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## FROM THE COSMOS TO MAN AND BACK. A READING OF PLATE B IN MNEMOSYNE ATLAS

Seminario Mnemosyne, edited by Elizabeth Thomson

The first three plates in the Mnemosyne Atlas, identified by the letters A, B and C, are an extraordinary diorama that, with the incisiveness of just a few images, succinctly demonstrates the complexity and practicality of the pioneering hermeneutical device which is the Bilderatlas. The function of the three opening plates is to define the “modes of orientation”, in other words, the spatial, historical and cultural co-ordinates in which expressions of the classical tradition are manifested, (see, in *Engramma*, the reading of plates A, B and C – Through the Maze: Seminario Mnemosyne 2015).

Plate A, the plate that immediately precedes Plate B, demonstrates three different ways of mapping reality: cosmological, geographical and genealogical (see the essay on a reading of Plate A: Seminario Mnemosyne 2015a). In Plate B, the eye is drawn to one of the central themes of the preceding plate: the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm, and the shifts in this system of relations (plate, enlargements, captions and details).

The ten images pinned to Plate B demonstrate and highlight a feature common to them all: the centrality of the human body which is placed at the centre of most of the images. The items displayed on the plate are placed in a discontinuous chronological order: mediaeval illustrations and drawings of two Renaissance masters, treatises on traditions of magic and the occult, and the survival of iatro-astrology into the C18th. In the sequence, the oscillations between different stages of interdependence

between microcosm-macrocosm and an unstable equilibrium between the heavens and the earth are made clear.



The brief note left by Warburg and his collaborators as a comment on the plate explains that it deals with:

Verschiedene Grade der Abtragung des kosmischen Systems auf den Menschen. Harmonikale Entsprechung. Später Reduktion der Harmonie auf die abstrakte Geometrie statt auf die kosmisch bedingte (Lionardo).

Different degrees of the cosmic system's influence on Man. Harmonic correspondences. Later, conversion of harmony to abstract geometry, rather than one that is cosmically determined (da Vinci).

Warburg himself, then, tells us in his note, what the main theme of the montage is, and its compositional meaning: astral influences that bind man's body to "harmonic correspondences". It is significant that he stresses the moment when, during the Renaissance revolution, Man understands the harmony that binds his body to the cosmos as being a series of norms which give rise to geometric abstractions rather than a burden of "cosmically determined" influences.

Together with the note on Plate B, the significance of the montage can also be deciphered by the text of the conference that Warburg held on 25 April 1925, which has recently been published together with accom-



panying iconographic materials, some of which coincide with the images on the plate. The opening lines of this invaluable text read:

The rediscovery of classical antiquity was not a phenomenon generated in workshops, but a process of conflict between a new vitality and the survival of what preceded it: the antiquity that asserted itself, demonically transformed by astrology into religious matter, gave Warburg scope for clearly understanding the rebirth of antiquity as the result of modern Man's attempt to free himself of practices in Hellenistic magic (Warburg [1925] 2014, 51).

In the montage, the two Renaissance works by Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer respectively – two examples of “modern Man's attempt to free himself” – are surrounded by various images taken from manuscripts and later printed works ascribable to the tradition of daemonic astrology in which the body of *homo zodiacalis* appears, fully or in part, to be surrounded, marked and constellated by astrological and planetary signs. By developing Warburg's ideas, it is therefore possible to identify three itineraries that mirror three different ways of relating to the question of “cosmic orientation via images [Die kosmische bildhafte Orientierung]” (Warburg [1925] 2014, 103):

- I. A cosmic itinerary
- II. An anthropometric itinerary
- III. A magic and apotropaic itinerary

#### I. THE COSMIC ITINERARY

The closely woven interrelationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm is represented in the upper sector of Plate B, where an image of a human body, encompassed by a circle or a *mandorla*, is displayed in three variants (with an appendix literally clinging to the third figure). Man is at the centre, in the sense that he is the object of cosmic influences that, depending on the prevailing cultural and philosophical climate, can be celestial and angelic, or planetary.

The first image is an illustration of one of Hildegard of Bingen's visions dating back to the C13th, drawn from the Lucca manuscript *Liber divinorum operum*. Man as a perfect being is placed at the centre of the large depiction of the creation and is seen in relation to the power of the cosmic machine constructed by God as a sort of wondrous container.



