

The Astrological Imaginary in Early Twentieth–Century German Culture

by

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Abstract

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My dissertation focuses on astrological discourses in early twentieth-century Germany. In four chapters, I examine films, literary texts, and selected academic and intellectual prose that engage astrology and its symbolism as a response to the experience of modernity in Germany. Often this response is couched within the context of a return to early modern German culture, the historical period when astrology last had popular validity. Proceeding from the understanding of astrology as a multiplicity of practices with their own histories, my dissertation analyzes the specific forms of astrological discourse that are taken up in early twentieth-century German culture. In my first chapter I examine the revival of astrology in Germany from the perspective of Oscar A. H. Schmitz (1873–1931), who galvanized a community of astrologers to use the term *Erfahrungswissenschaft* to promote astrology diagnostically, as an art of discursive subject formation. In my second chapter, I discuss how Paul Wegener’s Golem film cycle both responds to and intensifies the astrological and the occult revivals. As the revivals gain momentum, Wegener explicitly depicts seventeenth-century astrological and occult practices with the intention of generating a “purely filmic” experience. I provide new insight into Wegener’s last Golem film through the film architect Hans Poelzig’s personal investment in both baroque architecture and contemporary astrology. My third chapter explores Aby M. Warburg’s lifelong preoccupation with the investigation of astrological symbolism in art. This pursuit led him to create an institution that has played a pivotal role in the material conditions of possibility for people to study the history of astrology, even today. In my fourth chapter, I investigate the many references to astrological phenomena in Walter Benjamin’s intellectual work. I read his work on mimesis and experience alongside his practice of graphology in order to situate him in the debates brought up in the first chapter on the idea of astrology as an *Erfahrungswissenschaft*. My dissertation reveals how aspects of astrological discourse—specifically its approaches to issues of legibility and interpretation—constructively informed and shaped the middle brow (Schmitz) and the high brow (Warburg), the cinematic (Wegener) and the literary (Schmitz), the institutional (Warburg) and the philosophical (Benjamin) realms of early twentieth-century German culture.

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*For Gary*

## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

On the cusp of the Great War, in a fleeting scene of the film *Der Golem* (1914), a twentieth-century scholar struggles to complete his magnum opus on medieval magic.<sup>1</sup> Writing madly, fighting pangs of hunger, he realizes he can no longer stave off his corporeal needs. As an intertitle reads, “the starving scholar must sell a part of his beloved books in order to complete his cataclysmic new work on medieval black magic and sorcery.”<sup>2</sup> In due course, the man sells the grimoire with the instructions for animating the Golem to the antique dealer who has just conveniently acquired the Golem’s clay form. This early filmic episode about a historian of medieval magic tells of the influence of the interest in esotericism and its transmission in Germany before the Great War. Unfortunately the film by German actor and writer Paul Wegener has been lost, and although a few film stills and a few feet of film survive, no images exist that show how this modern scholar of magic appeared on the screen. What has survived is Wegener’s 1920 film, *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam*, which sets the action directly in the seventeenth century itself and portrays a Rabbi using astrological magic to bring the Golem to life. The progression—from depicting a modern scholar of medieval magic to depicting an early modern magician practicing astrology—is emblematic of the trend during the Weimar Republic for writers to explore early-modern European practices such as astrology through their literary, filmic, and cultural historical texts. My dissertation contributes to the emerging academic attention being paid to esoteric practices by focusing specifically on astrological discourse in its historical, socio-psychological, and imaginative roles in early twentieth-century German culture.<sup>3</sup> In my

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<sup>1</sup> First Screenplay for the Golem: Paul Wegener with Henrik Galeen, “Golem I Drehbuch,” 1914. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. NachlassArchiv. Golem file: 4359. Folder 4.4-80/18,1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., “Der hungernde Gelehrte muss um sein umstürzendes neuartiges Werk über Schwarzkunst und Zauberei des Mittelalters zu vollenden, einen Teil seiner geliebten Bücher verkaufen.”

<sup>3</sup> See most importantly the work of Kocku von Stuckrad, especially *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), edited with Günther Oestmann, and H. Darrel Rutkin, as well as *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), edited with Olav Hammer; See also Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, eds., *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity* (Bristol: Sophia Centre Press, 2011); important recent work on European occultism, which is not quite my focus here, can be found in specifically German contexts in Corinna Treitel’s *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); for the French contexts, see David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); and for the British context see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), to name only select examples.

work I show how astrology, as a specific practice of reading and interpretation that self-consciously grounds itself in an historical moment, became a source of rich cultural production in the Weimar Republic.

Understood in its most broad terms, astrology is the practice of relating the heavenly bodies and celestial phenomena to lives and events on earth. Drawing on recent work in the history of astrology, this dissertation follows Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene in maintaining that “it is impossible to talk about astrology as a monolithic entity, unchanged since ancient times and the same from culture to culture. It is increasingly apparent that under the general rubric of astrology there are competing methodologies, a diversity of techniques, and a variety of underlying philosophies.”<sup>4</sup> By embracing the multiplicity inherent in the “paradoxical nature of astrology’s relatively stable tradition of symbolic forms expressed through an inherent multivalence, fluidity and cultural adaptability,” cultural historians of astrology can arrive at better understandings of unique instances of astrological symbolism.<sup>5</sup> In terms of the varieties of astrological practice, my dissertation covers a brief moment in the strand of tradition broadly defined as modern Western astrology. A plethora of other astrological traditions—such as ancient Babylonian astrology, ancient Greek astrology, the astrology of the Indian subcontinent (in its various manifestations), the astrology of South America, the astrology of China, and many more astrological traditions—do not figure here. Comparatively speaking, within the wide realm of astrological practice and symbolism, my dissertation deals with the extremely narrow slice of astrology as understood, practiced, and sometimes created by individuals in Germany during a very narrow timeframe. Within this filament of astrological tradition are a multitude of distinct practices—such as natal astrology, electional astrology, horary astrology, and more—that all deserve specific critical attention, which I go into in the second chapter of this dissertation.

Germany remains a curious case in the history of astrology in modern Europe. The past decades of inquiry into esotericism at the turn of the twentieth century in Germany have focused on the role of the occult in the establishment of German National Socialism. This scholarly trend has dominated and yet also obscured sustained inquiry into the influence of astrology on modern German culture. More broadly, the frequent elision in contemporary scholarship of astrology and occultism has prevented the nuances of specifically astrological discourse to emerge in their proper fullness. As Günther Oestermann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku von Stuckrad have observed, “relating astrology closely to magic or other ‘occult sciences’ is a quite modern configuration” that reflects “a discourse of identity formation through strategies of distancing.”<sup>6</sup> This problem becomes extremely apparent in a trend of many postwar intellectuals to research Nazis and the occult in order to explain how Nazi Fascism and

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, “Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity: Introduction,” in Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, eds., *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity* (Bristol: Sophia Centre Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Campion and Greene, “Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity,” 2.

<sup>6</sup> Günther Oestermann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku von Stuckrad, eds., “Introduction: Horoscopes and History,” in Günther Oestermann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku von Stuckrad, eds., *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 5.

its genocide could erupt in modern Western Europe. Put another way, in the German context, scholarship on modern astrology has been plagued by the now overthrown “Mad-Nazi” thesis.<sup>7</sup> Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor W. Adorno’s mid-century work, *The Authoritarian Personality*, deployed theories about astrological superstition in diagnosing fascist tendencies in peoples’ personalities.<sup>8</sup> However, historian James Waller has successfully shown that personality plays less of a role in determining genocidal behavior than the pressure of certain extreme social situations. The Mad-Nazi thesis, according to Waller, is a relic of the scholarship of the postwar period.

Yet the history of astrology in the German context cannot seem to escape mention of Adorno’s study of Sun-sign astrology in a Los Angeles newspaper, which was informed by his mission to link what he saw as irrational superstitions with fascist tendencies in modern capitalist society.<sup>9</sup> We have to be very careful here. Often when the words “German” and “astrology” are thrown together, Adorno’s study of astrology comes to mind, but this is highly problematic. Just because Adorno himself was a German philosopher who lived in Germany during the Weimar Republic does not mean that his theories about astrology apply to the culture from which he came. Adorno studied one American astrological column in the *Los Angeles Times* from November 1952 to February 1953. This type of astrology is known as Sun-sign astrology. It targets a specific age-range of a magazine’s readership and makes general predictions based on this group’s Sun-signs and the current positions of the planets in the sky. As Nicholas Campion has noted: “The twelve paragraph Sun-sign format appears to have been developed in 1936. It then took off immediately in Britain and the USA. In Britain, the publication of Sun-sign columns ceased in 1940 due to newsprint shortage. . . . In the USA, publication continued throughout the Second World War, so the pedigree is slightly longer.”<sup>10</sup> Taking the historical and cultural specificity of astrological practice into account, the kind of astrology that Adorno associates with the “authoritarian personality” did not exist during the Weimar Republic or even the early years of Nazi fascism in Germany. By virtue of this fact alone (overlooking temporarily the study’s

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<sup>7</sup> James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), see esp. “The ‘Mad Nazi’: Psychopathology, Personality, and Extraordinary Human Evil,” 59–91.

<sup>8</sup> Statement 21 (out of 30) on the F-Scale (the Fascism scale), a personality test devised by empirical sociologists at UC Berkeley in the middle of the twentieth century, hints at the assumed relationship between astrological “superstition” and fascist tendencies: “Although many people may scoff, it may yet be shown that astrology can explain a lot of things.” Despite claiming to demonstrate a belief in the validity of astrology, that statement worded as such does not really express much. Aby M. Warburg definitely thought astrology could help explain a lot of things about Renaissance art even though he didn’t believe in it or practice it. See, T. W. Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950; repr. New York: Norton, 1969). On Aby M. Warburg, see chapter four in this dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “The Stars Down to Earth” appeared originally in *Telos* 19 (Spring 1974): 13–90, and is reprinted in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 46–171.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Campion, *Astrology, History and Apocalypse* (Centre for Psychological Astrology Press: London, 2000), 84.

other important methodological weaknesses<sup>11</sup>), we cannot begin to apply Adorno's findings on astrology to Germany of the early twentieth century.

Other histories that specifically treat the role of astrology in Germany during this time still lump astrology together with occultism, and often Nazism. Ellic Howe's history of astrology aims to illuminate the role of astrology during the National Socialist era.<sup>12</sup> Although Howe discusses a few astrologers not linked to occult or Nazi pursuits, the overwhelming emphasis on those figures who participated in National Socialism eclipses the impact of the ones who did not. Later studies such as James Webb's *The Occult Establishment* (1976) and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1985/1992) investigate the relationships between German National Socialism and the occult as a way of explaining how National Socialism emerged from a modern, civil society.<sup>13</sup> Goodrick-Clarke's focus on the "occult roots of Nazism" overlooks other agents of the astrological revival, who explicitly distance themselves from occultism and were not involved with Nazi fascism.

The role of the occult in the establishment of Nazism is less central than was once thought. Recently, David Allen Harvey (*Beyond Enlightenment*, 2005) has underscored that political and economic factors played a greater role in the rise of National Socialism in Germany than the occult tendencies of some of its members.<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, while Wolfgang Bock's recent work, *Astrologie und Aufklärung*, focuses on important figures who practiced astrology and were not occultists, his work is in German, leaving it

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<sup>11</sup> These weaknesses have been discussed in detail most recently by Nicholas Campion's article, "Astrology's Place in Historical Periodisation: Modern, Premodern or Postmodern?," 217–54, in *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity*, where he also points the reader to other scholarship on this topic. One important one, which will be come clear in my discussions below is the following: At the core of his critique, Adorno charges the readers of the astrological column with having an "alienation from experience" with astrology, in that the column omits astrological jargon that might inform the reader of the symbolic basis of the advice (49). Adorno's superficial discussions of astrological trade magazines demonstrates that he himself had no practical experience with astrology, even though he was aware of professional astrology. It is ironic that Adorno engages questions of "alienation from experience" while at the same time avoiding them himself. He also raises undiscussed class issues when he accuses "the personal advice of professional astrologers being too expensive" for the readers of the astrological column in the *Los Angeles Times* (49). This last claim seems to suggest that only the poor are subjected to being seduced by astrological columns, since the rich can afford personal advice.

<sup>12</sup> Ellic Howe, *Astrology: A Recent History Including the Untold Story of Its Role in World War II* (New York: Walker and Company, 1967). I use this edition and not the original, which was titled *Urania's Children* (1966), because the revised title shows more accurately the role the book seeks to play in the academic work in the field.

<sup>13</sup> James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1976); Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 156–7.

inaccessible to an English-speaking audience.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Bock's project expands upon and reinforces Adorno's problematic critique of newspaper astrology. Finally, Corinna Treitel has done important work relating the surging interest in esotericism and the occult as a fundamental component of the development of modernity in Germany. In her 2004 *A Science for the Soul*, she includes elements of the history of astrology, however she conflates astrology with the occult. This elision eclipses the intensity and breadth of the movement by contemporary astrologers to actively distance themselves from occultism. This dissertation seeks to build off her work and pay closer attention to the polemics separating the two.

Despite the trend to conflate astrology with occultism, all of these studies have provided a general outline of the surge of interest in astrology in early twentieth century Germany, which runs roughly and briefly as follows: In 1905 Hugo Vollrath and Karl Brandler-Pracht, both associated with Theosophists, began publishing astrological pamphlets in German. Starting in 1907 in Vienna and 1914 in Leipzig many German-speaking astrological societies and many more German-language publications started to appear.<sup>16</sup> Critic Richard Noll adds that, "in 1910 the Theosophical Publishing Society began publishing an enormous number of books on astrology, making such works available to the German-speaking public on a mass scale that was unprecedented,"<sup>17</sup> and that these Theosophical works were "accessible to the common individual without a university education who sought extra-Christian sources of spiritual inspiration."<sup>18</sup> Goodrick-Clarke has argued that the astrological revival in German-speaking Central Europe had "a specifically Theosophical background," because "most of the new astrological texts by Karl Brandler-Pracht, Otto Pöllner, Ernst Tiede and Albert Kniepf appeared under the imprint of the Theosophical Publishing House at Leipzig after 1910."<sup>19</sup> This may have been true for some of the early and more vociferous agents of the astrological revival, but not all who were interested in astrology were interested in Theosophy. For example, art historian Aby M. Warburg, whom I discuss in my fourth chapter, began collecting large numbers of historical astrological texts in 1908, though his interest in the subject was iconographical, not esoteric.

By 1912, psychologists C. G. Jung and Sigmund Freud were exploring astrology, and by 1917, the first academic history of astrology in German had appeared. In 1922, astrological psychology began to gain a mainstream foothold through the author Oscar A. H. Schmitz. Eventually the School of Wisdom in Darmstadt, run by the philosopher Count Hermann Keyserling, began to provide a platform for that angle. By 1927, the topic of astrology had gained such traction that the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* dedicated a special issue to its discussion.<sup>20</sup> In Munich, the scholar couple Heinz Artur Strauß and his wife Sigrid Strauß-Kloebe were publishing on the history of astrology in the Germanic context, and teaching astrology at a vocational school. Warburg's interest in

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<sup>15</sup> Wolfgang Bock, *Astrologie und Aufklärung: Über modernen Aberglauben* (Bremen: M&P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Howe, *Astrology: A Recent History*, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 68.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>19</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 9 (June 1927).

the subject culminated in a posthumous exhibition on the history of astrology at a planetarium in Hamburg in 1929. However, the arc of popular interest in astrology waned sharply starting in 1937 when the Nazi regime began to shut down astrological organizations and their publications.

This history provides a framework for my main concern, which is not the history of astrology as such, but the critical function played by astrology in early twentieth-century Germany. One of the eminent historians of this era, Gerald D. Feldman, opens his authoritative work on the German inflation with a reference to astrology:

It was, a novelist wrote only a few years after the German inflation had ended, “an extraordinary time. Disorder seemed to be trump, even in the heavens. The constellations were certainly in a wild state and demanded that things be so—for it was a time when one had to believe in all that again, in planets and the stars under which one was born.”<sup>21</sup>

The astrological tropes in this text—the constellations, planets, and stars—underscore the importance of astrology in the genesis of popular self-understanding during the Weimar Republic. Rather than accepting this at face value, one must ask why astrology became so important again? One possible answer lies in the deceptively universal term “experience.”

In the polemics surrounding astrology in early twentieth-century Germany, experience comes to play a central role. The topic of experience, especially during the Weimar Republic, raises complex methodological and critical questions. There are two words for “experience” in German: *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. As Martin Jay has pointed out, *Erlebnis*, with the German word “*Leben*” as its root, “generally connotes a more immediate, pre-reflective, and personal variant of experience than *Erfahrung*.”<sup>22</sup> The latter term “came to mean a more temporally elongated notion of experience based on a learning process, an integration of discrete moments of experience into a narrative whole or an adventure.” This process “connotes a progressive, if not always smooth, movement over time, which is implied by the *Fahrt* (journey) embedded in *Erfahrung*.”<sup>23</sup> During the Weimar Republic, many people believed experience in the sense of *Erfahrung* to be lost, and they accused modernity of turning society into an *Erlebnisgesellschaft*, emblemized by the shocks of every day cosmopolitan life.<sup>24</sup> The surge of interest in astrology is a direct response to this perceived loss. By engaging with astrology, people accessed an ancient system of wisdom and participated in figures of thought present throughout disparate cultures and historical time periods. Astrology provided exactly the kind of vehicle to traverse the “movement over time” suggested by Jay as being characteristic of *Erfahrung*. As I discuss below, the astrologers who sought to divorce astrology from esotericism stylized it explicitly as an “*Erfahrungs-*

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<sup>21</sup> Gerald D. Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation 1914–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1. Feldman quotes W. E. Süskind, “Raymund,” *Neue Rundschau* 1 (1927): 369–98, here 374.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See Jay, *Songs of Experience*, esp. 81, 126, 159.

*wissenschaft*,” an “experiential science.” The use of the term *Erfahrung* and not *Erlebnis* emphasizes the historical continuity of astrological tradition—a constructed continuity that bridges the traumatic lacuna of the Great War.

Astrology accomplishes this by rendering the complex relationship between discourse and ontology explicit: it provides a structure for relating celestial phenomena, which occur in time and space, with meaning production. The individual human body has a verifiable temporal and spatial moment of entry into this world, and natal astrology helps one make sense of this entry point, and by extension oneself, in highly narrative, and as Geoffrey Cornelius has argued, highly participatory ways.<sup>25</sup> Since my dissertation stems from a department of German literature, I am situated in a field that is uniquely poised to appreciate the legibility and textuality that inhere to historical instances of astrological symbolism and practice. For one thing, the field of texts at my disposal immediately widens when the realm of fictional engagement with astrological symbolism is not only allowed but called for. The narratives generated by astrological interpretation (whether they be generated by “actual” astrological practice or by “fictional” astrological practice) are well served by scholars trained to analyze literary texts. In the field of German studies, I am not new in identifying this.

In 1972, Klaus Haberkamm proposed that astrological symbolism in literature deserved its own layer of interpretation, which he called *sensus astrologicus*.<sup>26</sup> This interpretational mode played on the traditional fourfold interpretative method (literal/historical, allegorical, moral, and anagogical/eschatological). He asserts that while the role of astrology has been well documented in the field of art history (with reference to Warburg Institute scholars, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl), its role in literary studies has been widely overlooked. Haberkamm sought to pave a new path for research into the relationships between literature and astrology by focusing on texts by the early modern author Grimmelshausen.<sup>27</sup> Given that astrology was still a popular practice during Grimmelshausen’s time, applying the *sensus astrologicus* to his body of work makes analytical sense. As a critical practice, Haberkamm insisted that the scholar have a deep knowledge of astrological symbolism in order to even be able to recognize certain features of the literary work. This stance presages Patrick Curry’s recent proposal that historians need to take a more anthropological approach to the study of astrology in history:

The historian should have experienced, for him- or herself, the truth of astrology in action, in practice, and without any *post hoc* “reaching after the fact or reason” to disqualify such an experience as metaphysically, ideologically or personally unacceptable.” And “failing this, he or she

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<sup>25</sup> Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology* (2002; repr. Bournemouth: Wessex Astrologer, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Klaus Haberkamm, *Sensus astrologicus: zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Astrologie in Renaissance und Barock* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> See also: Erwin von Löw, “Die zwölf astrologischen Häuser im *Faust*,” *Antaios* 8, no. 4 (November 1966): 357–79.

should have recourse to some equivalent experience and a principled habit of accommodating it.”<sup>28</sup>

In this way the topic of experience arises again, but this time in the moment of scholarship, rather than the historical moment. What can we learn if we apply Haberkamm’s call for renewed attention to the role of astrology in literature to the interwar period? Rather than try to diagnose the texts I discuss in terms of how their plots or characters are determined by astrological characteristics, that is, rather than performing symptomatic readings called for by Haberkamm and Curry, I focus instead on the critical function of astrology as a practice of reading. I’ve titled my dissertation “The Astrological Imaginary” not because I presume that astrology is false. Rather, this appellation is intended to highlight the discursive and hermeneutic aspects of astrology as they are deployed in the texts I study.

In each of my chapters, I examine how the recourse to astrology supports specific forms of reading, which compensate for a certain perceived loss of experience in modernity. By foregrounding the constructedness of the planetary configurations in astrology, people attempted to establish a new kind of experiential reading practice. My term astrological hermeneutics refers to the discursive ways astrology becomes a medium of human experience of the world. Most importantly, my dissertation shows how astrology is drawn upon as a practice of reading and interpreting human experience, while simultaneously eliminating the element of esoteric belief.

My second chapter begins with an examination of the discourses surrounding astrology in Germany from the perspective of the author Oscar A. H. Schmitz (1873–1931). Based primarily in Bavaria and Austria, Schmitz was a well-educated middle-class man, who made contact with many of the intellectual elite in Europe. He also played a pivotal role in the establishment of modern psychological astrology by actively promoting the practice of astrology during the Weimar Republic. He did so by writing autobiographical accounts in *Das Dionysische Geheimnis* (*The Dionysian Secret*, 1921) and *Der Geist der Astrologie* (*The Spirit of Astrology*, 1922). Through these texts, Schmitz galvanized a community of astrologers to use the term *Erfahrungswissenschaft* to promote diagnostic uses of astrology. This chapter examines texts by Schmitz and his contemporary astrologers against the discourses surrounding phenomena such as Theosophy, telepathy, chiromancy, and séances, to arrive at a better understanding of the hermeneutic role that astrology played during the Weimar Republic. In this chapter, I also discuss the important shift in astrological practice from a medieval to a modern form. In doing so, I will show how modern Western astrology as practiced in Germany was built directly upon important innovations in early modern court astrology, and I outline the basic tenets of astrological symbolism that will enable the reader to follow me as I work through the rest of my chosen texts.

In my third chapter, I explore the nexus between astrology and film through examining the trajectory of Paul Wegener’s Golem film cycle in the history of early silent cinema. The first film’s screenplay, written in 1914, demonstrates a strong pre-war interest in the magic of the early modern period. As both astrology and the occult gain in popular appeal, Wegener delves into the seventeenth century and its practices to

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<sup>28</sup> Patrick Curry, “The Historiography of Astrology: A Diagnosis and a Prescription,” in Oestmann, et al., *Horoscopes and Public Spheres*, 261–74, here 267.

enhance his story. The third film of his cycle culminates in portraying an early modern Rabbi as both a practicing astrologer and magician. In tandem with this, the film's architect, Hans Poelzig, adds an important dimension. Poelzig, who spent most of his life between Silesia and Berlin, had a strong personal investment in both German baroque architecture and astrology. This chapter analyzes his contribution to the making of the third Golem film, and provides new insight into the details portrayed in there. In addition, this chapter examines the ramifications of Wegener's depiction of astrological knowledge in film, and reveals how astrology serves to provide a bridge for the tensions between visual and textual legibility surrounding the medium of film in its nascent phase.

In my fourth chapter, I travel north to Hamburg to explore the lifelong preoccupation with starlore of the art historian Aby M. Warburg. His pursuit of the history of astrological symbolism in art led him to create an institution that has enabled others like him to study astrological iconography and history. This chapter lays out his role in creating the material conditions of possibility for people to encounter astrological texts and images during the early twentieth century. Warburg's library continues to have a huge impact on the academic study of the history of astrology and its symbolism. This chapter also discusses how Warburg's interest in astrology is concomitant with his interest in specific forms of early modern culture.

In my fifth chapter, I investigate the many references to celestial and astrological phenomena in Walter Benjamin's intellectual work. Benjamin's turn toward baroque German tragic drama in his rejected *Habilitationsschrift* cannot be assumed to be distinct from his era's own interest in astrology. Over the course of his life, Benjamin developed a methodology of thinking in terms of constellations, which possesses fundamental analogies to early modern astrological hermeneutics. In this context, I read his work on mimesis and experience alongside his practice of graphology in order to situate him in the debates regarding astrology as an *Erfahrungswissenschaft*, discussed in my second chapter.

In each of these chapters the term "experience" figures heavily, appearing variously as a mode of discursive subject formation, polemical posturing, or artistic production. These chapters also emphasize the increasing importance of "diagnosis" rather than "prognostication" in modern Western astrology. I delineate an understanding of astrology not solely concerned with the prediction of the future, but also with the diagnosis of the present. Aby M. Warburg's interests in astrological iconography had to do with its future-oriented narratives, even though in practice, his work in astrological iconography effectively served to diagnose the artworks he studied. Oscar A. H. Schmitz, being on the cutting edge of psychological astrology in Germany, was expressly interested in developing astrology's diagnostic applications. As I discuss in my second chapter, the diagnostic character of astrology used for psychological purposes was a twentieth century modification of astrology, and it served to emphasize personal choice in the unfolding of one's future. When astrology's diagnostic applications are considered, the discourses surrounding astrology during the Weimar Republic suddenly gain new hermeneutic complexity.

## CHAPTER 2: Oscar A. H. Schmitz and Narratives of Astrological Experience

“wir fühlen uns heimatlos im unendlichen Weltraum,  
von allen Sternen enttäuscht.”  
—Count Hermann Keyserling (1910)<sup>1</sup>

“von hier aus scheint es fast,  
als sei die Lehre von den Sternen in Wirklichkeit  
eine Lehre vom Menschen.”  
—Olga von Ungern-Sternberg (1928)<sup>2</sup>

With the onset of the Great War, Oscar Adolf Hermann Schmitz fell into deep despair. His worst nightmare—serving in the military—threatened to come true. Schmitz, born on April 16, 1873 in Bad Homburg vor der Höhe, became aware of the inner tensions of the newly unified German state, and, like many non-Prussians in Germany at that time, he grew up abhorring the military. Petrified of entering combat, he did nearly everything he could to avoid serving as a soldier. In 1916 he moved from Berlin to a hotel in Salzburg, and it was here in 1917 that he encountered an astrologer for the first time. He set himself to learning the mechanics and the art of delineating and interpreting horoscopes. He would practice astrology for the rest of his life.

Schmitz’s prolific writing career began well before the war; he belonged loosely to both the Schwabing bohemians as well as the conservative intellectual *Kosmiker* circle in Munich. Schmitz came into contact with many eminent figures such as the poet Alfred Kubin (who married Schmitz’s sister in 1904), the philosopher Count Hermann von Keyserling, the graphologist Ludwig Klages, the psychologist C. G. Jung, and authors Stefan Zweig, Thomas Mann, Hermann Bahr, Gustav Meyrink, and Walter Benjamin.<sup>3</sup> Schmitz practiced astrology for many of these people. Wolfgang Martynkewicz writes: “Schmitz hatte mit seinen astrologischen Forschungen wieder einmal den Nerv der Zeit getroffen. In den nächsten Jahren erstellte er zahlreiche Horoskope, u. a. für Franz Hessel, Hermann Bahr, Hermann Graf von Keyserling, Heinrich und Thomas Mann.”<sup>4</sup> Schmitz is known to have delineated natal charts for Gustav Meyrink, and James Webb has suggested that it was Schmitz who first inspired Meyrink to write fiction.<sup>5</sup> Around September 1917, Fritz von Herzmanovsky-Orlando, another contemporary writer and artist, wrote to Kubin: “Sehr interessant war mir O. A.

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<sup>1</sup> Hermann Keyserling, “Sterndeutung,” (1911), reprinted in Keyserling, *Philosophie als Kunst* (Darmstadt: Otto Reichl, 1920), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Olga von Ungern-Sternberg, *Die innerseelische Erfahrungswelt am Bilde der Astrologie* (Detmold: Meyerische Buchhandlung, 1928), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Erwiderung an O. A. H. Schmitz,” (1927) *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), II.2:751–55, here 753.

<sup>4</sup> Oscar A. H. Schmitz, *Durch das Land der Dämonen. Tagebücher. Band 3: 1912–1918*, ed. Wolfgang Martynkewicz (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2007), 143.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 107. James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co. 1976), 38.

H. Schmitzens Horoskop; ich bewundere seine fleißige Arbeit. Er ist für mich der Typus eines sehr klugen und genialen Menschen der das Geheimnis der Maske wie kein zweiter erfaßt hat. Er geht die Dinge gerne im Smoking an, der für viele Gewalten ein wunderbarer Panzer ist. Ich glaube, daß er mit den bisher sichtbaren Vorarbeiten noch irgend etwas ganz Großes erreichen wird.”<sup>6</sup> After his wartime encounter with astrology, Schmitz wrote openly and freely about it. Corinna Treitel says that through *Der Geist der Astrologie*, “Schmitz was the first to bring astrology to a wide middle-class readership.”<sup>7</sup>

Schmitz’ story shows that astrology is not a monolithic subject, unchanging and unexposed to inner polemical tensions. Certain groups promoting the practice of astrology during the Weimar Republic felt a strong division between their practice of astrology and superstition, Theosophy, and occult activities. For them astrology was an experiential science, or as they put it in German *Erfahrungswissenschaft*. Beginning with Schmitz, debates about the terms experience and science take center stage in texts advocating and decrying astrology. In his role as a literary figure, Oscar A. H. Schmitz shaped astrology as an *Erfahrungswissenschaft* through writing about his personal experiences, which promoted the use of astrology as a psychological diagnostic tool.

### **Astrology and the Imagination**

In 1910, prominent philosopher Count Hermann Keyserling gave a lecture on “Sterndeutung” that framed astrology in terms of human imagination. “Das wunderbarste Weltsystem, das *Einbildungskraft* jemals ersann, ist das der Astrologie.”<sup>8</sup> For him and a broad range of individuals in Germany at this time, recent developments in scientific inquiry threatened to rip apart an integrated experience of the world, “Je weiter die Forschung vordringt, je eindringlicher sie den Tatbestand analysiert, desto uneinheitlicher erscheint das Universum, desto fragwürdiger sein realer *Zusammenhang*.”<sup>9</sup> Astrology serves to overcome this break and establish correspondences between disparate objects. “Die Gestirne in ihren Stellungen und Wanderungen sind die Projektion des Lebens in dem Raum, sie sind das Zifferblatt der Weltuhr. Sichtbares und Unsichtbares, Lebendiges und Lebloses, Kosmisches und Menschliches hängen dergestalt notwendig zusammen, der Sinn des Ganzen aber liegt im Menschen.”<sup>10</sup> The significance of astrology lies not in telling us anything objectively true about the outer world, but about mankind, i.e., ourselves. The German term, *Sterndeutung*, already gives clues to the hermeneutic function of the practice of astrology that the English term omits, and Keyserling’s text continuously emphasizes issues of legibility regarding the stars. For example, “Dem Sterndeuter ist das Weltall ein Uhrwerk, in dem jedes Einzelne auf das Ganze zurückweist und das Ganze sich in jedem Einzelnen bedeutend widerspiegelt. Die Kreise der Sterne zeichnen sich in den keimenden Seelen ab; was auf

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<sup>6</sup> Schmitz, *Durch das Land der Dämonen*, 143.

<sup>7</sup> Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 306.

<sup>8</sup> My emphasis. Keyserling, “Sterndeutung,” 12.

<sup>9</sup> My emphasis. *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Erden wird und werden soll, steht droben am Himmel *zu lesen*.”<sup>11</sup> In a similar sense, he links the arbitrariness of nature and human language to the hermeneutic system of astrology:

Was verschlägt es, daß die Elemente dieser Weltanschauung—die spezifischen Bedeutungen der Sterne und ihrer Kombinationen—unsinnig an und für sich und willkürlich bestimmt erscheinen? Willkürlich sind vom rein menschlichen Standpunkte erst recht die Produkte der Natur. Wie diese sehr wohl anders sein könnten, aber doch erfahrungsmäßig bestimmte immer gleiche Eigenschaften aufweisen, genau so sind die spezifischen Bedeutungen der Sterne in ihrem Dasein allerdings nicht weiter zu erklären, dafür aber durch vielstausendjährige Forschung als zutreffend dargetan.<sup>12</sup>

Here we see the seeds of the debate that will unfold in Germany over the next decade concerning experience and astrology. For thousands of years humans have been interpreting the stars and forming a body of stories that continue to circulate, get interpreted, and reinterpreted. In this sense, literary studies is a field uniquely poised to examine this element of interpretation present in narratives concerning astrology, both as a subject matter and structurally. Paramount for Keyserling is the element of human participation in the reconstruction of a coherent world of experience:

Die Sterndeutung hat sich Jahrtausende entlang als Erkenntnisquelle bewährt. Dies ist Tatsache, kann nicht bestritten werden. Und doch: wer die Ursache hierzu in den Sternen suchte, der mühte sich fruchtlos ab: die Elemente der Astrologie sind ohne denkbaren Bezug auf die Erfahrungswelt; im Rahmen der Naturordnung ist für sie kein Raum. Die Wahrheit der Astrologie ist wohl anderen Ursprungs: sie wurzelt nicht in der Natur, sie entspringt aus der menschlichen Seele. Sie ist echt Geisteswerk. Sie ist aber deshalb nicht weniger wahr. Aus der Einbildungskraft geht der Keim jeder Wahrheit hervor, die Welt ist zuerst vom Geist erschaffen worden. Ursprünglich ist die Wirklichkeit uns fremd, wir sehen, verstehen sie nicht; wir sehen nur, was wir erdichten.<sup>13</sup>

Keyserling was not alone in emphasizing the role of human imagination in the creation of astrology. In 1917 Franz Boll—aware of both this lecture by Keyserling and Aby M. Warburg’s early lectures on astrology in art history—wrote a groundbreaking academic study of the history of astrology in German. For the early years of the Weimar Republic, Boll’s study remained authoritative. Even though the developments of the natural sciences undermined astrology’s claim to scientific knowledge, Boll said that

das Große und geschichtlich Bedeutsame an der Astrologie darf darüber nicht vergessen werden [...] sie macht einen bewunderswerten kühnen

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 14.

Versuch, die Welt als ein Ganzes, als eine einzige große Einheit zu deuten; und sie fügt auch den Menschen in diese große Gemeinsamkeit ein, die alles Lebende gesetzlich bindet. Sie ist tot, insofern sie mit untauglichen Mitteln Wissenschaft sein wollte; sie lebt und wird immer wiederkehren in dem unzerstörbaren Verlangen der Menschennatur nach einem einheitlichen Weltbild und nach dem Frieden der Seele im Universum.<sup>14</sup>

Boll's desire to see in the history of man's imagination of the stars a type of universal constant, a unifying principle, is a direct response to the violence and destruction of the Great War. Boll, perhaps inspired by Keyserling's focus on the archive of human imagination, sees new urgency in going back to retrieve mankind's various historical interpretations of the cosmos. Astrology thus becomes a pacifist platform, providing a celestial perspective that unites all of mankind, past and present. Boll positions it as the one constant element in the thousands of years of various cultures across time on earth. Like Boll, Schmitz began writing his major astrological text, *Der Geist der Astrologie*, during the First World War, and it is this text that began to set a precedent for carving an imaginative space for astrology in the realm of psychology, thus divorcing it from both purely historical academic treatment and the appropriations of the Theosophists and the occultists.

### **Astrology as an *Erfahrungswissenschaft***

Schmitz's major astrological text, *Der Geist der Astrologie*, was widely read and appreciated. It blends horoscope readings of famous Germans of the time, discussion of the Great War with respect to astrology, and specific technical information about astrology. The book has two parts: "*Astrologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft*" and "*Astro-Psychologie*." These titles are the twin poles around which Schmitz organizes his discussion of astrological meaning. Schmitz pays homage to traditional astrology by styling the front cover of *Der Geist der Astrologie* as an expressionist version of a medieval chart (see Figure 2.1)

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<sup>14</sup> Franz Boll, *Stern Glaube und Sterndeutung: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1918), 101–2. All editions of this text are dedicated to Warburg, and the Warburg Institute helped fund reprints of this text. Wilhelm Gundel later edited Boll's text in its 1926 and 1931 editions, adding valuable commentary and bibliographical notes.



**Figure 2.1** The cover of the first edition of Oscar A. H. Schmitz’s *Der Geist der Astrologie* (1922).

Already upon first glance, the reader is confronted with iconic images of “Planetary children” popular in early modern astrological texts and pamphlets.<sup>15</sup> They present the glyphs and planetary children associated with them in rectangular boxes reminiscent of a standard medieval chart. The script is an expressionist variant of black letter script. In this sense, Schmitz stylizes the art of Urania (astrology) with a mix of medieval and contemporary graphic design. Before readers even open the book, the cover art prepares them for the experience they are to receive.

Schmitz’s register is very colloquial, presumably in a deliberate attempt to make astrology accessible to the masses. “This treatise doesn’t intend to replace a textbook for novices or to claim to offer anything substantially new to masters of astrology.”<sup>16</sup> Schmitz wants his work to be more like “a personal travelogue of a little-known country”

<sup>15</sup> See Dieter Blume, *Regenten des Himmels: Astrologische Bilder im Mittelalter und Renaissance* (Berlin: Akademie, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Oscar A. H. Schmitz, *Der Geist der Astrologie*, (Munich: Georg Müller, 1922), 7. “Diese Abhandlung will weder ein Lehrbuch für Neulinge ersetzen, noch beansprucht sie, den Meistern der Astrologie wesentlich Neues zu bieten.”

rather than an academic monograph.<sup>17</sup> The concept of travelogue presupposes a meandering, a going-through, an experience, and in this way his style underscores his message. Schmitz also does not consider astrology to be occult and talks about it as if he were talking about any other subject, psychology, the weather, or local politics. By choosing this register, Schmitz breaks through the veil of secrecy associated with both communicating messages about esoteric practice and certain academic discourse.<sup>18</sup>

From the outset, Schmitz addresses the evergreen problem of skeptics by prescribing to them personal experience with astrology:

So all the astrologer needs to say to the skeptic is: get yourself some accurate horoscopes, preferably your own, those of your relatives and friends, as well as those of a few famous personalities from history and of the present, such as Goethe, Napoleon, Bismark, Wilhelm II, Wilson: acquaint yourself with the interpretational rules, which have essentially remained unchanged since antiquity, and then judge whether these rules add up.<sup>19</sup>

This charge to get experience with astrology before making a judgment about it will echo throughout the coming years. It forms the basis for Schmitz's designation of the term *Erfahrungswissenschaft*, which he uses to propose an answer to the question of scientific definition. Schmitz says, "Astrology is through and through an experiential science [*Erfahrungswissenschaft*], and the ambiguity of its judgments doesn't have anything intricately mystical [about it], rather it corresponds in fact to the ambiguity of its objects. Organic life and individual psychology don't have the exactitude of machines, and that is why their regularities are not equal to physical laws."<sup>20</sup> Keyserling's words about the role of imagination in astrology resonate in this definition. This proposition helps Schmitz to ground his view of astrology in the emerging realm of psychology and provide a framework for future intellectuals to engage astrology as an "experiential" science. In addition, the second half of the text primarily seeks to establish that modern astrology should be practiced for the purpose of psychological diagnosis rather than for

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 7. "Meine Arbeit will sich zu einem Lehrbuch oder gelehrten Werke verhalten, wie eine persönliche Reisebeschreibung eines wenig bekannten Landes zu einer wissenschaftlichen Monographie."

<sup>18</sup> Joshua Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric: Mass Media and the Drama of Secrecy in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Schmitz, *Geist der Astrologie*, 9: "So braucht der Astrologe dem Zweifler nur zu sagen: verschaffe dir einige kunstgerechte Horoskope, am besten dein eigenes, die deiner Verwandten und Freunde, sowie einiger bekannter Persönlichkeiten der Geschichte und der Gegenwart, etwa Goethes, Napoleons, Bismarcks, Wilhelms II., Wilsons; mache dich mit den seit dem Altertum im wesentlichen unveränderten Deutungsregeln vertraut, und dann urteile, ob diese Regeln stimmen."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 12: "Die Astrologie ist durchaus Erfahrungswissenschaft, und das Vieldeutige ihrer Urteile hat nichts verworren Mystisches, sondern entspricht vielmehr der Vieldeutigkeit ihrer Gegenstände. Das organische Leben und die individuelle Psychologie haben eben nicht die Exaktheit von Maschinen, und darum gleichen auch ihre Gesetzmäßigkeiten nicht den physikalischen Gesetzen."

what Schmitz' calls "practical" (i.e., prognostic) purposes. In this he follows the trend of Alan Leo in nineteenth-century England, who, after much persecution, geared his practice of astrology toward helping clients understand their personalities, rather than toward predicting the future.<sup>21</sup>

Schmitz was so committed to the application of astrological chart analysis to modern psychology that he criticizes the Theosophists and the astrologers working with Alfred Witte for their innovative approaches to chart interpretation. *Der Geist der Astrologie* discusses Theosophical or Ariosophical material only insofar as Schmitz provides harsh critiques of the patterns he reads in the natal charts of the Theosophists themselves. Vehemence against Theosophy wasn't uncommon at the time. In 1919, Keyserling wrote, "Der Schreiber dieser Zeilen ist nicht Theosoph und wird so leicht keiner werden."<sup>22</sup> Schmitz also disparages the Hamburg astrologers led by Alfred Witte. Witte founded an astrological association in Hamburg in 1919 called the Kepler Zirkel, but also known as the Hamburger Astrologenschule and the Astrologische Studiengesellschaft e.V.<sup>23</sup> Witte invented fictional points beyond Neptune, so-called trans-Neptunian planets, that became new interpretational elements in a chart. Others in his group also began to work with "midpoints," the mathematical mean between two chart elements, that provided astrologers with entirely new interpretational systems. These astrologers saw themselves as improving the art of astrology for the twentieth century. This innovation wasn't acceptable to the conservative Schmitz.

