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From the *Darwinianische Evolutionslehre* to the *Geisteswissenschaft*: Max Dvořák on Alois Riegl's Positivist Art History

Francesca Bottura

Abstract

Besides being known for his writings on the history of art, Max Dvořák (1874–1921) reveals a refined understanding of the art-historical methodologies that preceded him and informed his own method of art-historical analysis. This generally ignored aspect emerges with great force from the unpublished notes Dvořák prepared for his lessons at the University of Vienna, where his archive is still preserved. In the manuscripts composed during his university career, between 1902 and 1921, Dvořák shows a particular interest in a methodological shift that had begun with his teacher, Alois Riegl, and Franz Wickhoff at the end of the nineteenth century and had spread widely during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Dvořák termed the beginning of this methodological transformation as historical Positivism, which introduced the theory of evolution into the history of art, thanks to the contributions of scholars such as Riegl. This approach can also be interpreted as a kind of ‘botany’ of art, committed to cataloguing, dissecting, and comparing the objects of study. Riegl’s *Darwinianischen Evolutionslehre*, or Darwinian evolutionary theory, was fundamental for the development of art history as a scientific discipline. Gradually, Dvořák’s reflection emphasises the need for a more in-depth study of creative experience, taking into account the broader history of ideas and human subjectivity. Dvořák describes the progressive abandonment of formalism in favour of a reconsideration of the emotional aspects of artworks by comparing the shift in thinking with the ideal distance between the series *Les Meules* (1890–1891) by Claude Monet and *Das Konzert* (1920–21) by Oskar Kokoschka. This essay aims to reconstruct, through Dvořák’s texts and notes, the methodological transformation underway between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the history of art, underlining his role in it but above all the characteristics of his interpretation.

Keywords

Max Dvořák, Alois Riegl, Cultural Darwinism, Vienna School of Art History, methodology of the history of art, theory of evolution

* This paper is the result of a research partly presented at the International Conference ‘The Influence of the Vienna School of Art History IV: Für Riegl / Gegen Riegl’, held by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague in April 2025, and partly included in my PhD thesis (Un’idea di storia dell’arte. La metodologia storico-artistica di Max Dvořák (1874–1921) attraverso le lezioni di storia dell’arte barocca all’Università di Vienna), successfully defended in February 2026 at the University of Verona (supervisor Prof. Valerio Terraroli). I would like to thank Dr Fabio Tononi and Dr Tomáš Murár for their assistance during the preparation of the article and for their continuous and helpful discussions.

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Introduction

The name ‘Vienna School of Art History’ – ‘*Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte*’ – became renowned after one of its members from the second generation, Julius von Schlosser (1866–1938), offered in 1934 a ‘brief sketch of its origins and development’, as he stated. In his essay on the development of Austrian scholarship, Schlosser outlined the Vienna School’s history and the personalities who shaped it.¹ He was not the only Viennese scholar interested in his predecessors’ (i.e. Rudolf von Eitelberger, Moritz Thausing, Franz Wickhoff, and Alois Riegl) contributions to the school’s critical method. In the second generation of the Vienna School, several members shared a focus on historiographical examination.

Before Schlosser reported on the history of the Vienna School, Max Dvořák (1874–1921) and Hans Tietze (1880–1954) had already dwelt on the methodologies of art history.² In fact, the former was ironically addressed as ‘St. Methodius’ in a satirical collage made in 1904 by Paul Eger (1881–1947) – at that time a student in art history and German philology at the University of Vienna – and meant for Dvořák’s teacher and director of the Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909) (Fig. 1).³ On one side, the collage shows the members of the Institute as they could have been depicted in 1204, and, on the other side, a nursery rhyme that mocks some of their scientific traits. At the centre there is ‘S. Erica’, Erica Tietze-Conrat (1883–1958), holding in her arms another student, Ernst Ebenstein, labelled as ‘S. Ernestinus’. On the right of the picture, there is the writer Ludwig von Ficker (1880–1967) as ‘S. Ludovicus’, while from the corner glides an ‘apocalyptic animal’, Ernst Diez (1878–1961), a student in Graz of Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941), ready to drop a baby into the void.

From the rhyme on the back of the collage, we learn that this part was meant as a rant against Strzygowski, although he is never directly mentioned. On the opposite side, Dvořák as ‘St. Methodius’ raises his right index finger in a significant gesture, while with his other hand he holds a board with the supplement to the Institute’s news bulletin *Kunstgeschichtliche Anzeigen*. At his feet, kneeling in prayer, a figure with a monocle and a

¹ Julius von Schlosser, ‘Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte. Rückblick auf ein Säkulum deutscher Gelehrtenarbeit in Österreich’, *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Institut für Geschichtsforschung*, 13, 2 (1934). Engl. trans. Karl John, ‘Julius von Schlosser, The Vienna school of the history of art – review of a century of Austrian scholarship in German’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 1 (December 2009), 1–50.

² See Max Dvořák, ‘Über die dringendsten methodischen Erfordernisse der Erziehung zur kunstgeschichtlichen Forschung’, *Die Geisteswissenschaften. Wochenschrift für das gesamte Gebiet der Philosophie*, I, 34 (1913–14), 932–36; and 35 (1913–1914), 958–61; also in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, XXVII (1974), 7–19. See Hans Tietze, *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte: Ein Versuch von Dr. Hans Tietze* (Leipzig: Verlag von E. A. Seeman, 1913). Tomáš Murár has already demonstrated a continuity between the thought of Schlosser and Dvořák. See Tomáš Murár, “‘The Work is Only in a Moment’: Max Dvořák and the Meaning of the Work of Art”, *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 64 (2023), 214–215.

³ Paul Eger, *Das Wiener kunsthistorische Institut im Jahre 1204, 1903–1904*, paper collage, 32 x 42,2 cm, Vienna: Archive of the Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Institutsakten/Fotos. Hans Aurenhammer has partially transcribed the rhyme.

square nimbus, suggesting him as the author of the work, is portrayed in accordance with the patron's iconography. From above, wrapped in a golden cloud, the blessing arm of the *Kunstwollen* emerges, clutching Alois Riegl's (1858–1905) unmistakable round glasses. This unusual picture not only offers a cross-section of interpersonal relationships within the Institute, emphasising Riegl's role as 'spiritual guide' of the Vienna School, but also reveals that his colleagues perceived Dvořák as a scholar dedicated to methodologies.

During his career at the University of Vienna, from his appointment as *Privatdozent* in 1903 until he died in 1921, Dvořák devoted himself to teaching with remarkable dedication. In this period, he taught almost 80 courses: half were introductory compendiums and exercises, and the other half were divided between medieval and modern art history and particular topics.⁴ The special care that the scholar reserved for his teaching tasks emerges from the many pages of preparatory notes preserved today at the Archive of the Institut für Kunstgeschichte of the University of Vienna.⁵ One distinctive feature of the manuscripts is that Dvořák opened each course with an extensive methodological introduction. In these prefaces to the actual topic, he described the points of view adduced by previous historiography, emphasising above all the taste prejudices that had long prevented the objective evaluation of some periods of art history, such as the Late Antique, the Middle Ages, and the Baroque.

