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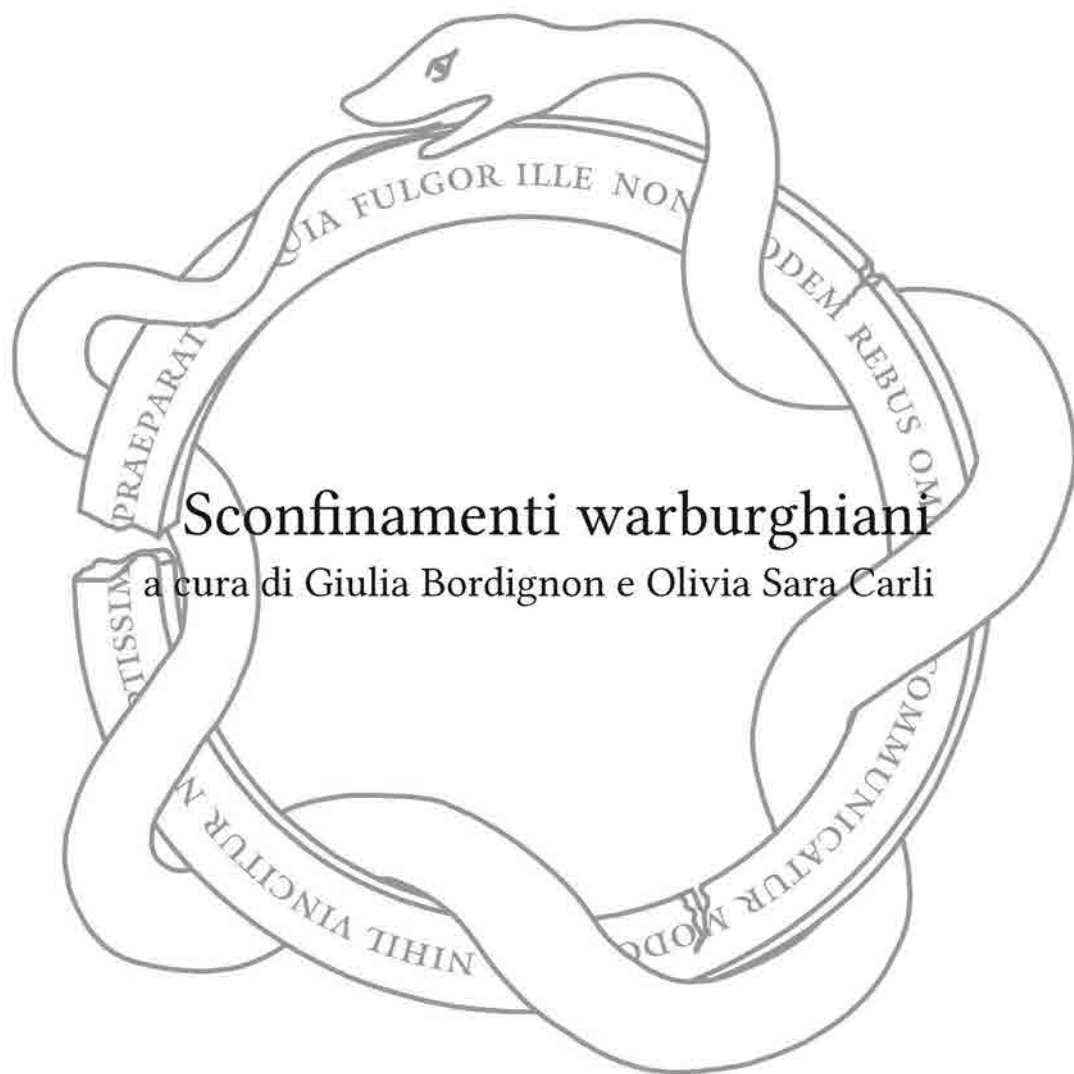
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## Sconfinamenti warburghiani

a cura di Giulia Bordignon e Olivia Sara Carli



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ИКОНОЛОГИЯ. НАЧАЛО  
ПРОБЛЕМА СИМВОЛА  
У АБИ ВАРБУРГА  
И В ИКОНОЛОГИИ  
ЕГО КРУГА



