

## No Break Out Insight

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**Abstract:** For the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were frequent powerful forays against the arrogance of the architectural profession and their disengagement from the realities of occupants' lives and their visions.

Why was there frequently negligible post-occupancy evaluation of buildings?

Why were architects so bad at user-participation to create consensually shared visionary briefs?

Why did architects pay such a fortune for architectural photography and its exclusion of occupant's inhabitation from those images? And why in turn did they seek to control and promote all criticism of their work in publications through dissemination of those same images, the cost of which, in turn, denuded any decent editorial budget for seriously researched criticism of architectural process, (if editors chose to independently commission photographs).

The forays, while being concerted, were, it would seem, ineffectual.

Does it matter? Were there very good reasons for these collapses? Were the premises of these forays flawed philosophically from the outset? Maybe?

The outcome, nevertheless, was the considerable ongoing disempowerment of the user and how that was captured in images; the exclusion of occupancy was possibly devastating and insidious in its propaganda messages through the magazines: maybe it spoke volumes about a detachment from a close sensitivity to a particular client culture's occupancy. They are in the architectural profession, I will argue, not much further forward in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century either.

But have we, in Interiors, free of that institutional collective arrogance, and with our origins in a user/design culture, and with a chance to make our own values in a different publishing industry, fared any better? Surely we, who profess an intimacy with the detail of distinct occupancy, should have bound into our working contracts with clients, the need for funded post-occupancy evaluation. We should have pioneered a whole new politics of the photography of building occupancy; we should have found ways to properly finance in-depth journalistic research of how successful design has, or has not made a better world for occupants. Have we done this? Is it being done with any rigour and consistency by sections of our discipline, or does it remain on the margins, locked in academe, or buried in the fringes of facilities management's conferences?

If the answers to those questions is still no, (and this paper will research those questions and review briefly the history of the architectural professions attempts to grapple with them) then do we have to look to the processes of apprenticeship in our discipline, where such values are subliminally engendered, to alter such a situation? Recognising that architectural and design education is frequently conducted with little or no interface with real user occupancy and their demands, (before or after the process) have we simply repeated, and mirrored the processes of trendy architectural training. Is that random art-house contextual 'mapping' of place that has spread outwards from the capitol's education hot-houses across the UK, at best a poor substitute to sensitising young designers to the political minefields of participatory design, or at worst, deliberate obscurantism to set up another impenetrable professional arrogance?

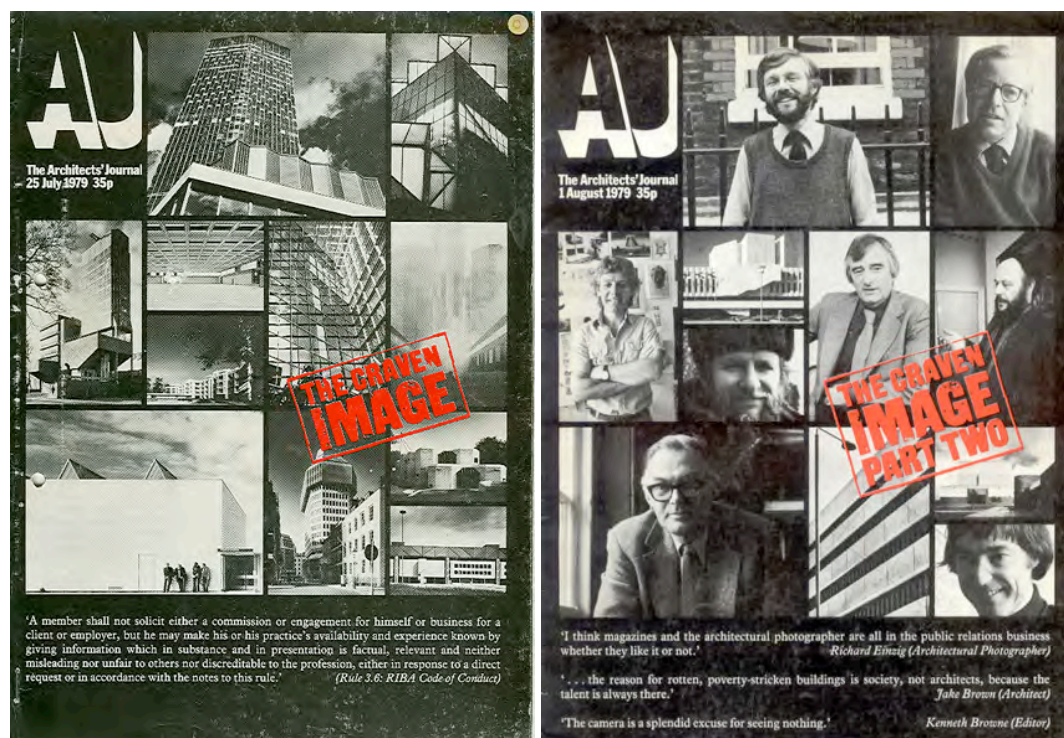
This paper will illustrate the financial equation that dominates design publishing, and undermines the possibility of substantial design criticism ever getting a decent foothold. It will also through original research and questionnaires with current magazine editors and photographers, who focus mostly on our discipline's work, check -out current practice and any signs of radical shifts in that equation. It will review the historical arguments and outcomes of the forays mentioned above in the architectural profession in the last 3 decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century and chart the marginal efforts to counter that in current practice. It will seek to map historically in UK design education, the spread of the 'mappers' and ask whether the sets of thinking that underpin this set of ideas, takes us closer to a more occupant sensitive environment of further away into professional obscurantism.

