AFTER THE MANIFESTO

EDITED BY
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ARCHITECTURE
REVOLUTION
wiesbaden

AFTER THE MANIFESTO

WRITING, ARCHITECTURE, AND MEDIA IN A NEW CENTURY

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ANONYMOUS MANIFESTOS

THE EYE OF THE ARCHITECT

RUBÉN A. ALCOLEA &
HÉCTOR GARCÍA-DIEGO

WHEN IN 1928 the Cubo-Futurist photographer Johannes Molzahn enthusiastically commanded, "Stop reading! Look!," he anticipated one of the principles that profoundly marked the development of the artistic avant-gardes. As one of the most remarkable statements by this artist and photographer, author of the renowned *Buchkinema* or *Cinematographic Book*, it constitutes an interesting defense of visual and subjective perception over theoretical statements and exhortations. Far from an isolated example—other well-known parallels include László Moholy-Nagy's *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (1925) or Dziga Vertov's *Der Mann mit der Kamera* (1929)—photography and cinema are defined here as a tool for expanding human perception.

These are only two examples from the immense list of writings that commonly went by the name of *manifesto* during the twentieth century, a genre understood as a public and often impassioned mission statement. The germ of the manifesto is often found in the political realm, in documents such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Communist Manifesto* (1848), or Anselme Bellegarrigue's *Anarchist Manifesto* (1850). Nor does it seem too far-fetched to note less polemical writings such as Simón Bolívar's *Manifiesto de Cartagena* (1812), the United States Declaration of Independence (1776), or even *Plakkaat van Verlatinghe* (1581), which constituted the formal document by which the Netherlands became independent of the Spanish Crown under Philip II.

One of the greatest difficulties in reaching a consensus about the term *manifesto* is the heterogeneous and broad content of all these works, especially those that have artistic connotations. Therefore it is difficult to classify the different texts considered relevant in the twentieth century, in particular if we pay attention only to their explicit content, disregarding the underlying messages that are not directly included in the text.

Returning to Molzahn's exhortation, what constitutes the essence of the manifesto does not seem to be the text itself (this being especially pertinent when the realm extends beyond the political and delves into the artistic disciplines). The graphic power of the image has played a fundamental role in these so-called manifestos. Their authors have been fully conscious of the persuasive power of the image over the word, which enjoys a freedom of interpretation and communication well beyond the barriers of language. Indeed, certain images have arguably been more influential than the texts they accompanied. The images shown in *Vers une architecture* (1923), for example, persist in the collective memory more clearly than the texts they followed, and announced with great clarity the main arguments and ideas beyond the book, functioning independently of the text they illustrated.

Although many of the architectural manifestos that appeared during the twentieth century were conceived of as manifestos, it is the nature of architecture culture that we have interpreted many essays as manifestos *a posteriori*, by including them, often by chance, in historical texts that analyze the broad spectrum of theoretical contributions to architecture.[1] Whether the texts had the clear intention of being a manifesto from the beginning, or later transcended the initial expectations of their authors by being read in this way, the truth is that all of them have in common the use of the image as an essential support for discourse, even occasionally playing the main role.

On this matter, it is possible to note a dramatic change in attitude after 1920, the influence of which extends until today. It was during those years, under the shadow of the fusion of art and technique, that deep transformations in the theory of perception developed, yielding fantastic and renowned essays and publications praising modernity. One of these books is *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten* (1926), conceived by Erich Mendelsohn after returning from a trip to the United States (a book that El Lissitzky and Alexander Rodchenko considered the [illegible] of an era of a new vision).[2]

Beyond the visual revolution, often linked to the [illegible] of photography as the main vehicle for broadcasting [illegible] possible to sense something deeper: the autonomy of the image [illegible] came to define the photo-manifesto as a specific category [illegible] the traditional classifications of canonical texts. Parallel to the [illegible] reading of the text, an impressionistic interpretation of photo[illegible] drawings used by architects allows us to foretell, against what [illegible] obvious, the most essential and deep interpretation of the [illegible] lates. Avoiding here a deep or difficult semiotic discourse, we [illegible] look to the most famous arguments of Gestalt theory, which provided [illegible] model for the interpretation of the image as a totally autonomous [illegible] image had been historically subordinated to text, as examples of [illegible] the avant-gardes were able to provide it with an autonomous [illegible] predominant role, radically reversing the process. Until that [illegible] possible to choose among different photographs to illustrate a [illegible] idea, associating image with text. Modernity, however, proposed a complete dissociation of written and visual languages. It is in this way that the so common systematic repetition of the same image in different works obtains a meaning beyond the morbid exercise of finding duplicated photographs in that same or different architecture. Thus, Ludwig Hilberseimer on several occasions in his *Großstadtarchitektur* (1927), used photographs that had

