

Mies(ing) Piece:

Finding the Project of Autonomy in the Miesean Generic:
The Grid, the Plinth, and the (Ir)Relevance of Abstraction

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Kai Gutschow

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Matthew Z Huber

Arguably, the central tenet of any stance on modern architecture must inherently emanate out of the very crisis of modernity itself; No problem was more crucial than positing a response to the shock and alienation experienced in Simmel's *Metropolis*. Immanent in projects ranging from his glass skyscraper proposals to the Tugendat house was an abstraction resonant with the reification of the capitalist metropolis. But crystallizing in his solution for the Barcelona Pavilion in 1929, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe developed a sophisticated resistance to the totalizing rationality of modern capitalism by working within a dynamic conception of type, referred to as the generic. I propose to compare two inextricably bound aspects of the generic type present in the Barcelona Pavilion, the grid and the plinth. The interplay between these two systems form the necessary requirements for an architectural autonomy to operate outside of and resist the complete planification of capitalism, as later enunciated by Manfredo Tafuri and Massimo Cacciari.¹ It is in this condition that Mies satisfies his own ultimatum for his epoch to "provide the spirit with the necessary prerequisites for its existence."²

In his 1923 "Working Theses," Mies decried the seemingly fundamental task of establishing an ideological position through architectural production. Instead, he presented a far more radical position: "We renounce all aesthetic speculation, all doctrine and all formalism. Architecture is the will of the age conceived in spatial terms."³ Rather than pursuing a highly specific functionalism as many of his contemporaries did, Mies was intent on shifting his focus towards "the will of the

¹ See: Tafuri, Manfredo. -. "Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology." In *Architecture Theory since 1968*. ed. K. Michael Hays. MIT Press, 2000. and also see: Cacciari, Massimo. "Eupalinos or Architecture." In *Architecture Theory since 1968*. ed. K. Michael Hays. MIT Press, 2000."

² Mies. "A New Era," In *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*. Ed. Ulrich Conrad. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1964, pp. 123.

³ Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig. "Working Theses," In *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*. Ed. Ulrich Conrad. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1964, pp. 74.

epoch," and its manifestation in technology.⁴ By working within the language of a generic type, that resonates with the will of the epoch, Mies invests himself in autonomous problems of the discipline, namely, the contradictions inherent in the generic type as manifested both by its relation to classicism, and as invented by or transformed by new technological-material systems. The dialectical pairing of the grid and the plinth that generates this autonomous contradiction, however, differs from the one-dimensional implications of Cacciari's negative thought.

In a re-writing of the modern era in terms of the political conceptualization of individuals, philosopher and political theorist Cornelius Castoriadis enunciates two seemingly contradictory societal beliefs that emanate from both a championing of, and indulgence in, reason. On the one hand, Western thought developed a rigorous conception of an individual human subject that was autonomous from the determinisms of higher authority, as demonstrated by the numerous political revolutions occurring in the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the Industrial Revolution and its subsequent modernization marked a parallel investment in an unwavering pursuit of the rational development of technology and science. Castoriadis, as well as others, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, depicts the totalizing stance that capitalism assumes within the conditions of optimal rationality found at the heart of this pursuit; thereby demonstrating the elevated presence of capitalism as it asserts itself in organizing efficient modes of production, consumption, and accumulation. The interesting paradox is that while the autonomy of the individual seems to promote the liberalism of capitalism, the two come into conflict as economic rationality exerts a uniform complicity with the efficiencies of capitalist planning. The individual, while maintaining distinction

⁴ Ibid. pp. 74.

from the collective and autonomy from higher authority, is brought into conflict with its imminent absorption into a system of control larger than himself, yet without center⁵

The modern tension between the autonomous individual and rational systems of standardization reveals itself within architectural circles as the debate between the standard type and a work of individual expression. A cursory reading of Mies's projects might lead one to categorize him with the standard type camp. Yet, as rigorously as Mies's work seems to adhere to rules of standardization and as redolently as it is informed by classicism, Mies does not exude an exact conception of the standard type in his work or thinking. In fact, after an early championing of new building methods, he worried that over-standardization could lead to an impoverishment of the "spirit:" "Let us not overestimate the question of mechanization, standardization, and normalization. [...] All these things go their destined way, blind to values."⁶ Standardization and functionalism might solve rational problems, but fail to provide meaning.

