
Painterly Thought: Max Liebermann and the Idea in Art

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Résumé

Max Liebermann est surtout connu comme peintre naturaliste/impressionniste. Il était également un écrivain passionné : *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* (*L'Imagination dans la peinture*) est l'expression la plus développée de sa théorie de l'art. Au tournant du XX^e siècle, les écrits allemands sur l'art ont souvent opposé le naturalisme français à l'idéalisme allemand. Liebermann tente de concilier ces oppositions en proposant une théorie de l'art qui rejette ce qu'il considère comme des catégories absolues, telles que le naturalisme et l'idéalisme, et les remplace par ce qu'il estime être des termes relationnels, tels naïf et sentimental (découlant de Schiller). Cet essai discute du rapport de la théorie de l'art de Liebermann à sa pratique à travers une analyse de son tableau *L'Atelier* (1902) et de la relation de celui-ci avec *Las Meninas* de Velázquez. De même que la théorie d'Erwin Panofsky sur l'Idée dans l'art et l'analyse de la théorie de l'argent de Georg Simmel, la théorie de l'art de Liebermann s'articule sur le rapport entre la distance et la présence. L'enjeu pour ces écrivains est la compréhension du relationnel comme une caractéristique fondamentale de la subjectivité moderne.

Painters with wonderful ideas are always bad painters.
Max Liebermann, *Die Phantasie in der Malerei*¹

Max Liebermann's censure of conceptual painting was not something new; similar criticism was often levelled at German painting of the nineteenth century. French critic Théophile Gautier, writing in 1856 about the work of the Nazarene painter Peter Cornelius, had remarked, "the idea has remained an idea and has not assumed a form."² One might suppose that Liebermann, the naturalist/impressionist painter, would have taken the stance that artists must work directly from nature and not from an idea that originates in the artist's mind. Liebermann, however, advocated something quite different. In his essay *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* (*Imagination in Painting*), the most developed statement of his art theory, he argued that whether art is naturalist or idealist, it involves conceptual and perceptual activity, as well as creative and formative imagination. Liebermann was writing at a time when it was a commonplace for the conceptual to be associated with Germany and the perceptual with France. He negotiated these national traits and theoretical poles through the development of an art theory that favoured relational terms over absolute categories. Like Erwin Panofsky's theory of the Idea in art and Georg Simmel's analysis of money, Liebermann's art theory hinges on the relation of distance to presence. What is at stake for these writers, as I will argue, is the understanding of the relational as a fundamental characteristic of the modern subject, whether it takes the form of Simmel's consumer, Panofsky's art historian, or Liebermann's painter. In this paper I will use Liebermann's essay as a focal point to discuss the Idea in German art theory during the second half of the Imperial period (the reign of Wilhelm II from 1888 to 1918). These discussions were not merely theoretical. They were highly political and nationalist, just as they had been earlier in the nineteenth century.

French Naturalism and German Idealism

In 1813, Mme de Staël wrote,

It might be said with reason that the French and the Germans are at the two extremes of the moral chain; since the former regard all ideas as moving from exterior objects; the latter, all impressions as proceeding from pre-conceived ideas.³

In the Imperial period, the issue of German identity continued to intrude into all areas of cultural activity, including architecture, theatre, opera, and art.⁴ Art theory was no exception.

French hegemony in the visual arts was often assumed in contemporary German art criticism, which frequently opposed French Naturalism to German Idealism. Karl Scheffler, who was closely associated with Liebermann and the Berlin Secession, summarized these binary oppositions by categorizing painting according to two poles: perception (*Anschauung*) and conception (*Begriff*). "Perception is the sensual feeling for the world, ... while conception reflects on the appearance and produces an idea." The main difference between the two is that "perception paints and conception draws."⁵ Scheffler, like his mentor Julius Meier-Graefe, considered most German painters to be painters of thoughts (*Gedankenmaler*) "because the German is by birth a man of ideas."⁶

In the 1890s, art historians Richard Muther and Cornelius Gurlitt had argued that the flame of conceptual art had been taken up in Germany by a group of artists they labelled New Idealists, including Anselm Feuerbach, Arnold Böcklin, Hans von Marées, and Adolf Hildebrand.⁷ New Idealism signalled something fundamentally different from earlier types of Idealism. While old Idealists like Peter Cornelius worked, so it was claimed, only in the realm of ideas, Hildebrand used nature as a model at the same time that he wanted to express his idea (*Vorstellung*).⁸ Artists of the new school, according to Muther, wanted to depict "modern emotions" rather than "modern life," but nevertheless grounded their work in the study of nature,

“the Alpha and Omega of all art.”⁹ As the very nature of the label suggests, New Idealism indicated something novel (a synthesis of naturalist and idealist tendencies) as well as something traditional (a link to an older German form of artmaking).

While some art historians championed the cause of New Idealism, other, more influential voices continued to give priority to the French naturalist tradition. Julius Meier-Graefe, for example, conceded that Böcklin’s early paintings may have had formal unity, but he found that the painter’s mature work suffered from sentimentality and paid little attention to painterly means.¹⁰ And this fault was not just specific to Böcklin; it was a national dilemma: “What is lacking in Böcklin, what is missing in Germanness, is in the final regard the same thing. The case of Böcklin is the case of Germany.”¹¹ Meier-Graefe, it is well known, modelled his Böcklin essay *Der Fall Böcklin* on Nietzsche’s *Der Fall Wagner*, and it was Nietzsche who had clearly articulated the association between idealism and all that was wrong with German culture:

*All great crimes against culture for four centuries they [the Germans] have on their conscience.—And the reason is always the same: their innermost cowardice before reality, which is also cowardice before the truth; their untruthfulness which has become instinctive with them; their “idealism.”*¹²

Liebermann’s *Die Phantasie in der Malerei*

Liebermann’s *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* negotiates this political minefield quite carefully. It is a complex theoretical text that can be understood in at least three different, but connected, contexts: first, Liebermann’s personal identity as insider and outsider, German and Jew; second, German cultural identity, especially in relation to France; and finally, contemporary German art theory. Published in 1916 by Bruno Cassirer, *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* contains three parts, two of which were issued earlier as journal articles.¹³ In 1904, when the first of these essays appeared, Liebermann was fifty-seven years old, an established painter, and president of the Berlin Secession since 1898. At the 1906 *Deutsche Jahrhundertausstellung* at the Berlin National Gallery, an exhibition celebrating German painting from 1775 to 1875, Liebermann’s eight exhibited paintings were more numerous than any other by a living artist in the exhibition. Liebermann’s work accorded well with the francophile tastes of the exhibition organizers. In the catalogue, National Gallery Director Hugo von Tschudi claimed France as the “classical ground” for nineteenth-century painting, “as Italy was for the Renaissance and Holland for seventeenth-century painting.”¹⁴

In his “Ein Credo” of 1922, Liebermann summarizes the main points set out in *Die Phantasie in der Malerei*. He writes, “if there is only an idealistic form, that is a form that precedes

the idea, there cannot be a naturalistic form in opposition to it.” Put another way, if one believes in a naturalistic form, that is in an image in the mind derived through sense-perception, then one cannot believe in some type of Platonic form that precedes perception. Liebermann then continues, “the terms idealistic and naturalistic” fail to capture the difference between artists and their relations to nature; the terms naïve and sentimental “come much closer to what should be expressed therein.”¹⁵ These two claims deserve unpacking: first, Liebermann’s rejection of a Platonic position that the form or idea has metaphysical existence; and second, his reclamation of Schiller’s terms from the 1794–95 essay “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry.”

