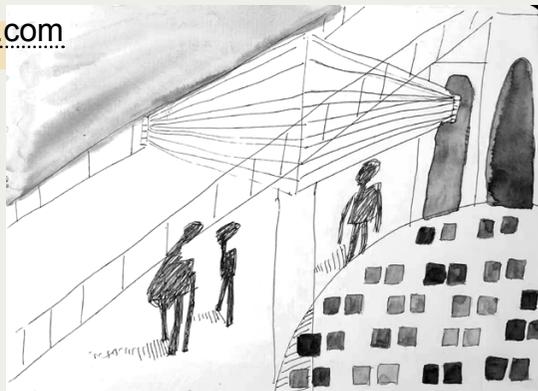


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# Colouring In 'The City'

A research project by  
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## CONTENTS

1 Introduction

3 Illustrating the City  
–*Stephanie Black and Luise Vormittag*

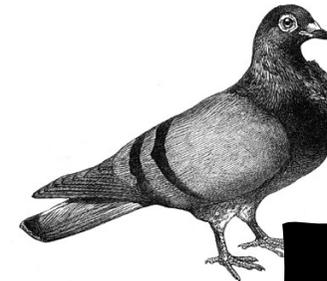
25 The Everyday and its Inhabitants: How can we use illustration as a method to understand place?  
–*Yo Hosoyamada, Giada Moriarty and Xiaobin Wang*

36 Colours on Ruins: A visual art and gentrification  
–*Sergios Striklogiannis*

43 The Storied City  
–*Various*

48 A Container For A Thing Contained  
–*Stuart Banno*

58 Colouring In: The City, A Roundtable  
–*Billie Muraben*



## A Container For A Thing Contained –Stuart Bannoeks

*Designer Stuart Bannoeks on the influences that shaped City Strips – a series of zines laying bare “the most read cities of fiction”.*

I'm already unhappy with how I'm coming across. We've probably gotten off on the wrong foot. Sorry (totally). It's my fault (obviously). Because, come close... to be frank with you, I'm somewhat unhappy to be writing this and I have almost zero interest in you reading anything I have to say. But it's more than just a general reluctance or disinterest. Don't get me wrong, it's not because I don't care about you. Please. No. I. Wouldn't want you to think that. I do care. And that's exactly why I don't want to talk about this. I've had some success in not talking. But I've also failed a bunch. If this is done in time and manages to be accepted here into this space of Colouring In – it'll be another failure.

If it were possible, and you know – only if you wanted to, we should both go back in time. No not we. Just you. Alone. You don't know me, and to fully labour, bore and blunt that point – it's because you don't need to know me. This isn't about having a meeting, a talk,

or reading some text that primes or frames something. It's about a thing. Quite a simple image, object - thing. A cold form.

Design as a verb and noun, actions and things, has a vast set of interpretations, deployments and readings. In amongst all of that nested, entangled mess – is one of the live tensions that has shaped and formed our understanding, misunderstanding and engagement in design. The interplay between the anonymous and the known – the onymous. The auteur, the hero, the brand, the signature vs something else (you tell me...). A sub-set of that tension would be the differentiation between a mode and result of an intentionally sought anonymity vs the emergent or happenstance anonymity that comes along with a certain moment's staging of a range of practices. Which is to say that at any given time sits a cluster of forms, gestures, undertakings – kinds of things that 'we' (whoever we are at whatever given time or place) have less (to zero) interest or concern in knowing who the signer, the maker, the putter-together-er was (or what they thought, or what they intended, or what they might have thought or currently think about other things). That to my mind should not be thought of as a binary state, a yes or no, an on or off situation. It's better thought of as an amount or variable, a dimensional value (X,Y,Z,N etc.) or an amount of something that is presently thought of as measurable (Temperature, Taste, Weight... Scarcity etc.), and that 'present value' is malleable



and susceptible to similar forces to those that afflict the physical qualities of a thing.

So just you. You go back a little bit in time. London. Go wandering into one of two comic shops Soho way. Gosh! Or Orbital, either would equally do it. Might be raining, might be shine - that's up to you (either are equally fine - it's your time machine. What a waste of a time machine!). Take a stroll up from Leicester Square station (preferably) and head on over to the small press section (Gosh!: it's back and to the right - Orbital: midway to the left) and get a copy of *City Strips*. Hope it's still in stock! If it is - get it, £3.50, or just have a quick free rifle through. Flick pages in corporeal. In the kinetic comix context. That's the intended, the 'designed for' factors.



