages reveals in his letter to Lars-Ivar Ringbom that he would have rather talked about (most likely his own metaphysical) *Weltanschauung* instead of lecturing on graphology.⁵ As for Ernst Gombrich, he gave a lecture entitled ‘Sleep of Reason’. Klages believed in the truth of the myth (and image), whereas Gombrich tried constantly to dissect myth from

* The article stems from a larger work in progress: a doctoral thesis on Sixten Ringbom's art historical thinking and its roots in pre-war preoccupations. I would like to thank professors Bo Ossian Lindberg, Renja Suominen-Kokkonen and Riikka Stewen for their critical comments on this article.

¹ Ludwig Klages preferred Germanized designation *Seelenkunde* or *Seelenforschung* for the Latinate term *Psychologie*. See Richard T Gray, *About Face. German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz*, Detroit and Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004, 137.

² Lars-Ivar Ringbom became a Supernumerary Professor in 1943 until 1958 and a Personal Professor 1958-1968.

³ ‘Oft noch erinnere ich mich unser gemeinsamen Stunden in Abo, unsrer Besichtigung der Kirche und anderer Bauten, unsres Ausflugs zu den roten Granitklippen von Nodendahl. Wie gern würde ich Finnland einmal im Sommer kennenlernen!’ A letter from Ludwig Klages to Lars-Ivar Ringbom in 30 January 1938. Lars-Ivar Ringbom's samling, Coll. F:I, Åbo Akademi University Library (hereinafter ÅAUL).

⁴ A letter from E.H. Gombrich to Sixten Ringbom, 29. September 1969. ÅAUL, Coll. 142:6.

⁵ A letter from Ludwig Klages to Lars-Ivar Ringbom 21 October 1935. „[...] leider das Thema ‘Handschrift und Character’ mit Lichtbildern gewählt. Ich selbst hätte einen weltanschauunlichen Gegenstand bevorzugt.’ ÅAUL Coll. F:I.

history. The polarity of rationalism and irrationalism is a common denominator that unites these two thinkers, but the valorisation is completely different. For Klages, irrationalism was a great power which could not be suppressed without causing great damage to human life; Gombrich connected irrationalism with the set of ideas that led to Nazi thinking. Klages sought after passive, 'pure seeing', for Gombrich, there could not exist any 'innocent eye'. For Klages, the knowledge of the reality was attained by the 'soul' of *Innerness*, not by reason. Even the use of language was completely different: Klages wrote German with pathos-laden, labyrinth-like style - everybody is familiar with Gombrich's witty and piercing English. The list of differences between these two scholars is long.

My intention in this essay is to look closer to this 'image'. I will first present shortly Lars-Ivar Ringbom and Sixten Ringbom, who are maybe unknown scholars to most of the readers. In the rest of my essay, I will concentrate on the impact that Ludwig Klages had on Lars-Ivar Ringbom, which means that my narrative will bring more out the 'irrational' side of the latter's thinking. In my opinion, Sixten Ringbom's thinking not only grew out of this matrix but also against it. I have in my article 'Ringbom on Kandinsky. The contested roots of modern art',⁶ already dealt with the tension that I find in Sixten Ringbom's writings between the metaphysical and irrational character of the artworks and art theories he was interested in, and the Anglo-Saxon positivistic approach to those problems. In that article I did not take into account Lars-Ivar Ringbom at all. This article will complement the picture from a somewhat other perspective.

Lars-Ivar Ringbom

In the beginning of the 1920s, Lars-Ivar Ringbom (1901-1971) had studied art in Germany and Austria.⁷ He was also a member of Swedish-speaking modernists in Finland, a loose group of writers, visual artists and scholars who wrote to a journal called *Quosego*. These modernists emphasized vitalism and the importance of a close relationship between nature, life and art. Many of the members of this group shared an interest in questions of visual perception. In the beginning of 1920, Lars-Ivar Ringbom also studied art history under J.J. Tikkanen (1857-1930) and Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941), the first professor of art history at the Åbo Akademi

⁶ Marja Väättäinen, 'Ringbom on Kandinsky. The contested roots of modern art', *Mind and Matter : Selected papers of Nordik 2009 Conference for Art Historians*, ed., Johanna Vakkari, Helsinki: Taidehistorian seura. 2010, 66-81.

⁷ Bo Ossian Lindberg has written about Lars-Ivar Ringbom's life and work in his obituary 'Lars-Ivar Ringbom'. *Årskrift Utgiven av Åbo Akademi 1970-71*. Åbo 1971, 347-353. See also Bo Ossian Lindberg, 'Lars-Ivar Ringbom och teckningen som forskningsmetod', *The Shaping of art history in Finland*, Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, ed., *Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia* 36. Helsinki: Taidehistorian seura, 2007, 99-109; Timo Huusko, 'Tahto ja elämä. Uusasiällisyys, persoonallisuus ja vitalismi Lars-Ivar Ringbomin taidekirjoittelussa', *Kirjoituksia taiteesta 3: Modernisteja ja taiteilijakriitikoita*, eds. Liina Lindgren, Hanna-Leena Paloposki, Elina Heikka. 2001; Päivi Huuhtanen has discussed Lars-Ivar Ringbom's work in the context of Finnish aesthetics, Päivi Huuhtanen, *Tunteesta henkeen. Antipositivisismi ja suomalainen estetiikka 1900-1939*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seuran toimituksia, 1978, 222-228. For the history of the department of art history and theory in the Åbo Akademi University, see Åsa Ringbom, 'Konsthistoria med konstteori', *Åbo Akademi 1918-1993. Forskning och institutioner 2. Humanistiska fakulteten. Teologiska fakulteten*, ed., Solveig Widén, Åbo Åbo Akademis förlag, 1993, 139-153.

University.⁸ Especially Josef Strzygowski had an immense impact on Ringbom – nevertheless, due to the scope of my article I will discuss his role only briefly. Similarly to his Viennese teacher, Lars-Ivar Ringbom was interested in pre-historic, medieval and modern art and did not choose as his field of specialization the canonical works or the ‘high art’ of Western culture.⁹ Strzygowski also orientated Ringbom’s studies with the perspectives of ‘North’ and ‘East’. Furthermore, the emphasis on the ‘materiality’ of artworks against the idealist approach to art comes from Strzygowski and Ringbom’s own background as an artist. This materiality imposed its own restrictions to the symbolizing human mind.

Lars-Ivar Ringbom was an extremely prolific scholar, which makes it difficult to write a coherent résumé of his thinking. His scholarly profile could be characterised as ‘all-in-one’. He wrote art criticism and art historical studies. He was an empiricist, but also very interested in theoretical problems such as the psychology of seeing and of expression, and the nature of representation and illusionism. He participated actively in cultural debates in Finland-Swedish journals such as *Granskaren* and *Finsk Tidskrift*. His internationally best known works are *Graltempel und Paradies* and *Paradisus Terrestris*.¹⁰ His works on Iranian art awarded him an honorary membership in The Asia Institute of New York in 1952.

Lars-Ivar Ringbom became acquainted with Ludwig Klages’s work at the end of 1920s while writing his doctoral dissertation *Kampen om illusionen i måleriet*. In the book, Ringbom concentrated on the ‘struggle’ between the expressive, non-mimetic decorative forms on the picture plane and the ‘will to representation’, which is the part of painting that recesses into depth and imitates optical illusion.¹¹ It is a theoretical and phenomenological study, an attempt to read or to see the image, its creation and reception, in the present tense. Like Ringbom’s other studies, it crosses the boundary of art theory to anthropology and aesthetics. Moreover, the book witnesses a profound ‘Klagesian turn’ in Lars-Ivar Ringbom’s thinking - it even imitates the manner of Klages’s writing. However, later Ringbom admits that he may have misunderstood some of Klages’s ideas and takes a distance from

⁸ For Josef Strzygowski’s years in Åbo Akademi University, see Lars Berggren, ‘Josef Strzygowski – en främmande fågel i Finland’, *The Shaping of art history in Finland, Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia* 36. Helsinki: Taidehistorian seura, 2007, 84-98; Sixten Ringbom, ‘När ett konsthistoriskt institut skulle inrättas på Åbo slott’, *Museerna och forskningen, festskrift tillägnad Knut Drake på 60-årsdagen* 6.3. 1987, 1987, 19-23.

