

A 'BIG' YES TO SUPERFICIALITY: ARLANDA HOTEL BY BJARKE INGELS GROUP (1)

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2. For major examples in the contemporary literature of architecture, which emphasize the idea of novelty in the design and production of ornament by means of digital technology, see Lynn (2004, 63-8); Kolarevic and Klinger (2008); Levit (2008); Domeisen (2008); Garcia (2009, 6-17); Colletti (2010, 60-3); Gleiter (2012).

INTRODUCTION

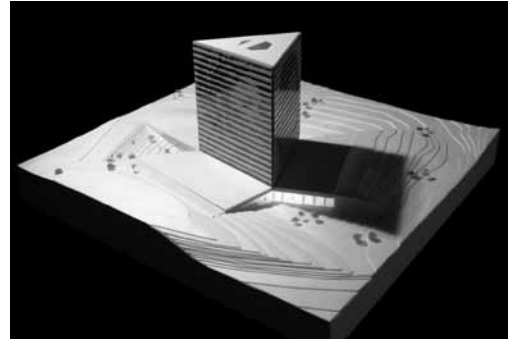
The re-emergence of ornament in the twenty-first century is usually grounded on the advent of highly performative computer-based design and manufacturing technology (2). As the contemporary architect Alejandro Zaero-Polo (2009, 22) remarks, technological development is a distinctive feature of surface in contemporary architecture. Digital technology enables the design and production of intrinsic surface effects, as well as performative parametric patterns and ornaments. Ornament, in this respect, is considered as new. Regarded as the novelty in design and production, ornament in contemporary architecture is conceived beyond the historical arguments of appliqué, mimesis, representation, and waste of labor.

In the last two decades, a vast array of books, journal issues, and themed exhibitions emerged in architectural milieu, indicating the current interest on ornament (3). The diversity of handling the issue suggests variety on viewpoints and case studies. This paper, as a case study, explores Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), the global architecture office founded by the Danish architect Bjarke Ingels in 2005. BIG is a relatively new office, yet they have accomplished significant projects throughout the world and caused controversial opinions through their designed or constructed works. Although their projects have ornamental characteristics, they are not discussed in terms of surface articulations in architectural literature. Also, Bjarke Ingels does not refer these façade designs by using the word "ornament"; instead, he uses terms such as "facelift", "cosmetic variation", "catchy head piece", "royal face treatment", and "eye catching appendage" (Ingels, 2010, 74, 94, 105, 341, 343). The word ornament has traditional and conventional associations. However, as it is seen from BIG's monograph and interviews, Ingels intends to create his own contemporary architectural jargon, as a part of his search for a new form of expression. In parallel to BIG's approach to building, this paper argues that unlike the general

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Figure 1. BIG, Arlanda Hotel, Stockholm, Sweden, 2007 (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

Figure 2. Model of the Arlanda Hotel (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).



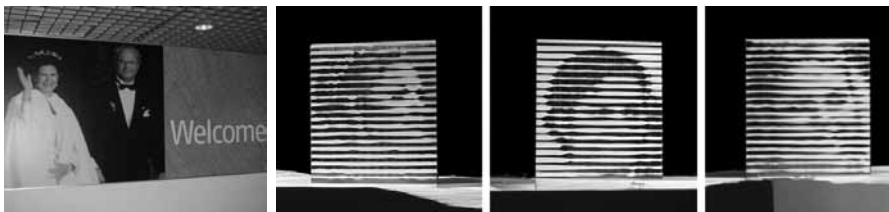
3. For a variety of interviews with contemporary architects in terms of their ornamental building forms, see van Raaij (2014). For an analysis on the history of ornament and the emerging views on ornament in contemporary architecture, see Picon (2013). For a survey on exhibitions, journals, and books on contemporary ornament, see Balik and Allmer (2010, 69-74). For a detailed analysis on the ornamental works of contemporary architecture, see Moussavi and Kubo (2006). For the journal issues of the last two decades that analyze historical overview and re-emergence of ornament in contemporary architecture, see *Arredamento Mimarlık* (2010) "Çağdaş Mimarlıkta Bezeme" issue, no. 241; *Forward* (2009) "Ornament" issue, no. 2; *Abitare* (2009) "Ornament: Return of the Repressed" issue, no. 494; *Architectural Design* (2009) "Patterns of Architecture" issue, no. 6; *Arch+* (2008) "Pitch, Type, Pattern, Script, Algorithm, Ornament" issue, no. 189; *Werk, Bauen + Wohnen* (2007), no. 11; *306090 Books* (2006) "Decoration" issue, no. 10; *Eye: The International Review of Graphic Design* (2005), no. 58; *Oase* (2004) "Ornament: Decorative Traditions in Architecture" issue, no. 65; *Architecture D'aujourd'hui* (2001) "Ornament" issue, no. 333. For the architecture and design exhibitions of the last two decades on the reappearance of ornament, see *Grammar of Ornament* (2013), curated by Rachel Barron, The Briggait Artists' Studios, Glasgow, Scotland; *Pure Ornament* (2013), Ann Long Fine Art Gallery, Charleston, USA; *The Body Adorned: Dressing London* (2012), Horniman Museum, London, United Kingdom; *Deep Surface: Contemporary Ornament and Pattern* (2011), curated by Denise Gonzales Crisp and Susan Yelavich, CAM Raleigh Museum, North Carolina, United States of America; *Political Patterns – Changing Ornaments* (2011), curated by Sabine B. Vogel, IFA Galleries, Berlin and Stuttgart, Germany; *Design Criminals Or a New Joy into the World* (2010), curated by Sam Jacob, The Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria; *Is Ornament a Crime?: Rethinking the Role of Decoration in Contemporary Wood* (2010), curated by Cindi Strauss, Exposition of Sculpture Objects & Functional Art (SOFA), Chicago, USA; *Ornament is Crime?* (2009), curated by Richard Slee, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, United Kingdom; *Lace of Architecture* (2009), curated by Odile Werner and Sophie Trelcat, Maison de L'architecture et de la Ville, Paris, France; *Visual Delight: Ornament and Pattern in Modern and Contemporary Design* (2009), curated by

conception of its newness and contemporaneity due to digital technology, ornament in contemporary architecture still relates to the postmodern ideas of representation, irony, and superficiality. The paper discusses one of their projects, namely Arlanda Hotel design, as it unifies the use of ornament with the ironic stance of BIG (**Figure 1**). It also uses BIG's monograph, *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution* (2010), as a tool to further investigate the textual and visual representation of the building in question.

