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The Other Weimar: The Warburg Circle as Hamburg School

Emily J. Levine

> The moment an artistic institution becomes dependent on municipal or state officials in the provinces it is lost. . . . There are, of course, exceptions in the larger provincial cities.
>
> —Kurt Tucholsky, *Berlin and the Provinces* (1928)

The port city of Hamburg, which lay on the periphery of Berlin's buzzing metropolis, seemed to many to be an improbable home for the modern discipline of art history. Dubbed by the poet Heinrich Heine as a city of dull and materialist merchants Hamburg was primarily known for its unabashed money-making and not for its marketplace of ideas.[1] Yet despite its professed cultural limitations, during the tumultuous years of the Weimar Republic the city of merchants became the unlikely haven for a group of German-Jewish scholars whose work has had a towering impact on the humanities at large: the historian of art and civilization Aby Warburg, the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, and the art historian Erwin Panofsky.[2] Rather than begrudge these peculiar origins, Warburg, on the contrary, attributed

[1] For a description of Hamburg as dull, see, for example, the poem "Himmel grau und wochentäglich" (Gray skies and every week day, 1831), *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1994), 2:30. For a depiction of a materialist and culturally unaware Hamburg banker, see "Die Bäder von Lucca," ibid., 7:94.

[2] Emily J. Levine, *Dreamland of Humanists: Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky, and the Hamburg School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming October 2013).

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much of his intellectual success to the specific conditions of his *Vaterstadt*. Writing in 1927, Warburg made the connection between the city and his intellectual project explicit: "It is also perhaps not a coincidence that it was a researcher from Hamburg who has arrived at the dynamic side of this problem, [and that] having experienced in his home city the powerful impression made by international traffic in the material world, directed his attention towards the dynamics of the traffic of the mind."[3] Not only did the Warburg circle prove Heine wrong, but for Warburg the connection between ideas and the city was more than merely circumstantial.

Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky have received attention in recent years for their ideas.[4] Their collective project to trace the epistemological and aesthetic foundations of what they called "symbolic forms" from the classical through the modern periods has influenced such diverse fields as visual studies, psychoanalysis, and film.[5] In particular, Warburg's identification of the archetypal classical Dionysian and Apollonian elements that result from this process, the so-called *Nachleben der Antike* [afterlife of antiquity], continues to inspire intellectual intrigue and his iconology enjoys an afterlife of its own among art historians.[6] Scholars interested in collective memory have also found a compelling model in Warburg's unique Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg [hereafter, Warburg Library for the Science of Culture], around which these scholars conducted their interdisciplinary work.[7]

To be sure, we read these scholars because of these intellectual contributions, which by definition transcend time and place. Yet Warburg's observation about his origins suggests that as historians we should also take seriously the relationship between locality and ideas.[8] Admittedly the group

[3] Aby Warburg to Heinrich Pfeiffer, 19 August 1927, General Correspondence (GC), Warburg Institute Archive (WIA). All translations are author's unless otherwise noted.

[4] For a review of Warburg scholarship in recent years, see Michael Diers, "Warburg and the Warburg Tradition of Cultural History," *New German Critique* 65 (spring/summer 1995): 59–73.

[5] Louis Rose, *The Survival of Images: Art Historians, Psychoanalysts, and the Ancients* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001); Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

[6] For German art historians, see Martin Warnke, *Handbuch der politischen Ikonographie*, 2 vols. (Munich: Beck, 2011). For France, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[7] Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (spring/summer 1995): 125, 129.

[8] For the elasticity of locality as a concept and its connection to German history, see David Blackbourn's and James Retallack's introduction to *Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place: German-Speaking Central Europe, 1860–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), esp. 9.

was not always complimentary about this city's mercantile spirit. Though Warburg lauded Hamburg as an open book, he also mocked its philistinism. Moreover, if Cassirer could have advanced beyond the level of *Privatdozent* in Berlin, he likely would have stayed there. Simultaneously a source of pride and anxiety, this urban identity was dramatized in a 1928 play, "Socrates in Hamburg: Or, Of the Good and the Beautiful," in which the Greek philosopher wanders among the affluent homes of Hamburg's Eppendorf neighborhood and contemplates whether businessmen have souls.[9] The anonymously authored play—later disclosed to have been written by the sometime Hamburger Panofsky—seemed to pose a pressing historical question: what are the consequences of one's urban environment on the culture that it produces?

Carl Schorske famously argued for Vienna as *the* explanatory principle in the life and work of Freud, among other turn-of-the-century Viennese luminaries, a contribution that exemplifies—notwithstanding recent critique—the fruitful potential for placing ideas in their urban context.[10] Despite the resurgence of interest in the contributions of these scholars to their respective fields, what is missing is a truly historical account of the Warburg circle. Felix Gilbert aptly summarized the drawbacks of this strictly disciplinary scholarship when he criticized Ernst Gombrich's formidable biography of Warburg for its lack of historical context.[11] According to the philosopher Raymond Klibansky, who studied under Cassirer in Hamburg, Gombrich could not completely grasp Warburg's intellectual world. "His way of thinking was foreign to him," Klibansky observed, "[Gombrich] was never in Hamburg."[12]

Hamburg presents problems for generalizations of Germany as autocratic, aristocratic, and insular. As a free city, a status awarded in the twelfth century, Hamburg enjoyed republican self-rule by a local senate whose members stemmed from patrician families and whose politics, like those of other Hanseatic cities, was characterized by a balance between local and worldly interests. In the German context, however, scholarship

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[9] *Phaedrus Hamburgensis* was performed in 1928 at an event sponsored by the Hamburg Society for the Friends of the University and published under the pseudonym A. F. Synkop, in *Der Querschnitt* 2 (1931): 593–99.

[10] Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1980). For criticism, see Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans: Masters and Victims in Modernist Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 34.

[11] Felix Gilbert, "From Art History to the History of Civilization: Gombrich's Biography of Aby Warburg," *Journal of Modern History* 44, no. 3 (1972): 381.

[12] Raymond Klibansky and Patrick Conley, "Die Grenzen des akademischen Lebens sprengen: Ein Gespräch über Ernst Cassirer und die Bibliothek Warburg," *Merkur* 50 (March 1996): 276. For a work in a similar spirit see Silvia Ferretti, *Cassirer, Panofsky, and Warburg: Symbol, Art, and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

on Hamburg has focused on its exceptionalism, which the Hamburg-born Percy Schramm called its *Sonderfall* within Germany's supposed *Sonderweg*.[13] Inspired by the "regional turn" in German history away from exclusively Prusso-centric narratives, several studies have explored the challenge posed by Hamburg's "liberalism" and its middle class with respect to this standard narrative. Work by such scholars as Jenkins, Kay, and Russell reveals a diverse bourgeoisie actively involved in the cultural affairs of the city and completes a rich portrait of regional diversity in the German Empire that defies a traditional center-periphery paradigm.[14]

Despite these challenges to sweeping narratives of nationalization, however, cultural and intellectual histories of the Weimar period still focus almost exclusively on Berlin.[15] This remains true even though it was then that the full effects of the local on the cultural and political scene were felt. Though Berlin remained the capital in the interwar period, it arguably emerged from the war diminished in importance, a fact further underscored by the Republic's namesake.[16] Yet Gay's assessment of the Warburg circle is instructive of persistent prejudice. Though he lauded the library as an expression of "Weimar at its best," Gay concluded that, because of its commitment to the Enlightenment, it conducted its work in "peaceful obscurity" and "serene isolation."[17] For Gay, Weimar culture meant increasingly anti-Enlightenment trends based in Berlin. That the Warburg scholars adhered to humanism in the late 1920s followed from their peripheral status, but it also sealed their fate as politically obsolete.

