

The work of Ernst H. Gombrich on the Aby M. Warburg fragments

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The file of documentary materials entitled *Geburtstagsatlas* (the Birthday Atlas) is preserved at the Warburg Institute Archive in London as a draft of the incomplete Warburg *Mnemosyne* project by Ernst H. Gombrich. This work, realized in collaboration with Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing, was given to Max Warburg for his seventieth birthday, on 5 June 1937.

On 1 January 1936, Ernst Gombrich arrived in London from Austria.¹ His task was to reorganize the last of Warburg's *fragments* and, in particular, to revise what was left of the incomplete *Mnemosyne* Atlas. The goal of this study and inventory was to collate Warburg's uncompleted studies with the purpose of putting together an English publication of his collected work. However, in 1970, the only result of this publishing endeavour was included in the pages of the famous *Aby Warburg. An intellectual biography*.² This is how and when the story of the second hand readings of Warburg – by the fortune of Gombrich's book – started out. The undertaking appeared to reach conclusion, in the Anglo-Saxon world, only much later, in the year 1999, with the published translation of Warburg's *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Getty Research Institute.³

The history of the intellectual, as well as critical, relationship between Gombrich and Warburg is, then, a posthumous one that was started on British soil. Further marking this distance are the different historical periods, as well as the cultural and intellectual divides that separate the two scholars. Moreover, this distance is also marked by certain material and non-material aspects of Gombrich's work in London, including his relationship with other Warburgian scholars.

Gombrich's aversion for some Warburgian mannerisms in certain studies based on the iconological approach is well known, and at times even openly declared by Gombrich himself. To emphasize this view, it was Gombrich who stated 'as Marx was not a Marxist and Nietzsche was not Nietzschean, so Warburg, ultimately, was not a Warburgian'.⁴

¹ Where not specified, Gombrich's biographical data is drawn from Didier Eribon, Ernst H. Gombrich, *Ce que l'image nous dit*, Paris, 1991. I would like to thank Claudia Wedepohl and Veronika Kopeky for their support in my consultation of Gombrich's papers at the Warburg Institute Archive in London (currently in process of cataloguing); a special thanks to Leonie Gombrich for the permission to quote these unpublished documents (the Literary Estate of E. H. Gombrich).

² Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: an intellectual biography*, London, 1970.

³ Aby M. Warburg, *The renewal of pagan antiquity*, K.W. Forster ed., Los Angeles 1999. For Gombrich's views on this edition see: 'Aby Warburg: his Aims and Methods', a lecture organized by the Warburg Institute on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Aby Warburg's death, published in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. No 62, 1999, 268-82.

⁴ 'So wie Marx vielleicht kein Marxist und Nietzsche kein Nietzscheaner war, so war Warburg auch im Grunde kein Warburgianer', Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Aby Warburg, 1866-1929', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*,

Star enmity

The *Intellectual Biography* by Gombrich was at first negatively received and criticised by the scholars tied to Aby Warburg and his Institute.⁵

Among these, the voice of Edgar Wind emerged most prominently. At the bottom of this vicious attack, there was Aby Warburg's uncertain fame in Great Britain; a notoriety more tied to the Library and to the research that it promoted than to Warburg's research and writings. As stated in the following, a biography of Warburg:

could well have helped to redress the balance, on the assumption that it would introduce the reader to the large number and wide range of Warburg's factual discoveries and to his new method of compact demonstration, in which divergent disciplines are fused together as instruments for solving a particular historical problem.⁶

In any case, Gombrich's original task was doomed, as he emphasised himself in its first pages. He was nearly obliged to take on assignments that were not part of his duty – assignments that were however missed by Gombrich, as Wind observed – and the book was supposed to compensate a biography and 'intellectual lexicon' of Warburg left incomplete by Gertrud Bing. The *Biography* followed soon after Bing's death, and she had been the last depositary of a present memory of Warburg's work. This memory was lost with her passing, and it was not registered in Gombrich's *Biography*.

Signalling three distinct defects in the arrangement of this book, Edgar Wind did not hesitate to further indicate three points of a Warburg-Gombrich dissonance. The intention of composing a miscellany of Warburg's notes and writings for consultation ultimately resulted in flattening the different language register adopted by Warburg in different contexts, and, at the same time, it betrayed and neglected the entirely different status of a personal or epistolary note, of aphoristic formulation of a concept, of writings for a lecture or texts for print. The biographic structure of the book functioned as a skeleton on which to insert an endless listing of citations, presented according to a chronological order that cannot – as Wind notes –

December 11, 1966, reprinted in Kulturforum Warburg ed., *Aby Warburg von Michelangelo bis zu den Puebloindianern*, Warburg, 1991, 9-21 (13); a few lines above, Gombrich's speech was again addressing Bing's observations about the success of the iconology as an element that could possibly obscure Aby Warburg's original work.

⁵ The welcoming tone to this work was much different – as was the reception of Warburg's thinking in general – in countries where the Warburgian writings had been published or translated. Among the reviews of the *Intellectual biography* see: Peter Burke, in *Listener*, 21 October 1971, 546; Felix Gilbert, in *Journal of Modern History*, 44, September 1972, 381-391; Sten Karling, in *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, 41, December 1972, 127-29; David Watkin, in *Encounter*, 38, April 1972, 78-80; Morris Weitz, in *Art Bulletin*, 54, March 1972, 107-10. Among the reviews of the Italian edition, see: Rossana Rossanda, in *La talpa*, supplement to *Il Manifesto*, 12 January 1984, 1-2; Enrico Castelnuovo, in *Tuttolibri*, vol. No. 11, no. 393, 11 February 1984, 4; Marco Bertozzi, in *Belfagor*, August 1984, 480-85.

⁶ Edgar Wind, 'On a recent biography of Warburg', in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25 June 1971, 735-36, reprinted in E. Wind, *The Eloquence of Symbols. Studies in Humanist Art*, Oxford, 1983, 106-13 (106).

function as a substitute for a true critical and contextual commentary on the quotations themselves. Such a structure literally posits itself as a draft for a path of works and thought in progress and evolution, but too often it inevitably results as a psychological-style analysis of both study choices and biographical events, as well as the relationship between the two.

The *Intellectual Biography* was printed two years before *Symbolic images*, the second book of Gombrich's 'trilogy' on *Studies in the art of the Renaissance*.⁷ By 1966 – the publication year of *Norm and Form* – Ernst Gombrich had already published three distinct contributions on Warburg: two speeches on the occasion of Warburg's birth centennial, held in Hamburg and London, and an article published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.⁸ Also for these texts, especially in regard to the two commemorations (as two slightly different versions of the same speech), what validly emerged were the crucial elements pointed out by Wind regarding the *Biography*.⁹ Gombrich opened his speech, given in Hamburg on 13 June 1966, the centennial of Warburg's birth, with sincere regrets at Gertrud Bing's death, acknowledging that, given her competence and experience, it should have rightfully been her honour to commemorate Aby Warburg on that date. Additionally, Gombrich made mention of the true devotion of Warburg's closest collaborators, and ultimately, precisely because of this, it was not perhaps entirely wrong (as Gombrich explained) to choose a spokesman for those memories who had a certain historical distance from the charismatic figure.

Even before observing that in these commemorative speeches the sources of Warburgian thought were presented in a schematic and often uneven manner – including hints of influences that refer also to rather marginal names of Warburg's formative universe – one thing became apparently evident. Not a single quotation used by Gombrich in his own speeches – be they literal or paraphrased – was ever precisely contextualized; not a single one was taken from the essays edited by Warburg while he was alive. And yet we read:

It hardly belongs within the framework of a festive address to talk of the problems which prevented and still prevent such publication. The private jottings of a scholar, who liked to elaborate his formulations on paper in ever fresh permutations and who, moreover, operated with words and symbols of his own coinage which would be unintelligible without a lengthy

⁷ *Norm and Form. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London, 1966; *Symbolic Images. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London, 1972; *The Heritage of Apelles. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London, 1976.

⁸ Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Aby Warburg zum Gedenken', lecture organized by the Hamburg University on 13 June 1966 in the occasion of the centennial of Aby Warburg's birth, published in *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen*, vol No 11, 15-27, reprinted in Ernst H. Gombrich, *Tributes. Interpreters of Our Cultural Tradition*, Oxford, 1984, 117-37; Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Aby Warburg', Warburg Institute Lecture 1966, printed in Aby M. Warburg, *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, D. Wuttke, W. Heckscher eds, Baden Baden, 1979, 465-77; Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Aby Warburg, 1866-1929', 1966, in *Aby Warburg von Michelangelo bis zu den Puebloindianern*, 1991.

