

1923: APHORISMS ON ARCHITECTURE AND FORM.

We reject all aesthetic speculation, all doctrine, all formalism.

Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space; living, changing, new.

Not yesterday, not tomorrow, only today can be given form.

Only this kind of building will be creative.

Create form out of the nature of our tasks with the methods of our time.

This is our task.

We refuse to recognize problems of form, but only problems of building.

Form is not the aim of our work, but only the result.

Form, by itself, does not exist.

Form as an aim is formalism; and that we reject.

Essentially our task is to free the practice of building from the control of esthetic speculators and restore it to what it should exclusively be: building.

1924: ARCHITECTURE AND THE TIMES.

Greek temples, Roman basilicas and medieval cathedrals are significant to us as creations of a whole epoch rather than as works of individual architects. Who asks for the names of these builders? Of what significance are the fortuitous personalities of their creators? Such buildings are impersonal by their very nature. They are pure expressions of their time. Their true meaning is that they are symbols of their epoch.

Architecture is the will of the epoch translated into space. Until this simple truth is clearly recognized, the new architecture will be uncertain and tentative. Until then it must remain a chaos of undirected forces. The question as to the nature of architecture is of decisive importance. It must be understood that all architecture is bound up with its own time, that it can only be manifested in living tasks and in the medium of its epoch. In no age has it been otherwise.

It is hopeless to try to use the forms of the past in our architecture. Even the strongest artistic talent must fail in this attempt. Again and again we see talented architects who fall short because their work is not in tune with their age. In the last analysis, in spite of their great gifts, they are dilettantes; for it makes no difference how enthusiastically they do the wrong thing. It is a question of essentials. It is not possible to move forward and look backwards; he who lives in the past cannot advance.

The whole trend of our time is toward the secular. The endeavors of the mystics will be remembered as mere episodes. Despite our greater understanding of life, we shall build no cathedrals. Nor do the brave gestures of the Romantics mean anything to us, for behind them we detect their empty form. Ours is not an age of pathos; we do not respect flights of the spirit as much as we value reason and realism.

The demand of our time for realism and functionalism must be met. Only then will our buildings express the potential greatness of our time; and only a fool can say that it has no greatness.

We are concerned today with questions of a general nature. The individual is losing significance; his destiny is no longer what interests us. The decisive achievements in all fields are impersonal and their authors are for the most part unknown. They are part of the trend of our time toward anonymity. Our engineering structures are

examples. Gigantic dams, great industrial installations, and huge bridges are built as a matter of course with no designer's name attached to them. They point to the technology of the future.

If we compare the mammoth heaviness of Roman aqueducts with the web-like lightness of modern cranes or massive vaulting with thin reinforced concrete construction, we realize how much our architecture differs from that of the past in form and expression. Modern industrial methods have a great influence on this development. It is meaningless to object that modern buildings are only utilitarian.

If we discard all romantic conceptions, we can recognize the stone structures of the Greeks, the brick and concrete construction of the Romans and the medieval cathedrals, all as bold engineering achievements. It can be taken for granted that the first Gothic buildings were viewed as intruders in their Romanesque surroundings.

Our utilitarian buildings can become worthy of the name of architecture only if they truly interpret their time by their perfect functional expression.

1927: A LETTER ON FORM IN ARCHITECTURE TO DR RIEZLER.

My attack is not again form, but against form as an end in itself.

I make this attack because of what I have learned.

Form as an end inevitably results in mere formalism.

This effort is directed only of the exterior. But only what has life on the inside has a living exterior.

Only what has intensity of life can have intensity of form.

Every "how" is based on a "what".

The un-formed is no worse than the over-formed.

The former is nothing; the latter is mere appearance.

Real form presupposes real-life.

But no "has been" or "would be".

This is our criterion:

We should judge not so much by the results as by the creative process.

For it is just this that reveals whether the form is derived from life or invented for its own sake.

That is why creative process is so essential.

Life is what is decisive for us.

In all its plenitude and in its spiritual and material relation.

Is it not one of the most important tasks of the Werkbund to clarify, analyse and order our spiritual and material situation and thus to take the lead?

Must not all else be left to the forces of creation?

1930: THE NEW ERA.

(Speech delivered at a Werkbund meeting in Vienna.)

The new era is a fact: it exists, irrespective of our "yes" or "no". Yet it is neither better nor worse than any other era. It is pure datum, in itself without value content. Therefore I will not try to define it or clarify its basic structure.

Let us not give undue importance to mechanization and standardization.

Let us accept changed economic and social conditions as a fact.

