

Ruminations on the dark side: history of art as rage and denials¹

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That, which satisfies the spirit,
is also the measure of its loss.

Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*²

The old philosophical puzzle about one and many has a wide range of implications for the various disciplines of intellectual history, such as histories of philosophy, science or art. The puzzle can be stated as follows: a multitude always consists of singulars, but is it always a mere sum of these singulars—or should we assume that a whole can differ from the sum of its parts? Is a multitude just a *joint name* for the individuals that constitute it? Or maybe we should conceive of singulars as constituted into what they are through their membership in a multitude? Are singulars perhaps mere manifestations of the group they belong to?

When it comes to human creativity: is the creativity of an artist (author in general) an instantiation of group creativity—or is the creativity of a group the sum of individual creativities? The creative decisions of an author (an artist, scientist or philosopher) are often assumed to be influenced by his or her context. But is this influence of the group that makes up the context merely the sum of that author's interactions with other individuals that make up the group? Or, can a context influence the creativity of an individual in a way that is not identical with, nor reducible to the sum of the influences of the individuals that belong to that context?

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² An diesem, woran dem Geiste genügt,
ist die Größe seines Verlustes zu ermessen.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Leipzig: Dürr'sche Buchhandlung 1907, 8 (Introduction, §2).

Holism-Individualism

Piero della Francesca, it may be said, used perspective in his work because he was a Renaissance painter. Such an explanation can be understood in a number of ways, depending on how one conceives of the Renaissance and its impact on *quattrocento* Italians. If we assume that this influence of the epoch was more than the sum of influences of individual contemporaries, the Renaissance starts to resemble a spiritual substance that landed on the Italian peninsula in the early *quattrocento*, stayed there for two centuries and determined the creativity of contemporary Italians according to what was appropriate to their time and community. The central characteristic of such, *holist*, view is that individual creativity is a mere manifestation of and fully explainable by the creativity of the collective (culture, class, race, ethnicity, period) the individual belongs to—that insofar as they are creative at all, individuals of a certain period or community can only be creative in accordance with the Spirit of that period or community. As Ernst Gombrich observed, this view

postulates that all the manifestations of an era—philosophy, art, social structures, etc.—must be considered as expressions of an essence, an identical spirit. As a result, every era is considered as a totality embracing everything.³

This approach is to be found, for instance, in Heinrich Wölfflin's view that to explain a style means to fit its expressive character into the general history of the period and prove that its forms conform to the other manifestations of the age.⁴ According to Otto Pächt, such an approach was also shared by Alois Riegl, in whose view, a great artist, even a genius, is nothing but the executor and the fulfilment, of the *Kunstwollen* of his nation and age.⁵ An example of the application of this programme is Oswald Spengler's view that there existed a deep internal link between the invention of perspective, book-printing, the credit system and point-counter-point in music.⁶ Similarly, in Wilhelm Pinder's *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*, we read that Vermeer was merely painting Spinoza (i.e. the

³ Ernst Gombrich in 'I think art historians are the spokesmen of our civilization; we want to know more about our Olympus', *The Art Newspaper*, 28:19, 1993, 18-19. A similar statement by Gombrich is in his *In Search for Cultural History*, Oxford, 1969, 28: 'The great Erwin Panofsky, ... never renounced the desire to demonstrate the organic unity of all aspects of a period. ... In his *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art* he explicitly defended the notion of cultures having an essence against the criticism of George Boas'. See also David R. Topper, 'On a Ghost of Historiography Past', *Leonardo*, 21:1, 1988, 76-78.

⁴ 'Einen Stil erklären kann nichts anderes heissen als ihn nach seinem Ausdruck in die allgemeine Zeitgeschichte einreihen, nachweisen, dass seine Formen in ihrer Sprache nichts anderes sagen, als die übrigen Organe der Zeit.' Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock*, Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1908, 58. Similarly, in his *Das Erklären von Kunstwerken*, Leipzig: Seeman, 1921, 8, Wölfflin states that 'Erklären wird überall hier heißen, im Einzelnen und Einmaligen das Allgemeinere fühlen zu lehren.'

⁵ Otto Pächt, 'Art Historians and Art Critics — vi: Alois Riegl', *The Burlington Magazine*, No 103: 772, May 1963, 188-193.

⁶ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, Munich: DTV 2003, 66.

content of Spinoza's philosophy), since the painter and the philosopher were born in the same year.⁷

Contrary to the holist view is the *individualist* position that collectives are *mere sums* of individuals—that, for instance, the Renaissance is a *mere name* for the creative thoughts, decisions, actions and mutual individual interactions of millions of Italians who, in a certain period, were exposed to similar challenges, such as an intensified intellectual exchange, strong urban environments, the influx of Byzantine scholars or the invention of the printing press. The context in this case does not *explain* why an individual did things the way he or she did them. Rather, what the context can explain is how an individual artist, scientist or philosopher acquired the skills or knowledge that enabled him or her to produce an artefact with certain properties.

In the philosophy of history there exists substantial literature on the debate about individualism and holism.⁸ Distinction between holism and individualism, it should be said, is sharp and requires an either-or answer: insofar as a specific creative decision of an individual author was influenced (or determined) by a specific group, this group can *either* be understood as reducible to a set of individuals—*or* it needs to be understood as more than and irreducible to a mere sum of individuals. Influence can be conceived of *either* as a set of specific influences of a group of individuals, *or* as the influence of a social entity that is understood as more than a sum of individual influences. But there can be no third possibility. Otherwise one would have to argue that there can exist a multitude that is, in the same sense and at the same time, both reducible and irreducible to the sum of singulars that constitute it.

Distinction between individualism and holism also applies to history writing. History writing itself is a creative process. When practicing it, large groups of historians may happen to adopt the same methodological assumptions, the way artists of the same period sometimes adopt the same style. This is particularly characteristic of Weimar-era art historiography which was marked by the widespread (one could say unanimous) adoption of a holist world-view—in other words, the holist propensities of Weimar-era scholars constitute a collective phenomenon in its own right, and one that has exercised a huge influence on

⁷ Wilhelm Pinder: *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*, Berlin: Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt, 1926, 134.

⁸ See Ernest Gellner, 'Holism versus Individualism in History and Sociology', in Patrick Gardiner, ed., *Theories of History*, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959, 489-503; J. W. N. Watkins, in his 'Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences' in Gardiner, ed., *Theories*, 503-515; Arthur Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 257-284 and Branko Mitrović, 'Intellectual History, Inconceivability and Methodological Holism', *History and Theory*, 46:1, January 2007, 29-47. In art history, the problem often manifested itself in the form of the debate about periodization. See for instance George Boas, 'Historical Periods', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 11:3, March 1953, 248-254; Paul L. Frank, 'Historical or Stylistic Periods', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 13:4, June 1955, 451-457; Robert C. Stalnaker, 'Events, Periods and Institutions in Historians' Language', *History and Theory*, 6:2, 1967, 159-179. For a review of *Geistesgeschichte*—style holistic historiography in English-speaking art history see W. Eugene Kleinbauer: 'Geistesgeschichte and Art History', *Art Journal*, 30:2, Winter 1970-71, 148-153.

English-speaking historiography.⁹ In this paper I discuss the possibilities and implications of a specific *individualist* explanation of this collective phenomenon: the claim that their *insecurities*, as well as those of the environment in which they lived, propelled Weimar-era scholars to adopt holist methodologies. The explanatory strategy that I examine here is thus psychological—as is often the case with individualist explanations, which have to understand the decisions, motivation or creativity of historical figures in psychological terms. A holist historian can argue that the decisions, motivation or creativity of individuals were manifestations of the collective spirit and independent of the individual psychologies of these individuals—but an individualist historian cannot make such claims. Individualist historiography, in its ultimate explanations of human creativity, typically relies on psychological facts.

The discussion of authorial and environmental *insecurities* as an explanatory strategy in (intellectual) history that is presented here does not include a psychological explanation of the concept of insecurities. Rather, the aim is to discuss (from the example of Weimar-era historians' holist propensities) whether such a concept could be usefully employed in historical explanations at all and what it could stand for. My main efforts here concentrate on describing a specific phenomenon, one could say a syndrome, that accompanies much of holist history-writing. The discussion (and especially the example of Weimar-era historiography) shows, I believe, that this phenomenon, (i.e. insecurities), could actually explain much of holist historiography, should a proper psychological account of the phenomenon be provided. However, since this paper merely describes the phenomenon, and does not provide the necessary psychological account, it cannot be taken to *explain* the holist propensities of Weimar-era scholars. More generally, even without psychological account, the term insecurities could possibly still be used the way other psychological terms (motivation, decision, belief) are used in history writing but with much reduced explanatory power. In any case, I believe that the discussion presented here shows that we are dealing with a clearly describable, definable and coherent historiographical phenomenon and that looking for its psychological (possibly psychoanalytic) explanation is a worthwhile project.

