

Chapter 3: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's interior perspective views

Around the specificities of his visual dispositifs

This chapter analyses the impact of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's strategies in his interior perspective views on the perception of the viewers of his representations. It places particular emphasis on the reasons for which Mies van der Rohe prioritized horizontality against verticality, analyzing the role of this prioritization in the way his drawings are conceived. The chapter also relates Mies van der Rohe's conception of stratification of parallel surfaces as a mechanism of production of spatial qualities to August Schmarsow's approach, paying special attention to his definition of architecture as a "creatix of space" or "Raumgestalterin". At the core of the reflections that are developed here are the ways in which Mies van der Rohe's photo-collages invite the viewers of his drawings to imagine their movement through space. Another aspect of Mies van der Rohe's modes of representation that is scrutinized here is the role of tactile and optical perception. Departing from Alois Riegl's distinction between tactile or haptic ("taktisch") and optical ("optisch") perception of artworks, the chapter examines the fact that the effect of abstract images and the effect of figurative images are produced simultaneously in many of Mies van der Rohe's representations. It also compares Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe's strategies while producing interior perspective views. The chapter also relates Mies van der Rohe's drawing strategies to Hans Richter's approach. Central for the issues analyzed here is how collage and the use of the images of cut-outs of reproductions of real artworks in Mies van der Rohe's representations affect the interpretation of his space assemblages.

The chapter argues that Mies van der Rohe's agenda in both design and teaching was based on his conviction that his designs could achieve timeless and universal validity only if they manage to capture the specificity of

Zeitwille. It explains that Mies's simultaneous interest in impersonality and the autonomous individual is pivotal for understanding the tension between universality and individuality in his thought. The paradox at the center of this chapter is that while Mies van der Rohe believed in the existence of a universal visual language, he placed particular emphasis on the role of the autonomous individual in architecture. The chapter draws upon George Simmel's understanding of the relationship between culture and the individual in order to interpret this paradox characterizing Mies van der Rohe's thought.

One of the key principles of modernism was the concept of a universally understandable visual language. In the framework of this endeavor to shape a universal language, many of the modernist architects and theorists, including Sigfried Gideon, Nikolaus Pevsner, and Serge Chermayeff drew upon the work of philosophers such as Oswald Spengler. The chapter explores Mies van der Rohe's specific perspective on these general ideas that were at the core of many modernist architects's thought. It analyses his representations of interior spaces, such as those for his Court house projects (c.1934 and c.1938) and the Museum for a Small City project (1941–43). These interior perspective views by Mies can help us better understand the specific character of Mies van der Rohe's conception of modernism and his interest in universality. Mies's simultaneous interest in individuality and universality is interpreted here in relation to Simmel's conception of the binary relationship between “subjective life” and the “its contents”¹.

Architectural drawings have the capacity to structure and pilot meaning for viewers. An effect that is provoked when one is confronted with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's interior perspectives is the difference of the way they are conceived depending on the distance of the viewer from them. We could make the hypothesis that Mies van der Rohe intended to provoke this disjunction between the impression made when the viewers of his drawings have a close look at his representations and the impression made when they get a distance from them. This phenomenon is the outcome of several strategies employed by Mies van der Rohe. A first strategy that one can discern in his representations is the creation of a contrast between the cut-outs of the reproductions of artworks, the colored surfaces, and the almost invisible perspective drawings of the interior views of the buildings he designed. A second strategy often used by Mies van der Rohe in his drawings is the juxtaposition between the standing figures and the ground, which is achieved through the use of grid. These strategies invite the viewer to seek a resolution of the figure/ground opposition. We could argue that, through the activation of this tension in the perception of the spec-

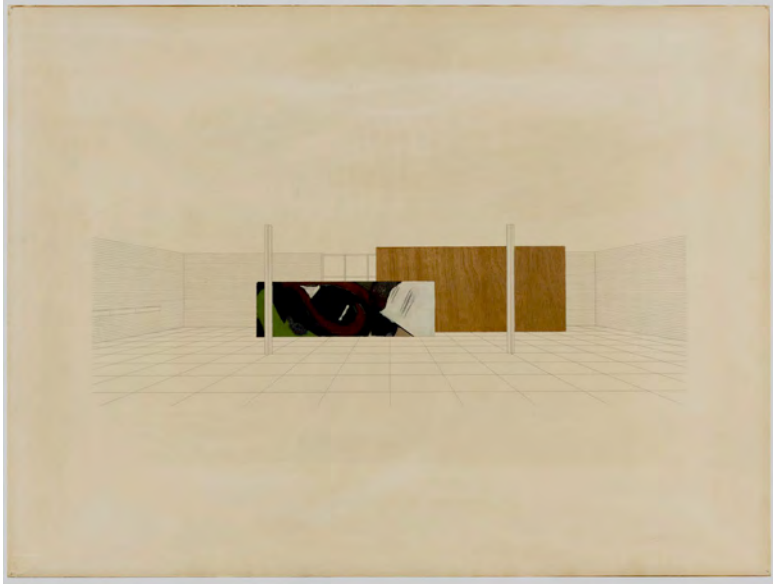
tator, Mies van der Rohe intended to transform the viewers of his architectural drawings into active agents.

