Atlas Reimagined | Richter, Flusser, Architecture

Blake Capalbo

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/architecture_theses

Part of the Other Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Architecture Dissertations and Theses at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.
Atlas Reimagined
Richter, Flusser, Architecture
# Thesis Contents

## 1. Atlas Reimagined

- **Gerhard Richter**
  - Atlas
  - Categories
    - Borders, Edges, and Seams
    - Sublimity Galleries
    - Chromafields
    - Embodied Bodies
    - Landscapes

## 2. Flusser

- **Networked Image Environments**
  - Juxtaposing Richter and the Sublime
- **Traditional and Technical Images**
  - Richter’s Overpainted Photographs
  - Apparatuses
  - Distinction of Imagery/Rungs of Abstraction

## 3. Image Investigations

- Reimagined Sublimity Galleries
- Overpainted Sections
Gerhard Richter is a German visual artist. However, to me he is not a painter, he is an image maker.
Gerhard Richter’s Atlas is a collection of photographs, newspaper cuttings and sketches that the artist has been assembling since the mid 1960s. At present, Atlas consists of 802 sheets. Spanning a period of almost four decades, the individual sheets reflect different phases of Richter’s life and work:

On the basis of its complexity and diversity, the importance of Atlas exceeds simple documentation and is widely considered as an independent artwork. The images are curated, but they are not in numerical order and they are not chronological.
Categories

In order to decipher Richter’s evergrowing collection of over 800 image plates, his Atlas was categorized into five distinct categories, each represented by distinct qualities and characteristics of his images and by thematic patterns of his imagery. By producing a key to his Atlas, I could begin to explore the modes and techniques Richter deploys in his work, as well as create a method to archive and reimagine his work in new combinations.
Vilem Flusser, a 20th century media and image theorist passed away in 1991, before the full impact of the World Wide Web and the extensive world of digital imagery. However, his writings and ideas presage the unique changes digital imagery has had on our society. To help better understand my thesis, Flusser is used as a perceptual lens to engage Richter’s work.
To Flusser, images are invaluable because of their magic capacity to transmit and receive information instantly between themselves. Because every observation is subjective, each new image brings some sort of new symbol to the code. Images must be apart of a chain of visual connection, for if they were not, they would not be decipherable.
screening multiple images at once allows viewers to imagine multiple trains of thought that all build on the relationships of the displayed images.
The power of imagination will enable a society informed by different types of images to generate continually new knowledge and experiences and to keep reevaluating and responding to them.

In the world of technical images the possibilities of new imagined environments are infinite if we understand and explore different affects of imagery as it is currently and rapidly influencing our global society.

If the image was produced by the hands of an individual, such as a sketch or painting, than it is an original, a true traditional image. These images are magical in the sense that they invoke imagination in order to be read.

Everything else has been produced through some kind of an apparatus, like prints from a disposable camera, infrared scanner or x-ray machine. They are all technical images because these images were produced through a device that has no cognitive awareness, it just is an automatic process that occurs because of our ability to utilize the apparatus.

The distinction between these two types of images [traditional/technical] is crucial to this thesis. We recognize and interpret only one of these mode of image at a time, either traditional, craft inspired pieces that are singular in nature, or digital reproductions that are only auras of their original selves, that operate on an entirely different level. A new mode of abstraction. The implication of images in the field of architecture is changing as we continually push towards digital media.
Gerhard Richter’s images are both technical and traditional images. They operate differently if they are to be read in independent instances. In his series of overpainted sections, he is equally utilizing the photographic image and the materiality of oil paint to instill two different types of reading or interpretation to the viewer. Is the image a photograph or is it a painting? Is it both?
Technical images are completely different from other objects that make up the objective world around us.

First, envisioners press buttons that set events into motion that they cannot grasp, understand, or conceive. Second, the images they visualize are produced not by them but by the apparatus, and, in fact, automatically. In contrast to writers, envisioners have no need for deep insight into what they are doing. By means of the apparatus, they are freed from the pressure for depth and may devote their full attention to constructing images.
We are not turning back to a two-dimensional prehistory but rather emerging into a posthistorical, dimensionless state. To support this claim Flusser proposes a model to be used to clarify the ontological position between traditional and technical images.

The model is a ladder with five rungs.

Humanity has climbed this ladder step by step from the concrete toward higher and higher levels of abstraction. It is meant to show that technical images are completely new media, even if they are in many respects reminiscent of traditional images.
One must observe closely to see, to observe the different readings of the different types of images. At first glance, technical images appear to be surfaces. They can be observed as traditional images in one sense, as an aura or snapshot of action, or as a series of strung together pieces of text that form the digital code it is comprised of.
Observing takes more than just looking, which is why it is essential to utilize the characteristics and properties of images to our advantage as contemporary image creators, to better understand the relationships images can produce.
Flusser believes that this type of interconnectedness will change the social code and potentially inform society, towards a more productive environment, as we head towards an exponentially growing digital future. Richter offers a unique way to critique the vastness of imagery, if read through the lens of Villem Flusser.
Reimagined Image Environments
The painted image can exist digitally as a copy of itself, a reimagined surface that begins to grasp at more information through the use of an apparatus. However, it becomes flattened. It can then be read as an interpretation of surfaces. Projected information that can only be revealed through the use of digital processes. It is a code that is read in a specific way in order for it to be legible.
Perhaps because I'm sorry for the photograph, because it has such a miserable existence even though it is such a perfect picture, I would like to make it valid, make it visible—just make it (even if what I make is worse than the photograph). And this making is something that I can't grasp, or figure out and plan. That is why I keep on and on painting from photographs, because I can't make it out, because the only thing to do with photographs is paint from them. Because it attracts me to be so much at the mercy of a thing, to be so far from mastering it.
...when I no longer felt like doing the figurative photo-pictures, and wanted a change from the unequivocal statement, the legible and limited narrative. So I was attracted by those dead cities and Alps, which in both cases were stony wastes, arid stuff...

It was an attempt to convey content of a more universal kind.
"My concern is never art, but always what art can be used for."

"The photograph is the most perfect picture. It does not change; it is absolute, and therefore autonomous, unconditional, devoid of style. Both in its ways of informing, and in what it informs of, it is my source."

Exodus, or the voluntary prisoners of architecture, Rem Koolhaas

By utilizing the techniques deployed by Richter and juxtaposing them with architectural of imaging and production that is taught in contemporary design schools allowed me to create a range of provocative imagery.

By using Flusser’s theories as a way to arm myself with a proper lens to evaluate this mode of study, I began to create images that address concerns of current document production as well as a new alternative mode of representation for image producers that begin to use imagery in new unconventional ways that are not standard for the discipline of architecture.
Overpainted Sections