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From Collection to Encyclopedia: Issues and Milestones of an Exemplary Undertaking
The Italian-Swiss architect Alberto Sartoris owes a large share of his fame to his intensive activities as a propagandist and cultural activist. From 1932 to 1967, with Milan publisher Ulrico Hoepli, he published six major works which have become legendary: the three editions, each one larger than the previous, of Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale: Synthesis panormica dell'architettura moderna (1932; 1939; 1941; 1136 illustrations); then, using the same principle of a visual panorama, the three volumes of L'Encyclopédie de l'architecture nouvelle (1948–1957, in French), which contained 2230 images, mostly photographs. These publishing undertakings, unmatched in scope and duration, were a major contribution to the establishment of a definitive reference corpus of the international Modern Movement.

The collection of photographs of modern architecture that Sartoris assembled during those 25 years was specifically for his publishing endeavors. Of this collection, over 8000 original prints remain, dating from the 1930s to the 1950s, not to mention the hundreds of photographs of Sartoris’s own architectural works and the many other later examples of iconography. Three-quarters of the prints are views of completed projects; the rest are of maquettes and of many other types of graphic representation. The collection’s documentary significance is exceptional, despite some imbalance in representation depending on the country (one third of the collection deals with Italy alone); it illustrates the founding period of the Modern Movement and its different phases of development, right up to its definitive institutionalization in the field of architecture. Almost 2000 works of architecture are included, for the most part designed prior to 1940, by some 650 architects from every continent. It encompasses most of the emblematic constructions of international modernism (in other words, primarily Western European), and many peripheral and/or “forgotten” examples.

Beyond the collection’s documentary value, its general interpretation poses multiple problems, requiring consideration of the architectural parameters appropriate to the works represented and to their creators, the distinctive qualities of the photographic images and the vantage point of the photographers, as well as the collection methods of the compiler, Sartoris. His motivations in terms of photography, and the selective use he made of this material over a quarter century, under changing historical conditions. Different prisms are thus superimposed, resulting in variable and some- times incompatible perceptions, starting of course with the differing viewpoints of architecture and photography, each with its specific values and standards of interpretation.

We will not linger at this point over the architectural dimension of the collection: it is intertwined with the now classic or canonical history of the international Modern Movement, some parts of which, it should be said, remain obscure to this day. The collection is a mirror that of necessity reflects only a partial image; the brief description offered in the second part of this book documents the movement’s structure and geography.

Instead we will first concentrate on the photographic component, which remains to a great extent to be discovered. The lack of knowledge about architectural photography is proportional to the ambivalence with which it has always been burdened, a sort of constant identity crisis. Architectural photography has traditionally been structured around three functions with loosely defined boundaries. As Eric de Maré, one of its first theoreticians, formulated these functions around 1960, they are “Record” (the raw documentation), “Illustration” (having additional aesthetic value), and “Picture” (autonomous image, independent of any architectural qualities). Photography’s original documentary mission and its conditions of production implied an absolute subordination to the purpose for which it was commissioned. It is hard to find a place for the Sartoris collection in a history of modern photography, which was characterized by a quest for autonomy particularly during the 1930s, the period that mainly interests us, marked as it was by the expression of the most extreme values of the two movements involved, Neues Bauen and Neues Sehen, in other words, the two poles of the avant-garde’s overarching mission during the 1920s.

For architects, the importance of photography grew at the same rate as the accelerated international spread of their work. The intervention of the photographer could have irremediable consequences, since it often established the definitive image of the subjects photographed: most of the major achievements of the Modern Movement were publicized, and are known even today, through a single sequence, made at a specific moment in time—in principle, between the end of construction and the arrival of the users, who could only interfere with the image of the architecture.

The Sartoris collection provides high-quality raw material for these different points of view; it should prompt many individual studies and provide fodder for discussion of the generic and functional relations between modern photography and modern architecture. We will limit ourselves here to indicating the most obvious elements as they appear in the corpus and are revealed in the uses to which they were put by the compiler or his competitors. As its second task, this introductory sketch will provide an account of the major milestones of Sartoris’s undertakings in publishing.

I. Photographing Modern Architecture: Reconstruction of its History. The first indication of the precariousness of the architectural photograph is how belatedly its historiography began to be constituted (in the 1980s) and how sparse and fragmented it remains. General accounts of architectural photography, based on a limited number of canonical situations, logically stress the era of the 19th century pioneers, who are frequently the pioneers of photography in general. These accounts tend to be studies of a particular sector or archival collection, and occasionally of particularly fertile national traditions. The first attempt at a historical synthesis has appeared only recently, as has the first study targeting the relations between photography and the Modern Movement. Similar targeting characterizes the “theme” issues of magazines—mainly architectural—which are sporadically devoted to it, with the galloping inflation typical of the media, they...
tend to stress questions related to the representation of current
architecture, to the detriment of a historical perspective. As for
monographs on architectural photographers identified as such,
they are mainly concerned with the generation that was active
after 1945. They indicate a process of dated evolution that also
remains to be studied, in which the relationship between architects
and photographers changed, and which continued until the first
signs of the role reversal illustrated in recent years in the United
States by the spectacular careers of photographers such as Ezra
Stoller and particularly Julius Shulman, who has been promoted
as the co-author or even the unique creator of Californian
architectural modernity. For the past few years, these changes,
along with the growing legitimacy of architecture as a subject in
various areas of contemporary photography (starting with Bernd
and Hilla Becher, then the Düsseldorf School), has produced,
particularly in Germany, a retrospective re-evaluation of once
ignored "documentary" practices, which are now being re-
examined with reference to the Neue Sachlichkeit (Werner Mantz,
Max Baur, Hugo and Karl-Hugo Schmölz, Ruth Lauterbach-
Baensch, etc.). Generally speaking, a historiographic outline common to the two
disciplines can serve to describe the progress of architectural
photography, given that the beginnings of photography are closely
connected with the subject of architecture and with classical
methods of representing it, particularly with regard to perspective.
In this area, photography rapidly assumed important heritage
functions (the inventory of monuments), which stimulated the
historical movement in 19th century architecture and provided it
with models. Photography was also used to illustrate the most
external manifestations of this movement, while providing no real
competition to the graphic or pictorial rendering that was the
exclusive province of architects from the Beaux-Arts tradition. But
in the opposing camp of the "engineers," it also became a very
effective tool for representing the industrial culture and thus
promoting its visual, material and spatial values. All of these
exclusively instrumental roles would orient and permanently set the
technical procedures and characteristic codes of architectural
photography, as it became a profession. Until about 1925, the
pictorialist trend, which had the manipulation of photography as
its goal, generally ignored modern architecture (in its rationalist
definition) as a motif, so it was up to the youthful tradition of
technical and commercial photography to envisage its simple
architectonic virtues and new spatial concepts, at the very time
photographs were beginning to replace drawings and picturesque
renderings in rapidly expanding publications (albums, collections,
monographs) that disseminated architectural images.

