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# Mnemosyne challenged

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# Mnemosyne Challenged

a cura di

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# Zwischenraum/Denkraum

## Terminological Oscillations in the Introductions to the Atlas by Aby Warburg (1929) and Ernst Gombrich (1937)

Victoria Cirlot. English translation by David Carrillo-Rangel

The comparison between the two introductions to the Mnemosyne Atlas allows us to distinguish significant differences, both with regards to the arrangement of the images in the panels and with regard to the texts. The first introduction was written by Aby Warburg between 27 May and 4 July 1929 (Warburg 2012a, Warburg [1929] 2016). The second introduction was composed by Ernst Gombrich in 1937 on the occasion of the Max Warburg's seventieth birthday on 5 June 1937, the reason that it was entitled *Geburtstagsatlas für Max M. Warburg* (Gombrich [1937] 2017). It was conceived as an attempt to revive the unfinished, vital project started by his recently deceased brother (26 October 1929). The most interesting thing about Gombrich's text is that it is a reading and interpretation of Warburg's work, resulting from intense and in-depth research at the Warburg Institute, where he worked as a research member from January 1936. It also constitutes the first stage of his renowned *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* published in 1970 (Wedepohl 2015).

I am not going to follow the complex trails of Gombrich's interpretation here but will focus only on the use of the concepts of *Zwischenraum* ("intermediate" space) and *Denkraum* (space of thinking) in Warburg's works, and their resonance in the Gombrich's text. I will begin by emphasising that Gombrich does not use the term *Zwischenraum*, even though this term dominates the opening of Warburg's introduction, and only uses the term *Denkraum*, also common in Warburg's works. The reason why the term *Zwischenraum* has captured my attention so fully is the prominent place that both thought and artistic creation have been granted in the twentieth century by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who wanted to highlight the coincidence in that intermediate space on the part of Max Ernst, (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 327-331; Cirlot 2010, 63-83); to Max Ernst

himself and André Breton (Ernst [1934] 1970, 232; Breton [1933] 2008, 471). The identification of *Zwischenraum* as *al-'âlam al-khayâlî al-mithâlî* or *barzakh* in Iranian thought, as *mundus archetypus imaginalis* in Corbinian expression, which means an intermediate world between the sensitive and the intelligible, the corporeal and the spiritual, or an interval (Corbin 1960, 128-142), is sufficient justification to explore the meaning within the works of Warburg and its suppression in Gombrich's text.

### ***Zwischenraum* in the Introduction of Atlas Mnemosyne by Aby Warburg**

The term *Zwischenraum* can be found already in the opening lines of the Introduction to the Atlas:

Bewusstes Distanzschaffen zwischen sich und der Aussenwelt darf man wohl als Grundakt menschlicher Zivilisation bezeichnen; dieser *Zwischenraum* das Substrat künstlerischer Gestaltung, so sind die Vorbedingungen erfüllt, dass dieses Distanzbewusstsein zu einer sozialen Dauerfunktion werden kann die durch den Rhythmus vom Einschwingen in die Materie und Ausschwingen zur Sophrosyne jenen Kreislauf zwischen bildhafter und zeichenmässiger Kosmologik bedeutet, deren Zulänglichkeit oder Versagen als orientierendes geistiges Instrument eben das Schicksal der menschlichen Kultur bedeutet [A1] (Warburg [1929] 2017).

The conscious creation of distance between oneself and the external world can probably be designated as the founding act of human civilization. When this interval becomes the basis of artistic production, the conditions have been fulfilled for this consciousness of distance to achieve an enduring social function which, in its rhythmical change between absorption in its object or detached restraint, signifies the oscillation between a cosmology of images and one of signs; its adequacy or failure as an instrument of mental orientation signifies the fate of human culture [A1] (Warburg [1929] 2017).

The intermediate space is understood as the result of a conscious creation by mankind, which needs a distance between the self and the surrounding world. Warburg raises as a possibility that this space constitutes the substrate for artistic creation, and from this point envisages that this distance can become a lasting social function. In order to end this section [A1] - the paragraph numbering is that of Ernst H. Gombrich -, Warburg



proposes a polarity that is formulated as “rhythmical change between absorption in its object or detached restraint” (*Einschwingen in die Materie und Ausschwingen zur Sophrosyne*), like “a cosmology of images and one of signs” (*jenen Kreislauf zwischen bildhafter und zeichenmässiger Kosmologik*). Success or failure depends on the “instrument of mental orientation” (*orientierendes geistiges Instrument*) (Warburg 2012b, 52). The first question that I pose is: at what point does the concept *Zwischenraum* appear in the works of Warburg?

It is generally thought that the first important precedent of the introduction to the Atlas, and the first concretisation of the Mnemosyne project that occupied Warburg’s thought since at least his return from Kreuzlingen in 1924, was the famous conference at the Hertziana in Rome on 19 January 1929 (Warburg [1929] 2014). Judging by the surviving materials from that conference, it does not seem clear that Warburg used the concept *Zwischenraum* at all. In his *Roman diary*, Aby Warburg exchanges impressions with Gertrud Bing some days after the event about the effect caused by the conference in the Hertziana as well as its repercussions in the progress of the project of the Atlas, and Bing as collaborator believes that:

Der Text des Atlas wurde gefördert durch die Einleitung des Vortrages, die allerdings, wenn sie eine methodologische Einleitung des ganzen Werkes werden soll, noch bedeutende Erweiterungen erfahren muß; so muß zum Beispiel bei der Erwähnung des psychologischen Begriffs der Polarität als heuristischen Prinzips noch eine Auseinandersetzung des Gedankens von dem Wechsel zwischen Distanzsetzung und Einverleibung hinzutreten.

The text of the Atlas ought to be supported by the lecture’s introduction, which, however, if it is to be a methodological introduction to the entire work, must undergo significant amplification. Thus, for example, when the psychological concept of polarity as a heuristic principle is mentioned a discussion must follow of the intellectual struggle between embodiment and distantiation. January 28, 1929 (Eng. trans. by C. Johnson, in Johnson 2012, 200).

