

Dvořák on the revolutionary temporalities of art

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This text discusses the relations between temporality and art in some elucidative writings by Max Dvořák (1874–1921). Even without explicit definitions or long theoretical discussions, his seemingly marginal but nonetheless revealing remarks on temporality carry significant consequences. Moreover, they help to define Dvořák's position in the history of ideas. Based on short, implicit and operational definitions, this analysis will provide a tentative conceptual map of Dvořák's thoughts on the temporality of art. The density of the map will be uneven, since any attempt at achieving a comprehensive view would require more space. The transition periods between Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance will get more attention, as they are the keystones of Dvořák's reasoning about the change in artistic values within European societies. Both limits describe revolutionary shifts in relations obtaining between temporality and subjectivity. Dvořák's thinking about this problem engages his pet concepts, such as 'idealism' and 'naturalism'. The preliminary map of his ideas will help compare his standpoint with several similar or contrasting positions of his predecessors and contemporaries.

Various historiographers of art have justly observed that the 'temporality of art' implies historical changes in the process of creating artworks as well as their changing interpretations over time. Some authors perceive the fluidity of these historical developments as the essential topic ushered by Max Dvořák, in contrast to his predecessor Alois Riegl:

Riegl's conception of artistic metamorphosis, moreover, allowed for only a single metaphysical core to exist at any given time, thus denying the notion of dialectical competition between alternative *Kunstwollen*. By contrast, Dvořák believed that the character of artistic periods is established by competing, and not universally shared, attitudes.¹

In this phrasing, Dvořák appears to advocate a dynamism of dialectics against more rigid metaphysical constructions of temporality. A similar evaluation was already articulated by Arnold Hauser in his philosophy of art history: 'just as Riegl transformed the concept of "nature" into something historical and reflective, so Dvořák makes the concept of "art" at once historical and dynamic, and ends by asserting that, instead of the art history moving within a framework of timeless aesthetic categories, develop and alter in history.'² This statement seems to introduce Dvořák as an unconscious predecessor to a

¹ Mitchell Schwarzer, 'Cosmopolitan Difference in Max Dvořák's Art Historiography', *Art Bulletin*, 74, December 1992, 674. Compare Michael Gubser, *Time's Visible Surface: Alois Riegl and the Discourse on History and Temporality in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006.

² Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History*, New York: Knopf, 1959, 226.

moderate Marxist version of dialectics.³ In another reading, Dvořák's revision of Riegl would mean 'radical historical relativism'.⁴ According to Hans Aurenhammer, Dvořák's 'consistently pursued approach of connecting proximity to the work of art with a historical-philosophical perspective, however, combined with his constant willingness to subject his own standpoints to critical revision, has lost nothing of its topicality'.⁵

It might be pertinent to offer further ideas on these observations. Did Max Dvořák develop some radical or even revolutionary ideas on the temporality of art? If so, what do they consist in when compared with other ideological positions encountered in his day? Today, these intriguing questions sound different from how they did a hundred years ago. Several art historians, however, have developed and articulated theoretical positions, which might be relevant to the ongoing debate.

Is art transtemporal? Functionalist vs essentialist perspectives

The question was provoked by Hans Belting when he coined a temporal definition of 'the era of art' starting in the early modern period.⁶ While he avoided an extended discussion of 'art', he explained his position in several places. For example: 'If we step (...) into the modern period, we find *art* in our way, a *new function* that fundamentally transformed the old image.'⁷ The definition designating art as a function can be called 'functionalist'. From this perspective, 'art' seems to be a relatively late product of historical development.⁸ Image anthropology, not art, 'aspires to a level of generality that transcends time,

³ The argument is still influential in reasoning about temporality. See Mieke Bal, 'Activating Temporalities: The Political Power of Artistic Time', *Open Cultural Studies*, 2:1, December 2018, or the reception of Benjamin's ideas in Giovanni Careri, 'Time of History and Time out of History: The Sistine Chapel as Theoretical Object', *Art History*, 30, April 2007.

⁴ Ján Bakoš, *Discourses and Strategies. The Role of the Vienna School in Shaping Central European Approaches to Art History and Related Discourses*, Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 2013, 13.

⁵ Hans Aurenhammer, 'Max Dvořák and the History of Medieval Art', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 2, June 2010, 16.

⁶ Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult : eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, München: C.H. Beck, 1990, 26: 'Das Subjekt ergreift die Herrschaft über das Bild und sucht in der Kunst die Anwendung seines metaphorischen Weltverständnisses'. Comp. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. A radically changed role of Riegl is beyond the scope of this article.

⁷ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 9; Belting, *Bild und Kult*, 19: 'die Kunst, die als neue Funktion das alte Bild grundlegend verwandelt hat'.

⁸ Another temporal consequence of this narrow definition appears closer to our own time: 'art' as a specific function can eventually disappear, again. In this respect, it belongs to the rich discourse pertaining to the 'death of art'. Compare Hans Belting, *The end of the history of art?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

place and, in many respects, the particularities of culture'.⁹ 'Image' robbed 'art' of the position of the central transhistorical concept. More questions, though, remain. For instance, what is the relation of an image to such concepts as 'presence' or 'eternity'?

Max Dvořák offered different conceptualisations of his central problem. 'Art' remains transhistorical but variable. The shift from the late medieval to early modern periods was marked by a substantial temporal change in the character of art. Unlike Belting's, Dvořák's solution accommodates the concept of 'art' as relevant for periods before and after the revolutionary change. Visual art existed even in periods without theoretical discourse on it. Like other phenomena, 'art' can exist even while being not fully realised or thematised.¹⁰ This position remains influential in contemporary art history. Belting's idea that 'art' has a temporal character did not, however, persuade all art historians.¹¹

