

Anny E. Popp, Art Historian of the Vienna School: Disappeared and Forgotten?*



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SYNOPSIS

This essay explores the works of art historian Anny Edeltrauth Popp (1891–?). One of the leading experts of the 1920s and 1930s on Michelangelo and the art of the Italian Renaissance, Popp seems to have disappeared without a trace in 1936. In the years 1919–1922, she published several studies with a distinctive and inventive analytical-hermeneutical approach to art history; the studies themselves deal with Cézanne’s style, Ferdinand Hodler’s compositional principles, Donatello’s relief style, and two artistic methods that have come to be known as *Steigerung* and *Akzentuierung* (‘gradation’ and ‘accentuation’) in the art of ancient Egypt.

KEYWORDS

Vienna School of Art History; Anny E. Popp; Italian Renaissance; Paul Cézanne; Ferdinand Hodler; Leonardo da Vinci.

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Among the students of Max Dvořák (1874–1921) — an art historian and celebrated member of the Vienna School of Art History — there is one whose name can be found throughout German and Austrian art history journals of the 1920s and 1930s¹: Anny Edeltrauth Popp (1891–?). At that time Popp was at the nexus of scholarly research on Michelangelo and her writings have been frequently cited in discussions on Italian Renaissance art.² In 1929, fierce public controversy arose between Popp and Erwin Panofsky that drew considerable attention in art history circles, and that would come

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- 1 Namely, *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst, Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Institutes* (Vienna), *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst, Belvedere*, *The Burlington Magazine*, and others.
- 2 The more current publications in which the works of Anny E. Popp are discussed include Maurer (2013, s. 51–72), Nova — Schreurs (2003), Poeschke (2005, p. 145), Fehrenbach (2006, pp. 84–113), Schumacher (2007), and Gütthner (2010).



to be considered as ‘probably the most famous debate ever on a drawing by Michelangelo’ (Maurer 2013, p. 62).

Yet the person of Anny E. Popp seems to have disappeared without a trace. The biographical data on Popp is quite meagre: born in 1891 in Ostrava (in what is today Czech Republic; Tietze-Conrat 2015/III, p. 60), she studied art history and classical archaeology at Vienna University, earning her doctorate in 1915 as a student of Max Dvořák with a dissertation on 16th century Florentine sculpture (Tietze-Conrat 2015/II, p. 125). In her early twenties, Popp lived in Munich and later moved to Vienna. The last trace of her life story (as an intellectual) brings us to the November 1936 issue of London’s *Burlington Magazine*, which features her study *Two Torsi by Michelangelo*. Perhaps we should find it symbolic that the last research published by Popp concerns truncated representations of the human body; it also happens to mark the premature end of both her scholarly career and personal biography (in any case, what we know of it).

In 1919, Popp published four studies that demonstrate her distinctive and inventive analytical-hermeneutic approach to art history: on Cézanne’s style, on Ferdinand Hodler’s principles of composition, on Donatello’s relief style, and on the concept of two artistic methods — *Steigerung* and *Akzentuierung* (‘gradation’ and ‘accentuation’) — in the art of ancient Egypt. The choice of these topics is characteristic of the Vienna School, which, in the late 19th century, began developing a theory and methodology in dialogue with current developments in modern art. In Popp’s studies, which juxtapose the artistic tradition of ancient Egypt to Renaissance and modern art, we read about ‘vibrating life’ and ‘stream of force’ (‘Kräftestrom’), about ‘pulsating rhythm’, the relative forces of natural elements, and the actuation of psychological and artistic energy in the use of various materials. The parallel between natural forces and artistic creation has its origin in art treatises of the Renaissance (Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.). According to Alberti, for example, the painting is imbued with divine *forza* (Alberti 1877/II, p. 89), and Giorgio Vasari considers *forza* as one of the main criteria for artistic quality. Riegl’s theory of *Kunstwollen*, influenced by discoveries in physics around the turn of the century, also resonates with the concept of natural forces. In addition to the theories of Henri Bergson, Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, and other ‘life philosophers’ that permeate Popp’s views of art history, we find a special affinity with Helmuth Plessner’s hermeneutics of nature, particularly his theories of human expression and expressiveness from the early 1920s, which coincide strikingly with Popp’s ideas.

THE DYNAMISATION OF SPACE BY COLOUR, RHYTHM, AND THE ‘INFINITE ACTUATION OF FORCE’: CÉZANNE AND HODLER

In her essay on Cézanne’s style, Popp analyses formal aspects of Cézanne’s work (the dynamics of space as a function of colour, the colour determination of objects, and the relationship of Cézanne’s art to Impressionism³) in order to reconstruct the art-

3 Popp’s study on Cézanne raises particular issue with J. Meier-Graefe’s book *Cézanne und sein Kreis* (‘Cézanne and his circle’; 1918). In a footnote to his essay ‘Zu Cézannes geschich-



ist's manner of conveying *Welterlebnis*, or 'experience of the world'. In the text on Hodler's principles of composition, she emphasises the law of parallelism as 'core of his worldview' ('Kern seiner Weltanschauung'; Popp 1919b, p. 49), with specific reference to his efforts to depict the elementary force that drives the individual and human society in general. The artist thus depicts characters in his paintings, as Popp demonstrates, in rhythmic sequence. We can see this in a number of paintings: *The Tired of Life* (*Die Lebensmüden*, 1892/1893) at the Neue Pinakothek in Munich; *The Day* (*Der Tag*, 1905) at Kunstmuseum Bern; the monumental painting *Unanimity*⁴ (1913) at Hanover City Hall; the drawing *View to Infinity* (*Der Blick ins Ewige*, 1914), Kunsthaus Zurich etc. For Hodler, the finite individual becomes part of the never-ending circular motion of an infinite rhythm (*ibid.*, p. 50). We find here not only a contemporary philosophy of life — the notion of 'rhythmic pulsation' for instance, emphasises the vitality of feeling and experience — but also Hodler's 'feeling for society' ('Gefühl für die Sozietät', *ibid.*) against the backdrop of war-torn humanity.⁵ According to Popp, however, the intention underlying these efforts has to do with expressing the 'infinite actuation of force' ('das unendliche Wirken der Kraft') as the elemental energy of a human being who is aware of being able to turn it to his or her own use, as a means for conveying shape, as a formative force. Hodler therefore invents symbolic and allegorical figures to express the struggle with and subjugation of this power: in his painting *Wilhelm Tell* (1897), for instance, *The Woodcutter* (*Der Holzfäller*, 1910), and *The Mower* (*Der Mäher*, 1910). In *The Woodcutter*, Popp writes, 'we see how each individual form submits to this idea: in the arch of a crouched leg, providing a broad base for centring the downward rush of force that breaks the resistance of a sharply vertical tree, falling with a groan. It is always simply a matter of clearly showing what is absolutely necessary, the force that created this scene; everything else, by contrast, must recede' (*ibid.*).⁶ It was precisely this artistic metaphor of human energy and will-power as it springs forth that impressed Edmund Husserl, who hung *The Woodcutter*

tlicher Stellung' ('On Cézanne's historical position'), Charles de Tolnay writes that 'despite the fundamental differences in method, Cézanne's conception of the world is basically the same as that of the Impressionists, as A. E. Popp alone among all who have written on Cézanne has recognised in her excellent essay (*Bild. Künste*, Vienna 1919, pp. 185 ff.)' ('Daß trotz prinzipieller Unterschiede der Gestaltungsmethode Cézannes Weltauffassung im Grunde mit der des Impressionisten übereinstimmt, hat unter allen, die über Cézanne geschrieben haben, bisher allein A. E. Popp in ihrem ausgezeichneten Aufsatz (*Bild. Künste*, Wien 1919, S. 185 ff.) erkannt'; Tolnay 1933, p. 93).

