foreigners from settling in many cities or towns. In many places the qualifications needed to become a master would have included the demand that one be a citizen, and the qualifications for citizenship may have depended on property ownership or local birth, or even religion in Protestant regions, thus excluding Catholic Italians. As is well known, literacy was therefore a feature of the career of many Italian sculptors. It is relatively rare that a continuing presence might be established in one place for long. The result was that there often existed extreme limitations to the lasting local impact of Italians.  

Religious beliefs also could have presented impediments. Religious differences per se seem in general to have been less of an issue. Thus in Protestant northern Germany and Scandinavia, Italian success stories were employed, as they were in orthodox Russia. Yet in Russia other sorts of controls could have been placed on the activity of sculptors. The prohibition against making graven images was interpreted in such a manner that opportunities for making statues were seriously reduced. Thus in Russia until the late seventeenth century Italians served more often as masons or architects than as sculptors. In the end, it may even be their very success that also restricted chances for Italians. Masons and sculptors who were drawn to Italy to be trained by Italian masters may in many instances have created competition for them. As van Hove’s letter suggests, many Netherlanders often took up in places where Italians did not reach. This is suggested by the pupils of Gianbologna, Netherlanders or Germans who had been trained by him in Italy. Moreover, indigenous traditions were often created to challenge Italian hegemony in some fields. And so by the early seventeenth century south German and Tyrolean scuola decoration was thriving in or not far from areas where Italians had earlier been involved in similar projects.  

As these last remarks indicate, this essay can at best be considered merely a sketch suggesting where further investigations may be pursued. Nevertheless, a good place to start reframing a more comprehensive view of the Renaissance is with the examination of Italian art and artists outside of Italy.

CHAPTER 3

“Vision Itself Has Its History”:
“Race,” Nation, and Renaissance Art History

CLAIRE FARAGO

In the last two decades, the nineteenth-century epistemological foundations of art history have been the subject of great debate. Despite some fundamental disagreements over the nature of visual images, there is a general consensus on two major issues: First, most art historians now regard as problematic the assumption that all images are at base naturalistic; in fact, almost everyone recommends severing the link between images and nature that has historically been postulated by resemblance theories of representation. Secondly, it has been widely claimed that an adequate theory of representation must take into account the culturally specific circumstances in which visual images function. Yet current theoretical discussions stop short of specifying how we are to define these circumstances. What would be involved in drawing out the implications of our theorizing? How might we establish a relativistic epistemological foundation for art history that adequately defines what “culturally specific circumstances” actually means?

With these issues in mind, the following essay explores the possibility of reconceiving our disciplinary paradigm based on national culture so that it focuses on cultural exchange instead. The history of our discipline has been written as a modernist enterprise. Most narrative accounts have been concerned with the formal features of theory at the expense of the cultural circumstances out of which accounts of artistic change emerged. An examination of these cultural circumstances reveals that some of our predecessors were challenged by problems similar to the ones we face today — to revise resemblance theories of representation, to incorporate a multicultural framework, to overcome the Eurocentrism of our inherited academic practices.

Moreover, the normative status of Italian art established within the discipline by Burckhardt, Michele, Ruskin, and others played a catalytic role over several generations of art historical revisionist writing. If we treat the writings of our founding fathers as documents of cultural history, rather than purely theoretical contributions, we discover that nineteenth-century theories about the nature of artistic development on the collective or “cultural” level emerged in connection with widespread debates about the evolution of civilization. First, Social Darwinist theories of cultural evolution provided the leading paradigm. When Social Darwinism per se was no longer the issue, German National Socialism made new demands on art historians and other European
intellectuals, who responded to the racism of Hitler's Germany by reinstating an earlier, internationalist view of culture. The revival of the Enlightenment concept of Bildung initiated during the Weimar Republic, as Carl Landauer has recently argued, fed American cultural aspirations in the post-World War II period when a growing appreciation for humanist culture was fueled by the presence of recent German émigrés like Erwin Panofsky.\(^7\)

We are still debating the paradigmatic status of Renaissance art and culture—the Renaissance no longer has the same cachet in disciplinary discussions of methodology as it did for Burckhardt or Panofsky, but many of us lament its decline along with other historical subjects in university curricula. I think we can revitalize Renaissance studies and other traditional historical fields without becoming mired in old polemics, by reconsidering our inherited assumptions about national culture based on a nineteenth-century assimilationist paradigm. Art historians have, moreover, weighed the methodological problems of using visual evidence in writing cultural history more exhaustively than scholars in any other discipline. We have important contributions to make in constructing a working model of transnational cultural processes.\(^8\)

Burckhardt's Notion of Italian Culture

A good place to begin reassessing categories of national culture that interfere with our perception of the complexity of cultural interactions is with Burckhardt's Civilization of Italy (1860). Burckhardt and other nineteenth-century historians sought to construct the historical memories of modern nation-states—not that I wish to suggest that a directly proportional relationship exists between historians and the formation of nation-states. Burckhardt, for instance, refused to take any active political role and became deeply disillusioned with contemporary political trends. An increasingly recluse member of the Swiss intellectual elite, he opposed the impending formation of the German nation-state. His political views are indirectly expressed in his characterization of "Italian national spirit" as a natural bond that transcends any central authoritarian structure. The terms for his understanding of national community as something bound by common interests rather than any specific form of government had been defined in the late seventeenth century, before modern European national boundaries were established. Accordingly, Burckhardt wrote about Italy as a country organized into political units by regional governments. He saw himself as a modern Dante or a Petrarch, the conscience of the spiritual nation, not as an advocate of large industrial interests.\(^9\)

In light of Burckhardt's explicitly contemporary investment in the history of Italy, and his dread of German unification—"even more apparent in his personal letters and historical reflections—it is somewhat perplexing that the concept of Italian Renaissance art and culture that is still associated with his writings has become so detached from the political circumstances in which Burckhardt and his contemporaries wrote history.\(^9\) Why is there no body of critical literature—as there is for other aspects of his thought—that has considered the effects of Burckhardt's views about modern nation-states on our characterization of the Italian Renaissance? According to one of Burckhardt's most

famous statements, in the opening discussion of Civilization of the Renaissance, in the Italian republics and despoties of the fifteenth and sixteenth century

for the first time we detect the modern spirit of the state [Staatsgeist] of Europe, surrendered freely to its own impulses, often displaying the worst features of an unbridled selfishness, outraging every right, and killing every germ of a healthier culture [Bildung]. But, wherever this tendency is overcome or in any way compensated, a new fact appears in history—the state as the creation of reflection and deliberation, the state as a work of art [Kunstwerk].\(^6\)

Michael Ann Holly, one of the few art historians who has expressed a methodological interest in Burckhardt's writings for its effect on disciplinary practices, argues that Burckhardt's historical narrative was influenced by the actual paintings that he admired, constructed on the principles of centralized geometric perspective (with its single focal point).\(^7\) The key to Burckhardt's frequent verbal portraits and other rhetorical strategies, however, appears to be even more profound—and more interdisciplinary. No historians have traced Burckhardt's use of the word Kunstwerk to describe the "State." If we did, we would find its precedents in philosophy and political theory. In political theory, the Thomistic/Aristotelian notion of a "work of art" appeared as a paradigm for productive legislation in discussions by seventeenth-century political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, who referred to the state as a "work of art," just as the metaphor appears in Burckhardt's Civilization.\(^8\)

