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Author(s): By Erwin Panofsky

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 43-71

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/595628>

Accessed: 24/05/2012 14:27

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On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory: Towards the Possibility of a Fundamental System of Concepts for a Science of Art

Erwin Panofsky

Translated by Katharina Lorenz and Jas' Elsner

In a study published some years ago,¹ I attempted to define a concept used frequently in contemporary art history, but not always classified correctly; that concept is *Kunstwollen*,² which after the work of Alois Riegl has come to define the sum or unity of creative powers manifested in any given artistic phenomenon.³ I tried to show that for *Kunstwollen* to have a mean-

This essay was originally published as Erwin Panofsky, "Über das Verhältnis der Kunstgeschichte zur Kunsttheorie," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 18 (1925): 129–61.

1. See Erwin Panofsky, "Der Begriff des Kunstwollens," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 14 (1920): 321–39; trans. Kenneth J. Northcott and Joel Snyder under the title "The Concept of Artistic Volition," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (Autumn 1981): 17–33.

2. *Kunstwollen* remains one of the most difficult concepts in all of art history. Among recent translators, Northcott and Snyder translate it as "artistic volition" whereas Jacqueline Jung uses "formative will of art"; see Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, trans. Jacqueline Jung (New York, 2004). For further discussion and a brief account of some attempts at definition, see the translators' introduction above. Here, given the controversy and given Panofsky's concern with terminological and conceptual precision in this paper, we choose to leave the original German. For similar sentiments, see Allister Neher, "'The Concept of *Kunstwollen*,' Neo-Kantianism, and Erwin Panofsky's Early Art Theoretical Essays," *Word and Image* 20 (Jan.–Mar. 2004): 41–51, esp. 49 n. 1.—TRANS.

3. By the term artistic *phenomenon* or artistic *manifestation* I mean any art-historical object that from the perspective of stylistic criticism can be regarded as a unit, whether this unity be seen as regional (vernacular style), temporal (period style), or personal (individual style) or whether it be the style special to a single monument.

ing it can be interpreted neither psychologically as the will of the artist (or the epoch and so on) nor as a psychological “reality” but as a metempirical subject—an immanent sense within an artistic phenomenon. In this respect—and only in this respect—can *Kunstwollen* be graspable within a fundamental system of concepts⁴ that is valid a priori, that is, as a subject of thought that belongs not to reality (not even to the sphere of historical reality) but that, to use Husserl’s terminology, has an eidetic character.

My critique of *Kunstwollen* has not faced objections, as far as I am aware;⁵ my positive propositions however—and specifically the thesis that a fundamental system of concepts for art theory with a priori validity is not only possible but necessary—have been attacked recently by Alexander Dorner.⁶ His objections have not shaken my position, partly because they are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of my views, partly because they depend on a mistaken grasp of the relationship between a priori and a posteriori understanding.⁷ At least Dorner’s attack on me demonstrates the need to clarify the purely programmatic arguments of my earlier study and to discuss in detail not only the theoretical nature but also the practical and methodological meaning of a fundamental system of concepts for art theory and with it the relationship between art theory and art history.

4. The German term translated in this paper as “system of concepts” or “conceptual system” is *Grundbegriffe*. It means literally “fundamental concepts” and a “fundamental terminology,” but it is used by Panofsky to imply not simply ground-zero concepts but also a systematically applied order of them.—TRANS.

5. Those objections would come shortly, especially in the writings of members of the so-called Second Vienna school. See Guido Kaschnitz-Weinberg, review of *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, by Alois Riegl, *Gnomon* 5 (1929): 195–213, and Hans Sedlmayr, “Die Quintessenz der Lehren Riegls,” introduction to Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Vienna, 1929), pp. xii–xxxiv; rpt. Sedlmayr, “Kunstgeschichte als Stilgeschichte,” *Kunst und Wahrheit* (1929; Mittelwald, 1978), pp. 32–48; trans. Richard Woodfield, under the title “The Quintessence of Riegl’s Thought,” in *Framing Formalism: Riegl’s Work*, ed. Richard Woodfield (Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 11–31.—TRANS.

6. See Alexander Dorner, “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens durch die Kunstgeschichte,” *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16 (1922): 216–22.

7. I discuss his misunderstandings in an excursus at the end in order not to overburden the current argument.

ERWIN PANOFSKY, the renowned art historian, was professor at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University, until his death in 1968. Among his many books are *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, and *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art*.

A

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In discussing a fundamental system of concepts for art theory, I shall refer to pairs of concepts (why it must be pairs of concepts will be apparent from the following discussion) in whose antithesis is found the conceptual expression of the fundamental problems of artistic creation that I postulate.

When we examine works of art, we talk of artistic problems for which the work of art itself offers solutions. Problems of this kind (such as extent and centralization, column and wall, individual figure and global composition) always present themselves in the form of opposites, while works of art create a conciliation between such binary polarities. The specific quality of the equilibrium, in which the artistic character of any given work of art or group of works of art consists, is that it constitutes its own world, a world completely independent from empirical reality.⁸ Now all these artistic problems are implicitly part of a single major ur-problem, which in itself has the shape of an antithesis (it is because of this that they can only be formulated as antitheses) and—insofar as it is the necessary result of the conditions of artistic creation—is an a priori issue. The ur-problem is perhaps best described with the words *volume* and *form*.⁹

Art, however one chooses to define it and from whatever vantage point one takes, operates through an organization of sensibility. The products of art both preserve a genuine volume of sensible perception and yet also subject it to organization; in this respect they curtail that volume.¹⁰ To put

8. Panofsky's word *Ausgleich* here seems to refer to a specific nexus that is generated within the interplay of the opposites. To bring this out we have opted for translating it with *equilibrium*; elsewhere we use other possible translations for *Ausgleich*: *conciliation*, where he seems to refer to the negotiation of the interplay between these concepts, and *balance*, where he concentrates on the state of this interplay.—TRANS.

9. I am indebted here and partly also in the following to a study of my friend Edgar Wind, "Ästhetischer und kunstwissenschaftlicher Gegenstand, ein Beitrag zur Methodologie der Kunstgeschichte," which I hope will soon be published.

[This is Wind's doctoral thesis of 1922 (University of Hamburg) to which in fact Panofsky's argument throughout this essay is very heavily indebted. It was never published as a monograph but revised sections appeared in two articles in 1925; see Wind, "Zur Systematik der künstlerischen Probleme," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 18 (1924): 438–86 (this in the same volume as the Panofsky essay translated here) and "Theory of Art versus Aesthetics," *Philosophical Review* 34 (July 1925): 350–59.—TRANS.]

10. Panofsky's word here, *Fülle*, means both "volume" and "richness." To represent this in English as "volume/richness" would be horrible, and so we have chosen to focus on "volume." For more on the difficulties of this word, see Neher, "The Concept of *Kunstwollen*," Neo-Kantianism, and Erwin Panofsky's Early Art Theoretical Essays," p. 50 n. 18, where the options *fullness*, *abundance*, *plenty*, and *completeness* are offered.—TRANS.

it another way, in any work of art there must be a conciliation of some kind between volume and form as the two poles of a fundamental antithesis. This necessary conciliation between two contrasting principles can only be realized if the a priori need for an antithesis corresponds equally to an a priori possibility for a synthesis. Volume and form—which come together as two individual and exclusive principles that seem unable ever to work together—can and must form a synthesis because the purely ontological antithesis of form and volume has a correlation to (or, to be more precise, is at its core identical with) the methodological¹¹ antithesis between time and space; the principle of volume corresponds to the nature of space and the principle of form to the nature of time. If the antithesis between form and volume is the a priori precondition for the existence of artistic problems, then the interaction between time and space is the a priori condition for their potential solution.

If a definition of a work of art can be attempted at all, it would have to go along these lines: the work of art examined from an ontological perspective is an argument between volume and form, while the work of art examined from a methodological perspective is an argument between space and time.¹² Only within this pattern of correlations can the work of art be understood. On the one side volume and form engage in lively interaction; on the other time and space unite themselves within one individually perceptible object.