All these take their blind and fateful course.

One thing will be decisive: the way we assert ourselves in the face of circumstance.

Here the problems of spirit begin. The important question to ask is not "what" but "how". What goods we produce or what tools we use are not questions of spiritual value. How the question of skyscrapers versus low buildings is settled, whether we build of steel and glass, are unimportant questions from the point of view of spirit.

Yet it is just the question of value that is decisive.

For what is right and significant for any era—including the new era—is this: to give the spirit the opportunity for existence.

1940: FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT.

An appreciation written for the unpublished catalog of the Frank Lloyd Wright Exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art of New York.

About the beginning of this century the great European artistic restoration instigated by William Morris, having grown over-retained, gradually began to lose force. Distinct signs of exhaustion became manifest. The attempt to revive architecture from the point of view of form appeared to be doomed. The lack of a valid convention became apparent, and even the greatest efforts of the artists of the day did not succeed in overcoming this deficiency. Their efforts, however, were restricted to the subjective. Since the authentic approach to architecture should always be the objective, we find the only valid solutions of that time to be in those cases where objective limits were imposed and there was no opportunity for subjective license. This was true of the field of industrial building. It is enough to remember the significant creations of Peter Behrens for the electrical industry. But in all other problems of architectural creation the architect ventured into the dangerous realm of the historical. To some of these men a revival of Classic forms seemed reasonable, and in the field of monumental architecture even imperative.

Of course this was not true of all early twentieth-century architects, particularly not of Van de Velde and Berlage. Both remained steadfast in their ideals. To the former, any deviation from a way of thinking once acknowledged to be necessary was impossible because of his intellectual integrity; to the latter, because of his almost religious faith in his ideals and the sincerity of his character. For these reasons the one received our highest respect and admiration, the other, our special veneration and love.

Nevertheless we young architects found ourselves in painful inner discord. Our enthusiastic hearts demanded the unqualified, and we were ready to pledge ourselves to an idea. But the potential vitality of the architectural idea of the period had by that time been lost.

This then was approximately the situation in 1910.

At this moment, so critical for us, the exhibition of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright came to Berlin. This comprehensive display and the exhaustive publication of his works enabled us to become really acquainted with the achievements of this architect. The encounter was destined to prove of great significance to the European development.

The work of this great master presented an architectural world of unexpected force, clarity of language and disconcerting richness of form. Here, finally, was a master-builder drawing upon the veritable fountainhead of architecture; who with true originality lifted his creations into the light. Here again, at long last, genuine organic architecture flowered. The more we were absorbed in the study

of these creations, the greater became our admiration for his incomparable talent, the boldness of his conceptions and the independence of his thought and action. The dynamic impulse emanating from his work invigorated a whole generation. His influence was strongly felt even when it was not actually visible.

So after this first encounter we followed the development of this rare man with wakeful hearts. We watched with astonishment the exuberant unfolding of the gifts of one who had been endowed by nature with the most splendid talents. In his undiminishing power he resembles a giant tree in a wide landscape, which, year after year, attains a more noble crown.

1950: ADDRESS TO ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY.

Technology is rooted in the past.

It dominates the present and tends into the future.

It is a real historical movement—

one of the great movements which shape and represent their epoch.

It can be compared only with the Classic

discovery of man as a person,

the Roman will to power,

and the religious movement of the Middle Ages.

Technology is far more than a method,

it is a world in itself.

As a method it is superior in almost every respect.

But only where it is left to itself as in

gigantic structures of engineering, there

technology reveals its true nature.

There it is evident that it is not only a useful means,

that it is something, something in itself,

something that has a meaning and a powerful form—

so powerful in fact, that it is not easy to name it.

Is that still technology or is it architecture?

And that may be the reason why some people

are convinced that architecture will be outmoded

and replaced by technology.

Such a conviction is not based on clear thinking.

The opposite happens.

Wherever technology reaches its real fulfillment,

it transcends into architecture.

It is true that architecture depends on facts,

but its real field of activity is in the realm

of significance.

I hope you will understand that architecture

has nothing to do with the inventions of forms.

It is not a playground for children, young or old.

Architecture is the real battleground of the spirit.

Architecture wrote the history of the epochs

and gave them their names.

Architecture depends on its time.

It is the crystallization of its inner structure,

the slow unfolding of its form.

That is the reason why technology and architecture

are so closely related.

Our real hope is that they grow together,

that someday the one be the expression of

the other.

Only then will we have an architecture worthy of its name:

Architecture as a true symbol of our time.