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CHAOS OR ORDER?

ABY WARBURG'S LIBRARY OF CULTURAL HISTORY AND ITS CLASSIFICATION

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The classification system of the Warburg Institute library, London, UK, is considered. First, a brief review of the scholarly work of Aby Warburg and the history of this library is given to illustrate the background of the classification. The classification is described and its basic features are clarified with examples. Finally, the classification of the Warburg Institute library is contrasted with ordinary classification thinking in library and information science. (Authors)

1. Introduction

The Warburg Institute in London is one of the most important centers for cultural and art historical, philosophical, psychological and philological research. It is mainly concerned with the study of classical tradition, those elements in European thought, literature, art and institutions which have their origin in classical antiquity. The institute was founded by Aby Warburg, a German historian of Renaissance art and civilization. The institute and its library developed from Warburg's own private library and through many phases and transformations it has preserved its original character and avoided both narrow specialization and becoming vast and diffuse (1). The aims of the institute are to promote cross-disciplinary study of cultural history, maintain its library and photographic collection and publish studies belonging to its scope (2). In 1992 there were approximately 300 000 titles and 2500 runs of periodicals in the library (3).

The classification system of the library is rather original and is based on Warburg's idea of scholarly associations. There are only two articles written on the subject: Edgar Wind's „The Warburg Institute Classification Scheme“ from 1935 (4) and A.F. Blunt's „A Method of Documentation for the Humanities“ from 1938 (5). Ours is the first major study on the classification of the Warburg Institute Library together with a presentation of Aby Warburg's life as a scholar and a history of his library. We have used mostly only sources written in English and some in German. We visited the Warburg Institute library in September 1993 and would like to thank the staff of the Institute for their generous help and guidance.

This study aims to find out what kind of associations build up the classification, how does Warburg's „good



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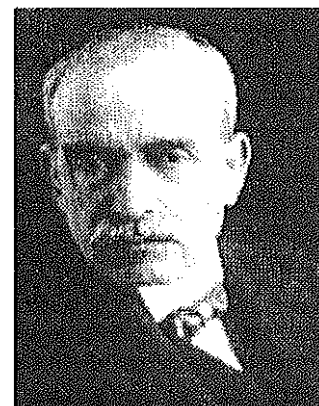
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neighbourhood of books“ concretely work and what kind of different divisions there appear in the classification. This is done by analysing samples from different levels of classification. We have also tried to trace the influence of Warburg's thinking on the classification. The Warburg Institute Library classification system offers new angles of organisation of knowledge in general. In fact this system made by a scholar for other scholars seems rather puzzling for a librarian and our stay in Warburg Institute library left us wondering whether it is a vast misleading chaos or a peculiar but sophisticated order.

In our article we shall first represent at some length Warburg's activity as a researcher and collector of books for this is necessary for understanding the scientific motives of his classification. Thereafter we shall describe and discuss some of the most original features of the classification.

2. Aby Warburg as a scholar

Aby Warburg (1866-1929), the founder of the Warburg Institute, was one of the most original thinkers in modern art history. Born in Hamburg, he was the eldest son of a wealthy Jewish banker family. He studied art history and classical archaeology in universities of Bonn, Florence and Strasbourg and his dissertation concerned the



mythological paintings, „Primavera“ and „The Birth of Venus“, of Sandro Botticelli (6,7). Warburg's aim was to find out what was it in antiquity that attracted the artists of quattrocento. He concluded that it was the expression of movement that Renaissance artists sought in antiquity and they were influenced by both learned humanists and the milieu of their own time. Thus Warburg started to question Winckelmann's widely accepted view of „noble simplicity and calm grandeur“ as the basic element of classical art and the idea of Renaissance art as products of individual men of genius (6, 8, 9, 10).

It was very characteristic indeed for Warburg as a scholar to question prevailing views and interpretations of historical situations and he never took them for granted.

