

Under a Starry Vault. Warburg, Jung and the Renaissance of Ancient Paganisms at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Manuela Pallotto Strickland

1. *A Nation of Stargazers*

In June 1923, a few dozen professional and amateur astrologers met at the Theosophical Society lecture hall in Leipzig to clarify once and for all that astrology was not the embodiment of a mediaeval superstition but a proper science, and that a neat separation should be drawn between real astrologers and mere charlatans. At that time, nowhere else in Europe were astrologers showing such a strong level of guild self-awareness and organization as in Germany. Their initiative came right at the time when astrology was quickly ascending to levels of mass popularity yet unheard of. So was astronomy.

Planetaria and observatories were being opened in all the major cities of the country. Berlin's in 1924, Munich's in 1925. In April 1930, a planetarium was built in Hamburg's old water tower. To launch the opening, an exhibition on the history of astronomy and the belief in stars. The exhibition realized a project of Aby Warburg who died, though, before seeing its completion. The Planetarium project focused on the relation between religious *Stern Glaube* and scientific *Sternkunde*, whose simple opposition was turned by Warburg into a very complex figure, revealing the intimate relation between the mythical universe of the pagan *monstra* and ancient planetary deities on one hand, and that of modern science on the other (Warburg [1993]).

Yet, the German astrological revival was a rather new phenomenon. Until the end of WWI, in fact, astrology stayed underground in Germany, and gained mass popularity only during the Twenties. Whereas in Great Britain and to a lesser extent in France, the appeal of astrological practices and knowledge had increased tremendously already

before the end of the 19th century, in connection with the rapid dissemination of Blavatsky's Theosophism and the general acclaim of occultism. As for the reasons why in Germany, where the reawakening of ancient paganism was already underway (Mosse [1981]: 67-88), was it only after the end of the war that interest in astrology became so widely spread as to turn almost a whole country into a nation of stargazers, we are left to hazard hypotheses (Howe [1984]).

Fritz Saxl openly read the astrological revival of those days as a neo-pagan phenomenon, connected to the spiritual crisis of modernity, which showed striking similarities with the twelfth century A.D., during which Arab astrologers initiated the revival of the Hellenistic astrological culture. That was a time when «the Christian religion seemed no longer completely able to satisfy the spiritual side of man, and there was room for paganism to slip in, as we see it doing today» (Saxl [1970]: 28). Saxl was not at all alone in reading the return of paganism in contemporary Western Europe as the symptom of a spiritual and religious crisis. Much in the same terms, Carl Jung diagnosed both the surfacing of primitive and archaic features of the unconscious on a collective scale and the birth of psychoanalysis as manifest signs of the last stage of the «official deposition of Christianity», initiated by the French Revolution and by its god of reason, which had stirred the «unconscious pagan in us», who from then on «found no rest». The present age reminded Jung of «the first centuries of our era, when Rome began to find the old gods ridiculous and felt the need to import new ones on a large scale. As today, they imported pretty well everything that existed, from the lowest, most squalid superstition to the noblest flowerings of the human spirit. Our time is totally reminiscent of that epoch, when again everything was not in order, and again the unconscious burst forth and brought back things immemorably buried» (Jung [1970]: 16). Like Wotan, «an ancient god of storm and frenzy» who, after a long sleep, woke up «like an extinct volcano, to new activity, in a civilized country that had long been supposed to have outgrown the Middle Ages. We have seen him come to life in the German Youth Movement, and right at the beginning the blood of several sheeps was shed in honor of his resurrection. Armed with rucksack and lute, blond youths, and sometimes girls as well, were to be seen as restless wanderers on every road from the North Cape to Sicily, faithful votaries of the roving god. Later, towards the end of the Weimar Republic, the wandering role was taken over by thousands of unemployed, who were to be met with everywhere on their aimless journey. By 1933 they wandered no longer, but marched in their hundreds of thousands. The Hitler movement literally brought the whole of Germany to its feet, from five-years-old to veterans, and produced

a spectacle of a nation migrating from one place to another. Wotan the wanderer was on the move» (Jung [1970]: 180).