been published before by Richard Neutra in his *Wie baut Amerika?* (1927), some of which were also used by Erich Mendelsohn in *Russland, Europa, Amerika* (1929), which constituted a sort of a second part of his *Amerika*.[4]

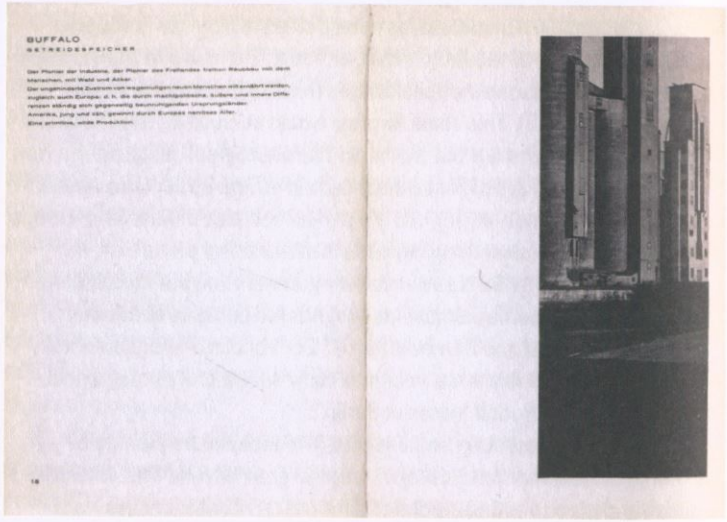
Mendelsohn's manner of reusing photographs is especially meaningful. The only picture appearing in *Russland, Europa, Amerika* that recalls his earlier interest in American silos comes directly from his first book, *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten*, although Mendelsohn frames and enlarges the image to show a specific area (making the original almost unrecognizable) (1, 2). This same formula would be used on a number of different occasions throughout the book. The photograph illustrating a New York street in *Amerika*, captioned *Nebenstrasse* (Side Street) also appears blown up and cropped—leaving out the parked vehicles in *Russland, Europa, Amerika* (3, 4). The same thing happens in still another picture of Fifth Avenue, which in *Amerika* is seen in a very general view, but in *Russland, Europa, Amerika* becomes almost unrecognizable because of the way Mendelsohn enlarges and frames it (5, 6).[5] Both books are fundamentally visual, in the manner of the very commercially successful photographic books published by Rudolf Mosse in Berlin.[6]

If *Amerika* presents a visual record of Mendelsohn's journey to the United States, *Russland, Europa, Amerika* goes beyond that, directly comparing and contrasting visions of different territories. Images from Russia portray popular and traditional architecture, in contrast to America, which is pictured through images of large-scale constructions, especially Mendelsohn's beloved skyscrapers. Europe meanwhile is presented as a place of emerging ideas and intellectual concerns, conveyed through images of housing projects and numerous drawings of unbuilt projects. The introduction, written by Mendelsohn, makes it clear that the intention is to synthetically portray the cultural reality of an era. In his words, the book "is not about politics; but both politics and business are the solid pillars that support architecture, so in the confrontation of Russia against Europe and America the most decisive and deep problems and the most elevated realities are tackled." As in *Amerika*, every image is placed "in its specific position, besides a dense text with a constant rhythm," producing an effect that is partway between aesthetic manifesto and cinematographic tracking shot.[7]

