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Changing Times, Changing Styles: Wilhelm Worringer and the Art of His Epoch

Magdalena Bushart

Translated by Neil H. Donahue

There are books whose significance results less from their originality or the precision of their arguments than from the point in time of their appearance and their reception. Wilhelm Worringer's successful early publications, *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908) and *Form Problems in the Gothic* (1911), belong to this category of scholarship. In these books, but also in his book on Lukas Cranach (also in 1908), this art historian undertook to establish criteria for evaluating non-classical artistic expressions. The methodological points of orientation for such an undertaking were provided him by, first, Alois Riegl's concept of "artistic volition" *(Kunstwollen)*, whereby art does not depend on the technical ability *(Können)* of the respective stage of culture, but rather from changing psychic needs; and second, the notion of empathy *(Einfühlungslehre)* of the aesthetician Theodor Lipps, upon the basis of which Worringer developed his construct of an "urge to abstraction." In Worringer's psychological system of styles, "abstraction" and "empathy" mark the two poles of artistic sensitivity, whose interchange has determined the development of art since its primeval beginnings: while the "urge to abstraction" represents that need to evade into art an external world perceived as a threat and to capture the multiplicity of phenomena in geometric forms, the "urge to empathy" is understood as a wish to express in the artwork a world-feeling *(Weltgefühl)* of harmony.

In his writings Worringer aimed, according to his own testimony, at animating scholarly discussion. His intention was, so he averred, to open up new areas of research and to reconsider the value of his discipline of "anthropological psychology" *(Menschheitspsychologie)*.[1] In fact, his dissertation *Abstraction and Empathy* and also *Form Prob-*

lems in the Gothic appear, for long stretches, as disputes with the art-historical literature of his time.[2] With that, Worringer found at first, precisely in academic circles, little support or appreciation; there one reacted to his theses with undisguised skepticism. The tenor of reviews ranged from keeping an aloof distance to outright rejection. On top of that, most discussion first appeared several years later, when art historians found themselves forced, as it were, by the popular success of the two books to take a position. In short order, *Abstraction and Empathy* and *Form Problems in the Gothic* were among the most popular art historical texts of the prewar years. While his scholarly colleagues carped that Worringer viewed history from the perspective of the present day and, consequently, could not possibly do justice to historical truth, artists and art critics recognized therein the possibility to interpret the present in a new historical framework.[3]

Especially among the Expressionists, the scholar's theses found a lively resonance. In his works they thought themselves able to discover their own ideas all over again and they welcomed Worringer as a champion of the new art. Thus, Elisabeth Erdmann-Macke, the widow of August Macke, recalls the enthusiastic acceptance of those two texts among the young painters: "I must however add that the books by Worringer that appeared at that time, *Abstraction and Empathy* and *Form Problems in the Gothic,* had an enthusiastic circle of well-informed followers among young artists; most of them bought a copy or lent and borrowed it among themselves. Finally, for once, there was an academic who was receptive to and understanding of these new ideas, who would perhaps step up for them and defend them against so many conservatively inclined art historians, who rejected from the outset everything new and unusual, or didn't even bother with it to begin with."[4] And the art critic Paul Fechter reports in retrospect that he himself at the time recognized at once the epochal significance of Worringer's intellectual construct: "I was pleased, since there it was, what we all had long looked and wished for, and had found nowhere. . . . We received from Wilhelm Worringer . . . finally solid ground beneath our feet for the constant meeting with the modern art that we considered and valued as our art, as the art of our generation of the eighties."[5]

In view of this reception it did not take long before Worringer's books were interpreted as programmatic documents of Expressionism. In 1917, for example, the architectural historian Walter Müller-Wulckow considered *Form Problems* the theoretical justification for the "fundamental transformation that our conception of art has undergone in the present" and attributed to the book a greater impor-

tance for contemporary art than for the history of art.[6] Also, probably the harshest critic of Worringer, the art historian Richard Hamann, wanted to grant this work, with due reservations about its methodology, its validity as a theoretical attempt to come to terms with Expressionism:

> And so we appreciate the book and estimate its value: as a document of a new consciousness in search of a style, as intellectual-spiritual [*geistig*] adherent of a new artistic movement, to which the Gothic and primitive art, linearity and surface ornament signify a new value. . . . Just as Worringer describes Gothic structures, so appear the works of Expressionists and Cubists, and as a manifesto of Expressionism, as an artistic product, not as a scholarly achievement, one will have also to give this work its due, which was written by someone who is modern, knowledgeable, extremely impressive and probably only too persuasive with words [*vielleicht der Worte nur zu mächtiger Mensch*]. Time will tell whether [or not] the expressionism of this book will have stood up longer than the art that now already invokes it for legitimation [*die sich schon jetzt auf ihn beruft*].[7]

