WAYS OF PERCEIVING. SESSION 4

ARCHIVES AS A PRODUCTIVE SPACE. THE 'ATLAS' AS CURATORIAL STRATEGY.

Estéfani Bouza: e.bouza-arnoso@uwtsd.ac.uk/ February 2023

RECAP FROM PREVIOUS SESSION

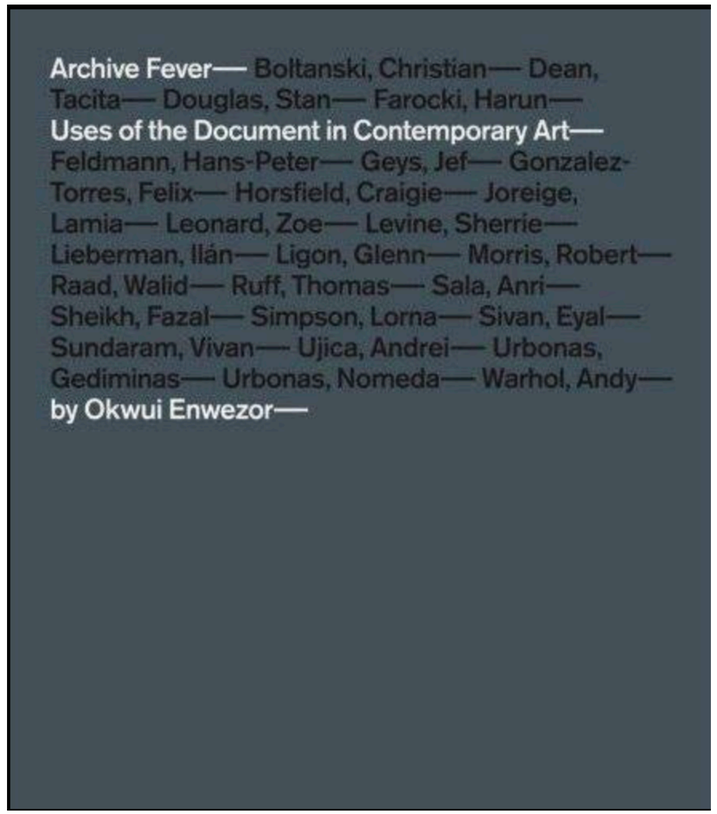
In the first part of last week’s session I introduced the idea of approaching archives as a curatorial strategy/context.

In the second part we had a workshop in which in groups we discussed ideas and feedback on your initial curatorial ideas.

AFTER THE SESSION TASK

Reference 5 books or printed publications that you are considering for your curatorial project and upload them on the shared drive.

OKWUI ENWEZOR ORGANISED AN EXHIBITION AT THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN NEW YORK IN 2008 CALLED ARCHIVE FEVER: USES OF THE DOCUMENT IN CONTEMPORARY



MARCEL DUCHAMP



Marcel Duchamp, *La Boîte-en-valise (Box in a Suitcase),* (1935-1941).

