

Hyperrealismus, vielfältige Wahrnehmungsformen, visuelle Architektur

Hyper-realism, multiperception and visual architecture

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Abstract:

The idea of transforming architecture from the concepts used in visual arts strongly began with the avantgardes, where was defined architecture in terms of space, air and perception. From then on, the evolution of photography/visual arts and architecture has remained extremely closed, and sometimes even creating some confusion in understanding the borders between them. Since the appearance of film and movies, 'reproduction' of reality has become a characteristic of modern civilization. The emergence of Computer and Internet technology have made 'complete' portrait penetrated into every aspect of our daily life. This paper tries to focus, into the straight relationship between the development of photography in the early modern architecture and the way both disciplines have walked together till today, a time when architecture is a mass media. Finally, it is defined the concept of *multiperception*, as a way to define the infinite reproduction.

The idea of the complete portrait, or the complete reproduction is not new. It is now nearly a century since Walter Benjamin announced that the future will be defined by reproduction, in what became one of the more suggestive texts of the twentieth century. Its very well known essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, published in 1935, addresses a modern, technologically effected transformation in the nature of art and, by extension, the political implications of that transformation. The idea of being able to transform a single object or piece of art into a non-unique object or performance that could be experienced not only by audience members willing to make a pilgrimage to the artwork's location was clearly one of the ideas due to change art theory in modernity. Benjamin contrasts the traditional art object with modern artworks, whose broad spectrum of reproductions as images, sound recordings or film reels, were going to be mechanically copied and distributed widely. A few years earlier, the french thinker Paul Valéry wrote, in the article *La Conquete de l'ubiquite*, that we should "expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art", and having clear that in all the arts there were a physical component which no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which couldn't remain unaffected by modern knowledge and power. For that last years, and setting a departure point in the turning from XIXth to XXth century, neither matter nor space nor time had been what it was from time immemorial.

Portraying reality now is no more a simple or easy operation. It becomes not only a reproduction act but also, and what it is genuine contemporary, a productive art. We might think of the works and programmes of the Futurist, Constructivist or Simultaneist age. Painting and photographing conceived by Boccioni or Delaunay, with its absolute plastic dynamism, embraced the accelerated rhythms of modern life. Cinema with Vertov's eye machine, for example, rendering all machines synchronous, transformed the act of seeing into something mechanical. Also, suprematists and constructivists architects transmitted messages and forms as the represented dynamism of builders and *constructeurs*. In all these cases, mediating with images is not any more just passive, but implies mediation of act, transforming, with no return, art as an active identity, that focus more deeply into their re/production, and less into the essence of what traditionally has been considered as an artistic procedure.



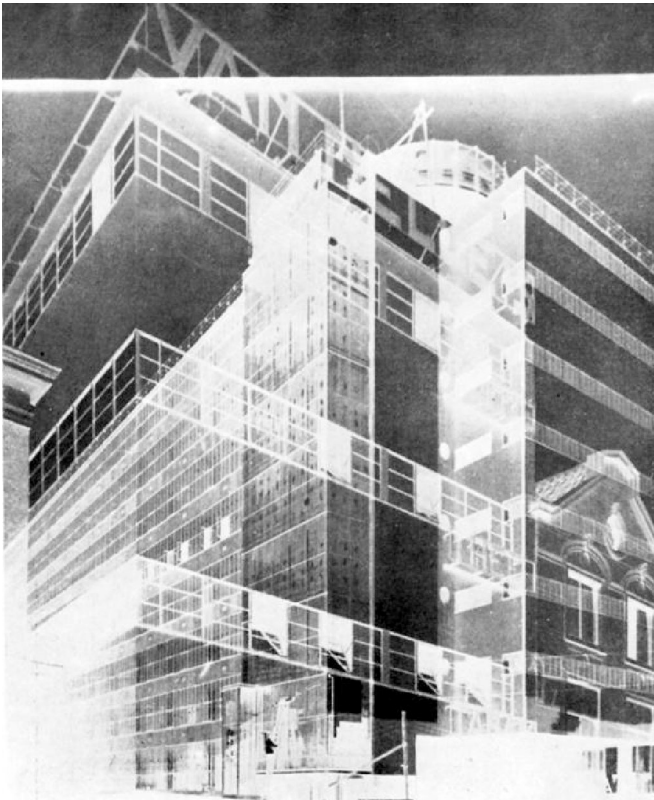
Hiroshi Sugimoto: Radio City Music Hall (1977)
Gelatin silver print 16 1/2 x 2 1/2 inches.
Collection Miami Art Museum

