

'Hundreds of eyes': Beyond Beholding in Riegl's 'Jakob van Ruysdael' (1902)

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Alois Riegl wrote nearly nothing about landscape painting; what he did has been assailed as mystical and oblique. The same might be said for his writing on the concept of *Aufmerksamkeit*, or attentiveness, which itself has come to generate a veritable sub-genre of art historiography.¹ Evocative comments on space, nature, and looking weave throughout Riegl's lecture notes and unpublished oeuvre, but nowhere are they as systematically, potently (and cryptically) wielded towards an entire reconceptualization of art history as in the obscure, 1902 essay on the Dutch landscapist Jacob van Ruysdael.² The essay pivoted on the partiality of the interpreter, offering a different mode of 'structure' than that enshrined by subsequent Vienna school formalists.³ Most importantly, within Riegl's concept of landscape there emerged, as this paper will suggest, a different idea of art *history* as a kind of aesthetic act.

My gratitude to Joseph Imorde, Abigail Newman, Jane Newman, and Margaret Olin for various guidances, and to Georg Vasold for assistance and access in Vienna. Suggestions by Diane Reynolds Cordileone greatly improved an earlier draft of this essay.

¹ Among the vast Riegl literature, see, for example: Kurt Badt, 'Alois Riegl', in *Raumphantasie und Raumillusionen*, Cologne: DuMont, 1963, 27ff.; Otto Pächt, 'Alois Riegl', *Burlington Magazine* 105, May 1963, 188-93; Wolfgang Kemp, 'Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik', in Kemp, ed. *Der Betrachter ist im Bild*, Cologne: DuMont, 1985, 7-27; Lorenz Dittmann, 'Die Begriff der Kunstwerks in der deutschen Kunstgeschichte' in *idem* (ed.) *Kategorien und Methoden der deutschen Kunstgeschichte, 1900-1930*, Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1985, 51-88; Jorg Oberhaidacher, 'Riegls Idee einer theoretischen Einheit von Gegenstand und Betrachter und ihre Folgen für die Kunstgeschichte', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 38, 1985, 199-218; Margaret Olin, 'Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentiveness', *Art Bulletin* LXXI: 2, June 1989, 285-99; Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993; J. Bazant, 'Bildkünstlerisches Zeichen und Symbol bei Alois Riegl', *Umeni* XLII, 1994, 230-38; Wolfgang Kemp, 'Augengeschichte und skopische Regime', *Merkur* 513, 1991, 1162-67; H.J. Sprosz, 'Die Naturauffassung bei Alois Riegl und Joseph Strzygowski', Ph.D. diss., Saarbrücken, 1989; Benjamin Binstock, 'Alois Riegl in the Presence of the Nightwatch', *October* 27, 1995, 36-44; Christiane Hertel, *Vermeer: Reception and Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 35-7; Margaret Olin, *The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007, 111-18; Michael Viktor Schwarz, 'Das Problem der Form und ihrer Geschichtlichkeit: Hildebrand, Riegl, Gombrich, Baxandall', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 53, 2005, 203-17.

² Alois Riegl, 'Jakob van Ruysdael', *Die graphischen Künste*, XXV, 1902, 11-20. Trans. Christopher P. Heuer in *Art in Translation* 4:2, 2012, 149-162.

³ And in fact may manifest the opposite. See Konrad Paul Liessmann, 'Kunsttheorie als Wissenschaftskritik (Paul Feyerabends Berufung auf Alois Riegl)' *Kunsthistoriker: Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Kunsthistorikerverbandes* II, 1985, 3, 10-12.

The Essay

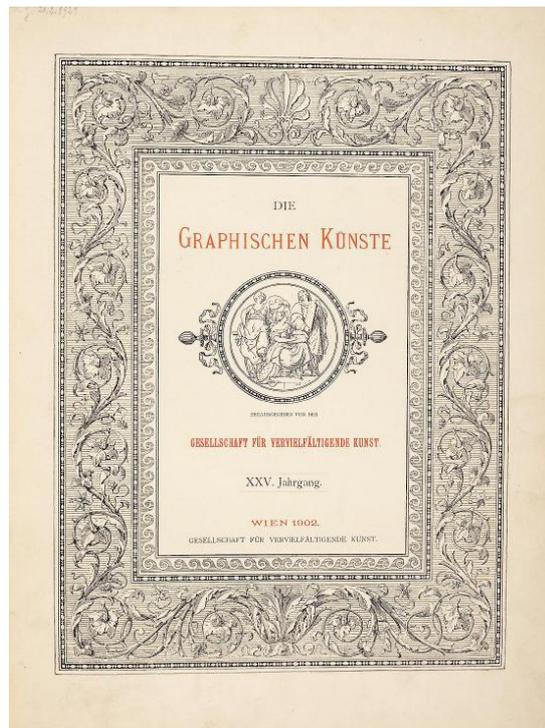


Figure 1. *Die graphischen Künste* 25 (1902), title page

The essay 'Jakob van Ruysdael' was first published in 1902, in a periodical devoted to prints. In the piece Riegl outlines a categorical history of the entirety of Dutch painting on the basis of 'three stages' of space-handling and 'Stimmung' - atmosphere, or mood, which we'll return to later - tracking 'a movement from a relative objectivity towards a subjectivity':

...individual things have to give up their tactile, tangible, and objective-physical character to reveal themselves only as optical stimuli. They are spots of colour [*Farbenflecken*] that can be reassembled as individual things...⁴

Riegl, somewhat confusingly, then sets out to define three evolutionary phases for all of Dutch painting: In the first stage, 'tonal' painters such as Jan van Goyen, working in monochrome, created paintings which, as Riegl put it, ignored specific details and did not 'reach out actively' to the beholder. In the second phase, characterized by Rembrandt, human activity is present and individual details are brought out, but all are subjugated to, as Riegl puts it, several kinds of 'darknesses' [*Dunkeln*] everything is connected through light, dark, and chiaroscuro, harmonious and balanced – specifically in etchings such as the 1652 *Goldweigher's Field*. Jacob van Ruysdael, meanwhile, emerges as exemplary of the third phase, in works like