Rifle is apparently an old French word for stealing stuff. Riffle might be a composite of 'ripple' and 'ruffle' (said the internet). Both would be fine. Steal a browse. Thieve an eyeball. Zine is a compression or shortening of the word magazine. The word magazine in relation to rifle evokes but is etymologically unassociated with firearms. Fire through it (mixed metaphorically).

What follows is not really to do with *City Strips*. *City Strips* was (and still is somewhat ongoingly and unfinished) a set of comics. Comics is a good description, but sometimes they are described and thought of as fanzines - which is also true enough. As publications they attempt to portray the cities,

architectures and objects of certain comics. It does this through a simple and unoriginal (in more than one sense) gesture or 'protocol'. Step 1: Characters, dialogue and non 'diegetic' text are erased from the original source. Step 2: In the now empty spaces left by that erasure a reconstruction, a redrawing, a restoration of the image is undertaken, and performed in as 'faithfully' or 'seamlessly' a way as plausible. The result is a portrait, a foregrounding of the architecture and objects of the comic. The spaces. The things. The vistas. The Mise-en-scène. That's the idea. As stated; simple and unoriginal. It's also relatively time consuming, more so than editing together a dinner, but considerably less than other things (you tell me...).

At the start of each issue there's a short introductory blurb in ALL CAPS (which you are about to read) and then no words. What follows here (after that introduction - which is coming shortly) is words, many more words than are warranted. Other's words. The comic doesn't know, and even if it could know, it doesn't need to have any of these things associated with it to make sense of itself or to do what it was designed to be. In fact these things, here in this context most likely actively hinder what it was designed to be. Sorry.

"ALL ACTION ARCHITECTURE - OBJECT ORIENTED VISTAS FROM ONE OF THE MOST READ CITIES OF FICTION EARTH. OUR 'HEROINE' - THE LOCATIONS WHERE

DEEDS OF DARING TAKE PLACE: HOMES OF THE INNOCENT. THE STREETS AND SIDEWALKS BUSTLING WITH BYSTANDERS. A SERIES OF BADLY LIT BACK ALLEYS PATROLLED BY WRONGDOERS, EMPLOYED AND GOVERNED VIA A SECRET LAIR BELONGING TO SOME VOCATIONALLY EVIL GENIUS. A 'BY-DAY' HUMBLE OFFICE FOR THE ALTER EGO, AND OF COURSE THE 'BY-NIGHT' HI-TECH HIDEOUT OF THE PHILANTHROPIC, HOME TO THE GENUINE SUPER-SELF. AND SO, HUMANS OF ALL AGES, WELCOME TO THIS ISSUE OF CITY STRIPS -"

Now can you just have a list of quotes? Is that fair use? Like, for review and criticism purposes? Hmmmm. Maybe. But it's probably not worth the risk. So I'll add some filler in-between just to try and cover bases.

"We see subversion as a sort of phenomenological scalpel, cutting through the surface of the spectacle of the commodity & bringing to light all the most subtle presuppositions on which the society is based."

Anonymous, *On Wielding the Subversive Scalpel* (1970)

Also something... something over used, something... something William S. Burroughs: "When you cut into the present, the future leaks out." But also other



things like the past, sofa foam, fruit juice, next day delivery distractions. Guts.

"Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his."  
Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972)

To paraphrase Timothy Morton, reality retreats as we attempt to study it. It is inexhaustible in the lines of enquiry and the indexable modes of retreat. In one of their Sci-Arc talks about "The Golden Stain of Time" (Ruskin) they have a passage about the inability to fully know what a building is through discrete analysis. At one point (paraphrasing again from memory), if you 'look' at a brick you get 'brick looks', if you 'lick' a brick you get 'brick licks'. That's what Marco is depicted as doing in that book, he's looking, listening, licking et.al bricks for Khan - and Khan is loving it!

"I'm not telling that story. We've heard it, we've all heard all about all the sticks, spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news."  
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1989)

You could say, if you really wanted, here, for the purposes of stretching over and loosely sketching some associated sense – that the city here is the container - the carrier bag for a way of life, a container that is made into the 'news'. But that might be stretching it too far. It's easier to pilfer some sense through this text to state the gesture of – 'hero under erasure'.

"He had once told me that he wished to become a spy but was not sure who to approach. In the afternoon he took me to the Chatham Street car park overlooking the Ramada Hotel where it turned out he was now living."  
Patrick Keiller, *Robinson in Space* (1997)

Who do we ask about that? I guess we don't - someone asks you. You are invited. Also, why can't I live in a hotel?

