



**LILLY REICH, THE OVERLOOKED AUTHOR**

Her influence, recognition and the mechanisms of exclusion in architectural history



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AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis

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# INTRODUCTION

Historically, modern architecture has long been dominated by male figures, often neglecting contributions of female designers working alongside them. Throughout the 20th century, many women collaborated closely with their male colleagues, yet their influence was rarely acknowledged. This has led to a structural underrepresentation of women in architectural history.

A good example is Lilly Reich, a German interior and exhibition designer known for her innovative use of materials and spatial compositions. For thirteen years, she collaborated with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe on iconic projects like the Barcelona Pavilion (1929) and the Tugendhat House (1930). While these designs were long attributed solely to Mies, recent studies have revealed Reich's substantial influence. Despite increasing recognition, her legacy remains closely tied to their collaboration, overshadowing the fact that she had already established a successful career before working with him.

Reich began her career in the early 20th century as an embroiderer and dressmaker, developing extensive experience in textiles and fashion. This background made her highly skilled in working with textures, colours, and the human interaction with space [1]. Over time, her work expanded into a broader range of disciplines like furniture and interior design [2]. By the mid 1920s, she established herself as a prominent exhibition designer. In 1926, she began a professional collaboration with Mies, which would last for thirteen years (see Figure 1.1). Through this collaboration, she also became increasingly involved in architectural design.

This career path reflects the gender structures of 20th century architecture; architecture was considered a male profession, while women were more commonly active in textiles and fashion [1]. Despite these patriarchy norms, Reich managed to position herself in a male-dominated world through her collaboration with Mies, but her influence was not recognized for a long time. The expansion of her work and her long-term collaboration raises the question how her design approach and characteristics influenced Mies in their collaborative projects. Addressing this knowledge gap was the first aim of this thesis. The following research question was formulated:

- In what ways did Lilly Reich influence Mies van der Rohe during their collaboration and how can her influence be identified in their joint projects?

To answer this question, first, the individual design characteristics and visions of Reich and Mies before their partnership were examined. By comparing their individual styles with their later joint projects, this research aimed to identify specific ways in which Reich's influence and contribution can be traced in the projects that are more attributed to Mies.

In particular, the following specific questions and topics were addressed:

- Which design characteristics, in terms of form, composition and material and colour are evident in Reich's early work? Reich's early exhibition and interior designs were analysed to define her characteristics (Chapter 2.1).
- Which design characteristics are visible in Mies's early work, and how do they differ from Reich's? Key projects from Mies before the collaboration were examined to establish his independent architectural characteristics and vision (Chapter 2.2).
- How did the design process unfold in their early collaborative projects, and which elements of Reich's approach can be identified (Chapter 3)?

A central case study in this thesis is *The Dwelling of Our Time* exhibition in 1931, where Reich and Mies each designed a dwelling, placed side by side and connected by a shared wall. This project is unique because it is the only occasion where Reich independently designed an architectural space herself, allowing for a direct comparison of their design approaches. Unlike their other collaborations, where authorship can be unclear, this case provides a rare opportunity to distinguish their individual contributions. The case study was used to answer the following question:

- What are the differences between the two spaces in *The Dwelling of Our Time*, and how do they reflect Reich's and Mies's distinct design approaches and partnership (Chapter 4)?

Finally, this study goes beyond comparing their designs by addressing the broader issue of attribution in architectural history. It explores why Reich's contributions were often overlooked and what their projects reveal about their partnership. By creating a framework to identify her impact, this research re-evaluates her role in projects traditionally credited to Mies and shows how their collaboration influenced the delayed recognition of her work. This led to the last question:

- Why have Lilly Reich's contributions often been overlooked in architectural history, and how does this relate to issues of authorship and attribution in architecture (Chapter 5)?



Figure 1.1. Lilly Reich and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1933. From "German-Architects," by U. Meyer, 2023.



Figure 2.1. Youth Centre in Berlin, Charlottenburg. From *"The Museum of Modern Art,"* by M. McQuaid, 1996.

