

**Enlightenment and Uncivilizedness in Aesthetics:  
Toward Reconstruction of History of Aesthetics  
From a Contemporary Viewpoint**

**Tetsuhiro KATO**

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## **Introduction: Abstracts of Research Project**

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8. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RESULTS  
Following three tasks were originally imposed in this research project:
  1. Tracing the genealogy of "enlightenment" in the history of aesthetics
  2. Elucidating the role played by the "savage" in modern aesthetics
  3. Investigating the aspects of the conflict between the elements of "enlightenment" and those of "uncivilizedness"The first task was tackled in the two articles in "Humanities Review" (2004; 2006), where the roles played by Kant or Rumohr were explained from the standpoint of the "Enlightenment" in the history of aesthetics.  
The next task were undertaken by the essay in "Humanities Review"(2003); the paper in the proceedings of the 15th International Congress of Aesthetics (2003); translations of Warburg's texts; and the article on Wittkower (2005).  
For the last task, a lot of interesting materials could be collected in the researches made in the museums and exhibitions (and biennials) in North American and European countries. Furthermore, this task was successfully

fulfilled by exchanging information and opinions in the presentation given in the 16th congress of aesthetics, Rio de Janeiro, 2004.

In this report are included eight articles based on these research results. These articles will be open to the public also in the web page. And I would like to continue the investigation of this theme for some time in the future.

## 9. REFERENCES

AUTHORS , TITLE OF ARTICLE	JOURNAL, VOLUME-NUMBER,PAGES CONCERNED, YEAR
Tetsuhiro KATO, "On Warburg's Maxim: <i>Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail</i> "	<i>Humanities Review</i> , 53-1, 15-28, 2003
Tetsuhiro KATO, "Aby Warburg and the Anthropological Studies of Art"	<i>Selected Papers of the 15<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics</i> , 128-132, 2003
Tetsuhiro KATO, "Native Americans in Paris: The Function of Examples in Kant's <i>Critique of Judgment</i> "	<i>Aesthetics Review</i> , 19, 1-12, 2004
Tetsuhiro KATO, "Panofsky and the Facsimile Debate in Hamburg: Art Historical Studies and Mechanical Reproduction"	<i>Studies in Western Art</i> , 11, 108-117, 2004
Tetsuhiro KATO, "Serpent and Eagle: Wittkower and the Cosmological Basis of Iconology"	<i>Aesthetics of Four Elements (Earth, Air, Fire, Water), Report of Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) 2001-1004</i> , 77-87, 2005
Tetsuhiro KATO, "Rumohr and the Essence of Cookery"	<i>Humanities Review</i> , 56-1, 14-28, 2006

## **I. Native Americans in Paris:**

### **The Function of Examples in Kant's**

### ***Critique of Judgment***

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Many interesting concrete examples can be found in Kant's Critique of Judgment in spite of the "transcendental" character of its methodology. In this paper, I have shown, by paying attention to one of those examples, an Iroquoian chief, that this leader of "savage" people played an ambiguous role in Kant's book as a target of mockery laugh and healthy respect at the same time, and that the many inconsistencies hitherto often noted in Kant's texts can be explained not only from the inner logical conformity but also from the connection with outer (social-historical) context through the windows of those concrete examples.

## **II. Rumohr and *The Essence of Cookery***

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Carl Friedrich Ludwig von Rumohr (1785-1843) has long been well known in German speaking countries as the author of "The Essence of Cookery", a popular book that appeared in the Reclam Universalbibliothek series in 1885. But he is also famous, even if to the academic specialists of the history of art history, as a founder of modern positivistic method of art history. What connected these two apparently divergent branches of learning was "aesthetics", a young academic discipline which was at that time just established as a "critique of taste" by taking notice of the charm of both sophisticated manners of enlightenment and the powerful beauty uncivilized nature.

### **III. Violence and Its Overcoming in the Visual Image:**

#### **Toward New Basic Concepts of Art History**

#### **in the Age of Globalization**

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In the current situations of academic art-historical research, new "Basic Concepts" which can be available as a common global platform for the scholarly investigation are strongly demanded. Among others, the problem about the mechanism of normalization of some visual imagery called "art" is now waiting for a prompt and satisfactory solution. For, while other major tasks are already in part performed in the so-called "New Art Histories" or "Visual Cultural Studies", the task to solve the problem of aesthetic values and norms are apt to be left almost untouched by these new researches.

