

## The Gestures of Hands in Drawing Books - a warburgian reading using the Historical Archive of the University of Porto



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**ENG Abstract:** The paper deals with the archival material from the Rectory of the Universidade do Porto, specifically with engravings published in Drawing Books from several figures of History of Art, namely: the Carracci family's educational prints and Francesco Bartolozzi engravings, both from the 18th century as well as Robert Sayer's edition from 1762(?). The proposal aims to reflect through our empirical contact with these archival materials, mainly focusing images instructing how to draw hands. Such images are engravings and were used in the early beginnings in the practice of teaching drawing in Porto, Aula de Desenho from the Academia Real de Marinha e Comércio da Cidade do Porto. Following Aby Warburg's thesis of *Pathosformel*, our reflection attempts to show how the representations of hand gestures "survived" in the pedagogy of drawing. More importantly, we will underline how the drawn hand gestures and poses are an emotional product of phenomenological forces of human experience. The arguments and reflections are grounded on Georges Didi-Huberman's analysis and his work around Aby Warburg's and Walter Benjamin's writings. (Didi-Huberman 2011, 2000, 2010). We will articulate texts from art history, theory of image, anthropology and neuroscience literature, with our own visual essays to enlighten our phenomenological experience when working around the archival material from the University of Porto.

**Key words:** Hands gesture; *Pathosformel*; Archive; Drawing; Artistic pedagogies; Warburg;

### **ES** Los gestos de las manos en cartillas de dibujo – una lectura warburgiana a partir del Archivo Histórico de la Universidade de Oporto

**Resumen:** Este artículo trata sobre el material de archivo del Rectorado de la Universidade do Porto, específicamente grabados publicados en libros de dibujo de varias figuras de la Historia del Arte, a saber: las láminas educativas de la familia Carracci y los grabados de Francesco Bartolozzi, ambos del XVIII así como la edición de Robert Sayer de 1762. Se trata de una propuesta que reflexiona a partir de nuestro contacto empírico con este material de archivo, centrándonos principalmente en imágenes que instruyen cómo dibujar manos. Estas imágenes son grabados y se utilizaron en los inicios de la enseñanza del dibujo en Oporto, en el Aula de Debuxo e Desenho (1779 - 1803). Siguiendo la tesis de *Pathosformeln* de Aby Warburg, nuestra reflexión intenta mostrar cómo las representaciones de gestos de manos "sobrevivieron" en la pedagogía del dibujo. Más importante aún, subrayaremos cómo los gestos y poses de las manos dibujadas son un producto emocional de fuerzas fenomenológicas de la experiencia humana. Para fundamentar nuestros argumentos, nuestra reflexión se basa principalmente en el análisis de Georges Didi-Huberman y su trabajo en torno a los escritos de Aby Warburg y Walter Benjamin. Combinaremos textos de historia del arte, teoría de la imagen, antropología y literatura de neurociencia, con nuestros propios ensayos visuales, para iluminar nuestra experiencia fenomenológica al trabajar con el material de archivo de la Universidade de Porto.

**Palabras clave:** Gesto de las manos; *Pathosformel*; Archivo; Dibujo; Pedagogías artísticas; Warburg;

**Sumario:** Opening the drawer. Drawing books or Benjamin's rags. Hands on the table, carving the archive. "Pathosformel" and the archive of the future. Final Remarks. Acknowledgements. References.

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### Opening the drawer

At the archive of the University of Porto, we enter a confined space where most historical documents are being stored today - a building<sup>1</sup> with new facilities and conditions which are appropriate for their conservation. Up until recently, most of the historical archives of the University of Porto were kept in the historical building of the Rectory, where the first classes of the dawn of this institution were taught 200 years ago. (Universidade do Porto 2012).

Documents on paper are slowly migrating to these new installations. A slow process is undertaken by the conservator Ana Freitas<sup>2</sup>, who opens one of the archive drawers for us. She hand selects a bunch of printed material, used at teaching drawing at the Aula of Debuxo e Desenho (1779 - 1803). We are shown a group of engravings, likely brought to Porto by Francisco Vieira, “o Portuense”<sup>3</sup>, when he had been appointed head director of Aula de Debuxo e Desenho in 1802, the first institution devoted to the teaching drawing of the city of Porto (Vasconcelos 1987, 122). There are recordings confirming that Vieira travelled to London and brought with him a large amount of material (drawings, prints and books).<sup>4</sup> Another figure from Porto's artistic milieu, José Teixeira Barreto also traveled to Italy and could've also brought such engravings for the Academy of Porto (Viana 1987, 11). The prints are either in a book form or can be seen as individual sheets of paper. Most of them showcasing fragmented images of anatomies.



Fig. 1. Francesco Bartolozzi. (1728-1815). Cipriani's Rudiments of Drawing. Engraved by F. Bartolozzi. 1796. Book showing the stamp of Real Academia do Porto. Archive of the Old Library Fund. Currently found in drawer 9. [numbered in the past as “141”]. Photograph by the authors. 2025.

Learning anatomy from fragments has been a tradition which started or could be traced back to Leonardo da Vinci and then to Florentine Academy of Drawing founded by Vasari in 1563 (Shiner 2001, 37). In similar contexts, students would draw both from other drawings but most often from prints depicting fragments of the body: eyes, ears, mouths, hands, etc. (Elkins 2001, 18). With this group we find quite an impressive number of images of hands: scattered in the composition of the page, each hand could be read from every direction: up or down, left or right, every point of view feels appropriate. And while some of the prints seem oriented toward instructing how to draw, others - floating on the page as random gestures frozen on paper - convey a sense of a catalogue, display of different hand posture.

<sup>1</sup> Unidade de Inovação Educação (U.Porto). Praça do Cel. Pacheco 15, 4050-453 Porto.

<sup>2</sup> Ana Freitas. Paper conservator. Code. 429988. U.Porto Digital University. University of Porto. URL: [https://sigarra.up.pt/reitoria/pt/func\\_geral.formview?p\\_codigo=429988](https://sigarra.up.pt/reitoria/pt/func_geral.formview?p_codigo=429988)

<sup>3</sup> “O Portuense” refers to Francisco Vieira as being native of the city of Porto.

<sup>4</sup> Those include 851 prints from Francesco Bartolozzi, 44 books with prints, 75 prints from several authors, 73 drawing manuals, and alongside he also added his own personal collection. (Lemos 2020, 118).

