



COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

eug

The background of the cover is an abstract composition of thick, expressive brushstrokes in various shades of teal and dark blue. The strokes are layered and curved, creating a sense of movement and depth. A prominent, dark, textured square, resembling a piece of fabric or a rough-painted block, is positioned in the center-right area, overlapping the brushstrokes.

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TOMO I

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(EDS.)

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INTRODUCCIÓN	XXIII
Juan Calatrava, David Arredondo Garrido, Marta Rodríguez Iturriaga	

TOMO I

FOTOGRAFÍA, CINE, PUBLICIDAD: LA COMUNICACIÓN VISUAL

DOS PELÍCULAS SOBRE LA COMIDA Y LA CIUDAD	29
Juliana Arboleda Kogson	
EL PAISAJE DE LA ESPAÑA MODERNA DEL <i>BOOM</i> DESARROLLISTA A TRAVÉS DE LAS TARJETAS POSTALES	37
Cristina Arribas Sánchez	
CLOTHING, WOMEN, BUILDINGS. THE ARCHITECTURAL IMAGES IN FASHION MAGAZINES.	49
Chiara Baglione	
LA PLAZA (BAQUEDANO) EN LA CIUDAD (DE SANTIAGO DE CHILE) EN DIEZ FOTOGRAFÍAS: DISCURRIR DE UN IMAGINARIO URBANO A TRAVÉS DE SU REGISTRO VISUAL	61
Pedro Bannen Lanata, José Rosas Vera	
ARQUITECTURA POPULAR Y PAISAJES SIMBÓLICOS: LA HUELLA DE FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA EN EL CINE ESPAÑOL	75
Paloma Baquero Masats, Juan Antonio Serrano García	
ESPACIO URBANO Y ARQUITECTURA EN LA REPRESENTACIÓN CINEMATOGRAFICA DE LA MARGINALIDAD COMO TEXTO MODELIZADOR DE LA CULTURA. UNA APROXIMACIÓN DESDE LA SEMIÓTICA DE LA CULTURA	87
Diana Elena Barcelata Eguiarte, Andrea Marcovich Padlog	

FILMS AS MANIFESTO. GIANCARLO DE CARLO AT THE X TRIENNALE OF MILAN	101
Gemma Belli	
LAS CELOSÍAS DE LA ALHAMBRA: CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UNA IMAGEN	113
Bárbara Bravo-Ávila	
TRANSITAR SOBRE EL TEJADO: HACIA NUEVOS IMAGINARIOS URBANOS A TRAVÉS DEL CINE. EL MEDITERRÁNEO Y BARCELONA	125
Marina Campomar Goroskieta, María Pía Fontan	
ORIGEN Y DIAGNÓSTICO DEL <i>COLLAGE</i> POSTDIGITAL COMO EXPRESIÓN ARQUITECTÓNICA DE LA DIFERENCIA A INICIO DE LOS AÑOS 2000	137
Alejandro R. Carrasco Hidalgo	
FOTOGRAFÍA, ARQUITECTURA Y PATRIMONIO: CONSTANTIN UHDE Y LOS <i>MONUMENTOS ARQUITECTÓNICOS DE ESPAÑA (1888-1892)</i>	151
Miguel Ángel Chaves Martín	
ESCRITORES Y DIBUJANTES VIAJEROS EN LOS REALES SITIOS. EL ESCORIAL EN LAS REVISTAS ILUSTRADAS ESPAÑOLAS Y FRANCESAS DEL SIGLO XIX	163
Pilar Chías Navarro, Tomás Abad Balboa, Lucas Fernández-Trapa	
BUILDING THE IMAGE OF MODERNITY: THE INTERACTION BETWEEN URBAN ARCHITECTURE AND MONTAGE IN EARLY FILM THEORY AND PRACTICE	175
Bernardita M. Cubillos	
UTOPIA IN ARCHITECTURE AND LITERATURE: WRITING IDEAL WORLDS	191
Jana Čulek	
LA FORMA DE LA LUZ. PROYECTOS, IMÁGENES, RECUERDOS (S. XX-XXI)	205
Maria Grazia D'Amelio, Antonella Falzetti, Helena Pérez Gallardo	
LA MIRADA SOBRE LA VIVIENDA COLECTIVA CONTEMPORÁNEA EN EL CINE: DE LA DISTOPÍA A LA REALIDAD SOCIAL	217
Rafael de Lacour, Ángel Ortega Carrasco	
ESPACIO Y TIEMPO EN LA ADAPTACIÓN CINEMATOGRAFICA DE UNA OBRA LITERARIA. <i>SOLARIS, BLADE RUNNER Y 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY</i>	229
Juan Deltell Pastor	
LA MURALLA ROJA. ENTRE EL ESPACIO REAL Y EL VIRTUAL	243
Daniel Díez Martínez	
CRÓNICAS DE UN ARCHIVO LATENTE. LOLA ÁLVAREZ BRAVO: FOTÓGRAFA, TAMBIÉN, DE ARQUITECTURA	257
Alicia Fernández Barranco	
ARCHITECTURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE MODERN ERA. THE ITALIAN SETTING BETWEEN THE TWO WARS (1920-1945)	269
Adele Fiadino	
GEORGIA O'KEEFFE Y BERENICE ABBOTT: MIRADAS CRUZADAS DE NUEVA YORK	281
José Antonio Flores Soto, Laura Sánchez Carrasco	

REALIDADES Y FICCIONES DEL SUEÑO AMERICANO: LA CASA PUBLICITADA EN EL SUBURBIO ESTADOUNIDENSE DE POSGUERRA	293
Estibaliz García Taboada, Javier Fernández Posadas	
CARTOGRAFÍAS CINEMATOGRAFÍAS: LOS DESCAMPADOS DEL CINE QUINQUI	309
Ubaldo García Torrente	
DOCUMENTOS DE ARQUITECTURA: PASIÓN POR DOCUMENTAR	321
José Ramón González González	
COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA MEDIANTE LA FOTOGRAFÍA: TRES MIRADAS SOBRE LA CASA URIACH	335
Arianna Iampieri	
GRAND HOTEL ARCHITECTURE AS DEPICTED, PHOTOGRAPHED, AND FILMED IN THE CASE OF THE CIGA: COMPAGNIA ITALIANA DEI GRANDI ALBERGHI	349
Ewa Kawamura	
THE IMAGINED AND THE LIVED: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KOWLOON WALLED CITY IN CYBERPUNK SCIENCE FICTIONS AND HONG KONG URBAN CINEMA	361
Zhuozhang Li	
PHOTOGRAPHED ARCHITECTURE: THE CASE OF THE VILLAGGIO MATTEOTTI IN TERNI BY GIANCARLO DE CARLO (1969-1975)	371
Andrea Maglio	
LA REPRESENTACIÓN DEL ESPACIO URBANO A TRAVÉS DE LA FOTOGRAFÍA. ESTUDIO COMPARATIVO DE LA PLAZA MAYOR DE SALAMANCA, PIAZZA SORDELLO EN MANTUA Y MOUNTJOY SQUARE EN DUBLÍN	383
María Gilda Martino	
STEEPED IN INFLUENCE: THE IMPACT OF TEA ADVERTISEMENTS ON BLACK URBAN DOMESTICITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS.	393
Nokubekezela Mchunu	
EXPLORING LANDSCAPES THROUGH VISUAL NARRATIVES: BETWEEN CARTOGRAPHY AND FIGURATIVENESS	407
Giulio Minuto	
LA ARQUITECTURA COMO PASARELA DE MODA	421
Marta Muñoz	
IMÁGENES QUE COMUNICAN Y SONRIÉN. EL HUMOR GRÁFICO EN LA ARQUITECTURA, DE LA CARICATURA AL MEME	431
Idoia Otegui Vicens	
EL LUGAR COMO GENERADOR DE LA IMAGEN: EL <i>STREET ART</i> COMO PATRIMONIO DE LA CIUDAD . . .	443
Larissa Patron Chaves, Bernardino Líndez Vílchez	
LO SINIESTRO EN EL ESPACIO DOMÉSTICO. ENCUADRES Y RELACIONES VISUALES EN LA CREACIÓN DE NARRATIVAS DE SUSPENSE	455
Aina Roca Mora, Maria Pia Fontana, Juan Deltell Pastor	
GAUDÍ BAJO EL ENCUADRE: LINTERNA MÁGICA, <i>FOTOSCOPI</i>, CINE DOCUMENTAL	469
Carmen Rodríguez Pedret	

