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Warburgian Studies in the Ibero-American Context

a cura di

Ada Naval, Ianick Takaes, Giulia Zanon



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Astrology Between Science and Superstition in Art History

Aby Warburg and Fernando Pessoa

Antônio Leandro Gomes de Souza Barros

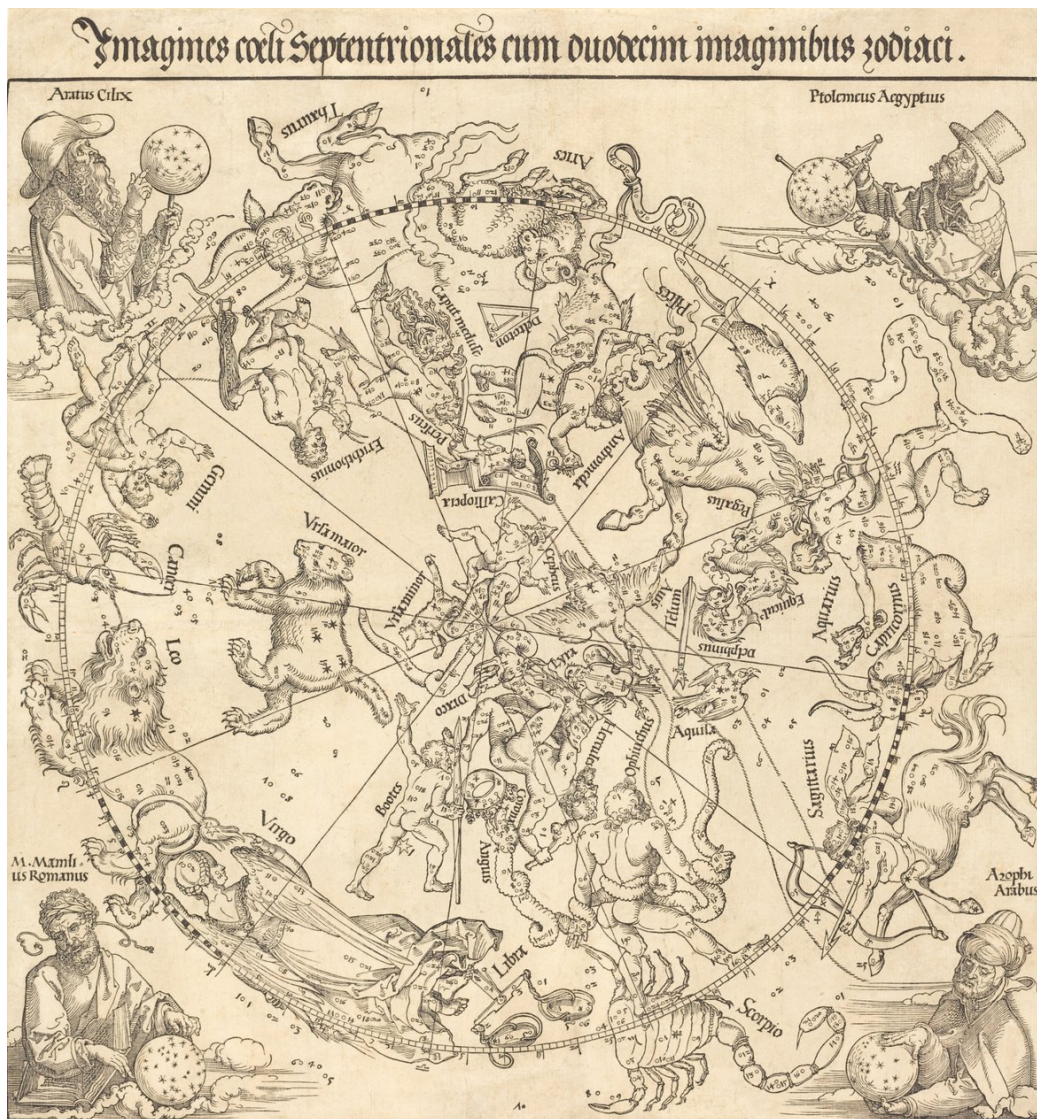
Introduction

Aby Warburg introduced his celebrated *Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther* as the necessary scientific investigation for a future study of “the Bondage of Superstitious Modern Man” (Warburg [1920] 1999, 598). Thus, Warburg’s longest essay begins with a review of the use of horoscopes in the ideological battle of the Reformation Era. Warburg, however, does not limit himself to exploring this interplay—which in itself makes the text seminal as founder of “political iconology” in the history of art (Warnke *apud* Didi-Huberman [2002] 2013, 379)—but he recognizes within it a decisive chapter of “the tragic history of freedom of thought in modern Europe” (Warburg [1920] 1999, 650).