Imagination and Perception

Liebermann adopts a Kantian approach in his art theory. In a 1921 letter to art critic and historian Julius Elias, he explains how Kant grounded modern aesthetics: “he does not investigate the thing-in-itself, but our idea of the thing; the object is only the correlate of the subject.”¹⁶ In seventeenth-century classical art theory a distinction was often made between sense-impressions and their manipulation into an idea—a distinction, according to Erwin Panofsky, that made idealism and naturalism “for the first time...logically incompatible.”¹⁷ In Liebermann’s Kantian framework, however, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the naturalist and idealist painter, for both work in the realm of ideas. Thus, Delacroix and Böcklin “never painted after nature,” while Manet and Leibl “painted every stroke after nature,” yet all “painted from memory. They just proceeded in different ways.” Leibl, just like Böcklin, “painted from his imagination.”¹⁸

The relation of perception to memory and imagination (*Phantasie*) has a long history.¹⁹ In nineteenth-century German writing on art, *Phantasie* is used in a variety of ways: sometimes in reference to the genius of the artist and other times in the context of its role in the process of perception and in creating mental images (*Vorstellungen*). In both these senses, *Phantasie* is almost always connected to perception and memory. In fact, in popular encyclopedias of the day, *Phantasie* is often distinguished from memory or reproductive imagination (*die reproduzierende Einbildungskraft*), which “renews already concrete sensed perceptions.” *Phantasie* or creative imagination (*die schöpferische Einbildungskraft*) “builds new ones.” But these new mental images are never divorced from sense perception. *Phantasie* “creates a new world, whereby it makes use of elements of the [given world], through original received impressions..., as building blocks, through which new and original associations bring forth new, original imaginary pictures.”²⁰ This understanding of imagination as expressive could help a writer distinguish a work of art from mere imitation and, at the same time, keep it connected to sense

perception. We see this employment of imagination in the discussion of New Idealism as a synthesis of naturalism and idealism and in Liebermann's conception of naturalist painting as imaginative work.

Liebermann's Kantian understanding of perception was very much in line with developments in nineteenth-century perceptual psychology. According to scientists such as Gustav Fechner (1801–87), Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), and Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–94), perception involved both external stimuli and mental activity.²¹ The work of Helmholtz, who was a physician, physicist, inventor of the ophthalmoscope, and scientist of the physiognomy of vision is especially intriguing in this context. He argued that visual perceptions (*Vorstellungen*) are “ideas or conceptions as to the existence, form and position of external objects,” which are formed “by sensations aroused by light in the nervous mechanism.”²² According to Helmholtz, visual perceptions are the effect of external causes, but he did not speculate on their relation, since “idea and the thing conceived evidently belong to two entirely different worlds.”²³ Helmholtz went on to differentiate between different types of mental images but conceded that it is frequently difficult to assess “how much of our apperceptions [perceptions accompanied by sense-impressions] as derived by the sense of sight is due directly to sensation, and how much of them, on the other hand, is due to experience and training.”²⁴

In German artwriting of the time, it was not only Liebermann who understood the idea in art as an effect of sense perception. Robert Vischer, in his theory of *Einfühlung* (empathy), and Conrad Fiedler, in his notion of *Sichtbarkeit* (visibility), similarly assume that sense perception constitutes the basis for formal matters.²⁵ Fiedler, for example, referring to Helmholtz's work, agrees that our sense perceptions are “not the mirroring of an object in an organ of perception, but the product of sensual mental activity.”²⁶ Members of Fiedler's circle, which included painter Hans von Marées and sculptor Adolf Hildebrand, were also well aware of the contemporary scientific debates surrounding perception. Relying on contemporary perceptual psychology, Hildebrand claims in *The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts* (1893) that “seeing is certainly no purely mechanical act; it is only through experience that the imagination turns the mechanical retinal image into a spatial image, allowing us to recognize what it represents.”²⁷ In the same essay, Hildebrand also discusses binocular vision and kinesthesia, just as Helmholtz had examined these issues in his 1871 essay, “On the Relation of Optics to Painting.”²⁸

While Liebermann did not refer to Fiedler or Hildebrand in his writings, his thinking was certainly in line with their basic ideas.²⁹ For Liebermann, perception and mental activity were only one part of the imaginative process. “Painting exists,” he claims, “not in the invention of thoughts”—what he terms at

another point creative imagination (*schöpferische Phantasie*)—“but in the invention of the visible form for thoughts,” or formative imagination (*gestaltende Phantasie*).³⁰ Imagination does not stop “when the work begins...but it must lead the hand of the painter up to the last stroke of the brush.”³¹ Liebermann thus does not distinguish between art and craft (*Kunst und Handwerk*), just as the Greeks, he reminds us, had only one word (*techne*) for the two.³² With this understanding of the imaginative process, Liebermann argues against the accepted norm when it comes to imaginative painting. A portrait by Frans Hals, he claims, is more imaginatively painted than one by Holbein, for Hals has developed the more adequate painterly means to express his conception of nature.³³

Schiller's “Naïve” and “Sentimental”

Liebermann's treatment of art in terms of conceptual and formative imagination collapses the naturalist/idealist dichotomy. Painting-from-imagination, he claims, is no different than painting-after-nature, “for they are merely two different paths leading to the same goals.”³⁴ This merger of naturalist and idealist painting leads Liebermann to Schiller: “The same opposition as between naïve and sentimental poets also exists in painting: the naïve painter begins with the appearance; the sentimental with thought.”³⁵ For Schiller, the naïve poet, who is best exemplified by the ancient Greeks, works unselfconsciously; he is co-extensive with, or part of, nature. The sentimental poet, like modern man, is “in opposition with nature.” Because of this opposition and of his awareness of it, the sentimental poet no longer merely imitates nature but touches “us through ideas.”³⁶ In claiming these categories for modern painting, Liebermann suggests that the naïve painter is characterized by a form of immediacy, the attempt to find painterly equivalences for sense-impressions (even if he only has access to ideas, not things-in-themselves). The sentimental painter, however, is defined through mediation, be it that of art theory, the understanding, or the manipulation of sense-impressions.

