Who Designs Architecture? On Silenced and Superimposed Authorship

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Guest Editor

Installation of a foreign section in the Palace of Victoria Eugenia, designed by Josep Puig i Cadafalch for the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition, c. 1928, detail.
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01. CHIPPERFIELD, David, "'God Is in the Details': But What Happens if the Details Don't Work?," in *Neue Nationalgalerie: Refurbishment of an Architectural Icon*, Jovis, Berlin, 2021, p. 116.

02. *Ibid*., p. 118.

03. MIETHKE, Annett, "Guiding Principles on the General Overhaul of an Icon," in *Neue Nationalgalerie: Refurbishment of an Architectural Icon*, p. 87.

04. REICHERT, Martin, "Monument Preservation and Renewal Concept," in *Neue Nationalgalerie: Refurbishment of an Architectural Icon*, p. 121.

05. *Ibid*., p. 121.

06. Conversation with Martin Reichert (architect and partner, David Chipperfield Architects Berlin, and partner responsible for the project of the overall overhaul of the Neue Nationalgalerie) during a site visit to the building with the students of the Architekturmuseum der TUM, July 16, 2021.

07. *Ibid*.

08. PUTZ, Andreas, "Glass: The Recasting is Convincing in its High Degree of Transparency," in *Bauwelt. Einblick "Neue Nationalgalerie,"* April 2021, p. 12.

The decade-long project to renovate the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin poses important questions with respect to the significance and value of architectural authorship. The office of David Chipperfield Architects has had the privilege and "the delicate and in some ways unenviable task"[1] of refurbishing the crowning piece of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's late work. David Chipperfield himself has described the project as a "poisoned chalice,"[2] due to the disciplinary responsibility entailed in protecting and restoring one of the most compelling monuments of architectural modernism (fig. 01). The original building from 1968 was the culmination of Mies's entire career as an architect, thirty years after he left Berlin for America. Today, the Neue Nationalgalerie's 50-by-50-meter column-free hall is one of the world's most-in-demand exhibition venues and is widely acclaimed by both the international architectural community and visitors to the museum. For architects, it is a landmark that summarizes the principles pursued by a master over his lifetime; for citizens, it is a symbol of the role played by architecture in the search of a new identity during the time that Berlin was a divided city.

The guiding principle of retaining "as much Mies as possible" was not formulated from the outset.[3] The goal of keeping the building's original authorship as visible as possible, underscoring the formal singularity of the modern monument, and treating it as a unique piece of art only came later. The clients first defined this aim once the original project and the state of the building had been thoroughly analyzed by the new architects, and after heritage preservation aspects had been considered in their entirety. Since the Neue Nationalgalerie is the only icon of modernism that is part of the Berlin State Museums, and the only one designed by an architect of Mies's stature, it is easy to see the desire to perpetuate the legacy of the German architect as a political choice by the owners.

Naturally, giving maximum visibility to the original architect would be detrimental to the signature of the architects responsible for the structure's later overhaul. Martin Reichert, one of the partners in David Chipperfield Architects, has stated that the motto that was embraced made them into "invisible architects," and left them "little room to maneuver."[4] All the necessary updates and transformations would have to be implemented "in the service of and with a responsibility toward the original designer . . . thereby refraining from incorporating [their] own personal preferences."[5] Literally, their task was to formally disappear. In a sense, not adding a "layer of design" was a regular practice for the office, since it explicitly distinguishes between two kinds of expertise: one that deals with "design" and the other with "heritage."[6] Having been chosen to develop the project based on their expertise in this second category, David Chipperfield Architects were ready to become "moderators of a conversation between different agents."[7]

The dismantling of the building –a very long process of forensic work, since 35,000 elements and parts of the construction had to be taken apart so as to be restored and reassembled later on– revealed a "mismatch" between the building's radical formal composition, the way it was built as an expression of modernism, and Mies's ambitious embrace of technology (fig. 02). The façade was "already no longer state-of-the-art," at the time of its construction.[8] Hence, the work of David Chipperfield Architects would consist of "realign[ing]" the building technology, so as to take the environmental and functional standards of the twenty-first

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century into consideration, with the goals that Mies envisioned for the original construction. Hence, with this new voice and with considerable work of interpretation and creation added to the history of its construction, the Neue Nationalgalerie would no longer simply be linked to a grand master builder's signature. The work performed by David Chipperfield Architects until April 2021 has thus called the grand master's work as well as his sole authorship into question.

