Vanishing architects, shifting nations.
Writing the history of Bohemian Baroque architecture, 1880-1945

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DOI: 10.17401/STUDIERICERCHE-1/2017-DEMEYER

Issues of nation and language in the architectural history writing of Bohemia and Moravia – those Habsburg provinces now more or less confined by the borders of the Czech Republic – occurred to me in a rather serendipitous way as the result of my interest in Czech history in general, and in the writings of Czech and German architectural historians of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century in particular. Both interests originated from my research on the Bohemian architect Johann Santini Aichel, who was active in the first 23 years of the eighteenth century and was a Prague contemporary of the Viennese Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach. I began to study Santini because I was intrigued by the stubborn and anachronistic plastic qualities of his buildings. I was driven by my aim to discover the architect’s, or his clients’, intentions behind those strange features. Before me, others had been struck by them: in a 1957 article, “Bohemian Hawksmoor”, Nikolaus Pevsner wrote about one of Santini’s projects, the pilgrimage church on Zelená Hora, the Green Hill, at Žďár: “the façade […] may look like a backdrop from Doctor Caligari”. An earlier version of the first part of this paper was published in Dirk De Meyer, Writing architectural history and building a Czechoslovak nation, 1867-1918, in: Jacek Purchla and Wolf Tegethoff, eds., Nation, Style, Modernism, CIHA Conference Papers 1. München, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Comité International d’Histoire de l’Art (CIHA), 2006, 75-93. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.


Through my study, I started to understand how Santini’s ‘Baroque-gothic’ architecture – as it was called in most literature – played a role in a process of reconstruction of identity by local Bohemian and Moravian monasteries that, during the fanatical Counter-Reformation of the seventeenth century, had been marginalized by an overpowering Jesuit-Habsburg alliance. I discovered in Santini Aichel – a Swiss-Lombard by origin (a third generation immigrant) and a Czech by marriage, in close contact with the Italian community in Prague as well as integrated into the higher, mostly allochthonous, German-speaking circles of Prague society – a choice subject for the study of the sophisticated nature and techniques of artistic mélisse. One of my theses was, finally, that it was precisely his condition as a German-speaking Czech of Lombard origins which placed the successful architect Santini in an ambiguous but not uncomfortable position between nationalities, between architectural cultures.
Hence, while studying the Santini reception in the architecture literature at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, I was struck by the recovery of Santini in nationalist disputes between Austro-Germanic and Czech scholars. I discovered that not only ruthless dictators make people disappear, but that so did well-versed European architectural historians. In what follows, the ‘material’ is not the buildings of an architect, but the writings of architectural historians. I present those writings in a specific political context. However, while bringing to the fore nationalistic and race issues in their publications, I have no intention of reducing the authors’ work to mere nationalist writing. Because, as Sigfried Giedion said in *Architecture, you and me* (1958), “nothing is more embarrassing today than when small-minded people, taking advantage of the fact that they have been born later in time, venture to criticize those who first opened up paths along which we are now treading.”(4) Rather I want to understand some of the ‘mechanics’ of architectural historiography in ‘the first nationalism age’.

**Art history, architectural historians, and nationalism**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, modern art history and nationalism came of age side by side. In the century that followed, nineteenth century ideas of “nation” and “national spirit” have continued to impose on our thinking, as Claire Farago has argued, unstable categories that conflated – let’s say – seventeenth century notions of time, geography, and culture with the nineteenth-century politics of nation-state, race, and colonialism. By ‘producing histories of ‘national culture’, scholars helped to manufacture the modern idea of a nation as an enduring collective. A significant aspect of the problematic of ‘nationalism’ is, therefore, to take into account the role of the scholars who produced it.”(5)

Nationalism should not be understood as an atavistic relic of tribal life whose

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persistence in modern societies should be considered a lamentable anomaly. Rather, as the Czech philosopher and sociologist Ernest Gellner pointed out, nationalism and nations are responses to specific needs of modern societies. Nations are modern – and they are constructed. In that construct, Eric Hobsbawm asserted, a powerful combination of representations – visible symbols of collective practices and values, including architecture and its history – “give palpable reality to an otherwise imaginary community.”

Academic art history had more opportunity to become central in the debate, because it was never more sure of itself and never more methodologically ambitious than in the Germany and Austria of the first decades of the twentieth century. As Christopher Wood argued, “art history saw itself as a powerful new *Kulturwissenschaft*, a synthetic, explanatory discipline uniquely positioned to mediate among the history of religion, anthropology, folkloric studies, intellectual history, social history, and the history of political institutions. […] Art history’s cultural-historical pretensions were rooted in a sense of the special eloquence

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and explanatory power of its objects. [...] The historian who could grasp the principles of artistic figuration could circumvent the tickets of distant and alien symbolic systems and arrive at the foundations of culture. Moreover, architectural history in particular was playing a central role in what Alina Payne has called “the imbrication of Stilgeschichte (history of style), Geistesgeschichte (intellectual history) and Kulturgeschichte (cultural history) that shaped art-historical discourse in the first decades of (the) century.” In the Czech context, the situation was even more radical. “The modern architectures that emerged,” Eve Blau has written, “[...] were heterodox, politically charged, and characterized by a complex historically rooted dialectic in which innovative design was “often combined with local reference and historical allusion.” Further Christopher Long demonstrated how “for scholars and architects alike, history became an ally in the quest for both identity and exclusion.” Whereas nationalism is traditionally more imminent in literary studies as the primary material was inescapably partitioned according to national languages, in Prague, architectural history could become the chosen ally of political and nationalist discourse not the least because of the lack of a Corneille in Czech literature. There was some reason why the early twentieth century historian of Czech literature Arne Novák turned to architecture and sculpture for his beautiful but tragically impressionistic essay Praha barokní (Baroque Prague).

