



Image Revealed, Extracted, Mounted, Expressed

Pictures and other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as architecture

Exhibition Catalogue, TU Delft, 2019.



This book gives an overview of the works by Rogier Franssen titled: *Image Revealed, Extracted, Mounted, Expressed*. The project evokes a contemplative and personal experience of 's-Hertogenbosch through the design of the architectonic object.

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Prologue



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The exhibition catalogue laying in front of you gives an overview of the exhibition, - titled: *Image Revealed, Extracted, Mounted, Expressed* - while simultaneously defining the fundamental thoughts behind the exposed works. The exhibition forms the culmination of an inquiry into the ways in which artistic methods of working can be used in the process of architectonic design.

This project derives from a search for authentically representing the past in the architectonic object. Specifically, this project explores ways of producing an architectonic object which seeks to connect with the individual or collective memory from the 'spectator' through contemplative and personal experience. In order to achieve this, the project draws upon the methods used by the German artist: Gerhard Richter.

The aim of this project is to devise a method for interpreting the immediate context of a building in the most authentic way possible. Through literary research it tries to formulate an approach suitable for this aim. However, this method is not meant to be a theoretical approach but a rather practical one. Therefore, the project will focus on presenting an actual building design as the

first approximation of the method described. A suitable assignment presents itself in the city of 's-Hertogenbosch.

Saturday evening, 27 of February 2016, the city was roughly awakened by a deafening roar. As the first bystanders gathered around the site it became very apparent what had caused this sound. One of the monumental, partly medieval, corner buildings on the Markt had collapsed and was now transformed in a huge pile of dust and debris. Inhabitants were shocked and amazed how such a thing could have happened right in the heart of their city. Soon after the dramatic event, the discussion about a new destiny for the site started to live within the city. The discussion pointed towards either rebuilding the corner exactly how it was, or, designing a modern building which would be in stark contrast to its surroundings. However, up until the moment of writing this prologue, the site still remains a ruin in the centre of 's-Hertogenbosch.

Sited within a prominent but historically laden location, the project seems to be the perfect location to design an architectonic object which is neither '*modern*', nor nostalgic but makes the authentic past of the city

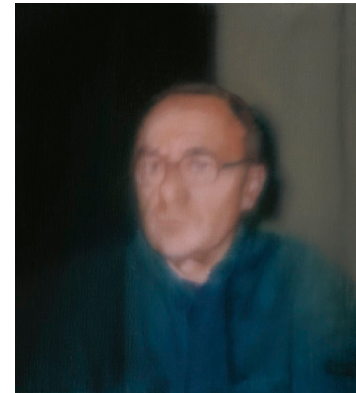
explicit through the physical and sensual appearance of the object itself.

In this catalogue you will find an overview of the complete project as it was presented in the exhibition, held at the Faculty of Architecture, TU Delft in January 2019. In addition to this, the catalogue presents two essays. The first essay, describes and reflects upon the working methods of Gerhard Richter which form the foundation on which the project is based. The second essay elaborates on possible approaches of transposing this method to an architectonic design process while at the same time reflecting on how this affects conventional architectonic design.



The ruin on the markt of 's-Hertogenbosch

***Essay 1 - On Richter, Photography and Methods of
Artistic Inquiry***



Atlas of Images

In 1962, German artist, Gerhard Richter (Dresden, 1932) started collecting and arranging photographs on sheets of paper. Motivated by the desire to create order in a collection that “hangs somewhere in between documentary source and something worth exhibiting.”¹ What started out as a kind of photo album of his own family archive, expanded continuously through the addition of images by himself, newspapers, magazines or archives given to him. Richter never conceived of the collection being a work of art, nor did he ever had the intention of exhibiting it.² However, ten years later, the collection amounted to a total of 340 sheets and was showed to the public for the first time in its existence. The exhibition titled: ‘*Gerhard Richter - Atlas van de foto’s en schetsen*’ was held at the *Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst* in Utrecht from which point on, the collection became known as ‘*Atlas*’. Since the first show in 1972, the Atlas continued to expand and presently consists of roughly five thousand photographs spread over eight hundred sheets and counting.

Photography plays an important part in the way the Atlas is constructed. Although all images, created by paper exposed to light, are sustained in the collection, a special interest in amateur photography is clearly visible. According to Richter, the subtleties and tricks of the ‘*art photographers*’ are easily seen through, “and then they are boring.” Photographs taken by lay people or by ordinary newspaper

photographers do not try to do anything but to report on a fact.³

This search for ‘reality’ is further intensified in the serial arrangement of images in the Atlas.⁴ By showing alternate views on the same subject beside each other, Richter represents the ambiguity of photography’s claim for authenticity.

