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Jerusalem, Israel, 2004)

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## Thinking in Images. In memoriam Moshe Barasch (Czernowitz, Romania [now Ukraine], 1920 – Jerusalem, Israel, 2004)

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Endowed with a leader's charisma, Moshe Barasch was actively involved in defending and building his new country – Israel, his homeland for more than five decades of his life. In the late 1950s he founded the Department of the History of Art (with the art library and slide collection) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, inspiring the establishment of similar departments at every university in Israel. Through his lectures given throughout the country and books written in Hebrew he helped to develop the art historical terminology in that language and drew attention to many of the themes that were to attract scholars in the humanities. At least three generations of Israelis grew up on the books he wrote, edited, or was instrumental in having translated into Hebrew.

Constantly active in the spheres of education and administration while being closely involved in his family life (three children and eight grandchildren), Professor Barasch never ceased his writing or his studies even when ill (for the last three decades he coped with heart disease). He passionately explored new fields of knowledge and eagerly wrote down his thoughts on various topics. This spiritual activity resulted in two dozen books and a multitude of articles, whose subject matters have amazed and enthralled scholars throughout the world. He was the first Israeli art historian to attain worldwide recognition, lecturing at prestigious institutions in Europe and the USA. Barasch's innovative attitude to the history of art, of a versatile, open-minded scholar, has a considerable impact on the study of European culture. [See Jan Assmann's Introduction to *Representation in Religion: Studies in Honour of Moshe Barasch*, Leiden 2001, pp. ix-xvii.]

Becoming Professor Barasch's student during the final year of my undergraduate studies (in 1975-1976), I was continually learning from every aspect of his personality, for he was far more than just an erudite scholar dedicated to teaching. Privileged to observe him at work, I would like to share my thoughts here about the way he related to his lifetime mission to investigate the language of art, as well as some of the principles that guided him to explore the topics that he called "diseases" and "curiosities." By "diseases" he referred to the broad variety of subjects that continued to interest him throughout his life, and by "curiosities" to the topics that, as emerged from his explorations of those "diseases," had surprised him in not being sufficiently touched upon or studied.

The *leitmotiv* of his life was to comprehend the works that resulted from the human ability to convey thoughts through images. This vast, multifaceted theme – thinking in images through its verbal and artistic expression – had preoccupied Moshe Barasch from his childhood in Czernowitz, formerly one of the most important centers of Jewish culture, and until the final days of his life in



### 1) Moshe Barasch

Annette Deschner, Frankfurt am Main 2003, pp. 105–120.] What may initially have been envisioned as chaotic existence and random reality would become ordered through being displayed in a work – a written page or a painting. He saw the awe-inspiring nature of creativeness in the perpetual ability of individuals to convert abstract concepts into tangible figures through rendering them in the medium of representational art and describing them in words. From childhood he was driven not only to record his thoughts through drawing but also through descriptive writing. For him to describe what is seen, sensed and thought about meant to analyze, interpret, and elucidate it.

The older Moshe Barasch became, the more he engaged in writing. *Nulla dies sine linea* was his favorite proverb, as it was of Apelles. He wrote daily in his notebooks, one of which was a diary of his work, for he explored several topics at the same time. Working on what he called “formulations,” he strove to fashion the written sentence so as to closely reflect what he saw with his mind’s eye. (He consequently delved into a study of linguistics and especially the philosophy of language.) Even when moving to computers, in the early 1980s, when this kind of technology was just being introduced, he retained the necessity to feel the process of writing by hand. He was enchanted with every stage of working on an article or a book.

Jerusalem (Francis Peters’ book on Jerusalem, published by Princeton UP in 1985, was dedicated to him and his wife Berta). When interviewed as a prodigal child of 13, who already had a solo exhibition of drawings and paintings in Czernowitz, Prague, Budapest and Boston, he declared that what attracted him about art was that a visible image is a symbol [see *Új Kelet*, 1934, pp. 305-306]. Equally valuing word and image, he related to both with that unusual attitude that the German philosophers termed “angst.”

Fascinated with the human urge to create both images and myths, Barasch saw a tension between human creativeness and the Biblical story of the Creation. He was concerned with the understanding of this, in his opinion, the most important dilemma of philosophers, theologians and artists and its expression through and reflection in works of representational arts. [See “*Creatio ex nihilo*: Renaissance Concepts of Artistic Creation. A minor mistranslation” in *Die Renaissance und die Entdeckung des Individuums in der Kunst*, ed. Enno Rudolph, Tübingen 1998, vol. III, pp. 37–58.] He constantly pondered on how one thinks in images and perceives them as well as on the different types and kinds of images and changes in attitude to their perception throughout the centuries. He was enchanted by the very idea of seeing visions, dreaming dreams, imagining distant lands, recreating ancient past, living by memories and especially by their being recorded verbally and visually.

