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e Maurizio Ghelardi

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Warburgian Studies in Belgium (2016-2019)

Stephanie Heremans

It is agreed upon that Aby Warburg's (1866-1929) main achievement consists of opening up the discipline of art history to the study of all types of artefacts, and the contexts and cross-cultural processes that they, too, reflected. Likewise, Warburg's combination of the study of word and image – that furthered our understanding of various forms of visual expression and dynamics of cultural transmission – is generally regarded as one of the principal innovations brought to the discipline by his *Ikonomie*. While the 'Warburgian method' attracted little attention during the 20th century in Belgium, a renewed interest in the historiography of art and iconological studies, during the last decades, has sparked the awareness and enthusiasm of Belgian researchers for Warburg's legacy (for studies on Belgian art history in general, see: Philippot 2005, Pirenne 2012). By presenting an overview of relevant research initiatives, this paper aims to shed light on the state of the art of Warburgian studies in Belgium (2016-2019) and expand the bibliography on Warburg.

Belgian studies on Warburg can be traced to a few scholars, in particular to Barbara Baert and Maud Hagelstein, each engaging with Warburg's oeuvre from different disciplines, research groups and universities. Both of them contributed widely to Warburgian scholarship in Belgium and abroad. Barbara Baert (art historian, KU Leuven) is the founder and editor-in-chief of four peer-reviewed series issued at Belgian publishing houses; *Iconologies*, *Studies in Iconology*, *Art & Religion* and *Recollection*. Also, she initiated and coordinates the Iconology Research Group (IRG, 2008-), a research platform that explores the role of iconology and deals with the making, meaning and migration of images from the Middle Ages to the present. In 2016, Baert was awarded the Francqui Prize Human Sciences – the highest and most prestigious scholarly and scientific honor in

Belgium – in recognition of her bold and innovative approach. As tokens of her gratitude, she published the celebratory volume *Fragments* (Baert 2018c) and organized, in collaboration with the Francqui Foundation, *The Right Moment: A Symposium on Kairotic Energies* at the University Foundation, Brussels (October 18-19, 2018). Internationally her distinguished iconological method and encouragements for an interdisciplinarily oriented art history have been much appreciated, while at once breaking a lance for Warburgian studies in Belgium. Currently, she supervises the project *Kairós, or the Right Moment: Nachleben & Iconology* (funded by KU Leuven, 2018-2022) in collaboration with Han Lamers. This ongoing PhD-project is mainly concerned with the meaning and significance of *kairós* and *fortuna* as concepts and images in Warburg's writings. Furthermore, a number of MA theses on Warburg and his circle have been written under Baert's supervision at KU Leuven (Tack 2018, Lust-De Troch 2018, L'Ecluse 2013, Heremans 2011).

Maud Hagelstein (philosopher, University of Liege) has published extensively on image theory in late modern continental philosophy and on Warburg's image theory and method specifically. Her impressive doctoral research *Origine et survivances des symboles. Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky* (Hildesheim 2014) has been published, and recently she also organized the conference *Bildwissenschaft – Image et langage* at the University of Liege (May 12-13, 2016). Hagelstein is appointed as secretary of the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (FNRS) group "Historiographie et épistémologie de l'histoire de l'art" (2005-) and associated with the "Centre Prospéro – Langage, image et connaissance (Université Saint-Louis, Brussels). Prospéro and the work of its affiliated scholars – such as Laurent Van Eynde, Natacha Pfeiffer and Laure Cahen-Maurel – has affinities with Warburgian studies (Cahen-Maurel 2009; Warburg [1893] 2007; Faivre d'Arcier, Madou, Van Eynde 2005). In the Flemish part of Belgium, Stéphane Symons' (philosopher, KU Leuven) research is concerned with 19th and 20th century German theories of aesthetics and philosophy of culture. Symons' work focuses predominantly on the writings of Georg Simmel (1858-1918) and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), but often touches on Warburg's theory and method (Symons 2012).

Besides these hubs of research in Leuven, Liege and Brussels, the PhD-research of Esther Tuytens (theatre studies) "Restoring Gestures:

Exploring Aby Warburg's Method for Theatre Studies" (funded by the University of Antwerp/Flanders Research Foundation FWO, 2012-2016) at the Research Center for Visual Poetics, and "The Afterlife of Catholic Bodily Imagery in the Post-Religious Landscape", PhD-project of the artistic researcher Maria Gil Ulldemolins (Hasselt University) should also be mentioned. Ulldemolins is chiefly interested in what remains of the European Catholic heritage in secular contemporary visual culture. Her 'research-practice' relies heavily on Warburg's approach and revolves around key concepts such as *Pathosformel* and *Denkraum* (see esp. *The Atlas of Things Before* or Ulldemolins 2017a, Ulldemolins 2017b).

