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## Epistemology of Wandering, Tree and Taxonomy

The system figuré in Warburg's Mnemosyne project within the history of cartographic and encyclopaedic knowledge

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# Epistemology of Wandering, Tree and Taxonomy

The system figuré in Warburg's Mnemosyne project within the history of cartographic and encyclopaedic knowledge

Sigrid Weigel

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- 1 Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* makes use of a very specific form of the genre and medium of atlas. Instead of projecting geographical knowledge onto a two-dimensional plane as the conventional cartographic map does, his atlas consists of a number of plates each of which is a configuration of reproduced images, which are collected under a common heading or leitmotif. Gertrude



Bing later supplemented these headings with a short explanation, - for example: "Pathos of Suffering in energetic inversion (Pentheus, maenads at the cross). Bourgeois keen, heroized. Ecclesiastic keen. Death of the redeemer. Entombment. Meditation of death." (Fig.1).<sup>1</sup>

Fig.1



Plate 42 in: Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE*. Ed. by Martin Warnke with the assistance of Claudia Brink. Berlin 2000, p. 77.

## Mnemosyne – a cultural technique for investigating a technique of the mind

- 2 Warburg's idea was to print the *Mnemosyne-Atlas* as a three volume publication, namely one volume with images and two volumes of text. Had he succeeded in accomplishing the *Mnemosyne*-project and in bringing a number of his plates between two book covers, we peradventure might hold his atlas in our hands or probably, because of its scale, have it on the desk in order to study it, or better: let our eyes wander between the ten to thirty images collocated on each page (Fig.2-Fig.3).

Fig.2

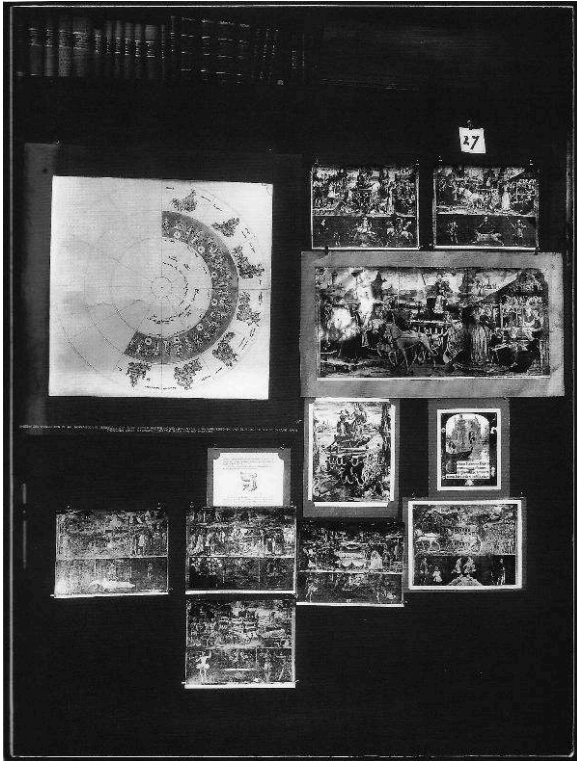


Plate 27 in: *ibid.*, p. 47.

Fig.3



Plate 47 in: *ibid.*, p. 87.

- 3 However, the *Mnemosyne*-Atlas we are *actually* talking about has never been finished – and would presumably never have been turned into the form of a printed book, – even if his author had survived his heart attack on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1929. But it makes no small difference whether one is talking about an atlas as a printed volume or about the more than 60 image tables that have been handed down to us by means of photography. It is the latter, namely an atlas as a work in progress<sup>2</sup>, that is the form of Warburg’s project named *Mnemosyne*, and the only one we may refer to when talking about Warburg’s *Bilderatlas*.
- 4 Since the tables were meant to stand upright as boards in a room side by side, the form of Warburg’s atlas may be described as an inverted cartographic atlas (Fig.4).

**Fig.4**



Reading hall with Rembrandt exhibition, 1926. In: *ibid.*, p. XI.

- 5 Instead of visualising and projecting the knowledge of the three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional map, the *Mnemosyne* atlas is itself a kind of projection into space, more precisely: a projection of the knowledge of images into a spatial constellation. When Warburg himself used his boards as a background stage for his lectures in order to visually present a certain configuration of images or to show the “migration” (*Wanderung*) of symbols, motifs, figures, gestures and pathos formulas he was interpreting in his talk, this situation turned the plates into a specific site of knowledge. Due to the spatial positioning, this form of presentation is related to an exhibition. Instead of moving in front of the pictures in the space of a museum, the audience, during listening to the lecture, could, with their eyes, wander from one table to the other and visually move around between the images on each board, up and down, left and right, back and forth. (Fig.5)

Fig.5

Plate 44 in: *ibid.*, p. 81.

- 6 In such a momentum the atlas actually turned into a common site for contemplating images and for reflecting the historical and iconological relationships between them. In this situation, that is to say when the *Mnemosyne* atlas was *in situ* and *in actu*, the series of plates effectively constructed a sort of *Denkraum*, a common space for thought. Both the spacing of the plates as well as the intervals between the images opened up a new space for thinking, reading, interpreting, - and for seeing, discovering and re-reading the history of images, of iconology and of culture. In this kind of material culture of an atlas technique Warburg found the ideal form for presenting his idea of an *Ikonologie des Zwischenraums*, an iconology of interval, or better, interspace, as he called his project in his notes to *Mnemosyne*: “Iconology of interspace [*Zwischenraum*]. Art historical material for a developmental physiology of the pendulous movement [*Pendelgang*] between stating a cause [*Ursachensetzung*] by means of images and doing this by means of signs.”<sup>3</sup>
- 7 The possibility to assemble and reassemble the boards for any subject or lecture and to arrange and rearrange different pictures on any of the plates is a characteristic that qualifies the atlas - beside his library and his note-boxes, *Zettelkästen* - as the most important medium of what Warburg himself called a laboratory of “kulturwissenschaftlicher Bildgeschichte”, a very dense formulation which may be read as history of images and also as history as recognised through images, examined by a cultural scientific approach.<sup>4</sup> Therefore the plates of the atlas *in situ* and *in actu* correspond to the table in the sense of the scholar’s work place mentioned in that passage of Warburg’s text on *Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther* (1920) where he invents this laboratory as a site where scholars from art history and the studies of religion come together at one and the same workbench.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the medium of the atlas became the perfect cultural technique for Warburg’s

