Architecture as Image

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IMAGINARY CITIES

THESIS

Images play an important roll in communicating the character of architecture and cities. This is both true today and historically. The 18th century artist Canaletto used a special type of image called a “capriccio” (Image 1) where a cityscape was composed of buildings from different cities. This city is completely imaginary, but the spectator is delightfully fooled (perhaps this is Venice?), captured by the detail, perspective and storytelling. This is not very different from the way images are used in contemporary architecture representation. The digital image looks smooth on the surface, yet the construction of such an image require lots of different photographs of places, textures, light and renderings. Many of these images are not only convincingly realistic, they look supernatural. The competition winners of Stockolmsporten (2010, Image 2 & 3) BIG and Grontmij have created images that are colourful, shiny and bright, like a dream sequence from a Hollywood film. There is not only realism in shapes and textures, there are lots of other (good) emotions being conveyed. You could almost suspect that the feeling of the image is its most important feature.

In this project I investigate this quality of architectural images; the way that they make you feel when you create them and look at them, of stepping into another world created from a collection of recognizable components.
Image 1. Canaletto
Capriccio with Palladian buildings
c. 1756 - 1759
oil painting
Image 2. Stockholmssfären
BIG & Gröntmij
competition winners of Stockholmsporten 2010
digital rendering

Image 3. Stockholmssfären
BIG & Gröntmij
competition winners of Stockholmsporten 2010
digital rendering
DECEPTIVE IMAGES?

THESIS

Representing architecture with images creates an overlap with art, and as images are very powerful they can also be controversial. As with other architectural tools there are many opinions on what is a "good" image. The architecture professor Jeremy Till1 is critical of how Modernists used abstraction to control the urban landscape. He uses the example of Edmund N. Bacon and his abstraction of Rome, in which Bacon reduces the city to nothing more than a line drawn between monuments. For contrast, Till wants us to consider another depiction of Rome by Piranesi (Images 4-5) where the streets are filled with life, stories, dirt and decay; a more inclusive portrayal.

Another popular stance is to question the deceptively shiny renderings of urban projects. MVRDV are often criticized for using the digital tools to their advantage, after placing too many bushes on balconies than what is physically possible. Vanessa Quirk writes about the overemphasis on unrealistic renderings and sees this as "symptomatic of Architecture's obsession with the image of architecture, an image completely detached from reality."2 Both Tills criticism of Modernist reductionism and the general hesitation towards the digital image seems to stem from the same fear: the fear of being detached from reality.

But perhaps realism is not the answer? It's not uncommon for architects to use a more artistic style for their digital images (Image 8). The honest representation may be obtained by embracing the subjective nature of images, not by denying it.

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Image 5. Veduta del Castello dell’Acqua (detail)
Piranesi
1751

Image 6. Design of Cities, Rome
Edmund N. Bacon
1967
Image 7. "Valley", Amsterdam
MVRDV
2015

Image 8. Submission for the competition Stockholmsporten
Kristine Jensens Tegnestue, Tydris och Steen Høyer
2010

theSiS - diceptiVe imaGeS?
As study subjects I have chosen three areas in Stockholm: Södra stationsområdet (Images 9-10), Starrbäcksängen (Images 11-12) and Skarpnäck (Image 13). They are all examples of Swedish postmodernism, and I have chosen these areas because of their close connection to the era. The new style was progressive with many different symbols and historic references and took a clear stance against the repetitiveness of the earlier styles. At the same time, the municipalities built a majority of these buildings and most of them are in fact residential. The expression of the buildings are free, yet they are accessible to the general public through the welfare states systems. Postmodernism in Stockholm had both a playfulness and an ideal of fitting in with the existing history and grid of the city. Thomas Hall writes about this aim: “An important element of postmodernism is precisely this ambition to become part of the context.” In Södra stationsområdet the aim is a diverse and impressive architectural mix, and at the same time create a seamless infill in the middle of the city. In Starrbäcksängen there is a unique pattern of circles that draws on Renaissance cities, or Skarpnäck with traditional stone city blocks of Bologna, Kristianstad and Ostermalm as its inspiration.

