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**SERIO LUDERE. ABY WARBURG'S BILDERATLAS:
A ROLE-PLAYING GAME TO STUDY CLASSICAL TRADITION¹**

The theme of my contribution is an exposition of the researches on Warburg's Atlas made by the "Seminario Mnemosyne" at the Centro studi classica Università Iuav di Venezia². In particular I would like to present the hermeneutic readings of the Atlas panels/plates, and the operation of the Bilderatlas as a device to study and display the intertwined connections among formal and thematic topics, and between images and texts.

**I. ORIGINS, FORTUNE, AND MISFORTUNE OF ABY WARBURG'S
MNEMOSYNE ATLAS**

πάθει μάθος
"through pain, from pathos,
you learn"
Aeschylus, Agamemnon, l. 177

As Aby Warburg left the Kreuzlingen Sanatory – where he was hospitalised intermittently for more than five years, followed by the psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger – in 1925, his assistant Fritz Saxl displayed a group of black panels in the Ellipse Reading Room in this Institute in Hamburg³,

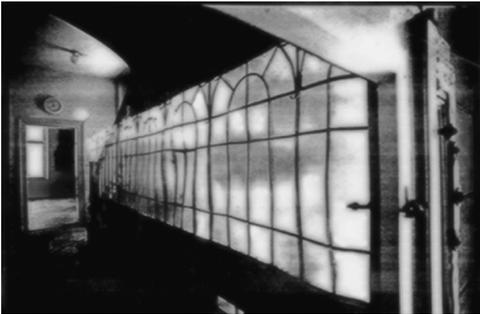
These panels presented many photographs, gathered according to the topics of Warburg's researches.

The actual project for the Bilderatlas was conceived between 1927 and 1928, as a result of researches conducted by Warburg and his scholars. His activities,

¹ The text is published as submitted by the author.

² See, in "La Rivista di Engramma", the readings of Mnemosyne Atlas by Seminario Mnemosyne, since 2000 http://www.egramma.it/eOS2/index.php?id_articolo=103#saggio%20corali. In general, on the methods of the Venetian Seminar, s. Centanni 2004.

³ On the design of the building, especially the Elliptical Hall and on Warburg's intervention in the design, s. Calandra 2014.



Kreuzlingen
(Thurgau, Switzerland)
Sanatorium
Bellevue, directed by
Ludwig Binswanger
(photographs 1920 ca.)

on his return from the hospitalisation in Kreuzlingen, resumed and used a large part of the research materials that he had only kept for his own personal use until then.

The first panels with photographic montages were conceived as small exhibitions, held at the Hamburg-based Institute and elsewhere. The scientific staff of the KBW, under the direction of its founder, created large panels on which it was possible, by assembling photographs, to reconstruct the research and investigation course. There was also the attempt of proposing a new style for scientific communication, without indulging in didactic simplifications of complex interpretative routes, reaching maximum expressiveness and efficiency.

From 1925 it is as if the private laboratory – the work of the researcher, a new version of the Renaissance *studiolo* – had opened its doors: not only

Hamburg, Heilwigstraße 116,
Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg:
the Ellipse Reading Room with some “thematic panels”





Hamburg,
Heilwigstraße 116,
Kulturwissenschaftliche
Bibliothek Warburg
The Ellipse Reading
Room

to its students, employees, colleagues, and scholars but also to the public. The panel displays then reveal the mechanisms of the research: by exposing them, they are also clarified and explained, triggering a virtuous circle between research and communication.

It was with the panels for the KBW exhibit that Warburg had the idea of creating a unique piece of work in the form of an atlas: a work that would collect the fruits of the research that he had conducted throughout the course of his life and that had inspired his students and collaborators.

Indeed, the Atlas was born as a result of stratified researches over the years: researches with their own history and their more or less formalised outcomes (articles, lectures, and lessons left in the form of notes). The Atlas project was in fact created in parallel with the creation of the Library and Institute.

The Atlas has been presented as a figurative and reasoned explication of the mechanisms of the Classical tradition and the dynamics of cultural transmission from one era to another. The theme of iconographic tendencies and of morphological and thematic image tradition – a theme that was never openly exposed by Warburg in his written works – is finally explicit in the Atlas. Mnemosyne is therefore proposed as an original and final outcome of Warburg's methodology and, at the same time, as an initial repertoire for its future applications.

Warburg died in 1929, leaving his *opus* unfinished and incomplete. The difficulties in the reconstruction of the original design of the piece (after the promoter's passing) were met by difficulties given by the historical circumstances that in 1934, after the rise of National Socialism in Germany, brought the KBW to move from Hamburg to London, where it became the Warburg Institute only after the Second World War¹.

The Bilderatlas project, that was meant to be published by Teubner publishing, was interrupted by the transfer of all the Institute's

¹ On the afterlife of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg, s. Fleckner, Mack 2015.

material – books, machines, photographs – from Germany to London. These factors came to qualify the critical value and meaning of Mnemosyne, bringing the Atlas to be considered as a sort of ‘ghost’ project.

Warburg’s followers – Gertrud Bing, Edgard Wind, and Fritz Saxl especially – with all the logistic issues they were forced to face, lost the tracks of the ambitious Atlas project. The materials and documents related to it resurfaced only at the beginning of the 1970s.

It was only recently, after 60 years in the dust, that Warburg’s last version of the Atlas was reconstructed in its panels, and put on display in various exhibits – the first one in Wien in 1994; another one in Venice in 2004, presented by the Seminar group that I promoted¹. The collection of the Atlas panels has since been published (based on photographic documentation of the 1929 original ones) in many different editions that have been coming out since 1998 in Germany, Italy, France. The Atlas has become Warburg’s most studied work, however only in the past ten years.

II. WHAT THE BILDERATLAS MNEMOSYNE IS

In the last two years of his life, Aby Warburg conceived a complete Atlas of Images (the Bilderatlas) that could be “an instrument of mental orientation” in the history of human civilisation, starting from the ancient roots of Classical tradition.

From 1927, Warburg and his collaborators dedicated all their energies to structure many panels that became:

- the tool-box of their researches;
- the work space in which they collaborated in;
- the most significant display format for their exposition (lectures and more or less improvised exhibitions) of their researches.

Between ‘27 and ‘29, the Atlas was both a study tool and a device for the display and sharing of studies and researches on Classical tradition brought forth by the Warburg Institute.

