

Title	The Warburg Haus: Apparatus, inscription, data, speculation
Type	Article
URL	https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/12118/
Date	2017
Citation	Finch, Mick and Westwood, Martin (2017) The Warburg Haus: Apparatus, inscription, data, speculation. <i>Philosophy of Photography</i> , 8 (1-2). pp. 3-7. ISSN 2040-3682
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The Warburg Haus: Apparatus, inscription, data, speculation

Mick Finch and Martin Westwood

The articles published in this edition of the *Journal of the Philosophy of Photography* were first given as short position papers for a colloquium event that was held on the 29 and 30 June 2016 at the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg (KBW) in Hamburg that is also known as the Warburg Haus. Built in 1926 it was the first manifestation of Aby Warburg's methodology becoming materialized as an institution. Warburg died in 1929 and Fritz Saxl took over the directorship of the Warburg Haus. In 1933 it became clear that its future was under threat as the Nazi party classified it as a Jewish organization. The Haus was closed and its entire contents were shipped to London, where the Warburg Institute is to this day. The KBW now operates within the corpus of the University of Hamburg primarily as a forum for Aby Warburg's work and also for its archive of political iconography.

Since 2013 we had been working together on the research project 'Headstone to Hard Drive' ('H2HD')¹ at Central Saint Martins (CSM). Through this project – looking at the consequences for artistic practices of the relationship between temporality, technology and agency and addressing the significance of Bernard Stiegler's thinking concerning the technical ground of memory for artistic and somatic practices² – we became interested in the idea of a Warburgian method, particularly in relationship with the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and his idea of the *pathos-formula*. These interests led us into contact and eventual collaboration with Bilderfahrzeuge, a German-funded research group based in part at the Warburg Institute in London. The Bilderfahrzeuge project aims to apply Warburg's principles and methods to a diverse range of subjects. Johannes von Muller and Andreas Beyer, respectively, the group's coordinator and one of the group's five directors, proposed that we scope the idea of mounting an event at the Warburg Haus, whose director Uwe Fleckner is also a Bilderfahrzeuge director.

We visited the Warburg Haus in February 2015 to scope this idea and soon became struck by something very evident about the building. Hung in its entrance are photographs of the Haus' interior before it was abandoned in 1933. These images are of a highly sophisticated internal communication structure of telephones, a vacuum message system and a dumb waiter. The Haus' famous reading room was equally complex with a motorized shutter system to control light and three projectors, including an early overhead projector. The reading room was where the famous *Atlas* was assembled and photographed supported by a photographic studio that had an early photocopier as part of its equipment. In short we came to the conclusion that the Warburg Haus was a highly complex and sophisticated technical apparatus designed to serve Warburg's particular methodology and that, in essence, it was a complex *site of production*. Undoubtedly some of these observations arose from a sensitivity that had developed in the aftermath of CSM's move from its historic site on Charing Cross Road to an altogether different kind of building and infrastructure that co-ordinated its users in specific, and perhaps novel, ways. Architectural and infrastructural aspects of CSM's new site were of certain concern and interest to staff involved in a constant process of configuring the layout, provision and employment of a new site for pedagogic and artistic production. In terms of the 'H2HD' project the Warburg site offered the opportunity to explore the agency of a specific technical apparatus. A further aspect also struck us during our encounter with the building in 2015. To what extent did the Warburg family background in banking remain symbolically and methodologically significant to Aby Warburg's practice despite his professional rejection of this occupation? Whilst paralleling libraries as storehouses of cultural values with treasuries may seem pedestrian, Warburg's library had employed the advanced technologies of bureaucratic organization – the infrastructure of banking appeared to imminently dictate the day-to-day practice of library life. This background of experiences led to the structure and organization of the colloquium event of June 2016. The propos that we circulated to the events' contributors best describes our thinking and intentions.

The aim of the workshop is to consider the KBW as a machinery orchestrating Warburg's research practice within the context of the digital, the image, time and inscription. The KBW is approached

as a material apparatus, a technical infrastructure allowing speculation on its employment as an apparatus with roots in contemporary media-technological conditions and the contemporary banking industry. This proposition has at least two fronts: a material and operational aspect allowing a specific practice of the image to arise and that operational technology's influence upon, sanctioning and generator of, Warburg's larger intellectual project, an influence bearing the marks of technological contemporaneity. In this approach the workshop will explore aspects of material practices that Warburg drew scant attention towards emphasising: economic and media conditions for an art-history of the interval.