Dvořák appears very sensitive to how methodologies shape the understanding of art and to how theories have changed the perspective on art history. Therefore, Dvořák's introductory lessons can serve as an important tool for enhancing understanding of the methods used by art historians in the nineteenth century and the changes brought by the Vienna School. This essay addresses two significant methodological turns detected by Dvořák, and both breakthroughs trace back to the critical work of Wickhoff and Riegl. The first could be described as the Positivist shift towards the history of styles and forms, addressed as the *Darwinianische Evolutionslehre*, the second one is the response to the dissatisfaction arising from the slavish application of the first method, paving the way for the *Geisteswissenschaft*. The methodological shifts were more evident when examining historical epochs or styles previously overlooked, and the Viennese scholars played a peculiar role in recovering these art-historical occurrences.

1. The *Darwinianische Evolutionslehre*

Dvořák identifies the first change in art historical methodology with the abandonment of historiographical dogmatism and, in its place, the application of an objective model derived

⁴ See *Öffentliche Vorlesungen an der K. K. Universität zu Wien ...* (Vienna: Druck von Adolf Holzhausen, 1898–1918); and *Öffentliche Vorlesungen an der Universität zu Wien ...* (Vienna: Druck von Adolf Holzhausen, 1919–1920).

⁵ Vienna, Archive of the Institut für Kunstgeschichte of the University of Vienna, Dvořák–Nachlass, fol. Dvořák 1–Dvořák 19.

from science. In his lecture notes, Dvořák wrote that during the nineteenth century, art history as a discipline underwent a methodological transformation, shifting from a cultural history of art focused on ‘humanity’s intellectual development’ to the analysis of ‘derivation and influence’, providing an evolutionary history of forms.⁶ Whereas historians such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) and Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) were interested in art for its cultural meaning, the rise of Positivism brought a new focus to art history: the evolution of formal elements. The discipline came closer to science through the positivist approach. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this meant a close alignment with the natural sciences, particularly the theory of evolution by Charles Darwin (1809–1882).⁷ An example of Dvořák’s thought on this matter is a note for the course on High Renaissance art held in the Winter semester of 1919–20 (Figs. 2 and 3).

For Winkelmann or Burckhardt, the works of art were precious monuments to the intellectual development of humanity; for us, they are just testimony of chains of signs and lines of development in a continuous evolution of formal problems. For half a century, what hordes of art historians have been tirelessly striving for is always proof that this or that has existed before or depends on this or that. The question of derivation and influence is so prominent that the work of art, as the fruit of a concrete spirituality, as the result of a specific never-before-seen and non-repeating phase in the spiritual life and struggle of an artist, of a people, has thus completely faded into the background of all humanity.

⁶ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS Max Dvořák ‘Die Kunst der Hochrenaissance’ (1919–20), fol. Dvořák 8. See Mitchell B. Frank, ‘Recapitulation and Evolutionism in German Artwriting’, in *German Art History and Scientific Thought: Beyond Formalism*, ed. by B. Frank Mitchell and Adler Daniel (Farnham: Routledge/Ashgate, 2012), pp. 97–116; Alfred Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer, *The Art of Evolution. Darwin, Darwinism, and Visual Culture* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2009); Barbara Larson and Sabine Flach (eds.), *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). Tomáš Murár, “‘The Work is Only in a Moment’: Max Dvořák and the Meaning of the Work of Art”, *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 64 (2023), p. 216: ‘The theories of art history advanced by Dvořák’s predecessors at the Vienna university were at their core concerned with tracing the development of art over the course of history. works of art in themselves were not the object of art-historical research, but rather served as evidence or documents of how the principles of art changed over time, attesting, on the one hand, to the immanent development of art over time and representing, on the other, in each case particular examples of historical changes, in which a specific meaning is ascribed to the universal principles of art.’

⁷ See Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Mean of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1859); and Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871).

The explanation for this lies in the Positivism of the past period and in the associated predominance of the natural sciences, especially Darwinian evolutionary theory.⁸

In this passage, Dvořák shows some restiveness toward the mere study of ‘derivation and influence’, noting that the practice of dissecting, organising, and comparing works of art was very similar to that of a botanist, once again bringing this method back to Evolutionary Darwinism.⁹

Like natural products, art has also been seen as the necessary product of all-time processes of transformation, which were given on the one hand by natural prerequisites, by geographical relationships, by race and climate, but on the other hand by a compelling pragmatic connection between art forms. Accordingly, the materially determined forms of works of art were dissected like a plant in botany, arranged into groups and circles, compared materially with each other, and traced back as far as possible, so that one usually reached primordial art.¹⁰

Dvořák describes the Positivistic method derived from the natural sciences: the works of art are organised in continuous lines of evolution in which transformations are motivated by nature and by forms themselves, and each line can be traced back to its original occurrence (the *Urform*). The primary focus is on the position that the art piece, artist, or artistic movement occupies in the broader development. In a previous course on ‘Idealismus und Realismus’ from 1915–16, Dvořák had already explained the connection created between interpretation and knowledge about nature and art.

⁸ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS ‘Die Kunst der Hochrenaissance’, fols 7v–10r: ‘Für Winkelmann oder Burckhardt waren die Kunstwerke kostbare Denkmäler der geistigen Entwicklung der Menschheit, für uns sind sie mehr oder weniger nur Belege von Beweisketten und Entwicklungslinien in einer durchlaufenden Evolution der formalen Probleme. Worum sich Scharen von Kunsthistorischen seit einem halben Jahrhundert unermüdlich bemühen, ist immer wieder der Nachweis, dass dies oder jener schon früher da war oder von diesem oder jenem abhängig ist. Die Frage der Ableitung und Beeinflussung steht so im Vordergrund, dass ihr gegenüber das Kunstwerk als die Frucht einer konkreten Geistigkeit, als das Ergebnis einer bestimmten nie früher dagewesenen und sich nicht wiederholende Phase im Geistigen Leben und Ringen eines Künstlers, eines Volkes so der ganzen Menschheit ganz in den Hintergrund hat. / Die Erklärung dafür liegt in dem Positivismus der vergangenen Periode und in dem mit ihm verbundenen Vorherrschaft der Naturwissenschaften im Allgemeinen insbesondere aber der Darwinianischen Evolutionslehre.’ Here and for all the following notes (if not specified otherwise), the English translation was made by the author.

⁹ See Nicola Gauld, “‘What is Meant by this System?’: Charles Darwin and the Visual Re-ordering of Nature”, in *Endless Forms. Charles Darwin, Natural Science and the Visual Art*, ed. by Diana Donald and Jane Munro (New Haven and London: Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge, 2009), pp. 119–140.

