

Schlosser and Montaigne in the Festschrift for Franz Wickhoff

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Julius Schlosser wrote the present essay at an important juncture in his career. It had been approximately a decade since he began lecturing at the university in Vienna and just as it was being published he decided not to accept the chair in Prague, preferring to remain in his position as curator of sculpture in the Hofmuseum, what is now the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

He had become an art historian after initially studying philosophy, languages, linguistics and classical archaeology, but always cultivated a broad interest in philosophy and particularly aesthetics. It was never a shallow interest, and his unusual range is also already apparent from his choice of Lucretius and Schelling for the two philosophers in his final examinations upon graduating from the Piaristen-Gymnasium a few blocks from where he lived with his parents. As a bookworm with a rather fluent knowledge of the classical and modern languages he was able to continue pursuing those interests in a time when the secondary literature was less extensive and the museum did not impose a busy schedule of changing exhibitions.

Since Schlosser has recently been said to have 'insured the fame of Riegl', it seems worth putting a finer edge on such generalizations. With the possible exception of his 'dialogue on the art of portraiture' published slightly later in 1906, the present essay states his confrontation with Riegl more clearly than any other.¹

Alois Riegl's inconsistencies had become a source of contemplation for Schlosser at an early date, and aside from his critical interest in Riegl, these 'glosses on a passage from Montaigne' also reveal Schlosser's philological acumen and wide reading in the theory of science. In a period of exaggerated politesse, even such veiled criticism must have been very striking in a volume edited by Riegl himself in honor of their friend Franz Wickhoff.

Schlosser did not save his personal notes and the correspondence he received, and although his university lectures from 1892 to 1936 seem not to have been particularly clear or simple to follow, he had a consistent and tangible influence on most German-speaking specialists trained during that time. This unusual essay provides a glimpse into what must have been typical asides or digressions during those lectures – which can be assumed to have contributed to books such as Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz's *Die Legende vom Künstler* or those devoted to caricature among others. Some readers will recognize a source of inspiration for Ernst Gombrich's *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* and *Art and Illusion*.

While Schlosser concentrates on the more concrete aspect in the origin of metaphorical motifs, his critical attitude to Riegl kept the view open to the relation of

¹ 'Gespräch von der Bildniskunst', *Österreichische Rundschau*, vol. 6, 1906, 255-292, English translation in *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 5, December 2011, 16 pp.

art to the rest of the world, to empirical as well as conceptual reality. This was in line with the program of the Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung while the idealistic arguments of Riegl were more of a departure from this institution – where along with their colleagues, they had both been trained for archival work.

Schlosser articulates his conception of expression as the core impulse of art at a primeval stage, as well as the idea that art is unified by nature and cannot be divided into genres or the scales of 18th century aesthetics. In later writings he occasionally referred to the drawing associated with Villard de Honnecourt depicting a lion frontally and inscribed as done ‘al vif’, and otherwise discussed naturalistic imitation which cannot possibly be accepted as such in our usage. Along with topics such as the drawings by Pisanello and more broadly in his book *Die Kunst des Mittelalters* he frequently demonstrated the comparatively late emergence of actual ‘studies from nature’ in the arts.² His thoughts on art as a desire to fix images from the imagination and not a ‘mechanical imitation’ remained a staple of his entire work.

Until the initial publication in the *Sitzungsberichte* of what would later be developed into *Die Kunstliteratur*, Schlosser published a sequence of programmatic, and some of them lengthy articles in the *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen*.³ Primarily on the basis of 14th century art, these exemplary studies illustrated the effects of the collector, the patron, the proprietor of the workshop, classicist theories including the origins of the medal as a genre as well as iconographic and other constraints on the spontaneous artistic originality of the artist. While each of these articles studies a concrete question surrounding an artifact in the Vienna museum collections, they also exemplify aspects of art which historically elude the theories for which Riegl was becoming known. Although the work of Max Dvořák, Hans Tietze, Georg Sobotka and others recorded the influence of Riegl’s lectures, Schlosser did not limit himself to easily discernible topics and tended to centre on what he repeatedly described as the ‘prickly problems of our discipline’. I understand that he was very formal and polite in oral examinations, and to judge from his often relatively detailed ‘Gutachten’ of dissertations, he was also generally liberal with those including subjects and approaches not perfectly aligned with his own preoccupations. However, we can also see from surviving letters of recommendation that he was pleased with students such as Otto Kurz or Ernst Gombrich who appreciated his nuance. At one point he resists being considered the ‘head of a school’ but then later says precisely that about his ‘Zweites kunsthistorisches Institut’ developed in

² A Vienna dissertation of 1967, Dagmar Hinker, ‘Studien zum Wortschatz der gotischen Architektur in Nordfrankreich’, is difficult to imagine without the example of Schlosser and if it is still necessary, might parenthetically allay the claim that he remained a marginal figure in Viennese studies of the history of art.

