

RESEARCH EXPOSITION

***FOR THE LOVE
OF EVERYTHING***

2021

THE WORK

This work is composed of two major parts - a diagram for mapping my *proposed categorization of visual attributes in architecture* and *playing around with appropriation* by intuition, using a specific site and context as a testbed.

One could view the goal of it all as *closing in* on the subject of appropriation and visual reference in architecture and the research question may be posed as follows:

How can one illustrate and map the width and variety of intention and interpretation of architectural attributes in contemporary architecture?

PROPOSAL FOR A CATEGORIZATION OF VISUAL ATTRIBUTES IN ARCHITECTURE

This work started with a loosely defined design task that I assigned myself, as a testbed for doing explorations into the world of appropriation in architecture. I picked a spot in a countryside environment, surrounded by a set of buildings of different times, different functions and varied levels of perceived cultural value.

Combined with my slight fascination for the generic mass of architecture that makes up most of our built environment, I was sure that I wanted to explore the potential magic of the generic and ordinary in architecture. The potential magic of what is yet to be romanticized - that which is seemingly uncared for - namely buildings shaped by economics and signified by the lack of representative value, from a time which is at the bottom of the architectural hierarchy as of today.

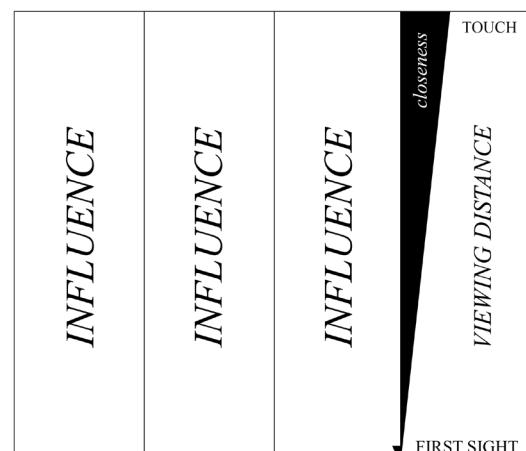
As I thought more about appropriation and visual reference in architecture, I came to notice that some of the few architectural works in Swedish architecture, that continues to speak to me, use appropriation in a quite straightforward yet curious way. When looking at the examples of Villa Snellman (Asplund, 1917), Villa Klockberga (P. Celsing, 1964) and Summer house (J. Celsing, 1994), I find that more specifically, a range of references are at play within each individual project. And opposed to how we in architecture school often are encouraged to look at specific grand examples of highly regarded architecture, this selection of mine carries references to broader culturally recognizable shapes, forms and motifs, even in plan and internal movement, spanning over different epochs.

Another aspect that comes to mind, is that the buildings are cared for differently at different scales. They have in common that their silhouette and color, at first sight, make them blend in with the surrounding built environment in the most humble of ways, leaving aesthetic room for innovation and freedom when getting closer, as the relation to the surroundings start to matter less and less. In my personal opinion, all of the three projects finds a sought after balance between historical continuity, friendliness and artistic integrity.

Against the background of these dynamics, I set out to try and create a framework for mapping appropriation and influence in architecture, arranging architectural attributes along the two axes of scale and influence. The result is a diagram where a building or architectural object may be dissected into any set of attributes, which are then sorted by viewing distances where they are relevant and by the influences and references that they are interpreted, understood and valued by an observer.

The resulting map which is the main product of my work must be understood, not as a map of intentions and theory leading up to a finished design, but a map of the actual sense-making of a design relieved of explanations. It is all about the effects and the achieved value of intentions that makes up a building and architectural object. One may even remove the idea of intention, as appropriation and value-borrowing approaches can be conducted in an undeliberate way and still produce the adequate effect.

The most important value of the diagram to me, is the thought exercise in understanding the variation and multitude in which appropriation can be conducted. It also implies that most architectural attributes carries associative values, even though not deliberate, which in turn motivates one to take control over and achieve greater awareness of the referential forces at play, as imitation, reference and appropriation is almost inevitable.



ON INFLUENCE

In the contemporary world of architecture one may argue that the idea of truth in shape and expression is dead. Nowadays, we may agree that the new condition is that there is no such thing as linear progress and development in design. We do not believe that there is any greater truth to be found in architecture, no higher purpose. There is no eternal order - except for that of cultural hierarchy and positioning.

We accept that the visual values of architecture are completely justified by the personal reading by a number of subject individuals. And the subject individual, in turn, will forever be changing as history develops. Tastes and ideas, the value of certain things, motifs and details, are all subjects to change. There is also a wide spread of individuals within societies, reading architecture in different ways.