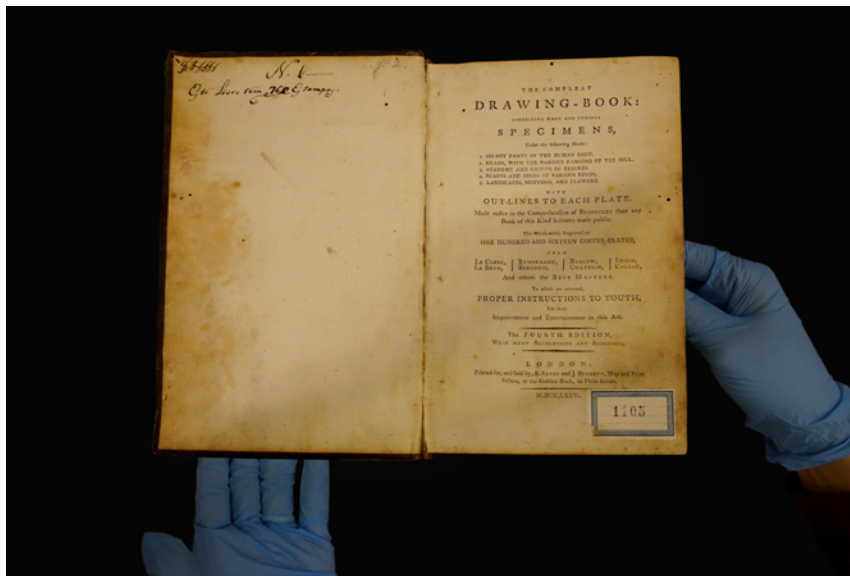


Fig. 2. Frontispiece of the book “The Compleat Drawing Book. (4<sup>a</sup> Edition). Printed for and sold by Robert Sayer. Archive of the Old Library Fund. Photograph by the authors. 2025.

This pedagogical tradition resonates with the popularity of drawing manuals in nineteenth-century Portugal<sup>5</sup> (Pimenta 2004). These were printed as pocketbooks or semi-large portfolios, allowing for their usage between peers. Drawing manuals were publications typically less dense in writing<sup>6</sup> and had greater focus on picture legibility, to encourage the reader’s drawing performance and practice, sometimes with step-by-step instructions. [Fig. 2] Such books were used by draughtsman for copying, to delineate or to trace motifs. The same trend followed Portugal’s culture of drawing with examples of Portuguese publications such as *Desenho sem Mestre* (1898-1899). (Pimenta 2004).



Fig. 3. Robert Sayer’s. *The artist’s vade mecum*, published in 1762. Engraving from the Archive of Fundo Antigo da Reitoria da Universidade do Porto numbered 10 whereas in the book form the same prints appear as number 28. Courtesy of Ana Freitas, Conservator from the Rectory of the University of Porto.

<sup>5</sup> The represented motifs of drawing manuals were often related to daily life of draughtsmen work, either related to industrial outputs, ornamental or decorative details for sculptures and painting and most often related with religious motifs.

<sup>6</sup> Although this was not always the case in earlier publications on drawing, where written descriptions were more substantial, this version of drawing manuals is rooted in what Bénédicte Miyamoto (2020) argues.

## Drawing books or Benjamin's rags

According to Teresa Viana<sup>7</sup>, the way these prints have been stored in Porto reveals a typical form of collecting in seventeenth century Europe that lasted for the next two centuries. Effectively, there is evidence of their usage: stains, marks of folding, annotations that show that these objects “were seen as tools for working, teaching and learning from”. (Viana 1987, 12). All of a sudden, we notice fingerprints of charcoal along the edges of the book's pages (Fig. 4). These collateral marks bear witness to the manipulation of the images in an effort to master their representation, traces left by the practice of learning to draw.



Fig. 4. Fingerprint marks showing on the back side of prints from Francesco Bartolozzi. *Livre de Portraiture d' Anib. Carrache*. Photography by the first author of the texts. 2025.

The arrival of these impressions to our time cannot be read as anything less than an apparition. They are ancient gestures turned into images, a display that deeply moved us to our core as “an apparition of a distance” and all the aura that accompanies this kind of epiphany (Didi-Huberman 2015, 181). A possible reading is the double evidence of gesture: centuries-old fingerprints intertwine with the printed hands; gestures folded into gestures. Before us, a “dialectical image” takes shape. We are struck by Benjamin’s “flash”<sup>8</sup> (2005 [1940], Note V, VI, VII), confused by these “living-pasts-from-the-present”<sup>9</sup> as João Barrento would phrase, in the sense that the fingerprints are not really from the past, not really present in the time being (2023, p. 25).

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has reasoned that the traditional hermeneutics based on meaning should be reversed to an understanding of reality based on the human–material relationship and the creation of an effect of presence, via the contact with the materiality and the sensory world (2004, 1–3). This idea is also reinforced by Horst Bredekamp throughout his body of work (2015 [2010]), as can be seen when he talks about the nature of fingerprints<sup>10</sup>:

the unmistakable individuality of a natural entity transformed into an image, in which one may see both the production of an icon and the bestowal of an element of dignity. In every case, one is concerned with that effect of an image that is achieved through a body suddenly becoming a pictorial entity and, by this means, the medium of a dual existence. (Bredekamp 2015 [2010], 148).

<sup>7</sup> Maria Teresa Viana was appointed Director of the National Museum Soares dos Reis of Porto, in between 2002 and 2006. URL: <https://museusoaresdosreis.gov.pt/museu/organizacao/>.

<sup>8</sup> Often referred to as “flash” in some English translations, such as Dennis Redmond in 2005. (Benjamin, 2005 [1940]).

<sup>9</sup> Translated freely by the authors of this text: “Só lendo deste modo “o que foi” poderemos chegar a um entendimento real do “Agora”, longe de qualquer empatia com o passado, ou da sua petrificação, tendendo antes para uma presentificação de imagem vivas. A dialética que orienta este tipo de pensamento é agora aberta e não-triádica, sem síntese, mas permitindo o aparecimento de terceiras coisas, nem passado nem presente, mas os passados-vivos-do-presente, (...)” (Barrento 2023, 25).

<sup>10</sup> In our modern collective imagery, the fingerprint surpasses even the face as a symbol for identity (Belting 2019 [2013], 236).

We can look at these images as breaches in time: latencies of a disciplinary practice of the teaching of drawing. On top of the historical document, we encounter the fertility of historical “anachronism” (Didi-Huberman 2017 [2000], 22), erupting in the charcoal-black fingerprints, like what Roland Barthes (1981) described as a “punctum” in photography: a detail that disturbs and unsettles, but also pleases. *Punctum*, stains, remains, and fragments can all be gathered under the name of “rags”. Borrowing from Benjamin’s *Das Passagen-Werk* (1982), Didi-Huberman evokes the metaphor of the 19th-century ragpicker of Paris, to support his thesis against the positive model of History as a discipline of facts. As he states, “History is not static nor is it just a casual narrative.”<sup>11</sup> (2017 [2000], 125) and like the debris of the city of Paris collected by the ragpicker, the historian needs to collect the debris of History. Didi-Huberman (2017 [2000]) stresses that “historians must become a ragpicker” (128 - 130), avoiding hierarchical tendencies, not placing “important facts over insignificant ones”, or choosing to place “objective facts over subjective ones”. (2017 [2000], 128). In the figure of the ragpicker, we find an interdependency between the concepts of “Archive” and “History” because by collecting the debris of the city, the ragpicker makes an Archive of some sort. Likewise, History is understood by the author as a complex arrangement of debris, that is, a collection of rags, –messy, unnoticed, unclear. (135).