³ ‘Materialien zur Quellenkunde der Kunstgeschichte’, *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, 1914-1920, vols. 177, no. 3, 179, 3, 180, 5, 184, 2, 192, 2, 195, 3, 195, 5, 196, 2, 196, 5. *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, vols. 15, 1894, 16, 1895, 17, 1896, 18, 1897, 19, 1898, 20, 1899, 23, 1902, 24, 1903, 29, 1910, 31, 1913. They are currently available at the page of the Heidelberg University Library and have been discussed by Schlosser himself in Julius von Schlosser, ‘Ein Lebenskommentar,’ Johannes Jahn ed., *Die Kunstwissenschaft in Selbstdarstellungen*, Leipzig: Meiner, 1924, 13 (107) and by Otto Kurz, ‘Julius von Schlosser Personalità Metodo Lavoro’, *Critica d’arte*, vol. 11-12, 1955, 402-419.

opposition to Josef Strzygowski. His significance has probably been overlooked primarily because of his idiosyncratic literary style and the dispersal of his students, the difficulties many of them faced after the race laws, but also because their work was objectively verifiable and universally accepted without overtly reflecting the source of inspiration.

Schlosser himself described the eureka experience of his intellectual development to have resulted from Benedetto Croce and his *Estetica*.⁴ This had been reviewed in the local journal by Robert Eisler, and Schlosser has stated that its value 'slowly sunk in' for him.⁵

His developing personal interpretation of how Croce's arguments should be applied to research in the history of art is perhaps best read in a full-fledged form in his final posthumous publication of the Ghiberti monograph which had been many years in the making.⁶ At this early stage in his career, the 'glosses on a passage from Montaigne' are almost unique. There were few occasions for such short pithy contributions to a more specifically art-historical festschrift. When the 60th birthday of Hermann Egger rolled around his topic was already the 'language of art', quite close to the subject of his last denser lecture published about three years before his death.⁷ Although the examples of Montaigne and prehistoric art are not drawn from his favourite fields, Schlosser's overall development is probably better reflected and anticipated in this essay than in any other. Although it is not customary to do so, I have again left many of the longer sentences undivided in order to preserve something of the original style.

⁴ Benedetto Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale*, Milano: Sandron, 1902.

⁵ Robert Eisler, 'Benedetto Croce, Ästhetik als Wissenschaft des Ausdrucks und allgemeine Linguistik: Theorie und Geschichte. Nach der zweiten durchgesehenen Auflage übersetzt von Karl Federn. Im Verlag von E. A. Seemann, Leipzig 1905. Lexikonformat, XV u. 494 S.', *Kunstgeschichtliche Anzeigen Beiblatt der 'Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung'* Redigiert von Franz Wickhoff, Jahrgang 1906, Nr. 4, Innsbruck: Wagner 1906, 116-130. Paraphrased from Julius von Schlosser, 'Ein Lebenskommentar', as cited above, p. 27 (121). Schlosser also discussed the intellectual peregrinations of Robert Eisler in one of his longer letters to Croce.

⁶ Julius Schlosser, *Leben und Meinungen des florentinischen Bildners Lorenzo Ghiberti*, Basel: Holbein, 1941.

⁷ Schlosser had been dying of colon cancer and not expected to survive the year 1936 – according to Arpád Weixlgärtner, 'Der Weixlgärtnerer zweiter Teil: Selbstbildnis', 1132 and other references in the unpublished manuscript of 1944, Nationalbibliothek Vienna, department of manuscripts.

Julius Schlosser, 'Glosses on a passage in Montaigne'⁸

'Here', said Wilhelm, 'there are so many diverse opinions, and one says that the truth lies in the middle'. – 'Not at all!' countered Montan: 'the middle is where the problem remains, possibly inscrutable or possibly accessible, if one dares to begin'.

