

*Svitlana Linda*

**VALUE OF THE FORMAL AND ICONOLOGICAL APPROACHES  
FOR CONCEPTUALIZATION OF STYLE PROBLEM  
IN ARCHITECTURE**

*Lviv Polytechnic National University  
12, Bandery str., 79013Lviv, Ukraine, svitlanalinda@gmail.com*

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**Abstract.** The article deals with the principles of formal and iconological approaches in art studies by which analysis of style in architecture is made. The value of these approaches for conceptualization of style is demonstrated.

**Key words:** formal approach, iconological approach, style in architecture.

## **1. Introduction**

The problem of style, as a main factor of cultural expression in architecture, is always highlighted when the major vectors of architectural development are being considered (in the past, the present and the future). In the classical understanding, the concept of architectural style is closely related to the criterion of architectural form. After all, the principle of form creation lies at the core of the traditional understanding of style evolution in architecture. Such a definition would suit the theory, were it not for the existing phenomena in the history of architecture that do not lend themselves to description from the point of view of form. One such instance is architecture of historicism. This style suggests the use of forms and signs from cultures of the previous epochs, originally dating back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it also refers to the development of architecture throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its presence attested in the new millennium. Historicism in its numerous manifestations suggested a concept where unity of form, as a distinctive feature of style, is absent. The criterion of architectural form alone turned out to be insufficient for analysis: the phenomenon did not fit into the defined canon terms, and thus, was either left out of the research scope and theory or was defined as a critical one. Modern methods of artistic analysis (by which the analysis of style in architecture is made) suggest different approaches that might be of use for the conceptualization of style in the architecture of historicism. In the modern meaning, a style is not a stable unity, as it was considered earlier, but a dynamic whole of content-and-form elements changeable over time.

## **2. Basic Theory Part**

The objective of the article is to shed light on the problem of value of the formal and iconological approaches for conceptualization of style in architecture of historicism.

Unfortunately, the problem of style theory in architecture has not become a major object of interest for domestic historians and theorists of architecture (except for the works by A. Puchkova) yet. Therefore, the author has based this article on research of the Russian scientists (V. Arslanov, A. Kaploon, O. Krivcun, I. Shestakov, A. Yakimovich), and Russian translations of works by foreign art critics (H. Wölfflin).

### 3. Results and Discussion

The 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the end of formation of art studies as a science, which systematically encompassed a wide scope of artistic issues from all time periods and countries, possessed its own methodology and was based on philosophical and aesthetical thought. A great influence on the development of art studies was made by aesthetical concepts of I. Kant, F.W.J. von Schelling, brothers of Schlegel and, especially, G.V.F. Hegel. They contributed to an integral image of art, pervaded with ideas of historical development and interconnection of social and cultural phenomena. Establishment of art studies as an academic science was connected with theoretical developments of the “formal school”, where problems of style in art and sources of its development occupied an important place.

*Formal approach. The “formal school” in art studies is a name given to theoretical developments of German and Austrian art critics at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.*

The formal school suggested *the formal method – a theoretical concept supporting a view on artistic form as a category defining special features of art works and architecture, capable of independent development.* Conceptualization of the formal method is connected with establishment of German and Austrian “formal schools” of art studies at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The German school is recognized, thanks to works by K. Fidler, A. Hildebrandt, H. Wölfflin, W. Worringer, and the Austrian school is presented by F. Wickhoff, A. Riegl.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a very important time for the formation of art studies. The historians of art tried to explain human perception of a work of art from the scientific point of view. That is why the category of “artistic vision” or “visual perception” became very important for comprehension of this kind of interaction. This category was understood in the formal school from the point of view of psychophysiology and manifested itself, first of all, in the way of perception of form characterizing a work of art.

Henry Wölfflin (1864–1945) is a classic of the formal method. The peculiarity of his method consisted of reconceiving Hegel’s dialectics, typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> century German and Austrian art studies. It was based on the system of binary oppositions and described all processes as a history of change and a conflict of opposites. Wölfflin elaborated a table of five opposition concepts, which served as a basis for formal analysis and became classics of art studies. To these oppositions belonged: 1) linearity – picturesqueness; 2) planeness – depth; 3) closed form – open form; 4) tectonic base – atectonic base; and 5) absolute clarity – incomplete clarity. Wölfflin was not interested in Hegel’s idea of “unity and conflict of opposites.” Instead, the focus of his interest was the form and its study. He insisted on exclusiveness of formal analysis that should be brought to perfection.

