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Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America

Warburg, Aby M., Steinberg, Michael P.

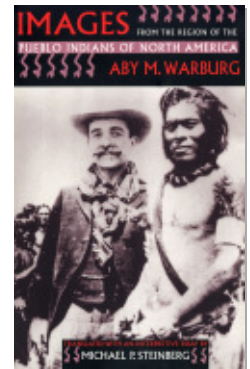
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Prefatory Note

In Aby Warburg's "Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America" we have the transcript of a slide lecture given by a patient in Ludwig Binswanger's Kreuzlingen Sanatorium to an invited audience on 21 April 1923. The German text was edited from Warburg's final draft, in Hamburg, by Fritz Saxl and Gertrud Bing, Warburg's assistants, both of whom later served as directors of the Warburg Library and Warburg Institute. Warburg did not consider the lecture publishable. In a letter of 26 April 1923, he asked Saxl to file all the lecture material and show it to no one without his explicit approval, with the exceptions of his wife, his brother Max, and two colleagues, of whom one was Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer, he suggested, might be interested in looking further into his notes brought back from America in 1897. Beyond these modest uses, the piece was, for Warburg, a prisoner of its multiple limitations. It is, he wrote, "the gruesome convulsion of a decapitated frog," "formless and philologically unfounded," and might have value only "as a document in the history of symbolic practice."

In 1938, nine years after Warburg's death and just over four years after the Warburg Library was moved from Hamburg to London, Saxl and Bing commissioned an abridged English translation from a Cambridge

Germanist, W. F. Mainland. This was published as “A Lecture on Serpent Ritual” in the *Journal of the Warburg Institute* (2[1938–39]: 277–92). The full German text was published for the first time in 1988, under the title “Serpent Ritual: An Account of a Journey (*Schlangenritual: Ein Reisebericht*, with an afterword by Ulrich Raulff [Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1988]).

As Raulff suggested in his afterword, “Aby Warburg’s Kreuzlingen lecture is a structure with many entrances.” The text can be read as a window on the life and work of a great European scholar. It can be read as an insightful and quirky document in the history of the ethnography of the Native American Southwest. These are, as it were, its two “subjects.” At the same time, the text has its own subjectivity, its own voice, which transcends both its author and his objects of analysis. It is a voice of spiraling and endless mediation: between cultures, between pasts and presents, between the self that is known and the self that is secret.

The interpretive essay that follows Warburg’s lecture is an attempt to draw out the various and overlapping hermeneutics of the text itself. Its length derives from the wish to serve Warburg’s text and certainly not to overshadow it. As such, the essay continues the work of translation, which can be said to involve the reproduction of resonances.

My work on this book has been guided by a sense of dual homage: to Aby Warburg himself—to his complex, vulnerable, and humorous mind; and to Anne Marie Meyer, who has been associated with the Warburg Institute for more than half a century and whose friendship, knowledge, and criticism have been essential to me within and beyond the bounds of this project. I could not have completed the project without her; I would not have tried. The Warburg Institute’s two directors during the period I have been at work, J. B. Trapp and Nicholas Mann, have been generous hosts and advisers. I am also

grateful to the institute's photographic staff for their help on the plates, many of which required the reconstruction of worn negatives. Finally, I thank the scholars who have read, heard, and improved drafts of my essay, especially Barbara Babcock, Wendy Doniger, Hal Foster, Carlo Ginzburg, Anthony Grafton, Curtis Hinsley, Michael Ann Holly, Lutz Niethammer, and Anthony Vidler.

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