What Is Style For?

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I.

Fundamentally, art historians can study two aspects of a work of art: the represented and that which represents, the representer (Saussure would have said *le représentée* and *le représentant*). The study of the represented is called iconography. The study of the representer is called critique of style. Critique of style means that certain characteristics of design are examined comparatively in order to deduce from the observations the authorship and cultural origin of the work: Rembrandt or an anonymous Dutch painter of the 17th century, Italian or Byzantine, antique or medieval, original or fake? While one can say that iconography adequately examines the represented in that it poses the central question of what is represented, it does not seem unfair to reproach critique of style for sticking to mere symptoms. It is interested in the classification features of the instruments of representing, but neither in the respective purposes of the instruments, nor in how they are used by the artists. In short: It is only interested in how the representer looks and not in how it represents.

Apart from speculations in the normative tradition of Poussin and classic rhetoric theory which start from and come to the assertion that specific styles enable the representation of specific contents,[1] there is a school of research which studies the functional aspect of form systematically. Sometimes the term *formalism* is used for it, following the name of a similar paradigm in literary criticism.[2] The starting point of these considerations was the art theoretical text *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* by the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (1893). The best known proponent is Ernst H. Gombrich. Similar to Hildebrand – although arguing not from the perspective of the producer, but instead from that of the interpreter – in his book *Art and Illusion* (1960) Gombrich addresses the question of how the representer represents: How is it that a few pencil strokes give viewers the impression of a living face, or that combinations of diagonal and orthogonal lines make it hard for them to reject the appearance of spatial qualities? Gombrich maintains that this works because the viewers unknowingly collaborate. They complement what they see according to their experiences and deceive themselves in a productive way. In their minds arises from the representer not so much the representation of objects as the illusion of them, for example of a face or a space. This approach is an essential contribution and appears to make art history complete. Nevertheless, it is full of unsolved problems.

Among the unsettled questions in Gombrich's model is that of the historicity of form.[3] Though cri-

1 POUSSIN, N.: *Lettres et propos sur l'art*. Ed. A. BLUNT. Paris 1964, pp. 121-125; BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Das Modusproblem in den bildenden Künsten: Zur Vorgeschichte und zum Nachleben des „Modusbriefes" von Nicolas Poussin. In: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 24, 1961, pp. 128-141.

2 Cf. BAKOŠ, J.: Der tschecho-slowakische Strukturalismus und die Kunstgeschichtsschreibung. In: *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 36, 1991, pp. 53-103 and BAKOŠ, J.: The Prague Linguistic Circle's Contribution to Art History. In: *Human Affairs*, 15, 2005, pp. 22-34.

3 SCHWARZ, M. V.: Das Problem der Form und ihrer Geschichtlichkeit: Hildebrand, Riegl, Gombrich Baxandall. In: *Wiener Schule: Erinnerung und Perspektiven* (= Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte, 53, 2004). Vienna 2005, pp. 203-216.

tique of style may not encroach upon the core problems of the representer, its observations are still real, and attest to this: The representer looks significantly different at various times, at various places, and in the hands of various artists. If Gombrich really is right when he asserts that representing always is only about the fabrication of an illusion in the eye and mind of the viewer, then with what do these differences in the appearance of the representer correlate? Why do the structures with which Raphael represents a naked man look completely different from those with which Rembrandt represents a naked man? Nevertheless, what happens in European art between the 14th and the mid-19th centuries seems to be a problem Gombrich can cope with. Here he perceives a gradual increase in the artists' dexterity in representing, which progresses according to the principle of trial and error, and in the public's growing proficiency in reading.[4] In the end, the former can paint impressionistically, and the latter can convert impressionistic paintings into misty illusions of reality. But there are also well-known changes in the opposite direction, for example in late antiquity and in the decades around 1900, in the time when Gombrich was born.

And even within the six supposedly normal European centuries, the trend towards the perfect guideline for the perfect illusion is recognizable only from a great distance. In detail there are enough occurrences that do not fit into Gombrich's picture – one may think of Raphael's contemporary Veit Stoß and his highly artificial figures of unpainted wood. It is hard to believe that they are wrought in such a way in order to call forth illusions of living people. On the other hand, this seems especially true of the figures and paintings which emerged from the workshops of the Central European artists two or three generations earlier. According to Jan Hus, their madonnas and female saints in their liveliness and beauty made men think *"nasty thoughts"* and *"fall into temptation"*.[5] Thus the art of Veit Stoß should be described as a sort of retreat from an art awakening illusions.

