Sedlmayr and Wittkower (1931–1932): More than a Skirmish

Evonne Levy

The three texts presented here—two by the Austrian Hans Sedlmayr of the Second Vienna School and one by the German Rudolf Wittkower—document an intellectual skirmish that played out in Viennese journals in 1931–1932. On the surface, the articles, whose subject matter was late baroque architecture, appear to debate the stakes of formalism. But in reality, their back-and-forth over a church façade by the late-baroque Roman architect Carlo Fontana registers a profound struggle for the soul of art history itself.[1] The essays are intertextually bound to a larger group of texts in which the young Sedlmayr announced a program of *Strukturforschung* (structural research) or *Strukturanalyse* (structural analysis) for a *Kunstgeschichte* (history of art) reoriented as *Kunstwissenschaft* (science of art). Sedlmayr laid out his program in two articles published around the exchange with Wittkower: "The Quintessence of Riegl's Teachings" (1929), in which he proposed his *Strukturforschung* as a substitute for Alois Riegl's *Kunstwollen*; and "Toward a Rigorous Study of Art" (1931), in which he formalized two levels of art-historical research: a "first" art history and a "second" art history.[2] Sedlmayr, who later characterized this early period as highly abstract, was

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[1] Prior accounts examine this episode from the perspective of Sedlmayr (study of Wittkower as a figure has been limited). See Lorenz Dittmann, *Stil, Symbol, Struktur: Studien zu Kategorien der Kunstgeschichte* (Munich: Fink, 1967), 149–51; Marco Pogacnik, "Beyond the Vienna School: Sedlmayr and Borromini," trans. Maarten Delbeke and Andrew Leach with Andrea Bosio, in *The Baroque in Architectural Culture 1880–1980* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 100–2; and Evonne Levy, *Baroque and the Political Language of Formalism (1845–1945): Burckhardt, Wölfflin, Gurlitt, Brinkmann, Sedlmayr* (Basel: Schwabe, 2016), 320–25. The articles are mentioned briefly in Joseph Connors and Jennifer Montagu, "Introduction," in Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1550–1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1, ix, xi; and Joseph Connors, introduction to Rudolf Wittkower and Margot Wittkower, *Born under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists; A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2007), xxii.

[2] Hans Sedlmayr, "Die Quintessenz der Lehren Riegls," in Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Karl Maria Swoboda, with an introduction by Hans Sedlmayr (Augsburg: Filser, 1929), xii–xxxii. Sedlmayr had earlier used the term *Struktur* in Hans Sedlmayr, "Gestaltetes Sehen," *Belvedere* 8 (1925), 65–73; and "Zum Gestalteten Sehen," *Belvedere* 9/10 (1926), 57–62. See Christopher S. Wood, ed., *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s* (New York: Zone,

working with concepts of Gestalt theory and cast himself as part of a "jungen Garde." Although this moniker suggests a progressive methodology, Gestalt, with its vision of holism, was used on both sides of the ideological divide in the 1920s and 1930s.[3] Moreover, while Sedlmayr saw his work as theoretical and advanced (and correct), he did not necessarily view it (or himself) as "progressive." As Sedlmayr sparred with the Jewish Wittkower, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) was consolidating power. Sedlmayr was "politically anti-Judaism," and on November 7, 1930 he joined the Nazi Party as an "Illegaler" (he then rejoined from 1938 to 1945).[4] In light of the precise overlap of these events with the textual exchange, we must consider whether the texts' intellectual differences also register ideological differences, a crisis on both sides that also ignited a personal animus just beneath the surface of a scholarly exchange.