ROBERTO PANE Y EL PAPEL DE LA FOTOGRAFÍA COMO HERRAMIENTA DE INVESTIGACIÓN CRÍTICA E HISTORIOGRÁFICA	483
Raffaella Russo Spena	
EL MENSAJE DE LOS PREMIOS PRITZKER: DISCURSO OFICIAL Y REACCIONES CRÍTICAS	493
Laura Sánchez Carrasco, José Antonio Flores Soto	
ENTRE PLANOS. LA ESCALERA EN LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL IMAGINARIO ARQUITECTÓNICO A TRAVÉS DEL CINE	507
Juan Antonio Serrano García, Paloma Baquero Masats	
DIAPHANOUS WHITE. THE INDUSTRIAL GARDEN CITY OF ROSIGNANO SOLVAY THROUGH THE COLORS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY MASSIMO VITALI	521
Chiara Simoncini, Giulia Gabriella Sagarriga Visconti	
CHILE EN <i>HOGAR Y ARQUITECTURA</i>, 1970. SERIES FOTOGRÁFICAS DE PATRICIO GUZMÁN CAMPOS SOBRE LA OBRA DE SUÁREZ, BERMEJO Y BORCHERS	533
Andrés Téllez Tavera	
ITALIAN SKYSCAPERS IN THE CINEMA DURING THE PERIOD OF ECONOMIC BOOM	547
Annarita Teodosio	
THE SPLENDOR (AND THE <i>SHINING</i>) OF SPACE: COMMUNICATION AND ARCHITECTURE AS STORYLINE CATALYSTS IN KUBRICK'S WORK	559
Manuel Viñas Limonchi, Antonio Estepa Rubio	
 CONSERVAR, ORDENAR, DIFUNDIR: ARCHIVOS, MUSEOS Y EXPOSICIONES	
OPEN-AIR MUSEUMS IN BORNEO AND THE DIALECTIC OF VERNACULAR FORM	575
Azmah Arzmi	
PRESERVING/SHARING/COMMUNICATING 20TH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE: THE CASE OF THE IACP-NAPLES ARCHIVES.	587
Paola Ascione, Carolina De Falco	
COMMUNICATING MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE: THE ROLE OF EUROPEANA COLLECTIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ARCHITECTURAL MEMORY	599
Helena Barranha, Isabel Guedes	
TRAS LOS REGISTROS DEL CONCURSO DEL PLATEAU BEAUBOURG	609
M. Fernanda Barrera Rubio Hernández	
CATEGORIZACIÓN DEL <i>MELLAH</i> EN MARRUECOS	621
Julio Calvo Serrano, Carlos Malagón Luesma, Adelaida Martín Martín	
SOBREEXPOSICIÓN. EL MITO DE LA ARQUITECTURA CHILENA CONTEMPORÁNEA Y SUS ESTRATEGIAS DE CIRCULACIÓN	633
Felipe Corvalán Tapia	

ARCHITECTURE FILM FESTIVALS: AUDIOVISUAL NARRATIVES, PROTAGONISM AND ACTIVISM IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN SPACE	645
Liz da Costa Sandoval, Tania Siqueira Montoro	
TURÍN 1926: LA MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE DI EDILIZIA, LA NARRACIÓN DEL CAMBIO	657
Annalisa Dameri	
ECOLOGÍAS PRODUCTIVAS: HIBRIDACIONES ENTRE LO RURAL Y LO URBANO A TRAVÉS DE TRES EXPOSICIONES RECIENTES	669
Eduardo de Nó Santos	
UNA RECOPIACIÓN DE LOS PROYECTOS DEL GRUPO NORTE DEL GATEPAC (1930-1936)	681
Lauren Etxepare Igiñiz, Leire Azcona Uribe, Eneko Jokin Uranga Santamaria	
PRODUCTIVE ARCHIVES AND ARCHITECTURAL MEMORY	691
Michael Andrés Forero Parra	
"ABOUT THE STYLE AND NOTHING BUT THE STYLE": EL ESTILO INTERNACIONAL Y LA MODERN ARCHITECTURE: INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION DE 1932	701
Daniel Gómez Magide	
BRASIL CONSTRUYE. LA ARQUITECTURA MODERNA COMO ICONO IDENTITARIO DE BRASIL, 1943-1957	715
Ramón Gutiérrez, Ana Esteban Maluenda	
URBAN CONCERNS IN CURATORIAL ASSEMBLAGES: AN INQUIRY INTO DESINGEL'S ARCHITECTURE PROGRAMME AROUND THE 1990S	731
Alice Haddad	
LA PRODUCCIÓN PLANIMÉTRICA DE LEOPOLDO TORRES BALBÁS COMO ARQUITECTO CONSERVADOR DE LA ALHAMBRA. RESTAURACIÓN DE LA COLECCIÓN TRAS EL CONOCIMIENTO DE SUS MATERIALES	747
Rafael Lorente Fernández, Ana M ^a López Montes, M ^a Rosario Blanc García	
LA MEMORIA VIRTUAL: DOCUMENTACIÓN Y HERRAMIENTAS DIGITALES DE TRATAMIENTO Y DIFUSIÓN	761
Jorge G. Molinero-Sánchez, Concepción Rodríguez-Moreno, María del Carmen Vílchez-Lara	
DEL ARCHIVO DIGITAL AL ARCHIVO FÍSICO. LA EXPERIENCIA DEL ARCHIVO DIGITAL DE ARQUITECTURA MODERNA DEL ECUADOR	773
Shayarina Monard-Arciniegas	
ANÁLISIS DE ESTRATEGIAS CURATORIALES POR MANUEL BLANCO. MOSTRAR ARQUITECTURA PARA COMUNICAR	787
Héctor Navarro Martínez	
THE SERGIO MUSMECI ARCHIVE AS A KEY TO UNDERSTANDING HIS FORM FINDING	801
Matteo Ocone	
COMMUNICATING THE CONTEMPORARY CITY. PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES IN A PARTICIPATORY PERSPECTIVE	811
Serena Orlandi	

