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**Aby Warburg:
His Aims
and Methods**

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Aby Warburg: His Aims and Methods

edited by
Monica Centanni and Giulia Zanon



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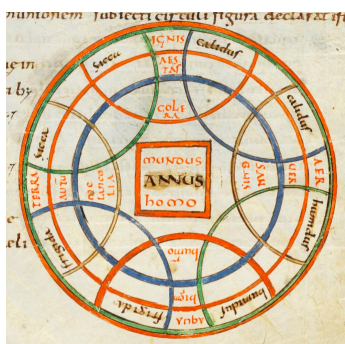
Aby Warburg: His Aims and Methods

Engramma 191, Editorial

by Monica Centanni and Giulia Zanon

An ideology can be described; a system of interpretation —the only one that counts because it alone can show what the originality of one cultural moment in time relative to every other is capable of— is imperceptible. [...] Ideas are seen by everyone; the historian of ideas is supposed to look in the wings, to contemplate another aspect of the theater, the stage seen from within.

Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, [1984] 1987, 12.



The cover image we have chosen for issue 191 of “Engramma” is an illumination titled *De Caelo*, from a IX century manuscript of *Etymologiarum sive originum libri*; *De natura rerum* by Isidore of Seville (Zofingen, Stadtbibliothek Pa 32, 62r)—one of the many versions of the illustration of Isidore’s text that provided the inspiration for the conceiving of The Warburg Institute’s emblem.

The title of “Engramma” 191 may sound familiar to Warburgian scholars. Indeed, it is a (rather irreverent) borrowing from the title of a Lecture given by Ernst Gombrich on the seventieth anniversary of Aby Warburg’s death, published in 1999 in the “Journal of the Warburg and the Courtauld Institute” (vol. 62, 268-282), with the title *Aby Warburg: His Aims and Methods. An Anniversary Lecture*. “Do not expect a solemn address for the occasion!”, announced Gombrich, before declaring his intentions:

I feel the best tribute I can pay him is to explain to the best of my power, *sine ita et studio*, how he saw in the purpose of art history and the methods it should employ, for I find that people tend to have the weirdest ideas about his aims and methods (Gombrich 1999, 268).

In his Lecture, Gombrich takes cue from the programmatic conclusion to Warburg's essay on Schifanoja frescoes.

I need hardly say that this lecture has not been about solving a pictorial riddle for its own sake especially since it cannot here be illuminated at leisure, but only caught in a cinematographic spotlight (Warburg *Renewal*, 585, quoted in Gombrich 1999, 270).

In the same paper, Gombrich enthusiastically welcomes the publication of Warburg's writings in English that very year, 1999, edited by Kurt W. Forster and translated by David Britt. However, even on this occasion Gombrich avoids explaining why, despite having been hired at the Warburg Institute in London back in 1936 precisely with the task of publishing in English Warburg's writings (and the *Mnemosyne Atlas*), and subsequently having directed the Warburg Institute from 1959 to 1976, he had not considered as his first duty to accomplish that task.

In this short piece of writing from 1999 (particularly short, in comparison to its title and to the ceremonial occasion), Gombrich once again, after his *Intellectual Biography*, demonstrates his fundamental misunderstanding of Warburg's thought, the reduction of Warburg's method to the application of "positivism" to art history and his stigmatisation of opening the way to "a psychological history of human expression", which was for Gombrich generic and vague. These few pages are the final evidence of Gombrich's inability to grasp the philosophical nature of the methods and the aims of the pioneering research that Warburg had inaugurated.

It is Gombrich himself who admits, in the course of his Lecture for the centenary of Warburg's death, "I fear that by now you will think that I have come to bury Warburg, not to praise him!". And it is true that the mood of the text goes somewhat in that direction. At the end of his "tribute", so to speak, Gombrich saves the scope of Warburg's thought only insofar as it reflects and expresses the crisis of his time, between the 1910s and

1920s. To support this idea, Gombrich resorts to a very generic quotation “All history is contemporary history” taken from Benedetto Croce, an author disliked by Warburg and therefore ungentlemanly to be quoted in a Anniversary Lecture devoted to him.

Hence, recycling Gombrich’s title is here to be intended as a provocation. In our idea, to banish from one’s mind the above-mentioned “weirdest ideas” means interrogating once again the fundamental epistemological questions raised by the Warburgian corpus. What is certain is that to set as the theme of a Lecture (Gombrich) or the issue of a journal (Engramma) Warburg’s aims and methods is a disproportionate and titanic undertaking and one can only proceed, as Warburg wrote about the Schifanoia frescoes, by partial illuminations, by zooms, by details.

This issue aims to present a series of exercises that, by focusing on specific themes, seek to apply and frame the methodological legacy of the scholar from Hamburg: a playing field that also offers the rules, if we know how to look for them. The fact that all contributions included in this issue are in English implies the intention of disseminating Warburgian studies as widely as possible. It is also intended as a tribute to the English edition of Warburg’s writings prompted by Kurt W. Forster in 1999 for The Getty Institute in Los Angeles, thus echoing the homage that Gombrich himself paid to that edition in the Lecture from which we have borrowed our title. Conversely, the actual Tribute to Kurt Forster for his new essay on Warburg included in this issue speaks the five languages of the scholars who agreed to participate in this choral reading.

A first section of this issue is dedicated to analyse specific aspects of the Panels from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*.

In her contribution *Zooming Mnemosyne*, Giulia Zanon investigates the use of detail as a scholarly tool in Warburg’s *corpus*. In the first phase of an ongoing study, the author makes a recognition of the cases in which the detail of an image in the *Atlas* is enlarged and juxtaposed to its original, highlighting the different visual strategies exploited by the scholar to develop and expose his research themes.

In *Collateral effects of the “visibile parlare”* (Dante, Pg. X, v. 95), Monica Centanni reconstructs the hypothesis of a visual model for the legend of Trajan’s Justice and Warburg’s intuition—borrowed from excerpts of lectures and, in particular, the notes left about Panel 7 and 52 of his *Bilderatlas*—that a Trajan’s relief reused in the Arch of Constantine could be the visual matrix of the Legend. Centanni reviews the hermeneutical steps necessary for the formulation of “energetic inversion”. The image from which inspiration is drawn is no longer that of the kneeling Province and the merciful Emperor, but that of the leader who “overwhelms by riding”.

In his illustration for Canto X of *Purgatory*, Sandro Botticelli draws the legendary episode of the Justice of Trajan. In order to illustrate the legend, Botticelli apparently takes inspiration from the bas-relief in the fornix of the Arch of Constantine with the inscription LIBERATORI URBS. This is a bas-relief that, thanks to modern archaeological studies, is known to come from a monument of Trajan. Filippo Perfetti in *Dante, Botticelli, and Trajan. An Open Note* questions how Botticelli could have known the Trajanian origin of the bas-relief. The analysis is carried on by surveying all the sources and critical studies available at the time. At this point in the research, a provisional conclusion is that the identification of the bas-relief as pertaining to a Trajanian monument could have derived from a *vox populi*.

A second section includes essays that take a broader perspective on Warburg and the intellectuals connected to him.

The contribution by Dorothee Gelhard, *Gertrud Bing’s Scientific Beginnings* traces the intellectual history of Gertrud Bing’s doctoral thesis by highlighting the first phase of her scientific life, which is still largely underestimated. The thesis, titled *The Concept of the Necessary in Lessing. A contribution to the historical-intellectual problem of the relationship between Leibniz and Lessing*, links German Literature, Psychology and Philosophy. and, among its merits. It acutely establishes an important dialogue with a great German scholar, highly important for Bing’s and Warburg’s thought: Ernst Cassirer. The author traces the history of the dissertation, by evidencing Cassirer’s recommendation for Bing to

join the KBW and the profound influence Lessing and Leibniz had in the Warburg circle.

The essay by Matilde Sergio, about *Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, and the Memory of Images* focuses on the connection between the two thinkers through the detection of some direct references to Aby Warburg's essay *Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther* in one of Walter Benjamin's most important early works, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Starting with these quotations, the author attempts to offer a glimpse of Warburg's legacy in Walter Benjamin's later reflection on the relationship between historical time and image.

From the last contribution in this section, we learn that a stellar friendship unites Aby Warburg and Anselm Kiefer and the hallmark of this relationship is the energy of inversion. *Anselm Kiefer's Logic of Inversion* is Salvatore Settis' opening speech for Anselm Kiefer's exhibition *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce* (Andrea Emo) on display at Sala dello Scrutinio in Palazzo Ducale, Venezia from March to October 2022. Taking his cue from Kiefer's title, Settis underlines "a logic of inversion between space and time, as well as a staggering fluctuation between preservation and destruction, between memory and oblivion", and questions the meaning of an "interval in a work of art". Settis recalls Warburg's definitions of *Zwischenraum* (intermediate space) and *Denkraum* (space of thought) extending them to contemporary art, in an extraordinary short-circuit of memory.

The third section of the issue presents some recently published volumes in Italy and the United Kingdom, and an exhibition in Hamburg, that have particular consonances with Warburg's research aims and methods.

The first is presentation of *La Dialettica del Denkraum in Aby Warburg* by Clio Nicastro, published by Palermo University Press in 2022. The volume investigates the concept of *Denkraum der Besonnenheit* as "the name of the constellations of methods, concept, forms of expression, and personal challenges that distinguish Aby Warburg's research programme". The book includes a Foreword by the author, an Afterword by Salvatore Todesco, and four chapters: 1. *The Shifting Boundaries of the Denkraum der*

Besonnenheit; 2. *The Corporeal Roots of Sophrosyne*; 3. *The Hospitalization in Bellevue*; 4. Table C: *An Elliptical Space for Reflection*.

Katia Pizzi introduces “Cultural Memories”, the publishing project of the Centre for the Study of Cultural Memory at the University of London. The Centre promotes research with a focus on interdisciplinary approaches to Memory. The series, published by Peter Lang, Lausanne, embraces new methodological approaches, encompassing a wide range of technologies of Memory in cognate fields, including comparative studies, cultural studies, history, literature, media and communication, and cognitive science.

Mary Hertz Warburg: Free and Unconventional by Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino is the review of the exhibition *Auf Augenblicke frei und glücklich MARY WARBURG (1866-1934)* at the Barlach Haus in Hamburg until 12 June. The exhibition is intended to be an homage to the artist —Mary Warburg, Aby’s wife— and displays around fifty selected works, including drawings, pastels and plastic works, covering a period of five decades.

In *The Choral Reading of Il metodo di Aby Warburg* by Kurt W. Forster. *L’antico dei gesti. Il futuro della memoria*, Barbara Baert, Victoria Cirlot, Georges Didi-Huberman, Michael Diers, Andrea Pinotti and Ianick Takaes deal, more or less directly, with the *Nachleben* of Warburg’s thought, starting from the Italian edition of Forster’s monograph on Warburg. The book, published in German in 2018, has recently been translated into Italian and published by Ronzani Editore. The scholars involved in this Tribute give us a polyfocal and heterogeneous view of the themes introduced by Kurt Forster in his book. This represents a new and fundamental approach, an illuminating interpretation in the labyrinth of Kulturwissenschaft of which Warburg was a pioneer.

English abstract

In this issue of Engramma: Giulia Zanon’s *Zooming Mnemosyne* deals with the use of details in Warburg’s *Bilderatlas*, Monica Centanni’s *Collateral effects of the “visibile parlare”* (Dante, Pg. X, v. 95) reconstructs the hypothesis of a visual model for the legend of Trajan’s Justice, according to Warburg intuition about it; this

contribution is connected to the paper by Filippo Perfetti's *Dante, Botticelli, and Trajan. An Open Note* where the author investigates how Botticelli could have come to know that the bas-relief of the Arch of Constantine *LIBERATORI URBIS* was related to an episode in Trajan's life". The focus of this issue is then extended to Warburg's cultural environment. Matilde Sergio's *Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, and the Memory of Images* investigates the influence of Warburg's essay about Luther, on Benjamin's thought, while Dorothee Gelhard's *Gertrud Bing's Scientific Beginnings* reconstructs the intellectual history of Bing's doctoral thesis and its influences on Warburgian work. The theme of Warburg's *Denkraum* is the focal point of Salvatore Settis' *Anselm Kiefer's Logic of Inversion*: a fundamental overview of Kiefer's *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce* (Andrea Emo) on display at Sala dello Scrutinio in Palazzo Ducale, Venezia from March to October 2022. The third section of the issue is dedicated to new publications and exhibitions. Echoing Settis' reflection on *Denkraum*, we present Clio Nicastro's *La Dialettica del Denkraum in Aby Warburg*, published this year for Palermo University Press; an introduction to *Cultural Memories*: a series published by Peter Lang and edited by Katia Pizzi. Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino with *Mary Hertz Warburg: Free and Unconventional* reviews the exhibition of the artist Mary Hertz Warburg. The issue closes with the important *Choral Reading of Il metodo di Aby Warburg* by Kurt W. Forster. *L'antico dei gesti. Il futuro della memoria*, where Barbara Baert, Victoria Cirlot, Georges Didi-Huberman, Michael Diers, Andrea Pinotti and Ianick Takaes offer us their personal reading of Warburg's life and thought as they are presented by Forster's newly translated book, edited by Ronzani editore.

Keywords | Aby Warburg; Mnemosyne Atlas; Denkraum; Walter Benjamin; Trajan; Anselm Kiefer; Kurt W. Forster.

Zooming Mnemosyne

Notes on the Use of Detail in the Mnemosyne Atlas

Giulia Zanon

The Good God in the Detail

In a letter addressed to the German philologist Johannes Geffcken on 16 January 1926, Aby Warburg recalls the opening speech for the first seminar he held at the University of Hamburg:

I told my young comrades-in-arms that I was pleased to have to point out with two principles what they had to expect from the Warburg Library of Cultural Sciences and from me: 1. 'we go in search of our ignorance and beat it – with the help of our friends – where we find it' and 2. The good God is in the detail. (Letter to Johannes Geffcken, January 16, 1926, in Mastroianni 2000, 416. Author's translation).

If it is true that God lurks in the details, it is precisely on the details that a scholar should focus, to grasp what the overall view fails to do. The aim of this contribution is to argue how the zoom – considered here as the act of extrapolation and display of details from a whole image – was used by Warburg as a hermeneutic device in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*.

Enthusiasms and Failures of a New Technique

A first issue must be kept in mind when attempting to theorize the design methodologies of the Atlas: at the start of the twentieth century, gathering photographs (and their manipulations) was not such an obvious operation. While the circulation and availability of images at that time set a certain degree of limits, the Hamburg scholar always expressed great confidence in the use of new technologies and new means for scientific dissemination, publications, seminars, and lectures. For instance, we read in his introduction to *Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie* (1902)

how the progress of photography has enabled the advancement of his research, starting with the themes introduced by Burckhardt's *Beitrage zur Kunstgeschichte von Italien*:

A stay of some years in Florence, researches in the archive there, the progress of photography, and also the local and chronological limitation of the topic, have emboldened me to publish, in the present paper, a supplement to Burckhardt's essay (Warburg, *Renewal*, 186).

In the same essay, we read these words regarding the profile of Lorenzo de' Medici in Ghirlandaio's fresco *Approvazione della regola francescana*:

Although the work has long been known to art history, no one has yet performed the simple, obvious duty of having a large-scale detail photograph taken, or at least subjecting the image to a thorough scrutiny (Warburg, *Renewal*, 191).

Warburg considers the use of detailed photographs as an "obvious duty" for scholars: a practical aspect that should not be undervalued in their approach to cultural studies. This comes with no surprise if we consider the restless commitment engaged by Warburg with photographers throughout his life. Let us consider, for instance, the partnership established with Alinari, witnessed by Warburg in a note to *Art of Portraiture*:

The details reproduced as figures 26, 27, 29, and 32 were taken for the first time, at my request, by Fratelli Alinari. Figure 24 is from an existing photograph by Fratelli Alinari (Warburg, *Renewal*, 217, n.13).

Commissions to Fratelli Alinari are documented over a period of 30 years, along with requests to other photographers based in the places of interest for Warburg's research. Black and white photography, furthermore, represents for the scholar some sort of "grisaille" that "vereinheitlicht radikal ihre Gegenstände und neutralisiert ihre traditionellen ästhetischen Kategorien" (Forster 1995, 193) ["radically unify the objects and neutralise their traditional aesthetic categories" (Author's translation)]. About the interest in the use of this tool, we read in Forster:

Bereits vor der Jahrhundertwende waren Montage und *trompe l'œil* Bilder als Randerscheinungen in Amerika und in Europa entstanden. Seit den zwanziger Jahren gehörte die Fotomontage – sei es in der Anhäufung von Bildern nach dem Muster illustrierter Zeitungen, sei es verfremdend in der surrealistischen und politischen Collage – zu den zentralen künstlerischen Verfahren überhaupt (Forster 1995, 190).

[Even before the turn of the century, montage and *trompe l'œil* images had emerged as marginal phenomena in America and in Europe. From the 1920s onwards, photomontage – whether in the accumulation of images along the lines of illustrated newspapers, or alienated in surrealist and political collage – was one of the central artistic processes in general (Author's translation)].

The new study tools offered by the latest methods for image production were widely used: from the use of detail in the attributionalism of Morelli to Duchenne de Boulogne studying the Laocoön, which, according to Philippe Alain Michaud could be considered “not only a montaged figure but a figure of montage” (Michaud [1998] 2004, 286). Despite the enthusiastic faith in this medium, however, it is not just the detail that Warburg bases his epistemological method, nor on the outputs of the photographic device. As Kurt Forster writes:

Während Warburg also einerseits dem historisierenden Sog der Medien nicht widerstand, verfolgte er andererseits ein Ideal, das er Verselbständigung des Bildes - und damit der Verabsolutierung seiner Magie - entgegentrat (Forster 1995, 196).

[Thus, while Warburg did not resist the historicising pull of the media on the one hand, on the other he pursued an ideal that countered the independence of the image – and thus the absolutisation of its magic (Author's translation)].

Warburg, nevertheless, went further in the aim of a discipline no longer based on the aesthetic impressions of connoisseurs, “but on the concreteness of the detail that carries the formal meaning or the detail pregnant with meaning” (Seminario Mnemosyne 2001, 35. For an updated version of the essay, see Seminario Mnemosyne 2016a). As we read in a

letter addressed to the German art historian Adolph Goldschmidt on 9 August 1903:

The connoisseurs and 'attributionists', for they are professional admirers, desirous of protecting the peculiar characteristics of their hero either through delimitation or through extension in order to understand him as a logically coherent organism: Bayersdorfer, Bode, Morelli, Venturi, Berenson, and the whole nose tribe [...] hero-worshippers, but in their ultimate derivations they are only inspired by the temperament of a gourmand. The neutrally cool form of estimation happens to be the original form of enthusiasm peculiar to the propertied classes, the collector and his circle (Gombrich 1970, 147).

Zoom: What is it?

It is not the 'peculiar characteristics' that interested Warburg when he used minutiae in his studies. The elusive god hiding in the detail is not meant to be a quiet guide for identification, but rather an unpredictable demon, darting from work to work, unconcerned with authorship, mouldable with the spirit of the times. At this point, a few questions could be asked about the matter:

- 1) What exactly is meant by 'zoom' in the case of the *Bilderatlas*?
- 2) What is the consistency of the use of this technique?
- 3) Can one identify different types of 'zooms' with different semantic purposes?

'To zoom' is a verb that became widespread in the late nineteenth century: 'to quickly move closer' as it refers to a specific aviation sense. Around 1900, the first zoom lenses were patented, thus the term was borrowed into the photographic and film lexicon – up to the current definition, according to the Cambridge English Dictionary: "to adjust a camera to make a person or thing being photographed appear larger or closer". This contribution shifts the notion of 'zooming' from the lexicon linked to the use of lenses in photography or cinema to a metaphorical sense of approaching the detail. Therefore, 'zooming' is to be considered here as an editing technique, found in some panels of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*: the detail from a picture in the panel is enlarged and juxtaposed with other images in the same panel. The main effect of this arrangement is the

isolation of figures that, being functional to the subject matter, need a formal autonomy, regardless of the context from which they come. By adopting the fundamental theorisation on 'detail' that Omar Calabrese offered us in *L'età neobarocca*, where we read:

'Dettaglio' viene dal francese rinascimentale (e a sua volta ovviamente dal latino) 'de-tail', cioè 'tagliare da'. Esso presuppone pertanto un soggetto che 'taglia' un oggetto. [...] La preposizione 'da' implica la precedenza di uno stato anteriore a quello del taglio, e altresì la provenienza dell'elemento tagliato da un insieme integro. [...] Una seconda riflessione riguarda il valore da attribuire al prefisso '-de'. La particella, infatti, non solo manifesta una anteriorità e una origine del dettaglio, ma illustra anche la natura dell'operazione. Il dettaglio, insomma, viene 'definito', cioè reso percepibile a partire dall'intero e dall'operazione di taglio. Solo l'intero e la sostanza dell'operazione permettono infatti la definizione del dettaglio, cioè il gesto di messa in rilievo motivata dell'elemento rispetto al tutto cui appartiene. Detto in altri termini: al dettaglio ci si avvicina per mezzo di un precedente avvicinamento al suo intero; e si percepisce la forma del dettaglio finché questa rimane in relazione percettibile col suo intero (Calabrese [1987] 1989, 75-76).

['Detail' comes from Renaissance French (and therefore, of course, from Latin) 'de-tail', i.e. 'to cut from'. It therefore presupposes a subject that 'cuts' an object. [...] The preposition 'de' implies the existence of a state prior to the cutting, and also the origin of the cut element from an intact whole. [...] A second reflection concerns the value to be attributed to the prefix '-de'. The particle, in fact, not only manifests an anteriority and origin of the detail, but also illustrates the nature of the operation. The detail, in short, is 'defined', that is, made perceptible starting from the whole and from the cutting operation. In fact, only the whole and the substance of the operation allow the definition of the detail, that is, the gesture of motivated highlighting of the element with respect to the whole to which it belongs. In other words: the detail is approached by means of a previous approach to its whole; and the form of the detail is perceived as long as it remains in a perceptible relationship with its whole (Author's translation)].

This definition could help us in trying to justify the presence of the whole image within the panel where its detail is also displayed. However, Calabrese introduces another semantic device:

Del tutto diversa è l'etimologia di 'framment', che deriva dal latino 'frangere', cioè 'rompere'. [...] Il frammento, invece, diversamente dal dettaglio, pur essendo parte di un testo preesistente (intero), non ne contempla la compresenza. Qui l'intero è *in absentia* (Calabrese [1987] 1989, 77-78).

[Entirely different is the etymology of 'fragment', which derives from the Latin 'frangere', i.e. 'to break'. [...] Unlike the detail, the fragment, although part of a previous whole, does not contemplate its presence in order to be defined. On the contrary: the whole is *in absentia* (Author's translation)].

By abstracting the bicephalic nature of detail *versus* fragment, used by Calabrese, we could try to apply this definition as a key to studying the *Atlas*. Is it really possible to apply this dichotomy to the black screen of *Mnemosyne*? Is, perhaps, the semantic power of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* that of transforming 'detail' into 'fragment', revealing the tragic character of a rupture – the disruption between the re-emersion from the Ancient and its wider pictorial context? The isolation of a *fulcrum* from a work of art firstly seems to stretch out into a horizontal movement, while the sensation that invades us, as we look at the panels, is that of the vertical movement of a *catabasis* into the deep seas of figuration. Calabrese's definition of 'detail' is therefore challenged by the processes that Warburg performs on images: these are acts of fragmentations whose results are not called to dialogue with their own origins but are rather energetically attracted to other images, striving for a more complex unity. The juxtaposition of images taken from different sources generates something new, something whose power would not be produced by the single image.

The methodology used for this contribution has been drawn, as a starting point, by searching the keyword 'detail' through all the captions in the *Atlas*. This has been possible thanks to the index of materials published by Seminario Mnemosyne in "Engramma" (Seminario Mnemosyne 2016), a further confirmation of the importance of the use of captions as a studying device of the *Bilderatlas*, and a validation of the possibility to examine it

with the methodology of a “scholar without eyes” (Pasquali [1930] 2022, 39). The nature of this quest goes further on from the real to the metaphorical: the use of detail in the construction of the *Atlas* proved to be synecdotal regarding Warburg's epistemological method. The recurrence has been detected in seventeen panels and surely with a margin for errors and implementations that will be addressed in subsequent studies. Furthermore, it should also be noted that this editing technique is also occasionally present, in the two earlier versions of the *Atlas*, dating from 1928, which we have not included because of their embryonic nature compared to the 1929 version (the so-called final one).

‘Zoom’ in Mnemosyne: All the Occurrences

At this preliminary stage, the attempt of this study, is to gather all the occurrences and to provide an example of a method that requires further and intensive work on the individual images of the *Atlas*. Whenever possible, an attempt has been made to cross-reference Mnemosyne panels with the corpus of Warburg's published writings. Warburg's precise textual descriptions of specific artifacts are effective tools in deciphering the value of the images in the panels' economy. The possibility of crossing these two universes is an extremely important tool for the theorisation of Aby Warburg's compositional strategies, thus sealing the “alchemical marriage” conceived by Kurt Forster:

Susceptible though he was to the attraction of visual media, Warburg simultaneously pursued an ideal that ran counter to the autonomy of the image – and of its magic. This ideal was that of congruence between visual material and conceptual definition. Verbal formulas of invocation made the affinities between image and concept into an alchemical marriage (Forster 1999, 49).

Panel 27



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 27, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

27_2 | Francesco del Cossa, The April sky with the triumph of Venus and the decans of the month, fresco, 1469-1470, Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi.

27_3 | Francesco del Cossa, The March sky with the triumph of Minerva and the deans of the month, fresco, 1469-1470, Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi.

27_4 | Francesco del Cossa, The March sky with the triumph of Minerva and her children, detail, fresco, 1469-1470, Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi.

27_6 | Francesco del Cossa, The April sky with Mars chained in front of Venus, detail, 1469-1470, Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi.

In Panel 27, the detail focuses on two of Francesco del Cossa's frescoes for the Sala dei Mesi in Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara. From the fresco depicting the April sky, with the triumph of Pallas Athena and the decans of the month, in the upper right-hand corner of the panel, Warburg 'extracts' the upper band, representing the triumph of Pallas Athena and her children, and places an enlargement of it on the panel. This enlargement corresponds with Warburg's description of this part of the fresco in his 1912 lecture *Italian Art and International Astrology in Palazzo Schifanoia*:

Above, on a triumphal car drawn by unicorns, its hangings fluttering in the breeze, we see the damaged – but clearly identifiable – figure of Pallas Athena, spear in hand, wearing the gorgoneion on her breast. To the left we see Athena's votaries: physicians, poets, lawyers (who might possibly be identified, on closer study, as contemporary figures from the university of Padua). To the right, by contrast, we find ourselves looking in on a kind of

Ferrarese needlework bee. In the foreground are three women knitting; behind them are three weavers at their loom, watched by a cluster of elegant ladies. To believers in astrology, this apparently unremarkable group was a sign of the prediction anciently associated with the subjects of Aries: that anyone born in March, under the sign of the Ram, would show a talent for artistry with wool (Warburg, *Renewal*, 572).

The same procedure is applied for the fresco depicting the April sky with Aphrodite and the decans of the month (displayed on the panel on the left of the March fresco). Warburg extracts and enlarges a detail of the upper band, isolating the floating chariot on which the goddess proceeds in her triumph, while Ares is kneeling in front of her. This is the same detail that Warburg dwells on in his 1912 essay:

Let us now turn to April, ruled by Taurus and Venus. Skimming the waves in her swan-drawn barge, its draperies flying so bravely in the breeze, this goddess betrays no superficial trace of a Grecian style. At first sight, only her costume, her loose hair, and her garland of roses distinguish her from the inmates of the two Gardens of Love, who pursue their concerns in so worldly a fashion to her left and right. [...] Let us now look back at Cossa's Aphrodite. The garland of red and white roses; the doves that flutter around the goddess as she floats along; Cupid, depicted on his mother's girdle as he aims his bow and arrows at a loving couple; and above all the three Graces, who are certainly copied from an antique original, prove the artist's intention of supplying an authentic reconstruction of antiquity (Warburg, *Renewal*, 573-577).

Panel 28-29



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 28-29, Warburg Institute Archive, London.
28-29_4 | Palio di S. Giovanni, Sellers of antidotes, detail, marriage chest, early fifteenth century, Firenze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.
28-29_5 | Palio di S. Giovanni, Marriage chest, early fifteenth century, Firenze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

In Panel 28-29, whose theme focuses on the daily life represented on chests as a vehicle for the circulation of images and themes from antiquity, Warburg studies the image of a Florentine wedding chest from the early fifteenth century, depicting the Palio di San Giovanni. By ‘zooming’ on its decoration (the photograph of the detail can be seen on the left side to the entire image of the painted chest), the attention is drawn to the scene of the medicine (*triaca*) sellers: the depiction of a “self-regarding society that presents itself, in all its pleasing detail, in the conversational tone of a court balladeer” (Warburg, *Renewal*, 282).

Panel 30



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 30, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

30_5 | Benozzo Gozzoli, *Journey of the Three Kings*, fresco, 1459-1461, Firenze, Cappella di Palazzo Medici-Riccardi.

30_6 | Benozzo Gozzoli, Giovanni VIII Paleologo as one of the Three Kings, detail, fresco, 1459-1461, Firenze, Cappella di Palazzo Medici-Riccardi.

In an 1893 lecture about Matteo degli Strozzi, the young son of a merchant, Warburg uses these words to describe this latter:

He wore a short purple doublet, and he had just been given a new cloak. We might imagine him as looking like one of the young horsemen who ride with the procession of the Three Kings in Benozzo Gozzoli's fresco in the Palazzo Riccardi, in Florence (Warburg, *Renewal*, 264).

The detail of this procession – depicted by Benozzo Gozzoli and affixed in Panel 30, about which Warburg notes: “Monumentalisierung und Distanzierung. Dazu Gozzoli. Paleologus” – makes us focus here on the figure of Giovanni VIII Paleologo as one of the Three Kings. Crossing the visual source (the detail) with the textual one (the simile) could be a good hermeneutical weapon for studying the concept of “monumentalisation and distancing”.

Panel 39



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 39, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

39_11a | Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (according to Warburg *The Realm of Venus*), tempera on table, 1477-1482, Firenze, Uffizi.

39_11b | Sandro Botticelli, Chloris, detail from *Primavera*, tempera on table, 1477-1482, Firenze, Uffizi.

39_11c | Sandro Botticelli, Chloris, detail from *Primavera*, tempera on table, 1477-1482, Firenze, Uffizi.

Panel 39 of the *Bilderatlas* gathers the themes of love and metamorphosis, where “Botticelli’s mythological allegories are examples of the introduction of the all’antica style in early Renaissance art” (*Mnemosyne Atlas* 39, “Engramma”). This panel must be considered a valuable object of study, as it has a direct correspondence with a text written by Warburg, *Sandro Botticelli’s Birth of Venus and Spring* (1893). The two figures, Chloris and Zephyrus, are taken away from Sandro Botticelli’s *Primavera* because they detain a particular autonomy, expressed by their pose, ascribable to a scene of erotic pursuit and allow us a precise comparison with the literary sources, either from Antiquity or Florentine Renaissance, used by the artist.

Panel 43



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 43, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

43_7 | Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Approval of the Franciscan Rule by Pope Onorio III*, fresco, 1479-1486, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Trinita, Cappella Sassetti.

43_8 | Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Approval of the Franciscan Rule by Pope Onorio III*, portraits of Luigi Pulci and Matteo Franco, detail, fresco, 1479-1486, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Trinita, Cappella Sassetti.

43_9 | Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Approval of the Franciscan Rule by Pope Onorio III*, portraits of Piero and Giovanni de' Medici, detail, fresco, 1479-1486, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Trinita, Cappella Sassetti.

43_10 | Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Approval of the Franciscan Rule by Pope Onorio III*, portraits of Angelo Poliziano and Giuliano de' Medici, detail, fresco, 1479-1486, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Trinita, Cappella Sassetti.

43_11 | Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Approval of the Franciscan Rule by Pope Onorio III*, portraits of Lorenzo de' Medici and Francesco Sassetti, detail, fresco, 1479-1486, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Trinita, Cappella Sassetti.

In *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 43, the device is functional to the text. The enlargements applied to the panel, taken from the Cappella Sassetti's fresco *Approvazione della regola francescana*, faithfully follow 1902 essay *The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie*, where Warburg guides the reader to the recognition of the single characters depicted in the fresco by Domenico Ghirlandaio. Circumstantial pieces of evidence and interest in the physiognomy of the figures make it possible to open the discourse to the entire cultural milieu of late fifteenth-century Florence. As in the essay the characters are described and recognized, so in the panel, below the overall photograph of the fresco, there are four details depicting the eight protagonists of the Medicean procession. The art of portraiture insinuates itself with vital overbearingness into the sacred representation and, thus, the celebration of power is accentuated by the immediate recognisability of its actors. Isolating each figure is the synthesis of this cultural and figurative process: the narrative composition is subordinate to the desire to portray the lords of the Medici court.

Panel 45



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 45, Warburg Institute Archive, London.
 45_16 | Davide and Benedetto Ghirlandaio (on Domenico Ghirlandaio's drawing),
Resurrection, tempera on table, post 1494, Berlin, Staatliche Museen,
 Gemäldegalerie.

45_17a | Davide and Benedetto Ghirlandaio (on Domenico Ghirlandaio's drawing),
 Head of a fleeing guard, *Resurrection*, tempera on table, painting, post 1494, Berlin,
 Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie.

45_17b | Bottega di Domenico Ghirlandaio, Head of two Dacians fleeing from the
 Romans, detail, ink drawing, 1490 ca., Escorial, Biblioteca del Monasterio de San
 Lorenzo el Real, *Cod. Escorialensis* 28-II-12, fol. 63.

In Panel 45, the 'zoom' drives our attention to the ancient model in Renaissance painting through the assimilation of pathetic formulae as engrams for the expression of human emotion. The Roman soldier who, in Ghirlandaios' *Resurrection*, flees in fear before the miracle of Christ defeating death, extrapolated from his pictorial context, and juxtaposed with the drawing of a relief of Trajan's Column from *Codex Escorialensis* depicting two Dacians running away from the Romans, assumes the same posture as the fleeing barbarian. The detail of the guards is, therefore, 'taken away' from the photograph of Ghirlandaio's *Resurrection* and displayed next to the drawings of the two barbarians, making their iconographic descent clear. As Warburg writes in 1914 in *The Emergence of the Antique as a Stylistic Ideal in Early Renaissance Painting*:

The central painting of the altarpiece that Ghirlandaio and his brothers made for the Tornabuoni chapel shows Christ's Resurrection on the reverse side, and the exemplary pathos formula of Antiquity penetrates here, even informing the expression of tragic horror. The Saviour, rising up from the grave, has plunged the three pagan guards in fear and alarm. One of them, raising his shield over his bearded head as if to defend himself, is fleeing,

his robe fluttering in the wind. [...] Ghirlandaio's sketchbook reveals the model: the fleeing barbarian from Trajan's Column who, just like the guard in terms of his physiognomy, his posture and the movement of his robe, is rushing away from the troops of Trajan. In terms of the momentary expression of fear on his face, with its furrowed eyebrows and open mouth, and even in terms of the ornamental wings on his helmet, the guard rushing off to the left points towards his model, admittedly not quite attained, namely, the head of the screaming winged Medusa crying out, which he carries with supreme effort on his shield as his coat of arms (Warburg [1914] 2001, 24).

Panel 46



Detail from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 46, Warburg Institute Archive, London.
 46_3 | Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of Saint John the Baptist*, fresco, 1486, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Maria Novella, Cappella Tornabuoni.
 46_7 | Ghirlandaio's workshop, Fruit bearer, copy of the detail from *Birth of Saint John the Baptist*, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Maria Novella, Cappella Tornabuoni, Pisa, Museo Civico.

In Panel 46, dedicated to the Nymph and her stride, Warburg focuses on Ghirlandaio's fresco *Birth of John the Baptist*, drawing our attention to the fruit-bearing maiden who is entering the scene. The figure of this Nymph, entering the fresco from the right side, is taken by Warburg and 'absolutised' in the figure next to it, in Panel 46. It is an image that, at a first glance, might appear to be an extrapolation of Ghirlandaio's canephore, while being in fact a workshop copy of the figure, evidence of the subject's diffusion in autonomous ways (Seminario Mnemosyne 2021, for an English version see Seminario Mnemosyne 2000).

Panel 47



Detail from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 47, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

47_25 | Scuola del Ghirlandaio, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, oil on table, 1489, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie.

47_25b | Scuola del Ghirlandaio, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, detail, oil on table, 1489, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie.

Panel 47 presents two photographs of the same subject: Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*. This uneven duplication – the second photo, affixed to the right of the first one, has a different cut – raises questions about the meaning of the montage. Is it a placeholder? It might be plausible to imagine that Warburg wanted to place something else. Possibly a picture with similarly posed figures, therefore he left a memento to, perhaps, commission another photograph. Alternatively, the double use of Ghirlandaio's painting might suggest a visual introduction to oxymoronic themes as the *Pathosformel* of cure and, at the same time, that of victory. Within the painting, it is interesting to note the presence of two distinct characters: Judith who, with her sword, expresses the idea of triumph, and, next to her, a canephore (the basket on her brim bears the macabre gift of John's head) who, with the drapery of her dress moved by the wind, expresses to the utmost degree the idea of the Nymph. As Warburg writes in 1905:

It is like the dresses of the flying Victories on Roman triumphal arches, or of those dancing maenads, consciously imitated from the antique, who first appeared in the works of Donatello and of Filippo Lippi. Those figures revived the loftier antique style of life in motion, as we find it in the

homeward-bound Judith, or in the angelic companion of Tobias, or in the dancing Salome, who emerged on biblical pretexts from the workshops of Pollaiuolo, Verrocchio, Botticelli, and Ghirlandaio, grafting eternal shoots of pagan antiquity onto the withered rootstock of Flemish-influenced bourgeois painting (Warburg, *Renewal*, 174).

Panel 52



Detail from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 52, Warburg Institute Archive, London.
 52_11 Cerchia di Andrea Mantegna, Triumph of the Romans over the Dacians, from *The Legend of Trajan*, stucco bas-relief, Paola Gonzaga's marriage chest, Mantova 1477, Klagenfurt, Museum Rudolfinum.
 52_13 | Cerchia di Andrea Mantegna, Trajan's Justice, from *The Legend of Trajan*, stucco bas-relief, Paola Gonzaga's marriage chest, Mantova 1477, Klagenfurt, Museum Rudolfinum.

Warburg in Panel 52 focuses his attention on Paola Gonzaga's wedding chest by Mantegna's workshop. Underneath the picture of the bas-relief decoration, representing the triumph of the Romans over the Dacians, is affixed a photographic detail of the scene. The image depicted is that of Trajan's Justice, following the legendary tradition whereby the emperor breaks his horse in front of the supplicant mother whose son has been run over by his soldiers. The enlargement isolates the emperor in front of the woman, separating them from the extended scene of the military procession. The inversion of the energetic sense whereby the imperial pathos – represented to the utmost degree by the depiction of the *condottiero* in the act of “overwhelming by riding” – becomes, using an overlapping pose, the representation of power restrained by Christian

piety (see Centanni's contribution published in this issue). As Warburg writes in his *Einleitung* to the *Atlas*:

[B8] Medieval church discipline, which had experienced a merciless enemy in the form of the deification of the Emperor, would have destroyed a monument like the Arch of Constantine, had it not been possible to preserve the heroic acts of the Emperor Trajan, supported by reliefs added later, under the mantle of Constantine.

Even the Church had managed to lend the self-glorification of the Trajan relief Christian sentiment, by means of a legend that was still alive in Dante. The famous story of the pietà of the Emperor towards a widow who was pleading for justice is probably the subtlest attempt at transforming imperial pathos into Christian piety, through the energetic inversion of its meaning; the Emperor, bursting out of the inner relief, becomes an advocate of justice, and bids his followers halt, because the widow's child has fallen under the hoofs of a Roman rider (Warburg [1929] 2017).

Panel 54



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 54, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

54_3 | Baldassarre Peruzzi, Astrological and mythological motifs: Eridanius, Jupiter and Taurus, fresco, 1510-1511, Roma, Villa Farnesina, Sala di Galatea.

54_5 | Baldassarre Peruzzi, Astrological and mythological motifs: Eridanius, detail, fresco, 1510-1511, Roma, Villa Farnesina, Sala di Galatea.

In panel 54, there are photos of Baldassarre Peruzzi's frescoes for the vaults of Sala di Galatea in Villa Farnesina, in which Agostino Chigi's horoscope is depicted. As we read in Warburg's 1926 *Astrology under Oriental Influence*:

In the Farnesina – and this has never previously been remarked upon – Agostino Chigi placed his own horoscope on symbolic display in the room painted by Peruzzi: the gods of antiquity, so casually facing each other, signify conjunctions, and the combination – as the director of the Hamburg observatory, Professor Graff, has kindly demonstrated – even makes it possible to specify 1465 as the year of Chigi's birth (Warburg, *Renewal*, 701).

From the image of a vault with astrological and mythological themes affixed to the panel, the detail – which is extracted and affixed below the picture of the entire vault – isolates the figure of the river god Eridanus.

Panel 55



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 55, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

55_7 | Marcantonio Raimondi (from Raphael), *The Judgement of Paris*, etching on copper, c.1530.

55_14 | Edouard Manet, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, oil on canvas, 1863, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

55_17 | Edouard Manet, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, detail, oil on canvas, 1863, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

55_18 | Marcantonio Raimondi (from Raphael), *The Judgement of Paris*, Seated River God, detail, etching on copper, c.1530.

One of the most relevant examples of the use of details in the architecture of *Mnemosyne* is Panel 55, focusing on the scene of the Judgment of Paris

as an example of the symbolic rise and fall of the gods on earth ("Engramma", Panel 55). Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and Marcantonio Raimondi's *Judgement of Paris* are both displayed in the panel in their entirety. They are then affixed in the lower right of the plate through the use of extrapolation, which isolates the characters of interest (and their postures). As Warburg writes:

Se adesso proviamo a confrontare le tre figure sdraiate del *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* con il sarcofago e con l'incisione italiana, l'anello di congiunzione sembra costituito dalla testa rivolta verso lo spettatore della ninfa acquatica di Marcantonio Raimondi. [...] Nella sinfonia a tre voci di Manet questa coscienza dello spettatore, propria dell'incisione italiana, si è chiaramente rafforzata: anche l'uomo accanto alla ninfa francese guarda fuori dal quadro con occhi rigidamente protesi (Warburg [1929] 2019, 42).

[If we now compare the three reclining figures of *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* with the sarcophagus and the Italian engraving, the connecting link is represented by the head turned outwards towards the spectator of Marcantonio's naiad. [...] In the three-voice symphony of Manet's scene, this consciousness of the spectator proper to the Italian engraving is clearly reinforced: even the man next to the French nymph looks out of the picture with firmly energetic eyes (Author's translation)].

The gaze here is both the link between the representations and the exemplification of the energetic inversion process: the skyward gaze of the figure engraved on the Roman sarcophagus becomes, in Raimondi, "la strada lineare di un abbandono senza timore alla bellezza e bontà originaria della natura" (Warburg [1929] 2019, 41) ["the symbol of a fearless abandonment to the primal goodness and beauty of nature" (Author's translation)]. Thus, it represents the prefiguring function for the modern feeling of fusion between man and nature, depicted by Manet, in which the intensity of the gaze is no longer directed at the wonders of the sky. Bored with what is happening in the universe in which they are painted, Manet's character, like the river gods of the Renaissance, energetically looks outwards:

La ninfa, che nell'opera pagana leva estaticamente la testa e saluta con un movimento adorante il prodigio che si svolge sopra di lei, qui volge invece il capo al contemplante mondo esterno (Warburg [1929] 2019, 40).

[The nymph, who in Heathen art rapturously lifts her head in an adoring way to the wonders of above, in the engraving turns her head to the contemplating world outside (Author's translation)].

Panel 56



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 56, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

56_5 | Michelangelo, *The Last Judgement*, The transport of the Column of the Flagellation, detail, fresco, 1536-1541, Roma, Vaticano, Cappella Sistina.

56_8 | Inside view, Roma, Vaticano, Cappella Sistina.

56_9 | Michelangelo, *The Last Judgement*, fresco, 1536-1541, Roma, Vaticano, Cappella Sistina.

In the panel dedicated to Michelangelo and the *Aphotheose des Kreuzestodes* ("Apotheosis of the Crucifixion"), we can see one of the most unconstrained and cinematographic uses of the zoom in the *Bilderatlas*. The lower left image displayed in the panel is a photograph of the Sistine Chapel interior. Moving along an ascending diagonal line (that reminds one of tracking shot), one finds firstly an overview picture of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* and, going upwards, the zoomed scene of the transportation of the scourging column.

Panel 70



Detail from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 77, Warburg Institute Archive, London.
 70_24 | Crispijn van de Passe (from Jacques Bellange), *Adoration of the Kings*,
 canephore, detail, etching on copper, 1600, ca., Berlin, Staatliche Museen.
 70_25 | Crispijn van de Passe (from Jacques Bellange), *Adoration of the Kings*,
 etching on copper, 1600 ca., Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

The detail in Panel 70 draws attention to one character: a canephore nymph who strides from the background of the *Adoration of the Kings* by Jacques Bellange (on the panel in a copy by Crispijn van de Passe) and brings the classical motif of Renaissance painting into a certain type of Nordic Baroque. The depicted Nymph, escaped from Panel 46 or Panel 47, and isolated from the etching with the act of 'zooming in', carries with it the *afflatus* of the antique. This is just like Ghirlandaio's Nymph, demonstrating reasons for the incursion of classicism into an international style that, conditioned by official art and festivals, proceeds in the direction of the excess of theatricality in expression (see Forster, Mazzucco 2002).

