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The exhibition:
Memento Metropolis in Stockholm 1998

CITY

Memento comes from the word mo-nere, to remind. The city is a reminder of what was there before it was built. The city’s built form is laid over the original topography. It testifies to the landscape the city was once built upon. One may say that the memory of the topography is built into the form of each city. The more pronounced the topography, the clearer it comes forward, either in its former guise as a landscape or translated into built form.

There are only a few big cities where the drama between built form and the original landscape is played out with such intensity as in Stockholm. Apart from the clearly dramatic character of its location between the landscape of the archipelago and the Lake Mälaren valley, there also exists, like a gigantic cross, two perpendicular lines over the city. The southern escarpment runs in an east-west direction and emerges as a landscape along Södermalm’s northern edge, while the north-south direction of the Brunkeberg Ridge is almost completely swallowed up by building development in the central areas of the city. This is made visible with the level differences in the inner city, for example in the form of bridges over Kungs-gatan, which mark Mälmskillnadsgatan’s level at the crown of the Brunkeberg Ridge.

The drama between the buildings and the landscape comes forward in the form of architectural elements and constructions. Like the tunnel that was excavated under the ridge, or the Katarina Elevator, which mediates between the heights of Södermalm and the water level at Strömmen. Stockholm’s parks mark the highest points in the
topography, those areas which most often have remained undeveloped. The fabric of the city lies like a ring around them, so that the roof landscape in the city’s silhouette, despite the pronounced level differences, forms an even level of height. The structure of building development in Gamla Stan is a reminder of former shorelines. The stretches of Österlånggatan and Västerlånggatan mark the former meeting of land and water. The development of the city runs parallel with the shorelines and piers. The plan structure of the city describes how the inhabitants from different periods settled in the landscape. Gamla Stan’s narrow building plots from the 18th century describes very different forms of social life than those of Strandvägen’s large-scale turn-of-the-century city front, or Birkastan’s apartment houses from the 1920’s. The relation of public buildings and public places to the water forms the city front. The vocabulary of the architecture further nuances the aesthetic and practical intentions of each era. Simplicity and opulence. Equality or inequality. Great architecture or just buildings. These nuances become less clear in a satellite image. The whole comes forward. Even failed urban building projects appear integrated in the density of the inner city. The contours of building development follow the forms of the islands on which the city is built. Seen from above, Stockholm is still coherent.

One artist who devotes herself to the study of the structure of the big city is Kathy Prendergast. The pictorial suite City Drawings is an ongoing project where she reproduces map images of capital cities from a satellite perspective. Prendergast’s pencil feels its way on the paper to represent urban plans, like a stylus on an old gramophone that feels the peaks and valleys in every groove and transforms them into music. A specific music that not only complements the map image itself, but also exposes something of the city’s inner essence, its own melody. It makes visible not only the formal principles from which the
city is conceived, but also something else, something more important – namely an aspect of its identity.
The drawing suggests a process of growth. The city becomes an organic growing entity. Prendergast’s drawings are like representations of the city’s nerve system. They expose the city’s inner image, which to some extent corresponds with the outer. Easily recognizable through certain main strokes, but still entirely different.

In our time the view from the airplane is a part of everyday life. In Preben Fjederholt’s sketch for Usikkerhetsfelt (Field of Insecurity), the city is also observed from above, but from a closer vantage than Prendergast, and with greater drama. Instead of contemplating the structure of the city, the observer is hurled between whirling cloud masses down towards reality.

The turbulence reminds me of the opening sequence of Werner Herzog’s film Herz aus Glas. Where ”everything” (in the film represented by clouds) continually falls and collapses in on itself. It is also reminiscent of documentary films from the Second World War where Spitfire or Messerschmitt planes nose-dive towards their targets. The distance between the pilot and the attacked city is large and abstract – if the plane is not shot down. In contrast to Prender-gast’s city images, the pattern of the city is three-dimensional and not graphic.

The two large paintings in Memento Metropolis are reminiscent of an airplane’s approach over a big city: when the plane approaches the ground there appears openings in the clouds. They reveal fragments of the structure of building development on the ground. Fjederholt’s Berlin / Berlin is a superposition of images from different time periods that form layers. Archeology or memory. Scandinavia / Europe consists of structures from Gamla Stan in Stockholm in the upper part of the image, and a central European city in the lower part. They are separated by a river – a summary of the rivers that flow through Europe’s cities, for example the Donau, Seine, Thames, Spree, Tiber,
Vltava, etc. It is the river that connects the cities to the sea and to the rest of the world.

This work differs from the paintings shown on Memento Metropolis in Copenhagen. Fjederholt says he is attempting to incorporate the chaotic and labyrinthine beyond the panoramic – "without it becoming a collage." Accordingly, the transitions are organic, not cut in. The condensation in the choice of perspective reinforces this. The layers of memory in the city find a correspondence in the many layers of paint on the canvas.

