Another Story, Another Image

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In the 1800s, a couple of hundred years after the birth of the central perspective, the architectural rendering had become a powerful tool for communicating architecture. Based on the perspective drawing, architects had found the rendering to be an excellent way of communicating ideas to audiences with little or no skills in reading traditional drawings. The ability of the rendering seemed particularly suitable in the rapidly emerging world of architectural competitions, arrangements often including jury members from outside the architectural profession.

To many architects, the architectural rendering had by this time become an art of its own, and great effort was put into the drawings: details, colors, surroundings, and traces of human life. Today, the rendering (or visualization) is a mandatory element in most architectural presentations, and with the introduction of modern, digital design tools, we even have the option to let the distinction between the architect’s proposal and reality cease to exist.

Working with architecture means working with images, and images produced by architects are usually intended to communicate something. This can be the horizontal distribution of a building, as in the plan drawing, or how loads are distributed between load bearing element, as in the section drawing. But there are other types of architectural images, containing additional layers.

With this project, I wish to explore my methods of working with architectural images. What if I allow myself to try other media and techniques than I usually use? What if I allow myself to introduce uncertainty in my images, bringing the language of my architectural images closer to the liberated language of art?

Besides challenging my own image-making, I also wish to challenge the prevailing image of some of the most significant elements of our modern housing history; late modernism, the Million Homes Program, public housing, and the suburb. In the project, this is done through a series of portraits of buildings, all relating to the decaying Swedish public housing program (a decay most obviously indicated by a new law in 2011, forcing municipal housing companies to act profitable). Due to a historical change in housing politics, these objects are now quickly losing their photogenic appeal. My project is an attempt to highlight these buildings and some of the architecture provided by the Swedish public housing program. By telling my story about the buildings, I wish to contribute to an alternative way of speaking of and depicting public housing, late modernism, the Million Homes Program, and the suburb of today.

The portraits are set up as a series of scenes, each comprising an image and a story. Each scene relates to a specific building, selected based on a specific architectural attribute or element. By working with a separate building for each scene, I wish to illustrate the wide range of architecture public housing in Sweden once offered. The scenes are set up using 3D models based on original drawings. With the opportunities of the digital model and the freedom of the scale-less perspective drawing, I have allowed myself to use any position, angle, and focal length required by the scene. For each scene, there is an art work serving as a filter for the scene. The selection of art works is based on an interchange between characteristics found in the art works and the buildings.

This is a project about the power of images, telling stories about our history and future. It’s about exploring my possibilities of developing my architectural images into something new, without losing their ability to communicate architecture. It’s a project about highlighting architecture that has lost its glory but still is of importance to me. It’s a project about the impact time and presence have on our image of the build environment.

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1 An illustration of a proposed building, usually an exterior perspective.
2 In 1965, the Swedish parliament decided to fight a drawn-out, massive housing crisis by enabling the production of one million dwellings, spread over a period of ten years. As the program was terminated in 1975, it had resulted in 1,006,000 new dwellings.
3 Translation of the Swedish term Allmännyttan, referring to housing companies owned by Swedish municipalities. The Swedish public housing program holds approximately half of the rental apartments in Sweden.
4 In 2009, Swedish Property Federation (Fastighetsföreningen) reported Sweden to the EU Court of Justice, claiming the non-profit commission of municipal housing companies to go against EU competition laws. Without awaiting the court’s decision, a new law was immediately prepared and implemented.
5 Today, municipal housing companies put greater focus on standardization than perhaps even during the Million Homes Program. In 2010, the Swedish Association of Public Housing Companies (SABO) released their product Kombihus, a fully standardized housing typology designed to fit on any flat, empty site.
I used to deliver mail to this place. Being a postman, this apartment, and the building in which it resided, left me in a state of confusion. On every second floor; long corridors lined with front doors on both sides. On the intermediate floors there was...nothing. Even more confusing were the apartments themselves. Based on the few glimpses I got, they offered some really strange spaces. An entrance hall, with stairs disappearing into the ceiling. And then, in the next apartment, an entrance hall with stairs leading downward, through the floor. During my career as a postman, I never figured this building out.

This spring, I return to the building. I'm an architect now, and with the change in profession comes changed perspectives. DUGGREGNET 5 was designed by architect Georg Varhelyi and finished in 1956. Strongly resembling Le Corbusier's famous Unité d'Habitation projects, the building was designed for a highly diverse program and with extraordinary apartments, comprising up to four stories. A majority of the apartments are vertically zigzagged around central corridors, enabling the apartments to take in daylight from two sides, despite the usage of corridors.

The Postman’s Riddle shows an axonometric perspective from below of the main interior voids of a one hundred and seventy square meter apartment on the 15th floor.

