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idea journal

idea journal

**(extra) ordinary interiors:
practising critical reflection**

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about

IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association) was formed in 1996 for the advancement and advocacy of education by encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture education and research within Australasia.

www.idea-edu.com

The objectives of IDEA are:

1. Objects

3.1 The general object of IDEA is the advancement of education by:

(a) encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research globally and with specific focus on Oceania; and

(b) being an authority on, and advocate for, interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research.

3.2 The specific objects of IDEA are:

(a) to be an advocate for undergraduate and postgraduate programs at a minimum of AQF7 or equivalent education in interior design/interior architecture/spatial design;

(b) to support the rich diversity of individual programs within the higher education sector;

(c) to create collaboration between programs in the higher education sector;

(d) to foster an attitude of lifelong learning;

(e) to encourage staff and student exchange between programs;

(f) to provide recognition for excellence in the advancement of interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education; and

(g to foster, publish and disseminate peer reviewed interior design/interior architecture/spatial design research.

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cover image

Lying motionless, listless. Consuming time; being present, each moment folds into another. Surfaces becoming expanses of inflections of hue. Normality expands into a stream of observing luminosity. Still image from video by Chora Carleton, 2021.

this issue's provocation

(Extra) Ordinary Interiors calls for contributions from academics, research students and practitioners that demonstrate contemporary modes of criticality and reflection on specific interior environments in ways that expand upon that which is ordinary (of the everyday, common, banal, or taken for granted).

This theme has two agendas: First, the desire to amplify critical reflection as a key practice of the disciplines associated with this journal's readership. In short, to prompt interior designers, interior architects, and spatial designers to be more proactive and experimental in asserting their specialist knowledge and expertise as critical commentary. This asks authors to reconsider the role of critique and criticism in their scholarly and creative works, or, to demonstrate how to reflect critically upon a design and to locate the design's relation to material, political, social, cultural, historical and geographical concerns. Such an enterprise may reveal whether models of criticality centred on judgement, authority and historicism are relevant, constructive, insightful or generative, or, as Bruno Latour poses, have they 'run out of steam'?[01] This exercise may prompt some to revisit key thinkers who pose new discursive, visual and temporal models for critical practice in this recent age of criticality. We draw your attention to *Critical Spatial Practice* by Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, which asks for thinking "about 'space' without necessarily intervening in it physically, but trying to sensitise, promote, develop and foster an attitude towards contemporary spatial production, its triggers, driving forces, effects and affects… [to] speculate on the modalities of production and potential benefits of the role of 'the outsider.'"[02]

We also look to Jane Rendell's introduction to *Critical Architecture*, which asserts that criticism and design are linked together by virtue of their shared interests in invoking social change.[03] Whether it takes written, built or speculative form, criticism is an action, which according to Roland Barthes, is a calling into crisis, a moment where existing definitions, disciplinary boundaries and assumptions about normativity are put into question.[04]

The second agenda of this journal issue takes heed of the ordinary, and how, in its intense observation, what is normal or often taken for granted exceeds itself, becomes extra or more ordinary. Everyday spaces such as supermarkets, service stations, laundry mats, hardware stores, parks and four-way street intersections, and banal gestures such as washing the dishes, walking the dog or street sweeping become subject to critical scrutiny and introspection. Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage Around My Room*, Julio Cortázar's *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* are but a few historic examples that draw out critical depth and aesthetic meaning about ordinary interiors, interiors understood in the most liberal sense.[05] What new actions to the crisis of critical commentary lurk restlessly in ordinary interiors?

While a nostalgic or romantic response to this journal's theme may dwell on interior situations with no special or distinctive features, or explore the persistence and abundance of ordinary interiors, even commonplace spaces, noticed or not, it can not be denied that recent pandemic events world-wide have flung the many facets of everyday life into crisis, including long-standing notions of proximity, intimacy, hapticity, privacy, freedom and rights to access 'essential' services. For many, the world has become home and home has become an internal world, an interior contaminated or augmented by virtual technologies serving as lifelines to a previous highly social and diversified lifestyle. As the interior of one's domestic space finds coincidence with one's isolation bubble, many are finding that interiority and interiors are conflating to take on new meaning, new function, and new configuration. Ordinary scenes of dead flies on windowsills, sun rays pointing to poor house-keeping habits, mounting bags of uncollected rubbish and recycling, shuffling of mattresses, improvised work surfaces, revised chores rubrics, commandeering of the bathroom, and the commodity of headphones and adapters highlight an intensified condition.

