THE LOGISTICS OF IMAGES:
ON THE PARTICIPATION OF ART HISTORY
IN THE DESIGN OF NEW FORMS OF INFORMATION

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When art history became an academic discipline in the middle of the 19th century it belonged to the *avant-garde* in the field of image reproduction and application. 125 years ago, slides and photographic prints were introduced as a medium of art historical teaching in Europe, and researchers began to co-operate with publishers and photographers and participated in the creation of large picture collections. At the same time publishing houses specializing in art history improved the quality of illustrations in their books and magazines, reaching millions of readers and increasing the social importance of the arts. Soon after, the so-called *Bildatlas* that was designed to visually compile the knowledge of that time became a successful instrument and was also adopted by the well-known founder of the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek* in Hamburg, Aby Warburg (to whose name and ideas the current project *Warburg Electronic Library* is obliged). As a result, art historical efforts in improving the pictorial reproduction in public university lectures and publications had a strong influence on the appearance of today's conferences, of poster presentations or even, indirectly, of multi-media applications.

The discipline has lost this innovative role since the use of high-quality illustrations in full colour became a matter-of-course, and journalism or the natural and economic sciences developed their own forms of visualization. Art history is still an important player because it delivers valuable contents: in spite of the "digital age", the number of copies of illustrated book titles is higher than ever. But scholars and students in art history have to be aware in how far far modern technologies for the digital storage and automatic analysis of images, their transfer and exploitation have become an economic factor they have to calculate with. Otherwise they will ignore in which way they could keep on contributing to the global market of images.

Technological innovations (and barriers!) concerning the image are now coming from software producers, picture agencies or internet providers. But as well as "art history" is no longer a coherent entity but signifies a wide range of particular activities in museums, academies, archives, libraries etc, also those branches have different ideas about the solution of technological and logistical problems and the exploitation of the pictorial world. This is where art history should step in by co-operating with IT faculties or private entreprises.

Art historical institutes provide high quantities of images that need to be digitized, classified, and interpreted; they stand for rich experiences in investigating visual resources and offering a broad cultural, geographical, and linguistic knowledge. Compared to former times, many representatives of art history now consider themselves incompetent for a co-operation with high-technology providers to change the situation, or they are content with old techniques. Indeed, some of those techniques (e. g. the card box which is to be discussed below) are not yet replaced by better ones; this is one of the reasons why art history is a challenging application domain for the IT, helping technology providers to evaluate their methods and tools and insisting in the simplicity, adequacy and economy of old *and* new media.

[Presentation of the Warburg Electronic Library *prototype]*