While there were relevant thinkers on both sides using the same (astro)logical premises to defend opposing positions, Luther himself advanced a dispute against those very premises, refusing to recognize any devotional or demonic value in the stars: “That art of theirs is so much manure. [...] The unholy drivel of astrology” (Luther *apud* Warburg [1920] 1999, 607). Warburg then identifies in this dispute a crucial moment of the influence of Antiquity, which he conceptualized as *Nachleben der Antike*: the afterlife, the ghostly survival, “inherently timeless” (Warburg [1920] 1999, 599), of expressive values that challenge the linear transmission of history. Thus, Antiquity manifests itself in the details, in a symptomatic rather than imitative way: its reception does not occur exactly in the copying of formal models, but in the updating of the polar tension between artistic-aesthetic conception and practical-religious conception:

Logic sets a mental space between man and object by applying a conceptual label; magic destroys that space by creating a superstitious—theoretical or practical—association between man and object. In the divinatory workings of the astrologer’s mind, these two processes act as a single, primitive tool that he can use both to make measurements and to work magic (Warburg [1920] 1999, 599).

In this struggle for freedom of thought, the essay ends up comparing Luther’s historical figure to the formal transcendence operated by Dürer’s art, specifically the realization of the figure of *Melencolia I*. In it, Warburg identifies the astrological reasons for the tension between the beneficent Jupiter (expansive, ostentatious, agile, orderly) and the maleficent Saturn (contracted, simple-minded, slow, clinging to his own regime) expiated. Its composition no longer represents the planets themselves, but an anthropomorphic figure that, in its satur-



Albrecht Dürer, *Imagines coeli septentrionales cum duodecim imaginibus zodiaci*, engraving, 1515.

nine melancholy, expresses formidable reflective capacities, aided and symbolized by a magic square behind it, emblematic of Jupiterian support. The astral conflict then becomes an inner tension of the human being, tending to express genius under it, which was previously considered bad.

If, however, Warburg mentions that both Luther and Dürer would still be at the beginning of this history of “freedom of thought in modern Europe”, it is because this is not a dispute with

guaranteed victory. Even the expectation of its slow progression from superstition to reflective thought keeps failing despite the undeniable and inescapable scientific advances—the ultimate example being the moment the essay was written, the end of World War I. Hence, the final quote from Goethe condemning the contamination of abstract and mathematical logic by superstition and fantasy, while reluctantly identifying anyone's difficulty to reinforce the exemption of superstition in the continuity of their acts and thoughts (Warburg [1920] 1999, 651).

Thus, just as Tylor promoted the common notion of *superstitio* to the concept of survival in order to also convert these pernicious derivations of reason into foundations of scientific studies (in this case, for anthropology; see Didi-Huberman [2002] 2013, 57), Warburg's essay ends up suggesting as the foundation of his "iconological science of civilization", or psycho-iconology, the conceptual promotion of *superstitio* ("what-survived" from ancient times) as *Nachleben*, and its study in a "laboratory" of images (Warburg [1920] 1999, 651).

However, in the same years we find a parallel project with impressive affinities in the process, and significant differences in conclusion. While the German historian revolutionized the study of artistic reception in visual works, the Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa, developed a tremendous innovation in the production of literary works, for which he became famous: the creation of heteronyms. Not only the creation of new poems, but of new poets, different from the author himself, and who interacted with him. Less well-known is the poet's deep involvement with astrological issues during his long years of poetic development. But unlike Warburg's academic and skeptical approach, Pessoa's was esoteric and practical. This is extremely interesting for us because Pessoa would also end up developing a series of concepts consonant with Warburg's. Thus, he would project a science of artistic expression characterized as "uma psicologia também—que a deve haver—das figuras artificiais e das criaturas cuja existência se passa apenas nos tapetes e nos quadros [a psychology too—which must exist—of artificial figures and creatures whose existence occurs only in tapestries and paintings]" (Pessoa [1913-1935] [1982] 2011, 381).

If the "laboratory of images", mentioned by Warburg in the conclusion of the essay on Luther, found its best expression in the *Atlas Mnemosyne*, we can agree with José Gil that it is in the *Livro do Desassossego* that the "laboratório poético de Pessoa está em plena atividade" [Pessoa's poetic laboratory is in full swing] (Gil [1987] 2020, 11). However we find in its conclusions that are almost diametrically opposed to those conceived by Warburg. For example, in the field of the "aesthetics of war", (Pessoa [1914-1915] 1990, 173) Pessoa argues that there is nothing more properly artistic and aesthetic in a battle than an astrologer making his calculations on the horoscope of the German Kaiser. In other words, identifying in the astral charts and their derived images the same artistic relevance that Warburg, in an unprecedented way, revealed by adding these new objects to art history. However, Pessoa did not identify them as forms to be overcome, but as artistic expressions of excellence in themselves. Because, as in the anecdote he recalls about Whistler, it is reality that ends up reconfiguring

itself in the becoming of a work of art. That is, also understanding horoscopes positively as a form that has no subordinate relationship with nature. Moreover, *Livro do Desassossego* also contradicts Warburg's progressive faith by reversing Goethe's quote: "Saber ser supersticioso ainda é uma das artes que, realizadas a auge, marcam o homem superior [Knowing how to be superstitious is still one of the arts that, when performed to its peak, marks the superior man]" (Pessoa [1913-1935] [1982] 2011, 359).

