

# The Political Project of Wölfflin's Early Formalism\*

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What would it mean to art history if its foundational formalist, Heinrich Wölfflin, also turned out to be a political thinker? In the literature on Wölfflin's early publications, only sporadic attempts have been made to reverse the overwhelming critique of Wölfflin's formalism as narrowly visual and apolitical.<sup>1</sup> Only one text has addressed Wölfflin's politics directly: in an essay from 1989, Martin Warnke demonstrated how Wölfflin's distress over World War I and the slavish service by the professoriat to its nationalistic themes elicited the icy ahistorical formalism of the *Principles of Art History* published in 1915.<sup>2</sup> In Warnke's reading, Wölfflin's apoliticism was, para-

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1. Joseph Gantner (Wölfflin's pupil and preeminent biographer), Joan Hart, Meinhold Lurz, Daniel Adler, and Harry Francis Mallgrave, among others, have discussed Wölfflin's philosophical Neo-Kantianism in terms of organicism and aesthetic theory, as well as his interest in empathy theory and psychology, and his relations to Gottfried Semper's theory of style, to archaeologist Heinrich Brunn's incipient formalism, and to Jacob Burckhardt's art and cultural histories. The intellectual biographies of Lurz and Hart in particular were written with full knowledge of Wölfflin's papers; and they have been correct to read his work through these and other intertexts and influences. Hart, for one, has argued forcibly against reading Wölfflin as a Hegelian, but rather for a reading in the context of Neo-Kantianism, an important argument that Daniel Adler has elaborated. Joan Goldhammer Hart, "Reinterpreting Wölfflin: Neo-Kantianism and Hermeneutics," *Art Journal* 42 (1982), pp. 292–300, and Hart, "Heinrich Wölfflin: An Intellectual Biography" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1981); Daniel Adler, "Leaps of Faith: Formalist Notions of the Painterly" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 2002); Adler, "Painterly Politics: Wölfflin, Formalism and German Academic Culture, 1885–1915," *Art History* 27 (2004), pp. 431–56, 476–77; Meinhold Lurz, *Heinrich Wölfflin: Biographie einer Kunsttheorie* (Worms: Werner, 1981); Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou, trans. and ed., *Empathy, Form, Space: Problems in German Aesthetics 1873–1893* (Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), pp. 39–54.

2. Martin Warnke, "On Heinrich Wölfflin," *Representations* 27 (1989), pp. 172–87. Wölfflin's *Classic Art* (1898) has been read as a politically inflected text in Margaret Iversen, "Politics and the Historiography of Art: Wölfflin's *Classic Art*," *Oxford Art Journal* 4, no. 1 (1981), pp. 31–34. Wölfflin's formalism in *Classic Art* and *Principles* is reconsidered as morphological rather than taxonomic, as "tools for interpreting the meaning of the artistic act and never a merely formal or analytic apparatus," in Marshall Brown, "The Classic Is the Baroque: On the Principle of Wölfflin's Art History," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (December 1982), pp. 379–404.

doxically, a political act of resistance. But as Wölfflin wrote in his diary in 1924, after his departure from the University of Munich and return to his native Switzerland: “I am taken as a formalist. As cool. I am not that.”<sup>3</sup>

Is Wölfflin’s resistance the only discernible form of political thought in his work? Besides Warnke’s exceptional article on this topic, discussions of the historian’s politics have been mainly relegated to ill-founded conclusions about Wölfflin’s purported sympathy towards National Socialism.<sup>4</sup> For art historians, Wölfflin is thus either apolitical or involved in the most heinous politics. While a full response needs to be carefully constructed on the basis of thorough archival research, it is true that Wölfflin’s work was readily taken up by National Socialists, and his comparative formalism seems to have possessed a potentially racist kernel that made it open to appropriation by fascism.<sup>5</sup> But neither Wölfflin’s largely uninvestigated biography nor his texts—which include thousands of unpublished letters and dozens of notebooks in his *Nachlass* in Basel—have been scrutinized for their political implications.<sup>6</sup> Wölfflin’s role as the straw



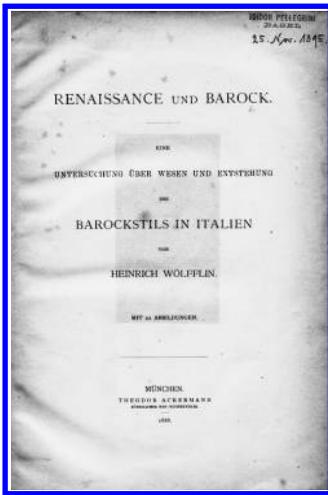
Heinrich Wölfflin. Courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek, Basel.

3. Joseph Gantner, ed., *Heinrich Wölfflin 1864–1945: Autobiographie, Tagebücher und Briefe*, 2nd ed. (Basel: Schwabe, 1984), p. 368.

4. At first sight the most damning evidence was the appearance in the Nazi newspaper *Völkische Beobachter* (January 11, 1929) of Wölfflin’s name on a list of founding members of the Reichskammer für Kultur, a group of cultural figures supportive of National Socialism organized by Elsa Bruckmann. Wölfflin’s friend since the 1890s, Bruckmann, together with her husband Hugo, were early supporters of Hitler, and the F. Bruckmann Verlag was the publisher of most of Wölfflin’s work and of *Mein Kampf*. The article has been used as evidence of Wölfflin’s political sympathies in Jonathan Petropoulos, *Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 18, and suggested as such in Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 114. However, in a recently discovered letter from Wölfflin to Elsa Bruckmann dating to 1929, Wölfflin expresses anger that Bruckmann published his name in the aforementioned list without his permission. Wölfflin’s anger over this abuse of their friendship is the strongest signal to date that he was not in sympathy with National Socialism. See Anne Bechstedt, Anja Deutsch, and Daniela Stöppel, “Der Verlag F. Bruckmann im Nationalsozialismus,” *Kunstgeschichte im “Dritten Reich”: Theorien, Methoden, Praktiken*, ed. Ruth Heftrig, Olaf Peters, Barbara Schellewald (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), pp. 289–90.

5. Art historians relied overwhelmingly on racial (and sometimes racist) categories during Wölfflin’s lifetime. For the category of race in Wölfflin and *Principles of Art History* as mapping conflict between North and South in the context of World War I, see Eric Michaud, “Nord-Sud,” in *Histoire de l’art: Une Discipline à ses frontières* (Paris: Hazan, 2005), pp. 76–84. The usefulness of Wölfflin’s comparative method in support of National Socialist ideology is to be discussed in the introduction to Paul Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator and Postwar German Art* (forthcoming), which the author allowed me to read in manuscript.

