Madman and Philosopher: Ideas of Embodiment between Aby Warburg and Ernst Cassirer

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Introduction

15.11.1921: Severe delusional ideas during lunchtime: cabbage is the brain of his brother, potatoes are the heads of his children, meat is the human flesh of his relatives, milk is not from the cow, eating a sandwich is eating his own son [...] 19.11.1921: Three children have been slaughtered and have been eaten by patients. Three dead kids are lying in the nurse’s bed [...] 09.04.1922: Patient very aggressive, boxing, hitting out and injuring nurse and doctor. Feels his nurse, coming back from leave has killed all his relatives on the order of Dr. Binswanger.

Keywords: embodiment, psychopathology, Binswanger, Cassirer, Warburg.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Colleagues, my presentation tries to highlight the extraordinary results of a self-healing effort of an unusual personality like Aby Warburg, his synergic and mutual profitable, yet unusual, connection with philosopher Ernst Cassirer, and the amazing theatre of therapeutic action and conflicting opinion around his case of madness played out on the mondiaire scenery of Bellevue Hospital in Kreuzlingen, a Swiss psychiatric shelter for the European upper class and nobility. In his novel “The Radetzky March” the Austrian writer Joseph Roth (1995:187) called Kreuzlingen

“the institution on Lake Constance where spoiled and wealthy madmen underwent careful and expensive treatments, – and the psychiatric attendants were as nurturing as midwives [...]”

These are only a few of numerous reports from the hospital-files of Aby Warburg during his treatment in Kreuzlingen between 1921 and 1924. Despite his diagnosis of an ongoing schizophrenia (later changed to mixed manic-depressive state) philosopher Ernst Cassirer and historian of culture Fritz Saxl tried to convince clinic director Ludwig Binswanger to give permission to Warburg to restart his cultural studies about the Hopi Snake-Ritual as it might stabilise his mental balance.

Warburg gave special attention to the study of emotional expression in gestures, rituals and depiction. As a young man he had gone through the personal experience, that the encapsulation of emotional states into bodily configuration had a calming down and protective impact on his vulnerable and easily affected mind. It fostered Warburg’s theory of iconography and his idea of ‘Pathosformeln’, looking out for the embodiment of human feeling in images and sculptures throughout the history of art.

Warburg’s approach guided by his very personal highly sensitive condition was somewhat contradictory, but at the same time complementary to Cassirer’s views. Cassirer, interested in the logic of mental categorisation, aligned himself temporarily with Warburg’s outlook, emphasising the primacy of ritual action in the emergence of culture. His idea of symbolic form though, remains focussed on the abstract and conscious end of the symbolising process, thus gaining distance from concrete emotions and from being caught in physical interaction.

My presentation focusses on the original encounter between Warburg and Cassirer, on the contemporary controversies about Warburg’s madness, and on the wider implications the whole Kreuzlingen scenario might have with regards to the implementation of symbolic/semiotic findings in today’s psychopathological discourse.
This is the place where Aby Warburg, deemed an untreatable and unrecovering schizophrenic, ended up in April 1921 – following a 30-month odyssey through a number of mental hospitals. Here he and ‘his case’ got drawn into an astonishing whirlpool of opinions between different schools of contemporary psychiatry, arguing philosophers, psychoanalysts, art historians, influential family protagonists and committed psychiatric staff: a clinical panopticon of madness and therapy in the early 1920s, and a drama with changing encounters, from which – strange as it seems – Aby Warburg emerged as a healed and furtherson fairly balanced personality, and a productive art-historian as well.

A PRIVILEGED WAY INTO MADNESS AND A PRIVILEGED CURE TO ESCAPE FROM IT

Aby Warburg (1866-1929) was the first of five sons (and two daughters) of the wealthy and conservative Jewish banker’s family (in which both parental sides were troubled by a number of depressed or psychotic individuals among their wider relatives). Aby was a spoiled and impulsive child. Noone could, or ever wanted to rule him in. He tended to follow his wishes and tempers, his own thoughts and daydreams. Problems caused by Aby used to be solved by subservient personnel. Wishful phantasies were, from early age on, followed by compulsive and frightening thoughts about his looks, his personality and character. He found it difficult to follow school discipline and teachers found him difficult to deal with. His meandering lifestyle and performance was an ongoing embarrassment for his father Moritz, head of the Hamburg branch of the Warburg Bank, who was a strict and overtly rigid parent. Aby often withdrew to his own company, a bit eccentric and isolated, already in younger years looking for remedies to calm down his troubled, and easily affected mind. With some help he managed his A-levels and started studies in art-history in Bonn, Munich and Strassbourg, rejecting any involvement in the banking business as his father had hoped.