The development of modern art history as a scholarly enterprise was intimately linked to the rehabilitation of the arts of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This process had started with Cornelius Gurlitt’s Geschichte des Barockstils of 1887 and with Heinrich Wölfflin’s more synthetic and better structured study – as Riegl would comment – Renaissance und Barock published one year later. Subsequently August Schmarsow developed, in his Barock und Rokoko of 1897, the first fully positive attitude towards the artistic production of the era.

For late nineteenth century Czech scholars a positive stance towards the overall and opulently foregrounded Baroque architecture was less evident. Their interpretation was deeply affected by the memory of the bloody defeat of Czech independence that was the outcome of the Roman-Catholic and Habsburg victory on the White Mountain near Prague in the autumn of 1620. Until halfway through the twentieth century, the 150-year period following that defeat was referred to by the Czechs as the temno, or ‘dark age’. Any ‘national meaning’ was hard to find in those decades of humiliation. Moreover, the period had also resulted in a neglect of the Czech language. While Czech remained the language in the countryside, the events of 1620 and the ensuing Habsburg

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(14) A couple of years earlier, Novak had published a reference work on Czech literature: Stručné dějiny literatury české.
(18) August Schmarsow, Barock und Rokoko (Leipzig, Hirzel, 1897) (Beiträge zur Ästhetik der bildenden Künste, Bd. 2).
centralization had brought about an “Austrianization” of the Prague idiom. It would only be with the (late) industrialisation of the Prague area and the continuous immigration of people from the countryside that the number of German speakers decreased.\(^\text{(17)}\)

A parenthesis: we have to be careful here in understanding the concept of ‘German’ as the use of such a term could lead to confusion. The concept of ‘nation’ had changing significances throughout the period under consideration. Germandom till the end of the nineteenth century represented a linguistic, cultural and intellectual community rather than a socially, economically and politically integrated group.

The Czech nineteenth century is coloured by an intellectual shift from territorial patriotism to a revolutionary Czech consciousness that was rapidly accompanied by a transformation of the institutions. By the late 1890s the Czech-German language conflict escalated to near revolutionary intensity resulting in rival Czech cultural, educational and financial institutions that sprung up in parallel to the long-established German ones. The buildings of these new Czech institutions such as the Spořitelna Česká, the Czech Savings Bank, or the new Prague Polytechnic School, both built by Ignace Ullmann, received particular attention in the first Czech architectural history books as respectively the “first building of considerable scale built in Prague by the [Czech] high finance” and “the first school building worthy of a civilised nation”.\(^\text{(18)}\) From the very beginning, historical research secured these developments. For instance, in 1818 the famous *Rukopisy*, the allegedly ancient Czech manuscripts of epic songs on Libussa’s judgment, were found – or rather forged – by the librarian Václav Hanka to ensure that the Czechs had an older literature than that of the Germans.\(^\text{(19)}\)


\(^{\text{(18)}}\) “[…] le premier édifice de grandes dimensions bâti par la haute finance [Czech] à Prague” and “ce premier bâtiment scolaire digne d’une nation civilisée”; Antonín Matějček and Zdeněk Wirth, *L’art tchèque contemporain* (Prague, Jan Štenc, 1920), 50.

\(^{\text{(19)}}\) Cf. Demetz: Prague, 335.


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**Germany builds!**

**Czech architecture in German architectural history of the late nineteenth century**

However, nearly all scholars of Czech architectural history were German, or wrote in German. For most of them, as we will analyse in detail, the history of the Baroque architecture in Bohemia and Moravia was a chapter in one *Geschichte des deutschen Baukunst* as the title of Robert Dohme’s book of 1887 reads.\(^\text{(20)}\)

Probably the most prominent, if not notorious, among the German art history scholars in Prague in the 1870s was Alfred Woltermann, professor at the k.k. Karl-Ferdinands-Universität, as the Prague University was called at the time.
Woltmann described his own mission as “to feel myself a German in Prague, to intervene politically for Germandom, and in all respects to hold onto the connection to the German intellectual life.” In 1876 Woltmann gave a lecture entitled *Deutsche Kunst in Prag* at the Prague artists’ society ‘Concordia’ that included both Czechs and Germans as members. In that lecture he addressed the question what exactly was German in Prague art: “And let us ask ourselves: what exactly is German in the artistic appearance of this city? […] beinahe Alles – nearly everything.” Woltmann’s position led to an uproar at the university, followed two years later by his move to Strasbourg, and was one of the events that eventually led to the split of the institution into a German and a Czech university in 1882.