⁹ Bo Ossian Lindberg, ‘Lars-Ivar Ringbom och teckningen’, 2007, 99.

¹⁰ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Graltempel und Paradies. Beziehungen zwischen Iran und Europa im Mittelalter*. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1951. Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Paradisus terrestris. Myt, bild och verklighet*, Helsingfors: Societas scientiarum Fennicae, 1958. Written in Swedish with a long English abstract.

¹¹ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Kampen om illusionen i måleriet. Studier i måleriets väsen och utveckling*, Helsingfors: Acta Academiae Aboensis Humaniora 7, 1931. (‘The struggle of illusion in painting. Studies in the essence and development of painting’). Originally, Ringbom had an idea to base his art theory on Gestalt psychology’s premises, but Klages’s thinking made such a great impact that he abandoned all the material he had written so far. ‘Ludwig Klages and Melchior Palagyi are now my authorities’ Ringbom declares in a letter to a German friend Herman (last name unknown) in 2 June 1930. Lars-Ivar Ringbom’s samling, F:I, ÅAUL. In *Kampen* the word ‘illusion’ has many different meanings, which makes it often hard to follow Ringbom’s reasoning. Professor Johnny Roosval noted in his evaluation statement for Lars-Ivar Ringbom’s professorship that Ringbom’s dissertation can be considered as a defence for modernist, especially expressionist painting against illusionistic one. Johnny Roosval, Humanistiska fakultetens protokoll 1942-1943. Åbo Akademi University Archives.

Klages's view on 'Pelasgian' symbolism.¹² I would also add that Ringbom couldn't wholly share Klages's anti-modernist bias. Nevertheless, one can discern Klages's deep impact on Ringbom's work until the end of World War II. After the war, when Lars-Ivar Ringbom turned from the physiognomic questions of expression to the iconographical and philological questions of meaning, Klages was no more an important point of reference. However, one can still trace echoes of his ideas in Lars-Ivar Ringbom's studies on the paradise myth in the idea of the two-sidedness or the double-rootedness of both the image and the myth.

Sixten Ringbom

Sixten Ringbom (1935-1992) studied art history in the 1950s at the Åbo Akademi University under his father, Lars-Ivar Ringbom.¹³ In the autumn of 1959, he went to the Warburg Institute for a year to study and to collect material for his dissertation, *Icon to Narrative*, in which he explored the meaning and emergence of new compositional type, 'the half-length narrative' and followed its 'genetic' roots to byzantine icon.¹⁴ There Ernst Gombrich became his supervisor and later his colleague and friend. After his dissertation, Sixten Ringbom became interested in the occult and theosophical roots of abstract art and in 1970 *The Sounding Cosmos* was published.¹⁵ In the 1980s, Ringbom concentrated more on the syntactical problems in images, such as 'indirect narration'. In Sixten Ringbom's writings, the monistic urge of previous generations to find a single *telos* for art is changed to a more historical, contextual and 'nominalist' approach. According to Irving Lavin, with his generation, art history was turned into a rigorous history of ideas to oppose the elitist aesthetics of formalism.¹⁶

Sixten Ringbom's methodology is often been described as iconographical. Nevertheless, as Craig Harbison has noted, Ringbom's approach to late medieval art offers an alternative to Erwin Panofsky's iconographical method.¹⁷ With the *Icon to Narrative*, Ringbom crossed the disciplinary frontier into anthropology. Like Lars-

¹² A letter from Lars-Ivar Ringbom to Ludwig Klages, 10 February 1934, F:1, ÅAUL. In his letter, Lars-Ivar Ringbom refers to Klages's third volume of the *Geist als Widersacher* (1932), which appeared after Ringbom's dissertation. In the book, Klages attacks fiercely against the *Geist* and writes about the soulful symbolism of the prehistoric Pelasgian people. In the same letter, however, Lars-Ivar Ringbom writes about the great influence Klages has had on Ringbom's life and work: „Ich danke Ihnen für die umwälzende Wirkung, die sie durch Ihre Werke in meinem Denken und Leben zustandegebracht haben.' Klages was important for Ringbom both as a philosopher and a psychologist. Besides Klages, Ringbom was also very interested in Melchior Palagyi's ideas. Melchior Palagyi was a Hungarian philosopher and a mathematician, who, in turn, had an impact on Klages.

¹³ For Sixten Ringbom's life and works, see Bo Ossian Lindberg 'Sixten Ringbom 1935-1992', *Icon to cartoon: a tribute to Sixten Ringbom, Taidehistoriallisia tutkimuksia* 16. Helsinki: Taidehistorian seura, 1995, 9-31.

¹⁴ Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative. The Rise of Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth Century Devotional Painting*, 1965. Åbo: Åbo Akademi, Acta Academiae Aboensis, 1965.

¹⁵ Ringbom, Sixten, *The Sounding Cosmos. A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*, Åbo: Åbo Akademi 1970.

¹⁶ Irving Lavin, 'The Crisis of Art History'. *Art Bulletin* 78, 1996, 13-15.

¹⁷ Craig Harbison, *Early Netherlandish Paintings. Rediscovery, Reception and Research*, Bernhard Riddebos, Anne van Buren and Henk van Veen, eds., Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.2005, 378-406, esp. 401.

Ivar Ringbom, Sixten Ringbom was interested in how pictorial forms were generated from each other, without the intermediate help of written texts.¹⁸ To my mind, this book is the most 'Warburgian' of Ringbom's writings, in a sense that it situates the origin of these late medieval and renaissance images in context of religion (especially mysticism) and relates works of art to religious imagination of lay people and their use in private devotion.¹⁹ As William Hood noted in his review on the book, *Icon to Narrative* was an important contribution to the history of the visual imagination as a projection of religious impulses.²⁰ The book has had a great influence on the writings of Hans Belting and other scholars interested especially in Early Netherlandish art, where the study of 'function' of art has already become a commonplace.

If Ringbom, with his *Icon to Narrative*, opened a door for anthropological studies of images, he shut the windows in order to ponder on questions more related to art history's own tradition. In an interview, Sixten Ringbom tells that it was his father who had taught him to read images.²¹ Although both Ringboms were against formalism, they had a 'structuralist' eye, which means that they both were interested in the formal devices and the 'representational strategies' that artists use to address the beholder.²²

Like his father, Sixten Ringbom was interested in the questions of perception, inner and outer, but in his writings the previous problematic is nearly always historicized. If Lars-Ivar Ringbom tried to trace the symptoms of *Innerlichkeit* in art history and the outer forms of artworks, Sixten Ringbom in his turn was interested in the representational techniques artists use in order to make this inner life, interiority visible. For Sixten Ringbom, the question was not to gauge the authenticity of this interiority, as it had been for his father.

Sixten Ringbom was interested in images as vehicles of mysticism, as points of intersection between two worlds as seen by the mystical tradition. He was introduced in this field of interest in the Warburg Institute where he studied in 1959-60, but also in the Donner Institute in Åbo, where he worked as a librarian during the 1960s. The latter was an institute for studies in religion. One of the important tasks of the institute was to promote the study of the role of mysticism (and even occultism) for the cultural development and for the cultural phenomena such as art. Ringbom worked there as a librarian and could avail himself of the unique collection of mystical and occult books. The library also included nearly all

¹⁸ Both Ringboms were interested in the 'power of images' in the Middle Ages. *Icon to Narrative* is closest to Lars-Ivar Ringbom's works, because the meaning of the work is in its impact on the beholder.

¹⁹ Roland Kany has noted that the dominant conception of Aby Warburg as an art historian is somewhat misleading, because the study of religion was one of his main concerns. Warburg saw that art and religion were in close contact to each other. Only after the removal of the Institute to London, the emphasis was more on art Renaissance culture. Roland Kany, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Forschung an der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*. Bamberg: Stefan Wendel Verlag, 1989.

²⁰ William Hood, 'Icon to Narrative', *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 128, 999, June 1986, 429-430; see also Colin Eisler's review on *Icon to Narrative* in *Art Bulletin* Vol. 51, No. 2, June 1969.