This was Jung in 1935.

The convergence of Saxl's remark with Jung's is self-evident, although Saxl did not qualify the reawakening of ancient paganism and the spiritual crisis that brought it upon the European world either as negative or positive historical outcomes. Whereas to Jung, the crisis undergone by Christianity was a serious, epochal problem. At any rate, the relation between the emergence of paganism and the crisis of Christianity pictured by both was of causality. We are left wondering whether Warburg too agreed or would have agreed with Saxl and Jung's readings, because, as far his writings go, he never stated explicitly that neither in the past nor in the present had a religious crisis, specifically Christianity's, been the catalyst of the renewal of ancient paganism. Nonetheless, ultimately, he too, like Jung and many others, regarded the increasing disenchantment and the unilateral understanding of human rationality brought forth by the thorough secularization of Western society, as very dangerous phenomena. Telegraphs and telephone, the «instantaneous electric contact» running through them like a beguiling snake, destroyed the cosmos and rid the space for devotion and thought opened by mythical imagination and primitive symbolism a long time before.

Electricity enslaved, the lightning held captive in the wire, has produced a civilization which has no use for heathen poetry. But what does it put in its place? The forces of nature are no longer seen in anthropomorphic shapes; they are conceived as an endless succession of waves, obedient to the touch of a man's hand. With these waves the civilization of mechanical age is destroying what natural science, itself emerging out of myth, had won with such vast effort – the sanctuary of devotion, the remoteness needed for contemplation¹.

In some respects, the 'anti-modernist' plea of the *Snake Ritual* occurred as a major breaking point in Warburg's thought. And an unexpected one too. Prepared during the final year of his therapeutic sojourn in Bellevue, the lecture that was supposed to prove that he had overcome his mental illness and thus was ready to go back to his family, ended with the enigmatic appeal to the reasons and the means of mythopoic, irrational thought. Until then, Warburg's idea of the fundamental dualism of human rationality, of the elliptical nature of the space of thinking which arranges itself around the two foci of «reason» and «un-reason» (*Unvernunft*), had never endorsed a plea for mythopoesis.

¹ A. Warburg, *A Lecture on Serpent Ritual*, in *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Apr., 1939), pp. 277-292.

But did Warburg really mean that modernity managed somehow to rid itself of the mythical root of thinking? It would have been hardly the case, considering that he, reasoning along with Cassirer², regarded the mythical imagination as one of the most fundamental faculties of the rational subject, thus nothing for the subject to rid itself of. To Warburg, creative imagination, whether scientifically or artistically oriented, was inherently mythical, spurred by the primitive frenzy of a Dionysian-like ecstasy. The figure of the exalted maenad, welcomed by him in her modern disguise as nympha, herald of the «return of the exiled gods»³ in the godless world of modernity, surely represented only half of the elliptical space where any rational thinking happens. Just half, but a half that could not be rid of. It remained like the shadow, the past, the memory of reason itself.

To Warburg, what modernity deliberately eliminated, without being able or willing to replace, was the critical acknowledgement of the 'rational' function of non logic-mythical-religious-primitive forms of thinking, dismissed as thoroughly alien. The one-sided understanding of what reason was and what was not, and ultimately of what man was and what was not, led to the radical estrangement from and disdain for the irrational as such, for the sake of a delusional and dangerous conception of the purity of the rational.

Such a reading of modernity was the late outcome of Warburg's thought, and spurred his last two projects, the already mentioned Planetarium exhibition and the atlas of images *Mnemosyne*⁴. Both offered a ticket with return for a guided journey through the dark underworld of the uncanny roots of the super-technological world of the present age, rather than passive, self-effacing and almost hypnotic immersions into the depths of history. The *Schlangenritual's* plea, therefore, resonates with a call for the critical reintegration of the irrational within the phenomenology of modern reason, rather than with a call for a conscious, programmatic exercise of mythopoeic imagination and the creation of new myths to fill the void left by the «gods in exile».