Wölfflin’s contributions to art studies were not only confined to the development of methodology of formal analysis on the basis of oppositions; he also formulated a scientific concept of style in art as *an integral system of formal features*. For him, the architectural style was identical to architectural form, that is to say “a distinguishing and substantial feature (*of style – S. L.*)... is integrity of form perception” [2]. Thus, for the first time, the criterion of artistic form was defined as a criterion of style. It should be noted that Wölfflin’s definition is still actual at our time owing to its preciseness and unambiguity, despite its obvious narrowness.

The researcher was also interested in one of the key problems of art studies: what in art is the source and carrier of development, and thus, changes in style? For this purpose, based on K. Fidler’s “artistic vision,” which dealt with psychophysiological dimensions of vision and A. Hildebrandt’s study of spatial form, Wölfflin developed a specific construction of style evolution, which amounted to alternations of peculiar “modes of vision”. In his view, differences in styles amounted to differences in eye capacity to “grope” an object (form) and to perceive it optically that is integrally [3, p. 108–109]. From this stance, he explains the change from the Renaissance to the Baroque: “Renaissance forms lost their attractiveness. Something seen too often does not catch the eye anymore: a weakened perception of form needs stronger activating factors. Architecture creates them and becomes baroque in style.” Furthermore, “Style is an expression of its time, it changes with change in human perception.” However, the form changes occur immanently: “...the necessity of changes does not come to style from the outside, but rather from the inside: form perception develops by its own internal laws” [3]. Thus, *Wölfflin explained style evolution as an alteration in modes of form vision, transformations of which occur by their internal laws independently from the character of the epoch.* He stated that the “modes of human perception of form” improve and a form must immanently change to “satisfy” those new visions’ desires.

Wölfflin was aware of the limited nature of his theory. He said that this theory was applicable only to the art of those periods in which unique “methods of vision” existed. In his view, “a beautiful task of history of art was preservation of, at least, an idea about homogeneous vision, overcoming the unprecedented confusion, and eye orientation on the tangible and understandable in the viewed object”.

Researchers of his theoretical heritage emphasize the fact that Wölfflin, having lived a long life (he died only in 1945), “saw the development” of romantic classicism, historicism, modern architecture, modernism and various revivals of classics. However, he consciously ignored them, not considering them to be a style, but rather a fashion, while he viewed the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a period of great decline in art [4].

While representatives of the “formal school” unanimously treated form as the major criterion of style in art, their views differed on the issues of the source and carrier of style development, though commonly recognizing that changes in form occurred immanently. For this reason, H. Töve designated these theories as “immanent” [5, p. 8]. Wölfflin’s concept belonged to those theories (described above) and also the concept of A. Riegl – the founder of the Vienna school of art studies. Alois Riegl (1858-1905) is a key figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century western art studies. The scientist’s works proved to be innovative by their character and stimulated the development of theory of historical cognition. A. Riegl did not create a single synthetic work. Instead, he would consistently lay out his positions. His scientific heritage is exposed in separate articles and books, so systematization of A. Riegl’s heritage has also become an object of scientific interest [5]. A. Riegl’s fundamental work is *Problems of style. Fundamentals of ornament history*, published in 1893. In it, the scientist contests a factologic view of art history arguing with the “materialistic” historical artistic concept of the German architect and theoretician Gottfried Semper, according to which laws of form creation were determined by the material, technical possibilities and a well-defined pragmatic purpose. Those three elements became a “coefficient of friction” for Riegl. The researcher addressed the issue of an objective artistic will that developed independently, which further reminded him of Hegel’s absolute idea. For A. Riegl, form alteration in art referred to metamorphoses of human immanent artistic will (*Kunstwollen*), which is the human’s subconscious psychic organization prone to change over time and manifesting itself in the change of two kinds of visual perception – a “tactile one” (also “optical”, “close” or “tactile and plane”) and an “optical one” (also “distant” or “spatial”). As a result, different modes of space perception emerged, the evolution of which form the basis for the development and changes of style (which is related to Hegelian dialectics of “changes and conflict of opposites”), including in particular, the change and conflict of “tactile” and “optical” bases.

So, the birth of the formal school in art studies was led by the two eminent figures, H. Wölfflin and A. Riegl, putting an end to classicist theory-making and opening a new era in history of science and art. However, the establishment of theoretical art studies in the frame of the formal approach was accompanied by the loss of very valuable ideas, accumulated by classic philosophy and the esthetical thought from Aristotle to Hegel. Nevertheless, “the formal school” was a great step forward in comparison to the previous cultural historical school, which proved that form existed in art and that form should become an object of profound analysis. The influence of the scientific activity of these researchers was very significant, though controversial. At the core of these controversies lay Riegl’s fundamental idea about “artistic will” – a mysterious idea that posed far too many questions than it gave answers. Thanks to this idea, Riegl successfully demonstrated how an artistic style emerged from a historical environment, though the very nature of this phenomenon and the genetics of its cause and effect remained obscure [6]. The founders of the iconological approach attempted to find a solution to this problem.

