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Proposals Concerning a Chair in Visual History
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1. Introduction

In this paper a brief account is given how interest in visual images has developed during the past century. Some problems in the present methods of arranging and classifying images are outlined. It is suggested that new solutions are possible with the aid of computers. Preliminary steps to be taken are mentioned. The scope of the incumbent's teaching duties is described. Three projects are outlined.

2. Historical Background

At present much is being done to collect and conserve contemporary photographs and other visual records. The National Archive of Canada acquires nearly one million new items per year. Nonetheless, the historical aspects of visual images have remained largely neglected, with the exception of those pertaining to fine art (cf. The Princeton Index of Christian Art, the De Witt Collection at the Courtauld Institute, the Warburg Institute Collection and that at I Tatti).

Nonetheless, already in the nineteenth century there were a few individuals who envisaged a more comprehensive history of visual images, including ornament, and industrial arts (Gottfried Semper, Alois Riegl). This ideal fascinated the founders of the Warburg Institute (Aby Warburg, fritz Saxl, Erwin Panofsky). The next generations focussed their energies on understanding the psychological motives behind these various forms of visual images (Ernst Kris, Otto Kurz, Ernst Gombrich). In the meantime the goal of making a comprehensive collection of man's visual expressions slipped into the background.

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3. Problems of Arrangements and Classification of Images

Apart from obvious problems of cost and space, photographic collections possess certain inherent drawbacks. A collection is usually arranged in terms of individual themes or motifs, ranging from concrete objects such as sundials, to specific gods such as Mercury and abstract concepts which have been visualized as allegories, such as Amor. The dilemma with this arrangement is that an important visual image applies to a number of themes and needs to be recorded anew each time that it is classified under a new heading. for example, Diana of Ephesus would need to be listed at least under Diana, Ephesus, fertility Goddess. Here cross-referencing will not do because one actually needs to compare the images. But even assuming one can afford multiple copies of photographs, whenever a person wishes to make multiple comparisons, he needs to take the photographs from their folders which is clumsy and endangers the order within the folder at each using.

Microfiche methods (e. g. Photo-Marburg) are much more economical in their use of space, and in terms of costs. Nonetheless, they do not solve the question of arrangement. Important visual images still need to be recorded a number of times and their order cannot be shuffled. Comparative work involving an arrangement other than that of the original recorders is awkward.

4. Problems of Scale and Context

A further drawback of the thematic organization in photographic and microfiche archives is that it obscures questions of context and excludes systematic comparisons of scale. Take, for example, the Baldachin of Bernini in the Church of St. Peters in Rome. In a photographic or microfiche archive one would need to look in one place for visual images of details of this Baldachin and in other places for visual records of the Baldachin as a whole; for ground-plans of its position in the Church, for historical drawings of the Baldachin and the Church, for aerial views of the Church, topographical maps of the Church and so on.

In short the present methods of organizing knowledge in terms of themes effectively make it impossible to gain access to this spectrum of visual recording processes ranging from electron-microscopic views to macroscopic maps.

5. Computers.

Both the problems of arrangement and of comparative scale studies might be resolved with the aid of a computer. If stored in a computer it would suffice to record an image once and then make it accessible through various theme headings. By linking the computer with a series of television-type screens, multiple comparisons of images would be possible, without threatening the underlying order as occurs with folders of photographs.

The use of such multiple viewing screens, used in conjunction with a computer, could serve, moreover, to enable the coordination of different scales of knowledge, different levels of abstraction, providing information not just about the detail in question but also about its context. The student of a Bernini statue on the bridge leading to the Castel San' Angelo would thus have systematic access to modern micro-photographs of the statues, historical pictures of various details and of their context, their setting in Rome both as it was in the early seventeenth century and is at present.

6. Preliminaries.

Such a project will require the direct support of a major computer firm, e, g, Siemens, Philips, I.B.M., who would provide not only the necessary equipment, but also a small team of experts consisting at the outset, minimally, of one programmer, one video and one electronics person.

Because knowledge is largely stored in the context of universities, the project should, from the outset, develop within the academic community. To this end it is proposed that a chair in visual history be established. The purpose of this chair would be twofold: 1) to further the study of the historical development of visual images and 2) to develop more systematic ways of arranging and classifying these images. Study of the development of visual images would be in relation to the development of practical/theoretical verbal treatises on linear perspective, painting, sculpture etc. In his role as teacher the holder of the chair would encourage this study in the coming generation. As concerns the second purpose he would seek to develop methods permitting a given visual/verbal image to be recalled under various historical classification systems.

