BITACORA ARQUITECTURA is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the School of Architecture of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM since 1999. The journal specializes in the critical, historical and theoretical study of architecture, landscape architecture, industrial design, urbanism and art as studied from multiple vantage points. It is published three times a year and its goal is to disseminate knowledge on these topics and, therefore, it is aimed at a wide audience including students, architects, philosophers, city planners, designers, artists, historians, critics and theorists of art, architecture and the social sciences, as well as any other person interested in the themes addressed in the journal.

BITACORA ARQUITECTURA requests original unpublished research to be submitted to a double-blind peer review. The Editorial Board will review the essays and forward them to two experts in the specific field of the proposed topic. Proposals may be accepted, accepted with revisions or declined. The criteria for evaluation are based solely on the thematic relevance, originality, contribution, clarity and importance of the work. Submissions must follow the Author Guidelines. The journal guarantees the confidentiality of the evaluation process and the anonymity of reviewers, authors and content at all times.

BITACORA ARQUITECTURA calls for papers addressing a specific theme with a deadline for each issue. The remaining content of the journal is open ended; submissions related to any of the proposed fields of study are welcome at any time. In addition to research articles, the journal welcomes essays, reviews, interviews and other genres, whose publication depends on the approval of the editors and the Editorial Board.

BITACORA ARQUITECTURA is indexed in the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals, Conacyt: Índice de Revistas Mexicanas de Divulgación Científica y Tecnológica, Periodica, Latindex, EBSCO and Ulrichsweb. It can also be found online at: www.arquitectura.unam.mx/bitacora.html and www.revistas.unam.mx/index.php/bitacora.

In accepting and agreeing to the terms set by the journal, authors must ensure that essays and related materials are original and that all permissions and copyrights have been secured. The content of the essays is the sole responsibility of the author and does not reflect the opinion of the Editorial Board or the School of Architecture at the UNAM.

We have done our best effort to find the copyright holders for the images published in this issue. In some cases this was not possible, therefore we kindly ask them to contact the journal.

Hemos puesto todo nuestro empeño en contactar a aquellas personas que poseen los derechos de autor de las imágenes publicadas en la revista. En algunos casos no nos ha sido posible, y por esta razón sugerimos a los propietarios de tales derechos que se pongan en contacto con la redacción de esta revista.

Editorial

The alliance between architecture and photography has been crucial to the development of modern architecture. Fundamental to its formulation and later international diffusion and popularization, this connection has continued up until the present day: architecture cannot be analyzed, taught, assessed or even simply discussed without using photographic images. A large part of any individual’s architectural knowledge is composed exclusively of instants that have been captured and then reproduced: the world in which we live is one centered on sight and one that is oversaturated with images; it instantly exposes all of its nooks and crannies to the light, allowing us to make private spaces and the most isolated areas public.

The avant-garde constructed a new vision through the camera lens: changing the angle of a shot and leaving things to chance produced a feeling of estrangement that revealed the everyday unconscious. Registering the rise of a new space of anonymous buildings – it taught us to see what we hadn’t been seeing – photography laid the groundwork for the conceptualization of modern architecture. Considering the antecedent of the architectural photography of the avant-garde, it’s worth asking why a large part of contemporary photography – or at least that published by the most well-known architectural firms – rather than proposing new readings through this two-dimensional space, instead shows buildings and construction projects using a perspective that is so traditional that it could even be said that it exaggerates, more than ever, the use of optical corrections that have long since been left behind in other disciplines.

One of the first lessons taught to all students of architectural photography is that images should be manipulated in order to correct the vertical lines of tall buildings (which naturally tend towards a curve in the center of the frame), as well as the horizontal lines of low-set buildings (which likewise tend to curve towards the horizon) in order to get pristine images of a type of representation that is pictorially traditional, utilizing a Renaissance perspective that is as perfect as it is unreal. The same occurs with interior shots, which – almost by definition – use wide-angle lenses in order to create the illusion of a space unlike that experienced by its visitors. For the most part, technical advances in architectural photography seem to have been used to perfect traditional compositions, with a few notable exceptions that have not been properly taken advantage of, their great potential exploited to propose new readings, expanding viewers’ perceptions and revealing new frameworks for innovation.

Although we are aware of the existence of distortions, or we can imagine their presence, and we understand the independence and autonomy of photography with regard to the object depicted, in reality we unconsciously consume countless images simultaneously, constantly acting as if they were an objective representation of reality. We forget to ask ourselves about the artist behind the camera and their intentions, much less give them proper credit – paying them royalties seems excessive.

If we take into account the deficiencies and distortions created by the camera lens, then we come to doubt the value of photography in terms of providing precise or correct information on spatial dimensions; this threatens its value as a documentary record, which has been vital for historians, theoreticians and critics. Reconstructions or restorations of buildings based on the photographic record are not reliable, and we are well aware of the uselessness of older photographs for recovering a building’s original color. To reestablish a building’s dimensions, materials and scale, we need other media to complement the necessary information.

No other art is as closely tied to the consequences of mechanical reproduction as photography. The rootless images with which the modern movement was disseminated in Latin America were reproduced in thousands of magazine pages: the copy of a copy of a three-dimensional space forced into two dimensions, technically manipulated to fit the format. These images, anonymous by omission and apparently truthful, unquestionably had a very important role in the reading of modernity and the projects designed from a distance by local architects. On some occasions, architects created local interpretations of materials and construction systems that they only knew by sight, relating these images with what they were already accustomed to seeing; on others, they built buildings with certain materials and in a certain way because they knew that, when photographed, they would resemble others. Architects sought to produce a broad, deep space, whose scale only existed in wide-angle photography.

Producers of architectural discourse have voluntarily made use of photographs, images – sometimes of their own work, other times appropriated – that have been manipulated for presentation in the media, thus giving visual support to their operative discourse. They have created the illusion of spaciousness or smallness through technical and optical manipulations, such as contrast with objects of known scale. By using technical effects for rhetorical and narrative purposes, they reveal their awareness of the importance of these processes, as well as of the independence of the image with regard to the object depicted.

There is photogenic architecture, like that designed by Luis Barragán, who was always well aware of how his work would look through a camera lens. His visual discourse included photographs of other objects, intentionally manipulated in close collaboration with the photographer Armando Salas Portugal, and his architecture was solely judged and praised through its photographic record. There is also architecture that is impossible to depict, or which looks radically different in a photographic image, such as the interiors designed by Josef Hoffman, which disappointed Le Corbusier when he was unable to see them in real life those tectonic qualities he believed he had seen in photographs.

It must be said that photographers are much more interested in producing a good photograph than in showing architecture as it is. This might bother architects, but accepting this fact opens up new possibilities in terms of the relationship between architecture and photography that go beyond traditional techniques of representation. Is a good architectural photograph that which heroically emphasizes the architecture, or that which reveals new ways of seeing those effects of the architecture that we don’t consciously register? Perhaps a good architectonic photograph would be that in which the photographer interprets the spatial, material and cultural qualities of a building from new perspectives, through the distortions and alternations naturally created by the camera lens, and not that which – naively and irresponsibly – seeks to be a faithful copy of architectonic reality, which has, in fact, never been possible.

Cristina López Urbe