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Alois Riegl's Spatial Conception of Salzburg and Its Afterlife in France Stele's Ljubljana

Vesna Krmelj

Abstract

This article regards Riegl's essay on Salzburg as a vital methodological shift in art history because it treats the city as an integrated historical and spatial form. In Riegl's work, Salzburg emerges as a space in which artistic monuments and processes can be discerned through the interplay of style, perception, the historical moment, and the urban whole. Therefore, his essay has a broader significance: it raises the question of how urban space itself becomes the object of art-historical inquiry. For Riegl, the city is a relational space where various artistic wills converge, and Salzburg is artistically most productive when it adopts Italian influences directly, without substantially transforming them in view of its northern environment. Riegl's approach also allows for a change of perspective on the relationship between the centre and province. The province establishes itself as an active space in which artistic impulses can be received, focused, or transformed in accordance with its spatial and historical logic. Riegl's understanding of space notably influenced subsequent representatives of the Viennese School and the development of Austrian art topography. Dvořák's students, especially France Stele, transferred this heritage to the new political and cultural context after the Monarchy's dissolution. In his interpretation of Ljubljana, Stele builds on Riegl's model of the city as a relational historical form, but transforms it into a cultural programme. During this process, Ljubljana is understood as a city that is gradually developing its own artistic centre from its intermediary position. Therefore, the comparison between Salzburg and Ljubljana shows how the Viennese art-historical tradition was transformed from an analytical model into a cultural-political vision of the city following the Monarchy's collapse.

Keywords

Art Historiography, Alois Riegl, Salzburg, France Stele, Ljubljana, Spatial Concepts

On 1 September 1904, Alois Riegl delivered a lecture titled *Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte* (*The Situation of Salzburg in the History of Art*¹) at the Mirabell Palace in Salzburg during the Meeting of the Association of German Historians in Salzburg. The event's local organising committee was later criticised for its choice of venue, as the

¹ According to the translation by Karl T. Johns in Alois Riegl, *Collected Essays*, trans. and ed. by Karl T. Johns (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2023).

audience had difficulty hearing the much-anticipated lecture because of the acoustic peculiarities of the Palace's Marble Hall.

The voice of the lecturer, seated in a spot too low in the middle of the back wall, was by no means loud enough for the huge hall. Even when the very large audience, which filled more than half of the room, crowded tightly around the lecturer, not a single word was intelligible in the back rows. In the opinion of most participants, the lecture, which the audience had awaited with the greatest interest and which was undoubtedly very relevant, therefore failed, and many left the venue.²

The lecture, which focused on the integrity of space, thus failed from the outset – precisely because of the specific characteristics of a particular space. This disparity between the concrete conditions of perception and the theoretical conception of space, which is significant for understanding Riegl, also explains why his treatment of stylistic particularities can be understood not only as an analysis of formal properties but also as a reflection on historically conditioned ways of seeing, thinking, and evaluating within a specific time and space.³

Riegl's lecture, which was later published and, in 1929, included in the posthumous edition of Riegl's *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Collected Essays),⁴ is rarely mentioned in the contemporary literature on Riegl.⁵ Nevertheless, the editorial selection itself suggests that the essay played a relevant, if implicit, role in Austrian historiography and in the provinces

² All translations from German are the author's own unless noted otherwise. *Salzburger Chronik für Stadt und Land*, 40. Jg., no. 199 (2 September 1904), p. [3].

³ On Alois Riegl as an early theorist of perception, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 251, n. 33; Michael Gubser, 'Time and History in Alois Riegl's Theory of Perception', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66.3 (2005), 451–74; Margaret Olin, 'Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentiveness', *Art Bulletin*, 76.2 (1994), 285–99; Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); Henri Zerner, 'Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism', *Daedalus*, 105.1 (1976), 177–88; and Valentina Bartalesi, 'Inside haptic Modernism: Alois Riegl and Anglo-American art criticism and theory', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 29, supp. 2 (December 2023).

⁴ Alois Riegl, 'Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte', in *Bericht über die Tätigkeit und den Stand der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde im 45. Vereinsjahre 1904/1905* (Salzburg: Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde, 1905), pp. 61–94. See also Alois Riegl, *Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte*, Österreichische Kunstbücher, 18 (Vienna: Hölzel, 1921); and Alois Riegl, 'Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by Karl M. Swoboda (Augsburg and Vienna: Benno Filser, 1929), pp. 111–32. An English translation appeared comparatively late: Alois Riegl, *Collected Essays*, trans. by Karl T. Johns (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2023).

⁵ Only recently has the essay attracted renewed attention as an example of Riegl's engagement with contemporary social conditions; Vasold demonstrates that in his 1904 lecture on Salzburg, Riegl also used Baroque art as a starting point for reflecting on the political issues of the time – especially immigration and cultural domination. In this regard, he also drew on the historical role of itinerant artists, builders, and workshops, noting that Salzburg's Italian character had been shaped precisely by the influx of artists and workers "from outside", especially from Italy, thus indirectly countering contemporary nationalist notions of Salzburg as a "German city" and suggesting that national belonging should not be the decisive category in art history. Georg Vasold, 'Die moderne Kunst verstehen lernen: Alois Riegls Barock', in *Praktiken des Neobarock in der Moderne. Figurationen des Übergangs 2*, ed. by Werner Michler and Clemens Peck (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 2025), pp. 51–74 (58–59, 65–69).

associated with the Monarchy. However, for a long time, the introduction to Riegl's collection of essays, written by the architect and art historian Hans Sedlmayr, was better known than the essay itself.⁶ In 1966, in his inaugural lecture marking the founding of the art history department at the University of Salzburg and his appointment as its head, Sedlmayr, burdened by a National Socialist past, referred to Riegl's "unheard" lecture in the very title of his own contribution and, as he explained in the introduction, paid tribute to the giant of the discipline.⁷ Sedlmayr's reference to Riegl was also a clear gesture of art-historical self-positioning in the continuation of the Viennese tradition of understanding the Baroque: from Riegl's formal analysis to the structural analysis based on Gestalt theory (*Strukturforschung*).⁸

Albin Rohrmoser, assistant at the Institute of Art History under Sedlmayr and later director of the Salzburg Museum, who was otherwise critical of Riegl's interpretation, regarded the essay as a tribute to the city because Riegl had chosen Salzburg as the setting for a debate about a concept he himself had formulated.⁹ Riegl exceptionally placed his admittedly difficult-to-define concept of *Kunstwollen* ("artistic will") in a concrete urban space. From the perspective of how real or urban space and *Kunstwollen* as "a structuring principle of perception and design" complement each other,¹⁰ his discussion remains productive even today. *Kunstwollen* is expressed not only in the style of the artworks but also in the way culture and history are inscribed within the city's space. In this regard, the historical will to form extends beyond the individual artwork and is expressed in urban space as an organised field of perception. Such a starting point can be understood as a broader interpretative model, i.e. as a perceptual key to understanding the spatial opening of (urban) form.

