



Post covid19: Inquiry on possible *relevance* of [Aby Warburg](#)'s case-history of being *confined* and then *leaving* confinement—after a period of mental illness and his sensational act of self-healing (after a [lecture](#) on his own state to psychiatrist [Ludwig Binswanger](#), w/staff and inmates)—*to our own time*.

During a coffee/lunch at [Portør pensjonat](#), composer Henrik Hellstenius was asked whether the Warburg story could provide a framework for an *artistic research* project in opera. Henrik returned to me with two questions: does the material require *music*? how will the material react if given to *song*?

Both having a *blooming* impact on the material that either may help to convey it or obstruct it, he said. We agreed that these were questions that *could* be asked in an artistic research project. Given that the material both relates to the blooming and *alteration* of forces, and Warburg's [loss/gain of voice](#).



By discussing *confinement* as a vehicle of transformation—repeatedly turning to Kafka's/G. Samza's [metamorphosis](#)—Latour gets [his point](#) across, but it is difficult to believe in it as *our* metamorphosis, since it is *complete*. Just as it is ever difficult to imagine that we can actually *leave* our circle.

Perhaps going into the detail of *leaving* confinement can bring some clarity to our hesitation—*believing* in, or *taking* the leap—by investigating a known historical case of healing: the sensational story of the psychiatric recovery of [Aby Warburg](#), the completeness of which was to remain controversial.

First, [Ludwig Binswanger](#)—who treated Warburg—*corrected* his initial diagnosis of schizophrenia *into* manic-depression. This correction is of significance, since the chances of recovery from schizophrenia were considered *nil*, while recovery from manic-depression was possible.

A symptom of Warburg's pathological condition was the *loss of voice*, at the point where his behaviour was life-threatening: to his family and himself. While the regaining of voice, lecturing on his own state, became to others a sign of recovery. His healing was a story of coming to voice, of re/naming.

He was *well-to-do* and upheld by a network of care. He was not disparaged by his entourage, like Gregor Samza by his [ubuesque](#) family, but the completeness of his healing—though sensational and almost miraculous—was questioned. And from this incompleteness the idea of perpetual healing.

However, it is clear that from his own vantage point Aby Warburg had changed. Not to the point of moving out of his social circle, but in relation to a different entourage: his [books](#). His perspective on what called images into his reach as an art historian, had fundamentally changed after his healing.

It moved from the prompt of the *mythical* themes in Renaissance-art, to the *forces* at play: from their existence as *formulas* into the opencast of *forces* with current claims (in his verbatim, [Pathos-Formeln](#)). He therefore proceeded from image-*composition* to *contact*-metaphor to *re/arrange* his books.

Not by author, topic, size or colour but from the idea that the concrete arrangement of books—surfaces touching on endless shelves—is of consequence for what is initiated, by principles of *haptic metaphor* that transduce [partial forces](#): such that are opposed, *before* they bloom, as *seed*.

The principles were derived from his lecture at the Kreuzlinger asylum on the [snake-ritual](#) of the [Hopi](#)—which he experienced during a sojourn on the Meza-plateau in Arizona—that somehow had kept him captive, arresting his mind and senses, after his return to Europe. The lecture was accepted.

And Aby Warburg was released, from his confinement at the asylum. He was healed, but never *completely*. He left his circle, but *never* completely. That is, [anamorphosis](#) rather than metamorphosis. Is this something we can believe in, at this juncture: after C19 and confinement during the pandemic.