

Styles of Renaissance, renaissances of style

Review of:

L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique. Variantes nationales et transmissions, edited by Sabine Frommel and Antonio Brucculeri, Roma: Campisano Editore, 2012, 343 pp, 91 b & w ills., € 40,00, ISBN 9788888168982.

Was war Renaissance? Bilder einer Erzählform von Vasari bis Panofsky, edited by Hans Christian Hönes, Léa Kuhn, Elizabeth J. Petcu, Susanne Thüringen, with a foreword by Ulrich Pfisterer and Wolf Tegethoff, Passau: Dietmar Klinger Verlag, 2013, 182 pp, 90 colour and b & w ills., \$ 47,50, ISBN 9783863281212.

Since art history was founded as an autonomous discipline it has been intensely engaged with the notion of 'style'. It is often employed as the organic core of a narrative¹ referred to as the biological life of styles, described according to the scheme birth-growth- decay-death, or spring-summer-autumn-winter. In spite, or perhaps exactly because, of its status consubstantial with the history of art, the concept of 'style' has always been highly problematic for aesthetic, art-theoretical and art-historical discourses. Firstly, for the multiplicity of its meaning – evoking at the same time the unmistakable features (both concerning formal and iconographic options) of an individual artist (*principium individuationis*) and what is shared by such an individual with a group, a school, a movement, an epoch, a region, a culture, even a spirit of the time, a *Zeitgeist* in whose general frame the artistic style was conceived as a specific moment of a more complex life-style (what might be rather designed as *principium dividuationis*, a principle of sharing). At a closer look, the '*dividuation*' actually affects the '*individuation*' as well, since the whole corpus of a single artist that can be identified through his/her style is, again, a multiplicity of sensible manifestations: each of them expresses somehow the artist's style, although no one can exhaust it or incarnate it. Each variation shares the theme, but the theme in itself is never given. Secondly, *having a style* sounds positive, as if an artist possessed his/her own irreducible expressive cipher; *being in a style*, meaning quite the opposite, when an artwork is realised without originality, in an imitative way.

Due to these and other reasons, after its glorious golden age, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which art history (*Kunstgeschichte*) was frequently identified

¹ On narration and style see Arthur C. Danto, 'Narrative and Style,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, 3, (1991), 201-209; Jonathan Gilmore, *The Life of a Style: Beginnings and Endings in the Narrative History of Art*, Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2000.

with history of styles (*Stilgeschichte*), the notion of style was declared old-fashioned: after the 1950s, as Irving Lavin ironically remarked, 'style went out of style',² surpassed by iconology and the social history of art. One might think of George Kubler's *The Shape of Time*, a book prepared in the late 1950s, in which the notion of style is critically understood (in order to be rejected) as a kind of illusionistically ordered constancy.

As a result of such a suspicious distrust, the recourse to the term as a technical concept and to the constellation of the stylistic categories progressively decreased in art-historical discourse, almost up to disappearance. Still, in 1996, the first edition of the *Critical Terms for Art History* included not only the entry 'style', but even the intimately connected notions of 'form' and 'connoisseurship', as aptly remarked by Jás Elsner, who finally wrote the chapter 'Style' for the second edition of 2003: once 'king of the discipline', Elsner says, 'the father has been impossible to lay entirely to rest.'³ Indeed, it might not be accidental that a renewed attention in the art historiographical context for the notion of style started simultaneously with a revival of the interest in the notion of form in the aesthetic debate.⁴

The volume *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique. Variantes nationales et transmissions* (*The Idea of Style in Art Historiography. National Variants and Transmissions*), edited by Sabine Frommel and Antonio Brucculeri, from the proceedings of the international conference organised by the École Pratique des Hautes Études of Paris and the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa and held in Cortona in 2007, testifies to the now solidly re-established acknowledgment of the crucial role played by such a category in shaping art historiographical, critical and theoretical discourses, and offers a very useful and stimulating reconstruction of some of the most important stations in the two hundred year old history of the *Stilgeschichte* from Winckelmann to Wölfflin.