6. Fragments have been published in Gantner, *Heinrich Wölfflin*, and the *Nachlass* is used extensively in Hart, “Heinrich Wölfflin: An Intellectual Biography.” I rely on the typed transcriptions of a broad selection of the notebooks deposited with Wölfflin’s papers (Heinrich Wölfflin Nachlass 95, Nachtrag, Ib, no. 1–22). Unless otherwise noted, all references to Wölfflin’s notebooks are from the Heinrich Wölfflin Nachlass, Universitätsbibliothek, Basel.



Title page of *Renaissance und Barock*, 1888.

man for the Anglo-American “new art history” has seemingly prevented scholars from looking at Wölfflin from a political perspective—although formalism itself can hardly be regarded as outside of politics.<sup>7</sup>

Admittedly, Wölfflin himself made the political a less than obvious focal point. Judging from his notebooks, which only rarely divulge a life outside that of the mind, World War I (during which he lived in Munich) barely distracted him from his intellectual preoccupations, and World War II passed virtually without mention by the retired professor in Zurich. Although his letters show he was not oblivious to his times, he was less likely to describe an actual event than to make oblique, suggestive, and slippery references.<sup>8</sup> It may thus come as a surprise to discover the extent to which Wölfflin’s *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888), his first art-historical work and the first work of formalism, is a highly politicized text.<sup>9</sup> In what follows I map

out the imbrication of politics and formalism in that work and begin to assess whether Wölfflin may have been both a political thinker and an apolitical man. I base my argument on a close reading of the language of *Renaissance and Baroque* and on heretofore unconsidered aspects of Wölfflin’s university education in political history and political philosophy and his preoccupation with the contemporary emergence of the German state. These studies and circumstances contributed to his own worldview as a Swiss national who studied and later taught in

7. That Wölfflin was a sacrificial victim, whose work was subject to certain reductive readings against which new positions were laid out, is viewed by Warnke as an inevitable and productive kind of distortion in the history of the discipline, necessary to move the field in new directions. Warnke, “On Heinrich Wölfflin,” p. 172. For a contentious debate from within art history over formalism and its politics, see Johanna Drucker, “Formalism’s Other History,” *Art Bulletin* 78 (1996), pp. 750–51 and Yve-Alain Bois, “Whose Formalism?,” *Art Bulletin* 78 (1996), pp. 9–12.

8. There are several published collections of Wölfflin’s letters to individuals in addition to the broad range of letters quoted in Gantner, *Heinrich Wölfflin*. See especially Joseph Gantner, *Burckhardt-Wölfflin: Briefwechsel und andere Dokumente ihrer Begegnung 1882–97*, 2nd ed. (Basel: Schwabe, 1989); Heidy Margrit Müller, ed., “*Etwas für die Phantasie*”: *Heinrich Wölfflins Briefwechsel mit “Züs Colonna” mit Erinnerungen und Erzählprosa von Lotte Warburg*, with an essay by Peter G. Meyer-Viol (Munich: Iudicium, 1997); Golo Maurer, *August Grisebach (1881–1950): Kunsthistoriker in Deutschland; mit einer Edition der Briefe Heinrich Wölfflins an Grisebach* (Ruhpolding: Verlag Franz Philipp Rutzen, 2007); and Ricarda Huch, ed., *Mosaikbild einer Freundschaft: Ricarda Huchs Briefwechsel mit Elisabeth und Heinrich Wölfflin* (Munich: Iudicium, 1994).

9. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock: Eine Untersuchung über Wesen und Entstehung des Barockstils in Italien* (Munich: Theodor Ackermann, 1888). All translations are mine, though reference will be made to the English translation by Kathrin Simon, published as Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966). In-text citations are first for the German text, followed by the Simon translation.

Germany as well as in Basel and Zurich. The question is whether young Wölfflin practiced a “political formalism”—in which the point of formalism was to understand the political—or whether the text under examination speaks to a political unconscious of formalism.

Of course there is a certain irony in the effort to recapture the political character of Wölfflin’s text now, for to a late-nineteenth-century reader architectural history—and specifically the question of style—was self-evidently a political issue. From the highly politicized, Prussian-supported rebuilding of Cologne’s cathedral in the Catholic Rhineland in the Gothic style in the 1840s to the discussions in Berlin in the 1880s about the appropriate style for the imperial capital, style was de facto political.<sup>10</sup> By the 1880s, the Gothic and Renaissance revivals were burning out in Germany, and the Hellenistic Baroque, exemplified by the spectacular Pergamon reliefs, had become the ancient imperial architectural model for the new unified German empire.<sup>11</sup> The newly excavated Hellenistic works, until then considered the decadent works of a decadent empire, were celebrated by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in June 1886 with a reconstruction of the Pergamon altar and a massive costumed parade in which 1,500 artists and actors participated. Wölfflin, who was studying in Berlin during this period, was in Italy at the time but surely knew about the event. Even before Berliners danced around the altar, the wildly expressive Pergamon reliefs had caught the attention of two of Wölfflin’s most important teachers. Jacob Burckhardt was bowled over by the sculptures when he saw them in Berlin in 1882; they reminded him of Rubens, whose work he increasingly admired as he came around to the Baroque, and he took some mischievous pleasure in watching the archaeologists dismiss them as decadent.<sup>12</sup> Heinrich Brunn, the Munich archaeologist to whom Wölfflin dedicated *Renaissance and Baroque*, published an important article on Pergamon reliefs in 1884 in which he retained a traditionalist’s reserve about them, comparing the Hellenistic works to the proto-Baroque creations of Giulio Romano (they reminded him of the artist’s Mantuan fresco cycle in the Sala dei Giganti).<sup>13</sup> The fact that Wölfflin originally planned to include a parallel analysis of the changes in style in antiquity suggests that Pergamon and its attendant political

10. The bibliography on this subject is vast. For two paths, see Michael J. Lewis, *The Politics of the German Gothic Revival: August Reichenberger* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993); Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship*, trans. Scott Kleager (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

11. The parallel architectural and political modeling was made explicit with the issuing in 1888 of a medal with then-emperor Friedrich III on one side and Eumenes II, who commissioned the Pergamon frieze to commemorate his victory over the Gauls, on the verso. On the discovery of the Pergamon sculptures and their political significance for unified Germany, see the rich article by Lionel Gossman “Imperial Icon: The Pergamon Altar in Wilhelmine Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006), esp. pp. 568–79; and Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Marchand’s book was brought to my attention by Alina Payne, who makes a compelling argument for the significance of the Pergamon reliefs for Wölfflin’s *Renaissance and Baroque* in “Portable Ruins: The Pergamon Altar, Heinrich Wölfflin, and German Art History at the *fin de siècle*,” *Res* 53/54 (2008), pp. 168–89.