Gombrich created a veritable science of the application and perception of the representer, but it does not work as a historic science.[6] That is no accident, but is instead in accordance with Gombrich's intentions; he mistrusted the narratives of history, above all when, in Hegelian manner, laws of history were supposed to be deduced from them. A history of style on a Hildebrandian basis, and at the same time in a Hegelian perspective, had propelled for instance Alois Riegl, who had argued that world history of the visual moved from the haptic to the optic (just as world history of the political moved, according to Hegel, from the feudal society to the monarchy).[7] Because such paradigms had already begun to be abandoned by historians in Gombrich's time, and because they seem only absurd today, nothing hinders the attempt to put Gombrich's concept into a modern (art) historical perspective that refrains from historical-philosophical speculation. That is what Michael Baxandall has done. His best known book, *Painting and Experience: A Primer in the History of Pictorial Style* (1972), deals with art in the 15th-century Florence. *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (1980), dedicated to Veit Stoß and his contemporaries in Southern Germany, is also pertinent. Like

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4 GOMBRICH, E. H.: *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. New York 1960, p. 88 and passim.

5 *Mistra Jana Husi Sebrané spisy české.* Ed. K. J. ERBEN. Prag 1865, Vol. 1, p. 71. It should be added that Hus, as distinguished from his followers, the Hussites, was no categorial enemy of images. In the sermon quoted here, he obviously refers to a specific type of images.

6 BRYSON, N.: *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. Houndmills – London 1983, p. xiii.

7 RIEGL, A.: *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn*. Vienna 1901; GOMBRICH, E. H.: *In Search of Cultural History*. Oxford 1969; GOMBRICH, E. H.:

Hegel und die Kulturgeschichte. In: *Neue Rundschau*, 88, 1977, pp. 202-219; GINZBURG, C.: Da A. Warburg a E. H. Gombrich: Note su un problema di metodo. In: *Studi medievali*, serie III, 7, 1966, 1015-1065, esp. 1045-1053. Reprinted in: GINZBURG, C.: *Spurensicherungen*. Berlin 1983, pp. 115-172. It should be mentioned that Ginzburg's interpretation of Riegl's idea of style as based on the category of race is misleading. Whereas Ginzburg translates that, according to Riegl, late-antique Christians and pagans belonged to the same *"razza"* (race) and thus used the same style, Riegl says that they belonged *"zu denselben Volksstämmen"* (to the same tribes). In this way, he stresses that style was independent of faith but he also states that it was independent of belonging to a specific *"tribe"* as well. – GINZBURG, C.: Stile: inclusione ed esclusione. In: GINZBURG, C.: *Occhiacci di legno: Nove riflessioni sulla distanza*. Milan 1998, pp. 136-170.

Art and Illusion, these books address the question of how forms become something that represents, though the question is answered not solely and not even primarily from the point of view of psychology. Instead of this, Baxandall focuses on what I would call the competence of the user. For Baxandall the ability of decoding visual data is historically determined, more exactly, it is a cultural anthropological phenomenon that is related to and based on the entirety of the cultural practices of a specific society.[8] An example from the first book: In order to read perspective as space, the users must possess a certain cognizance of the geometrical representation of space – a cognizance as it was taught in early modern Italian trading towns, not only by life, but also by schools. And this learned cognizance must suffice in order to read perspective routinely and to enjoy doing so. What in behavioral science is called *Funktionslust* (the performance of a function for one's own pleasure) is a part of competence, because it is not inevitable that the signs offered will be accepted; if the users don't like handling them they can reject them. The perspective constructions of Piero della Francesca or Uccello or others react thusly to the image-users' capability, given within a specific historical situation, to perceive in such constructions the representations of volumes, spaces or three-dimensional objects. Naturally these constructions are also based upon the skills of the artist, acquired in whatever way. It accounts for the comprehensibility of the employed forms that producers and users belonged for the most part to the same culture and cultivated together the corresponding skills and competences.

To give an example from the second book as well: According to Baxandall, the obsession with drapery forms, which one can observe in German sculptors of the decades around 1500, among them Veit Stoß, has to do with a culture of virtuosic adornment which can be observed further in music (the fioritures of *Meistersang*) and in calligraphy. Hence the fantastically formed folds were readable for the users of the work as an embellishment and as a specific type of visual rhetoric which did not aim at true-to-life effects but rather at artistry and elevation. As opposed to perspective, this is a competence that relates to forgotten aspects of a vanished *mentalité*, and therefore it is unfamiliar to us. Competences can, then, be lost.

Baxandall's approach does not just combine questions pertinent to the social sciences and to Gombrich's special idea of how to question art, but also highlights a basic experience of art historical work from which this discipline emerged at all, namely that of the contingency of the representer. Style, one can now say, is different because it reflects various forms of visual competence and thereby permits the observation of the course of cultural history by looking at the changing visual skills, needs, and interests of the culture's proponents – be they artists or the audience. Insofar as one does not define style solely as a symptom on the surface, one can also say that style is that which structures not only the representer, but also the visual competence of the producer and that of the user – as syntax gives structure and meaning to language and is historically variable as well.[9] To the users, style also signals familiarity and announces *Funktionslust* when dealing with the work of art.

