

Without Pictorial Detour: Benjamin, Mies and the Architectural Image

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'Radical knowledge' of architecture: Giedion and Linfert

In 1929 Benjamin sends a letter to the architectural historian and chief advocate of the modernist movement in architecture Sigfried Giedion. Previously, Giedion had sent Benjamin a complimentary copy of his freshly published *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (1928) in which he argues that nineteenth century utilitarian constructions such as the Pont Transbordeur in Marseille were unconsciously created manifestations of new architecture which no longer could be understood through its material and formal properties but rather as a dematerialised, dynamic field of 'floating relations and interpenetrations'.¹ These engineering structures are presented by Giedion as a 'prehistory' of a new architectural space which, according to him, would eventually manifest itself in Le Corbusier's designs from the 1920s. It was up to the architect's genius to plant the 'kernel' (*keimhaft*) of the new conception of space to be 'awakened' in buildings like the Cité Frugès in Pessac.

In his letter Benjamin acknowledges that he was 'electrified' after reading only a few passages of Giedion's work. Not merely did *Bauen in Frankreich* literally 'spark' an interest in the subject of architecture as it was put forward by Giedion; it was the book itself, by exerting 'the most immediate' impact, which had set Benjamin in an animated state he wanted to render operative: 'I deliberately write to you while I can still control the movement it

[the book] incites.'² The book appears to mirror the very same dynamic, relational properties of the new architecture allowing for the anthropological-materialist modes of experience Benjamin was interested in. Like dreams, deliria, or images, Giedion's illustrated book – and modernist architecture for that matter – embodied a 'radical knowledge' allowing a mode of retroactive historical thinking to become palpable which 'enlightened tradition through the present.'³

The realisation that a book like *Bauen in Frankreich* spelled out an innovative historical method by connecting the 'unconsciously' erected iron constructions with the 1920s architectural avant-garde and simultaneously acting as a shock-inducing agent capable of shaking up the dormant modern subject can be regarded as a methodological blueprint for Benjamin's later writings, especially *The Arcades Project*.⁴ Benjamin was straightforward about the credit that was due to Giedion as well as to Gotthold Meyer's work *Eisenbauten*: in 1929 he called them 'prolegomena to any future historical materialist history of architecture'.⁵ The illustrated book, through both its argument and its animating, bodily effect, now functioned – like the architecture it refers to – as an awakening machine to render active 'a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been'.⁶

Later, in the text fragments Benjamin assembles from 1935 onwards for *The Arcades Project*, Giedion

figures prominently in convolute N – ‘On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress’, the very section in which Benjamin outlines the objectives of his work, namely to establish modes of awakening as a historical method in order to dissolve “mythology” into the space of history’.⁷ Montage was predestined to help overcome the central problem of historical materialism: the idea of progress. Through the analysis of ‘the small individual moment’ one was to discover the ‘crystal of the total event’ and replace progress with actualisation.⁸ Benjamin cites Giedion twice; first, he presents the latter’s method for ‘writing’ architectural history as the model for his own undertaking:

just as Giedion teaches us to read off the basic features of today’s architecture in the buildings erected around 1850, we, in turn, would recognise today’s life, today’s forms, in the life and in the apparently secondary, lost forms of an epoch.⁹

Secondly, Benjamin regards the photographic images printed in *Bauen in Frankreich* taken from ‘within’ the ‘air-flooded’ iron construction such as the Eiffel Tower or the Pont Transbordeur not only as representative of the ‘basic aesthetic experience of today’s building’ hitherto reserved for workers and engineers but, what is more, as a model for a philosopher, ‘autonomous and free of vertigo’. [fig. 1]

Benjamin then introduces the infamous definition of the ‘image’ in order to substantiate the new historical method. Rejecting the metaphor of light as the medium for illuminating the present through the past – or vice versa – it is the image ‘wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill.’¹⁰ The ‘electric’ charge Benjamin received when first reading *Bauen in Frankreich* suggest that Giedion’s book operated like such an image, forming flash-like constellations of simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. Without trying to enter into the debate about what ‘dialectical images’

in fact are, it is safe to say that Benjamin presents an ‘image-based epistemology’, as Sigrd Weigel puts it.¹¹ Yet, Benjamin never dissociates the epistemic charge of the image from the question of language. He emphasises that the knowledge generated through the image has a locus which is language. The very first entry of convolute N makes clear that the image is always accompanied by a text, ‘the long roll of thunder that follows’.¹² Knowledge only becomes manifest when expressed in language. Benjamin pushes the idea of a coupling of image and language even further by arguing that it is ‘the image that is read’ that carries the ‘imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded’.¹³

If we assume that the radical knowledge Benjamin discovered in or through Giedion’s *Bauen in Frankreich* exemplified his epistemology – based on the link between image and language – we can ask how images of and texts on architecture are read. Could it be that the architectural image has a distinctive role in his theory of knowledge? Judging from a review Benjamin writes in 1933 of an essay entitled *Die Grundlagen der Architekturzeichnung* by art historian and fellow critic at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Carl Linfert such an assumption appears plausible.¹⁴

Benjamin’s discovery in 1931 of illustrations of eighteenth century French architectural drawings in Linfert’s essay struck a chord with him. Again Benjamin is awestruck. In a letter he writes in the same year he tells Linfert about being thrilled by the subject – which, he admits, had been foreign to him. ‘Even before I started reading the text’, Benjamin writes, ‘I was confronted with the thinnest, most exciting air emanating from the illustrations.’¹⁵ Linfert’s writing on architectural drawings appears to have sparked a sense of congeniality that led to a vivid exchange of letters and at least one meeting. In his review entitled *Strenge Kunstwissenschaft* Benjamin expresses his enthusiasm about the



Abb. 2. EIFFELTUM (1889)
Pfeilerinneres

An Stelle eines massiven Turmes ein offenes Gerüst auf geringe Dimension kondensiert. In ununterbrochen wechselnden Verscheidungen dringt die Landschaft ein.

attention Linfert devotes to the 'marginal case' (*Grenzfall*) of the architectural drawing.¹⁶ The operative, non-reproducing character of the image and its immediate agency are stressed in the review:

As regards the images themselves, one cannot say that they *re-produce* architecture. They *produce* it in the first place, a production which less often benefits the reality of architectural planning than it does dreams. One sees, to take a few examples, Babel's heraldic, ostentatious portals, the fairy-tale castles which Delajoue has conjured into a shell, Meissonier's knickknack architecture, Boullée's conception of a library that looks like a train station, and Juvara's ideal views that look like glances into the warehouse of a building dealer: a completely new and untouched world of images, which Baudelaire would have ranked higher than all painting.¹⁷ [fig. 2]

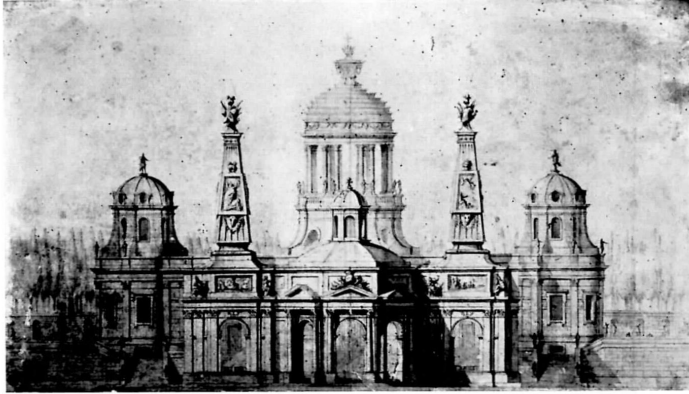
Architectural drawings, 'the peculiar imaginary world of architecture', are different from painterly representations of buildings and cities.¹⁸ The defining characteristic of the architectural drawing is that 'it does not take a pictorial detour' (*keinen Bildumweg zu kennen*).

