

Reinterpreting Rohe: The Peculiar Life of the Barcelona Pavilion

Reinterpretando a Rohe.
La vida peculiar del
pabellón de Barcelona

investigación
pp. 126-139

— Madhura Chatterjee

Abstract

The original Barcelona Pavilion was dismantled in 1930, a few months after its construction, and a replica was constructed in 1986. Therefore, essentially, the building has lived three lives: first, during the exposition; second, after it was taken apart and a portfolio of photographs was the closest substitute of its reality; finally, after it was reconstructed. This paper argues for the existence of a fourth life of the pavilion in print, created by the numerous critical interpretations of it. It analyzes how such articles contributed to its parallel life in media and its reputation as an icon of modern architecture.

Keywords: reconstruction of the Barcelona Pavilion, Mies van der Rohe, media and architecture, modern architecture

Resumen

El Pabellón de Barcelona original fue desmantelado en 1930, seis meses después de su construcción, en 1986, se erigió una réplica. Por lo tanto, en teoría, el edificio ha tenido tres vidas: en primer lugar, durante la exposición; en segundo, después de que se desmontara y un portafolio de fotografías fuera el sustituto más cercano de la realidad, y finalmente, después de que se reconstruyera. Este trabajo argumenta la existencia de una cuarta vida del Pabellón, impresa, creada por las numerosas interpretaciones críticas que ha merecido. En este artículo se analiza cómo estos artículos contribuyeron a su vida paralela en los medios de comunicación y a su reputación como icono de la arquitectura moderna.

Palabras clave: reconstrucción del Pabellón de Barcelona, Mies van der Rohe, medios y arquitectura, arquitectura moderna

The Barcelona Pavilion, or rather what was designed to be the German Pavilion for the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona, Spain, has a unique history. A few months after its inauguration, in January 1930, the pavilion was dismantled. All that survived of it was a portfolio of photographs by the Berliner Bild-Bericht. In spite of being one of Rohe's most celebrated works, people were only acquainted with it through photographs, for the building no longer existed! It took a quarter of a century for critics to begin writing about it, appreciating its magnificence. During this time, the journals and the books that covered it based themselves on observations made from photographs, or reinterpreted the few articles that were published while the pavilion still existed. In 1986, almost sixty years later, the pavilion was reconstructed through the efforts of Fernando Ramos, Cristina Circi and Ignasi de Solá-Morales. Its reconstruction caused a new wave of literature to be written on the pavilion, followed by a host of experimental photography projects at the site.

The building has essentially lived three lives: first, during the exposition; second, after it was taken apart and photographs were the closest substitutes of its reality; finally, after it was reconstructed. It is incredibly difficult to separate the histories of the pavilion from the building itself. Robin Evans has mentioned the existence of a phantom of the pavilion.¹ For a building that lived such colorful lives, there exists an equally long paper trail behind it. This paper thus argues that the pavilion has lived a *fourth* life: in print, created by its numerous critical interpretations. This essay traces the texts on the pavilion to see how they contributed to its parallel life in the media.

Juan Bonta's *Anatomy of Architectural Interpretation*² remains the most comprehensive source of information regarding the various accolades and criticisms the pavilion received. His essay points to nine kinds of reactions the pavilion received throughout its history: blindness, pre-canonic interpretations, official interpretation, canonic interpretations, class identification, dissemination, grammaticalization and oblivion, metalinguistic analysis and reinterpretations.

Journals and books that covered other structures in the exposition or other works by Mies conveniently turned a blind eye to the pavilion. This can be seen not only among journalists, but among eminent historians and architectural critics as well. Bonta refers to this category of reactions as "blindness." Under "pre-canonic interpretations," he includes the few authors who defended the pavilion from the start, due to their cordial relations with Mies or similar ambitions in the field. The third reaction, "official interpretation," alludes to a speech made by the German *Kommissar* Dr. Von Schnitzler and Mies's remarks on various occasions. These comments influenced the fourth category, "canonic interpretations," which consisted of the opinions of major figures such as Reyner Banham, Arthur Drexler, Peter Blake and Vincent Scully, which, by 1960, had "acquired a cohesion they did not have before and they were received with a consensus they did not enjoy before."³ They reigned undisputed for a decade, making the following claims: first, that the pavilion presented a "new kind of spatial experience" in its fluidity of space; second, that there was an independence between the roof, floor, columns and walls; third, that the abundant use of reflective or transparent materials turned the building itself into an exhibition; fourth, that its proportions were comparable to De Stijl paintings, and were influenced by Japanese lightness, Wright's early projects, Cubism and Constructivism; fifth, that it represented Germany's postwar recovery; lastly, it was dubbed as a work of art, "perhaps the best of the century." Bonta is of the opinion that these canonic interpretations arose out of collective inferences and "[n]either Mies's architecture nor anyone else's can speak for itself; it always requires a collective effort of interpretation."⁴ Bonta's fifth category, "class identification," situated the building within larger classes in accordance with its features or the interpretations made of it: Miesian architecture, International Style, Bauhaus or exhibition buildings. The next set of interpretations, "dissemination," involved the complicated process by which canonic interpretations reached the public. It took ten reprints for Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* to finally mention the pavilion, in 1954. Similarly, Nikolaus

Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture* ignored the pavilion from 1943 to 1957. In 1960, he said the pavilion was the most perfect work of modern architecture in the years following 1930. Suddenly, in the 1960s, everybody was talking about this seminal work. The seventh category, "grammaticalization and oblivion," refers to the eventual decline in interest once the same views had been reiterated everywhere: "Judgements too often repeated become subject to grammaticalization and loss of meaning, just as idiomatic expressions⁵ and are discarded, for they have lost their relevance. The eighth category, "metalinguistic analysis," is where the interpretations themselves become subject to scrutiny, discourses are written on previous discourses and, in the last stage, "reinterpretations" occur.

Bonta's book was published in 1975 and Mies scholarship has come a long way since then. After its reconstruction in 1986, the pavilion was the focus of new attention and two kinds of articles began to appear. While some critics continued to put the pavilion up on a pedestal, others tore it apart. The former compared the old pavilion to the new, while the latter discussed the differences in the experience of being physically present in the pavilion versus experiencing the building through photographs. Post-reconstruction scholarship differs in its interpretations of the building from those made before, as well as from Mies's own concepts. Researchers have also commented on the change in light quality, furniture arrangement, materials and site context, and have even questioned its place as one of the most prominent examples of modern architecture. Much has been written about the photographs and the building, but not about the discourses themselves.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War affected the institutions that had been associated with the exposition. These factors aggravated the existing inaccessibility of information due to the short life of the original building.⁶ The first attempt to draw up plans of the pavilion occurred when Werner Blaser was working on a monograph on Mies.⁷ On the fiftieth anniversary of its construction, another attempt was made to compile all the documentation on the pavilion – "graphic, written and direct testimonies" – by scholars such as Arthur Drexler, MoMA's Curator of Architecture and Design, and Ludwig Glaeser, director of the Mies van der Rohe archive.⁸ It was only with the leadup to the celebrations for the centenary of Mies's birth in the 1980s, however, that the inventory of documents took on a more comprehensible form.⁹ It was this set of sources that was used for its reconstruction, complemented by the wealth of information unearthed by the Spanish architects Ignasi de Solà-Morales, Fernando Ramos and Cristina Cirici when they undertook the enormous task of rebuilding the pavilion. A part of this documentation was published in the book *Mies van der Rohe: Barcelona Pavilion*, which remains the second most valuable source of information after Bonta's essay.

Mies has been repeatedly hailed as one of the harbingers of a revolution.¹⁰ Media and images contributed to raising him to the throne he occupied. Mies was no amateur in the field of advertising and publicity or to the photographic trends of the time. His fame was brought about by five projects – the two Glass Skyscrapers of 1921 and 1922, the 1923 Reinforced Concrete Office Building and the Concrete and Brick Country Houses of 1923 and 1924. None of these were realized. Yet they are referred to in journals, in every book on modern architecture that mentions Mies, featured in exhibitions and form the basis of his early writings.¹¹ Juan José Lahuerta compares the Friedrichstrasse montage of 1921 to the Flat Iron building captured by photographers involved with *Camera Work*, such as Alfred Steiglitz and Edward Steichen.¹² His skyscrapers were juxtaposed with a city from a different time, highlighting the role of the tower as a protagonist and an imposition on the city.¹³ While Lahuerta analyzes the manifesto aspect of these montages, Rosamund Diamond argues that Mies's montages shaped