Baxandall did not, however, address an obvious question: How is it with Gombrich's idea, under these circumstances, that the use of the representer is always aimed at illusion? And thereby we come to another problem with Gombrich's model. If Gombrich assumed that the goal of representing is the illusion of something independent from the image, then it follows that in the act of seeing and of completing the illusion, the viewer would mislead him- or herself about the fact that the represented is the product of the representer. Instead of this, the viewer starts from the assumption that the represented is the product or the reproduction of that item outside the image to which the represented refers. A represented landscape is therefore the representation of a landscape, and this landscape can be regarded not only in its represented, but also (by an outing rather than a museum vis-

8   GEERTZ, C.: Art as a Cultural System. In: *Modern Language Notes*, 91, 1976, pp. 1473-1499. Reprinted in: GEERTZ, C.: *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*. New York 1983, pp. 94-120; SCHWARZ, M. V.: Übermalungen und Remakes: Stil als Medium. In: *Stilfragen*. Ed. B. KLEIN – B. BOERNER. Berlin 2005, pp. 187-204.

9   For the German language cf. POLENZ, P. von: *Deutsche Satzsemantik*. Berlin – New York 1988, pp. 24-48.

it) in its naturally occurring form. The possibility of experiencing it *in natura* is, indeed, the precondition that one also (re)cognizes it in a solely represented form.

This may apply to photographic images and the audience's use of them, which likely shaped Gombrich's concept of illusion. Photos are optical-chemical impressions of that which was photographed, and that is central for their perception, as Roland Barthes points out in *La chambre clair* (1979). This, however, would surely describe the situation incorrectly, as far as manually generated images are concerned. Neither are they impressions which would not exist without an imprinted object, nor could the audience understand them as such before the invention of photography. There were some exceptions: In the field of sacred pictures, there was the so-called *veronica*, a type of fictive portrait which was believed to come from an impressed image of Christ's face on a cloth, and, in the realm of myths, there was the story of Dibutades, a Greek potter's daughter who, according to Pliny the Elder, invented the art of painting by penciling the shadow of her beloved's face on a wall.[10] The isolated position of these concepts shows, however, that, in pre-modern times, the idea of an imagery whose illusive quality is due to a more or less mechanical doubling of real structures cannot be taken for granted.

In order to describe realistically and more transparently the relationship of represHenter and represented in the audience's perception, one can fall back on a pattern in dramatic theory: Here the representer is the actor, the represented the character.[11] In the course of a given performance, a given audience member at a given moment may indeed perceive only the character, forgetting entirely that it is embodied by an actor and that one finds oneself in a theatre and not

in the castle of Elsinore. Taken as a whole, however, a wavering of perception is typical: Actor and character are simultaneously present; at times the one, then the other comes to the fore; only seldom does one of them disappear. An argument put forth in the 17th century against the moral worth of the theatre is that the edifying effect of the character ultimately has no chance against the erotic effect which the body of the actor imposes on the audience.[12] Here a conflict between presence and illusion reveals itself. In a theatre review of the 18th century, it was opined that actors who, in the appropriate scenes, let themselves fall to the floor with impact rather than smoothly gliding down, and who thereby received applause, were applauded for their daredevilry and not for their dramatics, and the audience would have done better to go to the circus.[13] Here a conflict between realism and illusion reveals itself. The more an actor plays his or her part, the more not only the embodied character appears before the audience, but also the person of the actor. Presumably therefore there are famous actors and not just famous pieces and famous characters. And therefore the audience goes to the theatre not just to see a certain piece, but also to see a certain actor. That the actor at times celebrates him- or herself at the expense of both the character and the piece is for the audience uncomfortable, but belongs absolutely to the problem of the relationship of representer and represented.

The relevance of this framework of theory especially for an art history concerned with the problem of the historicity of style becomes obvious when we carefully read Baxandall's books. From *Painting and Experience* onward, the beholder's wavering perception is implicitly present. One may look at Baxandall's remarks on the *"most three-dimensional of hats be-*

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[10] BELTING, H.: *Das echte Bild: Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen.* Munich 2005. (For a review of Belting's book see: SCHWARZ, M. V.: *Kunstchronik,* 59, 2006, pp. 484-490); SCHMIDT-LIN-SENHOFF, V.: Dibutadis. Die weibliche Kindheit der Zeichenkunst. In: *Kritische Berichte,* 4, 1996, pp. 7-20.

[11] FISCHER-LICHTE, E.: Was verkörpert der Körper des Schauspielers? In: *Performativität und Medialität.* Ed. S. KRÄMER. Munich 2004, pp. 141-162. I prefer this framework of theory to the *en vogue* phenomenological approach which allows the discussion, in the terms of representation and medium, of what I term the represented and the representer and

which leads to the result that we can either see the one or the other (Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty). – WIESING, L.: Merleau-Pontys Phänomenologie des Bildes. In: *Merleau-Ponty und die Kulturwissenschaften.* Ed. R. GIULIANI. Munich 2000, pp. 265-282.

[12] The texts concerning the *Querelle de la moralité du théâtre* were edited by THIROUIN, L.: *P. Nicole, Traité de la comédie et autres pièces d'un procès du théâtre.* Paris 1998.