Woltmann was not isolated in his efforts to provide (art)historical research and commentaries that tightened the link with the German *Heimat*. In Prague, in 1861, the same concern is evident in the foundation of the *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen*. The art historical contributions in publications such as this one tend to emphasize the importance of architects of German origin downplaying the contributions of local artists or Mediterranean immigrants. From Joseph Hofmann’s *Die Barocke in Nordwest-böhmen* (1898) until Martin Wackernagel’s broad analyses of the architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth century “in den Germanischen Ländern” (1915), which obviously included Bohemia, much attention was paid to the various descendants of the Dientzenhofer family, namely Georg, Christoph, Leonhard, Johann and Kilian Ignaz. The Bavarian Dientzenhofers are a choice subject for those interested in building a theory of German ‘import’ of the Baroque in Bohemia.

In this Germanophile context Johann Santini Aichel was far less useful: Santini was a third generation immigrant of Northern Italian origin, married into a Czech family, and integrated as fluidly into Bohemian society as he was into German society.

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the Italian architects’ community in Prague. For Wackernagel and others, “a Deutschböhme (a German Bohemian), Johan Auchel, hides behind […] the Italian artist’s name Giovanni Santini”. (25) And Albert Ilg, a late nineteenth-century Fischer von Erlach scholar, even claimed, with a rather Belgian penchant for surrealism, that Santini had never existed, or more precisely that he was the same person as Santino Bussi. (26)

It might be a surprise in this context that the chapter on ‘The Catholic Baroque Style’ in Cornelius Gurlitt’s pioneering and influential Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland (1889) opens with an image of Santini’s major building in Prague, the Palais Thun-Hohenstein. However, the name of the architect himself is absent from the whole book with the exception of one mention in parentheses as the “Beauftragter”, the collaborator of Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer. (27)

In this context of cultural appropriation, art history will be written as an artists’ history. This had of course been the approach since the very first account of art historiography in the Bohemian lands, Franz Martin Pelzel’s Abbildungen böhmischer und mährischer Gelehrten und Künstler (1773-1786), but in Gurlitt’s book the art-historical subject acquired central importance. New here was the emphasis on the artist’s appurtenance to a Volk, and hence, the prominence given to the artist’s language. Gurlitt, a professor at the Technical University in Dresden, gave an account of a very personal experience with the Prague language question. In his article “Die Barockarchitektur in Böhmen”, published in 1890 in the Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen, Gurlitt wrote: “When one morning I walked up the Prague Castle hill, I perceived the voice of the stones. Many buildings spoke to me in the beloved and well-known language of a foreign people. It was the language in which once
Michelangelo forged his fiery soul into sonnets. The full rich tones of Italian rang up out of Prague. More strongly however, German tones rustled in my ear. […] I heard from them the message of how German art had done its best to decorate the lovely City on the Moldau, and the lament of how Germany would be thanked by foreign peoples.” And Gurlitt continued, carefully listening for a third language, which of course we expect to be Czech: “I listened carefully so that I would not miss any language in the jumble of voices! Aber eine dritte Sprache vernahm ich aus der Wechselrede der Steine von Prag nicht! – But I did not perceive a third language in the conversation of the stones of Prague!”

Exit Czech architects. And Gurlitt confirms in his Geschichte des Barockstiles und des Rococo in Deutschland: “A Slavic art: there is as less of it in Bohemia as there is in Poland.”

As far as the Italians are concerned, “over there [in Italy] their [Italian] architecture was forceful and born from the soil. However, away from home, it became superficial and impoverished of its rich forms. Now however, since the Germans have learned to take this art in their own hands, it has quickly become obvious how infinitely more sure they were in capturing the Gemüth des Volkes, the mood of the people. And within a short time, the Italians who dominated all building activity, had moved back into second place.”

Noteworthy is the change, not only of terminology, but also of the style of writing architectural history. Gurlitt’s voice is authoritative and apodictic – making pronouncements rather than laying out facts. His writing is creative and full of verve. This is no coincidence: German art history’s new academic standing, its new relationship to the Geisteswissenschaften, and its liaison with humanist studies, meant that a great number of art history books were also written for a readership outside restrained academic circles – not to mention the fact that these books were illustrated by an unprecedented number of photographs (for example Dohme’s Barock – und Rococo-Architektur of 1892). These editorial changes are more than a marginal aspect of why architectural history could take up such an important role in nationalist issues.

Towards an own nation.
Czech national spirit and writing architectural history, 1890-1938

By the end of the 1880s the unresponsiveness of the Austro-Hungarian government to Czech nationalist aspirations convinced the heirs of Jungmann and Palacký that true autonomy could be achieved only outside the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. It was a cultural Gesamtkunstwerk that made manifest this con-

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viction: the premiere of Bedřich Smetana’s patriotic opera *Libuše* in 1881. The history of this libretto is paradigmatic of the Czech situation in the nineteenth century: first written in German, by the Czech patriot Josef Wenzig – and then translated into Czech. The story was largely based on the fabricated fragment of “Libussa’s Judgment” in the *Rukopisy*. The ancient myth, first told to legitimize the Přemysl dynasty, described the wandering of the Czechs, their arrival in Bohemia, and the leadership of the wise Libussa, who in one of her trances guided the people to a place in the forest where the castle and the city of Prague were founded. By 1881, it was monumentalized – or subverted – and an entire Czech tradition, in the age of emancipatory nationalism, found expression in Smetana’s oratorio: “Contemporary audiences understood very well why the final scene of the opera showed Hradčany Castle, and they were thrilled by the recurrent fanfare signifying the power of the ancient Czech state.”