Congruently, Mies placed himself in stark opposition to the deterministic functionalism of architects such as Hugo Haring who argued for a direct translation from function to building. Mies, instead, provided for a degree of multiplicity by offering openness. Likewise, Mies stridently held to the disciplinary autonomy of architecture itself, resisting the politicization that occurred, for instance, in his predecessor at the Bauhaus, Hanes Meyer. K. Michael Hays, in an argument that will be revisited later, depicts Meyer as a posthumanist interested in attaining a "performativity of perception," a collective interpretive engagement of designer, object, and viewer, in an attempt to

⁵ For an elaboration of these arguments see the introduction of the following text: Aureli, Pier Vittorio. *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. 2008, pp. 4-10. See also: See Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Retreat from Autonomy: Postmodernism as Generalized Conformism," in *The World in Fragments* Stanford University Press. 1997. pp.32.

⁶ Mies. "The New Era," In *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*. Ed. Ulrich Conrad. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1964, pp. 123.

represent the social conditions of modern industrial society and most importantly, its ideology.⁷ In a similar argument concerning Mies, Hays contends that Mies's contextualism "gives the subject over to the object," meaning that the viewing subject is placed into participation with and immersed in the reified conditions of the surrounding Metropolis.⁸ Absent from this particular posthumanist performance, however, is the ideological pandering of Meyer. Again, Mies's work could not be accompanied by that of his contemporaries.

Nor could Mies find sanctuary in a classical conception of the ideal type. Despite the obvious overtones of Schinkel's classical formalism, Mies denounces this central, and singular determinism in his work. He would later edify such an anti-classical view into the faithful ears of his students in Chicago: "The idealistic principle of order, however, with its over-emphasis on the ideal and the formal, satisfies neither our interest in simple reality nor our practical sense."⁹ In other words, underlying Mies's classical guise was an undeniable interest in material reality and function that made classicism incompatible with Mies's desire to fulfill the needs of his time. Mies remained confident in his assertion that form is a means not an end.

This doesn't mean, however, that Mies fits the individualist camp either. In fact, he vehemently argued against it: "great architecture and individualism are mutually exclusive."¹⁰ Mies certainly never sought the individual authorial will as motivation. The universalism of his work was actually particularly obviating of the individual author. Mies sought to enumerate an objective, universal system open to variation, while making the whims of authorship unnecessary. His work accommodates the possible future

⁷ Hays, K. Michael. *Modernism and the PostHumanist Subject*. The MIT Press, 1992. pp. 28.

⁸ Hays *PostHumanist Subject*. pp. 190.

⁹ Johnson, Philip. *Mies van der Rohe*. Museum of Modern Art, 1947. pp.194

¹⁰ Mies van der Rohe quoted in Oechslin, Werner. "Mies's Steady Resistance to Formalism and Determinism." In *Mies in America*. ed. Phyllis Lambert. New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 2001. pp. 73.

repeatability by other architects. This possibility additionally lies at the center of the project of autonomy; a loose generic type can be repeated to similar effect with significant variation by variable authors.

Contemporary architect Rem Koolhaas originally appropriated the broader term “generic” to describe this regular, yet flexible approach.¹¹ Never conceiving of Mies’s buildings as pure objects, Koolhaas contends that Mies allowed for significant addition and alteration. Likewise, historian Detlef Mertins expounds on the existential and variable characteristics of the Miesian generic. Arguing that Mies’s “loving neutrality,” engendered open-ended modes of living and catalyzed states of becoming, Mertins cites both Haeckel and Goethe with regard to typological systems.¹² Goethe is quoted as emphasizing: “the process by which one and the same organ presents itself to us in manifold forms.”¹³ In this light, Mies’s search for universal principles can be seen less as a deterministic system of rational rule sets, but more as an underlying structure that allows for variable emergent configurations.¹⁴ While universal space may also be experienced less as a rational datum, and more as locus for the unfolding of emergent social relations. In his aforementioned speech at IIT, Mies alludes¹⁵ to such a conception: “So we shall emphasize the organic principle of order as a means of achieving the successful relationship of the parts to each other and to the whole. And here we shall take our stand. The long path from material through function to creative

¹¹ “In a way it was a triumph of Miesian will. Anything can be or become anything.” Koolhaas, Rem. “Miestakes.” In *Mies in America*. Ed. Phyllis Lambert. New York: Whitney Museum. 2001. pp. 723, 739.

¹² Mertins, Detlef. “Same Difference.” In *Phylogenesis: FOA’s Ark*. ed. Foreign Office Architects. Barcelona: Actar Press. 2003. pp. 274.

¹³ Ibid. pp. 276.

¹⁴ Mertins points out Mies’s reading of the scientist Laplace who wrote about a single universal structure. Jean-Louis Cohen similarly points out Mies’s reading of Raoul France and Fritz Neumeyer explicates Mies’s readings of figures such as Ramono Guardini, Plato, and St. Thomas Aquinas. See; Mertins, “Same Difference;” Cohen, Jean-Louis. *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe*. Basel: Birkhauser Verlag, 2007.; and Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig. *The Artless Word*, ed. F. Neumeyer. MIT Press, 1986, (transl. 1991). Respectively.