Now, Herbert Kessler's book *Experiencing medieval art* seems to contradict Belting's thesis as it explicitly acknowledges the existence of 'medieval art'. The very choice of words could suggest that 'art' already existed in the Middle Ages. In a less straightforward reading, however, it could also mean that *a something* existed in the Middle Ages which the modern viewer perceives as art. In such alternative reading, considering the importance of anachronisms for contemporary art history, the contradiction of Belting's ideas collapses. Art would be the leading principle for interpreters, a concept that organises their experience. Kessler seems to have employed a slightly different definition of 'art': 'Resting on the assumption that what is perceived by the senses is at best partial, art is in its essence a fiction.'¹² As the definition refers to the essence of art, it can bear the label 'essentialist'. It appears in the chapter focused on the analysis of subjectivity. The formulation points to the fact that art is rooted in human imagination, transcendental to sensual experience. As imagination is the essential feature of human beings, present throughout the entirety of history,¹³ this concept of 'art' proves to be transhistorical. The production of artefacts engaging imagination took place from the outset of human history and endured until our own time. Imagination persists even though its content undergoes changes in time; the definition at issue, thus, points to transtemporal phenomena. What was, then, Dvořák's position concerning medieval 'art'? Does the transtemporal definition of 'art' require other human faculties besides imagination? With these

⁹ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, 'Hans Belting: Bild und Kult; eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst, 1990', in Richard Shone and John-Paul Stonard, eds, *The Books that Shaped Art History*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2013, 207.

¹⁰ Gerold Prauss, 'Freuds Probleme mit dem "Unbewußten"', in Reinhard Hiltchner and André Georgi (eds.), *Perspektiven der Transzendentalphilosophie im Anschluß an die Philosophie Kants*, München: Alber, 2002, 139-156.

¹¹ See Roland Betancourt, 'Medieval art after Duchamp. Hans Belting's Likeness and Presence at 25', *Gesta*, 55:1, Spring 2016, 5-17; Hamburger, 'Hans Belting: Bild und Kult', 202-215.

¹² Herbert L. Kessler, *Experiencing medieval art*, Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2019, 209.

¹³ See Yuval N. Harari, *Sapiens: a brief history of humankind*, New York: Harper, 2015.

questions in mind, one can begin to understand Dvořák's ideas on the temporality of art. His position makes sense from both perspectives. He did not hesitate to recognise medieval (or earlier) art as art. On the other hand, he saw a substantial change to its functions at the beginning and at the close of the Middle Ages. As for the beginning, he insisted on distinguishing between 'early Christian' and 'late antique' works of art, even if both originated simultaneously. He explicitly spoke of the change in the understanding of art, or a new concept of art.¹⁴ His lengthier and complex proposition seems to carry several implications: 1, the new concept of art operates with different meanings; 2, the new art stems from an altered sensibility and other spiritual situation; 3, the new definition of art entails new definitions of such abstract concepts as truth, beauty, or sublimity. For Dvořák, this radical multi-level change might mean 'an imaginative revolution', which started a departure from 'a period of decadence'.¹⁵ Nevertheless, a closer look at different connotations of 'revolution' across several early twentieth century thinkers' texts and actions reveals substantial temporal differences in the manner the concept was understood.

Evolution and revolution in art

Various scholars have observed that similar connotations go against the doctrine of a continuous development of art as determined by immanent forces and laws (which the younger Dvořák inherited from his teacher Alois Riegl).¹⁶ Shortly before the Great War, Dvořák recognised the impossibility of seeing, from a necessarily finite human standpoint, the development of world art as one coherent totality. Therefore, the revolutionary change of the concept of art did not come about as a result of an evolution of antique art. Instead, the new concept of art negates the whole evolution of antique art, calling for its complete reevaluation.¹⁷ Dvořák, thus, in part deserted the idea of totality, typical of Hegelian theories of art's historical development.¹⁸ As the new and old styles existed simultaneously, there remained no room for a mechanical model of unified *Zeitgeist*.

Still, Dvořák entertains other developmental concepts rooted in the Hegelian speculation, such as the 'fight of the opposites' or the 'negation of the

¹⁴ Max Dvořák, 'Die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst', *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, München, 1924, 33: 'Es handelt sich dabei nicht nur um die Darstellungstoffe, sondern nicht minder um einen neuen Begriff der Kunst, die eine neue Bedeutung für die Menschen erlangt und auf einem neuen Verhältnisse zur sinnlichen Umwelt und den geistigen Gütern, wie auch auf einer neuen Auffassung der Wahrheit, Schönheit und Erhabenheit aufgebaut wird.'

¹⁵ 'Dvořák reconceived the third century, elevating it from a period of decadence to one of imaginative revolution: Schwarzer, 'Cosmopolitan Difference in Max Dvořák's Art Historiography', 675.

¹⁶ Bakoš, *Discourses and Strategies*; Matthew Rampley, 'Max Dvořák: art history and the crisis of modernity', *Art History*, 26, December 2003, 220-221.

¹⁷ Dvořák, *Die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst*, 20: 'vollständige Umwertung der Kunst'.

¹⁸ Ernst Hans Gombrich, *In Search of Cultural History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, 28.

negation'. The early Christian changes in the concept of art – radical and revolutionary – point to an 'intentional negation of the classical'.¹⁹ It introduces a contradiction between the old and the new art, which can only be reconciled when a new, unclassical art appears.²⁰ The Hegelian idea of revolution feels at work in these theses. Yet, compared to some of his contemporaries playing with the same idea, Dvořák, a disciple of Viennese empiricism, looks fairly cautious and prudent.

His interpretation of revolutionary change is in stark contrast to the one put forth by the four years older Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924), who wrote a whole book to distance himself from Ernst Mach's empiriocriticism perceived as a reactionary philosophy.²¹ Lenin was a passionate reader of Hegel. He took copious and emotionally tainted notes of *The Science of Logic*, where he would underline everything he could use as an argument for his materialist view of history. As one of the most influential activists of the twentieth century, Lenin understood Hegelian ideas associated with the concept of the 'revolutionary' in a sense substantially dissimilar from that of Dvořák's. At the same time, he would probably have agreed with the latter's contention that 'liberal individualistic materialism faced a socio-ethical imperative'.²² What divides the two thinkers lies precisely in interpreting this socio-ethical imperative concerning the temporality of art and related cultural values. Unlike Dvořák, Lenin understood himself as part of a revolutionary process aimed at the creation of the new world order. Hence, he focused on the present and future struggle, instead of harking back to the past. Meanwhile, Aby Warburg's (1866–1929) sharp intellect saw the pitfalls of such an orientation, for, he maintained, a thinker who unconditionally commits himself to the future is in danger of becoming a victim of his own ideas.²³ Referring to a 'crucified Dionysos', Warburg hinted at Nietzsche before his nervous breakdown.²⁴

One more critical divergence between Lenin and Dvořák merits mention:

¹⁹ Dvořák, *Die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst*, 33: 'ein vollständig neuer, die ganze Evolution der antiken Kunst verneinender Begriff des Künstlerischen'.