Burckhardt also drew on longstanding associations between philosophical "reflection" as the quintessential activity of human judgment and the order that actual works of art manifest. This connection underlies Holly's insightful observation that Burckhardt's narrative structure resembles Renaissance painting constructed on the principles of centralized perspective. But the shared structural traits have a more complex relationship than the stylistic analogy between painting and prose can suggest. John Locke's 1690 Essay Concerning Human Understanding is an important philosophical precedent for Burckhardt's abstract idea of the work of art as the product of "reflection and deliberation"—and the original audience of Burckhardt's cultural history, at least its educated members, would surely have recognized this connection from Burckhardt's choice of language. Knowledge is acquired in successive stages, according to Locke. As described by Abbé de Condillac in his supplement to Locke's treatise, when knowledge is finally gained, the order of things within the mind will be displayed simultaneously.\(^9\) Which is to say, the activity of reflection disposes knowledge, arranges it in a manner that is comparable to visual order. This analogy should not surprise us, given the longevity of the theory that cognition proceeds on the model of vision. Descartes and many other philosophers combined the language of rhetoric and optics to distinguish the "clarity" or "distinctness of ideas" represented in the mind from "dark" impressions at the "lowest" levels of conscious attention.\(^10\)

Among the many routes that optical metaphors of cognition traveled from seventeenth-century philosophy to Burckhardt's characterization of the state as the product of reflection and deliberation, one of the most important to single out is the path through Herder, for whom Condillac's essay on human understanding was a fundamental source.\(^11\) Herder shifted history into the center of philosophical thinking in his effort to
establish aesthetic theory as a philosophical science that dealt with the reception of beauty. In his day, Herder was unique in approaching works of art created by other cultures and epochs with the analytical model of cognition developed by philosophers. Herder came to understand that it would be impossible for a philosophical theory of the beautiful to exist without history, arguing that time and environment give works of art their particular appearance. Burckhardt, who frequently cited Herder in positive terms, drew on this association: he saw the enduring "Italian national spirit" manifested in its individual works of art, be they despots and republics or paintings, sculptures, works of architecture, rituals, and ceremonies. Not that all these categories were equally accessible as historical evidence — Francis Haskell is quite right to emphasize that Burckhardt never invoked the fine arts individually when he wrote his famous cultural history of the Renaissance or established a theoretical rationale for their use as historical evidence, probably because the relationships between art and history are not straightforward, illustrative ones.10

My line of argument would be hopelessly detailed if we were to consider the status of Zedeges theories in general; the only point I wish to make about the implicit analogies in Burckhardt’s writings between actual works of art (as we define them still) and his notion that states are also works of art is that Burckhardt’s verbal picture of the Renaissance in Italy testifies to the role that scholars have played in constructing images of national culture. In a sense, Burckhardt’s cultural history of Italy is also a self-conscious “work of art” — an artistic imitation of the Italian national spirit insofar as his narrative exemplifies the coherence of the “Italian national spirit” he defines. This is Holly’s argument, also Haskell’s. Burckhardt gave the Thronistik/Aristotelian definition of a work of art as any composition created by human art a new concrete dimension: a function of a national spirit. It is not surprising, then, that when Burckhardt wrote Kulturgeschichte was responsible for fixing separate discussions of the notion “work of art” drawn from the literature of art, analytical philosophy, and political theory.

Burckhardt’s praise for the Italian national spirit, manifested in local forms of government as well as civic ceremonies and other visible symbols of collective identity, is not only a monumental work of historical writing, it is a nineteenth-century humanist’s critique of current politics. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that there were no nation-states in the sixteenth century. We look in vain for national boundaries on sixteenth-century maps: “Germania” was a geographical location bounded by topographical features, like “Italy,” which referred to the Italian peninsula, even as it did at the moment that Burckhardt wrote Civilization.11

Distinctions between sixteenth- and nineteenth-century forms of national identity are important to our present investigation of disciplinary paradigms. Unfortunately, however, as important as nationalisms is as a historical phenomenon, there are no satisfactory criteria for defining what constitutes a nation. In the sixteenth century, England probably came closest to qualifying as a modern nation-state. As Richard Hofstadter has recently argued, the emerging English sense of national identity was produced by disenfranchised writers who defended themselves against Italian humanist claims that all foreigners were “barbarians.”12 Cultural boundaries defined in opposition to, or in competition with, Italian humanist values were an important ingredient in the emerging concept of national identity for several hundred years. The rise of centralized, unified, bureaucratic states is, however, a modern phenomenon following changes due to the French and Industrial Revolutions.26 In the last quarter century, a new generation of scholars has significantly altered the accepted paradigm of nationalism on which the disciplinary paradigm of art history was fashioned. Ernsts Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and others of the new generation restrict the modern concept of a nation to the large-scale political units that emerged in the nineteenth century.27 Anderson, in a study of nationalism outside Europe that has gone far to shift the older definitions, defines a “nation” as an “imagined political community” — “an image of communion, as opposed to an actual meeting” that seeks to align itself with large cultural systems that preceded it, such as the religious community or the dynastic realm.28 Part of the current challenge of understanding the history of nationalism is due to the manner in which newly emerging nations in the nineteenth century imagined themselves as antique. Why, asks Anderson, should the nineteenth century need to construct a “nationalist memory” reaching back in time?29 By producing histories of “national culture,” scholars helped to manufacture the modern idea of a nation as an enduring collective. A significant aspect of the problematics of “nationalism” is, therefore, to take into account the role of the scholars who produced it. National traditions of historical writing arose in the same period that historians began to make use of specific visual sources to evoke the economic and constitutional realities of societies.30 Nineteenth-century nationalism has, without doubt, distorted the earlier material. In a classic study on the interrelationship between humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance published over four decades ago, Paul Oskar Kristeller warned us against taking up the prejudices of nineteenth-century historians.31 Yet nineteenth-century ideas of a “nation” or “national spirit” continue to impose on our thinking unstable categories that confound sixteenth-century notions about time, geography, and culture with the nineteenth-century politics of colonialism, race, and the nation-state. The international character of the humanist movement, as Thomas DiCosta Kaufmann argues in Chapter 2, has been neglected in studies of the Renaissance primarily because scholars in northern and central Europe imposed on the historical material sixteenth-century concerns with their own national culture.

