

The Concept of Artistic Volition

Erwin Panofsky

Translated by Kenneth J. Northcott
and Joel Snyder

Translators' note.—“*The Concept of Artistic Volition*” (originally “*Der Begriff des Kunstwollens*” [1920; rpt. in *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft* (Berlin, 1964)] is Erwin Panofsky’s theoretical warrant for a thoroughgoing autonomy of art. It provides the foundation for the method employed by him in all his later work.

According to Panofsky, the inherent or “immanent” meaning of works of visual art can only be grasped by an interpretive act based upon the deduction, *a priori*, of categories that are essential to “the being of the work.” Historical analyses, whether they deal with the intention of the artist (either conscious or unconscious), with the artistic volition of an epoch, or with the effect of a work of art on the original or a modern audience, are essentially extrinsic to the work and are ultimately viciously circular. The discovery of the inherent meaning of an artwork must deal with the formative principle, the *Kunstwollen*, that lies “beneath” the phenomenal appearance of the work and that is presupposed by that appearance. Thus, for example, the intrinsic meaning of a style cannot be grasped by mere description and cataloging, which deal only with externals, but can be reached only through the determination of the formative principles that are the basis of the style. The principles are irreducible and cannot be determined by reference to concepts that apply to the study of other disciplines.

The original German text was couched in that opaque language which German scholars frequently feel necessary if the gravity of their views is to be correctly communicated to their public—perhaps an essay on “scholarly volition”

In a certain way this article represents the continuation of my “*Das Problem des Stils in der bildenden Kunst*” (*Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 10 [1915]: 460 ff), the final paragraph of which is more closely argued here.

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is called for. We have tried to render the text in a form more palatable to those whose native tongue is English; we believe that in so doing we have at no point done harm or injustice to the stimulating ideas set forth in this essay.

* * *

It is the curse and the blessing of the academic study of art that its objects necessarily demand consideration from other than a purely historical point of view. A purely historical study, whether it proceeds from the history of form or the history of content, never explains the work of art as a phenomenon except in terms of other phenomena. Historical study does not draw on a higher source of perception: to explain the artistic production of a particular artist within the framework of his time (or in light of his individual artistic character), it traces a particular representation iconographically, or a particular formal complex according to a history of types, or even tries to determine if such a complex is derived from any particular influence at all. This means that each real phenomenon to be investigated is referred to all the others within the whole complex; their absolute locus and significance is not determined by a fixed Archimedean point outside their essential nature. Even the longest "developmental series" represents only lines which must have their starting and finishing points within such a purely historical nexus.

Political history, conceived of as the history of human action, has to be content with looking at things in this way—and can be content with it. A purely historical study of the phenomenon of action—that is, of the displacement of given contents and not of the moving force which shapes those contents—must be exhaustive; indeed, action so defined resists any but a historical approach.¹ Artistic activity, however, distinguishes itself from general historical activity (and in this sense is like perception) in that its productions represent not the expressions of subjects but the informing of materials, not the given events but the results.

1. Cf. Schopenhauer's beautiful distinction between "deeds" and "works" (*Aphorismen sur Lebensweisheit* [Halle, 1891], cap. 4).

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Thus in considering art we are faced with the demand (which in the field of philosophy is satisfied by epistemology) for a principle of explanation by which the artistic phenomenon can be recognized not only by ever further references to other phenomena within its historical sphere but also by a consciousness which penetrates the sphere of its empirical existence.

This demand is, as we have said, both a curse and a blessing. It is a blessing because it keeps the academic study of art in a constant state of tension, consistently challenging methodological consideration and, above all, reminding us that the work of art is a work of art and not just any arbitrary historical artifact. It is a curse because it introduces an uncertainty and fragmentation into scholarship which is hard to tolerate and because the attempt to discover inherent laws has often led to results which either cannot be reconciled with serious scholarship or which appear to offend the notion that the individual work of art has a unique value. The demand has led to puritanical rationalism in the form of normative aesthetics, to a national or an individual psychological empiricism in the form of the Leipzig School and the numerous theoreticians of the "creative artistic process," to Willhelm Worringer's arbitrary construction, or to Fritz Burger's obscure intertwining of concepts.* It is no wonder that many—and certainly not the worst—have tried to find new methodologies in aesthetics and, becoming skeptical, have seen the only hope of salvation in the purely historical approach.² However it is also not surprising that scholars have appeared on the other side who, through the conscientious use of philosophical critical methods together with the most comprehensive material knowledge, have in spite of all difficulties taken on the task of a "more-than-phenomenal" consideration of artistic phenomena.