12. Gossman, “Imperial Icon,” pp. 551–53.

13. Heinrich Brunn, “Über die kunstgeschichtliche Stellung der pergamenischen Gigantomachie,” *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 5 (1884), pp. 231–92. See Gossman, “Imperial Icon,” pp. 558, 564–65. Wölfflin’s notes on Brunn’s article are preserved in Notebook 9 (1885), pp. 80–81.

parallel to the German Empire had indeed been important in the genesis of his inaugural work on the Baroque.<sup>14</sup>

*Wölfflin's Renaissance und Barock: Individual and State*

*Renaissance and Baroque* was Wölfflin's habilitation, and it followed closely after his dissertation, *Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture*.<sup>15</sup> A trip to Rome in the intervening years led Wölfflin in this book to stage an encounter between the empathy-theory-based relations described in the dissertation and a then-controversial historical period of art (the Baroque), which forced him to face cultural history as well. The book is organized in three parts, the first of which most closely related to *Principles of Art History*, defines the chief formal characteristics of Baroque style: the painterly, grand style, massiveness, and movement. Part two is concerned with the undergirding of the Baroque in cultural history, posing the question Why does style change? The final part, which draws on the organization of Burckhardt's largely typological history of Italian Renaissance architecture, analyzes the change in style in churches, palaces, villas, and garden design.<sup>16</sup>

Political themes emerge within Wölfflin's formal categories, most significantly the relation of part to whole, of individual to totality. Wölfflin translates one of the central concerns of political philosophy (the project of securing the relation of the individual to the power structure or state) into a formal category. Freedom, a central preoccupation of Kant's political philosophy and of German political philosophy of the nineteenth century in general, is omnipresent in Wölfflin's conception of the individual architectural form.<sup>17</sup> Related to both of these themes is his conception of unity, which in the nineteenth century is a generalizable political category, linked closely to nationalism and to liberalism.

Two of Wölfflin's categories, "grand style" (*grosse Stil*) and "massiveness" (*Massigkeit*), return again and again to ways in which the individual form (the components of a classically based architecture like columns, pedestals, cornices, and so on) is overwhelmed by the totality in Baroque architecture. Renaissance architecture, by contrast, offers a secure place for the individual form: "More and more what was admired [by the sixteenth century] in antiquity was the colossal scale of its undertakings, not the pleasure in individual forms" (p. 12/p. 24). The increase

14. Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock*, p. vi. In a letter to Paul Wolters dated May 29, 1888, Wölfflin explained the dedication to Brunn as referring especially to what he learned from him about the painterly. But the dedication did not signal anything more, since he did not deal with the ancient Baroque, much of which is "pure hideousness" and the various ancient Baroques must be differentiated. Gantner, *Heinrich Wölfflin*, p. 52.

15. Heinrich Wölfflin, "Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture" (1886), in *Empathy, Form, Space*, pp. 149–87.

16. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Architecture of the Italian Renaissance*, trans. James Palmes, ed. Peter Murray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Originally published in 1868 as *Die Geschichte der Renaissance in Italien*.

17. I rely here on the classic work by Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

in scale to monumentality is, he says, a common symptom of decline, when there is a loss of sympathy for the individual: “There is no longer an understanding of the individual (*das Einzelne*), and a refined sense of form is lost; one strives only for the imposing and overpowering” (p. 26/p. 40).

One way in which the individual is absorbed into the form-mass is through the painterly effect of Baroque architecture. In Baroque architecture, he says, one sees: “Not individual forms, individual figures, individual motifs, but rather an effect of the mass, not something finite, but rather infinite!” (p. 21/p. 34). Not content to employ



*St. Peter's Dome, from Renaissance und Barock, 3rd ed. 1908.*

the rhetorical device of repetition to underscore his point about the loss of the singular, he escalates his language: “As its final consequence the painterly style must completely destroy the plastic form” (p. 21/p. 34). Drawing on contemporary writings on mass psychology, Wölfflin imagines individual forms and figures not just absorbed but destroyed by their absorption in a “*Masseneffect*.” Indeed, historians and political theorists of the late nineteenth century trying to explain the French Revolution reasoned that the formation of the mass deprived man of reason and individuality.<sup>18</sup>

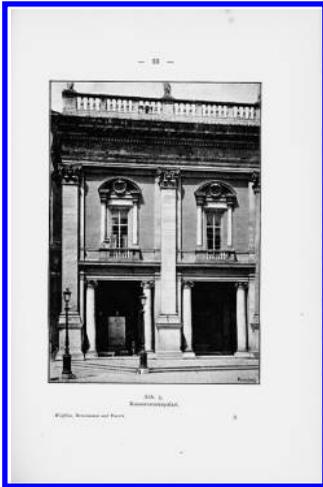
Wölfflin also uses the word “subordination” to describe the Baroque relation of parts to whole. The best example is his analysis of the dome of St. Peter's as an instance of the passage from Renaissance to Baroque style:

Bramante's St. Peter's is not Baroque. One may find here a cupola of the largest dimensions, but around it Bramante arranged four neighboring domes which do not cramp it but provide a counterbalance. They maintain their own independence against the large cupola and curb the impression of the overpowering. Michelangelo by contrast

18. For the significance for Wölfflin's terms, see Evonne Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 53–55.

counted precisely on this impression; he pushed the neighboring spaces so far down in size that they can no longer maintain themselves against the principal volume and in this way produced an absolutely dominating center, which makes everything else appear unfree and lacking in a will of its own (p. 93/p. 111).

In this passage we see an anthropomorphic characterization of Renaissance forms as “independent” and not “subordinate” to the larger form.<sup>19</sup> The Renaissance relation



Capitoline Palace,  
from Renaissance  
und Barock. 1888.

of parts engenders “calm” (*Beruhigung*), and gives to the minor form “security” (*Sicherheit*); it allows it to “be sovereign” (*beherrschen*) and to have its “feeling for life” (*Lebensgefühl*) fulfilled. In contrast, Michelangelo’s colossal cupola is so dominated by the “center” that the parts are “unfree” and “without will of their own”; they are “convoluted” and “swallowed up,” “repressed” and “inhibited” by the dominating form. The violent effects of powerful Baroque forms that engulf the individual parts by force are

dramatized in another anthropomorphic image when Wölfflin says that a form under the “force” of this “load” actually “suffers” (p. 31/p. 45).<sup>20</sup>

The pressure on forms and the “suffering” that results is developed in a detailed analysis of the arch: “the cheerful round arch becomes a pressed elliptical form,” as on the second floor of the Farnese Palace (p. 32/p. 45). There “the pedestals, which before were slender and high, helping to give the impression of lightness,” are now pressed down by Michelangelo “into such a low and uncomfortable form that one must feel the heaving force of their load” (p. 32/p. 45). Individual forms are pressed, or oppressed, and lose their freedom and self-determination at the scale of the column. Here his example is the arcade of Michelangelo’s Conservator’s Palace:

The upper story presses down so heavily on the (underscaled) subordinate (*untergestellten*) columns that they seem to be pushed against the giant piers. We feel convinced that the columns are only maintained

19. According to Hart, influenced by his studies in aesthetics with Johannes Volkelt; see Hart, “Reinterpreting Wölfflin,” p. 293.

