Thinking Through Images

Approaching Aby Warburg and the Digital Humanities and Arts

Amanda du Preez
Dealing with images in DH

- do you digitize images (digital imaging and processing) or use only digitally born images?
- do you aggregate images in a digital archive? (meta-data)
- do you use image recognition and machine learning to discern patterns?
- do you treat the image as a distinct data unit? In other words treat images as image-data in and of themself
Selfiecity (http://selfiecity.net, 2014)  
Lev Manovich and Software Studies
Mondrian vs Rothko: Revealing the Comparative "Footprints" of the Modern Painters
by Culture Analytics Lab
Robots Reading Vogue by Lindsay King and Peter Leonard, Digital Humanities Lab, Yale University
Aby Warburg's (1866-1929) BilderAtlas Mnemosyne

Ovid Exhibition in the Reading Room of the Kunsthissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg, Hamburg, 1927
"Approaching Aby Warburg and Digital Art History: Thinking Through Images" Amanda Du Preez
Guiding Warburgian Concepts

• Images as migrating units of meaning - they have an afterlife (Nachleben);
• Pathos formula (Pathosformel(n)) - pictorial representations of expressive gestures;
• Framing as both a conceptual and structural strategy (Denkraum, Zwischenraum);
• Networked atlas;
• Principle of the good neighbour;
• Movement between close and distant reading.
Neptune as a conducting, ‘serving God.’
Whom I now. ‘Virgil’

Meandering between the Southern and Northern Renaissances, Warburg here juxtaposes Italian and Dutch representations of a myth that was crucial to Virgil’s Aeneid, but that also speaks directly to his own attempts to find images where cosmographic-demonic forces are expressed in an artistic style that shows both formal restraint and individual expression. Building on panels 41a and 60, Warburg explores how late Renaissance and Baroque festive art employed a Virgilian Neptune to symbolize both...
Guided Pathways

Panel 70

Introduction (1 of 5)

The Baroque as the Renaissance?

In the draft "Introduction" ("Einführung") to the Mnemosyne Atlas, not published during his lifetime, Warburg describes the central goal of the project: the tracking of the dwelling forms that characterize human responses to potential threats from within and from the outside. Juxtaposing agitated and potentially merely reactive, "phobic-kinetic" responses to these stimuli, on the one hand, to the deliberate, controlled, even "artistically" contained moment of reflection prior to (defensive) "shaping" action ("Handlung"), on the other, he explains that the Atlas will display the tension between these two Nietzschean — Dionysian and Apollonian — responses as it is visible, first, in the pathos of antiquity's earlier language of gesture ("Gebrauchssprache") and, second, in the afterlives of that language in the Renaissance (3; on the evolution of Warburg's notion of "pathos formulæ," see Warnke 61-6). Both here and throughout Warburg's oeuvre, it was thus the achievement of a specific period, namely, the Renaissance, to have taken up the battle previously fought by the Ancients between forces capable of overcoming, possessing, and thus enlisting humanity, and the powers of human reason and self-control, which signify both personal and civilizational freedom. Because the permanent "schizophrenia" of the "West" perpetuates the possibility of the return of unreason, as Warburg writes in his "Notes on Mnemosyne" ("Mnemosyne I: Aufzeichnungen," 945), it was to be the task of the Atlas to tell the story of the return of apoekenstasis or pre-eminence in Europe during that period, indeed, to lock this version of the history of the "pathos formulæ" securely into place, via a series of panels that moved from ancient through medieval to Renaissance artistic forms.
THEMES:

1. Cosmological-genealogical prologue; cartography
2. Ancient cosmology
3. Classical “pre-imprinting”; an archaeology of artistic “expressive values”; ecstasy and melancholy; pathos formulas of sacrifice and triumph
4. Transmission and degradation of Greek astronomical thought in medieval Arabic, medieval and Renaissance European astrological imagery (Baghdad, Toledo, Padua, Rimini, Ferrara)
5. The “afterlife” of classical “expressive values” in Renaissance, mainly late quattrocento art
6. “Inversion,” ascent, and descent in Renaissance (esp. in the cinquecento) and after; from the muses to Manet
7. Virgil, Dürer, Rubens, and the northward migration (translatio); Neptune and nature
8. Baroque excess, art officiel, and Rembrandt’s mediation; theatricality and anatomy
9. Final “inversions”: advertisement and transubstantiation (Eucharist); the sacred and profane
Stefka Hristova
“Images as Data: Cultural Analytics and Aby Warburg’s Mnemosyne.”
Colourmetric analysis of Panel 45 (1924) consisting of 24 images which was selected for its relationship between colour and violence
Remapping the images of Panel 45, using the ImageMeasure and ImagePlot modules of the ImageJ Software.

"I argue that Digital Art History should continue its investment in contextual visual knowledge by combining quantitative image-data paradigms with traditional art history in order to foster critical interpretations of visual culture."