The most important representative of this serious philosophy of art is probably Alois Riegl. Because of the time in which he lived, this great scholar found himself faced with the task of securing the autonomy of artistic creation—something which had to be presupposed but which was not recognized in his time—against numerous theories of dependence and above all against the material-technological view of Gottfried Semper. This was necessary before he could direct his attention to the inherent laws underlying artistic activity. Rather than constantly emphasizing factors which determine the work of art—the character of raw materials, technique, intention, historical conditions—he introduced a concept which was to denote the sum or unity of the creative forces—forces both of form and content—which organized the work from within. This concept was "artistic volition."

* By the Leipzig School Panofsky presumably refers here to the work of Emanuel Löwy, Josef Göller, and Cornelius Gurlitt. [Translators' note]

2. See Hans Tietze, *Die Methode der Kunstgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1913).

The concept of artistic volition, perhaps the most timely of all concepts used in the modern academic study of art, is not without its dangers, mostly resulting from its emphasis on psychological volition, an emphasis which can, of course, be explained as a protest against those other theories current in the late nineteenth century which could be called theories of "necessity." For this reason the concept demands, in my view, as much methodological discussion as the equally common and parallel concept of "artistic intention." This latter concept seems to differ from the former only conventionally, that is, according to the way in which it is used. We use the expression "artistic volition" mainly in talking of total artistic phenomena, of the output of a period, a people, or a community, while the expression "artistic intention" is generally used to characterize the individual work of art. We speak of artistic volition in the Renaissance or in the plastic arts of late antiquity or Bernini or Correggio when we think we discern artistic intention in the ordering of certain combinations of lines and planes, the choice of certain color combinations, and the disposition of certain structural elements in an individual work; and we are sure that we are saying something significant about the essentials of artistic phenomena. Yet no unanimity exists about the actual meaning of such an observation, that is, about the sense in which artistic volition or artistic intention can be possible objects of perception in the academic study of art.

I

The most widespread views of the concepts already mentioned (views, incidentally, which are not always consciously accepted by those who hold them but are often set in motion by them *de facto*) are psychologistic and can be divided into three subspecies: (1) an individual, historically oriented interpretation based on the artist's psychology, which identifies artistic volition with the artist's intention or will; (2) a psychological interpretation of a period based upon a collective history, which seeks to interpret the will at work in artistic creation as it was alive in people living at the same period and as it was comprehended either consciously or unconsciously by them; and (3) a purely empirical interpretation based on the psychology of self-conscious perception, which, proceeding from the analysis and interpretation of aesthetic experience, that is, of the processes taking place in the psyche of the beholder savoring the work of art, attempts to determine the tendency being expressed in the work of art by means of the effect which it produces on the beholder.

1

The interpretation most frequently suggested by the usual meaning of the word "intention" (just as by the word "volition") is the one pertaining to the artist's psychology. Such an interpretation regards artistic intention and volition as psychological acts of the historically comprehensible "artist." This view cannot possibly be correct, even if in other cases artistic intention or artistic volition do have an objective content which touches the essentials of what is expressed by art. For on this view Giotto and Rembrandt, for example, are saddled with everything that appears to emerge in their art (whether we are talking of particular principles of composition or of expression) as though they followed from psychologically comprehensible acts of volition.

Since the processes which take place in the artist's psyche are, of necessity, not susceptible to objective study, two possibilities present themselves. The first is that we can determine the artist's real psychological intentions only on the basis of the works before us—and these works for their part can only be explained by these intentions. In this case we have to determine the artist's state of mind from these very works, and in the process of doing so we not only assert things which cannot be proved but we also fall victims to the vicious circle of interpreting the work of art on the basis of perceptions which we owe first of all to interpretation of the work. The second possibility results from the fact that we are, in certain instances, handed down statements by artists themselves who have become aware of their own artistic intentions and reflect on their own works. This knowledge is not of great use to us: it soon becomes evident that the intellectually formed and conscious will of the artist bears little relationship to what seems to emerge for us as the true tendency of the work.