The assumption that Worringer had actually written his scholarly works with an eye to Expressionism has remained in the secondary literature until the present; for Geoffrey Perkins, Worringer was even the theoretician of the new directions in the arts.[8] Nonetheless, not only does the recollection of Worringer's publisher Reinhard Piper,[9] according to whom this reception was not at all intended by the author, speak against such suppositions, but also the date when the works were written, which makes any direct relation to Expressionism highly dubious: *Abstraction and Empathy* was begun in 1905, the year in which the artist group Die Brücke (The Bridge) was founded, and completed a year later.[10] Worringer signed the contract for the Cranach book in April 1907, and worked on *Form Problems* from September 1908 on. The latter had to have been far enough along by 1909 that the author could submit it for his *Habilitation* (postdoctoral book for tenure and promotion).[11] Only at this point were Wassily Kandinsky, Marianne von Werefkin, Gabriele Münter, Alexej von Jawlensky, and others joining together to form the "New Association of Artists" in Munich, where Worringer lived until May 1909, until his appointment as *Privatdozent* in Bern. Apart from the fact that Worringer's knowledge of modern currents in the arts from

1905 to 1907–8 would not have been all too profound, his concept of art seems, upon closer inspection, surprisingly conservative. Worringer does not in any way argue for the renunciation of obtaining aesthetic norms. Instead, he wanted to limit the "transvaluation of values" that he announced with his investigations, to the area of historical research. For all other realms of inquiry the classical ideal should remain valid, "for the naive appreciation of art must not be expected to hazard in such digressions of powerful cogitation its impulsive and irresponsible feel for artistic matters" (*Form in Gothic*, 9 [8]). Behind this disposition lies less the timidity of the scholar, who knows the small degree of effectiveness of historical research, than an understanding of art that sees in tradition the binding principle guiding the art of the present. His contemporaries were entirely correct when they read Worringer's works as comments on contemporary culture. The slogan under which this commentary stands is, however, not "Expressionism" or even "artistic revolution," but rather "changing times" or "epochal shift" *(Zeitenwende)*. The term represents criticism of the development of culture in the modern period and of modern—impressionistic—society. As ideological premise it informs not only Worringer's art-historical inquiries, but also his essays on contemporary events in the art world. Here, in his critique of modernism, lie then also the actual points of contact between Worringer's understanding of art and the theoretical concept of the Expressionists.

According to the developmental scheme that Worringer designed for the history of art, the desire for abstraction is the result of a religiously determined understanding of the world and marks the beginning of each and every artistic creation. Simultaneously, however, he proposes it as characteristic of the "Germanic race." While the South of Europe has separated itself from the religious determination of art through increasing knowledge of the natural world and its laws, thereby arriving at the classical ideals of harmony and naturalness, for Worringer the North has remained true to a transcendental view of the world. The urge to abstraction, hence an essential element of the "Germanic artistic volition," finds expression in the Nordic ornamental bands just as well as in Gothic cathedrals. Only when the classical ideal, in the development of modern art since the Renaissance, gains entry into German art is this racial disposition suppressed (though also never definitively vanquished). Subsequently, civilization and education *(Bildung)* supplant religious ideals, *ratio* replaces transcendence, modern individualism takes the place of the collective consciousness of prior times, and the art of the North becomes

worldly and flat. Now that art begins to resemble the classical art of the South, without ever attaining its life-affirming harmony (*Form in Gothic,* 114–16 [77–79]). Where the Nordic feeling for form has nevertheless managed to assert itself, it arrives there unhesitatingly in conflict with the classical sensitivities of the day. Worringer names Albrecht Dürer and the painter Hans von Marées as prominent examples.

Before the background of this antagonistic model of history, can be seen Worringer's critique of the ideology *(Weltbild)* of modernity. Impressionism becomes the provisional high point, and at the same time, endpoint in the development of modern art. In the course of the nineteenth century, according to Worringer, [empirical] knowledge of the things of the world has reached such an extent that it no longer has an explanatory effect, but rather only creates more confusion. With all the senses and with "female receptivity," the individual has surrendered to the phenomena of life. This manner of increase in knowledge signifies, however, not an enrichment, but rather gives the individual a feeling of spiritual impoverishment. Faced with a multiplicity of impressions, the individual has finally lost perspective, even comes near to losing him- or herself: "This feminine surrender is really equivalent to the will to lose one's self, and it was perhaps the finest instinct of the period that felt that the last and most differentiated stimuli to knowledge were only accessible to whomever remained passive, only to whom dared give up the self."[12] For his own time, nonetheless, Worringer believes himself able to diagnose a transformation in worldview. The reigning cultural values since the Renaissance have begun to sway at the foundation; in their place a perspective opens up upon ideals long believed lost:

> Certainly it seems as if our present psychic constitution brings us closer again, at least indirectly, to Gothic values, since we gradually pronounce the word "personality" with a certain tiredness. The raging pathos of youthful individualism, confident of victory, has shrunk pitifully. And in us something comes to life like the desire for great, necessary values that elevate beyond all the individual noisemaking. Unsettled and tormented by all that is personal, there grows in us slowly an astonished comprehension of the sublime impersonality of the great, old styles.[13]

With the renunciation of a modern sensibility goes also, for Worringer, necessarily, a transformation of values. In the place of passive

(womanly) self-surrender is a new activism, a (manly) will to self-assertion; in the place of "analysis" steps "synthesis" ("Architektur," 498). Or as he states elsewhere:

> We stand today in the middle of a crisis, in which the young generation with its unconsumed energies and its restless need for activity breaks through all restraints, as they are ankered in an all too differentiated hyperconsciousness, in an all too sensitive receptivity, and, unconcerned about yesterday's truth, this young generation creates for itself a new truth from its own flesh and blood. It appears that we have matured for a second, other naiveté that will restore to us the happiness and unself-consciousness of an active individual.[14]

Not without pathos Worringer describes the result of this transformation of attitude: "And an art became modern again to which the abstract law stands higher than the subjective" ("Architektur," 497). That this art in each case also presupposed a relation to racialistic and nationalistic precepts is self-evident from Worringer's racial-psychological method.[15]

A similar development, as Worringer describes it, hovered before the eyes of the advocates of "conservative reform." They also considered Impressionism a symptom of cultural decline, whose roots they sought in the Renaissance, "the doom of German culture."[16] They chastised its representatives with charges of hedonistic aestheticism, boundless subjectivism, and a lack of intellectual/spiritual orientation. Impressionism has, so lamented Richard Hamann, "destroyed all values of life in the Beyond of Good and Evil."[17] Instead of cultivating responsibility and feelings of patriotism, one surrendered to individualism, liberalism, and hedonism. The soul has taken the place of reason; psychology the place of philosophy: in brief, the whole culture has become "feminized"[18]—the gender stereotypes under which Worringer operates are already preformulated here. The conservative cultural critics set their hopes for the future on the creation of a new, idealistic worldview: Karl Lamprecht spoke of a "philosophical classicism";[19] Wilhelm Dilthey of a "more masculine, harder and more enlightened manner of thinking about work, duty, love, marriage and religion."[20] From this philosophy (that is, their convictions), a new, uniform style could grow, one that in its suprapersonal dimension would be generally binding and exemplary.[21] This system of coordinates, with its "essential" characteristics, should build up, on the one hand, tradition and, on the other hand, the nation. With

that, these cultural reformers maintained throughout a distance to the rabid chauvinism of the Werdandi-Association or the literally understood historicism as practiced by the representatives of the Wilhelminian empire. Finally, they conjured the "spirit" and not the forms of a national past. Adolf Bartels defined this attitude as "conservative, not reactionary," one that "assumes something original and indestructible in each people, [does] not put all of life and being into mere progress, possesses natural piety before the given real national bonds and would like to create out of them, out of their spirit."[22] In reference to Barthel's definition, Worringer also described his own standpoint as "conservatism [. . .], that is not identical to reaction" ("Architektur," 498).

It is as characteristic of the climate of the time as it is for the amorphousness of the concepts that Worringer anticipated the question: In which form then would the transformed "spirit of the times" manifest itself? In these answers can be read not only Worringer's changing personal preferences, but also the change in paradigm that characterized the discussion of art in the prewar years. When in 1905 in an article on the dramatist Frank Wedekind, Worringer first broached the problem of transformed sensitivity *(Weltempfinden)*, he still located the desire for abstraction outside of art in the realm of philosophy—in those years, he considered himself, ultimately, more of a literary intellectual with philosophical ambitions than an art historian.[23] Philosophy was to him a "place of refuge" as a "chance to catch one's breath, when we are in danger of getting crushed in the mess of things pressing upon each other tightly in space."[24] In 1909 he came back to that topic again in his reviews of the Marées retrospective in Munich. Now he spoke of a "German classicism." He interpreted the popular interest in Marées as a reaction to the sensual indulgence of Impressionism,[25] which was finally foreign to a natural Germanness *(artfremd):* "We hunger and thirst for an art that does more than delight the eye and stimulate the senses. We stand once again at a point where the ineradicable ideological needs within us have restlessly shifted and wait for fulfillment. We are looking for a sacral art for nonbelievers—to speak with the terminology of the German—we are looking again for a classicism" (64). Indeed, this wish cannot go into fulfillment—according to Worringer's racial-psychological system, since "classicism and Germanness [are] actually a contradiction in terms" (64), classical works for artists of German lineage thus are "only attainable through a powerful exertion of force." Worringer then deemed Marées also a type of artist-personality that had failed in "its tragic heroicism" before the conflict

of interests between racial disposition and classical world-feeling, related in this tragic sensibility to the "Gothic" artist of the Renaissance, Albrecht Dürer:

> For our sublime insufficiency we have found in him [Marées] a new formula. . . . And if there is a German classicism, then it lies exactly in this restless transforming, so difficult to the Nordic individualist, of ethical moments into artistic values. It has to replace in the dualistically bound German, that which is attainable to other nations as an unconstrained expression of instinct without any problematics.[26]

This eulogy of Marées, who died in 1887, is not exclusively to be understood in retrospective terms. The classical ideal, of which we are speaking here, lived on in the twentieth century in the works of Adolf Hildebrand and Artur Volkmann. Worringer had had for many years an unrestrained admiration for the person of Hildebrand;[27] the title of his famous text about *The Problem of Form in the Plastic Arts* is unmistakably cited in the title of Worringer's *Form Problems in the Gothic,* and the concept Hildebrand develops there of sculptural relief based on "distant perspective" *(Fernsicht)* had served Worringer for his definition of the Nordic desire for abstraction tormented by agoraphobia *(Raumscheu).*[28]