⁹ On the review of the *Biography*, first published anonymously, and these other articles on Warburg by Gombrich see the correspondence between Gombrich, Charles Hope, Margaret Wind and others on the *London Review of Books*, and see the web archive at the page <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v06/n05/charles-hope/naming-the-graces>.

commentary, present the pious editor with un-surmountable problems. Warburg himself would surely have been the last one to offer these slips of paper for publication. We know from his published writings how ceaselessly he strove to let his person disappear behind his theme and let the past speak by itself through the image, the word and symbol.

[...]. But somehow the content of these literary remains must be made known if his personality and his role is to become intelligible. For however weighty his published contributions to the art and the cultural history of Renaissance may be, only the most attentive of readers can find through them access to the philosophy of culture, indeed to the psychological system underlying this philosophy, at which Warburg was aiming from the very beginning.¹⁰

Warburg's writings, as a matter of fact, are characterized by substantial upturns in his interests and by the choice of precise objects of investigation, which are often very distant from one another. However, in support of the thesis of the fragmentary nature of trends in Warburg's scientific production, Gombrich makes ample reference not to these edited essays but rather to Warburg's incomplete materials. The obscurity of Warburg's published essays, therefore, cannot help much in understanding his personality, and for Gombrich this can only 'somehow' be dissolved (and resolved), through his incomplete legacy. Not vice-versa.

In the article that appeared in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the same concept is once again reiterated with a further explanation: 'his essays remained as a fragmentary contribution to the history of Renaissance civilization, but his personality daemonically influenced all who came into contact with him'.¹¹

As was already highlighted by Gombrich in a 1938 review of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, Warburg's contribution to a cultural history was fragmentary, meaning it was deprived of a planned systematic outline, yet it was also characterized and recognized for its great methodological value.¹² In regard to this point in particular, Carlo Ginzburg made a point of developing the question as a central theme.¹³ In the 1938 review of the *Gesammelte Schriften* for the second volume of the *Bibliography of the survival of the classics*, Gombrich acknowledged Warburg's objective to shed light on specific and well delimited subjects through a reconstruction of their concrete relationships, despite the a-systematic nature of his work. He did not detect 'geistesgeschichtliche Parallelen', i.e. analogies that, in the work of Saxl and

¹⁰ Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Aby Warburg zum Gedenken', 1966, in *Tributes*, 1984, 118.

¹¹ 'Seine Aufsätze blieben fragmentarische Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Renaissance, aber seine Persönlichkeit wirkte auf alle, die mit ihm in Berührung kamen, geradezu dämonisch', in Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Aby Warburg, 1866-1929', 1966, in *Aby Warburg von Michelangelo bis zu den Puebloindianern*, 1991, 21.

¹² Ernst H. Gombrich, review of Aby Warburg *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike: Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, G. Bing, F. Rougenont eds, Leipzig, 1932, in *A bibliography of the survival of the classics*, vol. No. 2, The Warburg Institute ed., London 1938, (n. 1) 3-5; then in *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, 433-435.

¹³ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Da A.M. Warburg a E.H. Gombrich. Note su un problema di metodo', in *Studi medievali*, 3, 7, 2, 1966, 1015-65; engl. tr. Carlo Ginzburg, 'From Aby Warburg to E.H. Gombrich', in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, Baltimore, Md., 1989, 17-59.

Panofsky, often seemed to substitute for philological and genetic connections. Such is Gombrich's opinion, for instance, when he notes the analogical aspects in the thesis of *Perspektive als symbolische Form* by Panofsky, which establishes the relationship between the birth of a historical dimension through a comparison with the ancient world and the discovery of linear perspective in the Renaissance.



Fig. 1 Aby Warburg, *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, 1929, Plate 24, detail: 'Planetenkinder der Saturn', *Mittelalterliches Hausbuch der Grafen von Waldburg Wolfegg*, fol. 11r, Fürstliche Sammlung, c. 1470, The Warburg Institute

To indicate the complex intellectual relationship between Fritz Saxl and Aby Warburg, which originated with their common interest in the history of astrological representations, Bing had adopted the word 'synastria'.¹⁴ We could draw an image, forcing the interpretation of this question. The image of the Warburg Kreis as a circle of intellectuals 'daemonically influenced' and fascinated by the intellectual charisma of the master, in some way brings to mind an object of the research promoted by the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg: fifteenth century representations, on astrological calendars, of the planetary influences on humans, the so-called *Planetenkinder*, the Planets' children (Fig.1). The 'ill-omened star'¹⁵ that

¹⁴ Gertrud Bing, 'Fritz Saxl (1890-1948)', in Donald J. Gordon ed., *Fritz Saxl. A Volume of Memorial Essays*, London 1957, 1-46 (6).

¹⁵ Edgar Wind, 'On a recent biography of Warburg', in *The Eloquence of Symbols*, 1983, 106.

sees the birth of Gombrich's work in the Warburg archive, draws a line of intellectual contrast between Gombrich and not only Warburg, but the entire circle: as a diastria or a star enmity (*Sternfeinde*).¹⁶

Gombrich's first thorough analysis of Warburg is conducted through a study of his personal archive and research materials. This will remain a key reference for Gombrich in the reconstruction of Warburg's intellectual profile, which ultimately caused a rather original overturning of hierarchy between the scientific production that had been completed, and that which had been left incomplete.

All of the initial work by Gombrich on Warburg's fragment papers was followed and guided, often with criticism, by Saxl and Bing, who were tensely focused in their efforts to compose and create a worthy publishing project. The program also planned for an English translation of the edited work and, with greater urgency, was pushing in the direction for a complete re-composition of the unedited material, including an adequately adapted publishing solution for the *Atlas Mnemosyne*, the theoretical fragments, the aphorisms collection, and Warburg's correspondences on scientific subjects. The Warburg Institute, during the first years of Gombrich's experience, was laboriously introducing itself to the Anglo-Saxon cultural world, taking into account a legacy that was complex and difficult to categorize by discipline. The first courses at the Institute therefore aimed for specialization through more systemic arrangements with courses entitled 'Culture of the Renaissance', 'History of Images', 'The Classical Tradition', which inevitably lead to a process of parcelling, and even simplification, of that heritage.

Gombrich's perspective in regard to the study of art and images put him in an immediately critical, if not polemical, position in relation to what was being produced by the scholars that were gravitating around the Warburg Institute at the time.

Posthumous 'Mnemosyne'

It is not a surprise, given Gombrich's style, that he nurtured the legend of the shock he experienced – as a young scholar of the Vienna school who had just undergone a binding collaboration with Ernst Kris – when faced with the copious materials from Aby Warburg's personal archive.¹⁷ However, it may be useful to elaborate the story here a bit by returning to the work of his earlier years as a research assistant in London.

As is well known, Aby Warburg died in 1929, leaving the project on which he had been methodically working since at least 1928 unfinished: the *Atlas Mnemosyne*. Of the entire project, what remained were the photographs of the various work stages on the tables for the *Bilderatlas* of the book, some fragments of

¹⁶ The reference is to the Nietzschean 'star friendship' (*The Gay Science*, 279).

¹⁷ See Didier Eribon, Ernst H. Gombrich, 1991. See also Felix Gilbert in his review of the *Intellectual biography* by Gombrich, 1972, 381: 'my impression is that the character of the material through which Gombrich first became acquainted with the workings of Aby Warburg's mind has patterned his entire approach to the biography which he has now published'. For a history of the Warburg Institute from the Gombrich's intellectual perspective see E. H. Gombrich, 'The Warburg Institute: A Personal Memoire', *The Art Newspaper*, 2 November, 1990.

his writings, notes on the general outline and the contents' index. Immediately after Warburg's death, the project of publishing the Atlas was never put in doubt.¹⁸ In the last weeks of his life, the *Bilderatlas* had been completely reorganised and Warburg had reformulated the general outline of the work, which had already been re-elaborated several times.¹⁹

As we know, the historical events were to wipe away the optimistic plans of Bing and Saxl regarding the publishing of Warburg's complete work. The publishing plan ran aground soon after the publishing of the collection of essays in the *Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike* of 1932, a compromised work compared with the more developed original project.²⁰ One year after that, the Library was moved to England. The events that followed – the wandering of the library, in boxes, from the Thames House to the Imperial Institute Buildings, to its present location – prevented the concrete continuation of a publishing plan, which certainly was not facilitated by the new placement.