The will, in contrast to the impulse, can only address itself to what is known, to a content that can be "determined," that is, whose distinctive nature differentiates it from other contents. In other words, the act of will always assumes the character of a decision. We can only talk of a "wish" when there is no unified impulse which makes a particular result inevitable, that is, no conflicting aims potentially alive in the subject between which he must choose. Conscious affirmation of particular artistic goals—and thus of a particular art-theoretical view—will thus only be possible for those artists (or epochs) in whom at least one latent tendency opposed to the original creative urge is awakened by a "crucial experience" (for example, by contact with antiquity). It is when different creative possibilities illuminate one another in the artist's mind that he is faced with the necessity of discriminating, evaluating, and making decisions—and is in a position to do so. Thus Dürer theorized but not Grünewald, Poussin but not Velázquez, Mengs but not Fragonard. The

Renaissance theorized first, not the Middle Ages; the Hellenic-Roman period, not the period of Phidias and Polygnotus.³

For this reason every artist's aesthetic views contain, to some extent, contradictions: it is not the original view but the tendency first awakened by the crucial cultural experience—the view more capable of being reflected upon—which finds clearer programmatic expression in the artist's aesthetic theory. Of course, this tendency reflects a certain lack of unity which also appears in the work of a given artist; in the artist's theory it expresses more frequently, more fundamentally, and with postulative validity precisely that tendency which must be called artistically less creative, the secondary tendency, even the one which hampers the artist. Thus we see clearly what the significance of statements by such theorizing artists have for the understanding of their art. It is not as though such statements immediately define the "artistic volition" of the artist in question, they merely document it. Where reflective statements by an artist about his art or about art in general are extant they constitute, like unreflective statements such as we find in Michelangelo's poems or Raphael's letter about the *certa idea*, a phenomenon parallel to his artistic creations; and this can and must be interpreted. They do not, however, explain this creativity in detail. They are the object, not the means, of interpretation in the historical sense.⁴

Likewise, just because some artists who were in harmony with their times and with themselves and who represent a particular artistic possibility made no theoretical observations, we cannot impute to them any conscious intellectual desire to reject other possibilities. What has been said recently is just as untenable historically as it is philosophically: "Polyclitus could have sculpted a Borghesian fighter, and Polygnotus could have painted a naturalist landscape, but they did not do so because they would not have found them beautiful."⁵ In art history there is no question of "being able to," only a question of will. Such a statement is wrong

3. This applies, of course, only to theorizing *about* art. A theory within the practice of art (doctrine of proportion, perspective, or movement) is in principle possible in intellectually homogeneous periods. Leonardo da Vinci has a special position vis-à-vis other artist-theoreticians in that he is less a theorizing artist than an artistically active *Weltbegreifer* ["one who understands the world"].

4. The difference between the principles found in an artist's painting and his writings is particularly evident in Bernini's *Aesthetics*. Bernini's theoretical statements (with very few exceptions, and these less programmatically formulated) represent a completely objectivistic and idealistic point of view. (See in this connection my article in the *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 4 [1919], from which the above statements are, in part, taken.) An equally telling example is Albrecht Dürer's aesthetic theory, which agrees in general with the view of the Italian Renaissance and only betrays Dürer's subjectivistic and individualistic direction at a few points.

5. Gerhart Rodenwald, "Zur begrifflichen und geschichtlichen Bedeutung des Klassischen in der bildenden Kunst: Ein Kunstgeschichtsphilosophische Studie," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 11 (1916): 123.

because a "will" can only be directed toward something which is already known and because, by the same token, it makes no sense to talk of a "nonwill" in the psychological sense of denial (of the *nolle* not the *non velle*), where a possibility which diverges from what is "willed" is inconceivable to the subject in question. Polygnotus did not paint a naturalist landscape not because he would have rejected it as "not seeming beautiful to him" but because he could not have imagined it and could want nothing but a nonnaturalistic landscape—because of a necessity which predetermined his psychological will. Precisely for this reason there is no sense in saying that he more or less voluntarily neglected to paint a different sort of landscape.⁶

2

Objections arise to the concept of artistic intention based upon the psychology of a period. Here too we experience trends or volitions which can only be explained by precisely those artistic creations which in their own turn demand an explanation on the basis of these trends and volitions. Thus "Gothic" man or the "primitive" from whose alleged existence we wish to explain a particular artistic product is in truth the hypostatized impression which has been culled from the works of art themselves. Or it is a question of intentions and evaluations which have become conscious as they find their formulation in the contemporary theory of art or in contemporary art criticism. Thus these formulations, just like the individual theoretical statements of the artists themselves, can once more only be phenomena parallel to the artistic products of the epoch; they cannot already contain their interpretation. Here again this parallel phenomenon would, in its entirety, represent an extraordinarily interesting object of humanistic investigation, but it would be incapable of defining in detail a methodologically comprehensible volition. So, too, the view of art which accompanies a period's artistic output can express the artistic volition of the period in itself but cannot put a name to it for us. This view can be of eminent significance when we are seeking a logical explanation for the perception of tendencies dominating at a given time and thus also for the judgment of artistic volition at that time, which must also be interpreted. However, the perception of what had an effect upon contemporaries, in the sense of a "particular expression," in Heinrich Wölfflin's phrase, and which in their opinion seemed to constitute the artistic intention can never be valued as highly as the insight into the essence of artistic volition, which is objectively

6. Conversely, the establishment of a mere *non velle* would not bring us a step closer to the phenomena.

realized in the works in question.⁷ Even the critical or theoretical statements of a whole period cannot immediately interpret the works of art produced in that period but first have to be interpreted by us together with the work.

