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Maria Teresa Costa and Hans Christian Hönes (eds)

**MIGRATING HISTORIES OF ART**

Self-Translations of a Discipline

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**DE GRUYTER**

## AMERICAN PANOFSKY

Irving Lavin

The literature on Panofsky, his work and his life, is by now enormous, but I wanted to contribute to this volume because I think – maybe – I have something worthwhile to say specifically about his self-translation, as a scholar and as a human being. And I will tell you why. The answer is implicit in my title, *American Panofsky*, because it is not really proper English, as no doubt you are aware. We do not normally juxtapose an adjective of that kind with a noun of that kind. But the title is very deliberate and it is also metaphorical, and I hope that by the end you will understand what it means and forgive my grammatical transgression.

When we talk about Panofsky in this context, we are talking about one of his most famous writings, called *Three Decades of Art History in the United States. Impressions of a Transplanted European* (ill. 14), which we all know mostly from the republication as an epilogue at the end of his great volume called *Meaning in the Visual Arts*.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the essay was first published with the title *The History of Art* in a volume entitled *The Cultural Migration. The European Scholar in America*, edited by W. Rex Crawford in 1953. It was one of a series of Benjamin Franklin Lectures delivered at the University of Pennsylvania in 1952. The other lectures included, covering a wide range of disciplines, were: Franz L. Neumann, *Social Sciences*; Henri Peyre, *The Study of Literature*; Wolfgang Köhler, *The Scientists in their New Environment*; Paul Tillich *The Conquest of Theological Provincialism*; Rex Crawford, *American thought and Latin-American philosophy*. The authors were all famous scholars in their respective fields, and Panofsky's essay was thus delivered and published in a very distinguished context.

## THREE DECADES OF ART HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES

Impressions of a Transplanted European

Erwin Panofsky



PROFESSOR PANOFSKY AT HIS HOME IN PRINCETON

**E**VEN when dealing with the remote past, the historian cannot be entirely objective. And in an account of his own experiences and reactions the personal factor becomes so important that it has to be extrapolated by a deliberate effort on the part of the reader. I must, therefore, begin with a few autobiographical data, difficult though it is to speak about oneself without conveying the impression of either false modesty or genuine conceit.

I first came to this country in the fall of 1931 upon the invitation of New York University. I was then professor of the history of art at Hamburg; and since this Hanseatic city was always proud of its cosmopolitan tradition, the authorities were not only glad to grant me a leave of absence for one semester but subsequently consented to an arrangement whereby I was permitted to spend alternate terms in Hamburg and New York. Thus for three successive years I commuted, as it were, across the Atlantic. And when the Nazis ousted all Jewish officials in the spring of 1933, I happened to be in New York while my family were still at home. I fondly remember the receipt of a long cable in German, informing me of my dismissal but sealed with a strip of green paper which bore the inscription: "Cordial Easter Greetings, Western Union."

*Professor Panofsky needs no introduction to CAJ readers. His essay here reprinted with only a few minor changes was originally presented as a Benjamin Franklin Lecture at the University of Pennsylvania in the spring of 1952. It was subsequently published in The Cultural Migration: The European Scholar in America, edited by W. Rex Crawford and published in 1953 by the University of Pennsylvania Press, which has graciously permitted CAJ to reprint it.*

7

14 Erwin Panofsky: *Three Decades of Art History in the United States*, in: *College Art Journal* XIV-1/1954, p. 7

There is, of course, a great literature about the phenomenon of immigration of intellectuals from Germany both before and especially following the expulsion of Jews from the universities and other state institutions in 1933. Art historians, more specifically, have extensively reflected on the impact of this migration for the discipline. I will mention here only three: Karen Michel's very perspicacious book *Transplantierte Kunstwissenschaft. Deutschsprachige Kunstgeschichte im amerikanischen Exil* (1999) approaches the topic of this volume probably most directly.<sup>2</sup> Colin Eisler, himself born in Ham-

burg (1931) but educated at Yale and Harvard, thus having a personal familiarity with the German language and culture and many of the émigrés, wrote a long and admirable survey of the work of the leading immigrant art historians in the United States, *Kunstgeschichte American Style. A Study in Migration*.<sup>3</sup> Most recently, Andreas Beyer published a magisterial study of Panofsky, *Stranger in Paradise. Erwin Panofsky's Expulsion to the Academic Parnassus*, to which I fear I can add nothing, or little.<sup>4</sup>

### **'HITLER IS MY BEST FRIEND [...]'**

What I have to say about Panofsky can be summarized in one sentence: it has not been noted that Panofsky was, as far as I can see, the only émigré to write about what he *learned* in America. All the other immigrants wrote, or were written about what they achieved in America, as they properly should: how else could the range and depth of their contribution to American culture be fully grasped? By contrast, there is actually nothing about what Panofsky himself achieved in his essay. The most notable statement about his own person is in the essay's subtitle: *Impressions of a transplanted European*. This phrase alone conveys the essence of his meaning, with his usual verbal acumen. He was uprooted from one culture and took root in another.

