

## The Epistemic Advantage of Self-Analysis for Cultural-Historical Insights: The variants of Warburg's manuscripts on his Indian Journey

A vantagem epistêmica da autoanálise para insights histórico-culturais: as variantes dos manuscritos de Warburg em sua jornada indígena

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**Imagem:** The Diptych Oraibi (GUIDI; MANN, 1998).

## The Epistemic Advantage of Self-Analysis for Cultural-Historical Insights: The variants of Warburg's manuscripts on his Indian Journey

A vantagem epistêmica da autoanálise para insights histórico-culturais: as variantes dos manuscritos de Warburg em sua jornada indígena

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### Abstract

The article is devoted to analyze different versions and drafts of the 1923 Warburg's Lecture, held in Kreuzlingen in 1923, on his travel to the United States in 1895/96, at the end of his long convalescence in the sanatorium of Ludwig Binswanger, as well as the respective lectures of 1897. This essay focuses on how the dispersion of these texts, their different dates and interferences in publications over decades had epistemological implications in the interpretation of his famous Conference. Thus, the contrast between fundamental points of these texts, both in their forms and contents – including deliberate terminological fluctuations –, raises theoretical questions that interfere with the understanding of Warburg's work in its methodological specificity. It stands out his insertion in the style of characteristic thought identified as a movement of *Kulturwissenschaft*, the specificity of the relations of his work with Anthropology and Philology, but also with Psychoanalysis, especially in the process of certain Freudian formulations elaborated from a process of self-analysis.

### Keywords

Interpretations of Aby Warburg. *Kulturwissenschaft*. Snake-Ritual Lecture. Self-analysis as Method.

### Resumo

O artigo se consagra a analisar diferentes versões e rascunhos da Conferência de 1923, que Warburg realizou em Kreuzlingen, acerca de sua viagem ao Estados Unidos em 1896/97, após sua longa convalescença no sanatório de Ludwig Binswanger, bem como suas respectivas palestras de 1897. Este ensaio tem como foco discutir como a dispersão dos referidos textos, suas diferentes datas e interferências em publicações ao longo de décadas tiveram implicações epistemológicas na interpretação da célebre Conferência de Warburg. Desse modo, o contraste entre pontos fundamentais desses textos, tanto em suas formas quanto em seus conteúdos, incluindo flutuações terminológicas deliberadas, suscita questões teóricas que interferem na compreensão da obra de Warburg e sua especificidade metodológica. Destacam-se sua inserção no estilo de pensamento identificado como um movimento de *Kulturwissenschaft*, a especificidade das relações de sua obra com a Antropologia e a Filologia, mas também com a Psicanálise, em especial em certas formulações freudianas elaboradas a partir de um processo de autoanálise.

### Palavras-chave

Interpretações de Aby Warburg. *Kulturwissenschaft*. Conferência do Ritual da Serpente. Autoanálise como método.



Fig. 1. Aby Warburg. Photography (GUIDI; MANN, 1998).

A somewhat stocky gentleman in bourgeois attire: grey cloth trousers, dark cutaway, white shirt, waistcoat with gold chain and tie, and on his head an exotic piece of headgear that looks like an oversized bird's nest. This photographic portrait of the thirty-year-old cultural historian has become one of the most popular icons of Warburg's reception, which has recently attracted ever larger circles, especially internationally. Only the photo caption, however, makes it clear to the uninitiated viewer that the strange headgear is a mask from the Hopi Indians' *kachina* ritual, which Warburg visited in the winter of 1895/96 at the end of a nine-month trip to the US on occasion of the wedding of one of his brothers.

This portrait of Warburg<sup>1</sup> is at the same time an iconographic counterpart to what is probably his best-known text, which first appeared in 1939 under the title *A Lecture on the Serpent Ritual* (after the emigration of the Warburg library and archive to London in 1933, therefore translated into English)<sup>2</sup> and was published in German as *Schlangeritual* as late as 1988<sup>3</sup>. However, neither does this title originate from Warburg himself, nor does the edited text correspond closely to the manuscripts in his hand. The notes that the author never intended to publish were rather prepared by someone else, namely by Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing, and translated into contemporary standard English. In this way the characteristic Warburgian tone, which is crucial for his way of thinking and writing, disappeared. The publication is

based on one variant of several drafts (now preserved in his personal archive at the Warburg Institute) for his so-called Kreuzlingen lecture, which Warburg gave on 21 April 1923 at the end of his long convalescence in Ludwig Binswanger's sanatorium. A different manuscript with preparatory notes for the lecture, from which single passages have been quoted already in several articles on Warburg's lecture<sup>4</sup>, has now been published integrally<sup>5</sup>. These notes can be read as a preliminary version of the lecture's manuscript. In contrast to the cultural-scientific interpretation of Hopi culture against the background of ancient pagan culture in the lecture's "script", this text appears rather like a patchwork of recollections, readings and various theoretical approaches, which Warburg concatenates with specific examples of artefacts and practices from Hopi culture. A more careful reading, however, reveals a logic of argumentation that exemplifies Warburg's idiosyncratic way of thinking and working: the unfolding of a cultural-historical interpretation from scholarly sources, direct observations and a basic cultural-anthropological motif, which developed not least out of individual experiences.

The recollections and the cultural-scientific analysis of his "Indian journey" as he himself entitled his visit to the Pueblo Indians, belong to Warburg's unfinished projects. Interestingly, though, it were precisely these unfinished, abandoned and unpublished projects which have made the Hamburg banker's son and founder of the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Aby Warburg* (K.B.W.) a famous and exceptional figure beyond the circle of Warburg experts. In addition to the text about his journey to the Pueblo Indians, these unfinished projects include the so-called "nymph fragment" from the period of his stay in Florence in 1900, and the picture atlas *Mnemosyne*, the project that occupied him in the last years before his death in 1929; its publication in the form of a two volumes (one of texts, one of pictures) was planned but never realized. The fact that Warburg's life and scholarship are still surrounded by numerous myths today can be explained in part by the lack of a textual basis for his most famous projects, all the more so as he did not publish very much during his lifetime and only parts of the posthumous manuscripts and notes have been edited<sup>6</sup>. A further complicating factor is that his idiosyncratic terminology and unconventional and sometimes bizarre use of language are difficult to translate, so that the available translations into other languages can often give only an approximation of his ideas.