methodological-theoretical perspective in investigating the history of images as a function of a technique of the mind, namely as an archive of pathos formulas. In considering the images of gestures as memory images of physiologically and energetically expressed movements of the human body – or as a dynamographical archive<sup>6</sup> – and understanding them as a sort of human civilising action, Warburg was interested in interpreting their meaning as a function of the mind's technique, as a “geistestechnische Funktion”:

“The *Mnemosyne* in its pictorial foundation which is characterised by the attached / following atlas is meant first and foremost as nothing more than an inventory of the antique pre-coinings [*Vorprägungen*] which had a demonstrable impact on the style of how life in movement was depicted during the Renaissance.

Such a comparative examination had [...] to attempt to understand the meaning of these commemoratively preserved expressive values as a reasonable function of the mind's technique by means of a deeper social-psychological investigation.”<sup>7</sup>

- 8 From this text written as an introduction for the publication of *Mnemosyne* it is obvious that the transformation of the atlas into a book would have degraded the image-plates to a mere adjunct or supplement to Warburg's psycho-historical view of the history of culture. However, in its unaccomplished form as a mobile cultural technique it implies all the flexible components which Didi-Huberman and others have associated with the technique of montage in modern art. And this is also to be regarded as a modern survival or return of an *ars combinatoria* from the hermetic and cabalistic traditions of knowledge.

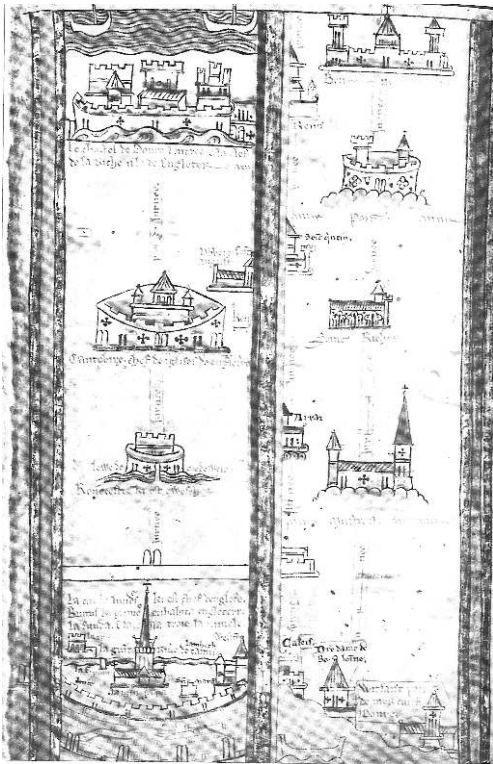
## ***Nachleben* of pre-modern aspects in the encyclopaedic era**

- 9 As regards the position of the atlas within the history of knowledge and its relationship to the arts, Warburg's atlas comprises characteristics of both aspects from modern genres of art and science, and elements from pre-modern figurations of knowledge and art. To put it in Warburgian concepts, many aspects of his atlas may be regarded as a *Nachleben*, as an ‘afterlife’ of pre-modern forms of knowledge which go back to the age preceding the separation of art and science as well as those of pictures and words, that is to say preceding the emergence of the classical encyclopaedic knowledge with its reign of a taxonomic order of things. Each table of the *Mnemosyne*, for example, is very similar to the structure of Baroque emblem books where the picture is always accompanied by, firstly, a lemma, motto, or inscription, and, secondly, an epigram, subscription or explanation. – And some of Warburg's pictorial configurations rather seem to stem from the age of curiosity with its *Kunstkammern* than from modernity. What his collection of pictures shares with the *Kunstkammer* is at least the character of an obsessive collection, the result of an intellectual and intimate story of fascination with certain details. Other tables do not yield the meaning of the arrangement, of the connection between the collocated pictures at first glance; they need to be read by visually wandering back and forth between the individual reproductions and following different pathways in order to reconstruct the archaeological layers of the constellation.
- 10 Thus the reading of the table gets turned into a literal corporealisation of Warburg's figure of *Wanderung* or *Wanderstraße*, which he invented in order to describe the ‘migration’ of symbols, images, and astrological figures from culture to culture in both

time and space.<sup>8</sup> For example in his deciphering of the mural cycles at the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara (1912), where he discovered the enigmatic personifications of the twelve months as being late heirs of the ancient figures of Indian deans (*Dekane*):

- 11 “The complicated and fantastic symbolism of these figures has hitherto resisted all attempts at interpretation; by extending the purview of the investigation to the East, I shall show them to be components of surviving astral notions of the Greek pantheon. They are, in fact, nothing else than symbols for the fixed stars – although over the centuries, in their wandering from Greece through Asia Minor, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Spain, they have lost the clarity of their Grecian outline.”<sup>9</sup>
- 12 With this aspect of ‘wandering’ both as an epistemic figure and a practise of reading images, Warburg’s atlas constitutes a very peculiar kind of its genre; it may be considered as a modern follower of late antique and medieval cartography. Within the development of topographical and isometric maps, which consists of transforming the heterogeneity of the world into a homogeneous schematic image in order to project this onto a two-dimensional page, the emergence of the cartographic technique, a “highly artificial construction” as Harvey puts it in his *History of Topographical Maps* (1980)<sup>10</sup>, had been preceded by pictorial maps that depicted not a virtual bird’s-eye view but an itinerary. Viewing or reading such a pictorial map means to perambulate stations or images in one’s imagination. (Fig.6)

**Fig.6**



Map of Matthew Paris' itinerary from London to Apulia, 13<sup>th</sup> century. In: Paul Dean Adshead Harvey, *The History of Topographical Maps. Symbol, Pictures and Survey*. London 1980, p. 66.