⁴ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 151.

the *Great Beech Forest*, where human activity has been expunged. It is, as Riegl puts it, sheer looking that becomes the subject of the work:

one perceives almost nothing but trees, each of them comes forward as an individual...None of the trees has that insistent tactile dimension - as experienced on every walk in a forest - that transfixes the eye, taking up the entire visual field and thus never graspable at once. And yet, between the trees, the bright sky looks at the beholder with hundreds of eyes.⁵

Tree and sky, anthropomorphized, thus acknowledge the beholder, almost socially. And indeed, the mutual balance between Ruisdael's subjectivity and that of the purported beholders' - eye to eyes - is precisely what Riegl tracked in the giant *Gruppenporträt* article from the same year (1902), a balance based on jointly deferential *Aufmerksamkeit*, or attention, between observer and sitter. The trees work like Rembrandt's glaring syndics. '...all of Dutch painting can be called, ' Riegl writes near the close of the Ruisdael essay, 'a painting of attention.'⁶

For this attention, Riegl explains, is uniquely harmonious in Ruisdael's own 'mature' phase, where certain paintings' design functions almost as an allegory for Dutch egalitarianism: 'individual things are always coordinated. No single one is emphasized at the expense of another...sky and earth are completely equivalent.'⁷ Riegl writes. This pictorial relationship *within* the painting models a relationship ostensibly *outside* the painting between beholder and actual artwork. The painting, that is, anchors a visual transaction. And just as the staffage is depicted in the act of calmly staring at trees, dunes, and water, so is the human beholder - placed before the picture - made aware of their own silent observational performance:

...we see a wanderer sitting and resting contemplatively. [...] Any remnant of action as an expression of will has been done away with; what the artist represents and the beholder experiences in now pure sensation.⁸

What the best Ruisdael pictures do, Riegl writes, is engage a 'pure enjoyment of looking.'⁹ Importantly, this is a looking cleaved from what Riegl calls the 'expression' of some extrinsic value - freed from duty to narrative or artistic will. The beholder's looking remains *engaged*, however, even without *Wille* - it is an active attention, but one that never seeks to overpower its subject.¹⁰

⁵ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 157-58.

⁶ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 159. This is nothing more than a reprisal of a near-exact line from the *Gruppenporträt*. On the content of the actual pictures, see Peter Ashton, Alice Davies, and Seymour Slive, 'Jacob van Ruysdael's Trees', *Arnoldia: The Magazine of the Arnold Arboretum* 42:1, Winter 1982, 2-31.

⁷ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 154.

⁸ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 158.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Riegl's careful distinction between *Wille* and *wollen* was explicated in his draft notes for the *Gruppenporträt*. See Olin, 'Forms', 292, n. 54.

As the essay concludes, Riegl turns to Ruisdael's last pictures, where, he writes, 'sensation is no longer acute'.¹¹ The cherished attentive balance is upset. Sentimentality strays into the landscape as human forms disappear, in the Dresden *Jewish Cemetery*, for example. Here symbols or 'feeling' overwhelm the picture's content, cloyingly beseeching the viewer to be read; nature is subjected towards the referencing of some artistic message or, indeed, expression. And without those beholding surrogates for us, the beholders *within* the picture - without those walkers, sitters, or fishermen that Ruisdael otherwise 'sink[s] into the ensemble of natural things'¹² - such feeling devolves 'into affect.'¹³ A 'hyper-subjective attitude' now reigns; we flesh-and-blood lookers have no concomitance within the scenes, and the artist's own individualism takes over:

...a simple interest has crept into the purely attentive act of looking. This is an interest...demanded by a heightened desire for feeling...¹⁴

Nature, that is, has been theatrically enlisted towards some effect; in the *Cemetery*, this is some visual message about human transience. The picture still looks out, but looks too forcefully; *Aufmerksamkeit* is no longer mutual.

In this last part of the essay, Riegl constantly tacks between descriptions of specific artworks and first-person statements about their present-day reception, mentioning 'we modern observers' and 'the viewpoint of modern taste...' or 'the modern-thinking art lover.' Rhetorical conventions, these, and ones familiar from Riegl's other writings on Dutch art (and their roots in public lectures.) Yet here the effect is to uphold the essay's larger contention that the art experience is best understood as a back-and-forth. In this, the 'attention' of the essay is signalled as more than just a museum-based transaction of seer and seen. Riegl is concerned, too, with the 'attention' that art history levels at its subjects, when it writes as well as looks; what it chooses to examine in its moment. The first sentence of the Ruisdael essay, after all, is not about *Kunst* but about *moderne Kunstgeschichtsforschung*.¹⁵

And Riegl seems not particularly happy with this art history; Ruisdael supplies a means to further inveigh (if more moderately than in his earlier writings) against historicism.¹⁶ In place of a pedantically academic approach to art, then, Riegl here presents an obsessive analysis of colours and surfaces that 'nourish the organ of sight.'¹⁷ He precociously chafes against the tendency to instrumentalize painting as the 'expression' of some artistic will, or some accumulation of subjectivity. 'Pure sensation' is instead held up as a crucial aspect of art's experience. Riegl exhibits,

¹¹ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 159

¹² Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 154.

¹³ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 160.

¹⁴ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 159.

¹⁵ On Riegl's methodological self-consciousness see, for example, Jas' Elsner, 'From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture: Some Reflections on Riegl's Concept of *Kunstwollen*', *Critical Inquiry* 32: 4, Summer 2006, 741-66.

¹⁶ Diana Reynolds Cordileone, 'The advantages and disadvantages of Art History to Life: Alois Riegl and historicism', *Journal of Art Historiography* 3 (December 2010).