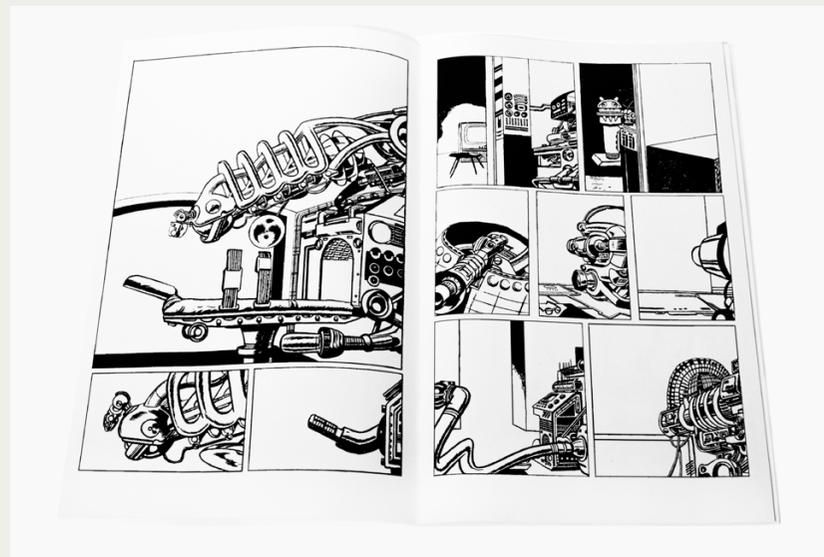
"...somebody once said to me, 'Don't you want to see it built, don't you want to be an architect?' To my mind, the assumptions behind these questions betray a misunderstanding as to what the work of Archigram represents. A misreading of it as a set of proposals, a set of windows through which to see a 'new world', is only a rather pathetic regurgitation of the dogma which asserts that architectural drawings are representations of something that wishes to become."  
David Greene, *Concerning Archigram* (1998)

A certain set of lines, shapes and descriptions of 'form', rendered in the associated gestures of design - misdiagnosed as a plan that you build physical things from. But that's obviously not the only kind of plan, and not the only way to enact, use and transpose.

"The only legitimate discourse is loss; art replenishes Junkspace in direct proportion to its own morbidity. We used to renew what was depleted, now we try to resurrect what is gone.... Outside, the architect's footbridge is rocked to the breaking point by a stampede of enthusiastic pedestrians; the designers' initial audacity now awaits the engineer's application of dampers. Junkspace is a look-no-hands world.... The constant threat of virtuality in Junkspace is no longer exorcized by petrochemical products, plastic, vinyl or rubber; the synthetic cheapens. Junkspace has to exaggerate its claims to the authentic. Junkspace is like a womb that organizes the transition of endless quantities of the Real - stone, trees, goods, daylight, people - into the unreal."

Rem Koolhaas, *Junkspace* (2001)

I've never been to New York. Delirious or otherwise. But I did briefly live and work in Rotterdam. I've also been to Sesame Street. Where does this fit in the discussion of 'Embodied Knowledge' vs 'Abstract Knowledge'?



"Grove Street, home. At least it was before I fucked everything up."

Carl "CJ" Johnson, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004)

I spent a large portion of my childhood in Springfield, Chelmsford. Also Springfield, Evergreen Terrace (via BBC2).

"I had realised that, in this instance, shops make astonishingly little difference to the city's complexion. They hardly impinge on it – they're wee zits rather than boiling Etnas of acne. And they will, in any case, soon be gone the way of the Civil Service Stores and Lipton's and Timothy White's and Augustus Barnett and Lyons Corner House. [...] The buildings that shops inhabit for their moth-life will (mostly) endure."

Jonathan Meades, *Museum Without Walls* (2004)

*The Strand* or just *Strand* is a thoroughfare in the City of Westminster. This short excerpt is from a section in *Museum Without Walls* titled *The Strand* (because it's about *The Strand*). This book along with an internalised conjuring of Meades' voice, stance and demeanour accompanied me for sometime on the many trips up-town to re-stock the comic shops that sold *City Strips*. It feels as if the relationship we have with 'place' is not so much a dialogue or genuine exchange, but two seemingly indifferent monologues. Two very separate accounts of space. One is oriented

in on our day to day readings, purposes, encounters and uses for them, the other is everything else - the environments themselves which remain silent. I tend to agree with Meades, lifting here from *Bunkers, Brutalism and Bloodymindedness* (2014) "Architecture does not have a language [...] it does not speak to us, it does not sign". But from time to time I think it just might be that we don't live long enough to hear them say anything.