This double problem (which in reality is only the twofold aspect of a single problem) dominates, I repeat, artistic creation in general—whether it takes its sensible material from visual or acoustic experience. In the specific conditions of visual experience, that is, in those conditions that are binding for the fine arts, the decorative arts, and architecture, the problem in question is naturally expressed through more specific contrasts. These specific visual contrasts or, to be more precise, these contrasts of specific visual values we may call the fundamental problems of artistic and architectural creation. Their conceptual description is thus what I mean by the fundamental conceptual system for a science of art.

11. That is, not the *ousia* (or *being*) of two contrasting principles or substances but the *methodos* for (or *route to*) their synthesis.

12. I avoid the expression *genetic* because this term does not denote the transcendent philosophical but rather the empirical and especially the historical conditions of artistic production. In this inquiry, I repeat, it is the former that are relevant and not the latter.

The table is an attempt to demonstrate the above.

general antithesis within the ontological sphere	specific contrasts within the phenomenal and, especially, within the visual sphere			general antithesis within the methodological sphere
	1. contrast of elementary values	2. contrast of figural values	3. contrast of compositional values	
volume versus form	optical values (empty space) versus haptic values (body) ¹³	values of depth versus values of surface	values of fusing versus values of splitting	time versus space

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This is not the place to examine this table of fundamental artistic problems methodologically in order to demonstrate their comprehensiveness and usefulness. But, following my argument above, it is also the table of a fundamental conceptual system for a science of art. To avoid misunderstanding, I explain the table as follows:

1. The pair of concepts in the first column (optical and haptic values) refers to a region of the experiential that we may call the layer of elementary values; it describes those qualities that need to be reconciled to create a visual unit (figure).¹⁴ The pair of concepts in the second column (values of depth and values of surface) refers to a further region of the visual, which we may call the layer of figural values; it describes those qualities through whose conciliation a visual unit (figure) actually comes into being. The pair of concepts in the third column (values of fusing and values of splitting) refers to the final region of the experiential, which we may call the layer of compositional values; it describes those qualities through whose conciliation a majority of visual units (whether the members of a specific organism, or the parts of a specific group, or the components of a specific artistic entity) are joined together into a unity of a higher order.

2. The fundamental problem expressed in the first pair of concepts is the argument between optical and haptic values, which can be understood as the specifically visual manifestation of the contrast between volume and form. For the realization of a purely optical value would lead to an annihilation of form, that is, to the completely amorphous appearance of light, while conversely the realization of a purely haptic value would lead to a

13. Here I use Riegl's terms without following their psychological interpretation.

14. Panofsky's word *Einheit* can be translated as both *unit* and *unity*; in this paragraph, and elsewhere, he seems to play out this double meaning, here leading his argument from *unit* to *unity*.—TRANS.

complete annihilation of all sensible volume, that is, to a wholly abstract geometric form.¹⁵ In comparison, the fundamental problem formulated in the third pair of concepts—the contrast between the values of fusing and splitting—can be understood as the specifically visual manifestation of the contrast between time and space. For a real and complete amalgamation of single independent units can only be imagined within the medium of time, which cannot be split, while reciprocally a real and strict isolation of single units from each other is only imaginable in the medium of space, unpenetrated by any movement. The antithesis expressed in this third pair of concepts could thus be described as calmness and movement (being and becoming) if the concept of movement or becoming included not only a sense of the purely temporal but also the idea of a spatiotemporal event. The fundamental problem expressed in the middle pair of concepts—the contrast between values of depth and values of surface—can be understood not only through the contrast between volume and form but also through the contrast between time and space, inasmuch as a specific relationship between depth and surface requires also a specific relation of optical and haptic values and a specific relation of fusing and splitting, movement and calmness. The difference between ancient Egyptian and classical Greek reliefs is well known; in ancient Egyptian art an utterly flat or even sometimes a receding execution of the relief and an almost complete relinquishment of foreshortening eliminate any values of depth in favor of values of surface while in classical Greek art a measured depth of the relief and an equally measured foreshortening establish an equilibrium between values of depth and values of surface.¹⁶ In this example, it is clear that these solutions of the surface-depth problem, however they be executed, are inevitably also linked to a corresponding solution of the problem of optical and haptic values as well as of the problem of values of fusing (or movement) and values of splitting (isolation or calmness). In this example, the movement of one individual form and thus also the connection of various individual forms with each other is only possible on the condition that this one individual form is free to move from the second to the third dimension of space (because not even a movement parallel to the picture plane, not to mention a turn or a tilt, is imaginable as long as the form cannot depart from this plane). A solution of the surface-depth problem in favor of surface necessarily means also a solution of the contrast between calmness and movement, isolation and amalgamation, in favor of calmness and isolation, and vice versa. Likewise, because a realization of

15. Here again, see Wind, “Ästhetischer und kunstwissenschaftlicher Gegenstand.”

16. This kind of relief corresponds to illusionism in painting: the modelling of *skiagraphia*.

optical values is only possible on the condition that a pure surface without any shadow be broken by extension and indentation, so a solution of the surface-depth problem in favor of surface means necessarily also a solution of the problem of optical and haptic values in favor of the haptic, and vice versa. So, while the two other fundamental problems can be attributed either to the space-time antithesis or to the volume-form antithesis, the fundamental problem of values of depth and values of surface can actually be understood from both sides. It is this mediating role of the second fundamental problem that helps us to understand that within any one specific style all three fundamental problems can and have to be solved in one and the same sense. Even if one understood that all three fundamental problems are only specific articulations of one identical ur-contrast, it would not be easy to demonstrate a concrete relationship between haptic and optical values, on the one hand, and calmness and movement, on the other, if it were not for the fact that a specific solution of the surface-depth problem is simultaneously linked to a specific solution of both other problems.

3. It should by now be clear how incorrect is the general opinion that a fundamental conceptual system for a science of art should aim to define the stylistic qualities of a work of art or of an artistic period by a single formula. What a terminology that merits the label of a fundamental system of concepts aims to shape into a formula is not the issue of how an artistic problem is solved but rather in what form such problems arise. Understood aright, the fundamental concepts are not labels to be stuck onto concrete objects; their necessarily antithetical qualities denote not stylistic differences apparent within the world of appearance between two phenomena that can be observed but a polarity between two principles that exists beyond the world of appearance and that can be located by means of theory. Because they are necessarily formulated antithetically, these fundamental concepts cannot account for the wealth of artistic reality—which is not to be reduced to dualisms—and thus cannot be accused of a failure to do so. All the concepts discussed above—optical and haptic values, depth and surface values, the values of fusing and splitting—refer not to contrasts actually encountered within artistic reality but to contrasts out of which artistic reality generates a conciliation of some kind. As is said above, a purely haptic value would only come into being in an abstract geometric figure, a purely optical value only in an amorphous manifestation of light; an absolute surface is *in concreto* as impossible as an absolute depth; a pure fusing would be spaceless time; a pure splitting would be timeless space. The fundamental conceptual system of art history can therefore only emerge in the form of absolute antitheses, while the urge to characterize actual monuments of art is far from the intent behind such

