

## HISTORICAL REVISIONISM ON ARCHITECTURE AT THE INTERSTICE OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES: VINDICATION, RESCUE OR DENIAL OF MEMORY

Revisionismo histórico en arquitectura en el intersticio de los siglos XX y XXI:  
Reivindicar, rescatar o negar una memoria

Revisionismo histórico na arquitetura no interstício dos séculos XX e XXI: reivindicar, resgatar ou negar uma memória



### William García Ramirez

Profesor, Investigador Facultad de Arquitectura y Diseño.  
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Bogotá, Colombia.

[william.garcia@javeriana.edu.co](mailto:william.garcia@javeriana.edu.co)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0434-0358>

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Negative image -  
Memory, Peace and  
Reconciliation  
Centre - Bogotá.  
Architect Juan  
Pablo Ortiz.  
Source: Architect  
William García R.

## ABSTRACT

Historical revisionism, a phenomenon typical of social and political sciences, has been consolidated at the start of the 21st century as one of the paradigmatic strategies in architecture, with the purpose of rewriting -or erasing- historical memories of the city. In this context, the objective of the research presented here was to investigate the relationship between different convergent social and political situations on the issue of memory and the demolition/construction of architectures, as a strategy to question events from the past and the official narratives. As this is a historiographic research, the methodology used a cross analysis between the discourses on which several socio-political issues around memory, that occurred in different countries, have been based, and the architectural projects built or demolished because of these issues. The conclusions, insofar as a research contribution, allowed detecting three lines of historical revisionism in architecture, starting from its use -and abuse- regarding the historiography of the facts: vindication, rescue, and denial of memory.

**Keywords:** Historical revisionism, architecture critique, demolition, history of architecture, memory

## RESUMEN

El revisionismo histórico, fenómeno propio de las ciencias sociales y políticas, se ha venido consolidando a comienzos del siglo XXI como una de las estrategias paradigmáticas en arquitectura, con el propósito de rescribir (o borrar) memorias históricas de la ciudad. En ese contexto, el objetivo de la investigación aquí expuesta fue indagar sobre la relación entre distintas coyunturas sociales y políticas convergentes en el tema de la memoria y la demolición / construcción de arquitecturas, como estrategia para interrogar hechos del pasado y cuestionar las narrativas oficiales. Tratándose de una investigación historiográfica, la metodología se sustentó en un análisis cruzado entre los discursos con los que se han argumentado distintas problemáticas sociopolíticas en torno a la memoria, acontecidas en diferentes países, y los proyectos arquitectónicos construidos o demolidos a propósito de tales problemáticas. Las conclusiones, en tanto aporte de la investigación, permitieron detectar tres vertientes del revisionismo histórico en arquitectura, a partir de su uso (y abuso) en relación con la historiografía de los hechos: reivindicación, rescate y negación de la memoria.

**Palabras Clave:** Revisionismo histórico, crítica de la arquitectura, demolición, historia de la arquitectura, memoria

## RESUMO

O revisionismo histórico, fenômeno típico das ciências sociais e políticas, vem se consolidando no início do século XXI como uma das estratégias paradigmáticas da arquitetura, com o propósito de reescrever (ou apagar) memórias históricas da cidade. Nesse contexto, o objetivo da pesquisa aqui apresentada foi investigar a relação entre diferentes conjunturas sociais e políticas convergentes sobre o tema da memória e a demolição / construção de arquiteturas como estratégia para interrogar acontecimentos do passado e questionar narrativas oficiais. Por se tratar de uma pesquisa historiográfica, a metodologia baseou-se no cruzamento dos discursos com os quais têm sido discutidos diversos problemas sociopolíticos em torno da memória, ocorridos em vários países, com os projetos arquitetônicos construídos ou demolidos como consequência desses debates. As conclusões, como contribuição da pesquisa, permitiram detectar três tendências do revisionismo histórico na arquitetura, a partir de seu uso (e abuso) no que tange à historiografia dos fatos: reivindicação, resgate e negação da memória.

**Palavras-Chave:** Revisionismo histórico, crítica da arquitetura, demolição, história da arquitetura, memória

## INTRODUCTION

In open defiance of the confinement paradigm, which international society was suddenly subject to in 2020, a large part of society decided to risk their own health, to head out onto the streets to protest about events which had unveiled injustice. From the protests against racism, led by the *Black Lives Matter* movement in the United States, to the repudiation of slavery in Europe, one of the most visible strategies is related to revisionist actions, where statues and monuments in public spaces, have been brought down as a kind of social and political trial of figures from the past. It would seem that confinement, lockdown, the impossibility of looking outside, has led people to introspection, to question themselves, examine themselves, to see in the city spaces, what has always been there, and examine it in greater depth. The city has become not just a territory of arguments and protest, but a field of dispute of existing narratives that, through art and architecture, tell a story, a truth. Parks and buildings which, as pages of a book, have begun to be re-read and questioned.

