

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The “General Science of Art”: an Impossible Science? A Path through This Almost Forgotten Discipline with the Czech Philosopher Emil Utitz (1883–1956)

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Abstract The article looks at the minorization of the “General Science of Art” (*allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*), a transdisciplinary movement that represented a very fertile laboratory for art research in the first decades of the twentieth century in German-speaking countries, before being almost erased from the history of art theory. Following in the footsteps of one of its leading figures, the Prague philosopher Emil Utitz (1883–1956), the article first looks at his biography, before examining his role in the development of the General Science of Art and the process that led to its oblivion.

Keywords: aesthetics; general science of art; minority science; systematization of art theory

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Introduction

The turn of the twentieth century represents a landmark in German aesthetics: a time when research in the arts opened many different paths, abandoning the canons of art history à la Winckelmann and challenging Hegelian as well as Kantian aesthetics. One movement plays a crucial role in this process: the so-called *Kunstwissenschaft* (“Science of Art”), a diffuse movement at first, more a way for art historians belonging to different schools² to forge a new path towards art research, distinct from philosophy, within which it was born, as well as from psychology, or from the historicist art history. Thus was created, at the beginning of the twentieth century, under the aegis of the psychologist

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2 For an overview of this movement in its diversity, see ANDREAS BAYER, DANIELE COHN, TANIA VLADOVA (eds.), *Ästhetik und Kunstwissenschaft / Esthétique et sciences de l’art, Trivium* 6/2010.

and philosopher Max Dessoir, the “General Science of Art” (die *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*),³ which specifically aimed to give this discipline a more solid conceptual foundation and a more global framework, in constant but critical dialogue with aesthetics and the philosophy of art. The term “science of art” is an oxymoron in English and seems even to be a barbarism. The great German specialist of this movement, Bernadette Collenberg-Plotnikov, proposed to translate it as “General Theory of Art” in a recent lecture in Prague.⁴ This translation is more rigorous, both from a linguistic point of view and from the point of view of the history of Anglo-Saxon aesthetics, but it has the inconvenience of overlooking the German context of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (literally “sciences of the mind”) in which the *allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* was resolutely embedded. The science of art was born within a context of great debates between natural sciences and humanities, where humanities were viewed not only as human sciences but also as “sciences of the mind.” Both Wilhelm Dilthey’s approach to the comprehensive sciences, based on “lived experience” (*Erleben*),⁵ and Rickert’s critical and neo-Kantian redefinition and overcoming of Dilthey’s approach with what he later on called “*Kulturwissenschaften*,”⁶ constituted the background of the disciplines whose objects are not simply a matter of pure (*reine*) knowledge, but of “understanding,” i.e. of a meaning that is also, and from the outset, value-laden, and an expression of the freedom of the mind, as Ernst Cassirer later coined it.⁷ The *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* definitely played a role in these debates about subjective human productions and their mode of cognition, seeking to investigate the conditions of possibility of “non-pure” historical

3 MAX DESSOIR, *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, Stuttgart 1906.

4 Bernadette Collenberg-Plotnikov, talk from February 9, 2023 at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences: “Emil Utitz, Philosophy of Art as a General Theory of Art.”

5 WILHELM DILTHEY, Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, ed. G. Misch, Leipzig 1923. On the subject see also HANS RAPPARD, Wundt and Dilthey on *Verstehen*. Two varieties of “Gentle-Meth,” *Revista de Historia de la Psicología* 5/1984, pp. 303–312.

6 HEINRICH RICKERT, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft*, Tübingen 1926.

7 ERNST CASSIRER, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. 3: *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, ed. R. Manheim, New Haven – London 1957, p. 13: “The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is not concerned exclusively or even primarily with the purely scientific exact conceiving of the world, it is concerned with all the forms assumed by man’s understanding of the world. It seeks to apprehend these forms in their diversity, in their totality, and in the inner distinctiveness of their several expressions. And at every step it happens that the ‘understanding’ of the world is no mere receiving, no repetition of a given structure of reality, but comprises a free activity of the spirit.”

objects like art, and more generally cultural and symbolical productions. To keep this background visible, I have decided to keep the expression “General Science of Art,” despite its sounding strange to English speakers.

In 2021, Bernadette Collenberg-Plotnikov published a very precise and erudite book about the main concepts, main institutions and general context of this largely forgotten discipline.⁸ The fact that this science disappeared into the ruins of the mid-twentieth century seems to bear witness to its minority status. Yet, one can ask in which sense it was a minor science. To address this question, one must first clarify what is meant to qualify a science as “minor.” Does its minority status reside in its internal shortcomings regarding a certain set of norms of what a science should be? “Minor” would then qualify a certain lability or elusiveness, a lack of methodological consistency or an incapacity to forge a robust set of concepts. Or does its minority status lie not in its objects or methodology, but rather in the historical judgment that one can cast on it *ex post*: a certain weakness of its institutions, the lack of dynamism of its field and eventually its being forgotten? When referring to the texts of the founding fathers of the General Science of Art, it does not appear, at first glance, as a minor science on those two levels. On the contrary, its very foundation anchors itself in the ambition and desire to give systematicity, strong conceptuality and clear delineation to a large-scale multifocal and transdisciplinary movement which had emerged between the history of art, aesthetics, and philosophy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in German-speaking countries. The General Science of Art is from its very beginning intended to endorse and subsume research in art history, philosophy of art and aesthetics – as well as encourage its relationships with other sciences such as the history of religion, psychology, anthropology – by providing it with a solid theoretical framework and conceptual definitions. The General Science of Art should therefore be considered less minor than its direct and more diffuse parent, the “science of art.” It is supposed to give a common ground to the different disciplines dealing with artwork, by providing them with an ontology of art on which we intend to go back.

If we take an extrinsic look and define the minority status of the science according to its importance as a field, its dynamism, and its institutions, it also seems at first glance that the General Science of Art is not an obvious candidate for the status of minor science. From 1906 until the coming to power

8 BERNADETTE COLLEBERG-PLOTNIKOV, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft (1906–1943). Idee – Institution – Kontext (Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, Sonderheft 20/2021)*.

of the National-Socialists in 1933, the *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* continued reaching an ever wider audience. The movement developed in very fruitful and dynamic institutions: a journal widely read – the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* –, in which some of the most important art historians, philosophers, sociologists and psychologists of the time wrote (such as August Schmarsow, Ernst Cassirer and Georg Simmel, to mention just a few), the very active “Vereinigung für ästhetische Forschung” (Association for Research in Aesthetics, 1908–1914), which in 1924 became the “Gesellschaft für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft” (Society for Aesthetics and General Science of Art). It organized the first international congresses of aesthetics⁹, welcoming outstanding art historians and aestheticians from all over Europe¹⁰ and bringing together up to 500 participants. From the point of view of both its program, or rather its ambition, and its institutions, the General Science of Art seemed destined for a radiant future. Unfortunately, its moment of glory was short-lived, as the *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* was minorized to such an extent that it almost completely disappeared from the historiography of art theory and art history until very recently.¹¹ What happened? Was this minorization linked to internal weaknesses, or should we understand it externally as the result of the political persecution of its principal members (who were mostly Jewish and/or opponents of Nazism)? Probably both. This article aims to provide an understanding of the rise and fall of this science by exploring the paths of a Bohemian Jewish philosopher born in Prague, Emil Utitz, who devoted two decades of his career to the structuration of this science and eventually fell with her into oblivion. Presenting this science through the career of one of its main architects helps us to understand why the general science of art remained minor despite the initial promise it offered: it was not only political persecution and historical obstacles that stood in its way, but undoubtedly certain internal weaknesses, that were paradoxically also the reason for its relative institutional success.

9 For a genealogy of these congresses, see BERNADETTE COLLEBERG-PLOTNIKOV, CAROLE MAIGNÉ, CÉLINE TRAUTMANN-WALLER (eds.), Berlin 1913 – Paris 1937. Ästhetik und Kunstwissenschaft im Zeitalter der Kongresse, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 2/2016.