Rausch

Writing in 1929, in the Preface to a collection of essays by Alois Riegl, Hans Sedlmayr described the kind of holist position that, in his view, had become the dominant approach to history writing since the end of the war 1914-1918.¹⁰ Sedlmayr may not have been quite accurate in his dating: holist historiography had been firmly entrenched in German scholarship since the times of Hegel—but other authors as well, such as Karl Mannheim, observed that holism had gained substantial

⁹ In this paper I use the term 'Weimar-era scholarship' to include all German-speaking scholarship from the period of Weimar Republic. I also take into account examples from other periods, such as the Wilhelmine era or the Third Reich, in which the authors whose works are discussed here were active.

¹⁰ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Die Quintessenz der Lehren Riegls' in Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Karl Maria Swoboda, ed., Augsburg, 1929, xii-xxxiv. Cited here according to the version reprinted in Hans Sedlmayr, *Kunst und Wahrheit*, Munich: Mäander, 1978, 32-48.

prominence in the early decades of the twentieth century.¹¹ The important aspect of holist history writing, Sedlmayr reported enthusiastically, was the rejection of the view that groups were mere sums of individuals and that individuals were the primary and the only real historical entities.¹² In his view, the individualistic understanding of historical events as the result of blind networks of individual causal lines was to be replaced with the view that there exist *real* meaningful self-movements of the Spirit which may be delayed, but not substantially affected, by specific historical events. (47) Sedlmayr explains that 'modern, non-atomistic' sociology has confirmed the existence of the 'objective Spirit' and cites Alfred Vierkandt's view about the 'domination of a superindividual Spirit in ... human cultures'.¹³

The same faith in the 'objective Spirit' is explicitly articulated in a 1924 textbook for methodology courses in art history departments written by the Heidelberg professor Robert Hedicke.¹⁴ Hedicke explains that art history studies the monuments of the visual arts in the context of their spiritual-historical evolution. The History of the Spirit (*Geistesgeschichte*) is a field of historical scholarship that studies the objective Spirit, its manifestations in human cultures and the way the Spirit reveals itself in every human cultural monument.¹⁵ A historical period is to be understood as a spiritual unit, a unified system of values, and the aim of art history is to acquire knowledge about it.¹⁶ A good example of such an understanding of history writing can be found in Wilhelm Worringer's works.¹⁷ In his *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* Gothic simply came about, *entstand*, from itself, apparently without any human participation. (145-146) Similarly, in *Griechentum und Gotik* Worringer postulates forces such as 'French artistic essence'.¹⁸ Since, from this point of view, creativity belongs to groups independently of the individuals that constitute these

¹¹ Karl Mannheim, 'Beiträge zur Theorie der Weltanschauungs-Interpretation', *Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 4, 1921-1922, 237-284.

¹² Sedlmayr, 'Die Quintessenz', 46-47.

¹³ 'Im großartigsten Maße zeigt sich das Walten eines überindividuellen Geistes in den Tatsachen der menschlichen Kultur.' Sedlmayr, 'Quintessenz' 36, citing Alfred Vierkandt, *Gesellschaftslehre*, Stuttgart: Enke, 1928, 343. Behind these facts of human culture stands a 'Wille von überindividueller Art, der dem Einzelnen als normative Kraft gegenübertritt. Man spricht dabei von einem objektiven Willen oder auch speziell von einem objektiven Gesamtwillen, und meint damit eine Kraft, die vom Einzelnen mit Recht als objektive Macht aufgefaßt wird.' This superindividual will is carried by a group of people, the same way as the objective Spirit. Sedlmayr, 'Quintessenz', 36-37.

¹⁴ Robert Hedicke, *Methodenlehre der Kunstgeschichte. Ein Handbuch für Studierende*, Strassburg: Heitz, 1924.

¹⁵ 'Kunstgeschichte ist die historische Wissenschaft von den Bildkunstdenkmälern erfaßt im geistesgeschichtlichen Wandlungszusammenhang. ...Geistesgeschichte ist die historische Wissenschaft vom Objektiven Geiste, wie er sich in den Kulturen der Menschheit entfaltet hat und wie er sich in jedem menschlichen Kulturdenkmal als Wert offenbart.' Hedicke, *Methodenlehre*, 3. 'Allgemeine Geistesgeschichte ist die historische Wissenschaft von dem allen Geisteswissenschaften gemeinsamen objektiven Geist in seinen verschiedenen historischen Äußerungen und Wandlungen.' Hedicke, *Methodenlehre*, 132.

¹⁶ „Die grundlegende Idee, der grundlegende Glaube ist dabei, daß es in jeder Zeit eine geistesgeschichtliche Einheit, ein einheitliches Wertsystem, einen einheitlichen Geist gibt und daß es letzten Endes gilt, diese Einheit, diese Wertgruppe, diesen Geist zu erkennen und darzustellen.' Hedicke, *Methodenlehre*, 141,

¹⁷ Wilhelm Worringer: *Abstraktion und Einfühlung. Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, Munich: R. Piper, 1921.

¹⁸ Wilhelm Worringer: *Griechentum und Gotik. Vom Weltreich des Hellenismus*, Munich: R. Piper, 1928.

groups, groups can also influence each other (and the creativity of individuals that participate in them) without any actual interaction between the individuals that belong to these groups. This enables Worringer to describe Iranian influences on French medieval art (61), the influence of Praxiteles on Duccio (88), or even to discuss Hellenism in Chinese and Japanese art (13). Dagobert Frey summarized this position by saying that art is one of the finest instruments to diagnose the spirituality of a nation or period; the creative subject (i.e. the artist) is an ideal entity, and cannot be easily identified with a biographical person; for the study of an artwork, the biographical person is fully irrelevant.¹⁹

However, if creative decisions are not the decisions of individual, biographical humans, then who makes them? Hedicke, in the methodology textbook I have just cited, explains that they are the manifestations of the Spirit of its Time. For instance, in order to understand Gothic, the art historian needs to understand something he calls *Gothic spiritual totality*.²⁰ The problem is, however, that all we can know about this 'Gothic spiritual totality' from which Gothic art arose, we know only on the basis of those properties of Gothic monuments which the 'Gothic spiritual totality' is meant to explain. Similarly, Max Dvořák, in his 'Idealismus und Naturalismus in der Gotischen Skulptur und Malerei' explained that Gothic art was a result of a specific understanding of space, that was different from the one in early Christian and Romanic art.²¹ But then, if we ask, how we can know that such an understanding of space existed in Gothic times, the answer is that we know about it on the basis of the Gothic art that resulted from it. As early as 1920, talking about the 'Gothic man' whose 'essence' is supposed to explain the characteristics of Gothic art, Panofsky warned that

the 'Gothic man' or the 'primitive' on the basis of whose supposed essence a specific artwork is to be explained, is in reality only a hypostasized impression, which we have derived from the same artwork.²²

¹⁹ 'Dieses schöpferische Subjekt ist aber ein rein ideelles, allein als Schöpfer des bestimmten Kunstwerkes gegebenes Subjekt; es ist mit der biographischen Persönlichkeit nicht einfach zu identifizieren, ja diese biographische Persönlichkeit ist für die Betrachtung des Kunstwerkes an sich ganz gleichgültig.' Dagobert Frey, *Kunstwissenschaftliche Grundfragen. Prolegomena zu einer Kunstphilosophie*, Vienna: R. M. Rohrer Verlag, 1946, reprinted in Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992, 82.

²⁰ Hedicke says that art is a product of the unity of the Spirit: 'Die grundlegende Idee, der grundlegende Glaube ist dabei, daß es in jeder Zeit eine geistesgeschichtliche Einheit, ein einheitliches Wertsystem, einen einheitlichen Geist gibt und daß es letzten Endes gilt, diese Einheit, diese Wertgruppe, diesen Geist zu erkennen und darzustellen.' Hedicke, *Methodenlehre*, 141. '... die gotische Kultur in ihrer Gesamtheit, ... muß auch vom Kunsthistoriker verstanden, erkannt, dargestellt werden.' Hedicke, *Methodenlehre*, 146.

²¹ Max Dvořák, 'Idealismus und Naturalismus in der Gotischen Skulptur und Malerei', in Max Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, Munich: Piper, 1924, 43-147, 88.

