

# Warburg's "Pathos Formula" in Psychoanalytic and Benjaminian Contexts

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## **T**he "Pathos Formula" redefined

This article is intended to offer some meeting points between Aby Warburg's "Pathos Formula", psychoanalytic thought, and the concept of allegory in the writings of Walter Benjamin. The comparison between the different thinkers will entail an examination from two points of view: first, I shall present the consequences of an encounter between these three formulas of the artistic sign; and second, I shall suggest an understanding of the impact of these concepts and their interrelations on historiographic issues. I will attempt to refer to various questions raised by contemporary writers concerning the "Pathos Formula": What are its limits? To what objects can the "Pathos Formula", as a symbolic mode, refer, and to what kinds of objects can it not? What emotive, cultural, and metaphysical contents is it able to hold or refer to? How can we characterize the theoretical perspective that the "Pathos Formula" creates?<sup>1</sup>

For Ernst Gombrich, the phrase – 'You live and do me no Harm' – seemed to summarize the principles of Warburg's concept of the "Pathos Formula".<sup>2</sup> This phrase expresses the relation between the primitive human and the external chaotic world that surrounds him. It expresses the situation in which the human being is able to bear the existence of chaotic power without being hurt.

The "Pathos Formula", which expresses this traumatic encounter between man and the world, is a result of a visual fixation, the source of which is a process of mimicry of some of the bearable (biomorphic) qualities of the threatening force, that then becomes petrified and fixed as an image. The original referent is one that exceeds the limits of every-day human consciousness, and that threatens its security and coherence. This process is typical of primitive societies and cultures. Warburg writes:

It is characteristic of mythopoetic mentality (cf. Vignoli, *Myth and Science*) that for any stimulus, be it visual or auditory, a biomorphic cause of a definite and intelligible nature is projected which enables the mind to take defensive measures [...] This kind of defensive reaction by means of establishing a link between either the subject or the object with beings of maximal power which can yet be grasped in their extension, is the fundamental act of the struggle of existence [...] This may be understood as a defensive measure in the struggle for existence against living enemies which the memory, in a state of phobic arousal, tries to grasp in their most distinct and lucid shape while also assessing their full power in order to take the most effective defensive measures. These are tendencies below the threshold of consciousness. The substituted image objectifies the stimulus causing the impression and creates an entity against which defenses can be mobilized.<sup>3</sup>

The fixated image carries within itself traces of the traumatic encounter with the threatening external force: the image, which is the outcome of the encounter, registers the external force's excessive vitality in forms that usually express movement. Having been created, the image magically "enables" man to use the force of the primordial chaos according to his needs.<sup>4</sup> The "Pathos Formula" has its base in magical action and experience, which characterizes the "primitive" stage of human development, and contains the identification and merging of the external, foreign, menacing, "Other", and non-human force, with the image, which imprints within itself the primordial presence. In this magical consciousness, the image acts as merger and unifier.

The "Pathos Formula" carries within itself two kinds of memory: on the one hand, it carries the memory of the traumatic encounter with the menacing force; and on the other, it remembers the defensive, fixating act that the consciousness of the recipient performs in relation to this encounter.<sup>5</sup> In the course of time, the "Pathos Formula" is fixated as a cultural product, which, as history develops, is able to express different and particular contents.

In his construction of the "Pathos Formula", Warburg used psychological, theological, and aesthetic theories. His reliance on Nietzsche's interpretation of Classical Greek culture at its peak, as containing a dynamic balancing of the Dionysian (the chaotic, changing and violent) and the Apollonian (the symmetric, calm, harmonic and rational) is well known.<sup>6</sup>

In its genealogical development, the "Pathos Formula" has gone through several stages: in the primitive, magical state, the Chaotic Presence and the

Sign were totally identified with one another; but at a later stage the chaotic referent continuously loses its presence in the visual sign, which is still able to be used as a cultural vehicle. The fact that a painter, a writer, etc., uses an image that has its source in a "Pathos Formula" is, for Warburg, evidence of the culture's need to connect with the primordial movements and qualities that enlivened the primitive image. Warburg found important examples of this process in the paintings of Botticelli and the Quattrocento culture in Florence. From exploring Botticelli's work and the lively forms of draperies (which for Warburg had their source in ancient culture), he went on to examine the figure and the formula of the Nymph, about which he wrote: ' Who, then is the "Nympha"? As real being of flesh and blood she may have been a freed slave from Tartary...but in her true essence she is as elemental sprite, a pagan goddess in exile.'<sup>7</sup> The mode of artistic sign that Warburg identified in Quattrocento Florence contains the two human tendencies (the chaotic and the rational) that are the source of the image in Warburg's thought, and that also characterize Greek culture and its revival in the Renaissance.

