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# Under the Volcano. Warburg's Legacy

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# Under the Volcano. Warburg's Legacy

edited by

Ada Naval and Giulia Zanon



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# "Aby Warburg was a volcano"

## Max Adolph Warburg, for the Centenary of Aby Warburg's Birth (1966)

Max Adolph Warburg, first edition by Davide Stimilli

### Introduction

What we present here is the first English edition of Max Adolph Warburg (henceforth: MAW)'s lecture on the centenary of his father's birthday, which I published in Italian translation in the monographic issue of the journal "aut aut" under the title *Per il centenario della nascita di Aby Warburg*, ("aut aut" 321-322, maggio-agosto 2004, *Aby Warburg, La dialettica dell'immagine*, 173-183), but is still unpublished in its original language. It lends us therefore the occasion to celebrate the 20th anniversary of that first Italian edition, but also coincides with the 50th anniversary of MAW's untimely passing in 1974 and is meant as an homage to this extraordinary missing link in the history of the Warburg legacy, a figure who is still waiting for his due appreciation. I am preparing a comprehensive selection of his writings and letters in Italian translation, but it is my hope that his writings will be read soon in the languages that he mastered and wrote eloquently in German and English, and this edition is meant to whet the appetite of the readers, as it were, for more. The lecture was never delivered but survived in a partial typewritten version, which is preserved in the Warburg Institute Archive (henceforth: WIA) with the signature WIA III.1.7.2.3. and numbered 1-10, and in handwritten form, in a blue octavo notebook, numbered 1-64, on the recto side, with marginalia added sparingly on the facing verso, which I was able to copy and transcribe thanks to the kindness of Maria Christina Warburg (henceforth: MCW), MAW's daughter, in the late 1990s, when I first sought her out looking for MAW's *Nachlaß*. I had become acquainted with him, before I even became engaged with his father's work, as the author of a brilliant dissertation on Plato's etymological dialogue *Cratylus* completed under the direction of Werner Jaeger and published in the "Neue Philologische Untersuchungen" under the title *Zwei Fragen zum "Kratylos"* in 1929, and I was eager to find out more about him and his other works. When I read Ron Chernow's history of the Warburg family and learned of the connection between MAW and AW, I contacted Chernow and asked him to put me in touch with MAW's daughter, who was, according to the book, the custodian of his papers. Chernow kindly obliged, and MCW agreed to meet with me and put at my disposal her father's papers. I am afraid already at that time some may have been lost, but I was lucky enough to make copies of the blue octavo notebook that contains what I deem to be the *Reinschrift* of the text, the final handwritten version of a lecture he worked on eagerly before its supposed date of delivery, as it is possible to conclude not only from the materials I was able to peruse thanks to MCW's graciousness, but also from notebooks that are preser-



ved in the WIA under the signature WIA III.1.7.2.4.3.2.1-3: these three notebooks contain a variety of notes and sketches that were then incorporated and reworked in the final version, but also go beyond its boundaries and expand in certain areas the arguments that MAW touches upon and even exceed what he discusses in the lecture. It is my hope to publish those materials, as well, in a future issue of this journal or in book form, but we feel that providing the public with a complete English text of the lecture that has been, thus far, only accessible to Italian readers is already something that may be reason for celebration: it provides immediate evidence of MAW's unique perspective and extraordinary importance for our understanding of his father's work and personality, but is also an essential introduction to his own contributions to the fields of philology and art history. I thank Monica Centanni and Giulia Zanon for their help in the transcription of the lecture and for allowing me to publish this important document: the happy choice of the title is theirs. Whenever necessary, obvious mistakes or misspellings have been silently modified; underlining has been maintained throughout; handwritten marginalia have been inserted wherever appropriate. Text marked for expunction in the typescript by MAW, either to save time or to deflect attention from himself, has been restored; lacunae in the manuscript are indicated with [...]. The 2004 Italian translation has been updated and integrated to reflect the present English text.