The concept *Zwischenraum* could be one of the components of that theoretical dimension that the Hertziana conference lacked, and the

concept was instead required in the Introduction to the Atlas. According to Bing it was necessary “to add a discussion about the idea of change between embodiment and distantiation” and it is precisely to “distantiation” that the term will refer, at least in one of its definitions. The fundamental role that the term performs in the introduction to the Atlas is evident since it controls all the first section [A], in which the preposition *zwischen* (between) and the concept of *Zwischenraum* are repeated on several occasions:

Um die kritischen Phasen im Verlauf dieses Prozesses durchschauen zu können, hat man sich des Hilfsmittels der Erkenntnis von der polaren Funktion der künstlerischen Gestaltung *zwischen* einschwingender Phantasie und ausschwingender Vernunft noch nicht im vollen Umfang der durch ihre Dokumente bildhaften Gestaltens möglichen Urkundendeutung bedient. *Zwischen* imaginärem Zugreifen und begrifflicher Schau steht das hantierende Abtasten des Objekts mit darauf erfolgreicher plastischer oder malerischer Spiegelung, die man den künstlerischen Akt nennt [A3] (Warburg [1929] 2017).

Those seeking to understand the critical stages of this process have not yet made fullest use of the way recognition of the polarities of artistic production, of the formative oscillation between inward-looking fantasy and outward-looking rationality, can assist possible interpretations of documents of the formation of the image. Between the imagination’s act of grasping and the conceptual act of observing, there is the tactile encounter with the object, subsequently reflected in sculpture or painting, which we term the artistic act [A3] (Warburg [1929] 2017).

Imagination and reason (*Phantasie und Vernunft*) substitute here the “matter” and the ‘Sophrosyne’ of the first section [A1] to the extent that they share with them immersion (*Einschwingen*) and oscillation (*Ausschwingen*), the nouns that here appear as adjectives (*einschwingender Phantasie und ausschwingender Vernunft*). But, above all, what is at stake here is the positioning of the artistic act in a place that is precisely a “between” (*zwischen*), which is repeated a couple of lines below: “between” the imaginative capture and the conceptual contemplation (*zwischen imaginärem Zugreifen und begrifflicher Schau*). The separation between the *zugreifen* (grab, take), pure sensitive, and the

intellective *begrifflich* that accompanies contemplation (*Schau*), plays with the shared root of the terms (*griff/greif*), and constitutes one of the contrasts characteristic of the Warburg's language and style. This third section, according to Gombrich's numbering, could be juxtaposed to the first, insisting on the creative act and looking for new ways of describing it. Both sections show the relationship between the polarity and the creation of space because the "between" or "intermedial" of that space is determined by that polarity and the oscillation from one side to the other. The section concludes by going back to the concept of *Zwischenraum* announced by the repetition of the preposition *zwischen*:

Diese Doppelheit *zwischen* antichaotischer Funktion, die man so bezeichnen kann, weil die kunstwerkliche Gestalt das Eine auswählend umrissklar herausstellt, und der augenmässig vom Beschauer erfordernden, kulturell erheischten Hingabe an das geschaffene *Idolon* schaffen jene Verlegenheiten des geistigen Menschen, die das eigentliche Objekt einer Kulturwissenschaft bilden müssten, die sich illustrierte psychologische Geschichte des *Zwischenraums zwischen* Antrieb und Handlung zum Gegenstand erwählt hätte [A3] (Warburg [1929] 2017).

This duality between an anti-chaotic function, which can be termed thus because the artwork selects and clarifies the contours of the object, and the demand that the beholder should gaze in cultic devotion at the idol that has been created, creates the human intellectual predicaments that should form the proper object of a scientific study of culture that takes as its subject the illustrated psychological history of the interval between impulse and rational action [A3] (Warburg [1929] 2017).

To the duplicity (*Doppelheit*) between (*zwischen*) the antichaotic function and the idol created (*geschaffene Idolon*), belongs the intermedial space (*Zwischenraum*) that separates the impulse (*Antrieb*) of the action in relation to the object (*Handlung zum Gegenstand*). But between these two sections [A1] and [A3], in which the term *Zwischenraum* thrives, as noted above, repeated twice and resonating in the reiteration of the preposition *zwischen* (up to four times), Warburg introduces another concept which seems to be a synonym, *Denkraum*:

Dem *zwischen* religiöser und mathematischer Weltanschauung schwankenden künstlerischen Menschen kommt das Gedächtnis sowohl der Kollektivpersönlichkeit wie des Individuums in einer eigentümlichen Weise zur Hilfe: nicht ohne weiteres *Denkraum* schaffend, wohl aber an den Grenzpolen des psychischen Verhaltens die Tendenz zur ruhigen Schau oder orgiastischen Hingabe verstärkend. Es setzt die unverlierbare Erbmasse mnemisch ein, aber nicht mit primär schützender Tendenz, sondern es greift die volle Wucht der leidenschaftlich-phobischen, im religiösen Mysterium erschütterten gläubigen Persönlichkeit im Kunstwerk mitstilbildend ein, wie andererseits aufzeichnende Wissenschaft des rhythmische Gefüge behält und weitergibt, in dem die Monstra der Phantasie zu zukunftsbestimmenden Lebensführern werden [A2] (Warburg [1929] 2017).

In a peculiar way recollection, both collective and individual, comes to the assistance of the artist oscillating between the religious and the mathematical world view. Although it does not create intellectual space unqualifiedly, it does nevertheless strengthen the tendency either to tranquil contemplation or to orgiastic devotion, which comprise the extreme psychological poles of behaviour. It establishes the lasting legacy of memory, yet not as part of a primarily protective tendency. Rather, the full force of the passionate and fearful religious personality, in the grip of the mystery of faith, intervenes in the formation of artistic style, just as, conversely, science, with its practice of recording, preserves and passes on the rhythmical structure whereby the monsters of the imagination guide one's life and determine the future [A2] (Warburg [1929] 2017).