### The Unoccupied Image

"In the middle of a depressed construction industry, in the growing crisis of western capitalism, the architectural photograph does its little bit to create a false optimism. Architects may well stop buying the architectural magazines and journals if they were only told the "truth," but soon there maybe few important buildings to encourage them to worship. Papers will then have to be filled with rehabilitation."<sup>1</sup>

No, this was not last week's feature page comment column. This was Tom Picton, writing thirty years ago, almost to this week. The year was 1979; the month, August. Thatcher had come to power. Decades of debate on user- empowerment, worker-participation, cooperation and collaboration, a questioning of architectural arrogance, all these were about to be washed away under a tide of monetarist authoritarianism. Only the unchallenging palliative of 'Community Architecture' and side- shows from the Royal prerogative would grab the airwaves, and in their turn act as a smokescreen for a brutal shift in architectural patronage, as the public sector was abandoned to privatisation.



Tom Picton's ground-breaking and devastating critique of architectural photography in 2 issues of the Architectural Journal

Tom Picton was a photography tutor at the RCA, writing for 'Camerawork,' the radical photography magazine of the *Half Moon Photography Workshop*. He was commissioned by the weekly Architect's Journal (AJ) to investigate the politics of architectural photography. The result was two 16 page articles, published over two weeks under the telling title, "The Craven Image."<sup>2</sup> The first issue was an essay; the second, a series of verbatim interviews with photographers, editors and clients. He didn't paint a polite picture.

"This is how our cities will look," he intoned early on in the essay; "when the neutron missiles arrive....illuminated by the flash of the last atomic bomb....they provide an impossible dream, a too impossible nightmare"<sup>3</sup>

"These pictures praise possessions and property in the same way that a medieval missal praises God. The magazines are the illuminated manuscripts of consumerism."

*"There are no people in the interiors because the corpses have already been removed....the photographs have a necrophilic excellence"<sup>4</sup>..... and then ramping up the critique.....*

*"Architectural photographers became lackeys to a greedy capitalism...tech - sergeants to a chromium plated barbarism"<sup>5</sup>....*

*"We would suspect a journalist who wrote advertising copy for the architect in his spare time. But the architectural photographer does precisely that, living in a strange moral twilight"<sup>6</sup>.*

One of his interviewees, the legendary photographer/writer, John Donat, put it more bluntly about his fellow photographers. *"Photography just started imitating modern art, and most of the classic modern architectural photographs are imitations of Mondrian or of abstract art or Duchamp. I mean they exclude people, they abstract reality....the picture is more important than the content"<sup>7</sup>.*

Thirty years ago, the architectural profession was still on the edge of undoing any pretence that its professional code of conduct prevented it from direct advertising. Picton placed on the AJ's front cover, Rule 3.6 of the then, RIBA Code of Conduct: *"A member.....may make his or his practice's availability known by giving information which in substance and in presentation is factual, relevant and neither misleading nor unfair to others...."* Picton inevitably blew most of that out of the water by exposing through his interviews, the levels of untruth created through photography.

Inevitably one of the commissioning agents interviewed riposted, *"Photographs are very artificial....it is therefore quite legitimate to extend this artificiality and stage-managing of the scene to be photographed."* That seems perfectly reasonable, I hear you say. John Donat<sup>8</sup>, giving a talk to the RIBA, entitled it, *"The camera always lies"*. It's naive to expect anything else surely. So why spend 32 pages exploring this in 1979. Why come to a conference 30 years later in 2009 and waste your valuable time re-treading this territory?

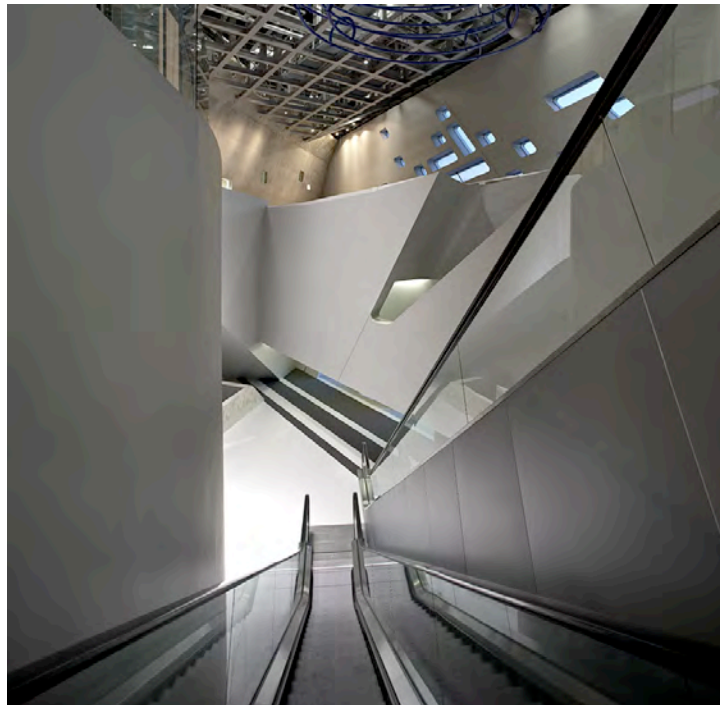
The arguments are as follows: First that properly researched critical architectural discourse in our culture, through the published written word and image, are vital contributions to the practice of architecture. Second, that the economics and politics of architectural journalism, lead the photographer and writer to be complicit in excluding 'occupation' from the architectural appraisal. Third, that the common exclusion of occupants from photos and any sign of their layer of inhabitation, seriously compromises any likely proper understanding of architecture, particularly remodelled existing architecture, and fourth that as architectural publishing has considerable influence on students of the discipline, this exacerbates the problem of their learning context, which also tends to exclude the occupants from the equation.