This does not mean that architecture and design is arbitrary and useless, obviously. What we aim for, in general, is some kind of acceptance of our work. We do not, in general, aim to provoke. There is always somebody we are looking to please, to address, even if it is just oneself or a small group of observers whose confirmation we value.

The dynamic of our built environment is a manifestation of conflicting interests in generation after generation proclaiming the truth of its time. Combined with contemporary economical conditions, a formula for change in architecture can be scented.

The work that I am about to present is a try at sorting architectural language in the postmodern condition of today. It is fairly safe to assume that the spread and variety in design approaches in architecture has only come to increase since the start of the postmodern era in which most of us we are born, raised and schooled.

Regarding postmodernism as a style, it may be viewed as a phenomena that peaked some 30 years ago. Nevertheless, the post modern notion of association and continuity in architecture as a generator of value persists to this day. This was not a foreign concept to modernist architects, but there was a general understanding that the best was yet to come in architecture, a statement which would be far from generally accepted today, if you would allow me to speculate.

Architects schooled in our cultural context and time have a tendency to verbally derive at least some of the architectural values produced from *context* - be it the physical context and the site, or historically recognizable types and attributes - possibly with the ambition of reducing the arbitrariness in a design world of endless possibilities combined with a lack of common narrative as to what the architecture of today should be.

In contrast to this way of working, there is a parallel movement in architecture that strive for an overall feeling of *newness*. Hi-tech and parametric design has developed simultaneously to previously mentioned ambition to achieve *rootedness*.

Between these two approaches, endless variety and mixing between *rootedness* and *newness* is practiced. And within most buildings, attributes are found that draw from different values and approaches.

To try and account for the possible approaches in design, regarding visual attributes in architecture, I have defined a set of categories. These should be sufficient in collecting all of the ways architects may justify the attributes of our designs.

ON SCALE

The second concept I focus on in this work is that of scale. One could argue that scale is central to architecture and in some way differentiates architecture from architecture from sculpture and other shape-giving crafts.

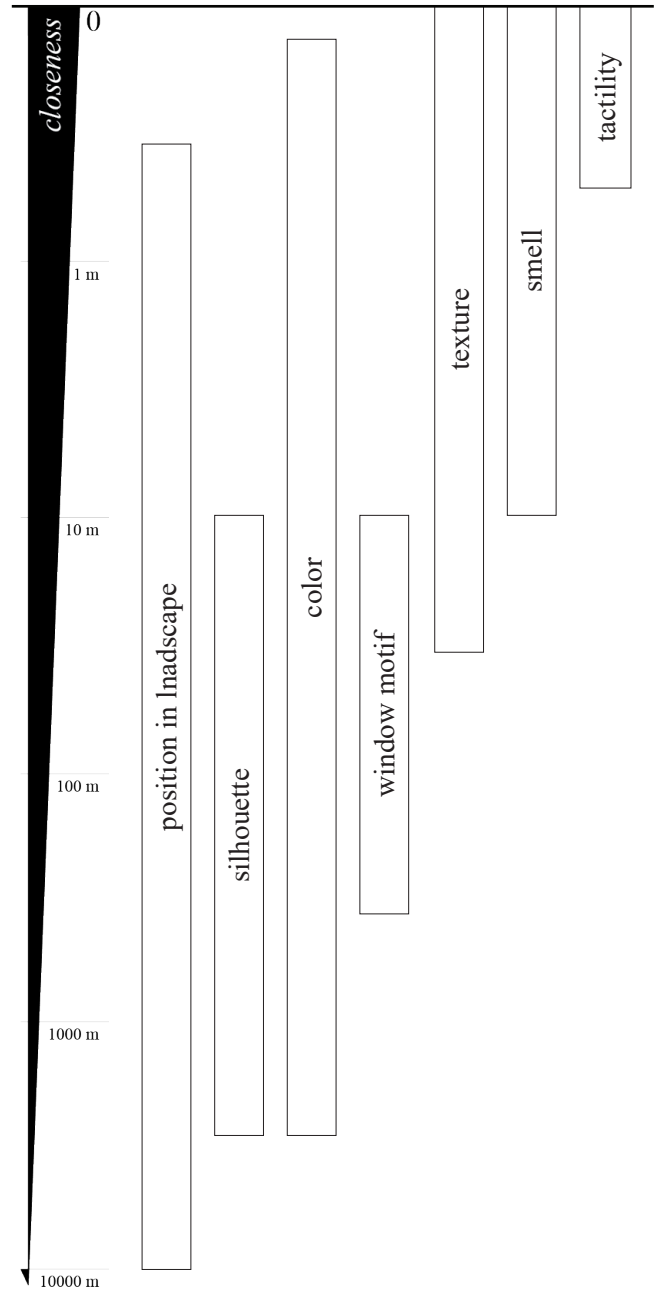
A building is as good as always interpreted and understood in relationship to the human body, or it should barely be identified as architecture.