The sixteenth-century sense of national identity was expressed differently, in terms of family, regional ancestry, or by association with the Roman Empire. The dominant forms of collective identity in the sixteenth century were multiple, clustered in overlapping groups defined by family, profession, religion, and region.32 Europe was organized into monarchies, local republics and despotic city-states, the Holy Roman Empire, and the papacy, but not into centralized nation-states in the modern sense. Felix Gilbert observes that, while those living on the Apennine Peninsula were “bound together in a special relationship,” there was “astounding” neglect of the national element in the political literature of Italy in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.33 Richard Goldthwaite recently wanted to argue that the internal economy of the Italian peninsula constituted a form of national unity in the sixteenth century.34 But the relationship between the relative economic autonomy of loosely associated city-states and a federal national consciousness that did not emerge until the Risorgimento is far from clear. Nineteenth-century studies of Italian culture desire to be contextualized in the setting of nationalist politics, not just for the specialist in their writings or in Italian
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history, but for everyone interested in the status of modern disciplinary practices. Jacob Burckhardt identified "Italy" with "national spirit" on a local level, without a centralized governing structure, in sharp contrast to contemporaneous efforts to unify Germany as an institutionalized nation-state. Burckhardt's formulation of Italian Renaissance culture was transformed by later histories of art written on the Burckhardtian model that construed enduring national identity in conformity with the borders of modern nation-states. Nineteenth-century historians understandably saw nationhood as being in the process of formation since early humanism, but the assumption — according to a new generation of historians of nationalism — is flawed. Many would argue that such a definition of a nation applies nineteenth-century categories to sixteenth-century material without justification. At the same time, the idea of a nation as an enduring, autonomous entity eludes all critical discussion of the ways in which cultural domination has operated.

Burckhardt's discussion of the state as a work of art — his central notion of the Italian Renaissance as a unified cultural entity organized into regional republics and despotic states — is indebted to Herder's innovative cultural pluralism. However, the Herderian assumption that each culture (and each language) remains discrete and incommensurable with any other is untenable today. Edward Said and other critics of the nineteenth-century phenomenon of Eurocentrism argue that cultural domination is the result of consensual assimilation (which leads to precisely the kind of national state Burckhardt advocated). The new generation of historians defines the development of nationalisms in terms of distinct stages. Drawing upon the groundbreaking work of Mirra Helwech and Helen Hobsbawm identifies three criteria for the formation of a nation: both a long and a recent historical association, a long-established cultural elite with a written national literary and administrative vernacular, and a proven capacity for conquest. An important aspect of Hobsbawm's analysis of nationalism has been his rather unexpected finding (surprising because it denies Herder's central assumption) that a common spoken language is rarely present, but a powerful combination of representations — visible symbols of collective practices — "give palpable reality to an otherwise imaginary community." All of these categories are implicated in the category "Italian Renaissance art," but the role of visible symbols in constructing national identity has been barely examined by historians. Why, then, have art historians not jumped into the breach?

"VISION ITSELF HAS ITS HISTORY"

written, "is based upon an immediate mastering of the visible world by a peculiar power of the human mind. Its significance consists solely in a particular form of activity by which man not only tried to bring the visible world into his consciousness, but even to force the attempt by his very nature." Works of art, regardless of how these objects functioned in their societies of origin, were first systematically defined as products of perception and objects of vision by a small group of late nineteenth-century art historians. I am not trying to suggest that these theories represent all art historians — rather, I want to acknowledge that Friedler and his German-speaking colleagues are the art historian/ theorists who stand accused by a current generation of art historian/theorists of naturalizing the Renaissance metaphor that art imitates nature. Austrian, Swiss, and German writers who assumed that "vision" had its own history, preserved in works of art, did not necessarily see eye to eye with one another; mapping the internal tensions in this field of discourse must wait, however. In the discussion that follows, I will try to suggest, contrary to the current view, that these founders of the discipline of art history made successive attempts to counter the humanist, Renaissance model of art.

Paradoxically, in resisting the normative role played by Renaissance art, Friedler and others who expressed similar views on endowed the Renaissance metaphor that art imitates nature with a new level of universality. The notion that all art, regardless of its origin or stylistic conventions, could embody the world view of an entire nation or people, as Panofsky understood in 1913, indicated that "vision" had come to signify metaphorically the entire process from physical sensation to philosophical reflection and deliberation. And this conflation of sight with higher mental processes, as the young Panofsky wrote of Wölflin's distinction between form and content, is too simplistic.

There is no question that internal dissent existed along generational lines among the founders of the new discipline over the definition of the culturally specific circumstances of art — an issue that is now, once again, the focus of critical discussion among a wide range of cultural historians. Why has this dissent escaped the attention of art historians, even in the most recent historiographical critical studies? In the discussion that follows, I suggest that art historians of the nineteenth century worked in an interdisciplinary discursive field dominated by anthropological questions. This intellectual arena, which actually extended into popular culture (as numerous historians of material culture are well aware), was disrupted by the external events of two world wars. During the interval between them, an older view of Renaissance humanist culture, grounded in the Enlightenment concept of Bildung, was reinstated at the center of the discipline. Bildung, meaning culture or self-cultivation, as it is often translated, was grounded in the view that art is a defining human characteristic of the highest spiritual order, with both universal and historical, culturally specific, characteristics. What the sentimental concept of Bildung did not do, because it intentionally sidestepped the issue altogether, was to engage in the longstanding debate over the definition of national, or "racial," character.

"Goering of the "Visual Arts"

The impetus for expanding the boundaries of what is culturally intelligible is of course much greater when we take into account our position as authors in a historical continum. Let us now return to the idea, implicit in Burckhardt's text and rapidly developed by his contemporaries Michelet and Taine, that works of art embody the collective psychology of entire nations and epochs in perceptible form. We no longer take the most sweeping of these claims seriously yet, as David Summers and Francis Haskell have both recently observed, this kind of essentialism pervades art historical writing and teaching. In 1876, Conrad Friedler was perhaps the first to use the phrase bildende Kunst (visual art) when he defined the perceptual powers of the entire human race in terms of the assumed visualness of art. "The origin and existence of art," Friedler said, "is based upon an immediate mastering of the visible world by a peculiar power of the human mind. Its significance consists solely in a particular form of activity by which man not only tried to bring the visible world into his consciousness, but even to force the attempt by his very nature." Works of art, regardless of how these objects functioned in their societies of origin, were first systematically defined as products of perception and objects of vision by a small group of late nineteenth-century art historians. I am not trying to suggest that these theories represent all art historians — rather, I want to acknowledge that Friedler and his German-speaking colleagues are the art historian/theorists who stand accused by a current generation of art historian/theorists of naturalizing the Renaissance metaphor that art imitates nature. Austrian, Swiss, and German writers who assumed that "vision" had its own history, preserved in works of art, did not necessarily see eye to eye with one another; mapping the internal tensions in this field of discourse must wait, however. In the discussion that follows, I will try to suggest, contrary to the current view, that these founders of the discipline of art history made successive attempts to counter the humanist, Renaissance model of art.

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"Enlightenment Definitions of Art and Culture"
must broaden our historiographical understanding of the foundations of art history to include contemporaneous developments in the social and even physical sciences, especially anthropology and the science of race. The main reason this broader context is necessary, as George Stocking aptly puts it, is that we no longer remember the alternatives which the answers were meant to exclude. What the discipline of art history inherited from Enlightenment thought would legitimately be the subject of a set of encyclopedias but, for the sake of identifying a field of discursive practices, the debt of the modern discipline to the Enlightenment might be quickly sketched as a double imperative. On the one hand, art history is still deeply invested in the Enlightenment project of accounting for the particular qualities of "rational cultures." On the other hand, art historians are still committed to the Enlightenment project of defining "art" as that which is universally human at the "highest" spiritual level. 