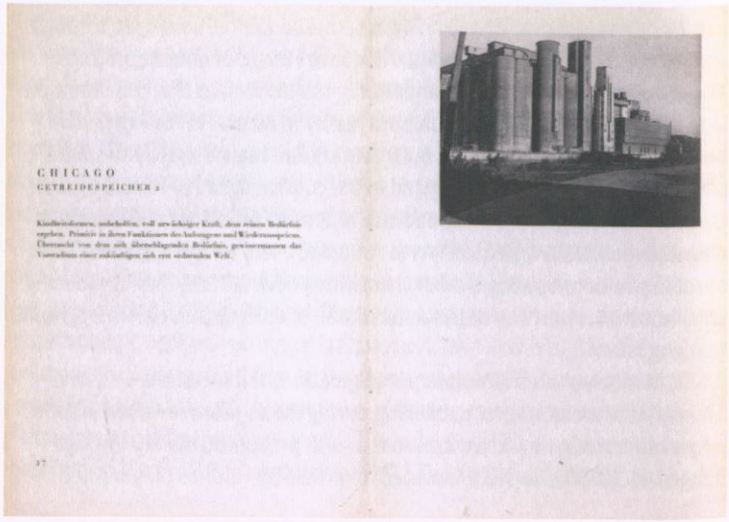
Mendelsohn's example is paradigmatic, but it is not the only one. The realm of architectural publishing during these years revolved around a formulation of a new architecture that was presented mainly through images. In 1926, *Das Werk* included an article by Hannes Meyer titled

"Die neue Welt" in which, after a brief introduction about art and life, Meyer included a visual sequence grouped with titles such as "The Cinema," "The Image," or "Propaganda."[8] Within this sequence, he devoted a section

1 Photograph of grain silos in Erich Mendelsohn, *Russland, Europa, Amerika* (1929), 19; enlarged and cropped from *Amerika*.

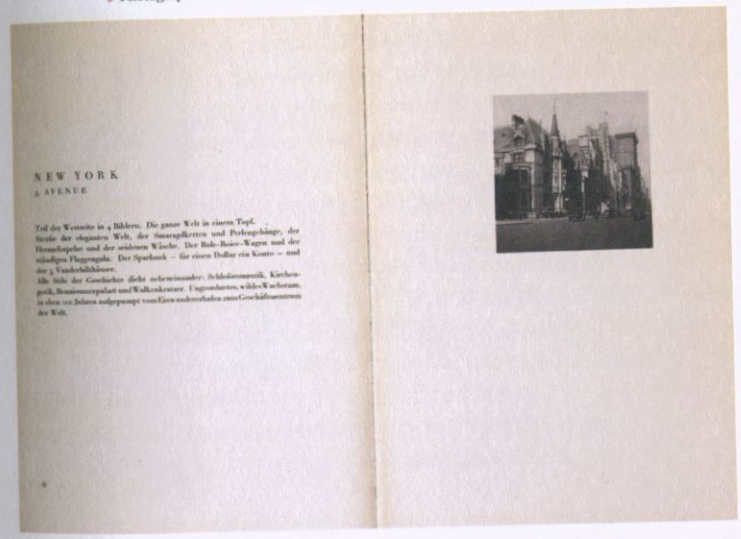


2 Photograph of grain silos in Erich Mendelsohn, *Amerika* (1926), 37. The location is listed as Chicago, which will be corrected to Buffalo in *Russland, Europa, Amerika*.

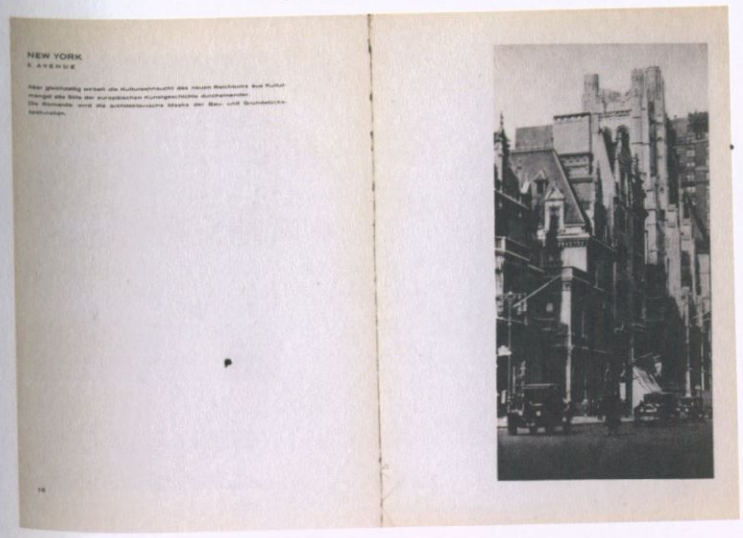


to modern books and magazines, quoting from heavily illustrated books by authors such as Le Corbusier, Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Kurt Schwitters, and Adolf Behne.