He moved to Florence in 1888, developing a revolutionary method of understanding the afterlife of the antiquity, the reemergence of pagan imagination and the magic impact of embodied emotion on art. In 1912 – following a reinterpretation of frescoes in the Schifano palace of Ferrara – he called his method ‘iconography’, yet his 1893 dissertation on this subject is seen by many art-historians already as the start of this new science. In open disregard of family opinion he married a non-Jewish (orthodox-protestant) painter and sculptor in 1897 and had three children with her.

During his visit to the USA in 1895/6 he carried out ethnological studies on the Indian Hopi tribe, a work which he would revert to during his psychosis. Back in Hamburg after 1902 he continued his life as a private scholar, remaining involved in a multitude of cultural activities. His massive collection of scientific books and prints brought about the idea of creating a cultural-historic library, thereby turning his private collection into a public institution which had grown to 60,000 books at the time of his death in 1929. In a letter to his brother Paul he explained his intentions: “The Warburg library is a post for the registration of the changing (amplitudes) and frequencies of human values, let’s say, between Virtus and Contemplatio (bloody action and pure observation), while it is I who discovered its polarity in images and actions” (Marazia/Stimilli, 2007: 115).

In November 1918, Warburg, 52 years old and only recently appointed professor of Art History, threatened to shoot his family and himself, claiming he was a ‘Werwolf’. These disturbances, followed by further sophisticated suicide attempts, were only the end of a lengthy nightmare in which Warburg had been increasingly worried and confused by late developments of WW I, which went through its final stages. Obviously angered and disappointed when a well loved and very close ‘Gouvernante’ – caring for his needs – left the Warburg home to return to England, he withdrew from daily communication and got obsessed with beliefs he might be responsible and accountable for Germany’s dire war situation. He was admitted to the psychiatric Anstalt Lienau, close to Hamburg, where Prof. Embden diagnosed a schizophrenia with phobic and compulsive traits. He also guessed Warburg was suffering from a “Beeinträchtigungswahn”.

Andersch, 2017
Warburg, constantly shifting between bouts of normality and extreme periods of hallucinatory delusion, could hardly be contained in his extremely loud, aggressive, upsetting and “egocentric” behaviour. A few months on the unruly patient was subsequently transferred from Lienau/Hamburg to Prof. Berger in Jena (who would successfully perform the first electroencephalography/EEG on a human being in 1939). Berger, following a careful examination, fully confirmed Embden’s schizophrenia diagnosis of Warburg. Several extremely difficult months of containment and helpless efforts of treatment in Jena led to Berger’s belief that Warburg would never fully recover. His prognosis seemed confirmed by Warburg’s further deterioration into lengthy, prolonged delusional stages, accompanied by very aggressive behaviour and screaming. Berger was finally fed up and wanted to get rid of the uncurable Warburg and transferred him to his old friend Ludwig Binswanger in Kreuzlingen in April 1921.

Both psychiatrists knew each other well as they had been young assistants under Binswanger’s uncle Otto in Jena in 1908. Berger knew how ambitious Binswanger was, when it came to the treatment of psychotic patients. This was helpful to the transfer. Moreover, the pavilion style of ‘Bellevue’ with specific single shaped ‘Jugendstil’-buildings (containing several rooms for each patient with additional living facilities for nurses and serving personnel) was a much better setting in dealing with an unruly, rich and demanding patient and his influential, powerful family compared to the more basic hospital grounds in Jena. There were also money issues at stake which the Binswanger clinic urgently needed, and: Warburg’s banker family had loads of it.

A TREATMENT CAROUSEL AT KREUZLINGEN AND A PANOPTICUM OF PSYCHIATRIC VANITIES

The Binswangers were a family clan and a powerful dynasty in psychiatry. Ludwig B’s grandfather (also named Ludwig) had founded the private Klinik Bellevue in Kreuzlingen in Switzerland in 1857. He became a household name among European aristocracy, recommended for his sophisticated treatment of seriously mentally ill nobility, mainly from Russia, Italy and Germany (Hirschmüller, 2002).