### **Warburg and the "First Cultural Science" (*Erste Kulturwissenschaft*)**

The above photo of Warburg among the Hopis is a condensed image of the contrasts that make up his personality and working method. Hanseatic citizen and convinced patriot from a respected Jewish banking family, the art historian with a doctorate in art history had an obsessive interest in the magical thinking, the rituals and symbolic practices of pagan cultures. This contrast between his distinguished Hanseatic appearance and his obsession with exploring the wild origins of European cultural history probably makes Warburg the most dazzling personality in the group of those scholars who, around 1900, developed a cultural science (*Kulturwissenschaft*) that, in terms of the history of ideas, presents an alternative to the conception of the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*) which Wilhelm Dilthey had formulated in competition with and as a counterpart to the natural sciences.

Although today the Warburg Institute in London has become almost a site of pilgrimage to which scholars and artists from all over the world are magically drawn by its exciting library and the slip boxes with Warburg's innumerable and often inscrutable notes, only few of these researchers are aware that his work was part of a fascinating and very specific intellectual movement around 1900. It is only in retrospect that those scholars and intellectuals who were geographically and institutionally quite dispersed at the time, but connected by a common characteristic thought style<sup>7</sup>, can be summarized and identified as a movement of *Kulturwissenschaft*: a title that already at that time attained a programmatic status through Warburg's designation of his independent, privately financed research institute on

Heilwigstraße in Hamburg as a *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek*. Characteristic of this kind of cultural science are symptomatic figures of thought which go beyond the conventional taxonomic ordering of knowledge and its methods and narratives based on chronology and typology. Rather, this ‘first cultural science’ can be characterized by a mode of thinking and working, which is orientated towards moments of *transition*<sup>8</sup>. The key concept of cultural science in this sense is not the mind (*Geist*), but an understanding of *culture (Kultur)* that has evolved from the *cult*. Likewise, the conventional understanding of history in the sense of progressive development is replaced here by the afterlife of cultural practices from religions, myths and rites or cults in modern, secular European cultures.

In addition to Warburg, the first cultural science encompassed authors such as Sigmund Freud, Georg Simmel, Ernst Cassirer, Walter Benjamin, Helmuth Plessner, Erich Auerbach, Karl Mannheim, and others from disciplines such as philology, art history, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. By transgressing the boundaries of their disciplines, these scholars directed their attention to the continued effects of cult, myth, religion, and magical thinking in modern European culture, and in this context lent a formative role to affects and the cultural unconscious. The exponents of this movement were intellectuals from the assimilated German or Austrian Jewish bourgeoisie. Around 1900, the majority of Jewish scientists, even those who had converted, were forced to work outside or on the margins of the established academic institutions; for precisely this reason, however, they may have been less influenced by those defensive habitus which come about with the demarcation of scholarly disciplines also known as *déformation professionnelle*. In addition, the ambivalent experiences of assimilation and the emptying of religious rituals that became commonplace in many German-Jewish families gave a particular urgency to the question of the sacred, religious tradition and cult. For the modern society emerging in the 19th century, which was considered as largely secularized, Jews were embodying a kind of *religious unconscious*, despite the fact that many of them were exponents of modernization. It is from this context that the epistemic interest of the cultural science in religious-cultural phenomena in modernity may be explained. These scholars countered the dominant model of progress with concepts of time based in the theory of memory – such as afterlife, return, posteriority (*Nachträglichkeit*), and the now-time (*Jetztzeit*). Walter Benjamin was the first to identify a movement of a “new spirit of research” (Benjamin, 1980: 374) in the work of these geographically-dispersed thinkers. “Not confined by professional obligation”, these intellectuals moved among the “border areas of multiple academic disciplines”, as Benjamin put it in 1935. At that time, however, all of the then-living authors of the first *Kulturwissenschaft* were already in exile or about to escape: Benjamin in Paris, Plessner in the Netherlands, Freud and Mannheim in London, Cassirer first in England, then Sweden, and Auerbach in Istanbul – while the library and estate of Warburg, who had died in 1929, were saved from Nazi-Germany and relocated to London.

### **Palimpsest as Object and Method - Textual Critique of Images and Cultures**

The history of the origin, transmission and publication of the texts on Warburg’s “Indian Journey” is a difficult complex to unravel – especially given the significant duration separating the journey in 1895/96, the first lectures in 1897 and the most extensive volume of notes from 1923. Unraveling these tangled texts today is a comparable task to that of deciphering the culture in the Pueblo Indian territory as described by the art historian and lay field researcher Warburg:

The material is contaminated, i.e. doubly concealed. Since the end of the 16th century, the original American ground has been overlaid with the cultivation of Spanish-Catholic church education, (...) The third layer of North American education is superimposed on this (Warburg, 2010: 526).

With the image of the layers, the *ethnological* study of the foreign culture is transformed into an *archaeological* one. A comparison of the Kreuzlingen lecture manuscripts shows that Warburg's image of layers likewise refers to a palimpsest within the method of *philological* textual criticism (Weigel, 1995). In a different version, directly following the description of the historical layers of the Pueblo culture mentioned above, the text reads: "From a philological point of view, we are thus faced with the most difficult object imaginable: a palimpsest whose text – even if it is published – is contaminated" (Warburg, 2010: 572). Such a conflation of the *ethnological*, *archaeological* and *philological* perspective has a methodological status; it characterizes Warburg's *Kulturwissenschaft* as a whole, with his experimental use of such diverse figures of knowledge as tableau, genealogical tree, wandering route map (*Wanderstraßenkarte*), picture panel, and the formation of his "critical iconology." When Warburg developed this latter concept in his lecture on the frescoes at Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara at the International Conference of Art History in Rome in 1912, the use of the adjective "critical" with respect to his method of deciphering the expressive gestures, figures and symbols in the images of overlapping cultural traditions indicates the affinity of his approach to that of textual criticism in philology, which examines a "spoiled" text as a series of layers that are hidden, illegible or overwritten. By analogy, Warburg interprets the depictions of the astrological decans in the palace frescoes as results of a corrupted transmission of tradition, results of overlapping and transformation.