- 13 The figurative walking alongside images is an epistemic centrepiece of Warburg’s atlas. In theoretical terms it may best be described as a commemorative practise very much



like the traces and images in the Freudian conception of memory. This correspondence between a pre-modern material culture of knowledge, the pictorial itinerary map, and the post-neurological description of memory in psychoanalysis, which is conceptualised as a scripture of images, provides a wonderful example for Walter Benjamin's anthropological theory in his *Doctrine of the Similar (Lehre vom Ähnlichen, 1933)*. There he argues that certain human capacities – he talks mainly of the mimetic faculty –, which in the phylogenetic and ontogenetic prehistory were directed to the outer world (i.e. mimetic behaviour and magic practises of interpreting bowels and astral constellations) have during the course of civilisation turned into an intellectual capacity. In the case of the mimetic faculty, the capacity of recognising the similar has “found its way into language and writing, [...] thus creating for itself in language and writing the most perfect archive of nonsensuous similarity.”<sup>11</sup> According to this perspective, the cultural technique of a wandering epistemology has been transformed into a technique of the mind, namely recognition through memory traces and images. Against this backdrop it is recognizable that the form of Warburg's atlas exactly mirrors the subject matter of his project, namely a reading of a cultural history through images and the development of the human culture from what he calls a *Greifmensch*, a man grasping with hands, to the state of *Begreifen*, comprehension.

- 14 To put it in Foucault's terms: In Warburg's *Mnemosyne-tableaux* elements from the epistemology of similitude reach into a genre established in the classical era of representation, i.e. the age of a classificatory order of things. - This is obvious not only because Warburg's plates resemble in many aspects the depictions of early modern encyclopaedic projects in that his principle of collocating pictures to a configuration neither follows conventional concepts of art history - like artist, epoch, style, or subject-matter/motif - nor modern scientific concepts of distinguishing different species, genres, and classes of things and beings. Instead it is structured by what Foucault in his description of “the four similitudes” (*convenientia, aemulatio, analogia, sympathy*), by referring to Paracelsus, has called signatures (cf. Fig.3):
- 15 “The system of signatures reverses the relation of the visible to the invisible. Resemblance was the invisible form of that which, from the depth of the world, made things visible; but in order that this form may be brought out into the light in its turn there must be a visible figure that will draw it out from its profound invisibility. This is why the face of the world is covered with blazons, with characters, with ciphers and obscure words – with ‘hieroglyphes’, as Turner called them. And the space inhabited by immediate resemblances becomes like a vast open book; it bristles with written signs; every page is seen to be filled with strange figures that intertwine and in some places repeat themselves. All that remains is to decipher them.”<sup>12</sup>
- 16 Although Foucault's historiography of the human sciences shows how the similitude has been excluded from epistemology during the subsequent development, i.e. the advent of the age of representation, classification and taxonomy, his *Order of Things* is to be read as a ‘rescuing critique’ in the Benjaminian sense, that is to say as illuminating a phenomenon in the moment of its disappearance. For Foucault simultaneously emphasises that resemblance is indispensable for any recognition. In this context he emphasises that the relationship between things is nothing which is just there, inherent in the nature of things, instead it is a result of the human perception – or rather the human eye and mind. “There is no resemblance between the things without imagination.”<sup>13</sup> In his historiography of the human sciences the imagination,

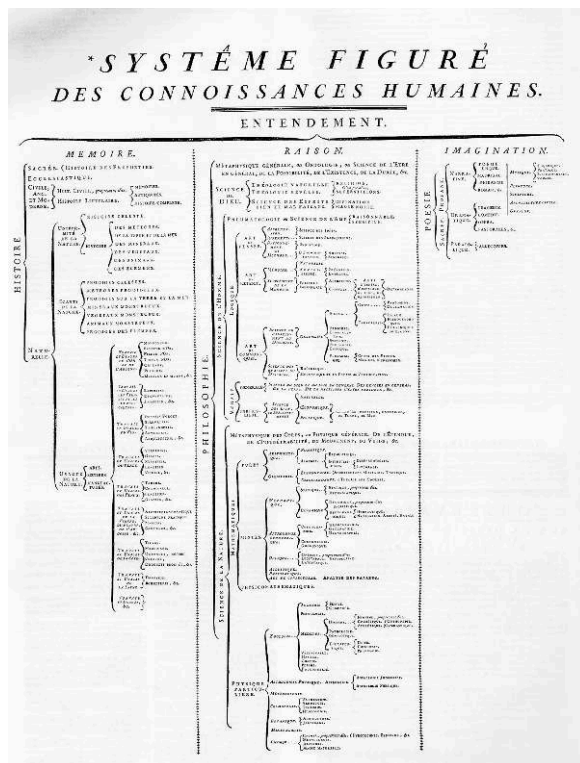
together with “language as literature”, i.e. the poetic language full of images, takes over the task to provide a sphere for the survival of similitude in the rise of the encyclopaedic will to fully capture the world by means of a taxonomical and chronological order of things and beings. Warburg’s atlas is part of a return of elements of similitude after the classical era of representation. In making use of these capacities, the concept of history is transformed into an image-structure. “The relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but like an image [*bildlich*]”<sup>14</sup>, as Walter Benjamin states in his notes of the *Arcades*-project.

