

A biosemiotic approach to landscapes: Alois Riegl's theories of *Kunstwollen* and *Stimmung* revisited in the contexts of cognitive and evolutionary aesthetics

Jui-Pi Chien¹

Abstract: This study explores the art historian Alois Riegl's heuristic terms '*Kunstwollen*' and '*Stimmung*' in the contexts of cognitive and evolutionary aesthetics. To begin with, the author draws on notions of instinct theorized by George Romanes, Charles Darwin and Charles Peirce. They are shown to have embraced instinct and associated it with states of mindfulness, good reasoning and intelligence of survival. Another art historian, August Schmarsow, is also shown to have favoured instinctive attitudes and mental trials and errors as the sophisticated approach to art. These rigorous theorizations of instinct serve to expand Riegl's idea that *Kunstwollen* suggests a relatively strong human will and desire for art. Further, to verify how viewers may attain states of *Kunstwollen* and *Stimmung*, the author draws on two landscapes (*Landscape with Roman Ruins*, 1536; *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859) to broaden viewers' horizons. Viewers are advised to take full advantage of the medium made up by light, air and space so as to work out perspectives that favour their mental wellbeing and the reception of artworks. Finally, the author integrates Riegl's theories into current research and emphasizes the necessity of unifying biological and cultural factors for the attainment of knowledge or original thinking in inquiries. In brief, Riegl's theories appear fairly biosemiotic when we consider the rich evolutionary, psychological and semiological contexts surrounding the birth of his insights.

Keywords: instinct; reason; landscapes; fragments; the optical principle; abductive cognition; *Kunstwollen*; *Stimmung*

1. *Kunstwollen*, the will of art, our instinctive mind and consciousness

How should we perceive the role of instinct when conceiving the correlation between the evolution of living beings and that of the arts? While some of us may

¹ Institute of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University, No. 1, Sec. 4, Roosevelt Rd., Taipei 10617, Taiwan; e-mail: jpchien@ntu.edu.tw.

believe that instinct remains unconscious in animals and humans, certain theorists back in the late 19th century such as George Romanes, Charles Darwin and Charles Sanders Peirce have actually made strenuous efforts to associate instinct with mind and consciousness. They put forward the bold hypothesis that instinct and reason, the unconscious and the conscious states of mind, may complement each other, and that there is little merit in adopting a binary oppositional approach to animal and human cognition. Due to their delicate observations on the links between animal behaviour and human creativity, they rather believed that instinct and reason should be working together to foster a sort of blended intelligence that enables both animals and humans to survive or to solve problems (Romanes 1883: 1–23, 355–384, 1888: 1–19; EP 2.208–225, 2.226–241, 2.463–474). This study argues that such an approach to the evolution of species and ideas may serve to revise our appreciation of the art-historical notions of *Kunstwollen* and *Stimmung* that Alois Riegl theorized.

The Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858–1905) had lectured on art-historical topics at the University of Vienna for ten years (1890–1901). He is one of the forerunners who led the public and the academia away from the biographical and generic approaches to the arts. He would always start from meticulous examinations of details and patterns, and simultaneously he guides the audience to reflect on two essential aspects: (1) how one may relate certain forms to artists' unique perceptions; (2) how artists across times and areas have revealed their distinctive traits and worldviews through these very forms. Judging in light of cross-disciplinary development, scholars have recognized the resemblance between Riegl's discourse and Saussurean semiology mainly as concerns three aspects: (1) the absolute continuity in history; (2) equal value between linguistic signs or types of art; (3) relativism between historical periods or worldviews (Ostrow 2001; Elsner 2006). Although Riegl has defined the heuristic term '*Kunstwollen*' in his writings, the paradox (i.e. the mixture of awareness, intention and impulses that governs artistic choices) that he included in his uses of the term still appears as a puzzling topic to art historians (preface to Riegl 2004[1966]). This study seeks to engage with the paradox by way of aligning Riegl's discourse with the notion of instinctive yet creative agency we gather from Darwin, Romanes and Peirce.

By way of revisiting Riegl's theories in the cognitive and evolutionary contexts that allow for rather flexible conceptualizations of our instinct, this study seeks to expand the notions of '*Kunstwollen*' and '*Stimmung*'² for our appreciation

² As for the term '*Stimmung*', it generally means a certain mood or atmosphere people are likely to perceive while being in nature or contemplating artworks. It is an essential term in the history of aesthetics, yet philosophers and aestheticians have employed it to different ends in view of their discursive positions. Some of them used it to indicate the perfect harmony that

of creative impulse. Adopting a kind of theory of mind together with Peircean abductive reasoning, this study assumes that creative agents have been actively and consciously implementing their plans in modifying what they have experienced or absorbed. Thus, the notion of instinct in this context appears like the strength of carrying on willed adjustment or modification of hypotheses. It enables agents such as artists and animals to sort out their directions to attain harmony with diverse environments. Further, equating art and life forms on the same horizons of agency, we are likely to conceive a vibrant evolution of forms made up by various artists. In the case of art history, the sort of absolute continuum in time that Riegl perceived is actually based on an alignment of similar yet different forms that reveal artists' careful estimation and modification of other forms or ideas they have spotted (Riegl 2004[1966], 2018[1992]). Such an arrangement of forms serves not only to blur the boundaries arbitrarily set between artistic genres, styles or periods, but also to disclose the sensation or consciousness of self-revision as a more profound instinct than imitation that induces artists to discover their directions of working or evolving (Riegl 2004[1966]: 395–433).

