

la rivista di **en**gramma
febbraio **2023**

199

**A Companion
to Warburgian
Studies**

La Rivista di Engramma
199

La Rivista di
Engramma

199

febbraio 2023

A Companion to Warburgian Studies

edited by Ilaria Grippa, Ada Naval,
and Giulia Zanon

direttore

monica centanni

redazione

sara agnoletto, maddalena bassani,
asia benedetti, maria bergamo, elisa bizzotto,
emily verla bovino, giacomo calandra di roccolino,
olivia sara carli, concetta cataldo,
giacomo confortin, giorgiomaria cornelio,
silvia de laude, francesca romana dell'aglio,
simona dolari, emma filipponi, anna ghiraldini,
ilaria grippa, laura leuzzi, vittoria magnoler,
michela maguolo, ada naval,
alessandra pedersoli, marina pellanda,
filippo perfetti, daniele pisani, stefania rimini,
daniela sacco, cesare sartori, antonella sbrilli,
massimo stella, ianick takaes de oliveira,
elizabeth enrica thomson, christian toson,
chiara velicogna, giulia zanon

comitato scientifico

janie anderson, barbara baert, anna beltrametti,
lorenzo braccesi, maria grazia ciani, victoria cirlot,
fernanda de maio, georges didi-huberman,
alberto ferlenga, kurt w. forster, nadia fusini,
maurizio harari, fabrizio lollini, natalia mazour,
salvatore settis, elisabetta terragni, oliver taplin,
piermario vescovo, marina vicelja

La Rivista di Engramma

a peer-reviewed journal

199 febbraio 2023

www.engramma.it

sede legale

Engramma

Castello 6634 | 30122 Venezia

edizioni@engramma.it

redazione

Centro studi classicA luav

San Polo 2468 | 30125 Venezia

+39 041 257 14 61

©2023

edizioni**engramma**

ISBN carta 979-12-55650-08-9

ISBN digitale 979-12-55650-09-6

finito di stampare maggio 2023

Si dichiara che i contenuti del presente volume sono la versione a stampa totalmente corrispondente alla versione online della Rivista, disponibile in open access all'indirizzo: <http://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?issue=198> e ciò a valere ad ogni effetto di legge. L'editore dichiara di avere posto in essere le dovute attività di ricerca delle titolarità dei diritti sui contenuti qui pubblicati e di aver impegnato ogni ragionevole sforzo per tale finalità, come richiesto dalla prassi e dalle normative di settore.

Sommario

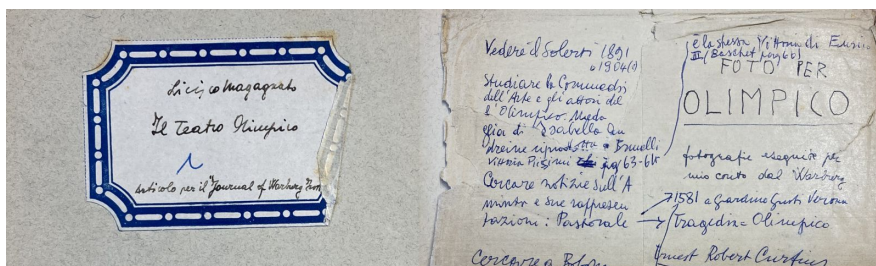
- 7 *A Companion to Warburgian Studies. Engramma 199, Editorial*
Ilaria Grippa, Ada Naval and Giulia Zanon
- 15 *A Companion to Warburgian Studies. Editoriale di Engramma 199*
Ilaria Grippa, Ada Naval e Giulia Zanon
- 23 *Forma atlante e storiografia teatrale. Questioni di metodo*
Daniela Sacco
- 45 *Aby Warburg. Per una genealogia del Rinascimento*
Arturo Mazzarella
- 57 *Per una semantica del Nach. Osservazioni di metodo su Warburg, Freud e Benjamin*
Raoul Kirchmayr
- 67 *Warburg, Aby. Voce dall'Enciclopedia Garzanti di Filosofia, a cura di G. Vattimo, M. Ferraris, D. Marconi, Milano [1981] 1993*
Alessandro Dal Lago
- 69 *"A small academy in a small town". Postwar Anglo-Italian Scholarship on the Teatro Olimpico*
Chiara Velicogna
- 93 *Livros e artigos sobre Aby Warburg em língua portuguesa (2018-2023)*
Ianick Takaes
- 105 *Исследования о Варбурге в России*
Екатерина Михайлова-Смольнякова
- 109 *Studi warburghiani in Russia*
Ekaterina Mikhailova-Smolniakova
- 113 *Warburgian Studies in Australia*
Jaynie Anderson
- 125 *Aby Warburg. Ein Porträt aus Briefen. Gekürzte Einleitung aus: Michael Diers und Steffen Haug mit Thomas Helbig (hrsg. von), Aby Warburg, Briefe, Berlin/ Boston 2021*
Michael Diers

- 161 *En el Archivo Warburg. A propósito de una nueva edición en español. Aby Warburg, Per monstra ad sphaeram. Terror y armonía en las esferas, edición de Davide Stimilli y Claudia Wedepohl, traducción de Joaquín Chamorro Mielke, Madrid 2022*
Victoria Cirlot
- 167 *Expanded Warburg. A Review of: M. Centanni (ed.), Aby Warburg and Living Thought, Ronzani 2022*
Gabriele Guerra
- 181 *Expanded Warburg. Una recensione di: M. Centanni (a cura di), Aby Warburg e il pensiero vivente, Ronzani 2022*
Gabriele Guerra
- 195 *Interrogare i simboli. Presentazione di: M. Ghelardi, Aby Warburg, uno spazio per il pensiero, Roma 2022*
a cura del Seminario Mnemosyne
- 207 *Gli affreschi astrologici di Schifanoia. Una presentazione di: M. Bertozzi, La tirannia degli astri, Livorno [1985, 1999, 2006] 2022*
a cura del Seminario Mnemosyne
- 211 *A Presentation of "The Edgar Wind Journal"*
Bernardino Branca

"A small academy in a small town"

Postwar Anglo-Italian Scholarship on the Teatro Olimpico

Chiara Velicogna



How did it come to be that the “single most passionate concern” of a singular intellectual resolved itself “not with a bang, but with a whimper”, with an essay published long after the main research work was finished, and after scholarship had progressed further? What we propose here is neither a solution nor a final answer, but a reading of a set of mismatched puzzle pieces that, as far as we can discern, gives us a glimpse of a method. All we have are letters, notes, essays and drafts; making sense of the fragments is left as an exercise to the author – while the exercise of educated imagination, to the reader.