Despite extreme difficulties, the activities of the Library continued and the publishing project was not entirely abandoned. On 1 January 1936, Ernst Gombrich arrived in London from Austria for a two-year fellowship and was entrusted with the reorganization of the Warburg fragments, which included also the *Mnemosyne* materials. In 1937, the efforts of Gombrich's collaborations with Bing and Saxl, however generated yet another result: the so called *Gebertstagsatlas*, that is the version of the *Bilderatlas*, which was to be presented as a gift to Max Warburg for

¹⁸ See in particular the editorial program in a letter by Fritz Saxl to the Teubner publisher, dated 1930, WIA, General Correspondence (GC), 1930, [see WIA III.104.1]; printed in Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, M. Warnke ed., Berlin, [2000] 2008, XVIII-XX. In this letter, Fritz Saxl indicated, as first priority, a republishing of Warburg's minor writings, that had been published in some specialized periodicals and that were by that time difficult to trace. The second step of the work would have been the publishing of the Atlas. There were not to be any autobiographical fragments missing, such as some letters, the diaries, the aphorism collection, and still other unpublished materials that included the thesis for professional qualification, the study on Dürer – published only as an abstract –, and even the materials of ethnological interest regarding Warburg's trip among the Hopi Indian Tribes. Of the entire work, there was a significant amount of precise (even if only indicative) technical data provided: 4-500 pages of "minor writings" with 300 illustrations, 100-150 pages of unpublished lectures, and about 400 pages of diaries, letters and aphorisms. For the Atlas, Saxl spoke of 300-350 tables in large format phototype (30 x 40 cm.), and 400 pages of text in small format.

¹⁹ Regarding the shift in the sense of definition and completion of the work structure, materially unfinished but finished as a project, the last pages of Warburg's work journal are most noteworthy, (see WIA III.15, Journals, 'Tagebücher der KBW', vol. No. 9; see Aby Warburg, *Tagebuch der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*, K. Michels, C. Schoell-Glass eds, Berlin, 2001) along with the letters written by Saxl and Bing answering the many messages of condolences from colleagues and scholars received at the KBW (see WIA, GC, November-December 1929). To the posthumous history of the Atlas is dedicated the final chapter of my PhD dissertation (*The project Mnemosyne by Aby Warburg*, University of Siena, 2006; forthcoming), a documental reconstruction and historical contextualization of the *Mnemosyne*; the considerations summarized in this article are drawn from the dissertation.

²⁰ Aby M. Warburg, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike*, Leipzig, 1932. Organized in five thematic sections, corresponding to the main areas of interest of the Warburg writings (*Antiquity in florentine bourgeois Culture; Exchanges between florentine and flemish culture; Antiquity and modern life in Renaissance pageantry; Italian antiquity in Germany; The olympian gods as astral daemons*) and a section that gathers the *Occasional writings on public cultural issues*, the 1932 publication includes some materials that were destined, in the original project, to be published in the volumes of 'minor writings' and 'unpublished writings'.

his birthday in June of 1937.²¹ Although it represents a kind of draft or private edition of the Atlas, the work also reflects, at least through its general outline, Saxl's original publishing project for *Mnemosyne*, arranged in an illustrative section with synthetic texts of presentation and with materials made available for in depth study.

The reconstruction of the plates is based directly on the last photographic sequence of the Warburg panels. The first drafts of the plates, referred to as *Gombrichsfassung*, are, as a matter of fact, montages with clippings of the single works, directly taken from copies of the 1929 photographs.²²

The work of reorganization mainly concerns the graphic design and layout of the panels. The density, that is the total number of images per printed plate, diminishes substantially, and on the mainly vertical structure of the sequences that are included in the original panels by Warburg, a horizontal arrangement of the groups prevails. The single photographs are fundamentally of the same size and the repetition of enlarged details is almost completely lacking; while the usage of different formats, enlargements, and/or repetition of details in the same montage became the device that was systematically adopted by Warburg in the drafts for the Atlas and in other experiments for photographic panel layouts used in seminars or lectures.

Let us consider some examples at a merely illustrative level. The revision of panel C excludes two photographs of current events in favour of a historical document, an illustration from the *Practica* of the year 1524 by the astronomer Leonhard Reymann, on which Warburg took notes in the last days of his life (Figs. 2-3). In this way, the flight of the dirigible air-ship is associated to the sign of Pisces, under which the inauspicious prophecies for the year 1524 would have come true.²³ Gombrich focused considerably on this in great detail, in the pages of the *Intellectual biography* that reaffirm the doubted validity of the Warburgian theory of social memory, according to which the associations employed in the Bilderatlas would be justified.

Moreover, the revision of table 4 (Fig. 4), is centred on the image of the river divinity, excluding the feminine figure of the Nymph, originally exemplified with the example of the Vatican's *Arianna*. In the table, only the marble relief with the *Gigantomachy* of the base is included. The file-card corresponding to the panel indicates the illustration, in the composition, of the relationship between the Olympian gods and the Titans: nothing to do with the Warburgian polarity *ekstatische Nympe/trauernder Flussgott* (ecstatic nymph/grieving river god) proposed

²¹ The *Geburtstagsatlas* comprises: versions of plates in printed format (approximately, the one indicated by Saxl, in 1930, for publication), composed and printed with Otto Fein, the photographer of the Institute at the time, with synthetic captions for the images; a short presentation; a file-card for each section of tables (the chapters of the Bilderatlas) and for each table – prepared by Gombrich with Bing and Saxl starting with Warburg's scattered notes; the still unpublished texts of the *Einleitung*, the lecture in memory of Franz Boll (1925) and the research on Manet (1928-29) composed on the basis of the original working papers of Warburg. See respectively WIA III.109.5.1-3.

²² WIA III.109.1. The photographs of the last sequence of panels in WIA III.108.5, cut up and with single images of the taken away works, can be traced back to this work.

²³ Already published in 'Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten', in Aby M. Warburg, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike*, 487-558; see WIA III.15, *Tagebücher der KBW*, vol. No 8, 5, 10, 17, 19 September 1929.

in the original panel 4 (Fig. 5). More simply put, the materials of plate 24 on the fifteenth century textual tradition of Children of the Planets are all composed horizontally, as in a written page (Figs. 6-7).

The near exclusion of almost all of the documents about court festivals in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and about the actuality of the 1920s, also eliminated Warburg's last elaborations, apparently considered unfinished or difficult to comprehend. To dictate this choice seems to be again the presumption of inaccuracy and inefficacy of Warburg's work on media and dynamics of the visual culture, work based essentially on the contextual study of those excluded materials. That exclusion restored a thematic extension of the Atlas, which was comparable to the first photographic registration of the tables, the forty-three panels of the so called 'first version' (*erste Fassung*) photographed in May of 1928.



Fig.2 Bilderatlas *Mnemosyne*, Plate C, 1929, © The Warburg Institute.

