Images that move

Analyzing affect with Aby Warburg

Kerstin Schankweiler and Philipp Wüschner

1. Introduction

In contemporary societies of mass communication, the rising dominance of images has gained increasing traction as a trope, in both public life and scientific discourse. Visuality and 'the visual' are thus increasingly critical to understanding the role of affects and emotions that resonate within any given society. Of course, analyzing this role is not the exclusive domain of art history. There are, for instance, a diverse array of empirical methods for analyzing the current flood of images, including neuroscientific approaches and algorithms[1] that sort and classify images according to similarities in form, content, or style. However, art history as a philosophical discipline is less interested in statistical analysis than in hermeneutical methodologies, which demand an interpretation of singular and concrete cases. As such, art history hones a deeply embodied set of techniques and practices of interpretation that have long fostered what might be considered an embodied expertise. Art-historical practice is thus highly relevant to research on affectivity, particularly where affect is understood as a relational concept. If affect entails the capacity to affect and to be affected, then it follows that this capacity can be trained and refined. Likewise, the disposition art historians have come to know as "expertise" entails an affective relation between a researcher and her objects. We believe that an understanding of "the way art historians work"[2] can help extrapolate this affective relation, making it accessible to a broader research community and contributing to the field of affect theory at large.

This essay champions Aby Warburg (1866–1929) as an especially relevant resource for understanding affectivity in a visual context. Warburg is better known for his unorthodox style than for his methodological rigor. Yet as we shall seek to show, Warburg's particular approach can facilitate the methodological analysis of images as they pertain to affects, from an art-historical point of view. In this essay, we will test this approach not on an example from the canon of art history but on one from modern media. Warburg is appropriate for this task for two reasons. First, Warburg is considered a pioneer of 'image science'. His unfinished project of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* is recognized as an early and radical extension of art history and can be seen as visual culture studies *avant la lettre*. His work and

methods are therefore especially valuable for any attempts to extend art-historical approaches beyond the discipline. Second, and even more importantly, what makes him especially interesting for our purposes here is that he is also the most prominent representative of the discipline dealing with the questions of affectivity and its visual mediation. His concept of *pathos formula* ("Pathosformel") offers not only an insightful account of how affectivity is formalized and 'stored' in works of art, but also provides fragments of a theory of affect in its own right.

Most methods of art history are descriptive in nature. They seek to link what can be seen with the socio-cultural, historical, or philosophical contexts and conditions of production and reception. Methods, in this sense, can concern the construction of a history or evolution of styles, formal elements, artistic mannerisms, symbols, and the particular semiotics of genres, as well as their categorization and comparison. They are often combined with theoretical perspectives tailored to particular research interests, such as gender or race. Within a hermeneutical framework, one particular arrangement of these tools is the iconographic-iconological method of image analysis, which is closely associated with Warburg's colleague Erwin Panofsky. Even within the safe bounds of hermeneutics, Aby Warburg remains, to this day, a kind of wild card, as is reflected in the differing attitudes of many of his contemporaries and successors. Ernst Cassirer, for instance, famously said that Warburg's archive either left the scholar running away screaming or compelled her to stay there for a lifetime (Saxl, 1949, 48). Meanwhile, Georges Didi-Huberman accused Warburg's successors, Ernst Gombrich and Erwin Panofsky, of trying to contain Warburg's vision within the limited confines of their own scholarly discipline (Didi-Huberman, 2003; see also Becker, 2013). In what follows, we will reverse this 'hedging in' of Warburg's approach. Taking Panofsky's systematized version of iconography and iconology as our starting point, we then move on to fuse these elements together again through Warburg's rather idiosyncratic approach, in order to hone in on the question of affect. Rather than hoping to emulate Warburg's peculiar frame of mind, we propose that an affective approach to images can benefit from closely attending to his seemingly mad methodology of arranging and rearranging his objects. His approach, we argue, not only exemplifies the art historian's habitualized method, but is also highly instructive for understanding the intellectual predicaments of affective analysis more broadly.

2. Iconology and image description

While Aby Warburg is often addressed as a pioneer of iconological practice (Becker, 2013, 1–3), the name of German art historian Erwin Panofsky is more profoundly associated with iconology as a genuinely art-historical *method*.[3] For this reason, Panofsky's methodological efforts are intimately bound to the birth of art history as an independent, methodologically founded discipline of the humanities. For the purpose of this volume, it will be useful to move backwards and start with Panofsky before approaching Warburg.

The two scholars met for the first time in 1912 at a conference in Rome. After Panofsky moved to Hamburg in 1921, their personal and professional relationship

deepened. Panofsky's work was, until his emigration to the United States after the rise of Hitler, closely connected to the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* (Warburg's library in Hamburg). He developed an advanced and applicable model for the interpretation of art, drawing on Warburg's focus on the *meaning* of works of art, later known as the *Hamburg School of Art History*. This change of focus was a paradigmatic shift within the discipline, which was until then predominantly concerned with questions of style and chronological classification.