Latin America has not been an exception. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, after summary proceedings, people with Misak origins decided to bring down the statue of the Spanish conquistador, Sebastián de Belalcázar, in the city of Popayan, Colombia. The action divided opinion, both in favor and against, as while some acknowledged it as an act of justice, others bemoaned the damage of a piece of art that for decades had formed part of the city's public space, opening the question about how to value these works. In this regard, it is worth considering the case of the *Valley of the Fallen*, a work led by and built during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. There, the law determined "... the removal of personal or collective shields, insignia, plaques and other objects or commemorative mentions praising the military uprising, the Civil War and the repression of the Dictatorship...", with the exception of the removal and concealment of these works, in two specific cases: "when the mentions are of a strictly private memory, not praising those in conflict, or when artistic, architectonic or artistic-religious reasons protected by law, are involved" (Government of Spain, 2017, Art. 15).

Thus, the historic revisionism considered in this law weighs ideological matters over artistic and architectonic aspects, and solomonically rules to value the objects and buildings using their physical qualities, not just through their ideological connotation or meaning.

In principle, it can be asserted that all historiographic exercise implies an act of revisionism, as every historical topic is subject to being reconsidered in light of the interests of every historian to build a given narrative. Yet, John Morrill contextualizes this phenomenon more accurately in the field of history:

Revisionism was a revolt against materialist or determinist histories and historiographies, and most periods and schools of history have had their revisionist moment. In many cases, it was straightforwardly a revolt against Marxist historiographies (as in the case of France); or against nationalist historiographies (as in Ireland); or against Whig histories, with their strong teleologies and grand narratives of progress ... (Morrill, 2015, p.577).

In this way, revisionism arises as a healthy distrust against the possibility of a totalitarian historiography which, in its absolutist thirst, could omit events that go against the uniformity a determinist historiography asserts. In these terms, the essential logic behind revisionism, lies in a permanent state of suspicion, and not necessarily as a critique of a specific vision of history.

In architecture, the revisionist attitude is played out indistinctively of whether this is a hegemonic discourse or not, as its attitude is not so much critical as it is comprehensive of the values that today have consensus in a society;

values that promote, through architecture, the vindication and rescue of memory, although also in some cases an eagerness to negate said memory.

Therefore, the field of action of Revisionism is situated, in the field of memory, as it is in past events where it is possible to recover and validate a series of historiographic narratives as a manifestation of invisible, perhaps forgotten, and for this reason ignored, social, cultural and political positions. Nevertheless, memory is also a flexible mechanism that allows permanent querying and questioning: "Memory insofar as *Ars* (art) is seen as a repertory of knowledge where information can be stored and, likewise as a capacity to evoke it once more" (Erl, 2012, p. 41). In this way, historic memory is both the source of answers and the reason behind questions that debate these. This is why "The road to memory is a slippery slope, especially in countries where history has been suppressed or buried for more than a generation" (Von Henneberg, 2004, p. 41)<sup>1</sup>. But memory does not just lie in archives and libraries, but rather in people, it is because of this that memory insofar as *Agere* (doing), derives from the act of bringing about, of "effecting", in the "capacity of the subject to generate critical non-hegemonic spaces of enunciation of the 'I', and from the collective, that challenge standard and/or hegemonic visions of history" (Museo Reina Sofia – Subplots).

In this way, the area of memory constitutes a cyclical field, a sort of *ouroboros* where memory and omission are intertwined in constant dispute, where memory wins sometimes, and omission in others. In architecture, this *ouroboros* is located in the successive construction and demolition of buildings as a natural condition of the growth of cities, disregarding that architecture also contributes to writing, but also to erasing the memory of cities. In this regard, Montaner and Muxi state that:

...starting from the 1990s, this concept -of memory- has been deconstructed in two opposite directions. On one hand, by the productive system, the mechanisms to erase and substitute memory have been reinforced and, on the other, social movements have been vindicating the diversity of memories in every city, defending their visibility, and unveiling how they coexist and how some are imposed over others (Montaner & Muxi, 2011, p. 70)<sup>2</sup>.

It is actually this last aspect, how some memories are imposed over others in architecture, that is one of the guiding questions for this research, as almost unanimously, the precept has been accepted where the cities and their architecture are a *palimpsest*, an overlapping of built events that are successively mixed and mingled with one another, without considering what the implications would be for history and, therefore, for the future of a city, implying that the light goes out on some memories, to shine upon other new ones.

Because of this, the cities understood as *palimpsests* offer an unusual field for architectonic intervention from its *pentimento*, that is to say, from generally regretful events, of a social, political or cultural nature, that have been obscured. Historical revisionism of these *pentimento*, of these hidden errors has, on occasion, led to judging them as failed acts, which is why it is in these failures where an opportunity for intervention emerges, that corrects and repairs them by means of an architectonic intervention. Said failings do just allude to mistakes of a material nature –destruction of urban or architectonic heritage–, but also to their acceptance as rulings -sentences and judgments where violence, injustice or silencing is detected-. This is why, starting from these material and social mistakes, is where the actions of architecture trigger the vindication and/or rescue of these losses.

The case of the raising -and fall- of the Berlin Wall is just one of the examples in which this condition of activating and deactivating a memory is seen.