The Atlas however, is not to be seen as a product of collecting and arranging. The Atlas rather functions like a film negative for his work, allowing him to focus on the reality and manipulation of the subjects which end up on the canvas.⁵ It can be seen as a model, or maquette, for what his paintings will become. A way for the artist to explore the possible realities of his art. This renders the Atlas to be such an important insight in the mind and work of Gerhard Richter.

Reality of the Photograph

The serial arrangement of photographs in Richter’s Atlas, denotes a skepticism towards the reality which the medium represents.⁶ In photographs, we see the things that have been. We see the image of light, reflected from the subjects we know, through the recording device of the camera. It is in this sense that photography is never metaphorical or abstract because we see the light of a

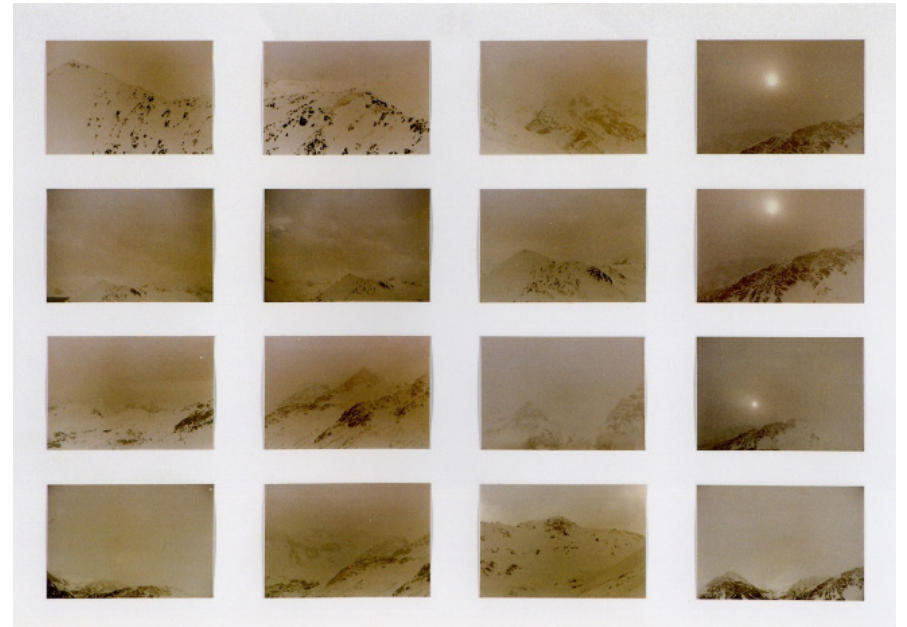
concrete thing. A thing that once existed in our individual or collective reality.⁷

Photographs show us concrete things in a direct, almost violent manner. As a result of which, we project great trust in the accuracy of the photograph and the thing it depicts. The photograph however, only reveals the reality of the way the lens transmits it to us. By showing us slightly altered views of the same subject, Richter's Atlas becomes an approximation of a more complete reality while at the same time questions the accuracy of the single photographs we used to rely on for remembering our past and the formation of our future identity.

Richter exploits the ambiguous reality of the photograph in his painting but at the same time acknowledges the medium's directness.⁸ It allows him to bypass the conventional painterly apprehension of the subject through sketching of dimensions, proportions and geometry, thereby arriving at the essence of the subject. According to Richter, this method of apprehension results in an abstraction in which reality becomes distorted, leading to a stylized interpretation of the subject.⁹ Photography just 'sees' a subject in its being, maybe not a complete reality but certainly a reality which is not distorted or abstracted.

Rearranging Reality

Richter's Photorealist paintings can be seen as an aesthetic interpretation of collective memory. The Atlas forms the direct source for these paintings in which Richter



literally translates photographs onto the canvas (plate 1). The painting becomes a compression of the sorted images from the Atlas and follows two reciprocating structures.¹⁰ These structures are underlying principles, not clearly distinguishable but very much present.

The first structure is based upon the juxtaposition of realities. Richter categorizes the images according to generic, almost banal, visual themes (plates 2,3), thereby rejecting the conventional art-historical categories.¹¹ Rather, he manipulates the way we perceive the photographic reality of the images in the Atlas and thus the way we perceive his painting.