The history of ornament in architecture consists of a diversity of arguments. The influential Renaissance architect and theorist Leon Battista Alberti (1452, 163) considers ornament as an attachment and addition to architecture, yet as a complement to architectural beauty in his seminal work, *De Re Aedificatoria*. The nineteenth-century British architect Augustus W. Pugin proposes the well known notion of "decorating construction" in his book, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), arguing that ornament should be generated as an enrichment of construction. The German architect and theorist Gottfried Semper (1860, 247-8) develops his *Bekleidungsprinzip* (theory of dressing) which indicates the origin of architecture as textile, rather than the structure. As he explains in his treatise, *Der Stil*, the idea of weaving natural materials for cover and protection was later transformed into weaving synthetic textile materials. In contrast to Semper, the Austrian art historian Riegl (1893, 5-9) establishes his own theory of ornament through an urge for abstraction in his most famous work, *Stilfragen*. According to his theory, ornament derives from artistic inventions and individual motives, rather than merely imitating nature. In contrast with the preceding theories, the twentieth-century ideas on ornament were highly controversial. Sullivan (1918, 189), the pioneer architect of Modernism, intended to reflect the spirit of nature through ornament, as he developed ornamental forms toward an organic complexity. The Austrian Modern architect Adolf Loos, on the other hand, led the way to banish ornament in modern culture and architecture. In his seminal essay, *Ornament und Verbrechen* (Loos, 1908), he dwells on the social aspects of ornament, as he defines it as a waste of time, labor, and economy. With an attempt to overcome the Modernist reduction of functional and structural concerns, architectural theorists in the late 1950s began to consider meaning in architecture. In the early 1960s, semiology as a branch of linguistic theory influenced architectural theory (4). Following these concerns, Postmodernism re-introduced the concepts of representation, meaning, symbolism, as well as new ideas of banality, superficiality, and irony, which in turn associate with the design of the Arlanda Hotel by BIG (5).

Figure 3. The billboard in the Arlanda Airport luggage claim area with a picture of the King and Queen of Sweden (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

Figure 4. The portraits of Princess Victoria, Prince Carl Philip and Princess Madeleine on the surfaces of the Arlanda Hotel (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).



Diane Minnite, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, USA; *The Power of Ornament* (2009), curated by Sabine B. Vogel, Belvedere Palace & Art Museum, Vienna, Austria; *Ornament and Pride* (2008-2009), curated by Nina Folkersma, Stedelijk Museum for the Contemporary Arts, Ghent, Belgium; *Re-Sampling Ornament* (2008), curated by Oliver Domeisen and Francesca Ferguson, Swiss Architecture Museum, Basel, Switzerland; *Technology, Performance, Ornament* (2005), Urban Center Gallery, New York City, USA; *Ornament* (2005), curated by Melissa Urcan, M5 Exhibition Space in Chicago, USA; *Sign as Surface* (2003), curated by Peter Zellner, Artists' Space, New York, USA; *Ornament and Abstraction* (2001), curated by Markus Bröderlin, Foundation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland.

4. Theorists and architects in the 1960s pioneered investigations on the issue of meaning in architecture. Previously, semiotics was introduced to philosophy as the study of signs and symbols, and was developed by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce in the nineteenth-century, and then led by Charles W. Morris in the early twentieth-century. In the 1960s, semiotics was transformed into semiology by the Swiss philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure, and was further elaborated by the French philosopher Roland Barthes and the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco. In philosophy, semiology analyzes the meaning and syntax of words, and in architecture, it analyzes buildings as carriers of meaning like a language. Architects contributed to the field by extensive treatises, which established theories of the newly developing postmodernism. Jencks and Baird (1969) demonstrated the application of semiology into architecture, and led the way to the concepts of sign and symbol in postmodern architecture. Moreover, Venturi (1977) illustrated complexity and ambiguity as an instrument of improving the multiplicity of meaning in architecture.

5. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, the pioneer architects of postmodernism, developed the categories of the "duck" and the "decorated shed" in collaboration with their colleague, Steven Izenour. The duck represents a symbol *per se*, which distorts the space, structure, and program of a building. The decorated shed stands for a building that has applied ornaments on its façades with space and structure at the service of its program (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, 1977, 87).

6. Personal contact with Andreas Klok Pedersen, Partner at BIG and the project leader of the Arlanda Hotel. 18.04.2013.

"WELCOME TO MY HOMETOWN!": PORTRAYING ROYALTY ON THE FAÇADES OF THE ARLANDA HOTEL

Arlanda Hotel is one of the significant designs of BIG, which dates back to 2007. Being yet unconstructed, the project is on hold after schematic design phase (6). The project is designed within an area of 25,000 m² near Arlanda Airport in Stockholm, the capital city of Sweden. It is designed to sit on an artificial topography, which is a base for a vertical triangular prism (Figure 2). The prism contains hotel rooms and their service spaces, whereas the topography consists of public spaces, such as conference rooms and hotel facilities. Since the project area is in a plain and relatively unoccupied district of Stockholm, the hotel is planned to be perceivable from a distance, standing alone with its enigmatic surfaces.

The idea of representing royalty on the surfaces of Arlanda Hotel derived from the architects' very first impression of Stockholm. When a team of architects from BIG arrived at the Arlanda Airport, they were inspired by the depiction of famous Swedish people, which adorn the walls of the airport (Ingels, 2010, 336). The luggage claim area of international arrivals section was decorated with a long series of billboards, where Stockholmer celebrities, from Ingrid Bergman to Alfred Nobel were appearing with cheerful images. Next to each image, one could clearly read the sentence, "Welcome to my hometown." It seemed as if celebrities were saluting foreigners that arrive Stockholm. Billboards came to an end with a large one at the luggage claim exit, where a pleasant image of the Swedish Royal couple, King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia appeared (Figure 3). Deriving from this first impression of the city, the architects intended to design the hotel as an extension of the greeting ceremony. They created surfaces with ambiguous depictions of the Swedish Royal family: Crown Princess Victoria, Princess Madeleine and Prince Carl Philip, the daughters and the only son of King Carl Gustaf and Queen Silvia (Figure 4). Throughout the centuries, portrait depictions have served as a representation of title, identity, and status of royal families (7). This time, depicting the royal figures of Sweden, the façades of the Arlanda Hotel reveal a significant role of ornament as urban portraits, and emerge as the embodiment and extension of memory, history, and authority. The portraits construct the identity, affiliation, and power of the royal family in a symbolic manner.