The aspect of scale that is of interest to my work, is the scales of perception when experiencing architecture. Visually, a building typically has far more layers than just interior and exterior - although this probably is not taken into account by all architects.

Even though the division between interior and exterior is often quite clear, both of these scales unfold into more complex sliding scales of detail, where different architectural attributes will matter in specific spectrums of scale. Some attributes matter only at a specific distance, while others will be present from zero to hundred meters.

The furthest point of the sliding scale of scales, would reasonably be that of *first sight*. and the closest would probably be that of tactility and smell. At first sight, a building is typically interpreted and understood through its relation to the surrounding, be it landscape or the built environment. If first sight takes place 200 meters away, one could assume that most of the deliberate choices within an architectural design will not be relevant at this distance. At 200 meters, all that is typically perceived would be the buildings position in the landscape, size in relation to surrounding buildings, silhouette and finally color, and maybe window motif. Facade texture and material, window partitions and detailing is not only unseen, but completely irrelevant. In turn, the silhouette, motif and the relation to surrounding building may be completely irrelevant at a distance of 20 meters.

Speculative example of a possible distances where attributes of a building may be active:



DEFINING CATEGORIES OF INFLUENCE

PHYSICAL CONTEXT

The attributes of associations to the physical context is signified by the absence of architectural experience needed from the observer. All that is within this category is related strictly to the surrounding environment in one way or another, by contrasting it or embracing it, or striking a pose in reaction to it.

Visual decisions in reaction to the physical context may become culturally conditioned, given enough time and representation - as it is incorporated in the common images in architecture. Take for example the image of a chimney: a strictly technical value, once upon a time - today, an image with strong recognizable value and thus cultural value in Nordic regions.

POSING:

Attributes that are interpreted and understood by projection of human or animal traits. When buildings or parts of buildings express, or implies, movement and direction of volumes, the recognition of some kind of creature is made. These are phenomena found exclusively in live creatures in the natural environment.

EMBRACE/COUNTER NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Reacting to the natural environment, attributes in architecture may embrace or counter what is present alongside the presence of the architectural object. Tree-lines, landscape and textures often provide stuff for architects to base some of their decisions on, whether it is by providing contrast to or homogeneity with it.

EMBRACE/COUNTER BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The immediate built surroundings of an architectural object is not much different from the natural environment in that we may actively choose how to relate to it.

RECOGNIZABLE TYPOLOGIES

The attributes sorted into the category of Cultural Context are those that are understood by the observer as part of a tradition or typology. These attributes have in common that their value is built by associations from any of the building traditions and typologies that make up the experienced built environment. Attributes within this category demands experience. And if the architects intended association is to be achieved, the viewer must share the same specific memory or experience of the reference. This category of attributes demands two things from the observer: the experience of architecture, and the common memory of it.

OFFSET TYPOLOGIES:

Given the above description, we may divide the category into two subcategories - the first one being associations to traditions and typologies which geographical and cultural boundary includes the context of the building in question. The second one is where attributes are associated by traditions and typologies that are offset from the specific site. Take for example a Japanese garden in London, or a New England-styled villa in the Swedish countryside.

TECH

Deliberate visual treatment of attributes that is not culturally recognizable, and not relatable through the surrounding built objects. Visual treatment of technical attributes may become culturally conditioned, given enough time and representation - as it is incorporated in the common images in architecture. Take for example the image of a chimney: a strictly technical value, once upon a time - today, an image with strong recognizability and thus strong cultural value in Nordic regions.

DISCLAIMER

ANTI-ATTRIBUTES

A key to understanding the system presented in my work, is that the mapping itself is only accounting for deliberate visual treatment of architectural attributes. What is not visually deliberate, and thus a practice of culture, is usually decided by factors that are not artistic - namely economical or practical factors.

Nevertheless, economic conditions are typically broader and more persistent than the tides of style and ideology in architecture, and may produce more long lasting cultural imprint, with stronger cultural values by association than products of *deliberate* cultural practices.

Attributes that spring from economy or innovation may not have a place on our map of recognizability to begin with. But as the new attribute is repeated and inevitably represented time and time again, due to the economical condition, the image of the attribute will sooner or later get a place in our perception of architecture and its parts. The new attribute is accepted and finally valued as a part of the visual landscape. And when the attribute finds itself abundant, economically and practically, we may start to mimic the image of it, as it is now dear to us.

