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Bernardino Branca

The Edgar Wind Archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford

12th of November 2019, 2.45 pm

Centre for Memory Studies, School of Advanced Studies,

Senate House, University College London.

I would like to share with you an aspect part of my recent publication, *Edgar Wind Filosofo delle Immagini, la biografia intellettuale di un discepolo di Aby Warburg*, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano 2019, pp 374: the papers of the German born scholar Edgar Wind (1900-1971), which have recently been reorganized into an archive in Oxford¹.

Please be aware that what I am going to discuss with you now, is an initial and very informal introduction to Edgar Wind's archive and the documents you can find there, and of course not a thoroughly exhaustive account of it.

The Edgar Wind Papers were bequeathed to the Bodleian Library by his wife Margaret Wind, and were transferred from her flat at Belsyre Court, Oxford, to the Bodleian Library, following her death in 2006. The current structure of the Archive was completed in 2016, almost just in time for me to begin working on it.

Edgar Wind is particularly known for *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance*, a work on the so called 'Afterlife' of Antiquity within the cultural and art historical experience of the Italian Renaissance. However, he wrote many more things, published and unpublished, also within the philosophy of science's scope. Almost his entire intellectual life is effectively dominated by a single concern: explain the *Verkoerperung*, Embodiment of metaphysical ideas into both Science and Art.

Edgar Wind and his wife Margaret were precise and meticulous persons, as they always kept, almost 'hoarded', a lot of documents of various kind; once put together, the result was an Archive which is particularly interesting from both a Biographical and Historiographical point of view. The reader will not find much new material on Renaissance Art and Cultural History as such, but a lot on the

¹ It must be said that the archive of his papers until the year 1939, which Wind left in his flat in London and in a storage at the Warburg Institute, were mysteriously lost during WWII, and this not because of German bombings. When he found out this, Wind was very distraught; this event too may have been one of the causes of his sudden departure from the Warburg Institute in 1945.

Intellectual biography of a key figure of Twentieth Century Iconology, if not of Twentieth Century Philosophy.

Explaining how the great artists of the Renaissance could ‘think through images’, embody metaphysical ideas into images, is Wind’s major achievement; it is something which could be relevant to interpret today’s contemporary art too.

Margaret Wind, and from 2006 her collaborators, including Ben Thomas and eventually the archivists responsible for the Special Collections section of the Library, Svenja Kunze and Claire Hills-Nova, managed to assemble a well-organized and user-friendly archival structure. Their work has helped me quite a lot in terms of producing a coherent narrative of Edgar Wind’s life and writings, as well as of the cultural and political environments he was personally exposed to.

The papers of the Wind Archive are arranged in six series:

I Biographical Papers: Papers relating to Edgar Wind’s life, with focus on his professional life and academic career, but also his early years and private life are well represented.

II Collections: Papers relating to private collections of pieces of arts, antiques, books and manuscripts part of Edgar and Margaret Wind’s flat at Belsyre Court in Oxford.

III Personal Correspondence: probably the most interesting part of the Archive. Edgar Wind’s private and professional correspondence sorted A to Z by correspondent, including collected material such as articles, photographs and memorabilia, by or relating to the correspondents. This part of the Archive includes also Margaret Wind’s personal correspondence, whilst the letters relating to specific publications can be found in section IV and section V.

IV Published Works: Papers vis a vis Edgar Wind’s published works, sorted chronologically by publication. Comprises original publications, papers relating to posthumous publications and research material.

V Scholarly Papers: Papers connected to Edgar Wind’s many research interests, including collected material, research notes, drafts, bibliographies lecture lists, photographs, articles and correspondence, divided in Topics A to Z. Among the drafts of his works on the Renaissance, *Die Bild Sprache Michelangelos (1936)* and *Raphael’s School of Athens (1950)*, are the most notable in terms of size and interest. As to the drafts of a number of nearly completed but unpublished works, this is a peculiar feature of Edgar Wind, which makes the reconstruction of his intellectual biography particularly interesting.

VI Offprints: Offprints received by colleagues and friends, which provide an interesting insight of the many topics he was interested in, and which he could have developed further had he lived longer.

It is interesting to note that most of the 278 folders of the Wind Archive contain short hand written notes by Margaret Wind, explaining to the reader the content of the files and providing *hand-holding* advice on where to find related material across the archive, as well as ad hoc *off the record* remarks on persons and events mentioned in them. Particularly caustic and witty are the ones on Erwin Panowsky, Wind's teacher and colleague, described as a 'self-centered egotist'; or the sense of almost comical reciprocal dislike, which her husband and Ernst Gombrich experienced whenever they met.