[13] ENGEL, J. J.: Ideen zu einer Mimik (1785/6). In: ENGEL, J. J.: *Schriften.* Berlin 1804, Vol. 7, pp. 58-60.

having as if it were two-dimensional, spreading itself flatly on the picture plane", Niccolò da Tolentino's hat in Uccello's *Battle of San Romano*: The represented – the hat – is three-dimensional; the representer – lines and colour fields on the surface of the painting – is flat.[14] Subsequently, in *Shadows and Enlightenment* (1995), Baxandall explicitly states that certain 18th-century French portraits are painted in a way that the beholder's *"perception flickers between paint and painted"*.[15]

II.

By regarding two statues and two paintings I wish to explain the usefulness of a further development of these ideas. The first pair is by Donatello, two sculptures which are poles in his varied oeuvre and raise the question of whether they can be understood at all as emanations of the same artistic culture. I refer to the bronze David (Florence, Bargello) and the Magdalene (Florence, Opera del Duomo).[16] Everything about them is dissimilar, a fundamental difference which research has tried to assign to formulas such as classic vs. gothic, idealistic vs. realistic, and at times has tried to explain using the biography of the artist. I would proceed differently in describing them.

In the case of the David, I would emphasize that a viewer inescapably looks at the representer first and regularly returns to it [Fig. 1]. While approaching the sculpture in the great hall of the Bargello he or she sees bronze and will only gradually experience skin apart from the metal. For the contemporaneous viewer, it was of special importance to recognize a bronze statue and with this a medium rich with

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[14] BAXANDALL, M.: *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*. Oxford 1972, pp. 89-91.

[15] BAXANDALL, M.: *Shadows and Enlightenment*. New Haven – London 1995, p. 138. This formulation is close to Richard Wollheim's concept of "twofoldness" which – in Andrew Harrison's words – allows the description of *"how we need to incorporate within our proper responses to pictures in art a simultaneous awareness both of what the pictures depict and of the qualities of the marked surface which renders such depiction possible."* HARRISON, A.: The Limits of Twofoldness: A Defense of the Concept of Pictorial Thought. In: *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting: Art as Representation and Expression*. Ed. R. van GERWEN. Cambridge 2001, pp. 39-58.

[16] ROSENAUER, A.: Donatello. Milan 1993, Cat. No. 41, 56.

1. Donatello: David. Florence, Bargello. Photo: author.

2. Donatello: Magdalene. Florence, Museo dell' Opera del Duomo. Photo: author.

prestige whose background in antiquity had become accessible through humanism.[17] Therefore the naked boy's beauty appears in a way that refers the audience to cultural tradition and qualities of art, and the shimmering, taut surface makes present not only a beautiful body but also artistic skill. We are reminded of him who produced the opportunity for this bewildering experience. Whoever is familiar with the gossip about Donatello's homosexuality cannot look upon the figure without thinking of it. Just as how the actor makes him- or herself known on the stage beside the character from time to time, demanding applause, so do the representing material and the representing medium appear, and behind them the artist as the representing personality. Vis-à-vis all of this, the represented character – the Old Testament hero, king, and Prophet David – possesses a low presence. No one would assert that this work of art was made in order to call forth an illusion of his attendance in the world of the viewer. If there is a meaning intended beyond artistry and beauty, then it has the character of an allegory or metaphor and concerns facts which are only distantly related to the historical figure.[18]

The Magdalene is entirely different [Fig. 2]: In a museum context, it may be an obvious response to view her as a Renaissance statue and a work of art. At the meeting place of a penitent confraternity, however, where the figure is supposed to have been placed originally, what clearly prevailed was the appearance of a piously gesticulating woman dressed in shabby, hairy locks in which the brothers and sisters immediately recognized the holy penitent. And indeed, the artist has avoided many features of the statue medium, a fact that becomes clear in comparison with the David: *contrapposto* is not used, but instead an improvised posture; not a body is visible, but instead isolated, thin limbs. Above all, however, one does not

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[17] PFISTERER, U.: *Donatello und die Entdeckung der Stile 1430–1445*. Munich 2002, pp. 412-425.

[18] This statement is in accordance with a long tradition of interpreting the statue. For a new version of a political reading see: McHAM, S. B.: Donatello's bronze David and Judith as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence. In: *Art Bulletin*, 83, 2001, pp. 32-47. For a reading which is, in my eyes, more appropriate and which is based on the theory of love and beauty, see: SHEARMAN, J.: *Only Connect ...: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*. Princeton 1992, pp. 17-27.

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see what material the figure is made of. The material is concealed by an illusionistic painting, and this is decisively involved in directing our attention to the represented and in obstructing the reflection of the representer. On the other hand, the figure is not at all only realistic, and one could hardly take Magdalene's attendance in the chapel for that of a strayed vagabond. In the painting of the locks, for example, gilding was used. This must have reminded the audience of "normal" statues of saints in Florentine churches. By making present peculiarities of sacred images, something awe-inspiring was added to the woman's appearance and her holiness was manifested.

