WARBURG'S INTUITIONS IN LIGHT
OF POSTMODERN CHALLENGES

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INTUICE ABYHO WARBURGA Z HLEDISKA POSTMODERNISMU. *Autor clánku se zabývá otázkou, jaký vztah má soucasná literární a umeleckohistorická teorie k Warburgove ikonografické metode. S historickým nadhledem zachycuje promeny v prístupu k ikonografii a ikonologii, jak probíhaly v posledních desetiletích v angloamerické vede, a konfrontuje tento vývoj se zvláštní situací oborové metodologie ve strední a východní Evrope (predevším v Polsku a v Madarsku) v éře totalitních režimu i po jejich pádu. V další cásti textu se zameruje na ty aspekty Warburgova díla, které považuje v dnešní dobe za inspirativní, a s kritickým odstínením se vyrovnává s nekterými aktuálními interpretacemi Warburgova myšlení v textech predstavitelu kulturních studií a feminismu.*

THE PRESENT PAPER LOOKS at the achievement of Aby Warburg's iconographical method from the perspective of present-day concerns in literary and art history theory. The first part offers a historiographical sketch of the fate of iconography and iconology in English speaking scholarship of the past few decades, including a glance at the Eastern European scene, where the reception of iconology has had a somewhat different career from that of the West. In the second part, I shall look at Warburg's works, highlighting those aspects and ideas which mark him not only as a great art historian of a certain period but also as someone who deserves a distinguished place among the founding fathers of modern cultural theories.

A Historiographical Approach

The rise of iconology, inspired by Aby Warburg and continued by his friends and followers, such as Saxl, Panofsky, Wind, Gombrich, and others, seemed to offer a good compromise between Positivism and *Geistesgeschichte*, avoiding the down-to-earth rigidity of the former as well as the loose generalizations of the latter. Iconology, in its most complex theory and practice as developed by Panofsky, in understanding culturally coded symbolic systems, relied, on the one hand, on individual hermeneutic intuition and, on the other, on the corrective systems of the histories of types and cultural symbols (i.e. tradition). It thus seemed to reach a reliable degree of objective knowledge about and comprehension of the works to be interpreted.[1]

If we look at the most outstanding achievements in literary and art history criticism of the 1950s and '60s, a very significant percentage of those studies had something to do with iconography and iconology.[2] Throughout the 1970s, this orientation of research continued to enjoy a high prestige;[3] from the 1980s, however, the situation changed. Although iconography continued to flourish in specialized art histori-

cal research and in literary history it inspired, for example, emblem studies (which started booming in that decade[4]), the post-structuralist turn in contemporary philosophy and interpretive practice has highlighted the problems at the foundations of iconography and iconology.

The greatest hazard seemed to be the problem of applying the principle of historicity without reductionist reconstructionism which, in the guise of objectivity, in fact would enforce the ideology of the interpreter on the subject matter. In the light of this revealed fallacy, the propositions of even the greatest intellectual and art historians – Kristeller, Panofsky – may have appeared somewhat anachronistic and in the 1980s one might have imagined that the days of iconology were numbered.[5] One of the landmarks of post-structuralist subversion against iconology was W.J.T. Mitchell's groundbreaking study, entitled *Iconology*, in 1986. In it the author confronted the views of Edmund Burke, Lessing, Ernst Gombrich and Nelson Goodman. From our viewpoint his critique of Gombrich is the most interesting. Mitchell tried to demonstrate Gombrich's ideological biases by juxtaposing and comparing the latter's *Art and Illusion* (1956) and "Image and Code" (1981). According to Mitchell, Gombrich had been one of the chief proponents of the view that pictorial signs were riddled with conventions. Fifteen years later, however, he made a sharp distinction between pictures and words, delineating the difference as a contrast between the naturalness of images and the conventionality of language: "*...images are naturally recognizable because they are imitations and words are based on conventions.*"[6]

This distinction between natural pictures and conventional words, of course, goes back to Plato and is related to the question of whether imitation or convention is the superior way of understanding. Mitchell charges Gombrich with having become an adherent of the principle of imitation; and this stance, according to Mitchell, has led him to give up

the program of finding the meaning of works through iconographical analysis. If the sole, firm, objective representation is natural imitation, conventionality can only have relative significance.[7] So while the early Gombrich could be regarded as someone who, in some respect, prepared the way for post-structuralism, his late opinion seems to have violated the theories of post-structuralists in two respects: first, post-structuralism would never recognize the possibility of arriving at objective, definite meanings in interpretation; for them, perceiving or acknowledging something as a natural imitation is only another convention. Secondly, post-structuralists would not accept an ontological difference between pictorial and verbal signs. For them, all signification is conventional. So Gombrich, because of his claim for objective meaning, and moreover because he related it to natural imitation, seems to have been expelled from the garden of iconology; it is as if his ritualistic removal (together with the disapproval of Panofsky referred to above) has lifted suspicion from the method itself.