Liebermann's adoption of Schiller's terms should not be seen in isolation; it was part of a larger rethinking of aesthetic discourse at this time. Since the 1890s the champions of New Idealism, as we have seen, attempted to synthesize naturalist and idealist impulses. Richard Muther, for example, adopts Schiller's language to describe New Idealism as sentimental painting. “The austerity of the antique spirit,” he writes of New Idealist art, and of Feuerbach's painting in particular, “is tempered by the melancholy of the modern intellect.” Olympus is filled “with the light, the mist, the colour and the melancholy of a later and more neurotic age, the modes of which are more rich in *nuances*—an age which is sadder and more disturbed by human problems than was ancient Greece.”³⁷ In reclaiming

Schiller's description of the modern age as melancholic and ill, Muther recalls a series of oppositions, such as healthy/sick and close/distant that went back to the first half of the nineteenth century.³⁸ In this context the reception of Arnold Böcklin is an interesting case in point. On the one hand he is characterized as the paradigm of the naïve artist. Meier-Graefe writes of his physical, not intellectual, strength.³⁹ Gustav Floerke speaks of his powerful nearness to nature.⁴⁰ Muther writes that he possesses "iron health" and "is as inexhaustible as infinite nature herself."⁴¹ On the other hand Böcklin's work is also described as mediated by his imagination and his powerful memory. He never sketched directly from nature, we are frequently told. Rather, he relied on his impressive ability to recall all that he perceived in order to create imaginative works in his studio.⁴² With all New Idealist artists, different forms of mediation are emphasized: Feuerbach's melancholic temperament, Klinger's imagination, and Marées's and Hildebrand's idealism.

Liebermann positions himself on the "naïve" side of the scale as is indicated in a discussion with cellular biologist Rudolf Virchow that Liebermann cites in *Die Phantasie in der Malerei*:

Virchow once asked me, when he sat for his portrait, whether I paint according to a preconception, and upon my answer that I set colours down intuitively next to another, the venerable scholar then excused himself on account of the question. Everything, he added, in art as in science, ... where you discover something new, is intuition.⁴³

Liebermann, however, also claimed drawing as "the foundation of all the fine arts," and thus aligned himself with a linear, idealistic, and imaginative tradition that was defined at the time as German in nature.⁴⁴ The national divisions are made evident in Karl Scheffler's portrayal of Liebermann as part of the great German graphic tradition:

Through the contribution that Liebermann made as draughtsman, this German leader distinguishes German Impressionism to a certain degree from French.... The old German art disposition, which arises more in graphic expression than in painterly sensuality, has been transformed in him by the character of today's shifting time.... In Liebermann is living still the age-old German graphic spirit of Holbein and Menzel.⁴⁵

Liebermann's identity as both intuitive impressionist painter and German draughtsman indicates how he saw himself (and others saw him) as aligned to a variety of artistic and national traditions. This multivalence is characteristic of Liebermann's constructed public persona. Françoise Forster-Hahn has convincingly shown how Liebermann pursued an identity as "cosmopolitan *Weltbürger*," which masked "his status as an out-

sider" and merged "his diverse affinities," at the same time that he and his circle "saw themselves as German patriots."⁴⁶

By replacing naturalist/idealist with naïve/sentimental, Liebermann changes the terms of the debate from absolute to relational.⁴⁷ In his own words: "Every artist is naïve in that there is only a difference in degree between sentimental and naïve artists, not, as between idealistic and naturalistic artists, a difference in type."⁴⁸ Schiller's concepts also allow Liebermann to reframe the naturalist/idealist debate within a German philosophical tradition. In fact, he begins *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* with the very Kantian statement, "I will speak about painting as a thing-in-itself, not about music or poetry in painting."⁴⁹ Finally, this reorientation breaks down the national divisions between French Naturalism and German Idealism. Liebermann's pairings in the above-quoted passages, of Delacroix and Böcklin, on the one hand, and Manet and Leibl, on the other, demonstrate how he supports both international modernism and German painting.

Panofsky's Subject-Object Problem

Schiller's categories thus allow Liebermann to reconcile French and German traditions by redefining naturalist painting as a form of imaginative work (or, one could say, idea-work), which begins with the perception of nature and ends with the application of paint to canvas. In this process, objectivity and subjectivity are at play. "Artistic form," Liebermann writes in an essay on Adolf Menzel, "does not reproduce the subject," but "gives the artist's conception of the subject: it is object and subject at the same time."⁵⁰ In his *Idea: A Problem in Art Theory* (1924), Panofsky uses similar terms, "the subject-object problem," to describe the Idea in art theory from the Renaissance onwards, which he believes had remained until his day "the focus of scientific thought about art."⁵¹ Panofsky's articulation of this problem, as we shall see, sheds light on Liebermann's theoretical position.

Panofsky describes the "subject-object problem" in philosophical terms as "the relationships between 'I' and the world, spontaneity and receptivity, given material and active forming power."⁵² This problem emerges, according to Panofsky, in the Renaissance. To simplify the argument of *Idea*: the understanding of the Idea in art theory changes from an external, metaphysical entity as articulated in Platonic thought to an internal, mental construct derived through sense perception as assumed in the Renaissance but only formulated explicitly in seventeenth-century classical art theory. One could extend Panofsky's argument to say that if seventeenth-century classical art theory understood the idea as "nothing else than the experience of nature 'purified' by our mind,"⁵³ then the nineteenth century no longer needed sense perception to be purified to be

the subject matter for art. Moreover, there was no longer an agreed-upon criterion against which a process of purification could be measured.

The subject-object problem is on the one hand *the* problem of art theory, since Panofsky defines art theory as the artist's "necessity of finding his own terms for dealing with nature."⁵⁴ On the other hand, the emergence of this problem in the Renaissance, like the discovery of linear perspective, is indicative of a larger concern, the origin of modern subjectivity. As Panofsky argues, the birth of art theory in the Renaissance

was accomplished by laying a distance between "subject" and "object" much as in artistic practice perspective placed a distance between the eye and the world of things—a distance which at the same time objectivizes the "object" and personalizes the "subject."⁵⁵

As we have seen, Liebermann's art theory is similarly constructed around a dialectic of distance (or immediacy and mediation). Such a tension is also apparent in Liebermann's 1902 *The Artist's Atelier* (fig. 1), a metapicture not just on the art of painting but, in Panofsky's words, on "the relation of mind to reality as perceived by the senses."⁵⁶

Liebermann's *The Artist's Atelier*

Liebermann's *Atelier* holds a special place in his oeuvre. After the 1890s, and specifically during the first decade of the twentieth century, Liebermann begins to paint in a more impressionist style and focuses mostly on landscape painting.⁵⁷ His *Atelier* is the only painting of this period in which he attempts to capture spatial and colouristic unity in an interior space. And this is not just any interior space: it is Liebermann's studio, his place of work and the only major addition he made to his family home, which was located in the heart of Berlin, next to the Brandenburg Gate on the Pariser Platz. The atelier extended through the roof of the house, and for that reason could only be completed after two legal challenges and some modifications to the original proposal.⁵⁸ The *Baupolizei* considered the glass and steel design of the addition a defacement (*Verunstaltung*) of the Neoclassical architecture of the Pariser Platz. Emperor Wilhelm II described the plans as "hideous" (*Scheuchlich*). After its completion in 1898, the atelier functioned not only as Liebermann's place of work but also as the room where he greeted guests and hung important works from his collection of paintings, where celebrated businessmen, artists, and professionals sat for their portraits, and where his daughter Käthe hosted parties for prominent young Berliners. Liebermann's atelier was thus more than his workspace. It was a sign of the central place he held in Berlin social and artistic circles.