1 Free translation.

2 Idem.

An exercise of power that implied raising a wall that divided an entire city, creating an artificial border; to later be brought down, in a counter-exercise of power, as a resignification of a physical act that signified a series of openly anti-democratic values. Nevertheless, it is significantly notorious that, years later, in 1998, the "Berlin Wall Association" was founded, through a Senate project, promoting not just a documentation center, but the *Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer* (Berlin Wall Memorial), with the purpose of recovering the spatial experience the former wall once had. As can be seen, building, demolishing and rebuilding the Berlin Wall has shaped a specific cycle which shows that, in historical revisionism, architecture not only has "remorse" but also "reverse".

The use of the term "revisionism", within the field of architecture, is nothing new, although its use is related to the context of architecture history. This is the case of the text titled "The revisionist and organic architecture in the United States", where González (Capital, 1997), celebrates architects like Paul Rudolph or Eero Saarinen, on daring, through their work, to break down the hegemony of the modern movement, opening alternative lines to the main narrative. Here, revisionism is understood as a rebellious or anarchical attitude against the paradigm of the modern movement, but also as the overcoming of an orthodoxy.

In summary, the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has been characterized by opening up the discussion in architecture on revisionism, a phenomenon that has, for some time now, been happening in an apparently isolated and local way, but that, as a whole, reveals a broader and more generalized trend. One that contextualizes the main hypothesis of this research: the emergence of historic revisionism in architecture, as a strategy that affirms a future vision of cities, not in a positivist sense, but rather through a revision of their past, based on vindication, rescue or denial, of a specific memory.

## METHODOLOGY

On this being a historiographic research, the methodology used is of a descriptive analytical nature, focusing on the goal of corroborating the aforementioned hypothesis, by developing 5 phases that seek to explain how historic revisionism has been manifested in and through architecture.

- PHASE 1: Outlining the topic. Given that the issue of historic revisionism is contextualized in a historic juncture shared by several international nations, the boom of memory, started with the identification of the reasons behind this international juncture, as criteria that allow screening the sampling of the architectural works being analyzed, reasons that according to Aguilar-Forero (2018) can be summarized into: the demand for truth; the search for roots; and the quest for identity.
- PHASE 2: Collection and systematization of information referring to historic high impact junctures in society, in the context of the criteria laid out by Aguilar-Forero (2018), that took place from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to today.
- PHASE 3: Collection and systematization of information referring to architectonic and urban projects, where a re-reading of historic events and memory in the cities is seen.
- PHASE 4: Analysis of the projects -collected in phase 3- in the historic context the architectonic projects emerge within.
- PHASE 5: Preparation of conclusions from the lines of historic revisionism detected in architecture, regarding the historic junctures in which they have been contextualized, bearing in mind the hypothesis laid out in the research.



**Figure 1**  
9/11 Memorial – New York, USA.  
Source: Photograph by the author.

## RESULTS

### HISTORIC REVISIONISM AS VINDICATION OF MEMORY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

This line falls within what has been called the “boom of memory”, a proclivity towards the past [Figure 1]:

... that bursting out everywhere in the boom of the historic novel and the biographical tales, the retro fashion in architecture and clothing, the enthusiasm for commemorations, the boom of antique shops, the growth and expansion of museums in the past three decades, the aesthetic restoration of old urban centers, the video as a device of memorialization and, even the converting of the world’s past into a databank (Martín Barbero, 2010, p. 17).<sup>3</sup>

In a narrower context, this is a historic revisionism that aims at vindicating the social, political and/or cultural rights that citizens have been deprived of, by state agencies and/or organizations, almost illegally, according to what is put forward by Aguilar-Forero (2018).

Given that “omission takes place, or has ‘a’ place, but one where nobody actually seems to be sure, except for the empty trail it leaves behind” (Klein, 2010, p. 209), it is necessary for this vindication of rights, to provide a physical place to house omission: The Museum of Memory. Place where society goes to remember, to look at itself through the mirror of its past.

The commemoration of these *puncta dolentia* in different parts of the world has contributed towards consolidating one of the typologies that most characterizes the panorama of contemporary architecture: Museums of Memory. This is an architecture that is generally State backed, arising from events of war, conflicts or holocausts. In countries like Colombia, this backing has been the result of two key events in its recent history: The celebration of the Bicentenary of its Independence (2019), and the signing of the Havana Accords (2016). In both the former and the latter, architecture is officially called upon, as a strategy of reparation and commemoration in the acknowledgement of a past, as through the architecture of the museum, the “musealizing” of memory, that is to say, “a particular way of building and legitimizing the collective memory” (Jaramillo & Del Cairo, 2013, p. 76), is sought.

In this way, the architecture of the museum is reconfigured beyond its traditional role as a temple for the arts, to take on the challenge of becoming

3 Free translation.

**Table 1**

Historic revisionism as vindication of a memory in architecture.  
Source: Preparation by the author.