The freedom of expression, and consciousness of plan patterns are two of the reasons why I chose to study these areas. The more illusive reasons has to do with the storytelling of the urban landscape, the buildings and the details of these areas. There is a distinct personality in each of them.

Image 10. Street view of Södra stationsområdet
EGR Architects
1987

Image 11. Starrbäcksängen
1992
Image 12. Starrbäcksången under construction
Photograph
1992

Image 13. Skarpnäck
Stockholms stadsbyggnadskontor
1984-88

CONTEXT - POSTMODERN UTOPIAS
“With the rise of technology, drawing as a significant architectural act withered away. Yet at the moment that the architectural drawing seemed consigned to the dustbin of history, a different generation found in its very anachronism the possibility of an alternative.”

This quote is from an article by Sam Jacob about the importance of reinventing the drawing in the architectural representation, whether the image is digital or not. He and his students create images that are inspired by the hand made image (Image 17), but they do use digital tools in combination with other analogue techniques. The technique of the drawing lives on using a new interface. The digital image is a collage, as you could claim that any inventive drawing is a combination of different influences and parts. For example, Aldo Rossis “analogue city” (Image 15.), inspired by Canaliettos works, draws upon this tradition of using many recognizable parts to create something new and equally familiar. In Rossis case, the landscape is an eclectic city plan.

The method of this project relies upon the hand drawn image, not as opposed to digital tools, but as a more direct way of connecting to the image. My technique is using impressions from my study subjects (the postmodern areas of Stockholm), and, using a collages, creating a synthesis.

**Original**

Moebius (Arzak Övervakaren 2012)

Lebbeus Woods (Terra nova 2012)

Leon Krier (Drawings 1967-1980)

**Analysing**

The building as object. This is a stand alone building that dominates the image and is the sole focal point and narrator in the composition, there is no foreground and the background in this example is not very revealing.

A dramatic composition where the lighting play a very important part, the foreground is shaded while the mid ground is lighted from the side. I would say that this is a romantic composition.

A central perspective and an orthographic projection at the same time. This is nothing unusual in architectural representation but I think that it creates an uncontemporary and uncanny feeling together with the lighting. This is not the light of dawn, it is rather the light of a distant detonation.

**Light and Composition...**

...relating it to observations

object

Södra Stationsområdet

S:t Eriksområdet

Skarpnäck

Södra Stationsområdet

Leon Krier (Drawings 1967-1980)

METHOD - DRAWING & IMAGE MAKING
Copying as well as drawing from reality is a long tradition in academic education. It could be landscapes, gypsum feet or the works of a master. To the artist, this practice of portraying space can make up a whole lives work. In Hasse Lindroths etchings (Image 18), the city of Stockholm is captured in the everyday gloom of a February afternoon. His observations are not polished and often put untidiness in the foreground, but his technique is poetic. The architect Ferdinand Boberg (Images 19.-20.) drew sensitive observational sketches that he used to develop his very characteristic interpretation of national romanticism. Likeness can be a goal for the observational sketch, but it can be just as much about capturing the energy and activity of a certain place, as in Lina Bo Bardi’s sketches (Image 21.-22.). This expression can in fact have a greater likeness than the more mimetically elaborate. Brazilian architects Artur Renato Ortega & Silvana Weihmann writes about the act of drawing as something deeply connected with cognition:

“This action is directly linked to the spatial and visual perception and, regardless of the type of drawing—to observation, memory or of creation—drawing relies on what has been observed, understood, and internalized.”

My method began with drawing the areas of study to create a library of observations. From this library a new story would eventually emerge.

International Multidisciplinary Congress PHI 2016 - Utopia(s): Worlds and Frontiers of the Imaginary, Monteiro, Maria do Rosário, Kong, Mário & Neto, Maria João Pereira, Utopia(s): worlds and frontiers of the imaginary, CRC Press, Boca Raton, 2017. p. 225
Image 18. Parque Passeio Público, Río de Janeiro
Leina Bo Bardi
1946

Image 19. Bahía
Leina Bo Bardi
1956
Image 20. Värmland Visnums Kyrka
Ferdinand Boberg
1924

Image 21. Värmland Visnums Kyrka
Ferdinand Boberg
1924
STEP 2-3 DISSECTION & ASSEMBLY