²² '...so daß der 'gotische Mensch' oder der 'Primitive', aus dessen vermeintlichem Wesen wir ein bestimmtes Kunstprodukt erklären wollen, in Wahrheit nur die Hypostasierung eines Eindrucks ist, den wir von eben diesem Kunstprodukt empfangen.' Erwin Panofsky, 'Der Begriff des Kunstwollens', in Erwin Panofsky, *Deutschsprachige Aufsätze*, Karen Michels and Martin Warnke, eds, Berlin, 1998, 2 vols, vol. 2, 1019-1035, 1024.

In other words, such explanations resemble a dialogue in Molière's *Malade imaginaire*, where opium's capacity to make people sleep is explained by its dormative powers, while its dormative powers are explained by their capacity to make people sleep.²³

A way to avoid such circular 'explanations' is to show that numerous members of a certain group produced artworks with certain properties, then to assume that *all* artists of that group produce artworks with such properties and then to use this assumption in explaining the works of the remaining artists belonging to the same group. Very few Weimar-era historians resisted the temptation to argue that the group that actually explains and determines individual creativity is ethnicity or race.²⁴ One of them was Spengler, in whose view race was a result of the locality where one lives. For instance, he says, when the English and Germans settled in North America they gradually acquired the racial characteristics of the Indians.²⁵ Another opponent of racial determinism, quite surprisingly, considering his notoriously right-wing political views, was Hans Sedlmayr, who, in his Introduction to Riegl's articles cited above, argued that nation (*Volk*) or period cannot be the bearers of *Kunstwollen*—if this were the case, then the products of the same nation (*Volk*) would have to be of the same style, or it would happen that all the products of a certain epoch would be the same.²⁶

But numerous prominent Weimar-era art historians commonly conceived of race and ethnicity as decisive for individual creativity. For Heinrich Wölfflin, the claim that the individual artists' creativity is determined by his or her nationality or

²³ BACHELIERUS:
 'Mihi a docto Doctore
 Domandatur causam et rationem quare
 Opium fecit dormire:
 A quoi respondeo
 Quia est in eo
 Virtus dormitiva
 Cujus est natura
 Sensus assoupire'

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière: *Le malade imaginaire*, Paris: Magnard, 1992, 134.

²⁴ For a general survey of this type of argument, see Lars Olof Larsson, 'Nationalstil und Nationalismus in der Kunstgeschichte der zwanziger und dreissiger Jahre', in Lorenz Dittmann, ed., *Kategorien und Methoden der Deutschen Kunstgeschichte 1900-1930*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985, 169-184.

²⁵ Spengler, *Untergang*, 696.

²⁶ Sedlmayr, *Kunst und Wahrheit*, 36. He says rather vaguely that the bearer of *Kunstwollen* is a certain group of humans that can be of different size.

race was the central explanatory strategy.²⁷ A racial approach should not surprise us in the case of Nazi art historians such as Wilhelm Pinder or Albert Erich Brinckmann. European creativity, Pinder says, is the product of European national character and coincides with the area between the Tiber, Loire and Weser.²⁸ It was thus the sick imagination of a Viking, he explains, that made van Gogh paint the way he did.²⁹ In his book *Geist der Nationen* Brinckmann claims that all the regions of the former

²⁷ In Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock*, 1, one reads that *northern nations* (not the individual artists who lived in the North) failed to make the transition from the Renaissance to baroque, from formal to formless. But even before that, ethnicity determined fundamental differences between German and Italian art; Wölfflin's favourite example is what he considers the incomprehensibility of Raphael's *School of Athens* to 'Northerners' (Heinrich Wölfflin: *Die Klassische Kunst. Eine Einführung in die italienische Renaissance*, Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1908, 2; idem, *Erklären*, 28)—even though he himself (a 'northern' art historian) discusses this painting extensively in *Klassische Kunst*, 92-97. The art of the High Renaissance was a free expression of Italian people. (*Klassische Kunst*, 33.) Throughout Wölfflin's opus one regularly finds the claims that some works of Italian art and architecture would not be attractive to 'Northerners' because of their ethnic background (e.g. Santa Maria Della Luce in Perugia, or Fra Bartolomeo's *St. Mark* in the Palazzo Pitti, both examples stated in *Italien und Deutsches Formgefühl*, Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1931, 18 and 28). In *Erklären*, 7, a High Renaissance building is said to appear bare and cold to a northern traveller; but as soon as one has the correct, Italian *Voraussetzungen*, this feeling disappears. He further says that although national artistic creativity undergoes historical changes, the different styles of art produced by a country still have a common element that originates from the ground (*Boden*) and race; the Italian racial type is to be found at the same time behind the Renaissance and baroque. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 6. For instance, the Mauthalle in Nuremberg and the Kornhaus in Ulm belong to different styles (Gothic vs. baroque) but they are still German solutions of the same problem. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 220. Similarly, in *Erklären* we read that in spite of differences between the various epochs of German art, the identity of the same *Volksgeist* asserts itself; in spite of differences in architectural styles, there exists a constant national way of design. Wölfflin, *Erklären*, 9. In the same book he explains that Ruysdael's sensibility was the result of his time and race and claims that it is possible to determine quite accurately how his creativity differed from that of the members of other Germanic tribes. Wölfflin, *Erklären*, 22. In the Introduction to his book *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, Munich: Münchener Verlag, 1922, vi, Wölfflin states that one of the aims of the book is to determine national characters. He also argues that it is impossible to avoid the discussion of the fundamental aspects of national sensitivity (*Empfinden*) (Wölfflin, *Grundbegriffe*, 9) and a whole chapter of the book is dedicated to 'National Characters' (Wölfflin, *Grundbegriffe*, 254-255).

Italianness in art in *Italien und Deutsches Formgefühl* is thus said to be characterised by the clear definition and separation of shapes, whereas in the North ('Bei uns im Norden'), proportions of bodies or surfaces are not decisive. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 13. Italian paintings create an artificial unity of groups of persons, whereas it is characteristic of German imagination that everything pertains to feeling the space and content. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 33-34. German understanding of space is infinite and moved, whereas Brunelleschi's space is always a limited and defined form. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 57. Italian art is based on homogenous form which contributes to the total harmony; in German architecture a great diversity of proportions and forms relate to each other on a single building. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 89. German architecture deals more easily with irregularity. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 89. Italian faces are more regular than German faces not only in the art but in reality too. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 107. Italians have the capacity to monumentalize everything. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 165. Sociological explanations are always peripheral, and what is central for art-historical explanations is the 'Form- und Vorstellungsweise einer Nation'. Wölfflin, *Italien*, 215.

²⁸ Pinder, *Generation*, 46. For the discussions of the Germanic nature of van Gogh's art see Ron Manheim, 'The 'Germanic' van Gogh: A Case Study of Cultural Annexation', *Simiolus: Netherlands' Quarterly for the History of Art*, 19:4, 1989, 277-288.

²⁹ 'Die kranke Wikingerphantasie van Goghs läßt Bäume und Blumen, Erdschollen und Wolken lodern und kreisen, als flammende Gebärdensprach'. Wilhelm Pinder, 'Pflicht und Anspruch der Wissenschaft', in Wilhelm Pinder: *Gesammelte Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1907-1935*, Leo Bruhns, ed., Leipzig: Verlag E. A. Seemann, 1938, 212-218.

Roman world where Germanic tribes did not settle (Southern Italy, Sicily, French Provence) have remained culturally fruitless.³⁰ But it is also to be admitted, he notes further, that the areas inhabited by racially pure Germanic population, which lacked the Roman base, have also remained unproductive; culturally productive regions are those where races mixed, such as Northern Italy, East France, Southern Germany. (28) Insofar as they wanted to assert the pre-eminence of Gothic art, German historians had to accept that Gothic was not purely Germanic: Worringer thus observed that the Germanic race was the *conditio sine qua non* Gothic art; race however should not be taken in the sense of racial purity, he says, but one should rather look at those nations in whose constitution the Germanic race played a decisive role.³¹ A particularly bizarre product of this type of methodology is Dagobert Frey's 1942 book *Englisches Wesen im Spiegel seiner Kunst*.³² Published in the midst of the war, the book expresses no negative prejudices about the English, but rather treats English art with all the respect appropriate for the art of the Germans' racially closest relatives. The book assumes a *strong* causal relationship between individual creativity and racial background. Vanbrugh's feeling for three-dimensionality is un-English according to Frey and needs to be explained by his Flemish racial origin (218); similarly, on the basis of family portraits it is possible to establish that Hogarth had Celtic racial characteristics, which explains the form of his artistic expression (306).