In fact, against the odds, iconolgy has not disappeared from the arsenal of contemporary interpretations. From the late 1980s on, we see deconstructionists and new historicists, cultural materialists and gender critics returning to questions of iconology, since it has become clear that ideology and cultural symbolism are inextricably intertwined and that neither hermeneutics nor semiotics could continue without maintaining some links with the interpretation of images. Interpretation, naturally, has had to change by adopting new questions, some of which were sharply formulated in cited study by Mitchell: "*What is an image? What is the difference between images and words? ...What is at stake in marking off or erasing the differences between images and words? What are the systems of power and canons of value – that is, the ideologies – that inform the answers to these questions and make them matters of polemical dispute rather than purely theoretical interest?* "[8]

These passionately stated programmatic questions highlight the paradigm shift in iconology: we are moving from the "objective" study of images to the examination of their politics and psychology: iconophobia, iconophilia, and fetishism – variations on the themes of iconoclasm and idolatry.

This revolutionary paradigm shift has led to such provoking propositions in iconological studies as those recently made by Stephen Orgel. He has called attention to the need for new strategies in approaching images in his essay, "Gendering the Crown" (1996). The agenda of his article is "*the interpretation of Renaissance symbolic imagery in relation to certain issues of gender construction, particularly the representation of royalty*". And his awareness of the theoretical indeterminacies can be seen in his remark: "*How do we know how to read a Renaissance image? In the simplest cases, we have Renaissance guides to interpretation, in the form of iconologies and handbooks of symbolism. Yet such cases immediately become less simple when we observe that reading imagery through them depends on reading texts, and therefore shares in all the interpretive ambiguity of that process. ...Interpretation depends, moreover, on what texts we select*

as relevant, and even on what we are willing to treat as text."[9]

It is no wonder that with such theoretical preoccupations Orgel demonstrates the fundamental ambiguities of seemingly fixed Renaissance meanings, such as the emblematic pelican of *caritas*: "*...the breadth of interpretive possibility often seems both endless and, for modern readers looking for a key to Renaissance symbolism, distressingly arbitrary. Renaissance iconographies and mythographies are in this respect the most postmodern of texts, in which no meaning is conceived to be inherent, all signification is constructed or applied; the fluidity and ambivalence of the image are of the essence.*"[10] The last quotation shows the present state of affairs in theory, which, as in iconography and iconology, has led to utter relativism.

Considering the approaches just mentioned, I think I can safely suggest that iconography and iconology have found their place even in the most radical critical trends which deliberately try to emphasize their detachment from the history of ideas as well as traditional semiotics. I also believe that the method of interpreting images can accomodate even controversial approaches, as this kind of inquiry tends to be more a methodology and a special area of research, rather than an independent critical theory with its own philosophy.

Before concluding this historiographical part of my paper, I would like to refer to the career of iconology in the East-Central European countries, particularly in Hungary. This thread of the narrative partly supports the statements of today's relativist critics, and partly warns against some exaggerations that they are inclined to make.

When Marxism became the enforced official ideology in the Eastern Bloc, quite a few areas of social research were cut off from the main trends of Western scholarship. This was the case with the history of ideas as well as with historical anthropology. It was only in the late 1970s that Hungarian scholars could become aware of the achievements of the history of ideas and the related iconographical schools. In Poland the situation was somewhat better, since the famous student of Panofsky, Jan Białostocki, did a lot to popularize the Warburg school.[11] While in Poland the most significant studies of Warburg and Panofsky were available in translation, in Hungary it was only in the 1980s that intellectual history became an attractive alternative to the drab materialism of Marxist approaches. Curiously enough, it was through Structuralism that Panofsky first appeared on the Hungarian scene. A short excerpt from his study on Gothic architecture (1951) was included in a collection of structuralist essays in 1971, while the first Cassirer translation appeared in a collection of semiotic approaches in 1975.[12] Sadly enough, even today there is no large-scale Hungarian edition of Cassirer; however, the most important studies by Panofsky were published in Hungarian in 1984, that of Gombrich in 1985, and Warburg's *Heidnischantike Weissagung...* appeared in Hungarian in 1986.[13]

I can mention with a certain degree of pride that I belonged to that group of young scholars who in 1980 launched a program of iconological research at

the University of Szeged. Our goal was twofold: we planned to pursue literary studies with the help of iconology and the method of emblem research, on the other hand we wanted to popularize the classic works of this approach in Hungarian. We were partly inspired by the personal encouragement of Frances Yates who in 1981 visited Hungary and came as far as Szeged to give a celebrated lecture. The first program bore fruit with our international symposium, "Shakespeare and the Emblem" in 1984, the published papers of which attracted some international attention.[14] As for the second goal, in 1985 we started a series in Hungarian called "Iconology and Interpretation", in the first volume of which we offered an anthology of basic studies on iconography, such as Gombrich's "Icones Symbolicæ", and essays by Daniel Arasse, Friedrich Ohly, Panofsky, Mario Praz, Louis Réau and others. Four volumes were published by 1988,[15] but our advance was ironically halted by the changing of the political system in 1989. To begin with, during those years most of the active intellectuals became involved in politics at least for a while, which definitely inhibited scholarly research. More significant, however, was the cultural shock we experienced when, with the first freely distributed travel grants, we could confront our ideas with what was currently going on in the West. I personally experienced this when, on a Fulbright scholarship at the Folger and Huntington libraries in the United States, I tried to communicate our commitment to iconology and the history of ideas. As anyone familiar with the American intellectual atmosphere of those years could expect, the response was polite silence. Step by step, I had to realize that those concerns went out of fashion in the West and that the leading discourse had become a relativist, post-structuralist, strongly neo-Marxist philosophical jargon. I hit upon the high tide of New Historicism and I needed to take a break to recover from the shock. I also needed to find my place again, since I became attracted to those western Marxists who seemed to prove that all meaning depended on the ideology of the interpreter and I started to see my own devotion to intellectual history as a form of resistance to our previous ideological oppression. On the other hand, I could not accept that the despised old ideology might come back in such a roundabout way.