With respect to both geography and ideas, Hamburg provides a helpful corrective to this portrait of Weimar culture. The banker-*cum*-scholar Warburg, whose private family fortune funded his scholarly mission, reflected a relationship between culture and commerce that was unique to this inde-

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[13] Percy Ernst Schramm, *Hamburg: Ein Sonderfall in der Geschichte Deutschlands* (Hamburg: Christians, 1964).

[14] Jennifer Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture and Liberal Politics in Fin-de-Siècle Hamburg* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Carolyn Kay, *Art and the German Bourgeoisie: Alfred Lichtwark and Modern Painting, 1886–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Mark Russell, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Aby Warburg and the Public Purposes of Art in Hamburg, 1896–1918* (New York: Berghahn, 2007).

[15] Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), esp. 41.

[16] Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919*, vol. 2, *A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 478–79.

[17] Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 33–34.

pendent city-state.[18] Though he was not a born Hamburger, Cassirer's attempt to integrate German thought into European intellectual history reflected a "cosmopolitan nationalism" which found a likely home in Hamburg.[19] And the young Panofsky drew on the autonomy of the extra-university environment and its entrepreneurial spirit to crystallize the iconographical approach in art history, an approach whose translation from one urban context (Hamburg) to another (Princeton, New Jersey) would have longstanding consequences for the humanities. In this vein, the urban context illuminates certain theoretical impulses in their work, and their work, in turn, reveals to us the particular predicament of German-Jewish scholars in Weimar-era Hamburg.

Moreover, this study moves beyond the recent rich work on Hamburg that remains circumscribed by German questions about the *Bürgertum*, in order to address a question inspired by the "sociology of knowledge" concerning the conditions for the possibility of scholarship more broadly: why are some contexts productive for ideas and others not?[20] Panofsky remained grateful for the opportunities Hamburg offered him and returned the favor by naming their circle the "Hamburg School" [*Hamburger Schule*].[21] This article takes this claim seriously to consider how place can be a productive paradigm for cultural and intellectual history, and how cities transfer their identities to the institutions they engender.[22] For despite the ascendancy of anti-humanism that would signal an end to the Weimar Republic, Warburg's Hamburg still supported the values of the Republic. Indeed, in the urban context of Hamburg, which had no Prussian history, a strong republican tradition, and international leanings, the Weimar Republic was more than a "gamble which stood virtually no chance of success."[23]

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[18] Carl H. Landauer, "The Survival of Antiquity: The German Years of the Warburg Institute" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1984), 33; Martin Warnke, foreword to Karen Michels, *Aby Warburg im Bannkreis der Ideen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007), 11–18; Ernst Gombrich and Fritz Saxl, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 105.

[19] This term derives from Thomas Mann's less favorable description of Dostoevsky's "cosmopolitan radicalism." Cf. Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 49.

[20] See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Fritz Ringer, *Toward a Social History of Knowledge* (New York: Berghahn, 2000).

[21] Erwin Panofsky to Kurt Badt, July 24, 1922, *Erwin Panofsky Korrespondenz, 1910–1936*, vol. 1, ed. Dieter Wuttke (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2001), 118.

[22] Daniel A. Bell and Avner De-Shalit, *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of Cities Matters in a Global Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[23] Gerald D. Feldman, "Weimar from Inflation to Depression: Experiment or Gamble?"

ABY WARBURG AND THE HAMBURG MODEL

In November 1918 revolutionary unrest threatened to destroy Germany. But as Max Warburg and Mayor von Melle watched the chaos of the workers' strike unfold from inside Hamburg's Baroque Town Hall, the mayor saw the Hanseatic predicament in a positive light: "I believe that for the university this new turn of events might not be entirely bad."[24] History would prove von Melle correct. Hamburg's merchants long opposed a university that would defray costs from the city's maritime economy, but the First World War would finally bring one to fruition that reflected the city's cosmopolitan and mercantile identity, as well as the democratic spirit of the time.[25]

Drawing on its historic membership in the Hanseatic League, Hamburg built a thriving mercantile culture over the course of several centuries from its prime position as a seafaring port on both the North and Baltic Seas. When Bismarck visited Hamburg's port in 1896 and surveyed the energy of its vital harbor, he is rumored to have observed, "It is a new world, a new age."[26] In 1913 the Hamburg America Line launched the SS Leviathan, making Hamburg home to the largest shipping line in the world. In that same year almost 42 percent of Germany's total imports and 38 percent of its exports passed through Hamburg's free port. Other provincial port cities did not fare as well against the encroaching tide of nationalization. Mann memorialized the progressive decline of his hometown, the neighboring Hanseatic city of Lübeck, which could not keep up with the rise of such new national maritime powers as Sweden and Denmark. Indeed, in Mann's novels Hamburg emerges as the modern city in contrast to Lübeck.[27] Hamburg's better geographical location transformed it into an "outpost" for commerce in the growing Atlantic trade network, and it soon became known as "Germany's Gateway to the World" (*Tor zur Welt*).

A mercantile free city is not in and of itself a unique setting for intellec-

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in *Die Nachwirkungen der Inflation in der deutschen Geschichte 1924–1933*, ed. Feldman (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1985), 385.

[24] Max M. Warburg, *Aus meinen Aufzeichnungen* (New York: Warburg, 1952), 68.

[25] Rainer Nicolaysen, "Frei soll die Lehre sein und Frei das Lernen," *Zur Geschichte der Universität Hamburg* (Hamburg: DOBU Verlag, 2007), esp. 17–19.

[26] A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of German History since 1815* (1946; London: Routledge, 2001), 169.