Authors are prompted to practice a form of critical reflection on one (extra) ordinary interior.

reviewers for this issue

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01 Bruno Latour. 'Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,' In *Critical Inquiry - Special issue on the Future of Critique* 30, no. 2 (2004): 25-248.

02 Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, 'Architecture and Critical Spatial Practice,' 1 May 2020, criticalspatialpractice.org.

03 Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian (Eds), *Critical Architecture* (Oxon UK, USA and Canada: Routledge, 2007), 4.

04 Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, translated and edited by Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London and New York: The Althone Press, 1966).

05 Xavier de Maistre, *Voyage Around My Room*, translated by Stephen Sartarelli (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1994); Julio Cortázar, *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, translated by Thomas Christensen (San Francisco: North Point Press 1986); Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* [1931] (California: Harvest Books, 1978).

in this issue

as an interior: reimagining gerhard richter's *atlas*

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abstract

Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* is a compilation of images arranged across 802 multi-image panels. Since its initial exhibition in 1972, *Atlas* has been continuously expanded, amended, and reorganised based on the volume of panels shown in each stage of its iteration. The serialisation of *Atlas*'s photographic register, its orthogonal schedule of panels (or sheets) grouped into blocks, is a by-product of its social, cultural, and material conditions. It is built from 'walls of images' shaped by the architecture of a given room.[01]

This article argues that *Atlas* is inherently an interior. Contesting Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's reading of *Atlas* as a mnemonic device and/or model for display, and Giuliana Bruno's account of its emotive and/or filmic quality, *Atlas* is considered as a space of representation in order to critically reflect on the narrative sequences built by its spatial elements. It reimagines Richter's *Atlas* as an architectural interior — a room of images where *Atlas* constructs the interior through systems of display.

Tracing the organisation of *Atlas*'s framework for encounter and the production of meaning by its viewer, the article is a retrospective of its quality as an interior. Reimagining *Atlas* in this way provides an alternative means of perceiving the work's historical, spatial, and material significance. Moving beyond descriptions of collecting, ordering, and exhibiting images, this article explores the bond between surfaces, openings, sheets, and subjects. It critically examines *Atlas*'s seemingly ordinary concept of display to reveal the work's extraordinary spatial condition.

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Gerhard Richter started to create *Atlas* in 1962; it was first exhibited ten years later at the Utrecht Museum, Hedendaagse Kunst (1972). It comprised mostly black and white images mounted to 343 unframed cardboard sheets fixed between two panes of glass. However, for most of its life, Richter's ever-expanding collection of images (both black and white and in colour) were systematically arranged in a strict orthogonal schedule across white cardboard sheets of three standard measurements: 50 x 65cm, 50 x 70cm and 50 x 35cm. These multi-image panels arranged into image-sheets (Figure 01) were uniformly framed in thin, pale coloured wood set behind glass. Until 2011, *Atlas* remained in this form.

Atlas has grown to 802 image-panels since it was created. It has been continuously amended and reorganised based on the volume of added and subtracted panels, and the conditions of its site for display. It has been shown both in its entirety and as a selection of panels. After important showings at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1992), and the Dia Center for the Arts, New York (1995), *Atlas* was purchased by the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus in Munich (1996). Its subsequent exhibition at the Lenbachhaus (1998, 634 sheets) prompted Richter to revise its ordering and establish a formal numbering system, achieving a catalogue raisonné of image-panels for its publication as a large-format book and instituting a model for how to display it in the future. This model was updated for the reconceptualisation of *Atlas*'s book format in 2006, when it comprised 783 sheets. Its most recent exhibition and fifth display at the Kunstbau of Lenbachhaus has 802 sheets, 16 of them new, that form *Atlas*'s current iteration.[02]

Figure 01:
Example of image-panel and image-sheet. Diagram by the author, 2021.

Figure 02:
Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* at documenta X, Kassel, 1997. Image credit: documenta archiv / photo: Ryszard Kasiewicz.

Richter's *Atlas* is built from 'walls of images' shaped by the architecture of a given room.[03] Flipping this notion, this article reimagines *Atlas* as an architectural interior — a room made of images whose system of display constructs the space itself. It does not extend current observations of the project as a retrospective of Richter's artistic practice or give explanations for its epistemology. While it draws on Richter's own methodology, and art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's and Professor Giuliana Bruno's scholarly accounts of the work, this article seeks to reconstruct *Atlas*'s space of representation. Critically reflecting on the narrative sequences built in the interior, this examination of *Atlas* positions the work as an agent in the production of space. To do this, *Atlas* is inverted and drawn as an architectural interior to detect the material bonds between walls, openings, image-sheets, and viewers.