Perhaps I need not have spent so many words on my personal history as today we have arrived at some sort of a compromise. I think we have learnt important lessons from post-structuralist philosophy, both from the "idealist" hermeneuticians and the "subjective materialist" new historicists. At the same time we have come to realize that no important stage in intellectual development can be jumped over. Thus, one still percieves in East-Central Europe a fresh appreciation for intellectual history, a domain which was a forbidden garden for us at the time it flourished in the West. We still like to play with those ideas which have become temporarily out of fashion at Western universities. While it is not easy to buy the outstanding monographs of the Warburg school in average British or American university bookstores, Hungarian publishers have been paying their debt by issuing translations of Gombrich, Panofsky and Wittkower, or, to mention Italian scholars of the Renaissance, Eugenio Garin and Cesare Vasoli. A new phase in the reception of Warburg in Hungary has set in. A few important articles have been written recently on his thought and finally a representative selection of his essays was published in 1995.[16] In this respect ex-Eastern Bloc scholarship may offer a possible bridge over the gap which divides Western approaches at the moment. The good thing about this new appreciation for Warburg, for example, is that it is happening with an understanding of postmodern theory, and consequently his work is appreciated and contextualized in a way that would have been impossible decades ago. It is more than a historicist curiosity about the achievements of a past historian because it results in the integration of Warburg's work and his legacy into the most modern approaches – alongside the special lessons learnt in Eastern Europe.

A Theoretical Approach

This is the horizon of expectations from which I propose to revisit Warburg's original program in using iconography and intellectual history in order to elucidate the obscure meanings of programmatic art works. Certainly, in this context, our interest will not primarily be focused on his discoveries in the interpretation of enigmatic art works; rather we have to look at the theoretical framework in which his iconographical method was formed. I am going to refer briefly to the following issues: first, the relationship between Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms and Warburg's interpretations; secondly, Warburg's concept of *mnémé* as a link toward *Rezeptionsaesthetik* and reader/viewer response criticism; and, finally, Warburg's theory of *pathosformeln* in the context of Darwin's psychology of expression and Jung's collective unconsciousness.

Warburg's theoretical basis can be compared with Cassirer's philosophy. Although their sources of inspiration were somewhat different (Burckhardt for Warburg, as opposed to the Neo-Kantians in the case of Cassirer), their firm foundation in Kantian rationalism and 19th century liberalism as well as profound interest in the logic and system of sciences – especially *die Kulturwissenschaften* – provided the natural affinity which characterized their common years in Hamburg in the 1920s. Cassirer recognized that Warburg's library was not simply raw material for research, but that in it the information had a systematically ordered structure, converging towards a designated goal: the problems of the history of reception of classical Antiquity. As he admitted to Saxl: one could do two things about the Library, either avoid it altogether or become addicted to it.[17]

As Jürgen Habermas has pointed out, Cassirer's philosophy shifted the focus of interest from the logic of judgements to the grammar of sentences and in this respect it was analogous to Wittgenstein's turn in language philosophy towards pragmatics.[18] Cassirer considered representation to be the basic function of the transcendental consciousness and suggested that

the achievements of this consciousness can only be seen in an indirect way, through the grammar of symbolic forms. As is well-known, Cassirer asserted that an essential property of humankind was the symbol through which man understood the world and at the same time represented the dimensions of his own world: space and time, myth and religion, language, art, history, and science. These are all self-contained systems; they do not simply mirror the world but rather create a world of their own. Thus the comprehension of existence happens not through passive imitation, but rather via these specially created active symbols. A consequence of this theory is that the different symbolic systems all put forward their respective claim for truth; thus Truth has become relativized according to the logic of the given system – or as today's cultural theory would formulate it: according to the ideology of the user or interpretive community.[19] As a Hungarian semiotician, Vilmos Voigt, argues,[20] the shortcoming of Cassirer's philosophy is that he did not reach beyond the grammar of symbols, and thus disregarded the historical dimension, the truly pragmatical aspect. He nevertheless took important steps towards a general semiotics of culture which grew into a complete system only in the 1970s, after the breakthrough of pragmatics in a number of disciplines: in semiotics with Morris, in language philosophy from the late Wittgenstein through sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, in interpretation techniques from structuralism through hermeneutics, and in social philosophy with Foucault's theory of discourse.

Aby Warburg's concerns were similar to those of Cassirer in that that he was interested in certain structures of cultural symbolism, but at the same time his perception was essentially historical. As Gombrich has pointed out, he was not interested in the abstract processes of stylistic change; he was aware that art was made by people who were facing decisions and who turned for advice to the past as well as to the present.[21] Edgar Wind had already pointed this out in 1930: "*Instead of positing* in abstracto *that iner-relationships* [between individual works of art, artistic theory and the historical situation] *exist, search for them where they may be grasped historically – in individual objects. In studying this concrete object, as conditioned by the nature of the techniques used to make it,* [this was the] *course Warburg adopted.*"[22] When he set out himself to answer the question which would become the *leitmotif* of his work, that is "*What was the meaning of the survival of Antiquity for the Western Man?*", and he discovered the double face of the classical heritage – the rational on the one hand and the demonic on the other –, he also arrived at a crucial intuition concerning cultural reception. He realized that the twofold, ambivalent effect, that is, the polarized interpretation of Antiquity, could not result from the works themselves. The driving force of the polarity was the *mnémé*, the cultural memory which assigned particular roles to the re-emerging elements and motifs of classical art. As we know, in his last project, the *Mnemosyne* atlas-album, he wanted to demonstrate the inharmonious reappearence of Antiquity through the *mnémé* in paradigms such as astronomy vs. astrology,

etc.[23]