²⁰ Dvořák, *Die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst*, 40. 'Damit verschwindet aber der Gegensatz zwischen der alten und neuen Kunst. Es gibt nur mehr eine Kunst – und die ist keine klassische mehr ...'

²¹ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and A. Fineberg, *Materialism and empirio-criticism; critical comments on a reactionary philosophy*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1947. The original was published 1909 by Zveno Publishers in Moscow. About this work of Lenin, in connection with Dvořák, Rudolf Chadraba, 'Max Dvořák a vídeňská škola dějin umění', *Kapitoly z českého dějepisu umění. 2, Dvacáté století*, Praha: Odeon, 1987, 25.

²² Max Dvořák, 'Eine Illustrierte Kriegschronik vor hundert Jahren, oder der Krieg und die Kunst', in *Kriegs-Almanach*, 1916, 12. Quoted in Rampley, 'Max Dvořák: art history and the crisis of modernity', 228.

²³ See Aby Warburg: *Schlusssitzung der Burckhardt Uebung* (1927). In: Aby Warburg et al., *Werke in einem Band*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010, 696: 'Der Mann, dessen Einziges die unbedingte Hingabe an den Glauben der Zukunft ist, ist bei diesem Versuch das Opfer seiner eigenen Ideen geworden.'

²⁴ Aby Warburg: *Schlusssitzung*, 696: 'Dionysos der Gekreuzigte'. More about the topic in René Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', *MLN*, 99:4, September 1984, 816-835, 834.

the former, as a political campaigner, appreciated propaganda more than elitist art. Consequently, he was not keen on artistic movements like Italian Futurism focused on the future, even if these very movements had influenced a couple of the leading personalities of Russian culture. When asked about the value of Vladimir Mayakovsky's Futurist poetry, Lenin declared that publishing that sort of poetry would be a waste of money. His close collaborator, Leon Trotsky, who during his exile years in Vienna used to mix with the Viennese intellectuals in Café Central, valued Mayakovsky's poems and even corresponded with the poet.²⁵ Of importance for our line of argument is also the fact that the Bolsheviks shared with the Futurists a positive attitude towards the use of violence – a stance Dvořák, with his traditional Christian preference for non-violent solutions to political issues, must have found distasteful.

Lenin was literate enough to grasp the value of cultural tradition. In certain rhetorical situations – for example, while speaking to young people who aspired to become communists – he did not hesitate to claim that 'communism arose out of the sum of the human knowledge'. He also proclaimed that the crucial task of communism was to reshape and apply 'everything that had been created by human society, without ignoring a single detail', or 'everything that human thinking had created'. He encouraged revolutionaries to learn from the past, insisting that they should enrich their minds 'with a knowledge of all the treasures created by mankind'.²⁶ This notwithstanding, the violent communist struggle for the ideal society directly targeted the pillars of conservative thinking such as the church and the clergy supporting the old regimes. The substantial collateral damage such violent struggle produced was subsequently interpreted as an unavoidable toll taken for the sake of the victory of the new ideal. As the movement focused on the vision of the future, it, in fact, existed in a different temporality from that of the conservative camp attempting to preserve the values of the past with their traditional religious narratives. Paradoxically, these narratives anticipated some of the future problems of the Bolshevik movement. A period propagandist cartoon features the revolutionaries about to sacrifice Russia's Christian heritage on the altar of a new idol, herein embodied in Karl Marx's statue.²⁷

Karl Marx, with his famous eleventh thesis on Ludwig Feuerbach – 'Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it'²⁸ – defines the substantial difference between Lenin and much less

²⁵ Robert Service, *Trotsky. A Biography*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009, 315.

²⁶ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Collected works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966, vol. 31, 283–299, here 286–287.

²⁷ 'Sacrifice to the International', a White Russian anti-Bolshevik propaganda poster produced during the Russian Civil War, in a colour lithograph from around 1919. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1819-2004. Source: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O101949/sacrifice-to-the-international-poster-mv-or-vm/>

²⁸ Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) cited from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955, 15.

politically engaged Dvořák. Lenin, in the context of the thesis, preferred to change the world, whereas Dvořák, a member of the establishment, fought to protect past values from the revolutionary threats and the destruction caused by the industrialisation. The cartoon, thus, constructs an ironic situation where the statue of the thinker who would militantly oppose all idolatry ignobly turns into an object of idolatrous worship. Wasn't the Marxist standpoint, with its thrust on ceaseless historical changes, meant to protect revolutionaries against idolatrous practices, usually associated with the timelessness of the worshipped ideas and values? In historical reality, though, even the agents of cultural change can eventually morph into idols. Such an embarrassing paradox got materialised in the domains under the Bolshevik rule, especially in the period of Stalinism, when the cult of leading party personalities was vigorously pursued. The images of idolized revolutionaries (for example, Lenin yes, yet Trotsky no) formed the foci of political rituals bearing an unequivocal resemblance to idolatrous practices. The secular priests and rituals sanctioned by them used to nip any form of criticism in the bud.²⁹

It seems that Lenin's revolutionary theory of state furthered, probably unwittingly on the part of the author, Jacob Burckhardt's famous idea of the state as an artwork.³⁰ Alas, Lenin's 'political artwork' – the new communist state – lacked an efficient safeguard against secularised idolatry in the form of political cults. Dvořák, by contrast, perceived no state as an artwork and was quite allergic to situations where political images got transformed into objects of idolatrous worship. He highly praised the opposition of early Christian art to what he deemed to be a materialism of the classical tradition. Unlike Burckhardt, he criticised the compromise struck with the state power in Emperor Constantine's era, branding it 'partial paganising'.³¹ Dvořák projected the artistic revolution back into the deep past. He spoke of a complete revaluation of art in the process thereof everything related to physical existence and sensual experience should give way to a new, psychocentric understanding of the world.³² According to Origen of Alexandria, Christian 'religious and moral psychocentrism' is the

²⁹ See Anthony Julius, *Idolizing Pictures: Idolatry, Iconoclasm and Jewish Art*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001; Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism. Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992.

