Between an illustrator and an urban place: The dynamic between word and image in illustrated cities

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[Desenho / Drawing]

Abstract

Hybrid illustrated cities, as the artistic production of an embodied practice in the city, work as intermediates between the concrete physical city and the illustrator's imagination. This paper presents an autoethnographic reflection on the engagement of the illustrator with the city and the different degrees of word and image dynamics through my artistic practice. Standing apart from traditional illustration, city illustrations are interpretations by illustrators that take urban space as their primary source. These hybrid illustrations combine elements from illustrated maps, graphic novels, sketchbooks and picture books following loosely the methods of graphic journalism which look for accuracy within the frame of a subjective approach and the limitations of the medium. In other words, these illustrations are personal creations that move between reality and imagination. As such, and following my own artistic practice, I intend to explore the dynamics between word and image in hybrid city illustration to highlight specific elements of the embodied experience of the city, namely the practices of drawing in situ and thinking by drawing. Far from simplifying the depiction of the city, hybrid illustration tends to show complexity and depth through the dynamic between word and image. By addressing the different urban dimensions in this way (architecture, moods, people and stories) in juxtaposed layers the illustrator interweaves those experiences and observations from simultaneous perspectives. Results show that the interdisciplinary context of these hybrid city illustrations may significantly improve the communication of the city and the exchanges between disciplines such as urban studies, architecture and sociology. My artistic practice, presented in this paper, regards the different ways in which the dynamics between word and image alter, enhance, complement or contradict the illustrator's urban perception and understanding of urban space.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Ever since the establishment of modernity that certain artists have a sudden desire to wander the city and try to discover its unique features, I would say also to search for themselves in the façades of the streetscape. The desire to explore the city carries on until today with the same type of

passion and curiosity of the late 19th and the early 20th century cities. This is emphasized in the work of artists and authors as different as the Surrealists and Walter Benjamin inspired by Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur,* the Situationists who later became an influence to later Psychogeographers, and so on2. In the face of this entire creative activity connecting artist and the city, illustrators started to take on the challenge to go to the streets and to draw inspiration from their immediate surroundings shinning a light on real urban issues and questions [10] 3. It is in this scenario that I started to explore the city through my artistic practice motivated by a feeling that suggests that there are pieces of myself scattered everywhere in the streets of the cities I wander. What I understand by this, and it is important to clarify, is that the connections one makes with urban space and everyday life are meaningful connections that create impact not only in one's life but in the case of urban illustrators affecting directly their work.

My artistic practice takes the embodied approach to the city as a mediator between the illustrator and urban place. The experience in physical space and its everyday life activities by walking in the city and wayfinding [11–14] is combined with the practices of drawing *in situ* and thinking by drawing [15] creating a storyworld that while not completely imaginary is also not false. This process loosely follows the methods of graphic journalism [16-18] that entails an embodied experience in space, aiming accurate depiction of facts and environments (in the preferred medium of choice) while keeping a subjective approach. Such artistic practice, walking and drawing in the city, is illustrated mostly in sketchbooks with the assistance of the study of historical documents and of other recording methods such as photography and audio devices. The embodied immersion in the city is an essential part in the artistic practice of hybrid city illustration. One should ask, what is hybrid city illustration? City illustrations are interpretations of the city by illustrators that take urban space as their primary source of inspiration in their practice. Hybrid illustration combines different types of illustration such as: the freestyle of the sketchbook; the sequential narrative of picturebooks; the crucial reference to the geographical dimension as present in illustrated maps; the potential of image juxtaposition as seen in comics; and finally, the different degrees of dynamics between word and image present in all of these types.

The extent of the relationship between word and image in these illustrations highlights specific messages and emphasize particular points of view. This paper intends to explore this relationship through a process

2 The conceptualization of the *flâneur* inspired by Baudelaire was defined by Benjamin as a male modern city wandered, an ambivalent figure detached from society that observes and critiques the industrialized life [2, 3]. This character became a significant urban type as a mapping body in the city noting and compiling different manners of everyday life [4]. For this reason, the Situationist International, headed by Guy Débord, took the character further by defining the act of wandering - *flânerie* - through the streets as an urban creative methodology in the form of *dérive*. In the Situationist approach groups of around three people would walk aimlessly through the city streets letting the urban senses captivate them and guide their stroll in a attempt to create city [5]. The approach of walking as an aesthetic practice has been influential until today inspiring activities from the architectural group *Stalker*, land art sculptors, to in-site travel games and illustration such as the *Urban Sketchers*, or as act of reflection as defined by the author Rebecca Solnit [1, 6–9].