¹⁷ Riegl, 'Ruysdael', 153.

again, a wariness regarding positivist art history's tendency to fetishize knowledge at the sake of experience, confrontation, and surprise¹⁸ - whatever its success, the Ruisdael piece exemplifies an alternative to such dry contextualizing. And it points towards a rescue of painting history from both dilettantism and university dogma. This was something Dutch art, in its revelling in everyday subjects, had already given rise to in writing around 1902, in imaginative (if fatuous) ways: Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890) which Riegl surely knew, was a part of the intellectual climate, for better or for worse.¹⁹ But Riegl never speaks of a naïve, and certainly never a *völkisch* gaze: his vision of the artwork here is *de facto* heterogeneous: a combinatory product of admixed objects, atmospheres, and views.

Both by zooming back and forth between the artwork and its reception, and by decrying those pictorial elements threatening to deaden a picture's *Stimmung* with specialized information or 'meaning' (in Ruisdael's case, tombstones and dead trees as icons of mortality), the Ruisdael essay secretes a musing on a *Kunst* freed from cultural duty to 'express' the past. It offers a consideration of what one *is* in fact paying 'attention' to when one does *Kunstgeschichte*.²⁰ In its very anchoring in a person-picture sociability, his paradigm suggested a creative, collaborative role for the beholder that the essay, in its very structure, puts into actual play. In a more condensed form than in Riegl's other writings, then, the Ruisdael essay seems to recast art history as the *individualized* production of knowledge.

Pedagogical Beginnings

At the time of writing, Alois Riegl had been *ordinarius* at the University of Vienna for six years, having shifted from a curatorial position at the Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie. Despite a seemingly uniform concentration upon painting, the Ruisdael essay appeared in a luxury periodical devoted to the print: *Die graphischen Künste*, the official organ of a connoisseurs' society known as the *Gesellschaft für Vervielfältigende Kunst*.²¹ The piece began life as a lecture as part of the Dutch painting course;²² other numbers of the journal had included lithographs by Franz Marc and essays by the print historian Max Lehre. The invocation of the

¹⁸ Consider, for example, Riegl's mocking commentary on the debates around lifeless 'revivalist' styles in Vienna arts and crafts, ca. 1900: Alois Riegl, 'Über Renaissance der Kunst', *Mittheilungen des k.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie* 10, 1895, 342-8, 363-71, 381-93.

¹⁹ Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher, von einem Deutschen* (Leipzig: C.L. Hirschfeld), 1890. The sustained popularity of the notorious tract is explored in Fritz Stern, 'Julius Langbehn and Germanic Irrationalism', in *The Politics of Cultural Despair*. 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 97-204.

²⁰ Heinrich Wölfflin singled out the 'artistic' stance of Riegl: '...Riegl durch seine Antithese auf ein anderes Problem hingelenkt worden ist, nämlich das der künstlerischen Denkrichtung.' (Riegl was led by this antithesis towards another issue, namely that of the artistic method of thinking.) See Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Barok*, Munich: Bruckmann, 1926. Andrew Hopkins ('Riegl Renaissances' in *The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome*, 73, n. 15) points out that this text was added by pupil Hans Rose.

²¹ On the journal: *Meyers Großes Konversations-Lexikon*, Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1907, vol. 7, 721-22.

²² Hans Tietze, 'Riegl, Alois', *Neue Österreichische Biografie 1815-1918*, Leipzig: Amatheo-Verlag, 1935, vol. 8, 142-8.

Rembrandt print in the middle section is an unexpected pivot for Riegl's narrative, and seems to be why the essay was included in a journal on graphic arts in the first place. Differently than much of Riegl's other work, the essay rooted the Dutch landscape painting in what was basically a curatorial impulse - an attempt to erect a teleological framework which could *account* for the numinous specifics of objects, and, at the same time, detail their place in wide swaths of cultural production.²³

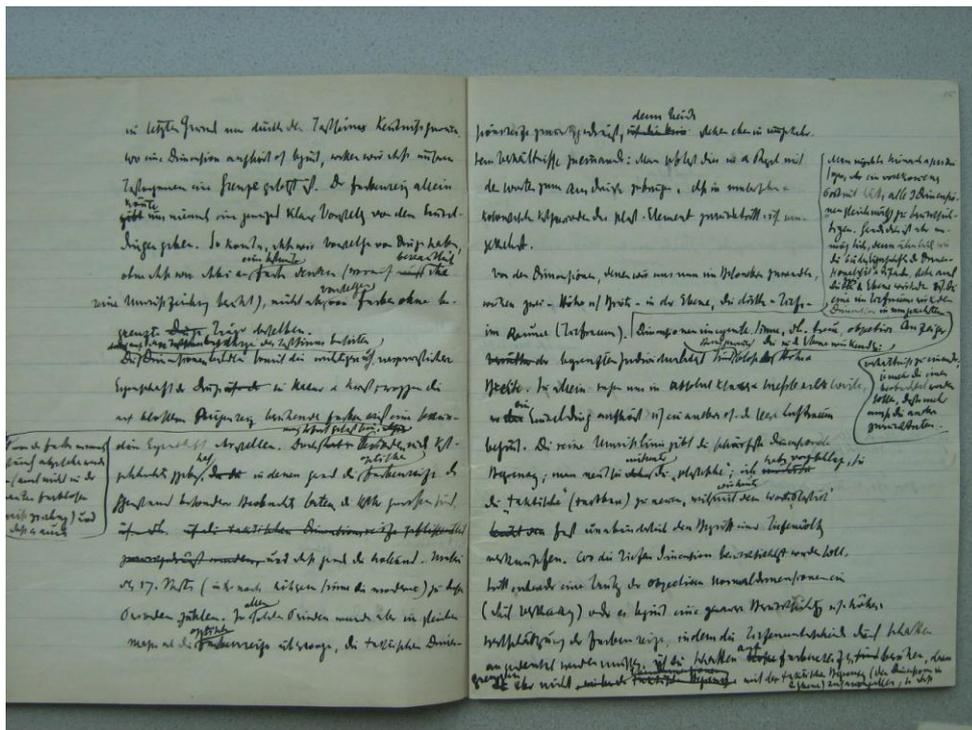


Figure 2. Pages from Riegl's lecture notes for the 1896 Dutch painting course (Kunsthistorisch Institut, Universität Wien)