The later modern stage of development of the "Pathos Formula" has its roots in 17<sup>th</sup> c. culture, especially in Northern Europe. This culture witnessed the rise of the Lutheran and Protestant theological models, which emphasized the rational and moral content of religious praxis. In Albrecht Durer's work, and especially in his print *Melancholy 1*, Warburg saw the use of images from Classical times, but in a way that bore content and relayed an atmosphere relating to melancholy, reflection, doubt and allegory. In this print, the image of the threatening and chaotic god Saturn becomes a vehicle for representing reflection, genius, and melancholy:

Dürer has rendered the Saturnian demon innocuous through the active work of reason. [...] What Melancholia holds in her hand is no base and servile spade – as Saturn used to carry it [...] – but the compass of creative genius. Jupiter, Magically invoked, comes to her aid with his appeasing and beneficial effects on Saturn. On the print the salvation of man through the neutralizing aspect of Jupiter has already become a fact. (Ges. Schr. II, 530-531)<sup>8</sup>

The Northern Baroque is, therefore, an epoch in which the relation to the original referent is mediated, conflictual and doubtful, an epoch that uses the intellectual tools of rational thought in order to transform the destructive and vital force into one that represents values of stability, depression, and reflexive contemplation. In the modern period, the sign gradually lost the merge between

referent and signifier, which had been valid in the magical-associative stage. In the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Warburg saw Manet's painting *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* as an example of a late development of the "Pathos Formula". He showed that the scene portrayed in this work has sources not only in 16<sup>th</sup> c. art, but also in ancient sarcophagi. Warburg's stand leads to an understanding of the activity of the "Pathos Formula" as that of an independent agent, cultural, impersonal, which makes itself present in the images of various periods, injecting Dionysian qualities into the image, even without the direct will of the artist, and which can only be read and revealed in the course of historical research. We are talking, therefore, about some kind of unconscious, latent cultural memory that is encrypted in particular images, but whose deciphering and decoding is possible only through the historical research of sources.

### **The "Pathos Formula" and Psychoanalytic Discourse**

A basic problem of the "Pathos Formula" concerns the issue of its transparency, and its being a mimetic reproduction of the traumatic experience, as well of its expressive energy. Is there a simple causal relation between the perceptual experience of the encounter with reality, and the sign created by the recipient-subject? If we accept the claim of most of Warburg's interpreters that the "Pathos Formula" preserves the theoretical tradition that explored the concept of "Empathy" within its theoretical structure, then we are dealing with a model of an unproblematic relation, which does not take negation, rejection, repression and opacity into account, all of which can be found in the transformation of the unconscious matter into the sign that is left on the surface of consciousness. The Empathic model also does not take into account the limited capacity of human consciousness to handle traumatic experiences, and the activity of memory in screening and neutralizing the effects of the traumatic experience on the subject's consciousness. But we can find evidence in Warburg's writings that suggest that he was indeed aware of memory's "screening" capacity:

The inherited consciousness of maximalized impressions stamped on the mind (engram) passes them on without taking cognizance of the direction of their emotional charge, simply as an experience of energy tensions; this unpolarized continuum can also function as continuum. The imparting of a new meaning to these energies serves as a protective screen. (Journal, VII, 1929, p. 255)<sup>9</sup>

Even though Warburg emphasizes the protective function of the "Pathos Formula", it is still defined, at least by more conservative interpreters, as able

to serve as evidence, as a testimony, for the primary traumatic encounter. In contrast, the concept of 'screen memory', as defined by Freud, is one that contains a considerable amount of skepticism about the ability to use memory as evidence:

... The concept of a 'screen memory' {is one} which owes its value as a memory not to its own content but to the relation existing between that content and some other, that has been suppressed. [...] Out of a number of childhood memories of significant experiences, all of them of similar distinctness and clarity, there will be some scenes which, when they are tested [...], turn out to be falsified. Not that they are complete inventions; they are false in the sense that they have shifted an event to a place where it didn't occur- [...] they serve the purposes of the repression and replacement of objectionable or disagreeable impressions [...] it may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all from our childhood. <sup>10</sup>

Freud took into account the opacity of the experience and memories of 'post traumatic' time. He noted that 'There is in general no guarantee of the data produced by our memory'.<sup>11</sup> In his writings, one can find a skeptical stance relating to the ontological nature of the trauma manifested, a stance that would become more explicit in Lacan's writings.<sup>12</sup> Lacan rephrases several times what he calls 'The Freudian Theory of Memory'. For Lacan (psychoanalytic) memory is a form of writing, but at the same time it is separated from consciousness:

[...] The psychoanalytic memory Freud talks about is [...] Something completely inaccessible to experience [...] Freudian memory is not located along a sort of continuum from reaction to reality considered as a source of excitation [...] What is essentially new in my theory, says Freud, is the claim that memory is not simple, it's registered in various ways. [...] It's been known for a long time that the phenomenon of consciousness and the phenomenon of memory exclude each other. [...] At the beginning of the circuit of psychical apprehension there is perception. This perception implies consciousness. [...] Between the essentially ephemeral Wahrnehmungen (Perception), which disappear as soon as they appear, and the constitution of the system of consciousness and, even at this stage, of the ego [...] one has to

assume a prior, and at least partial, organization of language in order for memory and historicization to work. The memory phenomena that Freud is interested in are always language phenomena. In other words, one already has to have the signifying material to make anything signify at all.<sup>13</sup>

The traumatic experience is not present in our conscious apparatuses in a simple positive sense – it can only be represented, become present post-factum, as and through interpretive activity. The notion of inscription and writing as crucial to the Freudian concept of memory should be emphasized:

...The impression of the external world as raw, original, primitive, is outside the field which corresponds to a notable experience, namely, one that is effectively inscribed in something that [...] Freud expresses right at the beginning of his thought as *Niederschrift*, something that presents itself not simply in terms of *Paegung* or of impression, but in the sense of something which makes a sign and which is of the order of writing.<sup>14</sup>

The meaning of the traumatic lies precisely in the fact that the event cannot be comprehended, apprehended, registered and codified by human tools and definitions. Warburg himself related his concept of the “Pathos Formula” to psychoanalytical terms of the trauma:

The primeval category of causal thought is maternity. The relation between the mother and child displays the enigma of a tangible material connection bound up with the profoundly bewildering trauma of the separation of one living being from another. The detachment of the subject from the object which establishes zone for abstract thought originates in the experience of the cutting of the umbilical cord. The ‘savage’, perplexed in the face of nature, is orphaned, without paternal protection.<sup>15</sup>

The notion of the traumatic experience as resistant to signification was connected by Freud and Lacan to the problematics of memory:

One may go so far as to believe that the opacity of the trauma – as it was then maintained in its initial function by Freud’s thought,

that is to say, in my terms, its resistance to signification - is then specifically held responsible for the limits of remembering.<sup>16</sup>

For Lacan, the concept of the traumatic encounter responds to the missed encounter with what he calls the 'real'. This impossible encounter, seen similarly by Warburg, is an experience that threatens the homogeneity of the ego, and at the same time initiates the reconstruction of the ego's identity.<sup>17</sup> This encounter with what could really be considered as 'external' to the self is also what constitutes the whole structure of desire and loss that operates in the subject.<sup>18</sup>

