

EXPANDED SUMMARY

Moodboards and the Atlas Mnemosyne: Possible methodological approaches

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Introduction

This article focuses on the use of moodboards in design, based on connections between two fields of knowledge: design and art history. The hypothesis underlying this work is based on the productive analogy between moodboards and the plates of the Atlas Mnemosyne by German historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929).

Although the practice of making semantic panels in the creative design process is widespread and used, there is a perceived need for more research and approaches that explore the tool. As it is not a deeply researched topic, the development of research that addresses moodboards, bringing them closer to other fields of knowledge and theoretical bases, such as art history, is seen as positive. Aby Warburg, a renowned figure in this field, was an art and culture historian whose works include Atlas Mnemosyne (1929), in which he compiled over a thousand images organized into visual panels.

As observed by sociologist Waizbort (2015), Warburg understood images both as material objects and as forms of thought, ways of thinking, assimilating, and formulating a way of thinking with images, starting from them. The same reasoning can contribute to the better use of semantic panels in design, bringing Warburg's way of thinking closer to its construction. The article is organized into three parts: first, the definition of semantic panels in design projects; next, the presentation of Warburg's way of thinking within the Atlas Mnemosyne, and, finally, the approaches between the Atlas Mnemosyne and moodboards, as well as some possible warburgian contributions to the design project methodology.

Development

The main purpose of the semantic panel, as a methodological tool, is to visually present semantic, symbolic, and functional aspects of the product to be developed, as well as its context and target market. Semantic panels are created especially during product design, right after scope research, one step before the creative development of alternatives.

By displaying the relevant information to the project in a visual manner, based on gathered qualitative data, the designer can visualize possible routes for the project's development. The panel serves as a visual guide to interpret the relevant characteristics of the problem, as well as a map of possible solutions. Although its assembly may be technically simple, the complexity employed in the moodboards is evident in the effectiveness in which the information is perceived by those who experience it: the colors, materials and shapes together communicate the concept.

One of the essential factors that distinguishes the moodboard as a qualitative tool, which presents quality visual data rather than simply displaying a collection of images without foundation, is the depth of research carried out by the designer. As presented by Cassidy (2009, 2011), the process of creating a moodboard is in part subjective and in part objective, originating from a broad and deep research process involving collection, technique, selection, and planning.

In the field of art history, Aby Warburg, through images, was a pioneer in iconographic and cultural studies. The Atlas Mnemosyne is one of the most significant works left by Warburg and studying it is a way of seeking to understand the way of thinking of Warburg and his collaborators.

Warburg used a wide, diverse, and heterogeneous collection of sources for his studies, exploring the associative possibilities within his imagery panels. The panels were not a finished product of Warburg's thinking, but rather a possibility for its interpretation. According to Zöller (2020), Warburg even manipulated images by varying the dimensions of photographs or objects, identifying a key image in each case. The Bilderatlas, therefore, entrusts the montage with the ability to produce, through the encounter of images, the ever-renewed dialectical knowledge, in an exhibition of multiplicities.

Design and art history are conceptually distinct fields of knowledge and professional practices, with different purposes. However, the use of images can serve as a bridge for analogies that connect both fields. The image is used as the main tool in the development of semantic panels, as well as the protagonist in the Atlas Mnemosyne. From the parallelism between semantic panels and the Bilderatlas'

plates, it can be thought that the images dialogue with each other, not to illustrate an idea, but to rub meanings together and promote dialogues in new semantic arrangements.

The first challenge proposed in the article is to observe the world around you as a large catalog of representations that can be explored, using everything from unpretentious images photographed in everyday life to images from art history, through museums, art exhibitions and books, moving away from representations taken from digital image banks. The creativity in the design of the panel will be present in the imagery library where the images originate, as well as in the images themselves, resulting in a greater likelihood that the moodboard will be visually more intriguing, thought-provoking and original.

After understanding the importance of good and diverse imagery sources, the next step in designing a semantic panel with potentially better quality involves positioning the images within the board. As presented through warburgian thinking, each arrangement within the same board can trigger completely different thoughts and interpretations. The goal is for the collection of images itself, with its intentionally and specifically organized arrangement, to manipulate and direct the observer's interpretation, without using obvious signs and representations to do so, thus enriching the project as a whole and the resulting product.

Lastly, the dynamic process of revisiting and redoing the imagery boards proposed by Warburg gives the construction of moodboards in design the opportunity for the product and the panels to continually update each other during the creative development. This process, which is potentially beneficial to the project's outcome, enables the emergence of infinite new relationships between concepts and images, providing the project with concepts that would not be observed or conceived with the initial arrangement alone. This dynamism allows the designer to revisit the boards to adjust them according to new unfoldings in the project. Besides that, to propose new paths, always seeking to imprint creativity, renewal, and differentiation on the product, characteristics so dear to the two areas explored in this work: design and art history.

Conclusion

The main objective of the article was to affirm the analogy between the two categories of imagery boards: moodboards, used in design, and the plates from Aby Warburg's Atlas Mnemosyne. In addition to the idea of revisiting the panels at various stages of the project, it is highlighted that the selection of iconographic sources goes beyond platforms and image databases, in the search for primary sources in art history, museum collections, and the designer's own sources of captured images. What is proposed, based on the approximations between moodboards and warburgian plates, is the possibility of a methodological contribution to the design project through a meaningful process of searching, intentional arrangement, and, if beneficial, rearrangement of the images presented in the semantic panels. As a result, moodboards become tools in a proper sense that, when used properly, can provide practical assistance in the development of innovative and assertive products.¹

¹ Translated by Eduarda Correa Flores da Silva, English teacher graduated in Letters - English, Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), 2025. E-mail: duda.flores1810@gmail.com.

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