This essay focuses on two separate pieces of scholarship on the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, published fifteen years apart: Donald J. Gordon’s *Academicians Build a Theatre and Give a Play: the Accademia Olimpica 1579-1585* (Gordon 1966) and Licisco Magagnato’s *The Genesis of the Teatro Olimpico* (Magagnato 1951). We propose here a parallel reading of both works, together with letters sent by Gordon to Magagnato, showing how the two essays can be interpreted as single parts of a wider collaborative effort. Conceived not as separate essays but as complementary parts, intended as the basis for a more comprehensive

work on the Teatro, when considered together they represent an early approach to Palladian studies aiming to cross disciplinary borders. The draft for Magagnato's essay, together with the script for the short film *L'Olimpico* written jointly by Magagnato and Antonio Dalla Pozza, as well as memoirs of Donald Gordon and Gertrud Bing, book reviews and letters all combine to form a picture that, hopefully, aims to be progressively more focused and complete.

Donald J. Gordon's research work on the Renaissance, the series of three essays on Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones produced after the encounter with Fritz Saxl at the Warburg Institute (Gordon 1943, 1945, 1949) probably coincided, at least in its final phase, with the arrival of Luigi Meneghello in Reading in 1947 and might have represented the point where Gordon and Palladio's Teatro Olimpico first crossed paths. A short while later, during his first trip to Vicenza in 1948 with Luigi Meneghello, Gordon's meeting with Antonio Dalla Pozza and Licisco Magagnato opened the way for a larger, more ambitious project (for the relationship between Meneghello and Gordon see Caputo, Napione 2018 and Velicogna 2021); the connection between Inigo Jones, Vincenzo Scamozzi and Andrea Palladio already pointed in the direction of Vicenza. According to Meneghello, Gordon "later became very fond of Vicenza [...] he came near to regarding it as his home town in Italy", where he later worked for weeks at a time in the Biblioteca Bertoliana, becoming a somewhat well-known figure, "il professore scozzese" (Princeton University Library, Frank Kermode archives [henceforth FKA], memorial essay from Luigi Meneghello to Frank Kermode, March 1979. This material overlaps with Meneghello's memoir of Gordon published in *La materia di Reading*).

At that time, Dalla Pozza and Magagnato had just completed work on a short documentary on the Teatro Olimpico. This fact might have prompted Gordon to propose to the latter, a young History of Art graduate, an architecture-focused study of the Olimpico as a part of a larger, collaborative work between the two, with the financial support of a scholarship from the Warburg Institute and under the auspices of its acting director, Gertrud Bing, who wholeheartedly supported the project (Velicogna 2021). The "Magagnato case", as Gordon named it, thus first took shape in Italy and was subsequently developed in London.

The project had a much stronger significance than a mere short scholarship. According to Gordon's 1949 application for the Chair of English at the University of Reading, it was to be:

"[...] with my pupil, Dr. L. Magagnato (whose work the Warburg Institute has asked me to supervise) a study of the most famous of Renaissance theatres, Palladio's *Tetro[sic] Olimpico* in Vicenza. We shall present, for the first time, a detailed account of the planning of the theatre, of its place in Palladio's work and in the history of the stage, with an account of the first production, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of 1584, and of the intellectual interests of the Academy which commissioned the theatre and directed the production. We have been fortunate enough to discover new documents. One of these is a detailed plan of the production. I know of no other such document for any sixteenth century production. Certainly none has been published. Our work has also led to the rediscovery of the *Acts* of the Academy, "lost" since the middle of the eighteenth century. This book should be completed by Christmas, 1950, and will be published by the Warburg Institute." (Donald J. Gordon application for the Chair of English in the University of Reading, March 1949, Princeton University Library, FKA)

Gordon emphasises the innovative aspect of his project: documents allowed to establish for the first time an accurate history of the building, inextricably intertwined with the theatrical history of the production, as well as the cultural history of the Vicentine Academy. Of particular interest is the reference to the volume that was to be published by the Warburg Institute: the expected, and rather optimistic completion date would have placed the *Teatro Olimpico* book in-between two volumes of the *Catalogue raisonné* of Nicolas Poussin's drawings edited by Rudolf Wittkower and Anthony Blunt; this suggests also that the research work on the Teatro was already at an advanced stage.

The "first" discoveries of the documents mentioned here constitute the first attempt to establish a cross-disciplinary approach to the primary sources (both documents and drawings), and are carried out collaboratively, in Italy and England, by Gordon and Magagnato. The extent of the collaboration between the two scholars can be appraised also from the exchange, often enthusiastic, of documentary information, where Gordon visits frequently the R.I.B.A. collections to study the drawings kept

there and Magagnato works on the Biblioteca Bertoliana archives. The achievements are shared:

Una cosa importante: quelle carte appartengono a noi. Scriviamo noi – se vogliamo – la storia dell'accademia. Che trionfo! Non credere mai che un documento sia andato perso quando tutto dice che nessuno ha cercato. Son' così eccitato che ho dovuto mandar via gli studenti venuti dieci minuti fa. Bello anche lo scoperto sugli affreschi. Bellezza! (Donald Gordon to Licisco Magagnato, undated but likely 1949)

An important thing: those papers belong to us. We will write – if we want – the history of the *accademia*. What a triumph! Never accept that a document has been lost when everything points to nobody having looked for it. I'm so excited that I had to send the students, who came ten minutes ago, away. Nice discovery on the frescoes as well. Pure beauty! (author's own translation)

As a likely starting point, at least for Licisco Magagnato, for his work on the Olimpico, it is worth taking a short detour into the script of *L'Olimpico*, as a first-hand testimony of how the Teatro was perceived in 1947-48, and what role could have been envisaged for it after the war.