In 1911, only a few months after the publication of *Form Problems,* in two articles that appeared almost simultaneously, Worringer delivered further variations on his understanding of art. The first of the two essays, "The Problem of Modern Architecture," appeared in the *New German Architectural News (Neudeutsche Bauzeitung),* a conservative architectural journal. There Worringer named representatives of *Stilkunst* as executors of the transformed sensitivity of the period: the painter Ferdinand Hodler, the architect Peter Behrens, and, once more, Hans von Marées and Adolf Hildebrand. Their works, created from a new "architectonic" sensibility and bound in equal degree to both the present and to tradition, corresponded to the conflict of modern mankind, "that is tired of its individualism, unable to regain the force of unreservedly universal validity" ("Architektur," 498). The result seems quite violent, and not without reason:

> What is only possible for us today and to which the architectonic sensibility that dominates us now pushes us, is to broaden our general sensitivity. Only such an individual sensitivity, sounded through the feeling for the general necessity, —

> no mass sensitivity is possible for us. This sounding will never be completely natural to us; rather it will always represent a strained effort that cannot deny its intentional character. But perhaps exactly that is the decisive feature of our time, that it [the time] cannot support what grows naturally, that it will detect everywhere the strain of overcoming, the effects of conquered inhibitions, the dynamics of the desired synthesis. Therefore we do not strain toward what is self-evident and universally valid anyway, but rather toward the individual element that has consciously constrained itself into the universal. ("Architektur," 498)

This description corresponds to Worringer's thesis according to which the development from abstract "Style" to classical "Naturalism" is irreversible and thus each attempt at a renovation of Nordic (that is, German) expressiveness in art *(Ausdruckskunst)* necessarily remains a compromise—or fails tragically. In this sense can also be explained the series of names. We have already spoken of Marées and Hildebrand as heroes of a modern, "Nordic" classicism. In a comparable way, the art of Ferdinand Hodler can be read as a compromise between the antagonistic principles of creation. His figures combine a pronounced frontality and linearity—according to Worringer's system these are characteristics of Nordic abstraction—with the mannered plasticity of Michelangelo's sculpted bodies. While Marées nevertheless had unmistakably failed with his idealistic conceptions (not by chance did Worringer say to his contemporaries of Marées's paintings: "His works should not be our schooling, but rather his volition and his great attitude"),[29] Hodler could advance to carry the hopes for the future. In 1912, in his *Old German Book Illustration*,[30] Worringer celebrated the painter as renewer of Nordic expressiveness in art *(Ausdruckskunst)*, in whose monumental murals for Zürich and Jena the fundamental disposition of the "race" comes finally into its own after several hundred years of foreign domination:

> The German is . . . by nature an expressive artist [*Ausdruckskünstler*]. Even if the ground beneath him has been withdrawn since the Renaissance, if he has toiled his way through the centuries, this subterranean force cannot be extinguished. It only waits, as it were, for the word, the cue, to come into its own again. This cue was given at the moment when the problem of monumentality became of moment again. Only a German hears it, only a German understands it, and the world

> can ignore Hodler's compelling frescoes as little as it can ignore Dürer's compelling illustrations. (8)

Worringer's enthusiasm for Hodler certainly had several sources. The painter was considered, ever since his first successful exhibitions in Paris and Munich, the chief representative of a new, idealistic art. The commission for the narrative painting "The Departure of the Jena Students for the War of Liberation in 1813" (1907) for the newly built University of Jena had created a considerable commotion in Germany. More important, however, might have been the influence on Worringer of his teacher Artur Weese, who maintained friendly contact with Hodler and wrote the first monograph about him. In a lecture in 1909 Weese had defined Hodler's art in exactly those categories that Worringer now, in turn, elevated as characteristic features of the new "artistic volition" *(Kunstwollen):* renunciation of the "cult of individuality," typicality, desire for expression, and the return to medieval principles of form.[31] Considered closely, Worringer's definition of the period style can indeed also be extended to other works of *Stilkunst,* to the tormented sculptures of Franz Metzner, for example, or to the paintings of Albin Egger-Lienz.

Worringer ultimately gave a clearly different accent to the second essay (which is far more well known because it was of greater consequence to modern art) that established his renown as a theoretician of Expressionism. Here it is the "young Parisian Syntheticists and Expressionists" (he subsumed all post-Impressionistic painting under this term),[32] who give expression to the new spiritual strivings. This second essay with the title "Remarks on the Historical Developments of Contemporary Art" appeared for the first time in 1911 in the polemical *In Battle over Art (Im Kampf um die Kunst).* That text delivers an answer by art historians, art dealers, and artists to the "Protest of German Artists" that was initiated by the Worpsweder landscape painter Carl Vinnen and published in April of that year. In that pamphlet, Vinnen had criticized the alleged overestimation of French art by gallery owners and museum directors and warned urgently against an "undue estrangement" or "excessive contamination" (*Überfremdung*) of modern German painting because of its orientation on foreign models. The initiative for the counterpublication issued from Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky; it was also Kandinsky who turned to Worringer with the request that he collaborate on the book and at first even offered him the position as its editor. Worringer turned down the editorship; he did not feel himself to have sufficient

"moral weight" for such a task.[33] Nonetheless he contributed an article to the undertaking.

