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The Painter's Modern Life

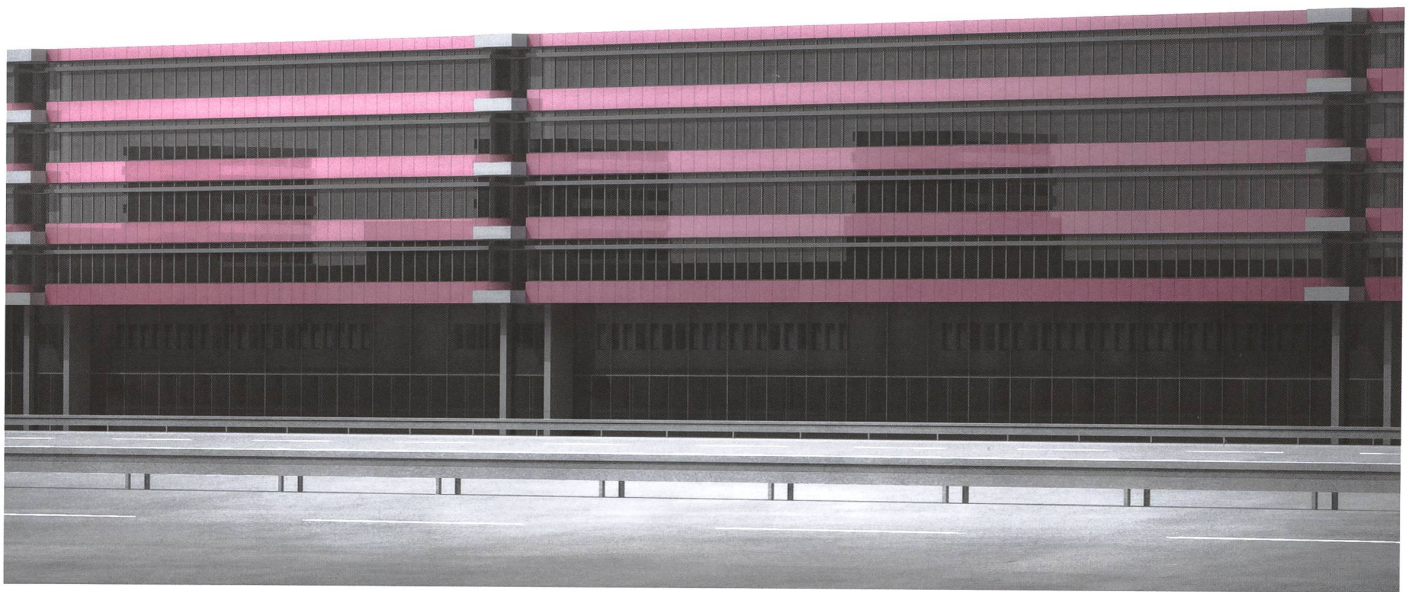
