Gombrich and Panofsky on Iconology*

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It is remarkable that when Gombrich's *Symbolic Images* was published, in 1972, none of its reviewers commented on its relationship to Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology* (1939). To the best of my knowledge, no subsequent commentators on iconology have pursued the matter either. Considering the centrality given to the Panofsky text and the powerful critique presented by the Gombrich volume, this is surprising.

One of the reviewers, Sir Kenneth Clark, was honest enough to admit that while he had eight of Gombrich's volumes on his shelves 'owing to my pitiful inability to follow philosophical arguments, I cannot claim that I have always understood them.' [1] He credited Gombrich with avoiding 'the extravagant interpretation of symbols which sometimes gives the air of a metaphysical fantasy to the writings of Panofsky.' He 'follows the warburgian practice of studying subject rather than form' and '(his) outstanding merit ...is that he makes us look at works of Renaissance art as they were seen by their contemporaries and by the men who commissioned them' giving Gombrich the backhanded complement of being able to do this through 'his prodigious knowledge of contemporary writers'.[2] He went on to say that, 'it would be unjust to say that Gombrich is concerned solely with subject rather than form. On the contrary, his comments on the formal and artistic qualities of the works analyzed are remarkably perceptive. But in the end his chief aim is to discover the meaning, in the fullest sense, of a work of art.'[3]

On close inspection, Clark's review seems rather naive, lacking a sense of what Gombrich was up to, and it would be impolite to probe more deeply. Clark's big problem was his inclination to separate form and content as independent factors in the production of art. The irony is that of all scholars connected with the Warburg Institute, Gombrich has paid the greatest attention to formal considerations governing the possibilities of artistic practice. And it is precisely the concern with the formal dimension, the appearance, of Botticelli's *Primavera* that

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[1] 'Stories of Art' in *The New York Review of Books*, November 24th, 1977, 36-9.

[2] *Ibid*, 36 (my emphasis).

[3] *Ibid*.

marked Gombrich off from Panofsky and Wind. Furthermore, for all of his erudition, Gombrich has been the most concerned to know when to stop being erudite: a stricture which applied neither to Panofsky nor to Wind.

There is a world of difference between Gombrich and Panofsky's views on the study of iconology, which reflects their fundamental differences in philosophy and method. Given the paradigmatic nature of Panofsky's approach it would be useful to sketch that out to provide a background for a characterisation of Gombrich's views.

Panofsky opened his discussion of artistic meaning in *Studies in Iconology* by analysing the case of an acquaintance greeting him on the street by lifting his hat. One interprets the configuration in the visual field to represent a man; one recognises the lifting of the hat as a greeting and one recognises the act as symptomatic of the man's 'period, nationality, class, intellectual traditions and so forth.'[4] As in nature and culture, so in art, Panofsky distinguished between three levels of analysis of the work of art:

1) the pre-iconographic, which identifies configurations as representations of objects, the relation of those objects as events, and features of humans as having expressional qualities. The basis of such recognitions is practical experience regulated by awareness of style.

2) the iconographic, which is based on the connection of motifs with concepts; this leads to the identification of images, stories and allegories. The basis of this level of interpretation is the knowledge of literary sources regulated by awareness of the history of types.

3) the iconological, or iconographic in the deep sense, in which images possessed Cassirean 'symbolical' values and are symptomatic of the times in which they were produced. This is a product of 'synthetic intuition (familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind), conditioned by personal psychology and 'weltanschauung' regulated by an awareness of the history of cultural symptoms. The contrast between the three levels of experience may be expressed in terms of sense, intellect and intuition.[5]

The naive Panofskian reader looks at an image, recognises the objects depicted in it, and any activities and expressions and emotions, looks out for visual clues which

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[4] *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1957, p. 5. The summary of Panofsky's views is drawn from the Introductory chapter, 3-31.

