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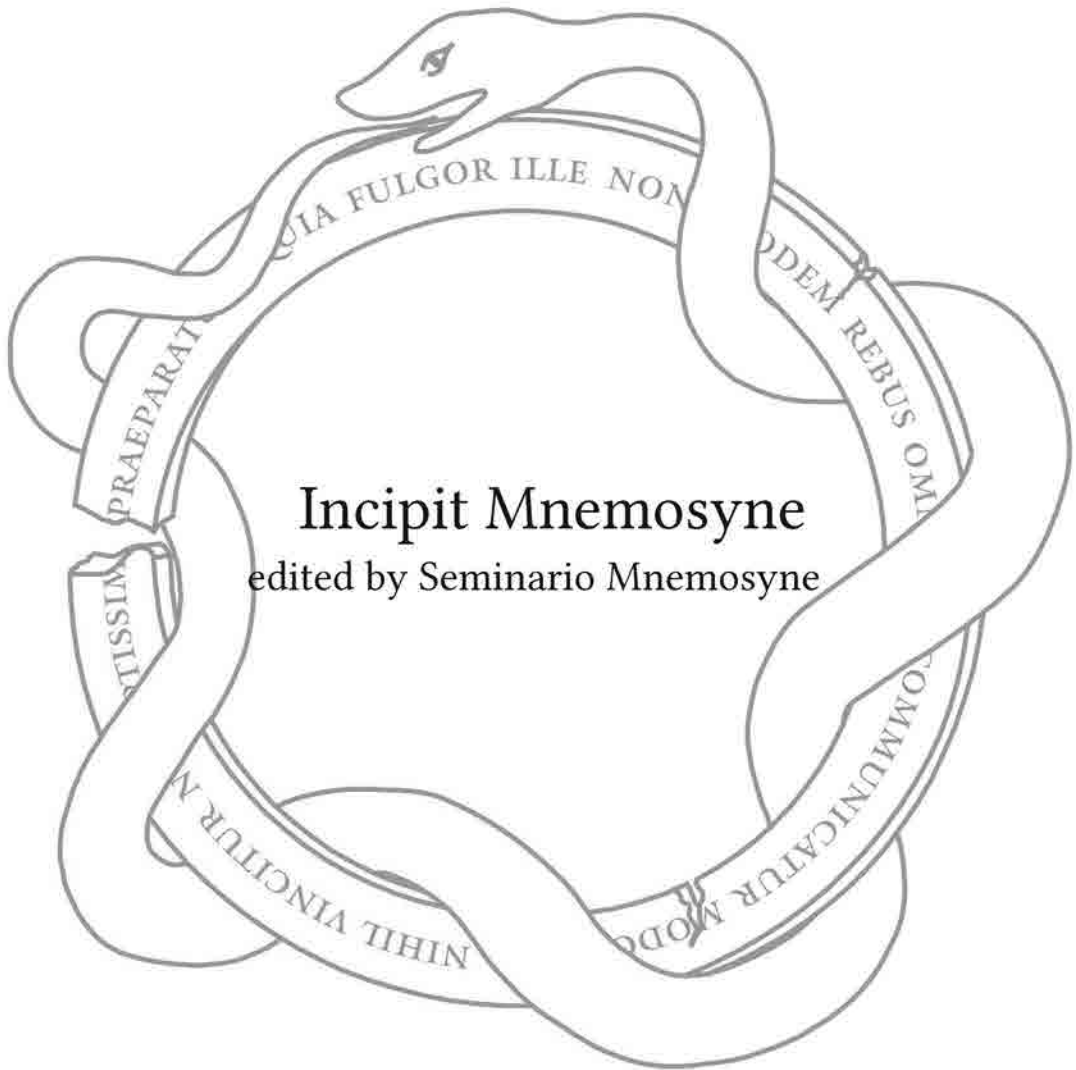
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The Nude Nymph: The Inhuman Object of Desire

Bogdana Paskaleva

In the culture of classical antiquity the term “nymph” denotes a minor female deity, a kind of demigoddess, that is, in most cases, connected to a particular geographical space: a forest, a mountain, a spring. Under this form, the nymph survives as an object of superstition up to the time of the Renaissance when interest in her acquired the character of belief in the spirits of the elements. Among these spirits the nymph occupies the place of water deity. An earlier and initial meaning of the lexeme *nympha* in classical language is “a young woman, a bride”. So, even though the nymph exists as a cultural phenomenon (as mythological character) long before Aby Warburg’s research activities, there is no doubt that it is he who invented and formulated the nymph as a scientific object. One of the possible aspects of researching Warburg’s studies on the nymph is to examine the *ethos* of the scholar himself. And it is a very peculiar scholar, indeed – a scholar who succumbs to his passions and whose scholarly activity is guided less by the search for the truth of knowledge than by one’s own personal obsessions. Some cultural phenomena (and maybe some other potential matters of study) have the quality of remaining latent for long periods of time, being left without any attention on the part of science precisely because of the lack of appropriate scientific instruments and methods, because of the lack of a research field capable of handling them. When a research practice is established, having a hold over such a level of analysis which unites an extent of subject matters that have remained up to that point scattered among other spheres or even completely unnoticed, the mere inventing of such an analytical level allows for new subjects of research to be constructed. Even if it is too fragmentary and incoherent, Warburg’s work is important for this very fact of having invented an unprecedented level of analysis, of finding itself in a field that had never before existed. This is asserted by Giorgio Agamben in an essay under the title of the “nameless science” (Agamben [1975] 2005). As a consequence of the invention of this specific level of analysis the scientific object of the nymph itself emerges. This is why there is such an obstacle in defining what exactly we are studying when studying the nymph – we do not know how to name it: the character of the nymph, the “image” of the nymph, the *Pathosformel* of the nymph, or something else? When we speak of her, we speak of all this at once.

The nameless science has its nameless objects, the science of many faces has its objects of many faces. To paraphrase the title of one of Lorenzo de' Medici's sonnets, the nymph would be something that "presents itself each day in a thousand manners" (un caso che ogni dì si mostrava in mille modi). We can think about this many-faced subject matter by defining it as a historically developing figure of the inhuman in the imaginary of Western Europe, or, at worst, as an "imaginary figure". The most specific feature of this figure among all others is that it exists only in a female hypostasis. Most often she is described as "non-female", meaning that she is not the 'other' of woman within the framework of the human, but rather that she is the 'female inhuman' or an 'in-female'.

ABY WARBURG'S *NINFA FIORENTINA*

The entrance point to the nymph as a subject of scientific study cannot be other than Aby Warburg's own studies on her, where the nymph appears in the first place as one of what he called *Pathosformel*. Studies on Warburg's research approach the topic with a particular scientific intuition, according to which the nymph stands out among the other *Pathosformel*, taking a special higher position. It seems that, for Warburg, she is different in a way, not only because he had forged his notion of *Pathosformel* by means of researching her figure in art, but also because he relates to her differently. The extraordinary position of the nymph has been conceived and treated in different manners by different Warburg scholars. In *Aby Warburg: An intellectual biography* (1970), Ernst Gombrich states that for Warburg the nymph "is a personification of Renaissance paganism" ("la personificazione stessa del 'paganesimo' rinascimentale") (quoted in Kirchmayr 2012). On the other hand, very often the nymph is identified as a figure of desire or as an image of the object of desire – generally, a visual element strongly intertwined with desire. Kurt Forster, for instance, considers the nymph a "late-Victorian male fantasy: the perfect incarnation of erotic desire" ("una fantasia maschile tardo-vittoriana: la perfetta incarnazione di un desiderio erotico": quoted in Kirchmayr 2012), while Alessandra Pedersoli defines her as "the seductive being *par excellence*" ("la Ninfa è l'essere seduttivo per eccellenza": Pedersoli 2008). In his essay *Ninfe* Giorgio Agamben calls her "a figure of the object of love in the proper sense" ("figura per eccellenza dell'oggetto d'amore") and ascribes her invention as such a figure to Boccaccio (Agamben [2002] 2012, 46), while Georges Didi-Huberman pictures her as the intersection point of memory, desire and time (Didi-Huberman 2002, 10). Raoul Kirchmayr raises objections to this interpretation – according to

him, the analysis of the nymph as an object of desire “not only doesn’t explain anything, but muddies the waters even more, because in fact, it only attempts to explain the proliferation of nymphs, sylphs, and other similar tender female *silhouettes* in figurative arts of the late 19th century” (“Il che non solo non spiega nulla, ma addirittura intorbida ulteriormente le acque, poiché questo tipo di argomentazione intende fornire un orientamento per comprendere la moltiplicazione di ninfe, silfidi e leggiadre silhouette femminili nell’arte figurativa e nella letteratura del secondo Ottocento”: Kirchmayr 2012).

