PART TWO

HERESIES, IDENTITIES, AND INTERCONFESSIONAL POLEMICS
The mistrust of the visual image winds, like a double helix, through the structural heritage of the Western mind [...] religiously or philosophically our tradition bears the message: beware of pictures.

Linda Sexson

1. Introduction: Paradigms and Polemics

That there exists a kind of “elective affinity” between the academic study of western esotericism and the study of images is obvious from even a cursory look at the main scholarly traditions in the field. Frances Yates’ influential concept of the “Hermetic Tradition” of the Renaissance was grounded in the assumptions and methodologies of the “Warburg school”, dominated by art historians (such as Aby Warburg himself, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, Edgar Wind, and Ernst Gombrich, all of them responsible for important contributions to our field of study) who traced the transmission of “pagan” traditions in Renaissance culture; and although Yates was not herself an art historian, the importance she attached to images is evident throughout her oeuvre. While Yates laid the foundations for what can be considered the first major research paradigm in the study of western esotericism, the second one emerged during the 1990s, and was based upon Antoine Faivre’s famous definition of esotericism as a “form of thought” characterized by four intrinsic and two non-intrinsic characteristics. Faivre’s intellectual development

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1 Sexson, *Ordinarily Sacred*, 78.
2 Warburg’s writings in this regard were focused on astrology; Panofsky and Saxl are famous for their discussions of the melancholic temperament in the context of Renaissance magic and astrology; Wind’s work highlighted the continuation of “paganism” in Renaissance culture; and to Gombrich’s crucial work I will return in this paper.
3 For my arguments in that regard, see Hanegraaff, ‘Beyond the Yates Paradigm’; and cf. id., ‘The Study of Western Esotericism’, 507–508.