Keywords architectural representation, intervisuality, visual discourse, visual architectural discourse, contemporary architecture, Caruso St John

Abstract The contemporary cultural sphere of architecture is saturated with images in constant competition. While these visual documents are often cast aside as representations of external designs, it is also possible to take them serious as images, first and foremost presenting themselves. Through images of Caruso St John Architects, the potential of a visual architectural discourse is provoked in three interlinked dimensions. The three dimensions represent ways in which the interpretation of the images is anticipated and discursive positions are expressed. First, the image is considered a meaningful whole that asserts ideological and architectural positions through its relations to a broader visual culture. Second, the image is considered to be disciplinary specific, and involved in a transhistorical dialogue with architectural drawing types. Third, the image is put in an intermedial relation to other visuals, textual information and objects, in an actual space such as an exhibition. In each of these dimensions, the image is directed and staged. The contention of this article is that the discursive formations are taking place precisely in these directional cues. It is in there that traces of an anticipated interpretation can be found, that represent core values and meanings of the architecture that is at stake.

Résumé La sphère culturelle contemporaine de l'architecture est saturée d'images en constante compétition. Si ces documents visuels sont souvent rejetés pour être des représentations d'objets situés ailleurs, il est également possible de les prendre au sérieux comme des images qui se présentent avant tout elles-mêmes. À travers les images de Caruso St John Architects, le potentiel d'un discours architectural visuel est entrepris selon trois dimensions interdépendantes. Celles-ci représentent la manière dont les images anticipent leur interprétation et expriment des positions discursives. Premièrement, l'image est considérée comme un tout signifiant, qui affirme des positions idéologiques et architecturales à travers ses relations avec une culture visuelle plus large. Deuxièmement, l'image est regardée comme étant spécifique à la discipline, et impliquée dans un dialogue transhistorique avec les différents types de dessins architecturaux. Troisièmement, l'image est mise dans une relation intermédiale avec d'autres images, informations textuelles ou objets, dans un espace réel tel qu'une exposition. Dans chacune de ces dimensions, l'image est dirigée et mise en scène. L'argument de cet article est que les formations discours prennent place dans les indices de ces orientations. C'est là que l'on peut trouver les traces d'une interprétation anticipée, qui traduit les valeurs et les significations essentielles de l'architecture concernée.

Louis de Mey

Intervisual Cues: Visual Architectural Discourse in Images by Caruso St John Architects

Visual Architectural Discourse

In the current age of mediatized architecture, architectural presentation images are either celebrated uncritically or vilified as unsubstantial and aestheticized expressions of a self-referential architectural culture. Instead of succumbing to either iconophilia or iconoclasm, there is a need to properly delve into architecture's *thick* images and take them seriously as layered constructions. Focusing on images by Caruso St John Architects, this article will develop an understanding of architectural images as a visual discourse. Caruso St John Architects has been engaging intensively with architectural history, photography, and the visual arts since its establishment in 1990. The practice is firmly embedded in Western European architectural culture through numerous (monographic) publications and teaching positions in various prestigious institutions. Throughout these activities, they have shown a careful and deliberate engagement with the images they publish. To hold on to the specificities of the image, the architecture, and the actuality of the image, I propose an interpretation that is threefold. I will demonstrate how intervisual relations—and by extension intervisuality (Mirzoeff, 2001; Spens, 2019) as defined in the next section—are established in three distinct dimensions of architectural images and how this threefold construction contains traces of discursive arguments. Firstly, an image is an entity on its own and can be read as such. It is visually read through acquired frames of interpretation and contains associative references. Second, architectural images are conceived as a set that represents an architectural project. Third, the images are perceived in concrete settings such as a publication or an exhibition. This creates a necessary context and entails spatial juxtapositions and links with other images. The text below is structured according to these three levels and develops an understanding of the intervisual nature of architectural images for each of the levels. This conceptual reframing of the approach to contemporary architectural images allows us to acknowledge their idiosyncrasy as well as their role in discursive formations within and beyond one architectural office.