Mies van der Rohe prioritized horizontality against verticality. One of the main objectives of this chapter is to examine what are the consequences of such a prioritization for the way the viewers of his drawings and the inhabitants of his buildings conceive his spatial assemblages. If we accept that the Miesian space is always defined by horizontal planes, we should examine what this assumption presupposes or implies for the way space is viewed and inhabited. A note-worthy characteristic of Mies van der Rohe's interior perspective representations is the insistence on the horizontal axis of the frame. His emphasis on horizontality contributes to the fabrication of *dispositifs* that aim to control the way in which the viewers would construct in their mind their position in space. Regarding the concept of *dispositif*, I use it here as Michel Foucault defines it:

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid.²

The reinforcement of the horizontal axis activates a desire to conquer the space through movement in it and through looking all around. In other words, Mies van der Rohe's way of fabricating a *dispositif* of extension on the horizontal axis provokes a panoramic effect. This effect is further strengthened when he draws many parallel lines, which are very close to each other, as in the case of the interior perspective for the Row House with Court (Figure 3.1). In this case, the use of dense parallel lines produces a panoramic effect and pushes the viewers of the illustrations to imagine what is not shown in the image, extending their perception in order to embrace the parts of space that are not represented. The reinforcement of the horizontal axis is of particular importance for Mies. The fact that the ceiling of the buildings he designed is in most cases represented without grid, in contrast to the floor, which, in most cases, is represented with grid, reinforces the horizontal axis around which the space is unfolded.

Figure 3.1. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Row House with Interior Court, project (Interior perspective) after 1938, Graphite and collage of wood veneer and cut-and-pasted reproduction on illustration board (76.1 x 101.5 cm).



Credits: Mies van der Rohe Archive, gift of the architect. Object number 692.1963. Department of Architecture and Design MoMA © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

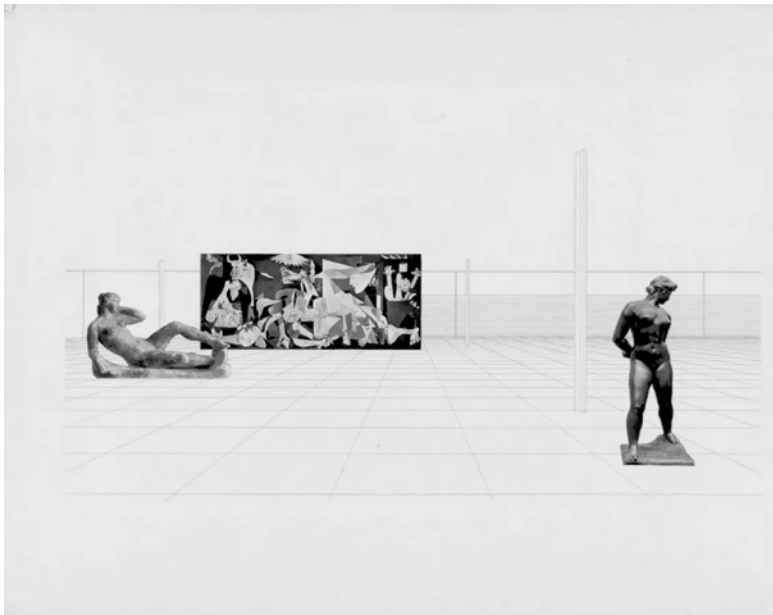
3.1 The viewer vis-à-vis the interior perspective views of Mies van der Rohe

Mies van der Rohe tended to work on his ideas mainly through sketches of plans and interior perspective views, as in the case of the Gericke House (1932). For this project, he also drew several aerial perspective views. The Gericke House and the Hubbe House are European residential projects of Mies van der Rohe that were not built. Mies van der Rohe, during the design process, used very often the points of the grid as guides. This permitted him capture a rhythm and imagine how movement in space would be orchestrated. In his drawings, the stairs play a major role, as in the case of the round stairs

of the Resor House project. Vanishing points represent points in space at an infinite distance from the eye where all lines meet. Perspective drawing in the West uses either one central vanishing point, two vanishing points to the left and the right or, occasionally, three vanishing points, with the third being zenithal. The vanishing point and the eye are symmetrically opposed. In other words, the vanishing point is the eye's counterpart. In Mies van der Rohe's interior perspective views for the Museum for a Small City project, which were produced between 1941 and 1943, the horizon line is placed at the mid-height of the illustration board and the vanishing point is placed at the center. The distance of the horizon line from the ground is the one third of the height of the represented space. The height of the standing statue is almost as the mid-height of the space. If we take as reference the dimension of Guernica and if we make the hypothesis that the cut-and-pasted reproductions of artworks are at the right scale, we can assume the height of the space. The dimensions of Guernica are 3.49 x 7.77 m., that is to say that the height of the space is almost 3.5 m. and the horizon line is placed somewhere between 1.4 and 1.6 m (Figure 3.2). The strategies that Mies van der Rohe used while producing his interior perspective views push the observer to focus on the horizon line. The line of the horizon is identical to the horizon line used to construct the perspective. Nicholas Temple maintains, in *Disclosing Horizons: Architecture, Perspective and Redemptive Space*, that "[t]he notion of horizon [...] served as the visual armature around which modern constructs of universal space were articulated"³.

We could relate the height of the actual horizon to the real dimension of architecture and the height of the horizon line used to fabricate the image to the fictive dimension of architecture. This means that, in the case of several of the interior perspective views of Mies van der Rohe, the real and the fictive dimension of architecture coincide. The apparent horizon, which is called also visible horizon or local horizon, refers to the boundary between the sky and the ground surface as viewed from any given point. A different definition of the visible horizon could be the following: a horizontal plane passing through a point of vision. The visible horizon approximates the true horizon only when the point of vision is very close to the ground surface. The horizon used to construct the perspective view is also called vanishing line. Therefore, we have three horizons: the visible horizon, the real horizon and the vanishing line. The horizon is always straight ahead at eye level.

Figure 3.2. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Museum for a Small City project (Interior perspective) (76.1 x 101.5 cm) 1941–43, Ink and cut-and-pasted photographic reproductions. Delineator George Danforth.