"Crime novels are tours of the city, but they are tours that take you off the tourist map... [...] Location is the sine qua non of detective fiction; poorly lit alleyways, offices at night, derelict buildings set in overgrown wastelands, expensive houses and hotels. The detective has to navigate across a city animated by social distinctions and divided by social antagonisms. [...] The detective is required to access both space and information and to do so invisibly."

Ben Highmore, *Cityscapes* (2005)

With our tour guide erased, their words and lens gone, we are left with the toured. A kind of home. We didn't do any of those things but it's where we remember growing up.

"London in the 21st Century. For the people who live here it can be the best of times and the worst of times. This is the story of both in one place. Of two separate worlds coming together in a bend in the river at Deptford. This is the tale



of the tower."

Anthony Wonke, *The Tower: A Tale of Two Cities*  
(2007)

Open. Fade in from black. Overlaid onto panning shorts of the 'deep ford' on the edge of the 'dark river'. "No, no, don't exist anymore, it's time to say goodbye," sings that singer what sings that song. Nearly every day I walk in eye-shot of that tower, and in those moments of looking, the meaning (not the information), the noise of that documentary looms.

"I believe in one matter-energy, the maker of things seen and unseen. I believe that this pluriverse is traversed by heterogeneities that are continually doing things. I believe it is wrong to deny vitality to nonhuman bodies, forces, and forms, and that a careful course of anthropomorphization can help reveal that vitality, even though it resists full translation and exceeds my comprehensive grasp. I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests."

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009)

The temptation is to imagine back in the humans, with their personalities, movements and words. That's OK. But don't.

"Who Made that Barrel? You Did!"

Olivier Lebrun, *A Pocket Companion To Books From The Simpsons in Alphabetical Order* (2012)

I have a handful of books that once belonged to my grandparents. Those books now sit on my own shelves. I've never read them, but I have read the titles.

"I'm Kenneth Goldsmith, a poet who lives in New York City. A city full of words. Poetry is all around us, we just need to reframe it, and suddenly it becomes our own. Now I'm going to read you a very short poem. Something brand-new. Entitled: French Writer Wins Nobel. Stockholm, Patrick Modiano of France who has made a life-long study of the Nazi occupation and its effects on his country was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature Thursday. The Swedish academy gave the 1.1 million dollar prize to Modiano (69) quote: for the art of memory with which he has evoked with the most ungraspable human destinies and uncovered the life world of the occupation - AP" Kenneth Goldsmith, *Interview: Poetry in a Newspaper* (2014) (Retyped 2022)

In 2015 there was a small pop-up show and shop of City Strips at a small gallery called 310NXRD. In the bathroom was a small plaque which read: "So is this design research? It may look like a comic and feel like a comic. But don't let that fool you. It really is a comic."

"Citation: Bannoeks, Stuart, 2014-2019 City Strips (open square brackets) Project (close square brackets). Reviewer score between 0 and 4 in increments of 0.2. 'I think it scores extremely high on Originality (capital O) but the Rigour (capital R) (open brackets) while absolutely embedded in the work (close brackets) isn't explicitly visible. It's also personal (open brackets) NICHE (question mark) (close brackets) rigour rather than something using conventionally recognised research methods and techniques'. Score 3.2 out of 4."

Anonymous, *Research Excellence Framework 'Internal Dry Run'* (2019)

Some years ago now I unintentionally and inconveniently became an educator as well as a researcher (clarification: the educator part was intended and is joyous, the researcher part was/is the itchy side effect). Unintentionally, because right now and for the time being those things in higher education are predominantly enmeshed. Inconveniently, because you are confronted with an inherited and inherent impasse, a dilemma that comes about through a tacit but also tangible dichotomy between 'teaching & research', and then with *disciplines* like design the sub-dilemma of 'research & practice'. There are those who think these things can be, or already are reconciled. I honestly don't want to waste our time bemoaning and begrudging their valid and well supported position. But this is not my project and I don't believe in it. Oh well. Never mind. It must be done

regardless. Done a bit like this. Done until such a time that something which genuinely nurtures rather than delineates, encourages rather than justifies, values rather than converts might emerge. A something that comes from and belongs to 'a *thingy*', a making, a happening, a doing-based enquiry...

The other problem is that they make you stick your name on it.

SB