

“Berlin, a Housing Block by Bruno Taut Will Be Demolished”. Álvaro Siza in the “Taut City” (1975-1988)

Miguel Borges de Araújo

PhD, Researcher, Center for Studies in Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Architecture, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal
miguelborgesdearaujo@gmail.com

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Introduction

Architects are attracted by ruins, if not because of their evocative and admonitory powers, then at least because of their materiality. Ruins are ultimately the end point of any architecture, but also often, whether literally or metaphysically, their origin. The ruin, as a reference conserved in a process of transformation, has been a key to understanding the work of the Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza (1933-).¹

The present article contributes to this discussion by depicting an encounter between Siza and the ruin of a building by the German architect Bruno Taut (1880-1938) in three sections: the first section suggests that Siza initially prepared it by studying books by and about Taut; the second conjectures the encounter in person between Siza and the ruins; and the third proposes how the latter could have influenced Siza's work.

In 1975, Siza visited Berlin to attend the symposium *Entwerfen in der historischen Straße* [Designing in the historic street],² organized by the International Design Centre Berlin (IDZ), a precursor to the famous urban reconstruction program International Architecture Exhibition (IBA), (1979-1987).³ Siza then actively participated in the following 1976 edition of the symposium, titled *Stadtstruktur-Stadtgestalt* [Urban structure – Urban form], and still in this sequence, he worked on a series of projects in Berlin between 1978 and 1988. Berlin provided Siza with his first opportunity to work outside Portugal, to measure his work against his more renowned international contemporaries,⁴ as well as against the architects of the Modern Movement. Brigitte Fleck, who was at that time in charge of the competitions organized by

1 Already the first reviews of Siza's work pointed out that his strategy “allows the place, the existing history and geography, to become the project's main subject.” Vittorio Gregotti, “Architetture recenti di Álvaro Siza,” *Controspazio* 9 (1972): 23. On Siza's creative relationship with ruins, see: Peter Testa, *The Architecture of Álvaro Siza* (Porto: Edições da FAUP, 1988 / 1984), 147-167; Carlos Machado, “Álvaro Siza and the Fragmented City,” *Athens Journal of Architecture* 3 (2005): 177-186.

2 Álvaro Siza, “François Burkhardt entrevista Álvaro Siza,” interview by François Burkhardt, *Area* 101 (2008): 162-169. <https://www.area-arch.it/francois-burkhardt-intervista-alvaro-siza/>.

3 See the symposiums' publications: Martina Schneider, ed., *Entwerfen in der historischen Strasse – Arbeiten des IDZ Symposiums im Herbst 1975 zur baulichen Integration Alt-Neu* (Berlin: Abakon, 1976); François Burkhardt, ed. *5 Architekten zeichnen für Berlin. Ergebnisse des IDZ Symposiums Stadtstruktur-Stadtgestalt vom Herbst 1976* (Berlin: Archibook, 1979).

4 The other participants in the symposium were Gottfried Böhm (1920-2021), Vittorio Gregotti (1927-2020), Peter Smithson (1923-2003) and Oswald Mathias Ungers (1926-2007). François Burkhardt, ed., *5 Architekten zeichnen für Berlin. Ergebnisse des IDZ Symposiums Stadtstruktur-Stadtgestalt vom Herbst 1976* (Berlin: Archibook, 1979).

the Senate of Berlin, visited Porto, became impressed with Siza's work, and encouraged him to participate in the IBA competitions. She then started preparing a book on Siza, which provided a first-hand account of his Berlin activities. Berlin – which Siza, according to Fleck, in a sign of admiration, called the “Taut city”⁵ – was at that time a city under extraordinary circumstances. Siza was shocked by the sight of this divided and partly ruined city: “... severe and varied Berlin, blackened bricks, large walls without windows.”⁶ Fleck's book provides clues that help understand Siza's heightened interest in ruins at that moment. Ruins appeared to Siza as a challenge already in his first projects in the center of Porto, where successive urban renewals had effaced large areas of the historic city since the 1940s. Siza sought alternatives to these renewals in his projects for the Avenida da Ponte (SWV19682001),⁷ Bouça housing (SWV197206), S. Vítor housing (SWV197477), and the Ribeira-Barredo area (SWV197676a).⁸ Fleck also identifies essential personal and political events in Siza's life, the tragic loss of his wife, the artist Antónia Siza (1940-1973),⁹ and the April Revolution of 1974, which ended a decades-long dictatorship.¹⁰

In the context of the revolution, a group of architects, including Siza, became involved in the program *Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local* [The Local Ambulatory Support Service] (SAAL). This participatory housing initiative attracted an unusual amount of international attention. For example, in 1975, Siza was invited to lecture in Seville, Spain. The lecture, eventually published in 1979, is one of the first of Siza's texts to mention Taut. In addition to showing a remarkable understanding of his professional responsibilities during this euphoric period, Siza hints at the importance of ruins for his theory:

“I have described [to the students] the moments of patient collection and gathering of the city's fragments, of traces of the most profound collective legacy, disseminated, truncated, but present in the smallest rock. And it will never be possible to bury all the small rocks.”¹¹

Taut and ruins – two of Siza's professed interests – coincide in Berlin, but in what way, if any, do they relate to each other? It can be ascertained that Siza's interest in ruins, as part of a strategy of “transforming the existing,”¹² precedes his work in Berlin, yet it was also heightened by it. The influence that Taut might have had on Siza remains unclear. The present article takes its clue from a 1977 article on Taut by the art historian Tilmann Buddensieg (1928-2013) published in the Italian magazine *Casabella*.¹³ Taut, slightly older than, for instance, Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) and Le Corbusier (1887-1965), came to critical attention during a period from before WWI until the early years of the Weimar Republic, with a series of expressionist designs and texts. Between 1923 and 1931, he built literally thousands of houses for cooperatives in Magdeburg and Berlin.¹⁴ This extraordinary activity, which contributed to

5 Brigitte Fleck, *Alvaro Siza* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1995), 77.

6 Siza quoted in *Ibid.*, 53.

7 SWV refers to the cataloging of Siza works used in the Siza Baroque Research Project; see “Siza Baroque,” accessed April 13, 2023, <https://www.sizabaroque.com/>.

8 Siza considers the problem also on a theoretical level: one of his first published texts is a reflection on the Avenida da Ponte, S. Vítor, and Ribeira-Barredo projects, presented in a seminar directed by Aldo Rossi and organized by the COAG – Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Galicia in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Álvaro Siza, “Três intervenções na cidade do Porto,” in *I Seminário Internacional de Arquitectura en Compostela*, eds. Salvador Tarragó and Justo Beramendi (Santiago de Compostela: COAG (1976), 85-101.

9 Fleck, *Alvaro Siza* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1995), 25.

10 *Ibid.*, 11-20.

