Imaging architecture: the uses of photography in the practice of architectural history

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Published online: 26 Mar 2007.

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Photography in architectural history is often used in a highly conventional manner, simply to depict, describe or identify the buildings under discussion. This paper, which provides a critical overview of the use of photographic imagery within the academic practices of teaching and publishing architectural history, considers alternative imaging strategies—dialectical imaging and temporality—to show how various political, social and other meanings of architecture may be created by photographs as well as by the written word. Concepts derived from Brecht, Benjamin and Hildebrand are used to expand on notions of the dialectic and temporality, and the latter in particular is developed into sub-categories of the everyday, the event, dissemination and the narrative.

Introduction

Architectural history exists not just as a body of work—as an archive comprising documents, lectures, texts, thoughts and so on—but as a process of disseminations, operations, teachings and writings of all kinds, involving active practitioners who produce their subject not only within but also outside of architecture schools and universities. This, I suggest, is a kind of 'architecture, not'—an architectural discourse that is not just confined to architecture schools, an architecture which is not thought about solely in terms internal to the architectural profession, and an architectural history that is not confined only to the lecture theatre or weighty tome. Such an approach encourages engagements with other urban professionals, with students and academics from other disciplines, with cultural commentators and indeed with anyone who might have an interest in the built environment.[1]

Imaging

These kinds of things obviously have major ramifications for the ways in which we teach, research and communicate architectural history, ranging from alterations to the canon of architecture, to the categories of interpretation made, to the political intention of the author-producer. However, these are not the only things to be so affected, for the practitioner of architectural history must be prepared to change working procedures as well as intellectual categories if their aims are truly to be realised. To explore this, I consider here a specific aspect of the process of architectural history, that to do with the imaging of architecture.[2]

Compared to, for example, paintings and sculpture for art history, the unique nature of architecture as an object of study presents some specific problems and advantages in terms of its imaging. In particular, the three-dimensional and spatial character of architecture demands an imaging

Image 1. 'This Is
Norman Foster': Chep
Lap Kok airport, Hong
Kong (photograph©
Iain Borden).

process that does more than replicate the surface of
the object. Buildings in the flesh are entities which
we inhabit and do not just look at—we move in
them, walk around, live, work, sleep. We occupy a
building and make it our own, and often over a
number of years. This socio-spatial-temporal con-
dition makes architecture a rather different entity
from a painting.

Consequently, however much those concerned
with architectural history might feel comfortable
with how architecture is imaged, however much
we consider that images are used as much as we
possibly can, this is not a closed subject. The
proposal here is that we should think less about
images as objects, and more about the whole of
architectural history as something which needs
to be imaged. In short, we should consider the
imaging of architectural history—the process of
interpreting and communicating architecture
which necessarily involves images as an integral
part of its operations. This discussion is therefore
not so much about the way that architects and
others have used photography to design or publish
architecture, nor about the way the viewer might
perceive the architectural image, although both
these issues are touched upon, but is focused on
the *production of architectural history* and the role
of photography therein.

Show and tell
When architectural historians (and architects) give
slide-and-talk accounts of their work, images are
commonly used to a high degree—probably more
than for any other subject or academic discipline,
including art history.

Of course, that images can be used in different
ways is well known, most obviously to identify and
describe a building, or to identify an architect
through association with their work. Even here,
there is a process of considerable abstraction at
work, for, as Robin Wilson points out, too often
the photograph is taken as a direct substitution for
a building,[3] when in fact to say that a certain
image of a building 'is', for example, that building,
still less Norman Foster himself, is actually quite
absurd (Image 1). Such a building is not 'Norman
Foster', nor even a building designed by him, but a
building designed by the office which bears his
name. In saying 'this is Norman Foster' what we
are doing is simplifying the highly complex process
of architectural design, construction and culture to
the body and identity of a single figure.

Images can also be used to provide more detail
about a building, such as the famous column
detail of Mies van der Rohe's architecture, or an
often over-looked or invisible part of a building,
such as a normally inaccessible interior of a private
flat. Alternatively, they may be used to explain

Image 2. Architectural detail: monocoque skin, Nat West Media Centre, Lords Cricket Ground, London; architects Future Systems (photograph© Iain Borden).

Image 3. Invisible architecture: interior, Nat West Media Centre, Lords Cricket Ground, London; architects Future Systems (photograph © Iain Borden).

some aspect of a building, such as a plan, section or axonometric cut-away. Such images are often purely imaginary, for no one ever truly experiences a building in such a manner. And images (particularly in lectures) are often used in a two-way double-projection, usually for reasons of comparison, or simultaneously to show different aspects of the same building (Images 2, 3). Images may also be used to establish geographic location, or to evoke a sense of place, either generically, or specifically, with famous buildings in particular acting as a kind of sign for the city. Maps similarly provide another sense of place, but in rather more abstracted and rationalised form.