Smetana composed his opera between 1869 and 1872, but had kept the score in his desk for nine years to save it for the opening of the Národní Divadlo, the National Theatre. Zdeněk Wirth, the most influential Czech-writing architectural historian at the turn of the century, later connected the symbolic meaning of the building with the newly-developed ‘national’ interest in the baroque period, and he used precisely this building for the cover of his *Česká architektura XIX století* (Czech Architecture of the nineteenth century). The Baroque represented the last moment of grandeur in Czech architectural history: “Nous pouvons distinguer dans l’histoire de notre architecture deux périodes principales, pendant lesquelles la culture artistique s’élève jusqu’aux sommets extremes de la création originale et le dispute avec success à l’art le plus raffiné de l’étranger; ce sont le haut gothique […] et le haut baroque […].” For Wirth, in the period following the first half of the eighteenth century, “Prague devient la province, et par les réformes de Joseph II, on lui enlève même quelques oeuvres impor-
The generation of the so-called ‘Czech renascence’ tried to recapture at least part of the artistic culture of the Prague Baroque from German annexations. Karel Boromejský Mádl, a Czech architectural historian who published in the last two decades of the century in German and in Czech, denounced the “annexations of our venerable artists of the past ad maiorem Germaniae gloriam”[37] and gave Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer a completely Czech profile as one of “the first sons of our country”. Again, Mádl’s argument is rooted in the issue of language; there is ample evidence, he wrote, that “Czech was his mother tongue”.[38] However, for other Czech scholars of the turn of the century, the Bavarian Dientzenhofers were too strong a memory of German cultural imperialism. On the contrary, architects of Italian origin, and Italian culture in general, had never imposed this type of cultural imperialism. Hence the long-standing tradition of Italo-Bohemian exchanges lent itself perfectly to translation in political terms. It gave historical precedence to a much desired integration of a new Czech state into a modern Europe. This position, gradually taken on by Czech scholars, also demonstrates how the endeavours to develop a national discourse and to create a national art and architecture were paradoxically the first step towards the creation of internationalism. Eva Forgács pointed out how these early movements sought to confirm national pride and consciousness in order to elevate the nation as a full-fledged member of Europe and integrate the na-
national culture into the European cultural heritage. The creation and cultivation of authentic national culture was seen as the token of cultural emancipation as well as national progress."(39) As Forgács further underlines, this cultural nationalism "lacked aggression and hostility towards other nations."(40) It had first and foremost an anti-imperial stance. Indeed, German-speaking scholars, conscious about the necessity to counter the growing narrative appropriation of the Czech lands by the Czechs, had mostly limited themselves to an apologetics of the role of Germans in the architectural history of the territory. However, Czech historians, like Josef Pekař, often did not limit their work to a national history, but they also developed a historical Czech discourse on the Empire.(41) Some Czech artists and architects started to question the issue of an authentic national artistic production: “Did we ever have such art and do we have it now?” asks Miloš Jiránek in his article “Českost našeho umění” (The Czechness of our art), published in the very first days of the new century.(42) For the most progressive among architects, local tradition was seen probably less as national, than as a necessary tool to open up the possibility of their own modern architecture. They understood that the concept of progress was to be rendered compatible with that of tradition – even when they refused a direct servitude to social-political transformations as Pavel Janák did. In “O nábytku a jiném” (About furniture and other things), Janák positions art above men and nature, and defines it as “an independent activity that has no obligation outside itself”.(43) For others however it was deemed that architectural history as well as contemporary practice could and should serve the just political cause. Karel Chytíl, for instance, deemed the importance of the Italian heritage of the Baroque period in Prague so great that he argued that it should be guiding contemporary urban planning practice in Prague.(44)

With Josef Pekař, Zdeněk Wirth, August Prokop, and Josef Susta (a former colleague of Max Dvořák), a new generation of art historians came to the fore that distanced themselves from the hitherto mainstream perspective of the Counter-Reformation as the low point of Czech history. They were to be the last Czech generation that had been trained in German, most of them at Viennese institutions.(45) Both Czech and German art historians of this generation, and even Czech architecture in its most radical (cubist) expression, were allying themselves with German-Viennese theory. This is no wonder: all were German educated, and all drew inspiration from advanced aesthetic theory – in particular, from Adolf von Hildebrand’s Das Problem der Form, Riegl’s Stillfragen, and Theodor Lipp’s Einfühlungstheorie. But Czech scholars and architects fused these readings with references to local traditions of late Baroque architecture.
The Czech cubist architect Pavel Janák read Gurlitt (as well as Dohme, Wölfflin and Lipps), as is evident from the notes in his diaries, while at the same time turned his attention to the "expressionism" of Santini. For Janák, as he wrote in “Obnova průčelí” (Renewal of the Façade), “Czech architecture developed both in scope and depth above all through the Baroque, that is, the period that is once again governed by abstraction which is characteristic for our national spirit.”

In an article of 1909, Zdeněk Wirth had been the first to draw attention to that most particularly Czech phenomenon amongst Baroque architectures: the barokní gotika, or ‘baroque gothic’, as he defined the gothicizing works of Johann Santini Aichel. Wirth’s influential article – not merely among Czech audiences – was more than a rehabilitation of Santini’s role; it tried to link a local Czech production with reappearances of the gothic style in eighteenth century England and Germany offering it a life independent from Austro-German baroque developments.