KADER ATTIA



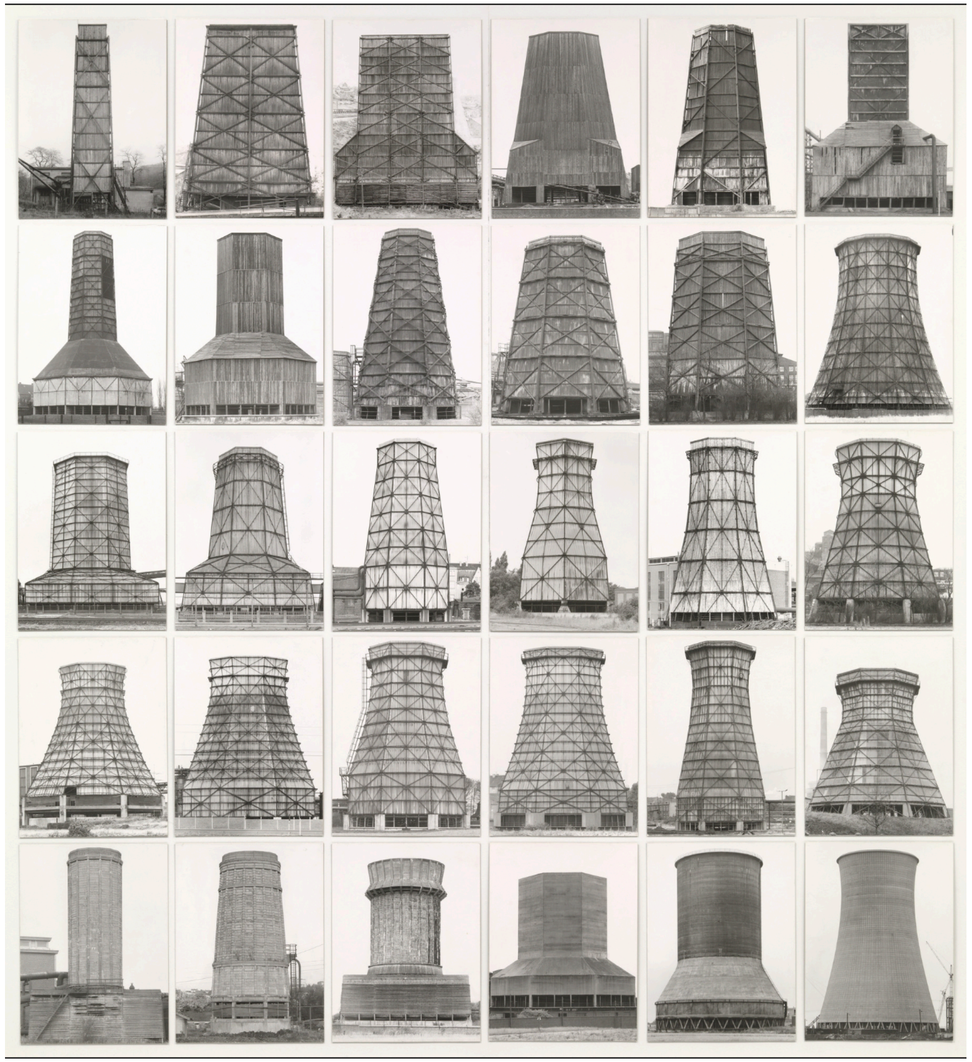
Kader Attia, *The Repair, The Debt* (projection), (2012).

CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI



Christian Boltanski, *Vitrine de référence*, (1971).

HILLA AND BERND BECHER



Hilla and Bernd Becher, *Anonymous Sculpture,* (1970).



Hilla and Bernd Becher, *Water Towers,* (1988).

ANDY WARHOL



Andy Warhol, *Time Capsule 21,* (material from the 1950s and 1960s).

Click on the image for a link to a video

SESSION OVERVIEW

In the first part of today’s session we will have a workshop in which as a group you will write the introduction text for your exhibition. Then you will present it and have feedback on it.

In the second part we look into the *Atlas* as a curatorial strategy.

ATLAS. HOW TO CARRY THE WORLD ON ONE'S BACK? GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

Georges Didi-Huberman's understanding of the ***atlas*** as a tool that serves to organise visual knowledge. Didi-Huberman argues that the ***atlas*** has an 'intrinsic capacity for montage' which has 'the potential of producing transversal knowledge'. Therefore, I will use Warburg's and Richter's projects to investigate how they construct different mnemonic systems by using the atlas as a visual tool to recombine and create juxtapositions of images to produce new connections between their elements.

ATLAS. HOW TO CARRY THE WORLD ON ONE'S BACK? GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

The atlas is a way of structuring and creating relationships among images. Following the dictionary definition, an 'atlas' is: '1 a collection of maps, usually in book form; 2 a book of charts, graphs, etc, illustrating aspects of a subject'. The term 'atlas' was first used around the end of the sixteenth century to refer to a collection of maps, printed in a set order in book format. The name comes from Gerhard Mercator's map collections in 1585. On the front page of which there was a picture of the mythological figure Atlas carrying a globe on his shoulders.

ATLAS. HOW TO CARRY THE WORLD ON ONE'S BACK? GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

In the nineteenth century, the term was also employed, particularly in Germany to refer to any tabular display of systematised knowledge, becoming almost a scientific genre. It was possible to encounter atlases in the fields of astronomy, anatomy, ethnography, archaeology and so on. In the twentieth and twenty first century, the term has been used in a metaphorical sense. For instance, in the visual arts, Georges Didi-Huberman, in the exhibition *Atlas, How to Carry the World on One's Back* (2010) takes Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas (1924-1929) as its point of departure.