This exploration identifies a series of spatial typologies to underscore the representational systems that form the interior of the work and the components that give structure to it. Assessing the arrangement of *Atlas*'s interior through mechanisms of display, the article reveals how its spatial elements generate a framework for encounter, and bring about the potential for the production of meaning by the viewer. Thus, when considered through this critical lens, the ordinary concept of displaying such a work reveals its extraordinary spatial significance.

navigating *atlas*

The serial, orthogonal schedule of *Atlas*'s image-panels and image-sheets sits within a genre of structurally similar projects.[04] Even though it appears to be homogenous, the work's cohesive totality is the result of the very conscious task of grouping and organising images into diverse typologies that establish interrelationships and narrative continuities between subjects and their representation. But, as art curator Lynne Cooke states in the exhibition brochure for the Dia Center for the Arts, 'for all its compendious nature, *Atlas* is governed by no overriding logic and no polemic.'[05] Beginning with amateur family photos, postcards, newspapers and magazine clippings, Richter then expanded *Atlas*'s categories to include pornographic and landscape imagery, portraits, and documentary of historical events. Richter's own diverse photographs and sketches soon began to fill image-panels, suggesting that *Atlas* might serve another purpose, operating not as an artistic work, but as a diary of practice that suggests the form it took was merely a practical necessity. The mode of its display emphasises the generic structure of the work — each image and panel seems interchangeable. Underplaying the specificity of each image's placement unsettles *Atlas*'s heterogeneity to give the appearance of uniformity. Richter's *Atlas* exists between documentation and fiction, the concrete, and the abstract; it toys with its audience's ability to properly *see* the work.

The roots of Richter's oeuvre can be found in the classical avant-garde, but it is his deliberate rejection of the formal traditions of representation that undermines the perception and meaning of his work's logic and/or polemic in contemporary contexts. For this reason, Buchloh draws parallels between *Atlas* and art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* to demonstrate how digressive and experimental forms of organising images can remap scholastic histories and build alternative models for reading collective (social and historical) memory.[06] Both projects collapse disciplinary boundaries by resetting the standards of how to describe, depict, and see their subject matter, and challenging the 'traditional bonds among subjects, between subjects and objects, and between objects and their representation [so they] appear on the verge of displacement or disappear.'[07] Warburg established a model of mnemonic reasoning and Richter's organisation of images built a model of display that surveyed the disconnect between the image's sign-value and corporeal encounters.

While Buchloh dwells on the first sheets (1–20) of *Atlas*, Bruno focuses on the intimacy of later image-panels, navigating the work as a filmic interior.[08] She approaches the work as a field of emotive images that construct a screen for an architecture of '(re)collection.'[09] To explore this notion, Bruno opens her excursus on *Atlas* with Richter's famed quote: 'Pictures will become an environment, an architecture.'[10] This provocation initiates a conversation about the interchange between visual arts, cinema, and the spaces of the museum; a space Bruno calls an 'architexture.'[11] The 'scope of a surface' that extends beyond the traditional means of inhabitation and space-making, architexture

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encompasses 'clothing, architecture, interior design, cosmetics, and the moving image' and so on.[12] Hence, for Bruno, *Atlas* is an architexture, as Richter's 'pictures dissolve into an architecture', becoming screens or walls of images sited in space.[13]

Richter himself, like Buchloh and Bruno — and others — have constructed methods for reading *Atlas*. These readings remark on processes of collecting, archiving, mnemonic and emotive experience, methods of display and, loosely, *Atlas*'s spatial dimension. Spatially, *Atlas*'s description is limited to an environment and optical field, a wall of images, a screen or architexture, and an echo of its venue of display.[14] The discursive nature of the architectural interior, or the implications of its effects, are not addressed. In this case, researcher Miguel Mesquite Duarte is correct in arguing that 'Richter's project should not be reduced to an "architecture of the interior".'[15] Duarte asserts that this interpretation is too simplistic and is 'to the detriment of its historical and meta-reflexive significance' — a clear response to Bruno's emotive connotations of interiority.[16] Despite this claim, Duarte does not suggest an alternative approach to understanding the architectural aspects of *Atlas*, choosing instead to abandon this line of thought and expand on its visual formation and narrative structure. Once again, he defines an epistemology for historical memory through the juxtaposition of images.

reimagining *atlas*

To establish *Atlas* as an architectural interior, the brief account of exhibition and display practices that follows provides a context for exploring *Atlas*'s historical, conceptual, spatial, and material significance. Richter's work gained momentum during the 1960s and 70s when the relationship between art, artists and the museum shifted toward a critique of the dialectic between ideas (intellectual/environment), bodies (artist/audience), and their context (building). This shift resulted in immersive art installations — constructions of space, not of objects — that triggered relations not just between people and art, 'but among [the] physical, spatial, textual, and temporal factors that enhance, obstruct, shape, distort, inflect, and otherwise mediate the human/art encounter.'[17] Artistic practices were no longer confined within, or defined by, a single medium. In this setting, Richter was offered the opportunity to present a mass of visual material he had accumulated in the exhibition *Gerhard Richter: Graphik 1965-1970* at the Museum Folkwang, Essen (1970). This work, *Atlas of Photos and Sketches*, was the precursor for *Atlas*.