An opening salvo was launched by Sedlmayr in a review of Eduard Coudenhove-Erthal's 1929 monograph on Fontana published in *Kritische Berichte*.[5] In Coudenhove-Erthal's book Sedlmayr found a good example of what he had started to characterize as first-level art history, which Sedlmayr considered the strictly empirical basis for the more substantive project of *Kunstwissenschaft*, or second-level art history.[6] When he wrote this review, he had just published his *Borromini*, an extended exercise in the "second art history," following Eberhard Hempel's monograph on the architect, which Sedlmayr mentions in the review as an another example of the preliminary type.[7]

2000), 32. On first- and second-level art history, see Hans Sedlmayr, "Zu einer strengen Kunstwissenschaft," *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschung* 1 (1930/1931), 7–32; available in English translation in *The Vienna School Reader*, 133–79. For the relation of that text to others by Sedlmayr, see Pogacnik, "Beyond the Vienna School," 98–99.

[3] See Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). For a closer parsing of this question with reference to a wider range of Sedlmayr's writings on the baroque, see Levy, *Baroque and the Political Language of Formalism*. A different view is expressed in an earnest attempt to resuscitate Sedlmayr's work in Ian Verstegen, "Sedlmayr's Borromini," *Journal of Art Historiography* 14 (2016), 1–22.

[4] Essential on the subject of Sedlmayr's party membership is Hans Aurenhammer, "Hans Sedlmayr und die Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Wien 1938–1945," *Kunst und Politik* 5 (2003), 161–94; and Peter Haiko, "'Verlust der Mitte' von Hans Sedlmayr als kritische Form im Sinne der Theorie von Hans Sedlmayr," in *Willfährige Wissenschaft: Die Universität Wien 1938–1945* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1989), 87.

[5] Hans Sedlmayr, "Eduard Coudenhove-Erthal, *Carlo Fontana und die Architektur des Römischen Spätbarocks.* – Wien, Schroll. 1930," trans. Daniel Spaulding, in this issue. The *KB* was an organ of dissemination for *Strukturforschung* while Sedlmayr tried to start his own journal (*Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*), which he intended to be "das Organ der jungen Garde." See Evonne Levy, "Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond, 1930–1935," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 59 (2011), 238–39.

[6] Sedlmayr, "Coudenhove-Erthal."

[7] Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Architektur Borrominis* (Berlin: Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt, 1930); and Eberhard Hempel, *Francesco Borromini* (Vienna: Schroll, 1924.)

Sedlmayr does not characterize the first art history, with its gathering of data and recon-struction of the circumstances of architectural projects, as positivist—*historical* would have been a more appropriate term, especially given the required training for Vienna School art historians in the neighboring discipline. Sedlmayr fooled no one with his dismissive attitude toward what he characterized as preliminary study, insofar as he considered it a kind of art history conducted in the dark by those who could no longer access the work in a spiritual sense. Because this kind of caretaker art history failed, in his view, to reveal the *artistic* character of a work, its results were not important. Indeed, Sedlmayr had a mystical appreciation for the unique capacity of the second art history to reveal the work of art as such and, in so doing, to reveal its essential unity.[8] Everything else an art historian considered in a historical account of a work—design development, patronage, iconography—was external to the work's essence. In one of his more withering characterizations, Sedlmayr describes monographs like Hempel's as so devoid of interpretive thread that any additions to an artist's oeuvre could simply be tacked on without altering one's sense of the artist, like additions to a stamp book. Because Sedlmayr would later reveal the demystification of art to be a symptom of the decline of Western Christianity, this conviction is the most visible kernel of his reactionary politics. As we will see, it is not idle to wonder whether there was also a kernel of antisemitism in some applications of the categories.

In a response to the review, also published in *Kritische Berichte*, Wittkower blasted Sedlmayr first for his disingenuous praise for the exhaustiveness of Coudenhove-Erthal's Fontana monograph (Wittkower's own work was still turning up more drawings) and, second, for his presumption to have all of the answers.[9] Wittkower was likely aware that Dagobert Frey had penned a devastating review of Sedlmayr's first book-length publication on Fischer von Erlach (1925), specifically noting that the absence of archival or new research on drawings and attributions had led Sedlmayr to "purely subjective" and obviously incorrect conclusions.[10] Wittkower reiterated Frey's insistence that architectural history stand on factual ground. A letter Sedlmayr wrote to Meyer Schapiro on February 2, 1932, reveals a slightly chastened Sedlmayr at work on a newly discovered cache of drawings by von Erlach: "the detailed questions of the 'first' art history are, as you know, time-consuming but disciplining."[11] With Hempel, whose own monograph on Francesco Borromini fell into Sedlmayr's first art history, the stakes were significantly raised. In a 1934 review of Sedlmayr's *Borromini*—and counter to his "rigorous study of art" [*strenge Kunstwissenschaft*]—Hempel questioned the historical basis for Sedlmayr's work.[12] The observation that Sedlmayr did not