### **Narratives of Schmitz's Personal Experience**

It is not enough for Schmitz to prescribe experience of astrology to his readers. By consistently writing in the genre of autobiography throughout his narratives, readers relive his personal story. He wrote about his astrological experiences in at least four texts: in two diaries (entries from 1917–18 in his personal diary and from 1918–20 in an astrological diary), in a fictional autobiography *Das Dionysische Geheimnis* (1921), as well as in *Der Geist der Astrologie* (1922). Evidence indicates that Schmitz probably wrote these accounts simultaneously. In a letter dated February 9, 1922, Schmitz wrote to Keyserling about *Der Geist der Astrologie*: "It was written in only three months, but I worked on it for five years."<sup>24</sup> This places the conception of the text in 1917, the period of his first encounter with astrology. Further, on March 30, 1918 Schmitz recorded in his diary the time and date when he began writing *Das Dionysische Geheimnis*: "Yesterday

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Alan Leo, see Patrick Curry, *A Confusion of Prophets* (London: Collins and Brown Limited, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Keyserling, *Philosophie als Kunst*, 223.

<sup>23</sup> Treitel, *Science for the Soul*, 269. In 1993 this type of astrology became known as Uranian astrology.

<sup>24</sup> "Geschrieben wurde es zwar in 3 Monaten, aber gearbeitet daran habe ich 5 Jahre." Hermann Keyserling and Oscar A. H. Schmitz, *Sinnsuche oder Psychoanalyse. Briefwechsel Graf Hermann Keyserling—Oscar A. H. Schmitz aus den Tagen der Schule der Weisheit*. Hessische Beiträge zur deutschen Literatur (Darmstadt: Gesellschaft Hessischer Literaturfreunde, 1970), 7.

at 12:35pm began ‘Dionys. Secret.’ Drew up a corresponding natal chart.”<sup>25</sup> Schmitz was in the thick of his initial engagement with astrology when he wrote both texts. In addition, from January 1918 to March 1920, Schmitz sporadically maintained an astrological diary, in which he planned his talks and events by casting horoscopes, “which he did not see as applicable to the prediction of fortune or misfortune.”<sup>26</sup> Even though *Das Dionysische Geheimnis* appeared in print before *Der Geist der Astrologie*, I’ll discuss his fictional text last. The fictional account blends together the non-fictional versions, and it will be most useful to know how he portrayed the non-fictional story before examining the nuances of his fictional depiction.

Within the first pages of *Der Geist der Astrologie* Schmitz tells his reader how he came to learn about astrology—a rhetorical move to demonstrate astrology’s usefulness. This autobiographical passage establishes Schmitz’ credibility to talk about astrology with authority, and it also functions to persuade the reader to take the subject seriously. In 1900 in Paris, he bought a copy of Adrien Adolphe Desbarolles’ 1859 book *Les mystères de la main*, which turned Schmitz onto rudimentary astrological symbolism through the subject of chiromancy. This book begins to help him formulate what he eventually calls “astrological psychology.”<sup>27</sup> “Never before or after this moment have I had in my studies the same intensity of feeling that I finally had found something I had been seeking for a long time, namely a legitimate individual psychology.”<sup>28</sup> This anecdote prepares the reader to understand the background behind Schmitz’ knowledge of astrology before his first encounter with an astrologer, a baroness whom he met in Salzburg.

In 1916, the staff of the hotel in Salzburg where Schmitz had been staying informed him that he had to clear his room by January 1, 1917 because a woman with children and a sizeable entourage had rented it for the year.<sup>29</sup> This displaced Schmitz to the floor below and disinclined him to meet the woman. One day in the dining room, he crossed paths with her, and they came into conversation. They exchanged polite words at first, but Schmitz’ entire demeanor toward her changed when she told him that she knew something about astrology:

Aber nichtdestoweniger machte sie eine zufällige Anspielung, aus der ich sofort entnahm, daß sie um Astrologie Bescheid wußte. Von diesem Augenblick an folgten sich meine Berührungen mit Astrologie und Astrologen auf dem Fuß. Die Stunde hatte für mich geschlagen, in der sich mir der Tempel zu öffnen begann. Nachdem ich meine Interesse bekundet

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<sup>25</sup> “Gestern um 12h35 ‘Dionys. Geheimnis’ begonnen. Stundenhoroskop dazu gemacht.” Schmitz, *Durch das Land der Dämonen*, 149.

<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang Martynkewicz, the editor of Schmitz’ diaries, says: “Schmitz führte sogar seit Januar 1918 ein spezielles ‘Astrologisches Tagebuch.’ Wichtige Ereignisse plante er nun mit Hilfe des Horoskops, dessen Möglichkeiten er aber nicht in der Vorhersage von Glück oder Unglück sah.” Schmitz, *Durch das Land der Dämonen*, 106, 339.

<sup>27</sup> Schmitz, *Geist der Astrologie*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 18: “Weder vor- noch nachher im Leben hatte ich bei Studien je wieder in demselben Maß das Gefühl, hier endlich etwas gefunden zu haben, was ich seit langem suchte, nämlich eine gesetzmäßige Individual-psychologie.”

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

hatte, sah mich meine neue Bekannte scharf an und sagte: “Wenn ich nicht sehr irre, müssen Sie die Sonne oder Aszendenten im Löwen haben, außerdem fühle ich den Uranus stark.” “Was ist der Aszendent?” fragte ich; “daß Uranus ein im achtzehnten Jahrhundert entdeckter Planet ist, weiß ich zwar, aber unter den in der Astrologie vorkommenden 7 Gestirnen ist er doch nicht?”<sup>30</sup>

Schmitz goes on to describe what the ascendant is and how Uranus came to be calculated along with the traditional planets, effectively using his own encounter to divulge information about astrology to his reader. He continues detailing his encounter with the astrologer and how she interpreted the information encoded in his natal chart.

In *Der Geist der Astrologie* Schmitz omits the astrologer’s name, but in his diaries he mentions her as Baroness Pach.<sup>31</sup> This is the only biographical detail he ever provides about her. Although he gives her credit for his initial encounter with astrology, in the summer of 1918 another figure, Friedrich Schwickert (also known as “Sinbad”) continued to teach Schmitz.<sup>32</sup> Schwickert’s astrological publications are based on the astrology of Jean-Baptiste Morin de Villefranche (1583–1656), the one of the last French royal astrologers.<sup>33</sup> Schwickert later published a five-volume set of instructional texts together with Dr. Adolf Weiss based mostly on Morin’s astrology, which appeared from 1925 to 1927.<sup>34</sup> Schmitz credits Morin with teaching him how to successfully interpret a natal chart—calling his work “ein rein auf Erfahrung und Vernunft aufgebautes System.”<sup>35</sup> Schmitz seems to appreciate Morin’s position as one of the last great astrologers to practice when astrology was still a credible worldview.

In contrast to *Der Geist der Astrologie*, Schmitz uses the medium of fiction in *Das Dionysische Geheimnis* to launch another plea for the usefulness of astrology for the individual. In the novel, he constructs the interior monologue and daily experiences of a main character who identifies himself explicitly as “süddeutsch” (as opposed to Prussian) and who has been extremely afraid of becoming an active-duty soldier since childhood. The novel begins by briefly introducing the main character’s childhood, which establishes the basis of his anti-militarism. It continues by following his various attempts to be declared unfit for duty when the Great War broke out. Schmitz also discusses the main character’s exploration of the writings of Lao Tzu, Nietzsche, and Meister Eckhart, among others. The main character turns to these thinkers in his attempt to figure out why his hatred of military service is so strong. None of these authors gives him a truly satisfactory answer. Two-thirds of the way through the novel, just after the main character is pronounced “Dauernd kriegsverwendungsunfähig,” he learns about astrology, which plays a decisive role in helping him to psychologically diagnose his resistance to military service.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 36–37.

<sup>31</sup> Schmitz, *Durch das Land der Dämonen*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 197. See also, Schmitz, *Geist der Astrologie*, 56.

<sup>33</sup> See Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology Volume II: Medieval and Modern Worlds* (London: Continuum, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Schwickert and Adolf Weiss, *Bausteine der Astrologie*, 6 vols. (Vienna: Barth 1925–27).

<sup>35</sup> Schmitz, *Geist der Astrologie*, 57.

The next two chapters cover the main character's encounters with astrology. The first of these chapters starts with a Latin phrase: *Astra non imperant, sed inclinant*. The stars do not command, they incline. This epigraph is a rewriting of the famous line, *Astra inclinant, non necessitant*. The stars incline, they do not determine. Schmitz's understanding of astrology is infused with this precept, which forms the philosophical basis for the entire modern practice of psychological astrology. Also, the fact that Schmitz keeps this epigraph in Latin shows that he desired to embed himself in the larger tradition represented by this phrase, and that he was either writing for an educated audience who knew Latin, or he desired to keep the words cryptic, saving them for those who were initiated into the language.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, the obscurity in the fictional text contradicts the openness of *Der Geist der Astrologie*.

The plot echoes Schmitz's biographical story in *Der Geist der Astrologie*. The main character visits his brother-in-law, Bernhard, in Austria with the goal of setting up a place to stay that summer. Schmitz often spent the summer in Austria with his sister and Kubin, so Bernhard functions as a weakly disguised Kubin figure. During this visit, the main character meets the cosmopolitan, Baron Eduard von Fernthal, who is proficient in alchemy, kabbalah, and astrology, and who has recently returned to Austria after his late father had bequeathed a castle to him. Schmitz's description of the baron's face turns him into an emblem for the status of the esoteric revival:

All passions had buried folds in that fully timeless countenance with the strong cheekbones, a hieroglyphic writing of a past life, which for a long while has not had anything to add to the present (moment). It was, as if the strong, noble forms of the face stretched out over these runes, just as the growth of a trunk swallows/erases letters that had been carved into it decades ago.<sup>37</sup>

The wrinkled surface of the baron's face is conflated with hieroglyphs, runes, and letters. This legibility of the face recalls how film theorist Béla Balázs describes the way the film close-up has restored the primacy of the visual vis-à-vis text in his 1924 *Der sichtbare Mensch*.<sup>38</sup> While Balázs argues that film has now rendered the face legible, the baron's face evades legibility in two ways. First, Schmitz describes the wrinkles as a type of hieroglyphic writing, so on the symbolic level, the script must be deciphered. Second, legibility is hindered by a temporal metaphor of tree bark enveloping and distorting letters carved into its surface with years of new and newer growth. Through this double erasure, these impenetrable and unreadable wrinkles, Schmitz identifies the baron with both the esoteric realm and the sense of time and age related to the German understanding of the term "Erfahrung." However, the continued existence of the

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<sup>36</sup> Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric*.

<sup>37</sup> Schmitz, *Das Dionysische Geheimnis*, 289. "Alle Leidenschaften hatten in das völlig zeitlose Antlitz mit den starken Backenknochen Falten gegraben, eine Hieroglyphenschrift vergangenen Lebens, der die Gegenwart längst nicht mehr hinzuzusetzen hat. Es war, als ob die starken, edeln Formen des Gesichts über diese Runen hinausstrebten, so wie das Wachstum von Baumstämmen die Buchstaben, die vor Jahrzehnten eingeritzt worden sind, verwischt."

<sup>38</sup> Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

hieroglyphs and runes is evidence of the powerful persistence of symbols in the face of time's erasure.

A few passages later, this implicit description becomes explicit. According to Bernhard, the baron occupied himself "seit Jahrzehnten mit den halb vergessenen Wissenschaften Alchymie, Kabbala, und Astrologie," which, "sobald man sich erst über die gewiß wertvollen Entdeckungen der neuen Naturwissenschaften etwas beruhigt hätte, eine Wiedergeburt erleben würden."<sup>39</sup> The newer natural sciences are included with the "half-forgotten sciences" of alchemy, kabbala, and astrology. This status of half-forgotten, as opposed to totally forgotten, is another testament to the existence of a continual tradition.

Bernhard, curious to test astrology's validity, gave the astrologer the main character's birth data; since the baron didn't know him at all personally the results of the baron's interpretation would show whether astrology worked. The baron immediately pinpointed the astrological symbols that illuminated the main character's fear of fighting in the military. Von Fernthals's reading stimulated the main character enough to want to learn to practice astrology for himself. Here, the main character encounters the experiential basis of astrological practice, and becomes immediately excited by it, exclaiming, "Gibt es doch Bücher über diese Dinge?" The Baron replies that while books do exist, the only way to gain insight into the art is through mentorship. Reading books about the subject trains one to focus too much on the technical detail and miss learning the art of how to synthesize those details properly. The baron promises to lend the main character some books, if he can read English (because, he notes, the English are the only ones, besides a few French and a few Americans who are still practicing this "half-forgotten" art). The question of the main character's summer housing is solved when the baron invites him to stay for a few weeks and learn astrology under his guidance. In reference to this, Schmitz (the author) writes that the baron often invited foreigners (*auswärtige*) for weeks on end and that at his castle "die Wirtschaft war verpachtet."<sup>40</sup> This could be a slight, perhaps even unconscious, reference to Baroness Pach, from whom Schmitz first learned astrology. In Schmitz's fictional account of astrology, he meshes his experiences of Baroness Pach and Friedrich Schwickert together in the figure of the Baron von Fernthal. This fictional astrologer has taken Pach's title (and the "*verpachtete Wirtschaft*") and Schwickert's gender.

In the historical and the fictional cases the astrologer tells Schmitz to study on his own before receiving more guided instruction. Schmitz maintains in both texts that one can only really learn astrology by analyzing one's own natal chart and then the charts of close friends and relatives, and finally the charts of historically important people. This way, an intuitive sense of the symbolic language can be built up through direct experience. The astrologer that the baron mentions, Alan Leo, is perhaps the most influential figure to popularize astrology for the modern world.<sup>41</sup> In *Der Geist der Astrologie* Schmitz recounts that Baroness Pach had first introduced him to Leo's work at the hotel. Baron von Fernthal mentions a few other astrologers, such as "Pearce, Simonite, Saphariel, Flambart und die Alten," all of whom are historical figures who

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<sup>39</sup> Schmitz, *Das Dionysische Geheimnis*, 289.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>41</sup> Curry, *A Confusion of Prophets*.

published texts before or during the Great War, and all of whom are discussed by Schmitz in *Der Geist der Astrologie*.<sup>42</sup> However, with respect to these materials, Schmitz maintains that books can only supply the technical means by which to do the mathematical side of the art. He stresses the importance of oral transmission from learned astrologer to apprentice by constructing his texts through his central experience, effectively positioning himself as an expert passing on knowledge to an apprentice. But the knowledge that comes through isn't technical knowledge, rather it is emotional knowledge—the sense of relief Schmitz feels when he finally explores and understands the meaning of his natal chart.

Schmitz' turn to astrology came out of a desire to understand and conquer his fear to fight in the war. More than Buddhism, ascetic life practices, or any other alternative esoteric practice, astrology helps Schmitz understand himself in a way that finally puts his endless search for personal meaning to rest. "For me it is a question of the fierce defense of my personal sphere against military rigor, which I was not healthy enough to endure, but that was hard to substantiate."<sup>43</sup> Schmitz's fear of serving in the military was overcome when astrology provided him with a way to combat the state's desire to conscript him. Schmitz sought to justify his refusal of being subjugated by military discipline by defining his selfhood outside the regulating norm of the German state. He appealed to an alternative source of legitimacy: the practice of astrology with its own historical and universalizing authority. The celestial sphere has a history that pre-dates the development of the nation-state, and it is and always has been beyond state jurisdiction. Astrology gave Schmitz a language with which to imagine that his behavior is condoned by a supra-governmental narrative. In fact, the historical move from the medieval style of horoscopy (concerned with the group) to modern natal horoscopy (concerned with the individual) also demonstrates a stronger interest in generating narratives of subject formation in modernity. The controversies surrounding astrology are based on fighting for control over what constitutes valid ways of gleaning knowledge of the self. Schmitz's story is testimony to these modern efforts toward individuation. He defined his subjectivity expressly through astrology's techniques for imagining the self—not Buddhism or yoga or any number of other "New Age" type practices.

One reason why this form, and not the others, was so appealing to Schmitz is the quasi-empirical character of astrological hermeneutics. Astrology offers the creation of a heterotopian space. It creates the same sort of imaginary space that literature can generate, but it has concrete relations with certain data sets and conditions of producing truth effects within its own system. Astrology as an art of interpretation delineates the possibilities of the individual as a unique entity. It does so by including this individual in a continuum of other possible and actual individuals by virtue of the ontological basis of astrology. That is, the physical aspect of being born on earth at a specific time and place wherein the planets and stars occupied certain positional relationships to the birth at the time of the birth. Further the practice of astrology in historical human communities adds to the sense of common heritage that escapes definition by national entities.

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<sup>42</sup> Schmitz, *Das Dionysische Geheimnis*, 295.

<sup>43</sup> Schmitz, *Geist der Astrologie*, 34: "Bei mir handelt es sich um die heftige Verteidigung meiner persönlichen Sphäre gegen militärische Zumutungen, denen ich mich gesundheitlich nicht gewachsen fühlte, was aber schwer nachzuweisen war."

The natal horoscope thus provides a normative narrative of origin, focusing on the individual's entry to this lifetime in a specific place and time on earth. But increasingly in the twentieth century it becomes a site of the imagination as well. Independently confirming Keyserling's approach, Nicholas Campion has stressed the role of imagination in the interpretation of horoscopes, "The horoscope does not carry a fixed set of objectively defined data, but can be used by us to extract the information we need for our own ends. This does not mean that there is no reality in the horoscope, but that we conspire with the astrology to bring out whatever information is relevant and meaningful at the moment, depending on our perspective and prejudices."<sup>44</sup> Schmitz's desire to emphasize his retrograde Mars in Scorpio over the other elements in his natal chart in order to justify his unsuitability for military service highlights this trend. From his diary we learn that, "Was einem an Leid & Lust *zukommt*, zeigt am besten d. Horoskop. Wer dauernd ihm nicht Zukommendes erjagt, dem muß als Pendelreflex auch passieren, was ihm nicht zukommt. Die absolute Zurückziehung auf mich *selbst*, hat mich z. B. auch frei gemacht von der Zumutung vom M. [Militärdienst]."<sup>45</sup> Once he learned that he wasn't predisposed to be a soldier, his entire complex of fears broke. He allowed him to create an alternative fiction of his "true self." This new narrative brought him comfort and enabled him to avoid military duty with confidence instead of fear. The security Schmitz found in the astrological explanations of this streak in his personality might be one reason why he so enthusiastically promoted a psychological understanding of astrology throughout his life.

Astrology helped Schmitz come to terms with modern life by providing an interpretive framework for developing an alternative fiction of the self. Martynkewicz says of Schmitz' astrological practice: "Auf der Suche nach Selbsterlösung wurde die Astrologie immer wichtiger, sie war Heilsversprechen und Entlastung, denn die individuelle Persönlichkeit erschien unter diesem Blickwinkel als ein Ganzes—und in der Ganzheit erkannte Schmitz das Heil. Heil und Heilung dachte er als Entropie, als Umkehrung des Zerrissenseins und der Gegensätze. Ins Kosmische projiziert, erlebt sich das Ich nicht mehr als Spielball fremder Mächte, als Produkt des Zufalls, sondern in einem Weltganzen aufgehoben, in einem Universum, in dem es zwar Leiden gibt, aber kein sinnloses Leiden."<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, Schmitz integrates his understanding of his horoscope with his understanding of God: "In this way my will becomes one with God's will, because my entity as it stands in my horoscope is God's will through me."<sup>47</sup> Formulated this way, astrology isn't against Schmitz's religion, rather, it becomes a way to read the language of God through celestial signs. For a turbulent and querying soul, astrology became a tool through which God could speak to Schmitz and assuage his fears about his purpose in life.

In his diary we read his philosophical position to the natal chart. Schmitz says:

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<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Campion, "Mythical Moments in the Rectification of History" in Noel Tyl, ed., *Astrology looks at History* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1995), 25–64, here 43.

<sup>45</sup> Schmitz, *Durch das Land der Dämonen*, 154.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 140–41.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 154: "So wird *mein* Wille Gottes Wille eins, denn mein Wesen, wie es im Horoskop steht ist Gottes Wille durch mich."

Für mich bedeutet [ . . . ] mein Horoskop ein Spiegel, in dem ich die einzelnen, im Bewußtsein noch immer getrennten Teile meines Wesens, als eine rhythmische Einheit wenigstens im Bilde zu sehen bekam, und es konnte nicht fehlen, daß diese "Anschauung" wiederum auf das Innere reflektierte. So wird das Horoskop zur magischen Formel, durch deren Besinnung unser inneres Wesen bestätigt und instand gesetzt wird, sich aus den Zufälligkeiten des Geschehens immer mehr herauskrystallisieren. Diese magische Wirkung der Astrologie fühlte ich nun aufs heftigste, ja fast bis zur Besessenheit. Es gab Zeiten, da es mich vom Spaziergang zur Umkehr trieb, um mich daheim wieder über die geheimnisvollen Zeichen zu beugen und ihnen ihren Sinn abzugewinnen.<sup>48</sup>

This obsession, lasting for about two years, didn't maintain its intensity. Toward the end of *Das Dionysische Geheimnis* astrology appears once again, but this time to confirm the main character's maturity and mastery. During the summer of 1918, the narrator finally makes his way to Styria to visit Baron von Fernthal at his castle. There he spends two months in a small town in the company of a fluctuating group of eight to twelve occultists of various backgrounds. Most of the people in the baron's company are distinguished cosmopolitans, but their setting is rural.<sup>49</sup>

Here the main character sets himself apart from these occultist enthusiasts: "und so wohl ich mich unter ihnen fühlte, ihre Überzeugungen und Theorien gewannen keinerlei Einfluß auf mich . . . Antworten auf ungelöste Fragen gaben sie mir nicht mehr."<sup>50</sup> Even his fervor for astrology seemed to wane somewhat, perhaps speaking to his experience of integrating its practice into his life, "Auch das Interesse an der Astrologie, von dem ich vor einem Jahr noch wie besessen gewesen war, trat in jenen Abstand zu mir selbst, in dem ich alles gelten und mir 'gefallen' ließ, aber ohne mich daran zu klammern. Überall gewährte ich das Wunder desselben sich persönlich in abertausend Formen bewußt werden wollenden Göttlichen."<sup>51</sup> After assimilating his experiences with astrology into himself, Schmitz came to accept astrology without clinging to it dogmatically. This shows that Schmitz utilized it as an important imaginative framework around which he could organize his understanding of himself.

However directly after establishing his intellectual distance from astrology, he indulges his reader with five pages of predictions his fellow astrologers had for the outcome of the war. He finalized and published this text a few years after the war was over, so skeptics could argue that he edited the predictions to match what actually happened. I argue that the postwar appearance of such predictions serves to diagnose the outcome of the war rather than attempt to predict it. That is, Schmitz might have written about these predictions after the fact in order to promote astrology's diagnostic function.

In broad terms, *The Dionysian Secret* is primarily concerned with freedom of choice. Like Schmitz, the main character didn't want to be conscripted, and astrology

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>49</sup> See also Corinna Treitel's ideas about rural vs. cosmopolitan occultism in *Science for the Soul*.

<sup>50</sup> Schmitz, *Das Dionysische Geheimnis*, 350–51.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

finally gave him the security to know that he wouldn't be. Rather than a strict determinism, Schmitz and the main character find in astrology an accessible map of potentiality. The individual can choose to maximize his or her own potential to gain happiness. In this way, Schmitz's writings played an important role in promoting astrology psychologically.

### **From Medieval to Early Modern to Modern Astrology**

At this juncture it will be useful to explain how Schmitz' understanding and use of astrology is the product of an oft overlooked aspect of the history of astrological practice. Current scholarship is only recently beginning to appreciate the nuances separating medieval astrological practice from early modern and modern astrological practice. Nicholas Campion, Bernadette Brady and their colleagues in the Sophia Centre at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David are in the process of tracing the steps that medieval astrologers, such as Guido Bonatti, used to delineate horoscopes. As Anthony Grafton has pointed out, technical astrological manuals as we know them today are fairly recent.<sup>52</sup> Brady and her colleagues are only now at the point where a systematic knowledge of the mechanics of medieval astrology can be reconstructed. What has emerged from their work is that Kepler was responsible not only for a revision of the astronomical understanding of the solar system, but also for a collapse in medieval astrological techniques. Understanding how Kepler revised medieval astrology is useful for understanding how Schmitz and his contemporaries hook on to a specific early-modern interpretation of astrological practice.

Astrology in the middle ages was much more concerned with external effects than with personal behavior and psychology. Medieval astrologers would first measure the vitality of a individual to see whether it was worth proceeding to characterize the phases of the person's life. Once the vitality had been calculated, the life was split into three phases, with a planetary ruler describing the character of each phase.<sup>53</sup> They also used calculations to determine specifics such as what the nature of the person's income would be, the nature of sibling relationships, parental relationships, and so forth. Medieval astrologers were not able to calculate the planetary positions with as much accuracy as astrologers by Kepler's time; in order to compensate for this lack of visual accuracy, Arabic astrologers developed a series of mathematical transformations that accounted for it. Essentially they put the various significant elements of the natal chart into a contest to determine symbolic weight, functionally assigning quantity to quality. Each theoretical "lot" or "part" had its own list of elements and mathematical relationships that needed to be taken into consideration. Kepler, not observing anything in nature that accounted for Arabic parts or the distinction between the zodiac signs and various house systems, proposed to strip astrology down to its essentials. Some contemporary German astrologers were aware of Kepler's modifications to astrology. In 1926 Heinz

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<sup>52</sup> Anthony Grafton, "Starry Messengers: Recent Work in the History of Western Astrology," *Perspectives on Science* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 70–83, esp. 80.

<sup>53</sup> See Guido Bonatti, *The Book of Astronomy*, trans. Benjamin N. Dykes (Golden Valley, MN: The Cazimi Press, 2007), and Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Volume II*.

Artur Strauß and his wife Sigrid Strauß-Kloebe focused an entire monograph on Kepler's astrological writings.<sup>54</sup> Importantly they also discuss Kepler's revisions of astrology in terms of experience:

was in der Folge das Besondere und Eigentümliche von Keplers Bauweise ausmachte, war das immer mehr sich zeigende Bedürfnis, seine Erkenntnisse, sofern nur irgend die Möglichkeit bestand, durch die Erfahrung der Sinne bestätigt zu sehen. [ . . . ] Und also unterzieht er immer wieder seine Spekulationen einer nachträglichen Kontrolle, stets bereit, auch Lieblingsideen zum Opfer zu bringen, wenn die Erfahrung es verlangt. Es ist dies eine Tatsache, die auch bei der Wertung seiner astrologischen Feststellungen niemals vergessen werden darf.<sup>55</sup>

For Kepler, this type of experience was based on observation; if he couldn't observe a particular phenomenon in nature, like the fictional division of the sky into the houses in a natal chart, for example, then the phenomenon did not belong in an astrologer's arsenal. Kepler sought to reform astrology by doing three things. First, he eliminated all of the complex Arabic parts because he argued that these were points that couldn't be seen. This had the effect of collapsing the complexity of medieval astrological practice into straightforward geometrical relationships between visible objects. Second, he added new geometrical aspects to the traditional Ptolemaic aspects ( $0^\circ$ ,  $60^\circ$ ,  $90^\circ$ ,  $120^\circ$ ,  $180^\circ$ ) such as the quintile ( $360^\circ/5=72^\circ$ ) and the biquintile ( $360^\circ/2.5=144^\circ$ ), which in his mind gave the astrologer new precision.<sup>56</sup> Finally, he reassigned the sphere of influence of a particular point (its "orb") from planets to aspects. In medieval astrology each planet has a specific orb. One can envision this orb as a sphere that surrounds the planet like a halo. When two orbs touch by aspect, the planets in question are in a significant symbolic relationship. This is called moeity. Moeity also determines which planet dominates this relationship. The degree of the orb carries different weights depending on how "strong" the planet is, with the sun being the largest, moon the next largest and so forth. These orb values are very small, so specific

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<sup>54</sup> Heinz Artur Strauß and Sigrid Strauß-Kloebe, *Die Astrologie des Johannes Kepler: Eine Auswahl aus seinen Schriften* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1926). For an extremely brief overview of how Kepler used astrology, see H. Darrel Rutkin, "Various Uses of Horoscopes: Astrological Practices in Early Modern Europe," in Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 167–82; and for a longer version see: Judith, V. Field, "A Lutheran Astrologer: Johannes Kepler," *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 31 (1984): 189–272. The most recent work on Kepler's astrology is being done by Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, cited in the notes below.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> This trend has continued to this day with dividing the  $360^\circ$  of the zodiac by various numbers to achieve aspects that are able to allow the astrologer to produce increasingly accurate interpretations. One modern iteration of this tendency that appears somewhat ironic in this light is Noel Tyl's "rediscovery" of the *quindecile* aspect [ $165^\circ$ , as part of the  $360^\circ/24=15^\circ$  increment family], which Tyl characterizes as the aspect of obsession and compulsion: <http://www.noeltyl.com/techniques/990801.html>.

planets must be in very close mathematical relationship to each other to be symbolically significant. Kepler inverted this scheme of orbs. When orbs are assigned to the aspect—i.e. the geometry—instead of the planet, the interpretational richness of moiety gets lost. This last change had a huge symbolic impact on astrological interpretation.

Kepler also proposed another significant reform. Strauß and Strauß-Kloebe noted, “Da Kepler die Einteilung des Tierkreises in 12 Zeichen nicht als in der Natur begründet ansehen konnte, mußte er auch jede qualitative Verschiedenheit der Zeichen verneinen.”<sup>57</sup> He cannot empirically observe why the sky should be divided into twelve parts, nor can he observe the results of calculating the Arabic parts, so he eliminates these elements of interpretation.<sup>58</sup> What he can see are the angles between the planets and their relationship to the time and place of the birth of an individual. By voiding the twelve signs and suspending the careful hierarchy needed to determine the Arabic parts, suddenly anything can be in significant mathematical relationship with anything else. This kind of symbolic equivalence recalls Walter Benjamin’s assessment of signification in German baroque allegory, in which suddenly “any person, any object, any relationship can mean anything else.”<sup>59</sup> It seems that Kepler is responsible for creating a similar situation in astrology. With Kepler’s changes, the entire complex of interpretational possibilities based on symbolic metaphor collapses into geometrical relationships between any empirically sensible point.

Kepler’s emphasis on visible points and geometric relationship allowed for future astrologers to rationalize the introduction of new planets (Uranus, Neptune, Pluto) and asteroids (Ceres, Vesta, Juno, Pallas, and many others) into astrological practice. Schmitz’s follows Kepler’s logic in his discussion of what newly discovered planets Uranus and Neptune mean astrologically: “Die Uranus- und Neptunwirkung in der Entwicklung der Menschheit offenbart sich erst unverkennbar, seit diese Planeten für uns sichtbar geworden sind.”<sup>60</sup> Schmitz asserts that planets appear to the human eye when we are ready to incorporate their symbolism into our collective lives:

Zu erklären ist diese Tatsache nicht leicht, indessen nehme ich nicht an, daß ihre Sichtbarkeit die Ursache ihrer Wirkung ist, sondern umgekehrt. Ihrer Wirkung verdanken wir die wachsende Empfänglichkeit für das Inkommensurable des unendlich Großen und des unendlich Kleinen. Diese Entwicklung wiederum befähigt uns zu der Erfindung von

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<sup>57</sup> Strauß and Strauß-Kloebe, *Die Astrologie des Johannes Kepler*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum has shown that Kepler’s desires for reform and his practice do not always coincide. See Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, “Kepler’s Personal Astrology: Two Letters to Michael Maestlin” (forthcoming in the proceedings of a conference on medieval and Renaissance astrology held at the Warburg Institute in 2008). See also the recently published translations of Kepler’s horoscopes in *Culture and Cosmos* 14 (2010).

<sup>59</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1977), 175. The German reads: “Jede person, jedweddes Ding, jedes Verhältnis kann ein beliebiges anderes bedeuten.” Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963), 152.

<sup>60</sup> Schmitz, *Geist der Astrologie*, (1922), 45–46.

mathematischen Rechenmethoden und astronomische Instrumenten, die uns erlauben, den Himmelsraum erkennend zu durchdringen.<sup>61</sup>

Anticipating Ernst Jünger's 1930 "Sizilianischer Brief an den Mann in den Mond" (Sicilian Letter to the Man on the Moon), where Jünger argues for a simultaneous view of the moon as both astronomical object and mythological entity, Schmitz combines a view of the cosmos that captures both the technological and the mythical at once, and gives him a vocabulary through which to make sense of the newest technological discoveries without losing a sense of the human scale.<sup>62</sup>

In the nineteenth century Alan Leo took Kepler's astrological reforms another step further. When Leo popularized astrology in England he introduced an interpretational system that broke down the various chart elements into little paragraphs of text that he could compile on demand and send to his clients. Leo had traveled to India, where he witnessed Indian astrologers provide astrological readings by fetching readings from a large cabinet.<sup>63</sup> In Indian astrology, like medieval astrology, a natal chart is read primarily for its external effects. Once a chart's moon position has been determined the astrologer discovers which cyclical period (called a *dasa*) a person has been born into. From there, the person's external life can be interpreted according to an established pattern. Thus, the astrologer is able to gather and collate the descriptions of what types of events this person will experience in the various points of his or her life fairly quickly. Leo was taken with this method of chart analysis because it enabled him to create a system to read charts with greater speed. After getting a client's birth data he compiled stock paragraphs of interpretations of each part of the chart. The client received a collection of generic interpretations for each chart element and was left to his or her own devices to determine which parts of these interpretations were more important than the others. While this method seems good in theory, and especially in terms of business acumen, what Leo didn't take into account was that the Indian system did not translate well from interpreting external effects to interpreting personal character. Instead of providing a general characterization of how their lives would unfold over the course of time, clients were given a disjointed bundle of interpretations of various elements in their chart without any of the rules for how to synthesize and delineate the significance and emphasis of these various elements. What Kepler started with aspects, Leo intensified with his specific brand of astrological interpretation.

When German astrologers began researching astrology in the early twentieth century, they looked to Alan Leo, but also to Morin de Villefranche. Morin is often absent from the English-speaking transmission of astrological knowledge because their astrological tradition was unbroken from the middle ages, sustained by figures such as William Lilly, John Worsdale, and others through to Alan Leo.<sup>64</sup> In the German case,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ernst Jünger "Sizilianischer Brief an den Mann in den Mond" in *Mondstein* (Berlin: Frundsberg, 1930), 7–21.

<sup>63</sup> Conversation with Lynn Bootes at the "Celestial Spheres" conference March 4, 2010, San Diego, sponsored by the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture.

<sup>64</sup> For more on this see Robert Hand, "John Partridge—One of the Founders of Modern Astrology?," in Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity* (Bristol: Sophia Centre Press, 2011), 83–108.

though, since Morin was the last known active court astrologer in the seventeenth century, he must have seemed to Schmitz's teacher, Friedrich Schwickert, to be the best person to look to for the state of the art. Ultimately, Schmitz's engagement with astrology forms a blend of Kepler's astrology (via Alan Leo's intervention) and Morin's—thereby reviving early modern, not medieval or ancient, astrological techniques.

### **Discourses of “Scientific Occultism” versus Astrology as “Erfahrungswissenschaft”**

In 1924, Carl Christian Bry wrote, “Wir stehen heute vor der Geisterwelt nicht mehr mit dem Schauer des Mittelalters, auch nicht mehr mit dem Humor von Dickens oder Wilde, sondern, bejahend oder verneinend, mit der Neugierde des Wissenschaftlers.”<sup>65</sup> In Germany at this time there was an ever increasing number of studies devoted to treating occultism scientifically. Contemporary scholars who were investigating the occult scientifically avoided engaging astrological topics. So while Schmitz was not alone among the astrologers in attempting to sever astrology from Theosophical and occultist appropriations, others were also investigating occultism apart from astrology.

In 1923 Dr. Karl Hermann Schmidt's small book on the occult and science restricts its treatment of astrology to a mere summation of why astrology must remain geocentric:

Daß die Astrologie mit dem ptolemäischen Weltsystem arbeitet, während doch allein das kopernikanische das “richtige” ist, ist kein Einwand gegen die Astrologie, denn da sie von den Wirkungen der Planeten auf den Menschen handelt und dieser sich auf der Erde aufhält, so sind naturgemäß die Planeten nur in ihren Bewegungen relativ zur Erde von Bedeutung. Für die Astrologie muß die Erde das Bezugssystem sein. Im übrigen muß man sich über den Sinn oder Unsinn der Astrologie bzw. über die Tatsächlichkeit astraler Einflüsse noch jedes Urteils enthalten, denn die Frage ist nur für den Glauben, nicht aber für das Wissen spruchreif. Nur die vermutliche Stelle der Astrologie innerhalb des Systems der Magiologie durfte angedeutet werden.<sup>66</sup>

Schmidt does not tackle astrology in his text beyond this. He attributes the effects of astrology to belief, not knowledge, which seems to be directed toward the fact that astrology does not make use of the same types of evidence that are necessary to investigate other forms of occultism, such as spiritism and telepathy. In 1927 Dr. August Messer, another scholar of “scientific occultism” stays away from astrology for a similar reason:

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<sup>65</sup> Carl Christian Bry, *Verkappte Religionen* (Gotha/Stuttgart: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1925), 273.

<sup>66</sup> Karl Hermann Schmidt, *Die okkulten Phänomene im Lichte der Wissenschaft: Grundzüge einer Magiologie* (Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1923), 89–90.

Bei der Astrologie handelt es sich nicht (wie nochmals betont sei) um direkt wahrnehmbare Erscheinungen, deren Echtheit bzw. Wirklichkeit noch umstritten ist wie bei den Okkulten, sondern um die Annahme eines *Zusammenhangs* zwischen Erscheinungen, nämlich der Konstellation der Himmelskörper bei der Geburt eines Menschen und seiner Begabung und seinem Schicksal. Wegen dieses wesenhaften Unterschiedes rechnen wir die Astrologie nicht zu dem Okkultismus, meinen aber, daß man ihr mit der gleichen Vorurteilslosigkeit entgegentreten sollte wie dem Okkulten. Daß auch auf diesem Gebiet der ernste Versuch gemacht wird, mit wissenschaftlichen Methoden, und zwar vor allem mit umfangreichen statistischen Feststellungen zu arbeiten, beweist das Werk von H. von Klöckler.<sup>67</sup>

Freiherr Herbert von Klöckler's statistical study of natal charts was one of the first German texts to style itself as expressly scientific in character.<sup>68</sup> In 1926 his text *Astrologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft* appeared, shifting Oscar A. H. Schmitz's subtitle to his main title. Von Klöckler avoids what he calls the "mystisch dichterische[m]" in order to argue for astrology as a valid science. "Auf bloßen Meinungen, Vermutungen und Verallgemeinerungen, denen ausreichende *Erfahrung* nicht zugrunde liegt, kann der Verfasser nicht eingehen, gleichgültig, ob sie sich nun für oder gegen die Sache aussprechen."<sup>69</sup> Once again, personal experience using astrology's hermeneutic system is critical for one to make any evaluation of it.

Von Klöckler's study describes in detail how one can use astrology to interpret the meaning of the stars in terms of one's character, effectively using astrology diagnostically to identify tendencies in personality. The second half of his text presents statistics to show patterns in certain types of claims about character made possible by astrological readings.<sup>70</sup> In his introduction, von Klöckler justifies his claim to treat astrology as a science and discredit claims on the subject by occultism and Theosophy. "Die Astrologie kann *rational* behandelt, auf *rationalem* Wege geprüft, bewiesen oder abgelehnt werden. Sie hat nichts mit dem Okkultismus im strengen Sinne des Wortes zu tun und noch weniger mit Theosophie, trotzdem wir sie—leider—nur allzuoft mit solchen Bestrebungen und Richtungen verquickt finden."<sup>71</sup> He argues that one reason Theosophy attached itself so fundamentally to astrology is that it sought, via astrology's

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<sup>67</sup> August Messer, *Wissenschaftlicher Okkultismus* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1927), 130.

<sup>68</sup> Freiherr Herbert von Klöckler, *Astrologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft* (Leipzig: Reinecke, 1926). Similar to Freiherr von Klöckler, Dr. Karl Th. Bayer provides another strong voice in trying to establish astrology as an "*Erfahrungswissenschaft*" with his 1927 book *Die Grundprobleme der Astrologie* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1927). His text, written between March of 1926 and May of 1927 provides a more philosophical emphasis on the problem.

<sup>69</sup> von Klöckler, *Astrologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft*, np, from the forward.

<sup>70</sup> Wolfgang Bock has claimed that von Klöckler didn't collect enough horoscopes to make his assertions statistically relevant. See Wolfgang Bock, *Astrologie und Aufklärung: Über modernen Aberglauben* (Bremen: M&P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> von Klöckler, *Astrologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft*, 13.

empirical character, to be able to justify their own claims about astral bodies and various other esoteric concepts empirically. But von Klöcker rejects their attempt:

Wie alles Ungeklärte, so wird auch die Astrologie in eine unberechtigte, zum mindesten aber methodisch falsche Verbindung mit dem Okkultismus gebracht. Das Wesentliche der Geheimlehre fehlt nämlich der Astrologie durchaus. Die angeblichen Erkenntnisse der Geheimlehren erfordern "Wahrnehmungsorgane," welche mit unseren fünf Sinnen *nicht* identisch sein sollen, eine besondere, das normale Tagesbewußtsein überschreitensollende Seelenverfassung. Die astrologischen Behauptungen gründen sich vielmehr auf gewöhnliche Beobachtung, so wie sie in allen Wissenschaftsversuchen üblich ist.<sup>72</sup>

Ironically, despite his emphasis on the diagnostic usefulness of astrology, he establishes astrology's role as a science using the predictive logic behind statistics. "Eines der wesentlichen *Ziele* aller naturwissenschaftlichen Bestätigung liegt in dem Möglichmachen von Voraussagungen künftigen Geschehens."<sup>73</sup> He hoped that statistical evidence of chart elements would help astrology gain scientific respectability.<sup>74</sup> Further, he claims,

Man wird einwenden, daß die naturwissenschaftliche Prognose einen anderen Charakter trage, der durch das Streben nach Bestimmung einer größtmöglichen Wahrscheinlichkeit gekennzeichnet sei. Wer so etwas vorbringt, weiß nicht, daß die astrologische Voraussage, sofern sie überhaupt möglich ist, jedenfalls nichts anderes erstrebt, als die *größte Wahrscheinlichkeit* zu ermitteln, daß sich also *prinzipiell gar nicht* von der wissenschaftlichen Prognose der Medizin, in der Meteorologie usw. unterscheidet.<sup>75</sup>

Other authors also performed statistical studies in order to aid their work on astrological psychology. Fritz Werle's book *Künstlerhoroskope* collects and analyzes the horoscopes of eleven poets, ten musicians and eight painters.<sup>76</sup> Werle acknowledged

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>74</sup> Geoffrey Cornelius has recently shown the fallacies of astrology trying to meet science using the methodologies and discourses of science. He argues that astrologers should return to the magical divinatory roots of the art. See Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology* (2002; repr. Bournemouth: Wessex Astrologer, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> von Klöcker, *Astrologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft*, 5.

