

Super-Powering Warburg Studies Beyond Art History's Patriarchal Ancestor Cults

A Possible Panorama of the U.S. Context in 2019

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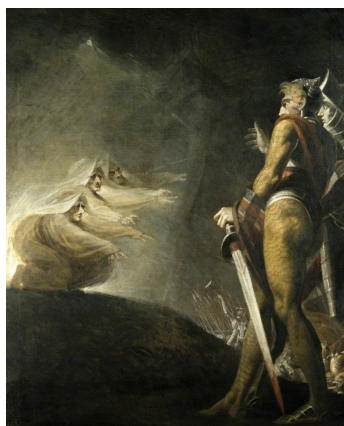


1 | Ileshia Evans at a rally in Baton Rouge after the shooting of 37-year old black man Alton Sterling at close range by police officers.

With zip-tie handcuffs latched to their belts, two white police officers clad in the pads and visored helmets of riot gear, rush to restrain a solitary black woman standing steadfast. Positioning her body firm in the face of police advance, the gesture of New York nurse Ileshia Evans at a Louisiana rally against police brutality was the most powerful work associated with U.S.-based Warburg studies in recent years. The agitated strips of her patterned summer dress appear animated by the dynamism of her stillness, giving expression to a tangible but otherwise invisible aura around her fixed stance. Barthesian theory would assert that, once

captured by Reuters photographer Jonathan Bachman, another body was made of Evans “in the process of ‘posing’” and the resulting image “mortifies” (Barthes as quoted in Pollock 2017). Yet, though ‘mortified’ in this manner, the gesture resists becoming another kind of “black death spectacle” (P. Bright, *Confronting My Own Possible Death*, 2018, mixed media on paper, 19x24 in., in A. D’Souza, *Who Speaks Freely?: Art, Race, and Protest*, “The Paris Review”, May 22, 2018.) through the tactical control of its representation by black writers and #blacklivesmatter activists. As the image of Evans’ gesture flits across various media channeled by people of color, its movement is reactivated for the imprint of energetic refusal it indexes. Evans’ posture – her ability to make visible the acute kinaesthetic awareness that allowed her to hold her body so deliberately – self-consciously occupies a space of agency between pose and gesture. While Evans intently posits herself to be objectified into an image by any variety of image-capturers – whether Instagram-paparazzi or professional photojournalists – her immobile motion resists the death-mask-effect of the pose, activating an affect that instead enlivens her gesture.

The Immediate Legibility of Turbulent Accessories: Teju Coles on Ieshia Evans



2 | Henry Fuseli, *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches* (from William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Act I, Scene III).

In his description of the widely circulated image of Evans in an article for the “New York Times Magazine” titled *The Superhero Photographs of the Black Lives Matter Movement* (2016), novelist, art historian and photographer Teju Cole identifies Evans ‘superpower’ as a contemporary iteration on Aby Warburg’s iconography of the nymph, bringing attention to the garments-in-motion that the self-proclaimed ‘psycho-historian’ called ‘turbulent accessories’ (*bewegte Beiwerke*): “Ieshia Evans, standing full length, in profile, calm, carrying something, her robes billowing from an unseen gust” Cole writes, “reiterates

almost perfectly the form of a nymph that the early-20th-century scholar Aby Warburg described in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*” (Cole 2016a).

The “immediate legibility” of Evans’ gesture, according to Cole, is “evocative of ancient painting and sculpture” and is thus inseparable from the way its “dynamism [...] honors the black body” (Cole 2016a). Thus in Evans’ instantiation of nymph iconography, her body brings the ‘dance’ of the sidelined nymph from the edge it characteristically occupies in reliefs and paintings, to the center of the digital photograph which Evans now holds determinedly. Her stance is so intense that its turbulence of spirit radiates; rather than compelling the sway of her own limbs, its power sets the police coming forth on their heels like the witches in Henry Fuseli’s painting *Macbeth, Banquo and the Witches* (1793-94).

Countering The Seduction of Another Ancestor Cult: Warburg as New Patriarch?