His son and successor Robert developed the typical ‘Bellevue style’, integrating psychiatric patients into the therapeutic and lavish Kreuzlingen environment like family members. He handed over Bellevue to his son Ludwig (1881-1966) in 1911, who, trained under Bleuler and Jung in Burghölzli, was a close friend of Sigmund Freud’s. Strongly influenced by psychoanalysis Ludwig B. remained committed to biological aspects of illness but was at the same time eager in grasping new philosophical approaches and elements of treatment from a gestaltist and phenomenological background.

In the early-mid 1920s Binswanger, after inquiring of Husserl and Scheler, got quite enthusiastic about Ernst Cassirer’s symbol theory and Goldstein’s psychological experiments on brain-injured patients. Finally reading “Sein und Zeit” in 1927 he fell for Heidegger’s ‘Daseins’ theories and followed a form of a philosophy of his own which – as a therapeutical outcome – tried to establish ‘Daseinsanalyse’ as a healing method. Still unexperienced as Head of Bellevue in the early years after takeover Binswanger could count on advice from his uncle Otto, (Prof. of psychiatry at Jena till his retirement in 1919) and on practical support from his cousin Kurt, also trained as psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, who remained as his first assistant at Kreuzlingen until 1927.

Cousin Kurt was actually much more involved in Aby Warburg’s day to day treatment from 1921-1924 than Binswanger himself. During his early month in Bellevue Warburg got possessed by the idea that Ludwig B., as clinic head, was leading a murderous conspiracy against him and family members and openly despised and physically attacked him. His time in Bellevue had been planned by Binswanger as a ‘talking cure’, but Warburg refused all forms of speaking contact and made conversation to moths or butterflies instead. He also insisted on ongoing visits by Prof Embden from Hamburg, much to the dislike of Binswanger. It was only after Warburg’s discharge that he developed a lasting friendship and correspondence with him.
Binswanger admired Sigmund Freud but felt unconvinced by his approach to psychosis and schizophrenia. He considered himself the more experienced clinician in cases of severe mental illness and, in an exchange of letters in 1921 expressed his personal prognosis that Warburg would never fully recover from his illness:

“It is such a shame that he most likely will not be able to use his enormous treasure of knowledge and his immense library again.”

Ernst Cassirer’s theory of Symbolic Forms seemed to Binswanger in 1923/4 like a new key to understanding psychotic features better and finally to distance himself from Freud. He took up a scientific correspondence with Cassirer and lauded his and Goldstein’s research achievements. At a conference in Zurich in early 1924 (Binswanger, 1924) he promoted symbolic and gestaltist approaches as new stepping stones in understanding the riddles of psychiatry. He had invited Cassirer to the Zurich event and now encouraged him to have a meeting with him in Kreuzlingen.

In the meantime Hans Prinzhorn, psychiatrist and collector of schizophrenic art, had presented his studies at Freud’s psychoanalytic circle in Vienna. Freud, a bit worried about Binswanger’s distancing course, informed him about Prinzhorn’s promising performance. Binswanger felt mildly pressed to invite Prinzhorn to see Warburg at Bellevue. There were indeed close parallels between Prinzhorn’s new publication ‘Die Bildnerei der Geisteskranken’ and Warburg’s efforts to use pictorial expressions to gain relief from mental tension. According to the clinical records (Item UAT 441/3782) Prinzhorn and Warburg talked “keenly and thoroughly about symbology.”

Prior to Cassirer’s visit, Fritz Saxl, Warburg’s assistant colleague at his Hamburg library, had made his way to Kreuzlingen with the idea to support Warburg in his weird struggle against hospital authorities. All Bellevue medics were stubborn in their insistance that Warburg “had to get well first”, before taking up his abandoned cultural studies. Saxl and Cassirer with their lengthy knowledge of Warburg’s troubled personality had a much different point of view. Saxl started efforts to convince Binswanger to allow a still partly confused Warburg to restart his pending research. This move was supported by Cassirer who knew very well that for Warburg diving into a realm of images of structured emotion (was not like some dangerous irritation, but) had a calming and healing effect. First positive steps had already been made in early 1923, when Warburg – still quite psychotic at times – managed to struggle successfully through a full hour public presentation on the Hopi-snake-ritual in front of Bellevue staff and patients. Still Binswanger remained hesitant. When Cassirer finally arrived at Kreuzlingen in April 1924 he spent most of his time discussing the importance of magic rituals with Warburg instead of confering with a disappointed and jealous Binswanger.