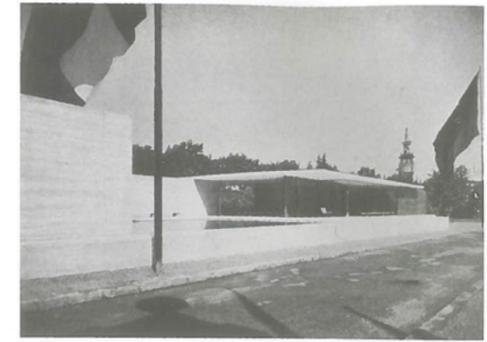
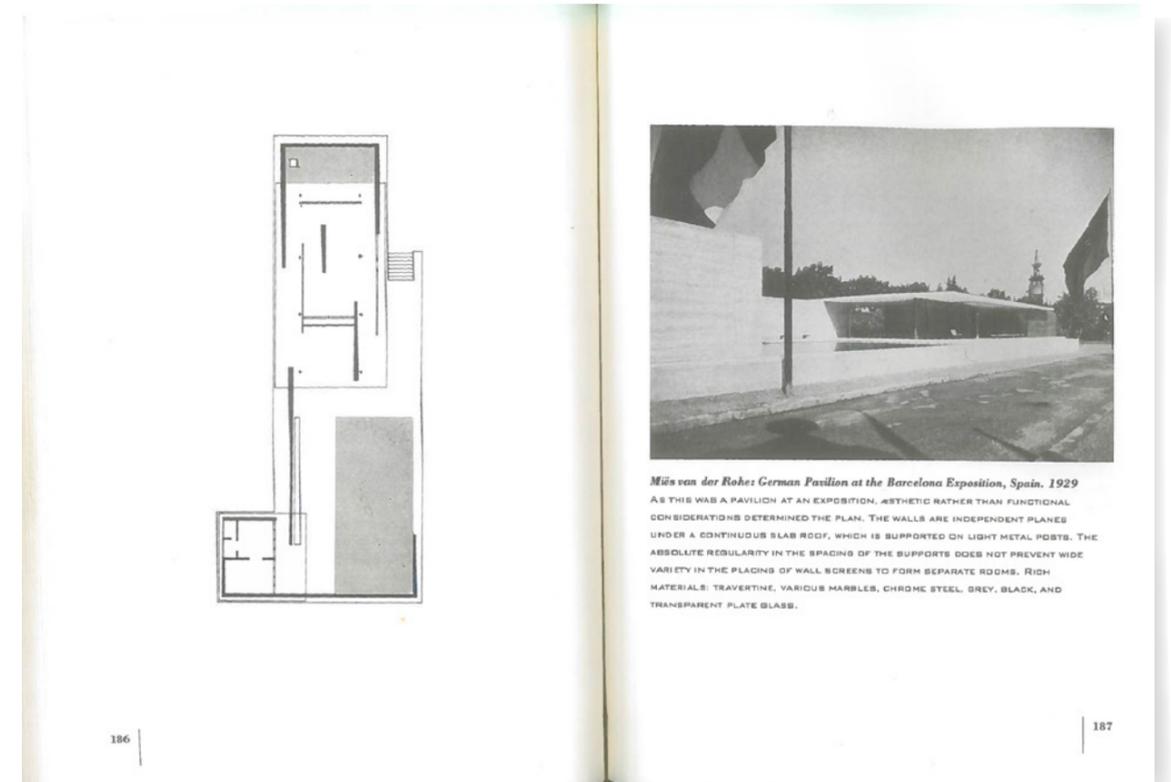
Mies's montage of the Friedrichstrasse skyscraper (1921) and Edward Steichen's photograph *The Flatiron* (1904) placed side by side to highlight Lahuerta's opinion of the skyscraper as a protagonist, imposing itself on the city. Mies van der Rohe©ARS, NY. The Mies van der Rohe Archive. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Edward J. Steiner©ARS, NY

his design methods.¹⁴ Later, images of his other projects were shot in such a way as to resemble the montages, especially in terms of the expanse of the sky and the scale of the human beings captured.¹⁵ His contributions to the journal *G* and his associations with the Werkbund, the Novembergruppe, the Bund Deutscher Architekten and Der Ring were all in pursuit of strengthening his foothold in Germany's leading artistic and architectural associations, which would further help his career.¹⁶ The mass destruction of his drawings made prior to the 1920s were also undertaken with the vision of "constructing a very precise "image" of himself, one from which all incoherence, all *faux pas*, were erased."¹⁷

Modern architecture has been referred to as the first movement in the history of architecture that thrived solely based on "photographic evidence."¹⁸ The Bild-Bericht photographs were the only ones Mies permitted as official representations of the building. In spite of these photographs being such important historical documents, no negatives exist. Two original prints, of which one has been claimed to have been cropped and retouched, have accompanied every article ever written on the pavilion prior to its reconstruction. According to George Dodds, the pavilion could have been saved from demolition, but Mies, busy with the construction of the Tugendhat House at the time, did not show any interest.¹⁹ He was perhaps aware that revamping the pavilion would require turning it into a permanent structure and hence did not invest in it. The photographs already presented a reality that never existed and they would help keep an illusory image of the building alive in people's minds.²⁰ Rebuilding it threatened the very existence that had contributed to the speculation on its possible reconstruction. It would bring the pavilion's shortcomings to light. So much so that Philip Johnson commented the following on its reconstruction: "The problem before us is, should a dream be realized or not? We have made such a myth of that building. Shouldn't it be left in the sacred vault of the memory bank?"²¹