One of the goals of the original call for articles for this issue of *RA. Revista de Arquitectura* was thus to question sole authorship and to shorten the long shadow projected by usually male, historically constructed, single architectural authors. The call was formulated so as to shed light on a theme that is too often taken for granted: "Who Designs Architecture?" Architects have traditionally defended the territories of their creation as if they were peaks reached on one's own, even though individual design is more the exception than the rule. Once the architects have gone on to new projects, the institutions responsible for their legacy also tend to perpetuate the singularity and uniqueness of that authorship, often omitting the credit deserved by other instrumental partners or team collaborators.

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The most explicit and probably best-known case of an architect leaving a trace of his authorship can be found in the frieze of the Pantheon in Rome, where the act of creation and the name of the author were engraved in stone: ""M·AGRIPPA... FECIT" (Marcus Agrippa . . . made it).[9] Conceived as a Pantheon for the city of Rome in 20 BCE, it was subsequently converted into the Pantheon for the Roman Emperor Hadrian in 126 AD. The inscription survived the transformation of the building that took place more than one hundred years later. The signature of the original architect and the notion of the architect "fathering" his work then mattered more than the old and the new occupants, or the craftspeople who built the structure. Even today, the monument is usually referred in the possessive as "Agrippa's Parthenon." The original author and his signature hence seem to be more important than the memory to which the building pays tribute.

This case shows that authorship is a long-established notion in architecture. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, it is "the source of a piece of writing, music, or art." This definition explains how authorship is the notion that enables the author, the person who performed the act of creation, to be traced. And that traceability mainly accomplishes two functions. The first is to add credibility to a professional trajectory, to contribute to the construction of the career of that specific author, or, in other words, to contribute to the formation of a particular authority. The other, and surely nobler, function is to hold the author accountable for the work. There is a political and ethical need to identify responsibility for any act of creation, since people will always seek an explanation for a work in the men or women who produced it.

One may argue that accountability has a greater significance in the discipline of architecture than in any other form of art, especially due to the social responsibility implied by any construction that shapes the built environment.[10] An architect will always be obliged to give reasons for the work of transforming a given context. The traceability of architecture is also more problematic than that of any other form of art, since architecture does not lend itself to an automatic or physical recognition of the author in his or her work. Due to its projective nature and its inherent mediation by and obligation to drawing, the very act of "writing" is less visible in architecture than in any other creative discipline.

During the 1990s, the work of Séan Burke contributed notably to shedding light on the complex theme of authorship, and explained how various thinkers and writers have historically addressed the question of the traceability of the author.[11] In 2007, the volume *Authorship and Architecture*, edited by Tim Anstey, Katja Grillmer, and Rolf Hughes, opened up the scope of this theme to architecture by approaching it from four different points of view.[12] Recently, due to the digitalization of the practice of architecture and the profound transformation that is occurring in the discipline, several academic institutions have once again taken a critical look at the notion of design authorship.[13]

This volume wanted to offer a specific approach to the question of authorship, which puts the focus on other actors involved in the design of architecture who have not acquired enough visibility. The call for articles departed from the hypothesis that an insufficiently acknowledged contribution is usually a symptom of an inequality in the conditions of that particular practice. Buildings are often attributed to one single architect, even though it is well known that designing architecture requires the efforts

Fig. 02
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Column with details. Black-and-white copy of the original sheet A18. Dated July 20, 1965. Pencil on acetate with printed title block and border. Delineator: Peter Pran. The Museum of Modern Art, New York / Scala, Florence.

09. The full inscription reads: M·AGRIPPA·L·F·COS·TERTIVM·FECIT (Marcus Agrippa, Luciī fīlius, consul tertium, fēcit') "Marcus Agrippa, son of Lucio, consul for the third time, made it."

