Panofsky's antinomies

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Erwin Panofsky's methodological essays of the 1910s and 1920s attempt a Kantian systematisation of binary stylistic terms found in the work of Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin (such as haptic/optical and linear/painterly). *Perspective as Symbolic Form* represents the culmination of this early period. His next major work, the still-untranslated *Hercules am Scheidewege* (Hercules at the Crossroads, 1930), includes an early version of what was to become the 'Introductory' section of his *Studies in Iconology* and accordingly marks the onset of the iconographic approach that was to make Panofsky's reputation in the United States.[1] The present article considers the Neo-Kantian framework of Panofsky's early meta-art historical (or theoretical) writings, with attention to the circular dynamic by which an empirical or a posteriori result returns in the guise of a 'quasitranscendental' a priori presupposition. Eventually, attention will turn to Panofsky's affinities with Ernst Cassirer's 'philosophy of symbolic forms', a philosophy that posits culture as its own ground. The problems resulting from the antinomies of this kind of art history are not fortuitous but rather emerge from conditions of knowledge-production that have remained in effect long after the eclipse of Neo-Kantianism as a philosophical movement. The aim of this essay is not, in the first order, to point out inconsistencies in Panofsky's method, but rather to suggest the possibility of a materialist art history that would take the incompletion of idealist art history as a spur for non-identical thinking.

Exhibit number one is Panofsky's essay 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory: Towards the Possibility of a Fundamental System of Concepts for a Science of Art', from 1925, in part because it has not yet been so extensively discussed as some of the author's better-known texts.[2] This essay amounts to a synthesis of Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* (1915) and Riegl's *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901) via a strategy that one might name Kantianisation: the rewriting of existing texts in explicitly Kantian language.[3] It is the third in a

[1] Erwin Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere Antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst*, Leipzig and Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1930.

[2] Panofsky, 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory: Towards the Possibility of a Fundamental System of Concepts for a Science of Art', trans. Katharina Lorenz and Jaś Elsner, *Critical Inquiry* 35.1, 2008, 43–71. The essay is framed as a response to Alexander Dorner's critique of Panofsky's earlier article on Riegl's notion of *Kunstwollen* (cited in the following note). See: Alexander Dorner, 'Die Erkenntnis des Kunstwollens durch die Kunstgeschichte', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16, 1922, 216–22.

[3] This method is consistently found in Panofsky's early work. The redefinition of Riegl's a posteriori descriptive binaries as a priori generative binaries in 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory' is already developed in: Erwin Panofsky, 'On the Concept of

tetralogy of methodological interventions that appeared approximately every five years from 1915 to 1932. The first is 'Das Problem des Stils in der bildenden Kunst' (The Problem of Style in the Visual Arts),[4] which is devoted to a lecture by Wölfflin that summarized the basic points of his then still-unpublished *Principles of Art History*; the second, from 1920, is 'Der Begriff des Kunstwollens' (The Concept of Artistic Volition), on Riegl;[5] the fourth and last (unless the introduction to *Studies in Iconology*, from 1939, is appended to the series) is 'On the Problem of Describing and Interpreting Works of the Visual Arts'.[6] The latter is related to the methodological section of *Hercules am Scheidewege* and similarly presents an early iteration of Panofsky's three-tiered model of meaning, which he describes as a movement from 'phenomenal meaning' (in 1939, this becomes 'pre-iconographical description') to 'meaning dependent on content' (iconographical analysis) to 'documentary' or 'essential' meaning (iconographical synthesis, or iconology properly speaking).[7]

'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory' is noteworthy for its articulation of the two disciplines named in its title. Much of the essay's framework is derived from Edgar Wind, specifically the doctoral work he had recently produced under Panofsky's supervision. An abbreviated version of Wind's thesis, under the title 'Zur Systematik der künstlerischen Probleme' (On the Systematics of Artistic Problems), appeared in the same issue of the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* as Panofsky's related text; since the two essays refer to each other, their composition must have been simultaneous, for all intents and

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Artistic Volition', trans. Kenneth J. Norcott and Joel Snyder, *Critical Inquiry* 8.1, 1981, 17–33, esp. 28. On Panofsky's Neo-Kantianism more generally, see, in addition to sources cited elsewhere in this paper: Mark A. Cheetham, *Kant, Art, and Art History: Moments of Discipline*, Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Cheetham, 'Theory Reception: Panofsky, Kant, and Disciplinary Cosmopolitanism', *Journal of Art Historiography* 1, 2009, 1–13; Karen Lang, *Chaos and Cosmos: On the Image in Aesthetics and Art History*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006, 12–40; Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, 178–208.

[4] The only one of these essays not yet translated into English. Erwin Panofsky, 'Das Problem des Stils in der bildenden Kunst', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 10, 1915, 460–467, reprinted in: Panofsky, *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*, Berlin: B. Hessling, 1964, 19–28.

[5] Panofsky, 'On the Concept of Artistic Volition'.

[6] Erwin Panofsky, 'On the Problem of Describing and Interpreting Works of the Visual Arts', trans. Jaś Elsner and Katharina Lorenz, *Critical Inquiry* 38.3, 2012, 467–482.

[7] Joan Hart points out that this hermeneutic is very close to the three tiers of 'objective meaning', 'expressive meaning', and 'documentary or evidential meaning' that Karl Mannheim develops in his 1923 essay 'On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauungen*'. Joan Hart, 'Panofsky and Karl Mannheim: A Dialogue on Interpretation', *Critical Inquiry* 19.3, 1993, 534–566.

purposes.[8] Wind in turn naturally depends on Panofsky, above all on 'Der Begriff des Kunstwollens'. Since Panofsky unreservedly adopts his student's ideas, it seems permissible to treat them heuristically as his own, or at any rate, to accept an inability to determine their exact parentage in the context of an ongoing dialog (much the same is true of the Cassirer-Panofsky relationship).[9]

Following Wind, Panofsky here claims that the a priori matrix of any artwork is constituted by two sets of antitheses. The first consists of the terms 'form' and 'volume' (*Fülle*, which here plays the role more traditionally occupied by 'content'; the choice of *Fülle* rather than *Inhalt* signals Panofsky's aim to develop a common matrix for both formal and thematic or representational values—already a central theme in his essay on Wölfflin from ten years earlier). Form subjects volume to 'organisation'. By 'volume' Panofsky quite broadly means any 'volume of sensible perception', thus seemingly any intuition, in the Kantian sense, whatsoever. The role of form is to 'curtail' *Fülle*.[10] This 'ontological' antithesis 'has a correlation to (or, to be more precise, is at its core identical with) the methodological 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.'[11] Panofsky laconically glosses his distinction between the 'ontological' and 'methodological' in a footnote on the latter word: 'That is, not the *ousia* (or *being*) of two contrasting principles or substances but the *methodos* for (or *route to*) their synthesis.'[12] Which is to say: space and time are here presented in orthodox Kantian fashion as a priori forms of intuition, rather than as properties of things in themselves. The four terms, namely volume, form, space, and time, constitute a schema of perceptual possibilities that Panofsky visualizes in a table. (Fig. 1) Any artwork represents an attempted 'solution' or 'synthesis' of this 'double problem (which in reality is only the twofold aspect of a single problem.' Hence: 'If a definition of a work of art can be attempted at all, it

[8] *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 18, 1925. Wind had completed his dissertation in 1922. Edgar Wind, 'On the Systematics of Artistic Problems', trans. Fiona Elliott, *Art in Translation* 1.2, 2009, 211–257.

[9] On Wind/Panofsky relationship, see: Consolato Latella, 'Wind and Riegl: The Meaning of a "Problematical" Grammar', *Journal of Art Historiography* 1, 2009, 1–47. For an analysis of the *Kunstwollen* essay and its place in Panofsky's early thinking, see: Allister Neher, '"The Concept of *Kunstwollen*", Neo-Kantianism, and Erwin Panofsky's Early Art Theoretical Essays', *Word and Image* 20, 2004, 41–51.

[10] Panofsky, 'Art History and Art Theory', 45–46.

[11] Panfosky, 'Art History and Art Theory', 46. Wind also aligns Riegl's *optisch* with *Fülle* and *haptisch* with form. (Wind, 'On the Systematics', 225.)

[12] Panofsky, 'Art History and Art Theory', 46. It seems obvious why space is correlated to volume, but it is harder to understand why form is correlated to time. The matter is clarified if Panofsky's reader grasps that he is pairing 'space' with Riegl's 'haptic' values and 'time' with his 'optical' values, which is comprehensible since the former values represent classical self-containment, separation of forms, and 'objective' indifference to the (temporal) contingencies of perception, whereas the latter represent fusion, dynamism, and direct address to the beholder's activity of perception, which takes place in time.

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

Figure 1 Diagram in: Erwin Panofsky, 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory', trans. Katharina Lorenz and Jaś Elsner, *Critical Inquiry*, 35.1, 2008, 47.

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.'[13] Here it becomes evident that Panofsky's 'volume' and 'form' most likely correspond to Kant's 'substance' and 'causality' (volume is the substance of an artistic representation; form orders substance as a teleological whole and is thus analogous to causal sequence). Strung between the 'ontological' and 'methodological' columns is a grid of 'specific contrasts within the phenomenal and, especially, within the visual sphere.' This secondary matrix effectively covers Riegl's and Wölfflin's bases: e.g., 'optical values (empty space) versus haptic values (body)', or 'values of depth versus values of surface'.[14] Panofsky goes on to redescribe each of these antitheses in his new terminology.