The other migrants in one way or another normally expressed their appreciation that they were accepted and often vigorously sought after, because many of them were very famous. This point is especially true of the art historians who came to the Institute of Fine Arts, the Graduate Department of Art History, New York University, founded at exactly that moment, 1932, by a most amazing man, Walter W. S. Cook, who occupies a seminal place in our history. It was he who said: 'Hitler is my best friend, he shakes the trees and I collect the apples.'<sup>5</sup> And so he did. Under Cook's aegis as Director a remarkable series of stellar German art historians came, some passing through, some remaining – that variety was in the nature of the place, and that is what made it great. Virtually overnight the Institute became, in my mind, the greatest art historical academic institution in the world.

Panofsky begins his essay with three brief personal paragraphs describing, as he thought proper, his life in the United States following his dismissal from the University of Hamburg, along with that of all Jewish officials from German universities, in the spring of 1933.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of these paragraphs was to confess that his own experience was from the outset not typical since he soon obtained privileged positions at prestigious institutions, the Institute of Fine Arts in New York, Princeton University, and finally at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton (the first and third then *in statu nascendi*). While he was of course deeply grateful for having been treated as a guest rather than a refugee, he regretted not having had much contact with undergraduate students. Only in these autobiographical paragraphs does Panofsky write, as said, in the first person sin-

gular. Subsequently the text is almost exclusively in the third person representing the immigrant in general.

There follows a brief survey of art history in Europe, especially Germany, until the great catastrophe, to reach the following, stunning conclusion: '[...] in the 1930s the German speaking countries still held the leading position in the history of art – except in the United States of America'.<sup>7</sup> He then embarks on a long disquisition on the history of art in America, which originated 'as the private hobby of such men of letters as Henry Adams (1838–1918) and Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908)', with no relationship to what was happening in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Panofsky also explains, as no one ever had, why the work of the founding fathers of American art history – Allan Marquand, Charles Rufus Morey, Frank J. Mather, Arthur Kingsley Porter, Howard Crosby Butler, Paul Joseph Sachs – was innovative and important. As pioneers of a new discipline they were not followers of an established tradition. They came from different fields: classical philology, theology, philosophy, literature, architecture, collecting. To give just two examples: Allan Marquand, the scion of one of the Captains of the American railroad system, studied philosophy at the newly founded Johns Hopkins University (1876), the first American university to adopt the German academic tradition combining teaching and research.<sup>9</sup> He obtained his Ph.D. there under the great logician Charles Sanders Peirce, with whom he later designed the first mechanical logical calculating machine, the ancestor of the modern electronic computer.<sup>10</sup> The machine still exists, housed in the Princeton Art Museum. He began teaching art history at Princeton in 1883, became chairman of the department in 1906 and founded (and funded) the famous Marquand Art library. Allan Marquand was also an important art historian with a vast bibliography of studies on ancient, medieval and Renaissance painting, sculpture and architecture. Particularly innovative and comprehensive were many volumes, including ample archival documentation from the Florentine archives, on the Della Robbia family of sculptors, which recovered the art of terracotta sculpture and especially polychrome glaze technology.<sup>11</sup>

In 1917 Charles Rufus Morey, then chairman of the Princeton Department of Art and Archaeology, founded what became a vast, indispensable database of medieval art in all media, the Index of Christian Art.<sup>12</sup> Many thousands of works are organized and illustrated according to the text of the bible, along with systematic descriptions of the scenes represented. This taxonomy of images made it possible to find and compare many examples of a given subject and so to identify, localize and trace the development of centers of production, or schools. On this basis, a Princeton professor, Earl Baldwin Smith, produced a major, pioneering monograph on a very early group of ivories from the south of France.<sup>13</sup> Be it noted that the underlying concept of iconography had nothing to do with meaning. The system distinguishes between the Annunciation from the left and from the right, but gives no indication what the difference might signify. I remember once in Oxford I was taken to see John Davidson Beazley's index of Greek vase paintings, which is a systematic illustrated listing of all the subjects on Greek vase paintings,



in this sense just like the Index of Christian Art. The difference is that only the subjects are inventoried, with no description of the scene and no indication of what subject is represented where on the vase. No notion of the vase as a work of art. By contrast, meaning is exactly what interested Panofsky, as signaled in the title of the book in which his impressions of America were finally published. To connote the difference he needed an appropriate title for another of his epoch-making books, a dazzling panoramic display of a powerful conceptual methodology new in America, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (1939).<sup>14</sup>