3 Due to its subjective and autoethnographic nature this paper will be written in the first person. I will also use the word artist in a general view and illustrator for the practice in question.

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of autoethnographic reflection in my own artistic practice in the city of Amsterdam. As such, I will start by explaining the encounter of the city through the practice of drawing *in situ* and thinking by drawing, an instrumental artistic practice to reflect on and understand urban space. What follows is an account of the city, where the artistic practice is synthesized and reflected allowing the illustrator to make choices in order to create the better dynamic of word and image to emphasize the communicated message and creating a meaningful connection with the audience.

2. An encounter with the city

My artistic practice involves an immersion in the city, a practice of sensing with the whole body and of responding to the immediate impacts in space by illustrated reflections. Drawing *in situ*, a combination between the act of walking in the city and of drawing on location, as an act of performance in the city resonates with what Tim Ingold calls wayfinding, a skilled performance of exploration (perception and action) that is in constant development with every new experience in space [13][4]. Wayfinding, as drawing *in situ*, carries out a performance that is not premeditated before departure but discovered along the way. In both performances the movements are continuously adjusted according to responses in space and to the flow of its activities in time (239).

By criticizing the "cartographic illusion" Ingold [13] analyses different knowledge of space in which stories intrinsically connected to geography are emphasized by the depiction of the accumulation of experiences in place (234). He advocates that the stories of movement through place (journeys) and experiences in a region (the network of connections of these journeys) are what allow people to know place to a certain degree (219). Wayfinding then, resembling storytelling, would be akin to Michel de Certeau's concept of walking in the city which emphasizes the street's everyday life in opposition to a totalizing, and totalitarian, viewpoint from high above, what de Certeau calls "a solar Eye, looking down like a god" (92). Overall, there seems to be some evidence to indicate that wandering and drawing through urban space provided the necessary conditions for my understanding and contemplation of the city I find myself in. Furthermore, when Ingold [13] concludes that "knowing is like mapping, not because knowledge is like a map, but because the products of mapping (graphic inscriptions), as those of knowing (stories), are fundamentally *un*-maplike"; however, the question of how to depict these "*un*-maplike" elements remains (220). Figure 1 shows that when immersing in urban space the movements and drawing practices of the illustrator are constantly adjusted in function of the environment in a response-like motion. Understood like this, the performance of drawing *in situ* is similar to the processes of mapping because the graphical outputs of apprehending space in such a way are closer to creating a narrative or telling a geographical story than to the process of map-making. In this sense, the illustrator creates knowledge by the performance of drawing *in situ*. The products of mapping and of know-

4 To a more detailed view on the performance of drawing *in situ* see [15]

ing during this performance are inscribed in these city illustrations that can be fundamentally, as Ingold [13] says, "*un*-maplike" (220).

Often, it is very difficult to explain the artistic approach of a certain illustration project. Constantly the question 'How did you thought of that?' is answered with an 'I really don't know, I just did it'. This could be explained, perhaps, by the aptitude of artists to think with the movement of their bodies, and the case of illustrators, through the gesture of their hands. I call this set of movements triggered by reflections in the artistic practice's performance thinking by drawing. This act is triggered by the immediate impacts of and responses to urban space in the artistic practice of drawing *in situ*. Thinking by drawing resembles what Nick Sousanis's [19] calls "picture-writing", a process of communication that combines word and image in a perception process which allows the reader to see and read simultaneously. Thus, the narrative is absorbed not only sequentially but also in totality. In comparison to "picture-writing", one might say that thinking by drawing is a process of refection that utilizes also both, word and image, in order to allow the illustrator to think visually (in an articulation between the totality and all its parts) while creating. In other words, these processes are ways to express visually based knowledge on the idea that both word and image in illustration are more than just the sum of their parts [19–21].
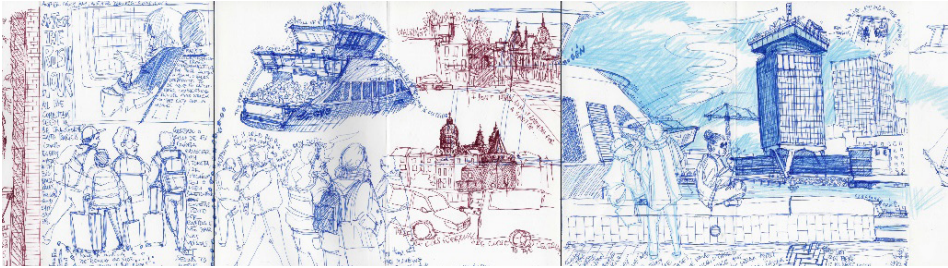

Fig. 1. Tânia A. Cardoso, personal research sketchbook (detail), 2019. Mixed media. 264mm x 212mm, 226g. Amsterdam. @ Tânia A. Cardoso.