While defending Darwin's hypothesis of descent with modification that presupposes a continuum between animal and human intelligence, Romanes argued that we should first and foremost change our perspective so as to appreciate the authenticity of Darwin's ideas. We are invited to regard such continuity as occurring on the level of mental or psychological evolution instead of following the conventional approach to anatomy or classification of species. From the perspective of mind and intelligence, we have the greater chance to perceive instinct in terms of various cognitive acts such as feeling, learning, choosing, revising and action taking (Romanes 1883: 17–18, 20–21). Rather than judging instinct as a set of fixed traits that is not subject to change, we should consider agents' spontaneous and conscious variation of hereditary traits as the driving force of evolution (Romanes 1883: 18). Such observations on agents' will of bending or shaping themselves allow us to perceive instinct as a dynamic

early humans (such as ancient Egyptians and Greeks) formed with their milieus, while others have suggested disenchantment or the loss of inner peace modern people have experienced due to various kinds of strife in religion, science and war. Riegl has addressed both aspects in his lectures and articles when he invited our euphoric sensations of perceiving ancient and modern art, on the one hand, and called for spiritual comfort or solace that art historians and educators should enable the public to regain, on the other hand (Riegl 2004, 2020; Gumbrecht 2012: 8–9). To render '*Kunstwollen*' and '*Stimmung*' mutually conditioning norms of viewing and contemplating, this study in particular draws on the meanings of German stems: '*Stimme*' ('sound' or 'voice') and '*stimmen*' ('to tune an instrument' or 'to be correct', Gumbrecht 2012[2011]: 3–4). To attain a harmonization of our inner world and surroundings, we should constantly modify our positions or viewpoints to gather pleasant or meaningful perceptions.

system that constantly examines and adjusts how agents should get along with others in various environments.

While bridging our sensations and ways of engaging with nature and the world, Peirce made the assertion that instinct actually claims such a major portion of our mind (i.e. the instinctive mind) that we cannot foresee when and how we are coming up with great ideas to solve problems (EP 2.217–218, 2.240–241). Exertions of instinct in our everyday life and work indeed appear enlightening and rewarding, yet they cannot be parcelled out as several steps of logical reasoning that lead to certain results. Rather, instinct is liaised with our holistic perception of any emergent situation that provides us with directions and sharpens our reaction as if we were animals surviving in nature (EP 2.217–218). In addition, drawing on animals' behaviour as a model of observation, Peirce noticed something more than the ordinary kind of instinct that may just appear impulsive and self-serving among animals. He put forward a type of instinctive acts (i.e. exertions of “natural rational instinct”) that should retain strong links with agents' will and consciousness of benefitting their communities and descendants as well as themselves (EP 2.472–473).

It appears that instinct is a group phenomenon, vitally bonding living beings with their ancestors and descendants. Likewise, creative agents are supposed to modify what they have inherited from their forerunners, on the one hand, and to open up potential directions for those coming later to pursue, on the other hand. Among art historians and aestheticians in Riegl's times, August Schmarsow in particular discussed implications of new studies found in psychology and Jakob von Uexküll's biology that may serve to boost a genuinely scientific study of art and culture. Drawing on impulse shared by animals and humans, he recognized instinctive attitudes (*Triebstellungen*) as the true cause of artistic creation that has enabled different peoples effectively to work out certain schemes or designs. In addition, Schmarsow regarded knowledge of human bodily constitution and functions as an indispensable reference in our appreciation of mental or spiritual pursuits such as culture and the arts. He believed that a genuinely scientific approach to art history should be grounded in an integration of our awareness of body and mind, instinct, sensual feelings, and a whole range of higher pursuits in life (Schmarsow 1918–19: 231–232).

Concerning his absorption of the evolutionary scheme for art history, Riegl noticed that notions such as ‘impulse’ and ‘inner drive’ might have been made rigid or meaningless due to materialists' and mechanists' appropriations of Darwinian ideas (Riegl 2018: 4). Being aware of the pitfalls of such approaches that somewhat ignore the strengths of human will and consciousness, Riegl (1985: 9, 11, 225, 231) rather defined his approach of *Kunstwollen* as an inquiry into

conscious and purposive manifestations of human desire for art. In one of the key paragraphs that summarizes his observations on late Roman art, Riegl used the word ‘*Begehren*’ (‘desire’) rather than ‘*Trieb*’ (‘instinct’) or ‘*Antrieb*’ (‘drive’) to construe *Kunstwollen* as fairly strong human will, desire or motivation to shape and to interpret the world in the ways we want:

All human will is directed toward a satisfactory shaping of man’s relationship to the world, within and beyond the individual. The plastic *Kunstwollen* regulates man’s relationship to the sensibly perceptible appearance of things. Art expresses the way man wants to see things shaped or colored, just as the poetic *Kunstwollen* expresses the way man wants to imagine them. Man is not only a passive, sensory recipient, but also a *desiring, active being* who wishes to interpret the world in such a way (varying from one people, region, or epoch to another) that it most clearly and obligingly meets his desires. The character of this will is contained in what we call the worldview (again, in the broadest sense): in religion, philosophy, science, even statecraft and law. (Riegl 1985[1901]: 231, 2000[1901]: 95; emphasis mine, J.-P. C.).