*The iconological approach.* Iconology is a current in history and theory of art, aiming to discover the image-and-symbol meaning of a work of art (mainly in painting and architecture). Iconology was defined by a Dutch researcher G. Huger as “an attempt at determining cultural value or social meaning of certain forms, modes of their expression and imaging in a certain period of time” [7].

The iconological approach has a long genesis of formation and development. The interest for image symbolism and its systematization arose during the Renaissance period. Thus, the term “iconology” dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was initially found in the title of the book by Italian humanist, C. Ripa, published in 1593, which discussed the meaning of any collection and description of images. The long forgotten term made its reappearance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Austria, in the works of F. Wickhoff and A. Riegl. The adherents of their cause were J. von Schlosser, F. Saxl, and M. Dvorak, who considered history of art as “History of Spirit.” In other words, they considered it as a mode of expression of the Spirit of the time. The work by E. Cassirer “Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,” in which the philosopher generalized the traditions of symbolic interpretation

of a culture in the thesis “man is a symbolic animal”, served as a philosophical basis of the iconological school. According to E. Cassirer, language, myth, religion, science images and art symbols are all symbolic forms created by our mind in the process of world perception, with which man organizes the surrounding chaos. This became the basis of iconology. The latter considers all history of art as a specific informational structure, which, through translation of symbolic signs, provides for the unity of all human culture [8].

Despite the fact that the iconological approach appeared to counterbalance the procedures of “the formal school,” not only did it not deny the achievements of formal scientists, but it also incorporated them, though focusing much more on “the problem of interpretation of art language and its meaning, search for the deriving point in comprehension of art independence, and at the same time, of its interconnection with other kinds of creative activities and intellectual efforts of a time period” [9]. The iconological approach was manifested in Hamburg in 1912 by the art historians Abu Warburg (1866–1929) and Fritz Saxl (1890–1948). Both scientists suggested studying an artistic form (Wölfflin’s object of research) not from the point of view of psychophysiology of its perception, but from the point of view of its representation as a certain general cultural meaning (emphasized by A. Riegl and F. Wickhoff). As a carrier of art meaning, it was suggested to consider not only its artistic compositional and stylistic embodiment (as did the formal school) or a concrete theme of a work (the object of interest in iconography), but also its specific image component – a “motif” as a certain trans-thematic “idea-form,” which interconnects with the thematic and esthetical sides of a work. However, unlike them, it is a manifestation or “icon” of its spiritual intention, “image wholeness”. It was A. Warburg who developed a symbolic approach to painting, defined as iconology and which presented all history of art as an alternation of extra-historical, latent, sacral symbols, appearing for the first time in the antiquity age and continuing to exist in the cultures of the subsequent periods. Symbolic protoforms, which act mainly in the field of social memory, can be appropriated by man only by means of their placement in the rational discourse of art history.

Iconology gained popularity thanks to A. Warburg’s pupil Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968), who presented works of art in the form of a meaning structure, where iconology as an approach aims at the analysis of the deepest level of meaning. According to Panofsky, “the task of art history is the search for a ‘hidden meaning,’ with the help of different scientific disciplines, connected by the iconological method”. The scientist described his approach in his most well-known work, “The Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art” in 1960. The primary aim of the iconological approach is “a gradual penetration in a work of art, its formologic exposition from within and the outside, which can be achieved only after long intellectual observations.” To be an iconologist one should primarily be an erudite with wit and observance. Observance alone does not suffice, confining one to the level of formal analysis, meaning the level of iconographic analysis elaborated by H. Wölfflin. E. Panofsky presented the structure of integral exploration of art works in the form of a three-level system of ascent, from the concrete to the general. This was visually illustrated in his well-known “Table of Interpretation” published in his work *The Content and Interpretation of Painting*. The Table dealt with four positions: object of interpretation, kind of interpretation, means of interpretation and the controlling principle of interpretation. The “object of interpretation” included “the phenomenal meaning” – the primary or apparent theme created by the world of artistic motifs, “the significant meaning” – a secondary conditional theme created by the world of images, stories and allegories, and “the inner value” – the content which creates the world of symbolic values. The *kinds of interpretation* consisted of: *pre-iconographic description* – discovery of the primary semiotic meaning of a work; *iconographic analysis* – discovery of a secondary hidden meaning, creation of a work mythologeme; and *iconological interpretation* – explanation of the essence and content of a work in terms of “time symbols” in the wider cultural context. The *means of interpretation* consisted of practical experience, – that is acquaintance with the subject and event; written resources – acquaintance with certain topics and ideas; and “synthetic intuition” – characterized by an individual psyche and the world view. E. Panofsky also suggested a *correcting principle of interpretation*, based on the history of style (knowledge of how objects and events acquired this or that formal expression in changeable historical conditions), history of types (knowledge of how certain terms and ideas were expressed by these or those objects and events in changeable historical conditions), and general history of cultural symptoms or “symbols” (understanding of how the main trends of the human thought were expressed by these or those terms and ideas in changeable historical conditions). Thus, E. Panofsky formulated an exhaustive definition of artistic interpretation of an artwork, which became classical. Scientists stress that the third iconological level is very complex, as it requires “a deep erudition in different fields of the humanities, capability of singling out from the flow of phenomena the main

