Visual Spaces of Change

Photographic documentation of environmental transformations

SOPHIA
scopio EDITIONS

An instant world: truth and reality

Leonor Matos Silva

> "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.
>
> Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."
>
> "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."
>
> John 18, 37–38

Today, technology allows us to capture reality in an extremely crude way. Consider, for instance, the images derived from micro cameras that invade our inter bodies for medical diagnosis. In this context, there is no valuable argument against the truth.

Back in the Architecture PhD freshman year, a group of students were asked to conceive an idea of a chair for an art class. It was a rather free proposal; yet all of them constructed a small, scaled model, and the objective was to photograph it on different urban sites. One of the proposals chose to use no software tricks in the pictures, based on the conviction that the truth was, like in Pilate's view, something one might question but cannot antagonize. In due course, this issue of SOPHIA gives us a chance to review this true story, based on real events in light of other perspectives, coming across with the notion of how 'true' it is that

> the specialised architectural journals, schoolbooks themselves, including those of a high scientific level, are (...) channels that tend to transform the spatiotemporal notion of architecture and landscape into that of signs, the notion of reality into that of a photographic representation of reality.[1]

One cannot escape the photographic representation of reality, in its fundamental sense. The focus of this number of SOPHIA is photographic documentation. What does distinguish these two features? Take here, for instance, the photographic work of Naoya Hatakeyama through the perspective of Marcin Piekałkiewicz: Hatakeyama wishes to represent "the destructive force of capitalism and its devastating influence on the environment". However, in his Blast (1995–2008) — derived from a series of photographs of stone explosions — he captures the balance of forms, of colours and of dimensions; he portrays significant instants; he implies a bursting movement, showing the complementariness of these facets in his work. Which proves representation and documentation do strongly cooperate.

---

1 Egidio Mucci, "Rappresentazione fotografica dell'architettura: un'ipotesi di lettura semiotica", p.11; In *Eugenio Miccini, Retorica della fotografia. Semiotica dell'Architettura Rappresentata,* Alinea Editrice, 1984; transl. by the author.

The essay ''Replacing urban identity: the disappearance of Sha'biya Al Safa Neighborhood'', by Luca Donner and Francesca Sorcinelli, presents impressive photographs of an urban environment. They are powerful images of ''real'' estates. Here, they are not ''proofs'' of capitalism decadence but rather of its contradictions. However, the most striking aspect of these images is they represent an instant world's identity. A reality commuting into another in every second. These are images narrating the loss of daily living, like argued in the essay.

Whereas the article by Yara A. Khalf, Ahmed El Antably and Mona A. Abdelwahab, ''A Walk-through Urban Decay: al-Hattaba Is Worth Saving?'' shows us images of Cairo that are admittedly manipulated. Let us here apply Egidio Mucci's words saying that they are images that ''transform the spatiotemporal notion of architecture and landscape into that of signs''. These images ironically would fit into an alternative tourist guide (the ''decadent'' city, as quoted in the text); which makes them a type of *media* close to illustration. Or of the pamphleteer register, in a strange, inverted sense.

This number of SOPHIA gathers these and various other authors who might answer the question of what is true and what is real in our instant (multiple, globalised, standardised, ...) world.

A question remains. As mentioned, in grad school, one used to think it was more 'truthful' to work without filters (and so on), seeing that this was a more authentic option, and that it had more value, that it empowered oneself. But now we play with other rules. In fact, we have always played. Because art has always been a manipulation. So, considering the current anything goes, we may be guided by an elementary value: our innerness. Do we like what we see? Does it pleasure us in any way? Should this be the motto for a next number of SOPHIA and I would not be surprised.