Although images, in their various formats, have been dominating our everyday (architecture) culture, the necessary knowledge for "visual literacy" in this material remains implicit and undiscussed.[1] Architectural images are still understood almost exclusively as "images of something" while their performance and logic are not

1 **W. J. T. Mitchell explains how people first rely on baseline skills, as a necessary condition for what could be termed "visual literacy": "connoisseurship: rich, highly cultivated, and trained experiences and techniques of visual observation". See (Mitchell, 2009).**

considered.[2] As contemporary image theorist Gottfried Boehm writes, "Images are equated with their content, representations with what they represent…It would be naïve to want to change this ingrained practice, yet one should see what it always conceals: namely, the ways of seeing that are formed in images and become manifest in the views they present" (Boehm, 2021: 37). In the monograph *Almost Everything* (2008) by Caruso St John Architects, architecture historian Philip Ursprung suggests something else entirely:

The architectural practice of Caruso St John is shot through with the theoretical potential of images. Both the discourse on images and the theoretical reflection of their work, can only profit from each other. (Ursprung, 2008: 234)

Such a notion of the "theoretical potential of images" seems to hint at an operationality of architectural representations that goes beyond their instrumentality in the design process or their function as documents that communicate an architectural object or project. Both these approaches remain on the level of *what* is represented. However, the intense investment architectural firms are making in publishing and exhibition culture today urges us to reconsider the role and meaning of such representations. The sheer number of drawings and collages in architectural exhibitions is an obvious indication, especially in relation to the relative absence of (photographs of) built architecture. The various elaborate constellations of images that Caruso St John Architects have exhibited in these settings can be interrogated in this regard. In this sense, I am treating the images of Caruso St John and their staging as both idiosyncratic and exceptionally rich, qualities that can be found in certain other contemporary practices as well.

If there is a theoretical potential in the images and their constellations, it is because certain architectural positions are formulated in a visual way. Taken together, these positions can be seen as a visual counterpart to written discourse. Architectural discourse has had advanced knowledge for many centuries in textual form or image-based treatises. Is a similar concept of architectural knowledge imaginable through more contingent—project-based—image discourses? In this respect, I am less concerned here with architectural drawing as a medium that influences design processes, as for example Robin Evans conceptualized it (Evans, 1986). Instead, I am approaching these expanded forms of architectural drawing or representation (drawings, collages, digital images, etc.) as a carrier of architectural knowledge or propositions for knowledge.

It is important to stress that such a visual architectural discourse is mostly project-based and relies on occasion-based discursive formations, in the form of projects, publications and exhibitions, as well as teaching positions.[3] The images under consideration anticipate various audiences at once and take up the various rhetorical functions that go with them: they are used within the office to make decisions, sometimes deployed to convince clients of ideas, but also used to communicate projects to a wider audience. Throughout the various stages of this complex reality, I contend that they also constitute visual discursive formations that shape a practice and an architectural landscape.

In his introduction to a collection of architect's drawings, anthropologist Edward Robbins made the analogy between architectural drawings and text. In relation to language, he writes:

Like architecture, drawings do not make predicative or relational assertions but describe or signify a world of objects through a series of personal and conventional representations. Though drawing, like architecture, can appear

2 This is an argument that many contemporary image theorists have made about visual material in general. See for example Boehm, 2021.

3 I have examined the rhetoric of visual references in the studio of Adam Caruso elsewhere. The central argument of that article is that the references not only inform the architectural design, but also ground the making of images in larger visual traditions, exposing their socio-cultural codes. See: De Mey, 2022.

to act like a language, it cannot be described by any grammar. (Robbins, 1997: 28)

Robbins further advances the proposition of the architectural drawing as "a critical component of what we might call 'architectural discourse'", which he defines as "socially produced communication". His focus is on the way in which architectural drawings are "conventionalized and used within a socially organized network of communication that shares the conventions used to read the drawing". While Robbins focuses on these conventions—orthographic projection, axonometry, perspective—he does not explore the situations of such communication any further.. Drawings are to a certain extent reduced to representations of a project.

Foucault writes that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality" (Foucault 1981: 52). These notions of constraint, restriction and exclusion are precisely what characterize discursive practices. Due to their inherent multivalent character, images have a tendency to encourage multiple interpretations (Traue, 2019: 327). Precisely because of the multiple meanings embedded in the images in the work of Caruso St John, I will rather adopt the notion of "direction" (Fr. Régie) than the Foucauldian notion of "control".[4] I am here evoking the cinematographic sense of the term in relation to the "control" a film director has. It is a softer term that recalls mechanisms of regulation and restraint but also has the connotation of of an author and his poetic freedom to it. This text examines precisely this direction in and on the images, and contends that a major part of the discursive message is located precisely in these direction "cues".

