FROM HISTORY TO SOCIOMETRY
THE TRANSITION IN GERMAN HISTORICAL THINKING

by
Carlo Antone

With a Foreword
by Benedetto Croce

Translated from the Italian
Dallo storicismo alla sociologia

by Hayden V. White
Department of History
The University of Rochester

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tolerance, of Erasmus and Grotius and the Arminians, which raises its voice against violence, fanaticism and irrationalism: "Today we are witnessing with our own eyes how almost everything which once appeared to be solid and sacred has become tenuous and unstable: truth, humanity, reason, law." However, his historiography was itself a symptom of the evil which he deplored. He sharpened the dualism between civilization and nature, and then argued that civilization was mere form, stylized convention, play, comedy. And history was nothing but a succession of these brilliant ceremonies. Should one be surprised if, from time to time, raw reality intruded, disrupted the play, and put the comedians to flight? What sort of spirit can be demanded of the participant in a play called upon to defend that which he knows to be nothing but a fatuous game? And how is it possible to lament the fact that all things "which once stood firm and sacred" have now been shaken? Especially if one has asserted the relativity of all cultural phenomena and the legitimate plurality of all forms?

Chapter 6

HEINRICH WÖLFFLIN

One of Goethe's observations in his *Italian Journey* (*Italienische Reise*) might well serve as the motto for the work of Heinrich Wölfflin. Goethe wrote: "It is evident that the eye forms itself by the objects which from youth on it is accustomed to look upon; and so the Venetian artist must see all things in a clearer and brighter light than other men. We, whose eye when out of doors falls on a dingy soil, which, when not muddy, is dusty, and which, always colorless, gives a sombre hue to the reflected rays, or who at home spend our lives in a close, narrow room, can never attain to such a cheerful view of nature." Wölfflin's theoretical problem, the problem of the eye of the artist, is a product of the Italian *Erlebnis* which every German from Goethe on brought back with him when he returned from the land of clear and perfect forms into a "formless Germany." It was this Italian experience which gave the German nation its greatest nineteenth century artists, Feuerbach, Böcklin, Marées, Hildebrand, and its two greatest dilettantes, Goethe and Burckhardt. Here, in fact, the German could enjoy beauty as pure and immediate visual stimulation, and by forgetting his inner problems in a sort of vacation of the soul, he could delight in the spectacle of life in its simplicity and its variety. Not having realized the extent to which the literary and artistic tradition forced him to apprehend men and things in an idyllic light, the German artist attributed the power of rendering the soul
clear, serene, measured, and classic to the nature of the country itself, to its lines and light. Only here, he believed, was it possible to learn the discipline of pure form: Goethe himself later wrote, "My greatest joy is the fact that my eye was educated through contact with stable forms and was easily habituated to forms and their relations."

Thus, as early as Goethe, the Italian experience was seen as a problem of form. But precisely because the form to which the German eye had to be educated was Italian, it came to be regarded as something purely external, something merely visual, and above all, as something completely alien to the Nordic nature (natura). Confronted with the Italian triumph of forms, the German came to regard himself as "living" art in some internal sense. Soon this notion was translated into the idea that the German had sacrificed the desire to perfect the external covering of the art object to a desire to express its inner emotional and ethical quality. Thus, a dichotomy was posited in which, throughout the nineteenth century, the problem of art was confused with nationalistic passions. From this confusion descended a long series of problems which were theoretically ill formulated and only partially resolved. If, for example, German art seemed to be rich in content yet weak in formal values, what criterion of judgment could be used for the evaluation of German figurative art? Goethe had denied to the German painter a pure delight in seeing. A century later, Henry Thode had flatly denied to the German people a vocation in the figurative arts and had banished their talents in emotional expression and fantasy to the realm of music. Could one conclude, therefore, that German art had indeed fallen into temptation, but they had been able to resist it and had remained faithful to the Nordic nature? And if so, what constituted this nature?

In his own way, Wölflin answered all of these questions by beginning again at their origins, that is, with the Goethean concept of the eye which is educated through the contemplation of a figure or landscape. He accepted the fundamental assumption of the complete difference between the two natural environments, but he did not conclude therefrom that the sense of form was a prerogative of Italy. There had to be a type of education of the eye, a visual experience, which corresponded to the German physical environment. That excessive realism which Thode had considered an unhealthy deficiency in German art in Wölflin achieves its justification as a peculiarly German sense of form. He held that the German artists of the Renaissance had indeed fallen into temptation, but they had been able to resist it and had remained faithful to the Nordic nature. And it was Wölflin who finally succeeded in defining this famous nature or essence. In a sense, the problem of form was for the German a problem of his very humanity and destiny. Confronted with his alter ego, the Italian form, the German is forced to define his own national individuality: "The more often one goes to Italy and the more intimately one comes to know it, the more alien it appears. However, it is possible that these experiences make the traveler more clearly and intimately aware of the special worth of the things of his own country." 2

It was on this encounter of the two forms that Wölflin loved to linger. Notwithstanding the fact that he gave the Germans a key to the understanding of their art—and perhaps even a way of exalting it above Italian art—he himself made little use of that key. Of his master Burckhardt, he observed how the only Nordic artist with whom he had been concerned was Rubens, "who, more than any other, was nourished on Latin culture without sacrificing himself." 4 Of Wölflin it could be said analogously that the motive force in his development was Dürer.