Following Ingold's and David Turnbull's [13] argument that knowledge is created "within a field of practices" which are intrinsically connected to place how does thinking by drawing affect city illustration, one might ask (229)? In my practice of drawing *in situ* the recording of my immediate surroundings in a fast and expressive way directly in my sketchbook is a method to log my thoughts about the urban space in that particular moment (see figure 2). Knowing that the interaction between theory and praxis in these embodied experiences is somewhat unclear, thinking by drawing allows me to store all that disconnected and diverse information in a sequential or non-sequential narrative. By working with word-image interaction and using them with different weights one can create a hybrid sequential narrative (see figure 1). The performance of drawing *in situ* is an active research reflection to understand urban space while being immersed in it. The illustration created in this performance is a form of sequential art that can be read as much as seen in the same way Sousanis suggests picture writing works. For example, in figure 1 the illustration

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starts with fast sketches of people and a more extensive writing report of what is happening at that moment, mainly what my drawing abilities are not fast enough to register in such short time. The sequence of drawings suggests mobility in urban space even if these are not sequential urban spaces in reality. The way in which they overlap are reflections on the urban space's impact on my drawing act. In the middle of the street or in the middle of walking people the lines of the illustration are fast and uncared for; the words express thoughts and explain situations that I wasn't able to express in image. Other parts are stable, still, it is noticeable a higher care for detail and imply the longer permanence of the illustrator at that place, often including a careful use of colour as shown in figure 2.

Following Sousanis [19], one moves between text and image as it better suits the reading moving in the page as one would move in the city streets. When looking in totality at the illustrated scene from my sketchbook one can distinguish a form of route, see movement, fast appointments, unsure thoughts and stopping points. While everything that gains my curiosity can be represented, the illustration is in fact a synthesis that reflects immediate choices of what is depicted and how. Some illustrations are actually composed of several smaller ones: a bigger picture with a detailed appointment, a written description of the temperature, onomatopoeias for sound, thoughts about place, textures and diagrams

Fig. 2. Tânia A. Cardoso, personal research sketchbook (detail), 2019. Mixed media. 264mm x 212mm, 226g. Amsterdam. @ Tânia A. Cardoso.

of several different elements and so on (see figure 3). The information recorded in these embodied experiences appears to support the assumption that my knowledge of urban space is created as I walk along a certain path stopping for those elements that evoke a greater response in my engagement with the environment. A possibility for future research would be to investigate how speed would influence my perception and drawing practice, and consequently the creation of alternative knowledge of urban

Fig. 3. Tânia A. Cardoso, personal research sketchbook (detail), 2020. Mixed media. 264mm x 212mm, 226g. Amsterdam. @ Tânia A. Cardoso.

space exploring further what Ingold [13] describes as "we know *as* we go" (original emphasis) (230).

Thus far, I have argued that my practice of drawing *in situ* is a performance in a reflective process of thinking by drawing in which my immediate surroundings affect directly the expression and focus of my drawing as part of my process of documentation. The choice of word-image dynamics depends on my response to urban space and it develops freely as I perform changing directions at any time. What follows is an understanding on how to convey movement and the information of these experiences to a hybrid city illustration by exploring the dynamics of text and image.

3. An account of the city

As I have pointed out in the previous section of this paper, my drawing *in situ* practice becomes a mediator between the city and the movement of the illustrator's body. The crevices of imagination triggered by the walk and the responses to the experience of urban space affect the expressivity of my drawing practice. Simultaneously, these immediate choices affect the dynamics of word and image in order to create impact and a meaningful message that rather than an autobiography reflects a critical reflection of the dominant urban issues observed.

How do the observations and immediate responses to urban space recorded through thinking by drawing are transposed to the hybrid city illustration? The reflection of urban space is no longer an immediate response but a calculated critical thought built to convey a certain message about urban space and allowing for the generation of different types of urban knowledge. This message can be made unique through the different degrees of word and image integration in a direct reference to spatial and temporal manners of expression [22]. In this section, I will shift the discussion of the illustrator's direct encounter with the city to the illustrator's subsequent account of the city.