Just arrived in New York, Karl Rossmann, the young main character in Franz Kafka’s novel America, very unexpectedly receives accommodation in his wealthy uncle’s house:

A narrow outside balcony ran along the whole length of Karl’s room. But what would have been at home the highest vantage point in the town allowed him here little more than a view of one street, which ran perfectly straight between two rows of squarely chopped buildings and therefore seemed to be fleeing into the distance, where the outlines of a cathedral loomed enormous in a dense haze. From morning to evening and far into the dreaming night that street was the channel for a constant stream of traffic which, seen from above, looked like an inextricable confusion, for ever newly improvised, of foreshortened human figures and the roofs of all kinds of vehicles, sending into the upper air another confusion, more riotous and complicated, of noises, dust and smells, all of it enveloped and penetrated by a flood of light which the multitudinous objects in the street scattered, carried off and again busily brought back, with an effect as palpable to the dazzled eye as if a glass roof stretched over the street were being violently smashed into fragments at every moment.

(Franz Kafka, America, translated by Willa and Edwin Muir [Minerva, 1994], pp. 42-43.)

Have you been to New York? The Metropolis par excellence. If you have not, a grand spatial experience
awaits. The encounter with Manhat-tan’s vertical buildings is unique. Those who have been there know what is meant. Hugh Ferriss was a successful illustrator of the great skyscraper projects of the 1920’s in New York and Chicago. Despite the technical possibilities of the photograph, his dramatic illustrations were in demand. They depict the skyscraper with a peculiar luminosity against the night sky, or as dramatic shadowed silhouettes against the daylight. In 1929 Ferriss published The Metro-polis of Tomorrow, whose aim was
”... to freely imagine a ‘Metropolis of Tomorrow’ – choosing, as his cues, those tendencies which seem, to him, best to promise the ultimate embodiment, in structural forms, of certain human values.” The book is divided into three parts. In the first, existing buildings are depicted; in the second, the main trends of the times are illustrated, and how they could be manifested if they were realized. The third, visionary part describes an imaginary Metropolis, consisting of building complexes 300 meters or more in height, with enormous non-urban spaces in between. Here one also finds a return to the formalized plan of an ”ideal city.” Its center is formed as a triangle, where the corners are given the designations Science, Art, and Business. The idea was to create the city as a depiction of man, and to create in built form an equivalent to man’s Thoughts, Feelings, and Senses. The geometry of the triangle generates a gigantic system of streets and building complexes of monumental dimension. The naïveté of this arrangement is staggering. When the architectural design begins to legitimize itself with symbols and numbers, it is lost. Ferriss, who was a master of light and shadow in his drawings, has here created the antithesis of a city. Gigantic formalist sculptures with enormous, desolate spaces in between. The opposite of Metropolis – instead of the mother city, utopia; instead of density, void. Instead of center, periphery. Instead of social interaction, isolation (see pages 274-281).
Le Corbusier’s plans for the Norrmalm district competition in Stockholm from 1931 represent a very different typology and a different architecture. The similarity lies in the large scale. Gigantic, complex, sculptural forms with landscape in between. "Today it is movement in the topography that contributes to the salubrious calm of a pure, unbroken roofline." (From the catalogue Le Corbusier och Stockholm, The Swedish Museum of Architecture [Byggförlaget], 1987.) Kilometer-long equal-height rooflines play against the Stockholm topography. The plan, which would have meant the demolition of the traditional urban block on Norrmalm (and Södermalm), was never implemented. Instead the foundation was laid for the fine-scale office and commercial development at Hötorget in the City Plan of 1952. Large-scale, sweeping demolitions would come to be carried out in the following decade instead.

When the city is discussed in Sweden today it is often in nostalgic terms. One mourns the loss of places. The qualities that are desired for the city are often limited to aesthetic or stylistic preferences connected to previous periods. The destruction of the Klara district in central Stockholm has become a mental hinder to the acceptance of contemporary architecture. Like many other cities, the city’s identity is threatened, but not so much by new development as by kitsch. Nostalgia has been accepted in Stockholm as a salable contemporary architecture. This is a declaration of cultural bankruptcy.

MAN

Stockholm consists not only of Hamngatan, Gamla Stan, or Gröna Lund. Even if the city is increasingly being reduced to a shopping, tourist, or entertainment sanctuary. Most Stockholmers no longer live in the city itself. During the last half of this century, offices have replaced one-third of the dwellings in the central parts of the city. The majority of
Stockholmers live today outside the city, like in Vårby Gård or Bredäng.

Of course, Stockholm is not a metropolis. To call the capital city a big city is perhaps misleading when big cities in America and Asia can be more than ten times in size. But big cities are defined not only by their size, but also by their character, variation, and intensity. Traveling the subway with stops at Norsborg, T-Centralen, Fittja, Östermalmstorg, Hornstull, and so on, creates a varied image. People clearly identify with specific areas within Stockholm. Similarities and differences have subtle nuances here. Urban attitudes are specific to a local area. People’s movements are often limited to their local territory. Some meetings never take place. Lars Tunbjörk’s portraits show Stockholmers from Vårby Gård. They meet the visitors of Memento Metropolis in their environment. Tunbjörk captures them in their own territory. The encounter is direct and naked. The images are taken in a direct manner, without concern for underlying references. There is an openness in the photographer to meet the subject and the moment. He is curious and unafraid. Completely without prestige. The result demonstrates that there is no special type of Stockholmer in Vårby Gård, or in any other part of the city. On the contrary. In every image the observer encounters a whole universe with a person at its center.