Since the age of Romanticism no formula had had such a fortunate career as his. It was not only applied by art historians, among whom it became a dogma or a commonplace, but also by
literary historians, students of pre-history and even by political publicists.

Some hailed him as “the first great and authentic art historian.” In reality, in those works which had the greatest circulation, he examined only the premises which would serve for the interpretation of painting, sculpture, and architecture. He himself speaks of “auxiliary constructions” which in no way seek to usurp the role of art history in its traditional sense. His famous demand for “a history of art without names,” which caused such a scandal, did not mean that he conceived of a history of art which could ignore personalities, but only that in order to understand a work of art, it was necessary to take into account that unity of atmosphere and style which it has in common with other works of its time and society. Thus, his investigation does not really move into the sphere of art history per se, but penetrates below that sphere into the zone of the distinctive character of civilizations, nations and races. He makes no value judgments, not because he considers them unscientific, but because they have no place in the investigation of a collective psychology, even if conducted on the ground of art.6

From the time when Dilthey had attempted a compromise between his spiritualism and his positivism in a theory of the types of world views and, after him, Max Weber and Troeltsch had introduced the concept of type into the historiography of religion and economics, the idea of the type became the nodal point around which everything revolved that was active or at least exciting in German historico-philosophical activity: the “life forms” of Spranger, the “soul types” of Jaspers, the “tribal types” [Stammentypen] of Nadler, the “types of mysticism” of Otto, the “types of humanity” of Worringer, the “cultural types” of Spengler, the “character types” of Klages, and the “racial types” of the anthropologists.6 In this intellectual atmosphere were Wölflin’s forms of vision born and nurtured.

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Burckhardt had answered those who criticized him for having avoided any reference to the history of culture in his The Art of the Renaissance in Italy (Kunst der Renaissance): “The great spiritual facts belong to the history of the artists, not to the systematic investigation which seeks to describe the impulses and conditions governing the whole.”7 Here was an outright rejection of the romantic conception of art as a translation of life or as a historical document. The new historiography which organized its data into events and their types was obliged to see in the history of art the solution of merely formal problems, anchored in life to be sure, but capable of being broken down into two parallel lines: one, the narrative history, that is, the biographies of the artists, and the other, the anonymous systematic history.

What constituted the anchorage or what sort of relationship existed between the two parallels Burckhardt did not ask; indeed, he prohibited himself from asking. Yet at the beginning of his systematic description of Renaissance architecture he had inserted a brief note on the monumental sense of the Italians of that epoch, and he had attributed the existence of this sense to their modern individualism and ambition. But there was little organic connection between this chapter and the rest of his work. His formal analysis went its own way, oblivious to any historical consideration.

Wölflin, Burckhardt’s disciple and successor in his chair at Basle, remained faithful to this dualistic view. In 1888, while still quite young, Wölflin asked with a suppressed smile: “What sort of relation could there be between the Gothic style, feudalism and scholasticism? What sort of bridge could link together the Baroque and Jesuitism?”8 Later, after he had become interested in the question of the origins of the Baroque, he observed that it was born of an epoch which enjoyed the sensation of discovering new vistas, was possessed of an eye which was well disposed toward whatever was detached from the classic rule, and which used the terms “new,” “capricious,” “extravagant,”...
and "bizarre" honorifically. But this ante literam futurism of the late Renaissance was not for him the main reason for the emergence of the new style. It seemed to him to be a necessary transformation, not a development brought about by the creative free will and experimentation of individuals, but by a process which was, so to speak, spontaneous, in which the forms changed almost by themselves under the hands of the artists. Finally, in his book on Dürer, although he did make mention of Dürer the man and his relation to the violent passions of the Reformation, he ignored any relations which might have existed between this and his work as an artist. At the very most the religious crisis is reflected in Dürer's selection of themes.

Yet Wölflin is distinguished from the positivistic art historians of the late nineteenth century who, in opposition to the Hege-lians and Romantics of the earlier part of the century, devoted themselves solely to the problem of formal analysis. Wölflin is distinguished from them by a trait which is also found in Dilthey. In his dissertation, "Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture" (Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur), Wölflin reminds one of Dilthey in his lamentation over the fact that the human sciences—and among them art history—still lacked the solid foundations which only psychology could provide. The type of psychology which he had in mind was the theory of empathy (Einfühlung) as it had been developed by Thomas Lipps, Volkelt, and Robert Vischer. Here he asks how architectonic forms can be considered expressions of states of mind. Bodily forms send back to us only what we put into them. In the case of stone we can put into it only those feelings which come to us through the body, that is, the feeling of heaviness, balance, and so forth. Therefore, the laws of architecture would have to be based upon our own bodily experience. The architectonic effect, thus envisaged, will be nothing but the feeling of an achieved balance, the feeling of the victory of our inner vis plastica over inert matter, the realization of our organic well-being.

This was a psychological justification of Burckhardt's classicism. In reality, Wölflin deplored the fact that in his time movement and excitement were preferred to simplicity, balance and serenity: all this appeared to him as a deficiency similar to that of Dürer's "Melancholy I" where he found "the unrequited frustration which comes of the failure to achieve form." The classic sense of form was for the Wölflin of that time an absolute: the uniformity of our bodily structure guaranteed its uniformity. There still remained, however, the fact of change in styles. In order to surmount this difficulty, he recurred to the variation of the ideal of beauty, that is, the variation of the ideal of the body, its attitudes and movements. For him architectural style could be correlated to the mode of dressing peculiar to any given epoch insofar as dress indicated how men desired to hold and carry themselves. And he concluded with some remarks about the relation between medieval pointed shoes and Gothic spires.