Liebermann's *Atelier* has often been read as an uncomplicated representation of the painter's social position and middle-class values. In one of the earliest commentaries on this work, Hans Rosenhagen compared the painting to the intimate interiors of "[Edouard] Vuillard, [Pierre] Bonnard and other young French Impressionists."⁵⁹ Art historians have continued to interpret this painting straightforwardly, as being after nature in the French tradition. The colourful carpet, the comfortable sofa, the lounging women (Liebermann's wife Martha and their daughter Käthe), the sleeping dachshund (a gift from Hugo von Tschudi), and Liebermann's painting collection on the wall⁶⁰ have all been taken as signs of Liebermann's self-declared middle-class way of life.⁶¹ In his catalogue raisonné of Liebermann's paintings, Mathias Eberle describes the painting simply as a representation of "the working room of a well-off *Bürger*, light, frugal, by no means sparse, simple, and not without comfort."⁶²

Liebermann's *Atelier*, however, is also a modern reconceptualization of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (fig. 2), which itself is a depiction of an artist at work. The back of a canvas on the left side of Liebermann's painting, the light streaming in from the right, the paintings on the walls (including Liebermann's copy after Velázquez's *Portrait of Innocent X*), the women, and the dog all allude to Velázquez's work. And of course the mirror reflection (Liebermann's self-portrait) completes the comparison. Liebermann has created an updated, modern, and middle-class *Las Meninas*.

In a letter to his friend and Hamburger Kunsthalle director Alfred Lichtwark, written in 1902, the same year *Atelier* was executed, Liebermann articulates some of the core ideas he would put down in *Die Phantasie in der Malerei*. He complains, "it is becoming clearer to me every day that the German has an instinctive aversion to painting, to painting that only wants to be painting." Liebermann then cites Ferdinand Avenarius, art critic and editor of the journal *Kunstwart*, who describes one of his paintings as "only a transcription of the observations of the eye." Liebermann objects,

What should painting be other than that? What is it other than that in the work of the great painters, in Titian, or Velázquez? or in Tintoretto? Developments in painting and in each particular painter can only lie on the side of Impressionism: that is shown in the history of art and in Rembrandt's or Velázquez's history. Germany, however, demands from painting: thoughts, poetry, and even philosophy. I also desire thoughts, but painterly [thoughts], which are expressed in form and colour.⁶³

Art critic Paul Fechter would claim in 1911 that Impressionism was "a protest against the conceptual [*Begriffliche*] in painting."⁶⁴ Liebermann is surely using the term this way, fighting against the prejudice he felt in Germany in favour of idealism.



Figure 1. Max Liebermann, *The Artist's Atelier*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 68.5 x 82 cm. Kunstmuseum St. Gallen. Acquired from the Ernst Schürpf-Stiftung, 1951 (Photo: Courtesy of the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen).

But he also does not want to limit art to the realm of pure sense-impressions, arguing instead that his work functions in the territory of painterly thought.

Liebermann's expansion of Impressionism to include Velázquez and other earlier, non-French artists was not uncommon in German turn-of-the-century artwriting. This tendency would culminate in Werner Weisbach's 1910 examination of the long history of Impressionism from Antiquity to modern times.⁶⁵ Following Velázquez specialists Weisbach calls the theme of *Las Meninas* "impressionistic:" "The artist recorded on

his canvas a fleeting moment, as it rushed by in the hustle and bustle of courtly life."⁶⁶ Liebermann himself claims that Velázquez, along with Frans Hals, had "no art theory; they painted what they themselves saw, and not what others before them had seen: they were naïve [in Schiller's sense]. They painted only with their painterly unconscious feeling and not with their understanding."⁶⁷

Las Meninas was of course not just any proto-Impressionist painting; it was considered central to the naturalist tradition. In the literature of the time Luca Giordano's designation of the



Figure 2. Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656. Oil on canvas, 318 x 276 cm. Madrid, Museo del Prado (Photo: Gianni degli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY).

work as “the theology of painting” is repeatedly quoted, as is, to a lesser extent, Thomas Lawrence’s description of it as “the true philosophy of art, the collection of essentials, of all which first and last strike the eyes and senses of the spectator.”⁶⁸ What can we make of Liebermann’s *Atelier* if we think of it in comparable terms, as his own “theology of painting?”

First, the still life on the table in the foreground takes on greater significance.⁶⁹ The palette knife, bottle of water, paper, mixing bowl, and paint box refer to Liebermann’s painterly means. The paint box contains the colours that unify the scene. And the thick blobs of paint near the tools emphasize that this painting, in Liebermann’s words to Lichtwark, “only wants to be painting.” Second, the spatial structure, developed as much through perspective as through tonal unity, gains more importance if we think of the *Atelier* in relation to Velázquez. In *Die Phantasie in der Malerei*, Liebermann describes the Spanish painter’s imagination as spatial (just as Raphael’s is linear and Titian’s, colouristic [*malerisch*]).⁷⁰ Space itself seems a subject of Liebermann’s painting, since the room is constructed essentially as a perimeter with an empty centre. The spatial effects of Liebermann’s paintings were recognized during his lifetime. A contemporary critic describes how Liebermann creates a “perfect illusion of space” through the application of colours that melt “entirely into the natural colour of objects, seen under certain conditions of light, and from a certain distance.”⁷¹

Liebermann’s *Atelier* also expresses some dramatic differences from *Las Meninas*—most especially perhaps in terms of the viewing subject. In Velázquez’s painting most of the figures look out at the viewer. As Leo Steinberg pointed out many years ago, *Las Meninas* can be understood in terms of recognizing the self in the other: “If the picture were speaking instead of flashing, it would be saying: I see you seeing me—I in you see myself seen—see you seeing yourself being seen—and so on beyond the reaches of grammar.”⁷² There is no similar social act of recognition apparent in Liebermann’s painting. All the figures are absorbed in their activities: the painter paints, the women read, the dog sleeps. The viewer, detached from the scene, is allowed to gaze dispassionately at this space of middle-class leisure in which nothing takes place in the centre.

The perspectival structure, however, draws the viewer into the room and, more specifically, moves the viewer’s eye to the reflected image of the painter on the left side of the canvas. (The vanishing point is located to the left, outside of the pictorial space.) Seeing the reflection, the viewer realizes that in relation to the pictorial space, s/he is standing not in a detached, abstract, undefined place, but behind the table with the painting utensils, on the very spot where the painter is painting. In Liebermann’s *Atelier*, unlike in *Las Meninas*, the viewer is not recognized by another and is only made self-aware through a displacement into the position of the painter. As such, detach-

ment gives way to being there. Taking up for himself a position of situated omniscience, in which he also places the viewer, Liebermann articulates pictorially the fundamental problem of the Kantian subject as he understands it: distance and presence. Liebermann’s *Atelier*, like Panofsky’s description of linear perspective, “creates distance between human beings and things... but then in turn it abolishes this distance by, in a sense, drawing this world of things, an autonomous world confronting the individual, into the eye.”⁷³

Distance and Relations⁷⁴

Panofsky’s examination of the concept of distance in *Idea and Perspective as Symbolic Form* certainly provides insight into Liebermann’s art theory and practice. Reading Liebermann’s work through Panofsky’s art history, however, is not without hazards. The critiques of Panofsky’s position have been numerous, from W.J.T. Mitchell’s treatment of iconology as lacking ideology to Margaret Iverson and Steven Melville’s analysis of Panofsky’s method (and art-historical methodology in general) as depending upon a problematical stance of historical distance.⁷⁵ Suffice it to say we are now rather skeptical of the viability of neo-Kantian epistemological and historiographical perspectives.

