

Medieval Narrative Structures and Visual Time (a historiographical outline)

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Abstract

For decades, thinking about structures within the Viennese School of Art history has continued without comprehensively embracing and rethinking Wickhoff's reflections on pictorial narrative and time. Sedlmayr's notion of structure was associated with the author's authoritarian emphasis on abandoning "vulgar time" and achieving a connection with timelessness, which limited his ability to understand the historical formalism established by Riegl. Otto Pächt shifted the focus of his thinking to the problem of visual language and its historical contexts. Creatively developing ideas of Viennese thinkers, Wolfgang Kemp elaborated notion of narrative structures, whose historical anchoring in the analysis of systems of reasoning and representation makes it possible to productively describe the hermeneutic paradoxes associated with developing a visual grammar of pictorial narrative.

Keywords: structure, narrative, visuality, image, temporality, art history, historiography

The topic of image structures, time and narrative is extraordinary in its scope and number of theoretical initiatives. The present text attempts to trace a trajectory leading from the overcoming of the classical conception of the spatiotemporal unity of the image in the Viennese School of Art history to later considerations illuminating the complex field of thought associated with the interpretation of the problem of narrative in the Christian art of the pre-modern period.¹ The concepts that started more than a hundred years ago with the Vienna School of Art History have been employed, modified and interpreted in various ways to the present day.

In the River of Time

One crucial initiative in the field of art historical research on pictorial narrative was famously launched in 1895, when the Viennese scholar Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909) published a commentary on illuminations of one of the earliest illustrated biblical fragments, known as the Viennese Genesis.² His most significant conceptual innovation was his attempt to define three modes, types or styles of pictorial narrative ("Arten", "Weisen," or "Stile der Bilderzählung"). Wickhoff's ideas on this topic can be considered the beginning of thinking about narrative

¹ Exploring the trajectories or paths of the various ideas of the Viennese School has been a long-term project of Ján Bakoš, to whom the author of this paper remains indebted despite the differences in our perspectives and emphases. See, e.g., BAKOŠ, J.: *Discourses and Strategies. The Role of the Vienna School in Shaping Central European Approaches to Art History & Related Discourses*. Frankfurt am Main; New York 2013. BAKOŠ, J.: *Štyri trasy metodológie dejín umenia*. Bratislava 2000. BAKOŠ, J.: *Stezky a stratégie I : metodologické*

trajektorie dejepisu umění (především ve střední Evropě). Brno 2017.

² HARTEL, W. V. – WICKHOFF, F.: *Die Wiener Genesis*. Wien; Prag; Leipzig 1895. The importance of Wickhoff's text is evidenced by its vivid resonance, extending into the 21st century: see REHM, U.: Wieviel Zeit haben die Bilder? Franz Wickhoff und die kunsthistorische Erzählforschung. In: *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 53, 2004, pp. 161–190.

structures, even if these exact words do not appear in the German original. Still, it figures prominently in the secondary literature (Ulrich Rehm has chosen “narrative Strukturen” as a chapter title in his analysis of Wickhoff’s thought),³ as well as in translations into English (Mathew Rampley understood Wickhoff’s types of narratives as “narrative structures”).⁴ Since “narrative structures” of images have also become the subject of analysis in texts that do not address Wickhoff’s legacy, we encounter a spectrum of interpretations of this concept.⁵ Their theoretical underpinnings and methodological implications for art-historical analyses must also be evaluated.

The relationship of pictorial narrative to time is substantial in Wickhoff’s thinking. He observed that the beholder’s experience possesses a unique temporal dimension in the so-called “continuous pictorial narrative”: “The method of constant repetition, though to the reflective faculty, it may seem to break up artistic unity, excites the imagination of the spectator. (...) Extreme naturalness of movement is here combined with an ideal treatment of time. The spectator who has assimilated this work knows that a new sphere has been opened to art. (...) No other kind of narrative could approach it in vitality and force”.⁶

It is difficult to understand what Wickhoff meant by “ideal treatment of time”. His understanding of time in painting differs from older idealising types of thinking about this topic precisely in its emphasis on the pictorial representation of a sequence of events in a seemingly unified space. The concept of contin-

uous narrative style (“continuierende Erzählweise”) describes and acknowledges the disruption of the unity of time in the depicted action. Thus, it goes against the principle of classical and classicist aesthetics. Instead of focussing on one crucial moment of an action, as proposed by Lessing, the images accompany the text more or less fluidly.⁷ Wickhoff expressed this idea in the impressive metaphor of a cruise. The illuminations accompany the text like the banks seen by a traveller on the water: “It is not individual images of outstanding, epoch-making moments that come together to form a cycle in order to compete with the ongoing narrative of the ancient myths employing essentially different forms according to the principles of different art, but, as the text flows, the respective heroes of the narrative accompany it, gently gliding and uninterrupted, just as the shore landscapes pass by the eye on a water journey, in continuously successive states”.⁸

Karl Clausberg ingeniously extended this metaphor in the title of one chapter of his book devoted to the same manuscript when he exchanged water for a stream of consciousness: “The riverside landscapes on the stream of consciousness”.⁹ The metaphor of the flow of consciousness is also used as an image of time in the famous Jorge Luis Borges quotation used by Oliver Sacks in his essay “The River of Consciousness”: “Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river. ...”¹⁰ This metaphor conveys the notion of time, for which movement is essential, as it is based on the realised fluidity of consciousness combined

³ REHM 2004 (see in note 2), pp. 169–172.

⁴ RAMPLEY, M.: *The Vienna School of Art History. Empire and the Politics of Scholarship, 1847–1918*. University Park, Pennsylvania 2013, pp. 37, 45.

⁵ WEIGEL, S.: Die Richtung des Bildes. Zum Links-Rechts von Bilderzählungen und Bildbeschreibungen in kultur- und mediengeschichtlicher Perspektive. In: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 64, 2001, pp. 449–474, pp. 456–457.

⁶ RAMPLEY 2013 (see in note 4), p. 48.

⁷ The most important theoretical text of this type is Lessing’s Laocoön: LESSING, G. E.: *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie. Mit beiläufigen Erläuterungen verschiedener Punkte der alten Kunstgeschichte*. Berlin 1788 (1766).

⁸ „Nicht einzelne Bilder ausgezeichnet, epochemachender Augenblicke treten zu einem Cyklus zusammen, um nach den Grundsätzen einer anderen Kunst durch ihrem Wesen nach verschiedenartige Gebilde mit der fortlaufenden Erzählung der alten Mythen zu wetteifern, sondern, wie der Text strömt, begleiten ihn, sanft gleitend und ununterbrochen, gleichwie die Uferlandschaften bei einer Wasserfahrt an dem Auge vorüberziehen, die jeweiligen Helden der Erzählung in kontinuierlich sich aneinanderreihenden Zuständen“. HARTEL – WICKHOFF 1895 (see in note 2), p. 7.

⁹ „Die Uferlandschaften am Bewußtsein-Strom“ – CLAUSBERG, K.: *Die Wiener Genesis. Eine kunstwissenschaftliche Bilderbuchgeschichte*. Frankfurt am Main 1984, p. 29.

¹⁰ SACKS, O.: *The river of Consciousness*. New York 2017.

with the fixed structure of an image, transcending one individual moment to depict a sequence of events. The pictorial representation of a conscious succession of events is a fundamental unit of narrative image structures that remains present in the thinking of later theorists, whether they consciously follow Wickhoff or not.

There are multiple ways to move beyond a single moment in an image's interpretation. Wickhoff has described three of them. First is the continuous narrative style described above. Then there is the so-called "distinguishing presentation method" ("distinguierende Darstellungsweise"), in which the unity of time and space remains preserved. Finally, there is the so-called "completing narrative style" ("completirende Erzählungsweise"). Both continuous and distinguishing narrative styles were – according to Wickhoff – born from this style, which unites various action moments in one image without repeating individual characters. Wickhoff claims that, to understand this style, which is typical of "old Oriental art", the perceivers must engage their imaginations even more.¹¹ A narrative structure of this type offers a kind of temporal synthesis: some elements of a given plot sequence are related to a particular phase, which is thus shifted to the centre of attention to become a decisive moment of its kind. Here, Wickhoff's thought does not represent a complete opposition to Lessing, as it develops his thinking concerning previously neglected material (attention to overlooked or despised phases of historical development eventually became a hallmark of the Viennese School of Art history). The choice of the moment depicted could not be wholly ignored, if only because it is an essential element in creating the image's meaning. When interacting with an image or even a cycle of images, time passes differently from when reading a text. The interpretation of an image usually produces another text whose temporality is already substantially anchored in the image's reception process.