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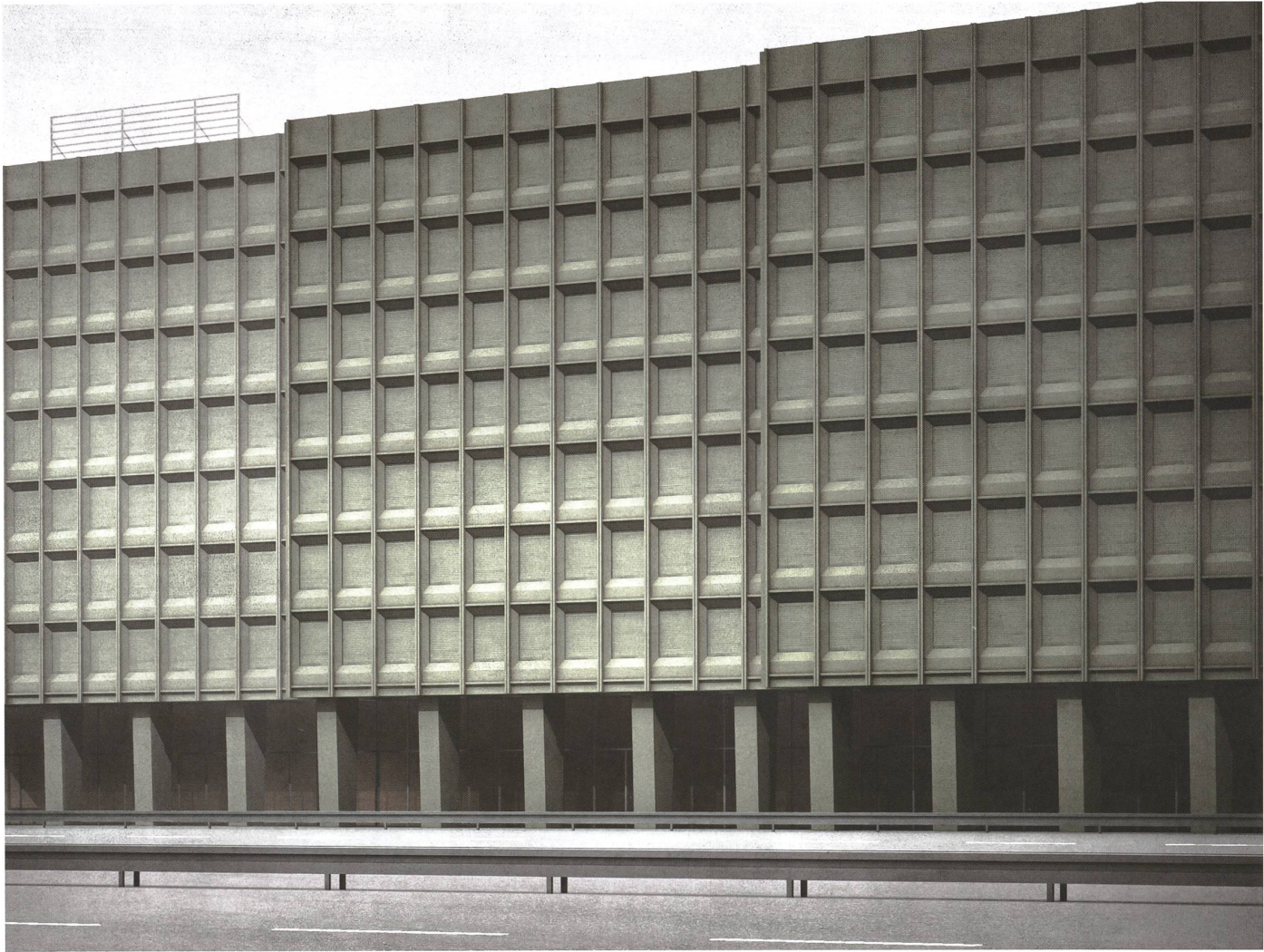
*Tiago P. Borges*