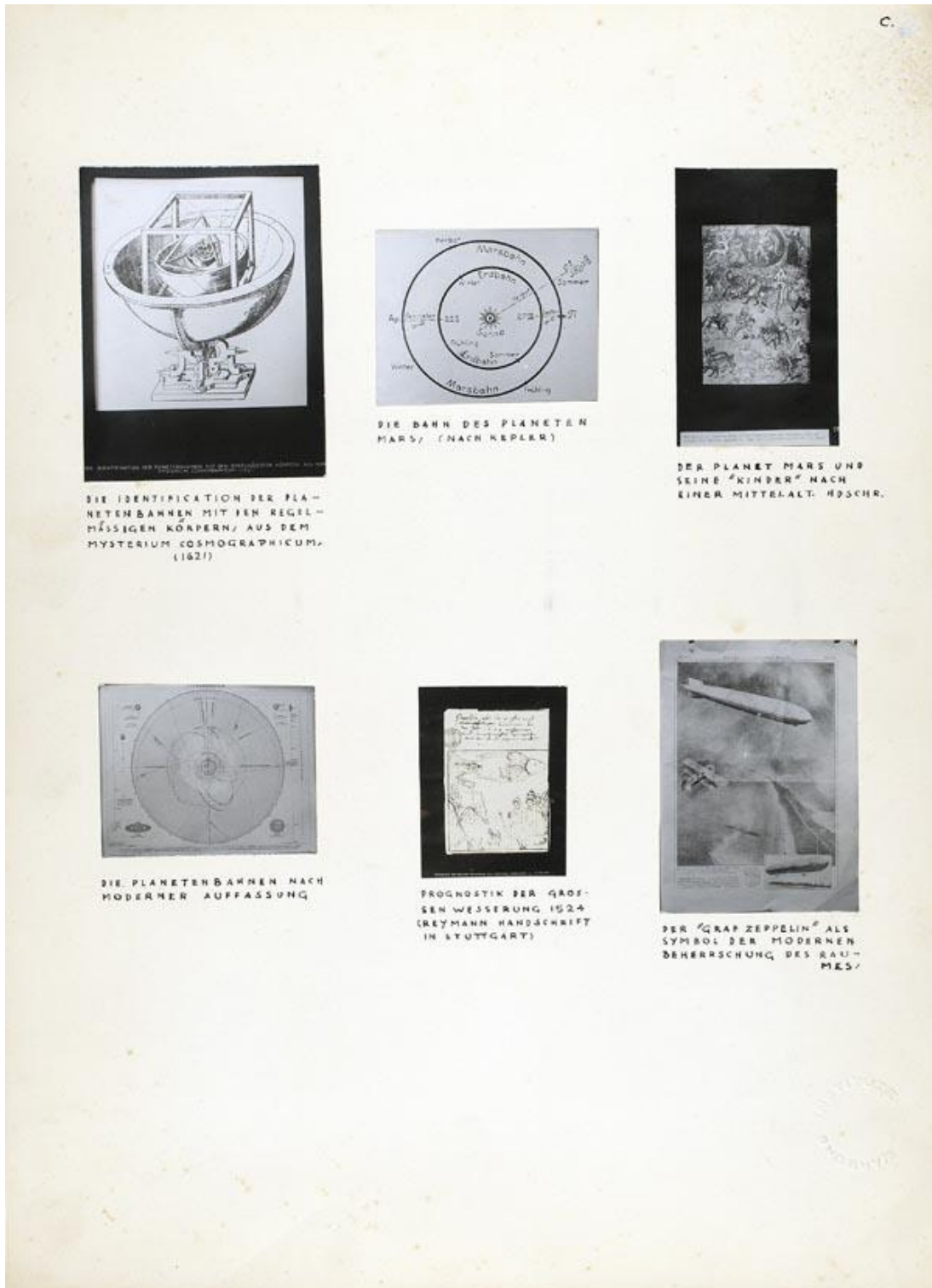


Fig.3 *Geburtstagsatlas*, Plate C, 1937, © The Warburg Institute.



Fig.4 Bilderatlas *Mnemosyne*, Plate 4, 1929, © The Warburg Institute.

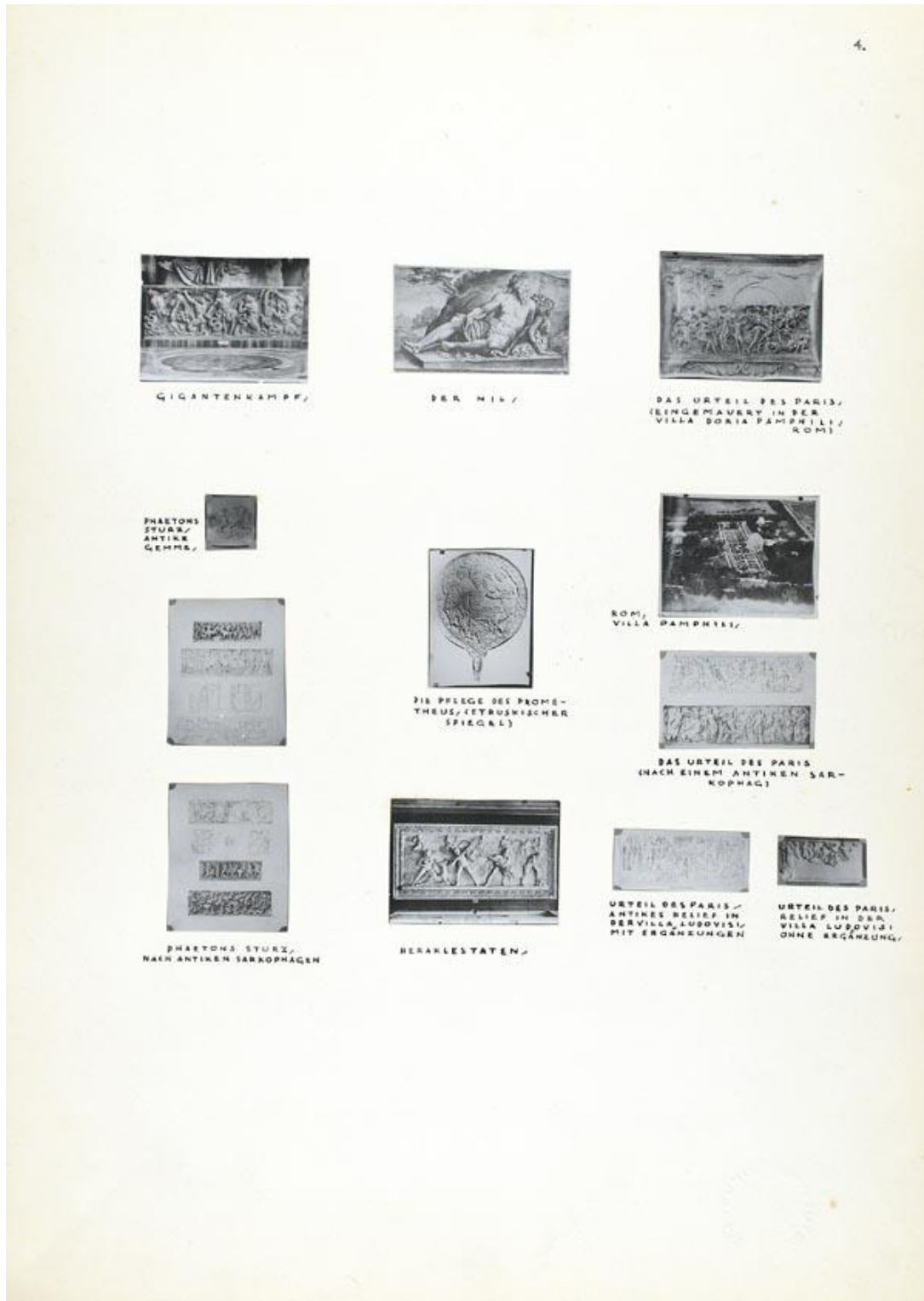


Fig.5 Geburtstagsatlas, Plate 4, 1937, © The Warburg Institute.



Fig.6 Bilderatlas *Mnemosyne*, Plate 24, 1929, © The Warburg Institute.