## Atlas and collection – supplement to the encyclopaedic taxonomy

- 17 Warburg’s *Mnemosyne* is part of a very specific version of the atlas which has been developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a visual-poetic form of knowledge and, as Didi-Huberman puts it in the catalogue of the current exhibition, as a combination of an aesthetic and an epistemic paradigm.<sup>15</sup> This hybrid genre developed by writers, artists, as well as some scholars, shares the appearance and form of a scientific atlas but it neglects the pretention to assemble the complete knowledge of the epoch in one systematic representation, - a project which found its ideal, model and its climax in the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. Published between 1751 and 1780 in 35 volumes, the project includes 60.000 articles. Whereas such an endeavour is only possible with the support of innumerable contributors, the post-encyclopaedic atlas is often engendered by the obsession of a single author and based on his own collection gathered together over decades. The latter can be described as a poetic-visual supplement, and sometimes even counterpart, to the scientific order of knowledge, in that it emerged at the margins of the formation and proliferation of the big encyclopaedic projects of the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century. In methodological terms it is a kind of echo to the fundamental and ultimately unsolvable problems of an encyclopaedic taxonomy based on the principles of comprehensive knowledge, systematic structure, classification, alphabetic order etc.
- 18 In the case of the *Encyclopédie* these problems can be studied in the preliminary reflections of the two founding authors, d’Alembert and Diderot, forming the methodological matrix of the project. Here, where they discuss especially the tension between deduction and distinction, between origin and classification of knowledge, the principle of kinship plays the role of an uneasy, outdated but indispensable part. In his *Discours préliminaire* (1751) d’Alembert writes:
- 19 “If it is already often difficult enough to prescribe a limited number of rules or general concepts for the individual sciences and arts, it is no less difficult to accommodate the infinitely intricate branches of human knowledge in a single unified system. [...] Our first step in this study is thus the analysis of - if we may use the term - the family tree and of the connections and continuities between the areas of our knowledge, the probable causes of their development and the characteristics of the distinctions made; in a word, we must return to the origin and emergence of our conceptions.”<sup>16</sup>
- 20 Thus the preface to the encyclopaedic survey describes the prehistory of the project as a family tree. That the initiator of this ambitious project thinks it necessary to apologise for the figure of the family tree signals its status as a kind of foreign body in

the systematic and alphabetical ordering. Whereas d’Alembert’s introduction reflects on the impossibility of a coherent system, Diderot’s *Prospectus d’Encyclopédie* (1750) enacts the transition from speaking of object and matter (science, the free arts, the mechanical arts) to engendering a system which, like a kind of palimpsest, underpins the encyclopaedia, namely the three classes of memory, reason, and imagination. Each heading of an article is followed by parentheses in order to assign any concept to its respective class – for example “Généalogie, f.f. (Hist.)” or “Familiarité, (Morale)”, “Famille, (Droit nat.)” and “Famille, (Jurispr.)”. Thus a systematic cipher supplements the alphabetical ordering. Although these ciphers mark the position of each concept within the system, the underlying genealogical structure becomes visible only in the graphic representation which supplements the comprehensive “Explication Détaillée du Systeme des Connaissances Humaines”. (Fig.7)

Fig.7



Système figuré ses connoissances humaines. Entendement. Memoire, Raison, Imagination; in: Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des metiers*. Paris 1751. Source: <http://ets.lib.uchicago.edu/ARTFL/OLDENCYC/images>

- 21 Referring to Bacon’s system in *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623) with the distinction of three main faculties of the mind, (1) the memory that records, (2) the judgement that analyses, compares and processes, and (3) the imagination that imitates and distorts, Diderot develops three classes of knowledge: Mémoire/Histoire, Raison/Philosophie, Imagination/Poésie. They form the frame for the entire knowledge to be included. Thus responding to the task formulated by d’Alembert to connect branched diversity and unity, Diderot developed a system that in its structure combines the two modes of classification and derivation/deduction. In the graphic representation of his *Système figuré*, the order of his explication is translated into a tableau in which the multiple derivations and sub-divisions of groups of knowledge are written one next to

the other. Leaving behind the alternative of an ascending or descending tree, derivation is here projected into the horizontal plane. As a graphic schema, the *Système figuré* is thus a hybrid figure, to the extent that it presents a mixture of the figures of register and the genealogical tree. The tree as a schema originating from pre-modern kinship functions here as the graphic palimpsest of the whole project but it disappears in the alphabetic order of articles in the published volumes. Thus it may be read as a symptom for the ambivalent equivocal role of similitude and relationship in the taxonomic era.

