**Title:** *Juno Moneta Atlas*:Warburgian Production or Performing Context-change

**Author:** Martin Westwood

**Abstract:**

This paper speculates connections between symbolic, pecuniary and formal economies in light of the question ‘what identifies Warburgian production?’ I propose that method occurs as a reflexive feature in Warburgian production. Engaging Elie Ayache’s discussion of the technology of the derivatives market, set-theoretical intersection and the context of context-change I will sketch a non-representational Warburgian capacity, existing in the intervals and velocity changes between reproductive and distributive contexts.

**Keywords:** Aby Warburg, Pierre Menard, reflexivity, poioumenon, Moneta, Elie Ayache

**Affiliation:** Resident in Critical Practice, Royal Academy Schools

 Associate Lecturer, Central Saint Martins

**Email address:** m.westwood@csm.arts.ac.uk

**Contributor notes:** Martin Westwood is an artist. His most recent solo exhibition, *Re-cut piece (working title)* (2016), was at Stanley Picker Gallery, London. Over the last twenty years he has exhibited, lectured and taught internationally. He has recently been investigating relationships between technology, temporality and iteration. In collaboration with Joey Bryniarska he is a current NEARCH Fellow at Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht.

**Postal Acceleration**

This paper considers Aby Warburg’s image of persistence– identified in the *pathosformel* – as a result of successive context changes induced by conditions of reproduction. As is well noted, technologies of image capture, reproduction and distribution are central to Warburgian production and analysis. If these can be thought in general terms, then the velocity of production induced by image technologies along with the velocity of postal and distributive technologies can be thought to constitute a formula for an acceleration in changed contexts of circulation.[[1]](#endnote-1) The difference between prior and subsequent speeds of reproduction, and distribution – alongside their socio-political sanctioning – constituting an abbreviated formula for image acceleration.

Warburg’s own era was, of course, marked by the imaging capacity of photography, which enabled a cultural-historical method to consider broader propositions than local stylistic developments. Instead the photograph made possible connections across longer temporal and wider geographic spans. But Warburg’s propositions of cultural history are not simply aided by photography making otherwise inaccessible artworks comparable. Whilst photography facilitated the specific iconological claims of Warburg it also induced, and made timely, the general claim concerning the mobility of images. Photography provided the ground for the possibility of comparative judgement but also, and most importantly here, photography, during the early years of the last century, induced an exponential acceleration in image circulation beyond the capacity of previous reproductive means: for example tapestry, lithography or plaster casting. This exponential acceleration is simultaneously the technical ground for a Warburgian iconology but also provides Warburgian production with a reflexive method.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The acceleration in image reproduction and distribution precipitates a critical awareness that Warburg aims to turn towards epistemological ends. But Warburg also struggles to reflexively incorporate the implication of the technical methods that provide the ground for his epistemological exertions. Whilst there is at least one quote in which Warburg acknowledges the significance of photography for his method[[3]](#endnote-3) I am not aware of any claim or acknowledgement that implicates photography in the general system he is in the process of identifying. As photographic media push the velocity of image distribution to a changed state or context Warburg constructs a photographic performance of montage that is a result of this change in context and that, in retrospect, produces the figure of the *pathosformel*.

In the scenario I wish to outline Warburg does not employ photography as an instrument for iconological claims, instead his intuition aims to reflexively harness the effects of photographic circulation. N. Katherine Hayles, describing the second wave of cybernetic thinking, writes, ‘Reflexivity is the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates’ (Hayles, 1999, 8). It is a movement Warburg indicates yet struggles to fully realise (figure 1.). In Warburgian production photography is used to develop the notions of *Nachleben* and the *pathosformel* along with a frustrated attempt to assume that which Hayles describes as a ‘changed perspective’: to position photography as an element in the story of ‘afterlife’ whilst simultaneously providing technical ground for the symptomatic image. In showing a cultural history based *in* and *of* reproduction, through reproductive means, an oscillation occurs between ‘in’ and ‘of’. To produce such an affect Warburg would need to travel at equivalent speed to the reproductive technology employed.

