

An Exhibition's Legacy: Fritz Saxl, Kenneth Clark and John Berger

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Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower curated 'English Art and the Mediterranean' as a touring photographic exhibition that was staged by the Warburg Institute in 1941. It was renamed 'British Art and the Mediterranean'¹ (BAM) in 1948² as the title of a book published by the Oxford University Press that restaged the exhibition's documentation and photographic material. As both exhibition and publication the project simultaneously addressed the past and the present while it unwittingly was laying ground for a future, that even from 1941-1948, would have been impossible to foresee. In terms of the past this was a question of staging a temporally panoramic history of British culture in relationship to the wider European continent and the Mediterranean. 1941 was a crucial moment for the British to take stock of such relationships, at a time when most of main land Europe was under Fascist rule. It also faced the past as it was a direct product of the photographic apparatus set up and employed by Aby Warburg in Hamburg, at his *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* (KBW)³ in 1926, and its subsequent migration to London in 1933 to escape the Nazi regime. Fritz Saxl was essential to Warburg's enterprise in the Hamburg period and, with Gertrude Bing, they oversaw the massive task of moving the entire contents of the KBW to London. The years between 1933 -1956 were when the transformation of the KBW into its identity as the Warburg Institute (WI) took place. As a refugee institution, it located to London firstly at Thames House (1934-37) and then to the Imperial Institute Buildings, in

South Kensington (1937-58) before moving to its current location in Woburn Square. Saxl, until his death in 1948, was the common denominator during this period. Through him, the DNA of Warburgian practices can be traced back from BAM⁴ to earlier photographic, image-led exhibitions and lectures during the Hamburg period, as well as to Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas that has so caught the imagination of scholars and artists during the last two decades. This was made possible because the contents of the KBW's photographic studio and the Reading Room's projectors were shipped to London. Otto Fein, the head of the KBW's photographic studio, also left Hamburg for London in 1933, assuring that the necessary specialist skills were available to the WI in exile. In 1926 the photographic equipment and apparatus of the KBW was state of the art. Even when it arrived in London in 1933, Fein's experience and the integration of photography into the academic practices of the WI placed it in a position where it was at least an equal to the major London Institution's ability to harness photography toward museological and academic ends.

Saxl's ability to use the valuable technical capital of the WI as a diplomatic bargaining card is important to note. Nowhere is this more evident than in the relationship between Kenneth Clark, Saxl and the Warburg Institute. Clark was an ardent supporter of the Institute and would play a key role in its survival. He became the director of the National Gallery in London in 1934 in the year after the Warburg Institute arrived in London. He had attended and was deeply impressed by Warburg's Hertziana lecture in Rome in 1929, where Warburg sat before the audience surrounded by panels which were attached photographs of his reference material. At that time Clark was also assisting Bernard Berenson in Florence, meaning that the young and ambitious art historian had an intense contact with *the* two major figures in art history of the time who had instrumentalised photography in the service of their studies and methods. On the one hand Berenson, the connoisseur, who used

photographs of details of paintings in his adaptation of the Morelli system by which he made attributions of works of art that would also make his fortune. On the other hand there was Warburg's use of photography, in the service of an iconological mapping of the migration of gestures. Clark's awareness of the role of photography for the discipline of art history had thus been introduced to him in his mid-twenties and increasingly, as he rose to power within the cultural institutions of British society, the reprographic image would develop as being essential in the service of his research and increasingly a powerful tool in the popular dissemination of knowledge. It is in this context that BAM, Saxl and Wittkower played an essential role and Clark was their fellow traveler. Much of the extensive correspondence between Clark and Saxl⁵ is about photographs, Clark requesting from Saxl images already held at the WI or for new images to be made. The extent of what this relationship constituted is clear from a letter of the 26th October 1942 from Saxl to Clark where Saxl requests payment of £250 for 'our photographic work'⁶, that represents £8350 in today's value. The finances of the WI were often if not always precarious and the WI's photographic acumen in relationship to its scholarship was a way for Saxl to both extend its influence and to keep funds moving through its coffers.

