

CHAPTER ONE

Points of View in Panofsky's Early Theoretical Essays

This love of the diagrammatic, this pleasure taken in an image of the general principle swooping down on the powerless, aimless, feckless particular and gathering it up into the stark clarity of a demonstration of the inner workings of the law, this is the frisson that reflection on the cognitive event produced in the first half of this [twentieth] century.

ROSALIND KRAUSS

Rosalind Krauss describes a general modernist enchantment, a fascination with the diagrammatic, the general principle, and the law. The specific focus of her passage is the critic Clement Greenberg's satisfaction with "Loran's bizarre graphs of Cézanne's pictures" in which "the bodies of Madame Cézanne or of the gardener sitting with folded arms" are "drained of everything but a set of their now brutishly definitive silhouettes, traced for them by Loran's own hand, each element notched in turn into the overall diagram of the picture plotted by means of the same myopic contour" (see fig. 1). Greenberg, in 1945, was not bothered by Loran's "presentation of the work stripped bare," of the "bluntness" or "bloodlessness" of his demonstration. Instead, Krauss contends, for Greenberg "these diagrams constituted simply a series of images of the logical moment, that instance of coalescence—which happens in no time at all—of a separate set of facts into a virtual unity."¹

In the first decades of the last century, particularly in Germany and Austria, the field of art history was coalescing into a "scientific," or systematic, discipline (*Kunstwissenschaft*).² Scientific art history was preoccupied with logical order and unity—those masterstrokes of methodological legerdemain capable of turning unwieldy, "irrational" works of art into "knowable" objects of systematic analysis. Like Loran's diagrams



1. Erle Loran, diagram, ca. 1963. From Loran, *Cézanne's Compositions: Analysis of His Form, With Diagrams and Photographs of his Motifs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963). Reproduced by permission of the Regents of the University of California.

and Greenberg's satisfaction with them, Erwin Panofsky's (1892–1968) early theoretical essays aim for “the logical moment”—the moment when aesthetic phenomena are arrested and arrayed in a unified field of inquiry. In this sense, Panofsky's early essays move to the rhythms of disciplinarity. As John Michael Krois reminds us, every “field of study, no matter how particular its objects, aims to relate particular occurrences to a general form or structure.”³ Indeed, the articulation of a discipline rests on its forms of relation: the more unified and logical the forms of relation, the more coherent the field of study.

In his essay of 1915, “The Problem of Style in the Visual Arts” (“Das Problem des Stils in der bildenden Kunst”), Panofsky informs us that art “is not only based on a particular perception of the world [*Anschauung der Welt*] but also on a particular worldview [*Weltanschauung*].”⁴ Here the author parlays the connotations of “*Anschauung*” into a subtle demonstration. Various defined as “view,” “experience,” “perception,” “idea,” and “concept,” the German word traps within its linguistic net the interplay between seeing and meaning that forms the basis of Panofsky's definition of art. Art, according to Panofsky, is based on perception and the intellectual views and postulates we bring to it. The same might be said of art history, and it should come as no surprise that Panofsky writes from the point of view of the art historian. After all, negotiating the interplay between seeing and meaning, art and history, with the aim of establishing a systematic discipline was something Panofsky shared with other practitioners of early twentieth-century German art history.⁵ Writing in 1910, the philosopher Ernst Cassirer described the highest criterion of science as “unity and completeness in the systematic construction of experience.”⁶ In the early years of the twentieth century, “scientific” art history oriented itself toward this very standard.

Like Cassirer's contemporaneous investigations in the philosophy of science, Panofsky's desire to determine the underlying concepts and principles of art history was in step with the neo-Kantian turn in German philosophy.⁷ The neo-Kantian movement arose in reaction to the supposed theoretical deficiencies of Hegelian speculation. In its attempt “to grasp all of human knowledge in one swoop, in a total system from the top down,” Hegelian philosophy had left “the specific bases of knowledge unexamined.”⁸ Returning to Kant was to return to a method of critical inquiry most suitable for the determination of the bases of knowledge of the academic disciplines. Abandoning grand, Hegelian-inspired speculations on the movement of spirit or culture over time, the theorist's turn to Kant was, in the field of art history, also a turn toward the work of art. Inspired by Kant's critical method, Panofsky's early essays theorize the possibility of a priori concepts and principles for art history, those con-

cepts that would account for the nature of art itself and those principles that would orient artistic phenomena within a unified conceptual field. In doing so, these essays address the question, what is art? at the same time as they investigate the possibility of a systematic art history. Determining fundamental concepts and principles would not only provide the systematicity required for a discipline of art history but would also establish the distinctiveness of art history as a historical science.⁹

The "scientific revolution" in German art history aimed to move beyond the consideration of art as merely an aesthetic phenomenon. As Edgar Wind remarked in 1924, the trouble with the aesthetic phenomenon is that it "has no other meaning than its own. It is isolated, it is indivisible, and it is self-sufficient." Consequently, "it can be neither wrong nor right. It is simply *there*."¹⁰ Rather than subjecting the aesthetic phenomenon to a systematic inquiry, the aesthetic point of view offered an individual judgment of taste, a love of beauty for its own sake rather than any understanding of the conditions of the appearance of historical beauty. In this way, the aesthetic point of view enabled aesthetic phenomena to remain "isolated" and "self-sufficient"—"simply *there*."¹¹

If the sensuous experience of aesthetic phenomena offered merely an aggregate of individual experiences of specific objects, it was thought that a systematic art history could offer reasoned judgment of historical works of art along with a clear understanding of the system of knowledge to which these objects belonged. Put differently, systematic art history sought to transform the chaos of aesthetic phenomena into the cosmos of a unified disciplinary structure. Panofsky recognized that the work of art "always *has* aesthetic significance," and he believed that attentive looking should lead to an engagement with art-historical problems.¹² Formulating his art history alongside advocates of empathy theory and psychological aesthetics, he was keen to ward off the incursions of "modern aesthetics" into scientific art history.¹³ Correlating aesthetic phenomena with a system of historical sequence was one thing, adequately describing the nature of art was another. Aesthetic phenomena, in other words, offered special challenges for art history, as Panofsky discovered when he sought to provide the "inherent laws" and to preserve the "unique value" of "the academic study of art."¹⁴

In "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," an essay of 1940, Panofsky asks the central question: How, then, is it possible to build up art history as a respectable scholarly discipline, if its objects come into being by an irrational and subjective process? While works of art are clearly distinct from the objects of scientific investigation, both the humanist and the scientist rely on theory, or hypothesis, to conjecture a "system that makes sense" for their respective objects. Hence, "what is true of the re-

relationship between monuments, documents and a general historical concept in the humanities is evidently equally true of the relationship between phenomena, instruments and theory in the natural sciences." "To grasp reality," Panofsky continues, "we have to detach ourselves from the present. Philosophy and mathematics do this by building systems in a medium that is by definition not subject to time. Natural science and the humanities do it by creating those spatio-temporal structures which I have called the 'cosmos of nature' and the 'cosmos of culture.'"¹⁵

In a speech delivered in 1945 to the Institute for Advanced Study, Panofsky comments further on the intersections between the humanist and the scientist:

There are, after all, problems so general that they affect *all* human efforts to transform chaos into cosmos, however much these efforts may differ in subject matter. The humanist, too, finds himself faced—once he attempts to *think* about what he is doing—with such questions as: the changing significance of spatial and temporal data within different frames of reference; the delicate relationship between the phenomenon and the "instrument" (which, in the case of the humanist, is represented by the "document"); the continuous and/or discontinuous structure of the processes which we lightheartedly call "historical evolution."¹⁶

The stations of Panofsky's art-historical methodology demonstrate his *thinking* about what he was doing: "the changing significance of spatial and temporal data within different frames of reference" is studied in his 1927 *Perspective as Symbolic Form*;¹⁷ "the delicate relationship between the phenomenon and . . . the 'document'" finds its fullest articulation in the iconographic method; finally, "the structure of the processes" that enable "historical evolution" might be suggested in the underlying laws of the discipline of art history itself. The search for such intrinsic principles animates Panofsky's early theoretical essays.

