Words into Images: Archives and Memory

Museum Studies Program

Department of Historical Studies

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If you, historians, or poets, or mathematicians had not seen things with your eyes you could not report of them in writing. And if you, 0 poet, tell a story with your pen, the painter with his brush can tell it more easily, with simpler completeness and less tedious to be understood… Now tell me which is the nearer to the actual man: the name of man or the image of the man. The name of man differs in different countries, but his form is never changed but by death…

Leonardo Da Vinci, The Paragone of Painting and Poetry 1500

Anselm Kiefer, The High Pristess 1985-89

The course intends to explore the specificities, but also the close family relationships of museums and archives (libraries, as well); explore the possibilities, and also the limits of turning words into images, textual documents into visuals. It deals with words, texts, the tension between literal meaning and figurative excesses, with *energeia*, the active, activating quality of images, the evocative character of both textual documents and artifacts. The class follows a selected history and theory of archives; the utopia of collecting, preserving, and presenting universal knowledge, and the efforts of turning textual documents into visual objects, icons, memorials, monuments, installations, moving images. As Aristotle wrote in *Poetics*: "A verbal representation was said to be persuasive when it gave the impression that it might have been alive". Examples and practices inside and outside the archives will be studied as well: visual theology, icons that bleed, excrete oil and tears, the *vera icon*, merging body and image thus creating the "true image"; the myths and problems of photographic images (the fictional character of images that, however, "does not prevent authorities from iris recognition or the surveillance of every sort of public space."); map making (cartographic and anatomical); visualization as analytical tool in science; political gestures and propaganda, visualizing notions political statements, mis-(and dis-)information by images; the use of images as forensic evidence and in legal procedure, especially in grave violations of human rights; etc.

Members of the class will face the problems of the difficulties of authenticating (archival) documents; the diminishing credibility and trustworthiness of archival institutions (and the efforts to restore them),

the gains and losses (of authenticity, evidentiary value, and authority) of turning textual documents into images; whether documents turned into images make it difficult to grasp the historicity of texts at a time when the division that separated textual from visual traces of events is becoming thinner by the day.

Members of the class (co-taught by members of the Blinken OSA Archivum, István Rév, Katalin Székely, head of the creative programs at OSA, Oksana Sarkisova, head of the Visual Platform at CEU, Csaba Szilágyi, Chief Archivist at OSA, József Bóné, head of the IT department at OSA) will, besides theoretical issues, get acquainted with technologies that make it possible to turn words into images, exhibitions based on archival material, documents and documentary works. The course will include a day-long excursion to the Archive in Budapest, and as a negative demonstration, a visit to the House of Terror.

Grades will be based on general classwork (25%), in-class presentation (25%), and an individual, semester-long final project, turning a particular, self-selected document into images (online exhibition, montage, photospread, icon, moving-image, etc.)

1st week:

The Archives: the space, the institution, the notion, and the problems.

Reading: Cornelia Vismann, *Files. Law and Media Technology*. Stanford U. P. Stanford, 2008 pp. 55-61, 117-122, 161-164.
https://monoskop.org/File:Vismann_Cornelia_Files_Law_and_Media_Technology.pdf

Patrick Hersant, Anthony Cordingley, *Translation Archives, META 66, 2021. hal-04006648* chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://hal.science/hal-04006648/document

2nd week

The utopia of archiving universal knowledge.

Reading: Thomas Richard, *The Imperial Archive* Verso: London, 1993 pp. 11-44 (Chapter: Archive and Utopia)

Jill Lapore, *The Cobweb.* The New Yorker 19 January 2015.

https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/26/cobweb

3rd week

Exhibiting documents.

Reading: Peter Anthony Lester , RESHAPING THE ARCHIVE: EXHIBITION AS A MECHANISM FOR CHANGE (doctoral dissertation) 2019 pp. 28-74

Jeffrey Schnapp, *Animating the Archive.* First Monday, **Volume 13 Number 8 - 4 August 2008.** **https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2218/2020**

The Note. A chance Event. Online exhibition at OSA

4th week

Christian Boltanski's archives.

Reading: Ernst van Alphen, *Visual Archives and the Holocaust: Christian Boltanski, Ydessa Hendeles and Peter Forgacs* In: A. Van den Braembussche et al. (eds.) *Intercultural Aesthetics: A Worldview Perspective.* 2009

David Houston Jones, *All the moments of our lives: selfarchiving from Christian Boltanski to lifelogging,* Archives and Records, 2015 https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2015.1010149

5th week

The other way round: images into words

Reading: James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery.* The U. of Chicago P. Chicago 1993. pp. 1-9.

Carlo Ginzburg, *EKPHRASIS AND QUOTATION* Tijdschrift voor Filosofie , March 1988, Nr. 1, pp. 3-19

Concret, Books bound in Concrete. Online exhibition at Blinken OSA Archivum 2008.

6th week

Martin Jay, *Must Justice be Blind? The Challenge of Image to the Law.* In: Costas Douzinas and Lynda Nead (eds.) *Law and the Image. The Authority of Art and Aesthetics in Law.* Chicago U. O. Chicago 1999.

The Trial. A Memorialization of words. A Memorial. Week-long audio public program at OSA, 2008

7th week

Preview presentation of the individual words-transformed-into-images individual projects in class.

8th week

Images of objectivity.

Reading: Lorain Daston-Peter Galison, *Objectivity.* Zone Books, (MIT) 2007, excerpts

9th week

Picture superiority effect?

Reading: Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts. A Systemic Approach to Visual Agency.* Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen 2007, Berlin 2015. Excerpts.

10th week

AI supported technologies of turning texts into images.

Sora. Video Generation Models as World Simulators by Open AI

https://openai.com/index/video-generation-models-as-world-simulators/

Imagen on Vertex AI | AI Image Generator by Google

https://cloud.google.com/vertex-ai/generative-ai/docs/image/overview

11th week

And what if there were no visual media?

Reading: W. J. T. Mitchell, There are no visual media. Journal of Visual Culture Vol 4(2): 257-266 http://vcu.sagepub.com

W. J. T. Mitchell, *Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation.* Critical Inquiry, 39 (Autumn 2012)

12th week

Final presentations – group discussion

Christian Boltanski, *Reserve, Canada*