According to the site plan, the building is designed in such a way that it is seen from various locations. When people leave Arlanda Airport and set foot in Stockholm, they would come across the image of Princess Victoria on the building surface. She would, figuratively, salute them and say, "Welcome to my hometown." When people approach the building area from north, they would come across the image of Prince Carl Philip. Lastly, when people leave Stockholm and return to the airport, they would see Princess Madeleine as the last image of Stockholm.

Figure 5. The cut-out surfaces of the Arlanda Hotel (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

Figure 6. Horizontal windows of the Arlanda Hotel seen from the interior (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

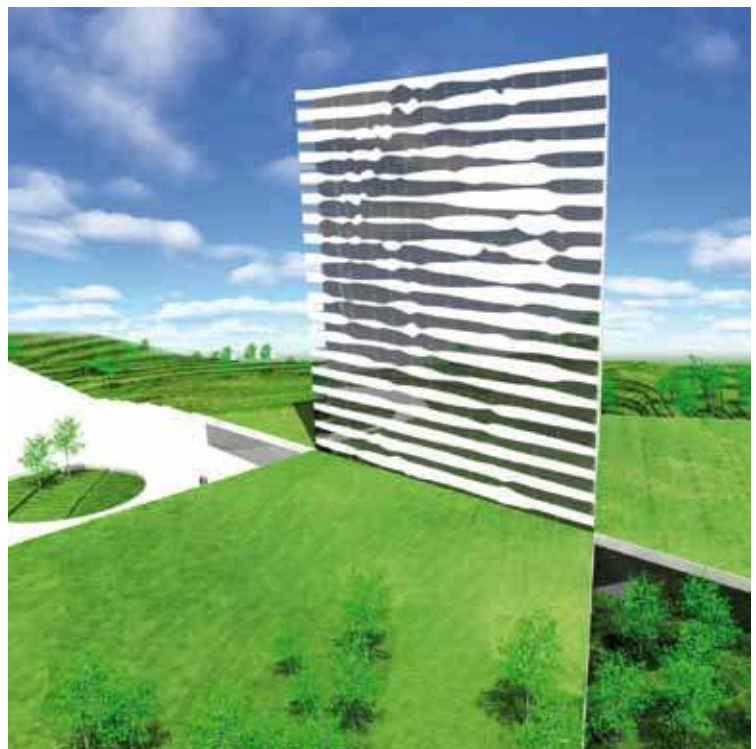
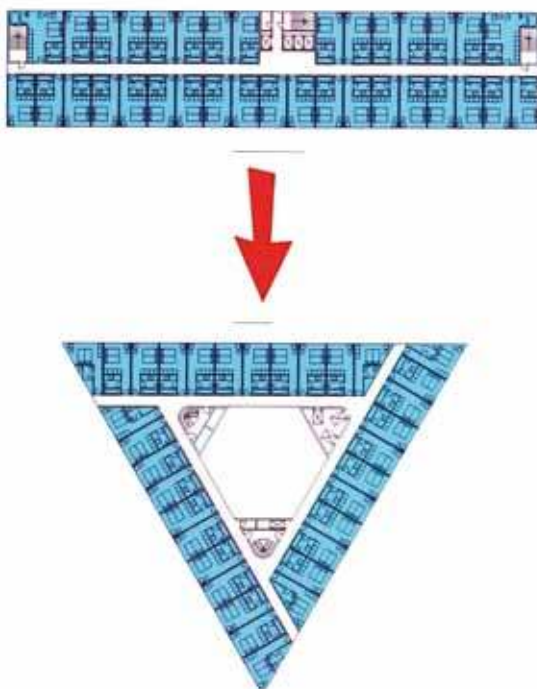


The ornamental character of the building is created by cutting solid surfaces out, and placing transparent windows in-between in order to let sunlight and air into the hotel rooms (**Figure 5**). Each horizontal window is designed with an intention to provide an unobstructed landscape view (Ingels, 2010, 338). In accordance with the composed portraits, some rooms have large openings, whereas others have narrow slits (**Figure 6**). Yet even the toilets of the rooms at the ends of the corridors have landscape views. What makes the portraits as ornaments come forth so intensely is the concealment of vertical structural system inside. The solid elements of surfaces are designed as non load-bearing elements, and are attached to the walls in-between the rooms.

Figure 7. Typical floor plan of the Arlanda Hotel (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

Figure 8. The effect of two-dimensionality on the surfaces of the Arlanda Hotel (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

The building form as a triangular prism contributes to the perception of portraits as two-dimensional surfaces (**Figure 7**). Referring each surface as a “royal portrait on a postage stamp,” Ingels (2010, 340) states that a close look at one of the surfaces from one edge of the building would render the other two surfaces invisible (**Figure 8**). The artificial topography makes the royal images fully exposed to the city by being a base for the perception of



images. The ornamental character takes so much attention that one would not even comprehend it as a building; rather, confuse it with an advertising billboard or an urban sign. Refashioning the architectural theoretician Karsten Harries' reading of the relation between representation and re-representation (Harries, 1998, 13), the cut-out surfaces of the Arlanda Hotel represent royal figures of Sweden and re-present the ornamental surfaces as a sign. Loaded with impressions and affects, the building emerges as an icon covered with instantly recognizable royal figures in the city. Performing as an essential element of the metaphorical greeting ceremony, ornaments as urban portraits transform the surfaces into a pure spectacle. They make the viewer focus on nothing but the decipherment of the images as royal figures. The building, in this sense, turns into an enigma in-between a hotel and an image.

"WHEN ZUMTHOR MEETS WARHOL": IRONIC EXPRESSIONS IN YES IS MORE

When Ingels (2010, 339-341) elaborates the design process of the Arlanda Hotel, he uses ironic expressions, such as "being reduced to façade architects," "building a hotel with a royal face treatment," and "Zumthor meets Warhol." Using these expressions as a part of the design input, Ingels develops the design idea through the binaries of rational and irrational, ordinary and unusual, serious and humorous. Being previously a postmodern tool, irony closely associates with the works of Venturi and Scott Brown. Recalling and re-interpreting postmodern aspects, irony re-surfaces in contemporary architecture, specifically in BIG's works. During the design process of the Arlanda Hotel, Ingels develops irony as a tool of collective creation, which he uses to generate ideas with other architects in the project team.