The second structure follows from the compression of time. The *18. Oktober 1977* (plates 4,5) paintings clearly depict how Richter manipulates the perception of a certain historic event. The paintings revolve around the death of the principal members of the *Rote Armee Fraktion*. Richter however, not only paints the events on that specific day but also paints the events leading up to that 18th of October. Although the title suggests the works relate to the specific day of their death, a much larger temporal frame is compressed in these paintings, clearly following the image series as found in the Atlas (plate 6).¹² Following this example, it is visible that Richter draws upon the element of time in our perception of specific historical events (and the



Plate 3
Kanarische Landschaften [136]. 1971

Plate 4
Erschossener 2, oil paint on canvas, 100 × 140 cm. 1988

actual duration of these events) but at the same time rejects any chronological categorization of the images in the Atlas.

Reality and Post-memory

The Atlas of images enables Richter to cultivate the sharpness of memories, rather than the sharpness of the photographic image itself in his art. Richter seems to paint from photographs in a search for the experience of authenticity while at the same time obscuring the details that allows us to perceive the concrete reality of the photograph.¹³ The blurred image of his paintings on the one hand seduces us into the visual aura while simultaneously articulating our inability to see a reliable image of the past. The blurred fog, Richter employs is not to be seen as an aesthetic feature however. For Richter, it is a tool to arrive at the desired image:

“I blur things to make everything equally important and equally unimportant. I blur things so that they do not look artistic or craftsmanlike but technological, smooth and perfect. I blur things to make all the parts a closer fit. Perhaps I also blur out the excess of unimportant information.”¹⁴

Thus, the fog seems to be a mere technological aspect within his method of ‘*painting photography*’, allowing him to

obscure the details needed for the complete apprehension of the image on the canvas.

Richter’s work embodies the sharpness of memory, or *post-memory*, as an enigmatic experience of our past, freeing us from the desire to act upon the laden, ideological imagery. But rather encouraging us to view the work as a reflection of one’s immediate experience. The juxtaposition of realities and time, combined with Richter’s *fog*, creates the distance between us, and the subject, that is required for the aesthetic appreciation of the work of art itself.¹⁵

Forgetting and Remembering

This essay is an investigation into the ways in which Gerhard Richter uses his Atlas of images as a working model, or maquette for the creation of his paintings. His working method seems like a continuous play between two main aspects; firstly, Richter Cultivates the ambiguity of the photographic medium as the basis for his art. His skepticism towards the medium results in images which spike our attention to the personal experience of our individual or collective past. Secondly, the serial arrangement of pictures in the Atlas allow Richter to cultivate with our perception of reality and time. This amplifies our spiked attention to the final work. At the same time, it provides Richter with the artistic freedom to arrange the past in a subjective,

fragmented manner, without any deformation or abstraction of the subject's reality.

By employing these two aspects in the process of creation Richter creates distance between the subjects of his art and the spectator. The blurring of images in his photorealist paintings increases this distance even further. Thereby allowing for a more contemplative and personal experience of the individual or collective past through the fragmented and enigmatic reading of his painting. Instead of portraying abstracted details of our reality, Richter presents us with a veiled interpretation of reality which is inherently personal and authentic.



Plate 5

Tote, oil paint on canvas, 62 × 67 cm. 1988

Plate 6

Baader-Meinhof-Fotos (18. Oktober 1977) [477]. 1989

***Essay 2 - On Photography, Richter and Methods
for Architectonic Design***



Introduction

What are the means for authentically representing our individual or collective past in architecture? Can the architect design buildings that relate to a contemplative and personal experience of space? Is it possible for the architect to create distance between the way a building is positioned within its context and our personal experience of architecture? It is certain, that these questions will not be answered in definite within the text laying in front of you. However, it is also certain that these same questions form the fundamental line of inquiry to which this text is written.

A line of inquiry that resulted from an investigation into Gerhard Richter's method of working (see essay I), and which seems to embody a compelling take on interpreting the past in the production of the architectonic object. This text will therefore try to transpose Richter's method of working, to a process of architectonic design. At this point, it should be mentioned that this text will not attempt to add to the already extensive debate on the notion of the architect as an artist. Nor, will this text form a clear path *towards an Architecture*. Rather, this text will explore the possibilities of artistic inquiry in the process of designing a building. About a mode of working which directly influences the outcome of the architectonic project but steers clear from presenting the building as a work of art.

Looking back at the analysis of Richter's working method, three main aspects can be distinguished in the

process. Firstly, Richter collects photographic material from varying sources without a clear view of direction or criteria. This collection forms the direct source for his art. Secondly, Richter categorizes the collection following his subjective view on the images before sticking them onto sheets of cardboard (plates 1,2). The final step is the actual production of the work of art. Blurred, realistic, paintings of the subjects found in the collection of images.