absolute antitheses. Indeed, it is certain that art-historical characterizations only refer to works of art themselves and thus operate not in contrasts but on a flexible scale. The fundamental system of concepts for a science of art defines the poles of a polarity that is constituted a priori and that cannot be grasped in a manifest form; normal art-historical characterizations describe a conciliation of these polarities, which is executed a posteriori and for which there are not two but an indefinite number of solutions. Now, if those concepts of absolute contrast (such as haptic, optical, and so forth) only generate but do not solve fundamental artistic problems, then those concepts such as pictorial, plastic, and so forth, which are only concerned with the solution rather than the generation of fundamental problems, will produce a scheme of gradual difference rather than a set of absolute contrasts. So plastic describes a middle balancing of optical and haptic values, while pictorial implies a balancing in which the haptic values are subdued in favor of the optical, and the formulation by which we might describe the extremely unpictorial art of the ancient Egyptians (for instance, stereometrical-crystalline) points to a balancing in which the optical values are subdued in favor of the haptic. The concepts pictorial, plastic, and stereometrical-crystalline by no means describe absolute contrasts; rather, they describe different points on a scale, whose freezing point is every time defined by the concept plastic. That is, if the theoretical end points of this scale, which cannot be touched by any reality, are located as it were in the indefinite, but are also ultimately defined by the contrast of haptic and optical values, then its historical end points are located in the definite and, therefore, depending on the specifications of the corpus of objects under scrutiny, must change their location. So a work of art that in relation to the style of the sixteenth century would have to be described as pictorial could however in relation to the style of the seventeenth century still be counted as plastic because by then the complete scale of values would have shifted towards the optical pole. It is clear, if only on purely theoretical grounds, that between an extremely unpictorial solution (as in ancient Egyptian art) and an extremely pictorial solution (as in modern impressionism) there are an indefinite number of possible intermediate stages (just as there naturally remains beyond ancient Egyptian style an imaginable solution that would subdue optical values even further and, beyond impressionism, one that would subdue haptic values still further).¹⁷ In art-historical practice, depending on the reference system applied, the same phenomena can

17. Panofsky writes of course (and presciently) before abstract expressionism although not before the pictorial experiments in abstraction by artists such as Kandinsky and Malevich.

—TRANS.

be described with different terms and different phenomena with the same expressions.¹⁸ But it is equally clear that the variability of the individual points on the scale is not proof against the constancy of the poles of the scale and only shows that concepts of characterization are not fundamental concepts and that fundamental concepts are not concepts for characterization.

Terms like *stereometrical-crystalline*, *plastic*, and *pictorial* (and all those terms that complement and differentiate these) only describe the solution of the first fundamental problem.¹⁹ Likewise, terms such as *surface*, *middle balancing of surface and depth*, and *depth* (in the sense of perspective) describe the different solutions of the second, and terms like *unmoved calmness*, *middle balancing between calmness and movement*, *movement* (in its organic-“eurhythmic” understanding), and surmounting calmness by movement—or, to put it differently, isolation, amalgamation, uniformity—describe different solutions for the third. Naturally, the same limitations apply to the usage of these groups of concepts as do to the first group (stereometrical-crystalline, plastic, pictorial).

So far, I have only addressed concepts that do not deal with color. Yet again even concepts characterizing color style describe nothing other than different solutions to the very same fundamental artistic problems, which (insofar as they are fundamental problems) are located wholly beyond the differentiation between color and noncolor qualities but which receive their solution in the choice of color as much as in bodily or spatial composition. The term *polychromy* describes those usages of color in which the problem of values of splitting and fusing is solved in favor of splitting, the problem of values of surface and depth in favor of surface, and the problem of haptic and optical values in favor of the haptic. The term *colorism* on the other hand, the most extreme case of which is shadedness, describes those

18. A study that for example only deals with art in the Italian trecento might name Giotto as working in a plastic style while a study of the complete early Renaissance would locate the peak of plastic tendencies only from the art of Mantegna onwards. By contrast, a study of Carolingian manuscript illumination would have to characterize the Ada manuscript in Trier [late eighth century, now in the Trier Staatsbibliothek, cod. 22—TRANS.] as plastic in comparison to the Godescalc Lectionary [of AD 781–83, now in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, BN NA.lat.1203—TRANS.]. It only shows the a priori validity of the fundamental artistic problems when art history in its frequently lamented conceptual poverty again and again seeks to operate with the same expressions — which are descriptions of solutions to those fundamental problems but, depending on the reference system, can in applied usage mean different things.

19. These concepts only ever describe the middle along with the two (relatively) extreme solutions, while one might prefer to think about the ancient Egyptian, the classical Greek, and the modern impressionist style as measuring the ground covered by this historical scale as widely as possible.

usages of color in which the problem of values of splitting and fusing is decided in favor of fusing, the problem of values of surface and depth in favor of depth, and the problem of haptic and optical values in favor of the optical.²⁰ So purely polychrome color design is the necessary correlate to an isolating, surface-oriented, and crystalline space and body composition insofar as it forms a solution to the fundamental problems, while coloristic, specifically shaded, color design is necessarily linked to a unifying, depth-oriented, and pictorial space and body composition.²¹

4. The duty of art theory is to define and develop the absolute antithesis of the fundamental concepts—the concepts that formulate artistic problems. Art theory does not incorporate an absolute antithesis of style-defining concepts equal to those with which art history operates. The fundamental concepts, far from separating the world of artistic manifestations into two hostile camps between which there would be no space for a considerable number of phenomena, simply describe the polarity of two regions of value that face each other beyond the world of manifestations and that are contrasted within the work of art in varied ways.²² The contents of the world of historical reality must be grasped not with the fundamental concepts but starting from them. The fundamental concepts do not dare, as a form of *grammaire générale et raisonnée*, to classify the manifestations of art; their duty is rather, if I may repeat myself, to offer an a priori legitimated catalyst from which a discussion of the manifestations

20. No special expression has yet been coined for the middle solution between polychromy and colorism (like “harmonized matching without a diffraction of the colors”), just as none has yet been invented for the middle solution between surface and depth.

21. That the color appearance of a work of art in contrast to its noncolor appearance is only characterized by one sequence of concepts and not three may be explained in that we study color as an addition to body, to adopt, not completely correctly, a postulate of extra-artistic understanding for the sphere of the arts. Color is treated as something that only clings to form, and rather than being seen as something elementary and figurative, it is only regarded as a compositional factor, which illustrates the already complete world of noncolor. Those terms coined for the description of color design like *polychromy* and *colorism* as well as *shadedness* might indeed only refer to the different solutions for the third fundamental problem (values of splitting and fusing), but the decisions which are described through these are indeed made for all three fundamental problems.

22. Heinrich Wölfflin’s categories are subject to the objection that they aim to reduce not the arising of the problem but the solution of the problem into one formula and hence to bring the theoretical antithesis of metempirical values into the empirical world of historical reality. They thus take an intermediate position that can be attacked from both sides. Studied as fundamental concepts of a theory of art they do not fulfil the requirement that they be legitimated a priori and that their object be beyond the world of manifestation; studied as concepts of art historical characterization they fail to fulfil the requirement to come to terms with the diversity of artistic phenomena because they restrict the wealth of such phenomena into one system of absolute contrasts, which even in itself is not without contradiction, by the way.

may be constructed.²³ They shape only the formulation of artistic problems, not the potential solutions; they determine only those questions that we direct to objects, not the individual and unpredictable answers that those objects can offer us.²⁴

Now, the questions formulated by the fundamental concepts to be directed towards art-historical objects are general questions. They can be applied to virtually any artistic or architectural object because they can be resolved in virtually any artistic or architectural object. Yet besides the fundamental artistic problems, with which all works of art have to deal, there are without doubt also individual artistic problems, which are solved only in a specific group of artworks, perhaps only in a single monument. Again, art theory then must provide specialist concepts so as to support fundamental art-theoretical concepts and order them systematically; the individual artistic problems should be shaped to formulae and related to the fundamental problems. This subordination of specialist concepts of a science of art to fundamental concepts of a science of art, that is, the construction of a connected and structured terminological system for a science of art, is possible because individual artistic problems—by contrast with the fundamental problems—must be understood as secondary problems, and, following from this, the corresponding specialist concepts are effectively secondary concepts in relation to the fundamental concepts. The individual artistic problems emerge, almost as if following a Hegelian scheme, from the fact that all solutions of the fundamental artistic problems in the course of historical development become themselves the poles of a specific individual artistic problem. Further, the solutions of this individual problem again form the poles of another, even more specialist second-order individual problem, and so forth ad infinitum. In this sense, to use an example from architecture, the shape that we describe as a column as well as that shape that we call a wall both present a specific solution to a fundamental artistic problem. If, under specific historical circumstances (say, in late antiquity or in Renaissance art), the situation occurs in which wall and column join into an organic connection within one building, then a new artistic problem arises, which in relation to the fundamen-

