



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Wine of Saint Martin's Day*, 1566–1567. Glue-size on twill / twill weave canvas. 58.3 × 106.5 in. (148 × 270.5 cm). Museo del Prado.

“The Chaos of Total Decay”: Sedlmayr’s Diagnosis

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Disgust is an affect rarely associated with the discipline of art history. To read Hans Sedlmayr’s 1948 book *Verlust der Mitte* (literally, “Loss of the center,” but published in English as *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center*) is to confront a vast vocabulary of abhorrence. In the book’s counter-Enlightenment history of European art from the French Revolution to the 1930s, Sedlmayr proposes a bile-soaked theory of modernism characterized as an “ally of anarchy” driven by a “hatred of the human race,” a succession of “artistic abortions” and “symptoms of extreme degeneration,” adding up to a “chaos of total decay” (and this all on a single page). Yet, his splenetic contempt for romanticism, abstraction, rationalist architecture, Surrealist automatism, and so on is directed not so much at the artists as at the world that made their work possible. In one passage, Sedlmayr offers a bitter “defense of the extremists,” noting that the apparent rejection of realism in modern art was in fact “realistic” in its “spiritual and moral portrait of man,” accurately reflecting a humanity dissolving into the madness of the masses, lapsing into racialized “primitivism,” and worshiping its own illusory autonomy.¹

Sedlmayr’s monstrosity, however, lies not in his anguish over the dissonance between the history of art and his own political commitments but in his period of optimism about their reconciliation.² Following his studies with Max Dvořák and Julius von Schlosser, Sedlmayr developed in the late 1920s and 1930s a mode of *Strukturanalyse* (structural analysis) of art that sought to make good on the promises of Alois Riegl’s method, writing pioneering and controversial essays on baroque art and architecture.³ Concurrently, while living in Vienna,

¹ Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center*, trans. Brian Battershaw (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 141, 221; and Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte: Die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symptom und Symbol der Zeit* (Salzburg: Müller, 1948).

² For the most focused analysis of Sedlmayr’s art history and politics, see Evonne Levy, *Baroque Art and the Political Language of Formalism (1845–1945): Burckhardt, Wölfflin, Gurlitt, Brinckmann, Sedlmayr* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2015), esp. 302–58. See also Hans Aurenhammer, “Hans Sedlmayr und die Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Wien,” in *Kunstgeschichte an den Universitäten im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Jutta Held and Martin Papenbrock (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2004), 161–94; and the detailed biographical presentation by Albert Ottenbacher, “Kunstgeschichte in ihrer Zeit: Zu Hans Sedlmayrs ‘abendländischer Sendung,’” *Kritische Berichte*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2001), 71–86.

³ Sedlmayr’s complex relationship to Riegl’s writing may be glimpsed in his 1929 essay “The Quintessence of Riegl’s Teachings,” in *Framing Formalism: Riegl’s Work*, ed. and trans. Richard Woodfield (Amsterdam: G+B Arts, 2003), 11–32. See also Christopher S. Wood, “Introduction,” in

Sedlmayr joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) as early as 1930. After briefly leaving the party in 1932, he rejoined the NSDAP as well as the National Socialist German Lecturers' League in January 1938, prior to the annexation of Austria by Adolf Hitler in March 1938, when both organizations were still illegal in Austria. During the Third Reich, he enjoyed prestige as a so-called *Illegal* in Nazi Austria and was appointed to the chair in art history at the University of Vienna.

Sedlmayr was no mere opportunist, nor did he perceive a conflict between his commitment to National Socialism and his art-historical scholarship. Rather, the *Anschluss* opened a new social order in which Sedlmayr's theorization of an Austro-German *Reichsstil* might find purchase. Naming its major exemplar, the Austrian baroque architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, as the "Man of Destiny in this world-historical hour," Sedlmayr might have felt a frisson of identification.⁴ Putting his expertise in service of the Reich, he proposed in 1939 the demolition of Vienna's Jewish quarter of Leopoldstadt and the deportation of its Jewish inhabitants. On this site, Sedlmayr called for the erection of a "Hitlerstadt" that would be the centerpiece of a new Vienna, "the second largest city of the National Socialist Empire."⁵

After the war, Sedlmayr was forced out of his position at the University of Vienna, though he was not prosecuted by the Allies.⁶ Despite never recanting his involvement with National Socialism—similar in that respect to his peers Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt (who each joined the NSDAP three years after Sedlmayr)—his professional rehabilitation was cemented in 1951 by his appointment, against student protests, to the chair in art history once held by both Wilhelm Pinder and Heinrich Wölfflin at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.⁷

This appointment came on the heels of a huge publishing success that saw Sedlmayr in the new role of a conservative Catholic public intellectual. *Verlust der Mitte* became a bestseller upon its publication in 1948, going through six editions in Austria alone from 1948 to 1953 and being rapidly translated into numerous languages. The book's negativity was evidently widely palatable in the immediate postwar period. It was also, as Sedlmayr's former student Wilhelm Schlink notes, quite literally "the fruit of research and consideration done

The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s, ed. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 9–72.

⁴ Cited in Ottenbacher, "Kunstgeschichte in ihrer Zeit," 76. On the "Reichsstil," see Levy, *Baroque Art*, 333–39.

⁵ Hans Sedlmayr, "Wien: Stadtgestaltung und Denkmalschutz," in *Deutsche Kunst und Denkmalpflege* 41 (1939/40), 161; our translation. Discussed in Ottenbacher, "Kunstgeschichte in ihrer Zeit," 78.

⁶ On Sedlmayr's legal status after the war, see Ottenbacher, "Kunstgeschichte in ihrer Zeit," 81.