[27] Hans Rudolf Vaget, "The Discreet Charm of the Hanseatic Bourgeoisie: Geography, History, and Psychology in Thomas Mann's Representation of Hamburg," in *Patriotism, Cosmopolitanism, and National Culture*, ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 193–205.

tual life.[28] These vast mercantile achievements, however, came at the expense of the city's intellectual reputation, a predicament that echoed Great Britain, where an equally powerful nonintellectual tradition persisted despite evidence to the contrary.[29] And this poor scholarly standing bothered a growing group of local scholars, who wished for Hamburg to be not only Germany's "Gateway to the World" but also the country's "Gateway to Knowledge." As an aspiring scholar, the banker's son Aby Warburg found himself in the center of the campaign to found a university and became known locally for the slogan "Education doesn't hurt at all, but it should also not be too expensive."[30] Born in 1866 in Hamburg, Warburg spent the decades leading up to the war nurturing his plans for a humanistic library and campaigning for a greater cultural presence in this city of merchants. Without the royal court that characterized major nineteenth-century cities, Hamburg possessed no court-sponsored art and culture. Instead, the city's merchants would come to replace the princely patron in their overwhelming support of art, culture, and scholarship. Nonetheless, due to disagreements among scholars, merchants, and socialists, Hamburg's scholars would have to make do with a Colonial Institute (1908), deemed sufficiently in line with Hamburg's economic goals. The plans to found the university, in contrast, were foiled when they came to the Senate floor of the city-state in 1912.[31] It was only the war and the democratic revolution that finally precipitated the opening of the University of Hamburg in May 1919.

Though the war was the catalyst, the city would provide the conditions for the development of the university's character. Many citizens were now persuaded that Hamburg's inhabitants did not want to become the mere "laborers and lackeys" [*Kärrner und Handlanger*] of German culture, but ought to develop their own ideas as well.[32] Subsequently, those ideas would be shaped as much by the democratic spirit of 1919 as by Hamburg's dis-

[28] For Frankfurt, see Helmut Böhme, *Frankfurt und Hamburg: Des deutschen Reichen Silber und Goldloch und die allerenglischste Stadt des Kontinents* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968).

[29] Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1ff.

[30] "Warburgismen" assembled by Max M. Warburg, WIA.

[31] Jens Ruppenthal, *Kolonialismus als 'Wissenschaft und Technik': Das Hamburgische Kolonialinstitut 1908 bis 1919* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007); Tim Schleider, "Die Haltung der Sozialdemokratie zur Gründung der Hamburgischen Universität" (Master's Thesis: University of Hamburg, 1989).

[32] Georg Thilenius, "Die Wissenschaft," in *Hamburg in seiner politischen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Bedeutung* (Hamburg: Friedrichsen, 1921), 125.

tinct civic identity. Unlike the Prussian university system, which seemed to exist for the sole purpose of providing training for the civil service, the privately funded Hamburg university served another god: mercantilism.[33] Warburg's predicament as a private scholar supported by his merchant family was exemplary of this wide civic practice. According to legend, the Warburg Library emerged from a famous childhood bargain struck between brothers over their inheritance in the family business: the elder thirteen-year-old Aby Warburg relinquished his birthright to the family inheritance in exchange for twelve-year-old Max Warburg's agreement to buy his brother's books for the rest of his life.[34] At its height a collection of nearly 60,000 volumes, the library remained supported by this deal—according to Max Warburg, the "largest blank check I ever wrote." Apocryphal as it might have been, this fraternal negotiation emerged naturally from a distinctive relationship between culture and commerce. Dubbed the "Hamburg model," this civic landscape laid the foundation for the intellectual climates of both the Warburg Library and the university.[35]

This civic culture had its advantages and disadvantages. As prominent members of the *Bürgertum*, the Warburgs possessed a greater degree of control over this cultural scene than they would have in the capital city, which housed a larger state-sponsored museum, wealthier patrons, and a more complicated political scene. This control was not always well received; the Hamburg museum director Alfred Lichtwark was known to complain of the lack of generosity among Jewish donors.[36] For his part Warburg accepted autonomy from the state in exchange for justifying his projects through contributions to the city's international trade. Yet Max Warburg was convinced of its merits and echoed the opinions of the founders of other private institutes of scholarship, such as the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and the Psychoanalytic Institute in Berlin, when he insisted on the financial independence of the Warburg Library as critical to its cultural success.[37] Not only did the private wealth of the Warburg

[33] Charles E. McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany, 1700–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 5ff.
[34] "Aby Warburg's Kindheit," III.1.5, undated, WIA.
[35] Volker Plagemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Stadt Hamburg* (Hamburg: Junius, 1995), 9–14.
[36] Kay, *Art and the German Bourgeoisie*, 119.
[37] Max Warburg to Aby Warburg, 21 October 1926, Family Correspondence (FC), WIA; and Friedrich Pollock, "Das Institut für Sozialforschung an der Universität Frankfurt am Main," in *Forschungsinstitute: Ihre Geschichte, Organisation und Ziele*, ed. Ludolph Brauer et al. (Lichtenstein: Topos, 1980), 347. For a counterexample, see Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 69, 84–86.

Library come to the institution's rescue at the height of the inflation crisis, but also, as a private institute of scholarship, it offered German-Jewish scholars the opportunity to work when state universities were still closed to them.[38]

Most important, material conditions also had a very real effect on the development of ideas. A proponent of the new "cultural" history in the tradition of Jacob Burckhardt and Karl Lamprecht, Warburg proposed widening the field of history to include the study of art and culture. That Warburg, as a private scholar, remained at the mercy of his merchant family doubtless influenced his scholarly subject: fifteenth-century Florence, a city he called the "birthplace of modern, confident, urban, mercantile civilization."[39] Through the study of paganism, astrology, and religious cults, he introduced a focus on the "darker side" [*Schatten*] to the legacy of antiquity and challenged the Winckelmannian notion of the classics as the highpoint of rational civilization. By complicating how classical motifs were introduced into Renaissance art, Warburg's dissertation on Botticelli contributed to this new scholarly approach. In this, his first scholarly work, Warburg introduced the concept that would be forever linked with him, the "afterlife of antiquity," by which he understood the tension between reason and irrationality that lay at the heart of the classical period but extended beyond this epoch. As Warburg would later observe, "Athens constantly needs to be taken back again from Alexandria," and, thus, this tension would remake itself in different iterations over subsequent ages. In his 1912 lecture "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia at Ferrara," Warburg unveiled a name for his methodology, which sought to trace the vicissitudes of aesthetic symbolism: iconology.

Warburg's deep awareness of the conditions of possibility for scholarship inspired several recurring typologies for his iconological analysis. In the first pair of articles published after his dissertation, "The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie" and "Francesco Sassetti's Last Injunction to His Sons," Warburg explored how the character of the merchant mediated various tensions, the old and new, tradition and modernity, and

[38] Shulamit Volkov, *Die Juden in Deutschland 1780–1918* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1994), 55.

