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Architecture as Images: Using Collage as Space Construction Method

* ¹ B.Arch Fiditya Daisy Charisma Aulia, ² Dr. **Kristanti Dewi Paramita** and ³ Professor **Yandi Andri Yatmo**
Department of Architecture Faculty of Engineering Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia
E-mail ¹: kristanti.dewi@ui.ac.id

Abstract

This study deconstruct architecture as images, using collages as a method of constructing space. It argues that architecture based on images perceives space as an overlapping and multi-layered fragment of spatial and material elements. This study is conducted through a case study by analysing six collage images of utopian architectural projects, breaking down layers that overlaps and constructed the images. The findings in this study demonstrate how space have different narrative meanings, which appear as foreground-background layers. The foreground layers appear as the main argument that has a larger scale which is positioned as the top layer, while the background layers appear on a smaller scale and are positioned as supporting elements. The study concludes that these findings can be used as a method in architectural design to create a meaningful narrative of space that exist in smaller diverse parts rather than as a generic whole.

Keywords: Architecture as Images; Collage Drawing; Narrative; Multilayer Fragments.

1. Introduction

This study dismantles collage drawings in order to present architecture as an image with meaning, with arguments and positions toward overall narrative. The study utilises process of collage-making in order to form architectural representation and narrative meaning. Spatial representation explains the gap between reality and imagination in the human mind (Debord, 1994). Architecture drawing has a meaning of ethics and aesthetics to connect the dynamic process of design to achieve visibility through representation (Sadler, 2005). Some utopian architectural projects, exist as representation images that creates particular narratives of meanings and esthetics. An example is the international situationist movement, which aims to explore representation of the city based on natural human movement in experiencing the urban context (Sadler, 2001; Aziz Amen, 2017; Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018; Amen & Kuzovic, 2018; Amen & Nia, 2021). The study explores images from utopian projects and deconstruct such images through an understanding of collage. A collage drawing is a 2-dimensional image that juxtaposes parts of other images forming a narrative representation (Pallasmaa, 2000). Collage has the function of shifting the perception of function, ambiance, and identity (Rowe & Koetter, 1993), shaping the narratives of social order architecture (Shields, 2014). We analyze how the images of utopian projects exists as collage, determining how the overall image is formed to understand how it shifts the perception and shapes the architectural narrative. The discussion start by discussing the idea of collage in architecture, followed by collage exploration in six collage images from utopian projects by Archigram and Superstudio. The study then conclude how such exploration forms architectural design methods where architecture exist not only as a meaningless images, but as layered forms of narrative representation.

2. Collage and architecture

The discussion of collage has two positions in architecture discourses, whereas the first position is collage as a technique in architectural analysis and design, and the second position is interpretation of architecture as the collage itself (Shields, 2014). Collage as the methodology functioned as an analytical and generative tool in architectural practice. When architecture exists as the collage itself, it shows the work of architecture that represents the collage principles in architectural building. For the first position, as an example, we can see how Archigram used collage methodology to create the endlessly and cyclically layered using line drawings and depth by photographic fragments (Louis et al., 1997). In the drawing works of Archigram, the dynamic scene comes from the line drawing, architectural fragments, and human figures on various scales (Shields, 2014). For understanding architecture as the collage itself, we can see the Casa Curutchet house project by Le Corbusier. The collage attitude is implied in the building with layered, vertical planes (seeing the juxtaposition of foreground, middle ground, and background), and compositional devices (Lapunzina, 1997). Collage is important for architecture in understanding the potentialities in the rich layering and complexity of the built environment, and it is used for both conceptual possibilities and its material, formal, and representational potential (Rowe & Koetter, 1993). Rather than seeing collage's importance for architecture, this paper takes focus on seeing how the architecture itself appears as a collage. This analysis is done by seeing how the collage method shapes the narrative for using it as a tool to use it in reverse, which means to read the narrative that is told behind the existing architecture which we see as a collage to represent the narrative. To create a precise articulation in the different contours of design knowledge we can use both text and visual tools

(Paramita, 2021). So furthermore, we can understand the architectural narrative with this collage method such as fragment, layering, scale setting, and seeing the focus of the architecture.