Hildegarda di Bingen, *Liber divinorum operum*, , early C13th, Lucca, Biblioteca Governativa, ms.1942, fol. 9

Three figures are identifiable in the miniature: at the top, the Father (God) emerges from the Spirit-Fire that encloses within it his Son (Christ-Man). The illustrator has emphasized the representation of the Spirit surrounded by flames in the format of the man-circle – with open arms, Man marks the boundaries of creation. The cosmos, in keeping with the mystical vision, is portrayed as a system of concentric circles.

A naked man – at once *imago Christi* and *imago hominis* – is placed at the centre of the final circle: his head touches the upper part, the toes of his feet the lower part, and with his arms outstretched he reaches the left and the right sides of the circle. Behind him, a globe representing the earth can be identified. The central position the human figure occupies in this composition signifies, according to Hildegard's vision, that in the structure of the world man "is the most powerful of all other creatures who reside within it" (*Liber divinorum operum*, ed. by Cristiani, Pereira 2003, 199).

Close to the points indicated by the human figure, the heads of four animals are depicted: a leopard at the top, a wolf below, a lion to the left and a bear to the right. From the mouths of each of these animals, strong gusts of wind blow, symbolising the four winds. Other animal heads occupying the middle spaces in the image, generate the median winds. "These heads blow towards the centre of the wheel and towards the representation of

man” (*Liber divinorum operum*, ed. by Cristiani, Pereira 2003, 175): in the symbolic economy of Hildegard’s vision, the winds are giving the breath of life and are keeping an equilibrium between the various forces that animate the cosmos. At the top, close to the leopard’s head, seven planets are depicted, three of which in the bright circle of fire, one in the circle of black fire (the sun), and the remaining three in the circle of pure ether. In addition, sixteen yellow stars are depicted in the bright circle of fire, and a series of red stars can be seen in the pure ether. Planets, stars, animal heads and the human figure are bound by gleaming rays of light. The rays create a reciprocal system of relations between all the constituent parts of the cosmos (Victoria Cirlot has proposed a reading and interpretation of Hildegard’s cosmic vision in her essay published in *Engramma*, [Cirlot 2016](#)).

According to Fritz Saxl, the illustration of Hildegard’s vision in Plate B takes on a well-defined meaning and demonstrates the form “[...] in which pagan cosmology reappeared for the first time during the Middle Ages [...], a man at the centre of the celestial spheres with arms outstretched and feet touching the innermost circle (Saxl [1957] 1985, p.51). For the close collaboration between Saxl and Warburg on the interpretation of Plates A, B and C in the introduction to the *Bilderatlas*, particularly during the latter part of Warburg’s life between September and October 1929, see the essay by [De Laude 2015](#).

The illustration of relations between macrocosm and microcosm is figurative, with additional radial lines indicating a distancing from the oldest of Christian iconographies and a return to figurative designs deriving from the astrological tradition of late antiquity. However, Hildegard adopts the traditions of Roman and Hellenistic astrology for the exegesis of Christian allegory. Nor should the fact that the illustration expresses continuity between Christ and Man be undervalued: the figure at the centre is the privileged body of creation because it would be singled out by the Son of God for his incarnation. In the illustration, Hildegard’s vision demonstrates iconographically the continuity between Man and Christ; the image of cosmic man becomes a potent image of the crucified Christ reaching out to the ends of the world outlining the cosmos he created. The binding force that bonds Man with the cosmos has its foundation in Thomistic thought and combines Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology. As Fritz Saxl observes of this image:

With arms and hands outstretched from the sides of his chest, the height of the human figure matches its width, just as the height of the firmament is equal to its width. Man is represented surrounded by the winds, while the rays of the seven planets touch the head and the feet of the figure, and connect the winds to the stars. Out of the field, the universe, at the centre of which lies the microcosm, is held in the arms of God (Saxl [1957] 1985, 51-52).

In the C15th miniatures, again pinned on the upper part of the plate – Heracles as ruler of the cosmos (from a manuscript preserved in Paris) and Zodiac man from *The Book of Hours of Duc de Berry* – the male figure is subject to other influences. It is not the celestial spheres, but the demonic forces of the stars that enclose the figure in the circle where the figure appears to be assailed by various forces, each of which affects a particular part of his body. The illustration “Hercules as world-ruler, his body parts allocated to the zodiac signs” (KBW caption), which is how Warburg describes it, is the incipit of a manuscript containing a collection of recipes and alchemical, botanical and medical writings belonging to the Hellenistic tradition, dating back to the 1400’s, as is demonstrated by a margin note made by the copyist Georgios Meidiades (the manuscript can be consulted in Gallica).



