

Art History, the Problem of Style, and Arnold Hauser's Contribution to the History and Sociology of Knowledge

Axel Gelfert¹

National University of Singapore

1. Introduction

In an article published in the mid-1990s, a sympathetic commentator wrote that '[a]lthough scarcely a decade has passed since his death in 1978, Arnold Hauser already seems a forgotten figure, a minor actor on the stage of modern intellectual culture' (Wallace 1996: 28). For a scholar who began his publishing career – at age 59 – with an ambitious two-volume history of art which stirred major controversy in academic circles for its Marxist outlook (and which was subsequently translated into seventeen languages), and who subsequently wrote major monographs on art history, its philosophy, and the sociology of art, this indicates a surprising reversal in popular appraisal. All the more so given that Hauser's work – both in scope and ambition – goes far beyond its immediate goal of making the case for a sociologically informed art history. Along the way, Hauser analyses the role of ideology in artistic and intellectual enterprises in general, notes the close interdependence between art, technology and science, and contrasts the different cognitive styles found in the arts and sciences. While critics have been right to note that Hauser's writing is often 'not presented systematically' and characterised by 'abrupt shifts in subject matter, level of abstraction, and mode of argumentation' (Wessely 1995: 32), perhaps this should be seen less as a *prima facie* reason to dismiss his work as irrelevant, and more as presenting a challenge to the charitable, though not uncritical, interpreter.

In the present paper, I wish to offer a reconstruction of some of the major themes of Hauser's thinking about art, its history, and its cognitive dimension. In particular, I hope to identify areas where Hauser's project overlaps with the concerns of sociology of knowledge, where the latter is understood both as a discipline with its own history and as a going intellectual concern. The structure of this paper is as follows: In Section 2, I discuss Hauser's personal and intellectual background, as well as the historical and academic context of the reception of his first book, *The Social History of Art*. In Section 3, I discuss how Hauser's response to critics came to dominate much of his subsequent writing, and how this may have accelerated what has been described as his gradual

¹ Email address: axel@gelfert.net

‘retreat from Marxism’ (Congdon 2004). Section 4 lays out in some detail one of Hauser’s main intellectual concerns, namely how best to square a thoroughgoing commitment to the social nature of art with the reality of successive artistic styles, given that the latter seem to be characterisable on purely formal grounds. Section 5 explores the rich set of questions that emerge at the intersection of art, science, and technology; this leads over, via a detailed consideration of the analogies and disanalogies between art history and the history of science, to the final question, discussed in Section 6, of whether art may be credited with a specific cognitive dimension of its own, and if so, what its contribution to our cognitive enterprise may consist in.

2. Arnold Hauser: Context and intellectual background

It is, of course, a platitude that each life can only be lived by one and only one person, and so it may be thought platitudinous to emphasise the uniqueness of any particular person’s biographical trajectory. Yet, in the case of Arnold Hauser, it is perhaps fair to say that, for him more so than for others, the formative influences and experiences of his life were subject to the historical and intellectual forces that shaped 20th-century Europe. This is partly because Hauser – despite his early involvement in such groups as Georg Lukács’s influential Sunday Circle, and notwithstanding his prolific scholarly output later in life – never did attain the level of success and recognition that would have put him on a par with his better-known contemporaries Karl Mannheim, Georg Lukács, or Theodor Adorno (whom he had befriended in the 1950s). However, what Hauser’s work lacks in terms of influence (what, in German, might be called its ‘*schulbildende Wirkung*’), it makes up for by independence of thought.

On the face of it, Hauser’s life shares many of the features one has come to expect in the lives of 20th-century Central European intellectuals. Born on 8 May 1892 to a family of assimilated Jews in Temesvár, Hauser enrolled at the University of Budapest in 1910 to study art history and literature. During this time, he befriended Karl Mannheim, who was barely a year his junior; the two friends would later publish their theses together in the same volume of the journal *Athenaeum*. (Wessely, p. 29) Throughout his university education, which included periods of study in Berlin and Paris (where he was influenced by Henri Bergson), Hauser worked as a freelance cultural correspondent for the newsdaily *Temesvári Hírlap*, honing his writing skills which would later serve him well when embarking on his books aimed at a general readership. (Congdon, p. 42; Forgacs, p. 86) In 1916, via his friend Mannheim, Hauser became associated with the Sunday Circle that had formed around Georg Lukács and Béla Balázs, and which had attracted artists and critics alike, including poet and artist Anna Lesznai and art historian Lajos Fülep. Hauser later described ‘these Sunday afternoon and evenings’ as ‘the greatest experiences of my life, because of the extraordinary people who gathered there’ (quoted after Congdon, p. 42).

In the spring and summer of 1919, during the short-lived attempt by Béla Kun to establish a Hungarian Soviet Republic, members of the Sunday Circle were drawn into active involvement with the Bolshevik government, with Lukács becoming deputy commissar for public education and appointing Hauser to the University faculty, putting him in charge of the reform of art education. (Cf. Congdon 2004: 43; Gluck 1985: 210.) When the Communists faltered, the new regime under Miklós Horthy instigated a two-year wave of violent repression, in retaliation for the 'Red Terror' associated with the Communists. Many of those who had been involved, however peripherally, with the Communist regime, were forced to seek refuge abroad: many, including Lukács and Balázs, went to Vienna, some, like Mannheim, emigrated to Germany, while Hauser travelled to Italy where he spent the better part of two years engaged in research on the history of classical and Italian art. Those who, like Mannheim and Hauser, had not joined the Communist cause in 1918, felt particularly uneasy upon visiting the exiled Circle in Vienna in 1921. Balázs, in a diary entry from 1921, writes:

I should write about Mannheim and Hauser. They moved away from the Sunday Circle when it committed itself to the communist revolution. [...] It is symptomatic that a year and a half later, almost at the same time, they returned, as though to Canossa. Not to communism. Rather, they are homeless exiles outside of the Sunday Circle; they cannot find an intellectual home and cannot live. [...] Mannheim was allowed to return to us, but no one has any use for Hauser. He is ill and sickly, and one cannot know when, out of cowardice, he might again leave one in the lurch. (Quoted after Congdon 2004: 43)

Whereas communism provided Balázs and others with a sense of purpose and a source of allegiance, Mannheim and, even more so, Hauser were acutely aware of their 'ideological homelessness' (Gluck 1985: 212). As Balázs again puts it:

For today, all intellectual activity that is not somehow rooted in the [communist] movement gains the quality of an idiosyncratic hobby that is no better than stamp collecting. And they [= Hauser and Mannheim] are aware of this. They feel that they have missed the train in a provincial way station. They have been pushed to the periphery. (Quoted after Gluck 1985: 212).