²¹ Sixten Ringbom's interview by Juhani Aromäki, 'Älymystön on käytävä vastaisuun väkivallan peikkoja vastaan' *Helsingin Sanomat*, 13 May 1990.

²² For Sixten Ringbom's role in the Bellini scholarship, see Alessandro Nova, 'Icona, racconto e *dramatic close-up* nei dipinti devozionali di Giovanni Bellini', *Giovanni Bellini*, ed., Sergio di Stefano, Milano, Silvana Editoriale. 2008, 105-115.

writings of Rudolf Steiner. I would even say that the two institutes formed a powerful 'constellation' of mutual enforcement which strongly influenced Ringbom's studies. Nevertheless, to my mind, the insights generated by this constellation were dampened down by the 'epistemological censure' of positivism and empiricism.

When Sixten Ringbom arrived at the Warburg Institute, Gombrich's book, *Art and Illusion*, had just been published. Ringbom wrote a review of the book, which shows that he was familiar with the thematic of perception – thanks to his father's investigations in the same field.²³ In the long run, from Gombrich, Ringbom inherited - among many other things - the Popperian aversion to totalizing historical schemes, metaphysics and a view on science, which narrowed the epistemological base of art history to documented evidence. Moreover, the concept of 'projection', which Gombrich had introduced to art history, seemed to have had a profound impact on a whole generation of art historians.²⁴ According to Bo Ossian Lindberg, Ringbom suspected that art historians were likely to underestimate the beholder's needs and drives. Consequently, he was worried that art historians were too optimistic as far as their possibilities of describing pictures in words were concerned, an activity that rested 'on a largely subjective and introspective foundation'. On the other hand, Ringbom was worried that psychologists were too eager to impose psychic forces on images without being sufficiently conscious of the history of representation.²⁵

In his own work, Sixten Ringbom seems never to refer to Ludwig Klages's or Lars-Ivar Ringbom's writings, which is of course quite natural. There is no one-to-one relationship between the work of the father and the son. To my mind, Sixten Ringbom's writings are in dialogical relation and partly contradictory to his father's studies. All in all, there is a thick web of polarities in Lars-Ivar Ringbom's work, his eclectic and synthetic mind was able to digest enormous amounts of theoretical thinking, which makes his work so demanding for a contemporary reader. It was the assignment of Sixten Ringbom's generation to unwind this tight 'organic' snarl, to divide the line between the science and the non-science and to judge what was rational and irrational in it.²⁶

Geist and Seele

As it is well known, Ludwig Klages's *Lebensphilosophie*, his *biocentric* thinking, was part of a larger cultural wave of nature-centric neo-romanticism, a reaction against the excesses of materialism, the mechanization in modern society, and against

²³ Sixten Ringbom, 'Verklighet och avbildning. Kring ett nytt arbete om stilväxlingarna i konsten', *Finsk Tidskrift*, 7, 1960, 304-313.

²⁴ This 'projection' (not only in its perceptual sense) made scholars aware of different subjective distortions imposed on art and the power of object to generate emotional responses. Michael Baxandall has called it an 'electrifying individual concept', which 'changed whole provinces of thinking' for him. Michael, Baxandall, *Episodes. A Memorybook*. London Frances Lincoln, 2010, 120.

²⁵ Bo Ossian Lindberg, *Icon to cartoon*, 1995, 18-19; Sixten Ringbom, 'An art historian looks at the TAT. (thematic apperception test)', *Aris. Art Research in Scandinavia*, Lund, 1973 25-30.

²⁶ Sixten Ringbom's writings on Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee are such attempts to 'deconstruct' the romantic tradition of the Goethean *Naturphilosophie*, which is also the background for the works of Ludwig Klages and Lars-Ivar Ringbom.

positivism in science. In Germany, *Lebensphilosophie* was closely linked with *Kulturkritik*. As Oliver I. Botar has noted, it was a 'critique of rampant urbanization, industrialization, internationalization, and the instrumentalist view of nature'.²⁷ The answer to modernity's problems, the growing feeling of alienation, was a return to the 'refreshing roots of life'. This meant nearly always a turn to the 'unconscious', which was now seen as the 'true' and 'authentic' side of human being.²⁸

I will hereby use *biocentrism* and the better known word *Lebensphilosophie* as interchangeable terms, although *biocentrism* has the advantage of designating more precisely the biologist inclination in Klages's worldview when compared to other advocates of *Lebensphilosophie* such as Georg Simmel or Wilhem Dilthey.²⁹ *Biocentrism* also captures well Lars-Ivar Ringbom's own interpretation of the philosophy of life, for besides 'life', it is 'nature' that is for him 'the measure of all'.³⁰ Furthermore, *biocentrism* refers to the tradition of J.W. Goethe's *Naturphilosophie*, which was for Lars-Ivar Ringbom the true and respectable matrix of Klages's thinking. For Goethe and Klages, as for Lars-Ivar Ringbom, the *Bios* is a great creative and formative power. Klages's *biocentrism* also meant overturning the valorization given in the Western philosophy to ideas as higher reality. For him, it was the immediately experienced images that constituted the true template of knowledge.³¹

The theory of Klages is based on an idea that there is an essential difference between a 'soulful', inner experience and a conscious act, between a man's continuous flowing course of life and his instant mental acts. Klages's holistic worldview was an attempt to overcome the body-soul division, maintained by modern science, a division that, according to him, had caused so much misery in human history.³² It was also an attempt to inject the ever-changing life, *Leben*, and

²⁷ Oliver A.I. Botar, 'Defining Biocentrism', Oliver A.I. Botar and Isabel Wünsche, eds., *Biocentrism and Modernism*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011, 15-45. For *Lebensphilosophie*, see Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany, 1831-1933*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

²⁸ Oliver A.I. Botar, 'Defining', 2011, 27.

²⁹ According to Oliver A.I. Botar, *Biocentrism* was a holistic worldview, which had its heyday both in modern art and sciences around the beginning and the first decades of twentieth century.

³⁰ For Klages and Ringbom, a true nature-lover does not impose any abstract, conceptual grids on the universe. This universe is not a Platonic cosmos of ideas, but a cosmos of constant flux. This idea comes well in Lars-Ivar Ringbom's lecture on Johan Ludwig Runeberg, Finnish national poet. Nature was the measure of the 'sound and truthful' for Lars-Ivar Ringbom against the world of empty ideas. During the war years Lars-Ivar Ringbom sent Runeberg's poems to Klages. Ringbom was attracted by Runeberg's piety for nature, which is not for him a Christian belief, but doesn't exclude it either. Ringbom did not attack at Christianity as Klages had done. According to Ringbom, Runeberg is after all a sound realist, who has a sense of reality. Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Den unga Runebergs naturfromhet', *Åbo Underrättelser*, 6 January 1949.

³¹ Ernst Cassirer criticized Klages for postulating a 'higher' reality of images, which was just a substitute for the Platonic world of ideas. In an unpublished manuscript, Ernst Cassirer tried to challenge the ideas of *Lebensphilosophie*; for him, it was essentially a metaphysical pursuit, maybe different from its goal but not in its *method*. Friedman, Michael A *Parting of the Ways*, 2000.

³² Ludwig Klages's thinking is discussed in Michael Grossheim, *Perspektiven der Lebensphilosophie*, Bouvier, 1999; Raymond Furness, *Zarathustra's Children. A Study of lost generation of German Writers*, Camden House, 2000; Richard Hinton Thomas, 'Nietzsche in Weimar German – and the case of Ludwig Klages', *The Weimar Dilemma. Intellectuals in Weimar Republic*, Anthony Phelan, ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985; Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary modernism, technology, culture and politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1986;

the immediate experience, *Erleben*, back to modern science. The nucleus of Klages's pessimistic worldview was the deep antagonism between *Seele*, the soul, and *Geist*, the spirit or intellect, the forces that permeated all life. In the beginning of human history there had been a time of full harmony, when life had been passive and immediate and in concord with the whole universe. At some stage of this being the intellect entered into life – as a sort of 'space-invader from another world', as Richard Hinton Thomas has aptly put it. Since then, human history has been a constant struggle between these two forces, as the destructive human spirit tries to dominate the creative, ever-changing life expressed in the soul. During human history, the body was thus gradually separated from the soul, which meant the alienation from life's vital energy in all spheres of culture. The human *Geist*, tearing the previous unity and harmony apart, began to formulate the world into things and conceptions.