10 B. COLLEBERG-PLOTNIKOV, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft (1906–1943)*, p. 215.

11 *Ibid.*

A short biography of Emil Utitz (1883–1956)

Over the past fifteen years, there has been a renewal of interest in Emil Utitz in Germany¹² and in the Czech Republic¹³ but he remains relatively unknown, and when people know about him, it is more for his organizational activities in the interwar period – as one of the founders of the so-called *Cercle philosophique pour les recherches sur l'entendement humain* for instance – or for his deportation and survival at the Theresienstadt concentration camp, than for his pre-war texts. The aim of this article is not to retrace Utitz's scientific and biographical career in all its detail¹⁴; however, it is worth recalling the major milestones in his life, which in many ways is exemplary of the extremely complex web of identities (Jewish, German, Czech, and Austro-Hungarian) in Prague at that time, before presenting his conceptual and institutional role in the General Science of Art movement.

Emil Utitz was born on May 27, 1883 into a German-speaking Jewish family in Prague¹⁵. Between 1901 and 1906, Utitz studied first and very briefly law,

- 12 REINHARD MEHRING (eds.), *Ethik nach Theresienstadt*, Würzburg 2015; GÜNTER SCHENK, REGINA MEYER, Emil Utitz, in: *Philosophisches Denken in Halle. Personen und Texte*, 3. Abteilung, *Philosophen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. G. Schenk, R. Meyer, Halle 2004; REGINA MEYER, Emil Utitz (1883–1956). Zu Leben und Werk eines halleschen Gelehrten, in: *Mitteldeutsches Jahrbuch für Kultur und Geschichte* 13/2006, pp. 127–138; UWE STREIBHARDT, Emil Utitz (1883 bis 1956). Einblicke in Leben und Werk, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Rostock* 4/1990, pp. 43–46; WOLF KARGE, Utitz, Emil, in: *Biographisches Lexikon für Mecklenburg*, Vol. 6, Rostock 2011, pp. 281–286; B. COLLEBERG-PLOTNIKOV, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft (1906–1943)*, pp. 122–142; LIANE BURKHARDT, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) – Von Wert für die Wissenschaftsgeschichte? Planung einer Studie, *Brücken. Germanistisches Jahrbuch Tschechien-Slowakei* 5/1997, pp. 139–148.
- 13 JOSEF ZUMR, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) Ästhetiker. Für den humanistischen Sinn der Kultur, in: *Prager Professoren 1938–1948. Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik*, eds. M. Gletter, A. Mišková, Praha 2001, pp. 237–248; DANIELA ŘEPOVÁ: Emil Utitz a Terezín, in: *Terezínské studie a dokumenty 2003*, eds. J. Milotová, E. Lorencová, Praha 2003, pp. 169–211, TEREZA MATĚJČKOVÁ, Surviving the Holocaust: Emil Utitz's "As-If Technique," *The European Legacy* 4/2020, pp. 438–454.
- 14 The philosopher's biography, particularly during the years of Nazi persecution and his deportation, has been the subject of several pieces of academic research. See among others REINHARD MEHRING (ed.), *Philosophie im Exil. Emil Utitz, Arthur Liebert und die Exilzeitschrift Philosophia. Dokumentation zum Schicksal zweier Holocaust-Opfer*, Würzburg 2018; D. ŘEPOVÁ, Emil Utitz a Terezín, pp. 169–211.
- 15 Here a widespread mistake concerning Utitz's birthplace should be corrected. The birth certificate preserved in Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, Prague, Archiv Akademie věd České republiky (hereafter MÚA, A AV ČR), f. Utitz Emil, Ia) 1, 1904–1947 s.d. Rodný list, attests that Utitz was born in Prague, as do the few autobiographical pages Utitz left. Yet, in the German

then art history and archaeology in Munich, and then mainly philosophy in Prague, except for one semester of psychology in Leipzig. This interdisciplinary curriculum had a major influence on the way he considered both art and science and their possible interconnection. He defended his PhD thesis in aesthetics in Prague in 1906, under the tutelage of Christian von Ehrenfels. Having met Franz Brentano for the first time during that same year, he numbered from then on among the participants in the “Brentanian circle” that gathered at Café Louvre (and among whom were also Christian von Ehrenfels, Oskar Kraus, Hugo Bergmann, Franz Kafka, and Max Brod).¹⁶ In 1908, Utitz converted to Christianity. Although he later said he had converted for spiritual reasons,¹⁷ he was also strongly encouraged to do so by his mentor, Brentano.¹⁸ As Jan Surman recalled in his study of the academic system in the Austrian Empire,¹⁹ the situation for Jewish scholars was hardly more enviable in Vienna or Prague than in Berlin, although there were strong differences between Austrian Catholic anti-Semitism and Pan-Germanic anti-Semitism,²⁰ at least until they colluded at the very end of the nineteenth century and during the first decades of the twentieth. Jews had little choice but to convert to Christianity if they wanted to have an academic career. However, even such a conversion did not guarantee that they would cease to suffer from

literature about the philosopher, we can very often read that he was born in Roztoky u Prahy (see, for example, the biographical medallion in GÜNTER SCHENK, REGINA MEYER, *Philosophisches Denken in Halle. Personen und Texte*, Vol. III: *Ästhetische und kulturphilosophische Denkweisen*, Halle 2004, p. 53). This mistake probably comes from the German Certificate of Discharge [*Entlassungsurkunde*] of October 18, 1934 by which Utitz – already threatened by the national-socialists – abandoned German citizenship to regain Czechoslovak citizenship. This document, headed “Deutsches Reich,” states the following: “Der Universitätsprofessor Herr Dr. Emil Utitz in Rostoky b. Prag, geboren am 27. Mai 1883 in Prag [...] sowie seine Ehefrau Ottilie geborene Schwarzkopf haben mit dem Zeitpunkt der Aushändigung dieser Urkunde die Reichsangehörigkeit durch Entlassung verloren”, MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, I.a) 7, 1934 Jednání o (znovu) udělení československého občanství. Utitz lived at the time in Roztoky u Prahy, which may explain why this mistake started spreading.

- 16 For more details about the gathering of this group, see EMIL UTITZ, *Erinnerungen an Franz Brentano*, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin Luther Universität Halle Wittenberg* 1/1954, pp. 73–90.
- 17 Národní archiv, Prague (hereafter NA), f. MV-SR, k. 6593, sign. 9/55/42. See also D. ŘEPOVÁ, *Emil Utitz a Terezín*, p. 172.
- 18 GUILLAUME FRECHETTE, Bergman and Brentano, in: *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School*, ed. U. Kriegel, London – New York 2017, p. 323.
- 19 JAN SURMAN, *Universities in Imperial Austria, 1848–1918. A Social History of Multilingual Space*, West Lafayette 2019.
- 20 *Ibid.*, see especially chapter 6, pp. 222–224.

ethnic anti-Semitism, and they were often considered as “Matrikelchristen”²¹ (Christians on paper). In that context, Franz Brentano had convinced three of his students – Edmund Husserl, Oskar Kraus and Emil Utitz – to abandon the Jewish faith and convert to Protestantism. Indeed, they were the only three among his Jewish students who were able to pursue an academic career in German institutions.²² Although Utitz claimed that his conversion was an act of faith, made from the heart in the Pascalian sense, his friend Arnold Zweig saw it retrospectively as an act forced by social and political circumstances “to the dishonor of times.”²³

In 1910, Utitz obtained his habilitation to teach (*venia legendi*) in Germany in Rostock with the support of the psychologist and philosopher Max Dessoir, with whom he started a long and fruitful collaboration, and he began teaching philosophy as a *Privatdozent*. During the war, Utitz obtained the right not to be called up to fight, as a *Privatdozent*, and became *außerordentlicher Professor* in 1916.²⁴ During that time, Rostock University did not have a chair of Art history and Utitz’s lectures on Aesthetics and the Science of art were very popular amongst students. Utitz was also active as an art critic. He wrote for journals such as *Kunst und Künstler*, and was even on the editorial board of *Kunst und Dekoration* (Darmstadt) from 1908 to 1921.²⁵ The year 1918 was disastrous in every respect; Utitz lost his mother (who died on December 11, 1918) as well as his motherland, as the Austro-Hungarian Empire broke up. Basing her study on Utitz’s private correspondence,²⁶ Liane Burkhardt has shown that the fall of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918 was a traumatizing event for the scholar. Far from welcoming the first Czechoslovak Republic, he was concerned the new regime would become a threat to Bohemian Germans and he feared the

21 Ibid., p. 223.

22 As Jan Surman has shown, in Austria, the conversion to Christianity did not imply that Jews would be freed from the anti-Semitic prejudices the Catholics had towards them and would be considered “Christians.” “In the late nineteenth century, Jewish converts to Catholicism or Protestantism were still referred to as Jews, and many saw themselves as such, despite their change of confession.” Ibid., p. 222.