Following this experience, and partly because, as Lee Congdon puts it, Hauser's visit to Italy had 'increased his sense of scholarly unpreparedness' (Congdon 2004: 44), he moved to Berlin in 1921, where he studied economics and sociology under Werner Sombart and Ernst Troeltsch.

In 1924, Hauser decided, at the insistence of his wife, to settle down in Vienna after all. In 1938, the Nazi annexation of Austria forced Hauser once again to emigrate, settling down in London, where his friend Mannheim had already been teaching after his own emigration from Germany in 1933. Mannheim invited Hauser to contribute to a book series he was editing for Routledge and Kegan Paul; while the initial plan to collate an anthology of work on the sociology of art was quickly abandoned due to a perceived lack of suitable material, it is this invitation that eventually led to a decade-

long research project on Hauser's part, which resulted in the publication in 1951 – four years after Mannheim's death – of Hauser's monumental first book, *The Social History of Art* (translated by the publisher from Hauser's German manuscript *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*). The same year, Hauser was appointed to a lectureship in history of art at the University of Leeds. Following his retirement from Leeds in 1957, Hauser embarked on a two-year stint as a visiting professor at Brandeis University, Massachusetts. During this time, not only was the work that had occupied Hauser during his Leeds years, *The Philosophy of Art History* (1958), published to critical acclaim, but he also decided to undertake a detailed study of Mannerism as 'the style that was most relevant to the tasks of the present' (Hauser 1978: 3, quoted after Congdon 2004: 53f.). During the final stage of completing the manuscript of *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art* (1965), Hauser received, and immediately accepted, another invitation to teach in the United States, at Ohio State University. The Ohio appointment gave Hauser ample time to plan, and pursue, his final book project, *The Sociology of Art*. Published originally in German as *Soziologie der Kunst* (1974), it did not appear in English translation until 1982, four years after Hauser's death on 28 January 1978 in Budapest, where he had spent the last year of his life.

Recognition came late to Arnold Hauser, and even after the popular success of *The Social History of Art* and his appointment, at age 59, to a formal academic position, he remained a relative outsider in academia. The post-retirement visiting positions at Brandeis and Ohio State were both financially attractive and offered Hauser the opportunity to pursue projects that he previously had to postpone. This is especially the case with *The Sociology of Art*, which he saw as his *opus magnum*: 'Having lost many years of serious work eking out an existence in Vienna between the wars, Hauser was granted the time he needed to complete his massive project.' (Congdon 2004: 56) Valuable as these opportunities were, they could not make up for lost time and for the fact that, throughout much of his life, circumstances prevented Hauser from being in a position to develop, over time, a theoretically ambitious grounding for his multiple projects. As a result, his later books rehearse much of the material he had previously analysed, adding new layers and gradually shifting positions, but refraining from radical reassessments.

Hauser's refusal to subordinate art to politics made him suspect in the eyes of many on the political left, including some of his former companions. The clarity with which he insisted on the aesthetic autonomy of the work of art, on drawing a distinction between aesthetics and the sociology of art, and on rejecting any suggestion that 'the social group is the carrier of historical action in the sense in which an acting, thinking, feeling, and working human being is' (Hauser 1959: 196), all meant that, in Balázs's phrase, Hauser's leftist critics regarded his approach as 'an idiosyncratic hobby that is

no better than stamp-collecting'.² Even those who had no particular axe to grind with Hauser, respected his work at best 'as a source of art-historical information' (Wallace 1996: 28), but were generally at a loss when it came to extracting positive theoretical proposals from his writings. More recent commentators, too, have occasionally echoed these sentiments. Thus, Anna Wessely, laments the 'surprisingly elusive, vague manner' in which *The Social History of Art* is written, along with the 'crudely simplified and exaggerated form' in which Hauser presents 'pairs of alternatives', which he tries to steer clear of. As a result, 'Hauser's peculiar understanding of dialectic degrades it into a "middle-of-the-road option"', rendering his arguments 'inevitably both suggestive and confusing' (Wessely 1995: 33).

Yet Hauser's social analysis of art is '[a]nything but feuilletonistic' (Johnston 1983: 386). While it is true that much of Hauser's writing suffers from unresolved internal tensions, this may be partly the result of his attempt to satisfy critics from both the left and the conservative right. If Hauser's work was received less than enthusiastically by those on the political left, it was met with outright hostility by those at the conservative end of the spectrum. Joseph Hodin, for example, in his review of *The Social History of Art* for the *College Art Journal*, accused Hauser of an 'unmethodical and partisan ... subjective and erratic' approach, whereas others took issue with Hauser's tendency to generalize on the basis of a broader social history of the conditions and forces of production, which went far beyond what conservative art historians were willing to admit – namely, a narrow notion of the 'social' that 'designated the immediate circumstances of artistic practice, conditions which rarely extended beyond the boundaries of "culture"' (Orwicz 1985: 55). Thus, the reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote:

[O]ne feels sorry when with a bump the author suddenly lands again in the barren field of 'the petit-bourgeois class' and 'high capitalism'. These terms of economic history tell one so little about art. [...] To make these generalizations bearable, many references would be needed to individual works, and the sayings, doings and writings of individual artists. (Quoted after Orwicz 1985: 54)

A small number of these critics, mostly formalist art historians, argued for the dismissal of the very idea of a social history in favour of analysing the succession of artistic style. As T.S.R. Boase argued in his review in *The Burlington Magazine*, the proper goal should be to 'produce a history of art that does not appear bound by any inevitable link to parallel developments of the social structure' (quoted after Orwicz 1985: 54). However, even those conservative critics who recognised the need for a social history of art, insisted that such an enterprise should respect established division into subdisciplines, periodizations, and immanent standards of interpretation. Hauser's broad-based synthetic approach, in which art emerged as a response to material and

² On Hauser's distinction between aesthetics and the theory and sociology of art, see also (Demeter 2008: 7).

cultural conditions, was consistently mistaken for an ideologically motivated attempt to subvert art history. Thus, Ernst Gombrich inferred that

Mr. Hauser is deeply convinced that in history ‘all factors, material and intellectual, economic and ideological, are bound up together in a state of indissoluble interdependence’... so it is perhaps natural that to him the most serious crime for a historian is the arbitrary isolation of fields of inquiry. (Gombrich 1963: 86)

In a surprisingly crude mixture of uncharitable interpretations and cheap shots against Hauser (reprimanding him for speaking of ‘inner contradictions’ of capitalism, where he should have referred to ‘conflicts within capitalism’, since only systems of propositions can properly be said to exhibit contradictions), Gombrich himself ‘conflates Hauser’s historical sociology with the most dogmatic forms of [historical materialism] which reduces art to a representation of either socio-economic conditions or a teleological conception of history which presupposes a priori truths’ (Wallace 1996: 42). How influential this interpretation has been, is evident from the fact that even well-meaning contemporary historians perpetuate the image of Hauser’s work as being squarely in the camp of reductionist determinism. Thus, Peter Burke writes:

As for Arnold Hauser, a more conventional Marxist, he was most important for [...] writing a *Social History of Art* (1951), which linked culture closely to social and economic conflict and change, discussing, for instance, ‘the class struggles in Italy at the end of the Middle Ages’, ‘Romanticism as a middle-class movement’, and the relation between ‘the film age’ and ‘the crisis of capitalism’. (Burke 2008: 16f.)