The image is inspired by works by Russian architect and artist El Lissitzky (1890-1941) and British artist Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963).
DUGGREGNET 5

Architect: Georg Varhelyi
Address: Björkhagsplan 9, Björkhagen, Stockholm
Year: 1956
Owner: Svenska Bostäder

Situation plan 1:200 000

West elevation 1:400
Section 1:400

16th floor 1:400
15th floor 1:400
Starting architecture school was the beginning of journey towards a new identity. An identity far more rich and complex than I could ever have imagined. During my first year at school, we had this role model architect as a teacher. He held an important position at school and appeared in newspapers and magazines every now and then. This was what we students wanted to become!

After a while, we found out that he lived in one of Stockholm’s poorest and least attractive areas, far away from the central parts of the city. Also, he lived in a rental apartment, owned by a municipal housing company. This made no sense.

At the end of the year, we were invited to a party at his place. By this time, the doubt had turned into respect. Respect for an architect who dared to challenge our image of The Architect and, even more important, respect for an area which surprisingly enough grew as we got to know it.

Newcomers shows an exterior perspective of TISSINGE I, located a few hundred meters from where we were that evening. The building was designed by architect Bertil Ringqvist in 1968, one of the most productive years of the Swedish million program era. The block is characterized by four small-scale buildings forming a number of small courtyards.

Besides the building typologies, the area is also characterized by extensive greenery. Even though the ivy on the facade didn’t survive the renovation a couple of years ago.

The image is inspired by works by Swedish photographer Sune Jonsson (1930-2009).
TISSLINGE 1

Architect: Bertil Ringqvist
Address: Gullingeplan 4-20, Tensta, Stockholm
Year: 1969
Owner: Svenska Bostäder
I call the municipal housing company to find out about those yellow fields. “We don’t know and we don’t know who might know,” they reply. Then I find an old information letter on the Internet, mentioning a coming renovation. The letter is published by the housing company and contains a short interview with a maintenance engineer, Nils-Åke. I get on the phone. “No one here with that name,” the operator replies. Is there perhaps some other maintenance engineer I can speak to instead? “Hold on.”

Nils-Åke retired two years ago. Talking to his replacer is a dead end: “Nils-Åke had been working here for thirty years. He knew so much. We weren’t able to keep more than a tiny bit of the knowledge as he left”, the replacer tells me. I hang up, thinking this lead won’t take me any further. However, Nils-Åke has a rather odd family name and, yes, he’s in the phone book!

During our conversation, Nils-Åke tells me the history of FONDBERSÅN 1. He tells me that the yellow coloring is an addition, performed during the renovation. Nils-Åke tries to recall the name of the architect who designed it: “He wanted to have LED lights in the niches, but the authorities didn’t approve.

So he went for coloring instead. Too bad, those lights would really have been something extra. I can’t believe I don’t remember his name!” As we hang up, I get into a strange state of euphoria and sadness. All this gathered experience and knowledge, and now there’s no one at the company maintaining it. Suddenly, FONDBERSÅN 1, or the whole district in which Nils-Åke had been operating in, seems so abandoned. Three minutes later, Nils-Åke calls me: “Per is the name of the architect. Per Wångstedt! He works at ÅWL architects!” As I start searching for Per’s phone number, Nils-Åke gives me the rest of the building’s history.

Today, I sometimes consider myself being a part of a secret association together with FONDBERSÅN 1, Nils-Åke, and Per. Perhaps we meet every once in a while, have a beer, share stories, and look at what has happened to the building since we left.

Kid’s Coordinates shows an exterior perspective of FONDBERSÅN 1, designed by architect Hjalmar Klemming in 1956. The image is inspired by works by Italian architecture office Superstudio.
Below here, I spent some time as a child. The floor is the ceiling of the apartment where a relative of mine used to live. While me being a skinny, not cool boy Jakob was an awesome punk-rocker, a couple of years older than me. I wore too short pants, he wore a mohawk haircut and a leather jacket yelling "The Exploited", "Napalm Death", or worse.

Coming here was nice. We (or I) had a play where I was tied using a huge amount of ropes and a pair of handcuffs. Then I was left alone, trying to break free. I guess we both enjoyed the time I was busy battling the ropes, but for different reasons. Outside the building there was a large rock with some forest. Here I learned how to make a cigarette lighter burn itself down. I once showed this trick to my grandmother. She wasn't too impressed.

I remember the apartment in detail. There was daylight coming in from three directions and the light conditions were made even better by a beautiful glazed wall separating the kitchen from the living room. Above the apartment, on the top floor; the modest appearance of the building shifted dramatically due to a huge, extravagant window that seemed to originate from a church rather than a 1950's building in a suburb. Due to the terraced design of the building it was quite difficult to tell to which apartment the window belonged.