3. Material and Methods

This study analyzes six collage images by breaking down the layers that construct the image. The collage drawing analyzed in this study are works by two architecture studios with eminent focus on the utopian and dystopian narrative, which is Archigram and Superstudio. The study focuses on images from Instant City and Tuned-in City projects from Archigram and the New Domestic Landscape project from Superstudio.

The study aims to deconstruct the image is to see the layers found in collage-making as a fragment of the actual narrative of its architecture. After the layers are identified, the second step is to analyze how the image fragments layers with each other, seeing the layer order and how they are juxtaposed to each other. The study follows by seeing the scale setting of each fragment, addressing them as the focus of the image, in which one is become the foreground and the other as the background.

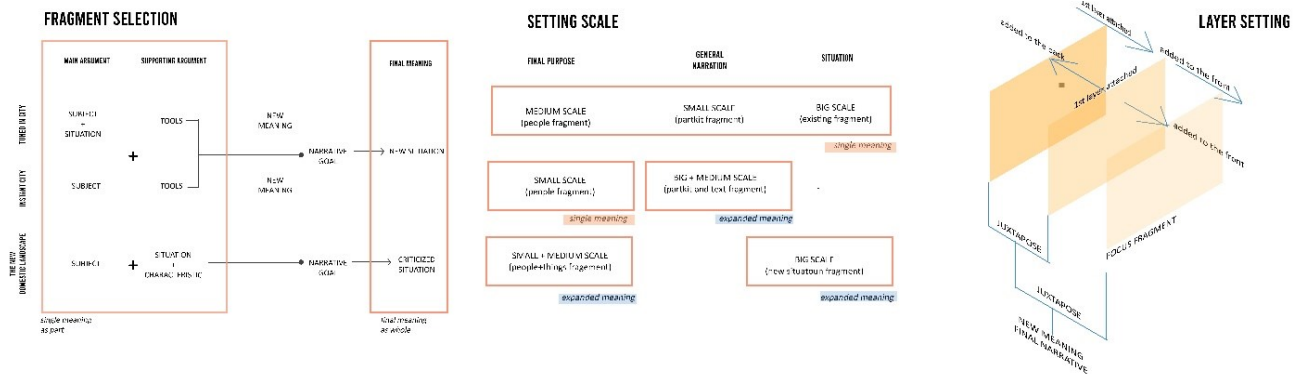
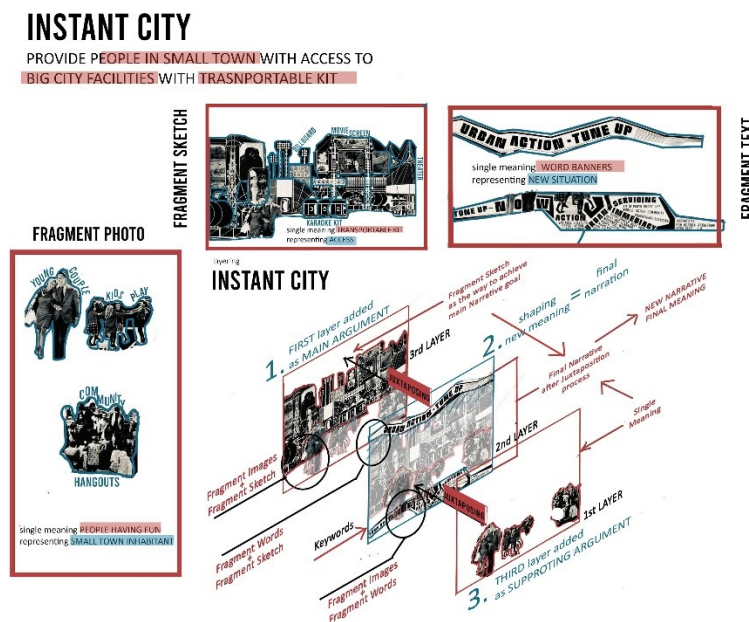


Figure 1. Fragments image analysis flows.