Panofsky's approach in 'Art History and Art Theory' is schematic in the extreme. In contradistinction to Riegl and Wölfflin, however, Panofsky does not apply his binarisms directly to artistic phenomena as descriptions (nor even to the subjective perception of artworks, as psychology), but rather understands them as transcendental conditions generative of the artistic problems to which every artwork is a specific solution: '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.'[15] The point is thus not to introduce new, or even more accurate, names for the Wölfflinian/Rieglian antitheses, but rather (just as in 'Das Problem des Stils' and 'Der Begriff des Kunstwollens') to shift the level of analysis from empirical description to transcendental reflection. Panofsky's concepts are a priori rather than a posteriori. They refer to conditions rather than results. However, the concepts are not 'predestined laws' but are rather the parameters established by the immanent

[13] Panofsky, 'Art History and Art Theory', 46.
[14] Panofsky, 'Art History and Art Theory', 47.
[15] Panofsky, 'Art History and Art Theory', 49.

'sense' (*Sinn*) of an artistic expression's solution of the *Fülle*/form and space/time antinomies. 'Sense' is the principle of unity that allows the art historian to produce an account of the work's resolution of internal tensions; 'sense' is therefore the proper object of *Kunstwissenschaft*.[16]

The movement here is from heterogeneity to synthesis, from unordered data to the formalisation of an artwork. Since the poles of Riegl's and Wölfflin's oppositions are also poles of subjectivity and objectivity (Riegl's 'haptic' belongs to the object, 'optical' to the perceiving subject; 'linear' and 'painterly', along with his other four basic antitheses, occupy analogous though of course far from identical roles for Wölfflin), Panofsky's chart also prescribes a series of possible syntheses—or if 'syntheses' is too strong: ratios, or balances of force—between subject and object, between the viewer and the world. Or more precisely, since everything here remains at the level of a priori, the 'opposition of viewing subject and viewed object' is rather 'a difference *within* the *mode* of contemplation, with the result that ultimately "objectivistic" and "subjectivistic" qualities could be traced back to two different *functions* within human consciousness', as Wind puts it (Panofsky would surely agree).[17] Panofsky assigns 'art theory' the role of unfolding these a priori categories. Art theory is more or less the same as a transcendental aesthetics. 'Art history' by contrast studies various a posteriori syntheses generated out of this matrix of oppositions: that is, artworks.

As I have said, 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory' is schematic, so much so that at first glance it seems to be dead in the water. Unlike the three-level model of meaning that Panofsky was to essay in 'On the Problem of Describing and Interpreting Works of Art' and then more definitively in *Studies in Iconology*, the table of antitheses from 1925 ultimately went nowhere and left few traces behind. One can however read an almost exactly contemporaneous and (justly) far more celebrated text as an attempt to put its method into practice: namely, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*.[18]

The initial mystery confronting readers of this essay—how is perspective a 'symbolic form'?—has been resolved to an appreciable measure in the work of

[16] Indeed, Panofsky defines *Kunstwollen* as *Sinn* or immanent meaning in his earlier essay on Riegl's term. An account of 'sense' is posed at the level of logical/structural interpretation rather than genetic sequence. Hence, as Panofsky writes in a footnote:

> 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.

(Panofsky, 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory', 70.)

[17] Wind, 'On the Systematics of Artistic Problems', 230; emphasis in the original.

[18] Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood, New York: Zone Books, 1991.

Allister Neher.[19] The term is derived from Ernst Cassirer, and it is maddeningly difficult to pin down, since there turn out to be few elements of human culture (from language to myth to mathematics) that cannot be defined as such. Neher quotes several of Cassirer's characterisations of symbolic form, one of which is this: 'We have so far tried to show how the individual symbolic forms… are aspects of the intelligent organisation of reality. Each of them presented us with an independent, architectonic principle, an ideal "structure", or, better—since we are here never dealing with describing purely static relationships, but rather with exposing dynamic processes—a characteristic way of "structuring" itself.'[20] Neher comments: 'Symbolic forms are symbol systems that structure an aspect of reality according to certain organizing principles, and this is what Panofsky argues perspective does for the representation of the world.'[21] This is generic enough to be unimpeachable. In Neo-Kantian fashion, Cassirer expands the notion of the a priori conditions of perception to the cultural forms through which we always and inevitably perceive reality, thus adding to the Kantian categories and forms of intuition such as space, time, and causality the 'trends' of an innate mythic consciousness, for example.[22] As Hubert Damisch has pointed out, Panofsky's

[19] See especially: Allister Neher, 'How Perspective could be a Symbolic Form', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63.4, 2005, 359–373. Relations, personal and intellectual, between Panofsky and Cassirer (and of both with Aby Warburg, who is not considered in the present essay) have been the focus of much historiographical interest. In addition to sources cited elsewhere, see especially: Emmanuel Alloa, 'Could Perspective Ever be a Symbolic Form? Revisiting Panofsky with Cassirer', *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 2.1, 2015, 51–71; Silvia Ferretti, *Cassirer, Panofsky, and Warburg: Symbol, Art, and History*, trans. Richard Pierce, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984; Maud Hagelstein, *Origine et survivances des symboles: Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky*, Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2014; Emily J. Levine, *Dreamland of Humanists: Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky, and the Hamburg School*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013; Allister Neher, *Panofsky, Cassirer, and Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Ph.D. dissertation, Concordia University, 2000; Thaliath Babu, *Perspektivierung als Modalität der Symbolisierung. Erwin Panofskys Unternehmung zur Ausweitung und Präzisierung der Symbolisierungsprozesses in der* Philosophie der symbolischen Formen *von Ernst Cassirer*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005; Muriel van Vliet, ed., *Ernst Cassirer et l'art comme forme symbolique*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010.

[20] Neher, 'How Perspective could be a Symbolic Form', 364; quoted from: Ernst Cassirer, *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, trans. J. Krois. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, 50–51.

[21] Neher, 'How Perspective could be a Symbolic Form', 364.

[22] Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, trans. Ralph Manheim, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965, 194. For a primer on Neo-Kantianism, see: Sebastian Luft, ed. *The Neo-Kantian Reader*, London: Routledge, 2015. Neo-Kantianism was a broad and internally diverse movement (divided only very roughly into the Marburg and the Baden or Southwest schools). It can probably be said, however, that Neo-Kantianism's distinguishing trait is this tendency to supplement Kant's transcendental conditions of possible experience with more complex mental structures, the analysis of which enables a priori accounts of the conditions of possibility for scientific reasoning, value judgments, and cultural phenomena

reference to *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* in his perspective essay is so fleeting as to be insubstantial.[23] What demands attention here, however, is not the content of the notion of 'symbolic form' as applied specifically to perspective (that is, the content of a *particular* symbolic form), but rather the way in which Panofsky constructs his various models—namely ancient 'angle perspective', medieval (non-) perspective, and Renaissance (linear) perspective—in such a way that this field of possible spatial constructions emerges as the a priori matrix of a historically variable subject/object ratio.[24]

In this sense, the analysis of perspectival regimes is much like the table of binary terms in 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory', with the difference that Panofsky now presents his spectrum diachronically rather than synchronically. This accounts for the seeming lack of mediation between Panofsky's theoretical essays and his properly art historical studies. It is not always made clear that the phenomenological/historical account of the development of a 'symbolic form' (whether a spatial construction or a more classically iconographic motif such as the compass in Dürer's *Melencolia I* [fig. 2]) represents the dialectical unfolding of a priori categories that one could also represent structurally/synchronically, if desired. For example, it would be entirely possible to map out the crucial transitions in *Perspective as Symbolic Form* as a table of the sort found in 'Art History and Art

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such as religion or myth. One implication of this approach is that a priori mental patterns need not be transhistorical; the limits of possible thinking and experience may shift over time as a result of scientific discoveries or changing cultural norms. In Cassirer's case, this led to a certain rapprochement between Kant's transcendental philosophy and Hegelian phenomenology. This in turn has perhaps led to confusion for interpreters of Panofsky himself. Clemena Antonova, for example, is concerned with 'extracting a Hegelian intellectual background from Panofsky's main thesis [in *Perspective as Symbolic Form*], which is largely obscured by the more obvious Kantian and Neo-Kantian allegiances.' (Clemena Antonova, 'The Hegelian Trichotomy Underlying Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form*', *Journal of the Oxford University History Society* 4, 2004, 1.) There is such a background; Panofsky explicitly refers to the 'Hegelian notion that the historical process unfolds in a sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis' in his book *Die Deutsche Plastik* from 1924 (translation quoted from Christopher Wood's introduction to *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 19). But this remark is just as cursory as the invocation of Cassirer in the perspective essay—with the difference that Panofsky consistently and carefully works through Kantian terminology in all of his early theoretical texts, as he never would with specifically Hegelian concepts. Dubious as 'Neo-Kantian' may be as shorthand for Panofsky's method, 'Hegelian' is thus surely even more so.

[23] Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994, 11–12.

[24] Rhys Roark has argued that these three stages of spatial construction correspond to Cassirer's 'mimetic', 'analogical', and 'truly symbolic' stages of symbolic form. This is broadly consistent with my understanding of the perspective essay. Rhys W. Roark, 'Panofsky: Linear Perspective and Perspectives of Modernity', in *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe, c. 1300—c. 1550*, eds. Alexander Lee, Pit Péportém, and Harry Schnitker, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010.

Figure 2 Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514. Etching, 9 7/16 × 7 5/16 in. (24 × 18.5 cm). New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1943.

