ArchDaily and Representations of Domestic Architecture in the era of Digital Platforms

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Abstract

At present, *ArchDaily.com* is the most visited virtual architecture platform in the world. Aware of the importance acquired in the architectural practice, the site declares itself to be the main source from which architects feed on tools, information and inspiration to develop their projects. However, it is clear that its importance is not limited to its status as reference bank for professional practice. The accumulation of visual and textual representations contributes to the idea of "good architecture", in turn transforming this platform into an institution validating and legitimizing the understanding of the discipline, its scope and limitations, its protagonists and predominant methods applied. The following pages propose an analysis of the platform's content in its residential architecture section, an analysis that supports a critical reflection on its wider cultural effects.

Keywords: digital era, digital platform, project diffusion, residential architecture, space representation

Introduction

Since the development of digital technologies at the end of the last century, architecture has undergone numerous changes in the processes of design, construction and diffusion whose magnitude and scope have yet to be fully thought through, assimilated and evaluated by practitioners and scholars alike. Particularly striking is the rapid pace of growth in the diffusion of architectural practice on digital platforms and social networks.

As a first attempt to study this, we can consider the mass media 's effects on the diffusion and production of architecture as a cultural phenomenon. For this topic there already exists a consolidated literature, although, as B. Colomina (2010, p. 9) recalls in the prologue of the Spanish edition of his famous work *Privacy and Publicity*, "the relationship between architecture and the mass media was practically anathema in the eighties". This author, in the same prologue, warns that the arrival of the internet and social networks "have profoundly changed the way we work, analyze, interact, and play. Can we expect architecture to not be affected?" This research starts from this question and focuses on one of the most paradigmatic cases among digital platforms as vehicles for the promotion and diffusion of architecture: the case of ArchDaily.

Created in 2006 by Chileans David Assael and David Basulto under the name of "Plataforma de Arquitectura", ArchDaily was born as a site halfway between an informative blog and a digital magazine, with the idea of spreading knowledge about the architecture that was booming in Chile at that time (Morales, 2014). After verifying the success of the site, the founders renamed it ArchDaily, published it in English and relaunched it in New York. The business model was supported by the contribution of supplier companies that place information about their products on the materials tabs, information that complements publications about projects and which remain in an archive permanently available to the user.

The digital format allows for a global diffusion of information on projects and the possibility to search for them far more efficiently than monographs and paper magazines afforded previously. ArchDaily has become one of the main places which architects and students consult for referents and analogues of the works they are working on. In 2020 the platform received 13,6 million monthly visits, 190 million pageviews per month, reaching 3 million fans on Facebook and 183,000 followers on Twitter. The text entries and publications of projects, which are shown and ordered in thematic tabs, grew exponentially.

The digital circulation of architectural projects presents innovative points for discussion. This is then also a case of democratization of participation in the architectural market allowed by the new technologies, a phenomenon linked to a complex social reality marked by a high informative inflation. I. Levy (2014) points out the passage from scarcity to informative abundance as a distinctive feature of the culture of the digital age. Cimadomo et. al. (2018) take ArchDaily as an example to discuss the difficulty at obtaining a coherent narrative when constructing a history of recent architecture at a time when platforms show thousands of projects with different styles; this difficulty is also fueled by what Jarzombek (2002) and Ferrando (2017) have described as the post-critical character of current architectural practices, centered more on professional pragmatism than theoretical speculation.

Specifically, in this work we intend to analyze the form that acquires architectural representation through photography and texts, the two main media channels used in ArchDaily. The material presented here will allow us to talk, not so much about the consequences and use

of the platform, but above all, about the content which we think may be affected by the possibility of giving visibility to a number of projects that go beyond the capacity of traditional magazines. We will see how architecture is represented photographically and narrated with texts, cognizant of the fact that any representation contains a potential field of distortion (Cruz, 2016, p.1); in this case, an "embellishment" thanks to which the architect makes his/her proposal attractive with the use of selected images (mainly photographs), and texts that accompany them. This last aspect is not considered in the work of Cimadomo *et. al* (2018). The work presented here aims to detect and analyze common patterns in these photographs and texts. In particular, we will focus on domestic architecture, where the clash between representation for commercial purposes and the reality of an architecture centered on user's needs and nature preservation is more evident.