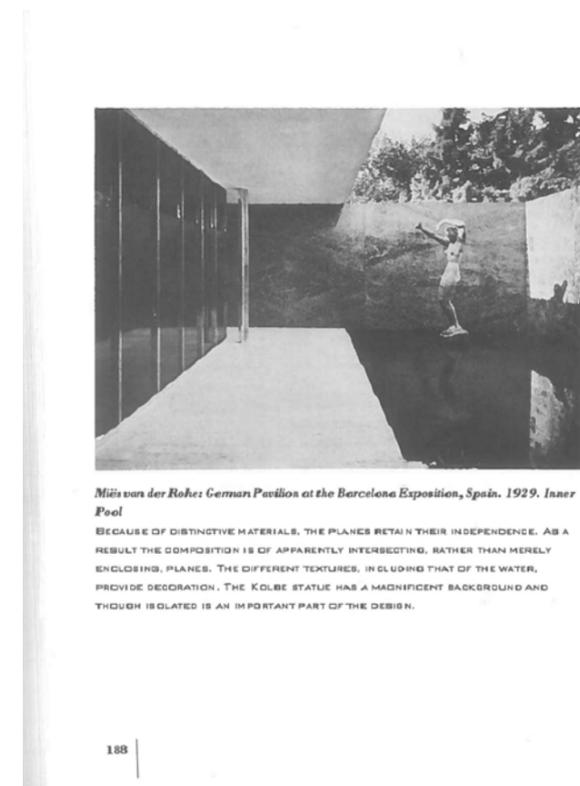
The architects Alison and Peter Smithson, too, refer to the existence of a "myth" of the pavilion.²² The loss of scale in the photographs first struck them when they visited the reconstructed pavilion, a desert-like impression was made by the travertine and an illusion of a forest by the green shades of the marbles.²³ They wrote that a mythical pavilion had been built in their heads through the photographs they had seen over the years.²⁴ In spite of the lack of color in the images, they were objectively aware of the colors of the materials. And yet it seemed to them as if the myth was more real than the reconstruction. The feel of the pavilion's age was lost: "It is this illusive nature of the invention that is most vulnerable when it comes to the myth-reconstruction: the exact touch of the period; the impact of minds and hearts; cannot be reconstructed."²⁵

Media delivers everything to our living rooms. We are hardly ever fortunate enough to physically visit the works of architecture we hear of. Our knowledge and opinions are largely formulated on the basis of what we read in architectural discourses and what we see through images carefully chosen and composed to represent each work. In her book *Privacy and Publicity*,²⁶ Beatriz Colomina highlights the role played by the mass media in shaping public opinion, which can be applied to the pavilion: "the process of labelling, and the product in turn becomes marketable."²⁷ As she argues, "Modern architecture does not simply address or exploit mass culture. It is itself, from the beginning, a commodity."²⁸ It was a system where meaning oscillated between the building itself and its representations. The building functioned free of its context, so often transported through photographs "into rather immaterial sites of architectural publications, exhibitions, journals."²⁹ She further adds that "[c]omplete projects are taken in one decisive shot, an advertising image that becomes as canonic as the building itself



Mies van der Rohe: German Pavilion at the Barcelona Exposition, Spain, 1929

AS THIS WAS A PAVILION AT AN EXPOSITION, AESTHETIC RATHER THAN FUNCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS DETERMINED THE PLAN. THE WALLS ARE INDEPENDENT PLANES UNDER A CONTINUOUS SLAB ROOF, WHICH IS SUPPORTED ON LIGHT METAL POSTS. THE ABSOLUTE REGULARITY IN THE SPACING OF THE SUPPORTS DOES NOT PREVENT WIDE VARIETY IN THE PLACING OF WALL SCREENS TO FORM SEPARATE ROOMS. ROOF MATERIALS: TRAVERTINE, VARIOUS MARBLES, CHROME STEEL, GREY, BLACK, AND TRANSPARENT PLATE GLASS.



Mies van der Rohe: German Pavilion at the Barcelona Exposition, Spain, 1929. Inner Pool

BECAUSE OF DISTINCTIVE MATERIALS, THE PLANES RETAIN THEIR INDEPENDENCE. AS A RESULT THE COMPOSITION IS OF APPARENTLY INTERSECTING, RATHER THAN MERELY ENCLOSED, PLANES. THE DIFFERENT TEXTURES, INCLUDING THAT OF THE WATER, PROVIDE DECORATION. THE KOLBE STATUE HAS A MAGNIFICENT BACKGROUND AND THOUGH ISOLATED IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE DESIGN.

(if it does in fact take over).³⁰ This is echoed in Claire Zimmermann's writings where she expressed her distaste for the use of a wide-angle lens for the documentation of the Tugendhat House, citing how this lens brought the "middle ground and background into apparently closer proximity to one another than they would appear on-site."³¹ She further stressed that treating these photographs as accurate documentation would make aspiring architects desire the "spatial grandeur" depicted therein.³² Additionally, she believed that the propagation of the International Style in Europe through publications and its adoption by architects are good examples for illustrating the problem of misrepresentation and the misconstruing of images in the field of architecture.³³ And rightly so: what could have been more influential in determining the status of the pavilion than its inclusion in MoMA's *The International Style* exhibition in 1932? The concept of the new style was Alfred Barr's contribution.³⁴ The text of the book, though promoted as co-authored by Henry Russell Hitchcock and Johnson, was composed by the former.