Just as Darwin and Romanes introduced innovative ideas of instinct into their evolutionary scheme that emphasizes animals’ active and conscious alteration of their traits while coping with time and the change of environments, Riegl theorized the occurrence of similar mental phenomenon on the part of humans when it comes to the creation of art. Presumably, *Kunstwollen* as a concept serves as a guiding thread for observers to discover many aspects of a culture or society. What we gather from observing various types of artistic output should enable us to unify our perception of a culture or society as a whole. Moreover, because of having avoided treading on the path that enlarges drive or instinct as something insentient and inflexible, Riegl provided us with the prospect of integrating sensory and enactive, instinctive and reasonable, individual and communal aspects of human mind in his approach. Such integration that serves to sharpen our observations on creative agents’ motivation appears to be compatible with the novel scope for instinct that Darwin, Romanes and Peirce put forward.³

³ In his posthumously published chapter on instinct (written and intended as a chapter for *On the Origin of Species*, yet deleted due to its length), Darwin discussed his observations on animal behaviour that can be attributed more to self-originating or motivated modifications than inherited traits (Romanes 1883: 368–369). He made the point that animals are not just compelled by the great forces in nature. Rather, animals in most situations have been actively modifying their traits, habits or instincts, not only for survival but also for the wellbeing of their species. Following Darwin’s thoughts, Romanes (1883: 269–272) recognized intelligent adjustment and natural selection as mutually governing factors in the evolution of species. Arguably, due to his interaction with Romanes, Darwin can be seen as practising a sort of cognitive and psychological

In response to Riegl's approach that emphasizes our comprehensive and unitary impression of a certain culture or society, Schmarsow made the point that we should not mistake *Kunstwollen* as something given, static, or the only perfect direction of working those creative agents were aware of in a certain culture. On the one hand, the unitary impression we gather may appear problematic if we simply base our analyses on one single perspective right from the beginning. On the other hand, considering the fact that creative agents may have changed their viewpoints from time to time, we should admit that the seemingly consistent style of art we gather here and now is actually the outcome of many trials and errors. To revise potential shortcomings implied in Riegl's statements and analyses, Schmarsow put forward a sort of cognitive and psychological approach that serves to substantiate the usefulness of *Kunstwollen* in our inquiry:

[Riegl's] artistic will (*Kunstwollen*) is supposed to be a "determined and purposeful" one that asserts itself in the struggle with the inhibiting, negative factors. A "certain" one, certainly, this is self-evident everywhere. It is, of course, "definite" wherever it is characteristic, recognizable to us and expressible, but it need not always be a "purposeful" one if this designation is to mean more than single-minded. We take our natural starting point from naïve artistic creation, which instinctively satisfies our aesthetic desire. We think of it as a purely emotional matter, not as an intellectual one, clearly conscious of itself and its purposes as well as its inhibitions and negations, its choice and its defence or its countermeasures, thus calculating and reflective. It can become all these, but only in periods of trained reflection, of manifold exhaustive refinement. We will unhesitatingly attribute it to late Roman art, to ancient Egyptian art, only if we can actually prove it. (Schmarsow 1905: 5; trans. mine, J.-P. C.)

approach to instinct already in *On the Origin of Species* (Darwin 1964[1859]). Moreover, Romanes in particular revised Herbert Spencer's quantitative approach to instinct by introducing the key concept 'perception'. Rather than following Spencer's idea that reason can only arise out of instinct, i.e. stronger instincts may lead to rational or reasonable thinking, Romanes (1883: 333) stated that there is actually "a genetic connection between Instinct and Reason [...] it is organic, and not historic", and "[p]erception being the element common both to Instinct and to Reason [...] Reason arises directly out of those automatic inferences which are given in Perception, and which furnish the conditions to the origin of Instinct" (Romanes 1883: 335). Peirce also drew on and emphasized such subtle functioning when he discussed the mingling of perception and abductive reasoning (EP 2.208). He believed that instinct plays a key role in how humans make progress in the intellectual history such as discovering innovative ideas or effective ways of revising oneself or someone else's ideas. By relating Riegl's theories to such biosemiotic conceptualizations of the instinctive mind shared by animals and humans, this study serves to boost a rigorous engagement with our perception of artistic entities.

Schmarsow believed that the type of determined and purposeful attitude Riegl theorized is actually surrounded by a host of mind qualities such as feeling, perceiving, measuring and revising. Specifically, when treating *Kunstwollen* as part of the human mind and consciousness, we should break it down into these various cognitive acts that together have functioned to consolidate agents' creative output. Measured within the evolutionary context, Schmarsow's remarks appear in line with the novel scope of instinct that Darwin, Romanes and Peirce have suggested. Art creation, very much like the survival of animals in nature, does not come for free. It is not just an effortless and unintended byproduct in human evolution, as certain theorists have suggested today (Tague 2018: 125–128). It rather takes training, learning and a series of trials and errors for creative agents to acquire certain instinctive attitudes and acts from within. We may just regard *Kunstwollen* as a hypothesis that allows us to explore the origin and evolution of artistic creation in terms of human perception and cognition.

While summing up his discussions on the scientific approach to art and culture, Schmarsow concluded that we should unify biological and historical perspectives so as better to explore the true origin of art (Schmarsow 1918–19: 232–233, 257–258). The biological approach would enable us to appreciate creative agents as part of their communities or societies, just the way we make sense of animal or organismic traits through observing their dynamic interaction and communication within specific environments. Such a pattern of working and getting along with other agents, though constantly changing and evolving across times and regions, can be deemed as a sophisticated cause, or, rather, an ideal type of art, in which agents cooperate with each other to not only create but also construct distinct meanings of art. Although certain theorists today have a hard time absorbing the hypothesis that also animals have their will and consciousness to make wise and rewarding choices (as Darwin, Romanes and Peirce have advocated), the communal, social and collaborative perspective proves essential in bridging animals and humans in the realm of art creation and perception (Tague 2018: 127, 134).