# Iconology begins. Aby Warburg, his concept of symbol, and the strides of iconology

Presentation of Иконология. Начало. Проблема символа у Аби Варбурга и в иконологии его круга, Moscow 2016

Marina Toropygina

The title of this book refers to one name and two significant concepts. Publications on art rarely avoid mentioning symbol or at least using the epithet 'symbolic'. Symbols, by definition of Ernst Cassirer, are sensory perceived signs and images. Iconology deals with interpretation of images and symbols in art. At the beginning of the 20th century this method is experiencing a rebirth in Germany and then in international art studies, thanks to Aby Warburg and the scholars community of his unique library. The new or modern iconology was reborn virtually on 19th October 1912, when Warburg made his famous speech about the frescoes of Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara. I might say that Warburg's name became linked with iconology. For a long time his name was associated with the library – i.e. with books that Warburg collected, but not with those he wrote himself. At the beginning of the 1920s Hamburg was the place where scholars of different disciplines (philology, oriental studies, history, philosophy) met and their works were published in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*. However the Hamburg intellectual group did not last for many years, especially compared to the tradition of the Vienna or Berlin school, but its ideology had a significant impact on the further development of humanities. It was partially through the forced emigration happened in the early 1930s that ideas and concepts of that group spread around Europa and America. The library moved to London, scholars went to the UK and the U.S.; their themes, ideas and methods came with them overseas. Erwin Panofsky lectured and published his works in America, Edgar Wind also began his career there even earlier than him. Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing re-installed the library in London. The library turned out to be a 'Christmas gift from Germany' for the British nation, Panofsky called his emigration 'expulsion into paradise', and despite the irony, the German tradition of art studies was actively permeating the English speaking global space.



But what is, in fact, the circulation of ideas? How does the influence work? Who was the first to pronounce the word *iconology*? What was the experience with the symbol for Aby Warburg and what concept of *symbol*, *symbolic* and *iconology* had those who considered themselves his pupils or colleagues? Of course, these are rhetorical questions. But an attempt to analyze works of art historians belonging to the Warburgian circle and to compare the use of terms in each of them's method might be promising and viable experience.

This research complies with general efforts to understand tradition and methodology of art studies. Art historians themselves play an important role in the history of art, and that is evidenced by the growing number of encyclopedias, memoirs and biographical literature. Knowledge of tradition and reflection of the method eventually confirm the development of discipline itself. Iconology has a special place here, since it was a very popular method in the second half of the 20th century, not only in practical approach, but as a subject of theoretical analysis as well.

Iconological discourse started in Russia with the article by Mikhail Liebmann in 1964, followed then by works of Mikhail Sokolov, Victor Grashenkov and other scholars. Among recent works articles of Stephan Vaneyan on iconography and iconology in the Great Russian Encyclopedia and Orthodox Encyclopedia should be mentioned. My work does not claim neither encyclopedic statement, nor polemical intonation of the scholars which are closer to the heroes of this research in generation and rank; yet I consider it as a modest contribution to the national tradition of iconology studies, due to 'archaeological' attention to the classic texts of iconology studies.

In this book I deal with the very beginning of iconology in the new meaning of this term, thus Aby Warburg and his followers will be its main heroes. Iconology as interpretation of meaning in the visual arts attracted scholars for generations, but their methods, analysis and understanding of the ways and integrity of interpretation differ. Iconological method is the subject of this research. Of course, the method can not exist in a pure form: this would mean rules and instructions, a kind of manual, appropriate in handling technical devices, but not the works of art. On the other hand, learning the experience of previous generations is essential not only to expand our knowledge on the history of art studies, but also to get necessary distance to look at the current situation.