The relevance of Winckelmann – who in the 1763 preface for his *History of the Art of Antiquity* had declared his intention to offer not a chronological succession of artists and artworks, but rather a history of 'the different styles' (*'den verschiedenen Stile'*) according to peoples, ages, artists – for the parabola of a style-oriented art history is well emphasized by Lorenzo Lattanzi, who outlines his debts toward ancient rhetoric,⁵ while Wolf-Dieter Heilmeyer reconstructs the 'Winckelmann-Rezeption zwischen Schinkel und Burckhardt',⁶ and François Queyrel comparatively distinguishes the Prussian archaeologist from Anne-

² Irving Lavin, 'Introduction,' in Erwin Panofsky, *Three Essays on Style*, Cambridge-London: MIT Press, 1995, 3.

³ Jás Elsner, s.v. 'Style', in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed. 2003. 'Form' and 'connoisseurship' still remain excluded.

⁴ See for example Nick Zangwill, 'In Defence of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism,' *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 50, 201, 2000, 476-493; Id., 'In Defence of Extreme Formalism About Inorganic Nature,' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 45, 2, 2005, 185-191; Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, 'New Formalism and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 62, 4, 2004, 363-376.

⁵ Lorenzo Lattanzi, 'Winckelmann et Longin: la rhétorique du sublime et les styles de l'art grec,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique. Variantes nationales et transmissions*, edited by Sabine Frommel and Antonio Brucculeri, Roma: Campisano Editore, 2012, 217-230.

⁶ Wolf-Dieter Heilmeyer, 'Winckelmann-Rezeption zwischen Schinkel und Burckhardt,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 49-63.

Claude-Philippe de Tubières, better known as the Comte de Caylus, with regard to the foundations of a science of antiquity.⁷

The figure of Caylus reminds us of the fact that, in spite of the majority of German-speaking authors dominating the *Kunstgeschichte als Stilgeschichte*, significant figures belonging to different linguistic areas relevantly contributed to the debate. The volume offers an interesting overview of the late 19th century French historiographical panorama.⁸ More specific studies are devoted by Jean-Michel Leniaud to the architect and theorist Charles Garnier, interpreted in connection with Wölfflinian doctrines,⁹ and by Antonio Bruculeri to the art historian Louis Hautecœur, compared to the Catalan writer Eugenio d'Ors, on the formulation of the stylistic polarity Classical/Baroque.¹⁰ As regards Italy, the role played in this complex framework by Benedetto Croce's aesthetic thought - especially on his friend Schlosser - is explored by Donata Levi,¹¹ who touches upon a very delicate issue, the relationship between figurative and linguistic style, still nowadays often at the centre of the word/image research within visual cultural studies.

Returning to the German-speaking area, stimulating chapters are devoted to figures who, although in themselves highly significant, are not habitually and immediately identified with the issue 'style' and the *stilgeschichtlich* approach: Carl Friedrich von Rumohr,¹² whose *Haushalt der Kunst* in the perspective of a practical aesthetics has received in the last years a renewed attention from the scholars; Karl Schnaase;¹³ and Henry Thode, pupil of Moritz Thausing in Vienna and co-editor of the journal *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, here analysed by Michela Passini for the very complex nexus of style-nationality.¹⁴ Among these authors, Aby Warburg should also be counted. For a long time, Warburg had been judged as a historian who was not particularly interested in the concept of 'style', as peremptorily and repeatedly asserted by Ernst Gombrich in his

⁷ François Queyrel, 'Caylus, de l'antiquaire à l'archéologue: une méthode différente de celle de Winckelmann,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 231-239.

⁸ Flaminia Bardati, 'Anticiviltà del Rinascimento: riflessioni su metodi e posizioni della storiografia francese di fine Ottocento,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 299-312.

⁹ Jean-Michel Leniaud, 'De Heinrich Wölfflin à Charles Garnier: quelques propositions sur l'invention du néo-baroque,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 313-320.

¹⁰ Antonio Bruculeri, 'Classico e barocco, categorie oltre gli stili: Eugenio d'Ors e Louis Hautecœur, interpretazioni a confronto nel contesto francese,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 321-334.

¹¹ Donata Levi, 'Julius von Schlosser tra Riegl e Croce: appunti su storia dello stile e storia del linguaggio,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 285-297.

¹² Alexander Auf der Heyde, 'Stil/stylus: Rumohrs Versuch einer Neuprägung des Stilbegriffs und die Flucht in die Kulturgeschichte,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 21-33.