3

Judgments based on the self-conscious psychological view of artistic volition—one generally accepted by modern aesthetics—that is, judgments which more or less avowedly relate not to a historical object but more to the impressionistic experience of a modern beholder (or of a majority of modern beholders), have less significance for the artistic intentions realized in the works of art than for the psychology of the beholder making the judgment. Such judgments, related not to a historical fact but to the reflection of it in a modern consciousness (even though they do reveal, in individual cases, a very high degree of refinement of feeling and of intellect), are concerned neither with the work of art nor with the artist but with the psyche of a modern beholder in whom inclinations of personal taste and the prejudices produced by education and contemporary movements are often enough forced to interact with the alleged axioms of rationalistic aesthetics.⁸

7. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1912): 576. In "Problem des Stils" (p. 463 n), I pointed to the fact that such a view of contemporary artistic intentions cannot be the authority for their objective evaluation. The opinion that it is the impression of contemporaries and not our own which is definitive in the evaluation of works of art has recently been defended in a very exaggerated form by Daniel Henry in an article which, by identifying Riegl completely with Worringer, can also lead to misunderstandings ("Vom Sehen und vom Bilden," *Die weissen Blätter* [1919]: 315–22). It cannot be stressed enough that Riegl's views are very much changed—and not for the better—in Worringer's work. When Riegl says, "Every art wishes to represent the world," Worringer says, "Art (as 'organic' art) either wants to represent the world or (as 'abstract') does not wish to represent it." Riegl has thus set aside a concept of "simple nature" which art either imitates or does not imitate and has, in this way, managed to vindicate for every art its own view of the world or its own world of views. That is, he has uprooted the old antithesis between natural art and art which deforms nature. Worringer, essentially, eternalizes this old antithesis, with the exception that he derives the "unnaturalness" of certain styles not from *Nicht-Können* ["being unable"] but from *Nicht-Wollen* ["not wishing to"] and thus arrives at a mixing up of the value accents [*Wertakzente*]. It is precisely in Riegl's sense that we cannot say with Worringer, "this style abstracts from the natural reality"; rather, we would have to say, "the reality of this style does not correspond to our concept of the essence of the natural."

8. As an example of this method we may quote the work of Theodor Lipps, in its own way admirable, which completely links classical, even puritanical evaluations with the apperceptive/psychological attitude (for example, rejection: of plastic groups from independent individual figures; of realistic representation of the eyes in the way antiquity, beginning in Egypt, did by introducing semiprecious stones of paste; of caryatids insofar as such figures do not arise as immediate representatives of tectonic supports, like those of the Erechtheum, etc.). The way in which Lipps justifies this amalgamation of psychological with normative aesthetics is interesting:

II

The inadequacy of the views I have described has to a certain extent counteracted the psychological interpretation of artistic volition. People increasingly hold that the artistic intentions of a work of art have to be separated just as strictly from the state of mind of the artist as from the reflection of artistic phenomena in the general consciousness of the day or even from the impressions the work of art transmits to a contemporary beholder. In short, artistic volition as the object of possible aesthetic perceptions is not a (psychological) reality.

It is no wonder, then, that artistic volition is interpreted as a mere abstraction in the sort of critical investigation that rejects the psychological view, even if only in a passing allusion.⁹ An abstraction is the simplest comprehensible form of the "nonreal" in direct contrast, one might say, to the "real." But the definition of artistic volition as the "synthesis derived from the artistic intentions of a period" does not seem to exhaust the methodological implications of the term, partly because a purely discursive summation of the kind that a "synthesis" produces would subsume under a common, superimposed concept stylistic characteristics which can be determined externally. That is to say, such a summation could lead only to the phenomenological classification of individual styles, not to the discovery of stylistic principles which, underlying all these characteristics, could explain the ontological basis of the style's character according to both form and content. A definition of artistic volition as a conceptual synthesis cannot adequately exploit the possibility of applying this term to works of art which are not confined to an epoch and, especially, to the individual work of art itself. We cannot be satisfied with a purely discursive view of artistic volition as the synthesis of the statements of a particular period (Riegl accepts such a view when he speaks of not only a baroque but a Dutch, an Amsterdam, even a Rembrandtian artistic volition) for we feel that we can determine an "artistic intention" in exactly the same sense in the composition of a single painting, sculpture, or architectural complex. We must be able to characterize