Now I would like to turn to the roots of Warburg's intuitions concerning cultural reception. It should be remembered that an important inspiration was, perhaps in connection with his medical studies, Charles Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). In it the author argued that human gestures were the vague remnants of once practical and effective actions. On the basis of this theory, Warburg created the term *Pathosformeln*, meaning that the repertory of gestures and mimics in classical art was nothing but repressed traces of barbaric rituals and orgiastic ceremonies. And the reception of these *Pathosformeln* in the Renaissance resulted in the formation of the humanistic conventions of symbolism.

The use of symbolism, according to Warburg's psychological theory, is a reconciliation of conflicting motivations, those that appear in Nietzsche's dichotomy of Apollonian and Dionysian antiquity. These recur periodically in Warburg's investigations of the ambiguities of the classical heritage: the ideals of perfection as well as the magical and the demonic. As Wind has pointed out: "*...in the course of the history of images their pre-existing expressive values undergo a polarization which corresponds to the extent of psychological oscillation of the creative power which refashions them. It is only by means of this theory of polarity that the role of an image within a culture as a whole is to be determined...*"[24]

What was the link between the archaic deeds and the *Pathosformeln*? It was the mythologies which transferred the old religious meanings and offered them either for classicizing rationalization or for demonic recreation.[25] Warburg in fact presupposed a collective memory which, like a reservoir, would contain those culturally ready-made patterns which offer the artists forms, motifs, *sujets*. But as he emphasized in his study on the "Intermezzi" of 1589: "*...the ensuing artistic development followed not simply from the act of return to the sources, but from the way of interpretation of those sources*".[26] At this point it seems obvious to compare this notion of the *collective memory* to Jung's *collective unconsciousness*. The common ground is that in both concepts one encounters that archetypal, inherited image-stock which manifests itself in myths, occult lore, and dreams. These are the catalysts for *anamnesis*, remembering. There is, however, a basic difference between the two approaches. Jung's ultimate search for the collective unconsciousness directed him to try to clear away everything that hid or covered it, so his exploration led him from consciousness to the unconscious, a realm in which reason, logic, and decision had no role to play. Warburg, on the other hand, opted for reason, a deliberate self-realization of the human being. In spite of the imminent dangers of *mnémé*, and the act of remembering, his ideal was that the *Pathosformeln* and their demonic archetypes could be tamed, humanised, through art. This is what Wind called *Ausgleich-psychologie*, the resolution of conflict. How could that happen? As opposed to Jung, for Warburg, myths had no predetermined meaning. He was convinced that while the act of remembering always works on the myth, the result of this work is open: it can signify either liberation or degradation. And since

meaning remains open, the work remains incomplete without the interpreting user, without the act of reception. Reception obviously happens on two levels in the intertextual space: everything Warburg examines is a reflected reception of earlier memories, while his own examination is also an act of reception which parallels self-discovery and self-reflection. This notion of a multiplicity of interpretations is suggested in the concluding words of his *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*: "*...the revival of demonic antiquity takes place through a polarizing function of empathic visual memory. We are in the age of Faust, when the modern scientist, living among magical practices and cosmological mathematics, was striving to work out a space of sober considerations between himself and his subject. ... The pictures and texts discussed above can be seen as so far unstudied sources for the tragic history of the intellectual freedom of modern Europeans.*"[27] Warburg's concept of collective memory thus performs the two basic mechanisms of reception: as *langue* it provides the grammar, the conventionality of culture, but in its pragmatics, as an actively used *parole*, it also subverts tradition and appropriates the myths.[28]

To sum up: through the never fully explained theory of *Mnemosyne* his intuitions came near the modern theories of *reader/viewer response*-criticism and *Rezeptionsaesthetik*. In his interpretive approach to art- and cultural history, Warburg seems to have shared the precognition of what was to become known as cultural relativism; in fact he appears to be one of those "inventors of modernism" who highlighted the crucial importance of pragmatics, in any kind of interpretive process, in any search for meaning.

Excursus and Epilogue:
Warburg's Tradition "Retrieved"

If looking at the publications of the past few years, I ought to modify what I have just said in the first part of my paper: it seems that during the last decade the previously diverging interests of Western and ex-Eastern Bloc scholarship have started to converge again. The 1990s have seen a new interest in Warburg, not only among traditional cultural historians, but among the representatives of cultural studies and even feminism. It is enough to look at the jubilee publication of the Warburg Institute which was published to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Warburg's famous lecture on the frescoes of the Palazzo Schifanoia.[29] The volume does not pay particular tribute to the art historian, the "inventor" of the iconographic art historical method; but rather presents Warburg as an anthropologist[30] and as a cultural historian who had important things to say for post-structuralist theorists engaged with anthropology and psychology.[31] This new relevance was heralded by Margaret Iversen's article in 1993, which openly declared the "retrieving" of Warburg's tradition for a feminist orientation in art history studies. Since this paper has been recently republished in a representative anthology on "the art of art history",[32] and thus has quickly become a classic in the historiography of the discipline, it is worth having a glance at it in order to see how the post-structuralist revival of Aby Warburg is taking place.