Previously, Warburg had explicitly elicited the philological gaze to characterize his own methodological approach in the so-called *Fragment on the Nymph*: there, he literally directs his philological gaze to the ground beneath the iconological figure that fascinated him. During their stay in Florence in 1900, his friend André Jolles had enthusiastically proposed a joint project on the figure of the nymph in art, based on the female servant in Ghirlandaio's fresco *Birth of John the Baptist* in the Tornabuoni Chapel of Santa Maria Novella. Although Warburg rejected Jolles' proposal, this figure nevertheless became the embodiment of the nymph *par excellence* for Warburg (he always wrote *Ninfa*), that is, the incarnation of pagan ecstasy and successor to the Dionysian maenads of antiquity in the culture of the Italian Renaissance. The arguments for his rejection clearly distinguish his interest in cultural science from the art enthusiast's desire for images:

That your pagan windchime may now whirl into this ponderously plodding respectability of the subdued Christian attitude, this shows to me the Tornabuoni from the enigmatically illogical aspect of the most primitive humanity, which attracts me at least as much as you are attracted by the pleasing carelessness of your stranger. You are tempted to follow her like a winged idea through all spheres in the Platonic intoxication of love; I am forced by her to turn my philological gaze to the ground from which she emerged, and to ask in amazement: Is this strangely dainty plant really rooted in the sober Florentine soil? (Warburg, 2010: 203)

So, nothing came of Jolles' idea of a book of nymphs, not even a fragment; yet the fascination for images propelled Warburg throughout his life to fathom the psychological dynamics and mental activity from which images arose and which are condensed and sublated in them.

What Ernst Gombrich calls "Fragment on the Nympha" in his "intellectual biography" of Warburg (Gombrich, 1970: 105) is in fact a collection of notes with the inscription *Ninfa Fiorentina* kept in Warburg's estate, which contains quite heterogeneous material that is often not easy to decipher: drafts of letters, fragmentary manuscripts, genealogical trees, lists and charts (Weigel, 2010). From these studies which spread into various themes and fields of knowledge, there emerged several other projects, in particular the studies of Ghirlandajo's frescoes in the chapels of the Tornabuoni family in Santa Maria

Novella and the Sassetti family in Santa Trinità, as well as extensive research in the Florentine archives of the banking and merchant world of the early Renaissance. Out of the latter there also developed the essay on Francesco Sassetti, in which Warburg discusses the idea of an “energetic state of equilibrium” characteristic of this culture (Warburg, 2010: 260). For Warburg, the merchants of the Renaissance are representatives of a “balancing psychology” (*Ausgleichspsychologie*). He interpreted the apparently “bizarre oppositions” in their pictorial program, for example “between God and the figure of Fortuna, David with the slingshot and the centaur,” as the “organic polarity of the immense capacity to fluctuate (*Schwingungsfähigkeit*) of an educated early Renaissance man (...), who in the age of the metamorphosis of energetic self-consciousness strove for a balance suffused with character” (*Ibidem*, 277). Such “balancing movements” between psycho-organic polarities as well as the mixtures or medians of opposing thought forms were considered by Warburg, as it were, as ideal or model states of cultural history, to which he contrasted the “tragedy of the split (*Gespaltenheit*) between compulsive magic and dissecting logic (*auseinandersetzen*de Logik)” (Warburg, 2010: 568) from which all cultural activity originates. The usage of the word *auseinandersetzen*, which denotes a cognitive mode of dealing with a problem, is characteristic for Warburg’s way to approach language: he takes it literally as *auseinander-setzen*, that is putting apart or separating. *Auseinandersetzung* in this way occupies the opposite pole to *Verknüpfung*, that is linkage or conjunction.

Warburg studied the staging of this polarity in the images of art as well as in the cult, which he understood as a kinetic form that precedes images or rather as “pictorial mime (*bildliche Mimik*)” (Warburg, 2010). The fact that this cultural-historical dynamic is also based on an individual-psychological motif is nowhere formulated more explicitly than in the notes he wrote in preparation for the Kreuzlingen lecture.

### **The Different Manuscripts of the ‘Indian Journey’ (1897/ 1923)**

The close interweaving of ethnological, archaeological and philological perspectives only emerged when Warburg revisited the journey that had taken place more than a quarter of a century before. In the text, which was written in Kreuzlingen and is known as the *Serpent Ritual*, the journey to New Mexico and Arizona is motivated by an interest in seeing the Hopis’ symbolic art, magical practices and rituals with one’s own eyes, and in this way gaining insight into still-lived practices of “pagan-religious” cultural life that one could otherwise only study through artifacts of the cultural heritage in museums or remnants of the archaic ancient cultures of Europe. For the young Warburg, who had finished his dissertation on Botticelli two years before his trip to America and then completed his military service, the *general* cultural-historical significance of what he saw was, for the time being, “to get to know the economic and spiritual life of people at the developmental stage of the pagan hunter, shepherd and farmer”. Conversely, he saw the *special* significance for the art historian in the possibility of exploring the “connection between pagan-religious ideas and artistic activity” (Warburg, 2010) and finding “material for studying the question of the emergence of symbolic art,” as he puts it in a slide lecture that he delivered not long after his return to Hamburg.

During this period, Warburg lectured at least three times on his journey: in January 1897 with the just-mentioned slide talk to the Society for the Promotion of Amateur Photography, in February 1897 at the Amerikanisten Club, both in Hamburg, and in March 1897 at a photography club in Berlin. The glass slides of this commented “journey of images” consist for the most part of the “snapshots” (*Momentaufnahmen*) that he himself had taken with his “Buck’s Eye Kodak Camera 8 1/2 to 10” (*Ibidem*: 509), one of the most modern cameras available at the time – a fact that partly explains the target audience of the photo clubs. Before this circle, Warburg excuses his pictures’ imperfections by reference to the “adverse circumstances” under which they were taken (*Ibidem*). Of these lectures, a handwritten

manuscript – titled "A Journey through the Pueblo Indian Territory of New Mexico and Arizona" – has survived, which was first published in our edition of the *Werke in einem Band* (2010), which is entirely based on the manuscripts and copies in Warburg's hand. The manuscript is a typical script for a slide lecture that presents and comments on the stages of the journey by way of the photographs, using significant rhetorical gestures such as "this image represents ..." or "the following image shows...".

