



Tagebuch der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg
Credits

Aby Warburg’s drawing above is a diagram for a line-up of the *Mnemosyne Picture Atlas* in the company of books: perhaps from a line-up that did take place inside the theatric hemicircle of his library. The point of including it here is not to make case of *that* Warburg occasional drew, but *when*.

It is from February 1929, 8 months before his death. Which means that the drawing may *not* be a plan. Neither is it *documentation*, since a [photograph](#) documented a *line-up*—Germ. *Aufstellung*—took place two years before in February 1927. So, it is a *reflection* of some kind (perhaps of *attitude*).

The *books*, the *panels*, the *drawing*. A candidate example of an environment (*Umgebung*) as *entourage*. All of them offer vantage points from which the other elements can be seen, as worlds to themselves given to a common world of correspondences. From the Atlas, the library’s book-arrangement.



Gertrude Bing, Aby Warburg and Franz Alber,
Rome February 1929 Credits

The context of the drawing [*recto*] manifesting an attitude in the interstitial space *between* the atlas *and* the library, likely could be understood as an *interception*: a spectral revelation one might expect in the confines of this particular library space which Aby Warburg coined as a *Denkraum*.

Literally translated: a *Think-room*. To the library the atlas, even as it is a world unto itself (*Umwelt*), forms an environment (*Umgebung*) to library's collection of *books*: a vantage point from which the relation between the books can be seen. It offers a readability to the library it lacks on its own.

The drawing was done in Rome—in the entourage of his two assistants Gertrude Bing and Franz Alber [*recto*]. In his notebook Aby Warburg writes: “Mnemosyne is lined up on two frames with jute canvas. It provides an overview of the entire architecture, from Babylonia to Manet.” He adds:

“...and it can now be bluntly criticised.” If he has reached the desired attitude—with the robustness from countless attempts—we can better understand the nature of the enterprise, in terms of the readability of the atlas stated by [Georges Didi-Huberman](#): reading what was never written.

However, if the book-collection constitutes our vantage-point on the atlas—abiding by our definition of *Umgebung*—it *doesn't* provide the atlas with its readability. But rather *appropriates* the atlas in a way indicated by Ernst Cassirer in 1929, commenting on the strange arrangement of the books:

“From the book-series a series exuded an increasingly clear series of images, of motifs and of original spiritual configurations (eine Reihe von Bildern, von bestimmten geistigen Urmotiven und Urgestaltungen).” Werner Hoffmann later called them *constellations*, Sgrid Weigel *knowledge figures*.

Behind the atlas Warburg's gut-feeling. Within the particular arrangement of books of his cultural science library, a constellation of images. In the drawing the revelation of a desired attitude. The value of this drawing does not lie in its technical prowess, but in its mediate execution: it is iconic.

An icon is not produced but revealed. It is not only received, it is passed on (*through the hands of* and then a *signature*). A structural equivalent of a poetry recital, perhaps. When we read out loud, our voice becomes a space in which the voice of the other not only occurs, but reveals its *attitude*.

If a signature is a sign-within-a-sign ([Agamben \[Melandri\]](#)) then the *voice* becomes a *theatre* in which writing can *occur*. In this mode, *writing* arguably shifts to operate in the mode of an *image*. Similarly Warburg's drawing may manifest an attitude that is intercepted and revealed, rather than produced.

Binswanger—“to our bafflement [...] it appeared that these deviations, also the psychoses that we have studied to the present, should by no means be understood only in a negative way—i.e., contrary to the norm—but that they correspond to a new norm and a new form of being-in-the-world.”