



SOPHIA
PEER REVIEW JOURNAL

CROSSING BORDERS, SHIFTING BOUNDARIES – PHOTOGRAPHY AND ARCHITECTURE

ISSN: 2183-8976 [PRINT] 2183-9468 [ONLINE]

Volume 2, Issue 1 | Publication year: 2017

DOI 10.24840/2183-8976_2017-0002_0001_02

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EDITORIAL: ARCHITECTURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY: OLD VISIONS UNDER NEW LIGHTS

Written by Iñaki Bergera

In a way, we could consider that the main scaffolding of the theoretical discourse of architectural photography –particularly on what regards to the Modern Movement– has already been profiled by the specialized historians and researchers. International research projects promoted by several universities and also by museums, archives, and other private or public institutions worldwide are currently strengthening this historical and documentary corpus, on the one hand, but also working on some new parallel approaches and theories, on the other. In the context of the Porto School of Architecture, Scopio Network and its supportive research group CCRE, is leading an outstanding innovative academic, artistic and social dialogue and exchange.

As the On the Surface conference –held at the FAUP in September 2016– and its previous editions pointed out, the relationship between architecture and photography is no longer bound to the constrained negotiation between their respective disciplinary and autonomous discourse. Indeed, the international increasing interest on the analysis of this liaison underlines the importance of proving that the exploration has definitely crossed its borders and shifted the preexisting boundaries. The urban, social, or artistic approaches and implications, among others, were widely explored throughout the event. And yet, the program of the conference included a first panel devoted to, and still grounded on, the study of the substance of the subject matter: photography and architecture. The presence on the stage of three valuable speakers –Paolo Rosselli, Mariela Apollonio and Marco Iuliano– proved that a more open and multiple approach could be delivered, particularly on what regards the role of the photographer on this enterprise. A brief introduction and statement by the invited speakers led to a fruitful dialogue between them and the audience. Sophia Journal –another promising and outstanding initiative released by Scopio Network– has become now the context to publish a few updated texts from those who then addressed the attendees at the meeting.

Paolo Rosselli is a pivotal and renowned figure in our field. His Architecture degree –together with his passion for travelling– helped him from the very beginning of his career to rethink

the visual reading of the urban landscape and the role of architectural space on its construction. Throughout his career Paolo has balanced vision and thought, action and theory. His research has been published on significant books that should be listed in any canonical bibliography of photography and architecture. Rosselli conducted his presentation by picking up and reviewing a few of his projects, the earliest ones but mainly those that represent the most recent state of his thoughts and commitments. Thus, his book *Landscape with dolls* explores the idea that is ultimately the camera that sees the world, not the photographer and his determinations. By photographing the camera as it looks –the hunted hunter, in other words– this double act of looking expands the notion of authorships, and the way the camera frames and chooses the reading of the urban landscape. For Rosselli, the most important issue in architectural photography is the way the photographer looks at the world, beyond the fact of depicting the aesthetic nature of any particular building. Other projects of Rosselli reinforce this notion by re-contextualizing the building including elements into the scene that rather than distracting the reading of the building explain it as a whole, as part of a wider and richer social and urban complexity. Paolo's text, "Photography Keeps an Eye on the Photographer", summarizes all these concerns and highlights his great sensibility and unique approach to the everlasting challenge of depicting the built world.

Mariela Apollonio arrived to photography from the artistic context. Working as a professional architectural photographer from 2008, she has developed a parallel personal artistic work. Her background allows her to understand architectural photography as a way of thinking and finding an interpretation of reality. She believes, moreover, that is inevitable to understand architecture from subjectivity and thought, without hiding the vision of the author. This coherent attitude has moved her to develop a personal research on the identity and the contemporary contextualization of architectural photography. She defines professional architectural photography as "mechanism image", an author-less and that image, free from any subjectivity or statement. Its objectives are linear and foreseeable. For Mariela, the "mechanism image" is the medium, not the message. It's an envelope not concerned about architecture but about looking like other mechanism images.

Concerned as she is, Apollonio argues that architectural photography is still living in its past. She doesn't see on the contemporary practices real proposals to transform it. It needs, she says, a change of paradigm that could redefine that inherited from modernity system of architect-media-photographer. A solution could come, for her, in gaining new allies. "The new image proposal has to contemplate photography of architecture as something cut off from architecture. Photography of architecture is not something else but itself". When relegated from any promotional need architectural photography will be coherent with itself. Playing with Jean Luc Nancy notion of mimesis, Apollonio would understand photography of architecture not as a copy but as resumption. Recalling that flattering comment of Le Corbusier to Hervé, saying that he had the soul of an architect, Apollonio affirms that is not that what an architectural photographer needs: they don't need the soul of an architect but having soul. This, we could add, would liberate him or her from any prejudgment pushing the photographer to an uninhibited reading of the built world.

Architectural photography has to break the formal consensus of the market and has to expand the photographer's implication and freedom.

Intention and interpretation: the architect's will, the photographer's contribution and the final viewer. The real power of the image, now more than ever, belongs to the observer and more specifically, according to Jacques Rancière¹, to the affect: images are operations between meaning and affect, between what you see and what you expect. These "modulating contradictions" expand the reading of the image. Today, more than ever, we have to understand –and act accordingly– that the image of architecture is assembled and reassembled as a language, a visual syntaxes that has to be cultivated under our contemporary practice and understanding.

¹ Rancière, J. *The Future of the Image*, London; New York: Verso, 2007.