ATLAS. HOW TO CARRY THE WORLD ON ONE'S BACK? GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

Didi-Huberman defines the ***atlas*** as a:

> Visual form of knowledge, knowledgeable form of seeing, the atlas disrupts all these frames of intelligibility. It introduces a fundamental impurity – but also an exuberance, a remarkable fecundity – that these models had been conceived to avert. Against any aesthetic purity, it introduces the multiple, the diverse, the hybridity of any montage.

ATLAS. HOW TO CARRY THE WORLD ON ONE'S BACK? GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

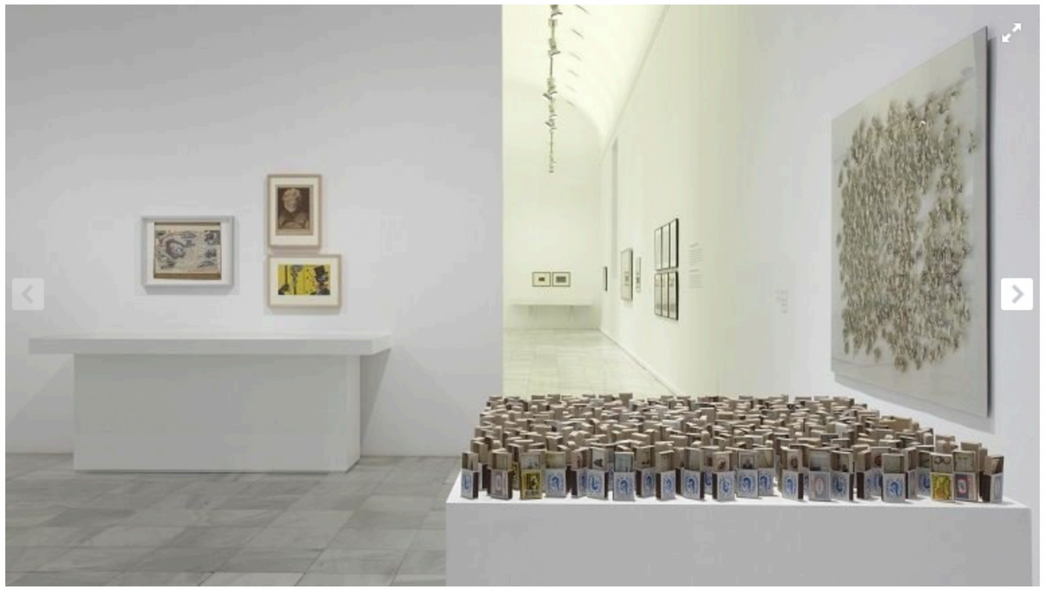
The atlas comprises a heterogeneity of images organised in a systematic way. However, what is more important is that the atlas is a tool to temporarily arrange visual materials and using the montage has the potential of composing and re-composing its contents in different ways. Through the artists' practices we will see how the atlas is a hybrid construction that offers the possibility of mixing both the bureaucratic character of the archive and the subjective element of the collection.

ATLAS. HOW TO CARRY THE WORLD ON ONE'S BACK? GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

Home / Exhibitions

ATLAS
How to carry the world on one's back?

November 26 - March 28, 2011 / Sabatini Building, Floor 1



Exhibition view. *ATLAS. How to carry the world on one's back?*, 2010

Atlas is a proposal to put the frame of thought introduced by German art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929) into the context of historical knowledge and images. This is not a monographic exhibition on Warburg, but a journey through the history of images from 1914 until the present day, where warburgism constitutes the *genius loci*.

Organized by:
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in collaboration with Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburgo y ZKM | Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe

Curatorship:
Georges Didi-Huberman

Exhibition Tour:
ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe (May 7 - August 7, 2011); Stiftung Falckenberg, Hamburg (September 30 - November 27, 2011)

Artists:
Francesc Abad, Ignasi Aballí, James Agee, Vyacheslav Akhunov, Josef Albers, Louis Aragon, **View more**

Brochures
Brochure of *ATLAS. How to carry the world on one's back?*
Brochure of *ATLAS. How to carry the world on one's back?*

Related

Related Activities

Collection artworks included in the exhibition

Related Videos

Museo Reina Sofía Publications

ATLAS

How to carry the world on one's back?