Any question of a Warburgian method is displaced into a performativity within an innovative Warburgian montage of technology and transdisciplinarity. How is this applicable to our contemporary media-technological environment? A premise to explore is that the KBW and the *tafeln* can be seen as sites of production that sustain analogy with the digital image and its network.³

The workshop brought together four distinct networks: the *Warburg Haus*⁴ itself as hosts of the event but also with the contribution of Uwe Fleckner's paper ('Dancer in a laboratory of images: Aby Warburg's performative didactics', which was a key reference for the colloquium and is published here); the *Bilderfahrzeuge* research project,⁵ without whom this project would never have materialized and for their contributions of five papers to the colloquium event, three of which are published here as articles; and l'Institut de recherché et d'innovation,⁶ which is led by Bernard Stiegler, who contributed to the second 'H2HD' event and who in many respects we owe the framework of thinking behind the term *mnemo-technical apparatus*. These networks were brought together with the support of CSM in so many ways. As already mentioned the 'H2HD' project held at CSM was from where the core of the thinking and key questions for the colloquium were derived and six papers were presented by staff from CSM during the colloquium. In addition, there were key contributions from outside of these networks: Thomas Hensel's

writing on Warburg had already begun focusing on the media conditions supporting Warburg's research practice (Hensel 2012); Markus Krajewski's study of bureaucratic practices on paper covered Warburg's lifetime (coincidentally ending in 1929, the year of Warburg's death) placing him in an ideal position to unravel the values inherent in indexes and other forms of paper organization (Krajewski and Krapp 2011); Maria Felixmüller's work drawing parallels between the Internet, the *Kunstkammer* and Warburg's image organization addressed the historical position of Warburg's practice; and Judith Clark's fashion-curatorial practice that is informed by the MA that she has recently completed at the Warburg Institute. The colloquium was comprised of members from each of the four partners along with these invited participants who addressed one or more of the motifs of the workshop. The four motifs were as follows:

- *Apparatus*: This session looks at the materiality of Warburg's sources and their mediation within the apparatus of the KBW. The relationships between secondary material, tertiary retentions, (re)production and exposition are considered.

Keywords: tertiary retention, photography, apparatus, *dispositif*, mnemo-technology, *spolia*, mediation, secondary material, montage, rhetoric, transmission, machine, *pharmakon*, (re)production, platform.

- *Inscription*: This session asks how Warburg's project speculates on cultural secondary memory, gesture and grammatization as a site for image retention, inscription and exposition in relation to technical and biological memory.

Keywords: gesture, recurrent image, *ur-bild*, engram, transmission, ideology, instrumentalization, phylogenetic, grammatization, reproduction, writing, symptom, cinema, film.

- *Data*: What relevance does Warburg's approach to his research project have for the digital context of images; what is the current value of the rhetorical and indexical idioms Warburg employed and invented? What does Warburg's framework for images tell us about data, metadata and the network?

Keywords: library, archive, index, annotation, hermeneutics, multiplicity, image/text, digital, interval, parataxis, hypertext, lexicon, meta-data, para-data, network, algorithm, ontology, repetition, recursion.

- *Speculation*: The influence of Warburg's banking background will be looked at both in its bureaucratic employment in the building and its effect on Warburg's expository of time. The relations of method and performativity in Warburg's research will be explored through a displaced awareness of finance.

Keywords: banking, bureaucracy, finance, Florence, debit, credit, derivatives, *Mnemosyne*, methodology, performativity, speculation, cosmology, astrology, economy.

The following articles range between those that are directly concerned with addressing Warburg's thought and the architecture of the Haus, other articles that explore parallels with Warburg's methods and interests, and articles that provide a context to either situate Warburg's methods in a wider framework of technical approaches or offer the reflection of relevant examples of media conditions and apparatus. The journal format follows the organization of the colloquium in terms of the four sections: Apparatus, Inscription, Data and Speculation. The articles in section correspond to the session in which the original papers were delivered.

Acknowledgements

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Many thanks are due to Uwe Fleckner and Katharina Hoins at the Warburg Haus, Janet McDonnell and Alex Schady at CSM, Andreas Beyer, Johannes Von Muller, Philipp Ekhardt and Hans Christian Hönes for their advice.

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Notes

¹ Initiated by Martin Westwood in his role at the time as the Frank Martin Fellow at Central Saint Martins. See <http://headstonetoharddrive.blogspot.co.uk> for further information.

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² Of relevance were *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stiegler 1998), ‘The Discrete Image’

(Stiegler 2002) and ‘The Tongue of the Eye’ (Stiegler 2011).

³ From the first ‘Warburg Haus: Apparatus, inscription, data, speculation’ document circulated in November 2015.

⁴ See <http://www.warburg-haus.de> for further information.

⁵ See <http://iconology.hypotheses.org> for further information.

⁶ See <http://www.iri.centrepompidou.fr> for further information.

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