

*Erwin Panofsky*

*Three Essays on Style*

*Edited by*  
*Irving Lavin*

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*With a Memoir by*  
*William S. Heckscher*

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# Introduction

*Irving Lavin*

This volume brings together all but one of the papers devoted to the subject of style written by Erwin Panofsky in English after he moved to America, having been dismissed as a Jew from his professorship at the University of Hamburg. The first essay dates from 1934, the year of his immigration; the second was written in 1936, the third in 1962.<sup>1</sup> Despite their chronological spread, and apart from their relative unfamiliarity even to art historians, the three contributions have in common several distinguishing features within Panofsky's vast scholarly legacy. The qualities they share reveal essential, if unexpected, aspects of Panofsky's sensibility, both intellectual and personal. To begin with, the subjects differ radically from the methodological formula commonly associated with Panofsky in his later years, that is, iconology, narrowly defined as the analysis of subject matter in art. These essays are all about style, its character, its geography, and its history. Panofsky seeks to describe the visual symptoms endemic, as it were, to works of a certain period (Baroque), medium (film), or national entity (England), and to assess the significance of those symptoms in a larger, conceptual frame of reference. Style—the “visualness” of the visual arts—is, after all, the key issue in the legitimization of art history as an autonomous field of inquiry.<sup>2</sup> In this enterprise he was following in the footsteps of the preceding generation, which had laid the foundations of the modern discipline devoted to the nature, significance, and history of visual expression, and employing distinctive tools of analysis. Conspicuous among these pioneers were Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin, and Panofsky's way of thinking about the problem and many of his observations depend on their insights.<sup>3</sup> Questions of style in art history were still very much in vogue in the 1930s, when the first two essays were written, and remained so for the next twenty years or more. Thereafter, however, style went out of style. Indeed, style became rather a bad word after it was supplanted in the 1950s by the seemingly more concrete and intellectual rewards offered by Panofsky's own methodological trademark, iconology; the socially relevant art history of the 1970s and 1980s followed, to be continued in the multiculturalism of recent years. Only lately have there been signs of a revival of interest in style, and in this sense the essays may be said to possess once again a certain timeliness.<sup>4</sup>

A second common denominator is that all three essays are about matters of principle. Their very titles betray a bold, not to say brash, willingness to grapple with the most fundamental tasks that confront the historian:

in particular, how to make sense out of history by giving it structure and meaning. They deal with essential aesthetic dispositions—the “Baroque” nature of seventeenth-century art, the “filmic” nature of the art of the motion picture, the “English” nature of the art of the British Isles—that manifest the significance of style in different aspects: chronological, technical, ethnic. Panofsky believed that certain formal modes are “proper” to a given medium, that in a given time and place all works of art have certain features in common, despite individual and local variations, and that shifts from one such commonality to another—periodization, in other words—constitute the historical process. In our age of complexity and deconstruction, such an attitude may seem naive, or arrogant, or both. Yet, with training and experience (and a lot of mistakes, to be sure) art historians tend to be able to appreciate, date, and localize works of art just by looking at them. If we want to know why, we have to turn to the Wölfflins and Panofskys of the discipline for help.

A further point, of special significance with respect to Panofsky’s own development, arises partly from the circumstance that the essays were not intended to be professional academic tracts but were conceived originally as public lectures for nonspecialist audiences, a fact that certainly conditioned both their content (broad topics of general interest) and their form (relatively brief and informal in tone).<sup>5</sup> However, it is also apparent that the choice of subjects and manner of treating them were affected by a particular turn of mind. The problems of style preoccupied Panofsky throughout his life; his first publication after his dissertation was a critique of Wölfflin titled “Das Problem des Stils in der bildenden Kunst.”<sup>6</sup> Reflecting his debt to the preceding generation, his earlier works on the topic are more abstract and theoretical than these very concrete, historical demonstrations, which reflect the mental shift Panofsky experienced after coming to America. The same may be said of his one other post-immigration paper devoted specifically to style, the better-known *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, a lecture published as a separate volume and still in print,<sup>7</sup> in which Panofsky correlates form and structure to a particular mode of reasoning and intellectual discourse. A change is also evident in Panofsky’s approach to his subjects. In the first paper, he identifies and embraces as virtues certain egregious features of a great period style—sentimentality, frivolity, and even humor—that flouted the classical aesthetic canon and offended “serious” critics. In the second, he takes seriously a “frivolous” theme: the artistic development of a new, unabashedly popular, and commercial technique. In the third, he gives a frivolous spin to

an idea that Panofsky had seen become, especially in his native country, deadly serious: the definition of the inherent character of a millennial national culture, the “genius” of a people. All these passionately felt and enchantingly devised arguments entail ironic inversions of conventional attitudes that might be expected from a traditional German historian of medieval and Renaissance art.

It is important to bear in mind in reading these essays that matters of style are central to many of Panofsky’s other interests, such as proportion theory, perspective, even Galileo and the “design” of the planetary orbits.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the subjects dealt with here also come up in other contexts: Dürer and the technique of engraving, national and period styles in German Romanesque sculpture, and early Netherlandish painting.<sup>9</sup> The role of style in Panofsky’s thought is by no means encompassed by the writings devoted expressly to the subject.