The idea that the production of "art" is a distinguishing (and unifying) feature of humanity has a long and complex history in Aristotelian thought. The identification of a distinct "people" or "nation" in terms of their shared practices, habits, and traditions is also very old-originating with the ancient histories of Herodotus and Plato's Lysis, and very complex. Both textual traditions underwent significant modification in the sixteenth century, during the initial period of extensive global contact. Any work of art which is defined as a model of human perception, as literature and the visual arts have been in the western tradition since antiquity, is also the manifestation of a larger complex of cognition. Aristotle's ancient and medieval commentators developed his discussions of the origins of art from individual experience and memory into further distinctions between men and brutes. A new genre of theoretical literature on artistic inspiration and artistic production emerged in the sixteenth century, largely on these neo-Aristotelian lines which distinguished art as a peculiarly human capability. According to Aristotle, the difference between human and animal intelligence, and also between human and animal art, required the distinction between human rational fantasy, which is associated with reason and reminiscence, and the fixed imagination of animals, associated with a retentive memory. These theories were applied in some detail to Amerindians, Africans, and other non-European peoples as early as the sixteenth century. We are still in the process of recognizing the repercussions of these acts initiated in the "Age of Discovery." 

Print technology encouraged a new, illustrated genre of cultural geography, grounded in the textual tradition of Pliny and Herodotus that distinguished nations in terms of their shared practices, habits, and traditions. As Margaret Hodgen has written of sixteenth-century precursors to modern anthropological texts, cultural geographies and travel literature organized by nations, cities, and continents according to ancient categories such as customs, religious rites, forms of government, costumes, language, and artistic products, provide an important and frequently visual record of emerging "European" attitudes.

What makes art history especially indebted to Enlightenment thought is the historical conjuncture of these two traditionally different ways of defining art: Johann Gottfried Herder's career may exemplify this uneasy marriage at its inception: after completing his fourth and most important treatise on aesthetics, in 1770, Herder put the unpublished manuscript aside and spent the next thirty years writing about art as culture, taking up aesthetics again only at the very end of his life. Despite difficulties, it has not proven feasible to divorce one way of defining art from the other—like the two ends of a seesaw, when one goes down, the other comes up, but they are cut from the same plank. "Art" (the essentialist argument) and "culture" (the materialist argument) express two extremes of the central anthropological problem of defining humanness through "art." Nearly every contemporary discussion of "art" as a manifestation of "culture" suppresses this element of tautology by taking one seat on the seesaw or the other without acknowledging the fulcrum that historically keeps the game in place. The problem that the double-seated issue of "art" presents for Renaissance art historians is even more complicated. Raymond Williams, the Marxist literary historian who was not, unlike Jacob Burckhardt, concerned to define the field of general change that introduced elements "we can point to as distinctly modern," describes culture as "one of the two or three most complicated" words in the English language. In Culture and Society, 1780–1950, Williams argued that, when culture came to mean a mode of interpreting common experience that refers to an area of personal experience, it affected the meaning and practice of art, which became the "center of defense against the disintegrating tendencies of industrialism." Williams pinpointed a decisive change in Herder's concept of culture as a variable form of collective identity. Herder defined a nation as a cultural (rather than a sovereign) entity unified by language, custom, costume, gesture, habit, and its artistic productions. For Williams, the historical transformation in the function of art that corresponds in time with theories of cultural relativism was the Romantic rejection of "all dogmas of method," especially those associated with representational art in the academic tradition of naturalism. But the meaning of "art"/"culture"/"modern society in this manner cannot adequately conceptualize the contribution of cultural interactions to modern notions of art. We cannot ground our attempt to offer alternatives to existing schemes for the study of art organized by national culture on the basis of the modern meaning of culture for the same reason that Williams used to justify his--because "art" and "culture" are the product of the same eighteenth- and nineteenth-century effort to define "national identity." The language and theorizing about culture emerged at the same moment in time as the concept of art did, and the object of art is an object meant for individual, secular appreciation. Herder's notions of cultural relativism and his antipathy to systematic "scientific" theories of history are clearly discernible in Burckhardt's writings. Historians of nationalism and of the institutional history of modern academic disciplines, as well as critics of Eurocentrism and postcolonialism, all point out, however, that Herder's idealized notions about cultural integrity and interaction, and the language in which he expressed his ideas, offered an inadequate account of the devastating effects of European colonialism three centuries into the global expansion of European interests. Whether we are considering exchanges within Europe or on a global scale, our dominant framework has usually been the history of a single civilization presented from its origins to its apogee or decline, without taking into consideration the relationship between politics and the writing of culture. Such a framework is poorly suited to investigating the complex historical record of cultural interaction. Benedict Anderson connects Herder's "blithe disregard of some obvious extra-European facts" to the "private property" language that had such a wide influence on subsequent theorizing
about the nature of nationalism." Moreover, Herder's ideas about national identity were, inevitably, informed by the period that is our primary subject of study. There is, in this reflexivity, a certain self-fulfilling prophecy, to say the least. How Herder's idea of national culture is indebted to the new sixteenth-century literature of cultural geography, the changing status of the visual arts, and other cultural phenomena awaits further investigation. Some problematic aspects of the twinned Enlightenment conception of art emerged, however, only at the end of the nineteenth century. Let us now return to these historiographical issues.

The Emergence of Modern Anthropology and the Redefinition of Culture

The co-construction of the categories "art" and "culture" witnessed in the latter part of the eighteenth century was replayed at the end of the nineteenth century. This continuing synchronicity can hardly be simple coincidence. Stocking observes that, before 1900, among German and Anglo-American writers, the word "culture" denoted culture — that is, culture was understood to be a singular phenomenon which every society possessed to a greater or lesser degree. Stocking makes the case that culture redefined as a progressive development in the mid-nineteenth century revitalized older, discredited theories of cultural evolutionism that (like Herder's) had posited the essential unity of mankind. Cultural difference was theorized, beginning in the late 1860s, by fitting the contemporary humanist model of national culture into a framework of progressivist social evolutionism. The modern anthropological idea of cultural plurality, Stocking writes, involved a further rejection of contemporary values. Franz Boas was among the first to use the word culture in the modern plural sense, when he shifted the grounds of inquiry from a search for signs of inherited difference to an investigation of how foreign material was taken up by a people and modified by preexisting ideas and customs.

The western notion that all cultures produce art (not merely artifacts or useful products) emerged gradually over several generations of nineteenth-century art historical writing, and made its earliest mature appearance among the German-speaking art historians and theorists that we have been discussing. This occurred around the same time, or slightly before, Boas began his revolutionary work (in the mid-1890s). In several respects, trends in art historical writing were analogous to concurrent trends in anthropology. The new definition of art as a universal human phenomenon also represented a partial rejection of humanist values. The source of the idea that all art is "visual," intended to function primarily as the object of the special sense of sight — as numerous critics of the foundationalist assumptions of the discipline have rightly pointed out — can be found in Renaissance arguments, such as those advanced by Leonardo da Vinci, whose elaborate defense of painting was built on a tradition of Aristotelian commentary on the function of the senses.