Thus imagery is commonly used in a more or less straightforward manner to identify and explain buildings: re-creating them on the screen. In this respect architectural historians are following one side of a long debate in architectural photography which, as Robert Elwall has shown in his considerations of the work of the architectural photographer, reaches back to the nineteenth century when those (such as Harry Lemere and the Bisson brothers) taking hard, 'objective' and detail-ridden images sought to dominate others (such as Francis Bedford) who preferred to produce more 'subjective' and picturesque images with a soft focus and atmospheric quality (Images 4, 5).[4] As Julius Schulman was later to put it, (but not always implement in his own photographs) 'remembering that the purpose of architectural photography is to convey information about design, one should beware of the photography which calls too much attention to its own art, thereby detracting from the art of its subject matter.'[5] The ultimately victorious camp, that favouring facticity and empathy with the design process over interpretation and wider cultural significance, found its zenithal achievements in the 'New Objectivity' work of those such as Werner Mantz and Charles Sheeler in the 1920s (Image 6).[6]

The justification for Mantz and Sheeler—rightly so—was that their harshly analytical and form-driven imagery was appropriate to the particular

Image 4. Hard
objectivity: Victoria
Assizes Court,
Birmingham
(photographer, Bedford
Lemere, 1891; ©
RIBA\Victoria and Albert
Museum).

Image 5. Soft
subjectivity: Rievaulx
Abbey, Yorkshire
(photographer, Francis
Bedford, 1850s; ©
RIBA\Victoria and Albert
Museum).

kinds of modernist architecture then being rapidly
developed as both formal and intellectual prop-
ositions. However, when compared to the spectrum
of architecture that historians might address, and,
equally importantly, to the full range of intellectual
categories that are invoked in textual explications
of architecture, such imaging techniques are very
often somewhat reductive. Indeed, it is particularly
in the published book—at the precise moment in
the production of architectural history at which its
writers try to be their most learned and pro-
found—that such imagery is generally used in the
most normative of fashions; although many of
those interested in architecture see this subject as
far more than just identifying and describing

buildings and their designers, somehow when archi-
tectural history is imaged in print it stops at the exact
methodological level of description and identifi-
cation that elsewhere so much is done to break
through. For example, one image in Barbara Miller
Lane's *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–
1945*[7] (a book highly respected for its scholarly
efforts and wide-ranging interpretive procedures)
shows the Zeppelinfeld in Nurenberg—designed by
Albert Speer and possibly one of the most pro-
foundly social spaces of the National Socialists, the
site of congresses and parades of upwards of
100,000 people—almost entirely as a piece of
form, largely empty of historical events and human
activity.
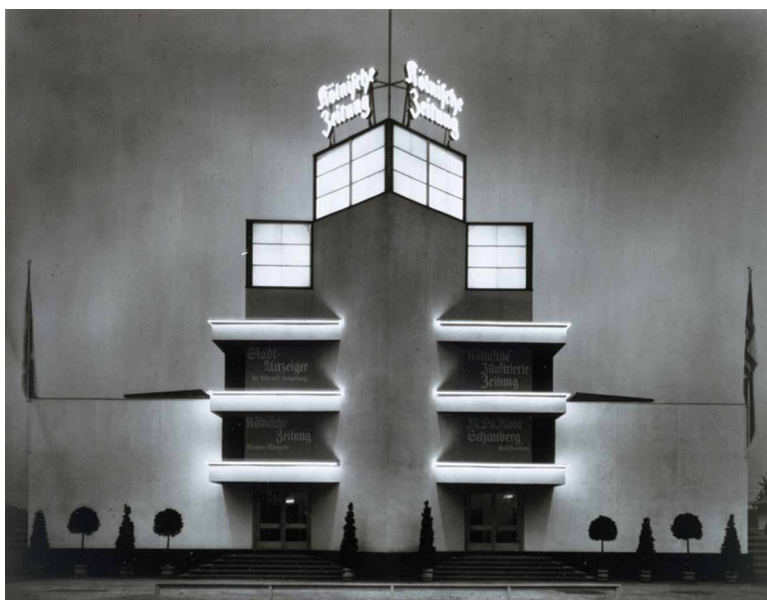
Image 6. New
objectivity: Kölnische
Zeitung, Cologne;
architect, Wilhelm
Riphahn.
(Photographer: Werner
Mantz, 1928; ©
ADAGP, Paris and
DACS, London/V&A
Images/Victoria and
Albert Museum.)

As Bertolt Brecht noted,

[L]ess than ever does the mere reflection of
reality reveal anything about reality. A photo-
graph of the Krupp works or the A.E.G.
tells us next to nothing about these
institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the
functional.[8]

How then might we do more to explore in imagery
the wider meanings and contexts of architecture?
How can we image the full import of architecture
as social process and object? Suggested here are
two broad strategies—dialectical imagery and
temporality.

Dialectical imagery

Architecture does not give up its meaning easily—it
is not a text, and has no voice. It cannot speak. Its
histories therefore have to be constructed; in
Brecht's phrase 'something must in fact be *built
up*.'[9] Brecht's thoughts on this matter are quoted
in Walter Benjamin's essay 'A Short History of Photo-
graphy', and it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that
Benjamin's work also provides some suggestions as
to how to address this problem, principally (although
not solely) through dialectical imagery.