The images of the Danish graphic artist Palle Nielsen may be read as a critique of the modern big city as an environment for life. Throughout his extensive production, man in the city is a returning theme. A great number of Nielsen’s images are about memories, about frozen moments. A building or a wall collapses. A man runs in front of a car. There are seldom any static figures in the images. People are continually in movement, with one leg in the air. On the run. Restlessly heading someplace, making their way over streets and squares. Spellbound in the tracks or by the power lines of the trolley car. Perhaps they are even
dependent on their direction? Man in the big city, alone on his way, dreaming, often fleeing. The city that people move in does not emerge as something specific, even if certain details are reminiscent of something familiar. In Nielsen’s cities, enigmatic, centrally symmetrical buildings often reappear. In the background there is often a central European urban architecture. The lack of density among the buildings is striking. Desolate spaces separate the buildings from each other.

The selection of images shown in Stockholm are the expressive graphic works from the 1950’s and 60’s. The images are not shown in a conventional manner, behind glass and frame. Instead they are backlit by momentary flashes of light in a dark room. The images illuminate in different places in the room. In this way the individual image is etched into the visitor’s retina in a fraction of a second.

Man’s longing for the new. The new city. Contemporary architecture. What image containing which architectural motif can represent a Stockholm of the year 1998? The most ”contemporary” architecture is without doubt Riksbanken at Brunkebergstorg and Kulturhuset at Sergels Torg, both by Peter Celsing. Buildings a quarter of a century old. Newer architecture of high quality is conspicuous by its absence in the capital city. The sunken square of Sergels Torg is the only public place in Stockholm in the true sense. People meet here spontaneously to demonstrate, to protest, and to celebrate, like with ice hockey victories. The sloping plane is reminiscent of the great hall in Le Corbusier’s Palace of the Soviets from 1930, when architecture was ”heroic”. Connection with the surrounding city occurs via pedestrian tunnels, stairs, and ramps. Only iconoclasts regard the square as something that should disappear. Peter Celsing’s Kulturhuset meets Sergels Torg and is a part of Stock-holm, in the same way that the Stockholm Stock Exchange meets Stortorget. Michael Perlmutter has photographed an evening view of Kulturhuset that makes apparent the dynamic but at the same time natural placement of the building. The
building, this enormous screen, stops the flow in the city plan. The place is formed. Perlmutter’s photograph shows a period in the city’s history when there was a longing for the new. The building’s qualities come forward. The loggia and the square. Transparency between the interior and the exterior. The idea behind Kulturhuset was to openly show the activities taking place in the building. The photograph describes the city’s coldness, darkness, and loneliness, but also its magic, clarity, and sharpness. Ironically enough, Celsing’s Kulturhuset was renovated for Stockholm’s year as the Cultural Capital of Europe in 1998. Its center became a bank of escalators. Symbolic for a time when communication is more important than what is communicated – the content.

Kathy Prendergast’s small sculpture Landscape I consists of a pair of shoes. The worn, blunted shoes have something immediately touching about them. They look like they could belong to a little girl. But there is something that sets them apart from normal shoes. They are lined with a map. A map of the city that the artist strolled through. The map, an abstraction of the city, is here affected – literally – both by the human body and the city itself. A closer relation takes place. A sensual meeting between body, map, and place. Cities cannot be described in abstract city plans. They must be experienced with all the senses. Architecture is in the best case a sensual art. It can be seen, heard, felt, and even tasted. Architecture is erotic. Eroticism is not a question of form but of a quality that can only be experienced through the senses. The ability of cities to speak to the senses varies. Stockholm’s frigid beauty is well-preserved. The missing sensuality reveals a materialistic mentality. Built form in Sweden is for the most part seen as ”property,” a question of so many square meters. It is a fascinating thought that Kathy Prendergast’s shoes have absorbed the city’s structure by laboriously or delightfully (step-by-step!) mapping it. The shoes are a memento of the city they have registered.
When the big-city dweller Suzan Etkin (from the metropolis New York) does a self-portrait, she does it in the form of a column of glass behind a fence. Etkin says that she is a New York dweller in heart and soul. "What cannot be talked about must be kept silent..." (freely quoted from Wittgenstein.) Etkin does not wish to speak about herself. The contradiction in Suzan Etkin’s Self Portrait becomes apparent in the column of glass. It is the absence of the Self that comes forward through the transparent column. What is unique with man is made relative through the use of a form and a material that lacks all individuality. Like a glass container, it could be filled with anything, or in this case, anyone. The fence is inadequate as protection. It is experienced almost as more open than the glass column itself. An important component in the existence of the metropolis is economy. Skyscrapers are formed to maximize the number of square meters. The air space has an enormous value for future development. But so does the ground floor, with its possibility for rental income. The piece associates to the fences one sees along the streets in London or New York, where they border gardens or prevent one from falling into the "basement." The black-painted fences have a tactile quality, and suggest a presence to the city. The black-painted fences are always at sidewalk level, and as a result become the closest visible parts of the city. The transparent glass form is a self-portrait that shows the big-city dweller, certainly transparent, unreachable and invisible. Both must be regarded as vicarious, as the object’s material quality is missing. The joining of the glass through common fittings and the banal rendering of the fence underscores that it is not about a sculpture, but about a reference to an interpretation. Etkin’s self-portrait is not of herself as a celebrity in front of, but as a private person behind the fence.