⁷ Wood, "Introduction," 38. Pinder had enthusiastically supported Hitler as early as 1933 and actively participated in the "Aryanization" of academic and art institutions. On Wölfflin's politics, see Evonne Levy, "The Political Project of Wölfflin's Early Formalism," *October* 139 (winter 2012), 39–58, esp. 40n4.

with the nationalsocialist [*sic*] party membership book in his pocket.”⁸ *Verlust der Mitte* was based on a series of lectures written and delivered during the Nazi period, from 1934 to 1944, of which Sedlmayr professed that “very little that is new and of substance has been added since.”⁹ While this “very little” likely involved a sanitization of overtly Nazi jargon (including the specific phrase “*entartete Kunst*”) to conform to a minimum of postwar propriety, Sedlmayr’s book maintains one of the crucial tropes of Nazi cultural theory: just as art’s duty is to give ideal form to the social body, impurities in this body give rise to symptoms of aesthetic morbidity and social decrepitude.¹⁰

The present text focuses on *Verlust der Mitte* as a paradigm of reactionary art history and serves as a prelude to the new translations and contemporary critical engagements with Sedlmayr published in this dossier. We do not take up the question of what may be recovered or reclaimed of Sedlmayr’s art history from his politics. That is, we do not seek to distinguish his serious work toward a structural analysis of art from his extreme ideological commitments.¹¹ Setting our focus on the concrete forms of entwinement between art history as a discipline and the politics of reaction, we ask not what value Sedlmayr may still have for the history of art *despite* his reactionary politics but rather what his art history can tell us about the “reactionary mind” itself and the role it confers to art.¹²

⁸ Wilhelm Schlink, “The Gothic Cathedral as Heavenly Jerusalem: A Fiction in German Art History,” in “The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezalel Narkiss on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday,” ed. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin and Bianca Kühnel, special issue, *Jewish Art* 23/24 (1997/1998), 275.

⁹ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 256.

¹⁰ While he mostly avoids the term *degenerate art*, Sedlmayr notes, for example, that “there is something harrowing and also profoundly degenerate in the cold cynicism of [George] Grosz’ lithographs.” Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 220. In his defense of Sedlmayr, American conservative Roger Kimball seeks to rehabilitate the term *degenerate*: “The Nazis mounted a show of modernist art and called it ‘Degenerate Art.’ They were wrong about the art, but does that mean we are henceforth forbidden from describing any art as ‘degenerate’? Consider the photographs in Robert Mapplethorpe’s notorious ‘X Portfolio’: would ‘degenerate’ be out of place in describing them?” Roger Kimball, “Art in Crisis,” *New Criterion*, vol. 24, no. 4 (December 2005), 4–9.

¹¹ The task is worthwhile and has been debated at length elsewhere. In addition to Levy, *Baroque Art*, and Wood, “Introduction,” see Frederick Schwartz, “Mimesis: Physiognomies of Art in Kracauer, Sedlmayr, Benjamin and Adorno,” in *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 137–242. See also Benjamin Binstock, “Springtime for Sedlmayr? The Future of Nazi Art History,” *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 53, no. 1 (December 2004), 73–86.

¹² See Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

The Abolition of Art History

While art historians have tended to picture *Verlust der Mitte* as an unhinged screed—to differentiate it from the self-proclaimed “rigorous study of art”¹³ developed in Sedlmayr’s interwar work—the book is theoretically coherent and develops an attack on the contradictions of liberal capitalism from the Fascist Right and from within the disciplinary debates of art history. The characteristic features of the worldview that Sedlmayr develops in his book held wide currency during the Nazi period and still do for reactionary movements in the present day: the wedding of modern technology to the atavisms of blood and soil; an equal hatred of capitalism’s disruption of tradition and of socialism’s economic democratization; an emphasis on the sovereign decision, mystical insight, force, and will over democratic deliberation; and the conscription of culture to give coherent form to predetermined and hierarchized identity categories. However tempting it may be to construe Sedlmayr as an eccentric deviation from the genteel liberalism of art history, he developed a case for his politics that was firmly rooted in our discipline’s most rigorous traditions.

The historical paradox one encounters in reading Sedlmayr today is that of a reactionary anti-modernist whose thought reflects a certain tendency in Marxist aesthetics that runs from Theodor Adorno to Hal Foster; namely, his contention that the distortions and fragmentations of modern art constitute a mimetic response to the real historical fragmentation of the human relationship to the world.¹⁴ As Christopher Wood aptly notes, Sedlmayr offers “a mirror image of the avant-garde myth. Revolution and reaction agree on the meaning but not the worth of modern art.”¹⁵ This is why Adorno was willing to engage with his thought. Adorno observed in 1958–59 that “my work on the ageing of modern music... paradoxically, runs parallel to the work of Sedlmayr.” In a footnote he then specified that he meant *in particular* Sedlmayr’s “crypto-Fascist” “*Verlust der Mitte*, a polemical tract on modern art which enjoyed a great vogue in the 1950s because of its despairing view of modern culture.”¹⁶ What brings Sedlmayr close to Adorno (as well as to Gerhard Richter, who

¹³ Hans Sedlmayr, “Toward a Rigorous Study of Art (1931),” trans. Christopher S. Wood, in *The Vienna School Reader*, 133–80.

¹⁴ We are thinking in particular of the line in aesthetic theory running from Adorno’s proposal that “Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated” to Foster’s recent concept of “mimetic exacerbation.” See Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 21; and Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, and Emergency* (London: Verso Books, 2015), 63–98. Its terms were also established in the 1938 debates about realism and expressionism between Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch. See Ernst Bloch, “Discussing Expressionism,” trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Fredric Jameson (London: Verso Books, 1977), 16–27; and Georg Lukács “Realism in the Balance,” trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 28–59.

¹⁵ Christopher S. Wood, *A History of Art History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 357.

¹⁶ Theodor Adorno “Reconciliation under Duress,” trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 167. Evidently, Sedlmayr cited Adorno’s writings on Arnold Schoenberg on several occasions. Wood, “Introduction,” 49.

returned to Sedlmayr's work at several points in his career) was the sense that modernism, in its essence, could not be reconciled with any narrative of artistic continuity nor be assigned any palliative function; rather, its truth value was in its negativity.¹⁷ The absolute distinction between Adorno and Sedlmayr at the level of aesthetic theory (to say nothing of their diametrically opposed politics and their status as racialized enemies during the Holocaust) lies in their historical diagnoses. For Adorno, the fractures of modernism were historical, rooted in the subsumption of culture and subjectivity to the technical rationality of capitalism. Conversely, for Sedlmayr, they are political-theological, resulting from the displacement of divine authority by human autonomy. Sedlmayr believed he could glimpse the new face of the human being, divorced from its grounding by God, in Pieter Bruegel's grimacing crowds or in the shattered physiognomies of cubism.