Finally, before considering the essays individually, we may take note that two of them are the only occasions where Panofsky ventured into the domain of modern art: film and commercial design, the former in extenso, the latter en passant.<sup>10</sup>

Periodization is the underlying theme of the first work, whose significance may be gauged by the remarkable fact that the standard history of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Italian art, Rudolf Wittkower’s *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600–1750*, first published in 1958, constantly refers to the Baroque but never seeks to define the term or describe the general characteristics of the period that justify its use. The book is a magnum opus of erudition and art-historical perspicuity, and this conceptual silence bespeaks a certain shyness in the field as a whole with regard to what might be called high synthesis. The truth, I fear, is that while our knowledge of the Baroque has increased exponentially in the last half century, our understanding has not kept pace. What is Baroque, anyway? Many of us—and especially the specialists among us—if pressed to respond to that challenging question, would probably sputter, gasp, and take refuge in the formulations provided by our heroic pioneer, Heinrich Wölfflin, in his *Principles of Art History* (1915). But Wölfflin was defining the first principles of a new discipline, whereas we are professional practitioners, too sophisticated, perhaps, to discuss first principles. Whatever the reason, I believe that one of the most important, and fundamentally new, contributions to the topic since Wölfflin is

contained in the lecture by Panofsky entitled "What Is Baroque?," which was written in 1934 and presented often for many years thereafter.<sup>11</sup> Panofsky never published the piece and ultimately came to regard it as obsolete.<sup>12</sup> I sometimes wonder, in fact, whether "What Is Baroque?" was one of those papers that, as I have heard, Panofsky deliberately withheld from publication in order to have something available for the flood of guest lecture invitations he received. A mimeographed text, evidently transcribed from Panofsky's typescript by a student at Vassar, where he gave the lecture at the conference in 1935, has always been available in various libraries, which is how I first encountered it when I was a graduate student at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts in the early 1950s.<sup>13</sup>

I have long thought that the text should be published, despite its shortcomings, and the author's misgivings, partly because it documents a distinctly "transitional" phase in Panofsky's own development—elegant English even at that early date in the American half of his life, yet with traces of the long, complicated Germanic periods that, as he later astutely observed, the need to adapt to Anglo-Saxon usage expunged from his prose style. More important, however, Panofsky's way of considering a perennial and quintessentially art-historical problem from a broad, interdisciplinary point of view makes the essay particularly consonant with current attitudes in the discipline. Indeed, because of this method, the implications of Panofsky's response look well beyond the narrow purview of his question.

To comprehend the significance of the substance of Panofsky's argument, it should be recalled that Wölfflin's analysis is based on a fundamental dichotomy between two opposing formal systems, classic and Baroque. The essence of his concept lies not only in the five antinomic components of the contrasting systems, but also in the notion that they are not temporally fixed; they represent immanent, immutable poles of perception, between which all artistic vision inevitably oscillates—not for nothing did he call his book *Principles of Art History*.<sup>14</sup> Panofsky also conceives of style and its development in dialectical terms, starting from an underlying dichotomy, an interior discrepancy he found embedded in the art of the early Renaissance. There was on the one hand a renewed interest in antiquity, and on the other hand a quite nonclassical interest in naturalism—epitomized by the importation to Florence and influence of Hugo van der Goes's Portinari altarpiece; there was on the one hand mathematical perspective, and on the other hand a persistent

Gothicism evident in the tendency of forms to cling to the picture plane. The great masters of the High Renaissance managed briefly to reconcile this dichotomy into a harmonious balance, which then disintegrated in the battlefield of contradictory forces, the everlasting tension, that pervaded mannerist culture. The burning of Giordano Bruno, Panofsky said, was an emphatically mannerist occurrence. In the Baroque, there was again a reconciliation. The conflicts and contrasts between plastic and spatial tendencies, ideal beauty and reality, neopagan humanism and Christian spiritualism, while still subsisting, began to merge. The merger was now in a new sphere, however, not in the harmonious balance and classical unity of the High Renaissance, but in highly subjective feelings, a picturesque play of light and shadow, deep, irrational space, and melting expressions. Panofsky described the Baroque as the paradise of the High Renaissance regained, but haunted and enlivened by the intense consciousness of an underlying dualism. The essence and novelty of the Baroque lies precisely in this twofold reconciliation of forces—an overwhelming feeling of subjective excitement, and an awareness of that feeling. While the hearts of seventeenth-century people quiver with emotion, he says, their consciousness stands apart and “knows.” The experience of many conflicts led to a kind of awakening. The Baroque, therefore, is not the decline of the Renaissance—at the time he wrote the paper, Panofsky later recalled, “the word ‘Baroque’ was still employed as a term of opprobrium in the Anglo-Saxon countries”<sup>15</sup>—but its climax: culture’s inherent conflicts were overcome, and not by smoothing them away but by realizing them consciously and transforming them into productive energy. (This definition of cultural progress in terms of psychological conflict recognition and resolution sounds remarkably like an art-historical transfiguration of Freud. I am aware of no evidence connecting Panofsky to Freud or psychoanalysis, however.)

On the phenomenological level, Panofsky had little that was new to say about the manifestations of the historical evolution. His readings of the ingredients of Renaissance art—classical revival, new naturalism, lingering medievalism, the anxiety of early mannerism, the formulaic quality of later mannerism (now called the *Maniera*), the return around 1600 to naturalism, classicism, and the High Renaissance—were “in the air” by 1934:<sup>16</sup> indeed, I suspect that this element of “cooptation” may have been one of the reasons he never developed the talk for publication.<sup>17</sup> Two such borrowings interest me particularly as a student of Bernini: Panofsky’s thoughts on the frontality



of Baroque sculpture and the modernity of caricature reflect recent, pioneering studies by the then bright new star on the art-historical horizon, Rudolf Wittkower.<sup>18</sup>

Panofsky's contribution was to bring together these myriad, more or less isolated observations, reformulate them in his own image, and integrate them, via the process of contrast and reconciliation, into a coherent argument. The result was a comprehensive view that encompassed and gave focus to the entire development of European art from the Renaissance to the mid-nineteenth century (the death of Goethe, as he put it). Panofsky's view of the Baroque as part of one continuous arc of Western development that ended only with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of mass culture, anticipated much recent historical thought. Contemporary thinkers also share this reference to economic and social forces as effecting historical change. But it is striking and symptomatic of the particular way in which he perceived the contemporary relevance of his own work that he ends his talk with an ironically brooding observation: that the unknown God or Devil who brought an end to the humanistic tradition of the Renaissance threatens the very existence of humankind in our own time.<sup>19</sup>