3 Photograph of Fifth Avenue, New York, in Erich Mendelsohn, *Amerika* (1926), 50.

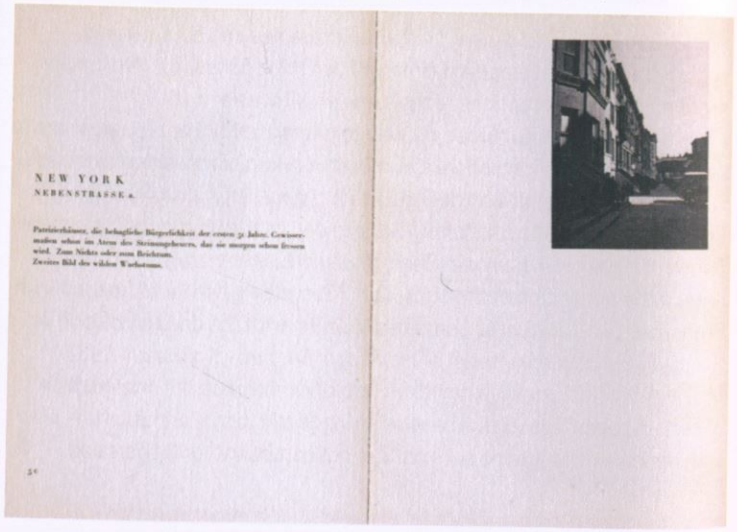


4 Photograph of Fifth Avenue, New York, in Erich Mendelsohn, *Russland, Europa, Amerika* (1929), 13; enlarged and cropped from *Amerika*.

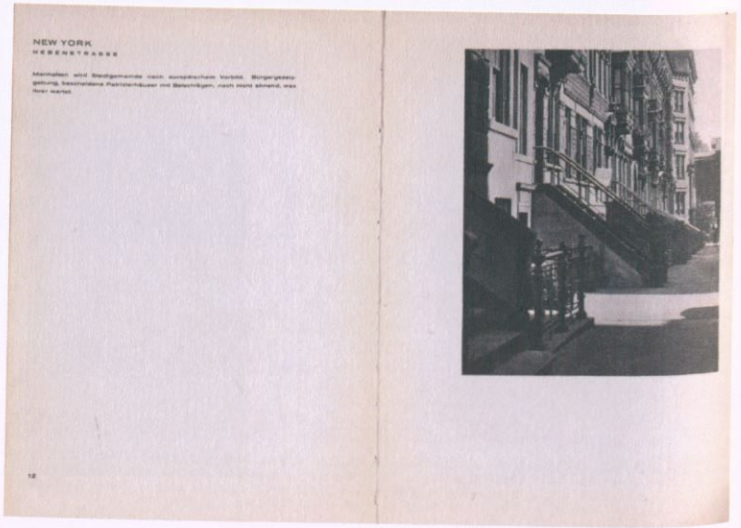


Many of the images and photographs published in these visual catalogues went on to enjoy independent afterlives, subsequently being republished in a number of books. However, the autonomy of the photographs from the original texts that accompanied the images is expressed