The core features of Sedlmayr's work—his reactionary politics, his art-historical rigor, and his attentiveness to modernist negation—are perhaps nowhere more convincingly intertwined than in "Bruegel's Macchia" (1934), an essay that is likely now his best-known work within Anglophone art history thanks to its inclusion in Wood's *The Vienna School Reader* (2000). Reading the sixteenth century through a modernist vocabulary, Sedlmayr argues that "estrangement" is the core structural principle of Bruegel's work (fig. 1), that which gives his paintings their qualities of "shock and disturbance." Estrangement, for Sedlmayr, is a process of fragmentation and emptying in which "the human figure becomes alien, is viewed anew and with suspicion, when it is malformed or disfigured."¹⁸

In an important passage, Sedlmayr clarifies the social character of Bruegel's "disintegration of figures":

What could be the common denominator of the preferred motifs that we have identified—peasants, children, the deformed (cripples, the blind, epileptics, fools), the mass, apes, and madness? They are all manifestations of life in which the purely human borders on other, "lower" states that threaten, dull, distort, or ape its substance. Primitives—a hollow form of human; the mass—more raw and primitive than the individual man; the deformed—only half human; children—not yet completely human; the insane—no longer human. These are liminal states of humanity in which and through which the nature of man is cast into doubt.¹⁹

Sedlmayr, before Bruegel's paintings, asks the vertiginous question, "What is man, anyway?" The apocalyptic answer he perceived in the "hidden dissonance" of Bruegel's paintings is a world in which the human persists, but grotesquely emptied of essence, a husk evincing "the

¹⁷ See Jeanne Anne Nugent, "From Hans Sedlmayr to Mars and Back Again: New Problems in the Old History of Gerhard Richter's Radical Reworking of Modern Art," in *Gerhard Richter: Early Work, 1951–1972*, ed. Christine Mehring, Jeanne Nugent, and Jon Seydl (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum; Getty Research Institute, 2010), 36–62.

¹⁸ Hans Sedlmayr, "Bruegel's Macchia (1934)," trans. Christopher S. Wood, in *The Vienna School Reader*, 339, 342.

¹⁹ Sedlmayr, "Bruegel's Macchia," 336.



1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Children's Games*, 1560. Oil on oak panel. 46.5 × 63.4 in. (118 × 161 cm).
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Gemäldegalerie.

demotion of the human to the animal or vegetable.” This is as evident in his “peasants’ dull, wooden faces” as in the “faces of foreign races whose expressions one does not understand [and which] have the uncanny effect of masks.”²⁰ Bruegel pictures what “man” has become: a cipher taking form as the racial other, the “mass,” the mentally ill, the primitive, the immature child, and the physiognomically distorted.

But, for methodological reasons, Sedlmayr resists claiming that Bruegel’s art *reflects* or is *determined by* a sociological reality outside the frame. The work of art, he insists, is a unity that risks slipping away anytime an art historian explicates the work through exogenous forms of causation. In his methodological writings—of which we publish major examples, including his review of Eduard Coudenhove-Erthal’s book on Carlo Fontana and the exchange with Rudolf Wittkower that followed—Sedlmayr insisted that art history consisted of “two entirely distinct sciences of art”: a “first” art history focused on the factual reconstruction of the context of an artwork’s production and a “second” art history, Sedlmayr’s own, which would “defer” the pursuit of social history for a “rigorous” study of individual works of art, conceived as irreducible totalities. Sedlmayr’s enemy was historicism, as Evonne

²⁰ Sedlmayr, “Bruegel’s Macchia,” 346, 361, 342.

Levy and Frederick Schwartz demonstrate.²¹ Whenever the art historian reads an artwork for what is “characteristic” of its period style or sociological backdrop, Sedlmayr argues, “The artwork is here not seen as a ‘world’ but rather as a medium through which something else ‘expresses’ itself. It is thus not seen as an *artwork*.” Thus, via the work of historical and stylistic contextualization, “the autonomous artwork is degraded to something like ‘handwriting.’”²²

The “second” art history, however, would not sacrifice the historical as such. Instead, in a mystical wager, Sedlmayr argues that “A work of art *only exists through a particular attitude in which virtually the entire historical situation is concentrated*.” An artwork by Bruegel, then, may not be causally explicated by its historical circumstances; the artwork qua artwork is not an artifact from history but exists as a holistic “organism” that concentrates historical truth within itself. This “transcendent character of the work of art” may be experienced by the art historian who brings a “particular attitude” to the artwork, using Sedlmayr’s *Strukturanalyse* to orient their perception to the aesthetic principle that governs the arrangement of the work’s constitutive parts.²³ Thus, the art historian would no longer reduce artworks to their historical facticity and thereby “dissolve the unity of the work.”²⁴ Instead, they would grasp the unifying principle of the work and, as Levy writes in this issue of *Selva*, “open up to a recognition of the world in the object.”²⁵ Levy argues that Sedlmayr developed his “mystical” conception of the artwork as a totality against “the demystification of art [conceived] as the symptom of a decline of Western Christianity.” Here, within Sedlmayr’s art-historical method itself, Levy proposes, is “the most visible kernel of his reactionary politics.”²⁶

The contradictions of Sedlmayr’s system explode into view with *Verlust der Mitte*. While in his methodological statements of the 1930s, he resisted making art history into a

²¹ Levy writes that “Sedlmayr’s ambition... [was] to move the discipline away from historicism.” Levy, *Baroque Art*, 311. Schwartz, for his part, describes how “Sedlmayr sketches the outlines of a coherent critique of historicist art history and a programme to refound it on post-historicist lines.” Schwartz, *Blind Spots*, 151.

²² See Hans Sedlmayr, “On the Concept of ‘Structural Analysis’ (Coudenhove-Erthal’s Fontana Monograph, Once Again),” trans. Daniel Spaulding, in this issue.

²³ Hans Sedlmayr, “Toward a Rigorous Study of Art (1931),” 155, 170–71; emphasis in the original.

²⁴ Sedlmayr, “On the Concept of ‘Structural Analysis.’”

²⁵ See Evonne Levy, “Sedlmayr and Wittkower (1931–1932): More than a Skirmish,” in this issue.

²⁶ Here, one might be reminded of Adorno’s critique of the category of “wholeness, as that which is constitutively preestablished over its parts” in the work of Heidegger: “The borrowing from the psychological theory of wholeness pays off after all. Its grammatical character is the renunciation of any causal argumentation, a renunciation that removes the alleged wholenesses from nature, and transfers them to the transcendence of Being... Accommodation, social compliance, is the goal even of a category like wholeness.” Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 140, 144, 142.



2. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Magpie on the Gallows*, 1568. Oil on wood panel. 18.1 × 20 in. (45.9 × 50.8 cm). Hessisches Landesmuseum.

subordinate branch of the “history of spirit” (*Geistesgeschichte*), in the postwar book Sedlmayr seems to have abandoned such trepidation.²⁷ With modernism under analysis, Sedlmayr simply sets aside the central principle of *Strukturanalyse*, namely, that the interpretation of art has “nothing to do with historical explanation” because it is based upon “the capacity to re-experience, that is, to recreate, the fundamental visual content of works of art.”²⁸ The reason for this apparent methodological about-face is not, however, mere inconsistency. Indeed, he explicitly states in the introduction that “this book, then, does not

²⁷ Levy notes how the 1934 Bruegel essay already marked a shift in Sedlmayr’s thinking from *Strukturanalyse* to the “anschaulicher Charakter,” a recognition that his art history would have to contend with “the image in the world.” Levy, *Baroque Art*, 326.

²⁸ Translated and cited in Binstock, “Springtime for Sedlmayr?,” 79.

in any sense profess to be concerned with the history of art as such.”²⁹ Rather, part of the ultimate thesis of *Verlust der Mitte* is (as the title of the English translation, *Art in Crisis*, indicates) is that the “*fundamental visual content of works of art*” has itself been lost. The mystical “unity” of art, which Sedlmayr’s “second” art history believed itself uniquely capable of grasping, had been a casualty of a total historical process of disenchantment, as Levy suggests. Sedlmayr thus wrote against a world history that had rendered his “second” art history impossible, in which the progress of secularization had not only undermined theological and political values but had destroyed the holistic existence of the work of art.

In his book, Sedlmayr tracks this disenchantment of the world and of the work of art. The story begins for him with the Protestant Reformation’s displacement of religious authority and its assertion of human depravity, which had its visible consequences in Bruegel’s image of “man” as a peasant defecating under the gallows (fig. 2).³⁰ From there, “It was as though a door had opened in man, a door leading down into the world of the subhuman.” Building on a common trope of Catholic reactionary thought, the Reformation was a prelude to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution: in the name of liberty, “humanism” celebrates the autonomy of reason and of art from all “heteronomous’ fetters,” as Sedlmayr writes, which now include the divine itself. Yet, this tendency to “exalt both man and art onto the highest possible level” reverses into a universal ruin. As though by natural consequence, all intrahuman hierarchies (of race, ability, gender, class, etc.) are thus deranged, indissolubly linking “man’s declaration of autonomy and his loss of his true nature, his self-degradation to the level of the inorganic and ultimately of the chaotic.”³¹

In Sedlmayr’s view, both rationalist abstraction and the irrationalist distortions of the body are symptoms of the same disease (figs. 3–4). In the former tendency, architecture, along with art, gives itself over to supposedly autonomous rational-logical compositional principles (Claude-Nicolas Ledoux) or “sings the hymn of the machine” (Le Corbusier).³² In the latter case, from Francisco Goya to Surrealism, “Man’s features become a grimace, he is turned into a monstrosity, a freak, an animal, a beast, a skeleton, an apparition, an idol, a doll, a sack or an automaton.” Thenceforth, the modernist deluge conjoins the “inorganic” and the “chaotic”:

²⁹ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 5.

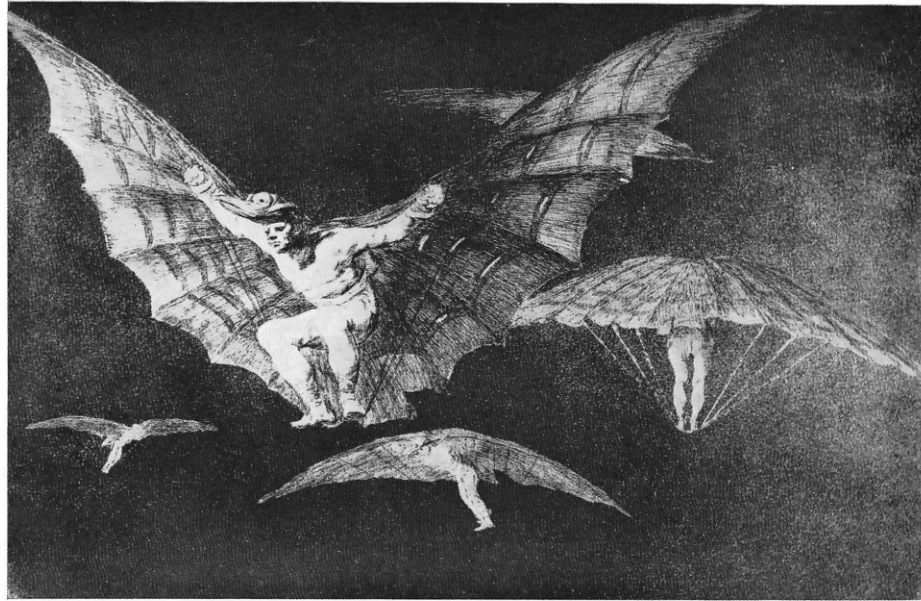
³⁰ Sedlmayr writes, “In Bruegel, this conception of humanity [as unnatural] has its roots in the Protestant view of man... He has lost his native dignity, he is no longer sublime, but has become a clod, incapable of rising by any effort of his own.” Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 193. Levy explains that Sedlmayr’s objection to Protestantism centered on its rejection of “the idea of human greatness, finding its expression in art in the ongoing medieval representation of man as he was—petty and miserable.” Levy, *Baroque Art*, 347.

³¹ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 121, 203, 175.

