Seeing Through the Eyes of Others
Representation and Perceptions of the Changing City

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The perception of reality, now, is mediated by multimedia supports. We observe the world with thousands of eyes that aren't ours. The images that we absorb, often, give us a mere reproduction of the reality and don't offer an interpretation of it. Is our capacity to comprehend reality reduced because we are used to seeing too many images made by occasional photographers without an analytic filter?
This study aims to analyze, through a scientific method, the larger part of images related to one specific place. The analysis will be conducted using a statistic method, analyzing many images and trying to elaborate a graphic strategy that allowing the peculiarity of every analyzed category to emerge.
The categories are made up of printed images, internet images and images present in the social forums.

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1. One architecture, many images

First of all, it is important to note that we are in the era of images. Our capacity to understand the reality and the whole world is strongly related with sight. The revolution of communication and the evolution of the media goes in this way. Every object that we want and we desire passes through our eyes.
So there aren't many things that we can't observe before choosing them. We can see our hotel before making the reservation; we can see a place before booking our holiday and so on. So, probably, we have lost our capacity to describe the world with words only.
We are architects, so we need to communicate with images. But the translation between the 3D complexities into the 2D surface isn't very simple and clear.
All the images that we can see are 2D, so we have elaborated a complex way to decode images in order to understand the space that they show.
I will try to show how a masterpiece of the 20th century has been represented in the last fifty years by professional photographers or by amateur photographers.
I have selected the building of the United Nations because it is one of the most representative pieces of architecture in New York City built in the last century, so it is possible to have many different kinds of representation of this building. It is part of our collective imaginary and it appears in very different situations.

For example it was the backcloth for the title sequence of the film *North by Northwest* by Alfred Hitchcock and has been the scene for fashion photography.

Moreover there are some structural and spatial aspects that allow different analysis.

The building of the United Nations Headquarters began in 1948, with the cornerstone laid on 24 October 1949, and it was completed in 1952. Wallace K. Harrison was named as Director of Planning, and a Board of Design Consultants was made up of architects, planners and engineers nominated by member governments. After much discussion it was determined that a design based on Niemeyer's project (number 32) and Le Corbusier's project (number 23) would be developed for the final project. Le Corbusier and Niemeyer merged their schemes and they were developed into a new project.

The building is composed of three blocks: 1. The Secretariat building, the Tower; 2. The General Assembly, the block with the domed hall; 3. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the large block on the South side.

The three blocks have a very simple shape and they are recognizable from a great distance. So, it is possible for me to determine some of standard configurations of images that represent this building.

Figure 1. *Title sequence of the film North by Northwest of Alfred Hitchcock (1959)*

2. Three categories of images

There are many many images of the U.N.H. building. What are the important images to select during this study? And what are the specific categories that we have individuated? We have already announced that we chose three big categories: the printed photos, the images present on internet sites, and the images coming from social forums.

In the first category there are all the images that have been done by professional photographers, some were artists like Ezra Stoller[1], Samuel H. Gottscho[2] and the photographers that worked in the company of Ewing Galloway[3], others were simply professional photographers like the authors of the official picture of the U.N.H. and the relative postcards.

The second category shows the images that we can see in different kinds of sites. There are sites of architecture, travel and photo sharing (like Flickr Instagram and so on). Here we can find photos taken by

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[1] Ezra Stoller (16 May 1915 – 29 October 2004) was an American architectural photographer. Stoller was born in Chicago. His interest in photography began while he was an architecture student at New York University. His work featured landmarks of modern architecture, including Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building, Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, Alvar Aalto's Finnish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. Stoller is often cited in aiding the spread of the Modern Movement.

[2] Samuel Herman Gottscho (February 8, 1875 - January 28, 1971) was an American architectural, landscape, and nature photographer. Samuel Gottscho was born in Brooklyn, New York. He acquired his first camera in 1896 and took his first photograph at Coney Island. Gottscho became a professional commercial photographer at the age of 50. His photographs have appeared on the covers of American Architect and Architecture, Architectural Record. His portraits and architectural photography regularly appeared in articles in the New York Times. From the early 1940s to the late 1960s, he was a regular contributor to the Times of illustrated articles on wildflowers.

[3] Ewing Galloway (1881-1953) was an American journalist and photo editor, and ran the Ewing Galloway Agency in New York City. In 1920 he opened his own photographic agency on 28th St. in New York. The "Ewing Galloway" by line that appears under many photographs reproduced in books, magazines, schoolbooks, and encyclopaedias', refers to the agency and not to Galloway himself, who learned to operate a camera only later in life. The lack of records from the company makes it impossible to identify the actual photographers.

amateur and other photographers who haven't always much interest in the theme of the correct representation of the space of architecture.