Panofsky himself compared the relationship between iconography and iconology with that between ethnography and ethnology (Panofsky, 1955). Accordingly, iconography is concerned with description and identification of depicted or the pictorial themes, while iconology aims at a more comprehensive interpretation of the content of an artwork. Based on this difference between iconography and iconology, Panofsky divided his method into three ideal-typical steps or stages of interpretation. These are (1) a pre-iconographic description of the object, (2) an iconographic analysis of the meaning of what is represented, and (3) an iconological interpretation, which contextualizes the object in its cultural and intellectual history. These steps are not usually applied one-to-one in the practice of art history today. They inform many art-historical analyses, but the stages of analyses inevitably merge.

Although it appears to be the most basic aspect of Panofsky's method, the relevance of image description remains highly influential. Writing about images and objects from an art-historical perspective is predominantly based on an ostensive description. Students learn and practice this essential technique at the very beginning of their studies, particularly in a German tradition. To do so, they are encouraged to look closely at original works of art and to describe them through conscious viewing. A description comprises various elements, including the image's composition – the direction of movement, spatial structure, etc. – as well as its surface, that is, its materiality, fracture, color, and the disposition of its surface areas and depicted bodies. But description also includes a reflexive understanding of the connection to the beholder, as well as the narrative structure and the time structure. Moreover, describing is a demonstrative act that already characterizes the image or object by highlighting certain aspects of the work and neglecting others. Thus, describing is always connected to the act of indicating and showing something, and is based on the art historian's own perception, observation, and reflection. Hence, it is objective not in the sense of a neutral truth, but in the sense that the art historian gives a plausible and traceable account of her being affected. Such an account does not necessarily seek to expose an introspective knowledge of one's feelings, but rather, to elucidate the interplay of the image's visible elements with their description.[4]

In his book *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (1985), Michael Baxandall has famously commented on the relation between a picture, its explanation, and the practice of description:

> We do not explain pictures: we explain remarks about pictures – or rather, we explain pictures only in so far as we have considered them under some verbal description or specifications. . . . But though "description" and "explanation"

interpenetrate each other, this should not distract us from the fact that description is the mediating object of explanation.

(p. 1)

For Baxandall, a description of a picture is "a representation of thinking about a picture more than a representation of a picture" (p. 5). To describe a picture, we must rely on concepts. Baxandall points out that words and concepts are not used absolutely or informatively but demonstratively. Descriptions are not given so that the reader knows what the picture looks like enough to accurately sketch it, for instance. Rather, descriptions work "in tandem with the object" (p. 8). Describing is, above all, expressing one's interest in the picture. This then leads to a deeper analysis and interpretation, while both description and interpretation impact one another. As an expression of how we are affected by an image, a description is already relational in nature.

In this sense, image description raises methodological questions of relevance for anyone seeking to analyze affect from an art historian's point of view. How can we describe affective qualities of movement or intensities, as what they are and in what they do? In turn, this question raises several others: How is affect materialized or encoded in images and pictures? What is the role of reiterating formal elements that constitute a series of images? How, finally, can an art-historical perspective inform our descriptions of affective dynamics within and between images, as well as between an image and its beholder?

Staying true to the demonstrative method of art history, let us look at an example. The following is an object of research in the project "Affective Dynamics of Images in the Era of Social Media" at the CRC *Affective Societies* that investigates, among other things, 'viral images' from the 2011 Egyptian Revolution (Figure 6.1).

This photograph was taken on 17 December 2011, in Cairo on Tahrir Square, which was the site of political demonstrations during the Egyptian Revolution. It depicts the brutal abuse of a woman by a group of military men. While two men are dragging the woman along the ground, her upper body is bared and her blue bra is exposed. Yet her face remains covered by her *abaya*. The pain that the woman must have felt remains strangely abstract because her face is not visible, but the violence against her body is drastic and concrete. Both of her arms are straight in the air above her head, creating a posture that seems not to be the result of her movement, but rather of the men acting upon her. One man is poised to kick her in the stomach: his left leg and arm are raised, his body leaned back in the action. One can see the dynamic of the men's movements and body tension around the woman they encircle, grabbing, dragging, and kicking her body, leaning forwards and backwards, with truncheons pointing into different directions. These movements stand in stark contrast to the seemingly lifeless body of the victim, who appears to be unconscious and therefore defenseless. The violent action of the scene in the center also stands out against the man to the right, who appears somewhat resigned, as though taking a rest, not looking at what is happening

Figure 6.1 Egyptian army soldiers arrest a female protester during clashes at Tahrir Square in Cairo on 17 December 2011.