Riegl's spatial concepts can be understood in relation to the development of at least three levels: the artistic will (*Kunstwollen*) as his central methodological category; mood (*die Stimmung*) as a spatial concept linked to perception, modern art, and science; and his aspiration towards a universal art history. On this basis, Riegl – and even more explicitly, his

⁶ Hans Sedlmayr, 'Die Quintessenz der Lehren Riegls', in *Alois Riegl: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Vienna: Benno Filser Verlag, 1929).

⁷ On Sedlmayr's National Socialist past, see Hans H. Aurenhammer, 'Zäsur oder Kontinuität? Das Wiener Kunsthistorische Institut im Ständestaat und im Nationalsozialismus', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 53.1 (2004), pp. 11–54 (20–21); Benjamin Binstock, 'Springtime For Sedlmayr? The Future Of Nazi Art History', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 53.1 (2004), pp. 73–86; Evonne Levy, 'Sedlmayr and Schapiro Correspond, 1930–1935', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 59.1 (2010) pp. 235–263; Maria Männig, *Hans Sedlmayrs Kunstgeschichte: Eine kritische Studie*, (Köln, Weimar and Wien: Böhlau, 2017), pp. 37–96, 221–235.

⁸ On Sedlmayr's transformation of Riegl's thought into a more systematic analysis of internal structure, see Ian Verstegen, *The New Vienna School of Art History: Fulfilling the Promise of Analytic Holism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp. xxxi, 331.

⁹ Albin Rohrmoser, 'Das Salzburger Bürgertum als Auftraggeber in der Kunst. Eine Antithese zu Alois Riegls "Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte"', in *Vom Stadtrecht zur Bürgerbeteiligung. Festschrift 700 Jahre Stadtrecht von Salzburg*, ed. by Heinz Dopsch (Salzburg: Selbstverlag, 1987), pp. 75–91, (pp. 80–81).

¹⁰ Cf. Adi Efal, see footnote 46 in this article.

successor Max Dvořák and the circle of his students, including Izidor Cankar (1886–1959), France Stele (1886–1972), Vojeslav Mole (1886–1973), and Ljubo Karaman (1886–1971) – indirectly opened up a new perspective on the relationship between the centre and the periphery in the European cultural landscape.¹¹ In this perspective, the peripheral regions of the Habsburg Monarchy could no longer be seen merely as flawed reflections of its artistic centres, but rather as spaces for distinct yet equally legitimate artistic processes. Riegl's institutional work, particularly within the Central Commission from his appointment in 1902/03 until his death in 1905, only fully revealed itself in the work of his successors.¹² In this sense, his approach proved particularly productive among his and Dvořák's students in the 1920s.

These concepts also found fertile ground in Slovenian art history as it was being shaped at the newly established University of Ljubljana after World War I.¹³ In the new social and political circumstances, the concept of cities as bearers of cultural identity and historical continuity assumed a central role, as illustrated by the establishment of the independent professional journal *Kronika slovenskih mest* (Chronicle of Slovenian Cities), published between 1934 and 1940. Therefore, it makes sense to compare Riegl's essay on Salzburg with the essay on Ljubljana by France Stele, the journal's founder and first editor, an art historian, conservator, and Max Dvořák's student. Such a comparison, presented in the second part of this article, reveals how the Viennese school of art history's starting points were transformed in the new situation.

Riegl's Essay on Salzburg

Already in the introduction to his essay, Riegl announces that Salzburg's position in art history is special because the Italian character – otherwise also characteristic of other cities north of the Alps – is “much purer and more authentic here than in other cities farther south, such as the old episcopal city of Brixn or the merchant city of Bolzano, which have

¹¹ The relevant works of Izidor Cankar, France Stele, Vojeslav Mole and Vojeslav Karaman remain largely available only in their original languages; Karaman developed this line of thought through three paradigmatic concepts defining the position of local artistic production: the liminal, the provincialised, and the peripheral. See: Ljubo Karaman, *O djelovanju domaće sredine u umjetnosti hrvatskih krajeva* (Zagreb: Društvo historičara umjetnosti, 1963), p. 142.

¹² Ernst Bacher, 'Alois Riegl und die Denkmalpflege', in *Kunstwerk oder Denkmal? Alois Riegls Schriften zur Denkmalpflege*, ed. by Ernst Bacher, Studien zu Denkmalschutz und Denkmalpflege, 15 (Wien, Köln and Weimar: Böhlau, 1995), pp. 11–42. Theodor Brückler and Martha Fingernagel-Grüll, *Zur Geschichte der österreichischen Denkmalpflege: Die Ära Helfert*, 2 vols (Wien, Köln, and Weimar: Böhlau, 2020), II, 155–95.

¹³ The University of Ljubljana was established in 1919. Izidor Cankar, who had received his doctorate in 1913 under Max Dvořák, was appointed head of the Art History Department. After the war, Cankar established a modern approach to art-historical studies in Slovenia, drawing on the Viennese school of art history. For further information about the first assistant professor of art history, see France Stele, 'Izidor Cankar utemeljitelj ljubljanske umetnostnozgodovinske šole', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. v. 4, 1957, pp. 9–30.

always maintained much closer secular and ecclesiastical ties with Italy than Salzburg.”¹⁴ The phenomenon involves the development of a pattern reflecting a specific artistic will characteristic of Italian space. The Baroque period, through direct Italian influences and artists inspired by Rome, was a driving force in this development. Riegl begins by tracing the city's history back to antiquity, noting that Salzburg was once a Roman city. In his view, during the Middle Ages, the city remained largely uninterested in Germanic art and in typical German medieval architecture, despite its predominantly Germanic population. He supports his observations by arguing that Salzburg never developed a strong Romanesque or Gothic tradition, as seen in other German or Central European cities. In Salzburg, the Romanesque style appeared relatively late, mainly in forms that clearly referenced northern Italian models, whereas Gothic architecture remained fragmentary and stylistically disparate.¹⁵

Riegl particularly highlighted the absence of a monumental Gothic cathedral, which could represent the pinnacle of medieval art in the city, and of a hall church, which would mark the culmination of German Gothic development.¹⁶ According to him, the only exception is the late Gothic chancel (at this point, he focuses on the interior), which was added to the late Romanesque parish church, now the Franciscan Church. The two styles meet abruptly here.¹⁷ Riegl then precisely describes the resulting perceptual effect: the contrast between the dark nave and the bright chancel creates a distinctly painterly, almost chiaroscuro effect. On the one hand, there is a strong contrast between light and shadow; while on the other hand, the view towards the chancel is broken down into fragments, so that only part of the whole can be seen from the nave, while the rest is left to the imagination. “Due to such a striking manifestation as that found in the Franciscan Church, this system can be straightforwardly described as the forerunner of modern art.”¹⁸ Riegl underlines that this solution did not directly influence the further development of Salzburg

¹⁴ Alois Riegl, ‘Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte’, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by Karl M. Swoboda (Augsburg: Benno Filser, 1929), pp. 232–45, here p. 111. The German elements, alongside the Italian, cannot be overlooked here, either. In the German Tyrol region, Italian and German elements blend seamlessly, whereas in Salzburg, they stand side by side in stark contrast: the German elements are purer, but so are the Italian influences.