Visualization the hue and saturation in images 45-4 (Annunciation) on the left and 45-10 (Massacre) on the right
Figure 1. A Pathosformel emerges. Left to right: drawing of vase from Nola, Louvre, AD 150, echoing after 5th century BC vase from Chiusi, G. G. Carandente, Amorini dell’antico, exh. cat., Amiens, 1979. Woodcut from Oval, Meteoropinaces, Venice, 16th century; Mitha, engraving, late 16th century AD, School of Mantua, Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Otto Liss, Death of Ophelus, 1607, Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

Leonardo Impett and Franco Moretti
Operationalizing Aby Warburg’s Pathosformeln

Figure 2. Extraction. The box around the body is created by drawing a line on the figure from head to toe, and then using it to estimate a "bounding box" centered on the body and enclosing its limits.

Figure 3. X-ray

Our skeletons are made of twelve segments - the lower and upper legs, the spine, the lower and upper arms, the shoulders, and the neck - which represent a compromise between anatomical accuracy and consistent reproduction. The reason we have shoulders and hips, for example, is that the later are usually invisible - they lie, partially implied, below layers of clothing - and our initial experiments revealed that they would be superfluous in any form.

Figures in this collection are often mirrored, rotated, and - in Greek pottery or construction templates - even upside-down. If left uncompensated, this spectrum of postures would quickly become the dominant feature in the data. We therefore rotate each skeleton so as to make the spine always vertical, and mirror the poses horizontally, so that the higher arm is always on the left. We then end up with some angled body parts, minus the spine, or even angles in total.

The decision to straighten the spine is clearly a questionable one - even more so, as several Pathosformeln Look even in part to involve a strong tension of the back. But we could think of no alternative option - and as we will see, the impact over the results seems to have been negligible.
“Our morphological model for Pathosformeln is statistically strong: but what are the art-historical implications?”
1st Edition

Art, the Sublime, and Movement
Spaced Out

By Amanda du Preez

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Key Terms:
place, space, time, belonging, gravity, displacement, home, falling, navigating, balancing, mobility, flight, void, cyberspace, Earth, outer space
Part 1:
Walking on Thin Air

Balancing Act
sauteur

Into the Void
mountaineer

Running-As-If
flâneur/ traceur
Part 2: Walking on the Moon

Up in the Air
aeronaut

In Vain
cybernaut

Approaching the
Unknown
astronaut
Spaced Out Atlas
Iconological Exploration of Album Covers from 2015-2021

How is the worldview of being 'spaced out' depicted through specific identified visual themes, signs, codes and tropes?
Research methods and process

- The album cover is an iconologically dense artifact that provides brief insight into artist's worldview consisting of image and text
- The mining of album cover images from the Album of the Year (AOTY) site - images are all of same size, easily comparable and manipulated
- So far albums covers from January to December 2021 have been downloaded **30 798 images** in total
- Imported into Tropy software a free and open-source desktop knowledge organization application that helps users manage and describe photographs of research materials. It was developed by the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University.
IMAGES HAVE BEEN TAGGED BY USING THE FOLLOWING ICONOLOGICAL IDENTIFIERS:

- Astronaut (84 items)
- Levitation (197 items)
- Flight
- Space Travel
- Planetary (604 items)
- Cosmos
- Figure in Landscape (619 items)
- Pandemic (19 items)
Iconological notations are open and constantly negotiated:

**astronaut** > visor; immersive suit, aeronaut

**flight** > figures with wings; birds, aeroplanes

**levitation** > suspended in air; diving; falling; drifting; floating in water

**planetary** > reference heavenly body, Earth, Moon; Mars; comets

**cosmos** > void; outer space

**space travel** > rocket; starship; alien

**figure in landscape** > lone figure; back figure (*Rückenfigur*); on ground
Tags Correspond and Meanings are Layered:

- Levitation
- Astronaut
- Planetary
- Space Travel

- Flight
- Planetary
- Space Travel

- Astronaut
- Figure in Landscape
- Planetary

- Figure in Landscape
- Levitation
- Planetary

- Green Montana/
  Melancholia999
- Arik Ancelin/
  Diamond in the Rough
- Transmission Zero/
  Bridges
- Eartheater/
  Scripture
511i5 - Isolation

Imitation, Ripa, Solitudine, abstract idea, allegory, community, distance, generalities, height, human being, idea, imitation, isolation, personification, singularity, solitude, space, uniqueness

Also see:
51BB61 - Singularity, Uniqueness
59AA1 - Loneliness; 'Solitudine' (Ripa)

Add more detail:
51i5c0 - Isolation (+ variant)
51i5c1 - Isolation (+ personification)
51i5c2 - Isolation (+ allegorical scene, i.e. two or more personifications involved in an action)
51i5c3 - Isolation (+ symbolical representation of concept)
51i5c4 - Isolation (+ emblematical representation of concept)
51i5c5 - Isolation (+ 'exemplum', representation of exemplary (historical) event)
51i5c6 - Isolation (+ situation or event (especially in genre-painting) with symbolical connotation)

4 sample images