On the level of principle, it is clear that Panofsky's process of thesis versus antithesis followed by synthesis was a Hegelian transfiguration of the bipolar principles of Riegl and Wölfflin. But there are three essential differences. First, Panofsky's principles were not purely formal modes, like Riegl's tactile and optic values, or Wölfflin's closed and open form; and they were certainly not aesthetic categories related to quality judgments or taste. Concepts like classical antiquity, Gothic and mannerism, balance and harmony versus tension and conflict, while they evoke or correspond to distinctive formal traits, are deeply embedded in the fabric of human society: war, religion, science, psychology, even—in the case of the Baroque—that special form of wit to which Panofsky here accords the name "humor." And unlike interpreters who sought to instrumentalize the Baroque in terms of such notions as theatricality, or the Jesuit Counter Reformation, Panofsky's categories are ultimately inseparable from the entire gamut of apparently coincidental cultural values and social responses that used to be called the spirit of an age, the *zeitgeist*.<sup>20</sup> Second, Panofsky's polarities are not independent categories of perception and thought—timeless, built-in structures of the mind. Instead, they are specifically timebound, historical conditions whose manifestations

are determined by, or are at least consonant with, other domains of contemporary meaning and experience. And third, whereas Wölfflin had focused on the polar extremes between which our modes of perception inevitably ebbed and flowed, Panofsky was concerned with an evolutionary process embodied in the interaction between antipodes to create a sequence of more or less complete syntheses that differed profoundly from one to the next.

However insightful and stimulating many of his individual observations about works of art may be, and however grand and compelling his reconstruction of the developmental and cultural forces at work during the period, the essential originality of the essay lies in what is, in the end, its main theme, the *psychological* interpretation of Baroque style.<sup>21</sup> In Panofsky's view, the Baroque left many valuable and lasting effects on Western civilization, but with this basic yet subtle thought he gave a positive cast even to the very "defects" of the style, such as sentimentality and frivolity. His definition was a penetrating extension into personal, even depth psychology of his notion of the Renaissance as the achievement of individual autonomy and historical distance. In this sense, the Baroque signaled the birth of modern European consciousness. In an unprecedented way, Baroque people were aware of their own feelings, including their own shortcomings, and were prepared to undertake uncompromising examinations of the self, whether through the critical philosophy of Descartes or a satirical portrait sketch by Bernini. Combining in one historical equation the concept of the Baroque with such disparate factors as the analysis of mind, swooning saints, frivolous angels, light and shade, deep space, frontally placed sculptures, and the invention of caricature drawing—all this becomes much more than a scintillating display of associations and ideas: the underlying theme of this "lordly racket," as Panofsky called it, portends nothing less than a new phase in human history.<sup>22</sup> To define an epoch of history in terms of its psychological state, to define the nature of that state as one of *emotional* self-awareness, and to define that emotional self-awareness as peculiarly modern—all this seems to me an unparalleled act of historical imagination and insight.

In the film essay, the interrelation between style and material or technique is at issue. The article was published in three versions: initially in 1936 with the title "On Movies"; again the following year, slightly enlarged and with a new title, "Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures"; and a decade later in the definitive version, extensively revised and expanded and with the

word "Moving" in the title changed to "Motion," when it was described as "one of the most significant introductions to the aesthetics of the motion picture yet to be written."<sup>23</sup> Already reprinted at least twenty-two times, it is by far Panofsky's most popular work, perhaps the most popular essay in modern art history. This unexampled success is the more astonishing given the author's traditional training and otherwise almost exclusive preoccupation with traditional "high" art. In fact, the essay offers a rare, if not unique, instance in which a sensitive and informed "eye- (and later 'ear-') witness" comments extensively on the evolution of a revolutionary new technical invention into a high art. Panofsky himself cites as a comparable innovation in the history of human communication the development of printmaking in the fifteenth century, but we have no comparable analysis of its nature and significance by a contemporary observer.<sup>24</sup>

Panofsky displays an amazing fund of knowledge—of plots, actors, directors, producers, filmic devices—which he obviously accumulated from an early age. He remembered the only *Kino* ("obscure and faintly disreputable") in all Berlin in 1905, when he was thirteen, and he watched the medium develop from its earliest infancy as a technical curiosity to a major international industry of great technical and artistic virtuosity. In this essay, therefore, the private-life experience of an avid moviegoer becomes part of the intellectual armament of a supremely articulate historian and theoretician of art. The circumstances of its origin are of great importance: it was not a formal presentation to a scholarly audience, but a casual talk delivered in 1934 to a group of Princeton amateurs intent on founding a film archive (ultimately one of the greatest in the world) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.<sup>25</sup> Panofsky elsewhere describes himself as having been then a lecturer at New York and Princeton Universities; he had just settled permanently in Princeton, and the following year he was appointed to the nascent Institute for Advanced Study.<sup>26</sup> The occasion marked the rapport Panofsky had established with the liberal-minded, public-spirited, and WASPish social and cultural ambient then in the process of creating the portentous amalgam of European sophistication and American enthusiasm that would establish New York as a new world cultural center of modernism.<sup>27</sup>

The genial, peculiarly American context from which the essay arose is reflected in its original title, "On Movies." This distinctly colloquial American term, which has no real counterpart in other languages,<sup>28</sup> expressed the two essential points of Panofsky's conception of the medium and its develop-

ment, one social, the other aesthetic. Panofsky lays great stress at the outset on the fact that film was first and foremost a medium of popular entertainment, devoid of aesthetic pretension, which reestablished the “dynamic contact between art production and art consumption” that is “sorely attenuated, if not entirely interrupted, in many other fields of artistic endeavor.” The “movies” were a genuine “folk art,” and if they rose to the level of high art they did so largely by never losing their common touch. This unpretentious social aspect of Panofsky’s definition of the film is the substantive counterpart of his choice of the colloquial name for the medium.

The second principle on which Panofsky’s analysis is based corresponds to the aesthetic aspect of his title, movement. The essence of the medium lies in its having given movement to a record of the real world, an observation that, as he admits, seems banal until he states and proceeds to develop his binary definition of the motion picture as the “dynamization of space” and the “spatialization of time.” Although he does not say so explicitly, it is evident that this formulation suggesting an endemic interdependence of space and time, a sort of space-time continuum, owed much to the theory of relativity. An important corollary, however, is the integration of sound into this matrix, the spoken word being fatefully wedded to movement through the device of the close-up. Panofsky defines this sound-movement dimension of the space-time continuum as the “principle of coexpressibility.” Much of the remainder of the essay is devoted to exploring the implications of these principles, including the dangers inherent in disregarding them, much like those attendant upon neglecting the roots of the medium in popular culture.