Like the anthropological concept of cultural pluralism, however, the late nineteenth-century concept of art as a universal cultural phenomenon displaced Greco-Roman culture from the normative position it had held without exception since the early humanist revival of ancient letters in the fourteenth century. The term "visual art," which seems too neutral even to have a history, actually made its earliest appearance (first in its German form, as bildenden Künste) in the first formalist theories of art by Ficiller (1786), Wolflin (1888), Hildebrand (1893), and Riegl (1893). The extent to which disciplinary discourses in art history and anthropology were driven by the idea that each of their existences awaits further study. Even now it is clear, however, that a loosely connected group of German-speaking art historians, like the German-edicated Boas, tried to stamp out the widespread (and we would say, ethnocentric) notion that the only transcendental works of art are those which emulate the cultural zeniths of Greco-Roman antiquity by imitating nature ideally. To a greater degree than Boas's statiscally grounded concept of cultural pluralism, however, the new assumption that every culture produces some kind of "visual art" retained the formalist orientation of earlier racial theories of cultural evolution. Identifying the tensions between this enduring theological framework and its changing contents is an enormous task. The following discussion tries to suggest what a productive line of inquiry for this undertaking might be.

Art and Cultural Evolutionism

Our nineteenth-century predecessors frequently expressed their idea about collective identity in racial categories. Heinrich Wolflin, the German Swiss art historian who lived in Basel when Jacob Burckhardt was still alive and succeeded him in the Chair of Art History there in 1893, is generally acknowledged as the founder of formalist analysis. Wolflin, regarding himself as continuing Burckhardt's work, defined the "essential" content of specific works of art within the narrowly circumscribed frame of reference of visual characteristics as manifesting the collective psychology of the "Germanic" or "Mediterranean," "classical" or "Late antique" or "Romantic" spirit. As Wolflin's muddled distinctions can begin to suggest, "race," epoch, and national identity were often interchanged and conflated in the practice of cultural history.

Since the 1950s, the word "race," signifying permanent hereditary differences between family groups, was considered an important factor in determining peculiar cultural characteristics. The anatomist Georges Cuvier, who claimed that negroes were stupid because they lacked civilization, was an early and influential proponent of the idea that permanent differences in mental capability were inherited "racial" characteristics. Racial qualities, like national characteristics, were considered in some sense innate, inherited, and distinguishing features of family groups. But the scientific concept of race was never clearly distinguished from the older notion of a nation or race of people. What Wolflin called Rassencharakter was something held to be the source of all structures of feeling and thought, naturally determined by blood and intellect, a shared assumption over and above the individual. The formal vocabulary of art history, like modernist concerns with the language of the text that developed around the same time, rendered these assumptions implicit:

it remains no mean problem to discover the conditions which, as material element — call it temperament, zeitgeist, or racial character [Rassencharakter] — determine the style of individuals, periods, and peoples.

Yet an analysis with quality and expression as its objects by no means exhausts the facts. There is a third factor — and here we arrive at the crux of this enquiry — the
mode of representation as such. Every artist finds certain visual possibilities before him, to which he is bound. Not everything is possible at all times. *Vision itself has its history, and the revelation of these visual arts must be regarded as the primary task of art history.*

Quality, expression, and "mode of representation" were the main components in Wölfflin's history of art as the history of collective vision, based on the assumption — shared with most of his contemporaries — that the outward forms of art manifest the inward feelings of artists. The grounding of formalism analysis in German idealist thought has received a great deal of critical attention from art historians in recent years. In light of all the attention to the history of our formal categories of art, is it not curious that no one has ever pursued the obvious connections between racial character and "mode of representation" in these texts?

What Gombrich calls the dangerous "physiognomical fallacy" is nothing other than the racial theory that mental capabilities of entire peoples can be read out of their physical features and, by extension, out of their collective cultural achievements. Also, Riegl's theoretical contribution, more than the writings of any other individual art historian, is the logical place to begin a serious investigation of how the discipline of art history has struggled to redefine its inherited models of national culture defined in nineteenth-century terms of racial identity. Riegl's open-mindedness to the aesthetic values of other cultures is still considered extraordinary. And, significantly for the present discussion, his career effort to establish art history on a new, more theoretical foundation (still widely recognized as a major contribution to methodology) stemmed from his attempts to reground a discipline formed for the study of Italian Renaissance art.

Yet art historians have isolated Riegl's ideas from the presaging contemporary social and political concerns that Riegl explicitly addressed. The most recent studies still consider primarily the philosophical precedents of his arguments — in Hegel, neo-Kantian philosophy, Herbartian psychology, and positivist history in the tradition of Leopold von Ranke. As Henri Zerner acknowledged two decades ago, however, there is a curious disjunction between the intellectual context in which we discuss Riegl and the evidence of the texts themselves: Riegl's writings, Zerner found, are a "philosophical bricolage" — and the only philosopher Riegl mentions by name is not a philosopher at all, but the neo-Classical sculptor Adolf Hildebrand, one of the first to use the category "visual art." Margaret Iverson suggests that Riegl's strongly worded condemnations of contemporary historical practice were directed against the prominent Viennese architect Otto Wagner. While this interpretation may be valid in the narrowest sense — and iverson's conclusion is certainly to be commended for being the first to acknowledge that the issue of race was a factor at all — it atomizes Riegl's social concerns, neglecting his explicit and far-reaching objective to eliminate Social Darwinism from the writing of art history.

More has been written about Riegl's revolutionary concept of Kunstwollen (more literally, "will to artistic expression" or "will to [make] art": there is no consensus on the best translation) than about any other aspect of his thought, yet no one has seriously considered that Riegl's coinage is addressed to theories of cultural evolution. Riegl devoted some fifty pages at the beginning of his first major theoretical publication, *Stilfragen Problems of Style* (1893) to refuting the idea of evolutionary cultural progress proposed by some of his contemporaries. That is, Riegl explicitly criticized the application of Social Darwinism to art history. In the introduction and opening chapter, where Riegl set out his theory of geometric style to refute the materialist theories of his contemporaries, his position is absolutely clear. He rejected theories of cultural history that post a parallel between the physical evolution of the human race and the progress of "civilization." He blames this trend on theories of racial difference that have steadfastly crept into the writing of art history:

By this [the predominant intellectual tendency of the last thirty years], I mean the materialistic-scientific world view, first promulgated by Lamarck and Goethe, and subsequently brought to maturity by Darwin, which has left such grave consequences in its wake even in the field of art history. As parallel to the effort to explain the evolution of the species by means of the purely physical drive for survival, there was also an effort to discover primary and intrinsically physical mechanisms for the intellectual evolution of the human race. Art obviously was — or to one thought — a higher stage of intellectual evolution and therefore could not have been present from the very beginning. First came technology, which concentrated on purely practical matters, then, out of this experience, and only after the culture had somewhat advanced, did art appear on the scene.