The oscillation between one pole and another, either between the religious conception and the mathematical, or between tranquil contemplation and orgiastic devotion, creates an intellectual space, in other words, intermediate space. The creator of that space is "Memor" (*Gedächtnis*), which moreover reinforces each of the poles at its furthest extremes. Warburg comments frequently on the demonisation of inherited phobic impressions (*Entdämonisierung der phobisch geprägten Eindrucks-erbmasse*) to define the purpose of his Mnemosyne Atlas which is to capture the process, which he defines as "the attempt to absorb pre-coined expressive values by means of the representation of life in motion" – the reflections with which Warburg concludes his Introduction to the theories that form the basis of his project.



concision of formulas; an immoderate taste for series with an abundance of rimes, assonance, similarities between words... the ludic and sometimes poetic, character of the puns, and even of 'grand words' pronounced as prophecies" (Didi-Huberman [2002] 2017, 308-309). Warburg's intense writing activity in the years 1927-1929 is also noteworthy. This is attested in unpublished manuscripts with titles that are enough "to understand that Warburg wanted to accompany the Mnemosyne Atlas, not with a *history* of the 'influences of Antiquity', but rather with a theoretical discussion of the *memory* of images and symbols based on the phenomena associated with memory's forms of survival" (Didi-Huberman [2002] 2017, 304-305). Didi-Huberman continues by pointing out that in these texts Warburg gives himself, erratically, but tirelessly, "to a *theoretical experience* – at once a test and an experiment- which finds its coherence in the very style of its exposition". He notices something that I believe is extremely important: the *visuality* Warburg's writing – "The ideas are disposed on the white pages like the images on the black screens of the Mnemosyne Atlas: in living piles, in constellations, in exploding packets" (Didi-Huberman [2002] 2017, 305).

Indeed, this first part of the Introduction could be resolved in three pages arranged horizontally [A1, A2, A3] and in them, the contrasts, the similarities, the differences would stand out, and below them, completing the picture, the two conclusive pages [A4, A5]. It is then that the similarity of both terms *Zwischenraum/Denkraum* emerges, and *Zwischenraum* stands out above the others, supported by the sonority achieved through prepositional repetition.

The term *Denkraum* had already appeared in other Warburgian texts (Nicastro 2016), specifically in the *Schlangenritual*, the text that reports on the famous conference in the Bellevue clinic on April 21, 1923, one that marked the beginning of Aby Warburg's convalescence (Seminario Mnemosyne 2017). At the end of this text one can read:

Durch sie zerstört die Kultur des Maschinenzeitalters das, was sich die aus dem Mythos erwachsene Naturwissenschaft mühsam errang, den *Andachtsraum*, der sich in den *Denkraum* verwandelte.

Der moderne Prometheus und der moderne Ikarus, Franklin und die Gebrüder Wright, die das lenkbare Luftschiff erfunden haben, sind eben jene

verhängnisvollen Ferngefühl Zerstörer, die den Erdball wieder ins Chaos zurückzuführen drohen. Telegramm und Telefon zerstören den Kosmos. Das mythische und das symbolische Denken schaffen im Kampf um die vergeistigte Anknüpfung zwischen Mensch und Umwelt den Raum als *Andachtsraum oder Denkraum*, den die elektrische Augenblicksverknüpfungen mordet (Warburg [1923] 1988, 59).

With these waves, the culture of the machine age destroys what the natural sciences, born of myth, so arduously achieved: the space for devotion, which evolved in turn into the space required for reflection. The modern Prometheus and the modern Icarus, Franklin and Wright brothers, who invented the dirigible airplane, are precisely those ominous destroyers of the sense of distance who threaten to lead the planet back into chaos. Telegram and telephone destroy the cosmos. Mythical and symbolic thinking battle to form spiritual bonds between humanity and the surrounding world, shaping distance into the space required for devotion and reflection: the distance killed by the instantaneous electric connection (Eng. trans. by C. Johnson, in Johnson 2012, 35).

In this text, *Denkraum* is linked to *Andachtsraum* and appears as a space conquered by the culture of myth and by symbolic thought, destroyed by the culture of the machine that has ended with the feeling of distance sacrificed to immediacy or fleeting connection. The telegraph and telephone are in Warburg's eyes the emblems of the destruction of the space of thinking and contemplation, or as he will say six years later, of the intermediate space without which civilisation cannot exist.

### ***Denkraum in the Geburtstagsatlas by Ernst Gombrich***

Ernst Gombrich's Introduction to the *Geburtstagsatlas für Max M. Warburg* (5 June 1937), *Zur Mnemosyne. Zur Erkenntnistheorie und Praxis der Symbolsetzung* (Gombrich [1937] 2017) is the outcome of Gombrich's work at the Warburg Institute, at least during one year, from January 1936, in which he gained familiarity not only with Warburg's published writings but also with the enormous documentation preserved (papers, letters, diagrams, and so forth). This reconstruction of the Warburg's project undertaken by Gombrich was offered together with Gertrud Bing to Max Warburg on his seventieth birthday by way of acknowledgement. It was donated to the Warburg Institute by a relative in 1984 (Culotta 2016) and

constitutes, in my opinion, a very interesting text, since it deploys a reading and an interpretation of Warburg's Introduction to the Atlas. The brevity of this introduction contrasts with the effort of providing each of the 24 *Tafeln* (a third of Warburg's final series) with a commentary in which the coherence of each constellation of images would be shown. Specifically, Warburg could not have finished these commentaries, and Gertrud Bing thought it could be resolved by using fragments of his writings (Wedepohl 2015, 135). Gombrich opens the Atlas with some preliminary words focussing on the concepts of orientation (*Orientierung*) and distantiation (*Distanzierungsprozess*), to observe:

Der Begriff Orientierung hat für Warburg im Anschluss an Kants Aufsatz "Was heisst sich im Denken orientieren?" sehr allgemeinen Charakter. Er ist ihm der Überbegriff für jede bewusste Beziehungsnahe des Menschen als eines Individuums mit der Umwelt im engeren oder weiteren Sinn. Erst dadurch, dass der Mensch eine Umwelt durch Zeichensetzung konstituiert - vermag er sein Ich von diesem 'nicht Ich' zu distanzieren. Dieser Distanzierungsprozess, der das Bereich des Bewusstseins von dem der Aussenwelt scheidet und jedem seine immanente Gesetzmässigkeit zuweist, ist ihm das wesentliche Agens und Ziel der Phylogenese wie es das der Ontogenese ist. 'Denkraum' nennt Warburg diese gewonnene Distanz zur Umwelt, *Denkraumschöpfung* den konstituierenden Akt jeder ontogenetischen und phylogenetischen Entwicklung. Zeichensetzung ist es, die diese *Denkraumschöpfung* einleitet, Missbrauch oder Verkennung der Zeichenfunktion die Gefahr, die der Kultur immer wieder drohte und droht. Denn das ursprüngliche Zeichen, das Bild wie der Name, birgt in sich selbst die Gefahr der Hypostasis. Der Bildzauber wie der Namenfetischismus ist ein solcher *denkraumzerstörender* Kurzschluss des Denkens, in dem die orientierende Funktion des Abbildes verlorengeht: Zeichen und Bezeichnetes verschwimmen im magischen Weltbild zur furchterregenden Einheit (Gombrich [1937] 2017).

The notion of orientation has a very general character for Warburg, in relation to Kant's essay "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking". For Warburg, it is a supra-notion to indicate every conscious relationship that Man as an individual establishes in a broad and narrow sense with the world around him. Precisely because Man represents the world around him by marking it with signs, he can distance his 'I' from his 'not me'. This process



of distance-taking, which separates the realm of self-consciousness from the outside world and assigns to each its own immanent law, is for Warburg the essential principle and purpose of both phylogenesis and ontogenesis. Warburg calls the distance achieved with respect to the surrounding world, "Denkraum", and the "creation of Denkraum" the constitutive act of all ontogenetic and phylogenetic development. Marking with signs is what introduces this creation of a space for thought, where abuse or disallowance of the function of signs constitutes a danger that threatens and continues to threaten culture. The original sign, be it image or name, conceals within itself the danger of hypostasis. The magic of the image as well as the fetishism of names is a sort of short-circuiting of thought, which destroys the Denkraum, and in which the orientation function of representation is lost: in the magical conception of the world, signs and what has been assigned a name disappear in an alarming union (Gombrich [1937] 2017).

The disappearance of the term *Zwischenraum*, so powerful in the first introductory lines by Warburg, is surprising in this initial paragraph, if only to introduce the term *Denkraum*, whose meaning is constructed from the passage of the *Schlangenritual* quoted above. The idea of the destruction of this space by means of a short circuit (*Kurzschluss*) as being very similar to the fleeting connection (*Augenblicksverknüpfungen*) of the *Schlangenritual* prevails. From the first paragraph of Warburg's text, only the concept of orientation (*Der Begriff Orientierung*), has been retained in the first words of Gombrich's text, which Warburg resolved as "an instrument of mental orientation" (*als orientierendes geistiges Instrument*). Gombrich reads, glosses, and understands Warburg's text, but probably not just Warburg's alone. The reference to Kant allows us to link it with a passage that can be found in the *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* by Ernst Cassirer, specifically in the second volume devoted to myth (*Das mythische Denken*), the prologue of which is dated December 1924 in Hamburg. In it, Cassirer acknowledges the Warburg Library because of the rich and abundant material offered to him there that enabled him to continue his research (Cassirer [1925] 1973, XIII). In chapter II we find the Kant quotation that discusses orientation, and where this is related to the *Denkraum*:

Das mythische Denken ergreift eine ganz bestimmte, konkret-räumliche Struktur, um nach ihr das Ganze der 'Orientierung' der Welt zu vollziehen.

Kant hat in einem kurzen, aber für seine Denkweise höchst bezeichnenden Aufsatz: "Was heisst: sich im Denken orientieren?" den Ursprung des Begriffs der 'Orientierung' zu bestimmen und seine weitere Entwicklung zu verfolgen gesucht. "Wir mögen unsere Begriffe noch so hoch anlegen und dabei noch so sehr von der Sinnlichkeit abstrahieren, so hängen ihnen doch noch immer bildliche Vorstellungen an... Denn wie wollten wir auch unseren Begriffen Sinn und Bedeutung verschaffen, wenn ihnen nicht irgendeine Anschauung... unterlegt würde?". Von hier aus zeigt Kant, wie alle Orientierung mit einem sinnlich gefühlten Unterschied, nämlich mit dem Gefühl des Unterschieds der rechten und linken Hand beginnt, - wie sie sich sodann in die Sphäre der reinen, der mathematischen Anschauung erhebt, um zuletzt zur Orientierung im Denken überhaupt, in der reinen Vernunft aufzusteigen. Betrachten wir die Eigenart des mythischen Raumes und stellen wir sie der des sinnlichen Anschauungsraumes, wie der des mathematischen 'Denkraumes' gegenüber, so lässt sich dieser Stufengang der Orientierung in eine noch tiefere geistige Schicht zurückverfolgen - so lässt sich deutlich der Punkt des Übergangs bezeichnen, an dem in Gegensatz, der an und für sich rein im mythisch-religiösen Gefühl wurzelt, sich zu gestalten, sich eine 'objektive' Form zu geben beginnt, durch welche nunmehr dem Gesamtprozess der Objektivation, der anschaulich-gegenständlichen Erfassung und Deutung der Welt der sinnlichen Eindrücke, eine neue Richtung gewiesen wird (Cassirer [1925] 1973, 116).