This article proposes to examine the parallel trajectories of Warburg and Pessoa through their engagement with astrology, not as a study of direct influences or shared historical context, but as a deliberate exercise in conceptual parallelism and epistemic resonance. By tracing how both thinkers developed their respective "sciences of expression", we highlight a trans-historical dialogue that, despite its philological contingencies, is nonetheless revealing of the confrontation over astrology's epistemic role in Europe's early twentieth century. It allows us to explore how their divergent conclusions (skeptical vs. esoteric) illuminate the tensions between science and superstition in artistic studies. Moreover, this methodological choice mirrors the heterogeneity central to Warburg's and Pessoa's thought, while echoing the analogical reasoning that underpins astrological studies—a point we will further explore through Deleuze's philosophy of expression, and Descola's anthropological analyses of figurative systems.

The Astrological Involvements

In 1907, Warburg began to look into the astrological question after reading Teucrus's *Sphaera*, published in 1903 with Franz Boll's refined philological study, including an appendix translating *The Great Introduction* by the Arab astrologer Abū Ma'shar (886 AD). In the following years, Warburg immersed himself in the study of the history of mythography and astrology, focusing on the description of pagan deities in medieval texts and on the continuity of astrological imagination from Antiquity to modern times. As a result, he published over a dozen significant works exclusively dedicated to the topic between 1908 and his death, at the end of 1929, along with others that indirectly drew on these studies or their findings.

In addition to the essay discussed above on astral signs in Luther's time, another formidable example is the conference *Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara*, in which Warburg supported the hypothesis of the transmission of an ancient Greek iconographic tradition through Indian and Arab mediation to the Italian Renaissance. He also expanded the frontiers of iconological analyses in order to achieve a "historical psychology of human expression" (Warburg [1922] 1999, 585). Above all, the idea of how "his astrological studies are directly related to the development of Iconology as a historical-artistic discipline and of the History of Art as a Cultural Science" (Barreto 2020, 149) remains indisputable through the vast material related to the subject distributed along his *Atlas Mnemosyne*—a gigantic "laboratory of images" that he organized until his death and which, to a certain extent, reflected his work. In its panels we find a large number of images related to astrology.

On the other hand, in 1908 Pessoa began to engage more deeply with the astrological issue by commissioning foreign astrologers to study his birth chart. However, his uncertainty about the exact time of his birth may have driven him toward increasingly personal and meticulous approaches towards astrology. As evidenced by his private library and his writings archive, in the following years and until the end of his life (1935) Pessoa studied the subject diligently: nearly 5% of his library consisted of books specifically about astrology and not just esotericism (one-third of them by Alan Leo), and about 10% of his vast archive contains direct astrological references, among which are more than 300 charts hand-drawn by Pessoa himself [1]. For all these reasons, if Fernando Cabral Martins was able to positively state that “occultism is perhaps the last frontier of Pessoa studies” (Cabral Martins 2025), we must agree with Centeno (1985, 23) when she highlighted that “magic and astrology deserve a separate study”, referring to Pessoa’s hermetic thought.

Beyond these factual aspects, it is clear that these studies are important to consider Pessoa’s poetics with heteronyms. The three main ones are Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de Campos: each one a remarkable poet with consistent production, independent from Pessoa himself—to the point that he responds to these creations by also publishing “his own” poems as “Pessoa ortônimo”. As Cavalcanti Filho demonstrates, Pessoa’s entire narrative of the emergence of the three heteronyms on the same “Triumphal Day” (March 8, 1914) is a fiction imbued with astrological aspiration (Cavalcanti Filho 2012, 228-231). This period marks not only his poetic turning point but, in parallel, the turning point of his astral studies. The following year, he created a semi-heteronymous astrologer, Raphael Baldaya, of whom the drafts of no less than two astrological treatises remain in Pessoa’s archive—“o romance e o tratado de astrologia são romances sobre assuntos diversos, que entre si diferem, menos que o romance de capa e espada do romance de costumes ou o conto policial da novela amorosa [the novel and the astrology treatise are novels on different subjects, which differ among themselves, less than a swashbuckling romance differs from a novel of manners, or a detective tale from a love story]” (*apud* Cavalcanti Filho 2012, 550).

Moreover, Pessoa himself went so far as to advertise in newspapers services of birth chart readings. In 1915, the poet wrote to an English publisher as a “student of astrology”, and defined his interest in charts with literary and creative terms highly significant for the project he was beginning to explore with heteronyms: as a “faculty of transpersonalization” involved in the ability of writing in different styles (Pessoa [1913-1935] [1982] 2011, 39). This further highlights the fact that, beyond studying his own birth chart, Pessoa left us the creation of specific “birth charts” for each of his main heteronyms, with a degree of interconnection among them that should not be seen as hasty or thoughtless works. Indeed, in subsequent years he would repeatedly assert that to understand these heteronyms and their poetics one should accompany these “horoscopes” [2].