Iconology is interpretation of the works of art. Art as thinking in images is one of the symbolic forms or ways to comprehend and understand the world, by definition of Ernst Cassirer. Artist understands and gives form, thus opening the gateway to knowledge in images. Creative nature of the image in art is associated with the very nature of the creative nature of the artist. Creation of images is a way to give a certain meaning its form: Russian *образ* and German *Bild* mean *image* and *form*, something that was built, and both are also connected with education, learning – *образование*, *Bildung*. The world of images, as well as texts, can establish connection between artist and audience, even if they are separated by centuries. Communicative ability of image in art suggests its symbolic potential. Quoting Stephan Vaneyan, ‘symbolic nature of artistic activity makes the product of this activity, i.e. work of art, a system of references or rhetorical discourse, where representation goes far beyond visual range’<sup>[1]</sup>.

Iconology is a method to interpret symbols and meanings. One of the symbol’s main characteristics, incongruence of form and content, as well its inexpendable potential for interpretation make the problem of method and discussion around it even more interesting.

In a narrower sense, the object of my study is the iconological tradition associated with Warburg, his library and ideas, as well as his disciples and followers. Here we see many influences, including iconographic method and positivism of the 19th century, Neo-Kantian philosophy, i.e. Ernst Cassirer, as well as hermeneutics, Vienna positivism, analytical and existential psychology. The book refers to scholars associated with Warburg: his closest assistant and disciple Fritz Saxl; Erwin Panofsky, one of the most brilliant lecturers at the Hamburg University in the beginning of the 1920s, he is also considered one of the founders of iconological method; another representative of the inner circle, Edgar Wind, disciple and friend – especially during Warburg’s last years. Ernst Gombrich never met Warburg, but dedicated part of his life to Warburg library in London, where he began to study the archive and years later became director of the Institute; in a consequence he took the honorable mission of writing Warburg’s intellectual biography. According to W.J.T. Mitchell, the role of Panofsky and Gombrich in art studies can be compared to that of Saussure and Chomsky in linguistics. Jan Białostocki, being Panofsky’s disciple, is a Warburgian in the third generation: on the one hand, he wrote articles on iconology for Encyclopedia of World Art and

[1] Ванеян С.С. Архитектура и иконография. «Тело символа» в зеркале классической методологии. М., 2010. С. 14.

Dictionary of the History of Ideas, summarizing the experience of previous generations as a 'grandson'; on the other hand, some of the Warburg's topics and ideas were reborn in Białostocki's works.

Thus, the book deals not with a narrow Warburg circle, but rather with a several circles and generations. As Stephan Vaneyan puts it, 'from a stone, thrown by Warburg in the calm waters of the 19th century's history of art, went waves, that reached the shores of various distance where different traditions of philosophy, psychology and aesthetics already waited for them'.

The amount of works about Aby Warburg is skyrocketing in these days. Such popularity of the name might to a certain extent compensate for years of shadow existence. The new period started with *Intellectual Biography* by E. Gombrich in 1971 and since then Warburg's person, his way of thinking, his language and ideas inspired many researches. Such topics as memory, culture or symbolic form are often associated with his name.

In this book iconology is a key word. First, because it is one of the main methods in art studies, which became a source of inspiration as well as an object of criticism. Secondly, because here the influence of Warburg as the forefather on the next generations of art historians can be traced, and finally, because iconological interpretation is concerned with the symbolic nature of image, and one of the Warburg's last works, his lecture on serpent ritual, deals with the origin of symbol and symbolic in art.

I hope that this work will contribute to research about this field in the history of art, and tell more about how terms and methods of art studies work, how schools and traditions differ, and how a scholar establishes his relations with colleagues, disciples, followers, and the image – not only as a subject of interpretation, but also a source of inspiration.