While most of the other authors of this polemic let it suffice to reject or refute the reproaches raised by Vinnen, Worringer used the opportunity to test his intellectual construct and his ideas about the "volition" of his own epoch on works of French and German avant-garde art. He imputed to them the same objectives that he thought to have already located for the artistic styles of older generations of artists. He also saw in the new direction in the arts primarily a countercurrent to Impressionism; the mainspring of this reaction would be the wish for "overcoming the subjective and arbitrary and what is only individually determined," for the "urge to objectivity," and for "struggling toward synthesis" ("Remarks," 94). The simplifications of form among the new artists, their recourse to "primitive" forms of expression, resulted from the general discontentment with modern culture:

> Today we certainly cannot return ourselves [*zurückschrauben*], forcefully and artificially, back to the level of primitive mankind, but what arises in us today beneath the surface is ultimately a reaction not only to Impressionism, but also to the entire preceding development in which we find ourselves since the European Renaissance and whose point of departure and direction can be broadly captured by Burckhardt's lapidary term about the discovery of the individual. The great wealth of external knowledge of prior epochs has left us impoverished and from this feeling of poverty we impose today certain demands on art that correspond roughly to those that primitive mankind naively posed. ("Remarks," 95)

For all that, Worringer's defense of the young artists seemed rather subdued. He spoke carefully of "principled partisanship" and of the "will to an understanding" and named their works "experiments, unarticulated sounds," that they have first to work through to a clear formulation. Whereas in the paintings of Ferdinand Hodler or Hans von Marées he found a concrete ideal, he saw in Expressionism a disposition that he accepted only as a "necessity of historical development" ("Remarks," 99). Basically he saw in Expressionism a transitional solution, a "drawing strength out of the concentrated reservoirs of the past." Thereafter, art would have to find its way back, strengthened, to a "more narrow tradition and with that, to itself once again."[34]

Despite his distanced manner of viewing the matter, the art historian entered with this article into the field of vision of the Expressionists, who subsequently also discovered for themselves his other scholarly works. Above all, the authors of the *Blue Rider Almanac (Der Blaue Reiter)* recognized and utilized the opportunities that Worringer's intellectual construct held for the Expressionist movement; his scholarly findings gave their own theoretical efforts much greater weight. The idea that a suprapersonal "artistic volition" *(Kunstwollen)* and not the "capability" *(Können)* of individual artists marked the cultural expressions of an epoch, assured the Expressionist version of modernism an existential justification that had been denied it by contemporary critics. It became a "necessity of historical development" that arose out of the psychic requirements of the epoch and from which the individual could hardly remove him or herself.[35] And the equation of abstract art, a spiritual worldview, and Nordic urge to abstraction not only made this tendency in the arts appealing to a conservatively inclined audience, which could detect here the first step toward a renewal of German art; it also approximated the ideological conceptions of the artists themselves. Thus, Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky defined their creative work in antithesis to Impressionism and as a reaction to modern industrial society. Just like Worringer and the conservative cultural reformers, they also hoped for the dawning of a new spiritual period, for which they considered themselves advocates. Also, they preferred the paintings of Hans von Marées, Ferdinand Hodler, and even Hans Thoma, to the art of Max Liebermann, which they felt was merely sensual.[36] By appealing to Worringer's antagonistic model of historical development, Expressionism could establish itself during the First World War as the national movement of opposition to international Impressionism (of mainly French extraction).[37] Already one soon saw, in a mistaken understanding of the historical delineation in Worringer's works, a "theoretical introduction to the most recent artistic strivings," even, moreover, the "productive stimulus to the creativity of numerous young artists."[38]

The attitude of Worringer toward the new art was even then admittedly ambivalent, though he had already long since become the figurehead of the Expressionist movement. He sympathized without reservation only with their anti-Impressionistic, later also their nationalistic, "sentiments" *(Gesinnung)*[39]—not, however, with their own artistic concept. In 1918 he turned down the request by Carl George Heise to review a painting by Conrad Felixmüller, with the reasoning: "Understand me correctly: I affirm the world that resides

behind this painting, not the painting."[40] His engagement for Expressionism, as he further clarified, had little to do with aesthetic appreciation in a traditional sense; rather he considered himself more a "believer in a living development": "If I don't believe in an art that goes on eternally in the usual, traditional sense, I do believe in an eternally living, progressively developing humanity that creates for itself ever new forms of expression, whether we call it art or not" (169).