When equating animals and humans on the expanded horizons of *Kunstwollen*, we may just stop judging or downgrading animals according to the sort of substantial art humans have created. We would rather admit that there is indeed something animal in human aesthetic perception so as better to absorb and integrate evolution theorists' and art historians' perspectives. On the one hand, animal traits enable us to appreciate the sort of active construct that humans seek to achieve with art creation, and on the other hand, the ability or potential to create art is not a specific domain or module in human brain. Art creation is rather the outcome of the social brain that has been staging cooptation or cross-

modular associations between various emotive and cognitive functions. Moreover, it is suggested that the emergence of the social brain has preceded human invention of tools and symbols that make up a sort of art objects we examine today (Magnani 2009; Tague 2018: 134; Menninghaus 2019[2011]: 102, 119–120). By means of the extended notion of *Kunstwollen* we gather from the cognitive and evolutionary contexts, we may form and verify the hypothesis that animals and humans have shared a state of life and art in which they seek to attain equilibrium or harmony with their unsettling environments or societies.⁴

2. Appreciation of *Kunstwollen* by means of perceiving, creating and unifying fragments on landscapes

In terms of viewing, interpreting and sense making, animals and humans are thought to have shared the strength of coping with ambiguities, uncertainties or shifting environments. The biological and organismic approach enables us to conceive the viewing and appreciation of art as a matter of life and death, survival and adaptation. First and foremost, we should be flexible and keep an open mind so as to make good sense of vague or fragmentary details we notice on first encounters. Ambiguities or disjunctions deriving from shifting environments may unexpectedly change how animals react and behave, just as much as how humans gather and revise meanings from numerous close readings. Moreover, we should not shy away from the numerous perspectives through which we can engage with and verify our intuitive ideas or presumptions. Such mental trials and errors may enable us to go beyond the confines of certain contexts, or rather, enrich our perceptions, to such an extent that we may unify incompatible contexts or situations as one harmonious whole in our minds (Welby 1896: 193–196; Tague 2018).

⁴ According to Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), it takes the unification of seemingly antithetical categories such as biological and cultural factors to gather comprehensive or absolute knowledge in scientific or systematic inquiries. In particular, he drew on Jakob von Uexküll's and Alois Riegl's approaches to enlarge on the merits of relativism in our times. He believed that our perception is biological and psychological while our apperception varies from culture to culture. Our apperception may not radically change how we feel and imagine, but it tends to monitor what we focus on and ignore while experiencing the world (Bertalanffy 1968: 235). Indeed, Uexküll and Riegl manifest two master tropes on Bertalanffy's scheme in how they have considered the validity of alternative lived experiences and worldviews among animals and humans respectively. This study in a sense pursues Bertalanffy's argument by way of unifying notions of animal and human instinct with a view to discovering the subtle functioning or dynamics in artistic creation and perception.

Let us take our perception of fragments or ruins we spot on landscapes as an example. While fragments inadvertently created can be disparaged as something unpleasant and unusable in everyday life, deliberately crafted or depicted ruins are deemed fairly charming and attractive in the arts. Concerning our appreciation of ruins on landscapes, partly due to the fashion of going on grand tours and partly due to the enthusiasm of sketching ancient ruins, artists and philosophers in the 18th and 19th centuries came up with guidelines that enable viewers to experience sensations of the sublime and the beautiful while contemplating eerie mixtures of nature and culture. According to certain aestheticians, the more we alienate ourselves from dark memories about the irrecoverable antiquity, the more likely we are to gather euphoria and inspiration from contemplating well-depicted ruins set against vast nature (Forero-Mendoza 2002: 11–12). In this regard, fragments are not perceived as a useless and inadequate agglomerate, but rather vitalized as part of our imagination that pushes for the widening of our horizons and the betterment of our wellbeing.

The biological and organismic approach enables us to value our perception as a self-motivated starting point while looking into texts, images and documents of all kinds. We are supposed to integrate types of information and to intuit original ideas about any topic we are studying as well. Nevertheless, we admit that there are actually certain limits to our perception so that we may simply see things without understanding while managing to absorb various sorts of information. This is so to say a fragmented state of mind or an incomplete sign function that is likely to occur at an early stage of our inquiry. To overcome such mental shortcomings, we should apply numerous perspectives throughout our inquiry so that we have a chance to recycle information we previously ignored. Such an approach should render the sign, proposition or argument we are devising for the community more or less complete. We are empowered to revise biases or assumptions about any topic we are inquiring on the basis of genuinely meaningful perception (Dretske 1999[1995]: 342, 348–349).

Our potential psychological problem of ignoring fragments may go much deeper so that it stakes certain paradoxes in defining and practising art history. Time and again, we worry about the suitability of skills and approaches we employ to deal with our objects of study. On the one hand, the myth of the origin, i.e. the communal search for the absolute and complete forms, induces us to associate our objects with specific intentions, functions and environments as we are managing the restoration of certain objects. We are tempted to cut and trim imperfections or marginal details that appear to be incompatible with the ideal blueprint we aspire to achieve with these objects. On the other hand, the idea of periodization, i.e. its evolution from one stage to another, may have governed our appreciation

of artistic problems and narratives. We might be restrained from experimenting with approaches or perspectives that may somewhat reduce the specificity of objects or certain art forms. These paradoxes invite us to reflect on the legitimacy of dealing with fragments that may lead to revised notions of form, temporality and environment in practising art history.

Let us look into two landscapes depicting Roman ruins and the American South Andes, respectively (Fig. 1). At juxtaposing the two settings on the same horizons, we notice salient differences between them, yet we cannot deny that they bear some resemblance to each other. It has been suggested that *The Heart of the Andes* (Frederic Edwin Church, 1859) introduces into art history a natural-scientific approach (outlined by evolution theorists such as Alexander von Humboldt and Charles Darwin) that serves to revise certain norms of depicting landscapes delineated by European humanist painters such as Claude Lorraine, Jacob van Ruysdael and Nicolas Poussin. In terms of composition, the American painter Church actually abandoned the conventional arrangement of sunset appearing at the vanishing point on the horizon. The source of light in *The Heart of the Andes* comes from the foreground, serving to light up the whole painting, while limiting the glare of the sun to certain areas in the foreground. In addition, there is nothing like encountering tricky situations such as deep forests and swamps in the foreground. Instead, we are presented with close studies of the greenery and rocks, the shades and varieties of which appear fairly picturesque and enticing. There are also subtle depictions of vegetation and the lands that appear natural and well matched with each other. Overall, the Andes landscape invites exploration and aesthetic enjoyment without inducing any unsettling fear of piercing light or eerie darkness in the viewers.