Heracles as ruler of the world and the correspondences between his limbs and the signs of the Zodiac [caption KBW], Ms. Gr. 2419, C15th, fol. 1r, Paris, Bibliothèque National.

However, Saxl notes that the text also includes references to Syrian astrological traditions (Saxl [1957] 1985, 48), as Warburg himself says:

A naked man who appears to be receiving rays from each part of the Zodiac distributed on various parts of his body. This means that different organs of Man are constantly subject to the influences that radiate from a sign of the Zodiac. This symbolic image is drawn on for centuries (Warburg [1925] 2014, 57).

The image is literally a depiction of *homo zodiacalis*, Zodiac man. Other forces, then, astrological and demonic rather than angelic, physically condition the health, character and temperament of Man and finally seal his fate.

It is the figure of Heracles that represents the model for man, and he is recognizable by his club and the drape over his arm – probably a vestige of the conventional, iconographic *leontè*, (Saxl [1957] 1985, 48). Heracles, positioned at the centre of the Zodiac, is also an actor in the cosmological theatre, and as in myth, the hero takes the place of Atlas to support the globe of the cosmos.

The same relation between human figure and the forces of the Zodiac can be found in the third image of the plate taken from *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, the priceless “Book of hours” that Jean de Berry commissioned the Limbourg brothers to produce in which Zodiac man is still subject to the influences of the constellations (reproductions of the pages of the codex can be found in Wikimedia).



Jean and Paul Limbourg, *Homo zodiacalis*, from *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, ms. 65, post 1417, fol. 14v, Chantilly, Musée Condé.



The image represents the two genders, male and female, enclosed within a *mandorla* surrounded by a border depicting the signs of the Zodiac from which fine rays extend to the organs of the figure; a scene based on the theory of *melothesia*, according to which every part of the human body is connected to a constellation in the Zodiac. According to Franz Cumont, the ancient Greek theory of *melothesia* was applied until the medical astrology of the Renaissance, and was known to the French miniaturist:

Les manuscrits figurent la mélothésie zodiacale par deux sortes de composition, que la peinture de Riches Heures semble avoir connues et combinées. Parfois, le personnage nu est représenté au milieu des douze signes disposés en cercle autour de lui. L'homme microcosme est placé au centre de la bande zodiacale, comme la terre, suivant la cosmologie des anciens, est suspendue au centre du monde. L'un et l'autre sont soumis aux mêmes influences stellaires, et ce parallélisme est souvent exprimé dans les textes qui traitent de la melothésie. [...] Les douze signes sont groupés en deux séries parallèles, dont l'ordre est indiqué par la numérotation A, B, etc. à côté de chacun d'eux, se trouve une notice indiquant à quelle date le soleil y entre, à savoir le 11 jour 1/2 de chaque mois. Cette indication, qui, en réalité, ne peut être uniforme pour tous les mois, est probablement valable pour le Bélier, pris comme point de départ, ce qui nous reporterait aux environs de l'an 1300 pour l'original du dessin, dont les inscriptions auraient été reproduites textuellement par le copiste. De chaque signe part un trait, qui atteint la partie qui lui est soumise du personnage placé au centre; la signification en est expliquée par les légendes. (Cumont 1916, 15)

Warburg writes:

In the Duc de Berry's illuminated manuscript, a work of outstanding artistic quality, Zodiac man is located in an oval space, covered from top to toe with signs of the Zodiac looking rather like leeches. However, the oval border divided in accordance with astrology suggests that the metaphorical significance, not the literal, was always known (Warburg [1925] 2014, 57).

"Signs of the Zodiac like leeches" – Warburg's description emphasises the theoretical and figurative significance of the image: the practical origins of *melothesia* are in fact manifested in the laborious therapeutic procedures, such as blood-letting, using leeches positioned over the critical parts of the body. Indeed, the subject of the image pinned immediately below Zodiac Man from the *Book of Hours* is the positioning of leeches in relation to the star signs.



Reconstruction of the order of the images of Zodiac Man in Plate B

According to Saxl, the series of “Zodiac Man” properly begins with the image drawn from the Munich manuscript: the metaphorical nature of the signs of the Zodiac (astral forces projected on to the body), becomes a veritable physical influence in the naturalistic portrayals of the animals of the Zodiac positioned directly on parts of the body, with no longer any distance between the human body and cosmic forces, no speculative mediation or metaphorical projection.