4. Architecture as Images with Collage as its Method.

4.1 Instant City - Archigram

Instant City project aims to remove the boredom in the village and bring the idea of the city to the village (Sadler, 2005). The project creates moving parts through the air using movable elements like air balloons, part kits, stage modules, and capsules making it easy to move from one area to another (Sadler, 2005). The goal of the social narrative is to provide people in small towns with the cultural attractions of a big city using various transportable kits (Cook, 2013).



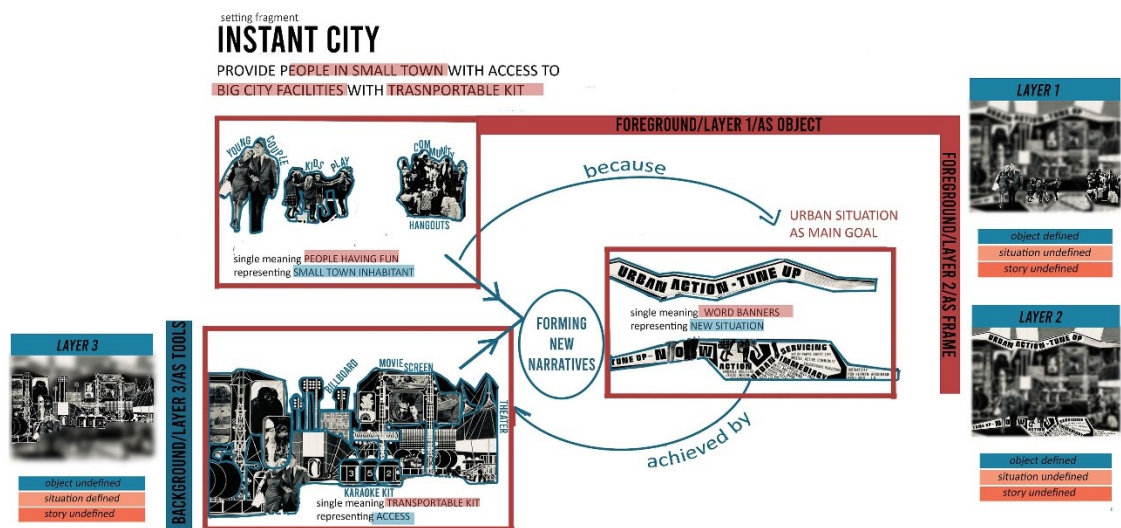


Figure 2. Instant City Fragment Image Analysis

The study identifies two types of fragments found in Instant City images, which are the fragment produced by existing sources or photos, and a fragment of the sketched forms that is made for a particular purpose for the collage. Figure 2 groups these fragments further into three groups that represent each meaning of the narrative goal. The first groups are fragments of people with the same age in pleasant expressions doing big cities, fun activities. The second group shows fragment sketch demonstrating transportable kits that shows the main ideas Archigram is trying to bring. The kit consists of a karaoke capsule, a movable stage, a screen kit, and a photo booth box that are all transportable through the modern technology that exists in the city. The transportability of these fragments allows further meaning, where such culture is meant to be spread around the country.

The study follows by determining the scale of each fragment to shows how the importance of each fragment. Three size scales found, consisting of a small scale found in the text fragment; followed by the composed human objects in the medium scale, with the transportable kits' fragments demonstrated in the largest scale. The large-scale fragments that dominate the image shows that the boredom of uniformity in the village which can be solved by bringing this facility. Combination of the scale and the position of the fragments in the image highlight the meaning further. While the size of the human fragment is not too big, its dominating quantity and placement on the front layer creates a narrative that humans are the main reason why these part kits from the instant city were made. The kits parts do not stand out despite its large size. The transportable kits, as the Instant City's main characteristic, is used first as the main layer added to achieve narrative goals. Further fragments of text is placed as the layer which confirms the meaning of the first sketch fragment attached. Then the layer at the front appears as the primary context of the narrative that is trying to be created. A photo fragment with a photo of young people having fun emphasizes the previous layers of the transportable kits. You can see the slices between the layers, which then form new meanings to each other as a representation of the narrative that is trying to be told. From this juxtaposing process, each layer meets the other, providing combination of meaning beyond just a singular image.