¹⁵ Johnson, Phillip. *Mies van der Rohe*. The Museum of Modern Art, 1947. pp. 194.

works has only a single goal: to create order out of the desperate confusion of our time.”

Although clearly, Mies never read Castoriadis’s approach to history mentioned earlier, as it was formulated decades after Mies’s death, this reading of modernity is useful in elucidating the relationship between Mies’s work and Mies’s much touted conception of the “will of the epoch.”¹⁶ The characterization provided by Castoriadis serves to illuminate a contradiction central to Mies’s work. Mies at once declares his buildings as “a ground for the unfolding of life,”¹⁷ which implies a provision of freedom to the inhabitants, and speaks of the “the dominance of economic power over us,”¹⁸ espousing a rigid order and rationality. This reading of Mies is not entirely a projection, however; Mies has a documented acquaintance with the writings of Max Scheler. Scheler’s book *Forms of Knowledge and Society* supports a theorization of both the “ordered variability” prompted by Mertins and a distinction between real historical processes and ideal human culture that correlates to Castoriadis’s rationality/freedom distinction.¹⁹ The question then, posed by Goethe’s manifold formation of a single organ is how exactly Mies’s architecture multipliciously manifests itself on each side of the dialectic declared by Castoriadis or more appropriately by Scheler. In the Barcelona Pavilion, and in the generic Miesian type of the pavilion in general, the dialogue occurring between the plinth and the grid gives rise to this complication.

However, the grid as a system in and of itself can be examined, such that subtle contradictions can be parsed out, revealing the grid to be the most palpable and almost

¹⁶ Aureli. *Autonomy*. pp. 74.

¹⁷ Mertins, Detlef. “Same Difference.” In *Phylogenesis: FOA’s Ark*. ed. Foreign Office Architects. Barcelona: Actar Press. 2003. pp. 272.

¹⁸ Cohen, Jean-Louis. *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe*. Basel: Birkhauser Verlag, 2007. pp. 82.

¹⁹ Oechslin, Werner. “Mie’s Steady Resistance to Formalism and Determinism.” In *Mies in America*. ed. Phyllis Lambert. New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 2001. pp.75.

inevitable choice. The grid itself, a simple construct, contains enormous complexity as an abstract system of organization. In Rosalind Krauss's seminal essay, "Grids," she expounds on the ability of grids to hold two values in para-logical suspension, that is to say, they provide a structure for two contradictory values to be held in simultaneous relation to each other, so as to reveal these contradictions.²⁰ Of particular relevance to Mies is Krauss's reading of grids as embodying the values of both science and spiritualism, two values central to Mies's writing, but seemingly opposed. Mies's rumination on technology and its extension into the spiritual realm reads:

Wherever technology reaches its real fulfillment it transcends into architecture. [...] architecture is the real battle ground of the spirit. Architecture wrote the history of the epochs and gave them their names. Architecture depends on its time. It is the crystallization of its inner structure, the slow unfolding of its form.²¹

Yet, importantly the grid alone does not resolve these contradictions or transcend one dialectic, rather it either oscillates between the two or assumes a position where one is repressed. Krauss furthers the cause of the grid by pointing out that the system serves as a non-directional, anti-narrative device, at the same time as it acts as a datum for perceptual location. And finally, Krauss posits two possible spatial boundary conditions for the grid, one centripetal and the other centrifugal. In most instances the grid operates beyond its own boundaries, organizing, and implying the infinite space beyond, but in other instances, the grid acts a subdivision of the interior boundaries, reinforcing the piece's limits.²² The difficulty, then of the grid is that it can be manipulated to fit one of its two dialectical poles, based on its context.

²⁰ Krauss, Rosalind. "Grids." In *October*, Vol. 9 (Summer, 1979), pp. 55.

²¹ Mies. "Technology and Architecture," In *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*. Ed. Ulrich Conrad. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1964, pp. 154.

²² Krauss "Grids" 58.

Additionally however, Pier Vittorio Aureli, an architectural theorist and historian who studied in Venice, extrapolates from the grid its essence as the most generic possible form of abstract organization; "it merely does what it is," he claims.²³ It is through this extreme abstraction that the grid is able to function in a deeply reified society, where the grid serves as a universal common denominator. This system quite clearly appeals to many of Mies's values, his latent classicism, his will to the universal, his appeal to technology, and his appeal to spirituality.²⁴ On the other hand, if the grid is held on its own, it can function as a device for strictly ordering and locating human subjects within the space of the metropolis. If appropriated by the planification of capitalism, the grid can become a tool for the rote rationalization of the infinitely extending metropolis. Thusly, in order for Mies to resist pure standardization and rationalization, his generic type must incorporate more than merely the invisible structure of the grid. It is under this premise that the plinth is included as part of a semiological pairing.