At its crudest, dialectical imagery can mean render-
ing pairs of images, as with the comparison

of buildings, or indeed any juxtapositioning; the *Architectural Review*, for example, in the 1930s experimented with forceful and polemical comparisons ranging from continental European buildings set alongside contemporary British ones, to scenes with advertising hoardings set next to the same scene with these hoardings erased.[10] Such examples are, however, scarcely adequate for the consideration of what a more sophisticated understanding of a dialectical image might be—Benjamin's conception of the dialectical image was, of course, considerably more complex, treating, as Susan Buck-Morss shows, concepts as if they were images and then deploying a 'system of co-ordinates' and other epistemo-visual schemata in order to juxtapose them in a manner analogous to montage.[11] This technique allows the conventional periodisations and causal explanations of historians to be destabilised. Meaning is then produced not by logical interpretation of facts and documents, but from a collision of politics, events and ideas, shocked out from objects through their displacement in time and space.

In a more direct and writerly installation of this process, graphics, images and texts can be montaged. Thus, for example, in the incomplete *Passagen-Werk*, 'Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century', Benjamin placed seemingly disparate sections about forms of representation, world exhibitions, the use of iron, etc., next to each other so that the text alluded not just to the constructional and architectural form of the arcades, but also to their role in the production of commodities for consumption as display and spectacle.[12]

The other way Benjamin used the idea of the dialectical image was in relation to the central notion of the commodity; here Benjamin was concerned to break the commodity apart, to show that it was a contradictory and dialectical image in itself, containing notions of material need, of ideological consumption, and of dreaming desire. Thus in illustrations by J.I.I.G. Grandville, which Benjamin refers to in the arcades project, we see this kind of thing at work, wherein fish try to lure people by using commodities as bait. Here a single illustration shows how the commodity is not a simple object to be purchased and consumed, but is disclosed as a relationship between people.

How then might this kind of dialectical imagery be pursued in relation to architecture? Perhaps most obviously, bringing together images of different subjects can lead to the production of a new meaning that goes beyond any one of them on their own. For example, an image of Trafalgar Square and Nelson's Column in London is obviously a representation of state architecture, and even on its own one could try to flush out meanings to do with imperialism, the control of public space and so forth. But it is only when used dialectically in combination with another illustration that the process may occur of *imaging* the notion that such projects were frequently based economically upon, and symbolic of, imperialist trade, development and colonially-based agricultural production (Images 7, 8).

This, of course, was a process that Le Corbusier, for one, understood very well, for, despite his assertion that the 'camera is a tool for idlers'[13] when experiencing architecture, when it came to reproducing his architecture in print he frequently used representations with the building fronted by a contemporary motor car (Image 9). In such

Images 7,8. Dialectical imagery between images: Trafalgar Square, London; tea plantation, Sri Lanka (photographs © Iain Borden.)

Image 9. Dialectical imagery within the image: Villa Stein-de-Monzie with motor car, Garches; architect, Le Corbusier. (Photographer: Francis Yerbury, 1927, © RIBA\Victoria and Albert Museum.)

images, the whole relationship of modernity, speed, technology and the urban start to come out; by using two objects in one photograph, a meaning is produced in excess of that created by simply adding two separate images. Here the *single* illustration has dialectical properties. More subtly, photographs like Julius Shulman's infamous night-time depiction of the Case Study House #22 are also dialectical even if they do not immediately appear to be so: the image is in fact two images, one long exposure for the view over the Los Angeles grid and a short flash exposure for the house interior, combining to create a conjuncture of architecture and the city.[14]

Image 10. S. Carlo alle
Quattro Fontane, Rome
(1637–41, façade
1665–7); architect,
Francesco Borromini;
photograph © Iain
Borden.

The importance of such techniques should not be underestimated, for when used creatively they can do as much as the written word to create intellectual content and meanings: for example, throughout Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* illustrations are used in a technique borrowed from advertising, not so much as evidence for the text, but more, as Colomina has noted, to 'construct the text'.[15] The Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau *S,M,L, XL* book on the OMA practice similarly uses all manner of visual and textual graphics to drive the reader through its 1,344 pages.[16]

Of course, using images dialectically does not have to rely solely on visual material; using the main text, or even more powerfully the caption, can have the same kind of effect. (Indeed, text is often an unavoidable attachment, for only those good bourgeoisie reproduced in the nineteenth century daguerreotype 'entered the visual space of photography with their innocence intact, uncompromised by captions.')[17] One of the very few books which attempts some of the things considered here (doubtless in no small way because of its being based on a BBC television programme of the same name, and because of the influence of Benjamin) is John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, with graphic design by Richard Hollis.[18] Appropriated here is one of Berger's most telling examples, which adds to Vincent Van Gogh's 'Wheatfield With Crows' the additional caption, transplanting its technique into architecture.[19]

Many things may be interpreted from the image of the façade, S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome (Image 10),[20] but most of those that initially come to mind are to do with its strikingly innovative

curved form. But if you replace the caption, a different effect is produced (Image 11). Thus the meaning of the building is irrevocably changed by the caption, such that image and text work together, creating a new meaning that goes beyond that supplied by either alone—it is certainly no longer just a building by Borromini. On one level, one could argue that that the new caption simply adds a layer of biographical meaning onto the building—except that, on another level, the relationship between Borromini's violent suicide and the architecture in question is not exactly