The text will elaborate on the ways that these three steps can be applied in an architectural design process. However, it is important to note that these steps do not follow the linear fashion in which they are presented. In practice, the steps are executed continually and parallel to each other.

Collection – The First Room

In the case of the architect, the collection of images ideally presents the architect with the existing realities of a project's immediate surrounding. The problem being however, that unlike Richter, the architect does not have a readymade collection prior to starting a project. Also, in order to inform the design in the most relevant way, the aim would be to devise a collection of images that is somehow related to the immediate, geographic and/or cultural context, surrounding the proposed building. Thereby already zooming in on the fragments of individual and collective memory of the '*spectators*'. The term *spectator* is crucial in this context since it does not limit the experience

of the building only to the users but includes the experience of passers-by, the flaneurs and all the other individuals or groups who, at some point will encounter the final design.

Although images can be found in archives, online, or from personal collections, it seems relevant to establish a collection that is more explicitly linked to both the surrounding context as well as the subjective view of the architect. A suitable approach might be found in the *dérive*, a method coined by the Situationist, Guy Debord. The *dérive* takes the form of an unplanned journey in an attempt to study the terrain of the city. Participants drop their everyday relations “*and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there*”.¹

In practice, the architect sets out on a journey through a preselected landscape, for instance; the city or neighbourhood in which the proposed building will be located. Equipped with some kind of camera, the architect follows patterns of encounters within the set area and photographs each new *attraction* he encounters. This should be done in a fast pace and without any preconceived route. At the same time, the *dérive* can be repeated endlessly on the basis of new patterns and encounters. Relating to Richter's collection of images, the photographs should report on the facts as presented to the architect. As



such, there is no need for planned or aesthetically pleasing imagery.

The *dérive* allows the architect to collect a big number of images in a very short time span, resulting in a collection which provides sufficient ground for sorting, categorizing and choosing the source images to be used in the design process. Simultaneously, the *dérive* produces a collection of images that is not mediated by the conventions of historians but gives a subjective representation of authentic facts within the immediate surroundings of the building site.

Categorization – The Second Room

The visual categorization of images allows the architect to assemble a subjective, but authentic reality of a specific context. The categorization is done by careful examination of the photographs, pursuing visual themes and trying to assemble them into a visually coherent category of images. It is an open-ended process in which the architect has the freedom to assemble the images in a way, the architect finds suitable.

However subjective and free the process of sorting and assembling occurs, the authenticity of realities is maintained since the photographs are not manipulated in any way.² It is within the juxtaposition of these realities that

the architect can find the freedom to cultivate the way they will be represented in the design.

Simultaneously, this process allows the architect to compress an extended time frame within one category of images and thereby abandoning the specific characteristics and conventions of period styles. Rather, assembling the photographs based on the generic elements and reoccurring themes that reactivate our individual or collective memory of the immediate context.

This step in the process bears a seemingly close resemblance to aspects of regular architectonic design. For instance, one might draw parallels with the analysis of reference images or architectonic precedents, leading to abstracted concepts on which the design is based. This is however, exactly a process of apprehension (see essay I), which transforms an existing reality into a metaphorical concept. Resulting in a distorted and stylized interpretation of the subject, which is not able to evoke a contemplative personal experience of the building within its context.

Production – The Third Room

The juxtaposition of realities and the compression of time, allow the architect to design a purely architectonic object within the reality of the immediate context. In this sense, the categorization of images functions as a formal study to the surrounding environment. Thereby eliminating abstract concepts about historical- or symbolical

importance, but aiming at the creation of form-generating ideas.³

For this reason, the steps described in this text are not to be interpreted as a linear process. While the design evolves, new problems will emerge, and so a new category is added or new photographs are added to the collection of images. Every aspect of the design may demand a different category but it is the subjectivity of the architect which mediates this process.

Where Richter paints, the architect sketches, draws and models finally arriving at a complete picture of the proposed design, through which a builder is able to transform ideas into built form. By employing the collection of images as a direct source for the design, the architect is able to subjectively work with the juxtaposition of existing realities and the compression of time. Thereby creating distance between the immediate context and the personal experience of the architectonic object.

In order to further increase this distance, it is imperative for the architect to find a way to obscure the details needed for a complete apprehension of the realities he chooses to assemble. In other words, the architect has to find a suitable means of applying an architectonic fog to the design. Thereby arriving at an architectonic object

which exhibits the veiled and fragmented interpretation of our individual or collective past.