If the grid is seen as both a timeless generic device and a paradigmatically modern system of abstract organization, then the plinth can similarly be seen as the grid's opposing element, both the generic and the classical. Mies sought, amongst the chaos of modernity, a timeless continuity with architectural classicism, at the same time as he reinterpreted that tradition in new materials. Numerous of Mies's early projects featured stripped down, abstracted forms of classical language. Critic Fritz Neumeyer elaborates the relationship between Mies and classicism on several occasions. Neumeyer identifies the plinth and the frame, a condition resulting out of a structural articulation of

²³ Aureli, Pier Vittorio. "More and More about Less and Less" In *Log* Vol. 16 (Summer 2009), pp. 9.

²⁴ Jean-Louis Cohen makes evident Mies's relationship to Schinkel, brick laying etc.. Cohen. *Mies*.

the grid and the viewing potential of the plinth, as reminiscent of Schinkel's classicism.²⁵ In this capacity, the plinth serves to analogize the limited, individual, architectural object with the self-contained occupation of space encompassing Bourgeois ownership. Additionally, a parallel can be drawn between the delineation of a sacred space from the space of the city in Greek temples to its abstracted forms in Mies's work. The plinth, is seemingly always a differentiator.

By embodying mutually connected dialectical contradictions, the grid and the plinth become mutually defining; thereby establishing themselves as objective problems within the universality of the architectural system itself. This concept was first put forth in a different setting by Hubert Damisch to characterize Brunelleschi's first perspective apparatus. For Damisch, Brunelleschi's use of silver leaf to reflect the actual sky in the background of his perspectively constructed buildings, both reveals the limitations of the perspectival system and defines the sky as that which is unknowable.²⁶ Rosalind Krauss, then, furthers this argument in combination with the art history theory of Alois Riegl. She claims that because these two systems define each other in a semiological pairing, they require no exterior signifiers to conduct meaning. Rather, the system becomes an autonomous dialectic, which she argues defines the series of problems repeatedly overcome by artists to define art as an autonomous discipline.²⁷

It is this same operation that is at work in the Barcelona Pavilion. Despite the strong connotations of the infinite that the grid carries, Mies consciously refutes the idea of infinity through the use of the plinth, a device that inherently separates, limits, and

²⁵ Neumeyer, Fritz. "A World in Itself: Architecture and Technology." In *The Presence of Mies*. ed. Detlef Mertins. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996. Also: Neumeyer, Fritz. "Space for Reflection: Block versus plinth." In *Mies van der Rohe: Critical Essays*. Ed. Franze Schulze. The Museum of Modern Art, 1989. pp. 148-71.

²⁶ Krauss, Rosalind. "The Grid, The /Cloud/, and the Detail." In *The Presence of Mies*. ed. Detlef Mertins. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996. pp. 142-143.

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 143-145.

establishes borders. The plinth creates and emphasizes a moment of discontinuity with the surrounding urban fabric. It likewise establishes a physical barrier that prevents the expansion of the logic of the interior from usurping the whole of the city. Yet Mies's use of the frame, an apparatus set up by the privileged position of the plinth, maintains the visual perception of the possibility of infinite extension through the strategic placement of frames and openings that repeatedly disappear and reappear as the viewer navigates the labyrinthine space of the pavilion.²⁸ In other words, without the elevation of the plinth, the infinity of the grid would be called into question by its collisions with surrounding site conditions. The plinth both questions and makes possible the interpretation of the grid as infinity.

The elevated plinth present in the Barcelona Pavilion and other of Mies's projects can also be seen in a number of other interpretations to act as a delineator between the chaotic surrounding urban fabric and the sanctity of the pavilion. For Jose Quetglas, for instance, despite the transparency, fluidity, and continuity, of the spatial configuration in plan, the pavilion is a closed space, like the hierarchic spaces of classical temples. As the plinth differentiates the pavilion from the rest of the exposition, highlighting the entrance/ascent, the space is defined as an exclusionary space.²⁹ Even the entrance stairs are hidden from plain view. Yet this stands in contradiction to the alternative interpretation posited by Aureli. For Aureli, the plinth is an opportunity for the viewer to turn his back to the building and witness the metropolis as an exterior spectator.³⁰

Ultimately, seen alone, either the grid or the plinth can be read and manipulated to fit a single, particular ideology. The grid can act as a liberator or oppressor, the plinth

²⁸ See Neumeyer, Fritz. "A World in Itself: Architecture and Technology," In *The Presence of Mies*. ed. Detlef Mertins. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996. p.76.

²⁹ Quetglas, Jose. "Loss of Synthesis: Mies's Pavilion." In *Architecture Theory since 1968*. ed. K. Michael Hays. MIT Press, 2000.