11 Álvaro Siza, “1975. Memories from Seville,” in *S. Vítor. Cidade Participada: Arquitectura e Democracia*, edited by Ana Alves Costa, Ana Catarina Costa, and Sérgio Fernandez (Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2019 / 1979), 138.

12 Gregotti, “Architetture recenti”, 23.

13 Tilmann Buddensieg, “Berlino, Kottbusser Damm 2-3. Una casa d'affitto di Bruno Taut sarà demolita,” *Casabella* 425 (May 1977): 56-60.

14 Part of this output has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008.

demonstrating the viability of modern architecture, was suddenly interrupted by the rise of the Nazi regime. While many of his colleagues emigrated to the USA, Taut exiled himself first in Japan (1933-1936) and then in Turkey, where he died prematurely in 1938. Taut's unusual route, coupled with the destruction and subsequent division of Berlin, may explain why his work was relatively neglected until the 1970s.¹⁵ Buddensieg's article was part of a series of initiatives that, in anticipation of Taut's centenary in 1980,¹⁶ brought his work back to critical attention. The article depicts the ruins of an almost unknown design by Taut, an apartment block at Kottbusser Damm 2-3 (1910-1911), damaged during WW2 and due for demolition at the time Buddensieg was writing. It discusses its significance for the development of Berlin's architectural tradition. In hindsight, we know that at the last moment, Taut's ruin was preserved and incorporated into a renovation design by the architects Inken and Hinrich Baller (1982). However, as argued here, only the ruin – essential and transient – and not the renovated building, could have captured Siza's attention.

Materials and Methods

As already mentioned, Siza's interest in ruins has intensified in Berlin. The present article suggests that Siza's interest in Taut precedes his activities in Berlin. However, what is considered decisive are the surprising circumstances in which these interests are interrelated — the sight of the great modern architect in a divided, ruined, and under reconstruction Berlin.

The first section of the article, *Taut books*, draws associations between readings of Taut and pre-Berlin works by Siza. For that purpose, it was necessary to identify publications by and on Taut that could plausibly have been read by Siza. For example, Siza could not have read Taut's famous text *Die Stadtkrone* [The City Crown] (1919) in its original German, but he could have had access to its 1973 Italian translation.¹⁷ In addition, Siza could, of course, have had access to Taut through secondary sources. Among the histories of modern architecture, Rayner Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960) pays special attention to Taut. Banham's fascination with technology and "material dematerialization" led him to recognize the originality of Taut's Glass Pavilion for the Deutscher Werkbund in Cologne (1914).¹⁸ Furthermore, Banham stressed Taut's role in popularizing the Modern Movement through housing projects and publications. In particular, Banham underlined the significance of Taut's *Die Stadtkrone*: "in part, a polemic against advanced town planning as it then stood, with its emphasis on residential planning, zoning and Garden City ideals," and which Taut criticized as a "torso without a head."¹⁹ Taut's idea that even the small house must be conceived as a part of the city organism – or, more metaphorically, that utility is only a prerequisite to beauty – is something Siza would have adhered to. Indeed, it is tempting to look at Siza's SAAL S. Vítor housing, with its seemingly contradictory components of everyday life and utopia, already as a lesson learned from Taut.

15 However, Taut had a lasting impact in disseminating the Modern Movement in Japan and Turkey and confronting it with the local cultures, which he studied closely.

16 Incidentally, a book published on this occasion by Barbara Volkmann, *Bruno Taut 1880-1938* (Berlin, Akademie der Künste), 1980, was among the selections of Siza's private library displayed in the exhibition Álvaro Siza: In/Discipline, organized by the Serralves Museum, Porto (September 19, 2019 – February 2, 2020).

17 Bruno Taut, *La corona delle città / Die Stadtkrone (con i contributi di Paul Scheerbarth, Erich Baron e Adolf Behne. Introduzione di Ludovico Quaroni)* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1973). I have consulted the Spanish and English translations: Bruno Taut, *Escritos Expressionistas 1919-1920* (Madrid: El Croquis Editorial, 1997); Bruno Taut, "The City Crown," trans. Ulrike Altenmüller and Matthew Mindrup, *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 63, Issue 1 (October 2009): 121-134.

18 Rayner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London: The Architectural Press, 1977 / 1960), 81.

19 Ibid., 265-266.

Even in the culturally closed Portuguese context, Siza could have had access to Taut's *Modern Architecture* (1929), which Banham described as "the first large popular work on the Modern Movement to appear in English."²⁰ The library at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, Siza's alma mater, holds the first edition of this book.²¹ On the other hand, Taut's housing cooperatives were underrepresented in secondary sources until the publication of Ludwig Hilberseimer's book *Berliner Architektur der 20er Jahre* (1967),²² which, by contrast to Banham, stresses the practical and rigorous facets of Taut's architecture, followed by the first catalog of Taut's complete works published by Kurt Junghanns in 1970.²³

Taut could also have come to Siza's attention via his writings on Japan. Within the scope of this article, however, this path can only be suggested. Fernando Távora, Siza's professor, first employer, and close friend, had a strong interest in Japan and acquired a copy of Taut's *Houses and People of Japan* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1937/1958) on the occasion of his visit there in 1960 (Siza was Távora's collaborator at that time).²⁴ It is conceivable that Távora would have identified with Taut's efforts to confront the Modern Movement with Japanese culture and tradition.

Berlin provided Siza with his first projects abroad, including the competitions for the Görlitzer Bad swimming pool (SWV197879), the residential complex Fränkelufer / IBA Block 70 and 89 (SWV197982), the apartment building on Kottbusser Strasse / IBA Block 11 and 12 (SWV197981a), the Kulturforum (SWV198286a), and the Monument to Gestapo victims at the Prinz-Albrecht-Palais (SWV198384b); Siza's Berlin period culminated with the construction of three buildings for the IBA in an urban block in Schlesisches Tor in the Kreuzberg district: the residential building Bonjour Tristesse (SWV198084b), the Kita kindergarten (SWV198688), and the Anziani senior citizens' club (SWV198788).