Conceptual Developments

Once the appreciation and significance that both Warburg and Pessoa attributed to astrology are established, even if broadly, it is important to outline the conflicts surrounding the development of a “science of expression” in which these interests emerged. It is remarkable how, despite the differences in their approaches to astrological studies, these developments were driven by resonant historiographical stimuli, and led to aesthetic conceptualizations that share a high degree of similarity. Thus, we now turn to examining how, on both sides, such trajectories and productions were coherently intertwined with respective projects aimed at challenging the representative paradigm of aestheticism, and at advocating for the critical notion of “expression”.

According to Warburg himself (Warburg [1927] 2016, 184), from the very beginning of his career, the primary impetus for his research emerged as the need for a “correction to Lessing’s doctrine, or more precisely to Winckelmann’s idea regarding the Olympian serenity of Antiquity”. At stake was, above all, a certain aestheticist paradigm in which works were understood solely as pure forms and styles, based on an idealist principle and through the model of imitation and representation. Amid the Apollonian framework of this paradigm, Warburg dedicated himself to seek the Dionysian, that is, the emotional and energetic background that composed those figures and images (Ghelardi 2022, 355). Consequently, he developed several fundamental concepts that would define his entire career and project. The most central of these is the already mentioned *Nachleben*, understood as the continuity of elements, symbols, and gestures that appear in a temporal discontinuity or overdetermination. It represents a concrete heterochrony in which the return of expressive values, challenging the linear transmission of history, is manifested. Not in grand themes or forms, but in details, symptomatically rather than imitatively, surviving only in a ghostly manner.

To understand these expressive values within their dynamics of revival, another crucial concept is *Pathosformel*. Warburg explains that it was through reading Darwin that he understood pathetic gestures not as “ancient formulas” (which would contradict the notion of *Nachleben*), but rather as “formulations of pathos” intertwined with the dynamics of historical-cultural life (Warburg [1927] 2016, 187-188). That is, a psychological tension, expressed in the movements of bodies and gestures, that emerges as “an effigy of practical life in movement”. In this sense, once primitive and utilitarian expressive movements are separated from their immediate needs and converted into manipulable formulations within cultural domains, the *Pathosformel* can be seen as the corporeal form of time that survives in a ghostly and symptomatic manner. It signifies the movement of meanings alongside the temporal movement of *Nachleben*. By being “archaeologically faithful”, the *Pathosformel* expands the representational logic of art history into a “science of expressions”. Images are now not only grounded in biology, but they also embody the complexities of social life dynamics. In other words, it is not merely that artists were capable of faithfully copying their ancient models, but that modern humans, in their vitality, continue—consciously or unconsciously—to express themselves in the

world through symbolic formulations that go back to the primitiveness of their cultural foundations.

In turn, in a text signed by Álvaro de Campos between 1924 and 1925, Pessoa also made the meaning of his aesthetic project explicit: he did not target criticism at Winckelmann's *Reflections* but rather at Aristotle's *Poetics*: “Creio poder formular uma estética baseada, não na ideia de beleza, mas na de força—tomando, é claro, a palavra força no seu sentido abstracto e científico [I believe I can formulate an aesthetic based not on the idea of beauty, but on that of strength—taking, of course, the word strength in its abstract and scientific sense]” (Pessoa 1924-1925). He accuses the ancient philosopher of bequeathing an intellectualized aesthetic, one that conforms to ideative rules that render each particular work a different path to the same aestheticized goal—like different mathematical demonstrations for the same theorem. Conversely, for Pessoa all art would be an indication of strength or energy whose forms also manifest themselves in life. It is in this dynamic, therefore, that one should seek art as sensitivity (that which is organic or natural, and which does not occur in the visible) and as a social phenomenon. This provides absolute historiographical meaning to this “non-Aristotelian” proposal: not only inverting its own terms (such as *dynamis*), but also reviewing the literary paths up to that point. After all, the Aristotelian landmark was, in short, to have consecrated *Poetics* as a specific field with its own operating laws, while Pessoa, from his early years as an essayist, announced the intersection of fields and the suspension of the laws of representation—as seen in *A Nova Poesia Portuguesa Sociologicamente Considerada* and *A Nova Poesia Portuguesa No Seu Aspecto Psicológico* (both from 1912).