If, as I believe, this is the case, the Warburgian plea for myth in the age of science and technology shows a fundamentally humanistic concern, which differentiates it greatly from other critical readings of modernity. If this is the case, we should say that,

² E. Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, New Haven: Yale, 1955-1958, vol. I-III.

³ A. Warburg, quoted in E. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography*, London: Phaidon, 1986, pp. 124 and 315.

⁴ Id., *Aby Warburg Gesammelte Schriften. Bd.2/1, Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, hrsg. M. Warnke, C. Brink, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000.

at least on principle, Warburg did not stand on a thoroughly different ground from Jung. The Swiss psychologist, in fact, always declared that the focus of his work and concerns was the psychological development of the individual, the process of «individuation»⁵ being the ultimate scope of analytical psychology. Yet, where Warburg expressed concern and saw a blind surrendering to the chaos, a renunciation to the heroic labors of human reason, Jung recognized the emergence of creative potentialities yet to be addressed and guided. He looked at the resurgence of paganism as an authentically creative phenomenon, to endorse with enthusiasm, even when the new pagan mysteries of the Century were already being orchestrated like ritualistic mass phenomena by officials with high boots and a red-and-black swastika, pinned on a sleeve. Warburg, although he too was captivated by the primitive and exotic energy of paganism, instead looked with concern at the terrible power concealed by the maenad behind the sensuous appeal of the young nymph. To his eyes, the demonic side of Dionysus was always present like an ominous shadow, even where the bursting of life from the sweet elation of honey and wine was most appealing. Yet, to him, it was not the Apollinean face of the *Antike* dreamed by Winckelmann that would have saved modern man from the sudden shock of the uncanny encounter with Dionysus, because no calmness and serenity could ever match the fury of the maenad. The *sophrosyne* winning the space and time for man to think was rather to be found within the very same manic gesture, in the instant of its suspension able to activate the «energetic inversion» of the violence and therefore the redemption of the raging impulse⁶.

2. *The Gods Who Will Save Us*

According to Jung, since the Enlightenment disposed of the gods as obsolete, Christianity had become unable to accomplish through symbols and rites the psychological and cultural sublimation of the unconscious animal libido, which can be regarded as the very foundation of science, technology and language – of anything distinctively human, really. In fact, the bond between the imaginary world of symbols

⁵ C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Volume 6: *Psychological Types*, ed. by Gerhard Adler & R. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 448 ff.

⁶ When the archetypal homicidal mother stopped and contemplated herself like in an image, she saw the knife in her hand. In that small instant, for the furious maenadic Medea who in another life was still grieving her Pentheus, dwelled the possibility to become the depressed fluvial god. On Medea and the energetic inversion of homicidal fury see A. Warburg, *Mnemosyne*, cit., table 73.

and language and the libido, as Jung described it, is so deep that they basically sustain each other. From this point of view, each symbol, regardless its specific descriptive and occasional content, can be considered as a symbol of libido, in the same way that each myth is a libido myth, and before anything else they are both bound to tell the eternal story of such unquenchable, conflicting, 'heroic' longing and desiring⁷.

Libido's primal sexual energy is sublimated when its purpose is rejected, its movement impeded, its flow obstructed and consequently side-tracked onto surrogate non-sexual representations which, fashioned by means of analogies, metaphors, symbolisms, are effectively able to take over the role played by the original object of desire. At this level, the symbolical and mythical imagination that realizes the libidinal sublimations is mainly directed by libido itself, and according to Jung should not be understood as an individual, conscious activity. Rather, it heavily relies on those unconscious imaginative structures that he called archetypes or «primordial images» (*Urbilde*)⁸, functioning as fundamental symbolic frames, exclusively within which the sublimation of libido and any symbolic creation at all can occur. Jung considered the archetypes as ancestral forms carrying the memories of life itself. They are the «precipitate of the psychic functioning of the whole ancestral line; the accumulated experiences of organic life in general, a million times repeated and condensed into types». Such primordial images «can be conceived as a mnemonic deposit, an imprint or engram (Semon), which has arisen through the condensation of countless processes of a similar kind»⁹. They are immemorially buried in what Jung called the «collective unconscious», from which man's eternal past, where the dead and their shadows have been piling up against each other in the darkness for millennia, still speaks to him through the language of dreams.