23. See Panofsky, "The Concept of Artistic Volition."

24. This describes the principal difference between art theory, as I understand it, and so-called aesthetics and art psychology. By addressing fundamental problems, art theory does not ask the questions of philosophical aesthetics, which seeks to determine the prerequisites and conditions that have made the artwork possible a priori, and even less those of normative aesthetics, which claims to formulate the laws that works of art must follow; art psychology on the other hand enquires into the conditions in which the work of art, or the impression of the work of art, becomes real.

tal problem has to be regarded as an individual problem.²⁵ Such an individual problem can produce further specialized individual problems, in that its varied solutions (say, the baroque and the classicizing) are themselves in dialogue with each other. In the same way, two different solutions of the fundamental artistic problems, for example, the solution of relief layering and the solution of perspective dispersal, can come to face each other as poles of a new contrast, which itself can be split into indefinite subproblems.

In this sense all individual artistic problems can be systematically linked with each other and finally—however particular and specialized (even singular) they may be—referred back to fundamental problems, and so from the table of art-theoretical fundamental concepts a coherently connected art-theoretical conceptual system emerges, which can branch out even into the finest specialist concepts.

How this conceptual system might be designed and used in practice is not possible to demonstrate here, but that is not necessary. What was attacked by Dorner but I believe has not been refuted is simply the possibility of finding fundamental art-theoretical concepts. These concepts are rightly described as fundamental because (a) they are valid a priori and are therefore suitable and necessary for understanding all artistic phenomena; (b) they do not refer to anything nonmanifest but to manifest objects; and (c) they build a systematic connection with those specialist concepts that form their subordinates. The three fundamental artistic problems themselves only present the manifestation of one major contrast, which is an antithesis, which belongs to the sphere of manifestations, and which takes a priori effect in all three fundamental problems in the same way.²⁶

25. Regarding this dialectical emergence of the individual problems of the first and second order, compare Wind, “Ästhetischer und kunstwissenschaftlicher Gegenstand.”

26. To demonstrate the alleged unconnectedness of potential fundamental concepts, Dorner brought together the following pairs of concepts: objectivist–subjectivist, realistic–idealistic, and form–content. The objection may be raised that the conceptual pair form–content cannot be coordinated with the other two; the conceptual pair of form and content does not deal with two principles of depiction or a stylistic difference between two sets of artistic phenomena as do the other two pairs but rather defines the boundary of two spheres which (logically) have to be differentiated within one and the same artistic phenomenon!

The contrast, still in common use, of formalist art (*l'art pour l'art*) and content art would have to be removed from the list of art-theoretical concepts. The relationship between form and content does not pose an artistic problem (like the problem of surface and depth) that could be decided in one way or another; rather there are two options: a specific content becomes part of a specific form (then and only then is it the content of a work of art, and one cannot ask at that stage whether it is more substantial or less substantial than the form) or it does not become part of the form (in which case the content is set beside the work of art and cannot influence its style). By the way, there is also a fundamental problem for the content sphere, whose poles on the part of form could be described with the term *definability* (general validity), and on the part

5. When the fundamental concepts of art theory are accounted for on an a priori basis and therefore are valid independent of any experience this does not of course mean that they could be deduced in a purely rational way independent of any experience. As the fundamental artistic problems from whose formulation we take the fundamental concepts of a science of art already represent the contrast between form and volume, time and space, presupposed a priori in a specifically sensible sphere, so the understanding of these fundamental problems presupposes an empirical (visual) manifestation. What applies to the understanding of the fundamental problems applies to a still greater extent to the understanding of the individual problems; artistic problems are only understandable by means of their solutions, that is, the works of art themselves. And if those concepts that formulate the problems claim a priori validity this claim does not mean that they can be found in a priori form but only that they can be legitimated a priori. Conversely it would of course be inappropriate to hold the a posteriori discovery of the art-theoretical concepts against their a priori validity. Just as Pythagoras's theorem was only discovered in an a posteriori manifestation but still can and must be accounted for a priori, so equally the art-theoretical fundamental and specialist concepts, even though they have their beginning in experience, are nevertheless valid before or above all experience. If the art-theoretical creation of concepts is impossible without art-historical experience, which continuously supplies our inquiry with new objects for study, so (assuming its own inner logical consistency) an art-theoretical system of concepts will not be shaken by such experience. Or, to put it differently, the system of concepts for a science of art, insofar as it is discovered and developed a posteriori, will continue the results of empirical research, but its existence, insofar as it is valid a priori, is independent from these results and cannot come into conflict with them. A new discovery or a new observation can constitute proof either that one of the already established and a priori legitimized artistic problems in a specific case has been solved differently from what had been supposed so far or that one of the questions formulated by existing concepts has in this case been answered wrongly (for the intention of art theory is nothing other than formulating questions). For example, if against all odds a pictorial landscape from the fifth century BC should be discovered, an amendment of art historical understanding must be made,

of volume with the term *undefinability* (uniqueness). The solutions (which necessarily chime in with those formal fundamental problems) come close to either the pure message or the pure emotion, but they are naturally never allowed to reach these extremes fully.

which in itself would not affect the theoretically constructed system of art concepts.²⁷ Or again a new discovery or a new observation can prove that a specific artistic problem has not yet been recognized as such, that the questions formulated in an earlier conceptual system were directed away from an important characteristic of certain objects. For example, when an architectural monument of a completely unknown form comes to light or when an already-known work of art unveils a new aspect of a new problem to the eyes of the scholar who studies it, the relevant problem needs to be shaped to a formula and brought in relation to those problems already known, which constitutes an extension but not a destabilization of the art-theoretically generated system of concepts.

B

I have clarified the possibility for the development of a conceptual system of a science of art from which radiate both the fundamental concepts and the most detailed concepts. It remains to examine whether this development is necessary.

One might ask if the construction and design of those art-theoretical concepts were not a futile game of logic, a useless mental exercise completely without meaning for the historical study of real and existing artifacts. My response is no.

The construction of an art-theoretical system of concepts and the empirical conduct of historical research are both essential because they study the object from two completely different perspectives, but in each case from only one perspective. Together, they partake of a peculiar and unbreakable reciprocal relationship. The conceptual system constructed by art theory can only become a tool of an actual scientific understanding if its origins lie in the manifest empirical observations that art history supplies; and conversely the results that art history supplies can only construct an actual scientific understanding if they are set in relation to the artistic problems formulated by art theory. The ultimate task of a science of art, namely, the determination of *Kunstwollen*, can only be achieved in the interaction of the historical and theoretical modes of observation.

One side of this reciprocal relationship has already been explained; the other can be demonstrated without difficulty.

27. Here Panofsky refers directly to an example given by Gerhard Rodenwaldt in an article of 1916, which was to be a frequent object of his attack. See Gerhart Rodenwaldt, "Zur begrifflichen und geschichtlichen Bedeutung des Klassischen in der bildenden Kunst: Eine kunstgeschichtsphilosophische Studie," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 11 (1916): 113–31, and Panofsky, "The Concept of Artistic Volition," pp. 22–23, 26 n. 10.—TRANS.