The emphasis on existing in a flux of consciousness, on being immersed in the stream of sensations and thoughts, can cause a heightened interest in the moment-to-moment appearance of the phenomenal



Fig. 1: Vienna Genesis: Noah Leaving the Ark and The Sacrifice of Noah. Cod. Theol. gr. 31, fol. 2v. Photo: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Vienna: www.digital.onb.ac.at/rep/osd/?10F14D2C

aspect of the surrounding world. Wickhoff linked his notion of continuous pictorial narrative to the illusionistic style of late antiquity, which he saw as akin to Impressionism. This idea may seem definitively old-fashioned, but it opens the way to understanding narrative through a seemingly continuous stream of images. More importantly, this phenomenal structure also received a specific media representation in the newly discovered technique during Wickhoff's lifetime: film.

Wickhoff's suggestion to see the flow of time embodied in the Viener Genesis illustrations is not the only possible approach to these images. For example, he read the illumination in which Noah, along with his family and animals, leaves the ark to then ritually

¹¹ HARTEL – WICKHOFF 1895 (see in note 2), p. 9. Andrea Pinotti has discussed an example of continuous narrative from ancient Egypt – the Hunefer Papyrus (Book of the Dead, about

1300 B.C., 5,50 mt, British Museum, 9901, 3. PINOTTI, A.: Story-Telling: Typologies of Iconic Narratives. In: *Image in Science and Art*. Ed.: POMBO, O. Lisbon 2017, pp. 33–58, here p. 40.



Fig. 2: Vienna, St. Stephen's Cathedral, southern portal (Singertor), Paulus-Tympanon. Photo: FLUM 2013 (see in note 17), p. 10.

slash the sacrificial animal at the bottom of the image (Gen. 8:14–20; Fig. 1) as depicting a single space in which the figure of the protagonist repeats himself to highlight the flow of time.¹² Götz Pochat pointed out the possibility that this picture can be seen as one scene that *simultaneously* combines *two* scenes separated in time and the image's composition.¹³ Instead of one image with a continuous narrative style, he saw two events depicted next to each other.

Ulrich Rehm has demonstrated that Wickhoffian categories can be used creatively to produce multiple ways to interpret a single work of art. In the case of image cycles, one can see, to some extent, all the structures of the pictorial narrative described by Wickhoff in each image field.¹⁴ Consequently, the variety of narrative styles, which are named using Wickhoffian terminology, may also imply a variety of iconographic interpretations of a single picture.

In other words, applications of different narrative structures can create recognitional disjunctions between different readings of an image.¹⁵

For example, in the first scene of the Hildesheim Door, depicting the Creation, the figures of the first human beings lack clearly defined specific sexual features, so Adam and Eve look very similar. Their resemblance to each other, or even to the figure of God, may not simply be the result of the stereotypical modelling of figures but may express the more profound idea of the illustrated text that the first humans were created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). As the similarity of the characters makes it difficult to identify their gender, this image can be read in several ways:

1. as a continuous narrative, with Adam appearing twice in the scene: the first time he is the God-made persona, the second time the figure observing the act of creation so that his double presence in the image represents a reflexive moment of action;
2. as a distinguishing (“distinguierende”) narrative, when Adam appears only once in the scene, namely as the figure observing the Creation of Eve;
3. the Creation of Adam, combined with the vision of his future partner – Adam, already in the moment of creation, imagines Eve, the second figure in the image. Again, the last reading would imply a distinguishing narrative, but this time, combined with different levels of reality in a single image (the figure of the created man is ontologically different from the pictorial body of an imagined woman).¹⁶

Such a reading certainly goes beyond Wickhoff's original intentions but, at the same time, opens up an important space for the interpretation of medieval pictorial structures in which imaginative realities (dreams or visions) often played at least as essential a role as depictions of everyday reality.

Similar ambiguities of narrative structures can be found in other works. Thus, for example, in the depiction of Paul's conversion at St. Stephen's Ca-

¹² Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. theol. gr. 31, fol. 2v. Ibid., p. 146.

¹³ POCHAT, G.: *Bild - Zeit. Zeitgestalt und Erzählstruktur in der bildenden Kunst von den Anfängen bis zur frühen Neuzeit. Eine Kunstgeschichte der vierten Dimension*. Wien; Köln; Weimar 1996, p. 156.

¹⁴ REHM 2004 (see in note 2).

¹⁵ DAVIS, W.: *A general Theory of Visual Culture*. Princeton 2022, p. 132.

¹⁶ REHM 2004 (see in note 2), p. 174.

thedral of Vienna, in the lower register of the tympanum of the south portal (1358–1365; Fig. 2), two men are falling from their horses; one is dressed anachronistically, in medieval knightly armour, so that his helmet covers most of his face, and the other is seen with a massive beard because he is wearing a wide-brimmed hat.¹⁷ On the level of everyday reality, the two figures represent two different men – Saul and one of his companions on the way to Damascus. This is not, however, the single possible reading.¹⁸ When seeing a continuous narrative in the scene of Saul's vision, the contrast between the armoured warrior and a man in plain clothes could express the fundamental transformation that took place in Saul's life under the influence of the vision, the double identity of the main character, as also articulated by the change of his name from Saul to Paul resulting from the depicted event.¹⁹

Nevertheless, when comparing the two figures within the continuous visual narrative of the lower register of the tympanum, only the bearded man in the hat matches the image of Saul, who is sent on his anti-Christian mission to Damascus in the first scene of the cycle. Perhaps that is why the problem of the identity of the knight, whose clothing bears witness to a brilliant anachronism, has not been adequately open to iconographic scrutiny.²⁰ Another reason

for reopening the issue lies in the reassessment of Wickhoffian notions and the recent shift in treating the question of narrative structures in Parler school reliefs.²¹

Touching on Timelessness

The potential for the creative application of Wickhoffian categories for analysing the structures of pictorial narrative remained unexplored for a long time. For the next generations of important art historians at the University of Vienna, the primary source of inspiration was not Wickhoff but Alois Riegl, who is best known as the leading exponent of *Strukturforschung*.²² This research orientation analyses the structures of a work of art primarily concerning its form or style. The value of this research has become the subject of heated discussions in recent decades.²³

When Hans Sedlmayr (1896–1984), one of the most debated representatives of this methodological orientation, elaborated on the notion of structure as one of his theory's central concepts, he offered some thought-provoking insights into the temporality of the image. In 1933, he and Otto Pächt (1902–1988) published their ideas on structure in the second volume of the *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*.²⁴

¹⁷ Vienna, St. Stephen's Cathedral, southern portal (Singertor), Paulus-Tympanon, lower register. See FLUM, T.: Das Paulusportal von Sankt Stephan in Wien. In: *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft*, 67, 2013, pp. 9–31, p. 9.

¹⁸ KOSEGARTEN, A.: Zur Plastik der Fürstenportale am Wiener Stephansdom. In: *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 20, 1965, pp. 74–96. She appreciated the refined and witty narrative style of the reliefs, the master's delight in narrative detail; still, she did not use Wickhoffian terms to analyse it.

¹⁹ Known from the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Holy Apostles.

²⁰ KOSEGARTEN 1965 (see in note 18), pp. 82–83: „Statt volkstümlich-drastischen Fabulierens hier eine geistreich ausfeilende, pointierte Erzählweise, eine ungleich vollständigere Umsetzung ins Zeitgenössische“ („Instead of folksy, drastic storytelling, here is a brilliantly polished, pointed narrative style, an incomparably more complete translation into contemporary language“).

²¹ PINKUS, A.: *Patrons and Narratives of the Parler School: The*

Marian Tympana 1350–1400. München – Berlin 2009, p. 39. Comp. PÄCHT, O.: *The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England*. Oxford 1962, pp. 15–16.

²² His ideas also inspired thinkers beyond art history: for example, Walter Benjamin – see BAKOŠ 2013 (see in note 1), pp. 41–45.

²³ WOOD, C. S.: *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930 s*. New York 2000, p. 17: „Strukturanalyse clearly has a part within the larger methodological drama of the century, that is, the effort to write a critical, contextual history of figuration“.

²⁴ *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*. Ed.: PÄCHT, O. Berlin 1931. The first volume (1931) was praised by Walter Benjamin (Strenge Kunstwissenschaft. Zum ersten Bande der »Kunstwissenschaftlichen Forschungen«. Zweite Fassung. Kritiken und Rezensionen | Walter Benjamin (textlog.de), visited 27. 6. 2023) About the two versions of this review – the first one more polemic to Sedlmayr – see LEVIN, T. Y.: Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History. An Introduction to „Rigorous Study of Art“. In: *October*, 47, 1988, pp. 77–82.

Their results were famously discussed three years later by Mayer Schapiro under the title *The New Viennese School*.²⁵ These publications were among the first in art history to open a dialogue with the then-new Gestalt psychology. Pächt and Sedlmayr seemed to fight for the same structural theory in this period. Still, in the years to come, their ideas developed in substantially different directions, closely related to their human fates and political positions. Therefore, we will discuss their perspectives separately.

The first problem concerns a relationship between Sedlmayr's theoretical construction of the artwork structure and the metaphysical problem of timelessness. These ideas concern abstract themes but were developed in concrete historical and political contexts. Sedlmayr, since 1936 a chair in Art History at the University of Vienna, did not hesitate to collaborate with the Nazi regime.²⁶ Even after the war, he maintained an authoritarian attitude in defining "structure" without removing the totalitarian ideas in its ideological background.

