William Curtis

The Ever Present Mies: Marking Time at the Barcelona Pavilion

PALIMPSESTO 27

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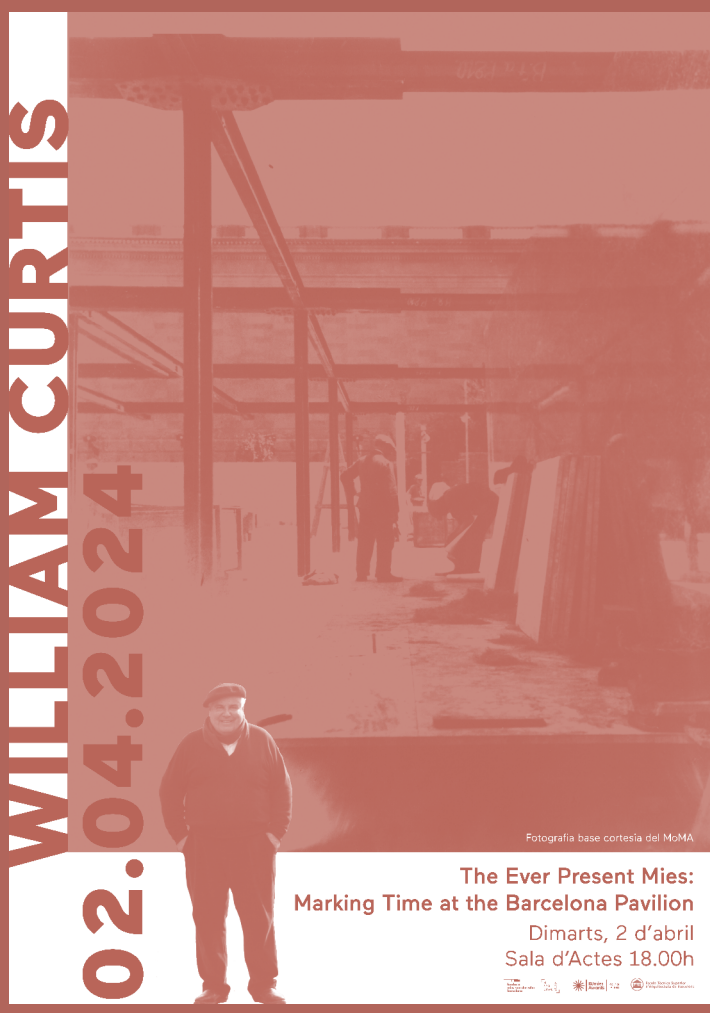
ETSAB Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona



Thank you very much for the introduction and also for the invitation. On behalf of the Mies van der Rohe Foundation, my fantastic contact, Ivan Blasi, on behalf of the ETSAB school... It's a great pleasure to come back here. I should say that my connections to Spain, to Iberia in fact—and also to Portugal—are enormous. The number of texts, of dialogues, of interventions, of juries, and an endless fascination I have for different regions of Spain and their architecture, not just modern but also ancient—it's part of my life, actually. From France, where I live, you can just sweep down into Catalonia through the landscapes.

In my approach to architecture, direct experience is very important. When I write texts, I never write about buildings I haven't seen, or very rarely. In all the years that I collaborated with *El Croquis*, the order was always the same: "William, would you write about X?" And I used to say, "I don't know. I don't want to write about X; I want to write about their buildings. If their buildings speak to me, yes, we can go further. If not, there's nothing to say." And this was always the same way. A very close analysis and reflection on works of architecture. And then, only later, maybe an interview or a discussion.

And this approach is, to me, almost an act of faith, including when dealing with historical works. It's also an attitude towards education, because there are many components to an architectural education. We all know that. But at the centre, there is something I call architectural knowledge. And architectural knowledge is not theory; it's not mathematics; it's not writing. It's a certain understanding of making spaces and putting them together to create this thing called architecture. It is the world of what I call architectural ideas. And architectural ideas are intangible and fleeting, but then they're concretized in a work of architecture. And for me, there's nothing better than to go with students and spend three hours going through a wonderful work, reacting. Why is this? What's this? What's going on? And this morning, precisely, we all had the experience.

Along with some faculty professors, we went to Casa Ugalde. For me, it's the second time to the Casa Ugalde; I went for the first time 15 years ago. This morning, people were transformed by it. We all were. This is a great work of architecture. Why? How? The experience of those spaces, the relation to the horizon, the transparencies, the insides and the outsides. It's a dream, the construction of a dream, of a myth about the Mediterranean, about landscape, but carried out with complete skill, modest materials, and a high level of intelligence and intuition. So, therefore, a great project lesson in a period of many technological means and much stupidity.