This thesis is based on the texts on art, biographical material, correspondence, as well as critical reviews. It sticks to the genre of intellectual biography, starting the presentation of theoretical perspectives of each author with a small biographic outline. In my study I consider primarily those texts where the authors deal with of symbol and/or iconology most explicitly. Extensive use of quotations is due to the fact that many of the texts have never been translated into Russian. On the other hand, the author's own words, both in the original language and in Russian translation, can give a better presentation of his intonation and thus indicate his intentions.

To some extent, this is a study in iconography and iconology applied as method to the art history texts: the main motives here are symbol and iconology and my task will be to follow their migration, *mutatis mutandis*, in the works of different authors. According to the classical scheme of Panofsky, it should lead to the intrinsic meaning and symbolic values, as far as comparative analysis of these works allows.

This thesis was so far (2013) the only Russian art history dissertation approaching Warburg's life and ideas and summarizing various facts and theoretical material, which prove that art studies and art history discourse necessarily includes philosophical, psychological and existential aspects. Many of cited works have not been translated into Russian, and many of the quoted publications are not available in the domestic libraries – therefore this study can be considered as introduction of new names and sources. We are studying the language of the past periods not to speak it, but to understand how the language of modern art studies and art criticism works. It might sound too poetic, but there is another side of the issue – in any case the author tried to meet the challenges of research once defined by Warburg himself: 'Und von diesen von mir so hochgeschätzten allgemeinen Ideen wird man vielleicht später sagen oder denken: diese irrtümlichen Formalideen haben wenigstens das Gute gehabt, ihn zum Herausbuddeln der bisher unbekannteten Einzeltatsachen aufzuregen'.

This book consists of three parts, each of them is divided into chapters. Before proceeding to the main material, in the first part issues of historiography associated with life and legacy of Aby Warburg are reviewed, as well as with the tradition of iconology and the definition of symbol.

Second part is entirely dedicated to Aby Warburg and the development of the concept of symbol in his works. His understanding of the image as a symbol, the definition of semantic units where interpretation moves on from *bewegtes Beiwerk* and *Nymphe* to *Pathosformel*, and then – to the collection of *Engrammen* in the *Mnemosyne* atlas. Warburg follows Burkhardt, assuming that the history of images in art is connected with the general history of culture. But his intention is to see the in-stream processes, the mechanics of these relations. Therefore, in the logic of the positivist 19th century, he looks for an obvious and credible evidence. And he finds *bewegtes Berwerk*, an example which demonstrates the relationship between the world of ideas embodied in the word (poetry) and the world of images (painting). But this is only a detail – flowing hair and cloth. Then comes the *Nymphe* – Warburg and his friend Andre Jolles refer to a girl

in the antique (and waving) robes on the fresco by Domenico Ghirlandaio *Nativity of St. John the Baptist*. Here is an image that defies iconographic analysis, but can nevertheless be considered very symptomatic both for its own world (15th century Italy) and for the Warburg's contemporary world (beginning of the 20th century in Western Europe). Next discovery will be *Pathosformel*: the image of defeated Orpheus, raising his hand in a protective gesture. Here is a search for a certain elementary unit (detail – figure – formula), but Warburg never loses sight of its significance and meaning, and not only in the context of the depicted narrative, but in the context of art history, cultural history and anthropology. This is the transcendent meaning or semantic perspective, which opens itself to Warburg. It is only natural, that in the end he can see the image as a symbol and provides a detailed explanation of his understanding and the role of symbol in culture and artistic practice in his lecture of the serpent ritual.

For Warburg this turn to symbol and iconological method was necessarily connected with the main task of the art historian – to investigate the influence of the ancient language of figurative expression on subsequent periods. A huge impact of the antiquity was quite obvious even before Warburg, but how the very mechanism of this impact works? How exactly the images are transmitted? And most importantly, what meanings do they can carry with them?

