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The surface is the
substance. From behind
the surface and upon it
the architect works. The
architect fattens the image.

The FAT Lady is still singing.

Adam Miller

Saturated FAT:
Replete Image in Architecture

"Well, curiosity killed this cat
Sorry I ever asked
What I don't know can't hurt me as much as
What's behind the mask"

The Cramps "What's Behind the Mask" (2004)

"Now Saturated Fat is Good for You?"

Christiane Northrup, MD for the Huffington Post (2014)

"The cosmetic is the new cosmic."
Rem Koolhaas "Junkspace" (2002)

FAT is dead, but Postmodernism isn't. Or at least there is some disagreement about this. We already know this: the architecture firm split ways at the end of 2013. Just two years before, Charles Jencks worked with FAT on an issue of *Architectural Design* and coined the term "radical post-modernism" to describe their work and that of other liked-minded architects (Jencks 2011: 15). Ironically, that same year the Victoria and Albert Museum opened what it called "the first comprehensive retrospective" in the world, titled "Postmodernism—Style and Subversion 1970-1990" which took the position that the movement had passed into history (Docx 2011). Despite some parties having distinguished postmodernism as dead by the early 1990s, FAT's last project, a house for Essex, was completed in 2015 in collaboration with British artist Greyson Perry to exuberant fanfare, where the house has become part of Alain de Botton's Living Architecture foundation, the subject of a BBC documentary, as well as numerous new articles.

Sean Griffiths, Sam Jacob, and Charles Holland worked together for 23 years on Fashion Architecture Taste, better known as FAT, and though having split ways, continue to ask the questions which remain

unanswered around postmodernism. Their work demands continued attention despite the end of their practice and new trends in architectural discourse, not only because it challenges the supposed beginning and the end of postmodernism, but also because it asks questions which remain fundamental to the practice of architecture and its representations. Robert Venturi once encouraged the firm to "keep up the bad work" (Griffiths 2007), understanding that the drive behind FAT's work is to push on notions like 'good' and 'bad' taste. Equally relevant is how their chosen mode of representation—the collage—reminds us to reexamine the role of the architect as author, where the surface of the image and its disparate elements, appropriated, invented, or merely found, inhabit an equal playing field. The fungibility of these elements is allowed by their nature as images. The surface of the representation becomes the surface of the building; the two sites mingle to become the single surface on which architecture might occur. The FAT Lady is still singing. Starting in *medias res*, we might begin to listen.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

In FAT's collage for Sint Lucas School one encounters two clashing representational techniques at work: the 'real' site of the building through the photograph versus FAT's proposal for a new façade, rendered in a saturated and colorful, pixelated, digital drawing (plate 1). Despite the clear disjuncture between the photograph and the drawing, these two forms of representation are forced to become reconciled with one another in the picture-plane of the collage. The ultra-drab 'reality' of the photographed site and of the original 1960's school-building are masked here, yet the original school-building still peeks through certain holes in the cartoonish new façade: new window frames are punched out, revealing the original windows beyond. As one's eyes stray to the right edge of the rendering-mask, one discovers the original building's side hiding quietly in plain view. The rendering of FAT's façade can be read as exaggerating and thus making apparent its ontological status: a façade is a face of a building, a non-volumetric object which envelops a volumetric one. The façade then, however three-dimensional it may appear to be, operates always on the surface. The fact of the façade is its inescapable two-dimensionality, its inescapable being-as-image. FAT's project to re-imagine a school simply through a façade treatment produces a *building* which is purely image. It is in the surface of the image where the architect's expertise lies. It is from behind the surface, behind the mask, that the architect possesses the power to create. The works of FAT play out this drama of the surface in various ways: the surface as place of creative agency, as locus of knowledge-formation through image-making; image-making as imitation; and so copying is the architect's proficiency. That is, the architect makes copious images: re-presentations of the existent and the supposed, which like any copy, extracts the substantive veneer of its origin to refigure. The surface is the substance. From behind the surface and upon it the architect works. The architect fattens the image.