Nevertheless, Kirchmayr’s statement doesn’t stand completely against the idea of connecting nymph and desire, but only against the simplifying reduction of it to an elementary male fantasy. On the contrary, according to him, a serious argument on the nymph as an object of desire should not move in a direction of simplicity, but in that of enrichment, showing how complicated the case actually is. From this point of view, problematising the body of the nymph, where the question of its nudity resides, and – after all – the indeterminacy, the uncertainty of this body, should evolve into a more general discussion on the question of the female body and the imaginary forms that it is subjected to and that it is able to generate. The conclusion of Kirchmayr’s parallel study of both Warburg’s and Freud’s nymph-like figures could be roughly formulated as follows: the appearance of the nymph is the hallmark of a particular economy of desire; this position Kirchmayr defines as an irreducible remainder, and this remainder, in its turn, is the female body itself. It poses itself as a problem in its impenetrability, lack of transparency and inconceivability. The female body doesn’t lend itself to be appropriated and assimilated in a simple manner, it poses itself as an unsolvable problem.

So, as far as the nymph is the imaginary figure which demonstrates the female body as an inhuman one, and furthermore, a nude one, marked by a peculiar kind of nudity, not the unequivocal nudity of the human female body, we may argue that the problem, posed by the body of the nymph, is actually profoundly linked to the question about the female body in general. In this perspective, the female body would appear as an inhuman body, so that gaining control over the inhuman of the nymph would mean surmounting the female body as such. In advance, we might suggest that this body will turn out to be characterised by the features of indeterminacy (including literally, its borders, which will tend to always remain unclear), affectivity, and transformability.

Warburg's interest in the nymph is rooted in his interest in the Italian Renaissance, his first research field. Generally speaking, to Warburg the Renaissance implies the idea of a 'humanisation' of the world. In this regard, the Renaissance is to him an epoch of increasing anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, but unlike the traditional concept of the replacement of Christian theocentrism by humanistic and rationalistic anthropocentrism from the late 13th century onwards, to Warburg the Renaissance process of anthropomorphising does not flow against Christianity as a restitution of ancient cultural forms. It is instead opposed to a state of disfigurement of these very forms, a distorting modification, their supposed 'monsterisation' and demonisation, the social basis of which is not Christianity, but Hellenistic culture. According to Warburg's opinion, the Hellenistic period 'restored' the pre-classical shape of the ancient pantheon, taking it back to the phase of horrible monsters and demons hostile to men that inhabited the starry skies. The Renaissance, in turn, re-endowed these monsters with human features. One of the cases that provide ground for studying these complex processes and their cultural causes is exactly the figure of the nymph, because it is situated on the border between the archaic monster and the human. The strategy employed in overcoming the nymph's border case consists in interweaving it with the divine, another sphere of the inhuman, which, as an object of the imaginary, could help in mapping the limits of the human. So, in Warburg's view, Renaissance 'anthropocentrism' seems to consist of tensions between the human and various forms of inhuman, such as demons (in both the positive and negative sense of the word), nymphs, divinities, planets, angels, heroes etc.

From the very beginning of his reflections on the nymph as an example of one of the forms in which ancient deities 'survived' until, and through, the Italian Renaissance, it was clearly not Warburg who put the accent on the nymph's ability to function as an image of the ever fleeting object of desire. In the fictive exchange of letters between Aby Warburg and his friend André Jolles, the nymph, for Warburg, as heir of *Victoria*, the Roman goddess of triumph (as he identifies her in his study *Florentinische Wirklichkeit und antikisierender Idealismus*: Warburg 2010, 227 et pass.), comes to show the paradigm for a new scientific methodology that is to be applied to visual culture in a historical perspective. This new kind of methodology aims at reconsidering the main tasks of art criticism, detaching it from the practice of mere aesthetic judgments and shifting it towards the historical character of certain devices of visual expression.

The conception of the nymph appears in November 1900 (Warburg 2010, 198-210), about five years before the first use of the *Pathosformel* notion in Warburg's essay on Dürer (*Dürer und die italienische Antike*) (Warburg 2010, 176-183). The *Pathosformel* is understood by Warburg to be an intrinsic iconic scheme that gives expression to a certain affect. The case of the nymph is located as one of the two extremities in the scale of human capacity for expression – it is the pole of highest intensity of the affect, “the highest degree of being possessed”, Warburg would say (“der höchste Grad des Ergriffenseins/ der Ergriffenheit”: Warburg 2010, 629-646). And since, according to Warburg, the state of being affected is intrinsically polarised on two levels – once, on the level of its intensity, and a second time, on the semantic level – the meaning of the *Pathosformel* ‘nymph’ would show a double value, as well. Positively, she will denote triumphal ecstasy, and negatively, the ecstasy of deepest despair. In any case, she will imply an intense agitation. In his later studies, Warburg would eventually link the nymph to the manic condition of the human psyche (Warburg 2010, 645).

If this is the case with Warburg's reading of the nymph-problem, at first glance, there appears to be no trace of the element of desire as a constitutive feature of this particular *Pathosformel*. What suggests to scholars that the figure of being-possessed should be interpreted as an image of the elusive object of desire, is a text which is in fact not written by Warburg himself, though closely related to the idea of the nymph as a *Pathosformel*. This is the first letter from the fictive correspondence and its author is André Jolles who introduces the character of the nymph in general and gives her precisely this name. Willing to make his language more ‘poetic’, he describes the first impression left by the female figure on Ghirlandaio's wall painting in Santa Maria Novella as falling in love, and calls the object of his longing “a nymph”. As Kirchmayr suggests, this is a reference to Hippolyte Taine's description of the very same mural in *Voyage en Italie* (Kirchmayr 2012):

Und hinter diesen grade bei der geöffneten Thür läuft, nein fliegt, nein schwebt der Gegenstand meiner Träume, der allmählig die Proportionen eines anmutigen Alpdruckes anzunehmen beginnt. Eine fantastische Figur, nein ein Dienstmädchen, nein eine klassische Nymphe kommt, auf ihrem Kopfe eine Schüssel mit herrlichen Südfrüchten tragend, mit

weit wehendem Schleier ins Zimmer hinein. [...] Vielleicht mach ich sie poetischer als wie sie wirklich ist – welcher Liebhaber thut das nicht – aber ich hatte den ersten Moment als ich sie sah, das sonderbare Gefühl, das uns manchmal beim Sehen einer düstern Berglandschaft, beim Lesen eines grossen Dichters, oder auch wenn wir verliebt sind, überkommt: das Gefühl von “wo hab ich dich *mehr* gesehen”. [...] Lieber Freund, man verliebt sich eigentlich nur einmal. Wenn man denkt es öfters zu thun, sieht man immer nur andre Fläche desselben Prismas. Die Objekte wechseln, die Verliebtheit bleibt eins und untheilbar. Und so entdeckte ich denn, in vielem was ich in der Kunst geliebt hatte, etwas von meiner jetzigen Nymphe. (Warburg 2010, 200-201)

And right behind them, near the open door, is running, no – flying, no – hovering, the object of my dreams, which started to gradually acquire the proportions of a charming nightmare. A fantastic figure, no – a servant girl, no – a classical nymph is entering the room, carrying a bowl of magnificent tropical fruits on her head, and her veil is fluttering far behind her. [...] Perhaps I am making her more poetic than she actually is – which lover doesn't? – but at the very moment I saw her, I had the strange feeling that usually overwhelms us at the sight of a somber mountain view, or at reading a major poet, or when we are in love: the feeling of “where have I seen you before”. [...] My dear friend, we do actually fall in love one single time. Even when we believe we do it more often, we are merely seeing different surfaces of the same prism. The objects change, the being-in-love remains one and indivisible. Thus, in much of what I used to love in art, I started to discover something of my present nymph. [My translation – B.P.]

The erotic connotations in the nymph's description and the implied references to Plato as a philosopher of love, become the reason why a text that is supposed to be an explanation of the essence of a *Pathosformel* turns into a proclamation of love to this very same *Pathosformel*. Now we can see why exactly this *Pathosformel* should become invested with desire and, at the same time, a representation of desire itself. And yet, the question remains – what exactly is the relation between desire and affect? How is it theoretically possible that the nymph, as connected to affect, could arrive at the position of being an object of desire? Due to the high complexity of this problem from a psychological and psychoanalytical point of view, instead of bringing it to congruence with some already existing theories of desire, we will try to reconstruct an idea about the essence of desire and its relation to affect, out of Warburg's texts.