The exploration continues by defining the foreground and background fragment of the image as a form of focus of the narrative. When determining the focus of the images, the study placed a fragment layer at the very front, and then blur the remaining fragments (See Figure 2, bottom right image). There is fragment text, fragment photos with human subjects, and fragment sketches with transportable kits objects. When layer one is made as the focus of the image, it can be seen that the position of this human image exists in some situation that could be in any place, event, or else. The narrative illustrates that it appears that there are people having fun, but the situation is not defined. When the writing fragment is made into focus, it can be seen that the position of this writing becomes the frame of an image, but the situation is not visible. When the transportation kits were seen as the focus of the picture, they emerge as existing objects without knowing the story behind the situation. In this position, the human fragment is the focus of the whole picture as it can still provide the meaning of the story and thus can be identified as the foreground. The fragment sketch of the transportation kits is seen as an existing situation without a clear context, showing its position as the background with the image frame.

3.2 Tuned-in City – Archigram

Tuned-in City is a project to criticize the slow development in the suburbs, where its inhabitants are left behind by the times and are stuck in a form of monotonous architecture (Steiner, 2009). Tuned-in city aims to alter the tune the suburbs to have the same tune as urban life (Sadler, 2005). The trick is to implement a kit permanently attached to the original building called as the old vernacular, where the kit act as the parachute tent as a place for performances, radio parts as a medium for spreading information, silos as a link between buildings, and so on (Sadler, 2005). The narrative-tuned city tries to deliver developing sub urban to save the next generation from the unresponsive city by tuning it up to modernization with prefab architecture (Cook, 2009).

Different from the Instant City, the Tuned-in City image has no text fragments included (See Figure 3). There are fragments sketches drawn particularly for this collage image to emphasize meaning. The sketches represent a generation of young people with particular emotions to show that they live in happiness, with a future full of choice and freedom. The next fragment is the unresponsive suburb represented by old vernacular houses before the modern era to show that it stopped the growth of young generations. The last fragment highlights the prefabricated architecture as a tool to tune up the suburban into modernization, keeping the old vernacular around. The interaction between prefabricated architecture and old vernacular is seen as new vernacular when being juxtaposed together with other fragments to create a happy and developed environment, shifting the image as a whole.