In his early text, "The Mirror Stage",<sup>19</sup> Lacan deals with this process of the building of the ego as form and coherency vis-à-vis the external chaotic environment. In many senses, this text recalls the process Warburg describes when relating to imprinting of the image in the "Pathos Formula". Lacan relates to the (non chronological) event in which the little baby, aged one or one and a half, who does not yet possess an identity that separates him from the world, and who is also relatively helpless, recognizes in an external image, and in a paradigmatic manner in the mirror image, the possibility to create coherence and structural identity for himself. Through the external coherent form he recognizes his "I" with a sense of victory, but at the same moment he also splits himself, into the identity of the ego, which actually comes from the external field of the "Other", and a chaotic, incoherent existence, which constantly threatens to break and shake the concept of the imaginary identity of the ego. The Warburgian "Pathos Formula", if we are to understand it from the theoretical angle of empathy, is based on a very similar logic of identification that characterizes the agency of the ego. But we should remember that, according to the logic of the "Mirror Stage", the surrounding world can simultaneously constitute a threat to the ego's coherence, while also being a ground for identification and self-coherence. Therefore, the forces of the ego must constantly be acting in order to preserve its coherence. In accordance with the process of the "Mirror Stage", we can offer a double interpretation of the "Pathos Formula" in psychoanalytic terms, both as an act of victory for the ego in seizing and using the chaotic external reality, and also as a traumatic moment, fleeting but undiminishing, which haunts the action of signification and sabotages it.

Another issue that is explicated and given expression in Lacan's writing, is of the place of mimesis in the creation of the (artistic) image in relation to the role that the subject fills in this process. In his 11<sup>th</sup> seminar,<sup>20</sup> Lacan maintains that the origin of the act of painting is in mimicking the external environment.

This conception is taken from the writings of Roger Caillois, which describe the tendency of animals to change their appearance by mimicking their natural animal or vegetal surroundings.<sup>21</sup> In Caillois, as in Warburg, this mimetic action is based on a concept of the subject-organism-recipient's fear, and of its mimicking of its menacing environment. By assimilating itself into the strange environment, the organism affords itself a possibility of existing and surviving. Lacan adds new contexts for the action of mimicry: he adds the motivations of seduction and entrapment, and the identification of the organism with the 'gaze' that is turned on him by his environment. The Subject wears a kind of mask, which locates him in the midst of his external visual field, in the visual field of the Other. In this manner, the recipient-subject is no longer located in a simple position of self-defense and of passively reacting to that which comes toward it, but it also acts as initiator, as having desire, as a subject inside a space of rituality. The insertion of desire into the inventory list of concepts of empathic mimicking and identification in Warburg may help in our attempt to reformulate the mode of imprinting the image in the 'magical stage' of Warburg's Pathos formula. The Subject does not merely 'freeze' the external impression, thereby taking hold of it, but it wishes to be this external impression; it wants to enter the field of the external force, and also wishes to be desired by it. The (always missed) encounter of the Subject with the Gaze is a traumatic 'event', forever showing what the eye cannot see. In this reformulation, re-activation of the "Pathos Formula" does not act as an elegiac and nostalgic representation of an encounter that 'has been' – it uses it to seduce both the referent and the spectator, to create a relation of continuous desire toward that same thing that threatened to deconstruct (and destroy) the subject in the primal traumatic encounter. In this manner, the action of the "Pathos Formula" along the pivot of history does not continuously diminish the presence of the chaotic essence – instead, it has a continuous dialogue with it, which defines and dissimulates the building of the ego in relation to it. But the most important thing is that the picture, which holds within itself the Gaze, contains not just the conscious sign of signification, but also the primal inscription, which can never be conscious.

### **The "Pathos Formula" and Walter Benjamin's concept of "Allegory"**

We have seen that, in his writings, Warburg has given us some key pointers that enable a complex reading of the relations between memory, expression and traumatic encounter. The most salient dialectic that characterizes the action of the "Pathos Formula" is that between mourning (understood as the cutting

off of the 'self' from its surrounding 'maternal' environment, and the construction of its identity in this dual structure), and desire (understood as the subject's drive, expressed in its wish to seduce the external environment, to be seen by it by looking at it). These two poles of the dialectic oscillate between passive and active positions, as master and as slave, in a process that encompasses these two opposite definitions of the subject.