Theory'. One would do so by choosing a pair of antitheses, which in this case might or might not be volume/form and time/space, and then filling in the three columns in the middle with the three spatial regimes: ancient, medieval, and Renaissance, each of which would function as a specific resolution of the subject/object problem. Ancient representations of space resolve the problem by failing to distinguish between the subject and object. Medieval non-perspective resolves it by eliminating the subjective viewpoint altogether (it is thus properly speaking not a perspectival regime at all, but rather the dialectical hinge between the other two regimes: it abolishes the discrete bodies and amorphous intervals of ancient space in favour of an ideal, non-mimetic unity that lays the groundwork for the modern spatial monism to come). Renaissance perspective, finally, achieves a balance between the subjective viewpoint and abstract conceptual space.[25]

[25] 'Perspective subjects the artistic phenomenon to stable and even mathematically exact rules, but on the other hand, makes that phenomenon contingent upon human beings, indeed upon the individual: for these rules refer to the psychological and physical conditions of the visual impression, and the way they take effect is determined by the freely chosen position of a subjective "point of view"'; 'The result was a translation of psychophysiological

The antinomic structure of an a priori subject/object relation is the continuity between Cassirer and Panofsky. Matters could not indeed be otherwise, considering that any given 'symbolic form' *is* a particular mode of relation between concepts and intuitions, between the perceiving subject and what it perceives—in short, between subject and object. Symbolic form is a 'functional' or dynamic rather than a static or 'substantial' term because the role of a symbolic form is to articulate a particular, historical subject/object relation. Panofsky's interest is not in the 'content' (or volume, or *Fülle*) that perspective organizes but rather in its formal structure, although ultimately, much in Cassirer's fashion, the 'symbolic form' turns out to provide its own content insofar as a way of seeing implies a way of ordering the world (that is, a culture)—a point that Panofsky had made as early as 1915 in his critique of Wölfflin, in which he argues that there is no way to separate a 'mode of representation' from its *Weltanschauung*. It is obvious that the three stages of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance representations of space correspond directly to three cultural epochs, each with their distinct *Weltanschauungen*. The progress here is from the 'aggregate space' of ancient perspective (which is in fact truer to physiological optics and thus to immediate experience), then to the annihilation of the subjective viewpoint in the Christian Middle Ages, and finally to the (modern, Kantian) truce between subject and object in linear perspective. From a Cassirerian perspective, there is no need to posit a causal link between social organisation and the mode of perception organized by a symbolic form; the two are coterminous. Hence, to take a relevant example, there is no need to derive Renaissance perspective from the early capitalist rationality of the Florentine bourgeoisie. Both are expressions of the same cultural unit. In practice this means that Panofsky provides no account at all of mediations between artistic and social form, but only an account of the mediation (or simply the parallelism) between artistic and intellectual form; thus his invocations of Descartes, Kant, and so on.[26] Because philosophy and art are both symbolic forms, translation between the two is 'horizontal', so to speak, whereas a

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space into mathematical space; in other words, an objectification of the subjective.' (*Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 67, 66.) In Wind's 'On the Systematics of Artistic Problems', to which, as already noted, Panofsky's 'On the Relationship between Art History and Art Theory' is intimately related, it is not Renaissance perspective but rather classical art that occupies the normative position of balance between every pole, against which Wind tends to counterpose on the one hand Egyptian art—on the side of form, the haptic, separation, etc.—and on the other hand either 17th century Dutch or modern Impressionist art, that is, on the side of *Fülle*, the optical, amalgamation, and so on. Hence, for example: 'The classical solution lies in the reconciliation of real and ideal elements in a midway reconciliation.' This is an utterly conventional claim (and by 1925—that is, after Riegl—a distinctly old-fashioned one). Wind's classicism is accordingly less compelling than Panofsky's more ingenious description of a similar balance in Renaissance perspective. (Wind, 'On the Systematics', 235, 238.)

[26] Panofsky likewise notes correlation between artistic style and intellectual history, while avoiding any strong claim of determination, in his later *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Latrobe, PA: Archabbey Press, 1951).

deduction of artistic forms from society (i.e. any model of social determinism) is 'vertical' and hence lopsided.

It was once common to misinterpret Panofsky's observation that ancient perspective is more faithful to physiological vision as a critique of the universality of Renaissance perspective. This is not the case. Immediate vision is deficient insofar as it lacks 'spiritual' self-consciousness of the distinction between subject and object. Although even ancient perspective is a symbolic form and thus represents an active mode of seeing, rather than a raw 'copy' of perceptual data, it nevertheless precedes the turn to the a priori and thus lacks any self-conscious articulation of experienced space with abstract or scientific space, as found in Renaissance perspective. As Margaret Iversen puts it: 'Compared with the rationalisation of represented space accomplished by Renaissance perspective construction, pre-modern perspective assumes a naively mimetic, "pre-critical" perceptual relation to the world.'[27] Because Renaissance perspective shows that representations are dependent on human cognition, it opens space for agency, for a recognition of the mind's sovereign power; this is an advance from mimesis to representation. Iversen again: 'Panofsky naturalises Antique perspective as mimesis of the optical impression so that it can serve as a dark cloth against which the constructive and rational character of Renaissance linear perspective sparkles like a gem.'[28] The error in 'relativist' readings of the perspective essay is to impute a romantic or primitivist impulse to Panofsky. His relativism is of a different kind: it recognizes both the self-consistency of divergent symbolic forms as well as progress from less to more advanced symbolic forms—even, perhaps, progress beyond our current standpoint.[29] Although Panofsky implicitly upholds Renaissance space as normative because of its balance between the claims of the subject and the claims of the object,[30] there is

[27] Margaret Iversen, 'The Discourse of Perspective in the Twentieth Century', *Oxford Art Journal* 28.2, 2005, 196. There are of course vast literatures on perspective in general as well as on Panofsky's perspective essay in particular. In addition to sources cited elsewhere, see, for instance: James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994; and Stephen Melville, 'The Temptation of New Perspectives', *October* 52, 1990, 3–15.

[28] Iversen, 'The Discourse of Perspective', 196.

[29] Michael Ann Holly unfortunately misinterprets this in her important book on Panofsky: 'In part 1 [of *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Panofsky] disputed the validity of Renaissance perspective, but by part 2 he has granted it a certain authoritative primacy and is judging other spatial systems against the standard of the fifteenth century. In other words, he is simultaneously undercutting and exalting perspective as a diagnostic instrument—an inconsistency that leads to several epistemological quandaries.' (Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984, 136.) There are indeed inconsistencies in Panofsky, but not at this level.

[30] This point is not always conceded. Neher has criticized Holly and Iversen for imputing a normative standpoint to Panofsky, specifically a bias towards Renaissance art as the ideal conciliation between Kant's understanding and intuition. This is incorrect, he argues, because 'the dual necessary conditions of knowledge in Kant's epistemology are not a position—they are a presupposition of experience.' (Neher, '"The Concept of *Kunstwollen*"',

nothing about his framework that precludes a scrambling of representational codes in light of further scientific developments, as his admittedly much later and not terribly convincing reference to the link between the 'fourth dimension' of time in Cubist painting and Einstein's theory of relativity indicates.[31]

45–46.) That is, every artwork involves both poles of any possible experience and hence the triangulation between understanding and intuition (and all their correlative binaries) is an element of every transcendental inquiry into aesthetic phenomena, a mode of inquiry that is not normative (it does not pass value judgments from an 'Archimedean point') but rather explicates the phenomenon's conditions of possibility. It seems to me, however, that the normative thrust of the perspective essay is unmistakable, if subtler than Wind's privileging of classicism. Perspective is particularly good at realizing a balance between the claims of the object and those of the subject. Every artwork is equally a 'solution' to the same transcendental problems, but some solutions are more equal than others.

[31] Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953, 5. The theory of relativity was important to Cassirer. Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, trans. William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey, Chicago and London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1923; originally published as: Cassirer, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff. Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik*, Berlin: B. Cassirer, 1910. Although the mathematics of Cassirer's argument are beyond the present writer's ken, his account of the genesis of relativity goes something like this: at a certain point in the development of science, discrepancies were discovered between results that previously had been unified by a single theory. 'And behind this conflict of "facts" there stood, as one was forced to recognize more and more, a conflict in general principles, to which the theories of mechanical and of optical and electromagnetic phenomena seemed to lead necessarily.' (*Einstein's Theory*, 369). This conflict of principles 'became the "paraclete of thought"—the real awakener of the theory of relativity.' (*Einstein's Theory*, 370.) By following Goethe's advice to change 'the *problem* into a *postulate*', Einstein arrived at the task of producing a new theory that would unite divergent experimental data: 'a shaping of theory is demanded which will simultaneously satisfy the conditions of the principle of relativity and those of the principle of the constant propagation of light. […] The two assumptions are indeed not compatible according to the means and habits of thought at the disposal of the kinematics generally accepted before the establishment of the theory of relativity, but they—*ought* no longer to be incompatible.' (*Einstein's Theory*, 371; dash and emphasis in the original.) Einstein's theory of relativity results as the only 'logically unobjectionable theory' that explains the phenomena. Although Einstein's notion of spacetime is utterly foreign to our everyday experience of the world, it results from analysis of experimental results, which here play the role of Kant's intuitions. Cassirer thus provides a model of scientific progress that is compatible both with empirical investigation as well as with transcendental philosophy, and which moreover can move beyond immediate 'phenomenological' experience to abstract concepts. Panofsky's beautiful opening paragraph in the third section of *Perspective as Symbolic Form* ('When work on certain artistic problems has advanced so far that further work in the same direction, proceeding from the same premises, appears unlikely to bear fruit, the result is often a great recoil, or perhaps better, a reversal of direction'; page 47) is a comparable description of a paradigm shift.