The issue that Warburg and his followers meant to address was that of structuring a system of exposition and representation of the Renaissance – Italian, at first, then European – as a force field, in which the formally composed and chaste medieval repertoire was forcefully irrupted by “life in movement” – those styles of Antiquity that are taken from the archaeological finds of the 1400s (sarcophagi, reliefs, coins). This is what we find in Warburg’s notes for the “Introduction” to Mnemosyne, when he writes that the Atlas would be an instrument of intellectual orientation with an anti-chaotic function (how the artwork clarifies and outlines its object).

“[There is a] duality between an anti-chaotic function, which can be termed thus because the artwork selects and clarifies the contours of the

¹ On the early history of Mnemosyne, and the first steps of its fortune, s. Seminario Mnemosyne 2004.

object, and the demand that the beholder should gaze in cultic devotion at the idol that has been created, creating the human intellectual predicaments that should form the proper object of a scientific study of culture that takes as its subject the illustrated psychological history of the interval between impulse and rational action”¹.

Furthermore, the collection of images presented in the Atlas have the function of “de-demonising impressions”, reclaiming their original meanings: “The process of de-demonising the inherited mass of impressions, created in fear, that encompasses the entire range of emotional gesture, from helpless melancholy to murderous cannibalism, also lends the mark of uncanny experience to the dynamics of human movement in the stages that lie in between these extremes of orgiastic seizure – states such as fighting, walking, running, dancing, grasping that the educated individual of the Renaissance, brought up in the medieval discipline of the Church, regarded as forbidden territory, where only the godless were permitted to run, freely indulging their passions”².

Warburg underlines the peculiar role of the image in the process of absorbing pre-coined expressive values, through the representation of life in motion: “Through its images the Mnemosyne Atlas intends to illustrate this process, which one could define as the attempt to absorb pre-coined expressive values by means of the representation of life in motion. On the basis of its images it [the Mnemosyne] is intended to be first of all an inventory of pre-coined classical forms that impacted upon the stylistic development of the representation of life in motion in the age of the Renaissance”³.

As early as 1905, the author was helped in such efforts by Osthoff’s writing on the nature of the superlative in the Indo-Germanic language: in brief, he demonstrated that a change in the root of the word could occur in the comparison of adjectives and conjugation of verbs. Not only does the conception of the energetic identity of the intended attribute or action not suffer (even though the formal identity of the basic lexical expression has fallen away) but the arrival of an alien root and the addition of supplementary forms achieve an intensification of the original meaning.

A similar process can be ascertained, *mutatis mutandis*, in the area of the language of gesture in art when, for example, the dancing Salome from the Bible appears as a Greek maenad, or when a female servant carrying a fruit basket in Ghirlandaio rushes by in a quite conscious imitation of the Victory of a Roman triumphal arch.

In this frame, Warburg introduces the concept of “Engram”, as an ancestral track impressed and preserved in collective memory, which is translated in a repertoire of gestures (the *Pathosformeln*): “It is in the area of mass

¹ Rampley 2017, A5; the *Einleitung zu Mnemosyne* by Aby Warburg, German text and Italian translation is now available in “La Rivista di Engramma”: s. Ghelardi 2016.

² Rampley 2017, A5.

³ Rampley 2017, A5-B1.

orgiastic seizure that one should seek the mould that shapes the expressive forms of extreme inner possession on the memory with such intensity – inasmuch as it can be expressed through gesture – that these engrams of affective experience survive in the form of a heritage preserved in the memory. They serve as models that shape the outline drawn by the artist's hand, once the extreme values of the language of gesture appear in the daylight through the formative medium of the artist's hand"¹.

In this conceptual context, there is no place for any aesthetic vision: "Hedonistic aesthetes win the cheap approval of the art-loving public when they explain such formal changes in terms of pleasure in the extended decorative line. Let anyone who wishes content themselves with the flora of the most beautiful and aromatic plants; this will never, however, develop into a physiology of the circulating, rising sap of plants, for this only reveals itself to whoever examines the subterranean roots of life"².

The main issue and chronological hub of the Atlas is Italian Renaissance culture, especially because the revival of Classic imagery, at the time, was experienced as a flag of individual freedom, against the (entirely medieval) subjection to Fate: "The Italian Renaissance sought now to absorb this inherited mass of engrams in a peculiar, twofold manner. On the one hand it offered welcome encouragement for the newly liberated spirit of worldliness, and gave courage to the individual, struggling to maintain his personal freedom in the face of destiny, to speak the unspeakable. However, to the extent that this encouragement proceeded as a mnemonic function, – in other words, it had already been reformed once before by art using pre-existing forms – the act of restitution remained positioned between impulsive self-release and a conscious and controlled use of forms; in other words, between Dionysus and Apollo, and provided the artistic genius with the psychic space for coining expressions out of his most personal formal language"³.

It is precisely in the Renaissance that there is the struggle involving the artist and his works; between the imitation of the ancient models and the emergence of the individual genius: "The compulsion to engage with the world of pre-established expressive forms – regardless of whether their origin is in the past or the present – signifies the decisive critical moment for any artist intending to assert his own character. It was recognition of the fact that until now this process had been overlooked, despite its unusually wide-ranging importance for the stylistic formation of the Renaissance in Europe, that led to Mnemosyne, the images of which are intended, most immediately, to present nothing but a traceable inventory of pre-coined expressions, which demanded that the individual artist either ignore or absorb this mass of inherited impressions surging forward in this dual manner"⁴.

¹ Rampley 2017, B4.

² Rampley 2017, B5.

³ Rampley 2017, C4.

⁴ Rampley 2017, D1.

In other words, as Warburg affirms by quoting – but also going beyond – Nietzsche, we have to find the best symbol of the character of Antiquity in “the double-headed herm of Apollo–Dionysus”. This is the right way “to take seriously the role of *sophrosyne* and ecstasy as a single, organic functional polarity that marks the limit values of the human will to expression”.