- 22 It was in the realm of literature where the subjected world of resemblance survived, - this not least due to a certain poetic genre entitled collection (*Sammlung*). After the completion of the *Encyclopédie* and concurrent to many following encyclopaedic projects, a number of authors started to collect that kind of knowledge which had found no proper place in the scientific system, especially scattered knowledge from the oral and popular tradition, as well as images, stories and figures from mystic, magic and other sorts of 'impure' knowledge. The project of collecting narrations, legends, poems and songs from the people became most famous by the work of the Brothers Grimm in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. But their collection of German fairytales (1812/15) was only the anacrusis for a century of collections in literature. One of the masters of the literary art of collecting was Heinrich Heine, who used the title *Salon* for the composition of his own compound texts, thus offering his prose, poems and dreams, so to speak, to the wandering eyes of a museum visitor. In his book on *Elementargeister* (1836), *Elementary Ghosts*, i.e. ghosts dwelling in the elements (in French published as *Traditions populaires* together with his *Dieux en Exil* in 1955), he discusses the work of the Brothers Grimm as part of a reverberant sound of the voices from prehistory, stating that "not everything is dead which has been buried". When Heine refers to Paracelsus' description of the elementary ghosts, he critically comments the attempt to force their plurality into a system: "However, to capture popular belief systematically, as some authors intend, is as malapropos as to bind clouds passing by in a frame. At the most one may gather the similar together under certain rubrics."<sup>17</sup> When Warburg, who was an avid reader of Heine, developed his *Kulturwissenschaft*, cultural science, his steps followed these poetic traces, - at least with one of his feet while the other one was grounded in exact sciences.<sup>18</sup> Not only that he named his *Ninfa* in reference to Heine a "Goddess in (the) Exile", his view of culture was also dedicated to the aim of including the popular and 'impure' traditions into his encyclopaedic project of collecting images, symbols and expressive gestures of European cultural history.

## Working through the limits of the two cultures

- 23 However, it was not from the beginning and not just in one step that Aby Warburg invented his cultural technique of the atlas. Similar to repeating phylogenesis during ontogenesis, his work may be described as some kind of repetition and working through of the problems of an encyclopaedic work which is methodologically situated on the threshold between the sciences and the arts and which, as a whole, was committed to open up art history to *Kulturwissenschaft*, - the latter comprising such different subject matters as all sorts of pictures and texts, symbols and gestures, astronomical knowledge and planetary deities, tapestries and the court's celebrative culture, theatre costumes and opera, last wills and patronage, airship and submarines

as they were imagined in the medieval, stamps and newspapers, and so forth. The work on the *Mnemosyne*-project, which occupied Warburg for years, was the product of a kind of re-conceptualisation of his approach after his return from Ludwig Binswanger's sanatorium in Kreuzlingen in August 1924, when Warburg called himself a revenant from his yearlong psychic illness. Almost no publication exists from these last five years of Warburg's life, but a lot of manuscripts of lectures<sup>19</sup> and an enormous number of notes as well as a huge collection of reproduced images. During these years all the efforts of Warburg and his colleagues were dedicated to two endeavours, the *Mnemosyne* and the establishment of the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* (K.B.W.) as the intellectual and material centre for new scholarship, i.e. as the library, archive and laboratory for *Kulturwissenschaft*. Most of Warburg's published writings indeed stem from the 25 years of his work between the printed version of his dissertation in 1893 and the year 1918, when his illness broke out. In the first edition of his complete published writings, undertaken by Gertrud Bing in 1932, they are running up to a volume of about 700 pages.

- 24 From his published oeuvre it is hard to identify how deeply the author was involved in the ambition of developing a kind of psychological history of expressions in ancient and Renaissance culture and arts, based on a theory informed by contemporary natural science, i.e. mechanics, physics, biology and psychology. For the most part the subject matter of these texts remains in the field of cultural, religious and social phenomena and within the history of rational knowledge and its relation to magic or mystical traditions. Only sporadically does the reader come across a terminology originating from the natural sciences, indicating his will to emphasise the material foundations of engendering symbols, gestures and art; and 'material' for Warburg meant expressions and symbols based in the energetic and kinetic state of the human body. The signifiers for this underlying theoretical interest are leitmotifs like the energetic, the dynamics of pathos formulas, the equilibrium or pendulum of the soul's forces, - as for example in the analysis of the mentality of the patricians, bankers and merchants in Florentine quattrocento. Yet this impression must be revised to a large extent when we look at the innumerable notes, manuscripts and entries of Warburg's bequest in the archive in London. There one can study his intensive, obsessive, and endless attempts to introduce scientific concepts and methods into the theory of symbol, art, and culture. And there one comes across several diagrams and tableaux well known from the history of science.
- 25 In the notebook on *Symbolism as the determination of circumference [Umfangs-bestimmung]*, which Warburg used from 1896 to 1901 in New York, San Francisco, Hamburg, Berlin, and Florence, for example, he tried to invent an algorithm for "the symbol in space and time" by operating with units like the "differentiated sign"; the "absorbing nutrient ground", and the "apperceiving mass".<sup>20</sup> It is no small wonder that such attempts did not reach very far- and never lead to a coherent theory. But, what is more interesting in the context of his whole project is the fact that two years after beginning the notebook in March 1896 he started to draw out different systematic surveys on his research, each of the attempts written down in regular intervals of about one year, only once one and a half years: in March 97, in November 98, December 99, November 1900, and March 1901, headed for example like this: "After another year (27.III.97, Berlin) hardscrabble wandering through the world of symbols the following attempt to organise the matter: The mood of a hussar has yielded sullen Prussianism."<sup>21</sup> While this