HISTORIC REVISIONISM AS A VINDICATION OF A MEMORY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE				
Year	Project	Architecture narrative relationship	Architect	City - country
2017	National Holocaust Monument	Public Space – Univocal Narrative	Daniel Libeskind	Ottawa – Canada
2016	House of Memory and Community Space	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Taller Síntesis	Turbo – Colombia
2014	Canadian Museum for Human Rights	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Antoine Predock	Winnipeg - Canada
2014	National September 11th Memorial – Memorial Plaza	Public Space – Univocal Narrative	Michael Arad & Peter Walker (Memorial Plaza)	New York, USA
2014	National September 11th Memorial Museum – Pavilion	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Davis Brody Bond (Museum) / Snohetta (Pavilion)	New York, USA
2014	Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion (LUM)	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Sandra Barclay & Jean Pierre Crousse	Lima-Peru
2012	Casa del pueblo. El Salado	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Simón Hosie	El Salado – Colombia
2011	Memory House Museum	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Juan David Botero	Medellín - Colombia
2011	Bundeswehr Military History Museum	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Daniel Libeskind	Dresden – Germany
2010	Memory and Tolerance Museum	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Arditti + RDT	Mexico City – Mexico
2009	Andalusia’s Museum of Memory	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Alberto Campo Baeza	Granada – Spain
2009	Museum of Memory and Human Rights	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Mario Figueroa, Lucas Fehr & Carlos Diaz	Santiago de Chile - Chile
2007	Jewish Museum Munich	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Wandel Hoefler Lorch & Hirsh	Munich – Germany
2005	Hinzert Memorial Monument	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Wandel Lorch Architects	The Netherlands
2005	Holocaust Monument	Public Space – Univocal Narrative	Peter Eisenman	Berlin – German
2003	The Mauthausen Memorial	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Werkhof Architekten	Mauthausen – Austria
2003	The Museum of Jewish Heritage	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	KRJDA - Architects	New York – USA
2003	The Danish Jewish Museum	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Daniel Libeskind	Copenhagen – Denmark
2002	Imperial War Museum North	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Daniel Libeskind	Manchester – England
2001	Apartheid Museum	Public Space – Univocal Narrative	Mashabane Rose Associates	Johannesburg – South Africa
1999	Jewish Museum Berlin	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Daniel Libeskind	Berlin-Germany
1998	Remembrance Park	Public Space – Univocal Narrative	Varas, Lestard, Baudizzone & Ferrari	Buenos Aires-Argentina
1981	Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial	Public Space – Univocal Narrative	Maya Lin	Washington D.C – USA
1960	Monument to the Dead of World War II	Public Space – Univocal Narrative	Marcos Konder Netto	Río de Janeiro-Brazil
1955	Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park – Commemorative Sculptures	Public Space – Univocal Narrative	Kenzo Tange	Hiroshima-Japan
1955	Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, Museum Building	Museum Space – Plural Narrative	Kenzo Tange	Hiroshima-Japan

a "formal stage of new collective narratives" (Fernández-Galiano, 2009, p. 3). An architecture that has the challenge, not just of presenting facts, but of recreating the experience of these facts, to produce an effect of memory and recognition and, in the long term, an effect of forgiveness and healing. In this sense, this is architecture, whose projected strategy aims at materializing memory, through the experiential design of paths and spaces of reflection, to tell and teach its visitors a different history. It is from this position, that the sense of museums of memory is pedagogical, and although all learning processes imply a principle of imitating that learned, in this type of museums, the opposite occurs, since these are museums that teach what must never be repeated.

The balance between symbolism and monumentality gives museums of memory this necessary balance between intimacy and evocation for reflection on painful events; spaces of public access whose atmosphere invites commemorating victims and, in particular, vindicating a series of events whose unveiled or partly revealed facets are shown. For this reason, a museum of memory can be defined as a *space* where a *time* is vindicated.

In Table I below, a relationship of the main vindicated places of memory, built in the world since the 1950s until now, is presented. A reading of the argumentative discourses of these projects reveals how the architectonic design is connected to the narrative that a memory looks to vindicate. Thus, the more open and public projects, like the Holocaust Monument (Peter Eisenman – Berlin), vindicate the memory of the victims through a univocal narrative based on the idea of monument. On the contrary, the projects built in buildings, and with limited public access, present a plural narrative and, in general, one that is open to permanent revision, despite having a preset museographic script.

## HISTORIC REVISIONISM AS A RESCUE OF MEMORY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

Throughout history, some architects, perhaps unintentionally, have gone against the city through their architectonic interventions, whose consequences, in terms of historic memory, are regretted today. This is why revisionism, as a rescue of memory, implies the act of recapturing lost and invisible memories of the city, through interventions in the space. These are projects that seek to recover a memory of the city, as a result of works made in the past, which today, without a doubt, are judged as unsuitable, even though they were considered appropriate at the time. An example of this revisionist line is found in the hundreds of kilometers of raised overpasses and highways that have been demolished in different cities around the world, to provide, no longer to the automobile, the condition of the private, but to the pedestrian, the condition of the public. Multimillion investments, that in their time, were considered a great achievement and a sign of magnificent progress, today are seen as aggressive interventions that alter the landscape and quality of life. However, revisionism as a rescue of memory, goes beyond the demolition of overpasses, but as the urban-architectonic interventions where the basic principles behind the memories and origins of the city are recovered, in tune with contemporary values like environmental sustainability and the respect for history. From this point of view, actions like rescuing the memory of water, erasing urban boundaries and/or valuing the pedestrian over the automobile, characterize the sense that this type of historic revisionism mobilized in the times of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and constitute a means of understanding the contemporary city starting from the transformative power that memory triggers.