Riegl had taught courses on Dutch and Flemish painting in 1896/7, reprised in 1900/1: the same year he offered classes on Baroque painting in Italy and Spain.²⁴ The Dutch course notes (fig. 2), which were originally to be published as a book (like the *Barokkunst in Rom*), exist in a 420-page typescript in Vienna, part of a project aborted in 1936.²⁵ At the time, Dutch Baroque and mannerist painting, even with the

²³ Kurt Forster, 'Monument/Memory and the Mortality of Architecture', *Oppositions* 25, Fall 1982, 69-77.

²⁴ The latter published as the *Die Entstehung der Barokkunst in Rom*, Vienna: Schroll, 1908, ed. and trans. Andrew Hopkins and Arnold Witte as *The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010.

²⁵ *Das holländische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, typescript. Kunsthistorisch Institut, Universität Wien. See Georg Vasold, 'Alois Riegl: "Die holländische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts": Überlegungen zu einer unveröffentlichten Vorlesung aus dem Nachlaß' M.A. Thesis, Universität Wien, 1999. In the Vienna files (unpaginated document, carton 5) there is a terse letter from the intended project editor, the Rembrandt specialist Ludwig Münz, to Riegl's widow, dated 21 October 1936, which apologizes for having to 'postpone' the project. Given the date, the reasons seem both grim and not difficult to fathom. Münz was a professor at the University of Vienna and director of its art gallery; he edited the 1933 edition of Riegl's *Gruppenporträt*, and was a close friend of Adolf Loos. He was also a decorated officer in the Austrian army in the First World War, and an outspoken critic of National Socialism,

repute it had been given by figures like Eugene Fromentin as a forerunner of nineteenth-century French Realism, was still something of a byway.²⁶ It has long been assumed that Riegl was heavily influenced in his thoughts on Dutch art by Karl Schnaase (d. 1875), a Prussian jurist and one-time student of Hegel.²⁷ Schnaase's *Niederländische Briefe* of 1834, to summarize bluntly, had introduced the idea that separate eras of art were mutually illuminating, extending Hegel's idea that there is a *fixed* relation to the art of the past. It was Dutch painting that made these 'circular' relations plainest in its sheer profusion, in its 'unlimited number of types.'²⁸ The Hegel of the *Ästhetik*, meanwhile, seems such an obvious presence in Riegl's understanding of the beholder as to appear invisible.²⁹ At the time of the essay, Riegl's dissatisfaction with the dogmatic historicism of the Museum of Art and Industry was at its height; in Nietzsche's critiques (which he read as a student) he found a basis for a more 'irrationalist' approach: a method which would not dispense with the past, but which would be *more* rigorous by its challenging of formulaic norms.³⁰

Riegl had made a study trip to the Netherlands in 1900, where he visited the great collections in The Hague, Amsterdam, and Haarlem; on this trip he filled more than six travel notebooks with notes and drawings in purple pencil – these too, survive (fig. 3.) In these notes, Riegl seems to be working out the kind of mechanics of viewing which would animate the *Dutch Group Portrait*, published in 1902, using arrows, for example, to designate the directions of gazes in the group portraits, as here.

Within these notebooks, schemes of oppositions and terms appear which will soon figure prominently – coordination, participation, surface, depth, internal and

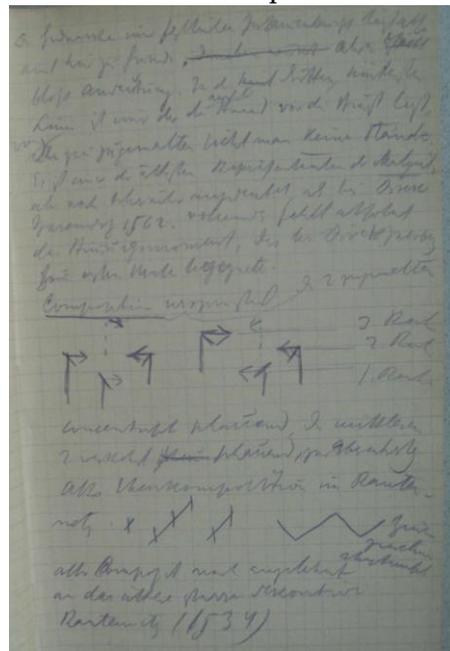


Figure 3. Riegl's travel diaries with notes on paintings in the Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem, July 1900 (Kunsthistorisch Institut, Universität Wien)

emigrating (he was Jewish) to England in 1938. Münz also has the distinction of being one of the few art historians to actually die at work – he suffered a heart attack and collapsed while addressing a Rembrandt conference in Munich on 7 March 1957. See Fritz Novotny, 'Einleitung' in Ludwig Münz, *Bruegel Zeichnungen*, Cologne: Phaidon, 1962, and Ulrike Wendland, *Biographisches Handbuch deutschsprachiger Kunsthistoriker im Exil: Leben und Werk der unter dem Nationalsozialismus verfolgten und vertriebenen Wissenschaftler*, Munich: Saur, 1999, vol. 1, 448-45. A critical edition and translation of the Dutch painting course typescript is forthcoming from the Getty Research Institute.

