The ‘Second’ Vienna School as Social Science

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Although the notion of a Kunstwollen excited the likes of Walter Benjamin and Karl Mannheim, most effort has not been spent on putting it to use but rather contextualizing and historicizing it. When Otto Pächt treated the concept in his celebrated article on Alois Riegl in 1962, he saw it less as a hermeneutic concept awaiting interpretation than a social scientific construct that helped solve historical problems surrounding art. In the same way that Pächt looked past Riegl’s changing terminology to the ideas of purpose and function, I want to do the same for him, and Sedlmayr.

Switching to Kunstwollen as a social scientific idea and limiting its historical reference makes understanding it more tractable. Considering what Sedlmayr meant in 1929, when he published his Introduction to Riegl’s collected essays, or Pächt in 1962, is easier than Riegl in 1902. While written only a little more than twenty years after Riegl’s death, Sedlmayr’s idiom is closer to our own. If Riegl’s Kunstwollen begs for deep historicization, Sedlmayr’s and Pächt’s instead calls for common sense informed by categories of thought. In fact, in the following I will read these essays through the lens of Gestalt-theoretical ideas. Sedlmayr and Pächt cite these but instead of taking him at his later actions, I take him at his word. What new meaning is provided taking Gestaltism into consideration?

In the following, I outline a model of the Kunstwollen as a signature of formative processes at any given time. The shape of history in this model is not organic and Hegelian but monistic and empiricist. It is not that history at any moment is governed by a singular Geist but rather that each of its parts co-determine each other. The first part of this paper is to contextualize the Kunstwollen and the second is to understand it as an evolving concept, first through Sedlmayr’s interventions in the late 1920s and then through those of his colleague Otto Pächt in his writing and lecturing in the 1960s and 1970s. Both Sedlmayr and Pächt treated the Kunstwollen as an evolving, naturalistic concept, and not as a category of formal philosophy, a la Hegel) and relied on the findings of psychology to inform it.

Riegl and Kunstwollen

There is a strong tendency, represented above all by E. H. Gombrich, to assimilate Riegl to Hegelian theorizing. Gombrich rejected Riegl’s highly abstract approach, which can be seen in the following quote from 1901:
The transformation of the late antique world-view was a necessary transitional phase for the human spirit in order to arrive from the idea of a, in the narrower sense) purely mechanical, serial, connection of objects projected on to a plane to that of an omnipresent chemical, space pervading connection. Whoever wants to regard this late antique development as a decline arrogates to himself the authority to prescribe today to the human spirit the road it should have taken to come from the ancient to the modern conception of nature.¹

Riegl could find cultural continuity in both the philosophy of Plotinus as well as a late Roman fibula, which Gombrich called ‘portentous nonsense.’²

‘Kunstwollen’ has been interpreted in a number of ways, as ‘artistic volition’ or ‘aesthetic urge.’ Pächt pointed to the form of the verb, that which is willed by art. Fortunately, thanks to the scholarly efforts of Margaret Olin, Margaret Iverson, Diana Reynolds, and most recently Mike Gubser, we are increasingly able to contextualize Riegl’s thought within the Austrian milieu in which he wrote.³ Reynolds’ in particular has argued for a recontextualization of Riegl that includes attention on Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and the Brentanist philosophical tradition best known in Austria.

Riegl is perhaps clearest in the conclusion to the Late Roman Art Industry, where he wrote that:

All human will is directed toward a satisfactory shaping of man’s relationship to the world, within and beyond the individual. The plastic Kunstwollen regulates man’s relationship to the sensibly perceptible appearance of things. Art expresses the way man wants to see things shaped or colored, just as the poetic Kunstwollen expresses the way man wants to imagine them. Man is not only a passive, sensory recipient, but also a desiring, active being who wishes to interpret the world in such a way, varying from one people, region, or epoch to another) that it most clearly and obligingly meets his desires. The character of this will is contained in what we call the worldview, again in the broadest sense): in religion, philosophy, science, even statecraft and law.⁴

The idea of mastery, meeting desire, is the crux of the Kunstwollen. Consequently, Adi Efel’s description of the Kunstwollen as a ‘regulator of subjectivity’ is very apt.\(^5\)

Pächt argued convincingly that Kunstwollen is less abundant in the Dutch Group Portrait not because Riegll had superseded it but because this later period had more documented personalities: the generic Roman Kunstwollen becomes that of a definable artist.\(^6\) Consequently, it is clear that the Kunstwollen is not a monolithic concept but formed of group life. As Jeffrey Tanner notes, Riegll observed the coexistence of different Kunstwollen in the late Roman world, between the elites and plebeians and also in sixteenth and seventeenth Low Countries, between Catholic and Protestants). Nevertheless, Riegll does make use of a concept of Volk. How much this is a totalizing concept, however, is open to interpretation. Both Tanner and Viktor Schwartz have questioned Gombrich’s imputation of racial thinking to Riegll.\(^7\)