## RESCUE OF MEMORY THROUGH URBAN INTERVENTIONS

## RESCUING MEMORY. ARCHITECTONIC INTERVENTIONS

**Figure 2**

Environmental promenade – Bogota – Colombia.  
Source: Photograph by the author.



During the 1940s, the city of Bogota, following the hygienist movement guidelines, and with the goal of making a modern city, uprooted one of the most characteristic landscape traits of its historic hub: the San Francisco River. This led to its channeling and paving over its surface. For almost half a century, the river ran silently under the pavements, until in 1990, the architects, Salmons and Kopec projected a pedestrian promenade where the presence of the river would be regained through successive channels, along the route the old river had previously had [Figure 2]. In the words of Salmons: “the tarmacked curves of Avenida Jiménez de Quesada silently invoked the buried San Francisco river, or as the first inhabitants of Bogotá (the Muisca) called it, Viracachá, meaning water glittering in the darkness” (Fundación Rogelio Salmons, 2020).

Under these terms, the built project recovers the silenced and hidden memory of the river, caused by its channeling. From this perspective, “looking back”, becomes an opportunity for redemption for cities that have erased chapters of their history. This is the case of the vast projects in international cities like Boston (BIG DIG), Madrid (Madrid Río), and Sao Paulo (Anhangabau Park).

In Germany, the Berlin Royal Palace, Berliner Schloss, was the result of an architectonic palimpsest that intertwined the typology of a medieval castle and a Renaissance Palace. It had driven Frederick III (1657-1713), the King of Prussia, to hire the architect Andreas Schlüter, to transform this building considering the Baroque ideals of the time. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the Second World War, a large part of the palace was destroyed by a fire in 1945, and was ultimately demolished in 1950 on the order of the then German Democratic Republic, whose authorities, skeptical of wanting to conserve a testimony of Prussian imperialism right in the heart of the city, opted to build in its stead, the so-called Palace of the Republic. This project, by the architect Heinz Graffunder, was conceived as:

a palace for the people, housing theaters, art galleries and cafés; and, although its architectonic style was a clear repudiation of the elitism of its predecessor, it became the stage for all the great celebrations and banquets of the communist elite<sup>4</sup>. (Burchard, 10th March, 2016).

In this way, an architectonic icon of monarchy was erased and replaced by another, this time of communism. In an act that, under the argument of reinstating the role of the people –and not the monarchy–, as the leader of the nation, it superimposed the writing of one historical narrative over another: an exercise of historic revisionism that bordered on denialism. Now, after the German reunification in 1989, the Palace of the Republic was closed to the public because of asbestos used in its construction, a closure that led to intense extensive debates about the future of the building, leading the German Parliament, in 2003, to take the unheard of decision of rebuilding the stereometry and facades of the former Berliner Schloss, now reconfigured functionally to work as a museum, through the architecture tender called in 2008, won by the architect, Franco Stella.

In this regard, it is necessary to ask “How the interpretations of the past and the new memory practices define individual, local, and national narratives?” (Luthar, 2013, p. 883)<sup>5</sup>. In the case of Berliner Schloss, just as in the examples mentioned below [Table 2], it is clear how these “new memory practices” have been predetermining factors in the rescue of a narrative, of a memory that was thought lost, and where architecture has become both an instrument of “erasure”, and as a tool for the recovery of memories.

In the analysis of the argumentative discourses of these projects [Table 2], it can be seen that the common intention is not *commemorating an event*, but rather remembering a space. In this sense, the memory that is rescued is not a

4 Free translation.

5 Idem.

result of a conflict, a war or a violent act, but rather a product of a self-critique that society and its leaders make of themselves, in order to recover a physical space that was considered lost in the city. It is worth noting that, from the revisionist lines studied in this research, this is the only one that appeals to the dismantling and disappearance of a work as a strategy to build a new one, that evokes a space and a memory made invisible, in the city.

