The Edgar Wind Journal

ISSN 2785-2903

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Gemma Cornetti

Contacts
info@edgarwindjournal.eu
submissions@edgarwindjournal.eu

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Introduction: Edgar Wind and a New Journal

Fabio Tononi and Bernardino Branca

This issue inaugurates the Edgar Wind Journal, which is dedicated to the works and research interests of the historian and theorist of art and culture Edgar Wind (1900–1971). The foundation of a journal is always a challenge, entailing a declaration of intent. Our belief is that fifty years after his death, Wind's remarkable achievements deserve new attention. Wind explored a variety of themes (for example the afterlife of antiquity, the role of symbols in art, and portraiture), historical figures (for example Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Ronald Brooks Kitaj), and disciplines, contributing to the study of art history, cultural history, and the history of science.¹ Wind’s opus requires further study in connection to his cultural context and in light of recent advancements and methodologies in the study of images and cultural history.²


Wind’s intellectual biography reveals an articulate and multidisciplinary scholarly career, which was the result of extensive and diverse reading, travel, and intellectual encounters. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the most significant aspects of Wind’s life.

In 1918, Wind enrolled at the University of Berlin, where he studied classics, philosophy, and art history under the supervision of Adolf Goldschmidt. There, he also attended the lectures of the Protestant theologian and social historian Ernst Troeltsch and the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer. On one occasion, Wind travelled to Munich to attend a lecture on Rembrandt delivered by Heinrich Wölfflin.

In 1919, Wind spent a term at the University of Freiburg, where he attended the lectures of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and another term at the University of Vienna, where he attended those of Julius von Schlosser, Josef Strzygowski, and Max Dvořák. In the same year, Wind moved on to the University of Hamburg, where he began writing his dissertation under the supervision of Erwin Panofsky and Cassirer, who had become a professor at that university. In 1922, Wind obtained his doctorate with a thesis titled "Ästhetischer und kunstwissenschaftlicher Gegenstand: ein Beitrag zur Methodologie der Kunstgeschichte," examined by Panofsky and Cassirer. Wind published only a portion of his dissertation. After achieving his doctorate, Wind returned to Berlin and set to work preparing the paper required for his habilitation.

In 1924, Wind met Aby Warburg for the first time in Hamburg, after Warburg had been decommissioned by the Kreuzlingen clinic. In March, Wind left for the United States, where he remained until 1927. In 1925, Wind was appointed Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he remained for two years.


During this time, he acquired knowledge of and an interest in the American tradition of pragmatist philosophy. This had a considerable effect upon his later reflections, including his readings of the works of Charles Sanders Peirce.

In 1927, Wind returned to Hamburg, where he met Warburg for a second time. Warburg was so impressed by Wind that he stated: ‘Ich vergesse immer daß Sie [Wind] eingeschulter Kunsthistoriker sind. Sie haben es ja so nett mit dem Denken’ (‘I always forget that you are a trained art historian. You know how to think so nicely’). At the end of 1927, Wind became Warburg’s personal research assistant at the Bibliothek Warburg. Although Warburg died two years later, the relationship played a decisive role in Wind’s intellectual path.

In 1937, Wind and Rudolf Wittkower became founding editors of the Journal of the Warburg Institute, in which Wind published his first iconographical studies of Renaissance
works of art. In 1939, Wind approved the renaming of the journal to the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes and the accession of T.S.R. Boase and Anthony Blunt to its board of editors. Wind continued to work as an editor of and contributor to the journal until 1942.

In 1955, Wind was appointed Professorial Fellow at Trinity College, University of Oxford. Here, he fulfilled the difficult task of establishing a new discipline — art history — in a conservative institution. In order to promote a cultural and historical approach to the study of art, distinct from the curatorial perspective of the Ashmolean Museum, Wind established a new department with its own research library. He gathered a noteworthy collection of books which, together with his own personal library, subsequently became the Wind Reading Room in the Sackler Library. The artist Ronald B. Kitaj, who studied at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Arts from 1958 to 1961, was one of those who attended and was inspired by Wind’s lectures at the University of Oxford. Kitaj showed Wind his drawings and was in turn introduced by Wind to Warburg’s serpent ritual lecture.