Wilhelm Meister's travelling years, book two, chapter ten

'Couleuvre arreste toy; arreste toy, couluvre, afin que me soeur tire sur le patron de ta peinture la façon de l'ouvrage d'un riche cordon que ie puisse donner à ma mie: ainsi soit en tout temps, ta beauté et ta disposition préférée à tous les aultres serpents.'

[Adder, stay; stay, stay, adder, that from the pattern of your coloring my sister may draw the fashion and the workmanship of a rich girdle that I may give to my love; so may your beauty and your pattern be forever preferred to all other serpents.] [*The Complete Work of Montaigne*, ed. Donald Frame, 1943, 158]

Such is the refrain of a love song that Michel de Montaigne recorded from the mouth of a West-Indian native in one of his most interesting essays (book 1, chapter 31, Of cannibals). Along with Chamfort perhaps, Montaigne was the finest and freest mind of the French tradition, and strongly interested in the world beyond the great ocean, which was then much newer than it is today. Montaigne himself owned a collection of ethnographic artefacts from those territories, and when, during the reign of Charles IX, natives from the New World arrived in Rouen, he did not miss his chance to converse with them – although the conversation was not successful because of a maladroit translator the conversation was not successful. He was able to hire a man who had travelled widely in that area, and the above quoted 'couplet' presumably came from this source. I cannot forgo citing the good words which Montaigne pronounces by way of this man's credentials. Their relevance will become clear in the following.

'That man who accompanied me, was a simple crude fellow, a character fit to bear true witness; for clever people observe more things and more curiously, but they interpret them; and to lend weight and conviction to their interpretation, they cannot help altering history a little. They never show you things as they are, but bend and disguise them according to the way they have seen them; and to give credence to their judgment and attract you to it, they are prone to add something to their matter, to stretch it out and amplify it. We need a man either very honest, or so simple that he has not the stuff to build up false inventions and give them plausibility; and

⁸ Originally published as: 'Randglossen zu einer Stelle Montaignes', *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte, Franz Wickhoff gewidmet von einem Kreise von Freunden und Schülern*, Vienna: Schroll, 1903, 172-182 and reprinted in Schlosser, *Präludien Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Berlin: Bard, 1927, 213-226.

wedded to no theory. Such was my man; and besides this, he at various times brought sailors and merchants, whom he had known on that trip, to see me. So I content myself with his information, without inquiring what the cosmographers say about it.

We ought to have topographers who would give us an exact account of the places where they have been. But because they have over us the advantage of having seen Palestine, they want to enjoy the privilege of telling us news about all the rest of the world. I would like everyone to write what he knows, and as much as he knows, not only in this, but in all other subjects; for a man may have some special knowledge and experience of the nature of a river or a fountain, who in other matters knows only what everybody knows. However, to circulate this little scrap of knowledge, he will undertake to write the whole of physics. From this vice spring many great abuses.' [*The Complete Work of Montaigne*, ed. Donald Frame, 1943, 151-152]

I only hope that the reader will not be tempted to maliciously refer the final lines of this old sceptic to the 'petit loppin' the – *pauperis cena* – to which I here invite an honoured guest. For the following *scholia* fragments do not touch on 'all of physics' but do bear on a large and rich chapter of the history of art, and I would not like to see them viewed completely devoid of the spirit of intelligent scepticism, that the chamberlain in Montaigne has taught us.

The refrain of the song quoted above seems to be quite reliable, recorded so early, and seems to preserve an idea that is not contemporary but that has recently been endorsed with confidence.

It traces the origin of the so-called geometric ornament from certain patterns occurring in nature. According to this idea, the peculiar patterns that are to be seen on Australian badges [Rindenschild] for instance, are by no means a free play of lines but rather illustrations based on patterns from certain colourful snakes and the like. Ernst Grosse has come forward as an adherent to this one-sided theory.⁹ Even if the illustrations accompanying his small book about the origins of art should prove themselves to be reliable, they would not seem widely valid. As frequently occurs, this theory has found an exaggerated and caricatured rendition in certain popular publications, such as the recent first volume of the general history of art by Karl Woermann.¹⁰ According to this, the spiral line of ammonites and echinites is believed to have inspired the earliest art, and the pattern that we have come to describe as serpentine taken to have originated in the observation of the pattern of a viper in grass. Nature generally offers the most widespread array of patterns for imitation such as the wings of butterflies, petals of flowers and so forth. This theory is undeniably appealing in its superficial rationality, although it is difficult to find any parallels in the living arts around us – which after all are continually seeking new forms from all conceivable sources. It can also be considered to be a current idea if we consider that a well known German scientist recently published a volume of

⁹ [Ernst Grosse, *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Mohr, 1894 in English translation as *The Beginnings of Art*, New York: Appleton, 1898.]