Subdivision of the human body according to astrological signs in order to perform bloodletting (C15th German manuscript), [caption by KBW], illustration of “Zodiac Man” from a manuscript, cod. Lat. misc.19414, C13, fol. 188v, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

What we call magic is merely the application of cosmology from the perspective of late antiquity, and the application of the principle of identity between the individual and the world that in the end leads to laborious practices. The diagram of the body passively influenced by the stars reflects cosmological theory. However, it does not become cosmological or philosophical speculation – rather, the influence of the stars on the human body has a functional spin-off in therapeutic practice (Warburg [1925] 2014, 57).

The human body continues to attract towards itself the influences of the stars, which, however, are no longer projected into the heavens. They

translate their metaphorical nature into medical practice which materialises in the leeches applied to corresponding parts of the body, with accompanying practical information on how to perform a blood-letting.

In the image drawn from the German manuscript, we can observe how the signs that were already present in the Duc de Berry codex now assume a more defined presence: the imponderable influence of the stars becomes the oppressive burden of animals on the organs of the human body, which can, however, be useful for the therapeutic outcomes. Saxl now observes:

Taurus really does weigh upon the body of man, and Gemini forms an attractive pair of children tight in its arms” (Saxl [1957] 1985, 57; English translation by Elizabeth Thomson).

The figure-Man, no longer locked in the cosmic or Zodiac circle of demonic forces, is a text that tests the power, both baleful and benevolent, of higher forces. Illustrations in almanacs depict the medical values of *melothesia*: correspondences between the stars and parts of the body are indicated, and the parts of the body to be bled are identified in accordance with the star sign through which, at that particular moment, the moon is passing.



*Blood-letting at the right and wrong time and the consequences thereof* (Calendar, Basle 1499) illustration from an incunabulum of Lienhart Ysenhut (detail), woodcut, 1499. Basel, Universitätsbibliothek.

Blood-letting also returns in an illustration in an incunabulum of Lienhart Ysenhut where the months are marked indicating the right time and the exact place for a surgical operation performed by a barber:



“Ancient precepts that gain the force of law in 1427 when Charles VII in an official letter ordered all barbers to display a copy of the calendar in their workshops (Saxl [1957] 1985, 57; English translation by Elizabeth Thomson).

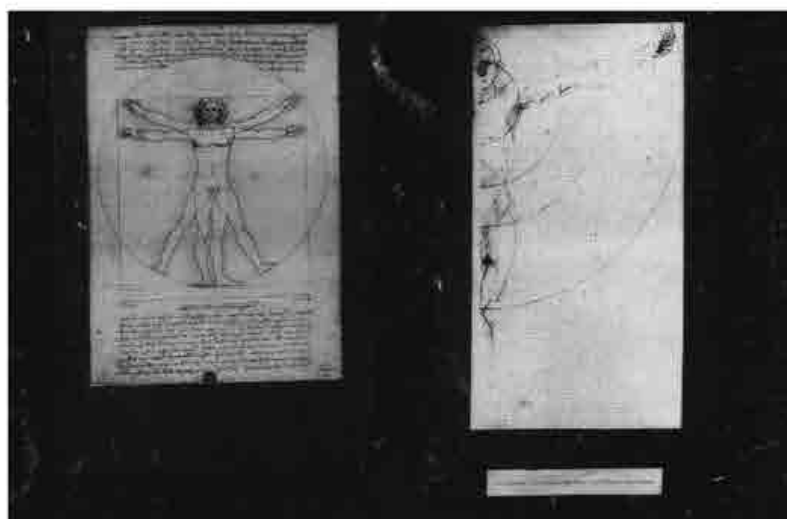
The illustration of “Zodiac man”, that for centuries had maintained a symbolic value, now becomes a body to open and dissect with a scalpel:

The constellations, however, suffer from the loss of space: they have become indications for the scalpels of the barber who now learns from the star signs of antiquity where and in which months to apply his knife or lancet. An indifferent and gory practice enters the scene, where the hand firmly holds the compass and the astrolabe in its grasp (Warburg [1925] 2014, 57-58; English translation by Elizabeth Thomson).