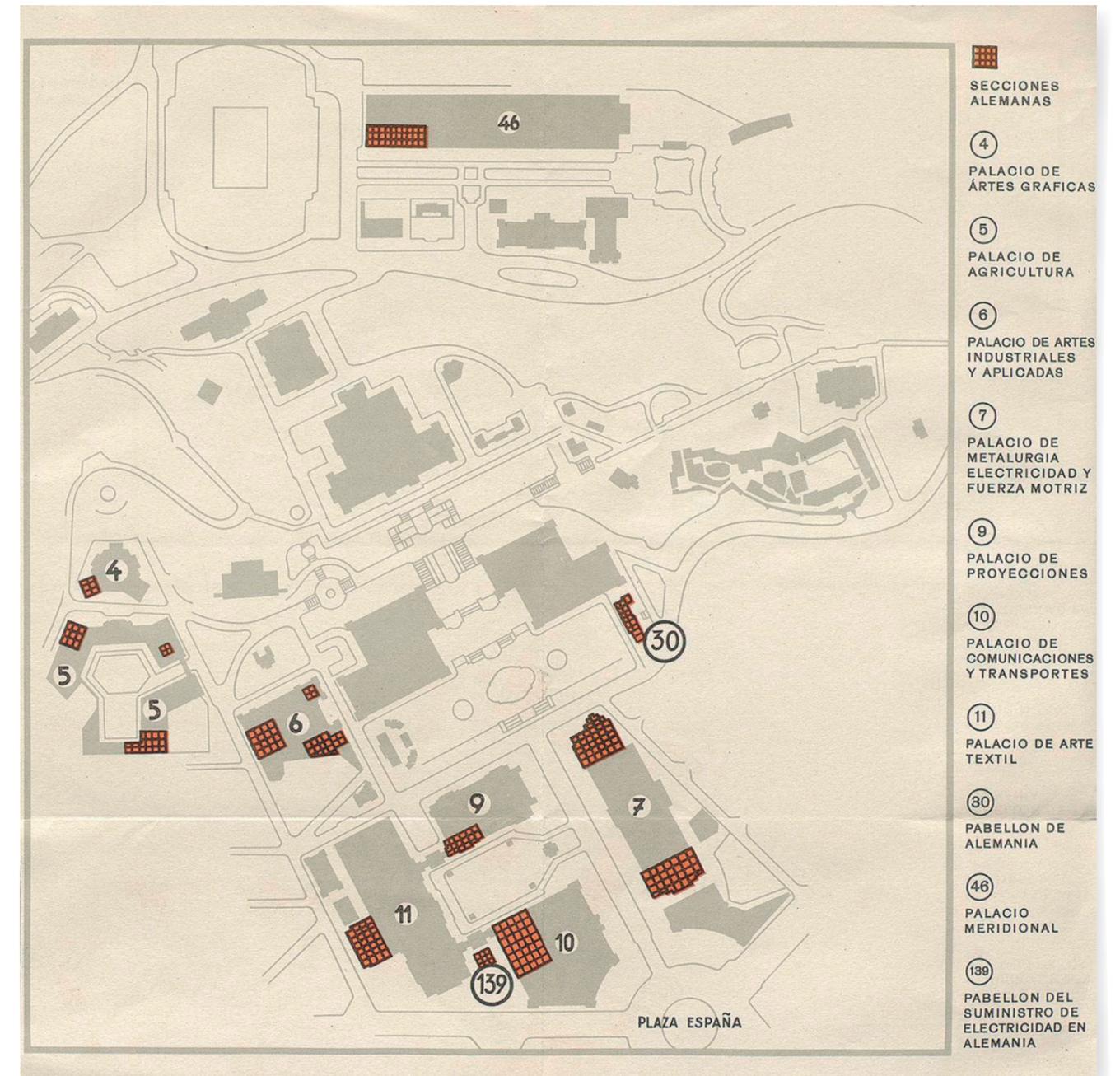
In an interview, Johnson made the following comment on the goals of the International Style and the people they considered to be its ambassadors: "We thought architecture was still an art; that it was something you could look at; that, therefore, architects should not be worried about social implications, but about whether the work looked good or not. In that sense, we had only three allies in the Modern Movement: Le Corbusier, Oud, and Mies."³⁵

The Barcelona Pavilion was one of five projects by Mies they chose to focus on, albeit it having been a difficult task to fit in with the general principles of the style³⁶ – "emphasis upon volume – space enclosed by thin planes or surfaces as opposed to the suggestion of mass and solidity; regularity as opposed to symmetry or other kinds of obvious balance; and lastly, dependence upon the intrinsic elegance of materials, technical perfection, and fine proportions, as opposed to applied ornament."³⁷ Three images, one of the plan and two from the Bild-Bericht portfolio, were accompanied by the following description:

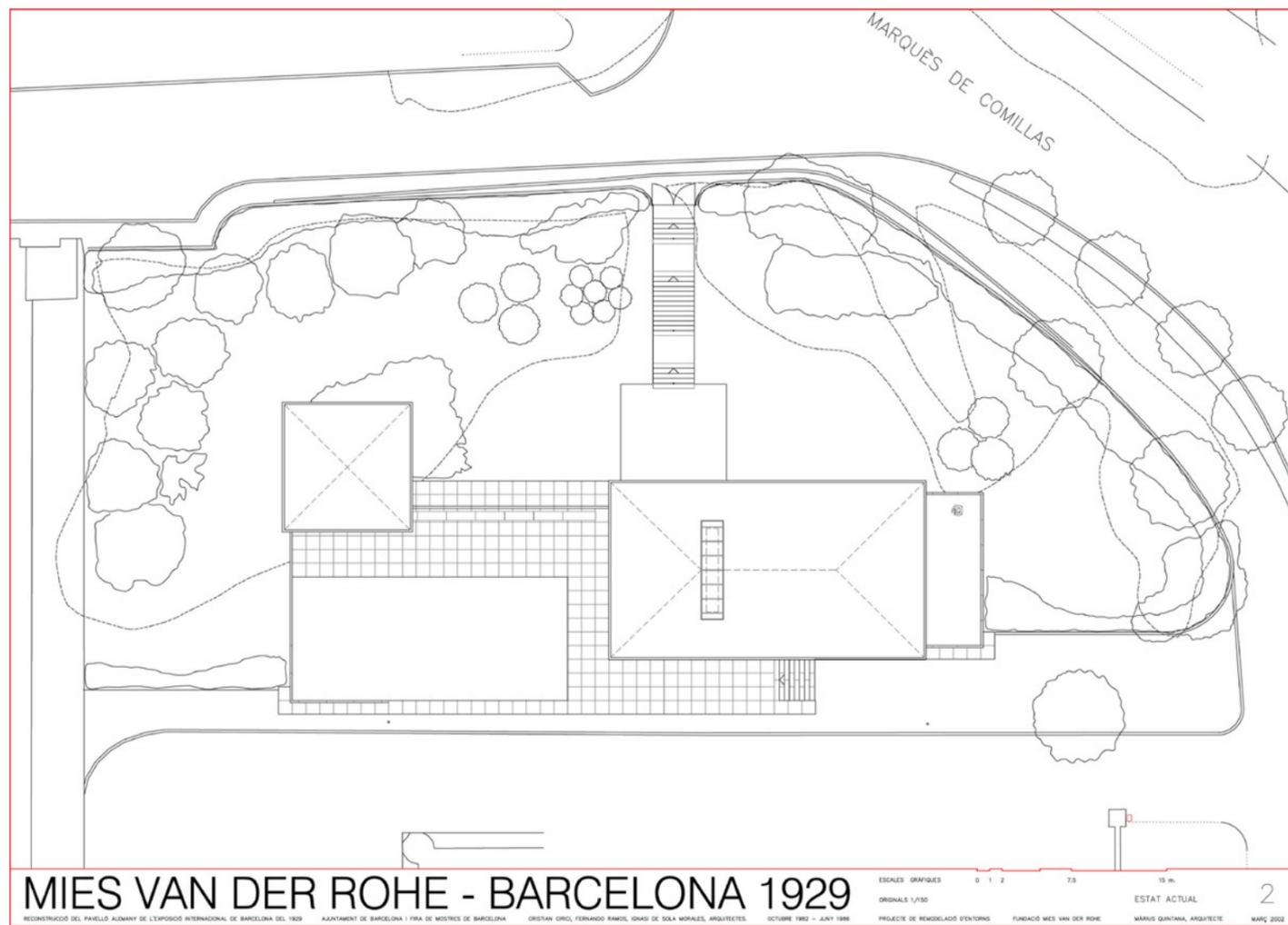
As this was a pavilion at an exposition, aesthetic rather than functional considerations determined the plan. The walls are independent planes under a continuous slab roof, which is supported on light metal posts. The absolute regularity in the spacing of the supports does not prevent wide variety in the placing of wall screens to form separate rooms. Rich materials: travertine, various marbles, chrome steel, grey, black and transparent plate glass.

Because of distinctive materials, the planes retain their independence. As a result, the composition is of apparently intersecting, rather than merely enclosing, planes. The different textures, including that of the water, provide decoration. The Kolbe statue has a magnificent background and though isolated is an important part of the design.³⁸

The authors themselves thought very highly of the impact the exhibition created. In the foreword to the 1995 edition, Johnson writes that it constituted a major "turning point in the history and theory of architecture of 1922-1932" and might have been the reason Mies was able to secure teaching jobs at American universities.³⁹ It has also been claimed to have influenced the way architects designed throughout the world.⁴⁰ Peter and Alison Smithson have publicly expressed how they were influenced by Mies's buildings.⁴¹ Hitchcock and Johnson were not entirely overestimating the ripple they created. MoMA collected as "art" and put on display a few pieces from the *oeuvres* of the architects of



Official catalogue of the German section, showing the location German pavilions at the Barcelona International Exposition, 1929: 4, Palace of Graphic Arts; 5, Palace of Agriculture; 6, Palace of Industrial and Applied Arts; 7, Palace of Metallurgy; 9, Palace of Projections; 10, Palace of Communications and Transportation; 11, Palace of the Textile Industry; 30, German Pavilion; 46, Southern Palace; 139, German Electric Utilities Pavilion. Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona



Rarely seen landscaped site plan of the Barcelona Pavilion, as mentioned by Barry Bergdoll in "The Nature of Mies' Space."
Fundación Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona

the Modern Movement. Their inclusion in the collection and its accompanying label resulted in a validation of their works and, at the same time, disseminated them as popular culture. The International Style ended with the exhibition, for it did not exist beyond the museum.⁴²

Johnson and Hitchcock claimed that the architects of the International Style were primarily builders who sought to exhibit the significance they attached to function and construction.⁴³ Mies had confessed that he had not been aware of what a 'pavilion' exactly was when he was approached to design it.⁴⁴ The term 'pavilion' was first used to describe temporary structures in seventeenth century gardens and went on to become one of the prominent architectural symbols of English landscape gardens in the following century.⁴⁵ Laura Lizondo Sevilla has theorized that the exhibition projects Mies worked on enabled him to experiment with his architectural concepts in the absence of the hindrances posed by more permanent constructions.⁴⁶ The Barcelona Pavilion has been dubbed as being devoid of a role to play, meant to be a stop along the journey through the exposition grounds.⁴⁷ However, it is often forgotten that the pavilion was created to represent a country, having been built in conjunction with Germany's Electric Utilities Pavilion, a lesser known building, also designed by Mies.

In her essay *Mies's Opaque Cube: The Electric Utilities Pavilion at the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition*, Lizondo Sevilla discusses how the form of the electric pavilion was a closed cube and did not conform to Mies's fluid space rule.⁴⁸ Its interior was designed, with Fritz Schüller, as an empty container. The aim was to display the country's industrial prowess in accordance with the exposition's theme of electricity. Photographs printed on fabric stretched along the walls and blended in with the furniture and exhibits, so that spectators felt like they were trapped inside a theater with the walls functioning as one gigantic advertisement.⁴⁹

Mies rejected the site offered to him by the Spanish authorities and went on to select his own. It was situated in the transition between the grandeur of the exposition and the Spanish village. For a building that has been named among the best examples of modern architecture, it is strange how it is always represented as a stand-alone building, never in its surrounding context. Even the landscape immediately around Mies's pavilion is hardly shown, a fact Barry Bergdoll refers to in his essay "The Nature of Mies's Space."⁵⁰ Bergdoll also notes the asymmetry of the pavilion, which contrasts with the exposition's surrounding symmetrical structures, claiming that it responds to its context by being at odds with it.⁵¹ A disregard for its neighboring buildings and general context made it alien to the natural terrain.⁵² It was merely a spatial composition, not to be mistaken for a more meaningful place.⁵³

In this regard, Josep Quetglas interprets the Barcelona pavilion as a stage set for Germany to perform on,⁵⁴ a perspective that has been voiced by other critics in their comparisons with circus tents.⁵⁵ The building itself had therefore become a spectacle, reinforcing Colomina's view that architecture itself is a means of representation, much like drawings, photographs, writings, films and advertisements. The pavilion was an image generator.⁵⁶ Evans, on visiting the reconstructed structure, called it a "building that ate ideas."⁵⁷

This superficial authenticity extended to the way its materials were used and how its structural elements worked. Mies chose materials that would enhance reflection – highly polished stone, tinted glass, stucco, chrome plates, even the black-bottomed pool and the water it contained contributed to the sense of illusion. Quetglas has written that reflections were the material of which the pavilion was made.⁵⁸ Its glass walls have been described as being of infinite thickness due to the reflections they created.⁵⁹ When an observer stood in front of them, they saw a blend of what was on the other side of the

glass and what it reflected, successfully enhancing the compactness of the room.⁶⁰ Everything about the pavilion made one feel as if one were trapped inside “a giant virtual mirror.”⁶¹ The walls of the pavilion were load-bearing, even though they appeared to rest on the cruciform chrome-plated posts that themselves acted as reflectors. The famous Barcelona chairs, too, were handmade, although they were publicized in the name of industrialization.⁶² The plinth was supported by a honeycombed network of Catalan vaults, unlike the solid mass it appeared to be. Quetglas asserted that “modern architecture is simply a cosmetic change applied to conventional building methods.”⁶³ What mattered was thus not how the building was really constructed but what it appeared to be, for what sold in the end was what his buildings were projected to be.⁶⁴ George Howe commented that material qualities had been so completely abstracted that nothing remained of the pavilion apart from “pure conceptual space,” an aspect that was representative of the period. He called the pavilion the epitome of “abstract design.”⁶⁵ Other scholars have, however, disapproved of such interpretations for deriving illusory meanings for “every material assuming, camelion-like, the attributes of something not itself – columns dissolving into bars of light, or glass walls becoming opaque and marble ones appearing transparent due to their reflectivity.”⁶⁶ These claims for “complete abstraction” also had the effect of deposing the pavilion of any political context.⁶⁷

