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Collecting Characters
Collecting characters, an introduction

A character is recognized as something that has lived a little. The etymological origin of the word character also suggest this, that it is something that comes with time. It derives from the ancient greek word χαϱακτήϱ – what is engraved.

For me, the word character is associated with personality. The development of character is directly related to what the swedish author Lars Gustafsson would call the physical misery of fundamental interaction, including the shifting forces of interaction, electromagnetic radiation and gravitation. To be constantly exposed to these forces, there is no wonder people and buildings develop a certain personality over time.

This spring semester I have been collecting characters that somehow relates to building, anything from a moresque ornament to a concrete beam. The characters then acted as a starting point when drawing on the programme of this semester, a new town hall in the residential city of Katrineholm.
Fragments and coherence, a method

Coherence is not unity alone, but rather expressing the same cause. How can I form a common expression between a diverse selection of fragments?

I have treated the characters as fragments - something that is ripped out of its context and doesn’t belong to a system. They are individuals.

The act of collecting characters relates to what the swedish author Torgny Lindgren says about his figures of projection. They are people and places he have encountered in real life, that made a strong impression on him. They have followed him through the years, reoccurring in his authorship in slightly different shapes. This is perhaps what I have been looking for, my own figures of projection within the field of architecture.

The architectural method of this semester could be described as that of still life painting, were seemingly disparate fragments have been carefully joined together.

The ambition was to make this diverse selection of characters come together in one building, forming a common voice.
Architecture and memory, a program

The city is an interior that belongs to the citizens, a body of collective memory that evolves slowly over time. Building in the city means a responsibility to retain certain qualities, but also the opportunity to create new ones.

The programme of this thesis project is a townhall in the residential city of Katrineholm. It is not an administrative center for the municipality, although the political decisions are made there, but rather a building were engaged people can meet and discuss, read and listen. The function is perhaps closer to the swedish concept of Medborgarhus (civic building), yet townhall is what I want the building to be perceived as. A hall in the town, for the town.

The focus of this semester has not been the social and economical aspects of the programme and the site. They have rather acted as a backdrop to the work with the characters, a civic setting where different characters were put into play.
Along the work with the characters, I have been reading A scientific autobiography by Aldo Rossi. Searching for my own figures of projection, Rossis description of his architectural practice has been to useful help. There is a clear connection between his sources of inspiration and his works, not only in physical resemblance, but also in strong ideas connecting different fragments with each other.

This also applies to how Gunnar Asplund saw a chapel in a manor house in Denmark, or how Raymund Abraham saw La Tourette in a rural italian barn (images on next side). Familiar figures that reoccur in different times and contexts.

“I believe that a building may be the conclusion to a chain of associations”

Aldo Rossi, A Scientific Autobiography
Fattighuset i Trivulso, Modena, Aldro Rossi

San Cataldo Cemetery, Modena


San Carlone statyn, Arona.

Begravningsplats i Modena, Aldro Rossi.

Fatighuset i Trivulso, Angelo Morbelli

Begravningsplats i Modena, Aldro Rossi.
La Tourette, Corbusier, Frankrike

Photograph from Elementare Architektur, Raymond Abraham & Joseph Daphia
Manor house in Liselund, Denmark

Woodland chapel, Gunnar Asplund, Stockholm
Civic carachters
- town hall foyer in Katrineholm

The interior builds on studies of two specific characters. The first one is the ornaments that are found in Alhambra, the moresque palace outside Granada in Spain. Those were described by Owen Jones in The Grammar of Ornament in 1868. The second one is the concrete structure in House on a curved road by Kazuo Shinohara.

I joined two moresque patterns which I thought gave a depth to the ornament, and a wooden cut was built from this. A interpretation of Shinoharas concrete structure were made, where beams and pillars overlapped to create a shadow effect and emphasize the knot. Together, they formed a fantasy about a room - a room with a rich wooden floor and a concrete structure framing it.
The Grammar of Ornament, Owen Jones, 1856.

Tolkning av moriska ornament i träsnitt

House on a curved road, Kazuo Shinohara, 1978
Civic characters
- An exhibition hall in Katrineholm

This interior also builds on two specific characters. One is the Economist Building in London, by Alison & Peter Smithson. The introduction of a piano nobile in the modern architectural setting creates a hierarchy between rooms on the inside, but also a similar order outside, on the street. The ground plan keeps the intimate space, in a sense a more human scale.

The second character is the Kolumba Museum, by Peter Zumthor. The feeling of a very polished floor, that brings not only the light but also reflections from the surroundings, into the room.
Tolkning av polerat golv i betongmodell


Tolkning av fasad i betongmodell

The Economist Building, Alison & Peter Smithson, 1964.

Tolkning av fasad i betongmodell
Civic carachters
- A townhall roof structure

This structure continues the former study of Shinoharas concrete knot. The beams are meeting in a traditional japanese wooden knot, which gives a smaller offset between the beams, but still lets them express theirselves as details. In this offset distance, a secondary beam structure were introduced, as detached consoles inspired by those in Nässjö Cemetery by Sven Ivar Lind.

The idea was that the structure could create a shadow play, where the smaller, secondary beams leads in the light on the roof surface.
Kapellet i Nässjö, Sven Ivar Lind, 1962

House on a curved road, Kazuo Shinohara, 1978
Civic characters
- A wall towards a public square

The wall is inspired by the entrance situation in Lunds Konsthall, by Klas Anshelm. A brick facade towards south lets visitors and bypassers rest in the warming light of the springtime sun.

The concrete wall is poored against canvas, to create a fabric in the city interior. A window lets the sun inside the building, creating a warm and diffuse light on the inside. When the spring turns into summer, a shadow from the tree provides a rest from the hot sunlight.
Lunds konsthall, Klas Anshelm, 1957

Tolkning av tegelmur i betongmodell
Civic characters
- Facade for a municipal administration

Inspired by Åkarnas Hus in Danderyd, I drew on a concrete element with the intention to create a depth in the facade and also in the city room. The depth of the facade also plays an important part of the interior spaces. The initial thought was that the repetitive pattern could be interrupted, marking a shift in the building program.
Åkarnas Hus, Danderyd

Tolkning av fasad i betongmodell
Civic characters
- A civic figure towards the town

In Georg Varhelyis residence building in Björkhagen I saw a civic figure, a building that seems to create space around it, perhaps because of its volume. The size of the building also allows different types and sizes of openings in the wall. This paired well with the different facades I had been working on.

In the end, the three dimensional facade became a graphic pattern, inspired by another facade of Varhelyi, Scandic Malmen.
Bostadshus i Björkhagen, Georg Varhelyi, 1956

Hotell Malmen, Georg Varhelyi, 1951

Tolkning av grafisk mönster i träsnitt
Elevation from south, 1:200 (A1)
Section and plan, 1:50 (A1)
Wooden site model of the project, 1:400
Wooden model 1:50
Model 1:50, dissembled