Turning from the strict observation of nature or culture toward speculation on their objects of study, the scientist and the humanist transcend their separate scholarly domains and join on a common plane of thought. This shift from the empirical to the objective point of view also marks the arrival of theory—what Panofsky describes as the thinking about what one is doing. Theory enables the scientist and the humanist to consider the object within a more speculative frame of reference; theory facilitates the creation and activation of fields of inquiry. Art history is theoretical in a double sense: first, after close observation and thoughtful study the art historian must interpret aesthetic objects that do not subscribe to natural laws; second, transforming an aggregate of aesthetic phenomena into a

scholarly discipline requires a theoretical point of view onto the field of the visual arts.

Art history is a curious discipline. Consisting of a domain of aesthetic objects, art history requires the close observation and study of images that by their very nature can never be "known" in the objective sense toward which science strives, as well as the classification of these objects into categories and contexts that—structurally speaking—resemble those of the natural sciences.¹⁸ If the goal of the sciences is knowledge, then, as Panofsky rightly states, that of the humanities must be wisdom.¹⁹ Conceding knowledge to science does not leave art history in the lurch of relativism, however. The methods employed by the art historian guide research toward reasonable ends. In this way, art history can be built up "as a respectable scholarly discipline" though "its very objects come into being by an irrational, subjective process."²⁰

How does an ultimately unknowable aesthetic phenomenon become an object of disciplinary knowledge? In what follows I reflect on points of view in art history, on what enables the turn from chaos to cosmos. To this end I will consider seeing, representing, and knowing. Each term of this triad can be correlated with a point of view: the term "seeing" describes the perception of an object, or the empirical point of view; "representing" implies the shift from the perception of an object to *Anschauung*, the mental image or representation of the perceptible object, and, correspondingly, an objective viewpoint;²¹ finally, "knowing" refers to the epistemological or transcendental vantage point, wherein one moves beyond the mental representation of an object toward speculation on that object within a broad field of inquiry. Examples of this last point of view include the search for the fundamental laws of perceptual phenomena or the initial classification of these phenomena into schemes and systems.

Encompassing internal and external vantage points within its purview, theory enables the movement from seeing to representing to knowing. As theory ushers our perceptions into thoughts, and finally into knowledge, so does it lead us from sight to insight, from the particular instance to the general category.²² In this way, the transition from seeing to representing to knowing describes the movement of disciplinarity in the visual arts. *Pace* Panofsky, we might want to consider wisdom rather than knowledge as the appropriate term for the purpose of "the history of art as a humanistic discipline," since art history trades in aesthetic objects. Yet art history is predicated on the transformation of aesthetic phenomena into "knowable" objects, if not objects of knowledge.

Written in the years before Panofsky's own depiction of the aim of scientific method "to transform chaos into cosmos," Cassirer's 1910 study

Substance and Function describes the outlines of this pursuit with a similar use of metaphor.

The aggregate of sensuous things must be related to a system of necessary concepts and laws, and brought to unity in this relation. This process of thought, however, demands really more than the mere combination and transformation of parts and presentations; it presupposes an independent and constructive activity, as is most clearly manifest in the creation of limiting structures. The “empiricist” also must accept this form of idealization; for, without it, the world of perception would not be merely a mosaic but a true chaos.²³

Likening the data of sense perception to an “aggregate of sensuous things,” Cassirer explains how the move from aggregate to system necessitates an “active process” that “transports what is given into a new logical sphere.”²⁴

As one shuttles between the empirical, the objective, and the transcendental points of view in this “active process,” fixed properties are replaced by the “intellectual abbreviations” of empirical or hypothetical concepts. Concepts, Cassirer explains, do not “copy” “a given manifold abstractly and schematically.” Instead, and more powerfully, concepts constitute a new “law of relation” and thus produce “a new and unique connection of the manifold.”²⁵ Empirical concepts gather sensuous particulars into serial relations by permitting one to find uniformity in the aggregate of sensuous experience; hypothetical concepts, in turn, allow one to conjecture necessary connections within logical systems. Whereas empirical concepts are forms of representation of the world of sensuous experience, hypothetical concepts mark the flight into the realm of pure speculation. In hypothesis, a whole is substituted for the part—fixed properties are replaced by concepts or universal principles in an “active process” that necessitates the negotiation of two points of view. As in the story of Thales, Cassirer makes clear in his elegant study that a vantage point on the concrete *and* the abstract is necessary for the building up of scientific knowledge.²⁶

If concepts provide the mechanism necessary for transforming sensuous particulars into unchanging objects of experience, judgment motivates the transformation from seeing to representing to knowing by ordering aesthetic phenomena under the empirical, the objective, and the transcendental points of view. Moving from the empirical to the objective point of view, judgment provides the organizing concepts that connect individual objects into serial relations. The transcendental vantage point of judgment allows one to move beyond the object and hypothesize about the meaning and correlation of objects in a unified field of inquiry. Fol-

lowing Kant, Cassirer describes how judgment brings knowledge into a unitary system of relations of superordination and subordination. Under a standpoint of judgment, Cassirer explains, "the limited circle of facts, that is sensuously accessible, expands before our intellectual vision into a universal connection of phenomena according to natural law."²⁷ Here Cassirer intimates the frontiers of objectivity, that imagined sphere characterized by a universal order permitting exact reconstruction from any particular point of view. While the "noble dream" of such rigorous objectivity is well a thing of the past, it is nevertheless important to underscore two things.²⁸

First, the transformation of what Cassirer and Panofsky refer to as the chaos of sensuous particulars into the cosmos of a system of thought begins with the conjecture of a unified system to which such elements belong. The imagining of a unified system serves as a Kantian "regulative idea," an idea we must assume in order to facilitate our understanding of objects in the first place.²⁹ Serving as an imaginary focus, the hypothetical idea of unity not only establishes the continuity of experience, it also guides the process of inquiry from immediate experience to reflection, from consciousness of uniformity to consciousness of necessary connection. Motivating the shift in point of view, judgment creates a meaningful set of propositions which are then tested.³⁰ What Cassirer describes as the highest criterion of science, namely "unity and completeness in the systematic construction of experience," is achieved when universal premises are determined. When these universal concepts, principles, or laws are established, then all propositions resolve themselves into pure correlations within a unified field of inquiry. The goal of investigation is therefore not the gathering of a quantity of sensuous particulars or empirical observations, but the quality of the connection made through judgment, the limit of which would be that imagined frontier of objectivity where an individual judgment could be deemed universal.

Second, as one moves toward the use of intellectual hypotheses, the object of analysis does not change. Rather, what shifts is one's vantage point relative to the object.³¹ Divergent points of view on an object enable a plurality of different forms of expression that nonetheless have the object as their initial frame of reference. It is worth remarking that when Cassirer and Panofsky were writing, the natural sciences had rejected the Newtonian belief in absolute space and time in favor of the understanding of a space-time continuum. Einstein's paper on the special theory of relativity, published in 1905, marked the transition from the belief in an absolute system of coordinates to the understanding of the relative relation of space and time.³² Granting the importance of such scientific discoveries, we may note the inherent reason why this shift in viewpoint

is inevitable: because the content of consciousness always comes to us shaped or arranged in some manner, it is impossible to separate completely the processes of perception and thought.³³ As Kant had remarked in his first *Critique*, the productive imagination is an ingredient of every possible perception. Indeed, a mutual relation exists between perceptual “facts” and one’s thinking about them, a state of affairs felicitously described by Goethe in his well-known maxim “Every fact is already theory.”³⁴ Panofsky cites Goethe’s maxim in his 1915 book on Dürer’s art theory.³⁵

If, as Panofsky and Wind suggest, the stubborn particularity of aesthetic phenomena presents special challenges for art history, aesthetic phenomena are nonetheless the starting points of investigation for systematic art history. This is not the case merely because works of art are the objects of art history. As the subject of art history, works of art are the starting points of theoretical investigation. To be sure, the subjective, objective, and transcendental viewpoints place the objects of experience into different logical spheres. A fundamental relation exists between these points of view, however: although each point of view is distinct, as Kant and Goethe suggest, they are also interrelated. Paraphrasing Kant’s famous phrase, Panofsky notes how “without objects, art-theoretical concepts are empty; without concepts, art-historical objects are blind.”³⁶ Like the scientific experiment, the investigation of what Panofsky terms “artistic problems” is an inherently circular process involving the object and one’s thinking about it.