Granting that I can know the conditions for the creation of a feeling of beauty, . . . then I can also readily say which conditions have to be fulfilled and what is to be avoided if the questionable feeling for beauty is to be called into existence. That is, the insight into the actual circumstances is, at the same time, an instruction. What is deceptive about this justification lies only in the fact that every "actual set of circumstances" represents, for its part, a subjective phenomenon determined by thousands of circumstances. An empirical subject's impressionistic experience which is conditioned by taste, education, milieu, movements of the day—or that of a majority of empirical subjects—can never be amenable to a pure science of experience of the sort that apperception psychology is and wants to be. We do not need to go into the fact that the conditions of experience of mankind as a whole could alone form the basis for universal, normative propositions. [*Ästhetik: Psychologie des Schönen und der Kunst*, 2 vols. (1903–1906), 1:2]

9. See Tietze, *Methode der Kunstgeschichte*, p. 13 ff.

artistic volition or artistic intention, on the contrary, as a concept which can be derived immediately from every artistic phenomenon, no matter how limited, whether it be the total creation of a period, a people, or a particular region, the oeuvre of a particular artist, or finally, any work of art at all. Such a concept defines the phenomenal characteristics of the work in question not generically, as discovered by abstraction, but fundamentally, revealing the work's immanent meaning and laying bare the actual root of its being.

This suggests a definition of artistic volition which could, with greater or lesser precision, determine it methodologically insofar as it concerns artistic perception. If the expression does not designate either a psychological reality or an abstract general complex, artistic volition cannot be anything except (and not for us, but objectively) what "lies" in the artistic phenomenon as its ultimate meaning.¹⁰ With this as a starting point, the characteristics of form and content in the work of art can not only be summed up conceptually but can also be explained on the basis of the history of meaning—which is not to be confused with the deceptive generic explanation which the psychologistic view of artistic volition presented to us. For the artistic entity presupposes the use and the determination of the concept of artistic volition, which demands that any interpretation aimed at the inner significance of an artistic phenomenon must comprehend that phenomenon as a unity. Formal and imitative elements (in contrast to Wölfflin's doctrine of the "double root of style") need not be reduced to separable and, for their part, irreducible concepts. They must be understood as different manifestations of a common fundamental tendency, the comprehension of which is precisely the task of the real "fundamentals of art history."¹¹

A comparison from epistemology may help to clarify the significance of this definition. If I take any judgmental proposition—for example, the one made famous by Kant's *Prolegomena*: "the air is elastic"—as given,

10. To take Rodenwald's example we would say in this terminology: "Polygnotus can neither have willed nor been capable of the representation of a naturalist landscape since such a representation would have contradicted the immanent meaning of fifth-century Greek art."

11. When Wölfflin (*Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* [Munich, 1915], p. 18) replies to this by saying that formal development has its own fixed laws (so that the plastic stage has to precede the painterly and not vice versa), we have to agree; except I do not deny that the development of the "modes of representation" follow certain laws, only that the laws governing this formal development are independent of the laws which govern content. The development of the "imitative" comes about with exactly the same degree of necessity as the development of modes of representation and in a completely parallel fashion, so that an epoch, for example, of landscape representation equally presupposes an epoch of purely figural representation, just as the painterly stage does the plastic. And it is precisely this point which has to be reached: that these two sets of laws are recognized as the expression of one and the same principle.