In order to further discuss this dialectic between the mournful emotive charge and the driving force of desire, I turn to Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory. The meeting between the latter and Aby Warburg's "Pathos Formula" can lead us to further refinements of Warburg's theoretical concept of the symbol. Various researchers have already noted some connections between Warburg's and Benjamin's thinking. Benjamin cited the works of Warburg and his circle several times, and wished to join their studies in London.<sup>22</sup>

We have already noted the problem of the transparency of signification and expression, which is implicated in the "Pathos Formula". As we have seen, the Dionysian aspect of Warburg's thought is characteristic of the "Pathos Formula" in its magical mode, as a first-degree representation of an essential, vital and chaotic presence. The concept of the "Pathos Formula" performs a rhetoric of vitality: the menacing 'living movement' itself is registered and inscribed, in a process of mimicry, of fixing and petrifying the image, which afterwards will serve as an agent for communicating and disseminating the essential presence. Therefore, there is an inherent connection between the 'transparency' of the sign of the "Pathos Formula", and the vitality reflected in it. When Warburg discussed the later stage of the "Pathos Formula", for example in Manet's painting, he related to the fading of the formula's power in a continuous and permanent connection to this essential presence; and the sign, torn out of his original context, is simply understood as less adequate for the "Pathos Formula", and is used to supply other cultural needs of expression and action. The problems of transparency and vitality are rigorously examined in Benjamin's thought. His concept of allegory, however, unlike Warburg's thought, does rest on the vital and menacing primordial presence.

Similar to Warburg, who saw the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the start of a new era of the symbol, Benjamin locates the essential formation of allegory in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, even though it relied on earlier, basically medieval, mystical and hermetic traditions.<sup>23</sup> From the start, the Benjaminian allegory relinquishes the immediate presence of 'truth' and 'the idea'.<sup>24</sup> It only allows the 'occurrence', and not the presence, of truth, and only within the evolving (and destructive) actions of signifying and representing. The meeting, the encounter, is only created as an

event inside the signifying processes, which are also reading, hermeneutic, processes. The 'missed encounter' of truth and the lineage of significance leads to the conclusion that the Benjaminian allegory presupposes that the possibility of an encounter disappears. In the allegorical economy of the Baroque, any meeting with 'truth' or 'being' is only possible in a non-causal, miraculous, manner, which comes from an external Godly intervention: the German *Trauspiel* is taken up entirely with the hopelessness of the earthly condition. Such redemption as it knows resides in the depth of the destiny itself rather than in the fulfillment of a divine plan of salvation.<sup>25</sup> Because the allegorical mode of expression is built on ever continuing decay and destruction, Benjamin sees the images of the skull, the corpse and the architectonic ruin, as the most central expressions of the allegorical impulse in Baroque culture.

If, as mentioned above, Warburg's concept rests, at least at first glance, on the continuous rhetoric of traumatic relation to a vital presence, Benjamin's allegory leans on the understanding of the image's coming into being as continuous dissociation, degeneration and fading, in a space that does not have a measurable relation to a source of experience. Nevertheless, both Benjamin and Warburg see the ritualistic source of all works of art. However, Benjamin's emphasis is not on the Dionysian side of the ritual, but rather on what he calls 'its use value':

Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of the ritual – first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritualistic function. In other words, the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. [...] The Ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.<sup>26</sup>

Experience and expression, which in Warburg are split into two successive moments, in Benjamin, are turned into one, non-dichotomous entity, which presupposes the giving up and disappearance of being and presence. In the introduction to his *Tragic Drama* text, Benjamin directs his words against the romantic and neo-Kantian aesthetic tradition, which distinguished between the symbol, considered to be the paradigmatic artistic mode of signifying, because of its aspiration to be actually 'pregnant' with the presence of the

sublime idea of which it was a representation, and the allegory, understood as the making-use of image-conventions, without being open to the full, abstract presence of the idea. Benjamin criticized the Romantic concept of the transparent symbol:

The unity of the material and the transcendental object, which constitutes the paradox of the theological symbol, is distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence. The introduction of this distorted conception of the symbol into aesthetics was a romantic and destructive extravagance [...]. As a symbolic construct, the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole.<sup>27</sup>

The dichotomy between the allegorical and the symbolic that was presented by the Romantics is, in Benjamin, made into one basic impulse, the allegorical one, which produces, in extreme cases of despair, the symbolical impulse. Even the German romantics condemned allegory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Benjamin recognized a revival of the allegorical praxis in the writings of Baudelaire.<sup>28</sup> But this allegorical way of writing has some other characteristics apart from those of the Baroque allegory:<sup>29</sup>