This criterion was easily applied by Wölflin to the history of art in general. Having forgotten his aim of describing how style was transformed by itself according to those inner laws of form which his master Burckhardt had wished to reduce to the "clearest possible formulae," he asked himself, in the essay on the origin and essence of the Baroque, what determined transformations of style. The explanation of the positivists, who found the cause of stylistic changes in the external limitations of the materials and practical aims, seemed to him too materialistic. Here also it would be necessary to discover the effect of the new corporeal sense. What, in fact, was the corporeal ideal of the Baroque? In place of the slim and austere figure of the Renaissance, we are now met with the massive Herculean body, swollen with muscles, in both painting and sculpture. Art meekly obeys and offers a swollen heaviness in place of an ethereal lightness.

For a moment it seemed as if Wölflin had succeeded in finally erecting a bridge between art and the general spiritual disposition of life. The corporeal ideal of the Baroque seemed to him
to correspond to the mood of an epoch which was no longer happy but had become serious: "In all spheres the element of seriousness is the supreme value: in religious thought, where
the world turns and confronts the sacred and ecclesiastical, there is a cessation of cynical, sensual gratification; Tasso chooses a
hero who is tired of life as the central character of his Christian
poem; in society and in all forms of communal experience, a
heavier and more reserved tone is evident; one no longer finds
the light and careless grace of the Renaissance—only seriousness
and dignity; instead of a ludic lightness, one finds an ostenta-
tious and deadening pomposity; everywhere the grandiose and
the important is sought." Perhaps it was this passage which
inspired Huizinga to formulate his theory of the ideal forms of
life which stamp every aspect of the culture of an age. When
Wölflin comes to the point of affirming that the nucleus of the
Baroque spirit is its craving for the sublime, its tendency to break
through to the infinite, one has a presentment of the motif so
dear to Dvořák, who saw spiritual crisis as the impetus to revo-
lation in style. However, when Wölflin concludes that it is not
by chance that Palestrina was contemporary with the Baroque,
that is, that architectonic forms have been absorbed by music—
a more adequate mode of expression for vague and formless states
of mind—one is led to suspect that Wölflin has succumbed to the
seductions of the romantic Nietzsche.

But the heresy—if it existed—was short lived, for in Classic Art
(Die klassische Kunst), when confronted with the problem of
the transition from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, he
turns to a concept of style as a projection of a definite corporeal
sense. Here he can point to the code which informs the new
corporeal ideal: the Cortegiano of Castiglione, the collection of
rules in use at the court of Urbino, the recognized school of the
new gentility. The scornful grace of carriage, the modesty and
pomp (grandezza) of the sedate walk, the air of self possession
and the flaccid delicacy of gesture are translated into the art of
the sixteenth-century in which sky and earth, madonnas, saints,
angels and putti, are all characterized by a sense of distinction
and refinement, like the new dominant class, the aristocracy of
the courts. Wölflin argues that it is this new manner of feeling
and observing the body which brings to the new style its famous
classic serenity. And yet the essay on Dürer presents the en-
counter between German art and Italian art, between the influ-
ences of Schongauer and Mantegna, as a conflict between two
different senses of corporeality: between the delicate and graceful
gesture, the elegant, dance-like walk, and the leanness of the late
Gothic body and the monumental solidity of Renaissance bodies.

Thus Wölflin has maintained that bifurcation of form and
spiritual content by which Burckhardt hoped to save the autono-
y of beauty and thus remove himself from the demands of
documentary art history. However, Wölflin felt it necessary to
attribute to form a psychological and a sociological origin. Be-
tween the psychological factor, the feeling or ideal of the body,
and style he placed a mediating factor, one less compromising
than that of causality, that is, the concept of determination.
Form is historically determined and is thus a document—if not
of the spirit of an age, at least of the rules of etiquette and
fashion. It is etiquette and fashion which the artist serves, as
much as does the tailor. One can easily understand, therefore,
how Wölflin could regard as "a refreshing shower upon a dry
earth" and at the same time as "a little crown of thorns" an
improvised affirmation of the freedom of art, the producer of
forms, the theory of pure visibility.

The theory of pure visibility is distinguished from the aesthet-
ics of its own time by its origins, born as it was of the researches
of a painter, Hans von Marées, a sculptor, Adolf von Hilde-
brand, and a patron of the arts, Conrad Fiedler. Having met in
Rome around 1870, these three friends breathed the air which
Goethe had breathed and, like Goethe, they found themselves
confronted with the problem of the classic line. Motivated by
the ideal of form for form's sake and immune to any naturalistic, sentimental, literary or social contamination, they reverted to a transcendental aesthetics and perhaps even more to Kantian ethics: the power (virtù) of the artist seemed to them to be the power of man himself, the force of character which, as plastic force (Gestaltungskraft), dominates a formless and elusive matter presented by sensations, by producing "truly determined, tangible, and sensibly demonstrable forms."

