

# Oldřich Stefan's amplification of the Vienna School of Art History

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## Prelude: Vienna School's influence in Czech lands

Czech art history was fundamentally influenced by the Vienna School of art history,<sup>1</sup> thanks primarily to the Czech art historians who studied under Franz Wickhoff, Alois Riegl, and Max Dvořák<sup>2</sup> – namely Vojtěch Birnbaum (1877–1934), Vincenc Kramář (1877–1960),<sup>3</sup> Josef Cibulka (1886–1968), Antonín Matějček (1889–1950), Eugen Dostál (1889–1943), and Jaromír Pečírka (1891–1966).<sup>4</sup> In the early twentieth century and especially in the years after Czechoslovakia was established as an independent state in 1918, these art historians were instrumental in giving shape to a modern method of art historical research that then took root in the then newly formed Institute for Art History of Charles University in Prague (Ústav pro dějiny umění Karlovy Univerzity) and later in the Department of Art History of Masaryk University in Brno (Seminář dějin umění Masarykovy univerzity).<sup>5</sup> The Vienna method was still a strong tradition in Czechoslovak art history in the late

<sup>1</sup> See: Karel Srp, 'Situace českého dějepisu umění ve dvacátých letech' (Czech art history in the 1920s), in: Rudolf Chadraba (ed.) et al., *Kapitoly z českého dějepisu umění II*, Prague: Odeon, 1987, 71–94. This study is an extended version of conference paper titled 'Prager Schule der Kunstgeschichte? Riegl's and Wickhoff's Czech Students and Their Influence on Art History in Prague'.

<sup>2</sup> See: Peter Betthausen, Peter H. Feist and Christiane Fork (eds.), *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon*, Stuttgart – Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2007, 68–71, 344–347, 498–499.

<sup>3</sup> More recently, see: Tomáš Murár, *Art as Principle and Pattern. Vojtěch Birnbaum's Concept and Method of Art History*, Kostelec nad Černými lesy: Archiv výtvarného umění, 2017, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/murar.pdf>, accessed 27 March 2019; Milena Bartlová, "Není možno se vzdát svobody myšlení." Vincenc Kramář a marxismus 1945–1960' (It is not possible to surrender freedom of thought. Vincenc Kramář and Marxism 1945–1960), *Umění*, 66, 2018, 246–263.

<sup>4</sup> See: Lubomír Slavíček (ed.) et al., *Slovník historiků umění, výtvarných kritiků a teoretiků v českých zemích, A–M* (A dictionary of art historians, critics, and theorists in the Czech lands, A–M), Prague: Academia, 2016, 183, 887; Lubomír Slavíček (ed.) et al., *Slovník historiků umění, výtvarných kritiků a teoretiků v českých zemích, N–Ž* (A dictionary of art historians, critics, and theorists in the Czech lands, N–Ž), Prague: Academia, 2016, 1095.

<sup>5</sup> See: Tomáš Murár, 'Ve stopách Vídeňské školy. České univerzitní dějiny umění v Praze za první republiky, 1919–1939' (In the footsteps of the Vienna School: Czech art history at the university level in Prague during the First Republic), in: Jakub Bachtík, Richard Biegel and Roman Prahel (eds.), *Dějepis umění na Karlově univerzitě 1848–2018*, Prague: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2020 (forthcoming); Jiří Kroupa and Lubomír Slavíček (eds.), *Sedmdesát let Semináře dějin umění Masarykovy univerzity v Brně* (Seventy years of art history at Masaryk University in Brno), Brno: Seminář dějin umění Filozofické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity, 1997.

1930s and then through the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany<sup>6</sup> and even after the Communist Party seized power in Czechoslovakia in 1948.<sup>7</sup> The established narrative around this kind of historiographic inquiry largely emphasises the influence of the students of Max Dvořák,<sup>8</sup> whose ideas were already attracting the interest of Czech students and scholars by the 1920s, shortly after Dvořák's death,<sup>9</sup> an interest that was reawakened in the early 1960s after this tradition of

<sup>6</sup> During the Second World War the head of the Institute for Art History at the German University in Prague was Karl Maria Swoboda, see: Jiří Koukal, 'Katedra "těch druhých"? Dějiny umění na Německé univerzitě v Praze, 1882–1945' (The department of 'those other'? Art history at the German University in Prague, 1882–1945), in: Bachtík, Biegel and Prahel (eds.), 'Dějepis umění na Karlově univerzitě 1848–2018' (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> The influence and legacy of the Vienna School in Czech art history during the political changes after 1948 is a historiographical question that continues to be discussed today and one that shifts between the need to define the limits of the (free) principles of art-historical research from the era of the First Republic and the attempt to integrate this tradition with Marxist ideology, just as some Austrian art historians reworked the principles of the Vienna School of art history to fit the purposes of National Socialism in the late 1930s and in the first half of the 1940s. In recent years it has been possible to observe a rift in Czech historiography over interpretations of (contemporary) Czech art history as the continuation of domestic developments in academic art history that began after 1948, a disagreement evidenced by the writings of Milena Bartlová and Pavla Pečinková: Bartlová believes that art history in Czechoslovakia after 1948 sought to connect with Marxist ideology in order to make the methodology of the multifaceted Vienna School tradition more scientific, while Pečinková shows how Czech art history smoothly only altered its interpretative method to conform to the ideological tenets of the time and without giving any deeper consideration to the issue of art history as a science. See: Milena Bartlová, 'Czech Art History and Marxism', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7, 2012, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/bartlova.pdf>, accessed 27 March 2019; Pavla Pečinková, 'Kupředu jdeme II (znovu k interpretaci naší předválečné avantgardy v padesátých letech a jejím důsledkům pro dnešní dobu) (We're moving forward II – again on the interpretation of the pre-war avant-garde in the 1950s and the consequences of that interpretation for our time)', *Bubínek Revolveru*, 25 March 2019, <http://www.bubinekrevolveru.cz/kupredu-jdeme-ii-znovu-k-interpretaci-nasi-predvalecne-avantgardy-v-padesatych-letech-jejim>, accessed 27 March 2019.

<sup>8</sup> See: Markéta Jarošová (ed.), *Professori Josef Cibulka ad honorem* (Professor Josef Cibulka ad honorem), Prague: Togga, 2009; Jan Royt (ed.), *Antonín Matějček (1889–1950)*, Prague: Karolinum, 1994; Jakub O. Blažíček and Jan Květ (ed.), *Cestami umění: sborník prací k počtě šedesátých narozenin Antonína Matějčka*, (Journeys through art: a collection of writings marking the sixtieth birthday of Antonín Matějček), Prague: Melantrich, 1949. On Dvořák see: Hans H. Aurenhammer, Max Dvořák, in: Ulrich Pfisterer (ed.), *Klassiker der Kunstgeschichte: Von Winckelmann bis Warburg, Band I*, München: C. H. Beck, 2008, 214–226.

<sup>9</sup> See: Jaromír Pečírka, Max Dvořák, *Český časopis historický*, 27, 1921, 1–7. As chief editor of the journal of the Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes (Mánes Association of Fine Artists) titled *Volné směry* (Free Directions) Pečírka was already publishing translations of Dvořák's writings in the 1920s. See: Max Dvořák, 'Pieter Bruegel starší' (Pieter Bruegel the Elder), *Volné směry*, 23, 1924–1925, 13–19, 33–51, 88–91, 114–120, 212–220; Max Dvořák, 'Studium umění' (The study of art), *Volné směry*, 24, 1926, 79–85; Max Dvořák, 'Masaccio', *Volné směry*, 25, 1927–1928, 99–107.

thought was sidelined for a time in the 1950s.<sup>10</sup> However, the question of the importance of Dvořák's thinking for Czech art history in the twentieth century has yet to be definitively resolved.<sup>11</sup>

The most notable figure instrumental in establishing the Vienna School's influence on Czech art history was Antonín Matějček. He attended Dvořák's lectures in Vienna between 1912 and 1916, while he also worked under Dvořák in the Central Committee for Heritage Protection. In 1926 Matějček began working at Prague University's Institute for Art History, which he then headed up from 1934 until his death in 1950. Josef Cibulka, who studied under Dvořák in Vienna in 1916–1917, started working at Prague University around the same time as Matějček, and from 1930 he was head of the university's Seminar of Christian Archaeology. He remained there until 1949 when he was forced to leave his position at the university. In the mid-1930s Jaromír Pečírka also habilitated at Prague University's Institute for Art History, however, he became professionally based mainly at the nearby Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague. Pečírka was one of Max Dvořák's last students: he studied under him in 1913–1916 and again in 1917–1920, when he was simultaneously working at the Central Committee for Heritage Protection.

These three art historians built on Dvořák's method of art history, especially in its later stage of development, when, after 1914, Dvořák studied works of art as expressive ways of grappling with the reality of the world as a distinct experience.<sup>12</sup> Matějček, Cibulka, and Pečírka mainly drew from Dvořák's method its tendency

<sup>10</sup> In 1961 a conference devoted to Dvořák's art history was organised to mark the fortieth anniversary of his death. The papers were published in a special issue of the journal *Umění* (Art), IX, including papers by Jaromír Neumann, Jaroslav Pešina, Rudolf Chadraba, Luděk Novák, and Viktor Kotrba.

<sup>11</sup> Jaromír Pečírka was primarily responsible for the 'cult' that formed around the figure of Dvořák in the Czech lands, as in 1936 he published a translation of some of Dvořák's writings in a work titled *Umění jako projev ducha* (Art as an expression of the spirit). Several years later Pečírka also published Dvořák's correspondence with Czech historians. See: Jaromír Pečírka, 'Max Dvořák. Životopis' (Max Dvořák: a biography), in: Max Dvořák, *Umění jako projev ducha*, Prague: Jan Laichter, 1936, VII–XCII; Max Dvořák, *Listy o životě a umění* (Letters about life and art), Prague: Vyšehrad, 1943. See also: Dobroslav Líbal, 'Max Dvořák – památkář' (Max Dvořák – preservationist), *Zprávy památkové péče*, 61, 2001, 173–175; Jindřich Vybíral, 'Max Dvořák a působení Antonína Matějčka na Uměleckoprůmyslové škole' (Max Dvořák and the influence of Antonín Matějček on the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design), *Umění*, 54, 2006, 270–271; Jiří Kroupa, 'Max Dvořák dnes. Od duchovních věd k vědám kulturním' (Max Dvořák today. From the spiritual sciences to the cultural sciences), *Opuscula historiae artium*, 61, 2012, 2–11.

<sup>12</sup> See: Josef Vojvodík, "'Fading, Fading...": Ztráta, vzkříšení a dějiny umění jako palingeneze: K umělecko-historickému myšlení Maxe Dvořáka na pozadí fenomenologie jeho doby' ('Fading, Fading ...': Loss, resurrection and art history as palingenesis: on the art-historical thought of Max Dvořák against the backdrop of the phenomenology of his time), in: Kateřina Svatoňová and Kateřina Krtilová (eds.), *Mizení. Fenomény, mediální praktiky a techniky na prahu zjevného* (Disappearance, phenomena, media practices, and technology on the edge of the visible) Prague: Karolinum, 2017, 155–202.

towards a synthetic understanding of how art emerges, so that, conducting stylistic and formal analyses, they examined the specific historical time in which the work of art originated as its intellectual foundations, which they understood as expressed in the art form.<sup>13</sup> Dvořák's method as it appeared in its early stage, developed before the start of the First World War, was by contrast taken up by Eugen Dostál in Brno, who completed his studies in art history in Vienna in 1914 and habilitated at the university in Brno in 1921, where in 1927 he was appointed a full-time professor. He tied in with Dvořák's method chiefly through his own approach to the interpretation of mediaeval art, which involved an evolutionary-genetic conception of artistic forms as being part of the self-enclosed process of art history's development.