A still relatively unknown survivor

Ferdinando Forlati, in reviewing war damages in the Veneto and the reconstruction efforts, highlights the fact that the Teatro Olimpico was not directly hit by bombs, which nevertheless fell nearby: most of its wooden perspective scenes, dismantled and sent to Venice for protection, had been reinstalled and restored in their original location immediately after the war (Forlati 1951, 268). Thus, in 1948 the Teatro Olimpico had been newly restored to integrity, and presenting this still relatively lesser-known Palladian work, to the world as a 'lucky' survivor of wartime devastation could serve as a symbolic token of a cultural, as well as economic, renaissance for post-war Italy.

There are various draft versions of the script in Magagnato's archive: two of those form a pair that, albeit undated, shows that the annotations included in the superseded one (the pages are crossed out in pencil) are

included in the other, most likely a final draft (AMV, b. 94). Another is attached to the dossier for the 1948 Biennale that accompanies the film and features a brief introduction by Dalla Pozza and Magagnato. There is yet another short draft, marked “l' abbozzo” that briefly sketches a history of the Teatro and the aims of the film: at the time, to illustrate the composite nature of the work (Palladio's last) and assess it as a crucial building from which modern theatre would develop; this last point, as we'll see, was destined to be completely subverted by Magagnato's work with Gordon.

On the page margins, notes on the proposed scenes for the film appear. A comparison with the subsequent drafts shows that the notes' focus shifts from drawings and mentions of other similar theatres (Sabbioneta, Parma) to a visual narrative of the city of Vicenza, where its '*all'antica*' image is emphasised (the scenes proposed feature statues, loggias, and gardens).

The Olimpico's survival is defined as a miraculous event, in stark contrast with the image of the nearby medieval tower, half destroyed by a bomb: the Teatro is depicted as a noble survivor with even nobler admirers, such as Goethe who defined it in his *Italienische Reise* as “unaussprechlich schön” (indescribably beautiful) (Goethe 1816); Magagnato and Dalla Pozza here slightly tweak the poet's words in a deliberate *lapsus*, misquoting it as “di una bellezza invincibile”, invincibly beautiful, a beauty that could not be conquered neither by war nor by the (wood)worm. (AMV, b. 94).

The archival material concerning the short film is accompanied by short drafts for the presentation text, which are annotated in Magagnato's hand and show how, even before the meeting with Donald Gordon, there was already the intention for a new approach to the study of the Teatro, going beyond the rhetoric notions such as those put forward by Napoleone Bonaparte (likely apocryphal) and Gabriele D'Annunzio who saw in the Olimpico a remnant of Ancient Greece: the theatre is perceived, rather, as a last living fragment of the humanist theatre, in which Palladio has successfully fused the villas, the palaces and the urban streets of Vicenza (AMV, b.99); this recognition as a harmonic fusion of the figurative and performative arts was to resonate with the methods of the Warburg Institute, via Donald J. Gordon.

As for the production of the short film, it is worth noting that it is the first of VaFra Film, founded in 1948 by Giampaolo Vajenti and Lino Franceschetti. Vajenti was the son of the most prominent photographer in Vicenza of the time, Carlo Vajenti, who died in 1943, and had spent a traineeship period as director in Cinecittà in Rome before returning to his hometown (Rebecchi 2014, 9). This first work would prove also to be their most successful. Their ambition was to produce a series of documentaries on historic monuments with an objective focus, avoiding an excessively literary or poetic interpretation (AMV, b.94).

The presentation text of the film at the Venice Biennale is accompanied by a brief history of the Teatro in order to strengthen the initial argument of the Olimpico as a subject worthy of objective scrutiny. Magagnato and Dalla Pozza describe the work of Palladio for the Teatro as, metaphorically, like that of “Columbus, who landed on a different – and much more lively – land than the one he imagined. Thus, his is not the last of ancient theatres but rather the first of the modern.” (AMV, b. 94, author’s own translation). The documentary also served to bring to the public’s attention the resumption of theatrical activities in the Olimpico, which had been cut short by the war, a symbolic sign of recovery; doubly so, given the fortunate survival of the Teatro in its integrity. This was most likely appealing to Gordon due to his own ongoing work on Renaissance theatre and production: as a fragment of a wider ‘history of culture’, the intertwining of the history of the Accademia Olimpica and their efforts to build a theatre and host a play were a very apt setting for conducting research that merged the literary and the visual. Finally, filming also presented technical difficulties, and this is made a prominent point in the presentation at the Biennale: the challenge of successfully representing a space that obeyed a radically different logic than that of the camera, and correctly employing lighting techniques was modern in its essence.

The short documentary was awarded a Silver Medal at the 1948 film Biennale, in the category reserved for art history films: we have not yet been able to retrace its subsequent history. It is however known through a note by Gertrud Bing that *L’Olimpico* was shown in 1951 at the Ministry of Education cinema in London, after a talk given by Antonio Dalla Pozza on the Teatro Olimpico at the Warburg Institute, most likely the event’s organiser; Bing herself deemed the short film “excellent” (Bing 1951, 41).

A matter of method

In his obituary for the poet and critic Ian Fletcher, Professor John Stokes states that “[...] Gordon had been trained in the methods of the Warburg Institute and knew how to select and how to put things together, which was worth learning” (Stokes 1991, 179). Stokes, in a memoir sent to Frank Kermode after Gordon’s death, also adds that “the idea of the shared enterprise probably stemmed from the personal legend of Saxl and the Warburg”, and, concerning academic interdisciplinarity at Reading, “there was only one standard, that of the Warburg” (FKA, John Stokes to Frank Kermode, 2 April 1978). These are also the general principles guiding the work he set out to do with Licisco Magagnato on the Teatro Olimpico, choosing from a wealth of diverse sources the right materials and composing, through them, a history: the approach is collaborative, meaning that the selection and the reconstruction are carried out by the two scholars jointly, if at a distance, rather than individually.