III. MNEMOSYNE ATLAS MISUNDERSTOOD

In the late 1960s, a biographical book on Warburg’s thought and life was commissioned to Ernst Gombrich. *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* would then be published in 1970 in London¹. Until then, Warburg’s name and his work were more or less unknown. In reality, while Gombrich was commissioned, first in the 1930s and again after World War II, to work on publishing the entire corpus of Warburg’s works, Gertrud Bing, Warburg’s closest assistant in the last years of his life, had assumed the job of writing the biography of the Master. According to Gombrich’s declarations, when Bing died in 1964, she destroyed all the book’s materials that had been left unfinished. However, a lot of archive materials collected in previous years by Gertrud Bing (and the other collaborator of Warburg, Fritz Saxl) is gathered in Gombrich’s volume.

Gombrich’s book represents a turning point for Warburg’s worldwide fortune and, at the same time, an incredible misinterpretation of his method and the importance and innovative nature of his research. In essence, Gombrich read all of Warburg’s intellectual biography, and especially the last years of his life after the Kreuzlingen Sanatorium, as a story strongly marked by the scholar’s psychiatric illness. Gombrich’s worst chapter in Warburg’s activity precisely concerns Mnemosyne Atlas, not considered as a superb project but as a symptom and a manifestation of Warburg’s mental disorders, necessarily destined to fail. In a recent essay, the story of Gombrich’s collaboration with the Warburg Institute in London, from the 1930s to the publication of the volume – which will be published (not by chance) only after the death of Gertrud Bing – has been reconstructed². Openly against Bing and the fidelity in Warburg ideas, and against the tenacity (both by Bing and Saxl) on the urgency of publishing the Atlas, Gombrich has exhibited all of his reservations since the early stages of his collaboration. Against the perseverance of Warburg’s closest collaborators in completing the most important project of his life, Gombrich did not even spare his pounding irony. Thus, in a letter sent to his friend Ernest Kris in 1942, Gombrich wrote on Gertrud Bing: “[She] is a really nice and clever person as long as she does not quote Warburg’s Atlas”³.

¹ On the troubled story of Warburg’s biography written by Gombrich, and on the materials that it includes see, recently, Wedepohl 2015.

² Wedepohl 2015.

³ Quoted in Wedepohl 2015, p. 131.

In general, Gombrich presents Warburg as a kind of disordered genius, deeply conditioned by intellectual currents of his time and lacking in a genuine original method. According to Gombrich, Warburg, troubled by his psychological disorders, at the last stage of his career would have converted to playing with figures because, after his illness, he was incapacitated to do much else and was no longer able to write anything.

The book – which stitches together biographical narrative, published and unpublished writings, diaries, fragmentary notes, and private letters – paints an extraordinary, fascinating, and tormented portrait of the German scholar. It is to Gombrich, therefore, despite the intentions of the author, that we owe the undoubted merit of having promoted and restored the charismatic personality of Aby Warburg.

Gertrud Bing decries the phenomenon: “Warburg’s posthumous fame is based more on hearsay than on the knowledge of his writings, and even today he shares the fate of those authors who [...] are praised with more zeal than with which they are read”.

Despite Gombrich’s intentions, by virtue of his successful biographical essay (translated into all major European languages), paradoxically, not only did the interest in Warburg’s personality increase but, most importantly, Warburgian studies reprised. Edgar Wind, one of the best interpreters of Warburg’s teachings, also slated Gombrich’s biography; in a review that came out shortly after Gombrich’s publication, he highlighted all the shortcomings of the publication.¹

Parallel, and as a counterpoint, to this contemptuous and denigratory reading, is the fanatic approach of Warburg memory keepers who treat the Atlas as an object of religious devotion. Two symmetrical positions – both unprofitable.

The second way to apply the Bilderatlas is by using it as a “machine for knowledge”: following the methods, understanding its operation as a machine for the study of the transmission of themes, symbols, and images of Classical tradition.

Giorgio Pasquali, one of the greatest 20th century Italian classical philologists, wrote that the illness was unleashed by fear.

“I saw him calmer and happier when he returned to Italy in 1927 than when I left him in 1915, frightened at the thought of the inevitable war between Germany and Italy, which would, he feared, create an abyss between the two countries he loved”².

Pasquali’s farsightedness when observing the life and works of Warburg made him view his death as an “autumnal euthanasia”: the sudden death of a life which was nonetheless “in a certain sense finished”. The conclusion to which Pasquali refers to is Mnemosyne. Unlike the superficial specialists and readers to come in the fifty years that followed, he considered it a “complete” work.

¹ Centanni, Pasini 2000; Wedepohl 2015.

² Pasquali [1930] 2014.

“He leaves a figurative atlas ready for publication, which takes its name from memory, *Mnemosyne*, aiming to show how different countries and different generations - the Eastern Mediterranean in the Middle Ages and the European Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Italian and German, and finally the generation and the circle of Rembrandt - had successively conceived and transformed the ‘pathetic’ Dionysian legacy of Antiquity. He wanted to continue to live in that atlas for posterity”¹.

Warburg’s legacy as teacher and scholar is recapitulated in words that have surprising relevance in the conclusion of Pasquali’s paper.

“Young scholars will work according to his intentions, according to his spirit, even if they do not accept with conviction concepts that are closely linked with his own powerful personality, and instead use the atlas as a touchstone for their own thoughts. Art historians and cultural scientists have a duty to make the work of Warburg fruitful, letting it operate on them, thereby transforming it”².

These are exemplary words, because they refer to the fundamental problem of knowledge: progressing at a slow pace, via successive changes of route without preliminary postulates, but with the distinct purpose of interpreting and comparing different hypotheses which, by interaction and reciprocal transformation, create sparks of knowledge.

In Warburg’s Atlas, the coordinates of Western civilisation are defined dynamically and within very wide ranges: the chronological period that he assesses runs from the ancient Sumerian civilisation to the contemporary age; the spatial coordinates outline a geography that is historically and politically fragmented but that also however presents a cultural continuum, with boundaries that coincide with a broader Mediterranean basin that reaches all the way north to Hamburg, and well beyond the east of Baghdad³.

The Atlas speaks of cultures and places that have profound logical and analogical relationships, such as the ones that the Warburg panels bind in images that are apparently different and distant. This way they come to reveal the system of co-presences and hybridisation, rejecting the outline of the “dynamograms” behind Mediterranean and European culture.

The Atlas will be an extensible system of hangers on which
I hope to hang all the clothes, small and large, that are
produced by the loom of Time.

Aby Warburg

The weavings of life and memory - the nervous knots, the information sorting centres, the alternate rhythms of persistence and oblivion, the complex

¹ Pasquali [1930] 2014.