Sedlmayr remained nostalgic about his first articles, like "Gestaltetes Sehen", published in 1925. For him, the concept of structure described the essential aspects of an individual work of art, "a world in a nutshell" ("Welt im Kleinen").²⁷ What, however, does perceiving a work of art as a miniaturised world or a microcosm mean? Does it imply that such a work is, in a strange way, intrinsically infinite and, therefore, allows for an endless variety of different approaches? Sedlmayr would probably disagree with the second part of this proposal. He

could not ignore the factual existence of multiple interpretations of an artwork, but, simultaneously, he believed in only one correct interpretation—the one that comes closest to the original structure of the artwork, because "the whole of a work of art is not an indiscriminate unity but something structured in itself".²⁸ The artwork's structure obeys the leading principle, and the beholder must find the right attitude to understand it: "There is one right attitude but many wrong attitudes".²⁹ The idea of a single right attitude imposes on the beholders a duty to perceive the artwork from the prescribed perspective. It restricts their freedom to see it from their perspective or even choose an aspect from which they would like to approach it.

The authority, hidden behind "structure", would decide whether an individual approach was valid without asking for feedback. This tendency towards a monologic approach corresponds to totalitarian political tendencies. The ideologist Sedlmayr could only have success with this idea because he was a brilliant analyst.³⁰ His notion of structure stimulated valuable interpretations of individual artworks, as he had exceptional sensitivity towards artworks. Still, it was hiding a dangerous ideological function.

Sedlmayr's interpretation transcended an empirical observation of an image's narrative structure to make a point. He argued that the "second" interpretative level of art historical inquiry would feed back and contribute to the "first" empirical level, assisting in attribution, dating and iconographic decoding tasks".³¹ As a part of this theoretical construct, his

²⁵ SCHAPIRO, M.: Otto Pächt (ed.): *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen II* (Book Review). In: *The Art Bulletin*, 1936, pp. 258–266. See also O'DONNELL, O. C.: *Meyer Schapiro's Critical Debates: Art Through a Modern American Mind*. University Park, PA 2021, pp. 35–56; TAMUR, E.: Specters of influence: Meyer Schapiro and the New Vienna School. In: *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 75–76, 1921, pp. 207–220, p. 209: "Dispensing with grand narratives in favor of analyses of the individual artwork..."

²⁶ See recently MÄNNIG, M.: *Hans Sedlmayrs Kunstgeschichte: eine kritische Studie*. Köln; Weimar; Wien 2017, p. *.

²⁷ „Postulat, die Kunstgeschichte auf der Erkenntnis einzelner Kunstwerke neu zu begründen und Methoden für die Erforschung des Kunstwerks als einer ›Welt im Kleinen‹ zu entwickeln – die Methode der ›Strukturanalyse‹ – Kunstges-

chichte als Wissenschaft (1958), reprinted in SEDLMAYR, H.: *Kunst und Wahrheit. Zur Theorie und Methode der Kunstgeschichte*. Mittenwald 1978, p. 22.

²⁸ „Das Ganze von Kunstwerken ist keine unterschiedslose Einheit, sondern etwas in sich Gegliedertes. Das Kunstwerk hat Struktur“ – Probleme der Interpretation (1957), reprinted *Ibidem*, p. 101.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

³⁰ AURENHAMMER, H. H.: Zäsur Oder Kontinuität? Das Wiener Kunsthistorische Institut im Ständestaat und im Nationalsozialismus. In: *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 53/1, 2004, pp. 11–54.

³¹ WOOD 2000 (see in note 23), p. 17.

notion of structure also integrated philosophical or theological considerations of time. The “right attitude” towards a structure produces a “transubstantiation of vulgar time into the higher time region”, a kind of “higher time region”. Sedlmayr discussed this idea under several alternative names: the beholder should be able to reach a “supra-temporal temporality” (*zeitlose Zeitlichkeit*), a “real presence” (*die wahre Gegenwart*) or a “healed, undivided time” (*heile, unzerstückte Zeit*).³² Each description expresses a similar understanding of temporality but entails slightly different contexts. The “higher time region”, understood as different from the “vulgar time”, signalises socially relevant distinctions: it might be hard to find an access point to this structure. The “higher time region”, if we take his spatial metaphor seriously, implies the existence of a “lower time region”. “Transubstantiation” is a theological term used to describe a miraculous change of eucharistic bread into the body of Christ—it seems that Sedlmayr promised a miracle to his ideal beholder. The paradoxical “temporality without time” (*zeitlose Zeitlichkeit*) points to something that is not changing in time: the concept of eternity, known at least since Augustine’s speculation on time.³³ Sedlmayr was unaware of some logical problems associated with the paradoxical “supra-temporal temporality”. He did not come to an awareness of the complexity of seemingly everyday forms of temporality partly because he concentrated on defending spirituality against the materialism and existentialism of the time. In the context of reflection on “vulgar” time and the associated weight of worries, Sedlmayr launched an attack on Heidegger’s interpretation of time.³⁴ He borrowed a few objectionable-sounding formulations from Heidegger without understanding or applying his existential analytics as a method.³⁵

The very difference in ideas about time may be why Sedlmayr ignored Wickhoff’s descriptions of

narrative structures. Sedlmayr’s notion of “true time” presupposes timelessness, but Wickhoffian categories do not include this dimension. Differentiating types of temporality seems to be a crucial step in understanding the structures of pictorial narrative, which can, among other things, open new ways to understand Wickhoff’s concepts.

Even before we subscribe to Sedlmayr’s solution, we can pose another question. If we already distinguish between different forms of time and consider this distinction to be productive, are there not more possibilities than just distinguishing two forms of time? Is it not possible that “vulgar time” itself, that is, the time of everyday experience, is much more complex and therefore much less vulgar than Sedlmayr thought?

Contemporary narratological research offers a much more comprehensive conceptualisation of these issues. For example, Mieke Bal has elaborated on the problem of heterochrony, i.e., the interrelation of different forms of time in the experience of a particular individual without having to resort to the opposition between vulgar time and a strong notion of timelessness. Instead, she found that a multi-temporality or heterochrony, as she called it, “is more than subjective experience” because it belongs “to the temporal texture of our cultural world”.³⁶

This heterochronicity can be objectified in various ways: for example, by visualisation. Its subjective side, in turn, includes the individual’s struggle with an idea. Such considerations seem to lead to one of the crucial problems of traditional iconology: the relationship between image and idea.³⁷ Nevertheless, this relationship is conceptualised slightly differently so that the moments of Platonism, typical of classical iconology, remain somewhat less weighty. They are, in a sense, wobbly and unstable. It is not entirely clear whether the idea’s existence preceded its realisation: “although I am working on an idea without knowing

³² SEDLMAYR 1978 (see in note 27), pp. 165–171.

³³ RICOEUR, P.: *Čas a vyprávění* (orig. *Temps et récit*). Praha 2000 (orig. 1983), pp. 19–55.

³⁴ SEDLMAYR 1978 (see in note 27), pp. 174–175.

³⁵ Hans Georg Gadamer devoted several pages of his *Wahrheit und Methode* to a critical debate with this theory. GADA-

MER, H. G.: *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen 1960, pp. 115–116. Despite the criticism, Gadamer acknowledged the role of various forms of temporality in experiencing art.

³⁶ BAL, M.: *Narratology in Practice*. Toronto 2021, pp. 101, 117.

³⁷ See above all PANOFSKY, E.: *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*. Columbia 1968.

exactly what it is I think, I am engaged in thinking an idea struggling to have me think it”.³⁸

Sedlmayr’s notion of temporality remains relatively flat despite its declared depth. What does this finding mean for the theory of structure described above, in which temporality was an essential element? The awareness of the complex structure of temporality is an important insight, but it alone does not resolve the question of the possible presence and function of the ordering principle in the visualised narrative structure.

