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Image Addiction

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IMAGE ADDICTION

Nicole Becker

“The essential difference between the culture of the past and the entertainment of today is that the products of the former sought to transcend mere present time, to endure, to stay alive for future generations, while the products of the latter are made to be consumed instantly and disappear, like cake or popcorn.”

Mario Vargas Llosa, *Notes on the Death of Culture: Essays on Spectacle and Society*

The practice of architecture itself has lost the ability to draw and imagine. Drawings used to negotiate the dimensions between the human and the cosmic. Today, it has been transmuted into a render factory of sexy images depicting an enhanced reality. ‘Drawing’ in architecture has lost its cultural importance and leads to a misrepresentation of design. Accessibility to visual interpretations of architecture has evoked false realities of the built environment. Do we want architectural understanding to be available to all levels of society but at the expense of truth? Architecture has become a product for the consumption of images; we design permanent structures for an ephemeral society.

Immediate access to information has given us image literacy but we lack the understanding. Juhani Pallasmaa, suggests, “information is replacing knowledge.” Rates of literacy have declined and attention spans have greatly shortened thanks to the widespread growth of the image. Our increasing reliance on the image has created ephemeral imagination. We allow images to become accepted as truth, even if the images pose as more authentic than existing reality. They allow the two worlds, one of representation, and one of physicality, to become indistinguishable. Rather than stimulating our imagination, images are replacing it. The mass

production of computer-generated images are imagining on our behalf. In their wake, they are raising a general lack of social visions that have a withering effect on politics, architecture, and globalization.

*“A coherent view of the world would undoubtedly reveal
the insanity of obsessive growth
and consumption.”*

Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image: Imagination and
Imagery in Architecture*

Architecture has fallen prey to the consumerism society. The practice of architecture has become a purely economical business with an emphasis on marketing its ‘product’. Motive to produce building after building, creating what imagery it takes to sell the project, turns human setting into a fictionalized representation. Accessibility to visual interpretations of architecture has evoked a specific understanding of the built environment that suppresses the experiential qualities and cultural understanding of the work. But even now, graphic representation has begun to move beyond client persuasion, and has become a practice in deception.

The built environment has become a closed circuit. Physical environments demarcated from their surroundings by self-sustaining boundaries. This has become a commercialized effort to even create a recognizable brand. Images exist independent of their design concepts and are left to be scrutinized as autonomous graphics. This ideology becomes perpetuated in academia when critics and professors prioritize the image as a source for the ‘perfect architecture’ as opposed to the implications of real, tangible design.

*“Time and again, the projects seemed intent
on fleeing the real world of people and places,
scale and context; retreating instead into the fantasy realms
of convoluted forms with no seeming purpose.”*

Oliver Wainwright, *Towering Folly: Why Architectural
Education in Britain is in Need of Repair*

These methods are propagated in the practice of architecture and offer promises that we will fail to fulfill. The proliferation



Amador Hotel in Panama City, Panama; source: author

of image making leads its viewers to formulate expectations about architecture, and the perfection of it, which are impossible to accomplish.

This leads to questioning whether architecture itself has lost its ability to imagine. Techniques of architecture today design imagery that creates a fictional world neglecting the art of building.

Architecture too willingly plays its part in the game of seduction. It entices with indulgent imagery that is responsible for defending the sense of reality. These digital delusions cause architecture to lose value and ethics in its control through imagery. The visual deluge of architecture manipulation causes an association with luxury and exclusivity in a response to mass consumption. We no longer imagine it for ourselves. Architecture has turned into the practice of sexy visualization in an era of image addiction.