Credits: Mies van der Rohe Archive, gift of the architect. Object number 995.1965 © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Department of Architecture and Design MoMA

A main implication of the conventional use of perspective is the establishment of a fixed view. We could argue that Mies van der Rohe, in opposition to this implication of perspective, aims to perturb this fixation. This confusion of fixation is provoked due to the way he constructs his interior perspectives, which pushes the viewers of his representations to perceive as equivalent “the ground and the ceiling planes about a horizontal line at eye height”⁴. The line of the horizon is the same as the picture’s horizon line. This provokes a confusion of the viewer’s perception of spatial and structural elements. The viewer’s position within the space is such that the horizon line (eye height) is half the height of the interior. The horizon line (imaginary) coincides with the horizon

(actual). Evans related this effect to that experienced by people when they try to see something far away⁵.

The effect of equivalence of floor and ceiling planes locks the view of the observer onto the horizon line. In parallel, this visualization strategy directs the view of the observer outwards, towards the horizon and deep space, where all views vanish. In other words, the visual *dispositifs* that Mies van der Rohe fabricated and his way of establishing a horizon exploiting the confusion between the actual and imaginary horizon, orientate and direct the spectators's view in depth and towards outside. The result is that the spectators are treated in a way that obliges them to construct mentally the image of the real horizon. These tricks that Mies van der Rohe used sharpen spectators's perception, pushing them to view landscape through the opening in a way that reminds the way we view landscape when we take photographs. The architectural frame invents a horizon and hence a world that it masters through its interiorizing devices. Robin Evans has underscored that in the case of Mies van der Rohe's perceptive drawings for the Barcelona Pavilion "[t]he horizon line became prominent"⁶. As Fritz Neumeyer suggests, "[i]n the Barcelona Pavilion, Mies demonstrated brilliantly the extent to which the observer had become an element of the spatial construction of the building itself."⁷

Another distinctive characteristic of the interior perspective views of Mies van der Rohe that should be analyzed is the use of grid. The grid serves to accentuate the distance between the artworks, the columns and the walls, in the case that these (the columns) exist. August Schmarsow notes, in "The essence of architectural creation": "Only when the axis of depth is fairly extensive will the shelter [...] grow into a living space in which we do not feel trapped but freely choose to stay and live"⁸. The grid represented on the floor of many interior perspectives of Mies, as in the case of the interior perspective views for the Court house projects (c.1934 and c.1938) and of the two interior perspective views for the Museum for a Small City project (1941–43), which combine collage and linear perspective and have grid on the floor, intensifies the effect of depth in the perception of the observers of the drawings. The space is represented as tending to extended on the axis of depth and on the horizontal axis. We could argue, drawing upon Schmarsow's theory, that the sensation of extension provoked by the use of grid and the use of non-framed perspective view gives to the spectator a feeling of freedom. The use of grid and the dispersed placement of artworks and surfaces on it serve to intensify the sense of spatial extension in the perception of the observers of Mies van der Rohe's architectural drawings.

Certain images and spaces of Mies van der Rohe provoke a deterritorialization in the perception of the observers of the drawings or the users of the buildings. This phenomenon of deterritorialization is intensified by Mies's minimal expression. In many cases, for instance, the lines of the spatial arrangements are less visible than the objects, the artworks and the statues represented in his architectural representations. This strategy pushes the observers of Mies's photo-collages to imagine their movement through space. This effect is reinforced by the simultaneous use of perspective and montage in the production of the same architectural representation. This tactic invites the observers of the images to reconstruct in their mind the assemblage of the space, facilitating, in this way, the operation of reterritorialization, which follows the phenomenon of deterritorialization. In this way, the process of reconstruction of the image provokes a perceptual clarity and an instant enlightenment.

Two aspects of Mies van der Rohe's representations that are note-worthy are the frontality and the stratification of the parallel surfaces he often chose to include in his representations. The choice of Mies to use the stratification of parallel surfaces as a mechanism of production of spatial qualities in combination with the frontality of his representations could be interpreted through August Schmarsow's approach. Schmarsow defined architecture as a "creatix of space" ("Raumgestalterin"). He was interested in the notions of symmetry, proportion and rhythm. In his inaugural lecture entitled "The Essence of Architectural Creation" ("Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung")⁹, given in Leipzig in 1893, he presented "a new concept of space based on perceptual dynamics"¹⁰. It would be interesting to try to discern the differences between a conception of space based on Schmarsow's approach and a conception of space based on phenomenal transparency, as theorized by Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky in "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal"¹¹.

August Schmarsow, in *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schoepfung*, originally published in 1894, aimed to establish a scientific approach to art ('Kunstwissenschaft') based on the concept of space. His main intention was to discern "the universal laws governing artistic formation and stylistic evolution"¹². Schmarsow conceived architecture as a "creatress of space"¹³. He used the term "Raumgestalterin" to describe the inherent potential of architecture to create space. A distinction that he drew is that between the sense of space, which he called "Raumgefühl", and the spatial imagination, which he called "Raumphantasie". The concepts of "Raumgestalterin", "Raumgefühl" and "Raumphantasie" could elucidate the ways in which we can interpret the relationship between the conceiver-architect and the observer of archi-

tectural drawings, as well as the relationship between the interpretation of architectural representations and the experience of inhabiting architectural artefacts.

3.2 The distinction between tactile and optical perception in Mies van der Rohe's work

In certain representations of Mies van der Rohe, the effect of abstract images and the effect of figurative images are produced simultaneously. The result of this encounter is different than the effect produced when the observer of architectural drawings is confronted with only abstract or only figurative representations. Borrowing the distinction between tactile or haptic ("taktisch") and optical ("optisch") perception of artworks that Alois Riegl drew in his text entitled "The Main Characteristics of the Late Roman Kunstwollen" (*Die Spätromische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn*)¹⁴, one could make the assumption that the abstract dimension of the representation enables a tactile ("taktisch") perception of the image, while the figurative dimension of the representation enables an optical ("optisch") perception of the image.