Figure 1. Left: *Landscape with Roman Ruins* (Herman Posthumus, 1536); right: *The Heart of the Andes* (Frederic Edwin Church, 1859).

Let us take the depiction of light and land as our guide to enter *Landscape with Roman Ruins* (Herman Posthumus, 1536) and contemplate how we can make sense of the painting. We have already learned what we are looking for due to our pleasant and enjoyable experience of *The Andes*. The light serves to enlarge certain details and to summon deeper thoughts about diverse worldviews seen through landscapes. The land around the ruins appears genuinely dark and gloomy, but it is intriguing to observe the shedding of light on seemingly random groupings of humans, ruins and monuments. We are not all that intimidated, since we are curious to discover the stories or historical backgrounds of these objects. However, upon reading the quote from Ovid carved on the monument, “TEMPVS EDAX RERVM TVQVE INVIDIOSA VETVSTAS O[MN]IA DESTRVITIS” (‘Oh, most voracious Time, and you envious Age, you destroy everything’), we are considerably discouraged and constrained. Following such a maxim indicating the state of the land, we should be indifferent to any creative and constructive attempts that have befallen on the land. Apathy appears to be an appropriate attitude if we adhere to the warning to stay away from such a miserable situation.

Let us re-enter *Landscape with Roman Ruins* and slice off the portions that portray human activities. On the second encounter, we derive quite a pleasant glow, emanating from the network of images we sort out on our own (Fig. 2). These humans appear to be taking pleasure in what they are doing on the land, and the glow truly enables us to examine the contents and prospects of their work. Starting from the foreground, we spot an architect who is alternating between measuring and sketching columns and bases with his instruments. In the mid-ground, between two statues of river gods, we notice a draughtsman who has been observing and sketching statues. Behind him, there seems to be a couple of onlookers who are paying close attention to what he is doing. Two noblemen (probably sages as well) appearing on the far left are strolling, and they might be debating over the situation of the land with each other. Some citizens appearing in the background are overlooking the river while admiring another landscape (depicted with the skill of aerial perspective) across the river. The network of their deeds forges the prospect that they are likely to achieve something impressive in the future. They may either rebuild certain sections of the land in another place or draw on their studies, conversations and observations for the advancement of their trades. Precisely what they are doing pertains to the shaping of artistic temperaments and the establishment of art history as a humanistic yet scientific discipline. Our willful cuts of images serve not only to induce favourable sensations about *Landscape with Roman Ruins*, but also to argue for the appreciation of *Kunstwollen* as potentially cognitive and psychological acts we may work out on landscapes.



Figure 2. Details of *Landscape with Roman Ruins*, focusing on the formation of artistic agents and their temperaments.

We are actually better in charge of our inquiry through fragmenting entities, be it in the realm of poetry, paintings, films or other art forms. Fragmenting in this regard is cherished as a means to re-contextualize, reinterpret and transform our objects of study, mainly for the enrichment of our mind. In one sense, our instinctive mind enables us fully to concentrate on fragments we have created or selected. We cannot ignore or dismiss these forms while considering how we should take action (like animals) or put to the test ways of meaning seeking and constructing. Through aligning, associating and networking our selected pieces, we may discover the merits of works that were underestimated or disparaged due to limited horizons (such as the propagation of moral lessons in the humanistic tradition). In another sense, we are motivated to sort out our appreciation of the twists and turns that characterize artists' unique imagination and reasoning. We are alerted to keeping a certain distance from ready-made iconographic labels and biographies that are assumed to provide us with safe information about artists'

styles of working. By way of dealing with our deliberately chosen details, we may gather clues and evidence that boost alternative ways of appreciating artists' genuinely creative acts in art history.

Landscapes in most cases already provide us with a peaceful and pensive state of things to deal with, leading us to contemplate worldviews and hidden meanings. Such a state reveals a great sense of control that the painters have achieved in the process of creating and polishing forms, an aspect we may fail to gather from reading their biographies. Further, landscapes are already charged with sensations of life, survival and vibrant thinking. Such an evolutionary strength can be seen as the outcome of the painters' struggle with nature and death, i.e. their numerous trials and errors in overcoming true-to-life representations on the one hand, and the compulsion of binary thinking in depicting details on the other hand. Admitting the fact that landscape painters have made efforts in directing our attention to the artistic forms within their works while managing to bridge types of binary opposition (such as separations between the past and the present, the native and the foreign, etc.), we as ideal viewers and interpreters should carry on the potential process of thinking and imagining and seek to bring alive the agency of certain artistic forms. Facing the organized and blended state of things depicted in landscapes, we should take measures to renew their life and development in view of our concerns, observations and widening horizons (Agamben 2019[2017]: 14–15, 27, 49–50; Deleuze 2007[1987]).⁵

⁵ While pushing for his theory of resistance that serves to unify artists' creative activities and their works on the same horizons of agency, i.e. networks of life, Agamben emphasized a sort of pure thinking (free from actual economic and social operations) in which artists resist following established norms or paradigms. Contemplating with such networks or entities in mind, artists as well as viewers are quite likely to discover potentially new ways of feeling, thinking and interpreting. Likewise, artworks seen as a sort of organisms resist remaining in the same state, yet they are constantly changing in accordance with artists' and viewers' standpoints. To attain such an insight into the shared agency by artists, their works, and potential viewers, Agamben, on the one hand, drew on Gilles Deleuze's notion of genuine creativity, which is mainly about overcoming sets of binary opposition, and, on the other hand, on Jakob von Uexküll's functional cycle, which enlarges on the capacity of motivated and self-sufficient artists and viewers just like animals. Further, in his analysis of landscapes as an artistic genre, Agamben (2019[2017]) mingled together the two strands of theories to validate his argument. While contemplating landscapes, artists as well as viewers not only alienate the real world, but also force themselves to exert their perception, concentrating on pure thinking, feeling and reasoning. Humans together with animals are thought to attain an "ontologically neutral" state in which they share the same traits and horizons exactly when viewing landscapes (Agamben 2019[2017]: 49–50). Intriguingly, to a certain extent Agamben has worked out the sort of comprehensive and absolute knowledge that Bertalanffy promoted by way of unifying biological and cultural factors through engaging with landscapes.