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[8] On this point, which Sedlmayr took from Benedetto Croce and from which he never wavered, see Pogacnik, "Beyond the Vienna School," 99–100.

[9] Rudolf Wittkower, "On Hans Sedlmayr's Review of: E. Coudenhove-Erthal, *Carlo Fontana*," trans. Daniel Spaulding, in this issue.

[10] Dagobert Frey, review of Hans Sedlmayr, *Fischer von Erlach der Ältere*, in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 4 (1926), 204–6.

[11] Levy, "Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond," 240.

[12] Eberhard Hempel, "Ist 'eine strenge Kunstwissenschaft' möglich?," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 3 (1934), 155–63; and Levy, *Baroque and the Political Language of Formalism,* 322, 339–41.

know his material well could have been career ending, and he responded in print on at least two occasions to Hempel's critique.[13]

Sensitive to Sedlmayr's championing of von Erlach rather than Fontana as the only true creative synthesizer in the wake of the highly inventive works of Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Borromini, Wittkower made a case for Fontana's creative reworking of Bernini's ideas. But Wittkower's key counter was his rejection of Sedlmayr's assertion that Fontana's façade of San Biagio in Campitelli structurally incorporated both a distant (*Fernsicht*) and a proximate view (*Nahsicht*). Here Sedlmayr was invoking the terms Riegl had used to inscribe into the site-specific work of art a mobile subject and, more deeply, the subjectivity that characterized baroque art in general.[14] Wittkower looked at the street plan of the site and concluded that the church could never have been taken in from a distance. As a scholar of Bernini's architecture and coauthor of a catalog of Bernini's drawings, Wittkower well knew the handful of drawings in which Bernini studied his architectural project from a specific prospect.[15] Both Wittkower and Sedlmayr were interested in a mobile spectator, but Wittkower's, with her psychological "*Architekturgesinnung*" (architectural sensibility), was situated in the historical city. Wittkower concluded that Sedlmayr's analysis was willfully theoretical. Sedlmayr retorted that it was Fontana who was willfully theoretical, that his own theory merely captured the architect's thinking. By "theoretical," Wittkower really meant unfounded, intuitive, arbitrary. There was a sense that *Strukturanalysis* was not a rigorous, systematic method, as Sedlmayr claimed, but was wholly intuitive.[16] In this point of contention one senses not just a methodological question but an ideological battle over how much mystification was in Sedlmayr's art history.

Furthermore, insofar as the architect in Sedlmayr's genetic thinking somehow loses control to the motif, Sedlmayr was willing to sacrifice the creative individual to the work of art itself—as if the DNA of the work, its artistic essence, generated the form according to some

[13] Hans Sedlmayr, "Geschichte und Kunstgeschichte," *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung* 50 (1936), 185–99; and Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Architektur Borrominis*, rev. ed. (Munich: Piper, 1939).

[14] Alois Riegl, *The Origins of Baroque Art in Rome* (1908), trans. Arno Witte and Andrew Hopkins (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010). On the centrality of the changing perceptions of the spectator to Riegl's baroque, see also Evonne Levy, "Riegl and Wölfflin in Dialogue on the Baroque," in *The Baroque in Architectural Culture 1880–1980*, ed. Andrew Leach, John Macarthur, and Maarten Delbeke (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 88–90. Sedlmayr made this simultaneity the keystone of his reinterpretation of the baroque architecture of Austria in his *Österreichische Barockarchitektur 1690–1740* (Vienna: Filser, 1930).