Residential Architecture and Photographic Representation

Architectural photography cannot be seen only as a way of documenting and leaving evidence, but as an important device in the production of the idea of architecture (Rattenbury, 2002, Serraino, 2007, Stetler, 2014). Beatriz Colomina (1994) argues that the magazines of the early twentieth century and the glamourous photographs published therein constituted a social construction, culturally based on the logic of mass media. Niedenthal (1993) describes that same period as marked by a democratized consumption of images, a new social form of reception of architecture. Whereas the photographs allowed for rapid diffusion and the dissemination of projects to all kinds of readers, in a society of spectacle and mass consumption, a large number of photographs weakly reflect the architecture, stripping it of its tactile, acoustic or kinetic dimension (Frampton, 1986, p.5). They are images intended to seduce, defined by Baudrillard (1981) as "the domain and strategy against the power of being and reality". Therefore, photography raises a debate on the potential gap between reality and representation, since the resource of representation - as both a tool for project work and for dissemination (with plans, artistically elaborated perspectives, models) – has been the occasion to increase the attractiveness of the proposals but also to misrepresent important spatial features.

H. Lefebvre (1991, p.39) saw very clearly the social implications of this fact and spoke of "spaces of representation", sets of images in which codes imposed by powers or alternative imaginaries can be found. This is where we could place the photographs. The texts would fall within the category that Lefebvre cradled as "representation of space" (maps, plans, designs and systems of intellectually elaborated signs such as texts), which are not in the hands of the inhabitants, but of experts, planners, urban planners and architects and are imposed on the physical space practiced and imagined by the population. From the foregoing one can infer a hypothesis by which the representations managed by these firms are aimed more at selling (appealing to the emotions achieved by the aesthetic impact) than reflecting the real housing possibilities of the proposed works.

Methodology

In order to have elements of discussion on the matters raised above, a content analysis of the platform was carried out with an approach to both images and texts of individual projects, limiting the study to the section on residential architecture published in 2018. For the images, a quantitative exploration of a number of parameters was conducted, which were then then addressed in a qualitative analysis, taking paradigmatic cases as reference where the phenomena pointed out in the quantitative exploration are most visible.

Furthermore, to complement the visual reading, a variety of texts, randomly selected among these projects, were analyzed. We chose a qualitative content analysis, in order to detect significant patterns. S. Krakauer (1952) defends the flexibility of this approach in spite of the intricacies of latent interpretations. In particular, a critical analysis of the texts is proposed here, understanding textual discourses as a social practice in which knowledge and power are conjugated (Foucault, 1980; Fairclough, 1989, 1995) It is interesting to see how collective narratives are filtered into individual discourses, with the use of implicit information, as well as detecting attempts to soften contradictions raised on top of the literal meaning conveyed by the words. Sperber and Wilson (2005) recommend an analysis going from the literal meaning of the proposition to the intention of the speaker (in this case the architectural firm) and the knowledge shared between issuer and receiver. The objective is to identify "argumentative repertoires" (Potter, Wetherell, 1988) and a lexicon associated with strategic placement of topics.

Below we present the results obtained from the analysis of the entries in the section Residential Architecture/Houses for the year 2018.

The Images

The photographed work – and specifically the photograph chosen for the cover page – is the one that will potentially initiate a journey of global scale through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, being able to receive thousands of likes or reach the emails of the millions of subscribers. Hence, the cover image is fundamental. In all projects this image is a photograph, which indicates the predominance of this medium when it comes to highlighting works. Although the projects have planimetry, the vast majority of images displayed are professional photographs that meet the requirements of the web.

Among the cover images, exterior views of houses predominate; 77% of the 482 projects published in 2018 privilege a perspective that favors the understanding of the limits and the volumetry of the building. This tendency toward external views is effective from a communicative point of view, insofar as it presents generally univocal, distinguishable and memorable "architectural objects" capable of circulating and being massively consumed. The house has its initial presentation centered on photography, which favors its objectification and the enhancement of an iconic condition associated with its superficial form. The preferred frame for these exterior views is the front, which seeks the fit between the horizontal of the facade and the lower and upper frame of the photograph. Although most of the exterior images consider the context, their inclusion is always controlled and measured. A photographic capture at ground level makes it difficult to appreciate the surroundings of the house, accentuating the perception of isolation and its objectual condition.