4 The painting depicts Dietrich Arnsborg (1475–1558) surrounded by the citizens of Hanover in 1533, as they swear an oath of loyalty to Martin Luther and the Reformation. The painting can be seen online at <<https://www.wikiart.org/en/ferdinand-hodler/unity-1911>> (accessed 02.09.2021).

5 Ferdinand Hodler died 19 May 1918, five months before the end of WWI.

6 'Bei dem Holzfäller z. B. sehen wir, wie jede einzelne Form sich diesem Gedanken unterordnet: die auseinandergebogenen Beine, die eine breite Basis für die Zielsicherheit der niedersausenden Kraft gewähren, durch die der Widerstand der steilen Vertikale des ächzend umfallenden Baumes gebrochen wird. Immer handelt es sich nur darum, das knapp Notwendige, die Kraft, die diese Erscheinung schuf, klar vor Augen zu führen; alles andere muss dagegen weichen'.



(alongside a reproduction of *Jacob's Struggle with the Angel* by Rembrandt) in his otherwise sparsely decorated study (Thiel 1997, p. 82); and it is precisely this painting by Hodler that Eugen Fink, an assistant to Husserl, describes in his dissertation⁷ as 'exemplifying the givenness of the image' ('exemplarische Bildgegebenheit'; Fink 1930, p. 305) and as an example of the specifics of the 'world of images' ('Bildwelt'; *ibid.*, pp. 305–306). Fink must have known *The Woodcutter* by seeing it in Husserl's study — as 'a painting hanging on the wall' ('ein Bild, das da an der Wand hangt'; *ibid.*, p. 305).

It is not uncommon to find the terms 'force', 'natural force', 'organism', and 'rhythm', which serve as the semantic cornerstones of Popp's argument, in the discourse on art theory and history around the turn of the century, in large part as a reaction to revolutionary discoveries in the natural sciences, especially in physics (Planck's quantum theory, for instance) and physiology.⁸ In his posthumous *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste* ('Historical grammar of the visual arts'), Riegl considers artistic creation (*Kunstschaffen*) as a driving force ('treibende Gewalt') in a 'creative contest with nature' ('Wettschaffen mit der Natur'; Riegl 1966, p. 23).

When writing her study, Popp was undoubtedly familiar with reflections on the power and dynamics of art in the works of Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin, August Schmarsow, and other leading thinkers of her time. Yet she develops her own interpretations for such concepts as 'organism', 'rhythm', 'dynamics', and 'power' (in the sense of German *Kraft* and *Gewalt*), especially in her engagement with modern art. Here, Popp's work strikingly prefigures Deleuze's conception of 'painting forces' in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2003), which render visible what are in the first place 'invisible forces', or affects — emotions, aggressions, instincts, passions, fears — by embodying them in forms and colours and transmitting them to the viewer. It is the action of these forces as they 'deform' the body that Deleuze, following Cézanne, calls 'sensation'. Their condition is strength, and the goal of art is to paint forces (Deleuze 2003, p. 34) as a 'pathic' quality, enabling communication between individual sensory experiences: 'It is in this way that music must render nonsonorous forces sonorous, and painting must render invisible forces visible' (*ibid.*, p. 57). Rhythm meanwhile is the elemental force that 'appears as music when it invests the auditory level' — yet the *very same force* will appear as painting when instead 'it invests the visual level' (*ibid.*, p. 42).

In Popp's treatise on Cézanne's style, she shows how Daumier's way of building composition handling colour⁹ provided Cézanne with his first solution to the spatial dynamics of his paintings as 'movement of forces in space', a notion entirely of his own invention which Popp defines as building the 'dynamics of space through colour' ('Dynamik des Raumes durch die Farbe'; Popp 1919a, p. 178). This concept of colour is a distinctive feature of Cézanne's style of his youth and represents something 'funda-

7 *Vergegenwärtigung und Bild. Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Unwirklichkeit* ('Representation and image: contributions to the phenomenology of unreality'; 1930).

8 See the introductory study by Fehrenbach, Felfe, and Leonhard on the topic of dynamics in art (2018, pp. IX–XIX).

9 In this context, Popp presents striking contrasts between light and darkness, sharp silhouettes as a means of dismantling space, and the slapdash application of a dense, pasty layer of paint as a way of restoring the dimensional forces of space (Popp 1919a, p. 178).

mentally new', in which light effects and the sharp movements of objects, rendered with the sweeping curve of his brush strokes — van Gogh too, Popp adds, adopted this method (*ibid.*, p. 183) — 'provokes the eye to move, giving the impression of shifting forces, and always at the same time an impression of the restless intensity of passion: because forces are not in the space in which objects stand; it is the objects themselves that must move' (*ibid.*).

It is a similar case with rhythm in Hodler's compositions, which generates division, intervals — Popp mentions *The Tired of Life* —, and whose bearers are rendered as characters, each with its own specific meaning. An 'endless rhythm of the world' ('unendlicher Rhythmus der Welt', Popp 1919b, p. 47) seems to extend laterally to infinity, suggested by the 'eurythmy' of parallel figures on either side of the painting. In her study *Steigerung, Akzentuierung und aphoristische Formensprache als Kunstmittel der Ägypter* ('Gradation, accentuation, and aphoristic morphology as an artistic means of the Egyptians'), published almost simultaneously with Hodler's treatise, Popp mentions that the motif of rhythmic movement which seems to be moving forward (as in the painting *Jena Students Depart for the War of Liberation 1813, 1908*), as well as the motif of the opening and closing group of characters, is inspired by the depiction of movement on ancient Egyptian reliefs. In this context, Hodler shows that Egyptian art is closer to him than Greek art (Popp 1919d, p. 152).

Rhythm connects the movement of individual characters, providing the connections that link together all parts of the composition (as in the final version of Hodler's monumental painting *View to Infinity*). The characters themselves are 'always individual beings, individual organisms' ('immer Einzelwesen, Eizelorganismen', Popp 1919b, p. 49). Rhythm is one of the elementary sensations of humankind, common to all people as a 'driving force' ('treibende Kraft', *ibid.*, p. 50); Hodler introduces rhythm into his painting experimentally through silhouettes and contrasts (figures appear to have been cut out and glued to the background; *ibid.*, p. 54). Rhythm is a manifestation of the vital flow of life and eternal return, as in *The Day*, where 'the circular repetition of movement makes [the viewer] feel the infinity of rhythms' ('die kreisende Wiederkehr der Bewegung die Unendlichkeit der Rhythmen fühlbar macht'; *ibid.*, p. 50).