In his *Grundlagen der Architekturzeichnung* Linfert argues that architectural drawings do not necessarily have to be regarded as preliminary acts that precede the realisation of architecture. A drawing is not 'a mere calculated plan or proposal' but it contains 'idiosyncrasies of the graphic comprehension of architecture in general and hence allusions to the incalculable unity of the planned space, which the finished building conceals once again'.¹⁹ Linfert is not interested in drawings that prepare the finished architectural object but rather in often fantastic and dream-like ideal designs of the pre-revolutionary period by Delajoue, Delafosse, Ledoux, and Piranesi. These *Idealentwürfe* are liberated from the strict conception of painterly images, namely from their dependence on a unified

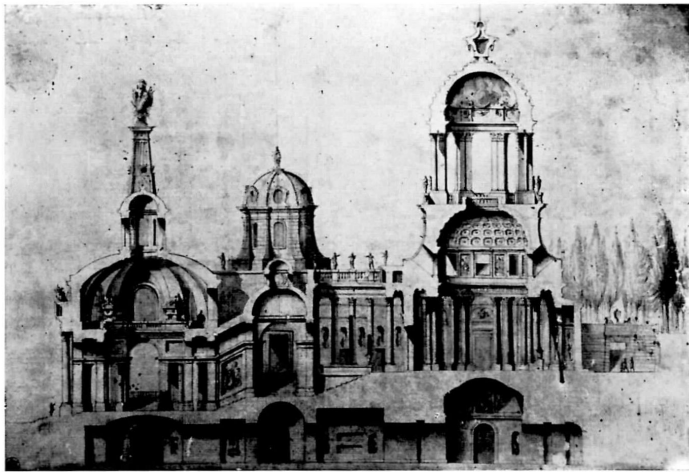
and homogeneous 'painterly-pictorial sight' (*malerisch-bildmässigen Anblick*) which, according to Linfert, is based on the strict laws of linear perspective.²⁰ Architectural drawings perform 'a visual circling around the building (*visuelles Kreisen um das Bauwerk*) which is only changing in perspective and as a representational image, not architecturally'.²¹ Drawing architecture, the design process itself, is also a visual process of making images, but in contrast to painterly images, it is indifferent to the viewer and his/her defined point of view in front of the pictorial space. Architectural apperception (*Architekturanschauung*), Linfert claims, escapes the analysing, rational gaze, just like architectural drawings escape the representational regime. Instead, these drawings are always 'pre-construed' (*vorgedeutet*) or 'pre-drawn' (*vorgezeichnet*). They do not mirror as *Abbilder* (objective pictures) an established image of the real but are rather constructive and projective, they anticipate the object to be built.

The gain of pictorial quality hence necessarily leads to loss in architectural quality. While architecture and the painterly images have in common the capacity to give an 'overview' of the 'whole', architectural images have the unique capacity to 'test' (*überprüfen*) this whole in the form of a peculiar 'image-entity' (*Vorstellungsgebilde*). Architectural space is hence comprehensible as a whole, but for that it requires an eye that does not look but a productive and embodied vision that 'apprehends' structures (*Strukturen durchspüren*), a 'building eye' (*bauenden Auge*) rather than a 'picture-forming eye' (*bildendes Auge*).²² For Linfert architectural drawings are hybrid entities, he himself uses the term hermaphrodite (*Zwitter*), they are interstices and borderline cases that negotiate two incongruous conceptions of space: pictorial space on the one hand and architectural space on the other.²³ It is important to note that Linfert does not conceive this hybrid quality of architectural drawings as a static

TAFEL 24



a) Juvara, Kirchenentwurf. Berlin, Kunstbibliothek



b) Juvara, Kirchenentwurf. Berlin, Kunstbibliothek



c) Juvara (?), Prospekt. Berlin, Kunstbibliothek

balance of the two tendencies; rather he sees the images as part of a dynamic design process, in which media of representation constantly intervene and work against – and sometimes even jeopardise – what he calls ‘the purely architectural’.

Both Giedion’s and Linfert’s works on architecture produce in Benjamin the same excitement, a flash-like moment of realisation he would later theorise in *The Arcades Project*. While Giedion demonstrates how the new method of historical knowledge becomes actualised or ‘awakened’ in the present, it is Linfert who, through his discussion of architectural drawings, outlines a coherent alternative definition of the image. Benjamin’s image-based epistemology rests on the very premises Linfert identifies in the eighteenth century drawings: images exist beyond their representational function – which is the basis for constituting both the delirium of an autonomous, acting subject and the existence of concrete, innate yet comprehensible objects at the disposal of the subject. The architectural image becomes the paradigm for redefining what an image is because it not only defies the clear separation between visual, mental and material image but, what is more, it is the manifestation of a de-subjectivising vision and a bodily perception. Existing independently of the subject, the architectural image gains its own operative agency within the process of conveying and constructing what remains the inexplicable ‘architectural’. We find a similar enigmatic core in Benjamin’s ‘dialectical image’, the purpose of which, beyond providing retroactive instances of historical awakening, is to produce constellations between modern technology and the archaic pre-linguistic symbols.

G as dispositif

Although Benjamin’s astonished reactions to the works of Giedion and Linfert might suggest otherwise, his encounter with architectural images was not unpremeditated. During the first part of the 1920s, Benjamin belonged the extended circle of

artists, architecture writers and intellectuals who to a degree were associated with the short-lived journal *G – Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*.²⁴ The documented evidence of his involvement is the translation of an article by Tristan Tzara entitled ‘*Die Photographie von der Kehrseite*’ (Photography from the Verso) which Benjamin contributes to the third issue of *G* appearing in June of 1924. However, the precise degree of his involvement remains unclear. Benjamin himself belittles his involvement in a letter he writes to Gershom Scholem in September of the same year: ‘Currently I am not able to send you an issue of the new journal *G*, for whose first [*sic*] issue, in an act of weakness rather than courtesy vis-à-vis the publisher (Hans Richter), I have translated with reverent dash a *blague* of Tristan Tzara.’²⁵ Benjamin had probably met Richter in 1918–1919 when both lived in the Zurich. And even after the *G* episode they appeared to have stayed in contact. Supposedly, Richter was the first to whom Benjamin sent a draft of ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility’.²⁶

Yet, upon closer inspection, his involvement in *G* appears to be much more than a mere ‘act of weakness’. The journal’s objective, namely to give visibility to new the gamut of objects and practices that modern technologies had introduced yet still remained unaccounted for by the dominant systems of representation and signification in place, seem rather congruent with Benjamin’s own preoccupations. What makes it difficult to classify *G* is the fact that it lacked a clear ideological affiliation. The *G*-group, as it was later called, was a loose association of people coming from heterogeneous, sometimes divergent backgrounds: Hans Richter himself, the driving force behind the project, was a former Dadaist who ventured into his pioneering works of abstract film; Raoul Hausmann was a technophile Dadaist; Theo van Doesburg one of the protagonists from *De Stijl*, El Lissitzky a Soviet Constructivist; Werner Graeff a recent Bauhaus graduate, Mies van der Rohe an architect mostly

known for his rather conventional residential architecture for a wealthy Berlin clientele. Their common denominator was not the invocation of a shared dogma or narrative but the intuition of the need for an alternative aesthetics to accommodate collective experience and an affirmative reception of technology.

As heterogeneous as the *G* affiliates was the range of subjects treated in the journal: iron and glass constructions, car design, fashion, city planning, painting, photography, and cinema all belonged to 'the means of our time' that Mies van der Rohe speaks of in his article in the first issue.²⁷ *G* comprehended itself as also being such a 'means', a medium that consciously refuses to simply serve as a neutral vehicle of representation and that instead sets out to reshape the boundaries of what is visible, thinkable, buildable. It is this epistemic dimension that distinguishes *G* from many other contemporary avant-garde journals which often served as printed outlet for propagating the ideology of a particular group or current. As Richter put it: *G* was created for those 'already equipped with all the modern apparatuses of instinct, reception and transmission, which assure [their] connection with life'.²⁸ The journal was one of those apparatuses, just like the other media treated in the pages of *G*, that could achieve this reconnection to a life made of flux, intensities and interconnections and that could open up to new forms of visibility and signification.²⁹

This type is alive

One of the central preoccupations of the *G* project was the creation of new life by means of technology. 'He who makes the connections, who deepens and organises the means of *Gestaltung* creates new life and abundance', Richter and Graeff write in conclusion to their programmatic statement in the first issue of *G*. Architecture, film, fashion, urbanism, industrial buildings, car design – and the journal itself for that matter – were manifestations of this 'new life' created by artists, architects

and designers capable of making the connections and of organising the media.³⁰ But Richter even extended this idea of animism further to the journal itself. In the editorial statement of *G* number four, two years after the publication of the famous third issue, he wants to reassure his readership that the spirit that had originally animated the *G* project was still present. 'THIS TYPE IS ALIVE!' (*DIESER TYP LEBT!*) Richter proclaims in capital letters.³¹ The expression 'Typ' is a deliberately ambivalent choice of words referring simultaneously to the journal, the typographic sign, and, in a colloquial sense, to a human being with a particular character. On a visual level, Richter intersperses his text with two large, identical letters 'G'. [fig. 3] The living 'type', this intuitive yet ultimately inscrutable material presence resembles an animate totem rather than a letter taken from the alphabet, the smallest unit of a potentially meaningful linguistic sign. This 'type', Richter argues, combines in itself the objective of the entire *G* movement:

It is our task to make us comprehensible to it [the 'type', i.e. *G*] as well as to comprehend it – then we will all see more clearly and will learn to work more methodically. The intuition and knowledge of a collective [*gemeinschaftliche*] task and a shared elementary experience [*gemeinsame Grunderlebnis*] will produce a spiritual connection [...].³²

The letter 'G' is hence not merely a signifier used by the subject to communicate a message. For Richter, the 'type' is a living entity that demands from the subject that he make himself understood. This 'living type' already encapsulates collective knowledge and meaning and it is the vocation of *G* to establish new connections not through but with the 'type's' material and animate presence.