<sup>76</sup> Fritz Werle, *Künstlerhoroskope* (Munich-Planegg: Otto Wilhelm Barth, 1926). In order of appearance these are: Theodor Däubler, Stefan George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Georg Kaiser, Gustav Meyrink, Alfred Mombert, Joseph Ponten, Rainer Maria Rilke, Friedrich Schnack, Wilhelm von Scholz, Georg Trakl; Alban Berg, Hermann von Glenck, Paul Gräner, Paul Hindemuth, Hans Pfitzner, Max von Schellings, Othmar Schöck, Arnold Schönberg, Richard Strauss, Julius Weismann; Lovis Corinth, Willy Jäckel, Alfred Kubin, Max Liebermann, Heinrich Nauen, Max Pechstein,

(only a few months before the publication of von Klöckler's statistical study) that "Man hat in der astrologischen Forschung bis heute noch kaum ein grösseres statistisches Material zusammengetragen und wenn, so hat man es um Fragen gruppiert, die praktisch mehr als fraglich erscheinen müssen. Die vorliegende Arbeit erhebt deshalb nur den Anspruch, einen Beitrag zur Psychologie vom astrologischen Standpunkt aus zu geben, und hier wiederum vor allem zur Psychologie des Künstlers."<sup>77</sup> Werle explained that he used only the charts of recent artists because their times of birth were known more accurately than those of past artists.<sup>78</sup>

Positioning himself on the cutting edge of astrological research, Werle includes an analysis of Uranus and Neptune's potential meanings into his system:

Will man aber die den modernen Kunstströmungen eigensten Seiten herauschälen, so wird man auf zwei weitere Faktoren aufmerksam machen müssen, auf Uranus und Neptun, deren überragender Einfluss sich auch in den meisten der folgenden Horoskope nachweisen lässt. Sie fügen das Chaotische der Darstellung hinzu, das fremdartig Ungewohnte heutigen Kunstschaffens. Um über ihre Wirkungen genaueres berichten zu können, *reichen die Erfahrungen nicht aus*, zumal sich ihr Einfluss tatsächlich erst seit jüngster Zeit hervorkehrt, sodass zuverlässige Forschungsergebnisse darüber noch nicht vorliegen. An Hand des hier verwendeten Materials werden sich jedoch Schlüsse ergeben, die uns diese Fremdlinge vertrauter erscheinen lassen werden.<sup>79</sup>

By including the positions of Uranus and Neptune in the charts, Werle hoped that his data set would enable other astrologers to begin to refine their interpretations of the new planets. His book contributes to the emerging codification of the meanings by using the examples of the life experiences of prominent people. Kepler's modification of astrology based on experience finds continued application in Werle's work and many other sources.

In addition to Werle, the psychologist Dr. Olga von Ungern-Sternberg wrote about astrology expressly in terms of experience in her 1928 *Die innerseelische Erfahrungswelt am Bilde der Astrologie*. Von Ungern-Sternberg, who worked with Keyserling and Schmitz personally, presents a first-person narrative of her use of astrology in her psychoanalytic practice. She uses C. G. Jung's theory of archetypes as support for her thesis that astrology offers an image of one's "Entfaltungs-

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Richard Seewald, Franz Marc. I've listed all the names here for future scholars who may be interested in reading what Werle had to write about these figures. For example, his focus on Meyrink and Kubin is noteworthy for my study.

<sup>77</sup> Werle, *Künstlerhoroskope*, 6.

<sup>78</sup> This type of exactitude is evidence of the twentieth century's obsession with temporal precision. In line with Geoffrey Cornelius's argument in *The Moment of Astrology*, Nicholas Campion has analyzed the phenomenon of wrong chart data still working. See Campion, "Mythical Moments in the Rectification of History," 25–64.

<sup>79</sup> Werle, *Künstlerhoroskope*, 12. My emphasis.

möglichkeiten.”<sup>80</sup> She often uses the verb “spiegeln” or “widerspiegeln” to accentuate her position that the positions of the planets at birth reflect the possible expressions of character. At the start of her text she states,

Nun ist aber—wie aus dem Ganzen hervorgehen wird—meine Problemstellung nicht willkürlich auf Grund eines als wahr vorausgesetzten Tatbestandes gewählt; sondern sie ist aus persönlichster Erfahrung, aus meiner Arbeit als Ärztin und Psychoanalytikerin herausgewachsen, betrifft also lebendige Wirklichkeit, ja wird von dieser geradezu herausgefordert. Dementsprechend muß diese Problemstellung nun für den, der sie in bezug auf sich selbst von der Tiefe aus versteht, eine Nachprüfung der vorausgesetzten Tatbestände an eigener Erfahrung möglich machen. Weiterin gelingt es von dieser bestimmten Problemstellung her, durch alle nur möglichen Tatbestände hindurch an jenen Punkt menschlichen Erlebens zu rühren, von dem allein es möglich wird, die astrologischen Sinnbilder als ebenso greifbare Wirklichkeit zu erfahren, wie es die Worte der Muttersprache für den Menschen sind.<sup>81</sup>

Von Ungern-Sternberg equates the interpretation of reality along astrological lines with the interpretation of reality made through a mother tongue (*Muttersprache*). Her work with Keyserling shows itself in her levelling of astrological significance to a hermeneutic enterprise located in the human imagination. The two questions that drive her research are: “Inwieweit und inwiefern gehört ein bestimmtes Schicksal zum einzelnen Menschen” and “inwieweit und inwiefern ist der Rhythmus des menschlichen Lebens dem Rhythmus des vom Menschen aus faßbaren Lebenszusammenhanges einbezogen?”<sup>82</sup> She says that, “Diese beide Fragen rücken nun ein fest umrissenes Problem in den Mittelpunkt der Betrachtung; denn von hier aus scheint es fast, als sei die Lehre von den Sternen in Wirklichkeit eine Lehre vom Menschen.”<sup>83</sup> Like Schmitz, for her, “über die Richtigkeit einer Lehre entscheidet nur die Erfahrung” and later, she notes that the people who argue against astrology show a “tiefe Unerfahrenheit” of the subject.<sup>84</sup>

Her focus on experience takes on another valence: until the advent of satellites and space expeditions in the later twentieth century, all astronomical data about the cosmos were gathered from the earth. But for von Ungern-Sternberg astrology is “Menschheitsbezogen” on the earth. Even though cutting edge astronomical knowledge established that the earth is dislodged in a universe where coordinates could begin anywhere, human experience on earth still dictates that we are at the center. Astrology acknowledges and supports this centeredness of human experience, but it does so in a framework that reminds people that they exist in a diverse community—everyone’s horoscope is different. However, the fact that everyone has a horoscope—that is, they

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<sup>80</sup> von Ungern-Sternberg, *Die innerseelische Erfahrungswelt am Bilde der Astrologie*, 161.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

have their own personal connection to the stars—establishes a commonality between them. The celestial imaginary looks to the planets and stars in order to generate meaning for the human experience of living on earth, not to generate knowledge as such.

Heinz Artur Strauß's 1927 *Astrologie: Grundsätzliche Betrachtungen* gives similar voice to the importance of the hermeneutic function of the modern practice of astrology. Strauß also separates himself and his understanding of astrology from Theosophical appropriations. For him, the person interested in astrology "wird bei gutem Willen wohl imstande sein, die sachlichen Grundlagen aus den theosophisch-spekulativen Ideen herauszulösen."<sup>85</sup> Strauß contextualizes astrology in the realm of other inter-pretive arts, such as graphology (interpreting handwriting), physiognomy (interpreting surfaces and faces), and phrenology (interpreting the skull), but like von Klöckler, he claims a special position for astrology, over and above these other practices:

Was die Sicherheit ihrer Aussagen betrifft, steht die Astrologie übrigens fraglos neben den andern *Deutungswissenschaften*: neben der heute voll gewürdigten Graphologie, wie neben Physiognomik, Phrenologie, u. a. An Deutungs-möglichkeiten ist sie all diesen jedoch überlegen, insofern die andern Deutungs-künste nur aus einem schon geformten Ausdruck—Kopfbildung, Schrift usw.—ihre Schlüsse ziehen, die Astrologie aber, an der Quelle der Ursachen sitzend, selbst Unentwickeltem gegenüber bereits imstande ist, die möglichen Ausdrücke zu bestimmen. D. h., was den andern Deutungskünsten erst im geformten Ausdruck sich erschließt, erfaßt die Astrologie bereits in der Anlage.<sup>86</sup>

Further in the book Strauß states,

Was wir heute unter der Astrologie zu verstehen haben, ist ein klar und deutlich zu umreißender, doppelgestaltiger Wissenskomplex (von dem in dieser Schrift nur Grundsätzlichkeiten behandelt wurden). Es ist die Astrologie als Wissenschaft, die sich zwar auf determinierenden Momenten aufbaut, ohne sich jedoch zum Anwalt eines naturwissenschaftlichen Determinismus zu machen. Es ist ferner die Astrologie als Deutungskunst, deren Bereich die letzten Tiefen menschlicher Welterkenntnis miteinschleißt.<sup>87</sup>

A familiar refrain runs from Keyserling's 1910 lecture on astrology to Olga von Ungern-Sternberg's 1928 book on astrological psychology: "Von hier aus scheint es fast, als sei die Lehre von den Sternen in Wirklichkeit eine Lehre vom Menschen."<sup>88</sup> We can see from this evidence that German individuals who were interested in astrology were

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<sup>85</sup> Heinz Artur Strauß, *Astrologie: Grundsätzliche Betrachtungen* (München: Kurt Wolff, 1927), 20.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 63–64.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>88</sup> von Ungern-Sternberg, *Die innerseelische Erfahrungswelt am Bilde der Astrologie*, 10.

not necessarily interested in the occult, and vice versa. Even in the realm of astrology, Theosophical astrologers should not be conflated with all astrologers. Kocku von Stuckrad's recent history of astrology appropriately credits both the Theosophical Society and the emerging field of psychology with bringing about a renewed interest in astrology in Germany. However, he assigns the emergence of psychological astrology to C. G. Jung alone.<sup>89</sup> Yet when we evaluate Schmitz's encounter with astrology, Jung was certainly not the only person mixing psychology and astrology, just the most famous. In light of the contemporary polemics circulating at the time, it is clear that more work needs to be done on lesser-known figures.

### **Alternative Accounts of Stellar Experience**

Schmitz was by no means the only author writing about the stars for the masses. Bruno Bürgel's popular book, *Aus fernen Welten*, sought to popularize the field of astronomy by reaching people who didn't have access to higher education.<sup>90</sup> The book was designed to give them an entertaining introduction to astronomy, with the underlying motive of increasing their "Bildung" and thereby combatting social problems. Like Schmitz, Bürgel does not claim to present an academic study. He points his readers elsewhere for that material. His aim is to whet the appetites of the working masses in the hope that they will seek out more detailed information on their own.

As can be expected, Bürgel belonged to that school of critics for whom the lack of causal explanation rendered astrology false. But the fact that Bürgel devotes fifteen pages (109–24) of his book to the historical and modern phenomena of astrology indicates the degree to which it was in vogue.<sup>91</sup> Bürgel writes about astrology in its historical incarnation. He responds to the contemporary resurgence of interest in astrology, describing it as an extreme reaction to the materialism of the nineteenth century. "Auf den krassen Materialismus der letzten Jahrzehnte scheint wieder eine Bewegung zu folgen, die—wie diese [astrology] und ihre verwandte Auswüchse zeigen—ins andere Extrem überschlägt."<sup>92</sup>

He makes an example out of two small ads for astrological services typical of those in the periodicals circulating in Berlin at the time. One of them states, "Kein Spiritismus! Nur studierte Planeten- und Kartenkunst"<sup>93</sup>—clear evidence that there was an effort to distinguish between charlatanry and "studied" forms. Ironically, right next to it, Bürgel says, "so gibt es also trotz aller Aufklärung, selbst im Kulturzentrum, im

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<sup>89</sup> Kocku von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2007). Von Stuckrad draws much from Richard Noll's 1997 work *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>90</sup> Bruno H. Bürgel, *Aus fernen Welten. Eine volkstümliche Himmelskunde* (Berlin: Verlag Ullstein, 1920), forward, n.p.

<sup>91</sup> By the 1939 edition of this text, the astrological material did not make it past Nazi censors.

<sup>92</sup> Bürgel, *Aus fernen Welten*, 121.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Jahrhundert der Naturwissenschaft noch mittelalterliche Sterndeuterei!”<sup>94</sup> Bürgel reserves further comment on this advertisement, and does not address the efforts of certain astrologers to disassociate astrology from the occult and make it a more scientifically acceptable practice.

Responding to criticism from astrologers—and Schmitz can be counted among them—that empirical science cannot account for all the mysterious phenomena in the world, Bürgel writes, “Als ob nicht gerade die Naturwissenschaft am besten wüßte, wieviel uns noch rätselhaft ist!”<sup>95</sup> However, this residual element of wonder in scientific research is the very point that Dr. Wilhelm Gundel used as a critique of astronomy. In his comprehensive history of astral religion published in 1922, Gundel, who later worked in tandem with the Warburg Institute, asserts that the latest astronomical findings have to be categorized as “Stern Glaube” as well:

Das Teleskop und die Spektralanalyse hat an Stelle der freien lustigen Phantasie keine absolut sicheren Erkenntnisse über die fernen Welten und ihre Bewohner gebracht, sondern alle näheren Behauptungen bleiben eben zunächst Hypothesen und gehören so gut in das Gebiet des Stern- glaubens, wie die Götter, Dämonen, Engel und die seligen Menschen, mit denen des Menschen Phantasie die Sterne in alter und neuer Zeit bevölkert hat.<sup>96</sup>

Gundel questions the basis on which scientific hypotheses rest and posits astral science as another type of belief system that has overtaken earlier, more religious systems of astral knowledge. This is a dynamic which attracted Aby M. Warburg to the study of astrological imagery and what it could tell us about the development of modern scientific practices.<sup>97</sup>

As a leading historian of astrology, Gundel participated in the culminating debate between astrologers and scientists in Germany, which appeared in a 1927 edition of *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*. The journal invited scholars on both sides of the debate to discuss their viewpoints. The editorial note at the end of the issue takes a neutral stance, concluding that the astrologers and scientists are simply “speaking past one another.”<sup>98</sup> Oscar Schmitz was also among those invited to contribute their input on astrology.

In his contribution “Über den Wert der Astrologie,” Schmitz discusses the modern practice of astrology in terms of possibility and argues against both determinism and causality. He admits that many opponents of astrology are against it because it does not conform to the principle of causality developed in the natural sciences over the course of the nineteenth century: “Wie viele lehnen die Astrologie nur darum ab, ‘weil sie doch unmöglich auf Wahrheit beruhen kann,’ lies: weil sie nicht mit den Hypothesen übereinstimmt, auf denen die Wissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>96</sup> Wilhelm Gundel, *Sterne und Sternbilder im Glauben des Altertums und der Neuzeit* (Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder, 1922), 166.

<sup>97</sup> See chapter four of this dissertation for a detailed discussion of Warburg’s investigations.

<sup>98</sup> *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 9 (June 1927), 216. “aneinander vorbeisprechen”

beruhte, in erster Linie mit der Hypothese der kausalen Erklärbarkeit aller Lebenserscheinungen.”<sup>99</sup> However, he refrains from totally eschewing scientific knowledge. “Was nun aber jene neuen Strömungen, die den Materialismus hinter sich lassen, auszeichnet, ist das Bestreben, ohne die Tatsachen der Wissenschaft aufzugeben, einen neuen Sinn zu finden, der dieselben Mittel des Heiles bietet wie die Religionen, ohne sich in Widerspruch mit Einzelerkenntnissen zu setzen, die von der modernen Menschheit angenommen werden müssen.”<sup>100</sup> Astrology offers people answers in their search for a greater unity, giving an individual in modern society a clue to the possibilities inherent in his or her lifetime. In this sense, astrology provides psychology a fine-tuned language, a “Typenlehre in mythologischer Verkleidung in der Gestalt von Jupiter, Venus, Mars usw.,” which “genau das ist, was die moderne wissenschaftliche Psychologie sucht.”<sup>101</sup> Corinna Treitel has also noted Schmitz’s emphasis on individual psychology. She says,

Here Schmitz highlighted an important goal of the modern occult program: scientifically grounded and self-focused salvation. Why this program proved so successful had as much to do with Germans’ faith in the saving power of science as their despair over its spiritual poverty. If Schmitz’s observation thus echoed the general modernist ambivalence tapped by the German occult movement, it also indicated something else. “Everyone is asking themselves: Who am I?”: in this pithy phrase, Schmitz captured neatly a devilish dialectic set up by the pull of the new mass culture, on the one hand (*everyone* is asking themselves), and the push of individuals seeking self-knowledge, on the other (who am *I*). With this close attention to the subjectivity of psychological experience and its permeation of the consumer market, the occult easily adapted itself to this mass quest after private truth.<sup>102</sup>

Treitel captures Schmitz’s concerns with the inability of science to account for all of existence. But she conflates his essay with her focus on the “occult,” when in fact, Schmitz was one of the major authors who sought to divorce astrology from occult practices.

Again Schmitz stresses, even in 1927, his adherence to using astrology diagnostically, not predictively: “Die Kraft der Astrologie liegt vielmehr in ihrer psychologischen Erkenntnis.”<sup>103</sup> Schmitz was well aware of the mechanics of predictive astrology, but because the margin for interpretational error was so great, he chose to remain within the confines of diagnostic astrology. He found in astrology a complex explanatory language for human difference and also for human improvement at the individual level.

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<sup>99</sup> Oscar A. H. Schmitz, “Über den Wert der Astrologie,” in *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 9 (June 1927): 162–66, here 162.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 133–34.

<sup>103</sup> Schmitz, “Über den Wert der Astrologie,” 166.

Against the opponents of astrology who have not explored astrology with experiential knowledge of how its own system works, Schmitz recites the familiar refrain: “he should say that he doesn’t know anything about astrology, not though, that it is nonsense, because that is unscientific.”<sup>104</sup> Ultimately, he says: “Between the stars and our life there exists no relationship of causality, rather of correlation.”<sup>105</sup> This evokes the epigraph in *Das Dionysische Geheimnis*, penned by Schmitz nearly a decade earlier: *Astra non imperant, sed inclinant*.

### **Irresistible Narratives of Experience**

Even modern scholarship on astrology cannot seem to escape the question of experience. Ellic Howe’s history of the German astrological revival contains his personal experiences with astrology. His text literally begins with the line, “The first astrologer I met—later there were to be many others—was introduced to me early in 1943.”<sup>106</sup> The narrative is punctuated with first-person testimony related to Howe’s involvement with creating astrological propaganda during World War II. This element of personal testimony evoked sharp criticism from Wolfgang Bock in 1995. “Ellic Howe [...] ist selbst astrologiegläubig und behandelt die Astrologie wie ein ernstzunehmende Bewegung, deren Entwicklung er eindimensional und unkritisch beschreibt.”<sup>107</sup> Bock claims further that Howe “versteht sich selbst als Kritiker, bleibt dabei aber an den Gegenstand gebunden, von dem er sich absetzen will.”<sup>108</sup> Contrary to Bock, Patrick Curry argues from the research paradigm of anthropology, that it is only through personal knowledge of how astrology works that one can evaluate it properly.<sup>109</sup> Bock perpetuates an attitude that is fixated on terms of “belief” rather than “practice” that serves more to muddle than enlighten the topic. Howe does not actually “believe in” astrology, as Bock claims, rather, he has personal experience *practicing* astrology, and his book by no means claims to prove or disprove astrology. Howe leaves that fully indeterminate. His own experience in the practice has shown him that it is more difficult to assert one way or another whether astrology is true or false, “while both astrology and those who practise it continue to puzzle me, I believe that the symbolism they use, but so rarely appear to understand, has a certain objective beauty, even logic. The possible meaning of the symbols, in their ever-varying combinations, can sometimes be sensed in the course of a subjective, incommunicable experience. The magic spell is broken the moment one tries

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., “der soll sagen, er wisse nichts von Astrologie, nicht aber, sie sei Unsinn, denn das ist unwissenschaftlich.”

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., “zwischen den Sternen und unserem Leben bestände aber kein Verhältnis der Kausalität, sondern der Korrelation.”

<sup>106</sup> Ellic Howe, *Astrology: A Recent History Including the Untold Story of Its Role in World War II* (New York: Walker and Company, 1967), 1.

<sup>107</sup> Bock, *Astrologie und Aufklärung*, 310, see also 312.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>109</sup> This also follows a similar trend in religious studies. See, Patrick Curry, “The Historiography of Astrology. A Diagnosis and a Prescription,” in Oestmann et al., *Horoscopes and Public Spheres*, 261–74.

to translate everything into ordinary, everyday words.”<sup>110</sup> Here Howe touches upon the same ephemeral quality of astrological interpretation that fascinated Schmitz in his biographical testimonies. The idea of translating personal experience into a kind of language is at stake. Engaging with astrology generates a kind of inner experience that at once creates meaning and renders it difficult to communicate, translate, and interpret in written words. In this sense, the highly personal aspect of astrological experience renders it esoteric once more, despite the efforts of Schmitz to use autobiographical narrative to popularize it for the masses.

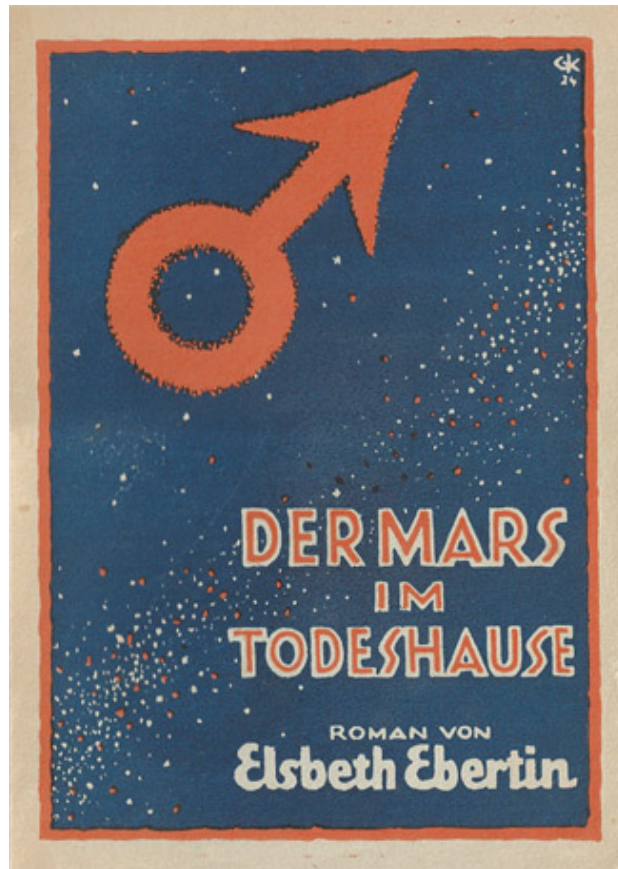
Like Schmitz, Elsbeth Ebertin grappled with the issue of communicability of astrological experience using fiction. Ebertin began her career as a graphologist and writer, but quickly became a prolific and prominent astrologer.<sup>111</sup> Ebertin’s story, *Der Mars in Todeshause* (1924), attempted to persuade readers of the validity of astrology. Ebertin’s novel carries the subtitle *Astrologischer Filmroman nach einer wahren Begebenheit*. The subtitle of the novel declares it as a “Film” novel, and it was actually filmed in 1925 as *In den Sternen steht’s geschrieben* by Münchner Lichtspielkunst AG (Emelka) in Munich.<sup>112</sup> The cover of her novel is a compelling mixture of astrological symbol with celestial vision (Figure 2.2). It shows the glyph of Mars suspended in space, as if the glyph itself were the actual planet.

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<sup>110</sup> Howe, *Astrology: A Recent History*, 8. See chapter five for my discussion of Walter Benjamin’s writing on mimesis and astrology with respect to experience.

<sup>111</sup> Ebertin also wrote about the astrology of Joakob Böhme and character types. See her *Historische und zeitgenössische Charakterbilder nach Handschrift, Bild, Nativität, und Lebenswerken bedeutender Denker und Dichter* [wie: Dante Alighieri, J. Wolfgang v. Goethe, Friedr. Nietzsche, Aug. Strindberg, Oscar Wilde, Gust. Meyrink, Joseph Aug. Lux] (Freiburg [Baden]: Fr. P. Lorenz, 1921). I find it interesting that she includes Meyrink in the same lineup as Dante, Goethe, and Nietzsche. Most of Ebertin’s texts were published through the Regulus Verlag in Görlitz. Later this press would be abused by British psychological warfare in WWII. See, Howe, *Astrology: A Recent History*, esp. 116, 218.

<sup>112</sup> Willy Reiber directed the film, and the cinematographer was Franz Koch (not to be confused with the Germanist Franz Koch who wrote about Goethe and Plato). See “Vom Sternen zum Stern,” *Die Filmwoche* 19 (1925): 449.



**Figure 2.2:** Front cover of Elsbeth Ebertin's 1924 novel *Der Mars im Todeshaue*.

The edges of the book seem to form the borders of the astrological house where Mars is located. The novel, set entirely in the later years of Wilhelmine Germany, opens with the discussion of Herr Heinz von Behren's horoscope. A circular graphic of his natal chart appears on the third page to illuminate the reading. His wife, Adele von Behren, is taken aback when she reads the prediction that her husband will be killed suddenly. The von Behrens allude to this chart throughout the text as if it were some kind of curse. Neither character practices astrology directly in the text, nor do they have any direct dialogue with astrologers.

Although the wife reportedly starts to learn astrological symbolism, she does not learn the technical side of astrology. At the end of the novel, when the details of her husband's horoscope interpretation are revealed to her and the reader, she maintains that she cannot understand the astrological terminology, all of which is understandable to someone who can practice astrology. The astrologer's detailed interpretation of von Behren's horoscope enhances the stress on astrology as a diagnostic tool. Even though the interpretation was a prediction, it only serves its purpose in the narrative after the plot event—the death of the husband—has passed. There is a tension between the novel's explicit desires to prove that the horoscope interpretation was a successful prediction and the novel format which betrays a fundamental determinism—the plot is already written. The result is that the astrological prediction can only ever really be diagnostic in this form, as persuasive as it might be to want to believe that the prediction was

accurate. Ultimately, the novel also shows that the practice of astrology was moving in the direction of becoming a diagnostic art aimed at unlocking the riddles of human psychology.

Schmitz's narratives of astrological experience and the other works I've discussed provide evidence of the role astrology played in the lives of individuals during the Weimar Republic. Schmitz establishes himself alongside Count Keyserling, Fritz Werle, Herbert von Klöckler, Olga von Ungern-Sternberg and Elsbeth Ebertin in the early twentieth-century tradition of using astrology as a psychological diagnostic tool to aid the individual in developing self-understanding in the fragmented world of modernity. By directing their attention to the celestial sphere using astrology, they were able to have a powerful, incommunicable—and therefore esoteric—experience of belonging. That Ebertin's novel was translated to film reveals the affinity of this astrological narrative to visual forms, even though the title of the film *In den Sternen steht's geschrieben* belies the underlying primacy of textuality in celestial and early cinematic legibility. The film version of Ebertin's novel has been lost. However, another film dealing with astrology has remained intact. The history of the making of Paul Wegener's Golem films sheds new light on the reengagement with star lore taking place during the First World War and its aftermath.

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**Staging Early Modern Magic and Science in Paul Wegener's**  
***Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (1920)**

“Immer wieder spricht der Nachthimmel in die Handlung hinein,  
tausendfältig ausgestirnt.”

—Andrej in *Film Kurier* Oct. 30, 1920.

In Berlin, around 8 P.M. on the evening October 29, 1920, just behind the clouds, if there were any, a waning gibbous moon rose in the east and the constellation of Cygnus hovered overhead. Inside the Ufa Palast am Zoo, the world premiere of *Der Golem: Wie er in die Welt kam* was about to begin. Paul Wegener's third film treating the early modern Jewish legend of the Golem opens with an establishing shot of the starry night sky above the jagged lines of the buildings in the Jewish ghetto. The sky and the buildings are visible in equal ratio, with the tallest building appearing to nearly touch a constellation of seven stars, which shine brighter than all the others. This observational tower forms the crucial link between the fantastic architecture of the world below and the portent-filled starry sky above. Most discussions of the set of this film concentrate on the style of the buildings and interiors that the film's architect, Hans Poelzig, designed. However the sky itself plays an equally important role in both the film's content and its technical production. Observation and interpretation of the stars drives the action of the film. The film's early modern setting—during a pivotal moment for astronomical progress, the practice of astrology, and the balance of powers in central Europe—allows Wegener to create a cinematic experience where the audience is explicitly exposed to and asked to participate in negotiations between myth, symbol, word, and moving image.

The history of Wegener's interest in the Golem material shows a deepening exploration of the affinities of early modern magic and cinema technology. Seven years earlier, on the cusp of the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Paul Wegener finished his first film, *Der Golem*. Set in Central Europe around the early twentieth century, it tells the story of how treasure hunters, a scholar of sixteenth-century magic, and an antique dealer come to revive the Golem in modernity. Then, at the same time that Oscar A. H. Schmitz was working on his manuscript for his best-selling *Der Geist der Astrologie*, Wegener's third Golem film debuted with astrology as one of its central motifs. As Tom Gunning and Marina Warner have shown, in its earliest forms, the medium of film occupied itself with occult themes and the scientific practices of early modern polymaths.<sup>1</sup> Through special effects, the very structure of a filmstrip, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Gunning, “Der frühe Film und das Okkulte” in *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: von Munch bis Mondrian 1900–1915* (Frankfurt: edition tertium, 1995), 558–61. See also Tom Gunning, “In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film,” *Modernism/Modernity* 4, no. 1 (1997): 1–29; Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria Phantasmagoria. Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

ways in which narratives are constructed, magical theories such as natural sympathies or correspondences between disparate objects were, and still are, functionally mobilized. By examining the creation and the content of Wegener's third Golem film alongside the first Golem film, one can see a slow and continuous preoccupation with esotericism—and its attendant questions of legibility and the negotiation of signs, words, and visual effects—that seeks to connect Weimar Germany with the early modern period and respond to the experience of modernity in Germany.

### **Paul Wegener's first Golem film**

Paul Wegener first expressed his idea for a film dealing with the old Jewish legend of the Golem in 1914. In that same year, he and Henrik Galeen wrote a screenplay, which they were able to film to completion by June of 1914 during Wegener's break from his theater work.<sup>2</sup> The first film didn't survive the war intact, and only a few scenes have been recovered.<sup>3</sup> The screenplay of the film, which survived the war, provides some important details that have a bearing on a new reading of the third film. The first film arouses issues of legibility, textual representation in intertitles, and appropriations of early modern esotericism that form a common thread with Wegener's later treatment of the Golem legend.

Set in the early twentieth century in Central Europe, the film depicts treasure hunters, who find the discarded and inert clay body of the Golem in a cave and sell it to a local antique dealer. At the same time, a starving scholar writing a history of sixteenth-century magic realizes he must sell some of his manuscripts in order to feed himself so he can finish his magnum opus. The antique dealer buys the grimoire that contains instructions for the Golem statue he just acquired, and quickly sets to awakening the Golem to life. The Golem, once alive, immediately wreaks havoc in the shop, chases the antique dealer's daughter across town, and disrupts a soiree at a count's castle, (the daughter eventually marries this count). The film culminates in a struggle between the Golem and the count on an ivy-covered tower. The count removes the life-giving word from the Golem's breast, letting him fall from the tower to his demise. The final scene insinuates that the possibility still exists for the Golem to reawaken, when, in a flash forward, the child of the count and the antique dealer's daughter finds the Golem head at the base of the tower.

In the 1914 script, the early modern myth of the Golem is introduced in a textual reference:

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Wegener, *Paul Wegener. Der Regisseur und Schauspieler* (Munich: Photo- u. Filmmuseum im Münchner Stadtmuseum, 1967), 8. See also, Claudia Dillman, "Die Wirkung der Architektur ist eine magische. Hans Poelzig und der Film," in *Hans Poelzig. Bauten für den Film*. Exhibition catalogue (Kinematograph 12) (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1997), 24.

<sup>3</sup> See Dillman "Die Wirkung der Architektur," 26, and Noah Isenberg's "Of Monsters and Magicians: Paul Wegener's *The Golem how he came into the World* (1920)," in Noah Isenberg, ed., *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 33–54.

The entire frame is only the book and the hand of the scholar. A page full of curly gothic letters. The hand turns the page, we see the image of the clay figure that we know from the antique store. Underneath it, in big letters: The Golem.

On the other page we read the text:

Text: In the Middle Ages the wonder-rabbi Löw lived in Prague. He was a master of black magic and kabbalah, through which he made himself famous throughout the world. He successfully brought life to the strange clay figure, the "Golem", in that he placed a strange saying, the "Schenn" [sic] in a cavity in his chest. As long as the Golem wore this Schenn [sic] he was as alive as a human, obedient to the will of his master, until the moment when the magician took the amulette out of his chest. Then he was returned to nothing but dead formed clay. In his last years of life, as Rabbi Löw swore off all forms of black magic, he no longer brought the Golem to life. The Golem, along with the other treasures of the high master went missing in the barbarous times of the Thirty Years War and perhaps still remains buried somewhere.<sup>4</sup>

The script indicates that this passage was presented in book form, so the viewer must read it from the screen. The hand of the scholar acts as an index that seamlessly integrates the text with the action of the film. The lettering also attempts a seamless integration as evidenced by its "krause" or frizzy gothic typeface. This version of the legend clearly indicates that Rabbi Löw gave up black magic. This thematic reappears at the end of the third Golem film, establishing a continuity between the legend of Rabbi Löw as presented in this first film and the story as it is told in the third. Finally, this legend makes clear ties to the period before the Thirty Years War. The chaos of the war has shrouded the location of the Golem's potential burial, and only the search for

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Wegener and Henrik Galeen, "Golem I Drehbuch," 1914. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. NachlassArchiv. Golem file: 4359. Folder 4.4-80/18,1, 7-8.

Das ganze Bild ist nur noch Buch und Hand des Gelehrten. Eine Seite voll krauser gotischer Buchstaben. Die Hand schlägt die Seite um, wir sehen das Bild jener Tonfigur, die wir aus dem Antiquitätenladen kennen. Darunter steht in grosser Schrift: Der Golem

Auf der anderen Seite lesen wir den Text:

Text: Im Mittelalter lebte in Prag der hochberühmte Wunder-Rabbi *Löw*. Er war ein Meister der schwarzen Kunst und der Kabbala, wodurch er sich in aller Welt berühmt machte. Im gelang es, eine seltsame Tonfigur, den "Golem" zu beleben, dadurch dass er ihr einen seltsamen Spruch, den "Schenn", [sic] in eine Höhlung der Brust senkte. Solange der Golem diese Schenn [sic] in sich trug, war er lebendig wie ein Mensch, gehorsam dem Willen seines Meisters, bis zu dem Augenblick, wo der Zauberer das Amulett aus seiner Brust herausnahm. Dann war er wieder nichts wie toter geformter Lehn. Als später Rabbi Löw in seinen letzten Lebensjahren alle schwarze Kunst abschwur, hat er auch den Golem nicht mehr belebt, der mit anderen Schätzen des hohen Meisters in den wilden Zeiten des dreissigjährigen Krieges verloren gegangen ist und vielleicht noch irgendwo vergraben liegt.

capital—the opening scene of the treasure hunt—makes it possible for this lost creature to be resurrected.<sup>5</sup>

The manner of the Golem’s revival in the first film echoes this blatant, nearly surgical extraction of the Golem from its past. The antique dealer, having finally acquired the grimoire with the instructions for bringing the Golem to life, finds the magical word drawn onto the grimoire’s parchment. Rather than reading the instructions and following them to create a new parchment for his Golem, the antique dealer simply cuts the drawing out of the book and inserts it into the Golem’s chest. This procedure bypasses the practice of black magic entirely, and serves as a harsh metaphor for the type of cut and paste appropriation of old legends for the sake of cinematic success.

The final scenes of the film contain another explicit reference to the early modern—a couplet from the poet Angelus Silesius. Just after the couple finally deactivates the Golem on the tower, an intertitle appears:

*Natur wirkt immer tief, so innen wie auswendig,  
Und alles lebt im Tod, und tot ist es lebendig.*  
(Angelus Silesius)<sup>6</sup>

This line poetically summarizes the interaction between subject matter of the legend and the technological medium of filming it. It speaks as well to the themes of vanitas and mass death circulating during the Thirty Years War, the period when Silesius wrote. That this film was completed before the atrocities of World War I began betrays a haunting prefiguration of what was to come.

In 1916, while discussing his desire to film the Golem material, Wegener stated that the Golem legend brought him into the realm of the “purely filmic” (“*rein Filmmäßigen*”), “here everything pivots on the image, on a convergence of a fantasy world of past centuries with contemporary life.”<sup>7</sup> Underlying Wegener’s obvious desire to mix temporalities is an emphasis on the continuity between the past and the present. The mythical fantastical past forms the stuff of the “purely filmic,” which in itself shows the ontological intermingling of that past with the present. Even though this statement applies to the 1914 film, this tendency continues in the way he later deploys astrology in his third film.

Wegener also insisted that everything depended on photographic techniques: “the actual purpose of film became increasingly clearer to me, to seek the effect out of the photographic technology alone.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, in all his Golem films he relies heavily on the appearance of textual sources. Reading—books and instructions, as well as intertitles—plays a pivotal role, and the silent films depend on verbal textuality as much as visual textuality to get their messages across. In this way, the presence of text in the film is

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<sup>5</sup> In an extremely oblique way it bears suggesting that the film itself is a search for capital which resurrected the story of the Golem for fiscal gain.

<sup>6</sup> Wegener and Galeen, “Golem I Drehbuch” (1914), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Wegener, “Die künstlerischen Möglichkeiten des Films,” in Kai Möller, *Paul Wegener. Sein Leben und seine Rollen*, 6. “Hier ist alles aufs Bild gestellt, auf ein Ineinanderfließen einer Phantasiewelt vergangener Jahrhunderte mit gegenwärtigem Leben.”

<sup>8</sup> Paul Wegener, “Die künstlerischen Möglichkeiten des Films,” 6.

evidence of a stronger continuity from the literary to the filmic, which underscores the temporal link between Weimar Germany and the early modern period.

After the war, Wegener was no longer content to keep the references to the early modern magical moment of Golem's first creation embedded in textual references. Not only had film technology improved since the war, but people were also more interested in participating in occult experiences directly. As critic Ralph Winkle has noted, after World War I "numerous combatants not only tried to make the uncertain future *legible* through the use of horoscopes, prophecies, and consultations with fortune tellers, but also to exert influence on individual and collective fate through incantations, ritualized actions, and the implementation of magical artifacts."<sup>9</sup> The crux of Winkle's insight lies not only in the idea that one could render the future legible, but that over time it required a kind of experiential participation—a development already in play in the case of Oscar A. H. Schmitz. As shown later, the creators of the special effects for the third Golem film definitely intended for the spectators to participate in their "magic."

### **Genealogy of the third Golem film**

When Wegener revisited the material of his 1914 film in 1920, he set it directly in the early modern period. His decision to depict the story in seventeenth century Europe, rather than in contemporary Europe, is significant because it allows him to tap directly into traditions of early modern magic. In this film the very depiction of early modern magic reveals critical elements of silent film practices both structurally and thematically; it conflates the moment of wresting a life-giving word from a spirit to awaken dead matter with the eerie, and sometimes dangerous, life-giving properties of projecting the film reel. Early reviews of the film caught on to this analogy: On October 30, 1920, just after the premiere of the film in Berlin, Hans Wollenberg praises Wegener for his ability to sink the viewer in another world and infuse the film with magic. He writes, "Indeed: This film is Wegener's corporeal child."<sup>10</sup> New aspects of this film become legible when we read it against the emerging popular interest in esotericism taking place in Germany at the time.

Wegener conceived the third and final Golem film as a prequel to the first Golem film, yet the general movements of the plot are similar to the first Golem film<sup>11</sup>—the

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<sup>9</sup> Ralph Winkle, "Masse und Magie: Anmerkungen zu einem Interpretament der Aberglaubensforschung während des Ersten Weltkriegs," in Gottfried Korff, ed., *Kasten 117: Aby Warburg und der Aberglaube im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 2007), 279. "Zahlreiche Kriegsteilnehmer versuchten über den Gebrauch von Horoskopen, Prophezeihungen und Konsultation von Wahrsagerinnen die ungewisse Zukunft *nicht nur lesbar zu machen*, sondern auch durch Beschwörungsformeln, ritualisierte Handlungen und den Einsatz magischer Artefakte Einfluß auf das individuelle und kollektive Schicksal zu nehmen." My emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Wollenberg, *LichtBildBühne*, Oct. 30, 1920. "In der Tat: Dieser Film is Wegener's leibliches Kind."

<sup>11</sup> In 1917 Wegener filmed a second Golem film, *Der Golem und die Tänzerin*—a comedy set in Wilhelmine Germany, wherein the Golem falls in love with a dancer. This film too

Golem is awakened, falls in love with the Rabbi's daughter (who herself falls in love with a Junker from the nearby castle), wreaks havoc when she is courted by others, and is eventually deactivated by a small child outside the huge gate of the Jewish ghetto. There are significant differences as well.

The film opens at an indeterminate moment set in the early modern Prague of Rudolph II. The Jewish community, living in a ghetto, receives a decree from the Emperor that they must evacuate the realm. The well-respected Rabbi Löw has already gleaned from his astrological interpretations that a threat looms over his community, and he has set in motion a plan to combat it, namely, by bringing the legendary Golem to life to save his people. He succeeds in creating the Golem, first by using ritual magic to invoke the demon Astaroth, who reveals to him the life-giving word, and then by placing a capsule with the life-giving word in the Golem's chest. As long as the capsule is in place the Golem will be animated with life. Once the creature has saved the Jewish people from eviction, it turns on the Rabbi and threatens to destroy the community from within.

Wegener's interwar experiences with early modern culture may have encouraged him to explicitly depict the Golem legend in an early modern setting. Wegener had viewed the Isenheim Altarpiece (1506–1515) in Colmar, where Matthias Grünewald's depictions of Christ on the cross and the temptation of St. Anthony are still located.<sup>12</sup> The altarpiece depicts monstrosity in a form that nearly presages Otto Dix's paintings of wartorn landscapes. Grünewald's images, as well as paintings by Pieter Brueghel and Hieronymous Bosch made an impression on Wegener, who used them as models for scenes in two of his interwar films—specifically *Rübezahls Hochzeit* (1916) and *Hans Trutz im Schlaraffenland* (1917).<sup>13</sup> By 1920 Wegener felt confident enough in the progress of film technology to revisit the Golem story and set it directly in the seventeenth century.