So, you know, this to me is also a question of critical evaluation. I never hesitate to say that the job of the critic is to talk about excellence. Just fabulous architecture. So, this brings us around to all the ambiguities of approaching, once again, Mies in the Barcelona Pavilion. And why is there ambiguity? Well, for the obvious reason that we don't really know what the original building was like. We know photographs. We know the descriptions. We know the construction of historiography, of legends, almost. And then we know the incredible skill and dedication that went into the recreation of the Barcelona Pavilion in 1986 by Ignasi de Solà-Morales, who I remember, Cristian Cirici, and Fernando Ramos. It was an act of courage to do that.

But what is the result? What are we looking at when we look at that thing? It's moving. We're very happy it's there. And, of course, the cynics will say, "No, it's not Mies. You can't say that." Well, it is, and it isn't Mies. And I had a reflection that may shock you a little bit. I don't know.

Last week was Holy Week, and in Holy Week, I always read the New Testament, the Gospels. I have a Catholic formation, but I'm not a practicing Catholic at all. But I believe in these great texts. I'm interested in them. I always wonder, Who wrote those texts? They were written after the evangelists had died. We don't know what veracity there is. But they are a sort of transcription, clearly, of things that happened, and they built a whole church on top of it. That's an interesting parallel, because the Barcelona Pavilion we see is like one of those Gospels. It has a certain truth, but out of that come strings of inspirations, observations, and rejections on top of the ones that were there in relation to the photographs.

As a historian, of course, I've always been interested in Mies. So, let me start off by talking about my interest in Mies. It started as an undergraduate in London, reading a few books about Mies.

I loved Reyner Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, and there is a very strong passage in there about Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye and about Mies, the Barcelona Pavilion. This gave me a sort of taste for Mies. Then, I went to the United States to study, and the first building I saw was the Seagram Building, which is a very strong skyscraper, which I nonetheless have certain doubts about. But then in the winter I went to California and discovered Reitz, Schindler, and Neutra, and then in the spring of 1971 I went to Chicago for ten days, nonstop looking at Sullivan, Reitz again, and so on. And I saw for the first time the Lakeshore Apartments.

I had just acquired a Nikon camera, and among the photographs, I took the one on the cover of the first edition of *Modern Architecture since 1900*. I happen to think the photograph says something about Mies' abstraction. It says a lot about his attitude towards American steel, but it also says something about his attitude towards nature: abstraction. Mies and the Midwest were made for each other. The land of the steel frame, and along comes Mies, a perfect marriage. And I was very happy to see it in a period where postmodernism was coming along, and that made me think, No, no, we don't have to bother with that.

Still in the States, I visited, of course, the Crown Hall in this extremely elegant night photograph and grasped, on the one hand, the directness of the fact—the technological fact of steel—of American construction. It has a certain classicism, a certain honorific quality. The podium, the middle, the top, etc. And then I saw

the Seagram—an extraordinary work, of course. I could see immediately "the honorific side of Mies," his ability to take a company headquarters and ennoble it through material, proportion, and so forth. The *plazas*, with marble and water, took the language of the Barcelona Pavilion and turned it into the corporate language of America. The risk in all this, and this is an important part of influence, is the passage from the original work into the *cliché*.

Part of the success of Mies is also the failure. Because, as we all know, the neo-Miesians, the academic Miesians, and then just plain construction carried on with the same language but without the intensity and poetic aspect of Mies. I happen to think that this building, compared with Lakeshore, is less interesting. Why? Because when you get to a certain size, you can't just go on repeating a small element. Somehow, there's a missing middle scale for me in this particular building.

In order to get into the subject of this talk, the Barcelona Pavilion, I'm going to move back and forth between different images taken at different times and try to evoke, on the one hand, the qualities of this building and of this idea, and on the other hand, the difficulties of interpretation, which I think a lot of us know about, but then come on to another subject.

There have been a lot of written reactions to the Barcelona Pavilion. There was the study in 1975 by Bonta on the different texts constructed around the Barcelona Pavilion, demonstrating, among other things, that in 1929–30, not all the international reviews thought it was so great. Gradually, it became canonised, we could say, in the gospels of modern architecture, including one that I humbly wrote myself in 1982 and then elaborated still further in 1996, with the text becoming even longer and reacting to the experience of the reconstructed version.

So, there are all these problems of interpretation of the word in relation to the thing. But I'm interested in something else, which is architectural interpretations of architecture. In other words, the problem of influence. I think the word influence is wrong. It gives the impression of flowing from A to B, but it does not. The relationship between the receiver and the transmitter is much more complex. It's reciprocal. Why do people allow themselves to be influenced by something? One, because they think it's strong or beautiful, but also because they think it's relevant to the problems they're trying to solve.

