The Edgar Wind Journal

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Animated Accessories or Poetical Trappings? Botticelli's *Primavera* Among Walter Pater, Aby Warburg and Edgar Wind

Robert Pawlik

Abstract

This paper focuses on two readings of Botticelli's "Primavera": firstly, one advanced by German art historian Aby Warburg in his 1893 doctoral dissertation; and secondly, one that was presented over sixty years later by a philosopher and a member of Warburg's circle Edgar Wind in his "Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance". Discussion of both readings is placed against the background of Walter Pater's 1870 essay on Sandro Botticelli – a milestone in the history of rediscovery of the Florentine master after 300 hundred years of oblivion. Bringing Walter Pater to the fore exposes the polemical dimension of Warburg's dissertation as well as its entanglement in the debates on the nature of the Renaissance as the turning point towards the modern era. But it also helps to see more clearly the respective positions of Aby Warburg and Edgar Wind.

Keywords

Sandro Botticelli; *Primavera*; Walter Pater; Aby Warburg; Edgar Wind; Renaissance; modernity; epicureanism; Neoplatonism

Edgar Wind's words are as true today as when they were written: Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* 'has remained a riddle' (PM, 114).[1] Despite more than one hundred years of scholarly scrutiny, surprisingly little has been established about this painting with absolute certainty. The date and circumstances of its commission, and even its original location remain unresolved.[2] Controversy persists regarding the identity of the figures populating the imaginary garden[3] and the literary sources of the painting. Consequently, there can be

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[1] Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London 1958, p. 114. [Hereinafter 'PM']

[2] Forty years after Botticelli's death, Giorgio Vasari claimed that he saw in Duke Cosimo's villa in Castello the painting depicting 'Venus, the symbol of Spring, being adorned with flowers by the Graces' (a clearly inaccurate description of the painting) together with the *The Birth of Venus*. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, translated with an introduction and notes by J. Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, Oxford 1991, p. 225. This view was complicated by Webster Smith, 'On the Original Location of the *Primavera*', *The Art Bulletin*, 1 (1975) p. 31–40 and John Shearman, 'The Collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici', *The Burlington Magazine*, 117 (1975), p. 12–27.

[3] See, e.g., Rab Hatfield, *Some Misidentifications in and of Works by Botticelli*, [In:] *Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research*, (ed.) Rab Hatfield, Florence: Syracuse University Press 2009. pp. 7–61.

no consensus about its meaning.[4] Significantly, no less mystery surrounds the life and fate of Botticelli himself. Once one of the most successful artists in Lorenzo de 'Medici's circle, by the end of his life Botticelli's reputation had fallen into oblivion. For three centuries, Botticelli almost completely disappeared from collective memory and, in the opinion of Michael Levey, 'probably no other great painter, so far, has endured so long a period of neglect'.[5]

Less enigmatic, however, is the history of Botticelli's rediscovery and the rise of *Primavera* to its status as the emblem of Florentine Renaissance art. A major step towards the reversal of Botticelli's fortune was taken in Victorian England.[6] Thanks to such writers as Algernon Swinburn, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater, Botticelli's works became admired and intensely studied. This paper focuses on three episodes from the rich history of Botticelli's rediscovery and *Primavera*'s reception. The first regards the Oxford don and writer Walter Pater. His essay 'A fragment on Sandro Botticelli', published in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1870, and three years later included in the immensely influential *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*,[7] was a watershed moment in the rediscovery of Botticelli. Pater envisaged Botticelli as a herald of modernity and a painter of a sorrowful, tender mood expressed especially in the faces of his Madonnas. A remarkable step in the academic reception of *Primavera* was made by German cultural historian Aby Warburg, who devoted his 1893 doctoral dissertation to two mythological paintings of Sandro: *Primavera* and *The*

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[4] On recent different readings of the *Primavera*, see, e.g., Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, Princeton 1992, Horst Bredekamp, *Sandro Botticelli La Primavera. Florenz als Garten der Venus*, Verlag: Fischer - Fischer kunststück, Frankfurt a. M 1993; Frank Zöllner, Zu den Quellen und zur Ikonographie von Sandro Botticellis *Primavera*, Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte, 50 (1997), pp. 131–157, pp. 357–366; Claudia Villa, 'Per una lettura della *Primavera*. Mercurio 'retrogrado' e la Retorica nella bottega di Botticelli', Strumenti critici*, Rivista quadrimestrale di cultura e critica letteraria* 1(1998), pp. 1–28; Giovanni Reale, *Botticelli. La 'Primavera' o le 'Nozze di Filologia e Mercurio'? Rilettura di carattere filosofico ed ermeneutico del capolavoro di Botticelli con la prima presentazione analitica dei personaggi e dei particolari simbolici*, Rimini, Idea Libri 2001.

[5] Michael Levey, 'Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 3–4 (1960), p. 291.

[6] On the history of the reception of Botticelli, see, e.g., Anthony Bertram, 'The English Discovery of Botticelli', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 98 (1950), p. 468–484. Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collecting in England and France*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press 1976; Michael Levy, *Botticelli and Nineteenth Century England*, op. cit., Frank Kermode, *Botticelli Recovered*, [in:] Frank Kermode, *Forms of Attention*, Chicago 1985, pp. 3–31; Gail S. Weinberg, 'Ruskin, Pater, and the Rediscovery of Botticelli', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 129, no. 1006, (1987), pp. 25–27; Paul Tucker, *'Reanimate Greek': Pater and Ruskin on Botticelli*, [in:] *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins and Carolyn Williams (eds), Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002, pp. 119–132, 320–323; Jeremy Norman Melius, 'Art History and the Invention of Botticelli', (PhD thesis), Berkeley, University of California 2010; John Coates, 'Variations on the Oxford Temper: Swinburne, Pater and Botticelli', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol. 40 no. 3, (1997), pp. 260–274; Mark Evans (red.), *Botticelli Reimagined*, London 2016; Ana Debenedetti and Caroline Elam (eds), *Botticelli Past and Present*, London 2019.

[7] Walter Pater, 'A Fragment on Sandro Botticelli', *The Fortnightly Review*, August (1870), pp. 155–160, then in Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, London 1873*,* in the second edition of 1877, retitled 'The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry'. The standard edition is Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, the 1893 text, edited with textual and explanatory notes by Donald L. Hill (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). [Hereinafter 'R'].

Birth of Venus.[8] Also, in his case, popular interest in Botticelli was driven by investigations into the circumstances of the rise of the modern world, which in Warburg's view was studied in its correlation with the revival of pagan antiquity. However, for the Hamburg scholar, *Primavera* is, at the same time, a painting deeply steeped in the traditional culture of Florence. The third stage regards Edgar Wind, another Oxford professor who was also a member of Warburg's circle and, in his own opinion, Warburg's heir. More than sixty years after Warburg's dissertation, Wind published his opus vitae, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*. At the very heart of the book he gave his solution to the riddle of Botticelli's *Spring*, captured in terms of a learned allegory of the Neoplatonic theory of love.

In this paper, I want to compare Warburg's and Wind's readings of *Primavera*. Bringing Walter Pater to the fore, however, allows us to see both positions more clearly, as well as expose another factor of Botticelli's reception: its entanglement in the debates on the Renaissance – that is, on the beginning of modernity as an epoch.

I

Walter Pater launched his career with a book on the Renaissance.[9] Together with Michelet and Burckhardt, he shaped the image of this epoch as a moment of fundamental cultural reorientation and a turn towards the modern era.[10] At the same time, the book was a manifesto of a new mode of criticism called 'aesthetic criticism', in which Pater advocated shifting critical attention from objective standards of judgement to the subjective sensation of pleasure, in this way, making delight the key to appreciation of a work of art. In the preface to his book, he famously posed a number of questions that the aesthetic critic should put to himself: 'What is this picture […] to me? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure?' (R, xx).

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[8] Aby Warburg, *Sandro Botticellis Geburt der 'Venus' und 'Frühling': eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellungen von der Antike in der italienischen Frührenaissance*, Hamburg-Leipzig 1893. [Aby Warburg, *Sandro Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' and 'Spring': An Examination of Concepts of Antiquity in the Italian Early Renaissance*, [in:] Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, Translated by David Britt. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities 1999, pp. 189–156. [Hereinafter 'SBG']

[9] On Walter Pater, see, e.g., Harold Bloom, 'Water Pater: The Intoxication of Belatedness', *Yale French Studies*, no. 50, (1974), pp. 163–189; Wolfgang Iser, *Walter Pater: The Aesthetic Moment*, trans. David Henry Wilson, Cambridge. Cambridge University Press 1987.

[10] See, e.g., Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1948, pp. 239–240; William H. Sullivan, 'Four Early Studies from Pater's *The Renaissance: The Aesthetics for a Humanist Myth*', *The Victorian Newsletter* No. 40 (Fall): (1971), pp. 1–7; Richard S. Lyons, 'The 'Complex, Many-Sided' Unity of The Renaissance', *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, vol. 12, no. 4, (1972), pp. 765–81; Paul Barolsky, 'Walter Pater's Renaissance', *Virginia Quarterly Review* 58.2 (1982), pp. 208–220; Jeffrey Wallen, 'Alive in the Grave: Walter Pater's Renaissance', *ELH*, vol. 66, no. 4, (1999), pp. 1033–1051.