[5] The reader is invited to turn to Panofsky's text for further elaboration.

give away the identity of the motifs, searches for various texts which may be hung on to those motifs and then conjures up the spirit of the age through the image. The tools of such an exercise become a sharp eye, a familiarity with the continuity of motifs, an encyclopedic knowledge of texts, and a view about the way that life was, whenever. But there are many obvious flaws in this approach, not least the division between sense, intellect and intuition in the experience of the historical work of art.

The direct association of the visible world and the pictorial field is invalid on the grounds that the former is natural while the latter is conventional.[6]

Panofsky took the strangely simplistic view that a picture formed a kind of screen through which one saw a depicted view without recognising that the picture itself was a depiction.[7] Another way of putting the matter is to say that a picture is a cultural object, as pictures do not exist in nature, and as a cultural object a picture has a point, a reason for its existence. A picture offers an experience which has to be taken as falling under a concept of a picture. The historian has to be acutely self- conscious as to the nature of that concept - this was one of Gombrich's earliest preoccupations. One of Gombrich's early experiments in

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[6] The earliest artist who drew pictures on cave walls didn't think in terms of boundaries and were happy to draw their pictures across each other; the Assyrians wrote across their pictures; the Chinese considered vacant space, space available for poetry and seals; there has been a variety of framing strategies since classical antiquity. Furthermore, whereas the seen world is composed of light, the drawn or painted surface is constituted of pigment; as we shall see, in the discussion of Art and illusion, there is a fundamental difference between the two.

[7] I claim no originality for this point. See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing* (1983), 236:

> What then do we make of the pictorial surface itself? In his seminal essay on iconography and iconology Panofsky clearly evades this question. ... What Panofsky chooses to ignore is that the man is not present but is represented in the picture. In what manner, under what conditions is the man represented in paint on the surface of the canvas? What is needed, and what art historians lack, is a notion of representation.

See also David Summers, 'Conventions in the History of Art', *New Literary History* (13), 1981, 111:

> Panofsky's direct transferral of an example from life to art must be questioned right at the beginning ... this transferral assumes too great a transparency on the part of the work of art, assumes that it is more 'realistic' than it actually is or can be.

testing the appropriateness of concept to experience resulted in a significant criticism of Panofsky's celebrated essay on perspective as symbolic form. This was published in *Kritische Berichte*, in the mid-thirties, as a review of Bodonyi's doctoral dissertation on the gold ground.[8]

A number of writers had approached late antique mosaics on the basis of the same assumptions that they had used to analyse earlier wall-paintings. The central assumption was that the mosaicist's field constituted a naturalistic representation of space.[9] Thus the gold ground depicted an object in the same way that a passage of colour might depict a hill or valley: the gold ground was taken to refer to a thing. The question now concerns the decipherment of the phenomenon represented by the gold ground. Pfuhl believed that in the Albani landscape it represented a flood; Sieveking interpreted it, in a different work, as a rocky path from foreground to background.[10] But, as Gombrich pointed out, that kind of passage from foreground to background was not representable. The images consisted in juxtapositions of motifs. But if motifs were juxtaposed, how were they to be understood in relation to each other in a possible depicted space?

Panofsky, in his now classic essay 'Die perspektive als 'symbolische Form''[11] had argued for a shift in the character of spatial representation. If earlier artists had a systemic view of space, as a continuum in which objects were to be depicted and in terms of which they were to be seen in relation to each other, the artists of late antiquity had other objectives in mind. As they did not know 'systemraum' they proceeded from the concrete individual object, generating a 'Dingraum' which was an aggregate, or discontinuous, space. Gombrich objected, however, that a lack of unity is not a special form of unity and there was a fault in Panofsky's logic: the mosaics involved a different form of representational system from the paintings and could not be interpreted as representing a natural spatial

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[8] Review of *Entstehung und Bedeutung des Goldgrundes in der spatantiken Bildkomposition* (Archaeologiai Ertesite, 46, 1932/3) in *Kritische Berichte zur Kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, 5 (1932/3).