² Pasquali [1930] 2014.

³ On the Atlas’ coordinates (Plate A, and the group A, B, C), s. Seminario Mnemosyne [2001, 2015] 2015; Seminario Mnemosyne [2004, 2015] 2016.

articulations of the transmission of thoughts - are reproduced in Mnemosyne in the form of joints and syntactic connections, ramifications, citations, and internal references, repetitions of forms and subjects.

It is in this sense that the Atlas is a piece that should be studied, but that is also a great Method Treaty: a figurative Treaty that reached us without the captions and explanations that the author had seen as necessary. Mnemosyne therefore invites us to travel through its streets, following the figures pinned on the panels as signposts.

IV. WHAT HAS SEMINARIO MNEMOSYNE DONE WITH THE BILDERATLAS?

IVa. The state of the materials

The first problem for the Seminario Mnemosyne was represented by the actual state of the materials and equipment: an absent (and not re-constructible) archetype; unpublished and fragmentary texts (in the Archives of the Warburg Institute in London); mixed and poor quality photographic reproductions of the original panels taken by Gertrud Bing, Edgard Wind, and Fritz Saxl (before the departure for exile in London); and a critical bibliography that in year 2000 (when Seminario Mnemosyne started to work on the Atlas) was still very small and superficial.

To this, one must add the absolute multiplicity of documents of which the panels are constituted of - regarding time period, cultural circumstances, styles, workmanship, support. In Mnemosyne, in fact, you can already find from the first panels (put together with equal semantic dignity) archaeological finds, maps of the stars, Arabic manuscripts, topical photographs, works of art, newspaper clippings, etc.

The year 2000 publication for the Akademie Verlag of a critical edition of the 1929 version of the Atlas¹ (proposed later in 2002, in Italian translation and in a new version by the publisher Aragno) now allows you to work on a solid textual basis that is philologically much more rigorous. The rekindled interest around Mnemosyne also brought a critical awakening and, therefore, a richer and updated bibliography.

The printed editions of Mnemosyne published in the last decade are good but are not exactly "suitable" for a thorough study of the work. The choice of an A4 format - the biggest allowed by market protocols in order to keep prices down and make it accessible to scholars, and not only to collectors and amateurs - is useful to give an overall idea of the direction of the project, but greatly penalises the crucial details of the images and pictures.

It is particularly problematic when the artwork that is displayed is not famous or of large-format. In many cases, Warburg "quotes" a detail from a miniature or an illuminated page, or from woodcuts of 16th century printed editions, or of "minor" works that are therefore more difficult to find in better

¹ Warke, Brink 2000; Ghelardi 2002.

reproductions. In these cases, if you don't have access to the original materials, and can only base your study on published editions of the Atlas, reading the images of the panels and understanding Warburg's choices can be almost impossible.

In short, anyone who has tried to grapple in the study of the Atlas has found himself to deal with the primary problem of the readability of the panels that are available in reproductions of reproductions that are by now quite old and difficult to read.

IVb. The choice of which panels to analyse

The choice of the panels to be analysed and published in *Engramma* was dictated by the interests of scholars and students, and by the different researches in progress among the Seminario Mnemosyne scholars. The first project was the reading of Panel 5¹. Panel 5 belongs to a group of panels (4–8) that assembles archaeological subjects and was selected because of the familiarity with the discipline – Classical tradition – and therefore with the images that appear in the panel (for example, a series of pagan sarcophagi), but also for the central role of a key concept of Warburgian thought: the *Pathosformel*.

Another investigation path that we followed was the selection of panels that had explicit relationships with Warburg's published essays. The analysis of these panels (e.g. Panel 39, in connection with the 1893 dissertation on Botticelli's mythological paintings²; or Panel 46, in relation to the masters of the early Italian Renaissance and the figure of the Nymph³) benefit from the direct entries by Warburg on the issues, and provide in-depth material on the essays and inspire original research ideas.

The new knowledge of the Atlas materials, but also of its entire structure, led to the study of the opening panels of Mnemosyne: Panels A, B, and C, are approached as an autonomous nucleus in the body of work, as does Warburg himself by identifying only these three panels with letters instead of numbers like the rest. The three opening panels were read as a hermeneutic access to Mnemosyne⁴. The study of Panels A B C – in connection with that of Panel 79⁵ which concludes (but doesn't close) the Atlas – has opened a door on the issue of Orientation, of the Man-World relationship, of the role of Representation for life and existence, and many contemporary issues. For Seminario Mnemosyne, this was a great step forward, an evolution and a first actual access to the materials, even because of the new possible methodological uses of the Atlas.

¹ Seminario Mnemosyne 2000a. On Mnemosyne Atlas Plate 5, s. also Seminario Mnemosyne 2003, and Bordignon 2012.

² Seminario Mnemosyne [2000] 2014.

³ Seminario Mnemosyne 2000b.

⁴ Seminario Mnemosyne [2001, 2015] 2015.

⁵ Seminario Mnemosyne 2001b.

In this sense, it was possible to trace Atlas themes through the succession of panel analyses that more eloquently lent themselves to this game of relationships.

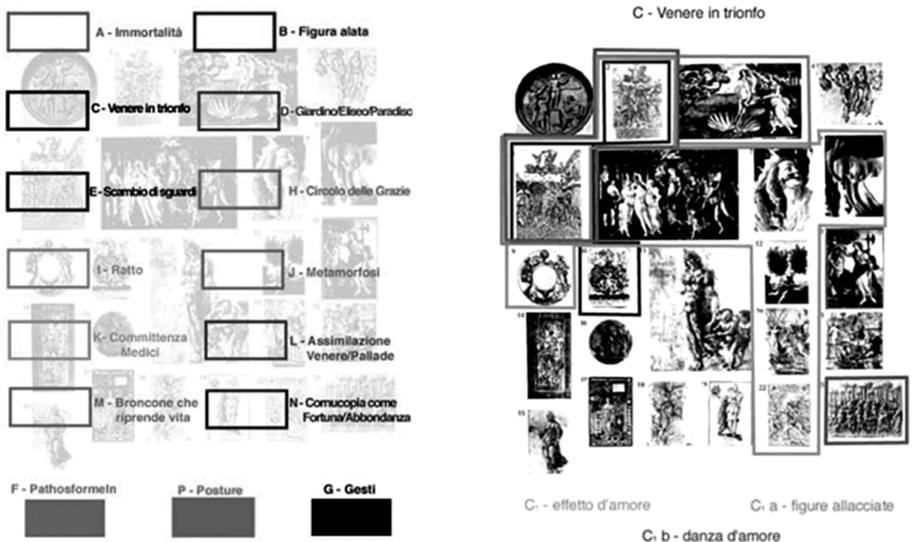
IVc. A reading method

Accessibility and readability of the materials of the Atlas were the first filter in the selection criteria of the panels to be analysed. The shortage of support materials and the general visual eloquence of the Atlas suggested an approach through the panels of the Atlas, which was – and is – both an essay and a visual product.