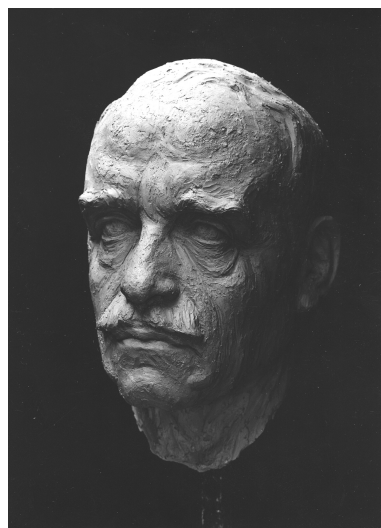
# For the Centenary of Aby Warburg's Birth (1966)

Max Adolph Warburg, edited by Davide Stimilli

The idea of adding an informal P.S. to Prof. Gombrich's talk came to me rather late. To do so, I had to overcome stubborn hesitation – not just the hesitation politely pretended by many speakers but, I assure you, a very real one. You will know or soon enough notice that I am not a scholar, like most of you, but have been an outsider to this Institute for more than 30 years, keeping in loose contact with it by periodical refuelling for my low-brow main job: the teaching of adolescents. Any effort to heighten my brows for this particular occasion would seem futile and ridiculous. Please discount name and kinship: what counts at this place is “Wahlverwandschaft” – the elective affinity which brought most of you here to continue my father's work: the insiders are you.

I have been called back to this place not by inclination and qualification, but by one single sad event: Bing's death.

It took all of us a long time to believe that she is gone. The reflex: “I must tell this or ask that Bing” has not died with her and sometimes overcomes me even now while, still feeling a bit like an intruder, I am working at her desk and in her atmosphere, studying my father's letters and diaries from which I hope to publish, in their original German, a fairly brief selection. In consultation with my sister Frede Prag I decided on this documentary form 1) because, unlike a comprehensive biography, this task might have a chance to be finished in the foreseeable future and 2) because the best witness on Aby Warburg is Aby Warburg. So the bricks should be his own, mine only the cement. Should I ever finish this book I would call it “Aby Warburg als Mitmensch und Mitbürger” i.e. roughly: Aby Warburg's relationship to his contemporary world. While his life in and with the past survives in his and his followers' writings and, most tangibly and vigorously, in this Institute, we might tend to forget how intensely he shared the life of his own time. To document this aspect, not so much a scholar is needed as somebody who has known him fairly well. I dare say I have. Whether being his son is more a help than an obstacle I am not sure. What is sure is this: the people who have known Warburg personally are dying out. Hence the plan for a publication, which, however, could not possibly be ready by 1966; all I have to offer now is this talk as a first instalment. I am most grateful for your presence: the



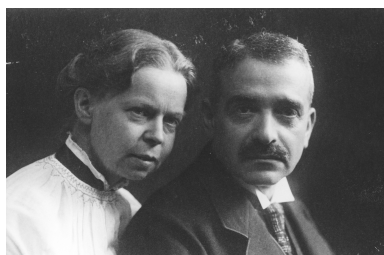
1 | Mary Hertz Warburg, Bust of Aby Warburg, clay model.

responsibility for the printed word fills me with horror; spoken words evaporate; the worst of them, one hopes, will soon be forgotten.

This is enough cackling about a yet unlaid egg. Fortunately two eggs have been laid, both noiselessly in the noisy year 1944: one of them emerged (I think this is not a secret) after Bing's death out of Prof. Gombrich's drawers, having waited there quietly in cold storage for 20 years: a comprehensive history of Warburg's scholarly development which everybody but the author would regard as almost "druckreif", ready for print; combining his well-known scholarship with an extremely rare gift of empathy, "Einfühlungsgabe". The existence and character of this typescript is a great relief to me: what I could not possibly do, has been done – thank God! This also applies to Prof. Gombrich's talk last week: it allows me to confine myself to supplementary contributions (Keine Taten, nur Zutaten).

Now in the same year 1944, also quite noiselessly, another egg has been laid – later to be mislaid and forgotten: A biographical sketch by Saxl, in English, leading as far as the beginning of World War I. (What a cryptic Institute!) I am not sure whether Saxl would like us to publish his excellent but unfinished work. "Cui bono?" would be his question in such cases, accompanied by his typical shoulder-shrugging. "Cui bono? Nobis!" is my answer and so I shall read tonight, even without his blessing, a few passages from his typescript.