### **The inequitable fee**

Evidence then and now<sup>9</sup> show that writer's rates are still derisive when compared to those of the architectural photographer. What is valued - the photo - throws that discourse out of kilter. The writer's rates are such that you cannot make a living if you want to do the job properly. How many free-lance architectural journalists reviewing buildings are currently in regular employment? The numbers could be counted on one hand.<sup>10</sup> Why so few? Why is most written discourse done by the very few in-house journalists? The answer is in the publishing budget.

This imbalance tends to have had several detrimental effects. First when magazines did independently commission photos, to offer evidence of the critics observations, the huge imbalance of fees paid for writing and photos (four times as expensive for photos) made it impossible within the fee offered by the magazine, for the writer to do more than take a train journey to the building, meet the architects - if lucky meet the owner, and then pen 1500 words on the return train. The magazine simply couldn't afford to pay the journalists more than a minimum going rate of so many £'s per thousand. There was no money for time talking to users, patrons, facilities managers - following up the engineers, following up the local public, researching the local press response. Post-Occupancy Evaluation (POE) is still a mirage after 30 years of asking for it to be a standard part of any professional design contract.<sup>11</sup> The writers could not, and still cannot, call on such evidence; the proper cross-section of

building users were written out of the journalist's frame of reference. The photos simply confirm that by excluding them from the image frame. The rush for the brand new, in both word and image, was to ensure a poverty of architectural knowledge on how buildings were occupied and what worked. Was that good for the body politic of architecture? Building appraisal, as a result, rarely sought to assess against the goals of the commissioning client- and yet isn't that a vital question to answer. Did the design achieve what it was asked to do? In 1995 William Hubbard Jnr. published '*A Theory for Practice: Architecture in three discourses*'<sup>12</sup>. He proposed one of the few convincing appraisal frameworks that encompasses all the participants goals. (in contrast to those formed by Bill Hillier etc al<sup>13</sup>) In the light of this, it is clear that the financing of architectural journalism ensures that what dominates, out of Hubbard's three discourses, is the '*architectural discourse*' ( what the profession values) to the detriment of any debate about the '*market discourse*' ( what the patrons and users value and) and the '*community discourse*' about broader societal values. To engage properly with those missing discourses, requires time, for which there is no money. The photographer has consumed all of the budget. Worse than that, the photographs simply exacerbate that imbalanced discourse, by excluding any sense of this being an inhabited architecture.



*A picture speaks (and costs a lot more) than a thousand words with a tragic consequence for what is valued in architecture. Photo by Richard Bryant.*

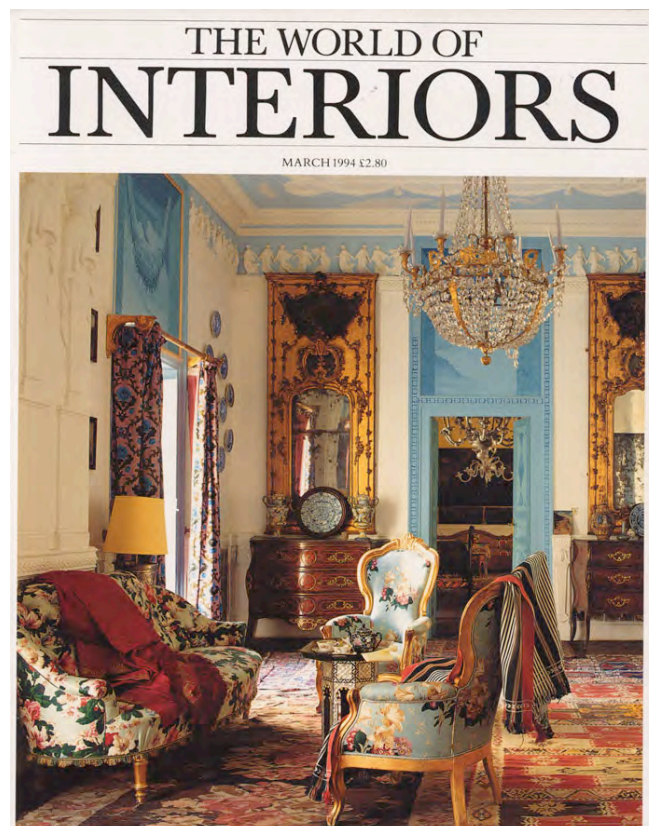
Art editors and editors wanted to use what they had spent such huge sums on, so they placed the images large on the page and the journalist's words small. This meant appraisals often had to be 1500 word max or even less. The price per thousand words made the writer's fee small. The fee limited the research time. When challenged, this was frequently justified by the familiar refrain, "well, architects don't read" ... reinforced by anecdotal evidence that practitioners even if they wanted to read, didn't have the time. "A picture speaks a 1000 words", was another favourite riposte, but then the content of the message depends on who owns the image and what's their motive.

If we accept, as several of those interviewed 30 years ago stated that, "*our first image of an important building is usually a photograph. When we visit the site we compare it with the memory of those pictures. Architecture is mediated by the photographer. He/she becomes the key figure in our experience. That is why they are so important and cannot be ignored when they mislead*"<sup>14</sup>. What happens if they utterly ignore occupation? Surely the poverty of architectural appropriateness is exponential.

### Inverting the question

One of the standard jokes or gripes of the first-time archi-tourist visitor is to be shocked by the actual context around the icon. Everything is changed by that, just as the reality of occupation internally is frequently another shock both to the tourist and the designer re-visiting. All the onlooker is left with, is to think how the pure image in their memory has been trashed; the thought then easily slips into, what philistines the users are. How can they have so misunderstood the architect's intent: and here we have the rub of a profound disquiet to which we shall return. The question needs inverting. How could the designer get the fit of occupancy and the architecture so wrong? Maybe because they had grown up never having it brought to their attention.