¹⁵ Riegl, *Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte*, pp. 115–116.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 112, 116.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 117–118.

¹⁸ Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, “In einer so pikanten Erscheinung, wie es in der Franziskanerkirche entgegentritt, ist dieses System geradezu als der Vorläufer der modernen Kunst zu bezeichnen.”

Vasold emphasises that Riegl's descriptions of the spatial and lighting experience in the Salzburg churches – in particular, the way one's gaze is steered from darkness to light and the field of vision is fragmented – are strikingly reminiscent of the experience of modern visual media and can almost be interpreted as an anticipation of cinematic perception. He also suggests that Riegl may have been inspired by cinematic images and prompted to write such a description by the state-of-the-art moving images. See: Vasold, *Die moderne Kunst verstehen lernen*, pp. 64–65.

architecture, but rather remained an isolated exception, a “genuinely Salzburgian product” that sharply juxtaposed the Italian and Germanic aesthetic tendencies.¹⁹

In the Early Modern Period, Riegl detects a gradual yet increasingly conscious opening of Salzburg to Italian influences, initially evident in the secular architecture and urban design. He regards the changes in the urban form – the abandonment of northern-style roofs and gable ends, and the emphasis on horizontal articulations and uniform façades – as a clear sign of a cultural orientation towards Italy. During this period, Salzburg began to distinguish itself from other cities north of the Alps and to forge its own identity as an “Italian” city within the German space.²⁰

Riegl sees the culmination of this process in the Baroque period, when Salzburg underwent an intense artistic transformation under the Archbishops, particularly in the 17th century. He regards the new cathedral and other representative buildings as the purest examples of the Italian monumental style north of the Alps, underscoring the decisive role of Italian architects and artists. During this period, Salzburg did not develop its own Baroque synthesis but instead consciously adopted Italian models, thereby achieving exceptional artistic concentration and clarity.²¹

Riegl identifies the turning point in the period of the architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach (1656, Graz – 1723, Vienna), who developed a distinct, more Austrian Baroque expression in Salzburg – a synthesis of Italian spatial clarity and Germanic dynamics of depth. It was in this city that Fischer von Erlach created his monumental early works, from which his own Austrian Baroque style emerged.²² Only here, in a city permeated with Italian sentiment in the north of the Alps, was the architect able to break free from the Italian style.²³ He managed to combine Italian and Nordic, Germanic artistic aspirations and realised them most consistently in the Collegiate Church (*Kollegienkirche*) before leaving the city and transferring his knowledge and experience to Vienna. His architecture in Salzburg is the first example of northern stylistic principles being introduced into the southern stylistic tradition. Although this represented an important step in the development of architecture in the broader region, Riegl believes it also marked

¹⁹ Das Werk steht damit, wie schon bemerkt, völlig isoliert: als echtes Salzburger Produkt erweist es sich aber selbst in diesem Falle durch die schroffe Nebeneinanderstellung einer italienischen und einer germanischen Geschmacksneigung, die beide allerdings antizipiert sind. Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 119; About the issue of the Franciscan choir, see: Daniel Tischler, ‘Die Schwelle zwischen Langhaus und Chor in der Salzburger Franziskanerkirche. Eine wirkungsästhetische Fingerübung auf den Spuren von Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlachs Gespür für Ortsspezifität’, in *An der Schwelle. Liminalität in Theorie und kunsthistorischer Praxis. Tagungsband zur 20. Tagung des Verbandes österreichischer Kunsthistorikerinnen und Kunsthistoriker*, eds. Verband österreichischer Kunsthistorikerinnen und Kunsthistoriker (Wien: VöKK, 2019), pp. 101–117.

²⁰ Riegl, *Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte*, pp. 129–130.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 123–128.

²² Ibid., p. 128.

²³ Ibid., p. 129.

the end of a period when Salzburg, as a city, reached its highest artistic intensity.²⁴ As Salzburg moved away from its immediate Italian orientation, its distinct art-historical role also came to an end.²⁵ Riegl concludes his essay by noting that Salzburg's relevance to art history lies not in stylistic originality or innovation, but in its status as a place where Italian artistic impulses could take hold directly, without gradual adaptation or internal transformation.

In his essay, Riegl largely sets aside sociological, economic, and political factors, including the question of patronage and the role of the Archdiocese of Salzburg.²⁶ Instead, he focuses on formal and spatial analysis: the organisation of the church space, the relationship between the façade and the interior, the transitions between Italian clarity and Northern structurality, and the tensions between monumentality and decoration, optical effect, and architecture. At this point, the focus is less on the genesis of the Austrian Baroque than in how, in Riegl's work, space transforms from a local circumstance into a perceptual and methodological issue for art history. In his analysis of Riegl's Salzburg Franciscan Church, Daniel Tischler points out that the character of the threshold – the contrast between the nave and the choir, which is not merely a stylistic opposition but an event of transition in which the regime of perception is altered – is decisive for the experience of this spatial phenomenon within the church.²⁷ Riegl's essay shows that observations can be read as precise records of the visual effect, which he then organises into his theoretical apparatus. In his efforts, he is not even hindered by anachronisms:

It is quite astonishing to see this tendency here in Salzburg as early as the first half of the 15th century, and inconceivable that the remarkable effect of such a design would not have been recognised at the time. Therefore, it must have been deliberate. The Baroque approach to interior design, based on contrasts between light and shadow, originated in Italy and was later introduced in the North, where it was happily embraced. Therefore, the reconstruction of the Franciscan Church in the 15th century was not an imitation of the Italian model in its use of light contrasts, but rather an anachronistic precursor to subsequent Italian development projects, the likes of which art history had never seen before. However, the other striking peculiarity – the separation into fragments – seems an even greater anachronism, except that it is not derived from Italian but rather from

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 128–130.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

²⁶ Rohrmoser presented his thesis of the bourgeoisie as the commissioner as the antithesis of Riegl's deliberations. Albin Rohrmoser, 'Das Salzburger Bürgertum als Auftraggeber in der Kunst. Eine Antithese zu Alois Riegls "Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte"', in *Vom Stadtrecht zur Bürgerbeteiligung. Festschrift 700 Jahre Stadtrecht von Salzburg*, ed. Heinz Dopsch (Salzburg: Selbstverlag, 1987), pp. 75–91 (pp. 80–81).