In the context of the Cold War, West and East Berlin followed opposite urban planning approaches. While East Berlin concentrated on constructing a monumental boulevard, Stalinallee (after 1961, Karl Marx-Allee), West Berlin favored a dispersed urban model. What both approaches had in common was a strategy of starting anew. Instead, the IBA (1979-87), which comprised two separate strategies, the IBA-Neubau (new) and the IBA-Altbau (old / existing), recaptured a historical dimension. In the former, the emphasis was on the critical reconstruction of largely demolished open areas. In the latter, which included Siza's projects, it was on step-by-step interventions in the urban fabric.²⁵ Through the IBA program, Siza engaged in participatory projects involving the immigrant community. Considering his reputation for working with the history and geography of the site, he likely attempted to make up for the lack of experience by increasing his visits and observations.²⁶ Siza continued to visit Berlin until the completion of the Schlesisches Tor projects in 1988, and therefore, with great probability he saw at least Taut's *Siedlungen* [Housing estates] in West Berlin, including the Freie Scholle (1924-1931), the Britz, or "horseshoe Siedlung" (1925-1933), and the Zehlendorf, or "forest Siedlung" (1926-1931). There is even a record of a recent visit by Siza to Taut's Britz complex, presented in the form of a return to the site.²⁷ Siza may have also come across other works by Taut, including

20 Ibid., 308-309.

21 Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (London: The Studio Ltd, 1929).

22 Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Berliner Architektur der 20er Jahre* (Berlin: Mann, 1967).

23 Kurt Junghanns, *Bruno Taut 1880-1938* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1978 / 1970), 210.

24 João Couto Duarte and Maria João Soares, "Fernando Távora's Japan through books: a fascination with tradition in search of innovation," in *Tradition and innovation*, eds. Maria do Rosário Monteiro, Maria João Pereira Neto and Mário S. Ming Kong (London: CRC Press, 2021), 3.

25 For a detailed account of the symposium and its context, the IBA programme and Siza's contribution, see, Marta Doménech-Rodríguez, "Álvaro Siza en el Berlín dividido: el proyecto urbano en los márgenes (1976-1988)" (PhD diss. Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, 2017).

26 Stressing these special circumstances, but also the openness of Siza's design practice, Nélson Mota identified Siza's experience in Berlin with that of the "wanderer".." Nélson Mota, "Álvaro Siza's Bonjour Tristesse: a symphony for a big city," *The Journal of Architecture*, 19:5 (2014): 779-782.

27 António Choupina, "Álvaro Siza: The Adoration of the Magi", *Drawing Matter*, January 19 (2022), <https://drawingmatter.org/alvaro-siza-the-adoration-of-the-magi/>.

the blocks at Ossastrasse 9-16a and Fuldastrasse 22-23 in the Neuköln district, not far from his IBA sites. However, the nearest Taut site was the lesser-known building ruin at Kottbusser Damm 2-3 mentioned by Buddensieg (there is a second pre-World War I building by Taut at Kottbusser Damm 90). For example, Junghanns, based in East Berlin, had mistakenly believed it was destroyed and lamented the destruction of what he regarded as a work of transition.²⁸

Buddensieg discussed Taut's building in a full-length article. Based on this article, it would be possible to reconstruct Siza's encounter with the ruin, which was located less than two hundred meters from his own building site on the Fränkelufer. Yet Buddensieg's article opens a second alternative, that the encounter would have happened as a reading of *Casabella*. The two options are even plausibly complementary and will be explored in the second section, *Taut wall*. Buddensieg's article concludes with an appeal to conserve Taut's wall, which, as already mentioned, occurred in 1982 with a design by the architects Baller (who, incidentally, had won the Fränkelufer competition ahead of Siza).

The hypotheses derived from the possible encounter between Siza and this particular ruin could largely be derived from the work of Taut as a whole. Thus, it is possible to discuss Taut's influence on Siza even on a conjectural basis. The final section of this article, *Forgetting Taut*, discusses Taut's influence on Siza, focusing on two projects by Siza for the IBA: the Fränkelufer complex and the apartment building on Kottbusser Strasse.²⁹ Several other projects by Siza, and not necessarily only his projects in Berlin, could be useful to demonstrate the influence of Taut. However, for feasibility and clarity, the discussion was limited to these projects and to the collection of drawings archived in the Álvaro Siza Fonds at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA). Thus, the article points to a parallel between Siza's use of ruins and models. Siza does not copy Taut; Taut's architecture becomes a reference in a process of transformation.

Taut Books

Some of the writings by Taut that Siza could have read before experiencing in person the work of the German master were already identified. The article further suggests possible associations between Siza's and Taut's works, starting with the latter's manifesto *Die Stadtkrone*. Taut is interested in the concept of the "City Crown," ostensibly the salient physical and symbolic center of the city (though, as will be seen, his argument goes far beyond this), which was considered a constant in the history of the city up until his times. He identifies the demographic and economic facts that led to a situation of "chaos," as well as its positivist reaction, in the way of scientific urban planning methods, concluding: "the narrow concept of building construction applied today is a complete inversion of what it was in the past."³⁰

More than the location (in the center and above) and materiality (i.e., the crystal, "its light, radiating onto each building, down to the simplest hut"), what could have impressed Siza is Taut's idea that, like the "old city," the modern city needs its places of collective and spiritual purpose. In Taut's words: "The idea of a new city has been born, but it is a city without a head."³¹ Taut himself was still searching for the adequate form for the City Crown in a social-oriented era. He continues: "What do the majority of people want today? What do they do? Are there no events in which the longing of the masses expresses itself in a veiled form? Let us follow the crowd to the places where they spend their leisure away from material wishes".³²

28 Kurt Junghanns, *Bruno Taut 1880-1938*, 36-38, 210.

29 Pierluigi Nicolini, "Álvaro Siza: tre progetti per Kreuzberg – Fraenkelufer-Kottbusserstrasse-Schlesisches Tor", *Lotus International* 32 (1981): 52-53.

30 Taut, "The City Crown", 122-123.

31 *Ibid.*, 127.

32 *Ibid.*

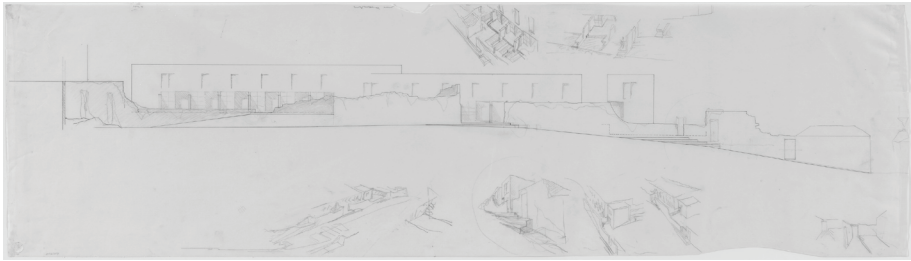


Fig. 1: Álvaro Siza, Elevation and perspective sketches, SAAL S. Vitor Social Housing, Porto, 1974-1977.