Neues Bauen and Neues Sehen, an Ambiguous Relationship.
To continue in the same vein, a schism occurred within the
international avant-garde in the 1920s, when architects and
photographers were working for the first time within a common
framework, governed, at least in theory, by relations of equality.
In their effort to revitalize experimentation with perception and
depiction in the medium of photography (the various modes of
visual manipulation originating in Dadaism and Constructivism, as
well as certain processes of the Neue Sachlichkeit), the
promoters of the New Vision (Neues Sehen) were supposedly
acting in line with the postulates of the New Architecture (Neues
Bauen). Their revelation and visual absolutization of the most
insignificant material and of the components of the urban context
are well known; László Moholy-Nagy provided a synthesis of this
work in his 1929 essay Von Material zu Architektur. But above all,
the avant-garde sought to remedy a shortcoming inherent in
photography, that is, the absence of the factor of time, by
constructing the image so as to suggest, by dynamic tension and
movement, the spatiotemporal continuum that gave substance to
architectural objects in the real world. According to Andreas Haus,
who was writing about the Bauhaus, this culminated in "a new,
artistically productive synthesis between architecture and
photography," which caused the viewer to experience spatial
organization in all its immediacy, beyond any verbal interpretation.
Raised to the rank of the "proper and ideal medium for the
existence and presentation of architecture," the New Photo-
graphy henceforth would present the structure of its subject at the
expense of its materiality and uses, asserting its subjective nature,
its existence independent of matter and time.

Despite the convergence of ideas about perception linking avant-
garde architects and photographers, and the relative parallelism
of their approaches, such an interpretation goes back to the
experimental program of the New Vision (Neues Sehen) much
more than to the actual practices of architectural photography at
that time and place. It nonetheless underlies most of the historical
literature, which provides only fragmentary, random or abstract
images, without much evidentiary value, to illustrate the
presumed homology between the two disciplines. Now it should be
emphasized that the exploratory approach of the New Photographers (if such a diverse group can be considered a
single entity) was applied only rarely to the real-world material
provided by contemporary architecture. This approach was used
to an even lesser degree for the works constructed by their New
Architecture partners (built objects which had their own manifest
technical and aesthetic values), except, of course, in montages or
collages, which in any case used "conventional" photographic
images. This phenomenon is confirmed by examining the principal
avant-garde journals and magazines of the 1920s, across all
disciplinary fields: in them, the visual experimentation of the Neues
Sehen is clearly distinguished from "photography of modern
architecture," which appears almost exclusively in its documentary
or professional form. Thus, after the "historical" models de Stijl
and L'Esprit nouveau, there were Opbouw in Amsterdam, Bois in
Vienna, Mámo and later RoDi in Prague, and 10 in Amsterdam.
The same observations are valid to a lesser extent with respect to the
"transitional" publications, henceforth dominated by architects
but attentive to photographic experimentation, which included Das
neue Frankfurt, Passagen in Warsaw, 8 de Opbouw in Amsterdam,
Opbouwen in Bruges and Finally AC in Barcelona, in which
ARCHITECTES : PRENEZ VOUS-MÊMES D'EXCELLENTES PHOTOGRAPHIES DE VOS CHANTIERS ET DE VOS CONSTRUCTIONS EN VOUS SERVANT D'UN ROLLEIFLEX

Sans vouloir médiocre des photographies professionnelles, les architectes ont tous plus ou moins constaté qu'ils leur était difficile d'obtenir certaines vues particulièrement intéressantes de leurs constructions. Pourquoi n'aprendre-ils pas eux-mêmes avec un appareil aussi simple, aussi lumineux et aussi pratiquant que le Rolleiflex?

Claire, nette, de format réel, telle apparaît l'image dans le viseur du Rolleiflex. En même temps, on juge de sa netteté et, tout en la délimitant dans le viseur, on suit les mouvements du sujet pour ne pas manquer l'instant propice au déclenchement, on peut mettre au point très exactement. Cela se fait si rapidement qu'on peut dire, sans exagérer que le Rolleiflex est, sans doute, toujours prêt. Pas d'évaluations de distances longues et compliquées à l'aide d'un instrument spécial. La netteté se met au point directement sur le verre dépoli, donc avec toute la garantie d'exactitude possible, sans la moindre perte de temps, sans détourner le regard du viseur. De cette façon, les erreurs de mise au point sont impossibles, et les images deviennent être nettes.

Le dispositif unique de mise au point permet au Rolleiflex d'utiliser en plein les plus fortes luminosités. Dans cet appareil, l'optique de la photographie n'est pas un luxe, toute augmentation de la luminosité réduisant singulièrement son rayon d'action par un temps sombre ou court, donc le rend plus indépendant de l'éclairage. Dans le Rolleiflex, la luminosité n'excède jamais le point où, à pleine ouverture la profondeur de champ et la netteté de l'image jouent dans ses limites sont encore impeccable.

