
THE CITY
OF IMAGES

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Fine Arts
2021

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INTRODUCTION

Our cities are currently facing a fundamental change. Not because we build more than ever, but because we are starting to look in new ways. Our perception of the city - the build urban environment - is radically changing. The advanced spin-off of photography, broadly defined as visual technology is invading these perceptions we hold. Visual technology is redefining how we interact with our city. The function of visual technology as a mediator between humans and their realities is mirrored by urban design. Instead of perceiving the functionality of the city, we are focused on the aesthetics of it. The role of the city as an interface for living is obscured by visual technology. The city is being visually exploited by urban design while the functionality of the city is outsourced to visual technology. What does this mean for the city and its design? And what does a new way of perceiving the city entail?

In this thesis I seek to find answers to these questions by connecting the ideas of urban planner Kevin Lynch to Susan Sontag's essays on photography and the philosophy of Vilém Flusser. By comparing them to the concepts introduced in Learning from Las Vegas, I propose a way of interpreting city that allows for the city to change along with our perception. This structure serves as a path which travels along artists whose work I not only find interesting and relevant for this thesis, but to whom I also owe great debt with respect to my own work. On the back of this thesis one finds *The City in Between*. This appendix is a small photographic essay made of a selection of photographic notes taken in major cities in Europe that formed the basis for this thesis.

My art practice is based on site-specific installations of photographs. To see a space under the influence of photographs is equivalent to physically altering that space. I aim to change the perception of the room inhabited by the work through the seemingly simple act of photographing crucial parts of the location. A location stretches far beyond the confines of the walls surrounding a room, rooms and cities are both just constructs that fall within the spectrum of what we define as a space. My works are the consequence of investigating the relation between spatial elements and the impact different representations have on the perception of these elements. Photographs can provide a cubistic way of looking at reality when they are materialized. What intrigues me about installing photographic images is the combination of renderings of other perspectives simultaneous with reality.

Growing up just past the ring road of Utrecht, the city has always been something to look at, to go to, and to discover. To me the city is more so a subject than a home. This shapes my practice as an artist and

is the basis for any work I create. Cities to me are about spatial relations; how does one part connect to the other? I consume cities. When I've seen every part of the city individually, when I've constructed a mental overview of how all parts interrelate, then the city has lost my interest. Paradoxically, the city is too complex to ever personally construct that overview. The city, in my case, is Amsterdam. I have had many years to develop an overview of this city. However, one can never exhaust all the possible ways of looking at any city. I walk through it, bike away from it, I try to find it on the horizon, I compare it to other cities I visit, and I try to define its place in the world as much as a try to define my own place in the city.

This thesis not only discusses how visual technology is influencing perception and therefore urban design, it discusses the theoretical basis for how I want to operate as an artist. Like my work, *The City of Images* is not about the city, nor is it about images, it is about how we perceive the city under the influence of images.

THE COGNITIVE MAP

Align with Reality

The train from Utrecht to Amsterdam Zuid can - depending on your departure time - arrive at one of two sides of the same platform. As a seasoned user of station Zuid, I know it is important to wait at the door of the train if one doesn't want to be trapped in the line for the escalator to the central hall. Despite my love for looking out of train windows, I sacrifice the last part of my journey for the sake of efficiency at the station; and wait in the windowless entry vestibule. The doors open. Confusion overwhelms me. The escalators are not where I expect them to be, buildings are out of place, and I walk against the stream of people. After a few seconds I realize something is awry. I expected my train to terminate at the other side of the platform. But apparently, my orientation differed exactly 180 degrees from reality. I turn around, follow the signs, and slowly my perception of location aligns with the shape of reality again.

To be aware of one's location requires more than just looking around. It is also to be aware of what one cannot see; to put your perceived surroundings in a bigger mental image of space. This image, this map, of spatial reality is highly subjective and does not need to correspond with real space. Such a map, which is "a process composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, stores, recalls, and decodes information about the relative locations in their everyday spatial environment" - is commonly referred to as a cognitive map.[1]

The cognitive map is the internalized reflection and reconstruction of space in thought. It determines our actions in the real world. It is the image we have of the place we inhabit and therefore the basis for all travels we embark on. The most general description of a cognitive map would be: A mental construct to know and use our environment.[2]

A Brief History of the Cognitive Map

The concept of the cognitive map first came about in the late 1940's when Edward Tolman did experiments with rats, as an analogy for humans, in a maze. After numerous attempts to find the exits the rats got to know the maze and knew how to get out faster.[3] Tolman used these results to make the hypothesis that humans construct a map-like representation in their mind which is used to guide their everyday movements. The term only gained broader recognition after more research was conducted in the 1970's. The number of studies on this topic steadily rose in the following decades. In recent years the cognitive map is becoming an increasingly interdisciplinary concept.[4]

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1 R.M. Downs and D. Stea, *Image and Environment: Cognitive Mapping and Spatial Behavior,* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company, 1973) p.1-7.

2 Stephen Kaplan, "Cognitive Maps, Human Needs and the Designed Environment." In *Environmental Design Research* ed. by W. F. E. Preiser (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, 1973) p.63-78.

3 Edward Tolman, "Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men", *The Psychological* Review, 328:1948.

4 Janne Holmén, "Mental Maps: Geographical and Historical Perspectives", *Journal of Autonomy and Security Studies,* 1:2018.

While these studies in the 70's remained rather abstract and focused on the biological and psychological explanations for the phenomenon, researchers in the field of urban design had been studying the same phenomenon with a different, more applied, approach. Instead of cognitive map they called it an environmental image. In the late 1950's Kevin Lynch did a extensive research on how inhabitants of 3 major cities in the USA experienced their city. Unlike Tolman, Lynch was researching subjects that could speak. He conducted interviews with about 30 people per city and analyzed how the respondents spoke about their environment.[5] The analysis of these interviews was a first attempt at formulating how the inhabitants formed an image of the city. Lynch then goes on to lay out a framework and a set of values from which one could construct a comprehensible and imaginable city that could withstand the growth of the new metropoles of the 1960's.

I was particularly intrigued by the section of the book in which Lynch describes how several people from Jersey City mentioned that they often got lost in their own city. The architectural difference was so little that every corner was like the next. One respondent put it like this:

> How I would recognize Fairview Avenue when I come to it? By the street sign. It's the only way you can recognize any street in this city. There's nothing distinctive, just another apartment house, that's all, on the corner.[6]

As a solution to the indistinguishability of the streets, people used street signs, but also other personal landmarks such as little grass triangles or advertisement signs.[7] It always made sense to me that cities with street plans that are as rigid and clear as many of the American cities, are good at accommodating wayfinding. However, it turns out the opposite is true, according to the inhabitants. The sameness that defined Jersey City turned the city into a space that was as hard to navigate as a mirror maze.

Lynch advocates for a city that is more legible, which means that it is made to suit the way people navigate and use the city.[8] It is to say that the city should be built according to 'the language' in which the inhabitants 'read' space. A key finding in his research is that people all have very particular ways of looking at their world, the city (**Fig. 1**). To make a city readable is not the same as making it literal. According to Lynch's research the city should be poetic, open for interpretation, allowing everyone to find their paths freely with personal and collective landmarks. His research was a first step into creating cities that suit the human way of perceiving space.