3. *Stimmung*, mood or atmosphere, continuous and universal history, and the spectators' unified perception

When regarding artistic forms as states or forms of life, we are quite likely to work out genuinely favourable interpretations of *Landscape with Roman Ruins*. Rather than feeling daunted or restrained from revisiting, we now manage to apply what we gather from Fig. 2 to other parts of the landscape. Actually, the glow that emanates from Fig. 2 appears to be a mixture of light and misty air: the former fails to work on intentionally darkened parts of the land, while the latter appears to be equally distributed throughout the whole painting. In addition, the key factor that divides our perception of artworks from that of things in nature boils down to our perception of space. Although we cannot soften the physical space in nature at our discretion, we tend to discern a kind of flow or emanation while roaming artistic space. According to Riegl (1995[1901]: 69), the spatial environment (*räumliche Umgebung*), or rather, the space that surrounds artistic forms, “should appear to extend freely and equally in all three dimensions”. This suggests that we have the chance to extend the foresight and joyful sensation we gather from Fig. 2 to other parts of *Landscape with Roman Ruins* just by means of the expansive air and space. We should value the air and space as the medium that may serve our goal to prompt a comprehensive and unitary perception of fragments.

The medium of air and space allows us to modify the *Stimmung* – mood or atmosphere – of *Landscape with Roman Ruins* while keeping a certain distance of viewing. Viewing the landscape from a distance forbids us from making distinctions between forms concerning their styles and periods. Without a connoisseur's close viewing and logical reasoning, we cannot even judge the value or quality of forms. Rather, we seek to integrate and to discover interconnections between seemingly isolated forms. The more we consider and group as many forms as possible at one glance, the more we are likely to overcome odd feelings we have experienced on previous encounters. The more we revise our feelings and presumptions by keeping the desirable distance, the more we may regain the sensation of peacefulness and harmony, thought to be beyond our reach in contemplating grotesque forms. Increasingly, our widening horizons govern how we perceive and interpret a certain mood that permeates and prevails the whole artistic space. The medium of air and space actually enables us to envision the creation of a three-dimensional structure in which the landscape and our mental state blend together. Such a composite structure serves to bridge the physical space existing between any form of art and our mind and consciousness (Simmel 2007: 21–22, 26–27; Riegl 1995[1901]: 51–64, 2020[1899]: 33–34).

Our revised readings enable us to gather the multiple moods of *Landscape with Roman Ruins* that serve to integrate its details, on the one hand, and to suggest its potential moves towards other landscapes or creations, on the other hand. Rather than attributing absolute values or qualities to details, we manage to invent perspectives that help *Landscape with Roman Ruins* go beyond its confines and unattractive readings. As opposed to the positivistic strand of the *milieu* theory that regards artworks as receivers that have already absorbed nourishment from their creators and times, our biological, cognitive and psychological approach conceives of artistic creations as lively and independent organisms that seek to reach out and to survive changing conditions of viewing and interpreting. Actually, the virtual composite structure we develop also serves to extend the artistic space to unexpected environments, namely various sites for display or exhibition. Thus, the medium of air and space is seen to be highly expansive and vigorous in crossing boundaries, bridging stylistic differences and creating innovative ways of comparing and contrasting. Considering the fact that artworks have been travelling beyond their birthplaces in our times, we should adjust our approach to seeking and constructing meaning accordingly. That is to say, the meaning or mood of any piece of art is far from being singular, obvious and long-standing as it might appear in conventional approaches. Our mental image of any piece is actually more or less affected by other pieces, which, to use an analogy, could be no less shifting than the drifting clouds in the sky (Welby 1896: 195; Gumbrecht 2012: 16–17; Christian 2021).

On top of the sensations of peacefulness and harmony, the merits of adopting the approach of viewing from a distance and gathering moods may go much deeper in terms of historiography. We may become so analytical and perceptive as to recognize common traits or characteristics that serve to equate pieces of art on the same horizons irrespective of their milieus or birthplaces. According to Riegl, these traits, or rather, perceptual cues (*Merkmale*) in terms of instinctive mind, suggest a sort of mental perception shared by artists, which should actually claim the true cause of art and art history. Rather than following biographical and philological approaches that enlarge on artists' life stories and clear-cut distinctive styles, we are advised to discover connections between their works by way of sharpening our proficiency of comparing, aligning and explaining similar-looking details. Such an approach serves not only to conceive continuous and universal history, but also to provide people exploring in the humanities with a genuinely scientific scope (Riegl 1995[1898]: 6–7, 9; Gumbrecht 2012[2011]: 7–9). Just like Ferdinand de Saussure who put forward something similar for the study of languages, Alois Riegl argued for the application of a semiological approach to art history. They both encouraged us to value human instinct and perception

as the starting point that gradually guides us through the process of sorting out correlations or parallels in time.

