Warburg’s Library in Hamburg is the core of the library of the “Warburg institute” in London (1933)
• Warburg was an art historian concerned with basic problems of cultural history: a way of new cultural and comprehensive investigations of images, pictures and photographies.

• Fritz Saxl and Erwin Panofsky: Warburgian iconology in England and in the United States.

• Warburg's focal themes: Renaissance and Antiquity in their historical dialectic, the mediation of figural traditions, Netherlandish painting, Dürer, and astrological and speculative imagery.

• Panofsky's approach is often catholic and synthetic, Warburg's one is comprehensive in concept and critical in its evaluation of evidence.

• The role of collective memory and the social functions of art.
• Warburg’s library: function of a vastly enlarged memory.
• Man, in body and mind, as the living evidence of his own development.
• Human products told and retold the functioning of personal and social memory.
• The fixed and hidden layers of human development, he found, would be recalled spontaneously and consciously by civilized man.
• **Human expression** as an *anthropological category* is the central focus of his studies:

  • “Therefore [he explained in 1923] I envisage as a description of the aims of my library the formulation: a collection of documents relating to the psychology of human expression. The question is: *how did verbal and pictorial expressions originate; what are the feelings or points of view, conscious or unconscious, under which they are stored in the arch*”
• The individual work of art has value above all as a record, as a highly complex and productive response of human memory to a particular situation.

• The peculiar quality of artifacts lies in their socially mediated functions (as memory and response), for Warburg learned:

“... in the years of work among the Florentine records, ... to understand the work of art as the outcome of a situation which involved the patron no less than the artist. It is in focusing on a given commission, and on the solution that emerges from conflicting possibilities which the historical situation presented, that Warburg's approach achieved its greatest triumph”.

• In a series of analytical steps, Warburg attempted to reconstitute its original context through historical research.
• Art historical analysis restores to the frozen and lated images of the past the dynamics of the very process that generated them.
• Images as the witnesses to an otherwise irretrievable phase of human development.
• In the course of history man developed instruments of defense against an aboriginal angst.
• By means of external control he made his way toward an internal emancipation from his fears and beliefs.
• Warburg considered the acquisition of culture a very gradual process, but doubted that the territory of freedom and mental control was a permanent gain.
• His Enlightenment view of scientific advance was tempered by a profoundly pessimistic evaluation of the dialectics of human progress.
• Human detachment from the real and threatening power of natural and political forces was constant peril, and the rapidly growing technology of his day rekindled ancient fears Warburg's mind.

• In 1895-96: trip across the United States. Attention to two peculiar aspects of American culture: a) popular magazines and b) the tenaciously surviving culture of Indian tribes.

• A study of Pueblo ritual in New Mexico, where he detected "the essential character of the conception of causality among the 'primitives,' . . . the 'corporalization' of the sense impression”.

• The modern historian of Warburg's persuasion would comprehend historical causality in a "de-corporalized," analytically distanced reading of symbolic representation. The coexistence of two totally different cultures on the American continent, a primitive and an ultramodern one, alerted Warburg to a potential loss of detachment and distance that threatened to throw man back to a newly "primitive" state.

• This "dialectic of Enlightenment” froze in Warburg's memory into the following confrontation on a snapshot he took in 1896:
I was able to catch with my camera in the streets of San Francisco the conqueror of the serpent cult and of the fear of lightning, the heir to the aboriginal inhabitants, the gold-seeking intruder into the land of the Indians. It is Uncle Sam with the top hat proudly striding along the road in front of an imitation classical rotunda. High above his top hat there stretches the electric wire. By means of Edison's copper serpent he has wrested the thunderbolt from nature. The American has no fear of the rattlesnake. He kills and exterminates it but certainly does not worship it. . . . Lightning imprisoned in the wire, captive electricity, has created a civilization that does away with paganism. What does it put in its stead? The forces of nature are no longer conceived as anthropomorphic or biomorphic shapes but rather as infinite waves obeying the pressure of the human hand. By this means the civilization of the machine age destroys what science, emerging from myth, had painfully conquered, the zone of contemplation that became the zone of reasoning. The modern Prometheus and the modern Icarus, Franklin and the Wright Brothers who invented the dirigible aircraft, are the fateful destroyers of that sense of distance who threaten to lead the globe back into chaos.
• These words become terribly real if we think of the technicized warfare of 1914-18, of the Holocaust of the Second World War, and of the threat of total annihilation through atomic warfare.

• Modern technology permits greater control and distance, but no escape from the threat of total destruction.

• The advance of the First World War and the collapse of Germany cost Warburg his sanity.

• As the war spread, he abandoned virtually all scholarly work in a desperate effort to cope with the course of events on the level of information, that is, at a distance. His friend and pupil Carl Georg Heise recalled that Warburg daily "concentrated all his energy on gathering clippings from the seven most important newspapers, foreign ones among them as long as he managed to obtain them, and to jot down . . . brief but telling comments" on the events.

• Warburg's "insane" effort reflects the utter incomprehensibility of events, and in its desperate persistence, the necessity to cope with them in the hope of discovering their causality.

• If an explanation could be found, then an element of logic would render in terms of the mind what defied human comprehension
1923: Warburg embarked upon a gigantic project, reminiscent of his compulsive gathering of informations and images.

An atlas of expressive human gestures, “an history of ghosts for adults”, through pictorial and diagrammatic records extending to the most recent news photographs and including ancient and medieval reliefs, Renaissance paintings, and even postage stamps.

Far from merely compiling similar human gestures through their historical transformation in pictorial records, Warburg was keenly responsive to ambiguities and even reversals in their function and meaning.

The *Atlas of Memory* abandons the customary linear discourse of the book. Warburg arranged photographs and reproductions on large screens in order to establish the historical recurrence or “revival” of key figures and gestures in polythematic patterns.

He recovered on the large scale of history the small and seemingly ephemeral vocabulary of human expression lying in what he called “Pathos Formula”.
• The “Pathos Formula”, which expresses the traumatic encounter between man and the world, is a result of a visual fixation, the source of which is a process of mimicry of some of the bearable (biomorphic) qualities of the threatening force, that then becomes petrified and fixed as an image.

• Warburg’s stand leads to an understanding of the activity of the “Pathos Formula” as that of an independent agent, cultural, impersonal, which makes itself present in the images of various periods, injecting Dionysian qualities into the image, even without the direct will of the artist, and which can only be read and revealed in the course of historical research.

• We are talking, therefore, about some kind of unconscious, latent cultural memory that is encrypted in particular images, but whose deciphering and decoding is possible only through the historical research of sources.