One could continue listing examples of holist and racial thinking among Weimar-era historians—but my question is, how an *individualist* explanation of this collective phenomenon can be provided. It would certainly be absurd to say that their ethnic background or some kind of *Germanic historiographical essence* predetermined the way Weimar-era historians wrote art history. In the opening of his book Spengler says that he writes history the way he has to, being a German historian. Nevertheless, when he, later in the book, argues that Diocletian was the first caliph (275) and that the Pantheon was the first mosque (273), it would certainly be inappropriate to say that his German ethnic background made him indulge in absurd fantasies. One would want to provide an individualist explanation that is fair

³⁰ Albert Erich Brinckmann: *Geist der Nationen. Italiener-Franzosen-Deutsche*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Compe, 1938. Brinckmann's major concern is not to assert supremacy of Germans, but rather to insist on the differences between various nations. Brinckmann, *Geist*. He even cites Goethe's view 'daß das wahrhaft Verdienstliche sich dadurch auszeichnet, daß es der ganzen Menschheit angehört' and Alberti 'non pro nobis sed pro humanitate scribimus'. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 253. German *Vergeisterung* is not Cartesian; it is *gefühlbetont*. It considers joy and suffering as worthy of representation. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 225. The method of this *Vergeisterung* is not logic or *ratio* but *schöpferische Wille*. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 226. German sense for experiencing Nature is stronger than in other nations. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 228. 'Denn die Darstellung ist weniger objektiviert und inniger verbunden mit der Mentalität des Darstellenden'. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 228. German sensibility for form and colour are fundamentally different from those of Italians or French. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 231. German Renaissance painting emphasises individualities, for a German is the concept of composition too poor, and a German does not see a Sum but only sums, pluralities. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 233. German art is marked by the lack of proportion even when they can be measured; and the *Wille zur Disproportion* is visible also in architecture; compositions full of tension almost become grotesque. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 238. He asks whether a German is a 'starrköpfiger Individualist'. Brinckmann, *Geist*, 240.

³¹ Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik*, Munich: R. Piper, 1920, 126-7.

³² Dagobert Frey, *Englisches Wesen im Spiegel seiner Kunst*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1942. The first page of the book has an alternative title: *Englisches Wesen in der bildenden Kunst*.

to his German colleagues and compatriots.

Denials

Consider Wilhelm Pinder's statement that no Maori, but only a European, could paint like Gauguin.³³ The statement is actually true—just as it is also true that no German or *other* Frenchman can paint like Gauguin either. Gauguin was an original artist. But Pinder is not making his point in order to emphasize Gauguin's originality. He is also not saying that *only a Frenchman* can paint like Gauguin. Pinder's implicit point is, rather, that a great painter like Gauguin had something in common with a German like himself: they are both Europeans. Racial theorists and holist historians, often sound like a person who hangs portraits of important people on the wall of his or her living room and tells the guests that these are his or her ancestors. In order to feel the need to fabricate one's own importance by using such methods, one must suffer from perceiving oneself as unimportant. A student of the works of Weimar-era holist historians will sooner or later notice how hard (in fact, impossible) it is to find sections where they argue the inferiority or present relative weaknesses of their own ethnicity and race. In other words, it is always useful to listen to what historians say about *themselves* when they write about various groups.

In his biography of Adolf Hitler, Joachim Fest describes how the young Hitler, while he lived unemployed in Vienna, used to carry a photograph of his father, a medium ranking provincial Austro-Hungarian bureaucrat, in the appropriate uniform, and show it to the people he talked to.³⁴ This was not a sign of an excessive attachment to the father, but, rather, a method to legitimise oneself, to compensate for one's insecurities and classify oneself (in one's own eyes in the first place) as more than a proletarian. Insecure people tend to use communication with others in order reassure themselves; in such cases it is often more important to listen to what their statements implicitly *deny* about themselves than what they say about the topic they are talking about. It is precisely this function of holist historical explanations of human actions—their great ability to assuage numerous types of insecurities—that one needs to consider here. Saying something about the group one belongs to (and how it differs from other groups) is an indirect way to say something about oneself. This strategy is likely to be used by those individuals who feel that they do not have enough to say about themselves as individuals. Obviously, a person who does not feel deficient that way, will not feel the need to invoke a compensatory narrative about one's own group and the way it differs from other groups.

A particularly common strategy when it comes to denials is appropriation. When showing the photograph of his father, the young Hitler was appropriating for himself the social status he did not have. Pinder was similarly claiming identity with Gauguin when he subsumed the French painter under European identity. Narratives about identity are often complex agglomerations of appropriations and denials—and appropriations and denials often constitute the world-view of historians as well. A good example is a protest letter written by Max Dvořák to Italian art historians in 1919, in reaction to the Italian government's repatriation of a number of artworks

³³ Pinder, *Generation*, 44.

³⁴ Joachim Fest, *Hitler. Eine Biographie*. Berlin: Ulstein, 2006, 67.

from Viennese museums—an act that at the time caused a substantial emotional reaction among the Viennese.³⁵ The letter leaves aside the legal aspects of repatriation (who actually owned the paintings) and opens with a surprising accusation that by repatriating the paintings of Cima da Conegliano, Vitore Carpaccio and Bartolomeo Vivarini, the Italians are requisitioning *foreign* artworks.³⁶ Dvořák then lists patronisingly the intellectual debt of Italian art historians to their German-speaking and especially Austrian colleagues: ‘You have learnt from us...you have been our disciples...’ and in the process introduces a particularly pregnant and multilayered ‘we’-form.³⁷ Insofar as we assume that the letter is about the repatriation of artworks, his argument is nonsensical: it implies that, since the Italians learnt to do art history from the Austrians, Austrian institutions have the right to retain Italian artworks even if the latter were obtained illegally. In fact, the letter soon drops the topic of repatriation behind the angry self-praise of the Austrian contribution to the Italians’ understanding of their own art. By his extensive employment of the appropriative ‘we’-form Dvořák uses the letter to tell his Italian colleagues (in reality, to re-assure himself) of *his* own importance and that *he* ranks among their Austrian teachers. At the same time, this appropriation is also a denial: for Dvořák himself is not Austrian—he is a Czech living in Vienna and writing in German. As for the topic of repatriation, the letter could have been much more damning if he had written it as a Czech, an impartial, third-party observer and if the repeated use of ‘we’ had been played down. But this is not what the letter is about; the repatriation of artworks is an occasion for Dvořák to satisfy his need to contemplate his own significance, constituted through his appropriated Austrian identity.

Another strategy in which holist historiography is used in order to assert the superiority (i.e. deny the inferiority) of one’s own group are fallacious statements pertaining to the *inconceivability* of a certain fact, concept or idea to the members of another group. Such claims abound in holist writings on intellectual history, though, in a different form, they can be made from the individualist position as well.³⁸ It is not controversial, for instance, that Plato, *because* he was an ancient Greek, could not have conceived of nuclear physics—an individualist historian will argue that Plato’s individual contacts did not enable him to acquire the necessary knowledge to conceive of nuclear physics. The holist explanation, however, is that Plato could not have conceived of nuclear physics because as an ancient Greek he was *constitutionally incapacitated* from doing that—the way, for instance, some animal species cannot see colours. Since individual intellectual capacities, according to the holist account, are constituted by the individual’s membership in a group, insofar as certain groups did not develop certain ideas, this means that the individuals who belonged to these

³⁵Max Dvořák, ‘Ein Brief an die italienischen Fachgenossen’, in Hans Tietze, *Die Entführung von Wiener Kunstwerken nach Italien: Eine Darlegung unseres Rechtspunktes*, Vienna: Anton Schroll & C., 1919, 3-9. I owe gratitude to Jonathan Blower for providing me with a copy of the letter. For the wider context of the repatriation of Italian artistic works, including their identification, see Jonathan Blower, ‘An Introduction to Max Dvořák’s *Denkmalpflege*’, paper presented at the meeting of Network for the History of Viennese Art Historiography, Glasgow, 4-5 October 2009.

³⁶ He actually talks about ‘Requisition fremder Kulturgüter’, Dvořák, ‘Ein Brief’, 3.

³⁷ Dvořák, ‘Ein Brief’, 7.