What they wanted, however, was an a priori aesthetics of the figurative arts. For them the aesthetic synthesis was something different from, but analogous to, scientific knowledge, and since this was presented as a concentration of sense data in the abstract concept, the artistic act was conceived by them as a process of abstraction which began with individual representations and ended in pure visibility. And just as science obeyed logical laws, so every art had to have its coherence, imposed by the a priori conditions of sensibility. In the case of the figurative arts, coherence had to result from the a priori structure of the eye. Fieldler concentrated upon the investigation of the "way in which the eye progressed, singling out, isolating, combining, ordering, and creating its autonomous, rich, infinite real-ideal world." Hildebrand, using the stereoscope as an archetype, sought to separate tactile from visual elements by opposing ordinary close range vision to long distance, two dimensional vision in which the artist was pure "seeing" (vedere).

It was this theory of art (Kunsttheorie) which awakened Wölfflin from his dogmatic slumbers. While all around him positivistic historiography continued to chart the derivations and transformations of styles, he now perceived in form the free activity of the artist and began to consider the eye as an image-producing organ which continually educated and perfected itself. Now the historical consideration only seemed to lead up to a certain point; in fact, one might even say that the historical consideration led up to the point where art itself began.

Standing on the shoulders of Fiedler and Hildebrand, he now determined what values this formative activity brought into existence: the simplicity and clarity of figures, the richness of intuitions, the unity of the manifold and the necessity of relations.

However, Wölfflin departed from those who had inspired him at the point where they began to search for an "a priori structure" of the eye. For him the formal values were not the representations of a universal and eternal beauty, but the characteristics of the art of the sixteenth century as compared with that of the fifteenth. He admitted that they were not exclusive to the Italian sixteenth century, and he discerned their presence, for example, in Ruysdael, but he sought to avoid identifying them with art per se. Instead, he reduced them to the status of "characteristic moments" of a definite type of art; that is, he saw them as characteristics of classic art. At the base of this type, he argued, there was a definite eye-structure, a particular mode of seeing, which does not exhaust all of the possibilities of art itself.

Having been raised in a Kantian atmosphere, Wölfflin immediately fell into the concept of type. He seems to have understood Kant in a psychological sense, if not in a physiological one. Psychology lent itself to classificatory methods of analysis. In this case, it served to render account of that purely formal evolution, independent of any spiritual disposition of artists, which Burckhardt had held to be the true object of art history. In fact, clarity, richness and organic quality of expression became the "inexpressible moments" of a given art style, standing beside the older "expressible moments" which were envisaged as a product of the particular corporeal sense. As Croce remarked, it was a strange sort of dualism and one which was not destined to endure; little by little the expressive moments disappeared before those which were conceived as purely optical. In place of the anonymous corporeal sense there now appeared the "feeling for visual forms"—also anonymous. What Wölfflin undertook to describe was the conditionedness (conditionatezza)
of the artist, his belonging to a type of seeing, to a pattern. Instead of a history of art, he developed a psychology of the "forms of vision" in which abstract entities instead of men became the object of study. The subject matter of this discipline was not the creative artist but line, contour, figure, drapery, the boundaries between light and shadow, that is, the particulars of the spatial configurations.

Wölfflin already possessed one type: classic art. It remained to define the other, non-classic type—a type just as truly artistic as the former even though it was a response to another manner of seeing things. Thus, instead of an antithesis of beautiful and ugly as categories of art, one is presented with a bifurcation of the concept of the beautiful. Whatever appeared to be ugly and defective from one of the categories became beautiful and complete from the other. Strictly speaking, the distinction between beauty and ugliness really no longer had any reason for being, for the rehabilitation of the so-called decadent ages, promoted by Burckhardt and completed by the "Viennese school," had placed all art styles on the same qualitative plane. Now, if the classic land was Italy, if in Italy, in the south, an unrivaled form of classic art had flourished, where was one to look for the other type if not at the opposite geographical pole, in the north?

In 1905 Wölfflin published his book on Dürer. His thesis is that Dürer was not the most German of all German artists, but that he, more than any other German artist, had looked with longing beyond the frontiers of his homeland to that great foreign beauty which was responsible for the "great insecurity" of German art. Thus envisaged, the problem is not merely that of the encounter and resolution within the spirit of a genius of the influences of Schongauer and Mantegna, a clash between late Gothic and Renaissance: it is the story of a dramatic concourse of two totally different natures, the Nordic and the Southern, the Germanic and the Latin. Thus, although Wölfflin had opposed himself to the Romantics, he developed the discussion in their terms, that is, in terms of the national genius (Volksgeist).

He might have asked himself if the difference were due to a fundamentally different spiritual disposition. But that would have led him back to the biography of the man, not into the history of the artist. It is true that Wölfflin admitted a difference in corporeal sense, but the real, the essential, difference was for him in the seeing (vedere).

In the young Dürer he discerned one who already possessed an unusual sensitivity for plastic form, for visual values. Later, Italy had taught the artist to see in terms of greater forms, to mold the figure with a sense of visual clarity, and to enrich his innate plastic sensitivity. But alas, the Nordic had to pay the price of his infidelity: his art became formalistic and lacking in color and immediacy. He was unexpectedly rescued by a trip to Holland: the painter returned to reestablish a living contact with nature, to regard every living thing, every head and every individual, with an attentive and loving eye, almost as if he had awakened to the world for the first time. The terrible spell of Italy was broken: the man of the north had rediscovered his own true nature.