then I can look at it from many points of view. Historically, I can determine the circumstance in which the maxim was uttered or written. Psychologically, I can look at its subjective presuppositions: the functions of cognition, the course of the thought process, and the sort of emotional states from which such a judgment could be made. Grammatically and discursively, I can determine the nature of the proposition as a statement or a question, a conditional or consecutive clause; logically, I can approach it according to its formal criteria, as positive or negative, general or specific, assertory or apodictic. Finally, I can ask whether an analytical or synthetic, an experiential or perceptive judgment is expressed in it. In asking this last transcendental-philosophical question of it, something is revealed that I would call the epistemological essence of the proposition: that which is in it as purely cognitive content apart from its formal logical structure and its psychological prehistory, indeed apart from what the person making the judgment "meant" himself. I can determine that, as it stands, the proposition "the air is elastic" merely contains a judgment in which perceptions are found only in their ordinary relationship, that is, the perceptions are linked only through their simultaneous life in an individual consciousness, not by the pure cognitive concept of causality "in consciousness in general." While I determine this I arrive at the insight that the proposition first of all does not contain an experiential judgment but merely a perceptual one. Its validity is that of a statement about the actual nexus of ideas of air and elasticity in the thinking self making the judgment, not that of an objective, universally valid law, according to which the one view necessarily conditions the other. A validity of this latter sort would, on the contrary, only befit the proposition if we had found that, instead of being linked by ties of psychological coexistence, the two ideas (air and elasticity) had been causally linked into a unity of experience. While I am thus investigating whether or not this is the case (if it had been the case the proposition would have to go something like this: "If I change the pressure on a body of air, that will change its extent"), I can see what has become valid in and by it, without, incidentally, having to compare the proposition with external data. In fact neither considerations of a historical or psychological nature nor a process of subsumption by which I might have compared the formal criteria of the proposition led me to this perception of validity. I was led to it simply and solely by the consideration of the given proposition, a consideration based on the principle of determination (in the form of causality), which decided the "yes" or "no" of the unit of experience and, on an a priori reagent, which caused the object under investigation to reveal a positive or negative relationship about its most intrinsic nature.

Let us now return to the question of the comprehension of artistic intention or volition. Just as a particular epistemological essence belonged to the proposition "the air is elastic" when it was considered in

the light of causality (and only thus), so an immanent meaning can be discovered in the objects of aesthetics in more widely or more narrowly, epochally, regionally, or individually limited artistic phenomena. Thus artistic volition is no longer revealed in only a psychological but also in a transcendental/philosophical sense. This is so if these objects are considered not in relationship to something outside themselves (historical circumstances, psychological prehistory, stylistic analogies) but exclusively in relation to their own being. They must be considered again, however, in the light of standards of determination which, with the force of a priori basic principles, refer not to the phenomenon itself but to the conditions of its existence and its being "thus." They must therefore relate to purely formal classifications of what Wölfflin called "modes of representation" (according to plane, depth, etc.) and to the collective concepts of "plastic" and "painterly" approximately in the same way that causality relates to formal logical hypothesis or the grammatical conditional.

It is certainly the task of aesthetics—going beyond historical understanding, formal analysis, and explanation of content—to embrace the artistic volition which is realized in artistic phenomena and is the basis of all their stylistic qualities. Just as certainly as we ascertained that artistic volition can of necessity only signify a work of art's immanent meaning, so it is equally certain 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. These categories, however, would designate not the form taken by the thought which creates experience but rather the form of the artistic approach. The present essay aims not to undertake the deduction and systematization of such transcendental/aesthetic categories but merely to secure the concept of artistic volition in a purely critical manner against mistaken interpretations and to clear up methodological presuppositions of an activity which is aimed at its comprehension.¹² I do not aim to pursue the content and significance of fundamental concepts of the artistic view beyond these suggestions. Nevertheless the suggestions can indicate how a systematic investigation of this sort will have to proceed.

One final point: once more it seems as if, apart from scholars directly influenced by him, it is Riegl who has come furthest in the creation and use of such fundamental concepts. He has not only created the concept of artistic volition, he has also discovered categories suited to the un-

12. I hope, however, at a later opportunity—perhaps numerous ones—to return to the example alluded to here.

derstanding of the concept.¹³ His concepts of "optical" and "tactile" (a better form is "haptic"), in spite of their continued formulation as psychological and empirical, in no way serve, according to their meaning, as genetic explanations or philosophical subsumptions but aim at revealing a meaning immanent in artistic phenomena. Riegl believes that he can characterize this meaning by relating it, according to circumstances, to two fundamental, externally directed attitudinal possibilities. Thus Wölfflin does not do justice to Riegl's concepts when he declares that the two terms, "plastic" and "painterly," which should be the foundations of his concepts, are merely other names for them.¹⁴ In this way "objectivistic" and "subjectivistic," the pair of concepts developed later as an expression of the possible intellectual attitude of the artistic ego toward the artistic object, are without doubt by far the closest to having categorical validity. Riegl's work on Dutch group portraiture, in which he first uses and develops the concepts of objectivism and subjectivism, can be comprehended and clarified with the help of these concepts.¹⁵ His treatment of an absolutely defined artistic problem reveals the urgency and elasticity of the immanent meaning of artistic phenomena, from a nationally and epochally limited total phenomenon down to the individual work of art of a particular Dutch master. This is in fact to say that these concepts, too, could be further deduced and could certainly completely characterize all artistic phenomena.¹⁶ The line drawn between

13. In spite of several points of contact with Riegl's reasoning, August Schmarrow's conceptual formation, like that of Oskar Wulff who is close to him, is still in principle psychologically and aesthetically oriented.

