

## **Moments and Situations: The Pavilion and Its Archive**

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This essay examines one of the most significant of all contemporary architectural monuments, Mies van der Rohe's German Pavilion, built in Barcelona in 1929. The political implications of this design are manifold. Originally, it was designed to represent Germany in an international exhibition, a highly politicized commission to any architect. When it was rebuilt in the 1980s, the decision to recuperate the lost pavilion also followed a political agenda, having to do with Spain's return to democracy, and for the city of Barcelona recuperating its link to the pre-civil war years. The "archival" life of the pavilion, as well as its living condition among printed media was recently interpreted by the Barcelona-born artist Muntadas through an installation that was situated in the Pavilion itself. This essay also refers to Muntadas' trajectory of investigating space, politics, and memory through artistic practice.

## 1. The Mies van der Rohe Archive

Early in 1930, Mies van der Rohe's German Pavilion in Barcelona started to be disassembled. After some fruitless attempts to sell it locally, nearly transformed into a restaurant, the German authorities decided to return the marble and stainless steel elements to Berlin for their resale. The dispersal of materials extended over different continents. Köstner und Gottschalk, the company that provided the marble slabs, opted to reuse them in Germany. Some fragments of the caramel-colored onyx wall ended up as table tops in Mies' Chicago apartment and in Sergius Ruegenberg's home in Berlin. Philip Johnson acquired one of the chairs for his collection. [1]

At this point, the Pavilion's existence retreated to a sole paper condition, to its archived materials and all the published documents that either reflected its making and presence, or elaborated on its significance in 20th-Century architecture. Mies had been keeping the office archive in Berlin, yet had to leave it behind when he hastily decided to depart for Chicago, in the Summer of 1937. Before the

end of the war, his collaborator Lilly Reich, together with Eduard Ludwig – a former student of Mies at the Bauhaus- packed the entire archive in five wooden cases and sent it off to Ludwig's parents home in Mühlhausen, a small town east of Kassel. This archive included all sorts of documents from the office, as well as from the years of his dedication to the Bauhaus: drawings, photographs, office files, correspondence, journals, competition documents.

Mülhausen location in East Germany made it impossible to attempt the recovery of the archive, even to consult it, during the Cold War years. Hans Maria Wringler of the Bauhaus archive in West Germany was the first person to check the condition of the archive, and Dirk Lohan, from Mies' office, painfully negotiated for several years the return of the crates, that finally arrived in Chicago in 1963.[2]

After the 1947 Mies exhibition organized by Philip Johnson, The Museum of Modern Art in New York started to request the donation of the drawings. Mies finally decided to give most of the architectural archive, over 20,000 documents that eventually

composed the Mies van der Rohe Archive, formally established in 1968 - the only architectural archive at MoMA, since the rest of the architectural collection is composed of a selection of documents to represent a wide number of designers. MoMA's decision has conferred to the Mies Archive an exceptional status in the

world of architectural collections, the only one to be kept –in isolation– in such an institution. The Archive, therefore, not only preserves the memory and origins of Mies' work, but also acts as a place of authority --a true domicile of crucial documents, an *arkheion* of Modern design.[3]



The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mies van der Rohe exhibit, curated by Philip Johnson, 1947.

The lack of access to Mies' European archive sparked several efforts to reproduce some of the documents. In 1965, Werner Blaser produced a set of new drawings in collaboration with Mies himself and his studio, published as *Mies van der Rohe: the Art of the Structure*. [4] Since the end of World

War II, Sergius Ruegenberg, a former collaborator of Mies in Berlin, worked for years on redrawing the Barcelona Pavilion. These documents, together with other drawn versions, and the extensive literature that accumulated on the Pavilion, became the basis for the impulse to rebuild it. Moreover, the

Pavilion was presented in a monographic exhibition at MoMA in 1979, curated by Ludwig Glaeser, who had been responsible for the Mies Archive since its creation until 1980, under Arthur Drexler as head of the Department of Architecture and Design. Even though interest in rebuilding the Pavilion dated as far back as 1959, when Oriol Bohigas wrote a formal letter to Mies seeking his approval for such a project, the concrete decision took place in 1981, shortly after the presentation of Glaeser's exhibit in Barcelona.[5]

For decades, the Barcelona Pavilion exerted its influence from a paper condition, from the archival crate in Mühlhausen. Its reconstruction, from 1982 to 1986, was also propelled by another, very extensive set of documents --the virtual archive of writings, documents and graphic reproductions of the pavilion that have been produced and circulated during the previous decades.

## 2. ON TRANSLATION: PAPER (BP/ MVDR)

Starting in the early 1970s, Muntadas worked on a series of projects

described as *sensorial experiences* that were based on an exploration of the senses of smell, touch and taste, and were then recorded in film, videotape, or through other means. [6] One of them, of particular relevance for the project *On Translation: Paper BP MVDR*, is the olfactory proposal for *About 405 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street*.