**Table 2**  
Historic revisionism as a means of rescue of memory in architecture.  
Source: Preparation by the author.

HISTORIC REVISIONISM AS A MEANS OF RESCUE OF MEMORY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE					
Year	Project	Nature of the Recovered Memory	Architect	City-Country	Case Summary
2020	Berlin Palace	Architectonic Memory	Franco Stella	Berlín - Alemania	The project seeks to correct the decision made by the German Democratic Republic to demolish the old Berlin Royal Palace and replace it for a new one. The memory of the original palace is rebuilt.
2019	Medellin River Parks	Environmental urban memory	Latitud Taller de Arquitectura	Medellín - Colombia	This project seeks to recover the memory and presence of the Medellín River, which was isolated by the construction of Regional Avenue alongside the river. A significant part of this highway has already been put underground, which has allowed recovering the relationship of the city with the river.
2014	Puerto Maravilla – Mauá Square – Museum of Tomorrow	Puerto Maravilla – Mauá Square – Museum of Tomorrow	Puerto Maravilla – Mauá Square – Museum of Tomorrow	Río de Janeiro - Brazil	Recovery of the memory of the old Gamboa Port, through the demolition of the roads and areas that separate the city, the port, and the sea; the construction of a tunnel capable of handling the road traffic and, finally, the construction of squares and pedestrian promenades.
2013	Boulevard del Río – Cali	Landscape urban memory	Elly Burckhardt & Juan Manuel Echeverri	Cali - Colombia	The isolation of the Cali River from the historic hub of the city is corrected. This was produced by the construction of Colombia Avenue around 1940, thus recovering part of the pedestrian promenades there have existed since Pre-Colombian times alongside the river, leading to the sea.
2006	Big Dig	Landscape urban memory	CA-T	Boston – USA	The decision of supporting vehicle over pedestrian traffic through the I-93 as an overpass, with a great impact on the city's historic center, is reversed. The highway is demolished and put underground, recovering the memory of the public space there was before the overpass' construction.
2005	Madrid Río	Environmental urban memory	West 8, Burgos & Garrido, Porras la Casta, Rubio A. Sala	Madrid - España	The isolation of the Manzanares River around the city, caused by the building of the M30 Highway around 1960 is adjusted, recovering, in this way, the memory of the river as a key part of the city of Madrid
2005	Parque Cheonggyecheon	Memoria Urbano paisajística	Gobierno de Seúl	Seoul - Corea	This is the regeneration of the landscape and restoration of the memory of the Cheonggyecheon River, through the restructuring of urban connections, which implied the demolition of major highways built during the 1960s.
2000	Environmental heart	Environment urban memory	Rogelio Salmona & Louis Kopec	Bogotá - Colombia	The decision of having taken the San Francisco River underground is reversed, returning the memory of the river to the surface as an essential element in the life of the urban center.
1991	Anhangabau Park	Landscape urban memory	Jorge Wilhem	Sao Paulo - Brazil	The decision of giving preference to the automobile through the building of an avenue in the 1990s, is reversed. Now the decision is made to take the avenue underground and regain the memory of the public space.
1989	Restoration of Pamplona Cathedral Belltower	Architectonic memory	Jaime Salcedo	Pamplona - Colombia	The original cathedral building dates from 1797, which was intervened in 1913 and 1926 to take on the 19th century stylistic expectations of the time. A later historic study revealed the typological importance of the original building, as such the new project of 1988 focused on correcting the intervention of 1926, in order to recover the typological memory of the original building, represented, in a great extent, by its belltower.

## DISCUSSION

### DENIALISM

In what is known as historic revisionism, two senses of the term “revisionism” are juxtaposed. One, which applies to the typical process of examining something with the idea of improving it or correcting its possible mistakes and, another, that refers to the building of an alternative historic narrative, refuting the other (Chiaromonte, 2013, p. 26).

This third acceptance of “revisionism”, reviewed here, can also be confirmed in the field of architecture: an alternative in the use of memory, that neither vindicates nor rescues it, but rather, deliberately tries to deny the memory of a past that is considered particularly toxic and/or shameful for societies. Denialism presents the challenges of erasing, hiding, removing, suppressing events or characters through an urban architectural project.

This is the case of Adolf Hitler’s birthplace in Austria. A 19<sup>th</sup> century dwelling, which in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had become a symbol of an ideology and of a perpetrator, where attempts were made to make his memory disappear, considering the atrocities he represented. In this regard, the Austrian Government initially decided, through Minister Wolfgang Sobotka, that “Hitler’s house will be demolished. The basement can remain, but a new building will be built on top” (BBC, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

However, this decision was later reconsidered: “After further debate, we have decided not to demolish it”, so there is no risk of accusations of wanting “to make an uncomfortable chapter of history disappear”, said the Governor, Josef Purhinger. In any case, the building “[can] no longer be identified from the outside” and will be used to house an administrative or social institution” (Infobae, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016). Despite these intentions, the “new” projected building, will be just like the original on its first two floors. This, despite the tender terms and conditions, made for this purpose, specifying that the outside remodeling of the current building had “to remove the memory of the national-socialist period” (Landsberg, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020).

In this architectonic project [Figures 3 and 4], there is a double denial: on one hand, trying to hide the memory of the perpetrator; the discussion exclusively revolved around this memory, without considering that there is no perpetrator without victims, that the memory debated here, is not just that of

#### Figures 3 and 4

Birthplace of Adolf Hitler – Braunau am Inn (Austria) and Police Station Project.  
Fuente: BBC (October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016) and <https://worldarchitecture.org/article-links/efeeh/marte-marte-architekten-selected-to-convert-hitler-s-birthplace-into-a-police-station-in-austria.html>



the dictator; but of the entire conflict, as this architecture does not represent the place where a person was born, but rather the place where a fight was.

Something similar has happened in Medellín (Colombia), with the *Tender for the design of a space of memory and reflection* being built at the site of the home of one of the main drug lords, the modern world has seen: Pablo Escobar. The purpose of the tender was: "... selecting the generation proposal of the public space that best presents the materialization of a place for memory, that allows reflecting about the past and rendering solemn homage to the brave..." (Sociedad Colombiana de Arquitectos, 2018, p. 10).

