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SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

*Theories of stylistic diversity –
aesthetic, ethical and political aspects in the middle of the 20th century*

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The doctoral thesis *Theories of stylistic diversity - aesthetic, ethical and political aspects in the middle of the 20th century* is based on an archeology of the aesthetic category of style, undertaken in order to substantiate the investigation on the resources and conceptual impasses of modernity, respectively of contemporaneity, understood as a generalization (frequently uncritical) of the modern cultural paradigm. Style, with its extremely bumpy and contradictory history, represents one of the keys to understanding modernity, of the mentality of the current historical subject, not only at the level of culture (visual and written), but also at the behavioral level, at that of aspirations and ideals of acceptability, comfort, reliability of communication or attractiveness of entertainment.

The topic of the doctoral thesis is directly related to my research activity in the field of aesthetics and art theory. Conducted in the last three decades not only at the "Constantin Rădulescu-Motru" Institute of Philosophy and Psychology of the Romanian Academy, but also in various other local and international university and art institutions and reflected in publications in Romanian and foreign languages, my activity its central subject is the philosophy, theory and history of predominantly modern and contemporary art.

At first glance, proposing style as a topic for doctoral research, at the current stage of philosophical reflection, seems a superfluous, perhaps even frivolous, undertaking. Fashion, the mass media, stars, stores, the graphic designers we turn to for the creation of books or for the arrangement of the home, or the spin doctors who determine what style of presentation each of us must have, deal with style.

Style is also handled, as this thesis shows, by the anonymous authorities who prepare the Default Style for the text editing programs on every computer, or the equally faceless committees that compose the stylistic guidelines for writing doctoral theses at the Academy Romanian, as is the SCOSAAR Guide, critically approached in these pages, but also respected and followed, uncritically, in the writing of the present thesis.

Nowadays, as you can see, very many people, institutions, organizations, companies, authorities deal with style. This happens because style is pervasive in our civilization. But contemporary philosophy is not concerned with style. He even has a genuine allergy to the aesthetic category of style. This is a matter of philosophy as well as style.

The present thesis is, at the national level, the first enterprise dedicated to style in the last (many) decades. From metaphysical speculations highly influenced by the German and Austrian school of art history and theory, from Semper and Riegl to Worringer, from Lucian Blaga's *Horizon and Style* (1935) and from Tudor Vianu's considerations of style from the years 40, no consistent approach has been dedicated to this aesthetic category crucial for contemporaneity.

It is not surprising - the only effective style (and literally, literally and figuratively) imposed in the last 70 years in Romania was socialist realism. As an important part of communist cultural propaganda, discourses devoted to socialist realism strictly followed the benchmarks established by the USSR and its instruments in the cultural world. There were no significant local theoretical contributions to the reflection on the realized socialist style. But there has been a campaign (official and informal) to repudiate it since the mid-1960s, which is briefly outlined in this thesis. After the success of this campaign, the styles approached or internalized by Romanian artists and theorists were globally influential, taken over, through self-colonization, from the canon of Western culture. Again, even these stylistic imports did not impose (allow) serious theoretical developments on the edge of an aesthetic category that was considered a common good.

As the present thesis shows, through the historical incursions it undertakes and through the references to the most recent contemporaneity, style is, by far, the most frequent aesthetic notion used in current civilization, from art to clothing and from gastronomy to politics. Style is not a fundamental category of aesthetics, like the beautiful or the sublime. But the beautiful and the sublime have enormously lost their relevance and notional presence in today's civilization. But not the style – since there are highly visible and influential styles such as punk, hip-hop, cocalar or trash, which, programmatically or not, have an aversion to beauty but have great public appeal, means that resistance terminology of the category of style, even compared to the category of beauty, is much greater over time.

The present thesis has, among the elements of remarkable originality and relevance, the merit of showing why an aesthetic category marginalized in the history and theory of art of the last decades is extremely present and meaningful in everyday life. The thesis shows that the detractors of the relevance of the aesthetic category of style, from Georg Simmel, Theodor Adorno and Ernst Gombrich to Svetlana Alpers, Mieke Bal or Peter Sloterdijk, base their option on the social appearance of style, on the fact that it incorporates, imposes and perpetuates the social norm, under

the guise of a formalism apparently chosen by each individual sovereignly, but actually inserted by society through all its channels of shaping consciousness. Style, in this view, is the (attractive) embodiment of the individual's alignment with the dominant norm.

Being individual, style cannot be anything other than the clearest image of the subjective diversity of individuation. At the same time, however, through the stylistic similarities and consistency of the productions of several individuals, the style tends towards unification, and when a meaningful form appears (a "stylistic profile", according to the terminology and concepts introduced by this thesis), accepted and embraced by society (such as the Amarna style, developed around the pharaoh Akhenaten and the sculptor Thutmosis, characterized by unusual elongations, dynamics and a crowding of figures, unprecedented in earlier Egyptian art) the style becomes the norm. And the formal, authoritarian norm establishes a state of monopoly - this was also the case with the Amarna style, which was the exclusive style of Akhenaton's era, being then eradicated from the practice of Egyptian art after the death of the pharaoh.

The style therefore has a paradoxical nature, marked by the dualism of the radical manifestation of individuality through style, contradicted by the authoritarianism of the stylistic norm of the unique style, which tends towards the most authoritarian monopolism, identical, in this respect, from the Amarna style to the realistic style socialist. The normative and dominant side of style that imposes formal alignment to an exclusivist paradigm has generated, over time, a theoretical reaction to detract from the positive function of the aesthetic category of style.

The present work devotes an extensive research to the philosophical roots of this derogatory view of style, which he identifies in the work of Georg Simmel (from *Das Problem des Stiles* to the monograph he dedicates to Rembrandt). The thesis contextualizes Simmel's beliefs with excursions into the cultural history of the discipline of art history and theory, where style was the cornerstone of the scientificity of the discipline founded in the latter part of the 19th century by Semper, Riegl, Worringer. At the same time, the thesis contextualizes Simmel's beliefs also against the background of Nietzschean theories on style, but also by opposing them to the dandy-ist stylization that is put into circulation by a whole section of art and culture from the end of the 19th century, from Charles Baudelaire to Oscar Wilde. At the same time, the thesis resorts to the comparison with the rejection of style in the theoretical works of Simmel's contemporaries, Hermann Muthesius and Petrus Berlage, who demystify style especially from the practical perspective of the (stylizing) architecture of the time.

The thesis then shows how Muthesius and Berlage, but especially Simmel, influenced the reflections of the founders of modernity and the avant-garde, from the architect Peter Behrens (founder of the Berliner Werkbund) to Walter Gropius (founder and director of the Bauhaus) and further to Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian. The decredibility and theoretical delegitimization of the style led (only apparently paradoxically) to the appearance of the modernist style (purified of stylization) which still dominates today.

Although historically, as seen in the present thesis, the problem of style already preoccupies Plato (in the Republic he devotes important passages to preferred or forbidden musical styles, as essential in the constitution of consciousness), speculative interest in style was extremely low during centuries, because the style was practiced for a long time and reflected for a short time.

With Petrarch and his rewriting, in Latin and in a classical-moralizing key, of Griselda's story, the last short story of Boccaccio's Decameron, by aligning the humorous writing, in the vernacular (Italian) of the latter, to the timeless stylistic canon of the great classics that Petrarch invokes (Martial, Juvenal, etc.), style becomes the central instrument on which the Renaissance will build the canon of the entire Western civilization. The thesis maps the subsequent historical course (from Vasari to Agucchi and from Félibien to Winckelmann), which causes, through normative over-exploitation, style to become, from the perfect tool for shaping the aesthetic vision of society, a pathological and (theoretically) reprehensible stylization of a canon always discussed, decomposed and recomposed.

Through Herbert Spencer and his Philosophy of Style, style becomes again, for philosophy, a possible objective tool for analyzing the coherence and solidity, but especially the particularities of human productions (literary, cultural, artistic), inexplicable otherwise, apart from the tire character unifying style.

Starting from Herbert Spencer's concept of "economy", the thesis proceeds to an original definition (somewhat "essentialist") of style, by introducing and explaining the notion of "stylistic profiling", respectively the way in which style propagates a sui-generis Gestalt, which helps, but at the same time risks impoverishing the public's perception and artistic practice - because style is viewed in the present thesis from both perspectives - that of the individual art creator, who arrives, through intuitive exercise, at the style, and that of the receiver, who becomes, through education and the experience of consuming culture, a cognitive manipulator of his own aesthetic perception, pre-packaged in stylistic categories projected on the perceived works.

In a lapidary definition, style, in any field, can be characterized by the conspicuous formal display of a deviation. Style is that inexplicable and irreducible residue which remains after all the technical, material, compositional, iconographical or psychological characteristics of a work or works have been sorted, classified and elucidated, and which nevertheless appear insufficient and non-explanatory for the distinct and characteristic presence of the work or work in question.

The present thesis presents, in an original way, the way in which the normative immateriality of the style is the most imponderable element of the work but, at the same time, it is also the most meaningful feature of a work. Before delving into an Impressionist work, its subject, technique or composition, what strikes the viewer at first glance is its style, "impressionism". In aesthetic experience, the Impressionist style is simultaneously contained, exposed, thematized, and conveyed in an immediate perception, even as each Impressionist work of art relativizes (particularizes or individuates) Impressionism. The primary (substantial) constituent elements of the work of art have a heightened degree of materiality relative to style, for they can be identified as the (very physical) organs of a body can be identified. In relation to these obvious materialities (such as that of the raw material from which the work of art is produced) or relative materialities (as in the case of subjects, characters or stylistic figures), the immateriality of style is the most radical, because it touches the total imponderable. There is nothing quantifiable, measurable and materially "impressionistic" about an Impressionist work. It is painted with the same colors as their realist contemporaries, on the same canvases, with the same subjects and frequently with the same compositions or with the same organization and layout of the theme.

However, what jumps out at the first contact with an Impressionist work is its impressionistic character, which cuts out and sovereignly overhangs all the other distinct elements of the work, giving the viewer the feeling and awareness that he is contemplating an "impressionist" work. ". And it is not at all surprising that, as will be seen below, the very birth of the "scientific" discipline of art history at the end of the 19th century happened in direct relation to the analysis of style. Style was considered a firm subject for a type of research that aspired to the status of science because it placed art in a framework specific to modern science – classification, cataloguing, taxonomic framework.

The present thesis uncovers, for the first time, the way in which the history and theory of art as a discipline was not built on the study of the raw materials of art, nor on the study of compositions, nor on the study of themes, nor even on the study of the reception of the work of

art, respectively one of the at least minimally material features of art. On the contrary, modern art history as a scientific humanistic discipline, together with a large part of art theory, has been built on the analysis of the most imponderable element of art, style. And this happened, as the present thesis shows, precisely because style was the only tool that titled art, gave it names, designations, built terminologies, classifications and evolutionary series, influences and derivations, with their inherent historicity, which made up, as always, a scientific object of study (the ideal of nineteenth-century research, which conferred a serious and prestigious status on the practitioner), the perfect material for any history, regardless of the branch of the human sciences it covered.

Style is one of the most significant recurrent categories in the aesthetic terminology of the 19th and 20th centuries. But since the 18th century, through the influence he exerted on Goethe, Schiller and Hegel, it is Johann Winckelmann who turns the spotlight on the style of Greek antiquity, seen as a corrective to the (apparent) lack of style of the 18th century. The ethical meaning of this aesthetic orientation is significant – style is a norm, and through its application to aesthetic experience, an improvement is envisioned not only in art, but also in the individual condition of the historical subject and society as a whole. Significantly, it is not the aesthetic experience, the intense relationship with the work (of the ancient catharsis type) that leads to the improvement of the human condition, but (in the Platonic spirit of the Republic) the alignment with a formal norm, intellectually constituted and applied, capable of irradiating (through internalization and imitation) desirable behaviors and skills.

Although it was founded on the most imponderable element, the style was considered the best adapted to the rigors of the new science. Style is not only a purely mental construct, but also a cognitive entity deeply anchored in the spirit of the ages, which it simultaneously reveals and represents. In this sense, style belongs to the plan of the spirit of the culture of a certain time. The fact that style was considered the starting point in the foundation of new disciplines in the spectrum of human sciences dedicated to art, to the detriment of the material elements specific to art, shows that spirituality was preferred to materiality, in starting the new disciplines that aspired to scientific quality and which, through this, they turn out to be equally spiritual.

The present thesis originally defines style as a specific, well and recognizable morphologically formulated deviation, which must, however, be intentional in order to be qualified as style. It must be systematically articulated and recurrent, somewhat like an automatic reflex of the creator, manifested apparently compulsively, but processed reflexively, intentionally. This

deviation does not have to be conscious (an intentionality that is transparent to itself) on the part of the author to generate a style.

There is no new style that is completely conservative, that does not aspire to and does not change something in relation to the style or styles that precede it. Even neo-classicism is not conservative in intention – it wants to be reformative in relation to the lack (perceived, imagined or real) of classicism (balance, harmony, unity) of an era. He does not want to preserve, but to change, and therefore he uses the old to induce the new, to innovate. New styles appear exclusively to replace old styles. They belong to that spiritual level of humanity which always aims at the new. The dynamic or even the dialectic between old and new is the most striking feature of stylistic alternation visible in the history of art.

Apart from the necessary formal feature and the subsequent need for it to be perceptible through the senses (there is no artistic style whose characteristics are purely mental, an-aesthetic – entirely imperceptible through the senses – precisely because the style is addressed to the senses), the style must be embedded in more than one object. A single object is an accident, it cannot ground a style. Style, as with scientific taxonomy (such as taxonomy of species and families, in biology), must create classes. A single individual (in the sense of a single entity) cannot found a species, a genus, a family. Likewise, a single object cannot found a class, a style.

The unifying character of style is not only what leads, through stylistic profiling, to defining, distinguishing and cutting out new styles against the background of old styles. All the unifying character of the style is also responsible for the (positive, but most often negative) normative force of the style. On this point, to which the present thesis pays consistent attention (including exemplifications and case studies), modernism and the historical avant-garde provide the most significant working front. On the one hand, through modernism's conscious and voluntary production of new styles, some of them with the notion of style directly included in the name (from Jugendstil to the De Stijl movement), in order to legitimize themselves as styles, as commodities recognizable (and marketable) aesthetic as such. The artists were thus echoing the dominance of the style category in the discourse of art history and theory, whose graces they sought to enter.

A special place in the course of the thesis is occupied by the case study of the genesis of the local avant-garde, from Romania, effectively obsessed with the launch of a new style (called pictopoetry by 75HP, synthetism by Punct, integralism by Integral, etc.), as its main contribution to the panoply of avant-garde styles. This veritable carnival or masked ball of styles is analyzed in

the thesis and through the detailed presentation of the veritable stylistic atlas of the avant-garde, *Kunstismen 1914-1924*, published by El Lissitzky and Hans Arp in 1925).

As such, these chapters of the thesis originally conclude that, through its modernist condition, the avant-garde led to an unprecedented proliferation of artistic styles, but simultaneously, through its radical, totalizing ideological (and political) condition, the avant-garde contributed to and led towards the worst moments of monostylism supported by repressive, totalitarian regimes.

Avant-garde, in its most innovative component, revolts against style, seen as the most aggressive embodiment of the norm. From Futurism and Dada, the allergy to style is then followed by a dramatic recoil towards the norm and propagandistic dictate, presented in the thesis by the theoretical discourses of the Soviet productivists, in favor of the style imposed by the triumphant communism in the Soviet Union (and then in many other occupied countries after World War II). Around the same war and immediately after, the thesis reveals the political and historical circumstances that lead to an attempt (also ideological and with the same propagandistic purpose) to reunite diversity and style, under the auspices of American democracy, in its fight against Nazi and Communist totalitarianisms .

The promotion of the phrase "stylistic diversity" through theses, theories, speeches, but especially through exhibitions (itinerant in the communist states - and here the thesis makes an excursion in the case of communist Romania) designed to generate an impact not only aesthetic, but above all political, by influencing the morale of societies under the domination of totalitarian regimes. The basic idea behind these approaches resides in the conviction that the exposure and defense of the stylistic diversity of art, in contrast to the monostylism of authoritarian societies, will lead, in the foreseeable future, to the emancipation of the consciences of creators and consumers of culture (visual, but not only) that , by revealing and cultivating the possibility of choosing between diverse styles, will cultivate its possibility of choosing between diverse commodities, between diverse ideologies, between diverse politics. Emancipation from the pressure of communist propaganda was the main element that led to the elaboration and extensive promotion of the notion of stylistic diversity.

Currently, in democratic societies there is no longer a dominant stylistic norm. Even in the least democratic, stylistic norms rarely boil down to monostylism. Perhaps the only exception is the most undemocratic country possible, North Korea, where the mono stylistic canon is extremely

authoritarian, unique and dominant, so that it led, in the mirror, to a calibration of the opposite propaganda, coming from South Korea, exactly along the stylistic directions rejected by North Korea, which is thus effectively bombarded with music from South Korea - the famous K-pop - broadcast non-stop through megaphones or distributed through sticks thrown with balloons in North Korea. Style can thus become a tool of evasion for some or a tool of torture for others.

An unprecedented stylistic diversity is visible in the capitalist societies of our time. But this is illusory, because it is a diversity that inflationarily and obsessively recycles previous styles. And that's because in the absence of a unique, normative and dominating style, the idea of style has become the norm. Having style has become a social imperative. The category of style is a category of everyday existence, much more present and active in our acts and consciousness than the beautiful, the good, the sublime.

We live, therefore, in a period of complete stylistic diversity in which all norms can be mixed and put into play, virtually, with relative ease, by absolutely anyone. But in order to create images that can be read by anyone, the grammar of previous styles became a kind of generic alphabet, with the help of which technically "new" images (previously non-existent) and at the same time fully "old" images appear from from a conceptual point of view, because they obey the aesthetic categories previously appropriated.

The present work is not a monograph of the aesthetic category of style, but uses the elements of a monograph to investigate the paradox presented above, that of the inherent individuality of style and, at the same time, the irrepressible pressure towards stylistic unification of expression. The dynamic between these two polarities constitutes another element of originality of the present work, the only research, at the national and international level, dedicated to the notion of stylistic diversity. Especially by bringing the discussion on style to the agenda and to the strictly current moment, the present thesis has an element of originality also in an international context, because, being faithful to the definitions and vision (with timeless methodological value) on style presented by Meyer Schapiro (*Style, in Anthropology Today. An Encyclopedic Inventory*, edited by A. E. Kroeber, The University of Chicago Press, 1953), goes beyond not only the apparently neutral and rather pessimistic view of style held by highly critical art historians, aestheticians and theorists with the terminological tools of the discipline (from Svetlana Alpers to Kendall Walton) from the extremely influential volume coordinated by Berel Lang, *The Concept*

of Style (Cornell University Press, 1979), but also the very pragmatic positivization of style, placed in the exclusively utilitarian framework of today's post-industrial civilization by Virginia Postrel (The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness, HarperCollins Publishers, 2003). At the same time, the present thesis opposes a nuanced perspective to the very vehement (ideological) negation of Peter Sloterdijk (The Aesthetic Imperative, Polity Press, 2017), because it reveals the inherent pitfalls of the normativity of style but, unlike Sloterdijk's pessimism, the thesis also reveals the inevitability of expansion stylistics of human creativity, which requires an overcoming of Sloterdijk-type alarmism and an approach based predominantly on casuistry, not on rigid principles of exclusion, because style is, as the present thesis reveals, an inherent category not only in the formal development of human creativity but also the cognitive evolution of aesthetic reception, started since the 20th century.

As Tudor Vianu said in 1941, stylistic analysis will continue to be considered as a type of study of artistic creation, because "For today's researcher there are not only stylists, but also styles, not only individual writers, but also groups that they contain them, currents that carry them. [...] In the present work [...] I have analyzed our prose writers in their individual stylistic particularity, but also in the stylistic currents that comprise them." And this because "style refers to a constant form - and sometimes to constant elements, qualities and expressions - in the art of an individual or a group. [...] For the art historian, style is an essential object of investigation. It is also a background against which the innovations and particularities of individual works can be measured. By considering the succession of works in time and space, and by relating stylistic variations to historical events and to varied features in other fields of culture, the art historian tries, with the help of psychology and social theory, to account for changes in various stylistic features." The present thesis, despite the presentation of the many paradoxes and pitfalls that style opens up in the face of the infinite diversity of human creative manifestations, maintains the confidence in the functionality of the category of style in the exploration of the work of art, a confidence that dates back to the founders of the discipline of art history and theory, at the end of the 19th century.

The present thesis, by its interdisciplinary character, combines the philosophical perspective with that of the history and theory of art, but also that of anthropology and the sociology of culture. In this way, he manages to account, in an original way, for the historical condition and current status of one of the most current (practically) and at the same time the most marginalized (theoretically) aesthetic concepts or categories.

The major concern of the doctoral thesis is not the diverse styles that have followed each other in history, but the notion of stylistic diversity, discussed in the 19th century, specific (although frequently rejected) in the 20th century and endangered (by the apparent over-promotion, by facilitating) in the 21st century, in the most recent actuality of virtual art, of creation assisted by artificial intelligence. The work does not present a descriptive study of the stylistic differences between the styles, even if in specific cases (mannerism versus baroque, cubism versus impressionism, futurism versus expressionism) we proceeded to highlight these differences. But they were highlighted only to present more clearly the fact that the styles were constituted by the aggregation of systems of exclusions, the demands of each new style being, in fact, manifestations of the rejection of the old styles.

The present research is a study of the ideological functioning of stylistic differentiation. It reveals the way in which the concept of stylistic diversity - which should apparently induce the differentiation and multiplication of styles - actually led, through its (geo)political and aesthetic imposition, during the 20th century, to the aesthetic monism of an international style. A style dominated by a small number of related aesthetic directions, which excluded from the global aesthetic system a wide range of other past or contemporary directions, currents, movements and aesthetic realities, from realist-socialist and academic art to kitsch, folk art, marginal, religious art, the art of the excluded, etc. Everything that did not fit into the conceptual and activist paradigm of international art was gradually evicted from the substantive definition of the current international style.

The exclusivism of stylistic diversity, which appears to be inclusive only at first glance - in the avant-garde - is generated by the predominantly communist option of the avant-garde. And the communist party of the workers was by definition a unique party - the annihilation of political pluralism by aspiring to a modern party totalitarianism is reflected in the stylistic diversity reduced to the aesthetic monism of the unique and unifying progressive art (supported by the avant-garde) which was put at the service of the party.

Stylistic diversity as such is inclusive and anti-systemic. On the contrary, the concept of stylistic diversity is exclusive and pro-systemic. The idea of style brings to the fore the aesthetic experience, but only a specific one, because style brings the stylization, the formal drawing of a perceptible and recognizable artistic paradigm from the recognized cultural repertoire, not a wild aesthetic

experience, without prior cultural landmarks. The idea of diversity brings to the fore plurality, non-homogeneity, which imposes coexistence (ethics) but also competition, competition (economics). Because there is no impetus for diversification if there are no reasons (related to aesthetic consumption) that require the proliferation and not the simple multiplication of a single aesthetic paradigm.

The aesthetic choice (which is always read behind the diversity) carries within it the subjective and individual option. It also insinuates the sovereignty of the cultural consumer. And sovereignty can thus nurture, from a proto-political level, freedom, namely the right to one's own choice in matters of taste, which can induce the sovereignty of individual conscience.

Style serves perception, aesthetics and culture; brings the cognitive to the fore. Diversity serves ethics, society and politics; brings morality to the fore. The notion of stylistic diversity, the formula as such, its special and specialized propagandistic use (as opposed to the aesthetic homogeneity of an artistic, stylistic monoculture), from a given moment and in certain historical contexts, brings with it ethics, ideology, politics, propaganda.

As far as organization is concerned, the doctoral thesis, through the **Introduction**, demarcates the problematic area addressed and reveals the impasses and paradoxes of the style, on the one hand as a specialized terminology, and on the other as an actual artistic practice. The introduction defines the style as a recurrent deviation, formally remarkable, which is inscribed, from the point of view of art history and theory, in a precise taxonomy, which gives the work, against the background of the scientific attachment of the discipline of art history and theory, not only rigor in classification, but also prestige and superior placement of the work in the axiological system of society.

Chapter I, Art seen through the prism of an aesthetic category, begins by highlighting the paradoxical status of the notion at the center of the research in this work - stylistic diversity. Its paradoxical and contradictory character is extracted from the analysis of Winckelmann's neo-classical positions. The way in which style has penetrated today's daily life at all levels is explored, with the addition of two excursions on styles implemented automatically in computer operating programs and on the writing style of doctoral theses as mandated by the SCOSAAR Guide. In contrast to the omnipresence of style in today's daily life, chapter I investigates the sources of the

extinction, marginalization and even prohibition of the aesthetic category of style in the specialized terminology of aesthetics, history and theory of contemporary art. The axiological platform that style outlines is then analyzed, as is the distinction between style inherent in art objects and style as terminology in the exegesis of art. The chapter ends with a presentation of the first coherent theoretical opening to the problematic of style, from Plato's Republic.

Chapter II, Style as modernity in the Renaissance and post-Renaissance, operates a release of the original historical perimeter of the debate on style in the Renaissance, Baroque and Mannerism. The recourse to style (the style of classical antiquity) as an axiological direction for the beginnings of modernity is highlighted by the ideas advanced by Petrarch along with the Latin translation (and moralized rewriting) of Griselda's short story, with which the Decameron of his friend, Boccaccio, ends. The dependence on the classical style of the Renaissance is then telescoped towards the style dependence (in general) of the late Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque, a process highlighted by analyzing the positions of Vasari, Agucchi, Passeri and Felibien. Thus it is revealed the way in which the aspiration towards style gradually reaches the stylistic over-saturation, which exasperates the theorists.

Chapter III, Style as a symbolic form of cultural authority, starts from Herbert Spencer's opus, Philosophy of Style, with emphasis on his idea that style resides in a certain "economy" of means of expression. Then, in this chapter, the proper notion of "stylistic profiling" is introduced and developed, considered as the key to understanding and the genesis of style, from the point of view of the creator, as a remarkably formalized recurrent deviation, and from the point of view of the receiver, for that style is a kind of Gestalt (a cognitive abbreviation of perception, the result of the synthesis of one's own education and experience) that is semi-consciously projected onto the contemplated work.

Chapter IV, Style: Terminology, Category, Methodology, and Ideology in the Aesthetics, History, and Theory of Art of the Second Half of the Nineteenth and First Half of the Century, begins with a presentation of the ideas and themes related to style launched by Nietzsche and found in the close intellectual environment – to Semper, architect and major theoretician, collaborator of Wagner, like Nietzsche, and also the first author to put the aesthetic category of

style at the base of the history and theory of art as scientific disciplines. The focus on style of most German-language theorists of art history and theory is illustrated by presenting the ideas and theses of Alois Riegl, Wilhelm Worringer, and Heinrich Wölfflin. Through them, style is super-positivized categorically, methodologically and ideologically, becoming the main research tool and objective assigned to the specialist in the field of *Kunstwissenschaft*.

Chapter V, The Negation of Style in the Early Twentieth Century: Simmel and Muthesius, presents in extenso the process by which the counter-reaction, of the negation of style, took root, particularly in the writings of Simmel and Muthesius. The background of negation is discovered in the excessive stylization of architecture and art at the end of the 19th century, but also in the dandy-ist stylization of clothing, tastes and gestures, attitudes and life in general, following the model of Baudelaire or Oscar Wilde. The negation of style is prominently found in the architectural writings of Hermann Muthesius, who challenge the architectural conception and especially the style theories of Semper and his disciples. Attention is especially focused on the negation, even the philosophical de-legitimization of style, in the work of Georg Simmel, the first theorist to draw attention to the fact that style is contrary to the vocation of art, which is to support individuation, while style imprints a behavior " societal" individuals. Through the impact of Simmel's writings on some of the mainstays of the avant-garde, such as Peter Behrens and Walter Gropius, the allergy to style became a trademark of the radical avant-garde. Decades after the publication of Simmel's work, his influence on critical aesthetic theories of capitalist culture continued to grow, through Simmel's echo of some of the central figures of the Frankfurt School, from Walter Benjamin to Theodor Adorno. Also in this chapter, Lucian Blaga's vision of style is briefly presented, strongly influenced by the super-positivization of style by the Austrian and German school of art history.

Chapter VI, Hypertrophy and stylistic implosion: the avant-garde. Chapter VI depicts the way in which issues of style evolved in the first decades of the 20th century under the sign of the avant-garde. From expressionism and futurism to Dadaism and abstractionism, the chapter presents and analyzes the relation of the avant-garde to the theoretical and practical pressure exerted by style and especially its transition from descriptive and analytical, in the case of art history and theory, to normative and prescriptive, in the case of those artistic directions that were under the dictates of ideology and propaganda. This transition is concurrent with the expansion of the stylistic

diversity of artistic practice, combined with the fixation on unity, unification and stylistic uniqueness inherent in the totalizing avant-garde (and, in some places, pro-totalitarian, as in the case of the Russian productivists), concerned with imposing a rigid canon of modernity. Chapter VI investigates in detail the radical positions of the De Stijl group and especially Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian, in order to highlight the profile of the art of the future (since then) which is extremely close to the profile of the art of our present. For a pertinent illustration of these tensions and impasses, Chapter VI ends with a case study – geenza and the early evolution of the avant-garde in Romania, obsessed with the imposition of a new style, in the form of naming a new avant-garde movement.

Chapter VII, Style Against Diversity. Chapter VII begins with an investigation of the principles but also of the historical and geo-political background that made it practically impossible to sustain the stylistic diversity inherent in the avant-garde, which, as it adapted to the authoritarian regimes between the two world wars, aligned itself with the propaganda of the extremist parties. The case discussed in depth in chapter VII is that of socialist realism, namely its genesis in the 30s, under the influence of Zhdanov's theory, directly inspired by Stalin, and which transformed the artist (as the historical avant-garde had wanted, but not in the direction of freedom, but in the direction of propaganda) in an ideological operator, a technocrat aligned to interests the unique party, which maintains the vocation of the unique style. In contrast to this background, Chapter VII presents a local case study, namely the detachment from socialist realism in Romania, during the 60s, also under the external ideological and geo-political impulse, but this time through direct recourse to ideology (also propagandistic) stylistic diversity, propagated by the cultural (and information) services from democratic countries (USA and France), which inserted pluralistic practices, ideas and stylistic models on the Romanian cultural market during the opening period between 1965-1971, in order to affirm the individual, to individualist capitalist ethics, seen as the only possibility of salvation in the face of the danger of the single, totalitarian discourse which, in turn, offered a contrasting interpretation to the stylistic diversity binomial.

Chapter VIII The return of the repressed: the position of style in current digital artistic practices. The last chapter of the work is also the most challenging, being dedicated to the current situation, especially that after the offensive of artificial intelligence (AI) in recent years.

The focus is on the very special issues raised by using algorithms based on historical styles to produce 'new' artistic creations with the assistance of artificial intelligence, especially after the launch in 2022 of the ChatGPT chatbot. The last chapter of the thesis highlights the paradox of an unparalleled diversity, made possible by current technology, which allows "stylistic transfer" without borders, i.e. the projection of any historical style onto any type of image - from the projection of a cubist structure onto a photo of the pit garbage from Glina, to produce a "stylized" work of art to the "creation" of a possible (new) Rembrandt painting, by the computational algorithm following all possible stylistic prescriptions. Style becomes, once again, a central tool in the development of creative practices, in the emancipation and in the artistic activation of the contemporary individual. In style, as the last chapter of the thesis shows, lies the potential of monopoly, of the perfect, final, absolute, unique, and unchangeable form that is endlessly manipulated. And this brings to the fore the use of style as a model or behavioral template that builds psychologies, experiences and not just expected, desired, cultivated forms.

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