"Das Wort zum Bild bringen" – to bring the word (i.e. the contemporary word) to the picture – was one of my father's slogans. Tonight, the opposite process seems appropriate: Let me give this talk at least some visual support, starting from this portrait our mother made of our father [Fig. 1] which, for this occasion, was transferred from its rather dark corner in the reading room. I think it is a great work, not only for sentimental reasons but by any standards; and great not only because the sitter was great – so was the artist while she made it. As a sitter, Aby Warburg had been unbearably impatient (he would have been more patient, he said, had she attempted his equestrian statue à la Renaissance). Meanwhile he died, so that Mary Warburg had to finish her work with the help of photos taken of her husband on his deathbed. Some of them show her fingerprints in grey clay. "Ihr kleiner schmutziger Finger", her little dirty finger, with which she also made many lovely unassuming little pastels, was proverbial in the family. This little dirty finger was guided by the purest heart I have ever known.



2 | Mary Hertz Warburg and Aby Warburg, 1916.

There you see husband and wife together [Fig. 2], with my father's inscription "Die undertjährigen Eltern", taken in the middle of the first world war, on my mother's 50th birthday – they were both born in 1866; so it is a good chronological milestone, exactly half-way between 1866 and 1966. Moreover, it is most characteristic of both our parents and their unique though far from simple relationship: the man facing us with almost aggressive frontality, tinged by a mixture of irony and melancholia; the woman keeping modestly in the background, with an expression of devotion and shy diffidence. Many years befo-

re, my elder sister Marietta, a thoughtful observer already at six years, described this contrast to her mother with these words: “Daddy looks as if he were going to say ‘Und damit basta!’ (and that’s that!); and you look as if you wanted to say ‘Ich weiss nicht so recht’ (‘I am not quite sure’)”.

Here you see one of the best photos ever made of Aby Warburg [Fig. 3], probably dating from the year 1926 when I had the privilege and pleasure to accompany him on his trip to Sweden, which essentially was a pilgrimage to Rembrandt’s *Claudius Civilis* – apparently an extravagant caprice. Actually, it is the left half of a photo – the other half, occupied by myself, I can spare you – except that I could have shown you that my father was even smaller than myself. At that time he still kindled the hope that, one day, I would become his successor as director of his library – a thought natural for a father but certainly inappropriate for the task concerned. In fact, my only merit on behalf of this institute is that I did not become its director: I shudder to think of the mess I would have made of the job!

The ten years between this portrait and the last one have, as you see, left their mark – not just the mark of ageing, a process which does not ripen us automatically – but of destiny, of transformation. The transforming element had been purgatory (not to say hell). Many of you know that he had spent six of those ten years inbetween in mental hospitals – which were far inferior to those of our time; so that afterwards he could claim to have, essentially, cured himself – like Münchhausen, he used to say, in that great classic yarn, he had pulled himself out of the swamp by his own hair.

This is the Warburg as just a few of those present will remember him – and as my mother saw him when she started his portrait. It is the photo [Fig. 4] which I always keep on my desk (or rather: on Bing’s desk which I still regard as a loan). I have to face it as it faces me, inescapably, so that I can consult it any time as a kind of oracle – and, really, the face is a bit enigmatic, as a proper oracle should be. It contains, potentially, the hints of many moods: it looks tired but resilient and vigilant; resigned yet expectant, even challenging, sharply critical, almost mocking, but not unprepared for a sudden smile. To pass the judgement of these eyes is a severe test. They tell me, faintly but perceptibly, what to publish and to write, and even more distinctly, what not to publish and not to write. For tonight, I believe to have, on the whole, their consent.

On one question his answer seemed negative: whether the best contribution for tonight would not be selected translations from those moving obituaries of 1929? From Heise’s outstanding memoir? From Bing’s excellent speech in Hamburg, 1958, at the restitution of his bronze portrait to the Hamburger Kunsthalle? No, it seems that he would not let me off all that lightly – all these contributions were available and written in quite readable German, and if the English students would really – well: *il resto, il resto non dico – ognuno, ognuno lo sà*. On my question whether I had to be very solemn tonight, in order to rise to the occasion, his answer was this: “Nein, nicht nötig – lass Dich ruhig auf Deine Vorderbeine nieder!” (This is an authentic

dictum: when somebody had to make supernatural efforts to keep up with his level of conversation, he felt tempted to say: "O please do get down on your forelegs!").