The aforementioned hypothesis could be reinforced by the fact that certain visual devices of the representations of Mies invite the observers to search for changing the distance of their position from of the architectural drawing in order to grasp what the image represents. Riegl's distinction between haptic ("taktisch") and optic ("optisch") perception is examined in Gilles Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. As Deleuze reminds us regarding Riegl's distinction between tactile ("taktisch") and optical ("optisch") perception of artworks, in the case of the former the observer feels the necessity to be close to the object, while in the case of the latter the observer feels the necessity to view the work of art from distance¹⁵. Mies, thus, aimed to provok the viewers to move while seeing his interior perspective views and invited them to activate both perceptions – tactile ("taktisch") and optical ("optisch"). Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, refer to the following two distinctions: that between "close-range" and long-distance vision and that between "haptic" and optical space. They prefer the term "haptic" over the term "tactile" because they believe that the former, in contrast to the latter "does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfil this nonoptical function"¹⁶.

3.3 Mies van der Rohe's Brick Country House

Mies van der Rohe's Brick Country House, as Jean-Louis Cohen reminds us, was part of the Great Berlin Exhibition (*Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung*), which was held from 31 May to 1 September 1924¹⁷. John Hejduk was particularly interested in this project. He sent a letter regarding the Brick Country House to Mies van der Rohe on 19 September 1967. In this letter, he wrote:

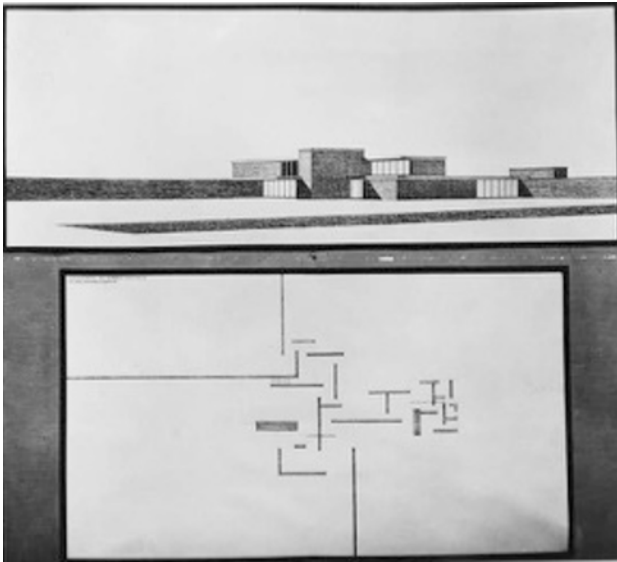
Your project for a Brick Villa 1923 has drawn me into many pleasurable hours of contemplation due to the vitality and joy of that particular work. It is an idea that grows in strength as one studies it, I have often thought that the Brick Villa project should come into reality, and if built would reveal in depth much of our modern architectural heritage, it is statement of our times¹⁸.

Interestingly, the plan and the perspective view that Mies produced for the Brick House Project do not correspond to each other (Figure 3.3). The abstraction of the plan activates a specific way of grasping this architectural drawing. Despite the fact that Mies van der Rohe's Brick Country House remained unrealized, it is one the most analyzed projects of Mies. This could be explained by the fact that the plan of the Brick Country House is characterized by a clarity that contributes to the creation of a specific kind of relationship between from the drawing and its observers. This relationship is characterized by an intensification of the fictive experience of inhabiting space. This is proven by the fact that a very high percentage of the scholarly descriptions of Mies's Brick Country House focus on the experience of movement through it, despite the fact that it was never inhabited or experienced as real space given that it remained unrealized.

The abundance of the scholarly descriptions of the plan of Mies van der Rohe's Brick House that focus on the fluidity of its space shows that the abstractness and clarity of the representation of the plan transmits a fictive sensation of moving through it. As Wolf Tegethoff notes, in "From Obscurity to Maturity: Mies van der Rohe's breakthrough to modernism", regarding Mies's Brick House, "[t]he interior has become the nucleus of a force-field which, by means of brick walls reaching out in all directions, fixes the co-ordinates of the environment and defines it with exclusive reference to the viewer inside."¹⁹ The aforementioned description confirms the hypothesis that the plan of Mies's Brick Country House activates a mode of interpreting the architectural drawing that is based on the intensity of the experience of moving through

the represented spaces. Tegethoff understands the arrangement of the walls of the plan of Mies's Brick House Project as organized using as "exclusive reference [...] the viewer inside" ²⁰ and their movement. What is implied in the aforementioned remarks concerning Mies's Brick House Project is that the effect of movement is the most distinctive characteristic of the plan of this building. The sensation of circulation could be distinguished into pedestrian and visual circulation. In Mies's work these two sensations are often overlapped or confused.

Figure 3.3. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Landhaus in Brick, 1924. Exhibition panels showing perspective view (above) and schematic floor plan (below). Print from a photographic negative.



Credits: Stadt Kunsthalle, Mannheim

Manfredo Tafuri, in his article entitled "Theatre as a Virtual City: From Appia to the Totaltheater", published in *Lotus International* in 1977, drew a parallel between the experience in Mies's Barcelona Pavilion and stage experience, as understood by Adolphe Appia²¹. Appia, as we can understand reading his text

“Ideas on a Reform of our Mise en Scène”, intended to reinvent stage design, through light and actors’s movement in space²². The reinvention of spatial experience through the movement of users is a characteristic of Barcelona Pavilion. According to Tafuri, the exact quality that is a common parameter of the Mies van der Rohe and Appia’s approach is the effect of rhythmic geometries on how the space is perceived and experienced. Tafuri also refers to the affinities between Mies’s technics and the stage design tactics of British modernist theatre practitioner Gordon Craig²³.