In the late 90s, I wrote a text about Le Corbusier, and it was called *Le Corbusier as a Mirror and as a Lens*, a magnifying glass. I meant that Le Corbusier has revealed people to themselves by looking in the mirror. At the same time, he's opened the way to solutions to generic problems. For instance, here is La Ricada of Bonet. It's an incredible building, actually, but impossible without the Petite Maison du Weekend of Le Corbusier of 1935.

But the amazing thing about the influence of the Petite Maison du Weekend is that no one influenced by it ever saw it. They saw photographs of it.

And in the case of Corbusier, they are highly manipulative, brilliant rhetorical devices demonstrating things. And so along came Bonet, who saw one set of issues in this project. Along came Aldo van Eyck, who saw a totally different set of issues, which he eventually transformed into in the orphanage in the 1950s.

In other words, the same prototype is read in different ways. Now, the photographs that were made in 1929 of the Barcelona Pavilion were not under the command of Mies van der Rohe. They were not, in other words, promotional. They were recording the building. But they were beautiful photographs, and they had a strong impact on people. But why? Because Mies seemed to bring the answer to a lot of issues at once. Not just visual, conceptual or technological. So, there are certain works that we could call seminal as if they gave a seed. They are the paradigmatic works of a period because they draw together the contradictions of a time in a forceful statement. The same thing happened with the Ville Savoye of Le Corbusier and with a handful of other buildings. I will later talk about the reverberations and transformations of the ever-present Mies.

We know the building, or we think we know the building. We know the plans, or we think we know the plans. Because even the question of which plans are correct or not raises many debates. In this drawing, for example, the podium disconnects from the far right. In fact, today, as it was reconstructed, it goes around the corner. There are a whole lot of issues about geometry, that are uncertain. But we all know the power of the general spatial concept, even as a plan, is quite extraordinary.

By seeing the classic photographs taken in 1929, it is possible to say a lot of things. First of all, the subtlety of Mies's understanding of the site. People sometimes refer to Mies as someone without a sense of context. Not at all. The way the geometry is placed in relation to the great wall of the *palazzo* is a wonderful offsetting, dialogue, or relation. Also, the greenery behind it is part of the concept. The podium, which takes you off the slope into a sort of honorary situation, is already a ritual.

There is a photograph where you can see the shadow of those big Corinthian columns that were there. It must have been a little bit bizarre to go through the colonnade and find this rather delicate but powerful work of architecture. And then there are the flags, which have only recently been investigated in any scholarly sense by Dietrich Neumann, and he points out that there are two flags. One is the Weimar Republic on the right, and the other is the former national flag of "traditionalist Germany." And in this photograph, there's not even a mention of Germany. So, there's ambiguity about what this was really doing. And the more we investigate that history, the more we discover that the German government was actually very hesitant to be involved in it. It was Schnitzler, who was the, let's say, businessman behind the whole thing, who not only funded it but also wrote a beautiful text on how this is supposed to represent the new Germany of transparency, clarity, modernity, and so forth. You see how complex is the creation of a building.

In addition, there are another fascinating photograph of the original situation, where we can see this rather silent building, surrounded by visual noise of all kinds. It was part of an international fair and was also a kind of reception area for the King and Queen of Spain. It was a representation space. And that was one of the things that Mies understood to perfection.

Anyway, what was the impact of these images? What did people see in 1929? What were their prejudices? As you know, the new architecture was developing quickly along several tracks. And for Mies to do this in Germany, the land of the new objectivity, the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, was like a heresy, a daring move. He's doing monumentality; he's doing rich materials. The German left were very troubled by Mies in a lot of ways. Also, there was a tradition coming from the *Deutsche Werkbund* and so forth of creating modern works related to modern technique with a strong abstraction of classical values, such as for example Peter Behrens.

Many things happened at the same time. It was an absorption, obviously, of a lot of spatial ideas from modern abstract painting. And the power of the work comes precisely from the fact that it could pull so many contradictory things together in a single statement. That's the role of art. But once you've done that, that releases new DNA for everybody. Those who wanted to be classical and modern at the same time, to do materiality, to be abstract, should look at this. "Look, and you shall find."

The Kolbe statue of Dawn, which introduces the body in space, introduces an ambiguity of scale, too. The furniture was designed with Lilly Reich, of course, who was her partner in all these designs. There are allusions to antiquity, ancient Roman thrones, and things of the kind. So, in this building, they established a language of reality and elegance, something sumptuous but restrained. That's Mies.