Source: REUTERS/Stringer.

beside him. The gray asphalt of the street and the soldiers' dark uniforms contrast against the only colorful spots on the image: the bright blue of the jeans and, above all, of the blue bra. The pavement around the scene is scattered with clutter, small stones, and pieces of paper. As leftovers, they bear witness to the demonstrations on Tahrir that were still going on at that moment.

This example of an image description follows some conventions: It starts by designating the image (photograph taken on 17 December 2011 in Cairo on Tahrir Square) and naming its theme (Egyptian Revolution, shows the brutal abuse of a woman by a group of military men). This provides some orientation for the reader or viewer, who might not otherwise know what they are looking at. The description in general takes the form of a narrative that guides its reader through the image, starting with the more important parts in the center, and then exploring the other parts, not necessarily mentioning each and every detail, but pointing out what is interesting from the point of view of the art historian describing the image. This narrative follows the action of the figures and their relation to each other. Apart from these very basic indications, a description will always take its cues from the object itself; if there are no figures, for example, we cannot follow their

action. Because every art historian's description is grounded in his or her being affected, no two art historians' descriptions of an object will ever be exactly the same. Yet they can all claim a form of objectivity, because they point to formal elements of the image – such as color, light, or composition – that are accessible to all viewers. We contend that the ability to identify these elements is bound to the capacity of being affected and of becoming what Warburg called a "very sensitive seismograph" for formalized and mediatized motion and affect (cit. Gombrich, 1970, 254). This "seismographic" capacity can be refined through repeated encounters with bodies of art.

Even from this short description, it becomes evident that image description almost inadvertently transcends itself, moving from the very first steps of making sense of an image towards a broader iconographic and iconological analysis. The brightness of the skin cannot be separated from the violence of the scene. The visible contrast between the blue bra and the military uniforms, between exposure and armor, cannot be isolated from the conceptual contrasts between power and powerlessness or between notions of masculinity and femininity. In short, the affectivity of the visible cannot be seen separately from the discursive. Already within the first steps of describing it, both dimensions inescapably merge on a symbolic field, evoking and carrying forward a whole iconography of violence, war, vulnerability, and resistance. Therefore, to achieve a sufficient level of understanding, art history needs to be thought of as "allgemeine Kulturwissenschaft als Lehre vom bewegten Menschen" or *the study of culture as the study of the moved human being* (our translation; Warburg, 1924, cit. after Raulff, 1997, 42). This understanding is precisely how we define the study of *affective societies*. Indeed, in describing an image alone, the art historian will always already have to express and reflect upon her own cultural, historic, and affective entanglement, so that an element of idiosyncrasy can never be fully avoided. Part of the methodological effort of the iconologist lies in the attempt to be affected by an image in a productive, plausible, and perceptive way. The example of Aby Warburg may shed some light on what this could entail.

3. Aby Warburg's pathos formula

3.1 Pathos and its expression

Aby Warburg's concept of *pathos formula* ("Pathosformel") is often cited among practitioners of cultural studies ("Kulturwissenschaften") as one of their key concepts. Definitions of what a pathos formula is or does, however, vary heavily or remain absent altogether, mostly because Warburg himself never elaborated the notion further. With "Pathosformel" Warburg tries to address the depiction of expressive gestures, specifically those which are found in works of Renaissance art, echoing antique portrayals of almost archetypal affect ("Pathos"). Warburg was interested in the migration and circulation of images across time and space. He coined terms like *migration of images* ("Bilderwanderung") and *image vehicles* ("Bilderfahrzeuge") that indicate the transgressive nature of images. However, his approach was not universalistic, and he was not looking for universal

pathos formulas that would occur in all cultures (Krois, 2002). Warburg also acknowledged that not every pathos would necessarily become a formula (ibid., 302). Rather, what Warburg wanted to describe with the concept of the pathos formula is the result of a transformation: something that is individual and refers to a specific event (pathos) becomes something generic and permanent (a formula). This formulaic character enables circulation and reiteration, in contrast to bodily expressions that are situational and ephemeral (ibid., 295).

Examples that Warburg uses are – above all – dancing female figures like nymphs, gestures of death and the dying, such as Orpheus, or scenes of erotic pursuits, such as Zephyr and Flora. However, pathos formulas are *not* studies of facial expressions of emotion as we find them, for example, in the French artist Charles Le Brun, whose *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions* (1702) advised artists and actors in the ways of portraying certain emotions. Warburg's interest lies not in the individual actualization of a general or basic emotion – like fear, anger, or desire – but in the generic reproduction of an expressive, affective formula that can serve many different purposes.