What kind of pleasure attracted the Victorian writer to Botticelli, this 'secondary painter' (R, 48) 'little known in the last century'? (R, 39). It is a peculiar sentiment, a mood of melancholy with which he infused his characters. In order to explain this mood, Pater advanced an intricate and complex argument that starts with an excursus on a painting which, by the authority of Vasari, had been ascribed to Botticelli, but which today is attributed to Francesco Botticini (1446–1498). This painting, *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1475–1477) (Figure 1), was an altarpiece for a chapel in the no-longer-extant church of San Pietro Maggiore in Florence. It represented a monumental vision of heaven with Christ crowning the Virgin Mary[11] and also features a portrait of its donor, Matteo Palmieri (1406–1475), a politician and poet from the circle of Lorenzo de 'Medici. Pater admits that Botticelli's painting may have been only one of the *Glorias*, that is, a composition depicting 'the various forms of beatified existence' (R, 42), yet what distinguishes it from the conventional *Gloria* is its heretical reputation. Again, following Vasari's account, Pater admits that the painting 'had the credit or discredit of attracting some shadow of ecclesiastical censure' (R, 42). It is worthwhile to quote Vasari in extenso:

> In the church of San Pietro Maggiore, at the side door, he painted a panel for Matteo Palmieri with a vast number of figures depicting the Assumption of the Virgin and including the heavenly spheres as they are represented, the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Doctors of the Church, Holy Virgins, and the Hierarchies of Angels, all taken from a drawing given to him by Matteo, who was a learned and worthy man. Sandro painted this work with masterful skill and minute attention. At the foot of the work, he included portraits of Matteo and his wife kneeling. But in spite of the fact that this painting was so beautiful it should have overcome all envy, there were nevertheless some slanderers and detractors who, unable to condemn the work in any other way, accused Matteo and Sandro of having committed the grievous sin of heresy. Whether this is true or not, I am not the person to pass judgement, but it is enough for me that the figures Sandro painted here are truly to be praised.[12]

It is significant that Vasari reported the accusation directed against the painter of *The Assumption of the Virgin*, but did not explain its nature. Based on other sources, Pater establishes that the blame lay not only with its painter but also with its commissioner, the poet Matteo Palmieri, and concerned an anthropological question. Matteo Palmieri was 'the reputed author of a poem, […] *La Città Divina*, which represented the human race as an incarnation of those angels who, in the revolt of Lucifer, were neither for Jehovah nor for His enemies' (R, 43,44).

Indeed, in 1465 Matteo Palmieri wrote a poem called *La Città di vita* (Pater misquotes the title) which was modelled on Dante's *Commedia* and where he narrates his journey through the different realms of the afterlife. Additionally, the poet was a true adherent of the unorthodox idea that human souls are derived from angels. The Victorian writer

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[11] See Por. Rolf Bagemihl, 'Francesco Botticini's Palmieri Altar-Piece', *The Burlington Magazine*, 138 (1996) pp. 308–314; Jennifer Sliwka, *Visions of Paradise: Botticini's Palmieri Altarpiece*, London 2015.

[12] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, op. cit., p. 226.

explains that this idea was the 'fantasy of that earlier Alexandrian philosophy about which the Florentine intellect in that century was so curious' (R, 42). In fact, early renaissance Florence witnessed a substantial rise of popularity of the Alexandrian theologian Origen, who taught about the pre-existence and angelic origins of human souls.[13] Therefore, the transgression of the painter of *The Assumption of the Virgin* allegedly had been to replicate the heresy of the poem – that is, embodying 'in a picture the wayward dream of Palmieri' (R, 44).

Palmieri claims that human souls are derived from angels who 'were neither for Jehovah nor for His enemies' (R, 42). Therefore, he starts from the well-known account in which at the beginning, God created the angels. Some of them followed Lucifer in rebelling against God, and once defeated were cast down to hell. Other angels remained loyal to God and continued their existence in heaven. The novelty in this version of the story is that there was also a third group, which consisted of those who did not take a stand in the conflict between God and Lucifer. They found themselves unable to make up their minds and remained 'neutral'. Those undecided angels descended to earth. Incarnated into human bodies and leading human lives, they were given a second chance to make a decision in favour of God.[14]

From the legend that holds Botticelli was accused of heresy by painting human beings as descendants of 'neutral' angels, Pater takes a clue for understanding the distinctive feature of Sandro's art, namely the mood of sadness visible on the faces of most of his characters. 'True or false, the story interprets much of the peculiar sentiment with which he infuses his profane and sacred persons' (R, 44). Botticelli's characters are 'in a certain sense like angels, but with a sense of displacement or loss about them – the wistfulness of exiles' (R, 44).

Pater's elaborate argument is seemingly modest in scope. The essay concludes with the statement: 'the object of this brief study has been attained, if I have defined aright the temper in which he [Botticelli] worked' (R, 50). Yet, at closer inspection, it becomes clear that the stakes of the essay are much higher than the elucidation of the 'sentiment of ineffable melancholy' (R,43) expressed by Botticelli's characters; they regard the nature of modernity and the condition of both modern man and the modern artist.[15] Pater uses Botticelli as a yardstick with which to measure a change that had occurred in the outlook

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[13] See Edgar Wind, *The Revival of Origen* [in:] Edgar Wind, *The Eloquence of Symbols: Studies in Humanist Art*, (ed.) Jaynie Anderson, Oxford 1983, pp. 42–56.

[14] On Palmieri, see e.g. Alessandra Mita Ferraro, 'Matteo Palmieri's City of Life: The Original Idea of Three Opportunities for Salvation', *International Journal of Literature and Arts*, Volume 2, Issue 6, (2014) , pp. 230–239. Fabrizio Crasta, 'Gli Angeli Neutrali Da Dante a Matteo Palmieri', *Lettere Italiane*, vol. 67, no. 1, (2015), pp. 5–25.

[15] William H. Sullivan claims the 'real subject [of Pater's book] is the condition of modern man, particularly the artist', and that the essay on Botticelli 'offers the most sustained portrait of the modern artist' (*Four Early Studies from Pater's The Renaissance*, op. cit., p. 1).

of human life during the early Renaissance. In order to demonstrate this change, Pater compares Botticelli with Dante.

Significantly enough, 'neutral' angels also make an appearance in the *Divine Comedy*, although in quite a different context. In the third canto of *Inferno*, in the vestibule of hell, the poet meets souls and angels who were neither faithful to God nor rebelled against Him, but who were 'for themselves' ('quel cattivo coro / de li angeli che non furon ribelli / né fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sé fuoro', Inf. 3.37–39).[16] For Dante, these angels who abstained from taking sides in the face of war in heaven were not even admitted to hell. They were 'hateful to God', but also hateful to God's enemy, Lucifer (*a Dio spiacenti ed a' nemici sui*, Inf. 3.63)[17]. Thus, Pater juxtaposes the 'conventional orthodoxy' of Dante with the heterodoxy of Botticelli. In the case of the former, neutrality is unacceptable – that is, remaining undecided is even worse than siding with Lucifer. In the latter, neutrality is affirmed. 'What Dante scorns as unworthy alike of heaven and hell, Botticelli accepts that middle world in which men take no side in great conflicts, and decide no great causes, and make great refusals' (R, 43).

The difference between Dante and Botticelli serves to demonstrate the gap between two epochs – the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: the pre-modern and modern world. The latter allegedly accepts the 'middle world' – the earthly, secular domain between heaven and hell. It recognises the outlook on life in which one can refrain from taking sides in great conflicts and live a life without aspiring to the heavenly realm but also without the fear of falling into hell. Botticelli emerges as a painter of such neutral, modern life. The melancholic expression of his characters is also a reaction to the prospect of having to make fundamental decisions or great refusals. His men and women are 'saddened perpetually by the shadow upon them of the great things from which they shrink' (R, 43). Their symbols are Sandro's Madonnas. Of the most famous of them, *Madonna of the Magnificat*, (Figure 2) Pater writes: 'Though she holds in her hands the "Desire of all nations", [she] is one of those who are neither for Jehovah nor for His enemies; and her choice is on her face' (R, 44).[18] Her saddened face expresses her neutrality or, rather, the choice not to choose: she 'shrink[s] from the pressure of the divine child, and plead[s] in unmistakable undertones for a warmer, lower humanity' (R, 47). Thus, the one who, with

[16] On neutral angels in Dante, see, e.g. Por. John Freccero, *Dante and the Neutral Angels*, The Romantic Review, 1 (1960), pp. 3–14. Xosé Afonso Álvarez Pérez, *Un nuovo contributo allo studio del mito degli angeli neutrali nella Commedia*, Revista de Literatura Medieval, XXI (2009), pp. 37–75. Fabrizio Crasta, *Gli angeli neutrali da Dante a Matteo Palmieri*, op. cit.; Stephen Cheeke, *'Fantastic Modernism': Walter Pater, Botticelli, and Simonetta*, Word & Image, 32:2 (2016) pp. 196–197.

[17] Dante's 'a Dio spiacenti ed a' nemici sui' was paraphrased by Pater as 'neither for God nor for His enemies'. In the second edition of 1877, he changed it into 'neither for Jehovah nor for His enemies' (R, 42 and 44). See Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, the 1893 text*, op. cit., p. 218.

[18] Pater also sees reluctance in Botticelli's other female figures, such as 'Judith, returning home across the hill country, when the great deed is over, and the moment of revulsion come, when the olive branch in her hand is becoming a burthen; as Justice, sitting on a throne, but with a fixed look of self-hatred which makes the sword in her hand seem that of a suicide' (R, 47).

her 'fiat', has always been the Christian's symbol of submission to God's will, is altered into a symbol of those who dread 'the shadow upon them of the great things' (R, 43), that is, a higher vocation or mission.[19]

Finally, Pater uses the genealogy of Botticelli's mood to allegorise the aesthetic domain as an autonomous sphere distinct from not only religion, but also ethics. Botticelli is 'undisturbed by any moral ambition' (R, 45); 'his interest is neither in the untempered goodness of [Fra] Angelico's saints, nor the untempered evil of Orcagna's Inferno' (R, 45). In other words, his art goes beyond not only the choice between God and Lucifer, but also transcends the choice between good and evil. Withdrawn from moral and religious duties, it 'exists only for itself'.[20]

Edgar Wind once noted that 'aesthetic theory has shown a remarkable unanimity in excluding the will from the aesthetic experience'[21] (AA, 140 n. 145). Significantly, the elimination of will and choice defines not only the concept of aesthetics but also of the modern artist. Therefore, the story of angelic origins of human souls serves Pater as justification of the attitude of neutrality. It is significant to note that Pater reversed the original intention of this concept. The theory of 'neutral angels' gained popularity in the Renaissance because it enhanced the category of free will and individual freedom. Although Christian orthodoxy taught the existence of free will, it also set a limit to it. For human beings their own efforts are not sufficient to earn individual salvation, which is obtainable only through God's grace. Renaissance thinkers were attracted to the notion of angels who took on human form because it 'allowed for the self-transformation of man'; in their view, 'man's place in the universe is not fixed, that he is able to move freely, up and down, between the angelic and the animal spheres, belonging to both and bound to neither'.[22] Walter Pater was attracted to this idea for quite a different purpose, namely because it fixes man's place in the universe to the 'middle ground' between hell and heaven, and legitimises an artist's reluctance to make radical choices.