As Panofsky indicates, scientific art history requires two points of view: a view of the object and a vantage point beyond the object. In his 1920 essay “The Concept of Artistic Volition” (“Das Begriff des Kunstwillens”), the author commences by addressing the particularity of art history, as well as the need for a theoretical point of view on the field of investigation.

It is the curse and the blessing of the academic study of art [*Kunstwissenschaft*] that its objects necessarily demand consideration from other than a purely historical point of view. A purely historical study, whether it proceeds from the history of form or the history of content, never explains the work of art as a phenomenon except in terms of other phenomena. Historical study does not draw on a higher source of perception: to explain the artistic production of a particular artist within the framework of his time (or in light of his individual artistic character), it traces a particular representation iconographically, or a particular formal complex according to a history of types, or even tries to determine if such a complex is derived from any particular influence at all. This means that each real phenomenon to be investigated is referred to all the others within the whole complex: their ab-

solute locus and significance is not determined by a fixed Archimedean point outside their essential nature. Even the longest "developmental series" represents only lines which must have their starting and finishing points within such a purely historical nexus. . . .

Artistic activity, however, distinguishes itself from general historical activity (and in this sense is like perception) in that its productions represent not the expressions of subjects but the informing of materials, not the given events but the results. Thus in considering art we are faced with the demand (which in the field of philosophy is satisfied by epistemology) for a principle of explanation by which the artistic phenomenon can be recognized not only by ever further references to other phenomena within its historical sphere but also by a consciousness which penetrates the sphere of its empirical existence.³⁷

The transformation of the object from aesthetic phenomenon to historical work of art requires one to connect images with their history. As Panofsky indicates, relating these historical objects to each other is then a matter of finding the uniformities among them and of forming classes or types of objects based on certain common attributes—a process generally known as finding the category and "style" of the work of art. Thus related, heterogeneous objects become homogeneous series of objects organized according to certain sets of structural relations. Panofsky makes clear, however, that this procedure only goes so far. The "demand . . . for a principle of explanation by which the artistic phenomenon can be recognized . . . by a consciousness which penetrates the sphere of its empirical existence" implies the new point of view required for the correlation of artistic phenomena into a systematic art history. This move away from mere seeing toward the abstraction of the object necessary for scientific knowledge arises from the desire to reduce the structural relations binding works of art together to a more fundamental "principle of explanation" that would determine the whole sphere of aesthetic phenomena from a transcendental, rather than an empirical or objective vantage point.

Noting the "curse and blessing of the academic study of art," Panofsky therefore demands that we seek to answer two questions simultaneously: what is art? and what are the conditions of a systematic art history? Examining the nature of the foundations of recent art history, in particular the methods put forth by Wölfflin and Riegl, Panofsky's early theoretical essays ponder the conditions of possibility of a scientific art history. In what ways does art history account for the empirical, the objective, and the transcendental points of view within a unified field of inquiry? I will argue that Panofsky's early essays engage seeing, representing, and knowing by demonstrating how a theory of style might compose perception, representation in the form of a work of art, and historical

knowledge in the guise of a history of style. In this way, Panofsky's theory of style accounts for the empirical, the objective, and the transcendental points of view just as it reveals something of the underlying principles comprising and correlating a systematic art history.

Chaos, Cosmos, and Correlation

Published in 1915, Panofsky's "The Problem of Style in the Visual Arts" responds to Heinrich Wölfflin's (1864–1945) December 1911 lecture to the Prussian Academy of Sciences.³⁸ Panofsky begins his essay by registering an inconsistency at the heart of Wölfflin's own system: "Every style," so Wölfflin begins, "doubtless has a particular expressive content; in the style of the Gothic or the Italian Renaissance are reflected a mood of the time and a way of life, and in the lines of Raphael there appear his personal characteristics." For Wölfflin, then, "the essence of style" consists in "not only what is said but how it is said." Curiously enough, however, as Wölfflin moves from the consideration of individual works of art to the art of a historical period, expression recedes in value. That "every artist of the sixteenth century, be he Raphael or Dürer, employs line rather than the painterly mark as the essential means of expression no longer depends on what one could call mentality, spirit, temperament or mood," Wölfflin asserts, but rather "on a general form of seeing and representation" that may be "interpreted solely as visual possibilities." Wölfflin, then, distinguishes two different roots of style: an "expressive, interpretative capacity for meaningful content" on the one hand, and a "psychologically meaningless form of seeing" on the other.³⁹ Because style is here based on a "double root," the concepts and categories of Wölfflin's entire system are themselves divided into "two fundamentally different groups," not the least of which is the separation of form and content.⁴⁰

Can "form" be defined merely as a general concept of representation, and so be categorically distinguished from the expressive content of particular representational forms, as Wölfflin implies in his double root of style?⁴¹ Is the eye merely an organic, unpsychological instrument, as Wölfflin claims? Can we fundamentally separate the relation of the eye and the world from the relation of the psyche (*Seele*) and the world?⁴² As they stand, Wölfflin's categories merely describe the style of an artist or historical period; they do not explain why a work of art has style in the first place. Whereas Wölfflin's five conceptual pairs describe *how* Renaissance and Baroque paintings are composed, and provide us with a formal vocabulary with which to describe these images, Panofsky's 1915 essay seeks to explain *why* representation is expressive.

Under the guise of taking Wölfflin to task for his double root of style, Panofsky charts a correlation between seeing and meaning on the one hand and form and content on the other hand. For Panofsky, the cluster of concepts that denote seeing—the act of seeing, the eye, and the optical—remain mechanistic and empty of connotation when these are understood only literally.⁴³ Endeavoring to provide seeing, the eye, and the optical with figurative meaning, which is to say with the capacity for expression, Panofsky stresses the role of the psyche (*Seele*). Understood variously as the site of feeling, temperament, and turn of mind, the *Seele* lends expressive content to what the eye sees, as it organizes what is seen into meaningful content. In this sense, *Seele* is considered a priori: the psyche is not inherent in any given content but presupposed as a method of ordering contents. Stressing the inner dimension that provides the “empty container” of the eye with the capacity for content and individual expression, Panofsky demonstrates the combined role of representation and expression in perceptual experience.