Panel 72



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 72, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

72_2 | Rembrandt, *The Blinding of Samson*, oil on canvas, 1636, Frankfurt, Städtisches Kunstinstitut.

72_6 | Rembrandt, *The Blinding of Samson*, detail, oil on canvas, 1636, Frankfurt, Städtisches Kunstinstitut.

72_11 | Rembrandt (from Leonardo), *The Last Supper*, drawing, c.1635, New York, Metropolitan Museum, Robert Lehman Collection.

72_12 | Rembrandt (from Leonardo), *The Last Supper*, detail, drawing, c.1635, New York, Metropolitan Museum, Robert Lehman Collection.

72_16 | Rembrandt (from Leonardo), *The Last Supper*, detail, drawing, c.1635, New York, Metropolitan Museum, Robert Lehman Collection.

Panel 72 has two separate cases of detailed use within it. In the upper left, the panel opens with the pictures of the 'complete' Rembrandt's *Blinding of Samson*, and the detail, extracted from that same picture, focuses on the action of one of the Philistines. In the panel's midsection, one finds Rembrandt's *Last Supper*. Two details of this drawing are then displayed in the lower-left corner, juxtaposed with a series of last suppers and convivial scenes from the Northern seventeenth century.

Panel 73



Detail from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 73, Warburg Institute Archive, London.
 73_10 | Jürgen Ovens, *Claudius Civilis goes to the Battle of Xanten*, drawing for the painting cycle in the Amsterdam Town Hall dedicated to the Batavian wars of liberation against the Romans, c.1662, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kupferstichkabinett.
 73_12 | Jürgen Ovens, particolare di donna inginocchiata from *Claudius Civilis goes to the Battle of Xanten*, detail, drawing for the painting cycle in the Amsterdam Town Hall dedicated to the Batavian wars of liberation against the Romans, c.1662, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kupferstichkabinett.

“*Art officiel* privileges the dramatic and emotive eloquence of historical painting: Roman historical episodes substitute Ovidian mythological stories” (Seminario Mnemosyne, Panel 73). It is the case of Jürgen Ovens’ *Claudius Civilis*, a depiction of the historical episode for Amsterdam Town Hall, of which several preparatory drawings are displayed in the panel. The enlargement is applied to the most complete version of the drawing: the isolated detail focuses on a kneeling woman (“*Frauen in der Schlacht*,” as we read in Warburg’s notes about the panel) who is affixed to the left side of the plate, below the kneeling woman in Marcantonio Raimondi’s *Massacre of the Innocents*.

Panel 76



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 76, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

76_4 | Pieter van der Borcht, *Jesus among the Doctors*, illustration from Hendrick Jansen Barrefelt, *Imagines et figurae Bibliorum*, Jacobus Villanus (= Christoffel Plantijn), Leiden 1580-1588.

76_8 | Pieter van der Borcht, *Jesus among the Doctors*, Jesus returning from the temple with his parents, detail.

76_9 | Pieter van der Borcht, *Jesus among the Doctors*, Jesus returning from the temple with his parents, mirrored detail.

The study of the extrapolated character isolates the preconceived expressive value present in a work of art and places it in dialogue with the other images displayed in the panel, thus activating them energetically. This is the case of Panel 63, in which the detail of the Holy Family, taken from Pieter van der Borcht's *Christ among the Doctors*, is useful for demonstrating with clarity the overlapping between Mary's formal posture and Niobe's one. From the daughter fleeing from the murderous gods, Niobe becomes the prototype of the mother concerned for her children and, consequently, a Marian figure (Seminario Mnemosyne 2018, 101). Firstly, the photograph is 'zoomed in', as to isolate the figures of interest for the discourse, and then, mirrored. Thus, the two images are both affixed to the Panel, revealing the persistence of the antique model regardless of the decisions individually taken by the artists and their compositional needs.

Panel 77



Detail from *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 77, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

77_3 | Eugène Delacroix, *The Massacre at Chios*, oil on canvas (419 x 354 cm), 1824 (Paris, Musée du Louvre).

77_7 | Dead mother with her child, copy of a detail from Delacroix's *The Massacre at Chios*, 1824 (Prag, Nationalgalerie).

In the painting by Delacroix, the *Massacre at Chios* – from which a detail is used in Panel 77, dedicated to the re-emergence of the classical in the visual culture of Warburg's contemporaries – the dead mother by whom the child attempts, in an act of intense pathos, to be nursed, is depicted as a novel Arethusa. It is interesting to note that here, again, the detail used by Warburg is not a detail of the painting but a photo of a reproduction of the painting.

Tonal Differences in 'Zooming': Two Examples

How to schematise and analyse, then, 'zoom' recurrences in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*? Is it possible to identify different semantic models in the use of this device? Obviously, a taxonomy of the types of editing carried out on the *Atlas* is to be excluded, as such a process would contribute to the flattening of an object whose greatest epistemic power lies in its complexity. However, it might be interesting to delineate two different levels of meaning in the hermeneutics of the device through the use of two examples. We will call them, by convention: 1) first-level 'zoom'; 2) second-level 'zoom'.



39_11b | Sandro Botticelli, Chloris, detail from *Primavera*, tempera on table, 1477-1482, Firenze, Uffizi.

39_11c | Sandro Botticelli, Chloris, detail from *Primavera*, tempera on table, 1477-1482, Firenze, Uffizi.

1) A good example of first-level 'zoom' can be found in Panel 39, where, from Botticelli's *Primavera* (or *The Realm of Venus*, according to the title Warburg proposed to the work) two details are extrapolated, focusing on the characters of Chloris and Zephyrus. The two characters are shown facing in opposite directions: they are looking at each other.

Surprisingly, the intensity of their gaze is intensified to the utmost degree when their depictions are juxtaposed by Warburg, rather than within Botticelli's painting. This

action on the image could refer to a film technique named shot/countershot where one character is shown looking at another character, and then the other character is shown looking back at the first character.

The juxtaposition of the two details is furthermore functional to trace the coordinates for the evolution and the repetition of the act of catching and on the theme of metamorphosis. Just as in the Ovidian quotations in Warburg's *Sandro Botticelli* essay, Chloris and Zephyrus are ascribed to Apollo and Daphne, so, in the montage of Panel 39, a range of depictions of Apollo and Daphne unfolds from the right side of the panel, starting from the 'zooms' on the two Botticelli characters. These paintings, from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, come from either the Italian or the Nordic Renaissance, thus testifying to a wide diffusion of the mythical theme.



39_15 | Antonio Pollaiuolo, *Apollo and Daphne*, tempera on panel, 1472-1473, London, National Gallery.

39_16 | Attributed to Giovanni Pietro Birago, *Apollo and Daphne*, miniature manuscript, last third of the fifteenth century, Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek.

39_17 | Hans von Kulmbach, *Apollo and Daphne*, xilography from *Quattuor libri amorum*, 1502, Nuremberg.

39_19 | Bernardino Luini, *Apollo and Daphne* (The tale of Myrrha?), fresco fragment, from Villa Pelucca in Monza, 1520-1523, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera.



46_3 | Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of Saint John the Baptist*, fresco, 1486, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Maria Novella, Cappella Tornabuoni.

46_7 | Ghirlandaio's workshop, *Fruit bearer*, copy of the detail from *Birth of Saint John the Baptist*, Pisa, Museo Civico.

2) An example of a second-level 'zoom' can be found in Panel 46. In the central upper part of the panel stands Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Birth of John the Baptist*, whose nymph is an emblem of antiquity. Endowed with an energetic charge that is completely disruptive, compared to her pictorial context: ready to move towards new shores in the history of art. And so she does. The same nymph is to be found in the workshop copy that Warburg exhibits next to Ghirlandaio's fresco: it is the same character from two different paintings. This is a precise choice and is an extremely effective way of demonstrating the semantic power of fragmentation. The use of workshop

material can be assimilated to the use of the authorial artwork, the most authoritative and frequent study object in the 'canonical' art history. The use of replica elevates even further the evocative power of a figure that transcends the aestheticisation of the artistic artifact and reveals its

importance throughout the tendency to be widely reproduced. The use of the 'zoom' in this panel has a fundamental importance in investigating the role of the artwork in Warburgian studies and the paradoxical lack of hierarchy between the piece of art and the pathetic formulae 'trapped' in it: "what matters in each panel is not the image itself as the idea of it" (Centanni, 2010, 20. Author's translation). We could consider the action of 'zooming' in this panel as a manifesto for the anti-aestheticisation of art. This is a theme that permeated the first half of the twentieth century: one year after Warburg's death, the film critic Béla Balázs, in his *Dei Geist des Films*, directly addresses Sergei Eisenstein, who, in 1926, had deplored the Hungarian's emphasis on the figurative content of images:

Now, images ought not to symbolize ideas, but rather to fashion or stimulate them. Idea arises within us as logical consequences and not as symbols or already formulated ideograms in the image. Otherwise montage is no longer productive. It becomes a production of rebuses and riddles... (Baláz 1926, in Michaud [1998] 2004, 280).

In the critique of Eisenstein regarding the return of cinema to the primitivism of the ideogram, lies the same Warburg's syntactic approach to his *Atlas*. In this regard Philippe-Alain Michaud writes:

Within the panel, the fragment has no separate existence; it is the specific representation of a general theme running through every element and leading to the formation of an "overall global image effect" (Michaud [1998] 2004, 283).

Is not the role of the detail/fragment to deflagrate from within the medium of an image, making its energetic potential visible through a rupture and thus tracing the mnestic processes we carry out, looking at it? The gesture has real power, which is so intense as to obscure the artistic work. This could be referred to as an inverted use of Morelli's detail: from the opposite pole to attributionalism, in Panel 46 the semantic power of the nymph's fragment lies in being orphaned of an identifying origin, but at the same time being strongly identitarian by itself.

It is interesting to note that this use of 'minor' art as perfectly overlapping with the 'official' art piece (if not more authoritative for Warburg's cultural

history of art), is already discernible in the layout of the Hamburg scholar's published articles. By analysing the editorial structure of 1902 first publication of *Bildniskunst und florentinisches Bürgertum*, it is interesting to note how, in the layout of the essay, the subjects are recognised by iconographic pieces of evidence. While Alinari's photos of the described subjects – the ones that will be later featured in the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* – are located as an appendix at the end of the essay, the medals of Lorenzo, Poliziano, and Leo X, as well as Luigi Pulci in the fresco by Filippino Lippi, are mounted in the text layout. The medals represent the same characters and could be considered equal than the details extrapolated from the fresco. Once again, the cultural expression of the context is superimposable, if not even more important, in isolating the figure.

Research Agenda

The analysis of the 'zoom' device can be one of the ways to study the composition methodology of the *Atlas*: this essay is therefore intended as an initial survey of the recurrences of the use of details in *Mnemosyne*, as well as an attempt to take the first steps towards its theorization through the cases of Panel 39 and Panel 46. In order to continue this research, it is necessary to carry out systematic work on individual images and on the panels. The complexity of the *Atlas*, furthermore, makes it impossible to stop at two levels in the use of this compositional tool: without committing the sin of taxonomy, there could be more than two types of 'zoom' and their application could reveal new ways to the exegesis of Warburg's *corpus*.

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English abstract

In this contribution, Giulia Zanon investigates the use of detail as a scholarly tool in Warburg's *corpus*. In the first phase of an ongoing study, the author makes a recognition of the cases in which the detail of an image in the *Atlas* is enlarged and juxtaposed to its original, highlighting the different visual strategies exploited by the scholar to develop and expose his research themes.

Keywords | Aby Warburg; Mnemosyne; Photography; Detail.

La Redazione di Engramma è grata ai colleghi – amici e studiosi – che, seguendo la procedura peer review a doppio cieco, hanno sottoposto a lettura, revisione e giudizio questo saggio.
(v. *Albo dei referee di Engramma*)

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Collateral effects of the “visibile parlare” (Dante, Pg. X, v. 95)

Aby Warburg’s insight about the visual matrix of the Legend of Trajan’s Justice

Monica Centanni

A neglected Warburgian hypothesis

Frequently, texts generate images; sometimes images generate texts. This is the case with the Legend of Trajan’s Justice, which in all probability originated not from a text but from an archaeological image. The question is: which image? From which find or monument did the Legend develop? An analysis of the passages that Aby Warburg dedicates to this matter in his writings provides a simple and clearly evident answer: a convincing answer, that until now has not been taken into adequate consideration and that I think is relevant to bring to light.

The Legend of Trajan and the Assumption of the Emperor in Dante’s *Paradise*

Let us briefly summarise the coordinates of the question. The Legend of Trajan – of his justice, of the salvation of his soul, even though the Emperor was a pagan – is made up of the assembly of two different parts: the first is the episode of Trajan doing justice to the widow, who asks for justice for the death of her son. The second is the discovery of the emperor’s speaking tongue by Gregory the Great, who performs the miracle of resurrecting and baptising Trajan, opening the gates of Paradise for him. The legend as a whole is so fortunate that it brings the Roman Emperor straight into Dante’s Paradise, right into the eye of the eagle of Justice, who so speaks recalling the episode of the “widow”:

Dei cinque che mi fan cerchio per ciglio, / colui che più al becco mi
s'accosta, / la vedovella consolò del figlio / ora conosce quanto caro costa /
non seguir Cristo, per l'esperienza / di questa dolce vita e de l'opposta (*Pd.*
XX, 43-48).

Of those five flames that, arching, from my brow, / he who is nearest to my beak is one / who comforted the widow for her son; / now he has learned the price one pays for not / following Christ, through his experience / of this sweet life and of its opposite *Pd.* XX, 43-48) [Translation by Allen Mandelbaum, 1984*].

In the Comedy, however, the most extensive description of the Legend, and in particular of the episode of the meeting between the widow and the Emperor, is in the passage in Canto X of *Purgatory* where Dante, climbing the path of the Purgatory mountain, sees three bas-reliefs representing examples of humility: the New Testament account of the Annunciation, with Mary and the angel; the Old Testament account of the broken dance of David stigmatised by his wife Micol (on the meaning of the three *Exempla humilitatis*, as opposed to the sin of Pride of the penitent souls in sector of *Purgatory*, see Vescovo 2022, in particular pages 52-53). These are the verses dedicated to Trajan:

Quiv'era storiata l'alta gloria / del roman principato, il cui valore / mosse Gregorio a la sua gran vittoria; / i' dico di Traiano imperadore; / e una vedovella li era al freno, / di lagrime atteggiata e di dolore. / Intorno a lui pareva calcato e pieno / di cavalieri, e l'aguglie ne l'oro / sovr' essi in vista al vento si movieno. / La miserella intra tutti costoro / pareva dir: "Segnor, fammi vendetta / di mio figliuol ch'è morto, ond' io m'accoro"; / ed elli a lei rispondere: "Or aspetta / tanto ch'i' torni"; e quella: "Segnor mio", / come persona in cui dolor s'affretta, / "se tu non torni?"; ed ei: "Chi fia dov' io, la ti farà"; ed ella: "L'altrui bene / a te che fia, se 'l tuo metti in oblio?"; ond' elli: "Or ti conforta; ch'ei convene / ch'i' solva il mio dovere anzi ch'i' mova: / giustizia vuole e pietà mi ritene". / Colui che mai non vide cosa nova / produsse esto visibile parlare, / novello a noi perché qui non si trova (*Pg.* X, 73-96).

And there the noble action of a Roman / prince was presented he whose /worth had urged on Gregory to his great victory / I mean the Emperor Trajan; and a poor / widow was near his bridle, and she stood / even as one in tears and sadness would. / Around him, horsemen seemed to press and crowd; / above their heads, on golden banners, eagles / were represented, moving in the wind. / Among that crowd, the miserable woman / seemed to be saying: "Lord, avenge me for / the slaying of my son, my heart is broken."

/ And he was answering: "Wait now until / I have returned." And she, as one in whom / grief presses urgently: "And, lord, if you / do not return?" And he: "The one who'll be / in my place will perform it for you." She: / "What good can others' goodness do for you / if you neglect your own?" He: "Be consoled; / my duty shall be done before I go: / so justice asks, so mercy makes me stay." / This was the speech made visible by One / within whose sight no thing is new, but we, / who lack its likeness here, find novelty (Pg. X, 73-96) [Translation by Allen Mandelbaum, 1982*].

Later on, I will return to some of the details of Dante's description.

A visual matrix of the Legend: Giacomo Boni's pioneering insight (1906)



Bassorilievo del II secolo, nell'arco di Costantino.

1 | Relief from the Arch of Constantine proposed by Giacomo Boni as a model for the Legend of Trajan and Dante's description (from Boni 1906, 38).

With regard to the second part of the Legend – Trajan's speaking tongue; his resurrection; the salvation from Hell—scholars have been arguing that the matrix undoubtedly referred to the hagiographic tradition of Pope Gregory the Great. As for the first part of the tale—the story of the "widow" – scholars agree that, in all likelihood, its matrix is of a different nature. The story, in fact, although widespread in a large number of texts, would arise not from a text but from an image (a recapitulation of the sources on the legend, is in Cetto 1966, 94 ff; Whatley 1984; Settis 1995; a summary of the *status quaestionis* in Centanni 2022).

As far as I know, the first idea on the matter came from Giacomo Boni, who in

1906 published an article in "Nuova Antologia" on the Legend of Trajan. Boni referred to the passage of Dante's *Purgatory* in which the episode of Trajan and the widow who asks him for justice for her murdered son is described with precision (on Boni's contribution on the subject, see Pilutti Namer 2019, 101-104). Boni is the first who proposes to look for a visual, non-textual matrix of the Legend of Trajan, indicating some possible

models: a bas-relief from the Arch of Trajan in Benevento; some coins of Trajan or Adrianus with a Province kneeling at the Emperor's feet and a relief on the Arch of Constantine, which Boni describes in this way:

Il penultimo rilievo, a sinistra di chi guarda dal Colosseo [...] rappresenta una donna scapigliata, povera a panni ed a cintura, seduta in terra, il gomito sinistro appoggiato a una ruota, il braccio destro alto, tesa la palma verso quattro personaggi uno dei quali, l'imperatore dal paludamento sovrapposto alla tunica, sembra darle ascolto. [...] Questo bassorilievo poteva aver tratto l'attenzione dell'*ultimus Romanorum* [Gregorio] che ivi presso trasformava la sua casa in monastero: poteva integrare la leggenda della vedova, dopo che le tre porte di bronzo chiudenti il sepolcro di Traiano furono svelte, ed andar scordato quando la leggenda ebbe sviluppo suo proprio. Nessun'altra scultura romana ricorda meglio la descrizione dantesca (Boni 1906, 36-39).

In short, the model that could have inspired the Legend of Trajan's Justice would be one of the bas-reliefs of the Arch of Constantine, which Boni identifies precisely [Fig. 1]. So it was Boni who first proposed to look for a visual and non-textual matrix of the Legend of Trajan. Therefore, the entry into the critical debate of the idea that the history of Trajan's Justice is a sort of fortunate, albeit erroneous, 'caption' produced by an archaeological image, is due to Boni. Hence, the hypothesis accepted by scholars of Dante without special in-depth analysis. According to this thesis, the origin of the legend has to be linked to a bas-relief on a Roman triumphal arch, showing the Emperor and a kneeling female figure next to him, probably is the allegory of a subjected Province:

L'origine della leggenda si pensa sia da collegarsi a un bassorilievo di un arco trionfale romano, in cui è raffigurato l'imperatore e accanto una figura femminile inginocchiata, forse una provincia sottomessa (Saffiotti Bernardi 1971, *ad voc.* "Gregorio I").

In the conclusions of Boni's article, in relation to the bas-relief he identified as the visual matrix of the legend, we read: "Nessun'altra scultura romana ricorda meglio la descrizione dantesca" ["No other Roman sculpture better resembles Dante's description"]. Therefore, Boni suggests

that Gregory would have had confirmation of the tradition of the Emperor's Justice by looking at the Arch of Constantine itself (Boni 1906, 36-39).

Certainly, Boni's intuition is brilliant, but his identification of the specific bas-relief from the Arch of Constantine for which he claims the most certain proximity to the description in Dante, does not seem at all convincing.

Searching for a visual matrix of the Legend: the proposal developed by Salvatore Settis (1995)

About the sources of the Legend in general, so wrote Salvatore Settis:

La sua origine è stata variamente discussa, spesso cercandone nuclei, o 'precedenti', in fonti più antiche, in greco: un passo di Dione Cassio (LXIX, 6) che racconta un aneddoto sul regno di Adriano, la vita di Giovanni Elemosinario scritta verso il 620 da Leonzio vescovo di Napoli, un episodio della vita di Eraclio narrato dal patriarca Niceforo ai primi del IX secolo [...]. Altri hanno preferito battere altre strade, ora additando paralleli di questa storia in Persia e in India, ora lungamente cercando, sulla suggestione tutta visiva di quel famoso passo di Dante, la possibile origine della storia nel *corpus* della tradizione iconografica antica: una spiegazione eziologica, secondo la quale una qualche immagine di una donna di fronte a Traiano (o a un altro imperatore) avrebbe 'prodotto', per essere compresa e spiegata, l'intera leggenda, e generato dai muti marmi il celebre colloquio (Settis 1995, 39-40).

In other words, Settis accepts and raises Boni's hypothesis according to which some image of a woman in front of Trajan, or in front of another emperor, could have 'produced' – and this should be understood and explained – the whole legend. In this regard, Settis observed:

La mossa più appropriata sarebbe certo di spostare l'attenzione dalla ricerca di un'improbabile "fonte unica", in immagine, della leggenda di Traiano (di cui andrebbe verificata l'accessibilità nel momento in cui si vuol collocare l'origine della storia) a una SERIE iconografica, dove una scena del tipo che abbiamo in mente ricorresse di frequente. Meglio se questa serie fosse, per caratteristiche tipologiche, diffusa non (o: non solo) su monumenti

inamovibili (come un arco trionfale), ma (o: ma anche) su *media* di larga circolazione (Settis 1995, 40).

Thus, rather than the search for an improbable “unique source”, in a specific image, of the Legend of Trajan, the attention should be placed on the “iconographic series” appearing not only on immovable monuments, such as triumphal arches, but also on widely circulated media. In this sense, Settis, expanding and discussing with precise accuracy the iconographic series already proposed by Boni, indicates some models on medals and sarcophagi. These are some of the works called into question [Fig 2].



2 | Four scenes related to Trajan's Justice, from Settis 1995, Figs. 15-18:

- Medallion of Constantine with the personification of London (*Londinium*) kneeling before the emperor (London, British Museum).
- Medallion of Valentinian and Valens with City kneeling before the emperor (in *exergo*, *Tellus*).
- Roman sarcophagus with 'biography' of a general (Los Angeles, County Museum of Art).
- Drawing from a Roman sarcophagus now in Los Angeles (Windsor, Royal Library).

I believe that in this search for the model – the matrix of the text – what is misleading is the gender of the characters in the Legend of Trajan: the Emperor on horseback, a male figure; the “widow” prostrated at his feet, i.e. a female figure. In particular, the idea of the “kneeling woman” has led scholars to look for the model in a scene that included a female figure, recalling the iconographic scheme, very common especially on coins and medallions, of the Province kneeling before the Emperor. But the reference to the iconographic scheme, with respect to the dictate of the legend, is very weak: the analogy between the text and the image that would have inspired it is reduced, in short, to the pair involving a female figure kneeling before a male figure, identifiable as a Province making an act of submission before the *Princeps*. In the relief from the Arch of Constantine identified by Boni as the one that would “most closely

resemble the Legend of Trajan", the Emperor is standing; in the series produced by Settis the Emperor is on horseback. However, the mounted army crowd around the leader is missing.

The trap, I suggest, lies in the search for an archaeological model involving a kneeling woman who would then be misinterpreted as the "widow". But in this case (as in many others) the principle of *cherchez la femme* leads onto the wrong track. The misinterpretation of the image that gave rise to the medieval legend also lies in the misinterpretation of the gender of the figure in the model. In all likelihood, it was not a female figure, but a male figure, dressed according to the iconography of the 'barbarian' and, as such, misunderstood with a female figure because of his clothing.

The visual matrix of the Legend can therefore be sought in one of those "mute marbles" (so wrote Settis) that must have been accessible and visible throughout the late ancient and medieval ages. And in all probability the image-matrix is on the Arch of Constantine, but it is not the image that Giacomo Boni had identified by following the misleading trail of the female figure at the Emperor's feet.

Searching for a visual matrix of the Legend: Aby Warburg's hypothesis (1914-1929)

We owe to Aby Warburg the most plausible identification, in my opinion, of the matrix-image of the story of Trajan's Justice. The proposal, original and brilliant, was put forward by Warburg in five "texts", among his writings, and the Note on the Panels of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. They are:

- The text of a lecture given in 1914 in Florence, entitled *Der Eintritt der antikisierenden Idealstils in die Malerei der Frührenaissance* (*The Entry of the Idealizing Classic Style in the Painting of Early Renaissance*).
- The text of the lecture, *Die römische Antike in der Werkstatt Ghirlandaios* (*Roman Antiquity in the Workshop of Ghirlandaio*), given on 19 January 1929 in Rome;
- the Diary of the "Italian Journey", written together with Gertrud Bing between the end of 1928 and the summer of 1929;
- The text of the *Einleitung der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (*Introduction to the Mnemosyne Atlas*) (Juni 1929 = WIA III.102.3-4);
- The Notes on *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panels 7 and 52, dated 1929.

It should be pointed that all these texts are not real essays intended for publication, but originate as lecture notes, diary entries, and notes. With regard to four of the texts mentioned above (the annotations of the 1929 Lecture in Rome; the Diary notes on the trip to Italy; the text of the *Introduction* to Mnemosyne; the Notes for the *Bilderatlas* Panels), they are all texts that remained unpublished until a few years ago. For the first paper – the 1914 Lecture in Florence – the text was conceived as a real essay, but due to a troubled publishing history, it too was destined to remain unpublished, with the exception of the excellent Italian edition Bing 1966 (see below the Note to editions of the 1914 Lecture).

Searching for a visual matrix of the Legend: Aby Warburg's first hypothesis (Florence, 1914)



87. Vittoria di Traiano sui Daci. Arco di Costantino.



88. Incoronazione di Traiano. Arco di Costantino.

3 | "Victory of Trajan over the Dacians. Arch of Constantine" (caption of Fig. 87, by the Bing edition 1966); "Coronation of Trajan. Arch of Constantine" (caption of Fig. 88, by the 1966 Bing edition).

Since the text of 1914 Lecture is very important and is Warburg's first and most extensive consideration of the Legend of Trajan, it is useful to recapitulate why it remained unpublished until very recently (the bibliographical data of the troubled publishing history are in a dedicated note at the beginning of the Bibliography of this contribution). In the first edition of Warburg's works, published by Teubner in 1932, we find only a very brief summary of the text (the same one that had been published in a journal in 1914, after Warburg's Lecture at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence). The same summary appears in the only edition of Warburg's essays in English available so far, edited by Kurt W. Forster for the Getty Institute in 1999. Meanwhile, the complete version of the essay, together with its apparatus of figures, was first published in the 1966 Italian volume edited by Gertrud Bing.

Only in 2010 was the complete text published in the De Gruyter edition by Martin Tremel et al. In 2001, an English translation of the essay was

published in a volume edited by Richard Woodfield (the English version of the quoted passages follows this edition).

I wanted to reconstruct the editorial history of Warburg's 1914 Lecture in order to underline a fact. With the exception of Bing 1966 edition, until Trembl 2010 edition, there has been no integral edition of 1914 essay, completed with figures, which in this case are anything but an accompanying apparatus (as often happens with Warburg's works), and constitute an integral and fundamental part of the text. These gaps and delays in Warburg's editions can partly explain why Warburg's so important insight into the visual pattern of the Legend of Trajan has not been taken up in the critical literature on the subject, neither among Dante scholars nor among archaeologists.

In 1914 Lecture titled *Der Eintritt der antikisierenden Idealstils in die Malerei der Frührenaissance* (*The Entry of the Idealizing Classic Style in the Painting of Early Renaissance*), Aby Warburg draws attention to the reliefs on the Arch of Constantine as models for Renaissance painting. However, in the same lecture there is also a very important passage on the visual matrix of the Legend of Trajan's Justice. In the essay we find the description of two reliefs particularly relevant in relation to our theme:

One of the reliefs shows the Emperor in the midst of the tumult of battle, jumping over a barbarian who has tumbled to the ground in front of him, while their leader is throwing himself towards the Emperor, begging for mercy. Another barbarian is desperately holding on to the neck of his horse which has collapsed; behind him, a second barbarian is trying to avoid the fate of his comrade, whose head has been taken hold of by an armoured cavalryman from the Emperor's retinue which is rushing into battle, in order to give him the coup de grâce. His impending and inevitable fate is indicated by the two decapitated barbarian heads which two legionaries are triumphantly holding up to the emperor. One can see another scene from a battle with the barbarians on the right of the other relief. One barbarian has already fallen, above him others are begging for mercy, one of them on their knees, another, vanquished by an armored legionary, is standing (Warburg [1914] 2001, 10).

Therefore, Warburg identified two reliefs from a Trajanic monument reused in the Arch of Constantine as important visual models for the triumph and battle scenes depicted by Quattrocento's painters. However, in Warburg's hermeneutic perspective, those reliefs are important not only for early Renaissance painting. In the same writing he proposed a connection between the Trajan reliefs of the Arch of Constantine and the series already recognised by scholars as the visual matrix of the Legend of Trajan's Justice:

Scholarly research has long perceived in this the echo of a triumphal arch that, just like the Trajanic relief, shows a victorious rider jumping over a fallen enemy, while another, begging for mercy, throws himself towards him. For in the medieval interpretation of such a group there arose the legend of the piety, in other words, the mercy, of Trajan. This example shows us how typically the Church subsequently transformed a brutal world conqueror, attacking in all pomp, into a devout Christian worthy of the intercession of Saint Gregory (Warburg [1914] 2001, 11).

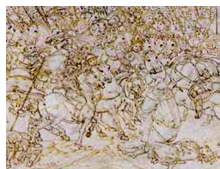
Corresponding to these two important descriptions given in the Lecture are the two figures I reproduce from the Bing 1966 edition – as mentioned above, the first complete edition of the paper, including the images that originally accompanied the text of the Florentine lecture [Fig.3].

In both reliefs, Warburg highlights the presence of the Emperor on horseback, the scrum of the army around him, the body of a barbarian under the hooves of the Emperor's horse who ran him over, another barbarian kneeling facing the Emperor impetuously advancing, begging for mercy.

Particularly interesting for the evolution of Warburg's idea about the subject, is an observation on Botticelli's drawing for the Canto X of *Purgatory* in which the bas-relief with the episode of the Justice of Trajan appears. In the 1914 paper, Warburg wrote:

It is well known that Dante portrays this scene [Trajan's Justice] in the tenth Canto of *Purgatory* and, significantly, in the form of a sculptural relief. I shall show you shortly Botticelli's illustration from his famous series of drawings of the *Divine Comedy*. In his illustration of the legend it was the mass of

riders, pushing forward, that interested Botticelli just as much as the pious and just Emperor coming to a halt. Unlike Dante, Botticelli was sustained by the direct memory of the original dynamic Roman style, for he had already studied the ancient triumphal arch" (Warburg [1914] 2001, 11).



4 | Rome, Arch of Constantine. Bas-relief from a Trajanic monument, inserted in the main archway of the Arch, with the inscription LIBERATORI URBIS above it.

5 | Sandro Botticelli, drawing for Dante's *Purgatory* Canto X (1481-1495). Silverpoint, ink and pen on parchment, Berlin Kupferstichkabinett (detail).

Two observations in the passage from the 1914 Lecture are remarkable. The first is the underlining of the fact that Dante describes the Legend of Trajan as a "sculptural relief". The second is to point out that, in illustrating Dante's episode, Botticelli polarises a double movement – the impetuosity of the mass of horsemen; the pious Emperor "coming to a halt". Warburg also states that Botticelli knows how to bring to life the "original dynamic Roman style" because he knows antiquity from his personal experience since, during his stay in Rome, he "had already studied the ancient triumphal arch" (on the theme, see Perfetti 2022, in this issue of *Engramma*).

Searching for a visual matrix of the Legend: Aby Warburg's second hypothesis (Hertziana Lecture, 1929)

In 1914 Lecture, Warburg does not explicitly mention Giacomo Boni. A direct reference to the essay published in 1906 in "*Nuova Antologia*" is contained in the second text in which Warburg refers to our subject. This is the draft of the Lecture given on 19 January 1929 at the inauguration of the Reading Room of the Hertziana Library in Rome. The lecture, entitled *Die römische Antike in der Werkstatt Ghirlandaio's (Roman Antiquity in the Workshop of Ghirlandaio)*, was the first public presentation of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* project and it is, as well known, a sort of incunabulum of the *Atlas'* themes (De Laude 2014).

In the Hertziana Lecture Warburg returns again to the subject of the reliefs of the Arch of Constantine as a model for the Legend of Trajan, in this case explicitly quoting Boni's 1906 essay:

What could be more natural for historians than looking around to see if a real ancient relief could have given rise to such an interpretation? The field of triumphal sculpture lends itself to such research; thus Giacomo Boni, in an illustrated essay published in "Nuova Antologia", had the happy insight of identifying Trajan, as he stands, for example, on a relief of the Arch of Constantine in front of the reclining Dacia, as the archetype of the Emperor helpful and mild (Warburg [1929] 2014, 23) [The English translations of the passages from the Hertziana's Lecture, based on 2014 De Laude edition, are by the author].

As we read in this passage, Warburg precisely recalls the image of the standing Emperor and the Province subjected at his feet as a generic "archetype" of a good and charitable Emperor, in agreement with Boni. Further on, in the text of the lecture, Warburg points out that the Legend of Trajan's Justice had arisen from a reinterpretation, whereby Trajan's "ruthless character" in the Christian Middle Ages was transformed into the "Legend of his Justice" (Warburg [1929] 2014, 22).

Fifteen years after the Florentine Lecture (1914), in the Hertziana lecture of January 1929, Warburg again recognises Botticelli's particular ability to reproduce the polarity between the soldiers and the Emperor, between movement impetus and restraint:

Botticelli's illustrations for the Divine Comedy lead to other considerations. A host of horsemen are rushing, with their commander who has to stop if he does not want to run over a woman who throws herself in front of him. It seems to me that a relief with the Emperor riding impetuously and sweeping away his dead enemies, which has already found a barbaric expression in Valens' medal, is an engram that defies the stylisation of the ethical level. Here we are faced with an energetic inversion of the meaning of ancient formulas of pathos: we will find other effects of this type in the Arch of Constantine (Warburg [1929] 2014, 23-24).

Carrying on the discourse already initiated (both in the text and in the accompanying figures) in the 1914 lecture, in the text from 1929 we read a clear evolution from the first idea, taken from Boni, that the visual model of the legend was the standing Emperor with the kneeling Province before him. Warburg now points out without hesitation that the relief from the Roman arch from which Botticelli took his inspiration depicts a scene in which the advancing Emperor sweeps away his enemies and their bodies lie under the hooves of his horse: it is the pathos of the victorious emperor that is also found as an engram in a “barbarian” style coin of emperor Valens. But the “engram”, as such, can be declined in different and even opposite meanings. Therefore, Botticelli – Warburg points out – performs an “energetic inversion of the meaning of ancient formulas of pathos” and, unlike the ancient model, the Emperor holds back the horse instead of spurring it to run over the bodies of dead enemies.

So, the case-study of the visual matrix of the Legend of Trajan becomes a crucial example for Warburg, for the formulation of one of the guiding ideas of the *Atlas*: the energetic inversion.

Searching for a visual matrix of the Legend: Updating Aby Warburg and Gertrud Bing’s proposal in their “Roman Diary” (1929)

The relevance of the case of Trajan’s Justice to the hermeneutic model that Warburg was developing in the last months of his life is confirmed by a series of notes kept in the Diary that Aby wrote with Gertrud Bing during their stay in Rome. On 1 January 1929, Warburg notes in his Diary:

My colleague Bing expresses her satisfaction with my Florentine conference of 1913 [vere: 1914]. The possibility of placing Trajan’s Justice at the beginning (problem of energetic inversion. Donatello, Duccio) and the Dutch concave mirror (*Auffangspiegel*): Medea-Rembrandt should in the end, be considered (Warburg, Bing [1929] 2004, 35). [The English translations of the passages from the Diary, based on the 2004 Ghelardi edition, are by the author].

Now, the crucial theme is the composition and editing of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, and Warburg, at this stage of the work, plans to place Trajan’s Justice at the beginning of the *Bilderatlas* as the starting point for the guiding theme of energetic inversion (the juxtaposition of Duccio and

Donatello, along the lines of energetic inversion, is extremely interesting, as is the idea of ending with Rembrandt's Medea). In a Note dated 14 January 1929, in the days immediately preceding the conference, we read these words from Warburg:

If one were to conceive the conference from the purely historical-expressive viewpoint and choose as its title: the mneme that consciously forms – mneme (social) – memory, antithesis between victory [Sieg] and commotion [Ergriffenheit]; being vanquished/defeated [Besiegtheit / Niederlage] as an expressive value that configures a pre-conciliation, to all this would correspond: Introduction: energetic inversion; determination of the polarising value [die polarisierende Werbestimmung] (Warburg, Bing [1928-1929] 2005, 42).

In January 1929, at the phase of the work corresponding to the Hertziana Lecture, Warburg seemed convinced that the exemplary case of energetic inversion represented by Trajan's Justice – and in particular the dialectic between the pathos of the victor and the pathos of the vanquished – could be the Leitmotiv to the architectural structure of the *Bilderatlas*. In a note dated 28.1.1929 (after the Hertziana conference) we read the following dialogue:

Gertrud Bing | The text of the Atlas was made possible by the introduction to the conference, but if it is to become a methodological introduction to the whole work it still has to be considerably expanded. Directional indication. [...] The introduction to the first table seems to me an almost complete elucidation of the concept of energetic 'inversion', to which, however, I would add the interpretation of typological thinking.

Aby Warburg | It is just as easy to confuse the emperor who restores the province (element of the woman lying on the ground) with the type of Christ who frees the patriarchs.

Gertrud Bing | An introduction to each of the remaining seven plates (now again corrected in detail) could form a large part of the text of the Atlas and I would be in favour of writing it now that the photographs are on display and the room is available to us (Warburg, Bing [1928-1929] 2005, 45-46).

It is worth noting Gertrud Bing's solicitude in encouraging Warburg to write the text of the Introduction to the *Atlas* now, when the panels are

still exhibited for the Hertziana conference, before the cues and ideas born so vividly from that occasion fade away, and the treasure of the work of those days is dispersed in an ungovernable labyrinth inhabited by ever new ideas, and dense with infinite branches of the paths of research.

Back to our theme, it should be observed that in January 1929 Warburg still recalls the image of the Province kneeling before the Emperor (according to Boni's hypothesis). But the energetic inversion that is now at the heart of his hermeneutic system has no longer anything to do with the image of the kneeling Province and the merciful Emperor. It has to do, instead, with the image of another bas-relief on the Arch of Constantine, which shows the Emperor riding over the enemy.

Searching for a visual matrix of the Legend: Aby Warburg proposal in the *Introduction to Mnemosyne Atlas* (1929)



6 | Rome, Arch of Constantine, (315 AD). Bas-relief from a Trajanic monument, inserted in the main archway of the Arch, with the inscription LIBERATORI VRBIS above it (with a clear reference to Constantine and not to Trajan).

The idea becomes more focused and precise in another text in which Warburg mentions the case of Trajan's Justice: the *Introduction to Mnemosyne Atlas*, dated June 1929:

Even the Church had managed to lend the self-glorification of the Trajan relief Christian sentiment, by means of a legend that was still alive in Dante. The famous story of the "Pietà" of the Emperor towards a widow who was pleading for justice is probably the subtlest attempt at transforming imperial pathos into Christian piety, through the energetic inversion of its meaning; the

Emperor, bursting out of the inner relief, becomes an advocate of justice, and bids his followers halt, because the widow's child has fallen under the hoofs of a Roman rider. (Warburg [1929] 2017, 18).

Now the idea is clear and linear: it is the bas-relief "inner the Arch of Constantine" with the scene of the Emperor overwhelming the barbarian that triggers the "Christian conversion" of the scene and the reversal of history (on the "Christian conversion" of the Emperor in a merciful

figure, see De Laude 2022, 53-54). It is the relief of Trajan bearing the epigraph *LIBERATORI URBIS* that is the matrix of the medieval Legend of the Justice of Trajan.

But the hermeneutic circle is positively closed in the last two Warburgian “texts” that we finally call upon in this reconnaissance: the montages of two Panels from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, and the Notes on them.

The visual matrix of the Legend: *Mnemosyne Atlas*’ Panel 7 and Panel 52 (1929)



7 | *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 7.

In the last version of the *Bilderatlas*, which was left incomplete at Warburg’s death on 26 October 1929, the “Justice of Trajan” does not open the *Atlas* – as it should have done according to the project phase dated January of the same year, during the period of the Lecture at the Hertziana. However, the subject is very present in two Panels. The first one (Panel 7) is part of the group of archaeological Panels presenting “Ancient Prefigurations” (*Antike Vorprägungen*): Panels 4-8, including “Archaeological models and impressions from Antiquity”.



8 | *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Panel 52.

The images on Panel 7 (as well as in all Panels of the group 4-8) are reproductions of various archaeological artefacts, many of which are known or at least accessible from the fifteenth century onwards, and could already have been known to the artists of the “early Renaissance”. The Panel displays images that can be grouped into three strands. The first one consists in battle scenes and triumphal processions: the Arch of Constantine and some of its bas-reliefs (7_2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8); a relief from the Arch of Titus (7_5); a

statue of *Minerva Victrix* from Ostia (7_11); a series of coins (7_1, 20, 21: the last one is the “coin of Valens” mentioned by Warburg in the Hertziana lecture as an example of the series of the Emperor on horseback with the enemy at his feet). The second strand presents a series of scenes of apotheosis, victory and “elevation on shields”: the Augustan Gem (7_10); the Tiberian Gem (7_11); a painting from Pompeii with Venus carried up in the sky by Zephyrus (7_9); a relief from the so-called “Arch of Portugal” (7_12); a relief with the apotheosis of Antoninus Pius and Faustina from the Antonine Column (7_13). The third strand consists of a series of illustrations on the theme of battle /triumph /apotheosis: a tenth-century Byzantine miniature with the elevation of King David (7_14); fifteenth and sixteenth-century drawings from Roman monuments (7_16, 17, 19), including drawings from the Antique by the Ghirlandaio’s workshop that were the focus of the Hertziana lecture. A case apart is Appiani’s nineteenth-century fresco in the Palazzo Reale in Milan with Napoleon’s apotheosis (7_15), which represents the ultimate outcome of the imperial apotheosis model.

The Arch of Constantine occupies a prominent position in the assembly of Table 7: next to it is the zoom on the detail of the bas-relief inside the main archway with Trajan on horseback sweeping away the barbarian. The Notes on the Panel of Warburg and collaborators, collected by Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl, read:

Antike Vorprägungen. Siegerpathos. Römischer Triumph. Triumphbogen.
[...]. Überreiten (Ancient prefigurations. Pathos of the victor. Roman triumph.
Triumphal arch. [...] Overwhelm by riding).

Further on in the *Bilderatlas*, the theme of Trajan’s Justice appears explicitly in Panel 52, which displays a series of representations of the medieval legend.

Panel 52 displays a series of images of works almost exclusively on the theme of Trajan’s Justice, demonstrating the exceptional fortune and diffusion of the Legend on a wide variety of media, from the first half of the fifteenth century to the seventeenth century: a “desco da parto” (birth tray) (52_1); a Tournai tapestry (52_16); a chest of drawers from the circle of Mantegna (52_11); Luca Signorelli’s monochromes for Orvieto Cathedral

with the three reliefs from Dante's *Purgatory* (52_5); a painting from the Köln Town Hall (52_17); pen and etching drawings from the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century (52_7, 8); a grisaille fresco by Mocetto (52_9); a drawing by Albrecht Dürer (52_19); a sixteenth-century etching (52_18). A parallel series is represented by the theme of Scipio's Continenza, often combined with the one of Trajan's Justice: a fifteenth-century chest (52_3); a woodcut for a printed edition possibly by Plutarch (52_10); a painting by Beccafumi (52_14); a drawing by Albrecht Dürer and workshop copy for the Nuremberg Town Hall (52_20, 21); an etching dated to the seventeenth century (52_6). But in the Panel we also find Botticelli's drawing on Trajan's Justice for Canto X of the *Purgatory* (52_2), and, for a thematic contiguity, the chest on which Botticelli himself painted the exemplary feat of Lucrezia (52_4).

The Notes on the Panel read:

Gerechtigkeit des Trajan = energetische Inversion des Überreitens. Ethische Umkehrung des Siegerpathos.

[Justice of Trajan = energetic inversion of overwhelming riding. Ethical reversal of the pathos of the victor.]

Compared to the considerations Warburg had developed on the subject of Trajan's Justice since the 1914 lecture, in the *Atlas* he takes a decisive step. The precise reference is to the "Pathos of the victor. Roman triumph. Triumphal Arch. [...] Riding on horseback" and again to the Justice of Trajan as a case in point of the "energetic inversion": the "ethical reversal" of the victor's pathos—the Emperor who, instead of violently overwhelming the enemy, brakes the impetus of his horse and performs an act of justice.