Regarding the pools of water, there was black glass under the water in one of them and a totally different treatment on the other one, showing the reflectivity of the materials. The ambiguities of perception. Glass is something to see through, but glass is also a surface that's almost mineralogical. In fact, in the creation of the glass, something they didn't succeed in doing in the replica, they used more lead, which gives a slightly handicraft quality to the glass, which is missing.

There is a certain ancient classicism that is conveyed just by the use of the material. But no material is used in an obvious way. In fact, we have the impression of being in a world of ambiguity. Ambiguities of space, of light, of proportion, where one thing becomes another thing, and water and light are part of the magic, the alchemy of the space. Part of the absolute power of the building is the plan. Even without knowing everything about marble and onyx, this is an incredible idea of space. The plan alone was enough to guarantee a long history for this building. It was a revelation to use a very limited number of elements to create an incredible *contrapunto* of spaces, of movement, and so on. And, of course, the relationship between the two pools.

There are actions of space with this structure where you're not even sure what it's made of. Now, I think this is important because buildings are not just what you see. They're also at the level of the invisible. They're the levels of concepts. And the drawings of buildings are just sort of conventional maps referring to these ideas. So, I think the power of the influence of the Barcelona Pavilion comes partly from consideration of the concept and the aura of the building.

This raises all these difficulties about reproducibility again. If the original building is what it was, can you, in any sense, reproduce it? Well, this is a yes-or-no question. And when we look at the present building, are we looking at something like a very chic piece of furniture by Knoll, copying the Barcelona chair? Is there something clearly different about a Barcelona chair from 1929 and one that is for sale for 7,000 euros in New York City? Well, I think there is a difference.

And part of it is fact—how things were made at a certain time. This includes the cutting of stone. It was done differently at that time, just like the pouring of concrete. Mies, let's never forget, was a master of stone. His father ran a marble quarry. He grew up in Aix-la-Chapelle, Aachen, with the Palatinate Chapel. It's an amazing, sacred use of stone. And he knew stone should be worked with delicacy and ambiguity, including joints. In the Pavilion, joints take the geometry up into the ceiling, which is completely and deliberately smooth, whereas the floors are, of course, textured.

There are many textures operating in this building. Another version of Mies became part of the legend through the writings of the historians. Through the canonization by the MoMA and all the other forces, Philip Johnson and company created his reputation. But for me, there's another aspect of it, which is space, something tangible. Space is something that releases mechanisms psychically, something we saw today. In the Casa Ugualde, space is the principal medium, along with the landscape. And what this does to you as you move through.

The drawings of the Courtyard Houses of Mies sum up an attitude of the early 30s and of the Barcelona Pavilion. An attitude of foreground in contrast to background, but also the introduction of nature, the framing of nature, and what we could call the intensification of the experience of nature. He has a wonderful statement somewhere about the role of architecture: to establish a unicum, a spirit, in relation to the natural world.

So, framing, material, and ambiguity in reading space. Perspective, but also flattening. Both are operating together. It's sort of all there, but without quite the same poetry as the drawing. Mies, of course, was fully aware of the visual cultures of his time and of the role of neoplasticism in the work of the Russian abstract artists, the supremacists. Also, of the culture of the Bauhaus and the extraordinary playful spaces by Paul Klee, which are themselves enigmas of ambiguity, And I think these are just almost second-nature concepts in his visual thinking. When he does the Barcelona Pavilion, he is constantly working on the relationship between inside and outside, in the presence of vegetation. There's always something going on with landscapes.

Back to the problem of the reconstruction, let's focus on the stone. By the thinness of the stone, he's telling us that this is an assemblage of plaques of stone. It's not a solid monolith. And remember, he's coming from another culture, one of the revestiment. To architects of his generation, and especially to an architect who had this background from home—in stone cutting and masonry—stone is something applied. Walls aren't necessarily supporting elements, but things are put together with coating and connection.

Mies knew how stone worked and that was part of the beauty. He knew the extent to which he would go towards polish. And the extent to which he'll maintain texture. And, of course, in the ground materials of the platform. In the walls, it's worked once more, slightly more delicate and smoother. So, the rough and the smooth, and glass as an intermediary between the two. And finally, the play of light, water, reflection, chrome, and all the other things going on. It's such a feast for the eyes—and not just the eyes, but physically as well. And yet underneath it is the strength of a great concept.

