

Book Review 3:
Wölfflin H., Boehm G., Eichelberger A. M.,
Neagoe S. *Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der
Architektur, 1886*. Edited by Giovanna Targia.
Gesammelte Werke / Wölfflin, Heinrich, Band 1.
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Schwabe's remarkable edition of Heinrich Wölfflin's *Collected Works* is a late but monumental editorial project that is meant to cement the memory of the legendary Swiss art historian. Wölfflin's *Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture* (1886) is the first of four volumes that have been published and has attracted new readers recently on both sides of the Atlantic. The necessity of a critical edition of Wölfflin's *oeuvre* is an easily justifiable and advisable project. Besides the German text of the *Prolegomena*, Schwabe's edition is important for the exhaustive critical apparatus that it includes. With its introduction by Gottfried Boehm, the work is the most accurate and scientifically reliable version to have ever been published. The text of the *Prolegomena* follows the 1886 edition as it was originally published by Kgl. Hof- und Universitäts-Buchdruckerei von Dr. C. Wolf & Sohn, the Munich-based academic publisher.

Overall, Boehm addresses the main thesis of the *Prolegomena*: that the animated human body is the criterion according to which architecture is experienced and evaluated. For Wölfflin, the symbolic understanding of architecture presupposes endowing tectonic forms with a certain purpose. Architectural forms are thus felt as disturbing or affirming the organic constitution of the body, and its movement in space, and so generate a euphoric or dysphoric affect. This theory of symbolism originates in Wölfflin's studies of Friedrich Theodor Vischer (and his son Robert), Johannes Volkelt, Goethe, and Schopenhauer. Other ideas draw from the physiological psychology of Wilhelm Wundt and the experimental aesthetics of Hermann Lotze, Gustav Fechner and the anatomist Rudolf Virchow. The *Prolegomena* thus combines different paradigms that determined the intellectual debates around art and architecture at the time. Wölfflin's explanation of architecture in terms of the human body is an attempt to find a center of gravity for an interpretation of the experience of architecture.

For Boehm, the *Prolegomena* is also related to Kant's Copernican revolution in the sense that the work delineates the a priori conditions of experience. Objects orient themselves to a mind which perceives them according to its working. The synthetic a priori judgments that are the goal of Kant's First Critique suggest that the mind and the world inherently meet in order to yield pertinent scientific propositions (17). Similarly, Wölfflin's goal is not to address specific architectural styles but to explain how tectonic structures appear as aesthetically meaningful.

In Wölfflin's concept of empathy, Boehm is right to see a certain "gesture" that transfers, and thus relates, the subject to the surrounding world and its objects. *Einfühlen* and *Mitfühlen* are semantic variations of this gesture that explain the aesthetic experience as fundamentally relational. He is also right to consider this transference of the interior self into the exterior object as fundamentally "pantheistic". However, it is precisely this gestural interpretation that will make empathy an obsolete theory. Perhaps instead of relating the *Prolegomena* to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, a comparison to the *Critique of Judgment* would have proved more fruitful. Granted, Wölfflin does not refer to the transcendental analysis of the beautiful and the sublime, but yet the Kantian description of the aesthetic judgment does contain the elements Wölfflin refers to in the *Prolegomena*: the stirring of the disposition or the mood (*Gemüt*) in terms of "vital feeling" (*Lebensgefühl*), its affirmation in the case of beauty, and its temporary frustration in the case of the sublime.

Another reference that deserved more attention in the work is Wilhelm Worringer's psychological reading of empathy, which reading brought about the idea of a generic typology of styles. But we do not have to wait long for a theory that resisted empathy as an interpretative model. Already in 1893 the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand argued in his *The Problem of Form* for an explanation of art on the basis of making. Art confronts every artist with challenges of perception and of forming the material. Art is no longer bound to Vischer's act of projecting a soul on objects (*Seelenleihung*) but to the emergence of visual forms. However, as Boehm briefly points out, Husserlian phenomenology will return to the notion of the animated body (the *Leib*) as the center of experience and distinguish it from the body as an object (*Körper*).

Finally, the question regarding the *Prolegomena* is whether the centrality of the human body and its organic existence is both a necessary *and* sufficient condition for the interpretation of architecture. The elements of architecture that Wölfflin derives from the human body (material and form, weight and power) are surely necessary conditions for an intuitive and direct experience of architecture. There is little question that the direct, intuitive, and sensitive relation of our bodies to tectonic structures consists of a continuously animated impression on the moving body. But the body is also always already formed by the specific architectural context where it developed. The relationship between body and architecture is never in a pure state and the aesthetic judgment itself presupposes this informed relation.

Since architecture is among the oldest of human activities, we can also infer that its *practice* and its *history* equally determine how bodies (should) move in space, how their sensitive constitution is conditioned, and especially how architectural design depends on an architect's practical wisdom and education. These topics are here left untouched even though Boehm convincingly argues that the weight of the thesis lies in the extension of the limited experience of visibility to broader feeling and the moving body (19). Hence, besides the *descriptive* character of the thesis, the *Prolegomena* also contains a *performative* dimension: the body's proportions are related to the rhythm of breathing, which relation also justifies the comparison between rhythm in architecture and music. Time and again, we realize that Vitruvius was right when he prescribed, amongst other pursuits, music and mathematics as essential disciplines in architectural education. However, one wonders whether, with Boehm, the *Prolegomena* can be read as the origin of architectural criticism. Surely, the essay is necessary to architectural criticism, but in order to become also a sufficient condition for such a practice, Wölfflin's pellucid prose of *Renaissance and Baroque* and the structural polarities of his *Principles* are also essential literature. In other words, architectural criticism depends not only on explaining how architecture is *felt* but on how it *works*. Hence, the history of architecture, the cultural variations, and the practical wisdom involved in the making of architecture are quintessential dimensions. Fortunately, Schwabe's edition is the monument that secures Heinrich Wölfflin's *oeuvre* as a fundamental force in specific questions about art and architecture and their history and meaning.

About the Author

Vlad Ionescu is associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Art (UHasselt) / PXL MAD where he currently teaches the history and theory of these domains. His research concerns the epistemology of formalist art history (Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin and Wilhelm Worringer) and architectural theory. Besides co-editing and co-translating Jean-François Lyotard's *Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists* (Leuven University Press, 7 volumes published between 2009-2013), he is the author of *Applied Arts, Implied Art. Craftsmanship and Technology in the Age of Art Industry* (A&S Books, 2016) and *Pneumatology. An Inquiry into the Representation of Wind, Air, Breath* (ASP, 2017).