Two years later, in his famous lecture on "Questions about Contemporary Art" (Künstlerische Zeitfragen),[41] Worringer retracted this confession of absolute solidarity with his contemporaries. Now he took definitive distance to Expressionist painting and sculpture, and declared them both a false development into mannerism that only appeared to propel them into a position at the forefront of contemporary sensibility. Works of art, however, do not reveal the worldview of the recent past; rather, it is to be found in philosophy and in scholarship: "Why are we still looking for the creative sensuality of our time in paintings [*Malbildern*] when it resides in works of intellect [*Denkbildern*]? Not in the fine arts, but rather in the spiritual-intellectual extensions of knowledge . . . lie the true artistic achievements of our time" (25). With this polemical turn, Worringer drew a sharp line of separation between his works and the Expressionist artists who cited them for authority. He reproached the artists for having failed utterly with respect to the broader cultural turn toward a new intellectuality *(Geistigkeit)*. In contrast, he counted his own publications among the positive productions of the Expressionist period. Whereas art had produced empty pathos when it claimed to focus spiritual energies, scholarship, and especially art history, with the help of a "suprascholarly ability for intimation and empathy" (26), had done the work of the plastic arts and developed spiritual visions:

> And here there is at work a spiritual urge to expand, which embodies the phenomenon of Expressionism more faithfully and more appropriately for the time than does Expressionism in painting. In these obsolete forms of painterly activity, that [creative] tension of the sovereign spirit has exhausted itself, as it were, upon unsuitable objects and has only been able to produce an unconvincing display of fictions in the airless space of stylistic experimentation; [that (creative) tension of the sovereign spirit] is now really productive and legitimate here, in the area of theoretical knowledge, of scholarly lucidity and vision, and is finally no less stimulating than it was in the

> half-baked commotion of our ungratifying artistic exertions. ("Zeitfragen," 27)

The art historian, who had begun his career as poet and as literary critic with a claim to artistry, has fully reversed himself. Art is dead. Long live art history!

NOTES

1. Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik* (Munich: Piper, 1911), 11; *Form Problems in the Gothic,* or in Herbert Read's translation, *Form in Gothic* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1964). Page references are to Read's edition, though the wording has been changed where necessary. The reference to the original German edition follows in brackets. Otherwise, all quotations from Worringer's works are by the present translator and page numbers refer to the original editions as cited. The following discussion is based on the first chapter of my book, *Der Geist der Gotik und die expressionistische Kunst. Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttheorie, 1911–1925* (Munich: Silke Schreiber, 1990).

2. The two-page bibliography that Worringer added to his dissertation, which he edited and published on his own (Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie.* Inaugural-Dissertation to achieve the Degree of Doctor of the Philosophical Faculty at the University of Bern, Neuwied, 1907), is missing in the editions published by Piper in Munich from 1908 on.

3. Already the first (and for a long time the only) reviewer of *Abstraction and Empathy,* the poet Paul Ernst, emphasized the topicality of the book for the present: it provided a "historico-philosophical" explanation for the cultural manifestations of the present; review in *Kunst und Künstler* 6 (1908), 529.

4. Elisabeth Erdmann-Macke, *Erinnerung an August Macke* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1962), 211. Also the painter Gabriele Münter, for many years the companion of Wassily Kandinsky, credited Worringer's works with a decisive significance for Expressionism. In a letter for his birthday in 1951, she wrote: "We know one another now ever since the beginnings of the postimpressionist developments in art, for which you helped prepare the ground. From those early years, I still have my old copy of your book *Abstraction and Empathy,* which had such an animating effect at that time" (Letter of 13 January 1951; GNM–ZR ABK 146/377).

5. Paul Fechter, *Menschen auf meinen Wegen* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1955), 292.

6. Walter Müller-Wulckow, "Wilhelm Worringers Formprobleme der Gotik," *Das Kunstblatt* 1 (1917), 216–18, here 216.

7. Richard Hamann, "Rezension zu Wilhelm Worringers 'Formproblemen der Gotik,'" *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 10 (1915), 357–61, here 360f.

8. Geoffrey Perkins, *Contemporary Theory of Expressionism* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1974), 118.

9. Reinhard Piper, *Mein Leben als Verleger: Vormittag–Nachmittag* (Munich: Piper, 1964), 277. Worringer himself characterized the question of how much of an influence his theory had had on the development of modernism, of whether it had served as pacesetter for abstract art, as "inconclusive [*unentscheidbar*] in a historical sense":

> I had at that time a loose personal relationship to Marc and Kandinsky; nonetheless

> I recall no conversation that would have brought the matter to a pointed and definite question of either-or. In any case, a direct correlation between the book and artistic practice only emerged later in our historical understanding [of the period]. Whereby one must not forget that my dissertation at that time, which contained the Abstraction and Empathy antinomy, primarily pertained only to historical investigations and interpretations. (Letter to Arnold Gehlen, undated, around 1958. GNM–ZR ABK 146/398; see also Arnold Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder. Zur Soziologie und Ästhetik der modernen Malerei* [Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1986], 116.)

Worringer first made a claim to have provided an "initial theoretical spark for the fundamental reorientation, . . . that occurred in the artistic practice of our contemporaries" (16) in the foreword to the 1959 edition of *Abstraction and Empathy* (repr., Munich: Piper, 1981).