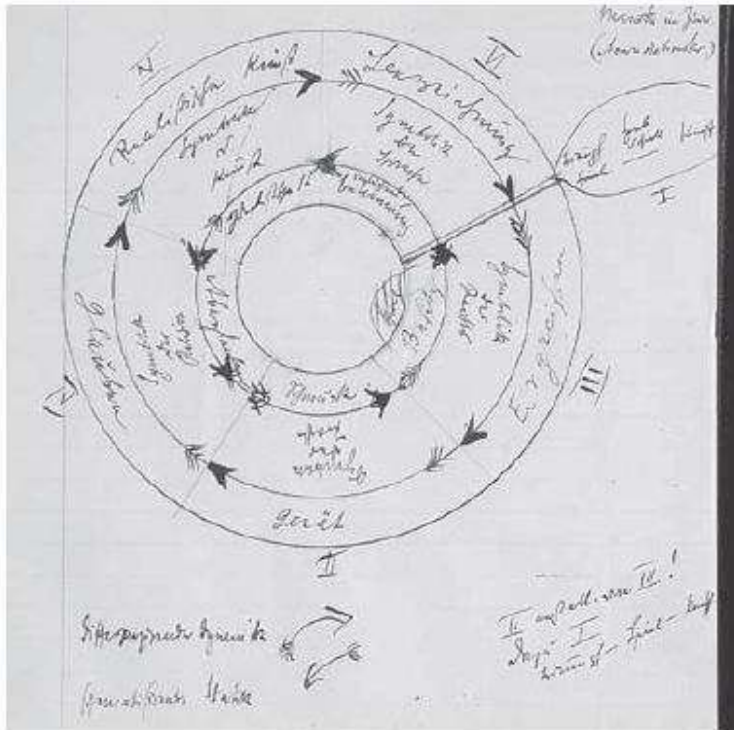


Fig.8D

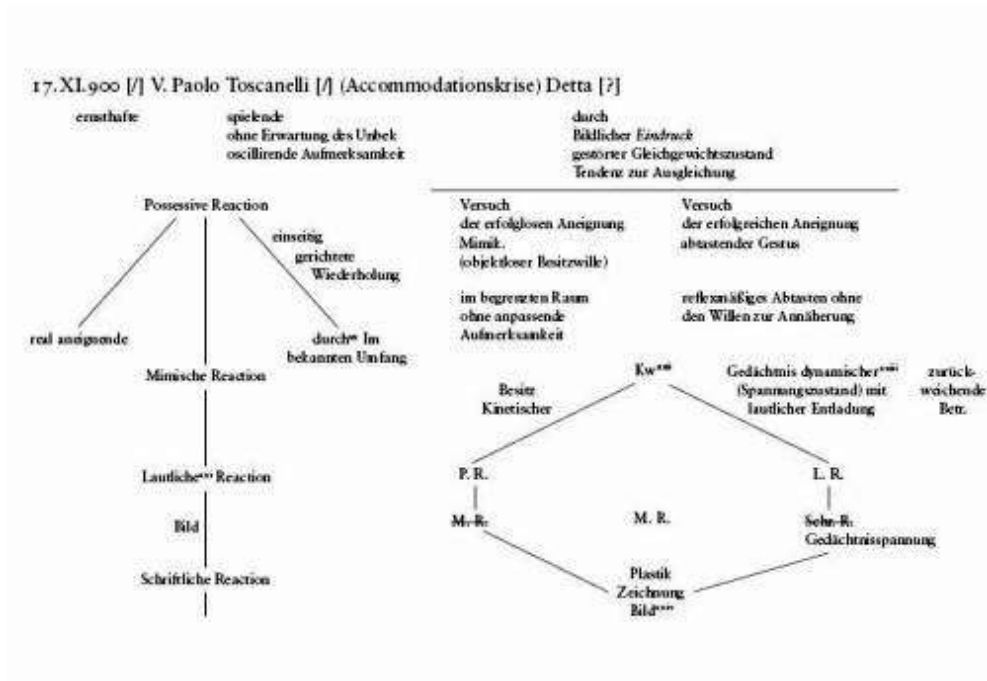


Diagram 1–4 in: Aby Warburg, System als Umfangsbestimmung. In: *Werke in einem Band*. Ed. and commented by Martin Tremel, Sigrid Weigel and Perdita Ladwig. Frankfurt/M. 2010, p. 619–622

26 It is foremost the tableau which connects these entries with the large and hybrid notebook on the *Ninfa Fiorentina* (1900), including very different kind of genres such as letters from and to a friend, reflections, manuscripts of lectures and different schemata, - mainly genealogical trees and tableaux. Contradicting André Jolle's desire

for pictures, who presented himself seduced by the Ninfa on Ghirlandaio's painting *Birth of St. John* (Fig.9), Warburg instead addressed the question of the figure's origin by directing "a philological gaze on the ground from where she alighted [*entstieg*]"<sup>22</sup>

**Fig.9**



Ninfa detail from Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Birth of John the Baptist*. Fresco. Santa Maria Novella, Florence. 1486–1490.

- 27 Thus he started a project of digging through the soil of Florentine Renaissance culture and its various ancient layers, which actually meant descending deep into the archives of cultural history. In this context he drew several family trees both of the generations of painters and their patrons, and he constructed several tableaux to tame and order the escalating matter of his research. The most interesting table here is an attempt for a taxonomic order of different genres, artists, and practices with respect to different fields of cultural history. (Fig.10)





Fig.11

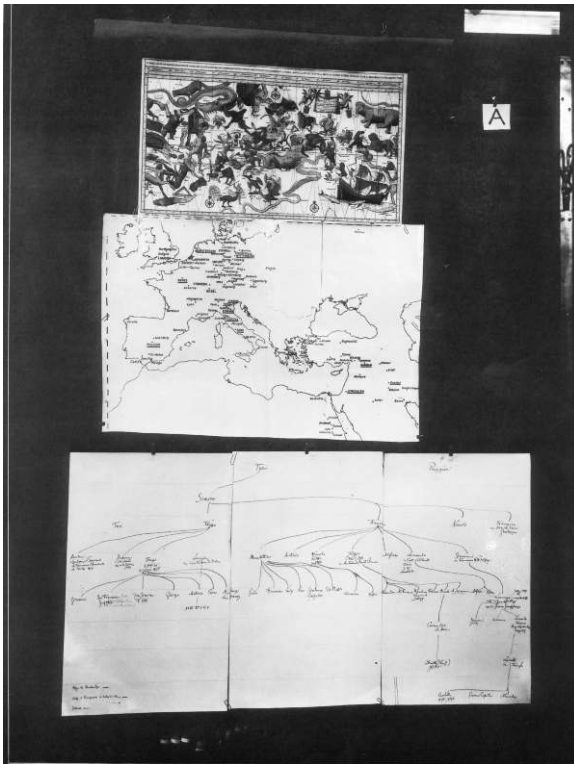


Plate A in: Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE*. Ed. by Martin Warnke with the assistance of Claudia Brink. Berlin 2000, p. 9.