Binswanger was under considerable pressure at this time. It was not only Freud who again started asking about the Warburg case (from which he had heard from one of his own clients, Helene Schiff, a close friend of the Warburg dynasty). It was also Max Warburg, after father Moritz’s death the factual head of the Warburg clan, who, worried by Aby’s lack of progress, unexpectedly and rigorously demanded that Warburg should be assessed by Prof. Kraepelin, a theoretical adversary of Binswanger.

Kraepelin, the unchallenged senior of German psychiatry had successfully treated the American banker James Loeb, brother in law of Aby’s younger brother Paul, from psychotic symptoms some time ago. Now Loeb and the wider Warburg family were enthusiastic about his healing powers and felt Kraepelin might have the right cure in Aby’s case as well. Binswanger was furious, but had to obey. Kraepelin came and assessed Warburg for two days. Binswanger went out of his way. Also Warburg did not like Kraepelin.

Nonetheless, the old fashioned conservative organic psychiatrist came up with a different diagnosis: mixed manic-depressive state and a more positive prognosis, compared to all other colleagues before him, including Binswanger’s. Fact is: Warburg improved impressively after Kraepelin’s visit. This change was much supported by Warburg’s close encounter with Cassirer in the same week. Warburg was highly relieved that Cassirer fully understood his plans to restart his research, that Cassirer highlighted
the importance of Warburg’s ongoing scientific efforts, and felt he could contribute substantively to the art history discourse. Warburg could be discharged back home in September 1924.

WARBURG’S VS CASSIRER’S EMBODIMENT: COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES TOWARDS THE SAME GOAL

The congenial understanding between Warburg, the eldest, eccentric son of a banker’s dynasty, and Cassirer, the very bourgeois, formal and controlled philosopher, brings up quite a number of interesting aspects. It is not only the madman who meets the philosopher, it is also the form of embodiment of uncontrolled emotion in images and sculptures – Warburg has been chasing around all his life to calm down his troubled and easily affected mind – which catches the philosopher’s attention. Beyond Warburg’s unconscious self-medication and strange healing-efforts it is the sophisticated structural order of his library of culture in Hamburg, which fosters Cassirer’s understanding of his own previously unclear shape of the symbolic matrix he considers the basis of human consciousness.

There are a few handwritten autobiographical excerpts in Warburg’s correspondence with Saxl, dated September 1922, when he was still in Kreuzlingen. Here Warburg describes early childhood fears which he connects to a time when he suffered from ‘fever phantasies’. He describes being tortured by chaotic hallucinatory memories and an extreme over-sensivity regarding acoustic or olfactory sensations. These horrifying experiences later turned into reoccurring events amongst the helpless efforts of the boy

“to bring some kind of order into this intellectual chaos, – an attempt which may be identified as the tragic childhood efforts of mankind as such – very early efforts indeed, and much too early for my personal constitution at that time”. (Marazia/Stimmili, 2007:101)

As a highly intelligent schoolboy Warburg advanced through the first forms very fast, an experience (carried out to highlight his progress, but) which he felt as extremely traumatic (considering his huge difficulties to adapt to new groups and environments). At times his own imagination totally took hold of him, so much that he felt “physically grasped by death” at the burial of a friend, got massively frightened of the “satanic character of the world” after reading Dickens’ ‘Oliver Twist’ or, got obsessed by the fear of having been bitten by a dog, suffering from rabies. This actually never happened; nonetheless Warburg remained convinced and horrified over weeks that he would die from thirst from rabies-induced fear of water. Warburg describes several nervous breakdowns shortly before exams (“a trauma I never managed to get rid off […]”) but also the healing effect of being involved in scientific work and research (which he experienced as “tools of liberation”).

His main project during his Florence studies thus focussed on the embodiment of antique forms of expression in a collection of life pictures from the European renaissance. Parts of these images were later put together and posthumously published in the book ‘Mnemosyne’ the name of the Greek goddess of memory (1993/4). In his 1905 presentation on ‘Dürer und die italienische Antike’ Warburg coins the term ‘Pathosformeln’ for the first time. This expression tries to grasp how gesture and mimic are formed to a pattern-like configuration in historical paintings.