To sum up: the passages we have quoted from his writings and, above all, from the editing of Panels 7 and 52 of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, highlight Warburg's idea that the legend of the widow would have arisen from the inverted interpretation of the bas-relief LIBERATORI URBS with Trajan's cavalcade, inside the archway of the Arch of Constantine. The barbarian asking for mercy from the Emperor, who is about to "ride him down", is misinterpreted, because of the style of dress and attitude, and transfigured into the "widow" who asks (and will obtain) justice from the

emperor. The body of the barbarian, already run over by the Emperor, becomes the dead son for whom the widow asks for justice.

The visual matrix of the Legend: Trajan's Justice as an exemplary case of "energetic inversion"

To accept Warburg's brilliant intuition, it is necessary, for once, to forget the subject, to apply the Panofskyan "principle of disjunction", and it immediately becomes clear that the visual model that gives rise to the Legend can only be the bas-relief *LIBERATORI URBIS*, since the Antiquity always been very visible and accessible. The impetus of the "riding over" (*Überreiten*), captured in the marble snapshot of the Roman relief, appears, in the eyes of Medieval and then Renaissance observers, as power restrained by pity. Or, to put it better in Warburg's words, the vitality of ancient pathos is translated into Christian clemency (on the energetic inversion, even in a Christian sense, see De Laude 2022, 55-56).

This is the paradigmatic case from which Warburg theorises the "energetic inversion"—the violent pathos of the victor becoming mercy and justice. In other cases it is a reversal of positive energy that is channelled into a murderous action: the enthusiastic maenads of Dionysus becoming the murdering of Pentheus and Orpheus; the pathos of the infanticidal mother, like Medea; the pathos of the "Headhunter", like Judith or Salome (Bordignon 2004; Seminario Mnemosyne 2014).

From image to word, and vice versa. From the misunderstanding of the image of Arch of Constantine comes the Legend, which in turn is retranslated into a figure by Dante, thanks to his visionary poetic imagination; hence Dante, from his vision, produces an "ecphrasis with a spectator" (I borrow the expression from the fine title of Vescovo 1993: for the relief of *Purgatory X*, see in particular pages 345-347). From Dante's ecphrasis, a new series of images starts and among these, the first, and most ingenious with respect to the probable visual model of the Legend, is the Botticelli's drawing. We have to follow Warburg's intuition: in illustrating the episode of the Justice of Trajan, Botticelli has in mind the reliefs of the Arch of Constantine which he "knew very well". It is Botticelli who, by referring to the relief of the Arch of Constantine as a model for the illustration of the passage from *Purgatory*, implicitly points us to the most probable visual matrix of the Legend of Trajan. Botticelli himself

activates a short-circuit that has to do not only with his prodigious sensitivity of the artist, but can also be compared to the enlightenment of the act of philological *divinatio*: here Sandro reveals his skill of “sofistico” scholar (according to Vasari’s *Lives*) – he is not only an artist.

Very often texts generate images; sometimes images generate texts (which will in turn generate images). Aby Warburg’s (underestimated) insight evidenced the power of the image contained in the visual matrix of the Legend itself. The reliefs of the Arch of Constantine have a great power, equal to that which, according to Dante, animates the bas-reliefs made by the hand of God on the cornice of *Purgatory*.

Dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace / quivi intagliato in un atto soave, / che non
sembiava imagine che tace (Pg. X, 37-39).

After long interdict, appeared before us, / his gracious action carved with
such precision— / he did not seem to be a silent image
(Pg. X, 37-39) [Translation by Allen Mandelbaum, 1982*].

It was the “mute marbles” that generated the Legend, because those marbles were evidently not so silent, but their eloquence, retained in stone, was clearly perceptible and effective. Actually, they are *imagines agentes* able to produce new strings of Memory. As Dante states in the very passage of *Purgatory* in which he describes the relief of Trajan’s Justice, the divine energy of the image is at the superlative degree of its power “on the edge of visible speech” – precisely, “sull’orlo del visibile parlare”.

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English abstract

The paper proposes the hypothesis of a visual matrix for the Legend of Trajan's Justice, also told by Dante in *Purgatory*, X. In particular, the author focuses on Warburg's insight – borrowed from excerpts of his papers, lectures and, in particular, the notes on Panel 7 and Panel 52 of his *Bilderatlas* – that the visual matrix of the Legend is a relief from the Arch of Constantine: not the figure of the kneeling Province and the merciful Emperor, but that of the Leader who “overwhelms by riding” his enemy. According to Warburg's hypothesis, Trajan's representation was reversed from a figure of violence into a figure of mercy: from the image of the Victor who overwhelms his enemies, into that of the just and merciful Emperor who gives justice to the widow for her murdered son. So, in Mnemosyne Atlas the reinterpretation of Trajan's relief from the Arch of Constantine is considered as a paradigmatic case of “energetic inversion”.

Keywords | Trajan; Constantine; Aby Warburg; Dante; Botticelli.

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(v. Albo dei referee di Engramma)

The Editorial Board of Engramma is grateful to the colleagues – friends and scholars – who have double-blind peer reviewed this essay.

(cf. Albo dei referee di Engramma)

Dante, Botticelli, and Trajan. An Open Note

Filippo Perfetti

Why Rome is good, so this is so,
that there were so many poets in him.
Caesars, of course, as I suppose.
But history – not they, and that, what the poets say.

Iosif Brodskij, *Marble*

This note starts from a detail in Botticelli's illustrations for Dante's *Commedia*. Looking at the drawing for Canto X of *Purgatory*, where the verses tell of a bas-relief that Virgil reads to Dante as the episode known as the Justice of Trajan:

Quiv'era storïata l'alta gloria / del roman principato, il cui valore / mosse
Gregorio a la sua gran vittoria; / i' dico di Traiano imperadore; / e una
vedovella li era al freno, / di lagrime atteggiata e di dolore. / Intorno a lui
parea calcato e pieno / di cavalieri, e l'aguglie ne l'oro / sovr'essi in vista al
vento si movieno. / La miserella intra tutti costoro / pareva dir: "Segnor,
fammi vendetta / di mio figliuol ch'è morto, ond'io m'accoro"; / ed elli a lei
rispondere: "Or aspetta / tanto ch'i' torni"; e quella: "Segnor mio", / come
persona in cui dolor s'affretta,
"se tu non torni?"; ed ei: "Chi fia dov'io, / la ti farà"; ed ella: "L'altrui bene / a
te che fia, se 'l tuo metti in oblio?"; / ond'elli: "Or ti conforta; ch'ei convene /
ch'i' solva il mio dovere anzi ch'i' mova: / giustizia vuole e pietà mi ritene".

And there the noble action of a Roman / prince was presented he whose /
worth had urged on Gregory to his great victory / I mean the Emperor
Trajan; and a poor / widow was near his bridle, and she stood / even as one
in tears and sadness would. / Around him, horsemen seemed to press and
crowd; / above their heads, on golden banners, eagles / were represented,
moving in the wind. / Among that crowd, the miserable woman / seemed to

be saying: "Lord, avenge me for / the slaying of my son, my heart is broken."
 / And he was answering: "Wait now until / I have returned." And she, as one
 in whom grief presses urgently: "And, lord, if you / do not return?" And he:
 "The one who'll be / in my place will perform it for you." She: / "What good
 can others' goodness do for you / if you neglect your own?" He: "Be
 consoled; my duty shall be done before I go: / so justice asks, so mercy
 makes me stay."

(Pg. X, 73-93) [Translation by Allen Mandelbaum, 1982*].



1 | Sandro Botticelli, drawing for Dante's *Purgatory* Canto X (1481-1495).
 Silverpoint, ink and pen on parchment, Berlin Kupferstichkabinett (detail).

It is beyond the limits of this note to contextualise the episode in *Purgatory* and to explore the versions of the Legend and how it reached Dante. This note focuses on one specific point: the drawing. It is evident that, in order to provide an image to that bas-relief described by Dante, Botticelli takes as a model one of the ancient *spolia* then visible in Rome: a bas-relief of the fornix of the Arch of Constantine. Furthermore, it can be said following, what has been proposed in punctual contributions in an archaeological perspective since the beginning of the twentieth century, that it is precisely that bas-relief the generator of the legend later taken up by Dante and then re-proposed in a visual key by Botticelli (a review of the *status quaestionis* on the visual matrix of the Legend is in Centanni 2022a). In this sense Botticelli's drawing for Canto X of *Purgatory* would fit into the genealogy of the Legend. It was Aby Warburg who first related Botticelli's drawing to the *spolia* of the Arch of Constantine, writing:

Le illustrazioni di Botticelli per la *Divina Commedia* inducono ad altre considerazioni. Una schiera di cavalieri si precipita, col suo comandante che però deve arrestarsi, se non vuole travolgere una donna che si butta davanti a lui. Mi sembra che un rilievo con l'imperatore che cavalcando impetuosamente travolge i nemici morti, che trova già una sua barbara espressione nella medaglia di Valente, sia un engramma, che sfida la stilizzazione che investe il piano etico. Siamo di fronte qui a una inversione energetica del significato di antiche formule di pathos: ritroveremo altri effetti di questo tipo nell'Arco di Costantino (Warburg [1929] 2014, 23-24).

[Botticelli's illustrations for the *Divine Comedy* lead to other considerations. A host of horsemen are rushing, and their commander must stop, lest he should run over a woman who throws herself in front of him. It seems to me that a relief with the Emperor riding impetuously and sweeping away his dead enemies, which has already found a barbaric expression in Valens' medal, is an engram that defies the stylisation of the ethical level. Here we are faced with an energetic inversion of the meaning of ancient formulas of pathos: we will find other effects of this type in the Arch of Constantine (Author's translation)].

In line with the same interpretation, Warburg writes:

Even the Church had managed to lend the self-glorification of the Trajan relief Christian sentiment, by means of a legend that was still alive in Dante. The famous story of the "Pietà" of the Emperor towards a widow who was pleading for justice is probably the subtlest attempt at transforming imperial pathos into Christian piety, through the energetic inversion of its meaning; the Emperor, bursting out of the inner relief, becomes an advocate of justice, and bids his followers halt, because the widow's child has fallen under the hoofs of a Roman rider (Warburg [1929] 2017, 18).

Warburg took his starting point from an article by Giacomo Boni in 1906, which he then elaborated on and went beyond, clarifying his idea in different contributions, gradually arriving at a precise identification of the bas-relief that would have served as the visual matrix for the Legend and constituted the model for Botticelli's drawing.

In his 1929 contributions, Warburg recognises the ancient bas-relief and Botticelli's drawing as particularly valuable examples for the concept of energy inversion (on this topic, see Monica Centanni's article in this issue of *Engramma*, where a precise profile of the evolution of Warburg's intuition is depicted: Centanni 2022b). But in this recognition there remains one point still to be explored: how Botticelli was able to trace and recognise in those bas-reliefs of the Arch of Constantine a depiction of Trajan and in particular the episode of the widow and the emperor. Botticelli is not mistaken in identifying in the bas-relief in the archway's fornix an artefact referable to Trajan. As we know, the Arch is an assemblage of resemantised parts of arches and other monuments, taken by Constantine to build a monument to his own image and triumph by gathering different fragments coming from monuments of selected predecessors: Marcus Aurelius, Hadrian, Trajan and others (see Zeri 2004, in particular the "Quarta conversazione", 67-80). It is in this context that the bas-relief under examination also fits, taken from a Trajanic monument, reshaped in faces, and redefined by the inscription *LIBERATORI URBIS* to become part of the Arch of Constantine. But this is what we know today, after centuries of archaeological and antiquarian studies on the ancient monument. Thus Zeri:

Quando si è incominciato a studiarlo, quando l'archeologia moderna, più scientifica, ha iniziato a occuparsene, ci si è accorti che l'arco è fatto di elementi compositi. Per di più si è scoperto che i due rilievi all'interno, e quelli sui fianchi, formano in realtà un unico grande rilievo, eseguito secondo uno stile che è quello dell'epoca di Traiano; quindi risale alla prima metà del II secolo. Poi si è visto che anche un altro fregio è traiano, ed è tutto continuo, è unico pezzo diviso in quattro punti, due settori all'interno e due all'esterno (Zeri 2004, 45-46).

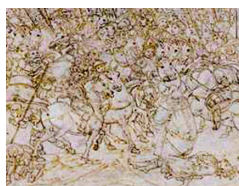
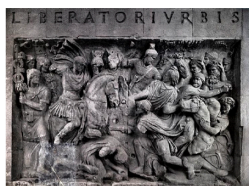
[When modern and more scientific archaeology began to study it, it became clear that the arch is made of composite elements. What is more, the analyses found out that the two reliefs on the inside, and those on the sides, actually form a single large relief, executed in a style that is that of Trajan's time; thus dating from the first half of the second century. Another frieze was found to be Trajanesque, and it is all continuous, a single piece divided into four parts, two sections on the inside and two on the outside (Author's translation)].



2 | *Spolia* system in the Arch of Constantine. Trajan (98-117), the four statues above the columns, in red; Hadrian (117-138), the four roundels in blue; Marcus Aurelius (161-180), the panels in the attic, in yellow and Constantine (306-337), the spandrels of the archways and the bases of the columns, in green.

Summarising Botticelli's personal and artistic story, we see how the trip to Rome made in 1480 for the frescoing of the Sistine Chapel under Sixtus IV would prove decisive in his artistic career. In that season, he introduced classical references into his painting that would remain in the years to follow. For example, a putto in the lower right-hand corner of the fresco with the *Temptations of Christ* is inspired by a Roman copy of an ancient Greek model – with the same snake and serpentine pose. Likewise, in the frescoes for the Sistine Chapel, he inserts in *The Punishment of the Rebels* the now lost *spolia* of Septimus Severus, and next to it, with a certain precision but somehow reinvented, the Arch of Constantine (Lightbown [1978] 1989, 106). After his Roman experience and starting in the three frescoes with the stories of the Old and New Testaments – perhaps inspired by the spiral frieze of Trajan's Column with the same narrative structure – he inserts, in his drawings for the *Commedia* made after his return to Florence, the structure of the continuous narrative with the presence in the same painting of one or more characters repeated several times. This narrative formula, as well as the Arch of Constantine that will be mentioned years later in the fifth of the *Stories of Lucretia*, are legacies of the Roman visit. The quotations from classical works and the continuous narrative are also part of the design for *Purgatory X*. There we see Dante and Virgil first in front of the depiction of the Annunciation scene; then in front of King David dancing; finally beside the bas-relief with Trajan stopping his horse's fury in the middle of the battle in front of the widow begging for mercy, after her own son has just been killed. The bas-relief depicted by Botticelli is a very precise quotation of the bas-relief

in the fornix of the Arch of Constantine with the inscription LIBERATORI URBIS above it.



3 | Rome, Arch of Constantine, (315 AD). Bas-relief from a Trajanic monument, inserted in the main archway of the Arch, with the inscription LIBERATORI URBIS above it.

4 | Sandro Botticelli, drawing for Dante's *Purgatory* Canto X (1481-1495). Silverpoint, ink and pen on parchment, Berlin Kupferstichkabinett (detail).

Thanks to the progress of more than three centuries of archaeological and antiquarian science, we today know that the bas-relief originally pertained not to Constantine but to Trajan. Yet the question is: how could Botticelli have known this in the fifteenth century? This is what our research is concerned with, some data of which we can anticipate even though there is not yet a definitive answer. Dante has knowledge of some Roman artefacts (see among others Fiero 1975), but he makes no reference to that particular bas-relief, nor do we have any sources that give us the precise information about those bas-reliefs in the Arch in his time. The situation was different in the fifteenth century, when attention to ancient artefacts grew as the decades progressed, and led to Raphael and Baldassarre Castiglione's letter to Pope Leo X where for the first time it was said that those reliefs were referred to Trajan:

E tra l'altre dall'arco di Costantino; il componimento del quale è bello e ben fatto in tutto quello che appartiene all'architettura: ma le sculture del medesimo arco sono sciocchissime, senz'arte o bontate alcuna. Ma quelle che vi sono delle spoglie di Traiano e d'Antonino Pio, sono eccellentissime, e di perfetta maniera (Letter from Baldassarre Castiglione to Pope Leo X, 1519).

[And among others by the Arch of Constantine; the composition of which is beautiful and well-done in all that belongs to architecture: but the sculptures of the same arch are very poor, without any art or goodness. But

what remains of Trajan and Antoninus Pius, is most excellent, and in perfect style (Author's translation)].

But how did the information reach Raphael in 1519? Probably in the same way it got to Botticelli – the problem is that we do not know the steps. However we do know that in the fifteenth century there was a rediscovery of antiquity and a real fascination for triumphs. So our research looked into the sources of the time that had the *spolia* of Rome as their subject.

There is no reference to the Trajanic origin of some elements of the Arch of Constantine in Biondo Flavio, *Roma Triumphans and Roma Instaurata* – his works date back 1457-59. There is no reference to the Arch of Constantine in the slightly earlier *Descriptio Urbis Romae* by Leon Battista Alberti; likewise, nothing is said in the twelfth book of *De Re Militari* by Roberto Valturio, which deals with ancient triumphs. There is no trace of Trajan's bas-reliefs in Pomponius Leto's *Antiquitates*, nor in Andrea Fulvio's *Antiquitates* where the Arch is mentioned – at the beginning of the fourth book – but nothing is said about what interests us. Another fifteenth-century source is Giovanni Marcanova's *De dignitatibus romanorum, triumpho et rebus bellicis*, unfortunately lost and therefore not available, and nevertheless, we cannot take it as a mediating text. If we look at sources prior to the fifteenth century there is no reference to bas-reliefs either in Eusebius' *Vita Constantine* or in Lactantius or the medieval *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*. At the end of the twelfth century, in the *Annales Ecclesiastici* (A.D. 312, Pope Melchiades anno 2, Constantine anno 7, ch. LXV, *De arcu triumphali Constantini elucidatio* and LXVI *Ornatus arcus Constantini ex diversis*), Baronius says that some parts of the Arch are re-used from other works, yet without giving specific indications. On the other hand, there are no answers to our question either in articles or essays from recent decades that touch on Dante or Botticelli, for example the recent contribution by Marcello Ciccuto (Ciccuto 2021); Barbara J. Watts' older study (Watts 1996), or that by Nancy J. Vickers (Vickers 1983). Similarly, the consultation of historical-archaeological studies dedicated to the Arch of Constantine or the monuments of Rome in general, such as those by Silvano Agosti and Massimo Farinella and by Antonio Pinelli (Agosti Farinella 1984; Pinelli 1985) collected in *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana* was of no use. Nor were the studies by Richard Krautheimer (Krautheimer [1988] 1993) and those collected by Rota

Colisei (Colisei 2002). Nor, the articles in the classical tradition by Stefano Miccolis (Miccolis 1998) and the more recent article by Manuela Morresi (Morresi 2010). And lastly, not even consulting the papers and drawings contained in the work by Alfonso Bartoli, a fellow student of Giacomo Boni, *I monumenti antichi di Roma nei disegni degli Uffizi di Firenze*, was conclusive.



5 | Trajan's panel in the Arch of Constantine.

Having completed this first and perfectible survey of modern, late antique, medieval and up to fifteenth-century sources, we can perhaps attempt a hypothesis. The hypothesis – based not on the identification of a source but on the very absence of one – is that Botticelli recognised the bas-reliefs as Trajan's because of a common knowledge of the origin of those elements: a *vox populi*. To support the hypothesis a few hints here and there save it from a quick fall. Evidence is offered by Federico Zeri, who reminds us how in Rome at the time there was a good knowledge of the works of the past among the people who were the guardians of this common knowledge:

I romani, vedendo quei rilievi, dovevano assolutamente sapere da quale monumento provenivano e individuavano il rapporto simbolico fra Costantino e il testo del passato che era stato inserito nel suo arco trionfale (Zeri 2004, 47).

[The Romans, seeing those reliefs, absolutely had to know which monument they came from and identified the symbolic relationship between Constantine and the text from the past that had been inserted in his triumphal arch (Author's translation)].

We can accordingly read an eighteenth-century source, Bernard de Montfaucon, who dealing with the parts that make up the Arch of Constantine writes:

Anaglypha sublimiora, mira arte caelata, doctam manum produnt: opinioque vulgaris est ex arcu Trajani huc comportata, indeque ortam nuncupationem, arco di trasi, qua insignitur arcus hodieque (Montfaucon 1702, 144).

The appeal is therefore to common opinion, to the *vox populi*, attested, however, at least to the best of our knowledge at this stage of research, only in the seventeenth century. Moreover, that knowledge of ancient works passed by word of mouth from generation to generation is told by such a sixteenth-century erudite as Marcello Adriani who wrote in a letter to Vasari:

In Roma si vede ancora l'arco di Settimio ornato di molte belle figure e molte altre opere egregie, delle quali non si sanno i maestri essendosene perduta la memoria (Adriani [1567] 1966, 226).

[In Rome, we can still see the Arch of Septimius adorned with many beautiful figures and many other egregious works, the masters of which are unknown as their memory has been lost (Author's translation)].

We do not know who they are because there is no memory of them, the *vulgata* has been lost, the *vox populi* has been interrupted.

In conclusion: the question of how Botticelli could have come to know that the bas-relief *LIBERATORI URBIS* from the Arch of Constantine was a work from Trajan's time, and related to an episode from Trajan's life, remains open. Meanwhile, we can say that, if the source was indeed the *vox populi*, we cannot but note once again how it is the vulgate that wins over history, and specifically in the sign of the 'energetic inversion' (to quote Warburg): Trajan's sanguinary victory over the Dacians in popular imagination turns into the cue for the legend of his justice – finally sanctioned by Dante. But we can also note how the popular legend about Rome's ancient monuments is taken up by Botticelli who, in his artistic work, puts on paper the recognition of the Trajanian origin of the bas-relief of the Arch of Constantine, anticipating by centuries the discoveries of art-historical and archaeological studies.

A Conclusion in the Form of a Legend

In his *Commentary* on the *Commedia*, Iacomo della Lana reports a legend that constitutes an element of complex tradition of Trajan's justice (Centanni 2022a). The source relates that in Rome, at the time of Pope Gregory the Great, the head of a deceased person was found in some excavations. Despite the time that had passed after the burial, the head had the peculiarity of having “la lingua così rigida, carnosa e fresca, come fosse pure in quella ora seppellita” – “a tongue so rigid, fleshy and fresh, as if it had just been buried” (Author's translation). To general astonishment, the tongue was brought to Gregory the Great, who questioned it; the tongue answered: “Io fui Traiano imperadore di Roma, che signoreggiai nel cotale tempo, dappoi che Cristo discese nella Vergine, e sono all'inferno perch'io non fui con fede” – “I was Trajan the emperor of Rome, who ruled at such a time, since Christ descended in the Virgin, and I am in hell because I did not stand in faith” (Author's translation). Trajan was then baptised by the pontifex and therefore taken to Paradise. But in the light of what we have written, the legend perhaps tells us something more. We can imagine that the rigid fleshy and fresh tongue is but the figurative representation of our vox populi, which together with the legend conveyed the knowledge of the origin of Trajan's bas-reliefs in the Arch of Constantine.

For their fundamental contribution to the drafting of this note, we would like to thank Damiano Acciarino, Myriam Pilutti Namer, and Daniele Pisani. Likewise, thanks are due to the curators of this issue who proposed this research and followed it step by step until its publication.

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*For Text and Translation of Dante's Divine Comedy, see <http://www.worldofdante.org>.

English abstract

In his illustration for Canto X of *Purgatory*, Sandro Botticelli draws the legendary episode of the Justice of Trajan. In order to illustrate the legend, Botticelli apparently takes inspiration from the bas-relief in the fornix of the Arch of Constantine with the inscription *liberatori urbis*, a bas-relief that, thanks to modern archaeological studies, is known to come from a monument of Trajan. In the Note here published, we question how Botticelli could have known the Trajanian origin of the bas-relief. The analysis is carried on by surveying all the sources available at the time and the critical studies. At this stage of the research, the conclusion that could be reached is that the identification of the bas-relief as pertaining to a Trajanian monument might have derived from a *vox populi*.

Keywords | Arch of Constantine; Dante; Botticelli; Trajan.

Gertrud Bing's Scientific Beginnings*

The 1921 doctoral thesis: The Concept of the Necessary in Lessing

Dorothee Gelhard

Gertrud Bing defended her thesis on 4 June 1921, and the title of her dissertation was: *Der Begriff des Notwendigen bei Lessing. Ein Beitrag zum geistesgeschichtlichen Problem Leibniz-Lessing* (The Concept of the Necessary in Lessing. A Contribution to the Intellectual-Historical Problem of the Relationship between Leibniz and Lessing). She was one of the first doctoral candidates to be awarded a doctorate at the University of Hamburg, which was founded in 1919. The minutes of the doctoral examination document that Bing took the doctorate in the major subject "German Literary History" with Robert Petsch and in the minor subjects psychology with Wilhelm Stern and philosophy with Ernst Cassirer, who had also been the second examiner of her thesis. She was thus also the first student to have her disputation with Ernst Cassirer. Gertrud Bing's doctoral file, which was found by Rainer Nicolaysen in the 1990s and handed over to the Hamburg State Archives for safekeeping, has been preserved in its entirety. In addition to the minutes of the oral examinations by the examiners Stern, Petsch and Cassirer, the file also contains the two expert opinions on her dissertation thesis, her handwritten and typewritten curriculum vitae, the application for admission to the doctoral examination dated 3 May 1921, an abstract of the thesis for the disputation and the doctoral certificate dated 18 October 1922, which proves that she passed the doctoral examination with "very good". Also a receipt from the university treasury dated 20 April 1922 for the first instalment of 20 marks of the doctoral fees due at the time, totalling 400 marks. On 17 June 1921, Bing confirmed to the University of Hamburg that she had received the thesis and her degree certificates back. Finally, a communication from the Faculty of Philosophy dated 18 October 1922 contains a request to Lütcke and Wulff to print seven copies of the doctoral thesis. Bing's work itself remained unpublished and until now was

only available as a typescript on thin carbon paper with handwritten additions and deletions. The original hand copy from Gertrud Bing's estate is now in the Warburg Institute in London. The existing carbon copies of the work differ in that they contain handwritten corrections.

Despite its precarious condition, the Hamburg copy is available for borrowing and still contains the original borrowing card, which lists Erwin Panofsky as reader of Bing's thesis in 1926. Panofsky, together with Aby Warburg and Fritz Saxl, championed a new science of art at the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg (KBW). Bing's thesis, which was consulted sporadically during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, was last borrowed in 2003. Evidently, it has not garnered much attention thus far. This comes as something of a surprise, seeing as Gertrud Bing, whose dissertation received the distinction "highly commendable" from Ernst Cassirer and the German philologist Robert Petsch, was immediately thereafter recommended by Cassirer to join the staff at the Warburg Library.

Bing's scientific achievement is still underestimated today. The sheer number of works, of which there are not many in Bing's case, cannot be a measure in this regard. Her thesis already and clearly shows that not only could she think independently and philosophically, to which supervisors Petsch and Cassirer attested without reserve, but that her work also amounts to much more, certainly, than a schoolgirl's attempt. August Ferdinand Robert Petsch (1875-1945) was a German philologist and folklorist. He studied, amongst others, under Erich Schmidt at Würzburg, joining the school that formed around Wilhelm Scherer. On 16 July 1919, shortly after Cassirer, Petsch was appointed to the University of Hamburg, where he took over the professorship of Modern German Literary History, which was transformed into a tenured professorship on 1 July 1923. His main research areas were Lessing and Goethe. Together with another student of Cassirer's, Paul Böckmann, Petsch signed the *Vow of allegiance of the Professors of the German Universities and High-Schools to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialistic State*. This document, or rather the disloyalty of colleagues with whom Cassirer had worked for years in a spirit of trust, induced Cassirer to resign his professorship. In doing so, he forestalled by only a few days the dismissal of Jewish university professors by the National Socialists. Petsch did not stand up for Cassirer. Cassirer's

chair of philosophy was redesignated for racial biology (See Nicolaysen 2011, 24).

(Benutzung seit 1905:)

Benutzer (Name, Stand, Wohnort)	Ort der Benutzung	Datum der Entleihung und Rückgabe	Bemerkungen
H. Grien Philosoph Hamburg	L. I.	27.8.1923	Eingesehen.
Panofsky, Prof. Alg. Univ.	Hamburg St.-u. B. H. B. Z.	29.8.23 25.6.26	Eingesehen. P.
67 Jöpper Hist. philo.	Univ. Halle Leipzig	3. VII 27	Eingesehen.
95 Friezel Land-Phil.	U. B. Dülmen	21.7.30	Eingesehen
W. Fritzsche Stud. phil.	Hall.	15.9. - 15.12.	

1 | Loan list of the Hamburg copy of Bing's dissertation, with Panofsky's entry.

Bing submitted her dissertation to two supervisors who could not have been more different. Petsch, only a few years later (1928), presented his version of a programme to establish "General Literary Studies" (Petsch 1928 615-622). It can be construed as a German variation of Russian Formalism, which was prominent during the 1910s and would come to lay the foundation for the methodology of literary theory prevalent in the various disciplines of philology after 1945, these ideas were first outlined in his 1906 text on Lessing (See Petsch 1906, 206-228). Following the "Congress for Aesthetics and General Art Studies" in Berlin (1913) — Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky and Ernst Cassirer were in attendance then — formalistic ideas became a topic of discussion in art, literary and music studies: contributors from the field of literary studies include Oskar Walzel with his lecture *Tragical Form* (Walzel 1914) and Gustav von Allesch with *On the Nature of Drama* (von Allesch 1914). They were increasingly being pitted against so-called 'intellectual history' (*Geistesgeschichte*). Petsch, accordingly, insisted on a "theoretical justification for scientific form analysis" (Petsch 1928, 619) which was opposed to "historical philology" (Petsch 1928, 621). In terms of language, he appears to have borrowed a thing or two from Heidegger's preference for neologism — it should be remembered in this context that the famous Davos controversy between

Heidegger and Cassirer would take place only one year later, in 1929. Petsch speaks, amongst others, of the “wortende[r] Mensch” (“wording man”) and of “wording” (“Wortung”, see Petsch 1928, 617 and 618). In general, the latter of which, when translated into English, can be confused with a common term referring to grammatical and stylistic properties, but it ought to be taken in the same metaphysical sense as its adjectival use in the first example suggests; Petsch, moreover, repeatedly refers to an “essence of poetry” (“Wesen der Dichtung”) whose “hidden meaning must be revealed” (Petsch 1928, 618 and 621). In 1930, he succeeded in officially separating the two German Studies’ seminars at the Hamburg University:

Next to the one seminar which, due to the expansion of the Nordic department, was renamed in 1923 from ‘German’ to ‘Germanic’, there appeared now the ‘Seminar for German Literary History and General Literary Studies’, which, at the request of Petsch, was shortened to ‘Seminar for Literary Studies’ (Müller 2011, 122).

Cassirer, on the other hand, represented the very opposite side, committed to what Petsch derided as “old poetics” (Petsch 1928, 616). In 1921, Cassirer published *Idee und Gestalt (Idea and Form)*, demonstrating in five essays on Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin and Kleist the indissoluble link joining these poets to intellectual history. Whereas Petsch worked towards a professional and institutional separation within the Humanities, Cassirer cooperated with the Warburg Circle not only to integrate the individual disciplines of the Humanities but also to consolidate them with the natural sciences. Petsch was later in occasional contact with the KBW. During Warburg’s stay in Kreuzlingen, Petsch would send him a few postcards. In 1924 Mary Warburg reported to her husband that Bing advised against inviting Petsch to give a lecture on Goethe at the KBW, for Warburg would certainly not enjoy his contribution (14.3.1924, WIA GC/37356). In 1927 Petsch was nevertheless scheduled for the KBW’s lecture series on drama and accepted the invitation according to the KBW’s diary (9.12.1927, WIA GC/37356, 160). Whether or not Petsch actually gave the lecture could not be determined. At any rate, the respective volume of the “Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg” from 1927/28, *Zur Geschichte des Dramas (On the History of Drama)*, does not contain it. From 1921 onwards, Cassirer would formulate these ideas for a *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*

(*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*) ever more clearly, with them culminating in the 1942 collection of essays *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften* (*On the Logic of Cultural Studies*). Considering Petsch's attitude towards literary studies, Cassirer's introductory remark to his Goethe lectures, which he gave during his exile in Sweden, is understandable:

That now [...] once again I ascend to the lectern to treat a topic of German intellectual history before a larger audience. Gratefully and joyfully, I have at once accepted this suggestion; for it afforded me the opportunity to fulfil a long-cherished wish of my own. One day to deliver a cycle of lectures on Goethe — that has always been one of my favourite academic plans. [...] I have [...] given individual lectures on Goethe but never a proper course of Goethe lectures. Standing in the way of this were established academic customs with which I did not wish to break — I was bound to my field of expertise, to philosophy, and was not at liberty to trespass on foreign territory. Only now that my academic career has been concluded may I dare commit such an incursion, without it being perceived as a breach of academic custom (Cassirer [1940-1941] 2003, 5).

Bing, it is evident, did not follow in the footsteps of Petsch. However, the same, it would seem, cannot be said for Petsch. In 1922 — one year after Bing's dissertation defence — Petsch published at Filser (an Augsburg publishing house) a small volume on Lessing as part of a series intended to provide introductory reading for interested theatregoers. These volumes were, therefore, limited to essentials on the respective author and included suggestions for further reading. From the extensive oeuvre of Lessing, Petsch, too, selects *Emilia Galotti* and *Nathan*, with his bibliographical references matching almost completely the literature of which Bing availed herself. Missing, though, is a reference to Bing's work. In the chapter on *Emilia Galotti*, Petsch states explicitly:

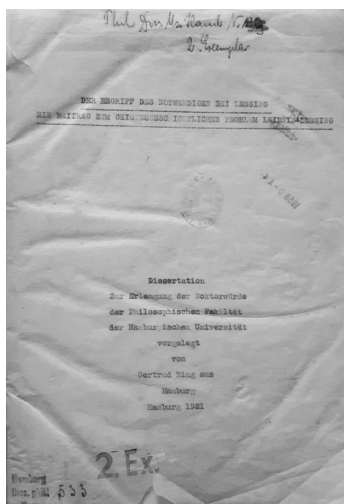
Itself reminiscent of Leibnizian thoughts is his [Lessing's] portrayal of Emilia, who cannot escape the onslaught of her feelings because reason has not yet gained the upper hand over passion in this young creature (Petsch 1922, 13).

And the paragraph on *Nathan* concludes:

Thus, Lessing, both as dramatist and thinker, has spoken his last, highest word to us with the 'Education of the Human Race', at the same time directing dramatic development towards an infinite goal of which all earthly appearance is only a parable (Petsch 1922, 15).

Bing's analysis appears to have convinced Petsch, who, in 1906, still expressly criticised making a "mutual influence between philosophy and literature" the basis for interpretation (Petsch 1906, 206). Accordingly, in her curriculum vitae, Bing thanks Petsch for "his friendly willingness" (Bing Diss., 87) and Cassirer, by contrast, for the "manifold stimulation, support and encouragement" (Bing Diss., 87) he provided. Indicating no trace of Petsch's formalistic method, Bing's text is in fact remarkably close to Cassirer's thought. The assumption by Laura Tack that Bing would follow in the footsteps of Petsch's *Freedom and Necessity in Schiller's dramatic plays* (*Freiheit und Notwendigkeit in Schillers Dramen*) is a grave misjudgement. Bing's dissertation yields not one piece of evidence to support it, other than a verbal coincidence ("necessary") featuring in the titles of both studies (see Tack 2020, 54). This is hardly surprising when considering the course of Bing's studies: from 1916 to 1918, she studied philosophy, literary history and psychology in Munich. There, according to her own statement, she studied primarily under phenomenologists Moritz Geiger — who was Edmund Husserl's assistant in Göttingen. Amongst his students were Hans-Georg Gadamer and Walter Benjamin — and Alexander Pfänder, who were both students of Theodor Lipps. Whilst Geiger was particularly interested in the philosophy of mathematics, drawing also on Wilhelm Wundt's psychology in his courses, Pfänder dealt with the "consciousness of willing" ("Bewußtsein des Wollens") in both his dissertation and habilitation. Both men introduced Bing to the "Fundamentals of Psychology". She studied "Logic and Epistemology" with Pfänder, attending Geiger's tutorials on Descartes (Winter 1916-1917), Schiller's aesthetic writings (Winter 1917-1918), and Leibniz's *Nouveaux Essais* (Summer 1918). In 1918, she interrupted her studies for a time to occupy a teaching position at the Oberrealschule in Eimsbüttel in Hamburg which had become vacant due to the war (Bing most likely refers to the Kaiser-Friedrich-Ufer secondary school). Bing resumed her studies at the newly founded University of Hamburg in winter 1919. The topics Geiger and Pfänder addressed in their courses might just as well have been covered by Cassirer. However, Bing must have immediately noticed the

great difference separating the Munich phenomenologists from Cassirer, the eminent scholar of cultural and intellectual history. Cassirer began his teaching career in Hamburg in winter 1919-1920 with a lecture on the *History of Modern Philosophy (from the Renaissance to Kant)*, another one on *Kant and German Intellectual Life*, and a tutorial on the *History of Modern Philosophy (Descartes and Leibniz)*. During the following Summer term, Cassirer gave a lecture on *Logic and Critique of Knowledge* and conducted a tutorial on the *Principal Directions of the Modern Critique of Knowledge*. In winter 1920-1921, he gave lectures on the *Philosophical Problems of the Theory of Relativity*, *Kant and the Post-Kantian Systems of Philosophy*, and *Schiller's Philosophical World View*. Petsch, during the same time (Summer 1920 and Summer 1921), lectured twice on *Lessing and his Time*, as well as on *Goethe's Faust*.



2 | Gertrud Bing, August 1933, WIA, The Warburg Institute.

Bing received the idea for the topic of her thesis as early as during her Munich years, namely from Christian Janetzky, a German philologist conducting, as private lecturer, a seminar on *Literature and Philosophy in the eighteenth Century* at the LMU during the Winter term 1917-1918. Janetzky became a full professor of modern German literary history in Dresden in 1922. Like Petsch, he signed the Vow of allegiance of the Professors of the German Universities and High-Schools to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialistic State in 1933. One year later, he was dismissed because of his advocacy for professors Paul Luchtenberg and Rainer Fetscher, who were persecuted by the National Socialists. However, his

retirement was revoked shortly afterwards because German was being considered too important a subject after all. Viewed in this context, Bing's decision for a first reviewer of her dissertation from the German Studies department makes sense. However, instead of following Petsch, as her topic would have suggested, Bing explicitly criticises Petsch's teacher, Erich Schmidt—and, implicitly, also the student—when she begins her thesis in medias res, stating that:

Die Geburtsstunde der modernen Philosophie ist der Augenblick (gleichviel wo er historisch liegt und ob er überhaupt eindeutig aufzuweisen ist), und wo man anfängt, die Sinneseindrücke unter die Sonde des Denkens zu nehmen, und wo man erkennt, dass sie nicht standhalten, dass die Welt, die sich dem Erleben durchaus als real und einheitlich darstellt, vor dem prüfenden Verstande in eine Vielheit unzuverlässiger Daten zerflattert. Von da an ruht der Gedanke nicht mehr, dass die sinnliche Wahrnehmung wandelbar in Raum und Zeit und als Erkenntnis trügerisch ist.

The birth of modern philosophy is the moment (regardless of where it may lie in historical terms and whether it can be pinpointed at all) when sensual perceptions are being put under the scrutiny of thought, and when it becomes evident that they do not stand their ground, that the world which to experience presents itself as thoroughly real and unified disintegrates before scrutinising mind into a multiplicity of unreliable data. From then on, the thought would no longer come to rest that sensual perception is subject to change in space and time, being epistemologically deceptive (Bing Diss., 1. Author's translation).

Pointing out Leibniz's influence on Lessing's poetics is neither original nor new. Scholarship on Lessing around 1900 had long before Bing taken notice of it, dealing with it more extensively as well. Bing, however, contradicts the relevant biographies on Lessing, elaborating instead on Gustav Kettner's study (Kettner 1904). Kettner had already researched Lessing's "relationship with Leibnizian psychology" (Kettner 1904, 220 ff.) by drawing on Lessing's own sources. Not only did Lessing study Leibniz's *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* thoroughly, but he also translated several passages from them. As Kettner recalls:

Here Leibniz was first to disclose the unconscious life of the soul to psychology. He showed how our whole process of thinking and willing is rooted in small and obscure perceptions (perceptions petites et insensibles). Gradually developing from them were the confused perceptions of sensation and, finally, clear cognition (Kettner 1904, 221).

Kettner recognised this Leibnizian gradual process distinctly in *Emilia Galotti*, and Bing would follow his interpretation.

What is innovative about Bing's work is that, by conjoining the Leibnizian principle of continuity—it is expressed, amongst others, by means of the infinitesimal calculus as well as by the 'necessary' in the Theodicy—with the tragical concept in *Emilia Galotti* and *Nathan*, Bing shows that the cultural science of Warburg and Cassirer does not "miss the core issue [...] of grasping the world and its inner and outer [...] formation" (Petsch 1928, 616) —as Petsch would later put it with respect to literary studies—but, on the contrary, that it leads towards an understanding of culture. The direction Petsch came to pursue with his conception of literary studies in the following years was increasingly *völkisch*. Accordingly, in *Deutsche Literaturwissenschaft* he wrote:

But our approach to research may be called German in yet another sense. What we practice here steers clear [...] of any former, legislative or descriptive, statically recording or psychologically-explanatory 'poetics', without dismissing their methods as meaningless. [...] By contrast, we, by our means, seek to penetrate to the essence of poetry in such a manner as clearly only the German man can conceive and as our German poets have, at least since Lessing, conceived of it time and again (Petsch 1940, 9).

Contrary to an opinion gaining favour at the time, neither phenomenology nor formalism can provide a panacea for analysing the 'essence' of culture. Bing clearly took up a position in a debate which was ever intensifying in philosophy as well as in art and literary studies. Two years after Bing's disputation, German philologist Oskar Walzel, publishing *Content and Form in the Poet's Work of Art* (*Inhalt und Form im Kunstwerk des Dichters*), would peremptorily usher in a new epoch in literary studies. Walzel paved the way for a history of poetry without poets, which would eventually lead to a disembodied formalism attaching paramount importance to surface structures. This is entirely in line with the Russian formalist Osip Brik, who once declared that Evgenij Onegin could have been written without Puškin. In opposition to Cassirer, for Walzel — and Petsch, accordingly — what mattered was not the development of a poetic work of art but rather the "being of the poetic work, which is to be illuminated" (Walzel 1923).

It becomes evident that Cassirer's strong recommendation of Bing for the Warburg Library was primarily due to scholarly reasons. By the time Bing

submitted her thesis, Lessing scholarship had already experienced a golden age, as it were. Following the July Revolution of 1830, two important attempts were made to establish a scientific foundation for research on Lessing: the first scholarly edition of Lessing's works and the first biography of Lessing based on precise documentary research. Karl Lachmann's *Neue rechtmäßige Ausgabe* of Lessing's writings, which Bing used, appeared in thirteen volumes from 1838 to 1840 (Lachmann's edition of Lessing's works has remained a model to this day. Franz Muncker expanded it to twenty-one volumes between 1886 and 1908. Two supplementary volumes and an index volume completed the edition). One could see in this an affront to Petsch, who had published Lessing's Complete Works in six volumes in 1907. Ten years later (1850), Theodor Wilhelm Danzel's carefully researched Lessing biography was published from his estate. Following in 1919 was a biography by Waldemar Oehlke, also used by Bing. However, the greatest influence on Lessing scholarship was exerted by Erich Schmidt and his two-volume study, which first appeared in 1884 to be reprinted and corrected time and again. It had remained the standard reference on the life and work of the early Enlightenment philosopher — the last edition, revised by Erich Schmidt, appeared in 1909, he died in 1913 — until Hugh Barr Nisbet's 1000-page monograph on Lessing appeared in 2008. Setting the tone around 1900 were also Kuno Fischer's interpretations of Lessing (Fischer 1881) and his treatise on Leibniz (Fischer 1855), both of which should be taken into account when reading Bing.

Even though Bing did not produce a biography of Lessing, she intensively dealt with Erich Schmidt's view of Lessing. In fact, Bing's thesis can be read, in a way, as a critical commentary on Schmidt's analysis of the significance Leibniz had for Lessing. The teacher of Petsch, Schmidt was himself a disciple of Wilhelm Scherer, whom he succeeded as chair of German Language and Literature at Berlin in 1887. Before the University of Hamburg was founded and as part of the Litterarische Gesellschaft (Literary Society), Schmidt had given public lectures in Hamburg that were so well attended that tickets had to be issued for them, eventually (Richter 2011, 47).

