

Narrative-Visual Atlas Project

Feeling your way through place: Empathetic storytelling through drawing and narrative writing in map making approached as mixed media works of art

Context

The Atlas Project requires students to weave the mapping work done in the electives (in terms of more standard architectural site analyses) into the interdisciplinary (in terms of arts based meaning making and representation): this is done by expanding the quantitative mapping process that is dominant in the site analyses into a qualitative arts based approach of meaning making and representation. These arts based "maps" could be combinations of poems, literature, the poetic use of theory, transcribed interviews, photographs, abstract or representational drawing and painting, collage, montage, storytelling, parts of newspaper articles, and so forth. Students can use the work completed in their electives, but need to intersperse and layer that work with broader forms of visual and narrative meaning making and representation.

This project is intertwined with the electives, and should support the work being done in the electives in the sense of creating deeper understanding of the research site. The approach to mapping employed in the Atlas Project is challenging to the students, who generally have a narrower but ingrained understanding of what it means to map than the arts based approach to mapping that is employed in the project. The project is also challenging to the students in the sense that it requires students to do their own basic interdisciplinary arts based research in terms of creating understanding that is not overtly design-solution focussed (a form of thinking they are comfortable with as a result of their previous study years) but focussed on an extended period of empathising and defining a research site. This project, amongst other benefits to the students, can teach them the importance of creating a sense of people / material / place when working with architectural presentations and when conducting a design process.

Requirement

The first part of the Narrative-Visual Atlas project is about producing a wide range of drawings and narrative writing about aspects of a series of sites as guided by your electives. An atlas can be understood as a series of maps that take a certain position regarding a subject matter. A map can show something real, but it can also show something of the imagination. The maps you make will constitute a handmade atlas of related and seemingly unrelated aspects of those sites.

This atlas will be a collection of non-linear / lateral evocations (in the form of maps) that will give the reader a sense of place. The idea of an evocation is useful here because it allows us to work in an associative way: It is the act of recalling a feeling, a memory, or an image to the conscious mind. You will make the atlas by drawing, writing and working with photographs etc. These works will be expressive forms that relate to the sites.

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Mapping that expands the notion of drawing

Create an atlas of a site to create a sense of place by aggregating information and meaning making possibilities from different disciplines: use a range of mark making through drawing alongside other types of evocations such as photographs, and written text.

- This project is about exploring aspects of the world that are relevant to your elective, through a drawing led process, and the associations from the interdisciplinary. Drawing is approached in the widest possible conceptual sense: as an act of coding aspects of the world. In what ways can a photograph be a type of drawing? In what ways can an interview be a type of drawing? In what way can a poem be a type of drawing? These drawing based evocations (the map pages you make) can influence, and substantiate, the designs you make in the elective.
- The map pages that you make for your atlas will be based in the expanded idea of drawing, and the range of mark making possible and appropriate for your message / the idea you have about your site. You will have to pay attention to the range of mark making you explore in the production of your map. Think about this project as map making through the expanded idea of what drawing is, using the elements and principles of design.
- Your maps, therefore, will have to include image making (drawing / photography / etc.) and writing (news articles / theory / literature / etc.). One map could be a topographic survey of the main areas of interest. A second map, can be a description of the site using only words. A third map can visualise something that is not seen in the site. A fourth map can write out a paragraph of theory. A fifth map can make a sketch of an interesting detail of the area. A sixth map could present an excerpt from a story book. A seventh map could be a drafted plan with hand drawn or written alterations to it. Think about the atlas as an aggregate of evocations that are relevant to your site, and to the way you think about your site.
- You can include drawings / plans / photographs / ideas / texts / research / site analyses that you are making in your electives into this atlas... but use the artwork pages of the atlas to tell the fuller story, the story that cannot be told by more standard maps and presentations.
- You should also think about your writing in a visual sense: scale of letters, font choices, tonality, the structure of a paragraph etc. Typography (the style and appearance of printed matter) can help create impactful narrative-visual messages. Hand made lettering (your script in your own hand) can also be useful to create nuanced narrative-visual messages.
- You will be required to think about an atlas, and a map in a broader sense. You should consider, for instance, that a map could exist over several pages: one page could be a sketch of a tree, another an observation of an area, and a third a topographic photo with a route marked out. Expand your idea of what an atlas, and the maps that make an atlas, can be.
- While you can make geographically inspired maps, your electives present a range of other interesting thematic areas which can be mapped: think about culture, belief, history, geography, politics, economics, education, place, mood, access, sentiment, movement, weather, sound, smell, feeling, material, housing, skin, atmosphere, your research passage through the design elective etc. Let your associations that are busy forming in your electives inspire your maps for this course. Also, think about alternative ways of mapping some of these aspects of the world. A topographic map does not always constitute the best representation of a felt aspect of the world.