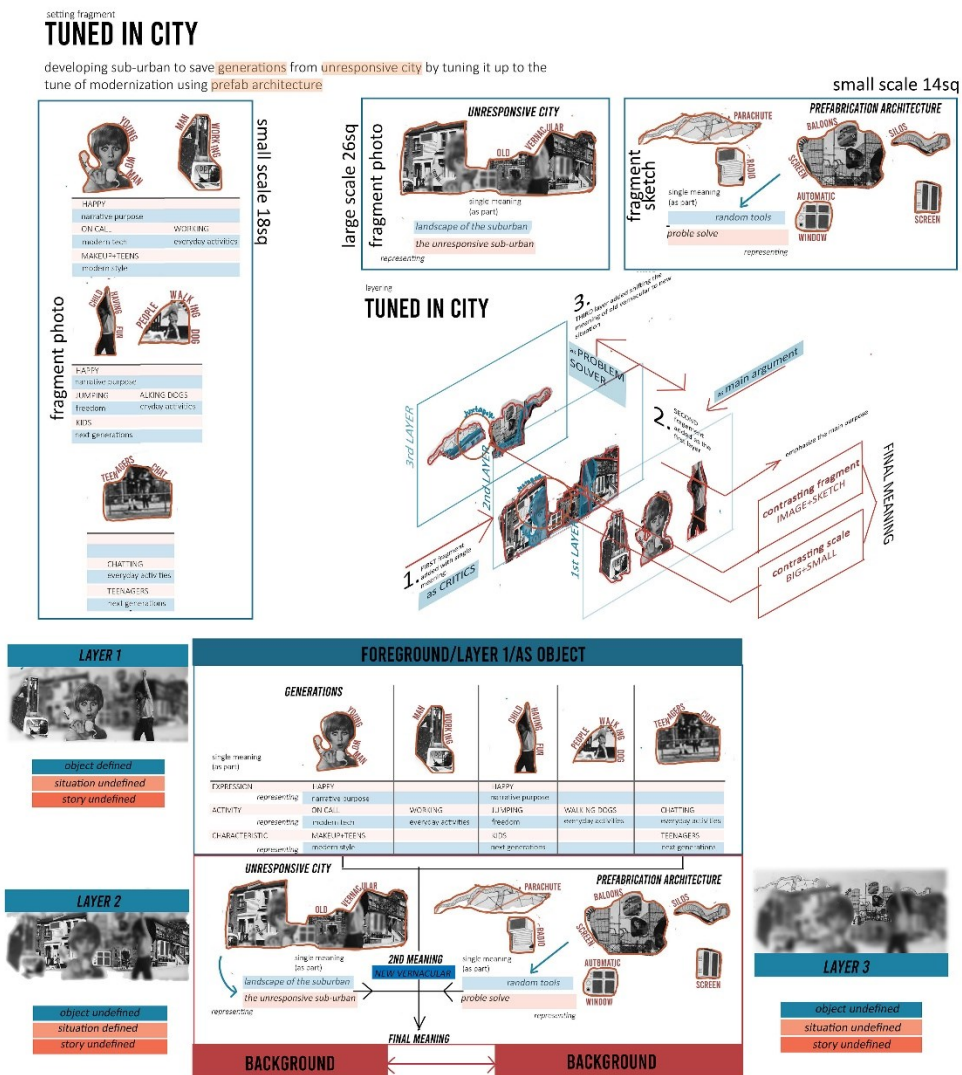


Figure 3. Tuned-in City Fragment Image Analysis

In the Tuned-in City image, three sizes of fragment are found, which are the small size for the fragment sketch, the medium size for the fragment images, and the big size for the existing old vernacular. Different from Instant City,

the fragment sketch of prefabricated architecture that was made in particular for this drawing does not dominate, but comes in various little parts of the whole picture. The existing condition of the old vernacular dominates the building and creates a combined meaning with the prefabricated architecture as the new vernacular with some modernity when seen as a whole. The fragmented image in the form of people exists in medium size, but when we see it in a perspective mode, the face of a young girl is positioned in a very front position from the other fragment. This brings the idea of how the next generations represented by young people are the priorities for the narrative that tried to be delivered.

Positioning the fragment in the layer is done by juxtaposing each fragment with another fragment, creating the other meaning. Two ways of juxtaposing are found in deconstructing the Tuned-in City image. The first one is to put together the fragment sketch and fragment images together, while the second one is positioning the big size layer in juxtaposition with the small size one. To see which parts are being juxtaposed, we have to pay attention to the line made between one and the other fragment. The first layer to be set in this drawing is the old vernacular which represents the sub-urban, and layered by the fragment sketch, while the last step is putting the fragment images, which represent the young generation as the very front layer. Placing the old vernacular as the base layer provides critical meaning which Archigram tried to respond, while adding the prefabricated architecture in the drawing, demonstrates proposition of ideas that Archigram is trying to bring. The front layer of human fragments demonstrates the main narrative of new vernacular.

The study creates further analysis to see which foreground and background in Tuned-in City, which are the same with the foreground-background analysis in Instant City. The result obtained from this process is when the front layer of human is being used as the focus, it shows that the definition of subjects' users but with undefined situation, making it the foreground layer. The next layer of the old vernacular, is set to be the focus, the situation is clearer, giving an impact of the unexplained story that makes its position as the background situation. The most bottom layer, which is the prefabricated parts, has no clear meaning or specific function or purpose of that thing, demonstrating how it rather being immersed to the other fragments of the images.