METHOD

Before the collage is put together, the separate parts need to be isolated. It is similar to establishing the characters in play. What are these objects? What are their agendas? In Aldo Rossi’s sketches (Image 23), everyday objects intermingle with buildings of the same scale. All of these domestic objects play a part in the story he wants to tell. The assembling of objects can of course be made to tell different stories. Some can be critical as in DOGMAs Stop City (Image 24) where urban growth comes into question by putting enormous walls around a squared out piece of nature. A somewhat earlier example are the collages of Superstudio (Image 26-27) where a dystopian future is often the topic. Sam Jacob uses a similar application of the familiar as Rossi in his Pasticcio tower: A collage of iconic historic references stacked vertically in a high-rise made out of different technical systems and aesthetics.

In my project, the collage was a way of storytelling. Buildings grow and morph until they fit together in their new storyline. I was never intending to create an obvious politic critique, but I would not shy away from associations that was bordering on uncomfortable. On the other hand, any image was not meant to be a pure dystopian vision. As in reality, a city is never one thing. I wanted to give way for assumptions and associations that could be made by other viewers.

Image 23. Stop City
DOOMA
2007

Image 24. Pasticcio Tower, Chicago
Sam Jacob Studio
Architecture Biennial 2017

Method - Step 2: Dissection & Assembly
Image 25. Rescue of Italian historic centres, Florence
Superstudio
1972

Image 26. Camp fundamental acts, Area designing actions
Superstudio
1971-72
STEP 3. IMMERSION

The concept of immersion is used in a new understanding of visual culture brought on in part by the digital development of virtual reality games. The idea of feeling physically present in a virtual space is not only applicable to gaming, but has historical and philosophical roots. It roughly translates to being captivated with a fictitious world: a book, an image, a film or a game. Take for example Piranesi images of prisons (Images 28–29). These paces convey the uncomfortable feeling of what it is like to be there physically by giving a sense of light and texture. You can almost smell the wet stone and feel the cold humid air on the skin. The cartoonist Moebious gives a fantastical vision of a Venice with flying gondolas. Using a series of images can create the feeling of immersion by getting to know the fictional world through many different angles and circumstances. The physicality is created by using colour, detail and perspective. But immersion is not to be confused with visual realism, sometimes the recognition of a physical state can become apparent using minimal means. Leon Krier (Image 32.) uses thin lines to create images with a strong sense of place and condition. The wind so obviously catches the curtain, there is no denying it because we feel it in our bodies with one glance.

In the last step of my project I wanted to create immersion by making a limited series of images. Light, shadow, texture and perspective were primary tools for creating a convincing sense of place.

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1 Immersion in the visual arts and media, Brill Rodopi, Leiden, 2016, p. 169
STEP 1. OBSERVATION

STUDY

My survey began with photographing my three areas of study, and then drawing from these photos. My tools have been graphite pencil, charcoal, ink pen and watercolour. I made 5-6 drawings each day for the first three weeks of the project. I spent approximately one week of drawing per area. Each drawing was done in 30–60 minutes.
SKARPNÄCK

February 5th
Graphite pencil
60 min

February 6th
Graphite pencil
30 min

February 6th
Graphite pencil
30 min
Step 1. Observation - Study - Skarpnäck

February 5th
Watercolour
60 min

February 6th
Graphite pencil
30 min
February 4th  
Ink wash  
30 min  

February 4th  
Ink wash  
60 min  

February 4th  
Ink wash  
30 min  

February 7th  
Graphite pencil  
30 min
February 5th
Graphite pencil
30 min

February 7th
Graphite pencil
30 min

February 7th
Graphite pencil
30 min

February 7th
Graphite pencil
30 min

Step 1: Observation - Study - Skarpnäck
**February 8th**
Graphite pencil
60 min

**February 5th**
Graphite pencil
30 min

**February 15th**
Fineliner
60 min
STARRBÄCKSÄNGEN

February 13th
Graphite pencil
30 min

February 13th
Graphite pencil
20 min

February 13th
Graphite pencil
30 min

STEP 1. OBSERVATION - STUDY - STARRBÄCKSÄNGEN
February 13th
Graphite pencil
30 min