Ideologically and historically, according to Warburg, the image as symbol was associated with the need for a human being to fix and form his affect. But this unit of affect captured within the form, is dual – it is *formula* and *pathos* at the same time. Pathos bears a dynamic and emotional characteristics of the image, associated mainly with dark Dionysian side of antiquity, and in a broader sense – with human passions and fears. Warburg is able to detect antique pathos in flowing robes and hair, in the figure of the nymph in a light dress and in the gesture of defeated Orpheus. Understanding the symbolic nature of the image comes through the analysis of details and attributes. Like a detective he sees meaningful coincidences (poetic descriptions and visual forms) or inconsistency (antique nymphs and venerable Florentine ladies). Warburg describes and analyzes the formation of symbolic image using the example of Indians' serpent ritual and comparing it with the image of serpent in the art of other periods and peoples. The fact that the image is located in the middle between magic and logic, allows a definition of a human being as *animal symbolicum*. Here Warburg is close to Cassirer: art and representational act are generally understood as a symbolic activity, aka symbolic form, by which man

comprehends the outside world and creates the distance to it. Warburg's library and system of information and knowledge established there can be seen as another kind of symbolic form. Even the form of the library was literally symbolic: the elliptical central hall as arena or orbit with two centers. It was the place where a long distance friendship of Warburg and Cassirer started. Unlike Cassirer, philosopher and theorist, Warburg acts almost as natural scientist, whose experiments bear danger, including for researcher himself. Exploration of the dark Dionysian antiquity coincided with his own existential experience, and the sublimation of this experience turned into one of the most important pages in the history not only of art studies, but also of existential psychology, this latter branched from Warburg's therapist and friend Ludwig Binswanger.

Books fascinated Warburg since childhood and he even sacrificed his right to inherit the family business for the library. But years later he started to collect and classify images. After returning from the Kreuzlingen hospital he begins the new project – Mnemosyne atlas, attempting to change the way the works of art and visual material were presented. Instead of the usual division by geography and chronological order, Warburg uses thematic fields and includes in the chart works both of art and crafts. The *Mnemosyne* atlas was left unfinished – and that stimulates researchers until today. Understanding the symbolic nature of image, Warburg not only studied their origins and role, but also tried to create new symbols as educators, which proves the story of the postal stamp *Idea vincit*.

In the third part, we consider the term *symbol* in iconological discourse that begins with Warburg and his famous contribution on the Schifanoja frescoes (Rome, October 1912), and where belong also Fritz Saxl, Edgar Wind, Erwin Panofsky, Ernst Gombrich and Jan Białostocki.

Speaking about iconological approach in 1912 Warburg advocates 'crossing of the frontiers' in art studies and humanities. Expanding the field of research Warburg never forgets about the center: he is accurate, precise and starts with the detail. Analysis of a single monument, placed in the broad context of literary and pictorial sources, allows him to make far-reaching conclusions.

Concerning the relations of teachers and disciples, schools and movements scholars usually talk about development, criticism or a substantial transformation of the founder's ideas. But it is problematic to trace these processes. On the example of the Vienna school, we know that the idea of art history



as *Geistesgeschichte* is connected with Max Dvořák, although the title of his book was invented by his students later, and Alois Riegl's idea of *Kunstwollen* was criticized by other representatives of the school. Warburg's disciples and followers, as far as symbol and iconology are concerned, do not necessarily argue with him, but even referring to Warburg, they emphasize their own aspects of understanding symbol and symbolic, and have their own ideas about how far the interpretation of meaning can reach; in this way challenges and advantages of iconology as interpretation method will also differ from that proposed by Warburg. Since each of the scholars in this study goes its own way, a separate chapter is dedicated to every one of them respectively.