Mythical thinking seizes upon a very specific and concrete spatial structure in order to carry through its whole "orientation" of the world. In "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?" - an article which despite its brevity is highly characteristic of his manner of thinking - Kant attempted to define the origin of the concept of "orientation" and follow its development: "However high we may place our concepts and much as we may abstract them from the sensuous world, still images adhere to them... For how should we give meaning and signification to our concepts if some intuition... did not underly them?". Kant then goes on to show how all orientation begins with a sensuously felt distinction - namely the feeling of the distinction between the right and the left hand - and how it then rises to the sphere of pure mathematical intuition and ultimately to the orientation of thought as such, of pure reason. If we examine the peculiarity of mythical space and compare it with the space of sensory intuition and the logical space of mathematics, we can follow these stages of orientation down to a

still deeper spiritual level; and we can clearly discern the point of transition at which an opposition intrinsically rooted in mythical feeling begins to shape itself, to take on an objective form, through which the general process of objectification, the intuitive-objective apprehension and interpretation of the world of sense impressions, assumes a new direction (Cassirer [1925] 1955, 93-94).

Some pages before, Cassirer explains the distance between mythical and mathematical thought, pointing out the “intermedial position” (*Mittelstellung*) of the mythical space, between the space of a pure sensory experience and the space of pure knowledge, emphasising not only the distance, but even the divergence between the visual and the tactile space and the space of pure mathematics, to which the *Gedankenraum* or *Denkraum* belongs:

Um die Eigenart der mythischen Raumschauung vorläufig und in allgemeinen Umrissen zu bezeichnen, kann man davon ausgehen, dass der mythische Raum eine eigenartige *Mittelstellung zwischen* dem sinnlichen Wahrnehmungsraum und den Raum der reinen Erkenntnis, dem Raum der geometrischen Anschauung einnimmt. Es ist bekannt, dass der Wahrnehmungsraum, dass der Seh- und Tastraum, mit dem Raum der reinen Mathematik nicht nur nicht zusammenfällt, sondern dass zwischen beiden vielmehr eine durchgehende Divergenz besteht. Die Bestimmungen des letzteren lassen sich aus denen des ersteren nicht einfach ablesen oder auch nur in einer stetigen Abfolge des Denkens ableiten; es bedarf vielmehr einer eigentümlichen Umkehr der Blickrichtung, einer Aufhebung dessen, was in der sinnlichen Anschauung unmittelbar gegeben erscheint, um zu dem ‘*Gedankenraum*’ der reinen Mathematik vorzudringen (Cassirer [1925] 1973, 104).

We may arrive at a provisional and general characterisation of the mythical intuition of space by starting from the observation that it occupies a kind of middle position between the space of sense perception and the space of pure cognition, that is, geometry. It is self-evident that the space of perception, the space of vision and touch, does not coincide with the space of pure mathematics, that there is indeed a thoroughgoing divergence between the two. The determinations of mathematical space do not follow simply from those of sensory space (the former cannot even be derived from

the latter in an unbroken logical sequence); on the contrary, we require a peculiar reversal of perspective, a negation of what seems immediately given in sensory perception, before we can arrive at the "logical space" of pure mathematics (Cassirer [1925] 1955, 83).

Ernst Cassirer does not mention *Zwischenraum*, but although the term does not appear in his *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, it is evident that he has been thinking about that intermedial space since his first attempt in the Introduction to the first volume (*Die Sprache*), in which he deals with the dualism of the sensible and the intelligible:

Die Idee einer derartigen Grammatik schliesst eine Erweiterung des traditionellen geschichtlichen Lehrbegriffs des Idealismus in sich. Dieser Lehrbegriff war von jeher darauf gerichtet dem 'mundus sensibilis' einen anderen Kosmos den 'mundus intelligibilis' gegenüberzustellen und die Grenzen beider Welten sicher zu scheiden. Im wesentlichen aber verlief die Grenze derart, dass die Welt des Intelligiblen durch das Moment des reinen Tuns, die Welt des Sinnlichen durch das Moment des Leidens bestimmt wurde. Dort herrschte die freie Spontaneität des Geistigen, hier die Gebundenheit, die Passivität des Sinnlichen. Für jene 'allgemeine Charakteristik' aber, deren Problem und Aufgabe sich jetzt im allgemeinsten Umriss vor uns hingestellt hat, ist dieser Gegensatz kein unvermittelter und ausschliessender mehr. *Denn zwischen dem Sinnlichen und Geistigen knüpft sich hier eine neue Form der Wechselbeziehung und der Korrelation.* Der metaphysische Dualismus beider erscheint überbrückt, sofern sich zeigen lässt, dass gerade *die reine Funktion des Geistigen selbst im Sinnlichen ihre konkrete Erfüllung suchen muss*, und dass sie sie hier zuletzt allein zu finden vermag. [...] In ihnen allen zeigt sich in der Tat dies als das eigentliche Vehikel ihres immanenten Vorgangs, dass sie neben und über der Welt der Wahrnehmung eine eigene freie Bildwelt erstehen lassen: *eine Welt, die ihrer unmittelbaren/Beschaffenheit nach noch ganz die Farbe des Sinnlichen an sich trägt, die aber eine bereits geformte und somit eine geistig beherrschte Sinnlichkeit darstellt.* Hier handelt es sich nicht um ein System sinnlicher Mannigfaltigkeiten, die in irgendeiner Form freien Bildens erschaffen werden (Cassirer [1923] 1954, 19-20).