Art historians have been content to refer Riegl's objections to Social Darwinism to materialist theories of artistic development. I think we have not sufficiently considered that Riegl's opposition was explicitly addressed to controversies over cultural development extending beyond disciplinary concerns within methodology. Chevalier de Lamarck, a well-known early nineteenth-century biologist cited by Riegl in the above passage, assumed that genetic characteristics are culturally acquired. The fundamental issue at stake was whether racial differences in mental ability existed — and if so, how were they inherited? Could cultural acquisitions be passed on from one generation to the next? To investigate these questions, Lamarck searched for perceptible characteristics that could measure human intelligence in a vertical scale classified by "race." Lamarckians are, for the most part, formalists who believe that genetic improvements in "races" would result from providing individuals with a better social environment.

In *Stilfragen*, in the same discussion we have begun to examine, Riegl condemned recent methods that trace motifs to their origins on the basis of technique, unaided by conscious artistic invention, citing the German Darwinist archeologist Haeckel by name. Riegl's objections to materialist histories of artistic development made far more sense when considered in the context of the wide debate over human evolution between the materialists (Darwinians) and the degenerationists (Lamarckians) that extended to the end of the century and beyond. These discussions, beginning in the 1860s, revived eighteenth-century issues of racial difference. In the 1860s, in German, French, and Anglo-American discussions, anthropology provided a new means for re-formulating the Enlightenment theory of the essential unity of mankind by acknowledging cultural difference according to racial categories. The proposed theories are important to consider in connection with Riegl's theories because, like his arguments, they revolve around the mental difference between the industrial arts and moral culture (or "human civilization.") Riegl objected only the latter was considered to involve "spiritual progress" in the acquisition of civilization.
The anthropological discussions, extending beyond scientific debates to the popular press, emphasized that aesthetic capability manifested in artistic productions helped to define the degree of cultural progress, and hence the degree of humanism. Darwin’s *Descent of Man* (1871) suggests how evolutionary theory was applied in its citizen forms to cultural history by Riegl’s contemporaries. Darwin placed savages at a point intermediary between man and animals—and even lower than some animals: “Judging from the hideous ornaments and the equally hideous music admired by most savages, it might be argued that their aesthetic faculty was not so highly developed as in certain animals, for instance in birds.”

E. B. Tylor’s *Primitiv Culture* (1871), according to George Stocking, set the stage for later definitions of culture as a universal phenomenon by suggesting that all areas of culture can be comprehended as one natural process rooted in primitive savagery. With this move, cultural differences came to be explained in terms of degrees of cultural progress through which every society passes. For our purposes, however, the most significant innovation of Tylor’s argument is that for him “spiritual progress” encompassed technology and the crafts as well as the fine arts. The concept of art as a universal and simultaneously “spiritual” phenomenon encompassing crafts was widely disseminated by Tylor’s publications and by writings associated with the British arts and crafts movement. Basically the same argument that all forms of human artistic production are “spiritual” rather than “mechanical” by nature is at the core of Riegl’s concept of Kunstwollen and constitutes his fundamental objection to materialist theories of artistic development.

A similar theory had been articulated even a few years before Tylor’s publication by the architect and historian Gottfried Semper. It is well known that the materialist-technical theories of stylistic change developed by Semper’s followers were the primary object of Riegl’s criticism. Riegl and Semper, however, agreed in two fundamentally important respects: neither ancient Greek culture nor the hierarchy of the “fine arts” should be the source of absolute aesthetic norms. Semper’s ideas on “primitive art”—a term he credited with coming—were soon popularized by his associate in the British arts and crafts movement Owen Jones.

Semper insisted that all the arts, including the utilitarian crafts, are concerned with beauty. His view that weaving is the fundamental source of aesthetic development, argued, like Tylor’s theory of “primitive culture,” for the fundamentally spiritual nature of all human artistic production. Like Riegl, Semper explicitly criticized the exaggerated claims that can be made for technology at the expense of the spiritual nature of all artistic endeavor. And Riegl, in keeping with the theories of both Tylor and Semper (but not the crude simplifications of their Social Darwinist followers), avoided associating inherited aesthetic capabilities graded in a vertical scale with national differences. Instead, he treated every culture in its own, incomparable Kunstwollen, Kunstollen—a concept introduced in Stilflagen and developed more fully in *Sprüngliche Kunstindustrie/Late Roman Art Industry* (1901)—overcomes Riegl’s two central objections to the Social Darwinist accounts proposed by his contemporaries and immediate predecessors: hierarchical distinctions in mental capacity among different cultures or peoples, and the reduction of human agency to technical or materialistic causes.

Yet Riegl explicitly did not reject Darwin’s theory of evolution. Indeed, who would have taken Riegl’s scientific theory of art seriously if he had objected to the dominant scientific paradigm of his day? Nor did Riegl completely reject the humanist model that granted pre-eminence to ancient Greek civilization. Again, who would have taken Riegl’s theory of art seriously if, instead of explaining cultural development, he had rejected the cultural values of his day? Rather, Riegl restricted the use of evolutionary theory and he qualified Winckelmann’s aesthetic preferences by placing Greek culture (and its Egyptian sources, which Winckelmann had rejected as “monstrons”) at the historical (rather than metaphysical) foundation of a continuous artistic progression (rather than a continuous drive towards “perfection”). Riegl’s scheme consciously avoids both the comparative method of racial science that had steadily crept into theories of cultural evolution and the teleological assumptions of the humanist model of cultural perfection and degeneration. Riegl’s contribution, widely recognized today, countered the widely held Enlightenment view that as the Roman Empire degenerated its Greek artistic heritage also declined, by creating a new, positive identity for late antique art.

Modern contemporary critical historians, impatient with essentialism in any form, want to dismiss the Idealist underpinnings of art history altogether. But can we really succeed in this endeavor without considering carefully the fabric of concerns with cultural development into which Idealist philosophy was woven in the foundational era of art history? My own reexamination of nineteenth-century theories of artistic change began with the abrupt (and, I recall, embarrassing) realization that Wölflin’s formalistic categories of analysis were inextricably tied to a racial theory of cultural identity. I tried to separate, for an undergraduate audience in a survey of “western art” I taught in 1989, the analytic technique which I respected from the racial theory I could only despise. I found I could not. How much more impossible this intellectual task would be to perform for a discriminating audience of professional peers!

Semper, Kagler, and BSBerkhards

It is easy to demonstrate that Riegl addresses key issues in the nineteenth-century debates over racial inequality because he tells us that he did. What Zerner and others call Riegl’s attempt to overthrow the supremacy of the individual creator is also, in reference to cultural evolutionism, an attempt to explain continuing cultural identity without resonating to the notion of a cultural hierarchy grounded in innate mental and aesthetic differences among “races.” Riegl’s theory accounts for the development of various dominant cultures as exactly parallel events, the products of formal laws and historical accident rather than inherited mental capabilities. By his own admission, Riegl’s objections to Social Darwinism, central to his program of theoretical reform, were not an isolated reaction: he participated in a project that spans several generations of art historical writing. In the context of fitting the idealized naturalmade art of the Graeco-Roman periods to the role of values, Semper and Riegl proposed the first histories of world art defined in non-representational terms. By turning to the writings of Gottfried Semper, we can suggest, at least in a preliminary manner, how Riegl’s immediate predecessors also revised existing notions of national cultural identity.