"MUSEOS" DE ARQUITECTURA: UNA COLECCIÓN DE IDEAS	825
Nuria Ortigosa	
LA APLICACIÓN NAM (NAVEGANDO ARQUITECTURAS DE MUJER): RETOS Y OPORTUNIDADES DE UNA HERRAMIENTA BIDIRECCIONAL PARA LA INVESTIGACIÓN Y TRANSFERENCIA DE CONOCIMIENTO	835
José Parra-Martínez, Ana Gilsanz-Díaz, María-Elia Gutiérrez Mozo	
VENECIA, 1976: LA BIENNALE ROSSA DEL PABELLÓN ESPAÑOL. UNA COMPROMETIDA EXPOSICIÓN INTERDISCIPLINAR, FINALMENTE "SIN" ARQUITECTURA	847
Antonio Pizza	
ENTENDIENDO LOS PAISAJES DE DESIGUALDAD URBANA. ENFOQUES, MÉTODOS E INSTRUMENTOS PARA UN ATLAS OPERATIVO ESTRATÉGICO PARA EL SUR DE MADRID	859
Alba Rodríguez Illanes, Miguel Y. Mayorga Cárdenas	
"ASÍ VIVE EL CAMPESINO ESPAÑOL": RECONSTRUCCIÓN, HIGIENIZACIÓN Y PROPAGANDA EN LA EXPOSICIÓN NACIONAL DE LA VIVIENDA RURAL (1939)	873
Marta Rodríguez Iturriaga	
LOS BARDI Y EL MUSEO DE ARTE DE SÃO PAULO: TRANSFUSIONES MUSEOGRÁFICAS ENTRE LO POPULAR Y LO ERUDITO, LA CALLE Y EL MUSEO.	889
Mara Sánchez Llorens	
EXPONER ARQUITECTURA. LA EXPERIENCIA DEL MUSEO MAXXI DE ROMA	901
Elena Tinacci	
URBAN STORYLINES OF CON-TEMPORARY MURALS IN MINOR ARCHITECTURES	913
Luca Zecchin	

TOMO II

REVISTAS, LIBROS, TEXTOS: LA COMUNICACIÓN ESCRITA

CRÍTICA Y DIFUSIÓN DE LOS TRABAJOS DE RESTAURACIÓN DEL ARQUITECTO LEOPOLDO TORRES BALBÁS EN LA ALHAMBRA A TRAVÉS DE SUS PUBLICACIONES	927
Fernando Acale Sánchez	
EL MANIFIESTO DE LA ALHAMBRA YA ESTABA ESCRITO. LA ARQUITECTURA ESPAÑOLA EN DEUTSCHE BAUZEITUNG (1915-1920)	939
Pablo Arza Garaloces, José Manuel Pozo Municio	
BUILDERS AND DEVELOPERS IN 17TH-CENTURY LONDON	953
Gregorio Astengo	
LA REVISTA HERMES (1917-1922) Y LA NUEVA IMAGEN DE LO VASCO. DEL CASERÍO AL CHALÉ NEOVASCO	967
Ana Azpiri Albistegui	

FOR A REFOUNDATION OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE: <i>METRON</i> IN THE FIRST YEARS (1945-1948) . .	979
Guia Baratelli	
LA REVISTA <i>ARQUITECTURA</i> Y EL DEBATE TEÓRICO EN UN PERIODO DE DESCONCIERTO (1918-1933): LA APORTACIÓN DE LEOPOLDO TORRES BALBÁS	997
Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa	
LA GUÍA DE ARQUITECTURA MODERNA ANTES DE 1951: TRES PUBLICACIONES PIONERAS	1009
Ángel Camacho Pina	
RONDA, VISIONES DE UNA CIUDAD Y SU ARQUITECTURA POR CRONISTAS Y VIAJEROS (SIGLO XII AL XIX)	1023
Ciro de la Torre Fragoso	
<i>FABRICATIONS</i>. 35 AÑOS DE LA REVISTA DE LA SOCIEDAD DE HISTORIADORES DE LA ARQUITECTURA DE AUSTRALIA Y NUEVA ZELANDA (1989-2024)	1035
Macarena de la Vega de León	
LA VIVIENDA SOCIAL ANDALUZA DE LA SEGUNDA MITAD DEL SIGLO XX EN LAS REVISTAS DE <i>ARQUITECTURA</i>	1045
Rafael de Lacour, Alba Maldonado Gea, Ángel Ortega Carrasco	
RESACA MODERNA: LA TRANSCRIPCIÓN DEL “AFTER MODERN ARCHITECTURE DEBATE” PARA LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UN CORPUS TEÓRICO ESPAÑOL	1057
Jorge Díez Estellés, Pablo Marqués Otero, Raúl Castellanos Gómez	
THE DIFFUSION OF ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE THROUGH TREATISES AND MANUALS ON THE ART OF BUILDING IN DENMARK BETWEEN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES	1069
Monica Esposito	
HISTORIAS GRÁFICAS: “EL ALOJAMIENTO MODERNO EN ESPAÑA” DE FOCHO	1083
Héctor García-Diego Villarías, Jorge Tárrago Mingo, María Villanueva Fernández	
VISIONES CRUZADAS: HACIA NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS DISCIPLINARES EN LA COMUNICACIÓN DE <i>ARQUITECTURA</i> (1959-1973)	1095
Eva Gil Donoso	
LAS PRIMERAS MICROESCUELAS DE RAFAEL DE LA HOZ. ARTÍCULOS EN PRENSA 1958-1959	1109
Alejandro Gómez García	
<i>PIVOTAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF UNSEEN EVENTS</i>: FIVE ARCHITECTURAL NARRATIVES FROM UNITED STATES HISTORY, 1871-2020	1121
Irene Hwang	
<i>HOUSE BEAUTIFUL</i>: INTRODUCING AMERICAN WOMEN TO THE WORLD	1131
Kathleen James-Chakraborty	
A BERLIN CATALOGUE. A REPERTOIRE OF ARCHITECTURAL FIGURES FROM MICHAEL SCHMIDT’S PHOTOBOOKS	1141
Marco Lecis	
EL SOPORTE PAPEL Y LO DIGITAL. DESVELANDO LA VIDA Y OBRA ARQUITECTÓNICA DE MILAGROS REY HOMBRE	1153
Cándido López González, María Carreiro Otero	