Concerning the question of paving, it shows the principal points of structure. The grid of paving was very important in measuring the harmony of the whole building. Again, inside and outside. And now with paving. And even though we're not 100% sure of the accuracy of the drawings we normally see, I have to say that Ignasi de Solà-Morales and his team had an incredible act of courage to do this. And, of course, they had the financial support necessary. I know there've been several abortive attempts to reconstruct it, and I sometimes wonder about the motives. You had a great building from the 20s, and since you became a more and more international city, it makes sense to show that. The "regeneration of modernism," which would be actually a complete fiction since I think that some of the best modern architecture in Spain was formed in the 1950s and 1960s.

However, international writers were always creating the great myth. Now that Spain is democratic, it can be truly modern. Think of a figure like De La Sota, who is completely inconceivable without Mies, even though he never saw a Mies building in his life. But he understood Mies through his nerve ends. Into his soul. In his great works of the 50s and 60s, it reminds me of Hawksmoor, the great British Baroque architect. Again, he never went to Rome, but he went in his imagination all the time and through publications. So, with Mies, you don't necessarily need to have seen a Mies building. You can read about him, see photos, etc., and you could conceive of what's going on. Someone as penetrating as De La Sota understood the essence of Mies. But he understood it in his own way. Which is the spiritualization of technology.

Back to the reconstruction let's talk now about the cruciform columns. Conceived as a detail that goes in all directions, it has to do with the idea of the space. Then we have the extraordinary onyx wall. The research looking for the right quarry took place in Algeria or Morocco. And when reconstructing the pavilion, they had to choose a stone, hoping that it was similar. But how do they know what colour the original one was? Beyond it being onyx, I don't know; perhaps there were written descriptions, no coloured photographs for sure. I've been told that the huge stone was brought not to the port of Barcelona but to Marseille because there were strikes at that time. So, it had to be that he brought a truck to Barcelona and then milled and cut.

There is a photo of the construction process. I love it because it's the nitty-gritty of construction. And Mies really knew how to put buildings together. It shows its metallic frame. It's a metallic frame, even though I am not sure which type of metal it is, whether it's just steel or whether it's a mixture of iron and steel. Also, you can see the stonework is in place. In the basin, you know where the water will go. Let's say the structure is one thing. But the tectonics, which means the visible aspect of the structure, is another thing.

Back to the cruciform column: when it meets the ceiling, the ceiling dominates. It's smooth. It goes through. That's the correct detail. You would not want to have a joint venture or a capital. The capitals are there in the form of rings above to help stabilise the raft. But they are deliberately made invisible.

On the other extreme, where it comes down to the floor, the floor has joints. And this introduces absolute ambiguity about the nature of the floor. It's a plaque of stone. You're not being told this is a monolith. You're being told, on the contrary, that this column is going through and sitting on something else. This is the reading that you have when you subliminate. Everything is very controlled.

I won't go into any vast detail about the construction of those walls, but they're walls, and they're also anti-walls. In a sense, we think of walls as thick things that support. Now, in the Barcelona Pavilion, I never know what to believe. It seems to me that both the walls and the columns are supported to some degree. It's not exclusively one or the other, nor exclusively anything. But for me, a wall must not look like just a wall. It should be a plane. In other words, it should be ambiguous in a tectonic sense. And this is exactly what we get. And it's very beautiful the way this is handled, especially in the joints. Wasn't it Louis Kahn who said architecture is in the joints? Indeed, it's in the joints.

Mies knew about assemblage. When you see the construction with these pieces of marble going up, you realise the extent to which what you see and what actually happens in pure structural terms are totally different. Because that is the role of architecture. "The role of architecture is to lie in order to tell the truth". I think that's from Paul Valery.

In those things, we really see the skill, not only of Mies but also of the restorers. In working to try and find the right degree of texture for walls, for what's underfoot, etc. Now, I think that for Mies, stone is a sacred material. It's not just a visual matter. It's a matter of almost religiosity. And let's be reminded of where he's from, Aachen. He grew up with these incredible sensations.

The first book I ever wrote was an extremely detailed history of Le Corbusier's Carpenter Centre at Harvard. And I took the project all the way from the first drawing through letters, reconstructing the design, but also the construction. And, you know, that research was done in 1972 or 1971. I could talk to the people who chose the concrete, who built the formwork, and who did their best to understand the intentions of Corbusier via the figure of Josep Lluís Sert, who was the executive architect, with these extraordinary letters from Corbusier. And I remember saying to my old professor, Edward Sekler, imagine if we had the letters between Michelangelo and the people who cut the stones in the quarries, the people who constructed the apses of St. Peter's, if we could have that, the discussion of texture, of light, of all the things that make great architecture.