The first stage of the analysis of a Bilderatlas panel proceeds from the reconstruction of the panel or plate in a readable format: retrieving good photocopy reproductions of the individual works, cropping them and reassembling them on a large cardboard, according to the order, pattern, and proportions presented by the first critical edition of the Atlas.

An example of this process is the work done on Panel 46 (the Nymph)¹ and 47 (The Angel and the Head-Huntress)²: the reason behind the insertion of a series of pages from a Florentine manuscript in a median strip of the montage initially appeared mysterious and was only clarified by means of a survey carried out directly on the original manuscript, preserved in the national Library of Florence. The miniatures that appear on the pages selected by Warburg present the themes of Judith and Tobias and the Angel, themes that are guidelines for both Panel 46 and Panel 47.

Examples of graphic reading of Plate 39, by Seminario Mnemosyne 2000



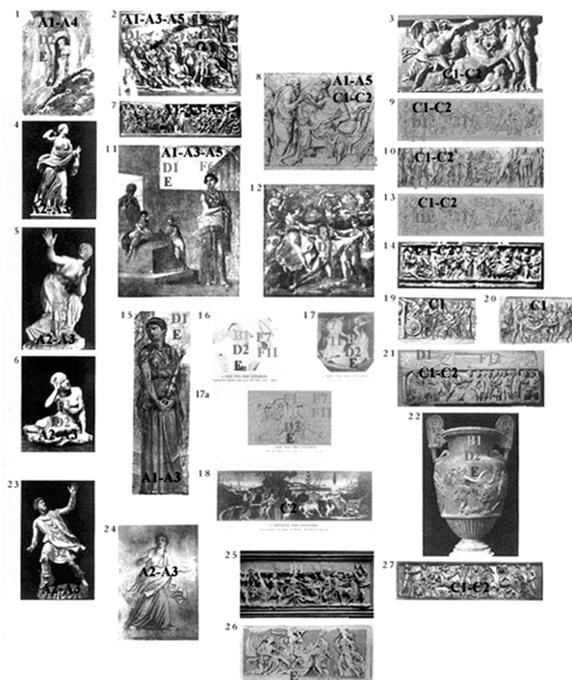
¹ Seminario Mnemosyne 2000b.

² Seminario Mnemosyne [2002, 2014] 2014.

For the first readings of the panels we made use of simple graphics software. It came to suggest possible patterns of access and understanding of the panel, highlighting individual sections of them and evident thematic and formal combinations of the montage.

The analysis continued with the comment and further evaluation of the identified thematic and formal areas. The readings tried to overcome the lack of original critical materials and specific studies, relying directly on the images and on the history of the individual works of art. The texts published in *Engramma* are the outcome and a choral writing effort¹.

What has manifested itself in this working process is the gradual complication of the methodology. The reading proceeds by identifying an *incipit* and an *explicit* in iconic sequences, an entry and exit from the panel, which guide the drafting of the text (like the link between Winged-Genius and Fortune recognisable as thematic figures in the reading of Panel 39²). Several corrections were necessary when faced with montages that demonstrated the possibilities of other combination strategies, such as the centrality and the attractive force of a particular image, or group of images. This is the case of the identity of Dionysus/Hades (as according to Heraclitus) and the figures in *sparagmos* caused by the god, in the central images of Panel 5³.



Example of thematic reading of Mnemosyne Atlas, Plate 5, by Seminario Mnemosyne 2000. At the centre of the montage, Orpheus' *sparagmos*.

¹ On the birth of Seminario Mnemosyne and the choral method for studying the Atlas, s. Centanni 2004, and Centanni 2012.

² Seminario Mnemosyne [2000, 2014] 2014.

³ Seminario Mnemosyne 2000a.

Further important information was given by the identification of precise compositional expedients in the general montage, such as the repetition of a detail from an artwork that is already present in the same panel in full reproduction. This is the case of the detail of the faces of Chloris and Zephyrus taken from Botticelli's *Primavera* in Panel 39¹; but the same strategy (complicated by the original/copy issue) is found in Panel 46, dedicated to the image of the Nymph². Again. In Panel 45 there are three images of the miracle of San Zaccaria, always from the Church of Santa Maria Novella³: the left vertical section of the panel shows the details under construction, but the same finished composition (shown in a much larger image in the middle of the panel) reveals the specific intent to draw attention to the architectural frame of the scene and its pictorial rendering.

These considerations made it necessary to maintain flexibility in the gradual readings that are necessarily a continuous processing. At the same time, the recognition of images or subject repetitions in distant panels has made it possible to identify specific structural relationships between groups of panels that refer to each other, even if not immediately close. The absence of the original archaeological piece in Panel 41a, dedicated to Laocoön, immediately recalls Panel 6, in the centre of which stands the same Vatican marble discovered in 1506⁴.

From the analysis of Panels 39, 46, and 74, for example (starting from the original concept of *Pathosformel*), come the derivations of "posture" to be considered as a pure iconographic convention that has been semanticised as "eloquent" or "effective gestures" (as occurs in the readings of Panel 39, as well as in Panel 74).

Positive results of this journey in the Atlas research are the attempts of appropriation and direct application of Warburg's method: this is the meaning of the proposition of original panel mounting experiments made by the Seminario Mnemosyne.

If left unattended, what can produce negative outcomes is the progressive complication (in length and in digressive inserts) of the accompanying texts of the panels, which may end up betraying the first and essential hermeneutical function of these readings: over-interpretation.

IVd. The general proposed scheme for the Atlas

Acting as guide to the project was the idea of presenting the Atlas like a big music score: orchestrated by its author according to a general design, it is complex in its articulations but simple and clear in its structure. The 63 panels that make up the final version of the work (the so-called

¹ Seminario Mnemosyne [2000, 2014] 2014.