Le Rolleiflex fournit des clichés clairs et nets par tous les temps et avec tous les éclairages.
experimental practices were limited to the extra-architectural domain and to advertisements. The phenomenon can be verified at another level in the copious visual material disseminated in connection with the international exhibition Pictorial and Foto (FiFo) in Stuttgart in 1929, at the height of the Neues Sehen movement: the use of contemporary architecture as a theme or pretext was extremely rare in the exhibition and in the influential publications that accompanied it, for example, Foto-auge and Es kommt der neue Fotograf. The “anti-Formalist” reaction and the reassessment of photography as documentation, which later developed in the international modernist milieu, did not have any fundamental effect on this attitude. During the 1930s, although the leaders of the Neues Sehen did not renounce their program, most of them (from Man Ray to Germaine Krull, Maurice Tabard and André Kertész, considering only the situation in Paris) practiced an informative type of photography for private and public purposes, including commissions. Historiography would deliberately forget this type of practice to obscurity. But not many of their works in this register are familiar, including photographs of structures of the Neues Bauen type, which would seem an excellent forum for their visual and spatial experimentation. The most emblematic example would again be Moholy-Nagy, in particular during his stay in Great Britain in about 1935; he created “mixed” works (documentary and experimental), published primarily in The Architectural Review, without claiming that they had any “creative” character. This dual mode of operation is also illustrated by the more discreet example of the Dutchman Jan Kamman, whose most widely disseminated “transgressive” image superimposes two canonical photos of built works by Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, who happened to be the photographer’s principal clients in a promotional practice that was mainly documentary in nature. As for the position of avowed representatives of Neue Sachlichkeit such as Renger-Patzsch, there are familiar, including photographs of structures of the Neues Bauen type, which would seem an excellent forum for their visual and spatial experimentation. The most emblematic example would again be Moholy-Nagy, in particular during his stay in Great Britain in about 1935; he created “mixed” works (documentary and experimental), published primarily in The Architectural Review, without claiming that they had any “creative” character. 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The exception that proves the rule was their colleague Philip Morton Shand, a London critic and organizer of cultural events, who in 1934 would make an argument for a conjoining of Neues Sehen and Neues Bauen in order to appeal to the subjective creativity of photographers, referring to the theories and images (very few “architectural,” in the event) of Moholy-Nagy; of course this was just at the time that Shand, who was a great collector of images, was supplying his friend Sartoris with “objective” photographic documents. The only recorded contribution by a quasi-official representative of the Modern Movement, the influential organ of the German Werkbund, Die Form, tended in contrast to warn against any arbitrariness by photographers in their representation of architecture—this on the very eve of the FiFo exhibition organized by the Werkbund to promote the Neues Sehen. Communication or Instrumentalization? A parallel development, as if in answer to the warning issued by Die Form, was the sparing use architects made of photographs of their own works that ultimately fell within the ambit of the Neues Sehen. The prototypical example, the Bauhaus in Dessau, which was photographed in 1926 by Luca Moholy in a large series considered today to be one of the exemplary achievements of the New Photography applied to the New Architecture, enables us to judge the ambiguity of the phenomenon. Walter Gropius, who commissioned the photographs, always refused to publish the image that came to be the most in demand because of its transgressive nature: the view of the glass façade of the workshops from below, all in diagonals and verticals that never seem to stand up straight, which is also the only photo of its kind. For all the dynamic nature of their construction (linear tension, angles, contrasts), the other views in the series, taken with a box camera on 18 x 24 cm plates and sometimes retouched as well as reframed at the time of printing, obey the conventions and procedures established by technical and scientific photography. Given the personality and career path of their creator, the series later came to be viewed as exemplifying a highly professionalized practice that was nonetheless inspired by the experiments of the New Photography; it showed a process of contamination or assimilation that in varying degrees would mark the activities of many of her colleagues. But this case also illustrates, even within the Bauhaus, which was the center of the institutional meeting of the two disciplines, the well-differentiated uses that devolved on the one hand upon the presentation of architecture simply as built objects, and on the other upon arbitrary visual interpretations of it: the former could emphasize certain architectural details but were to be used mainly for cultural propaganda (for example, the views from below of the
balconies of the student housing by Lux Feininger or Irene Bayer, spectacular examples, in the series Neues Sehen (the cover montages and to a lesser extent the graphic layouts of Eli Lissitzy) and the conventional nature of the photographs used. The same was true of the process of visual modernization that, starting in 1930, produced a characteristic tension for the latter magazine, which was also the house organ of the Hungarian section of CIAM, displayed a characteristic tension between the social respectability of the technical photographer (as baldly stated for a demanding practitioner: “When I ask you for two, four, ten or thirty photographs of my works (and not of yours), I require of you only a service of an industrial nature.”27 But this position appears to be in strong contradiction to the architect’s interest in the actual practice of photography (at least during his training years) and particularly to the intensive use he made of it throughout his career. The literature has more than once emphasized and analyzed his interest, without, however, discussing the creators or the conditions of production of these images28 except in a few individual situations29. The initial research into this question, which is very recent, shows the difficulty of historical reconstruction: attribution of the prints, even in an architect’s own archives, often remain problematic, and the position of Le Corbusier’s successive photographers from 1925 to 1945 (Charles Gréard, Georges Thiriet, Marius Gravot, Boissonnas, René Levy, Alain Saladin) is difficult to pinpoint, as is the nature of their relationship with the architect30. All were experienced professionals, very active in the artistic and architectural press in Paris. No technical or aesthetic analysis of their works provides a conclusive reason for their collaboration or their eventual rupture with Le Corbusier. Study of the Sartoris collection enables us—within specific limits—to lift the anonymity in which the profession in general has laboured. Two thirds of the original prints in it (about 6000 works) are signed—with a good deal of variation depending on the period and the national contests organized and publicized by Rolleiflex. But the majority of the items in the collection were produced by fewer than a hundred of them. The technical quality and the average format of the prints (18 x 24 cm), usually contact prints, indicate the “traditional” materials and procedures used (whole-plate camera, rectifier/enlarger), while their physical state, and in some cases a publisher’s copyright on the back, indicate their primary and nearly exclusive purpose: as copies for use by the press. In many cases, the presumed original state, the raw photo, has been modified by retouching the print (possibly after a touch-up brush was used on the negative), and indications of reframing may also be visible. Besides the questionable objectivity of photographic documents in general, these data make the photographer’s control of the process a relative matter at all stages of the process, and there is no possibility of specifically attributing responsibility for the successive corrections to the printer, compiler, photo-engraver, or even the architect, for these prints reveal nothing about the amount of interference by the architect, or his decision-making...
power, either before or after the photograph was actually taken. The documentation that accompanies the collection shows that Sartoris acquired its components essentially from his fellow architects (who controlled the selection of the prints but were not necessarily the initiators of the commission, which might have been the press), sometimes from another compiler or possibly from a publisher. No requests seem to have been addressed specifically to photographers, however; their names and the quality of their work are scarcely ever mentioned in the surviving correspondence.