It is not a coincidence that Leibniz and Lessing had always played an important role in the Warburg-Cassirer circle. Warburg, for example,

repeatedly expressed that Lessing had been his “ideal” (Warburg [1927] 2010, 683f.) since school days and that only gradually had he come to realise that he had to “apply a correction”(Warburg [1927] 2010, 685) to Lessing. Warburg’s project of correcting Lessing is due to the “Laocoon essay”, in which word and image are differentiated on account of the different possibilities of expression afforded by poetry and painting, respectively. Whereas depiction can, as Lessing argues, show Laocoon’s sighs but not his cries, narration can convey emotionality much more inclusively and precisely (see Laocoon, chapter XVIII). Warburg presents a different analysis, declaring that his entire scientific work is dedicated to the proof that passionate experience can in fact be depicted by means of images (see Warburg [1927] 2010, 685). The KBW’s diary contains repeated references suggesting that Warburg intended to communicate his “correction to Lessing” to the public at the Lessing Congress in Hamburg in 1929. He had plans for a lecture by the title of *The Transitory as influenced by Antiquity since the Renaissance period* (Das Transitorische unter dem Einfluß der Antike seit der Renaissance), this is accompanied by the remark:

Bis zum Congress muß unser Bilderatlas, der doch eigentlich nichts anderes ist als ein Supplement zu Lessing.

By the time of the Congress, our picture Atlas, which really is nothing more than a supplement to Lessing (TKBW, 11 December 1927).

On January 4th 1928 he changes the title of the lecture to: *The Influence of Antiquity on the Representation of the Transitory in Renaissance Artistic Culture* (Der Einfluß der Antike auf die Darstellung des Transitorischen in der künstlerischen Kultur der Renaissance, TKBW, 191). Unfortunately, Warburg’s death prevented any further elaboration of his correction of Lessing. Cassirer, for his part, not only wrote a comprehensive study of Leibniz (Cassirer 1902), but his philosophy of culture is also clearly influenced by Leibnizian thought (Gelhard 2018). However, Bing’s connection to Warburg and Cassirer goes beyond a shared interest in the poet and the philosopher. Instead of anticipating, as was recently suggested (Tack 2020, 55) the Warburg circle’s preoccupation with Fortuna, Bing, in fact, shares the Warburg-Cassirer Circle’s interest in the formation of ‘modern consciousness’. By means of Lessing’s aesthetics or,

more precisely, of Lessing's concept of the tragic, Bing demonstrates how Lessing engenders in his dramatic plays a realm of individual freedom within the Leibnizian system of lawful necessity. Bing takes Kettner's interpretation of Lessing a step further. Curiously, Kettner establishes no connection between his interpretation of drama and the significance of Leibniz for Lessing's understanding of the tragic, which he had previously demonstrated. Only hinted at in *Emilia Galotti*, this notion is fully developed in *Nathan*. Tack's interpretation, linking Bing's interpretation of *Nathan* to Nietzsche's *Ecce homo* and ultimately even to Warburg's attitude towards his own Jewishness, thoroughly misses the point:

In any case, it is striking that Bing's description of Nathan's mystico-religious life stance is strongly reminiscent of the description given by Friedrich Nietzsche (Tack 2020, 54).

Neither can there be a line drawn between Bing (*Nathan*) and Nietzsche, nor is Bing's account reflective of Warburg's Jewishness, except for the fact that Nathan and Warburg are both of Jewish faith:

Accepting one's fate on religious grounds, as expressed in Lessing's Nathan, becomes amor fati for Nietzsche; the loving acceptance of one's fate. Bing uses this terminology - amor fati - when, at the end of her life, she looks back on Warburg's fate and specifically his relationship to his Jewish identity (Tack 2020, 54).

Through Lessing, Bing argues —and Warburg, ever since beginning to study the afterlife of oriental antiquity, had applied himself to the very same topic— that reflection (Warburg refers to it as *Besonnenheit*) effects distance from the mere reactions aroused by affect. Accordingly, Bing concludes her chapter on *Emilia Galotti* thus:

Es gibt aber neben dem unbewußten Befolgen des Gesetzes, wie es in jedem Baum und jedem Tier vor sich geht, eine bewußte Einsicht und freiwillige Unterordnung darunter, wie sie nur dem Menschen oder Wesen von noch höherer Bewußtheit zukommt. Darin liegt eine Freiheit, die wieder Notwendigkeit garantiert.

There is, however, apart from an unconscious obedience to laws, which occurs with every tree and every animal, a conscious understanding of, and a voluntary subordination under, such laws, which is peculiar to man or beings of even higher consciousness. In it lies a freedom that, in turn, guarantees necessity (Bing, Diss., 72. Author's translation).

This is what constitutes the remarkable agreement between the thought of Bing, Warburg and Cassirer. Even though Bing, in her thesis, demonstrates a deep familiarity with, and a considerable command of, Lessing's oeuvre — a fact that, due to her habit of not always bothering with providing a source for citations, or, for that matter, with highlighting citations, posed a few editorial challenges — he serves more so as an example to characterise the beginning of Enlightenment thought as the process of liberation from an otherwise immutable determinism. On this point, she criticises Erich Schmidt, who fails to detect any semblance of free will in Lessing. In fact, Schmidt announces rather harshly:

How still today, of all times, anyone can view Lessing as a proponent of free will seems more than paradoxical in light of documentary evidence (Schmidt 1923, 430).

For Schmidt, Lessing's adherence to the notion of absolute 'determinism' is irrefutable and cannot be denied even on account of "motives of reason" (Schmidt 1923, 431). As Schmidt puts it:

But is necessity pouring from the insight of reason therefore less than necessity? Does the necessity of the good and the right by virtue of cognition cease to be a necessity? Not why I must, but whether or not I must, that is the question (Schmidt 1923, 431).

Bing does not object to this. In her commentary on Schmidt's treatment of Lessing's determinism, she does, however, introduce a psychological component to Schmidt's concept of cognition. Whilst for Schmidt there is a distinction to be drawn only between knowing and not knowing, Bing broadens this polarity by differentiating between two modes of cognition (presented in detail in chapters two and three of her thesis): conscious cognition and what is known to religion as 'revelation', which is a kind of cognition that does not come about through comprehending causation but

flashes up like lightning instead. Within the Leibnizian causal chain, such a disturbance would have to appear as an accident. Devoting an entire chapter to the “game of chance”, Kettner does not, however, establish a connection with his previous analysis of Leibniz (Kettner 1904, 230ff.).

Bearing this in mind, it is clear why Bing’s interpretative approach to chance in *Emilia Galotti* differs so completely from that of contemporary German studies. Of particular interest in this context is Waldemar Oehlke’s interpretation. Even though, like Bing, he acknowledges that Lessing is concerned with the problem of individual freedom in *Emilia Galotti*, Oehlke’s reading links the drama exclusively to a critique of absolutism (Oehlke 1919, 152). Moreover, he immediately discounts Leibniz’s influence as irrelevant:

As for the thoughts about the contradictions between a gentility revered with awe and an infamous procuration that have gradually and shyly taken root in the soul of the people, Leibniz and his posthumous ‘Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain’ need not be called upon, which gave Lessing occasion in 1765 to study the dissection of the mental substratum of acts of will, the interrelationship between character disposition and dark instincts (Oehlke 1919, 145).

Contradictions and ambiguities in *Emilia Galotti*, which allot great importance to chance in the plot, have always posed a considerable challenge for interpreters, who tended to be concerned with resolving them. Bing, on the other hand, makes no attempt to unify them; in fact, they serve her as means to support her initial proposition about the beginning of modern consciousness in that they show that determinism and chance are not mutually exclusive but instead lay the foundations for Lessing’s tragical concept.

In his correspondence with Mendelssohn and Nicolai, Lessing explained that the aim of tragedy was to evoke compassion in the audience (Petsch [1910] 1967, 54ff.). To achieve this, according to Lessing, psychological motivation, or the causal chain of the characters’ actions, needs to be comprehensible. Bing argues that Leibniz’s concept of the necessary serves as a prerequisite for Lessing’s concept of the tragic; in other words, a character suffers whenever he or she is subject to a constraint or

compulsion that, in turn, determines his or her actions. According to Bing, Lessing addresses this impotence in the face of limitation on several levels: politically, psychologically and religiously. The dramatic struggle, in Bing's view, is not waged by the characters against an evil outside world, but it takes place within themselves once they experience their subjection to regulations against which they are powerless. Bing interprets Emilia's self-enforced suicide — her killing by her father's hand — which for Oehlke guarantees the reinstatement of moral law (Oehlke 1919, 164), as one of the ways whereby Lessing defies the 'spell of necessity' (in this, Bing deviates from Schmidt's interpretation as well): voluntary death as salvation from the despair of the immutable that cannot be swayed; in other words, the consciously chosen act of freeing oneself from this necessity: "The death of the heroine [is] the only action in this tragedy" ("Der Tod der Heldin [ist] die einzige Tat in dieser Tragödie", Bing Diss., 71. Author's translation):

Das Weltgeschehen setzt sich zusammen aus den Einzeltätigkeiten der Monaden, von denen jede das eigne Selbst verwirklicht, die aber zu einem gemeinsamen Plan zusammenarbeiten. Das Ineinanderweben des Ganzen ist ein Bild nur für den unendlichen Geist. Ihm ist dieser ganze ungeheure Stufenplan mit der Unendlichkeit seiner Individuen, die sich in allen Stadien der Bewußtheit befinden, ein einziger Syllogismus, d.h. logisch verständlich und notwendig. Er sieht den Ursprung und Verlauf jedes Fadens, wo ein endlicher Verstand nur ein verwirrtes Stückchen des Gewebes wahrnimmt.

In *Nathan*, Lessing transforms this grim tragical insight into a rationale of the Enlightenment, leaving the immutable 'syllogism' of the Leibnizian system unchanged. But Lessing now focusses in on the moment of cognition itself:

World events are composed of the individual activities of monads, each of which realises its own self whilst cooperating towards a common goal. The interweaving of the whole presents an image only to the infinite spirit. To him, this whole enormous graduated scheme comprising the infinity of its individual beings, which are in various stages of consciousness, is a single syllogism, i.e. it is logically comprehensible and necessary. He sees the origin and the course of every thread, whereas a finite mind perceives only a tangled bit of fabric (Bing, Diss., 69. Author's translation).

Thus, the second solution for resisting determinism, which Lessing proposes with *Nathan*, is conscious understanding of its immutability and voluntary submission to the law of necessity (Bing Diss., 72). Bing's conclusion that Lessing "completed" (Bing Diss., 77) Leibniz's concept of the necessary with *Emilia Galotti* and *Nathan* hinges on the moment of conscious liberation: psychologically, man is unfree regarding his passions, desires and longings; politically, he is at the mercy of rulers and of society in the absolutist eighteenth century; however, in the domain of religion, surely, he faces his hardest battle because he is powerless against his fate and against providence. Modern man cannot extricate himself from these circumstances either, but, according to Bing, he is no longer subject to them because he can reflect upon them (Bing Diss., 77). Pointing out the coexistence of reason and religion, which is expressed in two modes of cognition, Bing moreover rejects Schmidt's interpretation of Lessing as a Spinozist (Schmidt, 1923, 432).

Thus, Bing not only shares Warburg's and Cassirer's interest in the emergence of modern consciousness but also their focus on the simultaneity of conscious cognition and affective reaction pertaining to the individual consciousness. This theme is prevalent in Warburg's works. Particularly in his last years, he would turn his attention to Giordano Bruno. On his last trip to Italy, on which Bing accompanied him, the two made special arrangements to visit Bruno's birthplace in Nola near Naples. If one compares Warburg's notes on Bruno with Bing's thesis, striking parallels become apparent. This is not surprising, considering that Lessing, too, occupied himself with Bruno's writings early on (see here, amongst others, Lessing, *Rettung des Cardanus*) thus, the circle is complete: Warburg's early engagement with Lessing leads him quite logically to Bruno. Erich Schmidt noticed the importance of Bruno for Lessing as well and kept emphasising it more and more throughout subsequent revisions of his biography. Whereas Bruno is mentioned only in passing in the 1899 edition of Schmidt's book (Schmidt 1923, 512), the last revised edition elaborates on the connection between the two, stating explicitly:

If one compares his [Lessing's] teachings with those of the most famous of all the Italians of the Renaissance and Reformation period, with Giordano Bruno's, the first impression the roundup affords is striking. According to

Bruno, the substance of all things rests in the act of divine thinking; in the Nolan, we thus find the fundamental idea of pantheism. (the fundamental idea of pantheism can thus be traced to the Nolan.) [...] These strong correspondences are hardly coincidental but lend themselves to the assumption that an early influence by Bruno [on Lessing], which had not been obscured since, manifested itself all the more resolutely, as Lessing cast off old-fashioned and antagonistic views; and following this trail, an even richer prize may be won than is afforded by the attempts made to establish an immediate influence of Aristotle's 'Metaphysics' on Lessing or to reap benefit from the profound speculations of Tertullian for the modern Enlightenment philosopher's worldview (Schmidt 1923, 475).

During his stay in Rome, Warburg wrote to his friend Cassirer that he was occupied with reading up on High Renaissance philosophy, focussing above all on Giordano Bruno:

His [Bruno's] critique of knowledge, symbolically disguised as a campaign of the gods against celestial demons, is in truth a critique of pure unreason, for which I can provide a direct historical context with my psychologically significant pictorial material [harmony of the spheres 1589] (Aby Warburg to Ernst Cassirer, 3 December 1928, in Cassirer [1995] 2009, 112).

Cassirer replies thus:

I was particularly pleased to hear that you are now applying yourself to Giordano Bruno. If anyone should succeed in showing us the way to understanding this peculiar man, it must be you. The discipline of the history of philosophy has still to this day been quite puzzled by this man, alternating between uncritical veneration and dismissive hypercriticism, which applies wholly wrong standards to Bruno. That the lever must be positioned elsewhere, that Bruno cannot be understood and interpreted based solely on philosophical problems — this I have already tried to show in my account of the philosophy of the Renaissance. But whilst I have detected the knot, you shall undo it for us. *The Spaccio della bestia trionfante* demands a commentary the philosophical history of problems cannot produce on its own but that only a history of images and a history of astrology can provide (Ernst Cassirer to Aby Warburg, 29 December 1928, in Cassirer [1995] 2009, 114).

With the help of Giordano Bruno, Warburg recognises a cultural-scientific continuity in terms of the Enlightenment ideal: it leads from Michelangelo's *Fall of Phaeton* to Dürer's *Melencolia I* and, finally, to Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*:

Arguably the most scientifically significant event in recent times is the path leading to Michelangelo. It was clear that, without a comment on him, every attempt at establishing a comparative series of observations in typological terms would have been a wild-goose chase. However, it turned out that, whilst investigating the ancient-style affectations of cosmic ascent in Rimini, the arduous journey towards Mithras was completed. As a consequence, I was led to the Dieburg Mithraeum showing the close connection between the cult of Mithras and the legend of Phaeton, that is, the ascent to the sun [which is] most intimately linked to the fall. From another wholly different direction, I was also led to the sarcophagus sculpture representing another ascent not properly understood in its accentuation: Venus' return to Olympus following the judgement of Paris. Forming now the tertium comparationis between the judgement of Paris and the legend of Phaeton are the earthbound genii, who, as frightening-mourning or astonished-worshipping participants, symbolise the terrestrial region, the nymphs of springs [i.e. Naiades] on the Phaeton sarcophagus and on the judgement of Paris (Aby Warburg [1929] 2019, 404-433).

If the age of modernity began for the natural sciences with Kepler's discovery of Mars' planetary orbit forming an ellipsis, Giordano Bruno's pantheism and his abstracting from images ensured the discovery of inwardness, which is expressed in the image of man absorbed in his thought (*Dürer's Melencolia I*). Both events, Warburg construed, take place simultaneously during the age of the Renaissance. Giordano Bruno, self-engrossed and meditating, is nevertheless a continuation of the Jew Melchisedech from Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, who tells Saladin the Parable of the Ring (Boccaccio, *Decamerone*, Day 1, Story 3) which would be resurrected in Lessing's *Nathan*.

The thinking of the Warburgians, it can be said, seeks to encompass the experience of being dominated by passions, on the one hand, and the attempt of distancing oneself from them, on the other — it thus spans, as was Bing's aim to show, the range between *Emilia Galotti* and

Nathan. Cassirer at once realised that Bing, too, was receptive in her scientific thinking for the forms of the transition between conscious and unconscious cognition, and that she was prepared and able to stand up to contemporary tendencies in the process of parting from antiquity studies and history. Because of it, Cassirer was so keen on securing Bing as a member of staff for the KBW. Bing's promotion to the library's board of directors only a few years later, where she would follow in the footsteps of Saxl and Warburg, is due ultimately to these scholarly and personal merits, and not to a skill in sorting books.

* The following is an excerpt from the introduction to the author's doctoral thesis, which is presented here slightly modified and in translation. The book will be published in Fall 2022 (Gertrud Bing, *Gertrud Bing im Warburg-Cassirer-Kreis*. Mit dem Text ihrer Dissertation von 1921, hrsg. von Dorothee Gelhard und Thomas Roider, Wissenschaftler in Hamburg, bd. 6, edited by Ekkehard Nümann, Wallstein Verlag).

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English abstract

The article traces the intellectual history of Gertrud Bing's doctoral thesis, highlighting the first phase of her scientific life, which is still underestimated today. The thesis, whose title is *The Concept of the Necessary in Lessing. A contribution to the historical-intellectual problem of the relationship between Leibniz and Lessing*, links German Literature, Psychology and Philosophy and, among its merits, establishes an important dialogue with a great German intellectual, of fundamental importance for Bing's and Warburg's thinking: Ernst Cassirer. The author traces the history of the dissertation, passing through Cassirer's recommendation for Bing to join the K&W to the profound influence Lessing and Leibniz had in the Warburg circle.

Keywords | Gertrud Bing; Ernst Cassirer; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.

Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, and the Memory of Images

Matilde Sergio

¿Y si la muerte es la muerte,
qué será de los poetas
y de las cosas dormidas
que ya nadie las recuerda?

Federico García Lorca, *Canción otoñal*, 1918

The possibility of making a comparison between the figures of Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin is a fascinating subject for researchers who are familiar with their works, especially in the perspective of shedding light on the reflections of two of the least ‘classifiable’ thinkers in the history of German culture in the twentieth century. This attempt, however, often fails to indicate the basis upon which such a comparison should be established, not highlighting the important differences that mark two authors belonging to different generations and cultural environments (Pisani 2004). First, what is problematic is the lack of a solid ground on which to base the hypothesis of a concrete affinity between Warburg’s art history research method and Benjamin’s historical-philosophical speculation. It is known that the two scholars never met. The time frame when this might have happened was short: Benjamin graduated in Berne in 1919, and only a few years later he would begin to seek contact with the German cultural circles of his time. Only after his failed attempt to obtain a professorship at the University of Frankfurt (for a reconstruction of the ‘sad affair’, see Schiavoni 2016, 121-140) he entertained the idea of contacting the Warburgkreis. A letter to Hugo von Hofmannsthal dated 30 October 1926 expresses for the first time Benjamin’s desire of getting in contact with this circle:

Later I may also be able to hope for the interest of the Hamburg circle around [Aby] Warburg in addition to the sympathy of [Walther] Brecht. In any case, I would first expect to find academically qualified and, at the same

time, sympathetic reviewers among the members of that circle (with whom I myself have no contact); as for the rest, I do not expect very much goodwill, particularly from the official representatives of the scholarly profession (Benjamin [1910-1940] 1994, 310).

This happens just a few months after the 'Frankfurt affair' had ended with the withdrawal of his application to the university, following the advice of the faculty itself. In his letter Benjamin rejoices for the early publication in Hofmannsthal's *Neue Deutsche Beiträge* of the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauspiels*'s section dedicated to Baroque melancholy. The book was the same famous text that Benjamin had written for the Frankfurt University and that had been the object of such an embarrassing refusal. Hofmannsthal, trying to comply with Benjamin's wishes, sent the published essay to Erwin Panofsky with a letter in the Autumn of 1928 (the letter is quoted in Kemp 1975). We do not have Panofsky's reply, but we do know that it appeared to Benjamin not only indifferent, but even hostile, as he reported to Gershom Scholem in January 1928:

You will be interested to hear that Hofmannsthal, who knew I was interested in establishing a connection to the Warburg circle, sent the issue of the *Beiträge* containing the preview of the *Trauerspiel* book to [Erwin] Panofsky with a letter, perhaps somewhat prematurely. This kind act, meant to be of some use to me, has – *on ne peut plus* – échoué (gone awry, and how!). He sent me Panofsky's cool, resentment-laden response to his parcel (Benjamin [1910-1940] 1994, 325).

Despite this total failure Benjamin did not give up hope of establishing relations with the Warburgkreis, attempting to get in contact with its members again a few months after the troubled publication of his work on Baroque drama, this time through Scholem's intercession with Fritz Saxl (Benjamin [1910-1940] 1978, I, 470). Yet, even Saxl's response in the Summer of 1928 didn't go beyond a mild recognition of Benjamin's book. He confirmed the impression that the text, described by the Frankfurt University as incomprehensible, was not easy to read:

Das Buch von Benjamin hat mich sehr interessiert, wenn es auch wahrlich nicht leicht zu lesen ist. Aber der Mann hat doch etwas zu sagen und kennt sein Material.

[Benjamin's book interested me a lot, even though it is not easy to read. But this man has something to say and he knows his material (Author's translation)].

Nevertheless, this timidly positive comment cheered the author up. In fact during July of the same year, Benjamin wrote to his friend Siegfried Kracauer to thank him for the review of his writings, which had been published in the "Frankfurter Zeitung". In the same letter he points out the publication, in the same journal, of an article citing the studies of the Warburgkreis, in particular Panofsky's essay *Die Perspektive als symbolische Form*. The article defined the essay as the only noteworthy text in the panorama of contemporary literature on the art of Roman and Late Roman time, which Benjamin had approached through his reading of Riegl:

Nun habe ich noch einmal die große Freude an Ihrer Rezension gehabt und will Ihnen das schreiben und Ihnen danken. Sie ist unter den vorliegenden die einzige, die nicht nur dies oder jenes hat beleuchten und darstellen sondern mir einen Rang in einer Ordnung hat anweisen können. Und als sollte ihr ein Glückssiegel anhängen ist sie genau an meinem Geburtstag erschienen [...] übrigens war mir auch der Leitartikel in dieser Nummer des Literaturblattes [der Frankfurter Zeitung] wichtig. Er hat die Vermutung bestätigt, daß die für unsere Anschauungsweise wichtigsten wissenschaftlichen Publikationen sich mehr und mehr um den Warburgkreis gruppieren und darum kann es mir nur um so lieber sein, daß neulich, indirekt, die Mitteilung kam, Saxl sei intensiv für mein Buch interessiert (Letter to Kracauer of 21th July 1928, in Benjamin GS I, 910).

[Now, I have once again had the pleasure of your review and I wanted to write to you to thank you. It's the only one that has not only been able to illuminate and illustrate this or that, but also to assign me a rank in an order. And moreover, as a benevolent sign, it appeared on my birthday [...] by the way, the lead article in the literary sheet [of the "Frankfurter Zeitung"] was also important to me. It confirmed the hypothesis that the most important scholarly publications from our point of view are increasingly gravitating around the Warburg circle, which is why I can only be glad that recently, indirect news reached me that Saxl would be intensely interested in my book (Author's translation)].

So Benjamin felt the affinity between his research and that of the Warburgkreis. Saxl's alleged interest in his work, however, never manifested itself. Benjamin therefore came to terms with remaining an intellectual outside of the academic environment. In 1924, however, his thought had already reached the turning point towards a materialist direction that would definitively distance him from academia (Rampley 2000, 12), marking a change in his own writing style, since the elaboration of the collection of aphorisms *Einbahnstraße*, published by the same publisher of the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauspiels* in 1928. Not surprisingly, this period would coincide with the initial draft of the author's gigantic unfinished work: *Das Passagenwerk* (Benjamin [1910-1940] 1978, I, 459). Nevertheless, the figure of Warburg is still present in Benjamin's reflections many years later when, in his 1935 essay on Bachofen, he recalls him with these words:

It would be worth tracing the type of the lordly scholar, splendidly inaugurated by Leibniz, down to our day, where it still gives rise to a number of noble and remarkable minds, such as Aby Warburg, who founded the library which bears his name and has just left Germany for England (Benjamin [1935] 2002, III, 15).

Even if we can just talk of a missed encounter between these two authors, the persistence of the Hamburg scholar's figure in Benjamin's essay up to 1935 seems to be the symptomatic result of a deep fascination that perhaps went beyond the author's simple awareness. This affinity, moreover, was felt in several studies concerning the two scholars, particularly within a perspective that questions both the relationship between historical time and image (Didi-Huberman 2000) and the dynamic and collective nature of the memory deposited within the works of art (Rampley 2000, 101-102; Zumbusch 2010, 117). It is not possible for us to retrace the steps of these theoretical approaches here: although illuminating at a hermeneutical level, these parallels may risk to appear forced from a strictly historical-biographical point of view. For this reason, we have chosen to address the theme of this 'problematic affinity' within an extremely tight framework, that is, by trying to locate the only direct quotations from Warburg in Benjamin's work. In fact, it seems important to us to note that in the very book that should have earned Benjamin the professorship at the Frankfurt University there are several quotations,

eight of them, from Warburg's essay published in Heidelberg in 1920, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten*. These quotations are, therefore, prior to that radicalization in a political sense of the Berlin writer's reflection, which constitutes an objection to the comparison between his work and Warburg's, as Scholem himself has argued (Campanini 2015).

However, only in abstract terms it is possible to separate Benjamin's reflections on the Baroque from his later writings which, as we shall see, take up some essential elements from the 1928 text, for instance the figure of the saturnine acedia (Bertozzi 2010, 86) and, above all, the theoretical results of the reflection on allegory's nature (Pinotti 2010, 157). Precisely for this reason, in order to attempt determining the importance of Warburg's contributions within Benjamin's text on Baroque drama, we will then try to identify how his influence could also be traceable in the development of certain concepts that Benjamin addresses in later texts, such as *Das Passagenwerk* and the last *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* thesis (Zumbusch 2004, 268). Not wishing to dwell further on this subject here, we want to point out that although the existence of references to Warburg's work in Benjamin's text on German Baroque drama has been noted by various interpreters, it seems that no one wanted to analyse their possible function within the structure of Benjamin's book. Actually, the majority of studies have concentrated on the presence of Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl's essay published in 1923, dedicated to Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I*. This work was in fact already mentioned by Benjamin in 1924 in two letters, where he writes that it was so fundamental that he had to slow down the drafting of the first version of the text on the Baroque drama (letter to Salomon of 29 December 1924, reported in Schiavoni 1999, XIII).

For this reason, in order to establish a comparison between Benjamin's studies and Warburgkreis' work, the attention of researchers has been primarily focused on the interpretation of the winged figure of Dürer's *Melencolia I*. It is worth noting that in Benjamin's book Warburg's text is quoted even more often than Panofsky's and Saxl's (8 versus 7 times): it seems strange, then, that Warburg's essay is not mentioned in the correspondence concerning the progress of the work. And yet the function of these references within Benjamin's book is not of a mere academic

quotation. They are in fact intimately involved in the development of the author's representation of the Baroque period as well as in his reflection on the mechanisms of transmission of the pagan tradition through the medieval and Renaissance periods. This issue in particular is addressed in the last paragraph of the text, that touches very closely the central themes of Warburg's reflection. The contribution of Warburg's work in Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauspiels* does not end with the iconographic interpretation of Dürer's *Melencolia I*, but, as we will try to show, it plays a central role in the overall structure of the text, and perhaps is also of significant importance in Benjamin's subsequent speculation.

Aby Warburg and the German Baroque Drama

The book on the origin of German Baroque drama has been considered a difficult text to read since its inception. It is possible that the professors at the University of Frankfurt who had to evaluate it had not even read it, or discouraged, they had given up after leafing through the introduction, the *Erkenntniskritische Vorrede* that, in Scholem's words, plays the role of "the angel with the flaming sword at the entrance into the Paradise of writing" (Scholem [1968] 2001, 148). Still, the text would be incomprehensible without this introduction, as it defines the intention of the entire work: to represent the idea of German Baroque drama (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 218). Nothing could therefore appear further from Warburg's 'philology of detail', that requires slowness, thoroughness, attention and respect for the details where 'God hides' and caution against any temptation of hermeneutic closure" (Centanni 2002, IX). And yet it is exactly in what Benjamin defines as the representation of the idea, where truly the very task of philosophical speculation lies, that an assonance with Warburg's thought and research 'method' is concealed: the need to overcome the generalizations by which the work of art of the past was stripped of any properly historical content and subjected to a purely aestheticising classification (Gombrich 1970, 39-40).

Even though the project outlined by Benjamin in his gnoseological preface is rooted in some theoretical postulations, peculiar to the author, linked to his youthful speculation on language (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 215-218), it is nevertheless clear that the procedure that leads his analysis of texts and images of Baroque dramaturgy has several similarities with the one

implemented by Warburg in his essay on the age of Reformation. Primarily an initial and fundamental claim to the legitimacy of their object of investigation is common to both studies: the fact of taking into consideration materials usually regarded as marginal by aesthetic research. Thus Warburg, at the beginning of his text *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten*, warns that in the course of the essay images unrelated to the purely formal speculation of art history will be examined, for two essential reasons: first, because they are indissolubly dependent on the content, and second, because they are aesthetically unattractive (Warburg 1920, 4). In fact, the objects of Warburg's essay are xylographic representations of images that are, at first glance, void of any artistic connotation, linked to the monstrosities of Reformation's astrological speculation and political propaganda. These materials, by the author's own admission, would have normally attracted the attention of religious scholars rather than art historians. He however points out that:

It is one of the prime duties of art history to bring such forms out of the twilight of ideological polemic and to subject them to close historical scrutiny. For there is one crucial issue in the history of style and civilization – the influence of antiquity on the culture of Renaissance Europe as a whole – that cannot otherwise be fully understood and resolved (Warburg [1920] 1999, 598).

From the very beginning of his book, Benjamin asserts with equal strength his choice to study an era where art-historical research had always been burdened by “prejudices of stylistic classification and aesthetic evaluation” (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 239). The same prejudices that had prevented any access to a real understanding of Baroque dramatic literature. Since the *Vorrede*, in fact, the author criticizes the artistic theory that had dismissed the historical specificity of the Baroque drama by an inductive procedure which, through a mere psychological reaction, had ended equating it with ancient tragedy. In the same way, Benjamin attacks those who, by invoking the need for an undetermined artistic development, had reduced its peculiarity to an inevitable period of decadence of the Renaissance drama, if not to a necessary transitional phase towards German Neoclassicism (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 232-234). On the contrary, Benjamin is convinced that baroque drama can find its

own internal coherence; but in order to define its true value it should have been examined through a stylistic criticism that did not consider the whole except in its determination through details, and by which “the Non-Renaissance, not to say the Baroque features, appear everywhere” (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 240). It is precisely in this attention to detail that the representation of the idea shows a deep affinity with Warburg's ‘method’ (Desideri 1980, 131). Indeed, it is not accomplished by means of abstract concepts, but only “im Mittel der Empirie” (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 214), that is, having become aware of the incongruity of a merely inductive or deductive procedure:

The impossibility of the deductive elaboration of artistic forms [...] provides the spur to a productive scepticism. This can be likened to a pause for breath, after which thought can be totally and unhurriedly concentrated even on the very minutest object without the slightest inhibition. For the very minutest things will be discussed wherever the work of art and its form are considered with a view to judging their content (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 45).

Therefore, the representation that is philosophy's task to trace is only realised through the abandonment of abstract thought in favour of a descent into the objective particulars of the world (Barale 2009, 61), immediately taking on a micrological dimension:

Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking in momentum. Both are made up of the distinct and the disparate [...] the relationship between the minute precision of the work and the proportions of the sculptural or intellectual whole demonstrates that truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 28-29).

As mentioned, such reflections do not find a place in Warburg, but they lead at least to an incredibly similar writing style in the two texts: the difficulty within the body of Benjamin's work is in fact mainly due to a ‘mosaic’ composition that has been repeatedly attributed to Warburg's work as well (Gombrich 1970, 59). The text of the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauspiels* appears almost hermetically sealed “in the inlay of its more than six hundred quotations” (“nell'intarsio delle sue oltre seicento

citazioni": so Schiavoni 1980, 201), the collection of which Benjamin boasted as an essential effort for the purposes of his work. He maintained this restless research and accumulation of materials as a constant in his style of thinking and writing: a characteristic, therefore, not dependent on his materialist turning point. On the contrary, it appears fundamental for understanding the particular declination that his adhesion to Marxism assumed in the years following the work on the Baroque drama (Arendt [1968] 1970, 322-325), and that, in our opinion, finds a counterpart in the research style of Warburg's work. This methodological affinity testifies to a closeness that cannot be explained in terms of dependencies or borrowings between the two authors: however, it is perhaps due to having the same strand of thought.

In Warburg's as in Benjamin's case, it is always the analysis of detail, delved into with philological love, that replaces the great points of view of universal art histories. As in Benjamin's opinion, this was the only way to ensure that the major developmental processes were illuminated in their connections (Warburg [1912] 1999, 585). Furthermore, for both scholars only the 'infinite' analysis of the image, often and indeed especially of works considered less artistically relevant, would have made it possible to read "what had never been written". This is why the investigation focuses, in Benjamin as in Warburg, on the territories left 'uncultivated' by traditional historiography (Warburg [1920] 1999, 651). The same territories where, as Benjamin would have said some years later, only madness had reigned (Benjamin [1927-1940], 1999, 456). The very material chosen by Warburg in his study on the Reformation seems to be in fact in stark contrast with the traditional image of an age of rationalistic enlightenment, which had seen Luther as its protagonist. On the contrary, the analysis of the texts and images presented shows the physiognomy of a profoundly contradictory age, divided between magic and science, pagan divination and mathematical calculation (Warburg [1920] 1999, 599).

This era thus presents the ambiguous figure of that 'two-faced herm' in whose irreducible polarities Warburg had seen the fundamental legacy of 'schizophrenic' Western civilization throughout its history: the influence of antiquity. It is of these polarities that the memory of images, the *Bildgedächtnis*, an expression Benjamin takes from Warburg's essay without mentioning it, preserves the memory. This polarity allows Warburg

to sketch, in his text on Luther, the hypothesis of a “more profoundly positive critique of a historiography that rests on a purely chronological theory of development” (Warburg [1920] 1999, 599). This is an intuition that Benjamin would have ended up elaborating on years later, thanks to the discovery of what he would have called dialectical images, as we will try to suggest. However, we would like to avoid referring to these later developments of the author’s reflection here. Benjamin’s study on the Baroque already states:

In literary-historical analysis differences and extremes are brought together in order that they might be relativized in evolutionary terms; in a conceptual treatment they acquire the status of complementary forces [...] They do not make the similar identical, but they effect a synthesis between extremes (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 38-41)

Thus, it is not the masterpiece that guides Benjamin’s art-historical research, but precisely what is first and foremost unattractive in the light of an aesthetic consideration and simply incomprehensible for a linear conception of history: the apparent excesses of artistic development (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 227). Such premises suggest that the representation of the Baroque drama’s idea would force the research:

Rather will it be guided by the assumption that what seems diffuse and disparate will be found to be linked in the adequate concepts as elements of a synthesis. And so the production of lesser writers, whose works frequently contain the most eccentric features, will be valued no less than those of the great writer (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 58).

Although Benjamin here explicitly refers to Riegl’s teaching, that, as mentioned, was to become a constant point of reference for his theoretical reflection on art (Kemp 1973), it is clear that the attempt made in his book on the Baroque goes far beyond the Viennese master’s work. This is evident in the curriculum where in 1928, the author tries to retrospectively summarize the programmatic intent of his own art-historical research method:

To open a path to the work of art by destroying the doctrine of the territorial character of art [...] through an analysis that would regard the work of art as

an integral expression of the religious, metaphysical, political, and economic tendencies of its age (Benjamin [1928] 1999, 78).

It is therefore this attempt, that Benjamin already implied in his work on German Baroque drama, that will be of fundamental importance for his subsequent historiographic reflection. This attempt allows us once again to approach Warburg. In order to understand the value of Baroque poetics, it would have been necessary to identify the context of autonomous significance in which it had been created (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 255). This meant, in contrast to the unitary approach of formalist aesthetic doctrine, to initiate research that, like Warburg's, did not disdain:

The labor of examining the individual work of art within the immediate context of its time, in order to interpret as 'causal factors' the ideological and practical demands of real life (Warburg [1902] 1999, 186).

It is precisely in the light of such a quest that Benjamin finds it necessary to note how, even against the declared Aristotelian poetics of the Baroque poets, the elements of modern drama differ totally from those of ancient tragedy. The Baroque production's predilection for depicting the ruin of royal dynasties, for example, could not be considered a simple characteristic derived from ancient tragedy, but must have belonged to a far more essential order of considerations; because, unlike tragedy, the object of the Baroque drama appears to Benjamin not to be the myth, but history. It is precisely this interest in the world's history that determines Baroque poetics entirely: "das geschichtliche Leben wie es jene Epoche sich darstellte ist sein Gehalt, sein wahrer Gegenstand" (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 242-243) ["historical life, as the era conceived it, is its content, its true object" (Author's translation)], to the point that, as the author underlines, the term 'Trauerspiel' could be used to indicate both the Baroque drama and historical events (It is this representation of history as 'Trauerspiel', as a mournful play of events that finds no dissolution and no redemption, that has to be explained. The cause of the sovereign's ruin, as a representative of the historical world, does not seem to be the ethical transgression that determines the tragic hero's extraordinary end:

It is the very estate of man as creature which provides the reason for the catastrophe. This typical catastrophe [...] is what the dramatists had in mind

when – with a word which is employed more consciously in dramaturgy than in criticism – they described a work as a *Trauerspiel* (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 89)

The ruin of princes, and with them of the entire human community, is thus for the Baroque era the ‘natural side’ of the historical process (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 267). In this representation of the world's history as a purely creaturely state marked by guilt emerges how Baroque drama shows its affinity not so much with the Renaissance as with liturgical-medieval drama. Yet this affinity is called into question by the ‘irredeemable despair’ in which the last word of the baroque drama consists, that is to say, by the total lack of an eschatology. As Benjamin states:

For the decisive factor in the escapism of the baroque is not the antithesis of history and nature but the comprehensive secularization of the historical in the state of creation (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 92).

While in the Middle Ages the creature's ruin marked by sin was nevertheless a necessary stage on the road to salvation, the Baroque drama sinks completely into its earthly constitution, and “the rash flight into a nature deprived of grace” is moreover, according to Benjamin, “specifically German” (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 81). The formal language delineated in his literary production must therefore find the explanation “as the emergence of the contemplative necessities which are implicit in the contemporary theological situation” (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 80-81). Benjamin's art-historical consideration is therefore not limited to the mere ascertainment of ‘facts’ uncritically immersed in a chronological-causal relationship, but questions first and foremost the reason for the presence of a certain image in a certain age, in order to unfold the dialectic of representation and self-representation within a certain historical period (as Elena Tavani notes, this is precisely one of the possible meanings of the subsequent concept of ‘dialectical image’: Tavani, 2010, 165). In similar terms to Warburg's reflection on the significance of the Renaissance reinterpretation of the ancient figurative repertoire (Bing [1960] 2014), Benjamin expresses himself regarding the presence of medieval imagery within Baroque dramaturgy, when, in a letter to Rang in November 1923, he writes:

I ask myself, to what should you attribute the fact that the Protestant writers in particular [...] exhibit a wealth of ideas that are medieval to the highest degree: an extremely drastic concept of death, an atmosphere permeated by the dance of death, a concept of history as grand tragedy. Of course, I am familiar with the differences between this and the Middle Ages, but I still ask, why is it that precisely this highly medieval range of concepts could have such a spellbinding effect at that time? [...] I suspect that the state of Protestantism at that time, which is not accessible to me, would shed light on this question (Benjamin [1910-1940] 1994, 216).

The identification of this link will play a fundamental role in Benjamin's text, particularly in the last paragraphs of the chapters dedicated to tragedy and allegory: not by chance, those places of the book where most of the Warburg's quotations are concentrated. It is therefore in a world scenario perceived as condemned to pure immanence, to the blind mechanism of a nature devoid of grace, that the Baroque scene is set: this is the same landscape that will be revealed before the wide-open eyes of the angel of history in the 9th of the *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* thesis of 1940; but here it is above all the spectacle that unfolds in the infinite brooding of Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I*:

The images and figures presented in the German *Trauerspiel* are dedicated to Dürer's genius of winged melancholy. The intense life of its crude theatre begins in the presence of this genius (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 158).

The Winged Melancholy

The survival of the medieval figurative repertoire within Baroque literary and artistic production can be explained by the relationship that Benjamin develops between melancholy and Protestantism in the last part of the chapter dedicated to the comparison between *Trauerspiel* and tragedy. According to the author, the Protestant Reformation establishes a deep bond with the medieval world and, from Luther's rejection of 'good works' value for religious life, ends up instilling:

[The Lutheranism instilled] into the people a strict sense of obedience to duty, but in its great men it produced melancholy. Even in Luther himself [...] there are signs of a reaction against the assault on good works. 'Faith', of

course, carried him through, but it did not prevent life from becoming stale (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 138).

The condemnation of good works results in an absolute separation between profane and divine worlds: since human actions are stripped of any value:

Something new arose: an empty world [...] those who looked deeper saw the scene of their existence as a rubbish heap (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 139).

With the Reformation, therefore, the hierarchical trait of the Middle Ages returns to impose its dominance on a world which is denied any direct access to the afterlife (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 259). Therefore the theory of mourning that essentially characterises the 'mournful play' of German Baroque drama is developed "in the description of that world which is revealed under the gaze of the melancholy man" (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 139), so much that the figurative and textual heritage focused on the melancholic's figure provides, according to Benjamin:

The philosophical ideas and political convictions which underlie the representation of history as a *Trauerspiel* (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 142).

Here, then, emerges the essential meaning of Dürer's *Melencolia I* engraving, that, according to the Berlin writer, anticipates the Baroque in many respects (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 319). The millenary codification of the complex of symptoms attributed to the melancholic temperament in fact

Could not but make an impression on the baroque, which had such a clear vision of the misery of mankind in its creaturely estate [...] to which the speculative thought of the age felt itself bound by the bonds of the church (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 146).

The ancient tradition referred precisely to the depth of the creaturely state to codify the melancholy's physiological origin, but not only. Benjamin remarks, in fact, that in the Middle Ages the doctrine of humors had returned to Europe through the mediation of Arabic science, but also that:

Arabia preserve the other Hellenistic science which nourished the doctrine of the melancholic: astrology (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 148).

With this remark, the author refers to a fundamental field of Warburg's studies, that resulted in his famous speech at the Tenth International Congress of Art History in Rome in 1912: the research on the survival of the ancient pagan gods within the late antique and medieval astrological tradition. Like Warburg and Panofsky and Saxl before him, however, Benjamin refers here first and foremost to Giehlow's findings (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 327-328) to show how ancient cosmological wisdom had found in the mediation of Marsilio Ficino's *De vita triplici* the missing link of a long chain of survivals that from Greece had brought the ancient Hellenistic cosmological order up to the circle of Emperor Maximilian I (Wedepohl 2015). Through these steps, the theory of the melancholic temperament had maintained a deep connection with the doctrine of astral influences, to the point that:

According to Warburg, in the Renaissance, when the reinterpretation of saturnine melancholy as a theory of genius was carried out with a radicalism unequalled even in the thought of antiquity, 'dread of Saturn [...] occupied the central position in astrological belief' (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 151).

It is here that Benjamin encounters Warburg's interpretation of Dürer's work, that the Hamburg scholar had linked precisely to the revival of pagan demonic antiquity in the age of the Reformation. As Alice Barale has already pointed out in her essay *La malinconia dell'immagine*, the interpretations of the two scholars in relation to Dürer's engraving do not coincide, but rather in some points take antithetical directions (Barale 2009, 62). Yet in Benjamin's reflection, the issue that the melancholic's figure poses to the Baroque is in Warburg's view the fundamental problem of any image: "the question of how it might be possible to discover for oneself the spiritual powers of Saturn and yet escape madness" (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 151). Saturn's children show in fact to the highest degree the signs of those multiple polarities that distinguish the 'god of extremes', and that render him, in turn, the figure of a 'saturnine dialectic' present within each image. In this *Dialektik des Monstrums* that Warburg would have planned to include as the title of a possible supplement to his essay on Luther, is shown how the symbol is not:

Une synthèse abstraite de la raison et de l'irrationnel, de la forme et de la matière, etc., mais [...] le symptôme concret d'un clivage sans cesse à l'œuvre dans la 'tragédie de la culture' (Didi-Huberman 2002, 284).

[An abstract synthesis of reason and the irrational, of form and matter, etc. – but [...] the concrete symptom of a cleavage incessantly at work in the 'tragedy of culture (Author's translation)].

In the specific case of the saturnine melancholy, as Warburg writes and Benjamin faithfully reports, in order to access its 'positive' side, the 'illa eroica' melancholy sought by Melanchthon, the ancient tradition envisaged a precise diet for body and spirit, together with a kind of astrological magic that was described in detail in Ficino's *De vita triplici* and thereafter taken up in the iconographic program of Dürer's engraving (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 329). Thanks to these indications Giehlow and then Warburg were able to interpret all its figurative elements. The scales as well as the magic square hanging on the table above the figure of the winged melancholy were thus revealed as objects capable of evoking the benevolent influence of Jupiter. Under this, according to the Hellenistic astrological tradition of the great astral conjunctions:

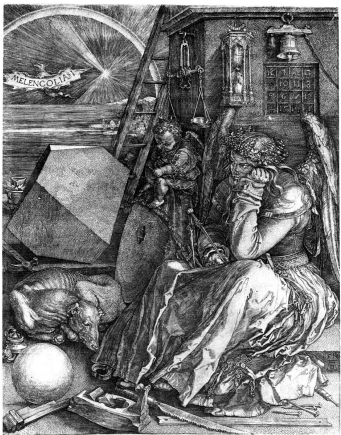
Harmful inspirations are transformed into beneficial ones, Saturn becomes the protector of the most sublime investigations (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 151).