The second source of influence of the Vienna School of art history on Czech art history emerged through the work of Vojtěch Birnbaum.<sup>14</sup> Like Dvořák, Birnbaum had studied under Wickhoff and Riegl at Vienna University around the turn of the twentieth century, and from 1919 he worked at Prague University's Institute for Art History. He became director of the institute in 1927 and retained the position until his premature death in 1934. Birnbaum thus worked in Prague alongside Matějček and Cibulka at the Institute for Art History, where they continued to practise the method of the Vienna School. Unlike Matějček and Cibulka, however, Birnbaum did not embrace Dvořák's approach to studying the work of art as the expression of historical thought in form, and he instead followed Alois Riegl in trying to discover through a work of art's form the causes behind the changes that occur in historical development.

Birnbaum conceptualised the 'baroque principle' as one of the key principles of artistic development.<sup>15</sup> In Birnbaum's view, every stage of artistic development is

<sup>13</sup> See: Otto Benesch, 'Max Dvořák. Ein Versuch zur Geschichte der historischen Geisteswissenschaften', in: Karl Koetschau (ed.), *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, Berlin – Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1924, 159–197.

<sup>14</sup> It is also possible to consider a third source of influence, which was the work of Vincenc Kramář, a contemporary of Birnbaum's who also studied under Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl. However, unlike Dvořák and Birnbaum, Kramář never taught at a university, thus despite the fact that he was the one who built on the theoretical ideas of the Vienna School most in between the two world wars, his influence on the practice of Czech art history is less pronounced, owing most notably to the absence of any direct students of him. Kramář's theoretical ideas and his legacy have nevertheless been the subject of consistent attention in the historiography of Czech art history. See: Josef Krása, 'Dílo Vincence Kramáře v českých dějinách umění' (The work of Vincenc Kramář in Czech art history), in: *Vincenc Kramář, O obrazech a galeriích*, Prague: Odeon, 1983, 449–477; Vojtěch Lahoda et al., *Vincenc Kramář. Od starých mistrů k Picassovi* (Vincenc Kramář: from the old masters to Picasso), Prague: Národní galerie, 2000; Karel Srp, *Teoretický odkaz Vincence Kramáře* (Vincenc Kramář's legacy of theory), Dissertation, FF UK, 1982.

<sup>15</sup> The first mention of the 'baroque principle' can be found in 1918 in Birnbaum's application to habilitate at Prague University. See: Archive of Charles University, the Vojtěch Birnbaum personal folder, Birnbaum's application to habilitate at the Faculty of Arts from 10 December 1918. Birnbaum then published his theory titled as *Barokní princip v dějinách architektury* (The Baroque Principle in the History of Architecture), *Styl*, 5, 1924, 71–85.

governed by a progression towards the 'baroque', irrespective of the particular forms given to artistic expression within a particular style, which change in response to changing socio-political and cultural factors. According to Birnbaum, every stage of artistic development aims towards fulfilling its purpose of completely transcending ordinary reality and is propelled to this end by means of a creative principle in art that gives rise to a different way of perceiving the world around us. Birnbaum used the term 'baroque' to refer to this principle, which rests on a creative disruption of the course of artistic development, and in so doing he was alluding to the architecture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the way it negated its own stylistic rules in order to produce a more intense (artistic) effect on the viewer.<sup>16</sup> For Birnbaum the 'baroque' was a theoretical concept whose application was not limited to the early modern era, as he considered it an internal principle of artistic development of art history, wherein every stage of artistic development was both disrupted by the 'baroque principle' but (thereby) at the same time fulfilled its objective of artistic transcendence of ordinary reality.

Birnbaum's theoretical ideas, unique within the frame of Czech art history in the 1920s, had a formative influence on his students at Prague University. This was especially owing to the epistemological-ontological premises of his ideas, which linked the hidden principles of artistic development with how this development is expressed in the form of a work of art. Birnbaum himself did not carry these ideas any further, but they were taken up and pursued after him by Růžena Vacková (1901–1982) and Oldřich Stefan (1900–1969).

In the autumn semester of 1922/1923 at Prague University, Vacková and Stefan began attending Birnbaum's newly established Art History Seminar – where

<sup>16</sup> In 2015 Jindřich Vybíral offered an interpretation of Birnbaum's theory of the baroque principle in which he claimed it was derived from a theory put forth by Heinrich Wölfflin in 1915. While it is possible to consider the influence that Wölfflin's conception of art history had on Birnbaum's thought, Vybíral's interpretation omits the ideas that Birnbaum was developing himself in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as recounted by Ivo Hlobil in 1987 in reference to Birnbaum's interpretation of Italian classical architecture, as recorded by F. X. Šalda. Birnbaum's interpretation of the origin of vault architecture in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries in Ravenna is shaped by his notion of an inexorable course of development towards the baroque principle, which influences in an unseen way how forms change, and thereby progress towards the fulfilment of their artistic purpose towards their artistic culmination. This idea allowed Birnbaum to explain Ravennese architecture as influenced by the architecture of classical Rome, despite the absence of any surviving wooden buildings. It is therefore more than likely that Birnbaum's art-historical thinking about art history have their origins in Riegl and not simply in the Wölfflin's art-historical thought. See: Jindřich Vybíral, 'Birnbaum's Baroque Principle and the Czech Reception of Heinrich Wölfflin', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 13, 2015, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/vybc3adral.pdf>, accessed 27 March 2019; Ivo Hlobil, 'Vojtěch Birnbaum – Život a dílo v dobových souvislostech' (Vojtěch Birnbaum – his life and work in the context of his time), in: Vojtěch Birnbaum, *Vývojové zákonitosti v umění*, Prague: Odeon, 1987, 379–411, especially 386–387.

Birnbaum focused on the methodology of art history<sup>17</sup> – even though art history was not the primary field of study of either one of them (Vacková completed a doctorate in classical archaeology, and Stefan graduated as an architect). Under Birnbaum's influence they devoted a large part of their work to theoretical issues connected with the fine arts.<sup>18</sup> The two of them also shared the same fate as Czech art historians who ended up being imprisoned during the period of communist rule in Czechoslovakia: Vacková was jailed for political reasons from 1952 to 1967 and Stefan was falsely charged with the misappropriation of state funds and was sent to prison in 1961.<sup>19</sup> They were both the subject of more focused attention in the 1990s as figures in Czech art history who had been subjected to communist persecution,<sup>20</sup> but it was not until 2014 that an analytical study of the ideas of Růžena Vacková in art history was published,<sup>21</sup> while Oldřich Stefan's art-historical thought has yet to be addressed in a study.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> As well as them, Václav Richter (1900–1970), later a prominent figure in the field of art history in Brno, also attended Birnbaum's lectures. See: Vojtěch Volavka, 'Václav Richter a Birnbaumova škola' (Václav Richter and the Birnbaum school), *Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity*, 10, 1961, 5–21.

<sup>18</sup> At the first seminar, Birnbaum dealt with Julius von Schlosser's account of the sources of art history. See: *Seznam přednášek, které se budou konati na Universitě Karlově v zimním běhu 1922–1923* (The list of lectures that will be held at Charles University in the winter term 1922–1923), Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1922, 37.

<sup>19</sup> See: Růžena Vacková, *Ticho s ozvěnami. Dopisy z vězení 1952–1967* (Silence with echoes. Letters from prison 1952–1967), Prague: Česká křesťanská akademie, 1994; Růžena Vacková, *Vězeňské přednášky* (Prison lectures), Prague: Archiv UK, 1999; Jana Stefanová, 'Profesor Oldřich Stefan ve vzpomínkách dcery' (Professor Oldřich Stefan as remembered by his daughter), *Zprávy památkové péče*, 65, 2005, 266–269; Tomáš Murár, 'Prodral se člověk všedního života na scénu. Oldřich Stefan ve světle českých meziválečných dějin umění' (An everyday man breaks onto the stage. Oldřich Stefan in the light of Czech interwar art history), *Český rozhlas Vltava*, broadcast on 17 March 2018.

<sup>20</sup> See: Věra Břeňová, 'Univerzitní profesorka Růžena Vacková' (University professor Růžena Vacková), *Časopis pro otázky knihovnické teorie a praxe*, 3, 1992, 62–64; Ivo Hlobil, 'Poznámky k osobnímu a názorovému vztahu Vojtěcha Birnbauma a Růženy Vackové' (Remarks on the personal and intellectual relationship between Vojtěch Birnbaum and Růžena Vacková), *Zprávy Klubu Za starou Prahu*, 1, 1997, 64–67; Pavel Preiss, 'Doctissima a Birnbaumova škola' (Doctissima and Birnbaum's school), *Zprávy Klubu Za starou Prahu*, 1, 1997, 76–79; Milan Pavlík (ed.), *Oldřich Stefan. Sborník příspěvků* (Oldřich Stefan Festschrift), Prague: Komora českých architektů, 1995.

<sup>21</sup> Josef Vojvodík, 'Zastoupení a odpovědnost: "absolutní passion" Růženy Vackové' (Representation and responsibility: Růžena Vacková's absolute passion), in: Josef Vojvodík and Marie Langerová, *Patos v českém umění, poezii a umělecko-estetickém myšlení čtyřicátých let 20. století* (Pathos in Czech art, poetry, and artistic-aesthetic thought from the 1940s), Prague: Argo, 2014, 80–115; see also Josef Vojvodík, *Life in Amplitude: Pathos, Passion and Thinking on Art and Aesthetics in Occupied Prague (199–1945)*, *Word and Sense. A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theory and Criticism in Czech Studies*, 16, 2019, 147–173.

<sup>22</sup> Oldřich Stefan was born in Prague, where, thanks to a scholarship from the Czechoslovak state, he was able to study architecture under Antonín Engel at the Czech Technical University (České vysoké učení technické – ČVUT) – Engel designed, for example, the new

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Fig. 1. Oldřich Stefan (on the left) at the opening of an exhibition of the work of artist Vojtěch Sedláček, 1943. Photo: Czech Press Agency Photobank.

The resemblance of Stefan's ideas to the method of art history espoused by the influence of the Vienna School, namely by thinking of Dvořák and Birnbaum, is already in evidence in his early writings. Stefan was just twenty years old in 1921 when Dvořák died suddenly in Hrušovany near Znojmo. Still a student he published his first scholarly article that same year and in it he shone a light on the figure of Dvořák and the instrumental role he played in the transformation of

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development in the Prague district of Dejvice. Engel's step-brother was Vojtěch Birnbaum, whose lectures at the Institute for Art History at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University (Ústav pro dějiny umění Filozofické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy – FFUK) in the 1920s were also attended by Stefan, and it was there that Stefan acquired his knowledge of art-historical theory. Stefan began lecturing at the Czech Technical University in the 1930s and also habilitated there, and in 1935 he was appointed full professor, one of the youngest to receive this appointment in Prague. From the 1930s, after Antonín Matějček left to work for Charles University's Faculty of Arts (FFUK), Stefan also began lecturing on architecture at the Academy of Fine Art (Akademie výtvarných umění – AVU). In 1945, after the universities were reopened, Stefan worked at the ČVUT and AVU, but after 1950, for health reasons, he cut back on his teaching work. After the war he was also active in heritage conservation and wrote a number of essential texts on Czech baroque architecture. In 1953 he became a member of the academic board of the Institute of Art Theory and History that was part of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (Ústav teorie a dějin umění Československé akademie věd). See: *Slovník českých a slovenských výtvarných umělců 1950–2005 St–Šam* (A dictionary of Czech and Slovak artists 1950–2005 St–Šam), Ostrava: Chagall-výtvarné centrum, 2005, 61.