The brief descriptions of the collection in the "national" sections provide further evidence of the very diverse conditions and methods of Sartoris's undertaking, temporally and geographically. They include the principal data about the nature of the documents and what distinguishes them technically and aesthetically, as well as the photographers who have been identified, and their positions. The limits of the available information, and in some cases its total absence, will be evident. Ideally, if the weather on each of the locations would provide welcome information. Most of the photographers are identified by their names alone. Only rarely can these names be recognized as belonging to the general history of photography, in its different hierarchical levels, national and international: they include only a few great names connected with various trends in New Photography, such as Man Ray, Rengen-Patsch, André Kertész, Germaine Krull, and, more peripherally, John Hafenstein in London, Willy Kessels in Brussels, Heinrich Höfflin in Helsinki and Ralph Steiner in New York, alongside isolated works of lesser visual power. The more substantial contributions of such photographers as Hans Finsler and Jan Kamman are evidence of a method of rigorous functionalization directly derived from the Neue Sachlichkeit in terms of material and spatial definition and construction of the image. But analogous characteristics generally apply to the work of many other professionals who emerged from the technical and especially of the Villa Savoye, but was also a prolific illustrator of the modernist Beau-Arts tradition and a supporter of the specialized press. The same eclecticism characterized his most active colleagues in Paris, such as Marc Vaux (the works of André Lurçat and Mallet-Stevens), Georges Thié (Guevrekian, Chareau, maquettes by Le Corbusier) and the veteran Albin Salaün (Michel Roux-Spitz, Lurçat and Mallet-Stevens), as well as Boissonnas in Geneva and Paris and the Chevojon studio, successor to the legendary Durandelle workshop in 1886 and a substantial contribution of such photographers as Hans Finsler and Jan Kamman

Historiography generally dates the origin of the Elementi to the founding meeting of CIAM (Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne) at La Sarraz in June 1928. To all intents and purposes, this meeting was of crucial importance to Sartoris, who was the only Italian architect on the list of participants. The project proceeded more generally from a group dynamic of the official emergence of the Modern Movement. The only authorized representative of Italy in the absence of Carlo Rava, the leader of Gruppo 7, the newcomer Sartoris spoke up only once, to propose the free publication by an Italian publisher of a "book that should conclude the conference." In the confusion that characterized CIAM's first meeting, the request received no response, but Sartoris did become the interim delegate to the CIAM executive committee on construction (CIRPAC). Sartoris's proposal for a publication was actually an addition to a plan formulated even before the La Sarraz meeting, in particular in letters to the Brussels architect Victor Bourgeois, from whom Sartoris requested photos for a "book on urban planning"; in July, an equally "urgent" request was addressed to Le Corbusier in response to "a volume on European architecture" to be published in Turin under Edouard Penicu, who had also been suggested as the publisher of the CIAM book. These are the first indications of the plan's ultimate gestation and the most widespread interest (although scarcely ever to the point of justifying the interest of historiographers): Marc Vaux and Albin Salaün in Paris, Max Krajewsky and especially Arthur Kröner in Berlin. The primary legitimacy factor-and the most fateful—of the collection was the Modern Movement—of the collection and its use, which would symbolically extend three decades later with the undermining of CIAM as an institution, as we will see.

The project proceeded more generally from a group dynamic of bringing together the achievements of the Modern Movement, and disseminating them internationally, which had already manifested itself in various ways, starting in 1926 with the failed launch of a international modernist association (AMI) initiated by the architect Victor Bourgeois, with the exhibition in Nancy by the Comité Paris-Nancy in 1926, and with the establishment of the significant and enduring Wisenshövel-Düsseldorf the following year in

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From Collection to Encyclopedia


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Stuttgart. The first CIAM itself was supposed to be accompanied by a large exhibition of photographs, “L’habitation nouvelle,” in Lausanne, which its initiator, Swiss writer and critic Paul Budry, had to abandon for lack of cooperation and—falsely—of ad hoc documents from the architects he approached.

References. This context was also marked by the proliferation, starting in Germany, of illustrated inventories of international modernism, which would be used by Sartoris as reference models. Whatever the level of compliance with the graphic principles of the Neues Sehen and the relatively conventional nature of the photographic documents used (and very exceptionally credited), they had as a common denominator the primacy of the visual over the verbal. The principal examples of these inventories have remained in Sartoris’s library, starting with Internationale Architektur by Gropius in 1925, a Bilderbuch that initiated and remained emblematic of the Bauhübeschüre series, designed by Moholy-Nagy in a format that was dynamic but not particularly transgressive, as were the exterior shots which exclusively comprise the work and which the author, moreover, described in his brief introduction as insufficient. In the same panoramic style are Adolf Behne’s Der moderne Zweckbau (Munich, 1926, in a more traditional format); Bruno Taut’s Bauen. Der neue Wohnbau (Berlin, 1927, designed to be a didactic work, with an inventive photographic layout by Johannes Molzahn); Ludwig Hilberseimer’s panorama of visual popularization Internationale Baukunst (1927, in the very widely disseminated series of Baubücher from publisher Julius Hoffmann in Stuttgart, which would include a dozen publications); and, also mainly consisting of photographs, Bauen in Frankreich by Roger Ginsburger and El Lissitzky, in the Neues Bauen in der Welt series mentioned above, published in 1930 in Vienna by Anton Schroll under the direction of Joseph Gantner. Sartoris’s library also contained volumes of a more subtle kind, such as M.S.A. (Mezinárodní soudobá architektura/’Architecture internationale d’aujourd’hui) by Karel Teige, published in Prague in the spring of 1929, the only “supra-national” work in an ambitious quadrilingual series with a systematically described mission, in which the division by countries was complemented by analytical texts, while the role of the photography, which in rare cases was experimental, was less crucial because of the detailed graphic information. There was also the second edition of the most monumental of these works, Die Baukunst der neuesten Zeit by Gustav Adolf Platz, issued by the academic publishing house Propyläen in Berlin (1930, first edition in 1927), with an ad hoc profile and presentation: 200 pages of historical analysis preceded 500 plates, sometimes prepared by the gravure process, some in color, illustrating a wide spectrum of contemporary production and its sources. In addition, there were the traditional typological collections consisting of gravure plates, henceforth to be devoted to promoting modernist achievements, for example, the major series L’art international d’aujourd’hui by the publisher Charles Moreau in Paris in 1929, which claimed to be warranted because of its new contributors (including Le Corbusier, Lurçat, etc.).
and Chareau). Less spectacularly, the formula of the international visual inventory also marked the theoretical works of certain leaders of the Modern Movement such as André Lurçat (Architecture, Paris, 1929) and Hub Hoste (Van Wonen en Bouwen, Bruges, 1930); the copies of these works in Sartoris’s collection contain personal dedications.