¹⁰ [Karl Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker*, Volume 1, Leipzig and Vienna 1900.]

illustrations entitled 'The artistic forms of nature'.¹¹ Whether art will profit or even have a use for such a project is a question we might well ask.

Anybody who has become accustomed to examining things more closely, will, I believe recognize that this theory is based on a very superficial and heavy handed form of materialism. The famous Greek anecdote that derived the invention of relief sculpture from the young woman who drew the profile of her lover on a wall with charcoal is more original and might include a greater grain of truth. It at least proposes a naïve and popular empiricism blithely relocating the direct subjective data into an outer realm. From the psychological aspect, this presents a critical weakness in the random selection of mostly insignificant details, which would appear to be unlikely either in the case of primitive populations or of children. With all of the necessary caveats we might compare them in this case.

In its general aspect, this theory is quite old. It had been a doctrine of the Epicurean school that vocal music began as an imitation of the song of birds. It was spelled out by Lucretius and enunciated in all earnestness by Georg Gottfried Gervinus in his book about Händel and Shakespeare – all fruit from the same tree.¹² It also thrives in the Romantic idea that the Gothic vaulting was first inspired by the branches of a forest, a poetic simile translated into a genetic explanation – we shall encounter further fallacies as we continue.

There is another view containing far greater subtlety and insight than that to which we have just alluded. It does not actually deserve the name of theory, and it seeks to demonstrate the origins of the most primal and straightest patterns by the direct and unmediated sources in technology, above all weaving – 'the oldest and most marvellous art, that finally distinguished humans from animals'. This is basically the same thought, expressed with greater differentiation, more scientifically, and not as crudely impulsive as the last. Here again, the proposal is that a given object is imitated, even if it is itself an artefact. It is well known that this theory was put forth with great ingenuity by a practicing artist, Gottfried Semper, that it then led to a one sided hunt for motifs among archaeologists, but finally found a well armed and successful opponent in the person of Alois Riegl. None will now deny Riegl's objections. His point in particular that Semper's idea of deriving symmetry in the heraldic arts from the technique of textiles, amounts to a ὕστερον πρότερον [the rhetorical device of the latter preceding the first] and will stand as one of the most enlightening and valuable passages of his *Stilfragen*.¹³

Since he takes greater account of the subjective side, Riegl's views are the precise opposite of these materialistic theorems. One might say that his point of view has a vitalist character. He posits an innate drive to form, and something in humanity which 'causes us to find satisfaction in formal beauty and allows us to freely invent linear geometrical combinations independently without having to insert a material

¹¹ [Ernst Haeckel, *Kunstformen der Natur*, Leipzig Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, 1899-1904, English translation as *Art Forms of Nature*, New York: Dover, 1974.]

¹² [Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Händel und Shakespeare Zur Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, Leipzig: Engelmann, 1868.]

¹³ [Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, Berlin: Siemens, 1893, in English translation as *Problems of Style Foundations for a History of Ornament*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.]

factor in between' (*Stilfragen*, 1893, 32, 1992 ed., 40). We cannot deny that this recourse to an irrational element ('Qualitas occulta') seems on the face of it to involve the elimination of a theory altogether. As we shall see however, it is precisely this that permits us an acceptable path to a more promising position.