However, Pessoa states that artistic sensitivity is not a mere sensation, as it is felt: here too, in order to be susceptible to becoming art, sensations need to lose immediacy and function. It is in the intellectualization of sensation as sensation (Pessoa [1916] 1966, 192) that emotion gains an “cunho estético [aesthetic coinage]”. From this coinage, from this sensitive formulation, comes an “uma intelectualização de uma intelectualização, isto é, o poder de expressão [intellectualization of an intellectualization, that is, the power of expression]” (Pessoa [1916] 1966, 192)—the ability to force others to feel through language what is prior to language. In another text, Pessoa speaks of the psychic tension between emotion and its expression, drawing attention to the same elements of Warburg's predilection: the figuration of pathetic gestures (Pessoa [1910] 1966, 5). As an example, Pessoa demonstrates in his laboratory of *Livro do Desassossego* how he moves from vague anguish and sadness due to the boredom of his bureaucratic work, to writing about the sadness due to his lost childhood, thereby evoking in the reader the emotion he really felt, but which had nothing to do with his childhood. That is, expressing, in essence, the discomfort of his work (Pessoa [1913-1935] [1982] 2011, 260-261).

While Warburg, following Darwin, thought of his “formulations of pathos” as symbolic traces of what had previously been immediate bodily reactions, Pessoa, following the logic of non-Euclidean geometries (in which the traces signify less forms and express more a specific and

abstract compositional plan), conceptualized the expressiveness of these coinages of sensations, of these psychological tensions between different degrees of sensitivity as “Abstract Sensation” (Pessoa 1924-25).

Finally, if the historian, following the imperatives of expression and concerned with the reception of works of art, focused on heterochrony, the poet, obeying the same imperatives but concerned with the creation of works of art, saw heteronymy emerge as its natural effect. For the former, “the time of images is not the time of history in general”. It is necessary to disorient the linear in order to examine how different phases of development combine in the same stage. For the latter, sensitivity of works is not sensitivity in general; “the human must become personal” so that we can truly experience sensations.

The Dramatic Experiments

Other consequent concepts or principles bring these two ‘scientific’ projects for artistic expression closer. While Warburg claims an “iconology of intervals”, Pessoa points to a poetics of “interstices” and “interludes”; if one claims the importance of details for the examination of works, the other insists on the production of the minuscule, of “the smaller, the more intense” for the poetic event; if the first prefers *grisaille* for his efforts on epistemological renewal, the second works with *pardo* as an objective category; where Warburg speaks of a dynamogram as a scheme for understanding the energy of a work of art, Pessoa speaks of dynamogenic as the basis of their creations; and if the former postulates a theory of “incorporation” for the most accurate artistic appreciation, the latter suggests a technique of “incarnation” in the making and reading of poetry. In addition to these, however, one last parallel deserves greater attention here.

In the last year of his life, Warburg seemed to recapitulate his conceptions and the polar tensions that animated them in a synthetic requalification of the formulations of pathos, according to nothing less than a “drama of the soul” (*Seelendrama*)—no longer just his own, but of an entire culture (according to personal notes from September 1928 and May 1929, *apud* Didi-Huberman [2002] 2013, 300). In this sense, finally, each object of his studies can be comprehended according to the dialectical struggle expressed between the unconscious causes and their critical effects. Every artist, at the very moment of creation, would face a “decisive crisis”, inevitable and structuring, between the pulsional alienation in pathetic formulas, and the conscious formal creation. The result would be a “psycho-iconology”, a “transindividual history” in each of the images he studied, and as they are revealed in his Atlantean laboratory full of astrological figures. (Didi-Huberman [2002] 2013, 514).

Coincidentally, in the exact same interval of months in which Warburg made his notes on the “drama of the soul”, Pessoa, reviewing his career and textual production, stated that heteronymy composes “um drama em gente, em vez de actos [a drama in people, instead of acts]” (Pessoa 1928). That is, instead of dramatic action, there would be the drama of events of dynamic, contrary, unstable sensations that meet, coincide, conflict, ... “dramaturgia dos estados mentais [dramaturgy of mental states]” (Motta 2009, 73). Pessoa adds: for the

proper study of the “interaction” of such “personal relationships”, there would be “biografias a fazer, acompanhadas, quando se publicarem, de horóscopos e, talvez, de fotografias [biographies to be written, accompanied, when published, by horoscopes and, perhaps, by photographs]” (Pessoa 1928).

This suggestion—which Pessoa repeats on other occasions—that horoscopes should be included in the comprehension of “drama em gente”, has generally been considered merely a playful rhetoric. However, both the horoscopes of Warburg’s *Luther*, and those of Pessoa’s *Estética da Guerra*, attest that these objects may be worthy of critical consideration in art studies. More than that, we can perfectly well consider Pessoa poetically creating astral birth charts for himself and his heteronyms in accordance with the alchemical coinage of immediate sensations into abstract sensations, and in accordance with the declared intention in the laboratory of the *Livro do Desassossego* to “reduzir a sensação a uma ciência, fazer da análise psicológica um método preciso como um instrumento de microscópio [reduce sensation to a science, making psychological analysis a precise method like a microscope instrument]” (Pessoa [1913-1935] [1982] 2011, 501). We can also imagine Warburg incorporating these astrological images into the scientific investigation of the *Nachleben der Antike* in modern man in a new panel of his laboratory of the *Atlas Mnemosyne*. He would thus quickly recognize, in the astral charts of the “drama em gente”, a vortex of dramas of the soul, an abyssal network of crises between pulsional alienation in pathetic formulas and conscious formal creation, a polar game between the creation of spaces for reflection and their magical destruction.