LAS PIRÁMIDES DESPUÉS DE LE CORBUSIER. <i>THE NEW ARCHITECTURE IN MEXICO</i> DE ESTHER BORN, 1937	1165
Cristina López Uribe	
THE ROLE OF ILLUSTRATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE EARLY MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY	1183
Fabio Mangone	
SINERGIAS Y DIVERGENCIAS: LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LA ARQUITECTURA BARCELONESA EN <i>ILUSTRACIÓ CATALANA Y ARQUITECTURA Y CONSTRUCCIÓN</i> (1897-1908)	1191
Pilar Morán-García	
THE HERALD OF A NEW WORLD. ALDO ROSSI AND <i>THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO</i>: AN ARCHITECTURAL THEORY	1205
Vincenzo Moschetti	
DEL <i>LIKE</i> AL <i>BYTE</i> PARA LLEGAR A LO “ECO”: LAS REDES SOCIALES COMO <i>INFLUENCERS</i> DE OTRA ARQUITECTURA EN LA ERA DIGITAL	1219
Francisco Felipe Muñoz Carabias	
REVISTAS COLEGALES DEL COAM (ESPAÑA) Y EL COARQ (CHILE). DE BOLETINES GREMIALES A ENTORNOS DE PUBLICACIONES	1229
Gonzalo Muñoz Vera, Paz Núñez-Martí, Roberto Goycoolea Prado	
A THICK MAGAZINE: MANUEL GRAÇA DIAS' <i>JORNAL ARQUITECTOS</i> AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CULTURALIST ARCHITECT	1243
Vitor Manuel Oliveira Alves	
ANÁLISIS COMUNICATIVO DEL LIBRO <i>PLUS</i> DE FRÉDÉRIC DRUOT, ANNE LACATON & JEAN-PHILIPPE VASSAL	1257
Ángel Ortega Carrasco, Rafael de Lacour	
LA EXTRAÑA PARADOJA: LAS REVISTAS GARANTES DE LA VERDAD	1271
José Manuel Pozo Municio	
CUANDO LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UNA CIUDAD PASA POR LAS PÁGINAS DE UN PERIÓDICO: <i>LA CIUDAD LINEAL. REVISTA DE URBANIZACIÓN, INGENIERÍA, HIGIENE Y AGRICULTURA</i>	1285
Alice Pozzati	
LA DIVULGACIÓN Y ANÁLISIS DE LA ARQUITECTURA HABITACIONAL FUNCIONALISTA A TRAVÉS DE <i>ESPACIOS. REVISTA INTEGRAL DE ARQUITECTURA Y ARTES PLÁSTICAS EN MÉXICO, 1948-1957</i>	1301
Claudia Rodríguez Espinosa, Erika Elizabeth Pérez Múzquiz	
DISCURSOS PATRIMONIALES EN LA REVISTA <i>ARQUITECTURA</i> Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UN RELATO HISTÓRICO NACIONAL	1313
Elina Rodríguez Massobrio	
THE MAKING OF ARCHITECTURAL IMAGERY IN THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY AND DISEMBEDDING	1329
Ugo Rossi	
ARCHITECTS AND THE LAY PUBLIC IN AN AGE OF DISILLUSIONMENT: SOME NOTES ON ACTIVISM, SATIRE AND SELF-CRITICISM IN BRITISH ARCHITECTURAL PUBLISHING	1341
Michela Rosso	

ESCAPARATE PÚBLICO DE UNA NUEVA ARQUITECTURA. LA COMUNICACIÓN DE LAS EXPOSICIONES UNIVERSALES	1357
Alberto Ruiz Colmenar, Beatriz S. González-Jiménez	
GEOMETRÍA, UNA REVISTA PARA COMUNICAR EL URBANISMO DE LOS ARQUITECTOS	1369
Victoriano Sainz Gutiérrez	
ESTADOS UNIDOS EN LOS BOLETINES DE ARQUITECTURA ESPAÑOLES. 1945-1960	1381
María del Pilar Salazar Lozano	
ARQUITECTURA Y ANSIEDAD EN LA OBRA DE ISAAC ASIMOV	1393
Mario Sánchez Samos	
MIES Y EL PERIÓDICO <i>TRANSFER</i>	1407
Rafael Sánchez Sánchez	
FROM DOMESTIC INTERIORS TO NATIONAL PLATFORMS. MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND INDIAN WOMANHOOD IN THE <i>INDIAN LADIES' MAGAZINE</i>	1417
Pooja Sastry	
COMMUNICATING THE WELFARE ARCHITECTURE FOR WOMAN AND CHILD IN FASCIST ITALY	1427
Massimiliano Savorra	
MOBILIARIO Y DISEÑO INTERIOR EN EL MÉXICO MODERNO EN TIEMPO REAL: LAS PUBLICACIONES ESPECIALIZADAS EN LA PRIMERA MITAD DEL SIGLO XX	1441
Silvia Segarra Lagunes	
<i>SUN AND SHADOW</i> Y LA TRANSICIÓN DEL PROGRAMA DOMÉSTICO A LA OBRA MONUMENTAL DE MARCEL BREUER	1453
Erica Sogbe	
EL REGISTRO FOTOGRÁFICO DEL <i>PLAYGROUND</i> COMO CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LOS IMAGINARIOS MODERNOS DE ESPACIOS DE JUEGO URBANOS	1463
Nicolás Stutzin Donoso	
<i>LES PROMENADES ET LE PAYSAN DE PARIS</i>. EL PARQUE DE BUTTES-CHAUMONT ENTRE LA LÍRICA Y LA TÉCNICA	1471
Diego Toribio Álvarez	
EL PROYECTO URBANO EN LAS PUBLICACIONES DE ARQUITECTURA EN CHILE: UNA SECUENCIA ANALÍTICA (1930-1980)	1483
Horacio Enrique Torrent	
LE CORBUSIER, 1933. UN LIBRO Y UNA <i>CRUZADA</i> CONTRA LA ACADEMIA	1495
Jorge Torres Cueco	
OTRA <i>ARQUITECTURAS BIS</i>: LA APORTACIÓN CRÍTICA DE MADRID	1511
Alejandro Valdivieso	
LA ARQUITECTURA DEL CONOCIMIENTO	1523
Ruth Varela	
LA CASA EN EL MAR Y EL JARDÍN: LA COLABORACIÓN DE LINA BO EN EL DEBATE PROPUESTO EN LA REVISTA <i>DOMUS</i> DE 1940	1535
Carla Zollinger, Eva Álvarez, Carlos Gómez	

LA ARQUITECTURA EN LA ERA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL

LA DIFUSIÓN DE LA ARQUITECTURA EN LA ERA DE LA POST-FOTOGRAFÍA: EXCESO Y ACCESO	1547
Luisa Alarcón González, Mar Hernández Alarcón	
UNA MIRADA DESDE EL METAVERSO A LA CIUDAD	1557
Mónica Alcindor, Alejandro López	
MANIERISMO <i>ON STEROIDS</i>: REFLEXIONES EN TORNO A LOS PROCESOS CREATIVOS EN LA ERA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL	1565
Serafina Amoroso	
APLICACIONES DE LA INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL EN ARQUITECTURA. CLASIFICACIÓN Y ANÁLISIS DE OBRA EN LA ERA DIGITAL	1577
Guido Cimadomo, Vishal Shahdarpuri Aswani, Jorge Yeregui Tejedor	
FROM PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL: THE IMPACT OF TWENTY YEARS OF WEB 2.0 ON ARCHITECTURE	1587
Giuseppe Gallo	
NIKOLAUS PEVSNER EN LA BBC: LA COMUNICACIÓN ORAL DE LA HISTORIA DEL ARTE Y LA ARQUITECTURA	1599
David García-Asenjo Llana, María Pura Moreno Moreno	
<i>CREAFAB APP</i>: HERRAMIENTA DIGITAL PARA LA INVESTIGACIÓN Y GESTIÓN DE PROCESOS DE REINDUSTRIALIZACIÓN CREATIVA EN CIUDADES HISTÓRICAS	1613
Francisco M. Hidalgo-Sánchez, Safiya Tabali, María F. Carrascal-Pérez	
REPRESENTACIÓN Y DIFUSIÓN DIGITAL DEL PATRIMONIO MONÁSTICO: EL PROYECTO <i>DIGITAL SAMOS</i>	1627
Estefanía López Salas	
ARQUITECTURA PARA REDES O ARQUITECTURA PARA LA VIDA	1639
Ángela Marruecos Pérez	
ENSEÑAR EL PROYECTO (Y TRANSFORMAR LA CIUDAD) EN LA ERA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL	1649
Paolo Mellano	
REVISTAS DE ARQUITECTURA LATINOAMERICANAS: EXPERIENCIAS Y RESULTADOS DE ARLA	1661
Patricia Méndez	
LA MUTACIÓN DEL DIBUJO PLANO A LA REALIDAD AUMENTADA. UNA NUEVA FORMA DE COMUNICAR EL ESPACIO Y SU CONSTRUCCIÓN EN LA ARQUITECTURA	1673
Alejandro Muñoz Miranda	
¿INVESTIGACIÓN O ACTIVISMO? EL CASO DEL <i>MAPA INTERACTIVO DIGITAL DE ARQUITECTURAS IDEADAS POR MUJERES EN ESPAÑA, 1965-2000</i>	1683
Lucía C. Pérez Moreno, David Delgado Baudet, Laura Ruiz-Morote Tramblin	