The trend in publishing was logically limited to the places in which the Modern Movement was most active. An initial inventory of pioneers, arguments and references was thus established, and would become historic. The trend also reached a saturation point, which the young critic Philip Johnson noticed in Germany as early as 1930 while he and Henry Russel Hitchcock were preparing the first inventory of this type for use in the United States: the exhibition "Modern Architecture" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1932, provided with an exemplary catalogue (also in the Sartoris archives) and accompanied by the soon-to-be-legendary work The International Style. The exhibition and its ancillary publications coincided exactly with the first edition of the Elementi and were a preferred source for comparison with Sartoris’s work, less for the relatively sparing and equally classical use of images than for the definition of the nature and objectives of the Modern Movement, which in New York were essentially reduced to their formal dimension.

**Fruition.** Sartoris’s anthology may seem a latecomer in the international context, but it is less so if we consider the relatively peripheral conditions, the obstacle-ridden emergence of the Modern Movement and the conflicts at work in the architectural milieu in Italy. Whatever the internal (Italian) issues, all of Sartoris’s publishing and documentary collection activities were based in Switzerland. The collection grew rapidly and was used to illustrate various articles in the Italian and then the international press. It may also have suggested to Sartoris a gigantic project for an international exhibition of modern architecture—to be a world premiere—which he proposed in 1930 to his future preface-writer Pier Maria Bardi, at that time director of the Galleria di Roma: it was to include the work of 300 architects from 27 countries, presented in six sections in the form of photographic enlargements, and would have required no less than 3000 running metres of space! Implementation of this utopian project would quickly be declared premature.

As for the publication of the anthology, it was announced on several occasions as “imminent,” usually under the title Antologia della nuova architettura europea, as early as April 1929, in the magazine Città futurista, co-edited by Sartoris and his Plastician friend Fillia. In fact it was the latter who produced the first work of this type in Italy, La Nuova Architettura (Turin, UTET, 1931), “the first book that presents the new construction forms according to their aesthetic value and their functional importance,” to echo the indulgent description by Sartoris, who contributed two texts and 100 photographs, but later declared (in private) “rather poor because of the discordant choice of the documents.” The collaboration of the two men continued in 1935 with Gli Ambienti della Nuova Architettura, devoted to interiors.
Filìa’s first album was intended as an artist’s book, with a refined graphic layout—at first glance, not very consistent with the Futurist aesthetic the author espoused—that notably experimented with varied positioning and scale for the images, which in some cases were spectacular and were reproduced by gravure printing. Consisting in part of the same photographs, Elementi differs from it in the much larger volume of iconographic material, in its more orthodox selection of subjects, and in its more classical and above all systematic presentation. The formula seemed to fit both Sartorius’s aspirations and the tradition of the Milan publishing house Ulrico Hoepli, founded in 1870, generalist but with a mainly scientific and technical orientation. In 1932, the catalogue of Hoepli’s general technical section included more than 800 titles, including about a hundred in the category “Science of construction and architecture”: these are essentially technical manuals and treatises.

The circumstances that led Sartorius to the Hoepli publishing house in 1931 are not known. Polerically, ideologically and aesthetically weighty, his work would at first glance seem incongruous in that setting, even if the publisher stressed its practical aspect, useful for “any builder.” The only other representative of the Modern Movement in Italy on the Hoepli list was Enrico Griffini, with a work that was in fact technical in nature, Costruzione razionale della casa, published the same year. Sartorius was able to exploit, in form and subject, the tension between activism and encyclopedic ambitions. However, in 1933, Ulrico Hoepli rejected another project by the young architect, entitled Pittura e scultura moderna, because, for one thing, it implied a critical approach deemed to be dangerous, rather than a scientific type of collection. But the Hoepli publishing house, particularly after the death of its founder Ulrico Hoepli and his replacement in 1935 by his son Carlo, would continue until the war to publish numerous other promotional works devoted to “modern architecture,” partly in connection with the Milan Triennale, often similar in presentation and written by authors with their origins in the same milieu: in 1941, when the third edition of Elementi was published, there would be some 15 such works, including three volumes by Agnoldomenico Pica (Nuova architettura italiana in 1937, Nuova architettura nel mondo in 1938, Architettura moderna in Italia in 1941) and various generic or typological inventories by such authors as Roberto Aloi, Mario Labò Piero Bottoni and Giuseppe Pagano.