If we take the two extremes of word and image dynamics, following Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's [22], we have a text block in one extreme and a wordless picture in the other (8). What stands in the middle of these two outputs is an endless field of possibility for illustrators. The different degrees of word-image integration can make the illustration fairly simple with a straightforward message or can make it visually complex and thus, demanding more from the audience. According to Jaleen Grove [23], the level of interaction between word and image – "counterpoint" - can vary from: mirroring one another; symbolic or metaphorical visual interpretations of the text; visual expansions of text descriptions or underlying concepts; contradicting each other; and standing not as image or text but on their own as a whole cohesive visual (13)[5]. In my artistic practice, these interactions might vary from page to page or differ according to specific moments of the visual narrative (different days, different points of view or different characters). My gestures add spatial, geographical

5 For a detailed account of the many divisions and subcategories of word-image dynamics see [22] and [10].

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and social information to the illustration in a constant growth movement of knowledge in the illustration. The process of building the hybrid city illustration becomes, in this sense, less of a map and more of a geographical visual narrative that includes map-like elements. Places are connected to stories and through this methodology I create a different storytelling element intrinsically connected to urban space.

While exploring the tension between the performance of drawing *in situ* and its later process of documentation in hybrid city illustration the questions of how to maintain these immediate responses to space relevant and how to keep certain aspects of my immediate expressivity arose. One possible path to finding a solution for this dilemma is to follow certain indigenous mapping methodologies such as the case of the Ojibwa pictographic ritual scrolls in which space, time and self are intrinsically connected and present in the final representation [13, 24]. Another possibility is to consider memory and the act of knowing from the embodied experience as important as the act of being immersed in the streets. According to Roland Barthes [12], orientation is made "by walking, by sight, by habit, by experience; here every discovery is intense and fragile, it can be repeated or recovered only by memory of the trace it has left in you: to visit a place for the first time is thereby to begin to write it: the address not being written, it must establish its own writing"(36). Following Barthes analysis of how the city of Tokyo can only be known by some sort of ethnographic activity, the commitment to memory means that the information gathered in the sketchbook from the diverse journeys will later become gestures in the hybrid illustration that retrace (more or less directly depending on the aim) the gestures in the streets [12, 14].

In retracing my drawing *in situ* practice in Amsterdam I divided information in different groups (activities, architecture, urban types, thoughts, and sounds). These are not closed divisions; they are rather flowing and mixing between each other and are useful in the construction of the hybrid illustration. As figure 4 shows the definition of rigid pictorial and spatial boundaries defined through the setting of framing lines is not necessary. The existing lines are depictions of ground lines and parts of the urban grid that influence my perception of space. For this reason, they appear to be distorted, broken or even ignored in my hybrid illustration emphasizing the initial embodied experience and not the representation of physical geographic construction. In this case, to showcase the distinction between public and private urban space in the city of Amsterdam ground lines are non-existent showing a similar spatial perception of both spaces and creating successions of spaces that might not exist in the real city but are connected by the sensation they provoke in the illustrator (the impact in the drawing is similar). The representation of succession of urban space is adapted freely as the illustration does not mean to guide one through the city but instead to reveal nodes of connections and networks created through wayfinding and the practice of draw-

ing *in situ*[6]. The presence of human figures works here as topographic characters showing the characteristics of certain urban space through its users so to speak, each playing its role (see figure 5). For this reason, and shadowing my thinking by drawing process, the illustration clusters different elements of word-image integration: of words narrating specific characteristics and sensations of urban space and my particular thoughts on the matter; of bigger images that overlap; of smaller details of urban elements and types; and of graphical diagrams aimed to explain specific places and concepts. The aim is to create a storyworld with spatial and temporal properties in a complex composition that shadows (although not explicitly) the route I've taken beforehand.

The dynamic between word and image in hybrid city illustration does not intend to mirror both elements. In other words, the images are not describing the text. In fact, both word and image are part of a cohesive whole and work together in different degrees to develop the narrative. I borrow the medium specificities of comics to these illustrations that likewise, can work sequentially or in linked parts in a non-sequitur narrative, which means that it has no visible particular order[7]. Word and image are then intrinsically connected and read as whole, each adding new information to another, their dynamics carefully thought throughout the narrative to establish a certain message. Changes in the counterpoint were compared in different parts of the city hybrid illustration to understand how the interpretation and response to urban space is depicted in the expressivity of the illustrator's drawings. Counterpoint such as contradiction is used in this example to emphasize a critical gaze to certain urban issues such as gentrification or touristic overexploitation.