[39] Aby Warburg, "The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie: Domenico Ghirlandaio in Santa Trinita. The Portraits of Lorenzo de' Medici and His Household," in *Renewal of Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 187. Originally published as *Bildniskunst und florentinisches Bürgertum* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1902).

form and creativity. Drawing on recovered family documents from the merchant Francesco Sassetti, Warburg illustrated the effect of the milieu through a contrast between two frescoes: the first, Giotto's 1317 decoration of the Bardi family's chapel with the legend of St. Francis; and, second, 160 years later, a series of frescoes also devoted to Saint Francis, commissioned by the merchant Francesco Sassetti and painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio for the Sassetti family's memorial chapel in the church of Santa Trinita. In contrast to Giotto's spiritual presentation of the body, Ghirlandaio transformed the portrait into a tribute to temporal and material life. Concerning this tradition, Warburg observed, "It is one of the cardinal facts of early Renaissance civilization in Florence that works of art owed their making to the mutual understanding between patrons and artists." It is difficult not to see this as in part a reflection of his family's own role as patrons and tastemakers in Hamburg.[40]

Warburg's great innovation—that economics would provide an essential context for art—would forever change our understanding of the Renaissance.[41] Yet Warburg's identification with the Florentine institutions of culture went even further. Already evident in Burckhardt's depiction of Florentine humanism was the central role played by private scholarship; indeed, dilettantism was an important ingredient of this cultural world.[42] Not only did Burckhardt defend Lorenzo the Magnificent against the common accusation that he was the "protector of mediocrity," he also argued that these tastemakers were incredibly important in making this transition possible.[43] This complicated attitude towards dilettantism also existed in Hamburg. On the one hand, it was thanks to such amateurism that Hamburg had any cultural life at all, and yet the satire of the Hamburg businessman who filled his leisure time with geography and the natural sciences persisted in the works of Heine and Goethe.[44]

This identification with the patrons of the Florentine Renaissance, then, must also have contributed to Warburg's conflicted attitude towards his own status as a private scholar. Without a doubt Warburg's idiosyn-

[40] Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Warburg Institute, 1970), 105.

[41] The influence of Warburg is still felt in Creighton E. Gilbert's survey, "What Did Renaissance Patrons Buy?" *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 392–450.

[42] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 91, 183.

[43] Ibid., 140.

[44] Gerhard Ahrens, "Hanseatische Kaufmannschaft und Wissenschaftsförderung: Vorgeschichte, Gründung und Anfänge der 'Hamburgischen Wissenschaftlichen Stiftung von 1907,'" *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 66 (1979): 217.

cratic personality benefited from the autonomy of this predicament. Yet he continued to feel the effects of his peripheral status. He was doubtless hurt when his query regarding a university position was met with a joke from the art historian Adolph Goldschmidt (himself a Hamburg banker's son), who suggested that Warburg "might combine his library and scholarly direction to create a luxurious convalescent home."[45] After all, Warburg expressed an early interest in having an official post at the University of Basel, where he could have worked alongside Burckhardt, but antisemitic sentiments blocked his appointment.[46] Instead, supported by his wealthy family, Warburg would remain outside, albeit connected to, the university. Though he craved the approval of Burckhardt, whom he called his "secular patron saint," Lamprecht, who also founded a semi-private institution, the Institute for Cultural and Universal History (1909), emerged as the model for his career.[47] Moreover, Lamprecht believed that Hamburg, lying outside the Prussian academic system, would be ideal for eschewing the "heretofore usual discipline of philology for a general and broader method of cultural-historical research and knowledge."[48] Hamburg's private scholars would promote a new cultural history.

Warburg himself would be unable to fully implement his research program. Due to numerous bouts of mental depression and one major breakdown, his productivity was severely limited. Indeed for him, the struggle between reason and irrationality was also deeply personal. As a result, his methodology found its greatest realization in his interdisciplinary library, the work of which was carried out by Cassirer and Panofsky, who helped fulfill Warburg's vision and ultimately surpassed him in fame and influence.

ERNST CASSIRER'S COSMOPOLITAN NATIONALISM

It was fitting that Ernst Cassirer should become the first chair of philosophy at this new university. Born in 1874, he already had a significant presence

[45] Adolph Goldschmidt to Aby Warburg, 7 September 1915, GC, WIA.
[46] Aby Warburg to Wilhelm Vöge, 16 September 1910, GC, WIA.
[47] Aby Warburg to Max Warburg, 30 June 1900, FC, WIA. Hans Liebeschütz, "Aby Warburg (1866–1929) as Interpreter of Civilisation," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 16 (1971): 234; Kathryn Bush, "Aby Warburg and the Cultural Historian Karl Lamprecht," in *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects*, ed. Richard Woodfeld (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 2011), 65–92. For Lamprecht's Institute see Roger Chickering's *Karl Lamprecht: A German Academic Life, 1856–1915* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1993), esp. 350–73.
[48] Gustav Schieffler, *Eine hamburgische Kulturgeschichte 1890–1920: Beobachtungen eines Zeitgenossen* (Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1985), 395.

by the First World War, but he could not obtain a full professorship in Berlin, or elsewhere in Germany, because he was a Jew. That Hamburg's university coincided with a new age might have been enough to land Cassirer a position there. That he promoted an interpretation that placed German thought in the context of European intellectual history, however, would signal the potential for a strong partnership with Hamburg's own urban identity as a cosmopolitan port city.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, Hamburg boasted several international institutions in addition to the Colonial Institute (1908), including the World Economic Research Institute (1905) and the Institute for Foreign Affairs (1923). The scholars affiliated with these institutes were broad-minded and maintained international contacts. One such scholar, the military historian Alfred Vagts, who went on to enjoy a long career at Yale University, was described as more familiar with America than with Prussia, "like a good Hamburger."[49]

Similarly, the University of Hamburg was poised to become Germany's premier "overseas and foreign-oriented university," and the modernist architect Fritz Schumacher was hired to build dormitories for non-German students, while plans were drawn up to provide instruction in foreign subjects and languages.[50] While Berlin's university became a bastion of national conservatism in the interwar period, Hamburg's university nurtured a tripartite mission of local, national, and cosmopolitan interests. This balance held special meaning for the Weimar Republic, which was viewed by Germans as indefinitely linked with the hateful treaty of Versailles and subsequently derided as "European" and "non-German." Republicans were compelled to prove that the democratic project was truly German in spirit. In this vein, Cassirer not only was a republican, but also presented his political support for the Republic as intimately connected with the scholarly project to revise and defend German Idealism. The port city of Hamburg with its new "Weimar-era" university offered precisely the place to accomplish such a delicate feat.

Before arriving in Hamburg, Cassirer was already well known for his ten-volume edition of Kant's works and his own contributions to neo-

[49] Angela Bottin and Rainer Nicolaysen, eds., *Enge Zeit: Spuren Vertriebener und Verfolgter der Hamburger Universität* (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 1991), 38.
[50] Wilhelm Weygandt, "Ist die Hamburger Universität ein Wagnis?" *Sonderheft zur Universitätsfrage* 4 (1918): 163; *Jahresbericht 1929 für die Hamburgische Universitätsgesellschaft* (Hamburg: Hamburger Studentenhilfe e. V. Akademische Auslandsstelle Hamburg, 1930), 7.

