

Art Historiography in the Expanded Field

Samuel Bibby, Association for Art History

'A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art', Robert Smithson's well-known intervention from 1968, sought to align the contemporary practice of artists' writings with the production of art itself. Such a demarginalisation conceived the publication as a site, one that Rosalind Krauss would in turn come to define as an expanded field. This session intends to perform just such an action upon the discipline of art history. Whilst historiography is today a burgeoning mode of enquiry for the subject, the majority of work produced remains fundamentally textual in its focus; the material and visual nature of art history (as a combination of words *and* images) is all too often overlooked. An expanded field should thus extend beyond simply considering art history's status as language – textual discourse – to incorporate alongside it the physical space of the page (or virtual realm of the screen), and its role as an object in its own right: as both content *and* form. Such an operation is all the more important precisely because of the subject's concern with questions of materiality and visibility in relation to the objects of its enquiry. Artists' books and magazines have in recent years proved to be particularly fertile ground for art history; this session adopts similar approaches in relation to the production of art historians' books and magazines. The papers, to expand upon Krauss, aim to present 'an organisation of [historiographical] work that is not [merely] dictated by the conditions of a particular [textual] medium'.

Speakers and Abstracts

Serif or Sans? Concrete alternatives in the 1960s

Stephen Bann (University of Bristol)

The development of what was known as 'concrete poetry' in the third quarter of the 20th century went hand in hand with broader developments in typography and book design. Little magazines and art catalogues registered a move away from traditional letterpress, just as they responded to the new possibilities offered by photo-lithography. Returning to the Bauhaus and the constructivist phase of the Modern Movement, avant-garde publications aspired to a kinship between 'medium' and 'message'. The Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer employed a new Swiss sans-serif typeface for his series of pamphlets by international concrete poets, prefacing them with the statement: 'concrete poetry is the aesthetic chapter of the universal linguistic formation of our epoch'. The German typographer Hansjörg Mayer, who taught in England in the 1960s, initiated a series of folding sheets which was specifically named 'futura' after another sans-serif typeface. This paper examines the significance of this shift to 'sans-serif' typefaces, such as Futura and Univers. It considers the implications as they relate to concrete poetry (Gomringer), typography as material (Mayer), and magazine design (in particular, *Form*, 1965–69, designed by Philip Steadman). It also looks at aspects of the concrete poetry of Ian Hamilton Finlay over the same period. For Finlay, the option of sans-serif typography was important, especially for his collaboration with the typographer Edward Wright. But he also favoured hand-drawn lettering, and, in his garden inscriptions, reinvigorated the tradition of classical epigraphy.

Cut and Paste: Scrapbooking as method for researching artists' publications

Mary Anne Francis (University of Brighton)

The scrapbook, which conventionally proposes a common ground for varied two-dimensional media including image-text, readily enables art's expanded field. Significantly adopted by artists in the 20th century, notable practitioners include Hannah Höch, William S Burroughs and Brion Gysin, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Ray Yoshida, amongst many others. Recently, access to this work has been enhanced not only as a number of public institutions have digitised their substantial holdings (Tate and the Smithsonian, for example), but also via exhibitions such as the ICA's *Paperwork: A brief history of artists' scrapbooks* (2014). Drawing upon that material, this presentation will itself be realised as a kind of scrapbook (i.e. using found images and texts) to pose two questions. First, it will ask what an image-text format yields for

knowledge, when neither strands anchor the other, and which, combined, may look to conceptual art more than to conventional art history. Second, it asks how artists' scrapbooks address the form's radical potential for material diversity, especially as that may set them apart from those versions made as a pastime. Practically, this presentation will be offered as a PDF document made available for attendees to read in the course of the session, i.e. in a form that allows the audience to scroll back and forth. This space will comprise half the delivery, with the other half given to a discussion of responses to the format, and to questions. The latter functions as more than just conference protocol: it also proposes that the scrapbook as analytical-interpretative device might devolve considerable agency to its reader-viewers.

Welcome to the Liberated, or, the Periodical as Propaganda: The *Oxford Art Journal* and the thematics of the 'New Art History'

Samuel Bibby (Association for Art History)