As the Director of The National Gallery in London⁷, Clark strove to equip it with a photographic apparatus to serve its, and his own, ends. The 1938 publication, '*One Hundred details from the Pictures in the National Gallery*'⁸ is evidence that by that time this apparatus was in place as the introduction credits and celebrates the Gallery's photographic staff⁹. It also points clearly to Clark's ambition to use photography to broaden the audience and interest in the collection. Using details as a way of intensifying a public interest in pictures, all-be-it in a format akin to that of a parlor game, has echoes of a Berenson-like relationship to the Morelli system, where details of works form the data that serve attributions. The

connoisseur as detective is transformed here into a pedagogic device whereby quasi-synoptic taxonomies focus the attention of a wide public within the imagery and details of the collection¹⁰. Thus, even by 1938 Clark was fully sensitised to the potential of photographic images to engage a wide public with 'high' culture.

However, Clark's understanding of photography and image-led practices was, in the case of *One Hundred Pictures*, within a limited range of narration and comparison somewhat akin to the way double-image lecture projections generate binary associations. The layout and the narration of this book was formatted in such terms and this dispositif inhibited the possibility of a more complex narration. The 1948 publication of BAM, reveals an inherent structure that is quite different from that of *One Hundred Pictures* and brings to mind the parataxis-like clusters of images of the Atlas. An offer was made by the Norwich based printer Jarrold to publish the exhibition in book form¹¹ after he had visited the 1941 exhibition. This offer was due to Jarrold importing a Harris Seybold printer, that he had shipped from the USA on the Queen Mary¹² that 'would enable us to print many and comparatively large plates without excessive cost'.¹³ The development of printing technology offered the means to translate the exhibition into book form. The large format of the publication meant that numerous high quality images could be grouped on each page. These groupings were faithful to the exhibition panel formats and the book's layout followed a pattern where the images were predominantly on the right hand pages with corresponding texts on the left based on the short introductions from the exhibition's guide. Thus, the general characteristic of the publication is that the images are foregrounded, the text serving and elucidating in support of the synoptic visual material. This was a radical departure from art historical publications up to that time and is also a taste of what the form of a publication of the Mnemosyne Atlas might have taken, had Warburg lived to realise it.

The division of labour for the production of the book (and presumably the exhibition) was that Saxl took the sections up to 1500, covering some 2000 years and Wittkower from 1500 to the modern period, covering some 300 years but containing 14 more sections than the pre-1500 section. The preface to BAM accounts for this in terms of a difference in temporality due to a lack of detail and documentation in the earlier period. Interestingly the preface makes a cinematic illusion as a way of figuring this temporal difference.

‘In the kaleidoscopic survey, therefore, which is unrolled before the eyes of the reader, the first half resembles those cinema pictures where the opening of a flower from the bud is shown as a consecutive movement, while the second half is like those which show a horse jumping a fence, in a number of shots recording every single position of the leaping animal’.¹⁴

This passage recalls the awareness of the temporalities of image-montage that is an implication of the Mnemosyne Atlas where great panoramic sweeps through time are contrasted with slowed-down attentions to particular works and details¹⁵. In this sense, the WI seemed to embody a consciousness of ways of thinking about groupings of images, their successive ordering and how the montages represent developments through a continuum of immense temporal spaces in contrast to how a focus into shorter temporal spaces operate, almost like filmic jump cuts. BAM embodies this cinematic allusion more than the other photographic exhibition projects the Warburg entered into during this period, namely the *Indian Art* exhibition of 1940 and *Portrait and Character* of 1943. Underpinning BAM is the scope of how the exhibition and the publication served a pedagogical purpose that goes beyond the ‘morale boosting’ function that these projects were obviously designed to serve.

It is conjecture that Jarrold saw in the exhibition the seeds of a pedagogical work, bringing British art into the scope of a European art history that could reach a wide audience. The BAM exhibitions had toured widely in the UK, attracting large and diverse audiences, and it was evident that the format and the content struck a popular chord through its reception. Again, it's conjecture as to how this resonated with Clark but the parallels with *One Hundred Details* and its popular success are too obvious to ignore. What is clear is that Clark understood Saxl's interest in the 'visual exhibition'. In a letter to Saxl in 1943 he requests a set of photographs, produced by the Warburg Institute, of bronze effigies in Westminster Abbey that he would like to give to friends. The original set he gave to the King to be 'used in the history lessons of Princess Elizabeth' remarking 'that your scheme for visual education is beginning at the top'¹⁶. Saxl's interest and activity in using photography in the service of visual education originated in adult education programmes he worked on at the end of the First World War aimed at demobbed Austrian soldiers, returning from the trenches.¹⁷ For Saxl, the effects of the first and second world wars are the impetus to use resourceful means to reach wide audiences, engaging cultural perspectives toward constructing historical and world views.