In the style of the David, what comes across as classic, smooth and addicted to beauty also serves to refer to the medium of the revived classic statue, that is, to a luxury product which was used to decorate a palace or a villa, at any rate a place where educated people enjoyed life. In this case the language of form makes the representer, and with that the artist's labor for his patron and the value of the work, a central issue. In the style of the Magdalene, what comes across as gothic, veristic, haphazard and ugly refers in contrast to the represented subject and distracts from the medium of the statue, from art and artistry. Not an artist's work, but something which could be experienced at times as the simulated presence of the saint, at times as an especially stirring devotional image of her should deter the pious brothers and sisters from any further enjoyment of life and incite them to penitence. It did not need to be suppressed that the Magdalene was made by a famous artist and so Donatello's name was passed on. But name and fame of the sculptor played a role only insofar as it was exclusively an artist of Donatello's niveau who could be trusted to manufacture a figure by which one had the chance to forget that it was manufactured.[19]

The other pair consists of two pictures that come from El Greco and Caravaggio and were painted in Rome within a few decades of one another, and under almost the same conditions: Both artists tried to establish the social and professional groundwork for

3. El Greco: Boy Lighting a Candle. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte. Photo: author.

a career in the orbit of the curia, and both lived in the houses of well-known patrons. Both created paintings of a medium size and of undemanding subject matters which let them be incorporated smoothly into collections. El Greco's picture shows the half-length figure of a youth, who is blowing on a glowing piece of wood in order to light a candle with it (Naples, Museo di Capodimonte).[20] The painter does not tell us what leads the boy to do this [Fig. 3]. Caravaggio shows, also as a half-length figure, a youth who for reasons revealed to us just as sparingly is holding a fruit basket [Fig. 4] (Rome, Galleria Borghese).[21] Similar in theme, the paintings differ considerably in painterly execution: Caravaggio's handsome, black haired youth is precisely modeled by a light that falls from the up-

[19] Cf. PFISTERER 2002 (see in note 17), pp. 430-475.

[20] WETHEY, H. E.: *El Greco and his School*. Princeton 1962, Cat. No. 122. Cf. also Cat. No. 121: an additional, signed version by Greco's own hand.

[21] CINOTTI, M. – DELL'ACQUA, G. A. : *Caravaggio: Tutte le opere*. Bergamo 1983, Cat. No. 49.

4. Caravaggio: Boy with a Fruit Basket. Rome, Galleria Borghese. Photo: author.

per left, and is presented together with the fruit in such a way that one believes it possible to touch the apples, pears, and grapes in the basket just as the nose of the *ragazzo*. The content of the fruit basket and the figure are rendered in technically different ways, but in ways that make leaves, cloth, hair, and the different sorts of skin, fruit skins and human skin, appear most clearly. This is Caravaggio's notorious realism in the state before it would become an art form of its own.

El Greco developed, in contrast, no coherent illusive structure: When looking at the picture, one sees a boy as well, but at any time the beholder can direct his or her gaze to the countless colored brushstrokes and dots that build up the subject out of the dark background. The brushwork can also be perceived independent of the subject, especially along the bor-

derline between subject and background, and it even partly emerges as a porous relief which advisably should not be touched. While we expect to feel skin when coming in contact with the nose of Caravaggio's boy, we know that we would feel but dried paint when coming in contact with the nose of El Greco's boy. Also in contrast to Caravaggio, the painter tolerates unattractive sections in the field of the represented: One may note the black shadows on the sides of the nose, which nearly distort the youth, and thus making him more present in an irritating way, but which also accentuate the difficulty of the chosen lighting and its representation. In one place, namely in the "hotspot" of the picture, the style of painting provocatively oversteps the limits of representing: Is that still an ember painted in a virtuosic manner, or is it glowing paint? That the painter merely meant to make a faithful rendition of an ember (just as Caravaggio made a faithful rendition of a fruit basket) — presumably that does not cross the audience's mind.

Both paintings are *bravure*, but differ in aim and strategy: The one painter paints in such a way that the audience tends to forget the act of painting and concentrates on the representation, which is characterized as beautiful and tempting according to all rules of art and life. The other paints in such a way that we see how his act of painting produces the representation whereby the attractiveness of the represented is kept within limits and thus refers us back again and again to the contemplation of the representer and the process of representing as the actual attraction of the work. Even so, El Greco's representation is no less precisely defined in its subject matter than Caravaggio's which seems to be inspired by a popular anecdote in Pliny the Elder and probably tries to surpass a brilliantly naturalistic work by the Greek artist Zeuxis: While birds flew to Zeuxis' picture of a boy with grapes and tried to pick the grapes, they would never fly to Caravaggio's picture because he painted the boy no less clearly than the grapes and so the birds would be afraid of the boy.[22] As Jan Białostocki