Even the title of BIG's book, *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution* (2010), which illustrates their projects, evokes irony as a statement *per se* (Figure 9). Being in-between a monograph and a manifesto, the book reveals that Ingels' own expression "Yes is more" is developed through an evolution of famous statements of Ingels' favorite characters, most of whom are architects. Ingels refers to Mies van der Rohe's dictum, "less is more," but points to the failure of indistinguishable similar buildings in modernism. He then quotes Robert Venturi's maxim, "less is a bore," by criticizing postmodern buildings for being unimaginative anonymous boxes (Ingels, 2010, 2-4). Ingels' analysis further develops with Philip Johnson, Rem Koolhaas and Barack Obama, until eventually he emphasizes his own statement. Designated as "yes is more," his idea revolves around the view of mediating between social, economic, and environmental dimensions of architecture. Rather than automatically contradicting previous ideas, Ingels approaches the issues in an affirmative manner. For him, being in contrast with a previous opinion makes the architect ironically a follower of it (Ingels, 2010, 14-15).

Pointing to critical thinking, irony has the potential of deciphering Ingels' expressions for the Arlanda Hotel project, some of which are stated above. When the architects of BIG were assigned to work on the design of the hotel, they were challenged by the strict demands of the client. From function diagrams to the building form, the client had determined most of the design decisions by himself without discussing with the architects. As a sarcastic and provocative reaction to the variety of the pre-determined parameters, the architects then focused on merely designing the surfaces in

7. Portrait painting as a representation of title and identity dates back to ancient times. In antiquity, various forms of statues, reliefs, wall paintings, and metal coins represented physical characteristics of the person in depiction. During the medieval age, position and status were essential representations of portrait depictions. Portraits became a significant medium of representing affiliation, status, and nobility from the sixteenth to the eighteenth-century. Leaders and royalties were portrayed in order to show and perpetuate their authority, power, and love. In these portraits, their faces and bodies as physical forms were transformed into ideal forms (Woodall, 1997, 1-3). The capacity and energy of portrait paintings are also emphasized by Alberti (1956, 63), as he conceives portraiture through the dichotomy of dead and alive or absence and presence, since the mortal life of a dead person transforms into eternity by means of portrait painting. Defined as the metaphor of body politics, or the absolutist portraiture, the ideal portrait depiction is based on the idea of omnipresent authority figure. In other words, nothing can escape from the sight of the king, since he is everywhere and sees everything. The manifestation of power with regard to emperor is further elaborated in the Panopticism section by Foucault (1995). The idea of omnipresent authority was effectual particularly in Europe, as large portraits of the king had been painted and used to substitute the king when he had been abroad. Conceiving this portrait as the representation of kingship, courtiers had regularly paid their respects to it. Otherwise, it would be counted as offense. Designated as "the contempt of Majesty," it was forbidden for the courtiers to turn their back on the portrait, as it had been the king himself. Such metaphor-laden portraits in particular, represent the ideal features of authorities, which are not affected by the age and other attributes of individual royalty (Mirzoeff, 2009, 35-36).

Figure 9. A view from the exhibition *Yes is More* at Danish Architecture Centre (DAC), Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009 (Copyright: Bujdosó Attila, 2009). Cover of the book *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution*, Taschen, 2009, which is published on the occasion of exhibition (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2009).



Figure 10. The clear ironic stance of BIG that accords with the unconventional layout of the book *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution*, 2009 (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2009).

detail (Figure 10). As the surface was the one theme that the client had not presented an opinion about, architects confronted him with an ironic point of view: “Jesus, he already designed the building – What’s left for us to do? Façades?” (Ingels, 2010, 337).

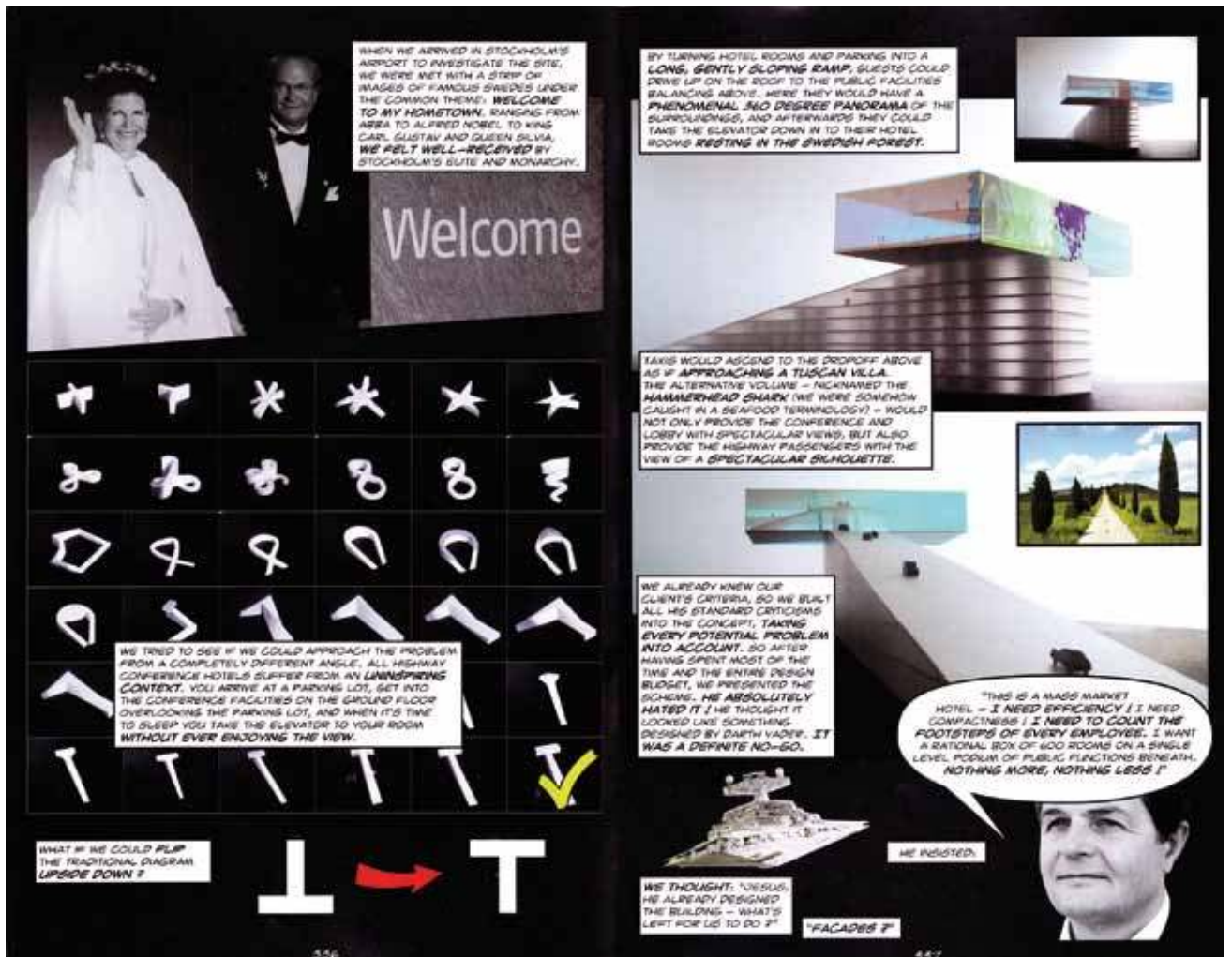




Figure 11. Site plan of the Arlanda Hotel (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

