RE-FRAMING THE PUBLIC SPACE: RELATIONS BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Written by Iñaki Bergera

As stated in the Call for Papers of this second panel of the conference, the session sought to fully tackle the core of the relationship between architecture and photography in its irrefutable urban context. The general approach to confront these thoughts would surely have to do with the perceptive and the phenomenological, that is, with the individual and social implications of the visual experience of architecture in the urban context. Likewise, the link between architecture and the city through its visual taxonomy could be detached from the ground —and therefore of experimental and sensory condition— and moved to an interactive virtual map. The image of the architecture in the city can also be read and used methodologically from the abstraction that confers its digital mapping.

The first of the selected papers, "Clareira: Towards a phenomenological perspective in the representation of architectural space", represents an exceptional and paradigmatic case study of this new sensibility that gives the photographer an authentic mediating role between the urban space and the use made of it by its users. The interest of this particular work is the value attached to photography as a research tool. An investigation that is and should be open and communicative. Photography is thus enriched with its pedagogical dimension, with an invitation to refine the perceptual gaze. The user lives and uses a space —the Trindade subway station in Porto, by Eduardo Souto de Moura— but is sometimes unable to internalize and visualize his or her phenomenological experience, even atmospheric, we could say. e opportunity to move from the objective values to the subjective readings of the urban and architectural space through

photography is surely one of the most enriching contributions of this rigorous project to the general debate of the congress.

The second presentation thrives in some way in these same assumptions but radically qualified by the ideological, cultural and religious nature of its context. "Behavioral mapping of Abu Dhabi's public spaces: Urban research photography and cultural clashes" delves into an unprecedented visual exploration about the nature of public space in one of the most representative cities of urban expansion in the Middle East. What is taken for granted in Western culture, here is a conquest: the barriers between the public and the private, the personal and the collective, are constructed and broken down by the force of use. That is why this experience is somehow an applied research. The design of these new urban spaces is faced from the absence of referents and context, without memory and identity. The verification of its use through photography gives it a safe conduct of viability or, on the contrary, inefficiency. The city is mapped to detect those areas of collective opportunity — the better the more flexible and less functionally regulated — superimposing the reality of an urban use marked by the sociological tensions that concur in this amalgam of collective identities.

Finally, on a higher stage of this will to visually mapping the city, the experience of "Atlas Interactive. Visual register of urban architecture in Latin America", introduces an ambitious and exemplary documentary and research practice on the support of digital platforms. From the moment in which the territory and the city can be explored and navigated through Google Maps, our visual sensitivity is able to internalize the recognition of the architectural elements and the public space that shape the city. We fly over the territory full of metadata in order to geolocate and descend by overlapping different systems of visual and photographic representation to the concrete information of an architectural or urban element. The photographic archives dust their memory ballasts and are updated by the immediacy and universality of their public access inviting then to some short of discernment.