To be fair, such selective interpretations are partly made possible by Hauser’s tendency, at least in *The Social History of Art*, to overstate the degree of his indebtedness to Marx. David Wallace may well be right in noting that Hauser’s project is best understood ‘as an attempt to seek a rapprochement between the Weberian tradition of historical sociology and the hermeneutical tradition of *Geisteswissenschaft*, as exemplified by Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Dvorák’ (Wallace 1996: 39) – that is, as a much more moderate enterprise than his Marxist self-designation must have suggested to his contemporaries.

In summary, Hauser’s take on art and its social history, in virtue of its ambitious synthetic approach, exposed itself to criticism both from the left and from the right. As John Roberts puts it, ‘on the right, as with Ernst Gombrich for example, it was viewed as an act of cognitive violence against the particularities of the aesthetic, whilst on the left it was felt to be non-committal on what constituted socialist history and cultural practice’ (Roberts 2006: 164). Lacking a close-knit network of colleagues and students who might otherwise have jumped to his defence, the biting criticism from more established figures in the discipline must have reminded Hauser of his status as an outsider. Thus, Gombrich, in a thinly veiled *ad hominem* argument, referred to ‘Mr.

Hauser' as 'a prodigious reader who has consulted most of the comparatively few studies which exist in this field' – only to then go on and detail those major works Hauser had failed to consult. The implication is clear: Hauser's account is incomplete and in places amounts not to 'social history but historical fiction', since 'his preoccupation with generalities makes him careless of the significant detail' (Gombrich 1963: 92). A 'prodigious reader' Hauser undoubtedly was, yet being dubbed so by someone who, had historical circumstances been slightly more favourable, might well have been a direct colleague, must have appeared as an attempt to relegate Hauser to his proper place as 'a member of that sparsely populated category, which scholars often wishfully refer to as the "educated republic"' (Wessely 1995: 30). Much of Hauser's work subsequent to *The Social History of Art* is, if not motivated, then at least coloured by a desire to preempt the wholesale criticism that his first work had incurred from both the political left and the conservative right.

3. From the 'Social History of Art' to the 'Sociology of Art'

Hauser's second book, *The Philosophy of Art History*, was published some seven years after *The Social History of Art*, in 1958 (first in German; a year later in English). While the different chapters 'arose out of various occasions' – some reproducing 'with little alteration the text of lectures', others (e.g., on psychoanalysis and art) written from the perspective 'of an enthusiastic, professionally uncommitted outsider' – the book as a whole, Hauser claims, is a unified attempt to come to terms with the methodological problems that had occupied him 'without intermission since the appearance of [the] *Social History of Art*' (Hauser 1959: vi-vii). The book, thus, may be understood as, to a large measure, a response to the criticisms outlined in the preceding section; as a result, it is part 'apology of the social history of art' as a discipline (Wessely 1995: 31), part 'the previously unwritten introduction to *The Social History of Art*' (Congdon 2004: 52). It also constitutes a significant qualification of some of the 'more conventional Marxist' ideas that conservative critics had found fault with in his earlier work. In this sense, it constitutes a first step in what Lee Congdon characterised as Hauser's 'retreat from Marxism' (2004: 51).

One of the most significant problems that needed to be addressed in *The Philosophy of Art History* was the relation between art and ideology. Some conservative critics, such as Gombrich, had mocked Hauser for the alleged vacuousness of many of the sociological explanations proffered in *The Social History of Art*, and in particular for his tendency to juxtapose grand generalizations and methodological caveats against 'simple sociological recipes': 'The more one reads these wholesome methodological reminders the more one wonders why the author does not simply give up his initial assumption instead of twisting and bending it to accommodate the facts.' For Gombrich, this case was clearly one of ideology: Hauser had 'caught himself in the intellectual

mousetrap of “dialectical materialism” (Gombrich 1963: 88). Another worry that troubled conservatives like Gombrich was ‘the fact that Mr. Hauser is avowedly not interested in the past for its own sake but that he sees it as “the purpose of historical research” to understand the present’ (Gombrich 1963: 93). In the political atmosphere of the early 1960s, and against the backdrop of Soviet attacks on Western conceptions of ‘artistic freedom’, this legitimate concern about the present-centredness of Hauser’s explanatory schemas quickly spiraled into outright suspicion about possible ideological motives on his part, prompting knee-jerk reactions such as this call to arms by conservative critic Joseph Hodin:

Why [do] we attach such detailed attention to a critical analysis of [Hauser’s] work? ... What we are concerned with is to save those values which rightly claim to stand above our daily pettiness, to save the greatness and courage of the human mind, its fantasy, its dreams, from that levelling tendency which Marxist thought will always bring about. (Quoted after Orwicz 1985: 57)

It was, thus, important for Hauser to clarify in *The Philosophy of Art History* precisely in what sense art was to be considered ‘partisan through and through’, and how it could nonetheless ‘make a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the world and of man’ (Hauser 1959: 24), that is: how it could serve a cognitive function without thereby inevitably introducing ideological distortion. To be sure, art by necessity ‘is directed in a far more unreserved and straightforward way to social aims’ than, say, mathematics, and hence may serve ‘far more manifestly and unmistakably as ideological weapon’ (Hauser 1959: 22), but this is not the fault of the sociologist of art who simply recognises that

[e]very honest attempt to discover the truth and depict things faithfully is a struggle against one’s own subjectivity and partiality, one’s individual and class interests; one can seek to become aware of these as a source of error, while realizing that they can never be finally excluded. (Hauser 1959: 7)

For Hauser, adopting a thoroughgoing sociological perspective is thus a matter of intellectual honesty, even if this means temporarily having to suspend one’s aesthetics concerns and paying for sociological knowledge ‘by destroying the immediate, ultimately irretrievable, aesthetic experience’ (Hauser 1959: 13):

Sociology endeavors to probe into the preconditions of thought and will which derive from a man’s social position. Objections made to such research are mostly due to the fact that correct estimation of these social connections is not a purely theoretical matter; men are inclined to admit them or deny them on ideological grounds. (Hauser 1959: 17)

Those who dismiss outright the legitimacy of the methodology of sociology often ‘exaggerate its deficiencies in order that they need not become conscious of their prejudices’ (ibid.).