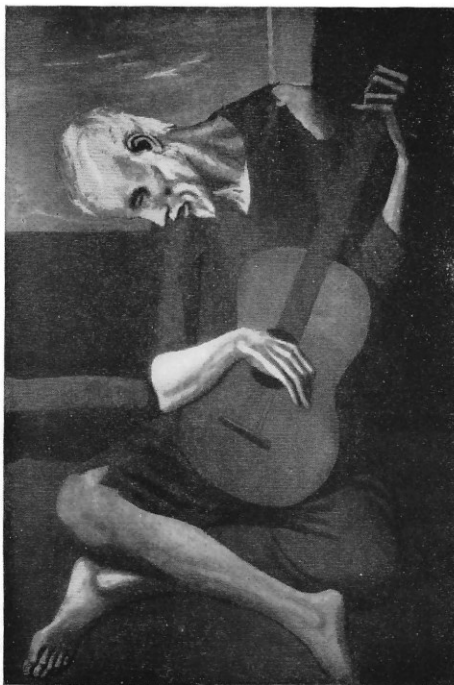
³² Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 58. Throughout *Verlust der Mitte*, Sedlmayr cites “the rediscoverer of the revolutionary architecture, Emil Kaufmann,” in particular Kaufmann’s *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier: Ursprung und Entwicklung der Autonomen Architektur* (Vienna: Passer, 1933). Sedlmayr affirms that Kaufmann’s defense of “autonomous” architecture negatively inspired the “very beginnings” of *Verlust der Mitte*. Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 100, 256. On the debate between Kaufmann and Sedlmayr, see Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 41–52.

GOYA: DEMONS
IN FLIGHT, from
Los Proverbios

'Man himself and
all his world have
been delivered to a
demon empire.'
(See page 119.)



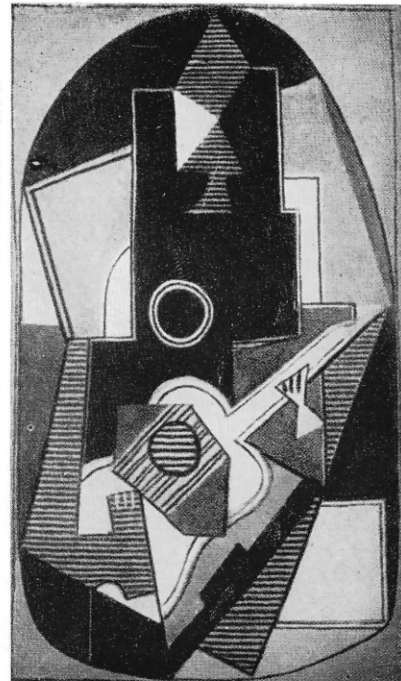
3. "Goya: *Demons in Flight*," plate from Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center*, trans. Brian Battershaw (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1958).



Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago

PICASSO: THE OLD
GUITARIST, 1903 (left);
and STREET SINGER,
1923 (right)

'Picasso's art no longer seeks
the complete human being
at all. It has lost the faculty
of seeing things as wholes.
It tears off one cover after
another in order to lay bare
the structure of nature and
in doing so penetrates even
further into the depths, dis-
closing the images of things
truly monstrous.'—Berdyaev.
(See page 156.)



4. "Picasso: *The Old Guitarist*, 1903 and *Street Singer*, 1923," plate from Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center*, trans. Brian Battershaw (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1958).

“Seurat was to represent man as though he were a wooden doll, a lay figure, or automaton, and still later, with Matisse, the human form was to have no more significance than a pattern on wallpaper, while with the Cubists man was degraded to the level of an engineering model.” Animated by the “spirit of 1789,” modernist art in both “technicized” and “irrationalist” guises celebrates, Sedlmayr argues, the unbounded mastery of the human over the world and consequently “destroys and ravages” the “genuinely organic” “wherever it finds it.”³³ The “genuinely organic” is simply “Man,” whose relationship to the world is “centered” by God.

Sedlmayr is thus led to the same Hegelian trope—of the “end of art”—that haunted Marxist aesthetics from Adorno to Guy Debord. Sedlmayr writes,

Logical and honest materialists are quite ready to admit that the abolition of God brings with it the abolition of art as such. What they will not admit is that such a development must inevitably lead to the abolition of man, to the transformation of man into something subhuman, into a human machine, a robot or into the anarchic human atom which, however, could in actual fact not be called “a-tom” at all, since it could be still further split and broken down. Most certainly man would ultimately thus be transformed into a demoniac.³⁴

The critical impulse to break down the whole into its component parts so that their relations may be understood rationally, with exclusive recourse to materialist causality, reduced the artwork to a compound of fragments and “man” to a being that may be reduced to ever smaller physical units. Deprived of God, who legislates the existence of undividable unities, the abolition of art and the abolition of “man” are inevitable. The unity of “man” was disaggregated scientifically and reaggregated into a disordered mass, operating with “demoniac” autonomy; likewise, the unity of the artwork was broken into the *disjecta membra* of modernism. Sedlmayr, who had long inveighed against the interpretive division of the work of art into constitutive parts, saw in this situation not only the historical eclipse of art at its highest but also the disciplinary end of art history.

Reactionary Motifs

In Sedlmayr’s work we have an opportunity to observe how certain core and interdependent characteristics of the reactionary worldview found root in the discipline of art history. A few crucial reactionary topoi may be enumerated, though the list is not exhaustive: 1) a figurative politics; 2) a “romantic anti-capitalism”; and, 3) an anti-dialectical mode of thought. The myths of race and nation are not listed separately, for they animate the whole and will be discussed within each.

³³ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 126, 134, 135, 149.

³⁴ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 211.

1.

Verlust der Mitte develops what might be called a historical physiology, an account of European art that progresses “not in historical terms but in human and psychological terms, as though we were dealing with the disease of an individual.”³⁵ Sedlmayr had previously advanced a biologicistic conception of the artwork as an “organism,” accessible via a “physiognomic understanding of the picture” (a project that culminated in his reading of Francesco Borromini’s “schizothymic” personality).³⁶ *Verlust der Mitte* proposes a grander organic analogy, expanding his scope from the individual artwork to a mythic body called Western Civilization, which faces not only “violent death as a result of alien invasion, [but also] a death from physical and spiritual disease... the madness of an entire civilization.”³⁷

Sedlmayr describes a Europe in which the advance of secularization and struggles for social emancipation have progressed hand in hand to shatter the organic being of the social body. Deprived of a legitimate principle of unification, the people of each nation progressively lose their innate racial character and congeal into an “amorphous mass.” The consequence, for Sedlmayr, is an “affection for the barbaric *per se*,” in “negro art and the art of primitive peoples in general.” The collapse of the racially distinct and nationally rooted “man” into a dedifferentiated collectivity is aligned with psychic disorder and physical degeneration. Europe thus gives itself over to “the psychology of primitives and children, of lunatics and criminals, the psychology of dreams and intoxication, mass psychology, and the psychology of apes.”³⁸

Against the racialized fears of biological infection and of the disordering force of the masses lies a familiar motif in reactionary thought: the holistic social body, held together by the “chains of subordination” described by Edmund Burke, that “inseparable union of the community” celebrated by the Nazi art historian Pinder.³⁹ This body is not identical with the population, conceived as a statistical entity, but is an organism infused with divine breath, given cohesion by race and form by art. This physiological conception of the unity of man, nation, and God was what led Schmitt (a figure who shared with Sedlmayr his Catholic conservatism and unrepentant Fascism) in his Nazi-period writings to turn to Thomas

³⁵ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 203.