The meeting point between the public and the private is touched upon in Mikael Thejll’s work As Long as You are
Here. The work consists of balcony-like objects that look down upon a type of seating that is typical of public places. The two objects summarize a whole series of environments and situations in the big city. The balcony, the viewpoint from which one can see and be seen, is already ”outside” in the public space. Behind the city’s facades there are rooms and private life, which are a complement to public life. The difference is often the thickness of an outer wall.

Bynomadens lejlighed (The City Nomad’s Apartment) by Willie Flindt could be such a room. For one decade the apartment, located in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen, functioned only as a place to sleep, change clothes, and write notes. By diagonally cutting out a piece of the building, ”the immobile” has become ”mobile.” Instead of being a part of a building, a block, and a city, it has become an object. The object is a memento of the individual life these rooms gave shelter to. ”The place” is no more, since the building certainly no longer stands on the location it had in the city. But the fragment of the room remains. The worn white-limed interior shows the absence of the resident nomad, who by definition exists in continual movement. Traces of the nomad’s residency have barely been registered in the interior. This is because the nomad, the man without a fixed dwelling, has his residency in movement through the landscape – in this case the streetscape and the public square in the city.

In Memento Metropolis there are works by artists from several different countries. The Turkish-French artist Sarkis is a big-city nomad, whose work has him traveling over a large part of the world. The journey from metropolis to metropolis is expressed in the installation Leidschatz Cities. The art scene is not bounded by national barriers. Sarkis’ small building reminds the observer of this. It is constructed from recycled boards. The outside is covered with blue signs. On each sign is the name of the city where Sarkis has exhibited his work. The signs have a clearly neutral form. All have the same size. Short names automatically lead to larger
text. The installation also has an inside. It shows traces of the artist’s own practice, represented by small watercolors.

ARCHIVE

Is the library an obsolete institution? The library, the archived memory, still seems to be relevant despite IT. The library in Alexandria was founded in 286 B.C. and included 700,000 book rolls. In the battle between Caesar and Pompeius the library was almost entirely destroyed in 47 B.C. The library is being built up again in Alexandria. It was designed by the Norwegian architect group Snøhetta, and will be completed in 1999. The last of François Mitterand’s Grands Projets was realized in Paris in 1996. The French National Library’s treasures were moved into four right-angled glass towers in the new Bibliothèque Nationale de France designed by Dominique Perrault. One section, the research library, contains 10,000,000 volumes. Incomprehensibly large. At the same time Sweden’s counterpart, Det Kungliga Biblioteket (The Royal Library), increased its book storage area. The 80,000 shelf-meter expansion is barely visible. Architect Jan Henriksson’s glass roof in Humlegården is the only reference to the two underground shelters on five floors with an area of 2,700 m2. The solution is without doubt more practical than the French with its glass towers. The Swedish practical attitude is a result of its local mentality.

Annesofie Becker’s and Willie Flindt’s idea with the Library in the Memento Metropolis exhibition in Copenhagen was among other things to illustrate the concept ”serendipity.” To find what you did not know you were looking for. Here one may bring a book and exchange it for another. The book one receives in exchange has the same weight as the book you left, and this is the only knowledge one has about it. The library in Stockholm has two very
different sides. One side is an empty wall with only one opening. The other is filled with books. In the opening sits the librarian, who takes care of the book exchange. The books that are checked out are stamped by the librarian.

The measurement of time in the Western world has a certain automatic self-evident quality. Information about the date and time is found everywhere. An atomic clock in Braun-schweig governs the bedside alarm clock at home in Stockholm with a precision of a tenth of a second. With the certainty of a sleepwalker we move in time. It is discovered only a few years before that many computers may not be able to handle the year 2000. The system passes from year 99 to year 00. All of the world’s governments, banks, indeed, all large organizations are working feverishly to program the year in its entirety: the year 2000. There can hardly be an artist more preoccupied with our measurement of time than On Kawara. Two of his works are shown in Memento Metropolis: One Million Years (Past), from 1970-71, covers the period from the year 1969 back to the year 998031 B.C. Every year of this period is recorded; each page contains 500 dates. The history of the world from the birth of Christ accounts for only four out of the 2000 pages. A dedication is mentioned in the book: "For all those who have lived and died.” The second work, One Million Years (Future), from 1980-81, covers a period of one million years of the future, from the year 1982 up to the year 1001981 A.D. A dedication is mentioned in the book: "For the last one.”

The thickness of daily newspapers stands in direct relation to the size of cities. The Swedish artist Anne Thulin lives and works in the metropolis New York. In New York the folded Sunday editions can be 5-10 cm thick. It is impossible to get through them. It is a matter of choosing amongst the mass of information. Demands are placed on the reader’s attention – and time. When Thulin dips the newspaper in wax the words become blurred. The flow of words are quieted down. An object of compact silence emerges.
Newspapers are both a perishable good with a short shelf-life and a document of a time – it may be seen as a memento of a day in the past. They contain the important and the unimportant. The material, the paper, is valuable for one day, and thrown out the day after. Dipped in paraffin, the newspaper is preserved, hard, but still brittle. The choice of paraffin presents itself immediately – it is used for conservation. The paper’s possibility for deformation is great, until the moment when the paraffin has hardened. Then the bundle of paper has become a sculpture. Anne Thulin shows in her work a great number of possibilities for transforming this everyday material to something entirely different. Through stacking, rolling, folding, hanging, opening, and positioning, the paper becomes everything other than a newspaper. Beyond its form, there are also the possibilities of the surface, which depending on the treatment is either smooth or buckled. A physicality emerges. The surface suggests smooth skin. Or wrinkles. Sometimes the paraffin’s character takes over, and the newspaper gives the impression of being cast. Depending on the thickness of the object, a transparent character arises. The underlying pages come forward. The words are barely readable. The graphic play of the columns and the overlappings become a graphic patchwork quilt, or a flowing mass.