10. Worringer dates his writing of *Abstraction and Empathy* to "Summer–Fall 1905," after the igniting idea came to him at Easter of the same year in the Trocadéro Museum in Paris (GNM–ZB ABK 146, 7). According to his own recollections, he received his doctorate in June 1906 (according to the resumé in his dissertation, however, only on 12 January 1907) in Bern under the direction of Artur Weese.

11. The detailed chronology of these publications can be found in his estate [*Nachlaß*] (GNM Personalia 1 and ZR ABK 146, 7); cf. further, Worringer's letter of 23 September 1944 to his publisher Reinhard Piper, in Piper, *Briefwechsel mit Autoren und Künstlern, 1903–1953* (Munich: Piper, 1979), 458–61.

12. Wilhelm Worringer, "Zum Problem der modernen Architektur," *Neudeutsche Bauzeitung* 7 (1911), 486–500, here 496.

13. Wilhelm Worringer, *Lukas Cranach* (Munich: Piper, 1908), 36.

14. Wilhelm Worringer, "Moderne Idealisten," *Berner Rundschau* 2 (1907–8), 737–42, 739f.

15. As stated in Worringer's review of the Marées-Exhibition in Munich in 1909: "Yes, this certainty impresses itself upon the viewer as the most surprising and most unmodern: art is not so international as we believed it to be. [Instead] it turns also back to national limitations, if one can call it so, with ultimate and highest effects that cannot be effaced from any general formation" (Worringer, "Die Marées-Ausstellung der Münchner Sezession," *Kunst und Künstler* 7 [1909], 231–32, 231).

16. Compare, for instance, Richard Benz, *Die Renaissance. Das Verhängnis der deutschen Cultur*, Blätter für deutsche Art und Kunst 1 (Jena: Diederichs, 1915).

17. Richard Hamann, *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst* (Marburg: Verlag des Kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars, 1923; 1st ed., 1907), 153. Worringer was most familiar with Hamann's critique of Impressionism; he had reviewed the book in "Moderne Idealisten" in the *Berner Rundschau* (Worringer, see note 14) and also in the *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 1 (1908), 338–40.

18. Hamann, *Der Impressionismus*, 150.

19. Karl Lamprecht, *Deutsche Geschichte*. Cited in Worringer, "Moderne Idealisten" (1907–08), 741.

20. Wilhelm Dilthey, "Gotthold Ephraim Lessing," in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1906), 1–136, here 136.

21. On the ideas of the conservative reformers, see Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Epochen deutscher Kultur von 1870 bis zur Gegenwart*, 5 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1977): 4:212–20.

22. Adolf Bartels, "Konservativ, nicht reaktionär!" in *Die Heimat, 1900*, 3–13, 10.

23. At his own admission Worringer had decided relatively late upon an academic career; beforehand he had sought a career as a writer, had written poems, and belonged to a

literary circle in Munich surrounding the philosopher Paul Stern, the poet Karl Schloss, and the art historian, poet, and author of a monograph on Stefan George, Franz Dülberg. Cf. Worringer's letter of 23 September 1944 to Reinhard Piper, in Piper, *Briefwechsel*, 458.

24. Wilhelm Worringer, "Frank Wedekind. Ein Essay," in *Münchener Almanach. Ein Sammelbuch neuer deutscher Dichtung*, ed. Karl Schloss (Munich: Piper, 1905), 55–64; 64.

25. Wilhelm Worringer, "Die Marées-Ausstellung in der Münchener Sezession," *Der Cicerone* 1 (1909), 64–66: "For France, Impressionism was classical, not for Germany. We are indebted to it for a great education in verisimilitude and a lasting enrichment and refinement of our artistic range of expression, but it did not set free the actual expressive forces of our people [*unseres Volkes*]. A more or less strong feeling of discontentedness remains and this feeling makes us ready for Marées, for whose volition [*Wollen*] our eyes are open for the first time" (65).

26. Worringer, "Die Marées-Ausstellung," *Kunst und Künstler* (1909), 231f.

27. Cf. Worringer's review of Adolf Hildebrand's works (Adolf Hildebrand, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* [Straßburg: Heitz, 1909], in *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 3 [1910], 212) and his discussion of the exhibition "München 1908" (Wilhelm Worringer, "Die Ausstellung München 1908," *Masken* 4 [1908], 19–24, 21f.).

28. Cf. Bushart, *Der Geist der Gotik*, 40.

29. Worringer, "Marées," *Der Cicerone* (1909), 66. The idea that not the invention of forms, but rather the "attitude" *(Gesinnung)* of contemporary art should serve as a model had been introduced into discussion at the beginning of the century by Julius Langbehn in his highly regarded *Rembrandt als Erzieher: Von einem Deutschen* (Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1890).