³⁶ On Sedlmayr’s “physiognomic worldview” and its relationship to Gestalt psychology, see Schwartz, *Blind Spots*, 157–78. For Sedlmayr’s Gestalt-inspired reading of Francesco Borromini, see Sedlmayr, “The Architecture of Borromini,” ed. and trans. Karl Johns, *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 14 (June 2016), <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/johns-sedlmayr-translation.pdf> (accessed August 26, 2020). See also the analysis developed in Ian Verstegen, “Sedlmayr’s Borromini,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 14 (June 2016), <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/verstegen.pdf> (accessed August 26, 2020).

³⁷ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 236.

³⁸ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 119, 152, 155.

³⁹ Edmund Burke, as cited by Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, 112. Wilhelm Pinder, untitled statement, in *Bekanntnis der Professoren an den Universitäten und Hochschulen zu Adolf Hitler und dem nationalsozialistischen Staat* (Dresden: Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund, Deutschland-Sachsen, 1933), 41–42. See our discussion of these figures in our introduction to this issue, “Reactionary Art Histories.”

Hobbes's leviathan, the "mortal god who brings to man peace and security."⁴⁰ For Schmitt, "The absolutism of the state is... the oppressor of the irrepressible chaos inherent in man." The organicist conception of the social body—and the political theology underwriting the exercise of absolute power—requires an enemy. Schmitt found this force working behind such apparently distinct figures as Baruch Spinoza, the Rothschilds, and Karl Marx. Each "did his work as a Jewish thinker—that is, he did his part in castrating a leviathan that had been full of vitality."⁴¹

Sedlmayr, likewise, was clear about the identity of the enemy in his correspondence with Meyer Schapiro from 1930 to 1935, discovered and analyzed by Levy. In these letters, written contemporaneously with the first of the lectures that became *Verlust der Mitte*, Sedlmayr writes, "I honestly have to say that I am anti-Jewish."⁴² In his antisemitism, Sedlmayr's politics and aesthetics again converge: art gives figurative form to social health, conceived as racial unity and purity. Jews, in the National Socialist worldview, are not merely members of a competing racial group but a pathogen infecting the integrity of race as a category and thus are "destroyers of culture."⁴³ For the Nazis, art played a central role in figuring the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the racially coherent community united under the Führer. As Éric Michaud writes, "It was through art and in art—understood in the widest sense, that is to say, incorporating the whole perceptible environment and even the behavior (*Haltung*) of each individual—that the links holding the community together could and had to be maintained."⁴⁴ This biologization of art and society animates the history of *Verlust der Mitte* in its smallest details and converges with a defense of artistic figuration. The political-theological integration of the body politic and the historical capacity to construct ideal images of "man" have together been undermined and emptied out, leaving both to resemble "bits and pieces stuck together on a wire skeleton, like a reconstruction of a form that has been destroyed."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, trans. Erna Hilfstein and George Schwab (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 53.

⁴¹ Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 21–22, 70.

⁴² Hans Sedlmayr to Meyer Schapiro, February 7, 1934, as cited in Evonne Levy, "Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond, 1930–1935," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 59, no. 1 (December 2010), 244; our translation.

⁴³ Adolf Hitler, as cited by Éric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 76. On this point, Moishe Postone writes, "Within this racialized imaginary, the Jews are not so much an inferior race as an antirace, responsible for historical processes that are profoundly dangerous and destructive to the social 'health' of other peoples—a threat to life itself." Moishe Postone, "The Holocaust and the Trajectory of the Twentieth Century," in *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*, eds. Moishe Postone and Eric Santner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 89.

⁴⁴ Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, 52.

⁴⁵ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 115.

2.

While the organized Right today almost universally accepts the neoliberal conception of the market as, in Corey Robin's words, a "proving ground" for "social hierarchy," an ambivalent attitude toward capitalism was nearly definitional for European Fascism in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ Spurred by the existential threat of communism, intellectuals on the Right advanced their own critiques of the deleterious effects of the capitalist mode of production. Common tendencies were to inflate and dilute the specificity of capitalism to the point where it became synonymous with "the modern world" (e.g., Julius Evola's *Revolt against the Modern World*, 1934) or to deplore certain aspects or effects of capitalist society—for example, technical rationalization of production, the disruption of peasant communities, the ascendancy of finance, the vulgarity of the petite bourgeoisie—divorced from their systemic context. Either way, capitalism was framed as a symptom of a deeper social disease to be contrasted against authentic values, including the health of the social body secured by racial and national borders, the superiority of a spiritual and intellectual elite, and the divine authorization of political power.

That Sedlmayr fulminates in his letters to Schapiro against capitalism and affirms his "will to destroy things thoroughly rotten (e.g. industrial capitalism in its present form)," is then hardly surprising.⁴⁷ But what is the fundamental character of capital for Sedlmayr? In *Verlust der Mitte*, he describes (with a nod to Max Weber) capitalism as rooted in a process of secularization emerging from the Protestant Reformation and the triumph of the "inorganic sciences." The result is the "inorganic man," governed only by principles of technical rationality:

Modern industry is the child of this marriage [between capitalism and science] and the whole process was endowed with tremendous dynamism, immediately the industrial worker became a numerically increasing type, who throughout his life was occupied wholly with the inorganic. The transformation of society now centers wholly around this type and was largely brought about by it, and all this works towards making the fixation of the human mind on the inorganic a permanent one. The type of the inorganic man is proclaimed as the universally valid human type.⁴⁸

Sedlmayr thus outlines a vision of both "man" and society as machines, deprived of their "organic" principle, a nightmare victorious in both the capitalist West and in the workers' states of the Third International. In Sedlmayr's view, the human result of a wholly technicized world wrought by modern capitalism is the proletariat, the ultimate "inorganic man." This rhetoric inverts the subject and object of capital. The proletariat is not dehumanized by class exploitation and the extraction of surplus value; the proletariat dehumanizes the world through the expansion of its ranks. The proletariat is not subjected to the law of reification; it is the exponent of a mechanistic worldview inimical to all higher values.