Following the doctrines of modern architecture, it is known that being merely in charge of the façade design is not an architectural approach to building. It essentially indicates superficiality, similar to Le Corbusier's association of style with the feathers in a hat as useless ornaments:

"The English suit we wear had nevertheless succeeded in something important. It had neutralized us. It is useful to show a neutral appearance in the city. The dominant sign is no longer ostrich feathers in the hat, it is in the gaze. That's enough" (Le Corbusier, 1930, 107).

Having the potential of everlasting connotations, irony accepts contradicting realities and becomes a coexistence of unstable meanings. Through irony, established codes and assumptions on architectural discipline become the points in question. Architects conceive irony as a double-coded parody, simultaneously justifying and undermining it (Hutcheon, 2002, 97; Petit, 2013, 8, 21, 40). In the case of the Arlanda Hotel, the architects attribute themselves the ironic stance of being façade architects, and approach the design with an unconventional attitude. In this sense, ironic approach produces an iconic building.

Throughout the design process, BIG justifies the ornamental surfaces of the Arlanda Hotel by means of various other ironic approaches. Ingels notes that the statues of royal figures were historically erected on squares at the intersection of two major streets. Adapting this idea to modern city, the architects designed the hotel with images of royal figures in the junction of two highways (Figure 11). Ingels (2010, 341) ironically explains this adaptation as the merge of the European square and the American strip, which are two different urban typologies. Despite the fact that he makes an analogical and ironic comparison, the relationship of the American strip and the European city was previously mentioned by Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour. According to them, the strip and the square are related to the dynamism and development of cities. Both the Las Vegas strip and the Roman piazza are known as the symbols of urban sprawls of their time (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, 1977, 18; Venturi and Scott Brown, 1996, 123). Concerning the concept of European city, statues of kings/queens, emperors/empresses, mythological gods/goddesses, and biblical personages on city squares are symbols of power. With the statues, fountains, and flags, the square establishes invisible routes for walking (Calabi, 2004, 112). It emerges as a three-dimensional public space, which is appropriate for the movements and pauses of passers-by. The traditional American strip, on the other hand, consists of huge signboards perpendicular and close to the highway. Big-scale ornaments and graphics as advertising billboards are perceived by the people in the cars at high speeds. According to Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, the strip is a landscape of symbols in space. It proposes two-dimensional signs rather than three-dimensional elements (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, 1977; Venturi and Scott Brown, 1996, 124). In the case of the Arlanda Hotel, the merging of the typologies of square and strip creates a hybrid typology, which Ingels designates as "a hotel with a royal face treatment" (Ingels, 2010, 341). Handling diversities with the keyword of "both - and," the Arlanda Hotel illustrates exactly what Ingels specifies through his expression, "yes is more."

In the monograph, *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution* (Ingels, 2010, 340), the Arlanda Hotel is represented through another ironic binary, which is called as "Zumthor meets Warhol." When the hotel is viewed closely, according to Ingels, the surfaces would render



Figure 12. The image of Princess Victoria on the surface of the Arlanda Hotel (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

pure Scandinavian materials visible. Since the surfaces are made of wood, stone, glass, concrete, and steel, as well as they lack any additional cover or paint, they associate with the architecture of the contemporary Swiss architect Peter Zumthor (Ingels, 2010, 340). From Zumthor's point of view, the meaning of materials and details in his buildings expands beyond their physical features. Details are thresholds for sensing different textured surfaces, and materials are reactive to one another through an infinite potentiality. They perform in accordance with a phenomenological idea, rather than being mere adornment (Zumthor, 2006, 15; Zumthor, 2010, 25). Leaving aside sheer material presence, Zumthor deals with material affects, perception, and tactility. Therefore, the essential qualities of materials for his architecture become temperature, sound, atmosphere, and sensation.

Expanding the other end of ironic expression onto the American Pop-artist Andy Warhol, Ingels indicates that a distanced look at the building transforms it into an immaterial image (**Figure 12**). According to Ingels, artificial lights in the hotel rooms reflect the colors of carpets and wallpapers at night. Contributing to the immateriality of building surfaces, color and light add a layer to architecture (Ingels, 2010, 340, 342). In Warhol's works, temporality and ephemerality of life, fame, commodity, and so on are presented as colorful effects by means of silk-screen printing. In Zumthor's architecture, on the other hand, temporality relates to modifications on natural and constructional materials due to weathering. The binary of "Zumthor meets Warhol" expresses divergent versions of temporality, as well as it ironically confronts Zumthorian materiality with Warholian immateriality. Irony develops into a slippery ground, as it proposes multiple layers of contradicting meanings.

Furthermore, Ingels (2010, 343) develops a third typology as an addition to the Venturian idea of the duck and the decorated shed, which is called as "the princess", or "functional elements that constitute a collective iconic expression." Elsewhere in the monograph, he gives more historical references, such as interpreting Le Corbusier's idea of "the house as a

machine for living" as "an Unité d'Habitation version 2.0" in a housing design, and merging the historical spire and the modern skyscraper as the "Danish version of the Spanish Steps in Rome" in a warped tower project (Ingels, 2010, 69, 105, 107). Although Ingels makes clear historical and architectural references, his adaptation of them stand in-between being serious or deep, and humorous or superficial. In this paper, BIG's tendency of creating "one-of-a-kind hybrids" through the merging of historical references is interpreted as an ironic approach. This approach, in this sense, demonstrates that BIG's references of architectural history justify their use of ornamentation, while over-theorizing their superficial surface effects.