Under the impression of Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals* (1890), Warburg understood pathos as inseparable from its expression, though without being identical to or causally related to it. Therefore, he did not follow the path of physiognomy, which understood expression as a mere effect of underlying mechanical occurrences in the soul. Drawing on Darwin, he understood expression as the result of conflicting forces between various elements. One such element is *affect intensity*, which comprises will- and habit-independent, biologically necessary 'direct actions' of a nervous system that is being affected. Another, *association*, can trigger the same expressive reaction without biological necessity, and through habit, bridges the gap between natural reaction and willful communication. Finally, the *principle of antithesis* indicates how forms of expressions are invented not by biological necessity but by an inversion of already established movements. This includes the creation of forms of expression that stay immanent to communication without biological necessity, such as shrugging one's shoulders to invert aggressive behavior (Didi-Huberman, 2016, ch. 3).

The principles of association and antithesis allowed Warburg to look for affect beyond its biological, embodied, or otherwise causal necessity. His focus on formulas as non-human agents does not mean that embodiment and experience, which have been emphasized in affect theory, have less relevance. However they, too, need to be flanked by formal qualities and their affective dynamics. In the end, bodies also have forms and can be read in this way. Building on the notion that affects have forms, Eugene Brinkema, in her book *The Forms of the Affects* (2014), outlines 'reading for form' as a methodological strategy:

> Reading affects as having forms involves de-privileging models of expressivity and interiority in favor of treating affects as structures that work through formal means, as consisting in their formal dimensions (as line, light, color, rhythm, and so on) of passionate structures.
>
> (Brinkema, 2014, 37)

Warburg's concept of pathos formula fits well into such a 'formalistic' account on affectivity, and can in turn help to elaborate it further.

For if there is no affect without expression, and if every expression that is not entirely necessitated by the physical demands of a body will, by force of association or antithesis, reenact an expressive habit or its inversion, then these personal or collective habits will determine the nature of affect itself. If, therefore, one could *store* these habits in the form of a repertoire or cultural memory,[5] one could also store the possibility of their affective reenactment, and thus, of affect or pathos itself. If this seems indeed to be part of Aby Warburg's program, in what sense precisely then can we say affect is 'stored' in its formalized or materialized state?

3.2 Formulaic iteration

Warburg used the word "Pathosformel" publicly for the first time in 1905 in a talk about *Dürer und die italienische Antike* (or *Dürer and the Italian Antiquity*), where he describes the defensive, protective gesture of Orpheus, who is about to be slain, as a "Pathosformel" (Warburg, 1905, 447).

Warburg then claims an expressive or 'gestural' genealogy that connects Dürer's depiction of the *Death of Orpheus* (Figure 6.2) to other, similar representations. Finally, through Angelo Polizianos' play *Fabula di Orpheo* and the writings of Ovid, Warburg also connects Dürer's depiction to the expressive repertoire or *formal vocabulary* ("Formensprache") of antique art. Warburg is *not* interested in an evolution of styles as understood by Giovanni Morelli, who had made them a point of scholarly interest in the 19th century. Rather, he is concerned with the formal iteration of expressions of pathos that constitute a memetic series within cultural memory, and which he calls *afterlife* ("Nachleben"). He claims that some of the affective intensity belonging to the *Death of Orpheus*, or the *War against the Amazons* of the Amazon Frieze from the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, has survived a number of changes. These include *changes in time* (lying latent during medieval times in its varying forms of expression), *geographic changes* (from antique Rome, to Renaissance Florence, to Dürer's Nuremberg), and *changes in its cultural context* (from paganism to Christianity). Afterlife is not a theory of the evolution of emotional expression, wherein an original image is simply copied and slowly changes over time until reaching its current form – as pictograms, for instance, develop into letters. Instead of an evolutionary model, the notion of afterlife follows a psychoanalytical model of a symbolic relation between singular or collective experiences and symptomatic reiterations (Didi-Huberman, 2003). In this context, the image of Orpheus' death, for example, could be a formula for all affects concerning death, murder, loss, or mourning.

Warburg claims that some affective quality or pathos always survives – or finds an afterlife – when different representations of the same formula are reiterated over time – as in Orpheus' crouching back, falling, being dragged, or lifting one hand for protection. To explain what he means, Warburg draws an analogy

Figure 6.2 Albrecht Dürer, *Death of Orpheus*, 1494, ink sketch.
Source: bpk, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Christoph Irrgang.

between his theory and Hermann Osthoff's linguistic theory of intensification. In Osthoff's theory, the Latin word *bonus* ("good") changes to suppletive forms (*bonus, melior, optimus*) – just like some infinitives do when conjugated ("to be – am – is – are"). However, the sense of what is *expressed* by these words *survives* the semantic changes, remaining the same, only different (Warburg, 1929, 631). This means that what is 'stored' in pathos formulas is not the encoded *meaning* of a certain emotion – as Panofsky would likely see it – but its primal *intensity*.[6] In this sense, intensity becomes form, while form is dynamized by intensity.