As Iversen programmatically announces, her aim is to enlist Warburg as an ally and identify him as one of the forerunners of feminist cultural theory. As she – somewhat patronizingly – states, "*in the difficult task of elaborating a new art-historical methodology, his work might prove valuable, usable.*"[33] The valuable use she thinks of is that "*Warburg's work [contains an] implicit critique of the ideal of total detachment in either aesthetics or scholarship,* [and that] *Warburg's approach anticipates in many ways feminist critiques of science and phallocentric logic.*"[34] What Iversen finds attractive in Warburg's ideals of cultural research is not surprising, but rather appealing to today's sensitive reader of cultural theories: his dialectical polarities of mind/body, reason/sense, logos/pathos; his built-in ambiguities and interest in the oscillation of culture; his aversion to any fixed, deproblematized presentation of artistic and/or cultural phenomena. What is disappointing, on the other hand, is the poor scholarly documentation as well as the unjust and biased conceptual backbone of her argumentation. The two aspects are difficult to separate from one another.

The main drift of Iversen's argument is that the "*nature of Warburg's contribution can be best appreciated by setting it beside Panofsky's.*"[35] With this comparison she hopes to arrive at "*a fairer reading of Warburg,*"[36] but one cannot help feeling that, instead, she mistreats and abuses such towering intellectual historians as Panofsky and Gombrich, while entirely neglecting to mention an essay which has been a key to the understanding of Warburg's cultural concepts. I am thinking of Edgar Wind's "Warburg's Begriff der Kulturwissenschaft und seine Bedeutung für die Aesthetik," which has also been published in English and – *nota bene* – has been reprinted in Preziosi's reader, preceding Iversen's paper. In such a context, it becomes discomforting when Iversen "discovers" Warburg's attraction to historical moments which were in a heterogeneous state of transition, such as: "*...the early Renaissance and the period of the Reformation in northern Europe. His interpretation of them tended to increase their heterogeneous quality; their incorporation of Oriental astrological belief and imagery. ...His Quattrocento Florence could accommodate business-minded merchant art lovers, perfectly pious and yet also believers in the Fate of the ancients and the astrology of the East.*"[37] She summarizes Warburg's research topics without mentioning Wind, who, as early as 1930, long before the birth of any feminist criticism, called attention to exactly the same characteristic features: "*Warburg always chose to study those intermediate fields in precisely the historical periods he considered to be themselves periods of transition and conflict: for example the early Florentine Renaissance, the Dutch Baroque, the orientalizing phases of late classical antiquity. Furthermore, within such periods he always tended to apply himself to the study of men, who, whether through their profession or their fortune, occupy ambiguous positions: for example the merchants who are at the same time lovers of art, whose aesthetic tastes mingle with their business interests; astrologers who combine religious politics with science and create a 'double trouth' of their own.*"[38] And let us add to this what Wind said about Warburg's library:

"...its strength, in short, lies precisely in the areas that are marginal; and since these are the areas that play a crucial part in the progress of any discipline, the library may fairly claim that its growth is entirely in keeping with that of the particular field of study it seeks to advance."[39]

The greatest problem with Iversen's views is not that they are practically identical with those of the Warburgian intellectual historian, Edgar Wind, but rather that while presenting them, she criticises other Warburgians, notably Panofsky and Gombrich. Her reasoning is problematic in two respects when she makes such claims as *"...in their hands Warburg is deproblematized, becalmed, and his complex and conflicted theory of art turned into an unambiguous affirmation of Enlightenment ideals."*[40] It is sad to see the deflated way in which flattened expressions such as "Enlightenment", "essential humanism", or "transcendental ego" have become strawmen in the jargon of certain post-structuralist theorists. As far as I can see, neither Panofsky nor Gombrich was in any way an uncritical adherent of an optimistic and reason-centered "Enlightenment"; with such an attitude, they could not have offered inspired interpretations of Abbot Suger's mysticism of light, or the *icones symbolicae*, that is, the dark symbolism of Renaissance magical neo-platonism. On the other hand, they certainly shared Warburg's ambition to understand – and in the process of understanding, to employ systematic research and a theory-governed method of interpretation – the long history of humankind's cultural evolution from archetypal awe to the containment of this fear, first through creating symbols, then rationalizing and demystifying the symbolic world by means of causal logic and science. In fact, Warburg was more the offspring of the 19th century than his younger followers, and at the time he wrote his intellectual biography of Warburg (1970), Gombrich already clearly saw the heroic failure of this positivistic optimism: *"To begin with, there was* the hope *that on the basis of psychological research one could give a scientific explanation about cultural progress. The student years of Warburg coincided with the heroic epoch which* still could believe *in the feasibility of such a project."*[41] Traces of this hopeful optimism can be found everywhere in the works of Warburg: from the systematic studies to his aphoristic fragments in the diaries and his notes for the *Mnemosyne* picture-atlas. Gombrich quotes quite a few of these marginalia, but we can detect this attitude also in the famous and much-discussed Kreuzlingen lecture on the snake ritual of the Pueblo Indians.[42] Warburg's goal in this study was to revisit the origins of imagery in order to understand images *"as the biologically necessary products of religion and the exercise of art."*[43] But at the end of his inquiry, he also realized how the archaic snake-god was domesticated by Uncle Sam's electricity: *"Lightning no longer terrifies the city dweller, who no longer craves a benign storm as the only source of water. He has his water supply, and the lightning serpent is diverted straight to the ground by the lightning conductor. Scientific explanation has disposed of mythological causation. The replacement of mythological causation by the technological removes the fears felt by primitive humanity."*[44] Warburg, of course, was not as narrow-minded so as to believe unconditionally in an evolutionary progress, à la Taylor and Frazer, from magic through religion to science. He was also clearly aware of the dangers to which a purely technological orientation would lead. But he was cautious enough not to mix scholarly explanations with emotional attitudes. As he remarked: *"Whether this liberation from the mythological world view is of genuine help in providing adequate answers to the enigmas of existence is quite another matter."*[45]