As Italian, my father's favourite language, comes easier to most of you than German, let me quote, as a paraphrase of the mood prevailing in those obituaries, Giovanni Pascoli's poem *La Quercia caduta*, the fallen Oak.

Dov'era l'ombra, or sé la quercia spande  
morta, né più coi turbini tenzona.  
La gente dice: "or vedo: era pur grande!"  
Pendono qua e là dalla corona  
i nidiotti della primavera.  
Dice la gente: "or vedo, era pur buona!"  
Ognuno loda, ognuno taglia. A sera  
Ognuno col suo grave fascio va.  
Nell'aria, un pianto... d'una capinera,  
che cerca il nido che non troverà.



*Herrn Leo von Saxe  
zu: deutschen Kollegen  
A. und M. Warburg  
14. Aug. 1925*

3 | Aby Warburg and Max Adolph Warburg, 14 August 1925.

There are many contemporary questions on which I would like to know my father's opinions. One of the first questions, of course, would be, what he would think of the fate and development of his library after his death. I am sure he would be slightly surprised, deeply pleased and immensely grateful; and that he would want me to thank all those who made the settlement and acclimatization of the institute in London possible – including those who are not with us anymore – I hope our thanks will reach them, somehow, at their unknown destination. The fruitful transplantation of this rather exotic garden on to British soil is really little short of a miracle. Apart from Saxl's wizardry, it took a lot of skilled English green fingers to make all these foreign plants strike root – and most of the time during a savage tempest while, as far as I remember, the British had a few other things to do than saving a continental library. In this context, Saxl's and Bing's absorption in actual gardening at 162 East Dulwich Grove, described with loving amusement by Prof. Gordon, becomes symbolic.

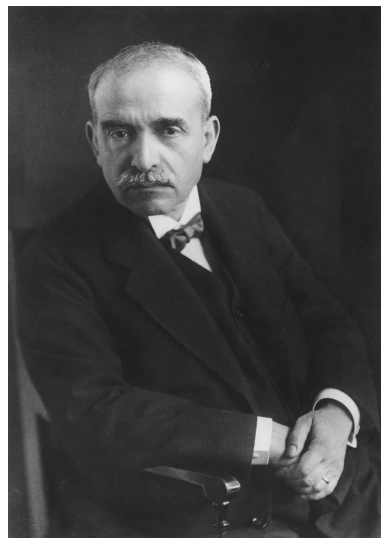
For this success, all four elements had to co-operate, not only Earth. All of them needed the patronage (blessing) of Mercury. All words beginning with "trans" or "inter" belong to his realm: transport, transfer, transactions, transplantation. This leads us, next, to the water, to the sea. The sea can be a separating and/or a connecting element. Between the North Sea countries, the latter function seems to prevail. By trade, transport, temperament and even language, Hamburg has for many centuries been more closely connected with the Netherlands and En-

gland than with the fairly new German Empire, especially in the time of my grandparents and parents. Anglophilia is very clearly reflected in the name of our parents, Aby and Mary.

I shall have to come back to this, briefly, a bit later. What about air? In the North Sea countries it is largely identical with water – they all share, almost every day, the questioning glance up to the clouds, sceptical or hopeful according to temperament. In this respect, our mother's wishful optimism was disarming, unsurpassed and not always born out by facts: "Es klärt sich auf" – it's clearing up – was her unshakeable motto. For the influence of all these elements on human races the best guide is still, the ancient Greek book *περί ἀέρων, ὑδάτων, τόπων* ("About weather, water and places"). In any case, it is better founded than Hitler's race theories.

But one fact does not seem to fit into the Greek theory either: Two of our transplanting gardeners have been resp. are Austrians. Here we could perhaps remember the interracial and interlingual character of that most improbable and lovable of all extinct political monsters: the Austro-Hungarian empire. How could it ever have stuck together for so long without the patronage of Mercury?