According to Panofsky, then, style does not have two independent roots but “one root with two stems.”⁴⁴ The root of style is that art is itself a shaping of materials. Hence, a will to form or expression is the fundamental principle of style. This fundamental principle serves to distinguish the academic study of art from the other disciplines. Style has two stems because general forms of representation and individual expressive content interact in the shaping of materials. If style is dependent on the interaction of the general and the particular, then this interaction implies the negotiation of two points of view. Instead of conceiving form and content as two separate, irreducible concepts, Panofsky sets general form and content in a dialectical relation mediated by the psyche (*Seele*).⁴⁵ This dialectic, moreover, both explains and creates the problem of style: if an understanding of the interaction of the eye and *Seele* is essential to activate the category of style and to provide it with conceptual value, then this very interaction is responsible for the multiplicity and heterogeneity of individual forms. Artists, Panofsky contends, work within and shape general stylistic categories: artists choose between linear and painterly just as they paint in a style that might be characterized as linear or painterly.⁴⁶ As a consequence, perception, expression, and representation must be joined in the concept of style just as they are joined in the creation of a work of art. Unlike Wölfflin, then, for Panofsky a single work of art and the art of a period are allied as manifestations of an a priori will to form and expression.⁴⁷

If the dialectical interaction of general categories of representation and individual expressive content make for seemingly endless resolutions to what Panofsky terms “artistic problems,” it is important to un-

derscore how general categories serve our understanding of style in the first place. Employing a musical analogy, Panofsky notes that it is precisely because all fugues are fugues that each can exhibit such varied individual expression; conversely, one can distinguish a passage in a sonata movement only because it is a sonata, with the result that even if it were possible for this passage to reach the greatest possible resemblance in theme, tempo, and modulation to that of a fugue, these two could never be absolutely identical.⁴⁸ Particular forms gain meaning only in relation to general forms or categories, since it is the mapping of the general that allows the historian of art or music to understand the refinements of, and variations in, a specific form. The composition of Panofsky's 1915 essay is itself musical in form. Its theme is the problem of style, and the variations on this theme are the dialectical relations between the individual psyche and the world, on the one hand, and the will to expression and the general forms of representation, on the other. As in his musical examples, Panofsky provides a demonstration of how two images with the same form have different content, just as two images with different content have the same form—an epistemological condition beautifully articulated later, incidentally, in Jorge Luis Borges's story of "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote."⁴⁹

Here we might note how the dialectical interaction of general and particular that gives us the category of style is itself based on comparison: it is only by reference to a general category that we might be able to recognize a new passage of music or a new work of art; likewise, it is only because musical passages and artworks relate to a general category that we are able to appreciate such fine distinctions among them. Taking this a bit further, it becomes apparent that an entirely unique object would remain stranded outside the classificatory system of art history unless this object were made "knowable" through a process of comparison with what is known.⁵⁰ While artistic phenomena are prized for their originality, it is useful to consider how, in terms of a *history* of art, originality itself is subjected to the "limiting structure" of general stylistic categories. Wölfflin's own use of the "comparative method" in his *Fundamental Principles of Art History* has been rightly criticized.⁵¹ It is nonetheless worth noting that if style is a basic principle—and a distinguishing feature—of the academic study of art, then it is not without coincidence that the comparative method would itself be a fundamental feature of the history of art.⁵² On this account, dual slide projection could be considered as art history's complementary technological protocol.⁵³

Correlating the empirical and the objective points of view in a single principle of style, Panofsky accounts for the possibility of form and meaning just as he demonstrates how form and content come together in the

expression of meaning. If, like Wölfflin, one considers seeing, the eye, and the optical too literally, they remain colorless concepts—analogous to the “empty container of the eye” in Panofsky’s essay. Like the dialectical relation between the eye and the psyche, Wölfflin’s general categories obtain their full value only when they are set in a dynamic relation with particular, actual forms. While Panofsky sets the general and the particular in dialectical relation, he nevertheless distinguishes the general from the particular. Whereas Wölfflin relates works of art to a category of style such as linear or painterly, Panofsky correlates the style of the work of art to the fundamental principle of style itself, and, in doing so, to the epistemological bases of art history. In this way, specific works of art “can be ordered into a system of categories” which themselves are based on a general “possibility of representation.”⁵⁴

Operating “like an epistemologist,” Panofsky is here “not concerned with the empirical subject,” understood as either the artist or the viewing subject, but with “art itself,” and more precisely, with “what is harbored within the work of art.”⁵⁵ Like Wölfflin, Panofsky trains his sights on the work rather than on the maker. Unlike Wölfflin, however, whom he criticizes for defining seeing, the eye, and the optical too literally, Panofsky finds the traces of the maker in the work—the psyche, after all, lends individual temperament and feeling to the organ of the eye. And yet, what Panofsky terms the psyche in the 1915 essay is considered more an a priori principle than an individual expressive element per se. Though Panofsky binds style to a single a priori principle, he is, in other words, not as interested in the composition of *Seele* so much as in how it operates. In this way he neatly avoids the thorny task of defining messy terms like temperament or feeling. Instead, he focuses on the apparently more important task of delineating the conceptual value of a unitary principle of style.

Operating “like an epistemologist,” moreover, Panofsky can assume the role of interpreter, discovering meaning otherwise lost on those whose gaze lies too near—spatially or temporally—to the object of study. From this vantage point he is able to regard what lies within the object: “an involuntary gesture, without a trace of expressive intention, can be eminently expressive,” he suggests in a footnote.⁵⁶ What remains in germ, expressed as it is in a footnote to the 1915 essay, is a prolepsis—the trace of a future, iconographic method. Forms, traces, clues: Panofsky’s search for meaning in an image has been likened to the practice of the medical doctor and the sleuth.⁵⁷ Yet it is precisely in validating the role of the present-day interpreter over the artist’s own interpretations of his or her work, or the reactions to this work by the artist’s contemporaries, that Panofsky hopes to determine the fundamental concepts of a system-

atic art history. Still, Panofsky presumes the a priori nature of his most important critical term, *Seele*, just as he fails to determine this term critically—so much, we might say, for the moves of the epistemologist.

Notwithstanding his criticisms, Panofsky praises Wölfflin for providing art history with general categories such as linear, painterly, and so forth. The “first task of art history must be the discovery, elaboration, and refinement of these categories,” he argues, for only in this way can art history achieve systematicity and disciplinary coherence.⁵⁸ Although he succeeds in offering an accounting of Wölfflin’s five conceptual pairs, Panofsky concludes by saying that a complete explanation is not possible since the causality of Wölfflin’s categories cannot be determined. Yet even if “it is not possible for scientific knowledge to delineate the historical and psychological causes of the general forms of artistic representation” (a task, it would seem, best suited for the interpretations of the art historian), binding Wölfflin’s style into a single root enables Panofsky to correlate concepts of form and content, representation and expression, and with them the stylistic categories, into one unified system.

Panofsky contends that it is Alois Riegl (1858–1905) “who has come furthest in the creation and use” of such fundamental concepts.⁵⁹ In “The Concept of Artistic Volition,” an essay of 1920, the author suggests that Riegl’s concept of artistic volition, the *Kunstwollen*, which encompasses both a will to form and the expressive features of the artwork itself, may account for immanent meaning and the history of that meaning as this is expressed in works of art.⁶⁰ As his 1915 essay on Wölfflin sought to correlate form and content, so here Panofsky understands “formal and imitative elements as different manifestations of a common fundamental tendency.”⁶¹ Acknowledging that an understanding of the *Kunstwollen* can easily slide into “psychological volition,” and into the “equally common and parallel concept of ‘artistic intention,’” Panofsky is keen to secure artistic volition as a first principle.⁶² He therefore avoids the use of artistic volition in “modern aesthetics,” since from this viewpoint we are told more about the “psychology of the beholder making the judgment” than about the work of art itself.⁶³ He likewise cautions the reader against a consideration of the *Kunstwollen* as the “historically genetic” volition of the artist’s time, as this point of view merely describes how works of art are represented in contemporary criticism. Instead, Panofsky focuses on an epistemological investigation of artistic volition, since only such a fundamental understanding of the *Kunstwollen* will permit knowledge of “immanent meaning.”⁶⁴

Considering artistic volition as a first principle is a matter of perspective. In order to illustrate this point Panofsky offers a comparison from epistemology: “If I take any judgmental proposition—for example,

the one made famous by Kant's *Prolegomena*: 'the air is elastic'—as given, then I can look at it from many points of view," he writes. Panofsky conveys the substance of the historical, psychological, grammatical, and logical viewpoints of this proposition. He then arrives at the importance of the comparison for his own argument. It is worth quoting at length.