The key to understanding Kunstwollen, however, is through Riegll’s larger idea of historical progress. A term that he uses, and which is repeated by Dvořák, is that of the ‘chain of development’, \(\text{Entwicklungskette}\). Riegll already uses it in the Stilfragen and it is a guiding metaphor in the Moderne Denkmalkultus. When Riegll mentions that ‘everything that once existed constitutes an irreplaceable and irremovable link in a chain of development’, he is echoing Buckle: ‘Every event is linked to its antecedent by an inevitable connexion, [every] such antecedent is connected with a preceding fact…thus the whole world forms a necessary chain.’\(^8\) In other words, each successive step is determined by the first and could not have happened as it did had any of the earlier links not preceded it. Indeed, this methodological commonality can be confirmed through influence.\(^9\)

It is necessary to pursue this line of inquiry, because Kunstwollen is hopelessly vague without this materialistic and positivist background. The idea that is taken for granted is that society is composed of tightly interlocking pieces. If that is the case, changes in one synchronic element will affect those in another


\(^{7}\) Jeremy Tanner, ‘Karl Mannheim and Alois Riegll: From Art History to the Sociology of Culture’, Art History 32, 2009: 755-784; Viktor Michael Schwarz, ‘What is Style for?’ Ars 39, 2006, 21-32: ‘It should be mentioned that Ginzburg’s interpretation of Riegll’s idea of style as based on the category of race is misleading. Whereas Ginzburg translates that, according to Riegll, late-antique Christians and pagans belonged to the same ‘razza’, race and thus used the same style, Riegll says that they belonged ‘zu denselben Volksstämmen’, to the same tribes. In this way, he stresses that style was independent of faith but he also states that it was independent of belonging to a specific ‘tribe’ as well.’ Such a clarification of terminology is also extremely important for the 1930s, when some non-biological versions of ‘race’ circulated; see Bernhard Radloff, Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism: Gestalt and Disclosure, Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007, p. 135.


\(^{9}\) Reynolds, Alois Riegll and the Politics of Art History; cited by Gubser, Time’s Visible Surface, 106.
synchronic element and likewise in the diachronic dimension. Part of the critique of Riegl as putative Hegelian can be found in the use of cultural details as symptoms of a larger whole. Thus Taine wrote:

> Just as in an animal, the instincts, teeth, limbs, bones, and muscular apparatus are bound together in such a way that a variation in the others, and out of which a skilful natural, with a few bits, imagines and reconstructs an almost complete body, so, in a civilization, do religion, philosophy, the family scheme, literature and the arts form a system in which each local change involves a general change, so that an experienced historian, who studies one portion apart from the others, sees beforehand and partially predicts the characteristics of the rest.\textsuperscript{10}

However, it is because a culture forms a tight whole that symptoms are accurate as predictors; they are actively formed by their neighbouring practices. To criticize such a model one must not attack its Hegelian assumptions but rather the very idea that societies form a coherent whole. One must move away from the imagery of a Hegelian ‘Geist’ imbuing a period, part of the rhetoric of ridicule) and make an ontological argument about the relative play of contingency and agency that upsets such closed wholes.

Similarly, in the diachronic sphere, it is important to note that such correlated systems are not teleological. Nineteenth century examples of theories that posited causal, co-existing factors and not prescribing any pattern of development are those of Adolphe Quetelet, Henry Buckle, and Hippolite Taine. Buckle and Taine, while influenced strongly by the positivism and naturalism of Comte, nevertheless erased teleological elements from their theories in favour of a thoroughgoing determinism.\textsuperscript{11} Any worthwhile theory of history has to be functional and not teleological in this way. Indeed, philosophers of science insist on forming explanations of successive processes as abstractive moments with tendencies and not ad hoc or \textit{ceteris paribus} laws.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Hippolite Taine, \textit{History of English Literature}, New York: Colonial Press, 1900, p. 22; \textit{Histoire de la littérature anglaise}, Paris : Hachette, 1911, vol. I, xl: ‘De même que dans un animal les instincts, les dents, les membres, la charpente osseuse, l’appareil musculaire, sont liés entre eux, de telle façon qu’une variation de l’un d’entre eux détermine dans chacun des autres une variation correspondante, et qu’un naturaliste habile peut sur quelques fragments reconstruire par le raisonnement le corps presque tout entier; de même dans une civilisation la religion, la philosophie, la forme de famille, la littérature, les arts composent un système où tout changement local entraîne un changement général, en sorte qu’un historien expérimenté qui en étudie quelque portion restreinte aperçoit d’avance et prédit à demi les caractères du reste.’