²⁶ Eveline Koolhaas and Sara de Vries, 'Terug naar een roemrijksverleden' in Franz Grijzenhout and Henk van Veen, *De Gouden Eeuw in Perspectief*, Nijmegen: Sun, 1992, 107-37.

²⁷ Karl Schnaase, *Niederländische Briefe von Karl Schnaase*, Stuttgart und Tübingen: J.G. Cotta, 1834.

²⁸ Cited in Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1982, 32.

²⁹ And yet not unambiguously. Max Dvořák, for example, claimed that neither Schnaase nor Hegel really mattered much to Riegl at all. See Max Dvořák, 'Alois Riegl' in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Munich: Piper, 1929, 280.

³⁰ On Riegl and Nietzsche, see Cordileone, 'Art History to Life,' 8-10.

external unity [*Einheit*], and above all, attentiveness [*Aufmerksamkeit*]. Standing before the paintings, buying the occasional postcard (on one he makes notes of coloristic features in the paintings using words like 'Tonally-bound,' 'brown,' 'subtle red contour-lines,' etc., fig. 4). In his scribbled notations, Riegl himself appears to have been enacting - and not just documenting - the social, visual relationships *with* the paintings in the Dutch museums he would later essay.

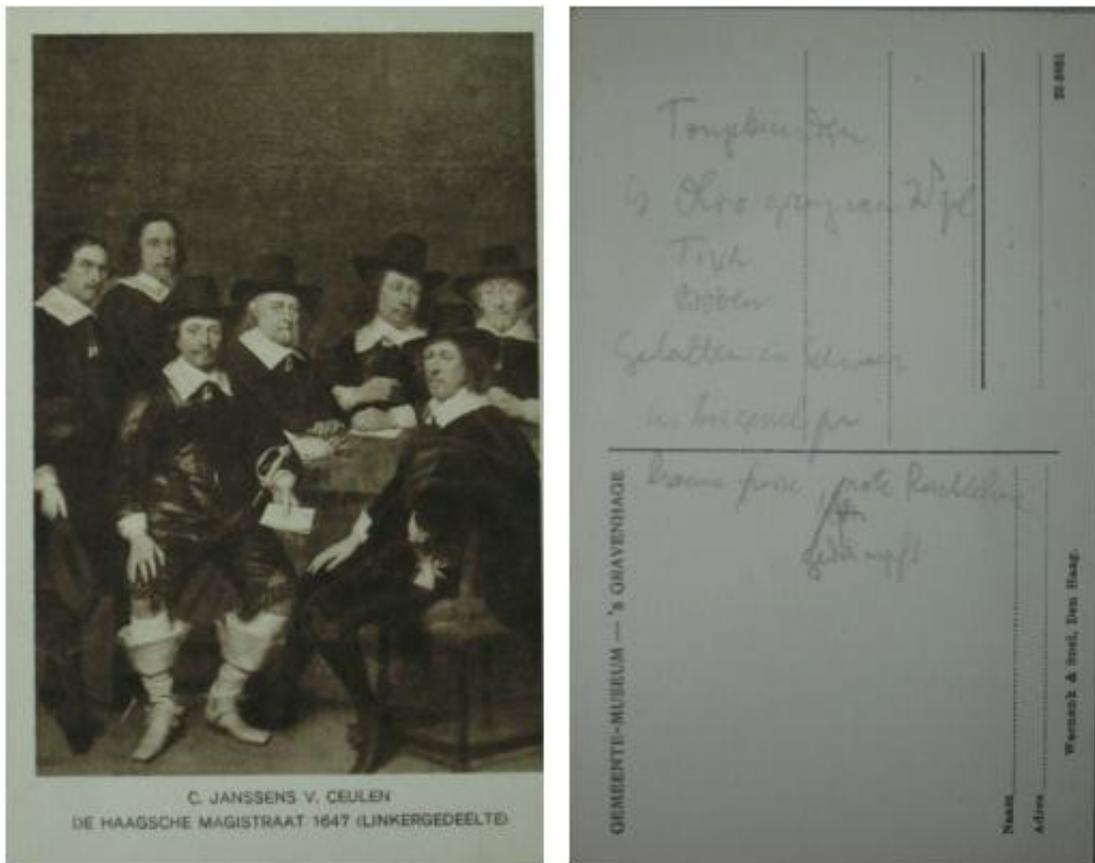


Figure 4. Postcard from The Hague, Gemeentemuseum, with photographic reproduction of a detail of Cornelis Johnson van Ceulen, *Magistrates of The Hague* (Oil on canvas, 1647). Riegl's notes from July 1900 are in pencil on verso (Kunsthistorisch Institut, Universität Wien)

Why the focus on landscape, however? In the essay Riegl consistently returns to the mystical concept of *Stimmung*, the famously untranslatable word meaning roughly mood or feeling, and here, atmosphere, a doubly problematic term in an essay devoted to weather, light, and landscape. The word has undertones of harmony, of spatial - and temporal - imbrication with the environment, and was frequently applied to various arts in Vienna.³¹ The writer Hermann Bahr used it to describe the experience of a pastoral house. Jakob Wassermann, the critic, related

³¹ Hans-Georg van Arburg, 'Ein Sonderbares Gespinst von Raum und Zeit: Zur theoretischen Konstitution und Funktion von "Stimmung" um 1900 bei Alois Riegl und Hugo von Hofmannsthal' in Kerstin Thomas, ed. *Stimmung: Ästhetische Kategorie und künstlerische Praxis*, Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2010, 13-30.