Now that we have recognized the legitimacy of unifying *Landscape with Roman Ruins* and *Heart of the Andes* on widened horizons, let us re-enter Fig. 1 and imagine that we are indeed appreciating the landscapes in the same space or environment. To begin with, let us summarize a couple of traits that characterize the integrated larger landscape in terms of compositional scheme and our perception: (1) the background is rendered vague and much less inviting than the foreground; (2) a certain manifestation of time (in the forms of river and waterfall) either encircles or runs parallel to the land; (3) the exuberant foreground is shown to be the place where humans, flora and fauna survive current situations. In particular, the image of a peacefully flowing river suggests the scope of an absolutely continuous history, in which the past, the present and the future all have their shares in shaping the state of the land. Moreover, after checking out information about the artists' approaches to the foreground, we confirm that they both have portrayed an imaginary land that does not correspond to the actual state of things and scenery at the time of their compositions. On the one hand, Herman Posthumous intentionally rendered vases and columns broken and piling up on top of each other as shown on the margins. On the other hand, Church inserted and modified his sketches of the Niagara Falls, replaced palm trees with oaks, and added trodden paths and even more greenery in the finalized landscape (Harvey 2020: 349, 353–355, 358–359). We learn that they both have resorted to their artistic perception as a final way out while managing to convey a certain vista or worldview made up by cultural artefacts and abundant nature.

Within the widened horizons, we can better perceive and engage with the merits of overcoming sets of binary opposition, those between life and death and between humanistic and scientific worldviews. First and foremost, those alarmingly broken and disjointed artefacts start to appear as lively and endearing as those delicate depictions of birds, flowers, oaks and moss. In terms of art history, the mass that Posthumous had deliberately created in the foreground would actually turn into well-received styles such as the grotesque and the fantastic in the 17th and 18th centuries. Something of the sort was further developed by later artists to appear even more massive and murky than the close studies shown here (Rodríguez, Borobia Guerrero 2011). While roaming on the integrated land, we can imagine not only the potential success of concentrated relics and vibrant species thereafter, but also admire the remote yet atmospheric hills and mountains that suggest the presence of the past. Overall, our revised perception of details enables us to gather a sense of time and evolution completely different from Ovid's. Rather than forgetting or feeling desperate about the past, we gather from the unified

worldview that we should persist in creating art and life forms that may flourish anywhere and in any way. Such a viewpoint fosters the attitude of active spectatorship that enables the viewers to regain the happiness and confidence of exploring the daunting and the unknown.

Both Posthumous and Church have painstakingly managed to fit into their artistic space as many miscellaneous forms as possible. We may well follow in their footsteps to look closely into the foreground and compile a catalogue of specific monuments, artefacts, mural paintings, flora and fauna they have exquisitely depicted. However, such a historical and generic approach may just deprive us of the chance to deal with biases, prejudices or divided opinions that have oftentimes befallen on the humanities. To overcome the sort of prejudice against human constructive attempts as exemplified in the quote from Ovid, we do need to employ an alternative approach such as the one that Church and Humboldt have developed. Church in particular had revised his sketches and paintings many times before attaining the visualization of perfect harmony that Humboldt described in his writings. By working out a much revised median tone or *Stimmung* on *Landscape with Roman Ruins* with the assistance of natural-scientific approach, we not only integrate negative and divided opinions about the state of the land that we gather from the past, but also propose a method for enhancing our intelligence in perceiving here and now. Indeed, it is more the medium of light, air and space than our precise knowledge about monuments and artefacts (i.e. the optical rather than the tactile principle) that enables us to monitor our direction of viewing and moving, and then gather how we may modify our feelings and perceptions in due course (Gadamer 2008: 72–73, 76, 80–81; Vassiliou 2018: 74–75, 77–78).

4. Concluding remarks and integrations of Riegl's theories into current research

Exploring Riegl's theories of *Kunstwollen* and *Stimmung* in the contexts of cognitive and evolutionary aesthetics allows us to revise certain myths about the quality and functioning of instinct in scientific inquiries. It is vital that we should not treat instinct as a notion *per se* or judge it as something rough and primitive that mainly explains bodily arousal. Rather, instinct as a heuristic term has been recognized as “sets of capacities”, ranging from intuitive reactions to complicated cognitive acts (Magnani 2009: 288). As demonstrated in the strand of thinking made up by Darwin, Romanes, Peirce and Schmarsow, instinct claims both the starting point and the end product of motivated self-modifying attempts

shared by animals and humans. We should admit that instinct is more or less a form of intelligence that enables living beings to put into practice suitable solutions to problems in various environments or situations. When extending such problematics of instinct to the context of art, we may conceive the type of aesthetics that encompasses both animal and human traits. It enlarges on the co-evolution of artists and viewers, and that of creative acts and sense-making strategies in both human and biotic artworlds (Prum 2013: 821–822, 827–829). In brief, instinct seen through the context of art explains how creative agents regard and adjust their relations with shifting environments or situations on their terms.

We can appreciate Riegl's theories of *Kunstwollen* and *Stimmung* as two mutually inclusive sets of norms that enable us to engage with the ongoing interaction between artworks and multiple receptions or evaluations of them. As heuristic terms, '*Kunstwollen*' and '*Stimmung*' serve to address spatio-temporal and bodily conditions that artists and viewers are obliged to cope with in creating and appreciating art. According to the theory of structural coupling, our inner world has the strong urge to entrain to the rhythm of something or someone we get along with in the physical world. Such a biological and psychological trait is seen to be heuristic in certain situations, in which we need to compare and contrast different entities that may demand a lot of attention and intelligence. It is also suggested that interaction or engagement happening within coupled systems is open-ended, which indeed allows motivated viewers to explore and to become liaised with art objects as much as they want (Brinck 2018: 207–208, 211–212). So it appears that viewing from a distance may actually prompt such a harmonization of our inner world and the physical outer world. As demonstrated in the analysis of landscapes, the sort of three-dimensional structure we hypothesize allows us to modify our positions and perspectives while we are shuttling back and forth between juxtaposed entities. Due to such constant yet controlled shifting of positions, we have not only experienced a gradual change of our emotion and perception, but also embraced the landscapes as if they also shared the happiness and enlightenment we gather from interacting with them.