Image 11. This is the
last piece of
architecture that
Borromini designed
before he killed himself
with a sword.
(Photograph © Iain
Borden.)

clear. Was the design of the building in some way informed by Borromini's suicidal frame of mind? Or did it in some way cause or lead to Borromini's death? Neither of these interpretations are, however, very likely, being too deterministic and simple in nature. Thus, biographical allusions aside, we cannot say exactly what this new meaning is, even though it must be said that in some way this new information does somehow change how we understand the building. Hence the new meaning lies in-between or additional to the text and image—it is an indefinable supplement, deliberately unknowable and ambiguous but present nonetheless.

Of course, such captioning does not have to address only the designer-object relationship and aspects of authorship. For example, if one was to caption an image of the well-known National Gallery in London with 'The expression of a dominant ruling class through architecture' the meaning is clearly different to that which would be suggested to us by simply identifying the building's architect (William Wilkins) and date (1834–1838). With the former caption, viewers no longer see just a building but are forced to consider a political assertion, even if it is not immediately clear why the two are connected. The point of this caption is then neither to identify nor to give extra information about the project, but rather to say something that is not immediately clear. Why should this building be an expression of a dominant ruling class? The answer, in this case, lies in the main text that accompanied the image (this example comes from the text *Architecture and the Sites of History*, which I edited in the mid 1990s),[21] such that the image-plus-caption pairing serves both as a normal illustration and as a kind of conceptual prompt, provoking a question that the readers can answer by puzzling over it themselves, or by reading the text.

It is perhaps worth pointing out here that in writing the captions to *Architecture and the Sites of History*, there was initially considerable reluctance to do more than just identify buildings, and for reasons of time and effort, perhaps as much as anything else, that was an attractive strategy. But what I really feared was the text not being taken seriously, considering that somehow captions

which comment, and particularly captions which have some kind of message, are often associated with 'unscholarly' work (and even a century earlier, harsh criticisms were already being made of those who gave poetic or interpretive captions to photographs, rather than straightforward identifications).[22] A decade further on, and such fears are at best a reflection of a kind of visual empiricism, thinking that the objects will just speak by themselves, and at worst a kind of intellectual snobbism, thinking that academics shouldn't use filmic or televisual techniques where words and images are used without lengthy textual argumentation and supportive evidence. While one might always do well to heed Benjamin's warning that the caption might become the most important part of the photograph,[23] the capacity of the caption at once to question and to supplement, reinforce and destabilise the visual image should not be forgotten.

Temporality

Dialectical imagery, as we have seen, tends to destabilise time, making it discontinuous, pushing it outside historical, periodised time. How then might we pursue this clue, and further consider the issue of temporality in imaging architecture?

An image of a building does alternatively two things to time. First, it can freeze time, rendering the building prisoner of a particular historical moment. This is particularly true of images which contain things which we can easily date, such as cars or people's clothes.[24] Second, it can erase time altogether, such that the building is without any historical period. This is particularly true if the image contains no such things as fashion or cars.

As Bernard Tschumi has pointed out, this is the usual condition of the architectural photograph, such that the order of architecture remains unviolated by the differing order of social activities: 'do architectural photographs ever include runners, fighters, lovers?'[25] And as Jeremy Till has argued, this is no accident, but is an explicit attempt to erase those elements of time which challenge architecture's authority:

> Take those pictures of buildings caught perfectedly before people, dirt, rain and history move in; since the beginning of the twentieth century it is these pictures which have framed a history of architecture in both its production and reproduction—a history, in which architecture is seen to be a stable power, existing over the dynamic forces of time.[26]

Yet buildings are neither fixed in time, nor are they a-temporal things. Rather they are part of social reproduction, part of the way people live their lives, of the way cities evolve, part of the way architecture itself changes; and so to bring out the meaning of this role, we need to bring out the temporality of architecture as it is imaged.

Temporality of the everyday

The first way to do this is through the temporality of the everyday, that is, as normal, routine uses of architecture as might happen day in and day out. Although this might, on the face of it, appear to be a commonsensical procedure, many photographers resolutely oppose such concerns, by, for example, refusing to portray people in the images.[27] Nor is this a prejudice of photographers alone: when a front cover of the *Architects'*

Journal in the early 1990s showed the recent refurbishment of the famous Tecton and Lubetkin-designed Penguin Pool at London Zoo, the magazine received concerned comments at the inclusion of penguins in the shot, 'detracting' from the architecture (Image 12).[28] In the face of such narrow-mindedness, then, architectural history has much to learn from architectural photojournalists like John Donat, who used micro cameras to record 'an experience of a slice of time in the life of a building',[29] and hence have rather different intentions to such architectural photographers as Eric de Maré who, despite his interest in vernacular and everyday architecture, advocated including human figures in shots simply for compositional reasons 'giving scale and focal interest' (Image 13).[30] By showing buildings in use, with people in them in particular, we can suggest that they are embedded within common human history—and thus that buildings are not static art objects.