trends of the humanities thought, the understanding of how they correlate with concrete historical circumstances of a culture and with the individual psychology of the author.” The latter implies knowledge and understanding of literary and visual “texts” and “traditions” [10].

The middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century may be defined as a time of triumph of the iconological method in Western European science (in the former Soviet Union, iconology was viewed as a forbidden subject even more so than the formal approach, since the subject of “hidden symbolism” was perceived as an insidious and ambiguous hint). At that time, the number of special research and periodicals grew significantly. The iconological approach was further developed in works by E. Panofsky’s pupil, J. Byalostotsky, who used the term “framing subjects” (universal, extrahistorical ideas, motifs and themes). A great contribution to the development of iconology was made by Rudolf Wittkower (1901–1971), who distinguished four levels of “visual symbol” (literal, literary, figurative and expressive) and four levels of objectivity of interpretation (a subject level intuitively accessible to all, a literary level through knowledge, a figurative level through poetic perception and emotional experience, and an expressive level through capacity for co-creative activity). The iconological approach with respect to the history of architecture was used for the first time by J. Bandtmani (1917–1975). He interprets architecture as a “carrier of values” presented by four types (symbolic, allegoric, historical and aesthetic), which correspond to the four types of human conscience expressed historically in this or that architectural typology and morphology. Interpretation of iconology as psychologically tinged semiotics can be found in works by Ernst Hans Gombrich (1909–2001) and W. Hoffman (born in 1928).

From the mid-1970s, the iconological approach was confronted with criticism from art sociologists for ignoring the historical and social background; psychoanalysts criticized it for rationalism and exclusive reliance on verbal sources; and formal school representatives criticized it for idealism in treating form as an external shell, filled with symbolic intuition programs. Despite this, iconology remains one of the most influential currents in art studies till our days.

#### **4. Conclusions**

As a result of the developments of representatives of the formal school and iconology, art studies gained a status of a fundamental science in European cultural tradition. Representatives of the formal school treated works of art (architecture including) as a certain formal structure, which can be described by means of a set of procedures and rules. While the art critic of the formal school analyzed the texture, form and other specific parameters of an architectural work, history and psychology, economics and politics, religious movements and the development of technical means were left out of the scope of his analysis. Thus, the subject of analysis was limited, isolated from subjective and social factors. Yet, beyond any doubt, such a concrete object of analysis was one of the major theoretical achievements of the “formal school” [11]. The aim of formal art studies was to single out structures inherent to all artistic form independently from a work, an author or a school. The use of formal methods in architecture contributed to the development of compositional ideas, objective methods of form creation and harmonization, based on the laws of perception [12].

The iconological approach became a logical continuation and completion of the powerful formal approach, even though it appeared as an opposition to the latter. A scientist put a stress not on description, but on explanation. E. Panofsky raised a very serious problem of historical time existence of a true work of art, borrowed and assimilated from the preceding artistic experience and what effect it has on the contemporaries and descendants [13]. Iconology focused on the problem of art language interpretation and also on interconnection with other kinds of creative activity and intellectual efforts (context). The principal methodical approaches in iconology, which took over the achievements of the formal school, remain among the most important methods of artistic and architectural analyses until today and are irreplaceable in exploration of the problem of style in architecture.

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*Світлан Лінда*

### **ЗНАЧЕННЯ ФОРМАЛЬНОГО ТА ІКОНОЛОГІЧНОГО ПІДХОДІВ ДЛЯ КОНЦЕПТУАЛІЗАЦІЇ ПРОБЛЕМИ СТИЛЮ В АРХІТЕКТУРІ**

***Анотація.** Розглянуто принципи формального та іконологічного підходів стосовно проблеми стилю у мистецтвознавчих дослідженнях. Показано значення цих підходів для концептуалізації проблеми стилю.*

***Ключові слова:** формальний підхід, іконологічний підхід, стиль в архітектурі.*