A Berlin Catalogue. A Repertoire of Architectural Figures from Michael Schmidt's Photobooks

Un catálogo berlinés. Repertorio de imágenes arquitectónicas desde los libros fotográficos de Michael Schmidt

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Abstract

Los libros fotográficos de Michael Schmidt, desde *Berlin Kreuzberg. Stadtbilder* hasta *Waffenhue* y *Berlin nach '45*, ofrecen un punto de vista polémico sobre Berlín y el área de Kreuzberg, donde el fotógrafo vivió a lo largo de toda su vida. Schmidt retrata la Südlische Friedrichstadt en 1980 y publica sus fotos solamente quince años después, en 2005: por entonces el área, que se había quedado congelada a la sombra del muro, estaba casi completamente reconstruida y ya se empezaba a hacer un primer balance crítico del trabajo de los arquitectos. El Berlín de Schmidt es muy diferente al Berlín cosmopolita y ecléctico del IBA y sus siguientes iniciativas: las imágenes del fotógrafo parecen rechazar la retórica arquitectónica y cuestionan la misma posibilidad de que los arquitectos puedan captar e interpretar las características de un lugar.

The photographic books by Michael Schmidt, from *Berlin Kreuzberg. Stadtbilder* to *Waffenhue* and *Berlin nach '45*, offer an oriented and polemical point of view on Berlin and the Kreuzberg area, where the photographer lived throughout his life. Schmidt portrayed the Südlische Friedrichstadt in 1980 and publishes his photos only fifteen years later, in 2005: meanwhile, the area, which remained frozen in the shadow of the wall, had been almost completely rebuilt and a first critical assessment of the recent architects' work had just begun. Schmidt's Berlin is very different from the cosmopolitan and eclectic city of IBA and its following initiatives: the photographer's images seem to reject every architectural rhetoric and question the very possibility that architects can capture and interpret the characters of a place.

Keywords

Berlín, arquitectura, fotografía

Berlin, architecture, photography

Michael Schmidt is one of the most important German photographers of the late twentieth century and has lived throughout his career (and almost his entire life) in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg. Located south of Mitte, the district also includes the southern part of the Friedrichstadt, an area that in the second half of the twentieth century remained on the edge of the wall with the persisting presence of ruins and voids¹. Kreuzberg is the main object of Schmidt's research, at least until the end of the 80s, and his three most important books –*Berlin-Kreuzberg. Stadtbilder* (1984), *Waffenruhe* (1987) and *Berlin nach '45* (2005)– are dedicated to it² (fig. 1).



Figure 1. Three Michael Schmidt photobooks dedicated to Kreuzberg: *Berlin Kreuzberg. Stadtbilder* (1984), *Waffenruhe* (1987) and *Berlin nach '45* (2005).

The last of those books is actually the first and differs from the others in style and intention: in 2005 Schmidt published a series of photographs taken in 1980 and made with a technique unusual for him. He used a large format camera, 13x18cm, which requires the assembly of the tripod, the careful choice of the point of view and the meticulous calibration of the shot: a slow shooting process that requires methodical organization. Another important aspect that distinguishes the book is the fact that it is exclusively dedicated to architectural subjects: the human figure is excluded (not only the portraits but the mere presence of the

¹ The district was also one of the liveliest and most problematic in the city, the embodiment of an alternative and anarchic Berlin, inhabited in the 70s mainly by a poor population, squatters and immigrants, especially from Turkey. The area has been gentrified starting from the 90s.

² Michael Schmidt, *Berlin-Kreuzberg. Stadtbilder* (Berlin: Verlagsgesellschaft, 1984); Michael Schmidt, *Waffenruhe* (Berlin: Nishen, 1987); Michael Schmidt, *Berlin nach '45* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005). An important study about the work of Schmidt has been published in 2020 as catalogue of a comprehensive monographic retrospective: Michael Schmidt, *Photographs 1965-2014* (London: Koenig Books, 2020).

inhabitants)³. Among Schmidt's books, *Berlin nach '45* is certainly the one that lends itself most to the analysis of an architect: for the choice of the neutral tone, for the methodical approach to the shooting, and for the prevalent use of a distant point of view, tending to the bigger scale. Through the images in the book, it seems possible to reconstruct a repertoire of figures, a conscious selection that determines a certain vision of the city⁴.

A repertoire of architectural figures

As I will try to demonstrate, Schmidt's restitution is highly oriented, strongly subjective, and innervated by a vision: and this is true even if it is set according to principles of apparent objectivity. As the photographer claimed during his courses, his first goal is not to document, but to express a point of view⁵. In our case, therefore, we could speak of a project, a vision of the city. The analysis of the photos led me to select three themes that evidently guided Schmidt: *the terrain vague and the re-emergence of the natural element; the image of the ruin; the surviving segments of the compact city*. They are all architectural themes and have been central also for the architects involved in the reconstruction of the area. Starting from the end of the 1970s, the part of the city depicted in *Berlin Nach '45* is affected by the activities of Kleihues' Internationale Bau Ausstellung, which culminated, after the fall of the wall, with the completion of the Friedrichstadt under Hans Stimmann. The photographer's campaigns, therefore, overlap with the architects' activity and offer a counterpart to the vision that was shaping the city concretely. IBA and the initiatives that have followed have built a cosmopolitan image of Berlin, projected into a global dimension, and they have done so by convening the most advanced profiles of the international debate: from Rossi and Ungers to Hadid and Libeskind (just to stay in the area of Schmidt's campaigns). But the rebuilt Berlin appears today uprooted, the fruit of a culture which, despite its aspirations, seemed unable to transfer organicity, continuity, and its own character to places. Schmidt's photos are interesting exactly because they reveal a Berlin radically different from that of the reconstructions: a city that the photographer knows directly, whose local dimension he

³ The books of 1984 and 1997 are collections that favor architectural and urban themes, but always combine the images of buildings and streets with portraits of their inhabitants. In fact, Schmidt dedicates several books to the human figure and to social themes. Just as his portraits are inspired by a crude, anti-aestheticizing but deeply empathic realism, his architectural images programmatically avoid reproducing recognized monuments and places, much less in a comforting way.

⁴ Schmidt takes care of all the moments of the production of his images, from shooting to printing, and carefully plans the edition of his books: their sequences and the search for an internal coherence are therefore as significant as the reproduced subjects. Over the course of the three books the photographic language and character of the shots change radically, passing from the neutral and analytical style of *Berlin after '45* to a fragmented and strongly contrasted one (especially in *Waffenruhe*). But even through the filter of an evolving sensibility, recurring elements are still recognizable. And if therefore *Berlin nach '45* can be the best field for my research, the comparison with the other books helps to define its characteristics.