European art history.<sup>23</sup> It is therefore more than likely that Stefan had already read Dvořák's writings in the 1910s, both the Czech translations and the German originals.<sup>24</sup> Stefan described Dvořák as a student of Riegl and, on the one hand, as someone who had created his own unique interpretation of art, especially through his interest in the history of painting, and, on the other hand, as a significant figure in heritage conservation. Stefan summed up Dvořák's method with the assertion that:

Max Dvořák [remained] true to the traditions of the Vienna School of art history and both of its founders, Wickhoff and Riegl. He did not just set out data and external characteristics side by side; adopting the position of scientific synthesis, he was always able to capture the big picture, contemplate influences, and summon up the most comprehensive view of the age whose art he was studying.<sup>25</sup>

Five years later, in 1926, Stefan turned his attention once again to Viennese art history when he reviewed Hans Sedlmayr's book *Fischer von Erlach der Ältere* from 1925.<sup>26</sup> Stefan acknowledged the major importance of the work of Fischer von Erlach, and not just for Austrian but for Central European architecture of the

<sup>23</sup> Oldřich Stefan, 'Za prof. Maxem Dvořákem', *Cesta. Čtení zábavné a poučné. Týdeník pro literaturu, život a umění*, 3, 1921, 537. Among the modest number of historiographical writings devoted to Oldřich Stefan that exist this article is not mentioned and his academic work is always indicated as beginning with the text 'Problém prostoru v dějinném vývoji architektury' (The problem of space in the historical development of architecture), *Styl*, 3, 1922/1923, 77–84. And this is so even though in a list of his professional activities that Stefan wrote up himself in 1962 this article is presented first. This could on the one hand be because this text by Stefan was almost unknown and on the other hand because it was considered unimportant for Stefan's professional work as a theorist and historian of *architecture*. However, the fact that Stefan mentioned it first in his list of scholarly writings means that it is worth considering that this text may have been important for Stefan himself. As a theorist of *art* Stefan published the majority of his articles in publications that were not focused on architecture, and perhaps that is why they have been overlooked to now, as Stefan has thus far been the subject of interest only from architects and not from scholars specialising in historiography or the theory of art history. For a recent list of Stefan's writings that does not include his article about Dvořák, see: Slavíček, 'Slovník historiků umění, výtvarných kritiků a teoretiků v českých zemích, N-Ž', 1361. See also: Chadraba, 'Kapitoly II', 282. On the Stefan's list of scholarly writings in Stefan's papers, see: Pavlík, 'Oldřich Stefan', 33.

<sup>24</sup> Foreign literature was easier to obtain in Austria-Hungary than it was in the individual nation-states that emerged in its place after 1918, as evidenced by the art-history library in the German part of Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague (Karlo-Ferdinandova univerzita), which Rudolf Eitelberger von Edelberg described as one of the best equipped libraries in the entire empire at the time. See: Rudolf Eitelberger von Edelberg, *Die Kunstbewegung in Osterreich seit der Pariser Weltausstellung im Jahre 1867*, Wien: K. K. Unterrichts-Ministeriums, 1878, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Stefan, 'Za prof. Maxem Dvořákem', 537.

<sup>26</sup> Oldřich Stefan, 'Hans Sedlmayr: Fischer von Erlach der Ältere', *Památky archeologické*, 35, 1926, 303–304.

late seventeenth and early eighteenth as a whole. To this end he drew attention to an art-historical study by Albert Ilg from 1895 and to Dagobert Frey's and Hans Tietze's studies of baroque art, which shaped Austrian art history's interest in this period. Along with and even despite the very positive assessment he offered of Dvořák's method of art history in 1921, Stefan did not agree with the conclusions of Dvořák's Viennese students and was sharply critical of them: On the one hand he was not convinced that Fischer's work was so extraordinary compared to Italian architecture of the seventeenth century (Francesco Borromini and Guarino Guarini) and he also pointed out the still inconclusive opinion on the significance of other architects who worked with Fischer von Erlach in Central Europe (Lucas von Hildebrand and Domenico Martinelli); on the other hand, he questioned the very merits of Sedlmayr's interpretation of Fischer's work and his attempt to formulate a new approach to art history.

While Stefan praised Sedlmayr's analytical interpretation of Fischer's inspiration in historical styles of art, he considered the book's greatest weakness to be that the author was far too subjective in the parts where in the place of unverifiable historical facts the author should have used the art-historical method to formulate speculations:

The book [has] weak spots wherever historically proven facts were lacking and the author reached for his own arguments, for which he does not have an adequate sense of what is primary and what is secondary in architecture, so that the result frequently seems forced and not thorough enough.<sup>27</sup>

According to Stefan, by tying his interpretation of architectural form to the figure of the artist, Sedlmayr thus overestimated Fischer's significance within the development of art history in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In Stefan's view, despite Fischer's importance for Central Europe, he produced an eclectic body of work that did not form a style consistent with its time:

J. B. Fischer of Erlach [...] was never truly an architect of the highest order, nor was he ever a vehicle of the main stream of artistic development, [...]. A characteristic feature is the way he employs elements that he has borrowed superficially, from the forms of Borromini, while misunderstanding their value as an internal transformational necessity, through to the French features of spatial arrangement. [...] All of his work also always had an aspect of antiquarian irrelevance, as Fischer is a closed type, not very much affected by current artistic will.<sup>28</sup>

Stefan took a different approach to the work of the Austrian architect than Sedlmayr did, although they both grounded their explorations of art history in the same method initiated by Alois Riegl and Max Dvořák. We can see this in Stefan's

<sup>27</sup> Stefan, 'Hans Sedlmayr: Fischer von Erlach der Ältere', 304.

<sup>28</sup> Stefan, 'Hans Sedlmayr: Fischer von Erlach der Ältere', 304.

use of the 'artistic will' ('umělecké chtění' in Czech) as a determinant of artistic expression, which is a term that Stefan would have found in Riegl's writings ('Kunstwollen' in German). It is thus possible to observe in the middle of the 1920s the development of a 'different' method of art history influenced by the Vienna School, one that was critical of how the principles of this school were being transformed in Vienna itself:

Sedlmayr's mistake is that [...] that he on the whole is intensively searching for Fischer's significance wherever he can; everywhere it is not, however. [...] In those sections Sedlmayr's book loses a great deal, clearly because the author is not yet reached sufficient maturity and tries to bridge many gaps with unsubstantiated and unconvincing statements (questions about the artistic priority of works based on their form) or more expansive excursions into art history.<sup>29</sup>

The Vienna School of art history's influence in the Czech lands is therefore evident not only in the work of those figures who studied directly under professors in Vienna but also, in turn, in the thinking of their students; this is apparent in a text by Stefan from 1931, in which he reviewed Sedlmayr's next book, *Die Architektur Borrominis*, published the year before.<sup>30</sup> In the early 1930s, Stefan, by then a docent at the Czech Technical University in Prague, no longer found anything positive in Sedlmayr's approach and considered it too 'aggressive' in its efforts to devise a new method of art history, one that Stefan regarded as not inadequate to the task of answering the basic questions of art-historical research:

Sedlmayr's books have long been characterised by unconcealed methodological and didactic aspirations. Increasingly they are conceived as attacks on the practices of art-historical method to date and on authors often of great merit, and they frequently deviate into standpoints of curiously great self-confidence, unusual in science. This is not always matched by the qualities of the work that Sedlmayr has done, which is characterised by imbalance, exceeding complexity, and often even outright mistakes, which result from an excess of subjectivity.<sup>31</sup>

Stefan was able to articulate his criticism of Sedlmayr's approach to art history owing to his own methodological grounding, which he had primarily

<sup>29</sup> Stefan, 'Hans Sedlmayr: Fischer von Erlach der Ältere', 304. Stefan's criticism can also be read as making a deliberate distinction between the Czech and Austrian method of art history after 1918. Stefan's remark about Sedlmayr's lack of maturity might seem curious, as Stefan was four years younger than Sedlmayr; Stefan was likely assessing Sedlmayr as immature in the sense of his not yet having formulated an entirely clear method of art history.

<sup>30</sup> Oldřich Stefan, 'Hans Sedlmayr: Die Architektur Borrominis', *Památky archeologické*, 37, 1931, 85–86.

<sup>31</sup> Stefan, 'Hans Sedlmayr: Die Architektur Borrominis', 85.

acquired at Prague University in Vojtěch Birnbaum's art history seminar. Stefan dedicated a text to Birnbaum after the latter's premature death in 1934,<sup>32</sup> where, like in the text he wrote about Dvořák in 1921, he highlighted how Birnbaum's work straddled both research – focusing mainly on Italian mediaeval and Czech mediaeval architecture – and heritage conservation. The tone of Stefan's recollections of Birnbaum, however, is much more personal than the text about Dvořák: 'There are events in human life that the mind cannot comprehend. They had once seemed impossible, unimaginable. And then they happen. – One such event is the sudden death of Professor Vojtěch Birnbaum. [...] all that remains is a dull and occasionally distrustful pain.'<sup>33</sup> Stefan associated Birnbaum with the art-historical thought of the Vienna School and with the figures of Wickhoff, Riegl, and Dvořák especially, and he in particular highlighted Birnbaum's teaching work at Prague University's Institute for Art History, where, as Stefan noted, Birnbaum was 'an exponent of a hitherto unaccustomed direction' of art historical research. Of Birnbaum Stefan wrote:

Using a logical conceptual structure that he exercised a unique command of, he created a picture of the stages involved in the construction of a complex structure. The conclusions that he – a historian with philosophical training – was able to draw from studying the technical state of heritage structures always sparked wonder for their far-reaching and persuasive nature and impervious to objections.<sup>34</sup>

Stefan – probably following the example of Dvořák, Birnbaum, Riegl, and other Vienna art historians – also divided his professional work between art-historical research and heritage conservation: he specialised in the study of Czech baroque architecture from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and focused especially on the work of Jean Baptiste Mathey and Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer.<sup>35</sup> At the same time he also carried out field research and restoration work on the Karolinum complex of buildings in Prague (work he took over after Vojtěch Birnbaum's death) and after the Second World War he led the work of reconstructing the Convent of St Agnes and Emmaus Monastery in Prague.<sup>36</sup> In

<sup>32</sup> Oldřich Stefan, 'Za prof. Vojtěchem Birnbaumem', *Národní politika*, 3. IV. 1934. Stefan published more texts on Birnbaum in 1935, 1944, and 1948.

<sup>33</sup> Stefan, 'Za prof. Vojtěchem Birnbaumem'.

<sup>34</sup> Stefan, 'Za prof. Vojtěchem Birnbaumem'.

<sup>35</sup> See: Oldřich Stefan, 'Příspěvky k dějinám české barokní architektury. Skupina římského směru. G. B. Matthei' (Papers on the history of Czech baroque architecture. The Rome Group. G. B. Matthei), *Památky archeologické*, 35, 1926, 79–116; Oldřich Stefan, 'O slohové podstatě centrálních budov K. I. Dientzenhofera – příspěvky k dějinám české architektury' (On the nature of the style of K. I. Dientzenhofer's central buildings – papers on the history of Czech architecture), *Památky archeologické*, 35, 1927, 468–545; Oldřich Stefan, *Das Hochbarock in der Architektur Böhmens und Mährens: (Giovanni Santini Aichel)*, *Prager Rundschau*, 6, 1936, 127–137.

<sup>36</sup> See: Jiřina Hořejší, 'Oldřich Stefan', in: Chadřaba, 'Kapitoly II', 273–281.

another area of his professional work Stefan conducted studies that focused on the style and significance of artistic work that had to that time remained on the margins of scholarly interest. These studies are nevertheless crucial to understanding Stefan's art-historical method.