## 2.1 DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS OF LILLY REICH

Before collaborating with Mies, Reich (Berlin, 1885) already had a solo career in textiles, interior and exhibition design [2]. In 1908 she studied in the Viennese workshops under Josef Hoffmann where she was introduced to the knowledge of fine materials. Later she undertook an apprenticeship with Else Oppler-Legband, whose expertise in fashion, needlework, window display and interior design helped Reich's professional career [1].

Reich's education led to her first major commission in 1911, where she designed the interior of the Youth Centre in Berlin's Charlottenburg district, seen in Figure 2.1, showing formal simplicity and efficient spatial use. A year later, Reich joined the Deutscher Werkbund, an influential association of architects, artists, and industrialist. As head of window displays, Reich moved into exhibition design [2].

This section analyses three key exhibition designs that reveal her early architectural spatiality and solo design characteristics through form, composition and use of material and colour, providing a reference for the following chapters.

## 2. BEFORE THE COLLABORATION

### *Elefanten-Apotheke, Berlin, 1913*

Aligned with the Werkbund principles, Reich (see Figure 2.2) abandoned the surrealistic and symbolic style for a simpler and functional approach in her 1913 Elefanten-Apotheke window display in Berlin. As shown in Figure 2.3, instead of showcasing the medicines, she highlighted the production tools that represented the pharmaceutical craft, such as mortars and pestles, glass vessels, and distillation tubes, as advertisement, highlighting craftsmanship [1, 2]. Reich chose clear, functional objects rather than decorative elements, reflecting a rational design language. In terms of form, the objects were displayed on simple structures against rectangular panels. Regarding composition, these objects were systematically arranged in a stacked layout against nearly empty background panels, creating contrast and emphasizing their abstract quality, achieving simple spatial unity. For material and colour, Reich used two contrasting tones, with white backgrounds and black frameworks to display the objects, creating an interplay between background and object [2].



Figure 2.2. Portrait Lilly Reich. From "Metalocus," by J. Juan Barba, 2019.