To better understand this scepticism vis-à-vis the idea of language, both linguistic and visual, it is helpful to call Walter Benjamin's language philosophical thinking to mind. Around the time



Zweifellos haben wir das Interesse unserer Freunde ebenso auf eine lange Probe gestellt, als auch den Widersachern genügend Zeit gegeben, uns für beerdigt zu halten.

Die Dinge, die uns wichtig waren, haben inzwischen nichts von ihrer Wichtigkeit verloren. Es ist heute so dringend nötig, sich um sie zu bemühen, wie vor anderthalb Jahren, als wir durch die Umstände gezwungen waren, das Erscheinen von „G“ vorerst einzustellen. Wenn aber auch inzwischen keine weiteren Nummern erschienen sind, so hat die Zeitschrift als solche nicht geschlafen. Wir haben an ihrem Plan weiter gearbeitet, oder besser: um ihn gekämpft.

„G“ erscheint wieder, weil wir es brauchen. Wir brauchen eine Kampfzeitschrift, in der wir um die Gestalt und Eindeutigkeit dessen kämpfen, was wir in unserer lebenden Generation geschaffen haben, schaffen und zu schaffen imstande sind. Wie breit oder wie eng die Basis der Zeitschrift sein wird, hängt davon ab, auf einer wie breiten oder wie engen Front, in wieviel oder wie wenig Gebieten sich heute ein neuer Typ geistig durchsetzt.

DIESER TYP LEBT!

Es ist unsere Aufgabe — ebenso uns ihm verständlich zu machen, wie ihn zu begreifen — so werden wir alle klarer sehen und planmäßiger arbeiten lernen. Aus dem Ahnen und Wissen um eine gemeinschaftliche Aufgabe und ein gemeinsames Grunderlebnis wird die geistige Berührung entstehen, die für jeden Einzelnen von uns ebensoviel bedeutet wie für die Gestalt der Sache selbst. In einer Atmosphäre gleichen Sinnes zu leben ist um so unentbehrlicher, je mehr uns von dem trennt, was uns umgibt.



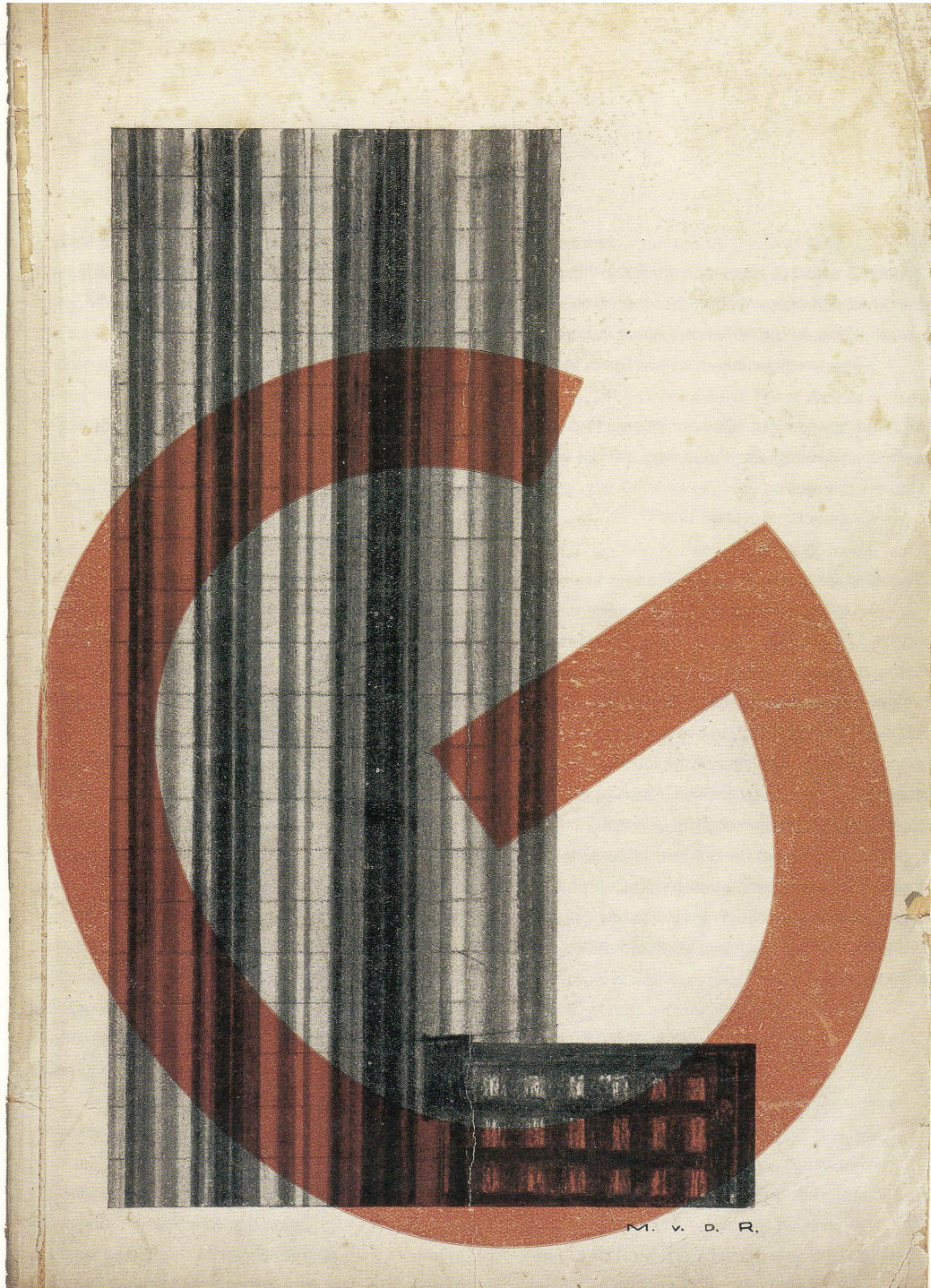


Fig. 4: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, cover, *G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, no. 3. (1924).

Benjamin makes the acquaintance of the Dadaist Richter and during the period of his affiliation with *G* he had begun to reflect on the nature and function of the sign and language. These reflections can very well serve as prolegomena for his later writings of the 1930s. In 'Über die Malerei oder Zeichen und Mal' (1917) Benjamin reflects about painting and makes a distinction between sign and mark: while the former is 'printed' onto a support, which for the most part is inanimate like 'buildings, trees', the latter 'emerges' on what is alive (e.g. a scar or a birthmark).³³ Contrary to the imposed and concluding sign the mark is associated with the emancipatory potential of life in the sense that it is the embodied manifestation of actualising events. The mark cannot be dissociated from the living body *and* can be understood, as Gilles Deleuze put it with reference to the wound, as a 'pure virtuality on the plane of immanence that leads us into a life'.³⁴ *G*, no matter whether the single alphabetic letter, the name of journal, or the emblem of an artistic project, is a medium, not in the sense of a vehicle that contains and conveys pre-inscribed meaning but in the sense of a mark that connects with life. As such, the mark disconnects from linear, progressive history and instead, as a 'medium', it can produce a 'temporal magic' capable of overcoming the division between past and present – an idea similar to Benjamin's later concept of the image that acts as an agent of historical knowledge by forming constellations between the what-has-been and the now. In his habilitation work on the German *Trauerspiel* (begun in 1923–24) Benjamin explores language elements which, once 'emancipated' from meaning-generating structures, can be 'exploited allegorically' and hence become invested with a different meaning. Tellingly, Benjamin argues here that it was the 'fragmentative, dissociative principle of the allegorical approach' that caused the capitalisation of the first letter in nouns in German. The capitalisation is for Benjamin evidence of a language that no longer serves as 'mere communication' but that itself becomes a 'new-born object'.³⁵ The 'type'

is alive, it turns into this new object awakened to life which at the same time forms a constellation with the original 'script'.