Popp's way of conceptualising the modalities of sensory qualities in their unity and interplay, as synergies of optical, acoustic, and tactile perception, is remarkably close to Helmuth Plessner's anthropological-philosophical theory of the unity of the senses in *Die Einheit der Sinne. Grundlinien einer Ästhesiologie des Geistes* ('The unity of the senses: elements of an aesthesiology of spirit'; 1923). In her reflections on, and formulations of, the relationship between colour and space, dynamisation of space by colour, rhythmisation of composition in painting (as well as sculpture and architecture) — by placing these relationships in the context of 'melody' —, Popp returns again and again to the notions of 'reality of the world' ('Wirklichkeit der Welt'), 'understanding of the world' ('Weltauffassung'), 'rhythm of the world' ('Rhythmus der Welt'), etc. Through these concepts, Popp introduces a specific isomorphism between sensory phenomena and objects with their specifically artistic representation, materialisation (whether truly or seemingly) of immaterial phenomena, and realities of the world. Popp considers Cézanne's observation of colour phenomena, for example, as the starting point for his painterly grasp of the world ('Weltauffassung'),



as well as his efforts, knowledge, and experience of the world realised immediately by transforming the object into a 'colour phenomenon' ('Farberscheinung'). That is why Cézanne constantly honed the sensitivity of the eye, 'intensified observation' and 'raised the culture of the eye to all other functions of life' (Popp 1919a, p. 186).

The subtitle of Plessner's 1923 work on the 'unity of the senses' already indicates that he will elaborate his theory within the context of an 'aesthesiology of spirit' ('Ästhesiologie des Geistes'), thus clearly distinguishing his work from other studies founded on empirical (psychological, physiological) observation (Plessner 1980, p 32). Plessner proceeds to examine specific functions of the intellect, defining three basic areas where it functions in consistent cooperation with sensory factors, namely, art, speech and science. These are also the areas in which Plessner sees the basic forms of human relationship to the world, and the human individual to him- or herself. Sensory perception together with its modalities and qualities represent a 'proper archetypal phenomenon' ('das wahre Urphänomen'; *ibid.*, p. 33), which connects *nature to culture*. He also elaborates his aesthesiology of the senses, on the basis of a correlation between *feeling* and *meaning*, as an inquiry into aesthetics. Plessner shows, for instance, the correlation between sensory perception, bodily experience, and the reception of a work of art using the example of architecture: 'Close contact, reciprocating movement, tactility, volume, a thousand ways to live in and through attitudes that give the silent image of spaces and surfaces a direct relationship to oneself. This is how to understand architecture. We still have to feel such an image on our own body and in its ideal form of expression in order to appreciate the meaning of a building' (*ibid.*, p. 267).¹⁰

When Popp writes about the 'movement of forces in space', the dynamics of which — in Cézanne's paintings — is made up of colour, or about feeling rhythm as one of the 'elemental sensations' (in Hodler), or when she explains how Cézanne's use of colour provokes the eye to move, giving the impression of shifting forces on the surface of the image, she draws our attention to the interplay of kinaesthetic modes: sight, movement, body posture, rhythm, etc. Popp here anticipates Henri Maldiney's 'aesthetics of rhythm' — and as with Popp (not coincidentally), Maldiney also bases his ideas on the works of Cézanne. 'Art is the truth of feeling,' he writes, 'for rhythm is the truth of *aisthesis*'¹¹ (Maldiney 1973, p. 153). Maldiney, who studied philosophy and art history, was strongly influenced by the phenomenological-anthropological philosophy and psychology of Erwin Straus, Eugène Minkowski, and Ludwig Binswanger. His emphasis on 'pathic' communication with phenomena on the basis of feeling echoes Plessner's aesthetics. Building on the phenomenology of Erwin Straus — and based on the reception of Cézanne's paintings — Maldiney emphasises: 'Rather, feeling has its own truth. Seeing, hearing, and other forms of sense perception not only convey sense impressions with imaginative value, but the

10 'Einschmiegung, Mitgehen, Abtasten, Ausgefülltsein, die tausend Arten, in Haltungen zu leben und durch Haltungen dem schweigenden Bild der Räume und Flächen eine unmittelbare Beziehung zu mir zu geben, sind die Wege, Architektur zu verstehen. Stets müssen wir solche Abbildung auf den eigenen Leib und sein ideales Ausdruckssystem empfinden, um den Sinn eines Gebäudes auszukosten.'

11 'L'art est la vérité du sentir, parce que le rythme est la vérité de l'*aisthesis*'.

same colours and tones that the objects themselves reveal to us [...] We communicate with phenomena in a pathic way, the legitimacy of which at this moment pervades the phenomenal character of the whole world'¹² (Maldiney 1966, pp. 221–222). In *The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze elaborates a concept of rhythm, forces, opposition of diastole and systole that follows Maldiney's aesthetics and phenomenology of rhythms (Deleuze 2003, pp. 74–83). Already for Popp, Cézanne's basic rendering of form is not a function of varying light or dark values ('Helligkeits- und Dunkelheitswert') but of varying hues — or as Popp writes, 'colour contents' ('Farbgehalt'). Cézanne himself distinguishes between these two techniques, as Popp recalls, using the term 'modelling' to describe the variation of light and dark values and 'modulation' for the variation of hues that make up the base colour (Popp 1919a, p. 183). Considering the analogy between Cézanne and Bacon in *The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze writes: 'And perhaps this modulation of color is Cézanne's principal operation' (Deleuze 2003, p. 118).

GRADATION OF PLASTICITY AS THE MANIFEST FORM OF SPIRITUAL LIFE: DONATELLO'S 'AFFECTIVE' RELIEFS AND TECHNIQUE OF VERTICAL AND OBLIQUE HATCH MARKS

In her study 'Eine Alterszeichnung Donatellos?' ('A Drawing of Donatello's Age?'), Popp uses such terms as 'expressive form', 'stream of force' ('Kräftestrom'), 'rhythmic vibrations in space' ('rhythmisches Schwingen im Raum'), 'impression of vibrating life' ('Eindruck vibrierenden Lebens') to describe a sketch of the Pietà (British Museum London) believed to be one of Donatello's later works. The study was published (like her essay on Cézanne and Hodler) in a 1919 issue of the Viennese journal *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Institutes*, edited by Max Dvořák. Popp first considers Donatello's relief style, emphasising that while there is not sufficient evidence to claim with certainty that the sketch is Donatello's, it still presents us with the peculiarities of Donatello's style, especially in works of his late period (Popp 1919c, p. 61). But this is not her main point; what Popp proceeds to demonstrate, rather, is that while Donatello's relief style is fairly consistent between his early and middle periods, the style of his later period (she gives the example of the *Passion Pulpit* in Florence's Basilica di San Lorenzo) is strikingly different. Here, we see a significant gradation of plasticity: images that make up the background ('Fernbild') are layered in low relief and with little variance of depth, with the effect that they reflect only very subtle surface differences; by contrast, figures in the foreground are drawn in high relief ('Hochrelief'), so that they stand out conspicuously. It is as if Donatello had cut the figures on each individual layer out of cardboard, as Popp writes, and then arranged them one behind the other (ibid., p. 50). Furthermore, to exaggerate the depth of the foreground figures, Donatello tends to use sloping rather than vertical surfaces (ibid., p. 51).