[9] It is arguable that even Riegl's view of the artist's field treated it on the basis of a naturalistically representational model. If, as he would say, the optic and the haptic modes are simply the poles of our normal visual experience of space, the optic mode is as visually valid as the haptic mode. This is, after all, the thought that lies behind the notion of the history of vision, which forms the lynch-pin of his art historiography.

[10] Sources given by Gombrich, loc. cit., 69.

[11] *Vortrage der Bibliothek Warburg*, 1924-5.

field. An image in which one found continuous representation signified a slice of space as little as it signified a moment of time.[12]

For Gombrich the perception of form cannot be divorced from the perception of meaning. His psychology emphasises the role that projection has to play in perception and he takes the Kantian view that one has experiences through conceptualisation. Recognising that pictures mediate experience of their created world, it is essential for to understand the nature of that mediation. Hence it is crucial to understand the function of imagery at the time that it was produced. Form follows function. The point of late antique imagery was not to simulate an appearance of reality but to function pictographically; therefore its picture space did not generate illusionistic space, it operated at a symbolic level. Instead of working on the assumption of naturalism one has to scrutinise the pictorial field in terms of its historical psychological possibilities. At the end of the day, any such explanation must count as a hypothesis subject to further empirical and conceptual enquiry.

This is as true of expressive characteristics as it is of spatial construction. Gombrich's first research project after leaving university was on the expressive features of the statues of the founders in the Cathedral of Naumburg:

> 'These lifelike but imaginary portraits appeared to be so full of expression that a whole drama had been woven around them. Ciceroni had developed the legend that all these figures were participants in a story of conflict and murder.'[13]

There was no doubt that the sculptures had enlivening features, in comparison to earlier sculptures, but 'their expression was more complex than clear.'[14] Empirical investigation into spectators' responses concluded that there was not sufficient consensus on the interpretation of the expressions on individual sculptured heads to justify the belief that they did have specific expressions. There could be even less justification for the incorporation of the figures into a dramatic plot. 'The medieval artist may very well simply have accepted the emotional overtones - including the facial expressions - as they happened to emerge.'[15]

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[12] In *Means and Ends: Reflections on the History of Fresco Painting*, The Walter Neurath Lecture, London 1976, Gombrich examined the problem of framing in relation to narrative.

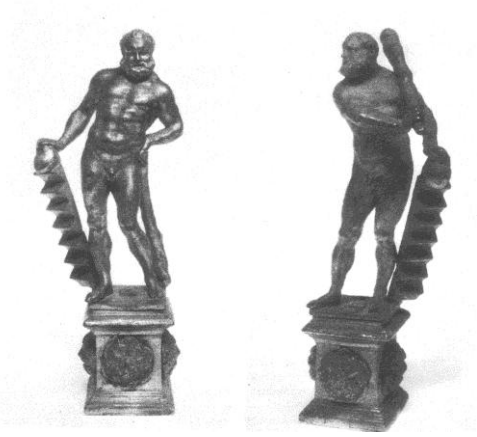
[13] For the context of this research, which was undertaken with Ernst Kris, see 'The Study of Art and the Study of Man' in *Tributes*, Oxford 1984, 224 ff.

[14] *Ibid*, 226.

[15] 'Wertprobleme und mittelalterliche Kunst' originally published in *Kritische Berichte*

Without knowing the context of a particular production it is easy enough to assume that an expressive reading is legitimate. There was the case of an art historian who had falsely assumed an armorial bearer from a piece of furniture to be a statuette of Hercules as a Christian Knight:

> The eyes gaze into the distance, they stand in a face that bears the marks of hard experiences. This man is no longer a wild adventurer, he is sensitive to the suffering destiny has laid upon him; it is with sorrow that he awaits the next test, though he is sure that he will win through in the end.[16]



Armorial Bearers

Spurred by a particular reading of the so-called Hercules' physiognomy, the author ascended into the giddy heights of his own fantasies. The fact that he thought it to be Hercules in the first place helped stimulate the reading. Such a reading is misplaced when we realise that the 'statuette' was, in fact, an armorial bearing and as such did not have any expressive characteristics at all.

