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"The Pevsner Way of Seeing"

A paper on contriving the "timelessness" of architectural photography for Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's "Buildings of England" series of books

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Introduction – "The Buildings of England": 1951 onwards

To an architect, and by proxy, an architectural photographer, "Pevsner" presents a set way of seeing. It is rigid, precise and is framed against a backdrop of formalism coupled with a need for timelessness, both in regard to the subject matter it describes, and the longevity needed for the vehicle in which it rests.

This visual style of documenting buildings and monuments is seen in a seminal series of British architectural books whose edition lifespan has historically been known to surpass four decades between revisions. Researched in the 1940's, first published in 1951 by Penguin Books and currently being revised by Yale University Press, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's "Buildings of England" series is regarded by architects globally in the same high esteem with which the hospitality industry regards the Michelin guides[1]. From the perspective of a long-established architectural photographer and more recently, an academic researcher of the genre[2], I set out to explore the photographic framework set by the Pevsner guides in their first iterations. I will then discuss how the manner of recording buildings 70 years ago has continued to prescribe the visual articulation of these same structures in the 21st century. Surely, utilising a code established by a historian exploring England just after the World War II is not still relevant in a world whose pace and technologies he would not and could not have foreseen.

1. Clare Hartwell, Nikolaus Pevsner, Elizabeth Williamson, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, London 2020, Plate 98: LH – Warehouses, Broadway, Lace Market (1856). Photo: M. Hamilton Knight

[1] **N. Pevsner's** "Buildings of England" series of books first published 1951 at YaleBooks: https://yalebooks.co.uk/pevsner (access date: 13.02.2021). See also *Michelin Guide*, https://guide.michelin.com/gb/en (access date: 10.02.2021).

[2] See **M. Hamilton Knight**, *Builtvision*, https://www.builtvision.co.uk (access date: 23.02.2021).

Pevsner's first book covered the county of Cornwall, and thereafter he proceeded by selecting counties seemingly at random and by 1974, 46 titles were complete. Subsequent volumes have expanded coverage to include Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The first 32 were penned solely by Pevsner, a German emigre who came to England in the early 1930's from his post at The University of Gottingen where he taught on English Art & Architecture. Remaining in the UK for the rest of his career, he stood in as acting editor for "The Architectural Review" (1943–1945) and wrote *An Outline of European Architecture* for Pelican books[3]. This was eventually published in 16 languages and sold half a million copies.

However, he remains best known for the "Buildings of England" series, which from its early editions, was broadened to include co-written counties and eventually became authored by a number of different specialist historians through the late 1970's. Owing to boundary changes and areas with significant conurbations, there are several "split" titles, for example London, which has six separate books. Most of the English volumes were revised in the 1970's and by 2003, Yale University Press took the series into remaining counties, and in some areas, a third edition. For England currently, there are 56 books in print. A further 33 represent Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with the Irish series being still incomplete.

The precedent on writing about architectural travels in England had been set by Sir John Betjeman in the 1930's with his Shell guides[4], which were glovebox books for the motorist. Light in tone, they were aimed at a readership who enthused over England's vernacular and pastoral delights but didn't necessarily exude a learned or scholastic interest in architecture.

Pevsner began research on his books in 1945 and Cornwall's guide came out in 1951[5], with a second title on Nottinghamshire, and a third on Middlesex later in the same year. By comparison to Betjeman, and although still intended for a lay audience, Pevsner intended his guides to bring a more authoritative voice to English architectural history. These would have eye-witness descriptions of what he found architecturally on his travels, together with brief, descriptive listings of each building of merit within a locality. Thorough, and with as much historic accuracy as might be expected of the time, they do, however, lack the anecdotal warmth of Shell's motorist's guides[6]. Indeed, Pevsner's narrations can be somewhat blunt and are, on occasion scathing about our architectural heritage as he traverses England's villages, towns and cities. Yet his own personal diaries and notes (now held by Getty)[7], in comparison are florid and witty, as he describes his battles with car travel (for instance if driving himself he found reversing terrifying), unappetising food and inadequate lodgings which may account for his somewhat cursory and dismissive descriptions of towns and villages.