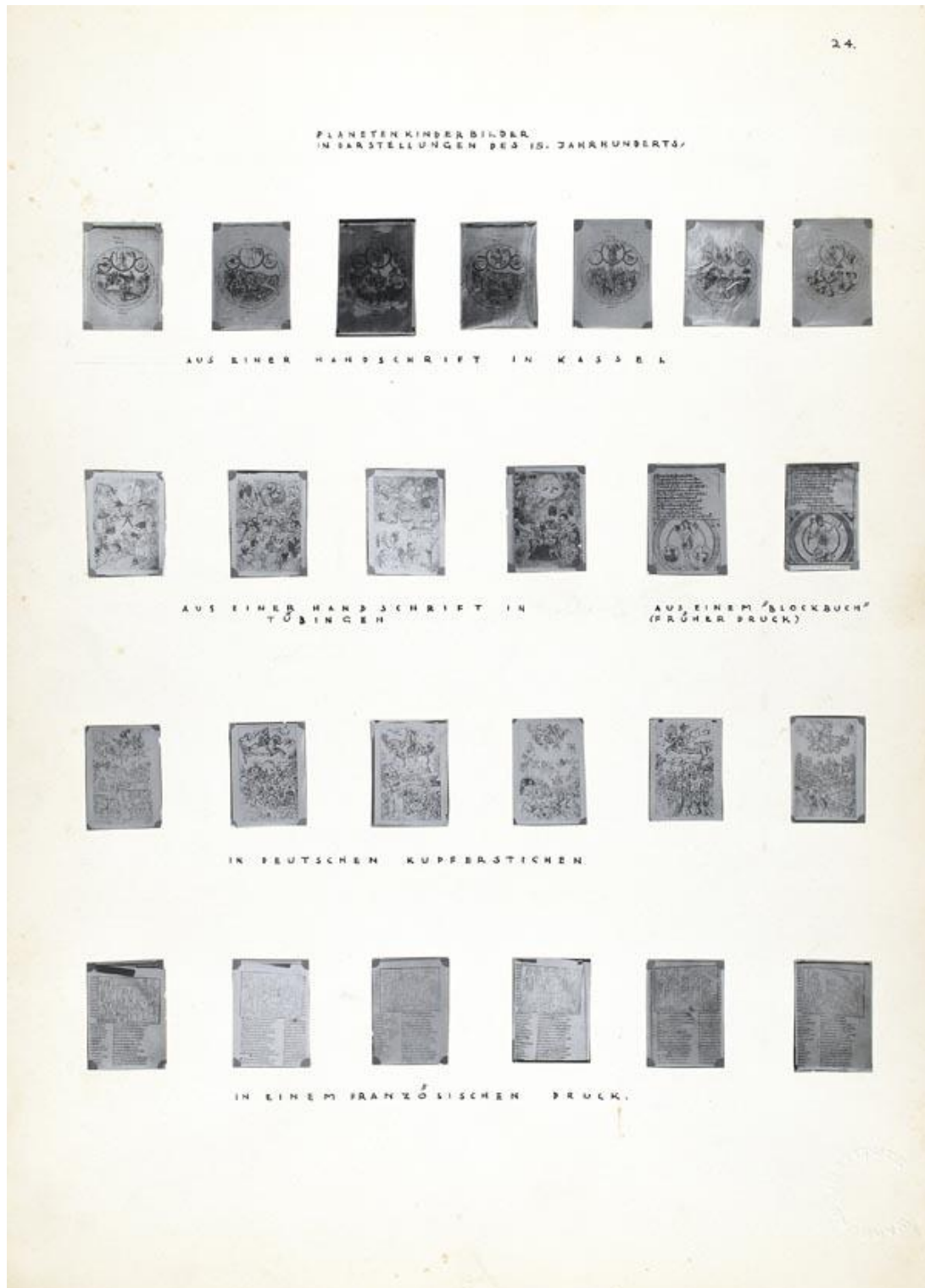


Fig.7 Geburtstagsatlas, Plate 24, 1937, © The Warburg Institute.

The tables of the 'Birthday Atlas' are indeed revisions of twenty-three of the original compositions included between panel A and panel forty-two of the so called 'ultimate version' (*letzte Fassung*, sixty-three tables marked as A-C, 1-79 with some gaps, September-October 1929) and are concluded with table 55 dedicated to Marcantonio Raimondi, to Édouard Manet and to the mythological subject of the *Judgement of Paris*. Therefore, they cover a historical-geographic extension that goes 'from Babylon to Manet'²⁴, but they especially centre on the materials and a phase of work (1928) in which Saxl's role was particularly significant.²⁵

The taxonomic paradigm that seems to structure the layout of the tables can easily be related to the type of Saxl's work arrangement, not so much for a direct participation but for consonance. It is an example of the so called 'Series of gestures', a thematic collection of material that was probably ordered and organized in 1927 by Saxl, starting with Warburg's photographic collection of works of art, and prepared for exhibition on panels during the Congress of Psychology in Hamburg in 1931, for which Fritz Saxl gave a discussion on gestural expressivity (Figs. 8a-b).²⁶



²⁴ It is a Warburg expression that referred to a preparatory phase of his Bilderatlas; see WIA III.15, *Tagebücher der KBW*, vol. No 7, 10 February 1929.

²⁵ See in particular the correspondence between the two scholars in that period.

²⁶ WIA, Fritz Saxl's working papers, 8. 'Ausdrucksgebärden', 1930-1931; v. Fritz Saxl, 'Die Ausdrucksgebärden der bildenden Kunst', in *Bericht über den XII. Kongreß der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychologie in Hamburg*, 12. – 16. April 1931 (*Im Auftrage der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychologie herausgegeben von Gustav Kafka*) Jena 1932, 13-25; then in *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, 419-431. A first hypothesis about these panels – only partially supported by documents – is in Ilsebill Barta Fliedl, Christoph Geissmar, ed, *Die Beredsamkeit des Leibes. Zur Körpersprache in der Kunst*, 'Veröffentlichung der Albertina', 31, Residenz Verlag, Salzburg-Wien 1992; see also Katia Mazzucco, 'Mnemosyne, il nome della memoria. Bilderdemonstration, Bilderreihen, Bilderatlas: una cronologia documentaria del progetto warburghiano', *Quaderni del Centro Warburg Italia*, III, 4-5, 2011.



Fig.8 (two plates) 'Series of gestures', (1927) 1931, The Warburg Institute

Here there was the use of a series of panels with photos of the same format, along with de-contextualized and isolated framed works having titles by themes (for instance *Klage*, *Conclamatio*, etc.), and a chronological layout by marked lines 'AN[antike]', 'M[ittel]A[alter]', 'RE[naissance]'. Although they are not conceived as (chronological) sequences or genealogies of a determined iconographic motive, and although they are built merely as the illustrative material for a speech, this series inserts and starts a process of genetic-evolutional association among the images. That is, in this case, a kind of transmission line of formulae adopted for the figurative rendering of expressive gestures. In this specific sense, the taxonomic sampling and order is ambiguously close to the association of an analogical character, or '*geistesgeschichtliche Parallelen*'.

Even in keeping the incompleteness of Warburg's *Bilderatlas* in consideration, along with the necessary and obvious phases of revision that any chosen publishing formula would have implied, the panels reconstructed for the 'Birthday Atlas' underwent a precisely intended effective reorganization and selection of materials. From this version of 1937, almost all the eccentric materials (newspapers photographs, newspapers clippings, stamps and advertisements) were excluded. In the arrangement of the images on the plates, the preference appeared to be to concentrate on the single themes for each assemblage, and to create a historical-sequential structure rather than the polyphony and anachronisms of Warburg's previous compositions. In these choices for the panels and text organization of the *Geburtstagsatlas*, we can read not only an indication and intention to provide easier legibility or simplification, given the purpose and aim of the work (a private publication), but also the desire to keep a distance from certain elements that characterized the Warburgian experiment.

Here we have then an initial specification – or complication – of the discourse. And in considering the selection of plates, their structure and text selection, we can hence refer to the *Geburtstagsatlas* as a *Gombrichsfassung* of the Atlas.

1939 Some of Gombrich's unpublished fragments on Warburg

His collaborators certainly were so much under the spell of this extraordinary enterprise that they were convinced that it was very close to completion when Warburg died on 26 October 1929. Even the cursory description of some of the themes and elements which have here been selected from this curious symphony of images may have sufficed to show the difficulties which would always have stood in the way of publication of so ambitious and esoteric a work.²⁷

Evidently, Gombrich was not entirely sure of this close completion, for which we should proceed with a further clarification. The *Biography* was not simply conditioned by Gombrich's first approach to the Warburgian work, nor was it affected by the overwhelming possibilities of the unpublished archives. The first nucleus of that biography was started at the end of the 1930s, precisely with Gombrich's research papers for an edition of *Mnemosyne*.

The works for the Atlas and the general publishing project were also continued after the *Geburtstagsatlas* and for the duration of Gombrich's first assignment at the Warburg Institute.²⁸ Among the proofs of Gombrich's work, there are also some file-cards of notes in English on the panels of the *Bilderatlas*. Gombrich also filled an inventory of the complete work by Warburg, partially in English, and organized it according to a programme formulated by Saxl.²⁹ As mentioned earlier, the work in progress also aimed at a publication that was to be made available to the English speaking scholarly public. The first step in 1939 was in fact the publication in English of the draft on the rituals of the Hopi Indians, indicated at the top of the list of the unpublished but completed works.³⁰

²⁷ Ernst H. Gombrich, *Intellectual biography*, 1970, 302.

²⁸ In 1938, when the Warburg Institute lost its temporary lodgings at Thames House and moved to the Imperial Institute Building in South Kensington, Gombrich moved to the newly-founded Courtauld Institute.

²⁹ WIA III.109.3, fols 6-12. The summary includes the chronological list of all of the published and unpublished works. In relation to these works and to the inventory of pieces, we shall review the ordered thematic collage works with notations by Gombrich in WIA III.105.1.4 as well as the letters taken from the correspondence and presented as a copy with the working papers of the stay in Rome in WIA III.105.1.5.