When not symbolically sublimated, libidinal energy flows back into the unconscious, and there accumulates dangerously. With similar words, Jung described the psychological condition that secularization introduced into the modern world by ridding the languages of the divine of any meaning, without then finding alternative symbolic and mythical forms for libidinal sublimation and transference. Modern rationalism, rid

⁷ C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, New York: Dover, 2002.

⁸ C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 9, Part 1: *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, ed. by Gerhard Adler & R. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

⁹ Id., *Psychological Types*, cit., pp. 443-444.

of God, also rid itself of the active link to the unconscious, leaving it unguided and unhindered and at the mercy of its own frantic outbreak. To Jung, WWI was the proof.

Jung thought that the secularization of the Western world did not disempower only the religious symbolic, but the very mythical, unconscious imagination from which the former sprung forth. Nonetheless, although severed from and unrelated to the conscious, rational side of the psyche, the unconscious was still alive, and so was the psychological need to reintegrate it like a shadow, an uncanny anima within a representation of the self wider than the rational and conscious ego¹⁰. Jung thought that the vitality of such a need was proved by the fascination for all sorts of psychic phenomena developed by modern man, who, no longer in the position to believe in God, began to look for a new experience of the «numinous», in which Jung recognized a pure Gnostic, pagan quality. The mere interest in the «numinous», though, remained only a symptom of the spiritual crisis in act. From a psychological point of view, it only showed the need for man to reach out to his unconscious, yet without being able to repair the divide. In the same way, the resurgence of paganism, along with the mythical universe it fed on, played a similar symptomatic role, yet did not, in itself, heal the split. The main task for modern man, was to bridge the gap between ego and unconscious. Jung's vision was optimistic. Neither the failure of religion nor the modern defiance of myth, in fact, were bound to have the last word. Besides the most archaic «unconscious way of transformation of the incest wish into religious practices», Jung suggested that there was a different way for man to reintegrate libido, precisely by means of a «conscious recognition and understanding» of the unconscious sides of the psyche¹¹. Such a recognition was meant to be an experience rather than an abstract knowledge. Jungian analysis aimed precisely at building the frame for this experience to happen within.

It has been said, rather correctly indeed, that such an experience had to be intended as one of «self-deification»¹², the model of which was provided by the onereic

¹⁰ C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 9, Part 2: *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, ed. by Gerhard Adler & R. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

¹¹ Id., *Psychology of the Unconscious*, cit., p. 262.

¹² R. Nolle, *Jung the Leontocephalus*, in *Jung in Contexts. A Reader*, eds. A. Storr, P. Bishop, Routledge, New York, London, 1997, pp. 51-90; Id., *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994; Id., *The Aryan Christ: the Secret Life of C. G. Jung*, London: Macmillan, 1997. A substantial critique of Noll's stance is S. Shamdasani, *Cult*