As we prepare to enter into the second decade of a millennial turn in visual culture that witnessed impassioned rethinking of the power of interaction between image and gesture through Warburg’s projects and personal struggles, the *Pathosformel* (emotive formula) of resolute fixity that Evans presents in her stance recalls the image of the radically oppositional Warburg popularized in the U.S. in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Among the underappreciated but seminal works that gave form to this image of an anarchic Warburg fighting an archaic art history, feminist visual theorist Griselda Pollock’s *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (2007) introduced Warburg’s *Pathosformel* to readers as the “term used by [...] Warburg [to challenge] what he dismissed as aestheticizing art history – a bourgeois way of telling the story of art that pacifies the violence encoded in cultural forms, notably the image” (Pollock 2007).

Teju Cole’s essay *The Atlas of Affect*, published in the collection *Known and Strange Things* (2016), is evidence of how this image of Warburg, shaped by Pollock and others, has helped us to see images like the one created by Evans’ gesture – what Pollock calls, “dynamic modes of the transmission of affects”, “formulae for intensity, suffering, abjection, ecstasy, and transformation” (Pollock 2006). Evans’ gesture – and Cole’s important reflections upon it – show that despite challenges to the image of a radical oppositional Warburg as revisionist fantasy, its power persists. Christopher Wood’s observation that “everyone is seduced by Warburg’s personality” still stands and “the ancestor cult” as Wood puts it, continues to “re-enchant scholarship” especially in the U.S. where Warburg’s

'iconology' was previously dominated by Erwin Panofsky's reconfigurations of it (Wood 2014). Wood – whose own graduate seminar syllabus on Warburg for New York University's Department of German can be found circulating on the Chinese social networking service, Douban – observed in 2014, "the rereading of Warburg now has its own American momentum" spurred by American post-structuralism (Wood 2014). It continues in this trajectory, guiding emerging research on images as active re-animators of affect rather than dead signs to be read. As Pollock's recent essay on Marilyn Monroe's imaging and imaged body shows, scholars persist in their continued commitment to this image of Warburg (Pollock 2017), what Wood called its "rough glamour" (Wood 2014).

The Radical Oppositional Warburg: From the UK through the U.S. to Japan

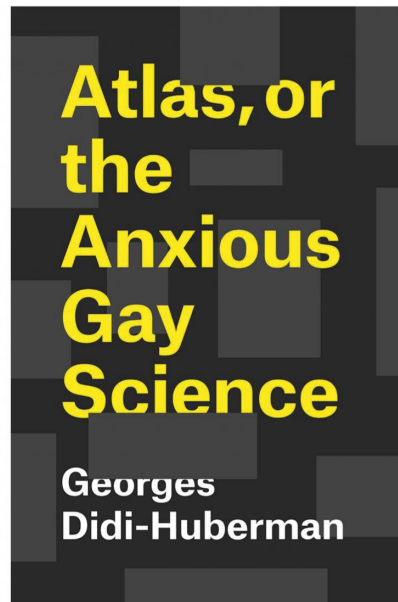
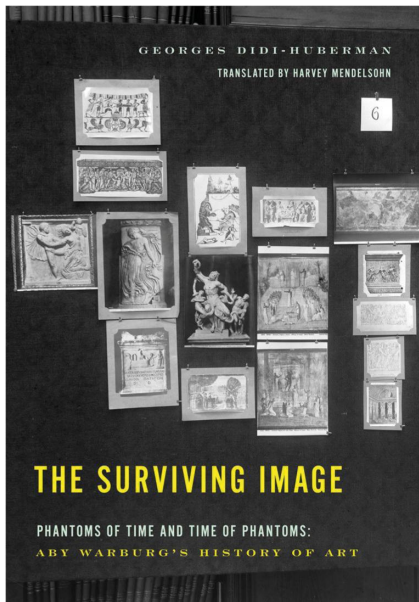
Our perspective on this phenomenon, however, has broadened. The global impact of the radical oppositional Warburg – specifically the version of this Warburg proposed by Pollock – can be noted in passing in art historian and art critic James Elkin's *Art and Globalization* (Elkins, Valiavicharska, Kim 2010). In a roundtable discussion titled "postcolonial narratives", Japanese cultural studies scholar Shigemi Inaga recalls Pollock's presentation of Warburg's work in Japan in the middle of an exchange about approaches to writing history through images that do not "reduce [...] multiplicity into one center" (Elkins, Valiavicharska, Kim 2010). Remembering Pollock's Warburg sets off a string of associations for Inaga; he ultimately concludes his contribution to the discussion with a warning against the perennial risk of the "passion" and "pathology of images" being repressed in favor of "solid narratives" (Elkins, Valiavicharska, Kim 2010). This shows that as scholars in the U.S. and beyond seek out ways to approach writing about contemporary global art and multiple modernities, Warburg remains a talisman, protecting against the danger of reductivism.