Perhaps such letters exist; I've never investigated them. But Mies is someone for whom materiality, to use the fashionable term, was central to architecture. But so was immateriality. Immateriality because of modern technology and because of glass. For me, glass is not just something to look through. It's to look through and look at. It's the ambiguity of perception. A great photograph reveals that. Glass, to the generation of Mies, was not just to make some windows. It was a metaphysical matter of transparency. Remember the whole atmosphere of post-war: Bruno Taut, *Glas Architektur...* It was related somehow to an utopian new society.

But with Mies, there's never one story. There are many stories. And some photographs of his works can reveal all the ambiguities of reflection. We have to imagine the movement of the light through the water and the reflection of the greenery. Some great photographs of the pavilion evoke an intention—a quality that Mies had. You know, the glass in the Friedrichstrasser skyscraper, unfortunately never built, of 1922, seven years before the Barcelona Pavilion. The building of the famous drawing, which is in the archives of MoMA, is not just a business building for Mies. It's a utopian symbol of some kind in a project like this. It's partly coming out of German expressionism. So Mies holds together different wings of Germanic and international architectural culture and brings them together in a single work. That's also why it had a huge impact.

There are also some drawings of night shots of the pavilion, which are wonderful, with a sense of festivity. And the role of water, which moves us and relates to life. Water creates reflexion and depth. Mies knew about water in the same way he knew about stone or glass. He knew about light the same way he knew about space. It comes out of his own research into space. The Brick Villa, this great project of 1923, I think, also never built, is a diagram or an idea of a complex space inside, outside, and extension, coming of course out of partly Rietveld or Van Doesburg.. But Rietveld looks so self-conscious and assembled compared with what is achieved by Mies in the Barcelona Pavilion. Memories of writing in space. In my opinion, there is also some level of Schinkel. The informal Schinkel, the Schinkel of villas in Potsdam. There's an urban monumental, symmetrical Schinkel, which was rediscovered by Mies in the National Gallery. And then there is the more lyrical Schinkel in relation to *paysage*. And the family of the Barcelona Pavilion is more in that mode, let's say.

The word classicism is so varied. What do we mean by it? Well, in the case of Mies, it's a very deep passion for Schinkel and its intensity, erudition, and clarity about load and support. The absolute control of proportion is one of the basic elements of classicism, but it is brought together with great intensity. Or a section there examining, you know, the elements of the classical language. There's a fantastic statement by Ozenfant, the painter who was a friend of Le Corbusier. He said that in the heart of every radical new movement, there is a core of classicism. It's wonderful. That sums up Le Corbusier. But in a certain way, it touches Mies as well.

His engagement with steel, with space, with the new society. And yet, there's a yearning to go back to the core values of architecture, its essence. Perceived through the great Greek works, for example. But also, through mythology, of origins from the late 18th century. Like Laugier's *Primitive Hut*. I'm not saying that he builds primitive huts. But I'm saying that there is something about his abstraction of classicism in the Barcelona Pavilion. A pavilion, after all, is going back to what he thinks are the beginnings of architecture.

And then, modern technology: the frame and the *cantilever*. The domino skeleton of 1914, presented in a drawing of 1927 by Le Corbusier, showed all the implications of the free plan, the cantilever. This is a shared origin form, a basic seed for a whole generation of architects. I need to go sideways for a moment in the world of Le Corbusier. The Ville Savoye, built in the same year, 1929, is also a destination of so many ideas, of so many myths of modernity, and, at the same time, of classicism. The *promenade architecturale* has a very different attitude towards material—actually

plaster and paint—rather problematic in the long run, but it's something that resists time. With these dreamlike images presenting the good life and the utopia of the new architecture, always with a doctrine, the light space, greenery... And of course, coming from a different lineage of painting, purism, which is very different from the style, very different from the Russians, a different ancestry than that of Mies van der Rohe. The Ville Savoye is a building that works on many levels, from being a manifesto of the new way of life to feeling like a kind of temple, a processional route or a landscape building. And the essence of the free plan is this: a grid with curved partitions.

I find it very interesting to put together the plans of the Ville next to almost exactly the same date to the month, the plan of the Pavilion—which I suppose is the right one, of 1928 or 1929—because we can see two different morphologies of modern space. Le Corbusier, who uses the grid and the procession to thread you through a series of sculpted events, positive and negative, and then Mies, who draws you through its very balletic movement of a lateral approach and then a zigzag of spaces through a labyrinth of reflexions and interactions of material. And even the attitude towards structure—Le Corbusier and the piloti, a pure cylinder—is also an ideological element of the new architecture and the new planning: the city lifted up. Differently, there's no attempt at posing urbanistically or anything of a kind with Mies. He's giving you a very beautiful object; he's not trying to overload it with an ideological charge, the way that Corbusier tends to do.