What is unlikely to disappear, at least in any future that Panofsky can imagine, is the chiasmus between space as experienced (subjective space) and space as abstractly known (objective space), for the reason that it is unlikely, perhaps impossible, that the subject/object divide will ever be overcome. For Panofsky, Renaissance perspective is a Kantian truce between the subject and the object. It is also and by extension a truce between Kant's intuitions and concepts.[32] It was once common to accuse Panofsky's work of an excessive fixation on content at the expense of form; the criticism was generalized to iconography as a whole.[33] Aside from this being unfair to Panofsky's powers of observation, there is in fact no contradiction between his method and a certain formalism. 'On the Relationship of Art History to Art Theory' is a demonstration of that, since the categories that Panofsky derives from his paired antitheses (form/volume and time/space) are formal categories, indeed precisely Wölfflin's and Riegl's categories. But they are grounded in a transcendental methodology that likewise provides the rules for deriving symbolic forms from the a priori 'trends' of culture. The notion of 'symbolic form' splits the difference between formalism and iconography.

An example is the somewhat later and already more classically iconographic work on the topos of 'Hercules at the Crossroads.'[34] Panofsky here reads adjustments to the bilateral symmetry of the motif as the metamorphosis of a symbolic form that articulates the transition from an abdication of subjectivity to subjective freedom.[35] In its 'canonical' epitome, a canvas of about 1596 now in the

[32] A relation that Panofsky develops at greater length in his 1924 book *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, trans. Joseph J.S. Peake. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1968.
[33] For more nuanced recent approaches to iconographic method, see: Whitney Davis, *A General Theory of Visual Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011; Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005; Adi Efal, *Figural Philology: Panofsky and the Science of Things*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016; and Jaś Elsner and Katharina Lorenz, 'The Genesis of Iconology', *Critical Inquiry* 38.3, 2012, 483–512 (this article functions as a commentary on Panofsky's 'On the Problem of Describing and Interpreting Works of the Visual Arts', translated by the authors in the same journal issue).
[34] Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege*, cited above. The first of the book's two essays is devoted to Titian's *Allegory of Prudence* and expands on a 1926 article Panofsky co-authored with Fritz Saxl; he would return to this artwork in 'Titian's *Allegory of Prudence*: A Postscript', in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. I will not consider the Titian essay in this context. *Hercules* is the most impressive document of Panofsky's early 'Warburgian' iconographic mode, alongside the co-written study of Dürer's *Melencolia I* (on which Warburg himself originally intended to collaborate); Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Dürers 'Melencolia I'. Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Leipzig and Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1923. Apart from Panofsky, the most notable analysis of the Hercules motif is found in a chapter of Joseph Leo Koerner's book *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 363–410.
[35] And, relatedly, from *mythos* to *logos*. Panofsky contrasts the motif of Hercules at the Crossroads to the Judgment of Paris. Whereas the latter is 'inherently a mythical event, a real

Figure 3 Annibale Carracci, *The Choice of Hercules*, c. 1596. Oil on canvas, 65 in × 93 ins. (166 cm × 237 cm). Naples: Museo di Capodimonte. Public domain.

Capodimonte in Naples, Annibale Carracci subtly dynamizes his figures with contrapuntal accents borrowed from antique models. (Fig. 3) The resulting 'rhythm' succeeds in 'bringing to expression a moment of intense experience with only the slightest measure of external movement.'[36] These adjustments dramatize the active, subjective choice facing the painting's protagonist, the choice between pleasant vice and painful virtue. But the drama is now almost entirely 'internal', almost entirely a matter of the deliberating intellect, and is signified only by minimal external signs such as the turning of a glance—in ironic contrast to the figure's bulging, unused muscles. Hercules is not simply pulled helplessly towards one or the other way of life, but rather directs his mobile attention. Panofsky comments: 'To the Christian Middle Ages, the "Choice of Hercules" between "virtue" and "vice" appeared as a

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action between the mortal and the three divinities that are only reinterpreted ex post facto as allegories of three forms of life', Hercules's decision is 'inherently a moral parable, the representation of an inner conflict that is only concretized ex post facto as a contest between living persons.' Whereas Paris typically confronts the three goddesses grouped to one side of him in an 'eccentric' composition, Hercules is more often depicted at the centre of a symmetrical composition, between the two female figures who are 'in truth only the corporealized [*fleischgewordenen*] tendencies of his own mind [*Geistes*].' Much later in the book, Panofsky observes that Virtue and Vice are ethical and worldly rather than mythical and transcendent figures. Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege*, 62–63, 154–156. All translations from *Hercules am Scheidewege* are my own.

[36] Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege*, 127.

struggle between Heaven and Hell for the soul', whereas in later Renaissance depictions Hercules is shown as a 'choosing subject' (*wählendes Subjekt*).[37] The choice is between self-sacrifice, self-control—the virtues of bourgeois rationality—or subjection to desire, which is unfreedom.

Carracci's painting, as Panofsky reads it, is a figural variant on both the schema of formal values in 'Art History and Art Theory' as well as our imagined schema of subject/object relations in *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. The painting itself might easily enough be schematized as a structural square, perhaps with the dyad sacrifice/autonomy at left and pleasure/heteronomy at right. And in principle Annibale's small calibrations of expressive gesture could all be charted, somewhere in the middle, as adjustments of the ratio of subjective freedom.[38] If Hercules's face had been slightly more frontal, his eyes more centred, or his left foot drawn more towards his body, the effect would not only have been a lessening of expressive dynamism but also of subjective agency; the effect would no longer be one of momentary hesitation but rather of catatonia. In turn, if the eyes and limbs had been drawn slightly more to either side, the effect would be scatteredness rather than self-composure. This is the precise point at which the 'formal' preoccupations of the early methodological essays are mediated to the 'iconographic' (content-oriented) approach of the later work. The articulation of 'art theory' and 'art history' is the

[37] Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege*, 156. The conclusion of *Hercules am Scheidewege* is akin to the perspective essay's invocation of 'anthropocracy', although here the notion of a dialectical synthesis between ancient and medieval mentalities is more strongly emphasized. The Renaissance 'at once fully restores the ancient concept of "virtus" as perfection within this world and at the same time reconciles it with Christian dogma: it is no longer perceived as a diminution of divine omnipotence, but on the contrary as its deepest confirmation, if at the centre point of the universe there stands the free human being—free no longer thanks to the aid of heavenly grace, but rather by the strength of his own inborn virtue.' Panofsky's argument is clear regarding the world-historical significance of the Hercules iconography: 'It is not often that the phases of a general historical process of development can be so clearly and completely read off from the interpretive history of a single poetic motif. In this context, what is continually reconfirmed is the fact that the concept of "virtue as such" (and perhaps also the correlative notion of "vice as such") is a specifically un-medieval one—that its emergence—or better: its rebirth—signifies a partial moment of that great process which we still may call the "Rinascimento dell' Antichità."' Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege*, 164, 166. This method of tracing world-historical changes in outlook through the subtle adjustment of a single motif resembles nothing so much as Panofsky's essay on Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia ego*, the first version of which appeared in a festschrift for Cassirer in 1936. Panofsky, '*Et in Arcadia ego*: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition', in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, 295-320; first version: '*Et in Arcadia ego*: On the Conception of Transience in Poussin and Watteau', in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, eds. Raymond Klibansky and H.J. Patton, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936, 223-54.

[38] In fact, the exercise need not be wholly imaginary: Panofsky descries a series of drawings dependent on Annibale's canvas as akin to 'variations on a theme.' Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege*, 129.

articulation of a transcendental aesthetic (a doctrine of form) with a transcendental philosophy of culture (a doctrine of content, albeit a formalistic one).

Perspective as Symbolic Form occupies a unique place in Erwin Panofsky's work because it synthesizes empirical and theoretical considerations more thoroughly than any of his other writings. Yet synthesis is not sublation. The various binarisms of the Kantian tradition here remain intact, whether under their own names or in art historical drag. It is notable that at precisely the moment Panofsky was developing his theoretical armature, a Marxist critique of Kantian philosophy emerged—with a vengeance—in the German-speaking world. Examples include Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* of 1923, or the early work of the Frankfurt School (Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer both studied under the left-wing Neo-Kantian philosopher Hans Cornelius before producing materialist criticisms of transcendental philosophy; Walter Benjamin attended lectures by Heinrich Rickert), or the lesser-known Alfred Sohn-Rethel, a thinker who likewise began to develop a Marxist critique of Kantian subjectivity as early as the 1920s, although this work would not bear fruit until after the Second World War. The most consequential of these attacks on Kantianism from the left—which are to be distinguished from attacks on Kantianism from the right, chiefly from the camp of the phenomenologists—can be found in the section on 'The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought' in 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', the longest essay in György Lukács' book *History and Class Consciousness*, published in 1923.[39] As they function here, these criticisms of bourgeois thought have a negative rather than a programmatic function. They diagnose contradictions also found in Panofsky.