5 Photograph of side street, New York in Erich Mendelsohn, *Amerika* (1926), 6.



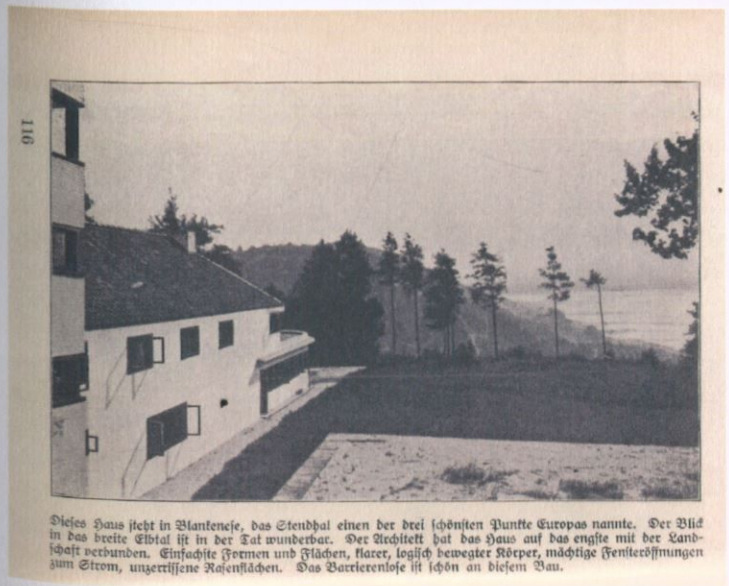
6 Photograph of side street, New York, in Erich Mendelsohn, *Russland, Europa, Amerika* (1929), 17; enlarged and cropped from *Amerika*.



not only through systematic repetition but also through the subtleties offered by photography that went beyond the architectural description. We might recall, for example, a photograph of a house by Karl Schneider published in Adolf Behne's *Neues Wohnen, Neues Bauen* (1927), displaying, among other subtleties, the interaction of architecture and landscape (7). In turn, that same house was used by Walter Gropius in his *Internationale Architektur* (1925) and presented as an example of an autonomous and abstract object composed simply of two brick cubes (8). Two images ascribed opposite intentions to the same architectural work.[9]

Other architects turned directly to photographers or typographers to design the interior of their books, turning them into composition exercises in which every element was designed with a visual intention. Sigfried Giedion collaborated with Moholy-Nagy to design the interior of his famous *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (1928), even against the opposition of the publisher.[10] Something similar happened with Bruno Taut, who entrusted Johannes Molzahn with the design not only of the cover but also the interior of his *Bauen: Der neue Wohnbau* (1927).[11] Molzahn's radical work led him to voluntarily unbalance the composition of certain pages, especially those referring to traditional architecture, often with derisive descriptions such as "it is not cardboard" or "style salad."

7 Karl Schneider, Haus Michaelsen, near Blankenese outside of Hamburg, Germany, in Adolf Behne, *Neus Wohnen, Neues Bauen* (1927), 116.



The pages devoted to modern architecture, by contrast, were composed as double-page spreads with a unified, perfectly balanced layout, and included high-quality photographs and references to standardization. The way the interior of the book is laid out is not incidental either; considering the double page as a single unified spread was something very common in these visual books about architecture. The image of architecture conveyed by the layout goes beyond the limits of the photographic illustration of buildings to create an integrated whole with the text, perceived at a glance, and conceptually linked to the widespread practice of photomontage used in graphics in Central Europe and elsewhere.

The predominance of increasingly graphic layouts over literary discourse produced a whole new genre in architectural literature. In many cases the intention of their authors reflected a certain eagerness to display a finished, homogeneous, and specific image of the intentions or arguments transmitted. This more visual way to develop ideas offered fewer constraints to better explain the formal and compositional arguments some

8 Karl Schneider, Haus Michaelsen, near Blankenese outside of Hamburg, Germany, in Walter Gropius, *Internationale Architektur* (1925), 71.

architects wanted to achieve than, in many cases, elaborate complicated texts or abstruse reasoning. In short, all these manifesto-catalogues are composed of a large number of images brought together with a brief text that serves as a support or accompaniment and which, in some instances, can even be disregarded. In this way, the narration is composed of many different layers, allowing for readings at different levels, from the most superficial or banal to a reading linked to the most profound of the aesthetic categories of modernity's visual principles.