transformation of Jung himself into the lion-headed mithraic divinity, a narrative construct which shows an exceptionally syncretic quality, bearing Pagan, Gnostic and Christian attributes at once¹³. According to Jung, the self-deification process was to be read exclusively as a psychological phenomenon, rather than as a metamorphosis into a divine being. It was the result of the successful integration of the ego and the unconscious into the archetypal image of the Godhead. Precisely on this basis, it could be argued that by understanding the symbolical phenomenon of the divine as a psychological fact, and by acknowledging the actuality of the divine on a solely psychological ground, Jung had in fact made his strongest contribution to the dreaded modern secularization. In a way, precisely because modern spirituality was already orbiting without the sphere of religious belief, Jung could ease religion towards the all too human sphere of the psyche. As he himself acknowledged, belief had already lost any relevance to modern man. Insofar as religious experience could still be considered as an experience of the numinous capable of bridging the gap between consciousness and the unconscious, it had to be moved from the realm of belief to the realm of knowledge, of gnosis – the knowledge of the Godhead being the knowledge of the self as a whole. Colored by more than a neoplatonic shade, the journey into the unconscious pursued by analytical psychology aimed at recovering this hidden and mysterious knowledge (hidden to consciousness and mysterious to rationality), which lived its eternal life in oneiric archetypal symbolism.

If dreams were to be considered the offspring of the unconscious estranged to consciousness, rich in archetypal elements yet alien to the ego, then Jung's goal was to bring consciousness in turn to dreaming. Unconscious contents had to be stirred up consciously, exercising what Jung called «active imagination»¹⁴. Although such an imagination wasn't conceived as a passive experience, a certain receptiveness to the unconscious and the capacity to speak its ancient and universal language, the ability to recognize different archetypal forms and to summon them to consciousness, were the faculties to develop and cultivate – at least by the analytical psychologist. Thus, to the reader of *Symbols and Transformations of Libido*, the colorful and heterogeneous range

Fictions: C. G. Jung and the Founding of Analytical Psychology, London: Routledge, 1998; and Id., *Jung Stripped Bare by His Biographers, Even*, London: Karnac, 2005.

¹³ C. G. Jung, *Analytical Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1925*, ed. W. McGuire, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

¹⁴ See Id., *Jung on Active Imagination*, ed. J. Chodorow, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

of historical source material should come as no surprise. Fragments of ancient mythological texts crossing over cultures and centuries linked up with oneiric and delirious fantasies of more or less anonymous dreamers of the present age; extensive etymological surveys of archetypal words, and an impressive knowledge of the Judeo-Christian traditions, all this varied material was worked through and gathered by Jung to demonstrate the uninterrupted psychological unity of humankind throughout history, the substantial identity of the collective unconscious in all its multifarious archetypal expressions.

There are no pictures in Jung's essay, yet if we wanted to imagine a visual transposition of *Symbols and Transformation of Libido*, Warburg's atlas of images, *Mnemosyne*, could promptly come to mind as a model, with its newspaper clippings and photographic reproductions of artifacts belonging to different historical ages and contexts, collected and arranged in comparative fashion to show the survival of pagan antiquity in the Western world. The same kind of syncretic imagination that allowed Jung to see analogies, metaphors and tropes amongst hundreds of heterogeneous symbolic objects, and thus to recognize them as embodiments of the same archetypal schemes, led Warburg to gather and organize a vast collection of images as diverse variants of the same ancient imaginative forms inherited from the pagans, impressed in the collective memory like indelible traces of the ancient gestures of bodies seized by religious euphoria, and codified via the Dionysian mysteries into the formulaic pathetic language of rite, passed on to subsequent generations like a vocabulary of pre-coined (*vorgeprägte*) expressive forms. With its blackboards, where the pictures were pinned up only to be taken down and replaced by others, the atlas functions like a gate opening onto the dark depths of collective memory, from which the ancient primordial images emerge like spectral glimpses of sudden reminiscences flashing back into consciousness¹⁵.