While these ideas come from the camp of the archaeologists on the one hand and of the art historians on the other, there is a fourth opinion that should be mentioned, which comes from ethnology and the natural sciences, and has had significant success. It begins with the assumption that linear ornament has an innate pictorial quality to begin with, involving a totemic aspect, but that it is subject to a process of increasing schematization. This process is still available for observation in some of the historic phases of art. Alfred E. Haddon, Hjalmar Stolpe and Karl von den Steinen have brought indisputable evidence for this from the arts of the so-called primitive peoples, and it cannot be denied that as a maxim, this theory promises success when applied in a limited and more easily surveyed field (as the researchers in New-Guinea, Polynesia and Central Brazil have shown).¹⁴ We cannot generalize from these examples since the evidence, especially from pre-history, is not sufficiently available. It is certainly correct in terms of its psychological postulates – which had been the failure of the first theory. As with most of the history of art, the study of primitive societies and of children has been too limited to the aspect of subject matter, and still today affects our understanding of art. We are grateful to Riegl for drawing our attention to the fact that the most widespread flower ornament, still present in our own contemporary decorations, is derived from an ancient holy symbol from the Nile valley, the Lotus, and that it has lost its original pictorial meaning almost completely, while other motifs such as the Uraeus Snake, for instance, which also appears in comparable decorative schemes, never spread beyond its area of origin into such a universal historical development.

This theory does not have any materialist ramification since it does not posit the origin of ornament in an outside world, but consists instead in forms that owe their particulars to the human imagination. As a principle, this would be insufficient to explain the general origin of ornament.

These thoughts are not unimportant for method. In a short essay comparing the competing theories about the origins of art, Alexander Conze, with the tranquility of a very experienced teacher, has observed that those materialist theories were so ingrained in the scientific processes current in the late 19th century that no other personal thought or zeal could be countenanced.¹⁵ Now that that particular view of the world and its related assumptions are receding from our purview, regressive spirits are bound to challenge the reversal that presents itself most harshly

¹⁴ [Alfred Cort Haddon, *Evolution in Art as Illustrated by the Life-Histories of Designs*, London: Walter Scott, 1895. Hjalmar Stolpe, 'Entwicklungserscheinungen in der Ornamentik der Naturvölker Eine ethnographische Untersuchung,' *Mittheilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, vol. 22, new ser., vol. 12, 1892, pp. 19-62. Karl von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentralbrasiliens Reiseschilderung und Ergebnisse der zweiten Schingú-Expedition*, 2nd ed., Berlin: Reimer 1897.],

¹⁵ [Alexander Conze, 'Über den Ursprung der bildenden Kunst,' *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1897, no. 8, 98-109, English translation as 'On the Origin of the Visual Arts,' *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 7, December 2012.]

in the opinions of Riegl. A surprising ferment and disquiet has recently been manifesting itself in the natural sciences, where the most unilateral and dogmatic standard bearers of materialist theories have traditionally been at home. A man such as Ernst Mach who has himself told us that a majority of his colleagues a few decades ago made quiet fun, or worse, completely misunderstood him, has now openly stepped out of physics and become a philosopher. We have become witnesses to a strange spectacle in which the methods claiming the exclusive right to be called 'exact' have swung open their gates to the once disreputable and dreaded critical speculation, and openly admit that they have been carrying mythological and metaphysical ballast. Aside from holding university lectures on natural philosophy, so famous a chemist as W. Oswald can today also publish a series of annals bearing a title that would not long ago have been decried as smacking of romantic philosophy and which must certainly leave his older colleagues feeling secretly uncomfortable. Previous theories that we believed to be long dead and buried seem now to be gaining a new life. Natural scientists can be heard discussing Neo-Lamarckism and Neo-Vitalism, even the ostracized concept of teleology has returned to the light of day, and a botanist such as Hugo de Vries has defended the theory of mutation against the stricter Darwinists. Albatrosses of the 20th century – all in all, we are seeing too much rather than too little epistemological debate. It is no less a symptom when an editor of historical sources such as Theodor Lindner felt the need to round off his work with an essay on universal history prefaced by reflections on the philosophy of history. Universal history and philosophy of history had appeared to be two subjects which specialized empiricism had thoroughly placed aside much in the manner of discarded furniture of the grandparent's generation.

The obscure Heraclitus made a profound comparison of the lyre and the bow: Οὐ ξυνιάσιν ὅπως διαφερόμενον ἑωυτῷ ὁμολογέει [‘People do not understand how that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself. There is a harmony in the bending back, as in the case of the bow and the lyre’].¹⁶ Dissonance seems to lead to the true harmony in academia as well. This seems at least to be the case in our own time, where the conception of dissonance is very different even from that of previous generations. And yet the theories that we have been discussing could only be unified in the very most schematic eclecticism and applied in isolation. In spite of this, one can admit that they all illuminate the question sharply, if one-sidedly, and in this way they indeed contribute to our understanding.