Morey was a medievalist who wrote extensively about manuscript illumination, and he was a major figure in the history of the Institute for Advanced Study as an advisor on the nascent School of the Humanities (later School of Historical Studies) to Abraham Flexner, the Institute's founding Director. He helped Flexner to try a new method of research methodology by appointing a group of professors who were essentially in the same field but focused on different aspects of it, so that they could work cooperatively. They chose the quintessential ancient locus, Athens, and the first appointments were in archeology, epigraphy, history, and philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Morey also urged Flexner to appoint the immigrant Panofsky to the Institute faculty in 1935, partly so that he might also teach at the university.

The College Art Association, founded in 1911 as a professional organization comprising the art departments of American colleges and universities, therefore included both historians and teachers of art. This amalgam was formalized in 1913 with the foundation of the *Art Bulletin*, devoted not primarily to scholarship but to art practice, education and educational methods. 'American art history evolved into an autonomous discipline from the beginning of the twentieth century, and after the First World War [...] it began to challenge the supremacy, not only of the German-speaking countries, but of Europe as a whole.'<sup>16</sup> A watershed came in 1923 when the Bulletin became predominantly scholarly, and in time 'the leading art historical journal in the world'. With the advent of Fascism in Germany, however, and the Exodus of the Jews, everything changed, dramatically, overnight: 'The immigrant scholar', Panofsky says, 'was amazed that he could order a book at the New York Public Library without being introduced by an embassy or was vouched for by two responsible citizens; that libraries were open in the evening, some as long as until midnight, and that everybody seemed actually eager to make material available'.<sup>17</sup> When I studied in New York in the 1950s I frequently worked at the New York Public Library. It is certainly one of the great libraries of the world in every imaginable field, founded with private money in the good old American way, including the proviso that anyone can go there anytime; in my time it was closed one day a year, on Christmas Eve.

Panofsky declares that 'what made the greatest impression on the stranger [...] was this: where the European art historians were conditioned to think in terms of national and regional boundaries, no such limitations existed for the Americans': And, read:

‘[They] either unconsciously yielded to, or consciously struggled against, deep-rooted emotions which were traditionally attached to such questions as whether the cubiform capital was invented in Germany, France, or Italy, whether Roger van der Weyden was a Fleming or a Walloon, or whether the first rib-vaults were built in Milan, Morienval, Caën, or Durham; and the discussion of such questions tended to be confined to areas and periods on which attention had been focused for generations or at least decades. Seen from the other side of the Atlantic, [...] the American art historians were able to see the past in a perspective picture undistorted by national and regional bias, so were they able to see the present in a perspective picture undistorted by personal or institutional *parti pris*’.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, three quarters of the essay are devoted to this kind of appreciation of the intellectual life and stimulation he found in America. This was the fertile soil, in which he took root. The fourth portion is devoted to a comparative analysis and evaluation of the academic structures in American and German universities, which, not being devoted specifically to art history, I will not discuss except to note that he thought both had advantages and both had disadvantages.

### **TRANSFORMATION OF LANGUAGE, TRANSFORMATION OF ACADEMIC PERSONA**

I will conclude with one of the American Panofsky’s most important considerations, the beneficial effects of having to learn English:

‘It was inevitable that the vocabulary of art historical writing became more complex and elaborate in the German-speaking countries than anywhere else and finally developed into a technical language which – even before the Nazis made German literature unintelligible to uncontaminated Germans – was hard to penetrate. [...] The German language unfortunately permits a fairly trivial thought to declaim from behind a woolen curtain of apparent profundity and, conversely, a multitude of meanings to lurk behind one term. [...] Every German-educated art historian endeavoring to make himself understood in English [...] had to make up his own dictionary.’<sup>19</sup>

In doing so Panofsky realized that English would require a simpler and more direct syntax and more precise vocabulary. Within months after his arrival he was already writing an absolutely amazing English – American English – so precise and sensitive to words and structure it is hard to believe. He was helped in this endeavor by Mrs. Alfred Barr (Barr was director of the Museum of Modern Art), who was known as Daisy (he often called her ‘Lady Margaret’). They became fast friends and conversed in dozens of

letters that are sometimes as long as ten pages at a time. He always spoke with an accent, never ridding himself of his Hamburg past, but he was an elegant lecturer in English, with a magnificent command of the nuances of the language. He also was soon writing with, I would say, emphatically delightful prose. This characteristic is evident particularly and no doubt deliberately, in an essay on the most profound and serious subjects – film and characters like Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin.