As we shall see, there is some tension in Riegl’s thinking between a closed system, which would be teleological, and an apparently closed system. But in either case, it is not enough to criticize the idea of Zeitgeist when it is affirmed that certain things cannot happen at different times. This is not due to Hegelian factors of inconceivability but rather material factors owing to the necessity of forms to pass through intermediate material states, Riegl’s ‘transitional phase’). This ‘gradualist’ emphasis of the Vienna School can also be challenged but not for its cognitive factors. Instead one would have to challenge, once again, the idea that systems play out conservatively in time. Indeed, as I shall show, this was the exactly the challenge that Dvořák faced after Riegl’s death.

**Dvořák and Mannheim**

Max Dvořák inherited from Riegl the idea that distinct historical artistic forms must pass through intermediate stages. This was the basis of his early materialism and seeming organicism through his career. The fact that Dvořák regarded the art of the van Eycks as a ‘Rätsel’, anomaly) shows how beholden he is to such a materialistic approach. His phrase clearly echoes those of Riegl above: ‘Every historical formulation is a link in a specific historical chain of evolution and is conditioned by previous formulations of the same material. This is the premise and the justification of modern exact scholarship; without this, it would be a farce.’ It is not that Dvořák ignored politics, religion or economics; rather, they were all one great self-modifying whole.

As Dvořák’s career progressed, he loosened the grips of the Rieglian monism and began to allow the direct influence of different social formations. We already saw that Riegl was able to account for stylistic pluralism in late antiquity and the Dutch Golden Age but his thorough-going determinism seemed to resist analytically separating different influences – Christianity for example – into an account of the rise of Medieval art. In his ‘Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Sculpture and Painting’, art becomes the manifestation of the Gothic worldview. History is made dialectical in the ‘contrast between the ideational and the material’, *(Gegensatz zwischen Geist und Materie)*. Viewing this historical system, rather than art being autonomous it is now in correspondence and in parallel with the history of the spirit. This is the true meaning of his ‘parallelism.’ It is not a non-doctrinaire form of *Geistesgeschichte*. Rather, forms are parallel because all cultural forms are parallel and part of the same whole.

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15 Parallelism is therefore not to be preferred to a more aggressive causal approach but should be seen as a more archaic holism. Paul Crossley, in discussing this problem in Dvořák and Sedlmayr, is less
Dvořák abandoned a universal history of art but I think it is misleading to suggest that he broke down the totality of the art historical field ‘into a plurality of incommensurable practices.’ It is important to note his retained commitment to a naturalistic and explanatory practice. What he relinquished is that it could come in a neat, unilinear package. Here, Vienna theorizing was undergoing a clarification similar to that found in Darwinian and Marxian theorizing. Already Lenin and Trotsky, not to mention the leading intellectual of Vienna Socialism, Max Adler, had criticized the standard teleology of Marxist thought and the Second International. Darwin’s ‘evolutionary’ approach is popularly understood to be teleological, and was misunderstood as such by Spencer) but in its pure form presumes that populations adapting to conditions facing them, resulting in greater survival of a particular population. Darwin’s criticism of Lamarck was motivated precisely by his functionalism, a form of teleology and lack of true, synchronic form to his theories. Marx is popularly seen as advocating historical inevitability, but a number of commentators on Marx have convincingly argued that the seemingly teleological and functionalist elements of his theories are mostly due to ‘sloppiness and rhetorical excess.’

What was at issue was precisely the idea of co-related practices, emphasizing ‘process’, ‘coexistence’ or ‘cause’ over teleology and functionalism. Riegl had assumed that a social whole was the same as a temporal whole, and would conserve determinism. But naturally chance variations in Darwinian or voluntary action in a Marxian system introduce unexpected changes; such changes can still be determined without everything causing everything in the sense of Spinoza or Laplace. It became clear that retroactive causal analysis of determination was not the same as prediction via a closed system, or that while effects are determined; whole...
events are not). By emphasizing Dvořák’s changes at the hands of the crisis of modernity risks losing the continuity of thought from Riegl to Sedlmayr and Pächt, and also understanding how they addressed the problems thrown up by Dvořák’s response to the difficulties that Riegl faced.

Lukács, and then Mannheim, became interested in Riegl and Dvořák for a model of cultural production that superseded the ‘vulgar’ Marxist mode of reflection. First, however, it is necessary to say something about Erwin Panofsky, who contributed to the debate over the interpretation of the Kunstwollen. Panofsky reinterpreted Riegl on broadly neo-Kantian lines and already in 1929 Sedlmayr replied that all such attempts to link Riegl and Kant are like combining ‘chalk and cheese.’ Subsequent commentators agree, for it is clear that Panofsky sought to change all that was interesting in Riegl based on his own, different critical prerogatives. As Jeremy Tanner notes, Panofsky was unhappy that Riegl had, 1) invoked artistic intention, 2) utilized collectivist concepts and, 3) made the Kunstwollen subjective. Panofsky turned to a comfortable Kantian approach to reverse these trends but it had the tendency of making Riegl unrecognizable.