It is, however, as Mitchell explains, “a lot harder to get away from idealist histories of visual culture than we might imagine.”⁷⁶ While I do not expect my analysis of Liebermann’s art theory to escape notions of historical detachment, I would like at this point to turn to Georg Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money* (1900) as a way to theorize the problem of distance in different terms than Panofsky’s. Simmel treats distance as a naturalized aspect of human relations, specifically due to the effect of the modern economy. Simply stated, money has value not in and of itself but because it represents things abstractly and makes objects, however dissimilar, comparable.⁷⁷ Relational terms become key, not only in Simmel’s discussion of distance in economic matters (“economic activity creates distances and overcomes them”⁷⁸), but in the way he understands how monetary exchange re-orientates all social relations and cultural activities. In art production as well as in “subjectivist or Neo-Kantian theories”—like the ones held by Liebermann and Panofsky—“the increase and diminution” of distance is treated relationally by Simmel to demonstrate how we grasp our place in the world and how we gain a better understanding of objects.⁷⁹ Indeed, Simmel’s discussion of naturalist art bears a close analogy to Liebermann’s conception of painterly thought that I have been emphasizing. “Even naturalism,” Simmel writes, “which specifically aims at overcoming the distance between us and reality, conforms to this basic principle of all art: to bring us closer to things by placing them at a distance from us.”⁸⁰

This conception of distance as relational is fundamental for understanding how Liebermann positions himself between absolutes, between the immediate and the mediated, between perception and the idea, between French Naturalism and German Idealism. As we have seen, he replaces the categories naturalism and idealism, which he considers different in type, with naïve and sentimental, which he considers different only in degree. For his part Panofsky understands the Idea in art similarly, as constructed in terms of the relationship that moves between the subject and object, between the artist and nature. I am not arguing that Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* is a key that explains Liebermann's pictorial theory and Panofsky's neo-Kantian art history. That type of argument would only reintroduce an idealist history, namely Panofsky's iconological method. Rather, I am suggesting that Simmel's understanding of distance as relational not only provides a justification for my approach that was relevant during Liebermann's time, but, more importantly, helps articulate a key structural element of modern subjectivity, as Liebermann, Panofsky, and Simmel understand it.

The End of the Subject-Object Problem / The End of the Idea in Art

When writing *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* between 1904 and 1916, Liebermann took great pains to position himself relationally between the naïve and sentimental, between perceptual activity and conceptual work. As we have seen, personal, political, and nationalist concerns were also at stake. These stakes were raised at the beginning of the First World War when Liebermann and his circle used the figures of Kant and Schiller in the service of German nationalism. In 1915 Karl Scheffler republished a section of Schiller's "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" in a call for "a united, inseparable, universal" art that would bridge the gap between realist and idealist tendencies and that could be achieved with a German victory in the war.⁸¹ For the journal *Der Kriegszeit* (*Wartime*), published by Paul Cassirer, Liebermann created lithographs that boosted German nationalist sentiment, including one of Kant (fig. 3) after Carl Friedrich Hagemann's 1801 bust of the German philosopher.⁸²

After the war, which ended the Imperial period in Germany, there was a reassessment of Kant's philosophy⁸³ as well as an articulation of serious misgivings in the conception of the modern subject as defined by detachment. According to Martin Jay,

"The Cubist war" could thus also mean the practical collapse of that transcendental notion of a shared perspective already theoretically undermined by Nietzsche. And with it could come the return of all the demons seemingly repressed by the "civilizing process," which was grounded to a significant extent in the domination of the dispassionate gaze.⁸⁴



Figure 3. Max Liebermann, *Kant*, cover of *Der Kriegszeit, Künstlerflugblätter*, no. 31, 17 March 1915 (Photo: Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York).

The use of Kant and Schiller for specifically German gain at the beginning of the war perhaps already suggests the demise of this universal paradigm. The understanding of the Idea in art as the subject-object problem was similarly challenged before and after the war by artists who were less concerned with painting an external reality and more focused on means of production and subjective states. Liebermann himself felt this challenge and thus the need to defend his position more rigorously. In his "Ein Credo" of 1922, he argued that an artist who makes a copy of nature without soul, feeling, or life is "no artist," while an artist who dispenses with the representation of appearances in favour of his feelings is "an idiot."⁸⁵ He then firmly defined the boundaries of artistic practice: "And herein lies the border that the fine arts or poetry may not cross with impunity: they

may never deform the model of nature into something unrecognizable.”⁸⁶ For Liebermann, art had to be situated on a scale between pure reproduction and pure feeling, between the objective and the subjective. At the extreme poles, distance could not be overcome or, put another way, distance could not be mediated by presence. At these extremes, relations were lost and so, for Liebermann, was art.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

- 1 Max Liebermann, *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* (Berlin, 1916), 46: “die Maler mit den großartigen Ideen sind immer schlechte Maler.”
- 2 Théophile Gautier, “Pierre de Cornélius,” *L’Art moderne* (Paris, 1856), 249: “L’idée est restée une idée, et n’a pas revêtu de formes.”
- 3 Madame de Staël (Anne-Louise-Germaine), *Germany*, trans. from the French, 3 vols. (London, 1813), I, 4.
- 4 Celia Applegate, “Culture and the Arts,” *Imperial Germany, 1871–1918*, ed. James Retallack (Oxford, 2008), 107.
- 5 Karl Scheffler, *Deutsche Maler und Zeichner im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1911), 3: “Anschauung ist das sinnliche Empfinden der Welt...; der Begriff aber denkt über die Erscheinung und produziert die Idee...die Anschauung malt, der Begriff zeichnet.” From 1907 to 1933 Scheffler was the editor of the journal *Kunst und Künstler*, which was published by Bruno Cassirer. Cassirer and his cousin Paul Cassirer were the first business managers of the Berlin Secession. Scheffler also wrote a monograph on Liebermann, first published in 1906 and with several later editions.
- 6 Scheffler, *Deutsche Maler*, 7: “weil der Deutsche von Hause aus ein Ideenmensch ist.”
- 7 The term New Idealism came from contemporary literary criticism. Literary and art critic Hermann Bahr attributes the coining of the term “Neu-Idealismus,” which he describes as a “crooked and unfortunate (*krummen und unglücklichen*) title,” to the Norwegian writer Arne Garborg. See Bahr, “Die Krisis des Naturalismus” (1891), *Kritische Schriften in Einzelausgaben. II. Die Überwindung des Naturalismus*, ed. Claus Pias (Weimar, 2004), 61. In art historical circles, the first use of the term, to my knowledge, can be found in Cornelius Gurlitt, “Adolf Hildebrand,” *Die Kunst unserer Zeit* 2 (1893), 76.
- 8 Gurlitt, “Adolf Hildebrand,” 71.
- 9 Richard Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, trans. Ernest Dowson et al., 3 vols. (London, 1895), III, 551. Muther’s

Geschichte der Malerei im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert was published in Munich, 1893–94.