Moreover – an aspect that I have worked out in more depth elsewhere – Santini’s major works were monasteries and pilgrimage churches, a countryside Baroque, as opposed to Jesuit and Habsburg urbanity. Its visual culture was tailored to the sophisticated desires of the monastic clerks, but also to the bigotry and the folk myths of the peasant population. These buildings and their publics were removed from the cities that were the seats of Austro-Hungarian power. Hence, from a Czech nationalist point of view, they could represent values of an earlier, more free Bohemia, much in the sense of Manzoni’s depiction of the Italian peasantry after 1848. More often Manzoni claimed, as Tolstoy would later, that the peasantry is morally superior because peasants have no awareness of themselves in time and history.

The developments in the writing of Czech architectural history might reveal traces of influences from outside the German and Vienna schools that hitherto had been neglected. Art history scholars at the Czech Prague University were witnesses (or more) to the transformations in the history programmes within the same faculty. The split of the Prague University had brought about not only changes in content, but also methodological and conceptual differences between Czechs and Germans in the approach to history. The Czechs started to develop their own research networks. While Germans depended nearly exclusively on the German world, the Czechs gradually developed contacts with France (and later with Italy and the Slavic world) that brought them in touch with the first attempts of social history foreshadowing the Annales’ revolution.

Transcriptions of the diaries in: Irena Žantovská Murray, Sources of cubist architecture in Bohemia. The theories of Pavel Janák, M.A. Thesis (McGill University, School of Architecture, 1990), various pp.; in particular, on Riegl and Schmarsow: diary entry 19.XII (1912); on Dohme and Gurlitt: 13.IV (1913).

For instance: Hans Tietze discusses Wirth’s article: Hans Tietze, “Neue Literatur über deutsche und österreichische Barock-Architektur”, Kunstgeschichtliche Anzeigen (1910), 10-24: 12-15; Gurlitt picks up the term “Barock-Gotik” in a review article in: Berliner Architekturwelt (1911), 40 (April), 82 (Mai), 124 (Juni), 165 (Juli), 208 (August), 249 (September), 292 (Oktober), here p. 249.


While these influences were more clearly present in the history programs at the university, they were also apparent on the art historical research.
to the German schools’ cult of the great historic personalities. The necessity for the Czech historians to differentiate themselves from the Germanic academic world led them to open themselves up to the new historiographical tendencies toward social history and the currents of European ethnography including the history of the peasant culture, thus bypassing military defeats and the political vanishing of their Kingdom. As a result, courses taught at the Prague German University stuck with the German and Austro-Hungarian history as *Staatslehre*, while the Czech University turned to a Herderian ‘national history-philosophy’. (53)

After nearly four centuries of Habsburg dominance, the end of the war brought the Czechs political independence in the form of the establishment of the first Czechoslovak Republic. This, however, did not imply the end of the national issue as the philosopher and first Czechoslovak president Tomáš Masaryk understood very well. In *The New Europe*, a hastily sketched book with visionary elements, first published in 1918 in English and French as a background study for the delegates of the Peace Conference in Paris, Masaryk wrote: “In the West there are no acute disturbing national questions: the nations of the West have their states and well-established forms of government, have their old civilisation – France and Belgium will have to rebuild their destroyed cities and villages, to repair their factories and fields, but in the East new states, new forms of governments must be created and the foundation of civilised life must be laid down.” (54)

However, the radically new political condition would alter the ‘working conditions’ of architectural historians on both Czech and German sides. Reflecting the dismissal of architecture from the service of national identity, the earlier focus on national identity began to subside in Czech art history and architecture programs. (55) Tomáš Masaryk, in his capacity as a philosophy professor at the Charles University, had already in the 1880’s, with his journal *Athenaeum*, questioned the romanticism of scientific national discourse. (56) For Masaryk and his followers the primacy of the state or the nation was superseded by the masarykian ideal of humanity.

Furthermore, the new Czechoslovak political identity would reinforce the change in perception of the Counter-Reformation period, and hence of Baroque art. However severely humiliating the Habsburg rule may have been, the cultural benefits of the era could now be valorised more easily after the returning of governance to the Czechs.

In Prague, a new government and administration created an opportunity, finally, for Zdeněk Wirth to fully explore his political role as an art historian at the very core of Masaryk’s project. By 1930, Wirth could consider his ambitions...
for the most part realised: “Les temps modernes et contemporains ont modifié radicalement le caractère de l’art tchécoslovaque en lui donnant sa réelle originalité et les signes distinctifs propres à la race […]” But Masaryk, in the 1936 edition of his Česká Otázka (The Czech Question), understood clearly how much Wirth’s optimistic stance became threatened in the meantime by a frightening question: “How are we going to survive as an independent nation? Our history as well as current developments are forcing us to come to a clear understanding of this question: how can a small nation survive and remain independent?”

Architectural history in the Reichsprotektorat Böhmen und Mähren
The defeat of the Central Powers and the downfall of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918 had stunned the Germans in Bohemia and Moravia even more than those of Austria and Germany, since the Czech Germans considered these events threats to their national existence. Post-war Czech-German relations did not consist in the simple exchange of the roles of the dominant and the dominated. While the Germans of the Czechoslovak Republic were a minority, they were still members of a large people, a Volk. Their strong ties with the German homeland, a neighbouring country, together with the high level of development of the Germans in the Czech area, still gave them an advantage over the small Czech community.