Melancholy bears in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a different character, however, to that which it bore in the 17<sup>th</sup>. The key figure of the early allegory is the corpse. The key figure of the later allegory is the "souvenir". The "souvenir" is the schema of the transformation of the commodity into a collector's object.<sup>30</sup>

If, as quoted above, the Baroque allegory comes from 'the hopelessness of the earthly condition', the Baudelairian allegory is founded on:

[The allegorical vision is always founded on] a devalued phenomenal world. The specific devaluation of the world of things that one encounters in the commodity is the foundation for the allegorical intention in Baudelaire [...] The inanimate body, still offered up to pleasure, unites allegory and the commodity.<sup>31</sup>

The Baudelairian allegory is a product of the flow of exchanges and reproductions in modern society and culture, which leads to and comes from a 'shock' experience, and it generates a work of art that presupposes and exhibits

the exchangeability of the signifier and the commodity, and the turning of every sign into interpreter and reader of another sign. In the modern age, it is not the natural, external, physical world that is degrading, but rather that of internal experience. The shock, which is the modern subject's mode of encounter with his surrounding reality, and which entails a malfunctioning of everyday experience, consciousness and memory, is expressed in the image of the 'souvenir', which is the 'inanimate' object in which authentic experience has been inscribed and buried.

Benjamin exchanges the anxiety and fear directed toward the vital presence and the defense procedures against it, which are latent in the concept of the Warburgian "Pathos Formula", for a melancholic concept of continuous mourning for a presence that never was. The phrase, 'you live and do me no harm', is exchanged for the phrase, 'you're dead (or dying) and so cannot give me redemption'.

The object in the allegorical image is simultaneously charged with both secular, mortal content of degeneration and decomposition, and with religious, sacral content.

This characterization of the allegorical image (in its baroque and 19<sup>th</sup> century versions as well) differentiates it from the "Pathos Formula" (at least in its magical version), which involves a relation of transparency and which is filled with the presence of the primordial force. The pathetic image is continuously emptied, and only becomes an empty shell when chronological events force it to draw away from the 'source'. In Warburg, the degeneration of the image occurs over a continuous sequence of time, in contrast to the allegorical Benjaminian image, whose debasement and sanctification take place all the time and simultaneously. The connection between the sacral relation to the essence and the agency of the image exists, in Warburg's theory, on a vector that points to the encounter's declining intensity, which proceeds on a temporal axis, and which operates through an economy of using and exploiting; whereas in Benjamin's theory these aspects are inherently necessary qualities of every image. The exploitation and reproduction of the image in the allegorical mode is permanent evidence and an expression of its debasement and sanctification.

The question as to whether, according to Warburg, the relation between the magical state of the image and its allegorical-disjunctive state is one of a break or succession, has not yet been answered definitively. Because we can identify the modern phase of the "Pathos Formula" with the Benjaminian allegory more easily, we should ask whether we are talking about two theories that relate only to the Modern period, or whether we can refer to these two theories as general theories of the symbol.<sup>32</sup> It should also be asked whether this comparison

between Warburg's "Pathos Formula" and Benjamin's allegory could relate to the contemporary discourse dealing with the allegorical impulse in postmodernism, best expressed in the writing of Craig Owens,<sup>33</sup> a line of interpretation that relies on the artistic praxis of collage or montage. The allegorical image, according to this line of interpretation, is represented in an image that is built on the continuous praxis of its own interpretation within itself, an image composed of a plurality of signs and spaces of discourse, of juxtaposition and "gluing" together different items and entities. My suggestion, based on the conclusions of the psychoanalytic part of this essay, is that, while giving up the presence of a vital primal idea, an image can be split up inside itself and sustain a plurality of acts of readings within itself, and still sustain a nostalgic, mournful attitude toward presence, without being a literal work of collage or montage. The image's "skin" can be united, as though it is a case of a harmonic unity of wholeness, and at the same time be a complex of juxtaposed interpretations, destructions and remembrances of past images. As Freud and Lacan suggest, memory and mimicry are both instances of a primordial plurality and splitting-up of the Subject and the Other, vis-à-vis the impossible, traumatic and missed encounter. It should be noted that Benjamin uses Freud's exact formula of psychoanalytic memory:

Becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system. Rather, memory fragments are "often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness". Put in Proustian terms, this means that only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject of experience, can become a component of the *memoire involuntaire* (*Illuminations*, 159-160).