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[19] According to Sara Lyons, Pater 'argues that Botticelli's paintings on sacred themes are only superficially religious; their real theme is the desire to be relieved of the burdens of religion, and the longing for a joyful, unmediated habitation of this world' (*Life as the End of Life: Algernon Charles Swinburne, Walter Pater, and Secular Aesthetics* (PhD, Queen Mary University of London 2013, p. 194). For theological context of Botticelli's Annunciations, see Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in 15th century Italy*, Oxford 1972, pp. 51–56.

[20] John Coates argues that 'these early essays [of Pater] try to define the distinct territory of aesthetic, as opposed to political, theological or moral experience and perception' (*Variations on the Oxford Temper: Swinburne, Pater and Botticelli*, op. cit., p. 261). Wolfgang Iser noted that 'Pater's work can be read almost as a blueprint for the aesthetic existence which he is attempting to illuminate' in contrast to 'the ethical decision or the religious renunciation of self' in the Kierkegaardian sense (*Walter Pater: The Aesthetic Moment*, op. cit. p. viii). On aesthetics as the negation of the political, see Carl Schmitt, 'The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations', trans. Matthias Konzett and John P. McCormick, *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary* 96 (1993) pp. 130–142.

[21] Edgar Wind, *Art and Anarchy: the Reith Lectures*, London, Faber and Faber 1963. [Hereinafter 'AA'].

[22] Edgar Wind, *The Revival of Origen*, op. cit., p. 44.

Pater, on the basis of Vasari's 'gossip' about *The Assumption of the Virgin* (an 'heretical picture', which later turned out to be the work of Botticini[23]) and on the basis of the heretical idea of Matteo Palmieri's poem *La Città di vita*, whose title Pater misquoted – and which he most likely had not read, as it was then 'still unedited' (R, 42) – creates a narrative that, regardless of being 'true or false', allows him to interpret 'much of the peculiar sentiment' (R, 43) of all Botticelli paintings. The charge of disregard for historical facts in Pater's essays collected in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* was levelled already in the early reviews of the book. For example, Mrs. Mark Pattison noticed that the book's title was misleading because 'the historical element is precisely that which is wanting' and concluded that 'the work is in no wise a contribution to the history of the Renaissance',[24] as the author attributed to the painter his own modernist convictions. Pater reacted by retitling the book *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, however, historical accuracy was never his main objective. Lauded as a 'prose poet' he had a flair for the mythopoetic.[25] He used Botticelli to create a narrative that justified his vision of the Renaissance and of modern art. His Botticelli, inspired by a current of unorthodoxy, confirmed the Renaissance as an epoch that was born out of antinomianism and a spirit of rebellion – a period of 'revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the time' (R,18).[26] Pater's Renaissance is a process rather than an epoch. It started with a 'mediaeval Renaissance' in XII century France, to which he dedicated the opening essay, 'Two Early French Stories'. He depicts it as a time of 'rebellion, that sinister claim for liberty of heart and thought' (R,19) in the epoch that has been treated 'preeminently as the "Age of Faith"' (R, 19). By contrast, the Italian Renaissance finds its continuation in the 'the emancipation of the human mind in the Reformation, or the French Revolution' that guided the footsteps of humanity to higher levels (R, 20).

To sum up, 'A Fragment on Sandro Botticelli' appears to be not only a founding text of aesthetic criticism, but also to be a work that established the founding myth of the modern artist, with the Florentine master as its precursor. Aestheticism presents itself as a realm of neutrality. The legend of people as incarnations of neutral angels, justifies the artist's neutrality towards religious and moral considerations and legitimises governance by

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[23] Pater most likely did not see the painting, as it was then in the collection of the Duke of Hamilton and was purchased by the National Gallery only in 1882; see Paul Tucker, *'Reanimate Greek': Pater and Ruskin on Botticelli*, op. cit., pp. 122, 321 n. 22.

[24] Mrs. Mark Pattison, *Westminster Review*, XLIII, n.s. April, (1873), p. 640, quoted in Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, the 1893 text*, op. cit., p. 285.

[25] William H. Sullivan argues that 'while all the "Renaissance" essays are germane to the nature aesthetic program Pater implemented in his novel, the first four [published in successive years from 1867 to 1870, "Winckelmann", "Poems by William Morris", "Leonardo da Vincie" and "Botticelli"] constitute a highly unified statement about the necessity of a humanist myth for the modern artist' ('Four Early Studies from Pater's *The Renaissance: The Aesthetics for a Humanist Myth*', op. cit., p. 1).

[26] Paul Tucker claims that 'the accusation of heresy constitutes the germ of Pater's essay' (*'Reanimate Greek': Pater and Ruskin on Botticelli* op. cit., p. 123). Similarly, Stephen Cheeke noted that 'the central theme of the essay [is] heresy' (*Fantastic Modernism': Walter Pater, Botticelli, and Simonetta*, op. cit., p. 196).

their own laws. Roger Fry was certainly correct in stating that 'Paterism was almost synonymous with Botticellianism'.[27]

II

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Botticelli became not only well-known but fashionable. His works were discussed more often than any other Renaissance artist, and his being in vogue contributed to turning Florence into a mecca of art enthusiasts drawn to that city on the Arno in search of 'the aesthetic Arcadia'.[28] In October 1888, a small group of German students of art history visited Florence under the direction of August Schmarsow. One of them was Aby Warburg. The visit kindled his lifelong interest in Sandro and his fascination with the city. (Later, he would declare himself to be Florentine 'd'anima'). In his doctoral dissertation, written under the auspices of Karl Janitschek at the University of Strasbourg, Warburg discussed two of Botticelli's paintings: *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*.[29] Botticelli remained an important point of reference throughout Warburg's life, while *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus* continued to play a prominent role even in his last project, unfinished before his death: *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*.

Warburg's attitude to Botticelli has been portrayed as a critical reaction to aestheticism, but it can also be presented as a critical reaction specifically to Walter Pater. That having been said, it is worthwhile to underline several points of contact between Warburg and Pater, mostly regarding the concept of the Renaissance. Warburg certainly would have agreed that the early Renaissance was 'perhaps the most interesting period in the history of the mind' (R, 48). Also, for him it marked the first sign of an epochal shift towards the modern era, which is why studying the Quattrocento was a way of unearthing the foundations of modernity.[30] For both of them, the Renaissance meant emancipation

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[27] Roger E. Fry, 'Sandro Botticelli', *The Burlington Magazine* XLVIII (1926), p. 196.

[28] See Bernd Roeck, *Florence 1900. The Quest for Arcadia,* Translated by Stewart Spencer*,* New Haven-London 2009.

[29] Aby Warburg, *Sandro Botticellis 'Geburt der Venus' und 'Frühling': eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellungen von der Antike in der italienischen Frührenaissance*, op. cit.

[30] Jacob Burckhardt described the Italian Renaissance as 'die Führerin unseres Weltalters'. Matthew Rampley called Warburg's project an 'archaeology of modernity' ('From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg's Theory of Art', *The Art Bulletin*, 79 (1997), p. 42).

from the bonds of the mediaeval world.[31] Finally, they both viewed Botticelli as a symptom of the emergence of something essentially new.[32] They perceived the novelty of the Renaissance, and the coming of the 'modern spirit,' in the context of 'a return to antiquity' (R, 86). Pater famously praised Botticelli's 'Greek temper' (R, 46)[33] and Warburg, in the title of his dissertation, promises to investigate '*die Vorstellungen von der Antike in der italienischen Frührenaissance'* ('Representations of Antiquity in the Italian Early Renaissance').

The differences between Warburg and Pater start with methodology. Distrustful of broad synthesis and abstract generalisations, Warburg studied the problem of the 'return of antiquity' with concrete examples – the two early Renaissance mythological paintings.[34] Rejecting the impressionistic attitude of Pater, Warburg made a point of answering the very question, 'what was it about antiquity that "interested" the artists of the Quattrocento?' (SBG, 89). Finally, his objective was not to construct a myth, but rather to create a historical image based on a positivistic commitment to verifiable facts and research of sources.[35] With philological tools – a vast constellation of quotations from various sources – he argued that, at least since the time of Alberti's *De Pictura* (1435), antiquity meant one thing for 15th-century Italian artists and poets: the representations of an intensified outward movement (SBG, 89). Renaissance artists turned to antique models whenever they wanted to represent physical agitation. They were expressing a sense of movement through windblown garments and hair, or, as Warburg styles it, through 'animated accessories'. In other words, the antiquity of *Primavera* does not manifest itself

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[31] In 1912, at the conclusion of his lecture on the Schifanoia frescoes at Ferrara during the international congress of art historians in Rome: 'The grandeur of the new art, as given to us by the genius of Italy, had its roots in a shared determination to strip the humanist heritage of Greece of all its accretions of traditional "practice", whether medieval, Oriental, or Latin. It was with this desire to restore the ancient world that "the good European" began his battle for enlightenment, in that age of internationally migrating images that we – a shade too mystically – call the Age of the Renaissance' (*Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara* [in:] Adolfo Venturi, (ed.), L'Italia e l'arte straniera: atti del X Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte in Roma (1912), Roma 1922, pp. 179–193, [Aby Warburg, *Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara*, [in:] Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, op. cit. p. 586]). Fritz Saxl underlined that 'diesen Kampf zwischen Freiheit und Gebundenheit in der Kultur der Frührenaissance zu schildern, ist das Lebensziel Warburgs' (*Die Bibliothek Warburg und ihr Ziel*, Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, 1921–22, p. 2.

[32] Pater refers to it as 'freshness, the uncertain and diffident promise, which belong to the earlier Renaissance itself' [R, 48].

[33] 'The quaint designs of Botticelli's [are] a more direct inlet into the Greek temper than the finest period' (R, 46)].

[34] On Warburg's Botticelli, see, e.g., Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, Phaidon, Oxford, 1986, pp. 43–66; Silvia Contarini, '"Botticelli Ritrovato": Frammenti di dialogo tra Aby Warburg e André Jolles', *Prospettiva*, 68 (1992), pp. 87–93. Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Alla ricerca delle fonti perdute. Warburg e il tempo della *Primavera*', *Aut Aut* 321, 322 (2004), pp. 84–96. Margareta I. Christian, 'Aer, Aurae, Venti: Philology and Physiology in Aby Warburg's Dissertation on Botticelli', *PMLA*, vol. 129, no. 3, (2014), pp. 399–416. Claudia Wedepohl, *Why Botticelli?: Aby Warburg's Search for a New Approach to Quattrocento Italian Art* [w:] Ana Debenedetti and Caroline Elam (ed), *Botticelli Past and Present*, op. cit., pp. 183–202.