The first work by Siza that invites comparison with Taut's City Crown, at least superficially, is his 1968 unbuilt office building for the Avenida da Ponte. This was also Siza's first commission for a site in the historical city of Porto. Since the 1940s, a large area of the medieval quarters had been demolished to create a new axis, which left the remaining buildings facing an exposed hillside. Siza connected the built fragments on each side of the granite outcrop with a "continuous, slightly angular façade," playing with the materiality of the glass/crystal façade, as Fleck put it, "to reflect and distort the surrounding urban context."³³ Like Taut, Siza was still searching for the adequate form to relate with the ruined fragments of the city. When in 2001 Siza had a second opportunity to design a project for that site, he completely changed the approach and suggested building directly across the main road. The wound in the landscape, which after several decades had become part of the collective memory of the citizens, was therefore integrated into the composition.³⁴

Above all, as noted by Banham, *Die Stadtkrone* presented a challenge to the then -emerging functionalist doctrine. Taut argues that architecture needs to "fulfil people's recurring and increasing needs," yet he emphasizes, "[architecture] is not constrained by the satisfaction of bare necessities." As a "form of art," Taut continues, architecture requires "imagination" and is directed to the "spiritual life and existence of mankind." However, architecture is also a special form of art because of its collective dimension, which Taut contrasts with music, a stance that in a way resonates with Siza's statement that: "I would not like to execute my own designs. Nor would I like to design alone. It would be like sterilizing."³⁵

Siza's S. Vitor housing project shows a complex understanding of the history and geography of the city (Fig. 1). The plan for the expansion of a crowded workers' block consists of bands of connected small houses set in the interior of a large urban block. Siza observed and recorded all kinds of references, including plot divisions, passages, informal gardens, ruined constructions. He proposed not to destroy, nor to literally preserve these. Instead, the old elements became part of a new, layered organization (unfortunately, the later interventions in this area partly destroyed this quality). The houses are painted pale green with bright red window frames and shutters. The opening image of Fleck's book is a detail photograph of this project, focusing on a concrete *pilotis* that rises out from the gaps of an old granite wall, announcing a restart to the area.

"The new city will stem from what is there and which, in a way, belongs to all," wrote Siza, referring to S. Vitor, "the streets, the squares, the gardens, the houses behind other houses, streets and squares and gardens isolated from the streets and the squares and the gardens, Loos, Oud, Taut, those who suddenly spring to mind and so many others, anonymous builders and thinkers, accrued knowledge."³⁶

33 Fleck, *Alvaro Siza*, 14. Seen retrospectively, Siza's use of glass curtain walls appears as an isolated experiment (who knows, influenced by the reading of Taut and Banham?).

34 On the 1968 and 2001 proposals for the Avenida da Ponte site, see Alexandre Alves Costa, "O Futuro – Dois projectos para dois tempos," in *A Ponte e a Avenida. Contradições urbanísticas no Centro Histórico do Porto*, eds. Manuel Luís Real and Maria Helena Gil Braga (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto), 81-86.

35 Álvaro Siza, "Vuit punts ordenats a l'atzar...", *Quaderns d'Arquitectura i Urbanisme* 159 (1983): 78.

36 Álvaro Siza, "1975. Memories from Seville," 138.

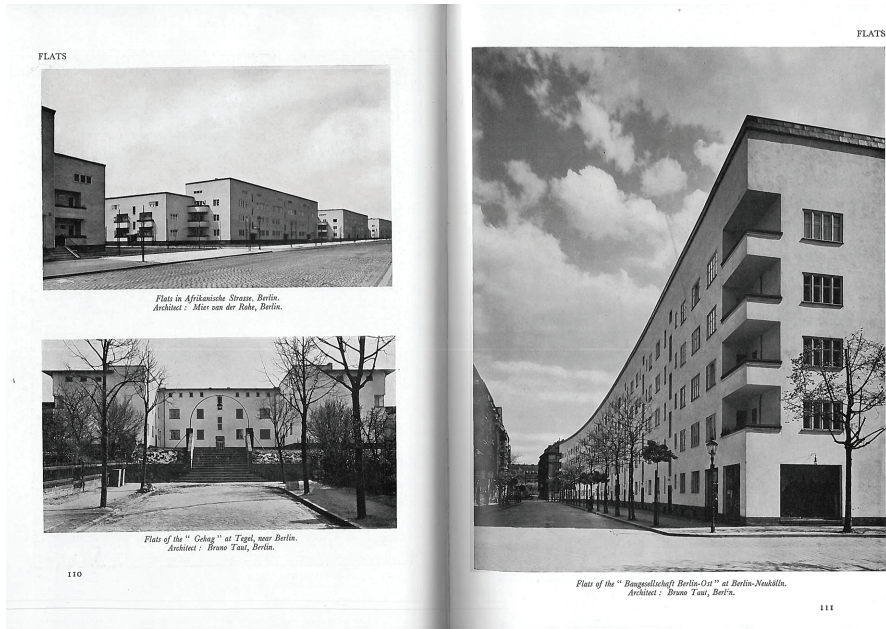


Fig. 2: Spread from Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (1929). On the left page, above, Mies van der Rohe's housing in Afrikanische Strasse, Berlin, 1926-1927; below, Bruno Taut's housing GEHAG, Berlin, 1924. On the right, Bruno Taut's apartment building in Ossastrasse, Berlin, 1927-1928.

Let us now focus on Taut's 1929 book *Modern Architecture*, which includes photographs of his own work, including various views of his famous Siedlungen, alongside with a selection of examples from various international architects. Compared with his Expressionist texts, *Modern Architecture* is practical. The impeccable black and white photographs accentuate the works' sachlich [objective] character. Rigor and repetition appear as themes typical for a democratic and industrially based era, suggesting connections to Siza's work. Among the most remarkable are the images of Taut's apartment buildings on Ossastrasse, Berlin-Neuköln, with their gently curving wall and uniform window openings (Fig. 2).

Siza's project for the Bouça workers' housing reflects the influence of Taut at various levels. The project started in 1972 and was revised after the Revolution of 1974 in connection with the SAAL program. The site was an empty plot in an expansion area between the historic city and a train station (today, the Lapa Metro Station). The plan consists of four bands of stacked double story row houses that directly reiterate the experience of the 1920s Siedlungen. The construction was left uncompleted when the program was discontinued in 1977. Therefore, between the 1980s and the 2000s, a visitor to this site would have found something between a ruin and an inhabited construction site. The project was finally completed in 2006. Probably, this sequence of events was possible since, from the outset, Siza understood that house and city, the small and the monumental, are interconnected. Therefore, within a limited budget, he planned the empty spaces between the row houses so that they could be used one day for social gatherings or even, as he wrote in the margins of a design sketch "as an open-air cinema" (Fig. 4). Siza also reserved the prominent corners of the scheme for communal facilities and shops. Therefore, in a surprising but coherent development of Taut's ideas, Siza conceived the project, if not as a torso with a head, at least as an expectant torso.