Structure. Physically, Elementi stood out from all its international predecessors because of its generous quartio format and volume and the quality of the paper, linen binding, simple typography and printing (by the Milan printer Stucchi). These indications of good manufacture and visual comfort were also evident in the iconographic component, and therefore in the photographs, as in the case shown in the photogravure reproductions (by Zincografica Monzani) and in the ample format (up to 22 x 16 cm), enhanced by a layout that usually presented a single image per page. The work consisted first of a sporadically illustrated text (56 pages out of the 540 in the first edition), then the “panoramic synthesis of modern architecture” that was the centerpiece of the work. The “300 illustrations” mentioned to Le Corbusier in June 1931 would grow to 676 within a few months. The same structure was maintained in the three editions, each larger than the last only because of the additional images (1 135 in the 950-page 1941 edition). As well as a dedication, successively to Arrabile Rigotti (Sartorius’s first teacher in Turin) and to the writer Paul Badut, the volumes contain a preface by Le Corbusier in the form of a letter dated 10 June 1931. It is as ambiguous as it is brief. Asked to give his imprimatur, Le Corbusier preferred to question the pertinence of the terms in the title of the work: “rational” architecture, as it was then called, then “functional” (white “elements” referred to the Dutch tradition of Mondrian and Van Doesburg). In light of the infinite aesthetic and social mission Le Corbusier envisaged for architecture, he deployed the restrictive definition. This preface would be used as late as 1948—in this last case in its original French version—in the first volume of the Encyclopédie de l’architecture nouvelle. In the 1932 edition, it was followed by a general presentation of the issues of modern architecture by an Italian journalist from Geneva, Carlo Ciucci, which was replaced in 1935 by a more polemical and personalized text by Pietro Maria Barni. To this was added an unequivocal paean of praise (collaudo) by academy member Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who placed Sartorius’s undertaking within the great tradition of Futurism. As for the author’s general introduction, which is found in all three editions, it consists of eight chapters that present the context (the “mechanical civilization”), the arguments, the theoretical justifications, the systems (in particular originating in the movements of the artistic avant-garde), the methods and materials, and finally the “formulas” of an architecture alternatively termed “modern,” “rational” and “functional.” Divided between an immanent concept of architecture and the primarily technical and social issues contingent on recent changes to it, the arguments, in which intentionally rhetorical generalization predominates over the use of examples, recapitulate a broad range of international debates from the preceding decade. Its ambivalent nature has frequently been described, as has its strategic dimension (given Sartorius’s extra-territorial position, as it were, in the context of Fascist Italy), based as it was on the tension between the affirmation of national or more broadly “Latin” primacy and the new architecture’s aspiration to universality. The “panoramic synthesis” in images offered a completely different version of the same raw material. Presented in “national” sections, necessarily of unequal weight but classified in alphabetical order to provide a semblance of objectivity, it suggested the triumphant internationalization of modernist models. From this standpoint, the panorama seemed much more extensive than all those that preceded it on the same terrain (such as the volumes by Platz, Hilberseimer and Teige): 25 countries (and 140 architects) were represented in 1932, and they would increase to 57 countries (and 190 architects) in 1941, a figure that was certainly boosted by a world situation in which geopolitical divisions were proliferating, but that also fit the cumulative rationale of the author. This rationale quickly re-established a dual hierarchy: between...
and within geographical locations. The resulting recognition of various national and personal achievements would evolve over the course of the decade. It reflected the decline of the German movement, which had logically been favored in 1932 and then reduced to its historical dimension after the advent of the Nazis, and the stagnation of its French opposite number, as well as the emergence of new centers of reference such as Great Britain, to all intents and purposes absent in 1932, and particularly Italy, of course, which was already over-represented. On a personal level, only a limited number of protagonists would see their position confirmed or established, starting with such founding figures as Gropius, Le Corbusier and Oud, and later including Aalto, Neutra and Terragni, not to mention Sartoris himself.

These considerations of status were evidence of a clear hierarchy of authority that continues to be an organizing factor in our image of the Modern Movement today. They take on additional significance in regard to the various national situations analyzed later on in the description of the collection, which contain, case by case, basic information that is useful for an understanding of the system of selecting subjects and images and of their continuance or replacement in successive editions; also useful are the texts describing or justifying Sartoris's choices. Of course, these data are also relevant to the partially common corpus in the volumes of the post-war Encyclopédie, which was constructed according to the same model as Elementi despite some replacement of an activist stance by a historical or even historiosophic interpretation, as the change in title forcibly suggests.

In all the volumes, the presentation of the images was organized according to the principle of accumulation and within the same homogeneous framework (with undifferentiated formats and layouts). While graphic representations were still numerous in the first edition of Elementi, starting in 1935 photographs would predominate in a proportion of 80%, irregularly interspersed with drawings and plans. Independently of their selection by the compiler, who eventually published about a third of the prints in his collection, these photos reflected the qualitative characteristics of the collection which have already been discussed. Their primary effectiveness stemmed from their quantity, their generous size (which was used in its full width, with horizontal prints being reproduced on their sides) and even their apparent repetitiveness. In fact, just as the number of constructions deemed worthy of dissemination tended to increase from one edition to the next, so did the number of photos documenting each subject, culminating in the Encyclopédie. Rare or very limited in the German panoramas of the 1930s described above, these extended sequences were another distinctive feature of Sartoris's anthologies which demonstrated an intent to show as many aspects of a building as possible, no matter whether this produced an effect of redundancy reinforced by the regularity of the format and the central placement. It was as though, beyond the "evidentiary value" inherent in photography, this cumulative principle, already tried and tested extensively and in many forms by Modernism and especially Futurism, was being used in an attempt to strengthen photography's authority and force as evidence still further. When the book was launched at the Galleria del Milione in Milan, a particularly dynamic synthesis of it was provided by the publicity montages by Gino Ghiringhelli and Luigi Figgini; thousands of copies of them were distributed in the form of tracts.

Dissemination and Reception. The first edition of Elementi was published in the spring of 1932, and the original printing of 1400 copies was quickly sold out. A year later, a second edition was already under consideration and Ulrico Hoepli was making suggestions about it: limiting the number of reproductions to under 600, eliminating works without value, replacing planned works by photos of completed projects, adding plans and cross-sections that the intended audience ("builders") would find useful, reducing the disproportionate amount of space devoted to Italy and particularly to the author. From Hoepli's standpoint, these were the preconditions for the work becoming a "classic of the genre." Sartoris compiled, more or less, at least in the second edition—indeed, in the event, the volume would practically double in size in 1941 and the Italian representation would increase even more. There was also discussion (with no practical consequences) of a French version, then a British one; the latter question would be raised again in 1934 via Raymond McGrath, on the basis of the second Italian edition then in preparation. The 1380 copies of that second edition, published in the spring of 1935, sold at a slower rate, and its sales did not justify the ultimate monumental version until 1941, after the war was under way. In October 1942, the major part of the printing of 1800 copies escaped the destruction of the Hoepli inventory in a bombing raid by the Allies, but most of the printing plates were destroyed and had to be redone for later editions.