In the third, final version of the paper two complementary changes were introduced. The trace of colloquialism that remained in the “Moving” of the second title was replaced by the purely formal “Style and Medium in the *Motion* Pictures,” which focuses entirely on the relationship between the technical properties of film and its expressive qualities. In the text, the social characterization retains its place, with some changes in wording at the beginning, but it becomes a kind of prelude to the now greatly expanded section dealing with the nature of the medium itself. The personal chat on a modern form of entertainment was thus transformed into a proper theoretical essay on a form of modern art. Balance is restored, however, in the last paragraphs, which deal with two points that lie at the crux of the matter: film’s relation to society based on its commercial nature, and its relation to physical reality based on its technical nature. The requirement of communicability imposed

by the first relationship and the requirement of realism imposed by the second are the preconditions for style in this uniquely modern medium.

To call the film essay "proper" is rather misleading, however. The title and the content are more ambitious than in the original version, but perhaps the most important quality of the text remained undiminished: the whole argument, full of erudite references to old and new films as well as to works of traditional art, is presented with an impish grace and wit wholly in keeping with the popular nature of the theme as Panofsky conceived it. Panofsky moves between Betty Boop and Buster Keaton with the same breathtaking ease born of intimate knowledge as he does between Albrecht Dürer and the Gothic cathedral. The prose combines the urbanity and entertainment value of the *New Yorker* magazine with the philosophical depth and methodological rigor of a German university treatise. Even in its ultimate form, then, the essay hovers in a sort of genre limbo somewhere between personal reminiscence, high journalism, formal art criticism, and professional art history. From any of these points of view it is a rogue, and it marks the birth of a new literary star—in English, no less!

The Rolls-Royce radiator raised for Panofsky the question of the ethnic component of style. While both the title and the content of the paper are remarkable, still more remarkable is the relationship between the two. Nowadays, the title would suggest something in the nature of a sociological disquisition on the taste and luxury of the English upper class, but one would be disappointed on two counts. The structure of English society is mentioned only incidentally, and the Rolls-Royce is mentioned only in the last, very brief paragraph. The body of the work is an audacious attempt to define the basic principle that inhabits English art, as well as other aspects of English culture, from the early Middle Ages through the nineteenth century. Panofsky again finds an "antinomy of opposite principles," comprising here "a highly subjective emotionalism" that may even be termed "romantic," and "a severely formal rationalism." He relates this bipolarity—as an incidental analogy, not as a causative "explanation"—to the peculiar "fact that social and institutional life in England is more strictly controlled by tradition and convention, yet gives more scope to individual 'eccentricity' than anywhere else."

The fact that Panofsky engaged in this enterprise at all is profoundly rooted in his heritage of continental, especially German art history. Two major books, both by German scholars, had been devoted to the Englishness of

English art, though curiously enough Panofsky does not refer to either of them: Dagobert Frey's *Englisches Wesen in der bildenden Kunst* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1942, 496 pages) and Nikolaus Pevsner's *The Englishness of English Art* (New York, 1956, 208 pages). These works reflect, as does Panofsky's, a long tradition of characterological study, both individual and national, traceable to the eighteenth century and beyond. The pursuit of such ethnic and geographical taxonomies of style in art was a special preoccupation of German scholars of that generation.<sup>29</sup> England evidently presented a particular temptation for them, partly for substantive reasons—its insularity and the pronounced individuality of its artistic traditions—and partly no doubt also for its Anglo-Saxon “snob appeal.” Despite wide differences in their approaches, moreover, all three studies have certain elements in common, methodologically and conceptually. All three perceive and define the essential character of English culture in terms of opposing, though occasionally amalgamated, forces of subjectivity and objectivity, intuition and rationality, romanticism and classicism, naturalness and order, and so forth. All three relate this dichotomy to extra-artistic factors such as the character of Britain's society, geography, and racial mix.<sup>30</sup>

Panofsky's essay differs from its predecessors in many ways, not least being its brevity. To be sure, it was presented in the form of a lecture at the American Philosophical Society, America's oldest and most sedate scientific society.<sup>31</sup> But the vast cultural panorama Panofsky evokes in a series of miraculously encapsulated surveys of English eighteenth-century gardens and architecture, medieval miniature painting, architecture, and literary sources—in that order—is an essential factor in the persuasiveness of his argument. The brilliant concatenation of ideas, illustrations, and texts presented in epigrammatic formulations carries the bedazzled reader with dizzying speed to an abrupt halt before the concluding paragraph. At this point the Rolls-Royce radiator appears, with its severely classical Greek temple-front grille improbably surmounted by the curvaceous romantic windblown Victory of Samothrace, alias the “Silver Lady.” The very incongruity of this design becomes the inevitable epitome, the trademark par excellence, of everything it means to be English. Perhaps the most beguiling aspect of the essay, in fact, is precisely that the climax of an utterly serious and penetrating analysis of a major European culture is, to use Panofsky's favorite word for things ironic but profound, “amusing.”