Stefan's most important studies on the significance of artistic work were published between 1938 and 1944, the period that began with the Munich Agreement, which was followed by the demise of the second Czechoslovak Republic in 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Czechoslovakia and established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and the reality of the Occupation that lasted until 1945. During this period Stefan faced the risk of being sent to fight on the front and possibly losing his life, or at the very least was at risk of being prevented from continuing to pursue the professional work that he valued more than anything. In 1939 Stefan wrote in his diary:

We don't know what's going to happen to individuals or entire families. Where will it end? If fathers survive, will they be allowed to remain in their jobs, will they be able to live in their own country or will they end their life somewhere abroad? None of this is known. Nor is it known whether any of us will be reduced to poverty and stripped of our opportunities to earn a living. Whether we will be forced in order to make a living to leave the profession that we have become attached to and is the source of all our significance.<sup>37</sup>

The strong sense of personal experience of the 1930s that permeates the pages of Stefan's journal is also reflected in his professional work during this period, which shifted from formal and stylistic analyses of art towards reflections of more existential and transcendental nature.<sup>38</sup> This is evident in the first study Stefan wrote during this period titled *Doba a my* (Us and Our Time):

This is a hard time for politicians and for everyone who is supposed to lead. All our questions today are preceded by a search. Individuals are searching, large groups are searching. What is being sought is a path. [...] A perplexed searching pursued in the midst of unrest, insecurity, and an alarming lack of critical attitude, an exaggerated atoning for things. An unhappy state of affairs overall, unless there is to be a turn for the better in the near future.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The personal papers of Oldřich Stefan, National Technical Museum in Prague, journal entry dated 10 March 1939. Stefan started keeping a journal on the day that his wife told him that they would be having a child – their daughter Jana. The tone of the journal's first entry is thus a combination of joy and concern. As Stefan noted: joy at the coming birth of their daughter, concern due to insecurity about providing for the family in the atmosphere of the approaching catastrophe of the Second World War.

<sup>38</sup> During the Second World War the focus on exploring theoretical questions connected with the creation of art may also have been due to the impossibility of studying the actual material of art history in situ.

<sup>39</sup> Oldřich Stefan, 'Doba a my' (Us and our time), *Život*, 36, 1938, 146–158, cit. 147.

According to Stefan, 'a turn for the better' would come about with the creation of a new artistic life-style ('životní sloh' in Czech; this Stefan's term does not include the style of living, but refers to the artistic creation as determining the all-embracing reality of life) by means of a productive disruption of the established principles of historical development. This disruption would occur as a result of individuals starting to actively – spiritually – intervene in the inexorable course of historical development, which would then slow the pace of historical decline in the late 1930s and restore the creative potential of (art-) historical development. According to Stefan, this process would be made possible by trying to grasp the historical situation of man (in the late 1930s) from the perspective of (art-) historical development: Stefan was calling for people to engage in activity of the spirit in the sense of trying to grasp the principles of historical development, which would according to Stefan lead to the creative disruption of those principles, as opposed to continued inertia and steady development. The result of this would be that the art of any given era or time would not be the outcome of the inexorable course of historical development, but it would be man who, in coming to understand this development, would be the creative source of (art-) historical reality. As Stefan wrote in 1938:

It appears [...] that it is time that European intellectual elites infer from this the only conclusion that in the intellectual sphere has not yet been discredited and become tainted with weakness: to turn attention to the study of the very nature of the age in which they live, to look past the barriers of ideology and, thus disencumbered of their influence, come to recognise what is the key signature of our time in a historical sense.<sup>40</sup>

In his research Stefan explored this element throughout the first half of the 1940s, as he was convinced that art historians in particular had the ability to fulfil this requirement in their work because they are naturally concerned with the causes and means that lead to the creation of a style of art, from which they try to maintain an objective distance from, but which at the same time they are able to examine through to the present day.<sup>41</sup> Because of the orientation of their work and their sensitivity to the historical changes that manifest themselves first in art and only later in the rest of life art historians were, in Stefan's view, best equipped also to examine the contemporary world and where it figures in larger historical development: 'Historians considering any era's capacity to produce a style cannot fail to see the threads that are stretched between art and the era in which art emerges.'<sup>42</sup> According to Stefan, the interconnectedness between the various spheres of life then leads to an integrated style as an outcome of (art-) historical development, and for this reason it was necessary to create 'a science of inquiry into

<sup>40</sup> Stefan, 'Doba a my', 147.

<sup>41</sup> Stefan, 'Doba a my', 147.

<sup>42</sup> Stefan, 'Doba a my', 147–148.

art-style' ('slohozpytná věda' in Czech, that means an inquiry into the essence of art-style, regardless its period), in order to obtain an integral understanding of a particular era in its entirety:

A style-producing force, which is to some degree or another inherent in every historical time, manifests itself as directly dependent on the level of interconnectedness of the underlying conditions, thus it is only at a certain level that it becomes possible to speak of an actual style as a notional structure organically piecing itself together.<sup>43</sup>

It is in this light that we can consider Stefan's elaboration of Dvořák's and Birnbaum's art-historical thought. In 'Barokní princip v dějinách architektury' ('The Baroque Principle in the History of Architecture') from 1924, Birnbaum reflected on the inexorable course of historical development, which, if allowed to fulfil itself, reaches the baroque phase, which is the climactic stage of artistic creativity in artistic style of a given historical period. In Birnbaum's thinking, style was thus contingent on history, and consequently not every style reached fruition, just as Stefan thought in 1938. Stefan also tied in with Dvořák and his view that historical changes can be best recognised in the form of a work of art, more so than in historical materials, because form is a direct expression of the transformation of the sensibilities and thinking of man in a given era, as Dvořák opined for example, in his text on the art of Pieter Bruegel the Elder published in 1921.<sup>44</sup>

In this respect, both Dvořák and Birnbaum, and indirectly Stefan as well, all marked a continuation of the method of art history practised by Alois Riegl, who understood art as the historically transforming 'will to art' (Kunstwollen).<sup>45</sup> Riegl explained his concept as the premise for the pursuit of art-historical inquiry outside the aesthetic categories of the nineteenth century, which in Riegl's view had the effect of constraining our ability to understand the art of the past as they apprehend the work of art not as part of the course of artistic development, but as the precondition for a subjective way of experiencing the (contemporary) world. In

<sup>43</sup> Stefan, 'Doba a my', 148.

<sup>44</sup> See: Tomáš Murár, "'Je-li umělecká forma vtělením duchovního vztahu ke světu.' Max Dvořák a umění Pietra Bruegela staršího' (Whether artistic form is the embodiment of the spiritual relationship to the world.' Max Dvořák and the Art of Pieter Bruegel the Elder), *Umění*, 66, 2018, 458–465.

<sup>45</sup> Riegl developed 'Kunstwollen' as a methodological tool for the study of art in a study from 1901 titled *Die Spätromische Kunstindustrie*. For other interpretations of 'Kunstwollen', see: Willibald Sauerländer, 'Alois Riegl und die Entstehung der autonomen Kunstgeschichte am Fin de Siècle', in: Roger Bauer (ed.), *Fin de Siècle. Zur Literatur und Kunst der Jahrhundertwende*, Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977, 125–139; Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 1992; Peter Noever, Artur Rosenauer and Georg Vasold (eds.), *Alois Riegl Revisited*, Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010. For interpretation of Kunstwollen as 'will to art' see also, Tomáš Murár, 'Kunstwollen: The Transfer and Precarious Survival of an Artistic-Theoretical Concept in Czech Art History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century', *Word and Sense. A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theory and Criticism in Czech Studies*, 24, 2015, 42–49.

order to distinguish between the art-historical and aesthetic understanding of artistic creation, he pointed to the form of a work of art as the basis of art-historical research, it being the outcome of historically determined theoretical and cultural thought.

Riegl built on the method of art history that was formulated in the middle of the nineteenth century by Rudolf Eitelberger von Edelberg, who examined the meaning of historical art as a medium for cultivating the taste of contemporary artists and thus who proposed the assumption of immanent artistic development, which gives rise to artistic forms that express a specific 'style' as representing the universal nature of a given historical era;<sup>46</sup> this assumption about the transhistorical significance that a (historical) artistic form holds for the present was incorporated by Riegl into his method of art history as a belief that the art historian's thinking is part of the process of understanding the historical 'Kunstwollen',<sup>47</sup> but that it is so in a way that is different from the researcher's aesthetic subjectivity interfering in an assessment of art: art historians should allow themselves to be guided by the problems of their own time, which are a part of immanent (art-) historical development and at the same time are a catalyser for experiencing the present day through an interpretation of the past. This notion of art history is evident also in the ideas of Max Dvořák, who in the painting work of El Greco, for example, identified the influence of the work of Michelangelo and Tintoretto and pointed also to the discrediting of a single Catholic truth in El Greco's time through Martin Luther's Reformation,<sup>48</sup> while at the same time, in coming to terms with a changing world in the aftermath of the First World War, he found in El Greco's painting a way out of the fractured reality of his time through the intellectual interiorisation of external reality and with an emphasis on the individual's subjective expression. Dvořák understood this art-historical aspect of El Greco's painting as close to the expressionist painting of the early twentieth century and to the work of Oskar Kokoschka in particular.<sup>49</sup>

The importance of understanding of historical art for experiencing the present that is evident in the Vienna School of art history and its successors – and thus for Birnbaum's interpretation of art history as the history-determining principle behind the creation of artistic forms that reflect deeper contemporaneous transformations of thought, as also Dvořák saw it, and also a conception of art history as a tool with which an interpretation of the past is obtained by acquiring an

<sup>46</sup> Edwin Lachnit, *Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte und die Kunst ihrer Zeit*, Wien – Köln – Weimar: Böhlau, 2005, 14–21.

<sup>47</sup> Alois Riegl, *Die spätromische Kunstindustrie*, Wien: Verlag der K. K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1901, 7: 'Unser modernes Kunstwollen verlangt eben gleichfalls eine Verbindung der im Bilde dargestellten Dinge untereinander, wobei der Schlagschatten eine sehr wichtige Rolle spielt.'

<sup>48</sup> Max Dvořák, Greco a manýrismus (Greco and mannerism), in: *Italské umění od renesance k baroku*, translation by Jan Krofta, Prague: Jan Laichter, 1946, 289–305, especially 298–299.

<sup>49</sup> Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Inventing "Mannerist Expressionism": Max Dvořák and the History of Art as History of the Spirit', in: Kimberly A. Smith (ed.), *The Expressionist Turn in Art History. A Critical Anthology*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, 192–193.

understanding of the present, which itself incorporated that interpretation of the past into its own artistic outlook, as Riegl and Dvořák believed, themselves tying in with Eitelberger – may have provided Stefan with the premise for the idea for the existence of a trans-historical revelation of an internalised reality through artistic form as part of the inexorable process of (art-) historical development. And it is in the light of such a hypothesis that may also grasp Stefan's belief in the creation of 'a science of inquiry into art-style' that would have the capacity both to grasp historical development and interpret or explain the role of that development in relation to the contemporary situation:

A science of style can thus guide us towards an understanding of what is essential to generate a genuine order that is embodied in artistic creation, whose principles and growth are so closely tied up with the concept of facts of style-producing process.<sup>50</sup>

Stefan formulated a theory articulating this method of thought in his book *Sloh a architektura* (Style and architecture) from 1940. This slender book was published by the Mánes Association of Fine Artists as the second volume in the series 'Abeceda umění' (The ABCs of Art) (the first volume published in this series was a work by novelist and aesthetics scholar Bohumil Markalous *Co je umění / What is Art*) edited by Jaromír Pečírka. The series was subtitled 'Sbírka populárních příruček o umění' (A Collection of Popular Handbooks on Art), and it was meant to be read by the general public and to introduce them to basic theoretical and practical concepts in the contemporary visual arts (the third volume in the series, titled *Olejové barvy umělecké a malířský materiál / Oil Colours for Art and Painting Materials*, was published in 1947 and written by painter Filip Milinovský).<sup>51</sup>

*Sloh a architektura* represents the highest point of Stefan's Vienna-influenced theorising of the late 1930s, and in the first half of the 1940s he built on an idea partially developed in the book in a number of texts published in the review *Život* (Life), which was published by another cultural-arts association, the oldest one in the Czech lands – Umělecká beseda (Artistic Forum). In 1943–1946 Stefan was a member of the editorial board of *Život* and he published his last text in this periodical in the 1946–1947 volume, shortly before it was shut down by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1948.