This residue of Hellenistic-medieval cosmology was thus the true subject of the engraving: only its understanding could allow the full appreciation of Dürer's genius. For both Benjamin and Warburg, the drawing ends up representing the very image of contemplation, transforming the figure of the planetary child-devourer demon into the:

The image of the thinking, working human being (Warburg [1920] 1999, 644).

However, in Benjamin the contemplative dedication of the melancholic retains a disturbing aspect since it remains inexorably bounded to the dimension of creaturely things – indicated by Warburg relives –, to the

The Greek god of time and the Roman spirit of the crops (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 151).



Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, engraving (24 x 18,8 cm), 1514.

Since the tenacity expressed in the intention of mourning stems from an extreme fidelity to the world of things, the melancholic continually recalls around him the fragments of a landscape from which all relations to transcendence have been removed. His sinking ad infinitum in a world separated by God finally reveals the demonic side of this gaze. It is for this reason that the mournful mask by which the melancholic attempts to restore meaning to the world coincides with the most arrogant of ostentations, with his absolute separateness from God (Benjamin [1928] 2018, 318-319 and 333). Indeed, the anguish of the loss of meaning inevitably induces the melancholic to bind himself to such emptied appearances, to which he arbitrarily assigns purely exterior meanings, ending up magnifying and endlessly repeating them. As Warburg notes with regard to the Baroque:



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engraving (24 x 18,8 cm), 1514.

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the anguish of the loss of meaning inevitably induces the melancholic to bind himself to such emptied appearances, to which he arbitrarily assigns purely exterior meanings, ending up magnifying and endlessly repeating them. As Warburg notes with regard to the Baroque:

One aspect of the development towards the Baroque consists in the fact that expressive values were cut loose from the mint of real life in movement. Here the task of social memory as a mnemonic function emerges clearly. Through renewed contact with the monuments of the past, the sap should be able to flow directly from the subsoil of the past to impregnate the classicizing form in such a way that an energetic creation should not become a calligraphic dynamogram (Warburg [1927-1928] 1970, 250).

The distancing of the image from the vital experiences whose the symbols of the past are bearers (in which, as we shall see, allegoresis consists: Rampley 1997), represents the first form of exorcism from the magical identification of the image with its meaning (Wind [1931] 2009,

83-111). But for both our authors an excessive distance between the image and its meaning makes the appearance of the image increasingly consistent, until it reaches the threatening dimensions of a fetish, an idol.

As Alice Barale writes:

La riflessione benjaminiana permette allora di intravedere un motivo teorico implicito, come si vedrà, già nell'analisi di Warburg. Dietro alle fisionomie agitate dei drammi e dei quadri barocchi non si cela un semplice disinteresse per l'interiorizzazione, ma il caos, l'angoscia per la perdita del significato. Nella dilatazione della forma si esprime per l'io lo smarrimento di una distanza prospettica nei confronti del mondo, il sottrarsi di quest'ultimo a quella possibilità di configurazione la quale soltanto, come si vedrà, garantisce dalla malinconia. L'eccessivo allontanamento di immagine e contenuto riconduce così allo stesso risultato della loro primitiva, magica identificazione: il significato a cui la rappresentazione dà corpo, il suo 'eidos', 'si oscura' e rimane soltanto il potere soggiogante di un eidolon non più interrogabile, di una datità immodificabile (Barale 2009, 65).

Benjamin's reflection allows us to glimpse an implicit theoretical motif, as we will see, in Warburg's analysis. Behind the agitated physiognomies of baroque dramas and paintings lies not a simply disinterest in internalization, but chaos, anguish of the loss of meaning. In the expansion of form, the ego expresses the loss of a perspective distance from the world [...] the excessive distancing between image and content thus leads back to the same result of their primitive, magical identification: the meaning to which the representation gives body, its 'eidos', 'obscures' and only the subjugating power of an *eidolon* that can no longer be questioned, of an unchangeable datum remains (Author's translation)].

Indeed, the traits of medieval acedia prevail in Benjamin's interpretation of the Baroque melancholy, since it remains inexorably bound to the creaturely dimension of a world that appears in ruins. Precisely in Dürer's engraving:

The concept of this pathological state, in which the most simple object appears to be a symbol of some enigmatic wisdom because it lacks any natural, creative relationship to us, was set in an incomparably productive

context It accords with this that in the proximity of Albrecht Dürer's figure, *Melencolia*, the utensils of active life are lying around unused on the floor, as objects of contemplation. (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 140).

This is why, in the author's reflection, Baroque melancholy is essentially linked to what he considers to be the main form of expression of the time:

This 'ripest and most mysterious fruit of the cosmological culture of Maximilian's circle', as Warburg has called it, may well be considered as a seed in which the allegorical flower of the baroque, still held in check by the power of a genius, lies ready to burst into bloom (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 154).

Allegory and the Survival of the Ancient Gods

Benjamin's reflection on Dürer's *Melencolia I* leads to the book's chapter dedicated to the comparison between Trauerspiel and allegory. In fact, it is in this expressive form that the only divertissement of the melancholic consists. It is around it that the representation of the historical-cultural connections that define the particular context of the birth of the Baroque drama 'gather' in its own idea (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 361-390). We want to argue that this is precisely the place where it is possible to measure a true affinity between Warburg's and Benjamin's thought. It is here that most of the direct quotations from Warburg's text can be found. All of them are dedicated to a reflection on the mechanisms of transmission of the pagan tradition in the age of the Reformation and in the Renaissance in general. Therefore, this chapter takes on paradigmatic importance in order to implement a comparison between the thought of the two authors. Once again, Benjamin's study on the allegorical claims the legitimacy of a choice that is in clear disagreement with the classicist aesthetic canon that finds in the symbol the centre of every philosophy of art. Yet for Benjamin, this is the domain of a usurper, since the concept of plastic symbol proposes a coincidence between sensible and supersensible that belongs only to the theological symbol, the Adamitic name (Benjamin [1928] 1991, I, 336-337). Once again, these reflections refer to some peculiar premises of the author's philosophy of language, according to which every language is constituted, after the paradisiacal fall, also as a sign convention destined to refer to something other than itself. In this form, language is

degraded to a mere means of communication of purely external meanings, thus to be fundamentally allegorical (Benjamin [1916] 1991, 152-157). Allegory is therefore the fundamental corrective of classicism (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 351): it clearly shows the intrinsic separation between appearance and meaning that takes place in every profane language, of which art is only one of the various expressions. And yet in Baroque allegory, this separation becomes radical, abysmal. It is in fact the result of an age that feels its own separation from God as absolute, the fruit of the same vision of history that opens up before the eyes of the melancholic. Since everything appears emptied of meaning, as we have mentioned, the melancholic binds himself to the fragments of a world that appears as a heap of ruins. For this reason, as Benjamin writes that "Allegories are in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things" (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 354). The image in the realm of allegorical intuition in fact is:

A fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The false appearance of totality is extinguished. For the *eidos* disappears, the simile ceases to exist, and the cosmos it contained shrivels up. The dry rebuses which remain contain an insight, which is still available to the confused investigator (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 176).

Precisely for this reason, Baroque allegory once again shows a deep connection with the medieval world:

In comparison to the symbol, the western conception of allegory is a late manifestation which has its basis in certain very fertile cultural conflicts (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 197).

To the point that it is identified by Benjamin as the typical expressive form of the periods of so-called 'decadence'. Allegory shows that level of meaning in which the images of the past, no longer believed to be true, are finalized to the exposition of a sense that is totally external to them. Benjamin, not by chance, quotes Usener, one of Warburg's masters, to investigate the mechanism through which, starting from the Hellenistic age, the ancient symbols of the pagan gods become means of allegorical expression:

Usener writes: 'To the extent that the belief in the gods of the classical age lost its strength, the ideas of the gods, as shaped by art and literature, were released and became available as suitable means of poetic representation. This process can be traced [...] from Horace and Ovid, to its peak in the later Alexandrian school [...] Small wonder that with these writers there is more room even for abstract concepts; for them the personified gods have no greater significance than these concepts; they have both become very flexible forms for the ideas of the poetic imagination' (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 223).

And yet, even if the existence of the ancient gods in their late antique and medieval allegorical guises appears to be ghostly, Benjamin notes that:

In the course of such a literature the world of the ancient gods would have had to die out, and it is precisely allegory which preserved it. For an appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity, is one of the strongest impulses in allegory (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 223).

The absolute separation between form and meaning that allegory exhibits shows how *allegoresis* triggers a contradictory dialectic in which: "the harmonious inwardness of classicism plays no role" (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 160). On the one hand, since allegory shows each image as equivalent to any meaning and wrenches it from its original context, the allegorist humiliates the images of tradition, 'empties' them of meaning (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 350-351). Yet, on the other hand, he saves them from dispersion. The Baroque 'winged melancholy' therefore accomplishes a truly dialectical leap, central to understanding the affinity between Warburg's and Benjamin's thought, since "in its tenacious self-absorption it embraces dead objects in its contemplation, in order to redeem them" (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 157). In addition to the explicit eschatological meaning attributed to *allegoresis* in the book's closing, which once again refers to the author's theological reflection, such 'salvation' can also be read in a properly historical sense when approached to Warburg's concept of survival. In fact, also in Warburg's view *allegoresis* appears to be one of the vehicles through which the memory of the ancient gods' Pantheon is preserved since the Hellenistic age. Although destined to lose, together with the reference to the original experiences from which they arose, even

their own specific traits, only in this way the ancient gods were able to carry out their existence banished from the church and survive their own end (Warburg [1913] 2010, 328). Warburg, starting in these pages a reflection similar to Benjamin's, had in fact pointed out how:

Evidence of the survival of the ancient gods was of two kinds. Firstly, they survived in the austere guise of moral allegories, in medieval descriptions culled from late antique sources and prefixed to allegorical interpretations of Ovid (Warburg [1908] 1999, 557).

The allegorical disguises of the ancient gods had thus represented, as Benjamin writes, the only possible salvation in a context such as the medieval Christian one (Benjamin [1928] 1991, 398). For the Berlin author indeed:

It was absolutely decisive for the development of this mode of thought that not only transitoriness, but also guilt should seem evidently to have its home in the province of idols and of the flesh. The allegorically significant is prevented by guilt from finding fulfilment of its meaning in itself [...] this view, rooted in the doctrine of the fall of the creature, which brought down nature with it, is responsible for the ferment which distinguishes the profundity of western allegory (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 224).

This 'doctrine' once again links the Baroque world to the medieval one. But if, on the one hand, "the deadness of the figures and the abstraction of the concepts are therefore the precondition for the allegorical metamorphosis of the pantheon into a world of magical, conceptual creatures" (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 226), on the other hand, Benjamin notes how it is on these very transformations that "their survival (*Fortleben*) in an unsuitable, indeed hostile environment" (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 226) is based. Allegory is therefore one of the means of ancient gods' survival up to the Renaissance. It is precisely at this point that Benjamin's thought intersects with Warburg's, whom the author quotes several times precisely during these reflections:

The classically refined world of the ancient divinities has, of course, been impressed upon us so deeply since the time of Winckelmann, that we entirely forget that it is a new creation of scholarly humanist culture; this 'Olympic'

aspect of antiquity had first to be wrested from the traditional 'demonic' side; for the ancient divinities had, as cosmic demons, belonged among the religious powers of Christian Europe uninterruptedly since the end of antiquity, and in practice they influenced its way of life so decisively that it is not possible to deny the existence of an alternative government of pagan cosmology, in particular astrology, tacitly accepted by the Christian church' (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 226).

Although the existence of the ancient gods in their allegorical guise appears emptied, phantasmal, Benjamin shows that the allegorical intention remains extremely faithful to its objects (Pezzella 1982, 61): as Warburg points out, the very selection of the pagan figurative repertoire in the medieval period:

They did not depend on learned recollection alone but on the attraction of their own intact astral-religious identities [...] seemed to the astrological believers of the day like the fateful hieroglyphs of an oracular book (Warburg [1912] 1999, 564).

This is another reason why, against any abstractly aestheticizing perspective, such 'abstruse allegories' could have interested the Renaissance period. Indeed it was through them that the memory of a genuinely ancient symbolism could be preserved since the Middle Ages (Warburg [1908] 1999, 559-560). Therefore, while getting control of the magic potential of the image, the allegory keeps its memory alive (Barale 2009, 67), to the point that even in the Renaissance:

European antiquity was divided and its obscure after-effects in the middle-ages drew inspiration from its radiant after-image in humanism. Out of deep spiritual kinship Warburg has given a fascinating explanation of how, in the Renaissance 'heavenly manifestations were conceived in human terms, so that their demonic power might be at least visually contained'. The Renaissance stimulates the visual memory [...] but at the same time it awakens a visual speculation which is perhaps of greater import for the formation of style (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 221).

It is precisely for this reason that the *Bildgedächtnis*, the memory of images, an expression that Benjamin takes from the conclusions of Warburg's text, always requires us to remember that:

Athens has constantly to be won back again from Alexandria (Warburg [1920] 1999, 650).

Indeed, even Dürer's work, which for Warburg represents the triumph of artistic and humanistic genius over the monstrosities of the Reformation era, does not seem safe from the *monstra* of astrological imagination:

Dürer's Melancholy has yet to break quite free of the superstitious terrors of antiquity. Her head is garlanded not with bay but with *teukrion*, the classic herbal remedy for melancholy; and she follows Ficino's instructions by protecting herself against Saturn's malefic influence with her numerological magic square (Warburg [1920] 1999, 647).

Even what for Warburg represents the liberation from the dread of Saturn (Warburg 1920, 61) shows again in action his definition of antiquity as 'a two-faced herm' of demonic and olympian. These conclusions, that Benjamin faithfully reports in his book, oppose to a purely positive interpretation of Warburg's reading of Dürer's engraving (Bertozzi 2015, 18):

For the Baroque, even for the Renaissance, the marble and the bronzes of antiquity still preserved something of the horror with which Augustine had recognized in them 'the bodies of the gods so to speak'. 'Certain spirits have been induced to take up their abode in them, and they have the power either to do harm or to satisfy many of the wants of those who offer them divine honours and obedient worship'. Or, as Warburg puts it, with reference to the Renaissance: 'The formal beauty of the figures of the gods, and the tasteful reconciliation of Christian and pagan beliefs should not blind us to the fact that even in Italy around 1520, that is at the time of the most free and creative artistic activity, antiquity was venerated, as it were, in a double herma, which had one dark, demonic countenance, that called for a superstitious cult, and another, serene Olympian one, which demanded aesthetic veneration' (Benjamin [1928] 1998, 225).

It is precisely around this investigation on the “polar functioning of the empathetic pictorial memory” (Warburg [1920] 1999, 650) that the comparison between the two scholars’ research can take place. In the dialectical ferment between appearance and meaning that allegory exhibits, works the same historical memory that Warburg had pursued in the migrations of the ancient pagan gods up to their humanistic resurrection. Benjamin would have sought a similar dialectic in every image of the past, which, precisely, for this reason, he wanted to call a dialectical image.

Conclusions

As we have seen, Benjamin’s reflections on allegory intersect with what we might call the fundamental program of the Hamburg scholar: the survival of the ancient gods (Didi-Huberman 2002, 51). Indeed, Benjamin uses the term “Fortleben” several times in the last part of the chapter dedicated to Baroque allegory, which corresponds to the term used by Warburg in his text on the Reformation age, where the canonical term “Nachleben” never appears. It is precisely the understanding of the fundamental historical dialectic that takes place, in the memory of images, between appearance and meaning, form and content, that brings the two authors together. We would therefore like to suggest how the contribution of Warburg’s reflection in Benjamin’s work might not be limited to his book on German baroque drama. It could in fact have assumed an important role in the development of the author’s subsequent historiographic reflection, first and foremost for the formulation of that concept of dialectical image that stamps both the writing of *Das Passagenwerk* and the last and desperate *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*.

The reflection that Benjamin develops in these works cannot be abstractly separated from the previous speculation on the Baroque: on the contrary, it appears decisive for understanding the ‘turn’ in a materialist sense of his historical reflection. The vision of history that he unfolds in his later writings appears substantially analogous to that shown before the gaze of Baroque melancholy: the spectacle of a process that uninterruptedly accumulates ‘rubble upon rubble’. This is the same desolate landscape that is revealed before the wide-open eyes of the angel of history (Benjamin [1940] 1991, 697). According to the author, this vision is the

result of a certain conception of history, omnipresent in the nineteenth century of which the work on the Parisian *passages* deals with, and that still constitutes one of the main cultural backgrounds in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. Benjamin refers to that historicism of positivist matrix which interprets the historical course as a linear, infinite and necessary process. This particular conception of history, according to Benjamin, in addition to being absolutely false, had also actively contributed to build the catastrophe that was taking place in his own time in Europe, on the eve of the Second World War. According to the author, the tendency to conceive historical knowledge as a scientific one had led to understanding the becoming as a necessary object of pure contemplation in relation to which no action, no decision was possible.

In this view, the past ends up appearing as a givenness to which one can reserve just a mere erudite interest. In the immediate identification with the fragments of a world emptied of any different meaning from the narration of the modernity's '*magnifiche sorti et progressive*', Benjamin detected the saturnine traits of that *acedia* which he had defined as the main characteristic of Baroque man. *Acedia* that now reveals itself as the very 'mortal sin' of modern historicism (Benjamin [1940] 1991, 696-697). What allows the materialist historian to challenge such a conception of history, inseparable, as the author points out, from a vision of the historical process as proceeding through a fundamentally 'homogeneous and empty' time (Benjamin [1940] 1991, 700-701), is precisely the dynamic of recovery, reinterpretation and reconstitution of meaning that takes place within each image that the author defines as dialectical. As we suggested, the detection of this process owes a lot to the author's previous reflection on Baroque allegoresis. In fact:

Il contesto consolidato della storia imprigiona le immagini del passato, consegnandole ad un unico, immodificabile significato e privando così il presente di ciò che, in esse, attende di trovare espressione. In questa immobilizzazione, che si cela dietro alle spoglie del divenire, consiste la 'catastrofe' a cui l'angelo assiste (Barale 2009, 113).

[The consolidated context of tradition imprisons the images of the past, forcing them to assume a single, unmodifiable meaning and thus depriving the present of what, in them, is waiting to find expression. This

immobilization, which hides behind the remains of historical becoming, is the 'catastrophe' the angel witnesses (Author's translation)].

Against such immobilization, Benjamin notes that:

The corrective to this line of thinking may be found in the consideration that history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance. What science has 'determined' remembrance can modify (Benjamin [1927-1940] 1999, 471).

In these words emerges the necessity to change the very vision of history through a view capable of seeing that what is indicated as 'progress' is actually an immense catastrophe. But this view is impossible without a thought embracing what is forgotten and hidden by the historiographic narrative of historicism. It is here that allegory shows itself as an essential dialectical tool of the author's reflection (Pinotti 2018, 5): the violence by which it rips the images of the past out of their original context in fact shows how:

Allegory has to do, precisely in its destructive furor, with dispelling the illusion that proceeds from all 'given order', whether of art or of life: the illusion of totality or of organic wholeness which transfigures that order and makes it seem endurable. And this is the progressive tendency of allegory (Benjamin [1927-1940] 1999, 331).

Although this characterization of allegory emerges with particular clarity in Benjamin's studies on Baudelaire (Zumbusch 2004, 267-273), it appears already contained in the book on German Baroque drama, as we have seen. The 'tear' that allegory produces in the consolidated context of tradition is precisely what allows us to interrogate what in the memory of its images remains as an unexpressed possibility, as 'desire betrayed' by the narrative of progress. The allegory, therefore, ends up representing the destructive moment of a dialectic of reconstitution of meaning in which the images, although separated from their original context, are at the same time saved from the 'garden of the thus it was' in which historicism condemns them to absolute immobility and to insignificance (Rella 1980, 22). Nevertheless, allegoresis cannot be considered as the ultimate method and object of Benjamin's speculation (Solmi 1959, XV;

Becker 1992, 64-89). As several authors have pointed out, it is only the previous moment of an operation of reconstitution of meaning that does not renounce to “the effort to reconstruct the natural unity between word and image” (*“la fatica di ricostruire la naturale unità fra parola e immagine”*, so Ferretti 2010, 121). It is an interpretation of Adorno that allows us to approach the author’s reflection on allegory to his elaboration of the dialectical image’s concept. In a letter that Benjamin reports in *Das Passagenwerk*, he writes:

With the vitiation of their use value, the alienated things are hollowed out and, as ciphers, they draw in meanings. Subjectivity takes possession of them insofar as it invests them with intentions of desire and fear [...] dialectical images are constellated between alienated things and incoming and disappearing meaning, are instantiated in the moment of indifference between death and meaning. (Benjamin [1927-1940] 1999, 466).

Although in the following lines Adorno criticises the ambiguity that this kind of image ends up exhibiting, it is precisely this fundamentally ambiguous structure that characterizes Benjamin’s dialectical image in an essential way, and that once again brings our author close to Warburg’s reflection on the heritage of antiquity as ‘a two-faced herm’. The dialectical image in fact is something that should be sought “Where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest” (Benjamin [1927-1940] 1991, 595). This not only makes it the true ‘Urphänomen’ of history (Benjamin [1927-1940] 1991, 592) and the main epistemological category of a form of historiography based on visual concreteness. It represents a ‘true synthesis’ since it shows a co-presence of opposites where past and present coexist so that the transitional state between them remains visible. As it has been noted, Benjamin’s dialectical images end up presenting a structural ambiguity common to the images considered by Warburg’s studies on the Italian Renaissance (Zumbusch 2010, 120-124). For Benjamin, in fact, the dialectical potential of this kind of images lies in their ability to maintain the polarity that constitutes them, that is, in their ability to overturn their meaning (Agamben 2004). As Warburg wrote in 1927, we could say that also for Benjamin the images of the past:

Are handed down in a state of maximal tension but unpolarized with regard to the passive or active energy charge to the responding, imitating, or

remembering artists. It is only the contact with the new age that results in polarization. This polarization can lead to a radical reversal (inversion) of the meaning they held for classical antiquity (Warburg [1927] 1970, 248).

It is therefore the Warburg's discovery of the polar function of the 'memory of images' that we can perhaps see as a decisive inheritance for the development of Benjamin's subsequent reflection, even if declined within a materialist historiographic framework. An inheritance that has suggested to many interpreters the 'elective affinity' between these scholars (that finds in Goethe's morphology an important common reference: Pinotti 2001). What is decisive here, and differentiates the dialectical image from Benjamin's reflection on Baroque allegory, is that the polarities that run through every image necessarily presuppose not only the triggering of a fundamental dialectic between form and content, appearance and meaning but also of a temporal dialectic between present and past, ancient meanings and forms of current interest (Zumbusch 2004, 292-293). This dialectic, that actually subverts the foundation of chronological time (Pezzella 1982, 118) indeed constitutes the very historical object:

It is said that the dialectical method consists in doing justice, at each moment, to the concrete historical situation of its object. But that is not enough. For it is just as much a matter of doing justice to the concrete historical situation of the interest taken in the object. And *this* situation is always so constituted as to be itself preformed in that object; above all, however, the object is felt to be concretized in this situation itself and upraised from its former being into the higher concretion of now-being [*Jetztsein*]. In what way this now being (which is something other than the now-being of the present time [*Jetztzeit*]) already signifies, in itself, a higher concretion – this question, of course, can be entertained by the dialectical method only within the purview of a philosophy of history that at all points has overcome the ideology of progress [...] its own higher actuality, is something determined and brought to pass by the image as which and in which it is comprehended (Benjamin [1927-1940] 1999, 857).

This dialectic between then and now that finds its constitutive place in the image defines the temporality of both Warburg's *Nachleben* and Benjamin's dialectical image, resulting in the paradox that the

anachronistic collision between present and past represents an opportunity for the style to change, to open up to its future (Didi-Huberman 2000, 235). It is only in this encounter, which in Benjamin's case would be configured as a real 'appointment' between generations, that the past can mean something for the present and turn to the future. Precisely for this reason, for both our authors, the image becomes the place where it is possible to challenge the historicist narrative rooted in a rectilinear conception of history (Di Giacomo 2010, 75). And yet to do so it is necessary not to stop at a mere acceptance of the images of tradition: allegorical melancholy, while representing a fundamental step to the awareness of the falsity of the progress' idea (Pezzella 1982, 54-56) cannot be the last word, but must proceed dialectically to its own overcoming. Thus, when Benjamin defines his book on the Baroque as not yet materialist, but already dialectical:

Il termine 'dialettico' sta a significare che, dopo aver attraversato la malinconia barocca, non ci si poteva arrestare in malinconica contemplazione del vuoto in cui questa sfocia. [...] 'dialettico' vuol dunque forse dire la capacità di avvertire le impercettibili vibrazioni del vuoto 'barocco', saperne comporre 'nuova' musica (Desideri 1980, 128).

[The term 'dialectical' means that, after passing through Baroque melancholy, one could not stop in melancholic contemplation of the emptiness into which it leads [...] 'dialectical' thus perhaps means the ability to feel the imperceptible vibrations of the 'Baroque' void, to compose 'new' music for it (Author's translation)].

It is in fact only in the reinterpretation, in the re-appropriation of the vital contents of tradition for the present, that new history and authentic progress are generated. In Benjamin and in Warburg both the historian and the artist move within this dialectic. For both of them tradition and its transmission are constituted "only as new *writing*, new *representation*, new *interpretation*" ("*solo come nuova scrittura, nuova rappresentazione, nuova interpretazione*": so Desideri 1980, 137, emphases in the text). As Benjamin wrote in a letter to Rang in 1923, thus at the beginning of his work on German Baroque drama:

We know of course that the past consists not of crown jewels that belong in a museum, but of something always affected by the present (Benjamin [1910-1940] 1994, 215).

It is only the contact with the present that decides the ambiguity of the image, whether the prophesying monsters of the past will be transformed into idols or into decisive life guides for the future (Warburg [1929] 2017). Or, for Benjamin, whether the images of consciousness subjugated to the progress' narration will serve to prolong its unstoppable continuity or will reveal the cracks that lurk in it. For both our authors, the memory of images is not expressed in terms of a passive acceptance of tradition, but the encounter that it makes possible between past and present is the place of a fundamental choice, the elusive threshold on which one must decide as much about the past as about the future (Barale 2009, 32).

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English abstract

This work intends to underline the connection between Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin's thought through the detection of some direct references to Aby Warburg's essay *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten* in one of Walter Benjamin's most important early works, the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauspiels*. Taking off from these Warburghian quotes in Benjamin's book about the Baroque drama we will try to take a glimpse of the legacy that Warburg's thought would develop in Walter Benjamin's subsequent reflection on the relationship between historical time and image.

Keywords | Walter Benjamin; Aby Warburg; Warburgkreis; Trauerspiel; Baroque; Bildgedächtnis.

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(v. Albo dei referee di Engramma)

The Editorial Board of Engramma is grateful to the colleagues – friends and scholars – who have double-blind peer reviewed this essay.

(cf. Albo dei referee di Engramma)

Reviews

Anselm Kiefer's Logic of Inversion*

On Anselm Kiefer's Exhibition: *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce* (Andrea Emo), Venezia, Palazzo Ducale, March/October 2022

Salvatore Settis



1 | Anselm Kiefer, *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce* (Andrea Emo), Sala dello Scrutinio, Palazzo Ducale, Venezia.

In a supremely important Italian city, Venice, a supremely important artist, Anselm Kiefer, puts under our eyes what I believe is a work of art supremely important for our time. Yet Kiefer, a German by birth and a citizen of the world by stature, education and choice, gives to his compellingly organic cycle in the Palazzo Ducale a title in Italian: *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce* (These writings, once burned, will finally cast a little light). We find these words, in Kiefer's handwriting, in a sort of decompression chamber that he has dropped down into the little room of the Quarantia Civil Nova (between the huge Sala del Maggior Consiglio and the Sala dello Scrutinio), where a "waste land" stretches in a tall apse, inhabited by burned books and

topped by the flashing of leaden skies and sudden rays. Kiefer chose these words as a powerful statement of his world vision, as well as of his intention in assembling the grand cycle now on view in the imposing Sala dello Scrutinio; and he made clear this is a quotation from Andrea Emo Capodilista (1901-1983), an Italian thinker to whom the artist has paid significant attention for years (Kiefer 2018).

This sentence, that mirrors and condenses the fragility and uncertainties of the present day, can therefore be safely attributed to both Emo and Kiefer himself, meaning that these writings (by Emo), but also these paintings (by Kiefer), those in the Sala dello Scrutinio, live in the precarious interval between the creative act – birth – and a preannounced death by fire, but are destined nevertheless to shed their light. But Emo's sentence, in turn, has a highly probable precedent in Heinrich Heine's tragedy *Almansor* (written around 1821 and performed soon thereafter at the Nationaltheater in Braunschweig). In Heine's play, we find a very famous line:

Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch
Menschen (Heinrich Heine, *Almansor*, 1823).

[Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too]

In the play, this was a reference to the burning of the Quran in an effort to eradicate Islam from Spain; but as a matter of fact in 1933 Heine's books were actually burned, among many others by Jewish writers, on Opernplatz in Berlin. The burning of books in late Medieval Granada in Heine's play embodies the Spanish Inquisition as much as the burning of books in Berlin embodies the upcoming Shoah. Let us pause for a moment to reflect on this outright *mise en abyme*: a German artist (Kiefer) quotes an Italian thinker (Emo); Emo, in turn, hints at a German poet (Heine), whose books were actually burned in public, while the works of Emo or Kiefer fortunately were not. The very title of Kiefer's cycle currently shown in Venice therefore conveys, by implication, what I would like to call a logic of inversion in space and time, as well as a staggering fluctuation between preservation and destruction, between memory and oblivion.

The very same can be said of Anselm Kiefer's paintings in their relation to the large hall in which they are placed. It is called Sala dello Scrutinio,

the room where votes were counted, in particular for the election of the Doge, a very complex operation with a carefully studied procedure that alternated phases of drawing names and of voting, a system meant to safeguard equality among the members of the Great Council and prevent fraud (Smith 1999, 41-66). Yet if walls and buildings have their own memory, this great hall, very much as in Emo's sentence and the title of Kiefer's work, has in its history innumerable books and a great fire. The Sala dello Scrutinio was originally called the Sala della Libreria, and served as a library twice, from 1468 (when it housed the manuscripts of Cardinal Bessarione) until the completion of Sansovino's Libreria Marciana almost a century later; and later from 1824 to 1905 when it held once again (in part) the books of the Marciana. Moreover, like a large part of the Palazzo Ducale, this room was devastated by a terrible fire in 1577, when luckily the books were no longer in it. A Flemish painter, Joris Hoefnagel, gives us an on-the-scene report, saying he was an eyewitness (*autoptes*, as he says in Greek) to the event (Franzoi 1989, 72): his drawing, originally bearing the date 1578, was later reproduced in an engraving that is part of the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1598-1617). Tall flames leap from the Palace, someone throws burning beams down into the square and then into the water; a mute, stunned crowd watches the terrible spectacle while soldiers armed with halberds line up across the square and the deck of a ship, and there are those who, using tall ladders, dare to enter the palace in flames to rescue whatever they can. In that disaster, the original decoration of the walls, which had been installed starting in 1530, was burned completely and was soon replaced by a new cycle, which in large part repeats the same themes as the first one. Among the paintings destroyed by the fire, two were by Jacopo Tintoretto: *The Last Judgment* (a subject painted for the second cycle by Palma il Giovane) and *The Battle of Lepanto*, replaced by one on the same subject by Andrea Vicentino. By redecorating the enormous rooms of the Maggior Consiglio and the Scrutinio with equally huge canvases, and almost all identical in subject, the Serenissima sent itself and the world a powerful signal of political and institutional continuity. *Renovant incendia nidos* ('fires renew the nests'), one might say with the Latin poet Martial (V, 7, 1): like the phoenix, the Palazzo Ducale was reborn, renewed, from its own ashes. The old Republic remained just as it had always been.

Once we cross the threshold of the Sala dello Scrutinio, we find it inhabited (or haunted) by the documental memory of what it was over the centuries (Library, Election Chamber) and the two great phases of its decoration, 1530s and after 1577. There are still a few vestiges of the decoration before the fire, such as *L'ordine del cielo della Libreria* ('The Order of the Ceiling of the Library') reproduced by Sebastiano Serlio in his *Regole generali di Architettura* (1537), or a long inscription on stone set into *The Last Judgment* by Palma the Younger (c. 1590); or else the ghostly figures, predating the fire, winking out from the lunettes just under the ceiling, and still emerging behind Kiefer's painting in their current installation.

As for the second decoration of the Sala dello Scrutinio, done after the 1577 fire, this is almost completely invisible now, as Kiefer's paintings hide the walls completely, but the rich ceiling is fully visible, and above the upper edge of the newest canvases (the ones by Kiefer) emerge the lunettes of the portraits of the Doges, each one (except the last) holding his own scroll. Kiefer's cycle thus offers itself as a third phase (albeit ephemeral) of the long history of the Sala dello Scrutinio and invites us to read its images in a sort of cross mapping:

Which one does by arranging maps one on top of another in order to detect differences between them – and the truth lies the truth lies in these differences, *I believe* (Kiefer [2011] 2018, 43. Emphases by the author).

What is the new truth of the Sala dello Scrutinio transfigured by Kiefer's work? It is not, it cannot be the one vertiginously glimpsed by Pilate in his dialogue with Jesus (John 18:38 *Quid est veritas?*). On the contrary, it is a structurally ephemeral truth, which does not live in and of itself, but is identified with the system of relations – in time and space – to which it belongs and which it changes for the sake of simultaneity, as Kiefer himself wrote in his diary:

I do not intend to represent the history of Venice, with its constant ups and downs, in chronological order, but as simultaneity, the simultaneity of something and of nothing (Page from Kiefer's diary, 15 July 2021. Thanks to Manuela Lucà Dazio).

Three cycles overlap in one same space, and the most recent (Kiefer's) can be there only to leave that room soon afterwards. Each phase is intimately linked to the others in a (diachronic) logic of superimposition, substitution, exchange; and in each of these cycles the canvases connect with each other in a meaningful (synchronic) sequence, in the Italian tradition of grand domestic decoration (Kliemann 1993). But the two dimensions, synchronic and diachronic, are inextricably interwoven; the paintings of the second phase repeat the same subjects as the first, and in Kiefer's canvases we recognize potent signs of Venice: the recurring lagoon landscapes, the memory of Doge Marin Faliero, the presence of Saint Mark from the saint's zinc sarcophagus to the Basilica, to the majestic flag with the Lion of St Mark's flying in the wind.

Kiefer has no intention to compete with the painters who preceded him on these same walls, but masterly plays with time and space. He creates hiatuses and suspensions, intervals and lacunae. His paintings take (for a short while) the place of two successive cycles, both conceived in praise of Venice, yet this newest of Palazzo Ducale's cycles does not replicate the same intentions, but rather urge us to take our distance, viewing the whole Sala and its historical memory as in a *mise en abyme*. The Sala dello Scrutinio thus becomes a metaphor not just for Venice, but for our world today, suspended as it is between memory and oblivion, between the relentless growth of collapsing ruins and our irrepressible impulse to preserve, to rebuild, to survive. Kiefer treats the ruins of history as a material (pictorial and conceptual) like any other. He builds a bridge between the long, long memory of the Palazzo Ducale (and of Venice as a whole) and the creative process of the artist, with the performative traces stamped on the canvasses like so many stigmata.

When entering the Sala dello Scrutinio, we should never forget that for many centuries doges and patricians, painters and carpenters, architects and librarians used to enter and exit that room, at least once in order to extinguish a sudden fire. The memory of places and things is made of such indiscernible traces of those who have been there over time. Of their ghosts. The Palazzo Ducale today is mostly experienced as museum space: but it is that pulsating life, those presences now spent, that have made it the heart of Venice. Institutions and rituals of days gone by have soaked

themselves into the canvases and walls, taken root in memory and names. But against the background of this tradition, what about Kiefer's canvases?

Like the grand canvases that preceded them in the Sala dello Scrutinio, Kiefer's cycle now installed there is also the result of a public commission by the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, at the initiative of its director, Gabriella Belli. But, 328 years after the last addition to the room (the triumphal arch of Doge Francesco Morosini, 1694) and 225 years after the end of Venetian independence, the differences of intention from those of the earlier patrons are stronger than the similarities.

Public art in our time proceeds on a knife-edge between institutional manifesto and political protest, between the permanent and the ephemeral. Diego Rivera's murals were meant to be institutional and permanent, from Mexican history in the Palacio Nacional (c. 1929-) to the *Detroit Industry Murals* (c. 1932-), and so were those by Massimo Campigli at the University of Padua (c. 1939-); while the street art of our time is individual and ephemeral. From one extreme to the other, public art aims to speak to the crowd, and in this sense it inherits the ambitions of the fresco cycles in medieval town halls and churches. It unfurls events and personages, moral values, beliefs and hopes, because it wants them to be shared. This is why the sixteenth century cycles in the Sala dello Scrutinio were devoted to a series of Venice's (real or imagined) military successes, and thus display the inevitable, perpetual victory of Venetian arms on land and sea, the virtues of her citizens and the wisdom of her government.

Today, anyone who wants to manipulate history to their advantage uses the universe of the media, not art works. Asking a great artist like Anselm Kiefer to create for the Palazzo Ducale a cycle destined to measure itself against the historic memory of the site was an unusual move. At its root is a question that undoubtedly the public patron and the artist asked themselves, and which now we must ask ourselves too: what can "public art" mean today? Must it mirror a political or culture concern chosen by the patron or agreed upon with the artist? Present itself as a *summa* of current values? Or as an inventory of the culture wars of our time? Should it maybe act as a manifesto of universal values (or offered as such)?

The Venetian patron has given these questions a forceful answer by the very choice of Kiefer, an artist as free and profound in his thought as he is in the act of painting. In the large canvases that dare to cover (and thus challenge) those in the Sala dello Scrutinio, he does not celebrate anything, does not preach any truth, waves no political banner. By leveraging a logic of inversion that imposes upon us astonishment and reflection, he suggests something that today we lack most: to stop and think. To yield to the majesty of his paintings, to ask questions of them and let them ask questions of us. The historical reality that dwells in these rooms undergoes a temporary suspension, and as though in a dream or a game, the artist lays out before our eyes the fragments of another reality: his reality, which immediately becomes ours. By placing his own works on top of the huge canvases that call that room home, Kiefer brings off a radical shift: he renders simultaneous and interchangeable space and time, the Doge's electors and the visitors of today. He injects temporal dynamics into space, spatial dynamics into time.

Kiefer studs this grid of memorial simultaneities with carefully chosen icons: Saint Mark's Lion flies on a flag, the (zinc) sarcophagus of the Saint gapes like an empty eye-socket, a ladder climbs skyward, an ancient goddess hands the painter his palette. Furrows of lands and seas, invariably in the bottom third of the paintings, evoke the Lagoon, summon up its sandbars or *barene*. Such a weave of self-evident representations heals what Kiefer calls "the pain engendered by the sacrifice of figuration" (Kiefer [2011] 2018, 199 ff.): if seen from very close, a picture can very well have "an abstract structure, a kind of molecular system", but stepping back at a distance reveals "a singular composition, an overall view" (Kiefer [2011] 2018, 297).

And if, as Kiefer once wrote, "the only interesting thing about the process of creation is the shift from figuration to abstraction" (Kiefer [2011] 2018, 285), this course can also be inverted, passing from the abstract of the detail seen up close to the figuration of a vision of the whole.

In this context and this spirit, Kiefer tracks down canonical images and incorporates them into his compositional grid, revealing their unprecedented potentials. His poetics of *remake* or *repêchage* have very little in common with the post-modern obsession with quotation. Extracted

from a layer of memory, as in the ritual sequence of an archaeological excavation, a passively iconic message is by him “regenerated..., reintroduced into the world” in that it is an object of fascination for the artist (Kiefer [2011] 2018, 241):

The artist is not the final product of evolution, but goes up and down the evolutionary ladder, like the angels on Jacob’s ladder in the Bible story. Our representation of the world is merely a retrospective hypothesis. The truth remains unreachable (*Art and evolution, or Jacob’s ladder*, A. Kiefer’s *lectio magistralis* at the Collège de France in Kiefer [2011] 2018, 257 ff.)

The paintings of the past are no less subject to these oscillating interpretation than are the paintings finished yesterday. For instance: could the ladder that splits in two Kiefer’s canvas on the entrance wall, with the human traces placed around it (clothes, shoes) be the biblical ladder of Jacob’s dream? Or could it be the ladder imagined in the seventh century AD by the Greek monk John Climacus, where souls ascend to Heaven with the aid of angels, while devils try to drag them down into Hell (Müller 2010)? One more example. One of the two angels that flank the large canvas with the ladder is an imposing winged figure, her hands stretched out to hold a large oval palette like a painter’s. Her archetype is a goddess, the *Victoria Romana* on Trajan’s Column, holding a shield torn from the defeated enemy, while in Kiefer’s metamorphosis, she becomes a majestic palette-holding angel. Is this an allusion to the artist’s sovereignty over the precarious balance between figuration and abstraction? As much as we wander around Kiefer’s cycle in the Sala dello Scrutinio, question marks and intervals multiply: intervals between creation and fruition of the canvases; between remote models and their reactivation; between the large sixteenth-century canvases of the Sala dello Scrutinio and the equally large ones by Kiefer that now cover them. Finally, between the moment when Kiefer’s work changed the aspect of that room and the day when Kiefer’s paintings will have to find a new home (and it would be wonderful and fitting if this were in Venice itself).

In the years we are going through, we have learned to live with the idea of ‘interval’: an interval between the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of great historical transformations or massive migrations of human beings, and more recently between the before and after of a pandemic, between the ‘before’

of a European war whose 'after' we have no idea about. And we are unable to decide whether, after dramatic intervals like these, we would like everything to spontaneously revert to the way it was, or whether (on the contrary) we would be willing to take responsibility for radical changes.

But what do we mean by 'interval' in a work of art? A 'logic of inversion' such as Kiefer's, instilled through images and based upon merging space and time, memory and oblivion, ruins and rebirth requires primarily an intermediate mental space, a place 'in between' in which to stop, to ponder only to start again with renewed moral energy. No word seems more appropriate than that used by Aby Warburg, the great historian of European figurative culture: *Zwischenraum* (intermediate space), which is the empty space that lies in the middle, the interval occupied by mere thought (the artist's, but also our own), and that therefore can also be called *Denkraum* (thought space). For Warburg, *Zwischenraum* is the conscious creation of a distance between oneself and the outside world, an interval where both artistic creation and its reception take shape (Ciriot [2017] 2018). For Warburg, *Zwischenraum* is the conscious creation of a distance between oneself and the scenario of life and art (the outside world). It is in this interval that both artistic creation and its reception take shape, moving – both of them – in a pendulum swing between emotional intuition and intellectual dominion command.

Moving closer to Kiefer, we might situate the notion of 'interval', in the terms of Paul Celan (a poet much loved by Anselm), at an immediately experiential and physiological level, as *Atemwende* ('breathturn'), that is "the instant of suspension and void between breathing in and breathing out, in which time, the will, the I stop, as in the breathing meditation of yoga" (Pezzella [2007] 2015, 165); while at a cosmic level the rhythm of breathing (*Atemwende*) corresponds with that of the cosmos (*Sonnenwende*, solstice). Let's say it with Goethe, Celan's likely 'precedent':

Breathing has two moments of grace:
breathing air in and breathing it out.
One oppresses, the other refreshes:
thus, wonderfully, life mixes opposites.

Thank the Lord when he pursues you,
and thank Him again when he sets you free!

Or, in German as a tribute to Anselm:

Im Atemholen sind zweierlei Gnaden:
Die Luft einziehen, sich ihrer entladen;
jenes bedrängt, dieses erfrischt;
so wunderbar ist das Leben gemischt.
Du danke Gott, wenn er dich preßt,
und dank ihm, wenn er dich wieder entläßt!
(Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Buch des Sängers, Talismane*, im *West-östlicher Divan*, 1819)

In Kiefer's vision, "the artist, inasmuch as he reigns over history, plays with the past, the future, the sublime, the religious, the shocking, the unconscious, he roams through history" (Kiefer [2011] 2018, 230 and 260. On sovereignty of the artist: Kantorowicz 1961, 267-279). For Kiefer, "history has always been a material just as clay is for the sculptor who shapes it in order to create his own story" (Kiefer 2022, 44). He manipulates "the wreckage of history not as an end but as a beginning," and conceives of the work of art as an interval, the "intermediate space between history and its narration" (Kiefer [2011] 2018, 268).

History – the past with its burden of ruins – and art – the present, but also the prophesy of the future – achieve by this path a full simultaneity. As in Paul Celan's *Meridian*, art entails the coexistence of "a variety of accents: the acute accent of the present, the grave accent of history, the circumflex accent of eternity". The poet or the artist "bestows upon his own work an acute accent", since he has "no other choice" (Celan [1960] 2003, 40-41).

Captured by Kiefer's Venetian canvases, one wonders whether we humans are shaping the cosmos (and history) on our own inversion of breath (*Atemwende*), or whether it is the rhythm of a cosmic or global *Sonnenwende* ('inversion of the Sun') that shapes human experience. In this long, apparent interval of history that we are living through in this time of pandemic, of the suffering Earth, of ever-looming wars, of increasing injustice and inequality, we have no choice: we must look at

Anselm Kiefer's paintings, under the acute accent of the present, holding our breath.