14. The establishment of a basis for the concepts of plastic and painterly, which have up to the moment only been used with great danger because of their methodological ambiguity, has recently been attempted by Bernhard Schweitzer, "Die Begriffe des Plastischen und Malerischen als Grundformen der Anschauung," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 13 (1918-1919): 259-69.

15. See Riegl, "Das holländische Gruppenporträt," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 23 (1902): 71-278. The concepts mentioned also play an important role in the posthumous publications of Riegl's lecture notes (Riegl, translation with commentary, *Vita des Gio. Lorenzo Bernini* by Filippo Baldinucci, ed. Arthur Burda and Oskar Pollak [Vienna, 1912] and *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom* [Vienna, 1908]), while the earlier work on the later-Roman art industry only operates with the concepts "optical" and "tactile."

16. In making these remarks I of course do not wish to deny that the study of art cannot successfully strive to comprehend the meaning immanent in a work of art without deduction and the use of fundamental concepts which can be founded a priori, to a certain extent without methodological consciousness (just as, conversely, the study aimed at the investigation of meaning, no matter how methodical, certainly never escapes from the danger, at least in the form of expression, of slipping from time to time into the psychological or the historical). Even before Kant recognized the categorical significance of the concept of causality, the deep-seated differences in the forms of judgment were felt and more or less clearly expressed. It is simply that such investigations always lack the certainty with which we have to distinguish the phenomenal, historically or psychologically genetic, from the conceptual. Thus, for example, one of the most beautiful books in the German language, Wilhelm Vöge's *Anfänge des monumentalen Stiles im Mittelalter*, an exemplary in-

the two poles of "objectivism" and "subjectivism" only forms a one-dimensional axis on which not all points of the plane can lie. The others can only be determined negatively with regard to this axis, and, while we recognize them as lying outside it, we must content ourselves with the modest achievement of determining when we have to assume this "outside" according to the particular circumstances. Medieval art or the art of Rembrandt or Michelangelo can, for example, only be characterized by trying to qualify their position—at any given moment a special one—outside the line of objectivism and subjectivism.

It can be freely admitted that an aesthetic of this sort, aimed at the history of meaning, must "listen to artistic objects according to certain concepts fixed from the outset." It is, however, by no means necessary to treat art history merely as "the history of problems" as it was feared it would be treated.¹⁷ Properly understood, a method of the sort which Riegl introduced does no more damage to the purely historical writing of art history, which is directed toward the recognition and analysis of valuable individual phenomena and their relationships, than, for example, epistemology does to the history of philosophy. Assuming the concept of artistic volition to be methodologically justified, the "necessity" which it, too, determines in a particular historical process consists not in determining a causally dependent relationship between individual phenomena which succeed each other in time but in discovering in them (just as in an artistic phenomenon) a unified sense. The intention is not to justify the course of events genetically, as a progression of so-and-so many single happenings, but to undertake to explain the sense of historical meaning as an ideal unity.¹⁸ And if in this case such a transcendental/aesthetic mode of looking at things is being advocated, this is not done in any sense to supplant previous historically oriented writing of art history but merely to secure for this mode a right to stand side by side with it. Far from displacing purely historical work, the method which adopts the history of meaning [*sinnsgeschichtlich*] is the only one competent

vestigation of the difference in essence between Gothic and Romanesque artistic volition, exposes a weakness in the attack because the author, who is not inclined to use the concept of volition in the exemplary interpretation of his examples' meaning, constructs in part historical-genetic relationships between them, which have not stood the test of criticism.

17. Ernst Heidrich, *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Methode der Kunstgeschichte* (Basel, 1917), p. 87.

18. Where Riegl and his disciples seem to be attempting to find something else, that is, a real causal foundation for certain historical processes, there is a question of the inadequacy of terminology which is linked to the fact that Riegl, as I have already mentioned, understood in a *psychological* sense both artistic volition and the concepts developed by him in order to come to terms with it. (In the same way, for example, the terms "*nahsichtig*" ["close-sighted"] and "*fernsichtig*" ["distant-sighted"] which were introduced by him, particularly with reference to Rembrandt's art, are particularly suspicious.) This was a result of his own historical position: he himself could still not completely recognize that he had justified a transcendental philosophy of art which left far behind the purely genetic method which had prevailed until that time.

to complement it, more competent, in any case, than psychologizing, which appears to deepen the historical picture but which in fact only confuses art and artist, subject and object, reality and idea.