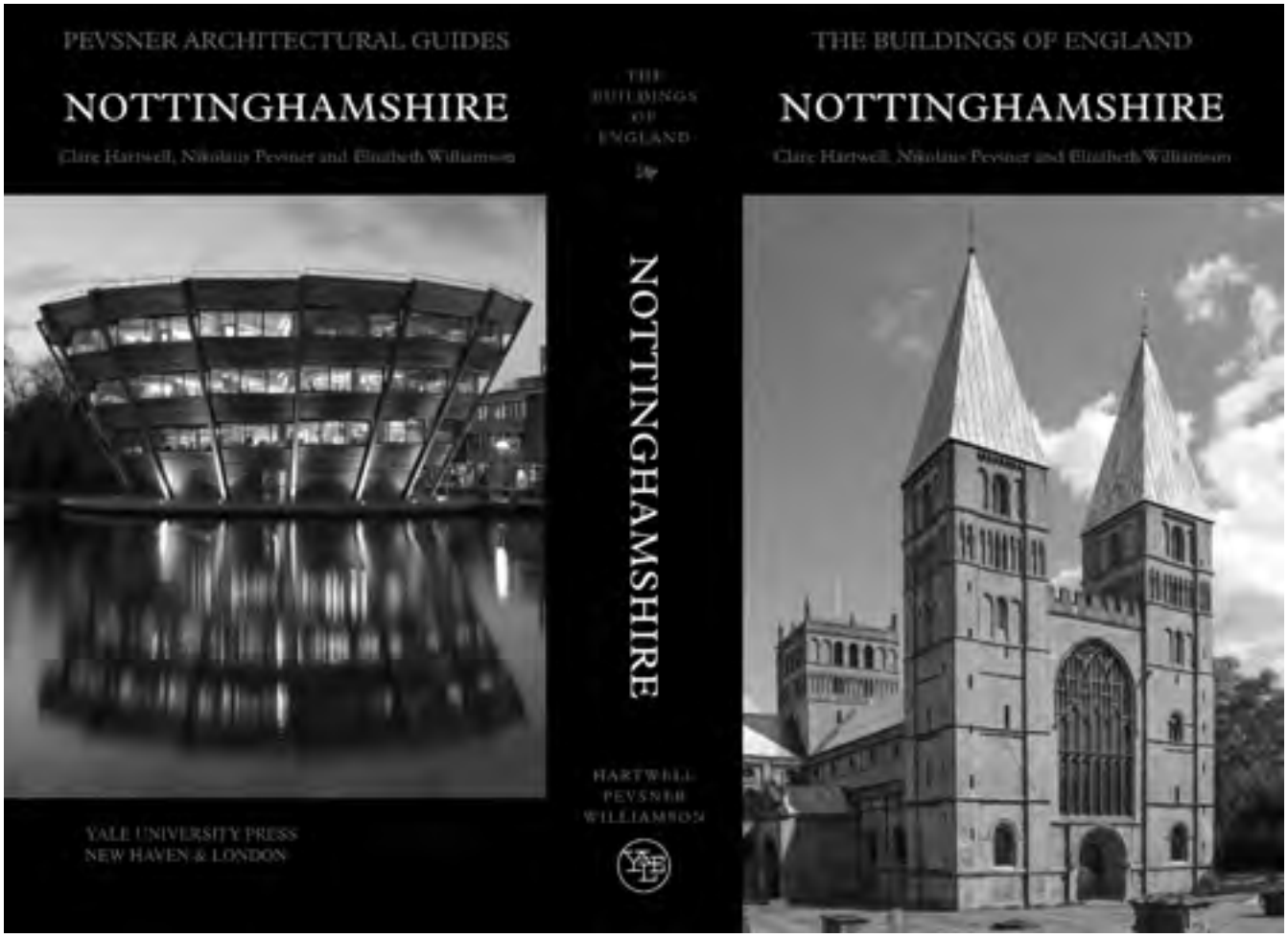
[3] **N. Pevsner**, *An Outline of European Architecture*, London 2009 (first published in 1942).

[4] John Betjeman's *Shell Guides* were first published in 1934. See **Learning Services Team**, *The Shell Guides: a short history*, https://libraryblog.lbrut.org.uk/2019/08/shell-guides (access date: 15.03.2022); *Shell Guides*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shell_Guides (access date: 20.02.2021).

[5] **N. Pevsner**, *The Buildings of England: Cornwall*, Harmondsworth 1951.

[6] See **D. Matless**, *Topographic Culture: Pevsner and the Buildings of England*, "History Workshop Journal" 2002, No. 54, p. 81.