Create a story in the atlas

Create a narrative that is placed in the atlas that tells a story about a character in that space using a range of mark making through drawing and other types of evocations such as photographs, and written text.

- You could make a character, or characters that traverse the landscape created in the atlas. Perhaps the story is about you meeting the person and talking to them... or maybe you would want to walk in the shoes of someone and see the space, and your architecture, through their eyes. Your story could

also be approached as a range of anecdotes or seemingly unrelated evocations that are relevant to the research site

- The story could have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It could also be a series of questions or observations.
- The story should take a certain position about the site. It should be a story that relates to the site in some way, and that helps to convince the reader of the contextual relevance of your “design structure”.
- The purpose of the story is to help the reader see the landscape in a particular way, and to understand the value of the problem statement you are working with through your design structure. You can edit your atlas pages accordingly.
- You can blur the line between what is real, and what is invented... it is here where your imagination can create a new assemblage. This story, therefore, can be fiction, but will be based on research.

Technical aspects

The assessment of the atlas will be based on the parameters outlined in this section. Read through this section to understand the project requirements.

The “People” pages

You should have a minimum of 7 atlas pages that deal with the “people” you are designing for, or who will be impacted by your design structure. The objective of these pages is to let the reader gain a sense of who these people are. You can give the atlas reader access to various aspects of people: what are their beliefs, their histories, cultures, their objectives, their economic position, their hopes, and their customs?

You should include:

- Sketches that are figurative or abstract.
- A reference from theory.
- Your own observation (site description).
- Your own photographs or found photographs.
- Use maps that give access to the activities of the humans you are working with.
- Any other representational modes that you find valuable to explore further.

The “Place” pages

You should have a minimum of 7 atlas pages that deal with the “place” you are designing for, and that will be impacted by your design structure. The objective of these pages is to let the reader gain a sense of the place you are working with. You can give the atlas reader access to characteristic aspects of the place you are working with: what is the place’s histories, its cultural associations, its climatic and natural conditions, its human and animal relationships, its dangers, its potentials?

You should include:

- Sketches that are figurative or abstract.
- A reference from theory.
- Your own observation (site description).
- Your own photographs or found photographs.
- Use maps that give access to features of the place you are working with.
- Any other representational mode that you find valuable to explore further.

The “Material” pages

You should have a minimum of 7 atlas pages that deal with the “material” you are designing with, and its relevance to the design structure, people and place. The objective of these pages is to let the reader gain a sense of the materials you are working with in your design structure. You can give the atlas reader access to material aspects that are influencing your design structure: What are the materials you are using, and what are their properties, and their relevance? How do these materials feel when they are used in the design structure? How are they related to the place, and the people you are designing for?

You should include:

- Sketches that are figurative or abstract.
- A reference from theory.
- Your own observation (site description)
- Your own photographs or found photographs.
- Maps that give access to the materials you are working with in relation to the site.
- Any other representational mode that you find valuable to explore further.

The “Design Structure” Pages

You should have a minimum of 7 atlas pages that deal with the “Design Structure” you are creating in the design elective. The objective of these pages is to let the reader gain a sense of the design structure you are proposing. You can give the atlas reader access to various details of the actual design you are making: Where is it situated in the site? What does it look like in the site? What is its floorplan or structure? What is the scale of the proposed structure?

You should include:

- Sketches and drawings that are figurative.
- Plans and elevations.
- A reference from theory.
- Your own observation (site description).
- Your own photographs or renderings.
- Presidents from other designers
- Maps that give access to the structure you are working with in relation to the site.
- Any other representational mode that you find valuable to explore further.

The “Extra” pages

You can make a maximum of 7 extra atlas pages that supplement the basic “people”, “place”, “material” and “design structure” pages. The objective of these pages is to let the reader gain a fuller sense of aspects of the design elective you want to expand upon. You can give the atlas reader access to various details based on the requirements of your previous pages.