Perception is Facing New Input

Lynch's research introduces a huge shift in thinking. Thinking about the design of a city shifted from the aim to be functional into aiming for legibility and image-ability. The city is not presented to the inhabitants as something they will have to deal with, the city is designed to make dealing with it easier and more intuitive. The way inhabitants perceive started to inform the design of cities. This new way of thinking also implies that the city was shaped after the way its inhabitants generally perceive.

5 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1960), p.140.
6 Ibid. p.32.
7 Ibid. p.30-32.
8 Ibid. p.3 and p.110-111.

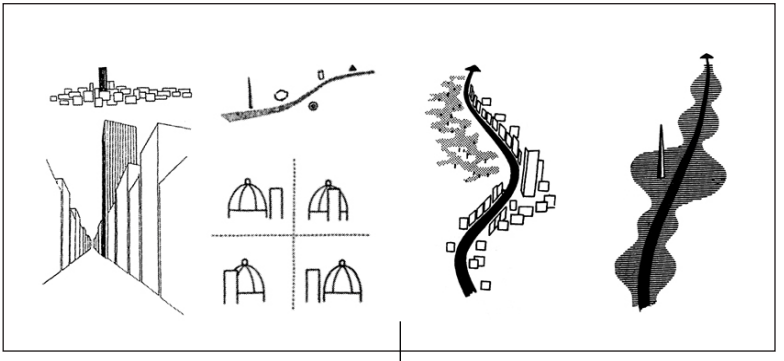
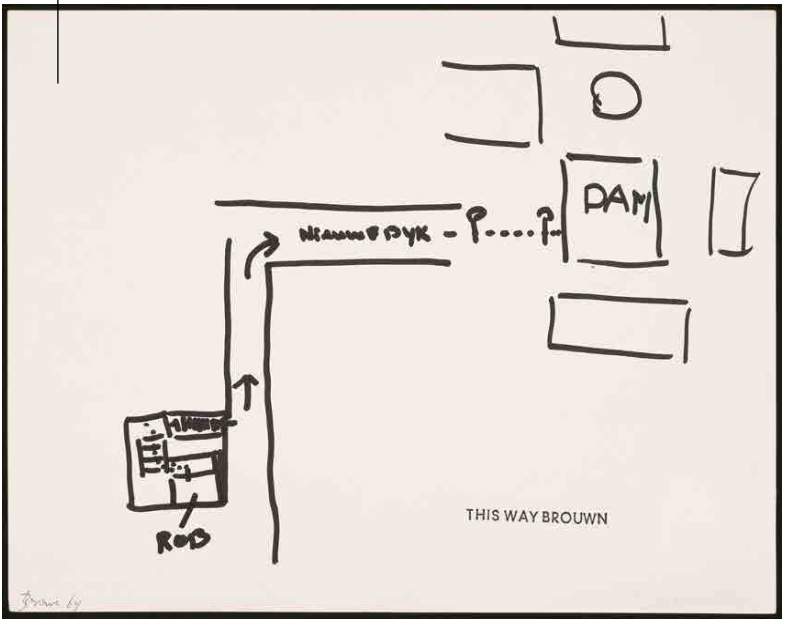


Fig. 1 A selection of drawings from *The Image of the City*, illustrating key concepts from the text.

Fig. 2 *THIS WAY BROUWN*, drawing on paper, stanley brouwn, 1964.



At the time Lynch published his research, stanley brouwn was conducting a very different type of research on the same subject. brouwn was an artist working with the concept of distance. In his work *THIS WAY BROUWN* (**Fig. 2**) he went out onto the streets of Amsterdam with white sheets of paper, slightly larger than A4, and asked anonymous passers-by to draw the directions from their place to some significant landmark in the city. brouwn Later puts a stamp saying 'THIS WAY BROUWN' on the papers and collected them in an artist book. brouwn's work picks up on a the same "image" Lynch is writing about in his research, However, brouwn's concept forced the participants to visualize instead of verbalize their image of the city.

Since the 1960's many new technologies have made their way into our daily lives that make legibility and image-ability easier, and in some cases even redundant. Google Maps and Street View make cities readable even when you are in another city. With the introduction of the smartphone these sources for wayfinding could be taken out onto the streets and in combination with GPS they offer seamless step by step navigation. In the past decades, maps have been made increasingly three dimensional, up to the level that now almost any city in the western world can be visited virtually. The days that navigating through a city was done by following street signs and carefully remembering little spots of grass and shop windows are long gone. Today wayfinding is increasingly becoming informed by visual technologies. Our cognitive maps are not only fed by the design of the city, but also by online imagery that can be recalled at any time on a smartphone or through memory. This will, of course, result in many different new ways of perceiving the city.

The Gradient of Spatial Awareness

To refrain from any generalizations on how 'we' are perceiving the city - or how 'our' perception of the city is slowly changing - I want to describe just how my ways of perceiving the city are informed by visual technologies. Some of these technologies would have been far beyond the imagination at the time of Lynch's research, while others are probably just a bit different or more advanced versions of technologies around at that time.

To travel through a city is one of my favorite activities. The joy comes from a combination of positioning myself and creating a personal map of the city. It requires a good spatial understanding of a city. I have to be somewhat familiar with the place in order to position myself in it. Insufficient understanding of the spatial structure of a city would just make me feel lost. However, some parts must be unknown in order to stay curious. There are few things as nice as discovering a new part of the city that I had been overlooking all the time in my personal map.

Every type of travel through the city has its own character. Walking, running, biking, driving, sailing, by tram, by metro, by train, or flying. All have their own scale, rhythm, view, freedom, motion, and require some time to adapt. Which is why I think it is important not to switch too much between types of movement.

When I go walking, it is for the purpose of being able to stop. I stop for taking a picture, to give a view a bit more time, to navigate carefully, to enter a place of interest. Walking somehow seems like the least usual way of moving through a city because the city provides so many alternative ways of moving. The majority of the

pedestrians are only between ways of transport. Running is for disappearing. While running my movement and presence in the city is a side effect of the activity. I am in it, but not acknowledged in the same way as a pedestrian. I bike to scan. I drive to carry. I sail to look up. I take the tram because I am lazy and the metro because I want to imagine. The train is for flying. And flying is for overview.

I could write much more about what I like about each way of moving through the city, but it is far more important what happens while moving. The beautiful thing about moving is that it requires little from the mind, which leaves space for thought. I move through a city with a certain level of awareness of my surroundings. To outline this gradient of spatial awareness I would like to define its two extremes.

On the one end of the spectrum I am completely unaware of my surroundings. I think of perceiving the city as a mental activity, which means that if I'm not required to think about the shape of the city, I also don't have to consciously perceive it. It often happens when I'm on the tram, in a taxi, or biking regular routes. The navigation has turned into an almost subconscious habit or it is done for me, by a driver. Sometimes I even forget where I was going, because I got distracted by a podcast or reading a book, which means I need to orient myself again on arrival. Whenever I'm using a navigation app that dictates my route in a car or on my bike I forget about my place and only try to figure out how to interpret the directions given. In all these examples, the act of wayfinding is basically non-existent. The movement stitches one place to another, and by not perceiving the space in between, I would argue that it is perceptually eliminated. Meaning that I also have no image of that space, except for the gap it forms in my cognitive map.