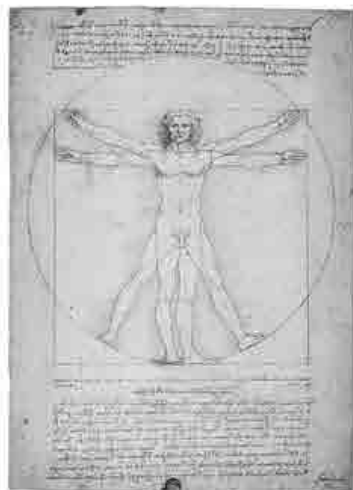
The dismissal of scientific instruments for the measurement of terrestrial and celestial space – the compass and the astrolabe – in favour of the practice of medical astrology is seen as a regression, a return to the safe belief in the magical bonds that bind the individual to the cosmos.

## II. THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC ITINERARY: MAN AS THE UNIT OF MEASURE FOR THE UNIVERSE

At the centre of the plate, Leonardo da Vinci’s drawing of the *Proportions of the human body* shows the figure of a man inscribed within a circle and a square, with none of the divinities or animals that populated the cosmic circles of Zodiac men. Relations between macrocosm and microcosm now occur through intellectual functions such as scientific observation and geometrical abstraction.



Da Vinci revived Vitruvius' canon (which was entirely functional to the technical discourse on proportion and harmony), endowing it with new meanings. The circle/square no longer encloses the human figure; it is a form of geometric correspondence and no longer of encirclement.



Leonardo da Vinci, *The proportions of the human body*, drawing 1485-1490, Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia.

The macrocosm/microcosm revolution put into effect by da Vinci, therefore, fits into a more general philosophical backdrop that weds the knowledge of the artist with that of the scientist. Ferruccio Masini, of da Vinci, notes:

Nature [is] conceived no longer as the chaotic negation of all form, but rather as the marble workshop where form in all its richness is realized.

In this sense, the anthropocentric illustration is also an anatomical drawing, paradigmatic, and not realistic:

Cognition is achieved by giving form. The designer of an anatomical illustration does not make a photograph; he makes an abstraction and a construction of the essential (Jaspers [1953] 2001; English translation by Elizabeth Thomson)

As Ernst Kantorowicz says, the model of New Man and the new “sovereignty of the artist” (Kantorowicz 1961) is conveyed by two intellectual artists of the Renaissance, cited several times by Warburg as examples of a “non-rhetorical style”: Da Vinci and Dürer. Soon after, the notion of Renaissance man migrates from Italy towards northern European countries. Pinned to Plate B next to Vitruvian Man is a drawing by Hans von Kulm-

bac known as the *Ideal proportions of the human body according to Dürer*, in which the body is freed from the geometric confines of the circle-square, expressing even more explicitly the definitive disconnection of the constraints of a theologically and magically deterministic framework.



*Ideal proportions of the human body according to Dürer* [caption by KBW], Hans von Kulmbach, Study of the proportions of the human figure. pen and ink drawing, 1513, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett.

In his essay on Dürer and Italian Antiquity, Warburg has this to say about the “Faustian tendency to brood on questions of measure and proportion” (Warburg [1905] 1999, p. 556) that animated Dürer:

Antiquity came to Dürer by way of Italian art, not merely as a Dionysian stimulant, but as a source of Apollonian clarity: The Belvedere Apollo was in his mind’s eye when he sought for the ideal measure of the male body, and he related the truth of nature to the proportions of Vitruvius. This Faustian tendency to brood on questions of measure and proportion never left him, and indeed intensified; but he soon lost interest in the ancient as a source of agitated mobility in any Baroque or Mannerist sense.

Both images, with their formal and artistic distinctiveness, indicate the ‘active’ anthropocentrism according to which man is the agent of the forces that assist him to break free from subjection to divine fatalism and cosmic servitude.

Karl Jaspers is instructive on the matter of the inclusion of this image on the plate, and on Leonardo da Vinci the philosopher where philosophy is understood as:

No longer a branch of science or doctrine, but a universal way of understanding, gradually becoming aware of itself as part of a whole, and itself leading back to its own guidance: therefore, like a vital form of human existence, taking knowledge upon itself (Jaspers [1953] 2001; English translation by Elizabeth Thomson).

The fundamental step taken by the two masters is the recovery of the 'classical tradition', i.e. a distance that is half-way between oriental magic and the seductions of the decorative style and the "muscular rhetoric" (Warburg [1914] 1966, 1996, p. 286) of mannerism. In their drawings, the figure of man is an ideal resulting from anatomic study based as much on geometric proportion derived from Vitruvius as on direct and experimental observation. It was after his journey to Italy, and during the twenty years that followed, which is to say after his contact with Jacopo de' Barbari, his knowledge of Alberti and the writings of Vitruvius, that Dürer developed his own theory, and compiled his *Four books on Human Proportions*.