When Warburg returned to his journey much later to demonstrate his recovery and restored ability to work by means of a scientific lecture before being released from the Bellevue Sanatorium, the meaning of what he had seen among the Pueblos had changed considerably. From the remaining drafts for this lecture, two quite different accents and leitmotifs can be identified; the differences can be studied in the two versions that are published in the edition mentioned above. The first version, "Images from the Pueblo Indians in North America", which obviously served as the script for the lecture, is based on the same manuscript as the text known as "Serpent Ritual", however our 2010 edition restores Warburg's version before the amendments by foreign hands<sup>9</sup>. Differing considerably from this text are the previously unpublished notes under the title "Travel-Memories from the Territory of the Pueblo-Indians in Northern America", the transcript of which is dated 14 days prior to the date of the lecture. In a clearly autobiographical gesture, Warburg here explains the motive and conditions of his journey<sup>10</sup>. While he speaks in the lecture script as a cultural historian – "What interested me as a cultural historian" (Warburg, 2010: 525) – by discussing the everyday culture and the magical rituals of the Pueblos against the background of ancient tragedy and the orgiastic Dionysian cult in pagan Greece, the self-referential *Travel-Memories* provide a palimpsest for the cultural-scientific approach to the *Images* of the Pueblo Indians. While in these *Images* the Pueblo culture and the wild origins of ancient Europe are conjoined in a kind of mirror-constellation, the other manuscript with the title *Travel-Memories* rather produces a parallelism between the author's own psychic condition and the symbolic-ritual culture of the Hopis. Self-analysis literally forms the reason and motive of looking back on the "Indian Journey", a motive that is then, however, erased as a motif of the lecture (since this more autobiographical version was apparently discarded) and thus sublated in cultural-scientific interpretation. Thus, in the changing mirror-constellations of the two versions, self-analysis is replaced by the ancient pagan culture and Warburg's mental condition likewise gets connected to the wild origin of European culture – mediated, indirectly, by Hopi culture.

However, Warburg did not consider the lecture's script to be a finished or publishable text; on the contrary, in a letter to Fritz Saxl he describes it as a "monstrosity (*Missgeburt*)" and speaks of the "dreadful convulsions of a decapitated frog" when he left the notes in the hands of his confidant and collaborator in order to share them with a few selected persons. To this small group belonged the very person who was indirectly responsible for Warburg's decisive impulse to remember the journey: Ernst Cassirer. Saxl, who maintained the connection between intellectual life at the K.B.W. and the Kreuzlingen patient, reported to him in 1921 that Cassirer had spoken about the Indian culture in a lecture at the Society of Religious Studies. This is what prompted Warburg to remember his long-past journey and to ask Saxl to bring him his "American material". The fact that he could indicate where exactly this material was stored (in the filing cabinet and the slip box marked "Americana") proves that these earlier notes were still present in his mind in some way (McEwan, 2007: 271). Cassirer, whom Warburg regarded as a kindred spirit because of his work on a *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*<sup>11</sup>, had increasingly likewise shown sympathy for the K.B.W., although he admitted feeling somewhat uncomfortable by the unconventional system of the library, as Saxl reported: he had either to stay away from the library, or else become imprisoned there for years (Saxl, 1980: 340). Warburg and Cassirer shared the idea of developing a general theory of the symbol appropriate to cultural history; and both of them saw astrology



as an exceptional form of thinking in whose systematic worldview mathematics and mysticism enter into a fascinating connection. Cassirer makes their shared point of departure clear in his book *Die Begriffsform des mythischen Denkens* (*The Conceptual Form of Mythic Thought*), which was printed in 1922 as the first volume in the series *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg*:

In astrology – says Warburg – two quite heterogeneous spiritual powers, which logically only had to fight each other, have in irrefutable reality joined together to a ‘method.’ Mathematics, the finest tool of abstracting thought, with fear of daemons, the most primitive form of religious causation (Cassirer, 1922: 46).

Cassirer may well have been referring to Warburg’s study on “Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther” (1920), in which astrology is analyzed as a combination of number and image, of logic and magic. There Warburg distinguishes between “*logic*, which *creates thought-space* (*Denkraum*) – between man and object – through conceptually separating *label*, and *magic*, which *destroys this thought-space* again through superstitiously *contracting* – ideal or practical – *conjunction* (*Verknüpfung*) of man and object” (Warburg, 2010: 427).

The term “primitive”, as used by Cassirer in the quoted passage and as also used by Warburg, is not to be understood as a discriminatory term for non-European cultures; it rather refers to the most primordial forms of thought and culture in the sense described by Edward B. Tylor in the book *Primitive Culture* (1871). Tylor’s observation of the *survival* of earlier cultural stages and thought forms, especially mythology and animism, in contemporary modern culture likewise provides the basis for Warburg’s discourse on afterlives and survivals. Sometimes Warburg also uses *Überlebsel*, which is how “survival” was translated in the German version of Tylor’s book (published as *Die Anfänge der Kultur*, 1873). The “primitive” is a key concept in the Kreuzlingen manuscripts. As in other manuscripts by Warburg, the title is supplemented in both versions by several title variants, which can be read as paraphrases of the subject matter and the guiding question. Some of these are added and dated after the text itself was written. Such a fluctuation in the overall description of his project is symptomatic of Warburg’s lifelong search for a general conception or synthesis of his interpretations and his struggle to find an adequate designation for it. The title of the *Travel-Memoirs* is supplemented by the title “Fragments on the Psychology of Primitive Culture”, followed by further variants: “The Afterlife of Primitive Humanity in the Culture of the Pueblo Indians” and “Materials from the Culture of Primitive Man on the Problem of Symbolic Conjunction,” and then, in October 1923, “Becoming and Passing Away of Thought-Space”. The subtitle of the lecture’s script, meanwhile, is “Materials on the Psychology of Primitive Religiosity”, to which Warburg added further paraphrases in the days after the lecture: “As Source of Logic Conjunction” on April 22nd and “Between Embodiment (*Verleibung*) and Analysis (*Auseinandersetzung*)” on April 24th. However, even if he discovers real *Überlebsel* of the magic serpent ritual among the Pueblo Indians, their contemporary culture is described as inhabiting a state “in the middle between magic and logos” (Warburg, 2010: 538, 561).

Using the visual arts and the symbolic ornamentation of the pueblos as examples, the lecture script of the “Images from the Territory of the Pueblo Indians” pursues the question: “In which elements can we identify here the essential characteristics of primitive pagan humanity?” (Warburg, 2010: 525). The commentaries on the wall paintings, pottery and ritual dances are explained along the stations of Warburg’s travel<sup>12</sup> all the way up to Walpi, the site of the serpent dance. Here Warburg’s account begins to change, referring more to photographs and narratives of others, which he quotes in detail.