The first is the Vienna school's student and Warburg's closest assistant Fritz Saxl. He also deals with the problem of antiquity and continued migration of symbols. One of his central topics was gesture, or rather its evolution in the visual arts and the conversion to pathos formula. By the example of the bull taming he analyses the coining of image and how it became classic. In the image of the man kneeling on the bull and grasping his head, both action and effect are present. Artistic practice is based on the images created by generations of predecessors no less (rather even more) than on direct observation of nature. Pathos formulae are visual symbols that Renaissance takes from antique ancestors. Borrowing form, image or gesture, the artist takes with them and their content, so far the study of the etymology of the image can contribute to the more accurate interpretation of the meaning of the contemporary image or work of art. It is important to note that Saxl was virtually co-author of the lecture on the serpent ritual and that one of his projects in the army prompted the design of Warburg's atlas. In his later works Saxl constantly refers to Warburg. But if Warburg's idea of symbol was Gestalt, which occupies the position between the magical direct contact and rational distanced comprehension, Saxl is also interested in the perfection of form. It is the quality of form that makes a gesture exemplary. And there is another difference: for Saxl this perfection of form is evidence of the presence of the Apollonian side of antiquity, which can later be observed in the ideal works of Raphael and Bellini, whereas Warburg prefers to watch the very dynamics of pathos taming: in the formula, in grisaille, in the atlas. Like Warburg, Saxl understands the purpose of art history as a study of the psychological expression, meaning evolution of pathos formulae: formation – development – circulation. For Warburg symbol indicates relation of the individual to the world, and this understanding is already the way to combat magic and to liberate the mind. For Saxl image is the material carrier of the idea; matrix on which you can restore the mentality of the past.

Erwin Panofsky is considered father of iconology. Without prejudice to his merits, the position of the godfather might be more appropriate. The need for interpretation of meaning was obvious, iconographic studies existed since the beginning of the 19th century in church archeology, Warburg's text on working peasants at Burgundian tapestry may be considered a model of the new method, and the book on *Saturn and Melancholia* Panofsky wrote in collaboration with Klibansky and Saxl was already there. In 1939 Panofsky summarizes and organizes, i.e. calls things and terms by their names and explains the meaning of these names. In his earlier work, *Study on description and content interpretation of the works of art* (1931) Panofsky makes a distinction between different levels of interpretation: the phenomenal (or meaning of the phenomenon), the meaning as *Bedeutung* (literal or figurative meaning) and 'documentary' or essential meaning. In 1939 he names them slightly different – primary or natural subject matter, secondary or conventional subject matter (world of images, stories and allegories) and the intrinsic meaning or content, that constitutes the world of symbolical values. In this version the levels of interpretation are also defined – pre-iconographic description (and pseudo-formal analysis), iconographical analysis, iconological interpretation. On each level interpreter relies on the 'equipment for interpretation': iconological level implies synthetic intuition of the interpreter – conditioned by personal psychology and *Weltanschauung*. And the corrective principle of interpretation is history of tradition: of style, of types and of cultural symptoms or 'symbols' – insight into the manner in which essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by specific themes and concepts. However, this division into levels or stages is only methodological (the fact usually omitted by the critics), all three levels are interrelated, at least because the interpreter himself has both practical experience and knowledge of literary sources as well as *Weltanschauung*, even if he is not always aware of the latter. The different aspects in the work of art can have symbolic value, since they refer to certain attitudes, mentality, historical period. Iconographic identification of the subject matter, a narrative story is of course important in this method, but the obvious priority for Panofsky has the phenomenal level: the intrinsic (documentary) meaning of different perspective constructions in painting leads to understanding of 'pure formal' aspect of the picture, perspective, as a kind of *symbolic form* – Panofsky borrows the term from his teacher Ernst Cassirer. Panofsky is often criticized for never following his own scheme, and sometimes also for dwelling at the level of extended iconographic interpretation, since his 'documentary' meaning left aside the timeless existential meaning of a work of art – more on this see in fundamental research by Stephan Vaneyan *Architecture and iconography. Corpus of symbol in the mirror of classical methodology*.<sup>[2]</sup>