Lars-Ivar Ringbom belonged to a generation of art historians who in their writings confronted the ideas of Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin, and who at the same time addressed 'the limitations of a so-called scientific study of art.'³³ Ringbom wanted to base art history more on psychological premises, but it is important to bear in mind that this 'psychology' was for him the same as *Seelenforschung*, which took distance from 'ordinary' psychology and Freudian psychoanalysis. The unconscious was not connected to personal repressed history, but had a more collective base. It was a source of primordial images, with which a human being could be connected to the world and to the larger cosmos.

Lars-Ivar Ringbom adopted Klages's world view, the metaphysics of soul, in his art historical writings. For him, the Klagesian dualism and antagonism between organic *bios* and spiritual *logos* became the foundational underlying principle in life and art. Although Lars-Ivar Ringbom constantly criticized formalism, he was a formalist *malgré tout*. Like the Viennese formalists of his time, he cultivated his 'structuring' eye to be sensitive to the disruptions of the representation on the picture's plane, the interplay between surface and depth.³⁴ Moreover, he was searching for the principal *a priori* organizers of art works, the fundamental categories of analysis, the immanent structure that builds up the work. Instead of the polarities of Heinrich Wölfflin, Ringbom introduced Klages's *Seele* and *Geist*, which were not confined to any defined historical epoch and thus were more all-encompassing. For him, they caught images' 'essence' as symptoms of desires and as mirrors of empirical reality. This is why Lars-Ivar Ringbom

Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots. Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005; Peter Davies, *Myth, Matriarchy and Modernity. Johann Jacob Bachofen in German Culture 1860-1945*, Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 2010; Karla Poewe, 2006, 84, *New Religions and the Nazis*, London: Routledge, 2005; Nitzan Lebovitz, 'The Beauty and Terror of *Lebensphilosophie*: Ludwig Klages, Walter Benjamin and Alfred Baeumler', *South Central Review*, 2006, 23-39. http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/47101719?access_key=key-1jll8jq8ya39x72ijt1h. Accessed 14.6.2012.

³³ This generation is discussed by Michael Ann Holly 1984, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 97-113.

³⁴ Christopher S. Wood has discussed the Viennese formalists in his 'Art History's Normative History The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century', Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, 1999; Florence: Olschki, 2002, 65-92, 73; see also introduction in Christopher S. Wood, *Vienna School Reader. Politics and Art Historical method in 1930s*. New York: Zone Books, 2000.

considered pure formalist art history, for instance, Wölfflinian 'opticality', inadequate, and supplemented it with a psychological and an anthropological approach.³⁵

For Lars-Ivar Ringbom, nearly everything could be inferred from the oscillation between these two antagonistic poles. The different constellations between *Seele* and *Geist* and the different relationships between the psyche and the world, allowed Lars-Ivar Ringbom to 'explain' various artistic phenomena such as the 'thought-images' of *Neue Sachlichkeit* or the Chinese 'dream-images',³⁶ and the differences between various artistic characters.³⁷ With the help of the polarities, Ringbom also divided the process of creating into two psychologically different currents: the desire to express (image-making that grew from memory) and the volition to imitate (image-making after a model).³⁸

Like Klages in his graphological work, Lars-Ivar Ringbom tried to discern *Seele* from *Geist*, to distinguish the rhythmical pulse of unconscious life from the punctual workings of conscious spirit, the *Rhythmus* from *Takt*, both in the creation as in the reception of art works.³⁹ In a successful work of art (and in a person's character), the involuntary life and voluntary spirit were united in an inseparable *Gestalt*.⁴⁰ For Lars-Ivar Ringbom, all art and even science was born out of the tension and struggle between these antagonistic forces, and this struggle became the foundation of his aesthetical manifesto.⁴¹ The true artwork (a Gothic church, for instance) was for Ringbom a dynamic battlefield of these components. 'All art and science, all culture on the whole, in line with the two-fold nature of human being, can be considered a result of the many variations in the tension between life and spirit.'⁴²

The tension in an artwork could also be approached with the Klagesian concept of 'form level' or 'Gestalt level'. For Lars-Ivar Ringbom this form level offered an 'objective' basis for the evaluation of artworks, an elastic yardstick to measure the originality and authenticity of the images and especially the character of the artist. This was a normative, but dynamic standard, which was not confined to any specific style. For Lars-Ivar Ringbom there was thus a possibility of

³⁵ See, for instance, Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Brytningstid', *Quosego*, 1929.

³⁶ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Kampen*, 1931. The tendency of the *Geist* to objectify, to possess and to separate the subject and object was central. For Ringbom, Chinese landscape painting is captured by experience, *Erleben and Schauen*, In the works of New Objectivity, 'things' are painted by reifying reason.

³⁷ See for instance, Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Tre målarlynnen. Klassikern, romantikern och realisten.' *Ord och Bild*, 1938, 465-481.

³⁸ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Kampen*, 1931; Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Konstrevolutioner*, Helsingfors: Söderströms, 1938, 119. The expressive images are the reality experienced, while imitative images are the illusory reality understood.

³⁹ For Klages, the handwriting's movements represented the soul's expressive power of *Gestalt* 'formation'.

⁴⁰ See, for instance *Kampen*, 1931, 219. According to Furness, Klages's 'characterology' sought to define the typology of the attitudes and structural features to be found in different egos, studying the constant struggle between 'body-sensuality' and 'mind-abstraction'. Raymond Furness, *Zarathustra's*, 2000, 108.

⁴¹ For Lars-Ivar Ringbom's aesthetics of tension, see Päivi Huuhtanen, *Tunteesta henkeen*, 1978, 222-228.

⁴² Lars-Ivar Ringbom 'Ludwig Klages', Lecture in radio 19, February, 1943, AÅUL This view emphasizes creativity in art against classical aesthetics, the idea of organic unity and integration. Anyhow, his anti-classicism did not prevent Ringbom admiring the art of Jean August Dominique Ingres.

interpreting the workings of *Geist* much more optimistically than Klages: it could even act as a stimulating counterforce for life's processes.⁴³ In addition, as Timo Huusko has pointed out, the expressive ability of the artist is at the centre of Lars-Ivar Ringbom's criteria for artistry.⁴⁴ Ringbom had thus a very romantic conception of art, in which the presence of the artist was important in the artwork. The analysis of the trace of the artist's hand was like handwriting which could reveal a person's true and authentic self behind the mask. The emptiness of expressive content that modern mechanization had brought to art was epitomized by the abstract art of the *De Stijl* group and the Russian constructivists, which was purified from all expression.⁴⁵

The polarity of *Seele* and *Geist* had a great hermeneutical value for Lars-Ivar Ringbom. However, the single-minded adoption of this antagonism created at times a somewhat idiosyncratic art history. As a matter of fact, Bo Ossian Lindberg, who has written about Lars-Ivar Ringbom's work, has taken into account only those - should I say rational, 'Gombrichian'- traits in Ringbom's art history that have validity even nowadays. Ludwig Klages is mentioned only in passing.⁴⁶ However, to see only the 'rational' side distorts Lars-Ivar Ringbom's art history and bypasses the tensions that are later echoed in the work of Sixten Ringbom.

The 'German way' of seeing

As many of his Finnish colleagues during the 1920s and 1930s, Lars-Ivar Ringbom was closely connected to the German cultural sphere. Professor Bo Ossian Lindberg, who studied under Lars-Ivar Ringbom during 1950s, has described him as a pan-Germanist, but not an anti-Semite.⁴⁷ This pan-Germanism made Ringbom align himself with German scholarship, which in turn was politicized during the 1930s. From his teacher Joseph Strzygowski, Lars-Ivar Ringbom learned - among other, much more respectable, things - to connect national characteristics with style. As for Strzygowski, for Ringbom the Nordic people experienced reality differently from Southern ones.⁴⁸ In Ringbom's writings, the 'warm' *Seele* is nearly always fused with Northern, German art, whereas the 'cold', intellectual *Geist* is usually connected with French and Italian art.⁴⁹ This tendency becomes even more apparent in his work during World War II: in his article about German Romanticism, Ringbom brings out approvingly the patriotic revision of Romanticism in new German scholarship.⁵⁰

⁴³ 'Form level' means the relation of 'original' rhythmical life to the 'developed' mental activity. A letter from Lars-Ivar Ringbom to Gustaf Lundgren, 21 March 1935. The right level or degree of originality of the artist, his personality was fulfilled, when the right balance between *Geist* and *Seele* was achieved. See also 'Uttrycket's psykologi' 1944, 264.