At Memento Metropolis in Stockholm Anne Thulin exhibits backlit transparent pilasters on which newspapers are waxed. The newspapers come from 120 different countries. Still, what predominates is the non-specific. A newspaper is a newspaper is a newspaper. . .

Collecting valuable objects is contrasted with collecting objects considered worthless by most others. Objects that can be found in the street. Johannes Kattrup says he has collected objects since he was fourteen years old. When he says he is not an artist we must believe him. His collecting may be described as constituting a kind of contemporary archaeology or collector mania. He is not interested in the
object’s former content or function. Objects are collected, registered, and exhibited in the Museum for fundne ting (The Museum of Found Objects) in Helsingör. Kattrup treats all objects equally. In the Memento Metropolis exhibition he presents objects he found in Copenhagen, Antwerp, and Stockholm, the locations where Memento Metropolis has been shown. Some objects are manifested by their transitoriness, others become something entirely different depending on their context.

Le Corbusier describes a table in a café that was just left by the guests: "Voyez l’ordre fatal qui met tous ces objets en rapport les uns avec les autres; ils ont tous servi, ils ont été saisis par la main de l’un ou de l’autre des convives; les distances qui les séparent sont la mesure de la vie. C’est une composition matematique agencée; il n’y a pas un lieu faux, un hiatus, une tromperie.” ”Observe the fateful order that places all of these objects in relation to each other: they have all served, they have been handled by the guests; the distances that separate them are the measurements of life. It is an arranged mathematical composition; there is no incorrect placement, no hiatus, no deception.” (Freely translated from Le Corbusier.) Like Corbusier’s table, Kattrup’s objects show traces of man’s actions and everyday life. The crumbs on Corbusier’s table are not art. If they were to be collected they would still not be art. On the other hand if they were to be arranged in a new way and exhibited they would then be able to be a work of art. The arranged collage that was exhibited by Kattrup in Copenhagen and Antwerp presents an uncertainty on this question.

A memento is an object that reminds one of an event or a person. Like a medal. Leise Dich Abrahamsen’s Verdensudstilling, 1990 (World Exhibition, 1990) consists of a table containing mementos from eighteen port cities visited by her father when he was as a sailor. The attempt to understand life is to understand one’s own life by tracing our parent’s lives.
Abrahamsen sets a table with objects from the port cities of the world. The fragile table is reminiscent of the display case in a museum. The furniture as such refers to the "museum." In a museum, a work shall be exhibited but at the same time must be preserved for the future. Abrahamsen’s table contains at once subjective interpretations and objective information about the cities. Each city is represented by both objects and a fact sheet. In Abrahamsen’s museum it is the object that is unprotected and to be experienced directly, while the written information must be retrieved from under the sheet of glass. The object is an emblem but at the same time charged with a sensual content that represents or suggests something specific about the special character of the cities.

A memory. It is nighttime. The contours of the city silhouette melt together. The individual forms of the buildings can no longer be discerned. The roofscape of the block stands out against the sky. The reduced vision in the dark activates the fantasy. A complex contour arises: in one moment a Venetian fortress, in the next moment common terracotta chimney pipes and gray slate roofs. But the sky is not completely dark. The light is neither dusk nor dawn. The streetlights and traffic of the big city light up the clouds above. The dull, reflecting light returns to the city. A first or a last lit window shines in the block. The window signals that an individual is still, or is already, awake. Behind the window is a room and a person. Those who pass by down at the street do not see the window. But someone who is alone looks up, sees, and fantasizes. About who lives there. About what takes place in the room. That someone is Christer Strömholm, who took the picture from around the same height as the lit window. Photography is a revolutionary technology. It can reproduce an image of physical reality. The observer sees what the image presents. The image can also be interpreted, like the "lit window.”
In Strömholm’s abstract images, however, the role of photography is turned upside down. His close-up images of structures do not describe what the observer sees. Now it is the observer himself who must decide what he wants to see in the picture. One attitude is to attempt to determine what it actually depicts. To investigate the structure. To find clues. To search for a scale. To decide for oneself what one wants to see. Like a symmetrical Rorschach test the observer can project meaning onto the image. He can see the photographic image as if it were a conscious aesthetic – a reproduced abstract “art.”