Stimmung to the theatre, invoking its overtones of 'an intensity of vision.'³² Riegl devoted an essay to it in 1899 (published in the same journal as the Ruisdael essay), entitled 'Stimmung as the Content of Modern Art,' (fig. 4) and in lecture notes he linked it *specifically* to made landscape:

That is why modern landscape painting is so popular, because it is recognized as being the most expedient method for putting us in the *Stimmung*...it is often much more expedient than the landscape in nature itself...³³

By 'modern landscape painting' Riegl (as in the Ruisdael essay) seems to mean French Impressionism and its German cognates. Max Libermann, Riegl goes on to explain, is among the modern artists who are successful in revealing *Stimmung*, 'in contour, mood, and colour.' It seems to be synonymous, again, with a kind of mystical, almost pantheistic harmony between subject and nature; *Stimmung* is, above all else, intangible; it is not a figure. If anything, *Stimmung* abhors subject matter altogether – all the same, it is quite 'real.' Riegl took this entire concept's relations to landscape, and the subject choice of Ruisdael, from Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869), whose own *Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei* was published in 1831. Carus was a correspondent with Goethe (himself a writer on Ruisdael³⁴) and an advocate of Caspar David Friedrich. He understood landscape as a dialogical experience, comparing, as would Riegl, Ruisdael's trees to interlocutors who 'spoke' to the individual viewer.³⁵

Nature, Culture, Attentiveness

Dirk Niefanger has shown that *Stimmung's* links to landscape in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna bespoke a specific anxiety about urban space, a reactive yearning for 'authentic' harmonious *Raumgefühl* (space-feeling) in the face of the hectic, ineffectual surfaces of the metropolis.³⁶ What certain kinds of Dutch landscape painting uniquely presented, then (and Riegl says this explicitly in the Ruisdael essay) - is that *actual*

³² Cited in Dirk Niefanger, *Produktiver Historismus: Raum und Landschaft in der Wiener Moderne*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993, 53.

³³ See Olin, *Forms*, 123. One of the earliest commentaries on the Ruisdael essay seized upon *Stimmung* as a spatial concept; see Hans Jantzen, review of *Alois Riegl: Gesammelte Aufsätze* [1929] in *Kritische Berichte* 1930/1: 3, 65-74.

³⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Ruisdael als Dichter' [1816] in Hendrik Birus (ed.), *Goethe: Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, Frankfurt am Main: Klassiker Verlag, 1987, vol. 19, 632-36.

³⁵ Cf., for example, Carus on Ruisdael in his Letter V: '...Ruisdael mit zu unendlicher Freiheit und Wahrheit hinstellt, das uns so die heimische geliebte Natur fast unmittelbar anzusprechen scheint.' (...Ruisdael presents to us with such infinite freedom and truth that our beloved native landscape seems to speak to us directly...) in Carl Gustav Carus, *Neun Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei*, Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer, 1831, 98. On direct-speaking nature, see Henri Zerner and Charles Rosen, 'Caspar David Friedrich and the Language of Landscape', *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art*, New York: Viking, 1984, 58.

³⁶ Niefanger, *Produktiver Historismus*, 19.

landscape might be a situation where one can fully apprehend *Stimmung* but not dissolve into it; individual subjectivity is preserved. Again, Riegl might be attempting to, as Margaret Olin has put it, 'neutralize threatening issues' of his own Viennese modernity, where, he feared, the idea of the self had run amok at the cost of actual nature.³⁷ In the utopia of Jacob van Ruysdael's final phase, by contrast, atmosphere and trees enwrap each other but remain independent, if intimate, phenomena. In the same way, Riegl argued, the ideal relation between the beholder and the artwork is modelled; the Baroque creation retains the 'subjectivity' of subject and object without loss of identity to either.³⁸ *Stimmung*, with its historically-specific connotations of pastoral mood, is what one apprehends via active attention – *Aufmerksamkeit* – to *landscape* as a picture. Through such a process, Riegl seems to posit, Ruysdael does not so much duplicate the world as reveal our place in it.

The *Aufmerksamkeit* which Riegl famously espouses in his work, as we have seen, is not specifically Dutch, but it is, crucially, *active* and social. Things go wrong, as he explains in the Ruysdael essay, precisely when this balance of attention is thrown off; when the beholder becomes passive; this is what happens in late, overly sentimental, overly 'subjective' Ruysdael, claims Riegl, in works like the *Jewish Cemetery*. Dramatic lights and darks, ponderous symbolizations of death are thrust forward; too much hermetic signification overwhelms the viewer-picture dialectic and destroys a polite, conversational intersubjectivity. A beholder no longer has interpretive work to do; it has all been done for her. Faced with a cluttering of (as Riegl puts it) 'high-strung' elements, it is sentimentality alone which is appealed to; landscape has there been reduced to working just as symbol which 'stands for' something outside of it. The 'objective' nature of objects is completely abandoned when only their signification comes forth. A disavowal of this, for Riegl, is what links 'good' Ruysdael to Romantic landscape painting or Impressionism. As did Carus, Riegl is lionizing a painting which seems to deny instantaneous passage from form to extrinsic meaning. He speaks of an art which arrests at the level of encounter. He speaks, that is, of a Romanticism.

The intellectual underpinnings of Riegl's take on *Aufmerksamkeit* have been well-charted by Lorenz Dittman, Otto Pächt, and Margaret Olin; all conclude in a late-nineteenth century context they were, undeniably, Romantic. For at the same time as Riegl was calling for attention to the essential 'realities' of forms, physicists like Ernst Mach emphasized the utter nonexistence of objects apart from their sensing, an idea used often clumsily to explain Impressionist painting. Riegl seems to have had some exposure to Mach's writing, for instance, but was far less positivist in his view of sensation.³⁹ While 'attention' as a state of human consciousness had existed for decades, its many species became of acute interest in

³⁷ Olin, 'Forms of Respect', 298. See, too, Johannes Stükelberger, *Rembrandt und die Moderne: Der Dialog mit Rembrandt in der deutschen Kunst um 1900*, Munich: Fink, 1996, 186ff.

³⁸ W. Schmidt, *Studien zur Landschaft Jacob van Ruysdael: Frühwerke und Wanderjahre*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1981, 175.