³⁸ See Mitrović, ‘Intellectual History’.

groups were *constitutionally* incapable of having such ideas. In other words, the argument is not that some groups did not develop certain ideas because no individual belonging to that group formulated such ideas, but, rather, that no individual came up with that idea because the group could not do it. Spengler was the great master of this kind of argument. In his *Untergang des Abendlandes* we read that the ancient Greeks and Romans were incapable of writing history beyond discussing contemporary events (i.e. he forgets about Herodotus or Livy) (11); that a 'real Russian' finds Darwin's theory incomprehensible the way a 'real Arab' cannot understand the Copernican system (31); that the Greeks had no sense for ceremony in public life. (79) A Russian has no relationship to God as the father, his ethos being that of brotherly love, says Spengler (259); the very sound of the Russian word for sky (*nyebo*) emphasizes horizontality, and a Russian looks towards to the horizon, whereas a Westerner looks up, for which reason no Russian can be an astronomer. (If someone were to argue that the same word is used in Copernicus' Polish, Spengler has a ready answer and explains elsewhere that Copernicus was an ethnic Viking. (425)) A good example of a widely circulated Weimar-era thesis about inconceivability is Erwin Panofsky's erroneous, but often cited view from 'Perspective as a Symbolic Form', that before the early Renaissance it was impossible to conceive of space as a homogenous and isotropic medium.³⁹ Until he left Germany, Panofsky often relied on arguments about inconceivability in his writing. For instance, in his 1920 article 'The Concept of *Kunstwollen*' he argues that Polygnotos did not paint a naturalistic landscape because, as a result of the 'necessity that predetermined his will', he could only have wanted to paint an unnaturalistic landscape.⁴⁰

³⁹ Erwin Panofsky, 'Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'', in Fritz Saxl, ed., *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1924-1925*, Leipzig and Berlin 1927. Citations according to the reprint in Panofsky, *Deutschsprachige Aufsätze*, vol. 2, 664-757. See also English translation Erwin Panofsky: *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, translated by Christopher S. Wood, New York: Zone Books, 1991. Few Panofsky's papers have been more cited for the past century, and few have weathered so badly. Because of the curvature of the retina, Panofsky claimed, the geometrical construction of perspective, (which provides an image on a plane) does not correspond to what is actually perceived—in fact, as subsequently pointed out by Maurice Henri Léonard Pirenne, *Optics, Painting & Photography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1970, 148-149, we never see the retinal image but the object outside the eye; the geometrical construction of perspective merely depicts the intersection of the picture plane and the rays that connect the object with the eye. At the same time, Panofsky's argument substantially depended on an inaccurate interpretation of the technical terminology of Euclid's *Optica* as well as Aristotle's discussion of space in the *Physics*. (For misunderstanding Euclid's terminology, see C. D. Brownson, 'Euclid's *Optics* and its compatibility with linear perspective', *Archive for History of Exact Sciences*, 24:3, September 1981, 165-194. For the misinterpretation of the section about space in Aristotle's *Physics*, see Branko Mitrović, 'Leon Battista Alberti and the Homogeneity of Space', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 63:4, December 2004, 424-440. Additionally, according to the definition of homogenous space Panofsky provided, his argument actually implies that no pre-Renaissance architect could have figured out that measuring one and the same wall from one end to another, and vice versa, would give the same result. (See Mitrović, 'Alberti and Homogeneity'.)

⁴⁰ 'weil er—kraft einer sein psychologisches Wollen vorherbestimmenden Notwendigkeit—nichts anders als eine unnaturalistische Landschaft *wollen konnte*' Erwin Panofsky, 'Der Begriff des Kunstwollens', Panofsky, *Deutschsprachige Aufsätze*, vol.2, 1019-1034.

Looking through denials

It is thus tempting, when interpreting Weimar-era historians' holist claims, to consider what these claims *deny* and not merely what they assert—in other words, to examine whether it may be possible to explain Weimar era historians' holist propensities, for instance, as a result of insecurities in relation to older European cultures, possibly additionally aggravated by the outcome of the first World War. A simplified and very general explanatory thesis would say something like:

Weimar-era historians' adoption of holist methodology was motivated by insecurities.

The thesis relies on (constitutes) a psychological claim; we have seen that such claims are hard to avoid in individualist historiography. One should certainly bear in mind that such explanations may easily end up as armchair psychology. At the same time, insofar as historians deal with the motivations and decisions of historical figures, they deal with psychological facts that ultimately must have psychological explanations: an explanation of the motivation of a historical figure that is not psychologically credible cannot be historically credible either. The importance of psychological clarification of the concept of *insecurities* is further strengthened by the fact that the concept is much less commonly used than concepts such as motivation or decision. Additionally, without a psychological clarification of the concept, saying that the holist tendencies of Weimar-era art historians were insecurity motivated is a circular claim: it says that the insecurities of Weimar-era scholars made them adopt a certain methodology and assumptions, while all we know about these insecurities is that they made a group of scholars adopt a certain methodology and assumptions. Only psychology can properly provide us with the wider picture that would enable us to overcome such circular reasoning.

However, before one can even start looking for such a psychological clarification, it is necessary to ask whether there is at all such a phenomenon as insecurities in history writing, whether it can be defined and described. Without this, it would be pointless to look for a psychological explanation. My motivation for analysing the possibilities of the application of this concept in explaining the holist propensities of Weimar-era art historians is precisely that such an analysis provides a reasonably comprehensive picture of the phenomenon.

It seems plausible to argue that a certain historiographical claim assuages insecurities (and was used to do so) if:

a) the claim denies the perceived inferiority (often by asserting the superiority) of the author or the group he or she identifies with or he or she writes for;

while, at the same time,

b) the claim relies on contradictory statements, statements that cannot be verified, contradict the facts that would have been known to the author or the beliefs that were widespread in the context in which the author worked;

and

c) the claim does not provide any pragmatic, direct, gain for the person(s) whose insecurities it is said to assuage.

It is pointless to rely on insecurities when explaining historical statements that are *not* contradictory, counterintuitive and contrary to what we otherwise know about the author's beliefs. In that case, the historian may have been simply doing his or her job well. Also, a historian may introduce fallacious or contradictory claims in order to achieve certain pragmatic (or even personal) gains: in that case too, one cannot say that these claims were insecurity motivated.

Can it happen that a historiographical claim satisfies all three requirements but is nevertheless *not* insecurity motivated? It certainly can. *Insecurities* are invoked here in order to explain, rationally, historians' irrational claims — 'irrational' often in the sense that they contradict other beliefs of these historians. Since we cannot explain these historians' statements as consistent with their other beliefs, the assumption is that sometimes, these claims can still be rationally explained on the basis of a specific motivation (i.e. insecurities) that drives them. Insecurity-based explanations merely expand the pool of rationally explainable statements made by a historical figure (a historian, in this case) beyond those statements that can be rationally explained as consistent with other beliefs of that historical figure. When applying the above three criteria and classifying a certain claim as still rationally explainable because it is insecurity-motivated, we may thus be giving the benefit of the doubt to a historian who is genuinely ranting. Nevertheless, if a historian's writing *systematically* manifests a certain type of irrational denial (e.g. in the form of the claim of one's own superiority) in relation to a certain perceived inferiority, we can assume with reasonable confidence that we are indeed dealing with an insecurity-driven discourse.

A good illustration of insecurity-driven scholarship (according to the tripartite definition stated above) is the variegated cluster of denials and appropriations that characterises the attitude of Weimar-era art historians' to the Italian Renaissance. (Note that some of the claims that follow are explicitly holist, while others are fragments used to formulate wider holist perspectives.)

Rage

In his book *Italien und das Deutsche Formgefühl*, Heinrich Wölfflin described the feeling of unease during the celebrations marking the 400th anniversary of Dürer's death in Nuremberg in 1928.⁴¹ The unease was caused by the awareness that Germany's greatest visual artist sought to learn in Italy, and that an 'essentially foreign art, such as Italian' exercised such a huge impact on him.⁴² Wölfflin's book

⁴¹ Wölfflin: *Italien und das Deutsche Formgefühl*, 1.

⁴² [Dürer]...italienische Lehre aufgesucht hat und daß eine wesensfremde Kunst wie die italienische gerade ihn, den führenden deutschen Künstler, so stark in ihren Bann ziehen konnte, womit doch notwendig ein gefährlicher Gegensatz zur heimatlichen Tradition entstand. Das war es denn auch, was

describes differences between the Italian and German sense of form in order to show that German visual sensibilities and consequently art are different, but not inferior to Italian.⁴³ His is no mean presumption, since he implicitly assumes the right to prescribe to Dürer (that is, Albrecht Dürer himself) what kind of art he should have liked to be a good German. That German and Italian arts should not be compared is Max Dvořák's important point as well. In his study of the Van Eyck brothers, he declares that the cult of the Renaissance is an unexplainable anomaly of historiography.⁴⁴ In his other writings Dvořák warns against judging medieval art by the objectivity of its representation, since this means imposing on it the standards of the art of *quattro-* and *cinquecento*.⁴⁵ For Worringer, the Renaissance was a disaster that disoriented medieval thinking, and made it into a mere means to achieve scientific truth.⁴⁶ Very much like Dvořák, Worringer protests against comparisons between medieval and Renaissance arts.⁴⁷ He argues with great passion that one cannot ascribe higher cultural achievements to Renaissance Rome than to the medieval Paris of the high Gothic.⁴⁸ In the Renaissance, he says, one does not find the sensibilities of Antiquity, but merely the archaeological knowledge of Latin Antiquity.⁴⁹ A more generous view of the Renaissance was expressed by Brinckmann, who observed, in his book *Geist der Nationen*, the tendency of German scholarship to regard the influences of the Renaissance as purely negative; but in

wie ein Schatten auf jenen Gedächtnisfeiern lag und selbst wenn man dem kühnen Eroberer fremder Fernen Beifall klatschte, so mußte dieser Romanismus eben doch als eine Störung der natürlichen Entwicklung erscheinen. Mit der wohlwollenden Mahnung, diese Dinge nicht zu ernst zu nehmen, ist nicht geholfen. Dürer selbst spricht dagegen: er *hat* Italien ernst genommen.' Wölfflin, *Italien*, 1.