I hope that two salient characteristics of Panofsky's style, intellectual and literary, will have emerged from this brief consideration of his own discussions of style. The first is that whether the subject is periodization, technique, or geo-ethnicity, Panofsky, unlike his predecessors, is never a pure formalist. Style for him inevitably has an expressive role, and he constantly invokes the subject matter of works of art, their "iconography"—be it the new conception of martyrdom scenes in the Baroque, the narrative possibilities of the animated cartoon, or the "angelic" intricacies of the evangelist portraits in an Irish illuminated book. Indeed, it might be said that Panofsky's primary concern—his ultimate heuristic principle of interpretation—was to illustrate how style or expressive form lends meaning to subject matter, and thus relates the work of art to the full range of extrastylistic factors that condition its creation.<sup>32</sup> After all, this interrelationship between style and meaning lies at the heart of perhaps his most familiar, and still indispensable, historical formulation: that of the Renaissance as having achieved, after the destruction of Greco-Roman civilization, the reintegration of classical form with classical content.<sup>33</sup>

The lapidary prose and especially the potent dose of humor evident throughout these essays are also vintage Panofsky—Panofsky in his American phase, be it noted, for neither of these things can be said of his earlier work in German.<sup>34</sup> Concerning the first point, Panofsky himself described the transformation toward economy of thought and expression entailed by his adjustment to the English language used in his adopted country.<sup>35</sup> What he did not mention is an equally profound transformation of his academic persona. Panofsky's wit had always been irrepressible and legendary, from cradle to grave, as it were; witness the immortal epitaph that he said came to him in a dream after spending an afternoon with his granddaughter:

*He hated babies, gardening, and birds;  
But loved a few adults, all dogs, and words.*<sup>36</sup>

I speak here of the infusion of this personal quality into the normally solemn koine of scholarly discourse. The charm and humor that abound in almost everything he wrote in English were a product of his Americanization. They were his own invention, however, for they were no more native to previous American scholarship in art history than they were to European. And they brought a breath of fresh air to academe, both here and abroad.

## Introduction

1. The first essay is heretofore unpublished; for the publication histories of the other texts see Publication Notes, p. 231 below, and the complete bibliography of Panofsky's writings by H. Oberer and E. Verheyen, eds., *Erwin Panofsky. Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*, Berlin, 1974, 1–17 (copy with addenda by Gerda Panofsky to the present in the library of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ).  
[After the English edition appeared, I learned that a version of the first essay had been pirated and published without authorization in a Spanish translation by R. Cómez, “¿Que’ es el Barroco?,” *Atrio. Revista de Historia del Arte*, no. 1, 1989, 7–20.]
2. It should be emphasized that while he fully appreciated the central importance of connoisseurship, that is, the attribution and dating of works of art on the basis of comparative formal analysis (see his *Meaning in the Visual Arts. Papers in and on Art History*, New York, 1955, 19f.), Panofsky was primarily concerned with the contextual and conceptual aspects of the history of style.
3. On Panofsky's relation to Wölfflin and Riegl generally, see the relevant chapters in M. A. Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca and London, 1984), 36–68, 69–96. Some studies on Panofsky that have appeared since Holly's book include S. Ferretti, *Cassirer, Panofsky, and Warburg* (New Haven and London, 1984), 142–236; D. Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History. Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven and London, 1989), 111–21; J. Lucio de Campos, *Do simbólico ao virtual: a representacao do espaco em Panofsky e Francastel* (São Paulo, 1990); G. Didi-Huberman, *Devant l'image. Question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art* (Paris, 1990); N. F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages. The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1991), 174–89; E. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. C. S. Wood (New York, 1991) (review by J. L. Koerner, “The Shock of the View,” *The New Republic*, 26 April 1993, 32–38); J. Hart, “Erwin Panofsky and Karl Mannheim: A Dialogue on Interpretation,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 534–66; M. Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1993); C. Cieri Via, *Nei dettagli nascosto. Per una storia del pensiero iconologico*, (Rome, 1994) (with extensive bibliography); C. Landauer, “Erwin Panofsky and the Renaissance of the Renaissance,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994): 255–81; B. Reudenbach, ed., *Erwin Panofsky. Beiträge des Symposions. Hamburg 1992* (Berlin, 1994); I. Lavin, ed., *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Views from the Outside. A Centennial Commemoration of Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968)* (Princeton, 1995).
4. After a long absence, style was more or less explicitly the issue in two sessions at the February 1994 meeting of the College Art Association.



5. Panofsky was a vivacious and inspiring speaker, and much in demand. Many of his English-language publications, including virtually all the major ones—*Studies in Iconology* (1939), *Albrecht Dürer* (1943), *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953), *Renaissance and Renascences* (1960, a Swedish lecture series), *Tomb Sculpture* (1964), *Problems in Titian* (1969, posthumous)—were first presented as public lectures, often for “mixed audiences”; this congenial format, for which the number and character of American institutions provided a flood of opportunities, complemented the intellectual and professional transformation that Panofsky himself described (see p. 14). Even so, they are also eminently scholarly contributions and sweeping syntheses like those offered here are rare.
6. *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 10 (1915): 460–67.
7. Latrobe, PA, 1951.
8. “The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles” (originally published in German in 1921), in his *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (cited in note 2 herein), 1–25; on perspective, see note 3 herein; on Galileo, see “Galileo as a Critic of the Arts. Aesthetic Attitude and Scientific Thought,” *Isis* 47 (1956): 3–15.
9. *Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton, 1943), 63ff.; *Die deutsche Plastik des elften bis dreizehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1924); *Early Netherlandish Painting. Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge, MA, 1953).
10. A minor instance, often misinterpreted as signifying a complete lack of sympathy for modern art on Panofsky’s part, was a letter to the editor of *Art News*, in which he corrected the caption giving the Latin title of a painting by Barnett Newman (see *Art News* 60, 2 [1961]: 6), and the ensuing exchange (see *Art News* 60, 3 [1961]: 6; *Art News* 60, 5 [1961]: 6). This episode has been mentioned by K. Michels, “Bemerkungen zu Panofskys Sprache,” in Reudenbach, cited in note 3 herein, 59–69, cf. p. 63f., and discussed at length by B. Wyss, “Ein Druckfehler,” *ibid.*, 191–99.
11. The lecture was evidently composed between November 7, 1934, and May 3, 1935 (see note 13 herein). The talk may have originated as the introductory lecture, titled “General Characteristics and Foundations of Baroque Art,” to a course Panofsky gave at the Institute of Fine Arts on “Principles of Baroque Art” in the spring semester of 1933 (he had come to New York to teach several times before he immigrated; see p. 183), and repeated in the fall of 1936. (I am indebted to Joan Leibovitz of the institute staff for checking Panofsky’s course listings on my behalf.) The subjects of the lectures listed for the second course correspond to those summarized in an undated mimeographed pamphlet in the

library of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University: "Italian Baroque Art. A Syllabus of Lectures given by Prof. Erwin Panofsky. New York University." There is also a twenty-one-page mimeographed bibliography for the course, "NYU Fine Arts 265 Bibliography: Principles of Baroque Art by Erwin Panofsky (Revised by Alice Robinson)." This origin may explain the discrepancy between the generic title and the Italian orientation of the text itself.