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22 EBERT-SCHIFFERER, S.: Caravaggio's Früchtekorb — das früheste Stilleben? In: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 65, 2002, pp. 1-23, esp. 18. According to Posèq, *"the difference between the superb rendering of the fruit and the somewhat weaker portrayal of the figure"* in Caravaggio is meant to reproduce Zeuxis' painting. – POSÈQ, A. W. G.: Bacchic Themes in Caravaggio's

Juvenile Works. In: *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 132, VI, CXI, 1990, pp. 112-121, esp. 116. But neither can I see a clear difference in quality, nor can I believe that the perception of a difference is intended. The figure of the youth shows some weaknesses in rendering, but we should not forget that Caravaggio was only at the begin of his career when he painted the picture.

pointed out, El Greco also transcribes a passage in Pliny the Elder: According to Pliny, Antiphilos of Alexandria – the famous rival of Apelles – painted a much-admired image of a boy blowing a fire, whose face is lit up by the fire.[23]

For the Cretian-born Domenicos Theotokopoulos, who maintained a distinctly Greek identity and who identified with Apelles (or at least was identified with him),[24] such a tradition was of great significance. Perhaps the image in Naples is meant to be something like an answer from the new Apelles, Domenicos Thetokopoulos: What connects the image and El Greco's style in general with Apelles is in any case the way of painting, because according to Pliny, Apelles himself saw the quality of his art not least in the fact, *"that he knew when to take his hand away from a picture – a noteworthy warning of the frequently evil effects of excessive diligence."*[25] In the framework of the wording used here, one would say that Apelles and El Greco consciously attended to keeping the represented from obscuring the beauties of the representer and the adventure of representing.

These small case studies are meant to show two things: Firstly, one must indeed take into account the audience's perception that swings between the representer and the represented, specifically because it is semantically relevant. It helps in discerning the difference between a devotional image and a statue for the adornment of a private home, and assigns the messages to the appropriate spheres of life, moral concepts and behavioral conventions. In the same way the wavering perception can help to make a theme of the artist's own national identity and of a specific artistry within a central Italian and later Spanish environment. Secondly, we have seen that it is above all style which guides this wavering and makes its tendency predictable. Style is the medium with whose help the artist tells the audience to which degree it should be interested in the artificiality of the work of art on the one hand and in the subject represented in the work of art on the other.

Interestingly, this type of semantics of style is not separate from the question of specific visual competences that Baxandall introduced to the game. Only before the background of possible differences in competence does it become understandable why the means observed in the case studies are so different, even contradictory: If, in the instance of El Greco's image, hints of the work process such as brush strokes are left visible and direct perception towards the representer [Fig. 3], then it is precisely the perfection of the surface in the case of the David which distracts from the represented and refers to the perfection of antique sculpture and therewith to the humanist ideals of artistry and patronage [Fig. 1]. Florentine viewers of the mid-15th century had, then, to have seen antique statues and to have heard of the culture of the antique statue, while the Roman viewers of the late 16th century had to be willing to encounter the peculiarities and beauty of Venetian Renaissance painting, whose conventions El Greco used when avoiding *"the evil effects of excessive diligence"* as Apelles supposedly did.

In the case of the Magdalene, one of several abilities required was to read a color scheme in which gilding occurs correctly [Fig. 2]. In his treatise *Della pittura*, Leon Battista Alberti refuses to "praise" the use of gold because he considers it inartistic, but informs us that his contemporaries believed gold to "give majesty" to representations.[26] This made its use appropriate for holy images and statues of saints. But gold could also irritate the viewer – especially the viewer of the Magdalene – if he or she was not prepared to read it as a representing instead of a represen-

[23] BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: Puer Sufflans Ignes. In: *Arte in Europa: Scritti di storia dell' in onore di Edoardo Arslan*. Milan 1966, pp. 591-595. Reprinted in: BIAŁOSTOCKI, J.: *The Messages of Images: Studies in the History of Art*. Vienna 1988, pp. 139-144.

[24] I refer to a well-known sonnet by Fray Hortensio de Paravicino AZNAR, J. C.: *Dominico Greco*. Madrid 1950, vol. 2, p. 1294. On Greco's Greek identity: HADJINICALAOU, N.: Zwischen byzantinischem Griechentum und westlicher Modernität. In: *El Greco*. Ed. S. FERINO-PAGDEN – F. CHECU

CREMADES. [Cat. Exhib.] Vienna 2001, p. 59-67. Surely Greco had no notion of *Byzantine* Greekness, but rather saw himself as the offspring of classic Greekness.

[25] PLINY: *Natural History: Books XXXIII-XXXV*. Ed. H. RACKHAM. Cambridge (Mass) 1952, p. 320.

[26] ALBERTI, Leon Battista : *Della Pittura. Über die Malkunst*. Ed. O. BÄTSCHMANN – S. GIANFREDA. Darmstadt 2002, p. 146; ALBERTI, L. B.: *On Painting*. Translation by J. R. Spencer. New Haven – London 1966, p. 85.

ted color: a color that is to indicate the hairy woman's holiness rather than to describe beautiful hair's shine.