²⁷ Daniel Tischler, 'Die Schwelle zwischen Langhaus und Chor in der Salzburger Franziskanerkirche. Eine wirkungsästhetische Fingerübung auf den Spuren von Johann Bernhard Fischers von Erlachs Gespür für Ortsspezifität', in *An der Schwelle. Liminalität in Theorie und kunsthistorischer Praxis. Tagungsband zur 20. Tagung des Verbandes österreichischer Kunsthistorikerinnen und Kunsthistoriker* (Vienna: Verband österreichischer Kunsthistorikerinnen und Kunsthistoriker, 2024), pp. 101–17.

Germanic taste alone. Meanwhile, the Italian Baroque style demands that the whole be perceived spatially, if possible.²⁸

Riegl's lucidity lies less in explaining the genesis than in focusing on the space as a relation among form, perception, and historical design.

His essay can be understood as a vital starting point for reflection on spatial epistemology. By demonstrating the significance of *Kunstwollen* and how this concept can be interpreted in relation to space, the essay can be read as a basis for understanding the concrete urban topography. At the same time, it provides a new outlook on the old city centre, as, for the first time in art-historical terms, it no longer regards it as a collection of individual monuments but rather as a complete work of art, following its own internal rules across different periods and styles. In this regard, space and time are inextricably linked: only through their interconnectedness can these rules be understood and experienced.

Universal Art History and National Discourses

In his book *Toward a Geography of Art*, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann underlined that art history had been closely associated with geography since its origins in the 19th-century universities.²⁹ Art was understood as a phenomenon situated in space, and art history developed in relation to the spatial and social circumstances in which art was created. In this sense, art history and geography developed in parallel at many universities.³⁰ This early connection fostered the understanding of art as a spatially and historically situated phenomenon, but it also paved the way for essentialist and hierarchical interpretations of space. The developments during the two world wars rendered this connection ideologically and terminologically problematic, and the involvement of many researchers in racial theories, together with their adherence to the National Socialist Party, further exacerbated the situation.³¹ It was not until Michel Foucault in the 1960s that systematic research on space, especially in relation to time, was reinvigorated. However, although Kaufmann demonstrated that art history could never be fully separated from spatial contexts, the exploration of this topic largely remained in the background until the spatial turn.³²

²⁸ Riegl, *Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte*, p. 131.

²⁹ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁰ Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art*, pp. 47–58.

³¹ Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 165–214.

³² Piotr Piotrowski, 'On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History', *Umění/Art*, 56.5 (2008), pp. 378–83, here p. 378.

Usually, Alois Riegl is not included among the representatives of the geography of art in the sense it acquired in the 1920s, 1930s, and after World War II.³³ The spatially deterministic model was more clearly developed at the University of Vienna by Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941), who interpreted art in terms of geographical and ethnic principles.³⁴ Although, as Kaufmann points out, Riegl's texts still retain traces of 19th-century race-based historical vocabulary, this diction or terminology, as Ute Engel emphasises, constitutes a vital theoretical framework for his work, particularly in his confrontation with Strzygowski.³⁵

In this sense, Riegl goes further: as a thinker from a multinational monarchy, he already points to a way out of the loop of closed nationalisms by gradually reframing space as a historical, perceptual, and methodological issue. For him, space is not merely a geographical basis for styles but rather a constitutive problem of art-historical knowledge, formed at the point of contact among the form of an artwork, the historical mode of perception, and broader collective cultural conceptions.³⁶ As early as the end of the 1930s, Hans Jantzen pointed out that only in Riegl was the notion of space subordinated to the scientific art-historical notion of stylistic regularity, i.e., the attribution of certain spatial structures to different times and cultures in accordance with their general spiritual attitudes. In many ways, Riegl's entire conception therefore serves as a starting point for a critique, transformation, and more precise implementation of spatial analysis in the study of individual historical periods, both within strictly formal historical methods as well as in the efforts to ensure fresh access to the idea of an artwork through its formal structure.³⁷ For this reason, Kaufmann's thesis – that the persistence of the tradition based on a determined geography of art³⁸ is closely associated precisely with Riegl's influence – should be accepted with caution.

Eleonora Gaudieri has recently explored Riegl's extensive archives of preparatory materials and written lectures on Baroque art, making a notable contribution to understanding his intellectual horizon. Her research shows that Riegl conceived of the issue of “racial history” very broadly, within universal history and in relation to creativity or

³³ We also do not associate Riegl's insights with the subsequent phenomenological understanding of space and its extreme concept of “genius loci”.

³⁴ Lately, research has extended the reception to Strzygowski's works, see Suzanne L. Marchand, ‘The Rhetoric of Artifacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism: The Case of Josef Strzygowski’, *History and Theory*, 33.4 (1994), 106–30; Georg Vasold, ‘Riegl, Strzygowski and the Development of Art’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 5 (2011). Annette Hoffmann and Barbara Kristina Murovec, ‘Josef Strzygowski and Avguštin Stegenšek: Some Remarks on Their Jerusalem Studies’, *Folia Historiae Artium, seria nova*, 22 (2024), 67–75.

³⁵ Ute Engel, ‘Riegl on the Baroque’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7 (December 2012), 1–6, here p. 5.

³⁶ Jantzen also mentions Heinrich Wölfflin or August Schmarsow. Hans Jantzen, *Über den kunstgeschichtlichen Raumbegriff. Vorgetragen am 5. November 1938* (Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Abteilung, 1938, 5) (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften; in Kommission bei C. H. Beck, 1938).

³⁷ Jantzen, *Über den kunstgeschichtlichen Raumbegriff*, p. 29.

³⁸ Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art*, p. XIV, 490. p. 57.

creative capacity – the potential of a particular nation (*Volk*).³⁹ From the universal historical perspective, an artistic phenomenon is understood either as a local phenomenon (*lokale Bedeutung, untergeordnete Bedeutung*) or as a universal cultural expression (*universalen Werth, weltbeherrschende Rolle, fundamentale weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung* or *führende Rolle*).⁴⁰ The decisive factor is whether the art of a particular period is regarded as part of a limited cultural episode or as a dominant trend within a broader historical development, such as the Italian Renaissance and Baroque art.