The idea of such a grammar implies a broadening of the traditional and historical concept of idealism. Idealism has always aimed at juxtaposing to

the *mundus sensibilis* another cosmos, the *mundus intelligibilis*, and at defining the boundary between these two worlds. But the usual means of drawing this boundary was to say that the intelligible world is governed by the principle of pure action, while the sensible world is dominated by the principle of receptivity. The free spontaneity of the mind prevails in the former, the confinement, the passivity of the senses in the latter. But for the “universal characteristic” which now stands before us in the broadest outlines as problem and project, this opposition is no longer irreconcilable and exclusive. For the senses and the spirit are now joined in a new form of reciprocity and correlation. Their metaphysical dualism seems bridged since it can be shown that precisely the pure function of the spirit itself must seek its concrete fulfilment in the sensory world. [...] We find indeed that, beside and above the world of perception, all these spheres produce freely their own world of symbols which is the true vehicle of their immanent development – a world whose inner quality is still wholly sensory, but which already discloses a formed sensibility, that is to say, a sensibility governed by the spirit. Here we no longer have to do with a sensible world that is simply given and present, but with a system of diverse sensory factors which are produced by some form of free creation (Cassirer [1923] 1955, 86-87).

Overcoming of the metaphysical dualism between the sensible and the intelligible world results from an understanding of an intermedial world, a world where the sensible and the intelligible meet, where the intelligible shows itself in the sensible and vice versa. Iranian philosophy was at a crossroads of thought in which the ancient Zoroastrian religion, Platonism and Islam coincided; and it dealt precisely with this world, which was later translated by Henry Corbin as *mundus imaginalis*.

A few months before writing the Prologue to his second volume of *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, on April 10, 1924, Cassirer visited Warburg. In the clinical history of Ludwig Binswanger, the importance of this visit is reported, and it is stated that “The patient is happy that Cassirer could confirm the hypotheses he has raised from his specific field” (Binswanger, Warburg 2007, 163, Eng. trans. by D. Carrillo-Rangel). Binswanger himself was very interested in Cassirer’s philosophical work, and found many similarities with his own. In his work from 1933, already quoted here, *Über Ideenflucht*, Binswanger talks about space and spatiality

and clarifies that he does not do so in the sense of physical space but in the sense of the spatiality of Martin Heidegger's *Dasein*:

Was wir (Stimmungs-)Optimismus nennen, ist nicht anders, als diese annähernde Übereinstimmung der räumlichen Grenzen der Gedanken – und der Sachwelt. Beide Räume sind hier nahezu gleich weit oder gleich eng. Diese Ausdrucksweise darf natürlich nicht gleichnishaft aufgefasst werden, vielmehr muss sie aus der Ontologie des Daseins und seiner Räumlichkeit verstanden werden [en nota: Räumlich ist hier nicht im Sinne des geometrischen oder irgendeines objektiven oder physikalischen Raums gemeint, sondern im Sinne der Räumlichkeit des Daseins überhaupt Vgl. Heidegger, a.a.O. & 22, 23, 24]. Dann ist aber klar, dass sie auch auf den Grund der annähernden Übereinstimmung der Grenzen beider Welten im Optimismus hinzuweisen vermag. Auch dieser Grund lässt sich noch räumlich fassen. Sagen wir doch von diesem Optimismus, dass es hier nicht weit sei vom Gedanken zum Entschluss und zur Tat, und dass hier nur ein Schritt sei von der Möglichkeit zur Wirklichkeit. Das zeigt wieder, dass, wie wir bereits wissen, Gedanken- und Sachwelt an Umfang nahezu gleich sind, überdies aber auch, dass sie hier nahe beieinander liegen. Beide Momente gehören ontologisch zusammen, eines weist auf das andere hin (Binswanger [1933] 1980, 61).

This mode of expression cannot naturally be conceived as images, it should be understood rather from the ontology of Dasein and spatiality (48, Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, & 22, 23, 24). But it is clear then that this also makes it possible to give some indications about the foundation of the harmony approaching the borders of the two worlds as optimism. This foundation can also be grasped spatially. However, it should be noted that this optimism is also not far from the thought of the resolution and the act, and that there is only one step from possibility to reality. As we already know, this shows again that the world of thoughts and the world of things are almost identical in extent, but also that they are here near each other. Both moments are ontologically equivalent, one reflects the other (Eng. trans. by D. Carrillo-Rangel).

Two pages later, he refers to *Denkraum*:

Die Volatilität auch der Denkgegenstände, insbesondere ihre Wandlung – und Gestaltungsfähigkeit, im Verein mit der Gelichtetheit des *Denkraums* überhaupt, hat zur Konsequenz, dass man hier nie vor einem unüberwindlichen Denkhindernis steht, immer einen Ausblick und Ausweg findet, dass sich hier immer (Denk-)Fäden, ‘nach allen Seiten’ spinnen und sich immer wieder neue Gedanken bilden (Binswanger [1933] 1980, 63).

The volatility of the objects of thought, specifically their capacity to transform themselves and to take shape, alongside the luminosity of the space of thought in general, results in the consequence that one is never in front of an obstacle of unconquerable thought, but that one always finds a point of view and an outcome, and that “on all sides”, the threads (of thought) are always being woven and that thoughts are formed always anew again (Eng. trans. by D. Carrillo-Rangel).

In the note to page 58 he introduces the term *Zwischenreich* (Binswanger [1933] 1980, 58). Peter Sloterdijk already understood that “Only a few Heidegger exegetes seem to have realised that the sensational programmatic tide of *Sein und Zeit* also contains an embryonically revolutionary treatise on being and space. Under the spell of Heidegger’s existential analytics of time, it has mostly been overlooked that this is rooted in a corresponding analytics of space, just as the two in turn rest on an existential analytics of movement” (Sloterdijk [1998] 2011, 333). Further in the text: “Heidegger’s analytics of existential spatiality arrives at a positive tracing of the spatiality of Dasein as approach and orientation in two destructive steps”. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger talks about *Zwischenraum* in order to allude to the space between the chair and the wall:

Das ‘Sein bei’ der Welt als Existenzial meint nie so etwas wie das Beisammen-vorhanden-sein von vorkommenden Dingen. Es gibt nicht so etwas wie das ‘Nebeneinander’ eines Seienden, genannt ‘Dasein’, mit anderem Seienden, genannt ‘Welt’. Das Beisammen zweier Vorhandener pflegen wir allerdings sprachlich zuweilen z.B. so ausdrücken: “Der Tisch steht ‘bei’ der Tür, ‘der Stuhl berührt’ die Wand”. Von einem ‘Berühren’ kann streng genommen nie die Rede sein und zwar nicht deshalb, weil am Ende immer bei genauer Nachprüfung sich ein Zwischenraum zwischen Stuhl und Wand feststellen lässt, sondern weil der Stuhl grundsätzlich nicht, und wäre

der *Zwischenraum* gleich Null, die Wand berühren kann (Heidegger [1927] 2006, 55).