If we are willing to perceive the intriguing modernity in Warburg's prescience of the immanent ambiguities of meaning, how could we entirely deny such insight in his associates, who were groundbreakers in establishing the doctrine of the conventionality of art, which, by definition, inhibits any rigid and indissoluble detachment between the work of art and the creating and/or receiving subject. Iversen's bias is particularly unjust in connection with Cassirer, whose philosophy of symbols in many ways disproves the allegation; what is more, we possess textual evidence about the close association between him and Warburg. As we know from the correspondence of Warburg and Saxl, the latter had two sessions in which they thoroughly discussed Warburg's *Schlangenritual* paper, Cassirer having been one of the four persons whom Warburg authorized to examine his text. As Saxl wrote to Warburg, *"There is simply nobody in the whole world who brings to this problem of masking and its treatment as much interest as Cassirer, who is currently working on the second volume of* Symbol; *it deals with mythology and your way of looking at a problem appears to him to be the right way of doing so."*[46]

As for Panofsky, Iversen is simply wrong to claim that Panofsky *"appropriated Alois Riegl"* in his 1920 essay on the *Kunstwollen* by establishing *"an Archimedean point, that is a fundamental a priori concept outside the historical phenomena."*[47] On the contrary, Panofsky criticized Riegl for not adopting a proper historical perspective in which the aspects of "meaning" and "form" are not detached from each other, since both are embedded in the conventions of representation and symbolisation.[48] With this view Panofsky, without a doubt, was fully in agreement with Warburg. It is characteristic that Iversen, while citing Panofsky's study on "Albrecht Dürer and Classical Antiquity", entirely neglects those aspects of this essay which emphasize the inherently conventional and bound-in-history nature of *Kunstwollen*: *"[In the North a classical work of art is] not experienced as a thing of beauty; and it could not be so experienced because the Northern* Kunstwollen *had no point of contact with that of classical antiquity. ...The Northern woodcut claims to be not so much the reproduction of a classical work of art as the record of an archeological specimen."*[49] The two sides of Iversen's fallacy are thus the falsification of Panofsky, Gombrich and Cassirer on the one hand, and a misrepresentation of Warburg on the other. While she accuses Panofsky of being Eurocentric in his tribute to Warburg (he called the scholars gathered around the Library *"the crew of* [Warburg's] *Colombus-ship"*) and also of treating art in general with the attitude of a *conquistador*,[50] she no less ferociously uses Warburg for her own purposes, a treatment I would not call "retrieving", rather ruthless appropriation.

Fortunately, there are other, more productive efforts to "retrieve" Warburg's tradition for today's cultural theories. Ulrich Raulff's attempt to verify the multiplicity of interpretations of the Kreuzlinger lecture – from objectifying, archeological and epistemological interpretations to subject-centered readings – seems to me a particularly reasonable approach. While respecting other approximations, he also successfully establishes the validity of indeterminacy and polivalence through the meanings of the central symbol of the work: the snake. As he warns other readers: whoever steps directly into the path of the Sphinx, will discover that the single all-embracing solution to the riddle is not forthcoming.[51]

Partial solutions, however, are still possible. And we have time to go round the Sphinx, discretely glimpse at it, and while trying to come to a useful and satisfactory representation of it, with ample sagacity we can respectably evade the dangerous direct encounter.

N o t e s

1. Cf. Erwin Panofsky *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (1939). Oxford - New York 1962. – Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955). Harmondsworth 1993.

2. I think of the prominent members of the Warburg school (Gombrich, Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, Walker, Yates, etc.); scholars somewhat associated with this circle (Białostocki, Chastel, Garin, Heckscher, Praz, Seznec, Wind, Wittkower); and works that were written under the inspiration of the approach represented by the above-mentioned authors (just a few examples: Samuel C. Chew, *The Virtues Reconciled: An Iconographic Study*. Toronto 1947. – Dietrich W. Jöns, *Das "Sinnen Bild". Studien zur allegorischen Bildlichkeit bei Andreas Gryphius*. Stuttgart 1966. – E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*. Princeton 1957. – Hans Peter L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World*. Oslo 1953. – Friedrich Ohly, *Vom Geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter* [1957]. Darmstadt 1966. – Louis Réau, *L'iconographie de l'art chrétien*. Paris 1955. – Albrecht Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock*. Munich 1964. – etc.). One should also mention the large scale typologizing and indexing projects which were carried out during this period (R.C. Morey's *Index of Christian Art* [Princeton, Rome, Washington, Los Angeles], H. van de Waal's decimal typology of Christian art [Leiden] and Arthur Henkel – Albrecht Schöne, *Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildenkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart 1967).