⁴³ See note 27.

⁴⁴ Max Dvořák, *Das Rätsel der Brüder van Eyck*, Munich: Artur Rosenauer, 1925, 145, reprint Vienna: WUV, 1999. See also Rampley, Matthew: 'Max Dvořák: Art History and the Crisis of Modernity', *Art History*, 26:2, April 2003, 214-237, 219.

⁴⁵ Max Dvořák, 'Idealismus und Naturalismus in der Gotschen Skulptur und Malerei', in Max Dvořák, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, Munich: Piper, 1924, 43-147, 45-46.

⁴⁶ 'Es war eine Katastrophe, die das ganze mittelalterliche Denken desorientierte und aus dem Geleise hob, als durch die Renaissance das Denken, das bisher Selbstzweck gewesen war, zum blossen Mittel zum Zweck, nämlich zur Erkenntnis einer ausser ihm liegenden wissenschaftlichen Wahrheit degradiert wurde, als der Erkenntniszweck alles und der Erkenntnisvorgang nichts wurde. Da verlor das Denken seine abstrakte Selbstherrlichkeit und wurde dienend; es wurde zum Sklaven der Wahrheit.' Worringer, *Formprobleme*, 117.

⁴⁷ 'Nein, in dieser Beziehung sehen wir heute wohl klar und begreifen, daß es sich da um Epochen handelt, in denen eben zwei verschiedene und inkommensurable Kulturgedanken die Stufe ihrer vollkommensten Ausprägung gefunden haben. Und dennoch bleibt uns, schwer korrigierbar, im historischen Gefühl immer noch jene humanistische Akzentsetzung, die keine Mehrpoligkeit des historischen Geschehens anerkennt, sondern uns die *Renaissance* als einpoligen Mittelpunkt des historischen Kreislaufes aufoktroiert. Mit welchem Rechtstitel die Renaissance diesen Anspruch durchzusetzen vermochte, ist klar: mit einer Berufung auf die Antike, die nur auf italienischem Boden wirklich legitim sein könne, weil nur da bluthafte Kontinuität der antiken Tradition vorhanden sei.' Wilhelm Worringer: *Griechentum und Gotik*, 8-9.

⁴⁸ 'Will heute einer noch im Ernst behaupten, das Italien der Renaissance habe, absolut genommen, eine höhere Kultur gehabt als etwa das Frankreich der mittelalterlichen Hochblüte? Daß das Rom Julius II kulturell schwergewichtiger gewesen sei als das Paris Ludwigs des Heiligen? Daß der Petersdom als künstlerische Höchstleistung ein bedeutungsvolleres Kulturdokument sei als der Dom von Reims oder sonst eine der französischen Glanzkathedralen?' Worringer, *Griechentum und Gotik*, 8.

⁴⁹ '...als Renaissance soll nicht gelten, das wiedererwachendes und wahlverwandt antwortendes Gefühl für die Antike, sondern archäologische Kenntnis der Antike.' Worringer, *Griechentum und Gotik*, 77.

Brinckmann's opinion, no nation can exclude itself from the Western spiritual community.⁵⁰

An important aspect of the negative attitude to the Renaissance is the rejection of anything that is referred to by the word *humanism*. For Spengler, the term is meaningless, since humanity is either a biological concept or an empty term. (28) Wölfflin, in his *Italien und Deutsches Formgefühl* cancels even this zoological unity: the North, he says, has a fundamentally different concept of humanity from Italy. (163) For Dvořák, the study of the humanities, *humaniora*, lost significance with classical antiquity;⁵¹ in his view, it was an error of Renaissance humanists to believe that *humaniora* of antiquity could be saved.⁵² For Worringer, humanism is a mere educational ideal that was defeated by the Reformation;⁵³ it is a subjective historical view, derived from the use of Latin language.⁵⁴ Humanism in contemporary history writing, he complains, is a dictate of Italian art historians.⁵⁵

The rejection or appropriation of the Renaissance discovery of perspective is another significant ingredient of the same project. Should Renaissance artists have discovered how human visual perception actually works and applied this knowledge to their art, then one could not deny special status to Renaissance paintings. For Spengler, Alberti's and Brunelleschi's discovery of perspective actually belongs to Northern art. (308-310) Dagobert Frey denied that perspective was discovered in the Renaissance, because all the necessary mathematical and optical knowledge was previously available – so there was nothing to discover.⁵⁶ Panofsky's thesis that perspective as a way of seeing is just a cultural construct belongs to this type of argument as well.⁵⁷

'It is a bizarre idea to believe in the rebirth of any kind of ancient art in the West in the fifteenth century,' wrote Spengler. (288) 'The Renaissance was born from spite. It lacks the depth, extent and the confidence of form-building instincts....It is

⁵⁰ Brinckmann, *Geist*, 114.

⁵¹ 'Es ist ein auf die Humanistenliteratur zurückgehender Kardinalirrtum, wenn man glaubt, daß die *humaniora* das einzige Vermächtnis der Antike für die Folgezeit gewesen sind. Sie sind mit den auf Naturrecht begründeten militärischen und polytheistischen National- und Eroberungsstaaten zusammengebrochen, und es blieben nur *membra disjecta* übrig; ihr im naiven Materialismus wurzelnder Sinn ging verloren, und so wurden sie an sich wertlos wie eine Schrift, die man nicht lesen kann.' Dvořák, 'Idealismus', 53.

⁵² Dvořák, 'Idealismus', 49 and 53.

⁵³ 'Der beschauliche wirklichkeitsfremde Humanismus, dieses Privileg saturierter Existenzen, vermochte auf die Dauer das gärend, ein voller Entwicklung befindliche Volksbewusstsein nicht niederzuhalten. Er wird durch jene grosse Volksbewegung, die zur Reformation führt, korrigiert. An die Stelle der Bildungsideale treten wieder religiöse Ideale, der Humanismus weicht der Reformation.' Worringer, *Formprobleme*, 79.

⁵⁴ Worringer, *Griechentum*, 90.

⁵⁵ 'Ich behaupte, daß diese Akzentsetzung immer noch die vom italienischen Geschichtsschreibungshumanismus diktiert ist. Immer noch trägt im Ablauf der Stile und Kulturen die Renaissance den das Taktgefüge des Periodenrhythmus regelnden Hauptakzent. Das ist für den, der vorurteilslos an die Wertung der Kulturhöhen herangeht, nichts anderes als ein humanistisches Vorurteil, aus dessen diktatorischer Suggestivkraft der Wissende schon gleich jenes *Roma locuta est causa finita est* heraushört, das für alle Zwangsvorstellungen unseres geschichtlichen Sinnes so entscheidend geworden ist.' Worringer: *Griechentum*, 7-8.

⁵⁶ Dagobert Frey, *Gotik und Renaissance als Grundlagen der modernen Weltanschauung*, Augsburg: Dr. Benno Filser Verlag, 1929, 10.