RELATION OF THE VIEWER TO THE IMAGE

The interpretation of the nymph's image as an image of the object of desire displaces and complicates the meaning of the term *Pathosformel*. A *Pathosformel* is, as we mentioned, an intrinsic scheme for expression of an affect within an image; the affect (or *pathos*) is to Warburg a universal human experience, an anthropological constant, although also a feature always marked by a historical index. So, examining human psyche becomes the task of the historical anthropologist who collects and inventories all visual forms of expression to the fullest possible extent into a catalogue or an atlas. It is in this context that the *Pathosformel* of the nymph takes a position on a higher level when compared to the other *Pathosformel*: she could be interpreted not only as an expression of exultation and triumph, i.e. as an instrument in the hands of the collective or the individual subject of expression, but also also a *Pathosformel* of the viewer himself: her function is not only to express the condition of being obsessed, but also to obsess. The viewer is becoming affected, obsessed, profoundly touched – and starts craving for the formula instead of understanding it as an expression of an external affect. That is how the formula-image is being transformed into an object of desire. This is how the formula of the nymph extracts and sums up the essence of the *Pathosformel* in general, disclosing herself as that element in the image that attracts the viewer to the image, so that he/she feels compelled to research the image. She is both one among the *Pathosformel*, and the paradigm of all of them – as a figure of the affective capacity of the human psyche in general, desired by the scholar as an object of research. In what way desiring the scientific object is linked to the traditional idea of acquiring knowledge of such an object, we will try to show by analysing a couple of passages from Warburg's texts along with some of the concepts we find in Giordano Bruno's *Gli eroici furori* (1585) a work which Warburg was studying before his unexpected death.

Warburg advances the idea of a transfer of affect from the visual formula to the viewer, by employing his concept of empathy. According to Philippe-Alain Michaud, the appearance of this notion in Warburg's work is connected to the influence of Robert Vischer's book *Das optische Formgefühl* (*The Sense of an Optical Form*), published 1873 (Michaud [1998] 2012, 91). Empathy is to be understood both as the empathy of the viewer towards the image, and as the empathy of the Renaissance painter towards the ancient *Weltanschauung*, imprinted on the stone monuments of Latin antiquity.

It has to be underscored that the identification of the viewer with the seen object is in Warburg's mind one of the necessary conditions to create the illusion of movement of the viewed object itself. As early as the year 1890 Warburg develops a series of fragments, entitled *Viewer and movement* (*Zuschauer und Bewegung*), where he attempts to demonstrate, first, that the impression of a moving object is obtained not only by means of modification of the depicted body, but first of all, of the so called "moving accessories" ("bewegtes Beiwerk"), i.e. garments, veils, and hair; and second, that this impression could reach its complete shape only in the consciousness of the viewer:

Mit der Einführung sich vorwärtsbewegender Figuren wird der Zuschauer gezwungen: die vergleichende Betrachtung mit der anthropomorphistischen zu vertauschen. Es heisst nicht mehr: 'Was bedeutet dieser Ausdruck?' sondern 'Wo will das hin?' Das Auge vollführt den Figuren gegenüber Nachbewegung, um die Illusion zu erhalten, als ob der Gegenstand sich bewegte.

As a consequence of the introduction of figures moving towards the front, the viewer is compelled to replace the comparative view with an anthropomorphic one. This means no longer "What does this expression mean?", but instead: "Where is this going?" The eye performs against the figures an 'after-movement' (*Nachbewegung*), in order to obtain the illusion as if the object itself was moving. (quoted in Michaud [1998] 2012, 92).

Zuschauer u. Gewdg. Bei bew. Gewdg. wird jeder Theil d. Contour als Spur einer sich vorw. bew. Person angesehen, die man Schritt zu Schritt verfolgt.

Viewer and garments. In the movement of the garments every part of the contour is perceived as the trace left by a character moving towards the front, who is being followed step by step. (quoted in Michaud [1998] 2012, 94).

It appears that "the movement is not anymore that of the observed object, but that of the observing subject" ("Le mouvement n'est désormais plus celui de l'objet regardé mais celui du sujet regardant": Michaud [1998] 2012, 93), as P.-A. Michaud concludes from the analysis of these fragments.

If we accept that, in Warburg's opinion, obsession and movement, affect and its bodily expression are inseparable, then we have to expand the problematic of empathy and the performance of *Nachbewegung* by the viewer's eye towards the idea that the affect too is finished by the viewer himself – a sort of an 'after-feeling', *Nachfühlung*. This could explain in what way the image functions as a transmitter from the object of desire to desire itself by rendering the affect complete within the viewer. The viewer begins to introject the exterior affect he is witnessing.

Even if we agree, though, with the interpretation of Warburg's nymph as an object of desire – at the price of its reduction to a simple male fantasy – the same question remains: why a nymph and what is she in her essence? We can paraphrase the question in another way: why is it that from the moment she becomes an object of desire, the ordinary woman turns into a nymph? An illustration could be provided by Wilhelm Jensen's novel *Gradiva*: a girl with whom the main character has been acquainted for years, transforms into the ghost of a Roman woman who had lived long ago in Ancient Pompei, and this she does precisely because she becomes the hypostasis of an object of the passion of the main character. The object of desire cannot have human features.

Actually, one of the principal impulses that lead to the interpretation of the nymph as a male fantasy is provoked by Freud himself and his work *Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva* (*Der Wahn und die Träume in Jensen's Gradiva*). As many scholars have noticed (Kirchmayr 2012; Didi-Huberman [2002] 2010; Michaud [1998] 2012), the relationship between Freud and *Gradiva* uncannily resembles that of Warburg and his nymph.

THE NYMPHS OF GIORDANO BRUNO: INTELLECT AND DESIRE

We discover the inhuman (divine or monstrous) nature of the nymph encoded or interlaced, preserved in some of the most archaic story lines – the stories about metamorphoses. We need to indicate that in Renaissance art *im Wort und Bild*, as Warburg understands it, the stories about nymphs (which, of course, go back to ancient prototypes) are first and foremost stories about metamorphoses, derived from Ovid with larger or smaller modifications. Actually, the earliest nymph figure to be discovered in Warburg – which is Venus herself along with all her proliferated visual versions in Botticelli's paintings – is to be traced back to Angelo Poliziano's poem *Stanze per la Giostra* (*The Tournament*) (written about the years 1474 – 76). The narrative framework of the poem, on the other hand, is based mostly on Ovid and Claudian. In his study Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus and Spring* (*Sandro Botticellis "Geburt der Venus" und "Frühling"*) from the year 1893 (Warburg 2010, 39-123) Warburg examines in detail the passage of the poem that pertains to the description of the birth of Venus, and identifies its ancient source as the Orphic hymn to Aphrodite. Warburg needs the fragment from *Giostra*, in order to show how the scene's description we find in the ancient texts and in the Renaissance poem not only provides the painter with the contents of a scene to depict, but suggests to him the techniques and devices for the execution of the paintings.

In other words, it supplies formal elements as well, and above all, those formal elements that are able to render the impression of movement. In Warburg's mind, it is exactly "moving life" (*das bewegte Leben*) that produces the most vivid connection of Renaissance art to the heritage of antiquity: to the Renaissance artist 'ancient' is that which is able to render the impression of movement (Warburg 2010, 63). Moreover, as we have mentioned above, such an impression is not to be achieved by modification of the body depicted, but by intervention in the inanimate attributes of the body: hair and garments, draperies, branches and flowers. Politian describes precisely those elements – and the manners of their movement – as they also appear in Botticelli's paintings: as the hallmark of an 'ancient aura' (*recht "antikisch"*) (Warburg 2010, 61).