- 10 Julius Meier-Graefe, *Der Fall Böcklin und die Lehre von den Einheiten* (Stuttgart, 1905). For a discussion of *Der Fall Böcklin*, see Christian Lenz, “Erinnerung an Julius Meier-Graefe: ‘Der Fall Böcklin und die Lehre von den Einheiten’ 1905,” *Arnold Böcklin 1827–1901*, ed. Katarina Schmidt et al., exh. cat., Basel, Kunstmuseum (Basel, 2001), 119–30.
- 11 Meier-Graefe, *Der Fall Böcklin*, 270: “Was Böcklin abging, was diesem Deutschtum fehlt, ist in letzter Hinsicht dasselbe. Der Fall Böcklin ist der Fall Deutschland.”
- 12 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* (“The Case of Wagner”), in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1966), 776. Emphasis in the original.
- 13 Liebermann, “Die Phantasie in der Malerei,” *Die Neue Rundschau* 15, 3 (March 1904), 372–80; “Die Empfindung und Erfindung in der Malerei,” *Kunst und Künstler* 9, 8 (1911), 415–17. Liebermann’s *Die Phantasie in der Malerei* was reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1922) and more recently in *Vision der Wirklichkeit: Ausgewählte Schriften und Reden*, ed. Günter Busch (Frankfurt, 1993). Liebermann’s *Phantasie* and *Gesammelte Schriften* are available online at the Internet Archive at <http://www.archive.org/details/diephantasieinde00liebuoft> and <http://www.archive.org/details/gesammelteschrif00liebuoft> respectively (viewed 4 March 2012). Liebermann likely chose his title, as H.-J. Imiela has suggested, in response to Paul Scheerbart’s essay “Die Phantastik in der Malerei,” which appeared in *Die Neue Rundschau* in 1891. See Imiela, “Die theoretischen Schriften von Max Liebermann, Max Slevogt und Lovis Corinth,” *Arbeitskreise für Deutsche Literaturwissenschaft, Kunstgeschichte und Musikwissenschaft im Forschungsinstitut 19. Jahrhundert der Fritz Thyssen Stiftung*, conference proceedings, 28–29 November 1969 ([S.l.], 1969), 163. For discussions of *Die Phantasie in der Malerei*, see also Heinrich Geissler, *Die Kunsttheorien von Adolf Hildebrand, Wilhelm Trübner, und Max Liebermann: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Kunstliteratur in Deutschland*, PhD dissertation, Ruprecht-Karl-Universität in Heidelberg, 1963; Ruth Langenberg, “Die Autonomie der Kunst: Zu den Quellen der kunsttheoretischen Ansichten Liebermanns und Tschudis,” *Im Streit um die Moderne: Max Liebermann. Der Kaiser. Die Nationalgalerie*, eds. Angelika Wesenberg and Ruth Langenberg, exh. cat., Berlin, Max Liebermann Haus am Brandenburger Tor (Berlin, 2001), 29–34.
- 14 Hugo von Tschudi, Introduction, *Die deutsche Jahrhundertausstellung, Berlin 1906* (Munich, 1906), ix: “Und es ist nicht zu vergessen, daß für die Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts Frankreich der klassische Boden ist, wie für die der Renaissance Italien und Holland für die Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts.” The exhibition was organized by Hugo von Tschudi, Alfred Lichtwark, Julius Meier-Graefe, and Woldemar von Seidlitz. For discussions of the *Jahrhundertausstellung*, see Sabine Beneke, *Im Blick der*

- Moderne: Die "Jahrhundertausstellung deutscher Kunst (1775–1875)" in der Berliner Nationalgalerie 1906* (Berlin, 1999); and Angelika Wesenburg, "Impressionismus und die 'Deutsche Jahrhundert-Ausstellung Berlin 1906,'" *Manet bis Van Gogh: Hugo von Tschudi und der Kampf um die Moderne*, eds. Johann Georg Prinz von Hohenzollern and Peter-Klaus Schuster, exh. cat., Berlin, National Gallery (Munich, 1996), 364–70.
- 15 Max Liebermann, "Ein Credo," *Kunst und Künstler* 20, 10 (1922), 335. This article is reprinted in Liebermann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 15–20.
- 16 Liebermann, letter to Julius Elias, 11 June 1921, in Max Liebermann, *Briefe*, ed. Franz Landsberger, new enlarged ed. Ernst Volker Braun (Stuttgart, 1994), 52: "er untersucht nicht das Ding an sich, sondern uns're Vorstellung vom Ding oder: das Objekt ist nur das Korrelat zum Subjekt."
- 17 Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, tr. Joseph Peake (New York, 1968), 109.
- 18 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 32–33: "Aber Delacroix oder Böcklin, die (wenigstens in ihren Bildern) nie nach der Natur gemalt haben, ebenso wie Manet und Leibl, die jeden Strich nach der Natur malten, haben aus dem Gedächtnis gemalt. Nur prozedierten sie auf verschiedene Weise.... Aber Böcklin wie Leibl malten aus der Phantasie."
- 19 For a discussion of this issue in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford, 2007); in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA, 1981). For a broad survey of the idea of imagination, see Barbara Ransch-Trill, *Phantasie: Welterkenntnis und Welterschaffung. Zur philosophischen Theorie der Einbildungskraft* (Bonn, 1996).
- 20 "Phantasie," *Meyers Konversations-Lexikon* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1885–92), XII, 984: "Phantasie (griech.), im Gegensatz zum Erinnerungsvermögen, d. h. der reproduzierenden Einbildungskraft, welche schon dagewesene sinnlich anschauliche Vorstellungen erneuert, das Vermögen, neue dergleichen zu bilden, also die produzierende und zwar ästhetisch und logisch schöpferische Einbildungskraft.... Die P. [Phantasie] schafft eine neue Welt, wobei sie zwar die Elemente der erstern [die wirkliche Welt], die durch die ursprünglich empfangenen Eindrücke gegebenen Vorstellungen, als Bausteine verwertet, aber durch neue und originale Verbindungen derselben neue, originale Vorstellungsgebilde hervorbringt." The division of *Phantasie* into two modes (reproductive and creative) in the encyclopedia literature goes back at least to 1817. See "Phantasie," *Conversations-Lexicon oder encyclopädisches Handwörterbuch für gebildete Stände* (Stuttgart, 1817), 478–82. The distinction between reproductive and creative imagination was made in the early eighteenth century by Christian Wolff (1679–1754). See Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 95.
- 21 Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Elements of Psychophysics*, trans. Helmut E. Adler, eds. Davis H. Howes and Edwin G. Boring (New York, 1966); Wilhelm Wundt, "Introduction," *Principles of Physiological Psychology in The Classical Psychologists*, ed. Benjamin Rand (Gloucester, MA, 1966, reprint of 1912).
- 22 Hermann von Helmholtz, "Concerning the Perceptions in General," in *Classics in Psychology*, ed. Thorne Shipley (New York, 1961), p. 79.
- 23 Helmholtz, "Concerning the Perceptions," 105.
- 24 Helmholtz, "Concerning the Perceptions," 92.
- 25 Robert Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics," *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, eds. and trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou (Santa Monica, 1994).
- 26 Konrad Fiedler, "Wirklichkeit und Kunst," *Schriften zur Kunst*, ed. Gottfried Boehm, 2 vols. (Munich, 1991), II, 160.
- 27 Hildebrand, "Problem of Form in the Fine Arts," in *Empathy, Form, and Space*, 236.
- 28 Helmholtz, "On the Relation of Optics to Painting," *Science and Culture: Popular and Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Cahan (Chicago, 1995), 279–308.
- 29 For the influence of Fiedler's writing on Liebermann's theory, see Langenberg, "Die Autonomie der Kunst."
- 30 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 27: "Denn die Malerei besteht nicht in der Erfindung von Gedanken, sondern in der Erfindung der sichtbaren Form für den Gedanken." Liebermann refers to creative and formative imagination in *Phantasie*, 8. For Geissler, Liebermann privileges *Formenphantasie* (imagination of form) over *Gedankenphantasie* (imagination of thought). See Geissler, *Kunsttheorien*, 205.
- 31 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 48: "Die Phantasie hört also nicht da auf, wo die Arbeit beginnt...sondern sie muß dem Maler bis zum letzten Pinselstrich die Hand führen."
- 32 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 56.
- 33 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 13.
- 34 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 12: "Aus der Phantasie malen steht also in keinem Gegensatz zum Nach-der-Natur-malen, denn es sind nur zwei verschiedene Wege, die nach demselben Ziele führen sollen."
- 35 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 50: "Derselbe Gegensatz wie zwischen dem naiven und sentimental Dichter besteht auch in der Malerei: der naive Maler geht von der Erscheinung aus, der sentimentale vom Gedanken." For a brief discussion of Liebermann's use of Schiller's terms, see Geissler, *Kunsttheorie*, 223–24.
- 36 Schiller, *On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature*, tr. Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Manchester, 1981), 41.
- 37 Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, III, 558. This quote is from a description of New Idealism in general, but Muther is repeating, almost word for word, his discussion of Feuerbach (III, 472). Emphasis in the original.
- 38 For a discussion of Romantic distance, see Hans Eichner "Germany/Romantisch—Romantik—Romantiker," in "*Romantic*" and