[7] See *Nikolaus Pevsner papers, 1903–1982*, Getty Archives, https://primo.getty.edu/primo-explore/fulldisplay?vid=GRI&docid=GETTY_ALMA211-269268-60001551&context=L (access date:15.03.2022).



2. Clare Hartwell, Nikolaus Pevsner, Elizabeth Williamson, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, London 2020, book jacket: Southwell Minster (front) and Jubilee Campus (rear). Photo: M. Hamilton Knight

Pevsner's biographer Susie Harries notes about the second book:

> Although Pevsner would correct and supplement the factual information he gleaned on his travels, he did not edit out the moods in which he had seen places, and Nottinghamshire was made to pay the price of the paraffin, the scraped and dented mudguards and the spivish publican[8].

Harries and furthermore, David Matless in his paper on the series[9], spends time exploring how, although Pevsner became the bedrock by which so much of England's architectural history is understood, he was too often driven by personal choice with what he included, and the manner in which he expressed his personal likes and dislikes.

Over time though, these personal grievances within the various volumes were addressed by subsequent writers, and omissions and

[8] **S. Harries**, *Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life*, London 2013, p. 413.

[9] **D. Matless**, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

3. Elizabeth Williamson, Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, 2nd Ed., Rev., London 1979, Plate 101: Ossington Coffee House, Newark (1882), Photo: A. F. Kersting, approx. date 1947

errors, where noted, were revised. In the 70 years since the first titles were published, there have been architectural losses, as well as more notably, substantial gains, and as one might expect, later books are significantly larger, almost doubling each time. An early county in the series; Hertfordshire, was 320 pages in edition one, revised to 460 pages by Bridget Cherry in 1977 and most recently expanded by James Bettley in 2019 to 804 pages[10].

In light of this latest series of revisions, it is the visual contributions to Pevsner's "Buildings of England" on which I wish to concentrate. As the architectural photographer commissioned to illustrate one of these recent titles; Nottinghamshire by Clare Hartwell[11], I have a vested interest in the visual approach that this series of books utilises to document our nation's built environment [Fig. 2].

The "Pevsner Way of Seeing"

Through examination of this collection of 89 books, I propose that the "Pevsner Way of Seeing" is a recognisable visual style of documenting architecture photographically. This is seen consistently across the stable of titles, and hallmarked by a precise, decisive and exclusive approach to image making. Partly this is established by the need to examine each building in isolation as a period case study of its architectural form, and partly because there needs to also be an authoritative visual document of each structure that is **not** judged by the date or time in which it was recorded.

[10] **N. Pevsner**, *Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, London 1953; ***idem***, **B. Cherry**, *Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, London 1977; **J. Bettley**, **N. Pevsner**, **B. Cherry**, *Buildings of England: Hertfordshire*, New Haven 2019.

[11] **C. Hartwell**, **N. Pevsner**, **E. Williamson**, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, New Haven 2020.

Pevsner and the team at Penguin Books sourced the black and white plates for the original titles from a number of different archives, most notably local studies libraries and national record collections, where photographs of historic structures were collated. In the forward to Nottinghamshire, Pevsner thanks Mr. Duncan Gray of Nottingham library who placed his collection of county images at Penguin's disposal[12]. Elizabeth Williamson's 1979 update (also re-released in 1997) re-uses the same plates[13]. Where supplemented by new additions, they are individually listed by the respective photographers, of which there are multiples. Again, they all follow the same visual code, and barring two single frames in the Nottinghamshire book, they are devoid of anything to specifically **time** their creation. However, the exceptions that do feature cars, including Ossington Coffee House look hopelessly dated even within the context of the 1979 publication, and when re-used again in the 1997 reprint look "quaint" and simply lack authority [Fig. 3].

Establishing and evaluating authority through contextualisation

As viewers of visual documents, we learn by experience about contextualisation[14], readily placing images we see into established frameworks which may involve a subliminal "time coding". By this, we mean that knowing the age of a photograph helps bring relevance to our understanding. It allows us to judge whether an image is contemporary, and therefore more worthy of close study perhaps compared with an older one showing the same subject matter. By using visual cues found within an image such as old cars in the example given here, we may mark it down as "historic" and therefore perhaps only worthy of our attention due to the antiquarian nature. The well traversed topic of visual semiotics and the ability to read photographs by the signs within them were explored in depth by Roland Barthes[15], Allan Sekula[16], and other 20th c. historians. Re-examined for contemporary learners by Liz Wells[17], Stephen Bull[18], Steve Edwards[19], and others, together they demonstrate that these "indexical" facets of many architectural photographs; the cars, the signage, the people inhabiting their spaces, are what accompany "icons" within photographs (in this case the buildings). These cues allow us to therefore place artefacts in time and space, and as Barthes puts it, the "here-now", or in the case of Ossington Coffee House [Fig. 3], a post war document re-appropriated for a readership in 1979 and 1997, the "here-then"[20].