It is essential to add to this discussion the issue of the disciplinary, methodological and historiographic implications of the meeting between Warburg and Benjamin's conceptions of the sign. As is evident from their writings, both Warburg and Benjamin saw their work as an action and reaction of memory. It is illuminating to compare two random texts taken from their writings. Warburg writes:

Memory is nothing but the collection of those stimuli which had been responded to by vocal utterances (overt or internal speech).

Therefore I envisage as a description of the aims of my library the formulation: a collection of documents relating to the psychology of human expression. The question is: how did human and pictorial expressions originate; what are the feelings or the points of view, conscious or unconscious, under which they are stored in the archives of memory? Are there laws to govern their formation or re-emergence?

The means of my library should serve to answer the question which Hering formulated so aptly as 'memory as organized matter'; likewise it should make use of the psychology of primitive man – that is the type of man whose reactions are immediate reflexes rather than literary responses- and also take account of the psychology of civilized man who consciously recalls the stratified formation of his ancestral and his personal memories. With primitive man the memory image results in a religious embodiment of causes, with civilized man in detachment through naming.<sup>34</sup>

Two important points should be noted here: first, Warburg relates his activity and scholarship to the universal activity of remembering; second, he characterizes this praxis of memory as composed of two enveloping moments: the 'primitive' one, based on 'immediate reflexes', and the 'civilized' one, which works through detachment and 'naming'. In a similar way, Benjamin maintains that '...history is not just a science but also a form of memoration. What science has "established", memoration can modify'.<sup>35</sup> And, like Warburg, Benjamin sees the (historical, dialectical) image as one in which 'It isn't that the past casts its light on the present or the present casts its light on the past: rather, an image is that in which the Then and the Now come into constellation like a flash of lightning'.<sup>36</sup> This 'flash of lightning' connects to the Warburgian concepts of 'primitive reflexes'. As Benjamin puts it: 'To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger'. (*Illuminations*, 255)

Now we can make the concluding move of our study, and relate to the triple connection between the "Pathos Formula", the psychoanalytic traumatic encounter and the allegorical mode of sign in Walter Benjamin: all three concepts are based on an experience of a shock relating to the external environment.<sup>37</sup> All three concepts see the process of mimicking, of mimesis, as a vehicle for the process of the construction of the image.<sup>38</sup> All three concepts, therefore,

implement the concept of the image in a concept of (cultural) temporality and therefore of history. In this way, all three relate their actions as historians and researchers to their concept of the image. They are all built around the problematics of the 'source', and construct the development (or history) of the image, according to my reading, as oscillating between mourning and desire. In all three theories there is wide space for the act of destruction.<sup>39</sup> In all three concepts, the underlying question is the problem of the 'self' (which includes the 'self' of the historian) and its auto-construction in face of the plurality of the cosmos. This essay has attempted to offer an uneasy encounter between these three concepts, in the hope of creating a dialogue between them, and not by forcing them into becoming identical. Not one of the three should become a 'source' of which the others will become representations. Nonetheless, Aby Warburg's "'Pathos Formula'" has been the focal point of our discussion. Warburg being an art historian, this discussion should serve to contextually, culturally and theoretically locate both his methodological tools, and ours.