Kantianism.[51] The onset of the war and nationalism, however, made it increasingly difficult for him to present German ideas as part of a greater "pan-European" tradition. In his 1916 work *Freiheit und Form*, a work that Cassirer wrote in the evenings following his daily war service in the Press Office, he observed, "The period of the Renaissance created for the European people a new unity extending over all national borders, by giving them a common direction to a free worldly educational ideal [*Bildungsideal*]."[52] Drawing on poetry and philosophy, he showed how man's struggle with individual liberation had its roots in the Renaissance and was later developed in the German aesthetic tradition of Lessing, Schiller, and Kant. Cassirer shared this "cosmopolitan nationalist" position, which combined social tolerance with respectful patriotism, with contemporary historians such as Friedrich Meinecke, though the latter dissented from Cassirer's particular brand of this position.[53] Together they resisted the notion that there existed certain concepts of freedom, community, and society that were essentially German, while others were distinctly Anglo-French, and they tried to reconcile Enlightenment thought with the new nationalism.[54] According to his wife, Toni Cassirer, this study allowed him to "preserve for himself the picture of an undisturbed and unchanging Germany."[55]

This Germany seemed alive and well in Hamburg, which welcomed Cassirer with open arms. Delighted to hear that Cassirer's early lectures in the *Hansestadt* were a success, Max Liebermann wrote to Cassirer, "It has always seemed to me that the businessmen there are more cultured than, for example, the Berliners, especially the assiduously educated."[56] And the decade Cassirer spent there became his most prolific period. Upon his arrival, Cassirer had drafted parts of the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, in which he extended his neo-Kantian framework to produce a broad philosophy of culture. The Warburg Library's uncanny simi-

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[51] Ernst Cassirer, *Kants Leben und Werke* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1918).

[52] Ernst Cassirer, *Freiheit und Form: Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1916), 3.

[53] Cf. Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1908).

[54] H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (1958; New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003), 234–35, 37–39; David Lipton, *Ernst Cassirer: The Dilemma of a Liberal Intellectual in Germany, 1914–1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), esp. 35, 58.

[55] Toni Cassirer, *Mein Leben mit Ernst Cassirer* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 119.

[56] Max Liebermann to Ernst Cassirer, 2 May 1920, Box 55, Folder 1090, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (BRBML), Yale University. Ernst Cassirer, *Nachgelassene Manuskripte und Texte*, vol. 18, *Ausgewählter wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel*, ed. John Michael Krois (Hamburg: Meiner, 2009), 44.

larity to Cassirer's work helped transform this idea into a three-volume opus. As Cassirer later reflected, "it was by this impression [of the library] that I was encouraged to pursue a study that I had been planning for many years—to give a systematic analysis of the problem [of the philosophy of symbolic forms]."[57]

Cassirer's work celebrated Warburg's library and supported his personal mission. He also validated Warburg's project to transform Hamburg into an intellectual city. This connection was made abundantly clear when Warburg faced the prospect of losing him. On June 24, 1928, Warburg read in a half-dozen newspapers that Cassirer had received an offer from the rival University of Frankfurt.[58] Cassirer's potential departure spurred Warburg to launch a campaign to persuade Cassirer to remain. Warburg's efforts were nothing short of hysterical: he privately negotiated with the president of the University of Frankfurt; he drafted an article, "Why Hamburg should not lose the philosopher Cassirer," for a special issue of the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*; and he convinced Hamburg's senator and mayor to solicit Cassirer personally.[59] For Warburg Cassirer represented Hamburg's lifeline to scholarly prestige. As he pleaded in a letter to the University of Frankfurt's president, Cassirer's departure would mean that "Hamburg's attraction would never be adequate to divert his course of life back to the provinces." It was difficult enough attracting visitors from the "big city" to his library.[60]

The "Cassirer Affair," as Warburg dubbed it, brought the image of the city under intense public scrutiny. Cassirer's longtime friend Ernst Hoffmann warned Cassirer, "Do not forget that Hamburg is the city of the Hamburg America Line and Frankfurt the home of Goethe."[61] Unlike Hamburg, Frankfurt's mercantile achievements had not come at the expense of an intellectual reputation. Yet due largely to Warburg's unflagging efforts, and "all that his friends, the university and the administrative bodies have done," Cassirer decided to remain.[62] In exchange, the professor

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[57] Ernst Cassirer, "Critical Idealism as a Philosophy of Culture: Lecture to the Warburg Institute, 26 May 1936," in *Symbol, Myth, and Culture, Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer, 1935–1945,* ed. Donald Verene (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 90–91.

[58] For newspaper clippings see, III.29.2.6, WIA.

[59] Aby Warburg, record of his own thoughts, 3 June 1928, III.29.2.7, WIA.

[60] Aby Warburg to Kurt Reizler, 19 July 1928, box 3, folder 78b, Ernst Cassirer Papers-Addition Gen Mss 355, TPC, BRBML.

[61] Toni Cassirer, *Mein Leben mit Ernst Cassirer*, 169.

[62] Ernst Cassirer to Kurt Goldstein, 10 July 1928; cited in Cassirer, *Ausgewählter wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel*, 107.

received not only a raise and the suggestion that he could become the university's next rector, but also the invitation to deliver a high-profile speech in honor of the *Verfassungsfeier* [celebration of the constitution]. Though this celebration was compulsory, it was rarely observed in a country in which universities showed increasingly little support for the government.[63] Given this context, it is remarkable that in his speech "The Idea of the Republican Constitution," Cassirer situated German intellectual history in a wider European context and drew on this tradition to prove that the Weimar Republic was not "un-German." He also cemented the relationship between his scholarship, republican politics, and his adopted city.

At the outset of his speech, Cassirer asserted the importance of intellectual life for solving current political problems. He then went on to outline the relationship between political and legal theory and practice in German philosophical idealism, beginning with the French Revolution. In the lofty speech that followed, Cassirer contended that in the hundred years that passed since the French Revolution, the notion of inalienable rights had retreated to the purely abstract realm of German philosophy. The mission to realign the worlds of theory and practice lay with Germany's present-day citizens. And the Republic—with its foundational constitution—was precisely the regime that could accomplish such a feat. To this end, he attempted to assuage his audience's fears that the German constitution was a foreign concept: "[T]he constitution as such is in no way a stranger in the totality of German intellectual history, let alone an outside interloper," Cassirer insisted, "rather much more so it has matured on its own ground, and through its quintessential power, it was nurtured through the power of idealistic philosophy." A German constitution would rightfully reintroduce inalienable rights from German theory into practice.