Intervisuality

Because of the project- and occasion-based reality of this visual discourse and the ambiguous nature of images, I am resorting to the notion of intervisuality to clarify the nature of the direction that is imposed on the images. Recently, this postmodern notion of intervisuality has been recycled to cope with new contexts and technologies that condition images in general. Mirzoeff defined the term as follows: "Intervisuality comprises the intertextuality of visual media, the interdependence of visual and non-visual media, the interface of viewer, technology and the viewed and the new infrastructures being created to support these changes" (Mirzoeff, 2001: 124). Taking cues from literary criticism, this approach towards architectural images starts as a post-structuralist quest for *meaning* in the images by considering them to some extent a form of text. Along the way, I will render this conception of the image as text more complex by bringing in the specificity of the architectural image and the image as developed in more recent visual studies.

Literary critic Gerard Gennette claimed that the true object of poetics was not the concrete text but its textual transcendence, or *transtextuality*. In his book *Palimpsests* (1982), he coins this term to redefine the (umbrella-) notion of *intertextuality* that Julia Kristeva coined several years before.[5] He defines transtextuality as "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (Genette, 1997: 1). Genette defines five types of transtextual relationships, of which intertextuality is but one. Kristeva's umbrella notion of intertextuality/visuality and Genette's subcategories of transtextual relationships clarify the formation of visual discourse. This process is what makes architectural images so thick, so filled with meaning.

4 A very direct example of this metaphor of directing can be found in the study of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye by Beatriz Colomina. In her analysis she describes the photographs as having a "detective" look, a "voyeuristic" gaze, as if somebody just left the picture frame. These cinematographic mechanisms of mise-en-scène are in effect how control is exercised within the picture plane. See Colomina, 1992.

5 Genette asserted that *intertextuality* was his terminological paradigm.

Fig. 1 *Falconhoven apartment building*, Antwerp, 2014–20, Caruso St John Architects. Model photograph (16.8 × 21 cm) as featured in the solo show Diorama, Betts Project, 2017. Giclée ink on Hahnemühle paper. The prints are signed and numbered on the back by the architects. Each of these small photographs in the show was printed as a limited edition of seven and was sold for £60.
© Caruso St John Architects.

In what follows, the possibility of a visual discourse is demonstrated in three distinct dimensions. Various intervisual relations, analogous to Kristeva's and Genette's notions, are considered the crucial means to direct this visual discourse.

1. The Image on Its Own Terms: Internal Rhetorics

Increasingly, architectural representations are circulating on their own. Either they are explicitly put on display as a singular image, or they end up in a state of permanent unrest in the digital realm, cut loose from associated images. There is an increased urgency for images to speak for themselves, and to communicate ideas in a concise manner. Case studies to demonstrate visual architectural discourse could straightforwardly entail projects that originated in the exceptional and highly rhetorical context of publications or exhibitions. In contrast, the Falconhoven housing project, which this text focuses on, did not. While representations of this project have been put on display on several occasions, they have not been omnipresent in exhibitions or publications by Caruso St John, nor were they produced in the context of such cultural events. As such, the images will prove to be both exceptional in their conscious construction and constellations as well as representative for images of other projects by the office.

In 2017, Caruso St John was invited to host a small exhibition of their work in Betts Project gallery in London. Along the walls, a strip of model photographs of a multitude of different projects was hung in no apparent order, with no contextual information about the respective architectural projects. Each of the printed images was for sale as a limited edition. One of these images detached from its project context was a model photograph depicting the façade of a four-story building, the Falconhoven apartment building, seen from a slanted perspective **(Fig. 1)**.

As a photograph of a (paper) model, it is positioned in a lineage of images by architects, often related to the intricate link between media and modern architecture (Fankhändel, 2021; Deriu, 2012). By extension, it is closely connected to the work

of visual artists such as Laurie Simmons, James Casebere, and most notably Thomas Demand.[6] On the work of Demand, Adam Caruso writes: "Tight framing and carefully controlled depth of field suppress perspective in the images, with all of the visual information pushed forward onto the surface of the picture" (Caruso, 2020: 250). In the same text, he explains the evolution in the model-making technique in the practice of Caruso St John: how "exposed card and timber as representations of what was intended in the full-scale constructions" was exchanged for models in which "[e]very surface of our new models was made in colours and tones of paper that we would lay onto a carcass made of thick foamcore". These paper models are constructed to be photographed from specific viewpoints, while still allowing a certain openness in contrast with the fixed perspectival viewpoint of a drawing.[7]

The architect goes on by acknowledging that this "strange combination of abstraction and figuration is obviously something we learned from Thomas' practice, and it was instrumental in facilitating our ongoing ambition to bring more and more of the history of architecture in our work" (Caruso, 2020: 250). Moreover, the architects started constructing these model photographs as a way to capture the atmosphere of a project, most notably in its interiors. The technique fits the practice's search for the "emotional content" of architecture, as Jesus Vassallo has put it (Vassallo, 2019: 296), but can be read more profoundly as a discursive position towards the prominence and character of the interior.