3.3 The New Domestic Landscape - Superstudio

Superstudio with the project positioned in the subsurface named as The New Domestic Landscape propose the most minimal and neutral space for human activity (Quesada, 2011). This project addresses the homogenization of space due to the existence of energy and information grids as its main narrative. There is a superimposition of the grid at various scales with the neutral ground to create a potential relationship and juxtaposition of collage-making (Shields, 2014). Unlike Archigram, Superstudio has fewer number of fragments in comparison with Instant City and Tuned-in City. This New Domestic Landscape has three groups of fragments, which are the fragment image of a group of people representing the meaning of humans as inhabitants and everyday activities. The second fragment is a slice of land where the people perform the activities. And the third fragment is the fragment sketch, consist of the grid lines plane and the skies.

In this picture, we can see that every single fragment has nothing particular as their meaning, such as jumbled things that exist in our everyday life. It turns out that as a whole it represents the narrative of this project which is the homogenization of space as a result of energy and information grids by using the minimal and neutral space for a backdrop to show the homogenization are slowly failed the interactions of its inhabitants. (Shields, 2014). There is only one person in this illustration with no interactions doing the everyday activities in the middle of nowhere represented by skies and grid as the reflection of the homogenization of modernization.

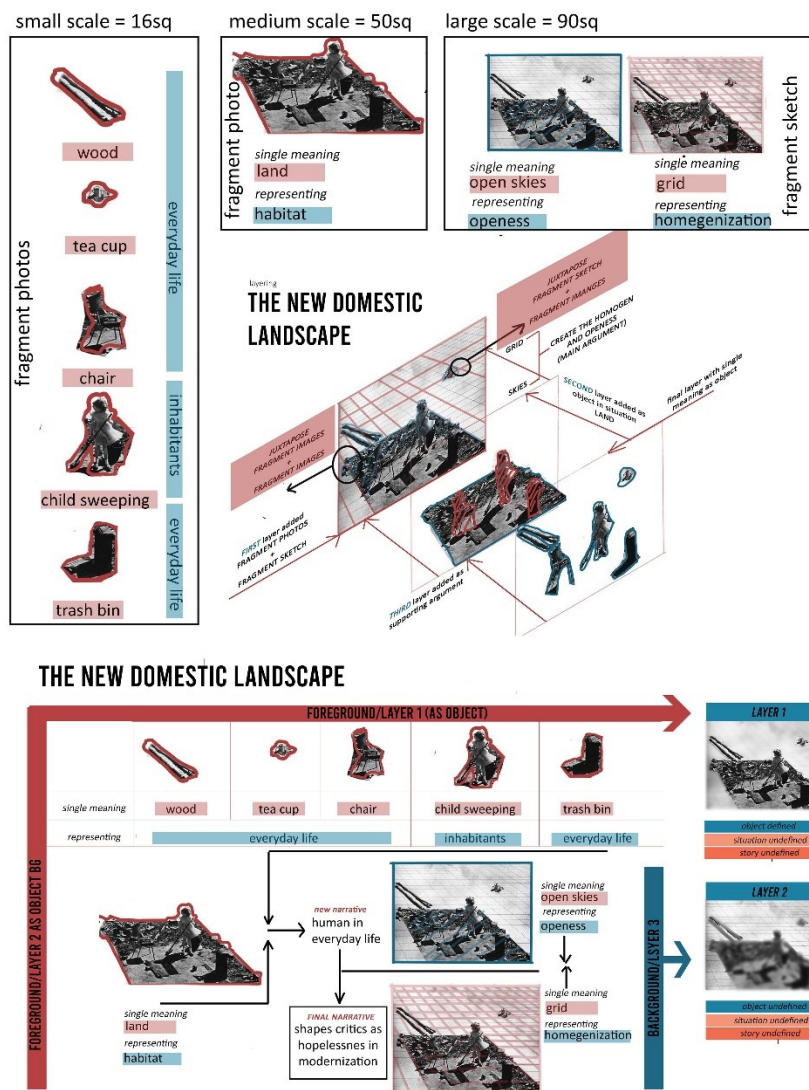


Figure 4. The New Domestic Landscape Fragment Image Analysis

The Domestic Landscape has fragments with three different sizes, from big, medium, and small sizes. Unlike Archigram, Superstudio does not provides proposition of architecture that respond to the narrative, but instead to enhance the current existence of a narrative that may be hidden. The big scale fragments, shown as the fragment of the sky and the grid on top of it represents the homogeneity of modernization shown as the main idea of the whole picture. And the medium scale fragments demonstrate the piece of land, whilst the smallest size fragments represent the inhabitant and its activities. The first layer set in this image is the layer of the skies and grid fragments. This fulfils the whole canvas with no meaning rather than the open skies in the perspective view represented by the grid. Then the second and third layers juxtapose the skies and grid layer, giving a different meaning that modernization, represented by the sky and grid, generate hopeless humans wandering in the middle of nowhere with no interactions. The everyday things show that even doing everyday activities, inhabitants that represent a little woman are slowly failing. The image exists in contrasts with the hustle and bustle of life as it is, which has many irregular lines in the fragment layer of existing images.

This picture's foreground and background are seen through combination of two fragments. The fragment of people and their everyday activities is in the foreground. The fragments exist as the background are the sky fragment combined with the grid fragment. Such identification of focus is seen clearly as the background has no object in it, so when the front part is blurred, this fragment does not have any meaning that clarifies its position as background. Despite its position as the only background, this layer emphasizes the main argument of boredom and never-ending homogenization in modernity. And when the background is blurred, and the foreground layer of people is the focus, the object is defined as an entity, but in a defined situation.