Semper was among the first writers who systematically tried to dismantle the category
Semper, far from agreeing with his predecessor Kugler (or with George Kubler) that the crafts and the "fine arts" should be maintained in separate categories, defined "art" as a unique phenomenon. Semper disagreed with Kugler by granting non-figurative "crafts" of non-European cultures the status of "art," and he attacked Kugler's theory that all ancient Greek art and architecture were constructed of "noble white marble," citing extensive archaeological evidence in a scathing rebuttal to Kugler's reading of the ancient literary testimony (which conformed closely with Winckelmann's aesthetic preferences). Semper's alternative thesis (which still followed Winckelmann and Humboldt) is a climatic theory of human development combined with an Aristotelian analogy between nature and art: populations imitate nature in various ways, but always derive their aesthetic preferences from their natural environment.

Kugler, Semper, and Riegl were all committed to revising the exemplary role of Renaissance art, but they instituted some culturally exclusionary categories of their own. Kugler recognized the artistic merits of civilizations other than those associated with the classical world, but he maintained and even helped to institutionalize long-standing cultural hierarchies. Semper disagreed with Kugler by granting "crafts" of non-European cultures the status of "art," arguing that the aesthetic preferences of each moment of culture are inseparable from the functional value of their manufactures and depend on their natural environment. Semper's idea of cultural relativism was influenced by his knowledge of art forms in non-European cultures, notably the Assyrian discoveries of the 1840s, the London Great Exhibition of 1851, and whatever he found in the ethnographic journals he is known to have read. On the other hand, Semper's newly coined category "primitive art" is still grounded in a European system of values that has nothing to do with the values of the society it is meant to describe. His comparative study of art is, moreover, deeply indebted to the scientific principles of his contemporaries such as the anatomist Cuvier, who ranked the "human races" according to the beauty of their design, even devising a scale of intelligence on this visual basis, that gave 30 percent to apes, 70 percent to Negroes, 80 percent to Europeans, 90 percent to ancient Greek sculptures of men, and 100 percent to sculptures of divinities.

Riegl rejected evolutionary theories of cultural development more completely than either Semper or Kugler. Yet Riegl, like Wolfflin and in keeping with most writers of their day, thought it was possible to discern psychological characteristics over and above the individual in cultural "forms of art." And, although he restricted the use of evolutionary theory in cultural history (by rejecting the comparative methods of racial science adopted by Social Darwinists) and although he abandoned the humanist model of cultural growth and decline, Riegl still placed Winckelmann's ideal of Greek cultural achievement at the foundation of his history of artistic progression.

Panofsky

When Panofsky grounded the individual work of art in a richer historical and cultural context than any of his predecessors, he had in mind the difficulty of using visual evidence to write history. Panofsky was certainly aware that cultural consciousness creeps into historical writing. His most famous discussion of method is probably the essay that
introduces *Studia in homology*, first published in 1939. The following brief analysis of this essay does not pretend to address the complexity of Panofsky's proposal for eliminating bias by means of an internal set of “correctives and controls.” The following analysis aims to uncover Panofsky's own cultural biases, grounded in a model of nationalism that we can no longer accept.

Panofsky revised Riegl's formalist notion of Kunstwollen and he rejected Wolfflin's distinction between form and content as an over-simplification that confines vision with higher mental processes of apprehension and cognition. At the first stage of a “pre-iconographic” interpretation, Panofsky proposes, the condition of being human is sufficient to interpret the meaning of certain gestures and expressions— "everyone can tell an angry face from a jovial one," he writes, though we might have to widen the range of our practical experience by “consulting a book or an expert." Panofsky qualified these remarks by noting that first impressions are no guarantee of a correct interpretation. But even in this qualified form, is Panofsky's claim for the universality of gesture and expression justified? Recent studies of colonial art and drama leave no room for doubt that gesture and expression are far more culturally specific than Panofsky gave them credit for being.

Panofsky evidently sensed that his definition of the universality of painting did not completely resolve the problem of how we “naturally” understand visuals, because he added a qualification, which he called “a peculiar problem” — that a work of art may be unrecognizable because of the "incompetence" or "malice aforethought" of the artist. He thus eliminated many hybrid works of art from prolonged consideration and reinforced the normative stance of representational practices associated with European styles of optical naturalism. Furthermore, Panofsky's argument makes undetermined assumptions about human agency. Products of intercultural contact like colonial maps and pictorial calendar books would not qualify for consideration according to Panofsky's criteria. This is not because maps and calendars fall outside the range of the "fine arts" — Panofsky might have applauded the ingenuity of the art historian who chose this subject matter — but because they conflate European optical naturalism with other, incompatible systems of visual signification. The result often compromises the European pictorial conventions they imitate, but the reasons for these compromises — as Pauline Watts, Thomas Cummmins, Elise Quiniones Keber, Cecelia Klein, and Dana Lepinski discuss in this volume — are more complex than Panofsky allowed. An indigenous, partially assimilated artist of the colonial period, with knowledge of different pictorial conventions, would have understood European images with a different conception of what and how they communicate from a native European artist. The artist might be malicious and he might not be professionally trained — but these are separate issues with their own social circumstances.

For a European viewing audience, as the case of the Sapi-Portuguese saltcellar I discussed in the Introduction suggests, the hybrid work of art would reflect on the mentality and intelligence of the artist. We are far from being compelled, however, to evaluate such hybrid objects as the inferior artistic products of cultural misconceptions — as "incompetent" versions of "orthodox" representational practices. We can conceptualize the interaction of different pictorial conventions across cultural boundaries in other terms than aesthetic considerations ("incompetence") or fear ("malice aforethought"). We can think of them rather as evidence of emerging colonial identities. Panofsky did consider some hybrid images when he turned to the art historian's problem of dealing with regional differences in representational conventions. Such puzzling aspects of images belong to the second stage of interpretation, during which the art historian examines "forms under varying historical conditions." At this stage, the art historian learns what the artist "knew" — for example, that a certain portrayal of Judith combines German and north Italian motifs. Panofsky argues that "a correct iconographical analysis" is always possible, presupposing a "correct identification of the motifs." Yet certain hybrid objects, such as the collectors' items that combine natural and human artistry which Martin Kemp discusses elsewhere in this volume (Chapter 9), intentionally defy such classification as well as determinate readings. How should we treat these objects?

In the most complicated cases of iconographical exchange, between completely unrelated cultures, visual motifs can act as permeable membranes, providing access across cultural boundaries. Yet because similar visual representations usually hold different meaning for previously unrelated cultures, visual symbols can be a fundamental source of miscommunication and reinterpretation. The mediating functions of visual symbols in these situations deserve to be carefully studied and articulated. What if every viewer has only partial access to the visual code? And what if this has always been the case for most images? Such fundamental questions about the nature of signification and visual communication raised by hybrid images encourage theoretical concern with the unstable and shifting signification of signs. Panofsky's modes of interpretation, on the other hand, constitute the third in a series of strategic moves that prevent him from adequately conceptualizing the process of cultural interaction in situations where deterministic readings are impossible. How could such interpretation be "correct" if the same image signifies differently for different audiences?