The awareness of the represented may also require competence: with the Magdalene foremost an iconographic competence. Above all, however, it is the form of perception demanded by the figure and its subject that aims at competence, namely at the readiness of intensive experience and at the willingness to link what one experiences sensually with one's own spiritual existence, an approach that was also nurtured by mystical practices, including self-flagellation in certain religious brotherhoods.[27] In the case of the Caravaggio boy, the viewers must cope with a chiaroscuro modeling developed by the upper Italian followers of Leonardo da Vinci, which then in no way belongs to the ancient basic asset of the European representational techniques [Fig. 4]. Whether a non-European or a medieval viewer would understand it correctly and not perceive dark-colored parts in the face, is thoroughly unclear. We may be reminded here of the thesis of Samuel Y. Edgerton, whereby it was the convention of the chiaroscuro technique in the following of Leonardo which made it possible for Galileo Galilei to perceive the surface of the moon through the telescope as a plastic landscape of craters, while his rival Thomas Harriot, living in England and therefore in a different visual culture, saw only untextured spots.[28]

Ultimately, Caravaggio's boy also gives an example of how the disposability of a variety of competences can influence the wavering of perception and the role of style therein: A viewer who is visually competent (that is, who is accustomed to looking at Italian late-Renaissance and Baroque pictures) will tend to immerse him- or herself in what he or she sees as existing in a virtual reality, and can thus widely ignore the fact that it is a product of painting. For the viewer who is also in possession of literary competence (who knows Pliny's story) or who is interested in art as art in general, however, the situation is different: In this case, the impression that one might be

able to touch what is represented paradoxically enables the picture to be seen as a perfect picture and as a product of a great painter. In Caravaggio's time most visitors of Roman collections had both competences and therefore, for them, the represener always lurked behind the represented just as the represented did behind the represener. It is possible that this balance between a highly intense presence of the represented and – recognizable for connoisseurs – an equally intense presence of the represener was the secret behind Caravaggio's success, and that it helped to shape the evolution of Baroque painting, ultimately leading to pictures such as those characterized by Baxandall as inviting the perception not only to swing or waver but to vibrate "between paint and painted".

We can reiterate that style as a structuring element in the fabrication of form depends firstly on competences: What is doable on the one hand and what is comprehensible (completable, Gombrich would have preferred) on the other? And secondly, style depends on the desired semantic. True to Wittgenstein's apocryphal statement – seminal for the pragmatics of linguistics – *"Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use,"* it is perhaps advisable to speak of function rather than of semantics.[29] What purpose should the work serve, what should its message and appearance trigger within the audience? The ability to align the work with the usage through style involves placing emphasis on the artificiality and/or on the givenness either of the work as a whole, or of parts of it. Where artificiality is stressed, the viewer's attention will tend to the represener, and thereby either the relation of the work to other works known to the audience (other statues or paintings), or the role of the artist and what the audience knows or suspects about him or her will become central. Both fields call up specific contexts of perception and interpretation. In contrast, the emphasis on the givenness directs the beholder's attention to the represented, and that, likewise, makes contexts available – either those from the visible reality or those from the literary tradition

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27 FREY, D.: Der Realitätscharakter des Kunstwerks. In: FREY, D.: *Kunstwissenschaftliche Grundfragen*. Vienna 1964, pp. 107-149; BELTING, H.: *Bild und Kult*. Munich 1990, pp. 459-470; MORGAN, D.: *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkeley 2005; LARGIER, N.: *Lob der Peitsche: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Erregung*. Munich 2001.

28 EDGERTON, S. Y.: *The Heritage of Giotto's Geometry: Art and Science on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution.* Ithaca – London 1991, pp. 223-253.

29 *Ansätze und Aufgaben der linguistischen Pragmatik*. Ed. M. BRAUNROTH et al. Frankfurt am Main 1975, p. 113.

and imagination of the audience. It has often been maintained – by Gombrich and others – that art is similar to language in that both systems use conventions.[30] While I am not sure whether what one calls convention in language and in art is really comparable, I have no doubt that the conventions in art are that item which, among art historians, is called style, and that they serve – by pointing at times to the representer, at times to the represented – to connect the audience with the relevant contexts of the work, which are normally many and diverse, and in this way make it meaningful. Without style as a mediating element, artificial visual phenomena such as paintings and sculptures would never have played a role comparable to linguistic phenomena in human societies which, according to the words of the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, consist of communication – verbal and visual.[31]

[30] GOMBRICH 1960 (see in note 4), pp. 362-364 and passim.