Astrologically speaking, Saxl has always struck me as eminently mercurial: In the rather complicated alloy of his temperament mercury, quicksilver, seemed to predominate. Hence his lightning speed of combination and action leading to the transfer of the library. Hence the epitheton lovingly bestowed on him by my father: "Saxl à vapeur". Hence the first figure to attract the young Saxl's attention was a drawing of an archaic statue of Mercury in Cyriacus of Ancona's collection. See Bing's brilliant memorial of Saxl, pg. 3-4: "This archaic figure of Mercury turns up time and again in Saxl's work and was the starting point of his interest in astrology".



4 | Aby Warburg.

Mercury's, or better: Hermes' functions are many-sided and versatile: Among the so-called Homeric hymns, those to Demeter and to Hermes are my favourites. Hermes, as a very precocious baby-god, slips out of his cradle in the cave where he was born and pinches, by most ingenious tricks, the cows of his half-brother Apollon; he rapidly slips back into his cradle, just in time to await, thumb in mouth, radiating baby innocence, the arrival of the inquiring Apollo. The way in which Saxl whisked away the library from Hamburg, right under the noses of the Nazis, was not much less ingenious, and probably protected by his patron planet.

*Hermaion* is a lucky find, as London was for Saxl in search of a new home for the books. And most important of all the god's gifts: *Hermeneia* – translation, interpretation, adaptation of the strange organism to the British mind. O Hermes – how many of our problems are, prosaically faced, just linguistic! What about travelling? What about our research in this polyglot

Institute? What about world peace? What is “international understanding” without the understanding of languages? Just quackery! Sheer poppycock! Believe an old man, young friends! Learn your languages early! At my age the brains won’t take them anymore! Forgive me: O Freunde, nicht diese Töne! I hope that this long digression to Saxl and Mercury will be accepted as a vote of thanks in the name of my father. One of our younger scholars is researching about a mysterious cabalistic figure called Franciscus Mercurius v. Helmond. With equal right Saxl could be called Fredericus Mercurius Saxolinus – “Saxolino” being one of my father’s affectionate nicknames for him.

Now we are coming to the last element, which should have been the first: Fire. When Saxl transplanted the library, he carefully left sticking to its roots big lumps of the original soil – which was volcanic. And this, ladies and gentlemen, is the main fact to remember: Aby Warburg was a volcano. Volcanoes can be conditioned, but never fully explained by their environment – by the surrounding geological strata, which they have to crack to get on top of them, to liberate their explosive power and to attain their pre-ordained form, height, and majesty. Every volcano is an uncanny (*unheimlicher*) stranger to its nearest surroundings, however many scraps and fragments of their top formation the lava may contain. The next akin are rarely its nearest relatives in spirit. Coming straight from the glowing heart of the earth, its congenial brothers may be far away in space and time, unmistakable in shape, allied by underground streams of fire invisible to our eyes. They are an interracial and interspatial brotherhood; their names are multilingual: Zarathustra, Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Herakleitos, Savonarola, Martin Luther, George Fox, Karl Marx (yes, even Marx) – Friedrich Nietzsche. You will, I hope, excuse me for using the words “volcano” and “prophet” as synonyms. Could the prevalence of Jewish names (of course there are many more to add) be explained by the assumption that Israel, prone to the most rigid stratifications, needed and received an excessive amount of volcanic prophets?

Bing, in her Hamburg speech, was right; let me quote:

Es ist kein Zweifel, dass seiner Person etwas von einem alttestamentarischen Propheten anhaftete. Alle, die je die Fülle und Beredsamkeit seines Zorns an sich erfahren haben, müssen das empfunden haben – “All those who ever personally experienced the fulness and eloquence of his wrath must have felt that”.

One might apply to him Vasari’s term of “terribilità”, but one would have to stretch it from the amusing shade of the “enfant terrible” right up (or down?) to the terror which Michelangelo experienced and expressed in his *Last Judgment*.

From the volcano A.W. we have now been detached by time and space – and Englishness – because detachment is a specifically British feature. By the detachment we have gained a lot, but possibly lost something.

First: the gain. You will know Warburg’s aphorism, full of self-knowledge (Selbsterkenntnis): “Ich bin wie gemacht für eine schöne Erinnerung” = “I am just cut out for a beautiful memory”.