There is no direct evidence to suggest that Clark ever made direct links between Saxl and the WI's relationship to image led scholarship and to his own eventual activities as a broadcaster. The programmes he made for Associated Television (ATV), in the early days of television in the 50s and 60s and *Civilisation*, that stands as the landmark of cultural broadcasting, demonstrate two aspects of his character that can be said to be also shared by Saxl. Firstly, there is an implicit belief that scholarship should reach out and find new, non-academic audiences. In another chapter of this book, about the history of the WI's exhibitions, it is clear that Aby Warburg and Saxl were invested in such ideas and ambitions. Clark was

motivated in similar ways and his directorship at the National Gallery galvanised his instinct that cultural institutions exist to serve and stimulate as wide an audience as possible.

Secondly, both Clark and Saxl understood the relationship between technology and the possibilities of disseminating scholarship to potentially huge audiences. BAM as an exhibition toured to 20 destinations and the audience was at least 20,000 people. Although the print runs of the two editions of the publication would not have been very large, libraries, and especially those attached to art history departments would have had access to this book.

Thus dissemination of the project's material was not only on a large scale but also to a wide and diverse audience.

After the war, Clark became the exemplar of the British mandarin class, who built key cultural institutions and put to work the technological means toward constructing an egalitarian culture. This was demonstrated in his membership of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) during the war years that became the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1945, for which he was the chair of the arts panel. His relationship to broadcasting was to prove his most enduring and revolutionary contribution to the cause of constructing a culture of consensus. Long before BBC2 had made him the offer to make *Civilisation* he had made numerous radio and television broadcasts about the arts. This can be seen as the key period of experimentation in making programmes of this genre and Clark was its pioneer.

Just before *Civilisation* he made *The Royal Palaces of Britain* with a cinematic film crew, That was shot in 35mm Technicolour even though British TV transmission at that time was only in black and white. He had the foresight to insist on using this same crew for *Civilisation*. Key here was that both of these projects shot entirely on location, in front of the actual works of art. They used mobile tracking shots to exploit the full potential of the works of art and architecture they were recording. In short, the technical apparatus used was the most

sophisticated available and the stage craft that the crews brought with them meant the contexts where the works of art were encountered could be exploited to the fullest. This amounted to a reinvention of the idea of how the canon of European culture appeared to an audience, many of whom had not, or would never encounter these work of art in the flesh. In a 1948 BBC radio broadcast that Clark gave about the Warburg Institute, he recounts his experience of being in the audience of Warburg's final lecture in 1929 at the Herziana Library in Rome.

"I speak with feeling, for I was the sacrificial victim at one of the last lectures Warburg ever gave. Around him were screens of photographs embodying almost all the subjects which had ever occupied his mind, and he would dart from one to another, always coming to rest in front of my chair. His whole approach was entirely new to me, my knowledge of the German language was incomplete, and at the end of three hours I felt I had been riding in an intellectual Grand National. But it changed my life, and I am eternally grateful"¹⁸.

Warburg's peripatetic use of the photographic material in his lectures¹⁹ is not easily likened to the means that were harnessed to the making of Civilisation. However, the potential of Warburg's means and methods were to be close to hand through Clark's most formative years. In addition Clark built a pragmatic relationship with Fritz Saxl, much of which involved transactions in photographic images through which they furthered their respective institutional aims but also mobilized their skills and methods toward addressing a wide audience. This stands as BAM's most important legacy; how can scholarly material reach wide audiences?