[35] On Warburg's attitude to archival research and his emphasis on 'the duty of reading old slips of paper', see Claudia Wedepohl, *Why Botticelli?*, op. cit. p. 183 and Hans Ch. Hönes, 'Warburg's Positivism: Confessions of a Truffle Pig', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3, December (2018), pp. 361–379.

exclusively in mythological subjects and representations of pagan deities, but rather in a stylistic trait – windblown draperies and curls (Figure 3).

Warburg recognises a similar attitude in Renaissance poetry: Angelo Poliziano, a leading Florentine poet and humanist of the Medici circle, author of the *Verses for the Joust of Giuliano de Medici*, looks to the poets of antiquity such as Ovid and Horace for the same reason – in search of 'accounts of motifs of movement, which he then faithfully reproduces in his own poems' (SBG, 97). Warburg demonstrates that, for Renaissance poets as well, the accessory forms in motion were the touchstone of 'antique influence'.

The kernel of Warburg's argument is that Botticelli's imitation of intensified movements of bodies and accessories cannot be explained in terms of being purely ornamental devices adapted for the sake of their aesthetic value – that is, serving to enhance the delight of the viewer. It is the same idea he would repeat more than 30 years later in the introduction to *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*:

> Hedonistic aesthetes win the cheap approval of the art-loving public when they explain such formal changes in terms of pleasure in the extended decorative line […] the new gestural language of pathos from the world of pagan forms was not simply drafted into the studio with the acclaim of the subtle eye of the artist or of a sympathetic, discerning taste for the antique.[36]

To be sure, Warburg does not talk here about 'animated accessories', but rather about 'the new gestural language of pathos', which would become the key concept of his future investigations, although the argument remains the same. The stylistic change that took place in the early Renaissance – the imitation of the ancient models – cannot be properly understood as a mere change of taste, or in terms of aesthetic pleasure alone. To do justice to this abrupt stylistic innovation, one must go beyond the domain of aesthetics. In Warburg's psycho-historical perspective, the adoption of 'fluttering draperies' in *Primavera* reveals the change occurring in the inner life of the Renaissance man. The intense movement of the clothing and hair blowing in the wind expresses liberation from mediaeval rigidity and increased emotions; as such, it is also a sign of intensified 'life'.

Whereas Pater made Botticelli an emblem of aesthetics conceived as an autonomous territory serving only itself, Warburg went in the opposite direction. His portrait of Botticelli demonstrates the embedding of the artist and the sphere of aesthetics within the broader system of culture. It is not autonomous but interconnected, and is furthermore under the influences of psychology and the social milieu.[37] That is why images have a symptomatic value, and why shifts in the realm of style signal transpositions taking place in

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[36] Aby Warburg, 'Einleitung' [in:] *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2000 [*The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past*, trans. Matthew Rampley, *Art in Translation* (2009), pp. 278, 281.

[37] See Margareta I. Christian, 'Aer, Aurae, Venti: Philology and Physiology in Aby Warburg's Dissertation on Botticelli', op. cit.

the domain of culture. In short, Warburg approaches images as cultural and historical documents providing valuable insights into the human psyche and society.

Likewise, whereas Pater excludes will and choice from the realm of aesthetics, Warburg binds the aesthetic sphere to choices – or, at least, to acts of resistance.[38] The recourse to ancient models in order to represent intensified movement was not an entirely passive process; when intellectuals and the artistic circles of Florence suggested to Botticelli the motif of flying hair and draperies, he could have surrendered to – or opposed – them. Warburg concludes that 'the purpose of this inquiry' was 'to show how Sandro Botticelli dealt with contemporary views of antiquity as a force that demanded resistance or submission' (SBG, 142). In other words, Warburg implies that adoption of a stylistic innovation requires a choice, a decision of ethical proportions. He affirms that Botticelli yielded to the impact of his cultural milieu; the Florentine master was 'one of those who were all too pliable' and easily influenced by antiquity (SBG, 141). Nevertheless, he did not surrender to it completely; that is, he did not fall into 'the unthinking repetition of superficially agitated motifs of motion' (SBG, 141), as occurred in the case of the reliefs of Agostino di Duccio in Tempio Malatestiano (SBG, 96–97) (Figure 4). Later, Warburg would point out other emblematic instances of such 'Leerlauf der künstlerischen Formensprache', like Ghirlandaio's *Massacre of the Holy Innocents* (Figure 5) or Giulio Romano's *The Battle of Constantine* (Figure 6).[39]

Nevertheless, Botticelli's adoption of dynamic forms, his 'modernity *all'antica*',[40] was balanced by an important component of tradition deeply rooting his art in the cultural practices of early Renaissance Florence. The striking parallels that Warburg discovered between Botticelli's *Primavera* and Poliziano's *Le Stanze per la giostra del magnifico Giuliano di Pietro de Medici* demonstrate two important points: first, that the painting was immersed in the tradition of Florentine poetry – Warburg even suspects that Poliziano may have played the role of Botticelli's humanist advisor (SBG, 122); and second, the painting's links to the festive practice of Florence, and as such, to Florentine 'life'. Warburg approvingly repeats

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[38] Ernst H. Gombrich emphasised the importance of Warburg's concept of '*Auseindersetzungsenergie*', which he rendered as 'the power to react', or 'the power and the will to react against prevailing trends' ('Aby Warburg: His Aims and Methods: An Anniversary Lecture', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 62, (1999), pp. 276, 280. See also Spyro Papapetros, 'The Eternal Seesaw: Oscillations in Warburg's Revival', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2003, p. 173.

[39] In the introduction to *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, Warburg asks rhetorically: 'How could the language of artistic form stand idle in this way in the vicinity of Raphael and Michelangelo?' (*The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past*, op. cit. p. 280). See also Warburg's 1914 lecture *Der Eintritt des antikisierenden Idealstils in die Malerei der Frührenaissance*, [in:] *Werke in einem Band*, Martin Treml (eds.), Berlin 2010, pp. 281–310 [Aby Warburg, *The Entry of the Idealizing Classical Style in the Painting of Early Renaissance*, trans. by Matthew Rampley, [in:] *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects*, Richard Woodfield (ed.) London and New York 2001, pp. 25–26].

[40] Daniel Arasse, *Botticelli's Manner*, [in:] *Botticelli: from Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola*, Daniel Arasse and Pierluigi de Vecchi (ed.), Milano 2003, p. 23.

Jacob Burckhardt's opinion that 'Italian festive pageantry, in its higher form, is a true transition from life into art' (SBG, 125).[41]

Poliziano's poem *Stanze per la Giosta* commemorates a joust that took place in Florence on 28 January 1475, in which Giuliano de' Medici fought for his lady, the famous beauty Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci. The poem was written a year later to commemorate her sudden death in April 1476 at the age of 23. Warburg sees *Primavera* in the context of 'the memorial cult of Simonetta' believing that the tragic event is the key to understanding the meaning of the painting. The Florentine master enshrined 'Simonetta's memory in a pictorial allegory in the figure of [….] Spring' (SBG, 133) (Figure 7). The painting represents 'the Realm of Venus' – a garden in which the Hora of Spring, Spring's patroness, is 'the consolatory personification of renewal' (SBG, 139). Because the Hora of Spring in the painting bears a resemblance to Poliziano's description of Simonetta Vespucci, she may also be her idealised portrait (SBG, 134). Warburg suggests that she is 'not simply an idealised depiction of Simonetta as a nymph but the likeness of her very face' (SBG, 136), an interpretation he would maintain throughout his life.[42] In the 1912 lecture 'Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia', he supported it with an astrological argument. Simonetta died on 26 April 1476 and April's ruling planet is Venus, the goddess of beauty – but also mistress of the reawakening of nature.[43]

Ernst Gombrich claimed that in his reading of the *Primavera*, the Hamburg scholar succumbed to the legend of 'Bella Simonetta', 'which was particularly dear to the aesthetic movement'.[44] Based on Vasari's remark that 'one of Botticelli's portraits was supposed to represent "l'innamorata di Giuliano de' Medici"', all of the female characters in Botticelli's

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[41] In 1895, Warburg wrote: 'All those now extinct transitional forms between real life and dramatic art, which the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries produced in such abundance — for example, in the carnival *mascherate*, for the *sbarre*, the *giostre*, and the *bufole* — afforded a unique opportunity for members of the public to see the revered figures of antiquity standing before them in flesh and blood' ('I Costumi teatrali per gli intermezzi del 1589, Atti dell'Accademia del Regio Istituto Musicale di Firenze, XXXIII (1895), pp. 133–146 [Aby Warburg, *Theatrical Costumes for the Intermedi of 1589*, [in:] Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, op. cit., p. 369]).

[42] In 1898, Warburg repeated: 'There are historical and external grounds for supposing that the same cause that prompted Poliziano to write the *Giostra* — Giuliano's adoration of the "nymph", Simonetta — also spurred Sandro to give pictorial form, for the first time, to the same complex of mythological ideas' (*Sandro Botticelli*, Das Museum: eine Anleitung zum Genuß der Werke bildender Kunst, 3 (1898), pp. 37–38 [Aby Warburg, *Sandro Botticelli (1898)*, [in:] Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, op. cit., p. 158]). [Hereinafter 'SB'].

[43] Aby Warburg, *Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia,* op. cit. p. 585.