According to Fleck, Siza crossed two models in the Bouça project: Porto's traditional workers' housing and the northern European modern housing estates. She illustrates this with a curious detail:



Flats of the “Gehag,” “Hufeisen,” Berlin-Britz (1925-26). Architects: (above) Bruno Taut (below) Bruno Taut and Martin Wagner, Berlin.

Fig. 3: Detail from Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (1929). Courtyard of the Britz, or “Horseshoe Siedlung” (1925-1933).

“The two top floors at the rear are set back and painted a deep red. This red color also required discussions with the residents. Siza’s explanation that the color was a homage to a German architect named Bruno Taut was eventually accepted.”³⁷

How did the aspect of color, which certainly is of great importance for Taut, influence Siza? After all, as mentioned above, Taut’s architecture was reproduced in black and white in the publications of that time. However, Fleck’s remark indicates that Siza was aware of the presence of color in Taut’s architecture, which raises the question of whether this discovery could have preceded Siza’s invitation to Berlin. If not, Siza may have been surprised by Taut’s striking use of color during his 1975 and 1976 visits (the first stage of Bouça was completed in 1977). Either way, Siza’s homage together with his increasing preference for using white, indicates that he considered the experiment with color settled, for that moment.

Taut Wall

The ruin of Taut’s building at Kottbusser Damm 2-3 was just down the road from Siza’s Fränkelufer and Kottbusser sites. A 1977 article by Buddensieg in *Casabella* depicts what was left of it (Fig. 5). This impressive “burnt façade,” with still a few shops operating on the street level, and “the emptied voids of its windows, with its projected and recessed balconies,” Buddensieg remarked, “nevertheless radiantly preserves the very fine structure which the dark brown Dutch bricks have woven into its surface.” Throughout the article, Buddensieg argues that this building represented in its time, and even since the time of Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), the greatest step towards the configuration of Berlin’s tenement building construction.³⁸ It is as if for Buddensieg, the sight of the ruin – the building liberated from its purpose – highlighted its architectural idea. It is tempting to imagine Siza observing this ruin of a modern wall.

Fleck mentions the following anecdote told by Siza: on his way to the Bonjour Tristesse site, Siza recalled that he saw the “shell” of a building “with a detail copied from my [his] idea ... someone there has copied the form of the building. But it was only an empty building that was supposed to be pulled down, a ruin.” Fleck documented the anecdote with a photograph of the curving rooftop of the Merkur Department Store ruins at Ritterstrasse 60. But Siza’s anecdote continues: “I went up closer in order to convince myself. I was never able to dismiss completely my doubts about whether I had copied that form. Many other things in Berlin have inspired

37 Fleck, *Alvaro Siza*, 20-21.

38 Buddensieg, “Una casa d’affitto di Bruno Taut,” 56. This and the subsequent quotes of the article are my translation.

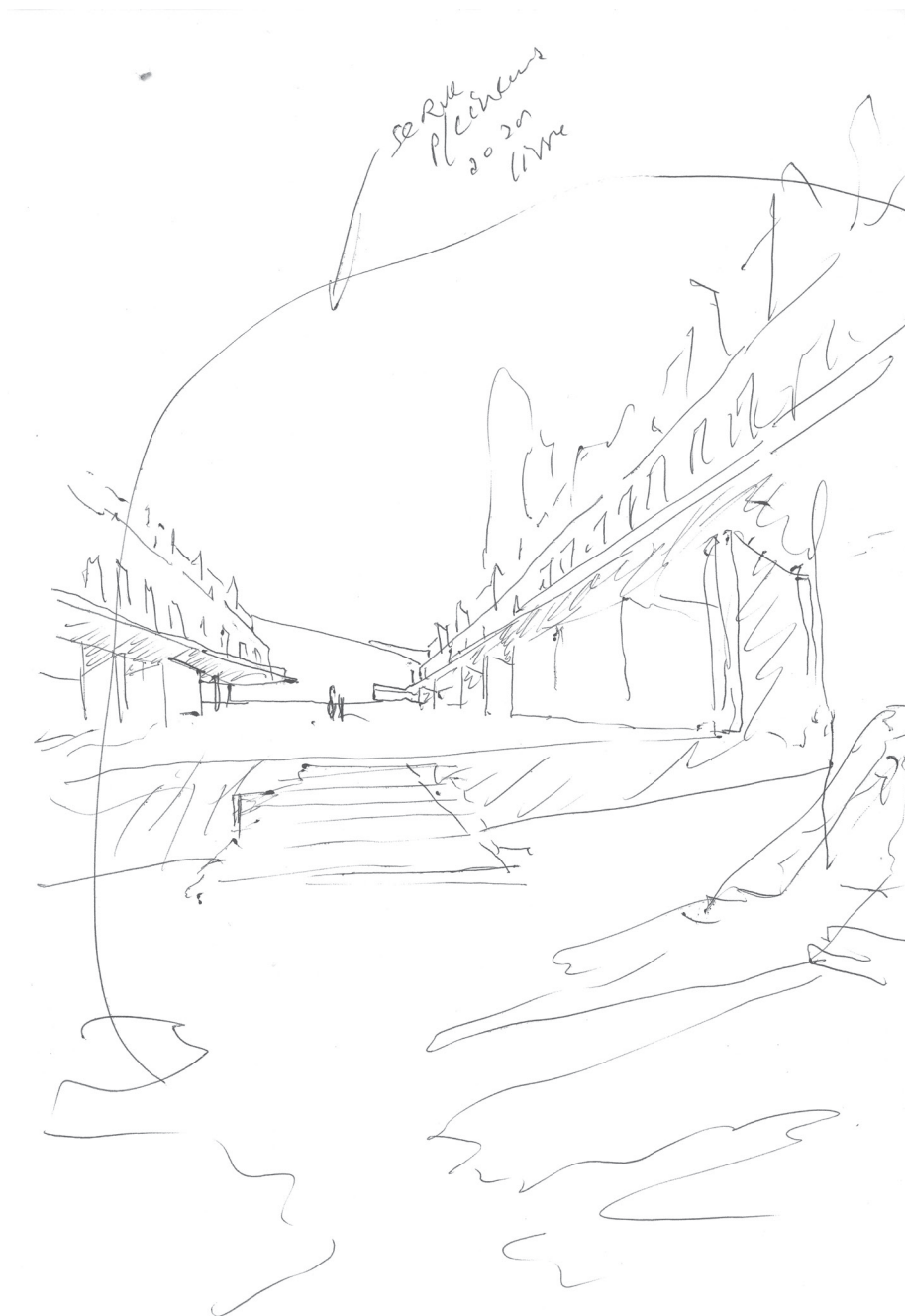


Fig. 4: Álvaro Siza, Page from Caderno 4 / Sketchbook 4 (1977). Sketch of the courtyard of Bouça housing, with a handwritten note "it can be used as an open-air cinema," Porto, 1972-2006.