Magazines stopped independently commissioning architectural photography some time ago. They simply couldn't afford it<sup>15</sup>. The prime cost was passed to the architect/design profession, the client and the contractors or suppliers, or it resulted in architects more and more believing they could (badly) do their own! (the bane of most architectural photographer's livelihoods,). The journals still pay a copyright fee to the photographer, but they have no say over the content other than selecting from a pre-edited selection. This change was beginning 30 years ago. Questionnaires today reveal, for example, one of the most well-known photographers has only "1% commissioned by magazines, as opposed to 60% fifteen years ago"<sup>16</sup>. Over the last 30 years, architectural photographers have formed themselves into agencies to cut admin time and costs for their collective archives<sup>17</sup>. This all has to be paid for somewhere. The image portfolios are thus tightly managed; there is only one truth; all this simply ratchets up the power of the promotional photo that excludes signs of human life. So we are only getting what the owners PR and the architects PR or the hired PR agencies want us to see. The workers in these building, the occupants, have no PR agency representing their interests. Does this matter?



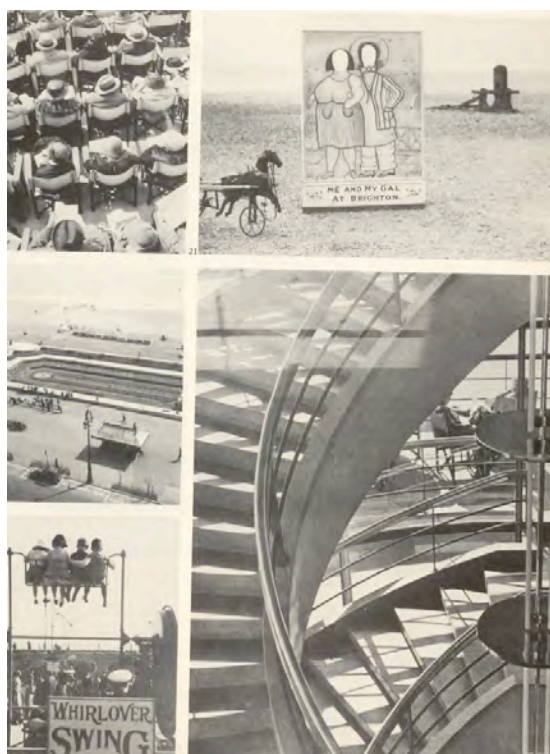
*The dominant photographic mode in architecture fixed, dead, uninhabited and tidy.*

If we shift focus to the world of the designer-apprentice, embalmed in their hot-houses of higher education; where do they meet building users in their years of instruction? How do they learn the skill of reading 'user/client cultures'? How do they understand the layer of

occupation, the fit of the 'client-culture' to the physical frame? Aren't magazines one of their main sources – but the occupants are not there. When they scan the burgeoning shelves of monographs, the bulging magazine-racks searching for clues, all they will find is 'day-one' (or even prior to occupation) shots of sunlight filled Mondrian-esque abstractions: not a soul in sight, and if they do spot actual occupation, they are clearly posed by members of the design team. They have a 'World of Interiors' 'Grand Designs' tidiness, a 'National Trust' time-fixated deadness. The table impossibly neatly laid waiting for the esteemed visitors who will never come, as though we all have butlers and don't drop crumbs. They might find a critical clue in the writing, but on the net they will find mostly non-refereed PR gush on behalf of the designer or patron. The occupant is invisible. So they latch onto the fashionable random situationist "mapping" technique spawned by tutors from the Bartlett to schools across the UK over the last fifteen years, with the result that the students have a false sense of embedded-ness in that 'place', which is in fact utterly arbitrary, and certainly avoids any real contact with members of the public.

As Picton's interviews showed, photographers were quick to explain away this lack of occupation.<sup>18</sup> There were the constraints of film technology coping with huge ranges of contrast and depth of field. Some photographers turned up with van-loads of lights, tripods, assistants and even their own plants – with the implication being you had to stage manage the shot, and for this you needed to disrupt occupation, so the easiest thing was to clear the zone of the photograph, or do it early in the morning or late afternoon. (A few, it has to be said – Martin Charles, John Donat and Morley Von Sternberg, rejected such arguments and practice.)

Once film technology had sorted the complexity of balancing the vast variety of hues coming from artificial light sources, photographing buildings at night, after all the occupants had gone home, was a liberation, particularly when those all-glass architectural elevations revealed their interiors to the street so conveniently at night. You no longer needed to wait for the sun. Thirty years on, these photographers can now add post-9/11 security controls, and issues of identity theft or child protection as a new set of techno justifications for their ghostly Mondrian-esque abstractions.