3.4 Mies van der Rohe vis-à-vis the assemblage of textual counters

According to Peter Eisenman, Mies van der Rohe’s Brick Country House constitutes “[t]he first indication in Mies’s work of textual notation”²⁴. Eisenman argues that Mies’s Brick Country House understanding as as textual notation is related to the exploration of “the limits of the independence of the object from the subject and how these limits can be articulated”²⁵. Eisenman is convinced that this project signaled the beginning of a new phase in Mies’s work. This new phase corresponded to the fabrication of architectural assemblages that function as “textual counters”²⁶. Despite the fact that Mies often underlined the importance of truth for his approach, Robin Evans, in “Mies van der Rohe’s Paradoxical Symmetries”, argues that what counts most for Mies’s compositional approach is the existence of a coherence of synthesis. Evans notes regarding Mies and especially his proposal for the Barcelona pavilion: “its relation to the truth is less significant than its coherence as a fiction”²⁷. Evans juxtaposed truth and fiction, relating Mies to the search for a coherent fiction. Evans also remarked that “[t]he elements are assembled, but not held together.”²⁸

It would be interesting to compare the way Le Corbusier and Mies conceive architecture as assemblage. In the case of Mies “the system as whole is betrayed”²⁹. Eisenman aimed to describe this betrayal of the whole in the case of Mies, referring to it as “irresolution of system”³⁰. David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi, in *Surface Architecture*, use the term “assemblage” to describe “the juxtaposition of elements in [...] Mies’s work”³¹. According to Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, Mies’s Barcelona Pavilion “the building is an assemblage of parts, each of which speaks a different language, specific to the material uses”³². Evans shed light on the fact that for Mies “structure [was] [...]

something like logic"³³. Mies remarked regarding this: "To me structure is like logic. It is the best way to do things and to express them."³⁴

Evans, in "Mies van der Rohe's Paradoxical Symmetries", also mentions that there is an opposition between Mies's posture in Barcelona Pavilion and the platonic understanding of visual perception. He notes: "Plato was wrong. These tricks do not deceive us; they sharpen our perceptions."³⁵ Evans also remarks that "Mies's pavilion suggests how, in this constant effort of resuscitation, vision can be revived by means of an elixir concocted from prosaic ambiguities — the ambiguities of everyday language."³⁶ Evans relates Mies's approach to "the ambiguities of everyday language"³⁷. This endeavor to associate Mies's compositional process with the "ambiguities of everyday language" brings to mind Peter Eisenman's arguments in "miMISes READING does not mean a thing"³⁸. In "miMISes READING does not mean a thing", Eisenman relates Mies's architectural signs to textual notation in order to highlight the fact that Mies's architectural signs can only be read and analyzed only in relation to other objects. Eisenman defines text as "a structural simulation of its object,"³⁹ maintaining that the process of examining a text is based on the revelation of a structural meaning. The fact that the meaning is structural is important, for Eisenman, because it shows that the interpretation of Mies's architectural signs is based on differentiation and not on representation. Eisenman juxtaposes structural reading of architectural signs to metaphoric or formal reading of architectural signs. He relates the textuality of Mies's architectural signs to the fact that "symbol and form can be extracted from the object"⁴⁰. An insightful remark of Eisenman is that, in opposition to "language, where signs represent "absent" objects, in architecture the sign and the object are both present"⁴¹.

3.5 Between Mies van der Rohe and Hans Richter: Around the use of charcoal tonalities

A characteristic of the construction of Mies's perspectives that should be also analyzed is the use of charcoal. The use of charcoal and its manipulation in order to produce different tonalities are very apparent in the exterior perspective views for the Concrete Country house and the three exterior perspective views for Villa Tugendhat. The affinities between the perspective representations of Mies's Concrete Country house and the tonalities in Hans Richter's film *Rhythmus 21* are evident. Hans Richter and Mies van der Rohe, who met each other

through *Novembergruppe* before the foundation of magazine *G*⁴² (Figure 3.4), shared their belief in the existence of “identical form perception in all human beings”⁴³. An issue to which both intended to respond was the establishment of a visual language that could function as universal and generally understandable. Another trait that characterized the attitude of both was the understanding of aesthetic perception as a sequential process. This aspect of aesthetic perception was also at the core of Eisenstein’s approach⁴⁴.

For the Concrete House project, Mies drew four perspective views corresponding to the same point of view. The contour of all the four perspectives is identical; the differences among them concern only their colors and tonalities. The two of them are in grey scale, while the other two are colored. The contrast between the aforementioned four perspective views provokes a cinematographic effect that echoes the techniques that Richter used in *Rhythmus 21*. The impact of the aesthetics of Richter’s abstract kinetic art on Mies’s representations of the twenties, and especially on the exterior perspective views of the Concrete House project and the Villa Tugendhat, is incontestable. The polarities and the utilization of the tones of black and grey remind the perspective view of the Concrete House project. As we have noted above, the techniques used in the perspective of the Concrete House project are similar to the techniques used by Hans Richter in *Rhythmus 21*.

The concern of Mies regarding the qualities that emerge due to the way the assemblage is conceived, fabricated and perceived by the observer echoes the thesis of Hans Richter, sustaining that “the result [...] [should] not [be] just a simple sum of spatial units”. Richter, expresses his view regarding the process of synthetically organizing the details in a way that incorporates motion, in “The True Sphere of Film”, published in *G. Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung* (*G: Materials for Elementary Construction*). He asserted there:

the whole process obtains the quality of time only because in it the details are synthetically organized as processes of motion in such a way that the whole is invisible, the meaning is acquired only from the whole. Such a temporal unit relates to space as a spatial unit does to the plane. The task would then be to make the whole process that leads in detail to light-space (time) the basis for the structure of the whole, so that the result is not just a simple sum of spatial units but rather a new quality⁴⁵.

Figure 3.4. Frontpage of *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, 1 (1923).