The subtle exposure of the original building beneath the façade can be seen to operate parallel to the way in which one reads the eyes beneath a mask. The mask is a surface which covers the face. The mask covers the truth, while
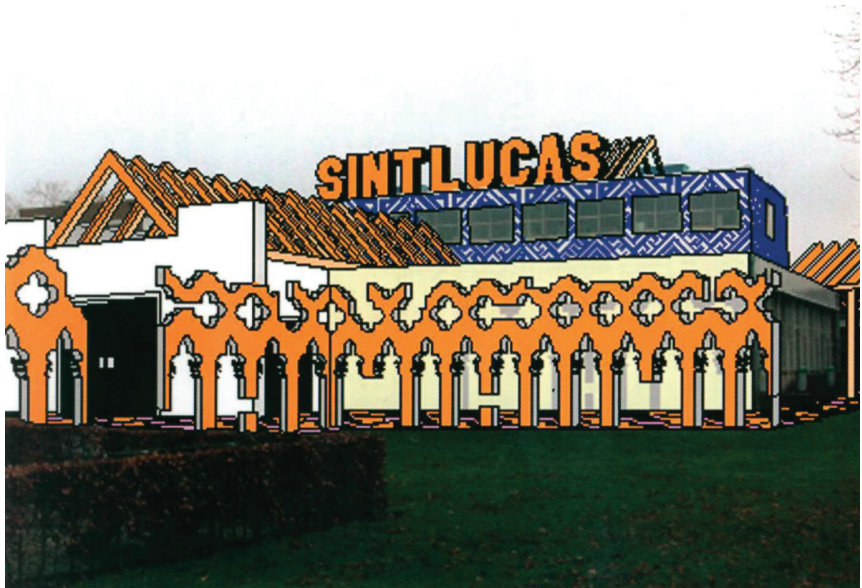
Plate 1: Collage for Sint Lucas School. FAT (Fashion Architecture Taste), 2002. Digital collage. (Bullivant, 2005: 125)

at the same time it reveals it. For Descartes, in his anonymously penned *Discours*, representation becomes the only means for approaching truth (Descartes 2007). This formulation roots epistemology within representation. Representations are thus privileged, and in an unexpected way, through a series of formulations and feints, transform their quality of imitation from a deceptive functioning to one which is inherently truthful. Descartes' proclamation of *lavartus prodeo* ("I wear a mask" or "masked, I go forward") references the god-like position one takes behind the mask—privileging the imaginative and creative aspect of mimesis (Descartes, 1963: 45). The mask veils the truth and simultaneously reveals the truth. This truth is the illusion of the world in the way that one would know the world; one is irremediably at a remove from knowing its universal form.

Operationally, FAT's insistence upon the façade as the paramount definition of a building exaggerates and concretizes the formulations of the irreconcilability of the design with its own realization, or rather, of the design with its image. The image of the building becomes the only way one can know the design. Corollary to this image-

privileging is the emphasis put upon the creational aspect of mimesis—the architectural design. This exaggeration of the inescapable image-status of architecture pushes for a leveling of mimetic hierarchies in the discussion of a design-idea. The constructed building, often conflated as being the design itself, becomes merely another vessel or *medium of the design*; in a Deleuzian sense, the building becomes virtual. The building itself is at equal distance from the universal concept of the design as is a picture/rendering/drawing of that building. This polemic is performed in the collage-rendering FAT produces for the Sint Lucas School. Cartoon-picture and photograph-real can inhabit the same spatial plane because they are in fact both representational techniques at equal remove from the design 'truth.' The image and the building, the pictorial representation and the real-ized representation, are all equal re-presentations of the idea. The image becomes the building; the building becomes the image.

What is at stake then, in FAT's architecture, is the possibility of façade as synecdoche (a part representing a whole): the façade is the place of architecture. As the marker of the new identity of the school, the façade stands in for the architecture as a whole. What exists behind the mask is of little import. For the façade in FAT, the issue of standing-in for the building is *to be the building*. In FAT the only possibility for architecture is synecdoche. How can the façade be the building, one might ask? If architecture is façade, then what is the façade standing-in-for in the first place? The façade stands in for the building, and the building stands in for the architecture-idea: thus façade stands in for architecture. Façade operates as analogy to the whole mimetic process of architecture-making as the making of images.