23 LIANE BURKHARDT, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) als „auslandsdeutscher“ Hochschullehrer an den reichsdeutschen Universitäten in Rostock und Halle, *Brücken – Germanistisches Jahrbuch Tschechien Slowakei* 1–2/1999, p. 197.

24 MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, 3. sl. 23, patent z 28. února 1916.

25 D. ŘEPOVÁ, Emil Utitz a Tereziín, p. 172.

26 Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe (hereafter GLA), N Andreas/835, Letter from Emil Utitz to Willy Andreas (October 29, 1918), quoted by L. BURKHARDT, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) als „auslandsdeutscher“ Hochschullehrer, pp. 187–189.

“Czech Bolshevik plebs²⁷” would seize power. In response both to the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the German defeat, L. Burkhardt has argued Utitz threw himself into feverish German patriotism, believing that Germany and Europe in general needed to be morally and spiritually renewed, and that art and culture – culture understood as *Bildung* – should play a central role, and she has underlined the fact that his patriotic illusions were very soon shattered, crashing against the reality of a country obsessed with the purity of its citizens, which made Utitz soon withdraw from any nationalism.²⁸ Still willing to “sing the Song of Songs of German Art and Culture,” he now despised “nationalistic narrow-mindedness.”²⁹ He could already see and fiercely condemned what German nationalism could or would lead to, harshly criticizing, for instance, Oswald Spengler’s *Untergang des Abendlandes*.³⁰ L. Burkhardt also recalls that Utitz did not consider himself Austrian, but German from the outside (*Auslandsdeutscher*) uprooted from his native Prague, and that like many Germans from Bohemia, and despite his efforts to assimilate in Rostock, Utitz was constantly considered in the context of euphoric German patriotism as a foreigner, at best as an “Austrian.” Even Max Dessoir, who was a very close colleague of his and had been his mentor, said in his Memoirs of Utitz and his wife Otilie that they were, by their language as much as by their manners, “among the Austrians of the best kind.”³¹ After the Second World War, in an autobiographical text, Utitz said their “attempts to be regarded as Germans of the empire (*Reichsdeutscher*) had always remained illusions.”³² Nevertheless, some of Utitz’s later texts make the philosopher’s relationship with his Germanness somewhat more complex. In the book he devoted to the journalist Egon Erwin Kisch, Utitz looks back at the German-speaking Jewish community in Prague in which he was born and grew up, and shows how this community differed from Sudeten Germans and Bohemians in general. He describes the Jewish-German Prague as “a small island”³³ lost in a sea of Czechs (95% of the total inhabitants of Prague at the time, according to him), and above all “despised” as well as “envied” by the Germans from the provinces. In short: threatened from all sides. This clearly tempers the German

27 L. BURKHARDT, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) als „auslandsdeutscher“ Hochschullehrer, p. 188.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 197.

29 GLA, N Andreas/835, EMIL UTITZ, Postcard to Willy Andreas (March 10, 1921).

30 L. BURKHARDT, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) als „auslandsdeutscher“ Hochschullehrer, p. 198.

31 MAX DESSOIR, *Buch der Erinnerung*, Stuttgart 1946, p. 165.

32 L. BURKHARDT, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) als „auslandsdeutscher“ Hochschullehrer, p. 206.

33 EMIL UTITZ, *Egon Erwin Kisch, der klassische Journalist*, Berlin 1956, p. 32.

patriotic enthusiasm that Utitz had expressed in the letter to Willy Andreas in 1918. Besides, as one of his former students testified after his professor's death, Utitz was at the time a fervent democrat, regularly meeting up with students belonging to all the democratic currents on the left of the political spectrum ("from the Spartacists to the Social Democrats and the Majority Social Democratic Party").³⁴ His German patriotism – already extremely critical, as shown by his interpretation of the Prague Jewish community's situation – never turned into nationalism.

If Emil Utitz and his wife never succeeded in being *considered* fully German, after having lived and worked for 10 years in Rostock, they officially became German citizens in 1924³⁵ and Utitz was appointed ordinary professor at the University of Halle-Wittenberg on the 3rd of November 1925, where he taught Aesthetics and Psychology for eight years. Still in Rostock, contemplating the social difficulties in Mecklenburg³⁶ and feeling more and more the dangers of the rise of an aggressive nationalism, Utitz abandoned the ideal of the Germanness he had associated with *Bildung* and turned towards internationalist socialism. His commitment to leftist humanism was directly reflected in innovative teaching methods³⁷ that he also implemented in Halle after becoming an ordinary professor there. Breaking away from the frontal and vertical relationship with students traditionally associated with the Professorship at university, Utitz organized evening seminars where students and professors could present their research in progress and engage in dialogue in a less formal setting than lectures, which also encouraged them to experiment. This is also when he took a more important role in the *allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* project. Being a member of the aesthetic society founded by Dessoir in 1908, Utitz published a large number of articles in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* from 1910 onwards. In 1927, he chaired the committee responsible for organizing the Congress of Aesthetics and Science of Art in Halle, the general theme of which was "Rhythm and Symbol." The organization of the conference was meticulous, and its scientific lectures were complemented by a rich artistic program, including concerts,

34 MAX SCHROEDER, Gedenken an Emil Utitz, *Sonntag* December 9, 1956, p. 7.

35 MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, I.a) 4, Propouštěcí osvědčení z československého občanství, 1924.

36 MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, I.c) 17 Vlastní životopis, 1948.

37 L. BURKHARDT, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) als „auslandsdeutscher“ Hochschullehrer, pp. 200–201. See also Max Schroeder's testimony, M. SCHROEDER, Gedenken an Emil Utitz, *Sonntag* December 9, 1956, p. 7.

operas and visits to artists' workshops and private collections.³⁸ The congress was a great success, with 431 participants from all over Germany, as well as Vienna, Prague, Graz, Budapest and Bern.

Not yet a decade after his *Ordinariat*, Utitz was hit by the national-socialist anti-Semitic "Civil Service Restoration Act" ["Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums"] decreed on April 7, 1933 and he was forced to retire prematurely from the University of Halle-Wittenberg in September 1933.³⁹ As Utitz retrospectively mentioned in an important text, *Německo mezi včerejškem a zítřkem*⁴⁰ ("Germany between Yesterday and Tomorrow"), when he was forced to retire from the university in 1933, Hitlerism had not yet reached the ranks of university professors, especially not in Halle, but was merely a rumbling among students. The letter that the dean of the University of Halle sent to Utitz⁴¹ bears witness to the emotion and the extremely complicated situation of the teaching community towards the banning of their Jewish colleagues.

Utitz had never lost contact with his homeland⁴² and decided to come back to his hometown Prague, where he was appointed an *ordentlicher Professor* at the German University in July 1934⁴³ and regained Czechoslovak citizenship on the initiative of the President of the First Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, on October 26, 1934.⁴⁴ However, he was very soon prevented from working freely, as anti-Semitism rose at the German University of Prague, too. Utitz invested his energy in intellectual circles outside academia, notably the *Cercle philosophique pour les recherches sur l'entendement humain*

38 CAROLE MAIGNÉ, Dessoir, Utitz, Frankl. Kunstwissenschaft, histoire et culture. Débats théoriques au sein du Congrès de 1927, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 2/2016, p. 254.

39 MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, I. a) 5 1925–1934, Jednání o habilitaci a profesuře na universitě v Halle-Wittenbergu.