Since then, display, curatorial, and design practices have transformed to enhance the museum's ability to shape interactions with, and understandings of, the world through the arrangement of galleries, exhibitions, and knowledge. Art critic and writer Brian O'Doherty's notion of the 'white cube' details this transformation.[18] His book, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, outlines how modernism utilised the white cube as a device for erasing the presence

and power of architectural expression through a system of new, seemingly passive, yet authoritative conventions for display.[19] This concept is still relevant today as new iterations of white rooms and walls appear across exploratory museum concepts such as in the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, the Kanazawa 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, and Paris's Palais de Tokyo and Centre Pompidou, among countless others. At the same time, the proliferation of perennial exhibitions and temporary events like biennials hosted within museum and/ or art precincts has produced a further homogenising effect on exhibition formats through globalised, experience-oriented display strategies. Further, with the expansion of technology and mass media, emergent and differentiated modes of knowledge production are transforming the museum. Termed a 'crisis of representation' by art curator, critic and historian, Hans Ulrich Obrist, this new digital phase has extended forms of experiential dislocation, not only from art, but from the museum or gallery itself, as the relationships traditionally built-in space are being altered.[20]

In this context, with the ambition of reconstructing *Atlas*'s space of representation, the following sub-sections reimagine the work as an architectural interior. Opposing Cooke's perception of *Atlas* — that its spatial quality is determined by the character of the exhibition venue — the sub-sections detail how the work itself produces interiors.[21] As an object in space, *Atlas* changes with each public display. But each seemingly ordinary method of display constructs a distinct type of interior. Examining these interiors below unpacks *Atlas*

via architecture's codes (form) and cultural practices (history) to explore the potency of its spatial effects. Each example critically explores the bonds between *Atlas*'s image-sheets, surfaces, openings, and subjects, assembling a series of interior architectural typologies specific to the museum and/or the gallery in which it was displayed. Assessing these relations through drawing, *Atlas* is revealed as an extraordinary model for reconceptualising how we come to understand forms of engagement, encounter, and meaning in both art and architecture today. Further, this *interior* exploration considers how the experience of *Atlas* might bring about new dialogues, intellects, and perceptions of art, space, and the viewer.

A note on the drawings:
The drawings of *Atlas* that follow have been constructed from written descriptions, Google searches, and photographs in a dislocated spatial survey. The drawings comprise a wall (Figure 02), a room (Figure 03), a series of rooms (Figure 04) and an event (Figure 05), to establish the typologies that frame the current, complete work. The architectural interiors detailed here came prior to Richter's catalogue raisonné and form the basis for how *Atlas* produces space in its final (or current) iteration (Figure 06).

interior(s)

A Wall:

From 23 September to 21 November 1993, *Atlas* was displayed at the Musée d' Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAM Paris), the Palais de Tokyo's twin building. While the building's exterior combines classical and modern details, the design of its interior is intentionally restrained — it is an expansive white interior of generous neutrality. In her visit to the museum in 1990, art critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss outlines how the building's 'newly stripped and smoothed' galleries shift the gaze from the art object — in her case a work by Flavin — to the empty space of the museum itself.[22] This neutrality is consistently revered as one of the building's essential architectural traits, so much so that its whiteness was intensified once again in its more recent refurbishment. Typical of most of *Atlas*'s sites of display, the MAM Paris's interior can 'represent without representing' — a space void of any defining markers beyond structure.[23] Sited in these conditions, *Atlas* took on a distinct spatial dimension.