This pure-image architecture has implications for understanding knowable-architecture as the icon or index of design. It may be helpful to extrapolate from Knappett's example of the representational role of the ambassador (which he in turn appropriates from Alfred Gell) to approach an understanding of the mimesis of architecture:

> "Normally the ambassador would be considered as an indexical sign, a part of the whole (the country) representing the whole in the spatio-temporal absence of the whole… In the particular context of an ambassador representing his country, it could well be said that the country looks like him: he is the visible icon of the country." (Knappett, 2002: 105)

Just as the ambassador operates as synecdoche to his country, so too does FAT's façade operate in relation to the architectural soul of the new Sint Lucas School. Icon and index are both integral to the mimesis of architecture, and the synecdoche-status of architecture is both index and icon. Indexical representation is a sign that is caused by its referent, or is connected in a spatio-temporal way to its referent. Smoke is an index of fire in that it is caused by its referent; a pointing finger is contiguous to its referent. Iconic representation is a sign which is visually similar to that which it refers. As a literal part of the inhabitable building, the façade is not only purely image but pure synecdoche. Architecture as façade is a sign which combines index and icon. The façade is the 'ambassador' of the design: façade is index of the architectural imagination

and icon of design within the instance of design's representation. It implies a concept of representation that is not belated, or representation as re-presentation.

Returning to the picture plane of FAT's collage for Sint Lucas one encounters a changed understanding of indexicality within the rendering versus the photograph. This issue of indexicality thus performs as a general problematic posed by the façade-privileging of FAT's design, but also in the making of the image which stages this very issue in a meta-narrative. As McLuhan reminds us, the medium is the message, and FAT's chosen medium for representing the design—collage—is telling. How do these apparently divergent representational techniques of rendering and photograph operate as indices? The photograph as presumed 'real' attains this feature due to its indexical, mechanical production. According to Krauss: "the way in which the world imprints itself on the photographic emulsion [is a] quality of transfer or trace [that] gives to the photograph its documentary status, its undeniable veracity." (Knappett, 2002: 111). The 'real' transfers it 'authenticity' to the photograph through direct contact. Indexical images in a Platonic sense gesture to a universal 'truth.' However, FAT's collage can be seen to complicate these associations of 'truth' with the photographic real, by making the entire collaged image an indexical proof. FAT's image-making subverts the assumptions commonplace to viewing photography. This truth paradigm hinges on image as index; it is through re-locating indexical truth to the materiality of the image that allows for a new understanding of how one evaluates representations.

If the authenticity of the photograph, or its truth, is the consequence of its production process by non-human actors (the play of light on a mechanical apparatus), then the interference of any human-actor in the production of images would purportedly be at another remove from channeling truth, at a remove from knowing the real. This seems to be a problem for imaginative creation. Knappett reminds us, however, that material honesty is a truthful staging of production. "Conspicuous" production, such as leaving traces of formwork within bronze casts, or the showing of the puppeteer's strings, lends "honesty to the product" (Knappett, 2002: 111). This material honesty is a didactic truth. In FAT's collage, the honest materiality of the digital signals to the viewer its status as a composed fiction. FAT renders the new façade in extreme pixilation paint-bucketed-in with solid flat fields of pristine computer-code colors which defy the natural physics of light as well as fly in the face of chiaroscuro illusion.

The photograph element of the collage is index of human subjectivity and thus intended composition: it is taken on foot at eye-level, belying the sympathetic role of the image which would allow the viewer to inhabit the virtual space. Stylistically the photo here performs as a caricature of its genre as 'vessel of reality' in its dead-pan capturing of the stark bland reality of the site, its grey sky, browning grass and skeletal trees. However, the imposition of the pixelated rendering at the photograph's center alludes to not only the photograph's production as human-artifact but also its necessarily digital materiality. The photograph and the drawing in their statuses as indices trace

back to their material source—the digital. Both are merely comprised of pixels, and further in, a sequenced code of letters and numbers contained within the language of the data-file. Drawing a picture and taking a picture are both acts of composition. Composition (or meaning-making) requires human participation, no matter how mechanical (or objective) the process may appear. What FAT's collage helps to elucidate is that these two acts of composition are inherently and equally imaginative modes of creation that might represent 'reality.' These two modes of mimesis are both working at representing reality, though it should not be surprising if one considers Roland Barthes's conception of the realist

> "as certainly not a copyist from nature, but rather a 'pasticher,' or someone who makes copies of copies. As Barthes says: 'To depict is to… refer not from a language to a referent, but from one code to another. Thus realism consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy… Through secondary mimesis [realism] copies what is already a copy'" (Krauss, 1981: 64).