Riegl's *Kunstwollen* and *Stimmung* claim to be principles that we as viewers can apply for our communities and us throughout the history of art. Although *Kunstwollen* appears to explain well the remote past or the artistic output in early civilizations, we still observe schools or movements in our times that advocated certain worldviews vibrantly. Likewise, even though the semantic contexts of the term '*Stimmung*' have been shifting in time (from music to aesthetics, psychology, physiology and art history), we do not shy away from using it to address our potentials of gathering and creating harmony from the kind of artworks we are dealing with. Overall, our engagement with landscapes pushes not only for the

unification of animal and human traits, biological and cultural factors, but also that of *Kunstwollen* and *Stimmung* for original theorizing or thinking now and in the future (Agamben 2019; Thonhauser 2020: 1262–1263). Precisely, landscapes serve to consolidate both the origin and appreciation of art in the functioning of social brain, or rather, in the mutual recognition of needs and ideas between creative agents and their communities (Riegl 2020[1899]). By way of comparing and staging exchanges of perceptual forms between similar-looking pieces of art, we are quite likely to devise concepts or propositions that invite people working in various academic fields or societies to engage in meaningful communication and examination.

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Ein biosemiotischer Ansatz zu Landschaften: Alois Riegls Theorien von *Kunstwollen* und *Stimmung* im Kontext der kognitiven und evolutionären Ästhetik neu betrachtet

Diese Studie untersucht die heuristischen Begriffe *Kunstwollen* und *Stimmung* des Kunsthistorikers Alois Riegl im Kontext der kognitiven und evolutionären Ästhetik. Zunächst stützt sich der Autor auf die Instinktvorstellungen von George Romanes, Charles Darwin und Charles Peirce. Es wird gezeigt, dass sie Instinkte geschätzt und mit Zuständen der Achtsamkeit, des guten Denkens und der Überlebensintelligenz in Verbindung gebracht haben. Ein anderer Kunsthistoriker, August Schmarsow, hat ebenfalls instinktive Haltungen und geistige Experimente mitsamt ihrer Fehlschläge als anspruchsvollen Zugang zur Kunst favorisiert. Diese rigorosen Theorien des Instinkts dienen dazu, Riegls Idee zu erweitern, dass *Kunstwollen* einen relativ starken menschlichen Willen und Wunsch nach Kunst vermuten lässt. Um zu überprüfen, wie der Betrachter den Zustand von *Kunstwollen* und *Stimmung* erreichen kann, zieht der Autor zwei Landschaftsgemälde (*Landschaft mit römischen Ruinen*, 1536; *Das Herz der Anden*, 1859) zur Horizonsweiterung heran. Dem Betrachter wird empfohlen, das Medium Licht, Luft und Raum voll auszuschöpfen, um Perspektiven zu erarbeiten, die sein geistiges Wohlbefinden und die Rezeption von Kunstwerken fördern. Abschließend integriert der Autor Riegls Theorien in die aktuelle Forschung und unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit, biologische und kulturelle Faktoren zu vereinen, um zu Erkenntnissen oder zu originellem Denken in der Auseinandersetzung zu gelangen. Zusammenfassend lässt sich sagen, dass Riegls Theorien ziemlich biosemiotisch erscheinen, wenn wir die reichen evolutionären, psychologischen und semiologischen Kontexte berücksichtigen, die die Entstehung seiner Erkenntnisse begleiten.

**Biosemiootiline lähenemine maastikele:
Kunstwollen ja Stimmung Alois Riegli teooriates taasavastatuna
kognitiivse ja evolutsioonilise esteetika kontekstis**

Uurimuses käsitletakse kunstiajaloolase Alois Riegli heuristilisi termineid '*Kunstwollen*' ja '*Stimmung*' kognitiivse ja evolutsioonilise esteetika kontekstis. Alguses lähtub autor instinkti mõistest, nagu seda teoretiseerivad George Romanes, Charles Darwin ja Charles Peirce. Näidatakse, et nad tunnustasid instinkti mõistena ning seostasid seda teadveloleku, hea arutlemisvõime ning ellujäämisintelligentsuse seisunditega. Näidatakse, et ka teine kunstiajaloolane August Schmarsow soosis instinktiivseid hoiakuid ning vaimseid proovilepanekuid ja katsetusi kui peenelt arenenud lähenemisi kunstile. Neid rangeid instinktiteoretiseeringuid kasutatakse, avardamaks Riegli ideed, et *Kunstwollen* osutab suhteliselt tugevale inimtaatele ja soovile kunsti järele. Edasi, tõestamaks, kuidas vaatajad võivad saavutada *Kunstwollen*'i ja *Stimmung*'i seisundi, kasutab autor kaht maastikumaali („Maastik Rooma varematega“, 1536; „Andide süda“, 1859), et vaataja silmapiiri avardada. Vaatajatel soovitatakse täiel määral ära kasutada valgusest, õhust ja ruumist koosnev meedium, töötamaks välja perspektiive, mis soosivad nende vaimset heaolu ning kunstiteoste vastuvõtmist. Viimaks lõimib autor Riegli teooriad kaasaegse teadusega ning rõhutab bioloogiliste ja kultuuriliste tegurite ühendamise vajadust, et jõuda uurimistöös teadmuse saavutamise või algupärase mõtlemiseni. Kokkuvõttes tunduvad Riegli teooriad üsna biosemiootilistena, kui võtame arvesse tema arusaamade sündi ümbritsevaid rikkaid evolutsioonilisi, psühholoogilisi ja semioloogilisi kontekste.