Starting from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*

Atlas is the name given in Greek mythology to a titan who, along with his brother Prometheus, contested the power of the gods of Olympus in order to make that power available to man. Legend has it that while Prometheus had his liver torn out by a vulture in the far East, Atlas was forced (in the West, between Andalusia and Morocco), to bear on his shoulders the weight of the celestial vault. It is also said, that from this weight he gained an unsurpassable knowledge of the world and an – albeit hopeless – wisdom. He is the ancestor of astronomers and geographers; some even say he was the first philosopher. He gave his name to a mountain (Mount Atlas), to an ocean (the Atlantic), and to an anthropomorphic architectural form (an atlas or atlantes) which is designed to support an entablature.

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Hannah Höch. *Album*, 1933. Collage of newspaper cuttings, 36 x 28 x 3 cm. Berlinische Galerie – Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur

Atlas, finally, gave his name to a *visual form of knowledge*: a gathering of geographical maps in a volume, and more generally, a collection of images intended to bring before our eyes, in a systematic or problematic way – even a poetic way, at the risk of being erratic, if not surrealist – a whole multiplicity of things gathered there through *elective affinities*, to use the words of Goethe. The atlas of images became a scientific genre in itself in the 18th century (we can think of the plates of *l'Encyclopèdie*) and it developed considerably in the 19th and 20th centuries. There are very serious atlases, very useful atlases – which are often very beautiful – in the life sciences (for example, the collections by Ernst Haeckel on jelly fish and other marine animals); there are more hypothetical atlases (for example, in the domain of archaeology); there are absolutely detestable atlases in the fields of anthropology and psychology (for example, *L'Atlas de l'homme criminel* [The Atlas of the Criminal Man] by Cesare Lombroso, or certain collections of "racial" photographs made by some pseudo-scholars in the 19th century).

In the visual arts, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* of images, composed by Aby Warburg between 1924 and 1929, and yet left unfinished, remains for any art historian – and even for any artist today – a reference and an absolutely fascinating case-study. Warburg completely renewed our way of understanding images. He is to art history what Freud, his contemporary, is to psychology: he opened the understanding of art to radically new questions, those concerning unconscious memory in particular. *Mnemosyne* is his paradoxical masterpiece and his methodological testament: it gathers all of the objects of his research in an apparatus that is also a reaction to two fundamental experiences: that of madness, and that of war. It can therefore be considered a documentary history of the Western imagination (as such, the inheritor of the *Disparates* and the *Caprichos* of Goya) and as a tool for understanding the political violence of images in history (comparable, as such, to a collection of *Desastres*).

At the montage table

ATLAS. How to carry the world on one's back? is an interdisciplinary exhibition which crosses the 20th and 21st centuries by taking the *Mnemosyne Atlas* as its point of departure. In spite of the differences of method and content which might separate the research of a historian-philosopher from the work of a visual artist, what is striking is their common *heuristic* — or experimental — method when based on a *montage of heterogeneous images*. We discover that Warburg shares with the artists of his time the same passion for an *operating visual affinity*, which makes him the contemporary of avant-garde artists (Kurt Schwitters or László Moholy-Nagy), of photographers of the "documentary style" (August Sander or Karl Blossfeldt), of avant-garde filmmakers (Dziga Vertov or Sergei Eisenstein), of writers who employed literary montage (Walter Benjamin or Benjamin Fondane), or even surrealist poets and artists (Georges Bataille or Man Ray).

The *ATLAS* exhibition was not conceived to bring together beautiful artefacts, but rather to understand how certain artists work – beyond the question of any masterpieces – and how this work can be considered from the perspective of an authentic method, and, even, a non-standard *transverse knowledge* of our world. You will not see, therefore, Paul Klee's beautiful watercolours, but instead his modest herbarium and the graphic or theoretical ideas which came of it; you will not see Josef Albers' modern squares, but instead his photographic album devoted to pre-Columbian architecture; you will not see Robert Rauschenberg's immense tableaux, but instead a series of photographs uniting objects both modest and heterogeneous; you will not see the coloured splendours of Gerhard Richter, but a section of montages created for his ongoing *Atlas*; you will not see Sol LeWitt's cubic structures, but instead his photographs of the walls of New York. In preference to the *tableaux* (the result of work) we have chosen, for this occasion, *tables* (as operating spaces, surfaces for play or for getting down to work). And we will have discovered in this way that the so-called "moderns" are no less subversive than the "post-moderns", and that the latter are no less methodical and concerned with form than the "moderns"... This is a way of recounting the history of the visual arts outside academic art criticism's historical and stylistic outlines.