- 30 Here the writings, although left unpublished, provided the place for his attempt to bring natural scientific approaches and the history of images and culture together, whereas the plates were reserved for the images and for Warburg's figurative epistemology of wandering. That he sought a proper title for his theory, i.e. for what he considered his "new method" and what he described as a "historical psychology of expression" or a "general theory of movement as a foundation for a general science of culture [*Kulturwissenschaft*]"<sup>23</sup>, is attested by copious formulations in his different notes, which look much like an *ars combinatoria* of concepts from physics, psychology, mechanics, religion and art. This series of titles indicates both the experimental status of the project and the difficulties to develop an analysis of cultural phenomena by means of a terminology from the natural sciences. In some of the entries this endeavour reads like an epistemological shortcut between mythology and sciences, whereas other formulations render the epistemological tension and even compulsion for a scientific foundation distinguishable. In Warburg's notes to *Mnemosyne*, for example, one comes across the entry: "Mnemosyne; the awakening of the pagan gods in the age of European Renaissance as an energetic constitution of the value of expression [*Ausdruckswertbildung*]"'. Or: "Mneme. The survival of ancient and mundane pathos formulas as a function of the law of the smallest measure of force by means of the return of expression values from the maximum degree of being moved [*Ausdruckswerte maximaler Ergriffenheit*]"'.<sup>24</sup>
- 31 While the notes around the *Mnemosyne* provide an interesting site to study theoretical and conceptual problems between the 'two cultures', the mobile technique of the atlas can be considered as a vanishing point of Warburg's experimental work resulting in a

fascinating laboratory of material culture. The figurative character of the wandering model of the image-plates provides, as any rhetoric and figurative language in scholarship, a possibility to deal with unsolved and potentially for ever unsolvable problems, that is to say a productive possibility for science, as Hans Blumenberg puts it, “to be able to endure without limit the tentativeness of its results”.<sup>25</sup>

- 32 On the opening plate of the Mnemosyne-project, Warburg collocated three figures of knowledge, a map of astrological pictures, a map of Europe, Asia Minor and North Africa entitled *Wanderstraßenkarte*, a map of moving paths, and a family tree of the Medicis/Tornabuonis. These kinds of maps and schemata from the history of science do not return on the other plates, instead they signal the underlying reading model for the configuration of images. They may be interpreted as the *system figuré* of Warburg’s atlas. The three schemata represent three figures of knowledge belonging to different eras of the history of science; they are like emblems of a mythological, a pre-modern and a modern mode of constructing the world and the order of things. Especially the family tree seems to form a kind of foreign body in the atlas project because the arrangement of images on the plates does not follow a genealogical direction or descent. To put it in more general terms, the mobile system of the material culture of Warburg’s atlas contradicts the episteme of clear and unambiguous relations between distinct units or species which rule the genealogical model. Therefore especially the family tree forms a kind of proxy of the theoretical model of interpretation that should have accompanied the visual part in the projected printed version of the *Mnemosyne*. The tree signifies the outstanding role of an evolutionary episteme underlying Warburg’s model of explanation for the origin, development and *Nachleben* of pathos formulas or expressions of emotions in civilisation.
- 33 In Warburg’s draft for an introduction to the *Mnemosyne* project he presents the history of gestures as a *Skala* (latin: stair or ladder) when he talks of a “process of dedemonizing the genetic constitution of impression [*Eindruckserbmasse*] that is coined by phobia and encompasses the whole scale of being moved [*Skala des Ergriffenseins*], ranging from a helpless submersion to a gruelling cannibalism”<sup>26</sup>. In this anthropological interpretation of human expressions a different interspace [*Zwischenraum*] is at stake, i.e. the distance between the outer world and the individual, which in Warburg’s eyes is the repeatedly intended target of all cultural endeavours. Thus the iconology of interval that structures the configuration of the plates is accompanied by a different concept of interspace as part of a theory of acting. Here the interspace is the *Denkraum*, regarded as the aim of all civilising work in order to produce a distance to the outer world, and at the same time it is described as the “interval between propulsion and acting”. The latter is defined as the object of cultural science, namely an “illustrated psychological history of the interval between propulsion and acting”.
- 34 Whereas the interpretative theoretical model of the Mnemosyne project subordinates the history of expressions under one general paradigm, the plates present different configurations of pictures without an ultimate interpretation, leaving interspaces for reading and contemplation. With the three different schemata of knowledge forming the emblematic entrance into the gallery of plates, Warburg not only refers to different modes of knowledge, he also presents a *system figuré* indicating the problematic relation between a pictorial knowledge (the astrological map), the order of space (the

*Wanderstraßenkarte*), and the episteme of descent (the genealogical schema), and the impossibility to synthesize them in one and the same model.