Given the challenges posed to explicit leftist endorsements of the Republic in increasingly right-wing university climates, Cassirer's assertion that the Republican constitution reflected not only a French intellectual tradition but also a German one should be read as a highly political claim. To further prove his point, Cassirer enlisted the seventeenth-century German philosopher Leibniz because of his heroic stature in both German intellectual history and European philosophy. The "Leibniz moment" was named accordingly, Cassirer explained, because Leibniz represented the first

[63] Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften: Studienausgabe*, vol. 7, *Tagebuch der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*, ed. Karen Michels and Charlotte Schoell-Glass (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 287; Ernst Cassirer, *Die Idee der republikanischen Verfassung: Rede zur Verfassungsfeier am 11. August 1928* (Hamburg: Friedrichschen, de Gruyter & Co., 1929), 24.

thinker to theorize the principle of the individual's inalienable rights. Leibniz achieved his status as a great thinker in the history of philosophy for his contribution to classical topics, including materialism, dualism, and the mind-body problem. Cassirer's own examination of Leibniz in his *Habilitation* had praised Leibniz for his application of mathematical structures to an empirically given nature. As a progenitor of inalienable rights, however, the choice of Leibniz seems far-fetched. If anything, his atomistic theory of humans as monads creates problems for free will. Moreover, as Cassirer conceded, Leibniz was not the only thinker to theorize this idea; it was also reflected in English philosophy and American founding documents, and through the friendship between George Washington and Lafayette these ideas had also been reintegrated into French thought.[64] For Cassirer this interaction among thinkers of different nationalities reflected a circular journey through intellectual history. Germany might remain at the center of the story, but it nonetheless shared in a wider network of ideas with universal meaning.

The unlikely prominence of Leibniz in this story reflects Cassirer's strained project to grant Germany a central position in the history of republican thought. Cassirer wished to enlist the German thinkers Leibniz, Kant, Lessing, and Fichte to defend the contested tradition of German Idealism and the Weimar Republic. But Cassirer's challenge was twofold, for the classical humanism of the eighteenth century from which Cassirer took his cue was also the Weimar Republic's intellectual inspiration, and therefore it was similarly suspect for its cosmopolitan credentials. Cassirer's logic was admittedly circular: Leibniz is essentially German; Leibniz supports republican ideals; therefore, the Republic is truly Germany.

Warburg was not wholly wrong, then, to view the fates of the Republic and Cassirer as intimately intertwined, and Hamburg as the rightful place for these to come to fruition. Indeed, Cassirer's cosmopolitan nationalism seems to present the intellectual analogue to Warburg's Hamburg. Warburg, like many Germans of his generation, was a nationalist who opposed the Treaty of Versailles, but he was not anti-cosmopolitan. As a Hamburger, Warburg was equally committed to the local, the national, and the cosmopolitan, and he viewed the city's local and national identities in terms of the city's rightful place in the international sphere. As he observed in his article at the height of the "Cassirer Affair," "While Hamburg indeed lies further from the center of traffic . . . as a result, it is able to see forwards and

[64] Ernst Cassirer, *Idee der republikanischen Verfassung*, 16–21.

backwards, if it would only utilize its own perspective to its advantage."[65] It was only right, Warburg suggested, that Cassirer publish his Weimar Republic lecture in Hamburg to cement this relationship.[66]

But not all Hamburgers continued to share Warburg's vision. In January 1929, the University of Hamburg celebrated the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the eighteenth-century philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.[67] If the symbol-laden event was typical of the festival culture of the Republic, it was clear that the members of the decade-old University of Hamburg were not in agreement about what those symbols should be. For some, Lessing appeared the logical emblem for the young university, and even suggested a new name for the University of Hamburg: "Lessing University." "In Lessing's time Hamburg was not only a city of business, but also a city of intellect," the presiding university rector argued.[68] Yet the growing nationalist camp balked at the idea that the university be associated with a "leftist" thinker such as Lessing. One newspaper commentator even suggested that Lessing himself would never have agreed to this presentation of his views: "This abandonment of the celebration of a man one rejected for 'national' [reasons] certainly deserves a preference and is more Lessing-esque than any porridge-in-the-mouth [*Breimauligkeit*] of a great Hamburg paper that has tried to shape Lessing as a spineless liberal."[69] Given Lessing's link to the Jews, the resistance to his symbolism was further evidence that the tide was changing for the Warburg circle.

Taking into consideration this growing hostility, therefore, it is somewhat astounding that over the course of these months Warburg succeeded in securing Cassirer his position as the first German-Jewish rector of a modern German university.[70] Though he would die on October 26, 1929, before Cassirer officially took charge of the 1929–30 academic year, Cassirer's

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[65] Aby Warburg, draft of "Warum Hamburg den Philosophen Cassirer nicht verlieren darf," 29.2.2, WIA.

[66] Aby Warburg to Ernst and Toni Cassirer, 6 September 1928; cited in Cassirer, *Ausgewählter wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel*, 109.

[67] "Erinnerungs- und Gedächtnisfeiern: Lessing-Feier," Universität I 364–5 I A 170.8.9, January 1929, Hamburg Staatsarchiv (StA HH).

[68] Staatliche Pressestelle I–IV 135–I 5375, Lessingfeier, 1929, StA HH.

[69] "Lessingsfeier der Universität: Künstlergruppe stiftet eine Büste: Rektor wünscht den Namen Lessing-Universität," 23 January 1929, *Hamburger Echo*, in "Erinnerungs- und Gedächtnisfeiern: Lessing-Feier," Universität I 364–5 I A 170.8.9, January 1929, StA HH.

[70] Preceded by Julius Bernstein of Halle (1890–91): Ernst-August Seyfarth, "Julius Bernstein (1839–1917): Pioneer Neurobiologist and Biophysicist;" *Biological Cybernetics* 94 (2006): 2–8.

tenure as rector represented the last gasp of Warburg's Hamburg. At the inauguration ceremony, Hamburg's mayor praised Cassirer for his loyalty to Hamburg and lauded him as the city's most valuable representative of its intellectual mission.[71]

Warburg once observed that the fact that "someone like Cassirer" could become full professor was the result of Hamburg's capitalizing on "the inner political change in Germany."[72] With Max Warburg's assistance, nearly two-thirds of the money raised for the university came from Jews. Yet Hamburg was by no means immune to antisemitism. The mayor thought it best not to advertise the university's source of funding.[73] And as for their new star professor, one faculty member reasoned, it was "despite Cassirer's Jewish faith" that he got the job at all.[74] In the year that Cassirer became rector, the younger Panofsky reconsidered becoming the dean of the art history department: "two Jews at the same time is a little much for one year," he confided to a friend.[75] Yet the mayor had insisted that Cassirer's career proved the seemingly improbable claim that "economics leads to philosophy."[76] And with the young Erwin Panofsky's arrival in 1921, the city of merchants on Germany's periphery would enable art-historical innovation as well.