[15] For example, the church of Santa Maria dell'Assunta in Ariccia (but also the piazza in front of St. Peter's and the Pantheon). See Heinrich Brauer and Rudolf Wittkower, *Die Zeichnungen Gian Lorenzo Berninis* (Berlin: Heinrich Keller, 1931) 1:123. The theme of the situated spectator would be central to Wittkower's publication of a critical counterproject to Bernini's plans for the Piazza of St. Peter's: "A Counter-project to Bernini's Piazza di San Pietro," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 3 (1939–1940), 88–106.

[16] See the wonderful description of the way Sedlmayr and Otto Pächt claimed to grasp the work of art in Christopher S. Wood, "Introduction," in *The Vienna School Reader*, 34.

inevitable expressive force. Sedlmayr compounded this point in his response to Wittkower when he wrote that, in determining the "concrete understanding of the form," even "all 27 volumes [of Fontana's drawings] in Windsor will be of no help in comprehending Fontana's art." One can appreciate how little the artist's own thinking, to which drawings were believed to give the most immediate access, directs the art historian's divining rod.

Sedlmayr countered Wittkower in a second, more substantive article in which he conducts a *Strukturanalyse* with the aim of distinguishing its way of proceeding from a kind of uncommitted description and stylistic analysis.[17] Embedded in this discussion is Sedlmayr's ongoing polemic with the *Stilanalyse* of the Wölfflin school, which Wittkower was pursuing along the lines of the individual style that Heinrich Wölfflin himself put to one side in favor of broad temporal *Formgefühl* (feeling for form) in the *Principles of Art History*. Sedlmayr insisted that the proper object for the analysis of Fontana's work was Santa Maria in Campitelli and not San Marcello. In response, Wittkower complained about the arbitrariness of the system—for why should a structure not be applicable to other works? But since Sedlmayr was looking at Fontana from Austria and through the work of von Erlach in particular, his claims for the most characteristic work differ not based on allegiances to the design ideas of Bernini, or even the most significant or characteristic works for Fontana's own style, but on the uptake of his ideas across the Alps.

In Sedlmayr's view, Coudenhove-Erthal's analysis explained some motifs but not the whole, failing to understand the governing motif (what he calls the *anschaulich erfassten Grundkonzeption* [visibly conceived fundamental concept]) tied to a design from beginning to end, accounting for its every detail. Both Wittkower and Coudenhove-Erthal failed to notice, Sedlmayr claimed, that the façade of San Marcello is a recasting of Martino Longhi's Roman façade of Santi Vincenzo e Anastasio.[18] Sedlmayr observes the unusual arrangement of three equally sized equidistant columns, one slightly recessed, as a pattern that Fontana took up at San Marcello. Sedlmayr then peels back the three layers of this façade to show that Fontana's rationalized design process was based on Bernini's (academic, wrongly termed "classical") habit of designing in layers (*Schichten*). The tracing of the development of a design

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[17] Hans Sedlmayr, "On the Concept of 'Structural Analysis' (Coudenhove-Erthal's Fontana Monograph, Once Again)," trans. Daniel Spaulding, in this issue.

[18] In 1937 Wittkower resoundingly rejected this analysis: "For the facade of S. Marcello see Coudenhove-Erthal, op. cit., pp. 53 ff. In this connection I wish to draw attention to the fact that Carlo Fontana in his scheme followed Lunghi's first project for S. Carlo al Corso (Fig. 84) very closely. Sedlmayr in *Kritische Berichte*, 1931–2, pp. 146 ff., tries to prove that Fontana derived his project from Lunghi's facade of SS. [Santi] Vincenzo e Anastasio. This is obviously wrong." Rudolf Wittkower, "Carlo Rainaldi and the Roman Architecture of the Full Baroque," *The Art Bulletin* 19 (1937), 310n118. But in a later publication, first published in 1958, Wittkower cites Sedlmayr on Santi Vincenzo e Anastasio. The choice of that work to discuss in a survey indicates his acceptance of Sedlmayr's analysis. He also uses the term *genetic*, which Sedlmayr had adapted from Gestalt theory. Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600–1750, Volume 2: The High Baroque, 1625–1675*, revised by Joseph Connors and Jennifer Montagu (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 106–107.

is an entirely different process than its structural analysis, the tracing of a rigorous logic that sees every part of a design as a functioning element of a whole.