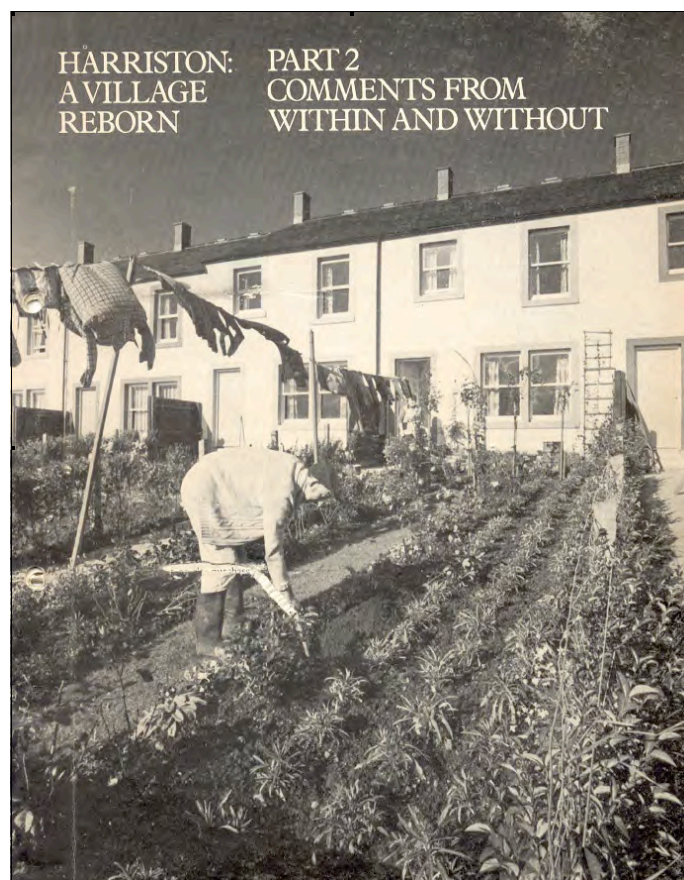


*Environment as lived: from Picton's "Craven Image" AJ critique, photos by Laszlo Maholy - Nagy*

Of course there have been, and still are exceptions, some intentional, others motivated by different agendas. Picton praised the work of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century photographer Henri Cartier Bresson<sup>19</sup>. He also picked out Laszlo Moholy- Nagy's photos for the Architectural Review's special 'Seaside' issue of 1936. After finding the two by three and a half inch en-prints or contacts from the local chemist in the AR's archive, he wrote "*they do not impress by their size or their glossiness. They lack professional glitter, but show a human face. They share a delight in seaside pleasures. They do not look at the proletariat with a middle-class smugness, like some of the AR's 'Manplan' issues of 1969*".

### Breaking the mould

There have been rare moments when Architectural magazines have shocked their audiences by breaking the image mould. The most infamous UK 20<sup>th</sup> Century example being that year-long Architectural Review's 'Manplan' series, in 1969<sup>20</sup>. The profession was outraged, clearly suffering withdrawal symptoms after not being fed their usual monthly diet of pornographic building flattery.



*In the Maholy Nagy tradition: architecture as backdrop to inhabitation; rare 35mm architectural photography for the AJ by Phil Sayer, a portrait / landscape photographer.*

Another rupture came for a brief period when the Architect's Journal (AJ) in the late eighties commissioned portrait photographer Philip Sayer to do architecture. (this style was continued later in the *Designers Journal* and *Blueprint* – the common link was Art Editor Simon Esterson) . For a brief period there were a remarkable set of architectural photographs<sup>21</sup> ( all black and white and on 35mm SLR cameras – as opposed to the heavy plate tripod format of most architectural photographers at the time). These captured and balanced 'occupation' and the 'architecture' in a new reading. It didn't last – eventually even Sayer got tired of waiting for the sun, even though as Picton quoting Henri Cartier-Bresson wrote. "*The secret is always work with the same fast film in a slight overcast. The sun is very annoying in photography: it dictates, it imposes itself. Slightly overcast weather allows you to range freely round your subject, it's 'manageable' weather.*"<sup>22</sup>

For a brief moment in the early 90's it seemed another breakthrough might occur. The agenda of the 'extra-ordinariness of the ordinary' as espoused so poetically by Caruso St John and many others from the studio influence of Florian Biegel, burst onto Blueprint's pages in grainy black and white with their own 'distressed' house interior in Highbury<sup>23</sup>. For those of us with the remodelling of existing architecture focus, this seemed a rare moment of intriguing sanity. It spoke of 'time' and 'memory', something the newness of day-one new-build architectural photography had no intention or capability of encompassing. It equally suggested another challenge to photography, to capture that ordinariness of daily life and occupation, but this, it seemed, was not to be. Photos of Caruso St John's work evolved into more 'art-house', photo-shoot compositions, refreshing because of their lack of gloss and glamour in a decade obsessed with over-consumption of the iconically new, but it didn't further the occupation cause. You were simply left thinking how could, or did anybody, ordinary, and ordinarily, live in such environments?<sup>24</sup> Mind you, that may not be surprising given that Rowan Moore reported that "*they seek to reveal this 'secret life' by presenting the normal oddly*"<sup>25</sup>. Is that what determined the photography?



Less shiny, more ordinary, but still 'art-house' and lacking real inhabitation. Caruso St John at Highbury

In the frantic corporate excesses of the 1990's ushered in by Thatcher's 'Big Bang' deregulation in the late 80's, Blueprint published the *Tomato* Agencies' HQ in Soho in June 1997<sup>26</sup>, designed by 25 year-old Architectural Association architects Graham Williamson and Zoe Smith's practice 24/Seven (now Block Architecture). This appeared to be another breakthrough - architectural photography's 'punk' moment. Here was a design vocabulary, a client's set of values that seemed an assault on the expectation of corporate (occupant-less) faceless design. The magazine's multiple tapestry-like image layout and content suggested a whole other narrative. (They also signalled the early marketing of digital camera technology).