[31] LUHMANN, N.: *Politische Theorie im Wohlfahrtsstaat*. Munich 1981, p. 20. Friedhelm W. Fischer was the first to relate style to non-Marxist social theory and to Luhmann's ideas on communication. – FISCHER, F. W.: Gedanken zur Theoriebildung über Stil und Stilpluralismus. In: *Beiträge zum Problem des Stilpluralismus*. Ed. W. HAGER – N. KNOPP. Munich 1977, pp. 33-48.

Načo existuje štýl?

Resumé

Príspevok sa venuje otázke, ktorá bola doposiaľ v odbore dejín umenia len málo skúmaná. Štýlová kritika obvykle znamená niečo celkom iné, ako vzťahovanie formy k funkcii: Kto používa štýl na atribúcie, datovania, lokalizácie diel a na výpovede o stave svetového ducha (a jeho profanovaného brata, ducha doby) koná približne tak, ako raní letci vo svojich dvojplošníkoch, ktorí vyžívali na svoju orientáciu línie železníc a ciest. Pri tejto forme pozorovania sa celkom odhliada od zamýšľaného účelu pozorovaných predmetov a namiesto toho sa zameriava na vybrané charakteristiky ich povrchu: Z tejto perspektívy sa nedozvieme nič o tom, čo znamená infraštruktúra dopravy pre hospodárstvo a spoločnosť krajiny – a teda ani nič o skutočnom geografickom význame pozorovaných daností. Avšak podobne, ako sa od Ferdinanda de Saussure skúma fungovanie jazyka a jeho súčastí, tak by malo byť od Adolfa von Hildebranda a jeho knižky *Problém formy vo výtvarnom umení* (1893) jasné, že popri symptómoch štýlu sa dá pozorovať aj jeho funkcia v oku a hlave vnímateľa. Heinrich Wölfflin zhrnul Hildebrandov spis do jednej vety, keď úlohu výtvarného umelca definoval takto: *„Prírodu treba urobiť primerane očiam.“* Na pozadí tohto zistenia je štýl tým, čo umožňuje nachádzať ekvivalenty prirodzených daností, ekvivalenty, ktoré zodpovedajú recipientovej schopnosti vnímať. V umeleckohistorickom diskurze sa dá rekonštruovať línia – hoci prerušovaná – ktorá až podnes nadväzuje na sochára a teoretika Hildebranda. Siaha cez často čítané dielo Ernsta Gombricha *Art and Illusion* (1960) k prácam Michaela Baxandalla.

Baxandall neorientoval argumentáciu svojich kníh *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (1972) a *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (1980) na základe klasickej umeleckohistorickej otázky, čo štýl vypovedá o umelcoch, regiónoch, obdobiach a kultúrach. V centre stojí otázka, ktoré výtvarné prostriedky vzbudili v určitých obdobiach a kultúrach – napríklad v spoločnosti florentského quattrocenta či v nemeckých mestských spoločnostiach desaťročí okolo roku 1500 – pozornosť publika a tým sugerovali – či priam umožnili – zbožné alebo zábavné používanie objektov. K Baxandallovým východiskám patrí psychologický prístup Ernsta Gombricha, ktorý v konečnom dôsledku znamená, že utváranie formy komplexným, ale pochopiteľným spôsobom riadi vnímanie. Avšak kým u Gombricha (ako už u Hildebranda) je to vždy rovnaká ilúzia skutočnosti, ktorú štýl vo vnímateľoch údajne produkuje, má u Baxandalla tento výsledok, produkovaný štýlom, vždy aj dejinnú dimenziu, či presnejšie takú, čo vychádza z dejín mentalít. Štýl produkuje vizuálne úžitkové objekty, ktoré sa svojím výzorom prispôsobujú používaniu jednotlivcami zakaždým osobitných spoločností, osobitným záujmom a osobitným situáciám. Preto sa Baxandallove knihy smú nazývať zásadným príspevkom k historickej antropológii vizuálnych kultúr.

Nadväzujúc na Baxandalla a na skúsenosti zo štyroch prípadových štúdií o dielach Donatella, Caravaggia a El Greca sa v ďalšom texte štýl určuje ako štruktúrny element, ktorý nielenže hovorí to či ono tým, čo pestujú dejiny umenia, ale aj oslovuje publikum. Štýl spôsobuje, že diela sa voči publiku stávajú transparentnými na svoj zamýšľaný význam. Zúčastňuje sa na úspechu toho, čo je prísne vzaté nanajvýš nepravdepodobnou záležitosťou: komunikácie, porozumenia. Aby sa niečo také udialo, musí producent zakaždým vyvinúť model adresáta alebo adresátov, ich vizuálnych kompetencií a ich potrieb a svoj produkt vypracovať podľa svojich vlastných možností v tomto smere. Ak sa model, stojaci v základe koncepcie, vydarí realisticky a ak producent na základe svojho vzdelania alebo iných okolností disponuje primeraným repertoárom, tak publikum zažije produkt ako zrozumiteľný a artefakt nájde využitie v rámci mnohohlasného a intermediálneho diskurzu, ktorým sa ľudské spoločnosti konštituujú a menia.

Preklad I. Gerát