February 15th
Graphite pencil
60 min

February 13th
Graphite pencil
30 min

February 15th
Graphite pencil
30 min
SÖDRA STATIONSMRÄDET

January 31st
graphite pencil
30 min

February 6th
graphite pencil
60 min

February 8th
watercolour
30 min
January 30th
fineliner
60 min

February 1st
graphite pencil
30 min

Step 1. Observation - Study - Södra Stationsområde
**January 29th**
Graphite pencil
30 min

**January 31th**
Graphite pencil
30 min

**January 29th**
Graphite pencil
60 min
January 31st
graphite pencil
30 min

February 1st
graphite pencil
30 min

January 29th
fineliner
30 min

January 29th
graphite pencil
30 min
February 1st
Graphite pencil
30 min

January 30th
Graphite pencil
30 min

February 15th
Graphite pencil
60 min

January 30th
Graphite pencil
30 min

Step 1. Observation - Study - Södra Stationsområdet
STEP 2-3 DISSECTION/ASSEMBLY

STUDY

Dissection
Following the first stage of Observation was Dissection. This was a stage where I started break apart the gathered material. It was through quick sketches and analytical drawings that I tried to understand the elements and atmospheres present in the first stage. For example: how can the orientation of the houses in Starrbäckängen towards a central pond be understood? What are the implications of the massive concrete pillars of Skarpnäck or it's gangways and exterior corridors? How can a prefabricated concrete element in Södra stationområdet create fantasy? I wanted to break up the architectural elements, and to make it accessible as references for my investigation.

Assembly
To re-fit and to re-represent what was taken apart in the last stage. To modify and to exaggerate. The purpose of this step was to create three distinct image worlds to investigate through architectural illustration. One way of concretizing my ideas on image making and the extended role of representation was to seek out emotions in relation to the built. Describing for example the cold and seemingly forgotten spaces in Södra Stationområdet or the interesting sensation of standing between two curved facades in Starrbäcksängen or the exhilarating notion of Skarpnäck as a geological feature rather than an architectural project. Each of the three areas would be given a chance to generate a new dimension of themselves that would be made credible through my images.
dissection
starrbäcksängen
graphite pencil

dissection
södra stationsområdet
graphite pencil/fineliner

STEP 2. DISSECTION - STUDY
Step 3. Assembly - Study
In the final step of my methodology the aim was to make images “come alive”, to invite an audience to a place that exists in its own logic, to create a motif that is not limited to the very edges of the paper. As architectural representation that is an entire world of imagery. Much like the Capriccio by Canaletto. To strive for a high level of sensitivity in the translation between mediums and scales, to add storytelling by creating sequences of images, to saturate the images in atmosphere to provoke emotion.
SÖDRA STATIONSMRÅDET

My Södra Stationsområdet is a place where people seldom are seen outside, especially after dark. At dusk, there is only the faint hint of human activity in the form of traces in the snow. What makes this city impossible to occupy at night? Is it a curfew or is it the architecture that does not allow interference. It seems that the streetlights are not lit, are they ever? If it is a residential house, we can be sure that the residents linger in dark, ice cold apartments. It may be that every one of the windows are false. Mirror glass panes, to bring about perfect symmetry in the facade. It is more likely that it is a government building or office place. A place for bureaucrats and agents. A lone lit window tells us that in exceptional cases there may be life here. Cold dark arcades in the northern hemisphere are not a place to seek shadow from the sun; rather, it is a way to get around unnoticed in the dark of night.

A channel or a road intersects the image diagonally and passes the crescent-shaped building, it is difficult to determine if it is wet asphalt or black water that moves at the bottom. On this side of the canal, one perceives a monumental open space, probably a large square. It looks like an even bigger building throws its shadow all the way across the square and onto the crescent. On the whole, you get the feeling of a place that pretends to be a city, which is afraid of itself.
An interesting thing with houses that have curved walls is that they go very well together with oval and round houses, in the same way that they match very badly with rectangular houses. It is as if, once you have started to build them, you have to continue. Starrbäcksängen is a reserve for curved buildings, an enclave shaped like a ring, of houses that are self-sufficient and turn their back on everybody else. Here you will find narrow balconies with metal railings that go all the way around in a maritime fashion. There have both aft and for, and they are facing the same direction. Either they are anchored, or they are moving away.