Mayer Schapiro justly objected to “the vague, intangible profundity” of the criticised text, alluding to its proximity to metaphysics.³⁹ Nevertheless, he shared a penchant for a moralising tone with Sedlmayr, transcending the empirical level of interpretation despite the differences in their underlying motivations, social backgrounds and political orientations, even after these differences were openly named in the last phase of their correspondence.⁴⁰

Despite their many differences, both used a similar strategy for how to link a narrative with an individual image. For example, behind the Brueghel-like painting of Icarus’s fall, both saw a broader problem: Sedlmayr a religious alienation, Schapiro a financial speculation leading to a crisis.⁴¹ These interpretations involve a narrative moment, in the first case in the image’s relation to historical forms of a religious understanding of the timelessness, and in the second to the events transforming the nature of socio-economic relations. Nevertheless, their stories are not directly depicted in the interpreted work. Instead of

a visualised narrative structure, the interpreters link the painting with a “grand narrative” substantial for their worldviews. The very structure of these narratives parallels the parable of human rise and fall, represented in the painting, but the structures of the larger historical narratives are present only in the interpreter’s mind, not in the picture itself. In such an ekphrasis, words “slide past images as they describe them, but they create new images in the minds of those who read them”.⁴²

The role of grand narratives in texts interpreting images must also be considered together with the overarching narrative structures of the artwork itself. This principle is especially true for image cycles. Both individual scenes and their interrelationship must be considered. Thus, for example, the depiction of the Genesis scenes on the Hildesheim door represents their Christian interpretation since the individual scenes follow each other vertically in a top-down direction, while the parallel narration of the Gospels on the opposite wing of the door arranges the scenes in a bottom-up sequence. The assignment of narrative direction thus interprets the Old Testament text in a predominantly negative sense and the New Testament text in a positive sense.⁴³ The grand narratives are incorporated vertically into the structure of this work of art, which is the rule rather than the exception. Even in cases where the essential pictorial narrative proceeds horizontally, parallels between individual scenes could be created vertically—the most famous case is the Klosterneuburg Altarpiece by Nicolas of Verdun.⁴⁴

³⁸ When describing this phenomenon (on p. 112), Mieke Bal refers to Christopher Bollas’s book *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (1987), p. 10.

³⁹ SCHAPIRO 1936 (see in note 25), p. 258.

⁴⁰ O’DONNELL 2021 (see in note 25), pp. 35, 44, 45. LEVY, E.: Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond, 1930–1935. In: *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 59, 2010, pp. 235–263. Sedlmayr elaborated on the notion of alienation in his polemic with Tolnai – see MORGENTHAUER, S.: *Formationen einer Kunstwissenschaft: Text- und Archivstudien zu Hans Sedlmayr*. Berlin; Boston 2020, pp. 109–110.

⁴¹ Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, 4030; O’DONNELL 2021 (see in note 25), pp. 52–56. WYSS, B.: *Landschaft mit Ikarussturz. Ein Vexierbild des humanistischen Pessimismus*. Frankfurt 1990.

⁴² MOXEY, K. P. F.: *Visual Time. The Image in History*. Durham 2013, p. 95.

⁴³ See e.g. GALLISTL, B.: In faciem angelici templi : kultgeschichtliche Bemerkungen zu Inschrift und ursprünglicher Platzierung der Bernwardstür. In: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kunst im Bistum Hildesheim*, 75/76, 2006/2007, pp. 59–92.

⁴⁴ SCHLIE, H.: Vom Ambo zum Retabel : das Klosterneuburger Goldschmiedewerk von Nikolaus von Verdun. In: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 80, 2017, pp. 247–272. In another masterpiece from his workshop, the Three Kings reliquary in Cologne, the vertical emphasizes the significance of the Epiphany. KEMPER, D.: *Die Goldschmiedearbeiten am Dreikönigenschrein : Bestand und Geschichte seiner Restaurierungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert : mit Beiträgen zu Materialanalysen und Herstellungstechniken*. Köln 2014.

Considering these facts, one should supplement Wickhoff's metaphorical understanding of time as a horizontal voyage on the water's surface by including a vertical direction. The analysis of the work must then also consider the form of the dialogue taking place between the horizontal and vertical directions of reading within the individual scenes. Returning to Bernward's door, we should note that the similarity among the figures of God, Adam and Eve in the opening scene of the cycle has implications not only for the iconographic interpretation of the scene but also for the search for a superordinate narrative within its iconological interpretation. Indeed, the problem of the similarity between men and God goes beyond the horizon of theological thinking towards anthropology, for example when analysing the problem of imitating God, a fundamental principle of many narratives.⁴⁵

The emphasis on the vertical dimension is not alien to iconology, which frequently likes to delve into the depths of images and seeking overarching narratives in the world of myths.⁴⁶ This idea might have inspired Sedlmayr when he compared structural analysis to the iconology developed and practised in the Warburg Circle.⁴⁷ This inconspicuous self-fashioning was strong enough to persuade some scholars on the other side of the Iron Curtain: for example, Rudolf Chadraba, who attempted to establish a "Marxist iconology", taking Sedlmayr for a figure as key as Erwin Panofsky.⁴⁸

Both *Strukturanalyse* and iconology are, in certain respects, interested in an artwork's complex aspectivity, but the problem is how all these aspects should be coordinated. In Sedlmayr's understanding, all of them are supposed to obey one central principle. This might sound innocent, but his emphasis on methodological similarity between his *Strukturanalyse* and iconology could also be meant to conceal the distance produced by the persecutions of Jewish scholars at the Vienna Institute in a tragic historical period in which Sedlmayr's star was rising. He started to think about a "specifically 'German' holistic iconology" when the members of the Warburg School emigrated and the books by Saxl, Panofsky and Pächt had been locked away in the so-called 'Judenkasten'.⁴⁹ The ideological bias can also be identified in a treatment of time in the *Strukturanalyse*, which differs substantially from iconology.

Narrative and Visual Vocabulary

Otto Pächt, who emigrated to England in 1936, developed his ideas on narrative and time under substantially different conditions. Ian Verstegen suggested that Pächt had to defend himself against the neoliberal ideology represented by, among others, arguably the most influential art historian of Viennese origin, Ernst Gombrich.⁵⁰ This argument might be debatable, but it might contribute to explaining why Pächt consistently tried to avoid speculation.⁵¹

⁴⁵ See e.g. the classical work of FEUERBACH, L.: *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Leipzig 1841. To its place in contemporary discourse NEGEL, J.: *Feuerbach weiterdenken. Studien zum religionskritischen Projektionsargument*. Münster; Berlin; Wien; Zürich 2014. FROMM, E.: *You Shall Be As Gods. A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Tradition*. New York 1966, pp. 63–65.

⁴⁶ DIDI-HUBERMAN, G.: *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg's History of Art*. University Park, Pennsylvania 2017.

⁴⁷ „Da es in der Strukturanalyse jeweils ein ganzes Kunstwerk betrachtet wird, sei es einfach oder höchst komplex, und da bei dieser Methode zugleich mit der formalen „Seite“ des Kunstwerks auch seine Bedeutung berücksichtigt werden muß, gewinnt in dieser Phase die Ikonographie, sich zur Ikonologie wandelnd, ein neues Gewicht...“ (note 10 on p. 233: „Namentlich in der Arbeiten des WARBURG-Kreises“)

Kunstgeschichte als Wissenschaft (1958), reprinted in *Kunst und Wahrheit*, Mittenwald: Mäander 1978, p. 23. More about the relation between Panofsky and Sedlmayr – ELSNER, J. – LORENZ, K.: *The Genesis of Iconology*. In: *Critical inquiry*, 38, 2012, pp. 483–512, pp. 489–492.

⁴⁸ CHADRABA, R.: *Dürers Apokalypse, eine ikonologische Deutung*. Prag 1964. See GERÁT, I.: *Marxism and iconology in Czechoslovakia during the Cold War*. In: *A socialist realist history? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades*. Eds.: KODRES, K. – JÓEKALDA, K. – MAREK, M. Wien; Köln; Weimar 2019, pp. 100–117.

⁴⁹ AURENHAMMER 2004 (see in note 30), p. 46.

⁵⁰ VERSTEGEN, I.: *Otto Pächt, 'Hegelian' Exile in Cold War England*. In: *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, 88/3, 2019, pp. 113–133.

⁵¹ More about differences between Pächt and Gombrich in BAKOŠ 2000 (see in note 1), pp. 36–37.



Fig. 3: Reichenau book of Pericopes (Cod. Guelf. 84.5 Aug. 2°; Heinemann-Nr. 2870, fol. 69v). Photo: Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: www.diglib.hab.de/mss/84-5-aug-2f/start.htm

He remained cautious, preserving the sound empirical basis of his study. Even when he returned to structural analysis, he did so without the spectacular rhetoric of Sedlmayr.

Another direction in which Pächt surpassed Sedlmayr was his attention to pictorial storytelling. He started to deal with this problem in his dissertation, but his decisive statement was his book *The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England*. Right at the beginning of the book, Pächt reminds readers of the essential connection between narrative and temporality: all narrative must “incorporate the elusive element of time”. He claimed that this requirement contradicted the Christian principle of seeing all things *sub specie aeternitatis*.⁵² This principle did not stop fascinating him in his later works. For example, in his last years, he claimed that the illuminators of the Reichenau book of Pericopes did not aim to

tell a particular story from the life of Saint Peter (Fig. 3) but to create a whole in which the events were mirrored from a timeless perspective.⁵³ This claim was not pure speculation but emerged from a comparison of the painting with the Resurrection of Christ. The close connection between visual form and thematic interpretation reveals that the imagination that created the High Medieval work worked with fundamentally different notions of time and space than are common today.