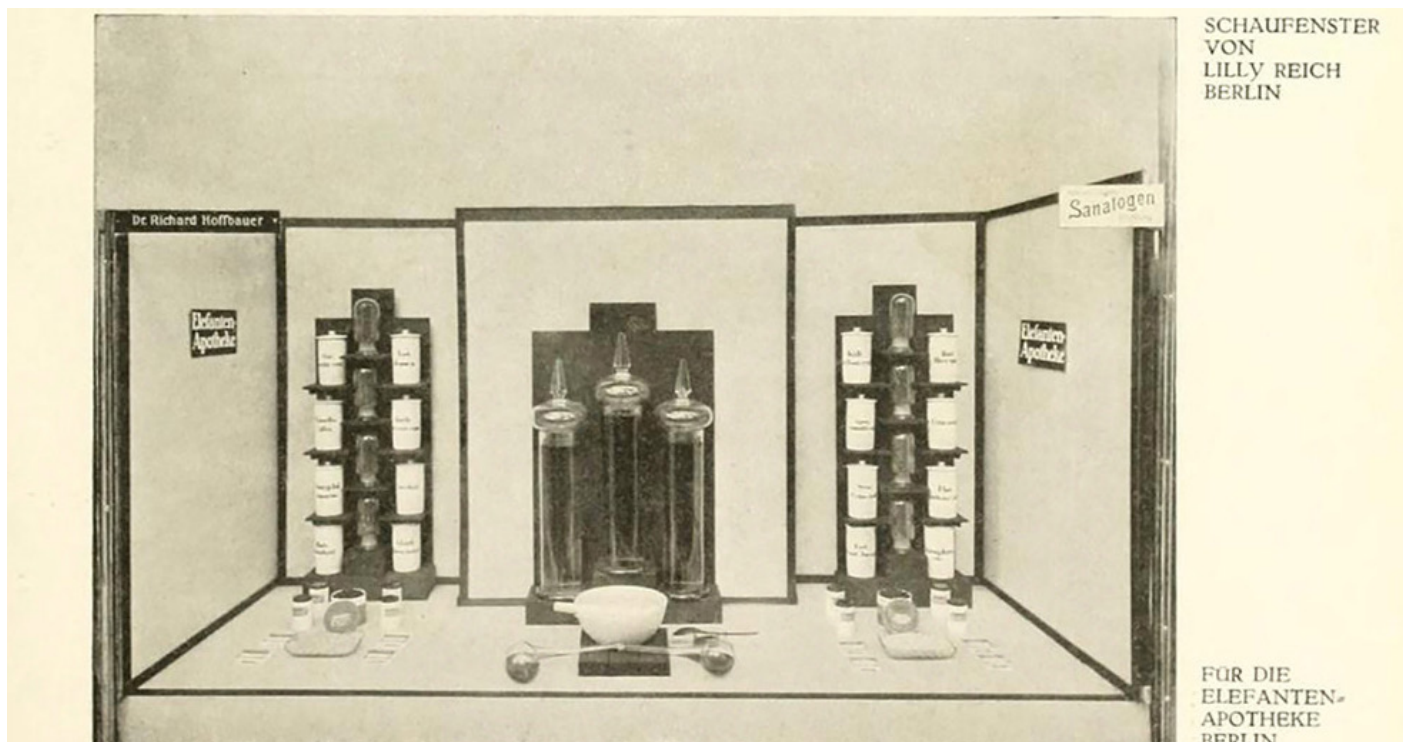


Figure 2.3. Elefanten-Apotheke by Lilly Reich. From "ScienceDirect," by L. Lizondo-Sevilla & D. Domingo-Calabuig, 2023.



Figure 2.4. *Kunsth Handwerk in der Mode* by Lilly Reich. From "ScienceDirect," by L. Lizondo-Sevilla & D. Domingo-Calabuig, 2023.

#### *Kunsth Handwerk in der Mode, Berlin, 1920*

After the First World War, Reich became the first woman in Werkbund board, which led to more prominent projects and increasing recognition. One of these projects was the exhibition *Kunsth Handwerk in der Mode* in 1920, co-organized with colleague Margarete Neumann, focusing on German women's fashion. The artisan was central, who according to Reich "had to respect the working laws of the machine, but at the same time exercise his own influence on it." The display's form is a freestanding geometric panel on which the exhibited materials were hung, as shown in Figure 2.4. Regarding composition, the panel formed the centre of the spatial layout, surrounded by a continuous route, which invites visitors to experience the showcased materials from multiple viewpoints. For material and colour, Reich created visual contrast by the interplay of colour and texture between the surface and the textiles [2]. She selected high-quality, handcrafted materials as she saw them as timeless, luxurious art forms [1].

#### *Von der Faser zum Gewebe, Frankfurt, 1926*

Her last major solo project was the 1926 exhibition *Von der Faser zum Gewebe* in Frankfurt. The theme focused on weaving techniques and industrial machinery, a subject Reich excelled in. As shown in Figure 2.5, she placed raw materials and techniques at the exhibition's centre instead presenting them as secondary [1, 2]. The stands consisted of operating machinery, directly linking the use of materials to the production process [2]. Regarding to composition, the machines were arranged in production sequence, creating a structured spatial layout. Striking signage guided visitors along a free and continuous route, maintaining visual order and explaining each step of the manufacturing process [2]. As for material and colour, Reich displayed processed raw materials rather than natural ones, further emphasizing the industrial nature of production. Finished textiles were presented as rolls of fabric, draped and rolled on tables and shelves [1]. Critics praised Reich's innovative ability to present a rather unattractive subject in a visually engaging way as she transformed functional industrial equipment into sculptural and spatial elements, bringing art and technology together [2].

Although exhibition's themes varied, several recurring elements and features were used to emphasize their essence. Geometric forms, contrasting colours, and the use of textiles and individual objects are consistent design characteristics. Reich was known for arranging objects to establish clear spatial relationships by positioning them in series, opposite each other, or rotating them at 90 degrees for dynamic effects. She often incorporated backdrops that framed and highlighted objects, a technique applied both in exhibitions and with furniture in interiors [3]. Her designs emphasized craftsmanship, production processes, and education, expressed through central arrangement, active demonstrations of production, and a functional simplicity that drew full attention to the subject and the exhibits.