Panofsky’s later theory relied, partly, on Mannheim’s ‘On the Interpretation of Weltanschauung’, but he never refreshed with Mannheim’s later writings, which developed Riegl’s ideas much further. Mannheim, in fact, returned to Riegl repeatedly and multiplied a number of Wollen throughout his work, now no longer restricted to the artistic sphere. What Mannheim recognized about the Kunstwollen is the way in which artistic, and by extension political actions, represent attempts to master, and by extension, represent) the world. They are ‘active volitions of subjects who had grasped or constituted the works from specific standpoints and with specific aspirations or commitments which shaped the character of their representation of the world.’ Mannheim was also attractive because he had answered Dvořák’s problem of development and determinism. In his Soziologie des Geistes, c. 1933, unpublished then but reflecting other themes in his work, Mannheim argued that, ‘we need not apply teleological hypotheses to history to realise the structural character of change.’

23 Sedlmayr, ‘Quintessence’, p. 27.
24 Tanner, ‘Karl Mannheim and Alois Riegl.’ There is of course much more to say of Panofsky, especially the way in which Mannheim shaped his interpretive model, Tanner, Hart and the way in which Elsner claims that Sedlmayr actually contributed to his mature approach; c.f., ‘From empirical evidence to the big picture: some reflections on Riegl’s concept of Kunstwollen’, Critical Inquiry 32, 2006, 741-66.
Mannheim’s continuation of Riegl’s thought is extremely compelling, capturing as it does the *motivation* of behaviour. Nevertheless, his extreme relationism does have its drawbacks, namely that his ontological relationism was carried also to an epistemological relationism; the relativity of being becomes the relativity of knowing. More concretely, if our viewpoint is always relative, how can we step out of that viewpoint to obtain objective knowledge? Mannheim notoriously addressed this by exempting the natural sciences from his analysis, something that is not too far from Bourdieu’s own treatment today.

In spite of Mannheim’s potential shortcomings, Dvorak’s efforts and Mannheim’s reinterpretation of them accomplished two things. First, the discussion was effectively transferred from art theory to sociology. Indeed, Pächt would later continue to cite Mannheim. Second, Riegl’s monistic determinism was qualified as a weaker Gestalt process that still maintained mutual accommodation and, in concert with current debates in the natural and social sciences, was reinterpreted as a question of an agent’s motivation.

**Sedlmayr and Alfred Vierkandt**

This is the situation in which Sedlmayr and Pächt worked in the late 1920s. What has been missing in analyses of both of their works is the way in which they sought to answer the Viennese heritage of Riegl and the floundering of Dvořák. As we shall see, they used their interest in gestalt theory in both perception and social life to find a suitable theory of super-individual social life and artistic compulsion. In particular, they saw the natural discussion of social evolution – as did Mannheim – in the sociology of knowledge, *Wissensoziologie*, a kind of move that had already been made by Max Adler, the Viennese socialist philosopher who interposed mind between social structure and consciousness.

They each had recourse to the figure of sociologist Alfred Vierkandt, which I will show to be simply a way to model *Kunstwollen* as sociology of knowledge. Indeed, today Vierkandt is remembered as a phenomenologically-oriented sociologist along with Max Scheler, however, with a Berlin connection. And this is how Sedlmayr and others regarded him circa 1930. Vierkandt was a more satisfactory Mannheim, both of whom explored ‘objective mind.’

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Vierkandt is cited by Sedlmayr in the ‘Quintessenz’ essay and Die Architektur Borrominis, and by Pächt in ‘The End of the Image Theory’. Vierkandt was a contested figure quickly. As Sedlmayr’s correspondence with Meyer Schapiro deteriorated, Sedlmayr contended that ‘I don’t care about Vierkandt at all’, suggesting some defensiveness. Later, Schapiro would justify what he thought to be a strange juxtaposition of ‘idealists’ (Vierkandt, Scheler) and ‘materialistic’ (Reichenbach, Carnap) thinkers in Sedlmayr’s system, as if to suggest he is having his cake and eating it too. Interestingly, however, apart from the use of the Gestaltist Lewin, Sedlmayr does not actually use Carnap and Reichenbach. Schapiro must have supplemented from his own memory in meeting Sedlmayr – he had mentioned in correspondence to Schapiro that he was interested in contributing to the International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method. In fact, Reichenbach is only cited in Die Architektur Borrominis, appropriately, to refer to a probabilistic explanation.