Ernst Gombrich was rather skeptical about the interpretation of images. Perhaps because he prefers to act relying on the second line of the Panofsky's scheme and look for correspondence with certain texts and ideas expressed in verbal texts. He interprets Botticelli's *Venus* as an allegory of humanity (*Humanitas*), in accordance with moral guidance of Ficino. Gombrich considers the very concept of the symbol rather as a complex spiritual allegory, as something connected primarily with the word. It seems that he returns to what Warburg called deciphering iconographic riddle whereas the presence of mystery (as enigma) remains as assumption. But perhaps the reason for skepticism and statement that interpretation is only a hypothesis is that 'synthetic intuition' of Gombrich himself relies on the philosophy of his friend and mentor Karl Popper.

Edgar Wind emphasizes the need to examine the subject matter in the work of art. In *Art and anarchy* he says that a profound understanding of aesthetically beautiful is rooted in comprehension of the idea. Although officially Wind was Panofsky's doctoral student under supervision of Cassirer, he considered Warburg and Charles Peirce his teachers. Following Warburg, Wind refers to the concept of culture, social memory and symbol: it is necessary to study the whole complex of ideas behind the image as well as the reciprocal effect of the images and forms on mental activity in general. Iconographic interpretation should be as 'indirect' as possible: the more texts lead us away from the image, the more likely they will lead us to it. Wind's thesis about the expanding the range of experience is directly connected with the third corrective principle of interpretation by Panofsky.

Panofsky's disciple Jan Białostocki sums up the development of iconography and iconology and discussions around it: he writes (on recommendation of Panofsky) articles for *Encyclopedia of World Art* and *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. Białostocki distinguishes intentional and interpreting iconography and introduces a new concept of *Rahmenthemen*, where his definitions of topics could be used as headers in the Warburg's *Mnemosyne* atlas tables. Although he could never meet Warburg, Warburgian themes and motives appear in Białostocki's texts, as if methodological pathos formula would reappear with the author of a new generation.

All scholars mentioned above adhere to a certain framework of thinking. Their similarity most obvious in their subjects: art of the Renaissance and the humanist tradition, reciprocal influence of Italy and Northern Europe,

[2] Ванеян С.С. Архитектура и иконография. «Тело символа» в зеркале классической методологии». М., 2010.

migration of motives and themes from antiquity to modern times. Mysterious figure of the Nymph first discovered by Warburg on the Ghirlandajo fresco, reappears in Wind's work on Donatello's Judith, iconography of Judith compared to that of Salome is a classic example of identification by Panofsky, and all ladies come together in Bialostocki's texts on maenads. Botticelli's *Spring* and *Birth of Venus* inspired Warburg to search for analogies with the poetry of the 15th century; Wind – to analyze the pagan mysteries of the Renaissance, and Gombrich – to research the didactic content of images. Topics on Dürer and Rembrandt, their relation to antiquity and taming of Dionysian pathos reappear in several works.

All these scholars are superb and subtle masters of analysis, they are able to consider work of art both detached and passionate, to reveal not only the prototype, but archetype of the image. They never accept 'pure decorative value' and are not satisfied by 'just enjoying' the art. Their desire to explain, to find 'the word to the image' aims not only at interpreting art of the past, but also at better understanding of the symbolic content of images in general, including contemporary visual practices.

A special topic with all of them is reflection about their own method and methodology of art history in general. To improve terminology and to explain aims of the art studies (a relatively young branch of humanities) they introduced new concepts, eg. *pathos formula*, as well as adopted and updated already known: *symbol*, *iconography*, *iconology*. To the key words of Warburgian circle belong expression (*Ausdruck*) and gesture, juxtaposition of *magic* and *logos*, the continuation of antiquity (*Nachleben der Antike*) and distance of contemplation (*Denkraum der Besonnenheit*), *symbolic form* and *Rahmenthemen*, as well as names of *Melancholy* and *Mnemosyne*.