This is exactly what Sugimoto, in its absolute and complete portrait of a film, is doing. The artist is producing its work by selecting an scenario, witting and watching through a couple of hours, in order to get produced a pure and blank square that contains a whole universe, as if it were Borge's *aleph*: that miraculous point of space that contained all other points in the universe. In Borge's story, the one who gazes into it can see everything in the universe from every angle simultaneously, without distortion, overlapping or confusion. Sugimoto's *aleph* contains not only every single frame of the movie, but also every single experience of the spectators, and all of them into a single unique blank square that provides a fully abstract view. He is able to translate the representation of the whole, moving image, into something specifically static and abstract. In our society, where we are surrounded everywhere and all the time, by hundreds of arrays of multiple and simultaneous images, the idea of just having a single and silent image commanding our attention becomes absolutely rare. It seems as if we need to be distracted in order to concentrate. As if we, all of us living in this new kind of space, the space of multiple information, could be diagnosed en masse with attention deficits disorder. Rather than wander cinematically through the city, we now look into one direction and see many juxtaposed moving images, more than we can possibly synthesise or reduce to a single impression.

Contemporary society is not any more into just the reproduction age, but into streaming age, where there is another reality, as an illusion, streaming itself online, even more real than the real one where we are living. We have got examples, never imagined by Benjamin or Valéry, as global webcams, global satellite streaming images or even global on-time geo-location, that makes possible having our world pictured several times at a time, in what has been defined as the contemporary *multiperception*.

But *multiperception* should be defined as something different than mere moving image practices and technologies that exchange the white cube of the exhibition space for the black box of image projection. *Multiperception* holds a context where reality is not linear, but complex and even contradictory. It has the ability to put together not only the representation of the objects into their context, but also the meaning of that reality and its singularities. Some artists and critics predicted that the raising of the moving image as video, holography or new forms of computer-based imaging, will modify the status of the work of art in our age of information. In fact, as the collage technique and photography replaced oil-paint, the LCDs will replace the traditional canvas. But it is not only technological determinism. The projected and multi-framed image has surprisingly found its way into the museums and also into the discourse of modernity.

This has a lot to do with the evolution of the discourses between cinema and art, as cinema and all its derivations, have become one of the most representative fields of work in contemporary art. As Peter Wollen pointed out in his essay *The Two Avant-Gardes*, it is necessary to define a clear-cut categorical distinction between an avant-garde critically and creatively dealing with the established language of cinema and an avant-garde formalistically focused upon the self-reflexive use of the medium, or what has been termed *Greenbergianism* as applied to film. But these seemingly opposed categories actually required and mediated each other, and in our present situation, it is quite clear that there is no longer a desire for clear-cut categories any more, but for integration of apparently very opposite intentions. In this respect, the history of photography is very significant. As Jeff Wall defended in his lucid essay *Marks of Indifference*, photographers such as Walker Evans worked as photojournalists in the 1930s while striving to achieve the status of a modern artist, while avangarde artists in the 60s –such as Dan Graham or Robert Smithson- used the model of the photojournalist to reject the false heroism and formalism that was part of the image of the modern artist. Nevertheless, this rhetoric supposes that photographers, film-makers and artists might strive to achieve the status of an avangarde artist, but the fact is that real avangarde artists use the media of film, photography and the broad visual field without fine-art ambitions, and many times simply to provide and contextualise visual information and, implicitly, to satirise fine-art ambitions.



Jan Kamman: architecture (1929)
Exhibition Film und Foto, Stuttgart.