Although I believe a straight-forward identification between Jungian archetypes on one hand, and Warburg's pathos formula and original images on the other would be misleading, there can be little doubt that they share meaningful qualities. They are both conceived like engrams *à la Semon*, indelible marks long ago imprinted and then

¹⁵ It's quite telling that in 1956 Jung's massive collection of images, which had been till then located at Eranos, was donated to the Warburg Institute to be integrated into Warburg's own photographic collection. On the relations between the Jungian circle at Eranos and the Warburg Institute after the war, fundamental is W. McGuire, *Bollingen: An Adventure in Collecting the Past*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

inherited by the individual, yet of a collective nature, therefore, as far as the single individual is concerned, like preposterous memories, traces of events that never happened. They both connect the individual to the collectivity in such an ambiguous way that the development of the persona, as autonomous individual differentiated from collectivity, can be achieved only if the collective memories are absorbed and acknowledged by the individual as his own imaginative resources, rather than simply rejected in the name of 'personal' creativity.

Yet, Jung's insistence on the universal nature of the archetypes led him also to state that they were biologically determined, a position which opened the way to racist uses of the concept, in open conflict with the archetypes' own universalist ambition. Such a biological conception does not sit too well with Warburg's more flexible and also more ambiguous use of Semonian vocabulary. Neither does it meet with Warburg's idea that ancient paganism survived the advent of Christianity, rather than simply having been transmitted genetically, as we would say nowadays. Paganism could have gotten lost, or it could have remained an inactive, forgotten memory, confined into the underground of unconsciousness where it was buried for centuries.

Nonetheless, since Warburg, precisely by defining the deepest level where the engrams are indelibly imprinted on the brain as an inorganic strata that sets a continuity between man and inert matter, embraced a quasi-biological and Darwinian explanation of the persistence of collective memories, his theory of social memory should not be posited in rigid antagonism to Jung's¹⁶.

3. *Wotan and Dionysus. Genealogies for the Future*

Differences and similarities withstanding, I believe that the real distance between Warburg and Jung can be fully appreciated only by considering how divergent were their readings of historical paganism, particularly in relation to the modern fate of Christianity, which literally shaped Jung's understanding of paganism but remained largely ignored by Warburg.

Jung's main concerns about the defeat of the psychological and historical function of Christianity were not Warburg's. Neither was the idea that the renewal of paganism had to be regarded as a psychological symptom peculiar of an epoch that had become thoroughly disengaged with its major religious system. As already mentioned, Warburg

¹⁶ This is Jan Assmann's firm position. See his *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*, in *New German Critique*, 65, Spring-Summer, 1995, 125-133.

did not link in any meaningful way the survival and the renewal of paganism to the vicissitudes of Christianity. Yet, since the Christian world of Europe gathered the waters where, from the depths of history, the aquatic flowers of the ancient gods re-surfaced like diurnal nymphae, Christianity did have a role to play in Warburg's narratives - if anything, as the obvious opponent to paganism. The mere reference to paganism in the modern age in fact conjured, like in a preposterous and mirror-like image, *in spaeculo et enigma*, the shadowy reflex of Christianity¹⁷. Such an antithetical specularity was missing in Jung's view. His understanding of Christianity was of psychological unity with paganism, although he regarded traditional Christianity as a force inhibiting the vital role of mythopoeic imagination, which could be revived, though, by returning to the origins of such a tradition, to that syncretic fluidity into which ancient paganism and early Christianity were entwined, while facing each other competitively, mutually reshaping their own identities.

Jung and Warburg's ways of looking at historical paganism of the present and the past were heavily conditioned by their different approaches to historical Christianity. Thus, although they both shared concerns about the dangers of an all-too-secularized modernity and looked with fascination at the pagan and primitive cultural and spiritual dispositions, little family resemblance can be found between Wotan, Jung's restless wandering god, and the modern maenad, the modern follower of Dionysus, the running maiden who Warburg saw moving swiftly like a light and graceful breeze among the *stanze* and the gardens of the early Renaissance cities, or playing golf in a smart sporty dress.