4. Discussion

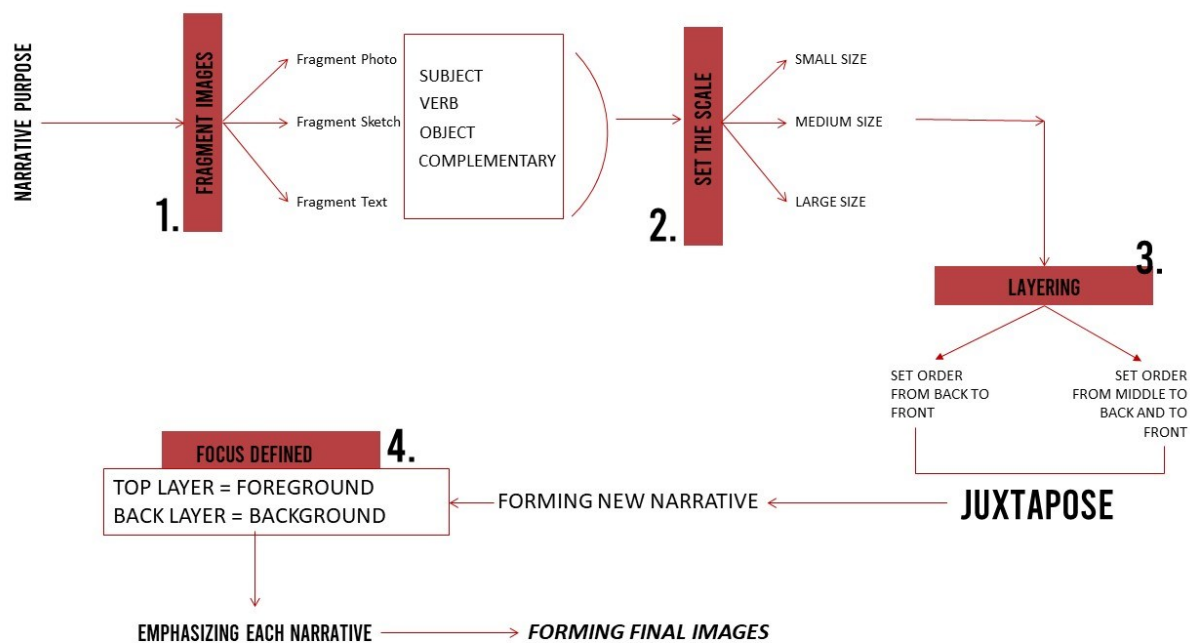


Figure 5. The Collage Image Making Process

4.1 Fragments and layers

From the analysis, we can see that the fragments create narratives a whole after being juxtaposed with each other in the collage image making process (See Figure 5). Those fragment positions have various meanings based on how architects shape the final narrative. Fragments found consist of fragment images obtained from an existing image. The other form of fragment is the fragment sketch, which is a form of image that is being creatively developed particularly for the collage image. Fragment sketch is meant to be the main idea of the whole narrative, either it is a tool or as a representation of some situation that the architect is trying to address. In Archigram works, the fragment sketch demonstrate proposition of architecture as a tool, while in Superstudio the fragment sketch reveals the hidden context that become the target of the critique. We found that positioning the layer fragments does not always start from the back layer, but it might start from the middle layer. The layer positioning creates meaning, and the juxtaposition happened between fragment sketch to fragment images in various sizes creates possible contrast and emphasis of the offered meaning. The top layer may exist as the purpose of the narrative created by the focus of images (foreground).

4.2 Scale and foreground-background

The analysis results indicate that the function of setting the scale is to emphasize meaning of juxtaposition process. Various scale of fragments, existing in small, medium, and big sizes of the fragments does not always consist of the same type of fragment in each project. The biggest part of the image turns out to be the fragments which represents the final situation of the narrative, and the small parts turns out to be the foreground of the picture. The focus analysis defines which fragment exist as the foreground and background, blurring each fragment separately to see if narrative meaning can be read if one layer is blurred and the others aren't. We may see that every time the foreground layer being the focus the context is defined without clear situation. But when the background is blurred the overall story can't be define and fragment turns out just into the meaningless images. The situation comes as the underlayer of it as the background to support meaning as the main idea of the narrative. When the existing situation and the fragment sketch combine from every single meaning, they become inseparable one meaning that represent the new situation formed as the main goal of the narrative.