Sedlmayr was keen to make clear the differences between the comparative methods of a structural and a style analysis. Coudenhove-Erthal used unlike objects to draw contrasts, whereas Sedlmayr found an essential kernel that connects one work to another. In assessing the difference between the two, Sedlmayr concluded that Longhi's design is based on and relentlessly adheres to its primary motif: the festive trident of columns (*Säulentriga*)—a powerful *Anschauung* from which the architect did not stray. Fontana's design, in contrast, was credited with being more intellectually rich and interesting but impoverished in *Anschauung*. Sedlmayr thus concluded that Longhi was deeply creative while Fontana was working with Bernini's basic academic design principles.

Is *Strukturanalyse* another term for formal analysis? Sedlmayr did not accept the periodization that was the goal of Wölfflin's *Stilanalyse*, insisting, rather, that the point of art history was to investigate individuals and their singular works ("Schritt für Schritt, in alle Einzelheiten"). In reality, for Sedlmayr, the individual is much less important than the work of art. He rightly pointed out that the goals of style analysis are external to the work of art—a series of formal characteristics that link works together according to time, place, generation (a nod to Wilhelm Pinder), or even an individual's stylistic trajectory. The work of art is reduced to a handwriting and to a medium, the means to a classification. For Sedlmayr, this project looked past and outside the work of art, which should instead be understood as a "world" in itself. Thus style history led inevitably to *Geistesgeschichte* and away from *Kunstgeschichte*, a not-so-veiled critique of the direction Max Dvořák (1874–1921) had taken in the first wave after Riegl.

Although the distinction between *Strukturanalyse* and *Stilanalyse* often seems on the verge of collapsing into a heap because of the particular examples under discussion, Sedlmayr's conviction that one works not toward generalities but toward specifics is substantive. With the objective of carrying out a thorough analysis of a building, structural analysis required the comparison of like to like, not like to unlike, which could yield only *Allgemeinheit*, and *Äusserlichkeiten*: generality and superficial, external characteristics rather than essences. Structural analysis can look more thorough; more important, its goal is different. But Sedlmayr's writing also contains a large measure of willful projection of what the essence of a work *is*, a design kernel that Sedlmayr believed he understood. I agree with Wittkower that, though Sedlmayr's observations are not wrong, what seems like a willful imposition of one idea over another is especially irritating—because, in the end, both the vocabulary and the mode of seeing are not at all far apart. Despite Sedlmayr's efforts to show their radical difference, in the Fontana instance his *Strukturanalyse* amounts to an intensification of style analysis, a question of degree rather than substance.

For Sedlmayr, the differences were more important than the cumulative under-standing that might be gathered under the big tent of art history. His higher goal was to disentangle *Strukturanalyse* from *Stilgeschichte*, to assert the former's preeminence in *Kunstwissenschaft*. In a note, he observes that *Strukturanalyse* partakes in formalism, a term he otherwise does not invoke. He points to another analysis whose *Struktur* has more to do with context (Area Capitolina) for what Christopher Wood describes as *Strukturanalyse*'s

"triangulation between artifact and worldview."[19] But in this instance the analysis does not appear to open up to a recognition of the world in the object (and later Sedlmayr would reflect that his work in this period was still too formalistic).[20] Is the search for a structural essence a method? There was, he ominously claimed, a crisis underway that demanded this emergence of his chosen method, the method of an authentic or "echten" *Kunstgeschichte*. Elsewhere, Sedlmayr located the crisis in the ambivalent gains of "expressionist" art history—an art history that had lost its capacity to value and rank the work of art.