Lukács's conceit in 'The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought' is to appropriate Kant's notion of the 'antinomies of pure reason' and then to deploy it against both Kant and his successors. The primary antinomy at stake is the separation of theory and practice. His aim is to 'sketch the *connection* between the fundamental problems of this philosophy and the *basis in existence* from which these problems spring and to which they strive to return by the road of understanding.'[40] Lukács notes that Kant's doctrine of the thing-in-itself smuggles irrationality into the heart of a rational system: 'For irrationality, the impossibility of reducing contents to their rational elements… can be seen at its crudest in the question of relating the sensuous content to the rational form.'[41] For 'classical' philosophy, by which Lukács means German Idealism, what is most immediate is also what is most unknowable. 'The question then becomes: are the empirical facts […] to be taken as "given" or can this "givenness" be dissolved further into rational forms, i.e. can it be conceived as the

[39] György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971.
[40] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 112. Here as in all other quotations, the emphasis is in the original.
[41] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 116.

product of "our" reason?'[42] Bourgeois reason's claim to totality disintegrates as it crashes against the irreducibility of intuitions. Reason finds itself dismembered into scientific disciplines that investigate specific 'givens', on the one hand, and on the other hand a hypertrophy of idealism that can conceive of nothing not produced by the mind itself. The rationalist tradition that culminates in Kant's transcendental idealism thus faces the dilemma of having either to deny the existence of any 'irrational content or actuality', thereby regressing into a 'naïve, dogmatic rationalism' that fails to recognize anything outside the system (this tendency can take the form of a reification of mathematics as the only valid form of knowledge), or else of conceding that 'actuality, content, matter reaches right into the form, the structure of the forms and their interrelations and thus *into the structure of the system itself*', in which case 'the system must be abandoned as a system.'[43]

As a result, 'the unsolved problem of the irrational reappears in the problem of totality.'[44] Or rather, bourgeois thought displaces the 'horizon that delimits the totality' to culture: 'This culture cannot be derived from anything else and has simply to be accepted on its own terms as "facticity"'.[45] Culture becomes absolute, its values neither derived nor justified but simply taken for granted.[46] Culture becomes the category of categories for the bourgeoisie, even as it bears no relation that bourgeois thought can explicate to 'reality as a whole and as existence.'[47] For Lukács, this is a manifestation of the divergence between theory and practice that results from the capitalist division of labour. Culture increasingly segregates itself to an autonomous realm that lacks any mediation to labour (to concrete social practice). And although bourgeois thought perceives this problem—German Idealism is its highest form—it lacks the means to do much about it.

Bourgeois practice, as much as bourgeois theory, always falls into this predicament because it takes as underivable givens the historical phenomena that genuine practice would transform. As Lukács points out, following Hegel, Kant's illustration of a universalizable ethical rule—that deposits should not be embezzled—presumes the existence of deposits and thus of private property. Kant's ethical formalism cannot itself derive the latter institution; his philosophy leaves private property untouched and only provides a rule for abiding by its law. The rule

[42] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 116.
[43] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 118.
[44] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 120.
[45] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 120.
[46] This absolutism of cultural values can be associated with the 'Southwest' or Heidelberg School of Neo-Kantians, whereas a fixation on mathematics is typical of the contemporaneous Marburg School. However, these are broad generalisations, not to say caricatures. Cassirer was a student of the Marburg professors Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, and indeed early in his career was better known as a philosopher of science than of culture.
[47] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 121.

is practical (it legislates specific behaviours), but it upholds a split between content and form:

> [I]n order to overcome the irrationality of the question of the thing-in-itself it is not enough that the attempt should be made to transcend the contemplative attitude. When the question is formulated more concretely it turns out that the essence of praxis consists in annulling *that indifference of form towards content* that we found in the problem of the thing-in-itself. Thus praxis can only be really established as a philosophical principle if, at the same time, a conception of form can be found whose basis and validity no longer rest on that pure rationality and that freedom from every definition of content. In so far as the principle of praxis is the prescription for changing reality, it must be tailored to the concrete material substratum of action if it is to impinge upon it to any effect.[48]

Lukács emphasizes that 'classical' philosophy's lack of a notion of practice is not a mere failure of imagination but is rather the result of capitalism's inability to rid itself of its own new forms of 'natural' (or rather naturalised) unfreedom, or new underivable 'givens': 'For the contradiction does not lie in the inability of the philosophers to give a definitive analysis of the available facts. It is rather the intellectual expression of the objective situation itself which it is their task to comprehend.'[49]

Lukács's cure for the contradictions of bourgeois thought is, notoriously, the perspective of totality, which he imputes to a proletariat that may not consciously occupy this standpoint at all. He localizes the overcoming of the subject/object split in a particular historical subject. But since in reality the proletariat has not yet attained the requisite level of class consciousness, Lukács is forced to speculatively posit a consciousness that it ought to have. The role of the vanguard party is then to make 'imputed' and actual consciousness coincide (or in a more Hegelian turn of phrase: to comprehend substance as subject). These problems have been widely noted; they stem from, among other things, Lukács's romantic unwillingness to abandon the ideal of an organic and transparent social whole, and they have provoked reactions as powerful as Theodor Adorno's philosophy of the non-identical. The horizon of reconciliation in *History and Class Consciousness* need not concern us further in the present context, however, since the point here is only to diagnose certain antinomies in Erwin Panofsky's implicit philosophy of culture. And these can be mapped quite precisely onto the antinomies that Lukács outlines.

Return to 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory.' Note, first of all, that the essay excludes the 'irrational' insofar as it excludes content altogether;

[48] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 125–26.
[49] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 128.

the fact that the essay exists as a 'theoretical' intervention apart from Panofsky's 'empirical' work is already symptomatic enough. But what of the table of 'specific contrasts'? Each of these provides a way to articulate a divide between concepts and intuitions, and thus to conceptually bridge their divide even as the table's antinomic structure preserves the separation between the two. Panofsky explains one of his binaries as follows:

> [T]he 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.[50]

Recall that Panofsky aligns time with form and with subjectivity (as is perhaps clearer in the haptic/optical contrast, where the latter term in Riegl already presages an 'external unity' that has its locus not in formal relations immanent to the art object, but rather in the beholding subject). Space, volume/*Fülle*, and objectivity represent the opposite pole. The viewer synthesizes these formal values in an 'amalgamation' of units that produces a subjective unity—subjective because the independent parts do not in fact form an objective unity absent the cognitive synthesis that takes place in the perceiving subject (on the 'ontological' rather than 'methodological' level, they form no unity in space insofar as they remain separate units). This subject provides the concepts that order intuitions that in themselves, that is in space, only exist in 'real and strict isolation… unpenetrated by any movement.'[51] The assignation of intuitions to space rather than time seems

[50] Panofsky, 'Art History and Art Theory', 48.

[51] These various schemata admittedly seem to trip over themselves in the attempt to mediate between visual and temporal arts, and perhaps even more so in Wind's and Panofsky's attempt to harmonize their slightly different accounts. In a footnote to 'On the Systematics', for example, Wind writes:

> As space is to visual art, so is time to music. As order next-to-one-another relates to order one-behind-the-other, so—in music—successive order relates to simultaneous order. Surface relations (to be 'read' individually) correspond to the chronological sequence of notes in a melodic passage; the

underdeveloped and perhaps would collapse upon closer analysis, but then, Panofsky's divergences from Kant's specific doctrines on space and time are less significant here than his allegiance to a basic subject/object framework: that is, to a schema that relates subject to object without overcoming their divide, and also without resolving the antinomy between unity understood as an empirical property of things (in this case, artworks) and unity as a product of the viewer's synthesizing cognition. The synthesis of 'ontological' and 'methodological' unity is nothing other than a restatement of Kant's famous observation that 'thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind'—but here the solution seems forever postponed. The spontaneity of the intellect represents 'becoming' in contrast to the intuitions that arrive to us as discrete bursts of radiation from the unknowable thing-in-itself. The sensuous analogue for the latter, since *as* sensuous it can be no more than an analogue, is the self-containment of classical art, which excludes the dynamic unification of separate parts either in itself (ontologically) or in an 'external unity' located in the subject (methodologically). Panofsky's a priori schema of perceptual possibilities thus correlates intuitive data with synthetic construction while firmly maintaining their separation. The question whether 'formal values' are ontological qualities in the object or methodological categories in the subject cannot be resolved but only stated as a permanent antinomy, even though the very point of the whole construction is to relate and thus to reconcile the opposing poles—hence the two columns that buttress Panofsky's diagram on either side, between which all phenomenality plays out. There is likewise no attempt here to account for the production of the a priori categories at any level below their mere givenness. To do so would be to understand the categories as a matter of praxis, which Panofsky does not countenance. Panofsky treats Riegl's and Wölfflin's antitheses rather as Kant treats bank deposits.

In her book *Hegel Contra Sociology*, the philosopher Gillian Rose describes this retrojection of the given into the a priori as the positing of a 'quasitranscendental' object, a figure of thought that she understands to be characteristic of Neo-Kantianism in general.[52] Rose's immediate object of critique in

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> unfolding of depth (observable at a single glance) corresponds to the temporal conjunction that produces a harmonious chord.

This makes a hash of Panofsky's 'methodological' distinction between time and space, since instead of associating space with *Fülle* and time with form, as Panofsky does, Wind asserts that *both* space and time play the *same* 'ordering' role, just in two different artforms. Yet, a few footnotes later, Wind approvingly describes Panofsky's time/space antithesis as a 'welcome and necessary complement to our own discussion of the relationship of contents and form.' (Wind, 'On the Systematics', 253–54.)

[52] Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, London and New York: Verso, 2009 (originally published in 1981), 1–50. See for example this passage on page 15: 'The social or cultural *a priori* is the precondition of the possibility of actual social facts or values (transcendental). The identified, actual valid facts or values can be treated as the objects of a general logic (naturalistic). The status of the precondition becomes ambiguous: it is an *a priori*, that is, not

the passage in question is the sociology of Émile Durkheim. For Durkheim, something called 'society', an empirical object, plays the role of a Kantian transcendental from which differentiated 'spiritual' forms such as religion can be derived. Marxist 'meta-critique' typically operates in just the same manner, albeit to contrary political ends. However, a related critique can also be advanced of *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. Indeed, that critique has already been adumbrated via a demonstration of the compatibility between the implicit schema of the perspective essay and the explicit schema of 'Art History and Art Theory', to say nothing of *Hercules am Scheidewege*. It is evident that, if the perspective essay describes a historicized series of ratios between formalized objective space and intuitive subjective space, the text presupposes the givenness of object and subject; it presupposes that what Renaissance perspective formalizes is a relation between two entities (world and subject) that exist. The essay posits its own presupposition. It may be that in some manner perspective 'produces' the modern subject. If so, that production is not illustrated in Panofsky's text. He has no account, as Lukács puts it, of the '*connection* between the fundamental problems of this philosophy [or here, art] and the *basis in existence* from which these problems spring and to which they strive to return by the road of understanding.' If he had taken note of Panofsky's essay, Lukács would have asked which social contradictions Renaissance perspective was invented to resolve.[53]

At this point, it may be objected that the diagnosis so far has been made in bad faith. The circularity at stake here is after all nothing other than a version of the famous hermeneutic circle, which neither can nor should be expelled from the

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empirical, for it is the basis of the possibility of experience. But a "sociological" *a priori* is, *ex hypothesi*, external to the mind, and hence appears to acquire the status of a natural object or cause. The status of the relation between the sociological precondition and the conditioned becomes correspondingly ambiguous in all sociological quasitranscendental arguments.' Rose, incidentally, tars an astonishingly broad range of thinkers with the brush of Neo-Kantianism; even Adorno does not elude the 'meta-critical' trap. Her proposed alternative is a recovery of Hegel's speculative thinking of the absolute in the shape of a historical phenomenology of 'relative' or limited ethical life—but in this context it is impossible do more than gesture towards the complexities of Rose's account.