Sales of the book were more than honorable, given the state of crisis and then war that marked Italy during the decade, but it does not seem to have received the enthusiastic reception the author expected. Despite its launch with great fanfare at the Galleria del Milione, the center of activity of the Milan avant-garde, Sartoris complained to his confidential Bard in particular about the indifference of the regional milieu, which practically amounted to a boycott. It is true that accounts of the first edition were fairly sparse in Italy as elsewhere, and the situation was repeated even more strikingly in 1935. Bard brought up the claim of a conspiracy of silence in his introduction to this second edition (pp. 3-5), to stress even more forcefully the fate of the Elementi internationally, and its multiple role of revealing (particularly in Italy), confirming, and providing a reference for "contemporary principles." There are similar descriptions in certain letters, for example from Sartoris's future competitor in Zurich, Alfred Roth, and in most of the accounts that have been found, usually from peripheral locations. In Paris, however, the editor of L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui gave a summary execution to "this book about which people have been talking so much" (a way of confirming it renown): "an uninteresting sequence of photographs, almost all of which have been known for a long time, without any logical order, without comments,
The structure and classification method, selection of subjects, and "confused, prolix" theoretical statements were all discredited. From the standpoint of the opulent Paris magazine, the argument that it had all been seen before was not irrelevant; during its first two years of activity, L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui had in effect published practically all the recent constructions reproduced by Sartoris and many others besides, given the magazine's eclectic profile—"with in general the same photographs but with more complete sequences and a more varied layout." But that argument blurs the distinction between the theoretical functions of periodicals, which are supposed to disseminate current events, and works of synthesis, which are dedicated to the canonization of models. The impact and the reference function of Elementi and the Encyclopédie still call for analysis from that last perspective. It was difficult to come to a unanimous conclusion about the anthologies during the 1930s, when despite a resurgence of traditionalism that was supposed to disqualify the modernist paradigm, their growing institutionalization went hand in hand with their popularization and diversification. The Italian anthologies published by Hoepli (and other publishers) at the time provide evidence of this, as do those designed by Sartoris's friends and colleagues in London, including Raymond McGrath (Twentieth Century House, 1934) and particularly Francis R. S. Yorke, the author of three shorter profiles for the publisher The Architectural Press: The Modern House (devoted to single-family dwellings, with three successively larger editions from 1934 to 1937), The Modern Flat (multiple-unit housing, 1937, with Frederick Gibberd) and The Modern House in England (1937).

These publications, which attested to a strong market demand even at that date, also showed certain analogies in structure (division by country) and similarities in details (even the typography) to the model of the Elementi, not to mention the photographs that Sartoris and Yorke frequently exchanged. However, the approach adopted by the Londoner is analytic rather than cumulative, despite the large number of architects and subjects represented (between 50 and 100, depending on the work, for the limited period from 1934 or 1927 to 1937), as is the method of presentation of the constructions and their images, which is systematic and visually diversified, and includes comments. This approach prefigured a type of international inventory that would soon make its mark as an alternative model, an example is Alfred Roth's trilingual Die Neue Architektur, published in 1940 and based on a detailed analysis of 20 subjects exemplifying the past decade, according to a list of factors: functional organization, technical achievement, economic factors, and aesthetic synthesis. Theodorisch Ueberreiter in 1943, again by Hoepli (the manuscript was ready for printing by the summer of 1942), which would have two subsequent editions, the last in 1949. These were thick, small-format volumes, mainly discursive, in which the author, in a dozen chapters, developed the different topics he had first discussed in his works in the 1930s. The photographic illustrations, usually taken from the Elementi and therefore from the collection, were still copious (151 plates out of 363 pages in the 1943 and 1944 editions; 190 out of 676 pages in 1949), and often in the form of a full page facing the text. Photographs were also used for the covers of each edition, with emblematic views of Schumacher's Schumacher's, then Terragni's Frigerio House, and finally the photographer Ben Schram's view from below—of course not credited—of the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building by Howe and Lescarce. Sartoris did not consider abandoning his "panoramic" undertaking in the new post-war context. In 1945, he resumed his quest for documents in the international community; he had in mind a fourth edition of the Elementi, which continued to be so named in documents until 1946. We do not know the specific circumstances that led him, once again with Carlo Hoepli, to reorient the project toward the form of the Encyclopédie, in French, in which the presumed universality of the new architecture would be divided into broad geocultural zones described in terms of "order" and "spirit." Its precise history remains to be established and interpreted, in the light of new conditions in the publishing market and the field of architecture, but also in respect to Sartoris's personal situation and the development of his ideas.

With 520 pages and 510 illustrations, the first volume, subtitled "Ordre et esprit méditerraneens," was published in 1948 in 4000 copies, still with the original preface by Le Corbusier and an introduction by the French-Swiss poet Edmund Humeau, who presented the work as complementing the Elementi. Only nine countries are represented (very unevenly), including Switzerland, Austria and Hungary, with Italy having a crucial advantage with half of the images and almost all the new documentation of the decade. This fact makes it easier to understand the need for a second, much larger edition (683 pages), which appeared only in 1957; the new iconographic material was, however, again essentially to the advantage of Italy, as well as the flourishing new architecture of Catalonia. Completion of the subsequent volumes, which were announced immediately, would take over a decade. "Ordre et climats américains" (over 800 illustrations) would appear in 1964, before the "Nordic" volume, with 740 illustrations, an example is Alfred Roth's trilingual Die Neue Architektur, published in 1940 and based on an extended analysis of 20 subjects exemplifying the past decade, according to a list of factors: functional organization, technical achievement, economic factors, and aesthetic synthesis. Reorientation and Continuity. It seemed that this development would undermine the value of the formula used by the Elementi. Sartoris himself responded to the new situation with a work that was entirely different in nature, Introduzione alla architettura moderna, published in 1943, again by Hoepli (the manuscript was ready for printing by the summer of 1942), which would have two
reached such a peak that it left the reader with a hazy picture of the evolution of the architectural qualities of the works photographed, which were sometimes separated by a half century, and blurred the technical and aesthetic changes in the photographs themselves, as manifested during the 1940s and 1950s in the United States, Mexico and Catalonia especially. Whether deliberate or not, this approach was consistent with the introductory remarks of the Encyclopédie, which were above all intended to demonstrate the principle of continuity that connected authentically new architecture with the classical (Latin) sources of rationalism.