¹³ Henrik Karge, 'Stil und Epoche. Karl Schnaases dialektisches Modell der Kunstgeschichte,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 35-48, touching on Franz Kugler as well, and stressing the emancipation from a linear style-history.

¹⁴ Michela Passini, 'Arte italiana e arte tedesca nell'opera di Henry Thode,' in *L'idée du style dans l'historiographie artistique*, 273-283.

Intellectual Biography. Quite the contrary is well argued here by Susanne Müller and Giovanna Targia, who focus on his early art-psychological fragments.¹⁵

Of course, what is found in the volume is to be expected, and it includes names that should not be missed in a collection devoted to style in art history. Specific chapters are devoted to the most famous champions of the *Stilgeschichte*, Alois Riegl (with a focus on his ornament-book *Stilfragen*)¹⁶ and Heinrich Wölfflin.¹⁷ In the chapter on Wölfflin, Alina A. Payne puts forward a controversial question at the core of the philosophy of art history of the Swiss author and of the *Stilgeschichte* as a whole: style does change but why? In his essay “‘Ein Volk, eine Zeit, eine Kunst’: Heinrich Wölfflin über das nationale Formgefühl”,¹⁸ Wilhelm Schlink approaches the delicate issue of the nationalistic implications of art historical categories, pointing out in a note which is emphasised here because of its importance not only for Wölfflin, but also for many authors of his generation, too quickly misunderstood and immediately identified as precursors of the Nazi ideology:

When Wölfflin in *Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl* (as already in his *Dürer*, 1905) repeatedly speaks of ‘race’, ‘racial predisposition’, even of a race-specific bodily organization’ of the German and the Italian (...), this does not necessarily mean that he was invoking the biological race theory of the German *völkisch* element.¹⁹

The recourse to the notion of bodily organisation in historians and theorists such as Riegl and Wölfflin indicated an aesthetic and perceptual sphere, in which the relationship of the spectator to the world of images also implies specific somatic reactions and optical responses according to different styles and epochs (respectively for Riegl and Wölfflin: close view in the haptic Egyptian visual culture and in the linearly oriented Renaissance; far view in the optic chiaroscuro chromaticisms of late Roman art or in the painterly Baroque).

¹⁵ Susanne Müller and Giovanna Targia, ‘Die ‘Bruchstücke’ Aby Warburgs und die Frage des Stils,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 199-213.

¹⁶ Emanuele Pellegrini, ‘Stile e problemi di stile: Alois Riegl,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 187-197.

¹⁷ Alina Alexandra Payne, ‘Architecture, objects and ornament: Heinrich Wölfflin and the problem of Stilwandlung,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 137-150.

¹⁸ Wilhelm Schlink, ‘‘Ein Volk, eine Zeit, eine Kunst’: Heinrich Wölfflin über das nationale Formgefühl,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 165-176.

¹⁹ ‘Wenn Wölfflin in *Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl* wiederholt (wie schon im *Dürer*, 1905) von ‘Rasse’, ‘rassenhafter Anlage’, ja von einer rassenmässig unterschiedlichen ‘Leibesorganisation’ des Deutschen und des Italieners spricht (...), dann muss dies nicht zwangsläufig heißen, dass er der biologischen Rassenkunde der Deutsch-Völkischen das Wort redete’ (Wilhelm Schlink, ‘‘Ein Volk, eine Zeit, eine Kunst’: Heinrich Wölfflin über das nationale Formgefühl,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 175, note 24).

A mere look at the content-index of the volume reveals that the major and titanic figure who intensely engaged the participants of the conference was Jacob Burckhardt. For his travels that comparatively shaped his art-historical gaze;²⁰ for the historico-philosophical implications of his approach;²¹ for his interpretations of specific forms of art, like architecture²² and sculpture;²³ as a term of comparison with other figures;²⁴ as regards the history of his effects and reception.²⁵

As one can see – in spite of the fact that these chapters are not collected under one specific section – mention of Burckhardt in the volume is so prolific that one might be tempted to speak of a volume on ‘Burckhardt &...’. This fact should not excessively surprise the reader: it confirms that the authoritative and charismatic character of the Swiss art historian functions as a veritable juncture, inheriting crucial issues from the eighteenth century culture and preparing the ground for the major tendencies that characterised the art historical and theoretical discourse of the twentieth century. It may be sufficient perhaps to recall the fact that Riegl profoundly admired him, Wölfflin was his direct pupil and successor to his chair in Basle, and that Warburg looked to him as a fundamental precursor of his own research. The far too exploited and stale cliché of the counter position between formalism on one side and iconology on the other side of contemporary art historical methodology could be once and for all deconstructed if one considered the role played by Burckhardt in this field of forces. This volume helps us to do that.