[53] The art historian Michael Baxandall's barrel-gauging burghers are an example of an essentially non-critical attempt to link bourgeois rationality to aesthetic habits on the ground of class practice. (Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.) Baxandall argues that quickly estimating the volume of barrels, an essential skill for Florentine merchants, exercised the same visual skills as these merchants brought to their appreciation of perspective constructions in pictures. Christopher Wood has pointed out that this image of early capitalism partakes of the old idealisation 'of a Quattrocento poised for one magical moment between the Middle Ages and modernity'—a moment in which art and social practice mingled happily in the lifeworld. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* 'is, perhaps, a book that could only have been written about the Quattrocento.' Christopher S. Wood, *Artforum* 47.9, 2009, 43–44.

analysis of culture. Of course, it is true that Panofsky was aware (could not have been unaware) of the circularity at the core of humanistic interpretation, which explains artifacts by outlooks that it infers from artifacts (or, in another register: explains cultural symptoms by something called 'society' or 'culture', to which we have no access other than cultural symptoms—that is, once again: artifacts). Panofsky's way of dealing with that problem is unobjectionable. But this is not the same as the problem of the quasitranscendental.

Panofsky's early articulation of the quasitranscendental is slightly different from the 'circulus methodicus' that he describes in an important footnote to the 'Introductory' chapter of *Studies in Iconology*.[54] The latter, 'virtuous' circle is what happens when an interpreter relates an individual observation to 'other, analogous observations in such a way that the whole series "makes sense".' Panofsky is right to say that the 'sense' of the series may then be 'applied, as a control, to the interpretation of a new individual observation within the same range of phenomena'. This much is continuous with the definition of *Sinn* as 'immanent meaning' in 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory'. He is likewise right to say that, if a new observation 'refuses to be interpreted according to the "sense" of the series', this 'sense' must be reformulated. This is the only way to construct either a 'history of style' or a 'history of [iconographic] types'.

However, this is not Panofsky's method in the deduction of his table of antitheses, nor in his differentiation of perspectival regimes. Neither the opposition of *Fülle* to *Form* nor the opposition between subjective space and abstract conceptual space is the output of data gathered from a series of related phenomena; such would be radically contrary to any claim for a priori status. These oppositions are rather matrices that allow for the relation and differentiation of phenomena to begin with, prior to the totalization of a style or a *Weltanschauung*. So, whereas a style or an iconographic type may be extracted as a theoretical object from an artifactual ensemble, via induction, the same cannot be done to produce a transcendental form. An ensemble of Greek vase paintings that depict the Labours of Herakles makes up a set in the properly mathematical sense. Additions to the set may change our understanding of the *Sinn* of the set as a whole, since they may introduce formal variations or iconographic peculiarities while remaining within the overarching parameter (i.e., the set of Greek vase paintings that depict the Labours of Herakles). We can also easily imagine a set that includes every ancient depiction of perspectival (or quasi-perspectival) space. Yet the *Sinn* of that set would not be the category of 'space' as such, nor even any historically specific construction of space. This is because 'space' (like 'time', 'form', or 'volume'), as opposed to 'depictions of Herakles', belongs to another order entirely, indeed to the order of the transcendental rather than the empirical. It is subjective space that is expressed in ancient perspective constructions, not ancient perspective constructions that are expressed in subjective space, since the latter is not an empirical artifact (or

[54] *Studies in Iconology*, 11. I am indebted to Andrea Pinotti for reminding me of this footnote.

'synthesis', in the terms of Panofsky's 1925 schema) at all. These forms are a priori—and it can only be a category error to infer the a priori from the a posteriori. Yet here we have an a priori that seems to shadow its empirical referent too closely for comfort.[55]

Indeed, the whole structure soon enough flips over. In *Studies in Iconology*, Panofsky by contrast relies on the incontrovertibility of empirical observations to build self-regulating finite series of morphological or iconographic resemblance.[56] These then generate 'controlling principles', a modest substitute for the genuine transcendental. The language here is in fact closer to that of Kant's regulative (as opposed to constitutive) ideas, which do not constitute phenomena but rather regulate their understanding. But: the 'controlling principle of interpretation' for each of the three interpretive levels ('pre-iconographic description', 'iconographic analysis', and 'iconographical synthesis') turns out, in each case, to be a knowledge of history—'history of style', 'history of types', 'history of cultural symptoms'—which regulates 'practical experience', 'knowledge of literary sources', and 'synthetic intuition', respectively. The controlling principles remain a matter of empirical knowledge.

By this point (1939), the role of the quasitranscendental accordingly migrates to the 'basic attitude' of a culture, religion, class, etc. The transcendental antitheses of 1925 have been left in the dust. Panofsky here is not far from where we will encounter Durkheim at the moment of Cassirer's critique, as we shall see over the next few pages of the present essay: except that Panofsky, as one might put it, ungrounds his own ground by ambiguating his 'controlling principles of interpretation', which no longer possess either the transcendental status of *Fülle* and *Form* nor the straightforwardly empirical status of an artifactual trait that defines a stylistic or iconographic set. To put it differently, *Weltanschauungsanalyse* here replaces transcendental aesthetics. Yet Panofsky hedges, assigning this ultimate regulative principle of interpretation the more modest task of keeping the (intuitive, synthetic, and thus not terribly scientific) 'equipment for interpretation' within

[55] We are here intentionally remaining within an idealist framework because this is the framework that Kant, Cassirer, and Panofsky share. A materialist approach (for example that found in the 'cultural techniques' school of German media theory) would, however, be quite comfortable with the claim that transcendental categories are the product of concrete technical and social practices, such as the measuring of three-dimensional volumes for commercial purposes (to pick up on Baxandall's example). See, in particular: Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. This is indeed perhaps the best available solution to the problem of the quasitranscendental; it has the advantage of accommodating Lukács's priority of praxis without nailing it down to the standpoint of the proletariat as the self-identical subject-object of history. Given that the present essay has a merely diagnostic function, however, it will be impossible to provide more than the barest indication of what this might look like as a fully articulated art historical hermeneutic.

[56] This notion remains underdeveloped in Panofsky. Sets and replicative chains were instead to become the bailiwick of *anti*-iconographers, notably George Kubler.

proper bounds. The contradictoriness of the quasitranscendental disappears under a new empiricism that Panofsky simply does not investigate much further, except in a vague appeal to the '*general and essential tendencies of the human mind*'—which is precisely, as we shall see, what Cassirer describes as innate 'trends', or in short, the quasitranscendental.[57] Empiricism does not really get us out of the problem at all. By 1939, Panofsky simply abandons the epistemological problem, instead of seeking to resolve it. And this is where iconography was to remain, to the bitter end.

To conclude, it will be necessary to show that the epistemological antinomies that Lukács detects in bourgeois philosophy, and which are also present in Panofsky's theoretical or meta-art historical writings, extend also to Panofsky's Cassirerian philosophy of culture and thus to his empirical or iconographic research, too. To do so, one may note that observations akin to those already made of Panofsky's perspective essay likewise apply to Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. (And in this context, it is not especially important to ascribe priority to one thinker or the other. Joan Hart has pointed out that the stream of influence may have run as much from Panofsky to Cassirer as the reverse. But at the level of generality with which this essay is concerned, baseline Neo-Kantian assumptions were no less second-nature to the art historian than to the philosopher; what is important to convey, then, is less Cassirer's impact on Panofsky than their shared presuppositions.)[58]

Because of its resonance with a chapter in Gillian Rose's *Hegel contra Sociology* already discussed above, it will be worth considering a long excerpt from a passage in the second volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* in which Cassirer delivers a critique of Émile Durkheim, and consequently of any social determinism:

> [M]yth expresses all natural reality in the language of human, social reality and expresses all human, social reality in the language of nature. Here no reduction of the one factor to the other is possible; it is rather the two together, in complete correlation, that determine the peculiar structure and complexion of mythical consciousness. Hence it is hardly less one-sided to 'explain' mythology in purely sociological terms than to explain it in purely naturalistic terms. The most incisive and consistent attempt at such an explanation has been undertaken by the modern French school of sociologists, particularly by their founder, Émile Durkheim, who starts by saying that neither animism nor naturism can be the true root of religion, for it they were, this would simply mean that all religious life is without solid foundation, an aggregate of mere delusions, a sum of phantasms. Religion cannot rest on such shaky ground, for if it is to claim any kind of inner truth, it must express some objective reality. This reality

[57] *Studies in Iconology*, 16; emphasis in the original.
[58] Hart, 'Erwin Panofsky and Karl Mannheim', 559.