According to Gaudieri, Riegl bases his observations on the assumption that, throughout history, the leading role of one cultural centre has been replaced by others. In this regard, the interplay between the “artistic talent” (*künstlerischen Begabung*) of an individual “nation” and the cultural, social, and political circumstances is decisive.⁴¹ Development occurs as periodic shifts in the leading roles of the individual “nations”, which determine artistic trends for a given period. Artistic domination occurs when, based on its “artistic talent”, a particular “nation” creates a model that others find relevant. Other nations either accept or reject such a model. If they recognise it, they assimilate its artistic language, but if they develop their own direction, it lacks decisive meaning in the wider art scene. At different periods, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine art all played a “universal” role.⁴² Similarly, the Italian Renaissance served as an authoritative model, while all other European arts remained local variants of it.⁴³ From the late 16th century onwards, Italy gradually lost its leading role to the Netherlands, Spain, and later France, while the Roman tradition continued to exert a lasting influence on the development of Baroque north of the Alps.⁴⁴ As an example, Riegl refers to Viennese architecture, which developed its characteristic features between the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries under the leadership of Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach and his school. In his view, the Viennese Baroque clearly attests to the influence of the Roman Baroque, without which the original development of the former would have been unthinkable.⁴⁵ Fischer’s understanding of the environment in which he studied was most profound, and his return to Salzburg was a prelude to further development. Salzburg’s art-historical significance thus becomes comprehensible precisely through the distinction between the universal model and the local historical setting: it was a northern space in which the Italian

³⁹ Gaudieri, Eleonora, ‘Alois Riegl and his Lecture Notes: A Reconsideration of His Concept of “Baroque”’, *Journal of Art Historiography*, 22 (June 2020), pp. 1–18, here p. 10; also see the book Gaudieri, Eleonora. *Alois Riegl: eine Neubewertung seines Barockbegriffs anhand ausgewählter unpublizierter Passagen seiner Manuskripte*. Böhlau, 2025.

⁴⁰ Gaudieri, *Alois Riegl and his lecture notes*, p. 10.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Cf. Alois Riegl, ‘Über Renaissance der Kunst’, *Mitteilungen des k.k. Österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie*, n.s. 5 (1895), pp. 342–93, here p. 345.

⁴⁴ Gaudieri, *Alois Riegl and his lecture notes*, pp 10–11.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 11; see also Alois Riegl, *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom: Akademische Vorlesungen aus seinen hinterlassenen Papieren*, ed. by Arthur Burda and Max Dvořák (Wien: A. Schroll, 1908). pp. 5–6.

Baroque emerged with particular clarity, even as it was beginning to attain partial independence.

This was not a matter of any individual artist's psychological will, but rather of a common, culturally conditioned orientation that determines which aspects of reality a culture recognises as relevant and how it articulates them in terms of design. Therefore, *Kunstwollen* serves as a structuring principle of perception and design. As Adi Efal has shown, for Riegl, artistic will is linked to the question of reality: art arises from the need to order and integrate experiential reality.⁴⁶ The integration of content and form is thus not a simple opposition but a dynamic relationship, a counterpoint: only when something is accepted as our own can new forms emerge. This is also the point at which a critical difference from Wölfflin's model of development emerges, as it is no longer governed by binary oppositions but rather by a more open and tense dynamic of transformation, closer to *contrapposto* than to polarity. This raises the question of whether a re-examination of Riegl's starting points and the notion of *Kunstwollen* can help unburden the reception of space as a determinative category and move it towards space as a possibility of experience, relation, and manifestation.

The Alps as an Experiential Framework

The Alps, where the city of Salzburg is located, were among the geographical areas that played a notable role in Riegl's research, although they are associated with Riegl less as a geographical motif than as a space that – by its remoteness, contact with nature, distance, and contemplation – made it possible to change the perceptual regime. It was in this Alpine

⁴⁶ Adi Efal believes that Riegl's reasoning can be associated with neo-Kantian realism, which acknowledges the existence of reality independently of the subject while emphasising that this reality is accessible only through certain cognitive and perceptual structures. Art thus becomes a privileged field in which the way reality is historically structured for human consciousness is revealed. According to Efal, the central thesis of Riegl's theory is that art is not merely an imitation of nature but a specific response to reality. In this regard, reality is not understood as a passive circumstance but as a causal factor in artistic production. Artworks do not arise from arbitrary subjective imagination, but rather from a particular way in which reality is accessible to human perception and experience at a particular historical moment. The concept of *Kunstwollen* plays a crucial role in this context. It denotes a historically determined will to design, which mediates between reality and the artistic form. It has nothing to do with the individual artist's psychological will: instead, it is a collective, objective principle that determines which aspects of reality a culture recognises as relevant and how it articulates them. Therefore, *Kunstwollen* serves as a structuring principle of perception and design. Adi Efal, 'Reality as the Cause of Art: Riegl and Neo-Kantian Realism', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 3 (2010), 1–20, here p. 4–10.

environment that Riegl articulated the notion of mood: *die Stimmung*.⁴⁷ He described it in his essay *Die Stimmung als Inhalt der Moderne Kunst* (Mood as the Content of Modern Art).⁴⁸

The essay begins with a scene on a “lonely Alpine peak”, where nothing is within reach, and the impressions of the world depend entirely on what one can see. Riegl describes this passage through his own experience of descending from a mountain peak, when the sight of the valley and the life within it instils in him indescribable bliss, peace, and harmony. Beyond the contradictions arising from what his imperfect senses present to him from up close, a premonition of something immeasurable emerges: the world soul (*Weltseele*), which interweaves all things and unites them in perfect harmony. This feeling of order over chaos, harmony over dissonance, and stillness over movement is what Riegl calls “*die Stimmung*” and identifies as a central characteristic of modern art and science.⁴⁹

Riegl associates the remote gaze, which allows for distance and stillness, with the artistic will of modern art, whose essence he sees precisely in mood (*Stimmung*). The latter relates directly to the observer’s elevated, detached, and focused position, enabling the perception of the world as an ordered whole. However, this harmony is never completely stable. The intrusion of a moment’s vitality – in Riegl’s case, the leap of a mountain goat into his field of vision – can upset this balance in an instant, breaking through the boundaries of harmonic integrity. The harmony of external reality is therefore only a reflection of inner experience. At this point, Riegl is still far from the awareness of presence, in which attention is so profound that an unexpected event can be the culmination of reality. Nevertheless, Riegl does not perceive *Stimmung* as an abstract or purely esoteric concept. The term originated in everyday language and was widespread in his time, including in art criticism.⁵⁰ For this very reason, it is significant that Riegl did not choose a more sophisticated technical term. In this way, he kept the concept on the border between aesthetic experience, historical sensibility, and everyday speech. It was this openness that allowed him to think of *Stimmung* not merely as a subjective mood, but

⁴⁷ In this regard, it is perhaps appropriate to note that the Alps also received considerable attention in the early 20th century within modern art – in the context of the Secession – when two exhibitions by artists from this field, Giovanni Segantini (1901) and Ferdinand Hodler (1903), were held in the period immediately following the publication of the essay *Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst* (Mood as the Content of Modern Art).