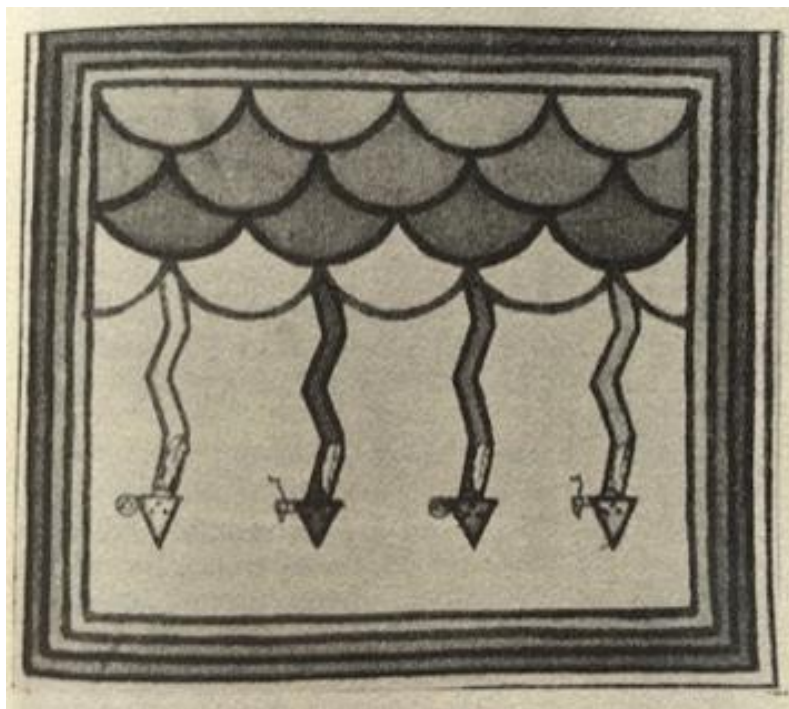


Fig. 2. The Diptych Oraibi (GUIDI; MANN, 1998).

At that time, there were already several ethnological studies on Pueblo culture; though Warburg's journey still took place at a time before the rituals of the Pueblo Indians had become a tourist attraction. Most notable among these was the famous 'Snake Dance' of the Hopis<sup>13</sup>, a clan of Pueblos. Their cultic dances, which are based on the esoteric knowledge of various secret societies, became one of the most photographed North American rituals at the beginning of the 20th century. This inevitably led to a conflict between secret knowledge and the modern public, to which the Hopis reacted in 1915 by prohibiting photography of the ritual (Sanner, 2007; Schüttpelz, 2007). Since Warburg's journey took place during the winter months, he missed the performance of the "Snake Dance", but was able to see the "Humiskatsina Dance" or "Corn Dance" in Oraibi (Arizona) and the "Antelope Dance" in Idelfonso (New Mexico). His epistemological interest in the cultural-historical evolution of symbolic practices, which was to become a leitmotif to the introduction to the *Mnemosyne* project, is already apparent in the interpretation of these two examples of magical cults: the former is interpreted as a purely mimetic-fetishistic animal mask dance practiced to enchant the animals by imitation and make them "intercessors with the weather gods", the latter as a cultic dance with symbolic actions in which the dancers are equipped with symbolic jewelry (Warburg, 2010: 517-519). Warburg was especially desirous to witness the "Snake Dance", however, because he saw in it a "much more primitive stage of magical dance" (Warburg, 2010: 547). When he classifies the ritual dances of religious magic within the cultural history of sacrifice, the "Snake Dance" stands for him "between imitative mimic empathy (*Einfühlung*) and bloody sacrifice":

The snake is not sacrificed in this Snake Dance, but is rather transformed into a messenger by consecrations and influencing gestures (*Mimik*), and sent out in order to return to the souls of the deceased, then to produce a thunderstorm in the sky by its own lightning-shape. This gives us an insight of how myth and magical practice are intertwined in "primitive" man (Warburg, 2010: 550).

Although Warburg did not succeed in seeing the snake dance with his own eyes, it is literally the pivotal point of his lecture. For with the snake, the knowledge of the cultural historian comes into play, and ancient pagan culture henceforth serves as a model for the interpretation of Hopi culture. From the travel station Walpi, which represents the blind spot of his own field research and at the same time the climax of the magical practices examined, the direction and character of the narrative undergo a decisive change from a travel account to the discussion of topics from ancient culture<sup>14</sup>. The section “Walpi/Snake Dance” is followed by the section “Snake/Laocoon”, which brings Warburg at last to the heart of his research interest.



Fig. 3. Aby Warburg with an Indian (GUIDI; MANN, 1998).

The motif of the snake had appeared much earlier in Warburg’s writings, for example when he refers to Leon Battista Alberti’s description of Sandro Botticelli’s paintings in the context of his conceptualization of “moving accessories” (*bewegtes Beiwerk*) and the “excited gestures” (*erregte Gebärden*) in the Renaissance art. The moving garments and hair with their twists and turns appeared to Alberti like

knotted snakes, with which he imbues “the will-less accessories with organic life”, as Warburg writes (Warburg, 2010: 48) who thus refers to the idea of the animation of the inorganic that forms the core of the theory of empathy (*Einfühlung*) of Robert Vischer, Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Theodor Lipps and others<sup>15</sup>. While their perspective of psychological aesthetics was concerned with the question of how people animate or endow artifacts, images and objects of their environment with souls or emotions, Warburg set out to find the cultural-historical origins of animistic magical practices in order to determine their place in the evolutionary history of thought-space and symbolic practices. Moving ahead in time to his Kreuzlingen lecture, the same questions Warburg had analyzed in his dissertation are sought anew among the Hopis and the moving images of living culture – there the afterlife of pagan Europe in Renaissance art, here the Indian cults:

The uninitiated may incline to see the elementary discharge of this religious magic of the Indians as an originary peculiarity of primitive wildness of which Europe knows nothing. And yet, 2000 years ago, precisely in the country of origin of our European education, Greece, cult habits were common, which in their distorted crudity even surpass what we see among the Indians (Warburg, 2010: 550).

He is thinking here of the “orgiastic cult of Dionysus” and the ecstatic sacrificial dance of the maenads, which he describes as, effectively, another snake dance. The “bloody sacrifice in ecstatic madness (...) in contrast to today’s dances of the Moki Indians – was the climax and the actual meaning of the religious dance” (Warburg, 2010: 551). What follows this comparison in the last part of the lecture’s script is a *tour de force* through European cultural history by way of the snake motif. This section refers no longer to travel images, but to book knowledge, with sections such as: Snake/Asclepius, Spanish Calendar, Snake/Asclepius stellar constellation, Snake/Bible, Snake in the O.T. [Old Testament], Snake/Paul, Snake/Typology, Snake/Typology/ Kreuzlingen, End, End/ Uncle Sam/ San Francisco.