Nottinghamshire's current full colour revision is fairly typical of the longevity expected of any given title. The first edition in 1951 lasted 28 years, and the second (in real terms), 41. The third can be anticipated to easily match that of at least the first again, if not by a further couple of decades. Within these parameters, it is immedi-

[12] **N. Pevsner**, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, Harmondsworth 1951, p. 9.

[13] **E. Williamson**, **N. Pevsner**, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, 2nd Ed., Rev., London 1979.

[14] See **S. Bull**, *Photography*, London 2010, p. 41.

[15] **R. Barthes**, *The Rhetoric of the Image*, [in:] *The Photography Reader: History and Theory*, Ed. **L. Wells**, 2nd Ed., London 2019, p. 134.

[16] **A. Sekula**, *On the invention of photographic meaning*, [in:] *Thinking Photography*, Ed. **V. Burgin**, Basingstoke 1982, p. 84–88.

[17] **L. Wells**, *Meaning and Interpretation*, [in:] *The Photography Reader…*, p. 124.

[18] **S. Bull**, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[19] **S. Edwards**, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2006, p. 81.

[20] **R. Barthes**, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

4. Clare Hartwell, Nikolaus Pevsner, Elizabeth Williamson, ***Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire***, London 2020, Plate 62: Willoughby Almshouses (1685). Photo: M. Hamilton Knight

ately possible to grasp the issue of **context** as needing to be largely absent. As we have seen in the case of architectural photographs, vehicles, together with people's fashions or signage may date urban pictures especially, as they specifically place a building in time, place and space. From a practical point of view, creating images in such isolationist terms is difficult, and at times almost impossible without the crutch of (thankfully available today) digital manipulation. For me as a practitioner, this raises ethical issues about truth and authenticity for the buildings themselves, where does one draw the line with objectivity and representation in the manner required for this body of photographs?

Much has been written about architectural photography's complicit guilt in removing context from a structure, and context plays a huge part in how we understand what we are looking at. Indeed, this was recognised as early as 1935 when Walter Benjamin wrote in the seminal *Work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction*:

5. Clare Hartwell, Nikolaus Pevsner, Elizabeth Williamson, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, London 2020, Plate 117: Clipstone Headstocks (1950). Photo: M. Hamilton Knight

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, it's unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership[21].

This last point is one with which I very much struggled as I made the body of images for the new Nottinghamshire book. In creating this work, I was tasked to be truthful to the buildings themselves about their appearance, but equally mindful of the fact that historic structures tend to go through a cyclical experience of construction, use, adaptation/extension, re-use, decline, restoration, re-purposing, re-use and decline etc.[22] Of the 120 or so separate structures needed for the colour plates, the vast majority of these buildings predated 1900, and therefore some found themselves midway between decay and (anticipated) restoration. Indeed, in the case of two buildings;

[21] **W. Benjamin**, *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (from the 1935 essay), [in:] ***idem***, *Illuminations*, Ed. **H. Arendt**, Transl. H. Zohn, New York 1969, p. 3, https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf (access date: 13.02.2021).

[22] See *Sustainable and Circular Re-use of Spaces and Buildings: Handbook*, Ed. **V. Barberis [*et al.*]**, Prato 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/sustainable_circular_re-use_of_spaces_and_buildings_handbook.pdf (access date: 15.03.2022).

The Willoughby Almshouses (1685) and Clipstone Colliery Headstocks and Powerhouse (1953) [Figs. 4–5] despite both being listed, they were derelict, their futures uncertain, and yet they needed to be objectively recorded for their architectural design. They could not risk becoming emotive causes, whose broken-down appearance at the point of documentation would become wholly "wrong" in times to come if they did indeed find intended re-use and subsequent refurbishment. Instead, they had to be seen empathetically, and with clarity, but without overt emphasis on their abandonment.