¹⁰ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS ‘Die Kunst der Hochrenaissance’, 10–12r: ‘Wie Naturprodukte hat man auch die Kunst als das notwendige Produkt allmäliger Umbildungsprozesse zugesehen, die einerseits durch natürliche Voraussetzungen, durch geographische Verhältnisse, durch Rasse und Klima, andererseits aber durch eine zwingende pragmatische Verbindung der Kunstformen gegeben waren. Dementsprechend zergliederte man die materiell bedingte Form der Kunstwerke wie im Botanischen eine Pflanze zergliedert, ordnete sie in Gruppen und Kreise verglich sie materiell untereinander und verfolgte die Formen zurück so weit als es nur ging, so dass man zumeist bis zur Urkunst gelangte.’

New times bring new themes, and the great transformation that has taken place in our relationship to art, and thus in the entire study of art, makes it possible to adopt a different perspective than the one previously common in the study of ancient matters. The transformation I mentioned is far too clear to warrant detailed treatment. It refers primarily to the relationship between art and nature. Ten years ago, perhaps just five years ago, the objective representation of nature was the most important measure of artistic development. This is related to the entire intellectual constitution of the last century, that century which was entirely influenced by the enormous achievements of the natural sciences; that century which possessed in the word 'progress' a slogan to which everything had to bow, a slogan which has often transformed into a fetish and clouded the view of explicit historical knowledge. In the achievements of natural science, the knowledge, and the management of nature, one sees something absolute, something that has been the goal and the title of glory of the entire development of humanity.¹¹

The tendency Dvořák identified as *Darwinianische Evolutionslehre* was not limited to art history. Biologist and historian of science Stephen Jay Gould describes the evolutionary structure of knowledge that emerged in the nineteenth century as 'Darwinian logic'¹², claiming it became more a way of constructing knowledge than a mere scientific theory. Marsha Morton offers another accurate definition of this larger phenomenon, calling it 'Cultural Darwinism'.¹³ Morton refers to a movement deeply rooted in Austrian intellectual thought, spanning philosophy, science, historiography, and art.¹⁴ One insightful example offered by Morton is the article by Eberhard Freiherr von Bodenhausen (1868–1918)

¹¹ Max Dvořák, *Idealismus und Realismus in der Kunst der Neuzeit Die Entwicklung der modernen Landschaftsmalerei: Akademische Vorlesungen aus dem Archiv des Kunsthistorischen Instituts der Universität Wien*, ed. by Norbert Schmitz (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswiss., 1993), p. 1: 'Neue Zeiten bringen neue Themen und die große Wandlung, die sich in unserem Verhältnis zur Kunst und damit in der ganzen Kunstbetrachtung vollzogen hat, bring es nahe, eine anderen Gesichtspunkt als den bisher üblichen in der Betrachtung der alten Materie anzuwenden. Die Wandlung, die ich erwähnte, ist viel zu klar, als dass sie ausführlich auseinandergesetzt werden müsste. Sie bezieht sich hauptsächlich auf das Verhältnis zwischen Kunst und Natur. Vor zehne, vielleicht noch vor fünf Jahren, war die objektive Wiedergabe der Natur der wichtigste Gradmesser der künstlerischen Entwicklung. Es hängt das mit der ganzen geistigen Verfassung des vorigen Jahrhunderts zusammen, jenes Jahrhunderts, welches ganz unter dem Einfluss der riesigen Errungenschaften der Naturwissenschaften gestanden ist; jenes Jahrhunderts, welches in dem Wort „Fortschritt“ ein Schlagwort besass, dem sich alles beugen musste, ein Schlagwort, das sich vielfach in einen Fetisch verwandelt und den Blick der klaren historischen Erkenntnis getrübt hat. Die Errungenschaften der Naturwissenschaft, die Erkenntnis und die Bewältigung der Natur, darin sieht man etwas Absolutes, etwas, was das Ziel und der Ruhmestitel der ganzen Entwicklung der Menschheit gewesen ist.'

¹² Stephan Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Harvard: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2002).

¹³ Marsha Morton, 'Art's "Contest with Nature": Darwin, Haeckel, and the Scientific Art History of Alois Riegl Publication in Darwin and Aesthetic Theory', in *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History*, ed. by Barbara Larson and Sabine Flach (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 53.

¹⁴ Morton, pp. 53–54.

published in the Modernist paper 'Pan' in 1899.¹⁵ Bodenhausen refers to the evolutionary theory (*die Lehre der Entwicklung*) as being 'as old as the world itself.'¹⁶ In this perspective, Darwin would be only the most recent occurrence of a much more significant human constant. Furthermore, Bodenhausen recognises in 'the theory of evolution' the necessary baseline for modern aesthetics, attributing evolutionary models to creativity as well.¹⁷ In fact, many other examples of 'Cultural Darwinism' in figurative arts could be made. Martha Lucy found a very evocative one in the artwork of the French Surrealist Odilon Redon, who, in the print series *Les Origines* (1883), investigates the universe's evolutionary history (Fig. 4).¹⁸

The application of Evolutionism soon expanded into different fields of knowledge, which came to influence one another. As noted by Kurt Bayertz: 'The theory of evolution had become an intellectual fad at that time – everything was interpreted in evolutionary terms.'¹⁹ This can be further testified by comparing Riegl's drive to locate the *Urform* and the theory of *Kulturkreis* elaborated by the Vienna School of Ethnology (*Wiener Schule der Volkskunde*) at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ethnologists such as Fritz Graebner (1877–1934) and Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954) were interested in a progressive chronological development of human culture, as well as tracing it back to the centre of the original cultural circle (*Ur-Kulturkreis*).²⁰ The 'Theory of Kulturkreise' interprets cultures as

¹⁵ Eberhard Freiherr von Bodenhausen, 'Entwicklungslehre und Aesthetik', *Pan*, IV (1899–1900), 236–240 (236): 'Die Lehre der Entwicklung ist alt, wie die Welt. In allen Kulturen, so auch in der unseren, lassen sich ihre Spuren, hier Anfänge, dort Ausbauten, verfolgen. Wir haben uns gewöhnt, sie im Namen Darwin verkörpert zu sehen, weil er es war, der als Erster ihr in bestimmten Grenzen die wissenschaftliche Grundlage gegeben. Seit Darwins That – die doch nur ein Anfang war – sehen wir die Welt im Licht dieser Lehre. Überall sind die Kräfte am Werk, ihre Grenzen zu erweitern; eine noch ungeahnte Vertiefung von Welt zu Welt wartet ihrer. Eine moderne Ästhetik wird in dem Masse de Wollen unserer Zeit Rechnung tragen, in dem sie auf dem Boden dieser Lehre steht.' For the Engl. translation, see Kurt Bayertz, 'Biology and Beauty. Science and Aesthetics in Fin de Siècle Germany', in *Fin de siècle and its legacy*, eds. Mikulas Teich and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 278–295 (279): 'The doctrine of evolution is as old as the world. [...] We have become accustomed to seeing it embodied in the name of Darwin, because it was he who first gave it a scientific basis within certain limits. Since Darwin's work – which was only a beginning – we have seen the world in the light of this theory. Everywhere the forces are at work to extend its boundaries; and as yet undreamt-of deepening from world to world awaits them. Modern aesthetics will take account of the will of our time to the extent that it stands on the ground of this doctrine.'