This was obvious in his studies on Reformation Germany: Luther and Melancthon, who were seen as intellectual liberators of their time, were in fact still influenced by ancient magical beliefs. Likewise his studies on the relations between Gothic and Renaissance art proved that it was not a question of Renaissance winning the battle and rooting out the outdated Gothic, but rather of these two artistic styles living side by side and having partly the same aspirations (8, 11).

Warburg found the stylistic approach to art history too narrow and widened his scope to anthropology where a new trend „Kulturwissenschaft“ was emerging (8). Warburg laid stress on the milieu in which the work of art was created and saw art as a reflection of life and efforts of the time. This led him to cross the boundaries of art history to related fields. An art historian can not focus his attention solely on the masterpieces of art, but everything that helps to reconstruct the complete picture of a certain historical moment is necessary. This Warburgian principle was expressed in his famous aphorism „God dwells in the detail“. His studies on the deMedici and Sassetti families gave him a reputation of a brilliant archivist (6, 11, 12, 13, 14).

Warburg's scholarly work concentrated mainly around symbols. Warburg saw art as a visual way of behavior and works of art as symbols (10, 13). In order to study primitive cultures and the way symbols functioned in them Warburg visited New Mexico in 1895 and observed the dances and ceremonies of Pueblo and Navajo indians (6, 7, 8). He concluded that symbols were born as a psychological defence mechanism of primitive mind and that they derive from the fears that wo/man felt in an incomprehensible and hostile world. Both irrational magical beliefs and rational thinking leading to science were reactions to these fears (8, 13).

In 1907 Warburg began a study on astrological imagery which was his final break-through as a scholar. By studying classical and medieval astrological texts Warburg followed the continuous iconological tradition of the zodiacal figures. Warburg applied his thought of polarity to the contrast between astrology and astronomy. The primitive mind tries to organize the chaos of the firmament by grouping the stars into figures and naming them after familiar things. This turns the sky into means of orientation and leads to rational astronomy but it can also lead to irrational magical beliefs and astrological divination. Hence opposite forms of actions are caused by the same phenomenon. Young Warburg's belief in the spiritual evolution of the mankind and the victory of logic was later changed to conviction that primitive mentality is a permanent threat even to civilized men and women and we must always be aware of it (8, 12, 15).

Warburg did not think of classical art as a norm to all art like Winckelmann and his followers. He nevertheless saw the revival of classical forms as a central feature in the history of European art and thought. What each era gains from antiquity depends greatly on the era itself and its interests. The Greek art offered a rich imagery that later

artists could use when representing basic human emotions: joy, agony, fear. Warburg called these always reappearing images of classical passionate gesture language pathosformels (10, 11).

3. Aby Warburg as a collector of books: The birth of a library

Warburg began to collect and catalogue his books already in his twenties. He soon realised that his collection had far exceeded his personal needs and with financial help from his family he started a collection for his students and colleagues. His aim was to build a library where the history of the whole human civilization would be combined (16). Warburg was convinced that art history should be studied in interaction with other branches of the humanities, and each branch can receive its real significance only when seen as a part of the whole (17). The library was situated in Hamburg and the collection grew systematically and rapidly. It soon was obvious that the library was lacking both space and staff and in 1909 it moved to better premises. By 1911 there were about 15 000 titles in the library. There was an extensive collection of bibliographies as well as exhaustive collections on special subjects (16). Warburg saw also the documentary value of books that were not generally considered worth collecting, for example almanacs, astrological pamphlets and descriptions of festivals (18).

The arrangement of books was peculiar, almost puzzling and Warburg never got tired of rearranging his collection according to new developments in his studies. Contrary to the library trends of the time, Warburg emphasized direct contact to the books and spoke of „the law of the good neighbour“. The book one most needed was not usually the book one already knew but its „unknown neighbour“ in the shelf. The general idea was that the books together with their neighbours guide the students to the knowledge they are looking for (16).

