

Foreword

Alice Barale, Fabrizio Desideri

«*Du lebst, und tust mir nichts*» («you live and do me no harm») is the famous motto that Warburg apposed on an early notebook, which was dedicated to the *Fundamental Fragments for a Pragmatic Knowledge of Expression (Grundlegenden Bruchstücke zu einer pragmatischen Ausdruckskunde)*. The «you» is here the representative form that Warburg investigates in these fragments. Is there a «life» (a «*leben*») of forms then, which is independent from us, as the «*du*» here states? If so, what is the meaning of this life? Moreover, what is the meaning of the second, oppositional sentence: «you do me no harm»? Is there a sort of relief in that, or on the contrary a certain amount of pain or delusion, as though something is missing?

These are some of the questions that the present issue of “Aisthesis” is going to raise, through a number of essays that deal directly with Warburg’s thought or, in other cases, take this Warburgian set of problems as their starting point. The present issue takes up, from this point of view, a work that was started with “Aisthesis”, vol. 3, 2010 (*Immagini dialettiche e costellazione tempestive: Warburg, Benjamin, Adorno*), and which will be developed further through a forthcoming international volume on Warburg, Panofsky and Wind (*Energia e rappresentazione: Warburg, Panofsky Wind*, ed. by A. Barale, F. Desideri, S. Ferretti, Mimesis).

The first contribution, by Christopher Johnson, is dedicated to a crucial aspect of Warburg’s late research that has been quite disregarded: Warburg’s investigation of Giordano Bruno and of the concept of «synderesis». In Bruno Warburg finds actually a very peculiar unity between the metaphysical aim and the importance that is given to every single aspect and detail of the «fallen nature». The strange concept of synderesis represents the possibility of setting a connection between these dramatically disparate aspects and objects. A connection that is, as we shall see, at every moment instable and «*in statu nascendi*».

This “initial” character is probably at the origin of Warburg’s interest for another crucial topic of his late research that has been very scarcely investigated: the late antique mysteries of Mithras. As Dorothea McEwan explains in her essay, for Warburg – and for Saxl, whose intense and mostly unknown work is also at the centre of McEwan’s paper – Mithras is not simply the triumphator, but rather a mediator between triumph and defeat, light and darkness, life and death. In the tension between these polarities is the meaning of Mithras as a symbol of «rebirth».

Rebirth of human being and rebirth of images and memories are strictly connected in Warburg’s thought. This aspect will become very important for an author who felt a great affinity with Warburg’s research and who is the protagonist of two contributions of this issue: Walter Benjamin. It is actually in the past, in what the past has of most unaccomplished and forgotten, that the present can find – as Fabrizio Desideri argues in his essay, which is dedicated to Benjamin’s and Cohen’s idea of messianism – the energy of its transformation. The messianic hope has not to be searched at the end of time then, but «into the depths of its texture». In that creatural world that inspires – as Cornelia Zumbusch shows in her paper – Benjamin’s idea of a «life» of forms. On this purpose, a very important question arises. The «life» of forms has not to be conceived for Benjamin as a biological or physiological concept, but it is has to be intended, nevertheless, as Benjamin states, in a completely literal and non-metaphorical way. What does this mean?

We can find a suggestion in the essay that Filippo Fimiani dedicates to a famous film by Martin Scorsese, *Shutter Island*. The island of the title becomes here the suspended spacetime where images emerge. It is the wild side that has to be approached, to let forms die and grow again. The death of forms is here a real death: a wound that affects the whole body and that is the origin and the condition, as we shall see, of every break of isolation and of every cure.

This tension between the advent of meaning and the bewilderment that it implies is at the centre of Pietro Conte’s contribution, which addresses the difficult question of how Erwin Panofsky’s iconology could face the challenge of abstract art. Abstract painting is the subject also of the Elisa Caldarola’s paper, which examines Ernst Gombrich’s position and the critical remarks that have been made against it.

Manuela Pallotto’s contribution investigates Warburg’s and Jung’s common interest on the pagan and irrational memories as well as their different relationship to them. This difference can receive actually a further clarification through the challenging comparison that Daniela Sacco makes, in the last contribution, between Warburg’s concept of

«Denkraum (space of thought)» and Sergej Eisenstein's experience of a sudden power failure inside the Maya museum of Chichén Itzá, in Mexico. Out from the semi-dark space, objects and bodies emerge in a funny and shuttering new way, like in a children's game.

The "Miscellanea" comprises the contributions of four scholars: Chiara Bisignano on Kendall Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Fabio Fossa on image, vision and symbol in Hans Jonas' anthropology, Tiziana Proietti on the aesthetics of proportion in Hans van der Laan and Leon Battista Alberti, and Dana Svorova on aesthetics and biodiversity.