Later, Hochstim, in the only extended discussion of Vierkandt, affirms that the super-individual affirmations in his theory prepared the way for Nazi Volksgemeinschaft. Similarly, Sedlmayr’s pupil, Dittmann, questioned the use of Vierkandt in the strongest terms. Reacting to Vierkandt’s ethnographic placement of the social over the individual, and psychological mechanism of ‘instinct to submission’, Instinkt der Unterordnung, he rejected any such social theory that seeks to undermine freedom, self-determination and self-responsibility. More recently, seemingly with Vierkandt in mind, Jonathan Petropoulos mentions Sedlmayr’s adherence to ‘collective psychology’ while Katharina Lorenz and Jas Elsner call Sedlmayr the ‘real apostle of a Nazi version of Kunstwollen’. What was so objectionable?


33 Sedlmayr to Schapiro, 19 April 1932, cited in Levy, ‘Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond.’


Let us turn to Sedlmayr’s ‘Quintessenz’ essay where he specifically quotes Vierkandt from the Gesellschaftslehre, although reference is also made to the 1928 reissue:

[Modern sociology has subsequently produced the nonatomistic theory of ‘object spirit’, objektiven geist, and in this theoretical context there appears the concept of an ‘objective collective will’, objektiven Gesamtwillens, which matches perfectly the concept introduced by Riegl.]

‘The facts of human culture reveal the sway of a supra-individual spirit to an extraordinary degree.’38 Behind them stands a supra-individual will that the individual person encounters as a normative force. What is being talked about here is an objective will, or even specifically of an objective collective will, Wille von überindividueller Art, and this refers to a force that is rightly conceived of by the individual as an objective power. Clearly this is precisely what Rieg mean.

Just like the objective spirit this supra-individual will is borne by groups of people. And although it is neither a ‘substance that hovers mysteriously between specific individuals’, nor some phenomenon, in other words, something detectable in the conscious mental life of a single person such as, for example, individual intentions, it is, like ‘spirit’, Geist, something real and, further, an actual force, Kraft).39

Vierkandt’s subquotation might seem startling in the context of Sedlmayr’s text. Because Vierkandt is seemingly not a gestalt or phenomenological figure, it seems to be a moment of ideological violence, when Sedlmayr’s conservative tendencies bubble to the surface. This is certainly how Dittmann, Hochstimm, and now Lorenz and Elsner read them.

Nevertheless, Vierkandt would have seemed an at least partially naturalized ‘gestalt’ figure to Sedlmayr. He taught with Wertheimer, Köhler and Lewin at the University of Berlin. Because he worked in an adjacent field, there were many opportunities to collaborate, if only for practical reasons like serving on dissertation committees. For example, Walther Schering had Wertheimer and Köhler on the committee for his 1925 dissertation overseen by Vierkandt: ‘Ganzes und Teil bei der sozialen Gesellschaft.’40 Vierkandt and Köhler were also on Aron Gurwitsch’s

38 Vierkandt, Gesellschaftslehre, 343: „Im großartigsten Maße zeigt sich das Walten eines überindividuellen Geistes in den Tatsachen der menschlichen Kultur."
39 Sedlmayr, ‘Quintessenz:’ „Dieser überindividuelle Wille’ ist ebenso wie der ‚objektive Geist’ getragen von einer Gruppe von Menschen. Und obwohl er weder eine »in mystischer Weise zwischen den Individuen schwebende Substanz’ noch etwas Phänomenales, das heißt in dem bewußten Seelenleben der einzelnen Individuen.‘
Habilitation committee, and both expressed approval of his text – *Die mitmenschlichen Begegnungen in der Milieuwelt* – unfortunately unpublished because of the rise of Nazism.41

More importantly, Vierkandt had cited both Lewin and Köhler in the 2nd edition of the *Gesellschaftslehre*, which would have not been missed by either Sedlmayr or Pächt. Vierkandt repeatedly discusses the gestalt category and hardly *Ganzheit* at all. In spite of the fact that his overall approach to sociology is ‘formal’, this affinity to *Ganzheit* is more to do with the old-fashioned nature of his theory, rooted in nineteenth century categories, than in content. Vierkandt liked the Gestalt work of his colleagues but his paradigm hardly allowed him to express it. In short, the decision to cite Vierkandt – independent of the cited content, which will be discussed now – is perfectly understandable.