If art history remains an aesthetic discipline as well as a historical one, it must answer the questions concerning why some visual images are normalized as canonical and why other images are regarded inversely as dangerous. As Kant elucidates it in the Critique of Judgment, art has two contrasting or dialectical aspects: enlightenment (taste) and wild violence (genius). Therefore, I will try here to make clear the mechanism of interactions between the violence and its overcoming in the expression of visual image by making some references to concrete examples from Renaissance Italy and, old and modern Japan.

#### 1. The Savage and the Sophisticated in Kant's Critique of Judgment

##### 1) Taste

At first I would like to make sure about the notion of taste, by giving attention to Kant's Critique of Judgment and the tradition of enlightenment in the background.

This tradition of "taste" and "cultural education" is, as Hans-Georg Gadamer pointed out in his famous primary work *Truth and Method*(1), cultivated in the aesthetic ambiance of the life of Christian courtiers. This tradition, beginning in the development of the virtues or liberal arts which free citizens as well-off "aristoi" must acquire, was completed through the military and political spirit of medieval feudality, that is to say, "courage" of soldiers, "loyalty" to the king, "decency" of knights, etc. And, as time went on, military and moral functions were cut down, and there remained only their aesthetic function.

When we think about the social meaning of this disinterested aesthetic judgment, we can obtain lots of instructive information from the description of a famous book by an Italian humanist-diplomat, Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529), who explained clearly the ideal of the Renaissance courtiers.

If I remember correctly, my dear Count, it seems to me that you have repeated several times this evening that the courtier has to imbue with grace his movements, his gestures, his way of doing things and in short, his every action. ... You have said that this is very often a natural, God-given gift, and that even if it is not quite perfect it can be greatly enhanced by application and effort. ... I should like to know by what art, teaching and method they can gain this grace, both in sport and recreation that you believe are so important, ... (2).

I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely, to steer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practice in all things a certain nonchalance which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless. I am sure that grace springs especially from this, since everyone knows how difficult it is to accomplish some unusual feat perfectly, and so facility in such things excites the greatest wonder (3).

With the change of times, the taste, which belonged originally to the aristocracy, became a common sense. Then, Baltasar Gracian (1601-58), for example, who thought about how to live in a corrupt society like the Spanish one under the absolutistic kingship, placed greater importance on this social concept of taste to emphasize the indispensability of the humility and the distance from desire for pleasure.

When Kant argues in the Critique of Judgment that the judgment of taste must be disinterested, one of its backgrounds was the tradition of culture like the one stated above. For Kant, in this phase, judgment of beauty presupposes competence to repress the wild desire from flesh-and-blood body by strict self-control. Content of beauty is not the problem. The most important in this tradition is the beauty as a form produced by the control of desire.

## 2) Genius

In the Section 2 of the Critique of Judgment, the "savageness" of the behavior of a Native American is pointed out in the same sense. However, as

is easily understood if carefully read, He (I regret the name of this Iroquois Indian chief is not identified) does not play the role of barbarian villain or dirty joke. As is clear from the historical context, Kant does not simply scorn the chief's expression of his desire in contrast to the gesture of courtiers. Kant does not entirely take sides here with "enlightenment" and "culture" and reproaches absolutely the ignorance and rudeness of the "wild" native people.

At the end of 18th century, Europe was in the period of transition. The change of social structure brought by the industrial revolution generated an enormous discrepancy between the "common sense" of traditional aristocracy and the new sense of moral or sense of beauty shared by the emerging class of citizens and workers.

In the Critique of Judgment, published just after the French Revolution of 1789, Kant struggles to maintain a proper balance between these two parties. For example, as is often pointed out, the conflicting polarity between the standpoint of "taste" and the standpoint of "genius" is a typical case. Genius, as a "natural endowment", transcends the social framework of taste by evoking original and creative images intuitively and subconsciously. But, Kant rather favors taste. According to him, taste disciplines genius. Taste cuts the wing of genius and transforms it into what is sophisticated and conforming to decorum.

Thus Kant, although he basically stands to the viewpoint of taste (humanities) and reproach the barbarity of the chief who was fond of meat eating, intended to ingest the so-called avant-gardes trend of thought which is directly opposite to the traditional standpoint of taste and manners. In this text, "He" appears as a kind of "trickster". Of course, the role the "chieftain" of the Iroquois who was brought to Paris from the "wild", new world, had to play was to become the comical object of mockery and curiosity. But, "He"(the chief) gradually (unawaredly) turned to be the target of a kind of respect and envy. It was a time when the romantic view of nature emerged in the world of art and literature. The era of "Sturm und Drang" began and the longing for the undeveloped primeval nature. As it can be easily inferred from the examples just after this episode, the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) who idealized the natural state of natural person was deeply reflected here. "Natural state" had been considered until then as solitary, miserable and unhappy, or savage, poor and selfish. Rousseau defines this condition as a free and equal society before the rise of social inequality. He insisted that there used to be man's original way of life that was lost in the biased urban life.