⁴⁶ Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, 128.

⁴⁷ Hans Sedlmayr to Meyer Schapiro, November 1, 1934, as cited in Levy, "Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond," 250.

⁴⁸ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 183.

In this, Sedlmayr exhibits core features of the reactionary stream of “romantic anti-capitalism” that was given its classic definition by Michael Löwy.⁴⁹ For Löwy, “The essential characteristic of Romantic anti-capitalism is a thorough critique of modern industrial (bourgeois) civilization (including the process of production and work) in the name of certain pre-capitalist social and cultural values.”⁵⁰ The ire of romantic anti-capitalism, Löwy argues, is not directed at the exploitation of the working class but at “the quantification of life, i.e. the total domination of (quantitative) exchange-value, of the cold calculation of price and profit, and of the laws of the market, over the whole social fabric.”⁵¹ This is a critique of capitalism that does not oppose, or even theorize, the regimes of value and class. In its reactionary mode, its rhetoric instead centers on an opposition to “rationalization” in the name of theological values; to bourgeois liberalism in the name of absolute authority; to international finance capital in the name of national productivity; and to technologized factory labor in the name of a mythical *Volk* linked to the soil.

In his letters to Schapiro, Sedlmayr makes manifest the conceptual and historical continuity between reactionary anti-capitalism and antisemitism. At one point, objecting to Schapiro’s definition of Fascism, Sedlmayr avows his allegiance to a particular kind of Fascism. Schapiro, he writes, has conflated two different phenomena under the name of Fascism: “Anti-anti-capitalism, which, as you rightly say, is capitalism itself. And an attitude toward capitalism and Marxism (and also that first Fascism) as thesis and antithesis *lying on a single plane*—and rejecting *both*. In *this* [latter] sense, indeed, I would be a Fascist.”⁵² In defining Fascism as a political alignment set against both capitalism and communism, Sedlmayr exhibits a classic reactionary trope of the period: that bourgeois capitalism and proletarian communism are merely two sides of the same coin, oriented to the quantification of life.⁵³

The structure of romantic anti-capitalism is deployed to reconcile the evident contradiction at the heart of Sedlmayr’s brand of antisemitism; namely, that Jews as a political power are responsible for both Bolshevism and finance capital. Sedlmayr writes to Schapiro,

I believe that the Jewish question would be very clear if one simply considered the sociological structure of Judaism as a whole without resentment. The fact alone that the Jews as a community have not had a peasantry as a “base” in the past few centuries (I know very well that there are a few Jewish farmers, but precisely not in the same proportion as the other nations amongst which they live) would explain a lot—in my

⁴⁹ The term’s Marxist history begins with Lukács. See the discussion of Romantic anti-capitalism in Trevor Stark, “*Complexio Oppositorum*: Hugo Ball and Carl Schmitt,” *October* 146 (fall 2013), 41–46.

⁵⁰ Michael Löwy, “The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization,” *Theory and Society*, vol. 16, no. 6 (November 1987), 891.

⁵¹ Löwy, “The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization,” 892.

⁵² Hans Sedlmayr to Meyer Schapiro, April 4, 1935, as cited in Levy, “Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond,” 256; emphasis in the original, our translation.

⁵³ Schmitt, for example, proclaimed that “American financiers and Russian Bolsheviks find themselves in a common struggle for economic thinking.” Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 13.

opinion, also their “predestination” for the “industrial system,” be it individual or collective-capitalist.⁵⁴

In its romantic valorization of precapitalist peasantry and its constitution of a racial enemy excluded from this organic connection to the soil, Sedlmayr’s critique of capitalism follows several key characteristics of Moishe Postone’s account of antisemitic anti-capitalism, which casts Jews as exponents of “abstract law, abstract reason, or, on another level, money and finance capital—from the standpoint of the ‘healthy,’ ‘rooted,’ ‘natural’ concrete.” “Modern anti-Semitism,” Postone continues, “involves a biologization of capitalism—which itself is only understood in terms of its manifest abstract dimension—as International Jewry.”⁵⁵ As the representative of the “inorganic” and “abstract,” the specter of the Jew is construed as the mortal enemy of the (*Volks*)*Gemeinschaft*, the organically integrated productive community, rooted in the soil of the homeland and unified by blood.

3.

What can one call a worldview that asserts the equivalence of communism and capitalism, that opposes “rationalization” in all its forms, that constructs holisms to demand the return of all deviations to a mythic center? Evidently frustrated by his correspondence with Schapiro, Sedlmayr poses the question himself and gives a clear answer:

What can a man who is an opponent of communism an[d] of jews [*sic*] (as far as they—in consequence of their history and the social structure of that nation—are preparers and allies of communism)—what can a man who believes in peasants, religion and art (see the end of my last letter) be? I am astonished that you could not solve this riddle. He naturally is a “conservative.”⁵⁶

Opponents of Fascism (liberal and Left) too often stop at pointing to these contradictory views, as though they were the marks of a logical deficiency (How can the Jews be responsible for *both* industrial capitalism *and* communism?).⁵⁷ The “conservative,” however, does not accept the logical inconsistency of their positions, for it is the essence of their political project to reconcile these tensions by force of will.

⁵⁴ Sedlmayr to Schapiro, February 7, 1934, as cited in Levy, “Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond,” 245; our translation.

⁵⁵ Postone, “The Holocaust and the Trajectory of the Twentieth Century,” 93.

⁵⁶ Sedlmayr to Schapiro, November 1, 1934, as cited in Levy, “Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond,” 249–50; English in the original.