Pächt noted that medieval art developed a narrative style substantially different from the Classical tradition. Even a secular work like the Bayeux tapestry operates with “gestures as signposts guiding the beholder”, creating thus a structure in which “the event and its interpretation are being presented simultaneously, often in open violation of the logic of natural illusion”.⁵⁴ In these formulations, one senses an effort to understand the determining principles of the visual structures of medieval pictorial narrative but without the author’s elaborating on the notion of structure itself and burdening it with a political theology. Pächt setting the task “to form an idea of the nature of the new narrative”⁵⁵ goes beyond Neo-Platonism. He understands the idea as not eternal but shapeable and replaces “structure” with “nature”. This tendency had multiple consequences for his readings of medieval pictorial narratives, such as hagiographic legends, and remained present in his later works.

When he returned to Vienna in 1963 to become a professor of art history, he substantially contributed to restoring art historical research and teaching after the catastrophe caused by the Nazi regime’s ideology and actions. Some of his formulations betray a natural desire for a higher order, a principle or idea that would describe a higher unity in the diversity of the work of art. Pächt does not hesitate to name this desire’s foundation with the biological-sounding terms “need” or “instinct”. For example, concerning the Ghent Altar: “Anyone who takes in the wealth

⁵² PÄCHT 1962 (see in note 21), p. 3.

⁵³ PÄCHT, O.: *Methodisches zur kunsthistorischen Praxis*. München 1995 (orig. 1986), p. 211.

⁵⁴ PÄCHT 1962 (see in note 21), p. 9.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 13.

⁵⁶ „Wer die Bilderfülle des gewaltigen Malwerkes in seiner nicht sehr regelhaften Vielgliedrigkeit auf sich wirken lässt, wird instintiv das Bedürfnis nach einem ordnenden Gedanken empfinden, der das Vielerlei der Bildvorstellungen zu einer höheren Einheit verbände und verdichtete.“ PÄCHT, O.: *Van Eyck. Die Begründer der altniederländischen Malerei*. München 1989, p. 126.

of images in this enormous oeuvre of paintings, with its not very regular, multi-layered complexity, will instinctively feel the need for an organising thought that would unite and condense the multitude of pictorial ideas into a higher unity.”⁵⁶ Pächt does not attempt to convince his readers of the timeless mystery of a unified artistic conception. Instead, he proposes a further critical examination of the organising force and unity in the artwork. Right at the outset, he pays attention to the iconographic program of the work and enumerates the arguments that can be made against attempts to find a logical unity between the whole of the retabulum and its components. The apparent contradictions are not resolved by an appeal to respect in the face of incomprehensible mysteries but by a search for a text that might inspire the seemingly incongruent whole. Since the most appropriate text was read during the liturgy of the feast of All Saints, the mystery does not disappear but moves from the timeless sphere into the concrete historical arena of liturgical celebrations.⁵⁷ As this sphere is graspable by the methods of the historical sciences, the possible accusation of obscurantism, which is often levelled at Sedlmayr, loses its validity in Pächt’s case. He thought about the relations between images and liturgy in the book on pictorial narrative when claiming that images in liturgical celebrations suppress the ephemeral to recall timeless truths, thereby creating symbolical meanings or even “symbolic time”.⁵⁸ This reasoning could lead to grasping a vital dimension in heterochronicity, but was it not too rational to be efficient?

Pächt knew that increased rational control over interpretation could entail a loss of emotional sensibility. He was aware that even describing can, with insufficient care, lead to “the original phenomena being replaced by inferior ones.”⁵⁹ This problem can

sometimes be caused by the perceiver’s lack of awareness of their experience. The “inner split between the one who experiences and the researcher” should be overcome and reconciled by an attentive perception of the experience.⁶⁰ Pächt is concerned with cultivating a level of self-awareness that, in the phenomenological tradition, could also be called *proprioception*. Considering the later extension of this psychology of visual perception to include a social dimension, we can see, with Whitney Davis, the basic structure of the workings of culture: “the recursion of sociability in proprioception might be defined as culture”.⁶¹

Otto Pächt perceived complex psychological issues related to pictorial structures but preferred to focus on their spatial aspects instead of their temporal dimensions. For example: “we will only fully understand the peculiarity of Dutch pictorial structure when we have an overview of the expressive possibilities of a painting that organises pictorial space from the projection plane”.⁶²

Despite focusing on the spatial aspects of vision, Pächt saw several temporal aspects of the image structures. For example, the spatial articulation of the image of Peter in prison depends on the stage of development in artistic language.⁶³ Anyone who does not realise that the vocabulary of medieval art included no specific word for “interior space” might think that Peter is balancing on the roof of a building.⁶⁴ This observation reminds us of the differences in the visual language of the art of the Ottonian period, which also applies to Bernward’s door in Hildesheim, discussed above. Thus, given the character of the contemporary visual vocabulary, one must also ask whether the similarity among the figures of Adam, Eve and God in the first relief of the door was intended as a statement of resemblance or whether the creator of these figures was merely working with

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 127.

⁵⁸ PÄCHT 1962 (see in note 21), p. 4 (paraphrasing the formulation by Otto Demus, whose life shows many parallels to his).

⁵⁹ PÄCHT 1995 (see in note 53), p. 20.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 20.

⁶¹ DAVIS 2022 (see in note 15), p. 9.

⁶² PÄCHT 1995 (see in note 53), p. 27: „Zum vollen Verständnis der Eigenart niederländischer Bildstruktur werden wir aber erst gelangen, wenn wir die Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten einer Malerei überblicken, die den Bildraum von der Projektionsfläche aus organisiert.“ Also see his quotations in MOXEY 2013 (see in note 42), p. 121.

⁶³ Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 84.5 Aug. 2°, fol. 69v.

⁶⁴ PÄCHT 1995 (see in note 53), p. 210.

a scheme standard in his time. Overestimating the similarity caused by the nature of the artistic language of the time could lead to overinterpretation, although one should also consider that this language was shaped by the tradition of imagery, which includes the narrative of the creation of man in the image of God.

The nature of the contemporary visual language is inextricably linked to the period's visuality, based on the language games of the respective culture, to which its initial narratives also belong. This observation raises further questions. Are there methodological tools for bridging the historical difference of cultures to such an extent that an image with a different historical rootedness reaches the sensibility of the modern interpreter, his or her proprioception? If so, to what extent can a similarly constructed understanding be regarded as a definitively valid result of research, and to what extent does the dialogue with the historical image need to be continued to continuously consider the new forms of the existential experience of modern interpreters?

The second dimension involved in this question is the possibility of understanding co-existing cultures. Wickhoff, Sedlmayr and Pächt were confined mainly to the cultures of the Mediterranean region and Europe. This geographic focus is one reason their notion of structure differed from that developed by the French structuralists. This difference had to be considered in further research on narrative image structures. This leap was taken by Wolfgang Kemp (*1946), who has established a firm position as one of the most prominent experts on pictorial narratives, recognised in German and English-speaking academic circles.⁶⁵

Chronotopic Structures

Kemp's book on early Christian art addresses the concept of structure, mentioned in its subtitle, as

one crucial topic to be analysed. Kemp learned much from French structuralists and other narratologists who opened substantially new avenues in interpreting the concept of structure.⁶⁶ Simultaneously, he re-evaluated some of the older ideas discussed in this article.

The linguistic analogies, typical for structuralists, gained importance in his texts. In addition to the visual vocabulary, he also discusses the syntax, i.e. the principles of a combination of individual lexical elements and their grammar. It is the syntax that he considers to be the primary categorial form, the basic structure. Religion and its related cosmology thematise the fundamental structures of reality, which can be sought in works of art. Art, as an essential part of the religious culture based on biblical texts, finds a way to satisfy the need for completeness of meaning, to create wholeness and to become an organon of community-building cultural practice. The connection between structure and narrative arises from the nature of this culture, in which divine revelation is given in the form of narrative.⁶⁷

Instead of Riegl's *Kunstwollen*, the notion of the will to structure ("Wille zur Struktur") is thus repeatedly employed to refer to the experience of the order established by victorious Christianity.⁶⁸ Kemp is seeking a system, "a principle of an ordered Christian universe, all-embracing in time as well as in space", excluding random deviations or curiosities from its sphere of influence.⁶⁹ Thus, the structure is not only a theme for him, but, at the same time, it is a substantial component of his method, based on his love for order, which motivates him to take a systematic approach to the search for regularities. He explicitly sets himself apart from researchers who, rather than seeking systems, adore curiosities in the spirit of Clifford Geertz's passionate confession: "We hawk the anomalous, peddle the strange. Merchants of astonishment".⁷⁰

⁶⁵ KEMP, W.: Narrative. In: *Critical Terms for Art History*. Eds.: NELSON, R. S. – SHIFF, R. Chicago, IL 2010, pp. 62–74.

⁶⁶ The theories of Vladimir Propp, Tzvetan Todorov, Algirdas Julien Greimas, and Roland Barthes were discussed by KARP, J.: *Strukturanalyse der mittelalterlichen Bilderzählung: ein Beitrag zur kunsthistorischen Erzählforschung*. Marburg 1994, pp. 23–59.