1

Even the kind of art history that is not open to theory has found itself with a double task. As art history, first it classifies the monuments historically, that is, temporally as well as spatially, and puts them in relation to each other; second, its role is to characterize the style of the monuments. The achievement of the second task (which has necessarily to take place before the accomplishment of the first because the historical place of a monument can only be assessed when its artistic character is known) takes place with the help of concepts that characterize in a more or less general way the stylistic qualities of the artworks studied;²⁸ and even a study that presents itself very consciously, and rightfully, as a historical one, like Georg Dehio's *History of German Art*, has necessarily to operate with expressions such as *pictorial* and *plastic*, *depth* and *surface*, *calm* and *moved*, *spatial style* and *body style*.²⁹ Even historical empiricism does not deny that the use of such style-denoting concepts in art-historical work is not only common but necessary; it only avoids interrogating them about their origin and legitimacy. For the practitioner of such empiricism they are concepts available in the contemporary culture, with whose help we can grasp the sensible qualities of the different works of art.³⁰

1. Against this thesis two sets of objections may be made. On the one hand, concepts that can characterize the style of an artwork denote something completely different from its sensible qualities; on the other hand, concepts that describe the sensible qualities of the work of art are not in themselves able to characterize its style but only to provide the preparation for stylistic characterization.

a) The sensible qualities that we may detect in a work of art may be nothing but pure qualities of visual perception—qualities that we habitually (this is, to be precise, a precondition not to be justified by sensible perception alone) divide into color and noncolor. To capture these pure qualities conceptually, the art historian has two options to choose from, which are close to each other in that they are each only an indirect form of labelling. On the one hand, one can imply the sensible qualities of the work of art in question by pointing back to other sensible perceptions that are taken as known (for example, when describing skin as leathery or doughy, a fold as in the shape of an eye, drapery as rustling, a color as mouse-colored or cadmium yellow). On the other hand, one can label the sensible

28. The pure clarification of date and place of production with the help of documents or circumstances of discovery can help historical classification but on its own cannot make it possible.

29. See Georg Dehio, *Geschichte der Deutschen Kunst*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1919–26), 1:5.

30. See Dörner, "Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwillens durch die Kunstgeschichte."

qualities of the work of art in question by attempting to describe the feelings stimulated by it (for example, when we talk of an emotionally rousing play of lines, of solemn or cheerful color design). The limits of both practices are clear. Labelling the sensible qualities of a work of art can never be exact or sufficiently determined because a general statement—general because it is linguistic-conceptual—can never do justice to individual, purely qualitative content.³¹ The most lively and sweeping account of a set of lines or a complex of colors is essentially only a hint towards a factual situation and never has the ability to cover it completely. In practice even art history surrenders to the impossibility of expressing the things it purports to describe; it usually avoids classification of sensible qualities and in most cases satisfies itself with paraphrases of what has been observed—as in “the mode in which the hands are depicted (or the drapery folds are composed) is similar,” or “the rendering of the hair differs.”³² Methodologically it is important to stress that classification of sensible qualities is by no means identical with classification of stylistic criteria. Taken on its own, a classification that only captures the sensible qualities of the artwork has no right whatever to draw any fundamental difference between those lines that were produced by the artist’s hand and those lines that appear because of cracks in the varnish; and even if this right were granted, that is, even if such classification could extract qualities of artistic importance from the wealth of purely sensible data, the observation of those qualities does not lead to the understanding of stylistic criteria. First we would need to establish that in specific, internally connected sequences of sensible

31. The objection that a few noncolor qualities can be determined exactly and sufficiently (by means of mathematical terms like *perfectly circular* or *elliptical*) may be answered in this way: we refer back to the circle in its concrete manifestation or to the ellipsis in its concrete manifestation as objects of sensible perception—and in that case the classifications *perfectly circular* and so forth do not differ from labels like *in the shape of an eye, silky*, and so forth—or we refer back to the abstract circle and the abstract ellipsis as a mathematical shape, so that instead of *perfectly circular* strictly speaking we have to say “in the form of a curve all of whose points are within the same distance of one given point”; and then (as in the case of numerical measurements) the manifestation that has to be described is stripped of its qualitative nature, and one is no longer describing real sensible qualities but essentially those schemes that form the ideal basis of these very sensible qualities.

32. It is futile to attempt to provide a table of all possible colors for reference when describing an image. Such a project would promise about as much success as the attempt to create a table of all possible forms. Each example of cadmium yellow in any given work can only be described as “cadmium yellow,” created with a particular brush stroke, in a particular area of the image, close to a particular area of gray or bluish green. Its unique quality cannot be more easily classified with words than the (equally unique) quality of any given manifestation of lines or surfaces. The problem of color terminology in the last analysis depends on the fact that the processes of mechanical reproduction have so far managed to match the color appearance of artworks even less than their noncolor appearance. Language can describe the ultimate qualities of the former as well, or as badly, as the latter.

qualities (let us call these sequences complexes of manifestation) specific artistic principles of design are fulfilled, and second we must be clear that within these principles of design we can find a unity without contradiction, without which we could not talk about style at all. This double precondition is a limited way of looking at things whose only purpose is to describe and to register the sensible qualities of artworks; it can neither organize observations into internally connected sequences and ultimately into a unity nor derive any principles that govern a work of art from these observations. So those concepts whose aim is solely to define the sensible qualities of artworks refer to matters of fact, which may be sketched by certain suggestions but cannot be defined exactly. They are not stylistic criteria themselves but only the substratum for a potential reinterpretation into stylistic criteria. In analyzing the style of an artistic manifestation, an art history that relied solely on concepts that only describe the sensible qualities of artworks (which we perhaps should be allowed to call suggestive or demonstrative concepts) would be futile from the start. Art history would then treat works of art no differently from natural objects; that is, by collating hundreds and thousands of individual observations indiscriminately and disjointedly, it would in the end only offer a more or less poetic paraphrase of sensible experience or some kind of personal description of the artwork, but never a characterization of artistic style.

b) Luckily, beside such demonstrative concepts that describe the sensible qualities of art but not its stylistic criteria, art history commands other concepts, which are capable of describing stylistic criteria but in doing so reach beyond the sensible qualities of art: pictorial and plastic, depth and surface, bodily and spatial, style of being and style of becoming, coloristic and polychrome. I hardly need note that such concepts have a fundamentally different meaning than those that describe the sensible qualities of artworks. The sensible aspects of the artistic rendition of a lion or a mountain landscape have no more pictorial, dimensional, spatial, and coloristic qualities than the lion or the mountain landscape themselves. When we use such concepts we no longer define or describe sensible qualities; we interpret them. Interpretation organizes individual, in itself purely qualitative and disjointed, perceptual content into an internally connected complex and underpins it with a function in the sense of its pictorialism, depth, and so forth. Only by looking at such complexes as expressions of artistic principles of design, which do not appear together by sheer chance but are united in a uniform and dominating stylistic principle, can we talk about them as stylistic criteria. What applies to the most general principles of design, described by concepts like plastic, pictorial, and so forth, applies equally to more specialized principles; we observe motifs of folds or bodily

proportions not as sensible qualities of the artwork but because we expect to derive a principle of drapery rendering or a principle of figure depiction from our observations and furthermore that underlying these individual principles of design there is a single and dominant stylistic principle in operation.

How else, to take an example, could we find a set of concepts to define the collaboration of two different artists on one and the same work of art (which is not difficult to discern for the expert)? Without the assumption of unified stylistic principles, the art historian would have to take the differences resulting from the conflation of two sensible qualities (for example, as regards the facial types) as something quite natural and harmless no less so than that the drapery of one figure is yellow but of another red. The difference between two sensible qualities can only be seen as a stylistic difference once we accept this double precondition that a given complex of visual expressions reveals a certain principle of design and that such principles of design are united in an unopposed unity.

What applies to the understanding of stylistic differences naturally applies to the understanding of stylistic correspondences; the art historian who singles out certain stylistically identical or related items from a given group of artworks and distributes them into stylistically connected subgroups can only undertake such a (separating as well as uniting) classification on the basis of a correspondence or similarity of principles of design among the related artworks and thus claim a correspondence or similarity of their underlying stylistic principle. The researcher who would underpin his groupings with the sensible qualities of works of art in themselves—rather than as indications of certain principles that are presumed to lie behind them—could never be certain that he has put together works which are really stylistically identical or stylistically related, and it could easily happen that his groups—rather than incorporating stylistically related monuments—would include items that correspond in size, material, color, or other sensible aspects.