Dürer produced his famous, iconic *Melancholia* in the same era in which medical astrology was practiced for the cure of the negative influence of the stars (in particular of Saturn). Warburg observes:

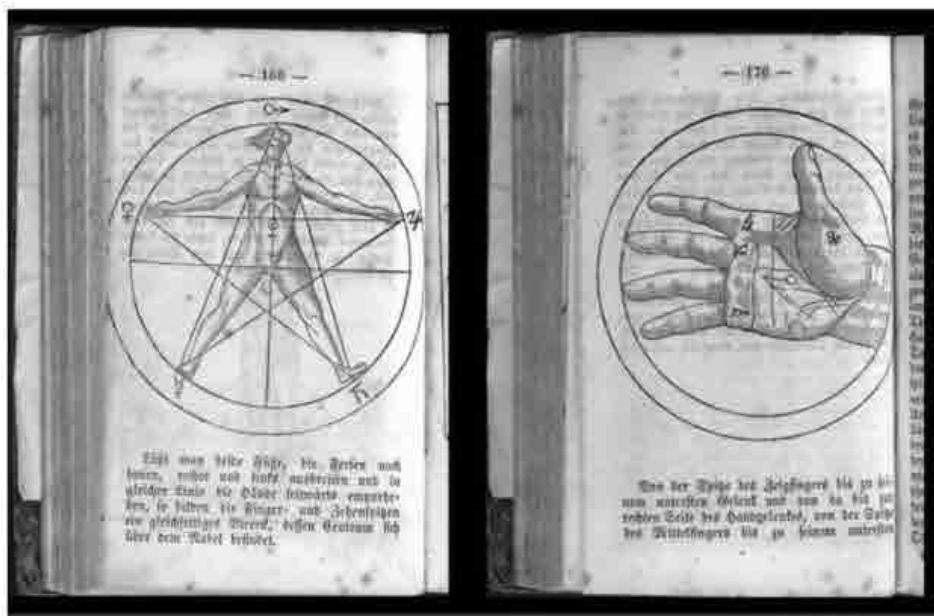
The truly creative act -that which gives Dürer's Melencolia 1 its consoling, humanistic message of liberation from fear of Saturn - can be understood only if we recognise that the artist has taken a magical and mythical logic and made it spiritual and intellectual. The malignant, child-devouring planetary god, whose cosmic contest with another planetary ruler seals the subject's fate, is humanised and metamorphosed by Dürer into the image of the thinking, working human being (Warburg [1920] 1999, 644).

With regard to astral influences, Dürer shifts the emphasis to the perspective of reconquered anthropocentrism. So it is that the artist produces the famously iconic Melencolia by Durer, implicitly evoked in Plate B, and present on Plate 58 of the Atlas (see in *Engramma*, *Mnemosyne Plate 58*, and the interpretive essay *Cosmologia in Dürer: Seminario Tradizione classica* 2002). During the Renaissance, therefore, the intellectual is at the centre of the cosmos, freed from the yoke of astral demons. The classics and nature, with the rediscovered knowledge of science of anti-

quity, are understood, readable and useful. Vitruvian man is the measure of all things – he is his own master, master of his horizons and of his cosmos, and with the rediscovered fullness of his *dignitas*, he has gained independence, even morphological independence, at the price of his active responsibility to give measure to things, and at the risk of being crushed into depression by the burden of the sky.

### III. THE MAGICAL APOTROPAIC ITINERARY

The two works by da Vinci and Dürer are not the end of a more or less linear and chronological journey leading to the human figure, subject to astral influences, to the “emancipated” man of the Cinquecento. In conclusion of the plate, there are two images contemporary with Dürer demonstrating a pragmatic and functional side to the value of magic connecting man to cosmic powers.



1. “Planetary man”, according to Agrippa von Nettesheim (1510) [caption by KBW], engraving from Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia*, 1533 Book II, chapter XXVII. 2. Division of the hand according to the planets by Agrippa von Nettesheim (1510) [caption by KBW], engraving from Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia*, 1533 Book II, chapter XXVII.