ERWIN PANOFSKY AND THE HAMBURG AMERICA LINE

With its new university and plenty of private money, Hamburg had a lot to offer an up-and-coming art historian like Panofsky. As the youngest of the three scholars discussed thus far, Panofsky benefited both from the university that Warburg helped to establish and from the camaraderie and resources of the library. Art historians have traced the roots of iconography to the efforts among nineteenth-century religious art movements to represent the divine through identifiable symbols.[77] These early origins notwith-

[71] "Rektoratswechsel," Staatliche Pressestelle I–IV 135–I I–IV 5377, 9 November 1929, StA HH.
[72] III.29.2.2.4, WIA.
[73] Schieffler, *Hamburgische Kulturgeschichte*, 357.
[74] "Gutachten für philosophische Professur," Hochschulwesen II 361–5 II A I 3:8, 6 June 1919, StA HH.
[75] Erwin Panofsky to Wolfgang Stechow, 15 July 1929; cited in Panofsky, *Korrespondenz*, 312.
[76] Staatliche Pressestelle I–IV 135–I I–IV 5377, Sta HH.
[77] Cordula Grewe, *Painting the Sacred in the Age of Romanticism: Histories of Vision* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009); Jan Bialostocki, "Iconography," in *The Dictionary of the History of* Ideas, vol. 2, *Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), esp. 529.

standing, there is no question that the "primary event" in iconography —and indeed perhaps art history—was the approach that crystallized around Panofsky in interwar Hamburg.[78]

For art history to develop from an avocational interest to the discipline that we know today required the coming-together of Panofsky's revolutionary intellectual spirit, Hamburg's young university, and its *laissez-faire* relationship with the state. Panofsky's iconology has come under recent criticism for its oversimplified mode of decoding meaning in images and its Eurocentric textual focus.[79] Yet these criticisms are directed largely at the "American" Panofsky and would remain unrecognizable to the "German" Panofsky, who regarded *iconography*—that is, identifying symbols, decoding gestures, and dating—as the starting point rather than the end goal.[80] Placing Panofsky into the context of the Warburg circle in Hamburg offers a crucial historical perspective to this ongoing debate and reveals the complex process of translation of the Warburg circle from Panofsky's Hamburg to postwar America.

Panofsky trained in Berlin with Goldschmidt and showed early signs of being a trailblazer in the still nascent field of art history. Already before he finished his prize-winning dissertation on Dürer, Panofsky attacked the two main art-historical theories of his day for failing to provide a sufficient disciplinary backbone: Heinrich Wölfflin's formalism and Alois Riegl's *Kunstwollen* [artistic will]. In the programmatic essays "The problem of style in the visual arts" (1915) and "The concept of *Kunstwollen*" (1920), he critiqued their respective approaches and hinted at the need for a holistic methodology that would make an art object knowable, create a historical framework for its analysis, and, by setting the standards of inquiry, lend the discipline validity. Warburg's approach would signal Panofsky in precisely that direction.

Though he reluctantly accepted the lesser-paid position of *Privatdozent* at the University of Hamburg in 1921, Panofsky quickly became *Ordinarius* in 1926 and came into his own at Hamburg's new "Weimar" university. He applied Warburg's iconological methodology to studies on thirteenth-

[78] Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 10.
[79] Thomas Crow, "The Practice of Art History in America," *Deadalus* 135, no. 2 (2006); 70–90; Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xix ff.
[80] Christopher Wood, "Art History's Normative Renaissance," *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century: Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, 1999* (Florence: Olschki, 2002), 80–81.

century German sculpture, the changing image of Hercules, and, together with Warburg's longtime assistant Fritz Saxl, Dürer's representation of melancholy. Drawing on Warburg's notion of iconology, Panofsky also continued to develop the epistemological foundations of the field, and in particular a "third way" between the two dominant approaches of the time, formalism and contextualism.

According to H. W. Janson, who studied with Panofsky in Hamburg, his mentor entered art history at a time when the field was experiencing an identity crisis. The main problem was how to account analytically for stylistic change over time.[81] Panofsky's Hamburg work contributed to this disciplinary challenge, and his lecture "Perspective as a symbolic form," delivered at the Warburg Library in the winter of 1924, represented an ambitious attempt to trace the relationship between various Western historical epochs and their respective modes of spatial representation, as well as to lay the groundwork for a schematic history of style. Panofsky's *Perspective* revealed the self-expressed influence of Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Just as the philosopher had extended the narrow neo-Kantian critique of rationality in this work to include a broader morphology of culture, so too did Panofsky aim for all theories of perspective to take one as their reference point but to understand how they emerged, like "symbolic forms," out of their particular historical and cultural moment.

The result is a fascinating text that cuts in two different directions across one of the central intellectual conflicts of the day: structuralism and evolutionism. That is, if every epoch possessed its own perspective, were they all equally legitimate (structuralism), or did each represent an incremental development towards the archetypal form of perspective (evolutionism)? At one point, Panofsky seems to suggest the former when he observes, "it would be methodologically quite unsound to equate the question 'Did antiquity have perspective?' with the question 'Did antiquity have *our* perspective?'"[82] As a text struggling with the full implications of "perspectivism," Panofsky's "Perspective" is a true Weimar-era text and shares much with Cassirer's and Warburg's respective struggles to come to terms with the full consequences of myth.

Yet Panofsky's experience was also radically different from that of his elder colleagues, and his ideas followed a distinct path. Having died in

[81] H. W. Janson, "Erwin Panofsky," in *Biographical Memoirs in American Philosophical Society Yearbook 1969–70* (Philadelphia: Buchanan, 1970), 154.

[82] Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher Wood (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 43; see also Jonathan Gilmore, *The Life of A Style: Beginnings and Endings in the Narrative History of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

1929, Warburg escaped the trauma of World War II, and he did not have to revise his ideas based on its impact. After his brief return to Hamburg in the summer of 1933, Cassirer emigrated with his family to Oxford and then to Sweden in 1935. Following the outbreak of war and the Nazi occupation of France, the Cassirers managed to catch the last boat from Sweden to the United States.[83] Settling in New York, Cassirer taught at Yale and Columbia Universities until his death in 1945. In contrast, Panofsky had already begun teaching alternate semesters at NYU in 1931 and earned recognition at home and abroad. It is telling that in the spring of 1933, when Hitler passed the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, which prohibited "non-Aryans" from working at German universities, Panofsky was the only professor on behalf of whom the university's students and faculty launched a petition.[84]

Following negotiations between the Warburgs, various London donors, and the Nazis, the Warburg Library was quietly transferred to London in 1933 and became incorporated into the University of London in 1944. Panofsky believed that without the Warburg Library, the future of art history in Hamburg was "unthinkable."[85] Likewise, the Hamburg School had become unthinkable without him, as the architect Schumacher wrote: "The news that we are losing you in Hamburg has affected me very deeply. . . . The spirit of Aby Warburg appears before me again and again, and I see his sad eyes." Scheduled to spend another semester at the Institute for Fine Arts in the spring of 1933, Panofsky considered appealing to Hamburg's university board to request a leave of absence.[86] However, Panofsky, too, soon received notification of his dismissal. The cable was sealed with "Cordial Easter greetings, Western Union." "These greetings," he liked to recall, "proved to be a good omen."[87]