20. See Brown, “The Classic Is Baroque” and Adler, “Painterly Politics,” for Wölfflin’s reversal on this in later works, where Baroque would become synonymous with all life, and the classic with death.

there by force. This impression results in part from the most highly irrational and infelicitously close spacing of the column intervals, from which no self-contented and no self-determining form can result (p. 32/p. 45).

The subordination of individual to the whole encompasses the entire building facade. Whereas on a Renaissance church façade Wölfflin sees a “coordination” of elements between bays (such as at S. Spirito), on a Baroque façade there is an “an emphatic subordination”:

S. Spirito has a façade of five bays, symmetrically disposed, with the only exception that the middle bay is somewhat wider. This coordination is replaced in the Baroque by an energetic subordination. And this was understood in a different way than the way subordination was understood in the Renaissance. The latter also had its façades structured into independent and dependent parts—usually a dominating middle bay flanked by narrower corner bays which were bound to the main body by receding sections. The subordinate parts, however, and this is the most decisive point, always possess the character of an independent individuality (*selbständiger Individualität*); they are subordinate (*untergeordnet*), but enjoy a fully free development, without any feeling in any line that their nature must be denied on account of another more powerful will. The Baroque, by contrast, recognizes no free individual existence. Everything remains closed in a general mass. Its horizontal courses operate in such a fashion that a middle bay projects while the side bays recede in steps and remain in a formless and unarticulated state (pp. 82–83/pp. 98–100).



S. Spirito,  
from  
Renaissance  
and Barock.  
1888.

Wölfflin demonstrates this loss of independence not only in elevations but also in plan, as for example in the palace courtyard, which is not allowed to convey the effect of an independent closed area: “The court is not an independent entity (*Ganzes*) that has *rights of its own* (*Recht für sich*)” (emphasis mine; p. 114/p. 138). Here again Wölfflin anthropomorphizes the courtyard, which loses its independence, its “Recht für sich”—as if a courtyard had “rights” that could be taken away.

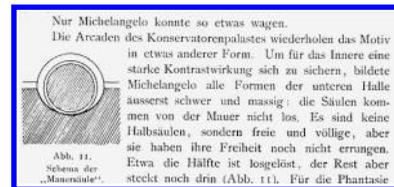
Wölfflin sees the loss of independence, individuality, rights, and selfhood at

all levels of Baroque architectural form. Walls become undifferentiated, unified masses with individual bricks hidden under a layer of unifying stucco (p. 34/p. 46), and the independent Renaissance column becomes an entrapped pier:

The solemnity of the pier lies in its material diffidence. While columns are free and round and clearly set out from a mass, are quite self-assured (*ganz selbst bestimmt*) in their form, full of will and of life, the pier always remains, so to speak, with a foot stuck in the wall. It lacks the independent form (the roundness), the impression of massive heaviness overwhelms (p. 38/p. 50).

As an example Wölfflin describes the columns in the arcades of Michelangelo's Conservator's Palace, which strive for freedom:

The columns cannot be freed from the wall. These are not half-columns, but free and whole ones, but they have not yet gained their freedom. Half has become detached but the rest is embedded. The impression on one's imagination is that of an endless, restless striving for freedom (pp. 40–41/p. 52).



*Embedded column, from Renaissance und Barock. 1888.*

Wölfflin sees the columns in politicized terms: the Renaissance column is “free” and “self-determining,” all “will and life”; the Baroque column is “imprisoned,” and the striving of the suppressed individual that has lost its independence for freedom becomes the drama of the Baroque, which has

no sense of the value and individual meaning of individual forms, only for the more muted effect of the whole. The individual (*Einzelne*) and finite (*Begrenzte*), the plastic form, cease to be important; one composes for the effects of masses (*Masseneffekten*). The most indefinite of all elements, light and shadow, have become the real means of expression (p. 71/p. 85).

Because of the loss of the sense of the value of the individual, Wölfflin's own method of empathy for architectural forms experienced through the body, which he laid out in his *Prolegomena*, breaks down: there can be no empathy for a person who has disappeared.<sup>21</sup>

21. “In fact an important characteristic of the Baroque style is that it cannot be seen in terms of the human body.” Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock*, p. 71; *Renaissance and Baroque*, p. 85.

*Symptomatic Reactions to Renaissance and Baroque*

Although Wölfflin voiced his skepticism of cultural explanations in his text, he does offer explicit historical and ultimately political motivations for these changes in form. In his second chapter, on the causes of the changes in style, he points to the Jesuits as having a “system that forced the individual”; he notes that it was the Renaissance papacy that compelled the push towards monumentality; and that it was the imitation of a manner of somber exteriority by the Spanish ruling classes that compelled the unification of the Roman palace exterior with the suppression of various divisions and parts (*Glieder*). The Baroque was, in sum, a product of the Counter-Reformation, a conclusion that was so understated that two of Wölfflin’s students

*Vestibule of the Laurentian Library, from Renaissance und Barock, 3rd ed. 1908.*



were moved to make it explicit in their publications on the Baroque in the 1920s. In the new edition of *Renaissance and Baroque* published by his student and assistant Hans Rose in 1926, with several chapters of his own added to the text, Rose wrote that the foundation for the Baroque in the history of ideas or spirit of the times was now the “heart of the Baroque problem.”<sup>22</sup>

In spite of any misgivings about the lack of cultural explanations, Wölfflin’s anthropomorphic analyses of these forms, politically inflected and dramatic as they were as an art-historical poetics of force and submission, were often influential for several generations of architectural historians, and are still admired by architectural historians today. One of the reasons that the political has been overlooked is that Wölfflin’s formal analyses make good sense on their own. Nonetheless, subsequent scholars reimaged the relation between part and

22. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock*, 4th ed.; expanded and with a commentary by Hans Rose (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1926), pp. 327 and 181. One wonders if Rose felt compelled to insert this after several reviewers of Wölfflin’s *Principles of Art History* lamented the absence of a cultural historical perspective in that work. Warnke, “On Heinrich Wölfflin,” pp. 172–73. Werner Weisbach is even more explicit about the need for sociological analysis in *Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation* (1921), a book written in the wee hours of the morning during his military service and the first to explicitly link the Baroque with propaganda. Werner Weisbach, *Geist und Gewalt* (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1956), p. 194.

whole, individual and state in the same terms but based on their own politics, which suggests their grasp, conscious or not, of the political inflection of Wölfflin's terms to begin with.