Thematic special issues have long been a mainstay of art-historical periodicals. Magazines such as *Apollo*, for example, would month on month present to their readers collections of articles focusing on topics which their editors felt were of current importance. 1978 saw the appearance of a new title in the field, the *Oxford Art Journal*, produced by a group of postgraduate students, which from the fore dedicated itself to the publication of such collections of material. But whilst those magazines intimately allied with the market brought out special issues on subjects such as the histories of collecting and taste, the *Oxford Art Journal*, by contrast, pursued new directions with the intention of addressing 'those problems that face the more wide-ranging ambitions of the social history of art'. This paper examines in depth one such thematic collection, dedicated to the topic of propaganda, which came out in October 1980. The periodical's beginnings as a title originating from, as well being addressed to, a specific place and its inhabitants, the university city of Oxford, are considered; the subsequent radical agenda that it adopted is set against the backgrounds of both other magazines (including both student publications and art-historical periodicals), in distinction to which it wished to be seen, and also the conservative cultural context from which it emerged. It is argued that this special issue of the *Oxford Art Journal* must be thought of as not simply taking the idea of propaganda as its subject matter, but should also be viewed, in terms of its form, through its complex engagement with, for example, advertising, itself something of a propagandistic medium. In so doing, a historiographical model is put forward for approaching the art-historical periodical as embodying the politics of its visual and material nature.

New York Video on the Page

James Boaden (University of York)

Early video art was often conceived in social terms, as a way of demonstrating modes of relationality. Tapes by artists such as Robert Morris, Lynda Benglis, Richard Serra, and Nancy Holt worked through the difficulties of human interaction using the medium's technological glitches as a metaphor for communication more broadly. Their works present the New York art world of the 1970s as both a community and a closed circuit. The utopian dream of a 'global village' proffered by some of video's most ardent evangelists in the period (influenced by Marshall McLuhan among others) was a technical impossibility at the time. Recent historical accounts of early video, though, have emphasised its utopian aspiration as a way of thinking about technologically mediated formations of subjectivity – in short, how it anticipates today's technically networked society. This paper looks at this period as it appeared to many beyond the New York bubble: on the printed page. It thinks about how the understanding of a number of influential tapes was dependent upon the supplementary medium of the magazine, looking specifically at *Artforum*, *Avalanche*, and *Art-Rite* as sites for the presentation of video as art (rather than as a technology *per se*). In doing so, video is rethought as a medium that posed particular challenges for the magazine as art itself, and that encouraged an interest in narrative over more visual strategies.

Books on Books: The photobook anthology and its historiography

Jessie Bond (London College of Communication)

The history of the photobook has largely been written through the publication of photobook anthologies, the first in English being Andrew Roth's *The Book of 101 Books* (2001), and the most extensive being Gerry Badger and Martin Parr's three volume *The Photobook: A history* (2004, 2006, 2014). These anthologies, which are mostly similar in format, survey historical and contemporary photobooks, and aim to reposition the previously overlooked photobook as central to the history of photography. This paper analyses the specific format of the photobook anthology, considering how the printed page is used to combine words (short narrative descriptions and longer introductory or contextualising essays) and images (photographs of selected spreads, thumbnails of covers, and photographs extracted from photobooks). Whilst the photobook anthology is significant in providing a mediated experience of rare, out-of-print or otherwise inaccessible books, in establishing a photobook canon it has also privileged certain kinds of publication. Scrutinising the page layout, types of photographic reproduction, and overall form of these anthologies, this paper considers what this format indicates about the kind of history of the photobook that has been written. It also explores what has been excluded and what alternatives there might be for writing about and visualising the photobook. Videos of photobooks posted online, and James Elkins' *What Heaven Looks Like* (2017), for example, are considered as alternative models, focusing on the importance of the tactile and durational experience of reading a photobook.

At the Limit of Visual Historiography: Georges Didi-Huberman's *Bark*

Matthew Bowman (University of Suffolk)

Since the 1990s, the French art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman has been engaged in a major intellectual project that simultaneously re-reads early 20th-century German historiography as well as seeking to comprehend how artworks produce significance and temporal complexity. The writings of esteemed thinkers such as Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, and Bertolt Brecht, their theorisation of montage and constellational strategies, have been plumbed by Didi-Huberman in order to comprehend the generative power of artworks, the ways that they actively prefigure and determine their historical accounting and interpretations. Whilst art-historiographical reflection is central to most of his works, perhaps most emblematic in this regard is a short book entitled *Bark*. Originally published in France in 2011, it is comprised of personal recollections concerning the murder of his grandparents at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and photographs that he has taken whilst visiting the former concentration camp. However, *Bark* is more than a family narrative; it also constitutes an extension of or postscript to Didi-Huberman's *Images in Spite of All*, in which a small group of surreptitiously taken photographs evidence the burning of corpses at Auschwitz-Birkenau. At the heart of both books is the question of whether the traumatic immensity of the Holocaust can be expressed at all by means of photographic and textual representation. This paper examines Didi-Huberman's *Bark*, its interplay of photography and text, as a photobook or photoessay, in light of its contribution to historiographical cognition. It aims to demonstrate how – following the examples of Warburg, Benjamin, Brecht, and indeed Theodor Adorno – for Didi-Huberman art history is less writing about images than the production of representations.