We might also pose the question as to whether the problem is historical, and if it might be clarified by that sort of research.

We could ask ourselves whether early statements about art allow the distinction between ornament (‘Ornament’) and pictorial image (‘Bild’), and whether that which we describe as ornament is universally understood in the same way. There can be no doubt that the term ‘geometric’ ornament is sometimes misunderstood or at least perplexing, almost fraudulent. The theory of transformation already militates against this.

Those ‘geometric’ forms which constitute the ‘pattern’ for us are by no means present in the naïve consciousness as abstract concepts: just as the *Bourgeois*

¹⁶ [Heraclitus, fragment Wheelwright 117, Diels 51, Bywater 45.]

gentilhomme of Molière unknowingly speaks prose. We can frequently observe children using the tiles from the game of Wilhelm Fröbel to make figures other than those prescribed, preferring to invent them from their own imagination, unconcerned by the fact that grown-ups would consider these to be very 'ornamental'. Wilhelm Preyer and Moritz Hoernes have published amusing examples of how children conceive and also name those 'abstract' things visually.¹⁷ Objects merge into one another in a dreamy way as in a game, or like the grimaces of the door knocker in a fairy tale by Boz. Depending on the situation, a simple square might be interpreted as a house or as a carpet in spite of its warped shape. A child will in the same spirit often repeat the same word from a pure joy in its sound without understanding its meaning. It does so 'ornamentally' and by our standards renders it pointless. This is a phenomenon recurring in all folk poetry observed by travelers in the art of isolated tribes, and on the basis of these imaginary games these observers all too often attempted an overly hasty explanation of the origins of ornament in terms of the transformational theory. It is difficult to find the limits. In fact, the classical profile drawing like the gesture of drawing is composed of a system of abstractions, of elements which we categorize under the concept of Geometric.

And so, the question of the origin of ornament might only be distinguishable mechanically from the question of the origin of art in general, and this reveals that the problem is not historical but also a psychological fact. It is not a question of where and when in the widest hypothetical range, but rather one of how. It seems to me as if two old theorems have been inserted to cause obscurity and confusion: for one, the unjustified and schematic separation of 'content' from 'form,' which caused a long and pointless dispute in aesthetics; then the misunderstanding of the Aristotelian μίμησις (mimesis). The latter deals primarily with the 'visual' arts, the "bildende" Künste', whose very name points toward the mistake. It has not occurred as grievously in relation to poetry. As far as music is concerned, the concept has never been of great relevance. It was also from here that the objections were first raised. Child psychologists know that a child never or only very reluctantly begins with an imitation of natural forms. This is due less to the technical reason that it would be too difficult (although something of the kind also plays a part), but rather since they are solely concerned with communicating an impression in and of itself (since an audience is hardly or only secondarily a factor), and of exerting a form of expression on its own terms according to their own stage of intellectual development. The apparent naturalism of certain artistic circles, such as from the southern French prehistoric period, that has been enlisted as an example in this question, appears from this to be based on a misunderstanding that might have originated in a badly applied catchphrase. It seems clear that the term 'naturalism' only has a justification in those cases in which it refers to a phenomenon following a period of 'idealism' or 'mannerism' – such as in the 15th, the 17th or 19th centuries, where we are dealing with an opposition of expressive means, technique in the highest sense, and a more strictly conceived visual impression of the immediate

¹⁷ [William Thierry Preyer, *Die Seele des Kindes Beobachtungen über die geistige Entwicklung des Menschen in den ersten Lebensjahren*, 4th ed., Leipzig: Grieben, 1895. Moriz Hoernes, *Urgeschichte der bildenden Kunst in Europa von den Anfängen bis um 500 vor Christi*, Vienna: Holzhausen, 1898.]

model. The profile drawings which are described as naturalistic, clearly reproduce images from experience. They are not whatsoever 'studies from nature', and they distinguish themselves from schematic drawings only by the amount and the precision of detail – simply because the details were important for one reason or another. There have been attempts to attribute this increased sharpness of observation to social organization among primitive tribes and hunters and gatherers. Fritz Schultze has by all appearances correctly refuted this recently.¹⁸ In all cases, as with the child, the image from memory is the main thing, and it does not come as a surprise that the image of a sheep will be sharper and more detailed in the mind of a shepherd than in that of a child living in a city. However, the process of its reproduction will develop in the same direction in both. However coarse or subtle they may be, this insight contradicts all of those theories which explain the origins of art in terms of a misunderstood form and direct 'reproduction'.