In 1913 Fritz Saxl joined the library and it was he who took charge of the library when Warburg fell mentally ill during the first world war. Under Saxl's guidance the library was transformed into a research institute in 1921 and was named „Die Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg“ (1, 6, 7). The Warburg Institute as it is today, with its research grants, teaching activities and publications is largely Saxl's achievement although based on Warburg's plans and ideas (13). When institutionalizing the library the most urgent task was to normalize Warburg's classification system. No existing classification system seemed suitable, and therefore Saxl in collaboration with Gertrud Bing, Warburg's new assistant, developed a flexible system that would make changes possible without major difficulties. Finding a certain book was not as easy as in ordinary systems but the books remained a body of living thought as Warburg had intended (16). The institute became a center for scholars from various branches. The work of the institute was reported in two publications, an annual volume of „Lectures“ and „Studies“ dealing with special subjects (16, 17).

After many years Warburg recovered from his illness in 1924 and returned to work in the institute (6). Since the collection had once again grown too large for its current premises, Warburg immediately started to plan a new library building. The building carefully planned to serve its purpose was completed in 1926. It included four stack floors and a spacious elliptical reading room (13, 16). Warburg based the arrangement of the new library on four main sections corresponding to the four stack floors. The main sections were:

1. Bild, image (archaeology and art)
2. Orientierung, orientation (religion, science and philosophy)
3. Wort, word (literature, transmission of classical learning)
4. Handeln, action (political and social history) (19, 20)

These sections still form the basic structure of the library. The only difference is that Orientation and Word have changed places. The librarian in Warburg was always directed by the scholar in him (16). The classical antiquity was for Warburg a stockhouse of images. These images live in our civilization like memories in the mind of an individual. That is why Warburg placed the word *mnemosyne* (memory) above the entrance of his library (21).

Warburg's last five years were spent in synthesizing his life-work. He concentrated on the role of memory in civilization and developed his concept of collective (social) memory. Symbols of basic experiences live in tradition as archetypes of human experience and are stored in collective memory. The significance of classical Greek to the Western civilization lays precisely in such symbols of permanent value. Warburg illustrated his concept of collective memory with the *Mnemosyne*-project that was to be a kind of vast atlas of expressive gestures and expressions. The wandering of gestures would be presented as art historical image chains leading from the ancient world to the present. His ambitious plan was to present these ideas only by pictures (8, 11). When Warburg died of a heart attack in 1929 he was already a recognised scholar. (6, 7) His published works comprise merely a fraction of his vast life-work (9).

In 1933 the political situation in Germany changed with the rise of nazism. It soon became obvious that it was no longer possible for the institute to work in Germany. Led by Fritz Saxl the institute and its library hastily emigrated to London with financial help from British friends (22). The institute managed to root in British academic life and researchers such as Raymond Klibansky, Rudolf Wittkower, Frances A. Yates and Otto Kurz started to work in the institute (18, 23). In 1937 Wittkower together with Edgar Wind started editing „The Journal of the Warburg Institute“, the most important publication of the institute (7).

When the institute's collection was compared with the British Museum Library's it was found, that 30% of the books and periodicals belonging to the Warburg Institute Library could not be found in the British Museum Library. Thus in 1944 the institute was integrated into the University of London as an autonomous unit (8, 18). At last in

1958 the institute moved to its present central situation in university area (24). This building was specifically designed for the institute and was based on the arrangement of the previous library in Hamburg (25). After Saxl the directors of the Warburg Institute have been as follows: Henri Frankfort 1948-54, Gertrud Bing 1955-59, Sir Ernst Gombrich 1959-76, Joseph B. Trapp 1976-90 and Nicholas Mann 1992. (3)

4. The classification of the Warburg Institute Library

In the following we shall first describe in general terms the basic intentions of Warburg when he started to arrange his library and create his classification. Then we shall give some examples to illustrate the order of books and topics in the classification and then through some notions of classification theory contrast it with what one could call „ordinary thinking on classification“ within library and information science.