[44] Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 8, (1945), pp. 9–10. On the Simonetta legend, see, e.g., Ross B. Ettle, 'The Venus Dilemma: Notes on Botticelli and Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci', Source: *Notes in the History of Art*, vol. 27, no. 4, (2008), pp. 3–10. Hans Körner, *Simonetta Vespucci: the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of a myth* [w:] A. Schumacher (ed) *Botticelli: likeness, myth, devotion: an exhibition organized by the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, November 13, 2009–February 28, 2010*, Ostfildern 2009, pp. 57–70; Judith R. Allan, *Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci: Beauty, politics, literature and art in early Renaissance Florence*, Ph.D, University of Birmingham 2014. Stephen Cheeke, *'Fantastic Modernism': Walter Pater, Botticelli, and Simonetta*, op. cit.

works have been identified with Simonetta.[45] However, Herbert Horne and Jacques Mesnil had pointed out that there was no evidence that Botticelli ever painted her.[46] However, Warburg's identification of the personification of Spring with Simonetta could have been motivated quite differently. While Poliziano and Botticelli mythologised Simonetta in a manner similar to how Dante and Petrarch mythologised Beatrice and Laura (see SB, 158), elevating her to the level of a time-transcending figure, Warburg searches for the historical reality behind the mythological façade. He wants to see in the painting traces of a real person, individual features and a historical traumatic event. Therefore, the identification of the figure of *Primavera* with Simonetta should be viewed in the context of Warburg's attention to the ties between images and 'life' and against the background of his other prosopographic discoveries, such as the portraits of the members of the Medici circle on Ghirlandaio's fresco "The Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule" in the Cappella Sassetti in S.Trinità[47] (Figure 8) or the portrait of Byzantine Emperor John Palaeologus on Piero della Francesca's fresco *The Battle of Constantine* in Arezzo[48] (Figure 9). Warburg was devoted to minute details, as evidenced by his motto, 'Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail', meaning that only through details can contact with the past be established. The indisputable facts and a 'flesh and blood individual' give access to history, since Warburg's God dwells not in myth but in history.[49]

Five years later, in 1889, Warburg published a short paper on Botticelli in the periodical *Das Museum*,[50] where he repeated his findings in the dissertation asserting links of Botticelli with 'cultivated Florentine society' (SB, 157). In this article, his polemic against

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[45] Walter Pater identified Simonetta Vespucci with the figure of Judith: 'The same figure—tradition connects it with Simonetta, the mistress of Giuliano de' Medici—appears again as Judith returning home across the hill country' (R, 47).

[46] Ernst H. Gombrich, *Botticelli's Mythologies*, op. cit., p. 9.

[47] Aby Warburg, *Bildniskunst und florentinisches Bürgertum: Domenico Ghirlandajo in Santa Trinità: Bildnisse des Lorenzo de' Medici und seiner Angehörigen*, Leipzig 1902 [*The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie Domenico Ghirlandaio in Santa Trinita: The Portraits of Lorenzo de' Medici and His Household*, [in:] Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, op. cit. pp. 185–221]).

[48] Aby. Warburg, *The Entry of the Idealising Classical Style in the Painting of the Early Renaissance*, op. cit., p. 14; Aby Warburg, *Piero della Francescas Constantinschlacht in der Aquarellcopie des Johann Anton Ramboux*, [in:] *L'Italia e l'arte staniera: Atti del X Congresso internazionale di storia dell'arte a Roma*, [1912] Adolfo Venturi (ed.), Roma 1922, pp. 326–327 [Aby Warburg, Piero della Francesca's 'Battle of Constantine' in the Watercolor Copy by Johann Anton Ramboux (1912) [in:] *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, op. cit., 339–342]. See Monica Centanni, Alessandra Pedersoli, *Costantino XI Paleologo vs Maometto II. Nota sulla cronologia della Battaglia di Costantino contro Massenzio di Piero della Francesca in San Francesco ad Arezzo*, Engramma, 52 | novembre (2006), pp. 1–18; Claudia Wedepohl, *Aby Warburg und die Aquarellkopie des Johann Anton Ramboux nach Piero della Francescas 'Konstantinsschlacht' in Arezzo*, [in:] *Artiummconjunctio: Kulturwissenschaft und Frühneuzeitforschung; Aufsätze für Dieter Wuttke*, Patra Schöner, Gert Hübner (eds), Koerner, Baden-Baden 2013, pp. 347–380.

[49] Burckhardt believed that the emergence of the portrait corresponded with the affirmation of the individual as it is a symptom that a human being had learned to understand himself as an individual (see Martin Warnke, *Individuality as Argument. Piero della Francesca's Portrait of the Duke and the Duchess of Urbino*, in: *The Image of the Individual. Portraits in the Renaissance*, (eds.) Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson, London: British Museum Press 1998, p. 81. See also, Patrizia Zambrano, *Sandro Botticelli and the Birth of Modern Portraiture*, [in:] *Botticelli Past and Present*, op. cit., pp. 10–35.

[50] Aby Warburg, *Sandro Botticelli (1898)*, op. cit.

Walter Pater is even more explicit. He directly challenges the 'adherents of the Botticellian cult' (SB, 158), who admire 'delightful melancholy […], a fashionable thing among today's lovers of art' (SB, 157). He stresses that Botticelli's art was not only about expressions of sadness but also 'the whole cycle of human emotional life, from melancholy stillness to vehement agitation' (SB, 157).

In the paper, Warburg discusses two of Botticelli's paintings: *The Madonna of the Magnificat* and *Primavera*. Referring to the latter, he explains that Botticelli 'became the first painter to capture in a monumental picture the new ideas that were then emerging about the pantheon of antiquity' (SB 157). In the case of the former, *The Madonna of the Magnificat*, Warburg provides his description:

> As she [Virgin Mary] moves to dip her pen in order to write the last line [of the *Magnificat*], the Christ child, laying his hand on her outstretched arm, points to the words of the Magnificat […] and at the crown that two angels hold above the head of the Mother of God as a solemn, symbolic confirmation of her elevation. (SB, 157–158)

This clearly contradicts Pater's assessment: 'the pen almost drops from her hand, and the high cold words ["the words of her exaltation, the *Ave*, and the *Magnificat*, and the *Gaude Maria*" (R, 45)] have no meaning for her' (R, 45).

When Pater argues that Botticelli is 'before all things a poetical painter, blending the charm of story and sentiment, the medium of the art of poetry, with the charm of line and colour, the medium of abstract painting' (R, 41) – but that, unlike Giotto, Masaccio and Ghirlandaio, he is not dramatic (see R, 42) – Warburg emphasises that the Florentine master 'sought to be more than a lyric poet: he *wanted to be a dramatist*' [emphasis mine] (SB, 159). Finally, contrary to those who concentrate on Botticelli's tenderness and melancholic indecision, Pater asserts that his works are 'a recorder of an intense and vigorous physical and mental life' (SB, 157). Warburg finds the most compelling confirmation of such qualities of his art in a Quattrocento source that was witnessed by an agent of the Duke of Milan, Ludovico il Moro, whose note was rediscovered in the Milan state archive in 1897 and subsequently published.[51] The agent gives a brief account of four chief painters working in Florence with a view to their employment in Milan: Filippino Lippi, Perugino, Ghirlandaio and Botticelli. The agent expressed his preference for Botticelli stressing his *aura virile* – that is to say, 'mood of manliness' or 'manly style' – that characterises all his works.

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[51] See Jonathan K. Nelson, *Botticelli's 'Virile Air': Reconsidering the Milan Memo of 1493*, [in:] *Sandro Botticelli: Artist and Entrepreneur in Renaissance Florence*, (ed.) Gert Jan van der Sman and Irene Mariani, Firenze 2015, pp. 167–180.

III

Edgar Wind was a philosopher who, in 1922, wrote his doctoral thesis under Erwin Panofsky and Ernst Cassirer.[52] In 1928, Wind was employed as a research assistant at the Warburg Library, where he had the opportunity to meet Aby Warburg in person and, after the library's emigration, worked as the deputy director of the Warburg Institute in London. In 1957, already a professor of art history at Oxford, he published his *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, which was hailed as an example of the 'Warburgian method'. In this book, Wind deciphered some of the enigmatic masterworks by Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian that had never been discussed by Warburg himself. However, at the heart of the work, he gave his own interpretation of Botticelli's *Primavera*.

The first striking difference in Wind's approach to Botticelli's *Primavera* concerns the intellectual influences decisive in its genesis. Wind argues that the driving force in the milieu that influenced the programme of *Primavera* was not only the poetry of Angelo Poliziano, but also Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonic philosophy. He assumes that the *Primavera* was painted for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de Medici, and that Marsilio Ficino was responsible for Lorenzo's education. Therefore, in Wind's view, it is Ficino who may have been Botticelli's humanist adviser.

Wind was not the first to assert the decisive impact of Florentine Neoplatonism on the Medici circle; as early as the 1920s, Ernst Cassirer and Erwin Panofsky had made the same argument.[53] Over time, the Neoplatonic paradigm in Renaissance studies gained

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[52] On Edgar Wind, see, e.g., Bernhard Buschendorf, 'War ein sehr tüchtiges gegenseitiges Fördern: Edgar Wind und Aby Warburg', *Idea: Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle*, 4 (1985), pp. 165–209. Pierre Hadot, *Métaphysique et Images. Entretien avec Pierre Hadot*, Préfaces: les idées et les sciences dans la bibliographie de la France, (1992), pp. 33–37; Michael Lailach, *Das Paradigma der Interpretation in Edgar Winds* 'Die heidnischen Mysterien der Renaissance', [in:] Horst Bredekamp, Bernhard Buschendorf (eds.), *Edgar Wind. Kunsthistoriker und Philosoph*, Berlin 1998. pp. 105–116; Bernhard Buschendorf, *Zur Begründung der Kulturwissenschaft. Der Symbolbegriff bei Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Aby Warburg und Edgar Wind*, [in:] *Edgar Wind – Kunsthistoriker und Philosoph*, op. cit., pp. 227–248. Rebecca Zorach, 'Love, Truth, Orthodoxy, Reticence; or, What Edgar Wind Didn't See in Botticelli's *Primavera*', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, no. 1, (2007), pp. 190–224; Franz Engel, *'Though this Be Madness': Edgar Wind and the Warburg Tradition*, [in] *Bildaktat the Warburg Institute*, (eds.) Sabine Marienberg and Jürgen Trabant, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 87–116; Bernardino Branca, *Edgar Wind. Filosofo delle immagini: La biografia intellettuale di un discepolo di Aby Warburg*, Milano 2019; Fabio Tononi, 'Aby Warburg, Edgar Wind, and the Concept of Kulturwissenschaft: Reflections on Imagery, Symbols, and Expression', *The Edgar Wind Journal* 2 (2022), pp. 38–74.