Architecture production is not isolated. In this time of extreme and absolute visibility/virtuality, architecture gets involved in a process of only-reproduction and not just constructing. The world of ideas and avantgarde is getting somehow impossible in our so called real life world, and only possible in the mirror, in that more real place where categories are pure, absolute abstract and, maybe, even more real than reality itself. On the other hand, if the photographic image assumed the category of a manifest icon during the modern movement, embodying its own autonomy with respect to the represented object, now it is contemporary, global and instantaneous society that lets reality be recreated in each of our homes. It is no longer necessary to have seen the reality itself, no even through public events at which the author narrates the personal history of his work. This filtered and nuanced trip has today become a personal and intimate show, letting viewers participate in these private and almost secret travels via new mediums.

The idea of transforming architecture from the concepts used in visual arts is not new. The exhibition *Film und Foto*, that was held in Stuttgart in 1929, made a very interesting definition of architecture, defined not by words but by a very unique photograph: Jan Kamman's *Architecture*. The definition of architecture was made in the most modern possible way, without any word and making possible to communicate the essential concepts of modernity and spatiality but just by a visual reference. From then on, the evolution of photography/visual arts and architecture has remained extremely closed, and sometimes even creating some confusion in understanding the borders between them.

Contemporary architecture production has also something to do with it. Let's take, for example, the case of the house built by Rem Koolhaas in 1998 in Bordeaux for a physically handicapped man. In his film *Houselife* and after a worldwide screening, its author, Rem Koolhaas, bring the house to viewers by means of different interlinked video sequences. Koolhaas *Houselife* is not so much an attempt to exhaustively describe the house down to its last details. It is quite different from the majority of documentaries about architecture. Maybe because *Houselife* explains the building, its structure and its virtuosity to let the viewer enter into the invisible bubble of the daily intimacy of an architectural icon. As the author states, "It is not flattering, it is realistic!". There is no flattery of the house or the architecture, but merely reality. In the interview at the end of the movie, the architect states the surprise about the working methods of Guadalupe, the cleaning assistant, above all after watching her carefully polish and clean steps that are possibly never used. The main interest of the famous architect is to depict an absolutely daily reality, to give life to one of these master works of architecture, replete with disorder. He wants to reveal those times that are never shown, where it is possible to see the daily reality, a tangible reality that perhaps surpasses and restricts the established myths. The canonical spaces suffer from this restlessness, just like Jeff Wall did at the Mies Pavilion in Barcelona, his most radical and evocative transformation.

Both are examples where a new way of looking at architecture is presented, undoubtedly expanding their field of representation. Enlarging the field of representation means offering a new and different perspective, both of the house and the pavilion, as we are already familiar with both of them due to their propagation and the photograph collection published in specialized and mass-consumption media. It is strange that in *Houselife*, it is Guadalupe, the cleaner and assistant, and other secondary characters, and not the owner, who explain the changes, the transformation and the most domestic details about the home. This is what expands our field of representation. It is through those who know its secrets and manage the house that we are shown the artifices of its implementation.

Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoîne, the directors of *Houselife*, explicitly propose "to give life to one of these architectural masterpieces that we can see everywhere without never being able to see them how they 'really' are in everyday life", banishing the iconic and idealized regard of architecture and "demonstrating its vitality, fragility and vulnerability" by observing the daily life, habits and testimonies of the people who live there, using it and maintaining it". While this is true, or aims to be so, while attending a screening of *Houselife*, we are presented with a filtered and different perspective of the house, down to its last detail, sublimated, a guided tour of the house not far from what anyone would intend to do "in vivo".

The fact is that visual production and media are linking all kinds of artistic work, that nearly do not exist without it. There are no longer appropriate or non-appropriate subjects for art, as the rules for appropriateness between particular forms and specific subjects. We live in a kind of representative regime where, somehow, *Société de l'espectacle* has now been replaced by the society of the non-extraordinary. The non-extraordinary has become the only possible, as every single frame of our every-day is uploaded online for global webcasting, in a exaggerated example of the so called "the result gets bigger than the action". There are, by the way, hundreds of examples of multi documentation of the whole daily life, getting terabytes of multi reproducing non-special actions for maybe the whole world but probably for nobody. Anyway, what is quite clear is that both aesthetical theory and artwork production is right now in a crossroad, not necessarily marked by conflict between disciplines, but by the necessity of defining new spaces and contexts, in and out of fine arts, to explore new media and expressions.