⁵ A declaration of intentions by Schmidt, recently found in the archive, is reported and discussed by Ute Eskildsen in the catalog of the retrospective exhibition dedicated to the photographer in 2020. Ute Eskildsen, "For Now, The Neighbourhood. Michael Schmidt's Early Works", in *Michael Schmidt Photographs 1965-2014* (London: Koenig Books, 2020), 32.

favours and which he reproduces in its most everyday and humble elements (even in its degraded ones). Schmidt seems to reject any possible architectural rhetoric, establishing a sharp contrast with the Berlin of the architects and demonstrating a very different attitude from that of other photographers who have dedicated monographic books to the reconstruction (for example Gabriele Basilico⁶, Giovanni Chiaramonte⁷ or Mitch Epstein⁸).

Terrain Vague and re-emergence of the spontaneous natural element

The first image of *Berlin nach '45* presents the city as a composition of blind walls and grassy fields. Nature plays a central role in the sequence, but not in the form of parks or gardens: the nature on which Schmidt lingers is spontaneous and seems to re-appropriate an urban space in a state of decay. In some images it is the foreground that stands out because the buildings are almost lost in a far-too-distant shot⁹. This method is in fact the most typical of the series and determines its tone: clearly evident throughout the lower half of the image a surface with informal characters sets the distance between the city and its buildings¹⁰. The compositions are often flat, structured in horizontal bands: very rarely does a shot appear aligned with the perspective of a street¹¹. It is a type of composition that breaks the illusion of depth and introduces another type of spatiality, a relationship between apparently non-communicating planes. The Berlin that Schmidt describes is made up of large voids rather than a few volumes, and these voids appear worn and abandoned, reconquered by nature. The photographer is intent on measuring the lacunas in the city: a city that is recognized and re-proposed precisely in this relaxation, in its rarefaction and lack of density (fig. 2).



Figure 2. The first picture of *Berlin nach '45*: an abstract composition of blind walls and a grassy field.

⁶ Gabriele Basilico, *Berlin* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2002).

⁷ Giovanni Chiaramonte, *Berlin, die Stadt, die immer wird* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2009).

⁸ Mitch Epstein, *Berlin* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2011).

⁹ On pages 44, 52 and 72.

¹⁰ The city remains in the background and its details are diminished and rendered indifferent.

¹¹ It happens on page 27, in the third photo of the series, and on pages 37 and 71, and only in the photographs on pages 95 and 75, the framing, moving away from the horizontal alignment, has an oblique orientation, stretched along the converging edges of the roadway.

The image of the ruin between monumental fragment and informal debris

The Anhalter Bahnhof, inaugurated in 1841, was redesigned in 1872 by the architect Franz Heinrich Schwechten¹² as one of the most impressive examples of the first railway station architecture: a large vaulted roof covered the platforms, supported by light metal arches that contrasted with the mighty walls at the base. At the head of the station an apparently undersized portico emerged from the transversal body and it is now precisely this portico, a minimal portion of the colossal building, the only remaining fragment.

In *Berlin nach '45* the ruin of the Anhalter Bahnhof is a recurring element, it appears in 7 images, but in many of these it is presented as a detail relegated to the background. The most significant images in this sense are those on pages 33, 42 and 91: these are shots in which the remains of Schwechten's architecture are almost invisible, covered by vegetation and confused among other buildings. These shots seem to lack a primary visual element, so much so that at first sight one is led to wonder what is being photographed. The ruin remains the center of the shot anyway: the monument seems to have lost its match with the surrounding landscape –because it gets lost in it and is no longer able to reorient it– but the ruin is still presented as a remote reference, caught on the verge of an extinguishing aura (fig. 3).

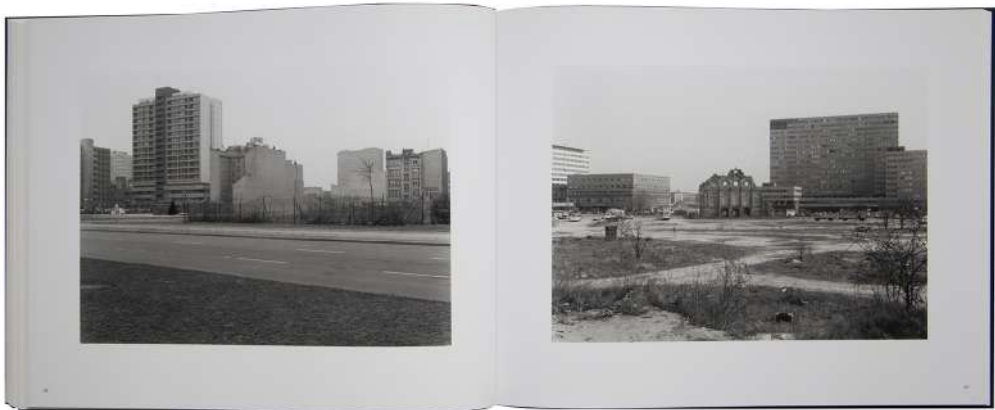


Figure 3. Pages 48 and 49 of *Berlin nach '45*: on the right a photo with the Anhalter Bahnhof ruin at the center on the background.

The other monument of the neighborhood is obviously the wall. It is not a ruin when Schmidt photographs it in the 1980s, but it may be useful to discuss it as such: we are legitimate to do so (as the photograph strongly suggests) considering the fragmentary nature of its construction and the wounds imprinted on its surface. The wall appears as the third image in

¹² Franz Heinrich Schwechten (Cologne 1841- Berlin 1924) is one of the principal architects of the Wilhelmine era. He is also the author of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, whose ruin becomes the symbol of the western part of the city and was completed with the two abstract volumes designed by Eiermann between '57 and '63.

the 1984 book and is present in only one image in the 2005 one¹³. But the wall is at the center of *Waffenruhe*, the 1987 book. It is precisely in this collection that the most evident fragmentary components and the corrosion of the material are presented. It is illustrated as a ruin even before it becomes one and it is entrusted as the main narration vehicle of the city's historical trauma.

The precariousness of the material and the signs of the time (and of human action) on it, are a central component of Schmidt's poetics, and much of the expressiveness of the images of *Berlin Kreuzberg* and *Waffenruhe* is entrusted to them. *Berlin nach'45* is perhaps the book in which this is evident the least: but in a certain sense what the photographer strives to portray are the detritus of a city, of its spaces and its form, more than those of its individual elements: the ruin of the Schwechten station, captured only in a few cases for its plasticity or for its lesions, is at the center of shots that exalt above all the degradation of the area around it.

The surviving segments of the street compact curtains

The idea that seems to guide Schmidt is not simply to present the lacunas of the failed reconstructions, but to illustrate the dialectic between the compact historical fabric and the dilated post-war spaces: an apparently unmeasurable space, in which buildings are located independently of the street grid. Schmidt's book is in fact constructed through the dialectic between these two visions: the second, the one materially portrayed, is always kept in tension with the first. And this is because many surviving segments of the city are inserted into the book's sequence as a constant counterpoint.

The *Brandwände*, the blind fronts of the fire walls, are undoubtedly the most recurring motif and the one most loaded with expressive tension¹⁴. They had become a typical figure in Berlin in the second half of the century and were a concrete sign that referred to the idea of a mutilated city. The *Brandwand* fascinates Schmidt with its evocative properties: because it shows the profile of historic buildings and their stratigraphies, associating them to an empty field. The photographer relies on the figure to give substance to the abstract image that he is pursuing (fig. 4).