The other end of the gradient is when I am highly aware of where I am and what lies beyond what I can see. This means that this awareness is not necessarily dependent on vision. A trip with the metro can be particularly exciting, as it requires to completely imagine by myself what is situated above. When I'm biking through the city, what I see overlaps with satellite images I have seen on the internet, with memories of streets that I know are just one block away, with sights I had from high buildings, and with the appearing of a skyscraper on the horizon. This visual information has shaped my cognitive map. I think the awareness of the space of the city is also the act of trying to perfect that 3D map. I'm continually comparing my image of the city with what I see in front of me. I often notice that what I see is merging with the visual effect Google Maps generates at the transition between Maps and Street View; a seamless switch between bird's-eye view and my own perspective on the city.

Whenever I'm on the more aware part of this spectrum I notice how much my observations confirm what I have seen before in images. It seems as if memories of other images dictate my gaze. Especially photographic images seem to have this power. I think it is because photographs render the world so similar to how my brain does it. This is not to say that the perspective is the same. It is especially because the perspective in photographs is different from my own that they inform my view on my surroundings. To see, for example, a couple of buildings on the street from a pedestrian perspective is one thing, but combined with photographs from a very zoomed in perspective of a satellite, some drone footage I came across a week ago, and the photographs of a recently completed penthouse on the other side of the street, it makes the perception of these buildings a completely different experience.

The visual information from the images falls into place in the cognitive map when I visit the actual place. Like when I see some installation view photos from an exhibition, and later on visit the exhibition. By visiting, the scenes in the images connect on a spatial level. This also means that I would have experienced that exhibition differently if I had not seen the pictures before, and probably that I would remember the exhibition slightly different if I had seen the images afterwards. I think it is safe to say that the image and the perception of what is depicted influence each other. Besides, the things I saw before in the images do seem more important than what I am adding by looking myself, similar to recognizing someone you know among the many strangers on the street. Photography and perception interrelate. Connecting this to perception and its function to experience reality, it is to say that the photographic image has the power to distort the experience of reality.

Photographs and other visual information are slowly infusing my cognitive map with information and importance from beyond my perception. This consequently means that my perception of reality is changing because of visual technologies. Our cognitive maps are fueling urban design, and our cognitive maps are fueled by how we perceive reality, which means urban design changes as our way of perceiving changes. This means that our new ways of perceiving create new ways of urban design. We are physically reshaping our environment by looking at it in new ways. Photography does not only shape our perception of the city; it eventually shapes the city itself. Before I try to elaborate on the effects this could have and might have had on urban design, I want to elaborate on the background of photography and visual technology by discussing some artists, philosophers, and writers in the next chapter.

II THE POWER OF VISUAL TECHNOLOGY

Distortion through Photography

I want to connect the empiric origins of urban design the to distortion of experience by photography. To say the photographic image has the power to modify the experience of reality is to say that the photographic image has the power to transform urban design. To express more clearly why I think this relation between photography and urban design exists, I want to distil some of the mechanisms mentioned by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*. Sontag was an American writer who, among many other subjects, wrote some essays on photography as a result of her obsession with it. The fascinating observations in her essays indicate the forces inflicted upon perception and consequently experience by photography.

According to Sontag "photography supplies (...) not only a record of the past but a new way of dealing with the present."[9] We do not see through photographs; it is photography that shapes our way of looking. Subjects that are photographed are given importance over the subjects that are not. What is photographed is seen as more important or greater than what is outside the frame; "the camera's rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses."[10] When something is photographed it suggests the evidence that someone found the subject depicted worthy of being complemented with an image. By giving importance to ordinary parts of the urban fabric, Photography could turn these parts into landmarks. The Beatles for example turned the zebra crossing at Abbey Road in London into a photographically made landmark by using it as their album cover. According to Kevin Lynch's study the more familiar people become with a city, the more they rely on landmarks for their wayfinding.[11] Landmarks in such systems of wayfinding are a visual indication of a place, which can vary from any urban detail such as doorknobs to major topographic features like mountains outside the city.[12]

The details specific for a certain city district can operate as indicators of what part of a city you are in.[13] Seeing certain types of ornaments in the city can make clear in what part of the city you are. Hans van der Meer is a Dutch photographer specialized in documentary photography. In his photo book *The Netherlands - Off the Shelf* (**Fig. 3**) Van der Meer shows pictures of commercial centers he took in towns that are close to big cities. At the end of the book is a catalogue attached that shows a collection of street furniture.[14] It is commenting on the bizarre sameness in these parts of the Netherlands, but more

9 Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977), p.10.
10 Ibid. p.23 and p.28.
11 Lynch, *The Image of the City*, p.78.
12 Ibid. p.48.
13 Ibid. p.68.
14 Hans van der Meer, *The Netherlands - Off the Shelve*, (Edam: YdocFoundation, 2015)

Fig. 3 The exhibition version of T*he Netherlands – Off the Shelf* at Les Rencontres Arles Photographie, 2014.

Fig. 4 *Elsewhere*, video projection, Tania Ruiz Gutiérrez, 2010.

importantly it provides a new way of looking through the book. Once the photos of the street furniture in the catalogue are seen, the ornaments keep popping up throughout the book. By putting a focus on things that are commonplace in certain parts of a larger city area he turned ordinary street furniture into archetypical landmarks for such places. Seeing such street furniture becomes similar to seeing a celebrity, the importance that is given to them through the photographic image makes that you recognize them in your real experience.

Inserting New Realities

In Malmö, Sweden, Tania Ruiz Gutiérrez created the monumental video installation *Elsewhere* (**Fig. 4**). In 2010 the central station of Malmö was extended with a tunnel to connect Malmö by train with Copenhagen. While the initial design had daylight wells fitted in the tunnel, they did not make it to the final design. The artist found that the station was in desperate need of windows and decided to project views that seem to be from train windows on the walls opposite of the platform. Every window shows a completely different place in the world, and the scenes rotate in random order. Standing on the platform one can see scenes from all over the world, landscapes and cities, slowly passing by as they wait for their own travel.[15] For a brief moment they are displaced, being in multiple places at the same time. Places from all over the world penetrate in the tunnel in Malmö, providing the commuters with a spectacular amount visual information of places they might never perceive firsthand. In all their similarity photographs supply us with a view on things beyond our perception, with which we can fill our mental maps.

Photographs are not just an interpretation of reality but are - due to the photographic process - also physically rooted in reality. Sontag reasons that photography allows us to take in information in our experience without experiencing it ourselves. Photography can therefore be used to create vast information systems that are ultimately traced back to reality and, more importantly, are an immense source of information for those who look at the pictures. Or as Sontag puts it: “people know a great deal of the world through photographic images.”[16] Photographic images give information of things beyond our perception, expanding in effect our experience and mental images.[17]

By now, our view on reality (how it happened, what it looked like) has become so dependent on photography, that it needs to be photographed (and reproduced) to become real.[18] A very clear example is how newspapers present a view on reality with the photographs they publish. By believing the newspapers a reality is created beyond one’s reception, which is also a reality that can never go beyond the photograph. In order to become real, it has to be photographed. However, photography cannot give access to reality, only to images.[19]

The work of Thomas Demand (**Fig. 5 and 6**) provides an interesting take on this principle that extends even further. Demand creates life-size cardboard sets of

15 Karen O’Rourke, *Walking and Mapping*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), p.172-174.
16 Sontag, *On Photography*, p.168.
17 Ibid. p.165-167, (more specific, p.165: “it is not reality that photographs make immediately accessible, but images”. p.167: “the photograps being taken now transform what is present into a mental image”).
18 Ibid. p.120-121.
19 Ibid. p.165.