In 21% of the exterior views, the house is cut against a twilight background, the "blue hour"– that moment of semi-penumbra and soft glowing light coming from the sun having moved below the horizon-combined with the artificial lighting coming from the house, allowing it to stand out from its context as a box containing clear and seductive light.

When analyzing the 23% of cover images that display an interior, the first thing that catches the attention is the overrepresentation of what could be considered the most public areas of the house. The living room, dining room and integrated kitchen, or the entrance hall and the distribution spaces are presented in almost 90% of all cases. A bedroom is rarely shown, even less often a bathroom, although these will probably be significant places for future life in these houses.

Paradoxically, human life has been marginalized in most of these domestic representations. In more than 80% of the exterior views and in 60% of the interiors analyzed, there are no human figures. The responsibility of transmitting an idea of interior habitability rests on the scant furniture carefully arranged on stage. When human beings do appear (usually men, followed by mixed scenes, women, and individuals whose gender is not recognizable), they are usually in a non-casual position, acquired for the photographic shoot. The figures do not intend to illustrate how the house is inhabited or the individuality of those residing in it, but rather serve as functional and aesthetic elements of image composition; providing an idea of scale and proportion, highlighting a specific area of the building, or offering dynamism to an otherwise static view. Quiet people with no apparent purpose abound; others are dedicated to contemplation, reading or idealized conversations. There are individuals taking a pause with no other purpose than remaining above the stairs and many others dedicated to contemplation. Lonely full-body individuals - like silhouettes - that cut a wall or the view to the outside are very common. Not only people, but traces of human life are equally absent. No dirt, no plates, forgotten things, packages or hanging bags, cables, extension cords or things left half done. Order, organization and cleanliness govern domestic space, giving rise to properly aligned chairs, carefully centered ornaments, radiant plants, crystal glass, carpets and smooth cushions correctly arranged and clear surfaces. The casual exists only in a deliberate way and to the extent that it works as a compositional contribution.
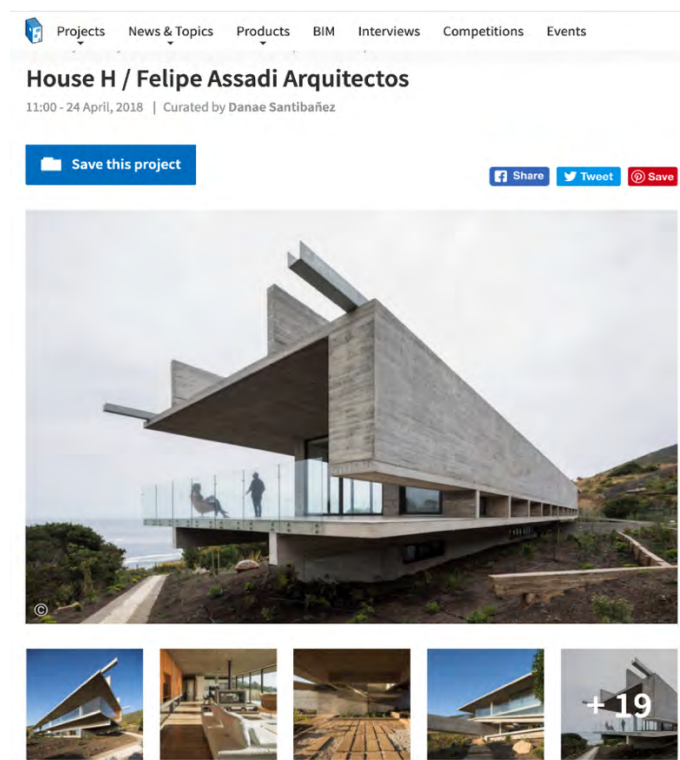

Figure 1: House H images. Source: archdaily.com/893225/house-h-felipe-assadi-arquitectos

An interesting photograph to analyze, selected by ArchDaily among the 50 most inspiring architecture photographs of 2018, is the "House H" by Felipe Assadi Arquitectos, photographed by Fernando Alda. Taking the vertex of the house as a vertical axis, the image replicates the classic format of the perspective with two vanishing points. The drama involved in the fugue of roof horizontals – farther from the photographic lens – contrasts with the peaceful horizontal line – placed at the same height of the lens – that runs through the entire image, unifying the horizon with the height and width and crossing the vertical axis at a right

angle. It is on this horizontal that the photographer places two people who, due to the focal distance, the absence of other elements (even the chair disappears) and the backlight effect, become true icons of the human figure: a man and a woman; one standing and the other sitting; silhouettes that scale, humanize and transform into architecture this geometric piece built in the middle of the landscape. Probably to a great extent thanks to this photograph, House H was voted by the ArchDaily readers second in the category Work of the Year 2019.