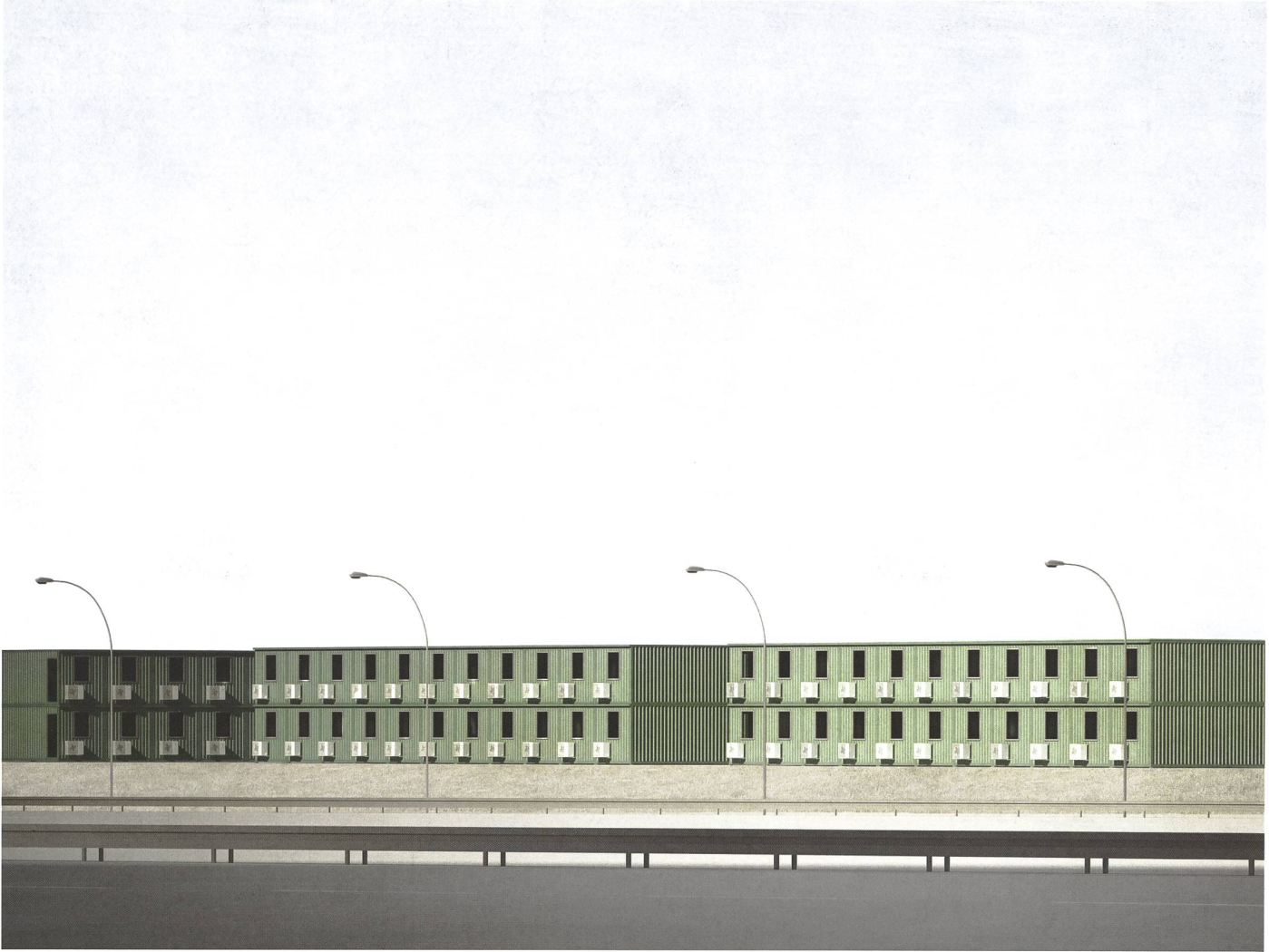


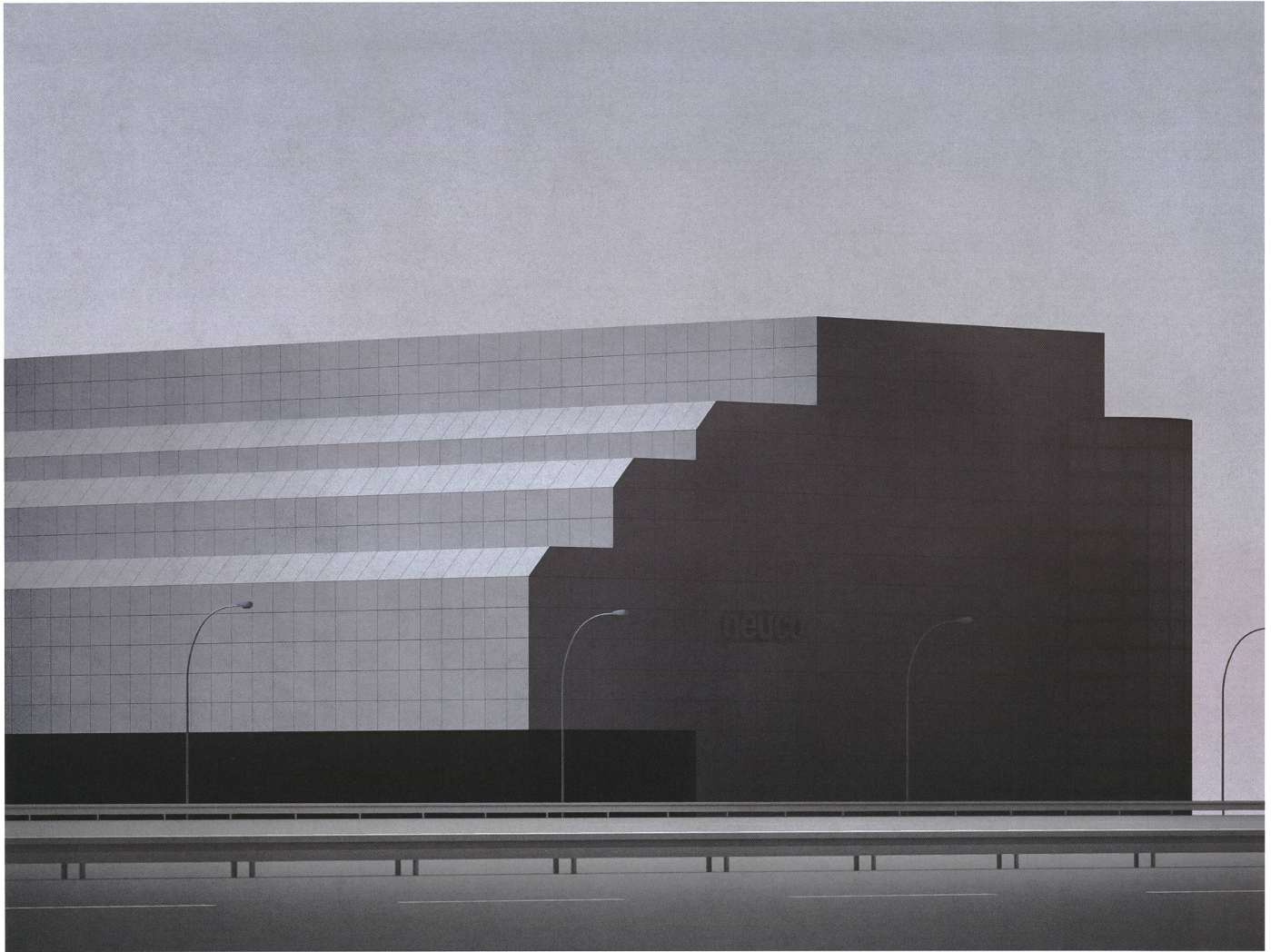




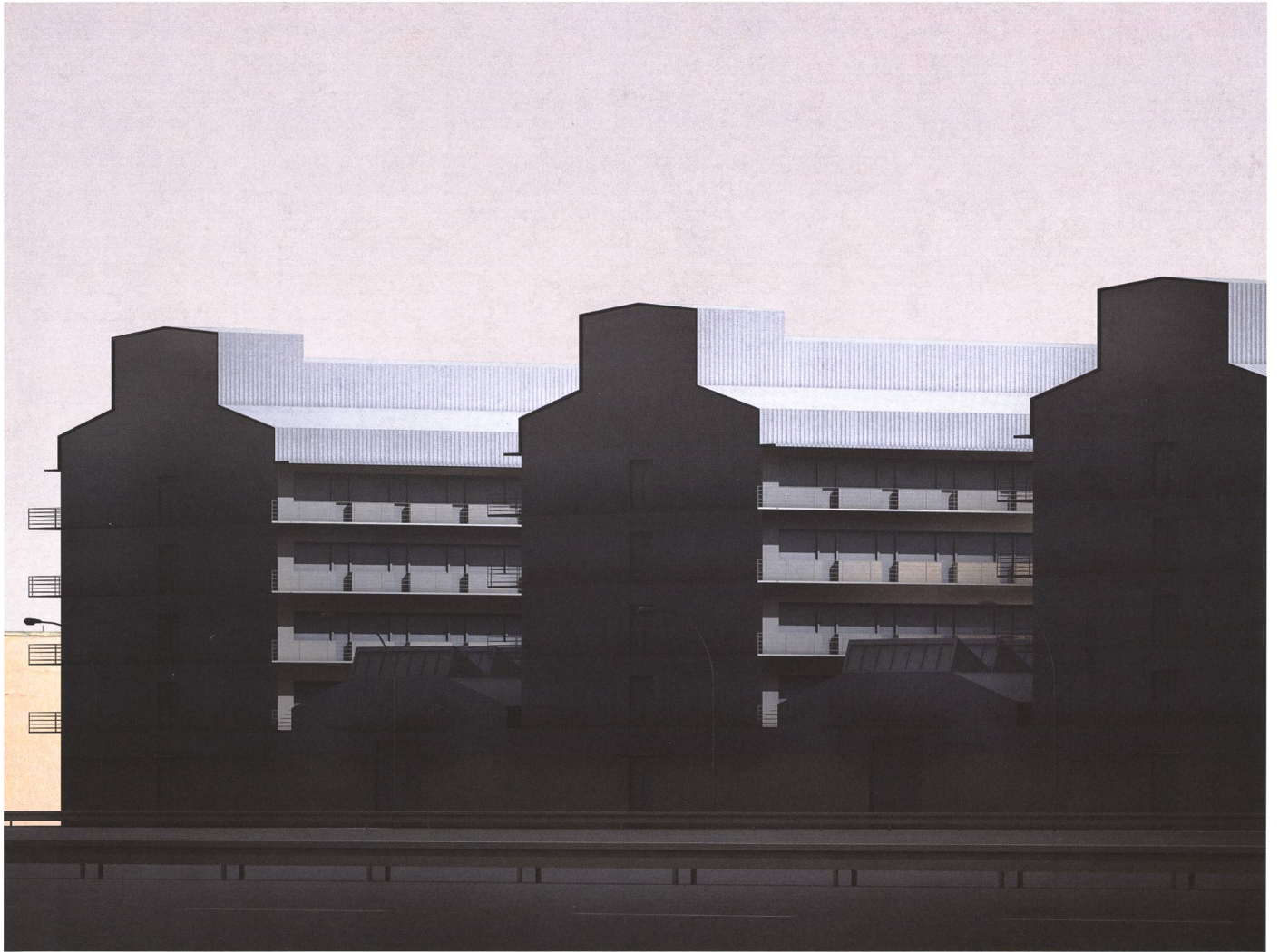


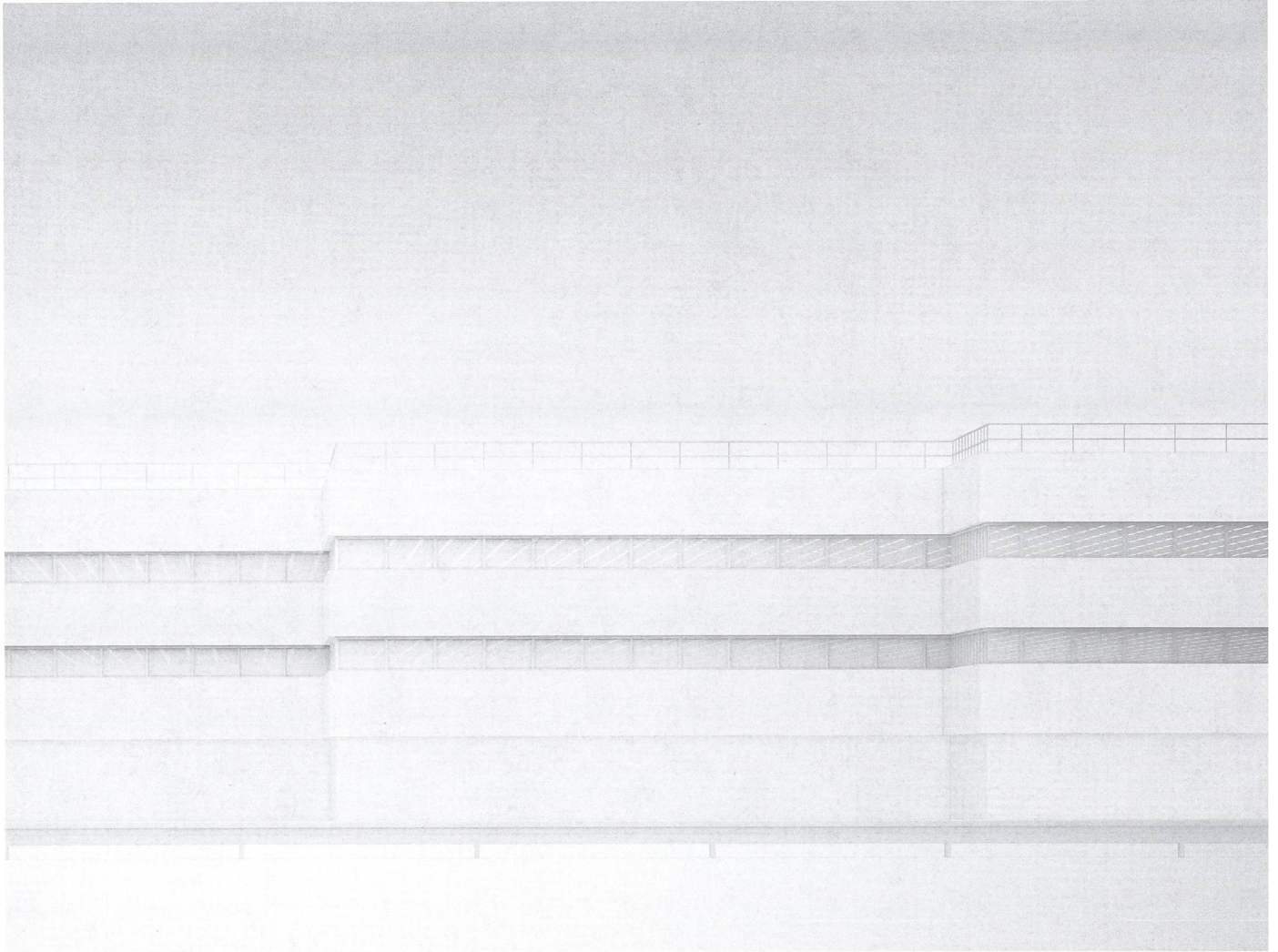














«And so away he goes, hurrying, searching. But searching for what?»<sup>1</sup>

For over more than a decade, between 1988–98, Mr. W drove through Bernerstrasse Nord. He took this road an uncountable number of times, as slow as the highway allowed. He took his time for two main reasons: the architecture and the essays of Charles Baudelaire. Mr. W never read Baudelaire's complete works, but those he did, he memorized. There was one that Mr. W enjoyed with particular interest: the «Mnemonic Art»<sup>2</sup>.

«As a matter of fact, all good and true draughtsmen draw from the image imprinted on their brains, and not from nature.»<sup>3</sup>

The architecture at Bernerstrasse Nord was neither remarkable nor exceptional, on the contrary. Mr. W was neither an architect nor an artist, on the contrary. Mr. W worked in a financial department and during the weekends he read the «Mnemonic Art» and he drew. He drew the Bernerstrasse Nord. Mr. W liked it when deserted and this maybe explains why he only drove during weekends. As a matter of fact, Mr. W was convinced that only Sunday's sunsets could truthfully illuminate those anonymous facades and he refused to discuss his beliefs.