When, in a different context, Baxandall suggested that in Botticelli's *Primavera*, 'we miss the point of the picture if we mistake the gesture'[17] he has simply got the matter the wrong way around. We cannot interpret the gesture until we know the meaning of the painting, or rather the text that the painting was intended to illustrate.[18]

If the reality of perception is that the mind is not a *tabula rasa*, but actively

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1937, translated as 'Achievement in Medieval Art' and published in *Meditations on a Hobby-Horse*.

[16] 'The Evidence of Images' in *Interpretation in Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton, Baltimore 1969, 71.

[17] *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth century Italy*, Oxford 1972, 70.

[18] The point is admirably demonstrated in what almost stands by itself as an essay in physiognomic interpretation in a footnote to Gombrich's 'Botticelli's Mythologies' in *Symbolic Images*, n. 23, 204-6.

works on its material, the art historian cannot look at a representation at a purely formal level without attributing it any significance. The belief that this is possible is sheer self-deception. The only condition in which one can look at either an object or an image and not see any thing, which would not attribute to its appearance any significance, is when one is completely baffled. Art historians, even of the formalist kind, do not dwell in a state of bafflement, even partial bafflement; they actively project meanings into what they see. Unless they do this self-consciously they run the risk of making grave errors or, more importantly, they take as facts projections fed by their favourite theories. In a long footnote to Gombrich's essay 'Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neo-Platonic Symbolism of his Circle' there is a compilation of fifteen different descriptions of Venus varying from Pater's 'He ... paints the goddess of pleasure... but never without some shadow of death in the grey flesh and wan flowers' to Muther's 'Flowering branches .. under which the goddess of beauty stands laughing.'[19] One does not attribute expressions to figures simply on the basis of experience but out of knowledge of the pertaining conventions, qualified by expectations concerning the subject of the picture. The contrast between pre-iconographic and iconographic analysis as one of sense and intellect doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

Without attributing some meaning to the depicted object one can have no confidence about its possible relation to a seen reality.

But this is to plunge in at the deep end. Gombrich believes in starting with the known. A didactic strategy, which he used in his lectures and in the introduction to *Symbolic Images*, is to take an object familiar to an audience and recast it within a complex of theory.[20] If Panofsky started with the example of a man walking down a street, Gombrich started with a well-known London statue.

Nothing could be much more familiar to a London audience than the famous statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus but the question of its meaning poses a number of problems. Over the course of years attitudes towards it have changed and the Picadilly of 1972 was a very different kind of place from what it was in 1893. In his review of *Symbolic Images*[21] Sir Kenneth Clark recalled:

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[19] SI, 204-5.

[20] This helps to explain the foregrounding of Constable's painting Wivenhoe Park in *Art and Illusion*. It is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, where his A.W. Mellon Lectures entitled 'The Visible World and the Language of Art' were given.

[21] 'Stories of Art' in *The New York Review of Books*, November 24th, 1977, 36-8.

> I first remember it in the peaceful possession of elderly flower-sellers, but gradually the proximity of theaters, cinemas, and restaurants (one of the most respectable restaurants in the district is now called the Sex Center) has given the god Eros a significance more in keeping with our normal idea of him. I doubt if a single one of the young people in blue jeans who mill around the monument has ever heard of Lord Shaftesbury.

Eros was a commemorative fountain dedicated to the memory of the great Victorian philanthropist, the seventh earl of Shaftesbury. The statement of the memorial committee was that it 'is purely symbolical, and is illustrative of Christian Charity.'[22] To say the least, that is very short and to the point.

But, as we have already suggested, it is one of the fundamental characteristics of the human mind that it constantly searches for meaning. The young child's persistent 'why?' is a feature of its behaviour which enables it to turn into an intelligent adult. It is utterly unsurprising, then, that over the course of time the statue has accreted meanings; particularly because it originated in a culture at least three generations old. As the statue's social context changed, it is not surprising that its meaning appeared to change as well; one cannot ignore the phenomenon.