40 EMIL UTITZ, *Německo mezi včerejškem a zítřkem*, Praha 1948.

41 MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, I. a) 5 1925–1934, Jednání o habilitaci a profesuře na universitě v Halle-Wittenbergu, letter from October 25, 1933. Also see J. ZUMR, Emil Utitz (1883–1956) Ästhetiker, pp. 242–243.

42 See, for instance, Utitz's correspondence with the "Deutsche Gesellschaft Wissenschaften und Künste für die Tschechoslowakische Republik" in 1927, MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, I.a) 6, 1927, Deutsche Gesellschaft Wissenschaften und Künste für die Tschechoslowakische Republik – volba korespondenčním členem.

43 MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, I a) 7.

44 Ibid.

(also known as *Pražský filosofický kroužek*)⁴⁵ which he had co-founded with Jan Blahoslav Kozák, and he took an active part in the sessions of the *Cercle linguistique de Prague* (*Pražský lingvistický kroužek*, founded by Jan Mukařovský in 1926).⁴⁶ During the First Czechoslovak Republic, *de facto* anti-Semitism – which, alas, had a long history – contrasted with the official policy implemented by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and his government, which sought on the contrary to treat Jews as a minority with specific rights and in need of protection, allowing them to choose Jewish nationality as their nationality from 1918 onwards, and encouraging discussions on questions of nationality, religion and freedom of worship through the creation of the Jewish National Council (*Židovská národní rada*).⁴⁷ However, these efforts were reflected less and less in the general atmosphere between the communities, and from the crisis of 1929 in particular, German-speaking Jews in Bohemia suffered a double ostracism: from the Czech majority, as Germans and Jews, and from the German minority as Jews.⁴⁸ From the annexation of the Sudetenland under the Munich Agreement in 1938, anti-Semitism crystallized into official policy, and Jews were progressively and “legally” persecuted in every aspect of their existence, banned from social and political life. The German University in Prague was taken over by the Reich’s Administration in August 1939⁴⁹. But Jewish scholars had already been forced to retire from their teaching duties at university in January 1939, a provisory decision that was turned into a definitive one on February 2, 1940. For the second time in six years, Utitz was forced to give up his position in a German university for being a Jew. He eventually got a visa to travel to Oxford,⁵⁰ but on the planned day, May 5, 1939,

45 The activities of the Circle were gathered in a Journal edited by the neo-Kantian philosopher Arthur Liebert who, like Utitz, was forced into exile by the Nazis in 1933 and went to Belgrade. See ARTHUR LIEBERT (ed.), *Philosophia, Philosophorum nostri temporis vox universa* 2/1936.

46 PETER STEINER (ed.), *The Prague School. Selected Writings, 1929–1946*, Austin 2014; on the influence of Utitz on Mukařovský see JAN MUKAŘOVSKÝ, Ästhetische Funktion, Norm, und ästhetischer Wert als soziale Fakten, in: Idem, *Kapitel aus der Ästhetik*, Frankfurt a. M. 1970, p. 9.

47 KATEŘINA ČAPKOVÁ, *Češi, Němci, Židé? Národní identita Židů v Čechách 1918–1938*, Praha – Litomyšl, 2005, p. 27.

48 ALENA MÍŠKOVÁ, Antisemitismus německé menšiny v českých zemích ve 30. a na počátku 40. let, in: *Fenomén holocaust. The holocaust phenomenon. Sborník mezinárodní vědecké konference. Praha – Terezín 6.–8. října 1999*, Praha 2000, pp. 68–70.

49 ALENA MÍŠKOVÁ, Německá univerzita za druhé světové války, in: *Dějiny Univerzity Karlovy*, Vol. IV: 1918–1990, eds. J. Havránek, Z. Pousta, Praha 1998, pp. 213–218.

50 MÚA, A AV ČR f. Utitz Emil, Ia) 11, 1939 Britské vstupní vizum.

he and his wife couldn't fly due to bad weather⁵¹ and they remained trapped in Prague.

They were both deported to the Theresienstadt (Terezín) concentration camp on July 30, 1942 under transport numbers AAV 266 and AAV 267. The Terezín fortress had started being used as a concentration camp by the Nazis in 1941.⁵² It had been conceived as a transit camp to the death camps of Auschwitz and Treblinka or to forced-labor camps in Poland, Belarus and the Baltic states, but very soon, it also served as a major propaganda tool for the national-socialist administration: the camp was supposed to appear like a self-administrated⁵³ Jewish ghetto,⁵⁴ with a library, a theatre, orchestras and a cultural and scientific life, where elderly Jews could rest⁵⁵ and take care of their community. The reality behind this simulacrum was terrible, and of the 141,000 men, women and children deported to Theresienstadt before April 1945, about 33,000 died of ill-treatment, hunger, disease or were summarily executed, and over 88,000 were taken to Auschwitz or Treblinka, where they were murdered. Only about 17,000 deportees who went through Theresienstadt before April 1945 survived.⁵⁶ Emil and Ottilie Utitz were among them.

In 1942, shortly after the couple was deported, the Nazi administration created a new category of deportees – the *Prominenten*⁵⁷ – endowed with

51 D. ŘEPOVÁ, Emil Utitz a Terezín, p. 181.

52 See HANS-GÜNTHER ADLER, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945, das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* [1955], Göttingen 2012, written by a former deportee and which is still considered a reference monograph for understanding the complexity of the Terezín concentration camp over the five years of its existence. Nevertheless, Utitz was highly critical of Adler's theses. He published a review of the book in 1955, criticizing his fellow inmate's careless treatment of non-Jewish sources, and defending the moral integrity of certain members of the Council of Elders against Adler's attacks. See R. MEHRING, *Ethik nach Theresienstadt*, pp. 115–126.

53 On the actual power of the Jewish council under the Nazi pressure in Theresienstadt, see LISA HAULFF, *Zur politischen Rolle von Judenräten. Benjamin Murmelstein in Wien 1938–1942*, Göttingen 2014, and ANNA HYNDRÁKOVÁ, RAISA MACHATKOVÁ, JAROSLAVA MILOTOVÁ (eds.), *Denní rozkazy Rady starších a Sdělení židovské samosprávy Terezín 1941–1945*, Praha 2003.

54 See PETER KLEIN, Terezín: ghetto, nebo koncentrační tábor?, in: *Terezínské studie a dokumenty 2005*, ed. J. Milotová, Praha 2005, pp. 100–111.

55 See LUDMILA CHLÁDKOVÁ, *Terezínské ghetto*. Praha 1991; but also SABINE ZEITOUN, DOMINIQUE FOUCHER, *Le masque de la barbarie. Le ghetto de Theresienstadt 1941–1945*, Lyon 1998; JELENA MAKAROVA, SERGEI MAKAROV, VICTOR KUPERMAN, *Univerzita přežití. Osvětová a kulturní činnost v terezínském ghettu, 1941–1945*. Praha 2002.

56 <https://www.holocaust.cz/dejiny/ghetto-terezin/bilance/>, 23 August 2019 [13.12.2024], see also MIROSLAV KÁRNÝ, *Terezínská pamětní kniha*, Praha 1995.

57 RUTH BONDY, Prominenti až do odvolání, in: *Terezínské studie a dokumenty 1998*, eds. M. Kárný, M. Kárná, E. Lorencová, Praha 1998, pp. 187–204.

a few privileges,⁵⁸ who had “become to some extent the counterweight of the Jewish self-government and the council of elders, which had until then had the final say in the ghetto.”⁵⁹ This category was intended as a tool to cover Nazi crimes after the war,⁶⁰ but also to invoke the envy and hatred of the rest of the deportees and discourage any collective resistance.⁶¹ Emil Utitz, as a former university professor, was considered a prominent person in “B” category (chosen by the Elderly council and not by the SS organs) as was his wife Otilie.⁶² He was appointed director of the ghetto library⁶³ and took an active part in the organization of scientific conferences and other cultural events that tried to give dignity to what he called a “provisorisches Dasein.” After the war, he tried to analyze this ‘as-if’ (*als ob*) existence in his *Psychologie des Lebens im Konzentrationslager Theresienstadt*.⁶⁴

After the liberation of the camp, where he stayed until August 1945 in order to protect the library and pass it on to the Jewish Museum in Prague,⁶⁵ Utitz was one of the very few surviving Bohemian Jews who decided to return to Prague and live there. He was forced to prove his good behavior during the war,

58 As Ruth Bondy (aforementioned) and Michael Wögerbauer have shown (see MICHAEL WÖGERBAUER, Prominentní vězňové Gutmannovi a diplomatické snahy o jejich osvobození, in: *Terezínské studie a dokumenty 2001*, eds. M. Kárný, J. Milotová, E. Lorencová, Praha 2001, pp. 200–214) these privileges were also arbitrary, and were no guarantee against “transport to the East” (a terrible metonymy which qualified deportation to the death camps of Auschwitz, Birkenau, or Treblinka).

59 HELENA KREJČOVÁ, ANNA HYNDRÁKOVÁ, JANA SVOBODOVÁ (eds.), *Prominenti v ghettu Terezín, 1942–1945*, Praha 1996, p. 121.

60 D. ŘEPOVÁ, Emil Utitz a Terezín, pp. 182–183.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

63 On the importance of the ghetto library in Theresienstadt, see MIRIAM INTRATOR, “People were literally starving for any kind of reading.” The Theresienstadt Ghetto Central Library, 1942–1945, *Library Trends* 3/2007, pp. 513–522. On Emil Utitz’s more specific role see KARL BRAUN, Die Bibliothek in Theresienstadt, 1942–1945. Zur Rolle einer Leseinstitution in der „Endlösung der Judenfrage“, *Bohemia* 2/1999, p. 380.

64 The book was first translated and published in Czech (EMIL UTITZ, *Psychologie života v terezínském koncentračním táboře*, Praha 1947) before the German (original) version could be published one year later by an Austrian publisher (EMIL UTITZ, *Psychologie des Lebens im Konzentrationslager Theresienstadt*, Wien 1948). Utitz’s other texts of the period have been edited lately by REINHARD MEHRING (ed.), *Ethik nach Theresienstadt*, Würzburg 2015. On Utitz’s philosophical approach to his own deportation experience, see T. MATĚJČKOVÁ, Surviving the Holocaust, pp. 438–454.

65 D. ŘEPOVÁ, Emil Utitz a Terezín, p. 195.

as well as, after 1948, his faith and faithfulness in/to the Communist regime.⁶⁶ He worked from 1952 onwards at the young Department of Philosophy of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences,⁶⁷ until he unexpectedly died on November 2, 1956, while he was giving a series of conferences in Germany. Just after his sudden death, many condolences and expressions of friendship from leading scholars (Roman Ingarden and Jan Patočka, for instance) were sent to his wife. But the name of Emil Utitz fell into oblivion soon afterwards. Despite having been an important figure in the intellectual circles of the 1930s, and before that, one of the most active members of the General Science of Art movement, he became a minor figure.

Utitz and the Foundation of the “General Science of Art”

In the second part of this article, I would like to go back to the interwar period, during which Utitz devoted himself primarily to the conceptual foundation of the “General Science of Art” mainly in a two-volume monograph entitled *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft*,⁶⁸ but also in *Die Gegenständlichkeit des Kunstwerks* (1917), and in several articles published in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*.⁶⁹ As I recalled in a note in the introduction, this project was baptized by Max Dessoir in his 1906 book: *Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*.⁷⁰ Before he became a cornerstone of the General Science of Art project, Utitz devoted himself to aesthetics from a psychological angle, influenced by Brentano. His early work focused on the theory of colors, and on what he called the “functional emotions” in his habilitation thesis.⁷¹ The idea that art cannot be reduced to aesthetics was inspired by his reading of Gottfried Semper.⁷² This idea grew stronger and

66 MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, I.a) 13, 1945–1948, *Řízení o potvrzení bezúhonného chování manželům Utitzových za války; I.a) 15, 1948, Osvědčení o účasti v národním boji za osvobození*. On November 10, 1948, Utitz was recognised as a “political prisoner” who had taken part in the liberation of the Czech nation.

67 MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, 3/23; J. ZUMR, Emil Utitz Ästhetiker, p. 247.

68 EMIL UTITZ, *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft*, Vol. I–II, Stuttgart 1914–1920.

69 See among others: EMIL UTITZ, *Das Problem einer allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft*, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16/1922, pp. 433–451; IDEM, *Zum Schaffen des Künstlers*, *ibid.* 18/1925, pp. 59–70; or IDEM, *Der Charakter des Künstlers*, *ibid.* 19/1925, pp. 130–142.

70 M. DESSOIR, *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*.

71 EMIL UTITZ, *Die Funktionsfreuden im ästhetischen Verhalten*, Halle 1911.

72 Gottfried Semper had developed a theory of style that included consideration of the artwork’s medium properties, of the cultural context and other historical functions, which contrasted

met Max Dessoir's desire to forge a science parallel to aesthetics that would take account of the fact, central to the initiative, that aesthetic is not identical with art, and that would combine the precise knowledge of works offered by art history with the universality of the philosophical concept. Nevertheless, the difficulties that this science faced from the outset were not unrelated to those that had confronted Alexander Baumgarten's aesthetics⁷³, although both Utitz and Dessoir sought to carve out a path that would not be reduced to that opened by Baumgarten. These difficulties have to do with the desire to constitute an "objective" science based on a sensitive and historical subject (art), and therefore necessarily *a posteriori*. In his *Philosophy of Enlightenment*, Ernst Cassirer summed up the problem posed by Baumgartenian aesthetics as follows:

For is not sense knowledge, according to a terminology which Baumgarten adopts, the realm of the confused and indistinct, in other words, of the opposite of pure knowledge, since this realm is impenetrable to knowledge? And can aesthetics maintain its rank and dignity as a science if it is confined to this humble sphere?⁷⁴

As Cassirer showed, the solution provided by Baumgarten – and prolonged in particular by Konrad Fiedler,⁷⁵ who was regarded by Utitz as the pioneer of the General Science of Art precisely because of his strict differentiation of art from the aesthetic – consisted not in lowering science to the region of the sensible, thereby endangering science itself, but in lifting the sensible to the dignity of an object of knowledge, a knowledge based on the exemplarity of the particular, which attains a certain universality, and not based on a *a priori* concepts. Dessoir and Utitz undoubtedly inherited Baumgarten's baptism of aesthetics, but whereas Baumgarten had wanted to produce a "science of sensibility," the fathers of the General Science of Art intended to go beyond aesthetics. As Dessoir wrote:

with the pure historicist or aesthetic approach of art. GOTTFRIED SEMPER, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Ästhetik*, Frankfurt am Main 1860.

73 ALEXANDER BAUMGARTEN, *Aesthetica*, impens. I.C. Kleyb, 1750. For the English translation: JOSEPH TANK, COLIN MCQUILLAN (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Aesthetics*, New York – London 2012, and on the topic: COLIN MCQUILLAN (ed.), *Baumgarten's Aesthetics. Historical and Philosophical Perspectives*, Lanham 2021.

74 ERNST CASSIRER, *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*, Princeton 1951, p. 340.

75 KONRAD FIEDLER, *Über den Ursprung der künstlerischen Tätigkeit* [1896], Grafath 2016.

The aesthetic moment does not exhaust the content and the purpose of that field of human production which we call ‘art’. Every true work of art is extraordinarily composed in terms of motifs and effects; it does not merely arise from aesthetic playfulness and does not merely strive for aesthetic pleasure, let alone for pure beauty. The needs and powers in which art has its existence are by no means exhausted by the calm pleasure that tradition has characterized the aesthetic impression and the aesthetic object. In truth, the arts have a function in spiritual and social life through which they are connected with our entire knowledge and will.⁷⁶

The aim of the General Science of Art was then to investigate the “content” and the “purposes” of artworks, as well as their “functions in spiritual and social life,” which essentially implied a transdisciplinary approach. The “great fact of art,” was to be conceived inside a network of determinations, some of which should be explored by sociology, others by the different disciplines attached to each art (musicology, art history, etc.), others by anthropology or by psychology, which further increases the difficulties as to the possible unity of method of such a science. Thus distinguishing between art science and aesthetics, the project conceived by Dessoir had a twofold objective:

- On the one hand, to reflect on the conditions of possibility, but also on the historical conditions that made art possible, on its functions in human life and on the factors determining artistic creation;

- On the other hand, to develop a discipline capable of subsuming the results obtained by the particular sciences linked to each art (musicology, literary studies, art history, etc.).

As Reinold Schmücker⁷⁷ and Bernadette Collenberg-Plotnikov⁷⁸ have argued, Dessoir remained at the programmatic level and did not fulfill the program he had set himself. It was Utitz who took on the difficult task of giving conceptual systematicity to the general science of art.

Not only was the methodology of such a transdisciplinary science a considerable challenge, but the object of the science itself – art as this “very complex cultural product” (Utitz) – was subject at the very beginning of the

76 M. DESSOIR, *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, pp. 4–5.

77 REINOLD SCHMÜCKER, *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft. Zur Aktualität eines historischen Projekts*, in: *Kunstgrenzen. Funktionsräume der Ästhetik in Moderne und Post-moderne*, eds. A. Bolterauer, E. Wiltschnigg, Vienna 2001, pp. 53–68.

78 BERNADETTE COLLEBERG-PLOTNIKOV, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft (1906–1943)*, pp. 123–124.

twentieth century to extremely rapid transformations, to a totally unprecedented increase in its field of application, and to mutations in all directions under the effect of the avant-gardes and modernism. The French art historian Raymond Bayer summed up this problem in his review of the 1937 Paris Congress of Aesthetics and of the General Science of Art as follows: “In art, there is certainly a ferment of revolution in taste that indirectly affects aesthetics: two or three times a century, it is forced to represent its problems differently, to revise its principles, to recast its theory.”⁷⁹ With the upheavals introduced by modernity, particularly the avant-gardes – Utitz was very close to the Bauhaus artists during his years as a teacher in Halle⁸⁰ –, the whole structure of art history was affected and its boundaries were called into question. Where was the unity of the General Science of art to be found then, if its object as well as its methodology were plural and continuously changing?

The Impossible Unity of the General Science of Art

Overall, the General Science of Art was resolutely embedded in the sciences of the mind as they were defined and separated from the sciences of nature by Dessoir’s teacher Dilthey, i.e. as sciences based on an *understanding* of the particular, relying on the singularity of the historical and which do not seek to generalize, except by means of an exemplary singularity. Utitz quotes in that respect Dilthey’s *Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*: “The basis of the human sciences is not conceptualization but the reflexive awareness of a psychic state in its wholeness and its rediscovery in re-experiencing. Here life grasps life [...]”⁸¹ Although Utitz refers in several places to Dilthey, he refuses to make psychology the mother of the General Science of Art, he does not want the artwork to be a mere stimulus for the reflection of subjective life. He seeks to produce an ontology of the artwork, before the phenomenologist Roman Ingarden does so⁸². What kind of being is

79 RAYMOND BAYER, Le II^e Congrès International d’esthétique et de science de l’art (Paris, 7–11 août 1937), *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 1/1938, p. 161.

80 J. ZUMR, Emil Utitz, Ästhetiker, p. 240. See also MIROSLAV MÍČKO, O Emilu Utitzovi, in: EMIL UTITZ, *Dějiny estetiky*, Praha 1968, pp. 113–114.

81 E. UTITZ, *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft* II, p. 263, quote of W. DILTHEY, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Berlin 1910, p. 66. For the English translation see W. DILTHEY, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences, Selected works vol III*, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel, Frithjof Rodi, Princeton 2002, p. 157,

82 In his major work of 1931, Roman Ingarden develops a conception of the literary work that distinguishes several ontological layers (Schichten). (ROMAN INGARDEN, *Das literarische*

the artwork? What is its mode of existence? Utitz is influenced by the Munich phenomenology debates⁸³, by those phenomenologists who were first disciples of Theodor Lipps's theories of *Einfühlung* (empathy) before amending it through the critical reading of Husserl and starting an original "phenomenological aesthetics." But again, Utitz, like Dessoir, tries to pave his own way by refusing to approach the work of art as a pure intentional phenomenon (as Ingarden later did), remaining focused on the objectivity of the work, this object that is constantly undergoing a *Gestaltwechsel*, and must therefore be considered as a becoming rather than as an object⁸⁴.

The search for unity of this multiply layered discipline should be conducted at the level of the ontology of the artwork: the definition of the essence of the artwork should form the basis of the general science of art, after which it can be examined from multiple angles. Already in the first tome of his *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft* in 1914, Utitz asserts: "The form of art, its structure (*Gestaltung*), is directly pushing towards a grasp of feeling; it is a representation of values aimed at awakening an emotional experience."⁸⁵ A few years later, he crystallizes this intuition in the following definition: "Art is the creation on the basis of an emotional and sensible experience (*Gefühlserleben*) of such a kind that the meaning of the creation is revealed in an emotional and sensible experience."⁸⁶ This call to an "emotional and sensitive experience" that appears as the touchstone of art, is embedded in both the Baumgartenian and the Diltheyan heritage that we have recalled, i.e. in the idea that art gives us access to an incarnated form of knowledge, something that cannot be grasped and circumscribed by discursive and conceptual thinking. In that sense, Karel Svoboda was right to emphasize that Utitz's approach is everything

Kunstwerk, Halle 1931). Such a polystratic conception had already been sketched out by Emil Utitz in 1917 and 1920 (EMIL UTITZ, *Die Gegenständlichkeit des Kunstwerks*, Berlin 1917; IDEM, *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft II*, Stuttgart 1920).

83 Utitz started his studies of Law in Munich in 1901, but under the influence of Theodor Lipps, whose seminars he attended, he decided to change the subject of his studies and turned towards philosophy of Art and Aesthetics. He was in relationship with Moritz Geiger and probably with the rest of the so-called Munich school of phenomenology, which around the same time was discovering Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (EDMUND HUSSERL, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vols. 1–2, Halle 1900–1901).

84 C. MAIGNÉ, Dessoir, Utitz, Frankl, pp. 257–258.

85 E. UTITZ, *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft I*, p. 64; "Die Form der Kunst, ihre Gestaltung, drängt nun unmittelbar auf ein Gefühlserfassen; sie ist die auf Erweckung eines Gefühlserlebens zielende Darstellung von Werten."

86 E. UTITZ, *Die Gegenständlichkeit des Kunstwerks*, p. 8.

but a “romantic” and “mystical” aesthetics.⁸⁷ Utitz condemned these paths as examples of subjective and vague *Schwärmerei* and sought, exactly on the contrary, to build an objective and scientific discipline. Producing before Roman Ingarden and Erwin Panofsky the very first polystratic theory of the work of art, he set out to identify the five conditions of possibility for the work of art: 1) the medium (*Material*), 2) the layer of being or ontological layer (*Seinsschicht*), 3) the mode of presentation (*Darstellungsweise*), 4) the value of presentation (*Darstellungswert*), and 5) the artistic attitude (*Kunstverhalten*)⁸⁸. Strikingly, none of these categories involves a judgment about the aesthetic appreciation of the work or about the “value” of the work⁸⁹. Utitz goes even further and includes arts that were usually excluded from consideration, such as popular arts (cabaret, popular novels, circus), calling into question the division between fine arts or high art and low art in a precursory way. It should also be noted that these categories all involve a to-and-fro between the object and the subject, rooted in the objectality of the work, which shows that even if Utitz does not consider the work as a purely intentional object, he is still very much influenced by the phenomenological aesthetics that was developing at the same time in Munich with Moritz Geiger⁹⁰.

Weaknesses and Strengths of the General Science of Art

Utitz’s methodology to define and distinguish what he called the artwork’s several “layers” was criticized as too vague⁹¹, and one must recognize that even its core, the so-called objectality of the artwork, is not obvious. Defining the “great fact of art” as multi-relational, without any value judgment (it can be mediocre, uninteresting, ugly art, etc.) is difficult at a time when a lot of new forms of creation are being given artistic legitimacy. The question arises of its delineation, its delimitation in relation to other objects, if art is not the

87 Contrary to what Daniela Řepová assessed, see D. ŘEPOVÁ, Utitz a Terezín, p. 202.

88 E. UTITZ, *Die Gegenständlichkeit des Kunstwerks*, p. 17 and the following.

89 We have addressed this aspect more in detail in another article, see LARA BONNEAU, Emil Utitz et la « science générale de l’art », *Recherches germaniques* 52/2022, pp. 73–90.

90 Here it should be noted that the influence was mutual and that Moritz Geiger wrote a very positive review of Utitz’s *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft*. See MORITZ GEIGER, Besprechungen, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16/1922, pp. 399–406.

91 WOLFHART HENCKMANN, Zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft von Emil Utitz, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 2/2016, p. 214.

creation of beauty (“*Erzeugung des Schönen*”⁹²), if its field is not framed by masterpieces (as in Brentano’s aesthetics), if it is not either “*die Erzeugung des Ästhetisch-Wertvollen*”⁹³ (the creation of that which has an aesthetic value), or a simple evolutionary “*Kulturgut*”⁹⁴ (product of culture). There is a desire on the part of the fathers of the *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* to maximize the definition, but the risk is not being able to circumscribe it. The transformations taking place in art creation at the same time call into question the validity, or rather the universality, of some of the categories identified by Utitz, such as the ontological layer (*Seinsschicht*). If we follow Utitz, the ontological layer expresses the attitude of an era, of a social group or just an individual towards reality. It takes up the idea that the composition and the style of the work reveal a certain way of approaching or feeling everything that is. Each work is a sensitive proposition in which one can find “the centre of gravity of the Being.”⁹⁵ Is this centre to be found in impermanence, in the flux of becoming, or does it, on the contrary, affirm the eternity of certain essences? These are the questions that the works address in their own sensitive way. But while this category may be relevant up to a certain point during Utitz’s time, it is largely called into question by the art created in the post-war period. Artistic productions are challenging more and more the idea that the artwork conveys any global vision (or feeling) of reality. Whether we think of the transnational and transartistic Fluxus movement, the Lettrist poetry of Isidore Isou, the spectral music of Ligeti (*Atmosphères*, for example) or French avant-garde movements of the 1960s such as Supports/surface or B.M.P.T., many artists in the post-war period rejected the idea that the work offers a vision of the world⁹⁶ or a grasp of Being and went so far as to question the notion of the work of art and its “objectality,” so central to Utitz.

92 E. UTITZ, *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft* I, p. 46.

93 Ibid., p. 48.

94 Ibid., p. 50.

95 Heideggerian echoes could be heard here, but Utitz does not defend the idea that art aims at uncovering the truth of Being. The philosopher even takes a very clear stand against Heideggerian ontology (See MÚA, A AV ČR, f. Utitz Emil, III.a) 42, 1949 “Bemerkungen zur deutschen Existenz-Philosophie”). The “*Seinsschicht*” should rather be understood as a sensitive stance towards reality: it reveals the features of reality that are most important to the artist (impermanence or permanence, globality or individuality, clear structures or formless flux, etc.), echoing Heinrich Wölfflin’s formal categories.

96 See on that topic JACQUES LEPAGE, *Dossier Supports/Surface*, Saint-Etienne 2018; ANTHE KRAMER-MALLORDY, De l’action aux archives : les écrits manifestaires, *Critique d’art* 38/2011, <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiquedart.1535>.

Even the very definition of art as a concretion of a sensitive and emotional experience calling forth in response a sensitive and emotional experience is called into question in certain forms of modern and contemporary art. It is first obvious that the sensitive and emotional experience we have as a spectator/listener/viewer of art does not often correspond to the experience the artist has shaped/experienced in/through the work⁹⁷. This was implicit in Utitz's statement that an appropriate reception of a work of art, not necessary, presupposes that one has the sensitive and emotional experience that was shaped in the creation of the work. But is this coincidence possible at all? Besides, if one acknowledges that the vast majority of works of art give rise to a sensitive-and-emotional experience (*Gefühlserleben*), it is not certain that the emotions always constitute the core of the artistic experience, as Utitz asserts⁹⁸. A large part of modern and contemporary art – whether we think of serial music, minimalism or post-minimalism in visual arts, or conceptual art – does not seek to convey emotions, but to work with matter for its own sake, to explore the properties of sound, or of color, to draw our attention to “the noise of the sensible,”⁹⁹ beyond any meaning but also beyond any emotional answer. It is always possible that deeply feeling this “noise,” engaging with it, can be or is often accompanied by emotions, but such emotions do not constitute the core of the artistic experience. As such, it invalidates Utitz's theory of the essence of the artwork as a “creation on the basis of an emotional and sensible experience (*Gefühlserleben*) of such a kind that the meaning of the creation is revealed in an emotional and sensible experience.”¹⁰⁰ Although he does not address it, Utitz seems partially aware of this difficulty. The philosopher constantly asserts that the work of art cannot be reduced to its aesthetic characteristics, that it has functions and aspects that are as essential to it as its aesthetic dimension and that it therefore calls for an

97 ROGER POUIVET, *Qu'est-ce qu'une oeuvre d'art?*, Paris 2007.

98 We should note here an important ambiguity in the Utitzian theory. On the one hand, he asserts that the essence of the work lies in a creation which is backed by a sensory-emotional experience and which gives rise to such an experience. But on the other, he never ceases to insist on the extra-aesthetic functions of the work. He insists on the impure and “interested” nature of our experience of art. In this sense, he paves the way for reflections such as those recently put forward by Noel Carroll, who has insisted on the extreme diversity of our experience of art, far removed from the sensitive and emotional epiphany in which we often think of the appearance of the work. NOEL CARROLL, *Beyond Aesthetics. Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge 2001.

99 JOCELYN BENOIST, *Le bruit du sensible*, Paris 2013.

100 E. UTITZ, *Die Gegenständlichkeit des Kunstwerks*, p. 8.

“appropriate” (*angemessen*) experience that cannot be reduced to sensitive and emotional contemplation. Reinold Schmücker has convincingly argued that the “*Gefühlserleben*” may not be so essential to Uitzian theory, and that his foundation of the General Science of Art could be saved while formulating a more parsimonious hypothesis according to which “works of art are objects that, through the form (*Gestaltung*) that manifests itself in them, intend to offer us something that every appropriate reception behavior intends to grasp.”¹⁰¹

Another obstacle encountered by the General Science of Art concerns its extension, its methodology and its place in the scientific field. The *allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* struggles to find legitimacy in the cross-disciplinary field of art, aesthetics and philosophy. Utitz is obliged to force the issue by insisting on the pitfalls the General Science of Art must avoid (against aestheticism, against subjectivism, against psychologism, against idealism, etc.), while subsequently and surreptitiously recovering certain of the main theses (notably psychological theses) of the philosophical or esthetical currents he has excluded at first. The structure itself of his *Grundlegung der Allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft* proves the difficulties to elaborate a path which avoids all these pitfalls while integrating their main results: the questions concerning aesthetic judgment, psychology of the artistic creation or of the reception of art are integrated in the course of the different chapters, but they do not constitute the core and the main structures of the Science of Art. On a more general level, it is not certain that Utitz succeeded in distinguishing aesthetics and science of art as firmly as he would have liked. Towards the end of Utitz’s involvement in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, during the 1937 Congress of Aesthetics and of the General Science of Art in Paris, Charles Lalo took a strong position against Utitz and Dessoir to defend the idea that “aesthetic values” should be at the core of the science of art¹⁰² and that a science of art distinct from aesthetics did not make sense. But this difficulty was already present during the first congress in Berlin in 1913. As the writer and journalist Wolfgang Schumann recalled,¹⁰³ there was a great divide inside the *allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* community between the philosophers

101 R. SCHMÜCKER, *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, p. 57 (our translation).

102 CHARLES LALO, *Sur les valeurs culturelles et sociales des beaux-arts, Deuxième Congrès International d’Esthétique et de Science de l’art*, Vol. 1, Paris 1937, p. 362.