12 'Das Empfinden hat vielmehr seine eigene Wahrheit. Das Sehen, das Hören, die anderen Sinne vermitteln uns nicht bloß sinnliche Eindrücke mit Vorstellungswert, sondern die gleichen Farben und die gleichen Töne, welche uns die Gegenstände erschließen [...]. Wir kommunizieren mit den Phänomenen auf eine pathische Weise, deren Gesetzmäßigkeit in diesem Augenblick den phänomenalen Charakter der ganzen Welt durchdringt'.



Popp goes on to demonstrate how Donatello transferred the technique of vertical hatches to his drawing style: the result is a 'vivid rhythmic alternation of form elements' ('Formelemente'), in which the 'impression of vibrating life' and 'active force to the highest power' crystallises in front of the viewer's eyes ('Eindruck vibrierenden Lebens', 'die Wirkungskraft zu höchster Potenz'; *ibid.*, p. 52). It is at this point that Popp turns her attention to a deeper internal relationship between the sketch and compositional elements of his reliefs (mainly the Pietà and *Deposition and Burial of Christ* from the pulpit of San Lorenzo). What characterises Donatello's late works is the 'system of forces' ('Kräftsystem') and 'stream of force' ('Kräftestrom') that permeate the relief, connecting its individual elements into an organic whole (*ibid.*, p. 55). It is a similar case with the sketch of the Pietà attributed to Donatello: the tangled lines ('Liniengewirr') in which the stream of force is manifest have their analogue in the elemental forces of nature that produce vortices (the impact of water on stone, for instance). According to Popp, however, the significance of this flow of forces can be found above all in its analogy to the 'psychological flow of forces' ('psychischer Kräfteverlauf'): the agonising pain of the Madonna, the collapsed figure of St John, and 'faith in despair' ('Wirbel der Verzweiflung') of St Magdalene (*ibid.*, p. 56).

Donatello thus transcends the specific naturalism of the 15th century, characterised by the congruence between unconscious ('unbewusste') plastic principles and fundamental mechanical laws that can be observed in the outside world (*ibid.*, p. 57). The innovation that appears in Donatello's late work is a parallelism between psychic phenomena and spiritual content, which results in a wealth of 'variations of expressive forms' ('Reichtum der Variationen der expressiven Formen') that are pushed to their limit (*ibid.*). What Donatello sought to portray in his works was a certain kind of spiritual life ('bestimmte Art des geistigen Lebens') with a great diversity of affects and characters, in this way anticipating the spirit of the Cinquecento. It is, as Popp argues, a new way of seeing the world, consisting in a detailed way of observing external phenomena and their connections, from the general to the unique, from great holistic composition to individual details, where the world becomes the subject of analysis and the artist approaches it with a 'keen focus on detail' ('Einstellung auf die scharfe Einzelbeobachtung'; *ibid.*, p. 59). From this point of view, the sketch of the Pietà does indeed reveal the hand of the artist, as he penetrates ever deeper, analytically, into every detail. Behind these formal elements, however, one detects the effect of a spiritual element, as if every line and feature were indication of a hidden psychic event.

Donatello's manner of artistic expression, style, and composition, as Popp shows, were later adopted by Botticelli, best exemplified by his paintings of the Pietà: *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (c.1490–1495) at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, and *Lamentation over the Dead Christ with the saints Girolamo, Pietro and Paolo* (c.1490–1492), at the Museo Poldi-Pezzoli in Milan.¹³ The paintings are characterised by a central composition, with flanking figures curving outward from a central vertical axis. This compositional scheme spread from Florence to other Italian centres of artistic activ-

13 *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (c.1490–1495) <<https://www.wikiart.org/en/sandro-botticelli/lamentation-over-the-dead-christ-1490>> (accessed 02.09.2021); *Lamentation over the Dead Christ with the saints Girolamo, Pietro and Paolo* (c.1490–1492) <<https://www.wikiart.org/en/sandro-botticelli/pity-1490>> (accessed 02.09.2021).



ity, including Venice. With the Venetians, however, we see an important difference in the way it is applied. With the Florentines, the movement takes place from a closed centre, from which the ‘compact matter’ splits into smaller parts, as if by centrifugal force (as we see in Botticelli and Bronzino). Popp focuses on the example of Lorenzo Lotto, who worked with the expression of mental states, such as fervour or devotion, as a means of depicting space (ibid., p. 64); but his use of central composition in the Florentine manner can best be seen in his *Pietà* (c.1538–1545),¹⁴ at the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan. With the Venetians, by contrast, movement passes instead through the whole composition towards a centre that is empty, or that contains very little mass; Popp mentions two paintings by Tintoretto: *Ecce Homo* (c.1565–1567)¹⁵ at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, and *The Last Supper* (c.1592–1594)¹⁶ at the Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore. Here, it is as if the space depicted in the painting were permeated by a rhythmic vibration, a centripetal force, with figures concentrated not around the vertical axis but intersecting in rhythmic alternation (‘im rhythmischen Wechsel’; ibid.). The general tendency to tilt the flanking figures to the sides (‘seitliche Neigung’), together with the effect of contrasting movement that activated the pictorial space, was thus a new concept in composition that began with Donatello and spread during the Cinquecento from Florence to Venice and Rome (ibid., p. 65).

If Popp’s writings on Donatello focus on his innovative manner of looking at the world, consisting namely in his analytical penetration into individual details, this could also be said of Popp herself — or, more precisely, of her formal-analytical and hermeneutic method. In this sense, her study of Donatello is a paradigmatic text, one that combines analysis, on the one hand, of the artist’s stylistic, material, compositional, and formal peculiarities, with a hermeneutics, on the other, of the noetic aspects of the aesthetic-artistic process and ontological status of the work. It is precisely this ‘keen focus on detail’ that characterises Popp’s approach to understanding the work of art by way of art history and art hermeneutics, focusing not only on the formal aspects of the painting, not only on the plastic and expressive means and techniques, but also on the stylistic formations and transformations (in the work or period of a particular artist) that Popp seeks to uncover. The term ‘Einstellung’ (in the sense of ‘intention’), which plays an important role in the theory of Russian formalism (Hansen-Löve 1978, pp. 212–226), seems here to coincide in some measure with Riegl’s notion of ‘Kunstwollen’. Indeed, Popp mentions Riegl’s *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (‘Late Roman art industry’; 1901) in her study on Donatello (Popp 1919c, p. 49), stating that he was a student of the Vienna School, and furthermore that Max Dvořák had a hand in shaping his notion of formalism in connection to art history and hermeneutics.

Popp emphasises how Donatello, in his later works, uses realistic means to clarify and intensify the parallelism between external phenomena and mental contents. The physical manifestation of death in the figure of Christ (in the drawing of the *Pietà*, for

14 *Pietà* (c.1538–1545) <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet%C3%A0_\(Lotto\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet%C3%A0_(Lotto))> (accessed 02.09.2021).

15 *Ecce Homo* (c.1565–1567) <[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecce_Homo_\(Tintoretto\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecce_Homo_(Tintoretto))> (accessed 02.09.2021).