In another interior scene (Teph Inlet House in Chester, Canada (Figure 2)), a young woman is shown sitting in one of the armchairs in the living area, looking at a little girl on the floor next to her feet. Although described in a generic way, the scene seems quite "normal"; when observing the photograph the extreme attention and concern with which every detail of this scene has been mounted is evident. The woman and the girl are dressed identically. Both barefoot, both are wearing a plain black dress without sleeves that, on the one hand, highlights their figures thanks to the contrast with the pale tones of the floor, sky and furniture; and on the other, integrates the house by matching the black of the window frames that run around the perimeter. While this chromatic attunement may be special by itself, the strangest thing about the scene is that there is no trace of the presence of the little girl in the house. Besides the book she holds, which probably allowed her to stay still for the shoot, the environment is absolutely devoid of objects, dirt and clutter that the arrival of a child at home usually entails. Paradoxically, the only element apparently out of place is a blanket carefully placed on the sofa, an element sharing the same color palette.
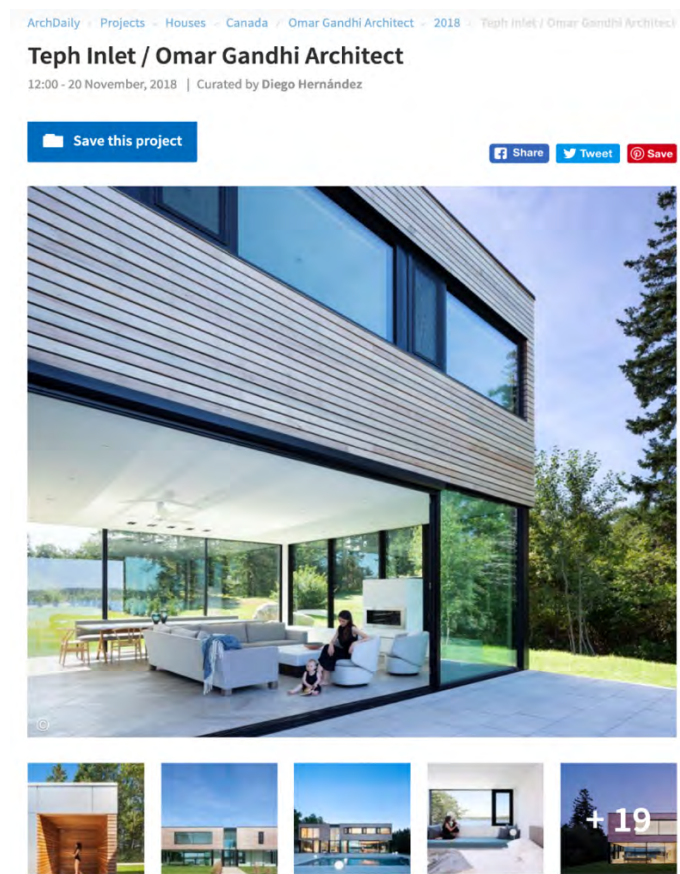

Figure 2: Teph Inlet House. Source: https://www.archdaily.mx/mx/920182/teph–inlet–omar–gandhi–architect

These two examples, qualitatively addressed in our description, confirm the general tendency that we presented at the beginning of this section. Projects opting for a reduction of the contained elements and presenting an unusual order are common and the rule. This may be due to the fact that these procedures highlight the spatial qualities of residential architecture. The readability and understanding of interior spatiality are facilitated by making visible the lines formed by the encounter between floors, walls and ceilings. A minimalistic style ensures this fluid reading of the height, width and depth of the enclosure and can appeal to the reader's desire for minimal and orderly life. If we think that objects are a structuring part of our daily lives (Gregson 2007; Miller 2010), their deliberate exclusion in these interiors can be interpreted as a lack of interest in the lives of current or potential users of these houses.