³⁰ Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien. Ein Versuch*, Basel: Schweighauser, 1860, 1-88; Jacob Burckhardt and S. G. C. Middlemore, *The Civilisation of the Period of the Renaissance in Italy*, 2 vols, London: C. K. Paul & Co., 1878.

³¹ Dvořák, *Die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst*, 35.

³² 'So liegt aber in dieser neuen Einheit von Form und Raum nicht ein unmittelbarer Fortschritt im Sinne der klassischen oder modernen Naturwiedergabe, sondern eine sowohl der Antike als auch allen anderen älteren Kunstperioden gegenüber neue, auf neuen metaphysischen Bedürfnissen und Anschauungen beruhende vollständige Umwertung der Kunst, die darin bestanden hat, das alles am körperlichen Dasein und Sinnenleben Orientierte als Ziel der künstlerischen Bestrebungen der neuen psychozentrischen Auffassung der Welt weichen mußte und der Glaube an einen übersinnlichen Zusammenhang der Dinge über die sinnliche Erfahrung erhoben wurde.' Dvořák, *Die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst*, 20.

opposite of idolatry.³³ Dvořák committed himself to the idea steeped in the Platonic tradition that predates Christianity.

Dvořák's immediate impact on his society remained but limited. In a sense, his spiritual ideas continued the Holy Alliance's mission, agreed upon in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna. The coalition (Heilige Allianz) linked the rulers of Catholic Austria, Protestant Prussia, and Orthodox Russia in their fight against liberalism, secularism, and revolutionary movements. Lenin, for his part, created the Soviet Union, a union which in several respects proved more dangerous than the reactionary nineteenth-century pact.³⁴ In his book, significantly entitled *Catechism of monument protection*, Dvořák insisted that the influence of the changing concept of art on the various strata of a monument should remain respected, protected, and unconcealed. In terms of caring for historical heritage, any 'misunderstood ideas of progress' may cause a 'great disaster'. Simultaneously, he criticized the 'idolatry of technical innovations'.³⁵

A deeper and more detailed comparison between Dvořák and Lenin could fill an entire book. At that, one should note that comparing these quite distinct personae exacts various forms of temporality.³⁶ In terms of *chronological time*, Dvořák and Lenin may appear as contemporaries featuring a number of similarities: Either was born into a middle-class family and they even had in common some reading interests, such as Hegel, or even Nietzsche. When it comes to the *anachronic power of images* or the Christian tradition, they were, however, in opposite camps, hence lived in different temporalities and developed different frameworks for their attitude towards art.

They were not the only radical thinkers of their generation who contributed to the *heterogeneity of temporalities* while addressing the concept of art. Among Marxists, the slightly younger Georg Lukács (1885–1971) stood much closer to Dvořák than Lenin did. Both thinkers knew each other, and, decades after Dvořák's death, Lukács recalled their meeting back in 1920, when the art historian allegedly lauded *The theory of the novel* as 'the most important' publication in the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*).³⁷ Both found a shared source of inspiration in Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–

³³ 'Er (Origenes – IG) beschränkt sich darauf, der heidnischen Idolatrie den christlichen religiösen und sittlichen Psychozentrismus entgegensetzen', Dvořák, *Die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst*, 29.

³⁴ Russian uses the same name for the alliance and the union: СВЯЩЕННЫЙ СОЮЗ and Советский Союз.

³⁵ Max Dvořák, *Katechismus památkové péče*, Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2004, 21-22.

³⁶ For a more detailed account of the used concepts see Keith P. F. Moxey, *Visual Time. The Image in History*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 2-3, 173-175.

³⁷ Georg Lukács, *Metafyzika tragédie*, Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1967, 15: 'Teorie románu' je skutečně typickým produktem duchovědných tendencí. Když jsem se v roce 1920 ve Vídni osobně seznámil s Maxem Dvořákem, řekl mi, že toto dílo považuje za nejvýznamnější publikaci duchovědného směru.' In this sentence, Lukács might have wished to lead the attention of his readers away from his activities in the time of the Hungarian Soviet Republic (1919), when he served as the People's Commissar for Education and Culture. I am grateful to Professor Adam Bžoch for the reference.

1911).³⁸ Lukács, however, in his older years, criticised the methodology of *Geisteswissenschaften* as not sufficiently informed by the analysis of social tensions and conflicts. For him, intuition did not secure foundations solid enough for arriving at a synthesis. Also, he rejected the timeless character of values and categories, postulated by Kantian aesthetics, in the name of their historical development grasped in terms of Hegelian and Marxian dialectics.

Nevertheless, there was at least one more moment in the early twentieth century where the two thinkers were grappling with similar questions. This topic takes us back to the problem of idolatry.

Moses, idolatry, and tragedy

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was approximately eighteen years older than Dvořák, whom he survived by another eighteen years. They both came over from Moravia to Vienna and held there teaching positions at the university. Similarities more relevant for this text include the fact that both men penned memorable texts about Michelangelo's *Moses*. Paradoxically, the text by Freud, a non-art-history professional who was more revolutionary of the two, still receives intense scholarly attention.³⁹

Dvořák's interpretation of the famous statue, created for the grave monument of Pope Julius II, was published along with his other lectures on Italian art by his former pupils Johannes Wilde and Karl Maria Swoboda.⁴⁰ Dvořák starts off his reflection with the remark that the monument, associated with the cult of the exceptional Pope, represents something 'new, unseen before, in Christian art'.⁴¹ Dvořák clearly identified the profound changes to the traditional Christian understanding of temporality in the early sixteenth century. Within the earlier framework, the Christian cult celebrated only heroes of the faith, saints, and martyrs as the members of the 'timeless community'. Later, with

³⁸ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung. Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Holderlin*, Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1910.