The easiest way of handling different responses to the same image is to deny that there was an original meaning in the first place. This opens the door to complete relativism: any person's interpretation is as good as any others and the historian's pursuit of archival material is simply wasted time. Indeed, there would be little relevance in Clark's observation about the difference between the flower-sellers and the Sex Centre. If the people who maintained the relativist point of view actually believed it, they would stop writing books to persuade readers of their views.

Another way of dealing with the problem is to recognise the distinctiveness of one's own critical position and examine the way in which other environments have shaped their own critical standpoints. In this context, Clark's comments become relevant. One can then either reject the primacy of the artist's originating meaning or one can follow Hirsch[23] and assert the difference between 'meaning' and 'significance'. Meaning is original to the production of the object and significances cluster about the object over the course of time, even the time in which it was produced.

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[22] Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 1.

[23] E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven and London 1967.

The difference between statuette and armorial bearing is one of kind or genre and every kind of work of art possesses its own expressive capacities. These capacities may change over time but at any point in historical time the genre may be identified. To explain this idea, Gombrich had recourse to Karl Buhler's principle of abstractive relevance. All signs and symbols have characteristics which are irrelevant to their communicative functions: 'The letters of the alphabet signify through certain distinctive features but in normal contexts their meaning is not affected by their size, colour or font.'[24] Unlike a written text, however, a painting has a multitude of characteristics which may be taken to have symbolic significance and the application of the principle of abstractive relevance becomes a matter of discretion and tact. In the so-called Garger Review[25] on the subject of medieval art, Gombrich wrote:

> in as far as the recognizability of symbols is not compromised and the sign remains a sign, primitive predelictions may be allowed free rein. This applies to the pure use of precious colours in medieval illumination as much as to that ornamental elaboration of the whole work which leads to such a high decorative achievement.[26]

The historical problem is to determine what can be appropriately construed as possessing artistic significance for the work and that decision is not aesthetic. The figurative image has a manifold set of characteristics which fall beyond the brief given to the artist and the task which he sets himself.

So far, then, we have seen that the constructions of space and expressive characteristics are mediated by history, genre and text. Another problem, not recognised by Panofsky, was that of the relationship between the universal and the particular in the visual image. A photograph of an actor used in an advertising hoarding is that of a specific individual but it is intended to function as a type, a chef for instance. Conversely, a drawing of a generic type might be used in a medieval manuscript to represent a specific person. One cannot tell on the basis of appearance alone tell which of the two we have in front of us. This extends in an important way to the matter of topicality.

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[24] ''Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura', in *Symbolic Images*, 95.

[25] 'Wertprobleme und mittelalterliche Kunst', a review of 'Uber Wertungsschwierigkeiten bei mittelalterlicher Kunst' (1932-3), published in *Kritische Berichte* (1937) and translated and published in English as 'Achievement in Medieval Art' in *Meditations on a Hobby-Horse* (1963).

[26] *Ibid*, 74.

In his description of the so-called *School of Athens*, Vasari described a figure that 'bends towards the ground, holding a pair of compasses in his hand and turning them on a board. This is said to be a life-like portrait of Bramante the architect.'[27] But as Gombrich remarked, it is a pretty strange portrait of a good friend and is more likely to be a motif drawn from Pinturicchio's painting of the same subject, a geometer.[28]

Artists may well have taken real people as models for figures in their paintings. The presence of contemporary figures has been taken to mean that the paintings were about contemporary affairs. But, as Charles Hope put it, '.. topical meaning would be wholly against the normal justification of religious art, which was to instruct the faithful;... what matters is that in putting on the identity of the historical characters, the models put aside their own. '[29]

One could carry on talking about Panofsky's first stage of pre-iconographic description at some length but space dictates that it is now necessary to turn our attention to iconographic analysis itself.

