

## "The City"

text by Jacob Kimvall (2007)

Aleksandra Stratimirovic is one of the initiators of Transnational Lighting Detectives, an international network gathered around the renowned Japanese light designer Kaoru Mende. It grew out of the Japan-based Lighting Detectives, and comprises designers, architects and kindred personalities united by a common interest in light.

In a book reviewing a number of TLD's projects one can read about their meticulous and systematic investigations of light in cities like Istanbul, Las Vegas, Singapore and Buenos Aires. They use the word Nightscape to designate the city's nighttime countenance of light. "There are two types of vantage points - the ground level and a height - from which to observe a nightscape. First, whatever the city, we search for an appropriate height overlooking the city [...] One comes to understand the structure or nature of a city by observing it from a height in the evening and can deduce the secret to various light-related matters."<sup>1</sup>

Stratimirovic's work *The City* (Staden, from 2007) is visible immediately from the main entrance of the Stockholm County Court building. It consists of 450 points of light each of which consists of seven LEDs, spread over a wall area of a little over 6x7 meters. The brightness, colour and tempo of the lights are controlled by a very detailed programme, which repeats after a little over three weeks. Sometimes the changes are hardly perceptible, sometimes they are quick.

This work permits of many approaches but offers few definite clues, so it can present different images according to the way one chooses to read it, as figurative, abstract or concrete.

The title brought to mind first of all a nighttime city seen from above, from a plane or a satellite - myriad lights laid out like a map of the city blocks, the motorways, the suburbs.

One may also experience similarities with the kind of control rooms

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<sup>1</sup>

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seen in science-fiction films chronicling a future dystopia. In both cases the lights become points on a surface, the work seen as figuration, or abstraction but embodying references to an external reality.

Stratimirovic herself has written that her aim was to depict the melodies of a city in a tale of light, which would rather tend to suggest a reading as a concretization than any actual connection to sensory impressions from an external reality. Though for me it also brings to mind the stylistic designation of synesthesia, where different sensory impressions are woven together to create a unified experience. In instrumental jazz for example the depiction of night city lights is such a commonplace that hardly anyone would even think of it as synesthesia any more.

Like a melody, *The City* also has an extension in time. It takes 150 hours in all for the programme to repeat. This duration makes it practically impossible to take in all at once, just like any really large city. This and the mention of "the melody of the city" make me think that it cannot refer to any particular city but rather to the city as a notion. The shifting images tell of a city of meetings and movement, of constant change and cyclic repetition.

*The City* is placed in such a way that every visitor to the building has to pass it. Stratimirovic writes that "The City lives its life without demanding the observer's attention". As I understand the artist this refers both to the work itself and to her view of city as a concept. The work is visible but should not take up too much of the viewer's space or overassert itself, while nevertheless offering something new to discover for one who wants to and is willing to spend the time. Much like the way the city envelopes the life of an urban inhabitant. It is always present and so often taken for granted that we hardly notice it, but at the same time there is always something to see and discover, for anyone who wants to.

*Baby Blue Sky* is a large-scale site-specific work in the commuter train station of Jakobsberg, a suburb of Stockholm. One of its key

components is a circular slab of semi-transparent glass cast into the floor of the station's upper level. It lets through a gentle light to the lower level, while from that level the footprints of the passing commuters are a transient pattern overhead. It took me a while to realize how decisive the lighting is for this work, and that like *The City* it embodies motion, it is constantly changing with the to and fro of travellers' shadows.

The artist has also worked on several works of monumental scale, for example two different light installations on the facade of Stockholm City Museum (1999 and 2000-2001).