Incidentally, in Rousseau's "Discourse on Inequality"(1755), almost the

same example as the one in Kant's Critique of Judgment can be found:  
(Here Rousseau reports about a chief of North Americans who was brought to London thirty years ago. And)

On several occasions people have brought savages to Paris, London, and other cities. They have been quick to lay out our luxuries, our riches, and all our most useful and most interesting arts. All that has never excited from them anything other than a stupid admiration, without the least reaction of covetousness. I remember among others the history of a chief of some North Americans who was brought to the English court thirty years ago. They had a thousand items paraded before his eyes in an attempt to give him a present that would please him, without finding anything that he appeared to care about. Our weapons seemed heavy and inconvenient to him, our shoes injured his feet, our clothes restricted him - he refused everything. Finally it was observed that, having taken up a woolen blanket, he seemed to get pleasure from wrapping it around his shoulders. "You will at least concede," someone said to him immediately, "the usefulness of this furnishing?" "Yes," he replied, "that seems to me almost as good as an animal skin." And he would not have even said that if he had worn them both in the rain. (4)

The ideal "natural state" is confronted here with the modern urban life. As was the case of Iroquois chief, what is the most important to these natives who were taken to London is nothing other the connection with the reality of life. And the early modern civil Society (to which Kant also belonged) began to find the new, direct and living value-consciousness in the attitude of the so-called "savage" people.

## 2. New Basic Concepts of Art History

The relation between these opposite pairs of concept now identified can be shown as a scheme like this:

Enlightenment (society, artificial beauty) / savageness (wildness, natural beauty)

Castiglione / Rousseau

Rococo (aristocracy) / Sans-culottes (bourgeois)

Institution (ancient regime) / reality (revolution)

Rationality / sensitivity

Sophistications (manner, culture) / naïveté (rustic, simpleness)

Taste / genie

Constraint (discipline, practice) / liberation (beating of wings)

As this arrangement shows, Kant was trying to ingest the direct opposite standpoints at the same time, so to say, at the entrance, Castiglione and Rousseau, and at the exit, taste and genius. The effort Kant had made to maintain the subtle balance of both sides was an extraordinary one.

Nevertheless, this delicate equilibrium was to be lost widely after Kant. The reason why that native American chief was pleased with that barbecue restaurant was not so much that the shop simply satisfied his appetite as that all the sort of meat were displayed at the storefront. Since 19th century "modern" artists were destined to devote themselves to the expression of savageness like this.

At first this trend appeared from the imagination of romantic writers and painters who described intentionally the barbarian actions of oriental Sultans. This movement stimulated the interests of Gauguin and German Expressionists in the uncivilized southern islands like Tahiti or Palau, and lead the European artists to the collection fever of African masks or American Kachina dolls in the beginning of 20th century. After that, appeared the artists who ware scorned directly by the name like Fauves, or positively declared their artistic creed as L'art brut.

These tendencies, which understand Primitiveness not as simply barbarian but as aesthetic and full of radical and primordial energy, had been reinforced also in the field of theory, in conjunction with the generic mood of degeneration spread all over Europe. For example, Nietzsche, who emphasized the primitive impulse of life in art and beauty, was its major example. However, aesthetic aspects of the wildness were not admired only one-sidedly. An anthropologist, Levi-Strauss (1908- ) (5), liberated the "pensée sauvage" from the evolutionistic prejudice, or, an art historian or cultural historian, Aby Warburg (1866-1926) discovered the "Denkraum" of symbolic behavior in the ritual of Pueblo Indians (6), and, moreover, Georges Bataille (1897-1962) read violence and eroticism in the function of art and beauty to reconcile culture with nature (7). In short, these authors have made clear the ambiguous and inextricable situation of humankind, that is to say, the "dialectic of enlightenment" between the savageness of civilized society and the civilizedness of the "savage" society.