Nonetheless, when we consider exclusively their psychological meaning, the substantial identity of Wotan and Dionysus is quite striking. Both the pagan divinities were chosen to embody the modern gods of memory, through which the collective voice of the archaic strata of human kind speaks, long forgotten and deeply buried in the depths of the unconscious, from which, like a siren's chant or a ghost's whisper, the remnants of all the bygones lure and convene us. Whether undertaken in the analyst's studio, before a white canvas, in front of *Mnemosyne's* black boards, the journey to such a land of the past, which is truly the land of the dead¹⁸, takes the individual beyond his own personal memories and connects him to the pre-individual bedrock, where, long

¹⁷ St Paul, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 13:12, quoted by Aby Warburg, WIA, *Grundbegriffe*, 1929, II, folio 49. See R. Kany, *Lo sguardo filologico e i dettagli*, in *Annali della Scuola Superiore di Pisa*, III s., XV, 4, 1985, p. 1283.

¹⁸ J. Hillmann, S. Shamdasani, *Lament of the Dead: Psychology After Jung's Red Book*, New York: Norton, 2013.

ago, the indelible traces of primeval collective experiences carved the ruts for the foundations of culture to be laid and preserved.

The two gods remind us that the eternal archaic still haunts and hunts us - us: the new *Aktaeons* turned into prey and thus requited with the knowledge of the past buried within, the highest knowledge of all¹⁹. Wotan and Dionysus transform us into seismographs receiving the cresting waves of ancient seismic activities, long ceased yet still rumbling in the void left by all that is no more²⁰. They make us speak the voices of the dead as if they were our own, our mouths resonating chambers for their tales of love, fear, confusion and injustice²¹.

Wotan and Dionysus were summoned by Jung and Warburg to show the haunting and imperative force of archetypes and ancient images, which eternally oblige us to recall, to dream over and over the same dreams, to imagine over and over the same images. Thus, they made us become the dreams, become the images; they made us dream dreams that dream us, imagine images that imagine us. The moderns are left to question whether there is anything, and, if so, what, which can truly be called 'ours', or 'yours', or 'mine', if even dreams and the most secret images are oneiric, imaginal echoes of images and dreams already dreamed and imagined for thousands of years.

Jung, almost with reticence, acknowledged the fundamental similarity between Wotan and Dionysus. Nonetheless, he could not really bring himself to state their full identity. The reserve he expressed makes us think that, although from a psychological point of view the two pagan gods were kindred products of archetypal imagination, historically and culturally they were not akin. Or, to put it differently, although archetypes were defined theoretically as universal and timeless, springing up from the depth of the unconscious part of the brain that had evolved through millennia, effectively they were invested with a very wide range of connotations and semantic subtleties pointing to the limit and the differences between their alleged psychological and cultural meaning. Jung's choice of a northern god as the archetype of the unconscious of the present age, instead of the Greek divinity dear to philologists and

¹⁹ G. Bruno, *Gli eroici furori*, ed. N. Tirinnanzi, Milan: Rizzoli, 1999, p. 57 ff. See also A. Warburg, *Giordano Bruno*, WIA 119.3+121.1.1. A transcription of the manuscript, edited by M. Ghelardi and G. Targia, can be found in *Philosophy and Iconology*, Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2008.

²⁰ A. Warburg, *Burckhardt-Übungen* (WIA III.113.4), quoted at length in E. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: an Intellectual Biography*, cit. p. 254 ff.

²¹ C. G. Jung, *The Red Book. Liber Novus. A Reader Edition*, ed. S. Shamdasani, translated by S. Shamdasani, J. Peck, M. Kyburz, New York: Norton, 2012.

professors, was not simply the collateral effect of an anti-intellectual and anti-academic position²². By referring to Wotan, Jung evoked a very specific archetypal genealogy, which excluded a much wider constellation of cultural references not primarily related with Nordic mythology, but rather closer to the 'other' Mediterranean heart of Europe.

Nordic mythology was never a subject matter of Warburg's work or thought. The cultural geography evoked by his genealogies mapped a very different lay of the land, firmly traced between four cardinal points, arranged along two opposing axes (North-South, East-West), yet dynamically engaged in continuous exchanges, which have been kept alive by sudden re-emergences of the subterranean circulation of paganism.