⁴⁴ Timo Huusko, 'Tahto ja elämä', 2001, 49

⁴⁵ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Bildkonst och funktionalism' *Granskaren*, 1931, 24-27. See also Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Kretsen och kloten', *Finsk Tidskrift*, 4, 1935.

⁴⁶ Bo Ossian Lindberg, 'Lars-Ivar Ringbom och teckningen' 2007.

⁴⁷ Bo Ossian Lindberg, personal communication, March 5, 2008.

⁴⁸ Lars-Ivar Ringbom has brought out idea this in a letter to Klages, 10 February, 1934.

⁴⁹ See for instance, Lars-Ivar Ringbom 'Vi presentera: Henri Matisse' 1934. 116 For Lars-Ivar Ringbom Matisse is too much of a rationalist to make profound art.

⁵⁰ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Omvärldingen av den tyska romantiken', *Finsk Tidskrift*, 3, 1941, 113-121.

In Lars-Ivar Ringbom's book *Konstrevolutioner* (Revolutions in art, 1938), the north-south opposition is also visible. The book is about evolutions and revolutions in the history of art from prehistoric times up to the Renaissance. Here again the Klagesian antagonism between *Seele* and *Geist* structures Ringbom's narrative. The history of art and the Western world is told as a story of the growing 'grip' of *logocentricim* over *biocentricim*. The grains of this evolution are sown in ancient Greece, in the invention of shade-painting by Apollodoros and in the thinking of Sophists. From then on, there has been a tendency in Western philosophy to deny the reality of the world of phenomenon. The reality of immediately experienced world of images, so dear to Klages, was condemned to be false. The Renaissance is the moment when the rational *logocentric* thinking finally suppresses the emotional, vital *biocentric* one.

In the beginning of the book Ringbom declares that the abrupt changes in styles are not explicable by the prevailing theory of evolution. He emphasizes technical revolutions, which are the workings of individual artists, the interventions of *Geist*. This scheme of history, where violent disruptions cut the long periods of slow stream, owes much to Johan Jacob Bachofen, Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig Klages.⁵¹

Once a revolutionary, innovative artist has created a new style, it evolves in its own 'natural' way. Ringbom later noted in another context that Riegl's concept *Kunstwollen* should be interpreted as *Kunstwachstum*.⁵² In *Konstrevolutioner*, he adopts Joseph Stzrygowski's atavistic view that the evolution of style is conditioned by 'natural laws', in a sense that it is rooted to the soil and blood of each nation (*Blut und Boden*). In addition, the historical periods of styles, such as the Gothic or the Renaissance, are given a 'psychological' content. Here Ringbom follows Wilhelm Worringer's ideas: the Gothic has a *Volkisch* essence, it is an expression of northern, German *Volkseele*. Nevertheless, for Ringbom, the origin of the innovation of Gothic style is not necessarily bound to a German source. Fortunately Ringbom maintained – in spite of his pan-Germanist inclinations – some critical distance to these matters, although he took some poetical liberties, which seem to be typical for those days even in academic writing.

The north-south opposition is also visible in Lars-Ivar Ringbom's interpretations of space. The medieval space was for him a subjective, emotionally experienced and visionarily seen fantastic space, in contrast to the rationally constructed, objective space of the Italian Renaissance. Here Ringbom shares Dagobert Frey's view of the Gothic's 'not yet rationalized' feeling of space. The Italian artists created an objective space by using the conceptual aid of the perspective. According to Lars-Ivar Ringbom, Jan van Eyck was able to reach the same results by an unmediated perception on the model.

Christopher S. Wood has written about the tendency of German scholarship before World War II to stress the anti-optical 'haptic' vision of German artists in contrast to the 'optic' vision of Italian tradition. For many of these scholars,

⁵¹ See Peter Davies, *Myth*, 2010. According to Furness, 'Klages saw the artist as a spiritual aristocrat, a superman beyond good and evil.' Raymond Furness, *Zarathustra's 2000*, 100.

⁵² A letter from Lars-Ivar Ringbom to Frederik Adama van Scheltema, January 1954, Lars-Ivar Ringbom's samling, Coll. F:I, ÅAUL.

German artists were not detached from the world and cosmos but somehow profoundly connected to it, a thing that is discernable in their art. To quote Christopher S. Wood, 'the German artist's lack of detachment from the world, his tendency to in effect pounce bodily upon things, seemed to imply his sincerity and spirituality. For what things meant to the recipient subject, what effects they worked on the soul, was surely more important than merely how they looked.'⁵³ Lars-Ivar Ringbom can be included in the list of these scholars, who wanted to hail the *Innerlichkeit* of German tradition and who saw in it a sign of the psyche's unique disposition to the world. However, he offers his own variation on this topos. The spiritual *Bindung* of the German artist to the cosmos and life is not explained by a haptic mode of seeing nor by *Einfühlung*, the projection of emotions. In many instances, Ringbom stresses that the prevailing theory of empathy is outmoded - it is too ego-centered and too bound with bodily sensation. *Einfühlung* can happen, but it is only in-feeling, a misleading projection. Instead of 'empathy' he offers 'sympathy'.⁵⁴

According to Klages, there was a (higher) reality of primordial images. With these images in the soul, the human being could be connected and had an access to this level of reality. This reality of the primal stream of Ur-images was available in dream states or in art. In addition, seeing was the most noble of the senses and the 'soulful seeing', holistic vision, *Schauen*, which does not appropriate its object with conceptual grip, was for him the most profound connection between world and psyche. In his *Kampen om illusionen*, it was the primitive man and children, who were closer to their organic bios being, and thus had the ability to experience the flow of images.⁵⁵ According to Ringbom, in art this sort of seeing is brought out by the works of Chinese landscape artists, Rembrandt and some expressionists. For Ringbom, in order to understand what we experience in art, we have to use our judgment.⁵⁶

However, as I already noted in my discussion about Sixten Ringbom and Ernst Gombrich, the formalist conviction to rely too much even on 'disciplined' seeing was challenged by the next generation. David Summers has written about the tendency of the early formalists to connect the 'form' to the 'mind' and its relation to the world.⁵⁷ In the beginning of twentieth century, as the form became the essence

⁵³ Christopher S. Wood, 'Germany's Blind Renaissance', *Infinite Boundaries: Order, Disorder and Reorder in Early German Culture*, ed. Max Reinhardt, (*Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies*, Vol. 49), 1998, 225-44; 228

⁵⁴ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Kampen*, 1931, 74-75.

⁵⁵ According to Lars-Ivar Ringbom, Worringer had misinterpreted the reason behind the impulses for realist and abstract art. For Ringbom, the beautiful abstract ornaments from prehistoric times or the drawings of children, witness (in their pure creativity and expressivity) of a profound harmonious relationship between human being and the universe - not of fear or restlessness of mind, as for Worringer. Lars-Ivar Ringbom *Kampen*, 1931, 220-221.

⁵⁶ The reality of the painting is for Ringbom its material, lines, colours. 'In order to understand what we have experienced we have to use our judgement, which makes us conscious about what we see soulfully and what we see by our body. The spectator, who is aware of that it is an image, representation, will not be not deluded. Illusion is not the same as hallucination.' Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Kampen*, 1931, 12; See also Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Uttryckets' 1944, 264-265. An art historian can make objective inferences from the form level of each work only with subjective emotion.