Besides this approach of the image via its technique, and the self-mythologization of the practice, we can also consider the image as a piece of visual information. We could consider this image for a moment as a singular visual document in a similar vein as semiotician Roland Barthes did. To do so, we require, according to Barthes, "cultural knowledge" to unpack it (Barthes, 1977). As the author exposed the cultural codes and myths that are evoked in an image that is as constructed as a publicity photo, he implicitly also showed how these images forge specific composed meanings and actively attribute certain values to the products represented. Similar things are happening in presentation images by architects.

Before anything else, we perceive such an architectural image as a representation of an architectural object. We instantly recognize that the image by Caruso St John represents a four-story building with a classically articulated façade that is entirely composed of loggias. Roland Barthes called this the denotational message of an image (Barthes, 1977). However, while we easily understand what is represented, there is a latent tension between a literal reading of the image as a "reflection of the built" (or the to-be-built) and the multitude of meanings and connotations that intrinsically come along with the "thickness" of an image. This is what Barthes hinted at when he spoke of the "utopian character of denotation"; precisely that a literal ("naïve") reading of an image is always immediately joined by a symbolic message: "it is first of all, so to speak, a message by eviction, constituted by what is left in the image when the signs of connotation are mentally deleted" (*ibid*., 1977).

The model photograph at hand indeed presents us with various symbolic messages that are inseparable from a more literal reading: firstly, the image presents a rather experiential view, as if the beholder walks up to the building and observes it casually. As an image genre, it bears resemblance to historical *Architekturmalerei*, for example of Eduard Gaertner's painting of Schinkel's Bauakademie. The beholder is presented with a realistic urban *scene* that feels familiar both in its casualness as well as in its content matter. Secondly, there are noticeable drop shadows in the recesses of the façade, implying a bright and at least slightly sunny day. At the same time, the sky is not very bright and the atmosphere feels oddly ordinary, as

6 Beatriz Colomina related the work of Thomas Demand to modernity (2017: 180-183).

7 Interview with Adam Caruso, 03/12/2021, Zoom.

a (stereo)typical Belgian day in autumn.[8] Moreover, the scene is softened by the trees that are slightly out of focus. Thirdly, a very limited set of extra elements are introduced to bring the scene to life: four brightly coloured canopies that set a focal point in the composition, a couple of chairs and a figure that steps out of a portico in the façade. Together, these symbolic messages present us with an entirely unspectacular view of the building, summoning a familiarity and immediately projecting the beholder into the image. The image has, in the words of image theorist Horst Bredekamp, the "latent capacity to move the viewer" (Bredekamp, 2018: 33).

On its own, the image thus engages in an intervisual dialogue first and foremost on the level of its structure, or image genre. Secondly, more specific visual tropes or visual quotations further evoke familiar references. An architectural image is then directed "from the inside" and holds several directing mechanisms that give us clues on how to interpret the image. Characteristics of the image, such as tonality, contrast or composition are activated in architectural images, as well as the more theatrical or cinematographic mechanisms of framing and directing the *mise-en-scène*. In its assembly of these image-inherent mechanisms, architectural images are necessarily "thick" documents, filled with meaning. If we are pursuing an attempt to read architectural images as a form of visual discourse, we need to move away from reading the image as a mere representation of some external referent, i.e. the building it depicts. Instead, we need to consider them as culturally overdetermined documents in their own right.

2. The Set of Images Documenting a Project: Relating to Conventions

The most common manifestation of an architectural image, however, occurs when it is accompanied by a series of associated images that together represent a project. If we take up the Falconhoven apartment building again, we find it represented in the online portfolio of the architects as a series of images, primarily consisting of a set of orthographic drawings (plans, sections, elevations). This comprehensive set of orthographic drawings is accompanied by photographs of the finished building, as well as several model photographs.

The tradition of the orthographic set is constitutional for the modern understanding of architecture and is a means to understand or grasp a project through a series of coded images. In this sense, the set has a documentary, instructive role and is governed by standardized drawing methods and projection systems. The codes or conventions to which these architectural drawings are subjected are in fact one of architecture's true disciplinary constraints in a Foucauldian sense, as Michael Young remarked (Young, 2021: 2).