3. Goran Hermeren, *Representation and Meaning in the Visual Arts: A Study in the Methodology of Iconography and Iconology*. Stockholm 1969. – George P. Landow, *Images of Crisis: Literary Iconology, 1750 to the Present*. London 1981. – Theodore Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images. A Literary Iconology*. Princeton 1977, are examples dealing with different genres and covering different historical periods. As for Renaissance cultural history, it is enough to think of the almost cultic popularity of Frances Yates, which came under attack in the inflated "hermeticism debate" of the later 1970s.

4. This trend was inspired by Peter M Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*. Toronto 1979. Cf. the journal *Emblematica* established in 1986, and the following series: *Index Emblematicus* (ed. Peter M. Daly), Toronto, since 1985. – *AMS Studies in the Emblem* (ed. by Peter M. Daly and others), New York, since 1988. – *Symbola et Emblemata* (ed. by Bernhard Scholz), Leinden, since 1990, and other ventures.

5. Cf. Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*. Ithaca, NY 1984. – Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*. New Haven – London 1989; for different points of view: Silvia Ferretti, *Il demone della memoria: simbolo e tempo storico in Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky*. Casale Monferrato 1984. – Renate Heidt, *Erwin Panofsky – Kunsttheorie und Einzelwerk*. Köln 1977.

6. Ernst H. Gombrich, Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation, in: Wendy Steiner (ed.), *Image and Code*. Ann Arbor 1981, p. 11. Quoted by W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago 1986, p. 80.

7. Gombrich's opinion declaredly relies on the much contested principles of E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation*. Chicago 1979.– E. D. Hirsch, Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted. *Critical Inquiry* 1984, December, pp. 202–225.

8. W. J. T. Mitchell (op. cit. in note 6), p. 1.

9. Stephen Orgel, Gendering the Crown, in: Margareta de Grazia et al. (eds.). *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*. Cambridge 1996, p. 133.

10. Ibidem, p. 136.

11. "Iconology" in the *Encyclopedia Universalis*. Paris 1970 and "Iconography" (cf. Jan Bia³ostocki, Iconography, in: Philip P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. New York 1973.). For his Polish and East German publications see *Teoria i twórczestwo. O tradycji i inwencji w teorii sztuki i ikonografii*. Poznan 1961. – *Stil und Ikonographie. Studien zur Kunstwissenschaft*. Dresden, 1966.

12. Erwin Panofsky, Gótikus építészet és skolasztikus gondolkodás, in: Elemér Hankiss (ed.), *Strukturalizmus*. Budapest 1971, pp. 208–225. – Toni Cassirer, A szimbolikus formák filozófiájából, in: Özséb Horányi – György Szépe (eds.), A *jel tudománya*. Budapest 1975, pp. 121–135.

13. Erwin Panofsky, *Jelentés a vizuális mûvészetekben*. Budapest 1984. Aby Warburg, *Pogány-antik jóslás Luther korából*. Budapest 1986.

14. Tibor Fabiny (ed.), *Shakespeare and the Emblem*. Szeged 1984.

15. József Pál (ed.), *Az ikonológia elmélete*. [The Theory of Iconology.] Szeged 1985. – József Pál – Tibor Fabiny – Gy. E. Szônyi (eds.), *Ikonográfia, embelamtika, Shakespeare*. [Iconography, emblem studies, Shakespeare.] Szeged 1986. – Tibor Fabiny (ed.), A *hermeneutika elmélete*. [The theory of hermeneutics.] Szeged 1987. – Tibor Fabiny (ed.), *Tipológiai szimbolizmus*. [Typological symbolism.] Szeged 1988. The series was continued in 1995 and eight volumes have been published thus for.

16. Sándor Radnóti, A pátosz és a démon – Aby Warburgról, in: Aby Warburg, *Pogány-antik jóslás Luther korából*. Budapest 1986, pp. 105–117. – György Tatár, Kronoszt fölfalják gyermekei. Gondolatok Aby Warburg könyvérôl in: György Tatár, *Pompeji és a titanic*. Budapest 1993, pp. 99–107. – Aby Warburg, *MNHMOSYNH. Válogatott tanulmányai*. Budapest 1995.

17. Cf. Ernst Cassirer's Der Begriff der symbolischen Form in Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften, in: Ernst Cassirer, *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs*. Oxford 1956, pp. 117. For the anecdote on the Library, cf. Toni Cassirer, *Mein Leben mit Ernst Cassirer*. Hildesheim 1981, pp. 103–107.

18. Jürgen Habermas, A *társadalomtudományok logikája* [=*Ein Literaturbericht: Zur Logik der Sozialwissenchaften,* 1967]. Budapest 1994, pp. 16–19.

19. Cf. Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy and the con-

cept of interpretive communities as developed in literary theory by Stanley Fish and in historiography by Hayden White.

20. Voigt Vilmos, Bevezetés Ernst Cassirer szimbólumhasználatába [Introduction to the use of symbols by Cassirer], in: Ágnes Kapitány – Gábor Kapitány (eds.), *"Jelbeszéd az életünk". A szimbolizáció története és kutatásának módszerei*. Budapest 1995, pp. 247–258.