For the Czechs, German cultural imperialism had not only trespassed into the domain of Czech culture through the enterprise of architectural historiography, but it would soon also literally overstep the political bounds with the Nazi-Anschluß, the German invasion on 15 March 1939. As a result of diplomacy in the Darwinian way, involving the disrespect of treaties and international law, the Czechoslovak Republic had to cede Sudetenland to Germany in 1938. The Slovaks declared independence on 14 March 1939 – reading a declaration of independence mostly written by von Ribbentrop – and became a Nazi vassal state. A day later Hitler’s troops marched into Prague and the Reichsprotektorat Böhmen und Mähren was established. In a display of Nazi power, the Czechs were forced to give up literally overnight driving on the left side of the road – a metaphor for political shifts to come.

In a 1938 Feststschrift with the title Gesamtdeutsche Vergangenheit, Hans Sedlmayr saluted the Anschluß. Sedlmayr’s article, Die politische Bedeutung des deutschen Barock – Der ‘Reichsstil’, illustrated how this outstanding scholar’s “Habsburg restorationism and Romantic-Catholic hostility to the Enlightenment made an imperfect but comfortable match with National Socialism.”

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(57) Wirth, Architecra cechoslovaca, unnumbered.
(60) Callum MacDonald, Jan Kaplan, Prague in the shadow of the Swastika: a history of the German occupation, 1939-1945 (Vienna, WUV Universitätsverlag, 2001), 35-36.
The German art historian Richard Hamann had already in 1933 declared the art of the Baroque fundamentally Germanic and had connected it to the equally Germanic Gothic art. But from 1938 on, in most German art historical publications, "interpretative violence, which we prize in Riegl, Warburg, or Pächt," as Christopher Wood called it, would "converge with ideological violence." For instance, in the 1939-1940 issue of 'Deutsche Kunst und Denkmalpflege', Sedlmayr discussed the advantages of Vienna's new second city centre Hitlerstadt, to be constructed on the site of the "former Jewish quarter". In Prague, in his inaugural lecture as a professor of art history at the Deutsche Karls-Universität in 1935, Karl Maria Swoboda had already clearly stipulated the Neue Aufgaben der Kunstgeschichte (The new tasks of art history), as the title of his lecture is called. It is, the study of "the constant character of the art of a people, of a landscape, of a city". These new tasks did not require the fruits of Czech intellectual labor, for immediately after the German occupation, most of the Czech institutions of higher learning were closed and civil liberties revoked.

The 'Deutsche Verein für Kunstwissenschaften' (German Association of Art History) in Berlin formulated a special programme of research in national art, a programme that comprised a department of 'popularisation', and that mainly organised exhibitions and lectures and sponsored publications. German cultural politics financially supported historical and art historical publications series and journals such as the 'Zeitschrift für sudetendeutsche Geschichte' (Journal for Sudeten-German History), 'Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Sudetenländer' (Journal for the History of Sudenten-Germans), 'Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen' (Communications of the Association for the History of Germans in Bohemia), and 'Jahrbuch des deutschen Riesengebirgs-Vereins' (Yearbook of the German Riesengebirge Association). All of these ceased publication with the fall of the Third Reich.

Wood, The Vienna School reader, 36.
Wood, The Vienna School reader, 47.
"gleichbleibenden Charakter der Kunst eines Volkes, einer Landschaft, einer Stadt." Karl Maria Swoboda, Neue Aufgaben der Kunstgeschichte (Brno, Brünn Rohrer, 1935), 21; cited in: Janatková, Barockrezeption, 23 n50.
In the 'Zeitschrift für sudetendeutsche Geschichte', in 1941, Swoboda published under the Anschluß-friendly title *Die Kunst des deutschen Hochbarocks in Böhmen und Mähren* (The Art of the German High Baroque in Bohemia and Moravia). Swoboda was also the editor of the book series 'Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kunst in Sudeten – und Karpatenraum' (Contributions to the History of Art in the Realm of the Sudeten and the Carpathians; 1938-44), that was inaugurated with Swoboda’s own volume *Zum deutschen Anteil an der Kunst der Sudetenländer* (On the German Share in the Art of Sudetenland, 1938). Other books followed, such as those by Heinrich Gerhard Franz, to whom I will return, and Hans Hegemann’s *Die deutsche Barockbaukunst Böhmens* (Bohemia’s German Baroque Architecture).

In the same year, 1941, Swoboda also published *Prag*, a vulgarizing book “published with the support of Herrn Reichsprotektors of Bohemia and Moravia”, Hitler’s governor general Heydrich, one of the darkest figures of the Nazi regime, who was, a year later, shot by the Czech resistance. The book is a re-reading of the last ten centuries of Prague’s architectural history, a history in which “for all three phases of the development the Germans have been decisive.” The Czechs stood for all that was bad in architectural production: “Up until 1848, in its population and building, Prague is a thoroughly German city. After 1848, in this very unfavourable time in architectural history, the Czechs have gained the upper hand.” But fortunately there will be some “Anschluß to German examples and directions”.

Swoboda praises “deutschen Architekten von Rang” that had recently been working in Prague, and he names the neo-baroque Viennese architect Friedrích Ohmann, a former professor at the Prague Kunstgewerbeschule, “who was able like no other to acquire an understanding of the forms of the Prague German Baroque”. Czech authors such as Wirth, on the contrary, had formerly been pointing to Ohmann’s successful interpretation of the local, not German, baroque idiom: “Il s’en imprégna l’esprit sous sa teinte local (…)”. 