16 *The Last Supper* (c.1592–1594) <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Last_Supper_\(Tintoretto\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Last_Supper_(Tintoretto))> (accessed 02.09.2021).



example, or pulpit in San Lorenzo) is depicted together with its 'psychological parallels'. Donatello has a tendency here to portray a particular emotion (pain, despair) in a different way for each character: "They form only the individual threads of psychological events and it is only together that they express an overall unified mood" ('einheitliche Gesamtstimmung'; *ibid.*, p. 58). In terms of both aesthetics and effects, the reliefs of Donatello's late period (c. 1460) may be seen as 'affective reliefs', in the metaphorical sense intended by Edmund Husserl in his phenomenology of affect, and specifically in his 'Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis'.¹⁷ The term 'affective reliefs' refers here to various degrees and differences of affect, suggesting a specific plasticity or tactility, an experience or knowledge that is mediated by touch. The theme of 'practical' corporeality in the lived present — affect, action, and suffering ('Erleiden'), the relationship between activity and passivity — plays an important role in the phenomenology of the 'late' Husserl. Each thing, Husserl claims, even when it is objectively remote, must be understood in principle as tangible and touchable. Affect being invariably a bodily phenomenon, everything that one may encounter is eminently dependent on 'experiencing' and suffering, in contact with and tangent to subjectivity. Furthermore, by feeling affects and objects, we also assess them. 'Affective relief' (Husserl 2001, pp. 212, 217), belonging as it does to the passive aspects of action and 'suffering', can also be understood, as Christian Lotz shows in his study, as 'value-affective relief' ('wertaffektives Relief'; Lotz 2002, p. 24). Feeling is associated with moments and positions of value; not only is touch itself a bearer of values, it also gives the 'overall affective relief' the character of value. Affects have their own ethical dimension and extension, yet without evaluation, whether positive or negative — pain and suffering, compassion, repentance, shame, etc. — they are not possible (*ibid.*, p. 31).

In Husserl's concept of 'affective relief', the notion of 'relief' is deployed metaphorically to characterise affective functions in an associative process. But it also identifies certain aesthetic effects that are directly relevant to the relief style of Donatello's later works, which, according to Popp, demonstrates a 'significant gradation of plasticity from the centre to the sides, from depth to surface, and from an application [of gradation] within the surface layer to one that breaks the surface'.¹⁸

¹⁷ 'In every living present that is looked upon universally, there is naturally a certain relief of salience, a relief of noticeability, and a relief that can get my attention. In this case, we accordingly distinguish between background and foreground. The foreground is what is thematic in the broadest sense. [...] I have already employed the quite suitable expression, affective relief. On the one hand, this alludes to a unity, on the other hand, to a difference of 'peaks' for the different particular moments, finally, too, the possibility of entire augmentations or entire diminutions insofar as the affective relief can arch out more prominently or become more flattened depending upon the alterations of the living present. I am alluding here to the differences of freshness in which all present objects, possibly through a sudden transition, but altogether, gain (or in the opposing case, lose) something of the vivacity of consciousness, of affective force. But at the same time within every present there are relative differences of vivacity, differences of more or less affectively efficacious data. Hence the discourse of affective relief' (Husserl 2001, pp. 215, 216–217).

¹⁸ 'das deutliche Steigern der Plastizität von dem Zentrum zu den Seiten, von der Tiefe zu der Nähe, von dem in der Flächenschicht haftenden zu dem die Flächenschicht durchbrechenden' (Popp 1919c, p. 47).



The purpose of this gradation of plasticity is to achieve ‘a vast richness of variations of expressive forms, in which all relations between the transient affect and enduring character traits are represented’ (Popp 1919c, p. 57).¹⁹ It is as if the relief figured as the medium of an affective-dynamic process — actively transforming, ‘vibrating’, approaching and receding in its plasticity, at once objective and subjective —, while retaining its relevance as a form of aesthetic production and reception.²⁰ It is in this sense that Popp writes of ‘a lively rhythmic alternation of forms that repeatedly elicits the active participation of the viewer’s eye’,²¹ evoking Husserl’s ‘affective awakening’ and ‘transference of affective forces’ (‘Übertragung affektiver Kräfte’; Husserl 2001, p. 217). By alternating forms, the relief compels the viewer to take an attitude of intense concentration, which in turn greatly enhances the ‘power of effect’ (‘Wirkungskraft’): ‘These are above all the most extreme affects, both momentary excitations and permanent dispositions (characters), which always cause a deviation from the basic form and, when combined, produce an infinite abundance of diverse forms’ (Popp 1919c, p. 57).²²

‘FIGHTING ELEMENTS IN THE ATMOSPHERE’: LEONARDO DA VINCI’S DRAWINGS OF ‘RAINY LANDSCAPES’ ('REGENLANDSCHAFTEN')

‘All nature is a living, self-contained organism, carrying its law within itself and forming a whole by the unity of its organic functions’. This sentence does not come from Plessner’s book *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (‘Levels of organic life and the human’; 1928), but from Anny E. Popp’s study of Leonardo da Vinci’s drawings (1928). In an essay on da Vinci’s ‘flood drawings’, Frank Fehrenbach writes:

Anny E. Popp can rightfully claim to be the discoverer of the aesthetics of the ‘flood drawings’. According to the author’s thin but excellent monograph on Leonardo’s drawings, his series of ‘rainy landscapes’ (‘Regenlandschaften’), or as she calls them ‘flood drawings’, are key to Leonardo’s artistic and scientific understanding of the world. The drawings, which date from 1516, depict ‘the battle of rain, wind, and clouds in the earth’s atmosphere’, while the viewer is no longer confronted with things

19 ‘das ungeheure Reichthum der Variationen der expressiven Formen, in dem alle Relationen zwischen vorübergehendem Affekt und bleibenden Charakterzügen zur Darstellung gebracht worden’.

20 ‘The affective relief has as a materially relevant support the structural nexuses of the present; by affection proceeding from a point and being distributed in an awakening manner along these lines, the entire relief is accentuated along these lines’ (Husserl 2001, p. 217).

21 ‘Ein lebhafter rythmischer Wechsel von Formelementen, der das Auge des Beschauers immer wieder von neuem zur Tätigkeit anregt’ (Popp 1919c, p. 52).

22 ‘Das sind vor allem die extremsten Affekte, die vorübergehenden Erregungen wie die bleibenden Dispositionen (Charaktere), die immer ein Abweichen von der Grundform bedingen und in ihrer Kombinierung eine unendliche Fülle mannigfaltigster Formen hervorbringen’.



nor with the 'air that is invisibly inserted between things'. Instead, everything is filled with a 'feverishly working network of lines of force' which 'reveal the weaving, acting forces of nature' (Fehrenbach 2001, pp. 13–14).²³

According to Frank Fehrenbach, the nature of Popp's interest in the flood drawings becomes clear when we notice how often she mentions Cézanne (and Joachim Gasquet's 1921 work on Cézanne) in her interpretation of Leonardo's later conception of nature, taking note of the new artistic context in which he arrived at this conception (one whole generation later). Rather than placing these motifs in a biographical context (visions of the end of the world based on the artist's self-awareness of old age) or on his historical context (religious reforms), Popp emphasises the singular nature of the drawings, arguing that they represent instead the 'inevitable regularity of all natural events' ('unentrinnbaren Gesetzmäßigkeit in allem Naturgeschehen'). In the drawings of cataclysm that characterise da Vinci's last creative phase, the destruction of man is depicted as any other natural process:

Nature — as omnipotence. Its work is catastrophic for anyone who gets caught up in the forces it unleashes. Powerless, he is swept away like a dead leaf and ruthlessly, inescapably destroyed. Measured against it, man has lost his dominant position on earth, in the same way that the earth under the planets (which does not mean, however, that man does not retain his place as the standard of reference). Leonardo drew the deluge: not a flood, not divine punishment, not a religious experience. It had nothing to do with the biblical event of Noah's Ark. For Leonardo such stories, like Genesis itself, were no more than old wives' tales (Popp 1928, p. 17).²⁴

As Frank Fehrenbach points out, Popp was the first to interpret this series of drawings along such 'stark' lines, turning her full attention to their expressive qualities. By focusing on the effects of their aesthetic and literary motifs, rather than their sci-

23 'Den Ruhm, die Ästhetik der "Sintflutzeichnungen" entdeckt zu haben, kann erst Anny E. Popp für sich beanspruchen. Für die Autorin einer schmalen, aber ausgezeichneten Monographie über die Zeichnungen Leonardos (1928) bildet die Serie der "Regenlandschaften", wie sie die "Sintflutzeichnungen" nennt, den Schlüssel zu Leonardos künstlerischer und wissenschaftlicher Weltauffassung. Die von ihr nach 1516 datierten Zeichnungen schilderten den "Kampf von Regen, Wind und Wolken in der Erdatmosphäre", wobei sich der Betrachter nicht mehr Dingen oder der "Luft, die sich unsichtbar zwischen die Dinge schiebt" gegenübersehe. Stattdessen sei alles wie von einem "fieberhaft arbeitenden Netz von Kraftlinien" erfüllt, die die "webenden, wirkenden Kräfte" der Natur zum Vorschein kommen ließen.'

24 'Die Natur — das Allmächtige. Ihr Wirken darum katastrophal für den Menschen, wo er in ihre entfesselten Kräfte hineingerät. Ohnmächtig wird er von ihr hinweggefegt wie ein welkes Blatt, das sie rücksichtslos und unentrinnbar zerstört. An ihr gemessen hat er die beherrschende Stellung auf der Erde ebenso gründlich verloren, wie die Erde unter den Planeten (was aber nicht heißt, dass der Mensch nicht der Maßstab blieb). Leonardo hat Diluvium gezeichnet: keine Sündflut, keine Bestrafung durch Gott, kein religiöses Erleben. Mit dem biblischen Geschehen, der Arche Noah hat das nichts zu tun. Das waren für Leonardo, wie die Genesis, Ammenmärchen.'

entific value, she shifts our attention to their quality of ‘expression’, or ‘Ausdruck’ (Fehrenbach 2001, p. 13).

If Popp’s interpretation of da Vinci is extraordinary and pioneering, this is not only because it directly challenges (or deconstructs) the idea that his work conveys a balanced anthropocentric image of the world, not only because it draws attention to his exceedingly radical (‘ungeheuer stark’) scepticism concerning the ‘nothingness of man’ (‘Nichtigkeit des Menschen’). The idea that the Renaissance helped bring about a new awareness of human individuality and singularity — the notion of man as wonderful and perfect — is not altogether rejected by Popp. Indeed, she mentions the works of other Renaissance artists in this context: Andrea del Verrocchio, Antonio del Pollaiuolo, and Domenico Ghirlandaio, for example. In most cases, however, this characterisation is simply not apt; Popp cites Leonardo’s caricatures of physiognomies and characters which convey the foreignness of man in terms of ‘deformations resulting from depravity and monstrous developments of form and character’ (‘Mißgeburten von Lasterhaftigkeit und abstruser Form- und Charakterverbildung’; Popp 1928, p. 18). In this context, Popp quotes one of da Vinci’s ideas:

It seems to me that coarse men of bad habits and little power of reason do not deserve so fine an instrument or so great a variety of mechanisms as those who are imaginative and articulate, but instead a mere sack from which to receive their food and later to discharge it. For in truth they cannot be considered as anything other than a passage for food, having nothing in common with the human race, or so it seems to me, than their voice and shape, everything else being animal in nature (Leonardo da Vinci 2008, p. 263).²⁵

Here, Popp demonstrates a special sensitivity to the discourse of anthropological negativity that was current among thinkers of the ‘new’ Vienna School of Art History, and that tended to focus on human eccentricity, uncertainty, ambivalence, fragility, vulnerability, and ‘dissimilarity’. It was a paradigm of the Vienna School that the works of Pieter Bruegel the Elder — but also of Cézanne — should be considered as most representative of these qualities (Wickhoff, Dvořák, Sedlmayr, Tolnay, Benesch, Popp, Novotny). This highlights an intersection between art history in the conception of the Vienna School and phenomenologically based (aesthetic) anthropology, one that thus far has received little attention. Perhaps it is in man’s ‘excentric positionality’ — his ‘split existence’, or ‘gespaltene Existenz’, in the words of Max Scheler — as well as his anthropological negativity that he is (also) *homo inveniens* and *homo pictor*. If man as a being of spirit and culture lives in the medium of the spiritual realm, as Plessner argues, then the spirit is that which detaches man from the realm of ‘organicness’ and nature (and naturalness), and gives him access to the realm of

25 ‘Non mi pare che li omini grossi e di tristi costumi e di poco discorso meritino sì bello strumento, né tante varietà di macchinamenti, quanto li omini speculativi e di gran discorsi, ma solo un sacco, dove si riceva il cibo e donde esso esca, ché invero altro che un transito di cibo non son da essere giudicati, perché niente mi pare che essi partecipino di spezie umana altro che la voce e la figura, e tutto el resto è assai manco che bestia.’



culture. This raises the question²⁶: do we find a certain consistency between Dvořák's model of 'art history and history of the spirit' and the concept in philosophical anthropology of the 'aesthesiology of the spirit'?²⁷

It should be noted that Popp draws a parallel between da Vinci's drawings of battle scenes (1508–1515) — drawings that convey the dark atmosphere of war 'with clouds of dust expressing unbound psychological elements and explosions' (Popp 1928, p. 11) — and the drawings of natural cataclysms that characterise his final creative phase (1516–1519), with their 'fighting elements' of water and air. In his preparatory study of *The Battle of Anghiari*, for example, nothing is depicted of the anger, courage, or strength of the warriors; what he presents us with instead is an image of the 'brutish, grim atmosphere of insanity' ('dumpfe, ungeheuerliche Atmosphäre seelischer Verrantheit'; *ibid.*, p. 12) and the omnipotent instinct of destruction. Popp describes these fierce battle scenes with concepts borrowed from the modern psychology of crowds, which she would have known from the book by Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules* ('Psychology of the crowd'; 1895): 'mass psychosis' and 'battle psychosis' ('Massenpsychose ist es — Schlachtpsychose!'; Popp 1928, p. 12). It is a way of thinking that resonates with the experience of the Great War, but also — as Popp is writing her study of da Vinci in the late 1920 — with a growing sense of foreboding for the new catastrophe to come.²⁸ Of particular importance for Popp's analogy between the

²⁶ This question will be addressed in another study.