- its Cognates: The European History of a Word*, ed. Hans Eichner (Toronto, 1972), 125.
- 39 Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1904), II, 449.
- 40 Gustav Floerke, *Zehn Jahre mit Böcklin*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1902), 38.
- 41 Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, III, 760, 744.
- 42 Floerke, *Zehn Jahre*, 42; Friedrich Pecht, *Deutsche Künstler des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Nördlingen, 1877–85), I, 196; Gurlitt, *Deutsche Kunst des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1900), 623.
- 43 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 45–46: “Einst fragte mich Virchow, während er mir zu seinem Porträt saß, ob ich nach einer vorgefaßten Meinung male, und auf meine Antwort daß ich intuitiv die Farben nebeneinander setzte, entschuldigte sich der damals schon greise Gelehrte ob seiner Frage. Alles, fügte er hinzu, in der Kunst wie in der Wissenschaft, nämlich da, wo sie anfinde Wissenschaft zu werden, wo sie Neues entdeckte, sei Intuition.”
- 44 Max Liebermann, “Gedanken über die Zeichnung,” in Liebermann, *Die Zeichnung* (Berlin-Zehlendorf, n.d. [1921]). Liebermann’s one-page statement on drawing is reproduced in Sigrid Achenbach, *Max Liebermanns Arbeiten für den Fritz Heyder Verlag* (Berlin, 2002), 37.
- 45 Karl Scheffler, “Liebermann als Zeichner,” *Kunst und Künstler* 10 (1912), 345: “Durch die Anlage, die Liebermann zum Zeichner gemacht hat, unterscheidet dieser deutsche Führer den ganze deutschen Impressionismus gewissermassen vom französischen....Es hat sich in ihm die alte deutsche Kunstveranlagung, die mehr auf zeichnerischen Ausdruck als auf malerische Sinnlichkeit geht, dem Charakter der sich wandelnden Zeit entsprechend, verwandelt...dass auch in Liebermann noch der uralte deutsche Greiffelgeist Holbeins und Menzels lebendig ist.”
- 46 Françoise Forster-Hahn, “Max Liebermann, the Outsider as Impresario of Modernism in the Empire,” *Max Liebermann: From Realism to Impressionism*, ed. Barbara Gilbert, exh. cat., Los Angeles, Skirball Cultural Center (Seattle, 2005), 181, 191.
- 47 Richard Schiff makes a similar claim in the French context concerning the difference between Impressionism and Symbolism. See his *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (Chicago, 1984), 39–52.
- 48 Liebermann, “Ein Credo,” 335: “Jeder Künstler ist naiv, daher ist zwischem dem sentimental und dem naiven Künstler nur ein Grad-, nicht aber wie zwischen dem idealistischen und dem naturalistischen Künstler ein Art-Unterschied.”
- 49 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 21: “Von der Malerei als Ding an sich will ich reden, nicht von der Musik oder der Poesie in der Malerei.”
- 50 Liebermann, “Menzel” (1921), *Gesammelte Schriften*, 205.
- 51 Panofsky, *Idea*, 51.
- 52 Panofsky, *Idea*, 51.
- 53 Panofsky, *Idea*, 108.
- 54 Panofsky, *Idea*, 50.
- 55 Panofsky, *Idea*, 50–51. On the issue of perspective and distance, see Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1927), trans. Christopher Wood (New York, 1991), 67–68. For an insightful discussion of the issue of historical distance in Panofsky’s method, see Margaret Iversen and Stephen Melville, *Writing Art History* (Chicago and London, 2010), 15–26.
- 56 Panofsky, *Idea*, 83.
- 57 For the change in Liebermann’s style from realist to impressionist, see Thomas Gaechtgens, “German Impressionism,” *Max Liebermann and International Modernism: An Artist’s Career from Empire to Third Reich*, eds. Marion Deshmukh et al. (New York, 2011), 51–62.
- 58 For the information that follows on Liebermann’s atelier, see Stephan Pucks, “‘Hier wohnte und wirkte Max Liebermann’. Die Stadtwohnung des Künstlers am Pariser Platz und sein Landhaus am Wannsee,” *Eine Liebe zu Berlin: Künstlersalon und Gartenatelier von Max Liebermann*, ed. Christoph Hölz (Munich, 1995), 21–22.
- 59 Hans Rosenhagen, “Von Ausstellungen und Sammlungen,” *Die Kunst für Alle* 19 (1904), 100–102.
- 60 For the identification of the paintings on the wall, see Mathias Eberle, *Max Liebermann, 1847–1935: Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde und Ölstudien*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1996), II, 602; and Annegret Janda, “Max Liebermanns Kunstsammlung in deinen Briefen: Versuch einer Chronologie,” *Max Liebermann und die französischen Impressionisten*, eds. G. Tobias Natter and Julius H. Schoeps, exh. cat., Vienna, Jewish Museum (Cologne, 1997), 229.
- 61 Liebermann wrote: “I am in my lifestyle the complete bourgeois: I eat, drink, sleep, go for walks, and work with the regularity of a church clock.” Liebermann, “Autobiographisches,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10: “Ich bin in meinen Lebensgewohnheiten der vollkommendste Bourgeois: ich esse, trinke, schlafe, gehe spazieren und arbeite mit der Regelmäßigkeit einer Turmuhr.”
- 62 Matthias Eberle, *Max Liebermann*, II, 602: “Es ist der Arbeitsraum eines gutsituierten Bürgers, hell, sparsam doch keineswegs karg, schlicht, und doch ohne Komfort.” Lothar Brauner similarly interprets the painting this way. See his *Max Liebermann* (Berlin, 1986), n.p. [#13]. Only Christine Hopfengart has read Liebermann’s *Atelier* in relation to his theory, suggesting that there is something “programmatic” about the painting. She interprets the painting as a “fundamental stocktaking of himself” not unlike *Die Phantasie in der Malerei*. See Hopfengart, “Selbstbeobachtung und Repräsentation: Zu den Selbstbildnissen von Max Liebermann,” *Nicht trägt weniger als der Schein: Max Liebermann der deutsche Impressionist*, ed. Dorothee Hanson, exh. cat., Bremen Kunsthalle (Bremen, 1996), 36–37.
- 63 Max Liebermann, letter to Alfred Lichtwark, 10 December 1902, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Alfred Lichtwark und Max Liebermann*, ed. Birgit Pflugmacher (Hildesheim, 2003), 143: “Mir dagegen wird’s täglich klarer; daß der Deutsche eine instiktive Abneigung