ITERATIONS



MODELMAKING

As i have already touched upon in the introduction, the iterations fase of the project was mainly spent on working with exploring appropriation and reference in architecture using a specific site. In the end I settled for the method of modelmaking in scale 1:100, and using the traditional theory of detailing saying that architectural drawings should not contain details that are smaller than 1 mm on paper, which I translated into my modelmaking. What my models contain, though, is something that contemporary architectural models rarely use as of today, namely color and to some extent texture.

Since the site chosen had a maximum viewing distance of 100 meters, the detailing that is percieved is the same as that of the 1:100 drawing. In this sense, the model making became about the *first sight* experience of the given proposal. As I was sketched the framework for the diagram parallel to planning the model making, the diagram gave me a quite clear hint on what matters at the scale of 1:100. I decided that when exploring appropriation and reference on-site, my models will contain all that matters at the given distance: silhouette, motif, window partitions and color.

The three models seen here are miniatures of the buildings at the site, which influence the making of additional models.

INTUITION AND FAMILIES

When the original set of buildings were remade in scale 1:100, I set out to play around with fictional buildings related to the originals in one way or another. As this process took place parallel to that of defining categories for the diagram, the two parts drew ideas from each other. On one hand, I had intuitively designed fictional buildings granting possible insights into the proposed categorization of influence. On the other hand, we had categories of influence in architecture, acting as seeds of thought for ways to relate the fictional model iterations to the existing.

The resulting models spread over most of the categories of influence found in the diagram, being varied in category influence within themselves. Some attributes of the iterations were influenced by the originals in quite literal ways, imitating both color, motif and typological theme. Others were connected to the originals merely by associations in typologies. A warehouse building inspires a silo, or another warehouse. The silo, in turn, gives way for a hangar like building, using the loading door of the warehouse. This iterative process produces families of buildings, sharing attributes and temperaments.