‘Objective spirit’, *Objektiven Geistes* is the subject of section 36 of the *Gesellschaftslehre*: ‘Die Bedeutung des objective Geistes.’ This concept is obviously of Hegelian origin and means ‘objective spirit’ or ‘objective mind.’ As such, it might appear compromised as an abstract instrument of the development of spirit. Nevertheless, it was naturalized as a sociological concept by Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, and Eduard Spranger, phenomenologists like Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann, cultural historians like Hans Freyer, and most importantly Mannheim himself, to refer to a super-individual thought or content.42 There is in addition a Marxist strand leading from Hegelian Marxists like Lukacs to Adorno and Habermas, who writes of, ‘symbolically stored collective knowledge’ or just ‘objectified culture.’43 The inoffensiveness of the term can be shown, *horribile dictu*, by Karl Popper’s discussions of the ‘objective mind’ and ‘World III.’44 True, the ‘objective spirit/mind’ is the basis of related theories of the ‘group mind’, but the slipperiness of the term simply refers to external ‘objective’ facts. It is compatible with collective *subjectivity* of the group, but not with executive *consciousness*.

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As Sedlmayr had recommended all of sections 38-40 to his readers, pp. 342-366, this quote could be seen as a chronological reading of Vierkandt’s text. Indeed, Sedlmayr sees the ‘objective collective will’, *objektiven Gesamtwillens* as a subset of the *Geist*, the compulsion that is a result of it. This will, like the spirit, is super-individual, *überindividuelle*). There is really nothing objectionable about this and Pächt in his later lectures continued to refer to the ‘supra-individual’ nature of the *Kunstwollen*. The real question is whether or not this is an example of radical, indefensible holism, or merely institutionalism, or, alternatively, anti-reductionism. If, for Durkheim, ‘collective representations’ suggest an organic group mind, they may still for Vierkandt legitimately suggest super-individuality and collective subjectivity.

If we contextualize the outright prohibition against supra-individual reasoning as a libertarian aberration, we can see that this was necessary for any kind of collectivist explanation, including of a Marxist kind. Von Mises, influential on Hayek, Popper and Gombrich, says so much when he notes of Vierkandt: ‘Now this opinion does not differ essentially from that of Frederick Engels as especially expressed in his most popular book, the *Anti-Dühring* nor from that of William McDougall and his numerous American followers.’ Mises’ conflation of Marxism and racist hereditarian, McDougall) thinking is typical of libertarian thought. Popper’s unmerciful critique of Mannheim was predicated on a similar unfair conflation of theoretical socialism and actual fascism.

The main question behind all forms of legitimate collectivism is whether we need to reflect in theory, 1) the fact that entities, like numbers) do not exist solely in the mind, psychologism) and, 2) the fact that we do not merely act on the social and that sometimes it acts upon us, the duality of structure). As we have seen, the way to avoid individualism was through invocation of the successors of Hegel’s *Geist*. In other words, to explain class exploitation, we need collectivism. According to a contemporary formulation of Levine, Sober and Wright, collectivism is needed to discuss capitalism as a generic, ‘type’) concept, although singular discussions of capitalism at any historical moment in a particular country, ‘token’) might make reference to individualistic data. For this reason, Nicos Hadjinicolaou found it fit to discuss Sedlmayr’s account of the *Kunstwollen* in his Marxist *Art History and Class Struggle*.

The same may be said for the willed part of being under the power of objective mind or spirit. Because of the attunement of the group to the normative

47 Levine, Sober and Wright, ‘Marxism and Methodological Individualism.’
principle to which they belong, there is a compulsion to accept that norm. The compulsion behind Riegl's *Kunstwollen* refers not only to the fact that we are determined to do some particular thing, generic determinism) but are compelled *at that moment* to do *that particular thing*. It therefore occurs at the agent level, that is, the level of individual psychology, but via the attunement to the collective subjectivity of the greater group’s first personal ‘we.’ Here, while this idea of the *Gesamtwillen* suggests ideas of mindless, crowd behavior, as in the case of a rich enough ontology to explain ‘capitalism’ or some other entity, here too the way in which groups of like minded people are united in activism, labor, or human-rights struggles is explained as well.

**Pächt and Metzger**

The name of Vierkandt does not appear again in the literature of *Strukturforschung*, which means principally in the work of Otto Pächt. We find him turning back instead to Mannheim or Simmel, but also interestingly looking aside contemporaneously to the gestalt psychologist, Wolfgang Metzger, 1899-1979). He does so in both his article on Riegl and also his *Methodisches* of c. 1970. Metzger provided Pächt with a satisfactory theory of the idea of compulsion in history in the idea of ‘creative freedom’, *schoepferische Freiheit*). This allowed him to continue along the path of naturalizing social science and reaffirm the notion of continuous evolution.