- gegen Malerei hat, gegen Malerei, die nur Malerei sein will. Hat doch neulich sogar Avenarius, nachdem er eins meiner Bilder bis über den grünen Klee gelobt hatte, geschrieben ‘doch nur Niederschrift der Beobachtungen des Auges.’ Was soll denn die Malerei anderes sein? Was ist den[n] anders in den Werken der größten Maler, in Tizian oder Velasquez? oder in Tintoretto? Die einzige Entwicklung der Malerei u jedes einzelnen Malers kann nur noch der Seite des Impressionismus liegen: das beweist, die Kunstgeschichte u die Geschichte Rembrandts oder Velasquez’s. Deutschland aber verlangt von der Malerei—Gedanken, Poesie ja sogar Philosophie. Ich verlange auch Gedanken, aber malerische, die sich in der Form u der Farbe ausdrücken lassen.”
- 64 Paul Fechter, “Fortbildungen des Impressionismus,” *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 29 (1911), 304.
- 65 Weisbach, *Impressionismus: Ein Problem der Malerei in der Antike und Neuzeit*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1911).
- 66 Weisbach, *Impressionismus*, I, 112: “Einen flüchtigen Augenblick, wie er vorüberauschte in dem Getriebe des höfischen Lebens, hat der Künstler auf seiner Leinwand festgehalten.” In his 1888 monograph on Velázquez, Ludwig Justi, in what Jonathan Brown describes as the impressionistic reading of *Las Meninas*, cites Friedrich von Waagen’s comparison of Velázquez’s painting to an image from a camera obscura and William Stirling’s claim that it anticipates the invention of Daguerre. See Justi, *Velazquez und sein Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Bonn, 1888), II, 316. Liebermann was well aware of Justi’s work, which he cites in “Zwei Holzschnitte von Manet,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, 107. For the impressionist or realist reading of Velázquez’s work, see also Karl Voll, *Velazquez: Ein Bilderatlas zur Geschichte seiner Kunst* (Munich, 1899), 12–13; H. Knackfuß, *Velazquez* (Bielefeld, 1900), 46; Richard Muther, *Velasquez* (Berlin, 1903), 42; and Walther Gensel, *Velazquez* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1905), xxvi. For a discussion of the nineteenth-century reception of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* in France, Britain, and America, see the essays in *Velázquez’s Las Meninas*, ed. Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt (Cambridge, 2003).
- 67 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 49: “Aber Hals und Velasquez hatten keine Kunsttheorien; sie malten, was sie selber sahen, und nicht, was andere vor ihnen gesehen hatten: sie waren naiv. Sie malten nur mit ihrem malerischen unbewußten Gefühl und nicht mit dem Verstande.”
- 68 The Giordano quote appears in Knackfuß, *Velazquez*, 47; Justi, *Velazquez*, 319; A. de. Beruete, *Velazquez*, trans. Hugh Poynter (London, 1906), 116. The Lawrence quote appears in Justi, *Velazquez*, 319n2; Beruete *Velazquez*, 116.
- 69 Hopfengart also points out the importance of the still life as a statement of Liebermann’s theoretical position. See Hopfengart, “Selbstbeobachtung,” 37.
- 70 Liebermann, *Phantasie*, 29.
- 71 S.C. de Soissons, “Max Liebermann and His Art,” *Artist: An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* (American Edition) 28, 246 (July, 1900), 66.
- 72 Leo Steinberg, “Velázquez’ *Las Meninas*,” *October* 19 (Winter, 1981), 54. For a recent examination of Steinberg’s interpretation in relation to Foucault’s *mise-en-abyme* analysis of *Las Meninas*, see Iverson and Melville, *Writing Art History*, 100.
- 73 Panofsky, *Perspective*, 67.
- 74 This discussion of distance was greatly developed in discussions with my colleague Mark Salber Phillips. See his forthcoming book, *Historical Distance: Mediating the Past in Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Twentieth-Century Histories* (Yale University Press, forthcoming 2013).
- 75 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago, 1994), 11–34; Iverson and Melville, *Writing Art History*, 26.
- 76 Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 22.
- 77 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. David Frisby, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, 2nd ed. (London, 1990), 120.
- 78 Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 75.
- 79 Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 474–75.
- 80 Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 473.
- 81 Friedrich Schiller, “Die Realisten und die Idealisten (Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung),” with introductory remarks by Karl Scheffler, *Kunst und Künstler* 13 (1915), 291.
- 82 For a discussion of Liebermann and World War I, see Timothy Benson, “Kriegszeit and the Discourse of War Imagery,” in *Max Liebermann and International Modernism*, 171–84; and Erika Eschebach, “Zeichnen für den Krieg? Max Liebermanns Beiträge für die Zeitschrift ‘Kriegszeit,’” *Max Liebermann in Braunschweig*, exh. cat., Städtisches Museum Braunschweig (Munich, 2008), 112–58.
- 83 Peter Uwe Hohendahl, “The Crisis of Neo-Kantianism and the Reassessment of Kant after World War I: Preliminary Remarks,” *The Philosophical Forum* 61, 1–2 (2010), 17–39.
- 84 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, 1993), 215.
- 85 Liebermann, “Ein Credo,” 337.
- 86 Liebermann, “Ein Credo,” 338: “Und hierin liegt die Grenze, die bildende Kunst oder Poesie nie ungestraft überschreiten dürfen; sie dürfen nie das Urbild der Natur zur Unkenntlichkeit verzerren.”