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*This contribution is the so far unpublished opening speech held on April, 20, 2022 for Anselm Kiefer's Exhibition *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce*, on display at Sala dello Scrutinio in Palazzo Ducale, Venezia, from March to October 2022. The text here published takes some cues from the author's contribution in the Exhibition catalogue: *Anselm Kiefer: A Venetian Solstice*, in *Anselm Kiefer. Palazzo Ducale a Venezia*, ed. By G. Belli, J. Sirén, Marsilio, Venezia 2022, 115-128.

English abstract

Taking his cue from Kiefer's title, Settis underlines "a logic of inversion between space and time, as well as a staggering fluctuation between preservation and destruction, between memory and oblivion", and questions the meaning of an "interval in a work of art". Settis, therefore, recalls Warburg's definitions of *Zwischenraum* (intermediate space) and *Denkraum* (thought space) extending them to contemporary art in an extraordinary short-circuit of memory.

Keywords | Anselm Kiefer; Andrea Emo Capodilista; Palazzo Ducale Venezia; Denkraum; Inversion.

Clio Nicastro, *La dialettica del Denkraum in Aby Warburg*, Palermo 2022. A Presentation

Clio Nicastro

Engramma presents an Introduction to the book by Clio Nicastro, recently printed by the publisher Palermo University Press, and the volume's Foreword.*



Denkraum der Besonnenheit is the name of the constellations of methods, concept, forms of expression, and personal challenges that distinguish Aby Warburg's research programme. It is the space of thinking and for thinking, a condition and a process, the method of which – precise at the same time, as it is always being modified and developed further – lives under the constant threat of the destruction of its confines. Investigating the nature of this formula by following its mutations over the course of Warburg's life

presents one of the possible ways to navigate the theoretical network of this author, which consists of images, fragments, disciplines, travels, fears, enthusiasms and repulsions, as much as the tireless exchanges with the friends and colleagues of the Warburg circle, constituted around the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek in Hamburg.

The *Denkraum der Besonnenheit* is a space that itself protects a constellation of different aspects of Aby Warburg's attempt to negotiate an 'adequate' distance from which to look at phenomena, to connect forms and images that have travelled in space and time. It is the interval to pause and take a breath, the space between stimulus and response, the

distinction between possessing and designating, between grabbing (*greifen*) and understanding (*begreifen*), an oscillation that can only find a (temporary) fulfilment in the artistic act: a space in between “the imagination’s act of grasping and the conceptual act of observing” (Warburg [1925] 2009, 277. Author’s translation). It is a condition and a process whose method undergoes the constant threat of the destruction of its boundaries.

The expression *Denkraum der Besonnenheit* appears for the first time in 1901 in the preparatory notes for his essay, *Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther* (1918) (Wedepohl 2014), where it stands for an interval to pause, a breath span. It indicates the process of structuring one’s own space of ‘oscillation’ between the fear of the unknown and the attainment of (self)awareness. The term, which will then become a crucial element in Warburg’s multifaceted theory, cannot be traced back to a single issue and does not correspond to a univocal definition. The name itself varies, from *Zwischenraum* to *Zeitraum*, *Zeitspanne*, *Denkzeitraum*, but more often appears as *Denkraum* and only in this case the term is accompanied by *Besonnenheit*. Investigating the nature of this notion by following its transformation during Warburg’s life is one of the possible ways to orient oneself in his theoretical world, made up of images, fragments, journeys, fears, enthusiasm and repulsion, and of a prolific exchange with friends and colleagues of the *Warburgkreis* formed around the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek in Hamburg. Warburg never systematically writes about his neologisms – among others, *Nachleben*, *Pathosformel*, “energetic inversion” – but rather applies them as operational concepts for the construction of his theory for a new art historical method.

This is of special importance for the *Denkraum*, a space Warburg not only reflects on but constantly moves within, making its limits (in the double meaning of boundaries and deficiencies) and mechanisms visible. A central element of the interpretation of the *Denkraum* here proposed is the decision to translate *Besonnenheit* with “sensibility”. Replacing the English literal translation of this German word – “prudence”, which in turn stands for the Greek notion of *sophrosyne* – with “sensibility” allows us to stress that the Warburgian version of the Greek principle does not support an

idea of balance, neither as the exact midpoint between irreconcilable polarities nor as a stable endpoint.

When Warburg was directly confronted with war and death after the outbreak of World War I, his theoretical framework collapsed. In 1921, after several failed attempts in other psychiatric institutions and right after his last violent crisis, when he threatened his relatives with a revolver, Warburg was hospitalised for three years in Bellevue, whose director at the time was Ludwig Binswanger. The story of Warburg's Kreuzlingen lecture on the *Serpent Ritual* is well-known and has become almost legendary; his presentation in front of the doctors and the patients of Bellevue is indeed often described as a turning point in Warburg's healing journey. This is the moment when the notion of *Denkraum* unveils its inherent ambivalence: Warburg faces his obsession with maintaining the right distance from reality in order to avoid the risk of incorporation, "to recompose the fracture between man and the outside world" (Trentin 2017, 122). In the conclusion of the Kreuzlingen conference, Warburg blames new technological inventions – including the airplane – for having destroyed the *Denkraum* (Warburg [1923] 1939, 292). A statement he will later retract but that reveals the danger of the *Denkraum* as a phobic closed space.

After the Kreuzlingen experience the *Denkraum* underwent a fundamental shift by becoming an architectural structure, a visual language in which the temporality of *Nachleben* acquires a spatial dimension (see Cirlot 2017). Here *Besonnenheit* is rather the name of the moment in which the form becomes expressive, and acquires sensibility thanks to the artistic gesture that captures the intersection between survivals (*Nachleben*) and formulas of pathos (*Pathosformeln*). In the last year of his life, the *Denkraum* is represented differently from its first appearance in the 1920 essay on Luther and its further appearance in the *Schlangeritual* (1923), but the configuration preserves all previous moments, becoming the visual archive of Warburg's obsessions. Now the time of art history does not follow a progressive unilinear direction but the re-emergence of certain forms and patterns that ask to be understood according to the questions that set them in motion. What does it mean that images are a symptom of their time? Why is art history a history of subjects and objects in motion?

Opposed polarities permanently oscillate and only apparently erase each other's traces. A conventional conception of the distinction between rational and irrational usually implies that the former is a dimension composed of distinguishable elements. One tends instead to consider the sphere of the irrational as an indistinct cloud. Warburg was convinced that:

If certain attitudes survive, and continually re-emerge through history intertwining with mankind's progress, they pose problems that must be addressed: historical and theoretical problems that pertain both to genealogy and meaning (Boll et al. 1977, XXIII. Author's translation).

By delving into beliefs, "regressions" and seemingly inexplicable phenomena, Warburg was interested in recognizing the appearance of what seems to resist critical thought.

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Foreword from: Clio Nicastro, *La dialettica del Denkraum in Aby Warburg*, Palermo University Press 2022

Premessa

Denkraum der Besonnenheit è il nome della costellazione di metodi, concetti, forme espressive e sfide personali che contraddistinguono la ricerca di Aby Warburg. L'espressione compare per la prima volta nel 1901 e sta a indicare l'intervallo in cui fermarsi a riprendere fiato prima di essere gettati, ancora una volta, nel processo di strutturazione del proprio spazio di "oscillazione" tra autoconsapevolezza e autoannientamento (Wedepohl 2014, 37). Da qui in poi diventerà un riferimento essenziale per Warburg, una costante che non si lascia però ricondurre a una singola questione e non consente di risalire a una definizione stabile e univoca. Anche il nome oscilla tra *Zwischenraum*, *Zeitraum*, *Zeitspanne*, *Denkzeitraum*, ma più spesso compare come *Denkraum* e, solo in questo caso, il termine è accompagnato dalla *Besonnenheit*. Indagare la natura di questa locuzione, seguirne le mutazioni nel corso della vita di Warburg, è uno dei possibili percorsi per orientarsi nel reticolo teorico di questo autore, fatto di immagini, frammenti, discipline, viaggi, paure, entusiasmi e repulsioni, di assidui scambi con amici e colleghi del *Warburgkreis* costituitosi attorno alla Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek di Amburgo.

Del resto, una delle cifre stilistiche warburghiane è proprio quella di non approfondire in maniera sistematica i neologismi di cui si serve – tra gli altri quello di *Nachleben*, *Pathosformel* e "inversione energetica" – ma piuttosto di utilizzarli come strumenti e concetti operativi per la costruzione di un nuovo metodo storico artistico. Nei suoi scritti, infatti, Warburg non si sofferma mai a lungo sul *Denkraum*, ma si muove al suo interno lasciandone emergere limiti (nel doppio significato di confini e difetti) e meccanismi. Un fattore centrale della mia proposta di interpretazione di questo spazio per il pensiero è la parola con cui ho deciso di tradurre *Besonnenheit*: "sensatezza". La scelta, ispirata dalla traduzione che Ilaria Tani (Tani 2009) utilizza per lo stesso termine introdotto da Johan Gottfried Herder nell'*Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* del 1772 (Herder [1772] 1995), consente di aprire una questione per me cruciale nell'esplorazione del *Denkraum* warburghiano:

se *Besonnenheit* è la parola tedesca per indicare la nozione greca di *Sophrosyne*, ho evitato il corrispettivo italiano “prudenza” e anche quello di “via di mezzo” – così come riflessività e ponderatezza – perchè la versione warburghiana del principio greco non supporta un’idea di equilibrio come punto di arrivo, non è l’esatto punto intermedio tra polarità inconciliabili. *Besonnenheit* è piuttosto il nome del momento in cui la forma diviene espressiva, acquista sensatezza grazie al gesto artistico che non coincide con il tocco geniale di un singolo artista ma è il frutto dell’interazione tra sopravvivenze (*Nachleben*) e formule di pathos (*Pathosformeln*). Quella che mi sembra una differenza cruciale tra il “contenimento” riflessivo, il controllo ponderato, e la sensatezza come messa in forma di tensioni che non si dissolvono in una sintesi intermedia, mi ha portata a chiedermi se e in che modo sia possibile parlare di una dialettica del *Denkraum*, quali sono gli elementi in gioco e quali movimenti disegnano. Se è vero che Warburg descrive la lotta estenuante e costante tra polarità – alla cui base risiede l’opposizione tra razionale e irrazionale – mettendo in luce schisi, interruzioni e regressioni che caratterizzano lo scarto tra l’agire e il pensare, il prendere e il comprendere, è però corretto concepire questo spostamento come oscillazione “bipolare” tra punti fissi? Come questi ultimi vengono sempre di nuovo modificati dal passaggio attraverso il punto di mezzo in cui si delineano i confini mobili dello spazio del pensiero? In che modo le forme espressive trasportano e risolvono (?) i conflitti dai quali vengono plasmate?

Ripercorrendo l’evoluzione del *Denkraum*, dalla sua prima occorrenza negli appunti per il saggio su Lutero all’*Atlante Mnemosyne* – in cui diventa parte stessa dell’architettura – passando per la conferenza di Kreuzlingen, ho delineato alcune delle linee portanti nell’analisi questa costellazione:

- La polarità (*Pendelbewegung*) tra superstizione e scienza (rapporto ambivalente con il progresso tecnologico).
- La distanza costitutiva tra soggetto e oggetto.
- Lo spazio proprio dell’espressione artistica in cui si realizzano le *Pathosformeln*.
- Un paradigma evolutivo storico non lineare basato sul *Nachleben*: l’idea warburghiana di storia implica da un lato un tempo irreversibile e vettoriale in virtù del quale le cose vengono trasformate e si evolvono

progressivamente; dall'altro il tempo della ripetizione, del ritorno in cui le forme, ostinatamente, riemergono. Un movimento che Sylviane Aginski legge come concezione post-dialettica della storia in cui coesistono una logica del presente che "supera" il passato e una persistenza dell'antico (Agacinski 2003, 110). Non vi è una logica lineare, irreversibile e teleologica nel processo di acquisizione del *Denkraum*.

- La dimensione personale del *Denkraum* come percorso di (auto)-guarigione dalle paure individuali e collettive. Un punto che emerge allo scoppio della Prima Guerra Mondiale, evento che avrà una forte ricaduta sulla stabilità mentale di Warburg.

La struttura di questo libro cerca di seguire il più possibile la natura di un tema costituito da questi livelli che si intersecano, si scindono, sprofondano e riemergono. Mi sono spesso interrogata sulla valenza del frammento per Warburg, non solo in relazione alla collezione dei ritagli di giornale che riempiono i suoi archivi, alla selezione di immagini dell'*Atlante* e alla sua necessità di guardare alla storia dell'arte in un montaggio alternato tra campi lunghi, primi piani e dettagli, ma anche rispetto alla scrittura. Molti testi brevi ma non frammentari, una predilezione stilistica che forse qualcosa aggiunge alla coreografia dello spazio del pensiero della sensatezza, delle relazioni tra individuale e universale, tra gesto espressivo e viaggio delle forme attraverso il tempo:

Chi mai canterà il peana, il canto del rendimento di grazie, la lode del melo che fiorisce così tardi? (Bing in Warburg [1966] 1996, xvii).

Gertrud Bing, racconta un aneddoto (legendario?) legato a uno degli ultimi appunti di Warburg, trovato la mattina dopo la sua morte. Nel giardino della casa paterna c'era un melo secco che Warburg si rifiutò di fare abbattere e che nell'ottobre del 1929, anno della sua morte, riprese improvvisamente a fiorire. Commenta la Bing come di fronte a questo racconto di frustrazione non si possa fare a meno di chiedersi cosa abbia conferito alla produzione warburghiana:

La sua inattesa capacità di espansione [...] quest'opera rimane certo un frammento se ne confrontiamo il risultato con la vastità degli interessi e con la capacità di soddisfarli (Bing in Warburg [1966] 1996, x).

Bing propone però un'immagine diversa con cui orientarsi nel metodo dello studioso amburghese, quella di una miniera scavata da Warburg, dal cui pozzo centrale si dipanano gallerie in ogni direzione e su diversi livelli:

Ognuna sfruttando una vena differente della medesima sostanza. Dobbiamo ritornare al pozzo d'origine per scoprire i punti nei quali l'escavazione si è dimostrata tanto feconda (Bing in Warburg [1966] 1996, xviii).

Una proposta indubbiamente accolta dagli studiosi di varie discipline che nel frattempo hanno scavato, riaperto le vie d'accesso di questi tunnel con l'intento di raggiungere il nucleo di origine. Le parole della Bing, che ha incessantemente lavorato con Warburg dall'anno in cui fece ritorno da Kreuzlingen alla sua morte, sono un aiuto prezioso e imprescindibile nel costruire l'architettura di cui i frammenti sono parte. Eppure, è difficile identificare questo fulcro centrale come un singolo problema, a meno che non lo si faccia coincidere con la vecchia domanda sempre attuale sul modo in cui lo storico debba approcciarsi alla materia viva di cui il passato trasporta tracce prive di vita, talvolta incomplete, trasfigurate se non del tutto assenti, da ricostruire. Ancora secondo la Bing, la ricerca di un metodo per accedere a una realtà "tanto ardente e sconcertante per coloro che la vissero, quanto la nostra realtà è per noi", è ciò che avvicina Warburg a Jacob Burckhardt. Per entrambi è fondamentale tenere conto dei materiali più irrilevanti e incomprensibili, senza la pretesa di elevare la microstoria a universale ma mettendo in evidenza il potere narrativo di ciò che apparentemente (o intenzionalmente) viene posto al margine, in questo lembo dove si manifestano i sintomi della storia.

Nella prima sezione ripercorro la genesi del *Denkraum* negli scritti di Warburg, mettendo in luce le funzioni che di volta in volta assume all'interno dell'impianto teorico e della vita personale dello studioso amburghese. Mi concentrerò sia sui testi in cui il termine viene utilizzato, sia su alcuni saggi e conferenze – tra gli altri: *Le ultime volontà di Francesco Sasseti* (1907), la conferenza del 1925 *Per monstra ad sphaeram*, conferenza in memoria di Franz Boll in cui pur non menzionandolo esplicitamente, Warburg continua a riflettere su manifestazioni e caratteristiche di questo spazio per il pensiero.

Nel secondo capitolo analizzo le radici greche del termine *Besonnenheit*, *sophrosyne*, mettendo in luce le peculiarità che il concetto assume in Warburg. La parola greca nel momento della sua nascita mostra un legame intrinseco tra corpo e intelletto che però subito si indebolirà fino a simboleggiare l'esatto opposto, ovvero la necessità dell'essere umano di dominare i bisogni e gli impulsi corporei con la forza della ragione. Essa è composta infatti dall'aggettivo *sōs* che significa sano, intatto, e il sostantivo *phren*, il diaframma, l'organo corporeo connesso alle funzioni intellettive che coincide con la capacità riflessiva in opposizione all'*aphrosyne*, la stoltezza. Il tentativo warburghiano di ritrovare quella che definisce come il "fondamento biologico dell'arte" (Warburg 2010, 596), che sarebbe diventato parte del suo progetto (incompiuto) per una nuova estetica energetica, è finalizzato a mostrare come astrazione e gestualità espressiva si innestino nello stesso tronco e si "materializzino" nel tempo/azione che intercorre tra stimolo e risposta.

Il terzo capitolo è dedicato all'esperienza della malattia di Warburg e al suo ricovero nella clinica di Bellevue (1921-1924, Kreuzlingen), allora sotto la direzione dello psichiatra e filosofo svizzero Ludwig Binswanger. Seguendo la proposta di Georges Didi-Huberman (Didi-Huberman [2002] 2006), uno dei primi autori a riconsiderare il periodo che Ernst Gombrich aveva quasi del tutto estromesso dalla biografia intellettuale dello studioso (Gombrich [1970] 1983) – etichettandolo come un periodo buio – mi interessa leggere l'aggravarsi delle condizioni di salute di Warburg come un sintomo dello sgretolamento del *Denkraum* in seguito allo scoppio della Prima Guerra Mondiale. Warburg venne inghiottito dalla spasmodica ricerca delle ragioni al fondo del conflitto mondiale e con disperata dedizione collezionò ogni singolo documento, ritagli di giornale e fotografie, scontrandosi con un problema che di lì a poco sarebbe diventato uno degli elementi più controversi della società di massa: la veridicità delle informazioni. È evidente come questo principio sia essenziale soprattutto per uno storico dell'arte sperimentale come Warburg, che ha dedicato la sua esistenza alla creazione di un paradigma metodologico basato sull'intreccio tra le differenti discipline, lottando al contempo contro convenzioni e relativismi.

Fu dunque profondamente turbato non soltanto dall'inedita precarietà alla quale dovette inginocchiarsi l'Europa, dallo scontro tra Germania e Italia (si

veda Sanvito 2009), da lui considerato il paese d'adozione, dalla violenza della trincea e dal progressivo intensificarsi della persecuzione ebraica (si veda Schoell-Glass 1998) ma anche dal modo in cui questi eventi lacerarono e scardinarono la convinzione dell'uomo moderno di dominare fobie, superstizioni e componenti istintuali. Quella lotta tra il prendere (*greifen*) e il comprendere (*begreifen*) che ossessionava Warburg:

Il tragico destino dell'uomo che viene sempre strappato via dalla condizione della *sophrosyne* (*Besonnenheit*) e rigettato in quella della passionale presa di possesso (*Besitzergreifung*), che deve sempre di nuovo prendere (*greifen*) quando invece vorrebbe comprendere (*begreifen*) (Warburg [1925] 2009).

In conclusione allo *Schlangenritual* – conferenza tenuta a Bellevue per un pubblico di medici e pazienti, “prova” che sancisce la guarigione di Warburg – torna il tema del *Denkraum*, che a partire dal lavoro su appunti e materiali relativi al suo viaggio in America (1896-1897) presso gli indiani Hopi risuona come un monito contro i dissennati progressi della tecnica che nel mondo occidentale hanno azzerato lo spazio di riflessione deputato alla preghiera/rituale e al pensiero critico. Ma cosa si cela sotto l'apparente tecnofobia? Perché sembra opportuno ritenere il periodo di Kreuzlingen fondamentale per le successive metamorfosi del *Denkraum*? La conferenza del 1923 coincide con un momento decisivo nell'elaborazione di un tema onnipresente all'interno della produzione warburghiana: la polarità tra distanza e fagocitamento, la distanza di sicurezza dalla pulsione fobica che ne annebbia le forme. Senza la pretesa di ricostruire il caso psichiatrico, prenderò in esame sintomi ed episodi emblematici direttamente connessi a quei tratti della personalità e della malattia dello studioso che confluirono nella sua ricerca scientifica.

Ludwig Binswanger ebbe un ruolo senza dubbio determinante, introducendo il suo paziente, da sempre ossessionato dalla distanza conoscitiva tra soggetto e oggetto, al metodo fenomenologico in occasione della conferenza (*Sulla fenomenologia, Über Phänomenologie*) del 1922 alla quale Warburg fu invitato ad assistere. Seguendo il suggerimento di Didi-Huberman (Didi-Huberman [2002] 2006) si è voluto costruire un confronto tra la prospettiva warburghiana che pone in luce il tenore sintomatico degli stili e quella binswangheriana volta a chiarire il tenore stilistico dei sintomi psichici.

Il quarto e ultimo capitolo è dedicato alla dimensione temporale della dialettica del *Denkraum* che vive all'interno dell'ultima, incompiuta opera di Warburg, l'*Atlante Mnemosyne*. Il passaggio sostanziale dal saggio del 1920 in poi – ovvero nell'arco di tempo che va dal ricovero a Bellevue a *Mnemosyne*, passando attraverso i materiali del viaggio in America – è probabilmente il risultato di una fruttuosa distorsione prospettica attraverso la quale da oggetto il *Denkraum* diviene strumento metodologico, scientifico e terapeutico. Warburg sente l'esigenza di tematizzare un paradigma evolutivo delle forme simboliche, al contempo storiche, artistiche e antropologiche, che si discosti da una concezione di progresso lineare e unidirezionale. Lo sviluppo delle forme attraverso il tempo e lo spazio è caratterizzato da uno sviluppo discontinuo soggetto alla regressione, la dimensione in cui il guadagno di nuove funzioni vitali può avvenire soltanto tramite la perdita di elementi preesistenti. Nella cornice di un vivo confronto tra biologia e scienze dello spirito, Warburg attinge dalle fonti più svariate per costruire una prospettiva metodologica originale, talvolta anche a partire da elementi di teorie tra loro discordanti. Il movimento ondoso-serpentino, il cui potere ambivalente energetico-simbolico era stato assai prezioso nelle ricerche degli anni di Kreuzlingen, diventa nell'ultima produzione warburghiana l'andamento stesso dell'evoluzione storica delle forme, riconfigurando i termini della dialettica tra energie primordiali e pensiero riflessivo in costante tensione all'interno del *Denkraum der Besonnenheit*. Quest'ultimo è però indubbiamente anche il nome di uno spazio condiviso, dal momento che soprattutto l'*Atlante* non è il risultato delle ricerche di uno studioso solitario, ma del lavoro collettivo del *Warburgkreis* riunitosi attorno la *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek*, dell'assidua collaborazione con Gertrud Bing, Fritz Saxl, Ernst Cassirer, Edgar Wind.

Questo libro nasce dalla mia ricerca di dottorato in Estetica e Teoria delle Arti (Università degli Studi di Palermo, 2011-2013) sotto la preziosa supervisione del prof. Salvatore Tedesco e grazie al periodo trascorso alla Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, dove ho avuto la fortuna di lavorare insieme al gruppo di studenti e dottorandi del Prof. Michael Diers. È stato lui a indirizzarmi all'esplorazione del *Denkraum*, una costellazione che avevo cominciato ad osservare senza sapere ancora che avesse un nome. Inevitabilmente, negli ultimi anni il mio approccio al tema si è trasformato,

è stato influenzato da altri autori, luoghi e soprattutto dallo scambio con altri studiosi, ricercatori e amici con background differenti.

Trovo spesso ridondante l'esigenza di giustificare un lavoro mettendone in evidenza la sua attualità come se questo dovesse automaticamente elevarne il valore. Eppure, non posso negare che riflettere sulla natura del *Denkraum* warburghiano durante i mesi della pandemia, abbia intensificato, non stravolto, il mio processo di comprensione del significato di uno spazio del pensiero e del suo valore politico. E non mi riferisco alla pretesa di empatizzare con le preoccupazioni e le incertezze vissute da Warburg davanti a una situazione storica inedita, evito infatti volentieri qualunque analogia tra la situazione attuale e lo stato di guerra, un linguaggio bellico che i media hanno diffuso specialmente all'inizio della pandemia. Warburg è stato però un attento osservatore dei momenti di passaggio, delle soglie, degli intervalli, degli anacronismi in cui magia e scienza si polarizzano e si barricano nelle loro rispettive superstizioni. Ci ha mostrato che simboli, forme e significati non si stabilizzano, che la loro valenza può in maniera repentina (seguendo percorsi carsici) mutare nel polo opposto assumendo le stesse sembianze. La sfida è come porsi di fronte a e all'interno di questa instabilità: se farsi confortare dalle credenze e dai dogmi, se annichilirsi nel relativismo, se cedere la propria libertà ai poteri forti o se invece ridefinire sempre di nuovo i confini mobili dello spazio del pensiero alla ricerca di una sensatezza che non si cristallizzi nel senso comune ma si apra all'imprevedibilità dell'altro. È forse appropriato – anche se filologicamente azzardato – prendere in prestito le parole di Adorno da *Minima Moralia* per comprendere la dialettica del *Denkraum*:

La dialettica deve fare lo sgambetto alle sane opinioni circa l'immodificabilità del mondo [...] è l'irragionevolezza di fronte alla ragione dominante: solo in quanto la confuta e la supera, diventa essa stessa razionale. [...] La dialettica non può arrestarsi davanti ai concetti di sano e malato, e neppure davanti a quelli, strettamente affini, di ragionevole e irragionevole (Adorno [1951] 1954, aforisma 45).

* The following is an excerpt from Clio Nicastro, *La dialettica del Denkraum*, published by Palermo University Press, 2022, with the kind concession from the author.

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English abstract

The Dialectics of Denkraum is the presentation of the book by Clio Nicastro, *La dialettica del Denkraum in Aby Warburg*, published by Palermo University Press. The volume investigates the concept of *Denkraum der Besonnenheit* as "the name of the constellations of methods, concept, forms of expression, and personal challenges that distinguish Aby Warburg's research programme". Along with a *Foreword* by the author and an *Afterword* by Salvatore Todisco, the book is divided in four chapters: 1. *The Shifting Boundaries of the Denkraum der Besonnenheit*; 2. *The Corporeal Roots of Sophrosyne*; 3. *The Hospitalization in Bellevue*; 4. *Table C: An Elliptical Space for Reflection*.

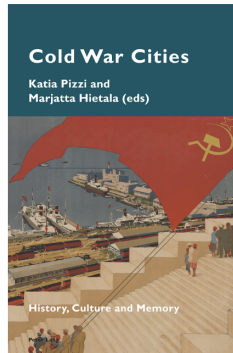
Keywords | Aby Warburg; Denkraum; Besonnenheit; Sophrosyne.

"Cultural Memories". A Presentation

A Series of the Centre for the Study of Cultural Memory, London

Katia Pizzi

Cultural Memories is the publishing project of the Centre for the Study of Cultural Memory at the Institute of Modern Languages Research, University of London. The Centre has an international role and visibility and promotes innovative research with a focus on interdisciplinary approaches to the theme of memory. This series supports the Centre by promoting original research in the global field of cultural memory studies. In particular, it seeks to challenge a traditional model of memory in favour of a more fluid and heterogeneous one, where history, culture and memory are seen as complementary and intersecting. The series embraces new methodological approaches, encompassing a wide range of attitudes to memory in cognitive fields, including comparative studies, cultural studies, history, literature, media and communication, and cognitive sciences. The aim of *Cultural Memories* is to encourage and enhance research in the broad field of memory studies while, at the same time, pointing in new directions, providing a unique platform for creative and forward-looking scholarship in the discipline.



Katia Pizzi and Marjatta Hietala (eds), *Cold War Cities: History, Culture and Memory*, Peter Lang: Oxford 2017

The Cold War left indelible traces on the city, where polarities on the global stage intersected with existing political and social dynamics. This collection taps into the rich fabric of memories, histories and cultural interactions of urban communities in thirteen cities worldwide, countering many myths about the Cold War era.

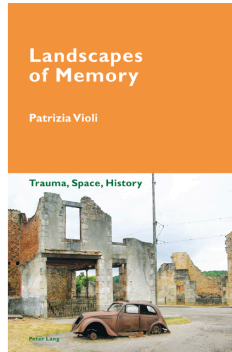
Memories of the Future

Stephen Wilson and
Deborah Jaffé (eds)



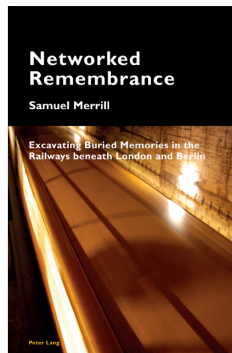
Stephen Wilson and Deborah Jaffé (eds), *Memories of the Future: On Countervision*, Peter Lang: Oxford 2017

What is a memory of the future? This book speculates on the connections between memory and future in a variety of fields, including counter-histories, women's studies, science fiction, art and design, technology, philosophy and politics. This book reveals how these subjects regenerate at the intersections of vision, counter-cultural production and the former present.



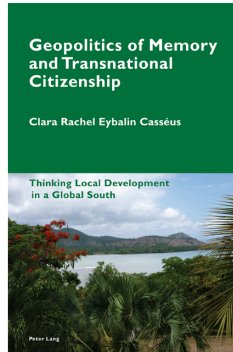
Patrizia Violi, *Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Space, History*, Peter Lang: Oxford 2017

What should we do with places that were theatres of mass suffering and atrocity? Should we keep them as they were, to remind us of the past, or transform them? This volume addresses these questions by discussing selected key trauma sites, analysed with an innovative semiotic methodology that sheds new light on the notions of trauma and memory.



Samuel Merrill, *Networked Remembrance: Excavating Buried Memories in the Railways beneath London and Berlin*, Peter Lang: Oxford 2018

Networked Remembrance is the first book to explore questions of urban memory in the underground railways of the contemporary city. Using London's and Berlin's underground railways as comparative case studies, this book reveals how social memories are spatially produced within the everyday and concealed places in these networks.



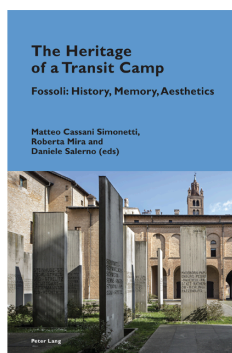
Clara Rachel Eybalin Casseus, *Geopolitics of Memory and Transnational Citizenship: Thinking Local Development in a Global South*, Peter Lang: Oxford 2018

This book offers new perspectives on transnational citizenship, memory and statehood. Drawing on case studies of Haitians and Jamaicans abroad, the book examines how citizens actively engage with their state of origin through narratives of remembrance. Memory is shown to play a key role in deconstructing citizenship and connecting beyond borders.



Pamela Krist, *Memory and the Trevi Fountain: Flows of Political Power in Media Performance*, Peter Lang: Oxford 2019

This book explores the Trevi Fountain through the prism of cultural memory to reveal the processes that make it so iconic and performative. Using a cross-disciplinary approach that includes imagery in art, literature, film, music and the e-Trevi of the internet, this volume looks at how memory travels between media.



Matteo Cassani Simonetti, Roberta Mira and Daniele Salerno (eds) *The Heritage of a Transit Camp. Fossoli: History, Memory, Aesthetics*, Peter Lang: Oxford 2021

Now maintained as a museum and memorial site, the former camp of Fossoli was a Nazi concentration and transit camp for political opponents, Jews and forced labourers. The essays in this volume analyse, from different disciplinary perspectives, the material and immaterial heritage that constitutes a rich and articulated memorial system today.

English abstract

This is the presentation of an editorial series where single researches on different subjects deal with the concept of Memory. Ranging from Architecture to Cognitive sciences, the aim of the project is to encourage the creation of a network of scholars that could lead Cultural studies off the beaten track and towards new interdisciplinary directions.

Keywords | Memory; Heritage; Cultural Studies, Peter Lang.

Mary Hertz Warburg: Free and Unconventional

Review of the Hamburg Exhibition at the Ernst-Barlach-Haus, February/June 2022

by Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino

The Books (...) threatened to suffocate the daily life of the family. His wife, a woman of refined sensibilities, who, as a talented sculptor, would have had the right to have a space for her own work, took note of the situation and dealt with it with touching patience
Fritz Schumacher



1 | Mary Warburg portaying her son-in-law Peter Paul Braden, 1928, Warburg Institute Archive, London.

The exhibition *Auf Augenblicke frei und glücklich MARY WARBURG (1866-1934)* – on display until 12 June at the Barlach Haus in Hamburg – is dedicated to the figure of Mary Warburg, née Hertz. The exhibition is based on the 2020 monograph *Mary Warburg. Portrait einer Künstlerin. Leben/Werk*, curated by Bärbel Hedinger and Michael Diers with Andrea Völker (presented in Engramma 177) which illustrated Warburg's oeuvre through numerous essays and a commented catalogue of her works. Staged in the splendid setting of the park of Villa Jenisch, the exhibition is a homage to the artist and displays around fifty selected works, including drawings, pastels and plastic works, covering a period of

five decades, during which Warburg's artistic ambitions asserted themselves repeatedly against social conventions and family commitments. The fact that Mary was the life companion of a scholar like Aby Warburg (1866-1929), both eminent and complex, did not allow her personality and talent to fully emerge. They remained confined to a small circle of friends, not permitting her work to be appreciated outside the borders of the Hanseatic city. Mary Hertz trained without attending public schools or academies, but took advantage of the opportunities offered in her private sphere in Hamburg: from the age of 16, she attended painting lessons with some of the most important artists, including several women, such as Agnes Steiner or Valeska Röver.

As the daughter of a senator from the Free Hanseatic City of Hamburg, she had to attend official and public events in her mother's stead, who suffered from Parkinson's disease at an early age. From 1882 onwards, she undertook several trips with her father, thus having the opportunity to practise drawing *en plein air*: the views that she collected in a number of notebooks are displayed in the exhibition. In her evocative travel pictures, her views of Hamburg in impressionistic colours and her portraits of family and friends, she shows to be a sensitive observer with a trained eye and an experienced hand. It was during one of these trips that Mary met Aby Warburg, with whom she fell in love to the extent that she defied social and religious conventions in order to marry him. She came from a family of ancient Protestant tradition, while Warburg was the eldest son of the city's most important Jewish family. Mary and Aby married in 1897 and immediately moved to Florence, where Aby continued his studies, living in the Potetje Palace. Some famous watercolours of the palace and its interior are among the most interesting exhibits.

Despite her three children and numerous other commitments, Mary was able to pursue her career as an artist, partly thanks to Alfred Lichtwark, director of the Hamburg Kunsthalle, who held her in high regard and became her first promoter. She participated in numerous exhibitions where she sold some of her works, although she always remained absolutely free to follow her own artistic interests. Along with Hamburg's most prominent personalities, she came in contact with other important artists of her time, such as the Berliner Käthe Kollwitz, whom she met in 1902 during an exhibition at the Kunstverein. We do not know whether

she came into direct contact with the expressionist Ernst Barlach, to whom the museum that houses the current exhibition is dedicated. However, the museum has managed to create a link between the two artists by displaying Barlach's design for the funerary monument for another branch of the Warburg family in the last room of the permanent exhibition.

Particularly interesting are the drawings and sculptures from which her symbiotic relationship with Aby Warburg emerges, such as the beautiful bust of their daughter Marietta (1899-1973) as a child, drawings illustrating Aby's work and some publications illustrated by Mary. On the other hand, the plaster models made by Mary Warburg to study the lighting of the elliptical room of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg (presented in Engramma 116) did not find space.



2 | Mary Warburg, *Lesende Frau am Waldrand*, 1902. Crayon on paper, 26,7 x 18,5 cm. Mary Warburg legacy at Hamburger Kunsthalle, photo by Andrea Völker.

3 | Mary Warburg, *Warburg's garden at Heilwigstraße 114 seen from the other side of the Alster*, 1922. Crayon on Paper, 22,5 x 15,6 cm. John und Kay Prag Collection, photo Andrea Völker.

Finally, one cannot fail to say a few words about the building that welcomes the exhibition. The construction of the Barlach-Haus was financed by the Hamburg industrialist Hermann F. Reemtsma, who had begun collecting the works of the expressionist sculptor and painter Ernst Barlach in 1934. With the advent of Nazism, Barlach's works were judged as degenerate art and he was banned from exhibiting and working from 1938. Reemtsma supported the artist until his death in 1938 with the purchase of 20 sculptural works and about 100 drawings. The museum, built between 1961 and 1962 by the Hamburg architect Werner

Kallmorgen (1902-1979), is a remarkable example of functionalist architecture, as well as fulfilling its function of enhancing the works on display without overpowering them.



4 | Ernst-Barlach-Haus inside the park of Jenisch Haus. photo by Hagen Stier, Hamburg.

English abstract

This contribution by Calandra di Roccolino, is the review of the exhibition *Auf Augenblicke frei und glücklich MARY WARBURG (1866-1934)*, on display at the Barlach Haus in Hamburg until 12 June. The exhibition is intended to be a homage to the artist Mary Warburg, Aby's wife, and displays around fifty selected works, including drawings, pastels, and plastic works, covering a period of five decades.

Keywords | Mary Warburg Hertz; Ernst-Barlach-Haus; Hamburg.

Il metodo di Aby Warburg. L'antico dei gesti, il futuro della memoria by Kurt W. Forster (Ronzani, 2022)

A Choral Reading

by Barbara Baert, Victoria Cirlot, Georges Didi-Huberman, Michael Diers, Andrea Pinotti, Ianick Takaes

§ Barbara Baert, *Mnemosyne, Giordano Bruno and the ox plough*

§ Victoria Cirlot, *Warburg revisitado*

§ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Primitifs émotifs*

§ Michael Diers, *Von Abbildungen ohne Ende bis zum Ende der Abbildungen. Eine Betrachtung aus gegebenem Anlass*

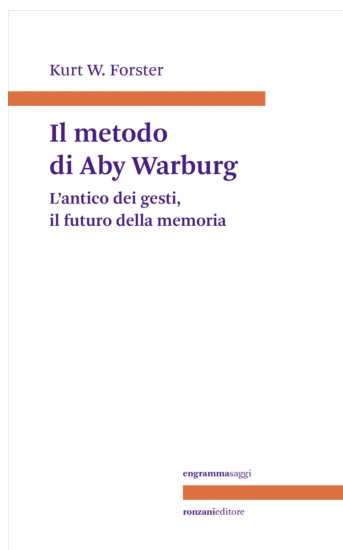
§ Andrea Pinotti, *Fase e neutro. Un cortocircuito warburgiano*

§ Ianick Takaes, *Stendhal and Warburg. Martyrdom and Victory*

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Introduction to the Choral Reading of *Il metodo di Aby Warburg* by Kurt W. Forster

by Redazione di Engramma



K.W. Forster, *Il metodo di Aby Warburg. L'antico dei gesti, il futuro della memoria*, Vicenza 2022. Engramma readers can use the promo code ENGRAMMA2022 to purchase this book at a 20% discount.

The presentation of Engramma's polyphonic homage to Kurt W. Forster and his recent book on Warburg's method might have as an *ex ergo* linking the various tributes a sentence taken from Ianick Takaes's contribution. Takaes, the last (in alphabetical order) and youngest scholar to take part in this Choral Reading, representing the "instructions for use" for Forster's last important work, recommends entering it "not as a bewildering maze, but as a sort of Ariadne's thread to our art-historical conundrums".

Kurt W. Forster's latest essay, first published in German in 2018, has now an Italian edition by Ronzani Editore, translated by Giulia Bordignon as *Il metodo di Aby Warburg. L'antico dei gesti, il futuro della memoria* (Aby Warburg's method. The antique of gestures, the future of memory).

The book outlines Warburg's *Kulturwissenschaft* as a dynamic hermeneutic project. It is, in other words, a "cardanic joint" at the crossroads of different disciplines. As such, and through Benjamin's recognition of the new status of images and the new horizons opened up by neurological and anthropological studies at the beginning of the last century, *Kulturwissenschaft* transmitted the energy of an unprecedented

heuristic device to the interpretation of the individual works studied by Warburg. Moreover and more generally, it affected the developments of visual studies up to contemporary artistic practices.

In this choral reading, scholars more or less directly dealing with the *Nachleben* of Warburg's thought are confronted with the Italian edition of Forster's monograph. This represents a new, crucial, and enlightened interpretation within the labyrinth of *Kulterwissenschaft* of which Warburg was the pioneer. Barbara Baert, Victoria Cirlot, Georges Didi-Huberman, Michael Diers, Andrea Pinotti and Ianick Takaes hence offer a precious polyfocal view on the themes introduced by Forster.

In *Mnemosyne, Giordano Bruno and the ox plough*, Barbara Baert reconsiders the meeting between Aby Warburg and Albert Einstein on 4 September 1928 in which Warburg introduced his *Bilderatlas* to the physicist. Einstein—it is told—stared at *Mnemosyne* “like a fascinated schoolboy”. Baert emphasises the important influence of Bruno's philosophy in the last phase of Warburg's thought. The Bruno-Warburg connection still requires to be explored in depth, especially with reference to the relationship between technique and magic—a theme Warburg will specifically develop in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, with the extraordinary montage of Panel C.

What led Warburg in 1929 to set up his headquarters in a room of the Palace Hotel in Rome to work with Gertrud Bing on the systematisation of the images coming from his decade-long research? This is Victoria Cirlot's crucial question in her *Warburg revisitado*. The author speaks of the “biographical and intellectual connection” outlined by Forster in his work. This new understanding of Warburg – she maintains – comes from the fact that his figure is both surrounded by known and unknown neighbours, the former of whom in particular need to be seen in a new light.

Taking its cue from a red thread running through the pages of Forster's book, Georges Didi-Huberman's contribution *Primitifs émotifs* considers the influence of anthropology on Warburg's research. In particular, the author focuses on Warburg's reading of *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* by Charles Darwin, from which he retained certain

principles, both structural and dialectical. These are the principle of mnemonic "imprints" and associative "displacement"; the principle of "antithesis" or reversive, "depolarising and repolarising" capacity, all of which Warburg would later develop into the concept of *Pathosformeln* in his *Atlas*.

Von Abbildungen ohne Ende bis zum Ende der Abbildungen. Eine Betrachtung aus gegebenem Anlass by Michael Diers is a critical reflection on the role of illustrations in book publishing. Starting from the foreword to the Italian edition of *Il metodo di Aby Warburg*, which maintains that publishing a volume on an art and cultural historian such as Aby Warburg without illustrations may seem bizarre, the author draws a comparison with the use of images in the German original by problematising the process, while also making insightful points on the "end of images".

Within the energetic and electro-technical lexis of Aby Warburg's thought, Kurt Forster's book shows how much his own *Nachleben* – a constant source of inspiration and further questioning – is deeply indebted to the short-circuits it can produce. In his fine contribution *Fase e neutro. Un cortocircuito warburgiano*, Andrea Pinotti reflects on the unsolved tension in Warburg's conception of the image between the polarised "engramma" that animates *Pathosformeln* and the intrinsic "neutral" value of the image.

By referring to the Italian experiences of Stendhal in Florence in 1832 and of Warburg in Rome in 1928-1929, Kurt Forster highlights the disruptive, and at the same time illuminating, effects of the Italian cultural heritage on these two exceptional travellers. Following on Kurt Forster's footsteps, in his *Stendhal and Warburg. Martyrdom and Victory* Ianick Takaes develops the theme of the Stendhal syndrome and combines it with Warburg's pathos. The concept not only put the endurance of Warburg's nerves to the severest test, but also played with his psychic discomfort to finally produce outstanding research on the energy of images.

Mnemosyne, Giordano Bruno and the ox plough

Barbara Baert

One never writes a book of fragments. What one ends up with is less than a book. Or more than a book.

A black glow in the deepest sleepwalking seas, invisible like our crystalline joints

and our fibrous limbs and as tangible as our tenebrous theaters of doubt.

Eugen Thacker, *Cosmic Pessimism*, 2015, 69

Die Energie, die all das ermöglicht und formt, ist zugleich ein Schlüsselbegriff des menschlichen Lebens und der neuen Erkenntnisse der Physik. Warburg zögerte nicht, sich gleich bei der höchsten Autorität zu erkundigen, als er sich kurzerhand vom Chauffeur seines Bruders Max zu Albert Einstein fahren ließ. Er vermutete nämlich, dass die "ästhetischen Werte [...] relativistisch zu betrachten" seien (TKWB, s. 339). Einerseits besitzen diese Werte eine "Schwere der Prägung", bewegen sich also wie feste Körper auf ihren Bahnen, andererseits "sind diese Prägewerte 'gefühllose' Monaden ohne Fenster, die erst durch Berührung mit dem selektiven Wollen der Epoche zu Funktionen der Anziehung oder Abstoßung von Leben werden" (TKWB, s. 339). Erst im Schwerefeld der Geschichte beugen sich die Strahlen, die von diesen "gefühllosen" Werten ausgehen, so mutmaßte Warburg, indem er sich einer jener Verkürzungen *more geometrico* bediente, die wissenschaftliche Modelle dem philosophischen Denken anbieten (Forster 2018, 57).