In *The Philosophy of Art History*, Hauser positioned himself more clearly with respect to the dilemma sketched earlier – relating to the question of how an artwork could at the same time function as a source of knowledge and be recognised as ideologically laden – which he had sketched in some detail already in *The Social History of Art*. In the latter book, however, Hauser mostly restricted himself to discussing the fin-de-siècle ‘psychology of exposure’, which he saw instantiated in the work of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. Marx, in particular, is credited with being ‘the first to point out that, driven by their class interests, [men] not only commit isolated mistakes, falsifications and mystifications, but that [...] they cannot see and judge except in accordance with the presuppositions contained in the facts of their economic and social circumstances’ (Hauser 1951, IV: 207).

Conservative critics of *The Social History of Art* may have interpreted Hauser’s tendency to present extensive summaries of positions he attributes to Marx as a form of agreement; however, the irony that ‘historical materialism with its technique of exposure’ is ‘itself a product of that bourgeois-capitalistic outlook on life the background of which Marx wanted to expose’ (Hauser 1951, IV: 207) is not lost on Hauser. It is this observation which forms the basis of Hauser’s discussion of the role of ideology in *The Philosophy of Art History*. There, Hauser attempts to steer a middle path between Lukács’s claim that ‘only those social classes which tried to impede social progress produced and propagated false consciousness’ (Wessely 1995: 37), and the claim that some art (e.g., ‘great art’) might be exempt from what one might call ‘ideology-ladenness’. Essential to Hauser’s view is the conviction that the manner in which art depends on social phenomena and interests is vastly underdetermined by any particular set of criteria: ‘It is essential to realize that art’s dependence upon society can take the most varied forms’; art, writes Hauser, ‘can express the structure of a given society either positively or negatively, can assent to it or reject it, promote some features and oppose others, serve as a propaganda weapon, defence mechanism, or safety valve.’ (Hauser 1959: 268) The social character of art and its history, thus, becomes itself an object of empirical investigation. Such investigation, however, must always

operat[e] within the limits of what is thinkable and imaginable from our place in the world, not in a vacuum of abstract freedom. And the fact that there are such limits of objectivity is the ultimate and decisive justification for a sociology of culture [...]. (Hauser 1959: 7-8)

It is in this sense that intellectual honesty demands that one ‘struggle against one’s own subjectivity and partiality’ – not in the vain hope, as some have claimed, ‘that one can escape ideological determination’ (Wessely 1995: 39), but in an attempt to correct ‘*to a certain extent* the one-sidedness and error of our views’ (Hauser 1959: 7, italics added). When Hauser insists that neither artistic individuality nor social determination are simple phenomena – that ‘[t]he whole concept of a self-existent society and of a separate individual freely associating himself with it it is false and misleading’ (Hauser

1959: 201) – he is, in effect, reflecting on the very ideological foundations of the debate about art and ideology itself:

The seeming contradiction in the conception of man as both maker of ideologies – subject for psychology – and made by ideologies – subject for sociology – is not an insoluble one; it simply expresses his double nature as both an individual and a social being. The criticism to which he may subject the ideologies is not incompatible with ideological conditioning of his thought; nor does the social origin of his thought prevent him from setting himself in opposition to, and remaining in continuous tension with, the society whose spiritual offspring he is. (Hauser 1959: 199)

It has been noted that Hauser's 'description of perspectively distorted knowledge faithfully follows Mannheim' (Wessely 1995: 39), and one might be tempted to draw a parallel between Mannheim's discussion of the figure of the intellectual, whose state of (political and economic) disengagement – at least in 'the detached state' – allows him 'to escape the optical limitations of particular occupations and interests' (Mannheim 1956: 159), and Hauser's view of the role of the sociologist of art. Like Mannheim's intellectual, Hauser's figure of the sociologist is subject to 'the duty of correcting the defects of his point of view', yet at the same time methodologically well-positioned to probe into the socially shaped preconditions of his own thought (Hauser 1959: 13).

It has been noted that in his last book, *The Sociology of Art*, Hauser 'went further than ever before in distancing himself from Marxism' (Congdon 2004: 57). For example, he rejects the causal primacy of material conditions – even when conceived of through a 'doctrine of "mediations"' – in determining intellectual and cultural forms of expression: 'For even a mediated causality which takes place by stages is still a causality, and beyond this the alleged explanation of the transition from one order of phenomena to another as a gradual dematerialization, spiritualization, and sublimation is only a metaphor to which nothing definite corresponds in reality.' (Hauser 1982: 201) This is not to deny that there is a connection between art and social reality – citing George Orwell, Hauser insists that 'there must exist [...] "some connection" between them' (Hauser 1982: 213) – but rather that the two realms are of a piece: 'Social and artistic values do not correspond to each other, do not presuppose one another, and cannot be derived from one another; they are simply incommensurable.' (ibid.) Thus, the 'unavoidable paradox' which the art historian finds himself confronted with – and which historical materialists, instead of accepting it, have tried in vain to resolve – 'consists in part in the fact that this "connection" of values is just as conclusive for aesthetics as is their incommensurability' (Hauser 1982: 213). Having described sociology in *The Philosophy of Art History* as 'a focal discipline in our day, one upon which the entire world-view of the age centers' (Hauser 1959: 17), its role is carefully circumscribed. As one commentator puts it, while social history does, in Hauser's eyes, transform our worldview, 'the sociological component enters a participatory relationship with a historically open-ended present' (Swanson 1996: 2203).

4. The problem of style

Hauser's concern for the dialectic of individual and collective – of innovation and continuity – finds its clearest expression in the discussion, throughout his work, of the problem of artistic style. One main target of Hauser's criticism were the views of formalist art historians, who conceived of the history of art as the succession of artistic styles, unfolding according to an immanent logic, in which each style represents a solution to the problems raised by the formal properties of its predecessor. Formalist art historians, thus, aimed at explicating the history of art by focusing on the autonomous aesthetic characteristics of exemplary works of art, rather than in terms of the (non-aesthetic) interests of the artist, the social and economic conditions of the period in question, or the specific audiences at which art works were directed. In the famous phrase of Heinrich Wölfflin – one of Hauser's primary targets – the goal was an 'art history without names'.