The idea that motifs have definable meanings in terms of traditions of association with specific texts is very misleading. It has led to the view that one can create a kind of dictionary of meanings of motifs. But 'it is even true of the words of an inscription that they only acquire meaning within the structure of a sentence'.[30] If this is true of motifs it is even truer of symbols. Gombrich quoted St. Thomas Aquinas to the effect that there can be no 'authoritative dictionary of the significance of things, as distinct from words:

> It is not due to deficient authority that no compelling argument can be derived from the spiritual sense, this lies rather in the nature of similitude in which the spiritual sense is founded. For one thing may have similitude to many; for which reason it is impossible to proceed from any thing mentioned in the Scriptures to an unambiguous meaning. For instance the lion may mean the Lord because of one similitude and the Devil because of another.[31]

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[27] Vasari, *loc. cit.*, II, 227.

[28] Gombrich, loc. cit., 95.

[29] 'Religious Narrative in Renaissance Art', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, CXXXIV (1986), 812.

[30] 'Aims and Limits of Iconology', *loc. cit.*, 12.

[31] *Ibid*, 14.

Context is all and the way in which one establishes contexts is to identify habits of understanding.

It was obviously not a habit of understanding in the pre-modern period to examine works of art with the Index of Migne's *Patrologia* in one hand and a photograph in the other. Images had a *habitus*, which would have a bearing on their meaning, and their audiences would have habits of behaviour towards them. The essay on 'Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura' is particularly valuable on this account.

Do we need to read volumes of philosophy, theology and poetry to understand the decoration of the Stanza della Segnatura? Gombrich's answer is negative: one simply needs to understand the purposes behind the decoration of the Papal court. The paintings on the walls were integrated by the figures on the ceiling (a reality which failed to surface through the limitations on reproductions of the room): 'the walls must be seen as expositions or amplifications of the ideas expressed by the personifications on the ceiling.'[32] The personifications of Law, Theology, Poetry and Philosophy are drawn into relation with each other through biblical and mythological scenes.[33] The School of Athens does not exemplify a complex philosophical doctrine but rather creates the presence of exemplary philosophers - beautiful and persuasive figures. On this basis, Gombrich argued, Raphael needed no more guidance than a musician called to set a text to music. The repertoire of appropriate imagery was available for his use and his preparatory drawings prove that he used it.

The terms on which an artist produced a painting, sculpture or whatever were historically specific. Different expectations were placed on artists at different times. A medieval artist worked from a stock of types. During the renaissance the artist was expected to produce inventive *istoria* and in the sixteenth century the so-called programme blossomed. Consequently, the degree to which one is entitled to decipher recondite meanings from images is variable. Annibale Caro's programmes for Taddeo Zuccaro's decoration of the Palazzo

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[32] *Loc. cit.*, 88.

[33] 'We know for instance that the personifications on the ceiling are flanked by episodes which Passavant interpreted as linking the various faculties - the Fall as between Theology and Justice, the Judgement of Solomon between Justice and Philosophy, 'Astronomy' or the contemplation of the Universe between Philosophy and Poetry, and the Flaying of Marsyas between Poetry and Theology, assuming that Dante's prayer to Apollo can thus be interpreted.' (94)

Caprarola are an excellent example of the degree to which meanings can get quite recondite: the evidence for that is the existence of the programmes themselves. The key issue is, of course, evidence. It cannot be assumed, but has to be proved, that a particular text or method of exegesis was relevant to the production of a particular visual image.

It has often been assumed, for example, that the hierarchical approach to the analysis of biblical texts (in terms of literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical meanings) lay behind the production of paintings. But there is no evidence that the painter had such things in mind. This is not to deny that a spectator might reflect on the symbolic meanings of an image's trappings, but the discovery of such symbolic meanings is secondary to, and elaborative of, the image's dominant meaning. Preachers, no doubt, elaborated and speculated on the significance of the events portrayed on their church walls; but there is no reason to build every speculation or elaboration into the purpose of the original image.

The way in which traditional imagery intersected with the concerns of the world was through the institutional structures within which such images were used. At a lowly level, a fireplace was a suitable site for stories concerning fire; a fountain, a place for stories of water; the entrance of a Bankruptcy Court for tales of folly. There were places for pictures and appropriate ranges of images for those places; the meaning of the images came out of the juncture of the two.

