

LONDON

the tumblr grand tour.

j.bell

Architecture circulates as imagery. Although building is a unique spatial experience, we tend to learn about the discipline through two-dimensional images.

The Modern Movement was disseminated through photography, a willing collaborator that served to exaggerate and enhance clean lines, heroic singularity and industrialised forms, materials and processes. As a result, buildings are increasingly portrayed through a handful of carefully selected "hero shots", reducing complex spatial and structural arrangements to eye candy.

The re-dissemination of such imagery was once the preserve of monographs and slide libraries, a narrow, elitist realm that helped architecture retain the lustre and aura of its subject matter. Despite being reduced to visual ciphers of their true selves, these buildings somehow remained authentic. But in an age of universal, unavoidable, inevitable mechanical reproduction, the aura of authenticity has been set free. Released from the tedious mire of information and even attribution, architectural imagery has been unburdened by the Internet. The Grand Tour is now little more than a constantly updated tumblr slideshow, a chaotically curated jumble of "inspirational" images set adrift from any cultural or social waypoint. Contemporary architectural re-dissemination has eschewed theory for image. This relentlessly visual approach is semantically aligned with language and psychology of food and consumption; images are "served" up, collections of pictures described as a visual feast, views are "delicious".

PROCESS, STRUCTURE, PLACE AND MEMORY ARE VICIOUSLY AXED UNTIL ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE RESEMBLES A BUFFET IN A LAS VEGAS CASINO: A BRIGHTLY COLOURED RIOT OF UNSUSTAINING NUGGETS, HORMONE-INJECTED STEAKS AND CORN SYRUP SOAKED DESSERTS.

The early lament that photography was acting as a co-conspirator to modernism, airbrushing out its imperfections, is dulled now the resulting imagery is torn from its moorings and cast loose online, without context or coherence. What does this emphasis on "inspiration" actually mean? The flattening of architectural history into an infinitely scrolling page of "tasty" visual morsels is matched by a rising desire for real, meaningful imagery. Unfortunately, authenticity is a loaded subject on the Internet, which by its nature is a machine for creating mechanical reproductions. Any lingering sense of aura is sustained mainly by deception. If something appears hyperreal, it's inevitably false. Hence the focus on craft, handmade, non-digital processes, like letterpress or screen-print; a visual eclecticism directly related to the relentlessly rotating drum of representation.

Another upshot of this reliance on instant-hit imagery is the emergence of unashamed architecture of spectacle: buildings that take their aesthetic from glossy CGI surfaces, structures designed to reduce well to 72 pixel squared icons. All the better for a building to be disseminated and re-disseminated, assembled alongside the other jack-daw-snaffled imagery that makes up the tilt shift aesthetic sensibilities of the typical design-centric weblog, with its artificially skewed focus and disorientating scale.

We no longer have time for Lacan's gaze, only a glance. Visual tropes like high dynamic range and Instagram are appropriate metaphors for the age, satiating our desire to see every facet instantly. Architecture is in danger of descending into this rabbit hole of visual chaos, flattened to a surface that can only be skimmed, never dredged. We age, distort, shine and scuff, creating a visual landscape without a road map, sold to us via the soft cushion of nostalgia, and leading, perhaps, to a wilderness without end.

Jonathan Bell is editor of Things Magazine, whose popular blog has been curating the Internet since 2001. thingsmagazine.net

NEW YORK

distinct positions.

g.manaugh

Fulcrum: *How and why did you start BLDGBLOG?*

Geoff Manaugh: At the time I was working on a novel, but I wanted to make further headway into fiction via blogging, and to pursue my interests in architecture. It seemed like architecture offered a sort of "tag cloud", with so many different things to cover, whether it was ruined cities, the space program, plate tectonics, science fiction films or foreclosed homes.

ANY NUMBER OF DIFFERENT THEMES CAN BE TIED BACK TO ARCHITECTURE. IT SEEMED LIKE AN UNBELIEVABLY RICH FIELD TO MINE FOR DAILY WRITING PRACTISE WITH A FICTIONAL BENT.

Blogging for me is not about just finding something and supplying a link; it's an attempt to determine what the implications of something might be, the unexpected future application of an idea, technology, or place, to see if something can be developed speculatively—to find value in an idea beyond what it is itself.

Architecture is something that has always interested me, but every time I went to the architecture section in a bookstore, or read an architectural magazine, I was bewildered at how they managed to cover everything that wasn't interesting about architecture. There was a massive and gaping hole in the field. Surely, I thought, there had to be other people like me who weren't being catered to by the architectural press. Surely, there are other people who want to read about ruined cities and movie sets, not just reviews of new opera houses or museum extensions for the 1%. The things I focused on in the first few years were not really in the architectural press at the time, and I feel like bloggers en masse have made people realise

that there's a huge audience for a different type of architecture writing. We can find spatial ideas worthy of attention far outside the offices of Frank Gehry or OMA. Of course, you see vague gestures to this type of coverage in even the mainstream press today, which I hope is an exciting long-term legacy of blogging.

F: *Are you optimistic about the future of blogging?*

GM: Corporate control over blogging is creeping into the picture. The lack of new, independently authored architecture blogs is an interesting indication of that. Writers are now gravitating back towards larger sites and getting swallowed up by these media superstructures.

F: *There is a division too between those republishing press releases and those with original content.*

GM: There were some early comment threads on certain architectural sites saying things like 'what's the point of this website, it just republishes press releases'. The editors defended their sites by claiming that the goal was not to offer original editorial feedback, but to get content onto the Internet faster than other websites. That moment really lowered the bar of what it meant to run an architectural blog. I do feel that the early architectural bloggers had a genuine editorial viewpoint. In Bryan Finoki's case [Subtopia], he made you realise that we need to look at military urbanism, to find ways that architectural or urban space is being militarised and becoming a surveilled part of a police apparatus. This is a very distinct position.

But then these new websites came along and all they wanted to do was post blog-friendly images and press releases. They inadvertently realised the dark fantasy of everyone who claimed that all blogging can be is superficial and contentless. They literally made that fantasy real.

Geoff Manaugh has been speculating about architecture, the city and landscape for almost ten years. bldgblog.blogspot.com



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Anthony   photocopies?

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James   @tony fairly professional looking photocopies! Also the dean at the AA went to China and found a book authored by him which he had not written. Someone had taken the free video content uploaded on AA website.

16 minutes ago · Like



Jack Self do you mind if I use this on the back of a Fulcrum? It's amazing.

4 minutes ago · Like