To understand the root causes of this "crisis" around understanding the work of art, we must look at the longer arc of Sedlmayr's thinking and also at his politics. Sedlmayr would eventually become one of the most articulate voices of the crisis of Western civilization—a crisis that he (and others) dated to the confessionalization of the Western Church with the Reformation. He advanced this thesis in his most widely read work of the postwar period, *Verlust der Mitte* (1948), but its seeds were present from the 1930s.[21] Sedlmayr's own Catholicism strongly guided his views, as well his decision to join the Nazi Party in 1930.

The subject of the Sedlmayr essays reprinted in this issue is of consequence. Baroque architecture was Sedlmayr's most important subject for the first ten or fifteen years of his career, and he worked on it until the end of his career. His focus was Catholic Austria, specifically the work of von Erlach, about whose work he wrote two monographs. The book under review by Coudenhove-Erthal was the first monographic treatment of the late Roman baroque architect Fontana, pupil and assistant of Bernini, whose work was in play for von Erlach. Although Germanophone architectural historians had made great strides in elaborating a history of baroque architecture north of the Alps, Rome remained the undisputed point of origin for baroque architecture. As a consequence, these historians felt a constant need to positively position the originality of the Germanophone baroque, to elevate it from the status of a derivative peripheral art. Cornelius Gurlitt had made this argument strongly for the Protestant baroque in 1889. Sedlmayr's work on Fischer entered into this polemic as well: his critique of the Fontana monograph subtly puts down the Roman architect to make space for the originality of the Austrian.

To read Wittkower without hindsight is difficult. By 1930 he had already spent years in archives and drawing and print cabinets, and he had lived for years in Rome in daily contact with the works with which he was concerned. (In contrast, I have not been able to find evidence of Sedlmayr's travels to Italy, or an extended stay in Rome, a city he surely knew but not as well as Wittkower did.) Few scholars would come to embody the antipodes of style and iconology into which postwar art history would settle. Wittkower accepted the turn away from a more philosophically informed art history, even writing an essay about precisely this

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[19] Wood, "Introduction," 11.

[20] Levy, *Baroque and the Political Language of Formalism*, 326–329.

[21] Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte: Die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symbol der Zeit* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1948). For the work leading up to *Verlust der Mitte*, see especially Haiko, "Sedlmayrs 'Verlust der Mitte'"; and Daniela Bohde, "Pieter Bruegels Macchia und Hans Sedlmayrs physiognomisches Sehen," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 57 (2008), 239–62.

subject in 1961.[22] When, in the late 1970s and 1980s, art history went through its first major disciplinary crisis, resulting in the theoretical turn, Wittkower could easily stand as a paragon of the kind of antispeculative positivist research that then came under fire, seen as a reactionary branch of art history. But what still lay in Wittkower's future in 1930? He still had a research fellowship, but after a brief stint at the University of Cologne in 1932–1933 the Nuremberg laws prevented him from holding a position in Germany, and it was only because of his father's English citizenship that Wittkower had little trouble emigrating to England, where he was hired by the newly transplanted Warburg Institute. When we look back at the skirmish with Sedlmayr, we should have more sympathy for the positivist groundedness with which Wittkower rose to oppose the capricious mystification of Sedlmayr's formalism.

What I call a "skirmish" between the two art historians was a prelude to another, more substantial epistolary conflict between Sedlmayr and Meyer Schapiro that ended in 1934, a four-year correspondence between periods of personal contact in Vienna.[23] With the National Socialists in power and Jewish scholars being shut out of German universities and research institutes, Schapiro appears to have confronted Sedlmayr about his political affiliation. In a series of heated letters from Sedlmayr (Schapiro's side has not yet come to light), Sedlmayr's antisemitism is openly acknowledged and shown to be fully embedded in his worldview.[24] Sedlmayr pleads with Schapiro to put their ideological differences aside for a purely scientific debate. Did he imagine he could continue to conduct arm's-length debates such as the one with Wittkower, notwithstanding the chastening letter he received from Fritz Saxl in 1932 to tone it down?[25] Ultimately it was Sedlmayr who admitted this was not possible.