¹⁶ Bayertz, p. 279.

¹⁷ Bodenhausen, p. 236.

¹⁸ See Martha Lucy, 'Into the Primeval Slime: Body and Self in Redon's Evolutionary Universe', in *The Visual Culture of Science and Art in Fin-de-Siècle France / La culture visuelle de la science et l'art dans la France fin-de-siècle*, *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 34, 1 (2009), pp. 18–29; see also Serena Keshavjee, 'Editorial Introduction: The Visual Culture of Science and Art in Fin-de-Siècle France / Mot de la rédactrice: La culture visuelle de la science et l'art dans la France fin-de-siècle', *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 34, 1 (2009), 5–17.

¹⁹ Bayertz, p. 291.

²⁰ See Max Dvorák, 'Alois Riegl', *Mitteilungen der kaiserlich-königlichen Zentralkommission zur Erforschung der Kunst- und historischen Denkmale*, 3, 4 (1905), 255–76.

organisms capable of expanding, developing, and influencing neighbouring cultures.²¹ This interpretative overlap between cultural event and biological organism is also significant for the history of art, which identifies ‘style’ as the primary biological unit on which to build its evolutionary history. Theoretical reflections on the genealogy of long-lasting cultural and anthropological phenomena became, in Vienna, part of a broader discourse on the question of origin. Riegl himself had been a member of the Austrian Verein für Volkskunde²², and his research can be counted among the many who, at this stage, shared a desire to trace the original, primary occurrence of artistic forms.

Riegl put into practice a comparative method for organising works of art according to precise evolutionary lines, such as the one identified for the ‘lotus flower’ in *Stilfragen*.²³ As Morton describes, Riegl employed cognitive instruments similar to those used in botanical studies.²⁴ The same comparison between art history and botany had been made by Dvořák as well.

Riegl’s methodological focus on the empirical analysis of objects reflected his training at the Austrian Institute for Historical Research, where scientific procedures had been imported to the fields of history and philosophy. His close scrutiny and description of visual evidence, which at times sounds like the writings of a botanist examining a specimen, are employed to uncover key moments of evolutionary change [...].²⁵

For Riegl, observation became the primary means of analysing the work of art: a model clearly derived from the natural sciences. Margaret Olin suggests a derivation from the work of Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891), who introduced comparative anatomy and experimental analysis to connoisseurship.²⁶ Morelli’s method profoundly influenced the

²¹ On the ‘Theory of Kulturkreise’, see Andre Gingrich, ‘The German-speaking countries. Ruptures, schools and nontraditions: Reassessing the history of sociocultural anthropology in German’, in *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French and American anthropology*, ed. by F. Barth et al. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), pp. 59–153; Fedra Alessandra Pizzato, ‘Migrazione. Popoli e paesi in movimento dall’età preistorica al discorso pubblico attuale – una overview’, in *Il tempo profondo dell’umanità*, ed. by L. Ciancio et al. (Rome: Carrocci editore, 2026), pp. 135–150.

²² Diana Reynolds-Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875–1905. An Institutional Biography* (Routledge: Ashgate, 2014), p. 135: ‘Riegl was a central figure in establishing the association, serving on its central committee and helping to develop policy for the formation of the club’s museum, which opened in early 1897.’

²³ Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen. Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: Siemens, 1893), pp. 48–61.

²⁴ Riegl proposes a similar botanical explanation for art in *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*. See Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the visual Arts*, trans. by Jacqueline E. Jung (New York: Zone Books 2004), p. 51: ‘Nature gives shape to raw matter according to the basic principle of crystallization, which is grounded in the law of symmetry: that is, the equal lateral distribution of even the tiniest molecules along an ideal central axis. [...] The same holds true for works of visual art made by human beings.’

²⁵ Morton, p. 56.

²⁶ See Margaret Olin, ‘“Look at your Fish”: Science, Modernism and Alois Riegl’s Formal Practice’, in *German Art History and Scientific Thought: Beyond Formalism*, ed. by Frank B. Mitchell and Adler Daniel (Farnham: Routledge/Ashgate, 2012), pp. 33–56.

Vienna School in its aim to develop art history as a scientific discipline.²⁷ This could be achieved by interpreting artistic forms as the result of a force akin to nature, making the work of art a reflection of artistic development, just as a single species exemplifies the general evolution of plants. Riegl himself compared the activity of art historians to that of scientists, in that both looked for the effect of a primordial impulse, calling the new methodology a ‘scientific art history’.²⁸ As summarised by Morton, ‘in both stagings of evolution, individuals (whether plants and animals for Darwin or artists for Riegl) are engaged in a dynamic with larger supra-individual controlling forces: natural selection or the *Kunstwollen*’.²⁹ The *Kunstwollen* in Riegl’s theory served as the impulse for the evolution of artistic forms.

Such a comparative scientific approach applied to works of art can also be recognised in the work of Adam von Bartsch (1757–1821), curator at the Imperial Library in Vienna. Bartsch adopted a taxonomic system for classifying the print collection.³⁰ He even used the taxonomic organisation in the illustrated tables added to his publications to show the differences between true and false in prints: a graphical construction that Gaia Schlegel recognises as derived from the naturalistic ‘*planches explicative*’.³¹ The many examples highlight the tendency towards the scientific treatment of the art–historical matter.

2. The *Geisteswissenschaft*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the formalist evolutionary approach started to feel narrow, at least to some art historians. It is worth noting that, at this point, the theory of evolution was also deemed insufficient by naturalists.³² Dvořák recognised a change in perspective urged by the different *Weltanschauung* which characterised the twentieth century. This represented more than a mere shift in art-historical methodology; it signalled a profound transformation in how nature and human creativity were conceived. The exact transition was best identified by Dvořák while describing the series of drawings by Expressionist artist Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980). The transformation could be observed by comparing Claude Monet’s series *Les Meules* (1890–91) with Kokoschka’s *Das Konzert*

²⁷ See Jaynie Anderson, *The Life of Giovanni Morelli in Risorgimento Italy* (Rome: Officina Libraria, 2019).

²⁸ Alois Riegl, *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*, ed. by Karl M. Swoboda and Otto Pacht (Graz-Cologne: Hermann Böhlau, 1966). Eng. trans. Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the visual Arts*, trans. by Jacqueline E. Jung (New York: Zone Books 2004).

²⁹ Morton, p. 59.

³⁰ Jesse Feiman, ‘The natural history of art: Adam von Bartsch and the taxonomic classification of prints’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 24 (2021), pp. 1–20.

³¹ Gaia Schlegel, ‘Competing images: illustrated volumes by Max Dvořák and his contemporaries shaping national Art History’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 26 (2022), pp. 1–25.