10. Already in 1910, Adolf Loos reminded us that "the house has to please everyone, contrary to the work of art, which does not . . . The work of art is responsible to none; the house is responsible to everyone." See LOOS, Adolf, "Architecture," in *The Architecture of Adolf Loos: An Arts Council Exhibition*, The Council, London, 1987.

11. See for example BURKE, Séan, *The Death and Return of the Author; Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992; BURKE, Séan, *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1995.

12. Affirmation, dislocation, translation, and dissolution are the four categories explored. See Tim Anstey, Katja Grillmer, Rolf Hughes, *Architecture and Authorship*, Black Dog Publishing, London, 2007.

13. See *Authorship* (Discourse; a series on architecture 1), Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University School of Architecture, 2019. And "On Authorship," Schwerpunkte 9, Chair Delbeke, Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich, June 7–8, 2021.

Fig. 03
Richard Paulick (with a pipe), office manager for Walter Gropius in Berlin (1928–30), surrounded by his employees, in "Modern Homes," the company he founded with his brother, Rudolf Paulick, in Shanghai, China in 1937. Unknown photographer. Courtesy Architekturmuseum der TUM.

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and ideas of many more individuals **(fig. 03)**. By focusing "On Silenced and Superimposed Authorship," the goal of this volume was to distinguish voices, to expand the notion of design signature, to discover other authors who may have played an instrumental role in the gestation of a project, to reveal the absences and erasures that the canon has overlooked, and to fight for a more diverse, inclusive, and plural history and practice of architecture.

UNVEILING ARCHITECTURAL AUTHORSHIP

The twelve authors brought together in this volume engage with the question of authorship from various nuanced points of view. One way to shorten the long shadow projected by usually male, historically constructed individual architectural authors is to look at the life of buildings written in retrospect, to recount the history of changes in their ownership over time, and to bring to light the complex relationship between authorship and ownership, as well as between intellectual and material property. Another approach to critically revising the role played by institutions that legitimize the discipline of architecture is to examine archives and publications that document built or unbuilt structures. A further method for distinguishing voices within the practice of architecture is to ascertain the real origin of specific projects and to bring recognition to architects who have been overshadowed by their own partners. Another way to reveal some of the absences in the canon is to gauge the extent of individual authorship in corporate practice, thus bringing to light the labor and responsibilities of various protagonists, while revealing different forms of partnerships. Another strategy being pursued is exploring the limits of creativity beyond the regular architecture work environment and to reveal the identity of other actors, including owners, clients, builders, technicians, craftsmen, and developers, who may have participated to a substantial extent in the gestation of a project. Finally, some authors explore alternative sources of form creation by looking at various working frameworks for researching and conceptualizing architecture. The twelve articles thus reveal facets of inequality in architecture that arise from reasons including gender, career stage, authority, or what is or is not considered to be an act of architectural design.

At the start of the collection of articles, Nora Wendl takes us on an intriguing journey that reveals the disappearance of Dr. Edith Farnsworth from the house she commissioned Mies to design and build, as well as from the discourse of architectural history. "Guard Everything Appropriately and All Will be Well" brings to light what had hitherto been protected by institutions of patriarchal power: the transcript of the lawsuit *van der Rohe vs. Farnsworth* (1951–55), as well as the house as it was originally furnished and inhabited by Dr. Edith Farnsworth. The article shows how an exhibition and the alteration of a text can be forms of research and artistic practice intended to counter the way that the authorship of a work and the legacy of its architect have been safeguarded over time, while they can also be effective tools for helping public audiences understand the actual, lived history of a mythical work of architectural modernism.

Archives are other institutions that inform the modes of reception of architectural projects, since they emphasize or obscure their designers' authorship. For a project like the Fun Palace (1961–75), which was regarded at the time as an "anti-building" designed by an "anti-architect," archives have played a considerable role in creating an imbalance with respect to the recognition of its two authors, Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood. In "Authorship and the Archive," Ana Bonet Miró reveals how, still today, the unbuilt project circulates non-stop in multiple reassessments of architectural scholarship. The article reconstructs the almost sixty-year history of the project –and its reception– so as to understand the ways in which different archives have influenced the construction of the project's image and that of its authors.