The three texts presented here (and others directly related to them) carry a conflict that Sedlmayr constructed between *Kunstwissenschaft* and *Stilgeschichte*, between the Vienna School and the Wölfflin school, between an art history Sedlmayr believed could be conducted only by Catholic believers and a discipline that could, in theory, be practiced by all. Despite the excellent contextualization of Sedlmayr's work among Frankfurt School figures by Frederic J. Schwartz, it is difficult to characterize Sedlmayr's engagement with *Strukturforschung* as "progressive."[26] For his mystical attachment to the work of art was tied to a deeply Catholic and reactionary worldview. In his correspondence with Schapiro, Sedlmayr calls himself a conservative.[27] Although the war of words with Wittkower never extended to political alignments, one can sense in Wittkower's article his deep suspicion of Sedlmayr. Indeed, language around the grasping of the work of art comes out in the heated

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[22] Rudolf Wittkower, "Art History as a Discipline: With Some Thoughts on the Study of American Arts," *Winterthur Seminar on Museum Operation and Connoisseurship*, 1961, 55–69.

[23] For a full account, and many transcriptions, see Levy, "Sedlmayr and Schapiro."

[24] Sedlmayr's surviving daughter, Susanna Guéritaud-Sedlmayr, told me (written communication, January 24, 2011) that Sedlmayr's widow, who lived in Salzburg until her death, destroyed the letters from Schapiro. I have some reason to doubt this account.

[25] For the relevant passages in the letter, see Levy, *Baroque and the Political Language of Formalism*, 324–25.

[26] Schwartz, *Blind Spots*.

[27] Levy, "Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond," esp. 250–52.

letter Sedlmayr sent to Schapiro in 1934 when it became clear that their scientific exchange could not be disentangled from their political differences:

> Here we are on common basis in the estimation of "Strenge," of rational and critical methods. We are—it seems to me—separated through our views on art. I cannot get rid of the suspicion that—in spite of your fine gifts in observing forms and form-differences—you must fail to grasp the true object of our studies i.e. "art" in its very peculiarity and marrow. For similar reasons why the ablest scholar will fail to grasp religion if he is a positivist: for lack of experience of a specific kind. I mean experience of what art meant in the past, not in our days.[28]

Although the lines above were written two years after the Fontana exchange, Sedlmayr's condescension about his superior capacity to grasp the essence of the work is at the absolute center of the Fontana debate. I have no doubt that Wittkower was sensing a deeper prejudice in Sedlmayr's words and he was correct to do so.

By the mid-1930s Sedlmayr had turned away from formalism toward an explicit form of cultural criticism that he had disguised in his *Strukturforschung*. Formalism has long been the carrier of the politics of the discipline, and in Sedlmayr's case it found its apotheosis, for he believed himself to be uniquely called to see the work of art. His willingness in 1932 to be something of a martyr to his convictions, as he remarked to Saxl, softened by the end of the decade, parallel to a distancing from National Socialism. In the late 1930s Sedlmayr may have been chastened by his conflicts with colleagues. Later in his career he did more of the first art history, even publishing a proper monograph on von Erlach, populated with a catalog and documents.[29]

There is no winner to be picked here. Wittkower and like-practicing art historians most certainly had limitations. But they also seem to have perceived the rottenness at the core of Sedlmayr's endeavor. To some extent, Saxl's wish was eventually granted—Sedlmayr did more of the first-level art history, and everyone politely retreated to their corners. Sedlmayr moved to Bavaria (despite the protests of those who were awake), where, to some extent, he straddled the methodological divide he had worked so hard to create at a time when art historians were compelled for their survival to take sides.

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[28] Levy, "Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond," 250–52.

[29] Hans Sedlmayr, *Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach* (Vienna: Herold, 1956). Hempel, who challenged Sedlmayr's disdain for the first art history as un-Viennese, would review this book as if the words exchanged in 1930 were all water under the bridge. See Eberhard Hempel, "Ist 'eine 'strenge Kunstwissenschaft' möglich?," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 3 (1934), 155–63; and Eberhard Hempel, review of *Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach*, by Hans Sedlmayr, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 20 (1957), 302–3.