For example, in Nikolaus Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture*, first published in 1943, we find the following response to Wölfflin's view of Michelangelo in a passage on the vestibule of the Laurentian Library: "It has often been said that the motifs of the walls show Michelangelo as the father of the Baroque, because they express the superhuman struggle of active forces against overpowering matter." But Pevsner, detecting the subjectivity of this view, goes on to say: "I do not think that anybody who examines without prejudice his sensations in the room itself would subscribe to this statement. There seems to me no expression of struggle anywhere." Yet Pevsner only slightly shifts Wölfflin's emphasis on struggle when he acknowledges the "conscious discordance all the way through," and his alternative to Wölfflin resides more in a new periodization that expands the concept of mannerism than in a change of terms to describe the works:

What Michelangelo's Laurenziana reveals is indeed Mannerism in its most sublime architectural form and not Baroque—a world of frustration much more tragic than the Baroque world of struggles between mind and matter. In Michelangelo's architecture every force seems paralysed. The load does not weigh, the support does not carry, natural reactions play no part—a highly artificial system upheld by the severest discipline.<sup>23</sup>

Pevsner's language has been connected to the psychological nervousness that characterized the spiritual crisis of Weimar intellectuals. But this text, written during World War II, might also reflect the particular situation of an emigrated German scholar in England with a very complex relation to his own Jewishness (which he denied) and to National Socialism (which he supported even after his dismissal from the university, although to what extent is not clear).<sup>24</sup> That such an interpretation should focus on the scholar's haunt, a library, makes its overdeterminations poignant.

A second revealing example is James Ackerman's analysis of the façade of the Conservator's Palace on Rome's Campidoglio in his 1961 monograph on Michelangelo's architecture, a work deeply indebted to *Renaissance and Baroque* but at the same time a profound revision of it.<sup>25</sup> Where Wölfflin saw subordination in

23. Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Middlesex: Penguin, 1945), p. 120.

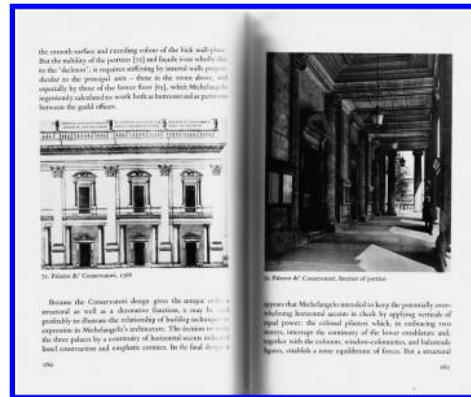
24. Pevsner was frustrated that, notwithstanding his conversion to Protestantism as a young man, his promising university career in Germany had been halted by the regime that he very much supported (also in print). See Stephen Games, *Pevsner: The Early Life: Germany and Art* (London: Continuum, 2010), esp. pp. 174–98.

25. It is striking the extent to which this book applies to Michelangelo's architecture *alone* (and identifies Michelangelo as the leader in the character of the Baroque) the characteristics that Wölfflin attributed to the Baroque as *exemplified* by Michelangelo. This is especially evident in the chapter on Michelangelo's theory, where Ackerman finds a justification for Wölfflin's general method of seeking empathy for architectural forms in the body. Ackerman says this is historical and evidenced by Michelangelo's sculptural sensibility, which is especially evident in his drawings. In this way, Ackerman's book seems like a larger exemplification of my point: by identifying the impersonal historical style in the work of the individual artist,

the bottom story and the imprisonment of the columns, Ackerman sees something else entirely:

Michelangelo intended to keep the potentially overwhelming horizontal accents in check by applying verticals of equal power: the colossal pilasters which, in embracing two stories, interrupt the continuity of the lower entablature and, together with the columns, window colonnettes, and balustrade figures, establish a tense equilibrium of forces. But a structural analysis reverses the process, proving that ingenious devices were necessary to prevent *verticals* from dominating the façade.<sup>26</sup>

Through a “structural analysis” Ackerman can show that Michelangelo (and Bramante) did not affirm monumentality, but actively worked against it. Distancing himself from a view that emphasizes the overwhelming of individual parts by the whole, Ackerman sees “ingenuity” as solving the problem of unchecked power by providing “checks”—verticals are kept in check by horizontals and by smaller forms to create a “tense equilibrium of forces.” This formal analysis of the seat of Rome’s civic government (as opposed to the autocratic Vatican across the Tiber), by an American scholar in the postwar era, expresses an ethos of individual participation in its accounting for the participation of the columns and colonnettes. With the whole façade embodying a political system that “structurally” ensures a balance of powers, Ackerman’s description of the Conservator’s Palace could stand in as a textbook visualization of the system of “checks and balances” of the United States government. All of these formal analyses appear to be shaped, even driven, consciously or unconsciously, by beliefs about the relation of the individual to the state.



*Illustrations from The Architecture of Michelangelo by James Ackerman. 1961.*

### *Wölfflin Against the “Great State”*

How to characterize the politics that emerge from Wölfflin’s pages? His stylistic antinomies are matched by political ones: the Renaissance is a moment

Ackerman accomplishes en masse what he attempts to do on a case by case basis with his analysis of the components of various buildings, restoring to the individual powers and intentions what Wölfflin had described as belonging to an epoch.

26. James Ackerman, *The Architecture of Michelangelo* (London: Zwemmer, 1961), pp. 64–65.

of equilibrium, where individuals are relatively free and autonomous relative to the whole; the Baroque, by contrast, is almost entirely negative in its oppressive treatment of the individual. Wölfflin echoes an even more entrenched view than the one found in the classics of Ranke and Burckhardt, that the Baroque was the product of an oppressive Counter-Reformation led by popes and Jesuits, with particularly bad results for the individual. Here Wölfflin is reliant on Burckhardt's view of the emergence of the individual in the Renaissance as a product of a relaxation in the Church's authority. But whereas Burckhardt's political views (known to us through his political journalism, his extensive correspondence, and his politically oriented historical writing) have been brought to bear on a political reading of his works in history, Wölfflin's have yet to be.<sup>27</sup> We have by contrast only hints from the published biographical material on Wölfflin of the late 1880s that he may have shared Burckhardt's anti-nationalism, anti-clericalism, Swiss particularism, and conservative critique of modernity. The political view that emerges from *Renaissance and Baroque* points at the very least to a robust anti-clericalism; if one reads between the lines of Wölfflin's work, it becomes clear that he shared Burckhardt's lifelong distrust of power as "an opponent of human individuality and creativity."<sup>28</sup>

One of the inheritances of Burckhardt's Renaissance was the notion—which Burckhardt did not invent but did shape distinctively—of the state as a "work of art." As numerous scholars have pointed out, what Burckhardt means is that the state was man's fabrication, an idea that can be traced to the Enlightenment.<sup>29</sup> But Burckhardt's use of the word "art" lends the idea a specific nuance, even though in his writing, this work of art does not find its way into specific forms. Wölfflin took up the idea of the state as an artwork more literally, and his own scholarly trajectory—from a Burckhardtian cultural history to a more autonomous history of art—suggests a path by which the political philosopher's preoccupation with the form of the ideal state entered art history.