Drawn from the *De occulta philosophia* by Agrippa von Nettesheim, the two images illustrate the human body and hand enclosed within a system of circles that circumscribes and sets out the links between man and fate. As Warburg notes in his essay on Luther, it was a time when theories and images evoked by Marsilio Ficino, and the numbered squares of Agrippa

of Nettesheim “essentially belong together as offshoots of very ancient, pagan practices; for both have roots in Hermetic therapeutic magic, as transmitted by the Arabs.” (Warburg [1920] 1999, 643).

The images from *De occulta philosophia* also show a pragmatic and functional reason for the link connecting man to the power of the cosmos, now in a sense that is entirely magic. Body and hand are enclosed within a circle that describes them and defines their links and their fate.

#### PLATE B: PASSIVE AND ACTIVE ANTHROPOCENTRISM

There is a “family resemblance” (to quote Salvatore Settis) between the images on Plate B – emphasized by the uniformity of the format of the chosen photographs – that links the images of human figures, more or less geometrically drawn at the centre of various illustrations. The protagonist, visually and semantically, is the human figure which, in the illustrations of cosmic powers, the Zodiac, and medical and magical precepts, is represented in his nudity as the central focus: man as a central object, mainly passive and receptive to the influences of the cosmos, who, for just a brief moment in historical time – the Renaissance – is emancipated from subjection to nature, and reclaims his own active subjectivity. Returning to Warburg’s note:

Various degrees of influence of the cosmic system on Man [...] Conversion of harmony to abstract geometry instead of that which is cosmically determined (da Vinci - English translation by Elizabeth Thomson)

The plate read together with the note presents the various “gradations” of anthropocentrism: one that is passive, which subordinates the body to predetermined cosmic influences; the other, active and positive, which manifests itself in the challenge typical of the Renaissance, of acknowledging abstract and general laws of geometry that explain the correspondences between man and the cosmos. The significance attached to the frame that circumscribes the figure is subtle and profound: whether it is a circle or a square, the overturning of meaning can be read where the framework is a projection and not, therefore, a grid or a cage. In the active, Renaissance version of anthropocentrism, the figure-Man is the subject that radiates meaning and measurements onto the universe, and not the other way around.

However, beneath the surface, Plate B proposes an inner reading of the anthropocentric theory, presented as a system of orientation for under-



standing relationships between the human body and the cosmos: whether relating to medical matters or magic and superstition, a functional application of anthropocentrism makes it possible to formulate a system for effective prognosis, diagnosis and cure.

From the mystical visions of Hildegard, to the body as a reflection of the Zodiac, and to medical and astrological guidance, with the inclusion of chiromancy, Man appears therefore to be subject to, or rather enslaved by, the influences of the power of the cosmos in its various and possible manifestations including the Pentacle of Solomon (which would become a sign of salvation in Masonic symbology).



In the compositional structure of the plate, the central section where images of “dominators” of the cosmos are placed acquires particular significance: Heracles (who held up the sky for Atlas), the *homo quadratus* (da Vinci), and the magic man in the Pentacle.

They are a series of images that are thematically and morphologically similar, progressing from the astrological figure, via the geometric abstraction to the positivism of magic. In the images on the plate, the human body is the model (figure-schema) positioned at the centre of the cosmic system. However, a more careful reading of the position of the human figure at the centre of the cosmic syntax indicates that the apparent homogeneousness of Plate B is contradicted by clear deviations of meaning. In the montage of images, no single form of anthropocentrism is proposed; rather, there are many that respond to radically differing theoretical and philosophical perspectives. The figure-Man can indeed be seen as the centre of the cosmic system in at least two senses: as the passive object of celestial, astral and cosmic influences (especially in the images pinned to the upper part of the plate); and as an active subject radiating order to the cosmos (in the Renaissance drawings of da Vinci and Dürer).

The active aspect of anthropocentrism, restored during the Renaissance, does not however represent an irreversible gain as it is always under threat of regression. Excepting Man as a figure of free and active *humanitas* (da Vinci and Dürer), Plate B displays different versions of what we could define as an andropathic, though passive, deviation of anthropocentrism. An overview of Plate B, however, also highlights continuity between the early medieval vision, foregrounded in the astrological conception of *homo zodiacalis*, to the drift towards therapeutic (scientific), but also magic and superstitious uses of cosmic ties and influences. Warburg highlights this continuity:

The pagan augur who assumed the mantle of scientific learning was a hard adversary to contend with, let alone to defeat” (Warburg [1920] 1999, 59).