*Radical publishing breakthrough – a sign of a new technology or simply another clever PR strategy. The Tomato HQ Soho as published in Blueprint*

Occupation in all its messy reality was to the fore – although again, no actual occupants were visible. There was only their detritus of living made even more striking because of the second-hand flea market aesthetic of the fit-out. Like so much of Blueprint's output, this may have been simply a crude complicit publicity stunt to mark *Tomato* out, in the highly competitive marketplace of advertising agencies. But it was a wake-up call of sorts. The digital holiday-snap multi-image occupation-oriented format that the *Tomato* publication promoted, became the regular fare of magazines like *Frame*, *Icon* and *Wallpaper* that were to follow in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Their model lifestyle and model audience was the elite party-snapping, globe-trotting or at least internet globe-hopping imagery of *Vanity Fair*, and *Vogue*. This was muddled with a 'holiday-snap' language that reminded its readers that essentially they were all wealthy archi-tourists, who certainly didn't want to, or didn't have time to study plans and sections. This shift was a paradoxically fatal one, given that the images were coming from a more 'interiors' obsessed set of publications. (One other unintentional outcome of this photo genre, was that as there was only one image of each building, and they were frequently so badly photographed, and so small – and the reader certainly never had any drawings to investigate, the outcome was that the reader was at least forced to go and visit the built reality, in all its complex context of occupation. There was a certain honesty in these crude small images; but that later gave way to double spread single images with a few words, reverting back to the worst of the journalistic 'we got there first – see the scaffolding's hardly down, but look at the *star-architects* latest feat of daring!' Try this one for size on your next project!

The odd architectural monograph has broken the mould. Koolhaas can always be relied on to do that; it is no surprise that Caruso St John in their exorbitantly priced current monograph "*Almost everything*"<sup>27</sup> do all that is possible to avoid the dominant architectural photography formula: but long before them, Heman Hertzberger's '*Lessons for students in Architecture*'<sup>28</sup> opened with a photo of two over-sized ladies having a meal in a street at a table jammed between two parked cars. Nearly all the B+W image of his interiors were full of people and everyday occupation.



*The humanist Hertzberger breaking monograph conventions through inhabited photography*

Curiously the one single large colour image in that monograph was of an intensely occupied 'hippy' environment of Centraal Beheer, in its early days of occupation.<sup>29</sup> This photo was to become hugely more poignant because of what Beheer was to eventually become, a reversion to standard corporate interiors and predictable alienating social behaviour.



*Hertzberger's Centraal Beheer – rare dose of interior reality*

### **Stuck in a frozen past**

Despite the plethora of design and building publications focussed on multiple audiences that proliferated over the last two decades, and the millions and millions of high gloss, now digitalised, photographs, the occupied image message still remains profoundly stuck in that *World of Interiors*, *National Trust*, *Country Life* imagery, where everything looks as though it is waiting for life to arrive; forced into a frozen timelessness, in its attempt to represent in a single frame, all of life, and yet no life: It's cold hand of ageless death excludes occupancy.

Thirty years on from Picton's essay and interviews, have the current major practitioners of architectural photography explored new territory with the new technology to capture proper, or at least a different image of interior occupation? Given that remodelling existing buildings is acknowledged as over 50% of the architectural profession workload, forcing most of the focus on a new interior ( rather than shiny sun- splashed elevations in context-less green fields) has this produced a new genre of user -occupied images? Is this reflected in the volume of their commissions? " No " said one, " *probably because they are not considered remarkable enough...which may be true. However*", he acknowledged, " *there may be inventive work that slips under the radar of many journalists.*" For another, the facts were more blunt." *In my experience* ", the respondent wrote, " *architects give more attention to having new projects photographed, because of the need for publication in order to get more work; they tend to spend more on photographing new buildings.*" Picton would recognise the trait. Nothing's new.

Do they approach that remodelling work differently? All gave a resounding "no". Are they being independently commissioned by the magazines to serve the cause of independent architectural critiques? Most said "No". Who is now controlling the public archive of images, filtering a particular truth? They are, vetted by their clients, (architects and building owners) but not in all cases." Are the new constraints of post 9/11, post-celebrity and identity protection, making the task of imaging complete occupation even more awkward? "Yes".

### **The writer's photograph**

A current series of occupied interiors, interestingly published through a major national broadsheet newspaper, throws all this debate into yet another sharp relief. The Saturday Guardian has been host to 'Writers Rooms' for some years now, photographed by the Guardian's picture editor Eammon McCabe. He rose to photographic prominence for his sports portraiture. The writer's room process includes sending the writer the picture to be published, and asking them to write a fixed number of words to explain the significance of objects in the room.

The room images are curiously flat. They demonstrate none of the 'art' of say, Phil Sayer's room portraits – and certainly nothing to do with *World of Interiors* photos shoots. McCabe's are essentially very 'ordinary', the sort of images seemingly that you and I would take, maybe with the simplest of cameras. (This is of course not the reality, but it appears that way.) There seems to be no artifice. There is no artful lighting or funny angles of composition. No forceful fore-grounding of striking objects. Most things in the room are given even weight. He often has very little time to do the photograph. They are as full a record of that moment in the writer's life where he or she does their writing. There are no occupants visible, but all the multifarious signs of occupancy come jumping off the page. Readers are fascinated by these privacy-breaking peeks behind this particular curtain of creativity, because hidden in those layers of occupancy there are clues, memories, history, poetry, loves lost and gained, life lived in all its peculiarities. A fiction is laid out in the image. A life's diary of significant events are made flesh. The occupancy *is* the architecture – the richness of both layers working together is a feast for the eyes. Readers get most upset when, for other editorial reasons, the weekly image does not appear.