Another way of seeing the image is through Strömholm’s eyes. To see the framed view as a fragment that he has discovered. Taken from an everyday object or place, from an infinite number of possible fragments not taken. They are exceptional pictures. They remind me of being close to walls, wallpaper next to my bed that I looked at when I was a child. Small patterns and cracks seen in close-up. When you cannot sleep they begin to live their own life. To be able to see, one must have seen. In man’s eye the impression of an image is reproduced optically. Before one sees, one reproduces in one’s own eye the ”seen.” Christer Strömholm’s abstract pictures open up the possibility of seeing something unprepared, that I am no longer accustomed to seeing. They have a braking effect that relates to time. It is not just a matter of looking at the pictures, confirming, recognizing something in them, and moving on. There is no déjà vu. I must begin from the beginning. They do not remind me of anything I have already seen. I become deeply moved just because the accidental does not exist in them, as might have been expected. Perhaps chance is there with the discovery, but not with the choice. They have been seen by someone who sees.

ANNIHILATION
Cultural Destruction / Annihilation. Herostratos from Ephesos made a conscious entrance into world history by setting fire to the altar of the goddess Artemis in his hometown in the year 356 B.C. It was not the first cultural destruction in written history. The pharaohs of Egypt competed for centuries in obliterating each other’s reliefs, and in so doing obliterating the memory of their predecessors. To be forgotten is to die once again.

A very different kind of cultural destruction took place in Sweden during the 1930’s. A conspiracy between Sweden’s builders and architects aiming to remove all plaster ornamentation from the city’s facades. The builders did not have to bother about renovating the troublesome forms and the architects were pure modernists who regarded ornament as decadent. Today facades are preserved, but the idea or special character of the buildings are not respected more for that. In recent years buildings in the central city have been spoiled through renovation instead. The integrity of architecture is not respected. The unique silhouette of the highrise offices at Hötorget, actually Stockholm’s silhouette, has been wrecked by the addition of ventilation rooms. The architects Ahlséns’ PUB-Bohags-huset department store, the most unique glass building in the country, has been ruined by renovation. The tramway depots have been demolished – except for the facades – and have been replaced by highly insensitive office buildings. Like NK, the Trygg-Hansa building by Erik Lallerstedt has maximized its usable area so much that the building volume at roof level appears to be cracking at the seams – The Architecture of Greed.

Le radeau de la Méduse (The Raft of the Medusa), Jean Louis Théodore Géricault’s huge painting that describes the survivors from the shipwreck of the Medusa, is a great image, perhaps known more for its interpretation of the story and the content of its message than as great art. Interpreted by many, and used in various contexts as a metaphor, it is most of all a painting of its time. In Peter
Weiss’ The Aesthetics of Opposition, the author identifies wholly with the painter Géricault. There is a contributing factor over and above the painting that captures the author’s interest. It has been replaced by a follower. The book. In Corréard’s and Savigny’s report Naufrage de la Frégate La Méduse (The Shipwreck of the Frigate Medusa), two eyewitnesses describe in the smallest detail the fate of the raft. It is these descriptions that are dramatized in over 60 pages in Weiss’ novel. The demand for and view of realism, and its execution in imagery, is not a constant. The theatrical, almost scenographically conceived installation that illustrates and monumentalizes the event was (hyper-) realistic for its time. This was further emphasized by Géricault’s way of working, which included the construction of a raft, the production of wax figures of the shipwreck victims, painting from the body parts of corpses, and depicting persons with connection to the real crew of the raft. The virtuosity with which the bodies are located in the picture also testifies to the ambition for a realistic, anatomical depiction.

The Raft of the Medusa is an image full of pathos from the first decades of the 19th century. The choice of theme, and the indignation shown by the times, contributed to its fame. The many interpretations, which are described by Dieter Bachmann in his essay on the painting’s history (see page 283), outdo one other. The image itself is full of contradictions. Light comes from several directions at the same time. The raft’s direction of travel does not match the wind direction. The raft is small, improbable in its dimensions. The large wave to the left has no relation to the rest of waves, and so on. The image can be described as being charged with conscious contradictions, or perhaps – more likely – with the conscious choices of a painter aiming to maximally use his medium to depict his vision using the realism of his time. Art attempts to discover reality over and over again. Interpretations are the occupation of succeeding generations.
Martin Kippenberger’s Untitled (The Raft of the Medusa) presents a blood-red background that is both sky and ocean, but also raft. It appears only as a contour in contrast to a light gray cloud. The ocean is “drawn” with a few brushstrokes of the same color. The shipwreck victims emerge not as in Géricault’s painting as bodies, but only as heads. The raft is sketched with just a few strokes. In short, the picture can be described as consisting of a background (the red surface) and a foreground (the heads). In the lower left-hand corner is Kippenberger himself, with his face turned up in order to momentarily avoid the waves. In a comic strip balloon he declares, ”I am Medusa.” If Géricault’s painting leaves open the question of rescue or annihilation, in Kippenberger’s Medusa the annihilation is complete. If Géricault’s painting is both an ex-pression of longing for and anxiety in the face of the new, in Kippenberger’s image the theme is annihilation.

In the Yellow Passage at Kultur-fabriken there is a wall built of sandbags. It signals an extreme situation, a location subject to danger. The wall originates from a borderland – from another world. The wall has to do with reprisals. Jan Håfström’s staging is built up of something that only is used in extreme situations. As protection against firearms, or spring flooding. Heavy but temporary. De-pendent on a large mass in order to be stable.