He knew the *terribilità* of his disturbing presence and that time had to elapse to put him into perspective. But distance of space adds to our detachment. To quote a less known *aperçu*: He used to say that at every gallery somebody should be employed in passing through all the rooms, shouting the one word: “Zurücktreten!” = “Stand back!”, just like on a railway platform at the approach of a train. (The contradiction to his best-known phrase: “Der Liebe Gott steckt im Détail” is only apparent: before focusing on the details you must have gained a view of the whole). Well, this island is cut out (or off) for standing back: From here, the majestic shape of the mountain can be admired within the context of the surrounding landscape – just as Hokusai’s pilgrims could admire the Fujiyama by approaching it from the distance. This double detachment, just because he had not known Warburg personally, made it possible for Prof. Gombrich to re-view and re-assess the man’s work against the background of Warburg’s contemporary milieu and against the foreground of subsequent research.

Something like this (I am sorry that I cannot offer you any colour slides) is one of the frequent views of Warburg from near-by. We, his children, were living too near to the crater to visualise the majestic profile of the mountain all the time; but near enough to feel the earth tremble under our feet; to have an occasional dizzy glance down into the boiling crater; near enough to become afraid or nervous, and, when the nerves wore off, even worse: a bit callous. And this blunting of our nerve ends earned us bitter epithets from his lips, when apparently we failed to appreciate his return from the hell of his illness; the miracle of living with a “revenant” not from the dead but from the mad. I do not think, however, that his fire was wasted on us: it gave us light, illumination, sometimes blinding, sometimes gloriously sparkling; and for this light the scars from a few burns were the adequate price to pay. As the Dutch would say: *Dat moet je daarvoor over hebben* [1].

This slide shows a cross-section through the strata near a Japanese volcano (Not the Fujiyama this time; with the colours of the illustration it is taken from, it would look even more impressive): During its effort to break through the solid and stolid stone layers in its way, the volcano can’t help pressing, straining and bending them into curved S-Shapes. It is a wonder that they, usually, don’t crack up completely (sometimes, of course, they do). The horizontal layers on top show normal stratification, after the volcano has become extinct (or dormant – one never knows). They look a bit less exciting, but a great deal safer [2].

“Symbol tut wohl” (Symbol is good for you) was a Warburgism, a variation on a then ubiquitous advertisement “Carmol tut wohl” (I think it was a medicine promising to cure almost everything). Would you, with a view to this slogan, allow me to extend my symbolic digression for a few more moments? So then: you know that volcanoes are not only destructive but often also fruitful – in due course. The immediate impact of a volcanic outbreak on the nearest vegetation is, naturally, not favourable; but in the long run it can be extremely fertilising. Many years ago, when I was painting in sight of the Aetna (though in respectful distance) I was struck by one name on the map, of a village half-way up the mountain, called Linguaglossa; meaning, pleonastically expressed in Greek and Latin: tongue. Don’t you see the mighty tongue of glo-



wing lava flowing down the slope, leaving the inhabitants just time enough to escape towards the valleys? As soon as the rumbling glossolalia of the crater stops, the villagers, stoically and trustingly, move up again to the shambles of their old place, patiently waiting for the lava to disintegrate and fertilise their temporarily scorched vineyards. Some of the bits of disintegrated lava, sticking to the Library's roots, transferred by Saxl and Bing, blended most propitiously with good indigenous English humus, has already proved its fruitfulness for more than 30 years – long may the blessing of this mixture last!

Now the last symbolic aperçu: is it not a strange fact that volcanism, the most dynamic, dangerous, uncanny force in geology, finishes by achieving by far the most regular shapes of mountains? Cones of almost stereometric precision? Most of the work now going on in this building (including mine) is not fire-made but water-made, by a process of stratification. Why not? There is nothing wrong with water. The lucid order of this library, the five layers of our floors, the neat tricolores marking the back of the books – all seem to reflect a process of tidy stratification. At first sight, they do not convey any suspicion of the fire which created it. But all those who penetrated deeper into this cosmos, this *lucidus ordo*, can't help feeling something of the tremors which led to its creation out of glowing chaos. And for this job a paradox was needed: that the volcano should, at the same time, be a seismograph – or, to come from the earthly to the heavenly fire: that he should be at the same time lightning and lightning conductor. Warburg's studies of the American Indian magic dances, of the snake as the symbol of lightning, are, as Prof. Gombrich reminded us, his only study published in English (in the Warburg Journal of 1939 vol. 2 no. 4). A limited number of separate prints are still available – I read the study again, remembering my father's [...] to his children: "Ihr seid mir lange nicht neugierig genug" = you are not nearly curious enough for my liking. He was right, as usual or often, but then: our curiosity was sometimes directed into other directions.