Is there any artifice in the photos? McCabe acknowledges the use of one artificial light source sometimes, but this is not to highlight and create drama in the room, but simply to balance everything up, so that all is revealed. It also allows him to show the view out of the window – sometimes a vital component of the writer's creative process. He does use a 40mm perspective-correcting lens (not on a digital camera) so that he can get in as much of the room as possible without distorting its proportions. (Remember these are frequently tiny rooms). Do the writers tidy up before he comes? Of course he can never be one hundred per

cent sure, and even McCabe acknowledges he removed some strewn papers from his own studio floor before I arrived to interview him – and yet naturally that does not alter the essence of McCabe's studio life, the accretions of time. It changes one trivial action, on one day. The last photos of the *Writer's Room* series, when, and if it has to come to an end one day, will be his studio.



*Beryl Bainbridge interior by Eammon McCabe for the Guardian. No person but all of life's narrative in the image.*

On the whole he senses the writers do not set up an image for him. He arrived at the first assignment of the series, to Beryl Bainbridge<sup>30</sup>, only to find a gun on her desk, which she had no intention of removing. McCabe takes them as they are. Maybe the pen-top is not always off the pen, as though caught on the word of the seventh chapter, but the majority of that life in the room is as it was everyday of many past years. The writers demonstrate no desire to arrange a fixed 'designed' view of their life. The room *is* their life. Very few of the rooms illustrate anything that would have Kevin McLeod dragging them into a *Grand Designs* programme.



*V.S. Naipul's writing interior by Eammon McCabe for the Guardian. More designerly or disturbingly chilling?*

Only V.S. Naipul displayed a somewhat manically ordered and minimalist interior<sup>31</sup>. McCabe found that somewhat disarming and cold, but also an extension of all that he had heard about Naipul's character and personality from his reading and other anecdotal conversations. (Designers beware!).

So how should we spatial/material design obsessed practitioners take all this; there are photographers critical of the seeming artlessness of McCabe's photography; they clearly feel he is doing a disservice to their profession? But maybe they mistake his very deliberate intent. He is neither for the architecture or the portrait but for 'life' as actually lived.

Do we dismiss the images as having nothing to say to the world of architectural photography, simply because the rooms are so private and domestic, that their layers of unarranged disordered overt private exposure are peculiar to that circumstance alone? We should not.

Or is this series of images importantly an unintentional guerrilla action, assaulting and making us question the very ground rules of the way we design, let alone, make, architectural photography.

These images of McCabe's are not PR for writers or PR for Design, as architectural photographs are dishonest promotional job-seeking tools for the profession; but are they nevertheless a useful truth to which we should heed?



*Eammon McCaeb's photos of writer's interiors (here Will Self's) usefully challenge dominant photographic values in architecture.*

What do we as designers feel about Will Self's *post-it* note strewn walls<sup>32</sup>. His room may be an extreme. The actual architecture of the room is almost expunged. Maybe the quality of the space and detail were irrelevant? The architectural reader might quickly point out, that for them, they need to see the architecture alone, the bits the professional is responsible for. Occupancy merely hinder that study; but such a response only confirms the critique of Hubbard and the telling attack of Stewart Brand in his aptly entitled book '*How Buildings Learn – what happens after they are built*<sup>33</sup>.' Do these images such as Will Self's room, simply reinforce us in our designer prejudices? Do we see them as a demonstration of a philistine, spatially illiterate, but nevertheless literary-dominated British culture, which has little sensibility towards quality design patronage. Is that what we think?

Do we simply say, it's writers; their environment is inevitably in their head; their decisions on their actual surroundings are almost immaterial, or at least operating in another sphere, to another set of values?

Maybe we need to challenge that observation with the thesis of William Hubbard Jnr. again, when he argued that the only realm in which you find powerful depictions and understandings

of a 'sense of place' are in fiction. Only in fiction does one find a full atmospheric social value-loaded vivid living architecture<sup>34</sup>. You will never find it in architectural publications in word or image.

So is the 'architecture-or-occupation' question a false dichotomy? Are we really incapable of finding a way of photographing, and much more importantly designing a living architecture that comfortably evolves over time, and that is empathetic to complex inhabitation? Architectural photography does need to find a new language appropriate to the remodelling of existing lived-in buildings, but of course that will only be possible when the profession has a wake-up call to recognise this in itself demands a very different sensibility, one that architectural photography for over half a decade, and the design attitude it embraces, has successfully kept at bay.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> 'The Craven Image or the apotheosis of the architectural photograph': Tom Picton; Architect's Journal 25.07.79 ; p.189

<sup>2</sup> Ibid: pp 175 - 190 plus 'The Craven Image Part 2': Tom Picton; Architects Journal 01.08.79; pp 225 -242

<sup>3</sup> 'The Craven Image': AJ 25.07.09; p176

<sup>4</sup> Ibid: p.176

<sup>5</sup> Ibid: p189

<sup>6</sup> Ibid : p189

<sup>7</sup> 'The Craven Image'. Part 2: AJ 01.08.79; p232

<sup>8</sup> Ibid: p.232: John Donat was also a writer, broadcaster, film maker and lecturer in architecture; his is the lengthiest and the most revealing of Picton" interviews. His most remarkable publications were as Editor of four volumes of 'World Architecture'; Studio Books: London 1964.

<sup>9</sup> 'Space Time and Journalism, who pays for the Record'. Oct 1985: Paper given to the Society of Architectural Historians at the Victoria and Albert Museum, analysing the reasons ( mainly economic) for the lack of in depth investigation of architectural process and its effect on the dominant values within the profession. Remarkably in 20 years architectural Journalists free-lance wage-rates, as in so much of journalism in general, are still £150-200.00 per 1000 words: at the time Picton was writing it was £100.00 per thousand.

<sup>10</sup> The weekly UK focussed Architect's Journal and the monthly world architecture magazine the Architectural Review, have now been, since Jan 2009 been brought under one editorship and one art editorship. The number of full time employed writers has been steadily reducing over the last 10 years.

