

## ATLAS FEVER:

### From Memory System to Database

W. J. T. Mitchell and Justin Underhill

This seminar, co-sponsored by the Getty Research Institute and the Program in Visual Studies at the University of Southern California, investigated the compulsion to construct visual arrays that allow worlds, both large and small, to be surveyed at a glance. Building on Jacques Derrida's concept of "archive fever," we explored the way that visual pattern recognition and retention constitutes an obsessive practice of total optical mastery over a world of documents, traces, clues, and relics. Ranging from new media projects such as ZKM's *T\_Visionarium*, to encyclopedias of natural history, to forensic evidential arrays in detective and espionage films, the seminar established its basic terms and questions in a detailed examination of Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, a "wall atlas" that is echoed in Andre Malraux's *Musee Imaginaire*, and elaborated in Georges Didi-Huberman's recent exhibition and catalogue, "Atlas: To Hold Up the World." Participants in the seminar used the resources of the GRI's Special Collections to explore a variety of both early and late modern atlas projects: e.g., Wenzel Jamnitzer's 1598 attempt to construct an atlas of Platonic polyhedrons; a photographic compendium of pickpockets apprehended at the 1889 Paris Universelle Exposition; the "bibles" or photo albums compiled by the research departments of Hollywood studios to provide an atlas of the visual world of film projects at the pre-production stage.

Readings and topics for the course included Sergei Eisenstein on montage, Michel Foucault on natural history and regimes of surveillance, Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*, Jacques Ranciere, "The Future of the Image," Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer*, Orit Halpern's *Beautiful Data*, and Tom Gunning's work on the phantasmagoria. Films discussed included Winsor McCay, *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1915), Stephen Spielberg, *Minority Report* (2002), Laura Poitras, *Citizenfour* (2014). A complete syllabus is available on W. J. T. Mitchell's Homepage: <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/wjtmitchell/courses/>.