³² Giulio Barsanti, *Una lunga pazienza cieca. Storia dell’evoluzionismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

(1921).³³ The former represents a study of light and atmosphere on an inanimate object, the stacks of hay in a field: the changes in colours and values are analysed by the painter as the characteristics and behaviours of a natural species.³⁴ In contrast, Kokoschka portrayed Kamilla Swoboda while she was listening to music, allowing the artist to trace the succession of emotions on her face and body.³⁵ The scientific study of nature conducted by the Impressionists was similar to the Positivist art history, whereas the in-depth analysis of sentiments carried out by the Expressionists represented a new interest in art as a manifestation of mind and soul. The works of art could not be studied in the same way as natural objects, since this method did not take into account the human, creative, *‘geistig’* aspect of art.³⁶

Dvořák, who had praised the formalistic approach, at the beginning of his last course on Baroque art in 1920, underlined the limitation of the scientific view on art history:

The difference lies in the word *evolution*, which is used hypertrophically in art history. For one must not forget: *evolution* is a scientific concept. A plant *evolves*; this surface of the Earth has *evolved*. Naturally, there are also countless series of historical developments. Still, it is precisely this ‘countless’ that should make us sceptical regarding the question of how far it is permissible to conceive the total time and the entirety of the evidence of a specific historical field as a single, researchable evolution.³⁷

What emerges from this crucial passage is the consciousness of the demand to understand art on a more intimate level, which was not possible through mere observation but needed the establishment of an inner relationship with art. The deeper understanding allowed one

³³ See Hans Aurenhammer, ‘Inventing Mannerist Expressionist: Max Dvořák and the History of Art as History of the Spirit’, in *The Expressionist Turn in Art History. A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Kimberly A. Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 187–208.

³⁴ Max Dvořák, *Oskar Kokoschka Variationen über ein Thema* (Vienna: Richard Lányi, 1921). Engl. trans. Max Dvořák, ‘Foreword to Oskar Kokoschka: Variations on a Theme (1921)’, in *The Expressionist Turn in Art History. A Critical Anthology*, ed. By Kimberly A. Smith (New York: Ashgate 2014), p. 231: ‘The subject of this naturalistic ode was the way a bit of nature changes, through the influence of the seasons and times of day, as an optical impression in its illumination and atmospheric ambience.’

³⁵ Ibid., p. 233: ‘At that point the entire proud temple of divine nature collapsed like a house of cards – and this occurred in art as well, because artists also began to ask themselves whether nature was more divine than the human soul, and whether it was justifiable to reduce the soul to a mere echo of natural impressions; whereas, in truth, it is something divine, the most exalted thing a human possesses, a power through which he can raise himself over his transitory surroundings into an everlasting spiritual world.’

³⁶ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS Max Dvořák ‘Entwicklung der Barockkunst’ (1920–21), fol. Dvořák 8.

See Murár, pp. 214–216.

³⁷ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS ‘Entwicklung der Barockkunst’, fol. Dvořák 8, 1r–4v: ‘Der Unterschied liegt in dem Worte Entwicklung, welches hypertroph in der Kunstgeschichte gebraucht wird. Denn man darf nicht vergessen: Entwicklung ist ein naturwissenschaftlicher Begriff. Eine Pflanze entwickelt sich, diese Erdoberfläche hat sich entwickelt. Es gibt selbstverständlich auch in geschichtlicher Fragen Entwicklungsreihen ohne Zahl, doch gerade dieses ohne Zahl sollte uns skeptisch machen in der Frage, wie weit es gestattet ist die Gesamtzeit und die Gesamtheit der Erweisung eines bestimmten historischer Gebietes als eine einheitliche erforschbare Entwicklung aufzufassen.’

to grasp the reflections of thought in the artwork; this contributed to the construction of a stratified, complex knowledge of the artistic phenomenon, no longer limited to its formal evidence.

Strictly speaking, one would have to replace [the word evolution] with the word *movement*, where this movement was in each case immensely complicated and manifold, so that nothing is more critical when we [subject] a complex of historical facts to our understanding. [...] How this happens is a question of time and method, or in other words, of scientific progress and conscience, of training and a love of truth, without which history would not be history and would turn into fables.³⁸

Dvořák recognises the initiation of this new critical interpretation, a ‘intellectual-historical view of art history’³⁹, precisely in the example offered by Wickhoff and Riegl: ‘they were both pioneers of a view of historical development [...] which is based on the conviction that the most important prerequisite and explanation of all historical processes lies in the history of the human spirit, in the history of the idea that dominates people.’⁴⁰ In the essay from 1899, *Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst*, Riegl introduced the concept of *Stimmung*, ‘a term suggesting mood or atmosphere’⁴¹, to deepen the art historical analysis and include an emotional, sensual character decipherable only through a long and intimate contemplation. For Riegl and Dvořák, reaching a profound understanding of the artwork implied considering the human nature of creativity. This way, the formalistic, evolutionary approach could be overcome without being replaced, but rather by becoming part of a more complex reading. Formalism as a methodology for art history had been ‘scholarly useful’ and could not be wholly set aside, ‘yet one must bear in mind that such works

³⁸ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS ‘Entwicklung der Barockkunst’, fol. Dvořák 8, 1–4v: ‘Streng genommen musste man sie durch das Wort Bewegung ersetzen wo diese Bewegung war jeweilig ungemein kompliziert und mannigfaltig so dass nichts wichtiger ist, wenn wir ein komplex von historischer Tatsachen unserem Verständnis [...]. Wie dies geschieht ist eine Frage der Zeit und Methode oder mit anderen Worten des wissenschaftlichen Fortschrittes und Gewissens, der Schulung und Wahrheitsliebe ohne die Geschichte nicht Geschichte wäre und sich in Fabeln verwandeln wurde.’

³⁹ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS Max Dvořák ‘Dürers Apokalypse’ [n. d. (1920)], fol. Dvořák 9, 2v–4v.

⁴⁰ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS ‘Dürers Apokalypse’, fol. Dvořák 9, 2v–4v: ‘Es war dies die geistesgeschichtliche Auffassung der Kunstgeschichte, die Wickhoff durch enge Verbindung der Entwicklung der Kunst mit der Entwicklung der Literatur so sehr gefordert, und die Riegl geschichtsphilosophisch eine neue Wendung gegeben hat. Beide waren sie auf dem Gebiete der Kunstgeschichte Bahnbrecher einer Anschauung vom geschichtlichen Werden, die sich heute die Führung in allen historischen Disziplinen errungen hat und die auf der Überzeugung beruht, dass in der Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes, in der Geschichte der Menschenbeherrschung[der] Idee die wichtigste Voraussetzung und Erklärung aller Geschichtsvorgänge gelegen sein.’

⁴¹ Alois Riegl, ‘Die Stimmung als Inhalt der Moderne Kunst’, in *Die graphischen Künste*, 22 (1899), pp. 47–56; Morton, p. 63.

cannot exhaust the tasks of art history, which, after all, also possesses a purely humanistic side.⁴²

The 'humanistic side' can only be read by accepting the subjectivity of historical interpretation. In this instance, Dvořák recognises a new path for art historiography and human sciences in general:

The fact remains that in every field of historical thought, we find ourselves facing an entirely new situation; a situation that teaches us to account for the subjectivism of historical thinking properly, and which teaches us to judge historical values – in their complexity and their constant influence upon that which is to come – quite differently than was possible in the age of the positivist worldview. Today, no period of intellectual development is held in lower esteem than any other. All converge into that which Rickert terms 'historical culture-consciousness' – the metaphysical result of humanity.⁴³

Dvořák pushes the change that his masters had begun a step further by recognising the influence of earlier methodologies on current interpretations of art history and on the place of the single artwork within the broader evolutionary line. Even further, he acknowledged the role of the *Zeitgeist* in historiography itself, meaning that art history was part of the *Weltanschauung*, alongside the visual arts and every other reflection of human thought. The concordance among figurative arts, art criticism, and worldview meant that the way artworks were interpreted would also be shaped by humanity's dominant ideas.