Panofsky's article on film 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 in the definitive version, extensively revised and expanded and with the word 'Moving' in the title changed to 'Motion', a decade later, when it was described as 'one of the most significant introductions to the aesthetics of the motion picture yet to be written'.<sup>20</sup> Reprinted at least 22 times heretofore, 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.<sup>21</sup> 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. The lapidary style and especially the potent dose of humor in a normally solemn academic and scholarly context, became vintage Panofsky.<sup>22</sup>

He himself described the transformation toward economy of thought and expression that the adjustment to the English language of his adopted country entailed. What he did not mention is an equally profound transformation of his academic persona. Panofsky was famous for his delicious and sometimes outlandish witticisms. In America, his wit was always irrepressible and legendary, from cradle to grave, as it were, for example: 'Children should neither be seen nor heard until they can quote Virgil in Latin.'<sup>23</sup> And witness the immortal epitaph which he said appeared 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>24</sup>

I speak here, however, of the infusion of this personal quality into the *koine* of scholarly discourse.<sup>25</sup> That is the critical point; he had no limit in-between. 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 characteristic of previous American scholarship in art history than they were of European. And they brought a breath of fresh air to academe, both here and abroad.

Of course, we all know that the matter of language also had a political, indeed ideological root deep in Panofsky's psyche. He neither wrote nor spoke German publicly after he moved to America – with the notable exception of his trip to Munich in 1967 to receive the *Pour le Mérite* award, Germany's highest honor. For the requisite acceptance address there, he spoke in German.

## American Panofsky (Irving Lavin)

- 1 Erwin Panofsky: *Meaning in the Visual Arts. Papers in and on Art History*, New York 1955, pp. 321–346. The essay was published simultaneously and with the same title in the predecessor of the *Art Bulletin*, the *College Art Journal* XIV-1/1954, pp. 7–27.
- 2 Karen Michels: *Transplantierte Kunstwissenschaft. Deutschsprachige Kunstgeschichte im amerikanischen Exil*, Berlin 1999.
- 3 Colin Eisler: *Kunstgeschichte American Style. A Study in Migration*, in: Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (eds): *The Intellectual Migration. Europe and America, 1930–1960*, Cambridge/Mass. 1969, pp. 544–629.
- 4 Andreas Beyer: *Stranger in Paradise: Erwin Panofsky's Expulsion to the Academic Parnassus*, in: Eckart Goebel and Sigrid Weigel (eds): *'Escape to Life'. German Intellectuals in New York. A Compendium on Exile after 1933*, Berlin/Boston 2012, pp. 429–444.
- 5 Quoted after Panofsky 1955, p. 332. The dictum was also quoted in an essay by a devoted pupil and protégé of Panofsky, Harry Bober: *The Gothic Tower and the Stork Club*, in: *Arts and Sciences* 1/1962, pp. 1–8.
- 6 Panofsky 1955, p. 1: 'And when the Nazis ousted all Jewish officials in the spring of 1933, I happened to be in New York while my family were still at home.'
- 7 Panofsky 1955, p. 324.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 On Marquand, cf. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin: *The Eye of the Tiger. The Founding and Development of the Department of Art and Archaeology, 1883–1923*, Princeton 1983, pp. 8–9; on Johns Hopkins University, cf. Hugh Hawkins: *Pioneer. A History of Johns Hopkins University*, Baltimore 2002.
- 10 Cf., for instance, Allan Marquand: *A New Logical Machine*, in: *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 21/1886, pp. 303–07.
- 11 Allan Marquand: *Luca della Robbia*, Princeton 1914; id.: *Giovanni della Robbia*, Princeton 1920.
- 12 Colum P. Hourihane: *Classifying subject matter in medieval art. The index of Christian art at Princeton University*, in: *Visual resources* 30.3/2014, pp. 255–262.
- 13 Earl Baldwin Smith: *Early Christian Iconography, and a School of Ivory Carvers in Provence*, Princeton 1918.
- 14 The concept of Iconology has been much studied and was deeply embedded in the culture of the Warburg Institute, but it is curious that one of its most devoted and learned refugee scholars (not a Jew) and a favourite student and friend of Panofsky reported that the term Iconology did not appear prominently in Warburg's own work. William S. Heckscher: *The Genesis of Iconology*, in: *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes. Akten des 21. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn*, 3 vols, Berlin 1967, vol. 3, pp. 239–262, cf. pp. 260, 262.
- 15 On Flexner, cf. Thomas Neville Bonner: *Iconoclast. Abraham Flexner and a Life in Learning*, Baltimore 2002; on the IAS, cf. Steve L. Batterson: *Pursuit of Genius. Flexner, Einstein, and the Early Faculty at the Institute for Advanced Study*, Wellesley/Mass. 2006.
- 16 Panofsky 1955, p. 324.
- 17 Ibid., p. 327.
- 18 Ibid., p. 328.