What is staged in FAT's collage is the reality of the past (the photograph) reconciled with the reality of the future (the picture), and secondary mimesis is inescapable in both photographic and delineated modes of creation. Additionally, both operate as indices to the architect's "productive investment and cultural sensibility" (Knappett, 2002: 101). The creational aspect of mimesis is privileged. As such it follows that material honesty is the indexical tactic for this exposition. Thus, the photograph and the rendering exist along the same continuum of representation in the real.

FAT's perspectival rendering for Sint Lucas School, which continues the style of the honest digital illustration found in the previous collage example, emphasizes legibility of figural and iconic aspects of the architecture to allow for easy recognition on part of the viewer (plate 2). The scene is proliferated with illustrated objects, each clearly delineated from the other as discrete instances of color and figural black outline, as if it were a 'paint-by-numbers.' This clear distinction of objects is also a feature of FAT's rendering for Heerlijkheid Hoogvleit and has implications for reading the landscape of the image as narrative, as fiction, which I will soon expand upon. For now, what is pertinent to the discussion of these objects is that they may be clearly recognized through their iconic simplification within the image. Trees, pavers, people, and importantly architectural ornamentation, are all considered equally in their representation within the images as denuded geometry. As icons, they all have the potential to become literal objects, to become integrated as adornment in an architectural design—and this in fact takes place in the Heerlijkheid Hoogvleit project, where icons become formalized as objects either useful or as follies (plate 3). The Gothic architectural tropes visible in the new façade and on the pink pavers (plate 2) are oversized and remixed samplings from churches near the site to create a moiré effect; copies layered upon copies which dizzy the eye and question the immutability of historical architectural forms.

This reappropriation and 'quoting' of architectural tropes from the historical canon is a tactic previously deployed by those architects taking a critical stance to Modernism (Venturi and Scott-Brown, for example). The free-play of recognizable icon-figures in FAT's architectural proposals begins to take action against the discourse of originality inherent to Modernism. What Modernism represses is the "concept of the copy" (Krauss, 1981: 64). FAT is comfortable with pirating ornament, and in any recreation or rereading it follows that there is a distortion of the idealized form. Deviation from the ideal-form in realizations of the classical column types of Vitruvius—which can be read as being unique copies—has been written about since the 17th century, beginning with Claude Perrault's astute observations. Essentially, copying has been an age-old practice of architecture. What FAT does for architectural ornament is what Krauss does in her reading of the modernist grid: "as we have seen, not only is he—artist x, y, or z—not the inventor of the grid, but no one can claim this patent: the copyright expired sometime in antiquity and for many centuries this figure has been in the public domain." (Krauss, 1981: 56). Ornament, architraves, columns, door-handles, trees, people, and their images are all available for copying. FAT works against the discourse of originality through its use of collage, the appropriation of ornamental markers, and quoting of architectural tropes. What FAT is doing in its productions of images (read: buildings) along with others who embrace the concept of the copy, is to expose what Krauss terms the "logically fraudulent original" (Krauss, 1981: 56). Copying is the work of architecture, and in a sense architectural elements can only be repeated. FAT's quotations open up the discourse of the copy, subverting modernist notions of originality to say that there is no original. The expertise of the architect is the copy.