From a psychological point of view (and it might be difficult to find any other), it seems necessary to frame the origins of ornament as a psychological phenomenon with an endpoint but not a beginning – and the visual arts are no different. It therefore transpires outside of the historical coordinates, occurring in the same way today as it has been for millennia, however old we consider humanity to be.

Precisely the same question has long preoccupied linguistics and seems only now to have arrived at a solution. A theory of the origin of language in terms of imitation has also been proposed here, and has been confronted among others by another spiritualist theory, which Wilhelm Wundt has somewhat disparagingly dubbed the 'wonder theory'. In the first volumes of his text book of popular psychology, Wundt included a 'theory of development' built on the only possible psychological theory.¹⁹ Just as with art, so can language also not possibly be a mechanical imitation, but only the expression of an 'inner' intellectual purpose, the developmental form of a psycho-physical phenomenon. In the essay quoted above, Alexander Conze has brilliantly and aptly alluded to the relation between language and art, and cited the following fruitful lines as 'the view of a friend whom he frequently approaches for enlightenment': 'The primary impulse toward the visual arts strikes me as the human urge to produce, not an urge to μίμησις (mimesis), imitation in the most common sense, but rather a drive to fix the images of our imagination as they emerge and flourish. The childish origin does not consist in sitting before an object and copying, but to reproduce the image of an object that is living in the imagination'. This opinion is very close to that which we have delineated above. After indicating the ensuing questions, Conze tells us that he sees language and the visual arts as emanating from the same root, and with a pregnant image he described the latter as an aspect of speech in visual forms, a stimulating observation that is typical of this short essay. In fact, the visual gestures, to which contemporary ethnologists owe many insights, can barely be distinguished from the arts, other than by the fleeting character of their source material. Gesture and sound

¹⁸ [Fritz Schultze, *Psychologie der Naturvölker eine natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte menschlichen Vorstellens, Wollens und Glaubens*, Leipzig: Veit, 1900.]

¹⁹ [Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte*, Volume 1, 'Die Sprache,' Leipzig: Engelmann, 1900.]

which belong together closely, give rise to language, music, imagery and print as well as to the visual and musical arts in the widest sense. We must also not overlook the fact that the essence of art is unified, and that the further they go into detail, logical divisions according to form of expression become increasingly random, pedantic and vague.

These are not thoughts which only emerged yesterday. They were recently expressed in German in two publications, one by our closer compatriot Friedrich von Hausegger, and the other with a greater philosophical acuity in an essay by the recently deceased Konrad Fiedler.²⁰ Both of these have concentrated on an individual subject, the former on music, the latter on the visual arts, and seem neither to have been aware of the other. We cannot claim that their conclusions have been appreciated. A southern Italian scholar of great originality and with an astonishing knowledge of German literature and scholarship, Benedetto Croce in Naples, has now published a very clearly conceived and written book, quite concise and only occasionally overindulgent in dialectic. To some degree, Croce begins from the work of one of the most remarkable and important aesthetic philosophers of his native country, Giovanni Battista Vico (whom Goethe compared with Hamann as embodying 'sybilline anticipation of the good and the right that will or should come in the future, based on serious observation and tradition'). The title of the book by Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale*, incorporates an entire program, and from what we have said above, the subtitle should also be clear.²¹ Croce has drawn the ultimate (äußersten) conclusions, and although one might differ on one point or another, the direction he has taken seems to be fruitful. On this basis, it seems possible to construct a philosophy of aesthetics that is completely consistent and coherent, like the much derided system of classicism, which can however also accommodate the facts of history, albeit only in terms of a pure philosophy of art and not a sensualist theory.

Since they bear on the theories we have referred to at the outset, we should still mention two facts which follow from this fundamental standpoint. These are imitation and technique. If the essential questions of the visual arts cannot be identified with imitation, then the already subjective and random theory of value is also entirely discredited, based on the classicist or Neo-Classical approach used to codify the supposed imperfections of earlier schools of art. In a large recently printed text book proclaiming itself the aesthetics of realism, such views are pronounced with a notable confidence [presumably by Konrad Lange]. It should be clear however that the essential questions are not dependent on the development of the artistic means ('Kunstmittel'), but instead merely relate to them ('mit ihr zusammenhängt'). As a purely historical phenomenon, this development is the subject of historical research. Konrad Fiedler made statements to this effect some time ago.