The exhibition at the MAM Paris comprised a selection of 171 image-panels. They followed no chronological order and were arranged continuously in four stacked rows. Just like the display mechanisms of the European academies' salon, this iteration of the work literally presented itself as a wall of images. After all, 'a gallery is a place with a wall, which is covered with a wall of pictures.'[24] But, counter to the hierarchical display of the salon, mosaics where high and low wall space was undesirable, *Atlas* was hung as a strip. This display concept provides an alternative way to observe *Atlas*'s spatial dimension, as a strip across a wall, through visual experience. Each panel and each image is arrayed seamlessly across a single surface. This surface, read in elevation, eliminated the idea of the motif and the single image. The repetition was universal, and no image was seen in isolation. The strip appeared as flat as wallpaper, collapsed into two dimensions with no edges and no mass (Figure 03). This panoramic display distorted depth and breadth of field, thus, surprisingly, enhancing Richter's ambition to 'blur things.'[25] As a strip, *Atlas*'s networks of narrative sequences dissolved, becoming irrelevant, and the wall became equally important and unimportant. Further, the strip denotes a ritualised emphasis on spatial order — there was a beginning and an end to the work with an intended procession for viewing.[26] *Atlas*'s strip was to be viewed sequentially and in detail from one end to the other, or, at a single glance in passing.

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Figure 04:
Perspective from the edge of *Atlas*'s
room at the Walker Art Center.
Digital drawing by author, 2021.

Atlas was the wall. Presenting a challenge to the established epistemological methods for observing the work, *Atlas* was perceived as an organised and conceivable whole. It generated a singular impression with sequential engagement between itself and its fixed or moving audience (Figure 03). But it was the wall that provided the context for establishing relations between the audience and the work — *Atlas* as an art object became secondary. The effect the wall produced was more important to the perception of the work than *Atlas* itself.

A Room:

In 1992 (9 February–31 May), a selection of *Atlas*'s image-panels was shown in six image-sheets across three walls at the Walker Art Center's exhibition, *Photography in Contemporary German Art: 1960 to the Present*, in Minneapolis. It was displayed in its own room. The room offered a space where meaningful interactions between viewer and image-sheets could occur. Its uniformity and flexibility as an exhibition space identify it as a 'proportional [reference] for works in which they can appear as that which they are and want to be.'[27] The removable room constructed from temporary walls is a designed pathway for viewing. However, the structure and orientation of *Atlas*'s room at the Walker Art Center generated a tension between disinterest and total immersion for the museum audience.

To encounter *Atlas* as a room was to encounter a view into an interior; like early 20th century dioramas, it was a staged visual experience. Differing from scenic painting, *Atlas* is more comparable to Le Corbusier's *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau*, or, even more so, to the *Rothko Chapel*. Designed by architects Philip Johnson, Howard Barnstone, and Eugene Aubry in collaboration with artist Mark Rothko, the chapel's interior is an octagonal space with no windows, flanked by fourteen of Rothko's large, dark paintings. Professor William E. Cain describes the interior as an environment where it is not possible to see one painting at a time. His 'consciousness was always of one while others demanded attention on either side.'[28] The experience of *Atlas*'s room is similar. The room determined how *Atlas* was received from both distant and close proximities — destabilising the engagement with the work and breaking the traditional means of viewing one continuous image. From afar, the room presented as three almost identical walls, disassociating the viewer from the room's content — the reduced scale of *Atlas* lessened its spatial impact (Figure 04). The hostile nature of the room's staging was further amplified by the reflection of image-sheets on the polished concrete floor. Up close, only upon entering, the interplay of images fleetingly engaged attention as the six groups of image-panels were separated, punctuated by white wall space and corners, further disrupting the experience of the room. It was never possible to see all image-panels or image-sheets at once.

There was nothing in the room to invite the audience to contemplate. The room aggressively mediated the interface between viewer and image-sheets. The tectonics of the interior constructed an image of a room, rather than participatory and/or immersive encounters in space. Further, the absence of the room's fourth wall confused the difference between looking at, and engaging with, space. Standing on the room's fringe — or outside the room — restricted what was seen to a single viewpoint (Figure 04). Architecture controlled the view, while simultaneously disregarding the viewer — *Atlas* could not be experienced at a single glance, even when fixed on the centre-point of the room's opening. What was retained was a snapshot of an interior observed in passing. Another gallery interior within an interior.

Figure 05:
Sequence of rooms produced by *Atlas* at the Dia Chelsea. Digital drawing by author, 2021.

A Series of Rooms:

Richter's complete *Atlas* (at 583 image-panels) was first exhibited in the United States in 1995 at the Dia Center for the Arts Chelsea (Dia Chelsea), New York City. It comprised twelve image-sheets: two large portrait and three large landscape sheets, and three small portrait and four small landscape sheets. Described by Cooke in the exhibition brochure as initially contingent and improvisational, *Atlas*, after repetitive public presentations, had constructed an organisational logic specific to itself.[29] This difference in the perception of the work changed the experience of its display through materiality and structured pathways. Its sequences and rhythms had come to generate an immersive environment of image-sheets, white walls, corners, and polished concrete — an atmosphere laden with architectonics housed in a series of rooms.