In 1973, Jean Dupuy invited thirty-four artists to participate in the exhibit. The aim of this collective project titled *About 405 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street*. was to intervene, modify or document the interior and exterior spaces of Dupuy's loft --following a process that he termed as "spatialisation". In critic Laurie Anderson's words, it explored the "description and manipulation of several interior, exterior, and interfacial aspects of the loft. The microscopic and telescopic realignments destabilized the conventional subject-object relationship." [7] As an example, Gordon Matta-Clark, one of the invited artists, proposed to simply clean one of several window's pane of glass, thus subtly modifying the relationship between interior and exterior spaces, a gesture that ensured the introduction of light.

For this same project, Muntadas introduced a standard vertical file cabinet with four drawers, each covered with a photograph of a shopfront in the neighbourhood:

“May 1<sup>st</sup> 1973, I walked the area between 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets, between ‘1<sup>st</sup>’ and ‘A’ Avenues. Four points were considered characteristic because of their particular smell. These four points/places propose an itinerary and partially describe the environment surrounding 405 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street.”

The file cabinet included four items, each taken from one of the chosen sites, each with an unmistakable smell –herrings from the foodstore, old books and papers from a second-hand bookstore, candles and incense from a church-shop, and leather

products from a shoe repair. Therefore, the spatial itinerary through a section of the city was recorded and reorganized in the file cabinet as an archival gesture to represent spatial perception through four sensorial elements. The smell thus acted as the vehicle to evoke an absent experience that conditioned one’s occupation of space.





Muntadas, *About 405 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street*, Jean Dupuy Gallery, New York, 1973

Even though this was an early project, we find the impulse that later, starting in 1995, has developed into an extensive series of projects under the general title *On Translation*, investigating the extent to which original manifestations and their translations need each other, cannot be understood without their mutual reference.

Muntadas' project for the Pavilion, ON TRANSLATION/ PAPER (BP/MVDR) introduces the invisibility of the archive through its olfactory presence –the archive, as well as all the documents about the project, propelled by the project. Within the enclosed space, next to the translucent wall, three

small fileboxes index them –including the extensive bibliography, images of the MoMA Archive, the many publications, as sold in any bookstore, even at the Pavilion's. It could even include, if only available, the documents that were produced – signed-- *in* the Pavilion itself in 1929.

The preliminary research led Muntadas to consider a double reference –the Barcelona Pavilion together with the Rosa Luxemburg monument, commissioned to Mies by the communist party in 1926. The permanent memorial in Berlin's Friedrichsfelde cemetery was destroyed seven years later by the Nazis, whereas the ephemeral

pavilion has become permanent in its 1986 reconstruction. The questions about temporality and permanence instigated by these two projects are therefore at the basis of Muntadas' intervention in the Pavilion –in his own words, “The archived memory of the Pavilion, together with the fact of its long existence in relation to paper and to printed documentation drove me again towards the perception of smell in relation to time, to the archive, to enclosed space, and to olfactive experience”.[8]

In this case, there is a reciprocal dependance between the built structure and its other, *paper-based* condition --its memory as embodied

by the archive, in its multiple publications and documents. Muntadas' intervention makes sensible the other Pavilion –invisible yet perceptible in the olfactory experience of printed, stored paper.

The glass structure thus acts as a bottling device, the recipient that keeps the invisibility of the odour, the evocation of what is absent during our visit to the Pavilion, yet it has managed to propel and shape our interest, our perception of those spaces and materials. The commanding smell of the archive evidences the ephemeral condition of the marble slabs and the steel columns.



Muntadas, ON TRANSLATION/ PAPER (BP/MVDR), Barcelona, Mies van der Rohe Pavilion, 2009.

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1. For a detailed discussion of the dispersal of materials, see the first chapter of Ignasi de Solà-Morales, Cristián Cirici, and Fernando Ramos, *Mies van der Rohe: Barcelona Pavilion*. (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1993), particularly pages 20-21.
  2. The fate of Mies' archive is described in detail in Frank Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985): 318-320.
  3. The Archive at MoMA has been published by Arthur Drexler and Frank Schulze, *The Mies van der Rohe Archive*. (New York: Garland, 1986). The meaning of *arkheîon* as an architectural space is described in detail in the initial chapter of Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'archive* (Paris, 1995)
  4. Werner Blaser, *Mies van der Rohe: the Art of the Structure* (Buenos Aires: Carlos Hirsch, 1965).
  5. The 1979 exhibit travelled extensively through the United States and Europe, including Barcelona. The catalogue is Ludwig Glaeser's *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: The Barcelona Pavilion's 50th Anniversary*. New York : The Museum of Modern Art, 1979.
  6. Mary Anne Staniszewski. "An Interpretation/Translation of Muntadas' Projects". In *Muntadas: On Translation*. M. Dávila and V. Roma, eds. Barcelona: Actar-Macba, 2002.
  7. Laurie Anderson, "About 405 # 1" In *Art Forum* (September 1973): .
  8. From some preliminary notes on the project by Muntadas.