We are still too dominated by the phantom of absolute truth, when knowledge and the associated conception of truth are nothing other than historically determined phenomena, life phenomena, related to the entire organisation of the psyche in a particular period, which is least dependent on professional philosophers. Geocentrism was overcome in the imagination hundreds of years before Galileo, anthropocentrism hundreds of years before Darwin, and there are signs in today's art and literature of an overcoming of psychocentrism that the sciences might even dare to think of in dreams. We do not know if there is an absolute truth and never will, but the method of seeking it

⁴² Vienna, IKG, Dvořák-Nachlass, MS 'Die Kunst der Hochrenaissance', fol. Dvořák 8, 12v–14v: 'Krampfhaft möchte man nach Analogien und Berührung [?] und konstruierte indem man als trennender ausschied entweder eine notwendige Stilentwicklung oder eine gleichrum in der Biologie der Menschheit in ihren Urkulturen wurzelnde Prädestination des künstlerischen Schaffens. All dies war natürlich wissenschaftlich nützlich und nichts liegt mir ferner als ein Verzicht auf die damit verbundenen Errungenschaften der Arbeitsmethode. Aber man muss sich doch gegenwärtig halten, dass derartige Arbeiten doch nicht die Aufgaben der Kunstgeschichte erschöpfen können die doch auch eine rein geistwissenschaftliche Seite haben.'

⁴³ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák-Nachlass, MS Max Dvořák 'Idealismus und Realismus in der Kunst der Neuzeit' (1915–16), fol. Dvořák 19, 3r–4v: 'Tatsache ist, dass wir auf allen Gebieten des geschichtlichen Denkens vor einer ganz neuen Situation stehen, vor einer Situation, die uns lehrt, den Subjektivismus des historischen Denkens richtig in die Rechnung zu setzen, die uns lehrt, die historischen Werte in ihrer Kompliziertheit, in ihrem ständigen Einwirken auf das Kommende ganz anders zu beurteilen als es im Zeitalter der positiven Weltanschauung möglich möglich [sic] gewesen ist. Es wird heute keine Periode der geistigen Entwicklung niedriger eingeschätzt als die andere. Alle vereinigen sich zu dem, was Rickert als historisches Kulturbewusstsein bezeichnet, als das metaphysische Resultat der Menschheit.'

becomes sublimer, the instruments become finer and thus more suitable for the mysterious principle of the further education of humanity, which was called evolution yesterday and will probably be called something else tomorrow.⁴⁴

Dvořák's conscious reflection on art-historical methodologies made him aware that the critical view he shared with Riegl was the fruit of a precise worldview, and that, as this worldview changed, the interpretation of art would also change. This point of view anticipates the future debate between the relativist position of André Malraux (1901–1976)⁴⁵ and the realist position of Ernst Gombrich (1909–2001).⁴⁶ Maurizio Lorber summarised the discussion as follows: 'For relativists, there are only interpretations, while for realists, not all interpretations are legitimate, indeed, there are some that are wrong and others that find confirmation or refutation in comparison with the facts.'⁴⁷ Based on this distinction, it is possible to connect Dvořák's thought to the relativist position expressed by Malraux.

Malraux's relativism was based on the idea that 'the recovery of the past is always tainted by the culture of the present',⁴⁸ meaning that the present is the only possible point of observation about the past, but at the same time it is also a filter that distorts its contours through subjective interpretation. Therefore, according to Lorber, Malraux was 'the first one to put this positivist paradigm in crisis and to develop a postmodern position'.⁴⁹ The relativist current emerged in opposition to nineteenth-century Positivism, which had given priority to a rational, certain reading of artefacts.

⁴⁴ Vienna, IKG, Dvořák-Nachlass, MS Max Dvořák 'Lionardos Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der Kunst und Wissenschaft Vortrag, gehalten am 2. Jänner 1913 am Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie', fol. Dvořák 8: 'Wir sind noch immer zu sehr beherrscht von dem Phantom der absoluten Wahrheit, wo ja doch das Wissen und die damit verbundene Vorstellung von der Wahrheit nichts anderes sind als historisch determinierte Erscheinungen, Lebenserscheinungen, die mit der ganzen Organisation der Psyche in einer bestimmten Periode zusammenhängen, die am allerwenigsten von Berufsphilosophen abhängig ist. Der Geozentrismus wurde Hunderte von Jahren in der Fantasie vor Galilei überwunden, der Anthropozentrismus Hunderte von Jahren vor Darwin und gibt es in der heutigen Kunst und Literatur Anzeichen für eine Überwindung des Psychozentrismus, an die die Wissenschaften auch nur im Traume zu denken wagen dürften. Wir wissen nicht, ob es eine absolute Wahrheit gibt, und werden es nie wissen, doch die Methode sie zu suchen wird sublimer, die Instrumente werden feiner und dadurch geeigneter für das geheimnisvolle Prinzip der Weiterbildung der Menschheit, das man gestern Evolution nannte und das wahrscheinlich morgen anders heißen wird.' In Sabrina R. Buebl, 'Max Dvořák's lecture Lionardos Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der Kunst und Wissenschaft', *Umění*, LXXII, 4 (2024), 379–388 (387).

⁴⁵ André Malraux, *Psychologie de l'art: Le musée imaginaire*, I (Lausanne: A. Skira, 1947).

⁴⁶ Ernst Gombrich, 'La philosophie de l'art de Malraux dans une perspective historique', in *Malraux, être et dire*, ed. by Courcel Marine (Paris: Plon, 1976), pp. 216–234; Ernst Gombrich, 'André Malraux and the Crisis of Expressionism', *The Burlington Magazine*, 96, 621 (1954), 374–378.

⁴⁷ Maurizio Lorber, 'Relativo e assoluto nella storia dell'arte: lo scontro fra Gombrich e Malraux', *AEAT arte in Friuli, arte a Trieste: rivista di storia dell'arte*, 30/2011, p. 179: '[...] per i relativisti esistono soltanto interpretazioni mentre per i realisti non tutte le interpretazioni sono lecite, anzi ve ne sono alcune di sbagliate e altre che trovano conferma o confutazione nel confronto con i "fatti".'

⁴⁸ Lorber, p. 189: 'Il relativismo di Malraux si fonda precisamente sull'idea che il recupero del passato è sempre viziato dalla cultura del presente.'