Much in contrast to Cassirer’s symbolic forms as patterns of consciousness close to reality – albeit used in an unreflected habit or attitude – Warburg’s ‘Pathosformeln’ are a collection of images and figures gained from the momentum of interference between new powerful affects and cultural patterns of incorporation. They are a spontaneous idea of embodiment of emotional energy in a temporary Gestalt. They emerge from a reoccurring fight at the borderline to psychosis meant to regain or maintain control over inner tensions – a protection from being overwhelmed by pure fascination or the horror of negative emotions. The cultural historian Bredekamp (2005/10) defines ‘Pathosformeln’ as “hardly contained eruptions of emotion, so much in continuous movement that they cannot be secured in a reusable pattern”.

In countering hallucinatory events and psychotic symptoms Warburg’s lengthy considerations led him to a model of ‘Denkraum’. His very personal experience fostered a concept where mythical and symbolic thoughts are creating a space for contemplation, thus providing protection and shelter from an overbearing world and
from inner mental compulsion; or: from being flooded by intellectual and technical demands.” Denkraum’ is a medium of safety that keeps subject and object apart; preventing both correspondents from collapsing into each other. Wedepohl (2014:49) points out that Warburg considers ‘Denkraum’ as a unity in time, as an act of recognition by differentiation, as a guide to subsequent sense-making.

Here is the closest bridge to Cassirer’s system of culturally created symbolic forms as connecting – but also protective – membranes, made from an always new and only temporary marriage of sense and sensuality.

In Ernst Cassirer’s research there is no specific differentiation between ‘Leib’ and ‘Körper’ as you will find with Merlaeu-Ponty. For Cassirer the animal paradise of instant instinctive (re)action and immediate experience is closed to the mentality of humans. It is growing reflective distance and detachment from immediacy which makes space for cultural creation. Cassirer’s outspoken views on this matter have led to some misunderstandings when it comes to the importance of embodiment, of ‘Leib’ and ‘Leiblichkeit’. Both sense and sensuality are basic phenomena in Cassirer’s view. They are the integral content of his philosophical categories. His concept of symbolic relations – spinning a net of cultural figuration between both correspondents – is not emerging from a theory of consciousness, but are emerging from the actual, lived body. His symbolic forms thereby are describing thresholds of growing reflection (like changing positions on an imaginary scale), which are marking the distance which mankind has successfully managed on its way from instant, concrete, highly emotionalized affect towards an open field of selfconsciously considered possibilities (Lauschke, 2012). Cassirer’s definition of symbolic form as “every energy of spirit by which the content of spiritually signification is linked to a concrete and intrinsically appropriate sensuous sign” has a clearly materialized feeling to it, because all that mental action without the hard link to bodily existence vanishes from the screen of our mind like a lost dream or cigarette smoke in the air. There are ample citations in his ‘Philosophy of Symbolic Forms’ confirming his stance: “Sense can only come into life by embodiment” (Cassirer, 2001/2 PSF I: 160), or: “[…] the human body (Leib) and its extremities are the coordination system onto which all our geometrical space conceptions are transferred.” (Cassirer, 2001/2 PSF II: 112)

Nonetheless the cultural world gets increasingly detached from bodily action, rising up from our concrete grounding to the light - but also very thin – skies of abstraction. Human complexity – throughout childhood and adolescence – transferred by symbolic means from the social group onto the subject distances us from our instinctive and biological roots. Cassirer always felt more at home in the realms of complex thoughts and consideration, and was quite a foreigner to conflict, tension, imbalance, but: he never wanted to lose contact to the other, more basic, rough, materialised side of our existence, and to conditions where the symbolic matrix has broken down, as in psychosis.

Warburg in his direct and abrupt action, in his balancing act on the borders of madness, in his meandering between intellectual discourse and violent physical action must have been the ideal counterpart for an overtly stiff, correct, calm, considered and conscious Cassirer. Warburg had spontaneity and used his potential to live emotion (instead of just considering it). He cleary had what Cassirer missed - and the other way round. There was something that made their personalities ‘click’, brought their complementarity to life. Cassirer’s emotional intelligence emerges as bright, respectful and (meta)analytical. You would hardly believe that Cassirer and Warburg met in Bellevue for the very first time in their lives. But they knew each other well, their mutual studies, their backgrounds, their places, their attitudes and considerations. Their meeting may have been a risky enterprise, an event of unfulfilled expectations or pretentions.