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As for the architectural production of the Baroque period itself: Swoboda mentions that after an initial period of domination by *landfremde*, or alien, architects, it was German Baroque that "gathered together onto the base of the Italian high Baroque also the contemporary building advances of the rest of the European cultural regions (...) under the German viewpoints of liberal unfolding of imagination and greater vividness."(78) Swoboda’s *Fischerozentrismus*, as both Eva Rehová and Helmut Lorenz have called it,(76) led him to see the Baroque palace building in Prague as fundamentally influenced by Fischer von Erlach. The first "einheimische Architekt" (indigenous architect) who followed Fischer’s example was Santini, who in the rest of the book is referred to as Aichel – leaving out the seemingly disturbing Italian part of his name.(77) In the other journals, Germanophone Czechs such as Beda Menzel, Adolf Schmidt and Anton Blaschka publish mostly on Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer.(78) As some fifty years earlier, Santini is mostly relegated to the margins of architectural history.

The most important scholarly publications of the period are Heinrich Gerhard Franz’s *Die Kirchenbauten des Christoph Dientzenhofer* (The Church Buildings of Christoph Dientzenhofer), published as the sixth volume in the series ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kunst im Sudeten- und Karpatenraum’(79) of 1942, his *Studien zur Barock Architektur in Böhmen und Mähren* (Studies in the Baroque Architecture in Bohemia and Moravia), and *Die deutsche Barockbaukunst Mährrens* (The German Baroque Architecture of Moravia), both of 1943.(80) The last book is part of another Swoboda-led series entitled ‘Deutschen Kunst in Böhmisch-Mährisch Raum’ (German Art in the Bohemian-Moravian Realm), itself part of a larger book project called ‘Ausstralungen der deutschen Kunst’ (Radiance of German Art), led by Wilhelm Pinder. The influential Pinder, who earlier in his career had been regarded as one of the most progressive German thinkers in the discipline, had, in 1939, expressed the hope that the removal of Jews from academe would purge art history of “der Gefahr eines allzu begrifflichen Denkens”, of the dangers of excessively conceptual thinking.(81) Franz’s introduction bluntly reveals what is at stake: “Art historical research is recognizing more and more how strong local ties, the geographic, political and ethnic connections to the land, influence artistic development. (...) The recent events have renewed our consciousness of Bohemia and Moravia as integral parts of the Reich.”(82) Follows a description of the distribution of the ‘races’ within the Bohemian and Moravian lands.(83) As for the Czech “minority”, Franz registers their complete failure at producing their own artistic character. Yet he saw a “willenlosen Aufnahmevereitschaft”, a “spineless readiness to accept” artistic developments from outside.(84) And Franz concluded: “Here
as well as throughout the East, the people who are colonising, not only as farmers, but also on an intellectual and artistic level are – one hardly needs to underline this – the Germans.\[85\] Franz recorded the presence of Italians and French architects, but he considered their formal solutions so close to the German ones “that one is inclined to consider them as completely depending on the Germans.”\[86\] Nevertheless, the most elaborate chapter of the book is dedicated to the buildings of Santini, who is presented as a “third generation eingedeutschten (thoroughly germanized) descendant of an Italian immigrant family.”\[87\] Following a seemingly Spenglerian cycle, German nationalist appropriation discourse on Santini is revitalised: Johann Santini (sic) spoke and wrote German (which is true, but so he spoke and wrote Italian and Czech, depending on whom he was addressing); he was the first of his family to ‘germanize’ his name, adding ‘Aichel’ (yet we know that the inverse is true); and hence, Santini is exemplary for how “the German artist (…) is supplanting the Italians in all artistic domains.”\[88\]

Finally for Franz, Santini contributes to the end of the hegemony of Italian builders in Prague – and he certainly has a point there – but he only does so to incorporate him in a triumphant Germandom: “Aichels idiom of forms is so obviously German and so un-Italian (…) that it hardly needs to be stated in order to ascertain the source of his art.”\[89\] As a result, the history of Baroque architecture of Bohemia and Moravia, has been purged of Czech architects, including those of Italian descent. The Czech and third generation Italian immigrant Johann Santini Aichel has evaporated into an omnipresent and triumphant Germandom.

Questions, rather than conclusions
At this point I would like to summarize what I have been exploring and identify some of the questions this material may raise – also outside of the context of early twentieth-century historiography.

We started from the study of an early eighteenth-century oeuvre that was, as I demonstrated elsewhere,\[89\] an attempt to formulate an alternative architectural idiom to the ‘official’ Jesuit-Habsburg discourse. Santini’s work demanded space for a cultural expression both inspired by the Italianate and rooted in Bohemia – in other words, it realised an acculturation of the stile all’italiana. Santini’s clients understood well that for a successful recatholization one had to make use, rather than of a well-oiled centralist and repressive Jesuit-Habsburg administration, of more subtle and locally anchored means of persuasion: “Jamais par la violence on n’entre dans les coeurs”, as Molière


\[86\] “… hat man mit vollem Recht die geringe Konstanz ihrer künstlerischen Entwicklung hervorgehoben, was bis zum völligen Fehlen einer eigenen künstlerischen Note – zeitweise auch grundsätzlich – führen kann. Immer wieder brechen von außen Schübe neuen Kunstgutes übermächtig herein und werden mit einer willenlosen Aufnahmebereitschaft empfangen.” Franz, Die deutsche Barockbaukunst Mährens, 6-7.