Cassirer would hold out for an offer that might permit the rebuilding of "old Hamburg" in a new place, but Panofsky had other options.[88] Building on his New York experience, he established himself anew as an art

[83] Raymond Klibansky, *Erinnerung an ein Jahrhundert: Gespräche mit Georges Leroux* (Frankfurt: Insel, 2001), 51.
[84] *Gutachten* for Prof. Panofsky, 20 June 1933, Sta HH, Akte HWD PA IV 2542.
[85] Erwin Panofsky to Gertrud Bing, 24 January 1932; cited in Panofsky, *Korrespondenz*, 477.
[86] Erwin Panofsky to Hochschulbehörde, 19 April 1933; cited in ibid., 593.
[87] Erwin Panofsky, "Three Decades of Art History in America: Impressions of a Transplanted European," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 321.
[88] Ernst and Toni Cassirer to Erwin Panofsky, 31 July 1933; cited in Cassirer, *Ausgewählter wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel*, 131.

historian at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, New Jersey, and became a leading postwar scholar in America until his death in 1968. Notwithstanding his American success, in a book published as late as 1939, Panofsky described his scholarship as a direct continuation of his collaboration with the Hamburg School, admitting that it was "hard to separate the present from the past."[89] Moreover, he insisted that Hamburg was "still 'different,' even now," and enjoyed lifelong correspondence, often in Latin, with his former Hamburg colleagues and students.[90] On the other hand, despite his attachment to a "kind of nostalgic glow [that Hamburg holds] in my memory," Panofsky declined a job at that university in 1946; indeed, he never wrote in German again. When he delivered a talk at Duke University in 1967, a former Hamburg student declared, "to hear Panofsky, is . . . to be attuned to a significant phase in the history of American cultural thought."[91]

This ambivalent relationship to Hamburg was replicated in the uneasy translation of his scholarship from one urban context to another. While Panofsky's interwar lecture "Perspective as symbolic form," as we have seen, promoted the possibility of multiple perspectives aligned with different historical epochs, his major postwar work, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953), insisted on the Renaissance as the only acceptable standard for perspective.[92] In the 1920s Panofsky worried about the so-called violence done by interpretation to images, but in America he clung to absolutist notions of aesthetic interpretation. In the experimental Weimar period, Panofsky's perspectivism shared much with the Nietzschean suspicion of such universal standards; in the 1930s and thereafter, Panofsky purified his work and subsequently settled for a less nuanced and "rational" methodology. Finally, while in Hamburg Panofsky wrote highly sophisticated and theoretical works, in Princeton, he became known for broad sweeping surveys of whole periods as in his famous *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (1951). The recent discovery of Panofsky's long-lost *Habilitation* on

[89] Erwin Panofsky, preface to *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), v–vi.
[90] Erwin Panofsky to Margaret Barr, 16 April 1933; cited in Panofsky, *Korrespondenz*, 592.
[91] Erwin Panofsky to Erich Jahn, April 27, 1967, *Erwin Panofsky Korrespondenz*, 5:1011. "Erwin Panofsky: Zum Tod des Kunsthistorikers," *Die Welt*, March 19, 1968. "Panofsky hatte Berufung nach Hamburg," *Die Welt*, March 27, 1968. William S. Heckscher, introductory remarks to lecture "Text and Images: The Value of Error in the History of Art," November 4, 1967, in *Erwin Panofsky Korrespondenz* 5:1094.
[92] Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 93.

Michelangelo in the Central Institute for Art History in Munich seems, to some scholars, to be reason to reconsider whether this trajectory from formal analysis to iconology would have occurred if Panofsky had not emigrated to America or whether this work amounted to an "opus juvenile."[93]

But traces of the subversive approach remain in the "American" Panofsky. For example, in his 1962 essay "The Ideological Antecedents of the Rolls-Royce Radiator," which is typically read as a lighthearted American work, the émigré offers a subtle satire on the polemics about the ethnic component of art. Here the "iconological" evidence of this argument is to be found not in the movement of hair, as Warburg had once observed in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, but in the wind-blown "Silver Lady" on the hood of a car.[94] Yet it is the sad truth that one tragedy of the emigration is that the translation—both linguistic and cultural—of Panofsky's scholarship ultimately yielded ideas that were purified of their subtlety and blunted in their impact. If the First World War led Cassirer and Panofsky, inspired by Warburg, to expand the notion of rationality, then the Second World War had the opposite effect: fear of human destruction through irrationality showed the importance of absolutes.

With the emigration, Hamburg would finally become, in Warburg's vision, a "gateway of knowledge," a place from which ideas—like goods—were exported. That the circle proved so easily exportable was testament to the cosmopolitan quality of its scholarship, which flourished in Hamburg so long as the city's local identity—equally cosmopolitan—reigned. When the national imperative usurped this Hanseatic tradition, these scholars would find a new oasis. Therefore, Panofsky represents a different end to the story than is often given to Weimar culture and politics, for it was in postwar America that the Warburg circle, the other Weimar, would persist.

Undeniably, recent art-historical criticism has turned, in part, against Panofsky's iconology: revisions to Panofsky's methodology shift focus from textual sources to pre-discursive and material relationships to art objects.[95] But the influence of Panofsky cannot be overestimated: the collective humanistic scholarship of the Warburg circle would provide the basis for multiple fields across the humanities in the twentieth century.[96] Moreover, the recent critique of Panofsky's one-dimensional methodology overlooks

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[93] "Es war ein viel zu ehrgeiziger Versuch," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 6, 2012: 13.
[94] Erwin Panofsky, "The Ideological Antecedents of the Rolls-Royce Radiator," in *Three Essays on Style*, ed. Irving Lavin (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).
[95] David Morgan, *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[96] Irving Lavin, "The Crisis of 'Art History,'" *Art Bulletin* 78 (1996): 13.

the ways that these ideas were shaped by and adapted to different urban and political contexts. Indeed, the translation of iconology into a new context reinforces the importance of origins in assessing the impact of ideas.

The city of Hamburg cannot *explain* iconology any more than Vienna could psychoanalysis. But the Warburg circle's scholarship benefited from the unique cultural autonomy that resulted from Hamburg's particular urban conditions, and, in turn, it came to share a deep affinity with the city. Just as the Hamburg School investigated the relationship between text and context, it behooves us as historians to accomplish a similar excavation of their intellectual origins: a city where the realities of commerce and geography were reconciled with the aspirations of culture to a height that no one could have anticipated.

University of North Carolina—Greensboro.