First, Warburg would identify the transmutations of the figurative astral traits of each chart into constitutive elements of the poets of the “drama em gente” and their respective particular poetics. For example, the fact that Caeiro—the “Argonaut of sensations” and author of *O Guardador de Rebanhos*, who only received primary education and wrote “out of pure and unexpected inspiration, without knowing or even calculating that he would write”—had the Sun and Mercury in the sign of Aries (the first sign, more impulsive, direct and independent, besides representing the golden fleece of the Argonauts). Then, Warburg would immediately move on to recognize the operative mechanism of planning the interaction of those involved, the dramatic ensemble in souls. Using the astrological mechanics, Pessoa established that orthonyms and heteronyms were born in consecutive years, and never with a birth interval of less than nine months—as if they could all be children of the same parents. Moreover, there is the fact that when combining the ascending signs of the four charts, the entirety of the astrological elements is found: Caeiro in fire, Campos in earth, Reis in air, and Pessoa in water.

Finally, the psychohistorian would emphasize the creative and counterintuitive use of astrology as an element of poetic creation: not only for the closed identification of a specific personality, according to common sense, but, above all, for the opening of subjectivity to becoming. Pessoa recognizes his Sun in Gemini in the eighth House—marked by tendencies towards psychism, by processes of profound transformation, and the sharing of resources with others—as the decisive astral aspect of his heteronymic “faculty of transpersonalization”. He then works

in such a way that Caeiro, Reis and Campos all have Mercury in the same place: since they only have literary existences, it is the planet of communication and writing in the eighth House that would allow them to becoming just as the Sun allowed the flesh-and-bone poet to transform himself.

The important fact is that such a scientific experiment—comparing the Atlas panels with Pessoa's astral charts—would work not because Warburg and Pessoa had similar projects and deep interests in astrology, nor because the Atlas already had a significant repertoire of astrological images, but because the graphic and poetic elaborations of these astral cartographies already respond to the most fundamental elements of the aforementioned sciences of expression. First, the heterogeneity of elements and the coherence of their connections. Next, strategies that figure these effects through the formation of composite beings, spatial and temporal networks, and correspondences of levels and scales. Also, the formal effort to represent both a type of content (a set of figurative objects) as well as a visual procedure for arranging the connections. Hence, the competence to give the empty space between the forms the possibility of being a space of transition. Finally, turning the perfectly discrete into almost a continuum, even deliberately proliferating the singularities and disparate components within each image.

It is not that the study of astrology—whether through Warburg's academic and skeptical path, or Pessoa's esoteric and practical path—conditioned or even caused the surprising and intricate network of parallel affinities between the two scientific projects discussed, the extensive correspondence between the series of concepts on both sides. This, in fact, would be an inadequate framework for the conception of relationships in which both the historian and the poet navigate: which is not a world of naturalistic cause and effect, but of transitive, broad and intertwined chains of causality. It is this underlying postulation—of an entire reality formed of experiences of singular moments and objects, harmonized only by the lacework of correspondences between its discrete elements—that ultimately also entangles in the same analogical chain Warburg's "nameless science", Pessoa's "science of historians of the future", and the superstitious scientificity of astrology. In all of them, we recognize the rational and judicious effort to postulate the conceptual and practical, epistemological, laboratory foundations of a science not of the natural world, but of the analogical world, of expressive determination.

Anthropologically, Descola points out these connections by shifting not only between astrological figurations and the figurative elaboration of Warburg's own *Atlas Mnemosyne*, but in these pages he demonstrates how the same analogical world is found among the figurative elaborations of the Hopi (Descola [2021] 2023, 305). That is, among the indigenous people who critically marked Warburg's historiographical experience after an important anthropological immersion in 1896. As Freedberg (Freedberg 2004, 580) reminds us, Warburg moves away from his interest in Hopi art as he delves into astrological studies, and when these studies eventually lead him to madness (at the end of the essay on Luther against superstition), it is a return to the Hopi at the conference in Kreuzlingen that marks his recovery. There, he iden-

tified a premise contrary to Luther's essay: the magical juxtaposition with an objective action, which for Europeans is a symptom of a split, and for indigenous peoples is a liberating, and not a schizoid, experience (Warburg [1923] 2015, 152). Which, returning to the astrological theme, he would recognize in Kepler: his language and premises of astral superstition would not have prevented him, but rather encouraged him to carry out his great scientific feats (Warburg [1925] 2015, 261).