It's been a long time since I had reasons coming to this place, which have been inhabited since before my first visit and since after my last. Day after day, over and over again. Do kids here today know how to make a lighter burn itself down?

Moving In shows an interior perspective from an apartment on the fourth floor of ARKIVARIEN 1 by architect Georg Varhelyi. The building was finished in 1952. The image is inspired by works by Swedish artist Ola Billgren (1940-2001).
ARKIVARIEN 1

Architect: Georg Varhelyi
Address: Ätravägen 9, Bagarmossen, Stockholm
Year: 1952
Owner: Svenska Bostäder

Situation plan 1:200 000

3D model
CELEBRATION


With a few exceptions, the digital traces left by Swedish architects that were active during the era when Sweden was turned into a modern country are non-existing. How will this affect the way our history is formulated in the future?

Celebration shows a window detail of SLEPPNER 4 by architects Stefan Szejnman and Ragnar Westin, designed in 1964. The image is inspired by works by Swedish artist Dick Bengtsson (1936-1989) and French cartoonist Hergé (1907-1983).
SLEIPNER 4

Architect: Ragnar Westin & Stefan Szejnman
Address: Västmannagatan 76, Stockholm
Year: 1964
Owner: Svenska Bostäder 1964-2008, BRF Sleipner 4 2008- (tenant-owner’s association)
My grandmother called me one day. Andrea needed help. Spring was
approaching and her three-wheel moped needed a switch of tires.
Andrea only had one leg and the moped was her connection to the
surrounding city. With the moped she could, under an ear-splitting
noise, go anywhere she wanted.

Before I went my grandmother gave me a little advice:
"Before eating something at her place, make sure it’s fresh. Don’t worry too
much about it, but she’s old and a little forgetful and sometimes she keeps stuff
a little bit too long".

Andrea lived in a large block in the southern part of the city. The five-storey
buildings were characterized by long, red access balconies. Actually, I used to
live here as a child so it was kind of like coming home. A while after my parents
split up, my dad got an apartment in the building next to the one me and mom
lived in, so this was really the center of my universe at the time.

"I’m so glad you’re here", she said as she opened the door. “I’ll be with you
in a minute, just let me get my leg”. Using an artificial limb and a crutch she
managed to get out on the access balcony and into the elevator, taking us all
the way down to the garage. She showed me the moped, three tires and a
small bag with tools. As I started working, a number of problems occurred.

First, there was no additional set of wheels with summer tires, so the winter
tires would have to be removed from the rims and then replaced with the
summer tires. Second, the bag only included some wrenches and screwdrivers,
no tools for removing the tires from the rims. Last, the tires where stiff as hell.
Compared to the one’s I was used to from my own moped, these were like
car tires.

I worked those three wheels. My hands were aching, full of blisters. As I now
and then went up to Andrea’s apartment to borrow the toilet, she offered
me something to eat. With my grandmother’s advice in mind, I stubbornly
rejected every offer, even though I was starving. Late in the evening, the last
tire finally slipped onto its rim. She was so happy. I was even more happy.

LADIES

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Ladies shows an exterior perspective of HANDELSMINISTERN 1, designed
by architect Ernst Grönwall in 1970. Two apartments per floor have a different
planning, with more generous kitchen and bathroom spaces. A short text on
the plan drawing explains the architect’s design: “Apartment for disabled”.

Twenty-five years after my visit, I realize there was a reason why Andrea lived
where she did.

The image is inspired by works by American artist Cindy Sherman (b. 1954).
HANDELSMINISTERN 1

Architect: Ernst Grönwall
Address: Byälvsvägen 28-32, Bugarmossen, Stockholm
Year: 1970
Owner: Stockholmshem

Situation plan 1:200 000

Photo © Jonas Lindgren

Typical floor plan 1:400

East elevation 1:400

Section 1:400

3D model
This part of the city has gone through changes recently, it’s less rough now. Even the hot dog stand on the square is well designed and as you leave the subway, you nowadays step into a shopping mall. But some elements from before remain. Some outsiders, the intense traffic, and the strange building at Hornsgatan 148.

According to the registers, SPETTET 21 was designed in 1974 by architect Lennart Pettersson at the unknown office Bentele & Co. It has a bold, strongly geometrical and three dimensional facade. The building requires some effort to be categorized. A rare piece of Brutalism? Or is the facade an ornament, a fun game by the architect? The plan drawings give the answer; the outside is a consequence of the apartment design. The protruding balconies are actually secondary elements, while the primary element of the building is a bay window. From what I can tell from the drawings, this should be clearly visible on the courtyard facade.