So it seems that Warburg's biography and writings do not only appeal to scholars. Recently, for instance, they have also drawn the attention of the Belgian filmmaker Manu Riche. The film *Snake Dance* – jointly written and directed by Riche and Patrick Marnham – premiered in Brussels in 2012. Their essayistic film, neither a documentary nor an entire work of fiction, has internationally been selected for film festivals and was granted several awards. While tracing the creation of the atomic bomb and its repercussions for landscapes the film travels from the landscape of the Congolese jungle (where uranium was mined), along New Mexico (where Aby Warburg studied native Indian culture in 1895-1896; the same location where physicist Robert J. Oppenheimer was to develop the atomic bomb fifty years later) to Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945). Both brilliant researchers, Warburg and Oppenheimer, served as protagonists and each other's counterparts. Warburg's study of the Hopi (his *Kreuzlingen Lecture* on April 21, 1923) as a crucial moment in the recovery process of his psychosis, juxtaposes *Snake Dance's* reflection on the genesis of a weapon of mass destruction and its consequences. Its screenings were preceded by Jerry Killick's performance of Aby Warburg's legendary lecture on the serpent ritual. In 2015, the lecture and *Snake Dance* were the theme of a 'crosstalk at the movies' session organized by the Free University of Brussels (VUB). One year later, the film reappeared in Belgian cinemas (Antonissen 2016).

Due to its geographical location – sharing not only its borders with the Netherlands, France and Germany but also its three official languages – Belgian iconological and Warburgian studies seem to be a point of intersection nestled in-between the neighboring traditions of

anthropologie visuelle, Bildwissenschaften and visual studies (Baert 2011). Barbara Baert uttered this ‘friendly contamination’ in her bilingual (Dutch and French) speech held in acceptance of the Francqui Prize on June 8, 2016:

Nul doute que la position charnière de la Belgique, avec ses trois régions linguistiques s’entre-chevauchant, ne soit pour quelque chose dans la moisson particulièrement riche des sciences de l’art: ouverte à toutes les dynamiques, à toutes les inséminations et contagions à bon escient, et toujours à l’écoute (Baert et al. 2017, 15-16).

The chronologically structured bibliography below presents an overview of Warburgian studies in Belgium from 2016 until the present.

Bibliography 2016-2019

2016

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Baert 2016c

B. Baert, *Kairos or Occasion as Paradigm in the Visual Medium. Nachleben, Iconography, Hermeneutics*, “Studies in Iconology” 5, Leuven 2016.

Baert 2016d

B. Baert, *In Response to Echo. Beyond Mimesis or Dissolution as Scopis Regime (with Special Attention to Camouflage)*, “Studies in Iconology” 6, Leuven 2016.

Baert 2016e

B. Baert, *Revisiting Salome’s Dance in Medieval and Early Modern Iconology*, “Studies in Iconology” 7, Leuven 2016.

Baert 2016f

B. Baert, *Pneuma and the Visual Medium in the Middle Ages and Early Modernity. Essays on Wind, Ruach, Incarnation, Odour, Stains, Movement, Kairos, Web and Silence*, “Art & Religion” 5 (2016).

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M. Hagelstein, *Iconic turn et critique du paradigme langagier*, "Bulletin d'Analyse Phénoménologique" 12/2 (2016), 340-356.

Hagelstein 2016b

M. Hagelstein, *Introduction*, "MethIS: Méthodes et Interdisciplinarité en Sciences Humaines" 5 (2016), 7-15.

Hagelstein, Hamers 2016

M. Hagelstein, J. Hamers, *L'atlas à l'épreuve de l'image en mouvement (Warburg, Farocki, Didi-Huberman)*, "MethIS: Méthodes et Interdisciplinarité en Sciences Humaines" 5 (2016), 151-173.

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A. Jakob, *L'Atlas Mnémosyne d'Aby Warburg et l'héritage du regard du spectateur de théâtre*, tr. par S. Neelsen, "Études Théâtrales" 65/2 (2016), 227-239.

2017

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Hagelstein 2017b

M. Hagelstein, *Soulèvements. Poétique et politique, une rencontre (presque) impossible*, "Fluxnews" 72 (2017), 8-9.

Ionescu 2017a

V. Ionescu, *On Moths and Butterflies, or How to Orient Oneself Through Images. Georges-Didi Huberman's Art Criticism in Context*, "Journal of Art Historiography" 16 (2017), 1-16.

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K. Pint, R. Roes, *The Visual Essay and the Place of Artistic Research in the Humanities*, "Palgrave Communications" 3/8 (2017), 1-7.

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2019

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English abstract

By presenting an overview of relevant research initiatives, this paper aims to shed light on the state of the art of Warburgian studies in Belgium (2016-2019) and expand the bibliography on Warburg.



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