Given Wölfflin's imagery of a powerful and oppressive superstructure, we must wonder about his attitude toward the emergent German Reich. In my reading of various passages from *Renaissance and Baroque* the architectural organism that absorbs and represses the individual is, at the very least, a figure of power, a state-like figure (although Wölfflin does not use the word "state"). One hint that the younger man shared Burckhardt's suspicion of the monolithic state appears in Wölfflin's diary after a meeting with his teacher in September 1888, just after *Renaissance and Baroque* appeared. His notes refer to two subjects of their discussion: his book and politics, specifically about Italy before and after unification.

27. See esp. Richard Sigurdson, *Jacob Burckhardt's Social and Political Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); and John R. Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000).

28. Sigurdson, p. 10.

29. See in particular Eric Slauter, *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). My thanks to Tom Mitchell for this reference.

“Size does not make greatness in politics,” he wrote in parentheses.<sup>30</sup> To pass from a discussion of Wölfflin’s book to pre-unification Italy, apparently to praise the small city-state, suggests a link between the two. In any case, Wölfflin’s note is not inconsistent with the negative view of monolithic power in *Renaissance and Baroque*.

Passages from Wölfflin’s unpublished notebooks also show that he was preoccupied with the question of the state in the mid-1880s and through the completion of his habilitation. Such a preoccupation would have been stimulated by hearing the lectures of the charismatic political theorist and historian Heinrich von Treitschke, the so-called “Herald of the Reich.” Wölfflin enrolled in Treitschke’s extremely popular lecture course on politics (widely diffused in print as *Die Politik*) given at Berlin’s Frederick William University.<sup>31</sup> In a notebook entry dated November, 1885, Wölfflin wrote: “Berlin is a metropolis. . . . In the catedra one hears Treitschke daily, before an audience of 700. . . . The idea of the state, of the great state (*grossen Staates*) is finally a living one for me, thank God!”<sup>32</sup> Treitschke viewed political institutions as the exterior form of the inner life of its people, and his lectures were infused with the language of part and whole, individual and state. Wölfflin did not take many notes during the lectures,<sup>33</sup> but he commented on them enthusiastically in letters to his family:

One has the feeling of sitting before an important man. He rouses his listeners to enthusiasm.<sup>34</sup>

The other day Treitschke held the attention of his public on the European state system. The pride in the capital of the first people of the world [Berlin] before the blossoming of its youth, to praise the beauty of the German nation—that is the basic tone of the lecture. About the unity of the Reich one speaks in an entirely different way here [in Berlin] than in Bavaria.<sup>35</sup>

We know that at this time he visited the Reichstag and saw it through Treitschke’s eyes: “It made a big impression on me, as prepared by Treitschke.”<sup>36</sup> Wölfflin quoted Treitschke at least twice in his notebooks from 1885 to 1888, and

30. Entry dated September 20, 1888, in Notebook 15, pp. 138–39, cited in Gantner, *Heinrich Wölfflin*, p. 55.

31. Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politics*, trans. Arthur James Balfour, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1916); originally published as *Politik: Vorlesungen*, 2 vols. (Berlin/Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897–1900).

32. “Berlin ist doch eine Weltstadt. Muss noch tiefer hinabkommen und schauen! Vom Katherer hört man tägl. Treitschke, Publikum vor 700 Leuten. Wo sind die Nationen, die unsere festgegründeten Staaten erschüttern könnten. —Die Idee des Staates, des grossen Staates wird lebendig in mir Gottlob, endlich!” Notebook 12 (1886), p. 3.

33. Wölfflin’s notebook for Treitschke’s course is preserved in the Heinrich Wölfflin Nachlass, II, A 13: Winter 1885–86 Treitschke, H.v. Politik. Universitätsbibliothek, Basel.

34. Heinrich Wölfflin, letter to his parents, May 2, 1885, quoted in Gantner, *Heinrich Wölfflin*, p. 26.

35. Heinrich Wölfflin, letter to his parents, November 6, 1885, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 31.

36. Heinrich Wölfflin, letter to his parents, February 1886, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 33.

there are some resonances between Wölfflin's language and Treitschke's. But these comments seem like the observations of an outsider. Overall, Wölfflin seems to be writing, like Burckhardt, against a Hegelian conception of the state as a kind of Leviathan that "could swallow up everything."<sup>37</sup>

A more important result of Treitschke's course was that it encouraged Wölfflin to make a place for political history and for the question of the form of the state in his thinking. In the years 1886–88 he was constantly mapping the various humanistic disciplines, including political history, in his notebooks as he tried to figure out what kind of historian he should be. In several entries he is specifically preoccupied with the form of the state. In one, appearing under the heading "political history," he writes: "The idea of the state, how it is established and realized by those who have power."<sup>38</sup> About a year later, in an unspecified reference to Wilhelm von Humboldt, founder of the German education system and theorist of the state, Wölfflin writes: "Truth and Goodness. Humboldt. The life of man, history, takes certain forms, the idea of the state is a form which tries to work its way into material."<sup>39</sup> There are notations of "Staatsform" (form of the state) in his working plan for his habilitation, and "Staatengeschichte" (history of the state) is noted as an area to be investigated.<sup>40</sup>

In 1887, however, Wölfflin differentiates political history from the type of psychological history to which he is attracted:

Politics lies in acts; writing about political history must convey the feeling of participation, of having lived through something (Treitschke). This history, which is bound to people and chance happenings, is the opposite of a history as psychic development, which functions according to laws, not only in the area of the state, but also in that of art, of philosophy and so on. This is history in the highest sense, it is philosophy.<sup>41</sup>

Although this passage seems to point away from political history, Wölfflin continued to pursue the question of the state. For instance, in October 1888, several months after he completed the habilitation, he met in Munich with a Professor Mayer (who must have been a legal theorist or political philosopher) and discussed national characteristics in law with him. Wölfflin quoted Mayer as saying, "legal thinking must cleanse itself of weak and ill-defined imagery of the state as an organism, as a person. The state is something thoroughly indeterminate: relational."<sup>42</sup>