Finally, I can ask whether an analytical or synthetic judgment, a judgment of experience or a judgment of perception, is expressed in it. In asking this last, transcendental-philosophical question of it, something is revealed that I would call the epistemological essence of the proposition: that which is in it as purely cognitive content apart from its formal logical structure and its psychological prehistory, indeed apart from what the person making the judgment "meant" himself. I can determine that, as it stands, the proposition "the air is elastic" merely contains a judgment in which perceptions are found only in their ordinary relationship, that is, the perceptions are linked only through their simultaneous life in an individual consciousness, not by the pure cognitive concept of causality "in consciousness in general." While I determine this I arrive at the judgment that the proposition first of all does not contain a judgment of experience but merely a judgment of perception. Its validity is that of a statement about the actual nexus of ideas of air and elasticity in the thinking self making the judgment, not that of an objective, universally valid law, according to which the one view necessarily conditions the other. A validity of this latter sort would, on the contrary, only befit the proposition if we had found that, instead of being linked to ties of psychological coexistence, the two ideas (air and elasticity) had been causally linked into a unity of experience.⁶⁵

Drawing on Kant's distinction between judgments of perception, which rest on empirical judgments, and judgments of experience, which require hypothetical judgments, Panofsky reinforces his earlier claim that only an epistemological point of view will reveal the "immanent meaning" of artistic phenomena. In terms of Kant's proposition, Panofsky neatly demonstrates that judgments of perception are at best capable of determining qualities of elasticity and air, and their casual, or historical, relation to each other. While judgments of perception indicate what I can expect based on my experience of perceiving the world, judgments of experience inquire into "consciousness in general," with the aim of discovering the conditions of possibility of cognition itself. A judgment of experience of this same proposition would therefore demonstrate that air and elasticity are related through an "objective, universally valid law," which would render them "causally linked into a unity of experience."

Panofsky turns from epistemology to artistic volition in the next paragraph, in which he attempts to explain how we might relate artistic volition to a systematic art history.

Let us now return to the question of the comprehension of artistic intention or volition. Just as a particular epistemological essence belonged to the proposition "the air is elastic" when it was considered in the light of causality (and only thus), so an immanent meaning can be discovered in the objects of aesthetics in more widely or more narrowly, epochally, regionally, or individually limited artistic phenomena. Thus artistic volition is no longer revealed in only a psychological but also in a transcendental/philosophical sense. This is so if these objects are considered not in relationship to something outside themselves (historical circumstances, psychological prehistory, stylistic analogies) but exclusively in relation to their own being. They must be considered again, however, in the light of standards of determination that, with the force of a priori basic principles, refer not to the phenomenon itself but to the conditions of its existence and it being "thus."⁶⁶

Comprehending a work of art under a number of possible concepts, such as time, place, or artist, judgments of perception help us recognize the work of art as belonging to a particular time, region, or artist's *oeuvre*. Helpful as this might be for the building up of stylistic categories and the understanding of historical periods, these judgments are made by relating the work to something outside its "essential nature." A judgment of experience of artistic volition, in contrast, would demonstrate the innermost sense of the work of art. As Panofsky suggests, determining the a priori principles of artistic volition not only necessitates our answering the question, what is art? but also "the condition of its existence and its being 'thus.'"

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant claimed space and time as forms of pure intuition (*reine Anschauung*), that is to say, as a priori preconditions of experience. Panofsky, through his own admission, does not have a ready answer for what might be analogous forms for artistic volition. As preconditions for cognition, Kantian categories of space and time render causality possible. In terms of art history, categories of space and time serve to locate objects within a stream of time rather than account for causality per se. As Panofsky indicates, we must assume the possibility of comprehending the artistic phenomenon "as a unity" in order to carry out our investigation of it from an epistemological point of view.⁶⁷ Yet even in presupposing this much, we cannot critically determine causality for artistic phenomena. Whereas what Panofsky calls a psychological or historically genetic view of artistic volition might lead us to conjecture psychological or historical "causes" for the sensuous appearance of works of art, these judgments can never determine artistic volition in its innermost sense. Yet if scientific art history is predicated on establishing

the a priori principles of works of art, and on correlating these with a system of categories, then where are we left?

Instead of continuing with his epistemological analysis, Panofsky concludes his 1920 essay by reintroducing the necessity of documents as "heuristic aids for an interpretation of meaning." As "heuristic aids," documents serve to correct false suppositions regarding the meaning of a work of art. In this way, they lead the art historian increasingly closer to valid interpretations of meaning. Documents, Panofsky writes, are not then "an immediate indication of the meaning itself; yet they are the source of those insights without which the grasp of meaning is, often enough, impossible."⁶⁸ Panofsky's turn toward an analysis of documents marks a shift in his essay from the consideration of immanent meaning to one of "phenomenal understanding."⁶⁹ As such, this shift likewise marks a turn from a discussion of the meaning of artistic volition per se to the meaning of a work of art.⁷⁰ Although Panofsky does not determine artistic volition from an epistemological point of view in the 1920 essay, he nevertheless succeeds in distinguishing artistic volition from "both the artist's volition and the volition of his time," and in demonstrating what would be necessary in order to secure artistic volition as a fundamental concept.

Employing the concept of the *Kunstwollen* as a theoretical instrument, Panofsky demonstrates how an epistemological point of view opens up the deepest level of meaning in the work of art. To ask the "philosophical-transcendental question" of Riegl's *Kunstwollen*, he suggests, is to consider the concept in a way not possible for Riegl himself on account of his own historical position.⁷¹ Panofsky's consideration of the *Kunstwollen* against the grain is nonetheless in keeping with the earlier art historian's own definition: for Riegl, too, the concept of artistic volition encompasses the sphere of the metaphysical and the historical particular. Yet unlike Riegl, who emphasizes both points of view in his definition and application of the *Kunstwollen*, Panofsky stresses the "philosophical-transcendental" connotations of Riegl's concept.⁷² By taking the *Kunstwollen* as an a priori principle, Panofsky correlates Riegl's metaphysical and historical senses of the concept into one unitary sense or "immanent meaning." In this way he shows us how we might arrive at a principle of artistic volition that precedes the particular "stylistic qualities" or "modes of representation" in works of art themselves. In keeping with his earlier essay on Wölfflin, Panofsky does not define the substance of the *Kunstwollen*. Instead, he "secures the concept of artistic volition in a purely critical manner" by offering a critically undefined concept of artistic volition to art history as its own fundamental concept.⁷³

In the 1925 essay, "On the Relation of Art History to Art Theory," which bears the subtitle "A Contribution to the Discussion of the Possibility of 'Fundamental Concepts for Systematic Art History'" ("Über das Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Kunsttheorie. Ein Beitrag zu der Erörterung über die Möglichkeit 'kunstwissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe'"), Panofsky offers a more detailed accounting of how a principle of style operates in art history, art theory, and systematic art history (*Kunstwissenschaft*).⁷⁴ Making a careful distinction for the first time between the activities of atheoretical and theoretical art history, the author ventures a critical articulation of the deepest level of meaning of aesthetic phenomena. Not surprisingly, this fundamental level is correlated in his schema with "a unitary principle of style," and so with the register of disciplinary coherence.