Margaret Wind was careful to make sure that the documents to be found in the archive were the ones which provided a certain picture of her late husband's character and work, rather than another one; Margaret conceived the Archive as a tool for keeping Edgar Wind's memory alive, and quite rightly so, as he definitely deserves this. However, this is sometimes done with a certain bias; for example, Margaret takes great care to highlight her late husband's debt to Charles Peirce and American Pragmatism. In my opinion, going through both his published and unpublished works, correspondence and other documents both inside and outside the Wind Archive, Edgar Wind comes across as an essentially German philosopher and cultural historian, greatly influenced by Warburg and German *Kulturwissenschaft* at large. Pragmatism too plays an important part in Edgar Wind's *bildung* (he spent three years crucial years of his life in the US from 1924 to 1927), but in my opinion the role played by it is more evident in his earlier 'epistemological' works, such as *Das Experiment und die Metaphisik*, than in the subsequent cultural and art historical ones. In the latter, the influence of Pragmatism can be found in the methodology he uses; the original Introduction to *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (1958), which was rejected by the publisher, and whose typescript can be found in the Archive, is a telling example. Moreover, Edgar Wind in 1933 did not choose to emigrate to England and then to the US; he was forced to do so by the Nazis. As I found out through the Wind and the Warburg Archives, in 1932, when the ascent to power of Adolf Hitler began to be felt, Wind proposed to the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, the Minister of Culture of the Fascist regime, to transfer the Warburg Library to Italy, which he describes as a very conducive location for the research work of the Warburg community, where Warburg himself had spent several years.² London happened to be a fortunate second choice. Moreover, one may rather malevolently suspect that it may have been

² Letter dated 13th of April 1932, Warburg Archive, Edgar Wind File, 1932

expedient, for Wind's academic career in post-war US and UK, to appear intellectually more 'American' and less 'German' and Continental European than he actually was.

Therefore, at times I got the impression that the Wind Archive is almost too much 'user friendly', as it conveys only a certain view of Edgar Wind's life and works, with little or no possibility to conceive a different one. This is the risk of a good archive such as the Wind one; it may provide the false feeling that everything that is in it is also everything that can be said about an author. To avoid disillusionment, one should search in other archives too, indirectly connected with this one. One of them is the Warburg Archive at the Warburg Institute in London, where the letters of the 1928-29 correspondence between Aby Warburg and Edgar Wind can be found, as well as the correspondence of other members of the Warburg circle with Edgar Wind. For example, in the Warburg Archive I found a 1936 letter of Wind to Fritz Saxl, referring to *Kritische Berichte*, a periodical of the Vienna School of Art History, which Wind discusses enthusiastically.³ Edgar Wind, during the 1919-1920 Winter semester at the University of Vienna had been a pupil of Julius Von Schlosser and Max Dvorak, the latter being the author of *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, History of Art as History of Ideas, which influenced a generation of German speaking art historians.⁴ Having said that, an untested conjecture is that it may very well be the case that Wind's focus on Content rather than on Form, is where both his Hegelian approach to art history and his Pragmatist one, both present in his writings, actually meet. There may not be an opposition, but a concordance, in this specific case. For this purpose, Wind's correspondence with art historians close to the Hegelian and the Marxist tradition, such as Arnold Hauser, Frederic Antal and Francis Klingender, may shed some more light on this issue; this will be discussed during our next meeting.

Combining the search for unpublished documents both in the Wind Archive in Oxford and in the Warburg Archive in London, together with the search of Edgar Wind's published books and articles in the Warburg Library, has been particularly interesting; there's no library in the world with such a peculiar and 'proliferating' classification method. A classification method which, on the basis of Aby Warburg's original conception, had been developed by Edgar Wind himself in 1934⁵. In a nutshell, the peculiarity of this method stands upon Warburg's idea that a text should not be classified according to an alphabetical or chronological order, but according to the principle of 'good neighbourhood': texts discussing the same argument should stay close together on the same shelf. The Warburg Library, being an open shelf reference one, often has helped me to find connections between each of Edgar Wind's published works with the ones, for example, of other members of the

³ Warburg Archive, Edgar Wind 1936 folder (WF1936)

⁴ Max Dvorak, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*, Pieper, Munich 1928.