Authenticity in the Architectonic Object

Several claims can be made about an architectonic method in relation to the work of Gerhard Richter. Firstly, the architect has to establish a collection of images to work from, which is specific to the context in which the proposed project will be realised. Since the *dérive* leads to subjective encounters with the authentic realities of the immediate context, it seems to be a relevant starting point in the formation of the collection of images.

Secondly, by working with photographs, the architect is able to make the existing realities explicit in a way that is relevant to the design task at hand. Simultaneously, the existing realities remain authentic entities in the process since the photographs are not manipulated in any way. In this way, the architect avoids any form of abstraction but is able to reactivate more distant fragments of individual or collective memory within the design.

Lastly, working with the collection of images, frees the architect from abstract concepts about historical- or symbolical importance and allows the architect to transform the assembled realities from the collection to form-generative ideas. In this sense, the assembling of realities is a recombinatory process, mediated by the architect. In order to arrive at the distance, needed for the contemplative, personal experience of our past, the

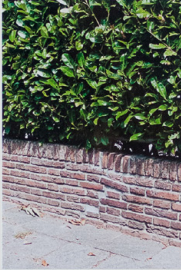
architect should somehow obscure the details needed for a complete apprehension of the realities he chooses to assemble.

This text aims at getting closer to a working method for architects, which builds upon the ambiguity of photography as a medium, inspired by the working methods of Gerhard Richter.

However, the text is unable to answer our line of inquiry in a definitive way, because up until this moment, the method remains to exist solely in written words. It is to be seen as an approximation of how this method could work, and gives suggestions on possible ways of bringing the method into practice. Thus, in order to arrive at definitive answers, we first need to actually execute the method described in the context of a real project.

Atlas of Images





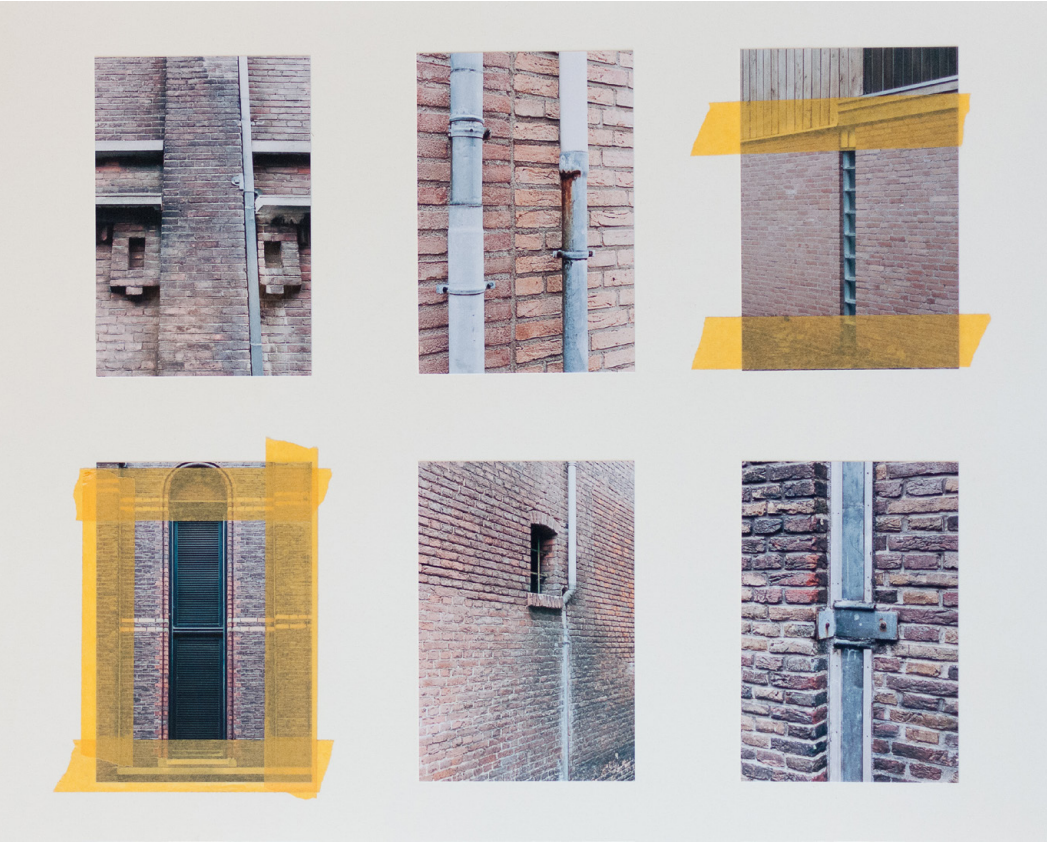














Image of Architecture

















Appendices

References Essay 1

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References Essay 2

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