Prizes add credibility and shape the development of architects' careers, at times overlooking the critical participation of the creative individuals working in congenial partnership with the awardees. The work of Denise Scott Brown, and the non-recognition of her in the Pritzker Prize awarded to Robert Venturi, prefigures the gender inequality that is still pervasive in the practice of architecture today and exemplifies the efforts still to be made in order to bring to light insufficiently acknowledged contributions. In "Learning from Denise Scott Brown," Miguel Mayorga and Maria Pia Fontana highlight Denise Scott Brown's facets as writer and coauthor of several texts regarded as pivotal within her extensive production and reveal the validity of her work based on the current relevance of her most important projects on university campuses and in cities.

Beyond the gender inequality that haunts the recognition of credit when it comes time to prove ownership, enjoy critical reception, or attribute the authorship of a work, Michael Abrahamson reveals problems of hierarchy found in a much earlier stage in the development of a design for a project. All the architects working in a corporate office do not always have the privilege of developing creative work. In "A Pyramid of Paperwork," Abrahamson narrates how a shift in employment patterns among architects in North America during the 1960s and 1970s affected the way architects at the top of the hierarchical structure monopolized certain types of tasks. The archive of Gunnar Birkerts and Associates reveals how imaginative tasks were distributed unequally. To fight this inequality, the article argues in favor of including the contributions of those individuals in firms, such as draftspersons and interior designers, who "translate designs into instruments of service," in the writing of history.

One may think that adding the work of such actors to the archives of corporate offices is an important step towards recognizing credit and constructing a more equal profession. This has been the approach of Norman Foster, who, coinciding with the publication of his own sketchbooks, is also making available for research the drawings created by other worthy draftsmen in the different phases of his firm's history. By exploring the holdings of his personally supervised archive at the Norman Foster Foundation (NFF), Gabriel Hernández unveils the authorship of three of these architects, Birkin Haward, Helmut Jacoby, and Jan Kaplicky, who played key roles in the early conceptualization phases of projects as well as in the development of the "Communication Strategies of Foster Associates at Fitzroy Street (1971–81)."

One way to recognize credit in real time can be seen in the position of Peter Harnden. In "Best as Team," Julio Garnica takes us, at a vertiginous pace, through the various stages of his career and reveals the different collaborative relationships into which he entered over time. Harnden would move on from directing an office that worked on exhibition designs for the American government in Europe after World War II, to establish PGHA Peter Graham Harnden Associates in France, and to finally found Harnden & Bombelli in Spain with one of the members of the earlier team. With no hierarchies, and no distinction anymore between a principal and an associate, it is today possible to see them as two partners of equal standing through analyzing the intense correspondence exchanged to keep the business of their global practice running.

Project-related correspondence has also been shown to be a key piece of evidence for bringing to light the input to design decisions by collaborators from outside an architecture firm. In "Who Designed Villa Planchart?," Giorgi Danesi revisits the history of the construction of the canonical house and reveals it to be a complex architectural landmark, in whose case the concept of authorship cannot be linked solely to the well-known architect Gio Ponti. The extensive correspondence exchanged between Italy and Venezuela –the site where the design originated and the construction site, on which many transformations were implemented– sheds light on the in-depth participation of the clients, as well as the crucial technical assistance of Mario De Giovanni, the first local architect, and in particular the details developed by Graziano Gasparini, the second architect in Venezuela. The correspondence reveals the project's geographical and intellectual challenges and the importance of this act of a collective writing of architecture for a project's development.

The multiple hands that collaborate in architecture call into question the notion of a heroic genius driving the invention of architecture on his own, and also counter the attributions of architecture to a particular biography that historiography has privileged. In "Silent Partner," Christine Casey reveals how the history of architecture has failed to offer a holistic view of design and craft. By analyzing the design and making of early modern architecture of Britain, and by looking at models and large-scale working drawings –further means of communication between architects and craftsmen– this article puts the emphasis on the architect's role as "orchestrator of craft production," while expanding the scope of the practice beyond conceptual design. Casey's article also reminds us that the signature that usually accompanies the name of a building –a building "by"– denotes "authority, decisiveness, and control," rather than design, which involves the creative input and diverse expertise of many other individuals.