L'energia che rende possibile e plasma tutto questo costituisce un concetto chiave dell'esistenza umana e, insieme, delle intuizioni della fisica che proprio allora si andavano delineando come novità scientifiche. Warburg non aveva esitato a raccogliere informazioni dalla più alta autorità in materia, quando senza indugi si era fatto portare seduta stante dall'autista di suo fratello Max a far visita ad Albert Einstein. Sospettava infatti che "i valori

estetici sono [...] relativistici". Da un lato, questi valori hanno il "peso di un'impronta", muovendosi come corpi solidi sulle loro traiettorie; dall'altro lato "queste impronte sono 'insensibili' monadi senza finestre, che solo attraverso il contatto con la volontà selettiva dell'epoca acquistano una funzione attrattiva o repulsiva". I raggi emanati da questi valori di per sé "insensibili" deviano solo nel campo gravitazionale della storia: così doveva aver pensato Warburg, quando *more geometrico* aveva impiegato una di quelle formule abbreviate che il modello scientifico offre al pensiero filosofico (Forster 2022, 61-62).

Aby Warburg reportedly said:

Contemplation of the sky is the grace and curse of humanity (Warburg [1923] 1995, 16).

Aby Warburg and Albert Einstein met on 4 September 1928—the day that the calendar celebrates the prophet Moses—a conversation near the Ostsee in Scharbeutz (Germany, Schleswig-Holstein). It was Warburg who initiated the meeting, and it is said that he talked to Einstein for four hours about the *Bilderatlas*, especially the panel with Johannes Kepler's *mysterium cosmographicum* (Bredenkamp, Wedepohl 2012 and Bredenkamp, Wedepohl 2015). The sketch where Einstein shows Warburg how the ellipse-shaped orbit of the Earth can be explained by the position of Mars has been preserved. According to Einstein, this was Kepler's most important discovery.

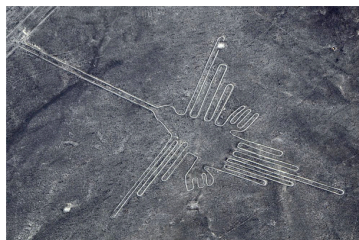
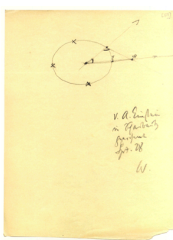
The next day, Warburg writes to his brother Max:

Das allgemein Bedeutsame besteht nun darin, daß ich dadurch Material zur Selbsterkenntnis des denkenden Menschen einliefere, daß ich den Weg von der Konkretion zur Abstraktion nicht als ausschließende Gegensätzlichkeit sondern als organischen Kreislauf im menschlichen Denkvermögen auffasse und nachweise (Aby Warburg to Max Warburg, 5 September 1928, WIA FC).

Apparently, Warburg wanted to test his cosmologic knowledge with the master. And in a letter to Fritz Saxl, Aby's loyal assistant and librarian, also dated 5 September 1928, he writes that Einstein had stared at his *Bilderatlas* like a fascinated schoolboy: as if it were a movie. Rather

wonderfully, this was described as such by Einstein himself: the *Bilderatlas* wants to move like a spider web—strong and fragile at the same time—echoing and murmuring throughout cultural history. But Warburg also writes that Einstein peppered him with many critical questions:

Gespannt wie ein Schuljunge im Kino meinen Bildern folgte und unter steten unerbittlichen Nachfragen die Stichhaltigkeit meiner Schlüsse prüfte. Nur bei Kepler und der Ellipse habe ich, glaube ich, nicht gut bestanden; sonst war er mit mir zufrieden (Aby Warburg to Fritz Saxl, 5 September 1928, WIA GC. See also Renn 2001, 185, no. 74).



1 | Albert Einstein (1879-1955) in Scharbeutz, 1928, From: H. Bredekamp, C. Wedepohl, *Warburg, Cassirer und Einstein im Gespräch. Kepler als Schlüssel der Moderne*, Berlin 2015, 61.

2 | Albert Einstein's (1879-1955) sketch to explain the calculation of the orbit of Mars to Aby Warburg, 4 September 1928, From: Horst Bredekamp & Claudia Wedepohl, *Warburg, Cassirer und Einstein im Gespräch. Kepler als Schlüssel der Moderne*, Berlin 2015, 94.

3 | Hummingbird Geoglyph at the Nasca lines, ca. 500 BC-500 AD, Nazca desert, Peru.

I wonder if Warburg talked with Einstein about his latest obsession: Giordano Bruno (Baert 2019, 73-76). The Dominican, born in Nola near Naples, was said to have an exceptionally good memory (Yates 1984, 199-307) and became both famous and criticised for his cosmology. He described the universe as an eternal, pantheistic system that could not have a centre due to its cosmic pluralism, and where in principle other life should be possible. This progressive vision on the universe – Bruno's heliocentrism was shared by Nicolaus Copernicus and Johannes Kepler – together with his writings on reincarnation – the transmigration of the soul – led to Bruno being denounced, and in 1600, he ended up being burned at the stake on the Campo de' Fiori in Rome, which nowadays still has a statue of him. Giordano Bruno, the heretic, the activist of the free word.

Admirer of Nicholas Cusanus whom we met before in this essay. More *esotericus* than *mysticus* maybe, but always wandering, searching (Colilli 2005, 121-131).

Aby Warburg had his important moment of clarity – *Wir müssen Giordano Bruno lesen* – on 22 November 1928 in Rome, when he invited Italians (1885-1961) to hold a lecture on this almost inaccessible philosopher, theologian, and astrologist (Warburg [1926-1929] 2001, 350. See also Olschki 1924, 1-79). A few days later, Warburg notes:

Nachmittags um circa 6 angefangen Giordano Bruno zu lesen. Zuerst mühselig durch die Wüste der Allgemeinheiten gepflügt. Dann begreift College Bing plötzlich mit bildschöner Sicherheit das immens complizierte Problem der Heiden-Götterwelt bei Giordano Bruno als explizierbar.

Afternoon around 6 began to read Giordano Bruno. At first laboriously ploughed through the desert of commonplaces. Then suddenly colleague Bing comprehends with beautiful certainty how to explicate the immense, complicated problem of the pagan pantheon of gods in Giordano Bruno (Warburg [1926-1929] 2001, 273-275. Author's translation).

We still have the notes Warburg collected on Bruno between December 1928 and June 1929:

He [Warburg] wants him to talk about the function of classical mythology in Bruno's thought as he hoped that it might demonstrate a link between pagan image-based thought and modern symbol-based thought. For him Bruno is the pivotal thinker of the sixteenth century, an 'antenna', a receptor of European thought (Warburg Institute website. The unpublished manuscript: WIA 121.1.1. See also Ghelardi, Targia 2008, 13-58).

During this time, Warburg bought a collection of 350 books on Bruno:

Ausserordentlich weit-tragende zweckdienliche Erwerbung: wird Folgen haben.

Extraordinarily far-reaching, purposive acquisition: it will have consequences (Warburg [1926-1929] 2001, 387. Author's translation).

Bruno's *Spaccio* (Expulsion) is a dialogue between *Sophia* (Wisdom), Saulino, and Mercurio, in which they discuss a hybrid world of philosophy, virtues, and astrology. The subjects of furor, enthusiasm, and a cosmological fire that fulfils the inner soul are mentioned frequently throughout the text (Giordano Bruno, *Spaccio de la Bestia Trionfante*, 16). The esoteric Spaccio wanted to develop a new civilisation and cosmology, a *riforma*, which takes time: a *spacciare* that would lead mankind in an orbit around the sun and bring them eternal truth. The path towards this ideal is described in dual terms: between light and darkness, between chaos and order. And in the chthonic darkness of chaos and the underworld, the truth of the light can be found (Mann 2003, 29).

De gli eroici furori is also a dialogue, this time between Tansillo and Cicada, who try to understand the fire of love as a mystical unification and ascent towards the sun. For example, in the first dialogue it says:

Cicada: Why is love symbolized by fire?

Tansillo: Putting aside many other reasons for the moment, let this suffice for you now. Love converts the thing loved into the lover, as the fire, among all the most active elements, is able to convert all the other simple and complex elements into itself. (...) My sweet pain, new in the world and rare, when shall I ever escape from your burden, since the remedy is weariness to me, and the pain delight? Eyes, flames, and bow of my lord, twofold fire in the soul, and arrows in the heart, because the languishing is sweet to me, and the fire is dear (Giordano Bruno, *De gli eroici furori*, 19).

Nicolas Mann summarises Bruno's ideas of *entheos* and *furor* as follows:

A central theme of all Bruno's writings is his ferocious opposition to Aristotelian theories of the division of form and matter, for he held that they were inseparable. He portrays the philosopher as driven by admiration for the unity of all natural life towards a progressive revelation of the power of the human mind. This desire for knowledge can only be achieved through human action and speculation, a heroic frenzy distinguishing the new freedom of mankind from the passivity of earlier generations enslaved by the monstrous forms of determinism (Mann 2003, 28-29).

The studies on the ‘Giordano Bruno-Universe’ were so inspiring for Aby Warburg that he was in danger of losing himself again (Wedepohl 2014, 385-402). Nevertheless he developed an —idiosyncratic— vocabulary to connect Bruno with the chthonic world of the Capua *mithraeum* he and Gertrud visited on the 17th of May in the year he would die: 1929.

Das Monstrum als/ Lichtsymbol / Erleuchtung
 Die gegabelte Wünschelruthe / bog sich auf Neapel nieder
 G. B. nach S. Domenico – Hygin/ A. W. nach Capua – Heliotropismus
 u. Trionfo della notte.

The *monstrum* as / light symbol / of illumination
 The forked dowsing rod/ bent down toward Naples
 G. B. to S. Domenico – Hyginus/ A. W. to Capua – heliotropis
 and *Trionfo della notte* (WIA, III.121.1.2, see Johnson 2012, 211).

Back to the Ostsee. Albert and Aby are still talking. Both men feel challenged by each other. Alas, we will never know all the details about their conversations. But what we do know is that they agreed on the unparalleled impact of Kepler’s *mysterium cosmographicum*. And they might have agreed also that the development of telegraphy comes close to that particular impact, close enough to close indeed the A-B-C introduction to the *Atlas*. Now the letters can make way for numbers. Incipit Panel 1 with “Abtragung des Kosmos auf einen Teil des Körpers zu Weissagungszwecken. Babylonischer Staats-Stern Glaube. Originäre orientalische Praktik”. Thus, the first step in the *Mnemosyne* project is the magical object: the transfer of the cosmos to the body and the control of the universe through predictions and the calculation of time. That is how *Mnemosyne*, mother of all Muses, started speaking in Babylon: with a liver and a clay tablet (Didi-Huberman 2010).

There, the time started again and unfolded into an endless circular movement —starting the ox-tail dance— and the instrument for orientation —spiritually, mythically, and astrophysically. There in the *Atlas*, the heart-rending assignment to give the fate of humans and their universe a voice through a gigantic cosmic *boustrophedon* started (Baert 2016). A voice under the all-seeing milky blue eyes of *Mnemosyne*:

zigzagging between memory and language, between mother and snake. And *Mnemosyne* ploughs her deep geoglyphs in the earth to guide us, we, the humble travelers on the Heavenly Ladder between above and below, between *monstrum* and *astra*, between fear and delight. And look at what *Mnemosyne* created with her plough: a gigantic hummingbird.

The bird that makes time flutter in one point, in the cyclopic black pupil of the universe. And in the fluttering of a fragile bird the impossible becomes possible: the unflinching creativities of the cosmos burst loose and fall down to us. And now *Mnemosyne* sings together with the hummingbird and all the Muses have gathered dancing in Venice. And each one – goddess, bird, Muse – jubilates so vulnerable planet of ours.

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Warburg revisitado

Victoria Cirlot

En el libro de Kurt W. Forster volvemos a encontrar las cuestiones centrales que afectan a la comprensión de Aby Warburg, de su obra y de su legado, desde nuevas luces. ¿Cómo es esto posible? Desde la meteórica reaparición de Warburg en las últimas décadas del siglo pasado, no han dejado de publicarse importantes estudios que han contribuido de un modo extraordinario a una valoración de este personaje gigantesco, a pesar de su estatura, cuya sombra nos sigue alcanzando en la actualidad, aún después de las grandes obras en la historia del arte debidas en su mayor parte a historiadores con una deuda mayor o menor, más cerca de él o más lejos, pero en cualquier caso surgidos de su espacio de pensamiento (*Denkraum*). Y sucede así porque su herencia no ha sido ni mucho menos agotada, sino que más bien se advierte como una cantera, de la que no se dejan de sacar tesoros cuyo brillo no deja de deslumbrarnos. Pero, ¿cómo es posible que todavía esas cuestiones centrales puedan ser replanteadas de nuevos modos que muestren nuevos significados y que abran nuevos senderos de investigación? El libro de Kurt W. Forster es un claro testimonio de ello. La lectura de este libro nos advierte acerca de que esas cuestiones centrales están ordenadas de un modo diferente, y, sobre todo, de que, siguiendo el “método” Warburg, sus aproximaciones a otros casos, su colocación junto a otros autores, otras obras, otras situaciones, otros actos, dentro de un mismo contexto histórico, permiten visitarlas desde otros lugares que ofrecen otras perspectivas.

Si hay un suceso en la vida de Aby Warburg que en este libro suena como un *leitmotiv*, ese es su viaje y estancia en Roma, “la ciudad de los mártires y los triunfadores”, durante meses, desde el 17 de noviembre de 1928 hasta el 28 de abril de 1929. A ello se dedica explícitamente el capítulo segundo, pero a la estancia romana de Warburg se vuelve una y otra vez, como ocurre también con el ‘otro’ viaje de Warburg, que tres décadas antes del de Roma le había llevado desde Nueva York/Washington a Nuevo

México junto a los indios hopi, y que tres décadas después reclamaba su repetición, pero que justamente tuvo que ser sustituido por el de Roma, por consejo médico y familiar. ¿Qué indujo a Warburg a montar su cuartel general en una habitación del Palace Hotel de Roma junto a la colega Bing y pasar allá unos cuantos meses dedicado a la reordenación de las fotografías en sus arpilleras, tal y como vemos en la fotografía reproducida en el libro, y que encabeza el capítulo II? Fue esta una estancia interrumpida por las excursiones al sur, Nápoles y alrededores, pero orientada claramente a un fin: la célebre conferencia en la biblioteca hertziana del 19 de febrero de 1929, de dos horas y media de duración, en la que quiso presentar su gran proyecto que no era otro que el célebre *Atlas Mnemosyne*. Creo que este es el núcleo del libro cuyo gran mérito consiste en ‘revisitar’ esta coyuntura biográfica, vivencial e intelectual. Detectado el ‘problema’, que no es otro que el que suscita esa obra que podríamos definir como un gran reto para la hermenéutica, porque como decía otro gran estudioso de Warburg, uno de los que mas han contribuido a su comprensión en el siglo XXI, en realidad, nadie sabe a ciencia cierta por qué Warburg colocaba una imagen junto a otra (“un atlas d’images que personne – moi pas plus que quiconque – ne comprend tout à fait” (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Aperçues*, París 2018, 16). En torno a este núcleo, naturalmente aparecen otros elementos: de entre la obra de Warburg, se cita el estudio sobre Lutero, el estudio sobre Manet, sobre Rembrandt, pero quizás sea *El ritual de la serpiente*, el que más atraiga la atención de Forster; el viaje a Roma está precedido de alusiones, fugaces, a su internamiento en la clínica de Binswanger; un primer capítulo está dedicado a una rápida biografía centrada en los hechos más singulares. Aunque la novedad en la comprensión de Warburg deriva de cómo lo rodea de vecinos ya conocidos aunque iluminados con nuevos focos, y de otros, nada conocidos.



1 | Aby Warburg con la colega Gertrud Bing y Franz Alber en la habitación del Hotel Palace de Roma (1929).

2 | Esquema preparatorio de Aby Warburg para su conferencia en la Biblioteca Hertziana de Roma el 19 de febrero de 1929.

3 | Frank Hamilton Cushing junto a Laiyvahrtseilunkya, Naiyutchi, Palowehtiwe, Kiasawa y Nanake, 1882, Smithsonian, National Portrait Gallery.

4 | Jesse Walter Fewkes (1850-1930) sucedió a Cushing como jefe de expedición arqueológica entre las tribus Zuñis y Hopi.

Señalo algunos ejemplos: la figura de Karl Lamprecht, antiguo profesor de Warburg en Bonn, adquiere en el libro un peso mucho más decisivo del que habitualmente se le ha concedido. Su retrato, realizado por su amigo Max Klinger, acompaña la página inicial del cuarto capítulo. El foco proyectado sobre Lamprecht se entiende de inmediato en este libro centrado en la *Kulturwissenschaft*, según se indica en su título, en la medida en que Lamprecht fue director del Instituto con ese nombre en Leipzig (Institut für Kultur- und Universalgeschichte). La idea que Warburg tenía de la *Kulturwissenschaft* no procedía solo de Burckhardt, sino también de Lamprecht, quien desempeñó un papel importante en la formación de la escuela francesa de los *Annales*, que Forster relaciona también con el método histórico del propio Warburg. El viaje a Nuevo México de 1895/6 se encuentra acompañado del viaje científico alrededor del mundo de Adelbert con Chamisso en el barco *Rurik* al mando de Otto von Kotzebue. D.H. Lawrence y su libro *Mornings in Mexico* (London 1927) es otro buen vecino de la estancia de Warburg entre los indios hopi, magníficamente precedida por la personalidad de Frank Hamilton Cushing, quien inició una etnografía fundamentada en la reciprocidad, antes de Jesse Walter Fewkes, a quien Warburg conoció y por quien pudo hacerse una idea precisa del ritual de la serpiente que nunca llegó a ver con sus propios ojos. Otro de los ámbitos explorados en este libro que nos abre a una comprensión más justa y precisa de los términos empleados por Warburg es el referido a la metáfora de la luz y la electricidad que se encuentran precozmente, en los primeros años del siglo XIX, en la obra de Johann Wilhelm Ritter, como por ejemplo, 'polarización', y que habrían de fascinar a los Goethe y a los Novalis. En lo que respecta al *Atlas*

Mnemosyne, el *Passagen-Werk* de Benjamin continúa siendo el compañero predilecto, aunque Forster amplia la red de relaciones al *Bauen in Frankreich* (1928) de Siegfried Giedion, construido como una partitura, que tanto impacto habría de producir en Benjamin, o a la revista *Documents* creada por Carl Einstein y Georges Bataille, cuyos quince números aparecieron entre 1929-1931, y cuyos materiales procedían de ámbitos tan diversos como la arqueología, las bellas artes o la etnografía. Ejemplos todos en los que se percibe la misma necesidad de hacer explotar la forma tradicional del libro de imprenta a través de una supremacía consciente y deseada de la imagen. Así, el libro de Forster va creando constelaciones y configuraciones que suponen nuevos escenarios donde situar a Warburg. Al capítulo dedicado al *Atlas* (VII) sigue otro dedicado a la Biblioteca (VIII) en el que se pone de manifiesto esa correspondencia entre ambos por participar de un mismo procedimiento de colocación (fotografías o libros): la asociación. Sostiene Forster que:

Per Warburg, “associare” significava da un lato ripristinare – cioè completare e continuare – connessioni intermittenti o sotterranee, e dall’altro lato significava inventarerapporti completamente nuovi. Nella conferenza su Rembrandt del 1926 lo studioso ricordava che “corrispondenze occasionali tra parola e immagine” non erano sufficienti per produrre l’effetto di una “illuminazione” del loro significato. Era necessario qualcosa di più: qualcosa che anche Benjamin nei materiali per il suo *Passages* postulava per i propri montaggi, definendo l’immagine una “dialettica nell’immobilità”. Nel giro di una frase, Benjamin formula un’idea straordinaria: il presente e il passato non gettano semplicemente luce l’uno sull’altro, ma la loro relazione si manifesta inizialmente solo in un’immagine, in cui “quel che è stato si unisce fulmineamente con l’ora, in una costellazione”. Benjamin rifiutava però l’opinione comune che questa costellazione derivasse da una presunta continuità storica e, al contrario, insisteva sul fatto che essa appare solo all’improvviso o “fulmineamente”, solo quando lo storico è in grado di riconoscere la “dialettica nell’immobilità” contenuta nell’immagine (Forster [2018] 2022, 191-192).

De un modo muy preciso y por ello tremendamente iluminador se ha puesto aquí de nuevo en relación la idea de la imagen dialéctica de Benjamin y la idea de las asociaciones de imágenes de Warburg. En el primer manifiesto, André Breton citando a Pierre Reverdy, ya confesaba su

extrema sensibilidad ante la chispa resultante de la aproximación de imágenes distantes. Quizás ahí resida la gran riqueza del legado Warburg. Por mucho que la cita filológica haga constantemente acto de presencia en las láminas del *Atlas*:

Per lui la precisione filologica costituiva la premessa a sostegno di un'intuizione, sempre difficilmente dimostrabile, e mai una garanzia di conoscenza (Forster [2018] 2022, 15).

Eso no significa que la imaginación no interviniera en el proceso de construcción, dentro de un dinamismo y movimiento constante de las imágenes gracias al arte de la combinatoria que Warburg empleó tanto en su Biblioteca como en el *Atlas*, ni que el azar no se colara de vez en cuando en las una y otra vez renovadas constelaciones.

Primitifs émotifs

Georges Didi-Huberman

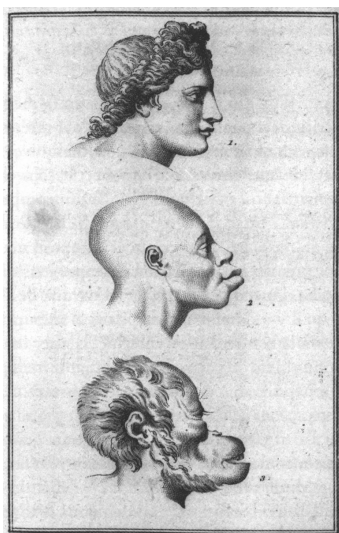
À reposer la question du 'primitif' dans l'œuvre d'Aby Warburg et à la prolonger sur les problèmes de l'émotion', Kurt Forster nous demande, d'une certaine façon, de repenser les rapports du 'primitif' et de l'émotif (Forster 2018, 107-158). Les émotifs seraient des sortes de primitifs, entend-on – ou sous-entend-on – souvent. Et les primitifs, en toute réciprocité, seraient de grands émotifs. Cette équivalence n'est, en réalité, qu'une bien mauvaise équivoque: un préjugé, raciste en son fond et auquel Montaigne, dans le fameux chapitre des *Essais* sur les cannibales, fut l'un des premiers, sans doute, à ne pas sacrifier (de Montaigne *Essais*, 200-213). Mais ce préjugé aura eu la vie dure. Il a accompagné conquistadors et missionnaires, colons et ethnographes, diplomates et touristes en tous genres. Il est consubstantiel à la pensée des hygiénistes, des observateurs d'"enfants sauvages", comme Lucienne Strivay en a restitué l'histoire (Strivay 2006), des anatomistes de la boîte crânienne, des physiologistes férus de localisations cérébrales, des philosophes évolutionnistes, des idéologues racistes ou des psychologues en quête de hiérarchies pour leurs chers 'quotients intellectuels'.

Au début de son livre sur *L'Art et la Race*, Anne Lafont a rappelé comment Petrus Camper (Camper, *Dissertation sur les variétés naturelles*), en 1792, avait imprimé un tournant décisif à la :

Mise en image de l'Africain, non seulement en le plaçant dans une série d'individus, mais encore en le positionnant sur un plan horizontal, propice à la comparaison (Lafont 2019, 10).

Comparaison qu'au tout début du XIXe siècle Julien-Joseph Virey, dans une Histoire naturelle du genre humain qui se donnait pour tâche de mettre au jour les "principaux fondements physiques et moraux" de l'humanité (Virey, *Histoire naturelle*) devait – comme bien d'autres après lui – reprendre en la verticalisant, c'est-à-dire en lui donnant valeur de

hiérarchie ontologique avec, par exemple : un profil d'Apollon tout en haut de la planche comparative, une tête d'orang-outang tout en bas et, au milieu, un visage de "primitif", un visage de "nègre" [Fig. 1].



1 | Julien-Joseph Virey, *Profil de l'Apollon, celui du nègre et celui de l'orang-outang pour termes de comparaison des divers angles de la face*, 1802. Gravure publiée dans *Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, ou *Recherches sur ses principaux fondements physiques et moraux*, Paris, Dufart, 1801-1802, II, pl. III.

Petrus Camper fait partie – avec Charles Le Brun, Johann Kaspar Lavater, Charles Bell, Pierre Gratiolet, Duchenne de Boulogne et Herbert Spencer – des autorités auxquelles Charles Darwin voulut rendre hommage, fût-ce pour les dépasser, en ouverture de son livre de 1872 *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (Darwin [1872] 1877, 1-13). On sait le retentissement considérable de ce livre sur la physiologie et la psychologie des émotions, mais aussi à travers de nombreux autres champs de savoir liés à l'anthropologie, à la philosophie, aux sciences sociales en général. Avec quelques savants tels qu'Alexander Bain ou Herbert Spencer, Darwin s'est fait le héraut d'une théorie affirmant d'abord le soubassement biologique et physiologique des émotions : c'est comme si la science positive investissait enfin – et même s'appropriait – tout un domaine jusque-là diffus dans les discours des philosophes ou des moralistes, dans les œuvres d'art

ou dans les écrits littéraires. C'est ainsi qu'avec Darwin semble se clore toute une époque 'sentimentale' ou 'romantique' de l'affectivité : celle où régnaient des vocables tels que *passion*, *affection*, *feeling* ou *sentiment*. Le mot *passion* était bien trop lié à l'Antiquité (pour le pathos grec) ou au christianisme (pour la Passion de Jésus). *Affection*, *feeling* et *sentiment* étaient trop ancrés dans la convention littéraire des poèmes lyriques ou des romans pour jeunes filles. C'est *emotion* qu'il faudra dire à présent, selon un impératif qui va – comme Thomas Dixon en a retracé l'histoire – se généraliser partout (Dixon 2003). Jacqueline Carroy et Stéphanie Dupouy, dans le troisième tome de *l'Histoire des émotions* publié sous la

direction de Jean-Jacques Courtine, ont ainsi résumé cet avènement théorique de l'émotion au sens darwinien :

De la conceptualisation évolutionniste des émotions, les sciences de la fin du XIXe siècle et du début du XXe siècle ont surtout retenu une idée, dont on pourrait ensuite retracer le cheminement jusqu'à nos jours : les émotions seraient des réflexes propres aux centres nerveux primitifs, inhibés par les centres nerveux supérieurs – la mise hors-circuit des régions cérébrales plus évoluées conduisant dès lors à exacerber les phénomènes émotionnels. [...] Darwin inaugure une ère 'post-sentimentaliste' et 'post-romantique' des sciences de l'émotion, marquée par la contestation des valeurs (morales et esthétiques) qui ont été prêtées au XVIIIe et XIXe siècles par les philosophes et les artistes (Carroy, Dupouy 2017, 42-43 et 46-47).

Mais qu'on ne s'y trompe pas: la "contestation des valeurs" morales ou esthétiques issues du romantisme ne s'est pas faite sans une contrepartie elle-même contestable, car soutenue par des valeurs, une morale, voire une esthétique. Revendiquer une position "scientifique" n'empêche en rien qu'agisse de part en part cette "philosophie spontanée des savants" dont Louis Althusser a su, autrefois, introduire la notion (Althusser [1967] 1974). Parler des émotions en termes de "réflexes" ou de centres nerveux "primitifs", moins "évolués" que les "supérieurs", voilà qui relève bien – ne serait-ce que dans le choix de vocabulaire – d'une échelle de valeurs philosophiques ou anthropologiques dont les présupposés moraux sont évidents. Cette échelle de valeurs apparaît, significativement, dès l'introduction de Darwin à son ouvrage, alors qu'il s'emploie à présenter, avec l'honnêteté typique du savant :

Les moyens d'étude [...] adoptés [par lui] avec le plus de profit pour avoir un critérium aussi sûr que possible et pour vérifier, sans tenir compte de l'opinion reçue (to ascertain, independently of common opinion), jusqu'à quel point les divers changements des traits et des gestes traduisent réellement (are really expressive of) certains états d'esprit (Darwin [1872] 1877, 13).



2 | James Davis Cooper, *État de la chevelure chez une femme aliénée* (d'après une photographie), 1872. Gravure publiée dans Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Londres, Murray, 1872, 296.

Il a été dit avec justesse – par Allan Fridlund, en 1992 – que Darwin dans son livre sur les émotions, comme dans tout ce qu'il énonça par ailleurs sur les sociétés humaines, ne plaçait pas au fond de tout cette fameuse "sélection naturelle" qui eût discriminé, à la façon du "darwinisme social" de Spencer, les 'émotifs adaptés' des autres qui ne l'étaient pas (Fridlund 1992, 117-137). Il n'empêche : si l'émotion court ainsi, presque directement, des animaux à l'homme, comme le dit Darwin, c'est bien qu'elle niche principalement chez ceux qu'on pourrait nommer, ici, les 'émotifs primitifs'. Or ceux-ci correspondent assez

strictement aux catégories les *moins adaptées* au monde social des sociétés occidentales : ce sont les "enfants" ("car ils expriment plusieurs émotions [...] avec une énergie extraordinaire"), les "aliénés" ("car ils sont soumis aux passions les plus violentes et leur donnent un libre cours"), les "vieillards" (comme chez Duchenne de Boulogne), les femmes et, enfin, les "sauvages" (ces "races humains [...] qui ont eu peu de rapports avec les Européens"). C'est ainsi que Darwin — planches photographiques à l'appui — aura scruté de près les pleurs "abondants" des 'enfants', qui "paraissent constituer l'expression naturelle et primitive (the primary and natural expression)" de toutes leurs douleurs ; puis ceux des 'aliénés' qui "s'abandonnent, sans aucune contrainte ou à peu près, à toutes leurs émotions" ; ainsi que ceux des 'primitifs' : "on sait que les sauvages versent d'abondantes larmes pour des causes extrêmement futiles (savages weep copiously from very slight causes)". Tandis que, bien sûr, "l'Anglais ne pleure guère (Englishmen rarely cry) que sous la pression de la douleur morale la plus poignante". Plus loin dans le cours de son livre, Darwin évoquera le cas d'une 'femme aliénée' dont l'état de frayeur provoquait le hérissément tenace de sa chevelure [Fig. 2]. La gravure illustrant ce phénomène — réalisée d'après une photographie — montre, en effet, une femme dont la chevelure était devenue toute crépue, en sorte qu'elle évoque à la fois, par ce trait mais aussi par l'aspect rudimentaire de son vêtement, une Africaine et une Indienne... Que cette

femme fût une pauvre sujette de Sa Majesté britannique, cela est fort probable ; mais ses émotions extravagantes l'avaient, en quelque sorte, ramenée au rang d'une 'femme primitive'.

Le hérissément des cheveux procède, dans ce contexte physiopathologique, d'un paradigme plus général selon lequel les 'émotifs primitifs', contrairement aux "gens civilisés", ne contiennent pas leur corps. Ça se hérisse, ça enfle, ça sécrète de partout – "du foie, des reins, des mamelles" – car "certaines glandes [...] sont impressionnées par les émotions violentes (certain glands... are affected by strong emotions)", comme le cœur peut battre à tout rompre, la sueur perler des tempes, etc. Les larmes elles-mêmes font partie, aux yeux de Darwin, de ce phénomène général. Tout un sous-chapitre concernant les émotions animales sera, ainsi, consacré à l'"érection des appendices cutanées (erection of the dermal appendages)": le naturaliste y décrira toutes les manières, pour les animaux, de manifester leurs émotions – peur, attirance, rage, défi – par différents types de gonflements, de turgescences, de dilatations, de hérissements, de suintements ou d'éjaculations (Darwin [1872] 1877, 13-15, 164-168 et 321-323; 72-73, 102-112).

Tout cela noté avec une précision qui se voulait rigoureuse, de façon à constituer une véritable 'sémiologie des émotions' dont les "signes", enfin lisibles universellement, se nommaient "dilatation capillaire", "rougeur", "trouble de la respiration" ou "accélération du pouls". On sait que, peu de temps après Darwin, en France notamment, la 'méthode graphique' issue des travaux d'Étienne-Jules Marey aura trouvé un champ d'expérimentation considérable du côté des phénomènes affectifs, des symptômes hystériques, des conduites sous hypnose, etc (Marey [1878] 1885). De la même façon que Charcot a pu "inventer l'hystérie" (Didi-Huberman [1982] 2012) en prétendant lui appliquer ce type de sémiologie – avec son développement esthétique si prégnant, en particulier dans les ouvrages de Paul Richer (Richer [1881] 1885) qui sont pleins de mesures et de graphiques, mais aussi de modèles empruntés à l'histoire de l'art –, les psychophysiologistes du XIXe siècle auront, à leur manière, 'inventé l'émotion' à coups de mesures "cardiographiques", "sphygmographiques" (pouls), "pneumographiques" (mouvements respiratoires), "plétysmographiques" (variations du volume sanguin) ou "sphygmomanométriques" (pression artérielle)...

Pour son ouvrage sur *Les Émotions chez les sujets en état d'hypnotisme*, par exemple, Jules Luys (Luys 1887) drogua systématiquement ses sujets d'expérience pour que leurs émotions fussent mieux "lisibles" (mais aussi photographiables). Quant à Charles Féré, il prétendit dans son ouvrage sur *La Pathologie des émotions* que celles-ci constituent une sorte de survivance d'états primitifs dépassés par l'évolution de l'homme civilisé, devenant ainsi, sous nos cieux d'Occident, une forme de maladie dont ses recherches entendaient théoriser la prophylaxie: "L'homme bien constitué et absolument en bonne santé est incapable d'éprouver des émotions violentes", écrivait-il sans lui-même frémir (Féré 1892, 494). Les émotifs, selon cette perspective générale, vivraient alors sur un 'mode primitif' au sens où ils seraient maintenus dans un stade 'involué' – voire 'dégénéré', comme on l'entend souvent dès cette époque – de leur psychisme, c'est-à-dire un 'mode pathologique'. Si l'œuvre de Darwin a pu servir de caution à ce genre d'entreprises normalisatrices, elle ne s'était pas pour autant focalisée sur une telle critériologie du normal et du pathologique. Attentive au seul 'mode physiologique', elle a surtout servi de point de départ aux ultérieures théories de l'émotion que l'on trouve, notamment, chez William James (James [1884] 1901) et Carl Lange (Lange [1885] 1895) ou Walter Cannon (Cannon 1915).

Or tout cela ne fut pas sans incidences sur la réflexion des sociologues et des anthropologues. Les 'émotifs primitifs', dans ce nouveau contexte, laissèrent donc la place aux 'primitifs émotifs'. En 1910, par exemple, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl – l'un des fondateurs, avec Émile Durkheim, de l'école française d'anthropologie – publia un livre intitulé *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*. Dans le chapitre consacré aux "éléments affectifs et moteurs compris dans les représentations collectives des primitifs", on pouvait notamment lire ceci: "leur activité mentale est trop peu différenciée pour qu'il soit possible d'y considérer à part les idées ou les images des objets, indépendamment des sentiments, des émotions, des passions qui évoquent ces idées et ces images, ou qui sont évoqués par elles"(Lévy-Bruhl 1910, 28).

Puis, en 1922, parut *La Mentalité primitive*. Lévy-Bruhl y entendait systématiser ou généraliser un type d'observation que l'on trouvait déjà chez les missionnaires, notamment le baptiste anglais William H. Bentley dont ces phrases étaient citées dès l'introduction:

L'Africain, nègre ou bantou, ne pense pas, ne réfléchit pas, ne raisonne pas, s'il peut s'en dispenser. Il a une mémoire prodigieuse ; il a de grands talents d'observation et d'imitation, beaucoup de facilité de parole, et montre de bonnes qualités. Il peut être bienveillant, généreux, aimant, désintéressé, dévoué, fidèle, brave, patient et persévérant. Mais les facultés de raisonnement et d'invention restent en sommeil. Il saisit aisément les circonstances actuellement présentes, s'y adapte et y pourvoit; mais élaborer un plan sérieusement ou induire avec intelligence – cela est au-dessus de lui (Lévy-Bruhl [1922] 2010, 72-73).

Et Lévy-Bruhl d'enchaîner pour son propre compte :

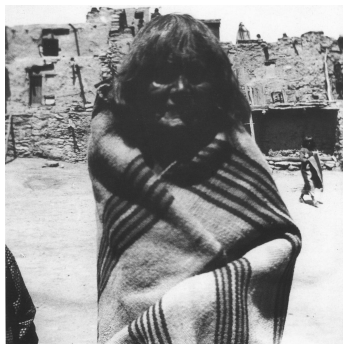
Bref, l'ensemble d'habitudes mentales qui exclut la pensée abstraite et le raisonnement proprement dit semble bien se rencontrer dans un grand nombre de sociétés inférieures et constituer un trait caractéristique et essentiel de la mentalité des primitifs (Lévy-Bruhl [1922] 2010, 75).

La "mentalité primitive" selon Lévy-Bruhl n'étant pas de nature intellectuelle, il lui restait d'être "mystique", mais aussi 'émotive':

Elle n'est pas orientée, comme notre pensée, vers la connaissance proprement dite. Elle ignore les jouissances et l'utilité du savoir. Ses représentations collectives sont toujours pour une grande part de nature émotionnelle. Sa pensée et son langage restent peu conceptuels, et c'est par là que la distance qui la sépare de nous est peut-être le plus facilement mesurable (Lévy-Bruhl [1922] 2010, 123).

Très critiquées par Marcel Mauss, ces réflexions allaient constituer, une quinzaine d'années plus tard – soit dans les *Carnets* de 1938-1939 – l'objet d'une honnête et radicale palinodie. La circonstance historique et politique n'y était sans doute pas étrangère : aux yeux de celui qui fut le cousin d'Alfred Dreyfus et l'ami de Jean Jaurès, le développement de l'antisémitisme européen, avec ses clichés racistes concernant l'émotivité dépravée des Juifs, apparaissait évidemment bien troublant dans sa nature de préjugé anthropologique.

À sa vieille notion de “mentalité prélogique” opposée à la “raison occidentale”, Lévy-Bruhl aura donc fini par opposer ce renoncement salutaire et catégorique :



3 | Aby Warburg, *Le chef des danseurs Hemis Katchina à Oraibi*, 1896. Photographie argentique. Londres, The Warburg Institute. Photo The Warburg Institute.

Il faut abandonner franchement un parallélisme arbitraire et artificiel qui en voulant trouver ce qui dans la mentalité primitive “correspond” à telle ou telle de nos fonctions mentales, soulève des pseudo-problèmes (Lévy-Bruhl [1949] 1998, 61).

En bref, s’il faut encore parler de “mentalité primitive”, il devient nécessaire de préciser qu’elle est “à la fois conceptuelle et affective” (Lévy-Bruhl [1949] 1998, 167) selon des valeurs d’usage spécifiques (“ils ne font pas le même usage que nous de la raison discursive” Lévy-Bruhl [1949] 1998, 169). En particulier, note Lévy-Bruhl dans un passage daté d’octobre 1938, cette

valeur d’usage suppose la mise en œuvre d’un “élément affectif inséparable du symbole”. Ce qui s’illustre bien dans ses analyses subséquentes sur la “participation sentie” inhérente au trope, extrêmement fécond et fréquent, de la synecdoque ou *pars pro toto* (Lévy-Bruhl [1949] 1998, 203-206).

Quarante années exactement après la parution de *La Mentalité primitive*, Claude Lévi-Strauss en apportait la plus éclatante et la plus convaincante objection avec son livre, devenu classique, sur *La Pensée sauvage*. À l’inverse de tout “primitivisme” psychologique ou social, Lévi-Strauss montrait l’extraordinaire rigueur et la complexité d’une ‘pensée’ – activité autrement abstraite, précise et organisée que toute vague ‘mentalité’ – capable d’élaborer une authentique “science du concret” à travers sa propre “logique des classifications” et ses propres “systèmes de transformations” conceptuels (Lévi-Strauss 1962a, 3-143). Parallèlement à *La Pensée sauvage*, Lévi-Strauss publia un essai très polémique intitulé *Le Totémisme aujourd’hui*, où il s’agissait de régler leur compte à quelques

travers méthodologiques persistants de la discipline ethnologique. Or l'un de ceux-ci n'était autre, aux yeux de Lévi-Strauss, que la prise en considération, comme objet ou comme outil d'analyse, des émotions en tant que telles (Lévi-Strauss 1962b, 102-105).

Les explications qui, en anthropologie, prennent comme point de départ un quelconque paradigme d'affectivité seraient donc tout simplement fausses: "ce n'est pas parce que les hommes éprouvent de l'anxiété dans certaines situations qu'ils ont recours à la magie, mais parce qu'ils ont recours à la magie que ces situations sont génératrices d'anxiété". Ce sont les "conduites articulées", comme les appelle Lévi-Strauss, qui se situent en amont des "désordres" eux-mêmes et qui ont, seules, valeur d'explication.

L'auteur ici critiqué pour son recours implicite aux catégories psychiatriques est d'abord Bronislaw Malinowski: "le vice fondamental de la thèse de Malinowski est de prendre pour une cause ce qui, dans la meilleure des hypothèses, n'est qu'une conséquence, ou un phénomène concomitant". Et Lévi-Strauss de continuer: "comme l'affectivité est le côté le plus obscur de l'homme, on a été constamment tenté d'y recourir, oubliant que ce qui est rebelle à l'explication n'est pas propre, de ce fait, à servir d'explication".

De la même façon que Malinowski, Freud dans *Totem et Tabou* n'aura, selon Lévi-Strauss, rien expliqué du tout:

À l'inverse de ce que soutient Freud, les contraintes sociales, positives ou négatives, ne s'expliquent, ni quant à leur origine, ni quant à leur persistance, par l'effet de pulsions ou d'émotions [...]. Nous ne savons et ne saurons jamais rien de l'origine première de croyances et de coutumes dont les racines plongent dans un lointain passé; mais, pour ce qui est du présent, il est certain que les conduites sociales ne sont pas jouées spontanément par chaque individu, sous l'effet d'émotions actuelles. Les hommes n'agissent pas, en tant que membres du groupe, conformément à ce que chacun ressent comme individu; chaque homme ressent en fonction de la manière dont il lui est permis ou prescrit de se conduire. Les coutumes sont données comme normes externes, avant d'engendrer des sentiments

internes, et ces normes insensibles déterminent les sentiments individuels, ainsi que les circonstances où ils pourront, ou devront, se manifester.

Autant le geste critique et méthodologique de Lévi-Strauss était justifié dans le contexte où il intervenait, autant son principe même laissait encore beaucoup de choses dans l'ombre. Ce qu'il gagnait ici, ne le perdait-il pas ailleurs ? Montrer la 'puissance conceptuelle' inhérente à la "pensée sauvage" est une chose (une bonne, une nécessaire chose); disqualifier en conséquence la 'puissance émotionnelle' d'un bloc, la vouer à l'inexistence, en est une autre (bien moins avisée). L'une n'exige pas l'autre, comme la lecture du *Totémisme aujourd'hui* le laisse entendre de façon très peu dialectisée. Lévi-Strauss, dans ce texte, ne parle en effet que d'"explication". Il ne voit pas d'autre façon de produire du savoir, alors même qu'il a si bien rendu hommage à la "science du concret" et à ses "bricolages" heuristiques. Or le règne exclusif de l'"explication" – ce "regard éloigné", comme s'exprimera plus tard Lévi-Strauss – n'épuise en rien notre rapport au réel et à sa connaissance : il faut compter aussi, non seulement avec l'implication d'un regard moins distant (comme fut celui de Pierre Clastres, par exemple), mais encore avec tout ce que les 'surdéterminations' opposent à notre volonté de "trouver toutes les causes", de "tout expliquer".

Bref, l'aspect à la fois éclairant et tranchant de la critique menée par Lévi-Strauss se paye ici d'une simplification principielle à l'égard des notions d'"affectivité" et d' "émotion" qu'il finit – ou qu'il commence – par appauvrir pour mieux en rejeter toute valeur théorique : l'auteur du *Totémisme aujourd'hui* n'envisage l'émotion, en effet, que selon les quatre dimensions, au fond réductrices, de l'"origine" (en tant que chimère inatteignable), de l'"obscurité" (qui ne nous dit rien puisqu'on n'y voit rien), de l'"individualité" (ces pauvres "sentiments individuels" soumis aux "normes insensibles" de la structure sociale) et, enfin, de la 'concomitance' (ou de la simple "conséquence", façon de dire que sa réalité n'est que secondaire).



4 | Aby Warburg, Une femme pueblo rentrant dans sa maison à la vue de l'appareil photographique, 1896. Photographie argentique. Londres, The Warburg Institute. Photo The Warburg Institute.

Il était, répétons-le, important d'en finir avec l'idée d'une "mentalité primitive" supposée ignorer toute pensée conceptuelle et, donc, dominée par de pures conduites "mystiques" ou "affectives". Mais Lévi-Strauss semble ignorer l'aspect dialectique inhérent à la palinodie de Lévy-Bruhl dans ses *Carnets* de 1938-1939. Il laisse donc de côté le champ extrêmement fécond ouvert par celui-ci à travers la notion – non construite, il est vrai, l'anthropologue étant mort en cette même année 1939 – d'une pensée qui serait "à la fois conceptuelle et affective", ou portée par un "élément affectif inséparable du symbole". On

comprend, à lire *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, que Lévi-Strauss a, pour sa part, voulu garder le "symbole" et s'est contenté de jeter l'"élément affectif" aux oubliettes. Il a donc joué jusqu'au bout l'opposition de la structure et de l'affect, sans prendre conscience qu'il rejouait par là l'une des plus vieilles oppositions de l'idéalisme philosophique, selon laquelle le *logos* serait, par nature, mise hors-jeu ou renvoi de tout pathos.