The Texts

For the review of the written content of projects published by ArchDaily in 2018, random samples were chosen of those houses that the portal considered to be the most outstanding of the year, which have been included in the publications with lines such as these: "The best architecture of 2018" and "The improvements of 2018 houses". The analysis was based on the descriptor text sent by the architect (for which the platform asks to have between 200 and 500 words) and which is published without any editing. This text always alternates with the images. The results are presented with the final thematic selection that emerge from an inductive type analysis that allows us to see recurring patterns.

The Presentation

It is common to find a beginning paragraph that summarizes the intentions of the project, general premises and the challenges met, generally emphasizing the benefits of the work with positive terms associated with widely accepted narratives in practice and architectural dissemination:

> This project is conceived as the refurbishment of a 1959 family house located in a traditional borough of this commune. The house was in good conditions and in its original state. Therefore, decisions that contributed to honor the house's history were made, both for its volume and the reuse of some of the materials. (Puerto de Palos House / jfs architect)[1]

In this example, the words "traditional", "original" and "respect" refer to the social value of tradition (from the pre-romantic and nineteenth-century recovery of the picturesque-popular) and to the possession of historical and scarce goods (originals, not replicas) from which an authenticity is to be derived and integrated into the project. This integration also has a connotation of sustainability, since the "reuse" of materials is framed within the ecological paradigm. Thus, in a few sentences, a maximum (or excess) of connotations coming from very different theoretical frameworks is condensed; that could appear pretentious if it were not for the fact that they are not explicit references but integrated in the connotation of the discourse.

> Rubielos de Mora, "the Gate of Aragon", is located in the southern area of the county of Gudar-Javalambre. When you visit it you understand why it was designated a place of historical and artistic interest in 1980, it received the Europa Nostra Award in 1983 and it was selected one of the "Most Beautiful Villages in Spain" in 2013. Vernacular

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[1] https://www.archdaily.mx/mx/909067/casa-puerto-de-palos-jfs-arquitecto

> architecture in Rubielos displays eaves, iron things, woodwork and stonework, providing an old time picture frozen in time. That's why Rubielos de Mora will not let you remain unmoved, because the spirit of its poetry, carved in stone and forged in iron, will forever ask you to come back. (House in Rubielos de Mora / Ramón Esteve Studio)[2]

In the previous case, a laudatory mention of the site has been placed as an initial statement, which predisposes the reader to consider the quality of the documented work equally outstanding. The location serves as a letter of presentation of a project for which it is expected, that the reader, without much resistance, attributes similar praise. Intangible, poetic qualities are added to tangible qualities; for example, in the Spanish version, the word "duende" is used, which is the maximum inspiration to which a flamenco musician can aspire.

> The aim of our intervention has been to open the housing in its entirety. Eliminating all the walls and the false ceilings, we have obtained a wide and fluid space that recovers the lordly aspect that had in his moment. (House in Palace / Ideo architecture)[3]

Above we read that, in a privileged context ("a palatial ensemble in the heart of Madrid built in the mid-eighteenth century"), the intervention follows canonical patterns in the contemporary trends of remodeling. Radical opening up of the space, transparency, luminosity are options that appear-without being questioned-as design guidelines according to the idea of fluid space. The fluidity of space has become a common metaphor of modern discourse that is taken up here as natural and self-evident. The fluid is presented as a positive counterpart to compartmentalized spaces, assuming that movement is preferable to stillness.

Language and Sophistication

In the following example, when describing the project's context, the use of adjectival constructions is forced to the point of attributing dreamlike qualities (perhaps reminiscent of Dalí's paintings) to a panoramic view, which is common to most of the houses located on the seashore. The language resorts to poetic abstraction drawing on generic statements that tell us about the inspiration that had given rise to the work, without pretending any scientific objectivity (using non-falsifiable statements, in Popperian terms). The praise of the project is reinforced with rhetorical figures as eliminated juxtaposition nexuses (asyndeton), personification, or metaphor ("the architect, with his house, sculpts the rock .."):