The historian, Kate Bush states "Photography can be architecture's guarantor. It can enable buildings to live on beyond their point of destruction or demise"[23]. The images in Pevsner's guides act as iconic referent in this manner for the architectural styles and architects whose work they represent, from the earliest Anglo-Saxon monument, to the most contemporary of buildings. Indeed, for the readers of these glovebox encyclopedias, there is a sense of pilgrimage to be undertaken, to the very spot where the tripod was placed in order to re-enact the "hero shot". Indeed, the longevity of Pevsner and the status within which it holds revere by the architectural profession as well as cultural bodies themselves as a published title[24], means that the plates themselves allow the buildings featured a canonical right to be recognised. Of the several thousand described in each county volume, the elevated rank of those few chosen for illustration places them within Bush's rank of "icons of a cultural time and place"[25].

Michele Nastasi's *Starchitecture* series of photographs, which were first published in 2011 and subsequently expanded, to be widely discussed in the 2017 book of the same name[26], explores different global locations where sense of place and icon combine. Tourists convene to gape at and photograph sites and structures which help validate their proof of "being there" and experience the architecture for themselves. He argued that these structures in themselves often held little regard for their immediate environments and contexts, but instead created their own "sense of place" through their (and especially in the case of modern buildings) computer engineered shapes and forms. Whilst Nastasi's actual images don't in themselves assist in the role of the "star-making", his coining of the term and visual exploration of the phenomenon is on point.

This is a view also asserted by Elias Redstone in his essay entitled *Manufacturing Iconography*[27] where he describes such photographs as enabling the buildings themselves to take on a celebrity status, in much the same way as we attach the label to Hollywood actors or stadium-filling music stars. Only one single property in the 2020 Nottinghamshire title denied the Yale team access for photography on privacy grounds, and yet the building was deemed of such significance architecturally that colour plates were still necessary. The only recourse was to source material available from a stock library. The limited offerings revealed an extraordinary neo-gothic

[23] **K. Bush**, *Two-Way Street*, [in:] *Shooting Space: Architecture in Contemporary Photography*, Ed. **E. Redstone**, London 2014, p. 8.

[24] See **D. Matless**, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[25] **K. Bush**, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[26] **D. Ponzini**, **M. Nastasi**, *Starchitecture: Scenes, Actors, and Spectacles in Contemporary Cities*, New York 2016.

[27] **E. Redstone**, *Manufacturing Iconography*, [in:] *Shooting Space*..., p. 19.

plaster ceiling, however, this single example is a poor relation when set against the book's other illustrations. It nullifies the reverie deserved of such exquisite craftsmanship, and with its flat lighting and distorted perspective. The space is difficult to read and fully understand in design terms.

In terms of being able to "read" three dimensional architectural forms, Bush describes the means taken by American photographer Walker Evans (1903–1975) who would set up in place for days at a time until he sensed the right angle of light cast by the sun to give him the three-dimensional presence for his images that he sought. "What results from Evan's patient method are pictures that have a vivid and immediate presence, an almost hypnotic clarity, as if the viewer stands in the world looking at the scene"[28].

This approach, as exampled by overtly commercial architectural photographers such as Richard Bryant (UK), Peter Aaron (USA)[29], together with a whole stable of globally based practitioners including myself, whose working career was formed on 5 × 4 technical cameras, and who today shoot via digital capture is, one would argue, utilising very similar principles.

Benjamin, however, refers to a trait so regularly displayed by architectural photographs throughout history, that of depicting emptiness, akin to the view seen here in Nottingham's city centre [Fig. 1; see page 82]. He states:

> But as man withdraws from the photographic image, the exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to the ritual value. To have pinpointed this new stage constitutes the incomparable significance of Atget, who, around 1900, took photographs of deserted Paris streets. It has quite justly been said of him that he photographed them like scenes of crime. The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence[30].

David Campany writes of this style and Benjamin's interest in Eugène Atget's manner of documenting the city in the essay *Eugène Atget's Intelligent Documents*[31]. Campany describes the photographer as "a man out of time". This is expressed both in the city he recorded which had undergone colossal urban transformation at the hands of planner Baron Haussmann and his grands-boulevards[32], between 1848–1870 and in Atget's use of the photographic medium, which forever records that which is past, and for him, the rapidly disappearing streets of medieval Paris (Barthes' "here-then")[33].