Yet, Warburg too made bold choices in articulating his lineages of the archaic. As Gombrich pointed out²³, he focused primarily on Hellenism and the early Imperial Roman period, whose syncretic quality led him to the necessary inclusion of the East into his narratives. Although, as he put it, «Athens must always be conquered afresh from Alexandria»,²⁴ the perilous winged *monstra* that, flying over Asia Minor, ensured paganism's survival, belonged to the very same genealogy claiming the descent of modern science and Winckelmann's *Apollo del Belvedere*. It was precisely such a selective view of antiquity that allowed him to develop his conception of paganism as a psychologically and culturally dualist phenomenon. In fact, one cannot but wonder whether his theory of the energetic polarity of images, which like a neural charge had kept them alive through the centuries, would have germinated at all if instead of a nympha he had before his eyes the uncanny stillness of a *kore*, whose immobility lacked even the promise of the most elemental, yet already fully polarized, atom of movement: «*instat* of turning»²⁵.

Both Warburg and Jung chose «their» archetypes and original images, and summoned them as the archaic forefathers of long-lasting genealogies, in much the same way linguists had been looking at the roots of the words as at original, almost

²² Id., *Wotan*, cit., p. 181 ff.

²³ E. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography*, cit., p. 308.

²⁴ A. Warburg, *Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther*, in Id., *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. D. Britt, with introduction by Kurt W. Foster, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999, p. 650.

²⁵ Id., WIA, III.43.3, *Grundlegende Bruchstücke zu einer pragmatischen Ausdruckskunde*, 7 January 1901.

Adamic, nuclei of heterogeneous cultural realities²⁶. The question of their genealogies, though, did not concern only the past. It was also the question of the futures that, under their name, were prepared ahead. If Jung had chosen Dionysus instead of Wotan to name the «divine» force that seized those «hundreds of thousands» and put them on the move like a modern bacchanalian parade - the rhythm of the marching heels echoing the distant blows of the thyrsus -, he could not have claimed, as in fact he did, that the character of this pagan renaissance was authentically German. Had he made a different choice, the whole project of his analytical psychology would not have been of any use to the national socialistic rhetoric, which, instead, capitalized heavily on the idea of a peculiarly Germanic collective unconscious²⁷. To be fair, the early mythical constellation sketched by Jung in his *Symbols and Transformations of Libido* was so wide and ecumenical in ambitions that it could not certainly be blamed for too narrow and selective a view of the archetypal roots and routes of human imagination. Yet, some twenty years later, when it was a matter of understanding a phenomenon of his own age, Jung did not hesitate in choosing a mythical figure highly characterized and surrounded by a multi-layered halo of nationalist overtones that could not possibly go unnoticed by his contemporaries. More importantly, even if he explicitly warned his readers of the dangers inherent in the unconscious left unhindered, his psychological portrait of Hitler did not resolve the fundamental ambiguity of whether, by embodying the medicine-man shaman type, the Führer's persona was the most intoxicated of all, or, instead, the one who could lead his tribe soberly, on a straight path, with the aid of a secret knowledge²⁸.

On the other hand, we are left with no doubt as to whether Warburg would have followed Nietzsche, the exalted shaman, the delirious prophet, or, instead, withdrawn into the safety of the observatory tower where Burckhardt and his kind would have already taken shelter from the frenzied storm. Which, almost literally, was to be Jung's later choice.

²⁶ J. P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-European*, Thames & Hudson, London 1989.

²⁷ C. Jung, *An Interview on Radio Berlin*, in *Carl Jung Speaking. Interviews and Encounters*, eds. W. McGuire, R. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977. And Id, *Psychology and National Problems*, in Id., *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume 18, *The Symbolic Life: Miscellaneous Writings*, Princeton UP, Princeton 1977.

²⁸ Id., *Diagnosing the Dictators*, in C. Jung, *Carl Jung Speaking*, cit.

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