Within this legacy also resides, all be it less directly, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* which was broadcast by the BBC in 1972. Clark is the only art historian the programme cites and Berger challenges the patriarchal and the ideological under belly of what *Civilisation* presented to its

audience. More importantly *Ways of Seeing* used simple means within the economy of the reproduced image. The opening sequence even acknowledges Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* as a key reference for the series. As Mike Dibbs said about the difference between the two broadcast projects:

"Kenneth Clark went everywhere for the series *Civilisation* so the BBC hold the copyright for all the film of the paintings and cathedrals and buildings featured in the programmes. But because we were responding to the modern means of reproduction whereby the images can come to us, we are ironically now stymied by the fact that every reproduced image has a copyright attached to it".²⁰

In the same interview Dibbs cites Chris Marker's book *Commentaires*,²¹ as a key reference. However the after-life of BAM seems to live on in the format of *Ways of Seeing* as a Penguin book²², with its Atlas like pages, inviting visual comparisons between its images. *Ways of Seeing* was also a comparable response to arguably what was then a time of crisis, all-be-it one of political uncertainty. The appropriation of images, through the use of the rostrum camera and Berger's face-to-face address in a studio remote from works of art evokes an apparatus more akin to that of the KBW, where the lecture/exhibition was the primary form of address and secondary material was put to work, than Clark's use of a film crew and locations. In these terms, in relationship to BAM's legacy, *Ways of Seeing* is its real *nachleben*, a jump-cut.

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¹ Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower: *British art and the Mediterranean*, Oxford 1948.

² The book was republished in 1969,

³ Also known as the Warburg Haus.

⁴ Henceforth, I will refer to the combined exhibition and publication project as *British Art and the Mediterranean*.

⁵ For the purposes of this research this correspondence was accessed in the Kenneth Clark archive at the Tate Gallery, London and the Warburg Archive at the Warburg institute, London.

⁶ Document 88/2/1/1/10/81, the Kenneth Clark Archive, The Tate Gallery Archive, London

⁷ From January 1934 – December 1945

⁸ Kenneth Clark: *One Hundred Details from the National Gallery*, London 1938.

⁹ Kenneth Clark: *One Hundred Details from the National Gallery*, London 1938, p. viii.

¹⁰ It's suggested that this publication was also the means Clark used to distance himself from the mis-attribution in 1937 of *Scenes from Tebaldeo's Eclogues* as being by Giorgione where as it transpired that the correct

attribution was Andrea Previtali. The Gallery paid the considerable sum at the time of £14,000 and the episode considerably damaged Clark's reputation with the National Gallery and with the contemporary media.

James Stourton: *Kenneth Clark-Life, Art and Civilisation*, London 2016, pp. 138-141.

¹¹ Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower: *British art and the Mediterranean*, Oxford 1948, p. i.

¹² The original reference for this information was accessible on Jarrold's web site but this is no longer visible on the current site. This information was gained from correspondence with the Jarrold Archive in Norwich.

¹³ Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower: *British art and the Mediterranean*, Oxford 1948, p. i.

¹⁴ Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower: *British art and the Mediterranean*, Oxford 1948, p. i.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Adi Efal's comparison of Warburg and Benjamin.

Adi Efal: 'Warburg's Pathos Formula in Psychoanalytic and Benjaminian Contexts, in: in Assaph (2000), n°5.

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¹⁶ In a letter from Clark to Saxl dated 27th July 1943, The Warburg Archive, The Warburg Institute London.

¹⁷ Dorothea McEwan: *Exhibitions as Morale Boosters. The Exhibition Programme of the Warburg Institute, 1938-1945*, in: *Arts in Exile in Britain 1933-1945: Politics and Cultural Identity*, Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam 2005, p. 272.

¹⁸ From the manuscript, *The Warburg institute and its Founder*, broadcast on the 13th June, BBC radio, in the Tate Archive, The Kenneth Clark Papers, reference number 8812.2.2.1117.

¹⁹ For a thorough discussion of this see - Uwe Fleckner: *Dancer in a laboratory of images: Aby Warburg's performative didactics*, in: *Philosophy of Photography* (2017), Volume 8, Issue 1-2, pp. 17-33.

²⁰ Juliette Kristensen: *Making Ways of Seeing: A Conversation with Mike Dibb and Richard Hollis*, in: *Journal of Visual Culture* (2012), Vol 11(2), p. 195.

²¹ Juliette Kristensen: *Making Ways of Seeing: A Conversation with Mike Dibb and Richard Hollis*, in: *Journal of Visual Culture* (2012), Vol 11(2), p. 188.

²² John Berger and Mike Dibb: *Ways of Seeing*, London 1972.