So back again, "Mies van der Rohe as a mirror and as a lens", as someone who reveals possibilities to people who find themselves by bouncing off Mies, and at the same time, he opens the way to investigations that have been begun by him and carried on by others. It seems to me that the reverberations of Mies are vast. If we just talked about skyscrapers, that would be enough. The same would be true if we talked about private houses, starting with the extraordinary domestic ideas of Mies: the Tugendhat house in Brno, the courtyard houses in Chicago, etc. But this pavilion, this purity, is a certain attitude towards nature. Now I think that the abstraction of Mies has something to do with this idea of the spirit of nature.

When I did the third edition of *Modern Architecture*, I changed the middle part of the book a great deal, and there's a whole chapter about Wright, Corbusier, and Mies regarding nature in the 1930s. All three had very different conceptions of nature, but Mies has a spiritual conception of it, where abstraction must try and reveal something of the invisible world, something of your relation as a person in a space to the outside, and how these things can interact.

There are many, many roads to Niemeyer. It would be absurd to say Niemeyer came straight out of Mies, but could Niemeyer have been what he was without Mies? I mean, of course we know he was heavily influenced by Le Corbusier, but when he does the house in Canoas, which is 1951, there's a dose of everybody. There's a dose of Corbusier, there's a dose of Aalto, and there's a little bit of Mies. Its extraordinary plan, which is a development of the free plan, has nothing to do with Mies, but in other respects, the floating horizontal, the supports, and so on, have resonances. It's very interesting to look at this plan after having spent the morning with Coderch in the Casa Ugalde. That house comes out of so many of the same things, because I could go on forever about the impact of the Villa Mairea of Aalto as a parent building, also known only through photographs in the war years. People didn't visit it, so they developed their own myth of the organicism of Aalto. The same happens in Mexico, in the Bebedero, a marvellous dreamlike space by Luis Barragán.

Barragán again has many sources in painting, in vernacular. It's Le Corbusier, of course, but could he do plans like that without Mies? In fact, probably without the plans of the Barcelona Pavilion?. He takes the partition wall, which actually makes a dream space, with the reflexions in the Barcelona Pavilion and turns it into a metaphysics of his own. This is Los Clubes, the stables, which are extraordinary but, I think, inconceivable without the presence of Mies somewhere in the imagination of Barragán. It's a bit theatrical, but it's a wonderful theatre, as is the Barcelona Pavilion, as it was supposed to be. It was a representation room. There's also something balletic about the movement through the Barcelona Pavilion.

Back to the Brick Villa diagram, its concept is incredible. In fact, maybe this plan would be more interesting than the building itself if it had been built. When you look at the brick and the volumes, it feels like it's enough. Essential Mies. You drink that, and you become a magician.

If we move from Mexico to Finland to this marvellous funerary chapel by Pitkänen in the cemetery of Turku, built in 1966, we can see that it is inconceivable without Le Corbusier and La Tourette, for granted. And by the way, Tadao Ando visited this. Ando could not be Ando without this. I did a long, long interview with the architect before he died about him struggling to, in a way, among other things, reconcile the Miesian side of his character and the Corbusier side, and then his Nordic sensibility. Now, that's the power of prototypes. All great artists work with other artists. I think that all great artists have the humility to look to the past, to their masterpieces, and say, Yes, I can always learn from that.

I produced a beautiful monograph with Jukka Laiviska, another great Finnish architect who died several months ago. He was an architect of space, light, and music, with a very developed sense of the sacred but also a sense of the quotidien, and he was constantly dealing with the extremes of Nordic light. You know, short winter days with low horizontal light, long summer days with soft overhead light.

He organised his plans in a special way. The Myyrmäki Church of 1982, an absolute masterpiece, shows how he was part of a generation that inherited Aalto. Aalto was too much in a way, so they had to break away. He also came from another side of modern architecture. His first great inspirations were the 18th-century Bavarian Baroque. He said that was just the beginning. So, you have the pressure of incredible Baroque spaces, but disciplined and intensified through modern abstraction.

Here in Tarragona, you have Alejandro de la Sota. We had an extraordinary dialogue, almost in silence. The Gobierno Civil is an amazing work. Among the many things it does, it puts together several construction systems. It's actually a banal construction system of concrete and brick, like the hotels on the Costa Brava in the 1960s. And yet, with a revetment of stone and then the steel elements in front, which give the impression that it's a steel frame building, it proved it's not. It just has these extra supports. But they give the thing an honorific character. Even the bench is very important, actually, as a civic gesture.