Some other voices present in the construction of the built environment were the stakeholders in the unsystematized negotiations of the speculative building world of early modern London: builders, landowners, investors, and even lessees. Gregorio Astengo presents the construction of London's urban fabric as a "Landscape of Conflict," one very rarely realized by means of authorial practices associated with architecture. By taking a look at the use of books and manuals, the article reveals how the construction of the cityscape was usually carried out without a clear project aim, and very often in the absence of any drawings. With housing layouts that were often negotiated on site between contractors and developers, who copied, adapted, or improved on existing models, the article reveals how individuals from outside the discipline built the larger part of the architecture of late-seventeenth-century London without any reliance on design.

One recent case in which urban form was also generated autonomously without design is the city of Lagos. In "Lagos' Delirium Is Not That of New York," Víctor Cano Ciborro looks at this other "conflictive territory" so as to analyze the research developed by Rem Koolhaas in an academic framework, and shows how purely formal analyses of realities generated outside the discourse of architectural design might result in erroneous interpretations. Despite the unlimited credibility that an architect can obtain within the discipline and the institutions that support it, the article warns about the risks involved when the figure of the architect is self-absorbed. In such cases, the misuse of a particular authority may lead not only to a superficial reading of complex spatial dynamics, but also to an overlooking of knowledge previously generated by other peers.

With a more optimistic view to the asymmetries of power that are still present in the creation of architectural discourse, Cathelijne Nuijsink suggests expanding the authority of the author-architect to comprise a "Multiple Authorship." By analyzing the history of the Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition (1965–2020), a yearly architecture competition in Japan, in which a theme is proposed and assessed by one single author-architect, and by examining the proposals of the shortlisted contestants, this article sheds light on what is described as a "collaborative multi-geographic production of knowledge." By including the voices of multiple formal responses to a single architectural problem, this article shifts the attention to and claims visibility for the "minor" voices of young architects, which influence the architect leading the contest to propel the debate in a certain direction.

Finally, the last article in the volume suggests how the debate may become exhausted when, instead of moving from ideas to forms –what has traditionally been called "research" in architecture, the search and exploration of uncharted mental and material landscapes– architects navigate through already explored and well-known territories, moving from forms to forms, and generating works whose composition is based on others that predate them. In "Browsing: From Exploration to Navigation," Juan Coll-Barreu calls attention to how the existing plurality of sources interferes with what he defines as the "machine" of the author, who now has "immeasurable circulating capital" at his or her disposal. Based on the recognition of a mutation into a "(Non-)Project of Architecture," the article argues that the use of data from multiple authors is the technology that will profoundly transform the discipline of architecture.

Fig. 04
**Lilly Reich and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.
Glass walls at the Palace of
Communication and Transport.
Lilly Reich Collection, Mies van der
Rohe Archive, The Museum of Modern
Art, New York. From** *The Mies van der
Rohe Archive 2: Part I, 1910–1937*, **vol. 2,
Garland, New York, 1986, p. 260.**