The third category is one where we could find a larger quantity of photos and where we can find a bigger variety of photographers. In fact we find the professional and the amateur and also the people who take photos occasionally and casually.

It is interesting to note that the images on the Google screen, or Yahoo screen, are very different if we write in English, Japanese, Arabic or in the French language.

If we write in English we can find, in the first thirty results, only contemporary photos which are three of the interior, two of the exterior monument (*Sphere Within a Sphere* sculpture by Arnaldo Pomodoro) and the rest represent the exterior of the building.

If we write in Japanese we find more historical photos and interior representations; if we write in Arabic we can also see some images of protest manifestations and in the French language we find more photos of the Non-Violence sculpture by Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd (also known as The Knotted Gun).

There is another set of images that are very interesting for me. They are the images located on the virtual site of United Nations Headquarters: the photos linked with a place and located on the virtual site in Google Earth or Bing.

These kinds of photos are linked with the name that the author gives them. So, for example, there are photos named " N.U.H.Q." and others are named "ONU" and so on. Most of the authors, here, are not professionals'. (Figure 4)

Figure 2. *a. Miss Universe, 1955; b. Evelyn Tripp models, 1950*

Figure 3. *The Google screen with the keywords in four different languages. a. United Nations Headquarters b.* 本社国連; c. المتحدة d. مقرر. الأمم *Siège des Nations Unies*
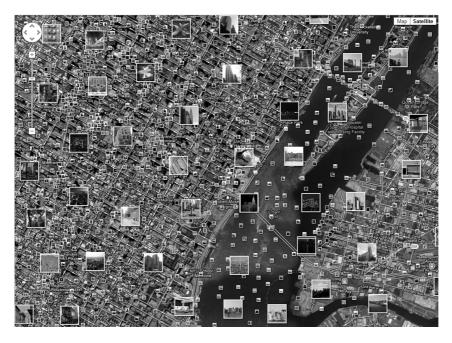
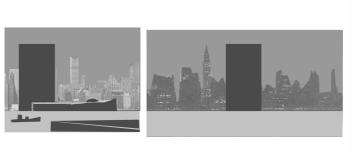Figure 4. *The virtual site of United Nations Headquarters in Google Earth*

Figure 5. *a. Ezra Stoller 1954; b. Ewing Galloway 1951; c. Samuel Herman Gottscho 1956*

3. An Abductive Reasoning

In these three categories we have found a lot of images that are very different. So it is important to describe the method of selecting the images that we can evaluate.

First of all we have only selected images that represent the exterior part of the U.N.H., and we have also excluded the partial photos and the photos that describe the texture or a singular aspect of this architecture.

So we try to analyze the composition of the photos starting with the most important authors.

Most part of these images have been edited in magazines like *Life, New York Times* and *Time* or on specialized magazines like *American Architect and Architecture, Architectural Record*. In these images we have chosen the view from Long Island where we can see the East side of the building. (Figure 5)

This is one of the views that give us an idea of the relation between the city and the architecture of United Nations Headquarters. I have aligned all the photos on the ideal horizon line. Scaling the photos the height of the Secretariat Tower is the same in each one. From this point of view the tower is the most impressive thing that we can see, in fact, the General Assembly with the domed hall, appears in the Stoller photo only. In the photos the tower shows the East façade with its spectacular and innovative, at that time, curtain-wall. Only in the last photo, the Gottscho one, is it possible to see the closed façade on the South side. These images don't have the "falling lines" so every vertical line is exactly perpendicular to the line of the horizon. In the first and the second photos the tower occupies most part of the surface of the photos, it is high two thirds of the total, and it is large between a ¼ or a 1/5 of the total. But, in my opinion, it is clear that the first photo is dedicated to represent the U.N.H. and the others represent only a part of the skyline of New York.

Figure 6. *a. Samuel Herman Gottscho, 1956; b. George Marks, American Institute of Architects, 1959; c. Bert Morgan, 1954; d. Unknown, propriety of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C, (1960?)*

In fact in the first one the Chrysler Building, the highest building that appears in the second one, is covered by the mole of Secretariat Tower.

In Figure 6 I have selected four photos where it is possible to see the North face of the United Nations Headquarters. The photos are aligned on the horizon line. The height of the tower, in the four photos,

has been made the same. It is incredible but in the four photos the Tower has the same width, whereas the block of General Assembly appears in the same position in the first, second and fourth photos. The first photo has been taken by Samuel Herman Gottscho in 1956 and I think that it is the most inspiring and harmonic one. The other photos that we have examined have been printed and are also postcards. In Figure 7 some postcards, like the third and the fourth, are very similar to the photos, which we have seen before, by Ewing Galloway of 1951 and Samuel Herman Gottscho of 1956.