³⁹ Moshe Halevi Spero, 'Moses Lactans: Evidence in Support of the Latent Mythic Value of Freud's 1914 "Moses of Michelangelo"', *American Imago*, 67:2, Summer 2010; Gerd Blum, 'Michelangelo als neuer Mose. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Michelangelos *Moses*. Vasari, Nietzsche, Freud, Thomas Mann', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 53:1, 2008, 73-106; Thomas Albrecht, 'Subject and Object in Psychoanalytic Criticism. On the Interpretative Method of Freud's "The Moses of Michelangelo"', *Textual Practice*, 28, November 2014; Mary Bergstein, 'Freud's "Moses of Michelangelo": Vasari, Photography, and Art Historical Practice', *Art Bulletin*, 88:1, March 2006; Wayne Stables, 'ACTION TIME: Freud's "the Moses of Michelangelo"', *Angelaki: journal of theoretical humanities*, 25, December 2020; Torberg Foss, 'Freud 100 years ago: The *Moses* of Michelangelo (1914)', *Scandinavian psychoanalytic review*, 37, November 2014; Malcolm Macmillan and Peter Swales, 'Observations from the refuse-heap: Freud, Michelangelo's *Moses*, and psychoanalysis', *American Imago*, 60:1, Spring 2003.

⁴⁰ Max Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance. Akademische Vorlesungen. Das 16. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols, München: R. Piper & Co., 1927, 15-20.

⁴¹ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 15: 'ein Epitaph [...] wie es die christliche Kunst bis dahin nicht gesehen hatte.'

the proceeding secularisation of culture, a similar status was attributed to historical personages, and symbolic values had to retreat in favour of historical facticity.⁴² Precisely this 'parting of ways' could have provoked tragic emotions, more so when the church, instead of promoting the timeless community of saints, succumbed to largely pagan values of wealth and vainglory.⁴³ It is this ideological-psychological constellation that Dvořák projected into his interpretation of the figure of Moses, while reading it as a 'carrier of abstract ideas and shaping energies'.⁴⁴ Taken altogether, the statues of the papal grave monument are intended to sing 'a mourning cantata' that symbolises 'the eternal forces of existence and humanity'.⁴⁵ The musical metaphor employed not just points to the negation of time in the concept of eternity, but also to a tragic understanding of life. The concept of the tragic was from the very beginning crucial for Dvořák's interpretation.⁴⁶ Herein, Dvořák agrees with Freud, who also quoted Justi's description.⁴⁷ The psychological intensity and tragic feeling of life conveyed by the artistic innovation are concepts proceeding from deep insights shared by other thinkers of the time under consideration. Yet the first question to pose is this: what exactly did the 'psychological intensity' mean in Dvořák's and Freud's interpretations? And, in our context, how does the question relate to the problem of temporality?

Dvořák reads the figure of Moses in terms that seem to contradict the

⁴² Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 16: 'Die ideelle Grundlage dieser Vereinigung war die Lehre von der Gemeinschaft, die alle Christen, die lebenden und toten, die Seligen und die um ihr Heil noch Ringenden verbindet. Im Rahmen dieser Lehre wurden in den Kirchen oder in ihrer Nähe auch Grabdenkmäler weltlicher Personen als Sinnbild jener zeitlosen Gemeinschaft geduldet, die später mit der steigenden Verweltlichung der christlichen Kultur auch mit Erinnerungen an das irdische Dasein der Verstorbenen, mit deren Bildnissen, mit verbaler oder bildlicher Schilderung ihrer Tugenden und Verdienste oder der Klage um ihren Verlust verbunden wurden. Die weltliche Glorifikation gewinnt besonders im XV. Jahrhundert vielfach das Übergewicht dem christlichen Jenseitsgedanken gegenüber; die Wege beginnen sich zu trennen.' [...] 'alles Symbolische der historischen Tatsächlichkeit weichen mußte'.

⁴³ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 17: 'die Wendung der Dinge: nicht Trennung der beiden Welten, der kirchlichen und der profanen, sondern ein Übergewicht paganer Auffassung in der Kirche selbst.'

⁴⁴ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 17: 'als Träger abstrakter Ideen und gestaltender Energien'.

⁴⁵ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 17-18: 'Es ist eine vom Künstler ersonnene Trauerkantate, deren Inhalt nicht die überkommenen bildlichen Vorstellungen, sondern seine Auffassung und Symbolisierung der ewigen Gewalten des Daseins und des Menschentums bilden sollte.'

⁴⁶ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 15: 'Seine äußere tragische Geschichte hat Justi in einer wundervollen, psychologisch ergreifenden Schilderung erzählt.'

⁴⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Der Moses des Michelangelo', *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften*, 3 (1914a), 20: 'Am eingehendsten hat C. Justi die Deutung auf die Wahrnehmung des goldenen Kalbes begründet und sonst nicht beachtete Einzelheiten der Statue in Zusammenhang mit dieser Auffassung gebracht.'

famous dictum of the 'inward turn'.⁴⁸ Our attention should no longer be taken up by the individual fight inside man as a natural being, but by the forces driving humanity in its historical progression. The focus is not on the interior fight but, rather, on real action in the external world.⁴⁹ The shift could have resulted from the Nietzschean concepts, above all that of the power of will. Yet, as will be shown below, the understanding of these concepts poses challenges concerning the issue of temporality.

Willpower, for Dvořák, is 'something divine in the figure' which has 'nothing to do either with the antique or with the Christian understanding of God'. The statue presents 'the apotheosis of the divine in a human being'; the force of will 'does not know any barriers, rules over men and crushes enemies'.⁵⁰ The rhetorical hyperbole employed in the description might stir up the problem of worshipping human qualities in an idolatrous manner. Among the emotionally charged adjectives used in the description of willpower, there pops up the word 'übermenschlich', pointing to the idealised superhuman being who would rise above conventional Christian morality to impose his own values.⁵¹ In the second decade of the twentieth century, the word possessed nothing of the present-day horrific associations with Nazi ideology. Instead, the word used to appeal to many an intellectual. It, too, infests Freud's text at issue: firstly, as quoted by Henry Thode, whose interpretation of the statue had equally influenced Dvořák.⁵² Secondly and more importantly, Freud uses the word in his final

⁴⁸ Eric R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight. The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain. From Vienna 1900 to the present*, New York: Random House, 2012, 3-18.