⁶⁷ KEMP, W.: *Christliche Kunst : ihre Anfänge, ihre Strukturen*. München 1994, pp. 17–19.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 73.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 29.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 281.

The search for a system could motivate an insensitivity to the variety and diversity of forms in which order manifests itself: for example, in a one-sided preference for Platonic philosophising that focuses on ideas. The meaning of the narratives and other human agency attached to them could be lost in this context. To avoid this danger, Kemp adopts the Lotmanian idea of double articulation—alongside the doctrine, which is the main text of the culture in question, various subtexts further render or modify the overarching structures of the world. Thus, in addition to a closed axiological structure, there is also a syntagmatic structure involving the telling and explaining of narratives and the performance of rituals.⁷¹

This simultaneous articulation of meaning on multiple levels links narrative structures' horizontal and vertical dimensions, making impossible a return to the simple Wickhoffian metaphor of riverside scenery. This implicit critique can be seen behind Kemp's extensive analysis of one page of the Vienna Genesis, in which he demonstrates that only a tiny part of the illumination corresponds to the text that accompanies the illuminations on the same page. By contrast, the other parts of the illumination can only be satisfactorily explained by engaging with a large corpus of other texts.⁷²

In the wealth of ideas on narrative structures, there is an essential insight concerning the transformation of time into narrative time: "Time in the biblical sense must be fulfilled in a double sense: as a sequence to be carried out and as a completed consequence, as an action and an act, as a working through and as the occurrence of a God-dictated providence laid out in salvation history: in short, as *chronos* and as *kairos*".⁷³ These polarities in the concept of time influence the formal structures of

pictorial narratives related to more general ideas about the structure of being. Similar thinking can be found in the author's other publications.

The first part of Kemp's influential book, *Sermo corporeus*—translated into English as *The Narratives of the Gothic Stained Glass*—is explicitly devoted to narrative structures.⁷⁴ The ideological differences have not discouraged Kemp from learning from Sedlmayr: in a vital passage about time and narrative, he states that time is transformed into narrative time (*Zeit wird zur Erzählzeit transformiert*). This transformation results in a structured whole (*strukturierte Einheit*) possessing a particular grade of "Gestaltetheit".⁷⁵

This inconspicuous continuity in the conceptual structure should not obscure the essential differences between Sedlmayr's and Kemp's understanding of structure. When, for example, Kemp cites Sedlmayr's thesis that, in the twelfth century, the subjective sphere of poetry was inserted between the "objective sphere of sacred writing" and the visual arts, he narrows the validity of this idea considerably. He denies that it can explain the birth of the cathedral. He does acknowledge, however, that it can illuminate the new space for creativity that has emerged in narrative media to rework older content with greater freedom and create additional meanings by newly producing stories in evolving narrative schemas rather than simply reproducing them.⁷⁶

Kemp believed that the image's immanent structural principles predetermine the beholder's approach. In his influential studies about reception aesthetics, he developed the theme of an "implicit" or a "picture-immanent" viewer, conceding that the image structure may have determined the viewer's role. In other words, it is somehow possible that the "reception can be deduced from the picture's inner structure".⁷⁷ Nevertheless, he has not repeated

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 91. Por. LOTMAN, J. M.: On the metalanguage of a typological description of culture. In: *Semiotica*, 14/2, 1975, pp. 97–123. KEMP 1994 (see in note 67), p. 91.

⁷² KEMP 1994 (see in note 67), pp. 112–116.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 124: „Zeit im biblischen Verstand muß sich in einem doppelten Sinne erfüllen: als auszuführende Sequenz und als vollendete Konsequenz, als Aktion und Akt, als Durcharbeiten und als Eintritt einer in der Heilsgeschichte angelegten, von Gott diktierten Fügung: kurz als *Chronos* und als *Kairos*.“

⁷⁴ KEMP, W.: *Sermo corporeus : die Erzählung der mittelalterlichen Glasfenster*. München 1987. KEMP, W.: *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass*. Cambridge 1997.

⁷⁵ KEMP 1987 (see in note 74), p. 270.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 265.

⁷⁷ FALKENHAUSEN, S. V.: *Beyond the Mirror: Seeing in Art History and Visual Culture Studies (Edition 1)*. Bielefeld 2020, p. 77.

Sedlmayr's claim about the one right attitude of the viewer determined by the artwork's structure. He realised that "every work is part of a process of communication that cannot be broken down into the active and passive roles of transmitter and receiver, but which instead can only be understood as a dialogical process".⁷⁸ The study of dialogical processes in culture was one of the vital methodological strategies employed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), whose work received an intense response among Western scholars in the second half of the twentieth century.⁷⁹

One more connection between Kemp and Bakhtin concerns the relationship between time and space of narration (*chronotopos* in the Bakhtinian sense). For example, in his book *Räume der Maler (Spaces of Painters)*, he refers to "a genuinely narrative space that can underlie the directional sense of depth with a temporal meaning and that orients the new narrative axis as clearly as the convention of reading direction was able to do".⁸⁰

The ideas mentioned above on a close relationship between time and space also play an essential part in Kemp's recent interpretation of the Ghent Altarpiece. Kemp explicitly follows these ideas while reopening the fundamental questions of narrative structures and temporality with some new accents.

Quite in the spirit of the historical formalism of the Viennese school, Kemp ponders the historical *a priori* that conditions the form of the work. This conditionality is not unambiguous, however, because the work combines medieval principles of reasoning with a new *a priori* basis, conditioning some elements of the whole. It is the new elements, such as the depiction of cast shadows in the illusory space of the painting, that he interprets using Sedlmayr's notion of critical form—a peculiarity or extravagance that "can serve as an indicator" but "not yet overthrow a system." The frame shadows in the Annunciation scene belong on the side of a new *a priori*, but this has not yet been accepted everywhere: "selective realism" can suspend its fundamental principles of consistency and causality.⁸¹

The disruption of the old system by a new type of thinking is also related to the problem of narrative structures. Thus, for example, the two windows in the Annunciation scene are also a kind of critical form: "These inserted and separated fields can easily be interpreted as filling and softening of the narrative through the description; at the same time, they are sites of the of the new in a systemic sense which as such goes further than the everywhere observable expansion of detailed realism".⁸²

⁷⁸ KEMP, W.: *Der Anteil des Betrachters. Rezeptionsästhetische Studien zur Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts*. München 1983, p. 28. Translation from FALKENHAUSEN 2020 (see in note 77), p. 78. *Der Betrachter ist im Bild. Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik*. Ed.: KEMP, W. Berlin 1992; Published in English as: *The Work of Art and Its Beholder: The Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception*. In: *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed.: CHEETHAM, M. A. Cambridge 1998, pp. 180–196. See also KEMP, W.: *Der explizite Betrachter : zur Rezeption zeitgenössischer Kunst*. Konstanz 2015.

⁷⁹ See e.g. HAYNES, D. J.: Bakhtin and the Visual Arts. In: *A Companion to Art Theory*. Eds.: SMITH, P. – WILDE, C. Oxford Malden, MA 2002, pp. 292–302.

⁸⁰ KEMP, W.: *Die Räume der Maler. Zur Bilderzählung seit Giotto*, München 1996, p. 89: „Wir erwarten [...] einen genuin narrativen Raum, der dem Richtungssinn der Tiefe eine zeitliche Bedeutung unterlegen kann und der die neue Erzählachse so deutlich orientiert, wie das etwa die Konvention der Lese- richtung vermochte.“ Also see WEIGEL 2001 (see in note 5), p. 455.

⁸¹ KEMP, W.: Realismus als Katalysator: der Genter Altar

- vom Bildsystem zum Gattungssystem. In: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 83, 2020, pp. 471–491, p. 477: "Das Ergebnis ist der klassische Fall einer »kritischen Form« im Sinne von Hans Sedlmayr: eine Absonderlichkeit oder Extravaganz, die gleichwohl »Eigentümlichkeiten enthüllen« kann, indem sie die Stiloptionen einer Epoche auf die Spitze treibt."; p. 478: "Ich habe oben gezeigt, wie das Äquivalenzprinzip den Zusammenschluss des Ganzen fundiert. Eine kritische Form kann als Indikator gelten, sie stürzt noch kein System."; p. 479: "Eyck erkennt Ursächlichkeit an, er teilt mit, dass es etwas außerhalb des Mediums gibt, aber er lässt solche Bedingungen nur partiell gelten. Ich würde also die Rahmenschatten der Verkündigung nicht ambivalent nennen wollen. Sie gehören eindeutig auf die Seite eines neuen Apriori, das sich aber noch nicht überall durchsetzt. Man darf von einem selektiven Realismus sprechen, der seine Grundprinzipien Konsistenz und Kausalität sistieren kann."