⁵⁷ Panofsky, 'Perspektive'.

the only epoch in history whose theory was more consistent than its achievements.’ (350) The Renaissance was no more than a failed attempt to reject Gothic, we gather from his book; while Gothic encompassed the entirety of human life, the achievements of the Renaissance were limited to the arts. It never affected west-European ways of thinking or life. (300) A strictly ancient capital is simply not to be found in Renaissance works (309), while Palladio’s architectural treatise had no influence in the West. (534) Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo were the only great men Italy had produced since Dante; in spite of their efforts to revive antiquity in accordance with Medicean theories, they actually remained Gothic artists (351). The paintings of Filippino Lippi, Ghirlandajo and Boticelli, Pollaiuolo and even Leonardo have much more Dutch in them than ancient, argues Spengler. (303)

A different and paradoxically affirmative view of the Italian Renaissance we find in Ludwig Woltmann’s *Die Germanen und die Renaissance*, published a decade before the 1914-1918 war.⁵⁸ Woltmann’s starting assumption is that the presence of the blond race determines the cultural worth of a nation. Consequently, their cultural achievements prove that Renaissance Italians must have been predominantly of Germanic origin, an offspring of ancient Goths and Longobards.⁵⁹ The Renaissance sense for freedom, we thus learn, is Germanic in its origin; (30) and the Germanic race, he reminds us, is the ideal of beauty according to Procopius (57), Giotto (59) and the Renaissance (59). Woltmann thus argues that Arnolfo di Cambio and Lorenzo Ghiberti were Germans because of their Germanic names (69); that Brunelleschi’s name comes from German *Brünell* (70), Alberti from *Hildebrand* (72); Bramante’s name comes from German *Braken, Brehm* (72); Buonarrotti comes from *Bonne, Bohn* and *Rohde, Rothe*. (73) Woltmann’s list of popes with Germanic names takes two whole pages (38-39). He also lists important Renaissance Italians who were blond: Luca della Robbia and Michelozzi had blond beards and hair (71); Savonarola had blue eyes and the family name could be Germanic (96); Palladio, according to a portrait, had pale eyes; Leonardo da Vinci had Germanic racial constitution, blond hair and beard. (83-86) (The sources actually do not mention that he had blond hair and beard, Woltmann admits, but since they praise the beauty of his hair, we can infer that it was blond.) Woltmann’s conclusion is, as he states, that 85-90% of Italian genius belonged to the Germanic race and that the Italian Renaissance is an achievement of the Gothic and Longobards tribes that immigrated into Italy in the early Middle Ages. (145) The reader is, however, left with little doubt that what motivates the book is the uncomfortable perception that the same race achieved much less on the less sunny side of the Alps—and since a book like this is a public act, this perception is not only the author’s, but shared by those readers who approved of its content; it was also obviously published by a publisher who expected it to be bought and to meet with the approval of a certain segment of the general public.

⁵⁸ Ludwig Woltmann, *Die Germanen und die Renaissance*, Leipzig: Thüringische Verlagsanstalt 1905.

⁵⁹ ‘Der Gehalt Volkes an blonder Rasse bestimmt seinen Kulturwert, und der Niedergang der höheren Kulturen hat seine anthropologische Ursache im Aussterben der Blondenen.’ Woltmann, *Germanen*, 16.

Wider framework of insecurity-based historical explanations

These simultaneous and passionate denials and appropriations of the Renaissance illustrate the importance of paying attention to the insecurities that individual scholarly works strive to assuage—and they also vividly depict insecurity as a historiographical phenomenon. A useful framework for the analysis of the methodological explanatory use of this phenomenon can be found in Panofsky's 1938 essay 'History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline', in which Panofsky endeavoured to redefine his methodology and re-position his work in relation to the individualism-holism debate.⁶⁰ In the essay, Panofsky defined humanistic art history as marked by assumptions of the free will and rationality of human (historical) subjects on the one hand, and the awareness of human frailties on the other.⁶¹ The three crucial concepts—rationality, free will and frailties—remained however undefined. For our purposes here, it is enough to assume that a historian and a historical figure share the same rationality insofar as they regard the same beliefs and statements as non-contradictory. In a situation where a historian finds a historical figure's statements (beliefs) mutually contradictory, he or she will not be able to explain them as consistent with that person's other views. Consequently, in Panofsky's scheme, insecurity can be seen as part of human frailties, a tendency to make counterfactual denials or adopt beliefs (contradictory to one's other beliefs) about one's own superiority when facing a situation that suggests (in one's own perception) one's own inferiority. Since Panofsky postulates the rationality and free will of historical figures, it is also implied that a person can overcome this frailty by analysing one's own motivation—although we cannot know or predict whether an individual will manage to overcome or succumb to this specific frailty. Assumptions of the free will and rationality of historical figures go hand-in-hand with individualist historiography; once a historian postulates such rationality and free will, it becomes impossible to say that the decisions or reasoning of these figures were determined by their social context.⁶² Individual Weimar-era art historians could have decided not to act the way they did (for instance, not to write the books with holist arguments that they wrote). The insecurities-based explanation *describes* the insecurities to which individuals succumbed; it does not say that they had to succumb. The thesis does not say that it was *necessary* that German Weimar-era art historians make a certain type

⁶⁰ See Mitrović, 'Humanist Art History'.

⁶¹ Erwin Panofsky, 'The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline', first published in T. E. Greene, ed., *The Meaning of the Humanities*, Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1938, 89-119. Cited here according to the version published in Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1955, 1-25.

⁶² Panofsky does not say it, but, in fact, one ends up with the individualist approach to history writing even if one merely admits that humans' possession of free will and universal rationality count among irresolvable philosophical problems: if one does not know whether human beings possess free will, one cannot claim that their actions are predetermined by the group they belong to—and holist historiography becomes impossible. Also, even a historian who denies free will (e.g. on religious grounds) need not necessarily adopt the holist position in history writing: believing that God predetermined human acting need not necessarily mean that God pre-determined it in a way that individuals' actions follow these individuals' membership in specific groups—except in the trivial sense, that all individuals who make certain actions belong to the group of individuals who make such actions.

of assumption in their writing; it merely describes the kind of intellectual weakness they yielded to.

Insecurities that affect history writing need not belong exclusively to historians; they can be environmental rather than authorial. Let us imagine that an extensive study of the individual psychologies of a great number of Weimar-era scholars has indeed shown that each of them was narcissistically injured and as a result his history-writing was insecurity-motivated. Such a study would provide an individualist account of a commonly shared aspect of a dominant stream of Weimar-era scholarship—but how complete would this account be? A scholarship of a certain era is not only the set of ideas expressed in the writings of the historians of those times; it is also constituted by the reaction to these ideas, their acceptance and rejection, the fact that historians write with motivation to have their work accepted or suppress their judgments in order to avoid confrontations. It is of limited help to describe the personal insecurities of individual historians, because the entire context in which and for which they were writing also needs to be understood *individually* as the generator of a certain, commonly shared characteristic of history writing. History writing is often, for instance, motivated by the authors' desires and expectations to achieve a certain reception; some historians make careers by pleasing their contemporaries, others fear upsetting their colleagues and yet others simply adopt, without questioning, the assumptions that are widespread in the works of their peers. One should merely try to imagine what kind of heroic stance it would take to defend the Renaissance in the context in which it was so passionately envied. (Indeed, it has been often observed that Renaissance studies had a peculiar position within the *Geisteswissenschaften* of the Weimar era and that all prominent Renaissance scholars left Germany after 1933.⁶³)

We are thus not merely dealing with historians' individual insecurities. In order to understand the impact of the insecurities of the general public, it is particularly important to pay attention to other contemporary works that, though often different in content, successfully assuaged the same insecurities: from this angle, Spengler's denial and Woltmann's Germanic appropriation of the Renaissance *say the same thing*. The reason why I have given so much space here to Spengler's nonsensical claims is their exceptionally wide reception in the context in which they were made. *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* had few, if any, truly positive reviews in scholarly journals when it came out.⁶⁴ Although historians saw through its

⁶³ 'Like Hans Baron, in fact all the leading representatives of Renaissance scholarship left Germany, including Paul Oskar Kristeller, Felix Gilbert, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, and Edgar Wind. And they did not have many students left in Germany.' Otto Gerhard Oexle: 'Was There anything to Learn? American Historian and German medieval Scholarship: A Comment' in Patrick J. Geary, *Medieval Germany in America*, Washington: German Historical Institute, 1996. Published without pagination. See also Horst Günther, 'Hans Baron und die emigrierte Renaissance', an introduction to Hans Baron, *Bürgersinn und Humanismus in Florenz der Renaissance*, Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1992, 7-10, esp. 9-10.

⁶⁴ The anonymous reviewer for *The Science News-Letter*, 8:268, May 29, 1926, 9-10, observes: 'In scope of conception, profusion of learning, boldness of generalization, impressiveness of utterance, eloquence of language, Spengler ranks with the German philosophers of the old school, with Hegel, Schopenhauer and Hartmann. He also shows the characteristics of the German philosopher in his overloading of sentences, cloudiness of meaning, arrogance of assertion and intolerance of opposing opinion. A work that no thinker can afford to ignore, however much he may disagree with its thesis.' In a review by E. R.

charlatanry, over a hundred thousand copies of the book were sold in a relatively short period of time. Frank H. Hankins, in a review in *Social Forces*, noted 'This speaks well for the Germans, for he [Spengler] is as hard to read as a muddy metaphysician; and two volumes of him would keep the average member of the intelligentsia busy long evenings for weeks.'⁶⁵ There obviously existed an intelligentsia who were receptive to the book's message and considered it important. Anyone exploring the intellectual and cultural history of the Weimar era must bear in mind that books published in that context were predominantly published for individuals who wanted to read (and believe) ideas akin to Spengler's. Extensive comparative studies may try to reconstruct the particular ideas that attracted their approval the most, and for that purpose it is reasonable to compare Spengler's book not only with works of similar content, but with those whose *denials* assuage the same insecurities. History writing, after all, occurs in a social environment and not in a vacuum; saying that society consists of individuals means also saying that the social environment is an environment of individual interactions.