⁴⁹ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 18: 'hier handelt es sich nicht mehr um Kämpfe, die jeder Einzelne, der Mensch, als natürliche Gegebenheit, in seinem Inneren auszutragen hat, sondern um Gewalten, die die ganze Menschheit in ihrer historischen Entwicklung regiert haben – nicht als inneres Ringen, sondern als Aktion, als Kampf nach außen'. This sentence could have pleased even a revolutionary, if they ever made it as far as this page.

⁵⁰ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 19: 'Es ist etwas Göttliches in der Figur, von der Vasari berichtet, daß Ghettobewohner wie Kranichscharen zu ihr gezogen seien, um sie anzubeten. Dieses Göttliche hat aber weder mit antiker noch mit christlicher Gottesvorstellung etwas zu tun. Was hier erscheint, ist weder die Natur, noch ein transzendenter Begriff, der nicht von dieser Erde ist: es ist die Apotheose des Göttlichen im Menschen, die Apotheose der Willenskraft, die keine Schranken kennt, Menschen regiert und Feinde zerschmettert.'

⁵¹ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 19: 'Ein unermesslicher Geist, doch zorndurchglüht im höchsten Affekt und von übermenschlicher Willenskraft'.

⁵² Sigmund Freud, 'Der Moses des Michelangelo', *Imago. Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften*, 3, 1914b, 23: 'Diese allgemeine Charakteristik wird weiter vertieft durch die Hervorhebung des Konfliktes, in welchen ein solcher die Menschheit gestaltender Genius zu der Allgemeinheit tritt: die Affekte des Zornes, der Verachtung, des Schmerzes gelangen zu typischem Ausdruck. Ohne diesen war das Wesen eines solchen Übermenschen nicht zu verdeutlichen.' The original source: Henry Thode, *Michelangelo. Kritische Untersuchungen über seine Werke*, Berlin: G. Grothe'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1908. Freud mentions this work nine times, mostly with high appreciation.

characterisation of the statue and of Michelangelo's artistic merits, where he praises the 'new, superhuman' qualities the statue epitomises.⁵³ The fact that the concept of the superhuman was key for the interpretations of the artwork under discussion by thinkers occupying radically different intellectual positions confirms its powerful presence in the culture of the early twentieth century. Today's viewer can admire the sculpture without discerning anything superhuman ('*übermenschlich*') about it. It is almost safe to say, therefore, that the concept seems just a specific concern of the period under discussion.⁵⁴

There are more concepts in Dvořák's interpretation that carry topical associations of his time. He saw a 'tragedy' in the fact that such a 'superhuman product of a genius', representing 'a peak of the revolt against the spirit of the Christianity', ended up on a 'modest wall grave surrounded by mediocre foreign works and crowned and ruled by the image of Madonna'.⁵⁵ Ideas like these show Dvořák as detractor of the egalitarian understanding of Christianity. This brings him closer to another thinker, the not-yet Marxist Georg Lukács who addressed the concept of the tragic in his essay 'The Metaphysics of Tragedy' (1910).⁵⁶ Both Lukács and Dvořák integrated into their thinking the concept of the tragic as articulated by Georg Simmel, who resorted to it while interpreting Michelangelo's work.⁵⁷ Lukács, however, tackled the tensions occurring among medieval metaphysics, mysticism, and the purity of over-temporal truth and unmasked by a tragedy in a more radical way than Dvořák did. Lukács thematised the tragedy of human beings as completely abandoned by God. He proudly quoted Paul Ernst: 'only when we become completely godless will we

⁵³ Freud, 'Der Moses des Michelangelo', 34: 'Damit hat er etwas Neues, Übermenschliches in die Figur des Moses gelegt, und die gewaltige Körpermasse und kraftstrotzende Muskulatur der Gestalt wird nur zum leiblichen Ausdrucksmittel für die höchste psychische Leistung, die einem Menschen möglich ist, für das Niederringen der eigenen Leidenschaft zugunsten und im Auftrage einer Bestimmung, der man sich geweiht hat.'

⁵⁴ In this respect, their ideas differ not only from those of our own time, but also from those of Vasari, a direct disciple of Michelangelo, who saw in his master work "a supertemporal body", identical with the one Moses would have at the end of time, before the Last Judgement.

⁵⁵ Dvořák, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 19: 'Es liegt wahrlich eine Tragik darin, daß diese Statue, die den Höhepunkt des Aufbruchs gegen den Geist des Christentums bildet, ihre endliche Aufstellung in einem bescheidenen Wandgrab fand, umgeben von fremden mittelmäßigen Arbeiten und bekrönt und beherrscht von dem Bilde der Madonna.'

⁵⁶ The original text appeared in Hungarian: György Lukács, *A lélek és a formák*, Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1910 The German translation followed next year: György Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen; essays*, Berlin: E. Fleischel & co., 1911 The Czech translation in: Lukács, *Metafyzika tragédie*, 25-49. The author has remained widely popular beyond Hungary – see recently Michael Thompson, *Georg Lukács and the Possibility of Critical Social Ontology*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020; Ulisse Dogà, "Von der Armut im Geiste": die Geschichtsphilosophie des jungen Lukács, Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2019; Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall, *Georg Lukács. The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence. Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*, London; New York: Continuum, 2011.

⁵⁷ Georg Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur*, Leipzig: Werner Klinkhardt, 1911.

have a true tragedy'.⁵⁸ This sort of reasoning on a tragedy offered him the opportunity for appropriating, probably from Søren Kierkegaard, the idea of 'tragic wonder', a synthetic 'great moment' that reveals eternity.⁵⁹ Such a moment wedded catastrophe to a total fulfilment rendering human life 'substantial'. Moreover, the relation between a tragedy and godlessness points, again, to Nietzsche. His essay 'The Birth of Tragedy' introduced the concept of the Dionysian, which stands in stark contrast to the Socratic tradition of self-reflection. It, rather, highlights unconscious powers, the core of Freud's thinking.⁶⁰ As these forces belong to the realm of nature, the thrust clearly contradicts Dvořák's ideas on eternity belonging in the spiritual world.