Problems of recording via analogue materials (film emulsions)

The aforementioned Atget, was not alone in emptying a city in his photographic depictions. He, and countless others, were victims of

[28] **K. Bush**, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[29] See the websites of the architects: http://www.richardbryant.co.uk (access date: 21.02.2021), https://www.peteraaron.net (access date: 21.02.2021).

[30] **W. Benjamin**, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[31] **D. Campany**, *Eugène Atget's Intelligent Documents*, https://davidcampany.com/atget-photographe-de-paris (access date: 23.02.2021).

[32] See **S. Kirkland**, *Paris Reborn: Napoléon III, Baron Haussmann, and the Quest to Build a Modern City*, London 2013.

[33] **R. Barthes**, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

6–7. LH – Retail area at Gatwick South Terminal, Chapman Taylor Architects (1995), Royal Holloway Library, Associated Architects (2018). Photo: M. Hamilton Knight

technical constraint, caused by slow analogue film speeds. This was most notably seen via the emulsions utilised by photographers prior to the mid 2000's when digital capture was finally embraced. The majority of architectural photographers working with film used large format cameras to give the appearance of correct perspective for structures, and exposure times on all analogue emulsions (regardless of camera size) were prohibitively long.

I personally have been guilty of rendering a busy airport terminal shopping mall lifeless; the movement of many people over several seconds of exposure time required for the transparency film stock, simply emptied it of life. Only odd individuals sitting on terminal seats can be clearly made out, whereas the mall's concourses were captured with a few faint apparitions floating across the tiled floors [Fig. 6]. I struggled with this predicament of "ghosting" throughout the 1990's, and fought hard to address such problems, always trying to cast willing passers-by to stay and animate the large format transparencies I shot for the architectural press.

The style of Pevsner, as beautiful as it is, is incredibly hard to align my personal aesthetic to. I have had three decades of being tasked to show buildings at work, rest and play, where users are busy going about their daily lives. This is far easier to record today, as seen for example in the atrium at Royal Holloway's library (University College London) [Fig. 7]. Even if pictured without their principal protagonists, I still endeavour to show human marks and attributes, which are always meaningfully placed within the camera's reach, allowing the viewer a sense of purpose and scale for the designed space.

When any of us regard a subject in three dimensions, we are very sophisticated in how we analyse what we are in front of and our brains simplify what our eyes actually see, to allow us to consider what it is we are looking at. We describe these things to others in terms such as "I focused on this", meaning that we are concentrated on some aspect of a scene which is of primary importance to us, to the exclusion of other facets also physically present. John Suler and Richard Zakia describe this as "visual search"[34] and further expand on this by citing *Pragnanz*[35], seen within Gestalt Laws concerning the system of perceptual organisation. In simple terms, we visually de-clutter what's in front of us to bring meaning to what we see.

In de-contextualising buildings of their 21st c. signs and human accessories to simply reveal their pure architectural form within the urban or rural setting, we are doing what the publishers Phaidon (1999) describe of their monograph for photographer Gabriele Basilico whereby he seeks to "banish human life to reveal the life of the building itself"[36]. Historian Robert Elwall also concurs, by saying "Basilico's desolate, monochrome cityscapes represent a kind of 'neutron bomb' photography, in which all structures remain intact but the inhabitants have chillingly vanished"[37].

[34] **J. Suler**, **R. Zakia**, *Perception and Imaging: Photography as a Way of Seeing*, 5th Ed., New York 2018, p. 12.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 60.

[36] See **F. Bonami**, *Gabrielle Basilico*, London 2001, https://www.phaidon.com/store/photography/gabriele-basilico-9780714845678 (access date: 14.02.2021).

[37] **R. Elwall**, *Building with Light: The International History of Architectural Photography*, London 2004, p. 199.

A question of deceit?

Elwall, writing elsewhere, and this time in the catalogue forward to *Site Work – Architecture in photography since early modernism*[38], a show at London's Photographers' Gallery in 1991 (and therefore at a point where analogue recording was the only means possible for photography), refers to even earlier criticism of this approach. He reviews an article commissioned by "Architects' Journal" magazine from Tom Picton[39], in which Picton was asked to investigate the style of photography widely embraced by the profession (and which I am naming the "Pevsner Way of Seeing"). In 1979, the "Architects' Journal", could be expected to provide critical peer review on the buildings it featured and was weekly reading for the industry.