Yet, Cassirer was well aware of Binswanger’s reservation against the restart of Warburg’s studies. Cassirer never took sides in a conflict-prone direction. He would never have risked Warburg’s health in the middle of crisis, he would never have arrogantly interfered in the sacred doctor patient relationship.

Instead he could figure out from his own theory that formative studies would work for...
Warburg; he encouraged him, he highlighted his skills, he empowered him carefully in the most concrete way - not in an empty flattering attempt but by spending time, by listening, by handing responsibility back to Warburg. And last but not least: by integrating into their conversation the importance of Warburg’s life-experienced contributions; what his – at times admirable, at times helpless – efforts had meant for his (Cassirer’s) own research and philosophy. Fact is: Warburg in his lifelong mental struggle and in his brave and inventive way of dealing with it, helped Cassirer finding his way – and getting an honest feedback from Cassirer, helped healing Warburg.

WHERE ARE WE GOING FROM HERE?

When I started studying Cassirer’s impact on the theory of psychopathology at the Warburg Library in London nearly two decades ago, none of my friends and colleagues knew who Warburg was nor what he stands for. There were a few busy scholars, though, lost in the corridors of the admirable building at Woburn Square; but back then, Warburg was something for medievalists and historians of art dealing with the Renaissance. This has fundamentally changed in recent years with regard to Warburg, this has considerably changed when it comes to Cassirer. Both are now subject to lengthy and sophisticated articles and reviews. They are at the centre of international meetings about the arts, culture, psychopathology. Warburg is fashionable discourse right now. Cassirer will get there soon.

Reconsidering Warburg from my clinical point of view, I was stunned about the powerful family clan who supported him, and the wide ranging professional network which was involved in his “case”. Remarkable was the intensity of the interdisciplinary discourse around his illness. In contrast to my expectation it were the psychologically orientated and ‘progressive’ clinicians who came up with the more damning diagnosis for Warburg – and with the worst of all prognoses: uncurable. For a single day or two within the five-year treatment period an ancient biologist (Kraepelin) had to appear on the scenery of ‘Bellevue’ to change all that. Who would have guessed it? And – not to forget: Cassirer had a considerable impact as well, a layman.

I have always been suspicious about self-healing reports, yet I am convinced that Warburg’s lengthy cure (including a little help from his friends\textsuperscript{12}) was something of that kind. Living in today’s unspirited desert of ‘evidence based psychiatry’ one can only dream of the 1920s when there was space for discussion amongst psychiatric phenomenologists, biologists, Gestalt- and-symbol theorists, neurologists, psychologists, psychoanalysts, anthropologist, culture-historians and philosophers.

Clearly, Bellevue was lightyears away from the inhumane day to day business of remotely locked-up asylum inmates, then – and now. Binswanger ‘Daseinsanalyse’, proven only amongst nobility and rich clients, may be much too much overrated – and Jaspers’ existentialist approach may not be the choice for the 21st-century schizoid man. But even if those approaches are chosen still: who has the time, who provides the money to make them work?

There was indeed a gifted clinician, group-therapist, experimental researcher and psychopathologist who picked up, or partly reconfigured, the formative embodying approaches of Warburg and Cassirer. This was Hanscarl Leuner in the early 1960s, professor at Göttingen University, an extremely experienced LSD researcher and brilliant writer, inventor of symbol-therapy (katathymes Bilderleben) and vivid critic of Freud’s and Jaspers’ limited psychopathological concepts.

Leuner rejected Freud’s biased interpretation of symbols as only regressive and pathological. Leuner’s findings point to the fact, that there is a genuine human quality of formative power which grasps pattern from environment, which creates embodiment, and: which has a figurative, gestaltist impact, back on itself. This is a system which absorbs energy, and its image producing capacity (i.e. in hallucinations) therefore should not be seen just as a symptom of illness, but as a healing matrix which has its equivalents in the healthy mind as well. This symbolic matrix can help in disentangling severe forms of schizophrenia, which, until now, are considered the unsolvable riddles of psychiatry.