The critical fate of the Encyclopédie, even more than that of the Elementi, is not well known, but the book seems to have elicited a mixture of indulgent approval in general, along with acerbic criticism of its ideological positions. We must remember that the last three volumes appeared in a context of crisis and challenge to the postulates of the Modern Movement, as evidenced in particular by the decline and death throes of CIAM, so closely associated with the genesis of the Elementi project; CIAM would be officially disbanded in 1959. It was logical that this state of affairs would also mark the end of Sartoris’s “historical” collection and its dissemination. He would continue the latter activity on a lesser scale until 1960 in the Swiss annual Architecture-Formes-Functions. From then on, his great anthologies would function as a vast inventory of high-quality images, drawn upon by many researchers, just at the time the historiography of the Modern Movement as a well-defined phenomenon was being established: one of its first proponents, Leonardo Benevolo, is said to have made ample use of these works in his History of Modern Architecture, resulting in rapid worldwide dissemination of the images through the many translations of his book.

It was natural that historical distance, added to the increasing rarity of these books on the market, would subsequently amplify the significance of the Elementi—and particularly of the first edition—as a specifically paradigmatic work, instead of as the comprehensive survey the Encyclopédie was intended to be. This status would receive final confirmation in the late 1980s, with Sartoris’s several abortive attempts at republication with various international publishing houses. These efforts would conclude with Taschen’s publishing a volume that, significantly, combined the Elementi (for the images) with another work of the same period, The International Style by Hitchcock and Johnson (for its stylistic interpretation of the Modern Movement). The original qualities of the photographs, reproduced from photogravures published for the most part by Sartoris, were effaced in order to create a pure effigy, fetishized and disembodied. Despite a suit brought by Sartoris, this new work, Functional Architecture: The International Style, 1925–1940, would become in its turn the internationally accepted inventory of reference.

Epilogue: Sartoris and Photography, Paradox or Inevitability?

None of the available accounts of Sartoris’s publications, and no other personal documents by or addressed to him, report any kind of attention—other than documentary—to the quality of the
thousands of photographs he collected, compiled, conserved and published. Sartoris, who at times took souvenir photos, entrusted the photographing of his own architecture to good local photographers (Emile Gos and Jechiel Feldstein in Lausanne, Oscar Darbellay in Martigny), who were occasionally motivated by a desire to experiment (for example, Grete Hubacher, connected with the Neues Bauhaus and Neues Sehen movements in Zurich, in the case of the Cercle de l’Ermitage in Epesses). Sartoris published only a very limited number of views—never transgressive—out of these several hundred photographs, mostly unfamiliar and to date never studied.

In a more general sense, there is no evidence, either in his many writings or in his own behavior, that he had any real interest in photography as a medium. On various occasions, however, he had a close relationship with some outstanding practitioners of visual experimentation. His collection, undertaken at the time of the first CIAM in 1928, was built at the apogee of the Neues Sehen. In 1929, moreover, he himself participated, without much motivation, in one of its landmark manifestations, the Congrès international du Cinéma indépendant (International Congress of Independent Filmmakers), along with such eminent filmmakers as Sergei Eisenstein and Hans Richter. At the Maison des artistes at La Sarraz, he rubbed shoulders with other emblematic activists, starting with Laszlo Moholy-Nagy in 1930. The next influences on Sartoris were the Milanese environment of the Galleria del Milione, the remarkable visual inventiveness of Persico and Pagano—the latter a genuine adversary of Sartoris on a personal level—as heads of Casabella, and then the equal inventiveness shown by his confidant Bardi in Quadrante, not to mention the "paraphotographic" works of Luigi Veronesi of the Como group. All of these activities were documented in Sartoris’s library (in the absence of any work specifically devoted to the New Photography other than the Bauhausbuch by Moholy-Nagy entitled Malerei, Fotografie, Film) by publications or magazines such as Campo grafico which were at the leading edge of European graphic design. They seem to have had no effect on his grasp or use of the photographic image, either in relation to architecture or otherwise.

Nor did photography have a place in the “contemporary museum” whose ideal organization he described for the preparatory congress organized on this topic in La Sarraz in 1931, except under the specialized heading of “filmism” or in the very general category of the “new viewpoint”. But the major evidence of his indifference is his publishing activity, including his anthologies: the medium of photography never attained the status of the “modern art” whose organic communication with architecture he emphasized and illustrated constantly. To him, modern art consisted of painting (Cubism, Futurism, “constructive” abstraction originating in Neo-Plasticism and Suprematism, and eventually Pittura Metafisica), occasionally sculpture, and even various forms of para-architectural spatial environments which could marginally use photographic material, such as the work of his friend Marcello Nizzoli.

The case of the eleven prints that Moholy-Nagy sent Sartoris in 1936 for publication in the Elementi shows the situation in a
44 Letter from Sartoris to Le Corbusier, 3 June 1931, requesting an already promised preface and supplementary iconographic material, Paris, Fondation Le Corbusier.
46 "Gebrauch der architektur als manifest";
47 "Die Neue Architektur (documentation in Sartoris’s archives).
48 See also the critical bibliography by SOMMELLA, Marina, "L’immagine di architettura come manifesto razionalista", in IDEM (ed.), "L’architettura come manifesto razionalista", in ed. (s. europeo, 1989, no. 4, pp. 89–99.
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