At the end of the 1940s the Teatro Olimpico would have appeared as the ideal research theme for an Anglo-Italian team: Inigo Jones tied it to English architectural culture, which was already steeped in Palladianism, whereas the source documents were readily available to an Italian scholar, who would have had easier access to them and a clearer understanding. In Gordon’s case it should be added that the Teatro allowed a fortunate convergence of literary and visual arts, and that it touched almost all his interests, architecture included. It should not be surprising, however, that he decided to let Magagnato, art historian by training, handle the architectural discourse: as we shall see further on while discussing his work on the translation of Magagnato’s essay, this did not mean that he did not have a grasp of the architectural problems but rather that Magagnato’s residence in Italy would have made him better equipped for the problem at hand.

In one of his earliest surviving letters to Licisco Magagnato, Gordon lays down a very enthusiastic, if not slightly disjointed, research plan for the Vicentine scholar in order to approach the problem of the architectural genesis of the Teatro Olimpico (AMV, Donald Gordon to Licisco Magagnato, undated). It is attached to the main body of a letter that was

translated from English to Italian by Luigi Meneghello; the long post-script is written autonomously by Gordon, who states that he cannot write in Italian:

“devi sapere ora o più tardi che non so scrivere italiano: però voglio aggiungere questa postilla per conto mio senza l'intervenzione di mio collaboratore.”

You need to know sooner or later that I cannot write in Italian: but I want to add this postscript myself, without the intervention of my collaborator.
(Author's own translation.)

It is likely one of the first letters that Gordon writes to Magagnato since their meeting in Vicenza, as the following ones appear to be written more and more without Meneghello's editing hand and in a progressively better Italian. Meneghello appears however to be aware of this long note, as he mentions it in a letter to Magagnato (Luigi Meneghello to Licisco Magagnato, quoted in Caputo, Napione 2018), where he also states that Gordon had found books about Vicenza in England which were not even available in the town itself, and that he could substantially aid Magagnato in his research.

In Gordon's view, priority had to be given to access the source documents freely, as well as to a thorough preliminary bibliographic research. But the core question, and the ultimate aim of the study was

Ti ricordi sempre che lo scopo dello studio è non soltanto di rintracciare i passi fatti per la costruzione del T.O., ma anche l'ambiente intellettuale culturale che sta indietro a quest'opera: prendiamo quest'edificio, cioè, come documento a) della storia architettuale di P. stesso a) della storia dello sviluppo del teatro europeo b) della storia dell'umanesimo tardo, veneziano, e italiano.

Always remember that the purpose of this study is not only to retrace the steps taken in order to build the T.O., but the intellectual cultural milieu that underlies it: we take this building as a document of a) the architectural history of Palladio himself a) the history of the development of European

theatre b) the history of late humanism, Venetian and Italian. (Author's own translation)

In which the influence of the Warburgian methods is explicitly laid out in the approach to an object (here, architectural) in its social and cultural context: the historian's focus is on the building as a document, progressively connecting it to geographically and historically broader contexts.

Gordon suggests that Magagnato should orient himself in the world and time he is studying, and he is to "take note of every book that has come out of that milieu. Everything must be read" ("Noti ogni libro uscito fuori da quest'ambiente. Tutti si deve leggere."); a possible starting point in this case is the *Dialogues* of Tasso and Speroni. It is not only a straightforward bibliographic study on sources available up to that point (although this is also necessary), but also a matter of thoroughly knowing the cultural world that has produced that specific building.

There is a crucial point on the approach to the sources, which has necessarily to be critical in all instances: namely, here, the manuscript on the Accademia Olimpica produced by Ziggioni, on the origins of which Gordon would later add a lengthy clarifying note in his essay on the Teatro (Gordon 1966): he prompts Magagnato to investigate on the sources, on their authors, in themselves and in relation to the object of the research, and to interrogate them accordingly.

Licisco Magagnato's presence in Veneto appears to be crucial in this, since Gordon also directs him on a task that was reasonably accomplishable only *in loco* and only by a local:

Devi metterti in rapporti colla famiglia Valmarana. Dove sono le carte della famiglia? Importantissimo scoprire questo. Son sicuro che dev'essere della roba fondamentale lì. Se la famiglia risponde che non sa niente, devi ottenere permesso di cercare per conto tuo tra le loro case [sic?]. Non si sa mai cosa può essere in qualche cassone, in qualche stanza trascurata, in qualche angolo polveroso tra mobili vecchi e sciuppati? La Villa è ancora in mani alla famiglia - no? O forse le carte sono dalla Bert.? 9) voglio anche

sapere la storia della biblioteca, carte, ecc dei Trissini. Ma per il momento i Valmarana hanno precedenza.

You have to establish a relationship with the Valmarana family. Where are the family papers? It is extremely important to discover this. I am sure there is fundamental stuff there. If the family answers that they know nothing, you have to get permission to search through their things yourself. You never know what you might find in some chest, or some neglected room, in some dusty corner among old furniture? The Villa is still owned by the family – isn't it? Or maybe the papers are at the Bert.[Bertoliana]? 9) I want to know the history of the library, papers, etc of the Trissini. But for the moment the Valmarana have priority. (author's own translation)

It should be noted here that there is a romantic quality in the hope of finding hitherto unknown documents in some decadent corner of a villa, in old rooms among ruined furniture, in a way reminiscent of the detective novels that were apparently Gordon's midday activity, as Meneghello himself noted in *Il dispatrio* (Meneghello 1993).

The close collaboration between Gordon and Magagnato on the subject of the Teatro Olimpico thus emerges, though fragmentarily, from Gordon's letters. There are no drafts of Magagnato's letters to Gordon in his archive, and it is likely that some of the replies could have been delivered to Gordon by phone, given Magagnato's predilection for it (Caputo, Napione 2018), or during Gordon's frequent visits to Vicenza, recalled by Meneghello to have continued until the late fifties, well after Magagnato's essay was published in 1951. Nevertheless, the bibliographic references suggested by Gordon to Magagnato are employed by both, once in 1951 and then in his posthumously published essay on the Teatro Olimpico in the monographic volume dedicated to the building (Magagnato 1992).