5. Conclusion

The study promotes understanding of deeper architectural narrative through deconstruction of its images using collage method. The collage method is a process of juxtaposition fragment to create different meanings. The collage exists as a technique to demonstrate an objective narrative behind the image. The analysis provides identification

of fragments from three different utopian projects created by Archigram and Superstudio. The fragments can be defined as the fragment sketch and fragment images. Fragment sketch consist of a creative form of images developed for the representation, whilst fragment images are the fragment created from existing image or context. The position and scale of these fragments demonstrate the juxtaposition of meaning, understanding which parts needs to interact to create new meaning. In this sense each of the fragments have no singular understanding and can only be seen as a whole.

The fragment sketch may become the main fragment that dominates the image in terms of scale and position, but it may also instead hide and immersed in fragment images. An example is in the Archigram work at Tuned-in City, where the prefabricated kits are located in the back layer in small size as the background. In this sense, the deconstruction of images demonstrates various existence of architectural proposition, not only as something that always become the main focus of the object, but can be something that needs to be merged in order to create new meaning of the architecture. Submerged fragments may also exist when the creative proposition fragments are actually part of the overall context. Such occurrence can be seen in the Superstudio work at The New Domestic Landscape, where the grids that are usually hidden within the overall landscape, is extracted as a creative proposition, but it is done to reveal the homogenization of the land. The study demonstrates various spatial qualities that exist in these utopian projects, which emphasise the narrative through positioning of its fragments of images. The study provides exploratory method on how architecture may be understood as collaged images, using collage techniques to deconstruct the order of image not only as visual composition purposes, but with interaction to its deeper narratives. This emphasize requires seeing how the fragments of architectural representation exist as a whole, which will offer a whole different meaning rather than seeing in solely in its singularity.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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