In my Starrbäckängen there are dry flanks of boats with even rows of square windows. You see command bridges and chimneys, making it easier to orient yourself in the unclear terrain. It is difficult to see what comes next, but it is clear that the houses, the ships, follow a direction. A bridge-like construction ends in nothing. Is it a bridge waiting for the tide to return.

It is time just after the snow melts and the soil starts to dry up nothing green is yet visible, it is still hidden by last year’s grass. It’s the time when the streets are still covered with sand and gravel, and summer is still a promise, it’s the best time of year. Dogs here are plenty, they appreciate this time of year when the scents return.
STEP 4: IMMERSION - STUDY - STARRBÄCKSÄNGEN
Skarpnäck was built in the latter part of the 1980s, constructed almost simultaneously in a place that did not house any buildings at all before. It would therefore be interesting to imagine a historical architecture in dialogue with a later one. In the pictures one can see a wooden house typology that probably existed there before the brick buildings were erected, one can observe a more past prosperous past, less urban. In the same way as many city centers during the 19th century were a combination of older wooden buildings, small industries and residential buildings in stone. And just as the early industrial era gave rise to crowded, dirty and socially unequal cities, my Skarpnäck has turned into a dirty laissez faire economy, perhaps built around a mine. A place where far too many have people moved, hoping for an opportunity to earn their living. Brick and bearing concrete is also typical of cheap architecture in many parts of the world. Here, a simple concrete structure can easily be filled with bricks, often erected informally, without a building permit and give the ones of lesser means an opportunity of having a home. The brick buildings in my pictures are probably not built by private persons, they are too large and the concrete constructions with pillars too advanced. But it is clear that it is an urban environment without plan or strong organization, where people do as best they as they can to survive. The cantilevered concrete also testifies to a possible abandoned function or never realized idea.

Skarpnäck is a place with heavy homogeneous buildings. Bricks everywhere, all in the same shades of color, some buildings a little brighter, perhaps with some dark patterns in the brick, others with bricks on the yellowish side. In the end they all converge to the same faint red color. The buildings are connected not just thematically but also by the feeling they give of being one big interconnected unit under one single roof that cracks and brakes like a mountain ridge. Arcades and pillars in concrete reluctantly force the brick bodies into uncomfortable positions.

Although it is a place that lacks all topography, just being an open field, so flat that it was once used as an airfield, has a strange mountainous character. The towers that shoots up from the building mass contribute to the feeling that Skarpnäck is not constructed, but rather a place carved out by erosion. It might as well be a monastery village with medieval thick walls, or why not a dirty suburb in a early industrial metropolis.
Before the collage is put together, the separate parts need to be isolated. From this library a new story would eventually emerge. “This action is directly linked to the spatial and visual perception activity of a certain place, as in Lina Bo Bardis sketches (Image 21.-22.). For example, Aldo Rossis “analogue city” (Image 15.), inspired by Canal-states systems. Postmodernism in Stockholm had both a playfulness and seriousness. At the same time, the municipalities built a majority of these buildings have chosen these areas because of their close connection to the era. The näck (Image 13.), Skarpnäck Starrbäcksängen (Images 9.-10.), and Södra Stationsområdet (Images 11.-12.) are all examples of Swedish postmodernism, and I suspect that the...
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dialogue with a later one. In the pictures one can see a wooden house

grey, wavy lines, a growing shape of a building, and a long tunnel.

Brick buildings with a wall in light green, an arch with a dark

a slightly larger one, and a square in the middle.

of night.

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interference. It seems that the streetlights are not lit, are they ever?

It would therefore be interesting to imagine a historical architecture in

light green, with a dark door and a white wall. The building is

In comparison to the previous pages, this page contains text that appears to be a continuation of the previous discussion, likely focusing on the architectural elements and their representation. The text seems to be part of a larger narrative or argument, possibly related to architectural studies or a specific architectural project. The presence of images on the page suggests a visual component to the text, which might be related to case studies, examples of architectural designs, or visual representations of the discussed elements. The text also includes references to specific locations or projects, which could be illustrative of the points being made. Overall, the page appears to be part of a comprehensive discussion on architectural representation, focusing on the details and elements that contribute to a cohesive architectural design.