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## NOTES

1. Aby Warburg: *Der Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE*. Ed. Martin Warnke with the assistance of. Claudia Brink. Berlin 2000, p. 77 (plate 42).
2. See Michael Diers: Atlas und Mnemosyne. Von der Praxis der Bildtheorie bei Aby Warburg. In: Klaus Sachs-Hombach (ed.): *Bildtheorien. Anthropologische und kulturelle Grundlagen des Visualistic Turn*. Frankfurt/M. 2009, p. 181-213.
3. Aby Warburg: Mnemosyne I. In: *Werke in einem Band*. Ed. and commented by Martin Tremml, Sigrid Weigel and Perdita Ladwig. Frankfurt/M. 2010, p. 643.
4. The English translation puts it as „laboratory of the iconological science of civilization“, but Warburg definitely talks more on a *kulturwissenschaftliche*, i.e. a cultural scientific approach of analysing images here. See Aby Warburg: *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*. Introduction by Kurt W. Forster, translation by David Britt. The Getty Research Institute 1999, p. 651.
5. „Mögen sich Kunstgeschichte und Religionswissenschaft, zwischen denen noch phraseologisch überwuchertes Ödland liegt, in klaren und gelehrten Köpfen, [...] im Laboratorium *kulturwissenschaftlicher Bildgeschichte* an einem gemeinsamen Arbeitstisch zusammenfinden.“ *Werke in einem Band*, p. 485.
6. Georges Didi-Huberman: *Atlas. How to Carry the World on One's Back?* Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 2010, p. 16. Georges Didi-Huberman: *L'Image Survivante. Histoire de l'Art et Temps des Fantomes selon Aby Warburg*. Paris 2002, p. 182 ff.
7. „Die ‚Mnemosyne‘ will in ihrer bildhaften Grundlage, die der beigegebene Atlas in Reproduktionen charakterisiert, zunächst nur ein Inventar sein der antikisierenden Vorprägungen, die auf die Darstellung des bewegten Lebens im Zeitalter der Renaissance nachweislich mitstilbildend einwirkten./ Eine solche vergleichende Betrachtung musste [...] versuchen, durch eine tiefer eindringende sozial-psychologische Untersuchung den Sinn dieser gedächtnismässig aufbewahrten Ausdruckswerte als sinnvolle geistestechnische Funktion zu begreifen.“ A.W., Mnemosyne Einleitung. In: *Werke in einem Band*, p. 630/1.
8. See Claudia Wedepohl: Ideengeographie. Ein Versuch zu Aby Warburgs 'Wanderstraßen der Kultur'. In: H. Mitterbauer/ K. Scherke (eds.): *Ent-grenzte Räume. Kulturelle Transfers um 1900 und in der Gegenwart*. Studien zur Moderne 22. Wien 2005, p. 227-254.
9. Warburg: Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia. In: *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity* (footnote 3), p. 565. Transl. modified.
10. Paul Dean Adshead Harvey: *The History of Topographical Maps. Symbols, Pictures and Survey*. London 1980, p. 9.
11. Walter Benjamin: Doctrine of the Similar. In: *Selected Writings*. Ed. by Michael W. Jennings. Vol. 2, 1927-1934. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England 1999, p. 697.
12. Michel Foucault: *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*. Tavistock/ Routledge 1970, p. 30.
13. P. 104 (German edition).
14. Walter Benjamin: *The Arcades Project*. Transl. by H. Eiland/ K. Mc Laughlin. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England 2003, p. 463, transl. mod.

15. Didi-Huberman, *Atlas* (footnote 5), p. 14.
16. Jean Le Rond d'Alembert: *Einleitung zur ‚Enzyklopädie‘*. Ed. by Günther Mensching. Frankfurt/M. 1989, p.12.
17. Heinrich Heine: *Sämtliche Schriften*. Ed. by Klaus Briegleb. Vol. 3. Munich 1978<sup>2</sup>, p. 647.
18. Sigrid Weigel: Aby Warburgs ‚Göttin im Exil‘. Das ‚Nymphenfragment‘ zwischen Brief und Taxonomie, gelesen mit Heinrich Heine. In: *Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus*, Vol. 4. Berlin 2000, p. 65-103. Italian translation: La „dea in esilio“ di Warburg. In: *Georges Didi-Huberman. Un'etica delle immagini. Aut aut*, Nr. 348, ottobre/dicembre 2011. p. 177-202.
19. See the edition of Stimilli.
20. Warburg: Symbolismus als Umfangsbestimmung. In: *Werke in einem Band*, p. 615. For a more detailed analysis of this text see Sigrid Weigel: „Von Darwin über Filippino zu Botticelli ... und ... wieder zur Nymphe.“
- Zum Vorhaben einer energetischen Symboltheorie und zur Spur der Darwin-Lektüre in Warburgs Kulturwissenschaft. In: *Warburgs Denkraum. Formen, Motive, Materialien*. Hgg. S. Flach/ P. Schneider/ M. Treml. München 2012 (forthcoming).
21. *Ibid.*, p. 619.
22. A. Warburg: Ninfa Fiorentina. In: *Werke in einem Band*, p. 203.
23. See his letters from Kreuzlingen in the correspondence with Binswanger.
24. A. Warburg: Menmosyne I. In: *Werke in einem Band* (footnote 6), p. 643, 646.
25. Hans Blumenberg: Anthropologische Annäherung an die Aktualität der Rhetorik. In: *Rhetorische Anthropologie. Studien zum Homo rhetoricus*. Ed. by Josef Kopperschmid. Munich 2000, p. 72.
26. Warburg, *Werke in einem Band*, p. 630.

## INDEX

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4125); Edition d'Aby Warburg: *Werke in einem Band* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 2010); "Omission du commandement dans certains cas monstrueux". In: *Retours à la mémoire de Stéphane Mosès*. Ed. Patricia Farazzi et Michel Valensi (Paris 2009) pp. 37-60.