In his earlier writings Panofsky aimed to correlate form and content into a unitary principle of style and to secure Riegl's concept of artistic volition as a fundamental concept. In this most recent essay he extends his earlier investigations by formulating them into a unified system. In the 1925 essay, Panofsky therefore translates Riegl's concept of artistic volition into a will to form (*Formwillen*), which is likewise referred to as a principle of style (*Stilprinzip*). As in his critique of Wölfflin, so here Panofsky defines a principle of style as the necessary interaction and "balance of two opposing principles." Whereas Wölfflin's stylistic categories merely account for the visual solutions of artistic problems, in this essay Panofsky presents the originary impetus for the problem of form and style.⁷⁵ By accounting for the problem of style, however, Panofsky does not merely extend his earlier critique of Wölfflin. Defining a fundamental principle of style that allows for seemingly infinite possibilities of artistic form and content, Panofsky also implies that this manifold of artistic possibility might be inappropriately constricted by Wölfflin's stylistic categories.

Shortly into the essay Panofsky presents the accompanying table of the conceptual system of scientific art history.⁷⁶ Instead of critically "deducing this table and showing its completeness and use value from a methodological point of view," Panofsky seeks more modestly to demonstrate how the characteristic artistic problems presented in visual and architectural creations are structurally related to the fundamental concepts of a systematic art history. Because different logical categories are unified by the author under the same system of explanation, the "facts" of art are neither stranded nor inert; instead, they become values in a system of relations. As we shall see, Panofsky presents a "cosmos of culture" as different but complementary points of view for considering the same phenomenon.⁷⁷

Universal anti-thesis within the ontological sphere	Specific oppositions within the phenomenal, that is, visual sphere			Universal anti-thesis within the methodological sphere
	1. Opposition of the elementary values	2. Opposition of values of figuration	3. Opposition of compositional values	
"Fullness" is opposed to "form."	"Optical" values (open space) are opposed to "haptic" values (bodies).	"Values of depth" are opposed to "surface values."	Values of "in one another" (merging) are opposed to values of "next to one another" (division).	"Time" is opposed to "space."

The table indicates how Panofsky grounds art history on first principles by discovering a transcendental category—a will to form, a principle of style—that is also perceptible in the work of art. Characterizing the “universal antithesis within the ontological sphere,” at the far left, as the “living exchange” of fullness and form, Panofsky provides a motor for the “great ur-problem of art”:⁷⁸ if art fulfills its specific task in the creation of sensuous form, then a resolution of the perpetual antithesis of “fullness and form” is the impetus for the creation of artistic phenomena.⁷⁹ As the condition of possibility of the work of art, the antithesis of “fullness and form” is conceived as the a priori substrate, or theoretical grounding principle, of artistic phenomena. In the “universal antithesis within the methodological sphere,” at the far right, we find “time opposed to space” (or, literally, time standing in opposition to space), categories borrowed from Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. For Panofsky, too, space and time are defined as a priori, hypothetical concepts. Yet where Kant demonstrates that categories of space and time are the condition of possibility of cognition and causality, Panofsky relates these categories to the work of art itself: precisely because every artistic phenomenon is a work of art, he suggests, it has a time and space of creation.⁸⁰ While “the ontological sphere” of Panofsky’s table therefore indicates how art originates as a “shaping process” of “relative” form and “absolute” fullness,⁸¹ “the methodological sphere” defines the antithesis of time and space as the condition for the solution of artistic problems. As a priori concepts, fullness, form, time, and space are correlated in Panofsky’s system.⁸² Consequently, the ontological and methodological spheres are themselves bound together by analogy, with the result that the universal antithesis of fullness and form “can also be spoken of as the principle of a systematic art history.”⁸³ As the outer registers of the table fold in on themselves, Panofsky unwittingly demonstrates how his own explanation is caught within the hermeneutic circle of that which it seeks to explain.

Moving to the middle columns of the table, we see that this fundamental “living exchange” is given characteristic visual form through the various oppositions described. In column 1 we find Riegl’s optical and haptic values, the opposition of which produces figure and ground relations. Column 2 offers Wölfflin’s binaries of plane and recession, which serve to connect visual elements. Finally, column 3 registers the opposing compositional values of merging and division in which the “highest region of the visual gathers the work into a high level of unity.” The three characteristic artistic problems of isolation, connection, and unity indicated in the middle columns of the table are themselves conceived as the representational results of the originary opposition of fullness and form registered in the ontological sphere. In correlating the ontological and visual spheres, Panofsky is careful to note the difference between them, however: if “the contents of historical reality are conceived . . . on account of the fundamental concepts,” then, he adds, these fundamental concepts—as “theoretical”—reside in a different logical sphere than “the contents of historical reality.” Hence, “the fundamental concepts are not a grammar by which artistic phenomena can be classified, but an a priori reagent” which creates the possibility of artistic form.⁸⁴

Panofsky intimates how investigations into the ontological, the visual, and the methodological spheres function in the manner of a scientific experiment. As a priori, the universal antithesis of fullness and form is transcendental, or beyond perceptual experience; yet, as an a priori opposition, this antithesis is nevertheless the condition of possibility of the work of art. When considered from a “practical-methodological point of view,” it follows that a priori concepts are “discovered and developed through experience.” The conceptual system of scientific art history can best be developed, then, by beginning with the work of art and forming hypotheses about it. Art theory, in other words, begins with looking. Commencing with the work of art, the theoretician inquires into the fundamental concepts of fullness, form, time, space, and their relations to one another. The general questions generated by this inquiry are then proved or disproved by the visual record. In this way, “the art theoretician determines the goals toward which the empirical researcher orients himself step by step.” Without orientation to the “state of affairs” offered by art theory, art history would, Panofsky writes, remain an aggregate of “one hundred, one thousand single observations.”⁸⁵ As he indicates in the table, it is precisely through an orientation to art theory—that is, to the ontological sphere—that art history can be correlated into a unified system.

If Panofsky’s table correlates the orientations of art theory and art

history, it also presupposes distinctions between art history and *Kunstwissenschaft*. One practice is initially separated from another by point of view. Atheoretical art history, analogous in the essay to a science of the thing (*Dingwissenschaft*), is an orientation toward the particular "sensuous characteristics," otherwise termed "the superficial style characteristics" or "stylistic symptoms," of the work of art. Accordingly, it is the task of atheoretical art history to bring monuments into spatiotemporal sequence and to characterize the style of these works. What Panofsky terms theoretical art history attends to formal or "artistic problems" in aesthetic phenomena in order to illuminate the style concepts and criteria we find in the middle columns of the table. Lastly, *Kunstwissenschaft* addresses itself to the "essence" of these stylistic criteria in order to "establish and develop the absolute antithesis of the fundamental concepts" of fullness, form, time, and space.

What I would like to draw attention to is the way in which "style" is the subject of inquiry of atheoretical, theoretical, and systematic art history. Although each pursues this subject according to its respective point of view, atheoretical, theoretical, and systematic art history, like the triumvirate of seeing, representing, and knowing, rely on one another in support of their inquiry. As the author is careful to point out, even atheoretical art history, as a "science of the thing," orients itself—whether consciously or not—to the artistic problems of theoretical art history. Theoretical art history, for its part, orients itself to questions of "stylistic criteria and its aggregate as well as to the forming principle of style and its unity." Panofsky further characterizes this latter understanding of style as "style in the innermost sense" ("Stil im inneren Sinn"). As in the registers of Panofsky's table, so here in his articulation of style: the reliance of one point of view on another results in a circuitous interdependency—what we might call the infolding of viewpoints inherent in the laying out of interpretation.

As the aesthetic phenomenon becomes a historical object, the work of art is connected to an expanded field of inquiry until, finally, as the theoretical object of *Kunstwissenschaft*, the question of the condition of possibility of artistic phenomena is investigated. The movement Panofsky traces from the aesthetic contemplation of a single object to the engagement with artistic problems, and onward to the ultimate goal of the discovery of fundamental concepts and principles, is likewise a trajectory from seeing to representation to knowledge. While an atheoretical art history is criticized by Panofsky for both isolating the object and considering it from an overly individual point of view, theoretical art history activates the object as the subject of art-historical problems. In this move

from seeing to representation, the work of art becomes a historical object that is queried and analyzed through the various methodologies of the history of art. Although, as Panofsky maintains, knowledge in the scientific sense cannot be achieved in art history, the historical object operates *as if* it were an object of possible knowledge when fundamental principles are pursued through the orientation of *Kunstwissenschaft*.