Such forms of graphic restraint have been analysed by Evans as crucial qualities of architectural drawings in the form of projections (Evans, 1989: 20). Along this strand of thinking, Stan Allen approached orthographic drawings as forms of notation, in a Goodmanian sense (Allen, 2000). Paul Emmons even called these drawing conventions "Foucauldian disciplinary discursive practices framed by ideologies" in his study on hand drawing practices (Emmons, 2019: 12). He distinguishes the introduction of a rationalized theory of architectural drawing at the end of the 18th century as a reductive moment in the history of architectural drawings. "This reduces architectural drawing to diagrams that merely report information about a design" (Emmons, 2019: 12). A similar statement can be made about perspective that functions as an epistemological model, albeit even larger in its cultural implications, going beyond the disciplinary boundaries of architecture (Damisch, 1987).

The model photographs as well as the digitally rendered façade drawings in Caruso St John's portfolio, on the other hand, "overdo" their job as documentary

8 **Mark Pimlott has made a similar remark on representations from drizzly countries such as Switzerland, Scandinavian countries, Great Britain. See Pimlott, 2022.**

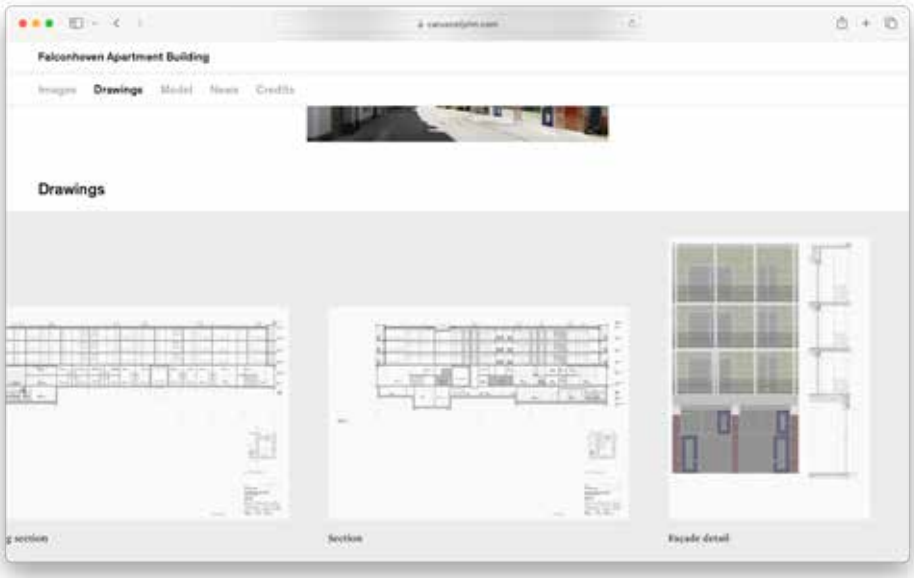

Fig. 2 Screenshot of the online portfolio website of Caruso St John Architects, showing the series of drawings that represent the project Falconhoven apartment building, Antwerp, 2014–20.
Source: https://carusostjohn.com/

images.[9] In the article cited above, Evans indeed proceeds by acknowledging that "[t]here is always a touch of illustration in even the most abstruse and diagrammatic visual instruction, and illustration always prompts us to envisage what it portrays as if it were already real, even when we know it is not" (Evans, 1989: 20). Precisely because of the inherent thickness of this "touch of illustration", a myriad of other associations and interpretations is smuggled into the project. Similarly, the combination of the orthographic set with drawings and other images is a manipulation, or way of directing the interpretation of the images in portfolios, publications or exhibitions **(Fig. 2)**.

Caruso St John Architects included one image in the set of drawings in which a rendered elevation of three façade bays is juxtaposed with a technical section of the corresponding façade. As an architectural image genre, as a fine-tuned part of the orthographic set with "a touch of illustration", it can be seen in a lineage of images with treatise-like statuses such as Schinkel's plans with rendered landscape contexts or Palladio's combinations of elevations and sections.[10] In part, we implicitly interpret these images by relating them to the conventional orthographic set of projections and their difference from this standard. By reading them as part of such a transhistorical intervisual conversation, their specificity can be pinpointed.