Credits: Yale University Library Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Call number: 1989 Folio S6

Gilles Deleuze, in *Cinema 1: The movement-image*, comments on the differences between the conception of montage of Richter and that of Eisenstein. More specifically, he distinguishes Richter's conception of montage film from the dialectics of Sergei Eisenstein. Taking as a starting point Deleuze's aforementioned distinction, one could reflect upon Mies's conception of montage and examine whether it is closer to Richter's or Eisenstein's conception of montage. Deleuze describes the montage of the "German school [as] intensive-spiritual montage of the German school, which binds together a non-organic life and a non-psychological life"⁴⁶.

The use of charcoal for the production of the aforementioned drawings by Mies produces a cinematographic aesthetic, which is further reinforced by his choice to depict the horizontal surfaces, such as the roof as bright and the vertical surfaces as dark. Mies also drew some aerial perspective sketches for the Villa Tugendhat, which helped capture the project as a whole. Mies used the charcoal to produce a big variety of grey tones. The use of charcoal and its utilization in order to produce tonalities echoes the impact of Hans Richter on Mies's visualization techniques in an ensemble of exterior non-symmetrical perspective views he produced for his proposal for Villa Tugendhat. The use of charcoal is characteristic of these perspective views. Mies drew two different versions of aerial perspective views from southwest. What is note-worthy is the fact that the two aerial perspective views do not show the transparency of the façade of the house, despite the fact that it is one of its principal characteristics. The transparency of the façade is visible only in the third perspective view, which is not aerial and which accentuates the contrast between the horizontal and the vertical surfaces.

3.6 Comparing Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe's *dispositifs*

Le Corbusier related the awareness of architectural invention to the experience of living "a human, intimate hour, fruit of the creation of the spirit". Corbusier also believed that in order to achieve this capacity of providing the possibility of such an experience of architecture, architects should "see the real and look inside it" and distance themselves from the attitude photographers, journalists or schoolmasters. The way in which Le Corbusier associates the invention in architecture with "a human hour", which is "[h]igh and never low, rather difficult to understand and decipher"⁴⁷ could be related to a remark of Robin Evans regarding the relationship of Mies van der Rohe's point of view with

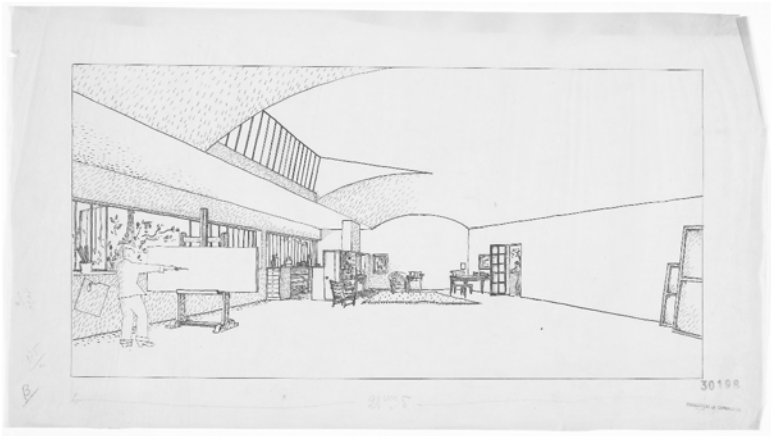
certain ideas of Spinoza. Evans refers to the following quotation of Spinoza by Mies: "Great things are never easy"⁴⁸. Twenty-six years earlier, Le Corbusier, in "L'Esprit Nouveau en Architecture", related the architectural invention to the notions of relationship, rhythm, proportion and to the conditions of emotion, employing the expression "machine for provoking emotions" ("machine à emouvoir")⁴⁹.

It would be interesting to compare the use of the grid in Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe's perspective views. Mies van der Rohe's interior perspective views are characterized by the use of grid. This is not the case for Le Corbusier, despite the fact that, in certain perspective views, he used grid only for the floor of his interior perspective views. In parallel, Le Corbusier, in most of his interior perspective views, used a frame in contrast to Mies van der Rohe who did not. Mies used a grid only in the floor of his interior perspective views, and, in certain cases, for the ceiling of his interior perspective views as well, as in the case of the interior perspective views for the project for Ron Bacardi y Compania (c. 1957).

In contrast to Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier used clearly distinctive frames in his interior perspective views. This choice witnesses a specific stance vis-à-vis the subject that views his drawings and vis-à-vis the subject that inhabits the space to which the drawings refer. In the first volume of Le Corbusier's *Œuvre complète*⁵⁰, there are several interior perspective views with frame, such as the sketches for the interiors of the maison Dom-ino (1914–1915), the Villa au bord de la mer (1916), the "Immeubles-Villas" (1922), the Villa à Vaucresson (1922), the maison d'artiste (1922) (Figure 3.5) and the Villa Le Lac (1924) among other. Apart from the interior perspective view for the Villa Le Lac (1924) and the maison d'artiste (1922), almost all the other interior perspective views that are included in this volume have a frame. In the same volume, there are some axonometric representations, as those for the maison "Citrohan" (1922–27), the villa au bord de la mer (Côte d'Azur), the "Immeubles-villas" in Pessac (1925) and the Villa Meyer (1925). For the latter, he also produced many interior perspectives (Figure 3.6). Le Corbusier used the technique of collage for the perspective views he produced for the Salon d'Automne (1929) (Figure 3.7). Le Corbusier used for these collages represent furniture designed by himself. In this specific case, the representation of furniture is more intense than the representation of space. This feature brings to mind Mies van der Rohe's collages, especially those for the Resor House project.