Scholarship on Wegener's third Golem film must perennially fight the battle against whether or not Wegener was influenced by Gustav Meyrink's best-selling novel *Der Golem* (1915). Kai Möller, Wegener's biographer, has attested numerous times that Wegener had his own version of the Golem myth and was not affected by Meyrink's take on the legend.<sup>14</sup> Elfriede Ledig argues that one reason why critics have been so quick to conflate Wegener's Golems with Meyrink's *Golem* is that both authors play with analogous shifts in narrative perspective in their renditions.<sup>15</sup> Heidi Schönemann has found evidence of a strain of a Czech version by A. Jirásek, which Wegener's wife

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has been lost. It branches off significantly enough from the synergies of the first and third films that I'll refrain from discussing it here.

<sup>12</sup> Heidi Schönemann, *Paul Wegener: frühe Moderne im Film* (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 2003), 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 57–59.

<sup>14</sup> A note by Kai Möller in the Golem file in the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek.

<sup>15</sup> Elfriede Ledig, *Paul Wegener's Golem-Filme im Kontext fantastischer Literatur. Grundfragen zur Gattungsproblematik fantastischen Erzählens* (Munich: Verlegergemeinschaft Schaudig/Bauer/Ledig, 1989), 284.

translated for him, in addition to the other versions.<sup>16</sup> Beate Rosenfeld's 1934 dissertation on the Golem tradition discusses Wegener's fusion of various Golem legends. She states:

Wegener hat die Möglichkeiten des Stoffes nach zwei Richtungen ausgewertet: er hat, von Holitscher beeinflusst, eine weltanschauliche und symbolische Seite des Stoffes in der Gestalt des Golem zu verwirklichen gesucht, er hat außerdem zum ersten Male versucht, in volkstümlichem Geschmack die Zaubersphäre der Rabbi Löw-Legende im Geiste der Zaubermagie des 16. Jahrhunderts und der Faustsage aufzubauen. Er kam damit dem Geschmack des gebildeteren und ungebildeteren Publikums entgegen, der in der Sehnsucht nach dem Übersinnlichen und Mystischen übereinstimmte, aber den verschiedenen Bildungsstufen entsprechend nach einer verschieden gestuften Darstellung dieses Übersinnlichen suchen mußte.<sup>17</sup>

She proposes that Wegener's mixture of Golem legends was designed to speak to two types of audience members. That is, on the one hand, those who were familiar with the emerging trend in astrology and esotericism would have been stimulated by the references to Rudolphine Prague. On the other hand, simple elements of occult practice were present for the less educated viewers, who could appreciate the magic without knowing historical details about it.

The most well known scholarly account of the idea of the Golem is from Gershom Scholem, in an essay by the same name, which seeks to trace the tradition of Golem creation myths throughout history.<sup>18</sup> Recently, Moshe Idel has critiqued Scholem's tendency to see the progressive evolution of one specific technique of creating the Golem that was common to different varieties of European texts. Idel reveals myriad simultaneous interpretations of Golem creation that do not fit into Scholem's conception of it.<sup>19</sup> As I've shown, just as there is a plurality of astrological practices, Idel shows that it is possible to speak of various Golems. Contemporary reviewers of Wegener's film echo Idel's analysis: On November 7, 1920, a reviewer noted in *Der Kinematograph*:

Bei der Betrachtung der Handlung sind zunächst Reminiszenzen, wie z. B. an Meyrinks "Golem" vollständig auszuschalten. Die Gestalt des Golem ist ja in den letzten Jahren verschiedentlich aufgetaucht, fußt aber

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<sup>16</sup> "Er benutzte eine tschechische Version von A. Jirásek, die ihm Lida [*sic*] Salmonova empfahl und übersetzte." Schönemann, *Wegener*, 91. She cites a note in the Jan-Moeller collection in the Märkische Museum in Berlin as the source of this anecdote.

<sup>17</sup> Beate Rosenfeld, *Die Golemsage und ihre Verwertung in der deutschen Literatur, Sprache und Kultur der germanischen und romanischen Völker*. B. Germanistische Reihe, vol. 5 (Breslau: H. Priebatsch, 1934), 149.

<sup>18</sup> Gershom Scholem, "The Idea of the Golem," in Gershom Scholem, *On Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, trans. R. Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1996), 158–204.

<sup>19</sup> Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), xxii–xxiii.

dokumentarisch auf so geringen Unterlagen, daß eine traditionelle Behandlung ausgeschlossen ist. Gemeinsam ist allen nur das jüdische Milieu, dessen Sagenkreis er seine Entstehung verdankt.<sup>20</sup>

One of the diverse forms of the Golem myth that is important for my reading of Wegener's film is Idel's identification of the possibility of an astrological infusion into the Golem literature as early as the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Scholem insisted that Hebrew sources of the creation of artificial men were not connected to astrology, but to the combinatorial possibilities of the *Sefer Yezirah* alone. However, Idel reveals a thirteenth century text, *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, composed by an anonymous author, that proposes a legend of the creation of an artificial man independent of the *Sefer Yezirah*. This text uses the astrology of Abraham ibn Ezra, and "the correspondence between higher and lower, the affinity between peculiar elements and supernal entities [...] rather than the magical power inherent in the combinations of Hebrew Letters" to awaken the Golem.<sup>22</sup> In addition, R. Yoḥanan Alemanno (1435/8–c. 1510) in northern Italy, understands Golem creation to be a Jewish counterpart to Ptolemaic astral magic, and he explicitly infuses it with an astrological interpretation wherein the Golem is created both by a specific combination of letters as well as the influx of astral forces into the clay matter.<sup>23</sup>

Around the seventeenth century, the Golem legend enters the realm of Jewish folklore, and this transformation gives rise to innovations that were not present in earlier versions of the techniques. For example, the element of uncontrollable danger comes to play a role in the stories. The Golem becomes dangerous when it "escape[s] the control of the human creator."<sup>24</sup> The mid-seventeenth century tale about R. Eliyahu contains the first instance of the word *'emet* being placed on the Golem's neck rather than attached to or carved into the forehead.<sup>25</sup> The famous Rabbi Löw legend also belongs to the Jewish folklore tradition rather than the magical tradition.<sup>26</sup> By embedding his Golem within astrological discourse, Wegener invokes the magical and mystical facets of the legend at the same time.

Wegener's insistence on the suitability of the Golem for film carries another valence: muteness. In early versions, the Golem was a mute creature with whom it was nearly impossible to communicate. Early cinema itself had to grapple with techniques to bridge the silence inherent in early film technology. Historically the creation of a Golem seemed to be more a confirmation of the power of the Hebrew language than the specific actions or instrumentality of the Golem doing anything for the Rabbi who created him. The Golem was created for the purpose of experiencing the process of creating it. Idel suggests that the Golem techniques reinforced the "peculiar power of the Hebrew language" in competing polemics (pagan, Christian, and others) during the last eight hundred years.<sup>27</sup> Kocku von Stuckrad's recent work on the plurality of esotericism in

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<sup>20</sup> Reprinted in *Film und Presse*, Nr. 18, p. 441.

<sup>21</sup> Idel, *Golem*, 88–91.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 169–75, esp. 171–72.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

Europe agrees with this hypothesis of identity formation.<sup>28</sup> The double sense of Wegener creating the Golem just to experience the power of creating it, as well as the film's inescapable involvement in questions of German-Jewish identity are illuminated by this facet of the historical Golem material.<sup>29</sup> One of the central problems of the transformation of the Jewish magical practice into cinema is the loss of the specific linguistic, that is Hebrew, nature of the practice. Linguistic contemplation cedes ground to visual observation.

But Wegener, historically known as a somewhat dominant individual, was not content to leave his personal vision of the Golem to the free play of the literary imagination. He sought to create a film, and for that he needed someone who could help him give the right shape to his vision. As Carl Boese, the director of the 1920 version of *Golem*, has recalled: "Der Bildgestalter musste ein Mann sein, der in der Lage war, diesem Film ein noch nie gesehenes, ein ganz neuartiges Gesicht zu geben. Und als wir berieten, fügte es sich, dass Wegener und ich gleichzeitig den gleichen Namen aussprachen: Poelzig!"<sup>30</sup>

### **Hans Poelzig: Baroque Enthusiast, Film Architect, Occult Adept**

While Wegener was busy visiting Colmar and making films about early modern gluttony in the land of milk and honey (*Schlaraffenland*), Hans Poelzig spent the early part of his architectural career traveling to Austria, the Rheinland, Franconia, and Bavaria. He was impressed by the late gothic architecture in Regensburg and the high baroque of Melk.<sup>31</sup> Heike Hambrock's detailed study of Poelzig's interest in Baroque architecture informs us of his early engagement with specific facets of baroque style.<sup>32</sup> Specifically in the contexts of festival buildings, Poelzig viewed the theater as an analogue to a modern church-like building, a new temple. Siegfried Kracauer would

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<sup>28</sup> See Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), esp. 34.

<sup>29</sup> For a reading of the film in its myriad Jewish contexts, see: Omar Bartov, *The "Jew" in Cinema from The Golem to Don't Touch my Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005) on the film in the context of Jews depicted in film history; S. S. Praver *Between Two Worlds: The Jewish Presence in German and Austrian Film, 1910–1933* (New York: Berghahn, 2005), esp. 33–41; and the most recent reading by Noah Isenberg, "Of Monsters and Magicians: Paul Wegener's *The Golem* how he came into the World (1920)," in Noah Isenberg, ed., *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 33–54.

<sup>30</sup> Carl Boese, *Erinnerungen an die Entstehung und an die Aufnahmen eines der berühmtesten Stummfilme*, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. Schriftgutarchiv. Golem file: 4359. Folder 2., 4.

<sup>31</sup> Theodor Heuss, *Hans Poelzig. Bauten und Entwürfe. Das Lebensbild eines deutschen Baumeisters* (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1939), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Heike Hambrock, *Hans und Marlene Poelzig. Bauen im Geist des Barock. Architektur-phantasien, Theaterprojekte und moderner Festbau (1916–1926)* (Berlin: Aschenbeck & Holstein, 2005).

later pick up on this trend when he calls the Gloria-Palast a “baroque theater” in his essay “Cult of Distraction.”<sup>33</sup>

In his speech about his design for the Salzburger Festival building, Poelzig spoke about his vision of the historical relationship between spectatorship and the night sky.

Und da kann man nicht das antike Theater als Gegenbeispiel anführen. Es hat ja eine architektonisch gegliederte Bühne, und im übrigen ist es ein Freilichttheater, und über den Zuschauern schweben der Himmel und die Wolken, um sie herum stehen die Berge und die Bäume. All das muß hier *gebaut* werden. Über den Menschen im Raum muß ein Himmel gebaut werden, ein Himmel in architektonischer Form, der sich über die Bühne fortsetzt, auch hier als Architektur.<sup>34</sup>

Although Poelzig goes back to Greek theater, he places emphasis on the spatial relationships inimical to the theatrical experience. Poelzig was able to execute his vision in his design for the Großes Schauspielhaus in Berlin. Over 1,200 stalactites hung from the ceiling in dripping concentric rings. In a gorgeous inversion of Plato’s cave, the grotto interior of the Großes Schauspielhaus had light bulbs installed on the tips of the stalactites which, when the lights were turned off, could be arranged to look like constellations in the night sky. The claustrophobic interiority of the cave opens to the illusion of communion with the cosmos.<sup>35</sup> The stalactites hid an organically embedded instrumental effect: they also worked as acoustic buffers to dampen echoes in the great building.<sup>36</sup>

Later, in 1927, Poelzig also designed the Deli-Kino in Breslau to look as though it had the night sky in its ceiling. He not only arranged the lights in concentric elliptical forms on the domed ceiling, but he also stylized them as ten pointed stars.<sup>37</sup> Unlike the wild, grotto stalactites of the Großes Schauspielhaus, the lights in the Deli-Kino assume a more literal and rationalized form, both by taking the shape of stars but also in their clearly mathematical arrangement on the ceiling. Although the dome of the ceiling is off-center, the ellipses of lights appear as rational points in the white of the ceiling plan. Whereas the points in the Großes Schauspielhaus reference the drippy cave formations, and are less like an overt mathematical map of the night sky.

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<sup>33</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, “Cult of Distraction,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 323–28.

<sup>34</sup> Hans Poelzig, “Festspielhaus in Salzburg,” *Das Kunstblatt* (1921; repr. Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1978), 84. Emphasis in original.

<sup>35</sup> “Im Schauspielhaus konnten die an den 1200 Rabitzzapfen befestigten Glühbirnen zu Sternbildern geschaltet werden.” Wolfgang Pehnt, “Wille zur Ausdruck. Zu Leben und Werk Hans Poelzigs,” in Wolfgang Pehnt and Matthias Schirren, eds., *HANS POELZIG Architekt Lehrer Künstler. 1869–1936* (Munich: DVA, 2007), 10–51, here 30.

<sup>36</sup> Sabine Röder, “Traumspiel mit Kulissen,” in Sabine Röder and Gerhard Storck, eds., *Der dramatische Raum. Hans Poelzig. Malerei Theater Film* (Krefeld: Kat. Museum Haus Lange, Haus Esters, 1986), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Hambrock, *Hans und Marlene Poelzig*, 137. Pictures of the plans for the Deli-Kino lights are viewable on p.163.

Poelzig's insistence on organic unity comes from his attraction to the baroque. He said, "In der Gotik, im Barock und Rokoko steht keine Figur für sich, sondern sie wächst als ornamentaler Gipfelpunkt aus dem Bau heraus."<sup>38</sup> We can see this "gipfelpunkt" in the stalactite stars in the Großesschauspielhaus, but this point can be extended to the set of *Golem*. Each element can be seen as an extension of every other element.

Poelzig's interest in stellar forms wasn't limited to architecture alone. He became interested in astrology and the occult revival in Breslau, where he lived between 1903 and 1916. Poelzig's biographer, Theodor Heuss, noted in 1939 that:

Was ihn bewegte, war durchaus bestimmt von der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Geistgehalt der Mystik wie von dem Erkenntniswillen, das Geheimnis von Schicksal, Bestimmung, Freiheit, göttlichen Willen zu erobern. Seine Bücherei steckte voll von Werken der Mystiker, der okkulten Wissenschaften, der Astrologie; wenn man in den Notizheften Buchtiteln begegnet, handelt es sich oft um Werke aus diesem Bereich. In der Breslauer Zeit hatte er begonnen, diese Welt sich zu gewinnen. Es war zuerst ein Tasten, später ein kühneres Schreiten, manchmal klingt der Ton ironischer Selbstkontrolle hindurch, wenn er etwa auf die "Horoskop-tante" schilt. Aber er wühlt sich immer wieder in die Fragen kosmischer Deutung.<sup>39</sup>

Breslau was not far from Elsbeth Ebertin's popular astrological presence in Goerlitz, and Poelzig and Schmitz were both in Salzburg in 1919. Wolfgang Pehnt also notes that:

Man experimentierte in engsten Kreis um Poelzig mit Astrologie, Chiromantie, Spritismus, Hypnose, Autosuggestion, Hellseherei, in den zwanziger Jahren verbreitete Praxis, auch bei anderen Kollegen vom Baufach. Okkulte Erlebnisse sind von Max Berg, Hugo Häring oder Martin Wagner berichtet. Marlene Moeschke, Poelzig's 'weiße Löwin,' liest Graf Keyserling, Rudolf Steiner und *Zarathustra*.<sup>40</sup>

Poelzig found himself, like Schmitz and Keyserling, a discerning reader of literature of the occult revival, and he did not subscribe wholesale to all the associated branches that were being developed. For example, like Schmitz and his circle, Poelzig was both anti-Theosophic and anti-Anthroposophic. Heuss quotes a letter from Poelzig in April 1921: "Steiner meiner Meinung nach geschraubter Unsinn, von allerlei hergeholt . . ."<sup>41</sup> But Poelzig, unlike Schmitz, believed himself to possess supernatural powers. In a letter from November 11, 1918 he wrote: "Ich habe ja nur alles kommen sehen und einschließlich der Abdankung des Kaisers vorausgesagt, als noch niemand im

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<sup>38</sup> Poelzig, "Festspielhaus," 60.

<sup>39</sup> Heuss, *Poelzig*, 40–41. Heuss, writing in 1939, mentions astrology apart from "okkulten Wissenschaften" showing that the trends witnessed in Oscar A. H. Schmitz's group continued into other spheres. Although affiliated, for Heuss, and therefor for Poelzig, astrology and the occult still distinct.

<sup>40</sup> Pehnt, "Wille zum Ausdruck," 37–38.

<sup>41</sup> Heuss, *Poelzig*, 41.

entferntesten daran dachte, schon im Beginn des Krieges. [ . . . ] es ist eine Spur Hellseher in mir.”<sup>42</sup> Heuss also notes that: “Poelzig besaß einen inneren Hang zur Welt des Geheimnisses, Wegener verfügte in diesem Bereich über historisches Wissen.”<sup>43</sup> When Wegener and Boese tapped Poelzig to create the sets for *Der Golem wie er in die Welt kam*, Poelzig finally got a chance to infuse his knowledge of esotericism and his interest in early modern architecture into the set of *Golem*.

The set has baroque elements in more than one way. Sabine Röderer says, “Hier war er keinen funktionalen Überlegungen unterworfen, hatte mit keinen wesentlichen technischen Problemen zu kämpfen. Er konnte sich ganz darauf konzentrieren, einen Erlebnisraum zu schaffen, der die dramatische Handlung unterstützt und die schauerliche Atmosphäre des mittelalterlichen jüdischen Ghettos widerspiegelt.”<sup>44</sup> The film set lacks a certain instrumentality that is inherent in a theater building. The theater had to be a space for many productions. The fictional film city was designed to last only as long as filming, and thus it allowed Poelzig to operate outside the parameters of instrumentality. The style of building allowed echoed with baroque innovations in architectural form.

Even the overarching historical appearance of the set of *Golem* carries with it an element of the Baroque, as seen by contemporary art critic Wilhelm Hausenstein in his *Vom Geist des Barock*, which Walter Benjamin deals with extensively in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*:

Das Barock baute viel. Es baute rasch. Immer schnitt es ein Ganzes auf einmal in die Räume. Das Material mußte darum geschmiedig sein. Es war wenig Zeit, mit Marmor, kaum Zeit, mit hartem Holz sich aufzuhalten. Zudem: materielle Schwere widersprach den Drang des Barock, der immer von obskuren Sprossen höher strebte. Man griff zum Stucco. Das Barock wird zum klassischen Stil der Stukkatur. Mit diesem Material wird alles möglich.<sup>45</sup>

Viewed with this quote in mind, Poelzig’s film set is baroque architecture par excellence. His set was built with Rabitz—a kind of metal mesh that could be plastered—in organic forms that were hardly possible in any other medium. It was destroyed just as quickly as it was created. The fleeting sense of *vanitas* echoes again. Nevertheless, the set abides in history through the film and archival remnants.

The set was baroque in another way as well. Earlier in his discussion, Hausenstein discussed *hara-kiri* and altars: “Die Tür einer Kirche öffnet sich: der Hochaltar ist wie das Innere eines brünstig aufgerissenen Leibes. Das Ekklesiastische macht *Harakiri*.”<sup>46</sup> Poelzig’s rendition of the Rabbi’s laboratory undulates with bodily shapes, like the stairwell being the bones of an ear. Poelzig designed the set in such a

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>43</sup> Theodor Heuss, “Begegnungen mit Paul Wegener,” in Möller, *Paul Wegener. Der Regisseur und Schauspieler*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Röderer, “Traumspiel,” 17.

<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm Hausenstein, *Vom Geist des Barock* (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1920), 26.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

way that the internal analogies of the film set cannot be divorced from their external analogies. Paul Westheim, a contemporary reviewer, also identified baroque aspects of the film set. It had “einen Schwung, eine Geste, ein Gesicht bekommen. Aus ihnen geistert irgendwie Ferne, Unfaßbarkeit. Legendarische Bewegung durchpulst auch sie, ohne daß sie der Legende, die zwischen ihnen tragiert werden soll, die Entfaltungsmöglichkeit verlegen.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Westheim says that the public must pressure Poelzig, “unseren großen Städten eine neue Physiognomie zu geben.”<sup>48</sup> Westheim’s terminology brings up another important concept—physiognomy. This concept was already being proposed by film theorist Béla Balázs as an important way to read film. Balázs brings together stellar observation, early modern hermeneutics of correspondence and early cinema.

In 1923, in a short essay on physiognomy, Balázs compares the viewing of faces to mathematical and observational astronomy, using the story of Leverrier, who predicted the existence of Neptune using inference rather than physical observation:

It is astonishing, how on each face one can see that there is something that cannot be seen on it. It is a kind of “docta ignorantia” (learned ignorance). It was Leverrier, who established the existence of a star [Neptune], even calculated its size and its orbit, without having seen it. Because he could not explain the movement of the stars by what he saw. And he calculated the invisible cause. Such an inferential equation takes place in the reading of faces. But so fast and unconscious, that I reckon to *see* what I can perhaps only infer.<sup>49</sup>

Balázs believes he sees something can only be inferred, just like Leverrier correctly believed in Neptune’s existence through inferring its presence via mathematical explanation of the physical observation of a different planet’s orbit, in this case Uranus. As part of the same unit, the solar system, this information allowed for a deeper perspective to be achieved, which was not yet measurable visibly. Mathematical

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Westheim, “Eine Filmstadt von Poelzig,” *Das Kunstblatt* 11 (1920): 325; reprinted in Röder and Storck, *Der dramatische Raum*, 113–14.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>49</sup> Béla Balázs, “Fiziognomia,” *Tüz* (Wien), 23.7.1923. Translated as “Physiognomie,” in Béla Balázs, *Schriften I* (Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft: Berlin, 1982), 205–8, here 206, emphasis in original. “Es ist verwunderlich, wie an jedem Gesicht zu sehen ist, daß es etwas gibt, was an ihm nicht zu sehen ist. Es ist eine Art “docta ignorantia.” Es war Leverrier, der das Existieren eines Sternes festgestellt, ja sogar seine Größe und Bahn ausgerechnet hat, ohne ihn gesehen zu haben. Weil die Bewegung der Sterne um diesen nicht damit zu erklären war, was er gesehen hat. Und er hat die unsichtbare Ursache errechnet. Eine solche rückschließende Gleichung vollzieht sich beim Lesen in den Gesichtern. Aber so schnell und unbewußt, daß ich zu *sehen* glaube, worauf ich vielleicht nur schliessen kann.” Physiognomy has a very intense connotation in the context of the brutal history of Europe during the early twentieth century. For an exploration of the role of physiognomy in Germany leading up to the racial hygiene of the Nazis see Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004).

inference allowed for progress in the natural sciences. Once the existence of Neptune was posited mathematically, its visual presence was confirmed. Thus Balázs utilizes an analogy to astronomy to come to an understanding of how faces can be read deeper than their surface. Although this process is not mathematical, like it was for Leverrier, Balázs is getting at another way of being able to use visual perception to achieve a deeper knowledge of invisible aspects beyond the surface image. Put another way, the movement of the surface image contains traces that allow for the inference of other information: as he put it, “soul, character, fate.”<sup>50</sup> The astrological nuance is hard to miss here. Balázs asserts that films, as surface phenomena, can be read in much the same way.

Director Carl Boese also used the word “Gesicht” to talk about the look of the film: “Der Bildgestalter musste ein Mann sein, der in der Lage war, diesem Film ein noch nie gesehenes, ein ganz neuartiges Gesicht zu geben,”<sup>51</sup> and “die Probleme zu lösen, die dem Film sein grosses Gesicht geben sollten: Die Bauten und Innenräume, die Kostüme, die Photographie nebst den photographischen Tricks, welche bisher noch nie gewagte Effekte vorsahen.”<sup>52</sup> Boese uses the word “Gesicht” which can mean either face or “looks,” but he could have chosen the German word “Vision.” The less determinate “Gesicht” belies the affinities between the surface appearance of a human face and the surface appearance of the film on the screen. Therefore the physiognomy of film as Boese interprets it can carry a valence of meaning that extends beyond a literal facial close up to the entire image of the film itself, namely, the framing of a scene, the editing of the film, the set, the costumes, as well as the conventional account of close-ups of actors’ faces. Contrary to Tom Gunning’s archaeology of the human face in photography and early cinema, Boese shows that, at least in the German language, something, like film, can have a face that’s not necessarily a literal close up of a face, and yet the same hermeneutic task can be carried out on this surface.<sup>53</sup> In this way physiognomy is present in the “reading” of any film.

In 1924 Balázs echoes Boese’s stance in his seminal work of film theory *Der sichtbare Mensch*. In his discussion of gestures and facial close ups, he discusses the “face of things” or “Gesicht der Dinge.” Like in his 1923 essay on physiognomy, a celestial analogy forms the core of his thoughts on the matter: “There are films which show us the face of the earth, the physiognomy of the globe, of the heavenly bodies . . .”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Balázs, “Physiognomie,” 206. “Seele, Character, Schicksal.”

<sup>51</sup> Boese, *Erinnerungen*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Gunning, “In Your Face.”

<sup>54</sup> Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 53. In a section titled “Großaufnahmen und Aufnahmen von Großen”: “Es gibt Filme, die uns das Gesicht der Erde zeigen [ . . . ] die Physiognomie des Erdballs, des Himmelskörpers. . .” For another perspective on Balázs and physiognomy see: Anton Kaes, “Das bewegte Gesicht: Zur Grossaufnahme im Film,” in Claudia Schmolders, Sander L. Gilman, eds., *Gesichter der Weimarer Republik: Eine physiognomische Kulturgeschichte* (Cologne: DuMont, 2000), 156–74, esp. 164–65. See also, Wolfgang Kabatek, “‘Moderne’ physiognomische Lesbarkeitskonzepte und visuelle Anthropologie,” in Wolfgang Kabatek, ed., *Imagerie des Anderen im Weimarer Kino* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2003), 149–74.

This celestial perspective is a nuance of Balázs's argument that gets lost in the scholarly focus on the facial close up.

Film posters for *Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* underscore this point. The set of the film became equally, if not more important than the close ups of any of the actors' faces. Johannes Kamp suggests that the film set was the "eigentlicher Star" of the film, and he analyses the film posters from the 1920 *Golem* that showcase the film's architecture, a practice that was rare at the time: "Architekturen sind selten im Filmplakat, das Medium bestand fast immer auf der dominierenden Abbildung der menschlichen Figur, auf der Abbildung der Hauptperson."<sup>55</sup> On the basis of this idiosyncrasy, Kamp argues that one could read Poelzig's architecture as a character itself in the film. However enough ink has been filled about the "stardom" of Poelzig's film set. Now it is time to look at the celestial element of the establishing shot of the film—the stars "als eigentlicher Star."

### **Astronomy and Astrology in *Golem* (1920)**

Immediately after the film's release, reviewers took note of the starry skies it depicted. Andrej, a film reviewer, noted, "Immer wieder spricht der Nachthimmel in die Handlung hinein, tausendfältig ausgestirnt."<sup>56</sup> On October 31, 1920, another reviewer remarked in *Der Vorwärts*: "Ja, das Mittelalter wird lebendig vor unseren Augen, mit all seinem Wunderglauben und seiner mystischen Versunkenheit; Astrologie und Kabbala berücken die Menschen."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, astrological knowledge drives the film from the start. The establishing shot cuts to the first title, which announces that "Der Hohe Rabbi Löw liest in den Sternen, daß der Judengemeinde ein schweres Unheil droht."<sup>58</sup> The next shot presents the Rabbi at his telescope in a circle frame that fades at its edges. The telescope points to the top left of the screen, as Rabbi Löw looks through it. Then a jump cut shows a stark circular frame of the stars, which move from left to right (Figure 3.1). The seven bright stars again pass through the circular frame as it pans to the right.

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<sup>55</sup> Johannes Kamp, "Der Set als eigentlicher Star," in *Hans Poelzig, Bauten für den Film*, Kinematograph (1997), 79.

<sup>56</sup> Andrej in *Film Kurier*, Oct. 30, 1920.

<sup>57</sup> *Der Vorwärts*, Oct. 31, 1920, reprinted in *Film und Presse*, no. 17 (1920): 418.

<sup>58</sup> Akt I, Title 1., Zensurkarte Prüf-Nr. 29156 (Berlin, 1931), 3, in the Schriftgutarchiv of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek. Hereafter as "Zensurkarte (1931)."



Figure 3.1

The sharp contrast between the faded frame of the Rabbi using his telescope and the stark circular frame surrounding stars creates the impression that the viewer sees what the Rabbi sees through his telescope. The panning of the stars also adds to this impression that the viewer is participating in the Rabbi's point of view. The camera will assume the perspective of Rabbi Löw reading again and again as the viewer is led to read other textual documents along with him.

The opening sequence ends with the Rabbi adjusting the telescope, sitting to look at a book, then a midshot of the Rabbi reading the book, then looking up to scan the starry sky with squinted eyes and then looking down again to scan the pages of his book. The Rabbi finally walks down the windy stairs to tell his famulus and daughter to warn the community about what he has just read in the stars.

A fade-in dissolve at minute 8:12 shows the view of the Jewish ghetto at night with the starry universe and the seven extra bright stars. Another dissolve brings the seven stars into view, but another dissolve quickly follows to a shot of the decree banishing the Jews from the empire. The dissolves work to associate the community to the stars to the decree, showing first the community, then the message, and finally a representation of the actual disaster that is threatening the community. The audience is being led by montage to see the correspondences between these images. The decree itself uses terminology associated with timing based on astronomical observation instead of an arbitrary date on a calendar: "noch ehe der Mond wechselt,"<sup>59</sup> that is to say by the new moon. Putting the deadline in terms of the phase of the moon and not a randomly selected numerical calendar date shows that the kingdom was still operating by the same principles used by the Rabbi to predict the doom of his community—a lunar calendar.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4.

If the audience is being led to read along with the Rabbi, what if anything, can we learn from the seven stars depicted in the film's sky? The film's setting in the early modern Prague of Rudolph II provides some fruitful information concerning the identification of these stars. Johannes Kepler, another resident of Rudolph II's Prague, saw a supernova in what he called "Serepentarius" in 1604. He dedicated a monograph to this in 1606 titled *De Stella nova in pede Serpentarii*. In his text he includes a woodcut of an upside down swan to depict the constellation Cygnus, which contains the asterism known as the Northern Cross (Figure 3.2):<sup>60</sup>



Figure 3.2

Cygnus is visible in northern Europe during the summer and autumn. The film was shot on an open-air set in Berlin Tempelhof during the summer of 1920 while Cygnus was visible in the night sky. Although the shots of stars at night are not of the actual sky, the film crew must have modeled the stars they filmed off of some kind of pattern, and the pattern of Cygnus is clearly discernable. If we take Hans Poelzig's avid interest in the occult and astrology into consideration, it is not out of the realm of reason to propose that he knew about Kepler's *De Stella nova*. The position of the stars embedded in the swan in Kepler's text is too reminiscent of the images in the opening shots of Act I and Act II. Considering the sheer amount of deliberate decision-making

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<sup>60</sup> The entirety of Kepler's 1606 *De Stella nova in pede Serpentarii* is available digitally from the rare book collection at the Vienna University Observatory via this URL, under the category "Digital Books": <http://www.univie.ac.at/hwastro/>. This image is on page 188 of the PDF file "1606\_kepStel\_ColMed.pdf." Accessed January 2, 2009.

that went into the creation of various other special effects in this film, the choice of which stars to depict must have gone through a similar amount of rigorous debate.

### Textual instruction:

Just as in Wegener's first film, scenes of the third film depict early modern astronomical and astrological texts. After the emperor sends Junker Florian to deliver the decree banning the Jews from the empire, a jump cut reveals a book with Rabbi Löw's hand on the right side. The page shows a line drawing of the Golem with a five-pointed star in the middle of his chest, surrounded by Hebrew characters. The hand then turns the page containing a medieval horoscope (Figure 3.3).<sup>61</sup>

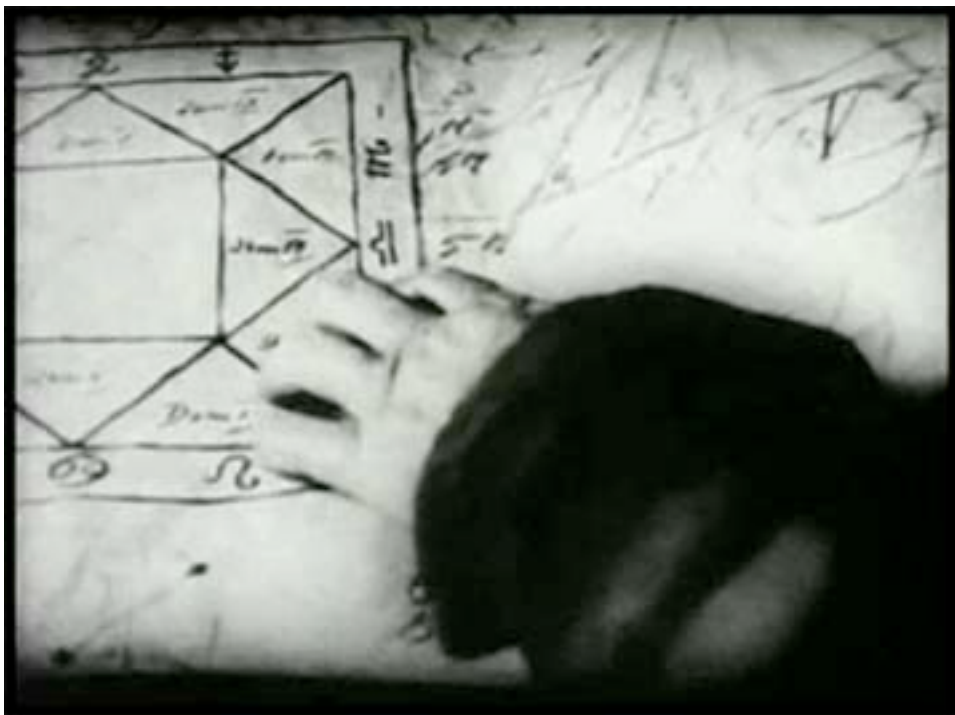


Figure 3.3

The hand of the Rabbi points to the words “Dom VII,” which indicates the seventh house of the medieval natal chart depicted here. The glyph for Libra, ♎, appears next to it. The glyphs flanking the seventh house are the appropriate traditional rulers of those houses: starting from the bottom of the image going counter-clockwise, the fourth house by the glyph for Cancer, ♋; the fifth house by Leo, ♌; then the eighth by Scorpio, ♏; the ninth by Sagittarius, ♐; and tenth by Capricorn, ♑. However, the houses are empty; no planetary glyphs adorn the space in the triangles of the houses, which is a critical component of drawing up an astrological chart. Despite the fact that the chart is generic, it serves to show the viewer that there are rules and codes to the symbolic language the

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<sup>61</sup> For more on the shape of natal charts see recent discussions in Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, eds., *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity* (Bristol: Sophia Centre Press, 2011).

Rabbi needs to use in order to decipher the messages he is reading in the configuration of the planets in the sky.

This page also contains other information. Shortly before the still in Figure 3.3 one can read “Theoricae Planetarium” above the horoscope. This title which is similar to the title of Campanus of Navarre’s thirteenth-century textbook, *Theorica Planetarum*, which included instructions on how to build a equatorium—a scale model of the Ptolemaic system used to compute the positions of the planets.<sup>62</sup> One can think of this as a type of primitive planetarium, which calls Poelzig’s star-filled theater ceilings to mind. Perhaps Poelzig was using historical astronomical texts as inspiration for his starry constructions? Campanus also devised a system of astrological houses (the division of the sky into various symbolic parts) that bears his name. But perhaps this is not what the film’s textbook refers to. In 1473 Georg von Peurbach’s *Theoricae Novae Planetarium* became the first printed astronomical textbook and compendium of astronomical information to that date. Either Campanus or Peurbach could have been the inspiration for this fictional astronomical/astrological text.

The moments after this still reveal a sketch of an eclipse and mathematical notes scrawled next to the archetypal horoscope in the Rabbi’s text. The numbers and the drawings are presented right next to the zodiac signs arranged in a prototypical astrological chart and suggest that the Rabbi was versed in both mathematical astronomy and astrology, as would be expected of a “mathematicus” at that time. Given that the film is set in a fantasy Prague, it may be most likely that these are fantasy astronomical texts based on an amalgamation of historical astronomical texts.

The third film also highlights media shifts. Scenes of “reading along” with characters reading medieval texts in the first and third Golem films are accompanied by scenes of “watching along” with the Rabbi as he practices observational astronomy and astrology in the third film. Despite the advances in film technology, textual scenes of reading are still critical for the story of the third film to unfold. These textual moments are shrouded through typography and subject matter; their intense convergence into the visual fold of the narrative shows the extent to which textuality is still paramount in film at this time.

### **Adepts and instructions:**

The textual instructions in the books are acted out in the action of the film. During the sculpting of the Golem, Rabbi Löw invites his famulus into the secret that the viewers already know. He points to the images on the walls of the basement to indicate to the famulus where the star (effectively, Golem’s heart) must go. These pointing gestures echo with the following scene, and also the scene of supreme magic (waking the Golem to life by instructing the viewers to look away from the mechanics of the cinematic trick). Even though the scene of Golem’s awakening so pointedly addresses the spectators, it is embedded in a network of scenes of educating the famulus. The role of the famulus then is to act as a foil to allow the magical arts to be conveyed as well to

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<sup>62</sup> Margaret J. Osler, “Book Note on *Campanus of Novara and medieval planetary theory. Theorica planetarum*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14, no. 4 (October 1976): 498.

the viewers; the Rabbi educates the famulus in such a way as the audience also gets educated. He shows him the star and the strip of papyrus that must go inside it; then they look through two different books. We read the directions for waking the Golem in the first book, and then we read along with them in the book titled “*Nekyomantie, die Kunst, Totes lebendig zu machen*.”<sup>63</sup> The fact that the book’s title has a subtitle explaining the meaning of *Nekyomantie* serves to bolster the claim of educating the viewing public. In this grimoire, we are shown the instructions for invoking Astaroth, which are acted out in the next scene. The creation of the parchment during the magical ritual is paramount; it forms the most central part of the entire magical ritual.<sup>64</sup> In the first Golem film the antique dealer cuts the parchment straight out of the grimoire. In the 1920 version Rabbi Löw constructs a brand new parchment for the Golem. Cutting the strip out of the grimoire in the 1914 film is akin to Wegener’s disjointed appropriation of the Golem material in the first film. In the 1920 film he corrects himself by showing us the production of the parchment in the context of an appropriately stylized magical ritual.

Despite the film’s seventeenth-century setting, or perhaps because of it, Wegener and his crew were challenged to make their magic believable. The viewing public had learned by then how to watch film and were no longer easily tricked by special effects. Four years after the debut of *Golem*, Béla Balázs discussed the relationship between magic and special effects in films in his essay “Filmwunder”:

The dreams of a child or of a poet have their own believability that the fantastic inventions of a rationalist do not have. One believes to feel the false front, and is annoyed. Unfortunately it seems to have gone the same way for film. Otherwise it would be impossible to grasp, why in a time when in the literature of novels, the fantastical, the occult, the magical was the great fashion, the fantastical could hardly permeate film or, in the films of fairy tales, not at all. And yet, one should think, that no other art on the basis of its technical possibilities for representation of such magic would be as appropriate as film. Oddly exactly the known technical possibilities appear to awaken our rational skepticism.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Akt II, Title 11, Zensurkarte (1931), 5. The title *Nekyomantie* is represented as two lines, “— —” indicating perhaps that it was illustrated in the intertitle, which is how it appears in the 2004 DVD version of the film. *Nekyomantie* is a synonym for the more popular word *Nekromantie*, or in English, necromancy.

<sup>64</sup> Jake Stratton-Kent, *The True Grimoire* (Scarlet Imprint, 2009), 11–13.

<sup>65</sup> Béla Balázs, “Filmwunder,” *Film Kurier* (Berlin), 12.12.1924. Reprinted in Balázs, *Schriften I*, 322–25, here 323. “Die Träume eines Kindes oder eines Dichters haben eine eigene Glaubwürdigkeit, die die phantastischen Erfindungen eines Rationalisten nicht haben. Man meint, die Mache zu spüren und wird verstimmt. Leider scheint es dem Film ähnlich ergangen zu sein. Sonst wäre es ja gar nicht zu begreifen, warum in einer Zeit, wo in der Romanliteratur das Phantastische, Okkulte, Märchenhafte die große Mode war, der phantastische in Film kaum und der Märchenfilm gar nicht durchdringen konnte. Und doch sollte man meinen, daß keine andere Kunst auf Grund ihrer technischen Möglichkeiten zur Darstellung solcher Zaubereien so geeignet wäre

Balázs argues here that to be successful, film must use a sense of realism to make the common world seem strange. Therefore a film like *Golem* would not necessarily have inspired horror in its audience, even though it deals with bringing inanimate matter to life. *Golem's* ability to make audiences believe its magic is stunted because of its fantasy setting in a distant past, which the audience already knows is not real. In fact, a reviewer from the *Berliner Morgenpost* on October 31, 1920 noted: “wie der große Bluff einer spiritistischen Seance wirkt die Erscheinung Astaroths.”<sup>66</sup> In films like these, Balázs asserts that “the representational possibilities of ancient myths appear as the most modern achievement. Not what happens, but ‘how it is done’ interests the people.”<sup>67</sup> Echoing Balázs, Carl Boese recalled that “Es hat kaum jemand gegeben, der mich sprach und nicht gefragt hätte: wie habt Ihr das eigentlich gemacht?”<sup>68</sup> In the middle of the last century, he made sure to leave a manuscript in the Stiftung Deutsche Kinematek discussing just that.<sup>69</sup>

Boese’s unpublished typescript about the making of *Der Golem* recounts the specific technological means by which he and his film crew staged various aspects of magical practice in the film. These effects were path-breaking in their own time, evidenced not only by the immediate critical reception of the film, but also by the sheer stylistic differences between this and Wegener’s two previous Golem films. Boese reveals himself to be a jack-of-all-trades problem-solver in his approach to achieving various cinematic effects by way of simple, yet genius application of techniques of meteorology, physics, and chemistry. Considering that the early modern period is often seen as a time of great scientific experimentation, I suggest that these effects were dependent on the film’s early modern setting for the conditions of their own possibility. Later films of the period continue to contain echoes of this homage to early modern magico-scientific practice (such as Faust’s conjuration of Mephisto in F. W. Murnau’s 1926 *Faust* or Rotwang and his anachronistic house and laboratory in Fritz Lang’s 1927 *Metropolis*). Exploring the rich technical history behind the production of Wegener’s third Golem film creates a deeper understanding behind the structural affinities of content and its creation in Weimar cinema.

Carl Boese’s account is replete with allusions to experiments, both physical and chemical, and he continuously emphasizes the great extent to which the crew went to make their images happen. In one instance, Boese discusses how they solved a

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wie eben der Film. Seltsamerweise scheinen aber gerade die bekannten technischen Möglichkeiten unsere rationelle Skepsis zu erwecken.”

<sup>66</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost* on October 31, 1920 (reprinted in *Film und Presse*, no. 17 [1920]), 415.