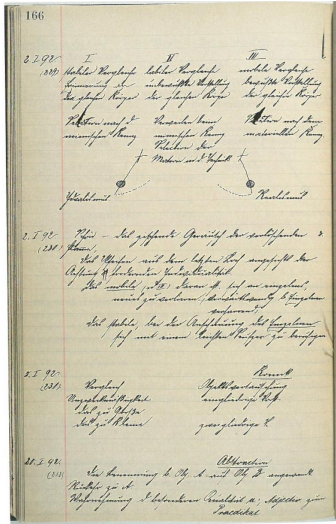
As an existential, “being with” the world never means anything like the being-objectively-present-together of things that occur. There is no such thing as the “being next to each other” of a being called “Dasein” with another being called “world”. It is true that, at times, we are accustomed to expressing linguistically the being together of two objectively present things in such a manner: “The table stands ‘next to’ the door”, “The chair ‘touches’ the wall”. Strictly speaking, we can never talk about “touching”, not because in the last analysis we can always find a space between the chair and the wall by examining it more closely, but because in principle the chair can never touch the wall, even if the space between them amounted to nothing (Heidegger [1927] 1996, 51-52 [I, II 12]).

Of more interest for our discussion is his reflection on the “between” between the subject and the object, suggesting how appropriate (or not) it would be to place the orientation in that “between”:

Was anderes stellt sich aber dann mit diesem Phänomen dar als das vorhandene *commercium* zwischen einem vorhandenen Subjekt und einem vorhandenen Objekt? Diese Auslegung käme dem phänomenalen Bestand schon näher, wenn sie sagte: das Dasein ist das Sein dieses ‘Zwischen’. Irreführend bliebe die Orientierung an dem ‘Zwischen’ trotzdem. Sie macht unbesehen den ontologisch unbestimmten Ansatz des Seienden mit, wozwischen dieses Zwischen als solches ‘ist’. Das Zwischen ist schon als Resultat der *convenientia* zweier Vorhandenen begriffen (Heidegger [1927] 2006, 132).

But then what else presents itself with this phenomenon other than the objectively present *commercium* between an objectively present subject and an objectively present object? This interpretation would come closer to the phenomenal content if it stated that Da-sein is the being of this “between”. Nonetheless, the orientation toward the “between” would still be misleading. It colludes unawares with the ontologically indefinite approach that there are beings between which this between as such “is”. The between is already understood as the result of the *convenientia* of two objectively present things (Heidegger [1927] 1996, 124 [I, V, 28]).





2 | Aby Warburg, *Grundlegende Bruchstücke*, 1888/1896-1905/1912.

Let us return to Gombrich once more. It seems to me highly relevant that Gombrich dismissed the term *Zwischenraum* only to choose the *Denkraum*. Moreover, Claudia Wedepohl reports in Gombrich's project to research and edit Warburg works an inquiry about Warburgian terminology was planned (*Mneme, Engramm, energetische Inversion, Ambivalenz, Denkraumverlust, Schlitterlogik*). This means that Gombrich considered the concepts employed by Warburg to be highly relevant (Wedepohl 2015, 145). However, in this list, we are also unable to find any mention of the *Zwischenraum*. If I have insisted until now upon the proximity between *Zwischenraum* and *Denkraum* and their use as almost synonyms in some contexts, it is now time

to point out their differences. That the space of thinking can be an intermediate space certainly does not imply that the notion of intermedial space and that of the space of thinking are identical. The latter comes from a need for a distance, of the creation of a space that allows the contemplation and the thought; while the first, in addition to alluding to that space generated between the two poles, necessarily implies a hybridity. This happens because that intermedial space is participated by both poles since in being a space of separation it is also one of meeting. In the *Grundlegende Bruchstücke* (1888/1896-1905/1912) an ink drawing by Warburg can be observed. In it, "idealism" and "realism" appear as two opposite poles in oscillation (Warburg 2015, 110) [Fig. 2]. Between both poles, the *Zwischenraum* is expanded, here not mentioned. But the *Zwischenraum* will possess in Warburg's work a creative potential because taking it as a point of departure a decisive expression for the understanding of the Mnemosyne Atlas will be generated.

### Iconology of the interval

It is in Warburg's *Tagebuch* where the concept *Zwischenraum* can be found, although here the term is used in a more specific way since it is accompanied by the concept "iconology": *eine Ikonologie des*

*Zwischenraumes*. The passage is quoted by Gombrich in his *Intellectual Biography*:

*Ikonologie des Zwischenraumes*. Kunsthistorisches Material zu einer Entwicklungspsychologie des Pendelganges zwischen bildhafter und zeichenmässiger Ursachsetzung ("Journal" VII, 1929, 267; Warburg 2001, 434).

Iconology of the interval: art historical material towards an evolutionist psychology of the oscillation between the positing of causes as images and as signs (Gombrich 1970, 253).