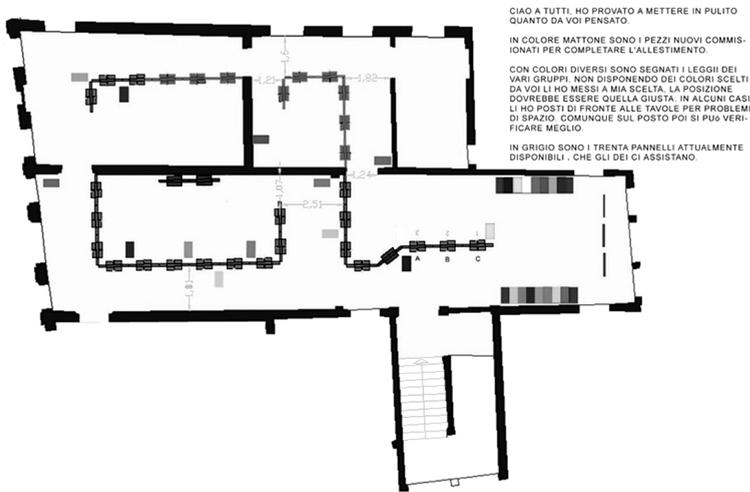
² Seminario Mnemosyne 2000b.

³ S. Mnemosyne Atlas 2012-, Panel 45.

⁴ On Mnemosyne Atlas, Panel 41a, s. Centanni 2003.

“Daedalus version”) have been divided in 14 routes or “Pathways”: I–XII, plus 2, alpha and omega, in the opening and close¹.

The effort of entering deeper inside the Atlas-maze propelled the study in the midst of Warburg’s thought, up to the adoption and reinvention of terms shaped according to his language. It is the case of the invention of the term *Statusformel* (always in the reading of Panel 39), which defines a morphologically and semantically characterised posture but which, unlike the already Warburgian *Pathosformel*, is not loaded with pathetic values.



Design by Fernanda De Maio, for the exhibition of Mnemosyne Atlas in Venice, Fondazione Levi 2004.

The suggested internal articulation, and the titles of each Pathway and their interpretation, is the result of the research of “Centro studi classicA”, as well as of individual scholars who are part of the group. We feel justified in proceeding with this division for several reasons – diversity, lacunae, and gaps in the progressive numbering of the panels – that implicitly announce that the works have an internal articulation.

More specifically:

- the first three panels (Panels A, B, and C) are identified with letters rather than numbers: a clear mark of an opening section, a thematic introduction to the work, and one we have designated as the “Alpha Pathway”;

- between Panels 8 and 20, and between Panel 64 and Panel 70, there is a gap in the numbering: in the two instances we have placed a *caesura* (between Pathways II and III, and between Pathways X and XI).

While establishing boundaries between the pathways, we also considered the relative uniformity that can be found between some groups of panels:

- Panels 1–8 show all the archaeological materials and have been subdivided into two contiguous pathways: Pathway I, Sumerian and Assyrian archaeological items (Panels 1, 2, 3); Pathway II, Hellenistic and Imperial Rome, mostly known during the Renaissance (Panels 4, 5, 6, 7, 8);

¹ Mnemosyne Atlas 2012, see section “Pathways”

– The group of panels numbered between 20 and 27, which we have defined as Pathway III, consists of materials that are mostly of an astrological nature originating from the Middle-East (Panels 20 and 21); and then a series of almost ‘monographic’ plates on Italian sites that borrow from eastern astrological subjects for the extensive iconographic cycles in Palazzo della Ragione in Padova (Panel 23), the Malatesta Monument in Rimini (Panel 25), and Schifanoia in Ferrara (Panel 27);

– Panels 28/29 to 36 portray a repertory of different vehicles of tradition (masterpieces by Piero della Francesca, and valued Burgundian tapestries, together with objects in daily use and popular illustrations), signalling that the avenues of circulation of themes and subjects moves from an East-West axis to a North-South one by placing an indistinct *caesura* with the preceding series, we have defined this group as Pathway IV;

– Panels 37-49, chronologically and geographically very consistent, illustrate the irruption of ancient models into Renaissance art of Northern Italy: we have decided to split them between Pathway V (Pollaiuolo and Botticelli: Panels 37, 38, 39); and Pathway VI (emergence of emotional formulas of grief and mourning: Panels 40, 41, 41a, 42); and Pathway VII (Ghirlandaio and Mantegna, Nymph, Fortune, grisaille: Panels 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49);

– Between Panels 50/51 and 64, the materials are not consistent from either stylistic or geographical points of view, but are united by the theme of forms of survival and of “trades with heaven” of the ancient gods during the Reformation: through these panels we have identified Pathway VIII (ascent to heaven and falling back to earth: Panels 50/51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56), Pathway IX (Dürer and cosmology: Panels 57, 58, 59), and Pathway X (16th century monarchies and the gods in the service of power: Pathway XII);

– The Atlas closes with the “Omega Pathway”, which throws light on the symbols of the bodies of power, and the pact between religious power and temporal power, using documents of a contemporary event (Panel 78: the Lateran Pact of 1929 between the Italian State and the Church of Rome), and stressing the symbolic sublimation of sacrifice (Panel 79).

Pathways through
Bilderatlas,
by Seminario
Mnemosyne

Pathways

- α. coordinates of memory
- I. astrology and mythology
- II. archaeological models
- III. migrations of the ancient gods
- IV. vehicles of tradition
- V. irruption of antiquity
- VI. Dionysiac formulae of emotions
- VII. Nike and Fortuna
- VIII. from the Muses to Manet
- IX. Dürer: the gods go North
- X. the age of Neptune
- XI. 'art officiel' and the baroque
- XII. re-emergence of antiquity
- ω. the classical tradition today

Obviously, there are many links between contiguous paths. This happens, for example, between Panel 27 and Panel 28/29, where the theme of vehicles of Classical tradition in Mantegna continues; and between Panel 77 and Panel 78, linked in an experiment to prove the persistence of engrams during the contemporary era.

There are also distant connections between remote panels. For example, some images of Panels 4–8 – representing the ancient models (“antike Vorprägungen”, as Warburg defined them) – reappear in Panels 37–49, which represent the Renaissance apographs in “anti-quarian style”.