### 3. Considerations of Concrete Examples

Now, let me examine the function of these "basic concepts" by applying them to some concrete works of visual art. For example, the Renaissance is usually considered as a process of enlightenment. Works by Giotto, Piero

della Francesca, Leonardo da Vinci, and Raffaello ... were gradually and progressively sophisticated and added the sense of grace. Interestingly, in this very process of cultivation, there often appears the violence and savageness. As Aby Warburg pointed out, the power of liberation in a "Pathosformel" which can be found for example in the engraving by Antonio Pollaiuolo also engendered dangerous emission of energy.

We can detect the similar polarity also from Japanese prints and paintings. This is a scene from a famous court romance "the Tale of Genji"(11th century). The painted scroll was produced in the 12th century, and this is said to be a typically Japanese example for the highly sophisticated expression of internal intimate feeling. But, please take a look at the next picture. This is a scene from a legend of an old temple and its foundation. Apparently, the style is different. But this picture scroll was made in almost the same time and same milieu as Genji Monogatari Scroll. The former has long been called onna-e (feminine style), and the latter, otoko-e (masculine style). And the latter, (violent, virile and energetic) style has shown a particular development. One of the offspring of this evolution of Muskelrhetorik (rhetoric of muscle) is Ukiyo-e, especially shun-ga (erotica picture), and in the contemporary manga (cartoons), similar style can be easily identified. This is a Geki-ga (graphic novel, with violent stylistic features). In contemporary Japanese Manga, the opposite and sophisticated style also can be found (shojo-manga, girl's comic, with sensitive lines and frame constructions). The famous figures by Murakami Takashi, Japanese contemporary artist (so famous for its contract price in the auction) has made a marriage (gattai: unite, incorporate) between these two styles.

#### 4. Conclusion

From the above consideration of concrete examples, we can conclude as follows:

The violence of art can be thought as not only a guarantee for the natural recovery of vital energy of humankind, but also it is a proof of human freedom. But, on the other hand, the complete and absolute liberty of art is, naturally, also impossible, because such a freedom would create a sharp conflict with the morals of civil life. If we do not adopt the very romanticist strategy (which would like to realize the perfect liberty of human feeling outside the real world, such as a dream, myth or nostalgia), we must seek for another and better procedure to incorporate artistic fiction smoothly into the real world.

After all, we can conclude, art is an unlimited challenge to the existing actual violence in the real world. By securing the closest coordination

between these two polar points (violence and civilization), art tries to extract, criticize and fight against the real, hard and concrete violence, or the trickier one, sometimes hiding cunningly behind the sophisticated look of civilization.

Therefore I believe we must not forget the significance of these "basic concepts" as a framework of thinking when we think over the current situations of contemporary or traditional or any other art from the global viewpoint.

#### Notes

- (1) Gadamer, H. -G.: *Truth and Method*, New York: Continuum, 1975.
- (2) Castiglione, B.: *The courtier*. London; et al.: Penguin Books, 1976, 1-24, p.65.
- (3) Castiglione, B.: *ibid.* London; New York: Penguin Books, 1976, 1-26, p.67.
- (4) Rousseau, J. -J.: *A Discourse on Inequality*. Harmondsworth; New York: Penguin Books, 1984, p.169.
- (5) Levi-Strauss, C.: *The savage mind*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.
- (6) Warburg, A.: *Images from the region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- (7) Bataille, G.: *Eroticism*. London: Marion Boyars, 1987.

## **IV. Serpent and Eagle: Wittkower and the Cosmological Basis of Iconology**

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In the fourth number of the second volume of *The Journal of the Warburg Institutes* (April 1939) appeared two articles: "A Lecture on Serpent Ritual" by Aby Warburg who was the founder of this institute, and "Eagle and Serpent, "A Study in the Migration of Symbols" by Rudolf Wittkower, the editor of this journal. Why these two papers concerning the images in "New World" were simultaneously published in this bulletin of the research institute for (western) classical tradition of culture? Here is explained the cosmological basis of iconology which can be seen from Wittkower's texts.

## **V. Panofsky and the Facsimile Debate in Hamburg:**

### **Art Historical Studies and Mechanical Reproduction**

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In the research of art history, mechanical reproduction is something more than a technical tool. One can safely say that it is rather a philosophical problem that transcends the practical level of instrument. This paper tries to elucidate the theoretical background of this problem by paying attention to Panofsky's statement in the so-called "Hamburger facsimile debate" (1929-30). According to Panofsky, reproduction can be positively valued in the praxis of art history as long as it generates transparent, mechanical and inorganic trace.