2. To repeat, one has to differentiate between two layers within the standard art-historical concepts: a superficial layer of solely suggestive or demonstrative concepts, which only define and describe the sensible qualities of artworks, and a deeper layer of concepts that actually characterize style, which interpret those sensible qualities along the lines of stylistic criteria in that they interpret certain complexes of sensible qualities as the manifestation of principles of design and these principles of design as the differentiation of a uniform stylistic principle.

Now, it is worth asking what grants art history the right to operate interpretatively in this way, as any interpretation, if it is not simply capri-

cious, demands the existence of solid and legitimized standards of definition to which objects of interpretation can be related. The answer, which should perhaps now be obvious, is the imperative of those artistic problems formulated in the fundamental concepts of art theory. These fundamental problems represent the standards of legitimation to which the sensible qualities of artworks can be related. These problems help observation navigate while collating the sensible qualities within certain complexes of manifestation and interpret them according to stylistic criteria. Only by being oriented towards them do we have the ability to conduct successfully this enterprise of collating and interpreting. The stylistic characterization “within this work of art, one finds a pictorial (or perhaps a plastic) rendering of forms or rather a shaded (or perhaps polychrome) color design” means, in fact, “within this work of art lies one of the fundamental artistic problems—or even all the fundamental artistic problems—which have been solved in this or that sense.” We only get to this point after first recording a certain complex of manifestations (for example, the extremely “textural” mode of surface characterization or the extremely unifying mode of color design) with the help of demonstrative concepts (doughiness or the addition of grey in all local colors) and then by interpreting this “texturality” or unity through the prism of the fundamental problems. Only by this process can the observation of sensible qualities, whether in relation to color or noncolor, reach the sphere of problems that actually characterize style and whose specific task is to relate the sensible qualities of works of art to artistic problems. Likewise, the judgment “within this work of art one finds a pictorial rendering of forms” essentially means that the fundamental problem of haptic and optical values is solved in favor of optical values in the work of art in question; and the view “within this work of art one finds an ornamental style of folds” means that within the artwork in question the individual problem or, rather, the individual problems of drapery rendering—for example, the particular form of drapery and bodily form or the particular movement of drapery and movement of the body—are solved in favor of the particular form and movement of the drapery and, further, that (since all individual artistic problems are implicitly instances of the fundamental problems and thus the solving of one individual problem also represents the solution of the fundamental problem) the fundamental problem of surface and depth is resolved in favor of surface.

Only from this perspective is it clear why the double precondition of stylistic characterization—that in certain sensibly perceivable complexes of manifestation an artistic principle of design become apparent and that the principles of design themselves be governed by a single underlying

stylistic principle—actually exists in its own right. Only if we can take these complexes of manifestation as solutions to artistic problems can we understand them as the manifestations of principles of design, that is, as testimonies for a certain position on fundamental and individual artistic problems. Only if we can detect within these fundamental and individual problems the shaping of a single ur-problem can we grasp a single stylistic principle in operation within and above all principles of design, that is, a certain position on these ur-problems. Moreover, only from this perspective is it clear why we have the right to deduce stylistic differences from the differences of sensible qualities and a stylistic identity or relation from a correspondence or similarity of sensible qualities. We can do this because (and on the condition that) the difference of sensible qualities provides testimony for differing positions on one and the same artistic problem (to which a unified artistic subject could only respond in the form of one position); we are allowed to do this because (and on the condition that) the correspondence or similarity of the sensible qualities provides testimony for an identical or related position on one and the same artistic problem (to which differing or, rather, different artistic subjects could only respond with different positions).

As such, every stylistic characterization (no matter whether it wants to or not, no matter whether it knows it or not) necessarily relates—both in choice and organization of its observations and above all in its creation of a conceptual system—to the contents of that sphere of problems that I tried to outline in the first part of this essay. A stylistic characterization that denies this relationship to the fundamental problems either denies it incorrectly or is incorrectly termed a stylistic characterization.³³

Yet the art historian qua art historian cannot understand these problems and their interdependencies. He who solely deals with empirical manifestations is in the opposite situation from the art theoretician, who aims to develop fundamental art-theoretical concepts and to differentiate art-theoretical specialist concepts. The art historian, as was said earlier, can define the empirical manifestation but not the solution of the artistic problems, while the art theoretician only supplies the solutions of artistic problems without being himself able to understand their empirical manifestations in actuality. Empirical manifestations, with which art-historical

33. One cannot object that the artistic problems were not known to earlier periods or that they could be disavowed by thinkers of decades and centuries past. Even Vasari, insofar as he actually attempts to characterize the style of an artwork (for example, when he underlines the *rilievo* of a certain painting), subconsciously refers to those very artistic problems to which every stylistic characterization has to refer—in this case to the fundamental problem of surface and depth.

study in its strict sense is concerned, do not show the fundamental problems at all; the problems are not apparent within the phenomena but are required behind the phenomena and therefore are only understandable by a form of investigation that is not art history but art theory. It is only the nonsensible conceptual speculation of art theory that can establish the goals by which the work of empirical researchers must navigate its every step. Only art theory can understand those artistic problems that are assumed in art-historical practice and can provide the fundamental and specialist concepts for this enterprise.

2

Insofar as art history as a pure science of things³⁴ wants to understand the style of a work of art in stylistic analyses and even in pictorial descriptions it must assume a basis in the fundamental and individual artistic problems. Therefore the fundamental and individual art-theoretical problems are assumed to be already established, even in cases where the practicing scholar could not give an account of these problems and concepts themselves and might even deny their existence. But art history is only a pure science of things up to the point where it navigates on the basis of the problems as ascertained art theoretically and not when it reflects on them. In instances when this should happen, when the results of art-theoretical investigation do not govern the choice of observation and the construction of concepts within research from the outside but rather directly infiltrate art-historical thinking, art history would move from denoting and interpreting a set of facts in the material world to denoting and interpreting an abstract relation between the formulation of a problem and its solution. At this point art history would cease to be a pure science of things and a restricted historical discipline and would change into what might be described as a transcendental art-theoretical discipline or, more modestly and perhaps more accurately, as a fully interpretative enterprise. Researchers need not accept this change of states as long as they are content with a solely stylistic morphology, but they must be ready for it the moment they want to move from an understanding of stylistic symptoms (of style in its external sense) to an understanding of the stylistic nature of art—that is, an understanding of style in the internal sense or *Kunstwollen*. Because the principles of design in a work of art are nothing other than the artist's comments, executed in this way or that, on the fundamental and individ-

34. We translate *Dingwissenschaft* as “science of things,” following the Cambridge Kant in rendering *Ding* as “thing” (rather than, say, “object,” which might seem more immediately art historical but is less philosophically inflected).—TRANS.

ual artistic problems and because the underlying stylistic principle is nothing but the artist's comment, executed in this way or that, on the artistic ur-problem, the principles of design and the underlying stylistic principle itself can only be understood if the understanding is based on an explicit confrontation of the solutions with the problems. Therefore art history as a pure science of things, because it only navigates according to the artistic problems but does not reflect on them, is capable of understanding stylistic criteria and their aggregates but not principles of design and their unity. This deeper understanding is reserved only for that form of study that is familiar with those problems that art history in the strict sense only assumes as known and that, by reflecting on them with the help of an art-theoretically constructed fundamental and specialist conceptual system, is capable of systematically dissecting the relations between the formulation of a problem and the solution of the problem. Art history as a pure science of things must content itself with defining a complex of manifestations *a* with a style-characterizing individual term *T*, a complex of manifestations *b* with a style-characterizing individual term *T*₁, and the work of art as a whole with a conclusion of these terms *T* + *T*₁. By contrast, the interpretative form of study must explicitly prove first that within the complex of manifestations *a* there is an artistic problem *x*, in the complex of manifestations *b* there is an artistic problem *y*, and these are afforded a specific solution by which the position of the author towards the fundamental and individual artistic problems, that is, the principles of design, is understood. Secondly, the interpretative method must prove that all these solutions have been achieved in one and the same sense, that is, that *a* relates to *x* in the same way as *b* to *y* and *c* to *z*; through this the position of the author towards the artistic ur-problem, the underlying stylistic principle, is understood.³⁵ In this way and only in this way can scientific study grasp style in its internal sense or *Kunstwollen*, which can be understood neither as the sum of sensible qualities nor as an aggregate of stylistic criteria but exclusively as unity within and above the principles of design, which not only