### **Self-Analysis and Cultural Theory**

In contrast to the voice of the cultural historian who presents this double image of the Pueblo culture and pagan antiquity, the preliminary version is characterized by a conjunction of self-analysis and cultural theory. The notes entitled “Travel-Memories from the Territory of the Pueblo Indians” bear the traits of a self-questioning: “Why did I go there? What attracted me?” (Warburg, 2010: 568). In these records, the author’s own psychological state is explicitly related to the psycho-historical interpretation of specific cultural phenomena. In this perspective, Warburg addresses questions about the intertwining of anthropology and cultural history in the most fundamental way imaginable.

Retrospectively written and driven by the will to self-healing through cultural-scientific studies, the preliminary version of Warburg’s “Indian Journey” positions itself as a successor of Goethe’s *Italian Journey*, whose author had likewise set out during a personal crisis in order to study the remains of antiquity *in situ*. Considered as a vehicle towards overcoming his own psychological crisis, Warburg’s analysis of the past journey becomes, as it were, a different “journey to the mothers” – as indicated by the modified quotation from *Faust*: “There is an old book to browse, Athens – Oraibi – all are cousins”. Warburg had already employed the correct quotation from *Faust* as a motto for the book *Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Word and Image in the Age of Luther*: “It is an old book to browse:/ From the Harz to Hellas, always cousins” (Warburg, 2010: 425).

If the Luther study had evoked the correspondences between Walpurgis Night and ancient cults, then the Kreuzlingen manuscript points to correspondences between Indian culture and antiquity.

The manuscript begins with the confession of a patient, a self-described “incurable schizoid”. He did not want his presentation of images to be understood as a result, but rather as “desperate confessions of a seeker of redemption from bondage (*Verhaftetsein*), of the mental attempt to elevate himself (*Erhebungsversuch*) from the compulsion of conjunction (*Verknüpfungszwang*) through [?] or imaginary embodiment (*Verleibung*)”<sup>16</sup>. In this perspective, the ‘Indian Journey’ becomes a subject-historical search for redemption in a double sense: back then, at the time of the journey, for redemption from disgust at the “sterile verbal commerce” of an “aestheticizing art history” and from the “emptiness of civilization in Eastern America”, and presently in Kreuzlingen for redemption from a state of mental discord. However, this mental state also places Warburg in an exceptional epistemological position: as he writes, he sees himself as a *seismograph*. The recognition of the correspondences between Hopi culture and ancient cults is thus based on subjective affinity to the psychological problems that motivate the Hopis’ cultic practices. If Warburg understands his own symptomatology in this way as a condition of possibility for cultural analysis, then he evaluates this work at the same time as an activity of general relevance in view of the overall state of the world:

But now, 1923 in March, in Kreuzlingen in a closed institution, where I feel like a seismograph built out of pieces of wood originating from a plant that was transplanted from the Orient into the nutritious North German lowlands and which bore a branch inoculated from Italy, I let the signs I receive come out of me, because in this epoch of chaotic downfall even the weakest is obliged to strengthen the will for cosmic order (Warburg, 2010: 573).

By this move, Warburg’s own person becomes the incarnation of cultural science itself. At the same time, this work goes beyond a purely historical or scholarly interest and takes on the character of a directed cultural action: self-healing through the analysis of past cultural practices and cultural analysis as an active contribution to contemporary culture.

What exactly Warburg connects with the idea of “cosmic order” becomes more specific in his interpretation of the cultural achievements of the Pueblo Indians:

I have seen two processes side by side with the Indians, which show the polarity of man in his struggle with nature in astonishingly strange meaningfulness. Firstly, the will to magically subdue nature by the metamorphosis into animals and, in doing so, secondly the ability to understand nature cosmically-architecturally as a whole, which is objectively interrelated and tectonically conditioned, by meaningful abstraction. (Warburg, 2010: 573).

Both magical practice, which he calls mime (*Mimik*) due to the kinetic form of dance, and the symbolic order of nature through artistic representations are in Warburg’s view basal acts of a general cultural history. He therefore understands his interpretation of the “Pueblo Indians” culture as “material for the history of symbolic behavior in mime and the fine arts” (Warburg, 2010: 588). For him, their motive and objective is the creation of a space between man and the forces of nature by means of creating a “figure of scope” (*Umfangsgebilde*) Warburg (*Ibidem*: 574), a “devotional space” (*Andachtsraum*), or ‘thought-space’ (*Denkraum*), depending on the specific mode and state of cultural practices.

In the preparatory notes, these central Warburgian terms are grounded in an ontogenetic perspective that sheds light on what Warburg associates with the “anthropomorphic and biomorphic scope” or the categories of “determination of scope” (*Umfangbestimmung*) and “thought-space” (*Denkraum*). As is well known, Warburg speaks about electricity destroying thought-space in the oft-cited final passage of the lecture, entitled “Uncle Sam”: The “culture of the machine age,” which on the one hand is said to have done away with “paganism,” on the other hand destroys “what natural science, which had grown

out of myth, had laboriously achieved: the devotional space that transformed itself into thought-space” (Warburg, 2010: 561). The “becoming and passing away of thought-space” is understood by Warburg as one of the topics of the preliminary version, as the title page mentioned above indicates. After comparing the patient’s capability of perceiving signs with a seismograph and introducing the snake dance and the transformation into an animal, there follows a paragraph on childhood as the “primordial category of the causal form of thought,” with help of which man responds to the “incomprehensible catastrophe of the detachment of one creature from another.” The emergence of thought-space is thus explained here from the perspective of developmental psychology: “The abstract thought-space between subject and object is based on the experience of the cut umbilical cord” (Warburg, 2010: 575). Sigmund Freud interprets the same scene a few years later as a birth trauma or ““*primal fear*” of birth” (Freud, 1971: 277). Starting from this ontogenetic primal scene, Warburg thus discusses more than psychological correspondences to totemism: the scene also provides a subject-historical framework for his own childhood memories.