It is evident that the book is very rich and complex, and full of insights on a concept like that of style, which, as no other, has contributed – and keeps contributing – to defining the status, tasks and possibilities of art history as a discipline. Moreover, as the editors themselves warn us readers at the very beginning of their ‘Introduction’ :

In order to orient the readers and to avoid a possible disillusion, it is certainly advisable to clearly point out what they would look for in vain in this volume: a

²⁰ Marie-Jeanne Heger-Étienvre, ‘Portrait de Jacob Burckhardt en voyageur: ses expériences comparées de Paris, Londres et Vienne,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 241-253.

²¹ Ian Verstegen, ‘Burckhardt, narrative and objectivity,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 91-104.

²² Sabine Frommel, ‘Der Cicerone et Die Baukunst der Renaissance in Italien: considérations de Jacob Burckhardt sur l’architecture du Quattrocento et du Cinquecento,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 117-136.

²³ Bruce Boucher, ‘Burckhardt, ‘die wahre Skulptur’, and the issue of color in Renaissance sculpture,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*, 105-115.

²⁴ Mathias René Hoffer, ‘Die Auffassungen des Genies und das Bild des antiken Künstlers bei Johann Joachim Winckelmann und Jacob Burckhardt,’ 65-79; Christoph Luitpold Frommel, ‘Was bedeutet Renaissance-Architektur für Burckhardt und Wölfflin?’ 151-163; Artur Rosenauer, ‘Burckhardt und Riegl,’ 177-185; Bruno Klein, ‘Burckhardt und Séroux d’Agincourt,’ 255-262, in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*.

²⁵ Joseph Imorde, ‘Schwingungen: oder: Stil aus Energie; zu Jacob Burckhardts gleichsam seismischem Fortwirken,’ 81-89; Francesco Paolo Fiore, ‘La fortuna italiana degli scritti di Burckhardt sull’architettura del Rinascimento,’ 263-271, in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*.

coherent and integral reflection on the idea of style as a fundamental issue of the methods in the field of art history.²⁶

That is why, having so much to discuss in the book, it would be useless and far too easy to lament what is not included: more on Wilhelm Worringer or Henri Focillon or Roberto Longhi or the English-speaking area, for example. But one striking absence cannot be omitted: a specific essay on Gottfried Semper, the architect and theorist whose *magnum opus*: *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Ästhetik* (1860-63),²⁷ embodied the notion itself into an eponymous title and offered a term of unavoidable comparison for any scholar of the younger generations wishing to engage in a discussion of the notion of style and its related issues. Semper (1803-1879) was not only a contemporary of Burckhardt (1818-1897), but an author who articulated – similarly to Burckhardt but with a peculiar personal inflection – a morphological-typological-functional approach to the issues of ‘style’ and more generally ‘art’, which he saw strictly and originally intertwined with somatic gestures proper to human crafts (above all weaving), thus opening up the field of the science of art (*Kunstwissenschaft*) both to the art industry (*Kunstindustrie*) in respect of the object and to the bodily pragmatics in respect of the subject.

Going back to what is present and interesting in the book, we could pick up once more the two already mentioned chapters by Ian Verstegen (‘Burckhardt, narrative and objectivity’) and Henrik Karge (‘Stil und Epoche. Karl Schnaases dialektisches Modell der Kunstgeschichte’), because, touching upon the intimate relationship between style and narration the former and between style and periodization the latter, they help to introduce the second volume to be reviewed here, devoted to a subject that Burckhardt himself notoriously contributed to in both a magisterial and highly controversial manner to define and circumscribe: the notion of ‘Renaissance’. *Was war Renaissance? Bilder einer Erzählform von Vasari bis Panofsky* (*What was Renaissance? Images of a Narrative Form from Vasari to Panofsky*), edited by Hans Christian Hönes, Léa Kuhn, Elizabeth J. Petcu and Susanne Thüringen, is the catalogue of an exhibition organised by the Institut für Kunstgeschichte of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in cooperation with the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich (May-June 2013). As is suggested by the subtitle, far from being a static concept of cultural and artistic historiography, the notion of the Renaissance rather resembles a kaleidoscope reflecting a dynamic flux of different images and of different narratives according to heterogeneous hermeneutic perspectives, epochs, geographies, individual and collective sensibilities. ‘Renaissance’ is thus rather to be