All the more difficult to defeat because if mystical knowledge and wisdom are lost, magic superstition, represented in Plate B by the final image, endures: the hand used in chiromancy. From this viewpoint, only the ‘Renaissance’ – Da Vinci and Dürer in Plate B – represents a break in the continuity and overhang of the structure.

It is the work on the occult by Agrippa von Nettesheim, a contemporary of da Vinci and Dürer, that is displayed in conclusion of the plate, immediately below the drawings by the two Renaissance artists. Another factor highlights the intention of restoring in all their complexity the



plots of the themes dealt with not in accordance with an inadequate historical and chronological linearity but by favouring a morphological equidistance. Right above the drawings by Dürer and da Vinci, there is an illustration taken from a medical calendar from Hamburg, immediately comparable with the other 'Zodiac men' on the plate, but dated 1724. As confirmation of this non-linear path, in the montage of Plate B, the works of art that are further apart in terms of manufacture, purpose, and content, appear to be linked by formal qualities, strongly emphasised by the quality and format of the photographic reproductions that mitigate the material differences between the works: da Vinci's 'inscribed' man and that of Agrippa von Nettesheim can almost be superimposed one on the other.

Compared with the forms of orientation indicated in the other opening plates – Plates A and C – in Plate B, the concentration of cosmological, astrological, medical and magical wisdoms configures another form of orientation of Man in the Cosmos. This comes about in a practical way in magical correspondences, but also in medical and therapeutic indications. From this viewpoint, forcefully emphasising, by their formal and artistic uniqueness, the "active" route of anthropocentrism, the drawings at the centre of the plate also acquire a leading role in the montage: the human body here is not the receptor of differing astral influences, but is a unit of measurement for the entire cosmos and a point from which forces are radiated.

In his essay, *Ancient and pagan divination in the time of Luther*, (1920) Warburg writes:

This was the age of Faust, in which the modern scientist – caught between magic practice and cosmic mathematics – was trying to insert the conceptual space of rationality between himself and the object. (Warburg [1920] 1999).

The construction of Plate B relaunches a nonetheless materialistic perspective of the links between man and the cosmos – links that only in humanistic representation appear to be abandoned, and allow man to invent his space for freedom as an opportunity to intervene in the real world. If the restoration of classical antiquity was "the result of an attempt to free modern man from the spells of Hellenistic and magic practices" (Warburg [1925] 2014, p. 51), the introduction of these two images within the pla-

te exposes the enduring contest between two variations of the link that binds man to the cosmos.

The cosmos is no longer pre-ordained, and is constructed almost on the harmony of the radiation of the basic measurements of the human body. A perfect overturning of Thomistic and Aristotelian determinism is brought about: in Dürer's illustration, free of the geometric frame of circle and square, concentric circles propagate as projections of specific proportional measurements of the limbs that become the unit of measure for the cosmos.

With his montage of Plate B, Warburg invites us to acknowledge the oscillation, even within the same historical and cultural era, during the Renaissance between the recovery of the space for thought (Denkraum) and its loss, and "the founding act of human civilization" (Warburg [1929] 2016), which for Warburg coincides with the creation of distance between the self and the external world.

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English version by Elizabeth Thomson

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

From Cosmos to Man and back again. A reading of Atlas Mnemosyne, Panel B

The A, B, and C Panels that open Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas define the "orientation" and coordinates (geographical, historical, cultural) of the Atlas as a whole, and set the grid for the analysis of the manifestations of the Classical tradition. While the first panel, Panel A, presents the three different "maps" of reality (cosmological, geographical, genealogical), Panel B focuses on one of the implicit themes of Panel A: the relationship between macro and microcosm and the consequences of the system that this relationship comes to design.

The images of this panel seem to all present the human body as a central figure. The need to represent and relate the human body to the cosmos is, in fact, expressed in this series of images that relate to the influences of the cosmos on man, establishing a correspondence between their respective systems. In the figures picked up on the panel, we see how from the Hellenistic to the Medieval and until to the Modern era, the human body is subordinated to the influences from planets and stars, first in a daemonic and then in a magical way. Only in two Renaissance examples, the scheme of this harmonious relationship is portrayed in a geometrical and logical form (Leonardo da Vinci). Human body is no longer subjected to the astral powers but is freed from cosmic influences. It is Leonardo's Man that will give his proportional measures to cosmos, not vice versa. Anthropocentrism instead of *andropathia*.



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