³⁹ Adi Eyal, 'Reality as the Cause of Art: Alois Riegl and neo-Kantian realism', *Journal of Art Historiography* 3, December 2010.

the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Discourse around early psychology with theorists like Wilhelm Wundt and Theodor Lipps in Leipzig, Berlin, and particularly in Vienna (where, of course, not just Riegl but Freud was writing) was less about close looking than about distraction, about the fragmentation of the unitary subject and the viewing whole in accelerated, disorienting, capitalist modernity. Industrialization prompted new concerns about how to make workers and consumers more productive and orderly. Georg Simmel and later, Walter Benjamin (who was, famously, much impressed with Riegl) cast the speed and technology of modern urban life, with its constant assaults of stimuli, as destabilizing the possibility of unitary viewing altogether. Riegl, by contrast, seemed to yearn for an older, conventional model, what Jonathan Crary calls 'a utopian...world of mutual communication';⁴¹ a quasi-theological union of beholding based on quiet, individual contemplation. It has recently been demonstrated that Riegl owes this concept to many immediate influences, but ultimately this, too, bespeaks Hegel, whose *Aesthetics* espoused the idea of equilibrium between art and observer, and the nonexistence of the self-sustaining artwork.⁴²

And yet Riegl was concerned not so much with attention as with attentiveness; as Olin has noted, the German word *Aufmerksamkeit*, which Riegl tended to use, has connotations of deference which *Beachtung* (which he does not use) does not.⁴³ This is what makes the Ruisdael piece more than just a re-application of the tenets outlined in the *Gruppenporträt*.⁴⁴ Even more so than in the model of attention that book posits, the Ruisdael essay assumes a mandarin aesthetic construction supported by quiet gazing, *individual* beholding. This flies in the face of everything that would be written after 1900 regarding new mass, collective forms of attention-media like film. As Mosche Barasch has pointed out (somewhat problematically),⁴⁵ Riegl's focus on attention as a historical category fused two seemingly contradictory, but omniscient, artistic/intellectual trends around 1900: psychoanalysis, which took as its charge the need to find truth behind appearances, and Impressionism, an art aimed, at least superficially, at nothing *but* appearances and their perception.

⁴⁰ On its deeper roots see Lorraine Daston, 'The Empire of Observation, 1600-1800', in Daston and Lunbeck, eds. *Histories of Scientific Observation*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011, 81-113, esp. 99-100.

⁴¹ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999, 51.

⁴² Dietrich von Loh, 'Alois Riegl und die Hegelsche Geschichtsphilosophie', *Kunstjahrbuch der Stadt Linz*, 1986, 1-42.

⁴³ In contrast to, say, Lipps, who relied upon the term *Beachtung* in his discussions of pictorial space. See, for example, the lectures compiled in Theodor Lipps, *Bewusstsein und Gegenstände*, Leipzig: Dürr, 1905, 40ff.

⁴⁴ One of the few writers to note this: Jan Białostocki, 'Nachahmung der Natur oder symbolische Weltschau', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 47: 4, 1984, 421-438, esp. 425-57.

⁴⁵ Moshe Barasch, 'Alois Riegl', in *Modern Theories of Art 2: From Impressionism to Kandinsky*, New York: NYU University Press, 1998, 143-70. For a broader take on Riegl's Viennese context, see Willibald Sauerländer, 'Alois Riegl und die Entstehung der autonomen Kunstgeschichte am Fin de Siècle', in: R. Bauer (ed.) *Fin de Siècle. Zur Literatur und Kunst der Jahrhundertwende*, Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977, 125-139.

As elsewhere, however, here Riegl maintains a very robust concept of the object; the subject, if anything, is far from the sole determinant of aesthetic experience. Yet proper landscape, like bourgeois group portraiture, is honest about its status as a 'conjunction of objective and subjective phenomena'⁴⁶ – not one or the other. When the equilibrium between elements in a picture, or between the picture and the beholder, becomes undone, becomes something other than separate *and* simultaneously intimate, art becomes dishonest. An ideal aesthetic, a Baroque aesthetic, for Riegl, thus becomes one of mutual communication, distance, and deeply active intersubjective attention. Modern painting, modern attention, claimed Riegl, errs when it is too subjective, looks only inward. It does not look at the beholder; it disingenuously pretends he is not there. It would seem, then, that subjectivity is acceptable when it is balanced, communal, deferential, and bourgeois.⁴⁷

Dutch Art's Productivity

Riegl's whole turn to Dutch painting around 1900, however, occurred quite suddenly. The Ruisdael piece represented a radical break with what Riegl was working on at the time, a project on 'anachronisms' in art – which he abandoned. Only a short article on Mycenaean cups, posthumously published in 1906, survived from that undertaking (when it was reprinted in 1929, and even when translated into English in 2000, the footnote mentioning this larger, astonishing-sounding project was inexplicably deleted).⁴⁸ Yet in this small essay, the issues of space, figure/ground relationships, and sociability that animated the *Gruppenporträt* text surfaced in a very different milieu; landscape was unexpectedly key; trees are the features of the object where a 'subjective' view of atmosphere – the appearance of landscape 'as it is seen,' overtakes, for the first time, the 'objective,' conventional rendering, that is, the landscape 'as it is known to be.' 'The cups,' writes Riegl, 'display a landscape that encompasses a section of the earth's surface intended for subjective momentary viewing....'⁴⁹ The interest in subjective viewing, even in a pre-pre modern milieu, shares much with the writings on Dutch art. Here too, we encounter a curatorial faith in what Riegl called the *unbefangene Auge* – the unfettered eye – at the cost of overponderous historical scrutiny.⁵⁰

Riegl's whole project could be construed as nostalgic; an attempt to assuage the bewildering new variances between humans and the exterior world and return

⁴⁶ Riegl, *Gruppenporträt*, 235.