Professor Barasch was captivated by human creativity as such and had great respect for any person capable of creating something, be it a work of art, literature, or science. He admired the ability of a creative human being (man, woman, and child alike) to render abstract thought, fathomable vision, complex event, and divine revelation in a finished product – a theorem, a story of some kind, or a crafted object – that reflects its creator’s organizational power. [See “Personal Style. The Emergence of an Idea,” in *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 59 (1997), pp. 180–188; and “The Renaissance Artist,” in *Mythen der Kreativität*, ed. Oliver Krüger, Refika Sariönder and

Professor Barasch saw no basic difference between the spoken or written presentation of a subject, and his lectures reflected the style of his writing precisely. He spoke aphoristically, *res* rather than *verba*; his concise sentences conjured up a tangible reality of the discussed subject matter. Pronouncing every syllable clearly and loudly, he respected a word as a word. No word was superfluous, for in his vision a word in itself had the power to form a link in a description that caused an abstract topic and an actual figure to become imaginatively visible. During the last two decades of his life he took immense pleasure in academic writing, seeing it as a form of art whose aim it was to express in words his understanding of images seen in works of art and read about in books on philosophy, religion, and anthropology, the three specific disciplines to which he continually devoted his attention. He weighed every word, sentence, and paragraph, for when combined these were intended to ultimately communicate his thoughts on the message of images, especially of those seen in paintings, sculptures, and prints.

He perceived the images that migrate from one work to another as an outcome not of an individual's but of collective creativity, for an artist (a painter, an engraver, or a sculptor) works in a given place and milieu. Such images unfold before the discerning eye and mind in the complexity of their content and form. The study of these images in the historically determined context in which the works that contain them were created and used will contribute to some grasp of their particular language. Simultaneously abstract and actual, these itinerant images always transmit spiritual messages and affect the viewer's senses.

Professor Barasch saw works of visual arts not as passive products of culture but as contributing to the shaping of this culture, in that paintings, prints, and sculptures translate abstract concepts into visible figures whose major message in turn appeals to and influences their viewers. [See "Wissensvermittlung durch Bilder," in *Wissensbilder: Strategien der Überlieferung*, ed. Ulrich Raulff and Gary Smith, Berlin c. 1999, pp. 117–144; "Das Detail in der Malerei," in "*Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail.*" *Mikrostrukturen des Wissens*, ed. Wolfgang Sigrig Weigel and Thomas Macho, Munich 2003, pp. 21–42; and "Renaissance Hieroglyphics," in *Hieroglyphen*, ed. Aleida and Jan Assmann, Munich 2003, pp. 165–190.] Always focusing on the imaginable and visible aspect of any subject he investigated, he was fascinated by having an imaginative experience of conversing with writers and painters who lived in the past about various topics (such as desert and deluge for example; see "Remembering the Desert," *Egypt: Temple of the Whole World. Studies in Honour of Jan Assmann*, ed. Sybille Meyer, Leiden 2003, pp. 1–20; and "Towards an Iconography of the Deluge," forthcoming in *Sintflut und Gedächtnis*, ed. Martin Mulow and Jan Assmann, Munich 2005). (The changing forms of artistic expression – color, gesture, and configuration – conveyed what these subjects or topics denoted in a given historical period.) He was equally stirred by how "the ends of the world" were envisioned and how the Antichrist was imagined and rendered in a work of art, as well as by the representation in painting of such notions as time and space. [See "Apocalyptic Space," in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, Leiden 2000, pp. 306–326.]

As painting is a medium of representational art distinguished by the use of color, so he set himself the task of comprehending what was understood by color, the impact of color on the beholder, and its role in transmitting a message. Another constant topic of his explorations, one of those "diseases," was that of ambiguity of gesture, whether of elevation or of despair, as known to the readers of his books. (A gesture, whether "expressive" or "symbolic," as a visible sign of the represented figure's state of mind or socially prescribed attitude – not part of her or his depicted action – is, as inferred from his writings, in itself meaningful, for it reflects something invisible and indescribable. [See "Gesture," *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner, vol. 12, pp. 502–504.] Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance were all among the periods in the history of European culture that Professor Barasch called "his diseases." However, it was not the certain historical period, the interesting work of art, or the specific image that drew him to deal with its particular or characteristic aspects. Rather he was driven by the general theme of his life, namely, the symbolical language of the represented human figures and of the ambiance rendered by means of the types of landscape and the kinds of surrounding objects. (The figure of a hermit in a desert thus becomes an image of solitude, as discussed in "The Hermit in the Desert: An Image of Solitude," in *Einsamkeit*, ed. Aleida and Jan Assmann, Munich 2000, pp. 153–172.)