Piecing together the order of things

When we arrange different images or different objects — playing cards, for example — on a table, we are free to modify constantly their configuration. We can make piles or constellations. We can discover new analogies, new trajectories of thought. By modifying the order, we can arrange things so that *images take positions*. A table is not made for definitively classifying, for exhaustively making an inventory, or for cataloguing once and for all – as in a dictionary, an archive or an encyclopaedia – but instead for gathering segments, or parcelling out the world, while respecting its multiplicity and its heterogeneity — and for giving a *legibility* to the underlying relations.

This is why *ATLAS* shows the game to which numerous artists have given themselves, this "infinite natural history" (according to Paul Klee) or that "atlas of the impossible" (according to Michel Foucault regarding the disconcerting erudition of Jorge Luis Borges). We can discover, then, in what sense contemporary artists are "scholars" or inventors of a special genre: they gather the scattered pieces of the world as would a child or a rag-and-bone man – two figures to whom Walter Benjamin compared the authentic materialist scholar. They bring together things outside of normal classifications, and glean from these affinities a new kind of knowledge which opens our eyes to certain unperceived aspects of our world and to the unconscious of our vision.



Aby Warburg. *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* [Atlas Mnemosyne] *(panel 7)*, 1929-2010. Courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London

Piecing together the order of places

To make an atlas is to reconfigure space, to redistribute it, in short, to redirect it: to dismantle it where we thought it was continuous; to reunite it where we thought there were boundaries. Arthur Rimbaud once cut up a geographical atlas in order to record, on the pieces obtained, his personal iconography. Later, Marcel Broodthaers, On Kawara and Guy Debord invented several forms of alternative geographies. Warburg, for his part, had already understood that every image – every production of



Paul Klee. *Pflanzen auf schwarz grundiertem Papier* [Plants on paper primed with black paint], ca. 1930. Plants on primed paper, 46.4 x 30.4 cm. Zentrum Paul Klee, Berne.Gift of the Klee family

culture in general – is the crossing of numerous *migrations*: it is to Baghdad, for example, that he went to find unperceived meanings of certain frescoes of the Italian Renaissance.

There are many contemporary artists who are not content to rely solely on the landscape to tell us about a country: this is why they bring together, on the same surface – or plate of an atlas – different ways of representing space. It is a way of seeing the world and of going through it according to *heterogeneous viewpoints* combined with one another, as we see in the works of Alighiero e Boetti, Dennis Oppenheim or, more generally, in the way that the urban metropolis was envisaged, from *Man with a Movie Camera* by Dziga Vertov to recent installations by Harun Farocki.

Piecing together the order of time

If the atlas appears as an incessant work of re-composing of the world, it is first of all because the world itself does not cease to undergo decomposition upon decomposition. Bertolt Brecht said of the "dismantling of the world" that it is "the true subject of art" (it should be enough, to understand this, to think of *Guernica*). Warburg, by contrast, saw cultural history as a genuine field of conflict, a "psychomachia", a "titanomachia", and a perpetual "tragedy". We could say that many artists adopted this point of view by reacting against the historical tragedies of their time with a work in which montage, once again, played the central role: we can think of the photomontages of John Heartfield in the 1930's, or more recently, Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, and the work of artists like Walid Raad or Pascal Convert.