³⁰ Aureli, Pier Vittorio. "*More and More..*"

can act as a limit to all extensive power, or as an elite bulwark. However, seen together in dialogue, they cohere into a pair of dialectical contradiction. Where the plinth is heavy, the framing elements defining the grid are light. Where the plinth grounds space to the land, the grid abstracts space into pure datum. If the grid is seen as oppressive in its extension, the plinth is read as a limiting device, a check on the grid. Where as, if the plinth is read as an exclusionary device, the grid serves as a liberator. In other words, the problem of the generic pavilion typology is not one of ideology, but one of mutual self-definition between the plinth and the grid, an impossibility of synthesis emerging out of the generic's and particular's mutual contradiction.

Mies ultimately achieves a kind of autonomy unanticipated by Tafuri. While Tafuri focuses on the blatant feature of Mies's work, its silence, its complete and utter absence of communication, he misses a more subtle form of autonomy, one more closely related to the typological grammars eventually pursued by Rossi. Tafuri's interpretation of Mies's critique of ideology through the negative, does offer a resistance to the total planification of capitalism, as he eloquently places an individual cast into the absurd labyrinth of the pavilion, in a "place of absence, man, aware of the impossibility of restoring syntheses, and having once understood the negativeness of the metropolis, as the spectator of an entertainment which is truly total because it does not exist, is forced into pantomime."³¹ However, Tafuri's interpretation projects no positive into the void left by negativity. Mies's work doesn't merely replace the absurdity of the alienation of the capitalist Metropolis with the absurdity of the impossibility of coherence. Mies projects a positivity, a renewed possibility to work within the universal grammars of the generic type, while contemplating technology, order, and being.

³¹ Tafuri, Manfredo. *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*. The MIT Press, 1978. pp. 111.

There is great resonance between the reading of Mies's semiological pairing of the plinth with the grid and Massimo Cacciari's analysis of Mies's work as "negative thought".³² As Cacciari views Mies through his more extensive investigation of Adolf Loos, Cacciari proceeds to investigate only the absence of utopian language in Mies's work, at first glance no differently than does Tafuri. In congruently, however, for Cacciari, Mies's abstraction is not merely a silence, an absence of language, or a making other of language and project, but the aporia, an impossibility of synthesis, present within the differences of language. In Loos, Cacciari compels, "It is a game – but inexorable in its irresolvability – between interior and exterior, wherein the exterior cannot unconceal the interior, and the interior, in its turn, is not an ultimate box of wonders, but rather an element of this relation, a function of this whole, a conflict of its being there." In other words, with in the unity of Loos's project, there is an inextricable and irresolvable set of contradictions as Loos "gives form to their dissonance."³³ This negativity functions within the larger framework of the capitalist Metropolis, as it revels in its own contradictions, to make impossible a grand Hegelian synthesis characteristic of the Bourgeois state, and in so doing, to embed itself in the permanent instability of revolutions inherent to capitalist cyclicity and to resist an ideological incorporation into the planification of capitalism.³⁴ It is easy to imagine how one could apply Cacciari's negativity to the dialectical contradictoriness present between Mies's plinth and grid, making apparent the potential for capitalist resistance. Yet, this reading remains somewhat distanced from a positive mode of working within disciplinary autonomy.

In fact, if one simply reads the negativity of Mies's project as abstraction, as in fact K. Michael Hays does, it can be seen to belie autonomy. Hays proposes that

³² Cacciari, Massimo. *The Architecture of Nihilism*. New Haven: Yale university Press, 1993. pp. 205.

³³ Ibid. pp. 202.

³⁴ Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy*. pp. 47.

abstract experience of the internal architectural conditions is bound to the external conditions of mass culture and not internal to the architectural system itself.³⁵ As an exemplar of architectural autonomy, Hays alternatively, promotes Ludwig Hilberseimer, ironically, someone considered as more or less a Miesean sidekick. Hilberseimer's specific contribution, according to Hays, lies in his ability to employ an architectural type that does "not measure itself against the context as a negative instance, but rather absorbs the context into its own system."³⁶ Further, Hays quotes Jean Baudrillard to emphasize the self-referentiality of Hilberseimer's system, one that extirpates all meaning. Yet, a further analysis of Hilberseimer's work reveals an additional criterion: much of his theoretical writings is based on a rote determinism, logical, efficient, and functional.³⁷ Whereas, the Miesean project, as has been shown, remains ineluctably interested in indetermination and openness.