NINE VICTORIAS: A READING OF BIG'S COLORFUL STUDY FOR THE FAÇADES

Throughout the design process of the Arlanda Hotel, Ingels is intensely influenced by Warhol's works, particularly his silk-screen reproductions of Marilyn Monroe. Along with Jacqueline Kennedy, Elvis Presley and so on, Marilyn was one of the celebrities that Warhol printed many times. By means of silk-screen printing, he reproduced Marilyn images as a series of flat and colorfully highlighted depictions. Recalling Warhol, Ingels makes a study of the Crown Princess Victoria portraits for one of the surfaces of the Arlanda Hotel in different color combinations (Figure 13). According to Ingels, artificial lights in the hotel rooms would reflect different colors each day through windows. Making the surface almost like a wallpaper pattern, Ingels' study illustrates compositions of different princess portraits on the surface in different nights. Since Ingels (2010, 342) makes this study by "revisiting Warhol", a comparison of the princess portraits of BIG to the Marilyn portraits of Warhol unfolds discussions on ironic representation through multiplicity. Particularly Warhol's *10 Marilyns* (1967), which is one of his well-known series of screen-prints on paper, makes Marilyn Monroe a disembodied icon (Figure 14). Similarly, BIG's study, which is coined as *Nine Victorias* in this paper, renders Princess Victoria immaterial and contributes to the visuality of the Arlanda Hotel.

Warhol's fascination for Monroe dates back to his childhood. Since he was a child, he had been amazed by movie magazines and autographed celebrity photographs (Indiana, 2010, 14). According to Warhol, celebrities represent the most significant spectacle of consumer culture. They transform from bodily presences to pure images and achieve the look of commodity. Through a profusion and consumption of images, Warhol politically and culturally questions the significance of iconography in modern culture. Depersonalizing individual figures through multiplication, he turns them

Figure 13. BIG's colorful study of the Princess Victoria image for the Arlanda Hotel (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

Figure 14. Andy Warhol, *10 Marilyns*, silk-screen on paper, 1967.



into mere stereotypes of icons (Dyer, 2004, 34). Defined as “nothing” in Warhol’s terms, pure images are representations of commercialized essences. Serial reproduction in his works connotes to his references of industry, as well as his ideas on immateriality and commercialization. Developed through multiplicity, Warhol’s images represent the infinite monotony of mass-production and consumption (Rosenblum, 2001, 14; Mirzoeff, 2009, 281; Indiana, 2010, 150-1). For him, being a celebrity is closely associated with the mechanical reproduction of photography. The technique of reproduction makes art and industry symbolically exchange signs. A commodity object may be attributed as aesthetic, whereas an art object may be produced as a ready-made. By being an infinitely reproductive machine, Warhol’s works redefine everyday reality, superficiality, and banality as aesthetic signs (Baudrillard, 1993, 72-5).

The act of deciphering the identities of royal figures in the Arlanda Hotel, despite the lack of details and photographic high-resolution, recalls the deformation technique in the works of Warhol. His prints accomplish the deformation of photographic images by a series of silk-screening process. Specifically in his works on disaster and death, Warhol made repetitive images in grainy and defective versions. What he intended by these defects was to deconstruct the reality of images and transform fatal topics into spectacle images (Collins, 2012, 150). With a similar approach, in the works of celebrity portraits, he reduced image quality and resolution in order to detach images from their initial referents. Therefore, celebrities as corporeal figures were transformed to sheer surface images (Shaviro, 1993, 209; Ergüven, 2001, 35). To a certain degree, for Warhol, deformation became a means of draining meaning and being superficial, since there is no theory or discourse beyond the surface.

In his serial works of celebrity portraits, Warhol challenges the conventional portraiture of singular unique images, and destructs the

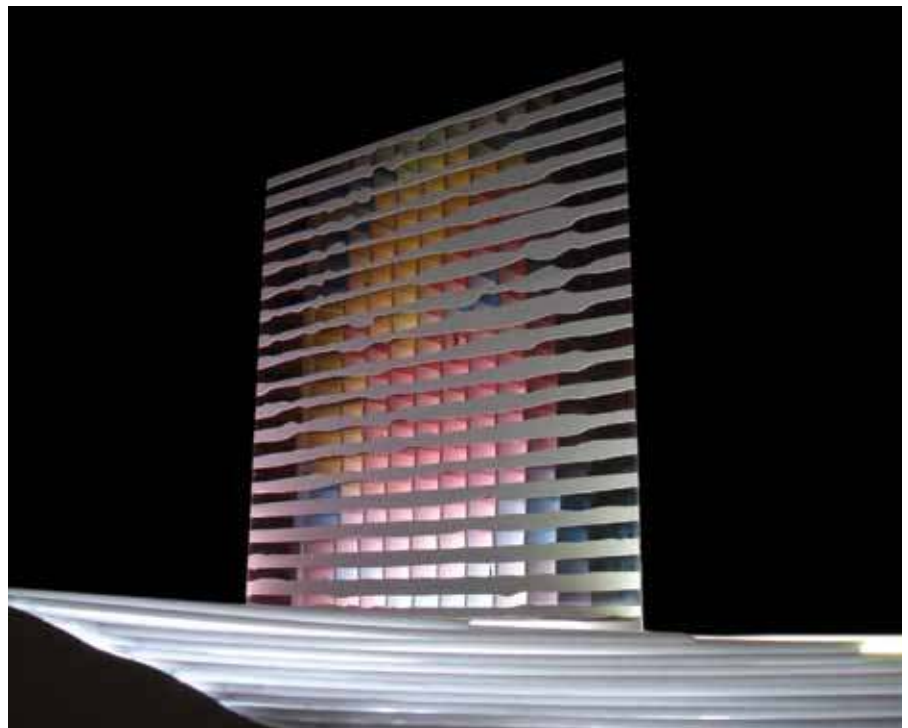


Figure 15. Model of the Arlanda Hotel as a study of shifting colors (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

notion of traditional in-depth contemplation on paintings. Although silk-screening process eliminates details, viewers are still able to recognize the figures as celebrities. Images with a lack of detail challenge human memory, which is slippery, vivid, and powerfully selective (Crow, 2001, 52). Physical features of a Warholized celebrity dissociate from corporeality, and do not depend on the physical body. In this sense, celebrity as a work of art acquires a multiplication of nothingness. Warhol makes a critique of consumer culture by way of his works, since the depicted celebrities have already been drained of meaning when their images were spread worldwide from advertising billboards to newspapers.