Didi-Huberman as Just Another Possible Patriarch?

Beginning a panorama of recent U.S. developments in Warburg studies with Evans the protestor and Cole the art historian-photographer, then moving to focus in on the U.K.-based Pollock and Japan-based Inaga, shows the diversity of contexts in which Warburg thinking is operating to influence the U.S. context. It also aims to avoid the expected: a panoramic view of the U.S. scene that reduces recent developments in Warburg

studies across the Atlantic to the long-awaited English translations of a new 'patriarch' Georges Didi-Huberman.

Didi-Huberman's two important book-length studies of Warburg and the impact of his Mnemosyne Bilderatlas on contemporary art – *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg's History of Art* (Didi-Huberman [2002] 2016) and *Atlas or The Anxious Gay Science* (Didi-Huberman [2011] 2018) – are undeniably an important event for U.S. Warburg studies.



3 | (left) Georges Didi-Huberman's *The Surviving Image* (2016) and (right) *Atlas or The Anxious Gay Science* (2018).

Warburg studies have been invaluablely facilitated by Didi-Huberman's impressive work, but as Wood noted in 2014, it has not been driven by it ("the rereading of Warburg now has its own American momentum").

The modest survey of the present situation that I present here takes the position that the tendency to create new personality cults for art history with new patriarchs can be resisted by recognizing Didi-Huberman's certainly privileged though networked place within a broader group of scholars, all of whom have been actively attending to "the irrational,

dynamic life of images” for which recent reviews praise Didi-Huberman’s works, crediting them with calling our attention to “images [...] not just as facts of history [but as] [...] symptoms of historical forces, sites of tension, of antitheses that [...] produce an energy that drives the movement of history” (Vellodi 2018). The enterprise of reevaluating images in this way has been a collective, dispersed operation, on-going, and not dependent on, though certainly fed by, Didi-Huberman.

In the Shadow of Didi-Huberman: Underappreciated Contributions

In other words, it is important that U.S.-based Warburg studies resist becoming centered on Didi-Huberman in its continued efforts to extricate itself from overemphasis on Warburg’s personality, aiming to reroot itself instead in rereadings of Warburg’s thinking that – without falling prey to the cult of personality – situate this thinking in the matter of his body.

Symptoms of recentering on Didi-Huberman can already be found in some instances in the European publication *Art History after Deleuze and Guattari* where, for example, Didi-Huberman’s work between Warburg and philosopher Gilles Deleuze is granted essay-length attention without any mention of other scholars who have been working in a similar vein all along (Chirolla, Mosquera 2017); again, art historiographical attention to similar work between the two thinkers by feminist visual theorists like Pollock (of particular importance in the U.S. context) has yet to be granted to acknowledge impact. Another work that it seems has been lost to the U.S. context in light of Didi-Huberman’s production is Giuliana Bruno’s *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (2003) whose introduction of Warburg’s atlas to a broader U.S. audience as early as 2003, will now have the occasion to be reread and rethought with its reprinting by Verso in a new 2018 edition.

Didi-Huberman’s seductive prose and trance-inducing intertextuality is wonderful, but could risk becoming a manner, and an obscurantist one at that. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood’s *Anachronic Renaissance* (2010) evaded this risk, responding to “Warburg’s provocation, amplified in Didi-Huberman’s exegesis”, by aiming to create a “nonlinear, nonperspectival ‘artistic’ time”: writing through “a process of reverse engineering from the artworks back to a lost chronology of art making” (Nagel, Wood 2005). Nagel’s *Medieval Modern* (2012) continued in this

vein, moving across periods to explore connections between the modern and the premodern (Nagel 2012). U.S.-based literary scholar Christopher Johnson's comprehensive and thoughtful 2012 book-length analysis of the *Mnemosyne Bilderatlas* – which, itself, is still not available in print in an English edition – was an important follow-up to the Getty Research Institute's 1999 English translations of Warburg's collected writings (*Gesammelte Schriften*, published in German in 1932). Indeed, Johnson's work can be seen as outlining exactly the kind of "programme or method" that some hoped to find in the English translation of Didi-Huberman's books on Warburg, but that as one reviewer suggests, were frustrated not to be offered (Vellodi 2018).