In *The Social History of Art*, notably in his discussion of the Baroque, Hauser already took strong issue with Wölfflin's 'thesis that the history of art is ruled by an inner logic, by an immanent necessity of its own' (Hauser 1951, II: 164). One line of criticism emphasised the heterogeneity of artistic expression at any historical moment, along with the inability of stylistic criteria 'to explain on immanent, that is to say, on purely formal, grounds, why there is an advance at a particular point in time from [e.g.] strictness to freedom and not from strictness to greater strictness'. All in all, Hauser cautioned,

[o]ne ought, really, never to speak of a uniform 'style of the time' dominating a whole period, since there are at any given moment as many different styles as there are artistically productive social groups. (Hauser 1951, II: 165)

Hauser disputes Wölfflin's identification of law-like regularities – such as the recurring polarity between formal rigorism of a classical period and a more baroque phase that follows it – in the history of art, since they do not lend themselves to contrastive historical explanations (and, one might say, in this sense are unfalsifiable). As Hauser emphasises in *The Philosophy of Art History*, '[i]n any art history that lays claim to be scientific, facts known or ascertainable must in all circumstances rank before judgments based on stylistic grounds and extrapolations based on the history of forms' (Hauser 1959: 254). This methodological commitment, in principle, to the primacy of historical evidence – even if, on occasion, it is violated – is all the more notable given that Hauser himself was attacked, most fervently by Gombrich, for 'thinking out ever new and ingenious expedients in order to bring [his] hypothesis into harmony with the facts' (Gombrich 1963: 87).

In *The Philosophy of Art History*, Hauser, perhaps in a conciliatory spirit, does identify stylistic characteristics as one of 'at least three different types of conditions' –

the other two being psychological and sociological factors – that need to enter into the analysis of the work of art, at least when the latter is considered not merely as ‘a source of complex personal experience’, i.e. as an aesthetic object, but as ‘a nodal point of several different causal lines’ (p. 13).³ He goes even so far as to acknowledge that something very much like Wölfflin’s “‘logic of history,” which asserts the inner necessity of each successive step in the development’ may have some justification ‘when applied within the limits of a certain unitary stylistic trend’ (p. 26). However, this acknowledgment merely forms the backdrop for a sustained critique of ‘the real aim and purpose of [Wölfflin’s] “anonymous art history”’, which is ‘to free the history of art from all appearance of the accidental and the arbitrary, and to display it as a manifestation of rigorous laws and inner necessity’ (p. 122). In its attempt to assert the autonomy of art history by freeing it from the history of civilisation-at-large, Wölfflin’s formalism throws out the baby with the bathwater, for it fails to recognise that the concept of ‘style’ is by necessity a ‘collective concept’, which as such (like the concept of, say, a ‘group mind’) ‘must never be supposed to be “prior,” but only “posterior” to the components that it unites’ (p. 135).⁴ While ‘[c]ollective cultural forms, and notably the styles of art, are obviously not in their entirety the creation of particular individuals’ (p. 197), this does not mean that, when it comes to the work of art, ‘the author and circumstances of its origin are equally irrelevant’ (p. 177). The artistic choices that present themselves always need to be made by individual artists, and Wölfflin commits a fallacy when ‘[f]rom the fact that one possibility was chosen [he] infers the inevitability of that choice’ (p. 187). By modelling the idea of art history’s ‘immanent logic’ after logical notions of validity, the formalist approach closes itself off from the recognition that what is artistically possible is always the joint product of psychological, social, and stylistic factors. While stylistic considerations do not positively determine artistic development, they may nonetheless act as constraints:

[W]hereas the inner logic of development cannot of itself bring forth any new forms, every novelty requiring some stimulus from without, yet this logic can at certain times definitely exclude the possibility of certain products. And so one may speak of the evolution of art being negatively, but not positively, conditioned by the inner nature of the available form. (p. 128)

Rather than in terms of an ‘immanent logic’, one may treat ‘stylistic forms as institutional structures’, in which case ‘the idea of their continuous development and inherent causality may appear more justifiable than it did from the point of view of pure validity’ (p. 185).

Hauser’s own sympathies lie with an analysis of ‘style’ that takes its lead from Max Weber’s ‘ideal type’. Ideal types, such as ‘capitalism’ or ‘the medieval town’, ‘do

³ All page numbers in the remainder of this section refer to *The Philosophy of Art History* (1959).

⁴ For a critique of Wölfflin’s divorcing of the scholarly methods of art history from those of cultural history, see also (Wind 1931).

not designate the “essence” of actually occurring phenomena, but a clarified and exaggerated model of these’ (p. 213). As Weber himself puts it, the ideal type is an ‘ideal limiting concept’, ‘against which the reality is *measured* and *compared* in order to bring out more clearly certain important constituents of its empirical content’ (quoted after Hauser 1959: 213). Similarly, Hauser argues,

[t]he nature of a style is not that of a schema to be applied again and again, but rather that of a pattern not to be found entire in any concrete instance. It should be regarded as an ideal case, not completely corresponding to any particular case, or as a type not exhaustively realized in any individual. (p. 213)

In an important respect, however, Weber’s ideal type and the concept of style in art history diverge: Whereas ‘ideal types are merely auxiliary concepts, *i.e.*, heuristic constructions without any kind of reality’, styles in art history ‘are not auxiliary concepts, labels, chapter-headings for the historian, but historical facts’ that make themselves felt to the artist who ‘is always in a state of greater or less tension with them’ (p. 213). Merely defining style as ‘an agreement in respect of a number of artistically significant traits’, thus, would fail to capture both its social origin and the degree to which the presence of an artistic style makes itself psychologically felt to those working within it (p. 208). A style is ‘neither set before the artist nor accepted by him as a goal’; instead, it is ‘a dynamic relational concept with continually varying content, so that it might almost be said to take on a new sense with each new work’ (p. 209). In its relationism, as well as in imbuing artistic style with a degree of causal-historical ‘effectiveness’ – without thereby elevating it to the status of a “higher”, Platonic, or Hegelian idea’ (ibid.) – Hauser’s position echoes the methodology of Georg Simmel, who in his *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900) argued for the need to

construct a new storey beneath historical materialism such that the explanatory value of the incorporation of economic life into the causes of intellectual culture is preserved, while these economic forms themselves are recognized as the result of more profound valuations and currents of psychological or even metaphysical preconditions. (Simmel 1978: 56)

5. Art, technology, and scientific knowledge

As the discussion in the previous section makes clear, Hauser’s later views are a refinement of, rather than a departure from, his earlier views on the social constitution of art. At the same time, Hauser – as, of course, befits his Marxist heritage – was well aware of the material and technological constraints that shape art. The mutual dependency of economic arrangements and available technologies means that society at large is profoundly shaped by technological change; this, in turn, determines not only which artistic choices are ‘live options’ but also how an artwork can function as a means of expression and thereby relate to an audience. This last aspect is analysed by

Hauser, at various points throughout his work, on the basis of the relatively recent art form of cinematography and film, whose status as ‘art for the masses’ he sees as a direct consequence of the ‘technical and economic conditions of its production’, including the ‘methods of its manufacture, reproduction, and distribution’ (Hauser 1959: 360).