The concept of intensity plays a pivotal role in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, whose works are foundational for affect theory. Some intensities, like temperature, are very common. Unlike extensive qualities such as length or volume, intensities of temperature cannot be divided. In order to "halve" a temperature, you have to reduce it continuously, and thereby change the nature of the body in general. In this process, according to Deleuze, intensities hit thresholds. Thresholds are singularities, like freezing points or boiling points, where the whole system undergoes a phase transition. In this moment, the 'pure intensity' can no longer be attributed to a body of ice *or* water *or* steam, but has to be thought of as belonging to all of them and none of them at the same time (Deleuze, 1995). Though less empirical in nature, Warburg's ideas about pathos fit neatly into this framework. They, too, describe qualitative changes of a body, and they, too, can reach singular thresholds that generate "extremes of physiognomic expression in the moment of highest excitement" (cit. Gombrich, 1970, 178). In these moments of intensity, which are captured in pathos formulas, the affect no longer belongs to one fixed emotional regime such as fear, agony, or lust, but instead marks the point of their possible transition. This allows Warburg to trace pathos formulas independently of their emotional contexts.

He goes so far as to claim that the emotional, cultural, and religious contexts of a pathos formula, and therefore its meaning, may completely invert into its opposite over the course of history. The desire of pursuit might transform into the fear felt in escape, while the agony of death might invert into the ecstasy of lust. He calls this shift *energetic inversion* ("energetische Inversion") to express the dynamism and ambivalence of tension-filled movement. Evil demoness or avenger angel, fighter or dancer – both are developed with the help of the same pathos formula. Warburg is interested in a generic and formulaic rendition of affective dynamics, rather than in individual expressions of emotion. His own example, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Figure 6.3), may help to make this point clearer (Warburg, 1893).

For Warburg, the most basic formula for any intensity is motion or movement. In his dissertation on Botticelli, Warburg does pay special attention to the external and ornamental movement of things like drapes or hair in the wind. Although they add little on the level of content, these ornamental motions, which Warburg began to call *dynamograms* ("Dynamogramme"), intensify the image. Warburg claims that the reason they so fascinate and *affect* us is because they create the illusion of movement and liveliness in something that stands still. In a similar manner, the term *pathos formula* itself binds together the event of affecting and

Figure 6.3 Sandro Botticelli, The Birth of Venus, ca. 1480, Tempera on panel.
Source: Photographic Department of the Uffizi Galleries, Florence.

being affected (pathos) with the timeless, motionless idea of a formula. Take, for example, the allegory of Spring in which a dancing nymph welcomes Venus on the shores. We miss the point if we take her dancing only as dancing, when the dance actually works as an *intensifier* to the whole scene. Warburg does not locate the affective intensity, or pathos, in the faces of the goddess or any of the other three depicted figures. Rather, he sees it in the wave of Venus' hair, in the joyful tumbling of the flower petals in the wind (allegorized by the two figures on the left), and in the dance movements of the welcoming nymph on the right. These moving elements – fluttering garments, flying hair, drapes etc. – act like accessories that Warburg calls "bewegtes Beiwerk" (*moving accessories*), and can be traced through time and through artistic genres alike. So according to Warburg, if an artist wanted to add affective intensity to an image, she could *accessorize* them with formulaic props that reach back to antiquity, and that worked independently of facial emotional expression.

3.3 Pathos formulas as intensifiers

If we try to adapt these ideas to our analysis of the picture of the "woman with the blue bra", it becomes striking how little of its affective quality is actually

carried by means of facial emotional expression. Only two of the faces on the picture can be seen clearly: those of the soldier on the left and the soldier on the right, who looks distantly away from the scene. The affective intensity of the face of the former must first be described in its formal qualities, as grimacing or twisting with his teeth barred. Only then, from an iconographic perspective, it could be interpreted as a distorted grin, and as an expression of exertion and violent ecstasy. More striking for an analysis of affect, however, is the intensity of the *dragged* body, the *falling abaya*, the *swung* truncheons, and the *dropped* clutter on the street. Darwin's principles of association and antithesis allowed Warburg to locate the true affective intensities of Botticelli's Venus *not* on her rather emotionless face, but in the "bewegtes Beiwerk" that accessorize her. In the same vein, the lifting of his helmet's visor by the soldier on the right and the lowering of his truncheon can be seen as prompting a movement that is antithetical to the violent scene in its center. And although it happens simultaneously with the beating of the woman, this pathos formula of exhaustion already anticipates the moment when the violence is over, as do the pieces of garbage that already prefigure the motionless remnants they are about to become. This temporary translatory movement is an integral part of pathos formula itself, a frozen moment in time that always already transcends the formulaic. This paradoxical *formulaic movement* is exactly how affectivity is *stored*. It is especially the suggested movement that approaches the observer actively and in an activating way.

In order to understand all these affective undercurrents, Warburg would encourage the researcher to try to connect this image to the pathos formula of Dürer's dying Orpheus, or even further back in time to the aforementioned fragment of the Amazon Frieze depicting a fight between the Greeks and the Amazons (Figures 6.4 and 6.5).