Il est vrai que, d'une façon très passagère – et qui restera, à ma connaissance, sans suite réelle dans son œuvre –, Lévi-Strauss esquisse dans *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui* l'hypothèse de "structures de désordre dont la théorie reste à faire" ... Quelle belle hypothèse, pourtant! C'est ce que quelques ethnologues auront tenté de mettre à l'épreuve, contre les principes d'un pur "constructivisme social", en reconnaissant la fonction structurante des émotions elles-mêmes, par-delà toute opposition du "primitif" et du "civilisé", de l'affectif et du pensable, de l'individuel et du social. De ces tentatives, Jan Plamper (Plamper 2017 13-36) a dressé un intéressant tableau dans l'*Histoire des émotions*: il y rappelle, notamment, le rôle pionnier du livre de Jean Briggs *Never in Anger*, qui se présentait comme une ethnographie des émotions et de leur contrôle chez les Inuits du Canada (Briggs 1970).

On peut aussi penser au livre *Knowledge and Passion* de Michelle Rosaldo: étude fascinante sur les Ilongots des Philippines qui, lorsqu'ils ont le "cœur lourd" – en dehors de toute situation d'échange social ou de rite de passage, comme on le penserait d'abord – vont couper la tête de quelqu'un, qu'ils jettent par terre pour se débarrasser de leur propre fardeau psychique (Rosaldo 1980).

Il faut rappeler que l'hypothèse d'une pensée qui fût "à la fois conceptuelle et affective", ou encore d'un "élément affectif inséparable du symbole", avait été longuement élaborée par ce contemporain de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl que fut Aby Warburg. Sa notion des "formules de pathos" (*Pathosformeln*) apparaît bien comme une tentative – authentiquement anthropologique, eût-elle les images pour véhicules privilégiés – de reconnaître ces structures de désordre efficaces dans les sociétés les moins "primitives" qui soient, celle de la Renaissance florentine par exemple (Didi-Huberman 2002, 115-270). Dès 1888, Warburg avait lu de près le livre de Darwin sur l'expression des émotions. Mais ce n'était pas pour y séparer les "émotifs primitifs" des "civilisés raisonnables", bien au contraire. Il avait plutôt retenu de Darwin certains principes tout à la fois structuraux et dialectiques : principe des "empreintes" mnésiques et du "déplacement" associatif ; principe de l'"antithèse" ou de la capacité réversible, "dépolarisante et repolarisante" comme Warburg devait, plus tard, le dire des grandes *Pathosformeln* occidentales dans le cadre de son atlas d'images *Mnemosyne* (Warburg [1927-1929] 2003).

Lors de son voyage au Nouveau-Mexique entre novembre 1895 et mai 1896 – qu'il devait évoquer, vingt-sept ans plus tard, dans une mémorable conférence (Warburg [1923] 2003, 2011) alors qu'il était lui-même affecté de graves troubles psychotiques –, Aby Warburg prit une série de photographies, soigneusement conservées par la suite, mais publiées en 1998 seulement par Benedetta Cestelli Guidi et Nicholas Mann. Certaines de ces images cherchent sans doute à documenter l'aspect d'une population occupée à ritualiser ses émotions autant qu'à "émouvoir" (à danser, plus exactement) ses propres cadres de pensée. C'est ce qu'on pourrait voir, par exemple, dans l'image frontale d'un vieux danseur Hopi prise en mai 1896 à Oraibi [Fig. 3]: elle est comparable, en un sens – qui serait celui d'une physiognomonie appareillée par la photographie –, au portrait de la femme aliénée dans le livre de Charles Darwin.

Mais il en alla bien différemment dans une autre image où la quête d'une visibilité "lisible" vint échouer devant le mouvement affectif du sujet à documenter [Fig. 4]: c'était une femme pueblo qui, devant l'approche de Warburg, rompit soudain toute possibilité de "contrat photographique", simplement en se retournant et en pénétrant dans sa maison, où elle avait sans doute mieux à faire. Dans un sens l'image était ratée, dans un autre elle est admirable. L'essentiel demeure que Warburg ait cru bon de la conserver, indice qu'il n'était pas seulement en quête de certitudes positives. Il acceptait, en somme, qu'une 'motion' ou une émotion aient pu garder par-devers elles, non pas leur simple "obscurité" comme dit Lévi-Strauss, mais plutôt leur 'réserve de refus', voire de défi, face à toute "volonté de savoir" (Cestelli Guidi, Mann 1998, 102 et 128).

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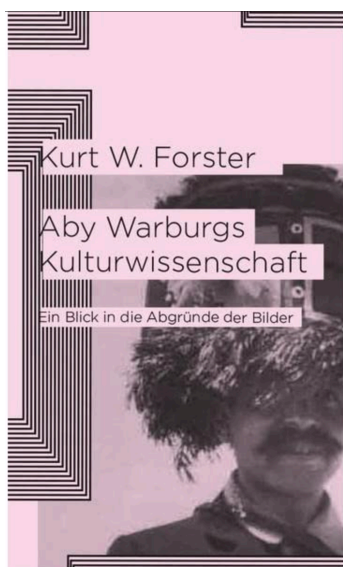
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Von Abbildungen ohne Ende bis zum Ende der Abbildungen. Eine Betrachtung aus gegebenem Anlass

Michael Diers

I



1 | Kurt W. Forster, *Aby Warburgs Kulturwissenschaft*, Berlin 2020, Umschlag.

Abyssus – Kurt W. Forsters lesenswertes Buch über Aby Warburgs Theorie und Praxis einer kunsthistorischen Kulturwissenschaft handelt, wie der leicht à la Heidegger tönende Untertitel besagt, von den “Abgründen der Bilder” [Abb.1].

Erläutert wird der zentrale Begriff eines Abgrundes nicht, er steht aber in einer Reihe mit “Abgründen der Geschichte”, “Abgründen der Zeit” und einem “seelischen Abgrund”, vor dem Warburg laut Forster am Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs stand. Welche Qualität mit dieser Untiefen-Formulierung den Bildern zugesprochen wird, bleibt diffus. Etwas unaufgeklärt und ominös Bedrohliches oder, kurz gesagt, das ganz Andere der Vernunft könnte damit gemeint sein. Ob diese Einschätzung jedoch den Kern der Warburgschen

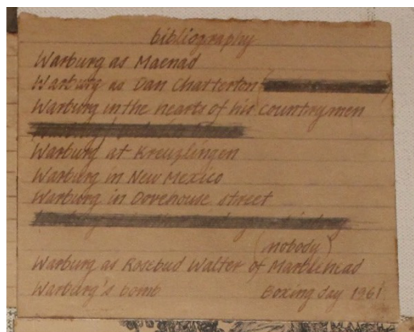
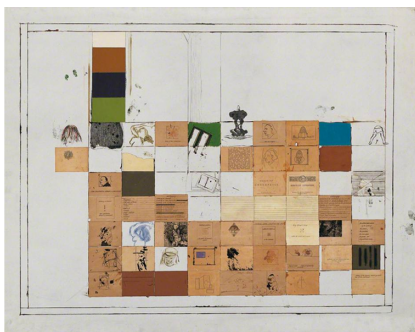
Bildauffassung trifft, bleibe dahingestellt. Raunen aber wollte Warburg im Blick auf die Bilder gewiss nicht. Ihm ging es vielmehr darum, die spezifischen Eigenschaften und Potentiale des die Sinne und den Verstand affizierenden Bildes, nicht zuletzt in der Gegenüberstellung zum Wort als dem dominierenden Vertreter des Logos zu erläutern.

Aber es gibt schließlich nicht nur die Bilder, sondern auch die Abbilder im Sinn von Reproduktionen, von denen nachfolgend die Rede sein soll. Abbildungen repräsentieren das Vorbild, sie sind als Wiedergaben technische Hilfsmittel, mit denen man sich über das Ausgangsbild – oder, emphatisch formuliert, über das Original – anschaulich Orientierung verschafft. Die Fotografie hat die Faustzeichnung und die druckgraphischen Techniken in der Funktion, Bilder zu reproduzieren und zu verbreiten abgelöst. Diese Medienrevolution hat auch die Kunstgeschichte als Fach in ihrem Selbstverständnis wegweisend geprägt und in ihren Methoden beeinflusst.

Warburgs Kunstgeschichte ist von den Anfängen bis zum Spätwerk, dem *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, von der fotomechanischen Kopie, sprich dem Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit geprägt: Ohne Reproduktion kein allgemeines Bildgedächtnis. Die Fotografie taugt als Instrument der Mnemotechnik und zugleich als Medium der Erinnerung. Vor diesem Hintergrund geben die ersten Sätze von Forsters Warburg-Publikation zu denken. Sie lauten:

Ein Buch über einen Kunst – und Kulturhistoriker wie Aby Warburg *mit wenigen Abbildungen* zu publizieren, mutet befremdlich an. Er schrieb ja nicht nur über Bilder, sondern dachte auch *in* Bildern, ja, erkundete *an* ihren Figuren die Gesten – und Zeichensprache menschlichen Ausdrucks. Es handelt sich bei Warburg um einen Wissenschaftler, der zeit seines Lebens aus unzähligen Quellen schöpfte und ausdrücklich jede Selbstgenügsamkeit seines Faches ablehnte. Deshalb ließ ich mich auf die Herausforderung ein, in knappen Strichen einen Eindruck der Bildwerke zu geben, die in Warburgs Gedanken eine tragende Rolle spielten. In unserer Zeit sind die allermeisten dieser Artefakte in weit verbreiteten Publikationen, in den Neuausgaben von Warburgs Schriften und im Internet zugänglich. Ich beschränke mich daher auf die Beschreibung kennzeichnender Aspekte, die Warburg an ihnen hervorhob oder die meinem Verständnis unentbehrlich waren. Den Mangel an Abbildungen nehme ich in Kauf, weil es Warburg selbst darum ging, Bildwerke aus den Zusammenhängen der Kultur und der Erinnerung zu erklären, deren Nachweis sich in immer weiteren Bild – und Vorstellungsgeflechten verlieren müsste, statt sich ausschließlich in einem einzelnen Bildwerk zu verfestigen (Forster 2018, 6).

Die Frage nach der Ausstattung des vorgelegten Buches mit Abbildungen verbindet der Autor mit Überlegungen zur gewichtigen Rolle des Bildes als Fachgegenstand und Vehikel des Warburgschen Denkens. Die Logik der Verknüpfung der Rolle von Abbildungen in einer Publikation einerseits und der Funktion von Bildern für Warburgs Denk – und Arbeitsweise andererseits wird nicht klar. Es scheint vielmehr theoretisch etwas umständlich eine Entschuldigung oder Entlastung dafür gesucht worden zu sein, dass es in diesem Fall bei “wenigen Abbildungen” geblieben ist.



2 | R. B. Kitaj, *Specimen Musings of a Democrat*, 1961, Malerei und Collage, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester.

3 | "bibliography". Die Aby Warburg betreffenden Notizen, Detail aus.

Tatsächlich wurden insgesamt nur zehn Schwarzweiß-Darstellungen aufgenommen, darunter die inzwischen vielfach zitierten Aufnahmen aus dem biographischen Kontext, ferner eine Atlastafel, eine bekannte Warburg-Zeichnung sowie eine Radierung von Max Klinger, *Bildnis Geheimrat Professor [Karl] Lamprecht*, 1915, und eine Collage von R. B. Kitaj, *Specimen Musings of a Democrat*, 1961 [Abb. 2 und 3]. Auf Nachfrage beim Pallant House in Chichester war z.Zt. leider keine hochauflösende Reproduktion der Collage zu erhalten, allerdings eine Detailaufnahme, welche die Warburg betreffenden Passagen in lesbarer Form zeigt. Kitaj hat dort unter dem Stichwort “bibliography” Folgendes notiert:

Warburg as Maenad/Warburg as Dan Chatterton/Warburg in the hearts of his countrymen/Warburg at Kreuzlingen/Warburg in New Mexico/Warburg in Doverhouse street/nobody/Warburg as Rosebud Walter of Marblehead/Warburg's bomb/ Boxing day 1961.*

II

Die Abbildungen sind wie Illustrationen zwischen die einzelnen Kapitel eingestreut und kommen ohne Unterschriften daher, so dass man bei der Klinger-Radierung lange überlegen muss, wer denn dargestellt ist, und im Fall des selten gezeigten Kitaj-Blattes Mühe hat, es seinem Titel und Gehalt nach zu bestimmen, zumal die Wiedergabe gemessen an der Komplexität der Darstellung zu klein und flau geraten ist. Man kann aber davon ausgehen, dass weniger der Autor als vielmehr der Verlag die Bildbeigaben betreut hat, denn in Forsters Text finden die Darstellungen keinen Widerhall. Für diese Annahme spricht auch, dass die Inhaltsübersicht zwar ein Abbildungsverzeichnis verspricht, dieses jedoch am angegebenen Ort statt mit den konkreten Daten mit einem weißen Blatt aufwartet [Nebenbei bemerkt: In der Inhaltsübersicht hat sich in das Wort "Abbildu[n]gsverzeichnis" ein Druckfehler eingeschlichen; möglicherweise steckt doch der Teufel im Detail, indem er sich für die fehlenden Bildangaben rächt]. Keine Bildunterschriften hier, kein Nachweis dort. Für die Gestaltung des Schutzumschlages wurde eine seit einigen Jahren wegen rücksichtsloser kultureller Aneignung problematisierte Fotografie verwendet, und zwar jene, die Warburg mit der Hemis-Kachina-Maske der Pueblo-Kultur zeigt. Auch hier fehlt wieder die Quellenangabe.

Der achtlose Umgang mit diesen Illustrationen, die bis auf die erwähnten Ausnahmen unterdessen notorisch geworden sind und folglich verzichtbar gewesen wären, hat allerdings nichts mit den gewichtigen Hinweisen zum Bild- und Abbildungsgebrauch der Vorbemerkung zu tun. Die Ausführungen widersprechen im engeren Sinn sogar den gezeigten Bildern, indem sie diese für überflüssig halten, weil sie als Dekor nichts zum Inhalt der Studie beitragen. Es bleibt aber die schwer zu verstehende Begründung, auf Abbildungen zu verzichten, weil diese zum einen inzwischen durch die Bank ubiquitär geworden und daher ringsum zugänglich seien (Stichwort Internet) und zum anderen Warburgs komplexe Bilderfahrzeugs und wanderungs-Ideen kaum angemessen wiedergeben könnten. Statt eines Einzelbildes bedürfe es zur Illustration von Warburgs Forschungsergebnissen in fast jedem Fall eines mehr oder weniger großen Bilderkonvolutes oder, wie Felix Thürlemann es formuliert hat, eines Bilderplurals beziehungsweise einer hyperimage-Darstellung (Thürlemann 2010 und Thürlemann 2013). Mit dieser Auffassung wären wir allerdings im Fall Warburgs und seiner Kulturwissenschaft mit der

Weisheit der Abbildung im Kontext eines Buches grundsätzlich am Ende. Es sei denn man publiziert, wie zuletzt geschehen, Warburgs Bilderatlas ohne weiterführenden Kommentar und setzt damit im Umkehrschluss gleich ganz auf Bilder ohne Worte ("ein Bilderbuch der Extraklasse", Verlagswerbung) und feiert die wiederaufgefundenen historischen Reproduktionen jetzt widersinnig als Originale (Warburg 2020).

Kurt Forster hat offenbar aufgrund der wenig befriedigenden Illustrations-Erfahrungen mit der deutschen Ausgabe seines Buches für die italienische Edition vollständig auf Abbildungen verzichtet. Daher lautet der Auftakt des Buches jetzt:

Publicare un volume su uno storico dell'arte e della cultura come Aby Warburg senza illustrazioni può apparire bizzarro (Forster [2018] 2022, 7).

Auch Titel und Untertitel wurden sachlich konkretisiert, so dass die Studie nun *Il metodo di Aby Warburg: L'antico dei gesti, il futuro della memoria* heißt. Im Übrigen aber bleiben die Argumente zur Frage nach der Stellung der Bilder und Abbilder bei Warburg identisch. Der Einband kommt jetzt ohne Abbildung, indem er rein typographisch gestaltet ist (Abb. 4).

Iconoclash – Vermehrt trifft man auch jenseits von Forster und Warburg in der kunsthistorischen Literatur auf einen verwandten Abbildungsverzicht. Die Begründungen für diese Askese unterscheiden sich zwar in der Regel nicht grundsätzlich, aber in den Details durchaus. So trifft man in Otto Karl Werckmeisters Buch *The Political Confrontation of the Arts in Europe from the Great Depression to the Second World War* unter dem Stichwort "illustrations" auf folgende Einschätzung:

Since reproductions of the art works mentioned are overabundantly available in publications or on the internet, I have found it pointless to engage in the negotiations and expenses that would have been required to reassemble them once more between the covers of this book. To do so would have meant sharing in the redundancy of neoliberal overproduction which has made the art-historical literature serve the current show and market culture.

I have limited illustrations to four sets of representative but little-known images, two of which I have photographed myself. (Werckmeister 2020)

Das Argument der leichten Zugänglichkeit findet sich hier ähnlich wie bei Forster, nur dass die Begründung neben dem finanziellen Aspekt aus einer neomarxistischen Perspektive erfolgt. Die Binnenlogik Forsters wird um eine Außenlogik ergänzt. Für die Kunstgeschichte von besonderer Bedeutung und für den Leser irritierend könnte die Formulierung “to assemble them once more between the covers of this book” sein. Es müsse demnach, da die Bilder ja bereits sämtlich irgendwann und – wo gezeigt wurden und daher als Reproduktionen in der Welt seien, keine Wiederholungen, sprich eine erneute Abbildung geben.

Wenn man das Internet als riesige Bilddatenbank versteht, könnte man diese Auffassung versuchsweise teilen, aber dann stünde fast jedes neue kunsthistorische Buch – theoretische Schriften ausgenommen – “nackt”, sprich ohne Abbildungen da. Damit wäre der enge und bis dato unverbrüchliche historische Verbund von Text und Bild, den das Buch auf hervorragende Weise stiftet, hinfällig, In der der Konsequenz hieße dies:

Lieber Leser, liebe Leserin, such Dir gefälligst die fraglichen Bilder geschwinde selbst, wenn Du wissen möchtest, wovon hier konkret die Rede ist (Werckmeister 2020).

Notabene – Der Schriftsteller und Filmemacher Alexander Kluge, ein Fanatiker der Abbildung, versieht seit längerem seine Buchtexte, dort wo es angelegen ist, mit eingedruckten QR-Codes, die zu sachlich entsprechenden Film-Clips hinleiten (Kluge 2020). Aber hier geht es nicht um Stand-, sondern um Bewegtbilder, eine Gattung, die sich anders als die Illustration dem Medium Buch nicht unmittelbar verbinden lässt.

Doch es finden sich, wie gesagt, auch noch andere Argumente in dieser wichtigen, aber öffentlich noch wenig geführten Debatte um den rhetorischen, theoretisch-epistemologischen und lesedidaktischen Status von Abbildungen. In einem Aufsatz von Andreas Beyer über die US-amerikanische Künstlerin Elizabeth Peyton heißt es in der “editorial note”:

The author has made the decision to publish this essay without illustrations. He understands it as a written commentary on the many widely available and, more-over, digitally accessible works by Elizabeth Peyton (Beyer 2021).

Wiederum wird die einfache Verfügbarkeit von Abbildungsvorlagen als Grund angeführt, von Illustrationen abzusehen. Wie aber kann sich ein einzelner Aufsatz als Kommentar zu den “vielen, in Reichweite befindlichen und überdies digital zugänglichen Werken” verstehen? Er wird doch, wie auch im vorliegenden Fall, immer nur eine Auswahl an Gemälden in Betracht ziehen, nie das Gesamtwerk. Und Vergleichsabbildungen kommen offenbar erst gar nicht mehr in Frage. Auch in diesem Fall scheint der Bildverzicht – eine versteckte Form von Ikonoklasmus – ideologisch verbrämt zu sein. Oder es handelt sich um die Verschleierung einer lizenzrechtlichen und kostenträchtigen Frage, wie sie sich für die zeitgenössische Kunst tatsächlich häufiger stellt. Erstaunlich am Beyerschen Abbildungsverzicht ist insbesondere der Umstand, dass der Beitrag in der Zeitschrift *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual. Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur*, erschienen ist – ein ausschließlich digital publizierendes Magazin, das als Open-Access-eJournal firmiert. Der Weg aus den digitalen Bildspeicherkammern in die Zeitschrift wäre folglich ungemein kurz und wenig umständlich gewesen. Möglich, dass die Kostenfrage im Weg stand. Das wäre als hinreichender Grund für einen Bildverzicht akzeptabel gewesen und man hätte mit diesem Hinweis zugleich auf mannigfache gesetzliche Barrieren im Blick auf die Veröffentlichung von Werken der Gegenwartskunst, die im Internet andererseits oft bestens zugänglich sind, als Problem des Faches aufmerksam gemacht.

Aber auch rechtliche Gründe können zum Bildverzicht zwingen: Wolfgang Ullrich musste in seinem *Buch Siegerkunst. Neuer Adel, teure Lust* (2016) auf die Wiedergabe bestimmter Werke von Jeff Koons, Andreas Gursky, Juergen Teller, Thomas Ruff und Doug Aitken verzichten, hat aber die vorgesehenen Papierflächen als Leerflächen mit einem lichtgrauen Fond und dem Satz markiert:

Die Abdruckgenehmigung wurde vom Rechteinhaber leider nicht gegeben (Ullrich 2016).

Aber der aktuelle Bildverzicht treibt noch ganz andere, im Sinne von Falschgeld weitaus gravierendere "Blüten". Ebenfalls im Jahr 2020 hat der Oldenburger Ideenhistoriker Matthias Bormuth unter dem Titel *Warburgs Schnecke. Kulturwissenschaftliche Skizzen* eine Sammlung von Aufsätzen des im Jahr zuvor verstorbenen Hamburger Kunsthistorikers Martin Warnke herausgegeben (Warnke 2020). Die neun Beiträge kommen in der Wiederveröffentlichung sämtlich ohne jede Abbildung aus, wiewohl das Buch Beiträge wie die in der Erstfassung extrem bildgestützte Untersuchung zum Lutherbildnis Lucas Cranachs enthält. Oder auch jene zu "Goyas Gesten" oder zu Warburgs Diktum vom „Leidschatz der Menschheit“. Allein die bedeutende Luther-Studie umfasst ursprünglich neben einer Falttafel 42 Textabbildungen, alle sorgfältig dokumentiert und analysiert, darunter zahlreiche entlegene Darstellungen der Reformationszeit. Wie kann man nur auf die Idee kommen, diese Studien, selbständig als kleines Buch in der Reihe "kunststück" 1984 erschienen, ohne Reproduktionen ausgehen zu lassen? "Wir schlagen die Ignoranz, wo wir sie finden", hat Warburg bei Gelegenheit dekretiert, ein Diktum, das hier wieder am Platz ist. Der Leserschaft wird eine Ausgabe von Warnkes Schrifte *ad usum delphini* offeriert, eine Kunstgeschichte, die ihrer Bilder verlustig geht.

Auch andere Kollegen haben die Kürzung der Texte um die zugehörigen Abbildungen kritisiert oder gegeißelt, siehe Jan van Brevern:

[...] Viel gravierender aber ist ein anderes Manko, das den Band beinahe zu einem Ärgernis werden lässt. Verlag und Herausgeber haben sich nämlich dafür entschieden, auf alle Abbildungen der Erstabdrucke zu verzichten (...). Diese Bilder sind bei Warnke nicht nur Illustrationen, auf die man auch mal verzichten kann, sie sind wesentlicher Teil des Arguments (van Brevern 2021).

Der Drucknachweis ist der einzige Platz, an dem der Leser erfährt, dass die entsprechenden Erstveröffentlichungen "mit Abbildungen" ausgestattet waren. Im Übrigen findet sich keine Erläuterung zu diesem Akt der Kastration. Mit diesem Begriff bezeichnet der Antiquariatsbuchhandel eine Publikation, die um "anstößige" Stellen bereinigt wurde. Man versteht nicht, was sich der Herausgeber und die Redaktion des Verlages bei diesem Vorgehen gedacht haben. Dass es in Bezug auf die notwendigen

Recherchen, die graphische Gestaltung und die Kosten erheblich aufwendiger ist, ein "illustriertes" Buch im Vergleich zu einem reinen Textband auf den Markt zu bringen, weiß jeder wissenschaftliche Autor und Verleger. Dieser Mühen der Ebene hat man sich begeben. Vielleicht weil man fand, eine sprachlich prägnante Beschreibung von Werken der Kunst, die alle Warnke-Texte auszeichnet, könne hinreichend als kostenfreie Reproduktion fungieren. Aby Warburg hat über die "indexlosen Bücher" gesagt, sie gehörten auf den Index; hier ließe sich der Spruch auf die fehlenden Abbildungen ummünzen.

Apropos Warnke und die Abbildungen. Als der Hamburger Kunsthistoriker daran ging, seine Habilitationsschrift *Hofkünstler. Zur Vorgeschichte des modernen Künstlers* (1985) zu publizieren, hat er Ernst Brücher, damaliger Leiter des Kölner DuMont Verlages, gebeten, auf Abbildungen verzichten zu dürfen. Beim "Hofkünstler" handelt es sich bekanntlich um eine kommentierte Sammlung von Schriftquellen. Abbildungen waren völlig fehl am Platz, weil in der Regel nicht einzelne Kunstwerke, sondern die Sozialgeschichte des genannten Berufsstandes im Mittelpunkt steht. Kunstreproduktionen hätten den Text nur als Illustrationen garniert, aber nichts zur Sache beigetragen. Folglich waren sie in diesem Fall überflüssig, zumal der Kunstgeschichte der Ruf einer Bilderbuch-Wissenschaft "für höhere Töchter" immer noch anhing. Es galt damals, der Kunstgeschichte als Disziplin auf die Beine der Theorie zu verhelfen und sie als historische Wissenschaft der Reputation nach mit den anderen geisteswissenschaftlichen Fächern gleichziehen zu lassen. Ein "reines" Theoriebuch konnte dabei nur helfen. Ähnlich war der Autor bereits 1976 mit seiner Untersuchung zu *Bau und Überbau* verfahren, die im Untertitel als „Soziologie der mittelalterlichen Architektur nach den Schriftquellen“ fungiert. Nochmals ein Warnke-Buch ohne Abbildungen. In der ersten Ausgabe des "Hofkünstler" bedankt sich der Verfasser im Vorwort höflich dafür, ihn:

Bei dem eigensinnigen Verlangen belassen zu haben, das Werk ohne Abbildungen erscheinen zu lassen (Warnke 1984).

In der Neuauflage von 1996 fehlt dieser Satz. Offenbar hatte sich das Buch inzwischen soweit als Standardwerk durchgesetzt, dass sich die Frage nach den Abbildungen nicht mehr stellte – weder in dem auf

Kunstkalender und reich illustrierte Bücher spezialisierten Unternehmen noch beim Publikum.

III



4 | Jacob Burckhardt mit Bildermappe auf dem Weg ins Basler 'Colleg', um 1878, Foto: Fritz Burckhardt-Brenne.

Pandoras Box – Am Ende sei noch auf einen völlig anders motivierten und gut begründeten Bildverzicht aufmerksam gemacht. Im Zusammenhang der Ausstellung *Blitzsymbol und Schlangentanz. Aby Warburg und die Pueblo-Kunst*, die im Frühjahr 2022 im Hamburger Museum am Rothenbaum zu sehen ist, ist auch ein Katalog geplant. Aufgrund der Gespräche der Museumsfachleute mit Expertinnen und Experten aus den heutigen Pueblos hat man sich darauf geeinigt, bestimmte “kulturell sensible Gegenstände, Fotografien und Dokumente”, darunter “auch solche, die bereits mehrfach reproduziert wurden”, in der Ausstellung wie im Begleitbuch nur als “visuelle

Leerstellen” zu zeigen. So das Museum:

Damit soll dem Anliegen vieler Pueblo und Native American Nations entsprochen werden, die Deutungshoheit über die eigene Kultur nach jahrhundertelanger kolonialer Erfahrung zurückzuerlangen (Presseinformation des MARKK, Februar 2022).

Der genannte Kontext erinnert noch einmal daran, welchen Aufwand, darunter auch Reisen in entfernte Länder, Aby Warburg als Kunst- und Kulturhistoriker treiben musste, um an geeignete Fotografien als Reproduktionsvorlagen für seine Publikationen zu gelangen. Er hat im wahrsten Sinn des Wortes, wie nicht zuletzt seine Briefe bezeugen (Warburg 2021) keine Kosten und Mühen gescheut, sich auch entlegene Abbildungen zu beschaffen oder eigens in Auftrag zu geben. Wo eine Fotografie nicht zu bekommen war, hat er selbst Zeichnungen angefertigt oder anfertigen lassen, dies alles “nur”, um seine Leserschaft mit

möglichst exzellenten Bildbeigaben zu versorgen und die dargestellten Werke als eigenständige Argumente zu ihrem guten Bildrecht kommen zu lassen.

Die eingangs erwähnte deutsche Ausgabe von Forsters Warburg-Monographie führt als Abbildung auch das bekannte Porträt Jacob Burckhardts an, der im Jahr 1878 eilenden Schrittes am Basler Münster vorbei dem Vorlesungssaal zustrebt [Abb. 4].

Unter dem Arm trägt der Basler Kulturhistoriker eine große Bildermappe mit Reproduktionen, die kurz darauf im „Colleg“ den Studierenden durch die Sitzreihe gegeben werden (Strauss 2018, s. 5-10) Die Anwesenden werden sich in die Darstellungen vertieft, einige sich eventuell sogar gedanklich daran verloren haben. Vielleicht setzt demnach mit dem Burckhardt-Porträt und der darin anklingenden Bildpraxis bereits der Iconic Turn ein, ein Terminus, der rund hundert Jahre später ebenfalls in Basel geprägt worden ist (Boehm 1994). Zu Burckhardts Zeiten musste man sich noch mit wenigen Bildern behelfen, weil sie noch nicht sonderlich verbreitet waren, heute scheinen wir bereits derer zu viele zu haben, so dass mancher glaubt, sie seien verzichtbar – jedenfalls im Buch. „Werch ein Illtum“, um dem Dichter Ernst Jandl das letzte Wort zu lassen.

*Ich danke Dani Norton, Chichester, für seine Unterstützung bei der Bildrecherche.

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Fase e neutro. Un cortocircuito warburgiano

Andrea Pinotti

In questo libro Kurt Forster riprende e rilancia un tema che gli è sempre stato molto a cuore come lettore di Warburg: l'energetica come chiave interpretativa privilegiata per comprendere l'approccio warburgiano alla storia e alla teoria delle immagini, e come idea ispiratrice anche (come potrebbe essere diversamente?) della Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek. Già il suo saggio del 1991 *Die Hamburg-Amerika-Linie* accostava la sala di lettura ovale (ellittica, kepleriana) della biblioteca amburghese alla sala macchine, ugualmente ovale, dello Umspannwerk Wilehlmsruh-Berliner Elektrizitätswerke (1926), progettato da Heinrich Müller. Così come nella centrale elettrica lo Umspannwerk opera come stazione di trasformazione, interconnettendo tramite i trasformatori più linee a diversi livelli di alta tensione e convertendo la corrente da continua ad alternata e viceversa, la K.B.W. si propone come uno spazio nel quale raccogliere i documenti che attestano come, nel corso del loro dispiegamento storico, le energie del passato arcaico si siano interconnesse a differenti livelli di carica, trasformandosi le une nelle altre in una corrente ora continua ora alternata, ora stabile ora oscillante, nel loro esprimersi e tramandarsi in oggetti culturali: parole, immagini (artistiche e non), dispositivi rituali, strumenti scientifici, mappe, insomma quell'eterogeneo coacervo di entità che, nonostante la sua apparente irriducibilità a un denominatore comune, trova comunque ospitalità sulle accoglienti tavole dell'*Atlante Mnemosyne*.

È nota l'inclinazione di Warburg a impiegare nella sua metaforica termini tratti dal vocabolario elettrotecnico per qualificare i processi trasformativi nella storia delle immagini: Forster li ricorda opportunamente in questo volume: "tensione", "carica" e "scarica", "inversione", "commutazione", "resistenza", "polarità"... A questa lista va senz'altro aggiunto il proposito di elaborare una "Dynamologie" dell'orientamento per immagini (*Grundbegriffe*, annotazione del 13.VI.1929), e il concetto di "Dynamogramm", che combina la potenza della *dynamis* greca alla dinamo intesa come macchina che converte energia meccanica in energia elettrica.

Il termine “Dynamogramm” viene a integrare con il supplemento energetico della *dynamis*-dinamo il concetto di “engramma”, che Warburg – come ricorda Forster – mutua dallo zoologo Richard Semon, insieme alla nozione di “Mneme”. Se quest’ultima viene definita come la facoltà di un organismo di registrare e conservare gli effetti di uno stimolo trasmettendoli alle generazioni successive (una sorta di dinamo transgenerazionale), l’“engramma” consiste nell’iscrizione dello stimolo come traccia materiale sulla sostanza nervosa: lo stimolo si imprime (effetto engrafico) e l’accumulo di tali tracce finisce per costituire un patrimonio engrammatico (che può essere tanto acquisito individualmente quanto ereditato dalle generazioni successive), appunto la *Mneme*.

È dalla *Introduzione* del 1929 all’*Atlante* che possiamo ricavare il modo in cui Warburg importa tali nozioni e le rende funzionali alla propria prospettiva:

Nell’ambito della esaltazione orgiastica di massa bisogna ricercare la matrice che imprime nella memoria le forme espressive della massima esaltazione interiore, espressa nel linguaggio gestuale con una tale intensità che questi engrammi della esperienza emotiva sopravvivono come patrimonio ereditario della memoria.

Il riferimento al “linguaggio gestuale” ci riporta alla celebre quanto problematica nozione di *Pathosformel*: una postura corporea tipica (e in quanto tale iterabile) nella quale viene a espressione un moto patemico. Il “patrimonio ereditario della memoria” rinvia dal canto suo all’ossessione principale di Warburg: il *Nachleben*, la sopravvivenza o vita postuma di quelle stesse formule di pathos, che consente ad esempio alla postura di una menade dionisiaca di riaffiorare nel corpo di una Maddalena cristiana ai piedi della croce (Tavola 25), e più tardi nel gesto elegante di una giocatrice di golf degli anni Venti (Tavola 77). Consente cioè di commutare la carica originaria imprimendole valori diversi, persino polarmente opposti: “pagano/cristiano”, ad esempio. O, per ricordare un altro esempio (quello della Medea infanticida raffigurata sugli antichi sarcofagi che accompagna i figli alla morte, in un atteggiamento corporeo che riaffiora nella madre che conduce in salvo il figlioletto salvato da San Bernardino dalla morte per annegamento: Tavola 41) – “madre malvagia/madre amorevole”.

Ora, in questa costellazione all'apparenza armonica di concetti – la carica energetica, l'engramma, il linguaggio gestuale, la memoria, il patrimonio ereditario – si istituisce una tensione destinata a mio avviso a rimanere un problema aperto nella concezione warburghiana dell'immagine: da un lato, proprio per l'origine dionisiaca degli engrammi arcaici (l'"esaltazione orgiastica" di cui ci parla l'Introduzione all'*Atlante* (vedi, in Engramma, l'edizione critica e traduzione italiana, e la versione inglese), la traccia inscritta per poi essere trasmessa nel movimento storico del *Nachleben* dovrebbe essere di per sé qualificata energeticamente, e di per sé polarizzata. Per contro, è proprio la stessa nozione di *Pathosformel* a richiedere che tale iscrizione sia un "neutro" (potremmo dire proprio nel senso elettrico del conduttore neutro), una mera potenzialità o virtualità ("dinamogrammi figurativi disinseriti", "una bottiglia di Leida non caricata", come leggiamo rispettivamente nelle annotazioni delle *Allgemeine Ideen* del 1927 e dei *Grundbegriffe I* del 1929) che attende di venire attualizzata ora come menade ora come Maddalena, ora come madre infanticida ora come madre salvatrice.

Nel richiamarci all'impianto energetico ed elettrotecnico della riflessione di Aby Warburg, il libro di Kurt Forster ci ricorda quanto il suo stesso *Nachleben*, che non cessa di interrogarci, sia profondamente debitore dei cortocircuiti che esso sa produrre nella sua storia degli effetti.

Stendhal and Warburg. Martyrdom and Victory

Ianick Takaes

Tracing a parallel between Stendhal's and Aby Warburg's Roman holidays, Kurt Forster tells us that both men had chosen the eternal city as the scenery for an intellectual trip into themselves and the depths of history (Forster [2018] 2022, 32-34). For the French romancier in 1832 and the German *Kulturwissenschaftler* in 1928-29, Rome served as a backdrop and sounding board – and also as a menacing labyrinth. Its monuments, tears of things that drip mortality onto the conscience, demanded some self-sacrifice from these insightful observers so that future memory could look beyond the servile shape into the longings of the bitter and violent men who reared their feelings in stone. The sufferings of the two, Stendhal and Warburg, may have resulted in triumph: almost one hundred years later (or, in the Frenchman's case, two hundred), the city and the sojourn emerge in Forster's *Il metodo di Aby Warburg* not as a bewildering maze, but as a sort of Ariadne's thread to our art-historical conundrums.

I am here enticed to follow the author's lead in one specific point and thus weave a slim string into the web of his discourse. One of the first instances of those "spiritual wounds" that Italy inflicted on Stendhal mentioned by Forster occurred in Florence in 1817. The French novelist writes in the third edition of *Rome, Naples et Florence*, published in 1826, that the very idea of being in that city at that time, close to the great men whose tomb he had come to visit (perhaps, a nod at *Inferno*, X and *Decameron*, VI.9?), had already put him in a "sort of ecstasy". Such feeling reached its paroxysm while Stendhal gazed at Volterrano's Sybils in the Santa Croce. Then he purportedly endured a faster heartbeat, dramatic dizziness, and extreme pleasure. If we are to believe Stendhal's account of the incident, this experience shook him to his core:

[L]es Sibylles du Volterrano m'ont donné peut-être le plus vif plaisir que la peinture m'ait jamais fait. [...] Absorbé dans la contemplation de la beauté

sublime, je la voyais de près, je la touchais pour ainsi dire. J'étais arrivé à ce point d'émotion où se rencontrent les sensations célestes donnés par les beaux-arts et les sentiments passionnés. En sortant de Santa Croce, j'avais un battement de cœur, ce qu'on appelle des nerfs à Berlin; la vie était épuisée chez moi, je marchais avec la crainte de tomber. Je me suis assis sur l'un des bancs de la place de Santa Croce; j'ai relu avec délices ces vers de Foscolo, que j'avais dans mon portefeuille; je n'en voyais point les défauts: j'avais besoin de la voix d'un ami partageant mon émotion. [...] Le surlendemain, le souvenir de ce que j'avais senti m'a donné une idée impertinente: il vaut mieux, pour le bonheur, me disais-je, avoir le cœur fait que le cordon bleu (Stendhal 1826, 99-104).



1 | Volterrano, *Sibille*, fresco, 1659-1661, Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Croce.

Stendhal's account is fascinating by how it intertwines vision and discourse like a double helix spinning around his body. Overall, he performs the tropes of the enlightened voyageur and the blind man restored to light (according to Foucault, the two great mythical experiences that kick off eighteenth-century philosophy (Foucault [1963] 1994, 65). But we also find plenty of other significant themes in his narrative. From top to bottom: the measurability of aesthetic affects by way of bodily effects, akin to the emergence of visible criteria for the artistic experience (contrast "le plus vif plaisir" produced by the ceiling paintings with the embodied aftereffects); empathetic projection exciting haptic feelings ("je la touchais

pour ainsi dire"); the artistic experience as secular soteriology ("les sensations célestes donnés par les beaux-arts"); the passions as the intermediary of the body-soul binary ("les sentiments passionnés"); the body as the field of subjective clashes and dispassionate observation, with the employment of clinical vocabulary ("j'avais un battement de cœur, ce qu'on appelle des nerfs à Berlin"); the uneasy linkage between morbid affects and embodied sublimity, arguably foreshadowing Freud's thanatotic drives; the re-integration of newly emerged psychic conflicts

by way of higher cognitive processes, thus restoring psycho-physiological homeostasis to and by himself ("j'ai relu avec délices ces vers de Foscolo"). Finally, we also find the praise of subjective self-edification by way of the empirical gaze to the detriment of hierarchical social standards ("il vaut mieux [...] avoir le cœur ainsi fait que le cordon bleu").

The eloquence of this account offered the literary and historical substratum to Graziella Magherini, the Florentine psychiatrist who published *La sindrome di Stendhal* in 1989 and, in doing so, helped popularize the notion that direct contact with too many artistic masterpieces can somehow drive the observer over the edge. According to Magherini, Stendhal was a sort of patient zero of the syndrome named after him a century and a half later. While refraining from a wholesale critique of her theoretical framework – to my mind, mired in a shaky mélange of post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory – I would like to foreground some of the cases described in her book. Patients who have been diagnosed with the Stendhal syndrome have experienced hallucinations with angels and demons at the Convento di San Marco; suffered from paralyzing euphoria in the Boboli Garden; experienced inexplicable sexual urges against their sexual orientation when faced by Caravaggio's Adolescent Bacchus; felt themselves dissolving to the point of collapsing onto the floor after seeing the Masaccios in the Cappella Brancacci; and had their gazes somehow reciprocated by Donatello's David in the Bargello (Magherini 1989, *passim*). On the one hand, one should be skeptical of the Stendhal syndrome on nosological grounds (see Innocenti *et al.* 2014, 61-66). On the other, it is necessary to bear in mind William James' admonition regarding odd phenomena. Remarking on the pioneering results brought about by the founding fathers of psychotherapy, the US-American pragmatist noted that while their "clinical records sound like fairy-tales when one first reads them, yet it is impossible to doubt their accuracy". James concludes: "They throw [...] a wholly new light upon our natural constitution" (James [1902] 2002, 184). Perhaps these exact words of caution apply to the cases reported by Magherini in *La sindrome di Stendhal*.

The question then is how to integrate such disturbing reports into the fold of our theories of artistic reception. How do we turn their psychosomatic

ordeal into our epistemological triumph? Let us begin by wildly assuming that such acute reactions to the artistic experience are not beyond the pale of aesthetics but just a manic extreme on a scale whose other end is constituted by disinterested sensory enjoyment. Let us now juxtapose to that wild assumption another: an artwork is but a radical 'Other' in whose sinopia we find our own effigy; that is, it indexes through shared sensorimotor activity a spatio-temporal situatedness whose constitutive tensions, because rooted in biological affordances, have cross-historical effects. When confronted by these heightened traces of past activity in an environment or atmosphere of reduced goal-oriented demands, the observer maps into themselves certain salient features of the artistic object, so that they seem to 'feel into' it. In doing so, by sacrificing their psychosomatic stability for the emergence of historical depths, they may crack open the inherent emotional conflicts that afford the artwork its protracted vitality. The discharge of 'energy' resulting from this 'fission' – to speak in the Warburgian terms highlighted by Forster – could give rise to all sorts of abnormal reactions, including the euphoria, dizziness, and tachycardia purportedly suffered by Stendhal in 1817 (for a skeptical investigation into Stendhal's account, see Barnes 2008, 72-77 and 222-231).

Certainly, by couching the matter of reception in such empathetic terms, we may end up lionizing a kind of populist aesthetics – as if a *coup d'oeil* and the resulting subjective states should suffice in terms of our artistic appreciation. And we may want to avoid that. For what would be the role of the hermeneutic devices commonly associated with the Warburgian tradition, such as Iconography and Iconology? A key and a shield, perhaps. A key because, judiciously employed, they open up the historical and geocultural locks that impede the life-enhancing encounters between immediate and distant subjectivities. As Warburg's chief disciple, Edgar Wind, states: "The primary aim of iconography should be [...] cathartic" (Wind 1950, 350). But what about the shield?

For that, let us go back to Stendhal. If we are to trust his narrative, he recovered from the incident in Santa Croce by reading some poetry in the nearby square. That is, by pulling himself away from Volterrano's frescoes and activating an associative network that placed his experience in a much larger context (as he states, he needed a friend with whom he could share

his troubling emotions). Ugo Foscolo's poem, *Dei sepolcri*, provided Stendhal with the necessary mental space within which he could integrate the disturbing sensory stimuli and obtain meaningful content out of them, thus shielding himself from their harmful aftereffects.

The nine-year gap between the incident and its published account is also significant: temporal distance and autobiographical writing consolidated the incident into a powerful node in Stendhal's memory constellation, not to say a shared resource in our cultural storehouse. Afflicted by his demons, Forster shows us that Warburg did much the same – in a much longer arc of time, yes, but with a significantly greater impact on our understanding of artistic phenomena. Martyrdom and victory.

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English abstract

Kurt Forster's recent book, *Il metodo di Aby Warburg* was published by Ronzani in 2022. All scholars who have participated to the collective reading—Barbara Baert, Victoria Cirlot, Georges Didi-Huberman, Michael Diers, Andrea Pinotti, Ianick Takaes—have responded, with their personal in-depth interpretation of the book.

Keywords | Aby Warburg; Kurt W. Forster; Ronzani Editore.



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