That is how we are looking at the historical prints at the University of Porto: choosing to pay attention to the fingerprints, as evidence of debris, or Benjamin’s rags. Moreover, some of the prints at University of Porto’s archive are nameless, undated and seemingly detached from their original source or publication. While some bindings keep the prints as originally assembled—such as those engraved by Bartolozzi for Cipriani’s *Rudiments of Drawing* (1796)—others, like the Carracci and Sayer prints, have been separated from their original volumes. Prints, which are now archived as individual sheets, can be understood as fragments or “debris,” in Benjamin’s sense of *rags*: remnants detached from their original context yet still bearing traces of it.

### Hands on the table, carving the archive

A curious way to think of the debris is the importance given by Didi-Huberman to Warburg’s device – the panel or table. Didi-Huberman (2013 [2011]) starts by bringing the roots of the use of the table for rituals – sacrifices and offerings to the gods. (2013 [2011], 49). Even though different terminologies exist for tables and altars, he argues that these distinctions are not sufficient to stop the formal relationship through which the table, as a device, influences human behavior.

The table is the place which invites for arrangements, to dissociate elements but as well to articulate them – to “cut the animal into pieces” in messy and visceral ways, or to organize meticulously the offerings to the gods”. (49). For the author, the concept of the table jumps into a reasoning that Warburg’s panels are tables. Using this analogy, it is as if Warburg’s images are body parts to be moved around: disposed, cut and reorganized in infinite possibilities. Interestingly, the fragmented body as image is also the subject of Aby Warburg’s panel B from his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*. A “homo signorum” –the zodiac man– appears to be placed on top of a table, with a representation of an open desiccated body (Didi-Huberman 2013 [2011], 46).

<sup>11</sup> Translated freely by the authors.

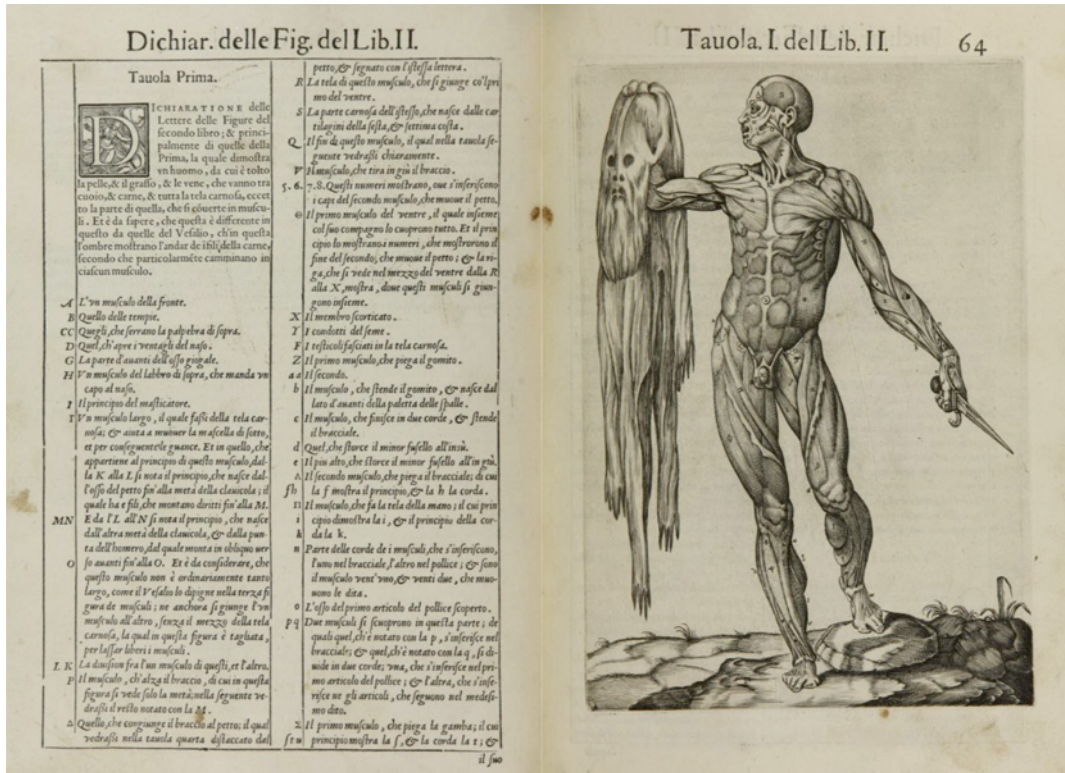
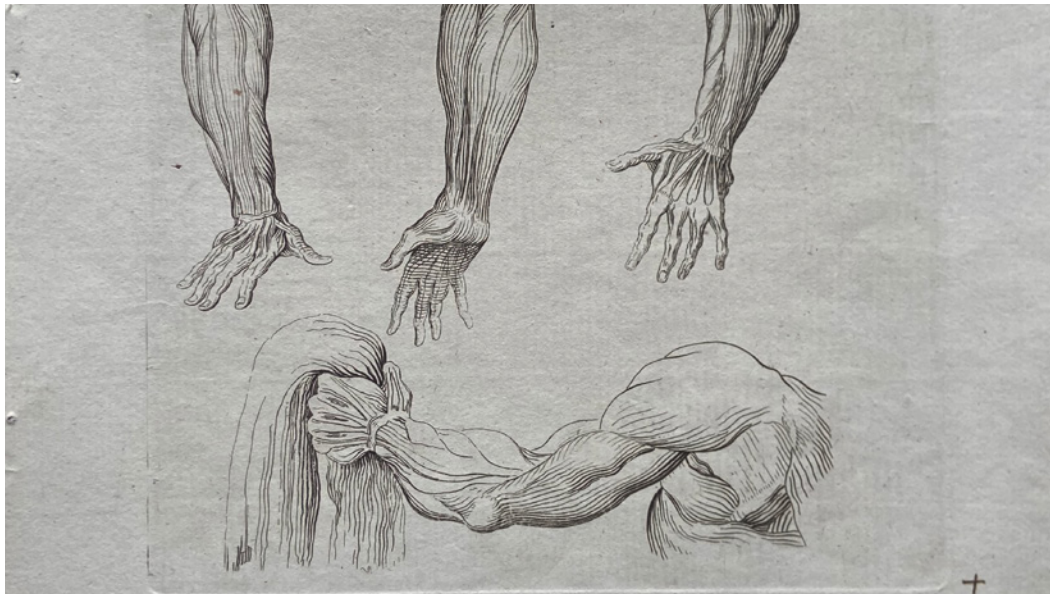