<sup>50</sup> Stefan, 'Doba a my', 152.

<sup>51</sup> A similar series that also sought to cultivate contemporary thinking was founded by another follower of the Vienna School in the Czech lands, a student of Vojtěch Birnbaum's named František Kovárna (1905–1952), who in 1939, in affiliation with philosopher and literary historian Václav Černý's (1905–1987) *Kritický měsíčník* (Criticism monthly), launched a series titled *Svazky* (Volumes). Among the contemporary intellectuals who published in this series was Růžena Vacková in 1939 with her text *Sokrates, vychovatel národa* (Socrates, the nation's tutor).

**Stefan's amplification of the Vienna School: the science of style**

In *Sloh a architektura* Stefan introduced his concept of a 'science of style'; Růžena Vacková was interested in a similar issue but was only able to develop her thoughts after she was released from prison in 1967, so hers was more of a later intellectual reconstruction of, mainly, Birnbaum's teachings than it was an elaboration of the Vienna School's method at a time when the question of style was still current, which was mostly up until the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, Stefan's book came out as a natural part of the concurrent transformation of the method of art history that was practised in Central Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, and it can therefore be regarded as an amplification of methodological thinking inspired by the Vienna School's art history represented in the Czech lands by Dvořák and in particular Birnbaum. With this book, however, Stefan was also moving away from their method of art-historical research, specifically in the lack of interest given to interpreting individual works of art, as Stefan conceived the book as a handbook with which to learn about style as an autonomous subject and as expressed through art's forms and especially through architecture.<sup>53</sup>

Following a path different from Birnbaum's method of work, Stefan began by formulating a theory of style that he could provide evidence for the basis of various manifestations of artistic expression, which he then classed under various 'style-producing principles', whereby, unlike Dvořák, he did not study individual works of art and look for more general principles of artistic creation in them, but rather was convinced that these principles exist as natural to human character connected to him while creating art, therefore without a need to identify them first of all in historical works of art. Stefan therefore did not concern himself with the 'formal' characteristic of historical architecture but instead studied their 'style-generating' characteristics as expressed via a more generally defined creative principle:

It must be noted from the outset that, contrary to what has long and persistently been believed, the science of forms in itself is not a science of style.[...] We feel and know that the style-producing capacity ['slohovost'] in Czech original, note by TM] of a work is incomparably more complicated

<sup>52</sup> See: Růžena Vacková, *Věda o slohu I* (The science of style I), Prague: Aula, 1993.

<sup>53</sup> Stefan realised that the study of style is a concern that extends beyond architecture and is therefore always part of the greater whole of artistic creation; Oldřich Stefan, *Sloh a architektura* (Style and architecture), Prague: S. V. Ú. Mánes, 1940, 11:

It is then especially clear that in the moment we expressed curiosity about the basic causes of individual forms and about the basic relations between them, we in that same moment touched on something that does not relate just to architecture (or, analogically, to painting, music, poetry, etc.), but also to style in a general sense, its causes, laws, and expressive possibilities. It is necessary that we be aware of this even if we speak only of architecture. It will always be only a part of a greater and more comprehensive theme.

and that the superficial nature of a style's forms does not yet make it a style and is not yet a style in and of itself.<sup>54</sup>

For Stefan architectural forms and the knowledge of such forms were part of the more general science of style, wherein art-historical descriptions of 'forms' 'only capture some of the finished outcomes of the activity that goes on within a style, ignoring a large part of its variability and especially everything that led up to the architectural form's creation.'<sup>55</sup>

According to Stefan, style thus can only arise out of the nature of the time it originates in and it cannot be artificially created by imitating the artistic forms of the past, which is what the architecture of the second half of the nineteenth century attempted to do and what, in Stefan's view, could also be frequently encountered during the first half of the twentieth century:

The shell of a thing that results from this might in the best case remind us of a genuine work of art that we have already seen before. A formation of this kind is cold, having been brought about by superficial labour and without adequate engagement. It lacks a deeper justification. It does not possess the surety of a complete creative process. It is missing what we could allusively call the "spirit of a style" to highlight the close and connective relationship a created work has to the actual substance of the time in which the work originated.<sup>56</sup>

In this case, style reaches a 'dead point' in its development, where it starts to reignite its style-producing capacity by means of 'inorganic' elements – historical and exotic elements in particular: 'If artists resort to historical features, if they revisit historical forms, that doesn't mean they are adopting the old style in its entirety. They are only transferring old elements to new tasks.'<sup>57</sup>

Stefan adopted this assumption from Birnbaum's idea about the evolution of style. In 1924 Birnbaum published *Románská renesance koncem středověku* (The Romanesque Renaissance at the End of the Middle Ages),<sup>58</sup> in which he looked at the use of historical and exotic elements in architecture as a way of getting past the exhaustion of a style's creative potential, in conformity with the 'baroque principle', that is, as attempts to reignite the style-generating process. However, this proceeds through formal principles, without the possibility of a complete understanding of style, and therefore this represented a resource of a style, and not style itself, which is also what Stefan believed sixteen years later.

Nevertheless, Stefan discovered productive unions of old forms with a new style, such as Czech baroque architecture, where a fully baroque style and spatial formation is applied to gothic forms, or Italian renaissance architecture, referencing

<sup>54</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 7.

<sup>55</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 7.

<sup>56</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 10.

<sup>57</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 12.

<sup>58</sup> Vojtěch Birnbaum, *Románská renesance koncem středověku*, Prague: Jan Štenc, 1924.

classical forms but creating the essence of a structure in manner entirely consistent with fifteenth century ideas about style:

In both of these examples the historicising work of the architects is something temporary (though lavish), while at the same time, before the eyes of contemporaries, in a slow and unseen process it fulfils its own contemporaneous stylistic programme. A gothicised baroque exists alongside fully-fledged baroque, a classicised renaissance is just one branch next to the complete and autonomous model of the renaissance.<sup>59</sup>

Stefan may have developed the idea about one form having a different substance in different styles from Dvořák's later art-historical thought. In 1918 Dvořák published *Idealismus und Naturalismus in der gotischen Skulptur und Malerei*,<sup>60</sup> a study in which he reflected on the transformation of renaissance painting and sculpture through mediaeval spiritualism, which was the reason why, despite drawing inspiration from the sculpture of antiquity, renaissance artists created their work in an altogether distinct intellectual and spiritual frame, which was similar to Stefan's reflections relating to Italian renaissance architecture. Stefan drew attention to the influence contemporaneous thought has on the style-producing process as follows:

During the age of the gothicised baroque, a wave of romanticism swept through Europe and among its most central props were the findings of contemporary archaeology [...] This archaeology led to historicism and to exoticism. – In Italy the age of the renaissance was marked by an attempt to understand the aesthetic laws in every branch of artistic work. Aesthetic speculation had ample opportunity to apply its well-known model of classical thinkers and classical art to stylistically comprehensible works of art.<sup>61</sup>

Influenced by Birnbaum and Dvořák, Stefan regarded style as a given period's 'certainty of expression', where, on the one hand, a past style is as unfamiliar in a more recent era as it expresses different intellectual concepts, while at the same time, however, the current style is determined by the same – unchanging – principles of style in historical development:

If someone were to ask us what attribute all the styles of the great historical eras have in common, though at first glance they seem to differ much from each other, our answer would be patterns. ['zákonitosti' in Czech original,

<sup>59</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 13.

<sup>60</sup> Max Dvořák, *Idealismus und Naturalismus in der gotischen Skulptur und Malerei*, München: R. Oldenbourg, 1918.

<sup>61</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 13–14.

note by TM]. Indeed, none of these styles could be described as random or arbitrary.<sup>62</sup>

For this reason, Stefan thought to link the style-producing process of the present day to the styles of the past, as understanding the past was supposed to shape the possibilities of creative work in the present day. Stefan's interpretation of artistic style can be understood in this context as determined by the approach taken to understanding reality at the time, namely through science: 'Science gives direction to a period's view of style. Knowledge acquired by scientific means can directly impact the style-producing developments directly and can hybridise the organic growth of a primary style.'<sup>63</sup>

Stefan traced this correlation between creative work and knowledge up to his own time: 'And today? Has the recognised close relationship between scientific knowledge and the conception of style grown any weaker? By no means!'<sup>64</sup> He did note, nevertheless, that the state of this mutual relationship had changed, and this occurred as a result of the rapid development of specialised scientific methods that influence cultural life and thereby also the style-producing potential of a given era. Stefan argued that in the twentieth century this potential was manifested on the one hand through the multi-layered nature of cultural forms of expression and on the other hand through a nuanced and prudent evaluation of the past, because, according to Stefan, the present in the first half of the twentieth century had ceased trying to achieve a style by means of the formal use of the past, and even in its understanding of the past through the multiplicity of the present it had stuck to generalising attempts to create a cohesive style. This represented for Stefan grounds for creating a science of style that would encompass the historical perspective of the advanced twentieth century in relation to the past and to its own present and would thereby restore the style-producing process:

We want to be fair towards all the inner processes that have occurred up to the present day in human society; the expression of those processes, which are deposited in a style, becomes the record of the individual stages of humanity's historical development. [...] Once again science governs the relationship of a time to questions of style.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, in order to restore the style-producing process in the early 1940s, Stefan had to formulate style not as a fixed set of forms but rather as a given period's creative pattern:

Nowadays, as we give more consideration to living man and his development than to schematics and norms, we would say: style is evidently

<sup>62</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 18.

<sup>63</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 16.

<sup>64</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 16.

<sup>65</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 17.

the outcome of man's inclination towards order and system. It is the outcome of his striving for patterns, which has been innate to him since time can remember, and which endures even when the conditions of life and work are changing around him.<sup>66</sup>

Stefan thus considered the pattern of artistic creation to be encoded within every individual and that it manifested itself according to the historical conditions of particular time: the principles of artistic creation did not change, but the ways in which they were expressed in art form did.

For Stefan the form of a work of art was thus a kind of 'ordained' or established process of human subjectivity, an act of free expression that was at the same time firmly rooted in, and thereby also (un-freely) determined by, the historical process:

There has always been less freedom and liberty to human action than is generally assumed. Nothing is less usual in history than absolute freedom. [...] Instead of liberty we find on the contrary the utter absence of freedom. The artist imposes it on himself. [...] For what else is symmetry or rhythm, what else is the relationship of separate parts to each other or to the whole? [...] All of this is actually a restriction of freedom! [...] It is thus that the pattern of a work of art emerges and grows. This pattern is the enemy of freedom, but it can in and of itself be an indissoluble force. It is not outward, it is inward.<sup>67</sup>

Stefan in this way questioned the idea that there is absolute freedom to artistic work, as he was convinced of the human need to create systems of knowledge and creation: 'Man has throughout the ages been imbued with an irrepressible longing to establish in pattern all his work and to establish in pattern all his knowledge as well. [...] It is by this path that man seeks and creates a certainty for himself.'<sup>68</sup>

This sense of 'certainty' emerged as a subjective construct, but it was determined by the stylistic patterns of the given time, which are given expression in artistic form. Stefan consequently regarded the stylistic patterns of a time to be a supra-individual attribute of each person but also its inner subjectivity, and it was only when the patterns of style and the potential that exists within humans came together that it became possible to produce a new style: the precondition thus being that knowledge of reality connects with the active creation of reality. Stefan based his science of style on this principle of the creative abilities of the artist intersecting in a given period of time with the human capacity for knowledge:

Not only form and the shapes freely decided on but also the relationship of these forms must be borne in mind as a relationship that is neither random

<sup>66</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 19.