Of course, while helping to represent a particular temporality of a building, this tactic can tend to emphasise a particular historical period. The architecture depicted becomes a building 'back then', back in the past and so somehow removed from the world today. This is particularly true of black and white images, which tend to emphasise the temporal otherness of the building, even suggesting it is somewhere else as well as in a different time. (Interestingly, under certain circumstances, the same is also true for polychromatic illustrations: for example, a colour image by an anonymous photographer using the Dufaycolour process in 1943, showing bombed houses in London, seems unreal and inauthentic precisely
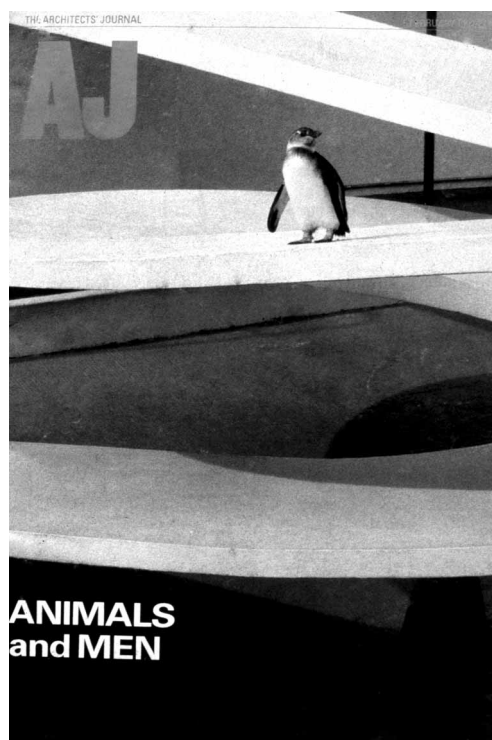
Image 12. The penguin pool, London Zoo, with penguin: *Architects' Journal* (5th February, 1992), front cover; photograph courtesy of the *Architects' Journal*.

because it is in colour; since it is monochrome photographs that we overwhelmingly associate with World War Two, the viewer inevitably reads the colour image as a reconstruction.[31]) Indeed, many of the most powerful photographs even dominate the buildings which they represent; in Robert Elwall's phrase they 'take command' such that the architecture itself is secondary to the image produced of it,[32] erasing its historical presence altogether.

Image 13. Architecture
with people: Boots
offices, Nottingham;
architects, YRM and
SOM. (Photographer:
John Donat, 1968, ©
RIBA\Victoria and Albert
Museum.)

Image 14. One
photograph from Mark
Oliver Dell and H.L.
Wainwright, 34-image
filmic sequence of the
RIBA building, London,
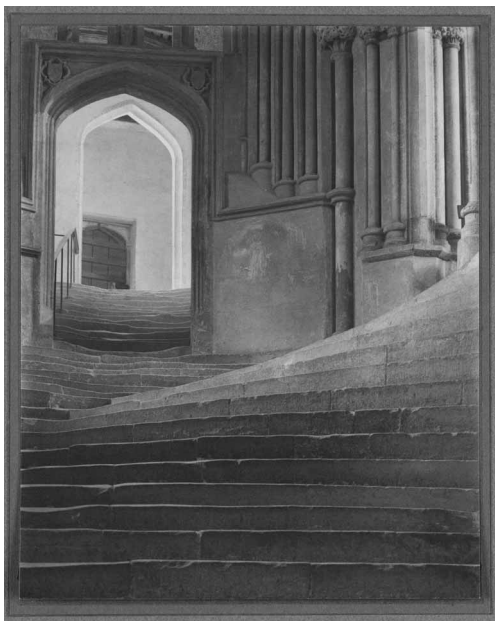1934; © RIBA\Victoria
and Albert Museum.

One way around this is to show the same building
in different periods or states. Thus the popular 'Past
and Present' books of towns show how well-known
street scenes have changed over time. Alternatively,
there are a few more academic examples of this,
although these are comparatively rare. The best-
known example is probably *Lived-In Architecture*
by Phillipe Boudon,[33] which catalogues how the
Pessac housing designed by Le Corbusier was sub-
jected to the actions of its inhabitants over time.

Another solution is to recreate a sense of move-
ment around a building, showing its spaces not as
isolated spaces and surfaces—which, as Claire
Zimmerman has shown, are often distorted by still
photographs, and especially in terms of the depic-
tion of the depth of space[34]—but as relational enti-
ties, encountered in differing sequences, glances
and memories. Photographs here can be shown in
series, as a kind of summary catalogue of rooms
and other architectural elements (as is often done
in architectural magazines for their reports on new

buildings), each being treated, in Adolf Hildebrand's
terms, as a 'distant' image to the viewer but none-
theless recomposed together in order to form a
composite whole. Mark Oliver Dell and H.L.
Wainwright's 34-image filmic sequence of the RIBA
building in London, designed by Grey Wornum, is
a classic example of this kind of approach (Image
14).[35] Less commonly, images may be used as a
kind of re-enactment of the moving subject's experi-
ence, showing how different parts of the building
are encountered, how they emerge and present

Image 15. The kinaesthetic, Bewegungsvors tellungen, image: 'A Sea of Steps, Wells Cathedral'. (Photographer, Frederick Henry Evans, 1903; © Science & Society Picture Library.)