Fig. 5. [composed image]. —[On the top]. Close up of page 80 from Robert Sayer's *The artist's vade mecum*, published in 1762. Engraving numbers 35 on Sayer's publication and number 14, stored at the Old Fund Library of the Rectory of the University of Porto. / [On the bottom] Page 64 from the book *Anatomia del corpo humano* by Juan Valverde de Amusco. Printed by Nicolò Bevilacqua. Published in 1559 in Rome. Source: <https://archive.org/details/9617625.nlm.nih.gov/page/n120/mode/thumb>

Suddenly, Carracci's, Sayer's, and Bartolozzi's prints of hands no longer seem like clouds drifting peacefully out of frame. They become visceral - as if a body had been torn apart: severed limbs, faces, torsos, eyes, and mouths scattered on the page. Sayer's 18th-century illustration of muscle anatomy of human body skinning itself (Fig. 5) could be traced all the way back to the 16th century where in the book of Amusco, the human figure skins itself more evidently. In the following pages, the human body tears down its muscles, becoming a skeleton and finally falls apart into pieces.



Fig. 6. Robert Sayer's. *The artist's vade mecum*, published in 1762. Engraving from the Archive of Fundo Antigo da Reitoria da Universidade do Porto numbered 11, whereas in the book form the same prints appear numbered as 32. Courtesy of Ana Freitas, Conservator from the Rectory of the University of Porto.

Each of these sheets bear witness to an act of violence that umbilically binds the teaching of drawing in the academies to far older and more primitive rituals. The pedagogues of the earliest drawing academies – among them the Carracci and Charles Le Brun– mutilated, rented, and shattered original works by the great masters of painting and sculpture in order to obtain the pages of fragments of bodies for others to copy from. This way of displaying images appears to be a *survival* of “primitive” gestures already identified by André Leroi-Gourhan. The author defines the technical importance of fragmenting known reality –in the case of his work, the “knapped pebbles” of prehistory– for the creation of a new tool, which he understands as a genuine “secretion of the body,” approximating the very idea of a limb (Didi-Huberman 2013, 45, quoting Leroi-Gourhan).

There is, in truth, a profound ritual violence inherent to this model of teaching: the violence of seizing an image and dismembering it into multiple fragments, fragments that refer us back to the mythologies and belief systems of the past, which survived well into the twentieth century. For René Girard, rituals of unanimity and violence are inextricably intertwined. By understanding the teaching of drawing as a ritual, we become aware of the unanimity that reproduces themselves cyclically within an order and hierarchy corresponding to the founding myths of the culture in which they are embedded (Girard 2002 [1990], 150-152). Until the 20th century, violence and dissidence within the academic community were appeased in the cyclical gesture of carnage and symbolic violence of dismembering bodies in the works by the “old masters”, (a definition that throughout history encompasses periodically new members). These works served as a “scapegoat” upon which the community projected the whole of its belief and energy. It is thus in their mutilation –in *sparagmos*– in what is, at its deepest level, a ritual dismemberment followed by the scattering of the members across the world through the medium of engraving –that the priest-teacher may reassemble and introduce into the academic community new images revived by the collective, renewing its vital energy through the ritual ingestion, without guilt, of this body part without name (Calasso 1990, 299-301).



Fig. 7. Douris (painter) (500 B.C.-460 B.C.). Red-Figure Cup Showing the Death of Pentheus (exterior) and a Maenad (interior), c. 480 B.C. Ceramic terracotta. 12.7 cm x 29,2 cm. Accession number. AP 2000.02. Kahn Building, South Gallery, Kimbell Art Museum, Texas, USA. Source: <https://kimbellart.org/collection/ap-200002>

The dismemberment of the human body into parts, the fragmented pages of drawing instructions –visible at the edges of the engraving, marked by holes where binding threads once held a book together– now seem to reveal yet another form of violence (Girard 2002, 1990). It adds to these arguments to understand also that some of Sayer’s prints, for example, are numbered differently from its first edition, which means that the copper engravings were scrapped and engraved again.<sup>12</sup>

The erasure of numbers in the first edition is an obliteration of gestures. Walter Benjamin (1942, Note VI) was not wrong to understand the “documents of culture” as a form of “barbarism”<sup>13</sup>, in the same way that contemporary theorists have understood that the very existence of an archive is an exclamation of power (Bishop 2013; Enwezor 2008). And it was Foucault who once compared archival documents to “stars”, that is, that some documents take up the stage, overthrowing other documents. (Enwezor, 2008, p. 11, quotes Foucault, 1972, p. 129).

(...) like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from afar off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing pale. (...) Nor is the archive that which collects the dust of statements that have become inert once more, and which may make possible the miracle of their resurrection; (...) Far from being that which unifies everything that has been said in the great confused murmur of a discourse, far from being only that which ensures that we exist in the midst of preserved discourse, (...) (Foucault 1972 [1969], 129).

However, as argued before, what the historian turned ragpicker does is something different: he turns the archive into an atlas because his selection is composed from “rags” –the debris or remains of History. This helps to explain why “Warburg’s *Mnemosyne* is called The Atlas of Images [*Bilderatlas*] –and not an archive of images. To make an atlas is to take a stand, having a point of view, it results from the will of the gesture of assembling and disassembling elements and disrupting History’s dominant narratives. Whilst the archive aims for totality, clusters and erases the difference or affinities between links - the atlas carves the archive. In following the ragpicker footsteps, Archive must become Atlas<sup>14</sup> (Didi-Huberman 2013 [2011], p. 258-259).

<sup>12</sup> The prints held by the University of Porto present several discrepancies in their numbering. Conservator Ana Freitas observed that engraving no. 28 in Sayer’s publication corresponds to no. 10 in the University of Porto collection. Likewise, engraving no. 32 is numbered 11; no. 33 corresponds to 12; no. 34 to 13; and no. 35 to 14. Further inconsistencies occur with engraving no. 38, which appears as no. 18 in the collection, and engraving no. 39, which is numbered 17. A comparative analysis using digital tools, allowing the superimposition of prints from different sources, revealed that in at least one case the original number “38” remains faintly visible and still legible.