12. Panofsky's reticence concerning the lecture, especially in later years, is evident from various references to it in his correspondence. I include here transcriptions of these passages, my knowledge of which I owe almost entirely to the kindness of Dieter Wuttke, who is preparing an edition of Panofsky's letters (abbreviations: WI = Warburg Institute; GC = Getty Center; AAA = Archives of American Art):

April 27, 1935, to Fritz Saxl: "Ich habe hier einen sehr generellen Vortrag über Barock dreimal in Princeton und zweimal in anderen Orten halten müssen." (Here I had to give a very general lecture on the Baroque, three times in Princeton and twice in other places.) (WI)

March 20, 1936, to W. S. Heckscher: "Ein amerikanischer Verleger will eventuell eine kleine Sammlung von 'essays' haben (Vorträge im Stil von 'What is Baroque?' und ältere Aufsätze ad usum Delphinorum), aber Ich glaube, für so etwas bin ich noch nicht alt und bedeutend genug." (An American publisher wants possibly to have a small collection of "essays" [lectures in the style of "What is Baroque?" and older papers useful for students], but I believe I am not yet old and important enough for such a thing.) (GC)

June 22, 1946, to Heckscher: "Concerning Baroque as a style, I can only refer your friend to a forthcoming article by W. Stechow (Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio) but I do not know whether he has already proof prints and would be willing to give them *avant la lettre*. Another impending article by U. Middeldorf (Chicago University) is concerned with the vicissitudes of the term and will certainly be of interest but has not appeared either so far as I know. In the mean time, I am sending along an unpretentious lecture of my own fabrication which you may pass on to Mr. Daniells if *you are sure that he will return it*. I may want to use it again if occasion offers. It is not very good and full of typographical and other errors but he may get some ideas, if only by way of opposition." (GC)

February 17, 1947, to Judith B. Williams, Department of History, Wellesley College: "As for the topic, I am not quite clear whether you are thinking of a general lecture trying to define what baroque art is or of a more specialized subject within the baroque period. Supposing the first of these alternatives to be true, I suggest the title 'What is Baroque?' This is, of course, a rather superficial characterization of the style but might stimulate further reflection. In the alternative case, I could only offer a kind of monographic treatment of the Arkadia theme which is, in my opinion, more rewarding but

has, naturally, not much bearing upon the general question as to how baroque might be defined. (AAA)

January 22, 1951, to Adolf Katzenellenbogen, Vassar: "If my memory does not fail me, an old lecture of mine entitled, 'What is Baroque?' was once mimeographed by your industrious Vassar girls. I wonder if there are still copies around. If so, would it be possible for me to acquire one or two since I lost my own old typescript?" (AAA)

February 19, 1960, to William B. Walker, librarian, Brooklyn Museum: "If memory serves that lecture on the Baroque was delivered at Vassar College about thirty years ago, at a time when the word 'Baroque' was still employed as a term of opprobrium in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and would seem to be pretty much out-of-date after a whole generation of art historians, Americans and others, have devoted so much effort to the exploration of Baroque art. I have heard that some industrious Vassar girl typed and mimeographed the lecture at the time but do not own a copy of this document (if it exists) myself. Thus, if you are not deterred by this note, I should advise you to write to the Chairman of the Art Department at Vassar, Mrs. Agnes Clafin." (AAA)

November 14, 1967, to P. Chobanian, librarian, Ripon College: "I am very flattered by your inquiry about a lecture called 'What is Baroque?' given at Bryn Mawr in 1938. Unfortunately, I am unable to comply with your request for a photoprint of it. The lecture was given thirty years ago, when the term Baroque was not as yet employed in the sense of a definite or at least definable period of art history but merely in a derogatory sense. In the meantime a whole library has been written about Baroque as an art-historical concept so that what made sense and even may have been necessary in 1938 would be entirely superfluous today. For this reason the lecture was never published and I still do not like to have it circulated in writing." (AAA)

13. Notices concerning the Vassar conference, at which Panofsky gave the lecture on May 3, 1935, are preserved in the Special Collections of Vassar College Library; I am indebted to Stephen Ostrow for unearthing this material on my behalf. The mimeographed version is mentioned by F. Hartt, *Love in Baroque Art* (Locust Valley, NY, 1964), 29 (as having been delivered as a lecture at Bryn Mawr in 1938), and C. H. Smyth, "The Department of Fine Arts for Graduate Students at New York University," in C. H. Smyth and P. M. Lukehart, eds., *The Early Years of Art History in the United States. Notes and Essays on Departments, Teaching, and Scholars* (Princeton, 1993), 73-83, cf. p. 76f.

There are a total of four versions of the text: (1) a typescript with autograph revisions, one page typed on the back of a letter to Panofsky dated November 7, 1934 (in the possession of Gerda Panofsky); (2) a clean copy of version

1 with autograph revisions (also with Gerda Panofsky); (3) the mimeographed text (a clean copy of version 2; judging from the letters of 1951, 1960, and 1967, cited in the preceding note, Panofsky himself did not have a complete copy of this version—which bears the subtitle “Summary of a lecture by Prof. Erwin Panofsky,” although it contains the entire text); (4) a version incorporating most of the mimeographed pages, but with extensive deletions and typed additions (with Gerda Panofsky). The present edition is based on the fourth version (see note on p. 19), which I am unable to date precisely, except that it presumably postdates Panofsky’s 1960 reply to the librarian of the Brooklyn Museum in 1960 (see the preceding note). In fact, Panofsky was prepared to include the paper in a series of lectures at the University of California at Santa Barbara in May 1961; learning at the last minute of the loyalty oath required by the University of California, he refused to comply and canceled the engagement. (I owe my awareness of this remarkable episode to Dieter Wuttke, who provided copies of the records in the Archives of American Art; Alexander Sesonske, then professor in the Department of Philosophy, with whom Panofsky corresponded, kindly supplied additional materials from his personal files.)