35. A concrete work of art, as shown above, can never directly treat the artistic ur-problem as such but only solves it indirectly in the sense that the fundamental and individual problems (each corresponding to specific sensible areas of the artwork in question) are implicit within the ur-problem. Likewise, scientific study of one concrete work of art cannot prove the position of the artist towards the artistic ur-problem, the underlying stylistic principle, directly and as such. It can only do so indirectly by attesting to a uniform solution process within the solutions of fundamental and individual problems, for example by finding proof that in a certain case all problems of color and noncolor relation were solved by means of a middle conciliation between the poles in question, which then shows directly that in this case the artistic ur-problem also was resolved by means of a middle conciliation.

requires a tacit relation to the results of art theory but a direct collaboration with it.

If this *Kunstwollen* can reveal the immanent sense of the manifestation in question then there is no barrier to comparing this sense as articulated in visual-artistic phenomena with the sense of musical, poetic, and even extra-artistic phenomena. Absolutely all philosophical and religious doctrines as well as juridical statutes and linguistic systems must be understood as solutions of philosophical, religious, juridical, and linguistic problems. This is why all humanities disciplines are related to a science of art.³⁶ Just as a science of art attests that within a certain artistic manifestation all artistic problems are solved in one and the same way, so the humanities in general can attempt to show that within a certain culture (which must itself be determined as regards epoch, region, and the persons involved) all intellectual problems, including the artistic, are solved in one and the same sense.³⁷ Though one cannot ignore the dangers inherent in the practical application of this process of comparison, today perhaps practiced all too often (the will to unveil analogies can easily lead to interpreting the phenomenon in question in capricious or even brutal ways), one cannot deny on purely theoretical grounds that it is undoubtedly possible and justifiable.³⁸

36. Just as art history can only interpret the stylistic importance of its objects of study if it relates them to a priori constituted artistic problems, so the other humanities disciplines, especially philosophy and religious studies, must relate empirical observations to analogous philosophical, religious, and other problems if they want to grasp their nature and their sense—to problems that, again, have been constituted a priori and that can only be revealed by means of systematic, theoretical thought. The tripartite organization of our discipline into art theory, art history as a science of things, and the discipline of interpretive study (which links the former with the latter) therefore finds its analogue in other humanities disciplines for which, to choose a comfortably distanced example, one might point to the study of juridical problems. The history of law as a pure science of things must define a certain public-judicial regulation temporally and spatially and discuss it according to its material content, thereby assuming the fundamental juridical problems (for example, the problem of the individual and society) as necessarily already constituted—otherwise it could not operate with concepts like state, citizen, duty, and so forth, even if it does not reflect on them. Only an interpretive history of law would have to prove in which specific way the regulation in question takes a position in relation to those fundamental juridical problems. Ultimately, the theory of law and only the theory of law is capable of understanding these fundamental problems as such and shaping them into formulae.

37. Panofsky here uses the German equivalent to *humanities*, *Geisteswissenschaften*, which literally translates into “sciences of the mind,” developed from John Stuart Mill’s “moral sciences” and underlining the humanities as proper scientific disciplines equal to and distinct from the natural sciences. Panofsky’s term *Kunstwissenschaft*, here translated as “a science of art,” is constructed in correspondence to this.—TRANS.

38. The process of such comparison (practiced by men like Schnaase, Riegl, and Dvořák), which contents itself to describe various manifestations like counterreformation and baroque style as analogous solutions of their specific problems and thus as expressions of one and the

C

In this way those fundamental and specialist concepts of art theory that formulate problems are at the same time also the key concepts for the empirical study of art history and the working concepts of that interpretative form of study that is directed towards understanding *Kunstwollen*. For this reason, not only should art theory have an interest in the continuing development of factual research (without which its concepts, to use Kantian terminology, would be empty), but empirical research on factual matters should have an interest in the prejudice-free development of art theory (without which its observations would be blind); and in the end both have to come together to work collaboratively, ideally within the same person.

This reciprocal relationship may be attested by a glance at the development of our discipline. The scholar who first inaugurated a consciously style-historical approach, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, felt himself obliged to orient his history of ancient art according to theoretical-systematic principles (not to mention his debt to German and English aesthetics); the discussion of these principles, only seemingly capriciously, constantly interrupts his historical narrative. And it is no coincidence that Rumohr, whom we rightly honor as the founder of art history as a scientific discipline, was the first to attempt the construction of a system of artistic problems in that odd introductory chapter of *Italian Studies* that he deliberately entitled "The Household of Art" and that we must regard not as a futile appendix but as a necessary correlate to his historical study. The art historian of today, who does not always need to develop his concepts himself, frequently avoids such theoretical constructions; yet does this not mean that he can avoid their results consciously or unconsciously? And even today the approaches and conceptual constructions of the most empiricist art history are governed by art-theoretical thinking.

same formative will of culture (*Kulturwollen*), is less dangerous than the etiological method, which aims to deduce the one from the other causally. The result is that one author may deduce baroque style from the counterreformation while another explains the counterreformation by means of baroque style and a third denies any relationship between the two. See a work that came to my attention only after this essay went to press: Karl Mannheim, "Beiträge zur Theorie der Weltanschauungsinterpretation," *Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* n.s. 1 (1923): 236–74; trans. Paul Kecskemeti and Kurt H. Wolff under the title "On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*," in Mannheim, *From Karl Mannheim*, ed. Wolff (New York, 1971), pp. 8–58.

[For the influence of Mannheim's paper on Panofsky's later iconological work, see Joan Hart, "Erwin Panofsky and Karl Mannheim: A Dialogue on Interpretation," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Spring 1993): 534–66, and Jeremy Tanner, introduction, *The Sociology of Art: A Reader*, ed. Tanner (London, 2003), pp. 10–12.—TRANS.]

It would be comfortable and certainly spare all methodological discussion from the start if art theory and art history really had nothing in common. Alas, in truth they rely on each other reciprocally; and this reciprocity is not a coincidence but the necessary result of the fact that the work of art—like all productions of the creative mind—has the double characteristic of being determined by temporal and spatial circumstances on the one hand and on the other of forming a solution, conceptually timeless and absolute, of a priori constituted problems—of generating itself in the flow of historical making and yet reaching into the sphere of hyperhistorical validity. Therefore an artistic phenomenon, if it is to be fully understood in its uniqueness, makes a twofold claim: on the one hand to be understood in its determination, that is, to be put within the historical context of cause and effect; and on the other hand to be understood in its absolutism, that is, to be lifted out of the historical context of cause and effect and, beyond all historical relativity, to be understood as a time- and spaceless solution of time- and spaceless problems. In this lies the peculiar problem of all research in the humanities but also its peculiar appeal; “two weaknesses,” Leonardo once said in relation to the architectural arch, “together form a strength.”

Let me conclude with the following theses:

1. Art theory develops a system of fundamental concepts and, subordinate to these, a system of specialist concepts whose task is to formulate artistic problems, problems that themselves fall into fundamental and individual problems and that can be deduced wholly from one unique ur-problem.

2. Art history as a pure science of things describes the sensible qualities of works of art by means of suggestive and demonstrative concepts and establishes the style in its external sense as an aggregate of stylistic criteria by means of interpretive/characterizing concepts. This purely morphological and stylistic operation has, consciously or subconsciously, to navigate according to those artistic problems that only art theory and not art history itself is capable of understanding and of providing the concepts for.

