Outside of my familiarity with his essential books and articles, my early personal encounters with Irving Lavin were in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly CIHA-meetings in Washington, Montreal, and Strassburg, as well as some meetings of the CAA. It was on these occasions that I could already witness his winning personality and his intensity in engaging with people, ever restless and driven by seemingly endless energy. Our first contact came about by chance, during a break in one of my PhD colloquia in Hamburg. When I stepped out on the balcony above Rotherbaum Straße. I spotted Lavin walking by; he was in town for a symposium. When I called his name and, half-jokingly, invited him up to participate, the unexpected happened: He came up to the second floor and got acquainted with every single one of the 15 PhD candidates. Sitting down, he was eager to learn each person’s name by heart, and in our discussions, he gave his opinion on the presentations like a long-time member of our group. His great enthusiasm for young scholarship was all the more reciprocated and marked the beginning of our life-long friendship.

At that time, ongoing discussions about the future of the Warburg House in the Heilwig Straße in Hamburg had come to a climax. The site of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg had been privatized after the war, and all attempts to reclaim it for the public sector had been in vain (fig. 1). Out of desperation my colleague Martin Warnke and myself proposed a business-lunch with the then senator of culture, Ingo von Münch and I invited Irving as an authority to help turn the tide. At one point during our discussion, he raised his voice and shocked the Senator by vigorously declaring the historical obligation of Germany and Hamburg, in particular, towards Warburg’s legacy. Into the silence that followed, the deeply impressed Senator responded by granting us the funds to host an international conference on Aby Warburg in order to make things happen.

The result of Irving’s “holy wrath” was an international conference of historical magnitude. The papers resulted in a publication that documented the first international discussion of Warburgian methodology after the 1930s. A commemorative photograph taken during one of the breaks shows Irving and Marilyn Lavin supporting the author from the back on the right (fig. 2). Looking back, this conference might have been a kind of “storage battery” of our relationships, that never lost its power.
Irving invited me afterwards to come to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, which led to one of the happiest times of my life. The evenings were filled with cinematic excursions, discussions and sports. We founded a soccer team, playing regularly on the sports field beside the buildings. In 2019, Irving asked me to come back to Princeton soon for at least one reason: He wanted to fix a medal to one of the goalposts of the field with the inscription. “This ground was changed into a soccer field by Horst Bredekamp in 1992”.

Working on Romanesque sculpture at the time, one of the themes I had researched was the continuation of antiquity in forms like flying putti holding medallions from both sides, like on the front of Gelduin’s altar table in St. Sernin, Toulouse (fig. 3). In retrospect, both Irving and I must have jointly been experimenting with hitherto unseen forms of the embodiment of art (fig. 4).

In a telephone call, about a year later, Irving rather spontaneously took me up on a given promise to explain the Romanesque art and architecture of the Pyrenees to both him and Marilyn. They told me to meet them at Bilbao airport in one week. Even though the semester had just started, promises had to be kept! Yet, upon arriving at the airport neither Marilyn nor Irving were to be found. When I finally asked another couple standing by if they knew the Lavins, the answer was “Yes. We’ll meet them in Jaca, as they are visiting the Altamira cave right now.” After an hour together in the rental car I had concluded that I was driving Frank Gehry and his wife Berta into the mountains towards Jaca, where the Lavins were already waiting for us, to visit the cathedral and its breathtaking sculptures (fig. 5). Upon my attempt to explain the Dionysic character of a capital from the late 11th century to the group, Frank, out of the blue, started to dance in front of the column, singing: “This is Ginger and Fred, the house that I am doing in Prague!” (fig. 6).

The story did not end there. While I had to leave soon thereafter, the Lavins and Frank Gehry went on to Dijon, where Irving showed Frank Claus Sluter’s tomb of Philipp the Brave with its famous Pleurants under their curved hoods (fig. 7). Frank was so fascinated by these shapes, that he did numerous fantastic variations on the sculptures in his architecture. After other transformations, the headcloth of the mourning monk in Dijon ended up in the hall of the DG bank building next to Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate (fig. 8). Both Irving and myself wrote about this remarkable example of historical actualization and the power of its association and fantasy.
I would like to end this reminiscence with a circumstance that brought us together again in 2013. Irving and I met with James S. Ackerman in Paris in order to visit Frank Gehry’s Fondation Louis Vuitton in the Bois du Boulogne, still under construction back then. We planned to write articles for the museum catalogue. While sickness prevented Frank Gehry from attending, the three of us met, strolling on the deck of his “ship”, stunned by his architecture, which, for Irving, made the Baroque of Bernini come to life in the frame of our time (fig. 9). We each wrote our articles for the catalogue, and then, in the following year, decided to republish them in a separate book in remembrance of James Ackerman, who had died in the meantime. It was Irving who enthusiastically came up with the idea for the book’s unconventional title “On the Good Ship Lollipop”. I am deeply saddened that the publication of the book missed him too, by just a few weeks.
What he meant not only to me, but to art history in general, as well as the German Kunstgeschichte is immeasurable. I have tried to express this in an obituary in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which was published together with other contributions in a journal. In the current contribution I wanted to shine a light on the friendship that was and is still binding us together (*fig. 10*). Whenever talking to him or Marilyn, each telephone call and each talk turned into a powerful discussion about history, German Jewish relations, art history and its methodology, as well as all questions of politics. But above all Irving, to me, was like a “väterlicher Freund”, a father figure and friend, to whom I owe more than I can put into words.

* Slightly revised paper, given at the Symposium in honour of Irving Lavin at Princeton, April 26, 2019.

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Among his awards are the Sigmund Freud Award from the German Academy for Language and Poetry in Darmstadt, Germany (2001), the Aby M. Warburg Award from the City of Hamburg, Germany (2005), and the Max Planck Research Award (2006). He is a member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of the Sciences and Humanities, Berlin (since 1995), the National Academy Leopoldina, Halle (since 2004), the European Academy, London (since 2010), the American Academy for Arts and Sciences (2016), and the *Ordre pour le Mérite*, Germany (since 2014).

He published 30 books and more than 800 articles.

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