New Approaches to Working with Warburg from the Hyperimage to Theatre

Nonetheless, reviewers of the recent English translations of Didi-Huberman's Warburg works seem to expect them to do everything for Warburg studies – to develop a new theory of time; to show how Warburg can help us thinking through our "current intellectual milieu"; to flesh out "conjunctions" with "Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze and Benjamin" that are only "passe[d] over" (Vellodi 2018). In making these demands, however, we risk forgetting that Didi-Huberman operates within a circle of Warburg studies scholars established and emerging, many of whom *are* developing these angles. In his Getty publication, *More Than One Picture: An Art History of the Hyperimage* (2019), Swiss art historian Felix Thürlemann proposes a theory of configurations and ensembles of images (the hyperimage) that elucidates the important role that ephemeral gatherings of images-in-interplay have had, not only in visual culture but in the way historical narratives take shape (Thürlemann [2013] 2019).

Under the mentorship of Islamic studies scholar Charles Burnett at the Warburg Institute, Spanish researcher Maria del Carmine Molina Barea recently published an article in the U.S.-based journal "Contemporary Aesthetics" that explores conceptual crossings among the notion of rhizome elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, philosopher Michel Serres' reflections on Hermes, and Warburg's *Bilderatlas* (Barea 2018). Like Pollock who continues to work with Warburg's hermeneutics in writings on gesture in American visual culture, German scholar Lucia Ruprecht's writing at the intersection of dance, film, literature and cultural theory, offers a new

comparative study of symptom and symbol through Warburg and Freud in explorations of the critical agency of dance: of particular interest for the U.S. context, are Ruprecht's reflections on the gesturing hands of Vienna-born U.S.-based dancer, choreographer, actress and painter Tilly Losch (Ruprecht 2019).

London-based Mischa Twitchin's study of the iconology of the actor through Warburg and the Polish artist Tadeusz Kantor is important to note for a U.S. context where renewed interest in Kantor's hybrid practice has been on the rise in the past ten years; Twitchin's book was published the year after the Yale School of Drama's much publicized 2015 event series on Kantor for the UNESCO centennial of the theatre luminary's birth. This study of Kantor and Warburg by founder and member of the performance collective, Shunt, is all the more notable as a representative example of a growing number of creative engagements with Warburg's process by scholar-artists around the world.

Elsewhere in the Americas: Warburg Studies in Argentina and Canada



4 | The exhibition *Nymphs, Serpents, Constellations. The Artistic Theory of Aby Warburg* on view at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2019).

Elsewhere in the Americas beyond the U.S. context, Argentinian scholar José Emilio Burucúa is presenting the exhibition *Ninfas, Serpientes, Constelaciones. La Teoria Artistica de Aby Warburg (Nymphs, Serpents,*

Constellations. The Artistic Theory of Aby Warburg) at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires this Spring for the occasion of the city's International Warburg Symposium held in April. A Canadian volume of collected essays titled *Raymond Klibansky and the Warburg Library Network* (2018) brings together talks from another Warburg conference that focused specifically on the Warburg Institute itself as a network of knowledge, not centered on the figure of Warburg, but diffused in the contributions of its many researchers, including the Montreal-based Raymond Klibansky and ever devout Warburg-collaborators Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl. A student hired by Bing and Saxl in 1926 to assist in library work, Klibansky's "exceptional ability in carefully retracing texts and their reformulations through centuries and across linguistic and cultural boundaries," led to invitations to collaborate on studies coordinated by the Institute.

Like the Institute itself, Klibansky was forced to migrate to England when Hitler became chancellor of Germany. He eventually moved on to Montreal, always maintaining contact with the Warburg circle in England through Bing. U.S. scholar Elizabeth Sears' contribution to the conference and its published volume of papers, focuses on Bing and her still underappreciated but seminal role coordinating and orienting Warburg Library projects. Other contributions focus on important source materials on the Warburg Library network held by McGill University as part of the Klibansky Collection. More attention is due to both the practice of decentering Warburg studies enacted at the conference, and to Warburg studies in general in Canada (s., in this Engramma issue, the article dedicated to Klibansky by Daniela Sacco).