⁵⁷ One suspects that his recently severed correspondence with Sedlmayr may have been in the back of Schapiro’s mind when he wrote, “The writers who try to explain modern art as the evil work of the Jews, attack Jewish intellectualism as the cause of abstract art, Jewish emotionalism as the cause of expressionistic art, and Jewish practicality as the cause of realistic art. This ridiculous isolation of the Jews as responsible for modern art is of the same order as the Nazi charge that the Jews as a race are the real pillars of capitalism and also, at the same time, the Bolsheviks who are undermining it.” Meyer Schapiro, “Race, Nationality, and Art,” *Art Front*, vol. 2, no. 4 (March 1936), 11.

Reading Sedlmayr as an exemplification in art history of the core tenets of reactionary thought, what is most striking—most typical but also most difficult to grasp—is the organizing logic of his anti-dialectical thinking. In this mode, thesis and antithesis are not reconciled, synthesized, or progressively entwined but represent divergences from a primordial *unity, balance, or center*. The abstract structure of Sedlmayr's social critique, applicable to any concrete phenomenon, is "the abolition of the distinction between top and bottom."⁵⁸ Without hierarchy, there is no "mean" or "center" (*Mitte*). "Autonomous man" and the "masses," the "primitive" and the technological, the capitalist and the communist, the financier and the factory laborer, Ledoux and Picasso, each are manifestations of the same decentering of "man's" place in the universe. Thus, to "recenter" art and "man" is not to affirm their autonomy but to restore their place in a cosmic hierarchy governed by God. From this, all other intraworldly hierarchies will follow.

Sedlmayr's politics and art-historical method are inseparable on this point. In *Verlust der Mitte*, he cites the art historian Theodor Hetzer (a signatory of the 1933 "Vow of Allegiance of the Professors of the German Universities and High-Schools to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialistic State"): "Since the French Revolution, there has been a tendency to offset opposites to the point of total irreconcilability."⁵⁹ Sedlmayr concurs: "Feeling and reason, reason and instinct, heart and head, body and soul, soul and spirit, all these are torn apart from one another and are declared to be in mutual enmity. The desire to unite them and to keep them thus united is, like all moderation as such, decried as a manifestation of the lukewarm." Through his *Strukturanalyse*, its subordination of any detail in the artwork to an a priori holistic principle derived by mystical insight, Sedlmayr developed in art history something akin to what Schmitt attempted in political theory; that is, a "decisionism of absolutist thinking."⁶⁰

Sedlmayr's Prognosis

At the end of his book, Sedlmayr sketches his postwar present, which he perceives to be at the crux of "total catastrophe or the beginnings of regeneration," and speculates on the role art history might play. He describes a world where the prior distinctness of national cultures has been abolished by the unification of the globe under technocapitalism, producing "a thing that is absolutely unprecedented, a planet that, at any rate in the technological sense, may be referred to as one world." The principle of this "one world" order, for Sedlmayr, is "transhumanism," and its most terrible consequence is "the comprehensive combinations of cultures." The narrative Sedlmayr has traced from the Reformation, of the uncoupling of the human from God and the consequent loss of "man" as such, has finally been achieved: "Only our own civilization... has attained a 'trans-humanist' stage." This great technological leap beyond the bounds of the human, however "will remain rooted in the inorganic, and will also be a retrogression, a *ricorso* to the primitive, but to a primitive that is not pre-human but post-

⁵⁸ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 147.

⁵⁹ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 148.

⁶⁰ Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 80.

human.” This post-human primitivism is “the end of all inward nobility, it is the end of personality. Behind all this, like the yawning of an abyss, we see the chaos of a disintegrating culture.”⁶¹ In this pessimistic vision, Sedlmayr contemplates the defeat of the Third Reich and the global victory of a “one world” condition of technologically progressive, multicultural, American-style capitalism, in which he perceives the abolition of racial integrity and thus the end of the human as such.

Sedlmayr assigns a redemptive role to the art historian in the fight against this transhuman, “primitivist” world order.⁶² Against a human retrogression in which “the organ for the grasp of the visible character has atrophied in most people,”⁶³ art historians stand as a privileged class, as “those whom nature has endowed with the gift of intuitive perception, a sense of quality and a feeling for symbols.” They, therefore, “should be the ‘cells’ from which healing should proceed... Yet for its flowering it needs a soil, and there is but one soil that can bring it to fruition—it is the soil of knowledge, the knowledge that we are creatures of God.” Here, Sedlmayr’s theological discourse of the organic revives his aesthetic holism and smuggles in what had become unspeakable by 1948: the ground of his antisemitism, the “soil” in which the *Volksgemeinschaft* could take root again. Each plays a role in Sedlmayr’s vision of art history as a seed bank, safeguarding that which “still hibernates and retains its germinal life” during the long winter of the “inorganic,” holding it *in potentia* until the day when the soil would once more be prepared.⁶⁴

Perhaps thinking of his encounter with Sedlmayr’s art history of the “center,” Schapiro warned in 1936 that the study of art played an indispensable role in Fascism:

The racial theories of Fascism call constantly on the traditions of art. . . . Where else but in the historic remains of the arts does the nationalist find the evidence of his fixed racial character? [...] Only the artistic monuments of his country assure him that his ancestors were like himself, and that his own character is an unchangeable heritage rooted in his blood and native soil. For a whole century already the study of the history of art has been exploited for these conclusions.⁶⁵

Art history can be of use to Fascism when it conceives art as a storehouse of organic human values to be guarded against the threat of the “inorganic”; when it constitutes itself as a professional caste gifted with an “intuitive” capacity to grasp “visible character”; and when it naturalizes racial hierarchies and borders under the banners of “heritage” and “national style.” Sedlmayr’s call for art history to “hold fast to the eternal image of man” can be heard again

⁶¹ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 207, 239–41.

⁶² Sedlmayr makes clear with whom he shares his vision of renewal in the book’s final pages, where he cites with brazen openness a litany of Nazi intellectuals, including Nazi urban planner Alwin Seifert, Nazi psychologist Philipp Lersch, and Nazi economist Alfred Müller-Armack (who, in 1933, published *Ideas of the State and Economy Order in the New Reich* celebrating the Nazi economic plan).

⁶³ Sedlmayr, as translated and cited in Schwartz, *Blind Spots*, 199.

⁶⁴ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 251, 253.

⁶⁵ Schapiro, “Race, Nationality, and Art,” 10.

today, as art is conscripted by the Far Right to give figurative form to irrational absolutes of nation, blood, soil, and God.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*, 254.