Although he makes a brief remark on it, Warburg doesn't focus his attention on the fact that the narrative framework of *Giostra* is borrowed from Ovid. The poem is constructed as a mythologised praise (*laudatio*) to Giuliano de' Medici who appears as a character under the guise of Actaeon. The development of the plot, including some description details, obviously follows the Actaeon episode we can read in Ovid (Ovid. Met. III 138-252) (Cataluccio 2012). The character of Iulio (a figure of Giuliano) is out hunting with his dogs. As he notices a beautiful white doe, Iulio separates from the hunters' group to go after her. While hunting, he accidentally finds himself in a small meadow in the woods, where he encounters a maid (a nymph) and instantly falls in love with her. Of course, the white doe and the nymph are the same character, their convertibility repeats the metamorphic element from Actaeon's story where the hunter himself is transformed into a deer. The falling in love with the girl (an image of Simonetta Vespucci) is the culmination of the poem (in the form it has reached us, probably interrupted and unfinished because of the sudden death of Giuliano), and it is as a consequence of this event that Iulio pledges to take part in the tournament from the title. The poem's conflict is centered on the fact that before the fatal hunt, Iulio has been refusing to succumb to the power of Cupid. That is why Cupid, supported by his mother Venus, contrives the trap with the doe, so that Iulio could meet the nymph and fall in love, i.e. surrender to Cupid's power. So, the poem ends with Cupid's triumph over Iulio – with Iulio's transformation from a person who doesn't desire into a desiring one, from a person who defies love into a lover. His metamorphosis is brought about by the meeting with the nymph. In this manner, it becomes clear that the function of the nymph is to transform the subject with relation to desire – to produce desire.

The sense in which the metamorphosis happens here is not merely metaphorical. What we encounter in this case is rather a use of the motif of metamorphosis to denote an ascent to a higher level of being. The metamorphosis theme is used in like manner by another author who was important to Aby Warburg (although he did not live to study him as thoroughly as he wished to) – Giordano Bruno. His collection of dialogues *Gli eroici furori* (*The Heroic Frenzies*, published in London, 1585) is focused on the essence of heroic love which is, in its turn, closely related to the philosophy of love of Renaissance Platonism. Here, love is treated as a mystic ascent towards the divine. In Platonic tradition, such an ascent is always metaphorically characterized as transubstantiation, transformation, metamorphosis of the Platonic lover into a superhuman entity. The fourth dialogue of the first part of *Gli eroici furori* starts with a sonnet on the topic of Actaeon. The sonnet itself is of great interest, but the commentary that accompanies it is even more curious:

Alle selve i mastini e i veltri slaccia
 Il giovan Atteon, quand' il destino
 Gli dirizz' il dubio ed incauto camino,
 Di boscareccie fiere appo la traccia.
 Ecco tra l'acqui il più bel busto e faccia,
 Che veder poss' il mortal e divino,
 In ostro ed alabastro ed oro fino
 Vedde; e 'l gran cacciator dovenne caccia.
 Il cervio ch' a' più folti
 Luoghi dirizzav' i passi più leggieri,
 Ratto vorârò i suoi gran cani e molti.
 I' allargo i miei pensieri
 Ad alta preda, ed essi a me rivolti
 Morte mi dàn con morsi crudi e fieri.
 (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* I, 4).

The youthful Actaeon unleashes the mastiffs and the greyhounds to the forests, when destiny directs him to the dubious and perilous path, near the traces of the wild beasts. Here among the waters he sees the most beautiful countenance and breast, that ever one mortal or divine may see, clothed in purple and alabaster and fine gold; and the great hunter becomes the prey that is hunted. The stag which to the densest places is wont to direct his lighter steps, is swiftly devoured by his great and numerous dogs. I stretch my thoughts to the sublime prey, and these springing back upon me, bring me death by their hard and cruel gnawing. (transl. by Paul Eugene Memmo, 1964)

In the final tercet of the sonnet, Actaeon's figure is interpreted as an allegory of the mind torn and devoured by its own thoughts, where the most exciting image is, of course, that of the dogs. Yet, in the commentary to the verses Actaeon's death is taken in an entirely positive light: "Atteone significa l'intelletto intento alla caccia della divina sapienza, all'apprensione della beltà divina." (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* I, 4) ("Actaeon signifies the intellect determined to hunt for the divine wisdom, to apprehend the divine beauty"). The "intellect hunting wisdom", a figure taken from the imagery of Nicholas of Cusa, is being transformed in the moment he catches a glimpse of "divine beauty". The death bestowed on him by his own thoughts is considered to put an end to the life in the insensible, sensual, blind and illusionary world, so he starts living in an intellectual manner, which is also a divine manner ("qua finisce la sua vita secondo il mondo pazzo, sensuale, cieco e fantastico, e comincia a vivere intellettualmente; vive vita de dei [...]") (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* I, 4).

What has the nymph got to do with all this? She is the object seen and beloved, the sight that turns the hunter to prey. In this case, the character revealed under the periphrastic description of "il più bel busto e faccia, che veder poss' il mortal e divino" is, of course, the hunter-goddess Diana. In Ovid Actaeon stumbles upon the nude Diana (by an accident that is not his fault, as the poet underlines) bathing together with her nymphs, her traditional companions (Cataluccio 2012). In the Renaissance interpretation we can notice the tendency of the nymph to appear with the face of a higher goddess. There are mainly two of them, even though completely opposite to one another – Diana and Venus. As Agamben proves with the help of Paracelsus's treatise *De nymphis, sylphis, pygmeis et salamandris et caeteris spiritibus*, Venus herself is an arch-nymph, a queen of nymphs (Agamben [2002] 2012, 38-45). On the other hand, we usually meet Diana as a leader nymph – for example, in Boccaccio's *Ninfale fiesolano* Diana is the tyrannic mistress of all nymphs, huntress and virgin, to whom a nymph who has lost her virginity has committed the heaviest crime. In a way, a nymph who has lost her virginity ceases to be a nymph – she is cast away from the party and even punished with death (Ovid's prominent example here is the story of Callisto in Ovid. *Met.* II 401-532). It is a question of a particular interest (which, unfortunately, cannot be considered in detail here) in what way those two hypostases of the arch-nymph are compatible with one another – the absolute virgin and her complete opposite. It is a state of affairs that should suggest some very ambiguous features in the nymph's portrait. This problem does by no means suppose an easy answer though, but we can suggest that pro-

bably one of the principal texts to be examined in this regard should be Boccaccio's *Caccia di Diana*, where the two goddesses meet in a conflict.

If we turn back to Bruno, we have to underscore once again Diana's ability to bring about a transformation (as she does in many of Ovid's myths, in *Ninfale fiesolano* and elsewhere). In Bruno's philosophical system, Diana is, as we know, the principal deity (Culianu [1984] 2006, 104-129), the one that reigns over the shadows of the ideas in this visible world, and that makes her, paradoxically, the most important deity from an epistemological point of view, because ideas are accessible exclusively through their shadows (Ansaldi 2013, 187-253). The preface to *Gli eroici furori* (*Argomento del Nolano*) – the whole book being dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney – is structured as an invective speech against earthly love, impure, vile and sensitive, and against all those who are praising it in poems. The reason why earthly love (and poetry related to it) is painted so black consists in the fact that its objects are human women. Bruno claims that, unlike all those vulgar poets, he is going to speak of the only honorable object of love – the heavenly Diana. The strangest move he undertakes in this derogation of women is an apology Bruno offers to “your” women, “your” meaning Philip Sidney's, i.e. those of “the British country”. They should not be offended, because they “don't belong to the sex of women” just as the British land, being an island, is not part of our world, but is separated from it (“[...] dove si ragionasse de tutto il sesso femminile, non si deve né può intendere de alcune vostre, che non denno esser stimate perte di quel sesso”) (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori*, *Argomento*).

What are they then? The answer is that, standing outside of the female sex, they are not women, but nymphs, divinities, made of a celestial substance; and among them excels the one and only Diana, whose name Bruno refuses to mention (this is an obvious reference to Queen Elizabeth I); none of the vices and frailties typical of the female sex are to be attributed to those nymphs (“perché non son femine, non son donne, ma in similitudine di quelle, son ninfe, son dive, son di sustanza celeste, tra le quali è lecito di contemplar quell'unica Diana [...] perciò a nessuna particolare deve essere improperto l'imbecillità e condizion del sesso, come né il difetto e vizio di complessione”) (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* *Argomento*). Right after the preface we find a poem entitled *Iscusazione del Nolano alle più virtuose e leggiadre dame* (*An Apology of the Nolan to the Most Virtuous and Outstanding Ladies*), where England's ladies are once again named nymphs of a superhuman kind (“specie sovrumana”), and again we see the image of Diana as one of them, the highest among them.

According to this *Apology*, the nymphs are such creatures that leave open the question about their essence – one cannot decide whether to add them, or to take them out of the number of women (“né computar, né ecctuar da quelle [i.e. le femmine]”) (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* Iscusazione). This undecidability of the nymph’s essence will turn out to be of great importance with respect to the constitution of the nymph’s body.