[53] See Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie*, Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner 1924 [*Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, translated by Joseph J. S. Peake. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 1968] E. Cassirer, *Eidos und Eidolon: Das Problem des Schönen und der Kunst in Platons Dialogen*, Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 2 (1922–1923) Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner 1924, pp. 1–27. [*Eidos and Eidolon*, [in:] E. Cassirer, *The Warburg Years (1919-1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, translated and with an introduction by S. G. Lofts with A. Calcagno, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2013, pp. 214–243; Erwin Panofsky, *The Neoplatonic Movement in Florence and North Italy (Bandinelli and Titian)*, [in:] *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York: Harper & Row. 1939, pp. 129–170; E. Panofsky, *The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo*, [in:] *Studies in Iconology*, op. cit., pp. 171–230; R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism,* London 1949.

acceptance and Neoplatonic philosophy became a tool for understanding not only Renaissance poetry and art theory, but also visual arts, architecture and music.[54]

Neither was Wind the first to apply this paradigm to Botticelli's *Primavera*. Ernst Gombrich preceded him; as early as 1945 he had pointed to Marsilio Ficino as the inventor of the painting's programme.[55] However, Wind found Gombrich's reading insufficient, claiming that 'the arguments he has found in Ficino […] lead all around the programme of the picture, but not to its centre', meaning that they did not relate to a 'basic Neoplatonic principle (*emanatio-raptio-remeatio*)' (PM, 114, n 6).[56] Wind's exegesis is consistently carried out in the light of the basic principle of Neoplatonic philosophy. In his view, 'the entire picture seems to spell out the three phases of the Neoplatonic dialectic, *emanatio-conversio-remeatio*. The "procession" is depicted in the descent from Zephyr to Flora, the "conversion" in the dance of the Graces, and "reascent" in the figure of Mercury.

The process visualised in the painting commences with a gale of the carnal passion of Zephyr, which transforms a bare nymph, Chloris, into the figure of Flora, represented as scattering flowers. According to Wind, however, the scene on the right of the painting is only 'the initial phase in the Metamorphoses of Love that unfold in the garden of Venus' (PM, 117). The next phase is depicted in the group of dancing Graces on the left of the painting. They resume and advance the theme to the higher stage of spiritual ascent. In Neoplatonic terms, they constitute a 'converting triad' that turns away from the world and leads towards the Beyond. This process is continued by Mercury, who completes the action begun in the dance of Graces. His task is to lead the mind 'back to the upper world', or to 'contemplate the Beyond' (PM, 124). In short, for Wind, the two contrasting groups of the *Primavera*, placed on either side of Venus – the erotic pursuit of Zephyr on the one side and the dance of Graces and Mercury on the other – are symbols of 'the two complementary forces of love, of which Venus is the guardian and Cupid the agent' (PM, 125). As such, these groups 'represent two consecutive phases of one coherent theory of love' (PM, 114).

Warburg's name appears several times in the footnotes, and it is worthwhile to examine some of these references. While discussing the literary sources of *Primavera*, Wind

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[54] On the Neoplatonic paradigm in the Renaissance studies, see, e.g. Horst Bredekamp, *Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus*, [in:] *Die Lesbarkeit der Kunst: Zur Geistes-Gegenwart der Ikonologie*, Andreas Beyer (ed.), Berlin: Wagenbach 1992, pp. 75–83, 102–106. [*Twilight of the Gods for Neoplatonism (1986/1992)* [in:] Berthold Hub and Sergius Kodera, S. (eds.), *Iconology, Neoplatonism, and the Arts in the Renaissance*, Routledge 2020, pp. 216–229]. F. Ames-Lewis, *Neoplatonism and the Visual Arts at the Time of Marsilio Ficino*, [in:], *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill 2002, pp. 327–338; S. Toussaint, 'My Friend Ficino: Art History and Neoplatonism from Intellectual to Material Beauty', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 59, no. 2, (2017), pp. 147–173; Berthold Hub and Sergius Kodera (eds.), *Iconology, Neoplatonism, and the Arts in the Renaissance*, op. cit.

[55] Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 8 (1945), pp. 7–60.

[56] Wind repeats his criticism that he had already expressed ten years earlier in *Bellini's Feast of the Gods: A Study in Venetian Humanism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1948, p. 11. n. 8.

admits that, so far, only 'the component deriving from Politian has been established with complete success' (PM, 113), which enabled identification of the triad of figures on the right of the picture. With this reference to Warburg's dissertation, Wind clearly credits him with that achievement (PM, 113 n. 4). At the same time, Wind suggests that what is lacking is the second component, derived from Marsilio Ficino, which would explain the presence of Mercury and the Three Graces on the left side of the painting. Because 'the mystery of the Graces' (PM, 25) is one of the pagan mysteries discussed in his book, Wind believes it 'may offer a clue to the programme of the picture as a whole' (PM, 114).

Thus, Wind creates the impression that his efforts complement Warburg's unfinished work by elucidating the role of the Graces and Mercury. Indeed, Warburg conceded that he had problems interpreting Hermes: 'the present writer has had no success in finding analogies for this Hermes in the productions of the contemporary imagination' (SBG, 128). Hermes was the messenger of the gods and the leader of the Graces, but Warburg was not sure 'what he is doing with the caduceus, which he holds in his upraised right hand' (SBG, 128). Wind's account of Mercury can be seen as an answer to Warburg's difficulty with Hermes, which resulted from a search for analogies in the wrong kinds of sources. For Wind, the figure represents a 'very peculiar, "philosophical" idea of Mercury' (PM, 122). In addition to being 'the leader of the Graces' or the 'guide of souls', Mercury is also 'the ingenious god of the probing intellect' and 'the divine *mystagogue*' who leads 'back to the upper world' (PM, 123), whereas the caduceus serves him to play with the clouds 'as a Platonic hierophant, touching them but lightly because they are the beneficent veils through which the splendour of transcendent truth may reach the beholder without destroying him' (PM, 123).

Wind has no doubt that 'the crux of any interpretation of *Primavera* is to explain the part played by Mercury' (PM, 121) because the figure of Mercury leads to the meaning of the painting as a whole. When Mercury is perceived as the one 'who dispels the clouds' (SBG, 133) – that is, who clears the winter sky – and together with the representation of 'the West Wind, whose love makes Flora into a bounteous dispenser of flowers' (SBG, 133), the painting emerges as 'the Realm of Venus', and a 'consolatory symbol' of the immanent process of the regeneration of life. Consequently, Venus herself becomes the cosmic *Venus Genetrix* – patroness of vegetation, fertility and the annual renewal of nature, as described in Lucretius' *De natura rerum*. However, the adoption of the philosophical idea of Mercury dramatically changes the tone of the picture by introducing the dimension of transcendence. The figure of Mercury embodies an orientation towards the Beyond, essential to Neoplatonic philosophy – that is, towards the reality 'from which all things flow and to which they all return' (PM, 125). The symmetrical figures of Zephyr and Mercury infuse the entire picture with the feeling of this transcendental reality: 'The composition and mood of the painting are pervaded by a sense of that invisible world towards which Mercury turns and from which Zephyr enters' (PM, 125–126). In other words, the most important element in the picture is what is *not* visible. The painting itself becomes an allegory of the Neoplatonic mysteries of love, which begin with a sensuous

passion, but when it is redirected, ultimately it finds its fruition in the contemplation of invisible 'heavenly things'. This is because 'what descends to the earth as the breath of passion returns to heaven in the spirit of contemplation' (PM, 125).

Wind buttresses this Neoplatonic reading by excluding *De rerum natura* from the range of literary sources pertinent to *Primavera*. He openly rejects the theory that the 'painting refers to Lucretius V, 736–9', writing: 'Although some of the *dramatis personae* are the same, which is almost inevitable in an allegory of Spring, their grouping bears no relation to the picture; and above all, some of the chief characters are different. Mercury and the Graces do not appear in Lucretius' (PM, 127 n. 47). Significantly, Wind does not mention Warburg among the adherents of Lucretian theory, even though the Hamburg scholar admitted the relevance of Lucretius' poem for both Poliziano and Botticelli (SBG, 129–130).[57] At the same time, Wind includes Warburg among the followers of this Neoplatonic reading: 'That the picture belongs to the context of Florentine Neoplatonism has been suspected by Warburg and many others' (PM, 114 n. 6).[58] This complete distancing of the painting from the Lucretian tradition contrasts with the vision of harmony between Platonism and Epicureanism in the Renaissance elaborated by Wind himself in *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, and which was hailed as one of the book's greatest merits. Eugenio Garin observed that Wind's book demonstrates 'the real and well documented understanding of the convergence, in depth, of the Epicurean-Lucretian intention of nature and the dynamic vision of being, proper to the Neoplatonists'.[59] Apparently, *Primavera*, in Wind's view, is an exception to this convergence.

Thus, Wind not only supplements Warburg's reading but also 'corrects' or modifies it. In his reading, there is no trace of the same kind of 'historicity' that characterised Warburg's approach. The painting is not related to Simonetta Vespucci, and the figure depicted as scattering flowers is not the personification of Primavera: 'As for Vasari's

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[57] Warburg quotes *De rerum natura* I. 6-9 and V. 735–738. In 1912, he repeated: 'Botticelli […] owed his new style to the revival of Greek and Latin antiquity — to the Homeric Hymn, to Lucretius, and to Ovid' (*Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara*, op. cit., p. 585).

[58] Apparently, Warburg's only reference to Neoplatonism appears in his 1898 article, where he wrote: 'The image of Simonetta Vespucci, who had died young, and whom both Lorenzo and Giuliano had loved with all the chivalrous reverence that Dante felt for Beatrice or Petrarch for Laura, was to be captured in the consolatory symbol of Dame Venus as the ruler of the reawakening of nature. In the courtly Garden of Love, where the troubadours once went a-Maying, Sandro has set up an antique icon of the mystic, Neoplatonic cult of the soul' (SB 158–159).

[59] Eugenio Garin, 'Enigmatic Veils', *The Burlington Magazine*, 101 (1959) p. 74. Also, Pierre Hadot underlined that 'Wind a touché un point important, la liaison entre hédonism et mystique. Il met en lumière une sorte de réhabilitation de l'épicurisme à la priemière Renaissance, spécialement chez Ficin' (*Métaphysique et Images*, op. cit. p 37). Gerard Passannante sees in Warburg high sensitivity 'to the presence of Lucretius in the world of the "Rusticus" [of Poliziano] and to the Epicurean wind he felt blowing through the hair of Botticelli's figures and their garments' (*The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2011, p. 74). For the epicurean reading of *Primavera*, see Horst Bredekamp, *Sandro Botticelli La Primavera. Florenz als Garten der Venus*, op. cit., See also Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2010; Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, New York: W. W. Norton 2011.

recollection that the picture 'signifies spring' (*dinotando la primavera*), this does not imply, as has been occasionally supposed, a separate personification of Primavera herself' (PM, 116). She is Flora, transformed Chloris, and with her 'sturdy air of a country bride' (PM, 120) she definitely cannot be a portrait of Simonetta Vespucci, either.