⁵⁷ David Summers, 'Form', Nineteenth -Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description', *Critical Inquiry* 15, 1989, 372-406.

of art, 'the formal analysis was related to nineteenth-century idealist metaphysics and thus to the kinds of historical inference and generalization running the gamut from quaint to dangerous.'⁵⁸ In the end of 1930s, Lars-Ivar Ringbom incorporated art works, their forms, with geographically and ethnically based 'essences', ethnic identities. This sort of physiognomic inference from the expressive form was severely criticized especially by Gombrich.⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, in his *Sense of Order*, Gombrich has described even Wölfflin as a 'physiognomist with an uneasy conscience'.⁶⁰ To my mind, this is an apt characterization even of Lars-Ivar Ringbom. However, the physiognomic tradition had always had a dubious reputation, and in 1930s this art of seeing the inner *Gestalt* on the outer image fell once and for all in disgrace – at least in academic writing.

Why Klages?

As Frederic J. Schwarz has noted, Ludwig Klages's work 'would no longer [--] survive the test of legitimacy imposed by universities and related institutions.'⁶¹ However, Klages's strange and abstruse writings had a seductive aura of profoundness for many contemporaries and his work gave conceptual tools for approaching the modern cultural phenomenon for more critically minded theorists as well. Even the scientific academy (in Germany as well as in Finland) was interested in Klages and held him in high esteem for some time.⁶²

As some writers have noted, this admiration of Klages is quite surprising, because in fact Klages used his metaphysical, *biocentric* worldview to deconstruct and criticize scientific discourse and its *logocentrism*.⁶³ Nevertheless, those who admired Klages, questioned rationalism as a sole basis for knowledge and tried to save what was lost and repressed.

For Klages, *Geist* was a very negative force, because it obsessively pursued control over life and strove for power. Nietzsche had earlier criticized reason and

⁵⁸ David Summers, 'Form', 1989, 372.

⁵⁹ Gombrich wrote in *Art and Illusion* that art history's habit of talking in terms of collectives, mankind, races weakened the resistance to totalitarian habits of mind. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 1959, 20; see also for critique of 'Gestalt seeing', Ernst Gombrich, 'Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia*, *Norm and Form. Studies in the art of the Renaissance*, London: Phaidon Press, 1966, 64-80.

⁶⁰ Ernst Gombrich, *Sense of Order. A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*, 1984, 201.

⁶¹ Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots* 2005, 192. '[Klages's work] combines reflection, introspection and evidence of ancient philosophy, medieval science, literature and myth, the sort of mixture of hearsay, authority and folk wisdom that is ordinarily associated with debased notions of physiognomy.' Walter Benjamin's fascination with Klages's has recently been a subject of several studies. Benjamin saw that Klages had endowed soul with mythical powers, soul's collective unconscious and image-fantasy. See, for instance, Nitzan Lebovitz, 'The Beauty and Terror' 2006, 23-39; Hansen & Block, Richard 'Selective Affinities: Walter Benjamin and Ludwig Klages'. *Arcadia*, 2000, 35:1; 117-136.

⁶² See Päivi Huuhtanen. 1978; Frederic J. Schwartz *Blind Spots*, 2005, 192.

⁶³ For many thinkers in the beginning of twentieth century, the 'mythical thinking' provided an alternative and respectable non-conceptual form of knowledge, in opposition to the prevailing rationalist discourses of modernity.' Klages's system, his 'metaphysical knowledge' was meant to be an epistemological critique of rationalism and science that was impartial 'search for truth', Peter Davies, *Myth*, 2010, 288; Karla Poewe, *New Religions*, 2005, 84.

intellect for its inability to overcome merely formal, mechanical connections.⁶⁴ For him, science was suppressing the vital, Dionysian forces of life.

In my opinion, for Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *biocentrism* was not a critique of science as such. Rather, the holistic perspective of biocentrism offered a stance to criticize the prevailing positivism, the grip of natural sciences on art theory and the mechanical causality and teleology as a mode of explanation. Causality bypassed the question of expressive content. Soul and body were together, a polarized and indivisible whole, there was no causal relationship between these two.⁶⁵ In addition, *biocentrism* was an alternative both to materialism and idealism, because it did not make the fatal distinction between body and soul.⁶⁶

To my mind, for Ringbom, the attack was not so much against reason *an sich*, but more against the alienation of reason from life, against the sterile reasoning, which could not take into account the emotional side, the religious roots of artworks. This alienation of reason was for Ringbom epitomized in the 'formalist' way of thinking, which had its roots in Renaissance.⁶⁷ In addition, with the ideology of *l'art pour l'art*, art had become too aesthetic, it had lost its vital roots in life. There was an urge to reconnect art with the deepest needs of human being.⁶⁸ In his radio lecture Ringbom says that people have misunderstood Klages: he is not against *Geist*, but against the confusion between the spiritual and the vital.

Nevertheless, the whole discourse around the opposition of *Seele* and *Geist* is full of paradoxes and ambivalences. When writing about Klages and life philosophy it is also difficult to avoid political issues.⁶⁹ Klages's worldview was for a while an option to the official Nazi ideology, but later the Nazi government (with Alfred Rosenberg) shed him from the list of ideological models. According to Raymond Furness, Klages was not an advocate of the 'power-hungry *Weltanschauung*' of fascism, but more a backward-looking Romantic. 'Klages exhibits in his lectures and writings a profound concern for life, its mystery, vulnerability and uniqueness'.⁷⁰ However, there is no consensus among scholars on the issue of Klages's true relationship with the Nazi Government.

⁶⁴ Anthony Phelan, 'The theme of the intellectual – argument and action', *The Weimar Dilemma. Intellectuals in Weimar Republic*, Anthony Phelan, ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985, 5.

⁶⁵ In his article 'Uttryckets psykologi' (1944) Lars-Ivar Ringbom writes about the theory of expression, which studies the relationship between the inner and its expression in an outer form. The movement expresses *individual's essence*, not just emotions. (253) The person's essence means a disposition, an inclination. According to Klages there is a *Gestalt* in an affect, in a soul state. The relationship is neither of causality nor of finality. A scientist of expression does not study the reasons for an expression but their content, what has been expressed.

⁶⁶ See Ringbom, Lars-Ivar 'Filosofen som försvarar livet', *Granskaren*, 1935, 9-12.

⁶⁷ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Formalistens tänkesätt', *Granskaren*, 1937, 95-98.

⁶⁸ Richard Hinton Thomas has written about the reception of Nietzsche in post-War Weimar by so-called revolutionary-conservatives. For them, Nietzsche was seen seeking not freedom but *Bindung*, the German spirit was one 'in search of synthesis'. It was distaste for liberalism and search for more organic type of thinking. *Leben* epitomized *bindung*.

⁶⁹ Philosophy of life has been branded by the stigma of irrationalism and it has been accused of being a precursor of fascism. Schnädelbach, *Philosophy*, 1984, 140. As Oliver A.I. Botar has noted, after World War I the biocentrism was already a 'highly charged political field'. Botar, 'Defining', 2011, 33.

⁷⁰ Raymond Furness, *Zarathustra's*, 2000, 108, 114. For Klages's anti-Semitism, see Botar, 2011, 42, note 94. According to Peter Davies '[Klages's] system provides an intellectual justification for anti-Semitism.' Davies, 2010, 288; see also Karla Poewe, *New Religions* 2005. 86. A more positive image of

As Peter Davies has pointed out, the Klagesian polarity, which chiefly was an epistemological critique of rationalism, blended easily into an ontological argument: the tendency to identify the destructive *Geist* with historical events, groups of people and institutions.⁷¹ In the writings of Klages, *Geist* is often associated with capitalism, liberalism and the Jews. In Germany, especially after the events in 1933, the term *Geist* was often given a strong idealist, ethical accent from those who opposed National Socialism.⁷² After World War II, this fusion of rationality with ethical impulse continued in the writings that united the tradition of irrationalism with the rise of Nazism. The oscillating tension between irrationality and rationality was dissolved into an either-or opposition. The question of Nazism was deeply entwined in the discussion of the *Lebensphilosophie* and continued well after World War II.

