“We all have an intuitive sense of what is meant by a diagram. After all, diagrams constitute a staple of our textbooks. A diagram, some might say, is a schematic representation, usually linear or geometric in fashion, of relationships between various interrelated objects or concepts that is designed to show how something works. At a fundamental level, however, a diagram is not a representation at all. Diagrams ultimately have no object or referent in the world: rather than reflect the world as it is, they first identify, then re-arrange its parts into coherent configurations that both reflect and enable, shape and structure our patterns of thought. There is, therefore, a poetic, operative dimension to the diagram. Focusing on the uses of diagrams as instruments of theology and biblical exegesis, the lecture also considers the medieval diagrammatic tradition in light of the thought (and drawings) of Charles Saunders Peirce, the nineteenth-century polymath scientist, mathematician, logician and semiotician for whom diagrams were central, not simply an appendage, to his thought. It then considers in some detail one of the most elaborate and extensive examples to have survived from the medieval period, a reworking in diagrammatic form by Berthold of Nuremberg, a little-known Dominican friar, of one of the most revered and most recondite works of the earlier Middle Ages, Hrabanus Maurus’ In honorem sanctae crucis (In honor of the Holy Cross), written during the Carolingian period (ninth century). Although the latter work ostensibly does no more than explicate the latter, it in fact reworks it completely, thereby providing a guide to the development of medieval art and thought across half a millennium.”

Prof. Hamburger’s areas of research include medieval manuscript illumination, art in medieval women’s religious communities, and medieval German religious writing, especially in the context of mysticism. His publications include The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany; Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent; The Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland circa 1300; and Leaves from Paradise: The Cult of John at the Dominican Convent of Paradies bei Soest.