To render this moving tale, Wölfflin employed two pairs of distinct and, in a certain sense, opposed concepts: plastic-painterly and Latin-Nordic. He then proclaimed the essential correspondence of the two concepts. All of this was, of course, an assumption, a postulate, but Wölfflin spent the rest of his life in the elaboration of the distinctions.

That stylistic movements might vacillate between two opposite poles was an old idea. Burckhardt had defined Renaissance architecture as "painterly," that is, as one which worked with forms and geometrical relations of a purely optical value, whereas the Gothic church and the Greek temple were organic, structural and functional expressions. Alois Riegel had organized his history of style around the fundamental antithesis of optical and tactile, assigning to tactile values a chronological
precedence over optical ones. Riegler’s student, Jantzen, had even attempted to demonstrate that the Flemish were predisposed toward tactile perceptions while the Dutch were oriented optically.

And while on the subject, it might be recalled that polarities are by no means an oddity in recent German art historiography: plastic-painterly (Schmarsow), being and becoming (Frankl), fullness-form (Panofsky), cubist-organic (Coellens), technical-contratechnical (Scheltema), naturalistic-anti-naturalistic (Dvořák), and, if one wished, it would be a simple matter to extend the list almost indefinitely.

In his *Renaissance and Baroque* (*Renaissance und Barock*), Wölfflin himself juxtaposed painterly to linear-plastic-architectonic, and he pointed out the predominance of the painterly in the Baroque. But he would not identify painterly with Baroque because he believed that Baroque corresponded to a general orientation of the sense of form and was not a prevalence of one form or art over others. He had surmounted the difficulties of the problem by 1912, in which year he submitted a communication to the Academy of Sciences in Berlin which later became his *Principles of Art History* (*Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*). Here he argued that painterly and linear have no particular links with a determined art style but are two optical types, two different orientations of the sense of form.

However, since there are two poles, the history of style must necessarily oscillate rhythmically from one to the other extreme. Like certain positivistic historians who were his contemporaries, for example, Breysig and Lamprecht, Wölfflin succumbed to the idea of the cycle, the Vichian motif of recurrence. The transition from one pole to another he sees as a law of periodic evolution of the optical pattern which is necessary, natural, inevitable. He examines a typical case of this evolution in the transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque, but he holds that the transitional pattern has already been verified in the movement which led from Romanesque to Gothic style and could be verified in every individual artist, every idea and every emotion coming under examination.

However, Wölfflin did not maintain his thesis with any sort of rigorous orthodoxy. With his usual eclecticism triumphing, he admitted that the ideal of beauty might exert some influence upon the visual disposition, and in the transition from Renaissance to Baroque he also hoped to find a transformation of the practical ideal (*Lebensideal*), a concept which was never clearly defined by him but which is probably a residue of his older corporeal sense. Thus, the criticism of the theory of visual forms put forth by Dehio is not wholly justified: Dehio had objected to Wölfflin’s asking how men *had* to see, instead of why do men see thus. It would have been much more appropriate to observe that Wölfflin had neglected to examine the relations between the visual forms and the practical ideal—a much more acute problem since in his terms it is unclear how far the ideal can influence the evolution of style, which is supposedly at the same time self-actuating by virtue of an inner, objective necessity.

The processes (or the aspects of the process) which lead from Renaissance to Baroque are five: from linear to painterly, from superficial plane vision to recessional vision, from a closed form to an open and less rigidly limited one, from a multiplicity of the parts to their fusion into a unity, and from clarity of composition to relative clarity. This process is supposed to have reached its apex in the sixteenth century, the acme of linearity, to have descended towards the painterly, and then to have veered upwards once more at the end of the eighteenth century, when the line once more predominates. There are some who have objected that these categories are not *a priori* deductions, some who have found them too subjective and too complex, and others who have denied the existence of any real polarity between linear and painterly. Actually, they are abstract schemata empirically arrived at through generalization, vague and indefinite by the admission of their formulator. Their deduction or justification in any formal sense was
never attempted by Wölfflin. Behind them there is only the negation of the thesis of the limitation of nature and the consequent assertion of the eye's productivity. But why this productivity is conditioned by determined optical possibilities and is not free is never stated. Wölfflin had the good taste not to follow the path set by Hildebrand's research on the physiology of the eye.

On the other hand, L. Venturi, while recognizing the provisional character of such classificatory schemata, confessed that after having become acquainted with Wölfflin's work one had a much clearer understanding of many art works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These abstract schemata have therefore, some use. According to Venturi, they are only intellectual cues, the theories of the artists, which the historian re-discovers. They are useful for determining the viewpoint of the artist, for understanding how he thought and conceived his own work. Wölfflin's mistake was in having given a rigidity to schemata which did not tally perfectly with the thought of the artists of which he spoke.

In reality, underlying all of Wölfflin's work there is a fundamental error—one which is common to a large part of modern art historiography. This error lies in his considering art merely as stylistic phenomenon, that is, as some objective reality. When Wölfflin declares that he hopes to offer us a natural history, he has quite correctly stated his aim. His procedure is that of the natural scientist insofar as he seeks to subsume art objects under general, abstract concepts. Art history, thus conceived, can never produce anything but abstract patterns, just as biology and mineralogy can never produce anything but abstract patterns. It is obvious that such schematizations can never be a priori, absolute, or universal, even though they may be useful in bringing some order out of chaos—at least when one is confronted, not by the work or art itself, but by the artistic production of an epoch, nation or the human race as a whole. And, in fact, this is Wölfflin's concern: he is not interested in the individual work of art, but in style, that is, in the common mean, the mediocre uniformity and generality of an epoch.