For this essay the apparatus of notes is curated by Lionello Puppi: as the introduction to the volume states and the draft in Magagnato's archive (AMV, b.99) confirms, Puppi undertook the task to add references to the text that was otherwise ready for publication. Concerning the use of the sources for the study of the Olimpico, Puppi states that the first scholar in the twentieth century to accurately peruse and employ the documentation kept in the archives of the Accademia Olimpica was Gordon, "in his

relevant and neglected essay” (Magagnato 1992, 78 n.5). It might be that Gordon even managed to meet Puppi in person during one of his frequent visits to Venice, or, in any case, he had that intention (see the letter in Velicogna 2021, dated Aug. 19). Puppi also states, in the same note, that most of Gordon’s source material, while unknown and unpublished in the late 1940s, was subsequently used by other scholars, thus partially superseding his work. The fact that Gordon’s essay appeared only in a collective volume dedicated to Mario Praz and was translated in Italian only in 1987 contributed to its marginal and ‘neglected’ place in Palladian scholarship.

The result of this collaboration are the two essays (Gordon 1966, Magagnato 1951) that indeed can be read as complementary parts of a whole, in-depth study. It is likely that only a fraction of their entire research work would end up on the printed page, but the two parts, read together, give an idea of what would have been the volume to be published for the Warburg Institute. In a short letter dated 1962, Gordon writes to Licisco Magagnato that:

Ho già scritto un capitolo, di circa cinquanta pagine, in cui do un resoconto delle discussioni in seno all’Accademia intorno al Finanziamento del Teatro e alla Scelta del Dramma da rappresentare. Lo Schrade non si occupa di questo, e varrebbe la pena di pubblicarlo. (DG to LM, 16 May 1962)

I have already written a chapter, roughly fifty pages, where I recount the discussions within the Accademia about the financing of the Teatro and the choice of drama to be represented there. Schrade is not concerned with this, and it’s worth publishing. (author’s own translation)

The letter is referring to a proposed monographic volume on the Teatro Olimpico that was to be published by Neri Pozza but this project, too, never saw the light of day; nonetheless this shows a continuing intention of eventually publishing the research on the Olimpico, whether in England or in Italy.

The apportionment of tasks between the two scholars meant that Gordon, uncharacteristically, almost never refers to or makes use of drawings for the Teatro or images in his essay, which conversely form the basis for

Magagnato's work. While in the essay for the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes he is concerned with the history of the architecture of the *proscenio*, in his later work the theme is extended to the architectural history of the whole building and its adherence, though flexible and contextual, to Vitruvian principles (Magagnato 1992).

For Gordon, the architectural aspect is treated only in passing and only as instrumental to the narration of the Accademia's actions between 1580 and 1584: in *Academicians Build a Theatre and Give a Play: The Accademia Olimpica*, Gordon defines the theatre

a building largely irrelevant to the course that the modern stage was to take, but a great work by a noble and humane genius, and calculated, more than any other modern theatre, to ennoble and aggrandize the human body in certain stances [...]. (Gordon [1966] 1972)

While Licisco Magagnato states that it "breaks the laws that from the sixteenth century on govern modern stage design" (Magagnato 1951, 209). He, however, also states the need to consider the sixteenth-century perspective scene as "a revolution, that is, in the aims and conventions that control the literary form, and in the architectural and scenic settings in which it is produced".

The two essays apparently take on different approaches: Gordon is concerned both with the internal processes and politics that bring a generally dilatory body of academicians to build a permanent theatre and choose a suitable play to be held there for its inauguration; and the role of the Accademia's prince, Leonardo Valmarana, in the resolution of the theatrical and financial impasse academicians found themselves in. Magagnato approaches the problem as chiefly an architectural one, underlying the novelty of Palladio's approach to a problem that had up to that time almost exclusively concerned painters and scene-designers (Magagnato 1951, 214).

It is, however, much more interesting to read Gordon's account of the discussions within the Accademia Olimpica on the genre of the play to be represented there, whether it had to be a pastoral or a tragedy (Gordon [1966] 1972), together with the architectural problem of a permanent

scene in mind, and of the modern consideration of the theatre as its own independent architectural type, directly descended from Palladio's own critical study on Vitruvius and Roman theatre. Conversely, Magagnato's analysis of the genesis of the *proscenio* appears more poignant if placed in context with the matter of the financing of the theatre by means of the statues, the change of figurative program (from allegorical female figures to male figures dressed "*all'antica*") and the cultural activity of the Accademia.

The *proscenio* is in fact interpreted as a "true and formal triumphal arch" on the basis of the analysis of the R.I.B.A. drawings that Magagnato was able to see during his stay in London on a Warburg Institute grant and whose contents had already been mentioned to him in advance by Gordon; as he notes, "the history of the *proscenio* between the death of Palladio and 1585 will be dealt with in the fuller study mentioned earlier".

This directly references the thorough and painstaking work on the primary sources on the Accademia available at the end of the 1940s which represents the core of Gordon's essay on the Teatro: by way of showing the financial concerns of the academicians and their stratagem of making the statues the means of raising the necessary money for the building of the theatre, the architectural problem, intended then as an issue of purely spatial relation, and the cultural problem, converge in a multifaceted picture. The triumphal arch of the *frons scenae* thus ends up not only being a testimony of Palladio's attitude towards antiquity, but also a self-celebration of the academicians who commissioned the theatre from one of their most illustrious members, and, arguably, a celebration of theatre itself.

Despite Luigi Meneghello's preoccupation that Magagnato was not to be involved in too great a project on the Olimpico (perhaps on account of having perceived the tendency towards grandiose scopes of his colleague's projects), his essay was extremely well-received by Rudolf Wittkower, who wrote to him that he

[...] was very much impressed, as I was before when you told me the story in London. I cannot make any suggestions, either for alteration or improvement, and I feel that you have made a very valuable contribution

towards solving the puzzle of the Teatro Olimpico. (AMVerona, Rudolf Wittkower to Licisco Magagnato, 14 December 1950)

And cited the essay in an updated re-edition of the *Architectural Principles in the age of Humanism*, defining it “a brilliant study”(Wittkower [1949] 1971, 69).