<sup>67</sup> Balázs, “Filmwunder”: “Die Darstellungsmöglichkeit uralter Mythen erscheint als modernste Errungenschaft. Nicht was geschieht, sondern ‘wie wird’s gemacht’ interessiert die Leute.” The preceding quote is also helpful: “Das Publikum hat ein immer gegenwärtiges Bewußtsein des Technischen dem Film gegenüber, und die Wunder, die es auf der Leinwand sieht, atmen nicht naiven Märchenschauer, sondern wirken geistvoll und raffiniert als Wunder der Technik, als belustigende Tricks” (323–24).

<sup>68</sup> Boese, *Erinnerungen*, 20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

complicated lighting issue using astronomical knowledge. Hans Poelzig had drawn the Rabbi inside his laboratory with strong diagonal streams of sunlight flooding through the window. Boese wanted to make sure that the film captured this scene exactly as Poelzig had drawn it, but finding a light source proved difficult. Boese recalls,

Entsprechende Beratungen mit unsrem Chefbeleuchter Deltschaft ergaben, dass eine so starke Lichtquelle, wie [the cinematographer Karl] Freund sie verlangte (es konnte nur ein Parabol-Scheinwerfer sein), nicht zu beschaffen sei—da fiel mir ein, dass der Himmel selbst uns genau die Lichtquelle zur Verfügung stellte, die wir darstellen wollten: *die Sonne selbst!*<sup>70</sup>

They had to pay attention to the sun along the ecliptic in order to realize Poelzig's drawing of the angle of light (Figure 3.4). The powerful and popular spotlights—aptly titled “Jupiter lights”—were no match for the sun.<sup>71</sup> The filmmakers were just as observational of the sun's path across the sky as an astronomer or astrologer would be:

Die Benutzung der echten Sonne bedeutete, dass wir den Bau “Laboratorium” so ins Atelier stellen mussten, dass die Sonnenstrahlen wirklich durch seine Fenster in den Raum einfielen. Natürlich konnten wir dann nur ganz wenige Stunden an jedem Tage an diesen Szenen drehen, da ja die Sonne auf ihrem “Kreislauf” nur eine gewisse Zeit, zwei oder zweieinhalb Stunden, durch unsere Fenster schien! Und konnten ueberdies nur an Sonnentagen drehen—genau wie bei Aussenaufnahmen...! Das bedeutete ein Kunststück an Disposition und war, trotz grösster Geschicklichkeit in dieser Beziehung, ein teurer Spass!<sup>72</sup>

They had to get the timing just right in order to make the image have a specific character. Boese and his film crew had a two-hour window to work with.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8. My emphasis.

<sup>71</sup> Ads for these lights can be found in film journals of the time.

<sup>72</sup> Boese, *Erinnerungen*, 8.



Figure 3.4

This practice of waiting for the sun to assume a special position to create their desired effect is no different than a querent asking an astrologer to reckon a good time to start a project in order to achieve a desired outcome.<sup>73</sup> Not only that, but they built the entire interior of this scene's set in a specific orientation to the sun to optimize the quality of light. Even a detail as small as this illuminates the synergy of filmmaking and solar observation.

They supplemented their astronomical knowledge with some chemistry as well:

Damit war aber noch lange nicht das ganze Problem [of capturing Poelzig's streams of light] gelöst. Die natürlichen Staubpartikelschen in der Luft erwiesen sich nämlich als nicht reflexfähig genug, um die Sonnenstrahlen für die photographische Schicht stark genug aufleuchten zu lassen. Nach mancherlei Versuchen fanden wir dann ein Mittel: wir liessen uns in einer Pudermühle einen Spezialstaub mahlen, der zum grossen Teil aus Glimmer bestand. Das Material wurde so unendlich fein gemahlen, dass schliesslich dieser Staub, wurde er in die Luft gestäubt, dort lange, lange stehen blieb. So fein und leicht war er.

Die Reflexkraft dieses Staubes war so gross, dass wir bei der allgemeinen Ausleuchtung grösste Vorsicht walten lassen und durch Abschirmung der dem Allgemeinlicht dienenden Lampen eine Art von Dunkelzone für ihn schaffen mussten. Der Endeffekt war dann allerdings einzigartig.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> This is electional astrology as opposed to natal astrology.

<sup>74</sup> Boese, *Erinnerungen*, 9.

In addition to the powdered mica experiment, Boese dabbled in chemistry to solve the problem of setting the famulus's clothing on fire during the conjuration scene of *Astaroth*. He had six jackets made, and soaked them in a mixture of nitric and sulfuric acid—"Salpetersäure und Schwefelsäure in einem ganz bestimmten Mischungsverhältnis"—words which sound like they come from an alchemist's recipe book.<sup>75</sup> Then Boese rigged the clothes with a special wire set-up that would generate sparks that would set the jackets on fire at the right moment.

Another chemical experiment accounts for the eerie effects after the conjuration scene. When the Rabbi and the famulus emerge from a layer of smoke escaping the Rabbi's lab. Boese achieved this effect using dummies on the ground and filling the room with two noxious gases, an opaque heavy gas, and a transparent lighter gas that pushed the opaque gas up as it filled the room. The film crew filmed both inside and outside the gas filled room, generating an outside establishing shot of the smoke escaping from the Rabbi's tower. All of these tricks show that in order to create the visual illusions of early modern magical practice, Boese and his crew had to emulate the early modern Rabbi by also observing the sun and performing rudimentary chemical experiments.<sup>76</sup> But these are all tricks that prevent the viewer from participating in the creation of the effects of the film; they are merely receptive to the effects.

The scene of Golem's awakening reveals this film at its most early filmic, and it shows us an important moment in the negotiation of the fourth wall emerging in cinema at the time. Boese's recollection of this scene is poignant in that it discusses an alternative shot of the film that has been lost and which reveals an aspect of the film that we cannot not readily view today. In this scene, the camera literally instructs the viewer how to bring the Golem to life, but while that is taking place the camera is pulling an even greater filmic trick on the audience. Boese acknowledges that his trick is dependent on spectator participation: He writes, "Zum Schluss sei der ungewöhnliche Trick beschrieben, der vielleicht überhaupt im Film gemacht worden ist—ungewöhnlich besonders dadurch, dass der Zuschauer im Kino selbst dabei mitwirkt—jeder Zuschauer!!"<sup>77</sup>

It was impossible to use any kind of cutting during this scene, as Boese states, "the viewer was already sly enough by then to know that he was being duped by cuts in scenes of this type."<sup>78</sup> The crew had tried to carry Wegener from the side of the room to the center, but his body was too pliable to appear as if it were made of clay. Faced with the problem of trying to create the switch from a clay Golem to Wegener-as-Golem, Boese divulges the solution:

...die Aufnahme wurde durchgedreht, ohne Anhalten, ohne Schnitt und auch ohne Ueberblendung, in einem ununterbrochenen Zuge. Die Kamera

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Physics was also included, in that they used a tesla coil to generate their lightning: "Die Blitze, welche also die Erscheinung der Geister einleiteten, wurden mit einer Tesla-Anlage aus einer Spannung von einer Million Volt erzeugt" (Boese, *Erinnerungen*, 9).

<sup>77</sup> Boese, *Erinnerungen*, 18.

<sup>78</sup> "So schlau war der Zuschauer damals schon, zu Wissen, dass er in Szenen dieser Art durch Schnitt gewissermassen betrogen wurde."

wurde gefahren und erlaubte so alles aus nächster Nähe, sehr deutlich zu sehen. Der Zuschauer konnte und musste also genau erkennen, dass es sich um eine tote Figur handelte.

Die Kamera fuhr an sich während der ganzen übrigen Scene eine Nahaufnahme des Rabbi—sie behielt aber (das war sehr wichtig!) während des ganzen Ablaufes der Scene immer den Golem im Hintergrund im Bilde! [...]

Der Rabbi nimmt den mit dem Zauberwort beschriebenen Pergament-streifen und *demonstriert*, wie er den Streifen in die Kapsel einrollt. Dann geht er wieder zum Golem zurück. Die Kamera fährt mit ihm, immer den Golem im Bilde behaltend, zu ihm hin—so nahe heran, dass schliesslich der Golem in Portraitgrösse gezeigt wird. Der Rabbi ist jetzt nur noch angeschnitten. Am unteren Bildrand setzen seine Hände die Kapsel in des Golem Brust.

Im gleichen Augenblick schlägt der Golem gross die Augen auf und starrt auf seine Umgebung. Die tote Figur lebt plötzlich und beginnt, tief zu atmen . . .<sup>79</sup>

By appealing to the audience's attention directly, this scene purposefully breaks the "fourth wall" and successfully carries out the switch from clay to Wegener with no jump cut. Without the possibility to zoom, Boese and his crew had to resort to the having Rabbi Löw approach the audience and, as if in secret, show them how he was placing the papyrus in the star-shaped capsule, in order to instruct the eye of the spectator to specifically *not* watch what was really going on behind the Rabbi's back (Figure 3.5).



Figure 3.5

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<sup>79</sup> Boese, *Erinnerungen*, 19–20.

Boese's use of the word "*demonstriert*" is particularly indicative in this case. In his typescript Boese admits his dependence on the audience's paying attention to the Rabbi's demonstration; the trick would be impossible without their participation. Under the guise of learning an early modern magical ritual presumably lost to modern viewers, the audience penetrates the fourth wall while the film displays an uncut scene of bringing inert matter to animated life.

Unfortunately in later editions of the film, this scene has been replaced with a backup scene that Boese and his crew shot, so that the Golem is no longer visible behind the Rabbi. "Nur wurde in dieser Reserve-Szene dafür gesorgt, dass im entscheidenden Augenblick des Auswechselns der Golem vom Rabbi im Vordergrund gedeckt wurde. Der Rabbi hatte sich bei seiner Manipulation mit einer unwillkürlichen Bewegung für drei oder vier Sekunden zwischen die Kamera und die Figur des Golem zu beugen."<sup>80</sup> However, even in this second version, Rabbi Löw's approach to the audience with the papyrus and the star capsule remains a stand-out moment in this film to this day. The scene in which the Golem is brought back to life for the first time portrays the productive conflation of text, image, and instruction to the viewer on how to understand and be part of this magical moment when dead matter is brought to life. Yet at the very same time the audience falls for those instructions to miss watching the mechanics of the filmic special effect of exchanging clay for life.

The "wie wird's gemacht" sensibility aptly identified by Balázs is satisfied by Boese's account of the making of the film; the magical effects are negated when we learn about their technical creation. However the technical effects do not account for the agency of astrological symbolism in the film's plot. As if a blind spot, with the exception of Beate Rosenfeld, scholarship has overlooked this critical presence in the film. This is precisely where the enchantment resides.

### **Astrological Symbolism**

As discussed above, astrological language appears in the film's first intertitle, "Der Hohe Rabbi Löw liest in den Sternen, daß der Judengemeinde ein schweres Unheil droht." This form of reading is mundane astrology, and this "threat" is actually not read as a certainty, but a possibility. Human action of some kind must accompany the vision he saw; and the Rabbi asks his community to pray to avert this, suggesting that by the action of praying, whatever stands in the sky might be averted on earth. In addition to asking the community to act through prayer, the Rabbi acts secretly and deploys electional astrology to bring the Golem to life and counterbalance the forces he sees at work in the sky.<sup>81</sup> Beate Rosenfeld has noted how the presence of the astrological allows Wegener to have a unique take on the motivation in the plot:

Nur bei bestimmter Konstellationen der Gestirne kann der Golem belebt

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<sup>80</sup> Boese, *Erinnerung*, 22.

<sup>81</sup> Electional astrology is choosing a specific moment in time in which to perform an action, so as to endow that action with a specific quality in order to maximize the potential desired outcome of the action.

werden, und durch eine ungünstige Konstellation bricht der Aufstand in ihm aus. Die Katastrophe ist hier demnach *weder psychologisch motiviert* wie bei Holitscher *noch kabbalistisch* durch das Sabbatmotiv wie in der Sage, obwohl dieses Motiv noch angedeutet wird, wenn der Rabbi gerade beim Ausbruch des Golem in der Synagoge weilt.<sup>82</sup>

Astrology becomes the central motivation of the plot. At the end of the first act, the Rabbi states, “Die Venus tritt in das Sternbild der Wage. Die Zeit ist da, wo die Beschwörung glücken muß.”<sup>83</sup> Thus he has viewed the conditions necessary to elect a time to perform his conjuration of Astaroth to awaken his clay figure. In the second act, an intertitle attributed to the Rabbi, who has just finished sculpting the face of Golem to the likeness of Paul Wegener, looks out of the window at the sun and determines the time with more specificity, “Die Stunde ist da. Der Lauf der Gestirne begünstigt den Zauber.”<sup>84</sup> The German word “*begünstigen*” means to promote, abet, favor, or benefit. The sense of the word then is generally to assist, encourage, or advantage to the benefit of someone or something. Etymologically, then, the filmmakers’ choice of language indicates an interpretation that the move of Venus into the sign of Libra does not determine that the Rabbi’s magic would be successful, but that it would “contribute to” or “encourage” the success. Human action, or inaction, ultimately establishes the determining factor.

The timing of the conjuring of Astaroth is essential to the success of bringing the Golem to life. The crucial instruction for wresting the word from Astaroth appears at the end of an intertitle posing as an ancient grimoire: the practitioner desiring the word will be successful, “so er die günstige Konstellation der Planeten beachtet.”<sup>85</sup> The German word, “*günstig*” means beneficial, opportune, advantageous, and this word choice reinforces that the constellation does not determine the outcome, only that specific constellations are more beneficial than others. Man’s powers of observation of the sky and of carrying out the “großen Zauber”<sup>86</sup> are the critical elements in achieving a successful result. At the final determination of the specific time to start the conjuration, the Rabbi peers out of the window, presumably at the angle of the sun, and exclaims “Die Stunde ist da!”

In addition, the demon Astaroth is traditionally associated with Venus, the moon, and the goddesses Inanna, Ishtar, and Astarte.<sup>87</sup> Over time, Astaroth’s historically female form gets translated into male form. Jake Stratton-Kent gives one possible explanation for this: “the gender of Astaroth on a particular occasion may be determined by the position of Venus in relation to the Sun. As a male when Venus rises before the Sun and as a female when Venus rises after the Sun.”<sup>88</sup> More likely, though, the

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<sup>82</sup> Rosenfeld, *Die Golemsage und ihre Verwertung in der deutschen Literatur*, 148–49. Emphasis mine.

<sup>83</sup> Akt I, Title 6, Zensurkarte (1931), 4.

<sup>84</sup> Akt II, Titel 4, Zensurkarte (1931), 4.

<sup>85</sup> Akt II, Titel 12, Zensurkarte (1931), 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Jake Stratton-Kent, “Astaroth: Lady of the Crossroads,” in his *The True Grimoire* (Scarlet Imprint, 2009), 185–200, here 185.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

appearance of Astaroth as a male demon in *Golem* has to do with a tradition of translation errors that associated the male form with demonic magic and the female form with pagan religion.<sup>89</sup> Astaroth's connection to Venus carries with it another powerful symbolic element: the pentagram. Over the course of eight years the conjunction cycle of the Sun and Venus form a pentagram when traced around the zodiac. This helps to explain the dual presence of five and six pointed stars throughout Wegener's 1920 *Golem* film. Finally, by appealing to Astaroth and not to Lucifer, the Rabbi was able to escape the worn trope of invoking the devil. In this respect, the presence of Astaroth makes Wegener's allusion to black magic more authentic. One of Astaroth's more important demonic capabilities includes conferring the favor of the great and powerful, which applies directly to the Rabbi's plight.<sup>90</sup> Anyone reading in the occult material surrounding the historical Faust would have come across Astaroth's name in the demonology included in Carl Kiesewetter's popular 1893 book *Faust in der Geschichte und Tradition*.<sup>91</sup> However, Venus is not the only planet that gets specific mention in this film. In later scenes, the mention of Uranus in conjunction with Golem's rebellion and the subsequent chaos for the Jewish ghetto is astrologically accurate, and yet startlingly anachronistic. No one reviewing the film to date has caught this anomaly.

## Uranus

Sir William Herschel discovered Uranus on March 13, 1781 in Bath, England. Given that the plot of the 1920 version of *Golem* takes place in Rudolphine Prague, that is, just before the start of the Thirty Years War, ancient texts that discussed Uranus in a planetary context did not exist. Thus the following intertitle's prediction that the Golem will rebel when Uranus switches planetary houses is a significant anachronism:

Hast Du durch Zauberwort Totes zum Leben erweckt, sei auf der Hut vor  
Deinem Geschöpf. Tritt der Uranus ins Planetenhaus, fordert Astaroth  
sein Werkzeug zurück, dann spottet der tote Lehm seinem Meister, sinnet  
auf Trug und Zerstörung.<sup>92</sup>

Astrologers in the early 1920s were still in the process of discovering what the new planets Uranus and Neptune might mean. Oscar A. H. Schmitz suggested that "Die Beobachtung zwingt dazu, den kurz vor der französischen Revolution entdeckten

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>91</sup> Carl Kiesewetter, *Faust in der Geschichte und Tradition* (Leipzig, 1893; repr. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1978), 367. "Astaroth ist ein großer und mächtiger Herzog: er erscheint in sehr häßlicher Engelsgestalt [. . .] Er giebt wahre Antworten bezüglich vergangener, gegenwärtiger, zukünftiger und geheimer Dinge. [...] Der Exorcist möge sich wegen des von ihm ausgehauchten unerträglichen Gestanks hüten, ihm zu nahe zu kommen." Kiesewetter takes his material from a Latin source by Johann Wier, a student of Agrippa von Nettesheim, who published *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum* in 1660.

<sup>92</sup> Akt IV, Titel 7, Zensurkarte (1931), 6.

Planeten Uranus [...] in Beziehung mit dem Wasserman zu bringen.”<sup>93</sup> And that, “Die gesamte Welt der Kino und der von ihm Besessenen dürfte stark unter Wasserman stehen.”<sup>94</sup> Other proposals for the meaning of Uranus carry significant resonances with Wegener’s Golem. For example, Schmitz suggests the following:

Man wird nun das Widerspruchsvolle folgender Eigenschaften des Uranus zusammenreimen können: intuitiv, explosiv, vulkanisch, energisch, erwachend, eigensinnig, verbohrt, unberechenbar, hochgeistig, bisexuell, asexuell, rätselhaft, heroisch, schöpferisch, überkritisch, sarkastisch, unordentlich, verschroben, blitzhaft, paradox, aphoristisch, im selben Augenblick einen Eindruck oder Gedanken auffassend und reflektierend, bald schwindelhaft hohl, bald überraschend tief.<sup>95</sup>

These are all words that in one way or another appear in various guises in this film and scholarship on it. Further Schmitz suggests:

In der für erledigt gehaltenen Vergangenheit findet [Uranus] plötzlich das Ungeahnte, und so sehen wir, daß diese so revolutionäre Zeit gleichzeitig in der Vergangenheit der Ur- und Vorgeschichte sucht, vergessene Kulte und Lehren ausgräbt, kurz, überall anknüpft, außer bei dem Jüngstvergangenen. Erst die polare Zusammenfassung des Zukünftigen mit dem Vergangenen in einem Hirn ergibt jenes Neue, das nur darum wahr ist, weil es sich zugleich als uralte erweist. Das ist hohe uranische Erkenntnis.<sup>96</sup>

Later, in 1926, Heinz Artur Strauß adds nuance to the emerging definition of Uranus’s meaning: “Die *Uranuskraft* zeichnet sich aus durch ihr vermittelndes Wirken zwischen der transzendenten und der sichtbaren Welt. Die Vermittlung geschieht in der Form plötzlicher Einbrüche von ‘drüben’ nach hier oder von hier nach ‘drüben.’ (Medien haben ‘starke’ Uranus- und Neptunstellungen.) Auch die plötzlichen ‘Zufälle,’ die ‘unerwartet’ hereinbrechenden Schicksale haben in Uranus ihren Gesetzgeber.”<sup>97</sup> The film suggests that Uranus shifting to a new planetary house correlates to a surprising change in the Golem’s behavior. The intertitle in the film simply states “Planetenhaus” leaving an immense degree of uncertainty (again a Uranian trait!) about just what house, or area of life, Uranus needs to move into to activate a rebellion. However, what is important here is that the Rabbi uses ancient texts to read information concerning the creation and management of the Golem. No ancient text contained information in the early 1600s about Uranus and its interpretation vis-à-vis the Golem. Therefore we are dealing with a very modern Golem here. Once the circulating astrological context becomes clear, the presence of Uranus in the film suddenly establishes that Wegener’s

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<sup>93</sup> Oscar A. H. Schmitz, *Der Geist der Astrologie* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1922), 257.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 254. Although astrologers now attribute Neptune more to the realm of film.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>97</sup> Heinz Artur Strauß, *Astrologie: Grundsätzliche Betrachtungen* (München: Kurt Wolff, 1927), 40. Emphasis in original.

film participated in the popular emerging discourses surrounding astrology much more deeply than we can sense today.

In order to respond to the larger significance of Golem's rebellion, it might be helpful to look into Wegener's earlier film career. Wegener plays the main roles in *Der Student von Prag* (1913), which depicts the dangers of film capturing an image. A young student sells his image for money. Once captured, the image goes on a rampage, blaming the lad for all its mischief. The student loses complete control over what is done in his likeness.

Film carries the potential to give images new life, but once completed they are no longer controllable, hence the uncanny eeriness of the Angelus Silesius couplet "und tot ist es lebendig." In his early career Wegener depicts characters that animate some sort of inanimate matter and turn loose. Wegener seems to have been obsessed with this uncontrollable element of the new medium. He himself states, "Ich bin nicht als Schauspieler zum Film gegangen, das Problem dieser neuen Kunstgattung interessierte mich allgemein. Die geheimnissvollen Möglichkeiten der Kamera erhitzten meine Phantasie."<sup>98</sup>

Wegener is aware of the danger of images and embeds a self-reflexive moment in the film itself. At the Rose Festival in the emperor's court, the Rabbi agrees to continue displaying his mastery of dark arts to the emperor. The vision of the Rabbi's ancient Jewish ancestors works as a cinematic experience. The spectators are all gathered in a dark hall, and the vision of the ancestors appears as if a movie screen above the throne of the emperor. No one stands behind this viewing space, and the Rabbi stands to the side as if a commentator to this quasi-silent film of his. He lays out one condition to the court audience: do not laugh. Yet the court, not listening to the Rabbi's instructions, breaks out into laughter after a comment by the court jester. Of course it is the essence of a court jester to make his court laugh, and thus a fundamental paradox arises that dovetails with the same issues of control that face the Golem (and Wegener's fascination with these types of roles). Once a film or vision is created, the creator cannot control the reaction. With the condition violated, the festival room begins to crumble, enabling the Golem to save the Emperor and by proxy, then, the Jewish people. The fact that the spectators in the court then experience the crumbling of their court for not following directions functions on another level as a punishment by Wegener to those who would laugh at his filmic representation of a bygone era. In this very scene, using the example of the emperor's court, he educates his audience as to how to react to his film.

Tapping to alchemical lore can add another layer of meaning to the themes of initiation, eternal life, and control. Mircea Eliade, in *The Forge and the Crucible*, says, "What the smelter, smith and alchemist have in common is that all three lay claim to a particular magico-religious experience in their relations with matter; this experience is their monopoly and its secret is transmitted through the initiatory rites of their trades."<sup>99</sup> The conjuration of Astaroth in *Golem* is an initiatory rite *par excellence*. Further, a fundamental component to the alchemist's rituals surrounding his engagement with matter is his "intervention in the temporal rhythm peculiar to living

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<sup>98</sup> Paul Wegener, "Mein Werdegang," in Möller, *Paul Wegener. Sein Leben und seine Rollen*, 13–37.

<sup>99</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 8.

substances.”<sup>100</sup> Film itself can be said to be an intervention into the temporal rhythms of life. It arrests aesthetic apparitions for as long as the film reel lasts. In this sense, when Wegener’s film explicitly depicts a number of initiatory rites, we become adept to the literal reawakening of the past, the symbolic reawakening of dead matter through light. The ontology of silent cinema persists to this day and finds heightened expression in the digital, where never-living things are brought to a type of life through pixels, stored in binary files not celluloid, and persist, like the Golem, only in copy form, defying the logic of an “original” reel. Already in the birth pangs of moving images, early cinema, the affinity of traditional forms of magical practice and film technique persist. One of the few academic experts on astral magic, Wilhelm Gundel, recognized Wegener’s fidelity to historical sources. In his comprehensive study of astral belief throughout history, Gundel brings in Wegener’s Golem film as an example of how astral magic can bring inanimate matter to life: “Sehr lebendig hat in jüngster Zeit der Verfasser des Golemfilm diese religiös gerichteten astrologischen Gegebenheiten zur Belebung der Golemstatue zu verwerten gewußt.”<sup>101</sup> The emphasis Gundel places in this sentence on “sehr lebendig” speaks both for the magic Wegener depicts in the film, as well as for cinema’s abilities to create life-like effects. And despite the popularity of the Golem material in literature, Gundel chooses to point his reader to the film as a successful example illustrating the astral magic he writes about.

## Conclusions

Wegener’s film about a never-dead, never-quite-alive Golem shows a kind of continuity between premodern and modern life rather than a radical rupture. Rabbi Löw serves as a cipher for this kind of hybrid magical-scientific activity. Sabine Hake has similarly argued that Wegener, among other fantastic film directors, “established a model for reconciling modern and premodern elements and for eliminating the high/low-culture divide through the imaginary worlds provided by film.”<sup>102</sup>

Another way in which Wegener underscores this continuity is through his conflation of word and image in this film, that is, the not-yet-successful transition from printed text to film. The *Kino-debatte* raging in Weimar Berlin were all about negotiating the role of text in film.<sup>103</sup> In Golem they are complimentary. The shifts in media are smooth: The Rabbi shuttles between looking at a book (reading a mediated text) to looking at the stars (reading a visual constellation, which is really a cinematographic representation of a celestial scene). Intertitles add a whole new level of textual dispersion in the film that mirror the historical appearance of other forms of cultural continuity. What Wegener’s film proves is that, ultimately, at the core of cinema at this time is the word.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

<sup>101</sup> Wilhelm Gundel, *Sterne und Sternbilder im Glauben des Altertums und der Neuzeit* (Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder, 1922), 331.

<sup>102</sup> Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 20.

<sup>103</sup> Anton Kaes, *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film* (Munich: dtv, 1978).

At the core of the Golem legend is a life-giving word embedded in the star-shaped capsul. The word not only gives life to the creature Golem, but to the film *Golem* as well. Yet, as Friedrich Kittler first pointed out, when the rabbi places the capsul into the Golem's chest, he rolls the parchment up much like the reel of a film is wound up into its tin case.<sup>104</sup> Words drive cinema to life, even though they are attempting to erase themselves in images. In his attempt to portray an individual who can productively read the stars, Wegener goes back to the same visual mode that Walter Benjamin discusses in his theories on the origin of language, which I explore in detail in my final chapter. However much he tries, Wegener cannot escape the word. His attempt to create the “*rein Filmmäßigen*” out of the Golem legend leads to his engagement with the stellar realm in order to attempt to circumscribe an act of reading that is dependent upon written language. Focusing on the astrological aspects of Wegener's film provides insight into the structural affinities between content and its creation in Weimar cinema. Even though Wegener's attempt to bypass written language in the medium of silent film was unsuccessful, another contemporary, Aby M. Warburg, succeeded in contributing to a critical hermeneutics that utilized images. Like Wegener's, Warburg's inspiration came from the symbolic language of astrology.

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<sup>104</sup> Susanne Holl and Friedrich Kittler, “Ablösen des Streifens vom Buche: Eine Allegorese von Wegeners drei Golemfilmern,” *Cinema* 41 (1996): 101–112, here 103. And on the writing of the magic word, Kittler says, “Schrift figuriert als Insert schlechthin” (103).

## CHAPTER 4: Aby M. Warburg, Cultural Institutions, and Celestial Hermeneutics

“sehete nur das Bild ein wenig besser an.”  
—Dr. Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>

In 1920, Aby M. Warburg concluded his study of astrological prophecy during the Reformation with the words, “We are in the age of Faust, where modern science—between magical practice and cosmological mathematics—sought to achieve the *realm of reflective reason* between itself and its object.”<sup>2</sup> In one utterance, the centuries between the historical Dr. Johannes Faustus and the modern scholar in twentieth century Germany collapse.

As the First World War raged on around him, Aby Warburg sought to comprehend the sudden rise in esoteric practices by examining another period of German history when these discourses flourished: the Reformation. By simultaneously collecting ephemeral literature produced daily, as well as investigating the ephemeral literature of the sixteenth century, Warburg hoped to understand the human capacity to think magically, rather than logically. What emerged from his wartime research is a monograph on prophecy in the time of Luther. Warburg’s investigation into astrological prophecy during the Reformation galvanized a generation of scholars to research astrological imagery anew. Warburg played a pivotal role as an agent in the material and institutional history of the accumulation and transfer of knowledge, and specifically astrological knowledge. Yet the hermeneutic method that came out of his work and his version of the history of astrology deserve new attention in light of the history of astrology in the Weimar Republic.

Warburg understood the history of astrology, and its eventual transformation into astronomy, as “man’s liberation from magic fears,”<sup>3</sup> whereas, contemporary astrologer Oscar A. H. Schmitz understood astrology as man’s liberation from fear through magic belief. Ironically, instead of proving that astrology was a deterministic system rendered obsolete by the ascendancy of science, Warburg actually helped amass a collection of books that gave *gravitas* to the reemergence of astrological practice in Germany in the early twentieth century. Many contemporary astrologers and scholars of astrology refer to Franz Boll’s seminal work, which Warburg and his institute helped to

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted by Valerius Herberger, *Gloria Lutheri* (Leipzig, 1612), 41–45, found in Aby Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1920), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 70. “Wir sind im Zeitalter des Faust, wo sich der moderne Wissenschaft—zwischen magischer Praktik und kosmologischer Mathematik—den *Denkraum der Besonnenheit* zwischen sich und dem Objekt zu erringen versuchte.”

<sup>3</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1970), 216.

popularize.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the centrality of the history of astrology to the mission of the Warburg library highlights astrology's pivotal role as a fundamentally interdisciplinary subject. Astrology encompasses a vast archive of human knowledge and claims to account for nearly all human activity. Warburg identified that unraveling its history—its various forms of expression in different cultural milieux—provides the cultural historian with a potent and concentrated realm of human knowledge production. In this way, astrology became the central vehicle that allowed Warburg to construct his interdisciplinary form of cultural history. It was astrology that enabled Warburg to develop a new model of interpretation of symbolic form, one that oscillated between expression and orientation. As Fritz Saxl put it,

Warburg was led by his studies of Florentine cultural history to recognize, for instance, astrological sources of images as among the most important transmitters of the heritage of antiquity. And the library, too, collects the visual and textual documents of astrology as material for the study of the transformation of mythologemes. The notion of a history of images is thus expanded by considering the image not only for its artistic content, but moreover as a source in the history of religion and in disciplinary history.<sup>5</sup>

The development of Warburg's engagement with astrology is thus critical to his hermeneutic method, his collection of scholarly material, and his creation of an institution that has proven to be so rich for cultural studies.

### **Warburg's First Encounters with Astrology**

By 1907, mid-way through his career, Warburg's interest turned for the first time to astrology. He "excitedly deciphered the Tarot cards, showing they weren't simply playing cards, but had been used to make astrological predictions."<sup>6</sup> And, "in December 1909, he told [his brother] Felix that he had made his discoveries after buying fifteen hundred books on astrology the previous year."<sup>7</sup> Warburg also read Franz Boll's path-breaking academic work on Greek astrological history, *Sphaera Barbarica* (1903), and met Fritz Saxl in early 1911.<sup>8</sup> Even though he was interested in the history of astrology

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<sup>4</sup> Franz Boll, *Stern Glaube und Sterndeutung: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1918).

<sup>5</sup> Fritz Saxl, "Die Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg in Hamburg," in L. Brauer, A. Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and A. Meyer, eds., *Forschungsinstitute. Ihre Geschichte, Organisation und Ziele*, vol. 2 (Hamburg: De Gruyter, 1930), 356. Quoted in: Michael Diers, Thomas Girst, and Dorothea von Moltke, "Warburg and the Warburgian Tradition of Cultural History," *New German Critique* 65 (Spring–Summer, 1995): 59–73, here 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ron Chernow, *The Warburgs: The Twentieth Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* (New York: Random House, 1993), 120.

<sup>7</sup> Chernow, *The Warburgs*, 120.

<sup>8</sup> Franz Boll, *Sphaera. Neue griechische Texte und untersuchungen zur geschichte der Sternbilder* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1903).

academically, Warburg didn't react positively to the revival of astrological practice taking place around him. Gombrich says, Warburg

discovered to his horror how much astrological nonsense survived in his own day and what opportunity superstition gave to exploiters of human credulity. His attention was drawn in 1913 to a "professor Roxroy" in London, who had built up a large commercial empire from astrological predictions and consultations. Warburg was determined to lay his trade and collected material to incriminate him.<sup>9</sup>

Even though Warburg was bent on exposing this astrologer as a fraud, Warburg once visited an astrologer.<sup>10</sup> It is curious that Warburg, who by 1917 owned so many books on astrological practice and its history, paid someone to erect and interpret his own natal chart. One would think that after his intensive engagement with the history of the subject, he would have been able to do this for himself. However, Warburg was always interested in the images produced by astrology and not the practice of astrology itself. Yet, without taking the time to learn the interpretational system from within, one's ability to interpret the full richness of the images is curtailed. The value in Warburg's work lies more in his desire to understand the images he found and the legacy this attempt left, rather than in his interpretive results.

### **An Observation Tower: Warburg's Library and the Cultural Transmission of Ideas**

Before I analyze Warburg's writings on astrological images in detail, it is important to understand the background of the cultural institution that emerged around his intellectual project. In Max Warburg's memorial address to his brother Aby, he recalled "the incident occurred that has become part of the Warburg legend," when Aby, at thirteen years of age, abdicated his right to head the family bank—M. M. Warburg & Co.—in exchange for a lifetime supply of books:

When he was thirteen, Aby made me an offer of his birthright. He, as the eldest, was destined to enter the firm. I was then only twelve, rather too immature to reflect, and so I agreed to purchase his birthright from him. It was not a pottage of lentils, however, which he demanded, but a promise that I would always buy him all the books he wanted. After a very brief pause for reflection, I consented. I told myself that when I was in the business I could, after all, always find the money to pay for the works of

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<sup>9</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 204.

<sup>10</sup> Bernd Roeck, "Psychohistorie im Zeichen Saturns: Aby Warburgs Denksystem und die moderne Kulturgeschichte," in Wolfgang Hardtwig and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, eds., *Kulturgeschichte Heute* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 241 fn 52. "Allerdings bemühte Warburg sich 1917 bei einem obskuren Astrologen gegen ein nicht unbeträchtliches Honorar um sein Horoskop." Roeck also cites where one can find it: "es ist im betreffenden Kästchen der berühmten Kartei des AWI noch erhalten," *ibid.*

Schiller, Goethe, Lessing and perhaps also Klopstock, and so, unsuspecting, I gave him what I must now admit was a very large blank cheque. The love of reading, of books . . . was his early passion.<sup>11</sup>

Aby Warburg was acutely aware of the value of his library, stating, in a letter to his brother Max, around 1900, “I would not hesitate for a moment to enter my library as a financial asset in the accounts of the firm. [ . . . ] we should demonstrate by our example that capitalism is also capable of intellectual achievements of a scope which would not be possible otherwise.”<sup>12</sup> Saxl also noted the relationship between the Warburg’s private capital and the creation of the library:

To give the student a library uniting the various branches of the history of human civilization where he could wander from shelf to shelf was his resolve. The Government would, in his opinion, never be willing to create such an instrument. [ . . . ] Warburg’s plan was unusual; it did not fit into the official scheme which recognized only two categories, the small specialized library or the big universal storehouse of books. He had been to England and to the United States where two of his brothers lived and had seen the workings of private enterprise in the field of learning in these countries. In Hamburg, which had undergone strong English influence, there was a chance that the unusual plan might succeed. It was a town of merchant-adventurers without a university and its hierarchy of professors, but with an old-established tradition of learning. This was the right soil for such a private foundation.<sup>13</sup>

Warburg succeeded in getting his family on board. At the inauguration of the library’s new building “Max [Warburg] likened the library to a Warburg bank branch that would deal with cosmic instead of earthly pursuits.”<sup>14</sup> The comparison to stellar phenomena did not stop there. The library’s “interior was ingenious.”<sup>15</sup> Fellow art historian, “Ernst Cassirer had extolled the ellipse as a central creative figure of the universe. Aby knew it traced the course of the orbiting planets and insisted upon an elliptical lecture room for the library. The reading room also had curving walls and tall rows of books illuminated by a circular sky light.”<sup>16</sup> Thus the reading room itself modeled the structure of the solar system, allowing scholars to come into orbit with all manner of esoteric books and materials. When Fritz Saxl first saw the library in 1911,

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<sup>11</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 130. Letter from 30 June 1900.

<sup>13</sup> Fritz Saxl, *The History of Warburg’s Library*, in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 325–38, here 326. For more on Hamburg as the proper city for such an undertaking see the recent dissertation by Emily Jane Levine, “Culture, Commerce, and the City: Aby Warburg, Ernst Cassirer, and Erwin Panofsky in Hamburg, 1919–1933,” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Chernow, *The Warburgs*, 265.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

it had at that time about 15,000 volumes and any young student like myself must have felt rather bewildered when entering it. On the one hand he found an excellent collection of bibliographies, most of them unknown to him and apt to shorten his labours; on the other hand very detailed collections, partly on subjects like astrology *with which he was hardly familiar*. The arrangement of the books was equally baffling and he may have found it most peculiar, perhaps, that Warburg never tired of shifting and re-shifting them.<sup>17</sup>

We know that by December of 1909 Warburg had at least fifteen hundred books on astrology, so if in 1911 his library totaled 15,000 volumes, at least a tenth was on the history and practice of astrology—not an insubstantial percentage.

Warburg's library also played a pioneering role in reprinting archaic texts on medieval magic, thus making them available to the public. One of the most famous texts that the Warburg Institute published in a new edition was the *Picatrix*. Warburg recognized the *Picatrix* as the “typische Vertreter der arabischen Überlieferung spätantiker, astrologisch-magischer Praktik in seiner überwältigenden Bedeutung für die gesamte Europäische Geheimwissenschaft, wie sie Ficino und Agrippa betrieben.”<sup>18</sup> Saxl was among the scholars who found the Arabic roots of this Latin version of the text. Warburg also notes that Emperor Maximilian (1459–1519) had two copies of this text. McEwan states, “to publish *Picatrix* was therefore an important task, as it presented a source for the understanding of early modern occultism. And indeed, the publication of *Picatrix* was a project which would occupy Warburg and his staff for many years to come.”<sup>19</sup> Warburg's engagement with publishing this text offers a counterpoint to the type of work being published through various lay presses, like the occult *Geheime Wissenschaften* (Secret Sciences) series, for example.<sup>20</sup>

Not all astrological texts are created equal, however. Anthony Grafton has recently noted that it wasn't until William Lilly that astrologers started to publish textbooks of astrology.<sup>21</sup> This mostly had to do with wanting to keep the methods of the lucrative art a secret. The *Picatrix* was expressly an astrological-magical text, not a textbook of astrological interpretive practice. Warburg was fascinated by the astral magic depicted within the *Picatrix*. In astral magic, a time is elected (electional astrology) to create a talisman (magical *not* astrological practice) with an image of the intended magical result. The confluence between the elected moment (astrology) and the image-object (magic) endows that object with a natal chart, and if the astrologer was

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<sup>17</sup> My emphasis. Saxl, *The History of Warburg's Library*, in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 327.

<sup>18</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 60.

<sup>19</sup> Dorothea McEwan, “Aby Warburg's (1866–1929) Dots and Lines. Mapping the Diffusion of Astrological Motifs in Art History,” *German Studies Review* 29, no. 2 (May 2006): 243–68, here, 248.

<sup>20</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke provides a bibliography of all the titles in this series in the bibliography at the end of *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Grafton, “Starry Messengers: Recent Work in the History of Western Astrology,” *Perspectives on Science* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 70–83.

good, the effect is heightened by virtue of the time of birth of the object. This type of magical deployment of astrology was at stake in Paul Wegener's depiction of the awakening of the Golem statue in his 1920 film, *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam*. But as is clear from psychological astrologers like Oscar A. H. Schmitz, astral magic is only *one way* of putting astrology into practice. Warburg's interest in astrology and the conclusions he made about it rest on the type of magico-astrological practice found in the *Picatrix* rather than on other forms of astrological practice.

The occult and astrological texts being printed by the more layperson-oriented presses didn't appear to be on par with the level of scholarly apparatus required by the academy. Neither Schmitz, Keyserling, Jung, or Warburg and even, as we'll see, Benjamin had any respect for Mme Blavastky's or Rudolph Steiner's work. For Warburg, familiar as he was with all the astrological "nonsense" circulating in his day, publishing scholarly studies of this material became part of his mission to fight against the spread of "nonsense." Essentially, Warburg possessed the scholarly skills and the means to be able to pursue this type of work in the manner acceptable to the academy, even though he himself never had a position at a university. The Warburg Institute reprints of archaic texts on medieval magic carry a sober academic patina, making those texts that were not produced with such a scholarly background appear unworthy of serious study.

To return to the larger picture, at every stage of its formation until it became attached to the University of London, Warburg's library was the product of a single family investing their private capital into a cultural institution. His family's international ties allowed them to escape the ravages of the inflation in Germany, and to continue to build up their library during the war.<sup>22</sup> In a sense, the cultural institution built by the Warburgs' during the extremes of the Weimar Republic could only survive by his brothers' emigrations. As we'll see later, Aby Warburg's unique connection to this aspect of inflation (and its effects on his family's wealth) will have a role to play in his perspective of "baroque" culture. Due to its fortuitous founding history, Warburg's collection of books became a focal point for the transmission of cultural knowledge in the Weimar Republic—in a sense becoming what it sought to study. Dorothea McEwan reminds us that,

Warburg even saw in his library an observation tower from which "the entire trade route of culture and symbols between Asia and America could be viewed." A pertinent Hamburg tradition with its Colonial Academy and shipping tradition was invoked when he declared the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg to be "a tower observing the trade routes of cultural exchange," scanning "our field of vision."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ron Chernow notes: "By making books prohibitively expensive, Germany's inflation hurt many private scholars who subsisted on family inheritances. When Max and Fritz could no longer buy books, they turned to Paul and Felix, whose dollars enabled Saxl to continue buying books uninterrupted. This, in turn, helped to attract top scholars. Both American brothers found Aby's work rather arcane and probably supported it more from fraternal love than any great conviction of its ultimate worth. Ironically, despite Aby's contempt for Anglo-Saxon culture, it was American money that saved his library in the 1920s, then English money in the 1930s." See, Chernow, *The Warburgs*, 256.