Back to Descola, the analogist figuration found even in Hopi image production can be alluded to Leibniz precisely as "expressive determination" (Descola [2021] 2023, 299). After all, Leibniz explained that an expression is precisely the multiplication of singularities within objects, so that they could correspond to another object that is not the representation of the first—like an ellipse expressing the points of a circumference (Kulstad 1977, 69). Which also brings us to the philosophical key to the role of astrology between two scientific experiments of expression. There is a well-documented, though neglected, historical fact: the implications that astrology has always had in relation to the philosophical problem of expression. In antiquity, for example, philosophical schools as disparate as Stoicism and Neoplatonism ended up discussing (and even validating, to a greater or lesser extent) astrological operations precisely because they claimed an expressive ontology (Long 2006). Even in the twentieth century, an unsuspected astral skeptic like Deleuze (Deleuze [1969] [1974] 2015, 177), but a great propagator of a flat and expressive ontology in the wake of Leibniz, did not fail to recognize in astrology the first great attempt at a theory of expression.

The Dioscuri Conclusion

Unlike historiographical approaches that situate Warburg's and Pessoa's astrological studies within biographical or thematic frameworks (Barros 2022), this essay demonstrates how their engagements, when analyzed as methodological counterpoints, reveal a crisis of representation precisely by favoring conceptual affinities over historical filiation. Beyond mapping connections, we expose how these non-aligned epistemologies (Warburg's critical iconology vs. Pessoa's poetic esotericism) destabilize representational paradigms through astrology as a boundary object—one that thrives in analogical systems (astrology, iconology, heteronymy) by resisting rigid scientific frameworks.

In 1931, two years after Warburg's death and with Pessoa still alive, the highly esteemed abstract mathematical logic would encounter its own internal limit. Kurt Gödel published his two "incompleteness theorems" shocking the most eminent mathematicians and logicians worldwide. They prove that, in a consistent theory, there are always propositions that cannot be proven as either true or false; and that a theory, recursively enumerable and capable of expressing basic truths of arithmetic and some statements of proof theory, can prove its own consistency if, and only if, it is inconsistent. "If [formalized calculus] is consistent, it is incomplete" (Nagel, Newman [1958] 2001, 105). In other words, any axiomatic mathematical system cannot be simultaneously complete and consistent. If the system is consistent, its consistency cannot be proven internally to the system. Above all, "we now understand that the

human mind is fundamentally not a logic engine but an analogy engine, a learning engine, a guessing engine, an aesthetics-driven engine, a self-correcting engine" (Hofstadter *apud* Nagel, Newman [1958] 2001, XVIII).

On the other hand, in the 1960s, the Brazilian master of folklore studies, Câmara Cascudo, published a fundamental essay *Para o Estudo da Superstição* (Câmara Cascudo 1971). In it, he also revisits the ancient meaning of superstition to, like Tylor or Warburg, understand it as what has survived, resisting the wear of successive cultural frictions, as living nerves of the dead organism, and following an affectionate transmigration through reflex gestures preserved by *Mnemosyne*. Above all, the decisive factor is that, based on these same parameters, Câmara Cascudo argues that not only is some superstition inevitable—as the final citation from Goethe confesses in the essay on Luther—but also that it is not exempt from its own reason and even effects. “O primeiro elemento para bem analisar uma superstição é pesquisa sua lógica [The first element to properly analyze a superstition is to investigate its logic]” (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 146); “Essencial, para mim, é ressaltar a existência lógica da superstição [For me, it is essential to emphasize the logical existence of superstition]” (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 166); “a superstição possui o raciocínio dela [Superstition has its own reasoning]” (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 183); “Essencial é notar o perfeito ajustamento psicológico [It is essential to note the perfect psychological adjustment]” (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 179); “Como processo psicológico a superstição apresenta-se como uma lógica necessária e clara [...]. Real e que deve possuir efeitos decisivos, embora escapando à percepção do homem [As a psychological process, superstition presents itself as a necessary and clear logic [...]. Real and which must have decisive effects, although escaping man’s perception]” (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 155); “Esse critério determina a consequente lógica. O efeito provoca a causa pela irresistível atração do ato analógico. Qui se ressemble s’assemble [This criterion determines the consequent logic. The effect provokes the cause by the irresistible attraction of the analogical act. Qui se ressemble s’assemble]” (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 191). It is in this sense that, rather than lamenting the impossibility of pure reason, it is even more logical to recognize the danger of superstition in not wanting to be superstitious:

Mesmo as Universidades, são viveiros de superstições antigas, renovadas, readaptadas às exigências modernas. Todas as profissões e atividades têm seu corpus supersticioso.

[Even universities are nurseries of old superstitions, renewed and readapted to modern demands. All professions and activities have their superstitious corpus] (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 151).

Que é um “conceito” senão uma superstição, imperativa e renovável? Não creiam que a superstição esteja cedendo sob a pressão científica. Muda de continente e não de conteúdo. Há uma superstição científica que segue como uma sombra a irmã formal e grave, vez por outra confundindo-se notadamente do domínio da interpretação psicológica. As “escolas”, e sobretudo o scholar, guardam muito da imponência através do aparato supersticioso.

[What is a “concept” if not a superstition, imperative and renewable? Do not believe that superstition is giving in under scientific pressure. It changes its continent and not its content. There

is a scientific superstition that follows its formal and serious sister like a shadow, occasionally straying notably from the domain of psychological interpretation. The “schools”, and especially the scholar, retain much of their grandeur through the superstitious apparatus) (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 154).