In the section “Memories/About Indian Books” he reports on episodes from his childhood that deal with the phobic and counterphobic effects of images and literature. In this context he interprets his reading of Indian novels (such as James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*) as a child in a situation of strong mental shock as a kind of protective inoculation, while the pictures (book illustrations) conversely “played a strangely demonic role in fever dreams”. The motif of phobia, which will fade into the background in the lecture’s script, plays a central role in the earlier notes – much as it did in the autobiographical fragments, with memories of his own childhood and youth that he wrote down the year before in the sanatorium<sup>17</sup>. Michael Steinberg (1995: 67ff) thus reads the Kreuzlingen notes as a struggle with personal and cultural demons. This motif of phobia leads to the theme of defense-fantasies and actions, which Warburg discusses in reference to his early reading of Tito Vignoli’s *Mito e Scienza* (1879) as a biomorphic dynamic. Referring to Vignoli, he interprets the mythical mode of thinking as an counterpole to the catastrophic experience of corporeal separation, namely as a biomorphically motivated linkage: “Defense through the conjunction (*Verknüpfung*) of subject or object with beings of maximally-increased, extensively comprehensible power is the basic act of the fighter for existence who thinks in the manner of a fairy tale” (Warburg, 2010: 578). With these considerations, Warburg has, as it were, developed an ontogenetic and phylogenetic derivation of his core idea about the psycho-historical dynamic that underlies the fundamental, even universal contradiction, between *separation* (for example by means of conceptual designation, abstraction, or logic) and *conjunction* (through magic or mime); he regards these deliberations as biomorphic explanations. What follows are remarks on the “phobic mythical phantasy as the “positing of a cause” (*Ursachensetzung*)”, on the analytically detaching (*Auseinandersetzung*) character of “ordered cosmic images,” and on the “tragedy of the human being who, through making use of tools, grows beyond his organic scope” (Warburg, 2010: 580).

From this biomorphic perspective, memory appears as a “collection of phenomena of stimuli to which one has responded”, and Warburg states that Ewald Hering found a lucky formulation for this problem with his title “The Memory as Organized Matter”<sup>18</sup>. Starting from the question of the origin of “linguistic and pictorial expressions”, and the “feeling or point of view” according to which they are stored in the archive of memory, Warburg here describes the activity of cultural analysis as work on and with memory and explicitly appraises it as a successor to the cultural achievements of so-called primitive man. Hering’s question shall be answered with the means of Warburg’s library, which he wants to be understood as a “collection of documents on the psychology of human expression”. The same question, Warburg continues, can be understood both through the psychology of primitive man and that of civilized man. The former is characterized as “reacting in a reflexive and unlearned way”, while the latter is

portrayed as a historical human being who “consciously remembers the stratified (historical) formation of his own and his ancestors’ past”: “With primitive humans, the memory image leads to religious action, with the civilized one to recording”. (Warburg, 2010: 582). And with the cultural scientist, one might add, it leads from field research to the library. In this way the study of *Kulturwissenschaft* receives a place within a series of cultural practices that begins with the very same “primitive” symbolic and ritual activities which comprise its fascinating research objects.

In the preliminary draft of the Kreuzlingen lecture, the biomorphic theory that Warburg had already discussed in the context of his studies on astrology and the *Sphaera Barbarica* a decade earlier (2010), is explicitly applied to the biological or organic foundations of symbolic practices. This issue had occupied the young Warburg intensively for years – even though his innumerable notes, tables, and drawings from this period did not travel beyond his slip-boxes and notebooks. The extent of his interests and studies in the field of natural sciences cannot be estimated from the writings that Warburg himself published; they rather form, as it were, a subtext of his writings on art and cultural history<sup>19</sup>. In the context of preparing the lecture in Kreuzlingen they returned to the surface. For many years, Warburg’s interest in the sciences of his day received scant notice; recently, however, it has been more strongly perceived<sup>20</sup> and made accessible in part through the publication of the booklet *Symbolismus als Umfangsbestimmung* (Warburg, 2010) and the edition of the *Fragmente zur Ausdruckskunde* (Warburg, 2015).

The question of symbolism directly arose out of Warburg’s “Indian journey”. One of the few theoretical entries in Warburg’s diary from the journey appears like a title for a future research: “Symbolism understood as gravitational function in the household of the mind” (18. Feb. Coronado Beach, California) (Weigel, 1998: 153). This formulation became the subtitle of the notebook on *Symbolism as Determination of Scope* that Warburg actually began soon after his return from the “Indian journey”. In this context he developed the concept of “determination of scope” (*Umfangbestimmung*) as the bodily-spatial distance from the forces of nature which the human subject achieves by means of symbolic, mimic, cultic practices and manual actions with tools. The *Umfangbestimmung* was later coupled with the concept of *Denkraum*, which bears a similar function – to produce a space “between man and object” (Warburg, 2010: 427) – but takes place within the sphere of conceptual thinking. In the manuscript on *Travel-Memories*, the determination of scope is described as a laborious conceptual abstraction and thus a kind of initial step to thought-space:

A fairy-tale animal, apparently the most concrete product of playful imagination, is *in statu nascendi* a laboriously conceived abstraction. It is a determination of the scope of phenomena which otherwise cannot be grasped as they incomprehensibility fly past. Example: The snake dance in Oraibi and Walpi (Warburg, 2010: 574).

In the context of the ritual, the snake gets transformed into a formation of scope (*Umfangsgebilde*) which mimetically invokes lightning, whereas the dance performs man’s imaginary metamorphosis through the kinetic imitation of the snake. Here, Warburg interprets the selection of the snake as a congenial animal as “courage towards causality.” In this way Warburg comes to see the Indians as primordial scholars: “The idea of the cause is – and this is the scientific achievement of the so-called savages – transmutable between animal and man, the starkest form of this transformation happens in dance” (Warburg, 2010: 575).

### **A return to the notes of the years of study – Freud and Warburg**

This preparatory version of the lecture notes thus forms a kind of bridge between Warburg’s unpublished notes and studies from the time of his Indian journey and the *Mnemosyne* project, which will be his main

concern after his return from Kreuzlingen. The introduction to *Mnemosyne* deals with the artistic work as a “process of de-demonization of the phobically-determined mass of inherited impressions (*Eindruckserbmasse*)” (Warburg, 2010: 630). In the wake of his methodological return to the biological basis of cultural and symbolic acts, Warburg also returned to Darwin, whose book on *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) he had first discovered during his studies in Florence in 1888. However, he had interrupted reading in the middle of Darwin’s book when he met Mary Hertz, who later became his wife. Only shortly after returning from the sanatorium did he pick up the book again, as the entry “Hbg. 23 Okt 924” proves; he even copied by hand a calendar entry from his diary “Florence, 26 Nov. 1888” into the book: “*Auf der Bibl. Darwin, Ueber den Ausdruck der Gemütsbewegungen gelesen. Endlich ein Buch das mir hilft!*” (Read at the library Darwin, On the Expression of Emotions. Finally a book that helps me!). In view of this non-linear trajectory of his reading, the Darwin myth in Warburg scholarship – based almost entirely on the isolated quotation of the last sentence in Gombrich’s intellectual biography – has to be corrected (Weigel, 2014: 162ff).