Gordon’s version

Despite exhortations to Magagnato to “give up doing the hundred useless things that fill your day, and concentrate on two things (a) the Teatro Olimpico and (b) learning English” [author’s own translation] (“Ora, caro Magagnato, non ti resta che smettere di fare le cento cose senza importanza di cui riempi le tue giornate, e concentrarti su due cose (a) Teatro Olimpico b) imparare l’inglese.” AMV, Gordon to Magagnato) his essay was originally written in Italian and later translated for publication. Wittkower had most likely read the Italian version of the essay to which his letter is attached: Magagnato likely kept his second-to-last draft or a copy of it, marked “in corso di pubblicazione”, as some minor pen corrections can be found in the text, sending to the editors of the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes a “clean” typescript. Wittkower also writes that he has sent the essay to the other editors to read, and then to an unnamed translator, whose name is not mentioned in the published essay.

This translator apparently ended up being none other than Gordon himself, as Magagnato writes to Meneghello at the beginning of 1953 (Caputo, Napione 2018 letter 24, 157, 23 February 1951 “la cortesia che mi sta facendo di curare lui stesso la traduzione del mio saggio”), thanking Gordon for curating the translation of his “little essay”.

A first clear sign of this supervision can be found in the only translator’s note (incidentally, the only instance where his interventions are explicitly declared) explaining why the Italian term *proscenio* has been retained in Italian:

We retain the Italian *proscenio* in the text; it cannot be rendered *proscenium* for obvious reasons*; and there is no English equivalent. Kernodle uses

“arcade-screen” but this, as well as being clumsy, carries theatrical implications about the origins of Palladio’s work that are not altogether acceptable. It would also be possible to retain the classical *frons scenae*. The Italian “arco scenico” has been translated as “proscenium arch”.

*In English the word *proscenium* refers to an arch dividing the scene from the auditorium, an element that is intentionally and notably lacking in the Teatro Olimpico. (Magagnato 1951)

A copy of a final draft (for publication) of the essay in Italian is kept in the Magagnato archives in Verona. It is a version that is very close to the original, perhaps even the one sent to the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld institutes for translation; and yet some discrepancies, not the mere solution to stylistic or linguistic issues but substantial edits, can be found by comparing the two texts.

In contrasting the Italian and English versions two main issues emerge: first, a concern towards representing the Teatro Olimpico chiefly as an architectural problem; second, a tendency to mellow some of Magagnato’s sharpest stances.

The emphasis given to the architecture of the Teatro Olimpico appears most interesting, as therein lie the most evident discrepancies between the two texts and the most significant additions by Gordon to Magagnato’s text. The most evident passage is the discussion of Palladio’s sources and the development of the Teatro’s architecture. Here Gordon adds sentences to the Italian text that emphasise the role of Palladio as an architect and the Teatro as a work of architecture rather than a mere wooden scene. The phrase “architectural problem” is reiterated four times in the span of a page (Magagnato 1951, 214) instead of the single instance in the Italian text, insisting on the fact that it was, indeed, the work of an architect that was needed for that specific theatrical problem, as opposed to the work of the scene-designers and painters.

It is not only a matter of antique sources and precedents. The fact that the theatre is approached by Palladio as a functional problem in its own right prompts Gordon to add:

“There is no question here of “theatre” envisaged as a special form implying architectural problems – problems of spatial relationships that must be answered in architectural terms.” (Magagnato 1951, 214)

This is clarified shortly after, in a passage that has been expanded in translation. While Magagnato’s Italian version is shorter and emphasises the incompleteness of some of the solutions

“ma d’altro lato solo nel T.O. ogni problema è posto con sensibilità architettonica, in vista di una soluzione unitaria, anche se non sempre - assai spesso per ragioni contingenti - i problemi sono stati compiutamente risolti.”

Gordon’s version makes it clear that

“it is only in the *Olimpico* that an attempt is made to confront the true problems of the theatre – and the problems of the theatre all turn in this central and essential question of the relation of actors to spectators – as architectural problems, and find an organic and unitary solution to them in the terms proper to this art and to no other: even if – and often for contingent reasons – success was not always achieved.” (Magagnato 1951, 214)

Conversely, some other passages of Magagnato’s text are expunged from the translation, arguably where they shift the argumentation from a dispassionate dissertation of the role of Palladio to a more ‘poetic’ interpretation, such as in this case, where

“Come ogni vera architettura il teatro Olimpico era ambiente nato per vivere nella luce divina; i giochi preziosi e capziosi di cristalli e luminarie dell’aula vasariana di Palazzo Vecchio, cui corrispondeva l’illusionismo della scena fatta apposta per gli spettacoli vieppiù macchinosi della decadenza italiana, sono affatto sconosciuti alla architettura palladiana.” (AMV, b.94, p.8)

has not been translated. Removing this passage also mellowed the opposition between the ‘true’ architecture of Palladio and the supposedly ‘decadent’ designs of some of his contemporaries; a position that contrasted somewhat with the history of culture approach that sought to investigate a problem in its context.

Another issue where Magagnato and Gordon's versions diverge is on the subject of Scamozzi, where Gordon 'mellows' the somewhat harsher stance of the Vicentine scholar, neither reducing Scamozzi's role to imitator of Palladian ideas nor accepting the idea of a "prepotente arbitrio" (AMV, b.94, p.8) on his part in building the wooden perspective scenes rather than painted 'periacti', retaining only the interpretation where Scamozzi's intervention serves to render Palladio's work more rigid (Magagnato 1951, 217).