3. Art history as a discipline of interpretation aiming to understand *Kunstwollen* is the result of a deep interconnection of art theory with purely empirical art history and must be constructed itself from the results of both. It demonstrates the relations between the sensible qualities of artworks and the artistic problems that are assumed by art history as a pure science of things, doing so explicitly and systematically and thus focusing no longer on a historical reality but on the relation between the formula-

tion of a problem and its solution, which finds its expression in a historical reality.

In the relation of certain complexes of manifestation to certain fundamental and individual artistic problems, art history as a discipline of interpretation formulates certain principles of design. When it relates the entirety of complexes of manifestation to the artistic ur-problem, that is, to one underlying stylistic principle that bridges all the individual principles of design, then art history grasps *Kunstwollen*.

Excursus on Dorner, "Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens durch die Kunstgeschichte," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16 (1922): 216–22.

1. Dorner's polemic against the thesis that *Kunstwollen* can only be understood by means of fundamental concepts valid a priori fails to grasp that *Kunstwollen* must be exclusively understood in a metempirical sense. So Dorner assesses my views on the validity and applicability of fundamental concepts according to his understanding of the nature of *Kunstwollen*, and it is clear that under these circumstances he has to deny opinions that I have never held and to uphold views that I would never deny.

Dorner misunderstands terribly the comparison I propose between the different possibilities open to us in making a judgment.³⁹ With the help of the fundamental concepts I have postulated, I defined *Kunstwollen* as an immanent sense, while Dorner takes it to be a content within the material sphere of reality that is only open to an art-historical study in the stricter, descriptive sense.⁴⁰ Therefore Dorner imagines the application of fundamental concepts as an attack on the claims of history. But, if one considers my definition of *Kunstwollen*, it is clear that what can be defined with the help of the fundamental concepts operates in relation to material reality as sense, operates in relation to manifestation; and so I completely agree with

39. Dorner accuses me of freely equating "in a purely formal conceptual equation" the sentence "the air is elastic" with the "practical historical study of an artwork" (Dorner, "Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens durch die Kunstgeschichte," p. 216). Of course I did not do this but rather drew a parallel between the different ways of analyzing the former and analyzing the latter: between the historical and the historical (because no one can deny that even the sentence "the air is elastic" may be studied historically, in that I ask when, by whom, in which context, with which results, and under which preconditions this observation was made); the formal aspects of grammar with the formal aspects of composition; and likewise the transcendental-philosophical with the transcendental-art-theoretical, which is founded in the understanding of *Kunstwollen*. However I cannot label *Kunstwollen* as art-theoretical because art theory, as I have been arguing, only provides the conceptual foundation of this mode of study.

40. See his definition, which hardly requires refutation: "*Kunstwollen*, understood historically, is the sequence of the works of art as such, defined through the concepts of the present."

him when he denies the characteristic of reality to my suggestion of conceptual construction—a characteristic that I never claimed for it nor could have.

2. Dorner's second objection rests on the same confusion—that what must be defined by reference to the fundamental concepts (namely, *Kunstwollen*) is identical with what the material study of art aims to characterize. This is directed less against the theoretical validity than the practical application of the fundamental concepts; he argues that they cannot claim to demonstrate an a priori necessity for the artwork's existence. Here again Dorner attacks an assertion that I never made. My view is that within an art-historical process (insofar as it is a historical process) no predestined laws can exist. Necessity as I understand it and believe it may be discerned on the basis of the fundamental concepts is not a necessity of temporal progression but a necessity of intellectual connection—not an empirical law by which various artistic phenomena can be understood as necessarily sequential but a principle of internal unity through which the multifarious peculiarities of one and the same artistic phenomenon become apparent as they are necessarily related. The sole instance in which I used the expression *predestined*—in the context of my objection to the claim that Polygnotus, “if he had wanted to,” would have been capable of painting a naturalistic landscape—may perhaps most directly clarify the real intent of my discussion. “Polygnotus,” I said, “did not paint a naturalistic landscape not because he would have rejected it as ‘not seeming beautiful to him’ but because he could not have imagined it and could not want anything but a nonnaturalistic landscape—because of a necessity which predetermined his psychological will [*Wollen*].”⁴¹ I further defined this claim by saying that Polygnotus neither could have wanted to paint nor would have been capable of painting a naturalistic landscape because “such a representation would have contradicted the immanent meaning of fifth-century Greek art.”⁴² I believe that this shows clearly that such a predestination has to be understood not in the sense of a law of succession but in the sense of a characterization—that the necessity (in this case negative) is not based on an empirical law of succession but on a metempirical principle of stylistic unity.⁴³ The question about Polygnotus is not in my view a link in an

41. Panofsky, “The Concept of Artistic Volition,” p. 23.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 26 n. 10.

43. When Dorner attributes to me the claim that “the generative cause for any artwork can be explained from an Archimedian point” (Dorner, “Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens durch die Kunstgeschichte,” p. 219) this is textually false; in truth my claim was that from any Archimedian point the “absolute position and importance of the manifestations” can be established—a fundamental difference, since the right wording clearly signals how far from my thoughts it was to assume a mechanistic necessity within artistic development.

unrolling causal chain of eternal predestination but can be understood as a revelation of a deeper sense and in this respect is linked to other phenomena related to internal unity.⁴⁴

But—and I add this explicitly to ward off misunderstandings—the temporal succession of artistic manifestations is not subject to pure coincidence. If the necessities created by historical circumstances exclude the predictability of artistic development, then the nature of a priori problems involves the logical consistency of artistic development. We all agree that a certain style could neither emerge from another one nor be followed by another one, as every artistic phenomenon carries only very specific possibilities of development in itself. The development of these possibilities might be regulated by completely unpredictable circumstances, as is demonstrated for example by Gandharan art, Sassanid art, Byzantine art, and the art of the early Nordic middle ages—whose common beginning lies in late antiquity but whose peculiarities of form depend on wholly individual and therefore not predictable contexts. But at the same time we can understand the development that led from late antiquity to these exceptional styles as meaningful insofar as we can recognize the artistic character of late antiquity and also the indefinite multifariousness of elements of modification (which admittedly one can only grasp after the event and never in their completeness). Studying developments, we belong not in a sphere of

44. Reduced into a formula the necessity postulated by me would not run:

X (law) conditions the succession a, b, c ,

but:

X (sense) explains the connection between a^1, a^2, a^3 .

In this context, in one part of my paper (Panofsky, "The Concept of Artistic Volition," p. 26 n. 11) I admitted, in the face of an objection by Wölfflin, that the plastic stylistic layer is followed necessarily or lawfully by the pictorial. I would doubtlessly have been clearer if, instead of terms from Wölfflin, I had used the expression *regularity*, as this succession (though one that can be documented by a large number of manifestations) is only a fact that can be empirically and psychologically explained from experience and by no means an a priori deductible law. In this case I am doubtlessly guilty of a linguistic inaccuracy (though the context of the discussion should have clarified the matter). I was concerned to refine Wölfflin's theory of the "two roots of style." This theory claims that optical stylistic development is completely independent from the imitative (an issue of content). What I argued for and still believe is that form and content within any artistic phenomenon, beginning with the temporal or vernacular style right down to the manifestation of the individual artwork, cannot be separated but must be understood as different articulations of a common fundamental tendency of a common sense. To justify this claim I have tried to demonstrate that formal development from the plastic to the pictorial is analogous to the development of content (for example, from history painting to landscape painting and still life), that, to speak in my terminology, we have to understand the facts pictorial and landscape depiction to be as much expressions of a common sense as the facts plastic and history painting.

necessity but in one of logical consistency or general sense; the sequence of individual artistic manifestations cannot be deduced as a causal or teleological sequence but can be understood as the collaboration of general tendencies of development and individual contexts of modification.