Atlas's display across a series of rooms, or throughout a gallery interior, enhanced the effect of the work as a series of larger patterns of spatial interactions. Like a *wunderkammer*, the white walls of Dia Chelsea and Richter's image-sheets produced a totalising effect. Parallels can be drawn between this method of display and that of house-museums such as *Sir John Soane's Museum* in London. It is no longer strictly a house, rather a fusion of museological and theatrical architectures; Associate Professor Helene Furján stresses the hybrid nature of the residence in the opening of her article, 'Scenes from a Museum.'[30] Domestic architecture is adopted as a space for framing and/or staging scenes and atmospheres. Just as the house-museum utilises windows, porticos, and apertures to

create an assemblage of interlinked spaces, *Atlas* made use of walls, corners, openings, and surfaces to build connections between its rooms (Figure 05). In both cases, this arrangement of rooms allows for the seamless unfolding of multiple environments into one concatenated space that reveals each item on display while simultaneously guiding visitors through each layer of the interior. But, for *Atlas*, the architectonics of the white-walled exhibition measured the connections and overlaps between and within its spaces.

Reading *Atlas* in this way produces contention between the interior, systems of display, and the artwork itself. While it produced similar spatial effects to other comparable methods of display, its potency at the Dia Chelsea has not endured. Its interior was flexible and encouraged multiple modes of interaction and interpretation, yet it was still chronological. The measured assembly of its tectonic parts transfixed the audience's attention to the detail among details and, simultaneously, to the overwhelming totality of emptiness (Figure 05). This sense of emptiness, and the unrelenting order of image-sheets, again destabilised the viewer, causing a conflict between absorption, obligation, and disinterest — the gallery, the work and the space possessed no distinct character, only infinite sameness. *Atlas* built a vast visual field, a perplexing excursion across and between bare surfaces. The gallery became the object and *Atlas*'s interior: transcendental, timeless, nothing. The art was not seen first, the interior was.

An Event:

In 1997, the complete *Atlas* was presented at *documenta X* in Kassel. Marking the final *documenta* of the 20th century — and the first directed by a woman — *Atlas* was shown as part of the event's 'retrospective' component 'that shed light on the significant tendencies of the past post-war period' and the critical artistic positions it developed.[31] Large-scale events like *documenta* are seen to establish international discourse in the public realm and represent an important part of the history and theory of display across both art and architecture.[32] Similarly, biennials, triennials and art fairs have been 'vehicles for city branding, modernity, democratisation, and internationalisation,' with the intent to showcase a dexterous, localised cultural knowledge.[33] Often housed in clusters of institutional infrastructures where experience-oriented display strategies can be deployed in site-specific contexts, the architecture of such events is fundamental in shaping the perception and experience of art. The drama of the venue is essential to the performance of the art and its audience's interpretations. Of course, the most well-known venue of this calibre is the restored Arsenales of Venice — a pre-industrial shipyard characterised by its Palladian-style masonry colonnades. In *Atlas*'s case, the monumental scale of *documenta X*'s site — the Grecian-style Museum Fridericianum, modelled on the British Museum — allowed for the work to be presented in a panoramic format with image-sheets sprawled lengthways across walls, like its display at the MAM Paris four years earlier (Figure 06).

But, exhibitions, in the words of curator Tina De Carlo, are 'no longer contained in space, but [are] constitutive of, and constituted by, space.'[34] For De Carlo, exhibitions, or exhibited works are architecture, and vice versa. In this view, *Atlas* as an event-space exists on the fringe of architecture and art and the concept of display within both domains. The rigid orthogonal nature of *Atlas* distinguishes its tectonics, constructing interior environments within each host venue (Figure 06). The venue does not dictate its arrangement; it merely provides a frame for it. To expand this notion, art critic Sibylle Omlin's point of view should be considered in this discussion of *Atlas*. She suggests that the narration of an event and its surrounding discourse constructs and represents a space essential

Figure 06:
The construction of *Atlas*'s interior display at *documenta X*. Drawing by author, 2021.