103 B. COLLENBERG-PLOTNIKOV, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft (1906–1943)*, pp. 226–227.

(Utitz, Dessoir, as well as Richard Hamman¹⁰⁴ and Oscar Wulff¹⁰⁵) who were trying to inscribe the general science of art into a philosophical conceptual framework in dialogue with the history of Aesthetics, and the practitioners of art (which should encompass not only the artists, but also art critics), who found this conceptual framework too philosophical and not close enough to the objects of art.

Do all these difficulties, therefore, mean that the General Science of Art was a failure?

Paradoxically, the weaknesses of the General Science of Art also appear to be its major strengths: the methodological vagueness Utitz was reproached for has, as a correlate, a very fluid and mobile extension, integrating new problems, new approaches. The very last chapter of Utitz's *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft* bears witness to the openness and to the necessary modesty of his enterprise, as well as to its renewed ambition:

Only a philosophy of art which arrogantly imagines that it can determine the entire course of development of the art in the past, present and future according to all its possibilities, must become obsolete. It is doomed to barrenness because all its points of view are dogmatically rigid, its categories limited; it is as "complete" as it is immobile and incapable of adaptation. It takes the present for an end and therefore ends with the present. But it is also factually wrong, because it does not separate that which is valid in principle from that which becomes and dies and is constantly changing in countless forms. For us, as long as there is art, the General Science of Art can never be completed because new problems constantly flow from it into its system, from which they burst forth again like new seedlings. If this system is, however, bent and changed or even overthrown, it shows an actual-individual point of failure in its application and certainly not a fault in its essence.¹⁰⁶

The difficulties encountered by Utitz in defining the essence of art and the categories that can subsume any work of art seem eminently modern, if

104 RICHARD HAMANN, *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft und Ästhetik*, in: *Kongress für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin 7.–9. Oktober 1913. Bericht*, Stuttgart 1914, pp. 107–113.

105 OSCAR WULFF, *Grundsätzliches über Ästhetik*, *allgemeine und systematische Kunstwissenschaft*, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 9/1914, pp. 556–562.

106 E. UTITZ, *Grundlegung der allgemeinen Kunstwissenschaft* II, p. 421 (our translation).

not contemporary; one need only read the work of a contemporary French philosopher in the analytic tradition, Roger Pouivet,¹⁰⁷ to be convinced of this. While none of the definitions given by the history of aesthetics and the science of art is fully satisfactory in his eyes, Pouivet is led to address questions that were precisely those addressed by the General Science of Art in the years 1910–1920, assuming that despite the transformations of contemporary art, one did not abandon the notion of art altogether. While continuously calling into question its own boundaries, artistic creation keeps constructing what we call art – a frame which survived all metamorphoses. Some of Utitz’s categories, such as the ontological layer, can seem only partially operative now, and the emphasis on the *Gefühlserleben*, which was at the core of Utitz’s definition of art, can be criticized. Nonetheless, contemporary art philosophy is re-embracing questions that were precisely circumscribed by Utitzian Science of art¹⁰⁸.

Conclusion

The *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* started and developed in margins that were twofold.

They were firstly conceptual margins, the very foundation of the General Science of Art being a confrontation and an overcoming of the main currents of philosophical aesthetics of the time, be it the Hegelian verdict on art being a “thing of the past,” the psycho-physiological *Einfühlung* theories, the neo-Kantian approach of art, or even the Brentanian aesthetics, which was an aesthetics of the masterpiece and of the beautiful. Utitz and Dessoir’s attempts to unify the field by giving it a universal foundation did not succeed completely, for lack of a common method as well as for lack of a stability of the object. Yet within a few years, they built an incredibly rich network of thinkers, art historians, philosophers, artists and critics who all had in common that they took part in the Congresses and debates and that they wrote in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, participated in the *Vereinigung für ästhetische Forschung* (until 1914) or then in the *Gesellschaft für ästhetische Forschung* from 1927 onwards. The great heterogeneity of their productions can be seen as a proof, one century before it became researchers’ daily bread, of a very fruitful cross-disciplinary dialogue.

107 R. POUIVET, *Qu'est-ce qu'une œuvre d'art ?*

108 See R. SCHMÜCKER, *Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, but also BERNARD SEVE, *Les matériaux de l'art*, Paris 2023.

Secondly, they were institutional margins. As Bernadette Collenberg-Plotnikov has recalled, the General Science of Art never defended an academic strategy,¹⁰⁹ and neither Dessoir nor Utitz tried to create a university chair that would be devoted to it. Emil Utitz occupied the chair of Philosophy and Psychology in Halle and then the chair of Philosophy in Prague. Furthermore, its main thinkers were German or Czech Jews, and all those who had not died before 1933 were affected by the rise of National-Socialism, forced into exile (Edgar Wind) or deported to concentration camps, like Emil Utitz. The institutions themselves (the Journal and the Congresses mainly, but also the Society of Aesthetics) that had been at the core of the development of the discipline, were persecuted and eventually banned.¹¹⁰ The Journal officially stopped being published in 1943, but from 1936 onwards, its very content was disfigured under Nazi pressure and Dessoir was forced to resign. Congresses were supposed to take place at regular intervals but were in fact postponed or moved, or even cancelled, like the Vienna Congress, due to take place in 1933¹¹¹. Utitz was forced to retire from Halle in 1933, Dessoir forbidden to teach in 1936 and to write in 1937, the *Zeitschrift* itself was banned in 1943 (and resumed in 1951). Most of the authors who wrote in the *Zeitschrift* died before or during the war or went into exile (notably in the United States, as was the case of Erwin Panofsky, Edgar Wind, and Ernst Cassirer) and their research took other paths.

It should be noted that Emil Utitz himself turned away from questions relating to the General Science of Art from the mid-1930s onwards. The political peril he observed and experienced in his own life led him to take an interest in the political and moral implications of the practice of philosophy and, more generally, to reflect on the functions of culture for humanity, as the books he published in those years attest: *Die Sendung der Philosophie in unserer Zeit* (1933) and *Mensch und Kultur* (1934). Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to regard this change of focus as a pure and simple abandonment of the problems associated with artistic creation. From the very beginning the General Science of Art involved a global reflection on the relationship between art and culture (i.e. between art and other symbolic forms) and on the role of culture in human life.

109 B. COLLENBERG-PLOTNIKOV, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft (1906–1943)*, pp. 284–285.

110 *Ibid.*, pp. 209–210.

111 *Ibid.*, pp. 257–258; B. COLLENBERG-PLOTNIKOV, C. MAIGNE, C. TRAUTMANN-WALLER (eds.), Berlin 1913 – Paris 1937.

The final factor contributing to the demise of the science of art was undoubtedly a more profound movement affecting the paradigms of human sciences in general. Whereas the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century had been marked by the search for great totalizing theories, the immediate post-war period was characterized, on the contrary, by an increasing particularization of disciplines (art studies being no exception) and a distrust of all-encompassing theories. The idea of a possible ontology of the work of art, although it was defended by Roman Ingarden in the 1960s, was abandoned in favor of a post-modern thought of the multiple, the processual, the evanescent, which dissolved the very boundaries of art. This move was also made by the artists themselves, many of whose works aimed to deconstruct the norms and boundaries of art and challenge any possible ontology of it, completing the disconnection of art theory from philosophical aesthetics that had begun in the early twentieth century.

Despite this process of minorization, it is clear that the General Science of Art represented a founding moment in German and even wider European aesthetics. Utitz's theses were more programmatic than definitive, as he himself acknowledged. He did not always succeed in giving them the conceptual consistency he had hoped for. But his tireless work in establishing links between people and institutions made him an important bridge-builder between different traditions. Although the answers he provided seem insufficient in some respects, the philosophical effort he made to question art in all its aspects remains invaluable today, as evidenced by the current return of an ontological or ontogenetic approach to art¹¹² or the calls to forge a new "General Science of Art."¹¹³

112 See among others ROGER POUIVET, *L'Œuvre d'art à l'âge de sa mondialisation. Un essai d'ontologie de l'art de masse*, Bruxelles 2003; ROGER POUIVET, *L'ontologie de l'œuvre d'art*, Paris 2010; STEPHEN DAVIES, Ontology of Art, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. J. Levinson, New York 2003, pp. 155–180.

113 R. SCHMÜCKER, *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, p. 62.