Epilogue

Considering the great impact of German-speaking historiography on scholarship in the United States and Great Britain after 1933, one has to wonder how many and what aspects of the Weimar-era holist propensities were transferred to English

B. for the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 47:2, 1927, 287-289 one reads: 'That some such [claver and original] observations may be there in this sea of pretentious verbiage I would not even now deny, but my own search for them has not been fruitful: I have dived repeatedly but failed to bring up a pearl: someone else may have better fortune'. 'There can be no doubt of the man's erudition; that he is a genius is sufficiently evident from the mysticism, egotism, contradictions, disputable assertions, and scanty intelligibility of his work', Frank H. Hankins, 'The Latest in the Philosophy of History', review of *The Decline of the West* in *Social Forces*, 6:2, December 1927, 213-216. A particularly inspired review by Cecil Forsyth, published in *The Musical Quarterly* in 1928, had the form of an imaginary university examination paper on Spengler's book. It included questions such as: 'If Columbus had made his discovery in 1492 B.C., what Pharaoh would now be on the throne of America? Would American music now be Nilotic, chaotic, tommy-rotic or jazzotic?' or: 'Show how the Byzantine arabesque was nothing but an early meander-synthesis of the christyminstrelfolk melody 'Ancient Nigritic Joseph''. Cecil Forsyth, 'A Musical Examination-Paper on Spengler's 'The Decline of the West'', *The Musical Quarterly*, 14:2, April 1928, 155-157. Ernst Troeltsch, untitled review, *Historische Zeitschrift* 120:2, 1919, 281-291 speaks of a book 'von reichsten Kenntnissen, wenn auch der an sich nicht verwerfliche Diltantismus in ihm mitunter an die Grenzen des groben Unfugs geht.' (281) and 'Es wimmelt von falschenangaben, phantasiereichen Behauptungen und schiefen analogien, es fehlt fast alle kritische Sicherung der Tatsachen und jedes Bedürfnis danach'. (285) The book itself, he says, is 'ein bedeutsames Kulturdokument aus der Zeit einer geistigen Krisis der deutschen Wissenschaft, ein Zeignis der überall spürbaren Empörung gegen die exakte Philologie und gegen die schulmäßig-formalistische Philosophie der Katheder.' (281). The success of the book has to do, in Troeltsch's opinion, with the contemporary German tastes: 'Der grundsätzliche Größenwahn, das majestätische Einstoßen offener Türen, die feierliche Ankündigung von *carmina non prius audita*, das befehlsmäßige Pronunciamento von Paradoxien und kecken Einfällen gehört offenbar zu den Stileigenntümlichkeiten der heutigen deutschen Literatur, auch wenn es sich um Dinge handelt, die auch ohne diesen Jargon ihrer Wirkung— wenigstens bei ernsten und sachlichen Denkern— sicher wären. Aber man nennt das heute 'Persönlichkeit', und das deutsche Publikum verlangt das, so sehr eine feinere Humanität gerade von diesen schlechten Manieren sich reinigen wollte.' (282-283) Similarly another German scholar, J. Ruska. Review, *Isis*, 5:1, 1923, 176-181.

⁶⁵ Hankins, 'Latest', 213

speaking scholarship at the time. If holist tendencies were a result of Weimar-era scholars' interaction with their environment, what happened when that environment changed? The scholars who escaped the Nazis found themselves in an environment marked by very different political values—values that largely derived from a different view on the relationship between the individual and society. They had very good reasons to re-examine the wider implications as well as the origins of their methodologies. Gombrich famously never ceased to warn against the totalitarian implications of holist methodologies, while Panofsky worked, for decades, on a project that *de facto* amounted to restructuring the central themes of Weimar-era art history into the individualist framework.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, intellectual adaptation is always a slow process. James Ackerman, who, as a student of the generation of Weimar-era refugees, witnessed this process first hand, observed that even in the German context of the nineteenth century, the implicit, ultimately Hegelian, philosophical assumptions contradicted the positivist interest in facts as well as the concept of individuality and interest in the uniqueness of the creative act.⁶⁷ During the reception of Weimar-era methodologies into English-speaking scholarship, this contradiction was 'so poorly perceived that judgments based on both positions are likely to be found in the same work, and particularly in textbooks' while at the same time 'what makes the situation insupportable is that most of us do not even share the philosophical concepts the positions are based on'.⁶⁸

It would be, however, naïve to think that Weimar era scholars arrived, after 1933, to an environment that was utterly devoid of holist tendencies and the insecurities that, this article has suggested, typically motivate them. In analytic philosophy and in the humanities in general, the 1950s and 1960s were the heyday of the linguistic turn and the widespread belief that thinking always occurs in a language: in other words, that human reasoning processes and the contents of human beliefs are always already predetermined by the socially available conventions which enable the communication of their content.⁶⁹ In German intellectual context, this is an old idea, going back to Johann Gottfried Herder and early Romanticism.⁷⁰ The view that all thinking is verbal was also one of the central assumptions of English-speaking, analytic philosophy and remained almost unchallenged until 1983 and John Searle's seminal book *Intentionality*.⁷¹ The thesis coincided with the main tenets of behaviourist psychology and, in particular, the denial of non-verbal forms of thinking, such as visual imagination.⁷² The linguistic

⁶⁶ See Mitrović, 'Humanist Art History' for a comparison of Gombrich's and Panofsky's approach to the problem.

⁶⁷ James Ackerman, 'Toward a New Social Theory of Art', *New Literary History*, 4:1, Autumn 1972, 315-330, 319-320. See also James Ackerman, 'On Judging Art Without Absolutes', *Critical Inquiry*, 5:3, Spring 1978, 441-449, 445.

⁶⁸ Ackerman, 'Toward a new Social Theory', 319.

⁶⁹ Richard Rorty, ed., *The Linguistic Turn*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967, see especially the Introduction, 1-39. For a general history of the linguistic turn, see Michael Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁷⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, Berlin: Christian Friedrich Boß, 1778, cited according to the modern reprint, Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam, 1966, 85-86.

⁷¹ John Searle, *Intentionality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

⁷² See Ned Block's Introduction to Ned Block, ed., *Imagery*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981, 1-18 for the suppression of research about visual imagination during the behaviourist era. See also Daniel C.

turn itself favoured certain types of holist positions. Here belong the claims of the inconceivability of certain concepts for cultural groups which (allegedly) did not possess specific words to express them (obviously, if all thinking is verbal, then people who do not have appropriate words cannot have the corresponding thoughts). The rejection of formalism in analytic aesthetics also went hand-in-hand with the view that all thinking is verbal and implied that individuals are incapable of aesthetic evaluation independent of the groups they belong to.⁷³ The idea that there is no innocent eye, widespread in those days, can also be easily converted into the claim that visual perception is determined by the perceiver's social group.

Due to the demise of the linguistic turn, for the past ten years many of these holist assumptions have been seriously challenged. The view that all thinking is verbal, or that thought-contents are identical to their articulation, has largely lost its credibility, especially as a result of a substantial body of research in cognitive psychology.⁷⁴ In aesthetics this has enabled the revival of formalism; in historiography it has brought back intentionalism and a renewed interest in the authorial intention, conceived of as ultimately irreducible to the author's social context.⁷⁵ For the first time since Sedlmayr, the dominant tone of international historiography seems on the way to liberating itself from holist methodological premises and to overcoming the dichotomy, described by Ackerman, between the humanist world-view, shared by many historians, and the holist methodologies that historians often rely on. But if such liberation is going to be more than a mere adjustment to the latest trends and what is currently academically credible, it needs to enable us to recognise and overcome the forces that drive the human soul into the denial of the free will and rational capacities of other individuals.

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Dennett, 'The Nature of Images and the Introspective Trap', Block, ed., *Imagery*, 51-60, for one of the last defences of the behaviourist position.

⁷³ Kendall Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review* 79:3, July 1970, 334-67.

⁷⁴ For a summary of this research see José Luis Bermúdez, *Thinking Without Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁷⁵ For the revival of formalism, see Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001. For intentionalism, see Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.