Dvořák was not enthused by the idea of the Dionysian and never glorified an utterly godless world. He did not have much use for the peaks of a single-moment human existence. In a much more sober way, he viewed art as 'a sphere separated from the dark abysses and inextricable questions of human existence. Imagination becomes the tool with an autonomous power to divinise the objective form up to a point of surreal perfection.'⁶¹ The proposal furnishes an option for the metaphysics of timeless values embedded in art. The above also proves his eclectic ability to reshape and assimilate concepts from various discourses of his surroundings into his narratives. Occasional ideological differences would not stop him from the practice. Such compromises expanded his repertoire of interpretative positions and rhetorical devices, making, thus, his theories more attractive for diverse audiences.⁶²

Far more radical thinkers than Dvořák can also be seen adopting fashionable concepts, especially the authors with a high-quality education. Freud's interpretation of Michelangelo's *Moses* included, for example, ideas and motives not typically Freudian and, in some respects, more congruous with the intellectual positions preferred by Dvořák. Freud also pondered the protest against materialist idolatry, performed as the dance around the Golden Calf, which must have provoked an angry feeling within Moses.

As Freud described the statue, he spoke of its 'emotional strata', bringing back to the reader the Neoplatonic hierarchy of soul. Yet the revival of

⁵⁸ Lukács, *Metafyzika tragédie*, 11 (the author's preface, 1967), 27 (the 1910 text).

⁵⁹ Konstantinos Kavoulakos, 'Essayistische Weltanschauungssuche durch Literaturkritik. Versuch einer neuen Lektüre von Georg Lukács' "Die Seele und die Formen"', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 60, 2014, 419.

⁶⁰ Sebastian Gardner, 'The Unconscious: Transcendental Origins, Idealist Metaphysics and Psychoanalytic Metapsychology', *The Impact of Idealism. The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

⁶¹ Max Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte. Studien zur abendländischen Kunstentwicklung*, Mittenwald: Mäander, 1979, 220: 'Die Kunst, als eine von den dunklen Abgründen und unlösbaren Fragen des Daseins losgelöste Sphäre einer künstlerischen Vergöttlichung der objektiven Form und ihrer sinnlichen Erscheinung, zur überrealen Vollendung durch die autonome Macht der Einbildungskraft entwickelt, gelangte zu Grenzen, die nicht mehr überwunden werden konnten.'

⁶² These included the young Arnold Hauser. See more in Arnold Hauser, *Philosophie der Kunstgeschichte*, München: Beck, 1958; Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History*, London: Routledge, 1959.

traditional philosophy was not quite his agenda. In its place, his dialogue with artistic, religious, and philosophical traditions made sense as part of his new, authentic search for psychological truth, motivated by a medicinal desire to help his suffering contemporaries. Contrastingly, when Dvořák resorted to Platonic philosophy to understand the notion of the ideal, he concentrated on its Christianised Neoplatonic version. In lieu of sensual perception, or mystical experience, or even contact with the divine, Dvořák searched for the 'real source' and the 'deeper sense' of the new art.⁶³ Art, for him, should visualise the 'immortal and invisible', leading to a 'soul-stirring present'.⁶⁴

Both Dvořák and Freud tacitly rejected the Hegelian scheme of the temporal development of art, along with his totalitarian vision. In the introduction to psychoanalysis, Freud explicitly mentioned 'the obscure Hegelian philosophy, in whose school Marx graduated'.⁶⁵ Dvořák, for his part, rejected Hegel and his spiritual ancestor Johann Joachim Winckelmann when he located the developed ideal in the Gothic period instead of classical Antiquity. The rejection, though, was not absolute, as his explanation of the Gothic ideal remained bonded with 'the idealistic norms of the golden age of Grecian art'.⁶⁶ Instead of Winckelmann's cheerful acceptance of physical experience and rationality, Dvořák reconstructed an emotionally loaded immersion into a supernatural vision. This vision should inspire a new, 'spiritual reform of the world' centred around 'a struggle ... for a new inner man with new moral obligations, or in short, a spiritual reform of the world'.⁶⁷ For many reasons, this inward-oriented struggle was the core element of Dvořák's idea of revolution and, in that regard, Michelangelo's *Moses* emerges as a good fighter.

A revolution projected into the past implies no radical change of the current social order. Dvořák failed to understand the word 'naturalism' as used in the context of an independent philosophical epistemology. He saw, instead, its ontological meaning within the framework of Christian theology and religious practice:

Because of their most intimate connection with the most profound secrets and teachings of the Christian *Weltanschauung*, these basic problems were thrust

⁶³ Max Dvořák, *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967, 33. Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, 63.

⁶⁴ Dvořák, *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, 36. Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, 65: 'in ergreifende und erhebende Gegenwart.'

⁶⁵ See Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 15: Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse., the last (35th) part: 'ein Niederschlag jener dunklen Hegelschen Philosophie, durch deren Schule auch Marx gegangen ist. '; Sigmund Freud and W. J. H. Sprott, *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1933; Sigmund Freud et al., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, London: Hogarth Press, 1953 vol. 22, 177.

⁶⁶ Dvořák, *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, 30. Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, 62: 'eine geistige Reform der Welt' and 'die idealistischen Normen der höchsten Blütezeit der griechischen Kunst'.

⁶⁷ Dvořák, *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, 38. Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, 67: 'das Ringen um einen neuen inneren Menschen, um neue moralisch Verpflichtungen, um eine geistige Reform der Welt'.

out of the sphere of theoretical epistemological systems, established for their own sake, into the focus of the total relationship of man to being; thus to a far greater extent than in classical antiquity they could and had to assert themselves directly in all the spiritual relationships of man to his milieu.⁶⁸

The new inner man should respect principles known for ages, if not timeless ones. No matter how conservative this may sound, Dvořák envisioned art as a tool to reach such spheres of individual intellect, imagination, and emotion which remained beyond narrowly understood clerical dogmas. The artists have a new freedom to choose and to apply a degree of reality answering their feelings and emotions. The inner freedom is part of an artistic personality whose religion is 'rooted in natural humanity' and unlimited by any confession or dogma.⁶⁹ 'Natural humanity', in these statements, integrates the description of essential human capacities, including intellect, imagination, and emotions. As essentially human, at least intellect and imagination could be referred to as transtemporal, even though their content changes in time. The emotions we share, under Darwin's persuasive account, with (other) animals are transtemporal in an even more radical way.