At length, Benjamin refers to the Romantic physicist and philosopher Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810) who had tried to 're-discover, or else to find the primeval or natural script (*Ur- oder Naturschrift*) by means of electricity'.³⁶ In other words, it is modern technology that can render visible and give access to an *ur*-state of nature that lies submerged in human language – an idea which seems completely congruent with the programmatic basis of *G*. In Ritter's writings Benjamin finds confirmation of his belief that the world is 'literally created by the word', and that 'the plastic arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, etc. belong pre-eminently among such script, and developments [*Nachschrift*] and derivations [*Abschrift*] of it'.³⁷ And even the image itself is first and foremost a '*Schriftbild*' or 'scripture-image'.³⁸ In its allegorical use the image is not a mirror of the real but 'a signature, only the monogram of essence, not the essence itself in a mask'.³⁹

The idea that architecture and images can be both considered as 'scripts', ideograms, or marks is maybe most plausibly demonstrated in the famous cover drawing Mies produces for *G*'s third issue. [fig. 4] The red letter 'G' is pasted onto the schematic, flat elevation drawing of a dark skyscraper dwarfing the black silhouette of an additional structure which the viewer can barely discern as a traditional building. The drawing is highly reminiscent of an elevation study Mies produced for the Glass Skyscraper project (1922). Yet what does Mies's cover suggest with the tilted, semi-transparent, striking red letter that takes the scale of the drawn skyscraper if not the idea of architecture as script or mark? The letter depicts the linguistic sign of the title of the journal and simultaneously functions as a mark emerging from both the corpus of the white page and the depicted architectural bodies.

All habitual codes of signification seem reversed: the supposedly transparent glass high-rise, devoid of all volume and three-dimensionality, appears as a dark, flat and opaque rectangular grid whose monochrome rhythm resembles one of Richter's abstract film sequences more than a traditional architectural drawing. By contrast, the letter 'G' is transparent and takes the scale of a building. Because it is tilted the 'G' oscillates between its signifying function and its acting as animated form or image in a montage field.

'Give meaning back to the words. [...] We want to give meaning again to things', Mies notes in response to reading texts by the philosopher of religion Romano Guardini.⁴⁰ This desire to renew the capacity of language to connect with life had certainly been with Mies at least since the early 1920s given the fact that he had been associated with some of the members of Berlin Dada whose principle preoccupation was the focus on language's incapacity to signify. Moreover, having read Henri Bergson, Mies certainly was aware of the central theme of the former's thinking: the contradiction between the continuous flow of life and the fixation of form. In his copy of *Creative Evolution*, just one paragraph before Mies's only annotation, Bergson stresses the inherent contradiction between words and the living, creative spirit:

The word turns against the idea. The letter kills the spirit. And our most ardent enthusiasm, as soon as it is externalised into action, is so naturally congealed onto the cold calculation of interest or vanity, the one takes so easily the shape of the other, that we might confuse them together [...] if we did not know that the dead retain for a time the features of the living.⁴¹

G, the letter, the journal and the entire project of *Gestaltung*, is about ending this dichotomy between word and idea and regaining the ancient ability to 'name' living phenomena. It opens up to the dimension of pre-linguistic collective *physis* and the

'shared elementary experience' that Richter refers to. The experiments with sequential scroll drawings and eventually with abstract films Richter and the Swedish artist Viking Eggeling had been involved in since the late 1910s intend to re-discover a 'universal language' made up of contrasting elementary elements. These elements (Richter, because he feared 'formalism', avoided calling the lines and squares forms) were neither meant as symbolic nor mimetic references to the real, nor were they meant as abstractions. Their 'universal language' did not function as the vehicle for textual, verbal, or visual information. Rather, what films like Richter's *Rhythmus 21* and Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphonie* – and the journal *G* for that matter – 'showed' were emblematic manifestations of a 'whole' that can only be grasped as a process in duration. The films do not 'show' anything except for a play of light relationships in time.⁴²

The spectator does not see symbols or representations of objects but indices of his or her experience of the 'process as such', as Richter emphasises. And because this process happens devoid of 'all material comparisons and memories' and is liberated from the limitations of 'the world of words' it becomes 'elementary-magical'.⁴³

Richter and Eggeling's 'universal language' shows certain parallels with Benjamin's foray into the philosophy of language. In his essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' (1916) Benjamin expands the concept of language to 'every expression of human mental life'. No longer limited to a linguistic dimension, one can discern for instance a language of technology, of music, of sculpture, and of justice.⁴⁴ In addition, Benjamin rejects the idea of language as simply an instrumental vehicle for the transmission of textual or verbal information. He argues that language 'is by no means the expression of everything that we could – theoretically – express *through* it, but is the immediate expression of everything which

communicates *itself* in it [*der unmittelbare Ausdruck dessen, was sich in ihr mitteilt*].⁴⁵ What Benjamin calls 'mental being' (*geistige Wesen*) hence resides *in* language. Rather than serving as a vehicle for the transport of information or meaning, language in fact communicates 'the mental being corresponding to it.'⁴⁶ The subject is no longer in the role of the active agent who 'names' the passive, inanimate world. Instead, what precedes the subject's utterance is the 'call' (*Anruf*) coming from thing or object.

Mies's cover design for *G* number three, and for that matter, his architectural language can be understood in a similar way. Architectural object and linguistic sign seem ambivalent and abstracted in such a way that all references to reality, whether past or future, and all efforts at symbolic attribution seem futile. The visual interpenetration of the letter *G* and the high-rise render the former corporeal and architectonic while the latter takes on the immediate and archaic character of a rune or hieroglyph. By superimposing the sign/mark with a building, Mies's cover design for *G* transposes the fundamental idea of *G* into the realm of architecture. He proposes an architectural image that is at once '*Schriftbild*' (script-image) and '*Bildraum*' (image-space), where meaning 'flashes up' in moments of recognisability.

Ghostly traces and masks

Reading the fundamental premises of the *G* project through the lens of Benjamin's reflections on language, sign and the image allows us to approach Mies's architectural images, his drawings and montages, in ways different from conventional architectural images. The pithy definition of an architecture as an animate, moving entity ('Alive. Changing. New.')⁴⁷ that he proposes in *G* 1923 appears to be in line with conceptual orientation of the journal. His collaborators on the first issue, Richter, Theo van Doesburg, Raoul Hausmann and El Lissitzky, all in one way or another offer 'cinematic' propositions for new elementary practices,

sustaining their arguments with illustrations showing filmstrips, image series, abstract sequential compositions and montaged storyboards. It is all the more surprising to discover Mies's *Bürohaus* charcoal drawing accompanying his article. [fig. 5] The image captures the imposing cube-like structure at an angle stressing the parallel horizontal slabs of the cantilevered floors as vanishing lines. Mies presents the viewer with an emphatic perspective drawing of a more or less recognisable urban scene taken from the point of view of a pedestrian. At first sight, Mies's 'still' image appears in stark contrast to the abstract, animated illustration of his peers seemingly reinforcing the very anachronistic visual regime *G* set out to overcome. And it is surprising that Mies continues to draw in perspective while his colleagues at *G* like Richter, Lissitzky, van Doesburg and Hausmann all experimented with ways to overcome this visual regime.

Yet, upon closer inspection Mies's images turn out to be riddled with ambiguities. Although the *Bürohaus* seems to constitute the image space's perspectival order, it at the same time appears to be detached from it, floating inside the Berlin streetscape. The building presents itself as a rational, utilitarian structure, it concurrently strikes the viewer with its ghostly apparition. The scene exhibits a strong contrast between new and old, between the radiant light grey and detailed office building and the coarse black silhouettes of traditional Berlin *Gründerzeit* buildings. Whether we are witnessing a daytime or night-time scene is not clear. One can discern one light source concealed from view behind the old Berlin façades on the left. From here the large front side facing the viewer is bathed in light, creating a stark contrast between the radiant office building and the cityscape which seems to sink into indistinct darkness. What is peculiar is that the street side also fades into darkness suggesting that the surfaces of the flat horizontal slabs are not light-absorbing but light-reflecting.

Kunst soll das Leben nicht erklären, sondern verändern.

Halt
Halt
Halt!!!
Halt.

gabemöglichkeit mit Hilfe eines kleinen Kondensermikrophons. Der wissenschaftliche Nachweis, daß sogar weit kleinere Kapazitätsänderungen, als die der Film erwarten läßt, für die deutliche Wiedergabe ausreichten, wurde 1920 durch einen kleinen Cylinderkondensatorfilter erbracht.