In intentional opposition to the denial of autonomy insisted upon by Hays, Rosalind Krauss offered artist Agnes Martin as a possible corollary to Mies, where Damisch's /cloud/, a semiological pairing, can provide the conditions for autonomy.³⁸ Because of this possibility, I suggest the interplay between the grid and the plinth as a dialectical pairing that defines an autonomous architectural problem. Seen mutually through the lenses of Cacciari/Tafuri and Damisch/Krauss this system is illuminated as having the potential to stake an autonomous resistance to the forces of capitalism, while also ruminating the negativity of a reified metropolis, yet still remaining open to

³⁵ Hays, K. Michael. "Odysseus and the Oarsman, or, Mies's Abstraction Once Again." In *The Presence of Mies*. Ed. Detlef Mertins. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996.

³⁶ Hays. *PostHumanist Subject*. pp. 196.

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 203.

³⁸ For an explication of the framework of /cloud/ see: Krauss. "/cloud/". And also Damisch, Hubert. *A Theory of /Cloud/Toward a History of Painting*. Stanford University Press. 2002.

unforeseen future configurations. The generic type of Mies's Barcelona Pavilion is neither blank nor explicitly tied to an external meaning. Wrought with contradictions, it confounds reduction, synthesis, and stability, yet offers a potential for construction and novelty.

By working within autonomous problems of the discipline, namely, the generic typologies of the grid and the plinth, as represented both in classicism and as invented by or transformed by new technological-material systems, Mies achieves a resistance to the rational systems making up the reified totalization of the city under capitalism. Rather than explicitly pronouncing one ideological stance, Mies extrapolated the fundamental conditions of modern technological society by seeking universal truth within its strictures. Combining this technological modernity with the continuity of classical architectural tropes, in turn, yielded a deeply human, ontological investigation, resonating within the freedom/oppression and individual/collective distinctions paradigmatic of the time. Mies instituted this dialectical resonance of impossible contradiction by operating within the strict rules of two mutually connected generic types, the plinth and the grid, offering new potential for the future.

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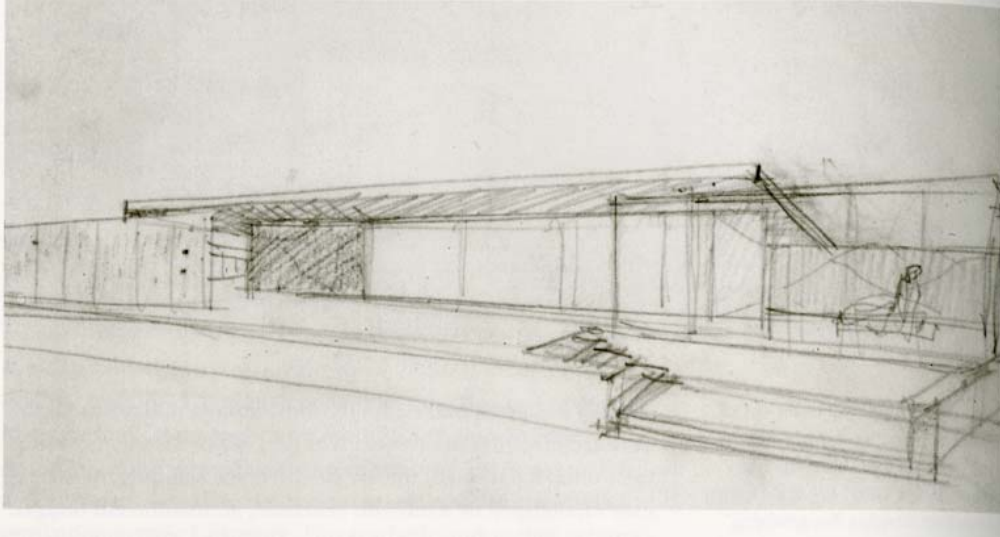