⁵ Edgar Wind, *The Warburg Library Classification Method*, Warburg Institute, London 1934

Warburg circle, sitting on a side of the same shelf. Or, on the other hand, to find how an issue, originally raised by Wind in a 1938 letter to Frances Yates, has been dealt with by a Warburg and Wind inspired French art historian in 2014⁶. In other words, a biographer of Edgar Wind should consult both the Wind Archive in Oxford and the Warburg Archive and Library in London, as the two are complementary with each other.

Last but not least, another important source of documental information has been the Wind Room in the Sackler Library, just in front of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, where Wind was a curator. There I have found Edgar Wind's personal library, an important source of clues for understanding what he read since 1940. (His personal library until August 1939, which he left in London upon his departure to America, has been lost during the war). His interests stretched to a variety of subjects, including the history and philosophy of early Twentieth Century Science, with books on Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and the works of Niels Bohr's and Erwin Schrodinger's too.

According to Gilles Deleuze, Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Nietzsche and Baruch Spinoza, were prime examples of the so-called rare ilk of the Private Philosophers.⁷ Unencumbered by the various kind of constraints attached to the duties of the much larger breed of Public Philosophers, such as main stream Academics, Private Philosophers such as Benjamin were truly independent. A lot of courage and personal cost was involved in Benjamin's lonesome way of practicing historical and philosophical research. In my opinion, the label of 'Private Philosopher', in a broader sense, could be extended also to Aby Warburg; he did not have to comply with the constraints and limitations imposed by the centralized and Prussian influenced German university system of the times. Could this label apply to his close 'disciple' Edgar Wind? In a sense, and especially for a certain period of his life, i.e. since his dismissal from nazified Hamburg University in April 1933 to the end of his embattled stay at Chicago University in 1943, Wind may have been considered a 'Private Philosopher' too; the Archive records show that he survived on the paltry salary which the Warburg Institute was able to provide him and his other fellow *émigrés* in London, who escaped from Nazi Germany. During that decade, other than to what he called the 'Warburg Gospel', like Warburg he did not have to comply with any particular constraints and limitations to his research. His contributions to the Warburg Institute's Journal during those years were exceptional, the closest to Aby Warburg, whose approach in Germany as well as abroad had been judged as very un-orthodox. Wind's penchant for 'heresy' became all the more evident when he abruptly left the Warburg Institute in 1945, on grounds of disagreements with Fritz Saxl and the rest of the Warburg circle concerning

⁶ Philippe Morel, *Renaissance Dyonisiaque*, Edition du Félin, Paris 2014

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza, philosophie pratique*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1981

the mission of the Institute. When in Oxford he always kept the kind of ‘stigma’ of the ‘outsider-insider’.

Edgar Wind, so far, has not enjoyed the seminal influence which both Warburg and Benjamin have provided to cultural and art historical studies throughout the second half of the Twentieth Century, and after.

Nevertheless, the Edgar Wind I met while going through the 1928-29 files of the Wind and Warburg Archives, was deeply involved with the work of Aby Warburg; along with Gertrud Bing he played an important role in advising Warburg while he was putting together the *Mnemosyne Bilderatlas*. The intuitions and almost ‘oracular’ style of writing of the last years of Warburg’s life were primarily meant to inspire and motivate the research of the other members of the Warburg Circle, which effectively worked as a *team*. The rather lonesome Wind, on the other hand, because of his background in philosophy of science and epistemology (the very reason why Warburg hired him in the Fall of 1927), would have been more suited to reorganise his mentor’s unpolished magma of ideas and intuitions into a systematic body of knowledge. Unfortunately, the events of 1933 and after and his premature death in 1971, allowed him to do so only to a limited extent.

As Wind’s letters in the Archive show, he thought that the Warburg Institute since his departure in 1945, and Ernst Gombrich in particular, distorted and ‘normalized’ Warburg’s message. The straw that broke the camel’s back was provided by the Warburg biography which Gombrich published in 1970, a year before Wind died, to his bitter disappointment. However, rather than Warburg’s orthodox and ‘Legitimate Heir’, the more I go through Wind’s published and unpublished works and letters through the Wind Archive, the more I think he should be viewed as an original and distinct thinker from Warburg, albeit very much part of the same *Kulturwissenschaft*’s tradition of Renaissance studies founded by Jacob Burckhardt and developed by Aby Warburg.⁸

Writing an intellectual biography about someone, spanning across all aspects of his life, and discussing the same author’s published writings, are two rather different ball games; as I went through the letters, manuscripts and typescripts of the Wind Archive in Oxford, I felt as if somehow, I was literally bringing back to life a person and his world. I hope that my work will help Edgar Wind’s decades long oblivion to finally come to an end.