## Notes

1. See Ferretti 1989; Forster 1996: 5-24; Ginzburg 1992: 17-59; Gombrich 1984: 117-138; Martin 1998: 4-36; Michaud 1995: 43-73; Rampley 1997: 41-56; Recht 1994: 5-23; Wind 1980: 21-36.
2. As quoted in English in Gombrich 1970: 71.
3. A quote by Warburg from *ibid.*: 217.
4. See Wind 1980: 31-32 ; Gombrich (1970: 221) quotes from the notes of Warburg: 'My starting point is that I regard man as a tool-using animal whose activity consists in connecting and separating. In this activity he is apt to lose the organic sensation of the ego. The hand permits him to manipulate things which, as inanimate objects, lack a nervous system but which nevertheless provide a material extension of the ego [ ] there exists indeed a situation in which man can become assimilated to something that is not he himself precisely by manipulating of wearing objects which his blood-stream does not reach ...'
5. Gombrich 1970: 222.
6. This approach by Warburg differed from the traditional one, which wished to see Classical Greek culture as an ideal only of the Apollonian side of Humanity. Many writers of our days see in this endeavor of Warburg a real revolution in the concept of the Classical Image and the Image in general, which Warburg presented as not just a calm reflection of an idea, but as containing chaotic, Dionysian energies as well; see Iversen 1993: 541-552.
7. Gombrich 1970: 124.
8. *Ibid.*: 213.
9. *Ibid.*: 249.
10. Freud 1899: 320-322. See also Freud 1901: 43-52, "Childhood Memories and Screen Memories".

11. Freud 1899: 315.
12. Terdiman 1993: 240-288; Freud 1914; Lacan 1977b: 53-67.
13. Lacan 1993: 152, 181.
14. Lacan 1992: 50.
15. Quoted in Gombrich 1970: 220.
16. Lacan 1977b: 129. For Freud dealing with traumatic experiences, see, for example: Freud 1916-17: 273-285.
17. On the double action of the traumatic experience, see Boothby 1991: 87-95; Lacan 1977b: 55.
18. Lacan (1992: 52): 'The whole progress of the subject is then oriented around the Ding as Fremde, strange and even hostile on occasion, or in any case the first outside [...] The world of our experience, The Freudian world, assumes that it is this object, das Ding, as the absolute other of the subject, that one is supposed to find again. It is to be found at the most something missed.'
19. Lacan 1977a: 1-7 - "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I".
20. Lacan 1977b: 98-101.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Rampley 1997: 52 – 3.
23. Benjamin 1998.
24. Cowan 1981: 109-122; Day 1999: 103-118; Hannoosh 1994: 38-54.
25. As quoted and translated from the German source of "The Origin of the German Tragic Drama" in Rochlitz 1996: 96.
26. Benjamin 1968: 224.
27. As translated from the German source in Rochlitz 1996: 100.
28. See Cohen 1993: 205-208.
29. Benjamin 1973, and Benjamin 1968: 155-200, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire".
30. Benjamin 1985: 54-55.
31. As quoted and translated from German in Rochlitz 1996: 205-206.
32. From the writings of the two scholars, it seems that both saw the two modes of development of the human consciousness as being present in the modern as well as in the primitive stages. For example, Warburg writes (as quoted in Gombrich 1970:221): 'All mankind is eternally and all times schizophrenic. Ontogenetically, however, we may perhaps describe one type of response to memory images as prior and primitive, though it continues on sidelines. At the later stage the memory no longer arouses an immediate, purposeful reflex movement – be it one of a combative or religious nature – But the memory images are now consciously stored in pictures and signs. Between these two stages we find a treatment of the impression that may be described as the symbolic mode of thought.' And Benjamin (1989: 49): 'It isn't that the past casts its light on the present or the present casts its light on the past: rather, an image is that in which the Then and the Now come into constellation like a flash of lightning. In other words: image is a dialectics at a standstill. For...the relation of the Then to the Now is dialectical – not development but image [.] leaping forth – Only dialectical images are genuine (i.e., not archaic) images; and the place one happens upon them is language.' Benjamin also says elsewhere (Benjamin 1978:157) 'Modernity...is always quoting primeval history'.
33. Owens: 1984.
34. Gombrich 1970: 222.
35. Benjamin 1989: 61.
36. *Ibid.*: 49.

37. For a discussion of the concepts of "encounter" and "shock" in Benjamin and Lacan, see Cohen 1993: 145-154, "Tuche and Misrecognition: Modern Materialism, Lacan, Althusser".
38. Benjamin relates to the important role of mimesis in his text: "On the Mimetic Faculty", Benjamin 1978: 333-336.
39. Lacan (1992: 209) writes: 'Remembering, "historicizing", is coextensive with the functioning of the drive in what we call the human psyche. It is here, too, that destruction is registered, that is, enters the register of experience.'

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