Fig. 5 *Büro*, photograph, 184 cm by 244 cm, Thomas Demand, 1995.

Fig. 6 Exhibition view of *HOUSE OF CARD,* an exhibition at M – Museum Leuven, by Thomas Demand. photograph by M – Museum Leuven.

crime scenes that appeared in the media. He photographs his set to recreate the image he started with and then destroys the whole set. The photo is then printed on a mural scale, as opposed to the scale images normally have in the media. His cardboard sets only exist within photographs, however, that means they are as real as anything else that is communicated through visual technology. The meaning of photographing something expands far beyond the photograph itself. To say that Demand's work is a wall size photograph, would do great injustice to his practice.

The Photography Apparatus

The photographic image is one of many visual technologies that shape our image reality. To understand better why a photograph is capable of such interference I want to take a look at *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* by Vilém Flusser. In this series of essays, he talks about the technical image, a type of image of which a photograph is just an example. Technical images are output of a machine, opposed to traditional images that are output of a human being. All photographs are technical images, however, not all technical images are photographs. While the photograph is perhaps one of the clearest examples of a technical image, it is explicitly a very narrow interpretation of a technical image. Technical images "are a final link in a causal chain that connects them without interruption to their significance", meaning that they are "just like fingerprints" directly connected to what they symbolize.[20] Any image that is created by human technology, but without interference of a human within the structure of the technology, can therefore be considered a technical image.

The fact that a technology creates technical images, however primitive the technology may be, creates the illusion that the result is objective. A machine is trustworthy because it has no intentions by itself, but if we take the maker of the machine into account it seems far less trustworthy. A camera is not made to make people look more beautiful, but some lenses are flattering. The structures that are beyond the machine are therefore a part of the machine, consequently they should be considered beyond just their output.

Sontag hints at this in her last essay. According to her a photograph can, unlike traditional images, be seen as "an extension of its subject" and can be used as "a potent means of (…) gaining control over it." She goes on to say that by acquiring the subject, photography makes that subject "Part of a system of information", hence the use of photography in fields ranging from art history to military reconnaissance. Through photography these professions (and all users of a camera) try to gain control over the subject.[21]

Flusser's thinking goes beyond the reasoning for the powers of the technical images (e.g. photographs) on reality. Photography is not an act, photography isn't making photographs, nor is it showing photographs to others. Photography is the name for an apparatus that includes all these aspects of photography and more. Apparatus as defined by Flusser is "a plaything or game that simulates thought; An overarching term for a non-human agency; organization or system that enables

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20 Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews, (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p.14

21 Sontag, *On Photography*, p.156.

something to function."[22] It is "therefore appropriate to call photographers functionaries."[23] The photographer participates in the photography apparatus and is therefore limited by the possible outcomes of it. In other words, the photographer can only discover that what was already in potential in the apparatus of photography. A photograph, or any technical image, can therefore never escape its apparatus, but instead only reinforce it.

A Functionary of Photography

As consumers of photographs trough visual technology, we are all interacting with the photography apparatus. If one participates, one becomes absorbed by the apparatus, one becomes a function of it. To illustrate the power of the photography apparatus I would like to quote a line from the movie *Alice in the Cities* (**Fig. 7**). This road movie by the German director and photographer Wim Wenders seem to me like a perfect example of how a human life can literally become a function of the photography apparatus.

First, there is the setting in which the movie starts. The German photographer Philip Winter is in the United States to make an article about the USA. He takes polaroid after polaroid of the empty countryside. However, it is clear that for him this is not about the USA, but about himself, he is obsessed with taking Polaroid pictures:

> I could hardly wait to compare the picture with reality. But comparing them wouldn't reassure me either. As the still images were always overtaken by reality, I photographed even more obsessively.[24]

Secondly there is the main narrative of the movie that takes Philip Winter and a little girl, Alice, through the Ruhr area in Western Germany looking for the home of the grandparents of Alice. All they have is a photograph of the house and Philip's knowledge of the region. For days they drive through the Ruhr area to find the house, asking passers-by with their picture as a guide, looking for the house. The photograph dictates how they navigate through the cities along the Rhine, the types of buildings they look at, and where they end up. On another level they are using the photograph as a window into reality, they only have the photograph to verify the correct outcome of their search.

Both parts of the movie show what Flusser sees as "the magical fascination of technical images", which he puts as: "The way in which they put a magic spell on life, the way in which we experience, know, evaluate and act as a function of these images."[25] Wenders Shows people under the spell of the technical image, as functionaries of the photography apparatus.

Ubiquitous Visual Technology

Today, a story like *Alice in the cities* would be near impossible. Photographs were still printed and had to be physically distributed, while the contemporary

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22 Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, p.83.
23 Ibid. p.27.
24 Wim Wenders, *Alice in the Cities*, (Berlin: Filmverlag der Autoren, 1974)
25 Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, p.16.

Fig. 7 Film-still from *Alice in the cities,* Wim Wenders, 1974. Philip and Alice comparing the house in the photo with the real building.

life of photographs is for the largest part digital and the possibilities for making technical images has been expanded massively by computer technology. The creation of technical images is increasingly becoming more automated and how we reach and see these images is changing rapidly. 3D scans of the city are becoming the basis for architectural firms on how their designs function in their contexts; but also determine legislation by municipalities on for example the access of daylight and zoning of functions. These digital models have unprecedented precision and connectivity with other systems of information, creating an image of reality that is increasingly more complex, however paradoxical that may seem in the light of the simplifying and explanatory origin of the image.

Even more transformative is how these technical images are accessed and used. Powerful computers like our phones with interactive software and hardware for interaction like touchscreens and motion sensors provide the ability to go beyond the traditional surface on which a photograph exists. The framed view provided by photographs is slowly transforming into a frameless version. With the introduction of 3D scans, and 3D interactive tools technical images are turning visual technology into a source of information that seemingly is looking and behaving evermore like the experience of perception.[26] Through its scientific credibility the visual technology apparatus is having an substantial impact on how we perceive and interpret reality.

Now, I would like to finish this line of thinking by examining an excerpt from Lewis Carrol's *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*:

> "What a useful thing a pocket-map is!" I remarked.
>
> "That's another thing we've learned from your Nation," said Mein Herr, "map-making. But we've carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?"
>
> "About six inches to the mile."
>
> "Only six inches!" exclaimed Mein Herr."We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!"
>
> "Have you used it much?" I enquired.
>
> "It has never been spread out, yet," said Mein Herr: "the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well."[27]

At first glance this excerpt turns the map described in it rather pointless. However, when taken literally it describes a fundamental change in thinking about the land. Before the map got spread out over the country, reality was signified by a map, now reality is signifying the map. Instead of looking at the map to see the

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26 Thomas Elsaesser, "The "Return" of 3-D: On Some of the Logics and Genealogies of the Image in the Twenty-First Century 3-D", *Critical Inquiry, 39:2013,* p.228-233.

27 Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded,* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1893), p.93

world, people now look at the world and see the map. For this reason, Photographs are, Like the map in this story, ubiquitous.[28] We cannot escape photographs as our reality seems to be made up of them. What happened with the map in the story, is what visual technology is doing to the city. The primary function of a city is changing from being an interface to being a spectacle.

