

MDA 599/VIST 599: Atlas Fever: From the Wunderkammer to the Database

Instructors: W.J.T. Mitchell (University of Chicago) and Justin Underhill (University of Southern California)

Summer 2015 1:00 5:10 PM, Getty Research Institute



Course Description: What is involved in trying to comprehend a totality with a visual array? This seminar will investigate practices of visual display that construct totalizing assemblages of multiple images, texts, and objects in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of a situation, period, or body of knowledge. The central example for examination will be the famous *Mnemosyne Bilderatlas* of the German art historian, Aby Warburg, which aimed at producing a comprehensive overview of the entire world of visual arts and media, embracing such disparate phenomenon as Hopi serpent rituals, Renaissance and ancient sculpture, and the coronation of Mussolini. The seminar will aim more

specifically at the “wall atlas,” the slide table, and the forensic “evidence wall” that serves as operational tableaux for seeking out patterns in massive amounts of data. From Andre Malraux’s *Musée imaginaire* to the cinematic editing table to the bulletin board array of suspects, victims, locations, and other clues in criminal investigations, the *Bilderatlas* has provided an investigative tool for organizing and comprehending large bodies of information. Artistic projects such as Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas* will be considered, along with cinematic explorations of the evidence wall in crime and espionage films (e.g., the virtual evidence wall in Stephen Spielberg’s *Minority Report*; John Nash’s schizophrenic

assemblages of “evidence” in Ron Howard’s *A Beautiful Mind*.) As this last example (and the case of Warburg) suggests, we will be interested in the psychological aspects of “atlas fever,” its relation to paranoid “discoveries” of patterns where none exist, hidden meanings in insignificant clues. The effort to *see* a totality, in other words, may have pathological as well as cognitive effects, encouraging forms of obsessive compulsive behavior and post-traumatic stress disorder, the occupational hazards of drone operators, flight controllers, and code-breakers. Readings for the course will include Ernst Gombrich and David Freedberg on Aby Warburg, Carlo Ginzburg on clues and historical method, Giorgio Agamben, and Georges Didi-Huberman on the concept of the *Bilderatlas*, Sergei Eisenstein on montage, and W. J. T. Mitchell on montage, method, and madness.

Grading:

30% Attendance and Participation

70% Research Paper/Final Project: A final research paper of 20-30 pages on the topic of your choice (relevant to the course) will be due on August 24. Preliminary research paper proposals are due July 24 via email.

Statement on Academic Support Systems and Conduct:

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departement/departement-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm> provides 24/7

confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu/> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs*: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Schedule of Meetings (With GRI Seminar Room Locations):

July 13: Course Introduction, Foundational Concepts (L3 Seminar Room)

W.J.T. Mitchell, "Method, Madness, and Montage"

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 21-90.

Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 33-80.

Robert Nelson, "The Slide Lecture, or the Work of Art 'History' in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 3 (2000): 414-434.

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 11-12.

Films: *Homeland*, *Memento*, *True Detective*

July 15: Warburg, Images, Coping (L3 Seminar Room)

Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 229-292.

Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 216-227, 239-306.

Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, ed. Martin Warnke and Claudia Brink (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000).

Note: Even if you cannot read German well, you are expected to take a look at this book and examine it.

Benjamin Anderson et al., *Mnemosyne: Meanderings Through Aby Warburg's Atlas*, 2013, warburg.library.cornell.edu

Films: *A Beautiful Mind*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, *Crazy Talk*

July 17: Introduction to Getty Collections (L3 Seminar Room)

Carlo Ginzburg, "Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method," *History Workshop* 9 (1980): 5-36.

July 20: Didi-Huberman's Atlas Project (Plaza Conference Room)

Georges Didi-Huberman, *Atlas, How to Carry the World on One's Back* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2010), 118-191.

July 22: Introduction to Digital and Forensic Methodologies (L3 Seminar Room)

Manuel Lima, *Visual Complexity* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 43-96. 159-220.

Orit Halpern, *Beautiful Data: A History of Vision and Reason since 1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 199-250.

Justin Underhill, "The Twilight of Presence: Pictorialized Illumination in Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*," *Leonardo* (Forthcoming).

Paula Lupkin, "'Auteur' or Architectural Historian? Digitally Modeling the New York YMCA," *Visual Resources* 25, no. 4 (2009): 379-402.

July 24: Phantasmagoria and Montage (L3 Seminar Room)

Tom Gunning, "Phantasmagoria and the Manufacturing of Illusions and Wonder: Towards a Cultural Optics of the Cinematic Apparatus" in *The Cinema, A New Technology for the 20th Century*, eds. Andre Gaudreault, Catherine Russell and Pierre Veronneau (Lausanne: Payot-Lausanne, 2004), 31-44.

Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. Jay Leyda (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977), 28-44, 72-83.

July 27: Cinema and Worldbuilding (L3 Seminar Room)

Philip K. Dick, "Minority Report," *Fantastic Universe* 4, no. 6 (1956): 4-36.

Alex McDowell, "The Evolution of World Building as a New Design Practice," in *Paradigms in Computing*, eds. David Gerber and Mariana Ibanez (Los Angeles: eVolo, 2014), 143-149.

Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 1-22, 91-108.

Films: *Minority Report*, *Alex McDowell: Worldbuilding*

July 29: The (Visual) Order of Things (L3 Seminar Room)

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 125-165.

Norman MacLeod, "Images, Totems, Types and Memes: Perspectives on an Iconological Mimetics," *Culture, Theory, and Critique* 50, no. 2 (2009): 185-208.

W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Future of the Image: Rancière's Road Not Taken," *Culture, Theory, and Critique* 50, no. 2 (2009): 133-144.

Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2007), 1-32.

Eugenie Barrow and Norman MacLeod, "Shape variation in the mole dentary (Talpidae: Mammalia)," *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* 153(2008): 187-211

August 3: Why You Should Care About Dinosaurs/The Atlas and Cultural Icons (Plaza Conference Room)

W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon* (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 1998). 41-95, 111-115, 207-214, 230-236.

Films: *Gertie the Dinosaur*, *Jurassic Park*

August 5: Countersurveillance and Counterpractice (L2 Conference Room)

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-230.

Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 1-24.

Trevor Paglen, *The Last Pictures* (New York: Creative Time Books, 2012).

Trevor Paglen, *Invisible: Covert Operations and Classified Landscapes* (New York: Aperture, 2010).

Films: *1984*, *Citizen 4*

August 10: Student Presentations (20-30 minutes each) (L3 Seminar Room)

August 24: PAPERS DUE

Students are invited and encouraged to participate in a VSRI/VSGC back-to-school event on August 28, 12:30-2 PM (details forthcoming).