Because Metzger was an orthodox gestalt psychologist, I want to fill in some gaps in order to make it clearer the way in which Vierkandt had been improved upon, as suggestive as he was back in 1930. The ontological status of the group was not clearly delineated by Vierkandt. He strove to outline the extra-individual character of culture yet the result was so formalized and impersonal as to be hardly distinguishable from Durkheim’s system. A breakthrough was achieved by Kurt Lewin upon arriving in America, which Metzger knew, to regard the reality of a group not in a substantive way but upon the causal criterion of existence: something must be real if it has effects. This does not reify the group and anchors culture in individuals, but it points to the causal efficacy of groups to effect change in ways individuals cannot. Groups exhibit emergent properties that make their effects different from individual behavior, as recognized also by Lewin in noting the ‘whole is different from the sum of its parts.’

In the second case, Vierkandt was not phenomenological enough, ignoring important literature on the nature of group-sympathy. Collectives live in many ways: through their spokespersons, through the interaction of their members, but the idea of collective subjectivity goes to the very way in which group members identify with each other, and against others). This is the subjective side of the life of

groups. Groups do have a mental or ‘spiritual’ link. As with social structure, however, this must only reside at the meso-level where the consciousness of individuals can fuse on a norm into a single subjectivity. Thus Vierkandt could have made reference to Max Scheler’s Gesamtperson, Edith Stein’s überindividuelle Personlichkeit and Husserl’s Personon der hoherer Ordnung. They clarify that collective subjectivity does not mean a consciousness that is shared by many individuals; it is not a stand-alone substantial consciousness in its own right but a mutual participation in a common intentionality and subjectivity. Thus, each theorist does not speak of personhood but only personality. The personality therefore does not have a stream of consciousness. Its participants share a stream of experience.

For the Viennese art historian art and its reception is a relative or, as I would prefer to say, relational affair. Pächt notes that, ‘a work of the past or of another culture is based on premises that are not our own’, which he assigns to Riegl. Pächt obviously echoes Marx in the Eighteenth Brumaire here: ‘Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted.’ Pächt explains determinism in very unique ways that are owed to recognition of such ideas above, as digested by Metzger.

Pächt explains his paradoxical notion of freedom in this way: ‘It is not the freedom to do as you please but the freedom to do the right thing, the one and only thing that makes sense is the context of a specific task. In other words it is tied to freedom.’ This is where Pächt directly cites Metzger’s theory of ‘schöpferische Freiheit.’ Metzger was a second generation gestalt thinker and indeed pupil of the original gestalt theorists that Sedlmayr, and Pächt) had cited a generation earlier. Metzger’s book grew from an earlier edition, which in turn was based on an article published during war time. The 1962 version that Pächt knew was the most successful, having incorporated Max Wertheimer’s results on obtaining insight in

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53 Pächt, Practice of Art History, p. 132.
problem solving in his *Productive Thinking*, 1945, translated into German by Metzger in 1957.\(^{56}\) Like Wertheimer, Metzger strove to emphasize the objective quality of situational determinism, when a state of affairs impresses a choice on us, rather than another. Problems lead us with different forces toward solution; we are impelled to reach a satisfying end-state, free of contradiction and confusion. Clearly, this was an effective way for Pächt to make contact once again with Mannheim and ultimately Riegl, through a new way to fashion the idea of *Wollen*. But the relativistic fears of those critical of Riegl should be blunted, such as Gombrich, because this is not an irrational kind of determinism but a kind of ‘immanent structuralism.’\(^{57}\)

Pächt openly polemicizes with Gombrich. Now, Popper’s original problem with ‘historicism’ is that it absolved personal responsibility and this is what Gombrich charged of the woolly Romantic writing found in Sedlmayr’s *Festschrift*, which he wrote ‘absolve the individual of personal responsibility’, making those with such texts ‘enemies of reason.’\(^{58}\) Against fears of historicism, it should be remembered that the whole platform of *Strukturforschung* was centered on the single work of art and superseded stylistic history. The point was not to deduce grand schemes of history. Therefore, the historical dynamic of which Sedlmayr spoke should be understand on a moment-by-moment basis, as we have already seen with the idea of a ‘chain of development’, *Entwicklungskette*).\(^{59}\) This was actually the suggestion of Lewin, probably Sedlmayr’s most-cited Gestalt theorist, who recommended viewing the development of even physical and biological systems not as a continuous, teleological process but one in which the outcome is ‘being-such-as-to-have-come-forth-from’, *existentiellen Auseinanderhervorgegangeneins*).\(^{60}\) The result is not holism but ‘moderate analytic holism’, ‘meso-gestalt’, or ‘intelligible holism’ defensible, it is required to do justice to art history.\(^{61}\)


\(^{59}\) Here, I would soften an earlier pronouncement that this phrase ‘historische Dynamik’ has to refer to a speculative history: Verstegen, ‘Gestalt, Art History, and Nazism’, *Gestalt Theory* 24, 2004: 134-150. It is now clear to me that Sedlmayr is referring merely to what we would call the ‘trajectory’ of history, rather than the teleology of history; c.f., Wright, Levine and Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism*, and Alex Callinicos, *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History*, Durham: Duke, 1995, 108.