⁴⁹ Lorber, p. 181: 'Il primo a porre in crisi questo paradigma positivista e a sviluppare una posizione postmoderna è stato André Malraux.'

The current of thought that precedes and informs Malraux's reflections on historical knowability has been identified in the 'expressionist criticism' both by Lorber⁵⁰ and Gombrich,⁵¹ as well as Udo Kultermann,⁵² and the founder of this current is, in all respects, Dvořák. Both Malraux and Dvořák elaborated their reflections starting from the contemporary artistic environment. Just as the artistic experience of the Surrealists, Picasso, and Duchamp had been fundamental to the historical relativism implemented by Malraux,⁵³ so was Expressionism for Dvořák.⁵⁴ Gombrich rejected this position.⁵⁵ Interestingly, Gombrich refused the idea of art as an expression of the *Weltanschauung* as it would entail 'as many and as different species of human mind as there are types of art', and the off-scale diversification would leave the discipline of art history only to 'describe the strange varieties which exist among human civilisations as we describe the odd forms of beetles'.⁵⁶ One could argue that both Dvořák and Gombrich aimed to distance art history from a positivist botany of art. Nevertheless, the two intellectuals pursued their goals in very different ways.

Faithful to the definition of the German historian Eduard Meyer (1855–1930), according to whom 'historical is what is or has been *effective*'⁵⁷, meaning that the importance of an occurrence of the past can be measured by its effect on the present, Dvořák sought in the present the disposition of spirit to understand the past. In doing so, the art historian welcomed subjectivism into art–historical practice, opening a new methodological season

⁵⁰ Lorber, p. 189: 'First of all, Gombrich sees a precedent in Malraux's assumption. This would be the expressionist criticism of central Europe which, in the 1920s, projected our passions and desires onto the past. The most illustrious example is represented by Max Dvořák [...] (*Innanzitutto Gombrich ravvisa un precedente nell'assunto di Malraux. Si tratterebbe della critica espressionista del centro Europa che, negli anni Venti, proiettava sul passato le nostre passioni e i nostri desideri. L'esempio più illustre è rappresentato da Max Dvořák*).'

⁵¹ Gombrich, 1954, p. 374: '[...] His [Malraux] message is derived from that of the expressionist critics most en vogue in Central Europe in the 1920s.'

⁵² Udo Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte. Der Weg einer Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1981).

⁵³ Lorber, p. 181.

⁵⁴ See Aurenhammer, 2014.

⁵⁵ Gombrich, 1976, p. 233: 'It is not that Malraux is wrong to remind us that the interpretation a historian gives to the facts changes our perception of them. The historian who considers Mannerism as decadent will make a different selection of data from the historian who sees this school as the precursor of modern art. But it would be an error to conclude that everything is relative and that there are no discoveries which could be useful to both historians at once (*Non que Malraux ait tort de nous rappeler que l'interprétation que l'historien donne des faits change la perception que nous en avons. L'historien qui considère le maniérisme comme décadent fera une autre sélection des données que l'historien qui voit dans cette école le précurseur de l'art moderne. Mais ce serait une erreur de conclure que tout est relatif et qu'il n'existe pas de découvertes qui pourraient être à la fois utiles aux deux historiens*).' Gombrich's relation to Dvořák is far more complex and layered, and depends on numerous other influences (such as that of the philosopher Karl Popper). Richard Woodfield provided some useful cornerstones of this complex intellectual relationship. See Richard Woodfield, 'Gombrich on Art, Style and Culture', *Nordisk Estetisk Tidskrift*, 12 (1994), p. 81: '[...] it would seem that Gombrich particularly admired Dvořák's analytical incisiveness in describing works in such a way that they could be seen to lock into the general climate [...]. And also pp. 84–85: '[...] Gombrich argued against what he called 'the physiognomic fallacy', the fallacy that one could read a culture from its art.'

⁵⁶ Gombrich, 1954, p. 374.

⁵⁷ Eduard Meyer, *Kleine Schriften. Zur Geschichtstheorie und zur wirtschaftlichen und politischen Geschichte des Altertums* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1910), p. 43: '[...] historisch ist, was wirksam ist oder gewesen ist.'

for the discipline. The new acceptance of the subjective aspects of historical understanding found full expression in the so-called *Geisteswissenschaft*, a phenomenon on the rise at the beginning of the twentieth century, as Fabio Tononi has shown.⁵⁸ Tononi argues that the interest in the human sciences found in Dvořák's thought and shared by philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) and artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) derives from a renewed consideration of the 'spiritual content' of human creations.⁵⁹ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the inclination towards the *Geisteswissenschaft* represented both a critical response to formalism and an expression of the *Zeitgeist*.

Conclusion

From the archival material emerges an unprecedented side of Dvořák, a 'Methodius' of the history of art, deeply interested in the imprint left by previous interpretations on the current understanding of artworks. What can be drawn from Dvořák's lucid examination of previous methodologies is an informed and deep awareness of the role that the chosen approach plays in historical research. Such consciousness, coupled with the recognition of the subjectivity of interpretation, yields a new vision of the art of the past as a phenomenon relevant to the present. To better understand how Dvořák intended the artistic experiences of the past as '*historisch*' and, therefore, 'effective for the present', one can look at the brilliant definition of the significance of art given in an interview of 1991 by the Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan (1909–1992) that perfectly encapsulates a vision of the past as the key to understanding the present:

For me, a Giotto painting is not a problem of the fourteenth century; it is my problem, that of a man of this century; Michelangelo, Botticelli, Leonardo, Titian, whoever you want, are all contemporary problems, ours. Their works move us, we are disturbed by them, they are current problems; what was their problem, we may never know. [...] Our function [as art historians] is to understand what kind of problem Leonardo, Michelangelo, Giotto, the Romanesque, the Gothic, the Baroque, whatever you want, are for our culture.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See Fabio Tononi, 'Dvořák's *Geistesgeschichte* Against Progress in *Kulturgeschichte*: A Comparative Perspective', *Umění*, LXXII(4) (2024), 367–378, esp. p. 369: 'Therefore, both Dilthey and Dvořák conceived of the work of art as containing the inner subjectivity of the artist. [...] In fact, whereas from the perspective of the natural sciences, humanity is a physical fact "accessible only to natural scientific cognition", from the perspective of the human sciences, humanity "emerges only insofar as human states are experienced [...]".'

⁵⁹ Tononi, p. 369: 'Moreover, what the human spirit projects today in some manifestation, tomorrow will be history.'

⁶⁰ Rossana Bossaglia, *Parlando con Argan* (Nuoro: Ilisso Edizioni, 1992), pp. 21–22: 'Per me un dipinto di Giotto non è un problema del Trecento; è un problema mio, di uomo di questo secolo; Michelangelo, Botticelli, Leonardo, Tiziano, chi vuoi, sono tutti problemi contemporanei, nostri. Ci emozioniamo davanti alle loro opere, ne siamo turbati, sono problemi attuali; quale fosse il problema loro, forse non sapremo mai. [...] La nostra funzione è quella di capire che tipo di problema siano Leonardo, Michelangelo, Giotto, il Romanico, il Gotico, il Barocco, quello che vuoi, per la nostra cultura.' I want to thank Dr Maurizio Lorber for kindly suggesting this text to me.