## **VI. Recovery of Reproduction:**

### **Overcoming the Myth of Originality**

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(This is written originally as a prefatory essay for the 11th volume of the academic magazine "Seiyō Bijutsu Kenkyū [Studies in Western Art]". This volume features "Originality and Reproduction".) Reproduction had been often negatively valued under the so-called "Genius Aesthetics" which was established only after the beginning of modern times and had given top priority to the originality in fine arts. However, recently, as aesthetics has been historically relativised, and because of the coming of the "time of copy without original", changes in such a value judgment are now taking place. Faced with such recent substantial changes, this volume made an attempt to get closer to the historical reality by putting the positive aspects of the production or reception of reproductions, which have been hitherto treated often from negative standpoint, into the foreground.

## **VII. On Warburg's Maxim: Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail**

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In 1925 Warburg wrote a famous maxim "Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail (God dwells in detail)" in a note for a lecture on the significance of classical antiquity in the change of styles in the art of Italian early Renaissance. However, and regrettably under the present circumstances, it cannot be determined whether he is the first original creator of this dictum. In this paper, therefore, the author tries to make clear the relation of this maxim to his method of art history or cultural studies, especially from the viewpoint of positivistic theory of learning.

## VIII. Aby Warburg and the Anthropological Study of Art

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Aby Warburg (1866-1929), a Hamburg-born art historian submitted his dissertation on Botticelli to the University of Strasbourg in 1895; he then went across the Atlantic to the United States of America and stayed there until 1896. There he visited several Native American reserves in New Mexico and Arizona, and took a lot of pictures of the rituals he saw there. He then brought back to Hamburg many items he had bought there such as *Kachina* dolls. Warburg himself had no intention to publish the result of this "field research" as a study of art history.

The evolutionist premises betrayed in his work are incontestably outdated by our standard. Nevertheless, his report of this journey still today poses interesting problems as follows:

1. How can these visual images from a pre-modern, non-European cultural world be scientifically approached through our own frames of reference?
2. Can these images be called "art" and regarded as objects of "art studies"?
3. What roles can the academic discipline 'aesthetics' play in our present-day approach to these "art works"?

To give some tentative answers to these problems, I will give in this paper an outline of his journey and his lecture on it, and then sketch out the essential features of Warburg's achievements. By doing so, I would like to demonstrate the current significances and limitations of his psychological history ('psycho-history') of culture.

### 1. Journey to the 'Frontier'

In September 1895 Warburg embarked on the *Fürst Bismarck* for New York to attend the wedding of his brother Paul <sup>1</sup>. After the ceremony, the young art historian, full of curiosity and aspiration for romantic adventure, visited the Smithsonian Institute in Washington and other famous museums and libraries, and got a lot of information about the Native Americans from the most eminent cultural anthropologists and archeologists there, including Franz Boas, James Mooney, Frank Hamilton Cushing, J.W. Fewkes and James Powel <sup>2</sup>. His interest in Native American art had been aroused by some members of the staff at the Institute whom he had met on board the *Fürst Bismarck*. But Aby had been interested in the rituals of these 'primitive' peoples and the symbolism of gesture found there, even before his

journey to America. He was a zealous listener to lectures given by Hermann Usener, a religious anthropologist at the University of Bonn. He also felt a strong repulsion toward the contemporary mainstream art historians who only repeated praises of old masters of the Italian Renaissance. For instance, he once wrote:

Moreover, I had acquired an honest disgust of aestheticising art history. The formal approach to the image - devoid of understanding of its biological necessity as a product between religion and art - ... appeared to me to lead merely to barren word-mongering..."<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, he lived in an age when such artists as Gauguin, and later Picasso, began to notice the expressionistic charm of the 'primitive' art. August Macke and Emile Nolde, painters of German Expressionism at that time, produced paintings and drawings of Native Americans and of their famous dolls <sup>4</sup>.

Now in the middle of November, Aby, furnished with all necessary information from the museums and libraries on the East Coast, departed for Santa Fe via Chicago and Denver. After staying in New Mexico for a while, he visited San Francisco and there he had a vague plan to sail across the Pacific Ocean to Japan <sup>5</sup>. But, much to our regret, this plan was not realized. Until he left America in May 1896, he spent almost his entire time observing various religious rituals of the Navahos and Pueblos in New Mexico and Arizona.

Aby donated the materials he had collected during his six-month stay in the United States to the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology (Hamburgisches Museum für Völkerkunde) soon after he came home <sup>6</sup>. In the next year (1897), he got married to Mary Hertz, an artist whom Aby met in Florence. The new couple settled in Florence, and Aby was devoted to the study of the function of image in Florentine bourgeois society in the Medicean era. Yet it was not until April 21st 1923, 27 years after he came back to Europe, that the report on his research in America was first delivered to an audience (even if informally).