<sup>13</sup> “There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.” (Benjamin, 1942, Note VI). This strong claim by Walter Benjamin, written in notes for his posthumous text “On the concept of History” or “Theses on the Philosophy of History” takes part in building a concrete argument focusing the assumption that progress follows history as continuum, that is, that time leads to human evolution. To Walter Benjamin who saw the uprising of Nazism, such belief could not be further from the truth.

<sup>14</sup> Here it matters to leave a note on how Didi-Huberman phrases it: The atlas represents the “becoming-sight” or “becoming knowledge” of the archive. The expressions come as they are in the English by Shane Lillis. *Atlas, or the Anxious Gay Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

The “montage” is therefore a proposal of discovery of new visibilities between chaos and rags (fragments). It is not by chance that Didi-Huberman said that the “Atlas is a mine”, since its nature is to be torn apart in perpetual moving constellations. (2013 [2011], 11). Later in his essay, he talks again about tables<sup>15</sup> (258), distinguishing once more Archive and Atlas. Before, he had discussed Goya’s *Los Caprichos*, plate 43, mentioning how the artist sleeps on top of the table and notices that on his back the monsters (*pathos*) are unleashed. (109). Regarding monsters, José Gil (2006 [1994]) correlated the historical interdependence of teratology – the study of the fetal deformations—and the cultural iconology of monsters (12). But he also concluded that humans need the construct of monsters to understand their own humanity (Gil 2006 [1994], 82). Thus, exactly how Didi-Huberman talked about Goethe, who, according to him, devoted himself to look at reality through the double manifest between chaos (*monstra*) and sampling (*astra*). (2013 [2011], 121).

The Atlas is, therefore, the primordial form of respect for the *astra* and *monstra*. “The willingness to exhibit the disorder”, as he phrases it, is that sort of respect why people in ancient cultures attached symbolic and magical connections - in the sense of Marcel Mauss’s and Henri Hubert’s (Hubert and Mauss 2019 [1902-1903]) *magical thinking* - to the tables where sacrifices and offerings to the gods were performed. The arrangement of debris is so crucial here that, in ancient Rome, it was considered impolite to clean the floor after someone had eaten, as Pliny the Elder notes in Book XXVIII of *Natural History*. The reason why, roman mosaics (*asarôtos oikos*) represented the meals’ leftovers scattered on the floor. (Didi-Huberman 2013 [2011], 51-52) Looking at these prints of hands in drawings manuals, their scattered compositions and disposal on the page seem to recall something of those *asarôtos oikos* or “unswept rooms”.



Fig. 8. *La manière et les faitures des monstres des homes qui sont en Orient et le plus en Inde*. Published in Hainaut Province, Belgium. Location: Paris. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Department of Manuscripts. Source: <https://portail.bibliissima.fr/ark:/43093/mdata94288ae185026af2d101ab30e3488caa1b62bed7>



Fig. 9. Page 118 from the book *Anatomia del corpo humano* by Juan Valverde de Amusco. Printed by Nicolò Bevilacqua. Published in 1559 in Rome. Source: <https://archive.org/details/9617625.nlm.nih.gov/page/n120/mode/thumb>

<sup>15</sup> This time now, he will address it as “panoramic tables”, when before he addressed it as “tables for collecting,” as according to the English translation by Shane Lillis in 2018.



Fig. 10. [composed image] – [On the top]. *Asarôtos oikos roman mosaic*. Vatican Museums: Gregoriano Profano Museum. Cat. 10132. Rome, Vatican. Photography by Alf van Beem. / [On the bottom] Page 68 from the book *The artist's vade mecum*, published by Robert Sayer. 1762. London. Source: [https://archive.org/details/gri\\_33125010911010/page/n3/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/gri_33125010911010/page/n3/mode/2up).

### “Pathosformel” and the archive of the future

Dances, human gestures in general, constitute the essential, the center of Warburg’s collection conceived from the beginning as an atlas of the “formulae of *pathos* [*Pathosformel*],” those fundamental gestures transmitted - and transformed - to us from antiquity: gestures of love, gestures of combat, gestures of triumph and of subservience, of elevation or of falling, of hysteria and of melancholy, of grace and of ugliness, of desire in movement and of petrified terror (...) (Didi-Huberman 2013 [2011], 22).

When we lay out the books and loose sheets on the archive table, a force propels our eyes from fragment to fragment. The *habitus* of our post-Enlightenment shaped body has an initial impulse to sort them into categories, but an even stronger force holds us back from moving these debris in an organized sense, propelling us through its expression to create an Atlas, a new (dis)order. As said before, the Atlas, in its improbable imagetic relations - averse to fixed themes and rigid chronologies - activates a disruptive order of the image, functioning, much like the fragment tables, as a seismograph of the *Pathosformel*.

The chaos of the Atlas and its seemingly improbable imagetic relations, resistant to predetermined themes and linear temporalities, sets in motion a disruptive visual order, operating, as with the fragment/altar tables, as a device of divinatory forces emanating from the *Pathosformel*. Through the eruption of primordial emotions summoned by the appearance of the *Pathosformel*, heterogeneous temporalities are activated

- temporalities to which the future is not averse. The formulas of *pathos* are thus, within the tradition inherited from the classical world, seismographs, oracles of a possible future.

When we observe the expressive power of the hand gestures in the engravings of the University of Porto's archive, we realize that these images do not only share the appearance of debris, they are constellations of fragments that pay tribute to the importance of disruption and chaos in life. The same disruption activates the gestures of *pathos* in the human experience.

On the path of the *Pathosformel*, one comes face to face with chaos: that mass of disconcerting disparities that constitutes the world, complemented by the principles that attempt to order and (re)assemble it (Didi-Huberman 2013 [2011], 21). It was between these two poles that Warburg found the *survivals* of *pathos* formula, that collective memory in which the emotional experiences of humanity are inscribed (Guerreiro 2018, 34). and are revealed by an intensified mimic (Guerreiro 2018, 34).

It is in this rupture between order and disorder that the phantom of the primitive (Didi-Huberman 2008, 281) reveals itself - something that drawing and printmaking have evoked since their inception [Fig. 1]. Therefore, it becomes urgent to "destroy" - "exploding" with the drawers - that structure and organize the archive, and embrace the monsters that came with the disorder of chaos: tear apart the veil that covers these rags, in search of a new epistemology - science without name, in Warburg's words (Didi-Huberman 2002, 199). Then, and only then, it will be possible to recenter *pathos* and phenomenology in the study of art and history.