Not even Plato, the fundamental source of abstract logical thought and of the understanding of general and natural laws, was able to imagine the conception of his world of ideas—that well-finished and exemplary expression of the effort to demonstrate a pure ideational plan—without dramatizing its elaboration in dialogues and even resorting to the creation of myths. Or, as the world-renowned physicist and astronomer Marcelo Gleiser, professor of the course “Physics for Poets”, aptly concludes: “Mass and charge do not exist per se; they only exist as part of the narrative we humans construct to describe the natural world” (Gleiser 2014, 70).

What scientific scrutiny shows us is that even the most abstract concepts, the most elegant mathematical formulas, and the most rigorous reasoning, are not the result of free and deliberate thinking, but rather thoughts also carried out amid dramatic charges that can involve an entire culture, a whole worldview. Warburg’s case became exemplary—due to the intensity of his own psychological suffering and recovery—of how dramatic engagement can lead thought to new epistemologies. Just as his aforementioned essay on Luther indicated, it is in the dramatic struggle of spiritual worldviews that a new, modern mentality manifests itself—and not in a calm and detached ivory tower. Pessoa, in the opposite direction, but in the same sense, demonstrates how new thoughts and sensations can reach the extreme requirement of whole other subjectivities to dramatize their existences and conceptions.

“A superstição portuguesa não retardou a epopeia navegadora nem a superstição espanhola evitou o domínio territorial do maior império na história do mundo [Portuguese superstition did not delay the epic navigation, nor did Spanish superstition prevent the territorial domination of the largest empire in the history of the world]” (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 164). The brilliant Goethe was superstitious, Cascudo assures (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 182), not necessarily in a negative sense, due to inevitable logical flaws, but because of what the hypothesis of Warburg’s *Nachleben* admitted, that perhaps all activity of genius can be understood as “positive manifestations” of what has survived (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 164).

Finally, Cascudo concluded his scientific study admitting that science and superstition are polar tensions, of exchanges or interpenetrations, as in the case of the mythical and constellated twin brothers Pollux and Castor—one divine and the other mortal, one scientific and academic, the other superstitious and popular—distinct, but always related (Câmara Cascudo 1971, 182). Can we, then, conjecture that, between the axiomatic limitations and the very reason of superstitions, astrology might be the necessary, basic, structural-structuring superstition, the figurative feature of one or any science of expression? Pessoa, like Castor, recorded that “ciência culmina na Astrologia [science culminates in Astrology]” (Pessoa [1918] 1980, 70). But what would the academic Warburg say, like Pollux, when facing a panel from his *Mnemosyne*

laboratory with Pessoa's and his heteronyms' astrological charts, before the intricate network of planetary analogies that bound them all together? What would he say upon realizing that he himself, Aby Warburg, by an absurd coincidence, had the Sun in the exact same degree of the sign of Gemini, just like Fernando Pessoa?

Notes

[1] Studying occultism in Pessoa's private esoteric library, Marrone argues that its arrangement could follow the method of another library, famous for a *sui generis* organization: that of Aby Warburg (Marrone 2021, 280-298). Another indirect and curious connection between Pessoa's and Warburg's astrological archives is that some of the letters exchanged by the Portuguese poet with the famous English magician and astrologer Aleister Crowley, leader of an influential initiative order, are now held by the Warburg Institute in London (Pasi, Ferrari 2012). This meeting between Pessoa and Crowley itself is a mysterious event, rich in astrological content, but beyond the scope of this article—for more information see Dix 2019 and Roza 2001.

[2] Paulo Cardoso not only dedicates himself to didactically present these astral relationships mapped by Pessoa (Cardoso 2011), but also published a study on astrological references. For example, in the set of poems that make up the second part of *Mensagem* (the only book published in Pessoa's lifetime), called *Mar Português* (Cardoso 1990).

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Abstract

This article explores the parallel trajectories of Aby Warburg and Fernando Pessoa, focusing on their respective engagements with astrology and its relationship to art history. Warburg's exploration of astrology examines the tension between superstition and scientific thought, framing astrology as both a symbol of the survival of ancient pathos and a battleground for the freedom of thought in modern Europe. Contrastingly, Pessoa's involvement with astrology, reflected in his poetic and critical works, reveals a more esoteric approach, where horoscopes and astrological imagery are embraced as great forms of artistic expression, rather than dismissed as superstitions to overcome. By analyzing Warburg's iconological methodology and Pessoa's poetic engagement with astrology, this article seeks to investigate their shared conceptual concerns, while highlighting the critical complexities that arise from their differing conclusions. The study offers a reflection on the boundaries of scientific objectivity in the study of artistic expression, and how these two figures contribute to a broader understanding of the intersections between science, superstition, and art.

keywords | Aby Warburg; Fernando Pessoa; Astrology; Science; Superstition.



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