³⁰ Aby M. Warburg, 'Bilder aus dem Gebiet der Pueblo-Indianer in Nord-Amerika', text of the lecture held in Kreuzlingen, April 1923, WIA III.93; see 'A lecture on Serpent Ritual', in *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol No 2, 1938-39, 277-92; reprinted in Michael P. Steinberg ed., *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, Ithaca, 1995; see the critical edition of the text in Ulrich Raulff ed., *Schlangenritual. Ein Reisebericht*, Berlin 1988. In 1939, this version of the 1923 lecture regarding the Hopi rituals, was the first – and for sixty years, the only – English translation from Warburg's works. Even considering the circumstances and the particular fruition of an original and pioneer work like the lecture of Kreuzlingen, which attempted a reading of the Indian rituals with a crossing over of classical

Gombrich's endeavours however continued to concentrate more on the composition of a draft for the *Mnemosyne* Atlas. His study materials for this endeavour also included notes on the tables of Warburg's *Bilderatlas*, which had been excluded from the reconstruction for Max Warburg. These were notes dedicated to specific concepts or connections between panels, and taken from Warburg's original notes that served as the true file-cards for the tables.³¹ And it was these notes in particular that were to become the main object of an exchange of letters and correspondence with Gertrud Bing.³²

On 5 January 1940, Gertrud Bing wrote a short communication in English to Gombrich, for a very precise exchange of information: she thanked him for the writings that he had sent to her, and asked for a typed version of the material, which would have otherwise been almost unusable. She also explained that he would not have had to worry about the translations from German because she herself would have taken care of it without any difficulty. A few days later, on 11 January, the exchange of information became even more precise, and Bing provided a clearer picture of the state of the works on the texts for the plates.³³ At this stage and level, then, all work on the Atlas was to be set or translated into English.

Additionally, a couple of notes included in Bing's letter refer to two precise texts: an 'Introduction', and a text on Rembrandt.³⁴ The material filed by Gombrich and indicated as the 'Introduction' is a text dedicated to the general presentation of Warburg's thought and to the entire project of *Mnemosyne*.³⁵ The text – composed in

and anthropological studies, the operation betrayed Warburg's refusal of this text, considered unfinished and thus one that could not be scientifically proposed.

³¹ WIA III.109.2-4.

³² WIA III.108.6, comprises notes on the panels of *Mnemosyne*, bibliographical notes, photocopies of three letters (fol. 103, 5 January 1940, Gertrud Bing to Ernst Gombrich; fol. 93, 12 January 1940, Gertrud Bing to Ernst Gombrich; fol. 2, not dated Fritz Saxl to Ernst Gombrich (see WIA GC and see below); the materials are to be linked to the notes for the tables file cards and to the drafts of the two texts by Gombrich for the Atlas, archived with the documents on the *Geburtstagsatlas*, WIA III.109.6-7.

³³ Many of the notations that were archived like 'Geburtstagsatlas' [WIA III.109] have in fact been re-worked or arranged after the work set-up for Max Warburg; regarding the index cards for the tables, which Bing refers to in the letter, see WIA III.108.6, fols. 124 following.

³⁴ This short draft by Gombrich on Rembrandt is a summary of Aby Warburg's lecture of 1926, and it includes references to theatrical contexts in the Seventeenth century and to Rembrandt's study of Leonardo's *Last supper* – it is therefore a draft that can be referred also to the 70-75 panels of Warburg's *Bilderatlas*. See WIA III.109.7, 'Kronprinz von Schweden'; on the fol. 6v is signalled the date '24 February'; on the fol. 7, there are notes by Bing referring to the tables of the Atlas; see WIA III.108.6, fols. 84-85, 129-30. Also in the draft of the text from the conference on Rembrandt from 1926 (WIA III.101.2.1) there are a series of notes by Gombrich referring to the last series of panels in the *Bilderatlas*.

³⁵ WIA III.109.6 (the Literary Estate of E. H. Gombrich), typescript text signed 'text 1939' on the first fol. and 'Wbg' (Warburg) on each fol., numbered 1-31 archived as a translation of the Warburg's introduction to the Atlas (pressmark now changed and corrected); the material is not complete and the dictation is interrupted at fol. 31; see WIA III.108.6 fols. 124 following. This 'Introduction' by Gombrich can be linked to the schematic trace in WIA III.109.1.2, fols. 59-73, articulated as: 'Textband / Vorwort / Einleitung / A. Warburgs Stellung in der Kulturwissenschaft / a) [...] Renaissance – Barock / b) Antikebegriff – [...] Nietzsche, Rohde, Usener / c) Kulturbegriff – [...] Vischer, Symbol / d) (biologischen) Traditionbegriff – [...] Semon / e) [...] Hegel / [...] Die Mnemosyne [...]'. On this so-called 'Introduction' see also the letters by Bing to Gombrich preserved at the WIA (the Literary Estate of E. H. Gombrich), and particularly a letter from 19 February 1940.

an English that is at times uncertain – starts with a reference to the two volumes of the work by Warburg published in Germany.³⁶

The two volumes of Warburg's work, hitherto, published are more than treasure-house of learning and scholarship, they are a monument of a singular spirit, passionately devoted to history as to a means of self-enlightenment +NB in a psychological sense+. No one who has come to grips with this ceaseless struggle of a great mind which find its expression in almost every line Warburg wrote can escape its spell. Yet it is not of these qualities that these lines want to give a picture. They are embodied in his published works, in the living creation of his institute and also in every line of his letters, which will no doubt be published in their time. Our task is at once a more modest and perhaps also a more difficult one, – we want to reconstruct the framework (of ideas), as it were, which governed Warburg's research work. Not his 'system' – because it was too much the result of a natural growth, the different layers of which are not *regularised*, or smoothed out by any attempt of systematisation <logical schematisation> to be called a system; but not a mere outlook or approach either, because its very terminology betrays the desire for scientific clarity. [1]

The difficult task undertaken by the intellectual heirs of Warburg – and by Gombrich as their collaborator – is indicated as the reconstruction of a cultural panorama in which the work of the scholar was born and wherein it flourished. What develops seems to be a panorama of justification, more than understanding, of a work that escapes any 'attempt of logical schematisation'.

The scientific character of Warburg's terminology is defined by Gombrich as a 'typical product of the period' and set in the ambit of the positivist culture of nineteenth century studies, involving the natural sciences, the coeval studies on perception – with reference to Riegl – and Freudian psychoanalysis.

This terminology is a typical product of the period when Warburg's ideas were in formation. It is the period of triumphal advance of natural science, the period where it seemed only a matter of years that psychological and historical facts should also be grasped in the network of the exact sciences. Warburg was not the only young scholar who felt himself as an outpost *pioneer* of this inevitable evolution. Let us recall two of Warburg's contemporaries, Riegl, with his heroic attempt to express the whole of art in terms of a rather fragile theory of perception, then accepted as experimental

³⁶ Gombrich's text is a typescript draft text with corrections and interpolations by Bing – especially on linguistic and lexical questions – Saxl – annotations on content –, and Gombrich himself. The quotations that follow don't have the pretension to be part of a philologically critical edition of this uncompleted text, and are used functionally to the argumentations of this article. For this reasons, the part of text here quoted are normalized: the grammatical corrections noted by Gombrich and Bing are accepted and abbreviations are dissolved; lexical variations are left out and the inserts are indicated as follows: <notes or corrections by Gombrich>, *notes or corrections by Bing*, +notes or corrections by Saxl+; numbering of the pages are indicated in square brackets.

facts, and – on another level – Freud, whose revolution of psychology started out in an effort to base it on quantitative notions of psychic energies. All these theories had one fate in common – they are now regarded as a reaction <against> or even as victories over the materialistic positivism of the nineteenth [sic.] century. But they are equally its product. Though dealing with the Irrational forces in man throughout his life Warburg would never have conceded that his outlook was one of irrationalism. On the contrary, his ceaseless efforts to grasp irrational experiences of mankind in rational terms without killing *destroying* their essence makes up *accounts* for part of the sense of tension and drama in his writings – more than that, it is mainly responsible for the inherent fragmentary character of his very work. We can watch the struggle going on in his notes, shifting and re-shifting the wealth of his experiences and results to fit the proposed lines of rational thought. And nothing was more alien to his mind than a vague appeal to ‘intuition’.
[1-2]

This titanic Warburgian struggle against irrationalism is reflected precisely in his incessant work of terminological sharpening. The ‘fragmentary character’, examined by Gombrich, is partially attributed to this rigorous research – indicating the author’s dissatisfaction – of the scholar’s writings. The ‘fragmentariness’ is a peculiar trait of the style and of the whole of Warburg’s work, but also a systematic refusal of pure ‘intuition’: it was further highlighted, using other words, in the coeval review of the *Gesammelte Schriften*.³⁷

In this essay, one term in particular is indicated by Gombrich as exemplary of the formation process of Warburg’s lexicon: ‘Mnemosyne’.