Fig. 05
**Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich.
Barcelona Pavilion, frontal view from the
Plaza de la Fuente Mágica.
Reconstruction, June 1986. Photograph
by Adrià Goula, June 2020.**
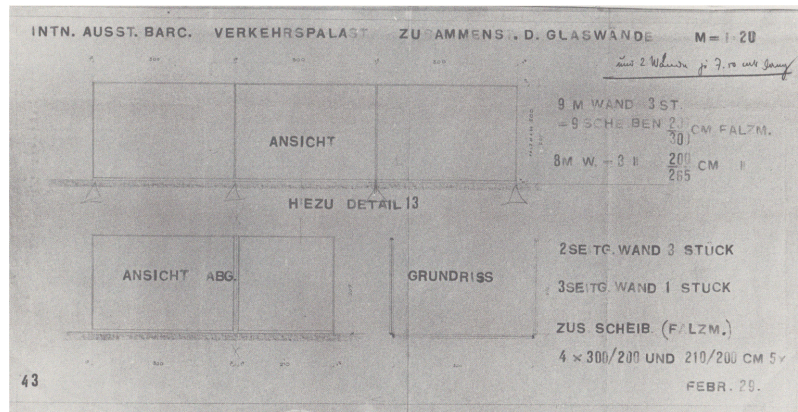
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In some sense, contemporary architecture is being converted into a "tissue of quotations," as Roland Barthes already proposed in connection with literature texts at the end of the 1960s.[14] Certainly, with the digitalization of practice and the rampant spread of social networks, we are observing the death of the single and individualist architect, as traditionally known, to the benefit of a more inclusive and sustainable means of practice. The "No Sweat" issue of *Harvard Design Magazine* made a crucial contribution to the examination of the contemporary workspace from this new perspective.[15] But the fact that the unique genius no longer fits into the new ways of working in architecture does not eliminate the need to produce a history in which insufficiently accredited authorship is brought to light. It is a first step in taking a stand against a structurally established inequality.[16] As the articles in this current issue show, with such knowledge at hand, it becomes easier to take a critical look at various work platforms when it comes to the generation of architectural ideas and forms; it becomes easier to open up the excessively protected discipline of architecture to exchange with other fields and forms of expertise; it becomes easier to transform an outdated mode of individual design towards a system of shared responsibilities; and it becomes possible to influence the established procedures of institutions that steer the impact of an architect's career as well as the making of architectural history.

Some works of architecture are born with a calling to disappear. This applies to the architecture designed by David Chipperfield Architects for the overhaul of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, despite their work to update Mies's masterpiece so as to satisfy contemporary requirements and resolve numerous construction-related details. It also applies to the architecture designed by Lilly Reich for the exhibits of the German section at the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition **(fig. 04)**, which was originally intended to showcase the products being exhibited, and which subsequently provided some of the technical and formal solutions for the architectural elements of the emblematic German Pavilion. When the time came to define the boundaries of the pavilion, Mies and Lilly Reich relied on the details and proportions of the glass screens they had designed and built for the exhibits. This can be verified today by simply comparing the elevations of the glass screens in the exhibits with those of the Barcelona Pavilion reconstructed in 1986 **(fig. 05)**.

At the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, formal modernism and the endurance of Mies's aesthetic composition prevailed, and David Chipperfield Architects were asked to work under a guiding principle that made the firm recede. In the case of the German Pavilion in Barcelona, the gender biases of the time and Mies's probable uneasiness about sharing credit[17] erased Lilly Reich from the project, as well as from the history of modern architecture. Now, more than ninety years later, Reich's congenial partnership with Mies in Barcelona has been brought to light in multiple art interventions and scientific publications.[18] It nonetheless still remains widely unrecognized that Lilly Reich is now credited as a coauthor along with Mies in the conception and construction of the 1929 Barcelona Pavilion.[19]

Transforming the canon, the history that has been written once and again, will take a significant amount of time. And in the meantime, inequality continues to prevail in both practice and academia. Revealing contributions that have been silenced or superimposed over time can be our best tool to fight against this. **RA**

14. BARTHES, Roland, "The Death of the Author," in *Aspen*, n. 5–6, 1967; "La mort de l'auteur," in *Manteia*, n. 5, 1968.

15. See "No Sweat," *Harvard Design Magazine*, n. 46, Fall/Winter 2018.

16. New creative and interdisciplinary initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus, launched by the European Union, have positioned inclusiveness and sustainability at the center of their objectives. See https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en (All URLs here accessed in October 2021).

17. As Martino Stierli states, Mies himself was "not very generous with acknowledging the contribution of Lilly Reich." See CAMPRECIÓS, Xavi, and MARTÍN, Pep, dirs., *Mies on Scene: Barcelona in Two Acts*, Fundació Mies van der Rohe / Nihao Films Productions, Barcelona, 2018, digital video, 36:45.

18. MARTÍNEZ DE GUEREÑU, Laura, "German Pavilion/German Exhibits: An Almost Forgotten Episode in the History of Modern Architecture," in *Grey Room*, n. 84, Summer 2021, pp. 38–63. https://doi.org/10.1162/grey_a_00324

19. ROBERTSON, Helen, "Inhabiting the Skin of Another: Lilly Reich and the Barcelona Pavilion," in *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, vol. 28, n. 1, Spring–Summer 2021, p. 143.