Since perception became pivotal for urban design, our ways of perceiving have been shaping our environments. However, as illustrated, our ways of perceiving are not static; visual technology is becoming an increasingly powerful force on perception due to its unrestrained and intrusive growth into our vision. Urban design can't stay behind, and so its origin in perceptual adherence is forcing it to reshape the results, the cities. To visualize the city is to change it, all we need to do is decide how to use that power.

In the next chapter I will propose a way of looking at the city that can indicate to what extent a change in perception can change urban structure and design. Furthermore, I want to explore the effects of the technical image expanding beyond its physical and digital presence, as an illustration of the effect the visual technology apparatus has on urban design.

28 Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, p.40.

III THE CITY AS INHERITED INTERFACE

The Rear-View Mirror

In 1966 Ed Ruscha photographed every building on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles in his book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (**Fig.8**). The photographs were taken rectilinear to the façade, or the "no style" format, as Ruscha calls it and from a driving truck. In the book the photos were combined to create a collage that showed a picture of every building on both sides of the street with the street address below every door. They were printed in black and white in a 7.5-meter long leporello. Ruscha referred to Los Angeles as "the ultimate card-board cut out town."[29] When folded out the book provides an overview beyond human perception of the strip. However, it shows just the façades of the buildings and merely peeks into all streets that cross the Sunset Strip, the space behind this superficial layer cannot be seen.

I disagree with Ruscha that the photographs in his book have a "no style" format, on the contrary, I would argue they refer to forensic and architectural imagery. It therefore did not surprise me when Adriaan Geuze, a renowned landscape architect and descendant of a dyke keeper, made a collage in a similar way. In a Dutch television show Geuze made a case for the protection of the Dutch polder landscape surrounding the highways between the four big cities of the Netherlands. Governmental regulations aimed at attracting logistic companies turned both sides of the highway into favorable locations for big warehouses. This new type of ribbon development creates the illusion that the major cities in the Netherlands are situated somewhere in an ocean of grey boxes. The buildings surrounding transport corridors transform our image of the land they cross. As these buildings obscure the landscape they are in, they literally set the scene. Geuze argues that these places of transition and their architectural sprawl are as important as the cities they are preceding.[30]

To give an example of what he was talking about he photographed a 600-meter section of a highway near The Hague. Limited by space he had to find another way to photograph the whole section. His solution was to create a collage of photographs (**Fig. 9**) taken at different points along the section of the highway. The source for this kind of imagery is to be found in his background as a landscape architect. Horizontal urban design is his profession and the imagery he sees on a daily basis must be of architectural nature. All pictures were photographed on a right angle with the highway, showing their facades without perspective distortion, very much like a technical drawing. The sky and the grass are only in the image to give the buildings their location and context.

Besides the architectural origin of the perspective provided by Geuze, there-presentation by collage is also very different from how it is normally experienced:

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29 Edward Ruscha, *Leave any information at the signal,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), p.244.

30 Peter van Ingen, "Zomergasten: Adriaan Geuze", *Zomergasten,* VPRO, Hilversum, NPO2, Aug. 16, 2015.

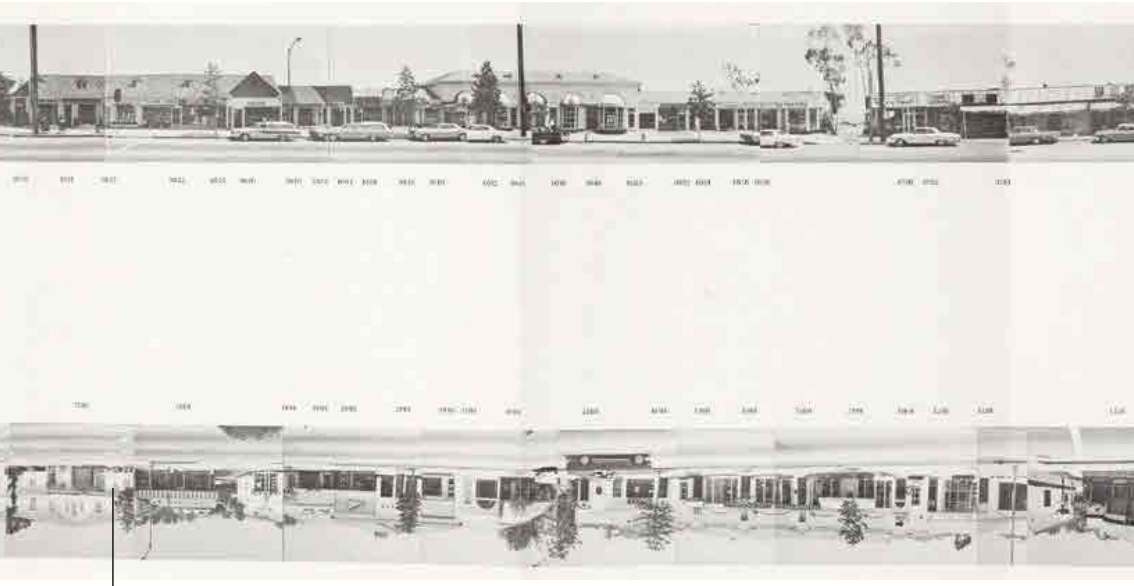

Fig. 8 *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (detail), Leporello, offset print, Ed Ruscha, 1966.

Fig. 9 Still from *Zomergasten*, Adriaan Geuze discusses his collage in the TV studio.

in a car on the highway. However, we all accept it as a method to represent the buildings along this part of the highway, which brings us back to why Geuze made this collage in the first place: to illustrate a phenomenon in urban design. Moreover, his motive with taking and showing the pictures was not only to illustrate the phenomenon, but to change urban design. The architect became a functionary of the photographic apparatus by using a photograph to change what is photographed. It is the very profession of architects and urban designers to change our cities, and they are, like all of us informed by visual technology.

Learning from Las Vegas

To see the potential power of visual technology on urban design I want to look at another moment in time when our perception of the city was radically changed. The research on cognitive maps, their function, and ways to use them happening in the 1960's coincided with an evolution of the American landscape. Cars became the dominant way of transport. Speeds increased and distances became smaller in their experience. This had an immense effect on the cognitive maps of people. The change in perception of the city from sidewalk to highway was an increase of speed by 15 times. As the experience of the city changed, so did the city. Within years a completely new way of urban structure came about, a structure that turned out to cooperate with the way people design their cognitive maps.

In *Learning from Las Vegas* By Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour conducted an elaborate investigation into the urban design of the commercial strip of Las Vegas. They describe a city very alien from a traditional city. The buildings in this city are no longer what they seem. There is no meaning to be gotten from the building's structure, it is a shed that provides the space for the function that inhabits the building. On the outside there is a sign that indicates the function of the shed. The signs are big, to be seen by the cars passing by from miles away. Las Vegas is built for humans in cars, and the design fits that. The city has adjusted its shape for the speeds of cars and gave a symbol to every building you are passing.[31]

Las Vegas designed as an interface for its functions in space. When passing by a supermarket, one cannot see the products on the shelves. The building, or shed, could be a bowling alley or a factory going from its looks. It is the sign on the outside that gives meaning to an urban reality that cannot be understood without it. Nothing but the sign gives meaning to the place.