The most difficult part of Warburg’s terminology seems also the most apt to give us the thread into our hands which may help us to unweave <unravel> the texture of his thoughts. It is the part he concedes to that play of mnemonic forces. MNEMOSYNE was written over the entrance of his library and Mnemosyne was to be the name of his last and most comprehensive work which was intended as a summary of his experiences as a scholar. Mnemosyne means remembrance and such a motto may well be fitting to all endeavours of historians. But the sense in which Warburg used the word transcends this obvious application. To him remembrance was not an act of individual consciousness only. It was a fatal <fateful> force, governing the destiny of mankind, a force of spiritual inheritance <heredity>, deeply rooted in the consciousness of the community. Mystical as this conception may sound, Warburg had adapted it from the writings of a materialist philosopher, Richard Semon, a disciple of the <german> protagonist of popular materialism towards 1900, the biologist Ernst Haeckel. We need not go into the details of Semon’s theory which is ‘monistic’ rather than materialistic, striving to express both the facts of inheritance and of memory

³⁷ Ernst H. Gombrich, review of Aby Warburg *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike*, in *A bibliography of the survival of the classics*, London 1938, (n. 1) 3-5.

in one set of physicalist terms. To Semon Mneme is an all pervading factor, directing the reactions of amoebae no less than those of man, the adaptations of species no less than those of individual. [2-3]

[...] It is not for us to discuss the biological aspects of this theory. It is sufficient to recognise that Warburg respected it as the result of the latest development of natural science. He began to look at the phenomena with which he had to deal from this angle. The problem of Renaissance for instance, which had fascinated him long before he now expressed in these new scientific terms. It was an essentially mnemonic phenomenon. An experience much like in pagan antiquity, once impressed upon the mind of Mediterranean man was undeletable. The energies at large in this great upheaval of human power might sink under the surface of actual consciousness but they could never cease to be potentially present. Once touched upon they awoke with all their power like any memory of bygone youth. [3-4]

[...] Semon had spoken of 'engrams' which preserved the psychic energy in the living nerve-substance of the brain – was anything of that kind to be conceded to the collective mind of the community? Warburg's answer was in the affirmative. He seemed little inclined to speculate on the idea of a collective memory in the biological sense, later developed by Jung and his school. [...] These 'engram' is Warburg's answer, do exist, and exist before our eyes. They are wrought in marble, written on paper, welded in sound. In one word, they are symbols. *Ikonographie Erweiterung Vischer*

Warburg applied this term in its most general meaning to comprise all perceptible signs of mental processes, emotions no less than thoughts. Gestures are symbols and so are mathematical signs, works of art, an philosophical systems. Even machines, so far as they betray a mental attitude. In these symbols the experiences of a generation gain form – as it were – as in Semon's engrams. And like those engram in the living substance the symbols are destined to carry the mnemonic energy across the centuries. [4-5]

Following this commentary, a central node of the Gombrich-Warburg intellectual contrast already becomes evident. It deals with Gombrich's distance and negative judgement of the Warburgian theory of the *Soziale Mneme*. By common consent, it was to be translated (and Gombrich thus translates it) as 'collective memory'. Along these lines, Gombrich rather rapidly liquidates the relationship between the concept of 'Mnemosyne' and the connection, given as very direct, with the term 'engram'. The problem, once again, is with a synthesis that often inevitably resembles a reductive simplification. The evaluation of the materialism of Semon's theory, that is the idea of a physical impression of emotional experiences in the cerebral matter, (which soon became completely outdated in scientific fields) liquidates the entire Warburgian experiment. The experiment aimed to provide 'a basis for the development of a new theory of the function of man's visual

memory'³⁸. Here it escapes, or at least intends to escape, the value of the terminological exchange and of the theoretical scheme of transmission by engram, which were adopted with the purpose of understanding or tracing the dynamics, technically the mechanisms, of the 'social mneme'. The main objects of this experiment were the process, the occasion, the ways of channelling certain entries of a visual language (before an artistic one) and not really the human emotional experience. For Gombrich, the Warburg 'engram' is the expressive image that comes before the image, the archetypal image, to then – as we read in his notes – become a symbol. The passage is direct, and Bing highlights the lack of an adequate reference to a crucial source for Warburg's theory on symbols, referring to the Hegelian philosopher Friedrich Theodor Vischer. What was missing in the Gombrich presentation seems to be a reference to the mechanism of 'iconography amplification' and an 'extension' of the symbolization process.³⁹ However, as it should perhaps be noted in regards to the archetypal image, not even Jung, after all, was ever really Jungian.

The fragmentary text proceeds like a panoramic discourse regarding the main contents of Warburg's *Bilderatlas*. It deals with a kind of presentation of the objects of study that were to have been collected in the unfinished *Mnemosyne* for an investigation on 'classical antiquity' and on the 'survival and destiny of its legacy'. In some of the dialogical notes that Gombrich added to what was dictated – addressing Bing and Saxl directly – what emerged were the problems of an adaptation of this elusive Warburgian lexicon, from its original linguistic and philosophical context to the receptive one.

Indeed no part of his teaching is better known than his thesis, that the Quattrocento resorted to classical patterns not for quiet repose – as did classicism – but for the representation of movement and 'pathos' <(Note: this is the gravest problem of all, pathos in English lies definitely a shade nearer to 'Ruehrung' than it does in Warburg's sense. Does anyone know how Schiller's "Ueber das Pathetische" has been translated? I am afraid the English of the 18th century would have said 'On the sublime', or 'on the grand manner' but both are impossible' ...)> in many instances, where we can prove actual borrowings from classical models, it was a figure in passionate motion from one of the sarcophagi which had attracted the Quattrocentist artist. [21]

It is these pages in particular that refer to the 'contents' of the images and their montage arrangement, which include another of Gombrich's firm points regarding a critique of iconology: the issue of the relationship between textual source and pictorial image. At various points, Gombrich in fact insists on a necessary cautiousness in establishing connections between text and image in the

³⁸ 'Die Grundlage [...] für die Entwicklung einer neuen Theorie der Funktion des menschlichen Bildgedächtnisses' WIA GC, 12 October 1929, Aby Warburg to Karl Vossler.

³⁹ Fol. 4, the note on 'Ikonographie Erweiterung' refer to Friedrich Theodor Vischer, 'Das Symbol', in *Philosophische Aufsätze Eduard Zeller gewidmet*, Leipzig, 1887, 153-93. The same note on Vischer is included in a letter from Saxl to Gombrich that comments this 'Introduction' in detail (see below).

interpretation of works of art, with reference, for instance, to studies on the astrological frescoes at Palazzo Schifanoia, attributed by Warburg to both Arabic and Latin textual tradition.⁴⁰ To this discourse, a note was added that refers to the work on panel 27 of Warburg's *Bilderatlas*:

<(Note for the plate: the source can not be Albricus or Fulgentius *Metaforalis*,⁴¹ this is a myth which did not stand a careful comparison of frescoes and texts, when I did my *Iconography*⁴² I did not find a single work of art besides downright illustration which does correspond to Albric. Nearest to it comes the *Venus tarocco*⁴³ but even then there are some minor inconsistencies, I only hope Goebbels never hear about that .> [13]

The reference to Goebbels and to the revivals of Esoterism in Nazi Germany can only be appreciated in this context. All historical flashes aside (of what were then current events), what is expressed as a note in these lines was to later take detailed form in the pages of *Aims and Limits of Iconology*:⁴⁴ the obsessive research or the invention of the text, that is of the program of an artistic representation was indicated by Gombrich as one of the main vices of the iconological studies.