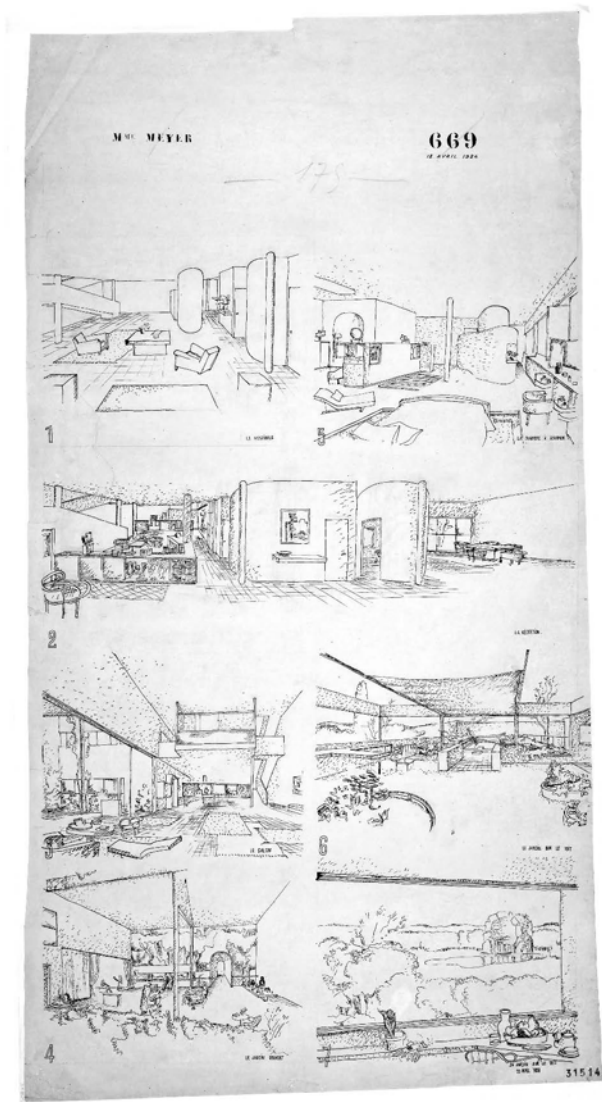
Both Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier intended to construct spaces that are based on the experience of spatial sequence, but they use different design strategies and prioritize different building components for similar purposes. Following Caroline Constant, we could claim that for Mies van der Rohe the walls are the primary agents for the production of spatial sequence, while for Le Corbusier the primary agents for the production of spatial sequence are the columns. Constant also argues that Le Corbusier's "concept of the free plan relied on the structural and conceptual primacy of the columns"⁵¹, while Mies's concept of free plan of relied on the primacy of walls.

Figure 3.5. *Le Corbusier, maison d'artiste (unrealised project), 1922.*



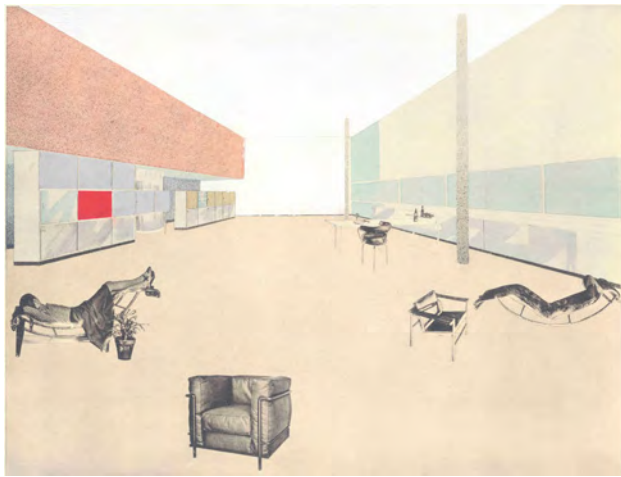
Credits: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, FLC30195

Figure 3.6. Le Corbusier, Interior perspectives for Villa Meyer.



Credits: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, FLC31514

Figure 3.7. Furniture presented at the Salon d'Automne, Paris, 1929.



Credits: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris © FLC/ADAGP

Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier shared an interest in using spatial sequence as a guiding strategy during the design process as it becomes evident in the design of Tugendhat house and Villa La Roche-Jeanneret respectively. This is evident in the interior perspective views that the two architects drew for the aforementioned houses. For instance, one can bring to mind the sketches concerning the circulation paths that Le Corbusier drew for the Villa La Roche-Jeanneret. The three most significant gestures regarding the spatial sequence in the case of the design of the Villa La Roche-Jeanneret are the following: firstly, the double height space, which provides visual perception of the bridge which links the spaces; secondly, the design of the bridge, and thirdly, the design of the ramp. Peter Eisenman has drawn a distinction between sign and symbol. He claims that Mies van der Rohe's columns have the status of sign, while Le Corbusier's columns have the status of symbol. Moreover, Eisenman compares the roof plane of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion and Le Corbusier's Maison Dom-ino. More specifically, he remarks: "The condition of the roof plane in the Barcelona Pavilion is in opposition to Le Corbusier's Maison Dom-ino, where the stature and status of man is symbolized by the roof plane/podium as coupled horizontal datums"⁵².

3.7 Towards a conclusion: Mies van der Rohe's representations as symbolic montage

Mies van der Rohe used perspective as his main visualizing tool against the declared preference of De Stijl, El Lissitzky and Bauhaus's for axonometric representation. Many of his perspective drawings were based on the distortion of certain conventions of perspective. In order to grasp how his drawing techniques shaped the way the interpreters of his drawings viewed them, it is important to discern and analyze what are the exact effects produced by the overcoming of the conventions of perspective by Mies. An important role in his endeavor to challenge the conventions of perspective played the use of the technique of collage or montage. In an interview, he gave to six students of the School of Design of North Carolina State College, in 1952, Mies van der Rohe remarked:

People think with the open plan we can do everything – but that is not the fact. It is merely another conception of space. The problem of space will limit your solutions. Chaos is not space. Often, I have observed my students who act as though you can take the free-standing wall out of your pocket and throw it anywhere. That is not the solution to space. That would not be space⁵³.