⁸² Ibidem, p. 480: „Diese eingeschobenen und abgetrennten Felder lassen sich unschwer als Auffüllung und Aufweichung der Narration durch die Deskription erkennen, zugleich sind sie Einsatzstellen des Neuen in einem systemischen Sinn, der als solcher weiter reicht als der überall zu beobachtende Ausbau des Detailrealismus.“

In describing the movement from the old to the new system, Kemp does not hesitate to make use, in a positive sense, of Heideggerian concepts that were too new for Sedlmayr to recognise their analytical significance: “Care (*Fürsorge*) and circumspection (*Umsicht*) govern Van Eyck’s depiction of the world. This goes further than the classical proof of truth of realism, which is based on consistency and causal connection criteria”.⁸³

A more detailed analysis of this concept of realism would require more space. At this point, the question is primarily the implications of the clash of different image systems for understanding the problem of narrative structures.

Disrupting the older system of pictorial narrative opened up the possibility of creating new, complex images in which elements of multiple systems can be combined into a single whole. A classic example is the central image of the altarpiece, in which a view of the seemingly natural landscape opens up, which seems to be fully compatible with the new realism. Supernatural action, however, dominates within the seemingly natural space, motivated by the text of John’s Revelation. The Lamb on the altar in the central scene of the Ghent altarpiece is a complex symbol whose temporal character points directly to the liturgical texts mentioned by Pächt but also indirectly to the roots of liturgical celebrations reaching back at least to traditions of animal sacrifices, described in the Old Testament. The image of the bleeding Lamb as a symbol of Christ would not have been possible without a Christian reconsideration of the Old Testament prescriptions related to the sacrifice of animals. This reinterpretation occurred at several stages, which took place at different times and operated with various temporalities. First, the Old Testament narratives and prescriptions associated the animal sacrifices with a particular time during the year; by then, the symbol of the Lamb, typical for the Easter season, had been firmly linked with Christ and carefully staged in the liturgical prescriptions. Finally, van Eyck decided on a particular visual

interpretation of this complex symbol and its place in life. This visual rendering included new temporalities, pointing to one particular moment of the passing time. Here, Kemp justly sees a “micro-level of temporality”—“the censers of the angels swing in a high arc in the direction of the Holy Lamb, the blood that flows from the side wound of the Lamb falls so actively into a chalice that it splashes back”.⁸⁴ These fragments of narratives, including processions of saints from various periods of Christian history approaching the altar from four directions, are organised around the central axis of the work, containing several visual references to the timeless presence of God.

The image thus narrates and visually argues on multiple temporal planes simultaneously, which can create the appearance of complexity, overcoming any temporal limitations. Nevertheless, it is a work of art created at a particular place and at a unique moment in the development of art and imagery, or, in other words, within a particular configuration of visual media and their functions in practical life. In close relation to these objectifying processes, the constitutive historical subjectivities of narrative structures, the persons manifesting a particular will to structure, are changing.⁸⁵ In other words, even the narratives of timelessness (and all later meta-narratives analysing their interpretations, including this text) are always realised in a language typical of a particular place and time.

Conclusion

For decades, thinking about structures within the Viennese School of Art history has continued without comprehensively embracing and rethinking Wickhoff’s reflections on pictorial narrative and time. Sedlmayr’s notion of structure was associated with the author’s authoritarian emphasis on abandoning “vulgar time” and achieving a connection with timelessness, which limited his ability to understand the historical formalism established by

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 486: „Fürsorge und Umsicht regieren die Wiedergabe der Welt durch Van Eyck. Das geht weiter als der klassische Wahrheitsbeweis des Realismus, der über die Kriterien Konsistenz und Kausalzusammenhang geführt wird.“ The concept of *Zubandenheit* on p. 483 is explicitly quoted from

Heidegger.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 475.

⁸⁵ Comp. DAVIS 2022 (see in note 15), pp. 70–71.

Riegl. In the mature period of his work, Otto Pächt shifted the focus of his thinking to the problem of visual language and its historical contexts. In doing so, he developed the notion of structure, elaborated in the 1930 s, rather implicitly. Only in Wolfgang Kemp's texts do we find the notion of narrative structures, whose historical anchoring in the analysis of systems of reasoning and representation makes it possible to productively describe the hermeneutic

paradoxes associated with developing a visual grammar of pictorial narrative. This line of research is a promising continuation of the way towards a better understanding of time in pictorial narratives developing on the crucial interdisciplinary interface between art history and the philosophical conceptualisation of human existence. This theoretical background can substantially contribute to a dialogue between iconology and hermeneutics of images.

Stredoveké naratívne štruktúry a vizuálny čas (historiografický náčrt)

Résumé

Téma obrazových štruktúr, času a naratívnosti v kresťanskom umení predmoderného obdobia sa vo viedenskej škole dejín umenia diskutuje už od Wickhoffovho komentára k Viedenskej genéze. Jeho najvýznamnejšou koncepciou inováciou bol pokus o definovanie troch spôsobov, typov alebo štýlov obrazovej narácie. Súčasní bádatelia chápu Wickhoffove myšlienky ako začiatok uvažovania o naratívnych štruktúrach obrazov a ponúkajú inovatívne interpretácie jeho koncepcií. Jeho metafora plavby po vode sa porovnáva s prúdom vedomia. Obrazová reprezentácia sledu udalostí je základnou jednotkou naratívnych obrazových štruktúr, ktorá zostáva prítomná v myslení neskorších teoretikov, či už vedome nadväzujú na Wickhoffa, alebo ho dokonca kritizujú. Dôraz na existenciu v prúde vedomia, na ponorenie sa do prúdu pocitov a myšlienok môže spôsobiť zvýšený záujem o momentálny vzťah fenomenálneho aspektu okolitého sveta. Táto fenomenálna štruktúra dostala aj špecifickú mediálnu reprezentáciu v novoobjavenej technike počas Wickhoffovho života: vo filme.

Ulrich Rehm ukázal, že Wickhoffove kategórie možno kreatívne využiť na vytvorenie viacerých spôsobov interpretácie jedného umeleckého diela.

V prípade obrazových cyklov možno v každom obrazovom poli do istej miery vidieť všetky štruktúry obrazovej narácie, ktoré Wickhoff opísal. Rozmanitosť naratívnych štýlov môže znamenať aj rozmanitosť ikonografických interpretácií jedného obrazu. Takéto čítanie určite presahuje pôvodné Wickhoffove zámery, ale zároveň otvára dôležitý priestor pre interpretáciu stredovekých obrazových štruktúr, v ktorých imaginatívne skutočnosti (sny alebo vízie) často zohrávali prinajmenšom rovnako podstatnú úlohu ako zobrazenia každodennej reality.

Potenciál tvorivého uplatnenia wickhoffovských kategórií pri analýze štruktúr obrazového rozprávania zostával dlho neprebádaný. Pre ďalšie generácie významných historikov umenia na Viedenskej univerzite nebol primárnym zdrojom inšpirácie Wickhoff, ale Alois Riegl.

Hans Sedlmayr (1896–1984) ponúkol niekoľko podnetných myšlienok o časovosti obrazu. V roku 1933 spolu s Ottom Pächtom (1902–1988) uverejnili svoje myšlienky o štruktúre v druhom zväzku *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*. Zdá sa, že Pächt a Sedlmayr v tomto období bojovali za rovnakú štruktúrnu teóriu. Napriek tomu sa v nasledujúcich rokoch ich myšlienky vyvíjali podstatne odlišnými

smermi, ktoré úzko súviseli s ich ľudskými osudmi a politickými postojmi. Sedlmayr si zachoval autoritatívny postoj pri definovaní „štruktúry“ bez toho, aby odstránil totalitné myšlienky v jej ideologickom pozadí. Štruktúra umeleckého diela sa podriaďuje vedúcemu princípu a pozorovateľ musí nájsť správny postoj, aby ju pochopil. Myšlienka jediného správneho postoja obmedzuje slobodu pozorovateľa vidieť ho zo svojej perspektívy alebo si dokonca vybrať aspekt, z ktorého by k nemu chcel pristupovať. Táto tendencia k monologickému prístupu zodpovedá totalitným politickým tendenciám.

Sedlmayr hovoril o „nadčasovej časovosti“ (zeitlose Zeitlichkeit), „skutočnej prítomnosti“ (die wahre Gegenwart) alebo „uzdravenom, nerozdelenom čase“ (heile, unzerstückte Zeit) ako o „vyššej časovej oblasti“, chápanej ako odlišnej od „vulgárneho času“. To signalizuje spoločensky a teologicky relevantné rozdiely. Sedlmayr si neuvedomoval niektoré logické problémy spojené s paradoxnou „nadčasovou časovosťou“. Od Heideggera si vypožičal niekoľko sporne znejúcich formulácií bez toho, aby pochopil alebo uplatnil jeho existenciálnu analytiku ako metódu. Je možné, že samotný „vulgárny čas“, t. j. čas každodennej skúsenosti, je oveľa komplexnejší, a teda oveľa menej vulgárny, ako si Sedlmayr myslel. Súčasný naratologický výskum ponúka oveľa komplexnejšiu konceptualizáciu týchto otázok. Napríklad Mieke Bal rozpracovala problém heterochronie, t. j. vzájomného vzťahu rôznych foriem času v skúsenosti konkrétneho jednotlivca bez toho, aby sa musela uchýľovať k opozícii medzi vulgárnym časom a silným pojmom bezčasovosti. Sedlmayrov pojem časovosti zostáva napriek deklarovanej hĺbke relatívne plochý. Uvedomenie si komplexnej štruktúry temporality je dôležitým poznatkom, ale samo o sebe nerieši otázku možnej prítomnosti a funkcie usporiadacieho princípu vo vizualizovanej naratívnej štruktúre.