There were cases where we could have returned his reproach: I tried in vain to make him read Hölderlin, for obvious reasons: 1) He created, in verses (and prose?) of incomparable beauty and purity, out of innermost experience, an Olympus all of his own; and 2) after the last phase of this ecstatic creation, his fire was burnt out; he survived it, physically, for almost 40 more years, the glowing ashes of this fire sometimes lighting up with a gentle shine.

The fragmentary poem I am going to read to you dates from his last ecstatic phase, but ends with a sad post-script added out of the ashes. As it is not quite easy to understand, I have been offering you stencilled copies which you might want to read at home. Its theme is – to put it most prosaically – the mission of the poets as lightning-conductors, as interceptors of the heavenly fire:

Denn sind nur reinen Herzens,  
Wie Kinder, wir, sind schuldlos unsere Hände,  
Des Vaters Stral, der reine versengt es nicht  
Und tieferschüttet, eines Gottes Leiden  
Mitleidend, bleibt das ewige Herz doch fest.

Aber das ewige Herz blieb nicht fest, the eternal heart did not stay firm – it broke under its message, it was burnt out by the intercepted lightning. So he added later these sad words:

Doch weh mir! wenn er nahet — doch weh mir! wenn von —  
Und sag ich gleich — Ich sei genahet die Himmlischen zu schauen,  
Sie selbst sie werfen mich tief unter die Lebenden  
Den falschen Priester ins Dunkel, dass ich  
Das warnende Lied den Gelehrigen singe.

Nor did Aby Warburg's heart stay firm; it was burnt out by its volcanic message. During his illness, he interpreted his suffering as a revenge of the sinister demons he had tried to exorcise. Unlike Hölderlin, by a miracle (as he rightly saw it) he recovered: Das Herz festigte sich wieder.

The terrible volcanic outbreak had released the [...] of the underground fire, and for a few more years the earth relaxed and calmed down under his feet, a planet to be trodden on again with safety and freedom – during his Italian year, even with a serene happiness, which he had experienced before only at rare moments.

Those of us who have known Bing are asking ourselves and each other, sadly, again and again, the question: why was this determined [...] person unable to write Aby Warburg's biography? Why was Saxl, after a [...] unable to finish his [...]?

Apart from [...] of personal temperaments, most of us think that for somebody who has been under Warburg's personal spell for a long time the detachment of the historian is impossible; so it is for me. That's why, with my sister's [...] advice, I decided on a mainly documentary publication. I hope you wish me luck. I need it.

The explanation of Prof. Gombrich's [...] is the blessing of detachment but – let me repeat it – combined with an unusual sense of empathy, based (we ought to add) on a most vivid oral tradition handed on by Saxl and Bing, and a few other [...].

What about the rest of you, the majority of this scholarly community? What I have to offer are, please believe, not [...] but very hesitant reflexions: All-right, you must think, so what? What logical or practical conclusions are we to draw from the sufferings of this demon-ridden volcanic founder?

As far as the volcanic fire is concerned, a simple cosmological meditation will do: I sometimes think that the great scientific discoveries since Copernicus are abstractly known but psychologically unrealizable. In spite of Copernicus, Kepler, Galilei and Giordano Bruno, our mental "Weltbild", image of the world, is still as geocentric and, especially, anthropocentric as before. Even after a deep dizzy glance up to the sky, we cannot but return to our tiny planet, ridden by that strange skin affection called life, including for a few hundred thousands of years a creature which walks on two legs and thinks that it can think. What about volcanism? About the realization that the ground we are walking is only a rather thin epidermis of a nucleus of glo-

wing fire? Well, volcanic outbreaks (elsewhere, of course) remind us temporarily of this fact, to be soon forgotten again by our imaginative (or rather unimaginative) memory.