The nymph is not a woman, she is something else. She might resemble a woman in some aspects, or even in her looks, but she isn’t one, because she is a creature of a higher order. It is crucial to answer the question about what is distinguishing the nymph from the woman. In the first place, the nymph, according to Bruno, is not a being of flesh, but an intellectual entity. We find a similar interpretation in Agamben’s *Ninfe*, where the nymph is considered the paradigm of pure image, an image of the image itself, that doesn’t have any corporeal component (Agamben [2002] 2012, 44-45). Paradoxically, this doesn’t reduce the erotic quality. Quite the contrary, it seems that the peculiar allure of the nymph is due exactly to her non-corporeal or para-corporeal body. In Agamben’s terms, we might even suggest that the special body of the nymph is an image-body, a body that is no more than an image. A problem we will leave aside here is that of the opposition between intellect and imagination: whether the essence of the nymph should to one or the other, is a question that needs a more careful examination that cannot be undertaken here. The question requires a digression into the problem of the cognitive faculties of soul in Medieval and Renaissance philosophy that would be inappropriate in the present context: however, what can be approached is the problem of the relation between intellect and desire.

The significant point here is that the nymph proves to be a non-corporeal entity. In the end of the preface to *Gli eroici furori* Bruno directly identifies nymphs with the celestial intelligences (here it is the Platonic term of *intelligentia* that is being referenced). The author describes the beatific condition of the intellect contemplating the divine, having reached the ‘dwelling place’ of the divine. There it would be able to contemplate “the nymphs, i.e. the celestial and divine intelligences” that support and assist the first intelligence. The first intelligence, in its turn, is compared to Diana among the nymphs of the desolate forests (“Ivi son le Ninfe, cioè le beate e divine intelligenze che assisteno e amministrano alla prima intelligenza, la quale e come la Diana tra le nimfe de gli deserti. Quella sola tra tutte l’altre é per la triplice virtude potente ad aprir ogni sigillo, a sciôrre ogni nodo, a discuoiprir ogni secreto, e disserrar qualsivoglia cosa rinchiusa.”) (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori*, Argomento).

This short description refers to the fifth and last dialogue of the second part of *Gli eroici furori* whose interlocutors – for the first time in the whole book – are two women. One of the women, Laodamia, gives an allegorical account of her arrival in this beatific place, inhabited by nymphs, which appears to be the British island (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori*, II, 5).

So, the nymph is the image of the abstract intelligence. But if we go back to the fourth dialogue of the first part of the work, to Actaeon's fate, we will notice she is not only an intelligible being, but she has a very specific relation to desire that concerns exactly the moment of metamorphosis: "the hunter turns to prey". In the commentary to the sonnet the character of Tansillo introduces the opposition of intellect and will (an opposition inherited from Scholastic philosophy). Here the distinction considered is based on the opposite direction of the transformation: "[...] andava per predare e rimase preda questo cacciatore per l'operazione de l'intelletto con cui converte le cose apprese in se." (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* I, 4) ("[...] he goes out to hunt, but ends up as prey, this hunter who is hunting by means of the operation of the intellect, with which he transforms the apprehended things into himself.").

The activity of the mind as an intellect consists in the operation by which the intellect transforms its objects into itself. In this conception we can trace Aristotle's heritage: the operation of knowledge is performed as an 'appropriation' of the object to be known. But in this point we can also clearly notice the influence of Italian Renaissance Platonism on Bruno, especially that of Marsilio Ficino and his *Quaestiones quinque de mente* (*Five questions on mind*). The intellectual faculty captures in itself the exterior objects and 'assimilates' them, renders them similar to itself. The will, though, functions not by means of appropriation, but by means of the opposite process, in which the desired object abstracts the desiring subject, extracts him out of himself, forcing him to step out and to let himself be converted into something else – into the desired object. Now, while hunting, the hunter undergoes a sudden event – something exterior to him takes control over him, and that is how will operates: "Tansillo: È questa caccia per l'operazione della voluntade, per atto della quale lui si converte nel oggetto. Cicada: Intendo, perché lo amore transforma e converte nella cosa amata." (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* I, 4) ("Tansillo: This is a hunt performed by means of the operation of the will, and by the act of the will he converts into the object. Cicada: I understand; because love transforms and converts into the thing loved.")

The intellect appropriates: it conforms the objects to its own measure. The will, in turn, conforms the desiring subject to the desired object. The nymph is the operator setting this process in motion. As an object of desire, the nymph conforms the willing mind to her own ontological level. But what does she transform it into? There is a circular moment here – she converts it from unwilling into willing, from unloving into lover. As an example here we can point back to the lot of Politian's Iulio. The object of desire and the desire itself come into being at the very same instant, in one and the same movement. We might even conclude they cause themselves mutually. The logic of desire, as Bruno describes it, is such that the act of desiring implies the co-inciding of desire and the object desired. This means that coinciding with the object is not the moment of obtaining and owning it, but rather the arising of desire itself. And the result of this self-exceeding is the turn to action: for example, Iulio makes the decision to participate in the tournament. The element of the growing activity is clearly visible in one of the hypostases of the nymph in Warburg – the maenad. The distinctive feature of the maenad is exactly her increased agitation and impulse to action, an overexcitement and excess of bodily movements, expressing the inner obsession (*Ergriffenheit*) by desire.

A similar idea on the circulation of desire within the relation of viewer and viewed, of subject and object of the gaze, is proposed by Louis Marin in his *Powers of the image* (1993). Interpreting the figure of Narcissus as a paradigm of a viewer confronted with an image, Marin states in psychoanalytic terms: “[...] the process of investment [of desire] returns to its subject: the imaginary is, in an absolute sense, nothing other than the manifestation of this return of desire which comes back to, converts itself into or reflects on the very same agency of its subject [...]. In any case, this return is a total one, this conversion – complete, this reflection – catastrophic. The desire of the absolute of the subject comes back to the subject itself within the image not as its own, proper, appropriated image, but as the image of another, basically of the Other himself, unrecognisable to the subject itself.” (“[...] le procès d’investissement [du désir] se retourne sur son sujet: l’imaginaire n’est absolu que de manifester ce retour du désir qui re-vient, se convertit ou se réfléchit sur l’instance même de son sujet [...]. Toutefois, ce retournement est total, cette conversion complète, cette réflexion catastrophique. Le désir d’absolu du sujet dans l’image lui fait retour, non comme son image propre, appropriée, mais comme celle d’un autre, et en son fond, de l’Autre même, méconnaissable par son sujet même.”) (Marin 1993, 17).

It is important to stress that the conversion of the viewer into the desired object is accompanied by his estrangement from himself. A mediation is needed in this process, and it takes the form of an image. If we apply this to Bruno's fable of Actaeon, the nymph would play the role of a paradigmatic image, a claim we can find in Agamben's *Ninfe*.

Going back to the relation between desiring and desired, two points could be made. First, we could show the coinciding of desiring and desired in the fragment of Giostra, which describes the rape of Proserpina. The passage is modelled on Ovid's story in *Met.* V 363-408 and in Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*, and Warburg quotes it in order to show the way hair and veils moved by the wind are described. The interesting detail is what is said about Proserpina: "Quasi in un tratto vista amata e tolta/ dal fero Pluton Proserpina pare" (Poliziano, *Stanze per la giostra* I, 113, 1-2; cfr. "paene simul visa est dilectaque raptaque Diti", Ovid. *Met.* V 395). In the relief in Venus's castle, Proserpina seems as if she were seen, loved and taken away in one single move. These verses could be read as an account for the coinciding of the act of desire and the act of identification with the desired object. We would have said it is even the act of 'gaining possession' of the loved object (certainly, that must have been the perspective of Pluto in this situation), if we hadn't already reached the conclusion that it is the desired object that 'obtains' the desiring subject.

Secondly, this transformation of the desiring subject into the desired object in the moment when desire comes into being, as Bruno recounts it, is precisely the effect of *Einfühlung* and *Nachbewegung* outlined in Warburg's early fragments. Being-possessed-by-desire emanates from the image towards the viewer in such a manner that it converts the viewer into itself – from an observer of a desire external to him he is transformed into one who is undergoing that very same desire with respect to the observed object itself. If we allow a generalization here, we should probably conclude it is not only the overagitated image of the nymph that functions this way, but any image at all in its essence as a phenomenon of expression, revealing an inner agitation through the bodily outside. So, according to Warburg, the nymph, regarded as a paradigm of the *Pathosformel* in general, is the one who is setting the viewer's desire in motion. This is a second route to confirm the statement that in Warburg the nymph plays the role of an object of desire, but we can restate that within the framework of a specific Warburgian theory of desire.