4.1 The whole of humanities

Warburg's library is a proof of his faith in the undivided whole of the humanities. He worried about strict borders between disciplines becoming more and more common and libraries arranging their collections according to these borders. Warburg wanted his library to be an alternative to collections applying those positivistic principles and to encourage scholars to browse and cull (13).

So as to be as useful as possible to the scholars the arrangement of books is based on scholarly associations (13). Warburg's law of the good neighbour can only work if the books are arranged thoroughly according to topic. Alphabetical orders hide the relations between books and make arbitrary neighbours. To find a book in an alphabetical order may be easier but on the other hand arranging according to topic makes browsing particularly rewarding. Glancing over the neighbours around the book of his/her interest a reader may find new ways of thinking and fresh views to his/her original topic (4, 16, 17, 26).

4.2 The system and the notation

The general subject areas of the library are

- European post-classical art (C)
- Pre-classical & Eastern art, Minoan, Greek & Roman art (K)
- Humanism, survival of classical literature, books and manuscripts, education (N)
- Classical & Modern literatures (E)
- Philosophy (A)
- Eastern religions, ancient & modern (G)
- Comparative, Graeco-Roman & Christian religion (B)
- Magic & science (F)
- Social history (D)
- Political history (H)

Classes C and K belong to the scope of Image, classes N and E to the scope of Word, classes A, G, B and F to the scope of Orientation and classes D and H to the scope of

Action. (See the main sections in chapter 3.) The main classes are listed here according to their arrangement in the library. The division into general subject areas seems to be according to different disciplines. This is actually deceiving: the boundaries between the disciplines are crossed whenever necessary, materials from related fields seem to gather around intensively studied subjects and same topics appear here and there in the classification.

Each special class is indicated by three letters and book's place within that class by Arabic figures. The first letter stands for the general subject area. The second letter specifies the general subject either systematically or historically. If the specification is systematical the second letter indicates a subclass of the general class, and if the specification is historical it indicates a period or a country. The meaning of the third letter is dependent on the meaning of the second letter. If the second letter indicates a systematic subclass, for example a branch of art, the third letter indicates a period and a country. If the second letter indicates a country the third indicates a period and a branch of art, and finally, if the second letter indicates a period, the third one indicates a country and a branch of art (4).

There are some special cases in the use of the third letter. If a book deals generally with the subject indicated by the first two letters, the third letter is for general, and this is the same in all departments. There are also classes, in which the chronological or geographical differentiation is not suitable and these may be systematically divided throughout. In that case the third letter only specifies the systematic division of the second letter. The library's policy is to separate source books dealing with the topic itself from books dealing with the same topic historically considered. Source books of any subject receive as the third letter a particular sign, which is the same in all the departments (H). In this case the subject of a source book can be seen from the first two letters (4).

A book's place within the three-letter class is indicated by Arabic figures. Numbers are not given to individual books but to subjects so that books dealing with the same subject receive the same number. Within this set of books with the same signum the order of books is arbitrary (4).

The subjects of each shelf are displayed at its gable as follows:

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------|------------|
| FO | ZOOLOGY, BOTANY, PHARMACY | |
| | SOURCES | |
| FOH | 50 ff | Zoology |
| | 520 ff | Botany |
| | 2005 ff | Mineralogy |
| | STUDIES | |
| FOF | | Biology |
| FON | | Zoology |
| FOM | | Botany |
| FOB | | Mineralogy |
| FOG | | Pharmacy |

This example shows the hierarchical structure of the classification. Under the section F (Magic & Science) there is the two-letter class FO (Zoology, Botany, Pharmacy) which is divided into three-letter subclasses. This example follows the thoroughly systematic division. One of the subclasses is the source book class FOH, and the difference between sources and studies is emphasized in the list of classes by extra headings. In this case 'Sources' would probably be original scientific texts on zoology, botany and mineralogy, whereas 'Studies' would be books on the history of the listed sciences. As we can see, there are several headings describing the contents of the subclass FOH (zoology, botany, mineralogy). These headings are probably added to make large subclasses easier to handle and the numbers in front of the headings indicate the point in the Arabic numbering in which the subject changes. This kind of more precise division has not been necessary in other classes of our example.