The major implication of Gombrich's principle of intersection is that there are no fixed meanings for individual symbols. In Caro's programme an elephant worshipping the moon features as a symbol of solitude in the study and a symbol of night in the bedroom. The habit of perceiving fixed meanings in symbols is notoriously widespread, though this was never the original intention in the creation of such symbols. Symbols were never intended to function as codes.[34]

Gombrich discussed the question of how symbols were meant to function was discussed at great length in his essay 'Icones *Symbolicae*: Philosophies of Symbolism and their bearing on art'.[35]

To return to the matter of the relationship between images and texts, this was something which Panofsky left in a state of some confusion.

Interestingly, although Gombrich's book only appeared in 1973, in 1938 he

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[34] For an excellent technical analysis of this subject see now Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, Cambridge 1975.

[35] Originally published as '*Icones Symbolicae*. The visual image in neo-Platonic thought' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 11, 1948.

had prepared an Ur-text on iconology for the students of the Courtauld Institute. Written jointly with Otto Kurz, it had an introduction concerning the relationships between image and text by Gombrich,[36] who also gave examples of the analysis of various genres of secular art.[37] Immediately after the war, and familiar with Panofsky's book, Gombrich wrote 'Botticelli's Mythologies. A Study in the Neo-Platonic Symbolism of his Circle' (1945)[38] which was both a kind of pastiche of Panofskian analysis[39] and a vindication of a scientific approach to a Warburgian subject.[40] Its most important aspect, in comparison with Panofsky's text, was the importance which it gave to formal qualities: something which apparently no-one seems to have noticed.

A crucial turning point in Gombrich's analysis of Botticelli's Mythologies was the section on 'The Typological Approach' opening with the paragraph:

> So far we have only used literary sources for the interpretation of the 'Primavera'. We are therefore not in danger of reading out of the picture what we have just read into it. How far does the picture answer to the ideas we have derived from the texts? How far did Botticelli enter into the spirit of Ficinian allegory and the message his picture was intended to convey? We may feel that he did so, but can we give more concrete reasons for this feeling than did those who saw in the picture a glorification of Love and Spring? We can, by investigating the pictorial terms in which Botticelli expressed the idea.'[41]

This runs in direct contradiction to the opening paragraph of the Introductory chapter to Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology* which reads:

> Iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form.[42]

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[36] Note his remark in the Preface to *Symbolic Images* that 'The number of fresh connections between pictures and texts which might be acceptable to a court of law as evidence remained regrettably rare.' (vii)

[37] These were to surface as later independent publications.

[38] Published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XI (1945).

[39] Conversation with author.

[40] Compare Gombrich's analysis of the Flora (and the Angels from Gozzoli's *The Adoration*, figs. 40-42) with Warburg's analysis of the Nympha.

[41] *SI*, 62.

[42] *Loc. cit.*, 3. This is not to say that Panofsky was unconcerned with the formal qualities of art; see Gombrich's obituary of Panofsky in *The Burlington Magazine*, 110 (1968), pp. 356-360. It is important to stress that he thinks it possible to separate content from form.

Furthermore, like Warburg and unlike Panofsky, Gombrich gave a particular and specific context to the production of the painting: a letter and a mistaken translation of a text. Gombrich's essay was, in a strong sense, archival and not simply textual. The great irony in the difference between the two authors is that while Panofsky claimed to be the representative of Warburg's legacy[43] Gombrich never made that claim for himself, despite having been on the Warburg Institute's staff and later in his career as its Director.

I find his account of Michelangelo's style, in 'The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo', systematically suspect insofar as it is described as 'symptomatic of the very essence of Michelangelo's personality' (178) and his Age. See Gombrich's comments on Panofsky in *The Sense of Order*, 199-2.

[43] See my essay 'Warburg's "Method"' in Richard Woodfield (ed.), *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects*, Amsterdam 2001, 259-293.