Faced with the hand gestures in the archives of the drawing at the University of Porto, we stand before an abyss. These images, like all images, are first and foremost an action (Bredenkamp, 2015 [2010]), where creation and perception converge in impure temporalities and heterogeneous desires. As Victor Stoichita argued, the production of the images is always associated with a form of desire, which challenges the visual underlining the forces of tactile and bodily experiences. (2007 [1960], 221). Each sheet presents a theme related with the learning of drawing, according to the hierarchies of the ancient tradition of The Academy(ies), between the 17th and 19th centuries (Shiner, 2001): copies of works by "the great masters of the Renaissance" or classical sculptures; diverse eyes; multiple mouths; legs and feet; picturesque landscapes and animals - all of them have their own agency (Gell, 1996). However, in terms of the psychic tension they evoke, nothing seems to compare to the jolt our body experiences when confronted with the engravings of hand gestures.

Just as every gesture is a *survival* of the past, every representation of a gesture is a spectral (Gil 2018, 76) representation of a potency which, through a mimetic principle, manages - within its *Pathosformel* - to traverse time and bodies. These forces were already wandering and erratic long before names like Carracci or Bartolozzi gave them the form we now see in the archive, continuing even today their journey through the images that inhabit our bodies and imagery - what André Leroi-Gourhan would call an "operational chain" [*chaîne opératoire*]. (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993 [1964]). The hand gestures are ghosts suspended between temporalities, going back before the publication of drawings books in the 16th century and still found today at publications used to teach how to draw.

The power of gestures lies in their double determination: on one hand, they operate in a symbolic, almost linguistic sphere (Leroi-Gourhan, 1974 [1964]); on the other, the emotional charge carried by the *Pathosformel* activates our cultural history and physical memory. The visualization of a gesture - or a drawing of a gesture - unleashes the full potential of the body's energetic tension, mimetically triggering within our own body the gesture itself, through our mirror neurons (Freedberg and Gallese 2008, 128) and in conjunction with our mental images and primordial emotions. As anthropologist Carlo Severi argues:

The unconscious projection of emotions intensifies the visual representation in two ways: it links the observer intimately with the image by creating a kind of compromise between what emanates from the imagination and what is represented by perception; and it enriches the image with associative chains of ideas. The most remarkable consequence of this psychic activity is that the mental connotations, distinct from the external image, 'it can become entwined into an inextricable whole' in the visual experience. (Severi 2007, 38)

Indeed, in front of a sheet depicting gestures, we place ourselves in an arena of tensions arising from the superimposition of impure temporalities. We look at the mark of a fingerprint that some ancient anonymous gestures produced on paper and we feel its aura - thus opening a dialogue with a ghost, a nostalgia for memories and rituals that are intangible to us.

Moreover, each gesture presented in the drawings of the hand is a *survival*, as familiar as the black-and-white photographs of our grandparents: errant images that populate our imagination - survivals of gestures we know but cannot fully recognize. What kind of *survivals* are these, that appear so familiar and yet so remote? We established that documents in the archive are part of an operational chain: first projected in drawings as studies for pictorial works (mostly executed by Annibale Carracci) and later produced as engravings for the purpose of teaching drawing, due to their "intensified mimicry" - that is, due to the *Pathosformel* they contained.

In fact, even before Warburg, Annibale Carracci's contemporaries - scholars from a Protestant iconoclastic culture, such as John Bulwer (1606–1656) - were already aware of the transtemporal and polysemic nature of gestures. This is attested by his work *Chirolgia, or The Natural Language of the Hand* (1644). In this book, Bulwer not only traces a genealogy of various gestures from a wide range of sources - Ancient Egypt, Classical Greece, Ancient Rome, biblical texts, and descriptions and images of Christian rituals - but many of the hand gestures presented in this work also appear, though in a different form, within the University of Porto archives. Originally intended to serve as the foundation for a gestural language for the deaf (Bulwer, 1644), the author complements his intricate text with several drawings of hand gestures to which he assigns meaning, always acknowledging the potential shifts in that meaning.

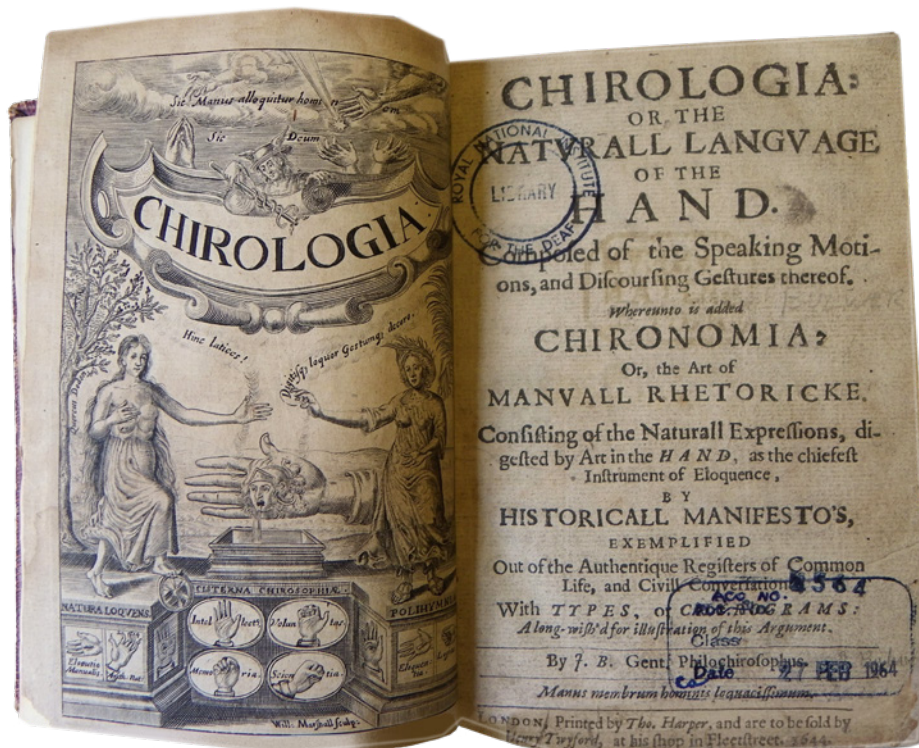
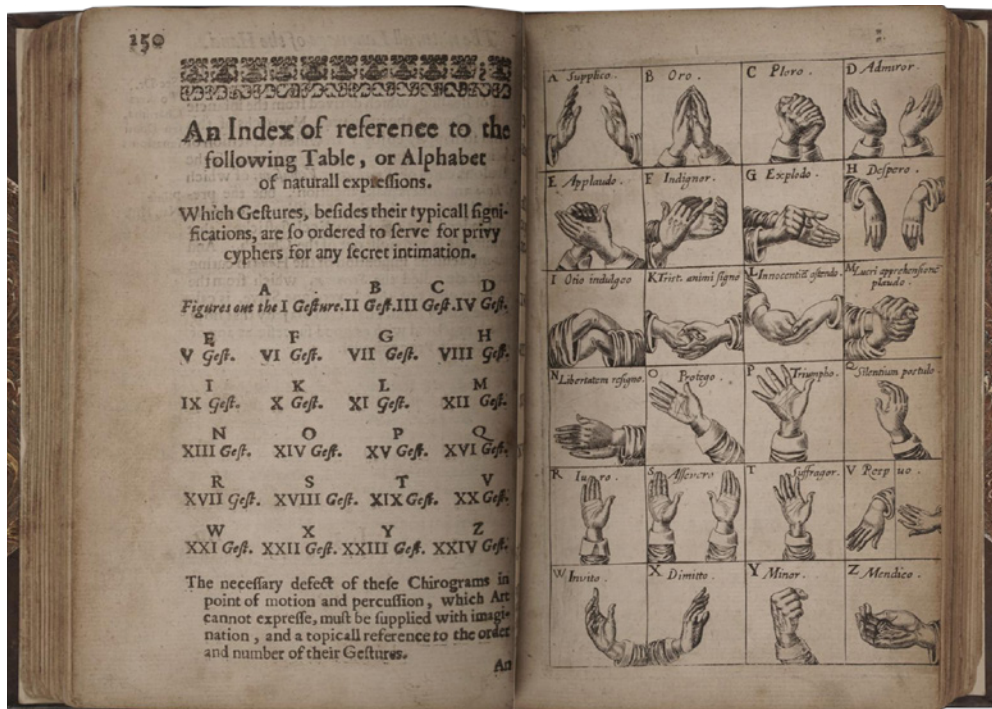