Suddenly, the scene can be read as the moment after the last strength of resistance, which was still palpable in the depiction of the Amazon, has been spent. A relationship of iteration and differentiation between the two images has been established. But apart from vague similarities, what would reconcile such seemingly random juxtapositions? Clearly, the photographer did not have Dürer or antique Amazons in mind when he took the shot. Yet, these associations only seem arbitrary and forced when they are misunderstood as an interpretation of the intentions of the artist, or of what the image represents. They become plausible precisely *as* associations. That is to say, they are only plausible when understood as the actualization of a repertoire that precedes all interpretation, and which allows associations. To view the 'blue bra' picture as a formulaic reiteration of the 'same but different' pathos of experiencing violence throughout history, means regarding the image's representational nature as secondary to its affective genealogy. Obviously, this is not the only possible way to look at it, nor is it inconsistent with a mere representational reading.

It cannot be denied that Warburg developed his idea of the pathos formula with reference to the human body. He was exclusively looking at figurative art

Figure 6.4 Amazon Frieze, Mausoleum of Halicarnassus (detail), ca. 350 BC, marble.

Source: Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 6.5 Egyptian army soldiers arrest a female protester during clashes at Tahrir Square in Cairo on 17 December 2011.

Source: REUTERS/Stringer.

and was especially interested in the depiction of human bodies and of *human* affectivity that certainly affect the beholder in a particular and very direct manner. However, we deem it important to stress the fact that pathos formulas are *not* conceptually bound to the human figure, just as being affected by an image cannot be reduced to feeling empathy towards who or what is represented. In Warburg's efforts to address what he calls *moving accessories*, we can already see a trajectory that leads beyond the human body, despite the fact that Warburg identifies elements that are bound to the human body and its excited motion, like the aforementioned flying hair or draping. We would suggest expanding the scope of Warburg's idea toward *moving accessories* that are detached from the human body (like the pieces of garbage on Tahrir Square). A painting or photograph of a dark sky shrouded in clouds above a turbulent sea, for example, could also be described as an affecting formulaic movement, or even as pathos. Moreover, even art or images that are not figurative at all could potentially be read along these lines. Think, for instance, of abstract painting like the scribbled, calligraphic elements in Cy Twombly's work or Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionism. The literal meaning of *pathos* in the term *pathos formula* might be strained by such examples. Yet we would still suggest a conceptual continuity between pathos formulas in the narrow sense and these formulaic arrangements of things with non-representational elements. This continuity is, for us, best expressed in Warburg's own words as *dynamograms*.

As we have seen, the semantic framing of a pathos formula within an image is not essential to its affective intensity. The content or subject of the image and its affective intensity might, therefore, drift apart from each other. This can create tilting effects between pain and lust, for example, or between serene calmness and chilling lifelessness. So, when it comes to analyzing affects via an image description, attention must be paid to the internal resonances and possible dissonances between the context of the picture and the intensity of its affective qualities – akin to Roland Barthes' theorization of the *studium* or *punctum* in photography (Barthes, 1981). A pathos formula does not have a fixed meaning of its own. Rather, it helps to *generate* meaning by arranging the affective dynamics within an image.[7] In other words, a pathos formula does not illustrate a specific content, but almost literally "moves" or arranges the elements of an image, thereby also moving and arranging the affective relation between the image and the viewer. Warburg understood these two conjoined processes, affectively arranging the elements of an image and by that arranging the relationship between image and viewer, as "storing" and releasing or reenacting affective intensity in a certain dynamic 'gestalt'. It is precisely this mutual affective relationship to which the art-historical description of artifacts and images testifies. No analysis of any image can step outside this affective relation. Hence, Warburg's idea of a pathos formula is of value not only for art historians but also for every researcher of affectivity who finds herself affectively entangled in the very objects she studies.[8] Before we elucidate this

more general methodological point further, we want to summarize in a few points what has been said so far:

a   The description of an image as the first step of its analysis is at the same time an expression of the affective dynamics between object and beholder. It makes this dynamic comprehensible and accessible to others by relating it back to the elements of the image.
b   As the analysis proceeds to explain the nature, effects, and sources of the relationship, its scope will widen to include, among other things, the iconographic and iconological interpretation of the elements of the image (contents, composition, symbolism, codes etc.).
c   According to Warburg, however, an analysis of content does not suffice. Instead, it is crucial to find and analyze those elements that intensify and thereby arrange the other elements. They will always (at least in a strict reading of Warburg) be an expression of some kind of motion, ranging from deathlike stillness to moments of ecstasy.
d   Some of these intensifiers, Warburg claims, are formulaic and generic in nature. These pathos formulas survived stored in artifacts that constitute the material, collective cultural memory. These pathos formulas link the image to a series of others that are not necessarily constituted by the represented content.
e   Lastly, contrary to what this list of bullet points might suggest, the analysis and interpretation of images does not work as a linear step-by-step program, but as a hermeneutically circular process of interpretation. This, we believe, is inevitable for any attempt to be true to the essential relationality of affective dynamics.