As a transition towards the third dimension discussed below, we can look at the rendered façade drawings that Caruso St John put on display in the installation "The Façade is the Window to the Soul of Architecture" at the 16th Venice Biennial, in 2018, in which the façade drawing of the Falconhoven project is included. Merely zooming in on the choice of images and their relationship to the conventions of architectural drawing, we

9 **For a historical overview of this relationship between the documentary function and more idiosyncratic modelling and representative functions of architectural drawings, see Ionescu, Van Den Driessche, and De Mey, 2021.**

10 **In this respect, architecture historian James S. Ackerman briefly uttered the possibility of drawings as a "graphic form of architectural theory" at the end of his essay *The Conventions and Rhetoric of Architectural Drawing*. He writes that these architectural drawings are "conceived not only to illustrate the designer's principles but to persuade the viewer of the validity of his or her point of view". Ackerman, 2002.**

Fig. 3a–3b
The Façade is the Window to the Soul of Architecture, Venice, 2018, Caruso St John Architects. Installation photographs of their main exhibition in the 2018 Venice Biennial "Freespace" © Photo: Louis Demey, 2018.

3a

3b

can read the installation as a contemporary treatise that puts specific attention forward on this idiosyncratic form of rendered elevation drawings. By doing so, Caruso St John loosely and implicitly formulates an encompassing project that highlights precisely these aspects which deviate from plain orthographic drawings: they not only highlight proportions but also emphasize haptic qualities (textures), atmosphere (tonality), depth (shadows) and the tectonic articulation of the façade construction. It is through their connection to and difference from conventional architectural drawings that, as we are acquainted with standards or canonical reference points, the images in this exhibition produce a very specific stance towards architecture.

3. Architectural Image Acts

When we finally interpret these images in the actual settings in which a public gets to perceive them, be it an exhibition or another form of publication, a more literal and theatrical form of "direction" occurs. Caruso St John was invited by curators Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, founders of Grafton Architects, to contribute a project in the main pavilion of the 16th Venice Architecture Biennial. They staged the above-mentioned installation "The Façade is the Window to the Soul of Architecture", showing 12 of their projects in a highly controlled environment. The installation comprised both a series of specific photographs of realized projects and digitally rendered elevation drawings **(Figs. 3a–3b).**

The elevation drawing of the Falconhoven project is altered in comparison to the portfolio website, or online blogs that document the project. In the exhibition, the modest street façade is shown without the section drawing that shows its assembly and details. The digital drawing now shows five bays instead of only three and is rendered in softer tones with shadows. Moreover, the way of presenting the drawing will prove to be very specific and directional.

As such, architectural images are in constant remediation, they are repeatedly re-enacted and reperformed, targeting specific audiences. This performance is what I would call the *staging of an image act.*[11] Image theorist Hans Belting has theorized the actuality of an image as follows:

Images are neither on the wall (or on the screen) nor in the head alone. They do not exist by themselves, but they happen; they take place whether they are moving images (where this is so obvious) or not. (Belting, 2005: 302)

In this act of taking place, an image is directed to perform in a specific way, anticipating a certain interpretation. This anticipation happens on several fronts: first, there is the direct anchorage or framing of the image. Second, the image is framed by what happens (or is performed) around it. And third, the image act is performed in a particular institutional setting with its own conditions and audience.

Firstly, captions, titles, and other forms of signage offer "reading keys" to the images. As directing devices, these titles and captions function in an analogous way as what Genette has conceptualized as the paratextual dimension of a text: all the textual information that surrounds a text and narrows down its meaning. These bits of information ("a title, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals") frame the text and offer rather direct clues for their interpretation:

These provide the text with a (variable) setting and sometimes a commentary, official or not, which even the purists among readers, those least inclined to external erudition, cannot always disregard as easily as they would like and as they claim to do. (Genette, 1997: 3)

As part of his expanded view on intertextuality, these paratexts frame the text in a

11 Horst Bredekamp's theory of the *image act* is deliberately invoked here, in which the author even goes a step further and investigates how images can act themselves, can speak or have agency in various ways. See Bredekamp, 2018.

wider (textual) field. In similar vein, we can find such paratexts as well as *paravisuals* in (architectural) exhibitions or publications.[12] In the case of "The Façade is the Window to the Soul of Architecture", a caption on the wall mentioned the respective projects that the drawings and photographs represented, where the projects were located and the period in which the project was designed and/or executed. On a more encompassing level, the title of the installation clearly frames the images as well. Its sensitive and slightly enigmatic phrasing suggests a certain weight or centrality to the propositions on display.[13]

Secondly, the images interact with the other images in the installation, as well as with other images in sight or nearby.[14] Here, intentional proximity and juxtaposition of images and other media form directional cues to interpret what is put on display. In analogy to a theatrical *mise-en-scène*, the images are positioned, embellished, surrounded with a *décor*, submitted to controlled lighting conditions and juxtaposed with props.[15] It is precisely in this theatrical direction of the images and the intervisual complexity that is constructed that the images suggest a specific interpretation. They take on the roles of actors on a stage that interact but maintain their own agency as well.