In this same cartoonish picture plane we find a scene delineated in a true one-point perspective; a flat-orange road guides the eye to the perspectival convergence point, the Sint Lucas School building, which is topped with a billboard-like sign spelling its name (plate 2). The school is orthogonally represented and its flat dimension is emphasized by the uniform-color fill; it thus helps make the mimetic transition from the perspectival foreground to orthogonal background, and thereon to the super-flat empty sky. The entire image is devoid of shadow and all figures (building, tree, human, or road) are collapsed into surface and projected onto the screen of the picture-plane. The mimetic tension between the super-flat and the illusory depth of the perspective is palpable. The perspective illusion which would seek to rupture the surface of the image and pull the viewer in is strongly challenged by the flat coloration, and is thrown into existential dilemma by the super-flat sky. In the middle left of the image, the treeline breaks to reveal an impossible window to the sky where ground should be, as if the whole of the building and its landscape was steamrolled and laid flat like a mask over the infinite plane of the matte blue sky. The drama of the desire to master and dominate the environment through drawing it in mathematic purity meets the void of the sky; this void could be termed the *chaogito* or the unknowable, the unrepresentable (Nancy, 1977: 27). This chaos is what precedes and permits the *cogito*, the thinking subject of Descartes, and yet at the same time "un-founds the subject in its very moment of foundation" (James, 2006: 58). It is the lack in the center of knowledge, the
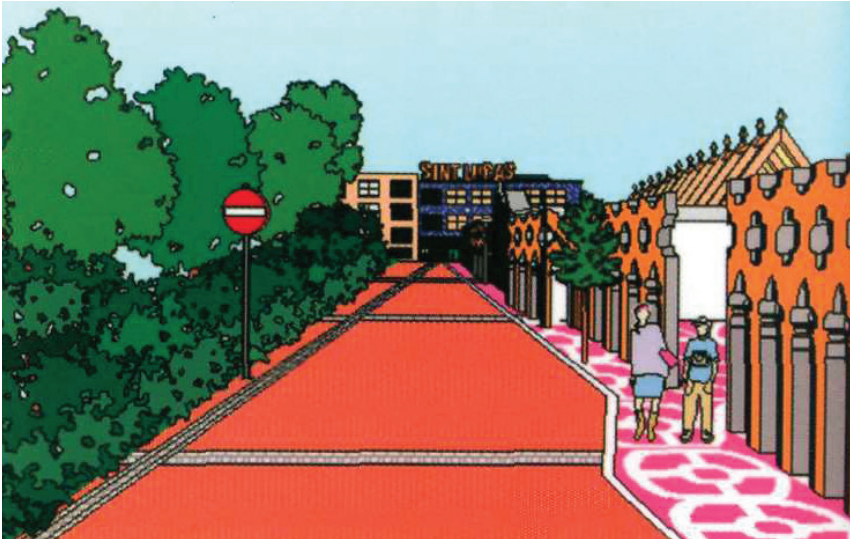
fallacy of objective determinable truth.

 Even at its inception, the earliest example of a linear perspective, constructed by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1420, could not reconcile the unrepresentable sky with the geometrized, orderly world below. This dilemma of representation has been widely addressed, but has not yet been thought of in relation to Descartes's cogito dilemma (Damisch 1994; Pérez-Goméz, 1997; Krauss 1999). Brunelleschi's viewing device consisted of a wooden board with a single-peephole at the vanishing point; the blank side is held to the face, the reverse side is painted with an outdoor, symmetrical architectural scene and viewed with a mirror (Pérez-Goméz, 1997: 25). Brunelleschi's contemporary commented that the flattening of the perceptible world in the mirror—viewing the world through a copy, an image of the world—allowed one to "discover" a geometric ordering in nature, a kind of mathematic truth (Pérez-Goméz, 1997: 25). The aspiration to master nature is inherent to the production of the linear perspective. The perspective is the geometric ordering device which presupposes the ability of mankind to comprehend the world, to make the world an intelligible whole. This method for representing, and thus making the world intelligible, makes image-making a tactic for truth-finding:

perspectival images become indispensable evidence to, and confirmation of, rational thought and the scientific method. One recognizes order in the world through its pictorial delineation. This evidence-of-images—the "recognition" of truths, or their "discovery," as Brunelleschi's contemporary put it—can find its foundation in Aristotle's formulation of the nature of man's "instinct of imitation" and it is "through imitation [that] he learns his earliest lessons" (Aristotle 2007). Images and thus nature (that which is represented), become subject to the economy of knowledge that Descartes would see fit, and saw fit to see realization of his self-phrased "practical" (or rather utilitarian) philosophy: "philosophy through which knowing the power and the actions of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens and all other bodies in our environment…we could put these bodies to use in all the appropriate ways, and thus make ourselves the masters and *owners* of nature" (Descartes 2007: 24). Thus it is that the perspective drawing becomes complicit in the constructed narrative of man's domination over all in the world—though the nature of the perspective, upon closer inspection, belies its role in this utilitarian economy of knowledge.

Returning to Brunelleschi's original perspectival construction, something is amiss: while Brunelleschi chose to *paint* the architecture and the ground—those elements which could be geometrized—it was the sky that escaped his ability for delineation, and thus, where a painted sky would have been he placed instead a polished silver ground to act as a mirror to the actual sky (Krauss, 1999: 84). The sky escapes circumscription, understanding, or mastery. It escapes representation. The creation of the rational world is coincident with the creation of that which precedes it and upends it—the unknowable. This is where the true power of representation lies: it makes evident not the mastery man has over that which can be known, as Descartes would have it, but rather the vanity and futility that defines such a pursuit. The dilemma of representation manifests the vast unknowable which is central to every image. In parallel, Descartes' formulation of the thinking-self, as has been noted, already produces its own dilemma for determinable truth. Descartes's foregrounding of *"I am thinking, therefore I exist,"* as the foundational truth, in the end only produces the image of self (Descartes, 2007: 15). According to James: "in the moment thought tries to seize itself in the self-certainty of the Cogito, it seizes nothing at all; it is unable to figure or grasp thought itself, it produces only fabulous images" (James, 2006: 58). What exists behind the mask is in fact nothing at all. There is only the mask. The only access point to meaning is through image, and image-making together with image-reading, or, both as *composition*, is the only means for meaning-making.

Through exaggeration and staging of the image-status of architecture, FAT's images work to dismantle the hierarchy of representation that Cartesian rationality has validated and proliferated. Conventional architectural representation, which is subsumed in the Cartesian framework, is challenged by the pure-image-architecture of FAT. Since even the 15th century, the architectural idea has been caught within a "mathematical and geometric rationalization of the image" (Pérez-Goméz, 1997: 9). This rational image creates a rational world, a purely instrumental world, whose mere existence is contingent upon its use value. A world of things in-and-for-themselves (as

FAT

Plate 3: Rendering for Heerlijkheid
Hoogvleit. FAT, 2002. Digital
illustration. (Bullivant, 2005: 113)

Heidegger might reply) has no place in this framework. The consideration of the work that things and images *do to humans*, the agency of things, is missed or repressed in this place of pure objectification-domination by human-actors.

FAT's images have agency. The exaggerated significance and pictorial simplicity that characterize FAT's renderings operate in equivalence to caricature—an image which does not merely represent things, but does things in the world. The image has perceptual agency over our experience in the world. It becomes part of the narrative of prefiguration. According to Gombrich: "We learn through the artist to see [the subject] as a caricature. He is not only mocked at, or unmasked, but actually changed" (Gombrich, 1938: 12). The caricaturist "does not seek the perfect form, but the perfect deformity" to reach his subject's essence (Gombrich, 1938: 2). FAT confronts and paints a caricature of the rational, conventional architectural rendering. As the caricaturist produces an image which literally changes his subject, so too does FAT's rendering change the ontological status of architectural design. What FAT's imagery proposes instead is a self-reflexive production of representation, which at once acknowledges the limitations of its own medium and seeks to engage the viewer in the discourse of viewing/reading.. The "one [and only] truth concerning any matter" of Descartes—and of the reading of conventional architectural images—comes crumbling down in FAT's vibratory images (Descartes 2007: 10). FAT's images do not float in objective rational space, the space of mathematics, the last space where one might find the potential for intersubjectivity. FAT's images require the beholder, and do work on the beholder. FAT's imagery produces the mask—but forces the beholder to confront the void that it conceals.

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