In addition to the blind facades, fragments of the curtain walls that marked streets such as Friedrichstraße¹⁵ are also present in Schmidt's photographs. The most recurring subjects of this kind are some blocks that overlook the southern part of the street: facades with regular layout, but with almost no quality of decoration. Their anonymity seems to reinforce the evocative principle of the book: the intention to recall a reality that can never really be shown, which is considered lost. Among the elements that refer to the lost urban density

¹³ On page 83, where it is presented with a certain emphasis and it is framed between two backlit walls, as if behind an opening curtain.

¹⁴ They are present on pages 25, 27, 36, 37, 41, 45, 57, 60, 61, 63, 71, 75, 85, 86, 88, 93.

¹⁵ On pages 30, 32, 46, 47, 53, 59, 41, 65, 83. A single photo, on page 51, offers a sequence of compact facades, endowed with a uniform classicist design and decoration. The facades are also placed in prominence in a shot that frames them using two building fronts on the sides, one of which is blind, and an area under construction at the bottom.

Schmidt often repropose the internal patios that have been partially destroyed, which now appear as fronts¹⁶. Once again, the photographer portrays a few buildings: especially those at civic numbers 9 and 12 of Friedrichstraße and another two in the opposite block, which overlook Wilhelmstraße. They are almost the protagonists of the book, given that Schmidt shoots them with great insistence from various angles and distances¹⁷. Their nature as fragments of a lost continuity is exalted and becomes the expressive key of the images that portray them.



Figure 4. Pages 86 and 87 of *Berlin nach '45*: examples of Berlin *Brandwände*.

The categories of this synthetic catalogue: *Terrains Vagues*, ruins and historical *urban fragments*, are united by a suspended sense of the passing of time and by the evidence of material degradation. For Schmidt, the city is above all an environment charged with history and it transmits this legacy in an indirect way: through the parts it has lost, which stand out in the voids, and through a sense of the wear and tear of surfaces, so typically at odds with the finished, performing images of a modern metropolis.

The photographer's city and the Berlin of the architects

In the years in which Schmidt begins his campaigns, and especially in those in which he reaches full expressive maturity, Berlin deals with the theme of the reconstruction of its historic center. It is a process that begins before the fall of the wall and which continues, through the 1990s and 2000s, up to the more immediate present. Indeed, in 2020, the Danish architect Dorte Mandrup wins the competition for the construction of the *Exile Museum*, overcoming contenders such as Sanaa and Kéré and proposing a spectacular brick facade

¹⁶ On pages 31, 41, 48, 61, 62, 67, 69, 79, 87.

¹⁷ The one now located at number 12 Friedrichstraße appears on pages 30, 32, 41, 48, 53, 59, 87 and the one on the corner of the same street and Franz-Klühs Strasse on pages 32, 41, 48, 53, 67, 69, 87.

that frames (and greatly resizes, from a perceptive point of view) the survivor fragment of the Anhalter Bahnhof¹⁸ (fig. 5).



Figure 5. View of the project of the *Exile Museum*, Dorte Mandrum, Berlin 2020. Source: <https://dortemandrup.dk>.

Some of the architects who reconstruct that part of Berlin operated on the same themes identified by Schmidt in his books, reinterpreting them and projecting them into their own visions. We can therefore try to read the photographer's images and the architects' work in superposition and bring out their specificities and contrasts.

High density and open fragmentation: two antithetical images of Berlin

The idea that the city had its character in a new expanded dimension is at the center of the debate on reconstruction and finds a first important definition in the summer school that Ungers organizes in Kreuzberg in 1977. Ungers proposed the vision of the city as *Green Archipelago*¹⁹ inspired by the romantic Berlin of Schinkel and Lenné: he dealt with

¹⁸ <https://dortemandrup.dk/work/exile-museum-berlin-germany> (visited 8 July 2023).

¹⁹ Ungers organizes a Summer Academy for Cornell University in Berlin in 1977, assisted by Rem Koolhaas, Hans Kollhoff, Peter Riemann and Arthur Ovaska. The place of work and the topics addressed by the students were both located in the Kreuzberg district. The results of the school have been published in various forms, including an article appearing in *Lotus International*: O.M. Ungers, "The city within the city", *Lotus*, n.º 19 (1978): 82-97. On the subject see also Florian Hertweck and Sébastien Marot (eds.), *The city in the city. Berlin: a green archipelago* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013).

demographic reduction by imagining a metropolis divided into parts, each one with its own identity and separated by green areas. In this hypothesis, the typology of the *urban villa* – an isolated volume of medium size surrounded by gardens – played an important role. Among the proposals elaborated together with the school students there were some which concerned precisely the two blocks at the center of Schmidt's 1980 campaign. In one of these proposals, tutored by Hans Kollhoff, two buildings – the blind volumes that dominate *Berlin nach '45* – become the pivot of a larger arrangement: big square courtyards obtained from the juxtaposition of volumes with a quadrangular plan of similar proportions (the proportions of the *urban villa*). Although starting from the module of a villa, the project tries to define a form at the scale of the block, making its perimeter emerge as a built curtain. This trend will eventually be the predominant one for the reconstructions of the historic center of the city, according to the direction of Keihues and Stimmann, and also Ungers and Kollhof – despite their original archipelago vision – will tend to adapt to it in their creations for the area²⁰.

The idea of the dispersion and indeterminacy of space, that of the negation of a continuous perimeter for the block, seems instead to be the basis of two projects by John Hejduk for empty blocks in the Südliche Friederichstadt: *Berlin Masque* and *Victims*²¹. Here no large-scale volume tries to give shape to the block, but interventions on a minimal scale, with an ephemeral and nomadic²² character, are spread without apparent order. These are small pavilions linked to public functions that encourage a spontaneous occupation of the city by its community.

Neither of the two mentioned projects will see the light, but Hejduk will build two of his rare buildings right next to the southern part of Friedrichstraße. One of these, the artists' tower²³, is defined as a courtyard open to a garden and rotated with respect to the main road. The building tends to break the continuity of the block and addresses directly an expanded green space, the Besselpark. The pivot of the composition, the iconic tower, also appears as a punctual, isolated and exceptional element, in opposition to the continuity of the facade's series.

Apart from Hejduk, among the architects who build in the area there is another one that sets its building in the sense of openness to the free spaces behind the urban curtain. He is Gino

²⁰ Ungers in particular in the building of the family court, from 1991-95, close to the southern edge of the area on which insisted the Anhalter Bahnhof (an area strongly present in Schmidt's campaigns of 1980). Ungers recomposes the perimeter of the block by regularizing the layout of some pre-existing buildings. Kohllof in the Victoria residential complex (1980-86) on Lindenstrasse (situated at a point from which Schmidt took some photos): a continuous front marks the limit of the block by superimposing some projecting brick bodies on a persistent white plaster screen.

²¹ The two projects were both drafted within the framework of the IBA, the first, *Berlin Masques*, in 1981, for two southern blocks straddling Wilhelmstraße (the easternmost of which is at the center of Schmidt's photographs for *Berlin nach '45*), the second, *Victims*, in 1984, for the block of the former Prinz Albrecht Palais a little further north, between Wilhelmstraße and Stresenmanstrasse, on the area of today's *Topographie des Terrors* centre.

²² Antony Vidler, *The Architecture Uncanny. Essays in Modern Unhomley* (Cambridge-London: MIT Press, 1992), 210.