The installation by Caruso St John first and foremost comprised a *room*. Amidst the labyrinth of exhibition spaces in the Central Pavilion of the Giardini flowing into each other, the architects explicitly defined a rectangular room with classical means. On the walls, a series of representations of projects was shown. The walls were painted in a soft and pale yellow, with a wainscoting of patterned wallpaper in the same yellow hues. Reflecting the *décor* of a theatre play, this backdrop sets the scene and already hints at a classical frame of reference. The patterned wallpaper even brings more specific references to mind such as the Arts and Crafts Movement and its central figures, such as William Morris.[16]

Within the constraints of this *décor*, the image acts take place. Above this wallpaper wainscoting, a strip of printed façade drawings is hung. They are digitally rendered in soft tones, printed in different formats, and framed. Upon closer examination, they all appear to be printed on the same scale and the dimensions of the drawings are based on the scale of the projects. Underneath these orthographic renderings, a series of photographs by Swiss photographer Philip Heckhausen is hung on the wall, unframed. The photographs show urban views, seen from a pedestrian point of view. Within the urban views, designs by "other modernists" such as Kay Fisker or Luigi Moretti can be distinguished, or a building designed by Caruso St John architects.

Even though the façade drawings are elaborately rendered, there is no doubt about the different status of the photographs and the drawings. Each of the series speaks of different aspects of (urban) facades through its respective medium of digitally rendered orthographic drawings or photography. Furthermore, they are differentiated in their framing and support. The media bring out several tensions that make up the complex nature of an (urban) façade, from its urban reality as part of a whole that is often perceived in a state of distraction, to its reality of design, materiality, and construction.

Moreover, the focus on the tectonically articulated façades imparts a more profound quality because of the scenography or *décor* resembling a classical gallery setting or an ornate bourgeois private interior. This spatial context of the drawings and photographs—the articulation of a plinth and mobilizing

12 For an in-depth analysis of textual communication in museums and by extension an understanding of the exhibition space as text, see Ravelli, 2006.

13 For literature on the role and characteristics of exhibition panels, see for instance: Bitgood, 2013.

14 For an introduction to the types of relationships among "components" of exhibitions, see: Bitgood, 1992.

15 Research on architectural exhibitions generally considers what I have termed the mise-en-scène as an act of curation combined with architectural design. See for instance the theme issue: Kayako, 2010.

16 This room can be conceptualized both as a setting or an environment, as well as what Tina Di Carlo terms "exhibitionism". See: Brown and Szacka, 2019. Di Carlo, 2010.

of ornaments and patterns—not only brings out another reference to classically structured architecture. It also makes the visitor aware of the very basic dual nature of a façade, connecting the private interior with the public urban space. This point on the public and urban nature of the façade in the work of Caruso St John had also been made by Pier Vittorio Aureli. In an essay for the first *El Croquis* monograph on the work of the practice, he considers the relative autonomy of the façade in relation to the interior and bases his analysis on the historical precedents of Brunelleschi, Alberti and Sullivan (Aureli, 2013: 23). While the décor and strip of photographs in "The Façade is the Window to the Soul of Architecture" stages a very different set of architectural references, implicitly a similar position is conveyed.

Thirdly, these image acts are taking place in particular institutional settings. Contrary to the white cube gallery or the black box of the theatre, the image acts take place in an overdetermined context of a biennial with many idiosyncratic installations and overlapping authorships. In this case, "The Façade is the Window to the Soul of Architecture" takes place in the curated section of the Venice Biennial. Curators Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara put forward "Freespace" as the encompassing theme of the biennial. In a statement on the Drawing Matter website, Adam Caruso and Helen Thomas position the exhibition as follows:

> ***In response to the Biennale's theme of Freespace, Caruso St John Architects put together an exhibition that celebrates the historical richness and social generosity of the façade. Whether a building is public or private, whatever its intended use, its façades have the responsibility to make a positive contribution to the public realm and should have the capacity to emotionally affect people who may only have a fleeting relationship to the building.*** (Caruso and Thomas, 2018)

The exhibition text written by the curators even mentions that the architects are "maintaining that [a discussion about a responsible treatment of the façade] has been missing from architectural discourse for too long" (Margutti, 2018: 47).