⁴⁷ And thus an attention subsisting in distance rather than intimacy. See Barbara Thums, *Aufmerksamkeit*, Munich: Fink, 2008, 404-424.

⁴⁸ Alois Riegl, 'Die kunsthistorische Stellung der Becher von Vafio' [1900], orig. in *Jahreshefte der Österreichern Archäologischen Instituts* 9:1, 1906, 1, trans. Tawney Becker in Christopher S. Wood, *The Vienna School Reader*, New York: Zone Books, 2000, 114. The footnote was added by the journal editor and then-director of the Austrian Archaeological Institute, Robert von Schneider.

⁴⁹ Riegl, 'Becher von Vaphio', 12, Becker trans., in Wood, *Vienna School*, 114.

⁵⁰ See Diana Reynolds [Cordileone], 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil des Historismus für das Leben: Alois Riegl's Bedeutung zur Frage der kunstgewerblichen Reform' in: Peter Noever, ed. *Kunst und Industrie: Die Anfänge des Museum für Angewandte Kunst im Wien*, Vienna: Hatje Canz, 2000, 20-29.

to a harmonious mode of set object-subject relations. Perhaps on the basis of his peripatetic childhood as son of a bureaucrat in Bohemia and Galatia, Riegl saw in the efflorescence of middle-class subjectivity, the interiorization of sense relations, a loss. He certainly inherited a distaste for narratives of cultural nationalism.⁵¹ But he agreed with the moderns that the true function of art was to do more than 'represent' – Ruisdael's trees, for example, are not just images of the world, they are painted denizens within it, 'who look at us with thousands of eyes.' The traffic of beholding they take part in helps *define* the exterior, looking subject, and not just ornament her existence. Riegl's audacity, and ultimately his most compelling trait, is his confidence in art writing to, *as an art itself*, reveal a historically-specific way of knowing the world.

Non-Sites

The hundreds of eyes that our own moment increasingly casts upon Riegl, in an ongoing flood of translations and redactions, has still not excavated a coherent program, a structure, for what his work was trying to do. This is part of Riegl's ongoing allure, and surely part of the attraction of the supposedly 'interstitial' art historical moments he helped enfranchise. After Riegl, for example, the Baroque as a style, epoch, or condition became an obsession of many critically-minded literary and art scholars in Europe. This was not just because the sixteenth century - a time of Reformation, mysticism, and war - seemed to share much with Europe in the 1930s: an era of demagoguery, dysphoria, and shock. For art historians like Hugo Kehrer and, far more differently, Hans Sedlmayr, the baroque as a field mandated a new self-consciousness on the part of the scholar; as an 'art *about* art,' the work of Michelangelo, Pontormo, Bruegel, and El Greco licensed an art history *about* art history - one which might, however shamanically, account for the specificity of the interpreter's viewpoint. Interwar mannerism (often darkly) emerged as a modernism, but also an experimental field for deeply historical investigation - one concerned both with the unrepresentable and the unspeakable, across two radically different eras. Formally Riegl is credited with the idea that the art of the sixteenth century *outside* the Renaissance emerged as a forum to pose questions of *all* representation, in seeming to suggest darker, less-redemptive relationships between beholders and artworks. Riegl and, again, Walter Benjamin (who wrote of photography as '*stimmunglos*') marked the threshold of modernity at the *decay* of the Renaissance, particularly with Michelangelo.⁵²

And yet Baroque space, as Riegl wrote, is always 'outlandish', it does not approach the viewer as something wanting to be read with an identificatory gesture (as linear perspective might). Rather it insists on distance:

⁵¹ Hans Tietze, 'Riegl, Alois', *Neue Österreichische Biografie 1815–1918* (Leipzig: Amatheia-Verlag, 1935), 8: 142-48; Margaret Olin, 'Alois Riegl: The Late Roman Empire in the Late Hapsburg Empire,' *Austrian Studies* 5 (1994), 107-20.

⁵² On which see Matthew Rampley, 'Subjectivity and the Baroque: Riegl and the rediscovery of the Baroque' in Richard Woodfield (ed.), *Framing Formalism: Riegl's Work*, Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001, 265-90.

...if in Antiquity and the Renaissance the extraordinary enthrals us – in the baroque it repels us, we find it disturbing, like an annoying indeterminacy; for example, a figure that prays and in the process is bent in convulsive movements. We ask 'why these movements'? They seem to us unmotivated; we do not understand them.⁵³

This distancing became most acutely visible, Riegl insisted, in architecture: 'the mannerist facade recalls something that cannot be immediately seen, much less *touched*,'⁵⁴ he wrote of Borromini. And yet this is precisely the tenet which certain interwar followers of Riegl applied, at times sinisterly, to painting, sharing his interest in the extra-textual, the marginal, and the act of beholding. As Hans Sedlmayr wrote:

The thing only possesses artistic properties when it is approached with an 'artistic' attitude [*Einstellung*].⁵⁵

Ultimately, Riegl's 'aesthetic' approach, too, insists that the fiction of impartial art historical analysis was just that – fiction. Nowhere is this plainer than in the Ruisdael article, which bears down on its images *hard* in mystical, idiosyncratic, confusing, and highly personal ways. Speaking quietly, but steadily, in the Ruisdael essay is a voice for art history as creative activity first and a knowledge-producing institution, or 'science' far second. What ultimately emerges from a writing, and a theory, aimed at a de-motivation of the modern, solipsistic self, paradoxically becomes a model immersed - perhaps - in nothing *but* a miasmatic subjectivity.

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⁵³ Riegl, *Barokkunst in Rom*, 3.

⁵⁴ Riegl, *Die Entstehung der Barokkunst*, 59 (my emphasis)

⁵⁵ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft' [1931] trans. Mia Fineman as 'On the Rigorous Study of Art' in Wood, ed. *The Vienna School Reader*, 144.