²⁶ ‘Afin d’orienter le lecteur et d’éviter une éventuelle désillusion, il est sans doute opportun de signaler sans détour ce qu’il cherchera en vain dans ce volume: une réflexion cohérente et intégrale sur l’idée du style comme problème fondamental des méthodes dans le domaine de l’histoire de l’art’ (Sabine Frommel and Antonio Brucculeri, ‘Introduction,’ in *L’idée du style dans l’historiographie artistique*).

²⁷ Gottfried Semper, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts: or, Practical Aesthetics* (1860-63), ed. by Harry F. Mallgrave and Michael Robinson, Santa Monica: Getty Publications, 2004.

declined in the plural, 'Renaissances', never-ending variations of a theme that take form in the eyes, in the artefacts and in the writings of artists, scholars, critics and historians.

The catalogue is articulated in four sections: 'What is the Renaissance?', 'When is the Renaissance?', 'Where is the Renaissance?' and 'Who makes the Renaissance?' Each includes illustrated chapters by the contributors with synthesizing and effective commentaries concerning the objects belonging to the Zentralinstitut and exhibited during the *Ausstellung*.

Particularly interesting among the rich and complex materials offered by the catalogue is the fact that the reader is confronted not only with capital texts like Vasari's *Vite*, Burckhardt's *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* or Panofsky's *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, but also with major works – like Wölfflin's *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* – in which what is thematised is not exclusively verbal discourse (the main subject of so many historiographical reconstructions of the different ideas of Renaissance), but also the way the author visually constructed his personal narration of the period, having recourse in the iconographic sections to the famous double-image comparison Renaissance-Baroque. Finally, also included are historiographical maps, cartographies, genealogical trees, diagrams and lists – from Antoine Frederic Harms' *Tables historiques des plus fameux peintres anciens et modernes* (1742), through Arcisse de Caumont's *Tableau figuratif des variations de l'architecture religieuse depuis le V^e siècle, jusq'à la fin du XVII^e* (1841), to Banister Fletcher's *Tree of Architecture* (1938), – which are engaged in a fascinating effort to visualise, and spatialise, the development of time and culture. In treating at the same level of dignity such heterogeneous objects, the catalogue – a veritable 'iconotext' – reminds us that 'writing' in 'historio-graphy' is only one side of the coin, the other being 'drawing and depicting' as also evoked by the Greek verb *graphein*.

The spectrum offered by the catalogue – including figures like Caylus and Füssli, Houbraken and de Piles, Sandrart and Warburg – is determined by two temporal extremes and veritable milestones: 'from Vasari to Panofsky'. But of course its operational scheme is open to further integrations, in the methodological form of the 'and so on'. The production of narratives and images of the Renaissance has evidently not stopped with Panofsky, and is intensely vital in our days.²⁸

Moreover, while focusing on a crucial and controversial historiographical category like the 'Renaissance', this catalogue offers at the same time an excellent methodological paradigm – mainly based on narratology and visualisation – for further 'kaleidoscopic' investigations in other periods and categories.

Andrea Pinotti is Professor of Aesthetics at the Università Statale di Milano and Directeur de Programme at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris. His research topics are the phenomenological aesthetics, the "Kunstwissenschaft", the image-theories. Among his

²⁸ We need only think here of a couple of remarkable titles: *Reframing the Renaissance. Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650*, ed. by Claire Farago, New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1995; Alexander Nagel, Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York: Zone Books, 2010.

publications the volumes: *Il corpo dello stile*, Palermo: Aesthetica, 1998; *Empatia*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2011 (French translation Paris: Vrin, forthcoming). He co-edited the volume *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe*, Leiden: Brill, 2012).

andrea.pinotti@unimi.it