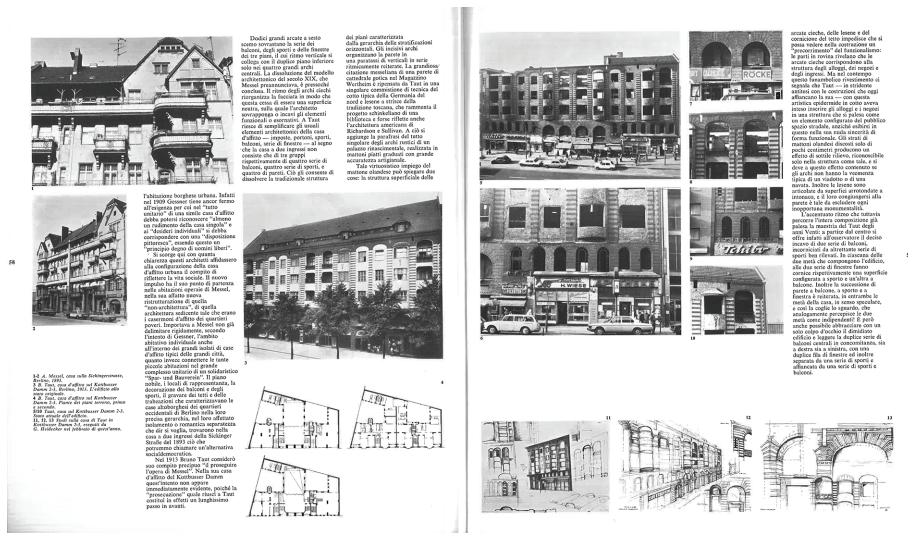


Fig. 5: Spread from Tillmann Buddesieg, "Berlino, Kottbusser Damm 2-3. Una casa d'affitto di Bruno Taut sarà demolita." *Casabella* 425 (1977). On the left page, centre, a prewar photo and the plans of Taut's apartment building in Kottbusser Damm 2-3, 1910-1911. On the right, 1970s photos of Bruno Taut's building in ruins (above), and Bruno Taut's sketches of the brickwork detail (below).

my plan like this form there."³⁹ Siza's conclusion encourages us to imagine, with the help of Buddesieg's article, his encounter with Taut's building.

Upon visiting London in 1826, Schinkel anticipated Berlin's rapid industrialization and growth and the emergence of a new kind of collective tenement house. Schinkel's problem was, in Buddesieg's words, how to give architectural form to a "construction that no ancient treatise described, when its truth can scarcely refer to the diversity of its mobile inhabitants, now transformed into buyers of goods?" Schinkel's disciples cited the façades of the classical palazzo, the orders, Buddesieg explained, to at least reach a certain urbanity, but they could not solve this dilemma organically.⁴⁰ In the best cases, the façades of 1840-1870 demonstrate, according to Buddesieg, the flexibility of a group of forms that reflected the identity of the street more than of the collective house. In the worst cases, the demographic pressure promoted the inverse: an identification between the poverty of the architecture and that of its inhabitants, or an excessive individuality.⁴¹ Taut resumed Schinkel's path, Buddesieg explained. His façade avoids both the utilitarian and the picturesque: "Twelve large round arches organize a series of balconies, projections, and windows on three levels, the vertical rhythm of which connects with the double lower floor only in the four large central arches."⁴² Instead of adding decorative elements, continued Buddesieg, Taut reorganized familiar architectural elements in a new rhythmic composition. He summoned the form of the arch and terracotta, proposing a solution of flat pilaster strips that is a cross between northern European and Tuscan traditions. He then highlighted the four central arches by employing the terracotta in that particular place with greater craftsmanship. With these subtleties, as Buddesieg noted, Taut inserted "the dwellings and shops in a structure conceived as part of the public street space, instead of simply being concerned with the sincerity of functional form."⁴³

39 Fleck, *Alvaro Siza*, 82. This photograph can be found in the CCA, Álvaro Siza fonds 1958-2002, Block 121, Schlesisches Tor residential complex.

40 Buddesieg, "Una casa d'affitto di Bruno Taut," 57.

41 Ibid., 57-58.

42 Ibid., 58.

43 Ibid., 58-60.

The description of this wall façade with a unitary but also individualized form, invites comparison with Siza's Bonjour Tristesse building (Fig. 6). Siza intuited from the start that the location of the building on a prominent block corner asked for designing the façade with a degree of autonomy from the plan. As Néelson Mota explained in great detail, the project changed many times, and it was this formal principle that allowed Siza to accommodate the numerous and often conflicting demands of the contractor and the inhabitants (the Bonjour Tristesse was a participatory project). Mota compared the successive design versions, showing that while the plan became increasingly crowded with more apartments per floor, the façade became increasingly simpler and compelling.⁴⁴ In the built version, the curving wall façade is pierced by identical window openings. The development of the project echoes with Buddensieg's observation that the program of the collective house influenced Taut toward rationalism: "the inevitable typification of the metropolitan dwelling, from an economic and technological point of view, is expressed in Taut according to a new artistic method . . . 'the simple solution with the use of broad outlines and transparent contrasts'."⁴⁵

Fleck quotes Siza saying: "No one would ever describe the developments of Bruno Taut in Berlin, Ernst May in Frankfurt, or J.J. Oud in Rotterdam as monotonous... Cheerfulness is a matter of people, not façades". Siza, continues Fleck, "may have had a sentence of Bruno Taut in mind," that is: "Let the beauty of the processes in and around the house take the place of the beauty of the house itself." On the subject of monotony Taut stated: "When the repetition, the lining up of identical building types, the rejection of variety in the form of the façade is described as monotonous, this only proves the lack of imagination, the disinterest in the real living conditions of the residents of this building."⁴⁶

Since, in the scope of this article, it will not be possible to analyze in-depth the Bonjour Tristesse, which is one of the best-known projects by Alvaro Siza, this section will conclude by mentioning two discontinued ideas raised in the design process that directly resonate with Taut's work. Firstly, the initial choice of brick as a cladding material. The client considered this too expensive, and Siza finally opted to cover the curving wall with a layer of white plaster. This solution, seemingly continuing the path pursued by Schinkel and Taut, earned the building much criticism and possibly the epithet of "Bonjour Tristesse" (after a graffito that appeared on the building's parapet). Secondly, Siza intended to build the new apartment building literally above the one-story shops that existed on the site in response to the IBA's concern about preserving the existing community and infrastructure.⁴⁷ It was seen that it was important for Taut to establish a difference between the public street space and the residential levels above. Taut emphasized this by inflecting the rhythm of the arches. Although Siza was forced to abandon his idea of preserving the existing constructions, he acknowledged Taut's principle by maintaining a horizontal separation between the two levels (i.e. using the rhythms of the fenestration and decoration) until the final built version of the project.