III

Artistic volition, as it has been distinguished from both the artist's volition and the volition of his time, can only be grasped by an interpretation of phenomena which proceeds from a priori categories. In the tradition which interprets works of art in words or with the aid of graphic reproductions, there is no immediately acceptable formulation to explain the phenomena directly. In spite of this, traditional "documents" are of the greatest value as heuristic aids for an interpretation of meaning of this sort; indeed, they are often indispensable. They are not, it is true, an immediate indication of the meaning itself; yet they are the source of those insights without which the grasp of meaning is, often enough, impossible.

If we are to establish the epistemological essence of a statement made in a linguistically formulated and textually transmitted form, the first prerequisite has to be that what is said in it, the positive content of the proposition, should be understandable. This understanding can, however, be rendered opaque or hindered by a number of objective and subjective circumstances. The original form of the statement can be distorted by a typographical error, a *lapsus calami*, or by a subsequent correction; an expression which occurs in it can (particularly if we are dealing with an old text) have changed its meaning; and finally, a slip in reading or a *lapsus memoriae* by the reader can make the proper understanding of the proposition impossible. In exact keeping with this, the work of art whose immanent meaning is to be perceived must also be understood, first of all, in the concrete and formal sense of its phenomenal appearance which contains this meaning, and, as was said earlier, this understanding can be hindered. The circumstances capable of causing these hindrances are completely analogous to those already mentioned, insofar as the proper understanding of a work of art [*Kunstdenkmal*] can be interfered with by the same trio of errors or delusions: by errors about the original nature of the object (if objective changes have come about in it); through errors about the original effect of the work (if there has been a general change in the view of art); and finally, through errors about the present nature of the object (if by chance it was misunderstood as to its positive data). Just as the linguistic text can be lost by faulty reproduction or by subsequent correction of its original content, so the work of art, because of some unperceived later changes (rebuilding, painting over, or the inadequate later completion of an unfinished work), can forfeit its objective appearance. Just as a particular

word can have changed its meaning because of a change in linguistic usage and thus have changed the whole tenor of the linguistic proposition, so, too, within the total artistic organism any detail at all can be interpreted in the present completely differently from what it was in the past and so have a completely erroneous formal effect upon us. (We can think, for example, of a plastic work which was originally connected in a particular place with a particular building but which is today conceived as a separate work.) And finally, just as the understanding of the text can be made impossible by a slip in reading or a slip of memory, so, too, the understanding of an artistic phenomenon can be placed in question or disturbed by a material error about its measurement, its color, its material significance, or its intention.

And now we are at the point where the effort to establish the perception of the immanent meaning needs the help of "documents," primarily to secure the phenomenal understanding of the given artistic phenomenon. The documents may correct these objective and subjective delusions, whether they are documentary records, art-critical evaluations, theoretical statements about art, or, finally, pictorial reproductions. The document's corrective function, as can be seen, is threefold. The document is first and foremost corrective if it makes possible the reconstruction of the lost state of a work of art by documentary proof or pictorial transmission. Second, it corrects exegetically when it proves that a change of meaning in the formal components has altered the effect which a work of art has upon us today (whether this correction is expressed in some critical or theoretical form or, even, by a representation which reproduces the object in the sense of a particular artistic impression). Finally, it operates correctively when it moves us to change a false view of the positive data which determine the appearance of a work of art as such, by means of indications which can again be in the form either of written remarks or of pictorial reproduction. What should be added is that the reconstructive or corrective emendation of any artistic view always includes its exegetical correction since the removal of an error about the actual nature of the work of art must, by its very nature, also imply a correction of its impression.

In all of these cases, however (to say it once more and for the last time), the documents secure only the presupposition for the perception of artistic volition, namely, the phenomenal understanding of the artistic phenomenon, no matter whether the documents work reconstructively, exegetically, or correctively. They do not spare us from the effort of trying to perceive artistic volition by going beneath the surface and seeking an immanent meaning in the phenomenon (since artistic volition can only be comprehended by fundamental concepts which are deduced a priori). Aesthetics, in contrast to the history of actions, has not only the task but the possibility of moving forward to such fundamental concepts. These concepts can appear to be established from the outset, and

in this way the comparison with epistemology can appear justified *ex post*. There is a contemporary point of view which stresses too strongly the argument against the theory of imitation, but art is not a subjective expression of feelings or the confirmation of the existence of certain individuals; it is a discussion, aimed at the achievement of valid results, that objectifies and realizes a formative force, using material which has to be mastered.