Hauser’s more general point, however – that in order to understand art, one must regard it as the outcome of ‘a dialectic movement between the poles of the technical and the visionary, the rational and the irrational, social requirements and individual impulses’ (Hauser 1959: 232) – holds throughout the history of art generally. As he puts it in *The Social History of Art*:

Art always makes use of a material, technical, tool-like device, of an appliance, a ‘machine’, and does so so openly that this indirectness and materialism of the means of expression can even be described as one of its most essential characteristics. (Hauser 1951, 4: 109)

To the extent that modern art since the Industrial Revolution appears to be especially affected by technology, not least by modern technologies of mechanical reproduction, this is ‘to be attributed not so much to the fact that more complicated and more diverse machines began to be used, as to the phenomenon that technical development, spurred on by prosperity, became so rapid that the human mind had no time to keep pace with it’ (Hauser 1951, 4: 110). In art itself, Hauser claims, this manifests itself in the emergence of Impressionism, which he sees a response to a ‘world, the phenomena of which are in a state of constant flux and transition, and in which there are no other differences but the various approaches and points of view of the beholder’ (Hauser 1951, IV: 160).

Importantly, however, ‘art in accordance with such a world will stress not merely the momentary and transitory nature of phenomena’ (ibid.), but will seek the criterion of truth either in what is experientially accessible (‘the “hic et nunc” of the individual’; ibid.) or in ‘what is effective, useful and profitable, what stands the test of time and “pays”’ (Hauser 1951, IV: 211):

It is impossible to imagine a theory of cognition more in harmony with impressionism. Every truth has a certain actuality; it is valid only in quite definite situations. (ibid.)

The dependency of art history on assuming a perspective – in other words, the recognition that ‘our place in the world’ determines ‘the limits of what is thinkable and imaginable’ (Hauser 1959: 7) – is merely an instance of a more general epistemic principle, casually summed up by Hauser in the Napoleonic dictum ‘*On s’engage, puis on voit*’:

One begins with a more or less arbitrary assumption conditioned by one’s historical situation, that is, with an intention or an act of will and a hypothesis appropriate to it; then one follows up the course thus marked out or one modifies it according as the facts emerge agree with it or not. No doubt, the dialectical structure of the undertaking gets more and more complicated at every step, for what ‘new facts emerge’ depends in part upon the preconceived idea, upon the provisional review

and the original choice of course. [...] This interdependence of the two factors in knowledge is of course no peculiarity of the historical studies; it marks our wrestling with reality by way of all forms of knowing and willing. (Hauser 1959: 153f.)

The idea of a finite epistemic vantage point has, of course, had many precursors throughout the history of hermeneutics and historiography, reaching as far back as Johann Martin Chladenius notion of a *'Sehe-punct'* (literally, 'view-point'; see Gelfert 2010, esp. p. 83f.) Any contemporary reader of the above passages, however, will most likely be reminded of post-Kuhnian history of science in recent decades, with its emphasis on tacit knowledge, paradigms, and the theory-ladenness of observation.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Hauser picked up on the same sentiments that found expression, at roughly the same time, in such works as Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (1958) and Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to correctly guess whether it was Kuhn, Polanyi, or Hauser who wrote, say, the following two sentences, if one encountered them in isolation:

But as soon as a discovery or an invention of this kind becomes an example or rule to be followed, it becomes a common possession; it is no longer simply the expression of a singular experience or of a personal attitude, but takes on the function of a formula, a convention, a scheme, in other words, an achievement the artist can take advantage of in order to make himself understood without himself having to traverse the long, vexatious road to discovering it, developing it, and exploring the problems of its application. (Hauser 1959: 185)

The doctrine of the equal value and incommensurability of all styles starts with the thesis that in the history of art there is neither progress nor decline, that one must get rid of the 'periods of florescence' and 'periods of decay' so characteristic of the older type of art history. (Hauser 1959: 217)

Indeed, in some passages, Hauser comes close to acknowledging that his perspectival account of objectivity – which holds that, '[w]henver we ascribe to an intellectual structure objective meaning or value', we are 'dealing with something may indeed be derived from [but is not entirely reducible to] empirical conditions' (Hauser 1959: 170) – may also be extended to the structures that constitute scientific knowledge:

Even in the case of certain scientific statements [...] it may very well be maintained that the social and psychological circumstances of their enunciation are relevant not only to an understanding of their meaning, but also to a proper appraisal of their value. (Hauser 1959: 170)

While this represents a significant move beyond the ahistorical Kantian idea, endorsed elsewhere by Hauser, 'that not merely objective but also subjective preconditions of knowledge must be reckoned with in the natural sciences' (Hauser 1959: 149), he stops short of explicitly drawing a parallel between art history and the history of science.

For the most part, Hauser instead holds on to a strict separation between science and art. Based on the claim that '[t]here is not really any progress in art' and the observation that 'the insights gained by art [...] often go out of currency and never really secure universal acceptance', he concludes that 'truth in art [...] is] very different from truth in science' (Hauser 1959: 36). At the level of scientific and artistic practice, one finds that whereas in science 'there is a radical distinction, perhaps even an insuperable gulf, between the validity of laws and the discovery and formulation of these laws', in art 'there can be no question of any such cleavage between idea and execution' (Hauser 1959: 174). Finally, when it comes to the history of art and that of science, there is a stark contrast between the whimsical nature of artistic change and genuine progress in science, where 'achievements form, on the whole, a linear, progressive series conditioned less by contemporary historical events than by the direction in which the previous results seem to point, by the solutions of past problems and the gaps felt to lie between them' (Hauser 1959: 175):

Strictly speaking, the sciences, and certainly the formal sciences of logic and mathematics, do not have a 'history' in the sense of a development determined by the external conditions and accidents of life; in their case, one feels inclined to speak more of a history of errors and misconceptions than of the historical character of valid knowledge and truth. (Hauser 1959: 175f.)