Image 16. The everyday life of buildings: Villa Savoye, Poissy; architect, Le Corbusier, 1927; © Fondation Le Corbusier/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London.

themselves to the motile subject—what Hildebrand called the kinaesthetic (Bewegungsvorstellungen) image.[36] Some architectural photographers have occasionally tried to this: as Robert Elwall notes, Frederick Henry Evans, for example, working at the turn of the last century, adopted a fragmentary and sequential approach to churches' interiors, thus producing what he hoped was 'a record of an emotion' and a better representation of 'space, the vastness, the grandeur of mass, the leading on from element to element, that so fascinates one in going through a cathedral' (Image 15).[37] However, such procedures are rare among photographers

and even more rarely exploited by architectural historians.

Whether historicised or not, experiential or not, photographs of the everyday life of buildings help disclose that which lies secret within them—not just the life of humans, but the way that this life re-activates architecture, making its forms and structures breath again with the immediate urgency and long-term waiting of social existence. Nor does this require the actual presence of the human body; the hat, sunglasses, lighter, cut loaf of bread and other objects disposed in many of the early interior photographs of Corbusier's villas suggest the presence of a figure,[38] and hence the life of a building that does not have to be explicitly imaged to be described (Image 16). Similarly, the *Architectural Review* under the editorship of Hubert de Cronin Hastings in the 1930s, keen to promote architecture to the general public as well as to architects, deliberately printed general views of buildings small and details large, thus allowing the part to speak for the

Image 17. Architecture as temporal event: Pruitt-Igoe housing project, St. Louis, USA; architect, Minoru Yamasaki; photograph: 1972 (unattributed).

whole.[39] These are photographs which dwell on 'the smallest things, meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams'[40] but, like Simmel's project of 'finding in each of life's details the totality of its meaning',[41] in reproducing them locate significance in architecture away from pure form or architectural theory. Indeed, Benjamin even considers that such images can capture the original subject in ways indiscernible to the natural eye.[42] Either way, everyday photographs re-live architecture, re-produce buildings, re-create history.

Temporality of the event

A different kind of temporality is that of the historical event, and here we can call to the witness stand some of the most famous and most telling images of architecture. Here we see the destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project, originally designed by Minoru Yamasaki, built in St. Louis in 1955, and demolished, as seen here, in 1972 (Image 17).

There are a number of things we can say about this. First, it is a temporal event. The building is in motion and there is therefore a sense of time even within the photograph. But beyond this very short temporality, there is also a much longer one being alluded to, and this, curiously, is made explicit by the very precise time attached to this image. When this image was published in Charles Jencks's *The Language of Post-Modernism*, Jencks identified the building with the following text.

> Modern architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15 1972 at 3.32 (or thereabouts).[43]

Now it is clearly not of any significance for us to know exactly what time of day the building was

destroyed. Nor does the actual day or month matter. Interestingly, although the date ascribed to this building is, no doubt, accurate enough, the time is entirely false. In textualising this image, Jencks consciously decided that giving the exact time would add historical power to the event— and as he didn't actually know the precise time the building was blown up, he made it up—the time of 3.32 pm is fake.[44] While this does not matter in terms of historical evidence—whether the building was blown up at 10.15 am or 3.32 pm is not very important—it does matter in terms of lending power to the image, for giving a precise time suggests that the event is significant, that something has happened that is, in architectural history at least, as significant as the assassination of John F. Kennedy at Dallas or the first military use of the A-bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

And of course what this image famously depicts, as Jencks's text asserts, is not so much the destruction of a particular housing block in St. Louis but the very death of modernism. As such, it

immediately evokes a whole series of debates over modernist design principles, living conditions, urban decay, municipal funding, architectural periodisation and so forth. In other words, this is not an image of a building, nor just of an historical event, but of an historical event which is loaded with meaning. The image is not object-centred, but history-centred; it reproduces not architecture but social meaning through a depiction of architecture.

To give a further example of this, consider another image, this time the famous photograph of St Paul's, London, taken by Herbert Mason (Image 18). Here is a rather different version of the historical event, in that while the exact date of the image is known (29th December, 1940), the historical value is not one of periodisation, seeking to mark a turning point in history, but of marking constancy: the

spirit of the English people, defiance, triumph through adversity, resolution of uncertainty, the greatness of English culture and, later on, nostalgia.[45] In Benjamin's terms once again, this is the kind of photograph whose meaning has an aura, a 'strange weave of space and time' in which 'uniqueness and duration' are 'intimately conjoined'.[46]

Indeed, Benjamin's description of the photographic portrait could easily be applied to this image of St. Paul's, as a 'remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead' infused with 'melancholy, incomparable beauty'.[47] The meaning of this architectural image is very difficult to put into words, but nonetheless it is clear that it evokes something that lies beyond the building itself—history as event, and imaged as such, simultaneously focuses meaning onto, and disperses meaning away from, a particular piece of architecture.