<sup>11</sup> During his presidency of the RIBA in the late 1990's Francis Duffy probably did more than anyone to promote POE to building clients and the UK architectural profession, and has done so and practiced it for 3 decades, through DEGW. But their sort of work is still very rare.

<sup>12</sup> 'A Theory for Practice: Architecture in Three Discourses': Bill Hubbard Jr. The MIT Press:1988

<sup>13</sup> However fine Bill Hillier's 'Space Syntax' analysis is, and his earlier four-part framework for architectural assessment, they tend to still be narrowly focussed either on the building professional's way of seeing the world, or on a measurable spatial analysis. They do not embrace all the participants.

<sup>14</sup> 'The Craven Image'; Tom Picton: Architect's Journal 25.07.79; p176

<sup>15</sup> During my period as AJ Building's editor, the range of photographers the magazine could afford to use became smaller and smaller due to the rising photography costs. As current Editor of 'Touchstone the magazine for Architecture in Wales' no photography is commissioned. It is done mostly by the editor. In recent research on this matter, most of the photographers questioned had shifted the major source of their commissions to architects, suppliers and contractors.

<sup>16</sup> Quote from Richard Bryant in response to questionnaire sent to five major architectural photographers: March 2009. Bryant gained his first architectural photography commissions from the AJ in the late 70's but his charges were soon to take him out of the sort of budgets the magazine could use for photographic commissions.

<sup>17</sup> Richard and Lyn Bryant led the way in setting up the agency Arcaid in the mid 80's, purchasing also the famous Richard Einzig collection of architectural photographs. Bryant was not interviewed by Tom Picton.

<sup>18</sup> 'The Craven Image' Part 2: Tom Picton; Architect's Journal 01.08.79; p226 ( interview with Richard Einzig)

<sup>19</sup> ' The Craven Image: Tom Picton: Architects Journal. 25.07.79; p.184

<sup>20</sup> Published for a whole year in 1969, The 'Manplan' series in the Architectural Review was a very dramatic break both in style and content; it was not entirely surprising that those with subscriptions felt this was not the magazine they had signed up to pay for. Tom Picton's interview with Photographer/editor Peter Baistow responsible for much of the photography in the 'Manplan' series, is on p.240 in part 2 of 'The Craven Image'.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Sayer was an established portrait photographer doing work for Crafts magazine ( amongst others), at the point in the early 80's when Art Editor Simon Esterson and the current Buildings Editor of the Architects Journal requested him to photograph building projects. Simon Esterson was later to work with Editor Lance Knobel of the *Designer's Journal* and then Deyan Sudjic on *Blueprint*, using Sayers photographs extensively.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in 'The Craven Image': Tom Picton; Architect's Journal 25.07.79; p.184. Picton selected several Cartier Bresson images to make his point, which are illustrated on this page in the AJ.

<sup>23</sup> 'Minimalism gets rough.' ( on Caruso St John's house in Highbury, London). Rowan Moore: *Blueprint* July/August 1994; p.39-40

<sup>24</sup> The Brick house: Caruso St John: See 'The New Materialists': Jay Merrick; *The Independent* on Sunday: 19.02.06; p.4-5: The austerity of the photographs with no signs of human inhabitation conformed to the predictable genre of abstraction, so popular in architectural photography. "We prefer characterful ugliness to calculated perfection," said Peter St John. I suppose it depends on your definition of 'character' as to how this could be interpreted in the photography.

<sup>25</sup> The full quote by Rowan Moore, was, " What really interests them is what they call ' the secret life of most of the world around us.' Following architectural artists, of whom Gordon Matta Clarke is the one they mention most, they seek to reveal this ' secret life' by presenting the normal oddly." ' *Minimalism gets rough.*' Rowan Moore. *Blueprint*. July / August 1994 p.39-40

<sup>26</sup> ' Anti Style architecture.' Marcus Field; *Blueprint* June 1997; pp.42-44.

<sup>27</sup> 'Almost everything'. Caruso St John: Ediciones Poligrafia. 2009. The shop price for a hardback copy in 2009 is £80.00.

<sup>28</sup> *Lessons for Students in Architecture*. Herman Hertzberger: Utgeverij 010 Publishers, Rotterdam. 1991 (1993 second revised edition). pp8-9.

<sup>29</sup> *Herman Hertzberger 1959-86*. Arnulf Luchinger, Arch-Edition, Den Haag. 1987. P118. For the best critique of Central Beheer when first opened read Architects Journal's *'Building illustrated: Centraal Beheer*. Francis Duffy; AJ. 29.10.75 pp 893-904. The only revisit article to the building was covered in *'Centraal Beheer: through the myths of time.'* Patrick Hannay: Designer's Journal: October 1985. pp. 44-56. Also for Hertzberger's responses to the changes in culture at Centraal Beheer read *'Rye Bread Architecture: A conversation with Herman Hertzberger.'* The Invisible in Architecture: Eds. Ole Bouman and Roemer van Toorn: Academy editions/ Ernst & Sohn: 1994 pp.292-303

<sup>30</sup> The Beryl Bainbridge *Writer's room* feature appeared in the *Guardian*

<sup>31</sup> The V.S Naipul *Writer's room* feature appeared in the *Guardian*

<sup>32</sup> The Will Self *Writer's room* feature appeared in the *Guardian*

<sup>33</sup> *How Buildings learn – what happens after they're built*: Stewart Brand; Viking. 1994

<sup>34</sup> Bill Hubbard Jnr argues this in depth with his Chapter 5 *'Talking across ways of thinking'* pp.121-147 in *'A Theory for Practice; Architecture in Three Discourses.'* MIT press. 1995