The system is flexible and can be changed according to development in research. (4) Thus the order of the classes is not alphabetical, a feature which guarantees the flexibility but makes finding of a certain class a bit tricky (see chapter 5.3.).

The structure of the notation as described here according to Edgar Wind's article makes the classification seem far more ordinary and traditionally structured than it actually is. In practice the notation seems more like a signum than a source of subject information for a reader, and to use and understand the classification it is not necessary to know what single parts of the notation mean. Also, as can be seen below, the ideas of good neighbourhood and like with like seem to be much more central to the system than the hierarchy.

4.3 Good neighbourhood

For the analysis we have chosen the sections F (Magic & Science) and D (Social History, Social Patterns), since these subjects were central in Warburg's studies. We have analysed the classification scheme concerning these classes at both the two- and three-letter levels. We have selected certain shelf sequences, that is all the books under the same heading, to be analysed book by book to clarify the good neighbourhood.

One way of ignoring the borders between different branches is placing the works concerning the handling of a certain phenomenon in art and literature next to the phenomenon itself, although both art and literature have their own sections in classification. This is clearly one of the basic principles throughout the classification, for example the following titles have received the same number (DCA 1320) under the heading Fools:

- *Der weise Narr in der englischen Literatur von Erasmus bis Shakespeare*
- *Clowning. An Exhibition Designed and Catalogued for Nottingham Festival 1977 by Rattenburg*
- *Fools and Folly: During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*

- *Hoffnarren im Mittelalter*
- *Iconographical Notes towards a Definition of the Medieval Fool*
- *Dwarfs and Jesters in Art*
- *A Social History of the Fool*
- *The Fool: His Social and Literary History.*

Thus the same topic is seen from the viewpoints of social history, literature and art history.

4.4 Polarities

The two-letter classes of the section D seem to echo the basic division of the library into four main sections: Action, Orientation, Word and Image. Warburg's idea of polarity can be plainly seen in the arrangement of section F where Magic and Science are closely intermingled throughout the section at its every level. This reflects Warburg's conviction that Magic and Logic (science) are two opposite ways of coping with the world. Thus at the level of two-letter classes there is a constant oscillation between the two polarities: from Sorcery to Zoology, from Mathematics to Divination and Prophecy. There are even classes with headings containing both sides of the polarity like Alchemy & Chemistry and Astrology & Astronomy.

This oscillation is not as obvious at the level of three-letter classes but still recognisable. The divisions at this level are mostly by period and cultural area and are different according to each subject. Periodical-cultural divisions alternate with subject-based divisions, for example in FE History of Medicine (Sources) the different branches of Medicine follow different stages in Medical History. We take this variability of divisions as a token of classification having a special kind of literary warrant and being created in terms of existing books. Warburg's way of viewing his subject from many different angles is reflected in points where a subject is followed by a critical view. Thus heading Freemasonry in section F is followed by Polemics against Freemasonry and Militarism in section D by Pacifism. There are points in which it is necessary to know Warburg's thinking to understand the neighbourhood of subjects, for example in the class DA Psychology headings Memory and Symbol are next to each other. Warburg's concept of collective memory connects these otherwise rather separate things.

4.5 The „like-with-like“-principle

The analysis of relations between books next to each other shows how the classification is built up by associations. This associative classification results in chain logic, combination sets and like-with-like sets. We chose to examine the book rows under the headings FMO Monsters (Studies), FEI Mental Illness (Studies), and DCA Birth, Marriage, Funerals (Studies). The general structure is different under each heading. 'Monsters' consists of short sequences of different divisions but 'Mental Illness' is chronologically ordered throughout and books on Men-

tal illness in certain stage of History are followed by books on Mental illness in Art and Literature of the same time. Birth, Marriage, Funerals is basically structured around the life cycle celebrations mentioned in the heading and inside this basic structure divisions according to geography, period and significant persons vary and intermingle constantly.