As we have seen, in the preface to *Gli eroici furori* Bruno calls the nymphs 'intelligences': the principal of all the 'intelligences', the highest nymph, Diana, is designated as 'the first intelligence'. However, in the fourth dialogue, it seems that these 'intelligences' pertain to the will, rather than to the intellect. So, we must say that Bruno's nymphs are intellectual and intelligible beings, but in such a way that they cannot be appropriated by human intellect in its typical act of knowledge. The nymph produces an intellectual activity turned upside down, in which the knowing one ceases to be a subject, an agent of knowledge, and instead starts 'undergoing' the activity of the thing known. That is how "the hunter converts into prey" and gets devoured by his own dogs, by his own thoughts. Later on, in the same fourth dialogue of the first part another sonnet on Actaeon appears in which the accent is displaced to the image of the dogs:

Ahi, cani d'Atteon, o fiere ingrante,
 Che drizzai al ricetto de mia diva,
 E voti di speranza mi tornate,
 Anzi venendo alla materna riva,
 Tropp' infelice fio mi riportate:
 Mi sbranate, e volete ch'i' non viva.
 Lasciami, vita, ch'al mio sol rimonte,
 Fatta gemino rio senz'il mio fonte!
 Quando il mio pondo greve
 Converterà che natura mi disciolga?
 Quand'avverrà ch'anch'io da qua mi tolga,
 E ratto l'alt'oggetto mi sulleve?
 E insieme col mio core
 E i communi pulcini ivi dimore?
 (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* I, 4)

Oh, dogs of Actaeon, oh ungrateful beasts, whom I had directed to the refuge of my goddess, you return to me devoid of hope; and coming to the maternal shore, too grievous a pain do you bring back. You tear me to pieces and wish me deprived of life. Then leave me, life, become a double stream deprived of its source, that I may reascend to my sun. When will nature agree to release me of my grievous burden? When will it come to pass that from here I too may raise myself and swiftly be delivered to the lofty object and together with my heart and common offspring dwell there? (transl. by Paul Eugene Memmo 1964.)

Once again, the devouring is considered an image of detaching from earthly life, by way of which the thoughts to accomplish that are metaphorically named "dogs of Actaeon" or "birds". However, in the commentary to

the sonnet Tansillo also calls them “nymphs”: “[...] non bisogna, dico, che io faccia doi fiumi de lacrime qua basso, se il mio core, il quale è fonte de tai fiumi, se n’è volato ad alto con le sue ninfe, che son gli miei pensieri.” (Bruno, *Gli eroici furori* I, 4) (“I shouldn’t be producing two streams of tears down here on earth, I say, if my heart which is the spring of these streams has flown away to the heavens together with its nymphs, that are my thoughts”). The nymph-thoughts are the intellectual attributes of the knowing subject, i.e. the heart, its retinue. This means, in fact, that the ‘I’ has already taken the position of Diana. The ‘I’ has transformed into the highest intelligible object, the arch-nymph (this is also philosophically justified, since in Platonic tradition intelligible entities occupy a higher ontological status than intellectual ones, and the ‘logical’ ascent of the mind would always move from intellectual to intelligible). On the other hand, if both “nymphs” and “dogs” are images of devouring thoughts, then it would turn out that Actaeon, devoured by his dogs, is getting closer and closer to the figure of an Orpheus who, torn by the maddening maenads, is the one who perishes by his own thoughts. We will interrupt this line of argument here recalling the image of Aby Warburg.

THE (NUDE) BODY OF THE NYMPH AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONS

So, one hypostasis of the nymph is the ability to convert the human into something else – into herself through desire, or even into nothing. The other hypostasis is to become herself converted into something else. At this point, considering this second hypostasis of the nymph, we might go back to the question about the borders of the nymph’s body. In this respect, we would argue that the nymph is always nude, but in such a strange way that it appears she is never exactly nude.

In his study on the process of modernisation of the *Pathosformel* ‘nymph’, Georges Didi-Huberman represents her exclusively in the interpretive key of the object of desire. According to this author’s view, from the 16th century on the nymph (i.e. the erotic subject), in her pictorial and sculptural representations, is moving downwards, towards the soil, the horizontal, and the lower erotics. The more interesting detail is that this process is being accompanied by a second, parallel one: while the nymph is falling (“sa chute”), a bifurcation occurs, and it would “take the form of an extremely slow dissociation of the nudity from the fabric that used to dress it before” (“cette bifurcation prendra la forme d’une très lente dissociation de la nudité d’avec le tissu qui l’habillait d’abord”: Didi-Huberman 2002, 16).

Basing his arguments on Gilles Deleuze's conception of the Baroque fold, Didi-Huberman reaches the conclusion that "once the body has been stripped of its veils, the fabric receives, just as much as the flesh itself does, a visual autonomy and a "life" of its own." ("Lorsqu'un corps est déshabillé de ses voiles, le tissu prend, non moins que la chair, son autonomie visuelle et sa "vie" propre": Didi-Huberman 2002, 20). Strictly speaking, the same development could be traced within the micro-history of Warburg's work itself: starting from the enthusiastic Florentine nymph of Ghirlandaio, Warburg ends up at the melancholy and nude nymph (probably a river-deity?) from Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Warburg 2010, 647-659; about the story of this nymph, see: Centanni 2004).

At first glance, it appears that in Didi-Huberman's opinion, it is in the process of approaching the earth and the horizontal in the process of dissociation of flesh from drapery that a collapse comes about, simultaneously with a separation: a denudation of the flesh that has always been, up until this moment, dressed up and in a downwards movement. The modern nymph is either nude and recumbent, or reduced to a piece of cloth, an abandoned and dirty rag. Now, if we go back to Warburg's idea of *Pathosformel*, we must point out once again that the nymph is to be considered the incarnation of a movement, the schema for the expression of affectivity, and that this being in motion (physically and spiritually) becomes visible not only due to the posture of the body and the countenance, but first and foremost, thanks to those elements which are not living body, but render the impression of being in motion – the hair and the garments, the *bewegtes Beiwerk*.

According to Andrea Pinotti, the importance of those visual elements was suggested to Warburg by an essay by Gottfried Semper from the year 1856, in which Semper is speaking about *Richtungsschmuck* – a set of decorative elements, whose only goal is to indicate a direction of movement (Pinotti --). The ways in which hairs and hairstyles are used in Renaissance painting and sculpture with these functions (i.e. showing movement and affectivity) are researched by Alessandra Pedersoli in her essay *The Hair of the Florentine Nymphs (I capelli delle ninfe fiorentine)*, Pedersoli 2008), where we could see that there is also a historical development in the use of hair as *bewegtes Beiwerk* in visual arts.

With regard to the borders of the nymph's body, the need for *bewegtes Beiwerk* would mean that the nymph is never simply a dressed body (as the body of a woman would be): all the peripheral elements belong 'inherently' to her 'body', which is not simple flesh. Hence, the whole apparatus of the *bewegtes Beiwerk* is of great significance for determining the

borders of the nymph's body. It is constitutive of her, because without it, she wouldn't be a nymph. Paradoxically, this means that the nymph is always dressed, and at the same time, always nude. Furthermore, she is nude with a double nudity – once, since her garment, structured as *bewegtes Beiwerk*, discovers the contours of her body, and a second time, since it is part of her 'body' itself, of the nymph's 'corpus'.

The link between nudity and *bewegtes Beiwerk* as an instrument for displaying movement is to be apprehended clearly in a passage from the treatise *On painting (De pictura)* by Leon Battista Alberti (written about the year 1436). Warburg quotes this passage in full length in his study on Botticelli's *Venus and Spring* (Warburg 2010, 47-48), intending to show its influence to both contents, and visual devices in the two paintings. We will, however, shift the emphasis from movement to nudity. At the end of paragraph 45, book II, about the movement of inanimate objects, after having recounted how to render hair, veils, and branches in motion, Alberti advises the painter to depict the face of a blowing wind in one of the corners of the picture and to represent all garments floating in the opposite direction:

Ex quo gratia illa aderit ut quae corporum latera ventus feriat, quod panni vento ad corpus imprimantur, ea sub panni velamento prope nuda appareant. A reliquis vero lateribus panni vento agitati perapte in aera inundabunt. (L. B. Alberti, *De pictura* II, 45)

So, thanks to that, this lovely feature comes about, that on the side of the bodies which is being hit by the wind, the garments get pressed to the bodies, so that the bodies appear almost nude through the veil of the drapery. And to all other sides the garments waver suitably, agitated by the wind.