⁸ I have discussed this issue at length in my recent biography *Edgar Wind Filosofo delle Immagini, la biografia intellettuale di un discepolo di Aby Warburg*, pp.374, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano 2019

Key features in Edgar Wind's Life and Works

Born in Berlin on May 14th 1900 from a wealthy businessman, Marcel Wind, and the Romanian born Laura Szilard. The father dies in 1914.

1913-18: Studies at the Humanistisches Gymnasium in Charlottenburg, Berlin

1918-19: University of Berlin, follows courses in Philosophy, Classics and History of Art, Wilamowitz-Moellendorf and Goldschmidt among his teachers, Bruno Snell among his friends and fellow course mates.

1919-20: University of Vienna, follows courses in History of Art taught by von Schloesser, Dvorak and Strzygowski.

1920-21: University of Freiburg, follows courses in Philosophy taught by Husserl and Heidegger.

1921-22: University of Hamburg, writes dissertation supervised by Erwin Panowsky, *Ästhetischer und Kunstwissenschaftlicher Gegenstand. Ein Beitrag zur Methodologie der Kunstgeschichte: Auszug der Inaugural Dissertation*, Universität Hamburg, Hamburg 1924

1924, March: moves to New York to teach Mathematics and French at a local High School.

1925-27: teaches Philosophy (Plato in particular) at Chapel Hill College in North Carolina. Meets the anthropologist Franz Boas and the philosophers Morris R. Cohen, Alfred North Whitehead and Sydney Hook. Wind gets also acquainted with Pragmatism and publishes a number of articles in American and German Journals. In 1926 marries his first wife, Ruth Hatch.

1928-1933: back to Hamburg, employed by the Kunsthwissenschaftlichebibliothek Warburg as *Wissenschaftlicher Assistent* to Aby Warburg. At the same time joins the University of Hamburg to write, under the supervision of Ernst Cassirer, his *Venia Legendi* (licence to teach) Dissertation in Philosophy of Science, which eventually will be published under the title of *Das Experiment und die Metaphysik. Zur Auflösung der Kosmologischen Antinomien*, JCB Mohr, Tübingen 1934. Until the death of Aby Warburg in October 1929 he is busy providing scientific support to Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Bilderatlas*, thereafter teaches several Philosophy courses at the University of Hamburg, one of them titled *Grundbegriffe der Geschichte und Kulturphilosophie*.

1933: with the Nazi takeover of Germany and because of his Jewish ancestry, Edgar Wind is stripped of German Citizenship and of the licence to teach in German Universities. After a first attempt to transfer the Warburg Library to Florence, with Fritz Saxl successfully manages to save the collection by moving it to London.

1933-1939: with Rudolf Wittkower is co-editor of The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, in which he publishes several articles. He also writes *A Bibliography of the Survival of the Classics. English Introduction*, Cassel & Co, London 1934. In 1938 writes an unpublished manuscript letter to Frances Yates on *Dionysus and the Renaissance*.

1939, August, to 1954: America. In 1941 Wind tries unsuccessfully to settle the Warburg Institute in New York. In 1942 Wind applies to New York University to teach Renaissance Philosophy, but has

a spat with his former teacher and colleague Erwin Panowsky, who opposes his candidacy. In the same year Wind marries his second wife, Margaret Kellner, and joins the University of Chicago to teach History of Art and Aesthetics, but leaves in 1944; he will teach Philosophy and History of Art at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, until 1954. During this period Wind publishes *Bellini's Feast of the Gods. A Study in Venetian Humanism*, Harvard University Press, Harvard 1948.

1955: Edgar Wind moves to Trinity College at Oxford University, to become the first full Professor of History of Art there. He also works for the Ashmolean Museum and publishes, among other books, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, The Norton Library, New York 1958, with several editions, translated in 8 languages, and *Art and Anarchy*, Penguin, London 1963. Dies in London in September 1971.

Some relevant links to Wind and Warburg archives:

www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/sackler/edgar-wind

www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/ist-das-alles/

www.zkm.de/warburg

www.youtube.com: Edgar Wind - *Art and Anarchy* 4/6, 5/6 (BBC Video Recordings, 1960)

www.warburg.sas.ac.uk