The most influential Dvořák's contemporary who was struggling with similar foundational questions was Freud. When he saw and described the visual expression of emotionality in Michelangelo's statue, his was by no means a banal observation. The accent placed on the brilliant artistic imagination Freud was praising in his study resulted from his life-long effort to understand Moses as a radical religious leader and assess his place in Judaism's historical evolution. Freud's transcultural perspective dramatically diverges from that displayed by Dvořák, who focuses on Christianity without digging deep to the very roots of this religion as encountered throughout ancient cultures.⁷⁰

Much more serious trouble, or even trauma, scars the socio-cultural status of Judaism in Vienna pre-dating the rise of anti-Semitism growing to the tragedy of the Holocaust. The tragic events expelled from Vienna many extraordinary intellectuals, including Freud and Ernst Gombrich. Art historical texts played their role in these deplorable developments, while instrumentalising substantial parts of Dvořák's theoretical heritage. At this point of time, the problem of idolatry verged on a real tragedy. Prior in this text, idolatry was addressed in the context of the Russian Bolsheviks, but the issue plagued Austrian socialists as well. Dvořák certainly knew Karl Lueger (1844–1910), mayor of Vienna and founder of the Austrian Christian-Social Party. Despite his many professional merits and commendable personal and civic qualities, this politician was among the first to use populist, nationalist, and Antisemitic rhetoric. He proved to be a

⁶⁸ Dvořák, *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Art*, 105.

⁶⁹ He used similar formulations in his study on Pieter Bruegel the Elder in Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, 222: 'diese grundsätzliche Möglichkeit, den Realitätsgrad subjektiv zu wählen und anzuwenden', 228: 'die größere innere Freiheit der künstlerischen Persönlichkeit', and 224: '...Verankerung der Religion in der natürlichen, an kein kirchliches Confiteor und Dogma gebundenen Menschlichkeit...'

⁷⁰ These ideas could equally serve in comparing Dvořák's impact with the influence of Aby Warburg's ideas.

source of inspiration for Adolf Hitler, who saw in Lueger 'the most powerful ("gewaltig") German mayor of all times'.⁷¹ The word 'gewaltig' (powerful, forceful, or even violent) might remind the reader of the present article of the 'eternal forces of human existence or humanity' ('ewigen Gewalten des Daseins und des Menschentums'), a phrase used by Dvořák, in his critical acclaim of Michelangelo's statue as free from any direct political associations.

When it comes to Lueger, Vienna's paternalistic mayor, the cultic quality is in this case chiefly political-propagandistic, which makes it responsible for one of Vienna's most prominent and politically charged monuments in the public space. The cult marked its onset in the second decade of the twentieth century by venerating Lueger with an enormous ten-metre high monument executed by professor Joseph Müllner.⁷² The towering artwork, as well as several later sculptural monuments put up throughout Vienna to honour Lueger as a beneficial figure and burnish the cult, continued to be a source of anger up to the twenty-first century.⁷³ Heated debates strengthened the close link connecting ideology and idolatry touched on at an earlier stage in the present essay. The disputes and debates over history also testified to the topicality and urgency of the matter for the twentieth-century Vienna.

Although Max Dvořák remained an apolitical scholar, the processes examined above are of relevance for the assessment of his work. Sculptures can undoubtedly become objects of idolatrous worship, especially when backed up with interpretations linking them up with allegedly eternal values. It was not hard to notice the temporal or even ephemeral character of traditional values during the political turmoil in the aftermath of the Great War. No small wonder, then, that any reasonable human being was facing the challenge of searching for something less transient to rely on. One method, phenomenological, made use of descriptions, in a bid to find enduring elements in various individual experiences of time. Another one relied on the concept of time, just worked out in modern sciences, trying to understand its nature and properties as they existed even before evolution produced first self-conscious beings. Scientific methodologies constantly try to arrive at an 'objective' concept of time and temporality. Under this perspective, historical changes in 'art' and definitions of the 'ideal' turn out as contingent products of historical circumstances, or even as social constructs. The third method made use of the concept of time which proceeds from an insight into the interaction between objective history and subjective experience of various narratives. The latter are shared among individuals, which means that the resulting ideas on temporality end up as not entirely subjective. Their formations, however, tend to change across societies and cultures.

Both Dvořák and Freud used, if in varying proportions, all the three

⁷¹ Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler's Wien*, München: 1998, 496; Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, München: Franz Eher Verlag, 1943, 59, praised Lueger with the sentence 'Heute sehe ich in dem Manne mehr noch als früher den gewaltigsten deutschen Bürgermeister aller Zeiten'.

⁷² Richard Riedl, 'Das Luegerdenkmal in Wien', *Die Christliche Kunst. Monatschrift für alle Gebiete der christlichen Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft*, 17, 1920/21, 45-47.

⁷³ See e.g. [Arbeitskreis - luegerplatz.com](http://Arbeitskreis-luegerplatz.com) (visited 15/7/2021).

methods. They approached Michelangelo's *Moses* differently, but despite the divergences either found his own path towards a deeper meaning of that artefact. Ironically enough, some of their inspirations – when used, misused, or abused by other people – would contribute to the tragedies to come. In particular, the controversial concept of superhuman powers, as incarnated in a limited and finite human being, may well be conducive of breeding idolatry. In this light, Freud, a physician dealing with disagreeable phenomena of life, displayed more courage in confronting immediate raw reality than Dvořák did, an art historian lavishing more of his attention on supratemporal perfection.

One more point perhaps merits mention in conclusion. Dvořák developed his understanding of the temporality of art with a view to identifying and mildly criticising the negative and sometimes even catastrophic phenomena of his day. His radical contemporaries acted under a different set of priorities, their creativity and understanding of art directly confronting the urgent issues of their time. Taken together, those writings offer exceptionally complex and nuanced insights into multiple temporalities of art, culture, and human life.

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