Had Hauser been as familiar with the historical facts of science as he clearly was with art history, he might have been more cautious in his pronouncements on the unilinearity of scientific progress; as things stand, it fell to others to apply ideas very much like Hauser's to the discipline of history of science.⁵

⁵ This is confirmed by Hauser's reiteration of the point in *The Sociology of Art*: 'In this sense, we can maintain that the sciences, especially the formal ones like logic or mathematics, have no "actual" history and that as far as they are concerned it is more proper to speak of a history of errors and misunderstandings than of one with positive results.' (Hauser 1982: 85) Debates within the history of science, following Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), seem to have had no impact on Hauser's thinking. Interestingly, Kuhn himself acknowledges the influence that debates in art history have had on his own thinking (Kuhn 1969: 403). An anonymous referee raised doubts about the extent of this influence, by noting that Kuhn cautioned art historians not to think of styles as paradigms: 'If the notion of paradigm can be useful to the art historian, it will be pictures not styles that serve as paradigms.' (Kuhn 1969: 412) However, this criticism overlooks that Kuhn's rejection of equating 'style' with 'paradigm' is, in actuality, a rejection of talk about 'theory':

Both 'style' and 'theory' are terms used when describing a group of works which are recognizably similar. (They are 'in the same style' or 'applications of the same theory'.) In both cases it proves difficult – I think ultimately impossible – to specify the nature of the shared elements which distinguish a given style or a given theory from another. (Kuhn 1969: 412)

Thus, Kuhn's target is a reified notion of 'style' that would be quite alien to Hauser – who, as shown in the previous section, attempts to rescue the concept of 'style' from those who would like to attribute to it the status of a "higher", Platonic, or Hegelian idea' (Hauser 1959: 213).

Hauser's dichotomy between art and science must, in retrospect, appear unwarranted, and it is not at all obvious what motivated his judgment – clearly implied in the passage quoted above – that a social history of science is, if not impossible, then at least misguided. One possible explanation is that this allowed him to draw an analogy between the exact sciences, as expressed in 'the theorems of mathematics or the laws of natural science', and the formalist approach in art history, which helped itself to a theory of 'aesthetic validity' that was 'evidently an adaptation of the *logical* theory of validity, according to which truth is independent of the individual who discovers and formulates it, and is regarded as an autonomous, unoriginated order of laws and norms' (Hauser 1959: 174). By insisting that notions of validity adapted from the exact sciences were unsuitable for explaining the diverse and many-sided nature of artistic change (because, as he claimed, they were meant to be applied only to the unilinear history of scientific progress), perhaps Hauser hoped to undermine the aspiration of formalist art history to be recognised as a 'science'.

Whatever Hauser's motivations for driving a wedge between the history of art and that of scientific inquiry, in making this move he does considerable harm to the persuasiveness of his project, leaving it exposed to criticism. Thus, Wessely argues that 'Hauser cleverly manoeuvres his way around the horns of the dilemma', when he simultaneously 'claims a cognitive function for art in spite of its ideological character' – i.e., indirectly draws a parallel between art and science – yet 'maintains that the dichotomy of true and false does not apply to art':

The 'value of the knowledge gained and propagated by art', we are told [by Hauser], 'is not at all impaired by its ideological character' [Hauser 1959: 36]. The nature of this knowledge remains a mystery. (Wessely 1995: 39)

As Wessely points out, 'Hauser might have argued that art promotes a specific kind of social learning', for example via 'repeated role-taking' through 'the identification of the audience with the protagonists of art works', or 'he might have understood audience identification as a medium of self-knowledge' (Wessely 1995: 39f.), yet he does not settle for any of these approaches, leaving unanswered the crucial question of how to connect the aesthetic and the cognitive. On the basis of the preceding discussion in this section, I here merely wish to suggest that had Hauser carried his project through to its logical consequence, by applying to science the same sorts of conclusions he had reached for art history, he would have found a natural way of resolving the tension between the cognitive function of the art work and its status as an 'eminently social' construct: 'whatever else it may be, it is among other things a product of social forces and a source of social effect' (Hauser 1959: 276).

6. The cognitive dimension of art

A recurring theme in Hauser's analysis of the cognitive function of art is the role of the artwork as an instance of communication. While he is aware of the limitations of

drawing an analogy between art and linguistic communication, Hauser is keen to defend a cognitive dimension of art – beyond its instrumental uses as, for example, a vehicle of propaganda – along with the capacity of the artwork to convey knowledge. In *The Sociology of Art*, he writes:

We try in art, as we do in normal practice and in the individual sciences, to discover the nature of the world with which we have to deal and how we may best survive in it. Works of art are deposits of experiences and are directed, like all cultural achievements, towards practical ends. (Hauser 1982: 5)

To be sure, Hauser never developed a full ‘communicative-action theory of art’; at the same time, it has been pointed out, that much of Hauser’s analysis of modernity is ‘in terms of the suppressed communicative potential of art’ (Roberts 2006: 171).

Having previously argued for a dichotomy between art and science, Hauser goes to some length to characterize the specific contribution that art can make to our cognitive enterprise. While art ‘does not begin as science and does not end as it, either’, it nonetheless ‘transforms, stylizes, and idealizes reality, just as even the most exact science imposes upon reality its own spontaneous creative categories’ (Hauser 1982: 6). Art and science, however, differ sharply in that ‘[t]he scientifically oriented cognitive subject must reject the chance, individually variable characteristics of the ordinary man involved in everyday life’, whereas it is just ‘these unique circumstances, which vary according to time and place’ which are ‘one source of the originality and individuality of the creative artist’s mode of expression’ (Hauser 1982: 12).

If art trades in ‘individual, incommensurable, and indispensable perceptions’ and conceives of the individual ‘as a peculiar being who is incomparable because of his unrepeatability combination of dispositions and tendencies’ (Hauser 1982: 13), then this raises the question of how intersubjective communication can ever be achieved by means of an artwork. It is here that such factors as convention and tradition, along with the presence of an established style, play a significant role, for ‘without a certain minimum of routine and improvisation no art is possible’ (Hauser 1959: 407). For Hauser, the history of art ‘a process in which striving for the novel and the personal gradually stretches the limits of the conventions and from time to time bursts them’ (Hauser 1959: 408). For anything to be recognizable as art at all, it must be situated within this historical process: ‘an art in which everything had to be original would be not only impossible in practice, but even unthinkable’ (Hauser 1959: 407f.). Innovation and originality presuppose the presence of some degree of artistic style, since ‘a novel artistic idea can be formed only if there is tradition and convention’ which it links to:

Though it is this dependence which makes an artistic idea communicable, it is the originality of the idea which makes it worth communicating. (Hauser 1959: 408)

It is this interplay between convention and originality, which sets knowledge in art apart from scientific knowledge. Whereas it is to originality and individuality – in the earlier sense of ‘unrepeatable’ and ‘incommensurable’ features of a state of affairs – that the

artist owes ‘the increase in knowledge which the world of ideas and images gains through his work’ (Hauser 1982: 13), the scientist operates with ‘timeless and neutral concepts of truth’ (Hauser 1982: 241). The same holds for the publics at which art and science are directed. Whereas science is always, at least in principle, directed at a potentially unlimited ‘scientific community’, art’s relation to its audience is much more volatile – for one, ‘[t]he artist and the public do not speak the same language from the beginning’ (Hauser 1982: 431), and even where overlap between interest may safely be assumed – as in the case of ‘employer and patron, permanent clients and steady customers’ of an artist – these need ‘not form a public for art in the strict sense of the term, for such a public does not exist where relationships are insecure and changeable, even if not permanently precarious’ (Hauser 1982: 453). It thus seems fair to say that, for Hauser, ‘the ideal reader or spectator is less of an ethically insistent presence and more of a diversified and contingent concept’ (Roberts 2006: 168) than, say, for his contemporaries Lukács and Adorno.