A suggestion that *Kunstwollen* is already functional is given by Pächt, when he writes of the ‘successive’ artistic activities of a school. He recognizes that the evolution of a school, of distinct individuals) and that of an, organically unified) individual is different. It is only the successive phases of a school that manifest the *Kunstwollen*. It is possible for Pächt to believe that history has a temporal pattern-like structure because he denies the symmetry of prediction and explanation. He clearly distinguishes between prediction, inevitability, or determinism as a closed system, and retrospective causal determinism, endorsing Wind’s comment of ‘retrospective prophecy.’\(^{62}\) This phrase, adopted by Wind from T. H. Huxley’s popular discussions of Darwin, refers to the ability to explain events retrospectively even as one incorporates contingency, ‘chance’ mutation).\(^{63}\) This distinction echoes post-positivist reforms to cover-law models in logical positivist philosophy of science, which viewed explanation and prediction as differing only in the arrow of time attached to them.\(^{64}\)

**Conclusion**

Let us take stock. At the point of c. 1970 Pächt has followed Sedlmayr in the 1928 ‘Quintessenz’ essay to reinterpret *Kunstwollen* as a social scientific concept. Not following Vierkandt, Pächt nevertheless accepts that art history can solve the problem of artistic production relative to different periods by reference to sociology and psychology. This he does through the theory of Metzger. Such a theory is *relational*, emphasizing differential artistic responses at different times, *causal* in stressing that artistic choices are active compulsions responding to determinate states of affairs, and *evolutionary* or demonstrating the power of continuously evolving tradition over individual choice. Pächt hints at but does not directly solve some conundrums, for example, how continuous evolution adheres when history is not a closed system, the exact constitution of a group, and so forth. As for the first issue, he clearly states it as a *methodological* maxim that situational and tradition-bound, evolutionary) explanations are to be preferred over those that first invoke the individual artistic agent.

As a final clarification, we can follow Mandelbaum to see that there are two different problems here: ‘whether, in a given situation, a person can do what he wants to do’ and ‘why, in a given situation, a person chooses as he does.’\(^{65}\) The first refers to Wölfflin’s claim that ‘not everything is possible at all times.’\(^{66}\) This question

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is in art and also in moral philosophy relatively uncontroversial. Riegler's, and Dvořák's and Sedlmayr's) question is the second, why did a person choose as he or she did? Most people regard 'freedom' in terms of a lack of constraint placed by the past. With this Mandelbaum would agree. Such determinism, or lack of freedom) is in fact contemporaneous. In other words, we are determined by what we apprehend at any given moment. Mandelbaum explains: 'our ability to respond to alternatives in terms of their own natures must be instilled in us by our past. We must be trained, and sometimes brutally trained, by natural causation or by the actions of others, to become capable of a choice based not on the past but on the alternatives themselves.'67 Because we are trained by trial and error to lead our lives in a productive and safe way, our 'determined' choices do not seem to be that.

The approach to art history and particularly the mysterious Kunstwollen needs to be contextualized historically, which allows a sympathetic understanding of the concept in general social scientific terms. In particular, the Kunstwollen must be seen as an evolving concept, which is how Dvořák, Mannheim, Sedlmayr and Pächt regarded it. By understanding it as an evolving concept aiming for empirical application, and also tracking the social scientific interests of thinkers like Mannheim, Vierkandt, Lewin or Metzger, it is possible to see that the Kunstwollen is none other than a concept of cultural explanation emphasizing art as an institution, with deterministic factors that, however, are rigorous in that they depend on point-by-point readings and not teleologies. In this, my findings parallel my previous work on E. H. Gombrich and Rudolf Arnheim. The accumulated weight of these results suggests that we need to resist filling in the blanks when confronted with someone with an unsavoury personal life like Hans Sedlmayr. We have to rethink how readily we connect Sedlmayr's biography to his theories. Not only are the theories interesting, they are actually defensible and necessary to do justice to the tricky problem of the historical explanation of artistic style.

In the end, Pächt's contribution to the debate about Kunstwollen is one of maximizing the return of social science to explaining Wölflin's question, why art has a history. Rather than err on the side of caution as the Popper and Gombrich group did, he takes instead the tailor's defence, and believes that if he cuts the cloth a little more generously, he will be more assured of ending up with the proper garment in the end. Perhaps the best monument to Pächt is to continue reinterpretting Kunstwollen in light of new insights from empirical social science.

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