Aber von sprechenden Film zur Cytographiemethode ist noch ein großer Schritt. Als erster hat der Erfinder des Autophonetik, Plummer, in einer Schrift „Die Zukunft des elektrischen Fernsehers“ diese Frage behandelt. Er sagt darin: „Kann der Lichtstrahl genossen werden, mittels einer Solarzelle Induktionsstrom zu erzeugen oder zu verändern, so muß ein in die Leitung geschaltetes Hörtelefon solche induzierten Erscheinungen in Klänge verwandeln. Was also in der Empfangstation als Bild entsteht, würde in Ziel-Apparat ein Ton entstehen und wenn ein Umraum bewegte Bilder, sichtbare Vorgänge, aufgenommen werden, so müßen sich diese als eine Folge von Tönen klanggeben, und umgekehrt. Die Gestalt eines Vierecks muß bei akustischer Verwandlung ein anderes Tonbild hervorufen, als das von einem Dreieck oder Kreis gekommen, ein Würfel muß anders klingen als ein Kugel oder Prismen. Kritische und Skeptiker werden zu reden beginnen, in welcher Sprache, in welchem Tongesäß? Das liegt noch gänzlich im Felde der Ahaung, aber aus dem Nichtwissen wird derzeitig das Verstehen matigert.“

Neu liegt dieser Vorstellung, wie auch dem Tonbildfilm, ein Naturalismus zugrunde, aus dem es sich für uns heute keineswegs mehr handeln kann. Daß die Musik in ihrer letzten Form (nach der Funktion) unserer Weltweisheit nicht mehr entspricht, so wie ihr die akustische Materie nicht mehr entspricht, ist eine unabwehrliche Tatsache. Wir müssen also neue, für unsere zeitliche Gesetze, eine neue Funktionalität für beide finden.

Wir müssen die Zugehörigkeit der Formfunktionalität zu den Schwingungszuständen in einer grundlegenden Weise ermitteln, um über die Zweckmäßigkeit zu einer neuen Formverbindlichkeit zu gelangen.

Berlin R. Hausmann

Jede ästhetische Spekulation, jede Doktrin, und jeden Formalismus lehnen wir ab.

Baukunst ist raumgefäher Zeitwille. Lebendig. Wedersind. Neu.

Nicht das Gestern, nicht das Morgen, nur das Heute ist formbar. Nur dieses Bauen gestaltet.

Gestaltet die Form aus dem Wesen der Aufgabe mit dem Mithes unserer Zeit.

Das ist unsere Arbeit.

BÜROHAUS

Das Bürohaus ist ein Haus der Arbeit der Organisation der Klarheit der Ökonomie. Helle weite Arbeitsräume, übersichtlich, angelegt, nur gegliedert wie der Organismus des Betriebes. Größter Effekt mit geringstem Aufwand an Mitteln.

Die Materialien sind Beton Eisen Glas. Eisenbetondecken mit ihrem Wesen nach Skelettkonstruktion. Keine Teilwägen noch Panzertürme. Bei tragender Bänderkonstruktion eine nichttragende Wand. Also Haut- und Knochenbau.

Die zweckmäßigste Einteilung der Arbeitsplätze war für die Raumliefe maßgebend; diese beträgt 16 m. Ein zweiflügeliger Rahmen von 8 m Spannweite mit beiderseitiger Konsolauskragung von 4 m Länge wurde als das ökonomischste Konstruktionsprinzip ermittelt. Die Bänderentfernung beträgt 5 m. Dieses Bänderystem trägt die Deckenplatte, die am Ende der Kragarme senkrecht hochgewinkelte Außenhaut wird und als Rückwand der Begleit dient, die aus dem Räumlichen der Übersichtlichkeit wegen in die Außenwände verlegt wurden. Über den 2 m hohen Regalen liegt ein bis zur Decke reichendes durchlaufendes Fensterband.

Berlin, Mai 1923

Mies van der Rohe

G MATERIAL DER NÄCHSTEN NUMMERN:

Fiat | Element und Erfindung | Neue Optik | Bauhandwerk u. Bauindustrie | Topographie der Typographie | Lunapark | Photographik | Kinderspielzeug | Acrobatie des Schauspielers | Das neue Wohnhaus | Die Internationale Verkehrszeichensprache.

Fig. 5: Page from G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung, no. 1 (1923).

In addition, the ambiguous status of the *Bürohaus* becomes evident once we compare the drawing of the luminous white building from the charcoal drawing with a photograph of the model Mies exhibited at the *Internationale Architekturausstellung* at Weimar in 1923. While the drawing shows an open structure whose ribbon windows allow for a high degree of transparency, the photographed model appears like a solid and dark block whose glossy surface throws back the flash of the camera.

Mies proposes a similar play of ambiguous difference with the four large-scale photomontages he produces for the Friedrichstraße skyscraper project. Again the images are scenes taken from the point of view of a pedestrian creating an emphatic perspective with a shining diaphanous edifice inserted into the bustling urban historical fabric. And, in order to further enhance the play of contrasts and ambiguities, Mies manipulates the photographic basis by darkening the detailed façades.

It is peculiar that Mies chooses as basis for his montage a perspectival photographic view of the animated Friedrichstraße yet the pedestrians discernible in the street lack recognisable features. They appear like fleeting shadows: semi-translucent, ghost-like apparitions that supernaturally blend into their environment. [fig. 6] The blurred figures are ethereal traces of human presence rather than the established visual evidence that would assist the viewer in identifying and classifying the urban scene. One is reminded of photographs from the nineteenth century when long exposure times often blurred animated human bodies, at times rendering them invisible.

Benjamin identifies decreased exposure time as the technical aspect that caused a fundamental caesura in the history of photography. In his 'Little History of Photography' he distinguishes between two different temporalities: an earlier period of the *Bild*, or 'original picture', and a later period of

the clearly recognisable and reproducible *Abbild* (copy).⁴⁸ In the first decades of photography light still had to 'struggle out of darkness'. The magic aura of these early images was banished when optical and photochemical advancements allowed events to be recorded 'as faithfully as any mirror'.⁴⁹ At the same time the aura was 'simulated' through the practice of retouching, toning or artificially highlighting the photographic image.

One could very well accuse Mies of trying to simulate this lost aura. Yet while gum prints, penumbral tones and artificial highlights were habitually used to cover up, as Benjamin argues, 'the impotence of [a] generation in the face of technical progress', Mies's manipulated photomontages produce the opposite effect: his intention seems precisely to render technology visible again (in the form of the glass high-rise) and to evoke the potential for a renewed congruency between modern subject and technology, the same congruency which, Benjamin argues, had existed during the early period of photography but has been irretrievably lost.⁵⁰

But if the aura has vanished once and for all from the medium photography, and if Mies's intention was not to resurrect a false aura, what to make of the ghostly figures in Mies's photomontages? What I would like to argue is that Mies's images contain the very critical impulse Benjamin recognises in the deserted Paris street views taken by Eugène Atget at the turn of the century. Atget's 'unremarkable, forgotten, cast adrift' urban spaces, cleared of human countenance and devoid of 'great sights and so-called landmarks', unsettle the viewer and prepare the ground for a 'salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings'.⁵¹ By banishing all signs of human presence from his images (which for Benjamin were the last vestiges of an aura present in early portrait photographs) Atget allows for an unprecedented encounter with an urban world of everyday objects.