Panofsky's formulation of correctives and controls at the final stage of analysis is the most problematic aspect of his discussion. He proposes that art historians compare their interpretations of the "intrinsic meaning" of individual works of art with the intrinsic meaning of other documents from their milieu, to compensate for the individual historian's "personal psychology and world view." The various humanistic disciplines meet at this ultimate stage of iconological analysis "on a common plane instead of serving as handmaidens to each other." We are fundamentally indebted to Panofsky's interdisciplinary vision, but the history of the humanist values that Panofsky praised should also be part of our subject of study. As George Mose has emphasized in his study of Jewish emigration immediately before and during World War II, scholars, professionals, artists, and other producers of European culture overcome the racism they experienced in their European setting with a global vision of humanity. Panofsky and other assimilated German Jewish intellectuals sidestepped the embattled issues of "racism" and "nationalism" when they replaced the Enlightenment concept of self-cultivation, or Bildung, and conceived of themselves as members of an international community.

In the interval between two world wars, cultural values associated with Italian Renaissance humanism were reinstituted by a European community which saw the sixteenth century through the filter of eighteenth-century Weimar classicism. Carl Landauer argues that the views Panofsky developed in Germany were entirely in keeping
with the Romanticist sensibility of Weimar culture. Later, in the post-war period, the presence of German scholars in the United States fed American aspirations for a new cultural identity associated with humanism.\[63\]

The theoretical and cultural refocusing of disciplinary practices associated, above all, with Panofsky's iconological approach created a major epistemological break in the formation of art historical discourse. Panofsky, like other refugees from Nazism, eliminated all direct consideration of racial theory from his writings. This distinguished generation of scholars rarely hinted directly at the contemporary societal pressures that encouraged them to embrace an internationalist view of culture at the expense of their own German loyalties.\[64\] Given the political circumstances in Germany in the 1930s, it is not surprising that Panofsky and other liberal intellectuals of his generation dealt with race by denying the historical role of racial theory altogether.\[65\] When Panofsky developed a method of art historical interpretation that relocated Italian Renaissance humanist values at the center of the discipline, however, he not only glossed over Riegl's objections to a humanist model of culture that grants priority to Greek antiquity and its modern revival, he gave Renaissance humanism an unprecedented status to govern the interpretation of all forms of art.\[66\] What should we make now of such ideas about the authority of Renaissance culture?

Theorizing Cultural Transition: a Retrospective View

The narrative history of art history would sound quite different if it were to emphasize the investigation of cultural exchange rather than the taxonomy of national culture. Pride of place would go to transnational transgressions of national and cultural boundaries – confrontations with the border polis, as Aby Warburg called them. Such a history would construct a different genealogy of foundational texts than those with which we are currently most familiar. Arthur Kingdell Porter's 1923 study Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads, for example, would gain in stature because, as Linda Seidel has recently argued, its findings were initially considered problematic because they implied that there were no real regional or national boundaries for art during the Romanesque period of French history.\[67\]

A revised narrative history of the discipline would also prominently feature Otto Kurz for his lifelong interest in cultural transition, the similar interests of his close friend at the Warburg Bibliothek, Fritz Saxl, and the Institute's visionary founder Aby Warburg.\[68\] Warburg's transcultural interests in magic and science, which substantially determined the holdings of his famous library and the research interests of its users, would surely be the centerpiece of any revised narrative that stresses the discipline's interest in cultural transformation.

Warburg, like Riegl and Semper, broadened his theoretical understanding of art through the study of non-European culture. In the final analysis, however, we are compelled to dwell upon the limitations of the Warburgian approach to the study of cultural development. An incident from the beginning of Warburg's own career can serve as an illustration. In 1896, Warburg traveled around the United States, where he witnessed a Pueblo ceremony – what Warburg called a "serpent ritual" – that reportedly changed his attitude even towards Florentine art.\[69\] The published essay that eventually resulted from this trip is evidence of Warburg's sincere theoretical interest in the universal problem of how art communicates with its audience.\[70\] His stated intention, however, was to decipher the workings of contemporary "primitive minds."\[71\] Warburg assumed that Pueblo culture evolved according to its own internal dynamic of cultural progress, despite the fact that Native Americans in the Southwest had lived in close contact with Europeans since the arrival of the Spanish in 1580.\[72\] Warburg showed no interest in the historical process of cultural assimilation among the forcibly acculturated Pueblo people. His assumptions about "primitive" mentality were grounded in discredited nineteenth-century theories of cultural evolution and racial identity.

On the other hand, even though Idealist assumptions about "primitive culture" are no longer tenable, Warburg's empiricism, manifested in such observations as "what appears to be purely decorative ornament must in fact be interpreted symbolically," and his original interest in the inherent tension that visual symbols embody, contain the seeds of an approach to cultural interaction that is still considered viable today. At present, the concrete nature of knowledge production through visual images in colonial situations offers a real test of the semiotic and phenomenological models that have developed in response to resemblance theories of representation. Despite the organization of the discipline in terms of unmerged assumptions about collective identity that take for granted the homogeneity of "national culture" and the hierarchy of the "fine arts," awareness of cultural difference has contributed significantly to the ways in which disciplinary methodologies developed. It is understandable that the discipline focused on national culture, modeled itself on the dominant scientific paradigm (evolution), and adapted current scientific procedures, such as typological analysis, to its own forms of evidence when and if Warburg believed it would go. I think the discipline would go. I think that, when and if Warburg believed it would go, the discipline would go.

Different questions are potentially most interesting to contemporary scholars, however, and these questions demand different methodologies and different claims to knowledge.

So how should we define "culturally specific circumstances" now? Certainly not according to nineteenth-century notions of national culture or racial identity. To develop a theory of representation on a relativistic epistemological foundation that treats the social circumstances in which visual images circulate, it is essential that we take into account the history of the discipline as it developed out of a broad discursive field about the nature of human civilization. And the longer history of these discussions, as I have tried to suggest, revolved around the respective roles played in western thought by mental operations, such as reasoning, memory, and the imagination, in defining humanness. Only by understanding our lingering epistemological assumptions can we go beyond them. Writing parallel accounts of the history of art from mutually exclusive points of view will not free us from the chains of the past. Not a wholesale rejection of the western philosophical tradition, nor a refusal to see beyond the historical boundaries of our dominant cultural tradition, nor any other dominating framework, will allow us to reconceptualize the Renaissance and other historical periods as the international, multicultural phenomena that they were.

Another major difference between the static notions of cultural identity held by
Panošky, Warburg, and their colleagues, and any model we might wish to develop today, should be our greater awareness that the discourse of the historian is not univocal: it shifts just as the significance of the work changes according to the historian’s interest. One of the greatest challenges facing the discipline of art history today is the challenge of remodeling our inherited notions of national culture, which have been widely discredited outside the field, and replacing them with a dynamic model of collective identity defined in terms of diverse elements that are always in flux and, therefore – like visual images – capable of producing more than one responsible interpretation.

Renaissance Theories of the Image