The cognitive map is used by the urban structure of Las Vegas to create a world of symbols. Nothing is really what it says it is. Everything is saying what it should be interpreted as through signs, while everything is completely anonymous in its actual shape. Of course, this works. It is easier to read through symbols than to find out what the function of a place is by investigating thoroughly from the outside or entering. Like computers, of which many people don't know how to interpret the code language; everybody can use a computer because designers made software for it. The software gives quick meaning to an otherwise meaningless world through symbols. The real world is covered by

31 Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972) p.90.

something that gives instant meaning. This also means that the world beyond that mediator of software is not necessarily understandable anymore. This world is dismissed of its duty to provide meaning, because it will anyways be covered with a layer that can be understood.

We do not need to examine something anymore to know what to do with it. The cover tells us straight away how to deal with the thing in front of us. However, this does not mean that we have a full understanding of it.[32] To have the right amount of understanding of the world in order to deal with it, but to not be overwhelmed by its complexity has always be the function of the cognitive map.

The most interesting part of Learning From Las Vegas, however, is that it is a retroactive manifest. It is an analysis of vernacular architecture, where in modernist times the manifest would be made before anything was made yet instead. It seems like the hotel owners and investors in Las Vegas were not aware of creating an interface for their businesses, they were just trying to be very clear in their role on the strip. It must have been only natural to put up a big sign or symbol. It is almost like a symptom of the way people were interacting with the urban structure of Las Vegas.[33]

By investigating the interface, Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour were able to construct the structure behind it. The structure of Las Vegas lays beyond normal perception. It took months of research, clarifying the logic of the structure that the regular Las Vegas visitor would have a hard time uncovering, while using it simultaneously. These visitors will instead take the easiest way to read the city around them. Las Vegas gave them exactly that: a world that tells you what it is without having to find it out yourself.

The city has become a life size interface, a symbolic simulation of what is going behind the facades. Las Vegas turned a mental interface, a cognitive map, into a physical version and by doing so it created a new physical reality. Las Vegas is hardware that looks like software. Las Vegas is an externalized cognitive map. Now, precisely like the photographs of Philip Winter in *Alice in the cities*, this new city of symbols is immediately taken over by reality, creating again the need for its inhabitants to make a cognitive map for it. This process is a loop obscuring the original city into oblivion. The cities we live in are inherited interfaces that the current inhibitors change into an ever more interpreted version.

An Inherited Interface

Where Las Vegas's revolution was facilitated by the sudden increase of mobility, the contemporary city is facing the opposite. Horizontal mobility was the catalysator for suburban development but is now becoming the bottleneck. The response is to look for possibilities for expansion within the confines of the existing city. Amsterdam has seen her entire historic center turn into a fully gentrified neighborhood that uses the rudimentary monumental façades as a fashionable fur coat. Next up was the industrial belt surrounding the centers. Since those areas are being devoured by restaurants and artists, the last frontier of urban renewal and densification is again the suburb.

32 Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography,* p.27-28.
33 Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, p.9.

Fig. 10a Bijlmermeer flats surrounded with new developments. Image from Apple Maps, TomTom.

Fig. 10b The flats lining the new dwellings. Image from Google Street View.

In the 1960's Amsterdam was the site of one of the most rigorous modernist social housing projects. The Bijlmermeer (**Fig. 10a-b**), as this project was called, would house 100.000 people at the edge of the city in 9 story high apartment buildings that would be subordinate to a park landscape at ground level. Like many projects of its kind, the decline of the Bijlmermeer's image became almost inextricably linked to its architecture. The modernist hexagonal architecture now represents all that went wrong with social housing in the Netherlands.[34]

In the 90's plans were made to improve livability in the Dutch Pruitt-Igoe. 70% of the apartment buildings were destroyed, leaving only a small part standing, called the 'Bijlmer Museum'. Standing in the middle of this part of the neighborhood it is as if nothing changed, however, behind the flats a completely new, typically Dutch early 21st century, neighborhood has replaced the radical design. The history of the neighborhood has been reduced to the looks of it, and only in one spot. The buildings that are left serve as walls between a past and a reality. One side of their façade is a symbol for Amsterdam's social housing history, the other side hides the original context of the buildings for its neighbors. It was made in a way to show its function and history.

We find ourselves in cities that are desperate to find space in land that is already urbanized. Which brings us back to the loop of the city slowly being obscured by new interpretations of itself. We are inheriting an interface for living that is estranged from our new and everchanging ways of living.

The Spectacle

The new cityscapes that were created in the United States were quickly imported to Europe. In Jacques Tati's *Play Time* the Americans literally invade Europe, not only as tourists, but they also spread their architecture and manners. The movie is situated in Paris, however, only reflections of the famous landmarks are indicators of this location as every building seems to be replaced by a glass international style building. The set could be seen as the movies main character, we as viewers only happen to witness the lives that are happening in it. We become the voyeurs that view Tati's satire on the international style through wide-angle shots. By rarely focusing on a single person. Every actor in *Play Time* (**Fig. 11**), Including Tati himself, is reduced to an extra.[35] They are anonymous and observed at the same time. The city is the spectacle.

During the past 60 years, the set has turned into reality at La Défense. The Parisian business district now has the highest number of steel and glass buildings in all of Europe.[36] Tati's shiny dystopia became our daily décor. In the decade after the movie was released mirroring glass facades became the face of corporate architecture.[37]

While the reflective buildings are made of radically different material as their surroundings they appear to blend in and by doing so they become almost

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34 Katie Mingle, "Bijlmer (City of the Future, Part 1)", *99% invisible* (Oakland, CA: Radiotopia), Feb. 20, 2018.
35 Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Tati's Democrac: an Interview and Introduction", *Film Comment*, 57:1973.
36 Pierre-Yves Guice, *Key* figures, Paris La Defense.
37 Martin Reinhold, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again,* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p.103.

Fig. 11 Film-stills from *Playtime*, Jacques Tati, 1967. Tati blending in with the extras, and landmarks reflecting in the glass.

invisible. From the inside the corporations can watch what is happening in the cities around them without being seen. The one-way mirroring glass facades provide a voyeur's perspective for those inside, much like the cinema visitors are provided with while watching *Play Time*.

Dan Graham plays with these positions of the voyeur and the observed in his pavilions (**Fig. 12 and 13**). With mirroring glass surfaces he creates reflective labyrinths that get activated once visitors walk in. Their reflections and perceptions of other visitors blend into each other obscuring their sense of reality as every turn creates a new view on the relation between the visitors and their surroundings. He turns the corporate architecture with mirroring facades into a world that invites to play, to move around and let the reflections play with your vision. The visitors are led by the work, as if it was a dance dictated by the act of looking. Like Tati's movie, Graham's pavilions ultimately are an investigation into the way architectural spaces affect human behavior.

The origin of Graham's pavilions is found in Renaissance gardens. His interest in landscape architecture lead him into researching their function as museums before there even was any. They invite people to wander around in the geometrical gardens, or the extensive labyrinths while being surrounded with extravagant sculptures. This of course connects very well to the way documenta is set up, but also hints at later developments of pavilion-based exhibitions like the Venice biennale. He sees his pavilions as a combination between the Barcelona pavilion by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and glass street furniture like phone booths and bus shelters.[38]

Graham took inspiration from the streets. As he Passed by the reflective objects in daily life and was fascinated by the alienating perspective their reflections offer at his surroundings, he was inspired to make artworks. The city is a spectacle to those who decide to look at it. Public space functions as an inspiration for many artists because of its effect on human behavior.