²⁷ In his contribution to the Second Congress of Aesthetics and General Art History (Zweiter Kongreß für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft) in Berlin in October 1924, Plessner briefly formulates the objectives of an 'aesthesiology of the spirit': 'The aesthesiology of the spirit, then, is a methodically well-understood critique of the senses, as Goethe had in mind: a critique and not a psychology, a science of the possibilities and normative meanings of the senses within the overall value system of the human spirit. Such a critique of the senses could also be useful for bringing idealistic and psychological aesthetics closer together. For its central problem, involving aesthetics and the theory of knowledge, aesthetics and psychology, leads us eventually to the question: to what extent is the normal sensory organisation of man really normal, that is compliant with certain standards? Is the sensory apparatus of the human spirit more than a mere empirical coincidence, is it a reflection of the spirit in the unity of its possibilities?' ('Ästhesiologie des Geistes ist also die methodisch richtig verstandene Kritik der Sinne, wie sie Goethe vorschwebte, Kritik und nicht Psychologie, Wissenschaft von den Möglichkeiten und der normativen Bedeutung der Sinne im Rahmen der gesamten wertvollen Betätigungen menschlichen Geistes. Eine solche Kritik der Sinne dürfte auch der Annäherung zwischen idealistischer und psychologischer Ästhetik nützlich sein. Denn ihr Zentralproblem, an dem Ästhetik und Erkenntnistheorie, Ästhetik und Psychologie interessiert sind, mündet doch in der Frage: inwiefern ist die normale sinnliche Organisation des Menschen wirklich eine normale, d. h. normgerechte? Bedeutet die sinnliche Apparatur des menschlichen Geistes mehr als bloße empirische Zufälligkeit, ist sie ein Widerschein des Geistes in der Einheit seiner Möglichkeiten?'; Plessner 1925, p. 56).

²⁸ These misgivings about the impending new war are expressed by Harry Haller, the hero of Hermann Hesse's novel *Der Steppenwolf* (1927). As early as the late 1920s, Hesse exposed Harry Haller's 'golden 1920s' as a time of great uncertainty, tension and crisis: 'Two-thirds of my countrymen read this kind of newspaper, read things written in this tone ev-



natural turmoil of war and unleashed fury of the elements is the idea that they are both catastrophic for man, because in both cases man is ‘ruthlessly and inextricably destroyed’ (‘rücksichtslos und unentrinnbar zerstört’; *ibid.*, p. 17). It is as if the meteorological reference of the discourse on war from 1914, which is still lingering in the 1920s, is reflected in the interpretation of da Vinci’s drawings of natural disasters. During the outbreak of WWI on 28 July 1914, as the meteorological narrative of the ‘beautiful summer’²⁹ degenerated into ‘bestial madness’ (or ‘pazzia bestialissima’, as da Vinci describes war in his treatise on painting; *ibid.*, p. 12), this radical contrast between summer and war, played an essential role.³⁰ As these contrasting meteorological narrative structures were still current in the 1920s, it is likely that Popp drew on them for her interpretation of da Vinci’s drawings of natural disasters.³¹ Moreover, this interpretation can be seen to rest on certain analogies between the realm of nature and that of man and his deeds, between the landscape and the human body. Da Vinci anthropomorphises inorganic nature, so that a mountainous landscape is analogous to the human skeleton, and stones are the ‘bones of the earth’ (*ibid.*, p. 14). It is for this reason that da Vinci understands the destruction of man as a phenomenon akin to any other natural process. Between the weapons and machinery of war that da Vinci drew and the ‘wheels of Nature’s machinery’ (‘Räder der Maschinerie Natur’; *ibid.*, p. 20) that crush man there is no fundamental difference.

For Popp, da Vinci’s portrayal of the ‘the battle of rain, wind, and clouds in the earth’s atmosphere’ represents one last great deed: namely, to make invisible natural processes visible. She returns here to Cézanne, arguing that it is precisely this aim — to depict by artistic means the ‘process of the origin of the world’ (‘Prozeß des Gewordenseins der Welt’; *ibid.*, p. 13), to capture the ‘the primordial nature of the world’

ery morning and every night, are every day worked up and admonished and incited, and robbed of their peace of mind and better feelings by them, and the end and aim of it all is to have the war over again, the next war that draws nearer and nearer, and it will be a good deal more horrible than the last. [...] And so there’s no stopping it, and the next war is being pushed on with enthusiasm by thousands upon thousands day by day. It has paralysed me since I knew it, and brought me to despair. I have no country and no ideals left. All that comes to nothing but decorations for the gentlemen by whom the next slaughter is ushered in’ (Hesse 1963, pp. 141–142).

29 Matthias Bode discusses the political significance of meteorological narratives concerning the ‘beautiful summer’ of 1914 in his work *Traumsommer und Kriegsgewitter. Die politische Bedeutung des schönen Sommers 1914* (‘Dream summer and war storm. The political significance of the beautiful summer of 1914’; 2016).

30 In his excellent book *Metaphern für Geschichte* (1978), Alexander Demandt shows how political-historical discourse based on meteorological analogies dates back to Homer and the Old Testament, and how the metaphorical treatment of political and social revolutions as ‘storms’ (Friedrich Hölderlin’s descriptions of the French Revolution, for instance), ‘thunderstorms’, ‘lightning’, ‘tempests’, etc. have been used since time immemorial (Demandt 1978, p. 135).

31 It is no coincidence that in the literary discourse of the 1920s, the naturalisation and metaphorical ‘meteorologisation’ of war plays a special role. We see this, for example, in Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1925), Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928), Joseph Roth’s *The Radetzky March* (1932), and other novels of the period.



(‘Urweltnatur’) without a trace of humanity (‘ohne menschliche Spuren’, *ibid.*) — that da Vinci shares with Cézanne. This claim anticipates both Fritz Novotny’s thesis on the ‘Außermenschlichkeit’ of Cézanne’s landscapes and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s well-known 1945 essay on Cézanne (which also refers to Novotny’s thesis), where he writes:

Cézanne wanted to paint this primordial world, and his pictures therefore seem to show nature pure, while photographs of the same landscapes suggest man’s works, conveniences, and imminent presence. [...] The painter recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things. Only one emotion is possible for this painter — the feeling of strangeness — and only one lyricism — that of the continual rebirth of existence (Merleau-Ponty 1992, pp. 13–14, 17–18).