²³ Built between 1984 and 1987.

Valle who built an elementary school between 1983 and 1987²⁴ just behind one of the isolated volumes portrayed by Schmidt²⁵. Valle’s building has a comb-like structure that extends in the direction of the sports fields and the gardens which directly overlook Lindenstraße²⁶. The mediation between the Friedrichstraße front, the body of classrooms and the gardens is very sophisticated with surprising variations in altitude, ramps and elevated paths: a complexity that certainly contrasts with the uniform image of the city with continuous facades (fig. 6).

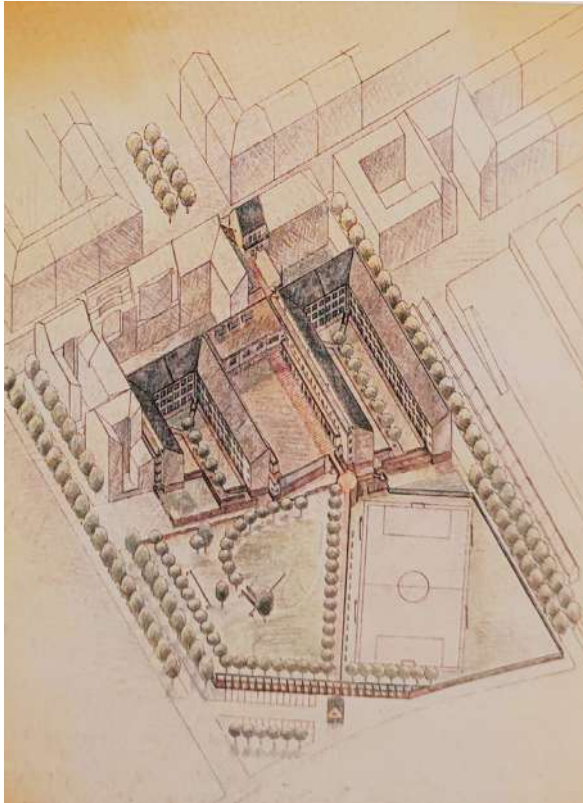


Figure 6. Axonometric view of the Elementary school on Friedrichstraße, Gino Valle, Berlin 1983-87. Source: Pier-Alain Croset, Luca Skansi, *Gino Valle* (Milan: Electa 2014), 276.

Ruin, persistence, and collective memory

Apart from the recent competition won by Mandrup, ruin in the monumental sense is not a theme among the projects and realizations of the Sudliche Friedrichstadt. However, pre-existence and memory are recurring issues and they became central –with a certain

²⁴ Pier-Alain Croset, Luca Skansi, *Gino Valle* (Milan: Electa, 2014), 276-279.

²⁵ The house number 12 on Friedrichstraße.

²⁶ Exactly where Schmidt took one of his photos.

degree of material concreteness— in the case of the Prinz Albrecht Palais area. This is a large block on the upper edge of which there are still fragments of the wall and whose southern corner borders on the ruin of the Anhalter Bahnhof. *Victims* by Hejduk was designed for this area and Giorgio Grassi and Peter Zumthor²⁷ worked on it at different times. It is interesting to mention these last projects—both unbuilt, like Hejduk's²⁸— because they offer two opposing ways of relating to the material presence of the (not conspicuous) ruins. The Milanese architect starts from the surviving traces to propose new volumes that resume the original configuration: he even increased the archaeological sign with false ruins, low walls built from scratch to support the legibility of the finds. The Swiss, on the other hand, while attesting his large hermetic volume on one of the axes of the remains, simply overlaps and hide them, building a monumental display case around them²⁹. These projects lack the sense of material density so important in Schmidt's images (in some of *Berlin Nach'45*, and in many of *Waffenruhe*), but perhaps Grassi's proposal, with his search for a low density and a laconic repositioning of historical forms, deprived of aura, can be compared to how the photographer shoots the ruins of the Anhalter Bahnhof. The silent technical object proposed by Zumthor also seems to be connected to many of the photographer's favorite motifs and the dark and nihilistic sense of his historical evocations. Those are very different sensibilities compared to the scenographic emphasis of Mandrup's hemisphere.

The reinvention of compact road fronts

The theme of the reinterpretation of compact urban fronts is instead central to the reconstructions of the center of Berlin, imposed by the indications of Kleihues and Stimmann. There is therefore a large number of variations that can be compared with how Schmidt interprets it. For the photographer, those fronts are isolated episodes, fragments of a lost continuity, now endowed with an individual figure: for this reason, instead of mentioning the large, monumental fronts created by Rossi or Kollhoff, it may be interesting to return to Hejduk and Valle, which occupy precisely the spaces photographed by Schmidt (almost facing each other on Friedrichstraße).

²⁷ In 1984 Giorgio Grassi participates, together with N. Di Battista, A. Renna, F. Collotti and G. Zanella, in the same competition in which Hejduk participates with *Victims*, while Peter Zumthor is engaged in the creation of the *Topographie des Terrors* center from his winning in the 1993 competition until 2004, when, despite part of the building having already been completed, it was decided to abandon the work. Giovanna Crespi and Simona Pierini (eds.), *Giorgio Grassi. Le opere e i progetti* (Milan: Electa 2006), 162-169; Thomas Durisch (ed.), *Peter Zumthor, Volume 2, 1990-97* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2014), 57, 79.

²⁸ The area has now remained almost completely free, mostly occupied by the forest of a park and, in the northern part, by the *Topographie des Terrors* documentation center and by the ruin of the wall, of which a large portion is still present. The center is now housed in a structure designed by Heinz W. Hallmann and Ursula Wilms, winners of a competition launched in 2006 (after the interruption of construction work on the Zumthor building) and built by architects Heinle, Wischer und Partner.

²⁹ The urban image of the new volume is independent from the historical one and creates new, completely abstract relationships with the large adjacent buildings (first of all with the Martin Gropius Bau, of which it was conceived as an extension).

The header of the Valle school is interesting because it seems to want to transfer the complexity of the building and the green areas of the inside onto the street front: in fact, the facade splits in two and is articulated with unprecedented intensity compared to the adjacent ones, rising on very light *pilotis* one of its part and leaving a vacuum that suggests the rich spatiality it hides. In the case of Hejduk however, the style is dried up, but here too is evident a certain intention of contradiction with the theme of the continuous front. The American architect built the *Gate House*, again in the second half of the 1980s, a few street numbers from the Valle school³⁰ (immediately opposite the buildings with open patios at the center of Schmidt’s sequence). Retreating slightly from the edge of the street, and above all opening up in the center into an evocative portal—which is the main motif—Hejduk designs the door of a road that crosses the interior of the block: it introduces the space behind the curtain wall of the Friedrichstraße (fig. 7).



Figure 7. View from the court of *Gate House*, John Hejduk, Berlin 1984-1987. Source: Photo by Marco Lecis, 2023.

The radical nature of Schmidt’s shots, for the stylistic choices that distinguish them, and for the ways in which they are revived twenty-five years later, is certainly characterized as a polemical alternative to the Berlin of the reconstructions. But although it is a protest, and ultimately a provocation, it also contains an alternative idea of the city, one that is built starting from concrete architectural elements that were at the center of the work of the architects. The photographer’s narration intertwines and overlaps with the architects’ vision in a way that is certainly not that of mere documentation: it could be read instead as an open challenge.

³⁰ The *Gate House* is also the direct transposition of one of the *Masques* from 1981.



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