Although it mentions that it must be a place "to reflect about the past", the determining factors to develop the tender proposal, avoid at all costs, alluding to that past.

## DETERMINING FACTORS FOR PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Actually, the local population and the policymakers want to transform this dark past, that is part of the history of Medellín, building in this way, a comprehensive narrative that acknowledges and values the memory of the victims for the symbolic reparation and reconciliation.

This decision of rewriting history and facing the paradigms of the so-called "Narco culture", with its fictional narrative and false heroes (films, series, novels), tries to build a collective narrative of what really happened, highlighting other stand out characters that bring an end to eulogizing crime and violence, to generate a culture with values that promote solidarity, transparency, and trust in one another. (Sociedad Colombiana de Arquitectos, 2018, p. 50).

That is to say, what is important in this tender was not building a place of memory, but rather a place where a distortion of history is materialized in light of a series of values, to bring an "end to eulogizing crime and violence", ignoring that all historic facts have causes and results, that focusing the narrative on just one of them, automatically promotes the denial of the other.

The basic principle, memory spaces are based on, is counteracting omission, at the same time narratives become more complex and the victims and their families are acknowledged. However, in this tender, omission is promoted, slicing away parts of the narrative, prohibiting them, forgetting that there are no victims without a perpetrator; that throughout history, the consequences of the events are related to a cause, that omitting these causes, creates a vacuum in the process giving sense to the story, because, above all, memory is a process, not an event. In the words of Maurice Halbwachs: "... the key to the city does not lie on memory as permanence, but rather on history as a flow" (Gorelik, August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009, p.17).

On the other hand, it is important to state, that within the tender, a citizen participation process was opened, which voted on 25 alternatives. From these 25 ideas, only one proposal involved conserving the building structure (proposal 12, that received 3% of the votes). The proposal with the highest vote (Proposal 6 – Public space: Park, 16% of the votes), was chosen, in a healthy logic. This consultation mechanism, justifies in principle, the intervention project in the place. However, the question asked here, is about the pertinence of referendum type consultations in matters that involve variables as complex as the narratives that the identity notions of cities imply. The plebiscite made on the peace accords in Colombia (2016) or the referendum made on Brexit (2015), are just some of the main examples that question the suitability of an indiscriminate use of this type of consultation, which predetermined, in the case of the Medellín tender, that the result was not one of a space of memory, as

had initially been foreseen, but rather a space of commemoration, that is to say, of the memory of an event through a State led univocal and partial narrative.

From this approach, the tender project prepared by *Taller Síntesis arquitectos* [Figure 5] is worth highlighting, acknowledging the denialism bias that entails the narration of a half-hearted story, which proposed maintaining the structural skeleton of the building as a ghostly presence in the new project. In this regard, Taller Síntesis argued that:

The efforts of the city to build a new narrative that distances itself from having been labeled as “the most violent city in the world”, that it had at some point in history, are noticeable. However, this has also practically implied making the recent past a taboo...

Hiding this history, means ignoring the misfortune of the more than one hundred and thirty thousand people affected, who between 1980 and 2014 were direct victims of the conflict in the city..., hiding the reasons behind why the city went through its darkest times and the reasons why today, drug-related activities continue in the city. Hiding this history means removing the content from the places where the events took place, erasing the voices of the victims, their resistance and capacity, not just of surviving, but of transforming their reality. (Taller Síntesis, 2018).

This unawarded proposal illustrates, in an open contradiction to the terms and conditions set out by the government, the need of acknowledging all the parties in the conflict, avoiding centering the view of a single side of the history of the drug trade, that of the victims, through an architectonic project that shows the tensions that characterized this drama in Colombia, represented in the park, a place of memory, and the ruins of the Monaco building, an eloquent footprint of what it can never be again.

Finally, a relationship of projects is presented, where denialism characterizes the sense of these works, as the line of action of the historic revisionism, that tends to deny, through architecture, one memory in particular [Table 3] The crossed reading between the projects and their justifying discourses allowed detecting a common factor in these denialist projects, since they are interventions ordered from a hegemonic power—a government, the church, a city council—which place themselves above the decision of another equally hegemonic power, with the goal of imposing a vision of history in the city, and therefore, within the citizenry.



**Figure 5**  
Tender proposal.  
Fuente: Taller  
Síntesis (2018).

**Table 3**

Historic revisionism as denial of memory through architecture.  
Source: Preparation by the author.