Figure 1. Sketch of Barcelona Pavilion, Including Plinth – Mies 1927

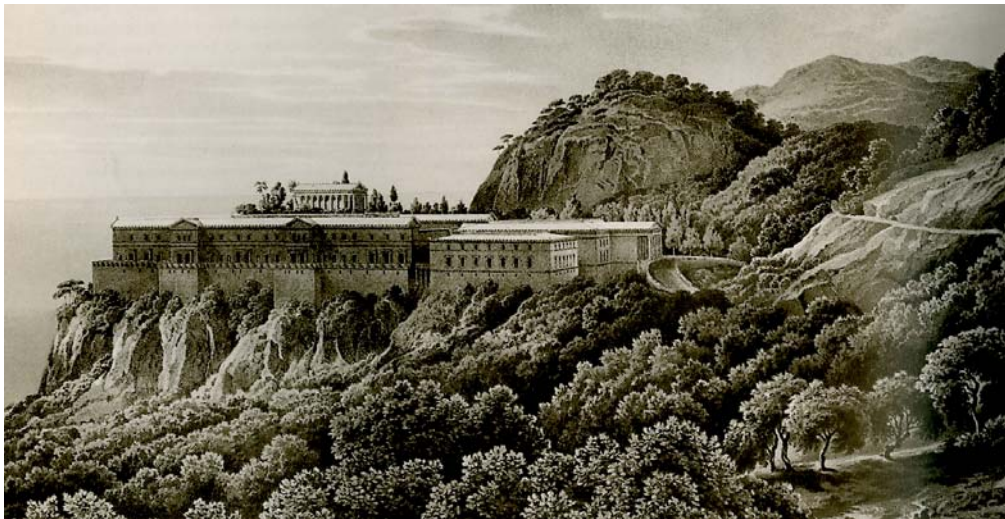


Figure 2. Schinkel's Oranienburg Palace Project

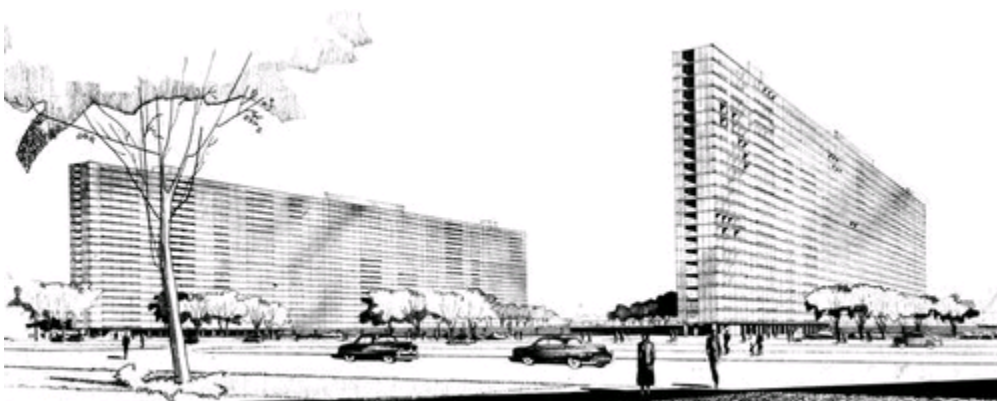


Figure 3. Project by Hilberseimer

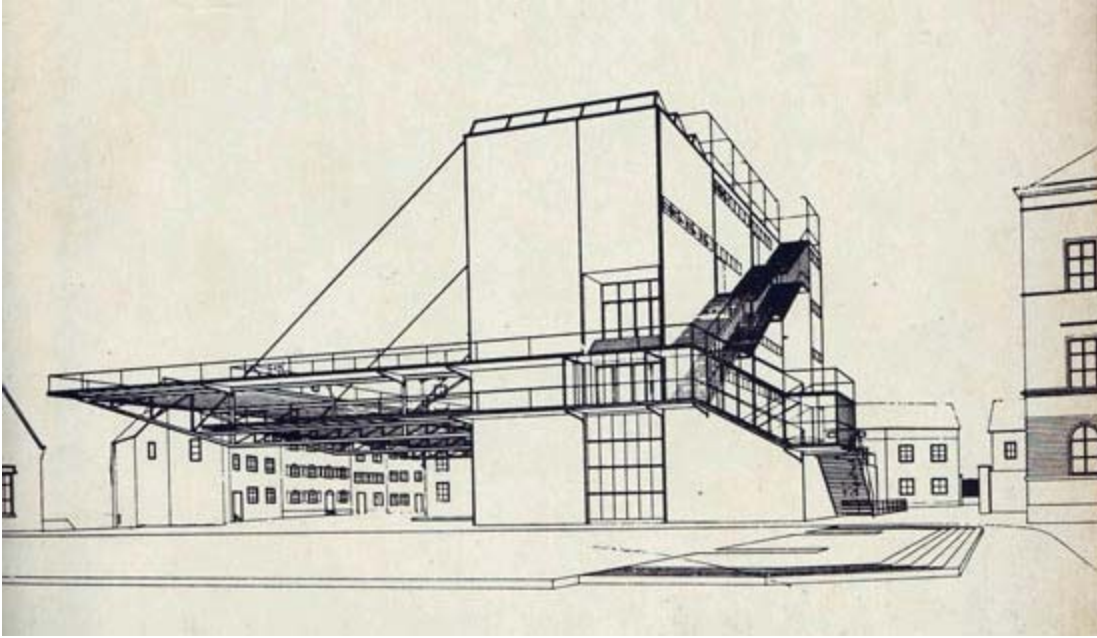