The presentation, titled "Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America," was held in a mental clinic "Belle Vue," located in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland <sup>7</sup>. Warburg had suffered from strong anxiety and obsessions since the First World War. In April 1921 he came under the care of Ludwig Binswanger, who was an assistant to C.G Jung and would later become famous for his "*Daseinsanalyse*", the psychoanalytical method he invented, deriving inspiration from Martin Heidegger's philosophy. In 1923

Warburg, convinced of his own recovery, proposed to deliver an academic lecture before the doctors and patients in the hospital. He intended to demonstrate that he could resume a normal life as an academic. This proposal was accepted and he talked about his experiences and observations of 27 years ago, showing more than 50 slides.

## 2. The Lecture on the Serpent Ritual

The lecture was composed roughly of three parts. First, the symbolic function of the serpent image found in the local applied arts, such as utensils and dwellings; second, the Native Americans' "masked dance" which Warburg had actually watched there; third, the symbolic signification of the snake as an image-language in European culture.

In the first part, Warburg describes the symbolic significations of the design of *Kachina* dolls, clay vessels, and the peculiar terraced houses, while explaining the Native Americans' basic life style, the form of their religion (totemism), and their harsh living environment <sup>8</sup>. "*Kachina* dolls" are meant to represent faithfully the divine ancestral spirits. And what is depicted on the earthenware for conveying and storing precious water in a dry land is not a mere pattern. It is, according to Warburg, a kind of "hieroglyph," which decomposes and reconstructs the images of the serpent (which is believed to be a sacred animal having the power to bring rain because of its lightning-like shape), and the image of the bird (which is not only a totem, but also has much to do with funeral rituals). Also on the altar in the *kiva*, the most sacred subterranean prayer room, the serpent is depicted in the shape of lightning as the supreme object of their worship.

What attracted Warburg's interest most, however, was the masked dance. He describes the details of the "antelope dance," which he saw in San Ildefonso, near Santa Fe <sup>9</sup>, and the "*humiskachina* dance," a dance of praying for a good harvest which he saw in the rock village of Oraibi <sup>10</sup>. And then he reports on all the ceremonies of Walpi <sup>11</sup> although he did not in fact observe all of them.

As Warburg says in the second part of his lecture, the antelope dance is an agricultural ritual dedicated to the antelope as the animal that brings water from melted snow, and in the *humiskachina* dance, too, people also pray for rain and fertility. Finally, the serpent ceremonies in Walpi are the most important annual event for the Hopi people. This is also basically a ritual to seek rain, where people supplicate heaven for thunderstorms just before the harvest. In these unique ceremonies, neither is the movement of snakes imitated nor are masks used, but, instead, live poisonous rattlesnakes are brought into the ritual. At the climax of the ritual they are dispatched to the

plains as messengers <sup>12</sup>.

In the last part of the lecture, Warburg changes the topic suddenly to the world of Greek antiquity, from which European culture sprang <sup>13</sup>. He suggests that only the Native Americans do not conduct savage rituals. The orgiastic cult of Dionysus is brought to his audience's attention at the outset of the last part of his lecture. In these rituals, frantic Maenads dance with snakes in their hands. According to Warburg, snakes are, at the same time, both the symbol of the destroying force of the underworld and that of immortality and rebirth, as is similarly found in the image of Asclepius, the ancient god of healing. Incidentally, Asclepius becomes the Serpent Bearer and stands over Scorpio <sup>14</sup>. This god of healing becomes, so to speak, a totem for those who were born in October.

Needless to say, Christianity condemned most uncompromisingly such a pagan idolatry. The Serpent was indeed expelled from the Garden of Eden. But, as Warburg insists, this pagan cult of the evil symbols survives also in the Christian world <sup>15</sup>. For example, in medieval theology, the image of a serpent is found in the Crucifixion because of its typological significance.

What Warburg wished to make clear in these analyses is the relationship between the process of civilization and images <sup>16</sup>. According to him, among Pueblo Indians symbols, gestures, and masks in their rituals represent the connection between nature and man. Pueblo Indian society is thought to be in the process of transition into civilization, in the sense that the people understand the causal relationship between natural phenomena and human activity, not as a scientific fact, but only in terms of spiritualized symbolism. But their apprehension of nature is not so sophisticated as to be called a systematic myth or science, which must be told in a completely abstract language. They have not yet found a way to express their world-view rationally, as they are still governed by the substantial power of imagery.