By way of introduction the incumbent would need to acquaint himself with the state of research in the realm of computers and video techniques. To this end it would be adviseable that he, in the company of a computer expert, made a six month world tour of major centres including London, Boston, Pasadena, Tokyo etc followed by six months to write up a report in the form of a pamphlet or small book that would be published. A chief concern of this report would be to determine what adjustments or advances will be required:

1) to translate visual records (photograph, microfiche, videotape, film etc) to a computer storage system and back again onto a visual display screen.
2) to co-ordinate ground-plans, photographs, aerial views and different scales of maps
3) to recall parts of a picture
4) to use pattern-recognition methods in searching for individual elements within a picture
5) to shuffle the arrangement of pictures or themes within pictures
6) to record pictures with cross-references to author, place shown, place produced, date
7) to add further cross-references in terms of themes.

Following this year of orientation the incumbent would devote himself to both teaching and research.

7. Teaching Duties.

Teaching duties will be such as to allow the incumbent to continue with his research. At the outset he will offer a series of 20 lectures for first year students designed to introduce then to the problems of visual history, such as the role of optical adjustments methods and the implications of linear perspective. He will offer one fourth year seminar which will focus on specific problems of visual images during the period 1400-1600 -- when theoretical treatises on the problem of drawing first emerged. Later he may choose to have graduate students.

In addition to teaching, the incumbent will serve as a consultant, working in coordination with the research unit of a large computer firm in order to adapt existing and develop new equipment to serve his needs. His attention will be directed towards three projects that he will set out to supervise.

8. Project One

The purpose of this project will be to catalogue standard books and manuscripts of Roman views (*vedute*); to co-ordinate these with standard historical maps and topographical views and to co-ordinate these, in turn, with some details of statues, columns etc. The programme is to be produced such that it remains open for later additions, details etc. It is proposed that this project be divided into nine phases:

Phase 1
As a first step each picture in the books and manuscripts in question would be recorded systematically. Accompanying each picture would be the following information:
1) Author of Picture
2) Author of Engraving
3) Author of Book, Manuscript
4) Title of Book
5) City: Publisher
6) Date
7) Folio Number
8) Translation of Description(s), Caption(s) 9) Themes

Phase 2
Alphabetical list of authors of pictures, with names of pictures, dates and locations.

Phase 3
Detailed analysis of each picture with sources of information: i. e. whether on the picture, in contemporary sources or in secondary literature.

Phase 4
History of each picture from the place it was made, through various collections in which it was stored up to present location.

Phase 5
History of effects of each picture: i. e. copies, various engravings, printed versions.

Phase 6
Cross-referencing with standard bibliographical sources: Thieme-Becker, Nagler etc.

Phase 7
Cross-referencing with secondary literature in these bibliographical sources.

Phase 8
Development of a computerized self-verification system.

Phase 9
Systematic analysis of themes, role of different countries in the development of these views etc.

9. Project Two

The purpose of this study would be to make a systematic study of all Leonardo da Vinci's notes and to explore them in context. This project would have seven phases:

Phase 1
Recording of each folio of the notes with folio number, list of proposed dates for each folio.

Phase 2
Numbering of each figure on each folio, as in Keele's edition of the Corpus with catchwords for each figure.

Phase 3
Arrangement of themes in accordance with various chronologies.

Phase 4
Correlation between folios, individual diagrams and corresponding models (Milan, Vinci etc).

Phase 5
Recording and correlation of standard manuscripts in the artist/engineer tradition (cf. Gilles), again numbering individual figures and listing them thematically.

Phase 6
Recording and correlation of books and manuscripts in his library.

Phase 7
Recording and correlation of sources that he is said to have used: confrontation of both visual/verbal images.

10. Project Three

This will be a pilot study to explore how the information in standard bibliographical reference works e. g. Kayser, Brinkman, Cumulated Book Index, and major library catalogues: e. g. Library of Congress, British Library, Bibliotheque Nationale can be coordinated.

Here it is not just a matter of pouring the information into a computer. Many standard bibliographical works give subject headings with short title listings or sometimes merely refer to author and year. A first phase would be to teach the computer how to work from an abbreviated reference to a complete reference elsewhere in the volume.

A next phase would be to coordinate the various subject headings that appear in each volume, sometimes on an annual basis such that a single chronological list would be available. A person wishing to explore the period 1940-1960 would thus be spared checking 20 volumes for a given country. Moreover, it could be arranged that the corresponding lists for each country would be readily on call and available on a visual screen. This would be equipped with a reader-printer, to produce a photocopy if the person wished to make a detailed study of the information.

11. Conclusion

These three projects would serve to bring to light the practical problems that naturally accompany any attempt at re-organizing knowledge. Once these are resolved, the way will be clear for a further project which might involve the recording and study of one subject heading such as *Geometrica* or *Astronomia,* in a major library such as the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbuttel. This will lead to more extensive projects which are outlined in another paper.