What is unusual about Barasch's academic writing is that his books and articles discuss several seemingly abstract topics, such as vigilance, solitude, despair, and the departing soul, topics not primarily thought of as being visually depicted. (Hence Moshe Barasch's significant contributions as an art historian to the collective research in the fields of religion, philosophy, and literature; see "Despair in the Medieval Imagination," *Social Research*, 66 (1999), pp. 565–576, and "Waking: A Form of Attention in Ritual and in Religious Art," in *Aufmerksamkeiten*, ed. Aleida and Jan Assmann, Munich 2000, pp. 226–240.) It is virtually impossible to mention all the subjects – "diseases" and "curiosities" alike – which constantly attracted him. [See the two fascinating studies: "Adam the Panphysiognomist: A Stage in Modern Physiognomics," in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. A. I. Baumgarten, J. Assmann and G. G. Stroumsa, Leiden 1998, pp. 67–86, and "Tiermasken," in *Die Sprache der Masken*, ed. Tilo Schabert, *Eranos*, 9 (2002), pp. 123–200]. Broadminded as he was, he directed his studies towards certain major topics (or "foci" as he

called them), exploring every one with the same persistence, consistency, and indefatigable inquisitiveness, seeking to get to the core of each phenomenon.

Among those foci of his research was the topic of the Departing Soul in art. What is it about this topic that captivates our imagination? When and where did this invisible substance become translated into the visible image? What are its characteristic features? When a soul was portrayed as a bird, a butterfly, a swaddled baby, a healthy putto, or a grown youth, what cultural ideas and religious beliefs had led to this concept taking on this or another visible form? What aspirations and notions were being expressed through the representations of the Departing Soul?

I had the joy of watching Professor Barasch at work, seeing his eyes sparkle when he took up a book, an article, or a picture. I saw him in deep thought over the meaning of what he saw and read about. I noted, too, his silent struggle with a verbal formulation for what he saw in images formed by his mind. And here I offer the story that might shed light on how this article – “Departing Soul: The Long Life of a Medieval Creation” – was written, the article that remained with me after the soul had departed from a philosopher who thought in images.

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Professor Barasch enthusiastically responded to the invitation to contribute to the issue of the *Artibus et Historiae* dedicated to the memory of Professor Philipp Fehl. He thought of the Departing Soul as a topic appropriate for commemorating his friend of many years. In March 2002, the month when he was thinking on this specific article, I went for a week to Rome where I happened to visit an exhibition of Giovanni Lanfranco’s paintings. The exhibition catalogue that I presented as a souvenir to Professor Barasch featured a reproduction of the painter’s *La salvazione di un’anima* (ca. 1612-1613). This particular work prompted him to organize his already planned article around the topic of this motif’s continuity throughout the ages. In December of that year, having written the text, including all the footnotes, Professor Barasch then received an offprint of an earlier article of his, also entitled: “Departing Soul,” published in *Tod, Jenseits und Identität*, ed. Jan Assmann, Rolf Trauzettel, Freiburg, Munich 2002, pp. 138–172. This collection of essays is the proceedings of a conference in which he had participated in 1996. As is well known to his colleagues, he never read from a fully written text but always expounded from a page of notes. Working since then on so many book – length studies and articles, he had forgotten not only that he had lectured on this theme (six years earlier), but also that he had written an article on the subject. Upon receiving the offprint he told me that he finds it awkward to publish another article under the same title. Moreover, a new subject had already captivated his mind. In an amazingly short period of time Professor Barasch then wrote a new article “*Elevatio*. The Depiction of a Ritual Gesture.” In the opening paragraph he recalls the custom that had been well familiar to his deceased friend, of elevating the plate with the unleavened bread during the ritual of the Passover meal. Hence the appropriateness of this article for that issue (no. 48) of *Artibus et Historiae* dedicated to the memory of Philipp Fehl.

When I compared the two articles about the Departing Soul, however – that already published in *Tod, Jenseits und Identität* and that being published here – I discovered with amazement that except for the first paragraph and despite references to almost the same works of representational art, the two essays approach the same topic in entirely different ways. Whereas the earlier one related to images of the soul whose represented features differ from those of the deceased or do not reflect the deceased’s status in the viewer’s belief, the present one discusses the image of the soul as a medieval creation still alive in the works of Baroque artists. Its main thesis is manifested in the final line of the text that now provides the basis for the article’s subtitle: “The Long Life of a Medieval Creation.” A few weeks later, after the *Elevatio* article was sent to the *Artibus et Historiae*, I strove to persuade Professor Barasch to send the present one for publication, and indeed I received his consent to do so at some time in the future. Sadly, Professor Barasch died during the week of July that the aforementioned issue 48 reached the Hebrew University Library. I thank Dr. Józef Grabski for bringing to light the article together with the story of its genesis, and for his suggestion to preface them both with an essay in tribute to this extraordinary scholar.

Luba Freedman