As much as art differs from science in terms of individuality of its content, it also diverges from it in its means of expression. Whereas scientific results are typically communicated through language, art – excluding literature, obviously – makes use of a diverse array of other formats and media. As Hauser puts it:

What science knows it can speak about; in art, on the contrary, by no means all that can be experienced can be directly expressed, and the artist must often ‘whistle’ for want of speech. That is, he must express himself in an indirect, incomplete, inexact manner, by means of conventional, stereotyped signs that dilute his experience.
(Hauser 1959: 406)

It would, however, be quite mistaken to think that the artist is unique in that ‘the conventionality of the means of expression may introduce an unbridgeable element of distance from reality’ (Hauser 1959: 407). For linguistic forms, too – ‘meanings of words, idioms, and metaphors’ – often ‘tend to be employed in a mechanical, often imprecise, or even positively confusing fashion; by providing a “well-worn track” for thought, they tempt the thinker to develop his thought along particular given lines and in accord with more or less rigid models’ (Hauser 1959: 374). If anything, the artist as cognitive subject – perhaps more so than his scientific counterpart – may be expected to be more attuned to the unavoidable limitations that are associated with any particular means of expression (which, if they are to make anything intelligible at all, are by necessity conventional). As Hauser puts it, ‘there is no more a stylistically neutral art than there is a mode of linguistic expression bearing no traces of any historical epoch or ethnic group’ (Hauser 1959: 212).

Throughout his work, Hauser emphasises the complementarity and incompleteness of scientific and artistic knowledge. Thus, Hauser resists attempts to characterize art as a ‘universal language’ of mankind:

Art is no more the unforgettable and irreplaceable ‘mother tongue of humanity’ than is any other mode of expression; it, too, is merely an ‘idiom’ which has a limited validity. (Hauser 1982: 29)

The same applies to scientific knowledge:

Even a scientific discovery is temporally, spatially, and socially conditioned – if not in its entirety, at least as far as its practical function is concerned. (Hauser 1982: 73)

While there is no textual evidence that Hauser was influenced in his later work by Kuhnian ideas concerning the history of science, he does appear to be increasingly interested in establishing a parity of sorts between art and science, regarding both as manifestations of the same cognitive mechanisms. With respect to completeness, ‘[s]cientific states of affairs and their theoretical formulations are of necessity incomplete and fragmentary and will remain so until – in an unforeseeable future – an exclusive totality of science is achieved’ (Hauser 1982: 721). The fiction of a future totality of scientific knowledge serves mainly a methodological purpose, insofar as scientific work essentially consists ‘in the reciprocal correction of partial points of view and a global view in the constant anticipation and the repeated suspension of totalities in the course of approaching an ever more comprehensive and tenable truth’ (Hauser 1982: 368).

This promissory character of a future ‘totality of knowledge’ is not limited to science, but applies more generally:

We cannot perceive or grasp in any theoretical form the ‘totality’ of truth, of perception, of society as a community of people, the unified context of their needs, norms, inclinations, abilities and products. (Hauser 1982: 425)

At the same time, granting precedence

to the category of totality over partial aspects of knowledge is justified by the fact that the individual moments of all human attitudes point beyond themselves and are directed toward accomplishment, whether or not this can be achieved. (Ibid.)

The partial, perspectival viewpoints and attitudes of individuals thus form the backdrop against which our collective projects – whether in art or science – necessarily take shape.

Creative inquiry must begin ‘with a more or less arbitrary assumption conditioned by one’s historical situation’; then ‘one follows up the course thus marked out or one modifies it according as the facts that emerge agree with it or not’ (Hauser 1959: 153). Which ‘new facts’ subsequently emerge

depends in part upon the preconceived idea, upon the provisional review and the original choice of course. One is continually driven from the one point of view to the other without ever reaching a final solution. This interdependence of the two factors in knowledge is of course no peculiarity of the historical studies; it marks

our wrestling with reality by way of all forms of knowing and willing. (Hauser 1959: 154)

This process of continuous revision and re-assessment, however, indicates no shortcoming on our part as inquirers; rather, it is an unavoidable feature of inquiry itself. Long before we can hope to draw inferences based on empirical material that we have gathered, ‘we have to make a sort of synthesis of what is present in raw and unordered state even to make a selection of the material available’. Yet,

[e]very perception is burdened with a tension between the facts which we know about things and those which we would like to know and hope to find out. Without a minimum quantity of knowledge of certain perceptions, which may be united extremely loosely and immaterially, no process of cognition starts up. (Hauser 1982: 368)

Hauser here hints at the fundamental problem of any empirical inquiry, namely how to select among the multitude of empirical findings those that have evidential force – without thereby predetermining the outcome of one’s investigations.

Perhaps, then, the cognitive significance of the artwork lies in its status as an exemplar of this relation of mutual dependency: ‘Nothing illustrates it in a more lively manner than the structure of the work of art, which can only develop, form itself, and integrate, if from the beginning the artist has a vision of the product he wishes to make, no matter how changeable his view of the path he has to tread.’ (Hauser 1982: 368)

7. Conclusion

In the present paper, I have sketched Arnold Hauser’s sociological conception of art history, and its relation to issues – such as the problem of ideology – that were of immediate relevance to the early sociology of knowledge. While Hauser’s direct historical influence was limited, his personal connections with such figures as Lukács, Mannheim, and – for at least some time in the 1950s – Adorno, make his theoretical position an interesting test case for the shifts that occurred in 20th-century thinking about knowledge. This applies especially to Hauser’s repeated comparisons between art and science which, although mostly dichotomic in character, nonetheless do gesture towards a more thoroughgoing acknowledgment of the historicity of scientific knowledge and, in this sense, foreshadow subsequent shifts towards post-positivist philosophy of science. That Hauser – this ‘prodigious reader’ – was not the one to initiate this transition, and that his later work, including *The Sociology of Art*, seems to have been largely unaffected by it, may simply be the result of a lifetime of thinking about art, upon which he brought to bear his own brand of sociological analysis, not in a spirit ‘of authority but of dialogic, mutually constitutive tension with an autonomous other’ (Swanson 1996: 2203).

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