Away from Presumed 'Centers' Towards Ornament and Architecture

Such reorientations of Warburg studies away from its presumed 'centers' – primary among them Warburg himself, conceived as control-center – urge appreciation of Warburg as facilitator and thus urge at least a bit of a shift in the tendency to seek out patriarchs. More interestingly, this shift in attention has also been complemented by a similar decentering of Warburg's key concepts. A recent symposium at the University of Florida on the art history and theory of ornament, organized around a keynote by architectural historian and theorist Spyros Papapetros, shows the influence that Papapetros' sophisticated close readings of the young Warburg's

studies of ornament have had on U.S.-based engagement with the Hamburg scholar as philosopher (Papapetros 2019). Less focused on Warburg's personality, and more ready to accept Warburg as "the greatest capitalist in the history of art history" as, for example, German scholar Frederic Schwartz has (Schwartz 2012), has also actually helped to move attention beyond *Pathosformel* to other concepts theorized by Warburg. Papapetros' work is fundamental to Warburg studies in the U.S. for the particularly sensitive manner with which it rethinks and expands the glossary of terms culled from Warburg's writings and popularized by U.S. based art historian Ernst Gombrich (Papapetros 2009; Papapetros 2010; Papapetros 2012). Papapetros bases his insights into these terms – and other underappreciated ones – on analyses of Warburg's early theoretical manuscripts, exploring the young Warburg's thought taking form through notes he took from the diverse array of readings that excited him.

Translations of Manuscripts, Lectures and Letters

Previously only available for study in the archives at the Warburg Institute, the manuscripts with which Papapetros has worked (*Fragmente zur Ausdruckskunde*, published by de Gruyter as part of the *Gesammelte Schriften* project edited by Horst Bredekamp and Uwe Fleckner, among others) now find in Papapetros' approach a model for future developments, now that more material has been made accessible, transcribed for print in German publication (Warburg 2015). The bi-lingual German-Italian edition that preceded the definitive de Gruyter version was invaluable to Italian scholarship; it is difficult, however, to imagine that a similar German-English edition will be realized, considering the difficulty of translating these impossibly dense fragmentary writings by the young Warburg. Though similarly not available in English translation, it is equally important to mention the German publication of Warburg's letters (Warburg 2019) and new German transcriptions of Warburg's popular lecture on Hopi culture given at the Kreuzlingen Sanatorium in 1923 (Warburg 2018). The latter is accompanied by hundreds of Warburg's photographs along with a complete catalogue of his collection of Native American artifacts.

Warburg and Critical Art History through the Study of Architecture

In a recent article that posits the study of architectural history by architects as a political decision – "you leave yourself terribly vulnerable to

absorbing the perspectives of people who have perhaps never gone beyond the most tired received ideas” – California-based cultural historian of architecture and town planning Richard Wittman situates Warburg among “those founders of a critical art history that was based in the study of architecture” (Wittman 2017). Even if only a passing mention in a longer argument, this comment acknowledges the centrality of Warburg in U.S.-based critical art histories rooted in architecture. Like Papapetros, Alina Payne is another architectural historian whose book-length study of ornament, *From Object to Ornament* (2012), can be considered part of these experiments, featuring important insights into the centrality of ornament to both Warburg’s thinking, and to art and architectural history as a whole. As Papapetros assesses in his review of Payne’s book, the importance of her study has been to further emphasize the “theoretical value” of ornament, while also encouraging readers to think about intersections between key figures like Warburg and Alois Riegl, whose shared concerns are rarely explored together due to the contrasting characters and approaches (Papapetros 2014).

Digital Architecture Beyond Computers: Warburg’s Projects

The diaries that Warburg kept during his final years in Rome show that he hesitated to make claims for the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* as a method despite his eagerness to share it as a heuristic practice. London-based architect, researcher and educator Roberto Bottazzi’s “cultural history of computational design”, *Digital Architecture Beyond Computers* (2018) situates Warburg’s Atlas, library and research institute within the history of the database as “methods to link and retrieve information” that are “precursors of the modern hyperlink” (Bottazzi 2018). Bottazzi’s focus on Warburg brings attention to his unique use of cards annotated by theme, not by bibliographical reference, thus “privileging [...] content – and potential associations – over the individual piece of information” (Bottazzi 2018). In a technocratic culture obsessed with generating, copying, and circulating information, but simultaneously paranoid about the meanings that can be made from metadata gleaned from this sharing, these connections made by Bottazzi offer opportunities for reflection in the U.S. context.