Another artist using architectural interventions to reshape human behavior was Constant. He spent a lifetime making designs for a habitable structure called *New Babylon* (**Fig. 14 and 15**). While none of his plans were ever directly realized, the ideas present in the designs did resonate in many urban developments in the 60's and 70's. The maquettes and drawings he made were plans for a structure that would span the world. Despite this connecting aspect of the design, the building is not designed to increase mobility in an absolute sense. Instead, he designed the public spaces in this new elevated world in a way that would invite for play, for wandering, much like a labyrinth. The inhabitants would be forced to move slow, always on the verge of roaming into new territory, in line with philosophy of psycho-geography.[39]

Constant based this new type of living, this new creature, on the Homo Ludens, the playing man, a term which later on Vilém Flusser used to describe the functionary within photography:

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38 Christian Lund, Dan Graham Recreating Childhood Desires, *Louisiana Channel*, Humlebæk, Oct. 25, 2015.
39 Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critigue of Urban Geography", Trans. Ken Knabb, originally appeared in: *Les Lèvres Nues*, 6:1955.

Fig. 12 *Neo-Baroque Walkway*, 2-way mirror, stainless steel, powder coated steel plates, Dan Graham, 2019.

Fig. 13 *Hedge Two-Way Mirror Walk-about*, 2-way mirror, stainless steel, shrubs, synthetic grass, Dan Graham, 2014.

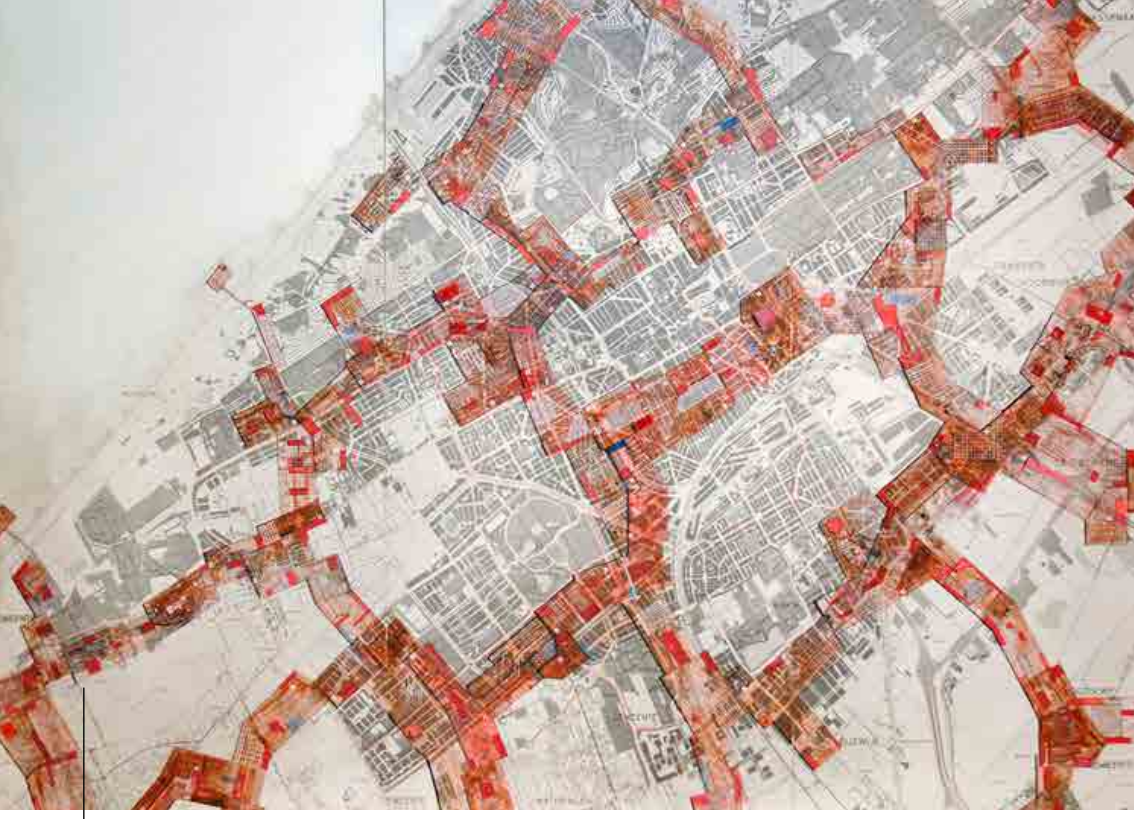

Fig. 14 *New Babylon Den Haag,* watercolor on photographic paper on city map on chipboard, 220 cm by 280 cm, Constant, 1964.

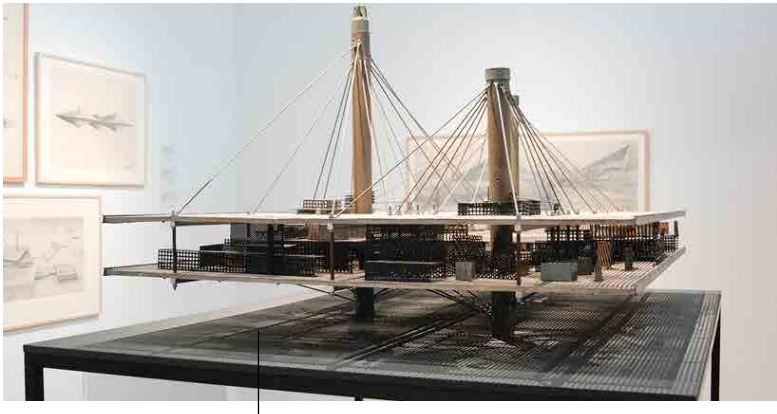

Fig. 15 *Hanging Sector, aluminum*, copper, iron, oil paint, steel, 76,0 cm by 130,1 cm by 99,0 cm, Constant, 1966.

> Such activity can be compared to playing chess. Chess-players too pursue new possibilities in the program of chess, new moves. Just as they play with chess-pieces, photographers play with the camera. The camera is not a tool but a plaything, and a photographer is not a worker but a player: not *Homo faber* but *Homo ludens*.[40]

Perhaps *Play Time* was the general repetition. Tati seems continually lost in a world that's either brand new or barely completed, but instead of trying to change it, he plays along. The behavior of all people in the movie becomes displaced and - due to the new transparent architecture - is displayed to us. The movie is often explained as a critique at the new urban environments that were created at the time, but by doing so it displayed the power of architectural intervention on human behavior.

As our behavior and architectural environment interrelate, one could argue that a change in architecture means a change in behavior and a change in behavior means a change in architecture. Going back to *Learning From Las Vegas* this becomes clearly visible. The car reshaped the city and the city reshaped the way people behave.

Kevin Lynch concludes his study in *The Image of the City* with stating that successful city design is not defined by its physical shape, but by the quality of the cognitive map it generates for its inhabitants. High quality cognitive maps are full of detail that is distributed equally over the covered ground and that is adaptable to any use. They are created by cities that are visible, coherent and clear, but also a stimulus for new exploration.[41]

This brings us back at the city as an inherited interface. Interfaces are made for connecting human behavior with a something they do not understand. The spectacle of the city is turned into a mental interface by means of a cognitive map. What Lynch called the image[42], Venturi called the symbol[43], they are interpretations of reality taken as reality itself for the sake of dealing with the real. *Learning from Las Vegas* showed that urban design can adhere to the needs of a cognitive map. Where does that leave us now, as our cognitive maps is reshaped again, this time by visual technology? As speed was the main catalyst for the rapid change of urban structure in Las Vegas, what could the effects of increasing the implementation of visual technologies be on a city?