Alastair Fowler, writing of the history of English literature, describes a sub-genre of meta-fiction that he defines as *poioumenon*: ‘the work-in-progress fiction’ (Fowler, 1987, 195). *Poioumenon*, derived from the Ancient Greek term for ‘product’ are ‘[…] self-begetting novels. In this genre, the central strand of the action purports to be the work’s own composition, although it is really about something else […]’.[[4]](#endnote-4) According to Fowler, ‘the poioumenon is calculated to offer opportunities to explore the boundaries of fiction and reality – the limits of narrative truth’ (Fowler, 1987, 370). The *poioumenon* appears as a meta-fiction concerned with its own processes of fictionalization. The genre attempts to produce its own conditions as its figure: to be both inside fiction but productively made from the resources that make that fiction possible. Warburg’s ‘work-in-progress’, Mnemosyne Atlas, and his *pathosformel*, in being about re-production and figured through reproductions are potential *poioumenon* that reflexively aim to produce their technical base as their figure.

***Juno Moneta Atlas***

What relations might pertain in conjoining the velocity of reproduction with the architecture of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* (*KBW*) as a whole? Above the doorway to *KBW* the carved marble lintel displays the name of the Greek goddess of memory: *Mnemosyne* (figure 2.). The solitary monumental word epigraphically announces why monuments exist: a meta-monument; a reminder to remember; an invocation to recall in the lapidarian medium of memory.

Andrew Meadows and Jonathon Williams essay, ‘Moneta And The Monuments’, explains the etymology of the latin *monumentum* as deriving from *monere* meaning to call to mind. Monumentums include poems, buildings, statues, and inscriptions. The authors describe how the monument is not excluded from fluid sites of pecuniary circulation. In Ancient and Republican Rome images of elite Roman families’ victory in war or social prestige were stamped upon coins and these circulating miniature monuments created and claimed public, collective memory. Later, Roman belief claimed *Moneta* (who identified with the Greek goddess *Mnemosyne*) as the Roman goddess of memory.

‘Moneta is a goddess who remembers and certifies the accuracy of the records [that is public memory]. Feet measure distance, coins measure pecunia, and a consular list measures the past’ (Meadows and Williams, 2001, 37). An incarnation of *Moneta* was personified as *Juno Moneta* and this personification of the goddess’s memorial function was characterized by her connection to Roman coinage. Both the Roman mint and the location of standards of measurement were housed in the *Temple of Juno Moneta* unifying memory, monument and money, guaranteeing both the historical record and the standards for certifying measurements and coinage. For the Romans *Juno Moneta* authorized symbolically: guaranteeing standards of measurement and monetary value, remembering, certifying and unifying memorial time, the archive and coinage.

Given Aby Warburg was born to a family of wealthy merchant bankers it could have been apt for Warburg to have chosen the Roman goddess who united money and memory, *Juno Moneta*, instead of the Greek *Mnemosyne*. In a polemical spirit, this article re-names Warburg’s magnum opus, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, as *Juno Moneta Atlas*. In the lintel above the entrance to *KBW*, a newly carved invocation associates the photographic archives, the monument (*KBW* itself) and the Warburg family’s banking trade, sealing in the revised inscription of *Juno Moneta* a pecuniary mathematics of memory.

**Reading Room: Trading Pit – Probability and Price Series**

In dis-locating works from their context, photography severs conversation with architecture and environment. Photography produces a mobility in which artefacts lack dialogue with the referent’s ‘here and now’ but gain the ‘here and now’ materiality of the signifier. In the montaged panels of *Mnemosyne Atlas* the discrete photographic unit converses with the edge of its material support, with other reproductive data and with a dissociated formal and architectural context: the materiality of the panels and library, later with the materialities of glass slides and their lit projection. Implicit in the restriction to secondary material is a rejection of the notion of the original in favour of the derivative. The reading room of the *Juno Moneta Atlas* is not a site that mints underlying cultural guarantees, rather a trading pit of cultural derivatives: reproductions of contingent claims arranged without underlying geographic or historic conditions.

Warburg’s photographically scripted *Nachleben* can be seen as the expression of *prices* after, and debts received from, the *values* of Antiquity. In this accountancy of influence the Antique is an underlying stock, a valuation separated from any subsequent pricing of, and trade in, contingent reproductive claims. From the values of Antiquity to the trade in technically contextualised instances (tapestry, casting, photography) a probability pattern emerges from the prices (cultural relevancies) of the derivative’s contingent cultural claims. This probability pattern defines the weave of the historical cloth, out of which *pathosformeln* rupture – as both a trans-historical improbability and, for the risky speculator who can perceive its motion, as a guarantee of contingent pay-offs. Engaging expansive amounts of data, Warburg constructs historical patterns from reproductions. The continuity of the *pathosformel* is discernible through analysis of a historical price series and across its intervals. Establishing data patterns, and projecting probability curves for valuing a derivative is, in part, about historic price fluctuations and then, theoretically at least, the derivative’s predictive value follows. *Pathosformeln* as projective probability maps are derivatives arising from attending to intervals in a cultural price series. Bernhard Siegert writes:

The impossibility of technologically processing data in real time is the possibility of art […] real-time processing is the exact opposite of being available. It is not available to the feedback loops of the human senses, but instead to the standards of signal processors, since real-time processing is defined precisely as the *evasion of the senses* [my emphasis]. (Siegert, 1999, 12)

Beyond the Warburgian seismograph is a data processing calculator aiming to travel at the speed of transmission, to approximate itself to real-time processing. Real-time processing, the ‘evasion of the senses’ that Bernhard Siegert describes, begins in Warburg’s choice of the two-dimensional photographic perspective. This evasion and reduction to two-dimensional data lacks the parallax of bodily motion emphasizing the context-changes between. In addition, this avoidance of the complications brought up by haptic motion and anamorphic distortion extends to the architecture of the *KBW*’s reading room. The room provides an oval curvature for the display of panels that both reduces the perspectival distortion that would be created by a flat and perpendicular plane whilst avoiding an imbalance to the frontality of vision that a circular room would cause.

**Set Theory, Pierre Menard**

In describing the *pathosformel* Warburg’s language of symptom and eruption implies not rational statistical prediction but an unpredictable event arising outside the probability curve, an event that is, paradoxically, a repetition of the ‘same again’. The *pathosformel* restricts possibilities to the repetition of a single possibility – in effect a certainty. Instead of probability and prediction can the *pathosformeln* of *Juno Moneta Atlas* be thought as a *set theoretical intersection*, outside of any probability distribution but consistent with mutually incompatible contexts?

The mathematical, singular possibility that could define the *pathosformel* has been previously explored in the relation of financial derivatives trading to a literary context: Elie Ayache’s reading of Jorge Louis Borges’ fictional author Pierre Menard (Ayache, 2010). Pierre Menard is an author who re-writes (but certainly does not copy) two chapters and a fragment of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* through the impossible task of occupying the creative *capacity* of Cervantes in writing the *Quixote*. This question of capacity consists in the time and process of writing the *Quixote*, a time when the possible novels that it may have become have not yet been reduced to the *Quixote* that Cervantes actually completes. The plural possibilities constitutive of this capacity stand against the singular *possibility* that is the actual completed work. This capacity is a virtual arena of multiple, un-realised threads that Cervantes never followed, or rejected, and that *Don Quixote* never became: it includes those states the novel never actualised. Pierre Menard sets himself the task of writing the *Quixote* word for word. Whereas for Cervantes the *Quixote* could at any point have become a different book until Cervantes decided his novel was finished, for Menard his *Quixote* must inhabit Cervantes’ productive contingency of the unrealized versions of the *Quixote*, a capacity that could always have turned out to be different, yet Menard must still produce the singular and standard version that is Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. Menard’s fabulated ingenuity is to live inside a contingent process *and* produce a *singular* possibility – a certainty: the Quixote - from inside his own contemporaneity, from within an incompatible context.

I wish to extend Ayache’s exploration of the mathematical/philosophic questions involved in Menard’s activity to the proposition of this paper: the *Juno Moneta Atlas*. Ayache writes of Menard as:

[…] a strange individual who happened to worm his way inside a *process without possibilities* but with *many contexts*. This ‘worm process’ is, if you will, the *set-theoretical intersection* of all the contexts that admit the Quixote as one of their elements. [my emphasis] (Ayache, 2010, 6)

1. Writing the Quixote is a ‘process without possibilities’ as these are reduced to the certainty that is one possibility. For *Juno Moneta Atlas* this is analogous to the repetition of the image motif known as the *pathosformel*.
2. This process of writing the Quixote, the symptomatic image motif or the singular possibility, has ‘many contexts.’ Each context is mutually incompatible with other contexts, incompatible with differing geographic and historic modes of production: Cervantes contemporaneity compared to Menard’s. There can be no enlargement of the frame of possibilities or of the context by introducing more variables to account for the eruption of the symptomatic image. Instead the eruptive appearance of the *pathosformel* is an event that changes the context. The context-changing event can only be unified outside of the previous probability distribution, that is, outside of the differing states of the world: the context that had pertained. It does this through re-writing or re-production.
3. The event of the single possibility having meta-dimensional context may account for the repetition of the symptomatic eruption, the repetition of a context-changing event. The place of one possibility sharing mutually incompatible contexts is the ‘set theoretical intersection’ of a single but repeated possibility that is named *pathosformel* and figures a ‘worm process’ event constituting the *Juno Moneta Atlas*.