In two separate issues spanning 16 pages, 35 pence bought readers a scathing essay about architectural photography and its absence of life in buildings which "march across the pages of architectural magazines like tombs in a graveyard". It robustly berated editors for encouraging architect-commissioned photography. Picton also blamed architects themselves for "submitting to a hubris that did not want people in photographs but still claimed they were for them". Elwall sides with Picton's view that the style of image making seen within the architectural press was no more than a form of advertising. However, in part two of the article itself, one of Picton's interviewees, an "Architects' Journal" staff member defends the industry stance by saying "Photographs are very artificial… it is therefore quite legitimate to extend this artificiality and stage-managing of the scene to be photographed". Nevertheless, Picton does give some traction to the people on the tools themselves[40], interviewing photographer Richard Einzig[41], who concurs that the issues with slow film speeds are significant factors in this outcome.

The debate over the morality of removing "life" from photographs of architecture remains active still today and is one with which I've alluded within this paper to eschewing from my own professional practice. However, in the face of Pevsner, and Yale University Press's adherence to the legacy of the style of curation of the series, the need for longevity trumps the possibility to embrace a more overt documentary approach.

One of Yale University Press's editorial staff recalled in a conversation to me that she was asked in all seriousness by a photographer for one of the other Pevsner editions (also undergoing revision), if it was acceptable to keep the sheep in a particular picture, or did they need photoshopping out? This said, certain manipulative inflections of post-production are a necessity for these books, if, for nothing else, to future proof the evidence against time. It is employed with a light touch on the likes of parish churches, where the settings witness little change throughout the seasons, but is manifest most in towns

[38] ***Idem***, *The Specialist Eye*, [in:] *Site Work: Architecture in Photography since Early Modernism*, Ed. **M. Caiger-Smith**, **D. Chandler**, London 1991.

[39] **T. Picton**, *The Craven Image, or the Apotheosis of the Architectural Photograph: Part 1*, "Architects' Journal" 1979, No. 30; ***idem***, *The Craven Image, or the Apotheosis of the Architectural Photograph: Part 2*, "Architects' Journal" 1979, No. 31.

[40] ***Idem***, *The Craven Image, or the Apotheosis of the Architectural Photograph: Part 2…*, p. 226.

[41] **R. Einzig**, *Classic Modern Houses in Europe*, London 1981.

8–9. Clare Hartwell, Nikolaus Pevsner, Elizabeth Williamson, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, London 2020, Plate 100: Trent Building, University of Nottingham (1928). Photo: M. Hamilton Knight

10–11. Clare Hartwell, Nikolaus Pevsner, Elizabeth Williamson, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, London 2020, Plate 83: Newark Town Hall (1774). Photo: M. Hamilton Knight

and city centres, or where human activity is taking place within and around the buildings, for example, the cyclists passing the University of Nottingham [Figs. 8–9].

Some of the plates for the Nottingham title took hours and hours of detailed and painstaking attention, and their capturing on site sometimes had to be made through several separate exposures taken from the same anchor point which were subsequently combined to form a single master canvas.

For approaches, where physical obstructions blocked the optimum view, the camera had to be actually shifted to record separate sections of detail which couldn't be seen from the main vantage point. These were then "painted" back in where there were missing parts in the original frame. This is skilled re-touching work, but is it the work of deceit? Or is it simply a little "magic" needed to rectify in two dimensions, what a three-dimensional experience naturally would allow by a shift of the foot, or a reach on tiptoes? [Fig. 10–11]

Certainly, to see both canvases together as "before" and "after" is fascinating, it allows the simple children's game of "spot the difference" to take place and is a clear lesson in how we shouldn't take on face value what is presented by any photograph as "fact" [Fig. 12–13]. In part, this body of work is "fiction", but indeed no photograph can ever be truly objective if it is created by a human, as it always bears the attributes of that particular creative's own conceptual and contextual judgements. The brief for Pevsner, is so tightly formed, by its history, its legacy and its future, that every single photograph under its banner is a carefully crafted, iconic representation of the individual works of architectural art it shows.