Thus envisaged, the real nature of the so-called polarity becomes patent. That art admits of no descriptive adjectives is self-evident. Adjectives such as "linear" and "painterly" point to limitations and defects in the work of art. The two poles are, in reality, slopes which rise to the peak which is art. If they were genuine poles, then extreme linearity and extreme painterliness would have to be considered the purest and highest forms of art: instead, the two extremes are nothing but geometricity and confusion.

Since any limitatio est negatio the adjectives can only be conceived as indications of incompleteness and defectiveness. When the historiography of art has recourse to naturalistic schemata, it blinds itself to beauty and perceives defects without realizing that they are such. That art which springs from the originality and creative genius of the artist defies classification, and all that remains is the uniform, the common, the mediocre, the art which is bound to the taste, fashion and prejudice of an age.

Venturi observed that such schemata were cues to the theoretical or intellectual orientation of the artist. But if such intellectual, that is to say, non-artistic, elements are discernible in a work of art, they constitute defects, bonds from which the artist has failed to free himself.

However, besides the doctrines and canons which make up the aesthetic precepts of an age and which more or less weigh upon the work of the artist, there is in Wölfflin's concept of the artist's eye yet another element. The artist strives for a definite ideal of beauty through suggestion as he moves from image to image. According to Wölfflin, only a dilettante would believe that an artist could work without presuppositions. In fact, a master teaches his pupils to see in a certain way and imposes upon them his own manner of observation and entertainment of objects. Thus envisaged, every epoch must be considered a school. There is an evolution of taste, that is, of the capacity to enjoy beauty.
and the educators, the creators, are the great masters. Wölfflin was working out of the realization that the taste of an epoch presented a unified whole: "The columns and arches of the High Renaissance speak as intelligibly of the spirit of the time as the figures of Raphael." Only in this sense can one speak of an optical schema and the style of an age. But the true artist, the creator who is not a disciple but a teacher, is his own master and breaks through the pattern to open the way to a new concept of the beautiful.

Having determined the two forms of vision, the linear and the painterly, Wölfflin could finally define the Italian and the German sense of form. Here the two schemata are transformed into or are identified with two distinct, permanent and essential ethnic types: "Italy revealed its national genius in the Renaissance, Germany in the Baroque."

However, in order to raise what had formerly been variable stylistic forms to the dignity of permanent racial structures, it was first necessary to link them with something solid. At this point Wölfflin utilizes an idea which he had hitherto ignored, that is, the concept of the *milieu*, the geographic environment. He had already found in the Italian landscape that exactitude (determinatezza) and measure which are characteristic of Italian art. Here things were offered in stable proportion, in defined figures, whereas the German came from a world of the "linked, dependent, intricate, where everything was a part of a whole."

For the five conceptual dualities noted above, Wölfflin substitutes two opposed senses of form. The conceptual dualities are maintained but are extended in number. Moreover, the new dualities acquire the greatest importance. Above all stands the duality of "techtonic-vegetal": "There is a beauty of the column and a beauty of the plant; the Italian sees the column in the plant and the German the plant in the column." Then, the duality of "proportion-function": Italian art strives for the effect of proportion and conceives the human body as a problem of measurement ("measurement is primary not secondary"), while the German "rebels against the use of the compass" and strives to attain the ultimate in functionalism. Third, the duality of "ideal-real": Italian art seeks the typical and believes in eternal models of the beautiful, whereas the German grasps life in its particularity and is much more penetrating in portraiture: "It is as though metaphysical reality consists for the Italian in the universal and for the German in the individual." Fourth, the duality of "static-dynamic": in the German picture there is a movement which is lacking in the Italian. Fifth, the duality of "regularity-variation" (arbitrarieità): in Italy rules are followed with decision and coherence; in German art there is a capricious looseness, because the German has a sense of the spontaneity and irrationality of nature. Finally, there is the duality of "limited-unlimited": in German art the outline is vague and fluctuating, for the German sees the isolation of the figure in Italian painting as a limitation, and he always seeks to plunge once more into his own proper element, that is, into the unlimited, the indefinite, the complicated. There is no need to examine here the extent to which these categories correspond with those mentioned earlier and with themselves: Wölfflin considered them to be variations of a unique antithesis.

At the base of the sense of form Wölfflin ended by admitting—possibly under Dilthey's influence—a particular life mood (Lebensstimmung), a definite life and world view. There could be little objection to such a conclusion. Undoubtedly the nation, the product of, and a factor in, history, imparts its own peculiar accent or gives an affective coloration to life. Also the nation may hypostatize certain traditional virtues from which (it may be believed) its greatest powers flow. But that does not mean that the national genius or spirit can be turned into a static schema. The national spiritual physiognomy which is a function of a peculiar destiny and which grows out of the diversity of political, economic and religious experiences becomes, thus
envisaged, a limitation on the growth of the nation itself. To rigidly schematize that physiognomy would be to turn it into a burden which the nation has to carry with it throughout the course of its existence and which would have limited its activity from the time of its origin. The nation, thus conceived, would have no power over its own will; in fact, the history of the nation would be determined by it. The writing of history, true and proper, would have to be preceded by a study of national psychology in order to establish valid interpretative criteria.