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11 See Thomas, *Edgar Wind and Modern Art*.


In 1971, he published a harsh review of Ernst Gombrich’s *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*. This was his last, definitive tribute to Warburg, who was perhaps the main source of inspiration of his research.

The significance of Wind’s intellectual legacy still requires study. Above all, the investigation into his archive – which contains unpublished texts of his courses, notes, projects and a very important correspondence – is an important task that scholars should undertake today. The Edgar Wind Journal wishes to make initial contributions in this direction.

To this end, this issue presents five articles that are early explorations of Wind’s works and research interests from different perspectives. The first is Bernardino Branca’s ‘“The Giordano Bruno Problem”: Edgar Wind’s 1938 Letter to Frances Yates’, which analyses the letter that Wind sent to Frances Yates in September 1938. Branca’s interpretation of what Wind says in this letter focuses on the relationship between Bruno’s thought and Warburg’s theme of the survival of antiquity and on what Wind perceived to be Bruno’s extraneousness to the methodology of seventeenth century science. The full transcript of the letter is in the appendix of the article. This letter offers important insight into Wind’s perspective on Bruno and the Italian Renaissance, and the influence that the letter had on Yates’ subsequent works on Bruno.

In the second article, titled ‘On Form: Wind and Warburg Examined’, Guido Boffi asks the following question: ‘what is the issue of the artwork’s form?’. Boffi addresses this question by referring to the works of Wind and Warburg. Boffi’s argument is that, for both Wind and Warburg ‘the artwork reveals itself as the connection along time between the deep background (mythical-energetic), and its phenomenality, in which it materializes but can never be exhausted’. From this perspective, ‘the form is the differential between being and a configuring, expressive force’.

The third article, titled ‘Time and Space in Dante’s Inferno: The Invention of Dante’s Clock’, is by Gioachino Chiarini, who proposes a remapping of the movements and time of Dante and Virgil in Hell. Chiarini does so by focusing on the literary imagery of astronomic descriptions in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, an approach inspired by that of Warburg and Wind.

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In the fourth article, titled ‘Freedom and Exile: Edgar Wind and the Congress for Cultural Freedom’, Ben Thomas explores Wind’s concept of freedom by focusing on Wind’s involvement in cultural events organised by the Congress for Cultural Freedom between 1952 and 1953. As Thomas points out, Wind’s definition of freedom (that is, ‘the breaking up of habitus’) contrasts to Martin Heidegger’s concept of ‘dwelling’ and reflects Theodor Adorno’s idea on the impossibility of dwelling, referring to that specific time.

In the fifth article, titled ‘The Problem of the Unfinished and the Shaping of the Canon of Finiteness in the Italian Renaissance’, Fabio Tononi explores one of the most important research interests of Edgar Wind – the Italian Renaissance – from an aesthetic perspective. Particularly, Tononi focuses on the phenomenon of the unfinished in the visual arts. In doing so, he proposes the existence of the canon of finiteness, that is, a canon that establishes when a work of art is finished.

Finally, the editors would like to thank the editorial team, composed of Jaynie Anderson, Andrew Benjamin, Guido Boffi, Peter Burke, Monica Centanni, Gioachino Chiarini, Claudia Cieri Via, Georges Didi-Huberman, Roberto Diodato, Astrid Erll, Claire Farago, David Freedberg, Maurizio Ghelardi, Martina Mazzotta, W. J. T. Mitchell, C. Oliver O’Donnell, Arturo Carlo Ottaviano Quintavalle, Giulia Maria Paoletti, Spyros Papapetros, Robert Pawlik, Donald Preziosi, Silvia Ronchey, Pablo Schneider, Elizabeth Sears, Salvatore Settis, Carlo Severi, Daniel Sherer, Larry A. Silver, Michael P. Steinberg, Ianick Takaes de Oliveira, Ben Thomas, Stéphane Toussaint, Sigrid Weigel, Christopher Wood, and Valentina Zaffino.

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