Leuner’s research outcomes fully confirm
Warburg’s very concrete life-experiences and the usefulness of cultural tools in balancing them. On the other hand Leuner confirms Cassirer’s theoretical, philosophical concept on the make up of consciousness.

In mainstream psychiatry all these efforts were systematically sidelined: by the US led ban on hallucinogenic research and by the tradition-loaded, Heidegger-infested, after-war branch of German psychopathology. Even now, having failed on a grand scale in the last decades, there are massive attempts to drag DSM/ICD dinosaurs and never ending, perpetuum mobile like ‘phenomenological’ approaches into the 21st century. This is why there are not only historical reasons to go back to Warburg, Cassirer and Leuner. Instead, there are very real considerations to be made about their embodiment theories and semiotic findings, which may help grabbing a way out of the dire straits of contemporary psychopathology (Andersch, 2017).

Endnotes
1: Famous patients in ‘Bellevue’ amongst others were: Raymond Russel (French writer), dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, actor and director Gustav Gründgens, Ludwig Kirchner (expressionist painter), Bertha Pappenheim (known as Freud’s Anna O).

2: Warburg was treated by Prof. Embden in the ‘Nervenheilanstalt von Dr. Lienau’ close to Hamburg from November 1918 to July 1919, thereafter in the University Hospital Jena (Prof. Dr. Berger) from October 1919 to April 1921. This was followed by the treatment in Kreuzlingen from April 1921 to 12. August 1924, when Warburg was discharged home. Prescribed medications: Trional, Veronal, Brom, Panopton, Opium.

3: The unconfirmed saga goes that Aby handed over his first-born-right of taking over the banking business to his brother Max in exchange for the promise to buy him (Aby) every book he wanted (which turned out to be an extremely costly deal for Max considering the number of 60.000 volumes – in parts extremely expensive middle-age foliants) – up to Aby’s death in 1929.

4: In 1909 Warburg moved to Heilwigstrasse 114 in Hamburg but had bought the neighbouring grounds as well. The new library building was started in 1924 after Warburg’s discharge from Kreuzlingen. His ever growing book collection comprised about 20.000 volumes in 1920 and had grown to 77.000 when it was moved to London in 1933.

5: Prof. Berger had taken over the Jena post from Otto Binswanger, the uncle (and later part-time advisor) of Ludwig Binswanger in Kreuzlingen. Otto B. had not only successfully treated Aby Warburg’s brother Fritz, some years ago – but had also tried his skills, albeit in vain, on the famous philosopher and writer Friedrich Nietzsche and his uncurable late schizophrenia.


7: Letter of Ludwig Binswanger to Ernst Cassirer referring to the publication of the first volume of Cassirer’s ‘Philosophy of Symbolic Forms’: “Having worked out the term of ‘Symbolic Form’ is of crucial importance for a psychiatrist – as soon as he acknowledges his main objective: to progress to a phenomenology of pattern of thoughts which are continuously presented and performed by our main group of patients: the schizophrenics.”


9: “Yesterday Harrison’s ‘prolegomena of the Study of Greek Religion’ arrived. [...] It actually was the very first of the new materials which had an impact on Warburg. You could literally watch how it took hold of him and pushed him getting back to science and reality. Those moments are unique [...]. In his recent letter Cassirer classified Warburg as a historian, who might have been the first among all others, to find out about the real problem. I immediately held this letter under Binswanger’s nose, which made him run wild with jaleousy, because it has to be just him to be recognized by Cassirer.” From Saxl’s notes in Kreuzlingen, excerpt from March 1923. Marazia 2007: 122.

10: “During Cassirer’s visit it could be proved – and I am greatful to my fate for this – that I am on the right way with my self-torturing considerations [...] they are about to come together to a system [...] which might turn out becoming a cornerstone to a new scientific paradigm (‘Weltanschauung’).” Aby’s letter to his brother Max from 16/04/1924.

11: Please compare this version (Wimmer, 2016: 263) to the translation of Bayer (2001: 15): “Under a symbolic form should be understood each energy of spirit (Geist) through which a spiritual (geistig) content or meaning is connected with a concrete sensory sign and is internally adapted to this sign.”

12: A preprint draft of this article was published and discussed (especially with regards to the impact of committed nursing staff on Warburg’s healing process). Please see: www.academia.edu/sessions/Madman and Philosopher.
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