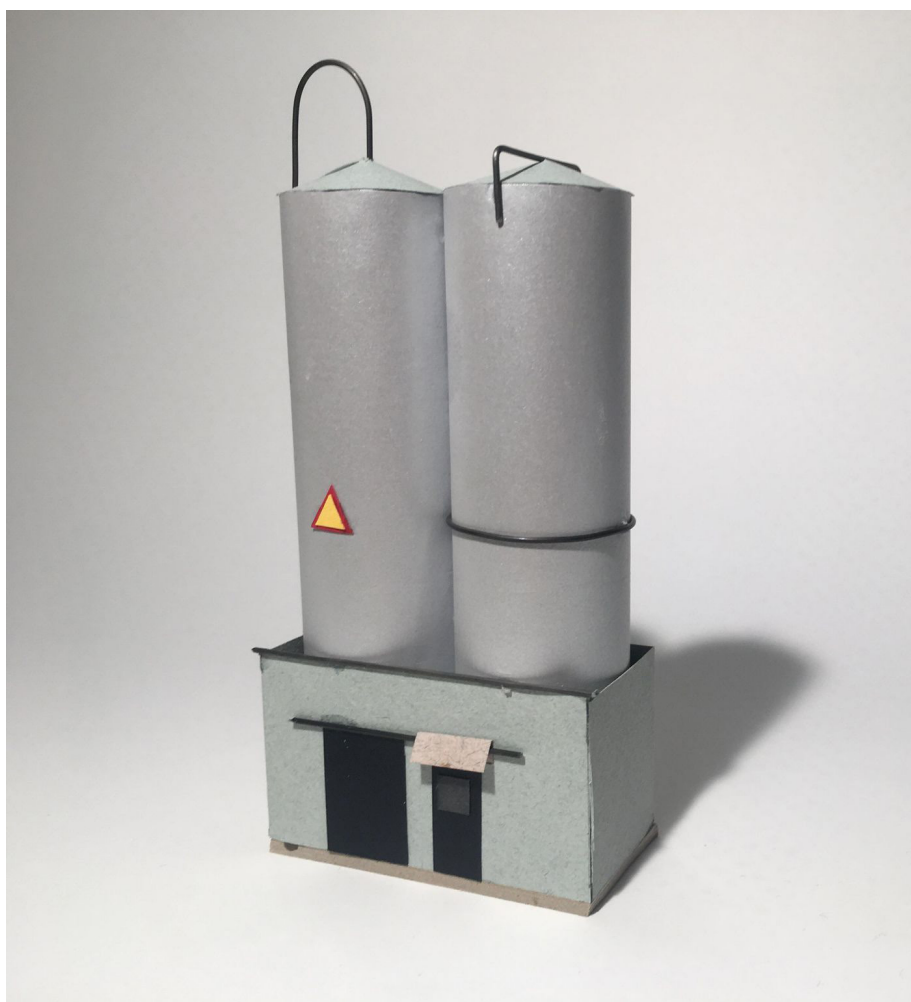






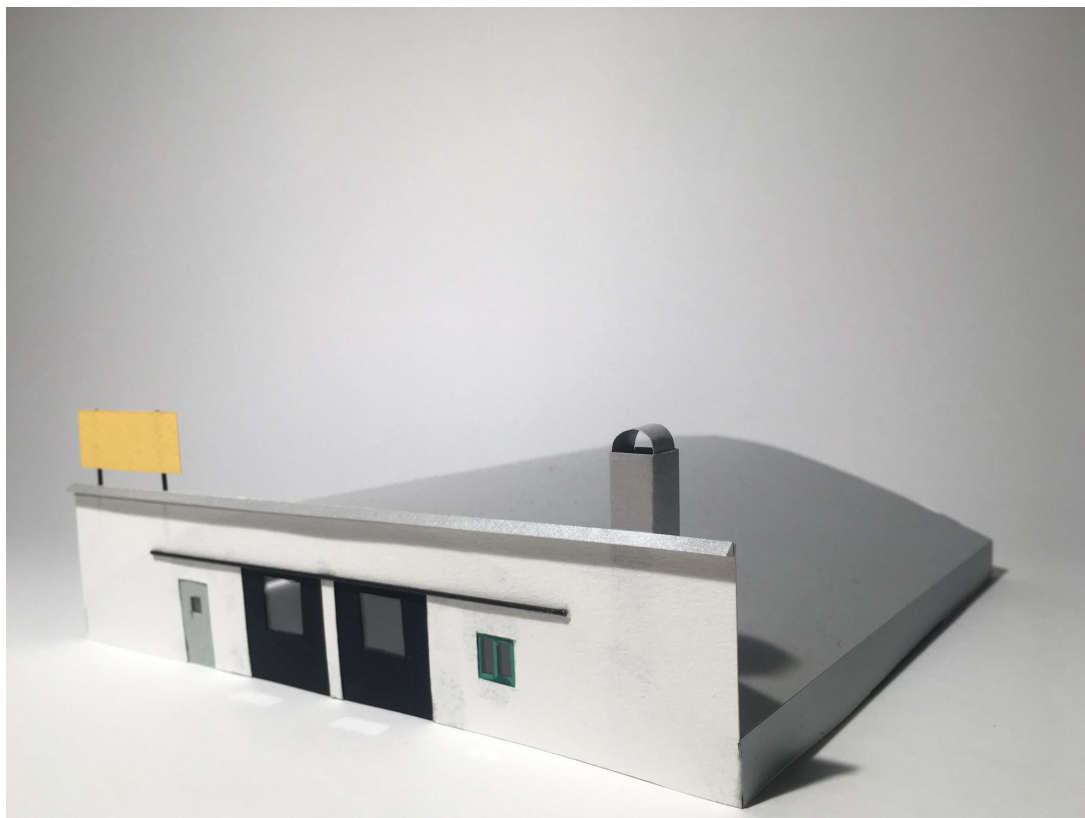
















WRAPPING UP

As the project is coming to an end, one tries to take a step back and overlook the result with a sober perspective, although this may be a bit soon for a judgement of adequate distance.

Either way, it has been a truly rewarding project for me personally. The system of categories ended up quite well informed in my opinion. As a design tool, though, I have trouble imagining a clear purpose. The value of it all is what i noted in the introduction. The diagram introduce a model and a language for talking reference, influence and appropriation in a neutral and non-judgemental way, which is in tune with the cultural condition of architecture today. As an architect struggling with using specific sets of high-prestige architectural canon as reference, I find the model of categorization highly compatible with my personal preference for working with what I like to call *deep reference* and sensitivity to the more generally recognizable typologies of the built environment. Working with the diagram has allowed me to work closely with what actually matters in the visual expression of architecture - which would be how it is percieved and interpreted, and its ability to be understood in a given context. Keeping the diagram close in my thoughts will help me, and whoever decides to take a close look at it, to take control over what informs and influence a design visually and culturally. At the end of the day, it is a tool for orientation in terms that, at first glance, may seem too loose and fluid to really grab and use in a deliberate way. It is a tool in demystifying intuition.