The Interface Favored over the Real

While traveling back home one day, I came across a construction site inside a train station (**Fig. 16a-b**). The construction site was hidden from travelers by wooden walls. Normally in places as busy as an Amsterdam train station these walls or fences are covered with texts or images about what will appear behind them in the near future, or they get a direct commercial function. Sometimes

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40 Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, p.27.
41 Lynch, *The Image of the City*, p.90-91 and p.110.
42 Ibid. p.6.
43 Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, p.137.

Fig. 16b Detail of the wooden wall at Almere Centrum.

Fig. 16a Wooden walls covered by a pattern looking like wooden walls at Almere Centrum.

there is nothing on such walls, and all one can see is the wood they are made of. These walls had none of that. Instead, they were covered with an illustration of the wooden panels they are made of. It was not a copy of actual wall put on top, but a stylized version of it. The walls were trying to look like archetypical wooden walls. I found out later that they were covered like this to indicate a construction site. The print on the wall was like Julia Roberts in Notting Hill, both herself and a made-up person like herself. The print was confirming its own existence, a symbol for itself.

We crave the real, and by demanding the real, we get the fake. This is not because the real does not exist anymore, but because our definition of real has changed from 'genuine' to 'archetypical'. Visual technology is to blame. Photographs created a version of the real that is beyond anything actual. By providing an abundance of versions of reality, photographs epitomize an archetypical version of the real. This results in a symbol for the real which, when actualized, turns out to be a copy of a symbolized real. The real construction site at the station had to be covered in a fake version of a construction site to become a real construction site. The actual version did not look like the archetype construction site and was therefore not a real construction site to the many visitors of the station. An archetypical fence for a building site was used to symbolize the presence of a building site to become real to those at the station.

The wall surrounding the construction site at the station is a very conscious choice by its designers. The wall shows that it knows what it is doing there. Visual technology has conditioned us to look at the world and as a result, it is not enough to just be a building site. If we project the function of a spectacle onto the station, or any place for that matter, its objective will be to display.

CONCLUSION

The strategy of creating technical images that are increasingly similar to perception seems to be hardcoded in the objective of visual technology. Our cognitive maps are drenched in information supplied by visual technology. Ultimately the apparatus of visual technology by means of being ubiquitous becomes indistinguishable from reality. Which could mean that despite being physically similar, the inhibitors could experience a completely different city. The visual technology apparatus continually tries to give meaning to the world by making a copy of the world to look at. Future urban design will be one of minimal intervention with maximal change as result. Like stanley brouwn's stamps on drawings by others, changing maps into conceptual artworks, the new city will be an appropriation of what was inherited with new meaning. Visual technology will leave the city seemingly the same while the whole structure and function has fundamentally changed.

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The City of Images

BA Thesis
Gerrit Rietveld Academie
Fine Arts
Amsterdam, 2021

Thesis Guidance
Alena Alexandrova

Teachers
Dina Danish
Becket Flannery
Rini Hurkmans
Jean Bernard Koeman

Special thanks to
Ditte, Hadar, Joana, Laura, Miquel

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APPENDIX:
THE CITY IN BETWEEN


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HERAS


VORM


HERA


BINATIE


42 luxe
appartement

This tower is not
about looking up.
It is about a
new perspective.


OUTH QUA
OUTHQUAYPLAZ
Berkeley
Designed for life
Foster


A
PROJECT
OFFICE
N
220
METRES
HIGH


PROJECT
OFFICE
SOUTH QUA
SOUTHQUAYPLA
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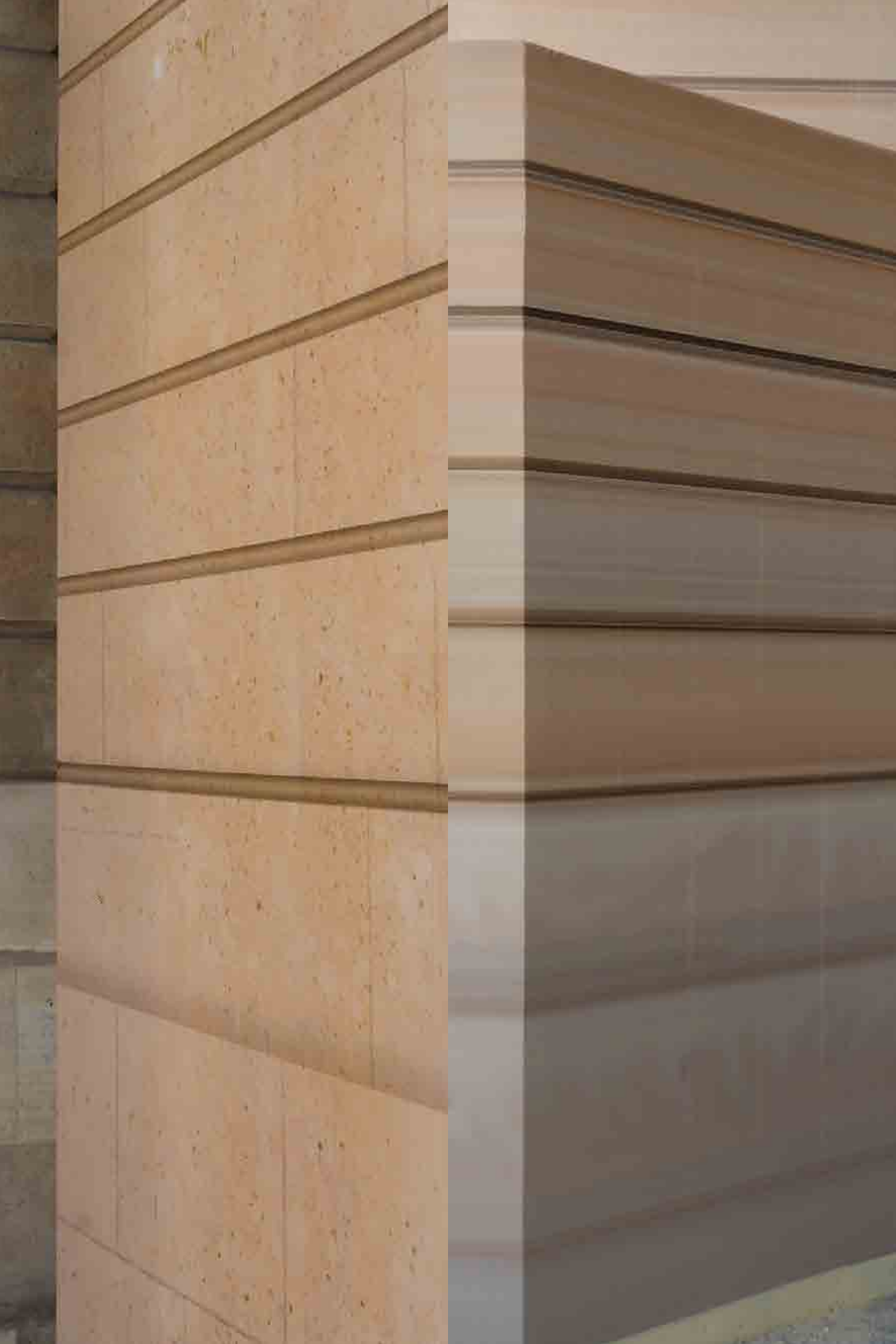



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