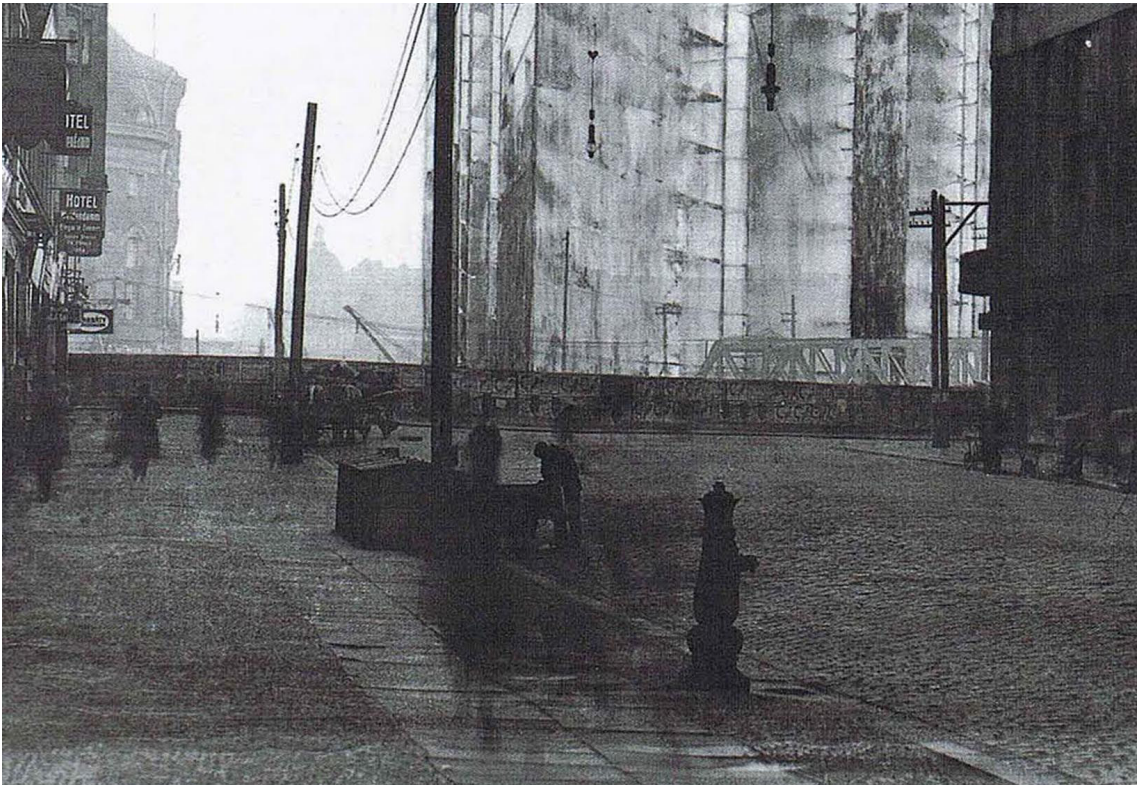


Fig. 6: Detail from Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Wabe'. Competition 'Hochhaus am Bahnhof Friedrichstraße', 1922. Bauhaus-Archiv / Museum für Gestaltung, Berlin.

The political significance of this hitherto overlooked object world becoming visible in mechanically reproduced images is that it demands from the viewer an entirely new perception. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' Benjamin argues that Atget's images, rather than demanding a contemplative gaze, 'unsettle the viewer; he feels challenged to find a particular way to approach them'.⁵² But because mechanically produced images still have a shocking effect on the viewer, a 'free play to the politically educated eye' is not yet possible.⁵³ The viewer still needs assistance, which according to Benjamin, is provided by the captions:

Picture magazines begin to put up signposts for him – whether these are right or wrong is irrelevant. For the first time, captions become obligatory. And it is clear that they have a character altogether different from the titles of paintings. The directives given by captions to those looking at images in illustrated magazines soon even become more precise and commanding in films, where the way each single image is understood appears prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding images.⁵⁴

Could it be that Mies's new architecture, just like mechanically reproduced images, requires 'captions', i.e. comprehensible texts, objects and spaces? At least Hans Richter, with whom Mies published the first three issues of *G* in 1923 and 1924, was keenly aware of the possible misreading of architectural representations. In 1925 Richter publishes an article entitled '*Der neue Baumeister*' (The New Master-Builder) in which he demonstrates his intimate familiarity with Mies's understanding of architecture. In the caption for the famous Brick Country House plan Richter warns the reader to abstain from reading the plan in a conventional way as a technical drawing: 'This plan is legible through the senses, it is not a mathematical abstraction'.⁵⁵

In fact, Mies might have well been aware of Benjamin's ideas since its central tenets are present in the pages of *G*, especially via Benjamin's own contribution, the aforementioned translation of '*Die Photographie von der Kehrseite*' by Tristan Tzara in which the Dadaist develops the idea that the mechanically reproduced image reveals a hitherto overlooked object world.⁵⁶ In fact, because architecture is always both image and built object this new condition poses a double challenge to Mies: not only can the renderings of the Friedrichstraße high-rise, the office building or the Adam department store, pasted inside photographic urban views, be considered as avatars of the new technological condition, but also Mies's architecture becomes in turn the subject of the camera's gaze. At the same time, his architecture itself functions like a mechanically reproduced image, in the sense that it changes the status of the object and requires the viewer/user to alter the way he or she perceives the object.

Still, the insertion of blurred human silhouettes remains peculiar. One is reminded of works by the Futurist photographer and filmmaker Anton Giulio Bragaglia who during the 1910s experimented with long exposure photographs of human bodies in motion. [fig. 7] His work was a response to both still photography and film: the former merely gave 'the reproduction of the immobile and static truth', whereas the latter failed to represent, he argued, 'the shape of movement'.⁵⁷ Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic motion studies presented no solution either because they 'shattered the action' by rationalising movement as successive instances in space. 'We are not interested in the precise reconstruction of movement', Bragaglia writes, 'which has already been broken up and analysed. We are interested in the area of movement which produces sensation, the memory which still palpitates in our awareness'.⁵⁸



Fig. 7: Anton Giulio Bragaglia, Change of Position, 1911. Gelatin silver print. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Bragaglia instead proposed what he called *fotodinamismo*: the continuous inscription of the moving body's light emanations on the photosensitive surface. What we see, the trajectory of time, exposes what lies between two shots, the space of the interval rendered invisible by the cinematographic apparatus. Bragaglia captures 'pure movement', informal and immaterial experiences that allowed access to a transcendental 'interior essence of things'.⁵⁹ He thereby proposes an alternative to the positivist view of reality based on the existence of solid forms, quantifiable data, and fixed images. With *fotodinamismo* Bragaglia responds to Bergson's famous criticism of the cinematographic character of science and proposes an alternative conception of cinema. His blurred images evoke a type of knowledge that does not reduce the body in movement to a series of instant views but registers the traces of the 'fluid continuity of the real'.⁶⁰

Interestingly, it is Benjamin who in 1928 writes an article on the occasion of Bragaglia's visit to Berlin in which he stresses the latter's reluctance to slice up reality and quantify time. Benjamin quotes Bragaglia's own critique of Erwin Piscator's use of film on stage, which he regards as a 'one-way-street, but a beautiful one'. He sees the difference between Piscator's and his own work in the relationship between text and filmic image: 'he disintegrates his texts with technical means [...; he] transects them, while I try to construct a transparent superstructure above the unblemished text'.⁶¹ In Bragaglia's Futurist theatre it is not the projection of film but the use of moving rubber masks that brings the stage alive. The mask allows the actor to remain 'isolated from his empirical I' and to become elevated into a 'higher space of effect' (*höhere Wirkungsraum*).⁶² The trajectory of light inscribed by Bragaglia's moving bodies on the photosensitive surface functions like the masks in his later theatre productions: in both cases the body seen by the spectator is merely, as Bragaglia puts it, 'the instrument of the

invisible body',⁶³ which itself remains protected from the dissecting empirical gaze.⁶⁴

Mies's blurred figures – just like his ethereal skyscraper image – function like Bragaglia's masks. The human body is present yet remains 'unblemished' by the empirical eye. It is visible yet unavailable to the analytical gaze. Therefore, to call Mies's images photomontages, an expression which denotes the avant-garde practice of assembling fragments of cut-up texts and images, might be misleading. His intervention in the imaging process leaves the picture intact and instead superimposes onto it an oneiric veil. The blurred figures are hence not simulations of a lost aura, but, like Bragaglia's rubber masks, provide a threshold into an alternative form of evidence that has existed all along. Their trajectories are not factual but potential. They do not capture but 'subtend' movement.⁶⁵

Shocking images

The same applies for Mies's architectural images. They are not utopian projections of future buildings but harbingers of a new architecture to come. In the late 1920s Mies was still convinced that 'we can only talk of a new building art when new life forms have been formed'.⁶⁶ Architecture could anticipate and prepare yet never itself construct these new life forms. What architecture should however aspire to is to address, as Mies writes in 1928 with regard to exhibition design and during the planning phase of the Barcelona Pavilion, 'the intensification of life' in order to prompt 'a revolution of thought'.⁶⁷ After all, the design process of the Pavilion appeared to have been guided by shock-inducing encounters with his own drawing similar to the epistemic shocks Benjamin refers to: 'One evening as I was working late on the building I made a sketch of a freestanding wall, and I got a shock. I knew that it was a new principle'.⁶⁸ Surely Mies's astonishment was not solely caused by his own invention of a new architectural element: the freestanding wall had