An example of the “blessing and curse of the academic study of art” is that artistic phenomena do not exist solely for themselves, but they also exist for us, and if we approach them from the point of view of the art historian, then they come to us “with absolutely specific demands.” As a consequence, Panofsky wagers the following:

“style” is for *Kunstwissenschaft* as “natural law” is for physics, with this exception: the world of *natural* “perceptual contents” is, so to speak, still an *Adiaphoron*: the lightning storm is, in and for itself, something entirely neutral. . . . The world of artworks, on the contrary, appears to us with absolutely specific demands. . . . [When] the art historian observes a work of art *sub specie* “style,” . . . he should not give a new meaning to the work but translate the given meaning from the realm of the irrational into a rational sphere.⁸⁶

While art history may set its sights on the systematicity of *Kunstwissenschaft*, artistic phenomena require interpretation. Wind summed up this state of affairs rather well in 1925: “in the field of culture,” he writes, “we evaluate the importance of meanings; . . . in the field of nature we explain their existence.”⁸⁷ Panofsky’s early theoretical essays advocate for the determination of the fundamental concepts of art just as they demonstrate that meaning can only be found in and through the work of art. This negotiation of two points of view, this arrival of theory on the scene of what is seen, does not describe the gap to be bridged between knowledge and reality so much as the movement of thought itself. Wind’s vivid description of the “methodical circle” of interpretation and Panofsky’s own understanding of the need for “aesthetic recreation” register why the search for meaning in artistic phenomena is a perpetual dance between part and whole, between object and hypothesis.⁸⁸ In this sense, Panofsky’s failure to fully establish the concept of art in his 1925 essay is not a failing so much as a revelation of an inherent rub in the academic study of art: namely, that we must “translate the given meaning of [aesthetic phenomena] from the realm of the irrational into a rational sphere.” Considering the work of art as a unity, Panofsky proceeds *as if* the “truth” of the object could be revealed at the same time as he indicates why unitary meaning will always elude the art historian.

The "Ideal World" of Style

The "art" of art history that we find in the central columns of Panofsky's table is balanced on either side by the transcendental categories of the work of art and art-historical methodology. The similarity of these categories and the manner in which they bracket the "phenomenal or visual sphere" of art demonstrate, to my mind, why style is such a powerful concept in the history of art and why it often appears like a hall of mirrors.⁸⁹ If style reverberates down the ontological, visual, and methodological alleys of art history, then Style, or style considered transcendently, can be coordinated with any variety of historical styles. In this way close looking at artistic objects, the historical view of a period, and theoretical meditations on art would all find their place within a unified field of inquiry. This is possible because, with the concept of style, a new point of view is achieved that refers at once to the part and whole of objects, to objects and their contexts, as well as to the correlation of the elements in a systematic history of art. For Panofsky, "style determines the structure of the ideal world of objects."⁹⁰ Yet style per se is defined only in relation to itself—the opposing categories of time and space are analogous in Panofsky's table with the "living exchange" of fullness and form. As the ontological and the methodological spheres fold into one another, style is caught within its own hermeneutic circuit.

Panofsky's early theoretical essays, including the table of 1925, reveal how style serves as a kind of truth content for art history. If truth might be equated—rather simply—with coherence, and coherence defined as a matter of avoiding contradiction, then style allows us to follow the advice of St. Thomas: "When you meet a contradiction, make a distinction." As the musical analogy in Panofsky's 1915 essay makes clear, style, the most capacious concept in the history of art, is predicated on similarity *and* distinction. Style preserves coherence while offering difference. What contradicts one style might just be another style whose definition awaits the future, when one will have more evidence at hand or the historical distance necessary for retrospective analysis. Genealogical and proleptic, capacious, flexible, and analytically powerful, style, it seems, can never be wholly controverted. And so style remains an animating principle—a truth content, if you will—for art history and aesthetics.

Panofsky would later indicate the impossibility of finding the first principles of art history.⁹¹ As his table suggests, however, this discovery is not really necessary. When style operates as an a priori principle, as a mode of description and analysis, and as a means by which to coordinate objects into historical sequences, then the drive to articulate the condi-

tions of possibility of style becomes unnecessary. As Panofsky's own iconographic method demonstrates, it is not necessary to determine the conditions of possibility of style so much as to retain the unity of the concept of style as an imaginary focus with which to guide one's inquiry into the meaning of the image. On this account, I would argue that Panofsky's much-lamented abandonment of theory might have less to do with his emigration to the United States in 1934 than with the discovery of a method that made this particular theoretical pursuit unnecessary.⁹²

The 1925 table is Panofsky's first and last outlining of how a history of art might be constructed on first principles. In an essay first delivered in 1931 to the Kiel chapter of the Kant Society, "On the Problem of Description and Meaning in the Visual Arts" ("Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst"), this table would be replaced by the stages and materials of iconographical and iconological interpretation.⁹³ Turning from the pursuit of the transcendental-philosophical question of style to the ways and means of its historical appearances, Panofsky leaves behind his epistemological investigations. One might argue that the aims of a scientific art history are still registered in the pursuit of iconology. If iconology is understood as "the search for intrinsic meanings or content,"⁹⁴ however, then art history—as a branch of the humanities—sets itself in search of a knowledge that can never be fully grasped. The pursuit of intrinsic meaning is nonetheless fundamental to the discipline since this pursuit presupposes a use of the theory and interpretation required to transform the aesthetic phenomenon into an object in and for the history of art. Since style might be the concept with which to describe and enact these various operations, a critical definition of style becomes less necessary than the deployment of a concept of style within the unified space of art history.

Panofsky's "The Concept of Artistic Volition" concludes as follows: "There is a contemporary point of view which stresses too strongly the argument against the theory of imitation, but art is not a subjective expression of feelings or the confirmation of the existence of certain individuals; it is a discussion, aimed at the achievement of valid results, that objectifies and realizes a formative force, using material which has to be mastered."⁹⁵ It is well known that the material of art history was mastered through Panofsky's own iconographic method. As in the 1925 table, where greater unity and disciplinary coherence are achieved in the movement from the visual sphere of the work of art to an understanding of the history of art, so the use of documents carries us away from the work it seeks to explain. The tables from Panofsky's famous essay of 1939, "Iconography and Iconology," demonstrate how interpretation moves further away from the work in the search for deeper meaning of it.

In a similar way, the generic concept of a period brings the most objects together under one umbrella of style: "Gothic" man and Gothic cathedral are, so to speak, rendered on a single, unified plane, one which is, at the same time, separated from us by centuries of historical distance.⁹⁶ If, as Wind assumes, considering the work of art as merely an aesthetic phenomenon isolates the object in its particularity, then generic concepts such as "Gothic" or "Renaissance" come with a ready definition that the works of art of these historical periods often cannot match.⁹⁷ The generic concept, the most powerfully inclusive concept, is itself predicated on a distinction that perhaps excludes as much as it includes.⁹⁸

Like the concept of causality, which concerns the connections between things or events rather than things or events themselves, the concept of style does not exist in individual works of art but in the relation between them. Drawing out a main strand of Cassirer's *Substance and Function* for our purposes here, we may note that any reference to similarity among works of art already assumes the function of a concept of relation that brings individual works of art together in a series, group, or genre of similar works of art. The concept of style rests on the concept of relation. When art historians employ the concept of style, however, they most often do so by surreptitiously introducing this relation between works of art into the visual qualities of the work of art itself.