As Stefan Nygård has noted, after World War I, in Finland, Germany's influence on cultural life was increasing and the emphasis in *Lebensphilosophie* was changed from the former French Bergsonian version to the German Klagesian one. At the same time, life philosophy became politicized.⁷³ Nevertheless, Lars-Ivar Ringbom tried constantly to detach the question of polarity between life and reason from politics and to connect it to a pure critique of culture and art. However, he did not always succeed.⁷⁴

When Lars-Ivar Ringbom for the first time introduced Ludwig Klages to the readers of *Granskaren* in 1935, the enthusiasm for Klages's thinking among the academy was already waning and Klages was largely associated with Nazism and 'animalism'.⁷⁵ Ringbom's article can be read both as an introduction to and as a defence of Ludwig Klages's philosophy. Lars-Ivar Ringbom stressed that Ludwig

him would emphasize his deep concern with the nature and its preservation, and instead of Nazism, he can be seen as a precursor of the ecological movement. According to Furness, 'of [Klages's] anti-Semitism there can be no doubt, as much of his writings will bear witness, although it is an anti-Semitism of an eccentric provenance.' Nevertheless, one cannot equate his irrationalism with fascism, and Romantic conservatism with *Lebensphilosophie*. Furness, *Zarathustra's* 2000, 100.

⁷¹ Peter Davies, *Myth*, 2010, 288.

⁷² Anthony Phelan, 'The theme of the intellectual', 1984, 5.

⁷³ Nygård, Stefan 'Vardandets världsbild och intuitionens blixtljus' 2006, 85 (79-110), *Mellan idealism och analytisk filosofi. Den moderna filosofin i Finland och Sverige 1880-1950*. ed. Stefan Nygård & Johan Strang. Bokförlaget Atlantis, Stockholm.

⁷⁴ See the debate about rationality by Lars-Ivar Ringbom, Carl Erik Knoellinger and Sven Lindman, *Granskaren* 1934, 101-104; 117-120.

⁷⁵ Hans Ruin, a Finnish-Swedish aesthete and writer, made this association. He had written very ironically about Klages metaphysics in his book *Gycklare och Apostlar* 1934. Hans Ruin had interpreted the situation in Germany as a result of the emancipation Freudian instincts and that Klages was a defender of a 'renaissance of primitivism'. Moreover, he claimed that Klages had received a professorship from Hitler. Lars-Ivar Ringbom refuted Ruin's assertions in his article 'Filosofiskt gyckel' in *Hufvudstadsbladet* 17.11.1934. Furthermore, in a letter to Klages, Ringbom writes that the problematic of *Seele* and *Geist* is not very well known in Scandinavian countries (Finland and Sweden) or it is condemned as 'unscientific metaphysics'. According to Ringbom, in Sweden, the German expression 'Tiefe der Bewusstsein', the profoundness of consciousness, is often an ironical saying. Moreover, *Lebensphilosophie* is regarded as 'tierische freudianismus'. Here Lars-Ivar Ringbom refers to Hans Ruin's critique against Klagesian thinking. A letter from Lars-Ivar Ringbom to Ludwig Klages, 3 August 1935. In the article, 'Filosofen som försvarar livet' (*Granskaren*, 1935) Ringbom brings out Goethe as a forebear of Klages. As Richard T. Gray has noted, 'in matters of intellectual paternity almost no other German has fathered as many illegitimate intellectual children as Johann Wolfgang Goethe.' Richard T. Gray, *About face*, 2004, 137.

Klages was not a political thinker, but more a (human) scientist, who above all offered a whole new worldview. Furthermore, Lars-Ivar Ringbom notes that Klages is not favored by the Nazi Government. In addition, Ringbom mentions also that Julius Deussen's 'Arbeitskreis für biozentrische Forschung' was dissolved, because Klages was an unpolitical scholar, and his cultural pessimism was not in accordance with Nazi optimism.⁷⁶ Lars-Ivar Ringbom also wanted to make a clear distinction between Kretschmer's infamous typologies and Klages theory of expression.⁷⁷ In addition, Lars-Ivar Ringbom defends Ludwig Klages by emphasizing that Klages's inferences are based on empirical investigations, which made Klages's thinking more scientifically respectable.⁷⁸

Although Lars-Ivar Ringbom tried to rescue Ludwig Klages from the blasphemy of Nazism, he nevertheless defends the new worldview adopted in Germany by the National Socialists and the events of World War II made him clearly take the side of Germany.⁷⁹ As he has later commented to professor Bo Ossian Lindberg, from the two evils, bolshevism and National Socialism, he chose the 'minor evil'. The fear of bolshevism has to be seen in the context of Winter War and World War II. The roots of this fear extend to Finnish Civil War, which had divided the nation to the white 'elite' and the red 'masses', the revolution of which was to be feared.

All in all, Klages's work can be considered as an attack against the Enlightenment project of disenchantment and demythologization. I think Ludwig Klages was important for Lars-Ivar Ringbom because Klages offered a holistic worldview without transcendence, a world (art and even science) saturated with enchantment. The highest good for both of Klages and Ringbom, as for Nietzsche, was the richness and fullness of life, its constant flux. To my mind, as an art historian and an artist, Lars-Ivar Ringbom was also attracted in Klages's worldview for the importance it gave to the images and seeing. Klages had once declared that 'the images and not the objects are the source of inspiration for the soul - this is the key for the whole teaching of life.'⁸⁰

For Lars-Ivar Ringbom, the visual arts were closest to 'life'. The image was for him closer to original life than the word. In his *Kampen om illusionen* he even brings out Fritz Mauthner's idea that the word 'God' originally goes back to 'image'.⁸¹

⁷⁶ This circle was constituted to study the metaphysical side of Klages's thinking.

⁷⁷ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Människan's lynne', *Finsk Tidskrift*, 1942, 1-13.

⁷⁸ Ringbom emphasizes that Klages had obtained a doctoral degree in chemistry, 'Ludwig Klages', Lecture in radio 19, February, 1943, AÅUL.

⁷⁹ Ringbom, Lars-Ivar 'Folk och stat i Tyskland', *Granskaren* 1938, 69-71.

⁸⁰ Klages is cited in Nitzan Leboviz, 'Beauty', 2006, 8.

⁸¹ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Kampen*, 1931, 28.

The Paradise on Earth

Ludwig Klages and Lars-Ivar Ringbom exchanged letters until 1944. Ringbom visited Klages for the last time in Kilchberg, Switzerland in 1951. He described this last visit to the Swedish graphologist Gustaf Lundgren. One can read the letter as a sign of growing critical distance from Klages: the last *Festschrift* for the honour of Klages's 75th birthday has nearly nothing to give for Ringbom, in addition, Klages seemed sick and gloomy.⁸² To Gustaf Lundgren's question about Lars-Ivar Ringbom's studies on characterology, Ringbom answers that he has written a book entitled *Målarlynnne*, but he has left it in his drawer. He is now interested in a completely new and much more important subject, the paradise myth.⁸³ In his last two books, *Graltempel und Paradies* and *Paradisus terrestris*, Lars-Ivar Ringbom does not mention Ludwig Klages anymore. Nevertheless, such life-radiating themes as the 'Holy Grail' and the 'Paradise', and the central role of myth as one pathway to knowledge and even to historical truth in these studies, indicate that the Klagesian worldview had not been totally renounced. The idea that 'mythical thinking uses concrete images',⁸⁴ not concepts, sounds Klagesian.

As a matter of fact, there is a motto in his *Paradisus terrestris*, which goes back to the main theme of Ringbom's dissertation, the 'desire to express and the volition to imitate': 'The images are formed by the dreaming seeing-in and by the mirroring imitation. Do you perceive the border between what is dream and what is mirroring in an image?'⁸⁵ The image was always for Lars-Ivar Ringbom double sided: on the one hand, the image was created by the deep (unconscious, even religious) needs of human beings and on the other it had its roots in the surrounding reality. According to Ringbom, the paradise images in medieval art had their concrete geographical reality, but they had also a future tense - they were images of longing for the second *parousia*.

As already mentioned, Josef Strzygowski oriented Lars-Ivar Ringbom's studies in many ways. During World War II Ringbom started to follow his teacher's idea that Western medieval art had its roots in the Far East. Nevertheless, Lars-Ivar Ringbom now took a clear distance from Strzygowski's search after the 'mystical blood heritage' or original 'Indo-German faith'.⁸⁶ However, there was a different agenda – especially behind his book *Paradisus Terrestris* – to show that behind the

⁸² A letter from Lars-Ivar Ringbom to Gustaf Lundgren, 1 December 1953, Lars-Ivar Ringbom's samling, F:1, ÅAUL.