<sup>67</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 19–20.

<sup>68</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 19.

nor pre-agreed but is rather the outcome of a compositional patterns that, emerging out of the deep reaches of creative work is an inner necessity for both the artist and the work of art.<sup>69</sup>

Stefan was thereby emphasising the relationship between knowledge and the creation of art within the context of the production of a style of a given period, or in other words, the relationship between science and art. According to Stefan, knowledge of the art of the past had an influence on work created in the present, so that, in the case of a merely scientific description of historical art forms, contemporary work was logically aimed more towards creating art centred around forms and not around a style. Similarly, knowledge of contemporary art had an influence on research into historical art, and with this idea the Vienna School's method and its requirement that historical art be understood through the present time of the art historian was thus amplified in Stefan's science of style. Stefan tied in with this methodological principle of the Vienna School of art history where the question of the time or the era in which any research is conducted is key and that time or era must be reflected on as the continuation of (art-) historical development.

While stressing the significance of understanding the present over research on historical art, Stefan transformed (Vienna's) scientifically oriented art history – still striving, that is, to achieve objectivity – into a philosophically centred 'science of style', which was not meant to be a method for research on historical art but, on the basis of knowledge of (art-) historical development was supposed to generate an opportunity to acquire knowledge and subsequently also then to actively create the reality of the present day. Within the frame of the science of style, research on historical works of art was therefore a means to obtaining knowledge about past style-producing principles of (art-) historical development, which influence also the present: the science of style was thus centrally concerned with a work of art's form as part of the creative style-producing process in its patterns-governed developmental changes and at the same time as an individual piece of work expressive of the given time, and acquiring new significance by being learned about in the present day. In this way, the method of the Vienna School of art history provided Stefan with an opportunity to explore and understand the causes of the decline of the European world in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Stefan's emphasis on the significance of (historical) works of art for (contemporary) viewers can be observed in his reference to the 'active forces of a work of art' that exist on the basis of the stylistic patterns of artistic creation: 'This principle [...] works to connect and organise the forces that a work of art exudes in the eyes of the one observing it, i.e. the active forces of a work of art.'<sup>70</sup> According to Stefan, a work of art contains 'active forces' as part of their internal pattern, which forms when the supra-individual patterns of style is combined with the internal creative principle of the artist. The observer perceives the 'active forces' of a work as the work's unity of expression, which exists outside and beyond the time and space

<sup>69</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 20.

<sup>70</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 20.

in which it originated. Nevertheless, by studying the form of a work of art it is possible to discover the patterns of the style in which the work originated, which is essentially embodied in the work's form:

An artist constructs a work, the foundation of which is the binding relationship between these internal forces. The artist himself summons them to life in his creative process. The observer then perceives them. [...] The artist determined their involvement during his creative work; he built the relationship between them and inscribed them with their intended effect. This is how the artist has incorporated the active forces into the work. The work then contains them in the present, it is alive with them in every moment.<sup>71</sup>

Stefan was consequently convinced that works in which no inner connection with the supra-individual patterns of style occurs during the process of artistic creation are not artistic works. For Stefan, only a true style can produce 'artistic' works, because in them we can recognise both the stylistic pattern of the creative work and its individual expression in form:

If we are considering 'style' in its true sense, we must have in mind not so much the internal pattern of a single work, but rather the shared internal pattern of many works that have emerged independently of each other but out of similar conditions.<sup>72</sup>

Stefan can thus be viewed as transforming the Vienna method, initiated by Alois Riegl and elaborated mainly by Max Dvořák, into an epistemological discipline with the premise that art-historical development exists on the basis of pattern-governed principles that can be identified in the form of a work of art, and thus in the sense in which Vojtěch Birnbaum thought about art history.

In the conclusion of his book Stefan drew attention to the difference between the style of everyday life determined by the civilisational needs of utilitarian or practical construction work and style as a 'creative activity' or in other words 'ideomorphous style'.<sup>73</sup> Style in this latter sense – the criteria for identifying which he laid out in his book – is not tied to the ordinary needs of humans or civilisation; rather its principles are 'concealed within the inner formation of man',<sup>74</sup> in which case whether it will be manifest or express itself cannot be taken for granted, unlike everyday style, which emerges spontaneously on the basis of ordinary reality:

If the mode of everyday life and utilitarian production is generated and guided chiefly by practical needs, this in no respect means that there does

<sup>71</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 20.

<sup>72</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 22.

<sup>73</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 43.

<sup>74</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 44.

not also exist a world of needs that are purely spiritual, where the interests of organising reason intersect with emotional life, which is rather consistent with the complex structure of man.<sup>75</sup>

These spiritual needs, if they are strong enough, can, Stefan observes (and here he alludes again to Birnbaum's theory of the 'baroque principle'), then overcome matter, the central feature of 'everyday style', and can imprint the reality of the present with a spiritual meaning, wherein creative activity becomes 'an active medium of created life'.<sup>76</sup> This constant process of overcoming matter with ideas (in this Stefan is alluding to Dvořák's art-historical thought after 1914) can, according to Stefan, be observed 'in the history of man, and ... we will never be able to consider it separately from the history of art'.<sup>77</sup>

According to Stefan, ideomorphous style is closely tied to culture and the changes it goes through, and based on knowledge of style's patterns it is therefore possible to discover the causes and effects of the decline of the culture of a given period:

Historians can glean directly from it basic facts to understand past cultures. If the style of any age is made the subject of an analysis, this will reveal how that age in its own way experienced and understood that need for that great and internal patterns, what resources and what compositional elements it employed to arrive at it, and in this what direction the collective work and efforts of its individuals were aimed at.<sup>78</sup>

Stefan argued that it was therefore necessary to pursue a science of style, because it – as a broader version of the art-historical method of the Vienna School of art history – makes it possible to embrace and discover the reality of the both the past and the advanced twentieth century, which it does through a grasp of the patterns of the style-producing process. In the conclusion of his book Stefan wrote: 'Is style not then a first-order indicator of how man has lived and spiritually evolved? The answer to this question can only be yes.'<sup>79</sup>

### **Stefan's theory of art history in the first half of the 1940s**

In 1942 Stefan presented a detailed explanation of his understanding of style in an article titled *Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějepytu umění* (Methodological Notes on Research in Art History Today),<sup>80</sup> in which he reflected on art history as an epistemological problem:

<sup>75</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 44.

<sup>76</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 44.

<sup>77</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 44.

<sup>78</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 45.

<sup>79</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 48.

<sup>80</sup> Oldřich Stefan, *Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějepytu umění* (Methodological notes on research in art history today), *Život*, 17, 1942, 142–159.

The twentieth century adopted from the nineteenth century several basic and as yet not entirely clarified, and consequently not fully answered, questions relating to the methodology of art-historical work. [...] The issue of art-historical knowledge and its reliability for making scientific conclusions (thus the question of objectivity) has been felt and continues to be felt as one of the main and one of the basic problems of all scholarly work.<sup>81</sup>

Stefan questioned not only the idea that artistic creation enjoys absolute freedom – in *Sloh a architektura* – but also the possibility that absolute objectivity can be achieved in the process of acquiring an understanding of artistic work:

Converting subjective resourceful methods into objective, “correct”, generally applicable and also generally intelligible ones is an endeavour that continues to be apparent in art-historical research to the present day. Basically, it is the organising intellect's attempt to deal with the irrational in art, an endeavour guided by a longing for an exact method that can be applied with the kind of success that is observed in the fields of the natural sciences.<sup>82</sup>

As examples of these efforts in Czech circumstances Stefan cites Vojtěch Birnbaum's theory of 'the objectively observable evolutionary thread' and Vincenc Kramář's theory of 'relative objectivity',<sup>83</sup> thus adhering still to the tradition of the Vienna School of art history, the foundation by which Birnbaum's and Kramář's theories of art history are similar to the objectified creative process of art: 'Both authors are trying to find out how a subjectively based individual can best grasp the objective reality of artistic facts.'<sup>84</sup> Stefan disrupted this objectified conception of (the history of) art by recognising twentieth-century humans' insertion of themselves into (art-) historical development: as Stefan saw it, in the twentieth century one in the midst of modern artistic currents could no longer construe a world that is subjectively qualified and yet still objectively driven, when this objectivity was unable of fully grasping the newly forming reality. Stefan presented Max Dvořák as the figure who foremost grasped this disconnection and incorporated it into his approach to the scientific study of art. Stefan wrote:

For the past several decades art historians have been drawn to and presented with many connections between science and life, between history and the vibrant present. The possibility of various reciprocal links is being revealed. (This is also the case of the young Max Dvořák, [who was] passionate about

<sup>81</sup> Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějepytu umění', 142, 147.

<sup>82</sup> Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějepytu umění', 147.

<sup>83</sup> Vincenc Kramář, *O objektivitě* (On objectivity), Brno: František Venera, 1937.

<sup>84</sup> Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějepytu umění', 147.

the fascinating richness of art and about its history, and in this relationship sought the route to an independent and energetic scientific path).<sup>85</sup>

Stefan also pointed out that Wickhoff and Riegl had in many of their studies already deviated from the frame of 'objectively' produced art history.<sup>86</sup> They did so by pursuing their interest in the theoretical questions of art, which historical criticism cannot itself provide answers to, and can only be answered by formulating 'basic art-historical concepts and categories':

The effort to obtain this kind of foundation – for an interpretation of what goes on in art history – is what led researchers in art history to seemingly go beyond the theoretically defined boundaries of art-historical research at that time. It is an attempt at systematicity, knowledge of which art history needs if it is to fulfil its task without getting stuck at just some referential or pragmatic stage and if it is to accommodate its new task as a genetic science.<sup>87</sup>

Stefan noted the absence of art historians 'deviating' from standard practice and turning to a theory of art in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, which he argued resulted in a disconnection between research on and the creation of (contemporary) art. This, he claimed, had produced a historical divide, where art work lost the possibility to be correctly understood, because this potential understanding to the

<sup>85</sup> Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějzpytu umění', 147. According to Stefan, this disconnection, addressed by Dvořák as examining the 'history of the spirit' by examining the history of art, also constrained the ability to form knowledge about (historical) art; in Stefan's view, art history should be creating its own method, independent of the natural sciences, as the Vienna School sought to do, Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějzpytu umění', 147–148:

The so-called "Vienna School" is a marked example of this way of creating a framework for a programme of work. Its significance resides not just in its construction of a method based on the principles of logic and systematicity, but also in how it unites directions of work that had hitherto been distinct – formal analysis and document-based history – so that they can usefully complement each other and form a single method, genetically focused, with the capacity to probe more deeply for a broader scope, and with a heightened, amplified objectivity. F. Wickhoff and A. Riegl after him combine the teachings of G. Morelli (building on formal analysis) with critical methods, thereby brings glory to the then Austrian institute of history famous in Vienna and achieving with their school unusually objective results by means of this very combination of two critical perspectives: one applied in the study of written sources, the other used in the analysis of materials sources, i.e. works of art. This leads to an internal order that is beneficial to science and possibilities that had previously been dispersed are brought together into a single and in a particular way coordinated system.

<sup>86</sup> Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějzpytu umění', 147–148.