Mies van der Rohe, in many of his representations, brought together different visual devices, as in the case of the illustrations he produced for the Row House with the Court and the Museum for a Small City project (1942), where he combined the technique of the photo-collage or photo-montage with the linear or nonlinear perspective. In some cases, Mies did not use at all linear perspective. He implied it and used only the cut-outs of reproductions of images and artworks, as in some of his representations for the Small City Museum, in which the frontality of the way the reproductions of Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica* (1937) framed by Aristide Maillol's sculptures *Monument to Paul Cézanne* (1912–1925) and *Night* (1909), and of the images of the nature scenes outside the window are placed imply the existence of a viewer. These representations invite the viewers to imagine that they move through the represented space.

In the case of the combined elevation and section for the Theatre project of 1947, he used only frontal surfaces: one gridded surface designed with graphite ink and colored yellow and the other created using cut-and-pasted papers, and cut-and-pasted photo-reproductions. In a collage for the Concert Hall (1942), he did not use any traces of lines. Despite the fact that the way he fabricated

was based on the use of the technique of collage, it gives a sense of depth and linear perspective. The use of the images of cut-outs of reproductions of real artworks for his collages or montages reinforces the cultural reading of his space assemblages. The placement of these cut-outs of reproductions of real artworks on the grid of the linear perspective views produces matrixes on which the ambiguities of cultural objects are unfolded. These choices of Mies van der Rohe make us think that he was interested in the multiple layers of the interpretation of images. This becomes evident in a collage he produced for the Concert Hall. In this case, Mies van der Rohe converted the image of the military warehouse into a cultural sign. In order to do so, he used the image of a statue of an ancient Buddha, at a first place, and then he added the title “Concert Hall”, at a second place. Mies van der Rohe through the use of the reproduction of the image of a military warehouse, the placement of a statue and the written message aimed to convey an argument. The importance of Mies van der Rohe’s aforementioned gesture lies on the fact that through the use of these three devices he turns abstract objects into cultural objects. Another instance in which Mies van der Rohe did not use at all conventional perspective, but he utilized only collage or photomontage was his collage for the Convention Hall. In this case, he used a picture of attendees at the 1952 U.S. Republican National Convention from *Life* magazine. What is of great interest in this case is the fact that Mies van der Rohe brought together many copies of the same image in order to create multiple vanishing points.

The techniques of the collage and montage are considered as avant-garde techniques. However, the technique of perspective is considered as non-avant-garde. Mies van der Rohe combined the two techniques in a way that challenged the very conventions of perspective and its philosophical implications. Collage and montage as techniques are opposed to perspective and are symbolic forms of modernity. Mies van der Rohe brought together these two opposed means of representation. The outcome of this strategy invokes a mode of viewing architectural representations that manages to activate modes of perception that are not reducible to the ways that are provoked by each of the aforementioned visual representation tool. In this sense, we could claim that in Mies van der Rohe’s representations the disjunction of avant-garde and non-avant-garde techniques activates a mode of perception that is special to Mies. Martino Stierli notes in “Mies Montage” regarding this issue: “montage and collage have different qualities of visuality and tactility. The inclusion of ‘reality fragments’ (Peter Bürger) means that collage is subject to tactile perception; mon-

tage, conversely, is not.”⁵⁴. Peter Bürger writes, in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, regarding Cubist collage:

the reality fragments remain largely subordinate to the aesthetic composition, which seeks to create a balance of individual elements (volume, colours, etc). The intent can best be defined as tentative: although there is a destruction of the organic work that portrays reality, art itself is not being called into question⁵⁵.

Following Peter Bürger and Martino Stierli, we could argue that at the core of collage is the incorporation of reality fragments, which in contrast to montage, provokes a tactile perception. The technique of montage emerged in the circle of the Dadaists after the First World War. It was at the center of the avant-garde discourse. A distinction that would be useful for problematizing Mies's conception of montage is the distinction that Jacques Rancière draws between “dialectical montage” and “symbolic montage”. According to Rancière, “dialectical montage” reveals a reality of desires and dreams, hidden behind the apparent reality, while “symbolic montage” creates analogies by drawing together unrelated elements, proceeding by allusion⁵⁶. In many instances, Mies used real pieces of materials, such as pieces of flag, wood, veneer, or glass, and not only small reproductions of artworks. The tendency of Mies to bring together unrelated elements makes us think that he could be classified in the second category mentioned by Jacques Rancière, that is to say “symbolic montage”.

Notes

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- 3 Nicholas Temple, *Disclosing Horizons: Architecture, Perspective and Redemptive Space* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007), 237.
- 4 Mark Pimlott, *Without and Within: Essays on Territory and the Interior* (Rotterdam: Episode publishers, 2007), 42.

- 5 Robin Evans, "Mies van der Rohe's Paradoxical Symmetries", *AA Files*, 19 (1990): 56–68; Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association, 1997), 233–277.
- 6 Ibid., 253.
- 7 Fritz Neumeyer, "A World in Itself: Architecture and Technology", in Detlef Mertins, ed., *The Presence of Mies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 54.
- 8 August Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation", in Robert Vischer, Harry Francis Mallgrave, Eleftherios Ikonomidou, eds., *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 281–297; Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schoepfung* (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1894).
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- 10 Mitchell W. Schwarzer, "The Emergence of Architectural Space: August Schmarsow's Theory of 'Raumgestaltung'", *Assemblage*, 15 (1991), 50.
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- 13 Schmarsow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," in Vischer, Francis Mallgrave, Ikonomidou, eds., *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, 281–297; Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schoepfung* (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1894);
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- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Evans, "Mies van der Rohe's Paradoxical Symmetries".
- 28 Ibid., 242.
- 29 Eisenman, *Re-working Eisenman*, 16.
- 30 Ibid.
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- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
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