> Bosc d'en Pep Ferrer is the traditional toponym of a large plot located next to the beach of Migjorn, on the south coast of the island of Formentera. This territory has a place that unleashes the desire to inhabit an oneiric view, where the horizon is only cut by the beautiful silhouette of the Pi des Català Tower, built in 1763. The project focuses on the duality between the telluric and the tectonic. The heavy and the light. The earth and the air. The handcrafted and the technological. Compression effort and traction resistance. The rock, which comes to the surface in the chosen place, has been carved as if it were a sculpture, offering a cavity reminiscent of the 'marès' stone quarries. A whole space materialized with a single stone. Monolithic. Megalithic. Stereotomic.[4]

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[2] https://www.archdaily.mx/mx/903797/casa-en-rubielos-de-mora-ramon-esteve-estudio
[3] archdaily.com/903743/house-in-palacio-ideo-arquitectura
[4] https://m-ar.net/bosc-den-pep-ferrer/

After the presentation, the text provides some technical descriptions and specific requirements of the clients are mentioned.

> The intervention offers a house for a family sensitive to the environment, which program is divided into three light modules built in dry construction systems and a cavity made by subtraction of material on the lower floor. (House in Formentera Island / Marià Castelló Martínez)[5]

Current users are only mentioned to indicate that they are a family sensitive to the environment. That is to say, customs, tastes, practices are not mentioned in a text that prefers to give ample space and reinforce the idea of sustainable legitimization in a project whose volumetric character stands out in the middle of a virgin enclave and, therefore, would be susceptible to criticism.

> The initial concept was to combine the ideas and the layout requested by the owners with the existing volume, the cladding and layout distribution conditions (...). The spatial concept for re-distributing the bedroom area is a symmetric scheme, with the lounge area as the body at the center and then bedrooms on both sides. (Puerto de Palos House / jfs architect).

The previous text mentions the owners but doesn't point out what their ideas and needs were, an area that is surely a determining factor when making final decisions about the architecture of an object. The text continues describing the house's second level, again with a density of language that denotes an intellectual sophistication ("the spatial concept") perhaps not necessary to describe the distribution of two resting areas, interspersed by a family room.

Sometimes ambiguity is played with, without concern for rigor or conceptual clarity. The cryptic, allusive, highly connotative language allows the exaltation of ambitious products.

> As for the architectural style, we have tried that the housing speaks to today language because we understand that any intervention in a historical building must answer to his time. Thus, we have used classic frames, but these frames do not come up to the ceiling, achieving this way to classic style and at the same time, contemporary. (House in Palace / Ideo architecture)

The previous paragraph alludes to the postmodern taste for the hybrid and justifies a restoration without restrictions regarding the preservation of the architectural heritage, even if it continues talking about "historical interior" and seeks to obtain symbolic benefits of both classical and the contemporary styles. It is understood that at a later point after its construction, partitions were added, but it is difficult to justify the union of the kitchen, the living room and the dining room as a "lordly" or classical practice.

Implicit Legitimization

The following text is an introductory-legitimating text about the connection and respect for the environment (which, in fact, as we can easily detect from the photograph, is already very urbanized), according to the author even positively "completed" not by a house but by a "spatial

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[5] https://www.archdaily.com/889088/house-in-formentera-island-maria-castello-martinez

composition". This last expression replaces euphemistically that of "building" or "property"– invasive in any terrain – and points to the designer's artistic capacity:

> The site is located in a typically developed area along the slopes of Kobe. The slope was scraped off, but the terrain still shows that character. Since the geographical condition has decided factors like wind direction, abundant sunlight, and vegetation, we thought it is important to conceive an architecture that receives and enjoys the natural environment such as daylighting and ventilation, and also give good effect to the ambience by making it a space composition close to the terrain. (House in Tarumi / Tomohiro Hata Architect and Associates)[6]

The concept that is coined to define the project mentioned below is summarized in the title "Little House", something that a critical analysis should not ignore, as the naming of houses is a questionable practice Here begins the presence of the architect as the author of a narrative that can be completely independent of the home's idea conceived by the users. Placing a title with or naming the construction is an act of unilateral power exertion that determines and defines a position, an aspiration.

> The Little House is nestled into a lush second growth forest on a north facing bluff overlooking Hood Canal with distant views to Dabob Bay. Designed to repurpose an existing foundation, the new building is just over 20m2. The simple form is abstracted against the forest – a stark exterior contrasting a warm bright interior.