In the middle of the room, the architects designed a large bench or podium. The object is ornamented with a motif resembling a weaving pattern, recalling the floor pattern of the intervention the practice designed on the roof of the British pavilion for this same biennial. The textile reference associatively evokes 19th century discussions on architecture and tectonics, most canonically theorized by Gottfried Semper.[17]

This biennial installation is but one example of the remediation of architectural images in the practice of Caruso St John Architects. At this point, we can read an architectural practice alternatively as an occasion-based image practice, in which images are constantly remediated or re-enacted. In these highly controlled settings, the potentiality or thickness of the images is directed into more specific interpretations through visual and textual constellations of architectural knowledge.

Conclusion: Direction as Anticipated Interpretation

The three dimensions of an architectural image evoked above represent key modes of intervisuality through which the meanings of images are directed and loosely regulated. If we can speak of visual discourse in architecture, then it is in the acts of direction that the discursive formation can be discerned. The mechanisms of direction such as the image tropes, genres, treatments, and modes of display are not just stylistic devices. The image as a thick document is also a document that potentially holds political ideas, social values or an approach to issues such as construction. Thus it is important not to speak of the visual discourse of an architectural practice, as it is ever-evolving and time and again reacting to specific contexts. Instead, we can speak of "actualized visual discourse" that is put forward on different occasions and thereby slightly modified every time. In the case of Caruso St John, transformations are

17 **It is no coincidence of course to find an excerpt of Semper's text in Caruso St John's first monograph *Almost Everything* (2008).**

noticeable in the representation of projects over time, and show how such actualized visual discourse is reacting to changing conditions and evolving ideas. As such, it starts to act cumulatively. In each of these moments of discursive positioning, there is a high level of self-consciousness in the construction and staging of the images. As we have seen, there is a strong authorial control in the direction in and on the representations of Caruso St John that makes the images idiosyncratic yet relates them to references, conventions and textual discursive positions.

Going even further then, the three dimensions finally show that we can also cut loose the image from its signature—and thus from its author—and interpret it as part of an architectural project, a specific environment, or a broader culture. As such, this allows for a reading that oscillates between the specific setting in which this actualized discourse is staged, and more transcendent visual connotations and tropes. Moreover, it allows for a reading that combines the "directed gaze", in which the interpretation is actively anticipated, and an "informed gaze", in which the beholders interpret an architectural image from their own perspective, with their own frame of reference. In effect, we can imagine this as an adapted form of the postmodern notion of intertextuality, as a form of architectural intervisuality.

Counter-intuitively, we can now attribute meaning to visual discourse in architecture that goes beyond a singular practice, beyond the position of one author(-function). This way, the image-based approach to architectural practices and their discourse creates the possibility of distinguishing communities of practice. Communities of practice are usually characterized by concrete exchange and regular interaction. Instead, I suggest that a visual approach reveals more free patterns and loose alliances in the architectural landscape that are not necessarily linked to concrete exchange. Sensibilities, approaches, or concerns come to the fore in the images that practices produce, or more specifically in the direction of these images in the three dimensions discussed.

What I termed the "visual discourse" of a practice as a hypothesis at the outset of this text can now more aptly be named the idiosyncratic visual discourse of a practice. Visual discourse, on the other hand, is precisely characterized by intervisual links that connect practices, involve the *longue durée* of architecture as a discipline and relate to the wider realm of cultural symbols. In this way, Caruso St John inscribes itself through architectural images into a realm of practices ranging from Schinkel, Semper and Morris to Moretti and Fisker. Equally, Caruso St John relates to a series of contemporary practices that share certain directional cues in and on architectural representations, for example in their use of model photographs, such as Bovenbouw Architectuur or EMI Architekten. Additionally, in relation to the care for façade drawings and the relation to technical sections, Sergison Bates architects come to mind. In the way they direct isolated representations of projects through a specific décor, on the other hand, certain analogies can be traced to the 35m^3 installation by OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen. However different these architectural firms may be, they share representational strategies for the formulation of their values and positions. These image acts contribute to the continuous formation of visual discourse across the architectural landscape.

Since an image cannot actually "speak a thousand words" but merely holds them implicitly; it requires a visually driven criticism to distil their potential meanings. Such criticism of architectural images then involves both pinpointing the acts of direction of possible interpretations, pointing out what is at stake for a specific practice such as Caruso St John Architects, as well as positioning the images critically in the field of architecture and culture at large. The notion of intervisuality allows for defining critical connections and distinctions between specific practices of image-making and ways of operating within the broader field of visual architectural discourse.

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