Furthermore, a passage is added that clarifies the Wwarburgian influences in the approach to the permanence of antique sources as living elements in Palladio's architecture:

"His archæological knowledge of Roman architectural forms comes alive as he deploys it in the perception and solution of new and contemporary architectural problems." (Magagnato 1951, 218)

And it is this life-force of theatre both as architecture and as performative art that informs the Teatro Olimpico, leading us to the conclusion of the essay, that again diverges substantially between Italian and English version. Whereas the published essay closes with

"So far as the history of the evolution of the modern theatre building is concerned the *Olimpico* is certainly an aberration, an abnormal variant. But it is one of the few theatres that has its own proper life." (Magagnato 1951, 220)

The Italian version adds this paragraph:

Ed è in questo la sua durata. Svincolato dai gusti e dalle mode letterarie del suo tempo, il T.O. non è il luogo della commedia del primo cinquecento, nè del nascente melodramma - in questo senso è un episodio anacronistico - ma è un armonioso spazio unitariamente articolato, e riesce ad essere il luogo senza tempo per la poesia di Shakespeare e di Racine, di Sofocle e di Goethe, proprio perché il Palladio creandolo rinunciava alle convenzioni scenografiche del suo tempo.

That has been, again, expunged from the final version.

The analysis of the two texts gives an idea of the work conducted by Gordon and Magagnato together: in this sense, the additions and deletions from Magagnato's text are not to be interpreted as an act of prevarication of the older, more experienced scholar towards his pupil, but rather as a part of the collaborative process, where translation serves as an occasion to clarify issues and for research to progress further. It is also worth noting that, while approaching an eminently architectural subject (the history of the Accademia and their activity as patrons of Palladio having already been studied, albeit not published, by Gordon), neither Magagnato nor Gordon are historians of architecture *per se*. While the former approaches the subject from an art historian's perspective, the latter as a theatre and literature scholar: it is in the middle ground where those two fields of expertise meet that the study of the Teatro Olimpico can be carried out.

The structure of Gordon's essay (Gordon 1966), in five parts, gives further evidence to the complementarity of the two works. Part I sets the scene, Part II approaches the financial aspects and *the modus operandi* of the Accademia, Part III discusses the inaugural play to be given, Part IV approaches the completion of the theatre, and Part V deals with the subject of the financing of the Oedipus and the role of Leonardo Valmarana, as well as his ties to Palladio). The conspicuous absence of any discussion of architecture and other visual aspects, which were normally central to Gordon's argumentations in his work on Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, appears as a clear signal that this was to be mainly Magagnato's concern and should have come together in the Warburg Institute volume; conversely, little is mentioned in the latter's essay of the workings of the Accademia Olimpica.

Donald Gordon, Gertrud Bing and architecture – a partial digression

The question of Donald J. Gordon's academic interest towards architecture as a research subject is still open, particularly in the light of there being no archives to his name available to access: something, however, can be gleaned not only in his writings but also through the intellectual context, in particular of the Warburg Institute, in which he worked. Tim Anstey (Anstey 2020), together with Mari Lending (Anstey, Lending 2021) has thoroughly analysed Gertrud Bing's interests towards architecture in her role of client: institutional in the case of her directorship at the Warburg

Institute but also private in the case of her and Saxl's residence (ultimately unbuilt) in the London suburbs. There emerges Bing's attention to contemporary architecture, in her contacts and correspondence in 1934 with Godfrey Samuel, founding member of the architectural partnership Tecton (Anstey, Lending 2021) and in the dissatisfaction with Charles Holden's scheme for London University (Anstey 2020, 181). The fact that a friend suggested young London architectural practices for the new Warburg Institute buildings, which had "enough of a flexible continental mind" to understand her vision (Anstey 2020) shows her views as essentially contemporary: poignantly so in the mid 1930s, when the Tecton group was spearheading the adoption of a modern architectural language in Great Britain. Bing still managed to have Samuel rearrange the Warburg Library at Thames House (Bing [1934]2023); it is unclear whether Gordon saw that incarnation of the Library or directly the one at the Imperial Institute.

The close relationship between Gordon and Bing has already been analysed (see Velicogna 2020), and while it is not yet possible to gauge how much the two shared in terms of opinion towards architecture, we can infer that, at least on the subject matter, there was a substantial divergence of approach: while Bing's attention was directed towards the modern, Gordon commented to Magagnato in a letter dated 1959 (AMV, b.99) how the early 19th century was, in his opinion, the last 'good' English architecture.

The question remains open: whereas, as part of a comprehensive approach, architecture was essential to theatre history as part of cultural history, and dialogue with architectural historians (not only Rudolf Wittkower, but also Colin Rowe are mentioned in his letters) appear to be constant, at least in the 1940s, specific research as in the case of the Teatro was assigned to specialists such as Magagnato.

Conclusion

Posthumously, Gordon's ambitions and enthusiasm concerning the Teatro Olimpico appear fated to be only partially shared with a wider public: despite actively researching the matter from at least 1948, his essay on the Accademia appeared only in 1966, almost 20 years later, in a collective volume dedicated to Mario Praz. The materials held in the Archivio Licisco

Magagnato thus shed light on a work that has been largely conducted in parallel: Gordon worked on the socio-historic aspects of the building of the Teatro, while Magagnato on the architectural history of the Teatro. The two essays, despite their 15-year gap, spring from a shared work and a common method: Gordon's translation and integration work on *The Genesis of the Teatro Olimpico* can represent a fragment of the scope and tone of the proposed monograph on the Olimpico. The intention never fully died out, even as Gordon's main interests shifted gradually away from the Renaissance (probably also due to Fritz Saxl's death) towards more contemporary authors and Magagnato's own professional trajectory led him progressively away from the London *milieu*. Magagnato came back to England in 1966 to assist Gordon with the finalisation of the essay on the Teatro: a library card dated 2 December 1966 shows his London address as "Warburg Institute" and a request to view Inigo Jones' drawings of theatres and stages (AMV, personali). Magagnato remained in Reading from 19th November 1966 to 9th December in 1966, as testified by an invoice signed by the University's sub-warden. (AMV, personali). It is unclear whether this short stay in England was Magagnato's last, though it speaks of a lasting interest, most likely due to his short, but formative, stay in London at the Warburg. The ties with the Institute's scholars went beyond Gordon, who was himself part of a different institution: the documents show a friendship with Rudolf Wittkower, as well as with Otto and Erica Kurz, who visited Magagnato in Veneto (AMV, personali, photograph of the Kurzs and Magagnato in Bassano); it is likely that Gertrud Bing, who frequently travelled to Italy, was part of those visits too (Gordon [1965] 2020). It is also interesting to note that Gordon directs young scholars he deemed promising not directly to his own department at the University of Reading, but rather to the Warburg Institute, whose formative function regarding philology was of fundamental importance (Velicogna 2021).

