Photography - a vehicle of architectural communication

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(Technical Note)

Abstract

The architectural photography is a fragment of visual impressions collected and rendered with sensitivity. It is part of the development of architectural thinking. It captures architectural images in a way that provokes ideas, communicates a message. With spirit of observation and sense of composition, the photographer artist discovers and carves sequences of the buildings' life, recreates architectural scenes, captures subtleties of space and light which often balks of the attention in the everyday haste. The architectural picture is often devoid of human presence, just to concentrate on the composition and texture of volumes. Others views of the photographic art oppose to the representation of the buildings as static objects or as art works, and propose realistic images of architecture, as it is in everyday life, worn and enliven by people. The architectural photography represents an efficient communication vehicle, accessible to all levels of understanding. Being that it artistically reinterprets and values the image of the buildings, it represents a resource of marketing in real estate business and a precious source of cultural documentation.

Rezumat

Fotografiile de arhitectură sunt fragmente de impresii vizuale culese şi interpretate cu sensibilitate. Sunt parte a dezvoltării gândirii despre arhitectură; ele înregistrează imagini arhitecturale într-un mod în care provoacă idei, comunică un mesaj. Cu spirit de observaţie şi simţ al compoziţiei, artistul fotograf descoperă şi decupează secvenţe din viaţa clădirilor, recreează scene arhitecturale, surprinde subtilităţi ale spaţiului şi ale luminii care scapă adeseori atenţiei în graba cotidiană. Fotografia arhitecturală este adeseori lipsită de prezenţa umană, tocmai pentru a se concentra pe compoziţia şi textura volumelor. Alte viziuni ale artei fotografice se opun reprezentării clădirilor ca lucruri statice sau ca obiecte de artă, şi propun imagini realiste ale clădirilor, aşa cum sunt ele, uzate şi însufleţite de oameni. Fotografia constituie un vehicul comunicaţional eficient şi accesibil pentru toate nivelurile de înţelegere. Întrucât reinterpretează artistic şi pune în valoare imaginea clădirilor, fotografia de arhitectură reprezintă o resursă de marketing în afaceri imobiliare şi o preţioasă sursă de documentare pentru cultura arhitecturală.

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1. Introduction

The photography communicates the architectural information to an unlimited scale in time and space. It is now the main teaching, marketing and advertising tool for the built architecture and a very accessible, widespread means of transmitting architectural messages.

The photography, an art object in itself, treats architecture as background, as main theme or compositional element for other themes. Through plays of light and shadows, composition and texture, through cutouts that capture certain characteristics of space or time, the photographic art values the works of architecture and reinterprets their semantic content sometimes even stronger and in a different way than the direct experience.

2. Content

The architectural photography is fragment of visual sensations which is cropped from reality and sensitively interpreted. It renders the personality of the building, its vibrations and specific atmosphere.

With observation and compositional sense, the photographer discovers and crops sequences from the buildings' life, recreates architectural scenes, captures subtleties of space and light which often balks of attention in the everyday haste (figure 1).

Figure 1. New York, Manhattan, photographer: Răzvan Nica [1]

Helene Binet confesses that her architectural pictures intend to catch the physical and visual sensations of light in order to facilitate transmission of significances. She takes pictures of architectural light, texture and shape, and not of the outer shell of the building, in order to allow more free interpretations [2].

Luis Barragan considers photography a separate entity, not subservient to architecture, with the role

of capturing the spirit of places. For him, the photography of the building in state of construction represents an analytical tool for the design process, from which he recommence another painstaking design process.

The architectural photography is often devoid of human presence in order to focus on composition, texture, volumes and reports full-empty, respectively built – unbuilt, positive – negative. Bernard Tschumi sustains this approach of photographic art in architecture. He thinks this is the common condition, the order of architecture not to be bewildered by the different order of social activities [3].

In other visions of the photographic art, it is considered that the creative use of human characters enliven the pictures of the buildings and gives them scale. Eric de Mare, photographer, includes human figures for compositional reasons, to focus interest and give scale to the image [4]. John Donat, photojournalist, uses micro cameras to overtake the time sequences experiences of a building life, which then he composes in suggestive representations [5].

Figure 2. Composition of geometry and light, photographer: Alina Tudose [6]

In architectural photography, there is the temptation of representing buildings devoid of temporality, frozen in a status of an art work (figure 2). From its composition are eliminated elements of time that threatens the authority of architecture: degraded finishes, nature, people and their movement, big and small events that are part of the every building's life.

But all these things belong to the usual history, says the art historian Iain Borden, and architecture is not a stable force, set above the dynamic forces of the time [7]. He opposes to the presentation of the buildings as static things or as art objects, and makes out a case for realistic images of architecture, as it is in reality, worn and enliven by people (figure 3).