Forgetting Taut

A site plan (Fig. 7) shows all six buildings of Siza's Fränkeler complex, in addition to the building site on Kottbusser Strasse (upper right corner). Taut's building at Kottbusser Damm 2-3 is located on the opposite side of the Landwehrkanal. Peter Testa (a collaborator of Siza's office between 1984-1987) considered the Fränkeler project crucial for understanding Siza's theory and practice. Testa described this project as an attempt to relate conflicting orders and thus go beyond both *tabula rasa* and mimetic restoration.⁴⁸ The complex consists of five

44 Mota, "Álvaro Siza's Bonjour Tristesse," 793-796.

45 Buddensieg, "Una casa d'affitto di Bruno Taut," 60.

46 Fleck, *Alvaro Siza*, 64.

47 Mota, "Álvaro Siza's Bonjour Tristesse," 794.

48 Testa, *The Architecture of Alvaro Siza*, 45-51.

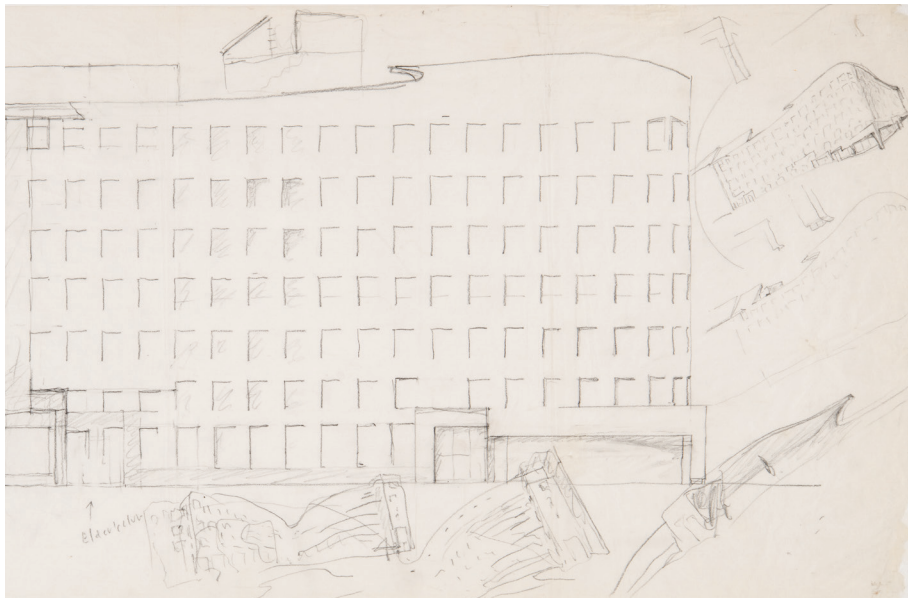


Fig. 6: Álvaro Siza, Elevation and sketches (detail), Bonjour Tristesse apartment building at Schlesisches Tor, Berlin, 1980-1984.

Fig. 7: Álvaro Siza, Site plan, Fränkelufer residential complex, Berlin, unbuilt 1979-1982. The Kottbusser Strasse site (not drawn) is in empty area on the page's top right. Bruno Taut's Kottbusser Damm building is located just outside the bottom right corner of the drawing.



independent and two linked buildings scattered across two urban blocks. Aligned in relation to each other, the six-story buildings form a distinct group, detached from the street frontage of their respective urban blocks. In each urban block, however, one of the new buildings also completes an existing empty corner, and this spatial coincidence enables the new structure to sit shoulder-to-shoulder with the old. The proposal embodies Taut's aim of matching individuality and urbanity, with Siza also using Taut's approach to rhythm, repetition, and exception. Siza's fragmented plan explores the spatial possibilities and the image of the obliterated Berlin at that time, of which Taut's ruin was an example. Siza's plan corroborates the earlier claim that the ruin would have impressed Siza more than the restored building.

The plan and elevation for the apartment building on Kottbusser Strasse (Fig. 8) show that Siza had to deal with a demolished plot that was shallow, irregular in shape, and enclosed by the rear walls of the adjacent 19th century buildings. As shown in the elevation, the triangular plan building would have appeared almost like a freestanding wall, as this construction does not touch the party walls of the buildings on either side. The inner courtyards of

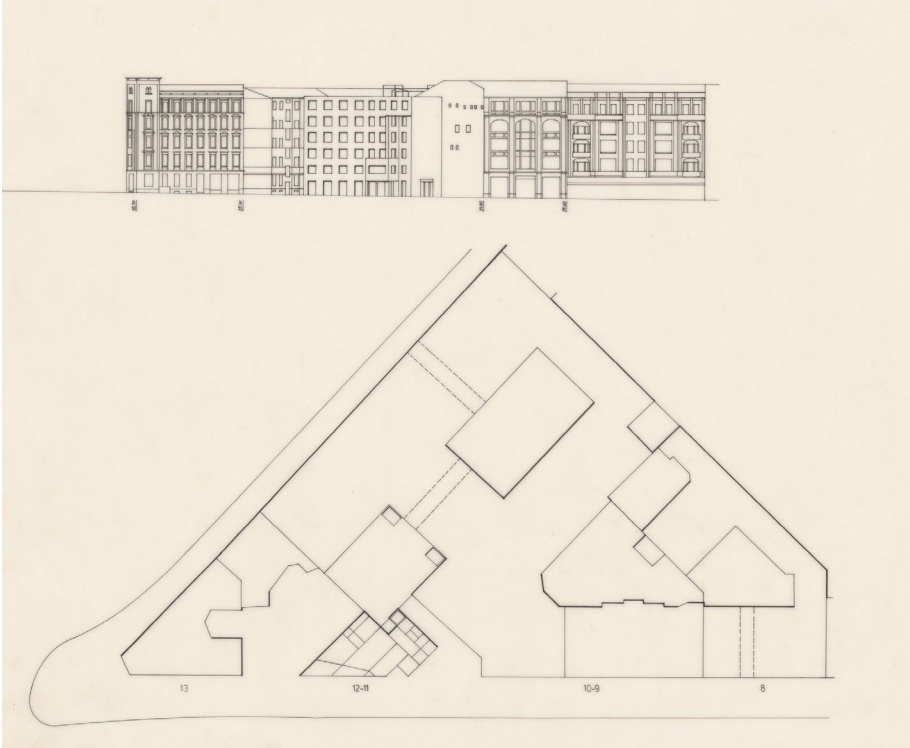
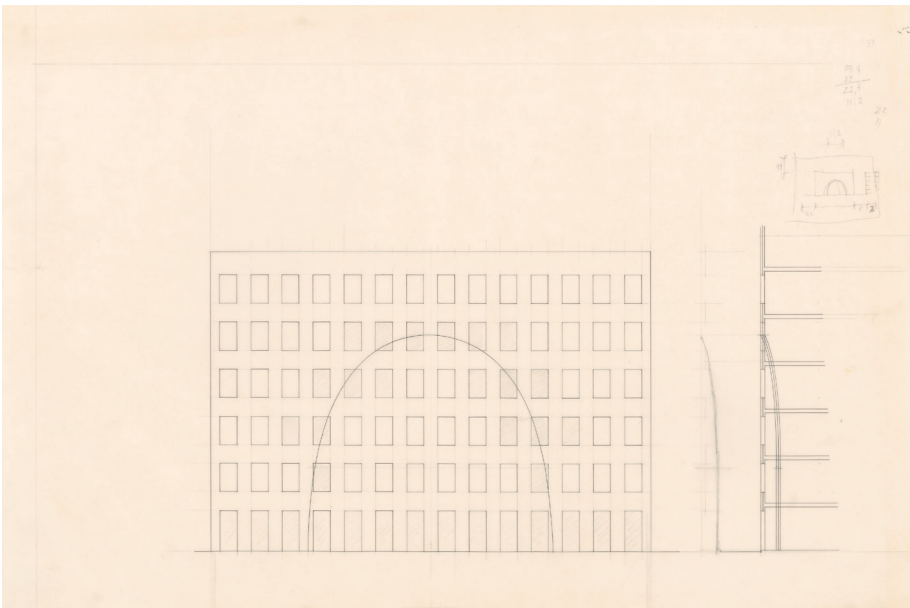