It is obvious that the morphology of all of these visual manifestos refers to the great photographic albums that became so popular in bourgeois culture at the turn of the century, such as the ones that collected pictures from distant cities or cultures. In them, the indelible footprint synthesizing the essential was grouped as a single object. The sum of all these ephemeral and fleeting experiences has turned contradictorily into categorical invariants close to the unchangeable and therefore purposeful. Moholy-Nagy's or Molzahn's arguments seem to be found in other texts of that same era, even if these are apparently alien to their immediate circle of reference. Sigmund Freud referred to the double nature of photography in an essay from 1930, seeing it as a comprehensive recording method but also purposeful and instrumental: "The photographic camera has been created as an instrument which retains the fleeting visual impressions, just as the gramophone disc retains the equally fleeting auditory ones; both are at bottom materializations of the power he possesses of recollection, his memory."[12]

Every single one of the image collections presented in these architecture books becomes, in itself, an eloquent partial or autobiographical stock list of the plastic and theoretical interests of their authors. And as a whole, it constitutes a visual universe of the principles that would go on to become common references. The manifesto is made up of the aggregation of individual visual elements, and, differing from other speculative arguments, the interpretation is neither direct nor imposed, leaving all responsibility to the reader. Alberto Sartoris's encyclopedic work *Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale* (1932) might be a good example of this. Assembling over a thousand photographs of different projects and buildings scattered around the world, Sartoris attempted to offer a panoramic vision of the essence of modern architecture.[13] Sartoris's subtitle, *Sintesi panoramica dell'architettura moderna* (Panoramic Synthesis of Modern Architecture), is expressive enough of this ambition. A brief introductory text with many images announcing the aforementioned characteristic elements of the modern works is followed by an almost infinite-seeming sequence

of images, to complete the nearly one thousand pages that make up the book—a panoramic synthesis indeed. Something similar happens with the monumental series of three volumes *Neues Bauen in der Welt* (1930), produced by the renowned publisher Joseph Gantner. With the aim of consolidating and internationalizing the concepts, he relied heavily on photography, producing three exceptional books devoted to Russia, America, and France, compiled by El Lissitzky, Richard Neutra, and Robert Ginsburger, respectively.[14]

The visual catalogue is thus turned into a type of manifesto, more focused on the ideas that come through our vision to our deep unconscious, and in which authorship vanishes gradually. This does not rely on the authentic or original generation of each picture, in terms of authorship, but on the synthetic capacity of grouping, rearranging, repeating, or manipulating those images that are already part of the collective imagination. The singularity or unique authenticity of the architectural work transforms into a collage in which images and architecture displace their authors.

The intended anonymous American architecture displayed by Mendelsohn in his books, through the recycling of images and fragments, or the voluminous photographic catalogues by Bruno Taut or Alberto Sartoris are, despite an obvious distance in terms of time and context, not far from the underlying conceptual principles of Bernard Rudofsky's famous 1964 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) titled *Architecture Without Architects*. The exhibition's catalogue offered almost two hundred photographs presenting the work of anonymous builders in completely disparate places. It is not by chance that the catalogue would sometimes be viewed as a "perfectly suitable substitute" for the exhibition, making the visit to the exhibition redundant.[15] For the exhibition and catalogue, Rudofsky used images from a number of varied sources such as anthropological archives or diplomatic and military departments, as well as some photographs he had taken himself during the late 1920s. It was on his trips through Italy in this period that he collected the pictures he would later characterize as "imaginative photographs taken by architects or photographers with a keen eye for modern architecture."[16] It is also not by chance that some of these images had been previously shown in the 1930 exhibition *Deutsche Bauausstellung Berlin*, anticipating the 1964 MoMA exhibition of "spontaneous architecture."

Although the exhibition has been seen as a critique of orthodox "International Style" architecture, it was also linked with its deepest statements. Rudofsky uses the same tools and methods, elaborating a visual catalogue rather than a simple exhibition, one whose influence extended

well beyond the scarce four months the exhibition was on view at MoMA. The number of editions of the catalogue published over twenty-five years, along with the dozens of countries where the exhibition was displayed, attest to how the exhibition became a sort of universal photo-manifesto. We see an endless succession of photographs, with barely any text, encompassing everything from an indigenous Alaskan igloo to the mud and stone skyscrapers of Yemen, to Galician elevated stone *hórreos* or Castilian castles.