The photographs are part of a social image; they communicate the way in which everyday life and people enliven architecture, making it live and have a social existence. The representation of temporal features of the architecture outlines the message of a particular historical period and shows us the way people are living their lives, the way cities and buildings are changing and evolving, notices Iain Borden [8].
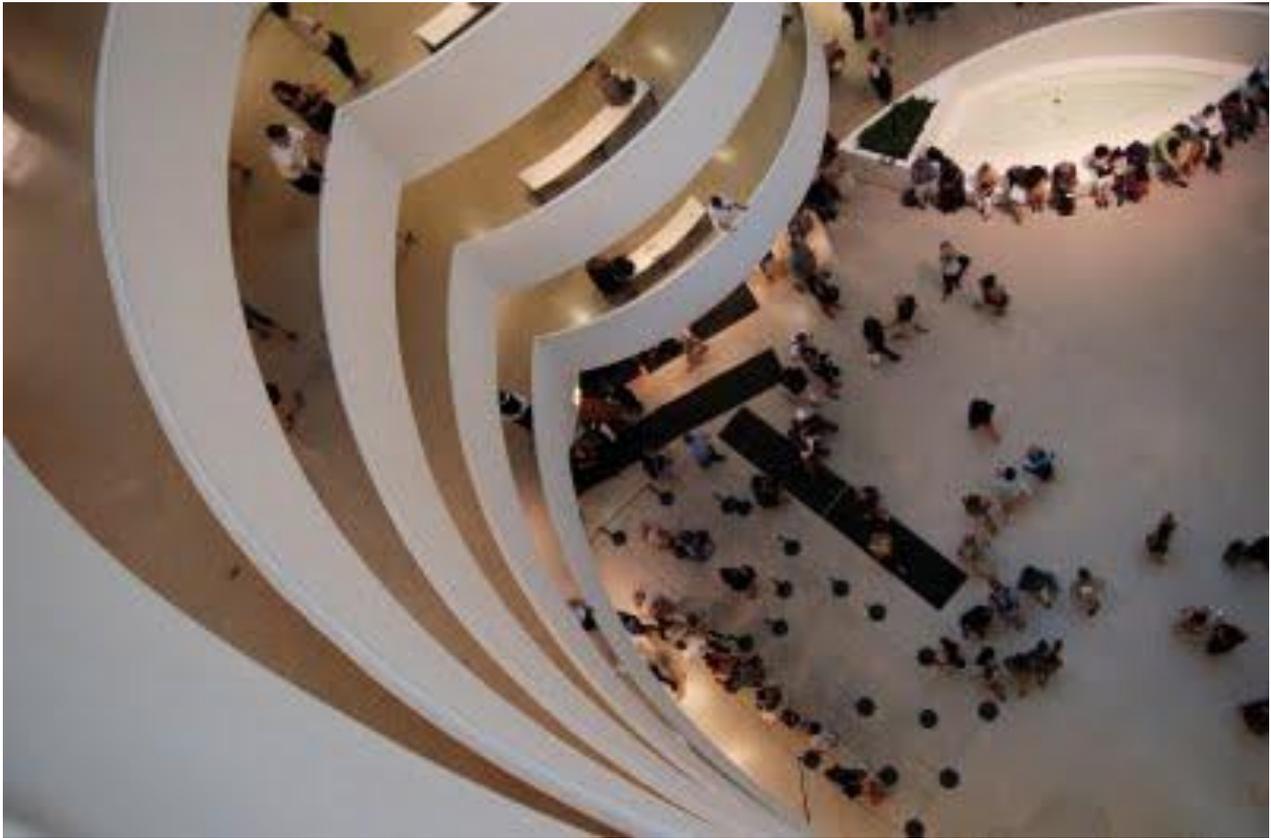

Fig. 3. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York , 1959, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, photographer: Răzvan Nica [9]

The photographs can be suggestive beholders about the transformations of architecture made by culture, time and history. Thus, the pictures *Lived-in architecture*, taken by Phillippe Boudon shows how the Pessac houses designed by Le Corbusier had been transformed by their inhabitants, according to their own cultural code: the ground floor houses were abolished, the terrace roofs where changed with sloped roofs, and the horizontal window bands where segmented into smaller windows for more intimacy.

The architectural photography has been over time a precious source of cultural documentation. The image of many famous buildings survives and is put forth owing to its reproducing on photo paper. There are pictures that have become symbolic images of some architectural works. For instance, the curtain-walls of Bauhaus photographed by Lucia Moholy, Villa Dall'Ava, Saint Cloud, Paris, photographed by Peter Aaron from Esto Agency. There is a close relation between the fame of an architect and a good photographer. Long-term alliances between these two sides - Richard Neutra and Julius Shulman, Richard Meier and Ezra Stoller, Barragan and Armando Salas Portugal, Paul Rudolph and Joseph Molitor, Tadao Ando and Yukio Futagawa, Wiel Arrets and Helene Binet, Peter Zumthor and Heinrich Helfestein, Hezog&Meuron and Thomas Ruff – have given a consistent interpretation of the architects' work in pictorial, suggestive and coherent representations [10].

The triad architect, photographer and building is the creation of an architectural distinction. For an

architect, to hire a photographer means to buy the skills of pictorial reproduction and the access to the exclusivist mass-media circuit, remarks Pierluigi Serraino [11]; the photography has became a essential vector of communication that can even decide the success of a building.

The pictorial qualities of the architecture are an aspect that should be considered from the beginning of the design process, especially when the commercial success and public appreciation of certain investors or types of buildings are tracked. This reality of the contemporary architectural world is acknowledged by Gernot Bohme, in his book about Herzog&Meuron: in many aspects, the photographic representation become more important than the building itself … we shouldn't be surprised that the photography of the building has to be included in the first phases of the design thinking [12].

5. Conclusions

The photography is a thought-out illustration of architecture; it does not only record the image of the object, but also has a rich semantic potential. It is part of the architectural thinking and is taken in a way that provokes ideas, transmits a message.

The photography reinterprets the architecture artistically and semantically, concurrently values the image of the buildings, being an important resource of marketing for real estate business and a precious source of cultural documentation.

6. References

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