Similarly, prior to the design of the Arlanda Hotel, images of the royal figures have been reproduced in different media from newspapers to websites. By duplicating their faces as ornamental surfaces in the Arlanda Hotel, they once more appear beyond their corporeal presences. Similar images of the authority figures repeat on various surfaces in media, as they promote the architects as producers, and the royal family as the produced object. In this sense, the royal portraits as ornamental façades can be seen as the epitome of culture industry. As elaborated by the Frankfurt School theoreticians, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, culture industry works with the technique of advertising, as it reproduces an image on many surfaces continuously (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002, 133). The multiplication of images assigns them a commodity value, as the royal figures transfer from their bodily presences to immateriality through national stamps and building façades (**Figure 15**).

From Warhol's point of view, color is an instrument of deconstructing the corporeality of the depicted celebrities in series. By means of vibrant colors, images are dissociated from reality, and achieve an almost cartoon-like surreality. As a contribution to this surreal effect, Warhol unifies image and surface through a picture plane, and destructs the distinction between figure and ground (Dyer, 2004, 37; Indiana, 2010, 103). Printed on a flat surface, Warhol's works are composed of nothing but shadows and highlighting colors. In his *10 Marylins*, for instance, each Marilyn image consists of at most four colors. Each image highlights a different part of Marilyn's face and drops shadow on a different area; yet her eyes, nose, mouth, and hair are more or less distinguishable. Images emerge as vibrant colored compositions of Marilyn. Concerning BIG's colorful study of the Princess Victoria, or *Nine Victorias*, each Princess image consists of three colors. In each image, her nose, ears, and mouth are fused into the whole surface. The blurry contours of her eyes, hair, and neck are less hardly distinguished. Shifts in colors render the portraits ambiguous. Solid walls contribute to this ambiguity, as they appear white in the sunlight and black at night. Vibrant color effects, or the Warholized surfaces, transform the whole building into pure visual ornaments. By means of multiplication, Warhol's *10 Marylins* are perceived as superficial flat images, which employ the idea of nothingness as a critique of culture industry. In a similar sense, there is no depth in *Nine Victorias* but only multiple layers of Warholian nothingness.

ORNAMENTAL DÉJÀ VU, OR ORNAMENT IN SERIES

As an extension of the idea of architectural evolution, BIG tends to replicate concepts, forms, and ornaments of a project on another design with a completely different scale, program, and context. As seen in many of their projects and also admitted by Ingels himself, the architects of BIG do not

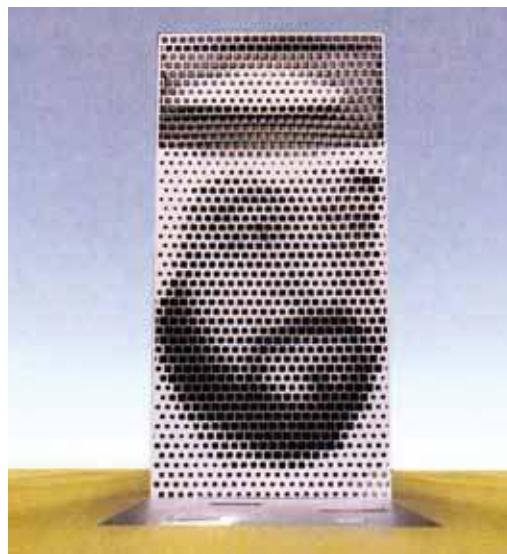
abandon the design of a form so quickly if it fails to be materialized in a project. Calling it as the “migration of ideas,” the architects often replicate the same form on another design by re-adjusting the scale or turning the form upside down (Ingels, 2010, 26). In this sense, BIG’s project of the Zira Island master plan in Azerbaijan is highly controversial, since it replicates several of their previously developed ideas. Designated as the Seven Peaks of Azerbaijan, the project refers to the seven mountains of the Caucasus, since they are related to Azerbaijan’s national identity. In the project, silhouettes of seven mountains are reproduced as seven building complexes (Ingels, 2010, 163). When designing the building forms, BIG replicated some of their rejected projects in the past, such as Vilnius World Trade Center in Lithuania, the placeless artificial island project of Dolphinarium and Wellness Center, Holstebro Handball Arena, and the Housing Bridge in Denmark. Unifying the forms of their previous projects in a new context, Ingels (2010, 175) reveals that, “Eight years of hard work on various aborted projects won’t be wasted. BIG has become a sort of urban laboratory where we develop prototypes, breed species and evolve ideas.” In order to support BIG’s tendency of replication, Ingels points to Le Corbusier’s seminal work, *Vers Une Architecture* (1923), which mentions that architecture is capable of producing typologies. Justifying his approach of sameness through Le Corbusier, Ingels (2012, 106) believes that different architects can develop and use any produced typology instead of starting from scratch. He further unfolds by giving grounds of artists, as they also gravitate toward working in series: “They will pursue the same idea in various iterations until they feel they have exhausted the potential of that idea and move on” (Ingels, 2010, 346). To a certain degree, designing in series has a commodity value as a promoter of the architect who designs in series. Like an embodied signature, series refer to a collection of specific works that derive from the same idea.

8. For the articles, which are published in *Clog: Bjarke Ingels Group* in October 2011 (2nd ed. May 2012) and specifically mentioned the replication of forms in BIG’s projects, see Buinno (2012, 37); Jacobs (2012, 52-53); Ho (2012, 54-55).

In BIG’s case, working in series emerges in relation to designing the concept, form, and ornament independently from the program and context. The problematic of replication is argued in the critical articles on BIG, especially in the “Bjarke Ingels Group” issue of the *Clog* magazine (8). In an ironic manner, authors criticize the replication of forms and concepts through expressions such as “repeated transplant operations,” or slogans

Figure 16. BIG, Leadership Tower, Dubai, 2007 (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

Figure 17. Model of the Leadership Tower at *Yes is More* Exhibition, 2009 (Copyright: Darren Webb, 2009).



such as “Pyramid shape fits within any context” (Ho, 2012, 55; Buinno, 2012, 37). Apart from replicating forms and criticizing them, BIG tends to work in series when ornament is in question, as well. Specifically, the ornamental surfaces of the Arlanda Hotel resonate with the design of the Leadership Tower in Dubai (**Figure 16**). BIG’s approach to the surface design of the tower is in the same manner as the hotel. The tower is conceived as a combination of an artificial topography in the plain desert and a multi-layered rectangular-prism building. Two opposing surfaces of the building are adorned with a lattice of small square window holes of different sizes (**Figure 17**). From a distance, the ornamental grid transforms into a composition of giant portraits of two Arabian Sheiks. Seeing the Arlanda Hotel and the Leadership Tower projects consecutively at the exhibition, *Yes is More* (2009) in Danish Architecture Center, or in the book, *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution* (2010), one has the sense of being already seen the same generation of ornaments, much like a déjà-vu experience. In both projects, ornamental surfaces are designed primarily without taking the building program into account. While the spatial program of the Arlanda Hotel consists of conference halls and hotel rooms, the Leadership Tower program includes offices and hotel rooms. In order to achieve a series, ornaments as royal figures are detached from their initial location of the hotel in Stockholm and attached onto the tower in Dubai as different portraits.