*Juno Moneta Atlas* is a context of context-change. Context-change is when an unanticipated state of the world arises: a new context must now include possibilities previously unconsidered. Does Warburg ‘worm himself inside a [historical] process’ inside a narrow angle, one Ayache describes for the derivative market as the movement from an abstract tool of valuation – for Warburg Antiquity – to pricing (Ayache 2016) – the semantic trade between discrete photographic units on the panels of *Juno Moneta Atlas*? Ayache continues:

[It comes down to] writing the *über context-changing event*, which speaks to us of the constitutive partaking of the contexts in everything we know and, correlatively, of the inscrutability of the context-changing event (the Black Swan) outside the context that can only take place after it. The way to write such an über context-changing event cannot be to write it in a given context (this would be a performative contradiction), but *to write it in line with itself and ourselves, to write it in line with the change of contexts* and to write it by improvising the writing process that is not only context-changing (like the rest of the writing process) but that *induces the context changes by the very process of its own writing*. This is a […] truly self-differentiating process. It […] *absorb[s] the exchange in its own elementary molecule*. This is the definition of the market of contingent claims […] [my emphasis] (Ayache, 2010, 28)

1. The ‘über context-changing event’ would be a pecuniary mathematics of memory – *Juno Moneta Atlas*.
2. ‘[T]o write it in line with the change of contexts’ is writing the total epistemological claim of *Juno Moneta Atlas* in accord with the principle of context change that underpins the *pathosformel* as induced by a photographic acceleration in image circulation. Such a possibility would need to evade the delay of the senses and achieve the state of real time processing. This would simultaneously negate the ‘possibility of art’ (Siegert, 1999, 12).
3. Accord with the *pathosformel*’s principle of change-of-context ‘induces the context changes by the very process of its own writing […] absorbing the exchange in its own elementary molecule’ (see figure 3.): *Juno Moneta Atlas* incorporates its own act of creation, inducing context-change through the reflexivity of Fowler’s ‘poioumenon’ and Hayles ‘movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made […] to become part of the system it generates’, spoken of earlier. This is worth considering as a production that aims to intercept the acceleration that is figured through its own technical production. This would amount to writing itself as a volatility open to subsequent pricing.

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Bernhard Siegert writes: ‘[…] a theory of the postal system always is a theory in the postal system […]’ (Siegert 1999, 4). Aby Warburg’s reading room performances, seen as *Juno Moneta Atlas,* symptomise this condition, producing an blind-spot of epistemology. The performative productions strive to recuperate themselves as a meta-fiction of the context of context change. This is simultaneously a position of reflexivity and dependent on travelling at the speed of current circulation. To achieve this the necessity of approximating to real-time processing negates the postal system as that which is open to delay, to interruption.

*Juno Moneta Atlas*, a version or part of *Mnemosyne Atlas*’s deviant capacity*,* proposes that the context of context change is the performance of a ‘knowing in movement’[[5]](#endnote-5) striving towards a reflexivity whose primary purpose is to induce and force the repetition of its own context-changing context, its own situated-ness in unknowing, destined to be a ‘theory *in* the postal system’, stating that context comes later, is a process of arrival.

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1. Mnemosyne Atlas and earlier montaged panels are littered with images of transportation and delivery: carriage and horse, airplanes, zeppelins, ships, postage stamps, the mobility of value in coinage. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. I will leave speculative (because unanswerable) whether Warburg’s apparently frustrated state of mind may have been satiated, to degrees, if the reflexivity of cybernetic thinking had been available in the first decades of the twentieth century as a methodological tool rather than as an intuition. However at least one quote indicates that reflexive activity was not far from Warburg’s mind: “Sometimes it looks to me as if, in my role as a psycho-historian, I tried to diagnose the schizophrenia of Western civilization from its images in an autobiographical reflex.” Quoted in Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography,* (2003). University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, p. *142.* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “If there were not a photographer in the house, the development of the “new method” would be impossible.” (Hensel (n.d.), 4) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. One of Fowler’s key examples of this genre was a favored book of Warburg’s: Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (Fowler 1987, 299-300, 370) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. If what has been […] called the object of interpretation is a form (not a static object, but a “moving being”), then it can be grasped only by another movement, by knowledge in progress. (Pareyson 2009, 15) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)