Temporality of dissemination

Another issue raised by the last example, given its initial publication in the *Daily Mail*, is the temporality of dissemination. For while the reproducible photograph may release the image from the ritual of seeing the authentic original,[48] it also brings with it the somewhat different context of production, publication and dissemination—a 'ritual' that is dispersed, repeated and mass-enacted, but nonetheless is not free of aspects of control, power and ideology.

There is, for example, a famous image of a famous building—a poster depicting the Finsbury Health Centre in London (1938), designed by architects Tecton—often used by architectural historians to show how modernist architecture was symbolic for

Image 18. Architecture as historical event: St Paul's cathedral, London, in the Blitz; architect, Sir Christopher Wren. (Photographer, Herbert Mason, 1940; © Solo Syndication Ltd.)

Image 19. Temporality
of dissemination:
Finsbury Health Centre,
London (architects,
Tecton) as shown on a
never-used British
poster produced during
World War II;
photograph courtesy of
the Imperial War
Museum, London.

the British public of the social conditions that awaited
them after the war (Image 19). Such interpretations
assume that the poster was viewed by the general
public, while it was in fact commissioned by the
army to be seen solely by soldiers. Furthermore,
Winston Churchill himself immediately censored the
poster and ordered its recall. Thus if we wish to con-
sider such an image we clearly need to know who in
fact did see it—images thus not only have to be
located and considered for their content, but also
for the conditions under which they were produced,
disseminated and consumed. And for architectural
historians as producers of imaged architectural
history, this in turn suggests the need carefully to con-
sider the context and manner in which this history will
be controlled, distributed and viewed—in part, what
Paul Ricoeur called the time of reading.[49]

Temporality of the narrative
Similarly, if we wish to understand images such as
Bellway's exhibit (Images 20, 21), we must do
more than look at what appears before our eyes.

What at first sight seems to be a typical domestic
interior becomes, on closer inspection, part of a
highly stage-managed history of housing put on by
the house developer Bellway at the *Ideal Home* exhi-
bition at Earl's Court, London, in 1995.

Here visitors passed sequentially through the
interior of the terrace, encountering a housing-
experience replete with recorded voices of fictional
inhabitants like 'Jack' and 'Bettie' recounting not
only some of the features of each new house interior
(indoor WC, electric light, insulation, etc.) but also—
and importantly for this exhibition—the pitfalls of
buying such a house on the used-property market
(unsafe wiring, slipped foundations, rotten roof
timbers, etc.). As such, this highly imaged
architecture was a very carefully crafted piece of
ideological warfare that both played upon and
sought to destroy people's nostalgic attitudes
toward the past—as signified by the title of the
exhibit. At the end of the terrace, revealingly entitled
'Yesterday's Houses, Tomorrow's Homes', visitors
were compulsorily transferred into a new Bellway
home with all of its modern spatial, constructional
and servicing 'advantages'. Images like these there-
fore have to be understood according to a specific
temporality of production and consumption, in this
case marking the instance when architectural qual-
ities are communicated to a prospective market.
This is, then, a narrative, a particular emplotment
of an image-space within a sequence of such
image-spaces, and carried out for reasons of econ-
omic and ideological as well as historical motivation.

And, once again, for architectural historians as
producers, there are lessons to be learned here. As
Pierre-Alain Croset points out, although the actual

Images 20,21.
Temporality of
dissemination:
'Yesterday's Houses,
Tomorrow's Homes'
display by the housing
developer Bellway at
the *Ideal Home*
exhibition, Earl's Court,
London, 1995;
photographs© Iain
Borden.

experience of architecture may not be reproducible in printed photography, it is possible to construct a narrative of that temporal experience—'a selection and organization of the visual material that allows the reader to, at least, imagine an experience.'[50] But a caveat should also be added here, for the very insertion of images into a narrative, as Benjamin and Berger both point out with respect to film,[51] tends to construct an irreversible argument and so also makes explicit the overt ideological use that may be made of them—as, for example, the *Architectural Review* consistently did in the 1950s and 1960s, and particularly in its 'Outrage', 'Counter-Attack' and 'Manplan' campaigns.[52] It also tends, and again like film, to distract viewers, such that they cannot arrest the image in their mind; sequencing discourages contemplation.[53] With what purpose, we might then ask, are historians producing their imaged-architectural-narratives? In Manfredo Tafuri's terms, what are the operative intentions of images, and at what 'precise poetical tendency' do they aim?[54] Is the imaged-history really, as Croset hopes, an 'open'

process between narrator and listener, between historian and reader, or is it a story with but one plot, one moral, one conclusion?

Rethinking imagery

Everyone will have noticed how much easier it is to get hold of [...] architecture, in a photograph than in reality.[55]

Benjamin's observation may be true, but it carries with it the consequent danger of assuming that, in taking a photograph of a building, architecture will itself have been captured, that the simple act of mechanical reproduction of surface appearance necessarily carries with it a concomitant reproduction of meaning, significance and import. This, clearly, is not the case, and there is much more to be done with the imaging of architecture through architectural history. Such a process would be better thought of not so much as a treatment of images but as an historical treatment of architecture that necessarily involves using images.