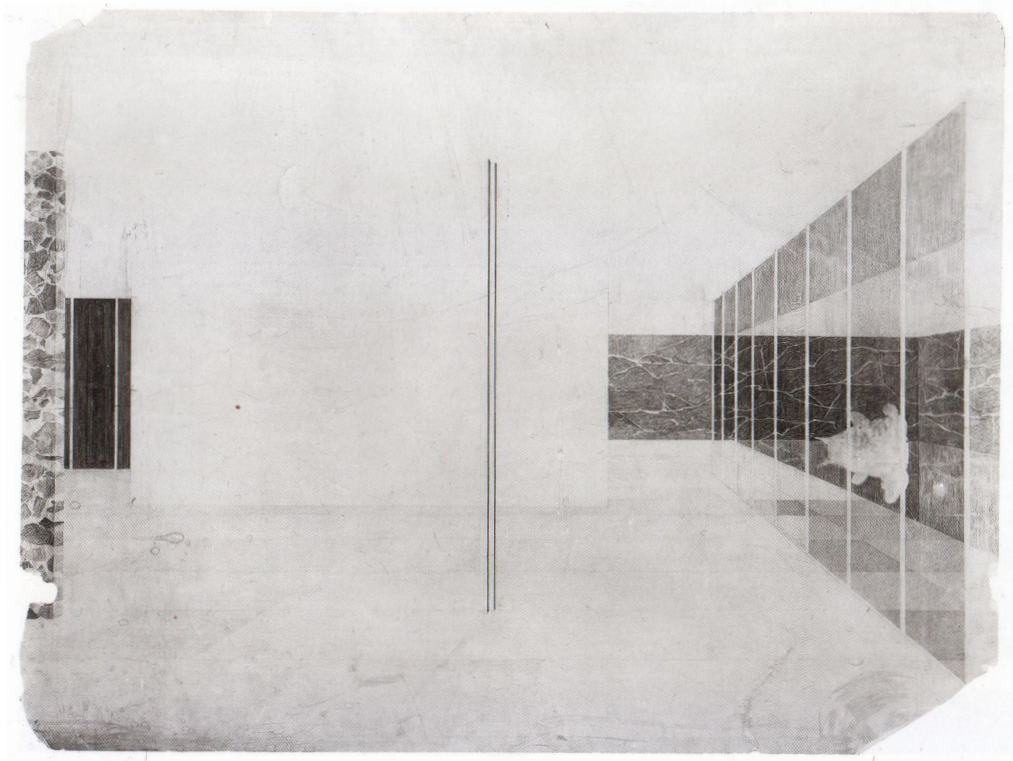


Fig. 8: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, German Pavilion, International Exposition, Barcelona. Interior perspective. 1928–1929. Collection Mies van der Rohe Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

already figured in his drawings since the 1924 Brick Country House. Rather one might argue that his astonishment was triggered by the realisation that the image he drew had come alive by voiding all representational, geometric or diagrammatic expectations, by refusing to take the pictorial detour.

Mies's famous interior perspective of the Barcelona Pavilion (1928–29) can be regarded as an exemplary meditation on the architectural image's agency. [fig. 8] In contrast to the traditional understanding of architectural perspectives which anticipate or project a precise vision of an architectural reality to be built, Mies's perspective renders this reality visible yet at the same time impossible. Certainly, Mies alludes to an emphatic perspectival space by producing pronounced vanishing lines along the sequence of aligned glass windows that converge in a single vanishing point. Yet upon closer inspection, the drawing turns out to be ambiguous. There exists not a single but multiple viewing positions rendering impossible what perspective set out to construct by geometric means: a stable and coherent subjectivity and, concomitantly, a linear, homogenous space. This representational instability is further heightened by the contrast between figurative and abstract elements within the scene, between the sumptuous venation of the marble partitions and the sober whiteness of partition wall, floor and ceiling. What adds to the ambiguity of the scene is the absurd presentation of the centrally placed elements of the picture: the cruciform, chrome-clad column and onyx wall. While the former is depicted as two thin parallel lines free of all corporeality and in complete indifference to the pictorial scene, the latter forfeits its colourful opulence and appears as a rectangular white void. At first sight, a viewer of the drawing might perceive it as a radiating white light wall that in plan stands perpendicular to the onyx partition.

If perspective claims to be an accurate, true-to-life representation or anticipation of the real, as

Erwin Panofsky famously argued, in the case of Mies's drawing the viewer is confronted with an image that alludes to yet withholds a stable position for the subject and that alters the appearance of the objective world at will.⁶⁹ As we have already seen with the example of the various appearances of the *Bürohaus*, Mies presents an objective world that moves, alters its appearance, awakens to life. The images, including the different visual regimes that sustain their presence, do not reproduce a reality, they rather function like masks that protect the life-world against the arresting gaze of the modern subject. We are hence confronted with a montage of contradicting architectural representations that cannot be taken at face value. The purpose of this montage is not so much the transformation of a static subject and homogenous space into an ambulant subject wandering through a cinematic space. The lesson of cinema Mies might have learned through his collaboration with Eggeling and Richter during the early 1920s is that the cinematographic image cannot be read, analysed or explained through the terms established by the visual regime of the still image – even in the form of a notation. Just as Richter had realised that film is simply a 'play of light relations' and that the abstract squares in his *Rhythm* films were not objective or symbolic forms but 'auxiliary means' (*Hilfsmittel*) that instead of reproducing the real produce new life, Mies arrived at the 'shocking' realisation that in order to remain operative – or 'intellectually alive' (*geistig beweglich*) as Richter put it in the same article – architectural drawings must display their resemblance with pictorial modes of representation as masks.⁷⁰ By not simply evoking the presence of what is absent (as in the case of any representation of reality) the drawing performs the fundamental mimetic gesture. As Benjamin writes in the draft notes to the second version of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', in the most ancient forms of imitation like dance and language, the mime had only his body to work with: 'the mime presents his subject

as a semblance [*Der Nachmachende macht seine Sache scheinbar*]. One could also say, he plays his subject.⁷¹ The shock Mies felt when drawing the freestanding wall might have to do with the sudden awareness of being confronted with an architectural image that takes no pictorial detour in the sense of representing an architectural space through the imposition of a codified visual script via the medium of drawing. The emancipatory shock might have been caused by the realisation of having created a striking semblance of a conventional pictorial space. For Benjamin the most ancient practices of mimesis are the 'ur-phenomenon of all artistic activity'.⁷² The shock Mies felt when drawing the wall might have had to do with the physical cognition of reconnecting viewer, architect and architecture with what Benjamin called the archaic symbol world.

The entire G project was less about giving precepts for the future or satisfying existing needs and more about creating 'new inclinations and needs' and 'new life', as Richter and Graeff emphasise in the first issue.⁷³ The glass high-rise, the concrete office building and the exhibition pavilions are supposed to unsettle the viewer, to coerce him to come to terms with a completely new architecture. Following Benjamin's argument, the contrast between the ruins of space (both urban and perspectival space) and the veiled appearances of his buildings do not form a dialectical opposition between old and new but rather between what-has-been and *Jetztzeit*. As such constellations his images function as harbingers of the new life forms still inaccessible to the empirical eye, images (in the Benjaminian sense) that form new constellations to reconnect technology with archaic symbols. A contingent world of movements, flows and currents situated outside the epistemological margins the exact sciences opens up, a world where body and technology once again can innervate. At once blinding and captivating, dreamlike and phantasmagoric, his images visualise, in an overlap of novelty and repetition, a temporal constellation that places

the modern subject beyond the limits of the positivist, exact sciences and prepares that subject for 'an inner leap into the ur-zone of Gestaltung'.⁷⁴

Notes

1. Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2000). Published in English as *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete*, trans. Duncan Berry (Santa Monica: Getty Centre for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995). For a discussion of the connection between Giedion and Benjamin see Heinz Brüggemann, *Architekturen des Augenblicks: Raum-Bilder und Bild-Räume einer urbanen Moderne in Literatur, Kunst und Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Hannover: Offizin, 2002), 360–396.
2. Walter Benjamin, letter to Sigfried Giedion, 15 February 1929. In Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz, vol. 3 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 443. Walter Benjamin, 'Bücher, die lebendig geblieben sind', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hella Tiedemann-Bartels, vol. 3 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), 170.
3. Benjamin, letter to Giedion, 443.
4. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), N2,6.
5. Benjamin, 'Bücher, die lebendig geblieben sind', 170.
6. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, K1,2.
7. *Ibid.*, N1,9.
8. *Ibid.*, N2,6.
9. *Ibid.*, N1,11.
10. *Ibid.*, N2a,3.
11. Sigrid Weigel, 'The Flash of Knowledge and the Temporality of Images: Walter Benjamin's Image-Based Epistemology and Its Preconditions in Visual Arts and Media History', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 41 (2015): 344–66.
12. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, N1,1.
13. *Ibid.*, N3,1.
14. Carl Linfert, 'Die Grundlagen der Architektur-zeichnung.