⁴⁸ Alois Riegl, ‘Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst’, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Augsburg and Wien: Dr. Benno Filser Verlag, 1929), pp. 28–39.

⁴⁹ Riegl, ‘Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst’, p. 34. For secondary literature, see: Konstantinos Vassiliou, ‘Essay: The Kunstwollen of the Scientific Era and Alois Riegl’s *Stimmung*’, *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, 27.55–56 (2018), 65–81; Lucia Allais and Andrei Pop, ‘Mood for Modernists: An Introduction to Three Riegl Translations’, *Grey Room*, 80 (Summer 2020), 6–25. About the concept of *Stimmung* around 1900, see: Margareta Ingrid Christian, ‘Aer, Aurae, Venti: Philology and Physiology in Aby Warburg’s Dissertation on Botticelli’, *PMLA*, 129.3 (2014), 399–416.

⁵⁰ The word “*die Stimmung*” – in its Slovenianised form “*štimungā*” – appeared as a key term even in the critique by the Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar, who was astonished by the Slovenian “*štimungā*” of his friends, the Impressionist painters, at the Mietke Gallery in Vienna in 1904. Like Riegl, Cankar also needed some distance from his everyday environment to recognise the power of contemporary Slovenian painting.

rather as a familiar yet historically specific way in which the world presents itself to the onlooker.

For Riegl, the transition from proximity to distance, from individual objects to the perception of the whole, is crucial not only for comprehending the modern perceptual experience but also for understanding his ambition to develop a universal art history. If a remote perspective allows the world to be seen not as a disconnected multitude of individual elements but as a relatively ordered whole, the same applies to art history: it cannot remain confined to local examples, individual monuments, or specialist collections of materials, but must instead strive for a broader historical horizon.⁵¹ Riegl argues that comparing temporally and spatially distant artistic phenomena is legitimate and even necessary, because it is precisely through such comparison that the higher laws of historical development are revealed. For him, the universal historical view is the “*eigentliche Krönung*” (true crowning achievement) of art-historical research. However, he also explicitly states that such a view is valid only if the immediate causes and contexts of particular phenomena are reliably established in advance.⁵²

It is therefore no coincidence that Riegl, in his essay *Kunstgeschichte und Universalgeschichte* (Art History and Universal History), compares the development of art-historical research to that of painting itself.⁵³ In his opinion, art history must not be content with narrow erudition but must again reach a level of synthesis at which it becomes possible to think about the relationships among individual works, perception, and broader historical development.⁵⁴

The City as a Whole and its Art Topography

Riegl's essay on Salzburg builds on understanding the city as a whole that operates on many levels and, in the art-historical sense, can almost be treated as a work of art with its own rules. For Riegl, the city is a meeting place for various artistic “wills” (*Kunstwollen*), which intertwine, confront, and influence one another. However, such relationships do not necessarily result in a distinct local style. Quite the opposite: in the case of Salzburg, Riegl emphasises that the city was most artistically productive when it adopted Italian influences directly, without significantly adapting or transforming them to suit its northern position. It is precisely Salzburg's openness to Italian art – its ability to become this style's Northern Alpine venue – that Riegl sees as the city's historical role. For Riegl, Salzburg is important not because of its particular innovativeness, the uniqueness of its commissioners, or its

⁵¹ Alois Riegl, ‘Kunstgeschichte und Universalgeschichte’, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Karl M. Swoboda (Augsburg and Vienna: Dr Benno Filser Verlag, 1929), pp. 3–9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

entirely novel stylistic language, but because of its ability to embrace and (re)shape Italian impulses in the region north of the Alps.

In 1902/3, Riegl became a member of the Imperial Royal Central Commission responsible for monument protection, while at the beginning of 1904, he was appointed Conservator General for artistic and historical monuments. The published notices reveal that he visited Salzburg in the summer months and in September 1903, dedicating himself to the *Karoluskapelle* chapel in the Franciscan Church.⁵⁵ His essay on Salzburg is the best evidence that he did not approach his work in a purely administrative way, but rather systematically addressed the question of how space, the monument, and the historical whole become the subject of art-historical assessment in the first place. During this period, Riegl laid the foundations of Austrian art topography, which Max Dvořák continued as a programme after Riegl's death.⁵⁶ The first volume in the series was dedicated to Riegl precisely because he had laid down the principles that guided the inventorying of artistic monuments.⁵⁷

According to Riegl, ancient artistic monuments and contemporary art are essentially carriers of similar mood content, whereas artistic monuments carry various historical, memorial, and psychological values, and the space serves as a medium through which these values become legible. The age value has an emotional basis, conveying a widespread feeling akin to religious sentiments, independently of any aesthetic or historical education.⁵⁸

In his introduction, Dvořák went a step further. The Austrian art topography, as Dvořák describes it in his introduction, is not merely an inventory of objects but a way of interpreting a monument – what he calls “the literary and pedagogical mission of art topography” (*eine literarischer und pädagogische Mission*).⁵⁹ In this manner, art topography also aligns with Riegl's broader understanding of commemorative value, in which the purpose assigned to the monument from the very outset ensures that a particular moment never belongs entirely to the past but remains in the consciousness of future generations – always

⁵⁵ *Mitteilungen der k. k. Central-Commission*, 2.10 (October 1903), 313.; Martha Fingernagel Grüll. *Zur Geschichte der österreichischen Denkmalpflege: die Ära Helfert*. Böhlau, 2020, 2 volumes. P. 193. For more about this, see Ernst Bacher, ‘Alois Riegl und die Denkmalpflege’, in *Kunstwerk oder Denkmal? Alois Riegls Schriften zur Denkmalpflege*, ed. Ernst Bacher, Studien zu Denkmalschutz und Denkmalpflege, 15 (Wien, Köln in Weimar: Böhlau, 1995), pp. 11–42, here p. 13.

⁵⁶ In this regard, we should take into account Sabrina Raphaela Buebl's recent research, which shows that Dvořák mainly continued and popularised ideas that Riegl had already developed in the 1890s. Sabrina Raphaela Buebl, ‘Alois Riegl and the Origins of “Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte”: Reconsidering Neo-Idealism in Viennese Art History’, *The Edgar Wind Journal*, 9 (2025), 89–106.

⁵⁷ Géza Hajós, ‘Riegls Gedankengut in Dvořáks Einleitung zur Österreichischen Kunsttopographie’, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, 28 (1974), 138–43, here p. 138.