A person I know briefly, Peter, lives on the opposite side of the block and I ask him to send me a photo. It shows a beautiful, bone white, sawtooth facade built up of sharp bay windows, ranging vertically over the first five stories. The expression of this side of the building really surprises me, it’s so bright.

By coincidence, I read an old article about architectural historian Martin Rörby, former chairman of the Beauty Council of Stockholm. From the article, I can tell that he lives really close to the building. Hoping he knows something about the building and its unknown creators, I give him a call. “There once was a rumor going around that it’s actually designed by Bengt Lindroos”, Rörby tells me. “You should try to get in contact with someone from his generation, like Tage Hertzell. And please let me know if you find something out!”. New call, this time to Hertzell, one of the key architects in Sweden during the 1970s. “This is news to me”, 87-years old Hertzell replies in a hoarse voice. “I have to this check out. I’ll go there right away.”

While waiting for Hertzell to get back to me, I do some research. It turns out that Lindroos, one of the most well-known architects in Sweden during the 1960s-1990s, has designed a subway entrance fifty meters away from the building. Could it be that Lindroos actually was involved in two buildings in the area? Also, I do some research on the official architect and find two more projects by him. These are really modest buildings, far from the expressive building at Hornsgatan.

This day, I’ll be late when picking up the kids at school. On my way home, I stop by the building and as the postman leaves, I sneak in. While studying some facade details, I bump into a woman, Birgitta. It turns out she’s been living here since day one of the building, and she tells me her story. “Moving here was so nice! My apartment was a myriad of patterns and colors. With medallion flooring!” She invites me to see her 2.5 room apartment, spanning over two storeys. It turns out one of her grandchildren is named Rasmus, just like me.

After exchanging contact information with Birgitta, I head home. I pick up the kids. They’re crying and yelling, so tired. I think of Hornsgatan 148, Birgitta, Bengt Lindroos, and Tage Hertzell.

Phase Shift shows an elevation of SPETTET 21 towards the street. The image is inspired by works by American artist Edward Hopper (1882-1962).
SPETTET 21

Architect: Lennart Pettersson + Bentele & Co
Address: Hornsgatan 148, Stockholm
Year: 1974
Owner: Svenska Bostäder

Situation plan 1:200,000

South elevation 1:400
Section 1:400
5th and 7th floor 1:400
4th and 6th floor 1:400

3D model
In 1953, architect Nils Ahlbom was given the assignment by the Swedish government to investigate the possibilities of the row house as a housing typology. The commission report pointed out that the row house had a potential in combining the small scale and accessibility of the detached, single-family house and the economical benefits of multi-family housing.

The development of the row house area in which RIKSFISKALEN 11 is a part was heavily influenced by the commission's report. After an initiative from a municipal housing company, architects Léonie and Charles-Édouard Geisendorf were commissioned to design 114 row houses in southern Stockholm. The primary target group for the project were families with many children.

The architecture of the area has drawn a lot of attention since it was finished in 1956 up until today.

In 2000, 105 of the 114 row houses were privatized. Since then, the market value of these houses has increased with approximately 670%, inflation disregarded. This is not only a prime example of the successful housing investments many Swedes have had the opportunity to take part in during the last twenty years, it is also a striking example of an ongoing transition from common to individual welfare.

REVIEW shows an interior perspective from one of the row houses of RIKSFISKALEN 11. According to some, seven of its row houses were designed by Léonie Geisendorf alone, while the rest were designed in cooperation with her husband, Charles-Édouard. The image is inspired by works by architects Alison (1928-1993) and Peter (1923-2003) Smithson.
RIKSFIKALEN 11

Architect: Léone Geisendorf
Address: Riksrådsvägen 46-58, Skarpnäck, Stockholm
Year: 1955

Note! The photo shows a house of a different type than the portrayed.
THANK YOU...

BIRGITTA GUNDERSEN for inviting me to your apartment in Spettet 21
NILS-ÅKE MÅRS for sharing histories about Fondbersån 1
JAKOB LUND for the interior photos of your apartment in Duggregnet 5
PER WÅNGSTEDT for sharing drawings on the facade renewal of Fondbersån 1
PETER LILLIENGREN for the courtyard photos of Spettet 21
MARTIN RÖRBY for the Lindroos story
TAGE HERTZELL for engaging in the Lindroos pursuit
ERIK STENBERG for general support
ERIK WINGQUIST for the book and for stopping by the light table
BIRGITTA BURLING for the quick tutorial on how to blend watercolors
JONAS LINDGREN for exterior photos
TOR LINDSTRAND for commitment
ANDERS WILHELMSON for questioning the initial framing of the project