Finally, Wind evidently not only supplements and corrects Warburg, but also criticises him:

> Botticelli's poetical trappings are unmistakably indebted to Politian's muse and to those ancient poems (particularly the Homeric Hymns, Horace's Odes, and Ovid's Fasti) with which Politian and Ficino had made him conversant but in none of these cases do the parallels extend beyond single traits or episodes. They establish a connexion of mood and taste, and a community of literary interests, but they do not explain the programme of the paintings [of *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus*]. (PM, 114)

There is no doubt that this passus refers to the Hamburg scholar, for it summarises his main contribution: evidence of the dependence of Botticelli's painting on Politian's poetry. However, by reducing his achievement to establishing 'a connexion of mood and taste', Wind appears to implicitly place this achievement on equal footing with that of Walter Pater and the aesthetic movement.[60] Furthermore, Botticelli's 'poetical trappings' borrowed from Politian's poetry can be nothing other than Warburg's 'animated accessories'. Wind avoids mentioning Warburg's *terminus technicus* – the category that was key not only to his doctoral thesis, but also to his whole conceptual framework. It is important to remember that Warburg's reflection on the dynamic stylistic motifs foreshadows his future studies on 'excited gestures' and the forms of bodily expressions (*Pathosformeln*). Wind's paraphrasing not only reduces its meaning to the level of ornamental device or oddity of style, but also suggests distancing from Warburg's category.[61]

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[60] On the points of contact between Morelli and Warburg, see Eleonora Del Riccio's article 'Details and Expression. Giovanni Morelli's Model and Aby Warburg's 'Types' in Connection with Experimental Psychology during the 19th Century', *Art and Art History*, vol. 8 no. 1 June (2020), pp. 58–66.

[61] In 1931, Wind admitted that Warburg was interested in 'the process of the formation of images "in statu nascendi" in the shape of the expressive gestures made by the body' and that he studied 'the expressive gestures of antiquity or, to use Warburg's words, the "pathos formulae" of that civilization, which were taken up by later art' (*Warburgs Begriff der Kulturwissenschaft und seine Bedeutung für die Ästhetik*, Beilageheft zur Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft J. 25 (1931), pp. 163–179 [*Warburg's Concept of Kulturwissenschaft and its Meaning for Aesthetics* [in:] Edgar Wind, *The Eloquence of Symbols: Studies in Humanist Art*, ed. by Jaynie Anderson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 30, 32]). The Hamburg scholar personally gave Wind access to his unpublished papers; see M. Ghelardi, 'Edgar Wind su Aby Warburg: un esercizio ermeneutico, con: Appendice di testi inediti di Edgard Wind sulle riflessioni di Warburg su Botticelli', *Engramma* 150 October (2017), pp. 625–635. It is worthwhile to note that Wind's own studies published in the 1930s echo this Warburgian motif as they regard heroic-dramatic gestures in English portraiture (see Edgar Wind, *Hume and the Heroic Portrait: Studies in Eighteenth-century Imagery* (ed. Jaynie Anderson), Oxford 1986). Gertrud Bing conformed the centrality of 'images as the embodiments of impulses, coined in the workshop of classical antiquity' for Warburg's conceptual framework when in a letter to Kenneth Clark, she stated that Clark's book *The Nude* is 'infinitely more Warburgian than much that now sails under Warburg's flag' (Elizabeth Sears, 'Kenneth Clark and Gertrud Bing: Letters on *The Nude*'. *The Burlington Magazine* 1301 (2011), p. 531). I am grateful to Prof. Elizabeth Sears for drawing my attention to Bing's letter.

Finally, Wind emphasises that Warburg's contribution addresses only mere details and not the painting as a whole; in other words, it is 'partial'. Wind asserts that by concentrating on details – 'poetical trappings' – the Hamburg scholar failed to understand the programme of the painting as a whole. Wind juxtaposes Warburg's 'detail-oriented' attitude to his own ambition of understanding the main 'argument' of the picture (PM, 120). This opposition becomes even more explicit when viewed in the context of Wind's BBC lectures, delivered three years after the publication of *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*.[62] While reflecting on the progress of the marginalisation of arts in contemporary culture, Wind argues that art's displacement from a central position by the 'triumphant progress of applied sciences' was also prepared by art's 'own centrifugal impulse' (AA, 18) – the cultivation of art for its own sake. Yet part of the blame lies with art critics and art historians who, by focusing on marginal minutiae (that can be scientifically studied), instilled a mental habit of approaching art from the vantage points of details or fragments. Such 'an art history of the smallest particles' (AA, 22), Wind argues, makes detail the most important element of the artwork and urges to put the fragment above the whole. A work of art is primarily a unity – that is, a whole – and it cannot be reduced to parts or fragments. As Cassirer explains: 'the true unity can absolutely never be the result and the mere sum of individuals for unity and multiplicity belong to completely different dimensions'.[63]

The problem with art history of the smallest particles is that when it loses sight of the work of art as a whole, it also loses access to its full understanding and enjoyment. Wind reminds us that knowledge plays a crucial role in all perceptions, including an aesthetic one. 'The eye focuses differently when it is intellectually guided' (AA, 60); it 'sees as our mind reads' (AA, 60). Thus, knowledge of an artwork's content – of its intellectual background and symbols – affects our aesthetic pleasure. In other words, Wind strongly believes that aesthetic appreciation can be improved by knowledge, and that the work of art begins to live more fully when its riddle is solved.[64] It follows that the main task of an art historian is to understand the iconographical programme of a work of art and to decode its symbols.

Significantly enough, the ultimate purpose of such art history is to enhance enjoyment of individual works of art. 'There is one – and only one – test for the artistic relevance of an interpretation: it must heighten our perception of the object and thereby increase our aesthetic delight' (AA, 62). That is why Wind attempted to solve the riddle of

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[62] Edgar Wind, *Art and Anarchy*, op. cit.

[63] Ernst Cassirer, *Eidos and Eidolon*, op. cit. p. 232. Wind applies the same principle to the concept of encyclopaedia, which is not a conglomeration of separate parts but rather where every piece of knowledge is related to the centre of gravity; see Franz Engel, *'Though this Be Madness: Edgar Wind and the Warburg Tradition'*, op. cit. p. 102. On Wind's idea of encyclopaedia, see also Elizabeth Sears, *Edgar Wind and the 'Encyclopaedic Imagination'* in *Edgar Wind: Art and Embodiment*, ed. by Jaynie Anderson, Bernardino Branca, Fabio Tononi, (Oxford: Peter Lang, forthcoming in 2023).

[64] Edgar Wind claimed that 'a great symbol is exactly the reverse of a sphinx; it lives more fully when its riddle is answered' ('The Eloquence of Symbols', *The Burlington Magazine*, 92 (1950), p. 349).

Primavera: reconstruction of the 'philosophic argument' illustrated by the artist (PM, 127 n. 47) and nuances of Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonism are useful only as long as they promote aesthetic joy. 'But it is questionable to what extent such excursions into a finesse of Ficino's system still contribute to an understanding of the painting [...]. This process should sharpen the sense of the "lyrisme exact" [of Botticelli's painting], but be stopped when it begins to detract from it' (PM, 126).

Wind approaches images as vehicles of ideas, and in his view, Italian artists of the Renaissance distinguished themselves by their acute ability to visualise ideas. That ability is also the most prominent attribute of Botticelli who was, as Vasari put it, a 'persona sofistica' – an intellectual with a great talent to paint ideas (PM, 126). Consequently, *Primavera* appears as a learned philosophical allegory. The problem with the Florentine master is that his 'philosophical pedantry has become so infused with lyrical sentiment that, for many generations of beholders, the sentiment of the picture has extinguished the thought, with the result that the mood itself has been too loosely interpreted' (PM, 126). The main scope of Wind's efforts was to restore lost balance by stressing 'the intellectual character in Botticelli' (PM, 126).

Warburg's name does not appear on Wind's list of art historians of the smallest particles, but Wind's argument applies to him nonetheless.[65] It is debatable whether the Hamburg scholar explained the programme of *Primavera* or not, but there can be no doubt that decoding the programme of an individual painting was never his goal in itself (even in the Schifanoia lecture), let alone for the sake of augmented aesthetic delight. The Hamburg scholar openly rejected the hedonistic trend in art history, 'which takes the description of the individual work of art as its goal and therefore implicitly grants to the owner the right to the most personal artistic enjoyment'.[66] Rather, Warburg studied "images" (and not "works of art"[67]), within the confines of the 'science of culture'. 'Accessory forms in motion', gestures and body postures, were studied as expressions of emotions and as reservoirs of psychic energies. As such, they contributed to the understanding of the psychological condition of man measured in terms of conquering fears and increasing self-reliance.

When comparing Warburg's and Wind's respective readings of Botticelli's *Primavera*, it is important to see the difference between viewing images as documents of 'cultural

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[65] Wind mentioned Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl, the Vienna School, Roger Fry, Clive Bell and Bernard Berenson (AA, 23).

[66] Warburg's letter to Edwin R. A. Seligman [in:] Davide Stimilli, *Aby Warburg in America Again: With an Edition of His Unpublished Correspondence with Edwin R. A. Seligman (1927-1928)*, RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics, no. 48, (2005), p. 201.

[67] 'In dealing with the individual work of art, Warburg proceeded in a way which must have seemed somewhat paradoxical to the student of art with a formalist training; his practice of gathering together pictures in groups gave his work its peculiar stamp: he interested himself just as much in the artistically bad picture as in the good, and indeed often more so, for a reason which he himself explicitly acknowledged – because it had more to teach him' Edgar Wind, *Warburg's Concept of Kulturwissenschaft*, op. cit., p. 35.

history' and viewing paintings as documents in the history of ideas. This difference is even clearer when their distinct approaches to rituals are concerned. Warburg always put the study of rituals at the core of his research. He investigated various forms of Florentine festive life, such as jousts, civic celebrations, and pageantry, as well as the dances and ceremonies of Pueblo Indians in New Mexico, and the Dionysian cults of archaic Greece. His keen interest extended even to blood and human sacrifices.[68] The violent Dionysian 'thiasotic cult' is mentioned in the introduction to the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* as 'the mint that coined the expressive values of pagan emotion'.[69] In Warburg's view, the experiences of 'mass orgiastic seizure' in archaic cultic rituals left lasting imprints on the social memory of mankind.[70] The 'survival of antiquity' he studied was the memory of such a Dionysian heritage, manifesting itself in the patterns of floating draperies, agitated female figures and various forms of violent body expressions that 'survived' in the imagery of the Renaissance and modern times.