What about Aby Warburg's volcanic sufferings – his own and those inevitably inflicted on his neighbours? In two cases he would have suffered in vain: 1) if all of us would have to suffer the same torment again, and 2) if we would completely forget it. The middle is Prof. Gombrich's empathy; with that gift we can feel that he has suffered for us.

I am neither willing nor scientifically equipped to comment on my father's mental illness. So much is clear that its root from his early youth was pathophobia – fear of illness – which is an illness itself, perhaps breeding so-called “real” i.e. physical illnesses. But here is one of his nature's paradoxes: this physically fear-ridden man was mentally the most fearless man I have known. He had in a [...] degree that quality which Bismarck badly missed in his Germans: Zivil-courage. Had there been more Germans like this very conscious German Jew, we might have been spared the horror of Nazism and our second war. To enforce this aspect, I am offering you, in addition to Hölderlin's poem, copies of H. v. Kleist's *Gebet des Zoroaster*.

What I would have shown you if I had stuck to my guns in their announced position, is an adjoining feature: Warburg's faithful friend and ally Franz Boll wrote a wonderful little essay about *Vita contemplativa*. Warburg was not an exclusively contemplative man. Though thinking was his business, *vita activa* [3] had a mighty share in his existence. In him, both ways of life were inseparable. The tension of this polarity was his curse and, much more, his blessing – and ours, if we can learn from him. Can we – and should we? From the failure of Plato's venture in Sicily onward, the king-philosopher or philosopher-king has never appeared. Now we need him more than ever. Should we all withdraw from politics as it is not our business? Or, if we are unfit for action, should we not, at least, sometimes pray the prayer: “Tauet, Himmel, den Gerechten – Wolken, regnet ihn herab!”.

And so to one last polarity: Warburg combined a universal cosmic vision with a search for God in the detail. In the detail, our Lord can nowadays not complain of neglect. In all our thinking, the trend towards specialization seems inescapable and irreversible. Blinkers have almost become congenital. But who is still capable of the great vision of One and All – ἕν καὶ πᾶν? Let me end with a confession and a warning based on my own experience. Strangely enough, when I was 16 years old, my father's and my fatherland's sudden terrible breakdown sparked off in me, like a flash, this very vision, ἕν καὶ πᾶν; this flash was kindled by the fire of Herakleitos of Ephesos, as far as my immature mind could grasp him then. This vision has since faded out, but never completely. It prevented me, however, from continuous faithful search in any one single field. Wherever this way may lead: certainly not to earthly success. With Goethe's epilogue to his *Werther* I should say: Sei ein Mann und folge mir nicht nach! – Where is the synthesis? Its place, if any, can be, and often is, this very Institute: it enables us to seek God in the detail, each in our own sector; by the chance to get introduced into our neighbours' sectors we can, at least at intervals, see the outline of the huge circle to which they all belong.

Let me end with a word which, many years ago, I picked up from Plotinus: in the eye of the mystic *der Denkraum*, the thinking-space, laboriously expanded by the enlightener, dwindles to nothing again:

Οὐ γὰρ μακρὰν οὐδὲ πόρρω οὐδενὸς οὐδέν

For nothing is far or remote from anything.

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## Notes

1. An approximate English translation: You are just paying your dues.
2. The typescript ends here.
3. On the facing page: "*politica*"

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## Abstract

Davide Stimilli presents the first English edition of the lecture given by Max Adolph Warburg on the occasion of the centenary of his father's birth in 1966. The text has so far only appeared in Stimilli's Italian translation entitled *Per il centenario della nascita di Aby Warburg* in the monographic issue of the magazine "aut aut" ("aut aut" 321-322, maggio-agosto 2004, *Aby Warburg, La dialettica dell'immagine*, 173-183), but is still unpublished in the original language. This text, written and never read to an audience, paints a portrait of Aby Warburg's explosive intellect and influence, which Max Adolph poetically associates with disruptive volcanic activity. This issue of Engramma includes both the original English and an updated Italian translation.

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*keywords* | Max Adolph Warburg; Aby Warburg; Mary Hertz; Gertrud Bing; Fritz Saxl; Ernst Gombrich.



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