is not nature but society; it is not of a physical but of a social nature. The true object of religion, the sole and original object to which all religious forms and expressions can be traced back, is the social group to which the individual indissolubly belongs, which wholly conditions his being and consciousness. It is this social group which not only determines the form of mythology and religion but also provides the basic schema and mode for all theoretical understanding, for all knowledge of reality. All the categories in which we apprehend this reality—the concepts of space, time, substance, and causality—are products not of individual but of social thinking and accordingly have their religious-social prehistory. To trace them back to this prehistory, to derive their seemingly purely logical structure from definite social structures: that is to explain these concepts and understand them in their true apriority. To the individual everything must seem a priori, universally valid and necessary, a fact which arises not from his own activity but from the activity of the species. The real bond which links the individual with his tribe, his clan, and his family is therefore the ultimate demonstrable foundation for the ideal unity of his world-consciousness, for the religious and intellectual structure of the cosmos. Here we shall not take up at any length Durkheim's epistemological grounding of his attempt to replace the 'transcendental' deduction of the categories by a social deduction. It is true that we might ask whether the categories which Durkheim seeks to derive from social reality are not rather the *conditions* of this reality: whether it is not the pure forms of thought and intuition which make possible and constitute both the content of society and that empirical regularity of phenomena which we call nature. But even if we exclude this question, even if we limit ourselves to the phenomena of the mythical-religious consciousness, it develops on closer scrutiny that even here Durkheim's theory amounts to a *ὕστερον πρότερον*. For the form of society is not absolutely and immediately *given* any more than is the objective form of nature, the regularity of our world of perception. Just as nature comes into being through a theoretical interpretation and elaboration of sensory contents, so the structure of society is a mediated and ideally conditioned reality. It is not the ultimate, ontologically real cause of the spiritual and particularly the religious categories, but rather is decisively determined by them. If we seek to explain these categories as mere repetitions and, as it were, copies of the empirical form of society, we forget that the processes and the function of mythical-religious formation have entered precisely into this real form. We know of no form of society, however primitive, which does not

> disclose some kind of religious imprint; and society itself can be regarded as a determinate form only if we tacitly presuppose the mode and direction of this imprint.[59]

Durkheim's sociology as well as Cassirer's criticism thereof are both framed in the language of Neo-Kantianism. Their disagreement turns on the nature of the a priori, or the transcendental conditions of experience (in this case, religious experience, but the problems are analogous in the case of art). For Durkheim, the a priori is something called 'society'. Cassirer does not say much about Durkheim's concrete ideas regarding the origins, characteristics, or structure of society, and hence neither need we. It is important only that, for Durkheim (at least as Cassirer understands him), society is a given upon which solid rock are built the forms and categories of possible experience, namely the tetrad of space, time, substance, and causality. Cassirer points out that Durkheim's 'society' can claim no more immediacy than the categories of perception that it supposedly determines. For Cassirer, Durkheim's shifting of the locus of the a priori from Kant's transcendental categories to social facts puts the cart before the horse (an expression equivalent in meaning to Cassirer's *hysteron proteron*). And this is because in no society, however 'primitive', does concrete social life exist prior to the spiritual expressions that Durkheim attempts to derive precisely from concrete social life. The two are rather co-present at all times. Durkheim's identification of society as the transcendental ground of culture is accordingly circular. He describes a product of spirit as spirit's ground. (Panofsky's critique of Wölfflin makes a similar tack: there is no level of pure seeing, no purely formal mode of representation that does not already imply *seelischer Gehalt*, 'the content of the soul'.)[60]

To foreclose the self-evident objection that his own doctrine of 'complete correlation' is no less circular itself, Cassirer here as throughout the second volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* develops a method of transcendental structuralism that grounds mythological-religious experience neither in social facts nor in immediate natural intuition, but rather in 'a definite trend in mythical

[59] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, 192–193. The phrase in Greek is *hysteron proteron*. A digressive note on Cassirer's representation of Durkheim: It is interesting that the social determination rather than the naturally emergent quality of religion (which can stand for any ideology) is here presented as religion's 'solid ground', given that the modern tradition of ideology critique invariably operates in the inverse manner: by revealing the social determination of beliefs and institutions and hence their non-natural quality, which is then taken to debunk those beliefs and institutions. In ideology critique there is a romanticism at work that neither Cassirer nor Durkheim shares. Ideology critique juxtaposes a claim to natural validity with the real artificiality (historicity) of the institutions that the claim validates. For a Neo-Kantian philosopher of culture, however, the fact of an institution's 'spiritual' (cultural and historical and thus artificial) rather than natural derivation is no demerit.

[60] Panofsky, 'Das Problem des Stils', 465.

thinking and in the mythical life feeling.'[61] (The other two volumes of the work do something akin for language, philosophy, and science.) This 'trend' grants to totemism (his example here, following Durkheim)

> not, it is true, a fixed correlate in the world of things, a *fundamentum in re*, but a foundation in the mythical-religious *consciousness*. The very existence and form of human society itself requires such a foundation; for even where we suppose that we have society before us in its empirically earliest and most primitive form, it is not something originally given but something spiritually conditioned and mediated.[62]

It is not the substance of mythical thought that is primary, then, but rather the function of its a priori structures, which themselves however cannot be attested except by an accumulation of corroborating empirical evidence. It is to the latter that the project of a 'philosophy of symbolic forms' is dedicated. Each symbolic form is, so to speak, a sluice that regulates commerce between subject and object; each specific symbolic form produces a specific division/relation between the 'I' and the world (and it is in just this way that Panofsky describes perspective).[63] Although in the preface to the third volume of *Symbolic Forms* Cassirer describes his inquiry as a phenomenology in the Hegelian rather than the 'modern' sense (presumably a reference to Husserl and his school), his mode of questioning is at the same time strictly Neo-Kantian; or rather, it conflates Kantian transcendental method with Hegel's phenomenology by reading the historical unfolding of culture as the unfolding of potentials found in the a priori categories that structure the human relation to the world. Empirical evidence validates a transcendental theory which in turn validates empirical evidence. Or to put it differently, Cassirer escapes the dry ahistoricity of pure Kantian forms (he delivers a phenomenology of culture) but only at the cost of an omnivorous absorption of pretty much any cultural phenomenon (any symbolic form) to an astonishingly labile a priori—such that the ground of any symbolic form either becomes simply imponderable or else finds itself reduced to a speculative rationalisation that, given the inevitable lack of any hard evidence, generally turns out to be hardly less mythical than the phenomenon it is meant to explain.[64] Circularity is not so easily escaped, then. To adopt Rose's

[61] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, 194.
[62] Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, 194.
[63] E.g.: '[T]he crucial achievement of every symbolic form lies precisely in the fact that it does not *have* the limit between the I and reality as pre-existent and established for all time but must create this limit—and that each fundamental form creates it in a different way.' Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, 156.
[64] A good example, from the very end of Cassirer's life, is the account of the origin of religion and myth found near the start of his last book, *The Myth of the State*. After rejecting Freud's sexual interpretation as too narrow—'It is not a very satisfactory explanation of a fact that

terminology, Cassirer remains unmistakably stuck within the forcefield of the 'quasitranscendental'. Similarly, in Panofsky, a theory of the modern subject validates the transcendental ratio of perspective, the product of which is nothing other than the modern subject. What is at stake here is an ontologisation of Kantian critique that surreptitiously, as it were, substitutes the given for the a priori, or in Panofsky's case, stylistic (Wölfflinian, Rieglian) descriptions and specifically historical subject/object ratios for transcendental categories. Which is a bit perverse, since all of this happens in the course of arguing that that there *is* no such thing as 'the given' independent of cognition and its a priori categories.

The form of every Neo-Kantian inquiry is the same: given the existence of a phenomenon—totemism, for example—what are the conditions of its possibility? In the case of spiritual phenomena, of which art is one expression, the answer can only be 'structure', because only the notion of structure appears to escape the circularity of grounding one empirical phenomenon upon another, as in Durkheim's grounding of the fact of religious belief upon the fact of society.[65] A structure is a

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has put its indelible mark upon the whole life of mankind to reduce it to a special and single motive'—Cassirer nonetheless does ultimately provide his own irreducible account of myth: as a response to the mystery of death. 'Primitive man could not be reconciled with the fact of death; he could not be persuaded to accept the destruction of his personal existence as an inevitable natural phenomenon. But it was the very fact that was denied and "explained away" by myth. Death, it taught, means no extinction of man's life; it means only a change in the form of life.' (Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1946, 49.) It is not very clear why the denial of death is any more transcendental than the vicissitudes of Freud's sexual instincts, except that Cassirer evidently considers it a more basic (but undoubtedly still empirical!) fact.

[65] A special case of this problem, to which the young Panofsky dedicated some fine pages, is that of historicism in the interpretation of artworks. In his essay on Riegl's *Kunstwollen*, he notes that '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.' (Panofsky, 'On the Concept of Artistic Volition', 18.) He writes that 'the task of aesthetics is to create categories which are valid a priori, which, like causality, can be applied to linguistically formulated judgments as a standard for determining their nature as part of epistemology, and which can be applied, to some extent, to the work of art being studied as a standard by which its immanent meaning can be determined.' (Panofsky, 'On the Concept of Artistic Volition', 28). As Neher rightly points out, 'What Panofsky wants, the central and defining idea of the essay 'The Concept of *Kunstwollen*', is that art history should undertake an investigation into what would be the category equivalents for art.' (Neher, '"The Concept of *Kunstwollen*"', 42.) This is precisely what he attempts in 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory'; as suggested above, the same method carries through, less schematically, in *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. The obvious circularity of explaining a phenomenon by another phenomenon is here (seemingly) dispelled by the less-obvious circularity of explaining a phenomenon by a priori concepts deduced from the phenomenon itself (as they must be, since to get to a level of specificity at all useful for concrete historical work the relevant concepts must be more determinate than pure time, space, and causality; Cassirer's 'trends' of mythical thinking are one such example, as are Riegl's and Wölfflin's

matrix of possibilities, some realized, some unrealized, and it is coterminous with its actual elements. The non-existence of certain 'solutions' to a structural antinomy does not affect their reality as conceivable positions: they are implied in the manifestations that actually do exist. In Wölfflin, for example, this is the relation of the classical style to the baroque in periods when the baroque is dominant, and vice versa. The Neo-Kantian transcendental approach also happens to be a recipe for cultural relativism. As even the idea of nature 'comes into being through a theoretical interpretation and elaboration of sensory contents', there is no level at which spirit (culture) is absent from perception. There is no such thing as the innocent eye, although there are more or less mediate, more or less 'natural' or primordial modes of thinking and perception. Myth is exactly this primordial, pre-rational mode of thinking/perception, but it *is* already a kind of thinking and is not mere unconditioned sight, hearing, etc. Myth is already symbolic form. By implication, there is no level at which the history of spirit (the variety of human cultures) is absent from experience. There are as many regimes of symbolic forms as there are views of the world. Idealism is the correlate of cultural relativism.