However (and here begins Warburg's unique way of thinking), Warburg argues that such rationalization or civilization through the abstract operation of symbols is, in fact, never achieved in a simple and conclusive manner <sup>17</sup>. The fact that the pagan iconography has survived into the Christian world testifies to this positively. Of course, Warburg admits the importance of the role of enlightenment in the life and history of mankind. This lecture itself was intended, above all, to prove his recovery, and consequently to demonstrate the need to overcome anxiety and fear by reason. Nevertheless, he expresses, at the end of this lecture, an ambivalent fear toward the modern American Prometheus and Icarus, i.e. Franklin and the Wright brothers, who apparently conquered nature and substituted science and technology for the serpent-worship <sup>18</sup>. Thus he insists that the *Denkraum*,

the space for symbolic thinking where the relation of human beings and their environment is understood in terms of concrete and organic shapes, is being destroyed by modern technology and abstract, rationalist education, and that this change helps produce another kind of anxiety.

### 3. Current Significance of Warburg's Method

Warburg was not alone in taking note of the importance of imagery as the 'language' of culture in the non-European world. Other works sharing the same idea include such substantial studies as Franz Kugler's *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* <sup>19</sup>, Dagobert Frey's *Grundlegung für Vergleichende Kunstwissenschaft* <sup>20</sup>, and Andre Malraux's *musée imaginaire* <sup>21</sup>. Or, if we limit our scope to the pre-Columbian culture, George Kubler's *Esthetic recognition of ancient American art* <sup>22</sup>, and Rudolf Wittkower's *Allegory and the migration of symbols* <sup>23</sup> must not be forgotten. Anthropological experts such as George Boas <sup>24</sup> and Claude Levi-Strauss <sup>25</sup> have also carried out not a few important investigations.

It cannot be stressed enough, however, that Warburg's work is decisively different from that of these scholars. In Warburg's iconology, what is of prime importance is cultural context. As I have already said, he had a strong antipathy to aestheticised art history. He never allowed painters aesthetic license even when he dealt with Italian Renaissance art. He treated paintings, as artifacts on a par with furniture, wallpaper, or tapestry, as "commodities," which are produced for the needs of consumers <sup>26</sup>. But his basic stance on art's social context is not a so-called materialistic determinism. His research system is rather characterized as an approach to the mentality of various people-groups from a historical point of view. He called his own method "psychology of style" or "historical psychology." No matter what he studied – whether Botticelli or Ghirlandaio, or whether the mask of *Kachina* dance or medieval astrological manuscripts – his main concern was always the 'mental' effect of certain images on the human soul. Above all, his analysis of the ambivalent roles those images play when anxiety about the irrational is rationalized in the process of civilization deserves our attention, for his work can be considered as the forerunner of the "dialectics of enlightenment" of the Frankfurter School of Sociology <sup>27</sup>. Pueblo people were at that time already 'civilized,' and the government of the United States had made the education of their children compulsory. But, Warburg recognized lightning in the shape of a snake in many of the pictures that he asked schoolchildren to draw <sup>28</sup>. And he did not overlook the fact that, though the new snake that caught thunder (electric wire) brought electricity into their houses, such civilization was also accompanied by a new anxiety

caused by the "loss of distance" <sup>29</sup>. Overcoming anxiety by rationalization was also the most serious problem for himself. It was, however, clearly beyond his power to solve the problem of ambiguity, which he knew existed in the study of social development and civilization, or to elucidate the ambivalent effects of image and its function as a symbolic form. It would, rather, plunge him into another realm of a new anthropological study of art in the sense that such study should treat the problem of the schizophrenic characteristics of culture.

Of course Warburg's method has its limitations, a fatally 'modern' problem. For example, like most contemporary art historians, he made much of classical art. However, in his case, it was not because classical art had any aesthetic value. It was because it had succeeded in controlling primitive emotions <sup>30</sup>. Yet we must not overemphasize the fact that Warburg set out to analyze "*Kachina*" dolls, motivated by the contemporary enthusiasm for the expressionistic character of primitive arts. Furthermore, he was an evolutionist who associated Athens and Oraibi linearly in historical terms. He believed in the continuity of the primitive and the prehistoric <sup>31</sup>. Like an anthropologist, he went on a series of field research-trips, but what he discovered was just what he had wanted to see <sup>32</sup>. He believed that the pagan rituals, such as those observed in Oraibi, had been kept frozen as a specimen of ancient pagan culture as if time had stopped, like the relics of Pompeii.