⁵⁸ Stele was clearly fond of this concept, as his articles show he was keen to draw on these human emotions and bring heritage as close as possible to the people. See France Stelè, ‘Varstvo spomenikov’, *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, I, 1921, pp. 79–89, 186–189.

⁵⁹ Max Dvořák, ‘Einleitung’, in Hans Tietze and others, *Österreichische Kunsttopographie. Band I: Die Denkmale des politischen Bezirkes Krems in Niederösterreich* (Wien: A. Schroll, 1907), xiii–xxii, here p. XVIII.

present and alive. As Géza Hajós reflects, this conclusion is not only theoretical but also programmatic.⁶⁰

Dvořák's 1905 introduction to *Österreichische Kunsttopographie* (Austrian Art Topography) marks both a programmatic continuation and an important shift within the Viennese school.⁶¹ As Géza Hajós has shown, Dvořák adopts Riegl's premises and partially transforms them. There is less emphasis on age value and more focus on historical and commemorative value.⁶² With this shift in emphasis, the space no longer appears primarily as a carrier of value, but rather as a carrier of historical meaning. In Dvořák's work, art increasingly appears as an expression of spiritual and worldview change. In this shift from form to meaning and from relational space to a historically saturated region, the difference between Riegl and Dvořák becomes clear, as does the continuity of the Viennese School's central question: how art in space not only exists but also becomes understandable as a historically structured and meaning-laden phenomenon.

Riegl, Dvořák, Stele: From an Analysis to a Programme, Salzburg – Ljubljana

After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the role of its cities changed politically, culturally, and institutionally. This shift involved not only urban and infrastructural development but also the transformation of public space, marked by the establishment of a new state: the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, or, after 1929, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. These processes were carried out in cooperation among politics, the economy, and culture, with art history playing a key role. France Stele, who influenced the development of architecture and urban planning as a conservator, writer, and member of various committees and commissions, stands out in particular. The influence of Alois Riegl and his works in Slovenia was evident mainly through Dvořák's students,⁶³ representatives of the first Slovenian school of art history (Josip Mantuani, Izidor Cankar, France Stele, Vojeslav Mole), who read Riegl's texts in the original. Even after World War II, when the Slovenian territory politically distanced itself from the German scientific tradition, this influence did not disappear. Instead, it persisted indirectly:

⁶⁰ Géza Hajós, 'Riegls Gedankengut in Dvořáks Einleitung zur Österreichischen Kunsttopographie', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, 28 (1974), 138–43.

⁶¹ Max Dvořák, 'Einleitung', in Hans Tietze and others, *Österreichische Kunsttopographie*, pp. xiii–xxii.

⁶² Hajós, *Riegls Gedankengut in Dvořáks Einleitung zur Österreichischen Kunsttopographie*, p. 139.

⁶³ Riegl's only direct student was Josip Mantuani, an art historian and musicologist. In 1893, he was in charge of the graphics collection at the Imperial Library in Vienna, and in 1898 he was entrusted with managing its music collection. In 1909, he arrived in Ljubljana as the director of the National Museum of Slovenia.

in the conceptual apparatus, methodological emphases, and the way of understanding the relationship between art, space, and historical development.⁶⁴

The following section explores whether Stele's description of Ljubljana as a cultural centre can be understood as a transformed continuation of Riegl's model from his essay *Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte* (*The Situation of Salzburg in the History of Art*), in which the activities of Jože Plečnik, with whom Stele⁶⁵ collaborated creatively throughout his career, represent its culmination.⁶⁶

In this sense, the links between Salzburg and Ljubljana are both historical and visual. Both cities are characterised by strong Italian influences, particularly during the Baroque period, and by a long-standing interplay between Romanesque and Germanic elements. In his abovementioned essay, Riegl showed that such a meeting point of influences does not necessarily lead to stylistic dependence but can create a space of specific historical possibility. It is precisely through its openness to receiving, transmitting, and transforming influences that a city can become a historically productive space. Such a conception of a city as a relational space is also crucial for understanding Stele's interpretation of Ljubljana.

In 1938, France Stele published several treatises on Ljubljana, including a transcript of his lecture on Ljubljana as an artistic centre,⁶⁷ delivered on 26 April 1938 at the Šafárik Learned Society at the University of Bratislava.⁶⁸ Stele also understood the city as a place of enduring cultural formation at the crossroads of various artistic trends. According to his interpretation, Ljubljana developed between Central European and Italian horizons: its Baroque style showed a marked orientation towards Venice and Italy, while already allowing for local articulation. Also for Stele, style was not a closed system but a relational category

⁶⁴ To date, no fundamental texts of the Viennese school of art history have been fully translated into Slovenian. We only have a partial translation of *Katechismus der Denkmalpflege*, *Katechismus der Denkmalpflege* (Wien 1916) – 'Katekizem spomeniškega varstva' (Vienna 1916), trans. by Katarina Mohar, Franci Lazarini, Tina Potočnik, Blaž Resman, and Damjan Prelovšek, *Umetnostna kronika*, 32 (2011), 44–50.

⁶⁵ France Stele entered the University of Vienna in 1907 and completed his doctorate in 1912 under the supervision of Max Dvořák with a dissertation on medieval mural painting in Carniola. In the same year, he was appointed a trainee at the Vienna Central Commission for the Protection of Monuments, and in July 1913, he assumed the post of Provincial Conservator for Carniola. After Izidor Cankar left for diplomatic service in 1938, Stele succeeded him as professor of art history at the University of Ljubljana. For selected literature on France Stele, see Emilijan Cevc, 'France Stele – umetnostni zgodovinar', *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. s., 5–6 (1959), 5–19; Damjan Prelovšek, 'Umetnostni zgodovinar France Stelè ob 130. obletnici rojstva', *Umetnostna kronika*, 53 (2016), 3–8; Vesna Krmelj, *France Stele v luči mladostne korespondence*; Vesna Krmelj, *Korespondenca Franceta Steleta kot vir in izhodišče za umetnostnozgodovinsko interpretacijo in zgodovino umetnostne zgodovine na Slovenskem: doctoral thesis*, [V. Krmelj], 2021; Vesna Krmelj, 'Beyond Dvořák's "The Last Renaissance": On the Beginnings of Slovenian Scientific Art History Inspired by Modern Art', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 29 (2023).

⁶⁶ Damjan Prelovšek, 'Jože Plečnik in France Stele ali kako je nastajala Plečnikova Ljubljana', *Acta Historiae Artis Slovenica*, 22.2 (2017), 101–11; see also Franci Lazarini, 'France Stele in prenovi arhitekturnih spomenikov', *Dialogi*, 59.1–2 (2023), 42–57.

⁶⁷ France Stele, 'Ljubljana kot umetnostno središče', *Kronika slovenskih mest*, 5.4 (1938), 193–203.