Fig. 11. Frontispiece and page 150 from the book *Chirolgia: or the naturall language of the hand* by John Bulwer, publish in 1644. Image credits: [top] Accessible in: <https://archive.org/details/b30324907/page/n187/mode/2up> / [bottom] Source: <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/library-rnid/2013/07/02/sign-alphabet-exhibition-chirolgia/imgp0805>

At a superficial glance, it might even seem that the origin of these gestures lies in Carracci's drawings, who predates John Bulwer, and that they derive only from the reproduction of Christian iconographic traditions. The truth is that their power stems from far more ancient and primordial times. What we encounter here is a drawing or impression of what Georges Didi-Huberman calls "fossils in motion" - emotions that manifest as gestures we perform, without realizing they come from deep within time. (Didi-Huberman 2002, 337). They have a very long, and very unconscious, history. "They survive in us, and even if we are incapable of observing them clearly within ourselves" (Didi-Huberman 2015, 32). Indeed, as stated by David Freedberg, "(...) to speak of automaticity is to speak of the human condition, to speak of responses that are predicted not so much on the particular, but on the neural substract of human behavior and feeling that subtend the particular" (Freedberg 2009, 2).

The body is a "place of images upon which cultures are constituted," in the words of Hans Belting (2014, 82). When we look at the printings by Robert Sayer (1762), in the University of Porto's Archive, we see a hand gesture with semi folded fingers and the index finger extended, in a gesture that immediately interacts with our mental images. [Fig. 10: left]. Within the Christian ontology to which the Western world belongs, we are easily in the presence of the gesture of Christ's blessing, an essential gesture for any religious artist to master, given that most commissions up until the 18th century had a Christian matrix.

However, the significance of this gesture, in its expressive force and *devenir-voir* ("becoming-sight") or *devenir-savoir* ("becoming-knowledge")<sup>16</sup> is but one among many it has had. Long before the establishment of Christian culture, Roman Emperors already used this gesture to rhetorically address their troops, as we see in the *Prima Porta* typology of statues and in certain reliefs. [Fig. 10]. Here it reports the idea of order, command, orientation.



Fig. 12. [left] Augustus from *Prima Porta*, Vatican Museum. Circa. 1st century A.D. Cat. 2290 / [right] Sayer's engraving: Number 11 [in the archive of the Old Fund Library of the Rectory of the University of Porto] and Number 32 in Sayer's publication from 1762, London.

<sup>16</sup> Expressions formulated by Didi-Huberman which are identified in the English translation of Shane Lillis in the book *Atlas, or the Anxious Gay Science* (2018 [2011]). Throughout the text we have been quoting from the Portuguese edition, translated by Renata Correia Botelho and Rui Pires Cabral.

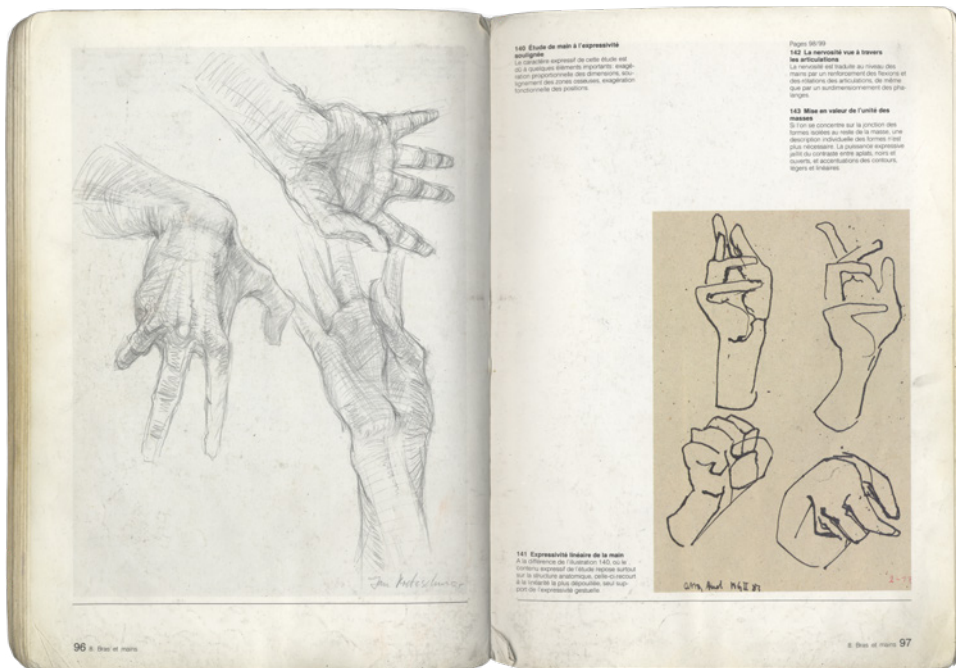


Fig. 13. Pages 95 and 96 from the book *L'étude Du Corps Humain - La Pratique Du Dessin D'anatomie Artistique* by Gottfried Bammes.

Later, in the secularizing society of the twentieth century, the same gestures reappear, as an apparition, in anatomy books such as Gottfried Bammes *L'étude du corps humain* (1990) [Fig. 14]. Whether a subconscious choice of pose by students of drawing or not, it is certainly arguable that such poses are rooted in the “survival” [*Nachleben*], and therefore with an emotive collective memory. Moreover, drawings in the same book seem to explore different gestural dynamics — arguably not for the narrative or symbolism they might convey, but as a way to study anatomy. Yet several of these poses delicately confront the viewer [Fig. 11].