Fig. 4. Tânia A. Cardoso, hybrid illustration experiment (detail), 2019. Line Drawing. 420 mm X 279 mm, 90g. Amsterdam. @ Tânia A. Cardoso.
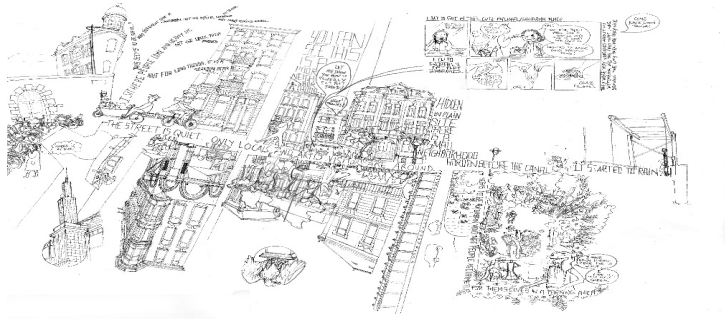
The use of balloons shows differences in focalizor and creates a separation of my personal thoughts and descriptions, and other peoples' sounds interpreted in different ways depending on my knowledge of the language[8].

6 Illustrators such as Jan Rothuizen and Mitch Miller use such hybrid visuals in their perceptions and depictions of urban space - from word maps to graphically complex entanglements of word, drawing and diagram - in hopes to better reveal hidden practices and social connections in the spaces they intervene as illustrator-researchers [25-26]. Chris Ware's work is also exemplar in the way in which he carefully constructs complex pages where architecture, action and feeling are waved into a creative narrative through its dynamic of word and image [28].

7 For more on the different manners on how to build a visual narrative see [29].

8 For more on focalizors see [30].

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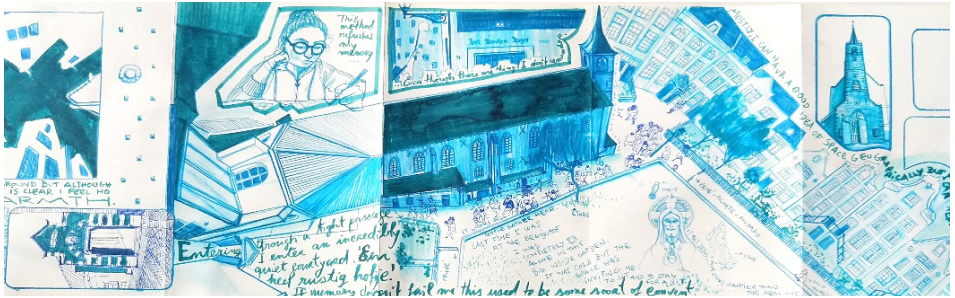
This creates a clear perspective between the self (illustrator) and the other. This documentation is a mixture of the act of observing different people frequenting a specific space (creating topographic characters) and the adaptations of conversations overheard from different dialogues throughout the day or even imagined by the illustrator if the depiction demands.

In general, therefore, it seems that word and image engage in a continuous dynamic in both processes of performance and of documentation of the city through my artistic practice. As Carey Gibbons[31] suggests when quoting W.J.T. Mitchell's work: the interaction between word an image is "constitutive of representation as such [...] there are no 'purely 'visual or verbal arts" (388). Hybrid city illustration would be, in this sense, what Mitchell conceptualizes as "image-text", a complex illustration that assumes the interwovenness of both word and image, collapsing their traditional roles and distinctions. In hybrid city illustration there are no distinctions between word and image, both are inseparable from the illustration as the illustration is inseparable from the illustrator's embodied experience and from the urban space that helped create it as explained in the first section of this paper.

Fig. 5. Tânia A. Cardoso, hybrid illustration experiment (detail), 2020. Mixed media. 264mm x 212mm, 226g. Amsterdam. @ Tânia A. Cardoso.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the dynamics of word-image interaction by articulating the embodied practice of the illustrator in the city and the subsequent reflection of the illustrator's interpretation in hybrid city illustration. Furthermore, I established these artistic practices and levels of counterpoint between word and image as responses to the illustrator's surrounding environment during the embodied approach and as critical reflections in its retracing through of the city in memory gestures.

The results provided in the form of hybrid city illustration support the idea that the immediate response of urban space by the illustrator is an essential part of the artistic research practice in order to understand the city and be able to generate knowledge through its illustration. As discussed before, this investigation contributes to the existing knowledge of walking in the city and wayfinding [11, 13] building on the parallels between these concepts and my artistic practice of drawing *in situ* and of thinking by drawing. Despite its exploratory nature, this paper offers some insight into the discussion of construction of urban space as a storyworld considering its activities and experiences as stories that enfold in the illustration in a

spatial and temporal manner of expression. This partially substantiates the importance of the dynamics between word and image in the elaboration of hybrid city illustration as a calculated critical reflection carefully designed to convey a specific message in a direct engagement with documentation and performance. The tension between both, documentation and performance in these illustrations still needs further investigation but the relevance of their word-image dynamics is supported by the urge to document what lies invisible in a traditional map and to communicate the activities interwoven in everyday life practice.

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