HISTORIC REVISIONISM AS DENIAL OF MEMORY THROUGH ARCHITECTUREARQUITECTURA					
Year	Project	Nature Of The Denied Memory	Architect	City-Country	Case Summary
2019	Inflexion Memorial Park – Memory Space Tender 1983-1994 – Monaco Building	Social Memory	Taller Alterno, Small Scale Architecture & Luis Felipe Zapata Flórez.	Medellin - Colombia	On awarding the tender to a proposal that erases the memory of the perpetrator, following the guidelines outlined in the tender, memory is being denied, making this project, not a place of memory, but rather one of commemoration.
2019	Hitler's birthplace tender	Political Memory	Marte.Marte Architects (modification)	Salzburg - Austria	The idea is to hide the memory of the house where Adolf Hitler was born; only the memory of the perpetrator is considered, avoiding mentioning the victims'.
2008	San Luis Potosi Prison / Arts Center	Heritage Memory	Carlos Suárez (original project) Alejandro Sánchez (modification)	San Luis Potosi - Mexico	The memory of the historic building is erased, as all reference to the original use as a prison is "cleansed", looking to just conserve those historic aspects of the building, that allude to a cultural condition in its now new role, as an Arts Center.
1998	Alfonso Reyes Echandía Palace of Justice	Political Memory	Roberto Londoño	Bogota - Colombia	The memory of the holocaust of 1985 is erased, on avoiding any resemblance and allusion to the first version of the Palace, and the historic event that took place there.
1976	Palace of the Republic (GDR)	Political Memory	Heinz Graffunder	Berlin – Germany	The memory of the Prussian Empire, which went against the communist principles of the German Democratic Republic, is erased, on demolishing the Baroque Royal Palace and projecting the Palace of the Republic in the same place.
1948	Bogota Civic Center Project	Heritage Memory	Le Corbusier	Bogota - Colombia	The intention is to erase the urban memory of the city, superimposing a "modern" morphology to the grid morphology of the foundational structure of the city, from which, just 9 historic foundational blocks would be kept.
1948	The Bogota Panoptic / National Museum of Colombia	Heritage Memory	Thomas Reed (original project) Jorge Camacho (modification)	Bogota - Colombia	The memory of the prison site is eliminated, suppressing all architectonic traces alluding to its function and opening the spaces up to house the collection of the National Museum of Colombia.
1438	Templo - 1538 Iglesia	Heritage Memory	N.A.	Lima - Peru	Inca Temple dedicated to sun-worshipping, looted in 1534 during the colonization process, which led to the construction of Santo Domingo Church, by the Dominican Community, on the foundations of the former Inca Temple.
c.a. 1524	Aztec ceremonial center / Historic heart of Mexico City	Heritage Memory	(Foreman) Alonso García (modification)	Mexico City – Mexico	The attempt is made to erase the memory of the Aztec Empire, when the Spanish decide to destroy the ceremonial center and found part of the new city center on it.
785	Mosque - 1236 Cathedral	Heritage Memory	Hernan Ruiz et al. (Cathedral)	Cordoba - Spain	The Christian Church dedicated to Vincent of Saragossa, demolished by Abd-al Rahman I for the construction of the new Mosque of Cordoba after the Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula (711-726 AD) and reconverted, more than 5 centuries later into the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption; The Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba is a case study that does not just have a successive spatial transformation, but an unsuccessful attempt to deny a memory that for centuries characterized the citizens of Andalusia.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a tip of the iceberg that shows a much greater phenomenon than can apparently be seen, architecture is revealed in cities, inasmuch as a visible manifestation, as a sum of processes, invisible at first sight. Thus, historic revisionism in architecture is set out, as the revision of this "submerged iceberg", of this city formed not just by architecture, but by events, decisions, agreements, and conflicts that, together form the memory of a city. Therefore, we are before the appearance, not of a new phenomenon, but of an unusual process of awareness and sensitization of the different phenomena that we have accumulated over time. A revisionism whose particular traits lie on what does not come from historians, academia, or from any hegemonic power, but from sectors of society whose revisionist actions in the city, reveal a way of seeing the past of the city and a way of thinking, at the same time, of the past and future of society.

The search for and activation of silenced memories is a sign of recent times, that led to the question of the research presented here: how to do it? How do some memories impose themselves over others in architecture? Searching for them is a task that, for some time now, has been done from areas like history, sociology, and anthropology. In architecture, the challenge is not just critically historiographing these memories, as this is a task that has already been started, in part, by positions like decolonialism. The challenge has to do with the ways architecture is used to activate a memory, a materialization that not only gives way to aestheticism or the consolidation of univocal narratives, but rather, on the contrary, one that gives way to the generation of plural memories, in permanent construction, that contribute in part, to breaking down a world as polarized as the one we live in today. Architecture for the vindication and rescue of memory, shows two of these ways of activating silenced memories. A third way, denialism, shows the most radical path for imposing one memory over others.

The paradox is that, the more architecture is produced to vindicate or rescue a memory, more data and information will continue being discovered and remembered, which generates in these architectures, a permanent effort to create mechanisms and spaces to remember and to not forget anything, like a *Funes el memorioso*, whose permanent effort to remember everything, always kept him anchored in a past that impeded thinking about a future.

Facing the weight of a history built up over centuries of existence, current cities and societies are no longer projected from a positivist point of view, but from a retrospective view that allows them to come through and face the weight of their past. This vision of a "retrospective future" has led to an alternate form of city development, starting from a critical revision of their history, where the architects can, with their interventions, make architecture an instrument for the vindication and/or rescue of memory. Thus, it is confirmed how historic revisionism, inasmuch as a characteristic position of the contemporary world, has transcended the social sciences and passed onto architecture, as a physical materialization of a critical reflection of society about its own past, a revisionism that reiterates to architecture as a writing tool of cities, but also as an instrument to suppress their history.

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