Conclusion

We have examined some of the criticism and discussions surrounding a visual typology which exists both in the professional domain and also within the art of architectural photography where environments, otherwise populated, have been stripped of their narrative contexts. This may be in the name of commercial interests, of art, or even simply owing to technical constraints of the age (pre 2000's). I have made the point that the rights and wrongs of this have been the source of debate for several decades, and they continue on today within the architectural press. Picton's 1979 essay was referenced to as recently as 2012, with regard to online architectural journalism and the perpetuation of highly stylised and largely empty imagery. An article by "The Guardian" journalist Owen Hatherley rebuking these methods was picked up by both "Architects' Journal" and the architectural news digest and blog site Dezeen, and was followed by plenty of reader feedback and viewpoints[42].

[42] **M. Fairs**, *Architecture "no longer interested in anything but its own image"*, 12 December 2012, https://www.dezeen.com/2012/12/12/architectural-photography-owen-hatherley (access date: 10.02.2021).

12–13. Clare Hartwell, Nikolaus Pevsner, Elizabeth Williamson, *Buildings of England: Nottinghamshire*, London 2020, Plate 111: The Council House, Nottingham (1929). Photo: M. Hamilton Knight

Nevertheless, the "Pevsner Way of Seeing", within the context of its primary application, namely "The Buildings of England" series and its longevity, remains, in my view, the only viable way of presenting via contextual isolation, the architectural styles embodied within buildings and monuments over the last millennia.

Strangely, of all times, the requirement to remove humanity (at any other point in history, a contrite artifice), can now be legitimately embraced and recorded "as truth", as cities the world over have emptied in the fight against Covid-19. This visual methodology and outcomes that it presents are probably better understood now. Wherever it is that we live, we have all personally temporarily experienced the truth of empty city centres, and our buildings stripped of their daily roles and contexts. But to use this as an excuse for a book published right in the middle of such a human crisis (September 2020), would be indeed a lie, for I put my camera down twelve months prior to this pandemic, when the title was compiled.

In summary, in a period where Elwall's "Neutron Bomb" really did come to pass in our experience of the built environment (and whilst I personally sidle with the critics of those who call into question an exclusionist narrative for showing architecture in the main), "Pevsner's Way of Seeing" in expressing architectural styles may be more understandable by this 21st c. audience than either he, or we would have ever thought possible.

Słowa kluczowe

fotografia architektury, historia architektury, fotografia, architektura i środowisko budynków, reprezentacja wizualna, produkcja książki

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Keywords

architectural photography, history of architecture, photography, architecture and the built environment, visual representation, book production

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A senior lecturer on the BA and MA Photography programme at Nottingham Trent University. She has been a commercial architectural photographer for over three decades and her work is published in architectural books and journals internationally. Her research interests explore the changes in the commercial photographic world, with regard to digital technology. She has recently worked with Yale University Press to illustrate one of the latest *Pevsner Architectural Guides* and an accompanying exhibition featuring 90 of the images is due to be held in Nottingham during summer 2022. She is also writing a book titled *Photography for Architects – Effective Use of Images in Your Architectural Practice*, which is due for publication by Routledge in 2023. Her commercial folio can be found at www.builtvision.co.uk.

Summary

MARTINE HAMILTON KNIGHT (Nottingham Trent University) / "The Pevsner Way of Seeing". A paper on contriving the timelessness' of architectural photography for Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's "Buildings of England" series of books

This paper explores the challenges of using a specific photographic style as seen within a series of books about architecture which have been published over the last 70 years and subsequently revised throughout that period. A commercial architectural photographer and academic at Nottingham Trent University in the UK, Martine Hamilton Knight was commissioned to provide the illustrations for *Nottinghamshire*, one of the recently updated titles in the "Buildings of England" series begun by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner in 1951. In her 30-year career documenting the built environment for the British architectural press, there has always been an emphasis on capturing buildings in their everyday use. The approach required to showcase structures dating from early Norman times to the present day threw up a number of challenges for Hamilton Knight concerned with context and representation. With reference to the historic writings of Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes, together with contemporary views from photographic critics including Liz Wells, Steve Edwards and architectural specialists including Kate Bush, Tom Picton and Robert Elwall, the author explores what she defines as the "Pevsner Way of Seeing". With a new body of images prepared using modern photographic methods for a digitally produced print publication, it calls into question the legitimacy of utilising a visual narrative established shortly after World War II. This is set against the parameters of creating a body of images which are not for immediate discard, but instead have an anticipated shelf life in excess of three or four decades, thus requiring them to maintain currency at all times.