'Symbolic form' is Cassirer's name for the shape of a spiritual structure. The pure categories of perception are preestablished on some ultimate a priori level. But any specific historical mode of seeing, of understanding the world, is possible only through the mind's active interpretation. Symbolic form is the device by which Cassirer explains the relation of society to culture; symbolic form denies that society is anything other than culture. Hence, instead of refuting Durkheim, Cassirer only substitutes one 'quasitranscendental' object for another via the detour of structure, which turns out to be the common denominator between idealism and social reductionism.[66] But Cassirer purchases the triumph of the former over the latter at the cost of erasing what, in Marxist terminology, would be called the nonidentity of the 'base' with the 'superstructure'—erasing, by the same measure, the possibility of conflict between ideology and social practice. The consequences of this for art history are potentially calamitous, since any hermeneutic that is insensitive to the non-identity between concept and material articulation—a non-identity that manifests in the negative, strained, contradictory, or uncanny moments of

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binaries). Because of its date, Panofsky's *Kunstwollen* essay cannot have been drafted in direct consultation with Cassirer. Hence it is clear that Panofsky's 'quasitranscendental' approach did not at first rely on the philosopher's work, though it was to converge with it. As we have already seen, by 1939, with the introduction to *Studies in Iconology*, the project of developing a transcendental aesthetic on the basis of 'Kantianised' versions of the Riegl/Wölfflin antitheses has been left behind in favour of a much less precise appeal to innate 'trends' of consciousness.

[66] Gillian Rose's admittedly somewhat underdeveloped critique of Louis Althusser is framed in these terms. Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 39–42.

artworks—will be severely limited in scope. It is a blessing, then, that Panofsky is not so consistently Neo-Kantian in practice as in theory.[67]

Although on one level the notion of symbolic form abolishes the split between content and form by describing forms that are, or at least imply, their own content (inasmuch as structure is immanent to its phenomena and vice versa; we have seen that Panofsky had made this point contra Wölfflin as early as 1915), Cassirer's resolution of the antinomy remains abstract because all the same it does not in fact abolish the '*indifference of form towards content*' that Lukács finds in Kant's practical philosophy—indifference not, this time, in the sense that it would be possible to fill any given form with any imaginable content, but rather in the sense that content and form have come to be so closely identified that it becomes difficult to imagine any fracture coming between them at all. There is something of a double bind built into this Neo-Kantian 'quasitranscendental.' On the one hand, the forms through which we perceive or indeed constitute reality are only (spontaneous?) mental events. On the other hand, as transcendental, the forms always already delimit possible experience, cognition, and practice.[68] A form, for Cassirer, is never able to criticize its own content, nor a content its form, except, it seems, in scientific research, when experimental findings contradict a given explanatory framework—in which case the data in question are neither 'everyday' spatiotemporal intuitions, nor the totalizing horizon of a *Weltanschauung*, but are rather produced by abstracting from experience.[69] This divergence seems to be foreclosed in the case of normal cultural practice because categories of perception are themselves determined

[67] As T.J. Clark writes of a passage in *Perspective as Symbolic Form*: 'This is dialectical thinking, with all the strength of dialectic—its power to open up a field of inquiry, to enable certain questions to be asked. And Panofsky's essay is full—inconveniently full—of the same mode of discourse: whether he is arguing that the Middle Ages' negation of spatial illusion is "the condition for the truly modern view of space", or wondering why it is that innovation is so often bound up with a renunciation of previous achievements, with primitivism, setbacks, reversals, "so that we see Donatello emerging not from the faded classicism of the followers of Arnolfo but from a definite tendency towards Gothic revival."' Clark, 'The Conditions of Artistic Creation', *Times Literary Supplement*, May 24, 1974, 561–562. Republished 2019: https://selvajournal.org/article/tj-clark-conditions-of-artistic-creation/.

[68] This Neo-Kantian paradox was to reappear in many 'postmodern' ruminations on the problem of agency and determinism. On the one hand, everything is a contingent social construct, and thus subject to critique or deconstruction. On the other hand, subjectivity just *is* its social construction, making it unclear where exactly the Archimedean point from which to exert either critique or political action might be located. (The Lukácsian answer here is a theory of praxis; another and perhaps better option, as suggested in an earlier footnote, would be a fusion of this Marxian perspective with a more finely nuanced analysis of 'cultural techniques'.) In a Cassirerian or Panofskian philosophy of culture, the equivalent conundrum might be this: Where exactly did the Renaissance—the birth of the modern autonomous subject—come from, if any symbolic form is an immanent fusion of *Weltanschauung* and mode of perception (and/or representation)?

[69] See note 31 above.

by symbolic forms and hence, unless it be as Wölflinnian oscillation between fixed poles, it is difficult to imagine anything not already presupposed in the form's modality ever entering the field of vision (or the auditory field, etc.). Translations can only be from like to like within the orbit of a culture: from text to image, each an avatar of the same 'meaning'.

And so we arrive at another notorious circle, that of Panofsky's later method. As Christopher Wood has put it, 'What [iconology] tells us about a culture is usually tautological (something like: this was the kind of culture that could have produced this work).'[70] Perhaps it would be, precisely, the art towards which Panofsky cultivated a studied non-engagement—the art of his time, that is, modernism—that could breach such immanence.[71] But something like a cultural parallel to Marx's conflict between 'forces and relations of production' is inconceivable to a philosophy of culture that identifies a practice with its 'spiritual' morphology. Totemism, for example, can never bear witness against itself because the forms of totemism are by definition adequate to its content: the forms are its content; no dialectic inhabits the forms except their eventual, melancholy passage from *mythos* to *logos*. And such precisely is the progress of perspective. Panofsky narrates the epoch-making swings from ancient to medieval to Renaissance space with brilliant dialectical flair, but the tale he tells is not a dialectical one.

This is no problem for anyone who idealizes organic community, but it ought to be a problem for anyone who hopes that art might fulfil a critical function. Otherwise, no distinction could ever be made between art and culture, so long as the latter is understood in Neo-Kantian fashion as composed of immanent, underivable, and hence incontestable values. (This nonidentity is central to Theodor Adorno's understanding of art, incidentally.) The abolition of the form/content distinction, like the abolition of the subject/object distinction, is an abstract reconciliation that does not affect the real social relations that account for the distinctions. Perhaps much the same is true of the 'material turn' in art history and related fields, which to a dispiriting degree has added up to little more than an iconography of materials. ('This is the kind of experience that could have been had of this thing.') Distant as Panofsky's early methodological essays may be from current scholarly practice, then, my account of the antinomies of bourgeois art history (if one can be excused the expression) implicates much current research in the humanities, oriented as the latter so often is to the underivable 'quasitranscendental'—and thus untranscendable—horizon of culture.[72] A critique

[70] Christopher Wood, introduction to *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 24.

[71] Suggestions along these lines can be found in the work of Sebastian Egenhofer, who has developed a novel account of modernist art's rupture with *doxa*. Sebastian Egenhofer, *Abstraktion – Kapitalismus – Subjektivität. Die Wahrheitsfunktion des Werks in der Moderne*, Munich: Fink, 2008; Egenhofer, *Towards an Aesthetics of Production*, trans. James Gussen, Zürich: Diaphanes, 2017.

[72] This critique of culturalism is broadly aligned with Éric Michaud's recent work on the racialist foundations of art history. (Michaud, *The Barbarian Invasions: A Genealogy of the*

of Panofsky in conventional methodological terms would be otiose, or at least several decades late, and hence that is not what this article is meant to be. It is to be hoped, rather, that feeling out the gaps in art history's never-completed self-constitution as a science, even or especially in its moments of highest achievement, might open lines of flight to salutary incoherence. It may not be that the discipline needs 'rethinking' so much as a little scepticism as to its very existence. Much as Gillian Rose reconstructed the misrecognition, lack, and negativity that make up the history of Spirit, critical phenomenologies of past art historical writing might serve as prolegomena to any future materialist art history.

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History of Art, trans. Nicholas Huckle, Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2019.) 'Race' need not be the only quasitranscendental ground of symbolic form, though. As suggested in the main text, research aligned with the 'material turn' often takes an oddly positivist attitude towards the reconstruction of culturally specific experiences, in which context Leopold von Ranke's 'wie es eigentlich gewesen' ('as it actually was') is taken to refer to the most *correct* experience of a chapel, an altarpiece, an ex voto, etc., within the immanence of a culture. In this case, the writing of history is an act of empathetic projection that succeeds best when as much critical distance as possible is eliminated between the historian and an original (imputed) horizon of normal usage—that is, unless the writing simply collapses into the historian's own experiential reverie.