14. *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* (Munich, 1915) (English edition, London, 1932; reprint, New York, 1950). Wölfflin was by no means unappreciative of the cultural and historical contexts of style, as is evident from the chapter on “The Causes of the Changes in Style” in his earlier work, *Renaissance und Barock* (Basel, 1888) (English edition, Ithaca, 1966); what he sought here was an inner, organic nexus between the specific creative act and such general phenomena. His ultimate purpose was to establish an autonomous structure of stylistic development in a framework of visual perception, or “modes of seeing,” which he called a “psychology of form” (see M. Jarzombek, “De-Scribing the Language of Looking: Wölfflin and the History of Aesthetic Experientialism,” *Assemblage* 23 [1994]: 29–69).
15. See the letters of 1960 and 1967 cited in note 12 herein.
16. See p. 6 and p. 207, note 2.
17. He referred to the lecture variously as “sehr generell” (1935), “unpretentious” and “not very good and full of typographical and other errors” (1946), “a rather superficial characterization of the style” (1947), “out-of-date” (1960), “superfluous today” (1967); see note 12 herein. Panofsky was given to such self-deprecating remarks, but in this case I think they signify more than simple modesty.
18. See p. 45 and pp. 84–88 below.

19. The very last phrase of the text, “provided that it [our epoch] does not put an end to all generations to come,” was added in the fourth version (cf. note 13 herein). For Panofsky’s views on the relationship between the active and contemplative life, see his “In Defense of the Ivory Tower,” *The Centennial Review of Arts & Science* 1 (1957): 111–22, and the observations in my “Panofsky’s History of Art,” in I. Lavin, ed., *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (cited in note 3 herein).
20. W. Weibel, *Jesuitismus und Barockskulptur* (Strasbourg, 1909); W. Weisbach, *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation* (Berlin, 1921); H. Tintelnot, *Barocktheater und barocke Kunst. Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Fest- und Theaterdekoration in ihrem Verhältnis zur barocken Kunst* (Berlin, 1929). Other interpretations of the Baroque include relating the style to the emergence of the modern state (C. J. Friedrich, *The Age of the Baroque 1610–1660* [New York, 1952]) and the classical tradition of rhetoric (see *Rettorica e barocco. Atti del III congresso internazionale di studi umanistici* [Rome, 1955]).  
For a helpful survey of literature on the Baroque generally, see D. A. Carozza, *European Baroque. A Selective Bibliography* (Norwood, PA, 1977).
21. H. Bredekamp has observed (see “*Ex Nihilo*: Panofsky’s Habilitation,” in Reudenbach, cited in note 3 herein, 31–51, cf. p. 44) that Panofsky specifically lamented Wölfflin’s progressive tendency to exclude psychological factors in art (“Heinrich Wölfflin [Zu seinem 60. Geburtstage am 21. Juni 1924],” reprinted in Oberer and Verheyen, cited in note 3 herein, 45–48, cf. p. 46). Panofsky’s notion of psychology in this context involved consciousness, emotional states, and so forth, as distinct from Wölfflin’s concern with perception (note 14 herein).
22. Panofsky’s concrete, humane, sympathetic, and modern evaluation of the Baroque contrasts markedly—and I sometimes think deliberately—with that of Walter Benjamin who, while he also saw the Baroque as the beginning of the modern era, interpreted the style pessimistically as a kind of paroxysm of allegory, and essentially degenerate. In 1927 Panofsky had read and disapproved of the section on Melancholy, much indebted to the recent work on the subject by Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, in Benjamin’s famous study of German Baroque drama, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerpiels* (The Origin of the German Tragic Drama), (London–New York, 1977); W. Kemp, “Walter Benjamin und die Kunstwissenschaft. Teil 2: Walter Benjamin und Aby Warburg,” *Kritische Berichte*, III, 1975, 5–24; M. Brodersen, “Wenn Ihnen die Arbeit des Interesses Wert erscheint . . . Walter Benjamin und das Warburg-Institut: engine Dokumente,” in H. Bredekamp, M. Diers and C. Schoell-Glass, eds. *Aby Warburg. Akten des internationalen Symposions. Hamburg 1990* (Hamburg, 1990), 87–91; and see the perspicacious introductory essays by C. Cases, in *Walter Benjamin. Il drama barocco tedesco* (Turin, 1980), and R. Solmi, in *Walter Benjamin. Angelus Novus. Saggi e frammenti* (Turin, 1995).

23. See “On Movies,” *Bulletin of the Department of Art and Archaeology of Princeton University* (June 1936): 5–15 (the date is mistakenly given as 1934 in some sources); “Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures,” *Transition* 26 (1937): 121–33, and “Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures,” in D. L. Durling, *A Preface to Our Day* (New York, 1940), 57–82; “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures,” *Critique. A Review of Contemporary Art* 1 (1947): 5–28 (the evaluation I quote is from the editors’ preliminary note).
24. Perhaps the nearest analogy is the twelfth-century Abbot Suger’s commentary on the new Gothic architecture at St.-Denis, a text Panofsky had published in his celebrated edition, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures* (Princeton, 1946), the year before he revised the movie essay. The connection is not as farfetched as it may seem and, curiously enough, the link may have been the *New Yorker* magazine. In his memorial, reprinted in this volume, William Heckscher has pointed to the stylish *New Yorker* profile genre as an inspiration for Panofsky’s biographical essay on Suger (see p. 186 below), and Panofsky himself makes reference to the *New Yorker* in his study of the film (see p. 102 below).
25. As noted by D. Talbot, ed., *Film. An Anthology* (New York, 1959), 15. Margaret Scolari Barr, wife of Alfred H. Barr, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, was a student in Panofsky’s first seminar in America (see the eulogy by Millard Meiss in *A Commemorative Gathering for Erwin Panofsky at the Institute of Fine Arts New York University in Association with the Institute for Advanced Study* [New York, 1968], 9), and they remained lifelong friends. Heckscher (see p. 188f. and p. 222, note 12 below) provides some personal reminiscences of Panofsky on the movies, including his delight during 1946–47 in giving the talk (evidently the newly revised version), followed by a showing of a silent film such as Buster Keaton’s *The Navigator* with comic commentary.
26. Panofsky recounted the facts and repercussions of his move to America in “Three Decades of Art History in the United States. Impressions of a Transplanted European,” in his *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (cited in note 2 herein), 321–46, cf. p. 321f.; see also Heckscher (see pp. 183–85 below); and now C. H. Smyth, as in note 13 herein.
27. Panofsky expresses his appreciation of this peculiarly American urbanity in his autobiographical essay, cited in the preceding note. On the importance for Panofsky of the intellectual environment of Princeton at that time—especially the emphasis on a broad, interdisciplinary approach to cultural history, which he must have found very congenial—see the contribution of C. H. Smyth, “Thoughts on Erwin Panofsky’s First Years in Princeton,” in Lavin, ed., *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (cited in note 3 herein).