There aren't so many book covers with the image of the U.N.H.. It's impossible to do an analysis with so few images. But it is interesting to note that there is one photo that follows the same construction of the Gottsho one.

In the second category we analyze photos that are on the Flickr site. Here we can find, approximately, 14.000 photos. Most of these are made by amateurs, but there are many photos made by professional photographers. If we use the filter "Recent", inside the Flickr site, the results are, in the first pages, only photos of political demonstrations. If we use the filter "Importance" we can find a lot of exterior photos and if we use the "Ranking" one we discover a lot of photos that show the *coloured world* of New York and of the U.N.H.

I have chosen, for this analysis, a set of photos that have the same composition: they showing the North face of the U.N.H. and follow the geometrical construction of the Gottsho photo.

In these photos we can individuate the curve line of the General Assembly and the vertical block of the Secretariat Tower. Most part of the images show a partial view of the building, only a few are related to the entire building. I have made the graphical analysis giving the same dimension at the close façade and also I have aligned all the photos with the horizontal line. These photos aren't professional, so there are many falling lines and the position of the Tower does not always balance the composition. Figure 11 shows the overlap of the full part of U.N.H. It is possible to note that compositions are very different and the corner of the General Assembly block has different heights in each photo.

Figure 12 shows photos that follow the geometrical construction of the photo made by Gottscho with more closely.

Figure 7. *Postcard edited by U.N. NYC; b. Created Acacia Card Company; c. Postcard edited by the NYC State; d. Curt Teich Postcard 1961*
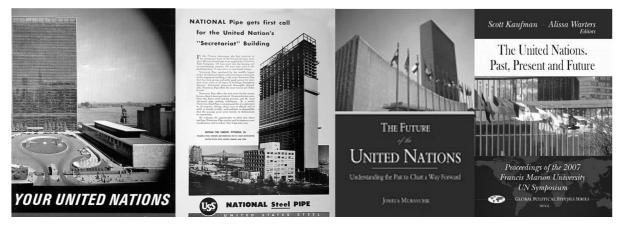

Figure 8. *a. Cover of a guide edited by U.N.; b. a notice published on a newspaper; c.d. Covers of conference proceedings*

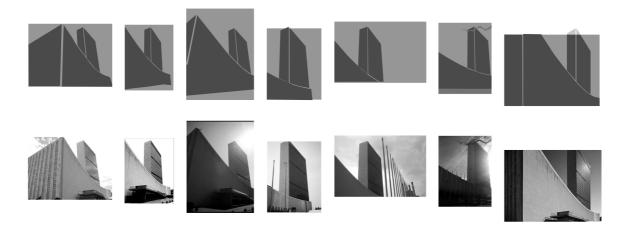Figure 9. *Flickr screen with the keyword United Nations Headquarters*

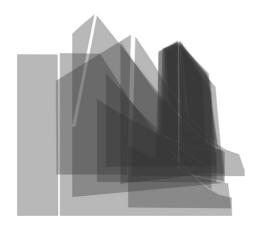Figure 10. *Analysis of photos from Flickr screen*

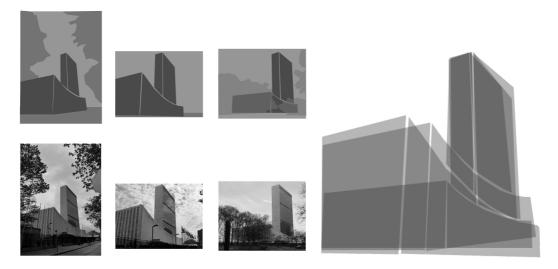Figure 11. *The overlap of photos from Flickr screen*

Figure 12. *Analysis of Flickr photos that are similar to Gottsho one. The overlap of these photos*

In the overlapped one we can see how dimensions of the corner of the General Assembly block is more balanced with the dimension of the Tower.

The last two images, Figure 13 and Figure 14 show the comparison between the casual images of Google screen and the photo by Gottsho. It is interesting to note that photos taken by occasional photographers have the horizontal line outside the field of the image and have many falling lines. Moreover in the fourth example the height of the Secretariat Tower has been cut by the photo.

After viewing hundreds of images related to the same site and, in part, taken from the same point of view we would say that the quality of the images that we see normally *Through the Eyes of Others* does not respect the rules of photographic composition.

Analysis showed that the choices and taste and of the great photographers of the past such as Gottsho are still present but in a convoluted form.