<sup>87</sup> Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějzpytu umění', 148.

work of art developed its concepts separately from art, even though that is where the style-producing capacity of a period was supposed to make itself apparent first; for Stefan (and for the twentieth century) this divide between the work of creating art on the one hand and knowledge about art on the other was the source of the collapse of (art-) historical development, leaving ideas and artistic creation in chaos:

The interest in art here becomes an interest in the science of art history and requires of the latter a clear and definite say and precision. Art-historical research thus finds itself under existential pressure and is internally fuelled by a need that is stronger and more urgent than the pressure that emerges from just science alone. [...] a fundamental change is occurring in the very function of art-historical science [...]<sup>88</sup>

This was not (yet) possible because (Czech) art history, in Stefan's view, lacked the systematic – i.e. theoretical – foundations necessary to create a science of art outside the (Vienna) tradition (prevalent) at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to Stefan, it was therefore essential that, after the multiple specialised scientific approaches that had existed in the late nineteenth century merged within the Vienna School's method of art history, the boundaries between these various approaches be broken down, which could be done by combining a genetic-critical method of art history with more comprehensive knowledge of reality: 'The once revolutionary act of the Vienna School, uniting hitherto isolated (and thus specialised) directions of work into a single stream of work, constituted just such an act of pushing back boundaries.'<sup>89</sup>

Stefan followed up on these methodological reflections from 1942 one year later in a study titled *Architektura, theorie a život* (Architecture, Theory and Life).<sup>90</sup> He opened the study by criticising the interwar idea of continuous technological progress dependent on previous (art-) historical development. According to Stefan's theory, scientific knowledge and artistic creation had lost their connection to the style-producing process that had governed the great eras of the past and this loss had occurred because in the midst of this reality man

was not aware [...] of having created an overly simplistic picture of his historical assignment and with his particular opinion scheme having excessively detached himself from the age-old multiplicity of relations that exist between the external world that surrounds him and the no less complicated world that resides within himself. His thought was mechanical and narrow in nature. He built his foundations industriously but on too small a scale.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějepytu umění', 148.

<sup>89</sup> Stefan, 'Metodologické poznámky k dnešnímu dějepytu umění', 151.

<sup>90</sup> Oldřich Stefan, *Architektura, theorie a život* (Architecture, theory and life), *Život*, 18, 1943, 50–58.

<sup>91</sup> Stefan, 'Architektura, theorie a život', 51.

One of the main factors negatively affecting contemporary architecture, in Stefan's view, was the disparate relationship between the creation and knowledge of art, that is, between the basic starting points within any science of style. Stefan was convinced that since the 1920s architects had become systematically aware of architecture's connection to its uses in life and deliberately pursued this side of architecture, which according to Stefan was what gave new buildings their functionalist nature but at the same dampened the 'spiritual' side of architecture, that is it diminished architecture as 'art': 'We now have before us the architect as builder, the architect as the organisers of technological and operational concerns, the architect as economist, the architect as social reformer.'<sup>92</sup> According to Stefan, architecture's conscious consideration to such necessities of life had the effect of reducing its artistic, and thus 'spiritual' dimension, which, in his view, was something that up until the middle of the nineteenth century had always been expressed in architecture by a balancing of the relationship between the external and the internal needs of artistic creation. As he noted in *Sloh a architektura*, in reference to the third and most advanced method of architectural creation (after the utilitarian and formal methods):

The architect who has recognised and understood the multiple and powerful effects matter can have on man if it is employed with understanding will proceed to shaping and organising it while deploying his rational thought and his capacity to weigh emotions in complementary ways. [...] The content of a structure is thereby enriched. The psychological component of artistic creation is allowed to fully voice itself. [...] On this level the architect has approached the architecture as art.<sup>93</sup>

This premise formed the basis for the reflections that in 1942 Stefan devoted to contemporary architecture, which he felt lacked the 'psychological component' that enables architectural work to have a spiritual dimension:

Amidst the precipitous theoretical planning devoted to a new, dreamt-of world, one component has surprisingly been lost, a component so natural, so taken for granted in the various forms it has assumed in the architecture of all times and places and thus inseparable from everything that is called architecture, that it seems almost impossible to understand it not being taken into consideration or it being explicitly excluded from consideration in an age that has at its disposal so many resources and measures with which to acquire knowledge of basic realities and relations.<sup>94</sup>

After the First World War architecture had, according to Stefan, lost its holistic nature, as it only served the individual fragmentary needs of external,

<sup>92</sup> Stefan, 'Architektura, theorie a život', 52.

<sup>93</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 23–24.

<sup>94</sup> Stefan, 'Architektura, theorie a život', 51.

everyday life. This kind of architecture was responding to the transformation of civilisation caused by the First World War, which, in Stefan's view, was understandable, but by limiting itself to the external concerns of the new reality it ended up losing one component of its own style-producing process, that component being the particular way in which a work elaborates on the supra-individual stylistic patterns of its time, just as Stefan thought in his book on the meaning of ideomorphous style from 1940. In this context the constraints on the style-producing process were primarily the result of the declared objectives of individual architectural movements, which, under the influence of rapidly changing theories, were unable to produce the kind of psychological architectural creations that arise when the stylistic patterns of a time are combined with a contemporary understanding of the life of the artist; consequently, their work was unable to be a part of the style-producing process, as it was created artificially, outside the supra-individual patterns of style, and thereby also outside the process by which these patterns are shaped by the artist:

The subjective psychological aspect remained hidden altogether along with everything that it gives rise to. If it suddenly burst through as a question in architectural practice, there was a theory at hand to get past it [...] How erroneous! The role of architecture is not to serve theory but life.<sup>95</sup>

Stefan's notion that the artist's absolute experience of contemporary reality was required if architecture was to be complete and thereby actually 'artistic' could be seen as an allusion to the 'Lebensphilosophie' of Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Simmel, and Henri Bergson around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; echoes of their philosophy can be found in the work of art historians in circles around the Vienna School and most notably in the ideas of Alois Riegl,<sup>96</sup> Max Dvořák,<sup>97</sup> and Vojtěch Birnbaum.<sup>98</sup> Their interpretations of the process of artistic creation – like Stefan's notion the creation of architectural work must be borne out of a total experience of reality – contain a clear emphasis on moving beyond the established concepts that had been set out as part of the normative aesthetics of the nineteenth century, and on the need to find a new centrepiece for man in the first half of the twentieth century, and it was the inner experiencing of supra-individual principles of reality, in most cases interpretable through works of art, that became that centrepiece. This way of thinking at the same time made it possible for the nascent Vienna School of art history to identify subjectivity as the central premise for art-historical research, and Stefan thought the same way on the matter in the first

<sup>95</sup> Stefan, 'Architektura, theorie a život', 52.

<sup>96</sup> See: Diana Reynolds Cordelione, *Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875–1905. An Institutional Biography*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.

<sup>97</sup> See: Matthew Rampley, 'Max Dvořák: art history and the crisis of modernity', *Art History*, 2, 2003, 214–237; Tomáš Murár, 'A work of art is an object that necessitates contemplation. Latency of visual studies within the Vienna School of Art History?', *Ikonotheke*, 29, 2019 (forthcoming).

<sup>98</sup> See: Murár, 'Vojtěch Birnbaum's Concept and Method of Art History', 108–116.

half of the 1940s: there needs to be mutual harmony between the creation of art and the pursuit of knowledge about art and only if this condition is met can art be in harmony with the reality of life and, through the patterns of art, express this in artistic form.

Stefan's familiarity with Nietzsche's reasoning is evident in a quote that Stefan cited at the end of another text he wrote in 1943 titled 'Na přechodu' (On Transition), which deals with the transformation of the advanced twentieth century: 'On the main matter I find artists to be more correct than all philosophers so far: they have not lost sight of the great track that life follows, they have loved the things "of this world" – they have loved life.'<sup>99</sup> In the same spirit of Nietzsche's thinking, in the first half of the 1940s Stefan himself asked: 'Is man himself – on whose basis life and all of its necessities is ultimately formed – not a complex union of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual in one whole that responds to realities, both external and internal, albeit to an uneven degree and even though to a different extent in each individual case?'<sup>100</sup>

Stefan expounded on the relationship between external and internal life and its connection to art in another study from 1943 titled *Umění a zevní svět* (Art and the Exterior World): 'The exterior world and the interior world! This old and estimable philosophical antinomy has not yet lost its validity even today. It is still vital and can be applied to the present time with its acutely felt shortcomings and quests.'<sup>101</sup> By shortcomings Stefan meant the contemporaneous loss of an inexorable style-producing process, which was supposed to be sought through contemporary artistic work, while the principles of the process were supposed to be discovered through research on historical works of art. According to Stefan, however, this process had been rendered almost impossible by the predominance of rationalism over the subjective pursuit of knowledge about art and the subjective creation of art, and this was unusual in history because it is unnatural to the style-producing process of every era:

Life in the second half of the nineteenth century and in all of the twentieth century so far is split. It is shaped by objects of the external world to such a prevailing degree that subjective elements are left to vegetate within man rather than living their own rightful life. [...] The so-called rhythm of life in the twentieth century is founded on the external world as it occurs in space and time. What is beyond that is more than disorganised. Uncontrolled. All that is volatile has its foundation here.<sup>102</sup>

According to Stefan, the reason for this was the failure to recognise the essential difference between civilisation and culture (and thus between everyday and ideomorphic style), where civilisation represented the rational component of

<sup>99</sup> Oldřich Stefan, 'Na přechodu' (On transition), *Život*, 18, 1943, 101–103, cit. 103.

<sup>100</sup> Stefan, 'Architektura, theorie a život', 57.

<sup>101</sup> Oldřich Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět' (Art and the exterior world), *Život*, 19, 1943, 21–27, cit. 21.

<sup>102</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 21.

everyday life, while culture needed 'spiritual life', 'an irrational co-factor', or 'metaphysical tendencies' for its own development. In other words: 'It requires subjective forces and abilities to be opened up in order for them to fertilise what was going on.'<sup>103</sup> The 'exterior world', which was determined by discoveries in the natural sciences and controlling knowledge and thereby also artistic creation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was problematic, in Stefan's view, because it regarded the existence of reality as something empirically observable by man and man as just a receptive object and in no way a creative subject. Conversely, 'life needs' – the spiritual aspects of internal life, as Stefan thought of them, much like the philosophers around the turn of the century – suffered under the positivist constructs of the twentieth century, which gave rise to a tension between the knowledge and creation of art: '

Is man still alive? Insecurity, as long as an area other than the physical world is involved, is, in our view, the basic source of the protracted crisis in art, as art in all its essence is alien to the ruling structure of life. [...] A man of the masses, unaccustomed to art, in the grim depths of his conception of life, replaces it with kitsch, whether in literature, music, pictures, or film, which is able for a while to satiate the hunger that is felt due to the suppressed 'inner world'. This is the state Europe was in between the two wars and persists in still.<sup>104</sup>

*Umění a zevní svět* thus represents a continuation of Stefan's criticism of the lack of a connection to (art-) historical development, a connection that is supposed to be built by forging a link between the pursuit of knowledge about and the creation of (artistic) reality in order to develop an ideomorphous style. Stefan claimed that the twentieth century was dominated by the objective and thus generally describable side of human reality, and any elements that were at odds with the concepts associated with this side of reality were deliberately excluded from the scope of both scientific and artistic interest. Works of art that focused on other, internal aspects of the contemporary experience of reality were regarded as examples of the isolated expression of individuals, and not as part of what underpins the basic creative principle of contemporary life, which is how, according to Stefan, they were viewed in the past: 'Life and art are evidently incompatible today. [...] The divide that is between art and society has long been too deep for it to be so easily eliminated. Without internal changes within society it is impossible.'<sup>105</sup>

In Stefan's view the advanced twentieth century lacked 'the will to style', and the reason it was lacking was that 'the will to style' was not an objectively measurable piece of knowledge but an irrational component of the artistic creation that was only ever observed among several individuals. In conformity with his science of style Stefan believed that the only way to overcome this crisis was to

<sup>103</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 21.

<sup>104</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 22–23.