Warburg also remembered Sigmund Freud during the preparation for the lecture. This is evidenced by the short section of the preparatory notes on the topic “Totem and Taboo”, a topic that Warburg discusses here also in the terms of his core hermeneutic pattern, the contrast between conjunction and distance. Inserted by hand, it says here: “I am missing Freud, Totem and Taboo.” It is unclear whether he also had the subtitle of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1912/13) in mind, “Some Similarities in Psychic Life of Savages and Neurotics”, but it would provide a perfect motto for Warburg’s consideration of the magical practices of the Hopi interpreted through the looking-glass of the Kreuzlingen patient.

In many respects it is illuminating to consider Warburg’s work in parallel to the work of Sigmund Freud: both dealt with similar questions around the same time, but sought different ways to answer them<sup>21</sup>. At the same time that Freud, in his search for the causes of neurosis, went beyond the scope of anatomical localization and neurological explanations and instead began to explore the structure of the psychic apparatus and the language of the unconscious, Warburg similarly went beyond the scope of stylistic and formal history of art and concentrated instead on the energetic and psychic dynamics bound up in images and signs, in rituals and other symbolic practices. Both endeavored at the end of the 19th century to sustain the analysis of cultural phenomena with knowledge from natural science. While Warburg in 1896 began his attempt at developing an energetic theory of the symbol on a physiological basis (in the notebook under the title *Symbolism as Determination of Scope*), Sigmund Freud had just set aside his attempt to develop a theory of memory on a neural basis in the *Draft of a Psychology* (1895). And during the 1920s, when Freud turned his attention more intensely to the question of religion and pleaded for a comparability of neuroses and religion, as in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Warburg established that very relationship by commenting on the magic practices of the Hopis from his own perspective as a psychiatric patient. Reflecting on one’s own mental state is, however, by no means new in Warburg’s working methods; the young Warburg’s notebooks already regularly contain comments on his own state of mind. For example, in the booklet on *Symbolism* he added a personal remark above a table with a system of various symbolic forms: “After another year (27.III.97) of laborious wandering through the world of symbols, the following attempt to structure the material: Hussar sentiment from California has given way to grim Prussianism” (Warburg, 2010: 619).

The traces of self-reference, which can be found above all in the numerous entries, manuscripts and notebooks, form a subtext to Warburg’s publications which is significant not only for the development of his methods and epistemological interests. It is precisely this self-analysis as a starting point for the cultural-scientific interpretation of his field research on the Pueblos that should be of interest to



contemporary ethnology, which has recently turned to the question of the “affective dimension of fieldwork and ethnography” (Stodulka et al. (ed.), 2019). Warburg’s texts on the culture of the Pueblo Indians exemplify like few others the thesis that emotions are capable of “advancing the research process rather than hindering or clouding it, when they are recognized as conditions and factors of gaining knowledge” (Lubrich; Stodulka (eds.), 2019: 12).

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## Notas

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<sup>1</sup> For pictures of Warburg's journey see *Photographs at the Frontier. Aby Warburg in America 1895-1896*, ed. Benedetta Cestelli Guidi and Nicholas Mann, London 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Warburg (1939: 272-299).

<sup>3</sup> Warburg (1988).

<sup>4</sup> For example in Michael P. Steinberg, "Aby Warburg's Kreuzlingen Lecture: A Reading" (1995: 59-114).

<sup>5</sup> Warburg (2010: 567-600). Our edition contains 25 texts, including his most important publications and several previously unpublished manuscripts. It is based entirely on Warburg's manuscripts, recording later modifications inserted by other hands in a text-critical appendix.

<sup>6</sup> The edition of the *Gesammelte Schriften* has resumed activity after a long hiatus, especially with the volumes *Bilderreihen und Ausstellungen*, ed. Uwe Fleckner and Isabella Woldt, Berlin 2012, and *Fragmente einer Ausdruckskunde*, ed. Ulrich Pfister and Hans Christian Hönes, Berlin 2015.

<sup>7</sup> On the concept of thought style (*Denkstil*) see Ludwik Fleck (1979: 158ff).

<sup>8</sup> I name this constellation "First Kulturwissenschaft" in order to position it within intellectual history in relation to the "cultural turn" of the humanities of the 1980s. See Sigrid Weigel (2001: 125-145); *Idem*. Wandering, Thinking in Transition, and Boundary Cases. Knowledge set in Motion by Warburg, Benjamin and other authors of the 'First Kulturwissenschaft' (forthcoming in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*); *Ibidem*. Thinking Culture in Transition. 10 Theses on the European Intellectual Heritage: Aby Warburg and other Affinity Scholars of his time: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3GhXKDFogA>>.

<sup>9</sup> The archive contains three typescripts of the manuscript (WIA III.93.1.) with handwritten notes, insertions and corrections by Warburg.

<sup>10</sup> It is a typescript with double pagination, with repetition of some parts and handwritten corrections and additions.

<sup>11</sup> After years of work the first volume of this project appeared in 1923.

<sup>12</sup> The stations are documented in Warburg's diary of the journey, which is in other respect quite unspectacular to read. In this pocket calendar he merely recorded places, persons, and meetings with only sparse commentary; see Dorothea McEwan (1988).

<sup>13</sup> The Hopi were also occasionally referred to – mistakenly – as the Moki or Moqui.

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed examination of this structure see Sigrid Weigel (1995); for a critical discussion of Warburg's approach to the contemporary Pueblo-culture and the conflicts of the Hopis see David Freedberg (2004; 2005).

<sup>15</sup> For the relation and difference between empathy and Einfühlung see Vanessa Lux and Sigrid Weigel (ed., 2017); for the role of animation see Spyros Papapetros (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Warburg (2010: 567-568); the question mark stands for an illegible word.

<sup>17</sup> Published in: Chantal Marazia and Davide Stimilli (2007: 101-105).

<sup>18</sup> The correct title of Ewald Hering's book is *Das Gedächtnis als eine allgemeine Funktion der organisierten Materie* (1870).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Weigel (2014).

<sup>20</sup> See for example Frank Fehrenbach and Cornelia Zumbusch (eds., 2019).

<sup>21</sup> On the proximity of Freud and Warburg, see also Weigel (2001); George Didi-Huberman (2002).

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