#### *The Form of the State: Baroque Is Modern*

Does Wölfflin's preoccupation with the form of the state, as evoked in *Renaissance and Baroque*, refer to a historical state, a state in the present? Here

37. Treitschke, *Politics*, p. 53 (citing the Hegelians).

38. Notebook 12 (1886), p. 57.

39. Notebook 14 (1886–87), p. 39.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

41. Notebook 15 (1887–88), p. 19.

42. Notebook 15 (1887–88), p. 125.

the notebooks again show that Wölfflin was also preoccupied with understanding the present as a precondition for understanding the past. In the first half of 1887 he wrote:

It seems laughable to me how someone can take as the object of their studies knowledge of the Renaissance or Descartes or Aristotle and have no concept of the natural sciences of our day. Overall, historical training only makes sense if one has examined it in relation to the present. One will be ungrounded and without guiding principles to jump into any historical period and to look around; to close ones' eyes to today's sun makes no sense.<sup>43</sup>

On January 23, 1888, he noted: "Put in the foreground the concept of the present as historian."<sup>44</sup> And in the same month he wrote: "Occupation: To be able to apprehend the present. Living connections must be sought in earnest. The historian of men must be a psychologist. He shows the forms of humanity, the life of the soul. Astonishing richness: modern man can model his feelings on the antique, on mysticism, classicism, and Romanticism."<sup>45</sup> Clearly, although not made explicit in *Renaissance and Baroque*, Wölfflin believed it the historian's task to view the past through the eyes of the present, and vice versa. In *Renaissance and Baroque* Wölfflin was, it seems, drawing a line between the form of the German state in his day and the emerging Grosser Staat in the Baroque: the Baroque revealed to him the form of present-day Germany, and the new imperial Germany made clear the origins of its form in the dominating, centralizing, and repressively monumental forms of the Baroque.

In the late 1880s Wölfflin was not alone in projecting a contemporary political order onto the formal description of Baroque architecture. Although Wölfflin was dismissive of the three-volume survey of European Baroque architecture by his contemporary Cornelius Gurlitt, their texts did travel on parallel tracks.<sup>46</sup> Compared to Wölfflin's, however, Gurlitt's politics—he was an ardent nationalist—are manifest.<sup>47</sup> His volume on the German Baroque reads as a post-unification and post-*Kulturkampf* saga that, for the first time, places positive value on the Baroque period not as a moment of weakness and susceptibility to international Catholicism but as an era of

43. Notebook 14 (1886–87), p. 74.

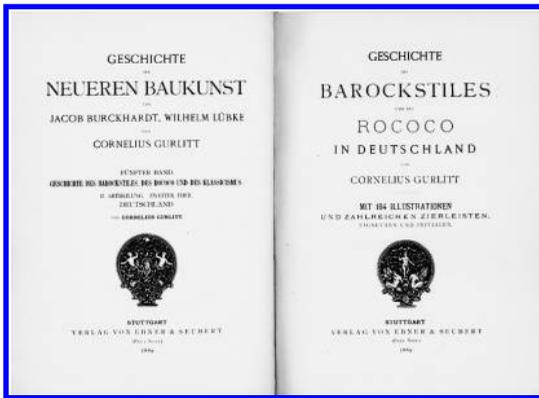
44. Notebook 15 (1887–88), p. 29.

45. Ibid.

46. Cornelius Gurlitt, *Geschichte des Barockstiles in Italien* (Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1887); Gurlitt, *Geschichte des Barockstiles des Rococo und des Klassicismus in Belgien, Holland, Frankreich, England* (Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1888); and Gurlitt, *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1889).

47. See Juergen Paul, *Cornelius Gurlitt: Ein Leben für Architektur, Kunstgeschichte, Denkmalpflege und Städtebau* (Dresden: Hellerau Verlag, 2003). Paul's monograph draws upon a collection of 1,600 letters from Gurlitt's family circle, which was recently published online as the "Nachlass Gurlitt," [gurlitt.tu-dresden.de](http://gurlitt.tu-dresden.de). A selection of these letters accompanied by scholarly essays is in Matthias Lienert, ed. *Cornelius Gurlitt—Sechs Jahrzehnte Zeit- und Familiengeschichte in Briefen* (Dresden, Institut für Sächsische Geschichte und Volkskunde, 2008). In English, see Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California, 1961), pp. 103–104, 110. There is a chapter on Gurlitt in Levy, *Barock: Art History and Politics*.

rich cosmopolitanism out of which an authentic German architecture emerged. Gurlitt's books could almost be read as the architectural companion to the famous history of nineteenth-century Germany by Heinrich von Treitschke. What was crucial for Gurlitt in Treitschke's *History of Germany* was his location of the foundation of modern Germany not in the Reformation and the break from Rome, but in 1648 when Germany lay in ruins.<sup>48</sup> Because in this revisionist history modern Germany saw its birth in the confessionally heterogeneous period of the Counter-Reformation, the world of the German Baroque held a pressing interest. Wölfflin's concepts of the individual, superstructure, freedom, and unity in



Title pages of *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland* by Cornelius Gurlitt. 1889.

*Baroque*. He was harshly critical of it.<sup>49</sup> Wölfflin was likely to have been especially dismayed by Gurlitt's radical recuperation of the German Baroque. For young Wölfflin, a passage to the Baroque in the north could not have occurred, since a pure and rule-bound Renaissance had never taken root there. The development to the Baroque was an Italian, and specifically a Roman, phenomenon, although he would later come to view the German feeling for form as essentially a Baroque one.<sup>50</sup>

Baroque architecture were used simultaneously by Gurlitt in his distinctive version of what in his case can aptly be termed “political formalism.”

Gurlitt published his historical survey of European Baroque architecture—the first systematic treatment of the subject—at the end of the 1880s. The Italian, French, Dutch, and Flemish histories were written in order to explicate and ultimately to exalt the cosmopolitan German Baroque. Gurlitt's first volume, on Italy, appeared in 1887, and Wölfflin read it at least twice before finishing *Renaissance and*

48. Heinrich von Treitschke, *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: McBride, Nast, 1915), originally published as *Deutsche Geschichte im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1879).

49. For example, he emphatically rejects Gurlitt's view of Vignola as the bearer of the Palladian rule book. Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock*, p. 6; *Renaissance and Baroque*, p. 20. On Wölfflin's critique of Gurlitt's book, see Lurz, *Heinrich Wölfflin*, pp. 120–21.

50. On the Roman focus of his study, see Wölfflin, *Renaissance und Barock*, p. 1; *Renaissance and Baroque*, p. 15. In Wölfflin's last monograph, *Die Kunst der Renaissance: Italien und das Deutsche Formgefühl* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1931), which focuses on northern and southern Renaissance art, his terms for a German sense of form (movement, unclarity) recall those of the Baroque. For the shift in his thinking; see Levy, *Barock: Art History and Politics*.