19 Ibid., p. 329; cf. also Michels 1999, pp. 59–69.

20 Erwin Panofsky: *On Movies*, in: *Bulletin of the Department of Art and Archaeology of Princeton University*, June 1936 (the date is mistakenly given as 1934 in some sources), pp. 5–15; id.: *Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures*, in: *Transition XXVI/1937*, pp. 121–33, and in: Dwight Leonard Durling: *A Preface to Our Day*, New York 1940, pp. 57–82; Erwin Panofsky: *Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures*, in: *Critique. A Review of Contemporary Art I/1947*, pp. 5–28 (the evaluation I quote is from the editors' preliminary note). I rely for bibliographical information on Erwin Panofsky: *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft* (ed. by Hariolf Oberer and Egon Verheyen), Berlin 1974 (copy with addenda by Gerda Panofsky through 1992 in the library of the Institute for Advanced Study); cf. id.: *Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures*, in: id.: *Three Essays on Style* (ed. by Irving Lavin), Cambridge/Mass. et al. 1997, pp. 91–126.

21 Cf. Regine Prange: *Stil und Medium. Panofskys 'On Movies'*, in: Bruno Reudenbach (ed.): *Erwin Panofsky*, Berlin 1994, pp. 171–190.

22 Cf. also Irving Lavin: *Panofskys Humor*, in: Erwin Panofsky: *Die ideologischen Vorläufer des Rolls Royce Kühlers & Stil und Medium im Film*, Frankfurt a.M. 1993, pp. 7–15.

23 Quoted after Abraham Pais: *A Tale of Two Continents. A Physicist's Life in a Turbulent World*, Princeton 1997, p. 205.

24 Ibid.

25 The most exhaustive collection of these *dicta* by Panofsky was made by William Hekscher and is today archived in the Warburg Haus Hamburg.

### Frederick Antal or a Connoisseur Turned Social Historian of Art (Jennifer Cooke)

1 John Berger: *Frederick Antal. A Personal Tribute*, in: *Burlington Magazine* XCVI/1954, pp. 259–260, p. 259.

2 Anna Wessely: *Antal and Lukács – The Marxist Approach to the History of Art*, in: *The New Hungarian Quarterly* 73/1979, p. 114; cf. also Michel Laclotte: *Histoires de musées. Souvenirs d'un conservateur*, Paris 2003, p. 26. On Gombrich, cf. Miranda Carter: *Anthony Blunt: His Lives*, London 2001, p. 127; on the reception of Hauser's theories, cf. Michael R. Orwicz: *Critical Discourse in the Formation of a Social History of Art: Anglo-American Response to Arnold Hauser*, in: *Oxford Art Journal* VIII/1985, pp. 52–62.

3 Frederick Antal: *Remarks on the method of art-history* [1949], in: id.: *Classicism and Romanticism with other studies in art history*, London 1966, pp. 175–89, pp. 175–176.

4 *Klassizismus, Romantik und Realismus in der französischen Malerei von der Mitte des XVIII. Jahrhunderts bis zum Auftreten Géricaults*, PhD thesis, Univ. of Vienna 1914, later published in excerpts as Frederick Antal: *Reflections on Classicism and Romanticism*, in: *Burlington Magazine* LXVI/1935, pp. 159–163, 166–168; LXVIII/1936, pp. 130–133, 136–139, 141; LXXVII/1940, pp. 72–75, 78–80; LXXVII/1940, pp. 188, 190–192; LXXVIII/1941, pp. 14, 18–22; reprinted in Antal 1966, pp. 1–45. The original manuscript in German has been recently published; cf. id.: *Klassizismus, Romantik, Realismus* (ed. by Nicos and Yannis Hadjinicolaou), Zürich/Berlin 2014.

5 On Lukács, cf. Michael J. Thompson (ed.): *Georg Lukács Reconsidered. Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, London 2011.

6 Hans Aurenhammer: *Inventing 'Mannerist Expressionism': Max Dvořák and the History of Art as History of the Spirit*, in: Kimberly A. Smith (ed.): *The Expressionist Turn in Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Farnham 2014, pp. 187–208, p. 197.