<sup>105</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 23.

create a connection between the internal and external worlds in life: 'Create one's own world inside oneself, unite the internal and the external! 'Till that time, one can paint and model, but it won't be art!'<sup>106</sup> According to Stefan, this way of linking reality to the knowledge and creation of reality – as has been noted here several times – was subject to the supra-individual patterns that determined the character of contemporaneous artistic creation and the method by which it is understood:

Out of confusion and towards some notion of supra-individual certainties and an increasingly greater hold on them – though they always again temporarily plummet to remote depths. It is this process, a smoothing synthesis, an entirely qualitative process, that gives meaning to work and life. This is how timeless values are formed.<sup>107</sup>

In Stefan's view, it was necessary therefore to change the entire structure of society, to transform it at its foundations, where a connection could again be formed between knowledge and creation and life would be shaped by both, and the inexorable style-producing process would thereby be restored again: 'Under the chaotic influence of our external world that exists in time and space and is hypertrophied, overestimated, and seemingly random, man becomes lost and does away with himself, of who he is as a person.'<sup>108</sup>

The criticism of the contemporary process of knowing and creating (artistic) reality that Stefan presented in his article *Umění a zevní svět* (Art and the External World), like his criticism of architecture in *Architektura, theorie a život* (Architecture, Theory and Life), may seem at first glance like a reaction to particular problems that were surfacing in (Czech) art during the first half of the 1940s. But a deeper exploration of Stefan's theoretical thought from this time reveals a different dimension, namely, the idea that the character of a time could be transformed by restoring the creative style-producing process, which exists as the point of intersection between a style's external patterns and how people experience them internally, 'because the picture of the world that penetrates within a person is something that is beyond the reach of the natural sciences.'<sup>109</sup>

Were one not familiar with Stefan's theory of style, his ideas from the first half of the 1940s might at first glance seem like some kind of non-conceptual writing about contemporary art that was trying to establish a new order and limit the freedom of artistic creation, and thus his thought could be mistaken for ideological manipulation with socio-critical intentions. Stefan's studies from this time should however be understood as independent on the ideologies of the time, as they are underpinned by a theoretical way of thinking about style that is built on the basis of an 'internal' and not 'external' knowledge of contemporary life, so it was still consistent with the ideas of the Vienna School of art history.

<sup>106</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 24.

<sup>107</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 24.

<sup>108</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 24.

<sup>109</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 24.

It is in this light also that we should read Stefan's notion of the 'higher-order patterns' that artists must achieve in order to inscribe their work with the authenticity of life in the present, leading then to a 'stylistic concentration' ('slohová zaměřenost' in Czech):<sup>110</sup> 'It is a flash of the self-shaping power of man. [...] [we could] call it as penetrating into the patterns of a higher order.'<sup>111</sup> The 'penetrating' of human life into 'higher-order patterns' served to stimulate the creativity of the individual in symbiosis with the time, which was the precondition of 'true' art and something that could be observed in (art) history:

Many great periods in the history of man have exhibited a great degree of homogeneity. These are periods with a strong philosophical or metaphysical (religious) focus, in which the life creed of generations became the only idea there was. In the collective stream, bringing together feeling, thought, and longing, the non-visual world merged with the visual one. [...] There thus arose and for a time persisted a situation that we might recognise as natural and customary if we did not know, from our own life in the present, that it is one that is sometimes difficult to achieve: where the intellectual life of the individual is at one with the intellectual spirit of the time. In times of this kind of intellectual concentration (and thus also a time of stylistic concentration, as that is one of the results of this situation) the artist as a subject is supported and oftentimes even borne aloft by collective force.<sup>112</sup>

Stefan reflected on the idea of a science of style in the last article with a methodological focus he wrote in the first half of the 1940s titled 'Racionální a "racionelní" v soudobé architektuře' (The Rational and the Economical in Contemporary Architecture),<sup>113</sup> where he addressed the lack of consistency in the terminology on contemporary architecture used by artists and art historians. According to Stefan, on closer examination the terms formulated as part of the artistic agendas of the avant-garde lost their relationship to the wider (art-) historical tradition and this gave rise to confusion not only with respect to understanding the objectives behind the work of contemporary architects, but also in the very work of those architects themselves. Stefan believed that by turning to artificially created theories, architects had drifted away from the inexorable style-producing process. They were therefore unable to create art in the true sense of the word because they were not in accord with the spirit of their time and its creative principles. It was in this light that Stefan examined the most widespread concept in architecture at the time, one, however, not clearly understood, and that was the term 'rational', which was also important for the general line of argumentation behind his science of style.

<sup>110</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 25.

<sup>111</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 24.

<sup>112</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 24–25.

<sup>113</sup> Oldřich Stefan, 'Racionální a "racionelní" v soudobé architektuře', *Život*, 19, 1944, 170–173.

As Stefan pointed out, the architecture of the late 1930s and early 1940s was created on a rational foundation, that is, on the basis of empirically identifiable postulates that can be clearly laid out and defended and are for this reason referred to as 'rational' ('racionální' in Czech). As well, another term took root in Czech architectural theory in the early 1940s that was similar to *racionální* but with a slightly different spelling, and that was 'racionelní', which was however a synonym for 'economy' in the sense of frugality or the efficient, thrifty use of something, and it thus referred to the utilitarian nature or utility of a structure. Stefan took this discussion further by pointing out that the processes based on 'racionální' (rational) and 'racionelní' (economical, efficient) considerations and thinking were both described with the same term, which was 'racionalisace' (rationalisation):

In the psychological sense rationalisation is: "an effective change in notions that have emerged from the subconscious occurring for rational reasons", and in the sociological sense it is "a systematic effort to achieve economy in human actions for the purpose of cheaper and better economic results".<sup>114</sup>

Stefan hereby put his thoughts on style into practice: he distinguished between the 'psychological' (*racionální* – rational) component in contemporary architecture as an expression of subconscious currents and utilitarian (*racionelní* – economical) creations focused on the needs of civilisation, which was just as he reflected on the matter in *Sloh a architektura*: 'We discovered that the range of significance between a structure of merely a utilitarian nature and an architectural work of art is quite broad.'<sup>115</sup> In 1944 Stefan used the term 'utilitarian economy' to refer to architectural creations with a utilitarian focus and set out in search of the causes for the division between 'racionální' and 'racionelní', or the 'rational' and 'economical' perspectives. He located them in the mid-nineteenth century, when 'the material world – for the first time in history – so predominated that under the weight of its pressure man lost his sense of self'.<sup>116</sup> Stefan noted that in architecture at that time the 'racionelní' or economical perspective predominated over the 'rational',<sup>117</sup> but in his view the main purpose of contemporary (and future) architectural work should be consistent with the 'rational' sense of architecture, thus combining rational knowledge with the creative potential of a time, and it was necessary to make a distinction between that and the utilitarian needs of civilisational development: 'In rational thinking we see the creative principle with open possibilities into the future [and] in the 'racionelní' [economical] [we have] only an organisational principle.'<sup>118</sup>

The next volume of *Život* (Life) was not published until after the Second World War, in 1946–1947. Stefan published a study in that volume titled 'Náš úvazek' (Our Commitment), in which he reflected on the new world that it had been

<sup>114</sup> Stefan, 'Racionální a 'racionelní' v soudobé architektuře', 171.

<sup>115</sup> Stefan, 'Sloh a architektura', 25.

<sup>116</sup> Stefan, 'Racionální a 'racionelní' v soudobé architektuře', 172.

<sup>117</sup> Stefan, 'Racionální a 'racionelní' v soudobé architektuře', 173.

<sup>118</sup> Stefan, 'Racionální a 'racionelní' v soudobé architektuře', 173.

necessary to wait for, and which had just been newly shaped with an optimistic vision of the future. The time had come to introduce a new style-producing process:

We know that amidst all this happening that terrible war, with its all its woe, was just one stretch, [and] that the ramifications of this great drama we are unwitting participants in are infinitely more profound and extend further than might seem on the surface, and that preparations have long been in the works for what had to come about as their necessary consequence. And we also understand that this new life, based on a more just social order, is a historical necessity, and, while as humans we attach our constructive longing to it, we are aware that what we are being presented with here are not just opportunities but also a commitment.<sup>119</sup>

The belief in this idea of a commitment arose from Stefan's theory about the inexorable style-producing process, which is able to reach its true creative potential as long as a connection is made between knowledge and the creation of present-day reality. Stefan was convinced that given the endurance of (art-) historical development beyond the intellectual and creative chaos of the first half of the 1940s, the time had now come for this creative period to reach a culmination point and with that for 'a better world' to come into existence. That process, however, would reach a turning point several months' later in very different socio-cultural circumstances than might have been imagined in the first years after the Second World War. The new social and political conditions ushered in under the dictatorship of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia prevented the style-producing process from developing freely, as the framework for obtaining knowledge of reality and creating reality was an ideological construction and was thus wholly incompatible with the principles of the style-producing process for which Stefan had formulated a method of research as a science of style during the first half of the 1940s.

### Final remarks

Stefan in his art-historical thinking of late 1930s and early 1940s noted the historical events surrounding the Second World War and he responded to them with a method of art history elaborated in theory that addressed the fractured reality of the time: Oldřich Stefan's art history in this period was a reaction to the collapse of man in history, in a manner close to the more intense experience of art envisioned in the method of art history Max Dvořák put forth during the First World War,<sup>120</sup> and at the same time it was an attempt to uncover the hidden – undestroyed – principles of art-historical development in the sense that Vojtěch Birnbaum understood them. Stefan thus tied in with the Vienna School's approach to art history, but in a different way than the more 'iconic' figures of Czech art history influenced by

<sup>119</sup> Stefan, 'Náš úvazek' (Our commitment), *Život*, 20, 1947, 13.

<sup>120</sup> As noted in the funeral oration by Dvořák's student Josef Weingartner, *Ein Gedenkblatt zur Trauerfeier für Max Dvořák*, Wien: Hölzel und Co., 1921, 11–12.

Vienna School of art history, such as Antonín Matějček, Josef Cibulka, Eugen Dostál, Jaromír Pečírka, and even Růžena Vacková.

The art history of Oldřich Stefan in the late 1930s and the first half of the 1940s was, as this study set out to demonstrate, influenced by the Vienna School's method of art history as well. However, Stefan adapted the method to the needs of his 'science of style', the purpose of which was to explore the connection between knowledge of and the creation of (artistic) reality and the relationship of the present to the past, and to do so by studying the forms of a work of art with an awareness of the human experience of the supra-individual patterns of the inexorable style-producing process – the absence of that awareness being deemed the source of the intellectual and creative crisis observed in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Stefan, in order to reverse the crisis of the late 1930s and early 1940s it was the task of art historians as well and artist to re-establish the creative style-producing process and they would do this by pursuing knowledge and the creation of present-day reality within the context of (art-) historical development. In other words, they were to pursue this task

in the light of the relations and connections, commitments and patterns that are not apparent at first glance, that have nothing in common with the conventional vision of and way of looking at the external world and that a subject suspects, catches sight of, uncovers, or also intends and desires, imagines and reconsiders out of a longing to apply oneself and out of a sense of obligation to oneself. [...] [A]gainst this backdrop is where we are able to then to see the pursuit of a style.<sup>121</sup>

In his comprehending to style as life-forming reality, Stefan adapted the method of the Vienna School towards epistemological condition how to understand and create life in its fullness, thus connected to the supra-individual patterns embodied in every individual, through which the form was created as artistic articulation of life in the inexorable development of art. Therefore, the influence of the Vienna School of art history could be comprehended in much wider sense, thus as affecting not only art-historical methods of its direct students, but also new-formulated art historical methods in 1930s and 1940s that carried the Viennese art-historical method forward into the later twentieth century, as it is possible to observe in Oldřich Stefan's amplification of the Vienna School of art history.

Translated by Robin Cassling

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<sup>121</sup> Stefan, 'Umění a zevní svět', 26.

Birnbaum's Concept and Method of Art History, 2017), in 2019 he completed his Ph.D. at the Charles University with proposing new methodological and theoretical concepts for interpretation of the post-1945 painting, following up to theoretical thinking of Konrad Fiedler, Fritz Novotny, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hans Belting.

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