



Pia Rönicke, *Somewhere Out There*, 1998, video stills. Courtesy of the artist.

ONE WAY OF contesting modernist ideas of unique architecture and ideal city planning is to turn a rigid functionalist building into a weightless object floating in space. With the law of gravity suspended, the building is now free to be sited – like any readymade – in new locations and less obvious environments, e.g. next to an old cottage in the middle of the forest. At least that is in part how the Danish artist Pia Rönicke modulates urban landscapes in her imaginative video collages.

In Rönicke's video *Somewhere Out There* (1998), a drawn version of a spacecraft guides us through a fantasy city where past and present come together in a utopian setting. We orbit through a multi-layered collage of historic buildings, illuminated skyscrapers at night, architectural plans for suburban living, photos of designer-hype interiors or a free-hand sketch of a public park. The images glide effortlessly into each other forming strange but poetic constellations – as when a slowly spinning chessboard drops from the sky and lands safely inside a house. Also, the soundtrack is performed with virtuosity – smooth transitions connect soft Chinese zither-like music to the sound of thousands of eager grasshoppers. But the charming thing about Rönicke's video works is the primitive production – they are simply animated collages of photos, magazine cut-outs and drawings along the lines of early Monty Python animations. For instance, when a comfy sofa carrying a relaxed couple (probably a cutting from a furniture ad) slowly takes off like a soundless hot air balloon, transporting the couple out of their chic designer home to a place outside the picture space. Or when a wall-size portrait of the German Chancellor Schröder appears inside an ordinary living room.

Compared to, say, Monty Python animations, Rönicke's work functions at a much slower pace (and so appears much less foolish). The animated movements mimic that of a camera during shooting (zoom, pan). There is a sensation of dreamlike investigation, a cinematic odyssey – not in space, but through an urban utopia where rice fields are cultivated on top of tall skyscrapers.

Variants on psychedelic city planning run through all of Rönicke's video collages. There is a sense of an evening out – between high and low, and between history and the present – particularly in the architecture and urban structures. The manner in which Rönicke performs her critique is not unlike the early collages of the Archigram movement. Rönicke, too, contests the idea of 'pure function' and ideal visions of architecture, in favour of concepts such as change, adaptability and movement. This is particularly true of her video collage *Storyboard For a City* (2000). Here, the main 'protagonists' are roughly drawn, squared modules, which alternately increase or decrease in number, forming various constructions that sometimes appear to be models for definite buildings or even for entire suburban areas – and sometimes look like simple, child-like constructions.

Not only does *Storyboard For a City* take the seriousness out of modern architecture, by using Lego-like elements in shifting colours as the main building stone, the banal modules (as well as the simple modular electronic soundtrack) also ridicule the idea of a unique architecture, where one particular drawing inevitably leads to one particular model, leading again to one particular building. There is no such thing as an 'objective architecture' (as Mies van der Rohe claimed his to be) – but there are zillions of places to take off – and stories to be told – between the sketch and the model, and between the model and the house.

Though Rönicke makes it obvious that architecture cannot be thought of in superstructural terms, she manages to present her critique in a far from didactic manner – not least because her relationship with modern architecture seem to be one of both love and hate. Whether she chooses to give (animated) life to imaginative architectonic constructions or to plain, anonymous-looking modules, Pia Rönicke works from a poetic angle, where simply adding colours and playing with elements can conjure up a great public park or Bauhaus buildings blowing in the wind. ■

—Pernille Albrethsen