In fact, Wölflin did assert that it was absolutely necessary to establish the ethnic sense of form prior to undertaking historical investigations. It is a singular notion, for it is difficult to imagine anyone seriously holding that before one can undertake a religious or political history of a people, it is necessary first to define their political or religious sense. If anything, such formulae would be the result of a history already narrated, standing as a sort of conclusion. Instead, Wölflin chose the period 1490-1530, the period from Leonardo to Titian and from Dürer to Holbein, and assigned to it the function of a “specimen” in which was reflected the whole of the art history of the two nations.

The result is that he assumes as a typical characteristic of Italy that Platonic canon of divine proportion which historically was formed during the Renaissance. Italian idealism is the result of a whole complex of spiritual elements which indeed has accompanied the development of the Italian intellectual world. But it remains nonetheless merely a moment of the total history of Italy. Nothing at all justifies identifying it with any morphological characteristics such as those which, according to Linnaeus, characterize the animal and plant kingdoms.

On the other hand, it is obvious that the new dualities, like the old ones, indicate a weakness and a one-sidedness in the two national cultural traditions. It is probably in this, their negative character, that they have their value: it is true that the Platonic ideal weighed heavily upon Renaissance art, just as German art has traditionally tended to realistic particularism and has, thereby, lost a sense of order and unity.

Yet even if we admit that the two senses of form represent two opposed unilateral entities, it is difficult to see what value the recognition of their existence might have. The older distinction between classic and romantic at least was justified by a distinction between feeling and form as two different moments. In place of that distinction Wölflin posits a distinction within form itself. He no longer deals with the prevalence of one or the other of the two moments, but of two different types of classicity. Do they correspond to the two senses of form described by Wölflin? Are they two moments of form itself?

Wölflin’s criterion of discrimination is furnished by the concept of line and thus by the antithesis of definite and indefinite (or linear-painterly). Now, it may be argued that art is the experience of the world in its totality, the totality being enclosed in an image. The artist finds himself confronted with the infinite world, but he does not remain in a state of aesthetic contemplation. What to the Romantics seemed to be an infinite approximation of the inexpressible infinite, infinite nostalgia, and presentiment is a single moment of creation. The artist can linger and indulge himself in an uncertain, magical atmosphere in which everything is attenuated and confused or in which all, even the insignificant, takes on a strange importance. But in a second moment, the world will assume outlines, will become a plastic image, definite and clear. Not that one perceives an isolated part of it: the artist always grasps the whole universe which is then broken down and consolidated into a concrete image. This process of determination turns upon a center: the world is concentrated and organized in an individuality. This individuality can remain faded and evanescent. Instead of having a nucleus, it can be dispersed into many creations and directions, especially if the artist is not afraid of imposing limits upon his experience. When reality is presented with such distinctness, the spectacle is transfigured into a starburst of ideality, while remain-
ing at the same time truthful and real. The cosmic experience continues to flutter around the image, to circulate in it and to nurture it. The finite is not the negation of the infinite, because if that were so, the finite would be dead and abstract; it is always the infinite itself which the artist perceives and offers to us. But if the original experience is defective and the plastic intervention too violent, the finite will seem to be detached from the whole and thus geometrically defined and limited.

Now, since the destinies of nations are diverse, one might even admit that northern and southern vacillate between the two moments, one moving out of the cosmic moment of infinity, the other being based upon the victorious affirmation of the limited. It will not surprise us that the land of humanism seems inclined to favour the figure and that the land of mysticism and the Reformation remains fascinated with the diffuse and unlimited, with the mysterious in nature. Only in such a sense and within such limits could the atavistic optical schemata of Wölflin be justified as a description of the dialectic of the creative act.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

2 Ibid., p. 225.
3 The best discussion of historicism as a concept peculiar to German thought may be found in Walter Hofer, Geschichtschreibung und Weltanschauung: Betrachtungen zum Werk Friedrich Meineckes (München, 1950), pp. 326-411. The best discussion of historicism in the general frame of European thought is Carlo Antoni, Lo storico (Roma, 1957) and his La lotta contro la ragione (Firenze, 1942). See also the exhaustive compendium of Pietro Rossi, Lo storicismo tedesco contemporaneo (Firenze, 1956) and Manlio Clardo, Le quattro epoche dello storicismo (Bari, 1947). It is unfortunate that Karl Popper chose the term “historicism” to denote an intellectual frame which is only a species of the genus. He regards historicism as any form of monism, failing to recognize that historicism may take many forms. See his perceptive study of this one aspect of historicism in The Poverty of Historicism (London and Boston, 1957).
6 See the excellent analysis of Burckhardt’s thought in ibid., pp. 93-103.
7 Ibid., op. cit., pp. 165-170.
9 Ibid., op. cit., p. 194.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid., pp. 210-21.
13 Ibid., pp. 223-43.
15 Croce, History as the Story of Liberty, p. 35 ff.
16 Ibid., pp. 312-17.
FROM HISTORY TO SOCIOLOGY

**C. Luzzatto, Storia economica, L'età moderna** (Padua, 1934).

*See B. Croce, "Calvinismo e operosità economica," La Critica, XXXVI, no. 5 (1938).

"Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen," Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik (1915-19); reprinted in Ges. Aufsätze zur Religionssociologie. The entire work is composed of one volume on the religions of China (3rd ed., Tübingen, 1954), a second on the religions of India (2nd ed., 1929), and a third, uncompleted, on Judaism (2nd ed., 1921). Ultimately the work was to have included a volume on Christianity and also one on Islam.

Also Weber attributed a decisive historical importance in the development of the West to the rationalistic character of the feudal contract, seeing it as the destroyer of the irrational bonds of the Sippe.

Roscher und Knies und die logischen Probleme der historischen Nationalökonomie," Schmollers Jahrbuch (1900-1906); "Die Objektivität sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis" and "Kritische Studien auf dem Gebiet der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik," both in Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik (1904-1909) and reprinted in Ges. Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre (Tübingen, 1929).

On the history of the concept of the type, see H. Grab, Der Begriff des Rationalen in der Soziologie Max Webers (Karlsruhe, 1927); W. Bienfait, Max Webers Lehre vom gesichtsli. Giltenen (Berlin, 1930); A. von Schelting, Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre (Tübingen, 1934).

Ultimately Weber's theory results in a conclusion not unlike that of Croce, according to which economic laws are mathematics applied to the concept of action, which submit to calculation certain determinations of actions in order to discover in them necessary configurations and consequences to the end of orienting oneself in empirical reality.

Marianne Weber, op. cit.


"Über einige Kategorien der verstehende Soziologie" (1918); reprinted in Ges. Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre.


The canon is also the practical rule for social politics. Weber promoted some investigations in the selection and adaptation of the industrial workers, concentrating upon their provenance and life-traditions and studying the effects of industry upon their way of life. By such investigations he hoped to clarify the situation for both the worker and management and to advance suggestions for labor legislation. See "Methodologische Einleitung für die

Erhebung des Vereins für Sozialpolitik über Auslese und Anpassung der Arbeitskraft" (1908) and "Zur Psychophysik der industriellen Arbeit" (1908-1909); both reprinted in Ges. Aufsätze zur Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik.

CHAPTER V


* Wege der Kulturgeschichte (Munich, 1930).


* See B. Croce, La storia come pensiero e come azione (Bari, 1938), p. 98.

* F. Gundolf, Caesar, Italian translation by E. Giovannetti (Milan and Rome, 1932).

* (2nd ed., 1925); German translation by W. Kaegi (Munich, 1929).

* Also of this period are: Tien Studien (Haarlem, 1926); Leben en werk van Jan Veth (Haarlem, 1927); Amerika levend en denkend (Haarlem, 1927); Mensch en menigte in Amerika (Haarlem, 1928).

* Im Schatten von Morgen, German translation by W. Kaegi (Bern and Leipzig, 1939); Italian translation (Turin, 1937).


CHAPTER VI

1 It would be interesting to study the origin of the Arcadian myth of the Roman Campagna which is the center of the landscape image of Goethe. Humboldt and countless painters. On the image of Italy as a classic land, see C. von Klemze, The Interpretation of Italy during the Last Two Centuries (Chicago, 1907), and W. Waetloldt, Das klassiche Land (Leipzig, 1927).

* H. Wölflin, Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl (Munich, 1931), p. vi.

For its influence on the interpretation of the German literary baroque, see the article by L. Vincenti in Studi Germanici, I, 39, and for its influence on the interpretation of Romanticism, see F. Stritch, Deutsche Klassik und Romantik (Leipzig, 1922), and O. F. Walzel, Idee und Gestalt (Potsdam, 1925).

Wölfflin defined the tasks and limits of art history in a short essay entitled Das Erkennen von Kunstwerken (Leipzig, 1921). He also defined the limits of his theory, which he wished to have coexist with others in a peaceful division of labor. The tasks of art history are four: 1) to teach how to see form by leading to the discovery in works of art of the unity and rhythm of color, line and design and to the correlation of the artist's standpoint to the type of his generation, his regional type, and his national genius; 2) to interpret art historically by taking into account the technical conditions of the material and the socio-economic conditions of the public (but as secondary factors) and by considering art as an expression of a life view, although not always and everywhere in the same degree; 3) to explain why a given form of art developed by rendering account of the organic process of forms, that is, the logic of artistic development; 4) to explain why a work of art is beautiful. For this fourth task Wölfflin appealed to the idea of reliving (Erleben), concluding with the words of Burckhardt: "If it were possible to express in words the deepest content or idea of a work of art, art itself would be superfluous, and all buildings, statues and paintings could have remained unbuilt, un-fashioned and unpainted."

W. Waetzoldt, Deutsche Kunsthistoriker (Leipzig, 1924), II, 189.


One of the strangest aspects of contemporary German culture is the tendency to attribute importance to the mysterious bond between the land and the soul of its inhabitants: the motif is found in Sombart's economic history, in Nadler's literary history, in the touristic-philosophical fantasies of Keyserling, and in the so-called "geopolitics."

It is worth noting that in his Voyage en Italie Chateaubriand found that the Italian landscape was characterized by the absence of any precise contours: "Une teinte singulièrement harmonieuse marie la terre, le ciel et les eaux; toutes les surfaces, au moyen d'une gradation insensible de couleurs, s'unissent par leur extrémités, sans qu'on puisse déterminer le point où une nuance finit et où l'autre commence."

This motif has been adopted recently by German historians of philosophy to define the tradition of German thought. See, for example, the work of E. Rothacker.