Books form chains on which each link is significant to make the whole understandable. In Mental illness the set of books on History of neurology (FEI210) is followed by a combination set containing books both on Mental illness in Antiquity and History of epilepsy (FEI 220). The two subjects are connected by a single book: „The Falling Sickness. A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginning of Modern Neurology.“ The next set is about Mental illness in Art and thought of antiquity (FEI 225). Without the combination set in between the shifting from Neurology to Art of antiquity would not make much sense.

J. Perkins who is in charge of the classification in the Warburg Institute Library described his classification principles by the expression „like with like“. Hence the only guiding principle in classification work is to place similar books next to each other. How the similarity is defined is up to each and every librarian. This results in like-with-like sets in which there is no single subject common to all of the books though there is at least one like-with-like pair for each book. The forming of the set is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's logic of family resemblance. This can be seen in Mental Illness set FEI 292:

- *Le figure della pazzia (=madness) nell teatro elisabettiano*
- *Bedlam on the Jacobean Stage*
- *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England*
- *Die Darstellung des Wahnsinns im englischen Drama bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts.*

The first two books deal with madness in Shakespearean drama, while the third book concentrates on real life madness of the same time and the fourth on madness in English drama throughout the theatrical history.

It seems that observing the associations and the like-with-like principle is the most important feature in the classification. It is more essential that a book or a subclass agrees with its neighbours than placing it under the most convenient heading. For example Chess can be found in the class FM Divination which at first sight seems peculiar. When glancing over the neighbouring headings (Dice & Board Games, Card Games), however, one finds the location of Chess among them quite natural.

5. Warburgian and ordinary classification

If the classification of Warburg is regarded in the light of the theory of classification and the „ordinary classification thinking“, we presume that its most essential features could be grasped through the following notions:

1. The level of concepts according to which the books were arranged.
2. Direction of work, not from top (general) to bottom (specific) but starting from quite specific common features of books to join them with each other, then joining another book to these already grouped on basis of some feature of some of these books, and so on.
3. A peculiar kind of literary warrant, arranging books on the conditions of the books, however seen from quite an unordinary point of view.
4. Specific „Warburgian associations“.

The first two notions have to do with the structure of classification, whereas the third and the fourth deal with the content of the classification. The third aspect of classification, use, is dealt with in chapter 5.3.

5.1 Structure: dividing vs linking

In an ordinary classification scheme the „universe of knowledge“ is divided by starting from rather general kind of concepts (typically disciplines) and within these subdivisions are made accordingly to the subfields, phenomena studied, objects, parts of objects, or kinds, species and subspecies, and so on. In the ideal case divisions and subdivisions proceed as consistently as possible according to some order of the principles of division. (As an extremely ideal example could be regarded the hierarchy generated through facet analysis and representations of the contents of books in terms of these facets as Ranganathan presents it in his Colon Classification, 1960 (27).) Thus is created an order of topics where books may be situated under a more or less specific title, according to the level on which the topic is treated with in the book.

The direction of the classification of Warburg seems to be quite opposite. The books are joint with each other on the basis of some rather specific features of the books, groups with other groups on the basis of some common feature between maybe only some books of the groups and so on. When ordinary classification is a hierarchy created through divisions and subdivisions from top to bottom, the classification of Warburg is (or at least seems to be) a chain built up from link to link, actually quite concretely, from book to book. The concepts, or features of the contents of books, on which the links are based may be much more specific than the most specific concepts reached at in the divisions of an ordinary classification. On the other hand, in the Warburgian chain the level of specificity of the concepts is not so essential as the aim is not to produce a high hierarchy from the most general to the most specified but only to link books with some „good neighbours“ on some basis or another. The question is not so much of „right“ place of a book in a great hierarchic organisation but of details which may usefully join individual books with each other. Maybe also here „God dwells in the detail“.