This has considerable ramifications for both what might be called the archive of architectural history, and its dissemination. For the archive, this means thinking about images which do not so much record an object but have the potential to convey meaning; and for the dissemination of architectural history, this means thinking about not only how we might image architecture in books and articles, but also about different formats of production. Beside books, we might also consider exhibitions, television programmes, videos, CD-ROMs, internet sites and so on.

There are undoubtedly many practical obstacles to securing large amounts of visual material (Corbusier for one had to go to inordinate lengths in order to obtain the commercial images used extensively throughout *L'Esprit nouveau* and other 1920s publications[56]), but those concerned with architecture should nonetheless bear in mind some of the advantages they have. There is, in particular, one very important difference between architectural history and art history, for art historians are facing increasing

problems to do with copyright protection and the attendant cost of reproduction. Paintings and sculpture, every art gallery and photographic collection has realised, are a money spinner, such that some art historians are now having to pay reproduction fees simply to show an illustration of a painting in their public talks and television broadcasts (although not, as yet, in their normal teaching lectures). Architectural history is, however, in a very different position, for architecture is a subject that is generally in the public domain, and, with the exception of such things as drawings or buildings which are very difficult to photograph—whether for reasons of obstruction, like Florentine palazzi on narrow car-infested streets; access, like private residences; reproducibility, as with buildings of attenuated spatial complexity; history, for buildings which no longer exist; and politics, for buildings which are sensitive in military or political terms—architecture can often be photographed without having to ask permission or to pay any copyright fee. Take a photograph of a building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, for example, and this means that you, and not the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, own the copyright to that image. (One exception to this is Disneyland, which is the first built environment to be entirely copyrighted: when Michael Sorkin wrote an essay on Disneyland, he highlighted this fact by reproducing an image of the sky above the theme park, the only part of it that Disney could not prevent him from reproducing.)[57]

We thus have a vast range of subject matter ready to be photographed, to be imaged as part of the continuing development of thought about architecture. The challenge is to get out there and

do it, to take that image, to use that image, to dis-seminate that image, and to do so in a way that challenges ideas, which communicates something, which is a *thinking* image of architecture.

Acknowledgement

Notes and references

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2. Some of the ideas in this article were presented with Joe Kerr as 'The Importance of Imaging' at the Annual Conference of Teachers of Architectural History, Manchester University (May, 1995). Some of the ideas in the section on temporality are included in Iain Borden, 'Mais que fait ce pingouin dans le bassin?', *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, n.354 (September–October, 2004), pp. 44–49.

3. Robin Wilson, 'At The Limits of Genre: Architectural Photography and Utopic Criticism', *The Journal of Architecture*, v.10 (June, 2005), pp. 265–273.

4. Robert Elwall, *Building With Light: the International History of Architectural Photography* (London, Merrell, 2004). See also, Robert Elwall, *Photography Takes Command: the Camera and British Architecture, 1890–1939* (London, RIBA Heinz Gallery, 1994), pp. 9–49.

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14. *Photographing Architecture and Interiors*, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–83 and 99.

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16. Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL: Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, Jennifer Sigler, ed. (New York, Monacelli, 1995).

17. 'A Short History of Photography', *op. cit.*, p. 245.

18. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, BBC and Penguin, 1972); Robin Kinross, 'For Meaning: the Graphic Design of Richard Hollis', *Frieze*, n.5 (June-July-August, 1992), pp. 44–7. Berger's debt to Benjamin is acknowledged in *Ways of Seeing*, p. 34.

19. *Ways of Seeing*, *op. cit.*, p. 27, depicts Van Gogh's 'Wheatfield with Crows' with simply an identifying caption. The following page adds the caption: 'This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself.'

20. I thank Jeremy Melvin and Adrian Forty for identifying this example of architectural suicide.

21. Iain Borden and David Dunster, eds, *Architecture and the Sites of History: Interpretations of Buildings and Cities* (Oxford, Butterworth, 1995), p. 41.

22. *Photography Takes Command*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

23. 'A Short History of Photography', *op. cit.*, p. 256.

24. A concern raised in *Photographing Architecture and Interiors*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

25. Bernard Tschumi, 'Violence of Architecture', *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT, 1994), p. 123.

26. Jeremy Till, 'Thick Time: Architecture and the Traces of Time', in, Iain Borden and Jane Rendell, eds, *InterSections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories* (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 286.

27. See, for example, Dell and Wainwright's views, *Photography Takes Command*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

28. *Architects' Journal* (5th February, 1992), front cover. My thanks to Sarah Jackson for this information.

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38. *Privacy and Publicity*, *op. cit.*, pp. 283–289.

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44. Conversation with Charles Jencks, UCLA (28th January, 1988).

45. A much more sophisticated reading of this image is developed in Brian Stater, 'War's Greatest Picture: St Paul's Cathedral, the London Blitz and British National Identity' (The Bartlett, UCL, unpublished master's thesis, 1996).

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48. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

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51. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *op. cit.*, p. 226; *Ways of Seeing*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
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