Bottazzi also asserts that the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* was “an example of information management elevated to the level of philosophy”, and

associates it with “software plasticity”, or rather “the possibility to convert different types of media into each other as well as [to] transfer tools [...]” (Bottazzi 2018). Influenced by Papapetros’ approach to further theorizing concepts important to the young Warburg, my own doctoral work in the U.S. context focused on the concept of the ‘plastic’ in Warburg’s early theoretical manuscripts, and the manner in which the concept, though not privileged in his writings, is emergent in his work with image configurations (Bovino 2017). A number of similarly oriented dissertations can be found scrolling through library databases, in particular Margareta Ingrid Christian’s *Horror Vacui: A Cultural History of Air around 1900* (Princeton University 2012), which mentors encouraged me to take a look at as I was developing the form of my own thesis (Christian 2012). My thesis, however, confronted very different issues than Christian’s. As an artist and art historian first exposed to Warburg’s work through the image-making practices of contemporary artists influenced by the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, I aimed to situate my work within approaches to the theory-practice hybrid in art. With hindsight, I can now see my work as situated among the projects of a growing number of like-minded artist-scholars, like Kamini Vellodi and Mischa Twitchin, both of whom practice with, think through, and write about Warburg. In an article for the “Journal of Art Historiography”, Eleonora Vraskidou worked with Warburg to inquire into the role of artistic practice in shaping art history as a discipline: “A Third Art History?” she asked. Indeed, I would answer, it is finding its way (Vraskidou 2018).

Third Art History? Artist-Scholars and Research-Based Practitioners

As the work of Teju Cole, Kamini Vellodi and Mischa Twitchin show, this “third art history” is a vast, variegated field. Though this is not the place to further expound upon the distinction, I do think it is important for me to note my position that the artist-scholar is not the same as the research-based practitioner. Artist-scholars are not only changing notions of what constitutes a research-based artistic practice and the contexts in which it is presented, they are also impacting their respective academic environments and transforming the conditions of learning. Research-based practitioners who have worked explicitly with Warburg studies include Goshka Macuga (whose work on Warburg I have written about extensively in *Engramma*, no. 130, s. Bovino 2015) and Micol Forti (featured as a guest editor in the last issue of *Engramma*, no. 163, s. Centanni, Forti 2019).

In *On Displays*, research-based practitioner, French artist, theorist and poet Franck Leibovici brings together a diverse set of practices including Warburg's projects, the work of California modernists Ray and Charles Eames, and New York-based contemporary artist Walid Raad to document an interdisciplinary research programme he developed on exhibitionary devices, with a grant from the French royalty collecting and distribution society, the ADAGP – Association pour la diffusion des arts graphiques et plastiques (Leibovici 2018).

Swiss publisher JRP Ringier published Danish artist Henrik Olesen's "Mnemosyne' of sexual identity" as *Some Faggy Gestures* in 2007, panels of which were picked up by the New York-based academic journal "Art Journal" in 2014 for circulation in the U.S. context (Olesen 2013). For the occasion of American artist Joan Jonas' Tate retrospective in 2018, an interview featured her discussion of Warburg's Kreuzlingen lecture on the Hopi as an influence on her process (Jonas, Rose 2018).



5 | Henrik Olesen, *Some Gay-Lesbian Artists and/or Artists relevant to Homo-Social Culture Born between c. 1300– 1870: III. Some Faggy Gestures* (2007) on view at the exhibition *The Keeper* at the New Museum, New York.

Filmmakers Manu Riche and Patrick Marnham undertook their own travels to New Mexico in their film *Snake Dance* (Riche, Marnham 2012), following both Warburg's excursions into Pueblo territories, and Robert Oppenheimer's work on the atomic bomb at Los Alamos. Artists and writers involved in the Hamburg-based initiative 8 Salon have published an impressive box-set of commentaries on Warburg's *Mnemosyne Bilderatlas* with the Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe (ZKM). Though only available in German, the latter publication is a model for artists and researchers interested in Warburg and the impact of his image-configuring practices on 8 Salon artists like Peter Piller and Andy Hope 1930 (s. in Engramma, Fasiolo 2016; Baldacci, Nicastro 2017). I've noticed that an increasing number of Instagram accounts I follow seem to make self-conscious use of Warburgian *Bilderreihen* (image strings) to introduce exhibition projects, like London-based Italian curator Milovan Farronato's upcoming Italian Pavillion at the Venice Biennale (2019) exploring the effect of the labyrinth, and Milan-based artist Jacopo Miliani's Salzburger Kunstverein collaboration (2019) on flowers as tactisigns.