5.2 Content: „Scholarly warrant“

By literary warrant (originally from Hulme) is meant that a classification should be based on the topics and their relationships actually existing in the literature (28). In Warburg's classification the books are arranged on conditions of their own, however, selection of features which in different cases base the collocation of books is unordinary. The classification is based on views of one individual scholar (Warburg) and afterwards on his successors' views of what features of books in different cases would make the books „good neighbours“. This kind of warrant which is closely connected with research originally of one individual researcher and then of one tradition of research, or research within one institute, could be regarded as a special kind of literary warrant, and it could properly be nominated „scholarly warrant“.

Closely connected with the „scholarly warrant“ are the specific Warburgian associations. They constitute the basis for joining books with each other. Maybe the most interesting and peculiar of these is the polarity of rational and irrational, of „apollonian“ and „dionysian“, exemplified above for instance in the joining of science and magic with each other. It should be kept in mind that for Warburg Magic was not so much an early stage of modern science but more of a mode of thinking living all the time side by side with the science or rational thinking. This unhistorical conception could be a bit astonishing from the scholar of historical topics. But with Warburg it probably is partly motivated by rather personal motives, his own fear of mental illness. A balance between rational and irrational, taking both of them into account all the time is needed for it could protect both an individual and a culture from a mental breakdown.

Another typical Warburgian association connects with each other different kinds of materials illustrating the same topic (in general terms what Warburg called „image“, „orientation“, i.e. different sciences, „word“ and „action“, and on a bit more concrete level, Arts and Sciences, on one hand, and Popular amusements, Festivals etc., on the other, of some particular era.). Besides these kinds of associations in the classification of the Warburg Institute Library there are more ordinary principles of arrangement, especially geographical and chronological. And when the collection had been growing, probably the most peculiar Warburgian elements have been more and more covered under these more ordinary principles all the time. But anyway, both inside the „ordinary sections“ as well as between them, both on the level of the whole library and in details one may find also „genuine“ Warburgian motives. Most obvious they probably are in areas which were mostly in Warburg's own interest, or where there has been active research going on later.

The last remark has probably to do also with the „odd“ locations of some books and topics, despite the disciplinary backgrounds of them. One can imagine that Warburg (and the later librarians) have tended to collect together especially those books which could have at least some relevance regarding the topics under research.

5.3 Use as browsing

The idea of the good neighbourhood of books is based on the assumption that researchers of humanities tend to seek information by browsing among the stacks of the library. Serendipitous findings are what we expect to achieve by browsing. Browsing is often seen as something ignorant people do when trying to skip the complicated bibliographical devices, but some think of it as a part of creative use of literature and thus contributing to the development of research (see Bawden 1986 (29) and Davies 1989 (30).) Warburg's idea of browsing and its value was clearly of the latter kind.

The classification system of the Warburg Institute Library has been developed with browsing in mind. In fact one could say that the association chains in the classification system are ready-made „browsing paths“. The system of the library actually forces the reader to browse: one must browse through the floor to find a certain class and through the whole set of books to find a certain book. Since the law of the good neighbour works only if every book is in its own place, there are certain methods by which to indicate a book even when it is absent. To widen the possibilities of browsing there are single articles relating to the subject of books next to them. The upsetting of interdisciplinary boundaries and subjects echoing in various parts of the classification are closely connected to browsing. It is known that browsing and serendipity are most significant in crossdisciplinary research.

The Warburg Institute Library can be seen as a chaotic response to over-rationalized library systems and strict order. In fact chaos and order seem to co-operate in the library: order is needed to guide the reader to the starting point of his/her search and from then on it is possible for him/her to follow the chain of associations in which chaos has its place.

Notes

1 The parts concerning Aby Warburg's thinking and the history of the Warburg Institute Library are written by Mari Friman and Päivi Jansson. They have collected the material on the classification of the library and done the analysis, whereas the comparison of the classification system to ordinary thinking in classification is mostly the work of Vesa Suominen.

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