Warburg points out that the relation between this advice and Botticelli's paintings was first noticed by Anton Springer in 1873, and quotes some similar passages in Renaissance sources, but without stressing the problem of this strange nudity. He brings in two more examples, in which nymphs are described as "almost" or "quasi" nude. One of them comes from Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on painting (Trattato della pittura)*:

[...] ma solo farai scoprire la quasi vera grossezza delle membra à una ninfa, o' uno angelo, li quali si figurino vestiti di sotili vestimenti, sospinti o' impressi dal soffiare de venti; a questi tali et simili si potra benissimo far scoprire la forma delle membra loro. (104); [...] et imita, quanto puoi, li greci e latini co'l modo del scoprire le membra, quando il vento apoggia sopra di loro li panni. (105). (quoted in Warburg, 2010, 104-105)

[...] but you can only reveal the true silhouette of the body of a nymph, or of an angel, who are to be represented in subtle garments, which are pushed or pressed by the blowing of the wind; of such and similar [figures] one could very well see the body [through the veil]. [...] and you should imitate, as far as you can, the Greeks and the Latins in revealing the body, when the wind is pressing the draperies to it.

The second example is a description of the Ancient Roman reliefs from the church S. Maria Aracoeli, in whose staircase they have been walled in. The quote is part of a larger description of the Ancient monuments of Rome, made by the architect and garden designer Pirro Ligorio about the middle of the 16th century:

Nel pilo sono sei donne sculpite, come vaghe Nymphhe, di sottilissimi veli vestite, alcune di esse dimostrano ballare e far baldanzosi atti con un velo, con li panni tanto sottili et trasparenti, che quasi nude si dimostrano [...]
(quoted in Warburg, 2010, 61)

On the column, six women are sculptured, like tender nymphs, dressed in fine and subtle garments; some of them are shown dancing and making bold movements with a veil, in garments so subtle and transparent, that they look almost nude [...].

The nymphs are distinguished by a peculiar kind of nudity: the ‘quasi’-nudity. The “almost nude through the veil of the drapery”, as Alberti puts it, is a most accurate account of the essence of the nymph’s body. It is nude with a quasi-nudity, which is actually the indeterminacy of the borders of the body, an uncertainty, in itself produced by the being in motion of the image. The image of the nymph has two ‘sides’ (in both the literal, and the metaphorical sense). One side is the direction in which the wind is blowing. This is the side of the wavering veils and in the course of the symbolical interpretation, that is following the sense perception of the viewer, this would be the side, from which the figure is coming. The other one is the side, where the garment is pressed to the body by the wind. Drapery and body coincide there, so that it looks “almost nude”. This is also the direction the nymph is moving to. So, under certain visual conditions the clothing might even support and underline nudity – and these are exactly those conditions which, in Warburg’s terms, provide the expression of affect. Thus, the affect becomes expressible on the border between body and drapery, between flesh and garment, or rather in destabilizing this border.

If we try to follow the development of the motif of the quasi-nudity in Warburg's work, we should notice it in such kinds of images that represent non-human bodies. Even when it comes to the portrayal of actual, historical persons, such as Simonetta Vespucci in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, this type of arrangement of the garment is only applied when the person is represented 'in the role of' a deity, of a nymph, when she is included as a character in a story, put as character on a stage. When depicting Simonetta 'in the role of' the Spring in *The Birth of Venus*, Botticelli is furnishing her with the wavering subtle veils of a classical nymph. But he is no longer doing that when he is drawing her portrait, where she is represented as herself. At the same time, when Piero di Cosimo paints her in the role of Cleopatra, she could appear even 'topless'. This argument would hold true, of course, only if we accept Warburg's identification of all these images as portraits of the same girl. On the other hand, in the essay *Flemish Art and the Studies of Florentine Early Renaissance (Flandrische Kunst und florentinische frührenaissance Studien)* (1902), Warburg identifies the face of Maria Portinari on several panels – two of them are plain portraits (by Hans Memling and Hugo van der Hoes) and there she is shown in the stern attire of a virtuous *matrona*. But in the Tani triptych by Memling, where she is represented as a woman emerging from the grave on the day of the Last Judgement, she is nude (Michaud 2012, 137-149). Furthermore, she is coming from underneath her white shroud, which is pressing to her naked body, while she is moving upwards. The peculiar relation of body and drapery, by which the two merge together, or perhaps function in symbiosis, but in any case cease to form an opposition, is never engaged in depicting a simple human body, an 'earthly body'. This happens only when this body undergoes a celestial transubstantiation – like the resurrected *corpus gloriosum* in the Christian paradigm.

Leaving aside the theological problem of the *corpus gloriosum* and the role of the flesh in this particular case, and turning back to the nymphs of antiquity, who, after a long period of exile (as Heine has put it), are coming slowly back to Europe in the course of the 15th century, we must make the following remark: the indeterminacy of the borders of *corpus nymphale* could be observed not only in the structure of indistinctness between the flesh, visible through the transparent veils, and all the 'moving accessories' that trace the trajectory of the body in motion. This indeterminacy is also linked to the nymph's own ability for transformation. Actually, a connection between these two aspects is established by Didi-Huberman who would eventually assume, in respect to Marcel Griaule's Guinea fowl-man, that "metamorphosis is a matter of drapery" ("la métamorphose est affaire de draperie": Didi-Huberman 2002, 106-107).

Thus, not only does the nymph induce metamorphoses but she is also prone to metamorphoses. She transforms, as far as she functions as an object of desire. On the other hand, the fact that she undergoes transformation, is what makes her presence ever more ephemeral, and her unity more doubtful. It is enough to think of the many stories of metamorphoses, in which the nymph, having become the object of passion or violence of a man or a god, is saving her honor by transformation. The most famous of all is, of course, the story of Daphne, which serves as a pattern for the metamorphoses of many Renaissance nymphs (and other characters).

As one of the numerous examples, we can use that of Lorenzo de' Medici's poem *Ambra*. In its framework and details, the poem is modelled mainly on the story of Apollo and Daphne (Ovid. *Met.* I 452-567) and on that of Alpheus and Arethusa (Ovid. *Met.* V 577-641). As Warburg points out in the essay on Botticelli, the description of running Daphne in Ovid is one of the principal sources for the visual representation of bewegtes Beiwerk. In a couple of verses in Ovid's text the emphasis is on the nymph's hair, charming in its disorder, and just loosely held up by a ribbon (*Met.* I 477: "vitta coercebat positos sine lege capillos"; *Met.* I 497: "spectat inornatos collo pendere capillos"). The simple ribbon in the hair is typical of the nymphs' portraits in Ovid. Daphne's attire of a huntress and a companion of Diana leaves her shoulders nude, and that suggests to Apollo that the hidden is even more attractive (*Met.* I 502: "siqua latent, meliora putat"). This verse implies a special relation between the visible and the invisible (hidden by the clothing) parts of the body and locates the god's desire in this relation. The most striking aspect of the image of the running nymph is that "her beauty is growing with the run", and this is happening because "the wind is divesting her body, and her garments are fluttering in the opposite direction, carried by the air current, and her hair is waving behind her" (*Met.* I 526-530: nudabant corpora venti,/ obviaque adversas vibrabant flamina vestes,/ et levis impulsos retro dabat aura capillos,/ auctaque forma fuga est.). It is as if we meet here the same image of the nymph as an object of desire, which has been reconstructed from Warburg's texts: desire is intertwining with movement, since it is movement that engenders the specific quasi-nudity, which, in turn, makes beauty grow.

The run of the nymph *Ambra*, chased by the amorous river-god Ombrone, is represented by Lorenzo de' Medici in a like manner: the god is stronger, he is beseeching her first from a distance, recommending his own merits, he is afraid that the nymph is hurting her feet while running; and finally – the nymph's prayer to Diana and the course of the metamorphosis are similar, too.

This could be due to Lorenzo's personal mythology: he loves to identify himself with Apollo's chosen tree, the laurel. In fact, Lorenzo appears as a character in the poem, the pious lover of Ambra, the shepherd Lauro, and the whole poem is designed as an etiological myth about the origins of the place where Lorenzo built his country house. Therefore, there are substantial reasons for the poem to be based on the story of Daphne, however a major difference can also be noticed: at the moment she is beheld by Ombrone and, then consequently, over the course of her run, Ambra is completely nude, because she has entered the waters of the river to bathe. At that point she resembles Arethusa who takes off her garment before descending in the waters of Alpheus (*Met.* V 594sq: "molliaque impono salici velamina curvae/ nudaque mergor aquis;" *Met.* V 601: "fugio sine vestibus").