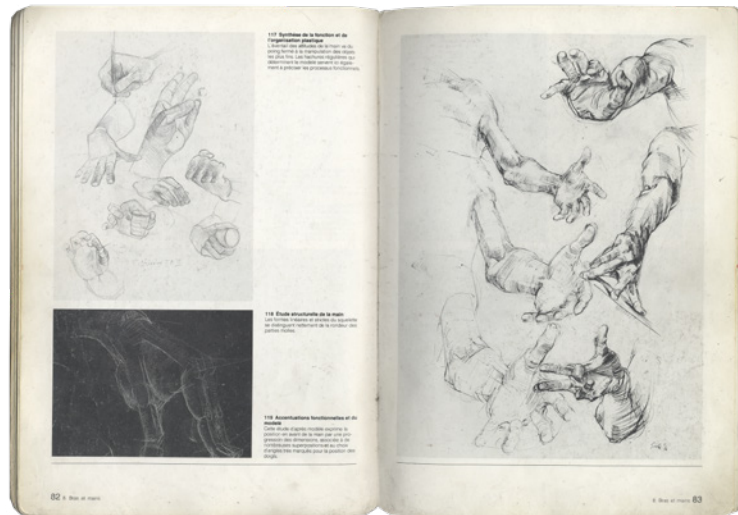
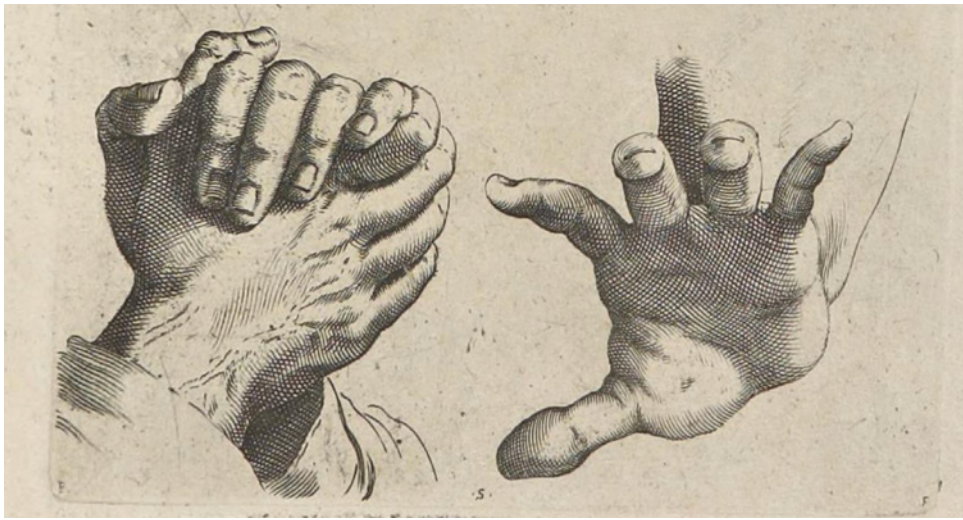


Fig. 14. [composed figure] – [top] A print by Anibal Carracci. (with the inscription “De Poilly ex”. In: *Livre de Portraiture d’Anib. Carrache*. Location: Old Fund Library of the Rectory of the University of Porto. Library code: 1097 - 2 to 1097 - 24. / [bottom] Page 82 and 83 from the book *L’étude Du Corps Humain - La Pratique Du Dessin D’anatomie Artistique* by Gottfried Bammes.

Even if today's drawing students are unaware of their original religious meaning, the way these hands were represented embody a certain aura, tied to their gestures. Understanding these poses and gestures can be a valuable path for researching and for the study of Drawing, both in academic contexts and in contemporary artistic practice.

It is through the *Pathosformel* present in these gestures that such images continue to be reproduced throughout History and will likely continue to. And whether we are aware of its operation or deliberately make

use of it, the *Pathosformel* remains active in representations—past or present, as it will remain in representations of the future.

### Final Remarks

With this text, we propose a Warburgian reading of historical artefacts through close observation and physical engagement with prints from the University of Porto archive, focusing on the representation of hands as a way to deepen the interpretation of gestures and postures.

This approach brings renewed visibility to the history of drawing pedagogy in Porto, particularly through nineteenth-century student use of prints. Fingerprints on engravings emerge as meaningful traces that should be preserved as integral parts of the artefacts. Drawing on Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Horst Bredekamp, we emphasise material engagement—touching and handling objects—as a way of recognising human presence. In an increasingly digital context, such contact opens new paths for reflection, while Georges Didi-Huberman’s notion of the “debris of history” supports attention to marginal and overlooked dimensions of artefacts.

Building on this, studies of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* by Aby Warburg, as revisited by Didi-Huberman, prompt an examination of anatomical fragments in drawing manuals. Unlike Warburg’s heterogeneous assemblages, these engravings suggest tableaux structured around ritual and sacrifice. Engaging with Roberto Calasso and René Girard, as well as the illustrations of Juan Valverde de Amusco (1559), we propose that drawing retains traces of archaic perceptions of violence directed at the body. This raises the possibility of confronting students with the symbolic violence embedded in drawing practice, enabling a distancing from ingrained habits and fostering a more performative and embodied engagement. In this sense, the archive becomes a space through which students access the corporeal dimension of their work.

In parallel, the arrangement of anatomical fragments across the page is read in relation to ritual structures, leading to a comparison with Roman mosaics of unswept rooms (*asarotos oikos*), situating these compositions within a broader logic of residue, fragmentation, and display.

Focusing on hands as central to both drawing and symbolic expression, we approach images through Warburg’s concepts of *Pathosformel* and *Nachleben*, recognising their historical continuity and affective charge, akin to what André Leroi-Gourhan described as “operational chains”. The persistence of gestures among contemporary students suggests that bodily attitudes carry an agency that exceeds specific symbolic systems. Even when detached from the body, gestures retain the performative force of prior movement, preserving the pathos of an original energetic field.

This paper does not aim to establish a unified theory but to identify visual and material correspondences that support Warburg’s notion of *Pathosformel*, pointing to the survival of expressive gestures beyond their original contexts. It also proposes a mode of research grounded in locally accessible archival materials—specifically those of the University of Porto—enacting a Warburgian approach to history through visual inquiry and opening new readings of the archive for the teaching of art and drawing.



Figure 15. Cueva de las Manos. Perito Moreno, Argentina. Between 7,300 BC and 700 AD. Photography by/Image credits: Mariano Cecowski.

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