But what is at issue here is not so much the defect of, as the present-day significance of Warburg's method. To sum up, the following three points are the main features of his achievements: first, he put forward a new, comprehensive and anthropological approach, by which he boldly uncovered the hitherto hidden facts which the symbol systems of the new and the old world held in common. Second, he tried to go beyond the parameter of the fine arts set by modern aestheticians who believed in art's autonomy, and to grasp art in the context of "culture." And third, he stepped into the field of mental mechanism in the production and the circulation of images, which deals with such issues as overcoming anxiety and controlling crude emotions.

#### 4. Conclusion

As I said earlier, Warburg had a plan to visit Japan. In his famous picture atlas "*Mnemosyne*", we find photographs of the scene of *HARAKIRI* and the sculpture of a thinking Buddha. If he had been to Japan, he might have met with some bankers. And then? Would he have discovered another "Greece" in Nara, as did Fenollosa and Okakura? He could also have found some new aspects of *Ukiyo-e* prints, and possibly have visited Okinawa or Ainu as he

fled from the snobbism of the East Coast...?

I should not indulge in fantasy now, but concentrate on how we can make use of Warburg's method today.

I think Warburg's journey to America and his report on it makes us realize the limitations of modern European aesthetics, which has prioritized those forms of art whose aesthetic function is dominant in society. But this attitude certainly betrays a kind of bias and abstraction. Moreover, this particular school of aesthetics has had the power to compel other art forms to assimilate into fine arts. In this sense, the name "art" might be unnecessary henceforth. But, it is not only the aesthetic function of intuitive form that has been privileged in the European world, as is seen in the history of visual culture. Visual cultures all over the world (including Europe) have relied not only on the formal aspects of the function of "art" but also on its other aspects, such as communication and the control of mentality, as Warburg pointed out. Such an aesthetic function, in the wider sense of the word, will play various roles in society as long as we invent things and concepts. It is indeed possible that aesthetes will again deploy the abstraction of this aesthetic function excessively in future. I believe, however, that the role of aesthetics in the new century is to offer a critical observation and respond quickly to such a foreseeable situation.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For Warburg's Travel to the United State, cf. [see] Saxl 1992; Gombrich 1986: 88-92; Raulff 1988; Forster 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Guidi 1998: 31.

<sup>3</sup> Gombrich 1986: 88f.

<sup>4</sup> For the relation between German Expressionists, Gauguin, Picasso and so-called "primitive" art, cf. Goldwater 1938; Wichmann 1972; Rubin 1984; Raulff 1988: 90f.

<sup>5</sup> Gombrich 1986: 91f.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Zwernemann 1984: Kat.Nr.298,300,301,302.

<sup>7</sup> For his **cure** in Kreuzlingen and his lecture on the Serpent Ritual, cf. Gombrich 1986: 216-227; Diers 1979; Raulff 1988.

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- <sup>8</sup> Warburg 1988: 10-25.  
<sup>9</sup> Warburg 1988: 25-27.  
<sup>10</sup> Warburg 1988: 28-40.  
<sup>11</sup> Warburg 1988: 40-43.  
<sup>12</sup> Warburg 1988: 41.  
<sup>13</sup> Warburg 1988: 44-50.  
<sup>14</sup> Warburg 1988: 49.  
<sup>15</sup> Warburg 1988: 50-54.  
<sup>16</sup> Warburg 1988: 25, 54f.  
<sup>17</sup> Warburg 1988: 55-59.  
<sup>18</sup> Warburg 1988: 59.  
<sup>19</sup> Kugler 1841-42.  
<sup>20</sup> Frey 1949.  
<sup>21</sup> Malraux 1947.  
<sup>22</sup> Kubler 1991.  
<sup>23</sup> Wittkower 1977.  
<sup>24</sup> Boas 1960.  
<sup>25</sup> Lévi-Strauss 1958; 1962.  
<sup>26</sup> Cf. z.B. Warburg 1992: 165-171.  
<sup>27</sup> For the relation of Warburg to the Frankfurt School of Sociology, cf. Diers 1992.  
<sup>28</sup> Warburg 1988: 1,56.  
<sup>29</sup> Warburg 1988: 57-59.  
<sup>30</sup> Warburg 1992: 125-130; Gombrich 1986: 177-185,229-238.  
<sup>31</sup> Cf. Gombrich 1986: 91.  
<sup>32</sup> Gombrich 1986: 91.