CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES ON ARCHITECTURE, CITY AND TERRITORY: VISUAL SPACES OF CHANGE

Written by Pedro Leão Neto

One of the main interests of this panel was to explore the relationships between virtual dimensions of photography and concrete physical realities in contemporary discourses on Architecture, City and Territory. We wanted to discuss, among other things, how constructed and manipulated images that suggest a new reading or create new idealised scenarios of existing architectural and public spaces may be used to cross or infringe certain borders people are bound in their daily lives as a way to act upon reality, fabricating new relationships between individuals and the collective public.

A number of relations between the artistic strategies developed by the authors of this panel could be examined, focusing on the various methods they used for the construction of visual narratives between the virtual world of photography, manipulated visual constructs and the field of architecture in contemporary discourse. In this way, it was possible to discuss and examine today's possibilities of image creation with digital tools that expand and potentiate significantly the practice of photography on creating imaginary environments of present architecture and public spaces. In fact, the projects presented went far beyond traditional objective approaches, exploring the fictional universe and making critical readings of existing spaces, going against the undiscerning saturated media consumption of architectural images.

Starting with the text ''HC (hortus conclusus)'' written by the panel's keynote speaker Beate Gütschow – an amazing artist who came from the world of realistic painting towards photography medium, having studied with Bernhard Johannes and Wolfgang Tillmans – it can be said that her body of work questions in a very significant way the likeness of photography, being also political and critical towards the notion of truth associated to this media.

While we could draw our attention to many of Beate Gütschow's works, we will focus on her series hortus conclusus (HC) that means enclosed garden in Latin, in which the artist has applied the principles of medieval art concerning pictorial space and perspective through photogrammetry. Beate investigates with this work the capacity of photography to

artistically explore and analyse the abstract processes used to represent and interpret architecture and landscape – as well as nature – through the creation of artificial environments.

By employing the parallel perspective of the Middle Ages – which can be seen in many images of the gardens in medieval book illustrations – to contemporary parks and public spaces, Beate develops a representational approach that goes beyond verisimilitude, questioning intelligently today ́s likeness of photography and the abstract processes involved in visual representations and interpretations of space and nature. is can be understood when the artist writes "One aspect is new, however: when viewing these "photographs", there is no longer a single camera position. e viewer can choose in a 3D application a viewing angle retrospectively. ey can even view the object from a vantage point that was not available when the photograph was taken, for example from a bird's-eye view." and then hypothesizes about the spatial logic of that parallel perspectives and their narrative potential and implications for the viewer: "I wonder whether this is a less dominant view of an object, precisely because the viewer can choose their own viewpoint? Does this circumstance generate greater knowledge? Or is it the other way around: does this method of capturing an image cause the viewer to have no relationship to the object, because the place where it was captured cannot be determined or understood?"

In fact, the artistic process and technique adopted by Beate in HC reveal how in each work the artist both changes the type of perspective and creates a new reality. This is so because the artist not only rearranges the perspective of the depicted parks by assembling digitally a huge amount of photographs previously taken – walls, benches, etc. –, creating a photogrammetric model, which then is transformed in a cavalier projection using a specific 3D software, but also recreates these parks and gardens through free compositions by putting together diverse urban elements from different photographs.

It is worth mentioning that this artist ́s interesting reading is very linked to matters of spatial perception and architectural representation, which comes about at the end of her text, after referring first the idea of Hans Belting about central perspective as something that brings the subject into the picture and then Wolfgang Ullrich's idea about the depotentiation of the image when the transition from parallel perspective to central perspective takes place. It is then that Beate forwards this new aspect of perception, which is that working for a long time with photogrammetry makes you perceive things more as outer shells. is is so because you are working in three-dimensional space as opposed to traditional photography which "(…) used to mean capturing something you knew had an interior;".

All this opens up the possibility to perceive and understand architectural space in new ways, namely in this case through photogrammetry, in which the recording of things can also, as the artist explains, "(…) be defined as photography.". Beate reveals with this series how art can be used to explore abstract processes of visual representation, making use of them in new situations, unearthing along the process a novel perception of the real and undermine the traditional use and logic of these representations.

Following is the selected paper ''Visually reinventing architecture in the pre-cinematic scenario of Idris Khan's photographs'' by Katarina Andjelkovic, which dazzlingly elaborates on the possible visual reinvention of the architectural media to express a new reality. Katarina´s text addresses Idris Khan's photographic strategies as a possible way for using this still medium for animating form which embodies architectural space, integrating into the process the changed experience of artificial environments (built space) in our collective imagination in result of the Anthropocene.

The author establishes an interesting connecting between Khan´s photography, that represents through motionless images architecture as an animated form of life symbolizing many contemporary issues of today´s anthropocentric world – ecological, economic, political, social and other more alike instabilities – expressing also a ''(...) desire to see the changing image of space in our experience of everyday life.''. Katarina presents at this point the idea that Khan´s imagery that gives life to inanimate forms ''(...) disclosures the opposite direction of his thought: the so-called search for epitomizing life´in our living world is strongly related to predicting an apocalyptic scenario.'' In fact, it can be said that Khan´s work takes architecture as a living organism, as a process, thus all the layers superimposed to each other, making both the epitomization of life or apocalyptic scenario prediction possible. As Katarine says ''Perceiving, capturing and constructing reality in repetitive fashion in the binary game of life and apocalypse, Khan's photographs pay homage to Deleuze's skepticism regarding the ''survival'' of the time- image of cinema in the digital age. His concepts and representations seem to synchronize our nostalgia for visually reinventing architecture.''.

Finally, it can be said when looking at Katarina´s digital manipulated work overlapping different time and space scenarios – multiple dynamics of urban change of our anthropocentric world and the apocalyptic scenario of the recent past NATO sanctioned bombings that took place during the Kosovo War conflict – that the medium of photography has an immense potential. In fact, the work displays well the potential of art and digital collage as a means to rethink how the universe of ''image representation'' can be used critically to address political, economic and social problems, allowing in this way a new perception of what exists. is too unearths important issues and raises interesting challenges as, to make a case in point, on the one hand, to better understand how society's historical and cultural processes in each era decisively influence the type and use of visual constructs. On the other hand, how can those be better used to inquire, perceive and communicate city space and architecture, as well as how people live in these spatial environments.