On the other hand, Edgar Wind opens *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* with André-Jean Festugière's distinction between two kinds of mysteries: 'mystères cultuels' and 'mystères littéraires'. The first one indeed refers to rituals of initiation, with Wind mentioning the festival of Eleusis as an example. But Wind clearly changes the register dedicating his book to the 'mystères littéraires', which he defines as 'a figurative use of terms and images which were borrowed from the popular rites but transferred to the intellectual disciplines of philosophical debate and meditation' (PM, 3). In other words, the mysteries that Wind studied are a metaphoric use of terminology borrowed by the philosophers from mysteries of initiation. Attested already in Plato, who declared 'that philosophy itself was a mystical initiation of another kind' (MP, 14), it gained special popularity in the Neoplatonic thought of late antiquity. Wind's study of the 'survival of antiquity' concerns the revival of philosophical concepts and doctrines veiled in riddles and

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[68] On Warburg's interest in sacrifices, see especially: Aby Warburg, Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen, Uwe Fleckner, Isabella Woldt (eds.) Oldenbourg Verlag, Berlin 2012, p. 85-89. See also Charlotte Schoell-Glass, 'Aby Warburg's Late Comments on Symbol and Ritual', *Science in Context* 12 4 (1999), pp. 621–642; Charlotte Schoell-Glass, 'La mort d'Orphée ou le retour de la bestialité: Aby Warburg et l'antisémitisme', *Revue Germanique Internationale*, 17 (2002), pp. 111–126; Charlotte Schoell-Glass, *Superlative der Gebärdensprache: Kindermord*, [in:], *Bild/Geschichte: Festschrift für Horst Bredekamp*, (eds.) Philine Helas, Maren Polte, Claudia Rückert and Bettina Uppenkamp, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007, pp. 155–170; Claudia Cieri Via, 'Menschenopfer', *Images Re-vues* 4 (2013) http://journals.openedition.org/imagesrevues/29.

[69] Aby Warburg, *The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past*, op. cit., p. 279.

[70] 'The unhindered release of expressive bodily movement, especially as it occurred amongst the followers of the gods of intoxication in Asia Minor, encompasses the entire range of dynamic expressions of the life of a humanity shaken by fear, from helpless melancholy to murderous frenzy, and in all mimetic actions, which lie somewhere in the middle, as in the thiasotic cult, it is possible to detect the faint echo of such abyssal devotion in the artistic depiction of the actions of walking, running, dancing, grasping, fetching, or carrying. The thiasotic hallmark is an absolutely essential and uncanny characteristic of these expressive values as they spoke to the eye of the Renaissance artist from the sarcophagi of antiquity'. Aby Warburg, *The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past*, op. cit., pp. 279–280.

allegories in poetical texts, as well as the masterpieces of Renaissance art.[71] To be sure, among these mysteries there were also Dionysian – or rather, Bacchic – mysteries. Wind traces the re-emerged 'Bacchic mysteries of Plato' in the philosophy of Pico della Mirandola and the art of Michelangelo. But the 'Bacchic frenzy' in Renaissance culture is only one of the metaphors of creative spirit that was portrayed as intoxication – or sudden and violent divine inspiration ('furor divinus').[72] However, Bacchic mysteries may also refer to the perfect or "polarly" opposite, a violent purification: 'the Dionysian ritual of flaying', which Wind finds attested in word and image – that is, in the poetry of Michelangelo and in his image of St Bartholomew within *The Last Judgement* (PM, 187–188).

When pondering Wind's 1957 interpretation of *Primavera* in relation to Aby Warburg's reading of the same painting, we can see that continuation and supplementation of Warburg's efforts is combined with modification as well as criticism. And when Wind takes over Warburgian motifs he usually significantly 'transposes' or 'transforms' them. This attitude was noted already by Erwin Panofsky, who in 1939 wrote: 'certainly [Wind is] the one man who has developed the ideas of the late Professor Warburg in an entirely independent spirit and is able to carry them on in a most stimulating form'.[73] Speaking about "an entirely independent spirit" Panofsky meant Wind's early studies published in the 1930s that were posthumously collected in the volume "Hume and the Heroic Portrait", but it also neatly characterises Wind's interpretation of *Primavera*.

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[71] Bernardino Branca underlines that Wind studied 'Il Nachleben-sopravvivenza di […] metafisica antica nella cultura del Quattrocento fiorentino' – that is, the return of 'le idee metafisiche neoplatoniche di matrice mistico-dionisiaca' (*Edgar Wind Filosofo delle Immagini*, op. cit. pp. 189, 193).

[72] Bacchus, who conveys drunkenness, is an allegory of 'divine madness' (see PM, 178). See also John F. Moffitt, *The Neoplatonic Bacchus of the Renaissance* [in:] John F. Moffitt, *Inspiration: Bacchus and the Cultural History of a Creation Myth*, Leiden 2005; François Quiviger, *Neither Drunk nor Sober. Dionysiac Inspiration and Renaissance Artistic Practices*, [in] Iconology, Neoplatonism, and the Arts in the Renaissance, op. cit., pp. 200-215.

[73] Letter from Erwin Panofsky to Boas, 5 October 1939, [in:] Erwin Panofsky, *Korrespondenz 1910 bis 1968*, ed. Dieter Wuttke, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001–2011, vol. II, p. 219, quoted by Ianick Takaes de Oliveira, 'L'esprit de Warburg lui-même sera en paix (A survey of Edgar Wind's quarrel with the Warburg Institute)', *La Rivista di Engramma*, 153 (February 2018), p. 125.

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Figure 1. Francesco Botticini, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, c. 1475–1477. Tempera on wood. The National Gallery, London (artwork in the public domain).

Figure 2. Sandro Botticelli, *The Madonna of the Magnificat*, 1481. Tempera on wood. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (artwork in the public domain).

Figure 3. Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, late 1470s or early 1480s. Tempera on wood. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (artwork in the public domain).

Figure 4. Agostino di Duccio, *Legend of St. Sigismund*, 1450–1457. Marble relief. Castello Sforzesco, Milan (artwork in the public domain).

Figure 5. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Massacre of the Holy Innocents*, 1486–1490. Fresco. Santa Maria Novella, Capella Tornabuoni, Florence (artwork in the public domain).

Figure 6. Giulio Romano, *The Battle of Constantine*, 1520–1524. Fresco. Stanze di Raffaello, Vatican (artwork in the public domain).
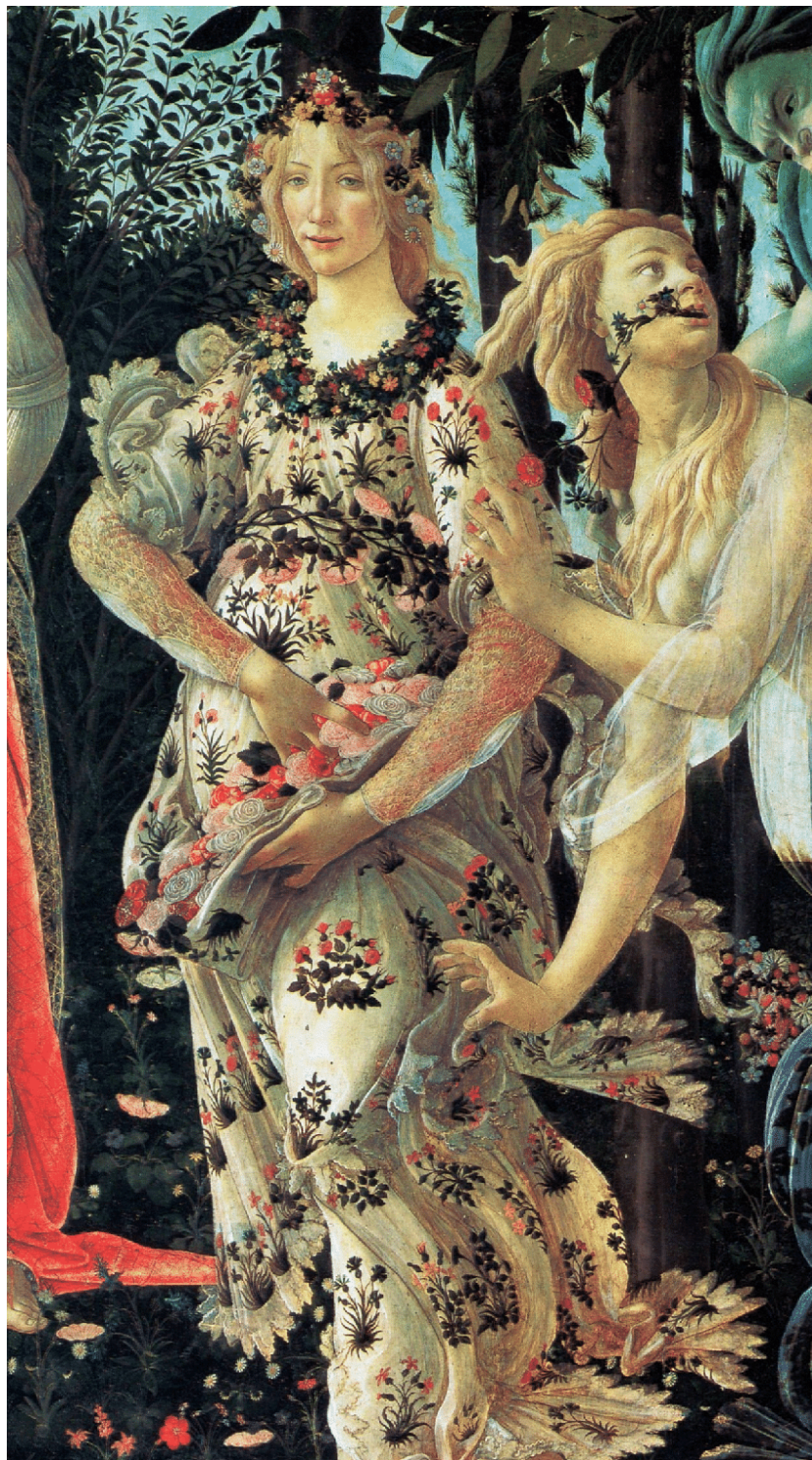
Figure 7. Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (detail), late 1470s or early 1480s. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (artwork in the public domain).

Figure 8. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule*, 1483–1485. Fresco. Santa Trinita, Capella Sassetti, Florence (artwork in the public domain).

Figure 9. Piero della Francesca, *The Battle of Constantine*, 1464. Fresco. San Francesco, Arezzo (artwork in the public domain).