Seventy years after his death, Argan seems to share Dvořák's interpretation. Whereas the Positivist approach of the nineteenth century focused on the scientific objectivity of the comparative method, employing evolutionary strategies to ensure the scientific validity of the new discipline, the *Geisteswissenschaft* draws on subjective opinions, on the deep, spiritual understanding of the artwork. At the same time, understanding the broader cultural mechanisms that shape knowledge becomes pivotal for explaining the models and results of historical research at a given moment in its development. Dvořák appears particularly responsive in this regard, as the manuscripts and the collage held in Vienna testify. A comprehensive history of the discipline that organises scholars interested in historiographical opinions is still missing. However, such an overview should compulsorily include, and with due space, the contribution of Max Dvořák.

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* Vienna, IKG: Vienna, University of Vienna, Archive of the Institut für Kunstgeschichte



Figure 1. Paul Eger, *Das Wiener kunsthistorische Institut im Jahre 1204, 1903–1904*, paper collage, 32 × 42,2 cm (© Vienna: Archive of the Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Institutsakten/Fotos).

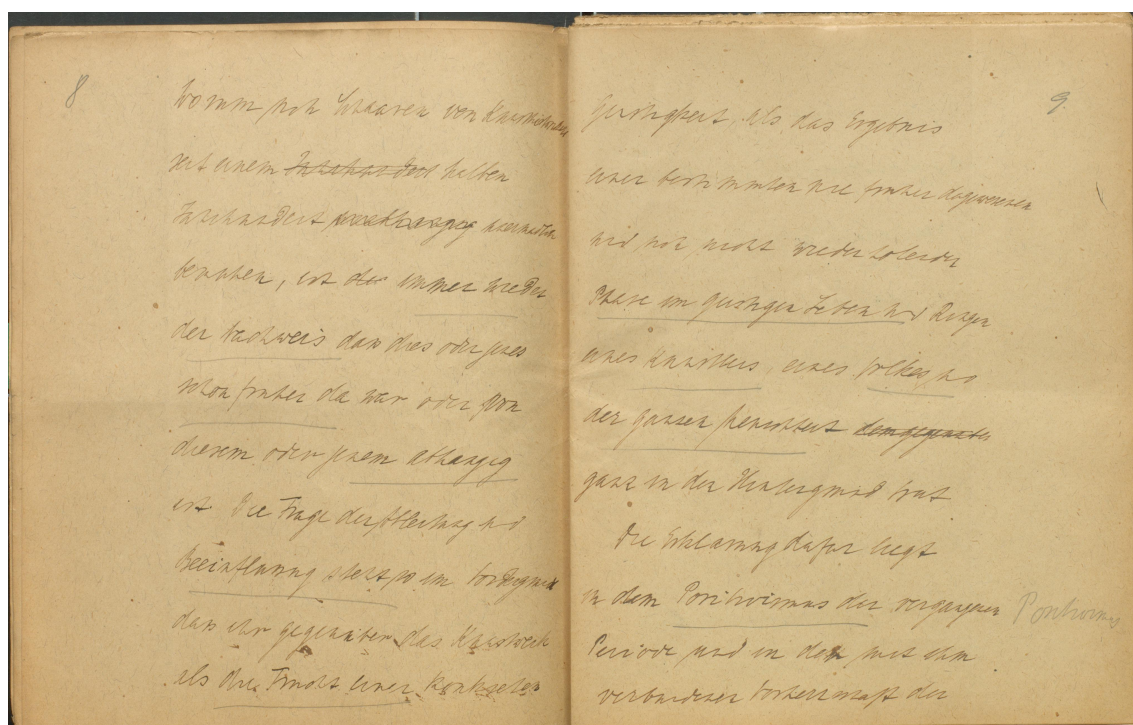


Figure 2. Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS Max Dvořák ‘Die Kunst der Hochrenaissance’ (1919–20), fol. Dvořák 8, 8v–9r.

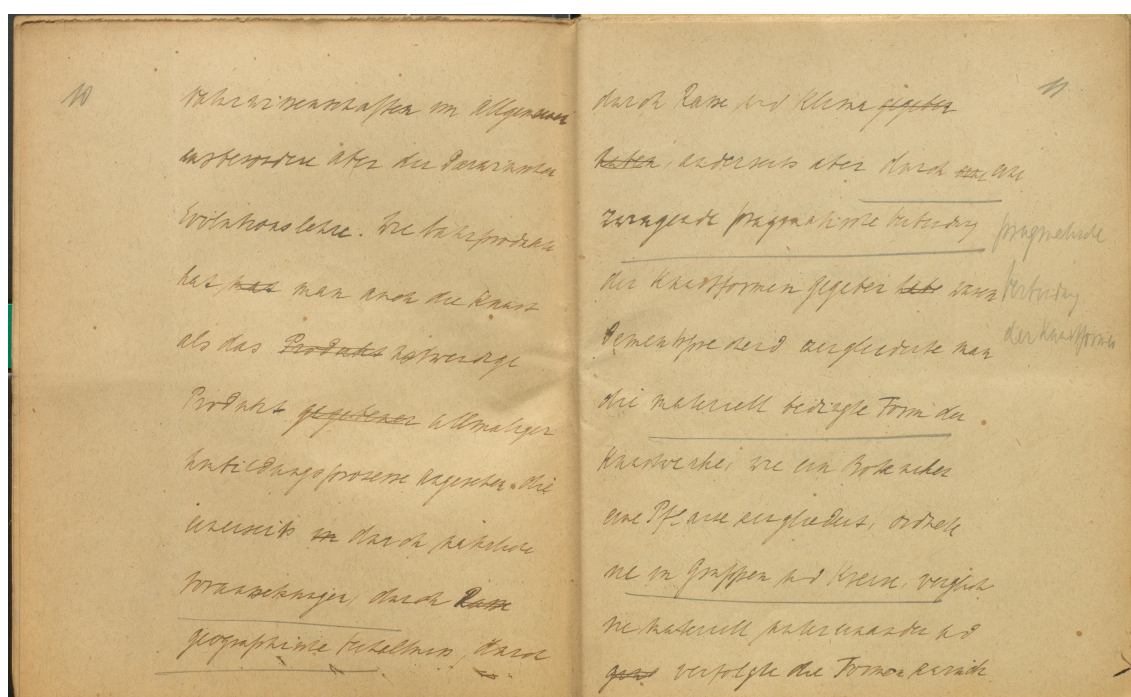


Figure 3. Vienna, IKG, Dvořák–Nachlass, MS Max Dvořák ‘Die Kunst der Hochrenaissance’ (1919–20), fol. Dvořák 8, 10^v–11^r.



Figure 4. Odilon Redon, *There Was Perhaps a First Vision Attempted in the Flower*, plate 2 of 8 from 'Les Origines', 1883, lithograph in black on light grey chine laid down on white wove paper (© Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago).