

**Zwischen Konservieren, Restaurieren und Konstruieren.
Restaurierauffassung um 1900: die Gebrüder Mezger
in Überlingen am Bodensee**

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Vorwort

Als freiberufliche Restauratorin hatte die Autorin in den vergangenen zwanzig Jahren immer wieder Objekte in Arbeit, die vormals von den Gebr. Mezger restauriert worden waren. Die daraus resultierenden Beobachtungen sowie eine Fülle von Archivmaterial, das der Autorin in Überlingen – vor Ort – zur Verfügung stand, bilden die Grundlage für die vorliegende Arbeit. Mein Dank gilt vor allen meinem Doktorvater, Herrn Prof. Volker Schaible, für die spontane Ermutigung zu diesem Promotionsvorhaben. Ich danke Herrn Prof. Dr. Hubert Locher für die Bereitschaft der Zweitkorrektur.

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Einleitung

Und wenn Veränderungen im Medium der Wahrnehmung, deren Zeitgenossen wir sind, sich als Verfall der Aura begreifen lassen, so kann man dessen gesellschaftliche Bedingungen aufzeigen.

(Walter Benjamin)¹

Im Augenblick der Fertigstellung eines Kunstwerks setzt bereits eine Veränderung ein, die im Lauf der Jahrhunderte sein Erscheinungsbild bestimmen wird. Dessen Wandel wird zum einen durch die Alterung der jeweils verwendeten Materialien gezeitigt. Auch wenn wir sie als mehr oder weniger langsame Bedrohung der Authentizität wahrnehmen mögen, bleibt diese gleichsam natürliche Veränderung dem Kunstwerk nicht äußerlich, sondern ist Teil seiner Geschichte. Dies gilt indessen auch von den einschneidenden Veränderungen, zu denen die unweigerlich eingreifenden Maßnahmen der Konservierung und Restaurierung führen. Dass Restaurierungen seit jeher den vielfältigsten Einflüssen unterliegen – dem Zeitgeschmack, den gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Hintergründen und nicht zuletzt den individuellen Fähigkeiten, technischen Möglichkeiten, und ästhetischen Empfindungen dessen, der mit den Maßnahmen betraut wurde – ist keine neue Einsicht und betrifft die Restaurierungen unserer Zeit ebenso wie die der Vergangenheit. Immer schon waren für restauratorische Entscheidungen verschiedene Umstände prägend und waren verschiedene Institutionen an ihnen beteiligt. Qualitative Bewertungen beeinflussten Entscheidungen hinsichtlich der durchzuführenden Maßnahmen in einer heute kaum mehr nachvollziehbaren Selbstverständlichkeit. Heute sind diese Entscheidungen bestenfalls in einer interdisziplinären Zusammenarbeit von verschiedenen Kompetenzen dem Objekt zuträglich; früher wurden sie zumeist vom Auftraggeber und namentlich im Fall der sakralen Kunst selten in gleichberechtigter Zusammenarbeit mit dem Restaurator getroffen.

Die noch relativ junge Disziplin der Restaurierungsethik und Restaurierungsgeschichte untersucht und analysiert diese komplexen Zusammenhänge. Sie muss sich dabei zwangsläufig auf gewisse zeitliche, regionale und personelle Dimensionen festlegen, um möglichst aussagekräftig und möglichst wenig pauschalisierend sein zu können. Die Idee, die Restaurierauffas

¹ Walter Benjamin: Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, Frankfurt 1963, S. 18

sung um 1900 am Beispiel der „Restaurierungen“ der Gebrüder Mezger zu untersuchen, geht nicht allein auf die Präsenz zurück, die die von ihnen bearbeiteten Objekte in den über zwanzig Jahren bis heute im Alltag des freiberuflichen Restaurators behaupten. Sie drängt sich vor allem angesichts des reichhaltig vorhandenen, aber für eine Klärung dieser Problemzusammenhänge bislang unerschlossenen unbearbeiteten Archivmaterials auf.²

Die Gebrüder Mezger hatten 1897 die Werkstatt des Bildhauers Eberle in Überlingen übernommen und sich hier im Laufe der Zeit eine gewisse Monopolstellung erarbeitet.³ Während Josef Eberle sich in seinem „Atelier für kirchliche Kunst“⁴ für „Altäre, Kanzeln etc. etc. nach eigenen oder vorhandenen Entwürfen in allen Stylarten“ empfohlen hatte, nahmen die Gebrüder Mezger die Zuständigkeit für folgende Arbeiten in ihr Firmenlogo auf: „Wand-&-Tafelmalerei, Dekorationsmalerei, Polychromie und Vergoldung, Kreuzwege in Sculptur und Malerei, Restaurierung alter Gemälde und Sculpturen, Übernahme ganzer Innenausstattungen von Kirchen in Architektur & Malerei, Spezialität: geschnitzte und gemalte Flügelaltäre, Herstellung von Sculpturen in Holz und Stein, Statuen & Reliefs, Altäre & Kanzeln, Chor & Beichtstühle, Orgelgehäuse, Communiongitter, Grabmonumente, Epitaphien, Taufsteine, Kirchenmöbel“⁵ wurden in dieser Reihenfolge angeboten. Diese Aufzählung der „Kunsthandwerkstatt“, wie Helmut F. Reichwald sie bezeichnete,⁶ umschreibt bereits das Tätigkeitsfeld in der Gleichwertigkeit von Restaurieren und Neuanfertigen. Die Grenzen zwischen beiden sind nicht immer klar zu ziehen, sondern werden oftmals in einem Objekt kombiniert und zu einer unauflösbaren Einheit.

Es existiert ein umfangreiches Archivmaterial: die bisher unveröffentlichten, als handschriftliches Manuskript erhaltenen „Lebenserinnerungen“ Victor Mezgers befinden sich seit 1989 im Besitz der Stadt Überlingen und sind als Zeitzeugnis von immenser Aussagekraft. Weiterhin liegen sechs Kopierbücher vor, die einen lückenlosen Überblick über nahezu sämtliche ausgeführten Arbeiten von 1908 bis 1924 erlauben.⁷ Zahlreiche Entwürfe für Umgestaltungen von Altären illustrieren diese Tätigkeiten. Da die fraglichen Arbeiten vor allem in den Kir

² Die reinen Neuanfertigungen der Gebrüder Mezger sind bereits in einer Dissertation von Yvonne Herzig behandelt worden und sollen daher in dieser Arbeit weitgehend unberücksichtigt bleiben. Die Wandmalerei wird lediglich in maßnahmen-terminologisch vergleichender Weise tangiert. Vgl. Yvonne Herzig: Süddeutsche Sakrale Skulptur im Historismus, Die Eberlesche Kunstwerkstätte Gebr. Mezger, Petersberg 2001

³ Nach Aussagen von Christiane Bögner und Eva Beate Fuhrmann, der Enkelinnen von Victor Mezger, gab es im badischen Raum keine vergleichbare Werkstatt dieser Größe in dieser Epoche.

⁴ Firmenlogo St. A. Überlingen, Mezger-Nachlass

⁵ Ebd.

⁶ In einem Brief an die Verfasserin vom 28. 09. 2005

⁷ Eine Auswahl an Rechnungen, Kostenvoranschlägen und Maßnahmen erläuternden Korrespondenzen wird in Teil II Katalog, Kopierbücher, zusammengefasst. Des Weiteren wurde eine Objektauswahl getroffen; die jeweiligen Fakten zur Identifikation eines jeden untersuchten Objektes mit seinen quellengeschichtlichen und restauratorischen Details sind separat in einem Anhang Restaurierungskatalog aufgeführt. Hinweise im Text sind unter fortlaufender Nummer in den Fußnoten vermerkt.

chen und öffentlichen Räumen fast alle noch erhalten sind, bietet sich die Möglichkeit einer praxisbezogenen Recherche sowie einer Untersuchung exemplarischer Einzelfälle. Hinzu kommt, dass bis dato im Überlinger Münster mehrere hundert gleichfalls unausgewertete Photo-Glas-Platten lagerten, durch die, meist in der Raumsituation aufgenommen und daher einen Gesamteindruck vermittelnd, Victor Mezger Vorzustände seiner Projekte dokumentierte.

Das Überlinger Münster bietet sich in mehr als einer Hinsicht für die Dokumentation einer vielfältigen Restauriergeschichte an. Es sind hier nicht nur die Vorzustände hinreichend fotografisch dokumentiert, sondern auch die zu verschiedenen Zeiten vorgenommenen Maßnahmen an den Altären ablesbar – in einer Aussagekraft, die durchaus auch den Wandel der Wertschätzungen und die Vielfalt der damaligen interpretatorischen Möglichkeiten deutlich werden lässt. Unter der Werkstatt Mezger war das Überlinger Münster vor dem ersten Weltkrieg vollständig ausgeräumt und, im Zusammenhang mit einer umfassenden baulichen Sanierung, in den zwanziger Jahren auch restauriert worden – wobei die vorausgegangenen Restaurierungen durch Mezger selbst vereinzelt stichwortartig dokumentiert sind und sich auch am Objekt ablesen lassen.⁸

Dass die „Eberlesche Werkstätte für kirchliche Kunst von Gebr. Mezger Überlingen a/B Baden“ im Laufe der Zeit mit insgesamt über vierhundert Mitarbeitern⁹ zeitweise größter Arbeitgeber in Überlingen war und eine Dependance in Karlsruhe unterhielt, gibt einen Hinweis auf den durchaus exemplarischen Rang der Dokumente, die hier zu erschließen sind. Das Einzugsgebiet der Werkstatt erstreckte sich damit von Bregenz bis Karlsruhe, vom östlichen Bodensee bis in die Pfalz. Auch war die Tätigkeit auf ganz verschiedenen Gebieten der Restaurierung, die heute grundsätzlich einer Spezialisierung unterliegen, für den früher zumeist einer künstlerischen und handwerklichen Tradition entstammenden Restaurator selbstverständlich. So hat Mezger auf nahezu allen Gebieten gearbeitet: Gemälde, Skulptur, Ausstattung, Wandmalerei, Schreinerarbeiten und Metallverarbeitung – bis hin zu Spezialitäten wie Paramentenstickereien.

Von besonderem Interesse ist unter der von uns gewählten Perspektive, dass Haupteinnahmequelle der Werkstatt Mezger lange Zeit die Neuanfertigung von Altären war. Daran erweist sich eine eigentümliche, für die Zeit um 1900 überaus charakteristische Ambivalenz: die

⁸ Voruntersuchung Lorenzer & Heberle 1992 unter der Prämisse der Schadensaufnahme und Konzeptentwicklung bzw. Erstellung der Leistungsverzeichnisse zur Konservierung und Restaurierung in den Jahren 1996-2003

⁹ Vgl. Y. Herzig: Sakrale Skulptur, dort Anm. 161

Gratwanderung zwischen Restaurieren (selten: Konservieren) und Neuschaffen. In den Arbeiten der Gebrüder Mezger ist beides häufig in ein und demselben Objektkomplex vereint.

Victor Mezger hat, wie aus seinen Lebenserinnerungen hervorgeht, mit besonderer Leidenschaft und gegen allen Widerstand erfolgreich für die Stadt Überlingen das heruntergekommene Reichlin-von-Meldegg-Haus erworben und als Museum eingerichtet. Das im Museum aus seinem ursprünglichen Kontext herausgelöste Kunstwerk steht bekanntermaßen in einem vollkommen anderen Zusammenhang. Auch hierauf soll in dieser Arbeit ein Augenmerk gerichtet werden. „Die Rezeption von Kunstwerken,“ so heißt es bei Walter Benjamin, „erfolgt mit verschiedenen Akzenten, unter denen sich zwei polare herausheben. Der eine dieser Akzente liegt auf dem Kultwert, der andere auf dem Ausstellungswert des Kunstwerks.“¹⁰

Dass restauratorische Maßnahmen an sakralem Kulturgut folglich unter anderen Gesichtspunkten beurteilt und gehandhabt werden als solche an Objekten, die als „museal“ betrachtet werden – auch in dem hier zu untersuchenden Zeitraum und namentlich bei Mezger – wird sich an einer ganzen Reihe von Beispielen verifizieren lassen. In einer restaurierungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung soll der Relevanz konzeptioneller, sozialer, lokalgeschichtlicher Aspekte auf dem Gebiet der Restaurierung von Ausstattung – Gemälde, Einzelskulptur, architekturgebundene Skulptur und Altar nachgegangen werden – am Beispiel der besonderen restauratorischen Charakteristika der Werkstattarbeiten der Gebrüder Mezger in der Zeit um 1900. In den zwanziger Jahren übernahm Viktor Mezger junior die Werkstatt – doch der Geist des Vaters blieb weiter präsent.

Zu berücksichtigen sind:

- die Technologie der Mezger-Fassungen, insbesondere
- der die Authentizität vernachlässigende Umgang mit der Fassung unter dem Primat der Form, der dem Bildträger eine der Fassung übergeordnete Rolle zuspricht
- und vor allem die besonderen Fassungs- und Vergoldungstechniken, die Mezger anwandte und die damit im Zusammenhang stehenden Wertung der Patina – auch der künstlichen Patina
- des weiteren die Kombination und Integration von mittelalterlichen „Versatzstücken“ – sozusagen in „Zweitverwendung“ innerhalb historistischer, neu geschaffener Komplexe.

Der Frage, inwieweit es sich dabei um Mezgersche „Spezialitäten“ oder um zeittypische Restauriermoden handelt, wird immer wieder im Vergleich zu anderen Werkstätten dieser Zeit nachzugehen sein. Wenn wir schließlich aus der Sicht des heutigen Restaurators dessen

¹⁰ W. Benjamin: Das Kunstwerk, S. 21

unterdessen verrechtlichten Prinzipien des zerstörungsfreien Handelns die Restaurierauffassung des beginnenden zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts gegenüberstellen, wie sie sich uns am Beispiel der Gebrüder Mezger darstellt, so darf sich daraus keine Abwertung der damals geübten Praxis ergeben. Vielmehr ist die derart in den Blick tretende Wandlung als eine restaurierungsgeschichtliche Entwicklung zu sehen, in der die Prämissen der Restaurierpraxis sich geändert haben. Begriffe wie Authentizität, Integrität, Bewahrung und Lesbarkeit eines Kunstwerks, deren wir uns heute bedienen, implizieren eine andere Interpretation – deren Relativität wir uns jedoch bewusst sein müssen. Der Anspruch auf Prüfbarkeit der restauratorischen Moral, wie Katrin Janis sie in einem „restaurierungsethischen Pentagon“¹¹ entworfen hat, wäre vermutlich von unseren restauratorischen Vorgängern mit gleicher Überzeugung erhoben worden. Nicht nur das Kunstwerk selbst, sondern auch die Auffassung des Umgangs mit ihm unterliegt somit den Veränderungen der Wahrnehmung.

¹¹ Mit den fünf Eckpunkten der „Rechtzeitigkeit, Verantwortung, Interdisziplinarität, Bewahrung der Authentizität und Klugheit,“ siehe Katrin Janis: Restaurierungsethik im Kontext von Wissenschaft und Praxis, München 2005, S. 142

Between Conservation, Restoration and Reconstruction.

Perception of Restauration around 1900: the brothers Mezger at Überlingen on Lake Constance

Just at the moment of the completion of a piece of art a process of modification is initiated that will determine its appearance over the intervening centuries. This change of appearance is in part caused by the ageing of the materials used. Even if we perceive this as more or less slow menace to the authenticity, this quasi natural modification does not remain external to the artwork, but becomes part of its history. This, however, applies also to the incisive modifications caused by the inevitably encroaching measures of conservation and restoration. It is not a new comprehension that restorations have been subject to most multifaceted influences at all times – such as the prevailing taste, the social and cultural backgrounds and last not least the individual skills, technical potentials and aesthetic perception of the person who was consigned to the task, and that applies to Restorations nowadays as well as in the past. Always were different circumstances formative to decisions on restoration measures and were different Institutions involved in them. Qualitative evaluations affected decision with respect to the measures to be taken in an implicitness that today can hardly be followed. Nowadays these decisions are suitable to the object at the best in an interdisciplinary cooperation of various competences; in former times they were mostly made by the customer and notably in the case of the ecclesiastical art rarely in equal cooperation with the restorer.

The still relatively young discipline of restoration ethics and restoration history explores and analyses these complex coherences. Inevitably it must commit to certain temporal, local and personal dimensions to be able to be as significant and as little trivial as possible. The idea to explore the conception of restoration of the beginning of the previous century using as an example the “restorations” by the brothers Mezger is not merely due to the presence which the objects worked on by them have sustained in the everyday life of a freelance restorer over the past more than twenty years. It obtrudes itself in particular in view of the richly existing archive material so far unexploited and unused for the clarification of the connections of the problem.¹²

¹² The plain manufacture of new products by the brothers Mezger has been covered in a dissertation by Yvonne Herzig, and shall therefore be largely unaddressed in this paper. Wall painting is only referred to in a manner as to compare terminology of measures. See Yvonne Herzig: *Süddeutsche Sakrale Skulptur im Historismus, Die Eberlesche Kunstwerkstätte Gebr. Mezger, Petersberg 2001*

The brothers Mezger had taken over in 1897 the workshop of the sculptor Eberle at Überlingen and had acquired in the course of time a certain monopoly position.¹³ While Eberle offered himself in his “Studio for ecclesiastic art”¹⁴ for “Altars, lecterns etc. etc. to own or available designs in any style”, the brothers Mezger included their fields of competence into their company logo: “Mural & Tablet Painting, Decorative Painting, Polychromic and Gilding, Stations of the Cross in Sculpture and Painting, Restoration of antique Paintings and Sculptures, Acceptance of complete interior trim of Churches in Architecture and Painting, Specialty: Carved and painted winged altars, Creation of Sculptures from Wood and Stone, Statues and Reliefs, Altars and Lecterns, Choir Stalls and Confessionals, Organ Cases, Communion Lattices, Tomb Monuments, Epitaphs, Baptisteries, Church Furniture”¹⁵ were offered in this sequence. This listing of the “Craftwork shop”, as Helmut F. Reichwald called it,¹⁶ already describes the field of activity in the equality of restoration and new built. The Borderline between the two cannot always be drawn clearly, as very often they are combined in an object into an irresolvable entity.

There exists substantial archive material: The so far unpublished “life retrospection” by Victor Mezger, preserved as a handwritten scripture, are time capsules with an immense force of expression and document by themselves in what intense a way the perception of restoration of the 19th century were yet present in that workshop.

In the examination of the Riegl terminology, which had not been conceivable without Ruskin and Morris, the attempt shall be made to interpret the practical implementing of those requirements in the works of the brothers Mezger and their preservatory and clerical clients. For this a retrospect onto the development of the preservation of monuments in the 19th century is enlightening. The ruins of the Heidelberg Castle seemed so to speak to enter into correspondence with the Friedrich Ruin of the Romanticisms; restoration related questions as to preservation and reconstruction, evaluation and devaluation, questions as to the relevance of the *restoring* have newly been formulated.

There are six copy books by the brothers Mezger available, which on a total of four thousand five hundred pages which allow a complete overview over nearly all of the works accomplished between 1908 and 1924.¹⁷ Numerous concepts for reconfigurations of Altars illustrate

¹³ According to statements by Christiane Bögner and Beate Fuhrmann, granddaughters of Victor Mezger, there was no comparable workshop of this size in the Baden area at that epoch.

¹⁴ Firm logo, city archive Überlingen, Mezger estate

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ In a letter to the author dated 28. 09. 2005

¹⁷ A range of invoices, cost estimates and correspondence explaining measures is outlined in the appendix copy books. Furthermore a selection of object was made, the respective facts for the identification of each object examined, together

those operations. As nearly all of the said works are still preserved above all in the Churches and public rooms, an opportunity was given for a practice related investigation as well as for the examination of exemplary individual cases. To this adds that till 2006 several hundred photographic glass sheets were stored in the Überlingen Cathedral, unexplored as well, by which, mostly taken in the room situation and therefore conveying an overall impression, Victor Mezger documented pre-phases of his projects. In the archives of the bureaus of monument protection at Tübingen, Karlsruhe and Freiburg historic photographs by Victor Mezger are kept, part of which were included into the Marburg archive and there enriched the voluminous figure part of the work. As an amendment current shootings are to allow for concrete comparisons.

The Überlingen Cathedral in more than one respect lends itself for the documentation of a manifold history of restoration. Not only are the pre-phases documented but also can the measures taken at different points in time be read from the altars – with a significance which definitely also makes clear the alteration of the appreciations and the diversity of the then existing possibilities of interpretation. Under the guide of the Mezger workshop the Überlingen Cathedral had been completely cleared out before world war I and, in connection with a structural refurbishment, had also been restored – where preceding restoration had sporadically been documented by Mezger himself and can also be read from the object.¹⁸

The fact that the „Eberle workshop for sacral art by the brothers Mezger Überlingen“ with a total over the time of four hundred Employees¹⁹ at times had become the biggest Employer at Überlingen and held a branch at Karlsruhe provides a hint to the quite exemplary rank of the Document to be developed here. The trading area of the workshop stretched from Bregenz to Karlsruhe from the eastern part of the Lake Constance till to the Palatinate.

Also the operation on fully different fields of restoration, which today are subject of specialization, was taken for granted by a restorer who mostly emanated from an artistic and technical tradition. So Mezger worked in nearly all of the fields: Painting, sculpture, equipment, mural painting, cabinetmaking and metal working – till to specialties like stitchery of liturgical robes.

Under our chosen prospective it is of special interest that for a long time the main source of income of the Mezger workshop was the manufacture of new altars. This proves a peculiar

with its source historical and restoration related details are listed in an appendix catalogue of restorations. References in the text are denoted in the footnotes under consecutive numbers.

¹⁸ Preliminary inspection Lorenzer & Heberle 1992 under the premise of damage inventory and concept development and preparation of the specifications for the conservation and restoration in the years 1996-2003 respectively

¹⁹ See Y. Herzig: Sakrale Skulptur, note 161

ambivalence characteristic for the time around 1900: The tightrope walk between restoring (seldom: conservation) and replacing. Within the oeuvre of the brothers Mezger both of them are frequently found combined in one and the same complex of objects.

Victor Mezger the Elder, as follows from his life retrospection, acquired for the city of Überlingen with a particular passion and successful against any kind of opposition the Reichlin-von-Meldegg-House and set it up as a museum. The artwork in a museum unhinged from its original context is linked as is well known in a different way. This dissertation will turn the attention also to this aspect. “The reception of artworks”, as Walter Benjamin says, “occurs with different accents, among which two polar ones single out. One of those accents lies on the cultic value, the other on the exhibitional value of the artwork.”²⁰

That as a consequence restorative measures on sacred cultural assets are assessed and handled under different points of view as those on objects that are looked at as “museal” – also in the period explored herein and notably by Mezger – can be verified from a whole series of examples. An analysis of restoration history is to go further into the relevance of conceptual, social, locally historical aspects in the field of equipment – painting, individual sculpture, sculpture bound to architecture and altar – instancing the particular restorative characteristics of the shop works of the brothers Mezger in the time around 1900. The interrelation of liturgy and state of preservation is thereby looked at in a timely comprehensive manner. This requires to consider:

- the technology of the Mezger framing, in particular
- the treatment of frames which neglects the authenticity under the primacy of the form, and which grants the picture carrier a superior role over the frame, makes frames leached off in order to framing newly *in the spirit of the original*.
- and above all the special techniques of framing and gilding, which Mezger applies and which with an ingenious trompe-l’œil effect was able to imitate gildings and frames apparently aged. In this context the valuation of the patina – also of the artificial patina – needs to be regarded.
- furthermore the combination and integration of medieval “sets” – quasi in “second hand application” – within historical, newly composed complexes. The latter definitely happened under the assumption to continue a tradition that existed since antiquity.

²⁰ W. Benjamin: Das Kunstwerk, p 21

The question whether these were Mezger specialties or fashions of restoration typical at that time has been followed up again and again using other workshops of that time for comparison. If we eventually confront from the point of view of a contemporary restorer his meanwhile legally defined principles of non-destructive acting with the perception of restoration of the beginning twentieth century, as it presents itself in the example of the brothers Mezger, this may not result in a depreciation of the practices being followed at that time. In fact the conversion which steps into our focus in that way is to be looked at as an evolution in the history of restoration during which the propositions of the practice of restoration have changed. Terms like authenticity, integrity, protection and readability of a piece of art, that we use today, imply a different interpretation – the relativity of which we must be aware of. The demand for verifiability of the restoration moral, as has been delineated by Katrin Janis in a “Pentagon of Restoration Ethics”²¹ would assumedly have been posed with equal conviction also by our predecessors in the restoration work. Not only the artwork itself, but also the perception of the dealing with it is therefore subject to changes of cognition.

In summary it can be said that interrelations in restoration history but partly result from the history of reception. If they can be developed from preserved works, this gives the advantage of the ability *to conceive the invisible by intrusion into the visible* – as was formulated analogously by Max Beckmann.

In the reflexive and comparative revision of the oeuvres explored it was diagnosed that it was not a matter of local and personal mannerisms, but that exemplary works from the period have crept over. The historical results make appear as a contradiction the thrilling discrepancy between the theorists’ main request or preservation of and respect for the original and the methods of restoration ordered by the church or by monument conservators. Therefore the starting point of this paper was the reception of Alois Riegl’s terminology and the analysis of the restoration efforts of his time by Georg Dehio, both of which, dealing with the theories of the English art theorists, first in this country formulated and stipulated the scientific reflexion and systematic analysis of the merits of artistic and cultural goods. Thereby the romance had a lasting impact; Arnold Hauser looks at Riegl, who understood the artistic intension of art as a personified artistic notion, as yet being completely integrated into the mysticism of the ideas of that epoch.²²

²¹ With the five key points of „timeliness, responsibility, multidisciplinary, protection of authenticity and wisdom”, see Katrin Janis: *Restaurierungsethik im Kontext von Wissenschaft und Praxis*, München 2005, p 142

²² The Gothic architectural style did not mean „the realization of a consistent and distinct artistic intent, but [...] rather the incidental result of special, temporary and regional needs [...]” See Arnold Hauser: *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*, München 1973, p 690 et seq.

The objects, that have come down to us and have been included in into this paper, show that, despite the extensive current criticism at first no methods of restoration evolved, which were realised. This at first appeared to be a phenomenon beyond comprehension, which only in part can be attributed to a different perception of the restoration aesthetics nor to a lack of technical possibilities. It was, however, also caused by the subjectiveness of the artistic intension, that by the end of the 19th century had gained an importance never known before, and that much more than initially assumed set the rules for the reproductive restoration – at least at those workshops that also the Mezgers’ one belonged to – in which the production and the ministration of Christian art had united. We were able to realise that in Christian art this had meant a return to the art of the past – with a particular esteem for the art of the medieval times – which caused fictive timelessness in the pluralism of styles. The renewal of the Gothic was by the way a ambition confessionally independent ambition, which applied to Catholic as to Protestant sacred art and its restoration – although, due to their richer tradition of setting, the Catholic churches were affected more intensely.

The French Revolution and Secularisation had cemented the breach between society and church and had destroyed the conformity of style. Not only did this phenomenon meet the intension of the artistic restorer who acted “in all styles” but justified what he did. The entity yet possible between *artistic restorer* and *restoring artist* was criticized by theorists and was welcomed by collectors and representatives of the church. When so art has its roots in the religion, differing religious believes had to determine and to modify the form of the art. How much this affected the perception of restoration and the methodology around 1900 and basically provoked the recreation, appears to lie above all in the importance of Thomas’ doctrine. “The rendition of his trilogy of the element that constitute beauty [...]. *Integritas sive perfectio* in Thomas’ view means the completeness of a thing in accordance with its purpose. *Proportio sive constantia* means the proportion of the parts with respect to the entity and with respect to each other. *Claritas* denominates the radiating clarity of colours, but not only as a decoration but in the sense of means of knowledge.”²³ And thus it becomes clear why at that time of search for contents of belief and life the theories of the medieval were given more importance than the knowledge of the then theorists. The “*Claritas*” by Thomas Aquinas therefore eventually effected the revised form of that time and had more gravity than the originality. The new form meant return having taken form, the demanded originality was, as knowledge of authenticity, an ahistorical. The request for intactness, the endeavour of the “compliance with the ensemble”, which had permanently been proclaimed, results from the medieval doctrine of

²³ A. Smitmans: Die christliche Malerei im Ausgang des 19. Jh., p 34

beauty as well as from the "proportio sive constantia". Conditional relief from these requirements was only possible in museal contexts and even there by far not sterile, but subordinate to other desires of how to stage. The connection with the tradition was regarded as a guarantee for the visualisation of the beliefs and of the divine – clarified in the importance of the *Souvenir* – and explains the volitional relation between new integration and new construction in connection with the reconstruction, as we find them in Mezger's works. A newly installed frame on the *souvenir* of the old substrate conveyed the "feeling of reincarnation" the "déjà vécu" as Arnold Hauser called it.²⁴ This sensation of the Romance was not a new one; the Renaissance as well as the Medieval integrated these thoughts of renewal and complained of "the current negligence, yet almost the total decay of so many magnificent and divine arts".²⁵ Yet: "No generation had, however, that strongly the sentiment of being inheritors and descendants, none that decidedly the desire to simply repeat and to revive a past time, a lost culture. The Romance consistently looks for remembrances and analogies in history and finds strongest stimulation in ideals, which she believes to see realized in the past."²⁶ And with this she was the precursor for the art of the historicism and for the perception of restoration in the historicism.

We are able to realize a link with tradition in two respects in relation to materials and techniques as well as to contents and perceptions. To the rebuilding restorer of that time this meant a "twofold subjectivity": On the one hand he was still too much bound to artistic thinking – also in clearly restorative matters –, on the other hand he had, in cases of clerical art, to abide by the clerical doctrine. Paul Wilhelm von Keppler, who was considered as one of the most important art critics of his time, had expressly underlined in the requirements to Christian art, which he formulated, that it had in fact to be bound by tradition, but at no time there was an obligation on a certain style. The "pure notion" in Christian art in his opinion had to be free of any kind of impurity, profanity and sensuality. That consistently applied also to its state of preservation and it recurred also in Schnütgen's principles, who constituted on the 47th general assembly of the German Catholics in 1900: "Christian art has the calling, to embellish and to ennoble all of Christian live [...]."²⁷ Thereby it was, however, under no circumstances allowed to "imitate".²⁸ In the appreciation of the "authentic Gothic" neo-Gothic new

²⁴ A. Hauser: Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur, München 1973, p 686 et seq.

²⁵ Leon Battista Alberti in a letter to Filippo Brunellesco, Florenz 1436, in: Künstlerbriefe über Kunst, Dresden 1956, p 7

²⁶ Ibid. p 687

²⁷ Quoted from A. Smitmans: Die christliche Malerei im Ausgang des 19. Jh., p 41

²⁸ Criticised as „slavish imitation of medieval forms“ was the adaptation to the language of colour and form of the Medieval in the parish church at Geisingen painted in by Xaver Kolb, the task master of Victor Mezger. His painting in of the abbey church of Mehrerau was, however, granted positive criticism, as it had not imitated the Byzantine style common in Romanesque times and hence was fully within the terms of Keppler, who as a repentant of the Tübingen William's College had held his first course of lectures on Giotto. See A. Smitmans: Die christliche Malerei im Ausgang des 19. Jh., S. 48 sowie

creations were easily conceived as disrespectful “ill-bred mason’s and cabinetmaker’s Gothic”²⁹ and were ridiculed as “confectioner’s Gothic”.³⁰ The *new Gothic* – like the one in the St. Margaret’s Chapel at Muggensturm – was able to fulfil the requirement for originality and apparent intactness at the same time. Thus, with their reproducing Gothic restorations and new creations, the brothers Mezger could meet the requirements and could be assured of professional recognition. The inessentiality of existing older Versions or even an original version is testified to us by reams of photographically documented “intermediate states”. Besides the interchangeability of matter also here strictly a spiritual pretension stands behind it: In the development of the essence it was necessary to penetrate the material. “The artist, being infused with the Catholic spirit, looks with the spiritual eyes deeply through all matter and intrudes till to the most interior carrier of any outside form.”³¹ If we transfer this theoretical approach to practice, we find based in the carrier the importance of the *interior form*, which thus makes downright obligatory the restyling in terms of colour in complete inessentiality of historic versions, to convey the message so to speak.

Not only the, compared to this, considerably more conservative proceeding in the treatment of the wall paintings let us recognize their higher ranking in hierarchy; it finds parallels in style maintenance in architecture, which – often literally – had pushed the décor into the background. The theoretic Graus described “the figural as such merely functions as a makeshift and marginal finery of church buildings.”³² Also this noticeable divergency thus had its theoretical motivation, which continues just to the sophisticated wordings. If we are therefore able to determine, that methods of restoration are always subject to the change of technological evolution on the one hand and to the perception of restoration of the restorers and the monument conservators on the other hand, this applies in the same way to their terminology. While today Conservation is strictly used for the targeted deceleration of the forces of decay, renovation as synonym for renewal is merely applied in the field of refurbishment of buildings, and restoration means the recovery of the “legibility” of an object under consideration of the traces of age and modifications, in the perception of restoration around 1900 these terms were applied arbitrarily, and were used interchangeably like nearly terms of nearly identical content. If the declaration of measures on an invoice for instance under “etc.” means the com-

Schwarz: „Restauration und malerischer Schmuck der Abteikirche Mehrerau“, in: Archiv für christliche Kunst 2 (1894)

²⁹ J. Graus: „Über die Grundsätze bei Neuschöpfungen kirchlicher Kunst“, in: Monatszeitschrift für christliche Kunst und Kunstgeschichte 22 (1891), pp 43-47

³⁰ August Reichensberger spoke in his introduction to Vinanz Statz/Georg E. Ungewitter (Hg.), *Gotisches Musterbuch*, Leipzig 1856-1861, p 4

³¹ Alexander Grillwitzer: „Über den „Grundcharakter der christlichen Kunst“, in: Monatszeitschrift für Kunst- und Kunstgeschichte 20 (1889), pp 61-63, here p 62

³² J. Graus: „Der Kirchenschmuck“, in: *Christliche Kunst- und Anzeigen*, Frankfurt (2/1894), pp 58-62

plete revision of a whole high altar including ornaments and figure decoration, we may take this as a proof for the fact, that no store was set by terminological exactness, and such no too big importance was to be dedicated to terminology. The substantial reconstructive restoration on the Bernhard-altar of the Überlingen Cathedral was made documented by Mezger simply with the denotation “renovated”³³, hardly visible to the viewer, in the opened book of the gable figure. If the “restoration“ of a complete interior³⁴, the partial revision of altars and stylistic corrections to them are all contained in the note *restoration*, then the terminological looseness is sufficiently demonstrated. If reduced declarations of measures like for instance “revision etc. of the altar”³⁵ – is contrary to “restoration & completion of the old wall painting”³⁶, this demonstrates not only the unimportance of terminological precision at that time, but once more different valuation of framing and wall painting. Wall paintings were “uncovered”³⁷, sculptures were leached off. Remains to be annotated, that the term *restoration* was also willingly used, when measures with no further definition were combined summary and indifferently – in the sense of the conception, as we find it described by Gustav Münzel, if he for example combined “the modifications applied to a piece of art in intentional artistic reconfiguration, means restoration, completions, formings” in a study of 1925 on *The Patina*.³⁸

Let us, for the clarification of the pejorative in its double sense – as to the significance of the term as well as to the measure – Victor Mezger have his say once more. “You might edit the required declarations quasi like this: The constructional modifications were executed in accordance with the design and under the personal control of the architect [...] and by the building company [...]. The task of repair of the discovered old wall and ceiling paintings was consigned to Mezger art shop at the nearby Überlingen, frequently proven for such works (Goldbach, Konstanz, Reichenau, Cathedral at Überlingen and many more), who’s owner Viktor Mezger designed completions after fragments while experienced and versatile painter Meinrad Glas, who not only diagnosed and embellished in a time consuming and hard endeavour with great love and care the old very battered and corrupted remains but also knew himself how to skilfully fit the completions to the character & the look of the old paintings. The panelling and the doors with their frames will accomplished to the designs of [the building director in charge] by the same Mezger art shop. In the scope of all of these efforts it was

³³ Fig. No. 146

³⁴ Examples – Pilgrimage Church Maria Schray at Pfullendorf, Überlingen Cathedral etc. etc. have been given plenty in this paper and are here not to be listed explicitly.

³⁵ Appendix Copy Books: *Copir-Buch No. 1*, p 320

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See V. Mezger: *Memoirs*, p 99, here related to the Reichenau wall paintings

³⁸ G. Münzel: *Die Patina*, Freiburg 1925, p 20

tried to further cultivate the traditions of the old castle builder Graf Grasheim and to restore preferably native forces. [...]”³⁹

The demands by Dehio and Riegl as well as the historical mania to renew eventually caused as a counteraction the de-restoration in the middle of the past century. In the same way apodictic as the requirement to uncover by Hubert Wilms was the “scientific restoration” by a certain Max von Pettenkofer or Paul Hübner. All of them seemed to further on justify invasive measures with irreversible consequences. But no doctrine is able to comprehensively satisfy the [...] diversity of the artistic and historical phenomena of the inherited monuments, particularly not if it is handled apodictically – thus dealing with them rather requires also tolerance and openness for undogmatic solutions.”⁴⁰ And after all the creation of the term “original restoration” clarifies – presumably unintentionally – the ultimate contradiction between original and restoration.

³⁹ Appendix Copy Books: *Copir-Buch No. 4*, p 331, letter dtd. 8 April 1920

⁴⁰ Reverend Weber in the Christmas mass 2005 in the Überlingen Cathedral on occasion of the restoration of the Cathedral’s crib figures