We did talk about Mies, about the desire to produce architecture almost without show, almost without the sense of the art, but it happened quietly to you, including through space and light. The Maravillas Gymnasium is not Miesian in an obvious sense. And yet, it's the spirit of Mies, as are several of the industrial buildings designed by Alejandro de la Sota on the campus of the University of Madrid. This is the spirit of Mies, not imitation Mies. On the other hand, that language of steel and brick of the 1960s in Spain and the way it was handled with such intensity and delicacy by de la Sota was his answer to the early buildings at IIT, which he'd never seen, just pictures of them.

For him, Mies was a kind of hovering myth of an architect to constantly think about, but he never saw the buildings. He knew them through photographs. I've never been to Farnsworth, but it's considered another, you could say, "exemplar building." I won't say that because there are so many problems with it. But as an idea, it's obviously a seminal idea. Here it is, the pavilion lifted up because there's also flooding there.

In the American Mies Resort Project, never built in Wyoming, we can appreciate that the steel frame is used to intensify the view. It's almost a filmic, cinematic attitude towards nature.

Here, in Olot, a very early work by RCR, the Mirador House, it's almost a homage to Mies. But they show an extraordinary capacity to generate a physical relationship between you and the landscape by dropping the floor slightly in relation to the panorama. The language, to begin with, is very Miesian, and that's just the beginning of continuing research, you know, transformed through these marvellous blobs. And then the work with voids, multiple transparencies in plastic, in the marquee for marriages at Les Cols, the restaurant in Olot. There, the artificial is used to intensify the natural. A modern technology of agriculture, in this case, is used to create almost a metaphysics of the ambiguity of space. The analogies between the steel frame and the traditional wooden frames of Japanese architecture are obvious. And this takes us gradually towards a project in the Barcelona Pavilion by Sanaa. They managed to put a Le Corbusier-free plan inside Mies but made it out of "jelly." It's marvellous, hypnotic, amusing, and it makes you think. Suddenly introducing this other taxonomy into the free plan.

Anyway, this could be a much longer discussion about the readings and rereadings of an enigma. In fact, I sometimes wonder if it's not precisely because we don't know more about it that into that zone of ignorance is a vacuum that attracts so many interpretations. Maybe this uncertainty is the whole beauty of the situation. Maybe that creates a kind of vibration in history that goes on and on. Each generation comes to the same things and reads them in a different way because they're trying to answer another question with a mirror and a lens.

When I walked into the pavilion, I was blown away by this space. I've lived with it ever since. That's it. That's architecture. And I always hope that there's just some people wandering in there who have a similar excitement about the building. Meanwhile, we're very glad it's there. We learn more and more from historians about the political complexities of it. But that doesn't matter. Now it has other functions: the Fundació, education, and enjoyment. Yes, as well as tourism. Why not? Architectural tourism.

And maybe there's the importance of accidents. Do you know that some of the best buildings I ever discovered in my writings on architecture were discovered by accident? In 1978, I unconsciously bumped into the church of Bad Svean without knowing it was designed by Utzon. It impressed me so much that I wanted to terminate the first edition of *Modern Architecture since 1900* with that church. A great work, which was modern but with a sense of tradition and many cultures. Again, countering the rhetoric of postmodernism, which was so simple-minded on the issue of precedent.

I think that all the great modern architects are deeply involved with history. All great artists are always deeply involved with history. It's just that they do it in their own way, and they metabolise history into modernity. That's what they've always done.

There is a series of diagrams on the Pavilion by Paul Rudolph, a very underrated and great American architect. He had an amazing sense of space. On these diagrams, he's plotting the movement and changing perceptions through the Barcelona Pavilion. When I saw these diagrams, they reminded me of a lecture in the early 90s in Vico Morcote in Ticino, where I organised a seminar called On Transforming Le Corbusier. There was a very good lecture by an American architect and historian about Terragni in the 1930s and Terragni's obsession with the Villa Stein, the great building of 1927 by Corbusier. It was all about his work, geometry, and the golden section. And then Enric Miralles, who passed through this life like a comet of energy, came and gave a talk about the same building three hours later, where he talked about nothing but the free plan curves and what an inspiration they were to him.

And to the extent that a work has profundity —that it materialises a concept of its time— it also goes on through time. This is the enigma of the timeless in architecture. What is that exactly? Maybe there are things about this that Mies didn't know he was doing. Have you thought about that? It's like photographers; sometimes they discover and photograph things they weren't fully aware were there. Maybe there's potential in this, which is not just to be anchored with Mies. It has something to do with the mystery of architecture. Anyway, here we are, like a magnetic force.

Thank you.