Listen closely to Edgar Wind as he outlines this move in regard to Wölfflin's "general forms": "This general form is now reified as a perceptible entity with its own history. The logical tendency towards formalization, which lends to the theory of aesthetic form a degree of precision which it cannot justify in its own right, is thus combined with a tendency towards hypostatization which turns the formula, once it has been established, into the living subject of historical development."⁹⁹ As the art historian proceeds to ferret out the similarities between works of art, arraying artistic objects in series or groups of objects, it should come as no surprise that generic categories are established, including what we term "period styles." Wind's gloss on Wölfflin emphasizes the value and usefulness of period styles and other stylistic formalizations of works of art: these moves not only enable us to categorize objects within a field of inquiry, they also smooth the transition from unique object to "the living subject of historical development," thereby permitting us to animate the work of art as the product of a maker, a time and a place.

For all the reasons why the hypostatization of the concept of style is useful to art historians, it nonetheless brings us squarely into the trap of circular argumentation. When this move is stated baldly, as it is by the scientist Edward Harrison, then it appears rather laughably obvious.

Owing to the aura of progress investing the notion of evolution, we use fittest, advantageous, and other terms that are saturated with value concepts. When we try to justify our value concepts we find ourselves trapped in circular argumentation. Individuals surviving are the fittest, but what are the fittest? Obviously, those that survive. Individuals having advantageous variations reproduce and flourish, and what are advantageous variations? Obviously, those that reproduce and flourish. Whenever a value judgment trespasses into the physical universe it chases its tail.¹⁰⁰

Translated into the vocabulary of art history, Harrison's words resonate with what Ernst Gombrich and Svetlana Alpers have reminded us about the saturation of value concepts inherent in the generic category "Renaissance": "Renaissance" not only excludes what it otherwise might include, it has traditionally instituted a value system that favors—if not highly prizes—the art of the Italian Renaissance over northern European art of the same period.

I have traced the methodical circle several times in this chapter. Panofsky's early essays and his tactic of "aesthetic recreation" demonstrate the impossibility of standing outside this circle at the same time as these essays seek to determine the contours and limits of this circle so as to shore up a unified field of inquiry for the objects of art history. As the concept of style moves with a deft sleight of hand from the concept of relation to the visual qualities of the work of art itself, it performs operations of relation and description simultaneously. Undergirding the logical and methodological legerdemain of Loran's demonstrations and Panofsky's table, style creates a history of art just as it obscures the operative traces of its own "logical moment."

Representation and Historicity

In the essay he read to the Kiel chapter of the Kant Society in 1931, Panofsky cites from Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, a book published two years earlier. Concluding his study of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Heidegger describes the inherent violence in interpretation: "Certainly, in order to wring from what the words say, what it is they want to say, every interpretation must necessarily use violence. Such violence, however, cannot be roving arbitrariness. The power of an idea which shines forth must drive and guide the laying-out [*Auslegung*]" of interpretation.¹⁰¹ After reading this passage by Heidegger, Panofsky explains to the Kant Society how his own method, including his use of documents, mitigates the violence in interpretation through a careful search for the intrinsic meaning in historical works of art.

Yet Panofsky's quotation of Heidegger omits a crucial, final sentence from the paragraph cited: "Only in the power of this idea [which shines forth]," Heidegger continues, "can an interpretation risk what is always audacious, namely, entrusting itself to the concealed inner passion of a work in order to be able, through this, to place itself within the unsaid and force it into speech. This is one way, however, by which the guiding idea, in its power to illuminate, comes to light."¹⁰² For Heidegger, Kant's first *Critique* was not simply a historical treatise, it was a living text in history. Consequently the meaning of the *Critique* could be read anew, as Heidegger did when, focusing on the first version of Kant's magnum opus, he opened it up to an ontological rather than an epistemological explanation. Likewise, it was the manner in which the Florentine Renaissance work of art was alive in its historicity that enabled Aby Warburg to study it in a deep historical sense while, at the same time, perceiving its emotive and thematic ties to a present human condition.¹⁰³ Finally, Panofsky himself might be criticized for at times becoming overly constrained within the cosmos of his own method, as when he suggests too close a link between the artwork and the personality of Michelangelo,¹⁰⁴ for example, or between Gothic architecture and scholasticism.¹⁰⁵ Yet it was his critical reinterpretations of Riegl's texts—his reading of Riegl against the grain—that enabled him to use and modify the *Kunstwollen* as an a priori principle in his early theoretical essays.

If there are to be points of contact between atheoretical, theoretical, and systematic art history, these might lie in a thoughtful engagement with history that would likewise permit images to remain potent in their historicity.¹⁰⁶ I conclude with a plea for history because in our contemporary condition—aptly described in German as a *Bilderflut*, or flood tide of images—the history of images is effaced along with, perhaps, their power to do more than distract attention or to illustrate a point.¹⁰⁷ Hovering somewhere at the other extreme, we may note the way the classification of an artwork as a "masterpiece" has the tendency to draw a large viewing audience to the work at the same time as it raises the image above the fray of historical debate. Like Wind's description, in 1924, of the trouble with the aesthetic point of view, the designation of an aesthetic phenomenon as a "masterpiece" isolates the individual work of art, enabling it to be "simply there," with "no other meaning than its own," since its own meaning and status is deemed reason enough for its existence and display.¹⁰⁸

I have argued that Panofsky's early theoretical essays chart the movement from seeing to representing to knowing as the points of view of atheoretical, theoretical, and systematic art history. While the intrinsic laws of aesthetic phenomena might be adumbrated through a transcendental vantage point, only an active engagement with the work of art

leads us from description to understanding to meaning. "Seeing" the work of art is crucial, in other words. Panofsky, in keeping with his own fear of the "arbitrariness" of "modern aesthetics" and his desire for a unified history of art, advises us not to rest there but to move on toward more theoretical points of view.

Acknowledging how "very comfortable" it would be for us "if art theory and art history had nothing to do with one another," Panofsky points out that, in reality, art theory and art history are "reciprocally related."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, a balance between art history and art theory leads to the solution of art-historical problems. Theorizing "seeing" in his 1911 essay, Panofsky brings together perception, expression, and representation into a single root of style. Wrestling further with what might constitute a unitary principle of style, he presents a more nuanced understanding of Riegl's *Kunstwollen*. Abandoning the search for a critical definition of artistic volition for the operations of a "principle of style," he then sets out to refine the method by which he would become famous. If theory arrives through an engagement with artistic phenomena, this investigation should encompass a wide-ranging sense of theory and method. Panofsky implies as much in July 1927, when, commenting on the "future tasks and directions for research" of art history for the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, he sets an expanding field of artistic objects and the development of art-historical method in a dialectical relation.¹¹⁰ A spirited search for meaning in artistic phenomena, and the negotiation of empirical, objective, and transcendental points of view, animates Panofsky's early theoretical essays. Rather than consider atheoretical, theoretical, and systematic art history according to the differing inquiries that define them, we might—following in the spirit of Panofsky—set these fields in relation to each other and into a force field of theoretical inquiry.¹¹¹ If, as Goethe famously put it, "every fact is already theory," theory, after all, begins with looking.

Just as Panofsky outlines a systematic investigation of artistic phenomena as the interaction of the empirical, objective, and theoretical points of view, Kantian philosophy turns on the negotiation of near and far. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the philosopher demonstrates how cognition relies on "two transcendentals," the standpoint of the finite and the infinite. According to Kant, the negotiation of these points of view lends truth content to our perceptions. The following chapter will examine the Kantian sublime as a movement from immediate experience to the point of view necessary for systematic knowledge. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* demonstrates why the inquiry into aesthetic phenomena proceeds with knowledge as its imaginary focus. At the same time, the philosopher demonstrates the impossibility of gaining conceptual knowledge of aesthetic phenomena.