The concept of *Ikonologie* was used for the first time by Warburg in October 1912 in his lecture on Palazzo Schifanoia, although already in 1907, the use of the adjective *ikonologisch* is attested (Heckscher [1967] 1985, 254 and 274). Gombrich introduces the quotation maintaining that "The image of art belongs to that intermediate realm in which the symbols are rooted". This means that Gombrich recognises it as intermedial space in which the sensible and the intelligible world meet, which is, indeed, the place of the symbol. Georges Didi-Huberman pointed out how enigmatic the expression was for many exegetes in order to state:

He seems to have defined, in 1929, the project of his atlas as the grouping together of a 'stock' of images forming the visual corpus of his hypothetical 'psychology of evolution in the determination of causes', an expression in which we recognise one of the innumerable formulations Warburg considered for the possible subtitle of the Mnemosyne Atlas. It also seems to relate to the *dictum*, inspired by Goethe, according to which 'the problem' – but Warburg also wrote: 'the truth' – lies in the middle (Didi-Huberman [2002] 2017, 327).

The fact that Didi-Huberman links the iconology of the interval with the assembly as the procedure and characteristic method of the Atlas seems decisive to me. Philippe-Alain Michaud also understood that the expression referred to the expression alluded to the way itself of construction of the Atlas: "[...] avec Mnémosyne, Warburg fonde 'une iconologie des intervalles' (*Eine Ikonologie des Zwischenraumes*) [...] qui ne porte plus sur des objets, mais sur des tensions, analogies, contrastes

ou contradictions”. Michaud talks about it as an “enigmatic formula” which would allude to the idea that it is “...une iconologie qui porterait non sur la significations des figures – c’est le sens que lui donnera Panofsky –, mais sur les relations que ces figures entretiennent entre elles dans un dispositif visuel autonome, irréductible à l’ordre du discours” (Michaud 2012, 260 and 321). For his part, Maurizio Ghelardi, in *La lutte pour le style*, adds a second quotation that is found in *Italienische Antike im Zeitalter Rembrandts*:

L’ascension d’Hélios vers le soleil et la descente de Proserpine dans les profondeurs symbolisent deux stations qui font partie intégrante du cycle de la vie, de même que l’inspiration et l’expiration. Dans ce voyage nous n’emportons pour seul bagage que l’*intervalle* toujours mouvante entre l’impulsion et l’action, et c’est à nous de déterminer quelle extension l’on peut donner à cette pause de la respiration grâce à l’aide de Mnémosyne (Ghelardi 2016, 231).

Ghelardi concludes maintaining that the Atlas can be understood as something like an “iconologie de la pause ou de l’intervalle respiratoire; ils impliquent une conception de l’art fondée sur le matériau histórico-artistique qui indique une ‘psychologie du développement’ oscillant entre l’image et le signe, et indissolublement liée à un principe architectonique et gramatical. L’art se situe, suivant cette perspective, entre le monde de l’expression pure et celui de la signification pure, et c’est pour cette raison que la parole et l’image représentent pour Warburg les termes médians entre le mythe et le *logos*” (Ghelardi 2016, 229).

When observing the *Tafeln* of the Atlas, it can be observed how each of them shows a different layout of the photographs attached to the black sack cloth. Sometimes the seriation is intensified, as in 24 and 25. In others, the details play a key role, as in 43 and 54, and yet in another, the gathering of images reaches lyrical values, as in 5, 6, 39 and 47, because the panel reveals intimate relationships between the images, and shows a structure that comes from the layout. In this, their arrangement is as important as the image itself as the intermedial space that separates them, like the blank spaces in the collection of poems or the silences that allow the word to be heard.

When looking for *Zwischenraum* in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Ritter, Gründer 1971), in the entry for *Raum* Vitruvius is quoted. Indeed, Vitruvius speaks of distance and interval in Book I, Chapter V of his *De Architectura*, when discussing the construction of walls and towers:

*Intervalla autem turrium ita sunt facienda ut ne longius sit alia ab alia sagittae missionis, uti, si qua oppugnetur, tum a turribus, quae erunt dextra sinistra, scorpionibus reliquisque telorum missionibus hostes reiciantur. Etiamque contra inferiores turrium dividendos est murus intervallis tam magnis, quam erunt turres, ut itinera sint interioribus partibus turrium contignata, nequeo ea ferro fixa (Marco Vitruvio Pollione, *De architectura*).*

The distances between the towers are to be so devised that one is no further from another than a bowshot; so that if a tower is besieged anywhere, then, by scorpions and other missile engines from the towers to the right or left, the enemy may be thrown back. And also, opposite the lower part of the towers, the wall is to be divided by intervals as wide as a tower; and these intervals opposite the interior parts of the towers shall be joined with planks. These, however, are not to be fixed with iron nails (Eng. trans. by F. Granger, Cambridge 1955).

Returning to the twentieth century, there is much debate in architecture around the “intermediate space”. In their tribute-article to Louis Kahn, the architects Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson (Smithson 1974), conceive that the regeneration of ideas in order to provoke the regeneration of city architecture should necessarily take into account the *space between*: from the renewal of the street to the need to create dialogue between old and new buildings.

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## English abstract

This contribution consists of a comparative study of the two Introductions to the Mnemosyne Atlas, one by Aby Warburg (1929) and the other by Ernst Gombrich (1937), starting from the concept of *Zwischenraum* (*space between*) that only appears in Warburg's. This essay starts out from the peculiar importance given to this concept by philosophers like Henry Corbin who, following Iranian texts, named it *mundus imaginalis*. The concept of *Zwischenraum* is linked with another, frequently used by Warburg, *Denkraum*, which appears in Gombrich's Introduction and is also present in Ernst Cassirer, Ludwig Binswanger and Martin Heidegger. From the theoretical concept of *Zwischenraum* as the necessary space for all acts of civilisation to take place, Warburg passes to the expression *Ikonomie des Zwischenraumes* (iconology of the interval), in which he lays the foundations of the Mnemosyne Atlas, where the space between images, always different, acquires meaning. This article ends with a quick reference to the sense given to the *space between* in contemporary architecture.





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