<sup>23</sup> McEwan, "Aby Warburg's (1866–1929) Dots and Lines," 251.

Thus, Warburg's library itself became a post in this trade route of ideas, one that could help scholars make sense of the ways people made sense of their worlds. Like Rabbi Löw probing the stars for meaning in his observational tower in *Golem*, Warburg's "observational tower" had as its main mission to probe the historical meanings of the stars for man.

### **Warburg, Prophecy, and the First World War**

Like esoteric practices in general, Warburg's investigation of astrology intensified during the period of the Great War. "The First World War," Mark Russell writes, "proved to Warburg that barbarism and irrationality did not belong to the past; he suffered horribly under the weight of its events. Early in the struggle, he decided to use the weapon he had at hand, his library, in a desperate effort to understand humanity's descent into unreason."<sup>24</sup> Warburg began collecting ephemeral literature on predictions and esoteric practices into what became known as his "Kriegskartothek." Doing so led him to an investigation into the ephemeral literature of the Reformation. Warburg became concerned with Martin Luther's belief in astrology, "How did this man regard the astrological pamphlets, the prognostics, and portents which at that time were pouring from the printing presses?"<sup>25</sup> He sought to compare his own time with a previous moment in German history, to see if he could draw any constructive parallels for making sense of the sudden surge of superstitious belief. The results of this investigation into astrology during the Reformation were given as lectures in 1917 and finally published in 1920, as *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten*. According to Dorothea McEwan, "The ongoing belief in astrology had to be interpreted as one that provided continuity in discontinuity, old beliefs in changing times. To understand the processes whereby it adapted to and was adopted by the new circumstances encountered would be a contribution to understanding its modern reemergence."<sup>26</sup> In his study of Warburg's "Kriegskartothek," Gottfried Korff says,

In seiner Kriegsaberglaubensforschung und –sammlung zeigte sich die 1917 von Saxl diagnostizierte Warburg'sche "Tendenz," "nicht den Wechsel der Dinge festzuhalten, sondern die Konstanz im Wechsel." Damit ist freilich kein ahistorische "Tendenz" gemeint, denn die "Heidnisch-antike Weissagung" war historisch in einem doppelten Sinn—bezogen auf die Umbruchszeit des 16. Jahrhunderts und bezogen auf die Umbruchszeit des Ersten Weltkriegs. [ . . . ] So war Warburgs Blick auf den astrologischen Aberglauben gewissermaßen komparatistisch ausgerichtet—auf die

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<sup>24</sup> Mark A. Russell, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Aby Warburg and the Public Purposes of Art in Hamburg, 1896–1918* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 207.

<sup>26</sup> McEwan, "Aby Warburg's (1866–1929) Dots and Lines," 248.

What becomes clear in McEwan and Korff's analysis is that Warburg understood astrological practice to be the constant, around which *the images* of its practice changed. However, astrology as a practice has its own developmental history. Over time, the mathematical calculations behind the images changed just as much as the images, but Warburg resisted seeing the images as symptomatic of a change in the practice of astrology itself. This factor is decisive for understanding the interpretations Warburg draws from his materials.

Warburg's monograph on Luther is structured in a circular or elliptical way. He begins his monograph with an episode about Philipp Melanchthon and a comet, and he returns to this point at the conclusion, effectively performing the pendulum-like motion in his argument that he maintains for the oscillation of magic and reason as cultural phenomena. The central bulk of the monograph concerns the debate around various rectified charts of Luther's birthday, which Warburg found puzzling. In professional astrological practice, to rectify a chart is to figure out a correct date from uncertain information, and it was a practice very common in medieval astrology when the exact birth time of a person was not known.<sup>28</sup> Given Luther's rise to fame, it would not be out of the question for astrologers to question whether Luther's birthday was accurate. However, in Luther's case, as Warburg shows, the astrologers attempted to move his birthday by an entire year, which is not plausible. This effort makes it seem more likely that the various rectified charts of Luther's birthday constitute a heated political propaganda. Oddly enough, this actually could have worked in Luther's favor. With so many various potential natal charts circulating, providing uncertain information, he is protected from any prognostication that could serve to harm him (whether or not the prognostication was actually true, people could take it upon themselves to make it true, as in political assassination and so forth). Warburg refers to these various charts as "kalendrische 'Wahrheiten,'" a historical and a mythical truth for the biographers of Luther's time.<sup>29</sup>

The appearance of the word *Weissagung* in the title already shows that this text will emphasize prognostication and not the diagnostic properties of astrology. In the opening letter from Philipp Melanchthon to Johann Carion about a comet, Warburg notes that Melanchthon "naht sich dem biedereren Carion wie ein trostsuchender Patient, und konsultiert ihn als sachverständigen Magus in astrologisch-prophetischen Dingen."<sup>30</sup> Melanchthon's tone as a "trostsuchender Patient" is similar to the tone Oscar A. H. Schmitz adopts in his letters to Count Keyserling and C. G. Jung.<sup>31</sup> As previously

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<sup>27</sup> Gottfried Korff, "Im Zeichen des Saturn," in Gottfried Korff, ed., *Kasten 117: Aby Warburg und der Aberglaube im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 2007), 181–213, here 202.

<sup>28</sup> See Nicholas Campion on the historical issues of chart rectification in "Mythical Moments in the Rectification of History," in Noel Tyl, ed., *Astrology looks at History* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1995), 25–64.

<sup>29</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Hermann Keyserling and Oscar A. H. Schmitz, *Sinnsuche oder Psychoanalyse. Briefwechsel Graf Hermann Keyserling—Oscar A. H. Schmitz aus den Tagen der*

discussed, Schmitz was less interested in astrology for its future-telling properties than for its psychologically diagnostic properties. Warburg picks up in passing on this element of comfort-seeking via astrology, but he refrains from discussing it in depth in those terms, preferring to place future-oriented astrology under his microscope.

Warburg viewed the astrological images he traced through history as what he calls “Gestirngötter.” Warburg defines them thus:

Die Gestirngötter [ . . . ] waren dämonische Wesen von unheimlich entgegengesetzter Doppelmacht: als *Sternzeichen* waren sie Raumerweiterer, Richtpunkte beim Fluge der Seele durch das Weltall, als *Sternbilder* Götzen zugleich, mit denen sich die arme Kreatur nach Kinder-menschenart durch ehrfürchtige Handlungen mystisch zu vereinigen strebte.<sup>32</sup>

The distinction Warburg makes here between the signs of the zodiac (*Sternzeichen*) and constellations (*Sternbilder*) exemplifies to the tension pervading his work between reason and magic. The symbol of the zodiac sign denotes a region of the heavens that is discrete and measurable. It was the classical mathematical way of interpreting the celestial sphere. The images of the constellations mapped onto the heavens are “false idols” (*Götzen*). In Warburg’s understanding, then, the stellar gods represent a unification of these two principles, oscillating between two poles or contradictory powers (*entgegengesetzter Doppelmacht*). What is interesting here is that the powers that seem to be set against one another are actually two layers of interpretation superimposed on one another: mathematical interpretation (for physical navigation) and mythological interpretation (for spiritual navigation).

The astronomer/astrologer was charged with decoding and interpreting these portents: “Der Sternkundige der Reformationszeit durchmißt eben diese dem heutigen Naturwissenschaftler unvereinbar erscheinenden Gegenpole zwischen mathematischer Abstraktion und kultlich verehrender Verknüpfung wie Umkehrpunkte einer einheitlichen weitschwingenden urtümlichen Seelenverfassung.”<sup>33</sup> Warburg identifies the astrologer as someone who once unified what is no longer commensurable in the natural sciences. In a sense, his attention to the astrologer as this unifier responds to larger currents of fragmentation being felt in German society at the time. But for Warburg, this

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*Schule der Weisheit*. Hessische Beiträge zur deutschen Literatur (Darmstadt: Gesellschaft Hessischer Literaturfreunde, 1970).

<sup>32</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 5. “were demoniac beings in whom uncannily contradictory powers were wedded together. As symbols of stars they helped to expand space by guiding the soul in its flight through the universe. As images of stars they were, at the same time, idols with which man in his wretchedness and childish fear tried to achieve a mystic union through acts of worship.” Translated in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 208.

<sup>33</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 5. “The star-gazer of the Reformation period embraces these twin poles which the modern scientist would consider incompatible. Mathematical abstraction and concrete cult of the stars as efficacious causes mark the range within which his primitive mentality is able to oscillate.” Translated in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 208.

unification remains problematic, and he uses a figure of thought he terms “*Denkraum*” or “space for thought” to sort it out.

Warburg’s definition of *Denkraum* seems to spring out of his interpretation of the “Gestirngötter,” that is the signs of the zodiac, the constellations, and their dual ontological and epistemological formation:

*Logik, die den Denkraum—zwischen Mensch und Objekt—durch begrifflich sondernde Bezeichnung schafft, und Magie, die eben diesen Denkraum durch abergläubisch zusammenziehende—ideelle oder praktische—Verknüpfung von Mensch und Objekt wieder zerstört, beobachten wir im weissagenden Denken der Astrologie noch als einheitlich primitives Gerät, mit dem der Astrologe messen und zugleich zaubern kann.*<sup>34</sup>

The system of astrological interpretation, of reading star signs and constellations, and its visual depiction in media throughout the history of human cultural expression, gives Warburg a model to form his hypotheses about the relationship between logic and magic. In this view, the astrologer commands over navigation of outer as well as inner space. Warburg celebrates the overcoming of measurement (*messen*) from magic (*zaubern*). Logic allows for a separation from this unified “primitive” state of affairs and establishes a contemplative distance between man and objects. When Warburg chooses to describe the astrologer as a magician, he derives this term from the astral magic depicted in the *Picatrix*. Whereas individuals like Schmitz and von Klöckler viewed astrology as an experiential science, engaging questions of scientific validity, Warburg maintains his analysis of astrology within the realm of magic.<sup>35</sup> Warburg’s assessment of astrology in the *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung* has had a huge impact on the conflation of astrology and demonic magic in modern scholarship:

In der Astrologie haben sich in unwiderleglicher Tatsächlichkeit zwei ganz heterogene Geistesmächte, die logischerweise einander nur befehlen müßten, zu einer Methode zusammengetan: Mathematik, das feinste Werkzeug abstrahierender Denkkraft, mit Dämonenfurcht, der primitivsten Form religiöser Verursachung. Während der Astrologe das Weltall einerseits im nüchternen Liniensystem klar und harmonisch erfaßt und die Stellungen der Fixsterne und Planeten zur Erde und zueinander genau und im voraus zu berechnen versteht, beseelt ihn vor seinen

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<sup>34</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 5–6. Emphasis Warburg’s. “*Logik*, which creates the space between man and the external world by means of discursive and conceptual signs, and *Magie*, which destroys that very space through superstitious practices that confuse man and the external world and create imagined or practical links between them—these two powers still form for the fortune-telling astrologer one primitive tool with which he can carry out measurements and work magic at the same time.” Translated in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 208.

<sup>35</sup> Revisiting the magical roots of astrology has come back into vogue as a reaction to the failed attempt of astrologers to speak the language of science. See Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology* (2002; repr. Bournemouth: Wessex Astrologer, 2005).

mathematischen Tafeln doch eine atavistische abergläubische Scheu vor diesen Sternnamen, mit denen er zwar wie mit Zahlzeichen umgeht, und die doch eigentlich Dämonen sind, die er zu fürchten hat.<sup>36</sup>

His insistence on calling constellations demons rests on his reliance, on the one hand, on the astral magic presented in the *Picatrix*, and on the other, with a productive misreading of texts that describe alternative modalities of astrological interpretation. Put another way, Warburg's focus on the transmission of images depicting astrological symbolism prevents him from attempting to understand the interpretational nuances at work in other forms of astrological practice. Claudia Brosseder has recently addressed the theory and practice of astrology in the social and intellectual history of sixteenth-century Germany, showing that "Melanchthon referred to a strictly naturalist interpretation of astrology, making Aristotle's *Physica*, *De generatione et corruptione*, and *De caelo* as well as Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* the point of departure of his thinking."<sup>37</sup> Demons are nowhere to be found. Thus she provides a corrective to Warburg's interpretation of astrologers as seeing—and fearing—astral demons. The Wittenberg astrologers "strove to praise astrology as a hermeneutic art that yielded knowledge of universal range, for the study of nature as well as for the history and fate of mankind and of human individuals in the past and future."<sup>38</sup> In analyzing the practice of one Wittenberg astrologer, namely Petrus Hosmann, Brosseder finds that, "he refers to Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, but most importantly, to the treasure trove of his personal experiences. This treasure of experiences was the astrologer's *arcantum* and the secret of his success or failure. This held true for an insignificant astrologer like Hosmann as well as an intellectually outstanding thinker like Girolamo Cardano."<sup>39</sup> This shows that even in the sixteenth-century the important role of personal experience with the interpretational art through time is a necessary prerequisite to successful interpretational practice. Schmitz was not alone in this assertion, and he was by no means new. As we'll see in the rest of this chapter and the next, the role of experience and astrological practice continues to be of paramount importance.

Ultimately, the Wittenberg astrologers "wanted to achieve a 'marriage' between Divine Providence and the most advanced science within astrology. They considered everybody who was not capable of recognizing this marriage a one-eyed cyclops."<sup>40</sup> The image of a "one-eyed cyclops" calls to mind the stereoscopic vision of Ernst Jünger in the "Sizilianischer Brief an den Mann in den Mond" (Sicilian Letter to the Man on the Moon), that requires us to view the moon in two ways to gain a new depth of experience in the world. It also echoes Marcuse's diagnosis of the one-dimensional man, who suffers under the oppressive flatness of instrumental reason in the form of late

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<sup>36</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Claudia Brosseder, "The Writing in the Wittenberg Sky: Astrology in Sixteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 4 (Oct. 2005): 557–76, here, 563.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 574.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 565.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 575.

industrial capitalism.<sup>41</sup> The celestial perspective counteracts this tendency to one-dimensionality by creating a frame of reference against which the individual could compare himself and contemplate himself in the context of various human communities throughout recorded history.

Contrary to Warburg's insistence on discussion of astrology in deterministic terms, Melanchthon and his colleagues maintained the concept of man's free will. For them astrology was not deterministic. Brosseder found that "Through judicious astrology, they claimed, an astrologer can only discern a man's inclination, but not predict his actual actions."<sup>42</sup> This sentiment echoes exactly the attitudes of Schmitz' and other astrologers contemporary to Warburg. In contrast with them, it seems that Warburg needed to see something deterministic in astrology in order to maintain the intellectual cohesion of his project.

Most importantly, the Wittenberg astrologers do not seem to be aware of the type of astrology that formed the basis of Warburg's understanding of it. Brosseder says, "There are no hints in the books of the Wittenberg scholars showing that they adapted to Ficino's astrology."<sup>43</sup> So, as she puts it,

in the cold north on the shore of the Elbe, we do not feel any of the splendid magic of Italian art, in which the planets, transformed into pagan gods, traversed the vaults of ecclesiastical or noble buildings in opulently decorated celestial chariots. The Wittenberg print products were never adorned by emblems suggestive of paganism. No, Saturn was only an ethereal cluster and not the menacing god who devoured his offspring. With this naturalist soberness, Melanchthon wanted to dispel the suspicion that he communicated with demons.<sup>44</sup>

Warburg didn't register any of this. His hunt for astrological demons sought justification in an image of the thirty degrees of Scorpio, which assigns different images as "rulers" for each degree. These are known as *parans*, yet Warburg refers to them as "Schicksalshieroglyphen."<sup>45</sup> This term fits the images much better than his other term "demon" since some of the images are of towers, or rivers, and not living beings (such as animals, people, or monsters). As hieroglyphs then, they are understood to need decoding. Warburg views them as rulers in an anthropomorphic sense rather than as emblems for the qualities of specific degrees of this sign, which can be understood in their correspondence with (and not causal determination of) human nature. Warburg analyzes a stunning example of one of these *parans* and the attendant celestial constellation depicted as a devil on a monk's shoulder in a woodcut in the 1492 text *Weissagungen* by Johannes Lichtenberger.<sup>46</sup> Warburg discusses the later attribution of

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<sup>41</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964).

<sup>42</sup> Brosseder, "The Writing in the Wittenberg Sky," 564.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 563.

<sup>45</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 41. For a discussion of the *parans*, see Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 197–98.

<sup>46</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 40.

the image to Luther and Melanchthon, and then he quotes a letter by Valerius Herberger to capture testimony of Luther's reaction to this image. Rather than dismiss the image entirely, Luther converts the prophetic interpretation of the images into a diagnostic interpretation, which serves to actually recapture and reinforce the salience of the astrological imagery.

Popular interpretations of Lichtenberger's image suggested that devil was a cohort of the monk. Combating this view, Luther interprets the devil on his shoulder metaphorically as the Pope, the Kaiser, and the potentates (princes). Luther says, "Ey Herr Doctor / sehet nur das Bild ein wenig besser an / wo sitzt der Teuffel? / Er sitzt nicht dem Muenche im hertzen / sondern auff dem necken [...] aber ich meyne er sitzt mir auff dem nacken / durch Bapst / Keyser und grosse Potentaten / und alles was in der Welt wil klug seyn."<sup>47</sup> Luther reinterprets the image by performing a close reading, "sehet nur das Bild ein wenig besser an." The devil becomes a diagnostic metaphor for the burdens that the Pope, Kaiser and other elites place on him, as opposed to a prognostic depiction as his ally in destroying faith through malicious aid. Warburg shies away from exploring how Luther's metaphorical reading turns this prognostication into a diagnosis. Rather than dismissing the image as being an unfit description of his situation, Luther embraces and celebrates it. In this sense, even though Luther thinks that his inversion of the message represented in this star-based image defeats the message, it actually fits in with the range of possibilities given by such star knowledge.

Warburg's study establishes another link between the early modern period and the early twentieth century. His monograph on astrology during the Reformation strikes at the heart of the debate on international legibility of images and technology common in discussions about the medium of film at the time.<sup>48</sup> While the printing press reproduced flyers at an unprecedented rate during the Reformation, in Warburg's own time, a new technology of moving image, the cinema, and its international legibility was at stake. He compares the early modern print technology with propaganda and the establishment of an international language of images:

Die Furcht vor den wahrsagenden Naturwundern am Himmel und auf Erden, die ganz Europa teilte, wurde durch die Tagespresse in ihren Dienst genommen: War schon den Druck mit beweglichen Lettern der gelehrte Gedanke aviatisch geworden, so gewann jetzt durch die Bilderdruckkunst auch die bildliche Vorstellung, deren Sprache noch dazu international verständlich war, Schwingen zwischen Norden und Süden jagten nun diese aufregenden ominösen Sturmvoegel hin und her, während jede Partei versuchte, diese "Schlagbilder"(wie man sagen könnte) der kosmologischen Sensation in den Dienst ihrer Sache zu stellen.<sup>49</sup>

Thoughts, by way of moveable type in the pamphlets, or flyers, essentially, have become "aeronautical" (*aviatisch geworden*). This German neologism is a great pun on

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<sup>47</sup> Valerius Herberger, *Gloria Lutheri* (Leipzig, 1612), 41–45, found in Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 45.

<sup>48</sup> Most notably by Béla Balázs; see Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

<sup>49</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 35.

*Flugblätter*—literally, flying leaves—that suggests a strong similarity between the propaganda of the Reformation and the moving images of the twentieth century. But interestingly, Warburg hints that the language of images actually gained international currency at this time, “die bildliche Vorstellung, deren Sprache noch dazu international verständlich war.” Thus he contradicts Béla Balázs’ famous assertion that since the Gutenberg press and moveable type, people have started to become blind to reading images, and only with moving pictures (the cinema) are we able to see again.<sup>50</sup> For Warburg, the legibility and the primacy of the image never went away. Warburg’s evocation of an internationally legible language of images touches both upon the early modern interest in the “*Ursprache*” and hieroglyphs, as well as, the film debates, *Kino-Debatte*, taking place in the Weimar Republic at that time.<sup>51</sup> Oddly enough however, images, while taken to be internationally understandable, are actually always culturally coded in fundamental ways. Warburg was not yet a part of a cultural moment that could know that the ideal of an international image language based itself on a notion of a universality that didn’t exist in practice.

Warburg sees the material he has presented in his essay on Luther as “bisher ungelesene Urkunden zur tragischen Geschichte der Denkfreiheit des modernen Europäers.”<sup>52</sup> Yet, the star knowledge brought to Europe by the Arabs wasn’t foisted upon them unwillingly. As Richard Woodfield has noted, “the introduction of Arabic astrology into Western Europe heralded the *renovatio* of the science of astronomy.”<sup>53</sup> Warburg’s insistence on viewing this trajectory in terms of overcoming superstition actually blinded him from seeing the myriad positive legacies left by this cultural transfer. Bernd Roeck emphasizes the eurocentricity of Warburg’s vision:

Der Zivilisationsprozeß, den Warburg hier identifizieren zu können meint, hat eine horizontale Dimension; die Perspektive ist eurozentrisch. In Europa dringt die durch die Wiederentdeckung antiken Geistes erweckte Rationalität durch, “Mittelalter” und “Orient” überwindend; die Struktur der Geschichte bestimmt er als dialektisch, sie ist geprägt von den Antithesen Logik und Magie, Fortschritt und Regression, Chaos und Zivilisiertheit.<sup>54</sup>

For all its claims to universality, it is a very eurocentric universal. His effort to liberate mankind from magic fear participates in ideologies of progress and conquest. Richard Woodfield has noted that:

Anthropology, as a discipline of understanding and self-understanding, has moved on since Warburg’s day. It’s also important to add that the

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<sup>50</sup> For more on this see, Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> Anton Kaes, *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film* (Munich: dtv, 1978).

<sup>52</sup> Warburg, *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung*, 70.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Woodfield, “Warburg’s ‘Method,’” in Richard Woodfield, ed., *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg’s Projects* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts, 2001), 259–93, here 283.

<sup>54</sup> Roeck, “Psychohistorie im Zeichen Saturns,” 236–37.

world has changed since Warburg visited the Pueblo Indians: a multi-cultural sensitivity has led to an awareness of the process of demonization. Cultural difference is not the same as irrationality and one cannot help but feel that Warburg's own pathological condition shaped his views on paganism: paganism was not pagan in his sense.<sup>55</sup>

How did contemporaries react to Warburg's Luther essay? The contemporary reception and impact of Warburg's *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung* wasn't immediately felt. Fritz Saxl undertook painstaking work to both popularize Warburg's new book, as well as revitalize Warburg himself (which had the unintended effect of making Saxl a very well known figure in academia at the time). Dorothea McEwan has documented nearly every response and comment that Saxl received about the book while Warburg was in the Sanatorium in Kreuzlingen.<sup>56</sup> Yet in all the responses, McEwan points out that there were only two individuals who offered criticisms. The first negative review shows Warburg's disconnect with the astrological revival happening all around him, in spite of his collection of astrological ephemera during the war. McEwan says:

There was one comment which was not favorable. It came from Ludwig Rudolph in Osterode, who disagreed with the main direction of Warburg's thoughts, as reported in Paul Hildebrandt's review under that title "Die Weisheit der Sterne." In his letter to Warburg, he confessed that he had not yet read the book, but understood from the review that Warburg saw "astrology as nothing else but the totally unsuccessful attempt for creating an attitude to life." He conceded that Warburg could probably deduce such a view from sources available to him but he wanted to point to facts which can only be ascertained by practice: "He who thinks that astrology preaches fatalism, errs. It will supply practical wisdom to him who understands it well. I am prepared to prove this at any time." He hoped for a reply, but there is no mention of him later on.<sup>57</sup>

Rudolph, perhaps for criticizing Warburg, or perhaps for accusing him of missing some key insights about astrology stemming from a lack of practical experience, was met with silence. McEwan herself does not delve any deeper into analyzing what this criticism might mean. That Rudolph didn't read the book before writing is unfortunate, however, his ideas about Warburg's understanding of astrology are exactly right. Rudolph's contact with Warburg shows that those practicing astrology were aware of Warburg's presence and open to assisting him to arrive at a better understanding of this as *Erfahrungswissenschaft*.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Woodfield, "Warburg's 'Method,'" 287–88.

<sup>56</sup> Dorothea McEwan, "Making a Reception for Warburg: Fritz Saxl and Warburg's Book *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten*," in Woodfield, *Art History as Cultural History*, 93–120.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>58</sup> See the second chapter of this dissertation.

The second major criticism of the work came from the scholar Carl Fr. Meinhof, who was upset with Warburg's account of Babylonian astrology. Saxl appears to have had an extremely defensive reaction to this:

[Carl Fr.] Meinhof's main criticism turned on Warburg's description of Babylon as the cradle of astrology. Whilst this was surely the case for the classical world, it was not the case for other continents, as exemplified by the system of astrology in Mexico. Saxl retorted that Warburg had not researched Babylonian astrology as such, he had only been interested in the "Wanderung," the journey of oriental astrology, of the processes being adapted to and adopted by new circumstances encountered. [Saxl said w]hether or not Luther believed in astrology and divination was "very difficult" to ascertain. "In order to characterize Luther fully, one would really have to say that it was not simply that he did not believe in all these things."<sup>59</sup>

In his response to Meinhof, Saxl clarifies that Warburg's vision was expressly eurocentric, which accounted for his lack of research into Babylonian astrology as such. In addition, according to McEwan, Saxl wrote to another potential reviewer that, "he would not need to summarize the astrological contents, as Warburg used the astrological material only to explain the psychology of people in the Reformation."<sup>60</sup> But Saxl's use of the term psychology is very different from Schmitz's use of the term. Rather than use the symbol language of astrology to explain the people in the Reformation, Warburg looked at their use of astrology at all as an explanation of their psychology.

Saxl and Warburg's defensive posturing might be better understood if we view their dependence upon Franz Boll. Warburg had been in contact with Boll requesting information about constellations and eclipses to provide evidence that would "show an instance of survival of classical astrology among Luther's contemporaries which went so far as to change Luther's date of birth from 10<sup>th</sup> November 1483 to 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1484—an example of retrospective prophecy and the power of belief in stars."<sup>61</sup> McEwan paraphrases Saxl's reply to Boll on September 13, 1920,

Neither he nor Saxl, he wrote, could finish the article without Boll. They needed Boll's "competent astrological view," as Saxl wrote, in one very important aspect: "the link of Luther's nativity by Gauricus to the prophecy by Lichtenberger. Does Gauricus go back directly to Lichtenberger?" Saxl enclosed the copy of the Gauricus nativity, showing "Saturn, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Sol all (in the ninth house) together with Scorpion, Mars in the second house in Aries" and the Lichtenberger text and raised the question of the position of Mars: "He is in a ruling house. Can this be Aries? But above all, can Mars be ruler of this conjunction without even standing in conjunction with Jupiter and Saturn or to be on the ascendant (he is in the second house!)? The answer to these

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<sup>59</sup> McEwan, "Making a Reception for Warburg," 110.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

questions is important for the whole history of the trajectory of astrological ideas.”<sup>62</sup>

On an extremely specific level, the question that Saxl poses to Boll about Mars acknowledges that he and Warburg were not interested in the practice of astrology. According to the way astrologers interpret charts, Mars rules the conjunction because the conjunction is in Scorpio, and traditionally, Scorpio is ruled by the planet Mars. In the system of depositors, Mars would rule this conjunction no matter where it was placed in the chart. Saxl is looking for a direct link to the conjunction (i.e., to solve how a planet can rule or lord over a conjunction if it isn't in a physical proximity to said conjunction). This evidence suggests that although they were interested in the symbolic meaning of astrological images, they stopped short of learning how to practice astrology, preferring instead to rely on Boll's expertise.

On a final note, it is useful to view Warburg's *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung* in light of other studies on superstition taking place at the time. Ralph Winkle has recently contextualized Warburg's "Kriegskartothek" alongside other research by contemporary German folklorists and French anthropologists (of religion) on wartime superstitious and prophetic practices. In their search for explanations for the upsurge in superstitious belief and practice, or "irrationaler Strömungen," during World War I, they came to many of the same conclusions.<sup>63</sup>

Auf diese Weise habe die moderne Kriegserfahrung eine Tiefenschicht im menschlichen Verhalten freigelegt, das durch Affekte, Emotionen und Triebe geprägt sei, welche sich in magischen Handlungs- und Deutungsmustern objektivierten. Diese waren von der "Sehnsucht" geleitet, die unsicher gewordene Zukunft berechenbar zu machen: "Diese Sehnsucht tritt in der Geschichte des Aberglaubens [...] wirksam hervor, sie treibt immer wieder zu Orakeln, Prophezeihungen und wissenschaftlichen Voraussagen."<sup>64</sup>

Most interestingly, Winkle suggests that the uncertainty created by technology in modern warfare precipitated the foundation for the impression of an uncertain future: "Für den Teilnehmer des Krieges, in dem der Feind die meiste Zeit unsichtbar blieb und die gegnerischen Geschosse mit bloßem Auge nicht wahrgenommen werden konnten, wurde alles zum Zeichen eines in einer ungewissen Zukunft liegenden Schicksals."<sup>65</sup> This view linking the rise of technology to the rise of magical-fatalistic thinking was

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 101. McEwan cites the letter as: [UB Heidelberg, Heid.Hs. 2109, F. Saxl to F. Boll, 13.09.1920.]

<sup>63</sup> Ralph Winkle, "Masse und Magie: Anmerkungen zu einem Interpretament der Aberglaubensforschung während des Ersten Weltkriegs," in Korff, *Kasten 117*, 261–99, here 273. One interesting thing to note about this article is that all of the thinkers that he consults discuss astrology in its predictive, not its diagnostic, form. And Winkle is interested in prognostication, so he doesn't discuss its diagnostic form either.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 265. He quotes from Erich Becher, "Zusammenbruch der Wissenschaft," *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 9 (June 1927): 187–90.

<sup>65</sup> Winkle, "Masse und Magie," 278.

echoed in the French sources he consulted: “Auch Lucien Roure, der in seiner 1917 erschienen Abhandlung über die ‘Superstitions du front de Guerre’ eine Funktionsbestimmung abergläubischer Verhaltensweisen vornahm, sah die zunehmende Hypertrophie der industrialisierten Kriegstechnologie mit einer wachsenden Ohnmacht der einzelnen Soldaten einhergehen, die sie in ihrem magisch-fatalistischen Glauben bestärkte.”<sup>66</sup> And further, “Roure wies den superstitiösen Verhaltensweisen der Kriegsteilnehmer deshalb nicht mehr den Status archaischer Relikte zu, sondern begriff sie als die dem modernen Krieg adäquate Form der Kontingenzbewältigung, die den Soldaten Hoffnung gab, im Chaos der Schlachtfelder zu überleben, unverletzt zu bleiben und die Angst vor dem herannahenden Trommelfeuer durch rituelle Handlungen zu bannen.”<sup>67</sup> That is, these seemingly archaic forms of *Kontingenzbewältigung* are adequately suited to modern war.

Winkle’s study brings out a finding from the French anthropologists that carries some weight here: “Der Hang der Kriegsteilnehmer zum magischen Denken [...] sei vielmehr der Angst besetzten Kriegserfahrung geschuldet.”<sup>68</sup> Winkle says that the collective threat the experience of war posed to the individual had more to do with the renewed surge in prophetic practice than with some external manipulative swindler forcing superstitions on the masses. For example, “diese Erkenntnisperspektive übernehmend, wandte sich Karl Helm gegen die These, dass der Glaube an die Macht der Sterne von Deutungseliten in manipulativer Absicht oktroyiert worden sei, und verwies auf den Zusammenhang von Kriegszeiten und dem kollektiven Bedürfnis nach einer Antizipation des Zukünftigen, um das eigene Handeln daran ausrichten zu können.”<sup>69</sup> That is, people were not coercing the masses to flock to prophetic practices from on high. There were no elite masters in charge of this cultural phenomenon. This concept of “Deutungseliten” is echoed in Carl Christian Bry’s work.<sup>70</sup> Bry’s *Verkappte Religionen* documents not only the increase in superstitious practice, but also many other practices in modern life that function as disguised religions, most of which have nothing to do with easily identifiable superstitions. Bry reveals how so many seemingly secular activities in modern life base themselves on a certain type of rationality that cloaks an underlying irrational character. In the study of the resurgence of the occult, it is easy to get swept away with content, by studying Theosophy, or spiritism for example. Bry suggests that many other types of clubs and techniques of life are prey to similar cultish activity, and they are even more insidious because they do not masquerade themselves as being subjects of either religious belief or superstition. The key feature is the presence of complex terminology—the language of the hard sciences versus that of economics, for example—that allows groups to define themselves hierarchically over and against other groups. Language itself becomes the basis upon which to decide who is a

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. Winkle quotes from Karl Helm: “Kriegs- und Friedensprophezeihungen,” *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde* 13 (1914): 195–98.

<sup>70</sup> Carl Christian Bry, *Verkappte Religionen* (Gotha/Stuttgart: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1925); see also Joshua Gunn’s *Modern Occult Rhetoric Mass Media and the Drama of Secrecy in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005) for a modern application of this.

member of the group or not, and more often than not, this power is awarded to a select group of elites. It is interesting that there is an urge to attribute the spread of esoteric phenomena to a group of powerful individuals rather than realize that the susceptibility to these types of practices moved in the other direction—that is, from regular individuals living under extreme threat. Winkle maintains, “Wie religiöse Muster überhaupt, so entstehen nach Meinung Hellwigs and Helms abergläubisch gefärbte Prophezeihungen in Situationen kollektiver Bedrohung, die die Zukunft und damit das eigene Schicksal sowie das der Angehörigen ungewiss werden lassen.”<sup>71</sup>

Here again Warburg’s intent to liberate man from what he called “magic fear” is turned on its head. According to the French anthropologists, the impulse to engage in esoteric practice comes from the deep-seated desire to overcome fear of the unknown; magic becomes a tool to establish emotions of comfort, not fear. When looked at this way, this explanation underscores Schmitz’s practice of astrology, and sheds new light on Warburg’s reaction to overcoming fear. Rather than practicing magic himself, Warburg spent his life studying it from an all-too-safe distance.

### **On Warburg’s Hermeneutic Method**

Warburg’s hermeneutic method arose out of his examination of these early modern astrological texts and images. Here, Warburg’s debt to nineteenth century anthropology makes itself felt. In her article on Warburg’s serpent ritual book, Sigrid Weigel pinpoints the problems with reading evoked by Warburg’s body of work. Weigel says, “by referring, for instance, to the category of humanity and to the ‘major universal processes of development’ in his texts, or by describing a comprehensive system of symbolic forms in terms of typological stages of developments, Warburg’s oeuvre tends toward a universalization which has the additional effect of buttressing his position, a move necessary in the face of his transgression of disciplinary boundaries and epochal orders.”<sup>72</sup> But scholars since Warburg’s time have gained an appreciation for cultural difference grounded in semiotics, and “it is no longer a question of comprehensive explanations or universal development, but rather the problem of the *legibility*, or rather of *reading*, that now is foregrounded.”<sup>73</sup> When taken at this level, a whole new element of Warburg’s oeuvre reveals itself. Weigel continues:

For precisely at those junctures where Warburg’s understanding of the symbols gains a conceptual form, the entire ballast of nineteenth-century biological and evolutionist thinking makes itself felt: be it in the description of a development away from instinct, or the body, to intellect, from magic to reason, from darkness to light, or in the understanding of the work of civilization as a process of de-demonization and de-toxification. It is his belief that at the origin of history there lies a phobic stimulus, the mastering of which moves upwards through the stages of magic, mythical, symbolic, and logical form. Warburg locates this

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<sup>71</sup> Winkle, “Masse und Magie,” 285.

<sup>72</sup> Weigel, “Aby Warburg’s *Schlangenritual*,” 141–42.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

evolution in the recurrent creation of a distance between man and nature as threat, and qualifies the increase in distance as the emergence of room for thought [*Denkraum*].<sup>74</sup>

Our awareness of Warburg's intellectual debt to the nineteenth century has been maintained most vocally by Ernst Gombrich: "Ich halte es für wichtig, ausdrücklich zu betonen, wie sehr Warburg wesentlich vom Geist des 19. Jahrhunderts geprägt wurde."<sup>75</sup> Warburg's sought to document the transition between medieval and modern culture in his work, but this search for the traces of the transition, Gombrich argues, had a specifically evolutionist slant. In one sense, the evolutionist trend in Warburg's thought helps to account for his resistance to realizing astrology's capacity for making symbolic correspondence legible to man. Warburg does not acknowledge the message of Melanchthon, and later Schmitz: "the stars incline they do not compel." To acknowledge this maxim would disrupt his entire avenue of reasoning with respect to astral symbolism. Warburg refuses to entertain a universe where correspondence is not causally deterministic. At its core lies the problem of mimesis.

In nineteenth century anthropological debates, mimesis took on "a wider meaning as a category of experience"; mimesis was associated with the experiential realities of so-called "primitive" or "partially civilized" peoples and is the foundation for magical or occult affinities.<sup>76</sup> Matthew Rampley and Philippe-Alain Michaud have refuted Gombrich's assertion that Warburg belonged to the intellectual heritage of the nineteenth-century by showing that Warburg did not believe in "progress."<sup>77</sup> But causality and progress are not one and the same. Warburg's insistence on finding causal effects is what is at stake. According to Gombrich, Warburg thought, "the original link between two projected causes is that of motherhood. It is the primeval causal category. The family trees of mythological beings and their link—through totemism—with the tribe foreshadow the structured image of the universe which contains the germ of science."<sup>78</sup> Warburg's emphasis on causality as an explanatory factor does not require a teleology of "progress," but the concept of filial relation between phenomena places him squarely in the same realm. His need to have proof of contact eliminates his ability to seek alternative explanatory modes, such as correspondence and similarity. Later, Walter Benjamin would argue that motherhood does not even constitute a causal connection. In a fragment from July or August 1919 titled "Analogie und Verwandtschaft" Benjamin claims that "Die Mutter ist dem Kinde verwandt, weil sie es geboren hat—das ist aber kein Causalzusammenhang; der Vater ist mit dem Kinde verwandt, wohl weil er es gezeugt, aber jedenfalls nicht durch dasjenige an der Zeugung,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>75</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich, "Aby Warburg und der Evolutionismus des 19. Jahrhunderts," in Robert Galitz and Brita Reimers, eds., *Aby M. Warburg: "ekstatische Nymphe . . . trauernder Flussgott": Portrait eines Gelehrten* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 1995), 52–73, here 52.

<sup>76</sup> Matthew Rampley, "Mimesis and Allegory. On Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin," in Woodfield, *Art History as Cultural History*, 121–49, here 122.

<sup>77</sup> Rampley, "Mimesis and Allegory," 129; Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*.

<sup>78</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 219.

was Ursache der Geburt ist oder scheint.” Thus in Benjamin’s early thought, relationship and causality have to be carefully sorted out. He states, “Verwandtschaft is rätselhaft,” which leaves Warburg with no easy answers.<sup>79</sup>

Warburg’s emphasis on evolutionary causality shifted in his later work to a model based on a continual oscillation between poles of expression and orientation. The celestial imaginary continued to play a role for Warburg here. He found in Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* a model of “the identification of stylistic trends with permanent psychological states which gradually replaced the evolutionist’s model in Warburg’s system of thought. And thus his scholarly instinct guided him to the field in which his interpretation of the polarities of the human mind could best be substantiated—the study of man’s attitudes to the stars.”<sup>80</sup> Put another way, “astrology thus provided Warburg with the most telling example of the bipolarity of the image.”<sup>81</sup> This polarity established a type of hermeneutic neutrality, essentially maintaining that something could be interpreted in polar opposite ways, depending on the situation of the interpreter and the text. This is, Gombrich argues, how pagan deities could be present works of Christian art, sublimated to mean the opposite in the Christian scenario as in the pagan one:

The symbol or “engram” is a charge of latent energy, but the way in which it is discharged may be positive or negative—as murder or rescue, as fear or triumph, as pagan maenad or Christian Magdalen. In this sense Warburg could describe the “engrams” as “neutral” in their charge. Only through contact with the “selective will” of an age does it become “polarized” into one of the interpretations of which it is potentially capable. [...] In this way, Warburg could reformulate his view of tradition as a neutral force.<sup>82</sup>

In his later work, Warburg comes to identify the hermeneutic openness that adheres to astrological symbols. In one of his journals Warburg writes, “A tension lacking polarity, essentially the vernacular of astrology, the symbol that takes on the colour of its background, a chameleon of energy.”<sup>83</sup> Here is the closest Warburg ever came to unleashing the type of hermeneutic power figures like Schmitz found so helpful in astrological practice. Even Luther struck upon this symbolic charge when he reinterpreted Lichtenberger’s woodcut. But even in this neutrality Warburg maintains the idea that celestial symbols are either to be interpreted as signs for scientific orientation or as magical demons. As Gombrich says, for Warburg “it was up to the individual who came into contact with this part of our heritage to decide whether to succumb to the primitive associations which turned these symbols into demons who

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<sup>79</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Analogie und Verwandtschaft,” in *Gesammelte Schriften* IV:43–45.

<sup>80</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 184–85.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 248–49.

<sup>83</sup> Warburg, *Journal*, VII, 1929, 251. “Unpolargespannt, eigentlich das xoinh, in der Astrologie, das passiv abfärbig ist, ein Chameleon der Energie.” Found in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 252.

ruled over human life—or to resist the temptation and instead turn to the energy derived from these cosmic symbols to the business of orientation.”<sup>84</sup> Gombrich was the first to chart a shift toward the end of Warburg’s life in which he moved from reading the astrological images less as an expression of humanity’s movement toward reason, and more along the lines of points of orientation:

the study of astrological imagery brought Warburg once more into contact with the basic questions of mankind, the emergence of rationality from magic fears. But it also suggested to him that evolutionism was not the answer to this permanent riddle. Every instrument of thought was double-edged, as it were. We always think in images and these images have their own power to enlighten us or to mislead us.<sup>85</sup>

Warburg maintained that there was a need for the cultural critic to acknowledge the symbol’s archaic past, to avoid evacuating it of all meaning. Here he points to Dürer’s transformation of the fear-inducing power of Saturn into the contemplative figure of Melancholia in his woodcut *Melencholie I*. The image itself depicts details that connect it to a long heritage of iconographical representations of Saturn’s power, yet lift it to a new realm of reflective thought. Finding evidence of this lineage was important for Warburg, for without this link, the symbol would be evacuated of all meaning. This loss of meaning is associated with how Warburg viewed later developments in Baroque art. Gombrich notes Warburg uses fiscal language to describe this phenomena, and, in fact, true to the legacy of his own family, resorts to a comparison of with the banking system. Warburg,

spoke of the gold reserves of suffering of which our civilization disposes and compared the ancient heritage to a mint or “savings bank” whose issues were backed by the archaic passions of which they bore the stamp. In this reading, “baroque” means inflation in the economic sense of the word—a mounting expression to an ever higher pitch without a corresponding increase in value. In other contexts Warburg liked to speak of these baroque clichés as “disconnected dynamo-grams,” for these products of an empty rhetoric had lost their original contact with the basic experience of mankind.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, in this view, the iconographic image must continue to carry a link to its origin in order for there to be a meaningful link to the “basic experience” of man. Gombrich says, “In Warburg’s view these inflationary tendencies which turned the coinage of profound experience into the paper money of empty flourishes were mainly due to the printing press which spread these facile adaptations of a once expressive language of forms all over Europe.”<sup>87</sup> The historian Fernand Braudel has noted a

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<sup>84</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 251.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>86</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 249–50. Plate 50a.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 250. Warburg quote from, *Übungen*, Notebook, 1927–28, 20, reprinted on the same page.

devilish dimension to the appearance of paper money and instruments of credit in the sixteenth-century, “If most contemporaries found money a ‘difficult cabbala to understand,’ this type of money that was not money at all, and this juggling of money and bookkeeping to a point where the two became confused, seemed not only complicated but diabolical.”<sup>88</sup> Warburg’s sensitivity to inflation was surely heightened by his family’s banking history. Germany gave up the gold standard at the beginning of World War One. This would have been a big deal to a banking family like the Warburgs. Perhaps Warburg’s fear of inflation (due to his family’s wealth) related to his fear of dilution of symbolic meaning in art during the baroque?