21. Ernst H. Gombrich, Aby Warburg emlékezete [=In memoriam Aby Warburg. *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen* XI, 1966], in: Ernst H. Gombrich, *Reneszánsz tanulmányok*. Budapest 1985, p. 104.

22. Aby Warburg's Concept of *Kunswissenschaft*, in: Donald Preziosi (ed.), *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*. Oxford – New York 1998, p. 210.

23. Cf. Dorothée Bauerle, *Gespenstergeschichten für Ganz-Erwachsene: ein Kommentar zu Aby Warburgs Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*. Münster 1988. See also the study of Salvatore Settis in the *Vorträgen aus dem Warburg-Haus*, vol 1. Hamburg 1997.

24. Edgar Wind, Warburg's Concept of *Kunstwissenschaft* and its Meaning for Aesthetics (1930), in: Donald Preziosi (op. cit. in note 22), p. 212.

25. The following train of thought was inspired by Sándor Radnóti's essay on Warburg. Radnóti also refers to F.T. Vischer's symbol theory and R. Semon's concept of collective memory contributing to the formation of Warburg's theoretical ideas. Cf. also Edgar Wind (op. cit. in note 24); [the German original in: Aby Warburg, *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen* (ed. Dieter Wuttke). Baden-Baden 1980, p. 401–419. – Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg – An Intellectual Biography*. London 1970.

26. *"Il progresso artistico che si fece nell'arte drammatica, non dipese tanto dal ricorrere alle fonti dei classici* quanto dal modo di interpretarle. *Negl'Intermezzi del 1589 ci appariscono due correnti opposte nel modo di concepire i modelli classici. L'una tendeva in una maniera barocca...; l'altra invece, in un senso piuttosto classico...* [italics mine]" Cf. I costumi teatrali per gli intermezzi del 1589, in: Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften* (eds. Fritz Rougemont – Gertrud Bing). Berlin 1932, vol. 1, p. 296.

27. *"Die Wiederbelebung der dämonischen Antike vollzieht sich dabei, wie wir sahen, durch eine Art polarer Funktion des einfühlenden Bildgedächtnisses. Wir sind im Zeitalter des Faust, wo sich der moderne Wissenschaftler – zwischen magischer Praktik und kosmologischer Mathematik – den Denkraum der Besonnenheit zwischen sich und dem Objekt zu erringen versuchte... Die hier behandelten Bilder und Worte* [sind] *etwa als bisher ungelesene Urkunden zur tragischen Geschichte der Denkfreiheit des modernen Europäers aufzufassen"*. Quoted from Aby Warburg, *Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen* (ed. Dieter Wuttke). Baden-Baden 1980, p. 267.

28. Sándor Radnóti (op. cit. in note 16), p. 116.

29. See Benedetta Cestelli Guidi – Nicholas Mann (eds.), *Photographs at the Frontier. Aby Warburg in America 1895–1896*. London 1998.

30. Cf. Peter Burke's essay in: Ibidem, pp. 20-28.

31. Ulrich Raulff's and Philippe-Alain Michaud's papers in: Benedetta Cestelli Guidi – Nicholas Mann (op. cit. in note 29); see also Michaud's recent book, *Aby Warburg et l'image en movement*. Paris 1998.

32. Retrieving Warburg's Tradition. *Art History* XVI, 1993, p. 541–551. Republished in: Donald Preziosi (op. cit. in note 22), pp. 215–225.

33. Margaret Iversen, Retrieving Warburg's Tradition (1993), in: Donald Preziosi (op. cit. in note 22), p. 215.

34. Ibidem.

35. Ibidem.

36. Ibidem, p. 217.

37. Ibidem, p. 222.

38. Edgar Wind (op. cit. in note 24), p. 213.

39. Ibidem, pp. 213–214.

40. Margaret Iversen (op. cit. in note 33), p. 216.

41. Ernst H. Gombrich (op. cit. in note 21), p. 102.

42. On the full historiography of Warburg's *Schlangenritual*-lecture see Ulrich Raulff, The Seven Skins of the Snake. Oraibi, Kreuzlingen and Back: Stations on a Journey into Light, in: Benedetta Cestelli Guidi – Nicholas Mann (op. cit. in note 29), with references to his German edition (1988) and Michael P. Steinberg's English translation (1995).

43. Quoted by Ulrich Raulff (op. cit. in note 36), p. 64.

44. Aby Warburg, Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America (translated Michael Steinberg), in: Donald Preziosi (op. cit. in note 22), p. 204; for the Italian translation see Aby Warburg, *Il rituale del serpente: una relazione di viaggio...* (ed. Ulrich Raulff; translated Gianni Carchia, Flavio Cuniberto). Milano 1998.

45. Aby Warburg, Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America (op. cit. in note 38), p. 204.

46. Warburg actually forbade the publication of this lecture, as can be seen from his correspondence with Saxl between April 26 and May 7, 1924. The correspondence is kept in the Warburg Institute Archives, the letters are cited in Ulrich Raulff (op. cit. in note 36), p. 74.

47. Margaret Iversen (op. cit. in note 33), p. 220. She refers to Panofsky's Der Begriff des Kunstwollens. English translation: *Critical Inquiry* 8, Autumn 1981, pp. 17–33.

48. Edgar Wind (op. cit. in note 24), pp. 208–209.

49. Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (op. cit. in note 1), pp. 318–319.

50. Margaret Iversen (op. cit. in note 33), p. 221.

51. Ulrich Raulff (op. cit. in note 36), p. 68.