Fig. 8: Álvaro Siza, site plan and elevation (detail), Kottbusser Strasse apartment building, Berlin, unbuilt 1979-1981.

Fig. 9: Álvaro Siza, elevation and façade section, Fränkelufer – Building B, Berlin, unbuilt 1979-1982.



the *Mietskaserne*, once crowded and hidden, then forcibly exposed by the bombings and demolitions, would have remained visible through the gaps between new and old. Confronted with the ruins, Siza perhaps sensed that the reconstruction of the urban block should advance only to the extent that it did not efface the history of Berlin. On the one hand, he could only have arrived at this layered conception by observing the architectural potential that was an inadvertent result of the destruction and division of Berlin: vacant lots, access to the interiors of the blocks, and voids in the walls. On the other hand, he could not have arrived at this concept without reflecting on the fate of the modern project. As his famous adage goes: “tradition is a challenge to innovation.”⁴⁹

Finally, let us focus on the elevation of the Fränkelerufer – Building B. Siza’s design indicates a reading of the Modern Movement’s critique of the 19th century *Mietskaserne*, and to some extent it builds upon the experience of the *Siedlungen*, through which modern architects — with Taut in their forefront — sought to develop a rational organization of the house and of environment.

Like his predecessors, Siza had reservations about the economic (speculative) principle enabled by the traditional urban block. Yet, unlike them, Siza avoided its complete rejection. In other words, Siza also revised the modern experiment. Carlos Machado has connected Siza’s strategy to the influence of Aldo Rossi, whom Siza met at that time. According to Machado, Rossi’s and Siza’s ideas converge in the theory that architecture can be understood as fragments, cities made of fragments, constantly transformed and rearranged, “open and available to many uses; some of them proposed and designed, others unforeseeable.” In Berlin, noted Machado, Siza “projects the permeability of the blocks, incorporating existing inner buildings and crossings, and in some cases, proposing others to allow a more diversified and global use of the city.”⁵⁰

Building B sits deep on the lot, with its well-lit rooms overlooking the open courtyard, which also functions as an extension of the public space of the street. The arched depression on the wall façade acknowledges this dimension. The interplay created between the existing, new, and old building fragments to some extent restores the image of the compact *Mietskaserne*, but also the spatial possibilities introduced by the *Siedlungen* in the form of open courtyards, passages, and diagonal views. On a deeper inspection, the elevation, drawn in straightforward black lines on white paper, indicates a similar search for beauty through simple means: volume, arch, surface, and window.

Conclusion

This article conjectured an encounter between Siza and the ruin of a building by Taut. Under this pretext, it discussed the latter’s influence on the former; it contributed to the idea, introduced by other authors, that confrontation with ruins is part of Siza’s method of observing and transforming the existing. Hence, Siza’s encounter with the ruin of Taut’s building stands for his broader encounter with Taut’s architecture in a divided 1970s Berlin.

The ruins of an object are both less and more than it. Ruins signify loss but also essential and even potential architectural matter. For instance, it was suggested that Siza prepared the encounter by reading Taut’s work. However, the reality he found in Berlin contrasted somewhat with the idealism and heroism that emanated from publications such as *Die Stadtkrone* and *Modern Architecture*. Perhaps this gap helps explain the complexity of Siza’s understanding of the city in the context of the revision of the modern, as exemplified in the layered solutions of Siza’s housing projects. The article showed that, within the Modern Movement, Taut advanced important arguments regarding the relationship between architecture and art, craftsmanship, and the collective dimension of the profession. The focus on an early work by Taut, with the help of Buddensieg’s review, demonstrated the coherence

49 Álvaro Siza, “Vuit punts ordenats a l’atzar...,” *Quaderns d’Arquitectura i Urbanisme* 159 (1983), 78.

50 Machado, “Álvaro Siza and the Fragmented City,” 183-184.

of theory and practice. Buddensieg placed Taut in the context of the development of Berlin and the Modern Movement program. The comparisons with Siza's housing projects in Berlin indicate that, if Siza had not read the article, he had at least reached similar conclusions and applied them in his work. Although following a path that could not have been projected by Taut, Siza was guided by the latter's ambition to build a modern everyday house fully articulated with an idea of city. In some respects, this approach in Siza's work precedes his visit to Berlin, going back to his projects for Bouça and S. Vítor. It has been said that Siza uses the ruin as a reference to be transformed. Observing how Siza used Taut's example, perhaps a parallel could be drawn between his use of ruins and models. Neither one nor the other is simply accepted: they condition and are conditioned by the project.

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Fig. 2: Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (London: The Studio Limited, 1929), 110-111.

Fig. 3: Ibid., 108.

Fig. 4: Image Courtesy of Drawing Matter, Álvaro Siza, Caderno 4 / Sketchbook 4, 2506.8.

Fig. 5: Tillmann Bundesieg, "Berlino, Kottbusser Damm 2-3. Una casa d'affitto di Bruno Taut sarà demolita", *Casabella* 425 (May 1977): 58-59.

Fig. 6: Álvaro Siza fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture ©Álvaro Siza, ARCH274284.

Fig. 7: Ibid., ARCH287790 and ARCH287790.

Fig. 8: Ibid., ARCH400595.

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