«In this way a struggle is launched between the will to see all and forget nothing and the faculty of memory, which has formed the habit of a lively absorption of general colour and of silhouette, the arabesque of contour.»<sup>4</sup>

Mr. W was not Constantin Guys, and Bernerstrasse Nord was not *Main Street*, nor was it *almost alright*. Mr. W's street was made up of segments, stripes of facades without beginning or end. It was a continuous assembling line of windows that Mr. W only saw from the window of his 1987 SAAB 900.<sup>5</sup> Driving through Bernerstrasse Nord was a way of seeing, not as it really was, but how it could be. *Mr. W loves Bernerstrasse Nord* (almost) like *Reyner Banham loves Los Angeles*. In the driver's seat, Mr. W tuned scale, distance and framed. In the driver's seat, he flattened all perspectives the best he could.

«It possesses one outstanding virtue, which is that, at no matter what stage in its execution, each drawing has a sufficiently finished look; call it a study if you will, but you will have to admit that it is a perfect study.»<sup>6</sup>

Despite obvious resemblances, Mr. W's buildings were not copies of the Bernerstrasse Nord architecture. One couldn't call it a copy when the process of copying became a way of conception. Mr. W invented reality from his memory and his daily temperament. He refined it. Without any heroic motivation, he trimmed extensions and annexes, he removed faded neon lights and superfluous add-ons so necessary to daily life. Mr. W wanted to rescue each one of those buildings, and he knew it could only be done with the tip of his Rotring on Sunday afternoons. He focused on repetition to create differences and he stopped drawing when he was fulfilled or when he was hungry. The drawings of Mr. W weren't brushed up realities but real fictions.

«Every now and then he will run through them and examine them, and then select a few in order to carry them a stage further, to intensify the shadows and gradually to heighten the lights.»<sup>7</sup>

1 Charles Baudelaire, Jonathan Mayne (transl). *The Painter Of Modern Life: And Other Essays* By Charles Baudelaire ; Translated And Edited By Jonathan Mayne, 1st ed, London: Phaidon, 1964, p. 12. Original text: «Ainsi il va, il court, il cherche. Que cherche-t-il ?»

2 The Mnemonic Art is the fifth chapter of *The Painter of Modern Life* by Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867)

3 Ibid, p.16. Original text: «En fait, tous les bons et vrais dessinateurs dessinent d'après l'image écrite dans leur cerveau, et non d'après la nature.»

4 Ibid, p.17. Original text: «Il s'établit alors un duel entre la volonté de tout voir, de ne rien oublier, et la faculté de la mémoire qui a pris l'habitude d'absorber vivement la couleur générale et la silhouette, l'arabesque du contour.»

5 Mr. W's first car was a Citroen DS that he sold in the same year he bought his first computer. In that year he also sold two of his three «Rotring Isograph», 0,2mm and 0,5mm. He kept the thinner.

6 Charles Baudelaire, Jonathan Mayne. op. cit., p. 18. Original text: «Elle a cet incomparable avantage, qu'à n'importe quel point de son progrès, chaque dessin a l'air suffisamment fini ; vous nommerez cela une ébauche si vous voulez, mais ébauche parfaite.»

7 Charles Baudelaire, Jonathan Mayne. op. cit., p. 18. Original text: «De temps à autre il les parcourt, les feuillette, les examine, et puis il en choisit quelques-uns dont il augmente plus ou moins l'intensité, dont il charge les ombres et allume progressivement les lumières.»

Tiago P. Borges, born 1983, is an architect and researcher based in Lausanne. He studied at the University of Coimbra and the EPF Lausanne where he's teaching-assistant. He's a contributing writer on architecture for different media.

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