28. The popular German coinage “Kino” refers to the theater, not the film itself; the equally colloquial English “flick” refers to the effect of light, rather than of movement, which was Panofsky’s primary concern.
29. The tradition is far from obsolete. Albeit in different contexts and guises, the effort to characterize ethnically and geographically defined styles might be said to underlie recent works such as M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy. A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford, 1972), and S. Alpers, *The Art of Describing. Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago, 1983); and it continues to pervade the current preoccupation with multiculturalism.
30. On this last point, it is curious to note that Pevsner (p. 9) praises Frey’s book as being “absolutely free” from any “Nazi bias,” whereas by the time the work was published Frey had participated in the plundering of the Royal Castle at Warsaw. See J. Lileyko, *A Companion Guide to the Royal Castle in Warsaw* (Warsaw, 1980), 84; further, H. Dilly, *Deutsche Kunsthistoriker 1933–1945* (Munich and Berlin, 1988), 73; L. H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa. The Fate of Europe’s Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World* (New York, 1994), 74f., reports that Frey opposed the destruction of the castle.
31. Philadelphia, November 8, 1962.
32. In his canonical introduction to *Studies in Iconology* (New York and Evanston, 1962), 3–31, Panofsky places style at the *primary* or *natural* level of the interpretation of the work of art, in that style (expressive form) is the means through which we recognize the meaning of motifs. On the relation of style to “iconography” and “contextualism” in Panofsky’s art history, see Holly, as in note 3 herein, *passim*; also my “Iconography as a Humanistic Discipline. (‘Iconography at the Crossroads’),” in B. Cassidy, *Iconography at the Crossroads* (Princeton, 1992), 33–42, and “Panofsky’s History of Art” (cited in note 19 herein).
33. *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm, 1960).
34. It is certainly “amusing” in the Panofskyan sense that the one explicitly humorous work he wrote in German is one of his few publications (all memoirs of former friends and colleagues) in his native language after he emigrated, in a Festschrift devoted to his beloved teacher Adolph Goldschmidt, entitled “Goldschmidts Humor” (*Adolph Goldschmidt zum Gedächtnis. 1863–1944*) (Hamburg, 1963), 25–32. The early essay “Sokrates in Hamburg oder Vom Schönen und Guten” hardly counts in this respect since it was published under the pseudonym A. F. Synkop, in a literary rather than a scholarly journal

(*Querschnitt* 11 [1931]: 593–99; reprinted in *Idea. Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle* 1 [1982]: 9–15).

35. See his “Three Decades,” cited in note 26 herein. The transformation of Panofsky’s language has been perceptively discussed by Michels, cited in note 10 herein.
36. Hugo Buchthal, recalling Panofsky as a teacher in Hamburg, stressed his warmth, generosity, and keen sense of humor in the commemoration cited in note 24 herein, 11–14; the epitaph was reported by Harry Bober in the same publication (see p. 20). Panofsky’s personal qualities, as well as his intellectual gifts, are evoked in every memorial of him (for a list see H. van de Waal, “In Memoriam. Erwin Panofsky. March 30, 1892–March 14, 1968,” *Mededelingen der koninklijke nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde* 35 [1972]: 227–44, cf. pp. 242–44).

### What Is Baroque?

1. The first four paragraphs were added in the fourth version of the paper (see pp. 204–5, note 13 above). Here Panofsky’s typescript contains a footnote reference to a review by A. Castro of L. Pfandi, *Historia de la literatura nacional española*, in *Revista de filología española* 21 (1934): 66–77, in which this etymology is briefly discussed on p. 76. Much more detailed studies of the various theories of the derivation of the term will be found in O. Kurz, “Barocco: storia di una parola,” *Lettere italiane* 12 (1960): 414–44; B. Migliorini, “Etimologia e storia del termine ‘barocco,’” in *Manierismo, barocco, rococò: concetti e termini. Convegno internazionale, Roma 21–24 Aprile 1960* (Rome, 1962), 39–54 (Accademia nazionale dei lincei. Anno CCCLIX, 1962. Relazioni e discussioni); E. Battisti, “Riparlando di ‘barocco,’” in M. Fagiolo, ed. *Gian Lorenzo Bernini e le arti visive* (Florence, 1987), 11–42.
2. There is here evidently a lapse, or rather inversion, of Panofsky’s fabled memory. Wölfflin did not in fact omit Tintoretto, whom he discusses at several points, but he did treat the artist as representative of the Baroque (*Principles of Art History*, cited on p. 205, note 14 above, cf. pp. 77, 210f.). The exception proves the rule! Panofsky reiterates a standard critique of Wölfflin, who failed to recognize the nature and autonomy of the development that intervened between the Renaissance and the Baroque, now commonly defined in three phases: mannerism, Maniera, and the antimannerist reaction around 1600. This basic structure had been laid out by Panofsky’s close friend, Walter Friedlaender, in two pioneering studies of 1925 and 1930, published in English as *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting* (New York, 1957), with a helpful introduction by D. Posner; see further the classic essay by C. H. Smyth, *Mannerism and Maniera*