In his journal, Warburg wrote: “Classicizing *pathos* as the inflated values of a paper currency. The triumphal arch of the Emperor Maximilian.”<sup>89</sup> This note about Maximilian’s triumphal arch could allude to the preface of *Dürer Melancholia I*, where Arpad Weixlgärtner draws the link between two different sets of hieroglyphs and the deliberate and profuse ornamentation of the arch.<sup>90</sup> Maximilian sought to charge his arch with the ultimate meaning and include as many figures and hieroglyphs as he could into it. Warburg wrote in his journal, “The function of the disconnected pictorial dynamograms only made possible by the printing press. This alone postulates the Esperanto or vulgar Latin of the language of Gestures.”<sup>91</sup> If the reproductive capabilities of the printing press were cause for concern in the early modern period, modern technologies of flight and communication posed even greater threats in Warburg’s mind. Electro-technical information allows us to experience the new without a necessary “chain of events” that is so crucial in Warburg’s conception of the production of meaning and symbolic significance. Magic and technology pose a double threat and another experiential way that the idea of correspondence could reemerge. According to Gombrich, Warburg held that

in the rational world things did not act upon each other at a distance without intermediaries, as they did in the world of witchcraft and sorcery. Man need not fear because he can grasp and isolate causes through detachment, stepping back, as it were, to contemplate the chain of events. This possibility of taking thought Warburg called *Denkraum*, the zone of reasoning, and it was this chance for reflection which he saw threatened by the “lightning speed” of electro-technical information. He never accepted

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<sup>88</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 471. Braudel takes this “cabbala” reference from M. de Malestroit, a sixteenth-century French thinker.

<sup>89</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 250. Warburg quote from, *Übungen*, Notebook, 1927–28, 20, reprinted on the same page. “Das antikische Pathos als Inflationswert Papierwährung. Ehrenpforte für Kaiser Maximilian.”

<sup>90</sup> Arpad Weixlgärtner, “Zum Geleite,” in Fritz Saxl and Erwin Panofsky, *Dürer’s Melencolia I. Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1923), ix–xv, here xi.

<sup>91</sup> Warburg, *Allgemeine Ideen*, Notebook, 1927, 37. Translated in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 251.

the wireless because of this threatening obliteration of distance. What would he have said to television from the moon?<sup>92</sup>

As I have shown above, Oscar A. H. Schmitz's journey to self-understanding proves that contemporaries of Warburg engaged with astrological thought in a different way. Schmitz utilized astrology as a way to overcome the state's desire to determine his personal freedom. The idea that his personality could be connected to an objective pattern of planets and stars actually helped him to *establish* a space to think about himself and to also open his mind to new arenas of the self that were closed off before he explored the celestial map of his personality. Warburg's emphasis on physical causality prevented him from being able to see alternative modes of orientation unleashed by astrological contemplation (emotional orientation) and technology (geographical orientation). However, Warburg primarily occupied himself with the history of astrological symbolism, which, in its own way, aligned him with Schmitz. That is the disparate temporalities that come together under the rubric of astrological symbolism and its various cultural manifestations constitute a sort of cosmopolitan non-place—a heterotopia—that has a universalizing tendency. For example, Warburg's interest in the history of astrological symbolism *in general* must be set off against figures, like the scholar Heinz Arthur Strauß, who were interested in astrological symbolism *in Germany*.<sup>93</sup> Even though astrology did not provide the emotional relief for Warburg that it did for Schmitz, it still provided Warburg with an intellectual refuge.

Warburg's last, unfinished project, the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, presents another iteration of Warburg's involvement with the history of the celestial imagination. And this project, being an atlas, was expressly dedicated to the idea of orientation. In his opening speech to the exhibit of Warburg's Mnemosyne project in the Kunsthaus in Hamburg on June 2, 1994, Werner Hofmann uttered the most concise formulation of the hermeneutic praxis of the *Mnemosyne* project: "Er denkt in Zwischenräumen."<sup>94</sup> Rampley recalls that, "In an early draft for the *Mnemosyne* introduction, Warburg speaks of his project as an 'Iconology of the Interval. Art historical material for a developmental psychology of the oscillation between a theory of causation based on images and one based on signs.'"<sup>95</sup> This title shows Warburg's continued reliance on causality as an explanatory principle. Yet, Hofmann identifies a mode of reading Warburg's panels that resists horizontal, left to right motions. Their arrangement challenges the common art museum experience. The images of the artworks are all photographs, no originals, which on one level, flattens them and strips them of any aura

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<sup>92</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 224.

<sup>93</sup> Heinz Arthur Strauß, *Der astrologische Gedanke in der deutschen Vergangenheit* (Berlin: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1926).

<sup>94</sup> Werner Hofmann, "Der Mnemosyne-Atlas: Zu Warburgs Konstellationen," in Galitz and Reimers, "ekstatische Nymphe . . . trauernder Flussgott", 172–83, here 174.

<sup>95</sup> Rampley, "Mimesis and Allegory," 132. Elsewhere the German reads, "Ikonologie des Zwischenraumes. Kunsthistorisches Material zu einer Entwicklungsphysiologie des Pendelganges zwischen bildhafter und zeichnemässiger Ursachensetzung." In Matthew Rampley, *The Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby M. Warburg and Walter Benjamin* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 58.

of “the original” piece. However, they are nowhere close to establishing a closed-off and unified whole:

Dieses freie Verfügen, Verknüpfen und Widerrufen bestimmt auch die Ästhetik von Warburgs Bildertafeln. Abgesehen von einigen, die monographisch Einheitlichkeit aufweisen, stellen die meisten Versuchsanordnungen (Konstellationen) dar. Wir begegnen thematisch umgrenzten Spielfeldern, auf denen sich verschiedene Deutungsprozesse austragen lassen, welche keinerlei Endgültigkeit und folglich auch keinerlei Eindeutigkeit behaupten.<sup>96</sup>

This scattered arrangement speaks perhaps to a shift in Warburg’s concern with the evolution of images. In practice, the panels actually participate in a type of exhibition and thought process that defies linearity or even a tree-like or coral-like structure popular in depictions of evolutionary thought.<sup>97</sup> With the images scattered and arranged in no particularly coherent order on the panels, this three dimensional exhibition speaks more to a genuine stellar arrangement, an actual constellation of images. One can imagine this almost as in the structure of a holograph—wherein the whole image is contained in every single pixel of the image—some of the images themselves depict constellations.

Warburg created a massive archival onion, and peeling back the layers, one finds only more layers. Oddly enough, what makes him so attractive to postmodern scholars is how the evolutionary impulse that gripped Warburg on his journey to uncover this “missing link” between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance gets sublimated into a form that models the subject it is trying to understand. Warburg confronts the spectator with clusters of images, he confronts the visitor of this library to clusters of books, resisting more “Enlightened” classification systems—alphabetization or disciplinary compartmentalization by call number—even eschewing the idea of closed stacks in order to allow the visitor to aimlessly stumble through the collection of books and randomly find new material. Scholars have often made analogies between Warburg’s library and the cabinets of curiosity (*Wunderkammer*) of the early modern period.<sup>98</sup> Matthew Rampley points to the role that curiosity played in Warburg’s work, noting that “in certain respects Warburg’s work was motivated by a concern with the historical revival of the culture of curiosity.”<sup>99</sup> Warburg’s *Mnemosyne* project further underscores the ascending primacy of the image in twentieth century culture identified by Balázs in *Der sichtbare Mensch*.

Warburg’s intellectual preoccupation with the celestial imaginary blazed a path in the early twentieth century. It gave the study of astrological imagery an institutional home and allowed scholars to absorb new cultural artifacts into their areas of inquiry. In

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<sup>96</sup> Hofmann, “Der Mnemosyne-Atlas,” 175.

<sup>97</sup> Horst Bredekamp, *Les coraux de Darwin: Premiers modèles évolutionnistes et tradition de l’histoire naturelle* (Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Rampley, *Remembrance*, 66. See also, Kurt Forster, “Introduction,” in *Aby Warburg. The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), 52.

<sup>99</sup> Rampley, *Remembrance*, 71.

this way, it must be stressed that Warburg was a passionate student of astrological images, rather than astrological beliefs and practices. “The very fact that he used images for this demonstration which included famous works of art brought it home to the public that images of the past have more to tell us than a shallow aestheticism had been able to extract.”<sup>100</sup> And although Warburg delved into the connections between astrology and these famous works of art, his emphasis on investigating astrological symbolism from an etic perspective occluded the discovery of even greater possibilities of what these images actually *could* represent. Martin Luther could give him a few words of advice, “sehet das Bild ein wenig besser an.” Warburg’s legacy is in the questions he asked rather than the answers he gave. This remained true for Warburg even in his last project, an exhibition of the history of astrology and astronomy, which was mounted in the Hamburg Planetarium in 1930.

### Warburg in the Planetarium

A few months after the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* published their 1927 special issue on astrology, the German Museum of Technology in Munich planned an exhibition project, titled “Bild und Zahl als Werkzeuge menschlicher Orientierung” or “Image and Number as Tools of Human Orientation.”<sup>101</sup> Dorothea McEwan notes that, “Warburg was in consultation and negotiations with the director, Oskar von Miller, for providing exhibition material for a history of astrology to give the proper introduction to an exhibition on the history of astronomy.”<sup>102</sup> The exhibition was never mounted in Munich, but Warburg found a home for it in Hamburg, fittingly in the Zeiss planetarium that was to be built there.<sup>103</sup> Closely connected to the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, it was to be the last significant public project of Warburg’s life. On April 15, 1930, months after his death, the planetarium opened with his exhibition.<sup>104</sup> And as Gertrud Bing recalls, both “were opened with a display on the domed screen of the huge instrument which showed the slow concourse of the planets in the sign of scorpion, forming a replica of the fateful constellation of 1484; it was a homage to Warburg, who had shown that this conjunction was the cause of the misdating of Luther’s birthday.”<sup>105</sup> The exhibition had a decidedly didactic function. Warburg’s fears of the ability of technology to collapse the realm of reflective thought drove him to supply the planetarium with historical evidence of “how men had everywhere and at all times endeavored to come to grips with the phenomenon of the starry sky by means of worship, divination, observation and calculus.”<sup>106</sup> According

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<sup>100</sup> Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 322.

<sup>101</sup> Dorothea von Mücke provides excellent archival evidence for the scholarly exchanges taking place around the creation of this exhibit, see her, “Aby Warburg’s (1866–1929) Dots and Lines,” esp. 254–59.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>103</sup> Chernow, *The Warburgs*, 283.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Gertrud Bing, “Fritz Saxl (1890–1948): A Memoir,” in D. J. Gordon, ed., *Fritz Saxl 1890–1940: A Volume of Memorial Essays from his Friends in England* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 18.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

to McEwan, Warburg “saw this exhibition project as his contribution to the education of the young, to introduce them to enlightenment, not a treasure house filled with curiosities.”<sup>107</sup>

In a sense, Warburg’s dedication to creating an exhibition that would explain the history behind this optical apparatus, the Zeiss projector, and the images that it projects, created the *Denkraum* Warburg so prized. Instead of the immediacy of the optical technology telling the story of modern astronomy, Warburg wanted to show the great path to this “Enlightenment” that mankind had traversed over the last thousands of years, demonstrating “the development of scientific astronomy from its origins in religion and magic.”<sup>108</sup> Yet, at the very same time, the telling of the history of superstition and magical practice preserves the presence of those very beliefs and practices, rather than simply erasing them from history by not mentioning them at all. In this way, despite Warburg’s best intentions, his intellectual project works both for and against his aims. Or as Sigrid Weigel has put it, “For whereas the discovered axiom describes how the wild origins are overcome, signs of the wild become visible again in Warburg’s fascination with the subject.”<sup>109</sup>

One contemporary critic of Warburg’s exhibit highlights the immense role the cosmos played in Warburg’s intellectual pursuits. Johannes Andres Baader, an architect and author who belonged to the Berlin dadaists, criticized the exhibit for not also including images of “Molekülsternsysteme”:<sup>110</sup> “Wenn den Wandschriften noch eine Abhandlung über das gesamt Gebiet der Lebendigkeiten unterhalb unserer Bewußtseinsschwelle nachgefragt wurde, wird draußen im Stadtpark das Rätsel gelöst sein, warum jeder Mensch sich von jeher als Mitte der Welt empfand und warum er auch weiterhin dies mit vollem Recht tun darf.”<sup>111</sup> Given the visual correspondence between phenomena at the atomic and the galactic level, Baader argues for a continued emphasis on man’s apparent role at the center of the universe. He speaks to a certain phenomenological experience that allows humans to continue to imagine themselves in the perspective of—according to Warburg and his circle—primordial human experience. Baader seems to be reacting against the erasure of the human perspective in light of the twin images generated by the microscope and the telescope—Plato’s maxim “as above, so below” is taken to the extremes. Baader criticizes Warburg’s one-sided documentation of the development of the modern, human experience of the world in a very compelling way. It also shows us the extent to which the outer cosmos played such a dominating and decisive role in Warburg’s work.

Saxl gave lectures on Warburg’s and others’ work in the new planetarium, using the Zeiss projector to scoot around the cosmos. Arthur Beer attended one of the first

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<sup>107</sup> McEwan, “Aby Warburg’s (1866–1929) Dots and Lines,” 254.

<sup>108</sup> Bing, “Fritz Saxl (1890–1948): A Memoir,” 18.

<sup>109</sup> Weigel, “Aby Warburg’s *Schlangenritual*,” 149.

<sup>110</sup> Johannes Andreas Baader, “Antiker Stern Glaube und Gegenwart. Bemerkungen zur Sammlung Warburg im Planetarium,” in *Hamburgischer Correspondent* 182 (17 April 1930), reprinted in Uwe Fleckner, Robert Galitz, Claudia Naber, Herwart Nöldeke, eds., *Aby M. Warburg: Bildersammlung zur Geschichte von Stern Glaube und Sternkunde im Hamburger Planetarium* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 1993), 173.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

lectures, and he describes the moment of confirming the planetary alignments in Warburg's research using the Zeiss projector:

Während solcher Betrachtung rasten die Jahre des Zeiss-Instrumentes mit Sechs-Sekunden-Geschwindigkeit bis zum 11. Dezember 1465. Dorthin hatte mühevoll der Rechenstift vorgearbeitet—und Chigis bisher unbekannter Geburtstag—, er zeigte sich wirklich kosmisch fixiert: wir suchten und fanden den Mars in der Waage, die Venus in Steinbock, den Saturn in den Fischen usw.—Ganz anders und tief war jetzt das Vorstellungsbild, das statt bloß Gelesenem und Gerechnetem durch das am Himmel Geschaute auf uns wirkte.<sup>112</sup>

Beer attests to the pleasurable experience of the way the Zeiss projector recreated the planetary orbits. “Kulturwissenschaftliche Versuche im Planetarium—sie waren ein Erlebnis von seltenem Reiz. Die Klarheit des Gesagten und des Geschauten ließ keinerlei Benommenheit zurück nach all diesem Rasen durch Räume und Zeiten.”<sup>113</sup> This technology's ability to simulate what the night sky would have looked like at various historical moments on earth generates a sense of wonder. The spectral effects unleashed by the Zeiss projector gave another cultural historian pause to consider the relation between man, cosmos, and technology: Walter Benjamin.

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<sup>112</sup> Arthur Beer, “Neues ‘Vom Himmel auf Erden,’ Kulturwissenschaftliche Versuche im Hamburger Planetarium,” *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* 350 (December, 18, 1930), evening edition, reprinted in Uwe Fleckner et al., *Aby M. Warburg: Bildersammlung zur Geschichte von Sternglaube und Sternkunde im Hamburger Planetarium*, 177–79, 178.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

## CHAPTER 5: Walter Benjamin, Astrology, and Reading What Was Never Written

“was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen”  
—Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

“Die Konstellation ‘will’ gelesen werden.”  
—Irving Wohlfarth (1992)<sup>2</sup>

In his fragment “Zum Planetarium,” written in 1926, Walter Benjamin figures the planetarium as an emblem not only for what has gone wrong with society, the domination of technology that blinds us to certain forms of experience, but also what can heal it, teaching us to see the sky and ourselves in new ways. Recently, Irving Wohlfarth has suggested that “what *Zum Planetarium* attempts to do—and actually, rhetorically, performs—is to span the great world-historical divide that separates cosmogony from cosmology, astrology from astronomy, myth from enlightenment, *Gemeinschaft* from *Gesellschaft*, and thereby to heal the rift on which the modern world is built.”<sup>3</sup> Benjamin saw in the planetarium a site for realizing and revealing how connected these seemingly disparate aspects of culture are. Benjamin writes, “Nothing distinguishes the ancient from the modern man so much as the former’s *absorption in a cosmic experience* scarcely known to later periods.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1923, the planetarium created a new, yet mediated experience of the cosmos. In early planetariums, a Zeiss machine was situated centrally in the round and, dotted with strange craters, it projected accurate constellations onto a domed ceiling. Aby M.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften [GS]* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972–89), II:697. Miriam Bratu Hansen points out that Benjamin borrowed this phrase from Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s play *Der Tor und der Tod* from 1906. See Miriam Hansen, “Room-for-Play: Benjamin’s Gamble with Cinema,” *October* 109 (Summer 2004): 3–45, here 38. See also Irving Wohlfarth, “‘Was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen’: Walter Benjamin’s Theorie des Lesens,” in Uwe Steiner, ed., *Walter Benjamin 1982–1940 zum 100. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1992), 297–344.

<sup>2</sup> Wohlfarth, “Was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen,” 320.

<sup>3</sup> Irving Wohlfarth, “Walter Benjamin and the Idea of a Technological Eros. A Tentative Reading of *Zum Planetarium*,” in Helga Geyer, Ryan Paul Koopman, and Klaus Yntema, eds., *Benjamin Studien I: Perception and Experience in Modernity* (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 65–110, here 80.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, “To the Planetarium,” in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*, Michael Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Levin, eds., (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 58, my emphasis. “Zum Planetarium/To the Planetarium” (1923–26; published 1928). “Nichts unterscheidet den antiken so vom neuen Menschen, als seine Hingegebenheit an eine kosmische Erfahrung, die der spätere nicht kennt.” (Geyer et al., *Benjamin Studien I*, 90).

Warburg's exhibition in the Hamburg planetarium in 1929 emphasized the experience of the planetarium as cinematic, collective, and filled with the transmission of educational star-knowledge. It not only collapses the border between temporalities (historical planetary configurations seen in the now), but also collapses the border between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. One experiences the encounter with the mythological constellations, but at the same time, this happens through a mediated experience (in the sense of *Erlebnis*) in a mass setting—the allure of the cinema fused with astronomical education. Benjamin faults the growing influence of optical technology developed during the astronomical revolution for the erosion of the ancient communal experience with the cosmos:

Its waning is marked by the flowering of astronomy at the beginning of the modern age. Kepler, Copernicus, and Tycho Brahe were certainly not driven by scientific impulses alone. All the same, the exclusive emphasis on an optical connection to the universe, to which astronomy very quickly led, contained a portent of what was to come. The ancients' intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance [*Rausch*]. For it is in this experience alone that we gain certain knowledge of what is nearest to us and what is remotest from us, and never of one without the other. This means, however, that man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally.<sup>5</sup>

In a planetarium the audience is both near and far, between each other, and the simultaneous illusion of the distant sky being projected on the very real, and very near dome. Benjamin's main concern in "To the Planetarium" is with the "intercourse with the cosmos," which has become saturated with and corrupted by technology. At first this infiltration of technology was merely optical; with the Great War, it became clear that it had become a deadly force. "The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the purpose of all technology. Technology is the mastery not of nature but of the relation between nature and man."<sup>6</sup> The planetarium appears nowhere else in the text but the title, but its presence there impregnates the entire piece with the resonance of what planetaria actually are and what they do: technologically mediated mass experiences of the cosmos, rescuing an experience of the cosmos while at the same time offering only a substitute experience, by way of the projector. In this way, "To the Planetarium," highlights another topic that preoccupied Benjamin—the loss of experience.

In his 1933 essay, "The Poverty of Experience" Benjamin explores the loss of *Erfahrung* vis-à-vis *Erlebnis*. He postulates that the Great War caused a rift in man's ability to access the age-old narratives of the older generation (*Erfahrung*) and that modern life is characterized by an endless litany of fragmented, lived experiences (*Erlebnis*). As I proposed in the second chapter, this poverty of experience (in terms of *Erfahrung*) ultimately led people to embrace astrology as an *Erfahrungswissenschaft*. As Benjamin argues, rather than imparting a lack of experience, the war enabled people to reconnect with the cosmos by reintegrating centuries of astrological symbolism. Imagining oneself in celestial terms directly connects the individual to a larger scale of

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin, "To the Planetarium," 58.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 58–59.

being, both societally and temporally. People sought to create a deeper sense of meaning based on lived experience by returning to astrology as a new soft science: *Erfahrungswissenschaft*—just as Oscar A. H. Schmitz created important narratives of his self by correlating his lived experience with planetary cycles.

Benjamin's interest in German early modern culture rests in his desire to explore the tensions in reading set loose by the astronomical revolution, when European societies were negotiating the qualitative and quantitative meaning—and therefore the legibility—of celestial phenomena. Warburg's studies of the history of astrological symbolism influenced Benjamin in this case,<sup>7</sup> but Benjamin transformed Warburg's iconography into a practice of reading that would enable modern man to negotiate meaning in ways that had been increasingly replaced with the success of quantitative scientific analysis and, later, instrumental reason. In his work, Benjamin returns again and again to a stellar or cosmological spatiality *as perceived by humans* to theorize language as well as create his critical concept of the dialectical image. In this way, he sublimates an astrological way of reading into a broader form of cultural interpretation.

### **Astrology, Mimesis, and Reading**

Benjamin's writings on astrology stem from 1932, but Gershom Scholem reveals that Benjamin began theorizing that the interpretation of the stars formed the original site of reading as early as 1918. Scholem says,

Schon damals [1918] beschäftigten ihn Gedanken über die Wahrnehmung als ein Lesen in den Konfigurationen der Fläche, als die der urzeitliche Mensch die Welt um sich und besonders den Himmel aufnahm. Hier lag die Keimzelle zu den Betrachtungen, die er viele Jahre später in seiner Aufzeichnung *Lehre vom Ähnlichen* angestellt hat. Die Entstehung der Sternbilder als Konfigurationen auf der Himmelsfläche, behauptete er, sei der Beginn des Lesens, der Schrift, die mit der Ausbildung des mythischen Weltalters zusammenfalle.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout his treatment of the link between astrology and reading, Benjamin shows that he's aware of astrology's prognostic and diagnostic uses. He is also critically aware of the experiential nature of astrological reading, which was absent in Warburg's formulations. In his Fragment "Zur Astrologie," most likely written in 1932, Benjamin looked at astrology as a refined way to navigate the "Kosmos der Ähnlichkeit."<sup>9</sup> He outlined his ideas in terms of a prolegomenon to a "rational" astrology. Many of the ideas in this fragment reappear in his short essay "Lehre vom Ähnlichen" or "Doctrine of the Similar," written in 1933. In this essay, Benjamin states, "Insight into the areas of

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (1928/1963; repr. New York: Verso, 1977), 34. Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963).

<sup>8</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin Geschichte einer Freundschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 79f. Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *GS II.3:955*.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, "Zur Astrologie," *GS VI*, 192–93.

the ‘similar’ has a fundamental importance for the illumination of large areas of occult knowledge. Such insight, however, is to be gained less by demonstrating found similarities than by *reproducing processes which produce such similarities*.<sup>10</sup> That is, Benjamin generates insight by constructing texts which themselves reenact the processes responsible for the creation of similarities. Warburg’s body of work relating the history of astrological imagery to the history of art is marked by a profound preoccupation with demonstrations of found similarities. The immensity of his collection is testament to this. Benjamin isn’t satisfied with demonstrating found similarities. He develops his critical writing to agitate the circumstances—or rather, the experiences—of reading that lead to these similarities being found by his readers.

In order to do so, Benjamin analyzes the process of reading the stars that informs astrological practice. He asks, “is it the case that the mimetic faculty is dying out, or has perhaps a transformation taken place? Some aspects of astrology may indicate, even if indirectly, the direction in which such a transformation might lie.”<sup>11</sup> Benjamin makes the distinction between the horoscope and the astrological interpretation that is made possible by it: “the horoscope must be understood as an original totality which astrological interpretation merely analyzed. (The stars formed a characteristic unity, and the character of the individual planets was only recognized by the way they function in relation to the stars.)”<sup>12</sup> Benjamin describes the fixed stars as having a “characteristic unity,” ostensibly because they are fixed; they only appear to shift due to the rotation of the earth. The planets, on the other hand, move across the ecliptic at varying speeds in relation to the stars. Benjamin describes the general phenomenon of a planet moving into a zodiac sign (a region of space along the ecliptic) and the resulting “character” that can be read from that position. Thus the “original totality” of the horoscope, as a picture of the heavens at a specific time and place on earth, contains all possible positions for stars and planets. The limitations begin with the *actual* positions of the earth, the planets, and the stars during a specific moment, birth being the most common example.

Benjamin claims that the “possibility of human imitation, that is, this mimetic faculty which human beings possess, may have to be regarded, for the time being, as the sole basis for astrology’s *experiential character*.”<sup>13</sup> I emphasize his word choice here to suggest that he is quite possibly aware of the debates that German astrologers engaged in during the 1920s. The choice of the term “experiential” belies an emphasis that aligns with the concerns of the overarching polemics surrounding modern astrological practice at the time. In his essay, Benjamin attributes astrological experience to “the mimetic faculty which human beings possess.” However, it isn’t just that “celestial processes could be imitated by those who lived earlier, both collectively and individually,” but rather, “the possibility of imitation contained the instruction to make use of an already present similarity.”<sup>14</sup> If the similarity is “already present,” then humans are not merely imitating that which they see in the heavens. The similarity is simply being recognized, or, put in other terms, read. Benjamin does not limit this phenomenon to the ancients alone, “it is scarcely possible not to attribute complete possession of this gift to the

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, “Doctrine of the Similar,” 65.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* My emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

newborn—especially when it is regarded as complete mimetic adaptation to the form of cosmic being.”<sup>15</sup> This, in fact, may provide an alternative interpretation of Benjamin’s preoccupation with the power of children and youth. Through their mimetic skills, Benjamin suggests that children have greater access to that realm of creativity that tribal ancients once possessed. This might also help clarify the surprising conclusion to the fragment “To the Planetarium”: “Living substance conquers the frenzy of destruction only in the ecstasy of procreation.”<sup>16</sup> Youth, and the ecstatic procreation needed to create it, is the only answer to the problems of technology gone wild. Only youth will be able to establish a new connection to—or a new experience of—the cosmos. One can almost see the proliferation of natal charts in that frenzy. The ontological status of this originary moment is paramount for Benjamin.

The moment of birth, which here decides everything, is but an instant. This directs our attention to another peculiarity in the area of similarity. The perception of similarity is in every case bound to an instantaneous flash. It slips past, can possibly be regained, but really cannot be held fast, unlike other perceptions. It offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars. The perception of similarities thus seems to be bound to a time-moment (*Zeitmoment*).<sup>17</sup>

This temporal moment is crystalized in a natal chart, which can be held fast, and can be interpreted.

In his theory of reading, Benjamin invests the astrologer with a capability that the astronomer has lost: “It is like the addition of a third element, namely the astrologer, to the conjunction of two stars which must be grasped in an instant. Here the astronomer is cheated out of his reward, despite the sharpness of his observational tools.”<sup>18</sup> The astrologer is able to read time for meaning that an astronomer cannot. The knowledge in question isn’t factual, but a kind of meaningful knowledge that connects both the observed with the observer. At this moment in Benjamin’s text, the astrologer’s reading isn’t directed toward the future, but rather toward a diagnostic analysis of the present. As Irving Wohlfarth has argued, “In strengem Gegensatz zu den ‘Wahrsagern,’ die die Zukunft vorzuschauen meinen, gilt der materialistische Astrologe als ein ‘rückwärts gekehrter Prophet,’ dessen Seherblick sich an Vergangenem entzündet. [...] Anstatt die Figur des künftigen Geschicks aus dem Gestirnstand herauszulesen, stellt er das augenblickliche Bild fest, in dem Vergangenheit und Gegenwart einander begegnen.”<sup>19</sup> What else is this than the modern diagnostic application of astrology? Wohlfarth does not name it as such, but Benjamin’s clearly recognized the diagnostic possibilities of astrology.

Benjamin then introduces a category of “non-sensuous similarity” or what could also be understood as correspondence, or acausal relationality. He states that “in our perception we no longer possess what once made it possible to speak of a similarity

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, “To the Planetarium,” 59.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin, “Doctrine of the Similar,” 66.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>19</sup> Wohlfarth, “‘Was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen,’” 324.

which might exist between a constellation of stars and a human being.”<sup>20</sup> It is hard to believe that Benjamin took this statement seriously given the rise in interest in astrology all around him, but he probably postulates it in this way for rhetorical reasons. For Benjamin, modern man can only access this knowledge any more by way of language. “It is worth noting that the written word, perhaps even more than certain combinations of sounds in language, clarifies, in the relationship of the graphic image (*Schriftbild*) of words or letters to that which is meant or which gives the name, the nature of non-sensuous similarity.”<sup>21</sup> Language has become the repository for our ability to derive qualitative meaning from our experiences.

For Benjamin the modern practice of graphology enables a kind of rescue of the type of reading once afforded by astrology: “Recent graphology has taught us to recognize images, or more precisely picture puzzles, in handwriting, pictures which conceal the writer’s unconscious.”<sup>22</sup> By 1933 Benjamin had extensive experience with graphology. He therefore knew firsthand the kinds of operations at stake in making a graphological analysis from a sample of handwriting. Instead of the astrological, or any other kind of explicit divinatory act, “Along with language, writing has thus become an archive of non-sensuous similarities or non-sensuous correspondences.”<sup>23</sup> This archival quality leads Benjamin to suggest that a certain form of reading must be recovered, namely the magical:

Since this non-sensuous similarity, however, reaches into all areas of reading, this deep level reveals a peculiar ambiguity of the word “reading” in both its profane and magical senses. The pupil reads his ABC book, and the astrologer reads the future in the stars. In the first clause, reading is not separated into its two components. But the second clarifies both levels of the process: the astrologer reads off the position of the stars in the heavens; simultaneously he reads the future and fate from it.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, the pupil who simply reads the ABC book misses an entire realm of meaning that opens up to the astrologer. It is not enough to stay at the “profane” realm of the literal meaning. The figure of the astrologer serves as an index of a different type of reader, one who can synthesize information and reveal a mimetic affinity which is no longer directly legible. Our writing only contains traces of what once was “reading what was never written.”

Benjamin looks at the baroque epoch as a period that generated—perhaps for the first time, or at least the first time in German—language’s arbitrary nature to signification. This epoch also allegedly divorced man from an experiential reality of a connected mimetic world. Benjamin is showing here that language has *become* arbitrary. As Irving Wohlfarth has put it, “Anstatt ein willkürliches Zeichensystem zu sein, ist sie vielmehr zu einem solchen erst *geworden*.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the seventeenth

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, “Doctrine of the Similar,” 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 67–68.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Wohlfarth, “Was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen’,” 299. Emphasis in original.

century marks the period during which astronomy as a mathematical science eclipsed the practice of astrology, or rather, the natural sciences began exploring stellar phenomena in quantitative rather than qualitative terms. At the same time, regional variations of the German language began to coalesce into a standardized language. Justus Georg Schottelius and Martin Opitz began codifying the German language—a process that symbolically began with Luther’s translation of the bible into Saxonian vernacular, but that really took off with the language societies like the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*. Their play with rebus, hieroglyph, secret code, and their preoccupation with all the potential permutations of language in general showed them at once in the project of pushing the boundaries of what the German language could be, but also confirming and locking in a certain linguistic identity, which they imagined had access at its foundation to a divine pre-Babel reality.<sup>26</sup> In addition, figures such as Agrippa von Nettesheim as well as Georg Philipp Harsdörffer remobilized discourses conflating script with the sky, reimagining various forms and ways that the stars could be read as a divine message.<sup>27</sup>

Benjamin’s contemporaries also explored theories of the stars as writing. In 1916 Franz Dornseiff wrote his dissertation on *Buchstabenmystik* under the direction of Franz Boll, which investigates the constellations as a site of Kabbalistic symbolism.<sup>28</sup> In Wilhelm Gundel’s 1922 history of starlore, *Sterne und Sternbilder im Glauben des Altertums und der Neuzeit*, he reminds the twentieth century of the history of seeing writing in the sky:

wir werden kaum solche dichterischen Bilder, die auch in anderen Sprachen von der “Schrift”, den “Zeichen” oder “Hieroglyphen” des Himmels reden, rein wörtlich fassen dürfen, so wenig wie das “Lesen” in den Sternen und die Metapher, daß das Schicksal ganzer Völker und einzelner Menschen in feurigen Lettern in den Sternen geschrieben steht.<sup>29</sup>

The fact that Gundel admits that these “poetic images” cannot be “simply literally conceived” speaks to their experiential nature. Cinema responded actively to this, as evidenced Paul Wegener’s film *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam*. As I have shown

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<sup>26</sup> Schottelius’s allegory of the *Schreckliche SprachKrieg* links the first syllable of *deutsch* to *deus*, or god which would justify a linguistic community organized around a divine basis. See Ulrike Haß-Zumkehr, *Deutsche Wörterbücher: Brennpunkt von Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 73, and Justus Georg Schottelius, *Der schreckliche SprachKrieg/Horrendum bellum grammaticale Teutonum* (1673; repr. Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Harsdörffer himself published on star lore and the stars as a script in at least two of his voluminous publications, the eight-volume *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* (1644–49; repr. Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1968–69) and the three volume *Deliciae physico-mathematicae, oder, Mathematische and philosophische Erquickstunden* (1639–53; repr. Frankfurt am Main : Keip, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Franz Dornseiff, *Buchstabenmystik* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1916).

<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm Gundel, *Sterne und Sternbilder im Glauben des Altertums und der Neuzeit* (Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder, 1922), 54.

above, this film generates an experience that can approximate this ancient form of reading. From the film's opening scene, the audience is treated to an establishing shot that depicts the stars in the night sky, and an intertitle that states that Rabbi Löw reads in the stars that a threat looms over the Jewish community. As in my previous discussion of the film, scene after scene, it guides the audience through an experience of participating in the Rabbi's astrological and magical pursuits. In addition, Elsbeth Ebertin's lost film *In den Sternen steht's geschrieben* gives us a sense that the cinema provided a rich home for exploring this kind of symbolism, if only from its title alone. Ebertin, if we remember, was also a graphologist—one of the most famous working in Germany at the time, in fact. Her double role as graphologist and astrologer shows how linked the deciphering of stars and script was in the early twentieth century.

Benjamin's own experiences practicing graphology are well known. As Gershom Scholem put it, possessed an "ans Unheimliche grenzenden graphologischen Begabung."<sup>30</sup> Adorno agrees that Benjamin was "ein guter Graphologe."<sup>31</sup> The work of Ludwig Klages, which Ebertin knew well, was central to Benjamin's interest in and practice of graphology.<sup>32</sup> Klages circulated in the same circles as Oscar A. H. Schmitz. In 1926, Schmitz invited Klages to give a lecture at Count Hermann Keyserling's School of Wisdom in Darmstadt.<sup>33</sup> Benjamin's interest in Klages brought him very close to segments of the emerging esoteric cultures in Germany. As Miriam Bratu Hansen has recently shown, Benjamin wrested his concept of aura away from problematic esoteric interpretations of the term, and like Schmitz, Keyserling and many others exploring Western esotericism, he vehemently resisted the dominance of the Theosophists.<sup>34</sup>

Echoing the popular push for a "scientific astrology," in 1930, Benjamin published a short article making the case for a "scientific graphology." He says, "today scientific

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<sup>30</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin und sein Engel. Vierzehn Aufsätze kleine Beiträge*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 15.

<sup>31</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 583.

<sup>32</sup> See Michael Großheim, "Archaisches oder dialektisches Bild? Zum Kontext einer Debatte zwischen Adorno und Benjamin," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 71, no. 3 (1997): 494–517.

<sup>33</sup> Hermann Keyserling and Oscar A. H. Schmitz, *Sinnsuche oder Psychoanalyse. Briefwechsel Graf Hermann Keyserling—Oscar A. H. Schmitz aus den Tagen der Schule der Weisheit*. Hessische Beiträge zur deutschen Literatur (Darmstadt: Gesellschaft Hessischer Literaturfreunde, 1970), 33.

<sup>34</sup> Hansen notes that "Benjamin also dissociates [Karl] Wolfskehl from the spiritists (and even the Steinerites who claimed him as one of their own) in a remarkable review of 1932, "Erleuchtung durch Dunkelmänner: Zu Hans Liebstoekl, 'Die Geheimwissenschaften im Lichte unserer Zeit,'" *GS* III:356–60; see esp. p. 357." Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 336–75, here 362. See also her posthumously published *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). Wolfgang Bock also provides evidence that Benjamin and Scholem did not like Rudolph Steiner or the Theosophists. Wolfgang Bock, *Walter Benjamin—die Rettung der Nacht: Sterne, Melancholie und Messianismus* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis-Verl. 2000), 39. For Oscar A. H. Schmitz and Count Hermann Keyserling's resistance to Theosophy, see the second chapter of this dissertation.

graphology is a good thirty years old. [. . .] It is a striking fact that academic science still withholds recognition, even though this technique has been providing proofs of the precision of its principles for the past three decades. To this day, no German university has established a chair for the interpretation of handwriting.”<sup>35</sup> That Benjamin uses the term “scientific” shows that he entered the fray of those seeking legitimacy for practices deemed unacceptable to the academy. Given the intensity of the debates surrounding scientific astrology, it also adds seriousness to Benjamin’s adherence to graphological practice. One reason for this is not simply his own experiences with the subject, but the role that experience played in the constitutive elements of graphology itself.

According to Benjamin, Klages “interprets handwriting fundamentally as gesture, as expressive movement.”<sup>36</sup> Benjamin himself sees “im Symbol nicht die Versinnlichung einer Idee, sondern die bildgewordene leibgebundene Erfahrung.”<sup>37</sup> Klages’ insistence on gesture invokes this “leibgebundene Erfahrung” central to Benjamin’s own critical work. Through the experience of practicing graphology Benjamin gained knowledge of something that is inarticulate in speech, in a very similar way to Schmitz’s experience of astrological practice. In a fragment titled “Zur Graphologie,” written sometime between 1922 and 1928, Benjamin spells this out in non-causal terms. The fourth thesis states, “Die ‘Theorie’ (im goetheschen Sinne) welche sonach jede vollendete Analyse von der Deutung gibt, indem sie die Einheit von handschriftlichem und charakterologischem Befunde sprachlich evident macht, hat also keinerlei Kausalverhältnisse zum Gegenstand.”<sup>38</sup> Benjamin’s non-sensuous similarity (*unsinnliche Ähnlichkeit*)<sup>39</sup> becomes palpable in graphological interpretation. Experience is encoded in the handwriting sample and decoded by the experience of graphological analysis.

Benjamin’s fine-tuned understanding of the subtleties of mimetic reading, enabled by his graphological practice and the hermeneutic affinities this type of reading has with astrological reading, allows for a critical reevaluation of one of Benjamin’s most famous texts on film. Benjamin’s response to Oscar A. H. Schmitz’s 1927 review of Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Battleship Potemkin* is actually quite popular in film studies. The short essay is often referred to as the Benjamin’s articulation of the prismatic spectrality of film. Until now, no one has read it for the historical and rhetorical specificity of his address to Schmitz, and most definitely not in the context of Schmitz as a representative of the *Erfahrungswissenschaft* of astrology.<sup>40</sup> If we focus on

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<sup>35</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Graphology Old and New,” in Jennings et al., *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*, 192. Originally published in the *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunkzeitung*, Nov. 1930. *GS*, IV:596–98. Translated by Rodney Livingstone.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin, “Graphology Old and New,” 193.

<sup>37</sup> Claudia Zumbusch, *Wissenschaft in Bildern: Symbol und dialektisches Bild in Aby Warburgs Mnemosyne-Atlas und Walter Benjamins Passagen-Werk* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 333. For a discussion of Benjamin, Klages with respect to physiognomy, see esp., 185–211.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin, Fragment 152, “Zur Graphologie,” in *GS* VI:185.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Lehre vom Ähnlichen,” in *GS* II.1:204–10, here 207.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Erwiderung an Oscar A. H. Schmitz,” in *GS* II.2:751–55. The article was reprinted in Michael Jennings new translations of Benjamin’s work, attesting to its crucial position in Benjamin’s thoughts on cinema and media: Walter Benjamin,

Benjamin's address to Schmitz, much more than his theories of film become clear. Benjamin, who in 1927—the high tide of astrological debate in German print—must have known about Schmitz's writings on astrology, accuses him fundamentally of reading the film on the wrong level, and he deploys arguments popular in the debates on astrology as a scientific practice to do so.

Benjamin criticizes Schmitz's reading in three crucial ways. First, displaying his penchant for mimetic reading, Benjamin reads the writing on the road, or rather, the surface: "What began with the bombardment of Odessa in *Potemkin* continues in the more recent film *Mother* with the pogrom against factory workers, in which the suffering of the urban masses is engraved in the asphalt of the street like running script."<sup>41</sup> Here we see an instantiation of the legibility of mass movement of people on the screen placed into analogy with script. Benjamin performs a reading of the surface of these configurations, the movement of the people over the surface of the pavement, their projection onto the surface of the screen, much as he argued the ancients once read the projections of the stars on the surface of the sky.