\[87\] “… die Menschen, die hier wie überall im Osten nicht nur als Bauern, sondern auch geistig und künstlerisch kolonisieren, sind – das braucht ja kaum betont zu werden – die Deutschen (…).” Franz, Die deutsche Barockbaukunst Mährmens, 8; my italics.

\[88\] “Es ist auch ganz eigentümlich, daß überall dort, wo in diesen Räumen (meant is the whole of Central Europe, and in particular Bohemia and Moravia) andere Menschen, Italiener oder Franzosen, auftreten und sich die freien Entwicklungs- möglichkeiten des Ostens zunutze machen, mit der Weiter- bildung ihrer angeleerten Formen in das große Formengebiet der deutschen Kunst hinüberwechseln bzw. in ihren Lösungen ihr so nahe kommen, daß man geneigt ist, sie als ihr unmit- telbar zugehörig zu betrachten.” Franz, Die deutsche Barockbaukunst Mährmens, 8.

\[89\] “… in ihm den in dritter Generation eingedeutschten Nach- kommen einer aus Italien zugewanderten Familie (…) vor uns haben.” Franz, Die deutsche Barockbaukunst Mährmens, 18; my italics. The pages on Santini are: 17-35.


had said. Much in the spirit of these early eighteenth-century convictions, Slavophile nationalists, in the outcome of 1848, understood that law (that is, Habsburg constitution) was incapable of legislating the pleasures in certain foods, the precise forms of their prayers, the fervent belief in certain saints, how people move when they dance, or the dialects they speak. They understood that “power cannot make culture.”

The project of the Czechoslovak nation, of its first president and of its architects, reflected much of these convictions and concerns. “Plecnik (was) the creator of a “language from below, (…) which (...) rejected imperial affectation and gestures”, Friedrich Achleitner wrote. In a certain sense this was close to the ‘project’ of Santini and his clients. And again, Plecnik, like Santini, could become a kind of symbolic figure for the new nation, “perhaps exactly because he was not a national (...) artist.”

But in the 1930’s, as much as Plecnik had to give up his Prague projects and leave the country under the pressure of right wing populist agitation, so we have seen Santini, in the very same years, expelled from Czech architectural history.

This brings me, not to conclusions but to some questions. Even when Zdeněk Wirth opened his 1909 article on the Baroque-gothic with a quotation of his master Alois Riegl – “the best art historian is the one who has no personal taste, because the point of art history is to find objective criteria to explain historical development” – it remains unclear to me whether, for Riegl as well as for Wirth, this was more than a

According to Christopher Wood, Riegl’s “world-historical scheme of archaic tactility gradually giving way to modern opticality (was) grounded in liberal optimism about the capacity of the freethinking subject concretized in aesthetic experience (...) to overcome obscurantism and prejudice.” Yet Riegl’s effort throughout his career to establish art history on a new, more theoretical foundation (and especially his Kunstwollen), would, in the hands of his lesser peers, turn into a mere taxonomic tool. Furthermore, while Burckhardt’s praise for the Italian spirit was a nineteenth-century humanist’s critique of current politics, Riegl tended to associate the formal sets designated by the term Kunstwollen not only with individual artists or historical epochs, but also with nations or “races”. And of Heinrich Wölfflin’s elegant and rarified concept of the Sehformen (forms of seeing), Claire Farago recalled her abrupt (and embarassing) realization that Wölfflin’s formalist categories of analysis were inextricably tied to a racial theory of cultural identity.
Is it conceivable that the abstraction from historical detail and contingency achieved by formalist analysis, made formalist art history especially vulnerable to ideological muddle? Formalist art history was, rather than related to, seemingly easily perverted into a racial theory that asserted that mental capabilities of entire peoples could be read, not only in their physical features but also out of their collective cultural achievements. It was the perverse extension of what Ernst Gombrich called the “physiognomic fallacy”, the faulty reasoning of seeing the style of a period as reflecting its Geist. As Gombrich scholar Richard Woodfield summarized, Gombrich argued that “expression was only achievable within a language and that a language could not have an expressive character of its own. At any given moment, the style in which a visual image was produced (that is, its overall characteristics which made it identifiable as being the product of a moment of culture and history) were the mechanics of its actual production. Style was not an abstract mirror to thought. Later, in his work in the Mantuan archives, Gombrich realised that a unified, and abstract, Geist did not lie behind the production of mannerist works of art; history was populated by people, with individual minds, inclinations and habits of work, not by abstractions.”

At times of invigorated nationalisms throughout Europe and the Western World, these issues seem to be worth reconsidering – in the context of our contemporary political behaviour, as much as in that of the discipline of architectural history. It may be worthwhile to remember Claire Farago’s appeal, written some twenty years ago, that “one of the greatest challenges facing the discipline of architectural history today is the challenge of remodeling our inherited notions of national culture (…), and replacing them with a dynamic model of collective identity defined in terms of diverse elements that are always in flux and, therefore (…) capable of producing more than one responsible interpretation.”

(98) Richard Woodfield, Gombrich on art and psychology (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996), 2.
(99) Farago, “Vision itself has its history”, 88.