⁶⁸ In 1938, the Šafárik Learned Society (*Učená spoločnosť Šafáriková*) was about to be reorganised and renamed. It operated under this name from 1926 to 1939.

established through adoption, adaptation, and gradual internal growth. In this sense, a comparison with Riegl's interpretation of Salzburg is justified, as in both cases it is not merely a matter of describing stylistic characteristics but rather a comparable model for understanding cities as art-historical issues.

It is telling that Stele does not highlight the ancient Roman city of Emona as a fundamental point of identity in his discussion of Ljubljana, even though it was clearly very important to him as a historical layer of the city. As a conservator, he was even directly involved in its protection.⁶⁹ For this very reason, its understated role in the narrative of Ljubljana as an artistic centre is all the more significant. In the political context of the interwar period, when a third of Slovenian territory was under Italian rule and its fascist regime, emphasising Roman roots could have had an ambiguous effect on foreign audiences, as the connections with Roman history that Riegl emphasised in the case of Salzburg were not desirable for Ljubljana at that time. Therefore, Stele highlights three periods of development – the Middle Ages, the Baroque, and the present – and emphasises that Ljubljana's "internal development" is crucial to understanding it as a centre.⁷⁰ The focus thus shifts to the historical continuity of artistic growth.

Another interesting point of contact between Riegl and Stele is the role of individual architects. For Riegl, the historical potential of Salzburg is embodied in Fischer von Erlach, who articulates a design break within the city's space and translates it into a new architectural language. Stele employs a similar approach when he identifies the culmination of Ljubljana's development in Plečnik's work. In both cases, the city functions as a space of reception and mediation for a long time, until its historical energy becomes concentrated in the work of an individual. The comparison between Fischer and Jože Plečnik is not intended as a direct parallel between the two architects, but rather as a comparison of the formative mechanisms through which a city attains a higher level of spatial and expressive articulation at a given historical moment. At this point, one of the peculiarities of Stele's geographical reasoning in the 1930s becomes apparent. While with Riegl, the city's relational position is not yet formulated in terms of centre and periphery, this relationship is already more clearly defined in the case of Stele.⁷¹ Ljubljana is not merely a place that adopts and transforms influences, but also a city that needs to redefine its role in relation to larger cultural centres and its own hinterland. The relational model is thus translated into a more hierarchical yet developmentally open framework: the relationship between centre and periphery is not merely a description of a situation but a question of the cultural organisation of space.

⁶⁹ France Stele, *V obrambo Rimskega zidu na Mirju v Ljubljani* (Spomeniški urad, 1928).

⁷⁰ "What is vital to understanding Ljubljana as an artistic centre is its internal development." France Stele, 'Ljubljana kot umetnostno središče', *Kronika slovenskih mest*, 5.4 (December 1938), pp. 193–217, p. 193.

⁷¹ Ljubljana broke out of its narrow provincial framework whenever "the young generation was aware that the centre of political life in Slovenia also had to become the cultural centre for Slovenians". Stele, *Ljubljana kot umetnostno središče*, p. 202.

The decisive difference between the two authors lies precisely in how they evaluate this relational position. Riegl does not regard the secondary position as a shortcoming. For him, Salzburg's significance stems precisely from its openness – its capacity to adopt foreign initiatives and transform them historically. In Stele, the same model is transposed into a different political and cultural horizon. During the interwar period, Slovenian territory was characterised by the question of cultural affirmation and the delicate position of a small nation without full political sovereignty. In such circumstances, Ljubljana's relational position was no longer merely an object of analysis but a task. From the description of its mediating role, the idea emerged of an artistic centre that had to translate its openness into its own expressiveness. For this reason, Stele's description of Ljubljana retains Riegl's foundation while shifting it more explicitly toward the normative and creative.

In this sense, the link between Salzburg and Ljubljana is not merely formal or terminological but structural. Both examples demonstrate that cities can be considered historically multilayered and relational formations, whose meaning emerges from relationships, acquisitions, and transformations. In Riegl, such a model remains largely analytical. With Stele, however, it becomes a cultural programme in which the present must shape the city's future. In his case, the relationship between the local and the universal is also reflected in the relationship between the centre and the periphery. Thus, the art-historical analysis of the city simultaneously becomes a cultural-political vision, which Stele himself helped realise through his fruitful collaboration with the architect Jože Plečnik.

Conclusion

By offering a different perspective on the city, Riegl's essay on Salzburg opens the possibility of a new art-historical understanding of the city as a whole, with its own internal logic, rather than merely as a collection of individual monuments or as a passive backdrop to historical events. Its significance is shaped by the relations among the local and the universal, adoption and transformation, and perception and historical context.

For Riegl, Salzburg is important not only for its ability to adopt and transform foreign influences but, above all, as a space where these impulses can manifest with extraordinary clarity and purity. It is in this very characteristic that Riegl recognises the city's historical power. He thereby establishes a model that enables an understanding of cities beyond the established division between centres and peripheries: intermediary and transitional spaces are no less important than the great artistic centres, but it is often in these spaces that the mechanisms of historical development become most evident.

A comparison with France Stele's intellectual horizon reveals that, after the Monarchy's collapse, this model was transferred to a new political and cultural space. In Stele's work, Riegl's analytical scheme is gradually transformed into a cultural programme:

from its intermediary position, Ljubljana has yet to establish a centre of its own. In this context, the relationship between art history, monument conservation, and architectural practice is no longer merely an interpretive issue but an active strategy for shaping space.

At this point, the relationship between France Stele and Jože Plečnik becomes particularly significant, as it can be understood as an original example of the close interaction between an art historian and conservator and an architect in Central Europe.⁷² Their dialogue can be recognised as an echo of Dvořák's vision of a balance between tradition and modernity, and between art-historical knowledge and artistic practice. The Monarchy's collapse and the turmoil of World War I interrupted this vision in Vienna, while in its later, radicalised forms it sometimes slipped into ideological appropriations. At the fringes of the former Monarchy, some of the former Empire's foundations developed differently. The example of Ljubljana thus shows that it was precisely on the periphery of the former Habsburg cultural landscape that historiographical and spatial ideas, which the centre itself could no longer realise, could be continued and transformed. Therefore, the subsequent international recognition of Plečnik's architecture, confirmed by the inscription of his selected works on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2021, does not merely imply a recognition of an individual author. Instead, it also serves as a stimulus for a new historiographical and theoretical assessment of the Ljubljana school of art history – especially the role of Stele and other actors in shaping the cultural space, understanding heritage, and reflecting on modern architecture.⁷³

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⁷² Vesna Krmelj, 'Beyond Dvořák's "The Last Renaissance": On the Beginnings of Slovenian Scientific Art History Inspired by Modern Art', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 29 (2023), 1–23.

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