Rabinow and Richter: The Afterlife of the Modern in the Contemporary

It is inevitable, of course, that Atlas-based practices like those of 8 Salon bring to mind the work of German painter Gerhard Richter. American anthropologist Paul Rabinow's recent book, *Unconsolable Contemporary: Observing Gerhard Richter* (2017), uses Richter to study what Rabinow calls the "ethos of the contemporary", which he rather cryptically explains as "one way of rendering visible and enunciative a specific reflective relation to the present [...] configuring it as actual" (Rabinow 2017). In Rabinow's volume, Warburg predictably appears with the key concepts *Nachleben* (afterlife) and, of course, *Pathosformel* which Rabinow uses to theorize Richter's 'contemporary' as "there is no postmodern" only "the afterlife of the modern". For the legacy of Warburg's interest in anthropology, Rabinow's deployment of Warburg's concepts to bolster what he calls his "invention" of the term "the contemporary", is notable – "just as the 'modern' can be thought of as a moving ratio of tradition and modernity", Rabinow writes, quoting himself as he invokes Warburg, "so the contemporary is a moving ratio of modernity, moving through the recent past and near future in a (non-linear) space" (Rabinow 2017).

Images on the Move in Conferences and Symposia

Amidst migration crises and isolationist hysteria, the adroitly titled “Images on the Move: Depots, Routes, Borders, Spaces” – the most recent London conference of the European-based international research group *Bilderfahrzeuge* (a term Warburg coined that literally translates to mean ‘image vehicles’) – continued the group’s exploration of Warburg’s legacy within the study of “the migration of images, objects and ideas in a broad geographical and historical context” (Images on the Move 2018). Though the group’s website has promised workshops and seminars across Europe, Germany, the U.K., Mexico and the U.S., its events calendar has yet to announce any U.S.-based activities. The recent establishment of the Aby Warburg Reading Group at the Warburg Institute is important, but again, continues to center Warburg study in London, perhaps not responding proactively enough to the diffuse geographical contexts in which Warburg’s thought is already travelling.

Warburg’s own ability to slip between past and future continues to captivate us as the challenges of climate change and the geopolitics of migratory movements require a visionary reorganizing of our conceptions of body and territory in geological time. The Helix Center’s two-day symposium “Aby Warburg: Art, Neuroscience and Psychoanalysis” sadly appears to have been the last important conference in the U.S. to explore Warburg’s plastic thinking. In a short-sighted historical moment that threatens the arts and humanities with the ideology of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), the Helix conference reflected on the way Warburg, the “cultural scientist”, found inspiration in evolutionary biologist Richard Semon’s theories of memory – in particular, his concept of the *engram* – using it to conceptualize the *Pathosformel* and its *dynamogram* (Warburg 2013). The conference entertained links between early 19th century German empathy theory and contemporary studies of mirror neurons, but any collaborations between art, science and psychoanalysis seem not to have been pressed much further in conferences in the U.S. context.

Shifting Contexts From Peninsula to Island: California to Hong Kong

Though not featuring any talks explicitly dedicated to Warburg, the Princeton symposium *Fake Friends* on art history and comparison,

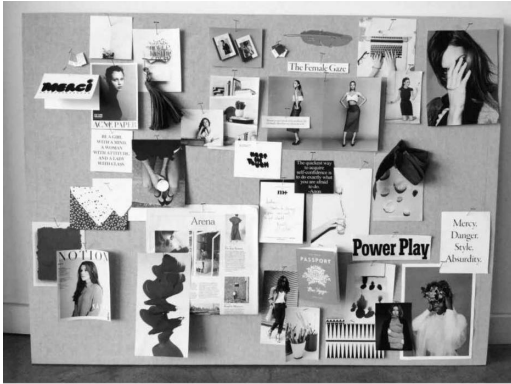
introduced its topic with a rather irreverent invocation of Warburg's working practice. So the symposium's abstract begins:

Aby Warburg spoke of working, with his assistants, in a 'veritable arena' of tables on which to lay out the documents... so that we can compare them, and these books and images must be easily and instantly within reach (Fake Friends 2018).