4. Learning from Warburg

In the last years of his life, Warburg worked on the extensive project of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (Figure 6.6) in cooperation with his staff members and colleagues, above all Gertrud Bing and Fritz Saxl. The Atlas, named after the goddess of memory in Greek mythology, is his attempt at a cartography of pathos formulas. By the end of Warburg's life, the Atlas consisted of 63 boards wrapped in heavy black cloth covered with photographs of artwork, illustrations from books or albums, newspaper clippings, and other media. As such, the Atlas offers insights into the methodological challenges of analyzing affect in images.

Warburg tried to give an instant, synoptic impression of the cultural, historical, anthropological, and philosophical interrelations of different pathos formulas by opening up the *thought-space* ("Denkraum") in which they appear. His genealogies, which informed the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, were not restricted to a succession of artworks. In this way, Warburg's approach – always cognizant of the ruptures and

Figure 6.6 Aby Warburg, The Botticelli Panel (No. 39), *Mnemosyne Atlas*.
Source: The Warburg Institute.

discontinuities of history – poses a challenge to an evolutionary model. Warburg suggests a form of *presence* of antiquity not only in Renaissance art but throughout European history at large.

One cannot determine, in a general way, how affective intensity can be identified within an image, since not all affective qualities appear neatly as formulas. It is important to clarify where and how affect materializes in the image and to specify the exact qualities that need to be the focus of the image description. Finding the affective qualities will always require the expertise and sensibility of the researcher. Nevertheless, we can very often identify formal reiterations in the materialization of affects over an extensive period of time and with wide geographical range. And this fact highlights the role these formulas play in constituting communities and their collective cultural memory.

It is vital to understand that the cartography Warburg developed in the *Mnemosyne Atlas* was a work in progress, and it also entailed performative methods like *showing* similarities and connections by rearranging media on his black boards when giving a talk. Therefore, it could be said that the context formed by the media was performatively *created* by Warburg and his colleagues *in situ*, rather than deduced.

This leads directly to the greatest challenge in any attempt to follow a Warburgian method. How can it be proven that the links someone claims to see between different occurrences of a pathos formula exist outside their subjective association? How, on the other hand, can the existence of these links be denied, when according to Warburg all these relations are based exactly *on* associations stored in a collective cultural memory? According to Georges Didi-Huberman, the role of the researcher as a *seismograph* (Warburg) for the affects encoded in all sorts of media is a form of *embodied methodology*, where the knowledge, expertise, and sensitivity of the researcher remain vitally important (Didi-Huberman, 2003). This sensitivity can be exercised, but it cannot necessarily be explicated. As the example of Warburg's own, often idiosyncratic, research makes clear, an art historian's *method* can only be made explicit to a certain point. Hartmut Böhme once called Warburg a "theorist without theory" and "an extremely detailed research practitioner" who developed his "theoretical consciousness" from working with his research objects themselves, without necessarily objectifying this consciousness (Böhme, 1997, 9, our translation from German). An art historian's method remains, first and foremost, a habituated ability to be affected by images in a productive way.

5. Epilogue

Looking at Warburg's non-linear compilation of images today, one cannot help but feel reminded of image clusters on screens, of the internet's image world and visual memory, and of social media, although there are obviously many differences. His cross-cultural concept of images as migratory vehicles seems all the more relevant in today's context of globally circulating digital images. We seem to live in an era where the globalized world is itself a kind of digital *Mnemosyne Atlas*.

Warburg's method might be described as *thinking* with and through images, an approach that very aptly characterizes cultural practice today. The rise of more

recent social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and the like demonstrates that social communication is continually becoming more focused on the exchange of images. Social media shapes and has shaped a whole set of cultural practices surrounding images, such as sharing, liking, commenting, etc. These are inter-active and affect-based processes of exchange between images and humans. As such, they emphasize even further the centrality of images in the circulation of affects. Images *move* users, who take action with images. But images also *move* other images that continually build and renew relations, which then appear in Clusters and Memes.[9] The affective dynamics that facilitate and even *constitute* these relationships can be understood as pathos formulas and analyzed as such. As we have shown, Warburg thought the afterlife of primal experiences of pathos came about through formulaic reiterations. In conclusion then, we want to stress that, within the realm of social media, this very same process must be under-stood as a means of instantly *spreading*, *distributing*, and *producing* affects. What we propose here is a Warburgian way of dealing with and describing affective dynamics of images in times of social media.