As can be gathered running through this review, some pathways are more clearly defined, and others appear to be blurred.

Defining the series of Pathways Alpha/I-XII/Omega is useful to track an organigram of the internal structure of the Atlas, and providing an X-ray of its principal framework. However, a reading of these articulations also serves to highlight the play of internal twists and turns that connect one panel to another, and each group of panels to other groups, criss-crossing different pathways. On the other hand, the experience gained during these years of research – while studying individual panels and the general structure of the Atlas – had already highlighted parallels and internal links between one panel and another, sometimes confirmed by the author’s own comments.

The most significant example is perhaps the case of Laocoön that appears as an ancient example in Panel 6 and reappears cited in copies and variants as the guiding theme of Panel 41a (but is also presented in a drawing by Mantegna in Panel 37). In this sense, Panels 37–49 (which we have grouped together in Pathways V, VI, VII) can be considered an expansion of the core defined as Pathway II, which groups together the ancient monuments to which Renaissance artists had access to.

An example of a distant link between panels is the ecstatic-pathetic posture of the Maenad (already present as an ‘original’ exemplar in Panel 6), which is re-employed in a neo-Attic relief and cited as a model for a Magdalene under the Cross in Panel 25.¹ The same Renaissance piece reappears later in Panel 42, where the posture is inserted within a panel that displays various figures of Mourners over the Dead Christ drawn from ancient models.

We believe that the system of divisions and interweavings that are here outlined is a valid point of departure for the reconstruction of the scenario planned by Warburg for the *Bilderatlas*. It is useful as a working instrument to suggest a framework in the reading of the “score” and internal orchestration of the Atlas.

IV.e Evolution of the reading method

Thanks to a critical review of the reading process of the Atlas, we found a new formula to expose the process of analysis of Mnemosyne panels in *Engramma*: the goal is to restore the dry directness of the first reading, without sacrificing the possibility of discussions on specific topics.

The new structure of the Atlas Mnemosyne, published in *Engramma* from 2012, includes:

- The partition of the panels in groups, via 14 pathways;
- a brief description of each panel;
- Aby Warburg’s notes for the individual panels (preserved at the Warburg Institute in London², so far unpublished and published for the first time in the German edition of the Atlas, Warnke, Brick 2000);

¹ On Plate 25, s. *Seminario Mnemosyne* 2001

² WIA III 104.1.

“La Rivista
di Engramma”,
section Mnemosyne
Atlas

Mnemosyne Atlas



Mnemosyne Atlas 39

Love 'all'antica' in Medicean Florence

Botticelli's mythological allegories as exempla of the introduction of the 'ideal 'all'antica' style 'in early Renaissance art. Intensified life is expressed in representations portrayed 'all'antica': the theme of Love and metamorphosis. The female figure in motion: conflation of Venus (an evolution 'all'antica' of Baldini's calendar), Pallas (in Botticelli and in the minor arts) and the Nymph (Chloris, Daphne, *Abundantia-Fortuna*).

Warburg and coll. notes | Panel | Captions | Details

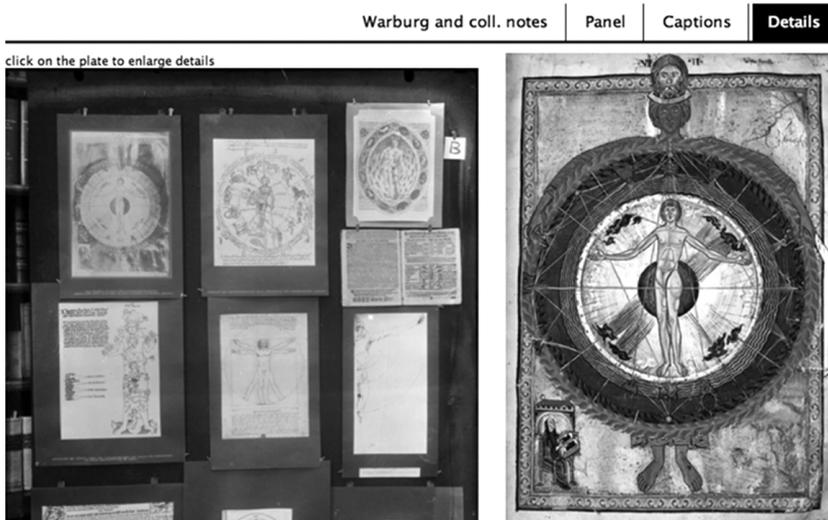


Botticelli. Idealstil. Baldini 1. und 2. Amor antikisch. Pallas als Turnierfahne. Venusbilder. Apoll und Dafne = Verwandung. Horn d. Acheioul.

Content analysis

- ◆ Metamorphoses of the Virtues of Love in Medicean Florence. A reading of Plate 39 of the Mnemosyne Atlas
Mnemosyne Seminar group of Classica
Engramma no. 116, June 2014
- ◆ The botticelliana serie and the 'ventilata veste'. Guide to reading Plate 39 translated by Elizabeth Thomson
Engramma no. 4, December 2000
- ◆ Research material on Mnemosyne – Panel 39 edited by Seminario di Tradizione classica
Engramma no. 4, December 2000 [OLD LAYOUT]

Example
of the “cover-page”
of Mnemosyne Atlas,
Plate 39



- Display of each panel with details and image captions;
- In-depth essays on the panel or individual thematic/formal issues offered by the panel.

This structure makes it possible for an articulation and an enrichment of the materials regarding each individual panel and allows the investigation of panels not analysed until now and getting back to already published readings in *Engramma*, in order to review the products in the light of recent methodological acquisitions.

Researching and publishing high-resolution images of the Mnemosyne Atlas panels: detail of Panel/Plate B

V. SERIO LUDERE

Giordano Bruno, a thinker who was fundamental to Warburg during the latter part of his life, wrote:

“Things, signs, images, spectres, ghosts present themselves to us [..] Not for nothing did Socrates define oblivion as the loss of perception; however, if for the same reason he had also defined the seed of what can be remembered as “chance and not conceived by memory”, he would certainly have inquired more deeply. If indeed phantasy availing itself of sensitive images does not knock with sufficient energy, the cognitive faculty will fail to open the doors, and if the cognitive faculty which is the custodian fails to open the doors, the mother of the Muses, scorning such images, will refuse them”¹.