The influence of the Warburg Institute methods on Donald Gordon, and particularly of Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing, filters through the analysis of the drafts and letters; and the same influence (rather, reverence, or myth) is widely acknowledged by many of the intellectuals that knew Gordon in their memoirs, collected and collated by Frank Kermodé, that resulted in Gordon's memorial speech (partially published in Kermodé's autobiography, Kermodé 1997). And, despite the complex publication

history of the two essays we have traced here, there emerges a strong interest towards architecture seen as a product of its time and culture, both as art and a functional solution. The historical role of the Teatro Olimpico, at the end of this first period of intense research, was to emerge as opposite to the initial intuitions of Dalla Pozza and Magagnato, no longer a precursor of modern theatre but an anomaly, an aberration: but, quoting the closing remarks of Magagnato's essay, it is in this aberration that life is to be found.

Bibliographical References

Anstey 2020

T.A. Anstey, *Moving Memory: The Buildings of the Warburg Institute*, "Kunst og Kultur" vol. 103, n.3, 2020, 172-185.

Anstey, Lending 2021

T. Anstey, M. Lending, *The Cottage at Bromley*, "Drawing Matter" 28, June 2021.

Bing [1934] 2023

G. Bing, *Notes on the Warburg Library (1934)*, "La Rivista di Engramma" 198, (gennaio) 2023.

Bing 1951

G. Bing, *Report of the Warburg Institute*, "Renaissance News" 4/3, Autumn 1951, 40-43.

Caputo, Napione 2018

F. Caputo, E. Napione (a cura di), *"Ma la conversazione piu importante è quella con te": Lettere tra Luigi Meneghello e Licisco Magagnato (1947-1974)*, Verona 2018.

Forlati 1951

F. Forlati, *Restauro di edifici danneggiati dalla guerra - Provincia di Vicenza*, "Bollettino d'Arte" XXXII, n.3, (luglio-settembre 1951), 266-275.

Kermode 1997

F. Kermode, *Not Entitled: A Memoir*, London 1997.

Goethe 1816

J.W. Goethe, *Italianische Reise*, Mainz 1816.

Gordon 1943

D.J. Gordon, *The Imagery of Ben Johnson's The Masque of Blacknesse and The Masque of Beautie*, "Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes" VI, 1943, 122-141.

Gordon 1945

D.J. Gordon, Hymenaei, *Ben Johnson's Masque of Union*, "Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes" VIII, 1945, 107-145.

Gordon 1949

D.J. Gordon, *Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel between Ben Johnson and Inigo Jones*, "Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes" XII, 1949, 152-178.

Gordon 1966

D.J. Gordon, *Academicians Build a Theatre and Give a Play*, in *Friendship's Garland: Essays presented to Mario Praz*, Rome 1966, 105-138.

Gordon [1965] 2020

D. J. Gordon, *In memoriam Gertrud Bing*, a cura di C. Velicogna, "La Rivista di Engramma" 177, (Novembre 2020), 131-165.

Magagnato 1951

L. Magagnato, *The Genesis of the Teatro Olimpico*, "Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes" XIV, 1951, 209-220.

Magagnato 1992

L. Magagnato, *Il Teatro Olimpico*, Milano 1992.

Meneghello 1993

L. Meneghello, *Il Dispatrìo*, Milano 1993.

Rebecchi 2014

A. Rebecchi, *Lo studio Vajenti e i suoi fotografi*, Tesi di Laurea, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, 2014.

Stokes 1991

J. Stokes, *Ian Fletcher 1920-1988*, "Yeats Annual" n.8, 1991, 179-183.

Wittkower [1949] 1971

R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, London 1971.

Velicogna 2020

C. Velicogna, *Gertrud Bing, Donald Gordon e il giardino di Dulwich*, Postfazione a Gordon [1965] 2020, "La Rivista di Engramma" 177, (novembre) 2020, 131-165.

Velicogna 2021

C. Velicogna, "*Bellezza!*" *On Donald Gordon - or a Warburgian Bridge between Italy and England*, "La Rivista di Engramma" 184, (settembre 2021), 31-60.

Abstract

In this essay, the author approaches two early post-war pieces of scholarship concerning the Teatro Olimpico: Donald Gordon's *Academicians Build a Theatre and Give a Play* (1966) and Liscio Magagnato's *The Genesis of the Teatro Olimpico*

(1951). Archival findings show that the two essays, despite a fifteen-year gap between their publication, stem from the same, collaborative research, informed by the Warburg Institute methods.

keywords | Donald J. Gordon; Licisco Magagnato; Palladio; Teatro Olimpico; Vicenza; Warburg Institute; Gertrud Bing; History of architecture.

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

(v. Albo dei referee di Engramma)

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

(cf. Albo dei referee di Engramma)



la rivista di **engramma**

febbraio **2023**

199 • A Companion to Warburgian Studies

Editorial / Editoriale

Ilaria Grippa, Ada Naval, Giulia Zanon

Forma atlante e storiografia teatrale

Daniela Sacco

Aby Warburg. Per una genealogia del Rinascimento

Arturo Mazzarella

Per una semantica del Nach

Raoul Kirchmayr

Warburg, Aby

Alessandro Dal Lago

“A small academy in a small town”

Chiara Velicogna

Livros e artigos sobre Aby Warburg em língua portuguesa (2018-2023)

Ianick Takaes

Исследования о Варбурге в России

Екатерина Михайлова-Смольнякова

Studi warburghiani in Russia

Ekaterina Mikhailova-Smolniakova

Warburgian Studies in Australia

Martin Warnke

Aby Warburg. Ein Porträt aus Briefen

Michael Diers

En el Archivo Warburg. A propósito de una nueva edición en español

Victoria Cirlot

Expanded Warburg

Gabriele Guerra

Interrogare i simboli

Seminario Mnemosyne

Gli affreschi astrologici di Schifanoia

Seminario Mnemosyne

A Presentation of “The Edgar Wind Journal”

Bernardino Branca