Notes

1 For example, the research carried out at the MPI for Empirical Aesthetics at Frankfurt a.M. For efforts from the new field of digital humanities with special regard to Warburg, see Impett and Moretti (2017).
2 Obviously, *the* art historian is a figment of the euro-centric mind, and we are well aware that German *Kunstgeschichte*, the perspective from where we speak, is not even paradig-matic for the broader discipline of academic art history, let alone for all other dealings with images or art in general.
3 Panofsky articulated this method for the first time in a lecture he gave in 1931, and then in different publications, finally in Panofsky (1955).
4 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison show in their history of the concept of objectivity that a reduction of objectivity to neural facts has only surfaced in the mid-nineteenth century as a key paradigm for scientific research (Daston & Galison, 2007).
5 We prefer the term *repertoire* to the concept of a collective or cultural memory, for it is less appropriating regarding the diverse and subaltern strands of a society or commu-nity, and because it grants greater agency to those who reenact it. However, it is clear that for Warburg the term *memory*, which is alluded at in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, is more appropriate.
6 Warburg himself has used the notion of 'intensity' with regard to pathos formulas; see Warburg, 1929, 631.
7 For a similar idea concerning concepts, see Slaby, Mühlhoff and Wüschner in this volume.
8 For a similar approach, see Stewart (2007).
9 The German art historian Wolfgang Ullrich has put Warburg's pathos formulas and Inter-net memes into context (Ullrich, 2015).

References

Barthes, R 1981, *Camera Lucida*, Hill and Wang, New York.
Baxandall, M 1985, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London.

Becker, C 2013, 'Aby Warburg's Pathosformel as methodological paradigm', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 9, pp. 1–25. Available from: http://arthistoriography.files.word press.com/2013/12/becker.pdf. [27 September 2017].

Böhme, H 1997, 'Aby M. Warburg (1866–1929)', in A Michaels (ed.), *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft. Von Friedrich Schleichermacher bis Mircea Eliade*, pp. 133–157, C.H. Beck, Munich.

Brinkema, E 2014, *The Forms of Affect*, Duke University Press, Durham, London.

Darwin, C 1890, *The Expression of the Emotions in Men and Animals*, Murray, London.

Daston, L & Galison, P 2007, *Objectivity*, Zone Books, New York.

Didi-Huberman, G 2003, 'Artistic survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the exorcism of impure time', *Common Knowledge*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 273–285.

Didi-Huberman, G 2016 [2002], *The Surviving Image. Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg's History of Art*, Pennsylvania State University Press.

Deleuze, G 1995 [1968], *Difference and Repetition*, Columbia University Press, New York.

Gombrich, E 1970, *Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography*, The Warburg Institute, London.

Impett, L & Moretti, F 2017, 'Totentanz. Operationalizing Aby Warburg's Pathosformeln', *New Left Review*, no. 107, pp. 68–97.

Krois, JM 2002, 'Die Universalität der Pathosformeln. Der Leib als Symbolmedium', in H Belting, D Kamper & M Schulz (eds.), *Quel Corps? Eine Frage der Repräsentation*, pp. 295–307, Wilhelm Fink, Munich.

Le Brun, C 1702, *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions*. *Proposée dans une conference sur d l'expression générale et particulière*, Chez François van-der Plaats, Marchand Libraire, dans le Gapersteeg, Amsterdam.

Panofsky, E 1955, 'Iconography and Iconology. An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance', in idem., *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, pp. 26–41, Doubleday & Company, New York.

Raulff, U 1997, 'Von der Privatbibliothek des Gelehrten zum Forschungsinstitut: Aby Warburg, Ernst Cassirer und die neue Kulturwissenschaft', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 28–43.

Saxl, F 1949, 'Ernst Cassirer', in PA Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, pp. 47–51, Evanston, New York.

Stewart, K 2007, *Ordinary Affects*, Duke University Press, Durham, London.

Ullrich, W 2015, 'Inverse Pathosformeln. Über Internet-Meme', *Pop-Zeitschrift*. Available from: www.pop-zeitschrift.de/2015/10/15/social-media-oktobervon-wolfgang-ullrich15-10-2015/. [15 October 2015].

Warburg, A 1905, 'Dürer und die heidnische Antike', in A Warburg, 1998, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike. Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, G Bing (ed.), 1932, reprint 1998, H Bredekamp & M Diers (eds.), pp. 443–448, Akademie Verlag, Berlin.

Warburg, A 2010 [1893], 'Sandro Botticellis „Geburt der Venus" und „Frühling". Eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellung von der Antike in der italienischen Frührenaissance', in M Treml, S Weigel & P Ladwig (eds.), *Aby Warburg, Werke in einem Band*, pp. 39–123, Suhrkamp, Berlin.

Warburg, A 2010 [1929], 'Mnemosyne Einleitung', in M Treml, S Weigel & P Ladwig (eds.), *Aby Warburg. Werke in einem Band*, pp. 629–639, Suhrkamp, Berlin.