¹ Giordano Bruno *Sigillus sigillorum ad omnes animi dispositiones comparandas*, 11, 19–20:

“Obiiciuntur nobis res, signa, imagines, spectra vel phantasmata. [...] Haud igitur temere oblivionem insensationem quam appellavit Socrates; qui si eadem ratione et memorabilis iactum semen a memoria non conceptum insensationem similiter quam appellasset, rem sane profundiorum explicasset. Ni igitur vivacius phantasia sensibilibus pulsaverit speciebus, cogitatio non aperiet, ostiaria quoque cogitatione non aperiente, easdem indignans Musarum mater non recipiet”.

It is common in the academic world to close yourself in the isolation of your field or theme, closing your mind, neutralising enthusiasm, spirit, and passion. However, as we well know, it is only by listening and learning that you can eventually teach something.

Together we can play the most serious game of all: shape our individual passions so that they can be useful to everyone. Knowing that we play together but also remembering that we have the commitment and duty to play our own game – ours and nobody else's.

The quality that “Engramma” is most proud of is the presence (in its drafting and editing team) of students, graduate students, young and very young scholars. Together with the more adult and experienced scholars, they share full editorial responsibility, both in a scientific and technical sense: from the programming of the journal issues and numbers, to the first essay evaluation and reviewer choice; to the relation with authors, and to the most specific aspects of the editorial job – layout, drafting, and work on images.

In the many choices and responsibilities, each team-member of Seminario Mnemosyne comes to learn to defend even his own line of research, finding ways and forms in which, according to the unwritten rules of the *serio ludere*, his scholarly passion can become part of everybody's game.

As in the composition of the panels of the Atlas Mnemosyne, the style that “Engramma” tries to practice is that of a non-solitary research. It is a varied and complicated forge in which everyone is called to find his place, and find time and care for the objects of his passion as a scholar. And for the objects of his desk-mate.

An example of our work is an analysis of the advertisements for Maison Valentino, published in Engramma no. 118, along with a presentation of the reading method on Mnemosyne Atlas, published in the following issue. Certainly, they are not the most important we have published in the recent years, but they are particularly interesting and relevant because they have been proposed by very young members of the Seminario Mnemosyne. I like to present them like a ‘movie trailer’ of our method and our research, taking the cue from Mnemosyne Atlas¹.

This is the “girl in grey” – a Valentino ad campaign that directly takes from the “ventilate veste” (dress in the breeze) of the Nymph figure, with clear Classical references to the maenads, to the figure of angels and Renaissance nymphs. Aby Warburg highlighted the connection among the Classical inspiration for the dresses of Florentine girls in the Renaissance age, and the suggestions by Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo, who teach artists to represent figures in movement, just like the ancient models.

This is what Alberti wrote in *De pictura*: “They take delight in finding amongst their hair, their mane, in the midst of branches, fronds and dresses, some movement [...] And so, in that grace, the bodies that are so rustled by

¹ Fasiolo 2014; Fressola, Giacomini 2014.



the wind will partly reveal the nude, and partly have the clothes sweetly thrust in the air”¹.

And this is what Leonardo wrote in his *Treatise on Picture*: “You [painter] shall reveal a nymph’s or angel’s actual size of the breasts, when they wear light and thin dresses, moving about in the wind”².

From the figure of the modern “nymph in grey” we can shift to the reading of Mnemosyne Atlas Panel 47. Its main theme is the grace of the Nymph/Angel that can transform itself in a Maenad and in a “head-huntress”, for a good reason (as Judit, the biblical heroine), or a bad one (as the cruel Salome against John the Baptist)³.

Studying the overall architecture of the Atlas, as well as the individual boards and tracing figurative and thematic routes, the study does not only focus on the operation of the Atlas-machine, but also on its possible application to the interpretation of themes, postures, and myths of contemporary culture.

Frame from Progetto
Mnemosyne

¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *Della pittura*, II, 45: “Dilettano nei capelli, nei crini, ne’ rami, frondi et veste vedere qualche movimento [...]: volgansi in uno giro quasi volendo anodarsi ed ondeggiando in aria simile alle fiamme, parte quasi come serpe si tessano fra li altri, parte crescano qua et parte in là [...]. a medesimo ancora le pieghe facciano; et nascono le pieghe come al troncho dell’albero i suoi rami. [...] Ma siano, quanto spesso ricordo i movimenti moderati et dolci, più tosto quali porgano gratia ad chi miri, che meraviglia di fatica alcuna”.

² Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della pittura*, IV, 527: “Solo farai scoprire la quasi vera grossezza delle membra à una ninfa, o’ uno angello, li quali si figurino vestiti di sotili vestimenti, sospinti o’ inpressi dal soffiare de venti; a questi tali et simili si potrà benissimo far scoprire la forma delle membra loro”.

³ On Plate 47, s. Seminario Mnemosyne [2002, 2014] 2014.

In this sense, the Atlas is a work that ought to be studied but that is also a great treaty on methodology: content and form – Warburg teaches – are held together.

In this way, every Bilderatlas panel and our own panels, produced by ourselves, are like storyboards. Or, better, the panels – both Warburg's and the new ones – are like a workbench with all its tools, designed as a play-board that is afterwards raised and set vertically.

It is not only the outcome of the (evident) research work. It also, and most importantly, presents the process, always open to new additions, elaborations, and variations, shown in each panel.

This is the game of knowledge, not simply a solitary romantic quest. In the free competition of the *serio ludere* everyone knows they must play hard to show others – and the world – that their research is necessary. And that therefore it can become 'publishable' and important for everyone.

In this school, you win with your team but only by having each team-member win his individual enterprise: it is for this reason that it is best to win in many.

Finally, in conclusion, I address the motto – or, in Renaissance terms, 'impresa' – process. At the end of his comment to Plato's *Republic*, Marsilio Ficino wrote:

“È proprio dei sapienti iocari et studiosissime ludere”.

“It is up to the wise to play and joke, and by hard-studying, to revel himself with joy”.

Or, more philosophically, in the verses we read the f. 159v of the *De Ludo Globi* of Nicolò da Cusa:

“Luditur hic ludus; sed non sic pueriliter at / Lusit ut orbe novo sancta sophia deo”. “Let's play at this game, and not in puerile manner, / but as the sacred wisdom plays with the new globe-ball for God”.

These words inspired the title of my paper. And I address these words as a good auspice to our work.

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