Úlohu veľkých naratívov v textoch interpretujúcich obrazy je potrebné zvážiť aj spolu s nadradenými naratívnyimi štruktúrami samotného umeleckého diela. Tento princíp platí najmä pre obrazové cykly. Vzhľadom na tieto skutočnosti je potrebné doplniť Wickhoffovo metaforické chápanie času ako horizontálnej plavby po vodnej hladine o vertikálny smer. Pri analýze diela je potom potrebné zohľadniť aj podobu dialógu, ktorý prebieha medzi

horizontálnym a vertikálnym smerom čítania v rámci jednotlivých scén. Dôraz na vertikálny rozmer nie je cudzí ikonológii, ktorá sa rozvíjala a praktizovala vo Warburgovom kruhu. Tak štruktúrna analýza, ako aj ikonológia sa v istých ohľadoch zaujímajú o komplexnú aspektovosť umeleckého diela, problémom však je, ako všetky tieto aspekty koordinovať. V Sedlmayrovom chápaní sa majú všetky podriaďovať jednému ústrednému princípu. Jeho zdôrazňovanie metodologickej podobnosti medzi jeho analýzou štruktúry a ikonológiou mohlo mať za cieľ zakryť odstup, ktorý vznikol v dôsledku prenasledovania židovských učencov na Viedenskom inštitúte v tragickom historickom období, v ktorom Sedlmayrova hviezda stúpala.

Otto Pächt, ktorý v roku 1936 emigroval do Anglicka, rozvíjal svoje myšlienky o rozprávaní a čase v podstatne odlišných podmienkach. Aj keď sa príležitostne vracal k štruktúralnej analýze, robil to bez veľkolepej sedlmayerovskej rétoriky. Vo svojej knihe Vzostup obrazového rozprávania v Anglicku v dvanástom storočí Pächt pripomína čitateľom základné spojenie medzi rozprávaním a časovosťou: každé rozprávanie musí „obsahovať neuchopiteľný prvok času“. Úzke prepojenie medzi vizuálnou formou a tematickou interpretáciou odhaľuje, že predstavivosť, ktorá vytvorila vrcholnostredoveké dielo, pracovala so zásadne odlišnými predstavami o čase a priestore, než sú bežné dnes. Pächt sa nesaží svojich čitateľov presvedčiť o nadčasovom tajomstve jednotnej umeleckej koncepcie. Namiesto toho navrhuje ďalšie kritické skúmanie organizujúcej sily a jednoty v umeleckom diele. Zdanlivé rozpory nerieši apelom na rešpekt voči nepochopiteľným záhadám, ale hľadaním textu, ktorý by mohol inšpirovať zdanlivo nesúrodý celok. Pächt vedel, že zvýšená racionálna kontrola nad interpretáciou môže znamenať stratu emocionálnej citlivosti. Preto mu išlo o kultiváciu úrovne sebauvedomenia, ktorú by sme vo fenomenologickej tradícii mohli nazvať aj propriocepciou. Pächt videl niekoľko časových aspektov obrazových štruktúr, ktoré závisia od stupňa vývoja umeleckého jazyka. Povaha určitého výtvarného jazyka je neoddeliteľne spätá s dobovou vizualitou, založenou na jazykových hrách príslušnej kultúry, ku ktorej patria aj jeho východiskové výpovede. Keďže Wickhoff, Sedlmayr a Pächt sa obmedzovali najmä na kultúry stredomorského regiónu a Európy, ich

poňatie štruktúry sa líšilo od poňatia, ktoré rozpracovali francúzski štrukturalisti. Tento rozdiel musel zohľadniť v ďalšom výskume naratívnych obrazových štruktúr Wolfgang Kemp (*1946), ktorý otvoril podstatne nové cesty vo výklade pojmu štruktúry, ale zároveň prehodnotil niektoré staršie myšlienky, o ktorých sa hovorí v tomto článku. V jeho textoch nadobudli význam lingvistické analógie, typické pre štrukturalistov. Okrem vizuálneho slovníka rozoberá aj syntax, t. j. princípy kombinácie jednotlivých lexikálnych prvkov a ich gramatiku. Kemp hľadá systém, „princíp usporiadaného kresťanského univerza, všeobjímajúceho v čase aj v priestore“, vylučujúceho zo sféry svojho vplyvu náhodné odchýlky či kuriozity. Hľadanie systému by mohlo motivovať necitlivosť voči rôznorodosti a rozmanitosti foriem, v ktorých sa rozvíjajú rozprávania a ďalšie ľudské deje s nimi spojené. Aby sa tomuto nebezpečenstvu vyhol, Kemp prijíma Lotmanovu myšlienku dvojitej artikulácie: simultánna artikulácia významu na viacerých úrovniach spája horizontálnu a vertikálnu dimenziu naratívnych štruktúr, čím znemožňuje návrat k jednoduchej Wickhoffovej metafore riečnej scenérie. Polarity v pojme času ovplyvňujú formálne štruktúry obrazových naratívov, ktoré súvisia so všeobecnejšími predstavami o štruktúre bytia. Ideologické rozdiely neodradili Kempa od toho, aby sa od Sedlmayra učil: v zásadnej pasáži o čase a narácii uvádza, že čas sa transformuje na naratívny čas. Výsledkom tejto transformácie je štruktúrovaný celok disponujúci osobitným stupňom „Gestaltetheit“. Medzi Sedlmayrovým a Kempovým chápaním štruktúry sú však niektoré zásadné rozdiely. Kemp uznáva, že naratívne médiá prepracovali staršie obsahy s väčšou slobodou a vytvorili ďalšie významy tým, že príbehy nanovo vytvárali vo vyvíjajúcich sa naratívnych schémach. Rozvinul tému „implicitného“ alebo „obrazom imanentného“ diváka, pričom pripustil, že štruktúra obrazu mohla určovať úlohu diváka. Pritom však nezopakoval Sedlmayrovo tvrdenie o jedinom správnom postoji diváka, určenom

štruktúrou umeleckého diela. Skúmal vzťahy medzi časom a priestorom rozprávania (*chronotopos* v bachtinovskom zmysle). Kemp tiež neváhal v pozitívnom zmysle využiť Heideggerove koncepty, ktoré boli pre Sedlmayra príliš nové na to, aby rozpoznal ich analytický význam. Obrazy rozprávajú a vizuálne argumentujú na viacerých časových rovinách súčasne, čo môže vytvárať dojem komplexnosti, prekonávajúcej akékoľvek časové obmedzenia. Napriek tomu ide o dielo vytvorené na konkrétnom mieste a v jedinečnom momente vývoja umenia a obrazotvornosti, alebo inak povedané, v rámci konkrétnej konfigurácie vizuálnych médií a ich funkcií v praktickom živote. Menia sa aj konštitutívne historické subjektivity naratívnych štruktúr, teda osoby prejavujúce konkrétnu vôľu k štruktúre. Wolfgang Kemp historicky ukotvil pojem naratívnych štruktúr v analýze systémov uvažovania a reprezentácie, čo mu umožnilo produktívne opísať hermeneutické paradoxy spojené s rozvíjaním vizuálnej gramatiky obrazového rozprávania. Táto línia výskumu je sľubným pokračovaním cesty k lepšiemu pochopeniu času v obrazových naráciách, ktorá sa rozvíja na kľúčovom interdisciplinárnom rozhraní medzi dejinami umenia a filozofickou konceptualizáciou ľudskej existencie. Toto teoretické zázemie môže podstatne prispieť k dialógu medzi ikonológiou a hermeneutikou obrazov.

Túto líniu uvažovania možno rozšíriť smerom k analytickému pohľadu na ľudské túžby. Zdá sa, že mnohé sekvencie obrazových naratívov sú založené na konkrétnej túžbe alebo na vytvorení hierarchie túžob. Toto pozorovanie otvára cestu k prehodnoteniu existujúcich teórií s novým súborom otázok. Ktoré túžby boli tematizované naratívnymi štruktúrami? Aký bol vzťah týchto túžob k času? Ktoré typy temporalít boli preferované? Aké hierarchie sa medzi nimi vytvárali? Ako obrazové naratívy vyjadrili tieto hierarchie? Okrem toho, boli tieto hierarchie v konečnom dôsledku vytvorené s cieľom organizovať túžby implicitného diváka naratívov?

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