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to the performance of the artwork.[35] Omlin identifies the work, architecture, and viewers as the protagonists that measure performative potential by calling into question the spatial experience of the installation and/or event. To assess the experience of *Atlas*'s performativity, the same protagonists are fundamental in realising the work's ability to deconstruct and reconstruct itself while simultaneously building its own spatial relationships. While this action might not immediately present itself, the assemblage of image-panels, image-sheets, white walls, corners, bare surfaces, rooms and audiences are all aspects that belong to *Atlas* and actualise its spatiality (Figure 06). Thus, heightened by its temporality and its position at the blurry intersection of art and architecture, *Atlas* is always performing in two ways. It is an event, and just as De Carlo recognises exhibitions and/or events as types of architecture, *Atlas* is an architectural interior.

atlas as interior

Atlas, when displayed in its entirety or in compressed overviews, constructs and is constructed by the architectural interiors explored in this article. Its ordinary display always comprises one or more of the interior's spatial elements: a wall, a room, a series of rooms, an event, or a compilation of all four (Figure 07). The critical observation of these seemingly ordinary components demonstrates *Atlas*'s extraordinary spatiality — they are its ordering system, and its image-sheets are the representational field that produces space by shaping the encounters within it.

Figure 07:
Atlas's ordering system.
Drawing by author, 2021.

How representation gives form to space is far from a new concept. It is useful to note that E. H. Gombrich's analysis of representations of animals in the caves of Altamira in Spain or Lascaux in France proposes a possible beginning of what could be determined interior space — he describes the location of the paintings distributed across the cave's 'roofs' and 'walls.'[36] This acknowledgment of the cave's extraordinary spatial dimension suggests that the drawings produce the space, and without them, the cave would remain an ordinary part of the natural world. Attributing this transformation of space to the experience of representation rather than shelter, architect and academic Sam Jacob asserts that 'representation is the site … where conceptions of space are generated and formalized rather than simply illustrated.'[37] For Jacob, representation is not a way to record and/or depict space, but a way to manufacture it through frameworks of encounter. The cave drawings construct space through representation and through their occupation of, and active participation in, space.

Active representational systems, and how and what we see, affect the economic, socio-political, technological and environmental manifestation of space — they are not simply pictorial, but are rendered concepts. Speaking through representation reveals the complex spatial vocabularies of the places we inhabit. The adornment of walls, floors and ceilings is a patterning of architecture, image, and display, shaped by the ideas, tools and processes of their time. In these spaces, the dichotomy between 'object and subject, viewed and viewer, object and frame'

no longer exists.[38] Instead, all the elements within the space cohere, presenting visually complex and conceptually multivalent orders of things that respond to contextually relevant forces and circumstances. *Atlas* makes up one of these systems, one of these surfaces or environments, rendering it extraordinary (Figure 07).

Atlas as interior is experienced as though the viewer has entered the pages of its catalogue raisonné. Its real-time display dematerialises its images, creating a spatial experience where audiences constantly move between perspective, detailed, panoramic, and fragmented views. *Atlas* is also a permanently temporary interior recorded in mostly image-based documents — this is its contemporary condition. Thus, it must find a way to traverse new-age digital cultures and their overwhelming circumstances. But the images that document it can potentially establish an alternative, more fluid format for displaying its content. As media theorist Geert Lovink puts it, learning how to consciously absorb information has the power to divert conversation away from the 'potential or the social impact of "new media"' toward how to manage or cope with it.[39] If we take Lovink's approach to circumnavigating the overconsumption of information, *Atlas* could measure and explore how media and technologies, such as open digital archives, can bring about new modes of encounter through strategies of virtual display. Its temporal nature provides an opportunity to redirect how we look at *Atlas* and the spaces it produces through systems of representation. After all, *Atlas* is an architectural interior

built by spatial elements and image-sheets; it appears, disappears, constructs, and reconstructs itself in relation to the space it generates and the audiences inhabiting it (Figure 07). The perceptions, interpretations, encounters, and interactions it generates are reliant on the components of the interior. Despite this necessity for corporeal spatial experience, the primary mechanism for viewing the work is still by record of its existence through images of the interior. This commanding visual mode of encounter causes the work to exceed proscriptive limits and take on new meaning, becoming an even more extraordinary representation.

atlas reimagined

Reimagining *Atlas* as an interior reconstructs its space of representation. Positioning *Atlas* as an instrument and agent in the production of space, this article explores the historical, conceptual, and material exchanges that occur within the codes and practices of architecture. Critically examining *Atlas*'s seemingly ordinary concepts of display allows movement beyond Bruno's provocation that *Atlas* is an architexture. The series of spatial typologies illustrated here instead outline the active systems of representation that form the interior of the work, highlighting its extraordinary nature. This architectural interior is not founded on epistemological interpretations of images such as those previously noted in this article, but rather, on the compilations of spatial elements that give structure to it. Collapsing typical readings of the work, *Atlas*'s white walls are established as its principal system of representation. O'Doherty's white cube, alongside architect

and academic Mark Wigley's description of whitewash's 'double gesture', are relevant here, as each describes white as a mechanism used to dematerialise buildings to construct new forms of representation.[40] Architecture and representation mutually accommodate each other to produce these new languages, spaces, and experiences. Thus, it is *Atlas*'s white walls that shape the material and immaterial bonds between interior space and its subjects, not the work's images or their content. Modes of encounter are thus informed by transformations occurring in the interior. It is in this context that the museum emerges as a powerful stakeholder — it forms *Atlas*'s second system of representation.