It is the atmosphere itself, acting as a fluid between things, that da Vinci wanted to depict, an aim that compelled him to develop an artistic means for portraying atmospheric phenomena. As Popp shows, this means was *sfumato*, occluding the radiant brilliance of neighbouring colour and contours. Da Vinci wanted to capture the hue of a colour as if it were smouldering and flashing from the depths, made possible through the use of ‘tenebrism’ (an especially pronounced chiaroscuro) to model the contours of bodies and forms. Leonardo’s *sfumato* seems to be a medium for conveying the weight of the air (‘gravitas æris’) as something at once tangible and intangible, as it was later viewed by 17th-century thinkers and physicists (Descartes, Boyle, Spinoza, Pascal, Leibniz, Newton, Burchard de Volder, Otto von Guericke, etc.). This was based on the idea that the air that surrounds the earth is a medium endowed with special weights, capable of causing movement and transmitting light. In the 17th century it was common to conflate pneumatics with hydrostatics — that is to think of air as a fluid (Descartes, like Pascal, considered air to be a particularly rarefied fluid).³²

Da Vinci developed and perfected a hatching technique that allowed him to model the surface of objects and produce the illusion of the three-dimensionality, plasticity, and volume of bodies, thus evoking their elusive, fleeting ‘presence’. According to Popp, da Vinci began experimenting with combined techniques to express the interaction of different forces starting in 1500. It was only later (around 1508) that he began developing his ‘cosmic thinking’ (‘kosmisches Denken’): ‘He combined everything: chalk, pen, brush, and sometimes even gouache’ (Popp 1928, p. 26) in order to produce the expression (‘Ausdruck’) of ‘the most extreme’ (‘das Äußerste’) method for modelling form. Then, in 1508, da Vinci began developing a completely new technique for enhancing the spatial effect of the body: on a black chalk base, which he spread to form a gray mist, da Vinci drew a detail with a pen, the plastic roundness of which he then ‘pulled’ from this nebulous mass and its marginal contour using a soft,

³² The topic of *gravitas æris* in the physical-mathematical and philosophical discourses of the 17th century is addressed in Wim Klever (ed.), *Die Schwere der Luft in der Diskussion des 17. Jahrhunderts* (‘The heaviness of air in the discourses of the 17th century’; 1997).

wide stroke of the brush (ibid., p. 27). As Popp writes, looking at the result from afar, without focusing on a particular detail of the contour, the eye may catch any one of a number of possible images (a special physical-optical effect of spatial vision).

According to Popp, da Vinci considered drawing as a unique medium, independent of other works of art. It allowed him to convey what painting still could not (its significance was similar, in this respect, to copperplate and woodcut for German and Dutch artists; ibid.), namely, to create series: plants, mountain landscapes, costume studies, and above all, the ‘most exquisite’ series of rainy landscapes (‘Regenlandschaften’; ibid., p. 28). In this conception of drawing as an autonomous art form, Michelangelo — especially in his drawings of Tommasa Cavalieri — would follow da Vinci.

The emphasis that Popp places on expressiveness and ‘expression’ (‘Ausdruck’) in her study of da Vinci’s drawings can be understood in relation to Helmuth Plessner’s theory of these topics, especially as he writes about them in his major work in philosophical anthropology *Levels of Organic Life and the Human: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, published in 1928 — the same year as Popp’s study on da Vinci. This coincidence is all the more interesting because both Plessner and Popp put ‘expression’ and ‘expressive possibilities’ (‘Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten’) in relation to the conceptual pair ‘content’ and ‘form’. As early as 1918, shortly after his doctoral dissertation with Paul Hensel in Erlangen, Plessner published his study *Zur Geschichtsphilosophie der bildenden Kunst seit Renaissance und Reformation* (‘On the philosophy of history of the fine arts since the Renaissance and Reformation’).³³ Here, Plessner thinks of artistic-historical styles as specific ‘expressive types’ (‘Ausdruckstypen’; Plessner 1918, p. 161), characterising them as ‘aesthetic formulas of crystallisation’ (‘ästhetische Kristallisationsformel’; ibid., p. 164) in which the specific material properties of individual art media together with the techniques for shaping them, their ‘force effects’ (‘Wirkungskraft’) and so on, meet and permeate. For Plessner, the analysis of style is therefore only possible on the basis of a ‘critical analogy’ of the material properties of the work. However, Plessner is primarily concerned with the problem of the autonomy of modern art (and the sense of the modern world), so that his thinking about ‘expressive types’ of historical styles is limited to the art of his time, especially cubism and expressionism. Modern art continues and further develops the process that was set in motion during the Renaissance, and which led to the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere and artistic creation.

We should also find Plessner’s early study interesting because it is one of the first treatises he wrote on his anthropology-based aesthetics and theory of human expression. Expression is ‘objectification of the spirit’ (‘Objektivierung des Geistes’; Plessner 1928, p. 337), in the complementary interconnection of form and content: ‘The expressivity of the human thus makes him a being who even in the case of continuously sustained intention continues to push for ever new realisations and in this way leaves behind a history. Expressivity is the only internal reason for the historical

33 Michael Hog mentions this early treatise in *Die anthropologische Ästhetik Arnold Gehlens und Helmuth Plessners. Entlastung der Kunst und Kunst der Entlastung* (‘The anthropological aesthetics of Arnold Gehlen and Helmuth Plessner. The relief of art and the art of relief’; 2015, pp. 146–152).



character of his existence' (Plessner 2019, p. 314).³⁴ A human being is subject to the law of 'natural artificiality' (ibid., p. 314), and lives through a process of discontinuous and emerging events rather than a linear development of history in pursuit of a single goal. By his actions and creations, in his 'excentric positionality', man brings about a certain balance:

The true motor of the specifically historical dynamism of human life is to be found in expressivity. With his deeds and works, which are meant to give the human the balance nature refused him — and actually do give him this balance — he is at the same time also thrown off balance again, only to try once more with luck and yet in vain. The law of mediated immediacy constantly knocks him out of the position of rest to which he wants to return. It is this basic movement that brings forth history. Its meaning is the recovery of what was lost with new means, the creation of balance through radical change, preservation of the old by turning toward the future (ibid., p. 315).

In his 1918 study, Plessner argues that the work of art is at once the result of individual 'expressive possibilities' ('Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten') and a manifestation of something that transcends the individual (similar to the 'Kunstwollen', in Riegl's conception, that belongs to a certain epoch, society, etc.). Plessner's study is remarkable in relation to Popp's work in art history for the fact that it contains a relatively extensive passage on the works of Michelangelo, where form becomes an expression of the artist's state of mind to the 'highest possible degree of affect' ('bis in das Höchstmaß des Affekts'; Plessner 1918, p. 170). Plessner writes of a 'volcanic eruptive force' ('vulkanischer Eruptionsdrang') that brought about the greatest intensification of artistic will the West had ever experienced (ibid.). As a consequence, Michelangelo's works seem as if they had been created from within ('wie von innen ausgebildet'), and with a certain plasticity. The creative force which runs through all of Michelangelo's works passes into bodies, into architecture, whose surfaces and contours thus acquire 'the full force, the full tension of existence' ('die volle Wucht, die volle Spannung der Existenz'; ibid., p. 171). For Plessner, Michelangelo is not only an artist who radically crossed over from the Renaissance to the Baroque, but a prototype of the modern artist *avant la lettre*, who invented the paradox of the work of art by incessantly crossing the boundaries between individual artistic disciplines and their expressive forms (Plessner mentions the vestibule and staircase of the Laurentian Library). In this sense, Michelangelo deliberately participated in what Oskar Walzel called the 'Mutual Enlightenment of the Arts' (1917)³⁵ — which is why Michelangelo is the originator of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (Plessner 1918, p. 171).³⁶

34 'Durch seine Expressivität ist er also ein Wesen, das selbst bei kontinuierlich sich erhaltender Intention nach immer anderer Verwirklichung drängt und so eine Geschichte hinter sich zurücklässt. Nur in der Expressivität liegt der innere Grund für den historischen Charakter seiner Existenz'.

35 Plessner also emphasises the importance of this pioneering work by Walzel in his book *Die Einheit der Sinne* ('The unity of the senses'; Plessner 1980, p. 122).

36 The text is a chapter in a larger study on Popp's work in art history in the broader context.

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