

[With Infinite Slowness Arises the Great Form]

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

[card 1]

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The attempt to revitalize the building art from the direction of form has failed. A century's worth of effort has been wasted and leads into the void. That heroic revolution of extremely talented men at the turn of the century had the time span of a fashion. The invention of forms is obviously not the task of the building art. Building art is more and different. Its excellent name already makes it clear that building is its natural content and art its completion.

[card 2]

Building, where it became great, was almost always indebted to construction, and construction was almost always the conveyor of its spatial form. Romantic and Gothic demonstrate that in brilliant clarity. Here as there structure expresses the meaning, expresses it down to the last remnant of spiritual value. But if that is so, then it must follow that the revitalization of the building art can only come from construction and not by means of arbitrarily assembled motifs.

[card 3]

But construction, that loyal safekeeper of an epoch's spirit, had rejected all that was arbitrary and created an objective basis for new developments. And so it has happened here also. The few authentic structures of our period exhibit construction as a component of building. Building and meaning are one. The manner of building is decisive and of testimonial significance.

[card 4]

Construction not only determines form but is form itself. Where authentic construction encounters authentic contents, authentic works result: works genuine and intrinsic. And they are necessary. Necessary in themselves and also as members of a genuine order. One can only order what is already ordered in itself. Order is more than organization. Organization is the determination of function.

[card 5]

Order, however, imparts meaning. If we would give to each thing what intrinsically belongs to it, then all things would easily fall into their proper place; only there they could really be what they are and there they would fully realize themselves. The chaos in which we live would give way to order and the world would again become meaningful and beautiful.

[card 6]

But that means to let go of the self-will and do the necessary. To articulate and realize the timely and not prevent what wants to and must become.

[card 7]

In other words: serve rather than rule. Only those who know how hard it is to do even simple things properly can respect the immensity of the task. It means to persevere

humbly, renounce effects, and do what is necessary and right with loyalty.

[card 8]

Only yesterday one spoke of the eternal forms of art, today one speaks of its dynamic change. Neither is right. Building art is beholden neither to the day nor to eternity, but to the epoch. Only a historical movement offers it space for living and allows it to fulfill itself. Building art is the expression of what historically transpires. Authentic expression of an inner movement.

[card 9]

Fulfillment and expression of something immanent. This may also be the reason why the nineteenth century failed. Unsuspected and deep beneath all the confused attempts of that time ran the quiet current of change, fed by forces of a world that was intrinsically already different, and a jungle of new forms broke out. Unusual and of wild power. The world of technical forms; large and forceful.

[card 10]

Genuine forms of a genuine world. Everything else that occurred looked, next to that, pale and marginal. Technology promises both power and grandeur, a dangerous promise for man who has been created for neither one nor the other. Those who are truly responsible feel depressed and respond to this promise by searching for the dignity and value of technology.

[card 11]

Is the world as it presents itself bearable for man?

More: is it worthy of man or too lowly?

Does it offer room for the highest form of human dignity?

Can it be shaped so as to be worthwhile to live in?

[card 12]

And finally: is the world noble enough to respond to man's duty to erect a high and magnanimous order? These are questions of immense weight. One can quickly affirm them and quickly negate them, and one has done that.

[card 13]

To the careful, however, beyond all prejudices and misjudgments, technology appears as a world which is what it is, specific and narrow, dependent on the panorama of its own time just as any other building art, and precluding a host of possibilities.

[card 14]

There is no reason to overestimate this form. But it is, like all other authentic forms, both deep and high. Called to the one, attempting the other. A real world.— If that is true, then technology, too, must change into building art to complete itself. It would be a building art that inherits the Gothic legacy. It is our greatest hope.

[card 15]

But none of this comes about by itself. History does not come about by itself. [addition in the original manuscript: History must be done.] And historical measurements are

shorter than many realize. Only thirty life spans separate us from the Acropolis. And the breathing span of the Middle Ages was too short for it to complete its cathedrals. [addition to the original manuscript: We have all reason to be wide awake and not sleep away our time.]

[card 16]

Furthermore, the technological age is not as young as it may appear. Whitehead transferred the hour of its birth into the seventeenth century. That may be. The ultimate reasons for what occurs today may be found in the discussion of lonely monks behind quiet Romanesque monastery walls.

[card 17]

With infinite slowness arises the great form the birth of which is the meaning of the epoch. [crossed out: But a reconciliatory forgiving kindness of history permits great things to die in their greatness and spares them from old age.] Not everything that happens takes place in full view. The decisive battles of the spirit are waged on invisible battlefields.

[card 18]

The visible is only the final step of a historical form. Its fulfillment. Its true fulfillment. Then it breaks off. And a new world arises.

[card 19]

What I have said is the ground on which I stand; that which I believe and the justification of my deeds. Convictions are necessary, but in the realm of one's work they have only limited significance. In the final analysis it is the performance that matters [crossed-out addition in original manuscript: That is what Goethe meant when he said: Create, artist, do not talk.]