The pages of this fragmented text are reviewed and densely annotated, and its material is considered absolutely temporary and provisional. In a letter by Saxl, addressed directly to Gombrich, the necessity of a greater articulation of 'Warburg's Quellen' (sources) is stigmatized, above all in regard to a better understanding and elaboration of basic concepts such as 'Orientierung', 'Denkraum', and 'Symbol'. The Warburgian lexicon cannot be understood as the simple result of scientific trends. In particular, the interpretive psychological boosts of Gombrich are the object of the point (and disappointment) for Saxl, who instead refers with insistence to the philosophical and philological thought of nineteenth-century Germany for an adequate understanding of the magnitude of these sources.⁴⁵

To follow the trace of Gombrich's work on Warburg would mean to go much further, beyond the *Mnemosyne* project, and to look into an episode of the history of the Warburg Institute following the deaths of Fritz Saxl in 1948 and Gertrud Bing in

⁴⁰ Aby M. Warburg, 'Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia zu Ferrara', in *L'Italia e l'Arte straniera. Atti del X Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte, 1912*, Roma, 1922, 179-93; reprinted in Aby M. Warburg, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike*, Berlin, 1998, 459-81 (English translation in *The renewal of pagan antiquity*, Los Angeles 1999, 563-91).

⁴¹ Here is a reference to the complex mythological and iconographic tradition collected on the *Libellus de deorum imaginibus* of the thirteenth century, attributed to Albricus, and on the *Fulgentius metaforalis*, a summa of mythology collected in the fifteenth century (from the *Mythologiae* by the doctus Fabius Planciades Fulgentius (V-VI century) and other texts).

⁴² The unfinished project of a book on iconography, written with Otto Kurz, and never published because of the outbreak of the Second World War.

⁴³ Referring to the series of *Tarot* attributed to Mantegna.

⁴⁴ Introductory essay to *Symbolic Images*, 1972, 1-25.

⁴⁵ See WIA III. 108.6, fol. 2, photocopy of a handwritten letter, without date, from Fritz Saxl to Ernst Gombrich; see the typed version in WIA GC (Saxl), dated April 1943; on the same questions see WIA GC (Gombrich), 19 April 1943, Ernst H. Gombrich to Fritz Saxl, and 10 August 1943 Ernst H. Gombrich to Fritz Saxl.

1964.⁴⁶ However, a symbolic end to this vicissitude can be found in Bing's unfinished work. Shortly before her death, as she was occupied on a trip for the collection of documentary materials for the drafting of her important biographical text on Warburg, Bing continued to exchange ideas with Gombrich in regard to the thought of the master, also by sending him her own temporary manuscripts and asking his opinions and general view. In one of this letters, Bing wrote:

The fact is, in my opinion, that he [Warburg] goes off the artist's job altogether with it. There is not a word in any of his later writings concerning other formulae, taken from Raphael or Michelangelo maybe. He does not care about them nor would he have had any objection if they had been pointed out to him. What I meant to say with my linking sentence that he looked at the Pathosformel in the same way as the copyists of ancient marbles in the Quattrocento is this: he concentrates more and more on the smallest units of 'language' of images, on the words as it were, instead of on sequences. The Pathosformel is the single posture or gesture as it is found on the marble – only on that assumption does the 'Wanderstrasse' make any sense. [...] The Pathosformel is only the first 'word' that he finds in that language of imagery which makes the relation between the *Ausdruck* – in the sense of *Bezeichnung* – and its contents perfectly clear to him. [...] The formula – that is to say a sharply outlined image – corresponds exactly to what we call 'Ausdruck' in the linguistic sense, just as the words triumph, terror, awe or whatever it may be are the expressions for the mental situations which they denote. That, I think, is the value which the Pathosformel has for him; and that is also part of the idealising or, as you very aptly (and newly) call it, 'maximalising' style is only incidental. The pathos form is one of the well-chosen expressions making for an exalted diction, but it does not by itself constitute the style.

[...] Even if I had succeeded in making all this clear in my last two pages, you would not have found in there very much help for the question as you pose it. You are concerned with the syntax of the language of style – and if it was not pressing the *simile* too hard; I would say Warburg is really concerned about its grammar, or rather the formation and application of words. It seems to me he was getting less and less interested in the individual artist's way of expressing himself, except in so far as his choice of words reflects on their meaning.

[...] The trouble is, I think, with Warburg that one has got to stress again and again that what sounds like an elegant phrase or even a modern

⁴⁶ A first draft of the book dedicated to "Warburg's Ideas" was composed by Gombrich between 1945 and 1949 (see. WIA, Gombrich's Papers, V.10.1, 'Aby Warburg's Ideas, Draft by E.H. Gombrich, 1947-48 with comments by G. Bing, deposited on 20 March 1996'): abandoned after the death of Saxl, Henri Frankfort proposed to publish the materials together with a true Biography that Bing was writing. A later draft acts as a manuscript of the *Intellectual Biography* (WIA (the Literary Estate of E. H. Gombrich), 'Warburg Biography MS 54'). In 1966, Gombrich deposited these documents at the Warburg Institute Archive, explaining in a note his own desire of documenting the intense exchange of ideas with Gertrud Bing regarding Warburg's thought.

catch-word is in fact an extremely limited concept. Actually it is the same with his use of 'symbol', but this is not the moment to enlarge on it.⁴⁷

To lose sight of some important links and connections, to lack respect for the due philological and genetic verifications compared with the 'filiations' – in reference to the '*geistesgeschichtliche Parallelen*' – are some accusations brought forth by Gombrich against Warburg's followers. However, to stop at the '*stemma codicum*', or at a genetic outline – or at the process, rather than at the methodological value of these philological theoretical tools – can hinder understanding of some of the important elements of Warburg's 'grammar' of images. At the centre of the problem are the mechanisms of creation and a case variation of the historical variants of form and sense, for a determined choice of visual linguistic entries. In these terms, also the Warburgian concept of *Wanderstrasse*, or the path of images migrations and wandering, acquires meaning. Ultimately, the focus in Warburg's research is more centred on the mechanisms and singularities, rather than sequences, of each visual unit.

However, among the papers so laboriously developed, it seems that one of the first notes for the contents and sense of the Atlas did not even raise Gombrich's attention:

A general layout of a grammar of gesture language would be called for: wealth of form and (phrase) organizing principles. A morphological maxim would be revealed: the ritual experience (Greek mythical-religious or Roman historical-political) as imprint of the expression of tragic emotion. [...] The sarcophagi [...] preserve deeply moving engrams of chthonic emotion in unipolar imprinted creation.⁴⁸

The morphological mark of Warburg's research dedicated to the gestural language (as well as the efforts to translate it), alongside the studies on the keywords of the tragic language tradition, is expressly indicated as the structure of his own visual work on the *Pathosformeln*. The section dedicated to the ancient pre-coinage of the work that Warburg was devising was considered as a grammar that

⁴⁷ WIA (the Literary Estate of E. H. Gombrich), letter from Bing to Gombrich, 15 August 1961. In those weeks Bing was travelling in Switzerland; the year after that she went also to Italy, Venice and then Florence, where she was in touch with Delio Cantimori, working for the first Italian edition of the Warburg writings (Aby M. Warburg, *La rinascita del paganesimo antico*, G. Bing ed, Firenze (1966) 1996. In 1965 the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* published an essay by Bing on Warburg: the article, a considerably revised version of a lecture given at the Courtauld Institute in 1962, was prepared to serve as an introduction to *La rinascita* (Gertrud Bing, 'Aby M. Warburg', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. No 28, 1965, 299-313; Italian translation in *La rinascita del paganesimo antico*, 1966, 8-31).

⁴⁸ WIA III.15, Journals, 'Tagebücher der KBW', vol. No 3, 30 July 1927: '[...] eine Sprachlehre der Gebärdensprache im Umriß zu liefern: Formenschatz u[nd] <Satz> Ordnungs-Principien. Eine <morphologische> Maxime würde sichtbar werden: das kultliche Erlebnis (griechisch-mythisch-religiös oder römisch-istorisch-politisch) als Prägwerk der Ausdruckswelt tragischer Ergriffenheit. [...] Die Sarkophage (Treppe v[on] S[anta] Maria Aracoeli!) erhalten die erschütternden Engramme chthonischer Ergriffenheit in <einpolig> geprägter Gestalt[un]g'. I would like to thank Werner Rappl for the English translation from the *Tagebücher*.

could indicate *per exempla* some key rules for the function of gestural expressivity in art.

Between 1936 – year of the first assignment of Gombrich at the Warburg Institute – and 1966 – publication year of the last of Bing's work on Warburg (the Italian edition of his writings) and the centenary of Warburg's birth – the role of Gombrich in the transmission of Warburg scientific legacy changed radically. As Wind had already raised accusations regarding the *Intellectual biography*, this transmission line deserves to be re-evaluated in considering the complex gestation of the book, in adequately making use of Bing's indications about the distance between the 'syntax of the language of style' and through a 'formation and application of words' in the 'language of images'.

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