It is therefore time itself which becomes visible in the montage of images. It is up to everyone – artist or scholar, thinker or poet – to make such a visibility into a *power to see the times*: a resource for observing history, for undertaking its archaeology



Aby Warburg. *War photographies*, 1914–1918. Black-and-white photographs, various sizes. Courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London

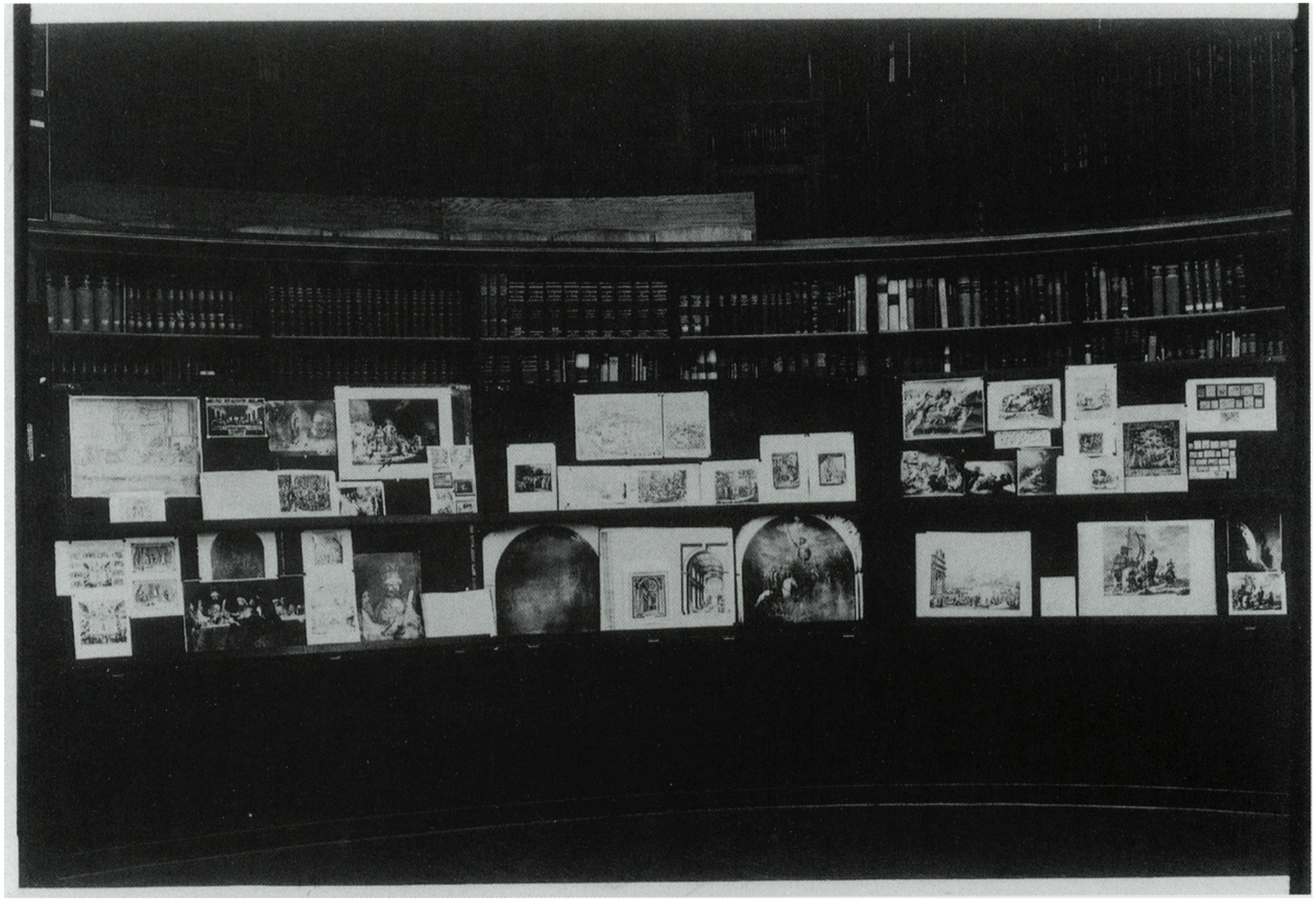
and its political critique, for "dismantling" it in order to imagine alternative models.