During the continuous performance of attaching, detaching, and re-attaching, the ornaments are modified and re-adjusted to compose portraits. The ornamental surfaces of the tower do not resemble the horizontal cut-out ornaments of the hotel in detail; rather, they appear to be a grid pattern that covers the whole surface. Performance of ornaments introduces the idea of replicating ornaments in order to initiate diversity among series. BIG’s practice of replicating ornaments recalls Warhol’s practice of serial silk-screen images, which can be read as, in Meyers words, “a duplication that can accommodate difference” (Meyer, 1994, 105). The images of sheiks and princesses as ornaments in series depend on the differences of similarities. Variety of forms distinguishes ornaments from one another as unique elements, whereas similarity of preliminary ideas unites them as a signature. On the other hand, from a critical point of view, ornamental déjà-vu can be seen as a camouflage of the end or lack of creativity.

In the book, *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution*, Ingels (2010, 347) remarks that the images of sheiks adorned billboards and building walls throughout the United Arab Emirates. Justified by multiplicity, their images are replicated on the Leadership Tower as an extension of this urban adornment. Scaling up the image sizes to intensify the representation of authority, ornaments attribute superhuman features to the power figures. Ingels (2010, 347) further presumes that sheiks’ images on the tower would give the impression of being a mirage in the desert. In this sense, he claims that the ornamental surfaces produce certain affects and sensations. Indeed, some contemporary architects, such as Farshid Moussavi and Michale Kubo (2006, 7-10), explicitly state that the role of ornament in contemporary architecture is the production of affects and resonances. Yet in the case of the Leadership Tower, the affect of mirage adds to the representation of power and the omnipresent authority figure, rather than merely producing affects and sensations.



Figure 18. Arlanda Hotel seen from a distance, 2007 (Copyright: BIG A/S, 2007).

Today, in the age of visual communication, a flood of images dominates the realm of contemporary architecture. Beginning with the twentieth-century widespread of photography, advertising, and publishing technology, mass media expanded worldwide and transformed objects into images. As it is indicated by the French Situationist Guy Debord (1967, 6), modern life is represented by the accumulation of spectacles, which is the mediator of social relation among people. Through this view, contemporary culture is defined by the concepts of advertising, displaying, consuming, and commercializing. The consumption of image-flow, or spectacle as a paradigm of contemporary society is related to the conception of current culture as industry. Baudrillard (1993, 16) argues that today, visual realm transforms bodily presence into spectacle, media, and image; since images and sign exchange values dominate objects and their use values. In a similar vein, architecture supplies the image industry through advertisements, website images, and so on, which make the building images to be constructed, perceived, and consumed instantaneously.

Through the ornamental aspect of the Arlanda Hotel, it is demonstrated that spectacle has shifted places with the building, since the hotel performs more like a display of royalty and an advertisement of Sweden. It dissolves as a two-dimensional ornament, making the building to be defined as an urban representation of royalty in Stockholm (**Figure 18**). Recalling the relationship of architecture and semiology, the ornamental façades reveal a symbolic dimension that contributes to the self-presentation of the building. Through the performance of display, ornament regains the feature of representation in terms of power, irony, and superficiality. It contributes to advertising, commercial success, and marketing strategy, as much as it becomes a designerly instrument of self-promotion in the celebrity-driven world.

Literature of the last two decades continuously highlights that ornament in contemporary architecture has a new definition and design approach. Yet this paper demonstrates that rather than experimenting with advanced digital techniques and producing new textures and ornaments as examples of contemporary digital architecture, BIG uses ornament with strong influences of postmodernism. As also supported by BIG's extensive use

of images that occupy much space in their monograph, *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution* (2010), their ornamental architecture becomes the production of image-driven contemporary society, which represents the superficial flood of images in the current architectural milieu.

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YÜZESELLİĞE BÜYÜK BİR EVET: ARLANDA OTELİ, BJARKE INGELS GROUP

Kültür endüstrisi tarafından üretilen imgeler, içinde bulunduğumuz görsel iletişim çağında oldukça hızlı çoğaltılıp yayılmaktadır. İmge yığınlarının günümüzdeki yükselişi, çağdaş mimarlıkta süs kavramını da etkilemektedir. Süs, temsil etme özelliğini geri kazanırken hızla üretilebilir ve çoğaltılabilir olmuştur. Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) gibi bazı çağdaş mimarların yapılarında süsün önemli bir yeri olmasına karşın bu yapılar mimarlık yazınında süsleme açısından irdelenmemektedir. Bu yazıda BIG'in Arlanda Oteli tasarımı (Stockholm, 2007), çağdaş mimarlıkta süs üzerinden tartışılmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, BIG'in *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution* (2010) adlı ilk monografı bir araç olarak kullanarak binanın metinsel ve görsel temsiliyeti incelenmektedir.

Arlanda Oteli'nin cepheleri, süslemeler aracılığıyla İsveç Krallığı'nı temsil etmektedir. Cephelerin portre oluşturacak biçimde tasarlanması,

öncelikle BIG'in ironik tutumundan kaynaklanmaktadır. Yirminci yüzyılda postmodernizmin bir aracı olan ironi, BIG ile yeniden gündeme gelmektedir. Projede tasarım girdisi olarak kullanılan ironi, rasyonel ve irrasyonel, olağan ve sıra dışılık, derinlik ve sığlık arasında gidip gelen bir düşünme dinamiğinden oluşur. Birbiriyle çelişen anlamları barındıran çok katmanlı ironi kavramı, bu nedenle BIG'in mimarlığında kaygan bir zeminde gelişir. Cephelerin tasarımında Pop sanatçısı Andy Warhol'a yaptıkları göndermeler de BIG'in ironik duruşunun bir parçasıdır. Yapıdaki süslemeler, prenses figürünü yeniden üretirken yapıyı saf görsel bir imgeye ve seyirlik yüzeylere dönüştürür.

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