Figure 4. Hannes Meyer, Progetto per Scuola a Basilea, 1926



Figure 5. Villa Steiner – Adolf Loos

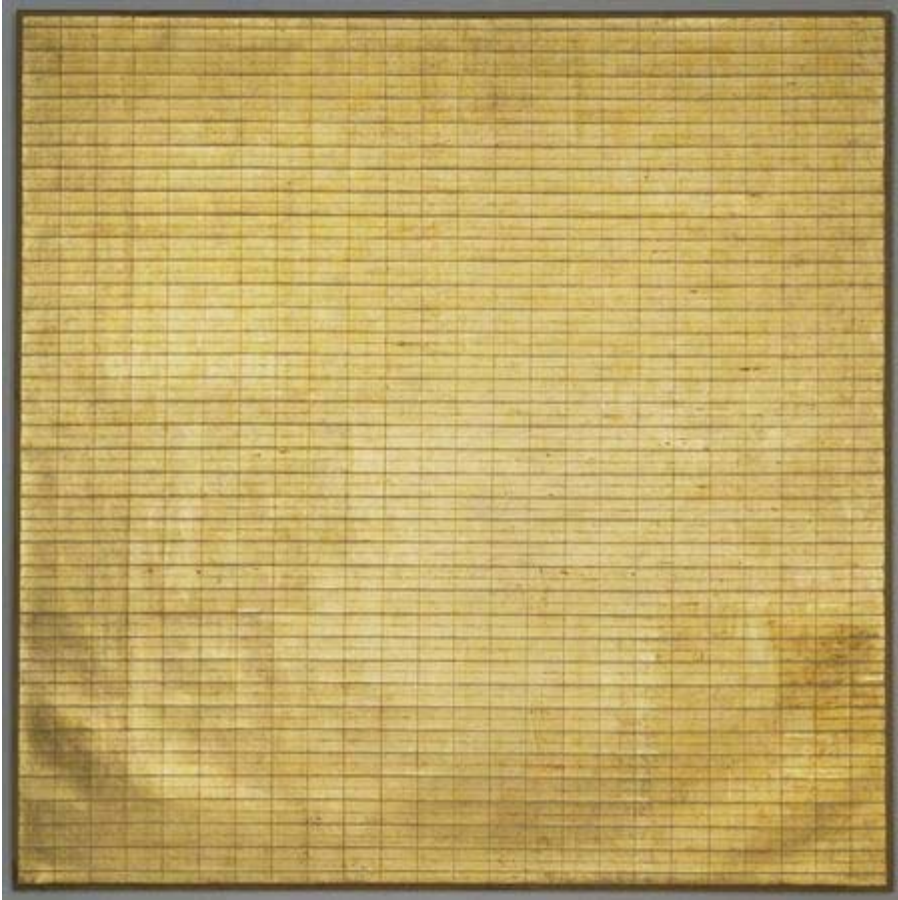


Figure 6: Grid by Agnes Martin

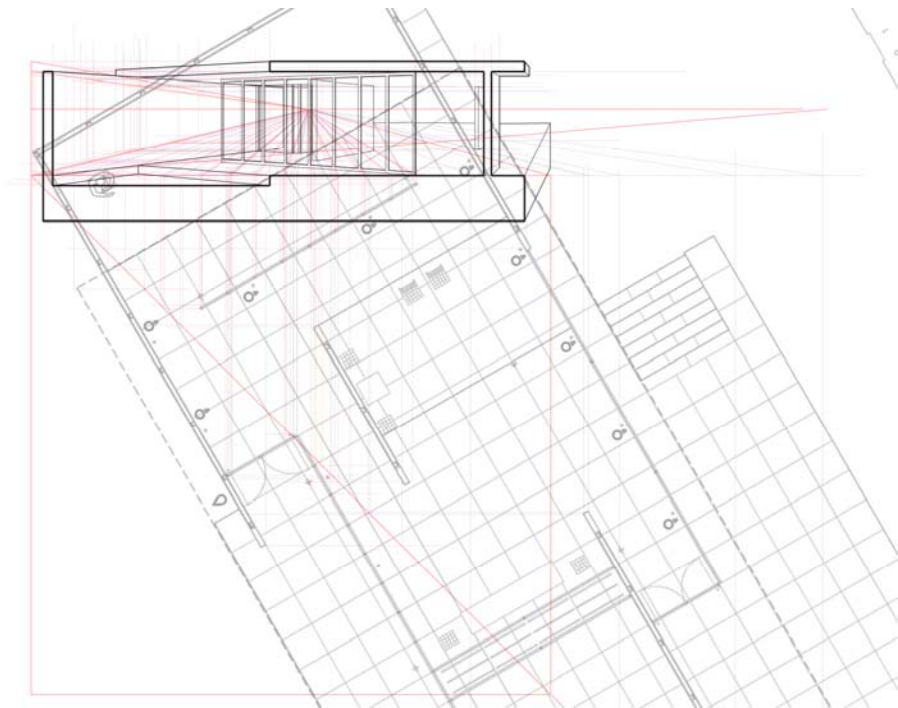


Figure 7: Grid and Plinth by Author