- Mit einem Versuch über französische Architekturzeichnungen des 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1931), 133–246.
15. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 4, 261. 'Noch ehe ich an den Text ging, schlug mir aus den Bildtafeln die dünnste, anregenste Luft entgegen.'
 16. Walter Benjamin, 'Strenge Kunstwissenschaft: Zum ersten Bande der "Kunstwissenschaftlichen Forschungen"', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, 367. Translated by Rodney Livingstone as 'The Rigorous Study of Art: On the First Volume of the Kunstwissenschaftliche Forschungen', in *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, vol. 2, ed. Michael W. Jennings and Marcus Bullock (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 669.
 17. Benjamin, 'Rigorous Study of Art', 669.
 18. *Ibid.*, 670.
 19. Linfert, 'Die Grundlagen der Architekturzeichnung', 134.
 20. *Ibid.*, 141.
 21. *Ibid.*, 135.
 22. *Ibid.*, 143.
 23. *Ibid.*, 153.
 24. Hans Richter and Werner Graeff, who were central figures of the *G* project, would later assemble lists of those involved in the journal. Both included the name of Walter Benjamin. Hans Richter, *Köpfe und Hinterköpfe* (Zurich: Arche, 1967), 69. Werner Graeff, 'Über die sogenannte "G-Gruppe"', *werkundzeit*, no. 11 (1962): 5.
 25. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 2, 484. Tristan Tzara, 'La photographie à l'envers', (1922), translated by Benjamin as 'Die Photographie von der Kehrseite', *G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, no. 3 (1924).
 26. See Eckard Köhn, "'Nichts gegen die Illustrierte!' Benjamin, der Berliner Konstruktivismus und das avantgardistische Objekt", in *Schrift Bilder Denken*, ed. Detlev Schöttker (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), 68.
 27. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Bürohaus', *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, no. 1 (1923): 3.
 28. Hans Richter, 'G', *G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*, no. 3 (1924): 3. 'DEN Zeitgenossen, der am Wachstum des großen Körpers, zu dem er gehört (der Menschheit) Interesse und Vergnügen hat, der nicht an Hemmungen dem Leben gegenüber leidet und der schon mit all den modernen Instinkt-Empfangs- und Absendungsapparaten ausgerüstet ist, die ihm Verbindung mit dem Leben sichern.'
 29. Edward Dimendberg, 'Towards an Elemental Cinema: Film Aesthetics and Practice in G', in *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923–1926*, ed. Michael W. Jennings and Detlef Mertins (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).
 30. Hans Richter and Werner Graeff, 'Ewige Wahrheiten', *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, no. 1 (1923): 1.
 31. Hans Richter, 'G', 3.
 32. *Ibid.*, 3.
 33. Walter Benjamin, 'Über die Malerei oder Zeichen und Mal', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, 605. Translated as Walter Benjamin, 'Painting, or Signs and Marks', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 85. Benjamin elaborates at length the relation between the mark and the word in painting. He also introduces the question of the 'mark in space' (*Das Mal im Raum*) arguing that the 'realm of the mark also occurs in in spatial structures (*räumlichen Gebilden*), just as the sign in a certain function of the line can without doubt acquire architectonic (and hence also spatial) significance. [...] Above all, they appear as monuments to the dead or grave-stones (*Toten- und Grabmale*), but these are marks in the exact meaning of the word only if they have not been given and architectonic and sculptural shape.' Benjamin, 'On Painting or Signs and Marks', 86.
 34. Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (New York: Zone, 2002), 31.
 35. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2003), 207–208.
 36. Ritter quoted in Benjamin, *Origin of Tragic Drama*, 214.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. *Ibid.* The English version translates 'Schriftbild' with 'form of writing' which omits the connotation with 'Bild' that was certainly intended by Benjamin.

39. Ibid.
40. Mies van der Rohe, 'Notebook (1927/28)' in Fritz Neumeyer, *The Artless Word: Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art*, trans. Marc Jarzombek (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 289. The notes Mies takes in 1927–28 are inspired by his reading of Guardini's *Vom heiligen Zeichen*. Interestingly, Mies underlined the following passage in the 1925 edition he owned: 'Words are names. And to speak is the high art of relating to the names of things; with the essence of things and the essence of one's own soul in its divinely ordained harmony... But language with its names is no longer a numinous communication with the essence of things, no longer an encounter between object and soul.'
41. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Mineola: Dover, 1998), 127–128.
42. Hans Richter, 'Demonstration des Materials', *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, no. 1 (1923): 2–3.
43. Hans Richter, 'Prinzipielles Zur Bewegungskunst', *De Stijl*, IV, no. 7 (1921): 109.
44. Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 62.
45. Walter Benjamin, 'Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 2.1. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 141. Benjamin, 'On Language as Such', 63. For a discussion of Benjamin's article see Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Color of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), 16.
46. Benjamin, 'On Language as Such', 63.
47. Mies van der Rohe, 'Bürohaus', 3.
48. Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 519.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 518, 519.
52. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version)', in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 258.
53. Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', 519.
54. Benjamin, 'Work of Art', 258.
55. Hans Richter, 'Der neue Baumeister', *Qualität* 4, no. 1/2 (1925): 7. 'Dieser Grundriss ist sinnlich lesbar, ist keine mathematische Abstraktion [...].'
56. A section of Benjamin's translation for the third issue of *G* would later reappear in 'Little History of Photography': 'When everything that called itself art was stricken with palsy, the photographer switched on his thousand-candle-power lamp and gradually the light-sensitive paper absorbed the darkness of a few everyday objects. He had discovered what could be done by a pure and sensitive flash of light – a light that was more important than all the constellations arranged for the eye's pleasure.' Tristan Tzara, 'Die Photographie von der Kehrseite', 30, in Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', 523.
57. Bragaglia cited in Millicent Marcus, 'Anton Giulio Bragaglia's Thaïs; Or, The Death of the Diva + the Rise of the Cenoplastica = The Birth of Futurist Cinema', *South Central Review*, 13, no. 2/3 (1996): 66.
58. Bragaglia cited in Caroline Tisdall, 'Bragaglia's Futurist Photodynamism', *Studio International*, no. 7 (1975): 13.
59. Bragaglia cited in Marcus, 'Anton Giulio Bragaglia's Thaïs', 66.
60. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 302.
61. Bragaglia quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'Bragaglia in Berlin', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, 523.
62. Ibid., 523.
63. Bragaglia cited in Marta Braun, 'Anton Giulio Bragaglia und die Fotografie des Unsichtbaren', in *Im Reich der Phantome: Fotografie des Unsichtbaren* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), 114.
64. This use of masks to protect the body from the gaze is also prevalent in the work of the modern dancer Mary Wigman, who had been a close acquaintance of Mies since they first met in early 1910s in Dresden-Hellerau. Wigman used her costumes to mask her body and her gender and to instead be perceived as 'a dynamic configuration of energy in space'. See Valerie Preston-Dunlop, 'Notes on Bodies in Dada', in *Dada: The Coordinates of Cultural Politics*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 173.

65. See Marie Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 174.
66. Mies's 'Notebook' cited in Neumeyer, *Artless Word*, 269. Interestingly, Siegfried Kracauer who visited the Werkbund Ausstellung as a critic of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, takes up Mies's terminology when he writes that modern architecture contains the 'germs' of 'new life-forms'. See Siegfried Kracauer, 'Werkbundaussstellung: "Die Wohnung." Die Eröffnung', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 24, 1927.
67. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Zum Thema: Ausstellungen', *Die Form* 3, no. 4 (1928): 121.
68. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, '6 Students Talk with Mies', *Master Builder* 2, no. 3 (1952): 28.
69. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
70. Richter, 'Demonstration des Materials', 3.
71. Benjamin, 'Work of Art', 127.
72. Ibid.
73. Richter and Graeff, 'Ewige Wahrheiten', 1.
74. Siegfried Ebeling, *Der Raum als Membran* (Dessau: C. Dünnhaupt Verlag, 1926), 20.

Biography

Lutz Robbers holds a PhD in the History and Theory of Architecture from Princeton University. He has taught at the RWTH Aachen, the Bauhaus-University Weimar, Columbia University and Princeton and has held research positions at the IKKM Weimar, the London School of Economics' 'Cities Programme' and the German Forum of Art History in Paris. He serves as managing editor of the journal *Candide – Journal for Architectural Knowledge*.