Another defining feature of the pavilion that has been frequently discussed is the dominance of horizontal planes, “in which vertical lines are always trapped or dissolved in the horizontal gaps.”⁶⁸ A visitor can be directed to the same space in multiple ways, reminiscent of the “rhythmical geometries” of the theatrical sets of Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig.⁶⁹ A space so generated has been believed to be “neutral” and suitable for all moods.⁷⁰ As one moved about the building, they would be greeted by framed views composed between horizontal planes, an aspect that allegedly creates an experience that is for the “most part two-dimensional.”⁷¹

For such a plan, it is hard to conceive of a focal point. However, the throne room was considered to be the center due to the chairs arranged meticulously to seat King Alfonso XIII. The columns are placed independently of the walls and their intersections. The pillars don’t act as a system and it can therefore be concluded that a grid did not form the basis of the pavilion’s plan.⁷² The overall plan is segregated into spaces enclosed on three sides by free-standing marble and glass walls. Instead of creating physical barriers, it is said to have created geometrical enclosures.⁷³ The continuous roof acts as the unifying element.⁷⁴

Among recent scholars, one significant contribution is Lance Hosey’s *The Ship of Theseus: Identity and the Barcelona Pavilion(s)*, which raises many valid questions. He calls the pavilion modern architecture’s Ship of Theseus and tries to determine the ontological status of the reconstructed pavilion between that of a replica or a reconstruction like that of any other preservation project. Here he brings to light how the reconstruction, owing to the decisions taken to ensure the building’s durability, is closer to Mies’s vision than the original building ever was.⁷⁵ Visitors are also able, all year round, to experience “unmediated, a broad range of space, time, light, and color for the first time in half a century.”⁷⁶ This has also shattered the preconceived images they had of the pavilion.

In an album titled *Lived Instant and Frozen Creature*, Juan Jose Lahuerta compared rarely-seen photographs of the pavilion taken by reporters and visitors to the Spanish exposition with the popular Bild-Bericht folio.⁷⁷ He drew attention to the ‘selective erasure’ that was performed in the official

photographs: even the name of the company supplying the travertine was removed, along with the doors, adjacent buildings and Ionic columns, not to mention the emptiness created by the absence of people. In the first set of photos, a crowd is milling around King Alfonso XIII, the *Komissar* Georg von Schintzler and Mies van der Rohe during their visit to the pavilion. Tiny puddles of water can be seen on the platform after the rain, and flower pots are arranged along the entrance. These create an ordinary image of the pavilion that destroy the myth of the pristine building.

Bonta has concluded that this pavilion was based on an “idea” that was promoted to greatness, a defining aspect of modern architecture. A work of architecture cannot be sufficiently modern if it has not engaged with mass media⁷⁸ or if a permanency has not been forcefully brought out of its transience.⁷⁹ In spite of the reconstruction, whenever we speak of the Barcelona pavilion, we still refer to the canonical interpretations that were based, as previously mentioned, on the original pavilion or on photographs, as if invoking a ghost. This practice has succeeded in keeping alive an alternate reality. At the same time, though Mies has long since disappeared from the context, the building has been rebuilt and research on it still continues. Mies was a part of the pavilion’s past, and following “[t]he removal of the Author...the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent. The temporality is different. The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book.”⁸⁰ Thus, a stark contrast has emerged between the content addressed in previous canonic interpretations and the new scholarship emerging to this day. Anna and Eugeni Bach’s *Mies Missing Materiality* is one such example. Others include Jonathan Hill’s *Weathering the Barcelona Pavilion*,⁸¹ which studies how the pavilion changes with the climate, and Paolo Amaldi and Annela Curulla’s *Chairs, Posture, and Points of View: For an Exact Restitution of the Barcelona Pavilion*,⁸² an interpretation of the placement of furniture at the pavilion. That attempts are being made to look beyond “canonical forms” is in line with Hays’ aspiration to “methods of formal analysis for objects whose cultural meaning is thought to be undecidable. It is precisely the responsibility of criticism that this cultural meaning be continually decided.”⁸³ Mies himself perhaps never imagined that his pavilion could be read in all of these myriad ways. These interpretations have become a museum in itself. However, the resulting multiplicity of opinions has reached the point at which one commentary cannot be called more credible than the other. This subject is beyond the scope of the present paper, but is surely something worth looking into.

Michael Hays used Mies van der Rohe’s works to illustrate that “an architectural object, by virtue of its situation in the world, is an object whose interpretation has already commenced but is never complete.”⁸⁴ Architecture is always evolving, it is never a finished piece of work. Bonta reminds us that architecture’s meaning cannot remain limited to what the architect had to say.⁸⁵ As Barthes put it, “[T]he birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.”⁸⁶ In his essay *The Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes argued that “a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.”⁸⁷ Similarly, in architecture, new interpretations are needed as times change: for a work to continue to exist, it must be reinterpreted and used in new ways.

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