In line with the hegemonic discourse of sustainability with which architects have to deal, it is pointed out that there was no work necessary to create the foundations of the house. In contrast, nothing is mentioned about the visual impact of the house on the landscape. On the contrary, its small size and its "simple" shape (although clearly perceptible in the landscape due to its geometry) stand out, "abstracted" from the forest.

When it comes to the owners, we are told about their attachment to the wild nature of the landscape, in which they wanted to locate a luxury property (which could affect that virgin aspect), that has been depicted as a "small refuge":

> The owners live full time in Houston, Texas, but have shared many summers with family at a nearby property outside Seabeck. They loved the wildness of the southern Channel and imagined a small retreat here of their own. Early design discussions focused on creating a compact, modern structure that was both simple and inexpensive to build. Intentionally restrained on an existing footprint (...).

Once again, the adjectives "simple" and "natural" are used. The vocabulary repetition is a tool that reinforces the main message: a house which has a minimal impact on its surroundings. A place where, by the way, there were already foundations, which supposedly legitimize the construction, although there is no mention of a previous house, whose demolition without replacing would have benefited the landscape.

A general analysis of the texts allows us to be aware of how the authors maximize their effect, compressing in a few words the technical, conceptual and artistic information. Far from being an obstacle to the launch of the architectural product, the format requires a density in the

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[6]https://www.archdaily.mx/mx/892392/casa-en-tarumi-tomohiro-hata-architect-and-associates

phrases that provides an interesting sophistication. The language gives each project an aura of intellectuality that turns out to be an ideal counterpoint to the seduction of images.

Since the architectural firms themselves are the text providers, there is of course no criticism to be found in the texts. They are, first of all, an instrument for the architectural legitimization of the projects, especially when from the photographs it could be deduced that they have been invasive in regard to the natural or urban environment. It also legitimates them socially. Following Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of the social and artistic strategies that generate distinction (1984), we can think ArchDaily's texts as highlighting the role that cultural capital plays in the design of the work (the architect's skills), which allows the transformation of economic capital (the client's capital, perhaps excessive for the sensibility of some readers) into symbolic capital.

The function of the texts is therefore not merely informative, but it seeks to draw the attention of potential readers, favoring their willingness to increase the number of likes, follow the firm, recommend it or even hire its services. The seduction, therefore, not only operates at the level of the images, but through a text that demonstrates not only the technical quality of the office, but its artistic capacity and conceptual vision to achieve an integrally successful work. The above explains the presence of a typology of statements that we find in all the publications studied; the descriptive-technical statements, the descriptive-poetic and the conceptual ones. It is an underlying trilogy because a combination of the three types of statements is common, either juxtaposed in the same sentence or with poetic adjectives that qualify the technical or conceptual resources. This mixture acts in favor of a concealed seduction strategy, similar to how, according to Bourdieu (1991), political discourse is characterized by a rhetoric of impartiality, producing statements presented as a result of consensus and common sense. The marketing discourse, like the ideological discourse, draws heavily on the connotation, the cliché and widely accepted social representations, without this being easily perceived, the presence of rhetorical figures are discrete and interspersed with elements of a technical and conceptual nature.

The general analysis of the texts also indicates that these, although coming from different offices and countries, repeat structural and content patterns, drawing on clichés and common places that refer to hegemonic discourses enjoying broad consensus in the architectural community. This could point to the existence of a universal discourse shared by people from all kinds of cultural backgrounds, but of a similar economic standing, related to a sort of global upper middle class that pretend to live a fake distinction based on cultural originality.

As regards the structure, the first paragraph is dedicated to the context (location, the environment characteristics, geographic constraints) and to the concept-guide-brief of the intervention, generally two points linked together, because, following the dominant paradigm, there is no room for architecture that does not integrate, dialogue or respect the environment. Each project follows an idea, challenge, theme or issue; for example, the modern interpretation of a historical space, the essential but updated cottage. Then, typically, the conditions of the program are presented and mention of the user's intentions are made, without extending the last point, either to preserve their identity and privacy or because the intention of the text is above all to highlight the architect's work. The texts continue detailing the characteristics of the distribution, materials, general morphology, with technical statements (sophisticated and sometimes deliberately dense) that alternate with the conceptual and poetic, hiding behind a technocratic façade rhetorical resources aimed at seduction effects and to make readers assimilate the three types of statements as part of the same message: the quality of the work.