Nevertheless, a detail of the *bewegtes Beiwerk* is preserved: the wonderful hair of the nymph, which is left loose and fluttering behind her while she is running. Its symbolic value rises even more here, as a lock of hair remains in the grasping hand of the river-god. Just as in the case of Daphne (and Arethusa), the run of the nymph makes her more attractive: "La ninfa fuggge, e sorda a' prieghi fassi [...] / cresce el disio, pel quale e ghiaccia e suda, / vedendola fugir sì bella e nuda." (Lorenzo, *Ambra* 31). In the context of this sight, Ombrone defines the body of the nymph as "more than human" and unattainable – only golden tendrils are left behind, the body itself has slipped away: "O mano, / a vellere e be' crin' presta e feroce, / ma a tener quel corpo più che umano / a farmi lieto, ohimè, poco veloce!" (Lorenzo, *Ambra* 29).

The specific corporality of the nymph – more than human, fleeting, female – discloses itself in a most distinctive manner in the scene of the metamorphosis, when Ambra converts into stone: after invoking "the pious goddess Diana", she starts turning into a solid rock, but in such a way that still preserves the vague outlines of a female body, as if it were a mere sketch of a female nude: "crescerli poi e farsi un sasso vedi, / mutar le membra e 'l bel corpo colore; / ma pur, che donna fussi ancor tu credi; / le membra mostron come suol figura / bozzata e non finita in pietra dura." (Lorenzo, *Ambra* 41), and then later on: "el sasso, che ancor serba qualche forma / di donna, e qualche poco sente" (Lorenzo, *Ambra* 44). (The motif of the sketched human figure is also taken from Ovid *Met.* I 400-406 where, in the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha, it is played in reverse; see: Frontisi-Ducroux 2009, 21).

The transformability of the non-human, more-than-human body of the nymph becomes the condition for its fugacious nature – it cannot be captured because of its ever-changing form. This form – *forma* meaning both ‘a contour’ and ‘beauty’ (such as Daphne’s *aucta forma*) – proves itself as completely indeterminable and uncertain right at the moment when movement is interrupted. That is when we see that we haven’t ever seen anything clearly. By turning into stone, the corporality of the body, its tangible density is growing – and along with this, the body as an image of a body – is becoming increasingly uncertain, its outlines increasingly nebulous. This process confirms Agamben’s assumption about the specific nature of the nymph as an image of the image: when turning into a body the nymph ceases to be (an image), when turning into human the nymph ceases to be (a nymph).

It is a very subtle moment: the female form of the nymphic body doesn’t vanish without a trace – it is not replaced by the rough shapelessness of the rude rock, which would have introduced a harsh opposition between form and lack of form. On the contrary, the female shape is preserved, but as vaguely distinguishable, unclear, remotely reminiscent – a distant allusion to the loved and lost. This form, once loved, frozen amidst the course of its disappearing refers to the topic of the melancholy of the river-god as a *Pathosformel*. Here we can remark that Ambra is a good example for illustrating Warburg’s opposition of extremities in the scale of human expressive values: the nymph and the river-god, destined never to meet.

The desired body is metamorphic in a very odd way – it has the ability to both change and preserve. It is this feature, that André Jolles underlines in his letter on the nymph and that Warburg afterwards implies in the *Pathosformel*-concept:

Bald war es Salome, wie sie mit todbringendem Reiz vor dem geilen Tetrarch angetanzt kommt; bald war es Judith, die stolz und triumphierend, mit lustigem Schritt, das Haupt des ermordeten Feldherrn zur Stadt bringt; dann schien sie sich unter der knabenhaften Gratie des kleinen Tobias versteckt zu haben, so wie er mit Mut und Leichterzigkeit zu seiner gespenstischen Braut marchiert. Manchmal sah ich sie in einem Seraphin, der in Abetung zu Gott geflogen kommt, und dann wieder in Gabriel wie er die frohe Botschaft verkündet. Ich sah sie als Brautjungfer bei dem Sposalizio in unschuldiger Freude, ich fand sie als fliehende Mutter bei dem Kindermord mit Todesschrecken im Gesicht. Ich versuchte sie wieder zu sehen, wie ich sie das erste Mal getroffen hatte im Chor der Dominicanerkirche, aber sie hatte sich verzehnfacht.

[...] Ich verlor meinen Verstand. Immer war sie es die Leben und Bewegung brachte in sonst ruhige Vorstellungen. Ja, sie schien die verkörperte Bewegung... aber es ist sehr unangenehm die zur Geliebten zu haben. (Warburg 2010, 202)

Once, it was Salome, as she was dancing with death-bringing charm before the eyes of the lustful tetrarch; then, it was Judith, bringing proud and triumphant, at a jaunty pace, the head of the murdered commander to the city; then she appeared to have hidden under the boyish grace of little Tobias, as he was marching with courage and lightheartedness towards his ghostly bride. Sometimes I could discern her in a seraphim, flown with a prayer to God, and then again in Gabriel, as he was announcing the joyful message. I saw her as the Virgin-bride, taken by innocent bliss, in the scene of Sposalizio, I found her as a fugitive mother at the Massacre of the Innocents, with mortal terror in her face. I tried to see her again in the way I have met her for the first time in the choir of the Dominican church, but she has multiplied tenfold. [...] I lost my mind. It was always she to bring life and motion into otherwise peaceful ideas. Indeed, she seemed the embodiment of movement itself... but it is so inconvenient to have her as a beloved.

So, the transformative quality of the nymph's body results in a multiplication of her image to a degree at which the unity of her being becomes more ambiguous, and the proliferation of the affect – limitless. Desire appears to be everywhere, obsessive and out of control. From Warburg's point of view, there would be only one remedy for this situation: scientific activity, such as the kind he performs in the psychiatric clinic of Kreuzlingen. The object of desire should be converted into the scientific object of an unknown nameless science about affect and its expression.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

During the 15th and the 16th centuries the nymph is emerging in the visual and poetic arts with renewed forces – these forces are perceived by Aby Warburg as the will to expression of affective states that stand beyond the expressive forms provided by the previous epoch. The nymph, inherited from ancient models, proves to be an appropriate vessel for the expression of the new sensitivity of Renaissance man, traditionally considered 'humanistic' and oriented towards the human. In the course of this re-orientation however, the desire and its object are figured as 'inhuman'. Thus the nymph stands out as an implement to the human, where imagination deposits a human element – desire – and from this moment on desire ceases to be a human feature and transforms the body-receptacle into a divinity (or a demon).

This imaginary form, where desire is stored, is distributed on the border between flesh and drapery, veiled and revealed, in the body and in its accessories, and is marked by the impulse of movement. The analysis of the nymph could open a possible perspective to the essence of human desire, or at least – to the manner in which human fantasy imagines the essence of desire as ‘beyond-human’. As Didi-Huberman writes, the nymph is “very troubling with regard to the destiny of anthropomorphism, the human form has actually withdrawn. And yet, it still exists suspended, or rather folded aside, thrown away – as the last possible form for human desire” (“Troublant pour le destin qu’il fait subir à l’anthropomorphism: la forme humaine s’est absentée, en effet. Mais elle demeure en suspens – ou plutôt en repli, en rebut – comme une dernière forme possible pour le desir humain”: Didi-Huberman 2002, 24).

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ABSTRACT

The paper is focused on the problem of the body of the nymph, who is considered on the one hand as a mythological character, and on the other as a *Pathosformel* in Aby Warburg's terms. The historical period at the center of the present study is the Italian Renaissance of the 14th and 15th centuries with some references to Classical Antiquity. The nymph's body is interpreted as a special kind of 'inhuman' body that could be defined as incorporeal, divine or demonic, intellectual etc., but in the final analysis, its most important mark of inhumanity proves to be the fact that it is a female body. As a female body it establishes itself as an object of desire, so the paper is attempting to trace the ways in which this female body has been apprehended and represented by the imagination of the 14th and 15th centuries. As a point of intersection of desire, female, and inhuman, the figure of the nymph provokes two main problems: the problem of the essence of the nymph's body, and the problem of defining the borders of that body. The paper claims that a single answer could be suggested for both questions – it is the nymph's metamorphic quality, understood both as active and passive. The nymph's distinctive feature is that her body becomes a cause of transformation, and simultaneously, the object of a transformation. The provided examples are derived from Italian Renaissance literature and art, and from Aby Warburg's essays.



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