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Jochem Kahl und  
Nicole Kloth



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Richardstr. 47

D-22081 Hamburg

sak@buske.de

Herausgeber:

*Prof. Dr. Jochem Kahl*

Ägyptologisches Seminar

Freie Universität Berlin

Fabeckstr. 23–25, Raum 0.0056

D-14195 Berlin

jochem.kahl@fu-berlin.de

*Dr. Nicole Kloth*

Sondersammelgebiet Ägyptologie

Universitätsbibliothek

Plöck 107–109

D-69117 Heidelberg

kloth@ub.uni-heidelberg.de

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# The Definition of Art and Sculpture Concerning Kai Widmaier's *Bilderwelten*

Alessio Delli Castelli  
Université de Liège

## *Abstract*

The point of departure for this article is Kai Widmaier's book *Bilderwelten: Ägyptische Bilder und ägyptologische Kunst. Vorarbeiten für eine bildwissenschaftliche Ägyptologie*, its invitation to assess one's own art historical definitions and methods and its assertion that Egyptian figurative culture should not be considered *art* but *images*. In response, this article presents a definition of *art as the product of the deliberate manipulation of pre-existing forms to communicate abstract meaning*. It defines art as a product of thought and as such dependent on the transcendental categories of Time-and-Space. Having defined art in general, the article goes on to apply this definition of art to sculpture from the perspective of its specific phenomenology, technique and transcendental meaning.

## *1 Introduction*

Kai Widmaier's book *Bilderwelten: Ägyptische Bilder und ägyptologische Kunst. Vorarbeiten für eine bildwissenschaftliche Ägyptologie* [Image Worlds: Egyptian Images and Egyptological Art. A Preliminary Work for a Scientific Approach to Images in Egyptology] is a complex analysis of the definitions and methods that Egyptology employs to think Ancient Egyptian art.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One poses the question of the applicability of the aesthetic concept of art to Egyptian images. Part Two offers a critique of the literature which has dealt with the First Intermediate Period from a historical, literary and stylistic point of view, with excursus into the late XII and early XVIII Dynasties. Furthermore, style is discussed in relation to its uses in art historical studies, *i.e.*, as a dating criterion and as a signifier. In Part Three, Widmaier answers the questions he poses in Part One through the evidence gathered in the case studies presented in Part Two.

For the readers who are not familiar with the book, an extract taken from Widmaier's English *Abstract*, limited to Parts One and Three, which are those discussed in this article, has been included in *Appendix 1*. *Appendix 2* also presents the present author's definition of art in general and of Egyptian art in distilled form, independently of the discussion carried out in the article.

The writer of this article entirely agrees with Widmaier's critique of the museological perspective, which places (Egyptian) art objects in a sterilised environment, aesthetically isolates them and invites anachronistic comparisons between vastly different cultures. This article also supports the substitution of the museological perspective with the study of the cultural context of production.

The present author partly agrees with Widmaier's reconstruction of Protestantism as an epochal change which caused the advent of *art* through the dissociation of *images* from society and the creation of an art scene. This article considers that these changes were produced by various other auxiliary causes that developed over a longer period that lasted four hundred years. The present author also starts from the assumption that the existence of art necessarily precedes that of an art scene; that art can be thought of independently of an art scene but that

an art scene cannot be conceived or even exist without art; and that therefore, the production of *true* art cannot originate from the appearance of an art scene. I also object to Widmaier's conclusion that the substitution of a museological perspective for the study of context automatically denies (Egyptian) material culture the status of art.

Lastly, this author entirely disagrees with the election of the aesthetic definition of art to universal status and the consequent exclusion of any culture preceding or opposing the Protestant Reform from those cultures which have produced art.

The aim of this article is to suggest a less aesthetic, more cognitive and inclusive definition of art and to restore the definition of the "Protestant Renaissance" offered by Widmaier to its proper cultural and historical context. It questions the definition of art as beauty and disinterested enjoyment and takes exception to the assessment of Egyptian Art as fundamentally "different from ours".

I argue that the problems Widmaier identifies in the Egyptological literature lie in its own definition of art, which the book leaves undiscussed. The practical application of an aesthetic notion of art on which the book concentrates instead, is only the by-product of such a definition.

## 2 *The Definition of Art*

Kai Widmaier's book *Bilderwelten* challenges Egyptologists interested in Egyptian art to question their definitions and methods. At the same time, however, Widmaier makes the conscious decision not to provide the reader with his own definition of art. In his conclusion, Widmaier explains that he follows the usual Egyptological praxis and does not seek a terminological definition of art.<sup>1</sup> He justifies his choice by declaring that a definition is unnecessary to his end. The scope of his book is not to prepare an Egyptological concept of art but to investigate the premises and consequences of Egyptological methods applied to Egyptian images.<sup>2</sup> Widmaier further points out that philosophy of art – which he distinguishes from aesthetics – has not been able to formulate a clear definition of art and he seriously doubts the possibility of finding any definition whatsoever.

Nonetheless, an underlying definition informs the whole of Widmaier's book. This definition of art can be deduced from the content of the book and from its sources.<sup>3</sup> In avoiding

<sup>1</sup> K. Widmaier, *Bilderwelten: Ägyptische Bilder und ägyptologische Kunst. Vorarbeiten für eine bildwissenschaftliche Ägyptologie, Probleme der Ägyptologie 35*, Leiden/Boston 2017, 454–455, „*die Frage nach ägyptischer Kunst auch die Frage nach Kunst an sich bzw. nach deren Definierbarkeit einschließt. Dieses Buch ist bislang der ägyptologischen Praxis in der Hinsicht gefolgt, dass es ebenfalls keine terminologische Klärung des Kunstbegriffs vorgenommen oder versucht hat. Da es bisher nicht darum ging, einen solchen für eine ägyptologische Anwendung zu präparieren, sondern vielmehr darum, die ägyptologische Praxis selbst auf ihre Prämissen und Konsequenzen zu untersuchen, war dieses auch nicht notwendig*“.

<sup>2</sup> Egyptian figurative culture is Widmaier's main preoccupation but the broader implication of his position denies the status of art to the whole of Antiquity and the Middle Ages as per a concept borrowed from Belting (cf. further).

<sup>3</sup> Especially W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens. Gestalt und Geschichte*, Stuttgart 1957, 66–68; H. Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, München 1990 and F. Junge, *Versuch einer Ästhetik der ägyptischen Kunst*, in: M. Eaton-Krauss/E. Graefe (Hg.), *Studien zur ägyptischen Kunstgeschichte*, Nußloch 1983, 1–38. It must be observed, however, that Widmaier does not completely accept any of the theories propounded in these books and articles but deprives them of their art historical connections, cf. Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 9–34.

the problem of a definition of art, what remains unexpressed is the fact that the definition of art found in most of the literature Widmaier assesses and his own definition are the same. The greatest difference between Widmaier and the literature he criticises lies in the ontological implications each draws, which can be encapsulated in Walther Wolf's statement *ägyptische Kunst (nicht) Kunst*.<sup>4</sup>

This article advances that it is in the definition of art that all problems reside. By adopting a different definition of art, all arguments and asperities are naturally dispelled on both sides – the critic's and the criticised.

### 2.1 *The Difficulty in Defining Art*

Before analysing Widmaier's definition, one introductory question must be asked: Why should it be so difficult to define art? I posit that the problem lies in the kind of definition provided.

When it comes to the definition of art, scholars are split in two groups.

One group – the present writer included – believes that art is one of the defining characteristics of *Homo sapiens sapiens*<sup>5</sup> as a species able to express abstract thought.<sup>6</sup> This group

<sup>4</sup> Widmaier makes a similar statement with regards to the positive or negative aesthetic assessment of the material culture of the First Intermediate Period, Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 187–239. His comments regarding the subjectivity of these assessments are commendable examples of a critique of the etic perspective. However, in his general definition of art, he has evidently not realised that in separating Antiquity from Modernity he has used the same cultural subjectivity as those Egyptologists who qualitatively separate periods of State unity (so-called Kingdoms) from so-called Intermediate Periods. In a different context, Widmaier denies that Thutmoseid portraiture politically references its Middle Kingdom precedents. Rather than a form of self-legitimation, he suggests that New Kingdom sovereigns were solely concerned with the formal continuity of the Middle Kingdom monuments they aggrandised („*bildliche Kohärenz zwischen alten und neuen Statuen und damit auch eine Form von Kontinuität*“). In so doing, Widmaier is positing an aesthetic concern – an *art pour l'art* concern almost – on the part of XVIII-Dynasty kings, Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 414–449: 444–445.

<sup>5</sup> This definition is usually found in Prehistorical studies. Cf. W. M. Davis, *The Origins of Image Making*, in: *Current Anthropology* 27.3, 1986, 193–215, with bibliography. The article is quoted here for its general content rather than for the theory it expounds, which is based on an aesthetic understanding of art and an etic division between different forms of representation set against a mimetic principle (cf. further). With reference to Prehistorical studies, one may wonder what Widmaier means when he states that Egyptian art does not have an artistic tradition and relative historical development (Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 453–479 (§ 3.1)).

<sup>6</sup> To my knowledge, the only Egyptological theoretical definition of Egyptian art in terms of abstract thought may be found in E. Hornung, *Der Mensch als „Bild Gottes“ in Ägypten*, in: O. Loretz, *Die Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen*, München 1967, 154–155, where images are described as „*sinntragendes*“ and D. Laboury, *Fonction et signification de l'image égyptienne*, in: *Bulletin de la classe des beaux-arts* 6th series, 9 (7–12), 1998, 131–148. (Egyptian) images are defined there as cognitive tools (*outils spéculatifs*), in the sense of a synthetic expression of metaphysical, theological and scientific notions. These notions were expressed in Egyptian images through means that are the sole appanage of the visual arts. The concept appears sporadically in the context of the Predynastic, cf. for example R. Ordynat, *Egyptian Predynastic anthropomorphic objects: a study of their function and significance in Predynastic burial customs*, Oxford 2018, 1, with (non-Egyptological) bibliography. The stress which such a definition places on the intellectual component of artmaking has at times led to the conclusion that it derives from Fischer's concept (H.G. Fischer, *L'écriture et l'art de l'Égypte ancienne. Quatre leçons sur la paléographie et l'épigraphie pharaoniques*, Paris 1986, 24–46 and 130–146) of the interrelation between hieroglyphic writing and Egyptian art (B.M. Bryan, *Portraiture*, in: M.K. Hartwig (ed.), *A companion to ancient Egyptian art*, Chichester 2015, 389). According to this manner of seeing, Egyptian art is not provided with a syntax that is independent of the writing of hieroglyphs. Consequently, it considers the Egyptian artist as a scribe in the restricted sense of the term (D. Laboury/A. Devillers, *The Ancient Egyptian Artist: A Non-Existing Social Category?*, in: K.M. Cooney/D. Candelora/N. Ben-Marzouk (eds), *Ancient Egyptian Society: Challenging Assumptions, Exploring Approaches*, London / New York 2022, 163–165). The confusion is derived from the

defines art in terms which purposely include the cave-paintings of Lascaux, the work of Isa Genzken and everything that was produced in between.

Widmaier considers this definition “essentialistic”, anthropological and non-relativistic and as such disputes it.<sup>7</sup>

The other group – Widmaier included – conceives art as the expression of modern western Protestant culture. This group seeks a restrictive definition of art. One concept which stands out in Widmaier’s *Problematisierung*<sup>8</sup> is the contrast between the functional use of *images* and the production of *art*, the content of which is beauty and the (un)practical end of which is disinterested enjoyment.

Consciously or unconsciously, Widmaier applies the definition of art established by aesthetics. As in Belting, the separation between images (*Bild*) and art (*Kunst*) is extremely significant and epochal. It differentiates between religiously conceived images believed to be the embodiment of metaphysical forces, and art as disinterested aesthetic pleasure. Both Widmaier and Belting suggest that art only appeared in the Renaissance as a by-product of the Reformation when images were first considered (also) for their aesthetic component. In Belting, images and art are connected and the latter is considered to have progressively lost its religious connection. Belting only includes religious images in his analysis while Widmaier also includes non-sacred images and moves away from the idea that images and art are related through an historical phenomenon of development and transformation. As such, in Widmaier, art was created ex-nihilo and without a tradition after the advent of Protestantism. In defining art, philosophy and criticism<sup>9</sup> are simultaneously explanatory of the

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classical *topos* that considers rhetoric a more sophisticated form of content communication (cf. further). The interpretation of Egyptian art as a cognitive tool does not transcend the inseparable relation which exists between hieroglyphs and images. The relation with hieroglyphs is considered as a form of symbiosis and reciprocity which moves in both directions, from the sign towards the image and vice versa – cf. D. Laboury, *Le signe comme image ...*, in: S. Polis (éd.), *Guide des écritures de l’Égypte ancienne*, Cairo 2022, 144–149 and D. Laboury, *... ou l’image comme signe*, in: S. Polis (éd.), *Guide des écritures de l’Égypte ancienne*, Cairo 2022, 150–153, rather than unilaterally as in Fischer. The independence of Egyptian images and hieroglyphic writing acquires further specificity in the discussion of the relative iconic nature of hieroglyphic writing, cf. P. Vernus, *Iconicité et figurativité dans l’écriture: pour un affinage conceptuel*, in: H. Campaignolle-Catel/K. Bouchy (éds), *Écritures V. Systèmes d’écriture, imaginaire lettré*, Paris 2019, 101–118; W. Schenkel, *Wie ikonisch ist die altägyptische Schrift?*, in: *Lingua Aegyptia* 19, 2011, 125–153; J. Assmann, *Ancient Egypt and the Materiality of the Sign*, in: K.L. Pfeiffer (ed.), *Materialities of Communication*, Stanford 1994, 15–31.

<sup>7</sup> Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 58–62 (§ 1.2.16 *Kunst und Ästhetik vs. Ästhetik ohne Kunst*). And also the definition of art (*Kunst*) and Egyptological art (*Kunst, ägyptologische*) provided in the *Glossar*, Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 547–549.

<sup>8</sup> Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 8–34.

<sup>9</sup> “I assume that criticism is that department of thought which either seeks to find out what poetry [editor’s note: or any other art] is, what its use is, what desires it satisfies, why it is written and why read, or recited; or which, making some conscious or unconscious assumption that we do know these things assesses actual poetry. [...] Criticism, of course, never does find out what poetry is, in the sense of arriving at an adequate definition: but I do not know of what use such definition would be if it were found. Nor can criticism arrive at any final appraisal of poetry. But there are these two theoretical limits of criticism: at one of which we attempt to answer the question ‘what is poetry’ and the other ‘is it a good poem?’ No theoretic ingenuity will suffice to answer the second question, because no theory can amount to much which is not founded upon a direct experience of good poetry; but on the other hand our direct experience of poetry involves a good deal of generalising activity. The two questions, which represent the most abstract formulation of what is far from being an abstract activity, imply each other, the critic who remains worth reading has asked, if he has only imperfectly answered, both questions”. T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, London 1932/1933, 16.

past, prescriptive for the present and propaedeutic towards the future.<sup>10</sup> These three different motivations result in definitions which are more concerned with what art ought to be rather than with what it actually is or has been. Even when expressed in the affirmative, this kind of definition always poses a negative. For the past two hundred and fifty years, for as long as there has been a theory of aesthetics and a modern form of criticism, restrictive definitions have resulted in a game of cat and mouse played by critics and artists. A critic would say what art is (not) and an artist would demonstrate the opposite.<sup>11</sup> The exact same game has been applied to the art of Antiquity which, contrary to contemporary art, is not in a position to defend itself against the dogmas of criticism.<sup>12</sup>

Widmaier, for instance, writes that art is an open concept that cannot be reduced to common individual qualities or characteristics.<sup>13</sup> Although it is impossible to define, art is still recognizable as such.<sup>14</sup> He objects to an essentialist definition of art – such as that of the above-mentioned first group – and insists that similarities must extend beyond the (superficially) visual.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> If one takes the writings of J.J. Winckelmann, I. Kant and G.W.F. Hegel as an example, one will notice that the same pattern occurs in all three. They provide a universal history of art, pose guidelines for contemporary artists to follow – usually against prevailing bad taste as is the case of the Rococo for Winckelmann – and maintain that their work has educational value for the art of the future. As such, they assume that their analyses have universal value.

<sup>11</sup> 200 years of contemporary art have taught us that for every critic who states that art is *mimesis* (Winckelmann) there is an artist who produces abstract art (Mondrian). For every critic who says that the Greek profile is the most noble (Winckelmann) there is a sculptor who creates a masterpiece *au nez cassé* (Rodin). If it is stated that beauty is the content of art (Kant) or that the grotesque only serves the purpose of enhancing beauty (Burke), the category of the non-delightful makes its appearance (Medardo Rosso). For a definition of art as the product of the faculty of imagination (Kant), there appear works which rely heavily on the conceptual (ex. Duchamp, Conceptual Art). If it is said that art should not have any use (Kant), there appear works based on the de-contextualisation of everyday objects within the White Cube of galleries and museums (Duchamp, Pop-Art). It must be acknowledged that contemporary art has contributed to a deeper understanding of Egyptian Art. Less bound by preconceived notions and naturally keener to retrace the *Ursprung* of artistic phenomena, artists have often looked back to ancient art to grasp its essential nature. Contemporary Art was also the spark that allowed Alois Riegl to formulate his concept of *Kunstwollen*, which largely contributed to formulating an approach towards Late Antique and Medieval art unaffected by the ideas of *mimesis* as a sign of progress.

<sup>12</sup> If not by its mere existence and the fact that artists have always looked back to the past to capture the essence of their craft. Differently from what the mimetic approach to art states, the school of art is not nature but art itself. D. Laboury/A. Delli Castelli/F. Boulay, *L'artiste Rodin face à l'artiste égyptien*, in: B. Garnier (éd.), *Rêve d'Égypte*, Paris 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 461, objects to the fact that representation, decoration and signification are sufficiently characteristic to define art only because they are shared characteristics between ancient and modern art. According to the author, this notion eliminates the value of the context of production, projecting ideas pertaining to one's own culture onto past and foreign cultures and fosters a teleological interpretation of history.

<sup>14</sup> Widmaier finds Wittgenstein's idea of resemblance particularly unconvincing, *i.e.*, that one is able to define an object as art because it resembles something else that was previously defined as art. According to Widmaier, there is no way to determine the value and hierarchy of these resemblances. Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 455–156.

<sup>15</sup> This allows him to take up the thread of Belting's historical confinement and include the context in which a work of art is made. Only when a work of art is made within the institution of the art-world can it be defined as art. The statement is contrary to reason, because the insertion in the art-context always comes at a later stage than the production of art itself. In the Greek and Latin words *tekhne* and *ars* Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 463–464 finds the oldest definitions of art in terms of technical ability and still valid today, although generally these words are used to demonstrate the opposite. He concedes that these terms/definitions may also apply to Egypt but that history has charged the semantic value of the word art with other meanings, especially at the threshold of modern times. He denies that this phenomenon proves that the concept of art is flexible enough to include infinite possibilities, rather it tends to aid the projection of anachronistic content. This kind of definition develops from the

These restrictions result in a kind of exasperation which perceives art as undefinable because its form, content and use cannot be crystallised in a historically unalterable formula.

This impasse depends on which human faculty art is thought to originate from, the stage in its production process at which it is assessed and confusion between its objective/transcendental dimension and subjective/aesthetic dimension.

Between the two groups of scholars identified above, the first considers art as a conscious product of the faculty of abstract thought while the second defines it as the unconscious product of the faculty of imagination. The fundamental and consequential difference that the *location*<sup>16</sup> of the creative faculty makes in the assessment of art cannot be emphasised enough. To understand this is crucial towards contextualising the concepts of beauty and freedom applied – among others – by Kai Widmaier.

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idea that art-status is dependent on the viewer or, rather, the critic (cf. fn. 9). *Tekhne* and *ars* are not terms that can be applied universally, especially in the contemporary age which has explored the so-called conceptual side of artmaking. If mimetically conceived art invites us to suspend disbelief and believe that we are in front of an actual object even though this is obviously not true, in a strict sense (cf. further), conceptual art requires us to believe that no formal discourse was involved in its making. However, in order to exist, even the most conceptual art pieces, such as Yoko Ono's performance instructions, which are just written on pieces of paper as potential happenings, are still formal in their own way although they reduce form to a minimum. One of art's fundamental aspects is the manipulation of form, which entails the manipulation of our perception of time and space (cf. further). In the case of monumental sculpture (§ 3.3.1), which is bound to the place where it is erected, displacement operates on its most vital principle. In the case of *objets-trouvés* or of so-called usurpation (re-use), even the simple displacement of sculpture is a manipulation of form because it tampers with one of its fundamental characteristics, *Räumen* (cf. § 3.3.1). In the Greek context, the strict employment of the terms *ars* and *tekhne* does not consider the – non-hierarchical – *egraphsen/epoiesen* relation found on Attic vases. In the Egyptian context, it does not take into consideration the difference between the simple making of an object (*jrj*) and the more specialised process implied by the word *hmw.t*. On the subject, cf. D. Laboury, *Le scribe et le peintre. À propos d'un scribe qui ne voulait pas être pris pour un peintre*, in: P. Collombert/D. Lefèvre/S. Polis/J. Winand (éds), *Aere perennius. Mélanges égyptologiques en l'honneur de Pascal Vernus*, OLA 242, Leuven 2016, 371–396 and Laboury/Devillers, op. cit., 166–168. With regard to the appearance of the art world, cf. P. Bourdieu, *Lettre à Paolo Fossati à propos de la Storia dell'arte italiana*, in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 31, 1980, 91, « *quelle sont les conditions économiques et sociales de la constitution d'un champ artistique fondé sur la croyance dans les pouvoirs quasi magiques qui sont reconnus à l'artiste moderne, c'est-à-dire sur le fétichisme du < maître > et de l'œuvre du maître – qui se traduit sur le plan économique dans la valeur accordé à l'œuvre ? [...] Il [...] s'agit [...] de décrire les conditions sociales de la possibilité du personnage de l'artiste comme « maître », c'est-à-dire comme producteur de ce fétiche qu'est l'œuvre d'art ; de montrer comment l'ensemble du champ de production artistique [...] contribue à la production de la croyance dans la valeur de l'art et dans le pouvoir créateur de valeur de l'artiste. [...] le < sujet > de la production et du produit artistiques [...] n'est pas l'artiste ou l'artisan (peu importe) mais l'ensemble des agents producteurs d'œuvres considérées comme artistiques [...] critiques, collectionneurs, intermédiaires, conservateur, etc. [...]* ». One of the interesting aspects of Bourdieu's text is the manner in which it relativises the connection between art and magic in archaic societies, underlining how the fetish nature of artworks and the masters who make them survives in contemporary western societies; cf. also Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford 1998, 3. Bourdieu's passage is also informative with regard to the notion of genius (*maître* in Bourdieu) (cf. further).

<sup>16</sup> The word *location* is here intended metaphorically. In aesthetics, the separation between the rational mind and the imagination implies that they originate in two different loci, such as the mind and the soul. The definition of art as the product of abstract thought places both rational and imaginative (creative) thought in the mind. In the eighteenth century the two branches of human knowledge were often described as *sense* (as things are thought) and *sensibility* (as things are given).

## 2.2 *The Influence of Protestantism and Philosophy*

It was Kant who described art as a product of the imagination, at the very outset of aesthetics. His was yet another example of a restrictive definition. To state that art was the product of the imagination simultaneously denies that art is the product of thought. According to Kant, art can only be judged through the subjective faculty of taste. Consequently, art cannot be the subject of rational discourse but can only make show of a person's good taste. Art cannot be understood or explained through rational thought because it is not itself the product of thought – as Widmaier also writes.

The concept of art as a product of the imagination is found in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urtheilskraft*). This has been described as the dark mirror of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*) since the structure of the two treatises is the same but the assessment of their respective objects – Art and Thought – is purposely antithetical.<sup>17</sup> The *Critique of Pure Reason* discerned that thought can be thought in itself because its processes are based on the transcendental categories of Time-and-Space which regulate the understanding of all phenomena indiscriminately. In other words, through these transcendental categories, it is possible to understand our understanding of understanding. The *Critique of Judgement* defines art as the independent or spontaneous product of the imagination.<sup>18</sup> As such, art is unrelated to the understanding and explanation of phenomena – art's mutism in Widmaier.<sup>19</sup> It cannot be known a priori because it is a phenomenon. In the hierarchy of knowledge, this automatically places art at a lower level than rational thought.

Throughout Widmaier's book, emphasis is rightly placed on the importance of emic contextualisation – archaeological, social and religious/political – but also on etic contextualisation – a scholar's preconceptions which are inevitably projected onto the culture of foreign/past civilisations. It is therefore quite surprising that Widmaier does not examine the aesthetic definition of art and its context of production. Perhaps because this laid the foundations for *Bilderwelten* and informed his own etic perspective was Widmaier not able to follow his own advice and failed to contextualise and consider „*Die Relativität des eigenen Standpunktes als Chance auf Korrigierbarkeit*“<sup>20</sup> as he himself suggests the art historian should do.<sup>21</sup>

Let us explore the context of Widmaier's definition of art.

The origin of the definition of art as the unconscious product of the imagination can only be understood in the context of Protestant culture.<sup>22</sup> Rather than universal – as its formulation in the context of theoretical philosophy suggests – the concept is entrenched not only in modern western culture but in one of its sub-groups.

<sup>17</sup> P. D'Angelo, Introduzione, in: I. Kant, *Critica del Giudizio*, Roma/Bari 1997, viii–x.

<sup>18</sup> The concept of genius relates to the concept of imagination and equally reinforces the romantic aura of the independence of artistic creation from any thought process (cf. further).

<sup>19</sup> Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 480–489.

<sup>20</sup> Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 523.

<sup>21</sup> Widmaier states that John Baines does not thoroughly explain why this position is over-evolutionary and Eurocentric and by-passes the statement without further comment. Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> H.G. Fischer, *L'écriture et l'art*, 14, « *Naturellement le protestantisme est pour quelque chose dans notre impression équivoque des pharaons, que nous voyons dès notre enfance à travers la Bible, avec tous ses préjugés, justifiés ou non, contre les oppresseurs idolâtres* ».

It must be absolutely clear that the issue here is not people's beliefs<sup>23</sup> but the appropriateness of raising them to the level of universal truths.<sup>24</sup>

Protestant religious belief seeks to re-direct knowledge of the divine onto the Word, as defined in biblical theological terms (*John*, 1:1)<sup>25</sup> through the direct study of scripture as a gnoseological instrument at the expense of all intermediaries, which include images.<sup>26</sup> In the relatively more secular context of the Age of Enlightenment, the power of the Word came to include transcendental philosophy – suffice it to say that Hegel defined philosophy as rational theology.<sup>27</sup> The inferiority of images as a product of the faculty of imagination must be understood in the context of the Protestant exclusion of sacred images from theological discourse and the self-proclaimed superiority of philosophy as an instrument of sacred and secular knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.3 *Art as an Expression of Abstract Thought*

On the contrary, art as an expression of abstract thought, from a gnoseological perspective, is just as useful as the products of rational thought. This means that creative thought is also based on the transcendental categories of Time-and-Space.<sup>29</sup> It does not mean, however, that creative thought and rational thought are the same. The conceptual form in which the two express the relation between time and space is different. Rational thought expresses itself

<sup>23</sup> As will be seen further in more detail, different beliefs are considered here as different translations of the same metaphysical problems so that they may be intelligible to a specific culture at a particular historical moment. This in turn implies an interpretation of religion as creative thought and explains the reciprocal attraction which existed between art and religion for a long time.

<sup>24</sup> In the context of Widmaier's book, this raises the question of how pertinent it is to consider the Reformation as the instigator of true art by reasoning that it sanctioned the death of the social, religious and sacralised dimension of images. On the other hand, it also explains why Widmaier is so adamant in believing that alterity is unknowable – and suggests that he laboured under an “us and them” perspective – to use Malinowsky's famous dichotomy. Unless it was written in jest, which seems unlikely, this is the only possible explanation for the frankly quite shocking inclusion of a quotation from the seventeenth century Protestant Scottish traveller William Lithgow. In the quote, papists performing image-worship in St. Peter's are deemed “worse of knowledge then [*sic*] *Ethnicke Pagans* [my italics]”, Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”.

<sup>26</sup> The same as that of wood worshippers, as they were called in Mosaic Law and Byzantine Iconoclasm, (cf. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, Oxford 1968, 147–209). The connection with Byzantine Iconoclasm is of interest here as it informed a large part of Hans Belting's arguments for the distinction between images and art.

<sup>27</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Aesthetik*, in: H.G. Hotho (Hg.), *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke*, Bd. 10, Berlin 1842, 117–123, according to whom philosophy has no other object than God and is thus essentially rational theology and in the service of truth, God's perennial cult. The fact that Hegel used the word theology rather than metaphysics is revealing. Theology is a monotheistic invention and only appears when there is contention about the real nature of God (and Christ and the Virgin Mary in Christian Religions). However, matters of theology are also always ideological, *i.e.*, political, as the history of the Byzantine Empire (cf. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 50–68) the advent of Protestantism and even Atenism testify (D. Laboury, *Akhénaton*, Paris 2010, 93–223). It is this level of discourse on images which is not included, for example, in Belting, who takes the discussion out of its historical context and examines it simply for its abstract theological content.

<sup>28</sup> Protestant distrust of images also explains Belting's attitude towards images and his understanding of Byzantine iconoclasm, especially.

<sup>29</sup> *I.e.*, can be known transcendentially, a priori, independent from and chronological prior to experience, I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Leipzig 1868, 34–36. Cf. also E. Brunner-Traut, *Epilogue: aspective*, in: H. Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian art*, Oxford 1974, 431–443, in which the author states “that aspective art is able to exclude space and time as inessential”.

*analytically* while creative thought expresses itself *synthetically*. Rational thought is concerned with *differences* while creative thought is concerned with *connections*.

As eminently philosophical, the problem concerning differences and connections is found throughout Widmaier's book, especially with reference to the problem of the relation between style and history. This is especially revealing in the context of Egyptian art, one of the characteristics of which was the necessity to include the analytical and the synthetic through the inclusion of writing and images.<sup>30</sup>

To consider art as an expression of thought solves many of the difficulties which Widmaier and aesthetics encounter. No one would suggest that thought exists *a priori* or that it is already endowed with a subject matter and a finality. This would be a contradiction in terms. On the contrary, it is easily accepted that thought exists *per se*, *i.e.*, potentially – as a faculty – in one's understanding while still being able to include an indefinite number of subject-matters and formal applications. Likewise, no one would infer that thought could not be defined, intimate that it does not exist or that it does not define *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

The same levels that Kant applied to rational thought also describe creative thought and art.<sup>31</sup>

In their purest form, Time and Space must exist as ideas that are unknowable to men but the existence of which can be divined (level zero). At a first level of particularisation,

<sup>30</sup> One of the earliest Egyptian iconographic formulae, that of the funerary repast can serve as a perfect example. The formal syntax of these tableaux can be divided into two parts – one pertaining to the deceased and the other to offerings – and into four elements – two image-based and two hieroglyph-based, so that the image can ideally be read both vertically (information regarding the deceased; information regarding offerings) or horizontally (figurative information; written information) (this is slightly different from the division into sections presented in P. Der Manuelian, *Slab stelae of the Giza necropolis*, PPYE 7, New Haven (CT) 2003, 1, 141–160 and their application to each individual stela on 32, 42, 46, 50, 54, 58, 64, 70, 76, 84, 92, 98, 108: a) “the overhead identifying text, placed at the top of the stela”; b) “the funerary repast at the left side (seated figure before the table of offering loaves)”; c) “the list of offerings, located centrally” and d) “the linen list at the right edge of the stela”). At the level of information regarding the deceased and offerings, the difference between writing and images can be detected in the taxonomic function of writing, complying with the motivation behind its invention (J. Kahl, *Hieroglyphic writing during the fourth millennium BC: an analysis of systems*, in: *Archéo-Nil* 11, 2001, 101–134), with the detailed lists of titles and offerings – down to the number of threads in textile offerings. Taken *per se*, the images offer a synthetic representation of two invisible elements, their social and religious connections (cf. N. Cherpion, *Mastabas et hypogées d'Ancien Empire: le problème de la datation*, Bruxelles 1989, 42–46, on the symbolic value of the table of offerings, the passage from *demi-brioche*s to *roseaux* and their different meaning, without considering the difference the author includes between realistic and ideogrammatic(/stylised) representation). Furthermore, what unites the two parts of the composition and what gives unity to the tableau as a whole, is the gesture of the deceased, whose one arm is outstretched to receive offerings and the other pressed to the chest as a means to retain them. That gesture was the object of formal speculation between the Proto-Dynastic and the Old Kingdom, during which time sculptors found different ways to accommodate the different profiles they used to represent the body and the different ways to represent the relation between figure and background. The example of the funerary repast also shows the difference between the use and the form of art, which troubled Widmaier in his critique of analyses of the stelae of the First Intermediate Period (with reference to F. Junge's statement that canonicity (*i.e.* adherence to a classical canon) made an object religiously efficacious and lack thereof inefficacious, Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 192–197). Certainly, as an etic concept, the canonical aspect did not affect the functionality of objects. At the same time, the more transient and culture-specific understanding of Time-Space relations affected form. In this way, by intending form as culture specific, it is also possible to veer from the inherent value judgement contained in the concept of classicism/canonical form.

<sup>31</sup> In the context of this text, creative thought is the faculty (potential) and art its material application (act). Creative thought is the faculty which allows the synthetic perception of the cosmos via its inner connections. Art is the ability to materially express such connections.

Time-and-Space exist as transcendental, culture specific categories. At a second level, there appears the distinction between creative and rational thought. They are two complementary (non-hierarchical) ways through which the mind confronts phenomena by means of the transcendental categories. Creative thought is a synthetic understanding of the categories of Time-and-Space. Such understanding is the ultimate content/form common to all art. At a third level of specification, the arts divide by form, genres and sub-genres according to the pre-existing forms they choose to work with and the kind of manipulations which they operate. It is only at this level of specification that art materialises individual subject-matters and uses, as further cultural particularisations.<sup>32</sup> It is only at a fourth level of specification that the viewer is included and the lives of an artwork acquire their transiency. Between levels 3 and 4, there is a short intermediary moment, which follows an artwork's completion, when artwork and culture exist in symbiosis. When these circumstances change so does the public's perception of works of art. The art historian is neither the artist nor the public. His job is to recreate, as far as is possible, that fleeting moment in which the original intention of an artwork and the needs of its culture coincide (cf. table 1).

The various contents and uses of art only arrive at a third level of specification. Beauty and disinterested enjoyment are only one historical declension of art's possible contents and employments, not the epochal event which sanctioned the beginning of *true* art. Not only are beauty and disinterested enjoyment extremely specific manifestations but they are also one among indefinite possibilities. As a form of thought, *a priori*, art is subject-less and fluid and as such it needs an *object* – mental as well as physical – to hold its form; as the essence of a liquid is not in the vessel that contains it, so the content and form of art are not in its subject matter or in its use. The research for a canon of beauty is the prerogative of western modern *-isms*<sup>33</sup> which derives from a detachment of the concept of beauty(/perfection) from morals and knowledge (cf. further). Thus, the definition provided by aesthetics is thrice removed from the essential nature of art – to use Plato's words.

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<sup>32</sup> This is, I believe, Panofsky's underlying meaning when he wrote that canons of proportions and perspective are not the result of a differently developed mimetic faculty but of different *Weltanschauungen* (E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, New York 1955, 55–107 and E. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, New York 1991). Considering the (meta)-physical importance with which air was endowed in Egyptian culture, Ancient Egyptians could never have invented perspective, which rests on the understanding of the space between solid objects as a void. Expressed in another way, it has been demonstrated that the Egyptians were aware of the visual distortions of perspective but deliberately avoided using them in representation. Proof may be found in the fact that Egyptian sculptors manipulated the physiognomy of colossal statues in order that they would appear correct from their ideal vantage point, *i.e.*, from the part of the temple from which a viewer was most likely to observe them (D. Laboury, *Colosses et perspective. De la prise en considération de la parallaxe dans la statuaire pharaonique de grandes dimensions au Nouvel Empire*, in: *RdE* 59, 2008, 181–230).

<sup>33</sup> In this sense, there are three different ways in which a culture can relate to the past, all of which depend on the distance from the particular culture they reference. First, in so-called Egyptian archaism, the culture of reference was still in existence. Second, for artistic movements such as neo-classicism, the culture of reference (Greek and Roman) was extinguished. A third position is that of the Renaissance artists and intellectuals, who presented themselves as the direct descendants of the Romans although this was largely a literary and rhetorical construction. Only in modern times, with a division between morals, knowledge and beauty(/perfection) can there be abstract research into past artistic expressions in terms of beauty based on selection and good taste (case two).

**Table 1. The relation between the transcendental and subjective dimensions of art**

	Objective/Transcendental	Subjective/Aesthetic <sup>34</sup>
<b>Level 0</b>	Time-and-Space <i>per se</i> unknowable but deducible	–
<b>Level 1</b>	Time-and-Space as <i>transcendental categories</i> Culture-specific, universal content of philosophy and art	–
<b>Level 2</b>	Specification according to <i>forms of thought</i> [Rational (philosophy)] or Creative (art, religion)	–
<b>Level 3</b>	Specification according to <i>forms and manipulations</i> Artforms, genres and subgenres Specific <i>contents</i> and <i>uses</i> Different relations to Time and Space	–
<b>Intermediary Level</b>	Connection between the objective/transcendental dimension of a work of art and the subjective/aesthetic perception of the viewer. It is the moment when the intention of the maker and the expectations of the viewer coincide. This is possible because the maker is a representative and creator of culture while the viewer is the beneficiary of such culture. This is the moment which art history seeks to recreate through the study of the context of production.	
<b>Level 4</b>	Work of art as <i>transient</i> Loss/modification of meaning due to historical and cultural change	Museological perspective

One of the characteristics of western art is that it includes the viewer at the objective/transcendental level of its conception. It is what Walther Wolf means when he differentiates between *Wirkungsform* and *Daseinsform* (cf. further). This truly epochal change must also be considered as culture-specific and resulting from a different conception of Time-and-Space and ultimately dependent on the concept of the individual in western societies. It can be related to Immanuel Kant's idea that subjectivity is objective, *i.e.*, a universal human condition.

To consider art as thought, connected to the fundamental way in which the mind apprehends phenomena, also relieves Widmaier of his fear that the similarities between ancient and modern art are only superficial. Their similarities do not lie in the fact that they both use images. The way images express meaning, their translation through matter and technique have undergone deep and profound changes over time.<sup>35</sup> The inescapable content of art – both ancient and modern – is rooted in the perception of the existence of Time-and-Space as a constant reminder of the most fundamental and inescapable ontological questions (cf. further § 3).

<sup>34</sup> In the etymological meaning of “sensory and cognitive perception”, cf. Laboury, On Presence and Visual Agency of Amarna Statuary, (in print).

<sup>35</sup> For this fact, it is quite surprising that Widmaier should state that in the era of reproducibility the concepts of *ars* and *tekhne* are still applicable. What is still applicable, is the general concept of form manipulation disjointed from any concept of manual prowess or mimetic ability. On the concept of manipulation cf., the next paragraph as it applies to sculpture.

#### 2.4 *Beauty, Mimesis and Freedom*

The idea of beauty as the content of art is connected to another question, the difference between natural and artistic beauty. In many art-historical writings, especially *mimesis*-minded ones, the two concepts overlap and are considered the same.<sup>36</sup> Natural and artistic beauty are not the same, however.

Natural beauty is a human physiological-biological phenomenon connected with the propagation of the species, which is expressed outwardly in desire. Certainly, there are works of art which insist on the *impression of being real*,<sup>37</sup> on the sensual – in both meanings of the word – to draw the spectator in.<sup>38</sup> This is an especially Greek thought,<sup>39</sup> even though in Plato's *erotica* (theory of desire), the ideas of love and desire relate to maieutics and not to art.<sup>40</sup>

Artistic beauty is always – at all times and in all places, even to the Impressionists<sup>41</sup> – an intellectual process concerning *limit* and *rule*. *Limit* in that, unlike the cosmos of which it represents the understanding, every work of art is finite in its spatial and temporal dimension – be it the surface of a painting, the block of a sculpture, the duration of a piece of music, the syllables of a stanza or the relation between body and stage in a performance. *Rule* in that the artist, confronted with such limits, always applies a set of rules – be they dictated by the artist, or by an outside institution or a tradition makes no difference.<sup>42</sup> A successful work of art is not judged by its approximation to nature – unless that was the rule the artist applied – but by the ability of the artist to follow their (own) rules evenly throughout their work so that it may be intelligible without need of explanation.

<sup>36</sup> Cf., for example, M. Müller, *Schönheitsideale in der ägyptischen Kunst*, in: H. Györy (éd.), *Mélanges offerts à Edith Varga: « le lotus qui sort de terre »*, Budapest 2002, 239–86. In this instance, artistic beauty is considered, as in this article, an obedience to limit and rule (cf. further). Ideal beauty (*Schönheitsideale*), however, is considered as a sub-category in which art mimics biological reproductive behaviour.

<sup>37</sup> Laboury/Delli Castelli/Boulay, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> In a chapter called *Zweck der Kunst* (The purpose of art) Hegel dismisses in a few words the whole mimetic premise. If art really were in competition with nature, it would lose the battle from the start since an art object always remains inanimate and inert. Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Aesthetik*, 54–57.

<sup>39</sup> Although anticipatory phenomena of the same kind can also be seen in Egyptian art, especially in Amarna Art. Laboury, op. cit. (in print).

<sup>40</sup> As for example in the *Symposium*.

<sup>41</sup> I mention this movement in particular because, according to W. Wolf, *Die Stellung der ägyptischen Kunst zur antiken und abendländischen, und, Das Problem des Künstlers in der ägyptischen Kunst: zwei Aufsätze*, Hildesheim 1951, 33–36 and Wolf, *Die Kunst*, 192–196, Impressionism was the final stage of a process which had begun with the Baroque and was based on perceptive reality (*Daseinsform*), from the perspective of both the viewer and the artist. As regards the Baroque, which was one of Wolf's favourite periods to reference, it is – as is well known – the art of the Counter Reformation. Widmaier's and Belting's dismissal of what they describe as the feeble attempts of the Catholic Church to revive images against the inexorability of the Reformation is further confirmation of the bias of their etic perspective. However disputable the concept is, Wolf's *Daseinsform* originated in the Catholic sphere and not in Protestantism. This should have been taken into consideration in Widmaier's historical reconstruction of the supposed advent of true art in the Renaissance.

<sup>42</sup> I am reminded of Dorothea Arnold's article (D. Arnold, *Egyptian art – a performing art?*, in: S.H. D'Auria (ed.), *Servant of Mut: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Fazzini*, Leiden/Boston 2008, 1–18) which defines Egyptian art as performative. Arnold intended performative in a musical sense considering multiple, anonymous artists working on the same object similar to the members of an orchestra. The metaphor between music and sculpture can be amplified to the relation between composer and performer, whose relation is essential, neither can exist without the other. The relation between tradition and the sculptor or the influence that the State/religion had on them can be described in the same terms.

In aesthetics, the rules which an artist follows in producing their work are connected to the idea that a work of *true* art is produced in *absolute freedom*. The restrictive side of this idea is the dogma according to which art should have no practical use<sup>43</sup> – the main point Widmaier exploits to indicate that Egyptian art is not art (*ägyptische Kunst nicht Kunst*).<sup>44</sup>

There are at least two implications in the statement of absolute freedom/no practical use:

1. Art should not be used by external institutions such as religious institutions or the State.
2. As an art-object is distinguishable from all other objects because it does not have a use, so is the artist to be distinguished from the craftsman.

Since its roots are in Protestant belief, the problem of the relation between art and religion as posed in aesthetics is more concerned with what this means for religion rather than for art.<sup>45</sup> The Protestant position on the subject propounds that there has been progress in religion and that Lutheran rational and historical theology constitutes an advancement compared with religions which employ images (= symbolism)<sup>46</sup> to explain their content.

Behind the idea of the alleged *liberation* of art from the binds of religion and the State operated by the Reformation lies the exclusion of the artist and art from society. The process was neither so simple nor so immediate and it is questionable whether the Reformation can be identified as the epochal event that caused it. The process which separated art and the artist from society was a relatively long process which took four hundred years, *i.e.*, the whole of

<sup>43</sup> This also explains why, against all evidence, aesthetics associates art with freedom of expression and use. Protestant culture dismissed the social and religious aspect of works of art. At the same time, philosophers were confronted with an apparent paradox. Even though it had lost its use (Kant) and *raison-d'être* (Hegel), art was still being produced, which created a fundamental contradiction. To solve this contradiction, art was simultaneously defined as producing disinterested – non-sexual – pleasure and as devoid of intellectual use. When pleasure is defined as non-useful, a moral component is added to the equation. Even if disinterested enjoyment/pleasure were the finality of art – which they are not necessarily (cf. below) – enjoyment would in any case be a use – negative perhaps but nonetheless still a use. The Protestant moral perspective deemed it negative and therefore useless – but useless here means, rather, unbeneficial and as such entails a value judgement.

<sup>44</sup> A survey of Egyptological literature on portraiture – a subject where the question of use has been perceived as being of great importance – contradicts Widmaier's findings on the subject. Utility is not the neglected subject he states, often quoted and seldom brought to its ultimate consequences. The subject of the utility of Egyptian images has been explored in great depth and with different results at least from August Mariette's excavations at Giza and Saqqara in the 1880s until the Second World War. What is interesting in this respect is the difference between the German and French Egyptological Schools. The German School was generally in line with Widmaier's position and the French School usually considered the magic/utilitarian aspect of Egyptian Art as having a profound effect on its (magic) realism. After the second half of the twentieth century, the application of the term art to Egyptian material culture has seemed more justified. Consequently, despite the obligatory short-hand form dictated by its inclusion in an encyclopaedia, Eaton-Krauss' quote at the beginning of Widmaier's *Einleitung* expresses the factuality of Egyptological literature much more precisely, Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 1 (M. Eaton-Krauss, *Artists and Artisans*, in: D. B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford 2001, 136).

<sup>45</sup> This is especially clear in Hegel. Considering the fact that Hegel defined philosophy as rational theology, his aesthetics as well as his philosophy of history can be seen as histories of religions (G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in: P. Marjeinecke/E. Gans/H.G. Hotho/E. Michelet/F. Föster (Hg.), *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Werke*, Bd. 9, Berlin 1848). Thus, when Hegel speaks of the death of art, he is referring to its use within the context of religion. The position is exactly the same as that of Widmaier and Belting, who speak from the point of view of art. This is why Hegel can speak of the death of art whereas Widmaier and Belting can speak of the birth of *true* art.

<sup>46</sup> According to Hegel there have been three periods of religious speculation and related art production, Symbolic (which includes Egyptian art and religion), Classical and Romantic.

modern history from the end of the Middle-Ages to the Enlightenment, and which did not come to complete fruition until the turn of the 19th century. The institutions which Widmaier and Belting identify as originating in the Reformation – museum, gallery, auction house – are as many entities which slowly came to substitute Church and State in the artistic context of secularised societies. A theoretical stance asserting that museums, galleries and auction houses do not exercise a restraint on the freedom of artistic expression has no basis in reality.

The process of liberation/exclusion of art was the historical result of the secularisation of society,<sup>47</sup> which is the same process that allowed the idea of beauty to be conceived independently of morality and knowledge. In traditional societies, Egypt included, these three concepts are inseparable.<sup>48</sup> In this conceptual triangulation, each term is defined by the other two – knowledge is perfect (beautiful) goodness; goodness is knowledge of perfection and perfection is knowledge of goodness. In this sense, it is impossible to state that Egyptian art created objects that were beautiful *per se* or conformed to the idea of *art-pour-l'art* according to a term which made its apparition in the Egyptological literature of the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>49</sup> As stated earlier, it would be wrong to infer that the Ancient Egyptians did not create art because they did not possess an independent concept of beauty for it is highly questionable whether beauty is the actual and sole content of art.

The historical reconstruction of art as independent of society often endows artists with much of the responsibility for this process – as is the case in *Bilderwelten*.<sup>50</sup> It is so that a romantic, stereotypical and genius-oriented interpretation of the Renaissance or worse the bohemian Montmartre artist, is juxtaposed to the sheepish and uninventive Egyptian artist – as in Junge's problematic concept of demiurgic creation quoted by Widmaier.<sup>51</sup>

The idea of genius has been employed in aesthetics to confirm the appearance of art based on the faculty of imagination and inspiration.<sup>52</sup> Once more, the problem is one of de-contextualisation. Seventy years have passed since Hauser placed the independence of the Renaissance artist in its proper sociological context – that of a dissociation from Medieval corporations in order for the *artist* to be better remunerated.<sup>53</sup> It should also be noted that

<sup>47</sup> In this sense, it is not only art that was disengaged from religion but the entirety of people's lives, in their government, in their calendars and in their belief systems. Secularization was a process which invested the western world in all its facets, not only art. Art simply complied, on occasion after having overcome the crisis of its founding principles (cf. § 3.3). The process is therefore not one of active disengagement or the will of artists to finally produce works for beauty's sake but a historical inevitability.

<sup>48</sup> J. Winand, *Le beau et l'idée du beau. Les mots pour le dire*, in: E. Warmenbol (éd.), *Beautés d'Égypte. « Celles que les ans ne peuvent moissonner »*, Treignes 2002, 17–24.

<sup>49</sup> For ex. J. Capart, *Propos sur l'art égyptien*, Bruxelles 1931, 51–99 (in a chapter entitled *Problèmes d'esthétique égyptienne*); M. Weynants-Ronday, *L'évolution cyclique du goût et l'art égyptien*, in: *CdE* 15.29, 1940, 51–64; D. Ragai Shafik, *L'art pour l'art dans l'Égypte antique*, Paris 1940.

<sup>50</sup> Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 11–20.

<sup>51</sup> Junge speaks of the Egyptian artist in terms of demiurgic creation (Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 20–34), which, in the literal transposition of Platonic thought, is the entity which created the world from the archetype represented by the World of Ideas. As such, the Egyptian artist is negatively considered as an emulator. Junge's description of the Egyptian artist simply dresses Winckelmann's contrast between *imitatio* (positive) and *emulatio* (negative) in (semi)-Platonic clothes. In Plato, the idea of demiurgic creation is not connected to art – that is a contemporary etic perspective – but is the explication of the origin of evil.

<sup>52</sup> I. Kant, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, Leipzig 1880, 148–162.

<sup>53</sup> A. Hauser, *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*, München 1958: 331–362. In terms of a social history of art, it is what Pierre Bourdieu refers to in terms of "*lutte*", Bourdieu in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences*

the argument which the Renaissance artists brought forward to dissociate themselves from craftsmen – or rather corporations – was not the fact that they created objects that were more *beautiful* but that their creations entailed an *intellectual added-value* which raised artists to the level of men of letters at a time when, according to the Latin tradition, rhetoric was still considered to be the height of intellectual accomplishment.

The Ancient Egyptians may or may not have had a word to indicate art independently of craft, for the same reasons they did not have a word for beauty independent of morals and knowledge (*cf.* above). Cultural anthropology has taught us to discard the idea of the existence of different levels of worth within the material culture of a people, as in the adage according to which the Egyptian Pre- and Proto-dynastic sculptors *only* produced vessels and *only* achieved figurative sculpture during the Dynastic Period proper.<sup>54</sup> From the point of view of speculation on time and space, there is nothing in Old Kingdom figurative sculpture that cannot be found in Pre- and Proto-dynastic vases. At the same time, cultural anthropology has the tendency to perceive artifacts as agents. This means that it does not consider them inanimate objects but actors and entities in themselves because they were intended as such by those who made them. In describing artifacts, anthropology concentrates on their effects rather than their form. From the point of view of history of art, especially in the context of cultures in which art has an important social/political/religious dimension, artifacts should be considered agents and patients simultaneously.<sup>55</sup> This allows the historian to avoid Eurocentric rankings between arts and crafts, and between genres within the arts while maintaining the study of form. It is Widmaier's contention that the analysis of form – style – of artifacts is completely unrelated to their context. This is true insofar as stylistic examination provides an assessment of the objects, which normally entails a judgment according to mimetic and canonic principles. When the study of form does not produce gratuitous comparisons – rightly criticised by Widmaier as museum practice – but refers form to the context, it can retrieve information on the manner in which thought was manipulated and expressed, rather than merely make a show of the scholar's good taste.

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sociales 31, 1980, 91, « *Tout cela [cf. supra fn. 15] veut dire simplement que non seulement le statut de l'« artiste » mais aussi l'ensemble des concepts qu'il emploie pour se définir ou que les autres agents du champ de production (critiques contemporaines, clients, intermédiaires, etc.) emploient pour le définir sont un enjeu de lutte entre les « artiste » et les non-artiste [...] et aussi entre les « artistes » eux-mêmes* ».

<sup>54</sup> « *Il y a quelques milliers d'années, les Égyptiens découvrirent soudain le bonheur de sculpter. A moins qu'ils n'aient d'abord découvert le prix de leur personne, l'importance de leur individu qu'ils estimèrent digne d'être sauvé pour toujours. Aussitôt apparurent les artistes nécessaires, aptes à répondre à ce besoin. Jusque là, ils savaient tailler des vases, ils avaient gravé des stèles frustes, même quelques statues schématiques et irréelles. Maintenant, on leur demande la réalité, l'image exacte, complète, d'un notable : la dignité de la fonction, le rayonnement de la personnalité, la merveilleuse mécanique du corps* » C. Vandersleyen, *Liminaire*, in: N. Cherpion, *Mastabas et hypogées*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Gell, *Art and Agency*, 24 “The public, or ‘recipients’ of a work of art (index) are, according to the anthropological theory of art, in a social relationship with the index, either as ‘patients’ (in that the index casually affects them in some way) or as ‘agents’ in that, but for them, this index would not have come into existence (they have caused it)”.

### 2.5 *The Relation between the Objective/Transcendental and Subjective/Aesthetic Dimensions of Art*

So far, this article has questioned the validity of the aesthetic assessment of works of art in order to introduce the notion that works of art exist in themselves as an intellectual manifestation of our understanding of Time-and-Space. The concept of the transcendental nature of art has not been introduced here as a substitute for aesthetics but as its complement (cf. table 1, *Intermediary Level* and *Level 4*).

The aesthetic component of a work of art is neither wrong nor inexistent. It describes an artwork not in itself but in relation to the viewer. Aesthetics states that a work of art *only* exists in relation to a viewer and therefore denies it any transcendental quality (cf. above). This makes its literal subjectivity, the fact that it is perceived by a subject, its only ontological premise.

Aesthetics – intended as a viewer’s ability to judge whether an object is *beautiful* – is the externalisation of a person’s or a culture’s understanding of that object. The understanding of an art object is the resonance of an object of the past into the present of an individual/culture.<sup>56</sup> As such, its resonance changes with the times, cultures and, in our society, individuals. The aesthetic understanding of art is the apprehension of the rules employed by the artist(s) as a means of making their work intelligible to a viewer/culture. It follows, therefore, that when we judge an object as *beautiful*, we are expressing our understanding of a culture’s or of an artist’s way of expressing abstract thought rather than assessing their ability to produce an object of beauty.

Consequently, works of art exist in a double dimension, (1) in themselves as an expression of Time-and-Space and (2) to the viewer as a phenomenon which is apprehended through the senses, like all other phenomena, and understood through the transcendental categories of Time-and-Space.<sup>57</sup> The encounter between the manipulation of, and perception through, the categories of Time-and-Space constitutes the essential core of a work of art. Differently from nature, artistic phenomena manipulate our perception of time and space and in so doing show us the effect that time and space exercise on our understanding of the world.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, they are also phenomena like any other and are perceived as such.

As already suggested in speaking of the difference between artistic and natural beauty, the problem lies in what has been aptly termed the mimetic-trap.<sup>59</sup> The mimetic conception of art exasperates the suspension of disbelief which works of art demand of their viewers. The implication is that no qualitative difference is perceived between what is represented and the representing – even as far as forgetting that a painting is flat, or that sculpture is made of stone or metal. The mimetic principle makes the dimensions [(1). objective and (2). subjective] described above coincide and thus ignores the *manipulative* side of works of art, *i.e.*, their

<sup>56</sup> „Die Geschichte ist Gegenstand einer Konstruktion, deren Ort nicht die homogene und leere Zeit sondern die von Jetztzeit erfüllte bildet. So war für Robespierre das antike Rom eine mit Jetztzeit geladene Vergangenheit, die er aus dem Kontinuum der Geschichte herausprengte. Die französische Revolution verstand sich als ein wiedergekehrtes Rom“, W. Benjamin, Über den Begriff der Geschichte, in: R. Tiedemann/H. Schweppenhäuser (Hg.), Walter Benjamin. Gesammelte Schriften, Frankfurt am Main 1980, 701.

<sup>57</sup> Laboury’s etymological – as opposed to etic – application of the word aesthetic can be interpreted in this sense, Laboury, *op. cit.* (in print), cf. also fn. 34.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. fn. 32.

<sup>59</sup> Laboury, *op. cit.* (in print).

ability to play with our perception of things and express something about our understanding in the process. It also restricts art to the figurative whereas art is always abstract even when we have the impression of standing before a real object.<sup>60</sup> As such, works of art are considered substitutes for the objects they represent.

The concept of art as substitute for what it represents is further connected to the problem of the semantic understanding of works of art. Thought and phenomena constitute the double nature of works of art and this is why the semantic approach fails.<sup>61</sup> The semantic approach only takes into consideration the existence of a work of art as a sign. A work of art always and simultaneously presents itself as a phenomenon and a sign – or *soma* and *sema* to use Jan Assmann's words.<sup>62</sup> A work of art is, however, neither a phenomenon nor a sign but a *third thing*<sup>63</sup> which derives from the interaction and intersection of both the phenomenon and the sign. This is the reason why a work of art can neither be approached as a natural thing (*mimesis*) nor as a sign of the alphabet (*semantic*). A work of art constantly plays with these two aspects of its existence and the Egyptians, as a culture, were particularly sensitive to this.

The consciousness that an artwork is an object in itself and simultaneously the representation of a something explains the complexity of Egyptian drawing.<sup>64</sup> To reduce the image to a *sign of the alphabet* is tantamount to denying it its most basic nature. It also implies that, like writing, its content is independent of context,<sup>65</sup> which is the one concern of Widmaier's which is worth pursuing – and which is pursued, as a matter of fact, in Egyptology.

<sup>60</sup> As, for example, G. Stein's "A rose is a rose is a rose" or R. Magritte's, Foucault-inspired (M. Foucault, *Les Mots et le choses*, Paris 1966), « *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* ».

<sup>61</sup> Starting from the assumption that the world does not speak but only humans do (cf. fn. 62), Widmaier denies the predicative character of art and therefore its interpretation. Thus, although he advocates a semantic approach, he considers that it should be limited to description.

<sup>62</sup> J. Assmann, *Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture*, in: P. Der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, Boston (MA) 1996, 61.

<sup>63</sup> Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 453, used the quotation by Richard Rorty „*Die Welt spricht überhaupt nicht. Nur wir sprechen*“ to assert that images are mute things. While true as far as the phenomonic world is meant in *die Welt*, the statement does not apply to art-objects which are both phenomena and man-made objects. The quote is to be understood in relation to Kant's assertion that „*Die Natur in ihren schönen Formen spricht figürlich zu uns, und die Auslegungsgabe ihrer Chifferschrift ist uns im moralischen Gefühl verliehen*“, Kant, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, 142, also quoted at the beginning of Friedrich Hölderlin's *Hymne an die Schönheit*, an echo of which can be found in Martin Heidegger's quote below (*der Orten aus denen die Götter entflohen sind*) (§ 3.3.1).

<sup>64</sup> In this respect, it should be noted that Schäfer's notion of *vorgriechisch* implies a value judgement which derives from a classicist, Greek-minded orientation and was ultimately influenced by J.J. Winckelmann and his school. In his *Principles*, Schäfer asserts that Egyptian art afforded a better understanding of Greek art, *i.e.*, of Greek art's greater value in terms of the universal history of cultural progress. H. Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian art*, Oxford 1974, 1–5. Certainly, Schäfer was interested in Egyptian art as an expression of thought, as the employment of the word *Geradvorstellung* confirms, although the idea of "conception" (*Vorstellung*) he applied was based on contemporary psychology and anthropology. The greatest critique that can be directed at Schäfer does not concern his interpretation of Egyptian art as the projection of the mental structure of the Ancient Egyptians but his failing to understand Greek art as a highly conceptual, mathematical and non-sensorial art.

<sup>65</sup> Certainly, as P. Vernus, *La naissance de l'écriture dans l'Égypte ancienne*, in: *Archéo-Nil* 3, 1993, 76, « *Il y a écriture au sens propre lorsque le message fixé graphiquement peut être décodé hors de son contexte de production, pour peu qu'on possède les clefs du code. L'écriture a en effet la vertu de conférer aux énoncés linguistiques qu'elle véhicule une autonomie par rapport aux conditions de leur originelle profération* ». The exception to the rule is represented by monumental writing, and not only in Ancient Egypt. Monumental writing shares part of its fundamental nature with monumental sculpture (§ 3.3.1) in that it is rooted in its place of installation, from which it derives specification of meaning. As an example, in the Ancient Egyptian culture, cf. the studies of the

The semantic approach to images is similar to the methods of iconography. Whereas in iconography there is a conscious separation and temporary suspension between form and content in order to concentrate on the latter, the semantic approach willingly negates the existence of form as a signifier.

With regard to Egyptian works of art, the semantic approach often translates into a correspondence between Egyptian images and hieroglyphs – either in their form or in part of their linguistic morphology, *i.e.*, their use as determinatives. On the one hand, one can observe that the semantic method is as unsuccessful or as partial in explaining the functioning of determinatives as it is in its employment in history of art.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, the relation, which certainly existed, between Egyptian images and determinatives is one of overlap and not one of identity. While it is true that images could be transformed into determinatives and *vice versa*,<sup>67</sup> they simultaneously shed and acquired the characteristics which make them distinct during their process of transformation. Whereas the function of determinatives is to restrict and indicate semantics, that of a work of art is to express invisible connections.

The semantic-hieroglyphic approach to Egyptian works of art has been confused with their interpretation as cognitive tools.<sup>68</sup> The various non-communicating dichotomies<sup>69</sup> which have been super-imposed onto the study of art separate content and form to such a degree that content appears as the intellectual – literary – aspect of a work of art while form is interpreted as being dependent on inspiration, imagination or technical ability. In regarding Ancient Egyptian works of art simply as hieroglyphs, the problem of form is avoided because the meaning of a work of art is considered independent of its particular form, as in the case of alphabetic signs. The interpretation of a work of art as a form of thought places form and content on the same level and perceives them as two barely separable entities.

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relation between *Pyramid Texts* and their position inside the burial chamber, J.P. Allen, Reading a pyramid, in: C. Berger/G. Clerc/N. Grimal (éds), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, Le Caire 1994, 5–28 and B. Mathieu, La signification du serdab dans la pyramide d'Ounas: l'architecture des appartements funéraires royaux à la lumière des Textes des Pyramides, in: C. Berger/B. Mathieu (éds), *Études sur l'Ancien Empire et la nécropole de Saqqâra dédiées à Jean-Philippe Lauer* 2, Montpellier 1997, 289–304.

<sup>66</sup> One may quote, for instance, Orly Goldwasser's attempt to interpret Egyptian language and art according to modern semiological terms. The emblematic images of the Narmer Palette (Cairo Museum, CG 14716/JE 32169) are defined there as surrealistic, or considered to "portray an impossible representation of objects in the known world" (O. Goldwasser, From icon to metaphor: studies in the semiotics of the hieroglyphs, OBO 142, Freiburg (Schweiz) / Göttingen 1995, 11–12), which allows for the definition of these images as metaphors that free the literal and realistic mind and let the imaginative space emerge.

<sup>67</sup> Assmann, *op. cit.* (1994), 19–20, "Protodynastic pictorial narrative uses picture-signs on two distinctly different physical scales. The large pictures portray a 'scene,' and the small pictures identify actors and places by including names. The small pictures therefore refer to language (names), the large pictures refer to the world (acts). It would be a mistake, however, to categorize only the small pictures as 'writing'. [...] A new stage is reached when the 'large' signs are integrated into the inventory of the 'small' ones. This is the origin of determinatives. The determinative is originally nothing more than a 'picture' reduced to script size that joins the preceding phonogram as annotation. The reference of these sense signs only gradually becomes generalized from sememes to classemes".

<sup>68</sup> Cf. fn. 5 and 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ideal/realistic; form/content; beauty/sublime; intellect/imagination; arts/crafts.

### 3 The Definition of Sculpture

At a more specific level than art in general, the ideas revolving around use involve sculpture more particularly. These are, more particularly, Widmaier's concept of the *Eingebundenheit in architektonische und religiöse Kontexte* and Wolf's *Wirkungsform* and *Daseinsform* as constituting the difference between ancient and modern works – or in Widmaier's terms, between images and art. Sculpture was an essential part of Ancient Egyptian culture and, as such, it deserves a clear definition. In presenting an analytical definition of sculpture, it is necessary to distinguish the various levels of its manifestation. In the following pages, I have proceeded from the most superficial to the most essential. Here the word superficial is intended literally – as in the way sculpture treats its surfaces (Definition 1, § 3.1). Then, I have taken into consideration the specificity of sculptural working methods (Definition 2, § 3.2). These two definitions also require that the specificity of sculpture be defined in the general context of the figurative arts, *i.e.*, what constitutes the difference between sculpture and painting. Lastly, I have dealt with the issue of the general meaning of sculpture in its different relations to Time and Space (Definition 3, § 3.3).

#### 3.1 Definition 1. Sculpture is relief – raised, sunk or in the round.<sup>70</sup>

As its linguistic definition implies, an act of sculpture places an object or space into relief, *i.e.*, in “the state of being clearly visible or obvious due to being accentuated”. The formal characteristic of sculpture is intrinsically connected with its essential characteristics – the detachment of an object/space from the undifferentiated flux of existence which endows it with particular significance. In the context of traditional and religious societies this definition of sculpture overlaps with the definition of sacredness (cf. Definition 3, § 3.3.1).

The formal definition of sculpture has implications specific to Egyptology. It is customary in the field to consider only sculpture in the round as sculpture, *i.e.*, three-dimensional, while relief is usually defined as bi-dimensional. As I understand it, this confusion between definitions has two different interpretative causes. The first is more commonplace but illuminating of the different perspectives which viewer and artist may have. Figurative, anthropomorphic sculpture in the round is the ultimate mirror held up to the viewers, which allows them to stand before the embodiment of their own physical presence. This also explains the subjective, entirely psychological preference for sculpture that is life-size or bigger. In absolute terms, size should not matter in the evaluation of sculpture and art in general. To a sculptor, raised or sunk relief is the most engaging and intellectual form of sculpture. Whether “perspective” or “aspective”, relief necessitates a mental process of detachment from the representation of nature 1:1.

The second cause is more scholarly – rooted in the very foundation of the Egyptological study of images, *i.e.*, in Heinrich Schäfer's *Von ägyptischer Kunst*. In this text, painting and relief are included in one group – as justified by the fact that the author was trying to define the psychology underlying Egyptian *drawing*. In time, this has produced the impression that Egyptian painting and raised/sunk-relief are the same.<sup>71</sup> The common ground of painting and raised/sunk-relief in drawing is not limited to Egyptian sculpture, it also extends to other

<sup>70</sup> P. Mola, Brancusi. L'opera al bianco, Venezia 2005, 15.

<sup>71</sup> That the two were considered different is suggested by the two Ancient Egyptian expressions *zš-qd* (painters/draftsmen) and *ḥy-md3.t, s-nḥ* and *qs.tj* (sculptors), cf. Laboury/Devillers, op. cit.

artistic periods. But, since no-one would define Donatello's reliefs as bidimensional on the grounds that he utilised the same drawing principles as Piero della Francesca, neither should we confuse Egyptian painting and raised/sunk-relief.

The difference between painting and sculpture is more complex than the difference between the bi- and three-dimensional. Painting and sculpture express two different time-space relations.

The essence of sculpture concerns the physical presence of objects in space. Every human being feels that they occupy a certain amount of space, a feeling that is connected with the fundamental awareness of being alive, of existing, of *being*. Sculpture is an outward manifestation of this awareness which crystallises the existence *per se* of an object-in-space.

Painting, on the other hand, is concerned with the relation between objects in space and their *becoming*. As such, it does not consider objects *per se* but their development through time. Painting relates the representation of an object to its surrounding context – especially light and air but also to extraneous objects.

Described in this way, painting and sculpture are dissociated from their relation to the viewer and relate instead to the intrinsic way they express thought. They are the manifestation of different approaches to the cosmos and its phenomena. As such, it is not unusual for an object in the round to be painterly or an apparently “flat” work to be sculptural.

### 3.2 Definition 2. Sculpture which subtracts matter and sculpture which adds matter.<sup>72</sup>

A connection between a painterly and a sculptural attitude is found in the sculptor's choice of technique. Stone technique – what is normally defined as direct cutting – proceeds by cutting parallelepiped volumes, the edges of which were rounded to achieve cylindrical volumes.<sup>73</sup> Sculptural technique based on soft materials – normally employed for sculpture that is subsequently cast in other materials – proceeds by addition and results in surfaces which play with the light and atmosphere and therefore connect to a more painterly rather than strictly sculptural attitude towards phenomena.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> The definition is found in the Italian Renaissance architect, sculptor and theorist Leon Battista Alberti, cf. J. von Schlosser-Magnino, *La letteratura artistica*, Firenze/Wien 1964: 121–126.

<sup>73</sup> Indirect cutting makes use of plaster models which reflect, 1:1, the finished work in stone. With the aid of pointers and drills, a series of key-points were taken from the plaster model and drilled into the stone block. This allowed the sculptor to rough-hew the block without fear of taking away too much matter. This work, usually carried out by workshop assistants, left the master the less fatiguing, more creative job of finishing the surface of the statue. The technique differs greatly from that of direct cutting which approaches the block directly, beginning with ampler and simpler volumes which are progressively individualised. Through this method, sculpture retains the geometric relations of its working method and that of the crystalline structure of the stone. Although they used clay and plaster sketches as models, the Egyptians never used indirect cutting. This method was much scorned by purist sculptors, such as Brancusi for example, because it robbed sculpture of its hardness. From the point of view of *mimesis*, such hardness has been interpreted as a weakness. To explain it, art historians have resorted to theories such as the law of frontality. Originally conceived by Julius Lange, the law of frontality had a long following in Egyptology. The law of frontality is the perfect example of the etic perspective changing the value of a constitutive aspect of an artform into a negative aspect that is subject to progress.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Tefnin's description of the technique associated with the Amarna plaster heads in T. Tefnin, *Un chef-d'oeuvre de la fin de la 18<sup>e</sup> dynastie au Musée de Beyrouth*, in: *CdE* 64.127–128, 1989, 139, « *Le modelage, lui, relève d'une démarche inverse, puisqu'il mène de la matière informe aux volumes tendus, par progressif accroissement dans le creux de la main qui façonne. De limite statique, frontière intelligible entre l'être et l'espace, la surface devient membrane, gonflée par une force intérieure de croissance, signe tangible de la sève, de*

Hybrid forms also exist. In Egyptian art, there are two well-known examples of sculptures which were cut in limestone with plaster *added onto* them – the bust of Ankh-khaf<sup>75</sup> and that of Nefertiti.<sup>76</sup> In the history of art, there are also examples of sculptures produced in stone which translate the treatment of surfaces of soft materials onto hard materials. In ancient art, an example is Praxiteles' Hermes with Dionysus – which also exploits the light-refracting effect of Parian marble. In modern sculpture, examples of this kind are works by Bernini and Rodin. In Egyptian sculpture, examples are found in the corpus of statues of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III and the works found in the workshop of the Amarna sculptor Thutmose. The plaster works found in his workshop demonstrate research on the relations between light and sculpture consistent with both Atenist philosophy and a more *painterly*, light-oriented attitude towards the cosmos.<sup>77</sup>

The definition of the difference between sculpture and painting closely resembles Walther Wolf's defining differences between archaic and modern artworks – *Wirkungsform* and *Daseinsform* and the general strict division in Egyptology between “knowing” and “seeing”, “aspective” and “perspective”. This is a further aspect of the mimetic trap. Fundamentally, sculpture is concerned with objects in themselves while painting is concerned with the subjects who perceive them. *Wirkungsform* and *Daseinsform* are not epochal changes which separate Ancient and Modern art but an etic misunderstanding of the fundamental character of sculpture and painting (*cf.* further).

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*la vitalité créatrice, de cette force qu'est Aton et qui se manifeste dans toutes les créatures, comme le chantent admirablement ses hymnes ».*

<sup>75</sup> Boston, MFA 27.442.

<sup>76</sup> Berlin, ÄM 23100.

<sup>77</sup> However, as already noted by Schäfer, this was probably part of the usual working-method of the Ancient Egyptian sculptor. It suggests a conscious and willing detachment from nature achieved through the various steps which divided the sketch from the finished work (H. Schäfer, *Kunstwerke aus der Zeit Amenophis' IV*, in: *ZÄS* 52, 1914, 86–87; H. Schäfer, *Altes und Neues zur Kunst und Religion von Tell el-Amarna*, in: *ZÄS* 55, 1918, 8). Schäfer discussed this in approaching the question whether the Amarna plaster masks were casts directly from life – at a time when it was thought unbelievable that an Egyptian sculptor could reach such levels of realism (especially by L. Borchardt, *Ausgrabungen in Tell el-Amarna 1912/13*, in: *MDOG* 52, 1913, 35–38). On the subject, it is interesting to note Widmaier's discussion on the musealisation of fragments and intermediary works such as the above-mentioned masks and the Bust of Nefertiti. This is a difficult subject because it is one of those cases in which two different sensibilities clash. Ancient and then academic schools had very precise notions of what constituted a finished work of sculpture, even if their rationale differed. Modernistic perceptions of sculptural work concentrated on immediacy and freshness (*sprezzatura*) against the academism of too-highly-polished works. As such, modern sculpture experimented with the interruption of the sculptural process, bringing forth works in clay, plaster and wax which would not have been considered as finished works before. In turn, this also affected the appreciation of works from Antiquity. Throughout Modernism, there was also a tendency to imitate the appearance of archaeological objects. It is thus that limbless, headless and empty-eyed – as in eyes that have lost their incrustation – statues were purposely made. It is certain, as Widmaier implies, that the archaeological object can explain the style of these modern works while the opposite reasoning is philologically inaccurate. At the same time, the fascination with fragments does expose the nature of our relationship with the past, which is incapsulated in Benjamin's metaphor of the historian as the prophet with his back turned to the future mad facing the debris of the past. Widmaier is also right in that the use of the word bust for headless and limbless works which were not originally conceived as such is an abuse of terminology. As concerns intermediary works, the problem is more subtle. If one considers Egyptian sculpture as a form of thought – as for Schäfer's intuition above – the distancing from nature which the process demonstrates is very informative for a history of art that takes the context of production into consideration. All the more when this is applied to what is normally considered, from an etic perspective, as the most realistic period of Egyptian art – the one created in the context of Atenism.

### 3.3 Definition 3. Monumental Sculpture and Ephemeral Sculpture

In the definition of art (§ 2, table 1), I stated that there is a totally abstract, objective concept of Time-and-Space per se which human beings have no cognitive access to but which they can divine the existence of (level 0). I also stated that the concept of time and space changes with the times and the contexts (level 1) and that, in accordance with Kant, the categories of Time-and-Space are inseverable. Furthermore, every artform (level 3) can be defined by the different relation it entertains with Time and Space. One of the two categories always emerges as predominant in every artform except perhaps for dance and performance which, as movement, express a balanced relation between Time and Space. In music and literature the time component is stronger while in the figurative arts it is the space component which dominates. As already suggested in the previous definition, however, predominance does not entail exclusivity, since in our understanding/representation of phenomena neither time nor space are ever exclusively given.

Sculpture is the art of space (*cf.* above, §§ 3.1 and 3.2) or as Heidegger wrote of making space – *Räumen* (*cf.* further). However, sculpture also entertains a strong relationship with time as the expression of the will to remember and endure eternally. Since there are two concepts of eternity, also and moreover in Egyptian culture, so there are two forms of sculpture. These two kinds of sculpture are the *monumental* and the *ephemeral* – where the two words are employed according to their etymological meaning.

#### 3.3.1 Monumental Sculpture

As is the word colossal, the word *monumental* is often used as a synonym for a statue of large dimensions.<sup>78</sup> The word *monumental*, however, relates to memory and in sculpture its meaning is associated with contexts where something happened or continues to happen from a historical or religious point of view. The phenomenon is known the world over in pre-Enlightenment cultures. We find it expressed most clearly in the Bible, in the story of Jacob's ladder.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> For the meaning of the word monumental *cf.* further § 3.1. For the meaning, history and etymology of the word colossus *cf.* N. Badoud, *Les colosses de Rhodes*, in: CRAI(BL) I (janvier-mars), 2011, 122–140, with an interesting excursus on the influence of Egyptian sculpture on the additional meaning of the word colossus as sculpture of exceedingly large dimensions. In terms of the relation between the transcendental and aesthetic aspects of sculpture, two only apparently irreconcilable stances can be mentioned here – Brancusi's – who speaking transcendently stated that size does not affect sculpture whatsoever but only its inner proportions matter – and Laboury's work on the perceptual (*i.e.*, aesthetic) manipulations of the sculptures from the *Gm-p3-Jtn* at Karnak and the manner in which their sculptors took into consideration the viewer in relation to their place within the architecture (Laboury in: RdE 59, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> Genesis 28:10–19, “And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up

Consequently, the relation between sculpture and context is of paramount importance, be it the architectural space of the temple or a topographical space of the Sinai quarries, for example. It is for this reason that when Widmaier speaks of “*Eingebundenheit in architektonische und religiöse Kontexte*”<sup>80</sup> he actually uses one of the fundamental characteristics of sculpture as a reason for not calling it art.

The relation between sculpture and architecture as expressed by Widmaier as proof of the functional aspect of Egyptian images and the consequential non-applicability of the definition of art also has an etic component. The perspective which separates sculpture from architecture perceives *ornament as crime*.<sup>81</sup> It originated at the end of the nineteenth century and was promoted by architects.

Whether funerary or religious, not only is the Egyptian temple built around the statue but it is also a petrification of the performative and literary aspect of the cult which revolves around the sculpture. As such, the relation between architecture and sculpture is a vital and inseparable one of container and contained. A temple was not a temple if it lacked its sculptural elements.<sup>82</sup>

This is what Heidegger expressed with the word *Räumen* – making space, which connects architecture and sculpture to the concept of the sacred as a space separate from the secular:

*Das Räumen erbringt das Freie, das Offene für ein Siedeln und Wohnen des Menschen. Räumen ist, in sein Eigenes gedacht, Freigabe von Orten, an denen die Schicksale des wohnenden Menschen sich ins Heile einer Heimat oder ins Unheile der Heimatlosigkeit oder gar in die Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber beiden kehren. Räumen ist Freigabe der Orte, an denen ein Gott erscheint, der Orten aus denen die Götter entflohen sind, Orte, an denen das Erscheinen des Göttlichen lange zögert. Räumen erbringt die jeweils ein Wohnen bereitende Ortschaft. Profane Räume sind stets die Privation oft weit zurückliegender sakraler Räume. Räumen ist Freigabe von Orten.*<sup>83</sup>

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for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first”. One may say that traditionally, monumental sculpture is the verticalization of stones (= stelae) in sacred places. For Egyptian culture, cf. J. Assmann, op. cit. (1987).

<sup>80</sup> Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, 8.

<sup>81</sup> As per the famous title by A. Loos, *Ornament und Verbrechen*, Innsbruck 1931. To my knowledge, in the context of Egyptian art, the concept was first expressed by M.A. Murray, *Egyptian Sculpture*, London 1930, 32, who thought that the advent of stone architecture at the end of the II Dynasty deprived Egyptian sculpture of its vitality.

<sup>82</sup> R. Tefnin, *La statuaire d’Hatshepsout: portrait royal et politique sous la 18<sup>e</sup> Dynastie*, *MonAeg* 4, Bruxelles 1979, 144–145, has noted, with regard to the sanctum sanctorum of the *dsr-dsr:w* at Deir el-Bahari, that the temple would not have been functional without its sculptures. The Osirian Pillars represented Hatshepsut as the recipient of a funerary cult, while the offering statues made the temple functional as a temenos. In reverse, during Hatshepsut’s proscription, in order to make them completely ineffectual, Hatshepsut’s statues were buried outside the ground of the temple, just like Akhenaten’s at Amarna, cf. D. Laboury, *La statuaire de Thoutmosis III: essai d’interprétation d’un portrait royal dans son contexte historique*, *Aegyptiaca Leodiensia* 5, Liège 1998, 484–486.

<sup>83</sup> M. Heidegger, *Der Kunst und der Raum*, Genova 1979, 26. In the context of Ancient Egyptian culture, cf. J.K. Hoffmeier, *Sacred in the vocabulary of ancient Egypt: dsr*, with special reference to Dynasties I–XX, *OBO* 59, Freiburg (Schweiz)/Göttingen 1985.

This position regarding the relation between sculpture and sacred architecture is also connected with the ideas of *Wirkungsform* und *Daseinsform* mentioned in definition § 3.2. The foundations for the scientific study of Egyptian art were established at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries when sculpture had been experiencing a most violent crisis of its monumentality (§ 3.1) and during which time the ties between sculpture and context were severed. The cause is to be found in the Enlightenment – rather than in the Reformation. It was the Enlightenment which produced the insuperable gap between Church and State that resulted in a secular society to which sculpture lost its defining space and therefore meaning. It took the whole of the nineteenth century for sculpture to be redefined,<sup>84</sup> after which it found a new space completely separate from society in the White Cube of the gallery or museum, or in the open air.

While sculpture was confronted with the loss of its defining circumstances, painting occupied artistic discourse entirely. This also had repercussions on the etic perspective of Egyptologists. Between the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, Egyptologists demonstrated profound painterly sensitivity and little understanding of the actual nature of sculpture. This resulted in a wide-spread dislike for Egyptian stone sculpture – usually considered monotonous – and *masterpieces* being chosen consistently with a predilection for painterly objects, the surfaces of which display a relation to light and a “photographic sensibility” (cf. definition 2).<sup>85</sup>

### 3.3.2 Ephemeral Sculpture

Whereas monumental sculpture has a connection with specific and unique spaces, as well as to a concept of eternity, *ephemeral* sculpture is not fixed to one place and has a different connection to time.

Ephemeral has a double meaning – *made of perishable material* but also, etymologically, *of the day*. If monumental sculpture expressed the kind of eternal endurance that is expressed by the Egyptian words such as *dt*, *nḥḥ* and *r<sup>c</sup>-nb*, ephemeral sculpture is connected to the (Egyptian) calendar in terms of sacred happenings that are associated with particular times of the year. In Egyptian culture, the sun-barques carried in procession,<sup>86</sup> the wooden statues of Deir el-Medina used for prophesies, the garlands placed on mummies and the sistra carried in Hathoric processions are all forms of ephemeral sculpture. Ephemeral was also the

<sup>84</sup> At the turn of the century, with August Rodin, Medardo Rosso and Constantin Brancusi.

<sup>85</sup> Which are the same as the ones mentioned earlier, Ankh-haf, Sesostris III and Amenemhat III, Nefertiti and Thutmose’s plaster works, which looked so real that Egyptologists doubted for a long time they could have been made by hand by an Egyptian sculptor. To my knowledge, the earliest mention of a contemporary photographic sensibility as essentially different from the Egyptian sensibility is found, in G. Perrot/C. Chipiez, *A History of Art in Ancient Egypt*, London 1883, 182. The idea that portraits constitute the few masterpieces of Egyptian art by virtue of their realism is found in G. Steindorff, *Altägyptische Porträtplastik*, in: *Velhagen & Klasings Monatshefte* 29 (8), 1914–1915, 481–482; Capart, *Propos*, 19; A. Scharff, *Egyptian Portrait-Sculpture*, in: *Antiquity* 11 (42), 1937, 177; D. Dunham, *Portraiture in ancient Egypt*, in: *BMFA* 41.246, 1943, 69–71; J.D. Breckenrige, *Likeness. A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture*, Evanston 1968, 44. A different, positive approach which confirms, nonetheless, the influence of the times on the perception of Egyptian sculpture, is the instance of German Egyptologists of the turn of the nineteenth century mentioning the work of Donatello, whose work alongside that of Early Renaissance was re-discovered by Wilhelm von Bode, a contemporary of Schäfer’s and his colleague at the Staatliche Museum zu Berlin. Cf. Schäfer, in: *ZÄS* 52, 1914, 85.

<sup>86</sup> Hornung, *Der Mensch als „Bild Gottes“*, 134–135.

architecture which *Jjj-m-ḥtp* transformed into a monumental form by translating it into stone at Saqqara.

Egyptian texts offer a distinction between monumental and ephemeral sculpture. Jean-Marie Kruchten has been able to distinguish between two classes of statues, *sšmw jmnw/dsrw* and *sšmw-ḥw* and simultaneously resolve the question as to whether the processional and cult statues in the Karnak Temple were one and the same.

*sšmw jmnw/dsrw* refer to hidden (*jmn*), placed apart or sacred (*dsr*) images.<sup>87</sup> These images were the ones to which Egyptian priests were introduced the day of their inclusion into the higher category of priesthood, that of the *ḥm-ntr:w*. Kruchten has noted that such introduction is described with the verb *bsj*, which he connects to the transfiguration of the priests into super-human beings. This allowed them to step into the sanctum sanctorum, which texts describe as the sky or the horizon, where the gods dwelt. *sšmw jmnw/dsrw* were therefore the hidden, removed and sacred statues of the sanctum sanctorum. According to the terms employed here, they refer to a form of monumental sculpture.

*sšmw-ḥw*, refer to *protected* images. As their representations in relief testify, they were processional images, simply placed portable tabernacles which was often protected, as the verb *ḥwj* suggests.<sup>88</sup>

Lastly, it must also be noted that the division between the monumental and the ephemeral was not so clear-cut. Both monumental and ephemeral statues were meant to interact with other objects and people and were thus considered, from an anthropological perspective, as both agents and patients.

In analysing the section of the Abusir Papyri which deal with the cult of statues, Paule Posener-Kriéger underlined the strangeness of the fact that statues were the object of extensive cult – washing, burning incense and dressing – only one day each month – the eighteenth day, first day of the lunar month. She wondered why the cult was not more frequent. One possible explanation for the rarity of the occurrence is that ephemerality is dependent on a concept of qualified time in the same way as monumentality is dependent on a concept of qualified space, which should not be considered in terms of quantity but of sacredness.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> J.-M. Kruchten, Profane et sacré dans le temple égyptien: interrogations et hypothèses à propos du rôle et du fonctionnement du temple égyptien, in: BSEG 21, 1997, 28 and fn. 23, in which the clarification that « *dsrw* peut être traduit aussi par « sacrées », le verbe égyptien *dsr* ayant les mêmes connotation que le latin *secerno* « mettre à part, écarter » » is significant in respect of the role of sculpture within the emic context of Egyptian architecture. Cf., also, Hornung, Der Mensch als „Bild Gottes“, 140–141, on the difference between *ḥntj* and *sšmw*.

<sup>88</sup> Kruchten, in: BSEG 21, 1997, 28–29. The author contrasts the two sculptures as the expression of an official (*sšmw jmnw/dsrw*) and popular (*sšmw-ḥw*) religion, especially because the latter were called *ntr pn špsj* or *ntrt tn špst*, which Kruchten translates as this august/visible god(dess), and explains through the fact that the common folk really believed to be in the presence of a deity when they saw these statues. L. Gabolde, À l'exemple de Karnak, une « chambre des rois » et une cachette de statues royales annexées au temple de Ptah à Memphis?, in: L. Coulon (éd.), La Cachette de Karnak: nouvelles perspectives sur les découvertes de Georges Legrain, Le Caire 2016, 41, has noted that these statues of gods were often accompanied in processions by statues of the king, which may lead one to believe that the terms in which Kruchten has posed the dichotomy between popular and official cult may be too strict.

<sup>89</sup> Posener-Kriéger, Les archives du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê-Kakaï (Les papyrus d'Abousir): traduction et commentaire, BdE 65, Le Caire 1976, 52–57.

#### 4 Conclusion

*Vergangenes historisch artikulieren heißt nicht es erkennen „wie es den eigentlich gewesen ist“. Es heißt, sich einer Erinnerung bemächtigen, wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt.*<sup>90</sup>

In its quest for absolute knowledge, there is something commendable and at the same tragic about Widmaier's *Bilderwelten*. The author seems to conceive of only two options, total knowledge or abysmal ignorance, conspiring to create the impression that Socratic wisdom, *i.e.*, the awareness of one's lack of knowledge, has become a Nihilistic impossibility of knowing.

While it is easy to sympathise with such struggles, one cannot help but be wary of the extreme consequences of such reasonings. Widmaier's discourse requires one either to abandon historical, literary and artistic studies or limit oneself to description, which amounts to the same thing. Within the specialisations of Egyptology, only philology remains untouched by Widmaier's critique. As his position concerning the utilitarian aspect of Egyptian images projects Egyptology back to the ideas and methods which were popular 150 years ago, so the salvage of philology alone reminds us of the contempt with which art historical studies have traditionally been met in Egyptology.

In this article there has been much discussion of philosophy and modern art, subjects which, I realise, fall outside the bounds of Egyptology. The reason for this lies in the fact that Egyptology makes use of concepts derived from philosophy and modern art without contextualising them and thus confuses universal definitions with individual historical interpretations. This article has attempted to contextualise these concepts and show that they are inapplicable not only to Egyptian art but also to art in general.

Specifically, the object of the article has been to demonstrate that the problem is not whether Egyptian art can be considered beautiful beyond its use but the fact that the content of art as beauty and its use as disinterested enjoyment are romantic myths embedded in particular historical, religious and social contexts.

Widmaier's *Bilderwelten* is comprised in a specific group of Egyptological literature which asserts that Egyptian art is not art (*ägyptische Kunst nicht Kunst*) because "different from ours".

The idea of Egyptian art being "different from ours" usually entails that it is not mimetic or photographic, which is a concept that is derived from the nineteenth century and does not define western art as a whole, if at all.

Art is more than beauty and pleasure. It is the formal, synthetic expression of our thoughts concerning the cosmos and our existence in it. The scholar who denies any culture the ability to produce art is not denying it the ability to produce beautiful things but the faculty to speculate on its very existence and essence.

This article has also sought to underline the inherent problems contained in the statement "different from ours". When something is declared to be different, absolutely nothing of value has been stated from a gnoseological point of view. Believing that difference equals non-being is a violation of the most basic ontological law, according to which difference

<sup>90</sup> Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, 695.

(alterity) is a third element existing alongside being and non-being. Lastly, Widmaier's statement according to which alterity is completed debarred from our knowledge has wider implications, both in the way it affects Egyptology, the world we live in, and our ethical position as researchers.

One should be aware of the philosophical, historical and social ramifications of such a statement. Not only is absolute knowledge of otherness precluded to us but, in our own minds, we and our culture are objects that constitute as much an otherness as any foreign/past object of study. The difficulty and the whole point of the study of Egyptology is to attempt to know what difference is. Refusing to articulate difference is perilous – as in Benjamin's *Erinnerung im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt*.

*Appendix 1. Kai Widmaier, Bilderwelten. English Abstract (Parts I and III)*

Part I

(1) Although Egyptology takes Egyptian art as a given, uneasiness remains concerning the concept's possible contamination, and therefore its suitability. [...]

(1.1) To begin, we examine positions that expound upon the problems of using the term *art* to describe ancient images. (1.1.1) [...] Hans Belting [...] draws upon a convincing, yet – within Egyptology – not widely received, approach which historicizes the concept of art. According to Belting's approach, in the course of the Reformation, images which had up to that point been involved in church practices began arriving in art collections and artists also began to appear as participants in an emerging art market. It is only since this time, says Belting, that we can speak of *art*. [...] Junge argues that researchers have imposed a conjectural perception (*Abbildungsvermutung*) upon Egyptian artifacts that is hardly justified by theory. [...] According to Junge, Egyptian artifacts in museums are often presented as aesthetic objects, even though their beauty is actually of little relevance. [...]

(1.2) Other positions react to these critiques by arguing in favor of maintaining and preserving the concept of art in Egyptology. (1.2.1) John Baines [...] advocated a concept of art that conceptualizes art as aesthetic and as decorum-related product meant for the Egyptian elite. [...] (1.2.2) Alexandra Verbovsek [...] supports a paradigm shift. At the same time, however, she continues to view the study of art (*Kunstwissenschaft*) as a legitimate Egyptological subdiscipline. [...]

(1.4) What several of the already mentioned approaches have in common is that they all view *art* as an anthropologically universal phenomenon. Upon closer examination, however, it will become apparent that viewing art as a universal concept bears little fruit and is hardly justifiable. In contrast, relativistic approaches yield far better descriptive potential. [...]

### Part III

[...] (3.1) [...] a philosophical examination of the concept of art will be carried out, which does not view art as having an essence, but rather understands art as an observer-dependent status. There have been attempts to speak of Egyptian art because of the supposed existence of similarities between Egyptian images and more contemporary art. Moreover, these approaches suppose that by employing a concept of art that was acquired by constructing analogies one could make further specifications by taking into account material observations of the Egyptian circumstances. From the perspective of conceptual history, however, this proves fatal: The term *art* as a basic term [...] does not function as a neutral label communicating a specific semantic content that is related to the Egyptian context. Since the term today always contains meanings associated with the contemporary art scene, its use within Egyptology, as well as in perceptive and interpretive pattern, has become particularly modern. This determines the possibilities within the discipline of using this term. The decision to start with an observation-dependent concept of art leads to a rejection of its usage in regard to Egyptian images, as no plausible case can be made for an *Egyptian art scene*. The Egyptological practice of viewing and treating Egyptian images as art creates a kind of art that hardly has anything to do with Egyptian contexts. Rather, it has more to do with Egyptology. For this reason the term *Egyptological art* is proposed. Building on the philosophy of art and conceptual history, this terminological differentiation can be further substantiated by recurs to Visual Studies. In order to achieve this, images are defined as objects that show something that they themselves are not. It is always the observer who makes this semiotically describable reference, as the observer creates this reference by following a rule and thereby views the observed object from a particular perspective [...]. Images can, therefore, be seen and understood in completely different ways [...]. The epistemological artifact of Egyptological art can be characterized by a multitude of traits observable within the discipline: Selecting and emphasizing (whether stylistically or aesthetically), decontextualizing, aestheticizations, as well as conceptual openings and integration into the contemporary art scene. The elements are constantly being recombined into varying hybrid forms of perceiving art that seek to discover historical relationships, although they systematically avoid historicizing their own terminology. These Egyptological perspectives can also be described with the term *museum perspectives* [...] in which images have been conceptually removed from their original contexts and are virtually collected, compared to one another, and offered up as art for viewing. Two objects that have never before been brought together can, in this place, be observed together and compared. In this way, stylistic similarities are emphasized, but there is no questioning whether or not such a state of affairs was ever possible in ancient Egypt. The resulting effects within the discipline can hardly be overstated, especially since we can only understand how the museum perspective determines our perception when we identify its historical conditions. Without reflection the museum perspective leads us to view Egyptian images as Egyptological art – that is, as art cannot be connected coherently with the images' original context. [...]

(3.2.1) Research informed by Visual Studies needs to rely on a reflective critique of images which takes more into account than the fact that images are not immediately understandable. Instead, in order to differentiate itself from everyday hermeneutic notions, it must also understand that similarities are neither self-evident nor intrinsic to the object. Both belong to the realm of reception and are observer-dependent. The validity of the observer's perspective can be determined by whether or not the contexts in which the observation takes place are part of the imaginary museum or if these contexts can be coherently brought together with conditions in which the images were created.

(3.2.2) Contexts do not create themselves, rather they are observer-constructed "frames" [...] within which the object is observed. Contextualizations are therefore unavoidable components of every interpretation. They consist of not only additional archeological information, but also of the premises, concepts, and terminology, which is (most implicitly) employed by the researcher. Our contextualization of an object determines everything we can say about the object.

(3.2.3) Semiotics is often understood as a way to decode the messages of images in order to get closer to their original meaning. It is therefore often overlooked that the process of interpreting symbols always remains open. [...]

(3.2.4) The analyses of the interpretation of style (Part II) have shown how strongly their results depend upon Egyptological concepts of history. Therefore, an Egyptology that makes use of a Visual Studies approach cannot avoid examining critically the narratives and conceptions of history that serve as backgrounds against which images are viewed. This is because history can neither be discerned directly from images nor can we assume 'one true history'. Rather, we can choose which story to tell in order to correlate this story with the relevant images.

(3.2.5) Concerning ourselves with a foreign culture presents a hermeneutic challenge that should not be underestimated. The primary reason for this is that the hermeneutic process aims at a complete understanding that is fulfilled in appropriation. This is because we can only understand the other by means of recognized similarities that we are already familiar with. When the other becomes familiar to us and loses otherness, we can speak of the *pull of understanding* [...]. Thus understanding becomes a harmonization with what is familiar, as well as a question of power and a facet of orientalism. This is particularly noticeable in regard to the museum perspective [...]. An impression of familiarity with Egyptian objects, as conveyed in terms like *Egyptian art*, gives Egyptology self-assurance and allows the process of appropriation to occur without impediment, along with immunizing the discipline from ever having to think about the interpretative methods it uses. The appearance of similarities leads researchers to analogizing. This analogizing forms a self-consistent picture under the title *Egyptian art*, behind which, however, is the hidden epistemological artifact of *Egyptological art* which fails to do justice to the original contexts of Egyptian images. Therefore, guidelines will be formulated in order to overcome this problem through an increase in degree of complexity as well as transparency, and

through the avoidance of the avoidable; if we want to gain understanding, an awareness of what unsettles us can be used by pausing for a moment to reflect on what it is that we are unsettled by and by gaining perspective through proceeding carefully [...], and even allowing for gaps in our understanding. Aside from this, if we no longer take our everyday perceptions for granted, but rather exercise historicizing both the objects and methods of our perceptions, this insight into the relativity of our own perspective gives us a chance to correct it. Only this sort of reflection may enable us to adequately evaluate the validity of our observations.

(3.2.6) The framework we choose to place around Egyptian images in order to observe them is up to us. It is important, however, to understand that our decision determines our potential observations. This book has shown that the decision to employ an art-historical methodology led Egyptologists to speak about *Egyptological art* and hardly consider *Egyptian images*. Within this discourse certain perspective and interpretative patterns, the museum perspective being one example, have created their own ‘image worlds’ (*Bilderwelten*). These worlds exhibit, at best, only a peripheral connection to the contexts of origin of Egyptian images. These image worlds and the methods associated with them are not based on critical reflection, and the conceptual agenda created around them has led to disjuncture rather than to productive discussion. An alternative framework aiming to avoid the museum perspective would initially be connected to wide-reaching reductions. For the avoidance of art-historical methods would result in a careful approach that restricts itself to describe the object of investigation, when a non-museum method does not lead anywhere. If in doubt, and when it limits itself to the contextualizations outside of the imaginary museum, Egyptology should withhold judgement and reflect in order not to give rise to *Egyptological art*. This sort of Egyptological practice could find a way out of the methodological impasse – an impasse that will continue to exist if the conclusive changes outlined here are not addressed properly. Egyptology, however, needs an understanding based in the methods of art studies in order to avoid intuitively reverting to art-historical methods. Instead of adhering to common image worlds of *Egyptological art*, Egyptology must actually create alternative image worlds from *Egyptian images*”.<sup>91</sup>

#### *Appendix 2. Synthetic Definitions of Art and Egyptian Art*

The general definition of art employed by the author of this text is: *Art is the product of the deliberate manipulation of pre-existing forms to communicate abstract meaning.*

*Deliberate* is intended here as *Homo sapiens sapiens*’ ability to express abstract meaning.

*Manipulation* refers to any intervention performed on pre-existing forms.

The expression *pre-existing forms* refers to any material, phenomenon, code or object, natural or man-made. From the point of view of art, these forms exist as potentialities and only acquire meaning when they are the object of deliberate manipulation.

*Abstract meaning* implies that art does not reproduce phenomena but communicates their invisible connections, making thought perceivable by the senses.

<sup>91</sup> K. Widmaier, *Bilderwelten*, xxxii–xlii.

In the context of art, the manipulation of form is a carrier of abstract meaning which unites form and content indistinguishably.

The manipulations and contents of art are indefinite in kind and number. The general meaning of form manipulation is subject to further particularisations which depend upon the specific techniques and genres and their historical development.

The form/content of a work of art is also dependent on its use, which can vary. A work of art can have religious, political, social, individualistic and aesthetic uses, which differ according to the culture and its historical circumstances.

A work of art does not exist as an unchangeable phenomenon. Since art is always the product of a specific culture at a specific moment in history, it is bound to the context of production in which it was created. Changes in the circumstances of its context of production lead to loss and/or modification of meaning. These changes exist as histories of ideas and as an archaeology of thought.<sup>92</sup> Art exists as a transient phenomenon for the viewer, depending on their cultural circumstances. The transiency of the subjective perception of art is itself proof that art exists transcendentally as a universal phenomenon.

The definition of Egyptian art employed by the author of this text is: *Egyptian art is a totalising, performative and monumental – etymologically speaking – form of art.*

It is performative both in the terms described by Edna Russmann<sup>93</sup> as a group effort and in the fact that it did not exist in (aesthetic, museological) isolation but interacted – as agent and patient – with people and other objects.<sup>94</sup> The totalising aspect of Egyptian art reflects its totalising worldview.<sup>95</sup> Egyptian texts<sup>96</sup> and archaeology demonstrate that Egyptian sculpture did not exist separately from architecture or, consequently, from literature, music or (ritual and dance) performance. Its production was a matter of State and as such it was embedded in the very fabric of society. Rather than *useful*, art was *necessary* to the accomplishment of society's rituals – memory and eternalisation.<sup>97</sup>

As regards the Egyptian figurative arts, the present article starts from the assumption that all art has always been conceptual, a conceptualism which is communicated through form. As such, the problem of mimetic representation is misleading. Egyptian figurative art is not less advanced than western art nor does it operate according to different psychological conditions (aspective). Instead, the present article considers western art to be as conceptual as Egyptian art. Western art simply employs different formal manipulations which are culturally and historically driven. What is called *mimesis* and believed to be the objective representation of

<sup>92</sup> R. Tefnin, *Art et magie au temps des pyramides: l'énigme des têtes dites « de remplacement »*, MonAeg 5, Bruxelles 1991, 19–39.

<sup>93</sup> D. Arnold, op. cit., 1–18.

<sup>94</sup> A. Gell, *Art and Agency*.

<sup>95</sup> P. Vernus, *Les espaces de l'écriture dans l'Égypte pharaonique*, in: BSFE 119, 1990, 36–37.

<sup>96</sup> P. Posener-Kriéger, *Les archives du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê-Kakaï*, 52–57; P. Posener-Kriéger/M. Verner/H. Vymazalová, *The Pyramid Complex of Raneferef*. The Papyrus Archive, Abusir X, Prague 2006, 344–346.

<sup>97</sup> J. Assmann, *Sepulkrale Selbstthematisierung in Alten Ägypten*, in: A. Hahn/V. Kapp (Hg.), *Selbstthematisierung und Selbstzeugnis: Bekantnis und Geständnis*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, 210.

phenomena and the mark of progress in western art is nothing other than an *effet de réel*<sup>98</sup> which relies on a *vertige du réalisme*<sup>99</sup> as a rhetoric means to attract the viewer.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> D. Laboury, *Réflexions sur le portrait royal et son fonctionnement dans l'Égypte pharaonique*, in: *Ktèma* 34, 2009, 178; D. Laboury, 2016–2017, *Senwosret III and the issue of portraiture in ancient Egyptian art*, in: *CRIPEL* 31, 2016–2017, 75; transposed from R. Barthes, *L'effet du réel*, in: *Communications* 11, 1968, 84–89.

<sup>99</sup> R. Tefnin, *Les yeux et les oreilles du Roi*, in: M. Broze/P. Talon (éds), *L'atelier de l'orfèvre: mélanges offerts à Ph. Derchain*, Leuven 1992, 147–156. The expression must be interpreted, also, as a sarcastic hint to Vandier's "*amour de réalisme*", cf. J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne*, tome III: les grandes époques – la statuaire, Paris 1958, 194.

<sup>100</sup> D. Laboury, *op. cit.* (in print).