30. Wilhelm Worringer, *Die altdeutsche Buchillustration* (Munich: Piper, 1912), 8.

31. Cf. Artur Weese, *Ferdinand Hodler* (Bern: Francke, 1909), 43–57, and 64. Just how lively was the exchange of ideas between the two scholars is clear from the letter in which Weese reports to his former student of his upcoming lecture:

> Next Monday I will give a lecture in Zürich on Impressionism and eurhythmics. To be exact, —about Amiet, van Gogh and Ferdinand Hodler. A lecture from Hamann to Worringer. I've let myself be carried back and forth in the stream and countercurrent of ideas between the poles of empathy and abstraction, until I've become dizzy. I've been hunting along the border between two worlds and am happy to meet you at each turn; indeed I was also annoyed that you are not here right now. . . . To get over that absence I'll go to visit Hodler in Geneva. I was astonished at what an exact thinker he is. He articulates his ideas like a theoretician, somewhat obscure and rough, but excellent. Everything revolves around unity, parellelism, permanence and symmetry. But I said to him, just as the Parisians have named their new art "Impressionism" after a painting of Monet's, so too I want to call his whole manner, his principle, his style, "Eurhythmics." He was pleased. (Letter of 8 January 1909, reprinted in Artur Weese, *Ausgewählte Briefe, 1905–1934* [Bern: Jahresgabe der Bernischen Kunstgesellschaft für 1935, 1935], IV)

On the relationship between Weese and Worringer, see Hans Christoph von Tavel, "Der Lehrstuhl für Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Bern von den Anfängen bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg," *Jahrbuch des Schweizerischen Instituts für Kunstwissenschaft* (1972–73), 33–58, 47–50. Possibly, Weese could have also arranged for a meeting between Hodler and Worringer. In his correspondence with Wassily Kandinsky, Worringer mentions an (unsuccessful) attempt to meet Hodler in Geneva; cf. his note from 17 April 1911 and the card from

26 April 1911 (Gabriele Münter-Stiftung and Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich).

32. Worringer, "Entwicklungsgeschichtliches zur modernsten Kunst," in *Im Kampf um die Kunst* (Munich: Piper, 1911), 92–99; here 94.

33. Letter to Kandinsky from 17 April 1911 (Gabriele Münter-Stiftung and Johannes Eichner-Stiftung, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich).

34. "Remarks," 97. Also: "Since this modern primitivity should not be a definitive stage. . . . This primitivity should rather be a transition, a long respite to catch our breath before speaking the new and decisive word for the future. Out of what, for the time being, are still experiments and unarticulated sounds, will be wrought the clear word, —and how strong can this art of the future become that, which after working out the most elemental and powerful language of forms, will return to a more narrow tradition and thus once again, to itself." That Worringer kept an extreme distance from the "affected primitivity" of modernism is also apparent in his volume *Altdeutsche Buchillustration*. There he warns not only of historical longings ("direct, obvious recourse to past means of artistic expression that are foreign to us"), but also of a new archaism: "Since art is, in both cases, forced back into an abstractly expressive language that it has since lost [*verlernt*]" (7).

35. Cf. Bushart, *Geist der Gotik*, 60f.

36. Marc named Hodler and Marées in one breath with Kandinsky as forerunners of the new art in Germany (Franz Marc, "Zwei Bilder" in *Der Blaue Reiter*, ed. Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky [Munich: Piper, 1912], 8f.). And Kandinsky complained in 1912 to Marc about the lack of recognition for Gabriele Münter's paintings with the words: "Today one 'understands' a French brushstroke. A German brushstroke can sound however it wants to, as loudly as it wants—it falls only on deaf ears. . . . Or does it seem too 'unrefined' for the German heart, imbued with French jargon, to hear that German resonance? I posed the same question already to Liebermann with respect to Hans Thoma, whom he, the dear man [i.e., as pun, 'der Liebe Mann'], disdains. Such matters can lead to despair" (Letter from 18 March 1912, quoted from *Wassily Kandinsky–Franz Marc. Briefwechsel*, ed. Klaus Lankheit [Munich: Piper, 1983], 144).

37. Cf. Magdalena Bushart, "Der Expressionismus, ein deutscher Nationstil?" *Merkur* 45 (1991), 455–62.

38. Commentary in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on the lecture "Bemerkungen zur neuen Kunst" that Worringer held in 1917 in Frankfurt. Quoted in Herwarth Walden, "Bemerkungen zu Worringer," *Der Sturm* 8 (1917–18), 178–79; here 178.

39. Thus Worringer emphasized the separation of the German Expressionists from the "subconsciously binding romanic-classical view of art" and their recourse to national forms of expression (Wilhelm Worringer, "Künstlerische Zukunftsfragen," *Kunst und Künstler* 14 [1916], 259–64, here 262) and later spoke of "a dark new racial and communal feeling" that marked their art (Worringer, "Vorwort," in *Katalog Freie Sezession* [Berlin: Freie Sezession, 1918] 9f., here 10).

40. Letter to Carl Georg Heise, 8 August 1918, as quoted in Jenns E. Howoldt, "Krise des Expressionismus. Anmerkungen zu vier Briefen Wilhelm Worringers an Carl Georg Heise," *Idea* 8 (1989), 159–73, here 169.

41. Wilhelm Worringer, "Künstlerische Zeitfragen." Lecture held on 19 October 1920 in the local chapter of the German Goethe Society. (Munich: Bruckmann, 1921).