Rudofsky's use of the most radical and modern structure, the photo-manifesto, as a means of expression and critique of the avant-garde's principles opens the door to a new category or, at least, an alternative classification. The compendium of images, generally used in a banal manner in postmodernity, was a symbolic (and perhaps the only possible) way of transmitting the deepest and most essential derivations of modernity. Such compendia begin to play a metaphorical role, suggesting something that is beyond what is photographed or intended by their authors, and become discourses that, as suggested by Minor White, "use the camera in relation to the mind, the heart, viscera and spirit of human beings. The perennial trend has barely been started in photography."[17]

1 See Ulrich Conrads, *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1970); Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1993); K. Michael Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998); and Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999). We can also mention Spanish efforts, such as Pere Hereu, Josep María Montaner, and Jordi Oliveras, *Textos de arquitectura de la modernidad* (Madrid: Nerea, 1994); and Simón Marchan, *La arquitectura del siglo XX* (Madrid: Corazón, 1974).

2 Erich Mendelsohn, *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten: Mit 100 meis eigenen Aufnahmen des Verfassers* (Berlin: Rudolf Mosse 1926); see also Matthias Noell, "Nicht mehr lesen! Sehen! Le livre d'architecture de langue allemande dans les années vingt," in Jean-Michel Leniaud and Béatrice Bouvier, *Le livre d'architecture XVe-XXe siècle: Edition, représentations et bibliothèques* (Paris: Ecole des Chartes, 2002).

3 See also Lucía Santaella and Winfried Nöth, *Imagen: Comunicación, semiótica y medios* (Kassel: Reichenberg, 2003); and Rene Lindekens, *Elements pour une sémiotique de la photographie* (Paris: Didier, 1971), 38-58.

4 Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Großstadtarchitektur* (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann,1927); Richard J. Neutra, *Wie baut Amerika?: Gegenwärtige Bauarbeit amerikanischer Kreis* (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann,1927); Erich Mendelsohn, *Russland, Europa, Amerika; Ein architektonischer Querschnitt* (Berlin: Rudolf Mosse, 1929).

5 These are just two examples, but there are many others. The photograph published on page 19 in *Russland, Europa, Amerika*, is a partial view of the image published on page 37 in *Amerika*; also, the pictures in pages 13 and 17 in *Russland, Europa, Amerika*, are details of the pictures published on pages 6 and 50 in *Amerika*.

6 Notable, for example, is a book by Hans Hildebrant that, in 337 images, systematically illustrated artistic contributions made by women. See Hans Hildebrant, *Die Frau als Künstlerin, mit 337 Abbildungen nach frauenarteiten bildender Kunst von der frühesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Rudolf Mosse, 1928).

7 Mendelsohn, *Russland, Europa, Amerika*, foreword (n.p.).

8 Hannes Meyer, "Die neue Welt," in *Das Werk* (1926): 205-236. See also Bruno Maurer, "Das Werk," *Archithese* 5, no. 24 (1995): 17-29.

9 Adolf Behne, *Neues Wohen, Neues Bauen* (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, 1927), 116; Walter Gropius, *Internationale Architektur* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1925), 66.

10 Sigfried Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (Leipzig and Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1928).

11 Bruno Taut, *Bauen: Der neue Wohnbau* (Leipzig and Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1927).

12 Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1930). Published in English as Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 38.

13 Alberto Sartoris, *Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale: Sintesi panoramica dell'architettura moderna* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1932).

14 El Lissitzky, *Russland: Die Rekonstruktion der Architektur in der Sowietunion, Neues Bauen in der Welt*, no. 1 (Vienna: Anton Schroll & Co., 1930); Richard J. Neutra, *Amerika: Die Stilbildung des neuen Bauens in den Vereinigten Staaten, Neues Bauen in der Welt*, no. 2 (Vienna: Anton Schroll & Co., 1930); and Robert Ginsburger, *Frankreich: Die Entwicklung der neuen Ideen nach Konstruktion und Form, Neues Bauen in der Welt*, no. 3 (Vienna: Anton Schroll & Co., 1930).

15 Felicity Scott, "An Eye for Modern Architecture," in *Lessons from Bernard Rudofsky: Life as a Voyage*, Architektur Zentrum Wien, ed., (Basel: Birkhauser, 2007), 175.

16 Bernard Rudofsky, Letter to Luis Sert (September 25, 1982), cited in Scott, "An Eye for Modern Architecture," 176.

17 Minor White, "Equivalence: The Perennial Trend," *PSA Journal* 29, no. 7 (1963): 17-21.