²⁰ [Friedrich von Hausegger, *Die Musik als Ausdruck*, 2. vermehrte und verbesserte Auflage Vienna: Konegen, 1887 and Konrad Fiedler 'Über den Ursprung der künstlerischen Tätigkeit' (1889). *Konrad Fiedlers Schriften über Kunst*, herausgegeben von Hans Marbach, Leipzig: Hirzel, 1896.]

²¹ Benedetto Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale*, Milan: Sandron 1902.

The other question surrounding the influence of technique is intimately bound up with this. It is only by a misunderstanding that it can be addressed as a source of artistic expression. Although this is done in certain circumstances, it is hardly possible to consider it a factor in the creation of form, which is clearly documentable historically, or as affecting or changing form, however ambivalent and cross eyed such an expression might seem. The elemental factor in it can still be directly verified. In his studies about childhood, James Sully has assembled very instructive examples of how the muscular impulses affect the writing or drawing hand, and insofar as this presents a technical result, it can be also seen as an influence on the development.²² And even if it was meant in a different context, this can explain the apparent paradox expressed by Michelangelo: 'Si pinge col cervello, non colla mano' ['We paint with the mind and not with the hand'].

'Snake skins are flaunted as belts among the savages.'

The song of the Indians quoted by Montaigne has led us onto side paths. He made his statement unambiguously. The question is whether we have done him justice in reading it too literally.

Picture and ornament commingle. To separate them rationally presents a practical postulate that misses their essential qualities. We know how easily a child can interpret its doodling. One must wonder if 'interpretation' is not an overstatement of the situation. Hoernes, on the other hand, has assembled quite remarkable historical examples of 'technical' patterns being transformed into pictures. Underlying all of this is the primitive creative imagination with its primeval and apparently ineradicable roots in animism and anthropomorphism, which has left deep traces in all of the languages. On occasion they even continue to affect scientific thinking. The recent theory of aesthetic empathy, which doubtlessly includes a kernel of truth, is based in this, and there can be no doubt that the most popular and possibly the oldest approach to art is to project a spirit, a life or a presence into it. This extends from the fettered statues in the most ancient Greek literary sources, the columns gifted with life and movement at Alcinoos' Banquet Hall [Odyssey Book 8] and it survives with many nuances into the epigrams and ekphrasis of the Hellenistic period, declining into a literary cliché among the medieval *Mirabilia* of both eastern and western Europe, returning in the famous allusion to Giotto by Boccaccio [*Decameron*, VI, 5], and ultimately surviving in the late Renaissance workshop expression of 'terribilità'. Both in its primitive and advanced stages, artistic terminology, ancient and modern, is full of demonism. Whether the child interprets a triangle as a pointed cap, the Brazilian tribesman interprets a certain lozenge or triangular shapes as symbols of the female sexual organs or of suspended bats, it all reflects the same fact, or at least has the same origin as when the Chinese describe the Greek meander pattern as 'thunder hand', or we today refer to ornamental motifs as the 'running dog', 'egg staff', 'tendrils', 'serpentine' or 'wavy lines'. Another example of this is the charming legend about the origin of the Corinthian capital, so typically Greek in its inventiveness. Unless its development from a given symbol or image can be completely proven through the theory of transformation, we should be well

²² James Sully, [*Studies of Childhood*, London: Longmans, 1896, translated as] *Untersuchungen über die Kindheit Psychologische Abhandlungen für Lehrer und gebildete Eltern*, Leipzig: Wunderlich 1897.

admonished against making inferences about the origins of certain forms on the basis of poetic images and metaphors. It is a legacy from our sensual heritage and naive objectivism. In many cases, we can still discern the origins of terminology in the poetic animism of a popular fairy tale imagination. The song quoted by Montaigne is another example of this. It is not even correct to say that the poetic expression has transformed the vacant 'ornament' into a sensually recognizable 'image', but it has rather seized upon a form in such a way that it alone can enter the naïve imagination. For this one reason we might be excused for ending with a quotation from Friedrich Nietzsche, that soft hearted, merciless seeker and hunter of all too human idols: 'Small wonder that humanity only finds those things in the objects of the world which it has itself invested them with!'

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