But what is "within reach in comparison?" the symposium's organizers questioned. Their concluding call was to "not only challenge but change the 'rules' of art history's game" by "shuffl[ing] likes and unlikes" and "generat[ing] tickled parallels and troubled parallaxes" (Fake Friends 2018).

Having relocated from the U.S. to the Greater China Region, leaving behind the California peninsula of my doctoral studies for a return to the Hong Kong island of my childhood, my own attentions have been reshuffled by radical change, and the rush of returning memories I had not known were lost. From within the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), the condition of being split - in-between the One Country Two Systems policy implemented in 1997, and the expiration of SAR status in 2047 - proposes new polarities between trauma and ecstasy to explore in conversation with Warburg.

In 2014, W. J.T. Mitchell proposed such a dialogue in a seminar he gave at Hong Kong Polytechnic University titled "Montage and Madness: Aby Warburg to A Beautiful Mind" (Mitchell 2014). A year later, a talk by Uwe Fleckner, "In the Theatre of Visual Teaching: Aby Warburg's Image Montage in Experimental Atlas of Science and Art", proposed Warburg as a model for visual teaching at the OCAT Institute in Beijing (Fleckner 2015). These different approaches to presenting Warburg between Hong Kong and Beijing - two cities that, depending on the situation, exchange positions as center and margin - is material for long deliberation not appropriate here; it suffices to say, however, that, with the further geographical decentering of Warburg studies, more opportunities for Warburg's ideas to wander will hopefully find their way to the region. It appears that Gombrich's 'intellectual biography' of Warburg was just translated in simplified Chinese in 2018.



6 | An Atlas is NOT a Mood Board: (left) example of a mood board by Ana Kristiansson Design Agency, date unknown; (right) Plate 79 of Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas (1924-1929).

The Atlas: Challenging the Hegemony of the Mood Board in Design Education

In his essay *The Atlas of Affect*, Cole moves from a profile of Warburg to writing about Baltimore artist Dana Kelberman's *I'm Google* (2011), which he calls a "plasticky" iteration of the Bilderatlas (Cole 2016b). *I'm Google* is a "visual world-building that explicitly sidesteps not only the language of antiquity and classicism, but also any suggestion of 'artistic' image making", exploring new kinds of gestures and their traces through images and image juxtapositions only possible with Google (Cole 2016b). As Cole explains, unlike New York artist Taryn Simon's automated Google-based analytics visualized in the project *Image Atlas* (2012, a collaboration with the Internet hacktivist Aaron Swartz, who committed suicide while under prosecution for illegal data sharing), Helberman's project works with hand-clicked images found in a more mundane process by the artist on Google Image Search, then posted to a Tumblr blog. In these images-strings (*Bilderreihen*), the manipulation of matter and environment are ends in themselves.

Since completing my doctoral studies, my experience of working at a University in Hong Kong that aims to train creative professionals from around the world to create images with global impact in various culture industries from gaming to fashion has left me convinced that, indeed, Warburg's Bilderatlas as heuristic practice is essential to nurturing critical thinking and reflexive image-making in the age of Google search and

market-driven education. Insisting on the distinction between the designer's mood board – where the power of pathos in images is too often used to generate a sanitized 'mood' that replicates derivative, thoughtless design – the Bilderatlas of Warburg's *Kulturwissenschaft* (cultural science) offers an invaluable means to sensitize a new generation of image-makers to the visionary potential of the image as affect.

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English abstract

Beginning with ruminations upon #blacklivesmatter protestor Ieshia Evans' 'new nymph' and ending with a challenge to the hegemony of the 'mood-board' in art-and-design education, this essay proposes one possible panorama of Warburg studies in the United States. Rather than isolate activities in the U.S. within the nation's borders, the author – a Warburgian who currently holds a faculty position at an American college of art and design in Hong Kong – considers the U.S. context as one node within a broader global network of Warburg studies from the Americas to Southeast Asia; a node that plays the part of receiver and transmitter, a channel or thoroughway. With special attention to feminist projects, artistic research, and work that aims to decenter 'Warburg studies' from both the figure of Warburg himself

and his most frequently cited concepts, this survey of recent developments looks at the myriad ways scholars, artist-researchers, and scholar-artists whose work is based in the U.S., or has moved through the U.S. with great impact, have worked to move Warburg studies beyond becoming just another one of art history's patriarchal ancestor cults.