The analogy between a man’s face and a building’s facade is very close, where a symmetrical arrangement of openings tends to be associated with eyes, nose, and mouth. Håfström’s wall suggests openings that could be interpreted as the mask of terror that accompanies sandbag constructions. The cavities in the wall are cave openings. They relate to the cranium. The organization of the image as a whole follows assem-blage-like forms, both in its content and form.

The barricade is both a protection and a locked situation. A shield has been created which brings about a situation not unlike that of a pri-
son camp or a penitentiary. In one of our conversations Hafstrom said:

"... every person has an inner room which is one’s own room and is carried throughout one’s life. The first inhalation takes place in this room, and it is there one wants to exhale – to breathe one’s last.” The cave was man’s early dwelling. Hafstrom says he has always longed to return there. Like other children he read the Phantom, but the image of the skull-and-crossbones cave became a part of his dream life. In this connection he names Tacitus’ description of the catastrophe in the Teutoburger Forest and Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Dark-ness. In Conrad’s novel on the European colonization of Africa, the gruesome scenography from Tacitus’ decription is repeated: The skulls of people and horses hung on tree trunks. The place, the inner station, is a defiled terrain whose dead gazes will haunt Western man forever.

Forgængelighedens Kalligrafi I-III (The Calligraphy of Mortality I-III) by John Olsen & Lars Abrahamsen presents a large number of pictorial images. The three large images seem from a distance to be built up from pictorial or text characters. On closer inspection it becomes apparent that the "text" is actually made up of seagull cadavers. A fascinating fact is made apparent here: in death all seagulls are different. In this lies the difference with text characters, where in a text something must/should be repeated after 200-300 characters. Or at least show similar characters. In Olsen’s images, on the other hand, a character vocabulary is presented where all characters are different, where no repetition occurs. What do we know about seagulls? The dying soulless replicant played by Rutger Hauer in Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner describes the remarkable things he has experienced in his life: strange stars, galaxies he has seen annihilated. But still he is only a product created by man – or so man believes. At death his identity becomes apparent. He is not only a cloned product. He is a being with his own experiences and memories. The seagulls, who observe the
world from above, that we see flying in flocks over port cities or around boats, and who are not particularly different from one another, all appear in death to be unique.

REBIRTH

”Longing for the New” was the subtitle of Copenhagen’s exhibition of Memento Metropolis. This was given expression with Uppfinnarnas katedral (The Cathedral of Inventions), whose content was modern inventions in the form of diverse technical apparatuses. Inventions continually change our existence. In each country inventors are engaged in very different areas. They search, either individually or through multinational corporations, for new technical solutions, with the goal of taking out patents. The search for inventions embodies the ”longing for the new.” The Cathedral of Inventions in M-en-mento Metropolis in Stockholm is about man’s attempt to replace his own body with artificial parts. Anything from skeleton parts to corneas. Hearing aids that can be coupled directly to the nerve ends in the inner ear. By replacing the body with all kinds of spare parts it becomes more and more ”immortal.” The Cathedral of Inventions contains a few eternity machines – perpetual motion machines that relate to this continually renewed human body. The dream of suspending the aging process and of eternal life – Man as perpetual motion.

In the Ice Pavilion, a project for Stockholm – Cultural Capital of Europe during the winter of 1998, there was a strange object. It was a radiator carved out of ice. A sculptural narrative on the qualities of water, on the function of the radiator, on its inner form, and a comment on the ice pavilion itself, created by Christian Partos. He employs the elements air, fire, and water in his work. His instrument is technology, combined with poetry.

On the abandoned site of Vin & Sprit (Sweden’s Wine & Spirits monopoly) there were found two-hundred metres of glass pipes that had once been used in the bottling process.
They are transformed by Partos into a kind of pneumatic dispatch. The function of the pneumatic dispatch is to transport a physical object or an original message by the fastest possible means between a sender and a receiver in a closed channel. Partos makes the mailed item visible by using a transparent tube. The mailed item is made up of light, which moves at high speed.

Memento Metropolis in Stock-holm presents paintings by two Swedish artists. What is the place of painting in the context of the new? What is the sense of painting in a time fascinated by virtual reality created by ever faster computers? Does painting have a role at all in today’s mass-media society? The works of painters Ola Billgren and Johan Scott respond to these questions each in their own way.

There is a clear connection between the Roman metropolis Pompeii and the theme of the exhibition. But in Pompeii time was stopped by the rain of ashes. It embalmed both the mortal life and the city, which was thought to be eternal. Pompeii has most likely become a time capsule, a memory, by being preserved in the ashes for (up until this year) 1919 years. Ola Billgren’s travels to Pompeii and Herculaneum in 1995 was the inspiration for the suite Pompejansk interiör I-V (Pompeian Interior I-V). A particular memory was the silence that arose among the visitors. Oral communication was sucked up by the presence of the place, and the visual impression took over. The encounter with the stripped-down architecture, Pompeii without details, was a powerful experience. The primary structure of the architecture came forward in all its clarity. Floor, wall or opening, pillar, and roof. But the paintings do not depict the closed-in, labyrinthine in Pompeii’s atria. Instead the view opens, the ”virtual” manifests itself by forming imaginary passages. The paintings are reversed, and together they form a tunnel effect. This is the structure of the composition. The other structure is claire obscure, which Billgren calls ”the randomness of time.” The deeper the observer moves into the opening, the greater the changes in
color and light. The reversed backsides fade, and structures overlay the underlying composition. In the last image the colorist element takes over. It glows with great intensity.