Gurlitt's grand explanation of the Baroque can be outlined briefly as follows.<sup>51</sup> Michelangelo and Palladio were the late-Renaissance architects whose works set the stage for the Baroque. Palladio's architecture was interpreted by Vignola in the spirit of the Counter-Reformation as a "dry" (*nüchtern*) rule-bound architecture that suppressed architectural detail (understood by Gurlitt as the unity of the individual). This is Gurlitt's "bad" Baroque. Michelangelo's individualistic, "unique" (*eigenartige*) architecture of "interiority" (*innerliche*)—read Protestant—resolved itself into the "good" Baroque, not in Italy (as Wölfflin saw it), but in Germany in general and in the architecture of Protestant Germany above all. Unlike Wölfflin, Gurlitt explicitly links proclivities in architectural form to political form, as in the following passage:

Where in the life of the state and society there is a proclivity for logical clarification and for fixed forms, where the lawful regulation [*gesetzlicher Regelung*] of relationships prevails, where reason predominates, there will one find Palladio's disposition to be dominant. . . . But where emotional life was conducted prevalently as a religious relationship, where a fervent piety reigned, where the bold "I" displaced and overcame the social order, and broke through men's rules and laws . . . there would Michelangelo's spirit be powerful.<sup>52</sup>

For Gurlitt, German architecture came to maturity when it broke free from the cabinetmaker's *Kleinkunst* mentality—the focus on details that dominated the German Renaissance—to the *real* project of architecture, which was the consideration of the whole: "the feeling for the unity of the work of art, for the orderly arrangement of the parts by the whole, into a unified mass."<sup>53</sup>

The similarities between Wölfflin's and Gurlitt's thinking are particularly apparent in their analyses of princely palaces. Gurlitt differs from Wölfflin in seeing unity as a key to the expression of princely power, but like Wölfflin he argues that in Italian palaces unity is achieved at the expense of the individual forms, which are all suppressed.<sup>54</sup> For both men, Italian Baroque palaces embody autocracy achieved by force. But Gurlitt sees a solution to this Italian formulation take shape in the Baroque palaces of Prague, when the German spirit revived and where unity was redefined "in the German way" as the "harmony of many parts put together, the whole as the product of many individual forms."<sup>55</sup> That such a

51. Evonne Levy, "The Jesuit Style and Bohemian Architecture in Cornelius Gurlitt's 'Geschichte der des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland' (1889)," in *Bohemia Jesuitica 1556–2006*, ed. Petronilla Cemus with Richard Cemus (Prague: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2010), vol. 2, pp. 1139–50; and Levy, "Cornelius Gurlitt als 'Barockmann,'" in Lienert, *Cornelius Gurlitt*, pp. 45–53.

52. Gurlitt, *Geschichte des Barockstiles in Italien*, p. 6.

53. "Die Empfindung für die Einheit des Kunstwerkes, für die geregelte Unterordnung der Theile unter das Ganze, für geschlossenes Massen." Gurlitt, *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland*, p. 38.

54. Gurlitt, *Geschichte des Barockstiles in Italien*, esp. p. 222.

55. "Zusammenklang vieler Theile aufgefasst, das Ganze als das Erzeugnis vieler Formen-Individualitäten." Gurlitt, *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland*, p. 206.

development in German art should take place in Bohemia was no accident, he says, for it was here that the national question was the most animated. It is in his assessment of the Berlin Schloss (to which he erroneously believed both Borromini and Andreas Schlüter contributed) that Gurlitt most directly expressed his understanding of how a building can convey an ideal relation of individual to state. There the German architect, he says, moderated the harsh severity of the Italian parts of this uniquely monumental building, and “into the building he carried that spirit of the Prussian kingship, which does not see its greatness in being cut off from the people but in its inner ties to them. From a defiant *palazzo* he made a Prussian royal palace.”<sup>56</sup> In Gurlitt's view Schlüter modified Italian monumentality—the precondition for the Baroque in Germany—with an assertion of individual parts that was about power binding itself *to* the people rather than absorbing them and thereby cutting itself off from them.

The deeper explanation of Gurlitt's formal language for German Baroque architecture is to be found in the *longue durée* of German political theory. Leonhard Krieger argues for a distinctive German notion of freedom, which differed fundamentally from that of other European nations because of the historical relationship of regional princes to the Holy Roman Empire. Because the German princes, who were sovereign over their territories, asserted their own freedom from the Holy Roman Emperor, princely authority was always linked to freedom rather than the opponent of it.<sup>57</sup> Thus Treitschke is in keeping with the German idea of freedom as Meinecke outlines it when he argues that “freedom should be sought within the state not from it,” for the “power of the state and the liberty of the people are inseparably connected.”<sup>58</sup> Treitschke's vision of the relation of part to whole is subsumed by Gurlitt's political formalism: this *is* Gurlitt's ideal Baroque palace.

The views of Gurlitt and Wölfflin of the Baroque are no doubt similar, yet while for Gurlitt the Italian Baroque is subordinate to the ideal organization of parts to whole that could only be born in Germany, for Wölfflin the golden age of rational coordination in the Renaissance degenerated into the subordina-



*Berlin Schloss*, from *Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland*. 1889.

56. Ibid., p. 380.

57. Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom*, p. 5.

58. Treitschke, *Politics*, vol. 1, p. 152.

tion of parts to whole in the Baroque, marking the complete annihilation of the individual.

The comparison of Wölfflin's and Gurlitt's texts suggests that we should take more seriously the centrality of the figure of the state in both books as a preoccupation of the times. For if the state was, as Lionel Gossman has shown,<sup>59</sup> at the center of the German historical project in the nineteenth century, we should consider art history as moving on a parallel track to its closely linked discipline. Wölfflin's text can be seen as Hegelian in its validation of the spirit of the age. Everyone was a Hegelian to some extent at this time.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, how he defines that spirit seems closer to contemporary German historiography's view that the "form" of political organization is equally an expression of that spirit, and that the form of the state is the proper subject of history. If Wölfflin, as he would later put it in *Principles of Art History*, believed in writing the history of civilization from the point of view of a lost sensibility, reconstructing it on the basis of the material traces of (mere) art, we must rethink Wölfflin's *Renaissance and Baroque*, as the history not of the traces in architecture of early modern culture or society, but of the form of the state.

The most important question, though, is this: should we think of the political in Wölfflin's work as political formalism? That is, is the description of the form of the state one of the purposes of formalism? Or is the political system the *unconscious* of formalism—always already present, but in a repressed form? The evidence of Wölfflin's notebooks suggests strongly that the former is the case.

59. Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), esp. chapter 15.

60. See Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 7–8.