Conclusions

Regarding the current and inescapable question about how platforms such as ArchDaily impact on the representation of culture in architecture, the interpretation of the material previously analyzed suggests that – at least at the content level – the traditional architecture magazine model is still present. In this model, photography is strengthened as a hegemonic element in the dissemination of projects. When adding, and contrasting, the analysis of images and texts, we note that in both cases the objectual condition of the architectural project is reinforced. The explanation about users and their needs occupy a secondary place; they are understood as context and origin of some requirements whose mention is made in a very punctual way, as if wanting to respect an intimate environment, but also to give prominence to the work of the office that is promoted in each project. The above discussion surprisingly coincides on many points with criticism of analog photography Kenneth Frampton had already made almost half a century ago. This coincidence points to the fact that, in the new media, there is not a rupture but an evolution in which issues already present in the previous mass culture are intensified. Most of its mechanisms continue to operate and present us with an architecture whose diffusion follows the logics of consumer objects, and in which, as occurs in the evolution of numerous cultural goods, it is not strange to see sacrifices in the quality of information for the benefit of ease of handling and access. The great difference lies in the scope that these media have today, the number of projects, news and interviews that the portal manages to accumulate, its continuous updating and the opening of the archives to navigation by the user. While architectural journals had clear limitations both in the amount of material generated and in the audiences reached, the traffic of data and people that ArchDaily exhibits on a daily basis and the visibility that this platform acquires on a planetary level as the main diffusion space and database for contemporary architecture is absolutely unprecedented. And yet, the abundance of information is also correlated to a standardization of the format, so that the presentation is more rigid and synthetic than in many print journals, the texts are often brief, as if the space available in traditional journals was compressed here to accommodate even more projects. By specifically analyzing the front-end photographs of houses in the residential architecture section, a series of coincidences of form and content are uncovered, with the existence of a shared language or an implicit agreement on how to represent residential architecture being evident. Surprisingly, although the ArchDaily portal brings together projects from all over the world, there are no major variations. A future line of inquiry could be to investigate the reasons for this homogeneity, which we believe proceed not only from the propagation of a general globalizing cultural wave, but also from features particular to architecture as a discipline. While in other academic fields there are still very marked national or regional intellectual traditions (for example, French anthropology as opposed to an Anglo-Saxon one), in architecture, since the Modern Movement (and the International Style, which prolonged it), the tradition in the expansion of discourses and global patterns had been achieved relatively early on. Users have, therefore, a longer and more consolidated path in the constitution of world references (magazines, Pritzker prizes) at the level of aesthetic and disciplinary discourse. The networks and digital magazines have had a path already well tread to reinforce this type of adhesion to similar aspirational architectures in different countries.

Another aspect that has been mentioned when describing digital culture is the opportunity for horizontal gain in the dissemination of works (Alsina, 2010). As is the case with Spotify, or even Netflix, platforms such as ArchDaily give visibility to works from a wide range of places and groups, something that, in past decades was limited to a disciplinary elite. The abundance of information and its concentration in a single institution, as the quasi-core of the described system, has consequences that require greater attention and will be the focus of future

investigations. This focus should also include an in-depth investigation into the interactive nature of the platforms. For now, we can point out that, in addition to a standardization and massification of a single structure of presentation of projects (given by their online format, the requirement of "professional" photographs and short texts unedited by the website), a key element in this line of study will be to see the mediatization of searches by filters and suggestions, in many cases placed with commercial criteria described by the criticism of platform capitalism (Cingolani, 2016). One might think that as ArchDaily legitimizes itself as an authority in the field of architecture, there is a danger that these conditions will be incorporated and naturalized as "normal". Similarly, the need for firms and architects to have visibility in this type of medium in order to disseminate their works and position their services on the platform is validated, although this implies resorting to strategies commonly associated with digital and multi-channel marketing, with messages adapted for all types of public that favor the repetition of socially accepted narratives.

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Figures

Figure 1: House H / Felipe Assadi Arquitectos, Zapallar, Chile. Photography by Fernando Alda. https://www.archdaily.com/893225/house-h-felipe-assadi-arquitectos

Figure 2: Teph Inlet / Omar Gandhi Architect, Chester, Canada. Photography by Ema Peter. https://www.archdaily.com/906222/teph-inlet-omar-gandhi-architect

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