The Pompeiian interiors emerge, or rather vibrate, through the observer’s own perception and visual experience. It is not only the painter’s search for new means and techniques, but also the observer’s altered view and experience that make the encounter possible.

Johan Scott’s work often consists of diptychs, triptychs, or series of images. Works ”in series” create their own internal relations, and this makes them into autonomous exhibitions. His new work for Memento Metropolis connects with this composite approach.

At the end of the 1980’s Johan Scott said that when he made an image it was just an image, it had no mythological or literary pretensions. Now, ten years later, the image has been further reduced – to the essentials. The paintings Utan Titel – Stockholmssvit (Untitled – Stockholm Suite) are no longer an image, but a drama or perhaps a trauma in paint. Art is now created not on the image’s, but on the paint’s own conditions. There is no longer any distance between the painter, the medium, and the work. It is the paintbrush that finds its way on the panel’s surface, with the oil paint as the lubricant. The traces of the paintbrush that makes its way through the paint results in the surface. The apparently organic structure turns out to be neither of organic nor ornamental structure. Upon closer inspection, it avoids that sort of categorization by being reminiscent of nothing, except perhaps in certain details in some of Scott’s earlier graphic works. Movement is no longer dictated by the painter, but by the paint. Scott frees himself now from the demand to paint pictures. Untitled – Stockholm Suite is paint discovering a canvas. Nostalgia, the known, and the preconceived no longer have a place here. The described surface, however, does not cover the entire surface of the panel. Other unexpected and disturbing forms push their way forward. Sometimes as a background color.
Sometimes in the form of a color change. Sometimes as a coating in another color over the brushstroke of the existing structure. There is no given order in this search. Instead new forces manifest themselves which push away the searching ornamentation of the paintbrush. These forms and this way of working may be interpreted as a longing for the new. On this foundation the unpredictable can happen to an even higher degree. What do these paintings have to do with Stockholm now? Here it is not about similarities in appearance, but about relations. On the painting’s surface there are relations like closeness, distance, and place. Recognizable concepts that would be able to be found in a city. Undoubtedly the images relate to themselves in the same way as a real place relates to itself: the distance between objects – the ones in the painting and the real ones in the landscape. At the same time Scott does not leave the slightest opening for pictorial illusion. Untitled – Stockholm Suite is like a portal that you cannot go through.

A peculiar light shines through from the background. It turns our understanding of reality upside-down. Which is actually the front side of the image? It is as if the observer would see the back side of the painting. In which room does the observer stand? In order to reach the room where the painting is located one must step in and through the painted surface.

All interpretation or description of art is an anachronism. The work itself should speak through the medium that the artist has chosen to express himself/herself in. Everything else falls short. Images must speak for themselves, says Martin Kippenberger. The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s Amerika by Kippenberger is a large collection of tables and chairs. On the other hand, this collection of existing, individually adapted, or newly created furniture is impossible to represent in words, it must be experienced.

Kafka’s story ends when the main character Karl Rossmann discovers a bill where the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma is searching for performers. ”Everyone is welcome!
If you want to be an artist you are one of us!” The uncompleted novel becomes complete with the presence of more than 50 groups of tables and chairs that are set up for employment interviews. The end (the Happy End) means that all of the interviewees are offered a job. Kippenberger compares The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s Amerika with the changing seasons, a movement to something else – a transition to the future. The tables represent different decades and are associated with them. The observer finds himself in his ”own” time and is drawn into the story.

Martin Kippenberger presented The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s Amerika for the first time in the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam in 1994. Peter Greenaway’s work was shown shortly before in the same building. Kippenberger showed a great interest in Greenaway’s installation. Stockholm – Cultural Capital of Europe 1998, presents 100 Objects to Represent the World by Peter Greenaway. The central room of Kulturabriken is adapted to Greenaway’s Prop-Opera. Kippenberger’s work will be placed two months later in the same room in relation to Greenaway’s remodeling. The circle is closed.

Memento Metropolis is not only about the longing for the new, but also the way towards the new. The role of art is to stretch and cross boundaries. The arrival of the new manifests itself not primarily in futuristic design and exciting inventions, but rather in changes on various planes of society. The focus on objects by the Copenhagen exhibition is complemented in Stockholm with man’s presence and importance for life in the city. The future as a state of being or an altered understanding of existence. Individual areas of knowledge are alienated from ”everyday life” to the degree that they are no longer accessible. There is no limit to the possibilities of technology. In this respect the future is already here.

In Memento Metropolis a meeting takes place between the City, Technology and Man, with his anxiety and optimism in the face of what’s to come. Perhaps art is the mediator
between humanism and the new technology? The artist will be the one who builds bridges of understanding.

Notice: In an interview from 1966 Martin Heidegger says, “Technology in its essence is something that man does not master out of himself.” The task of thought is for man to at all be able to acquire a satisfactory relation to Tech-nology. Heidegger speaks about how the role of philosophy has been taken over by Science. Philosophy’s position has been replaced by cybernetics. (Freely translated from the interview in Der Spiegel, 1976.)