Certain differences should be explained primarily through the influence of philosophers: Cassirer, Popper, Peirce. But it's not just 'influence'. Each of them chooses in the symbolic form of philosophy his own pathos formula. The choice is determined by the intention of the researcher, which can be in some degree perceived in his style, manner and intonation.

Warburg's pathos is tamed in a refined form of his long sentences, saturated with sometimes compound, sometimes brief and precise neologisms (Warburgismen). Fascinated by the idea of conservation, continuation and transmission of heritage – whether through books that hold the wisdom and experience of the past, or an atlas of images recording the expression of human passions – he sought to establish (and in fact,

to restore) the communication network of the humanities, to expand the scope of art history up to cultural history. Hence his interest in working with young scholars, conversion of the library into the institute and cooperation with the university. In many ways Warburg's attitude as a scholar was related to his private circumstances, the fact that has been repeatedly stressed both by contemporaries and further researchers. It will be fair to say that for other scholars their profession was not just a job, but a vocation (German *Beruf*, 'profession', has the same root as *Berufung*, 'calling'). Panofsky's correspondence is a confirmation to this. Yet calm and thoughtful Panofsky, who 'always have an idea to share' is a more classic type of university teacher, a scholar who along with research should pay attention to systematization of knowledge and methods of its transmission. This appeared relevant particularly due to the emigration. German speaking Jewish scholars emigrated from Europe in the 1930s, among them were Gombrich, Saxl and Wind. Transplanted German-speaking art history influenced the world of humanities in a broad way. During this period Panofsky's texts became more transparent, and this is not for lack of profoundness, but rather due to the structured presentation. He gives his lectures not only for students, but also for art collectors and for public in museums, so there was a different audience compared to the Oval Hall der KBW in Hamburg. Saxl and Wittkower organized an exhibition in London, *British Art and the Mediterranean*, Gombrich writes the popular *Story of Art*, Wind was giving public lectures in Oxford theater and on radio. Of course, the ability to speak easily and clearly about the complex problems confirms the highest level of competence and ability. Yet the dynamics and the pathos of the discovery gives way to static and ethos of apology.

Now, hundred years after his famous speech at the congress in Rome, Warburg has become a symbolic figure in the history of art. Odd enough we connect Panofsky to iconology, Cassirer – to Neo-Kantian philosophy, while Warburg, who wrote less than any of them, has become a center of academic circle, called by his own name, – a circle, which embraces Panofsky, Cassirer and all the other personalities in this book. This might be due to the fact that academic discourse also has its stable rules and methods, i.e. its own iconography. Warburg changes iconography of art history, appearing here with his pathos formula, symbol, magic and rational relationship to the world. Much remains lit only by 'kinematographisch scheinwerfen' and it might be that disciples and followers partly tamed the original pathos of the Warburg, but there is one more consideration.

Iconology is the interpretation i.e. explanation. But if we explain something, it means that there was a question or problem statement. There is a challenge offered by the image or symbol. The meaning of the symbol is tied not to a specific content, but to the level of questioning – just as half of ceramic shard is only a shard, if the status of the stranger, holding it in his hand, is not relevant for us. And the other half, the one that we hold in our hand, is no less important for the recovery of the truth.

To accept the challenge, iconography revolves to the past, searches for the source, studies tradition. Iconology remembers the past, but decodes the meaning for the present, referring to the contemporary. In the first place – to the researcher himself. Thus iconology not only suggested the studies of art should expand their borders, but also changes its focus: from object to researcher, both to his method and the ideas relevant for him. Warburg was not only the first one to speak about iconology as method, he changed iconology of art studies, linking them with the existential experience of the researcher. Iconology in this version becomes a symbolic form of scholarship, a way of not only thinking and creative acting, but of existence itself. Thus Warburg emerges as a new type of researcher: a scholar who is not hiding behind the object of his studies, whether text or image, but facing it and at the same time looking into himself, just like Rembrandt and Dürer on their self portraits.



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