Second, Benjamin criticizes Schmitz for denying the masses a free will of their own, "why the actions of a collective should be deemed unfree, while those of the individual are free—this abstruse variant of determinism remains as incomprehensible in itself as in its meaning for the debate."<sup>42</sup> Schmitz, who grew up in the early years of the Wilhelmine empire and was formed by his obsessive search for self, could not see at the collective level. His autobiographical writings show that, for him, the collective pressure to submit to military service scarred and scared him for most of his life. Schmitz, who so passionately adhered to a psychological astrology oriented around the individual, was reluctant to see the possibility of a group being able to make choices freely. Alternatively, Benjamin always figured the primal astrological experience of the cosmos as being a communal one.

This tension reiterates the dichotomy between modern individual-oriented astrology and medieval astrology still focused on the masses. As Michel Maffesoli has recently put it,

Researchers are now finding a double layer of meaning attached to astrology, both cultural and natural. Gilbert Durand has shown how individually centered astrology is of relatively recent origin, for classical astrology "concerned itself above all with the *destiny of the group*, of the earthly domain." Astrology can be placed in an ecological perspective,

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"Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz," *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*, 328–32. Among others, Norbert Bolz and Miriam Hansen have written on it, see, Norbert Bolz, "Farewell to the Gutenberg-Galaxy," *New German Critique* 78 (1999): 109–31, esp. 118–19; as well as Miriam Hansen, "'Of Lightning Rods, Prisms, and Forgotten Scissors': Potemkin and German Film Theory," *New German Critique* 95 (Spring/Summer 2005): 162–79. Oscar A. H. Schmitz's review, "Potemkinfilm und Tendenzkunst," was reprinted in Benjamin, *GS* II.2:1486–89.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin, "Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*, 330.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

represented by “houses” which predispose all of us to live in a natural and social environment. [. . .] it has something of the aesthetic aura [*aisthétikos*] which is found in the union, however tenuous, of the macrocosm and the microcosms, and the union between these microcosms.<sup>43</sup>

Here he underscores the emotional element inherent in human experience that binds people together beyond state forms and political expressions. Maffesoli argues that these emotional strata secure the continued existence of humanity and its various social groupings. The resurgence in phenomena such as astrology in the twentieth century speaks to this emotional need to be part of something greater than oneself and one’s immediate social field. This underscores that celestial level of imagining oneself that I proposed in my earlier discussion of Oscar A. H. Schmitz and overcoming his fears of serving in the military for Germany. Astrology offers people a way to connect not only beyond their current definitions as citizens of a specific nation-state, but with historical human communities.

Finally, and most interesting perhaps, Benjamin appeals to statistics in order to argue against Schmitz’s focus on individual cases: “it would be senseless to depict [the opponents of the masses] as differentiated individuals.”<sup>44</sup> Benjamin refers to them at first as bourgeois types, but hinting at Schmitz’s milieu, he changes his vocabulary to a specifically psychological register that at the same time judges these types. They go from being bourgeois to “sadistic.” Benjamin says:

It is well known that many facts gain their meaning, their relief, only when they are put in context. These are the facts with which the field of statistics concerns itself. If a Mr. X happens to take his own life in March, this may be a supremely unimportant fact in itself. But it becomes quite interesting if we learn that suicides reach their annual peak during that month. In the same way, the sadistic acts of the ship’s doctor may be isolated incidents in his life, the results of a poor night’s sleep, or a reaction to his discovery that his breakfast egg is rotten. They become interesting only if we establish a relationship between the medical profession and the state.<sup>45</sup>

Thus statistics afford a new legibility of behavior at a higher level. Individual sadistic incidents form a trend that exposes the larger sadistic expressions of the imperial state. Benjamin’s claim reveals itself as an even more direct response to Schmitz than can be read on the surface. Given that Schmitz was one of the main agents in popularizing a specifically “scientific” variety of astrology that uses statistical methods as its main argument for validity, and that by 1927 many publications advocated this statistical approach to astrology, then Benjamin’s appeal to statistics is an effort to prove to Schmitz in his own terms that behavior can and should be read on a mass scale.

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<sup>43</sup> Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, trans. Don Smith (London: Sage, 1996), 13–14, here 14.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin, “Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz,” in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and other Writings on Media*, 331.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Whereas for Schmitz the individual's inner world broke open to legibility through their natal chart, for Benjamin the entire world broke open. All manner of surface configurations, all manner of events beyond new births, could be read again mimetically. In this response, Benjamin reprimands Schmitz for reading at the wrong scale.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Celestial Unconscious**

Optical technology—such as the planetarium and the cinema—also offers redemptive possibilities. Gertrud Koch has found that for Benjamin “the camera becomes the telescope of prehistory.”<sup>47</sup> She says, “The fact that cinematic technology does not actually present (*Darstellen*) movement but rather represents (*Vorstellen*) it illusionistically through a series of photographically fixed moments, turns it, in the wake of photography, into a medium in which time is immobilized in space.”<sup>48</sup> In this sense the camera literally becomes a telescope into the past, and not only that, but it reveals things to us that we might not have seen in the given moment. Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious gains new intensity when viewed in light of the horoscope, or natal chart. A natal chart documents the stars in their given positions at a given point in time from a given point on earth. The chart is a pictorial record (in the sense of graphics) of a certain moment, and thus it contains a trace of the optical unconscious coded in symbolic form. In “Doctrine of the Similar,” Benjamin put it this way, “the horoscope must be understood as an original totality which astrological interpretation merely analyzed.”<sup>49</sup> Put another way, to read astrologically in the twentieth century also

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<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, Schmitz and Benjamin are connected in other ways beyond this public exchange. Both Schmitz (in 1902) and Benjamin (in 1927–34) wrote about hashish and intoxication, which puts them on common ground, despite their differences regarding the focus on interpreting the individual (Schmitz in the nineteenth-century legacy, highlighted in his novel *The Dionysian Secret*) and the masses (Benjamin's twentieth-century variety). The topic of intoxication brings them both into contact with Nietzsche's “Dionysian” mode. Georg Dörr traces the reception of the Nietzschean “Dionysian” element through both the intellectual *Kosmiker* circle in Munich, with which Oscar A. H. Schmitz was loosely related, as well as through Benjamin, (and eventually Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the Enlightenment). Georg Dörr, *Muttermythos und Herrschaftsmythos. Zur Dialektik der Aufklärung um die Jahrhundertwende bei den Kosmikern, Stefan George und in der Frankfurter Schule* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007). The intriguing aspect of his study is the exploration of the oscillation from conservative right-leaning political receptions of the Dionysian with left-leaning receptions. Dörr argues that Benjamin's reception of Klages is responsible for how the Dionysian creeps into Benjamin's intellectual project (123–28).

<sup>47</sup> Gertrud Koch, “Cosmos in Film: On the Concept of Space in Walter Benjamin's ‘Work of Art’ Essay,” trans. Nancy Nenno, in Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, eds., *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy Destruction and Experience* (New York : Routledge, 1994), 205–15, here 214.

<sup>48</sup> Koch, “Cosmos in Film,” 213.

<sup>49</sup> Benjamin, “Doctrine of the Similar,” 66.

depends on arresting a specific moment in time and depicting it spatially in a natal chart.<sup>50</sup>

As I've discussed earlier, over time the horoscope came to include elements that were synthesized out of astronomical observations, but were never directly observable themselves, as well as new planets that had not been present in natal charts prior to these planets' discoveries. Early Babylonian astrology worked with fixed stars and planets. By the time astrology had reached the Arabic world, complex systems of interpretational hierarchies came into play, placing symbolic emphases on various physical points in the horoscope. Kepler's modifications to the practice of astrology began to erode the traditional symbolic correspondences and transform them into allegorical pictures. He cleared the way for a hermeneutic practice that was not possible before. His revised system for interpreting planetary relationships made it possible for any planet's position to be related to any other planet's position, effectively destroying the careful architecture of medieval astrological convention. In this sense, just like in Benjamin's understanding of allegory, anything could stand in for anything else. This also means that any celestial body with any kind of regular predictable path, such as Uranus or Neptune, can be retroactively included in natal charts that existed before their discoveries.<sup>51</sup> The possibility of new planets to be retroactively incorporated into horoscope analysis, embodies the optical unconscious trace in the horoscope. As cameras and telescopes improve, ever-newer things can be incorporated into the natal chart.<sup>52</sup> It is important to keep this in mind as we examine Benjamin's work on allegory in the early modern period.

In the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" to the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin states, "Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars."<sup>53</sup> Max Pensky has argued that "the image of constellation is clearly chosen in full cognizance of its relation to astrology."<sup>54</sup> However, Pensky's understanding of astrology comes straight from Warburg's understanding of astrology. He hooks onto Warburg's notion of the dialectical movement between mythology and enlightenment:

The dialectical character of the mythic in general explains the fact that this motion toward encipherment and decipherment of nature contains both an element of myth and its negation. The cosmos is transformed into a realm of mythic gods and astral forces, exerting malign or beneficial influences upon human life, robbing life of its spontaneity and autonomy.

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<sup>50</sup> I specify in the twentieth century because historically, horoscopes were not always depicted in spatial terms. In Greek and Babylonian astrology, they were often presented as lists.

<sup>51</sup> People who practice medieval astrology today do so without using Uranus or Neptune or even Pluto in their interpretations. See the work of Benjamin Dykes (to name just one).

<sup>52</sup> An excellent example of this is the database of over 16,000 asteroids on the astro.com that one can choose to include in their horoscope:

<http://www.astro.com/swisseph/astlist.htm>

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 71.

At the same time, the very collective effort by which these astral forces are expressed is the same one that renders the mysterious cosmos known and controllable, and produces the first possibility of rational control of natural features and processes.<sup>55</sup>

But Benjamin himself would not support this notion of the evacuation of spontaneity and autonomy from life. He states, “Phenomena are not incorporated in ideas. They are not contained in them. Ideas are, rather, their objective, virtual arrangement, their objective interpretation.”<sup>56</sup> Ideas are related to phenomena “in the representation of phenomena.”<sup>57</sup> Thus causality does not enter into Benjamin’s formulation of the relationship between ideas and phenomena. Just as there is no causality between the image of a constellation and the stars within it, neither is there a causality between the idea and the phenomena that help constitute it. Put in relation with contemporary astrological discourse, the planets and stars show inclination, but they do not cause events to occur (*astra inclinant non necessitant*).<sup>58</sup> Human agency is responsible for identifying the phenomena that come together to form an idea, just as people utilized their imaginations to group certain star clusters together, to the exclusion of others, to form constellations.

However, the constellations that humans have projected on the stars are culturally and historically determined. Wolfgang Bock has suggested a revision to Benjamin’s claim: instead of Benjamin’s statement that “ideas are timeless constellations, and by virtue of their elements’ being seen as points in such constellations, phenomena are subdivided and at the same time redeemed,”<sup>59</sup> Bock proposes, “the stars are eternal constellations, into which images are put. The images, in that they shift human order into the heavens, bear also their twofold character of image and ideal.”<sup>60</sup> As Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene have most recently identified, as ideas shift and change culturally and historically, the stars provide only the canvas, the surface, upon which these images can be projected.<sup>61</sup> The emphasis on the role of the imagination in astrology, which Count Herman Keyserling first proposed in 1911, is highlighted by this critical view:

die Elemente der Astrologie sind ohne denkbaren Bezug auf die Erfahrungswelt; im Rahmen der Naturordnung ist für sie kein Raum. Die Wahrheit der Astrologie ist wohl anderen Ursprungs: sie wurzelt

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 34.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> See chapter two for a more thorough discussion of the relationship between causality and astrology.

<sup>59</sup> Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Bock, *Walter Benjamin—die Rettung der Nacht*, 111. “Die Sterne sind ewige Konstellationen, in welche die Bilder jeweils hingelegt werden. Die Bilder aber tragen, indem sie die menschliche Ordnung in den Himmel versetzen, auch deren zweideutigen Charakter als Abbild und Wunschbild.”

<sup>61</sup> Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, eds., *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity* (Bristol: Sophia Centre Press, 2011).

nicht in der Natur, sie entspringt aus der menschlichen Seele. Sie ist echt Geisteswerk. Sie ist aber deshalb nicht weniger wahr. Aus der Einbildungskraft geht der Keim jeder Wahrheit hervor, die Welt ist zuerst vom Geist erschaffen worden. Ursprünglich ist die Wirklichkeit uns fremd, wir sehen, verstehen sie nicht; wir sehen nur, was wir erdichten.<sup>62</sup>

Written nearly eighteen years later, the words of the astrologer Olga von Ungern-Sternberg echo Keyserling, “von hier aus scheint es fast, als sei die Lehre von den Sternen in Wirklichkeit eine Lehre vom Menschen.”<sup>63</sup> Here she suggests that by reading the stars, we read ourselves. Benjamin seeks to decode this practice of celestial hermeneutics and apply it to reading other forms of culture, and he can do so by unlocking the logic that pertains to astrology’s claim on interpreting origins.

Benjamin’s concern with origins in the *Trauerspiel* book is evident not only by his title, but his choice of opening epigraph. This epigraph outlines the production of Goethe’s *Urphänomen*, which theorizes that “the whole” was contained “within the concrete particular.” Goethe used the metaphor of a plant’s morphology to describe this, but I argue that the natal chart also describes this phenomenon. The originary moment of history, the moment of birth, captures a stellar picture, which—understood in contemporary terms—crystallizes the set of possibilities for that particular organism’s life. The whole (all the known and unknown stars) is contained in this concrete particular (the human life). By way of metaphors produced in astrological interpretation, the possibilities of unfolding (of a human life, an event, etc.) are infused in the moment of its inception. Benjamin also carried Goethe’s concept of *Urphänomen* to his graphological practice as we saw above. In that case, the sample of handwriting forms in gesture and content have the same originary totality in which the fact is already theory. In this context, the replacement of handwriting with typesetting also serves to account for some of Benjamin’s concern with the loss of aura in modern life. Graphology and astrology both rest on signatures, one human, one planetary, but in this way their hermeneutic processes are linked.

Benjamin’s work on the *Trauerspiel* rests upon astrological hermeneutics in another way. Viewed against the background of the *Urphänomen* and its astral corollary, Max Pensky’s claim—that, “The embeddedness of the *Trauerspiel* within historical time means that the genre becomes the aesthetic expression of the reality of historical catastrophe, above all the unparalleled physical violence and devastation, and social and political chaos, of the Thirty Years War”<sup>64</sup>—suddenly gains new valence. For Benjamin, rather than a superficial discussion of authors being influenced by historical and social forces around them in the creation of their plays, in Pensky’s words, “far more significant is the phenomenon in which an aesthetic expression enters into a relation with historical time so dialectically deep that time itself comes to dictate the actual

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<sup>62</sup> Hermann Keyserling, “Sterndeutung,” in *Philisophie als Kunst* (Darmstadt: Otto Reichl, 1920), 14.

<sup>63</sup> Olga von Ungern-Sternberg, *Die innerseelische Erfahrungswelt am Bilde der Astrologie* (Detmold: Meyerische Buchhandlung, 1928), 10.

<sup>64</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 75.

procedure and contours of aesthetic production.”<sup>65</sup> Building on this, I argue that, time, qualitatively legible in the astrology based on the movement of the sun, moon, planets, and stars, dictates the contours of aesthetic production. Recalling Benjamin’s understanding of the horoscope, where he says, “the moment of birth, which here decides everything, is but an instant. [. . .] It offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars. The perception of similarities thus seems to be bound to a time-moment (*Zeitmoment*).”<sup>66</sup> We can see an astrological hermeneutics subtending Benjamin’s thought. By reading the quality of this time, that is, that of the Thirty Year’s War, we can read more carefully into the quality of the aesthetic productions of this time. They are intertwined on such a deep level that they cannot be separated. And they can only become legible at certain times. What I am suggesting is that an astrological hermeneutics subtends the more obvious attraction to a culture of death that accounts for Benjamin’s interest in exploring German baroque culture. When he suggests that certain forms of culture become legible at certain times, he is pointing not only to the confluence of death and destruction that is common to both periods in Germany’s history, but to deeper structures that give form to these patterns.

### Benjamin and “Saturn”

Saturn makes a recurring appearance throughout Benjamin’s work. Despite Benjamin’s resistance to assigning biographical peculiarities of the author to the critical work, he relied on Goethe’s self-professed status as a child of Saturn (“Saturnkind”) to open up interpretational possibilities in his reading of Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften*.<sup>67</sup> And at the height of his direct philosophical interest in astrology (in “*Lehre vom Ähnlichen*” around 1933), he wrote in the enigmatic text “Agesilaus Santander”: “I came into the world under the sign of Saturn—that star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays.”<sup>68</sup> Regardless of the role that Saturn played in Benjamin’s own natal chart, this statement shows that he derived some satisfaction in describing himself in Saturnian terms.

Saturn also offers a point of entry into Benjamin’s well-documented rejection by the Warburg circle.<sup>69</sup> Benjamin’s section “*Trauerspiel and Tragedy*” in the *Origin of*

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Benjamin, “Doctrine of the Similar,” 66.

<sup>67</sup> See Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 87.

<sup>68</sup> Gerschom Scholem, “Walter Benjamin and his Angel,” in Gary Smith, ed., *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 58–59.

<sup>69</sup> Sigrid Weigel has written in great detail about Benjamin’s rejection by the Warburg school, despite Saxl’s keen interest in his monograph and acknowledgement of his erudition. This was as close as Benjamin’s orbit would take him to this group. See Sigrid Weigel, *Walter Benjamin: Die Kreatur, das Heilige, die Bilder* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008), 228–64. Her discussion also provides reprints of correspondence pertaining to Benjamin’s case. Despite Warburg’s rejection of Benjamin, ironically, some argue that Benjamin’s rise in popularity in academia in the 1980s and 90s contributed to the recent revival of interest in Warburg and his activities. Recent work has tried to evaluate Benjamin and Warburg in tandem, giving balance to each as

*German Tragic Drama* relies heavily upon the work of the Warburg scholars, but they were not sufficiently impressed with his work to include him in their academic sphere.<sup>70</sup> Benjamin's interest in Saturn goes a step beyond the Warburg group's. Although their scholarship influenced Benjamin, it was his deviation from or rather expansion of Warburg's technique that enabled him to become so fundamental to the shaping of cultural studies in academia in the last three decades. That is to say, Benjamin's extrapolation of the hermeneutic possibilities of the celestial imaginary that the Warburg scholars turned him onto, enabled his method to become a *modus operandi* for reading culture and practicing cultural history.

Saturn and its interpretational possibilities also provide a model of thought for Benjamin to develop his concept of the dialectical image in the *Arcades Project*. Susan Buck-Morss has provided a helpful definition of the dialectical image is "a way of seeing that crystallizes antithetical elements by providing the axes for their alignment . . . the 'synthesis' of which is not a movement towards resolution, but the point at which their axes intersect."<sup>71</sup> Fritz Saxl and Erwin Panofsky's work on the symbolism of Saturn in Albrecht Dürer's woodcut *Melencolia I* emphasizes two diametrically opposed ways ancients thought about the meaning of distance between Earth and Saturn.<sup>72</sup> They saw it as either the furthest planet away from the Earth or the highest planet in the order of the celestial spheres. In the first instance, Saturn is cold and slow, in the second, exalted and dignified. Taking up Warburg's late emphasis on neutrality in symbols, Saxl and Panofsky show how these two diametrically opposed interpretations are equally valid and present throughout the history of starlore. The astrological hermeneutics of the planet Saturn thus form a base structure upon which Benjamin can flesh out his idea of the dialectical image.<sup>73</sup> Celestial metaphors such as Saturn's interpretation inform Benjamin's most important contribution to theories of reading culture—his explanations of the concept of the dialectical image from the *Konvolut N* in the *Arcades Project*.<sup>74</sup>

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opposed to viewing Warburg for his contribution to Benjamin, see Claudia Zumbusch, *Wissenschaft in Bildern*.

<sup>70</sup> As Uwe Steiner, Max Pensky, and Jane O. Newman have noted. See esp., Jane O. Newman, "Hamlet ist auch Saturnkind": Citationality, Lutheranism, and German Identity in Walter Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*," in Geyer et al., *Benjamin Studien I*, 178.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 210.

<sup>72</sup> Saxl and Panofsky, *Dürer's Melencolia I. Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1923).

<sup>73</sup> Wolfgang Bock picks up on Saturn's determining role in the creation of the dialectical image in his *Walter Benjamin—Die Rettung der Nacht*, 13: He aims to show, "daß der melancholische und genialische Einfluß des Planeten Saturn, wie er im Neoplatonismus der Renaissance interpretiert wird, den Angelpunkt einer sprachlich gefaßten Bilderlehre ausmacht, die Benjamin zunächst an den Barockallegorien exemplifiziert, um sie dann im Passagenwerk, den Baudelaire-Aufsätzen und den Geschichtsthesen zur Theorie des dialektischen Bildes zu entfalten."

<sup>74</sup> Margaret Cohen explicitly uses the theses on history as they appear in *Konvolut N* of the *Arcades Project*, "because the urgency regulating [her] project does not approach the terrifying pressure of fascism leading Benjamin to rearticulate the flash of historical

## Celestial Metaphors and the Dialectical Image in *Konvolut N*

In *Konvolut N*, Benjamin continually refers to spatial metaphors to work out his ideas about temporality and history. “Pedagogic side of this undertaking: ‘To educate the image-making medium within us, raising it to a stereoscopic and dimensional seeing into the depths of historical shadows.’”<sup>75</sup> The references to stereoscopic dimensions evokes Ernst Jünger’s “Sizilianischer Brief an den Mann in den Mond” (Sicilian Letter to the Man on the Moon), as well as calls forth the idea of a spatial dimension to history that dovetails with Karl Clausberg’s recent discussions of the potential visibility of life on earth from other stars.<sup>76</sup>

Jünger’s text literally addresses the moon as an entity in the second person. He poetically inserts scenes of what it must be like for the man on the moon to view the earth from his position. This has the effect of making the reader view earth from this perspective. At the end of the text, Jünger brings the technological vision of the moon together with the mythical:

Gewiß, die Mondlandschaft mit ihren Felsen und Tälern ist ein Gebiet, das der astronomischen Topographie ihre Aufgaben stellt. Aber ebenso gewiß ist es, daß sie zugleich jener magischen Trigonometrie, von der eben die Rede war, zugänglich ist,—daß sie zugleich ein Gebiet der Geister ist, und daß die Phantasie, die ihr ein Gesicht verlieh, mit der Tiefe des kindlichen Blickes die Urschrift der Runen und die Sprache des Dämons verstand. Aber das Wichtigste für mich in diesem Augenblicke war, diese beiden Masken eines Seins unzertrennlich ineinander einschmelzen zu sehn.<sup>77</sup>

Jünger articulates the conflation of these two surfaces with the childhood pleasure of looking through the stereoscope: “Das war das Wunderbare, das uns an den doppelten Bildern entzückte, die wir als Kinder durch das Stereoskop betrachteten: Im gleichen Augenblicke, in dem sie in ein einziges Bild zusammenschmolzen, brach die neue Dimension der Tiefe in ihnen auf.”<sup>78</sup> The technical vision of the moon is akin to the ABC

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recuperation in 1940.” Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 10, fn29. While the Angel of History (*Angelus Novus*) plays a role in Benjamin’s lifelong gravitation toward celestial utopias, I agree with Cohen’s assessment here, and will also examine the fragments contained in *Konvolut N* rather than the “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940).

<sup>75</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), [N1,8], 458.

<sup>76</sup> Ernst Jünger, “Sizilianischer Brief an den Mann in den Mond” in *Mondstein* (Berlin: Frundsberg, 1930), 7–21, here ; and Karl Clausberg, *Zwischen den Sternen: Lichtbildarchive. Was Einstein und Uexküll, Benjamin und das Kino der Astronomie des 19. Jahrhunderts verdanken* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Jünger, “Sizilianischer Brief,” 21–20.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

book-type reading in Benjamin's "Doctrine of the Similar." Rather than rendering the technical vision obsolete, the element of the fantastic actually serves to enrich and deepen it—just as the astrologer's "magical" reading enriches the experience of the world.

Karl Clausberg, on the other hand, has recently written on the emerging awareness in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries of the ability of astronomers to see the past by looking through telescopes at the light of the stars.<sup>79</sup> Clausberg explores the thought experiment in the short text, *Die Gestirne und die Weltgeschichte*, published anonymously, but written by Felix Eberty in 1846. At its basis, Eberty fleshes out the idea that if the stars that are visible to the human eye are actually "happening" light-years ago, perhaps a being existing light-years away from earth can see the unfolding of our world history? This idea turned out to have incredible imaginative consequences for space-time imagination and, as Clausberg argues in one part, Einstein's development of his theory of special relativity. The duality of this gaze carries potential for Benjamin's dialectical image. In another fragment, he lays out the working of such a critical method:

Modest methodological proposal for the cultural-historical dialectic. It is very easy to establish oppositions, according to determinate points of view, within the various "fields" of any epoch, such that on one side lies the "productive," "forward-looking," "lively," "positive" part of the epoch, and on the other side the abortive, retrograde, and obsolescent. The very contours of the positive element will appear distinctly only insofar as this element is set off against the negative. On the other hand, every negation has its value solely as background for the delineation of the lively, the positive. It is therefore of decisive importance that a new partition be applied to this initially excluded, negative component so that, by a displacement of the angle of vision (but not of the criteria!), a positive element emerges anew in it too—something different from that previously signified. And so on, ad infinitum, until the entire past is brought into the present in a historical *apocatastasis*.<sup>80</sup>

The method that Benjamin proposes here is a constant shift in observational work, "a displacement of the angle of vision," so that binaries cease to be binaries, and the "abortive," "retrograde" (itself a celestial term), or "obsolescent" phenomena are rescued from their negative fate. The last term that he uses, *apocatastasis*, refers to the "restoration of all things," but it is specifically celestial in nature, originally referring to the return of celestial bodies to their original places. This cannot be emphasized enough. Most scholars stop short at the Jewish messianic connotations of this term without fully embracing the fact that it is also utilized as a celestial concept dealing with the reading and interpreting the positions of planets in the sky. It is not astrology in the sense that we recognize it today, but the term's hermeneutic intention is astrological. Integrated back into Benjamin's celestial view, his constellating method, this term gains a whole new meaning. It is less about a messianic "return," and more about observing a "setting

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<sup>79</sup> Clausberg, *Zwischen den Sternen*.

<sup>80</sup> Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, [N1a,3], 459.

right” of the relations between humans and celestial bodies. In a sense, Benjamin restores the secular to the religious in a term that was once used historically to mean both simultaneously. In the context of his “modest” proposal for criticism outlined above the constant “displacement of the angle of vision” also seems to belie Benjamin’s awareness of his earth-boundedness in celestial terms. Life on earth is constantly subjected to a displacement of the angle of vision as evidenced by the earth’s rotation causing the illusion of the sun’s movement by day and the stars’ movement by night. The fundamental experience of living on this planet forces us to see new angles each second. Benjamin calls attention to this subtle yet foundational reality and applies it to historical and cultural criticism.

In another fragment in *Konvolut N*, Benjamin evokes an astrological view when he suggests that one should aim “to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event.”<sup>81</sup> In this fragment the ideas of progress and of decline are both held to be two sides of the same issue. By formulating the moment this way, he escapes a developmental explanation and relies on identifying a specific quality of time inherent in the moment itself—astrological hermeneutics clearly subtend such a claim. The dialectical image is also coded in astral terms as well:

For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time. And, indeed, this acceding “to legibility” constitutes a specific critical point in the movement at their interior. Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each “now” is the now of a particular recognizability. [ . . . ] It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural (*bildlich*).<sup>82</sup>

Here, time is marked off as different from the things that fill time. And image is not some thing found pre-made in nature, but the result of the critical task of reading. One can hear echoes of Benjamin’s “Epistemo-Critical Prologue”: “Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.”<sup>83</sup> Images do not exist prior to man, man makes them using his imagination. In this way, Benjamin identifies two sets of images, historical and archaic. For him, “only dialectical images are genuinely historical—that is, not archaic—images. The image that is read—which is to say, the image in the now of its recognizability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.”<sup>84</sup> In 1933 in “The Doctrine of the Similar,” Benjamin postulated that all reading was founded on astrological hermeneutics. The image itself possesses a certain quality inherent in the “now of its recognizability” giving the critical

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., [N2,6], 461.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., [N3,1], 462–63.

<sup>83</sup> Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 34.

<sup>84</sup> Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, [N3,1], 463.

analysis itself a time stamp. We are in the position now of seeing how Benjamin's attraction to early modern signification practices related to tensions and anxieties surrounding reading and meaning production in his own time. This critical moment is always shifting and this is why the object of history must be rescued over and over. As the earth hurtles through space, the angles of human perception change, and the critic must constantly look again to find the new constellations that have become not only possible, but legible in certain moments. The work of the critic is never done.

The spatiality of the constellation of “what-has-been” and the “now” is paramount for Benjamin: “In order for a part of the past to be touched by the present instant (*Aktualität*), there must be no continuity between them.”<sup>85</sup> The dialectical image is thus not only infused with celestial spatiality, but with the hermeneutic processes for decoding that configuration. This seems to form a counterpoint for what I have been arguing up until now. Two senses of continuity come to the surface in this statement. The first, the continuity of historical progress figured purely in terms of temporal succession, and second, the continuity in terms of cause and effect that is conspicuously absent from graphological and astrological interpretation. The dialectical image captures both simultaneously. It is not that there is no symbolic continuity between them, but rather no temporal, causal continuity.

To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions—there the dialectical image appears. It is the caesura in the movement of thought. Its position is naturally not an arbitrary one. It is to be found, in a word, where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest. Hence, the object constructed in the materialist presentation of history is itself the dialectical image. The latter is identical with the historical object; it justifies its violent expulsion from the continuum of the historical process.<sup>86</sup>

The appearance of a horoscope itself is a crystallization of an event (a birth) that expels itself outside the continuum of historical process. This celestial view is bolstered by statements of critics like Max Pensky, who says of dialectical images that they “mark in the first instance a peculiar, nonreproducible structure in the movement of history.”<sup>87</sup> An analogy can be made here to the peculiar, nonreproducible configurations of planetary orbits in our solar system. This celestial analogy adds a new element to the discussions of Jewish theology and German romantic appropriations in Benjamin's work. And it might have had more weight than the latter two in helping Benjamin arrive at his theoretical formulation of the “objective” and nonarbitrary quality of the dialectical image,<sup>88</sup> especially when we recall Gershom Scholem's assertion of

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, [N7,7], 470.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, [N10a,3], 475.

<sup>87</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 216.

<sup>88</sup> For Pensky's critique of Susan Buck-Morss's discussion of the dialectical image and Kabbalah, see Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 233–37. Pensky, without fully providing a satisfactory answer to the problem he brings up, notes that Susan Buck-Morss's argument that Benjamin's dialectical image derives much from Gershom Scholem's

“Benjamin’s lifelong effort to recover a form of perception ‘as a reading in configurations of the surface, which is the way prehistoric man perceived the world around him, particularly the sky.’”<sup>89</sup> The spatiality of astrological reading is important in another way.

The natal chart is a strange elision of a symbolic record of an “outer” space and, increasingly in the twentieth century, with the development of psychological approaches to astrology, an “inner” space. The horoscope map conflates both spaces, and remains outside normative societal structures because its claim to knowledge—to a certain kind of truth—has been deemed invalid by the natural sciences. The space of the natal chart is a heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense in that it connects disparate spaces (the heavens with the human body in the form of a symbolic map) and times (the moment of someone’s birth with the moment of life during which one looks at the birth chart).<sup>90</sup> The latter case assumes that there is continuity between the moment of birth and the individual who it represents, reinforcing the idea of a singular selfhood. But the experience of reading the chart seems to escape this chronological flow of narrative time by connecting two moments in time that have no apparent direct link to each other (the moment of birth and the moment of now). Darrelyn Gunzberg has researched the sense of temporality during the reading of charts and identified a remarkable sense of timelessness that erupts in the hermeneutic process.<sup>91</sup> This sense of timelessness springs out of the historical continuum, if only momentarily, and establishes a space for reflection on the star maps and the human lives they depict.

Nowhere does Benjamin discuss astrology’s validity. He simply states that we do not have the same kind of access to it as people did before the early modern period. So when Benjamin sees astrology’s decline being due to a loss of a certain type of experience this does not mean one cannot practice astrology anymore—that astrology is something that is not true—rather it means that modern man no longer has popular access to the kind of hermeneutic insight it can offer. Its ability to offer that insight is still there, but most people in the modern world no longer read that way.

Benjamin does not advocate that people practice astrology, rather he constructs a way of being in the world that derives its power from the astrological way of reading the world. He most definitely gained this experiential reality through his work as a graphologist, which gave him experiential knowledge of this kind of correspondence at work. In this sense, we can draw a parallel between Benjamin and Kepler. Critics often champion Kepler as a figure who liberated astronomy from astrology. They begrudgingly acknowledge that he practiced astrology, but they characterize this explicitly in terms of this dire need for money, which accounts for his creating annual

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work on Kabbalah cannot hold, mostly because Scholem’s work began much later than Benjamin’s initial formulations of the dialectical image, and also that Scholem’s discussions of Kabbalah reflect Benjamin’s own influence.

<sup>89</sup> Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 72. Pensky quotes Scholem, *The Story of a Friendship*, 61.

<sup>90</sup> Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22–27.

<sup>91</sup> Darrelyn Gunzberg, “How Do Astrologers Read Charts?,” in Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity* (Bristol: Sophia Centre Press, 2011), 181–200.

calendars and such. Proponents of this view claim that Kepler abhorred astrology, but that ignores the nuance of his relationship to it. Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum has recently reiterated the call to discard this claim in a recent special issue of *Culture and Cosmos*: “This volume of *Culture and Cosmos* contains only a sampling of Kepler’s astrological oeuvre, yet the depth and breadth of these writings show that we must again lay to rest the popular but unfounded claim that Kepler only practised astrology for the money.”<sup>92</sup> German astrologers in the early twentieth century were well aware of Kepler’s serious interest in astrology and efforts to take it seriously themselves. Heinz Arthur Strauß and Sigrid Strauß-Kloebe—two historians contemporary to Benjamin—approach Kepler’s astrology in an attempt to integrate his body of work:

Die Calendria waren für ein breites Publikum bestimmt, und wenn sie auch in ihrer ganzen Bedeutung den geringsten Platz unter Keplers Werken einnehmen, so muß doch festgestellt werden, daß trotz ihrer Zweitklassigkeit und ihrer verachteten Bestimmung die Keplersche Philosophie in ihnen in reicher Weise zu Worte kommt. Auch sonst bieten die Kalender manches Interessante. Es fesselt der im weiteren Sinne auch zu den Prognostiken gehörige “Discurs von der großen Conjunction” allein schon wegen der lebendigen Gegenwart des Dreißigjährigen Krieges, und wegen der aus Keplers Darstellung und verschiedentlich ansprechenden Verwandtschaft jener Zeit zu unseren Tagen.<sup>93</sup>

By reintegrating Kepler’s calendars as a part of his oeuvre, Strauß and Strauß-Kloebe follow the similar method of Warburg and Benjamin and other cultural historians, in trying to make sense of cultural expressions that do not quite fit in the dominant explanatory paradigm. Their interest in Kepler’s calendars parallels Warburg’s interest in the astrological pamphlets of the Reformation.

Similarly, the history of the reception of Benjamin’s oeuvre falls in a similar trap. Like Kepler, Benjamin also worked on an astrological calendar in 1927, for which the editors of his *Selected Works* ironically could not find a suitable place.<sup>94</sup> Benjamin wrote twelve humorous couplets combining astrological symbolism with political satire. The text was accompanied by drawings by Rudolf Grossmann that showed on the left side, a depiction of the star sign, and on the right, caricatures of the figures Benjamin poked fun at. That Benjamin was able to generate verses that highlight the humorous aspects of the astrological signs shows that he took it seriously enough to learn the nuances of the archetypes. This holds even if the aim of the calendar was to make fun of astrology itself.

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<sup>92</sup> Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, “Introduction to *Kepler’s Astrology*,” *Culture And Cosmos* 14, nos. 1 and 2 (Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter 2010): vii–x, here vii.

<sup>93</sup> Johannes Kepler, *Opera VIII*, 339. Quoted in Heinz Artur Strauß and Sigrid Strauß-Kloebe, *Die Astrologie des Johannes Kepler: Eine Auswahl aus seinen Schriften* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1926), 26.

<sup>94</sup> The editors of Benjamin’s *Gesammelte Schriften* freely admit to not knowing where to put this particular oddity in their criticism of Benjamin’s collected works. This calendar is “isoliert” in Benjamin’s oeuvre, and therefore it must “in der Anordnung der ‘Gesammelte Schriften’ eine Sonderstellung beanspruchen.” Benjamin, *GS VI*:631.

Much of the scholarship on Benjamin is marked by an unwillingness to recognize how central his experience of practicing graphology was to the foundation of his philosophical ideas. It is often brought up as an aside, as almost an unfortunate fact, that he practiced graphology to support himself financially. I argue that Benjamin's experience of graphology, and graphology's proximity to astrology at that time, has a greater impact on Benjamin's body of work than heretofore imagined or admitted. Miriam Bratu Hansen has shown that situating his reception of Klages, and his practice of graphology within the historical force field of their common practice in Germany at that time gives us a new way to appreciate difficult terms such as "aura," for example. Benjamin himself stated in 1935, "Bestehen zusammenhänge zwischen den *Erfahrungen* der Aura und denen der Astrologie [?] Gibt es irdische Lebenwesen sowohl wie Sachen, die aus den Sternen zurückblicken? die eigentlich erst am Himmel ihren Blick aufschlagen? *Sind die Gestirne mit ihrem Blick aus der Ferne das Urphänomen der Aura?*"<sup>95</sup> In one short question that almost seems to answer itself in the process of being posed, Benjamin productively brings together the stars, Goethe's *Urphänomen*, and his concept of aura. Warburg's story about primitive man looking up to the sky transforms itself with Benjamin into the idea that the stars *look back* at us. Felix Eberty's thought experiment comes to life in Benjamin's theoretical formulations. Contextualized in light of the debates surrounding astrology as an *Erfahrungswissenschaft*, we can gain a whole new appreciation for the valence of that kind of experience that Benjamin spent so long arguing for.

In the early twentieth century something about the type of reading inherent to graphology and astrology was being rediscovered at a popular level: namely, a way of apprehending how two distinct things can be connected meaningfully without any causal or physical relationship existing between them. Benjamin applied this hermeneutic process to other elements of culture. This type of meaning production fell out of favor with the increasing emphasis on the scientific method, which is concerned with experimental repeatability and explaining phenomena in terms of material causes and proof. The theories of progress that subtend such knowledge production serve to create the impression that the ways of knowing inherent in astrology had died out or been proven wrong. My discussion of the surge of interest in astrology in early twentieth century Germany has shown that this is simply not the case. By viewing Benjamin's *oeuvre* against the background of the astrological revival, one can finally appreciate the discourse he engaged in when he discussed astrology. Doing so can also help make sense of the type of experience that graphology afforded Benjamin and the critical importance this experience had on the development of his hermeneutics of culture.

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<sup>95</sup> Benjamin, Ms 931 (1935), in Benjamin, *GS* II.3:958. My emphasis.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the winter of 1929, perhaps even in early 1930, Fritz Saxl gave a talk at the Warburg Institute, titled, “The Belief in Stars in the Twelfth Century” essentially asking the question of how Christians in the twelfth century could adopt astrological worldviews after they had been successfully banned from Christian life for nearly one thousand years.<sup>1</sup> Saxl situates his talk in an important methodological frame, beginning his lecture by stating, “The history of astrology is still regarded as an obscure and unimportant subject.”<sup>2</sup> This shows that by 1929, even though the Warburg Institute had made studying the history of astrological iconography one of its central missions, the perception persisted that it was not gaining the same popularity in academia that it was receiving in practice in the non-academic world. Saxl ends his talk with a familiar call to arms, “We must learn to trespass into strange fields and try to co-ordinate pictures with beliefs, religion with science. [...] It seems to me that no more important task faces the historical sciences nowadays than to collect the materials for a history of beliefs. They are the masonry which underpins the bridge of our cultural consciousness from antiquity to modern times.”<sup>3</sup> Not only does he assert the fundamental position of the study of astrological symbolism and its history for Warburg’s version of cultural history, but he also posits astrology as the bridge that connects man from “antiquity to modern times.” Astrology was and is as important as ever.

Throughout its various expressions, astrology fundamentally rests on the premise of man making meaningful connections to the sky—whether this is emphasized through fixed stars, like Babylonian astrology, or planets, like Western astrology, or imaginary points based on planetary positions, like medieval Arabic astrology. In all its forms, astrology is the practice of humans creating meaningful connection between themselves, as individuals or social communities, and the natural world. It is only fitting then, that Warburg and his contemporaries would find in astrology’s history an inexhaustible archive of cultural data informing us about the history of mankind. German astrologers at this time were part of a larger movement to differentiate prognostic and diagnostic astrology. This distinction is important because diagnostic astrology—that is astrology tempered by twentieth-century developments in psychological science—seems to be exactly the kind of practice that could establish the logical space for thought (*Denkraum*) that Warburg accused astrology of destroying. In fact, when mobilized as an interpretive tool, astrology establishes a very specific form of *Denkraum* between symbolic events that could never have been unified except under that hermeneutic umbrella. Warburg himself did this! His study of Luther and astrology links the early modern period directly to the interwar period, and helps him make sense out of his current cultural moment.

The rich interpretive qualities of astrology, whether prognostic or diagnostic, are perhaps why it was even possible for it to persist, survive, be revived, despite the claim

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<sup>1</sup> Fritz Saxl, “The Belief in Stars in the Twelfth Century,” in Fritz Saxl, *Lectures* vol. 1, (London: Warburg Institute, 1957), 85–95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 94–95.

of the natural sciences to have rendered its systematic base meaningless, and therefore to have eradicated it. Viewed from the standpoint of reading, legibility, and intelligibility, the results however, stand out in strong relief. Humans are storytellers; astrology affords a system that tells stories about humans that connects them spatially and temporally not only to their immediate environments, but also to those of the past and potentially the future. In this way, astrological discourse and its history are important for literary studies. In a field that examines human stories, fictional stories, embedded in their historical contexts, it is time to revisit the field of astrological interpretation. Predictions as well as diagnoses of natal charts contain vast symbolic meaning, almost a language unto themselves, that at its core are no more of a hermeneutic enterprise than an analysis of a story. Klaus Haberkamm began this work his 1972 study of Grimmelshausen. My dissertation has shown how critical it is to understand the astrological imaginary in order to understand early twentieth century Germany more thoroughly. Astrology and its symbolism played a decisive role in the creation of certain forms of psychology (Schmitz), film (Wegener), art history (Warburg), and philosophy (Benjamin) in early twentieth-century Germany. The presence of the astrological imaginary in German culture at the start of the twentieth century played a key role in generating influential types of cultural interpretation as well as popular films, novels, and experiences. The astrological imaginary provided them with a system for navigating the realms of the possible.

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