Georges Didi-Huberman

List of participants

Francesc Abad • Ignasi Aballí • James Agee • Vyacheslav Akhunov • Josef Albers • Alighiero e Boetti • German anonymus • Roman anonymus • Louis Aragon • Hans Arp • John Baldessari • Georges Bataille • *Bauhaus-Alben* • Samuel Beckett • Bernd and Hilla Becher • Walter Benjamin • Ernst Benkard • Karl Blossfeldt • Erwin Blumenfeld • Mel Bochner • Christian Boltanski • Jorge Luis Borges • Brassaï • Bertolt Brecht • George Brecht • André Breton • Marcel Broodthaers • Stanley Brouwn • Jacob Burckhardt • Victor Burgin • Lewis Carroll • James Coleman • Pascal Convert • DADACO • Salvador Dalí • Hanne Darboven • Moira Davey • Guy Debord • Fernand Deligny • Ernesto de Martino • Marcel Duchamp • Max Ernst • Walker Evans • Öyvind Fahlström • Harun Farocki • Hans-Peter Feldmann • Robert Filliou • Peter Fischli and David Weiss • Alain Fleischer • Benjamin Fondane • Thomas Geve • Alberto Giacometti • Jean-Luc Godard • Francisco de Goya • George Grosz • Hans Haacke • Ernst Haeckel • Raymond Hains • John Heartfield • Susan Hiller • Hannah Höch • Roni Horn • Douglas Huebler • On Kawara • Mike Kelley • Paul Klee • John Latham • Le Corbusier • Zoe Leonard • Sol LeWitt • El Lissitzky • Ghérasim Luca • Master of the Codex Coburgensis • Man Ray • Piero Manzoni • Étienne-Jules Marey • Gordon Matta-Clark • Henri Michaux • Matt Mullican • László Moholy-Nagy • Bruce Nauman • Dennis Oppenheim • Ulrike Ottinger • Amédée Ozenfant • Jean Painlevé • Giuseppe Penone • Sigmar Polke • Walid Raad • Robert Rauschenberg • Gerhard Richter • Arthur Rimbaud • Pedro G. Romero • Charles Ross • Dieter Roth • Thomas Ruff • Naomi Tereza Salmon • August Sander • Meyer Schapiro • Franz Schubert • Kurt Schwitters • Claude Simon • Robert Smithson

ABY WARBURG



Aby Warburg, *Panels from Rembrandt's exhibition as displayed in Aby Warburg's library,* (1926).

ABY WARBURG - MNEMOSYNE ATLAS



Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-1929), panel 7.



Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-1929), panel 41a.

GERHARD RICHTER - ATLAS



Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (1962-ongoing), panel 1 (1962).

GERHARD RICHTER - ATLAS



Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (1962-ongoing), panel 9 (1962).

GERHARD RICHTER - ATLAS



Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (1962-ongoing), panel 9 (1962).

GERHARD RICHTER - ATLAS



Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (1962-ongoing), panel 17, panel 18 (1972).

SUMMARY

Some of the ideas that we discussed today are:

- Workshop exploring your exhibition introduction.
- The atlas as a curatorial strategy.

STRUCTURE OF 1500 WORDS WRITTEN COMPONENT

EXHIBITION TITLE:

INTRODUCTION (150 words)

- What is the show about, why is it important to be discussed in relation to now?
- Outline the theories, artists and themes you will touch upon.

CONTEXT (600 words)

- Analysis of the theme.
- Foundations laid with a view of introducing the artists you have selected for your imagined show.
- Reference theorists/philosophers.

STRUCTURE OF 1500 WORDS WRITTEN COMPONENT

ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS (750 words)

- Analysis of the artworks selected.
- Think about the following aspects:

  What the work is (formally)

  Who made it?

  When it was made (does the time in which the work was made give meaning to the work?)

  What does the work address? – **in relation to the context**

STRUCTURE OF 1500 WORDS WRITTEN COMPONENT

All sections should reference the writings of others (philosophers, writers, interviews with the artists, background contexts etc).

= 1,500 words.

+ Bibliography (IMPORTANT you need to use at least 3 PRINTED SOURCES. These include books, academic journals or magazines that you can find in the library. If you are planning to use online sources they need to be an addition to those three).

+ Map of the show with the works selected in situ.

NEXT SESSION

Next session - Tue 7 March 2023

Archives as a Productive Space. The 'atlas' as curatorial strategy.

Sign-in tutorials for feedback on your work-in progress proposals.

AFTER THE SESSION TASK

Initial draft of your exhibition text and gallery map with artworks.

THANK YOU

Estéfani Bouza: e.bouza-arnoso@uwtsd.ac.uk/ February 2023