It is within the museum that critical engagement with *Atlas*'s interior is assessed through spatial cues to expose the empiric reflexes that shape and control the way space is encountered. The typologies 'wall', 'room' and 'series of rooms' all sit within the museum's representational system. Each comprise interplays between image-sheets, subjects, white walls, corners, and openings. The MAM Paris, the Walker Art Center, and the Dia Chelsea reveal the relations between these parts. *Atlas* uses the museum as its format, both physically and figuratively, to generate pictorial, spatial, and architectural form — it has constructed a vast visual field, an excursion across bare surfaces. In effect, *Atlas* disrupts the experience of its own display, creating the impossibility of seeing all its image-panels/image-sheets at once. It also generates its own sense of emptiness and infinite sameness, triggering the imbalance between absorption and disinterest in the space

of the work. Immersion and distraction combine in compelling detail and expansive nothingness. Neither of *Atlas*'s two primary systems of representation possesses a distinct character.

Atlas's final system of representation is that of its image. Most often shown at institutions of great reputation, *Atlas* continues to shape its perception through its experience-oriented display strategy. Once more, this perception is framed by the fundamental spatial typologies inherent to temporary exhibitions within the museum or the gallery. Thus, the 'wall', 'room' and 'series of rooms' construct *Atlas*'s 'event' space, and its events have been documented and visually represented using the same methods and tools as the museum, primarily as images. In her introduction to *Images of the Art Museum*, Professor Eva-Maria Troelenberg highlights how the museum as an object is 'literally regarded, pictured, and visually represented' in Western art and media history.[41] This visual phenomenon constructs powerful reputations for museums, not only as institutions, but as architectures, interiors, archives, and social entities. Troelenberg's claim underscores the importance of images in the shaping of institutional identity and perception. We can identify the same manner of effect in *Atlas*. Its image generates effects that are fundamental to its interpretation in physical and virtual space — a concept this article has looked to address. The patterning of *Atlas*'s architectural interior constitutes its image, and vice-versa.

Individually, each tier of *Atlas*'s space of representation (both physical and virtual) appears to be exceptionally ordinary. But together, they become a system that considers much more than the image-sheets that compose it, revealing the work's extraordinary spatial condition. They recognise the 'various agencies between institutions, objects, cultural entities, or individuals that reveal themselves' inside the art museum itself.[42] The work is therefore an active agent in the production of space and provides an avenue for institutional critique — its interior and image are the response to the tools and processes of its time and other contextually relevant forces. The compilation of image-panels and image-sheets, white walls, corners, bare surfaces, openings, rooms, audiences, experiences, museums, and images all belong to *Atlas*. These are the elements that construct and actualise the composition of its interior. Reading *Atlas* in this way reimagines its relation to its contemporary context, the anxieties around looking, seeing, and experiencing in the digital age, and how encounters with the work might elicit unanticipated responses in space. Its image-based and permanently temporary nature also presents an opportunity to reinterpret institutional forms of display and standardised patterns of looking in both real and virtual time by asking: how could representations of *Atlas*'s interior become more than simply a record of their existence?

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To address this question, parallels between Richter's *Atlas* and novelist and art theorist Andre Malraux's concept of the *museé imaginaire* can be drawn. In *The Book on the Floor*, art critic Walter Grasskamp outlines the importance of Malraux's imaginary museum as a manifesto that marks 'a paradigm shift in traditional modes of collecting.'[43] Malraux's *museé imaginaire* essentially identifies the displacement of the art object by photographic reproduction. This realisation, that reproduction elicits changed responses to the materiality, intellectualisation, and perception of the object, led Malraux to conceptualise the museum as a representation, or a museum without walls. Like the museé imaginaire, Richter's *Atlas* potentially marks a shift in the perception of contemporary knowledge production, ideas of the museum and the archive, and practices of display. *Atlas*'s rigorous orthogonal and uniform presentation is a representation formalised by ordinary spatial elements documented in images. It is an architectural interior, but more so, it is the extraordinary representation of one. This concept poses an opportunity to consider how *Atlas*'s representation could re-materialise it, bringing forth new forms of encounter through strategies of physical and virtual display to produce transformed methods for interpreting its spatial and visual structures and exchanges.

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