⁸³ The topic of character and expression interested Lars-Ivar Ringbom until the end of the war. He wrote about the psychology of expression for the last time in 1944. Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Uttryckets psykologi', *Eros och Eris. Kulturessäer tillägnade Rolf Lagerborg*, 1944, 246-265.

⁸⁴ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Paradisus Terrestris*, 1958, 31.

⁸⁵ 'Bilder formas genom drömmande inbillning och speglande avbildning. Skönjer du gränsen mellan det som är dröm och det som är spegling i en bild?' *Paradisus terrestris*, 1958, 51.

⁸⁶ 'Hiergegen versucht meiner Untersuchung eine g e s c h i c h t l i c h e Erklärung zu geben. kein mystische Bluterbe von Urvätern, sondern feste, durch Jahrhunderte sich hinziehende, geschichtliche Beziehungen und Ereignisse erklären zur Genüge die in sagen, Mythen und Symbolen, in Kunst, Dichtung und Religion hervortretende unverkennbare Verwandtschaft europäischer und iranischer Überlieferung.' Lars-Ivar Ringbom, *Graltempel und Paradies*. 1951, 514. This study aimed to show the similarities between the palace churches with round plan and their mutual roots in the famous Grail temple.

medieval tales, myths and images of Paradise there was a grain of truth. Ludwig Klages had situated his own paradise in the south, in Greece, among the pre-historical nations of the so-called *Pelasgians*.⁸⁷ As for Lars-Ivar Ringbom, he situated Paradise in the Far East, on the Plateau in Azerbaijan, a highly sacred place, a cult centre, about which the later Paradise myth in images and in literature originated. To Ringbom, this historical Paradise was already 'Paradise lost', it was not a stage of primordial unity with cosmos as it was for Klages.

In 1928, Lars-Ivar Ringbom had declared the (French) iconographical and historical approach as something outmoded.⁸⁸ However, during World War II he became more and more interested in the iconography and the symbolism of images. Ringbom had already in his *Konstrevolutioner* 1938 cited Panofsky's 'perspective essay' (1927) favourably. To my mind, the 'Viennese, formalist' Panofsky⁸⁹ convinced Ringbom about the intellectual challenge that an iconographical approach could offer. Moreover, in his 'paradise books' Ringbom's approach was based on the 'history of ideas'. This meant actually a history of 'images', for images had for Lars-Ivar Ringbom an important generative role.

I am very well aware that my article cannot make justice to Lars-Ivar Ringbom's later studies, whereby I restrict myself to only some short remarks. Swiss historian Johan Jacob Bachofen, whom Klages's greatly admired,⁹⁰ had taken the myth and its power at the centre of his work and considered its study vital for the modern age. Bachofen had two different kinds of view about myth: one that insisted on the objective documentary value of myth as evidence and the more subjective approach, which saw myth as a pre-rational mode of thought.⁹¹ Ringbom was convinced that the medieval paradise images had their origin in historical reality. Ringbom's method in his *Paradisus Terrestris* was euhemerism, a theory which considers that 'there is kernel of truth at the foundation of any mythological narrative'. Nevertheless, myths carried also an emotional truth, in the case of paradise images, the longing for eternal life and the second paradise.

From Vienna to the Warburg Institute

As my 'image' of the two visits at the beginning of the article shows, in the 1930s, the epistemic frames of art history seem to have been much more porous and flexible than after World War II. After the war, human scientists were building up

⁸⁷ According to Ludwig Klages, behind myths and fairy tales there is a glimpse of 'das Pelasgertum', the paradisiacal Urworld, unique pagan culture, where human beings (Pelasgians) lived an image-bound life that was later destroyed by the workings of Geist. In Lars-Ivar Ringbom's work the name Nietzsche recurs often, but he does not seem to refer to Bachofen. Nevertheless, he could not avoid this Swiss scholar, who was such a central thinker for Klages. From Bachofen Klages received his Pelasgian world, the ancient pre-historical world of the eastern Mediterranean.

⁸⁸ Lars-Ivar Ringbom, 'Brytningstid', 1929, 128 and 133.

⁸⁹ See for the 'formalist' Panofsky, Christopher S. Wood 'Art history's', 1999, 73.

⁹⁰ Klages 'reckoned the work of Bachofen to be amongst the greatest spiritual creations of mankind and the guiding star of his life'. Klages differed drastically from Nietzsche's concept of the will to power. Ludwig Klages was in his youth inspired by the ideas of Nietzsche, but his thinking was later modified by Klages's immersion in the work of Johann Jacob Bachofen. Raymond Furness, *Zarathustra's*, 2000, 101.

⁹¹ Peter Davies, *Myth*, 2010, 18.

more steady epistemic bulwarks against metaphysics, which was now considered a highly dubious enterprise, when married with science.⁹² As many writers have remarked, the Nazis' rise to power, the concomitant emigration and World War II, all created a profound break in the German-speaking human sciences and art history.⁹³ Many of the previous chains of thought were broken and the theoretical speculations of the previous generation were actively forgotten. The 'self-reflective' theory and the 'tortuous' German language were considered a burden to be abandoned. Most of art historical analyses were now based on empiricism.⁹⁴ In the 1950s, when Sixten Ringbom learned the science of art history from his father, Lars-Ivar Ringbom, Klages was no more an option to be followed – analytic philosophy (which demanded conceptual clarity from philosophy and art history) had dethroned the life philosophy (but not for good, though, as many very likely had thought). Furthermore, at the Warburg Institute Sixten Ringbom became acquainted with an 'emigrated' art history, which created a filter through which the past was approached. The emphasis was now on the content or function of art works, not on their expressive form.⁹⁵ For Sixten Ringbom, the main task of an art historian was to fill in the 'white spots' of history, which had been left by the previous formalist art historians. Sixten Ringbom was first and foremost an art historian, who was as suspicious about the speculations of 'methodologians' as the 'American' Panofsky had been. The past was something to be left behind. In 1972, in a letter to a doctoral student, Sixten Ringbom advises the latter to avoid (Viennese, formalist) Panofsky and his *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*: 'Panofsky's *Grundfragen* is absolutely outmoded and many have wondered, how he can now in his late days allow his sins from the youth to be published like this. Let's take Panofsky's *Meaning in the Visual Arts* supplemented with Bialostocki's article 'Iconography and Iconology' [...]'⁹⁶ Sixten Ringbom could not foresee that in ten years time, the outdated Panofsky and all the Viennese formalists would be of interest again.

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⁹² On Gombrich's polemics against metaphysics, see Jan, Bakos, 'Introductory; Gombrich's Fight against Metaphysics', *Human Affairs*, 19, 2009, 239-250.

⁹³ See for instance, Stephanie Barron, ed., *Exiles and Emigrés. The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, 1997. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997; C.M. Soussloff, ed., *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*, Berkeley, 1999. Berkeley : University of California Press; Christopher S. Wood, 'Art History's', 1999; Erwin Panofsky, 'Three Decades of Art History in the United States, Impressions of a Transplanted European', *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1955.

⁹⁴ On issues of subjectivity and art history as a science, Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf, Dan Karlholm, eds., *Subjectivity and Methodology in Art History*, Stockholm: Konstvetenskapliga institutionen, 2003.

⁹⁵ As Christopher S. Wood has noted, the emigrant scholars emphasized the intellectual content of art works Christopher S. Wood, 'Art History's', 1999.

⁹⁶ 'Panofskys *Grundfragen* är hopplöst föräldrade och mången har frågat sig varför han på gamla dar lät sina ungdomssyndar utkomma på detta sätt; vi tar därför hans *Meaning in the Visual Arts* kompletterad med Jan Bialostockis Iconography and Iconology -artikel (...)' . A letter from Sixten Ringbom to Veikko Larjatie, 23.June. 1972. The Department of Art History at Åbo Akademi University, Arken.

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The art of art history of Lars-Ivar and Sixten Ringbom

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