Reich's solo career showed a progression towards the higher arts, evolving from interior design to temporary architecture. It is notable that until 1926, she often worked in collaboration with other professionals, both men and women, yet all her projects were still recognized as her own. Critics noted her designs possessed qualities "as only a male hand would ever have done", reflecting the limited expectations of women in design at the time [2]. Nevertheless, Reich established herself in this male-dominated field through vision, craftsmanship and determination.



Figure 2.5. Von der Faser zum Gewebe by Lilly Reich. From "ScienceDirect," by L. Lizondo-Sevilla & D. Domingo-Calabuig, 2023.



Figure 2.6. Portrait Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. From "Wikipedia," n.d.



Figure 2.7. Model Concrete Country House by Mies van der Rohe. From "andrew.cmu.edu," by G. Cuéllar, 2007.



Figure 2.8. Model Concrete Country House by Mies van der Rohe. From "andrew.cmu.edu," by G. Cuéllar, 2007.

## 2.2 DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS OF MIES VAN DER ROHE

Mies van der Rohe (Aachen, 1886) is known as a key figure in 20th-century modern architecture. As the son of a stonemason, he developed an early appreciation for materials and craftsmanship [4]. After working for architects Bruno Paul and Peter Behrens, Mies opened his own studio, initially designing neoclassical villas [5].

Between his classical villas and modernist work, Mies made a sudden shift. In 1921, after a quiet period, he began visionary architectural studies and joined the Deutscher Werkbund [5]. Though never build due to their idealistic character, these designs can be seen as the foundation to his later modernistic work. Seeing himself as a pioneer of a new modern age, Mies aimed to create architecture for contemporary needs [4]. The characteristics of two of these designs, the Concrete Country Building and the Brick Country House are further described below.

### *Concrete Country House, 1923*

The Concrete Country House was Mies's first zoned house, breaking from the traditional 'box' structure by separating its wings with courts and patio's [6]. The villa's form extended asymmetrically from a central core into three L-shaped wings, as seen in Figures 2.7-2.8. Each served a function such as living, dining or sleeping [7]. The simple, rectangular volumes featured flat roofs and horizontal rectangular windows, emphasizing a strict geometric order [6]. Mies introduced a 'pinwheel' composition, with the wings projecting into the surrounding landscape. Point supports allowed for large windows, maximizing outward views and daylight. The villa created a rhythm of mass and void that blurred interior and exterior boundaries, marking an early step towards the open and fluid floor plan, a key element of modern architecture [7]. In terms of material and colour, Mies envisioned reinforced concrete for both structure and aesthetics. Concrete allowed fewer load-bearing elements and more spatial freedom. He also envisioned to use rubber floors and sliding windows for sound insulation [7]. The sober, grey colour tone of concrete gave the house a sleek, modernist appearance.

### *Brick Country House, 1923*

The Brick Country House strongly reflects Mies's developing spatial ideas and was a modernized take on Frank Lloyd Wright's work [6]. As shown in Figure 2.11, its sculptural form consists of asymmetrical closed, cubic volumes and strict geometric shapes made of walls and slabs [7]. Regarding composition, the most striking aspect of the house is its open floor plan (see Figure 2.9). Freestanding walls guided movement through open spaces, creating a continuous flow. The spaces were only labelled as "living" and "service" areas to emphasise universality [7]. The walls extended beneath a flat roof into the landscape, visually connecting interior and exterior [4, 6]. This wall composition appears to be inspired by Van Doesburg's painting *Rhythm of a Russian Dance*, with its asymmetrical shifting, linear planes evoking movement in a labyrinthine manner (see Figure 2.10) [7]. Turning to material and colour, Mies envisioned the house constructed in brick, familiar from his training in Aachen. Floor-to-ceiling glass walls interrupted the brickwork, appearing solid from the outside but dissolving from the inside, blurring interior and exterior boundaries. The combination of extended walls, projecting roof slabs and material use created a balance between enclosure and spatial freedom [7].

Both designs show Mies experimenting with spatial freedom, open floor plans, and fluid transitions between inside and outside. He used simple, clean geometric forms arranged asymmetrically to create movement in open, continuous spaces. The low buildings emphasized horizontal orientation towards the landscape. Despite using different materials, both contrast solid, closed volumes with transparent glass, making material essential for structure, appearance and spatial continuity.

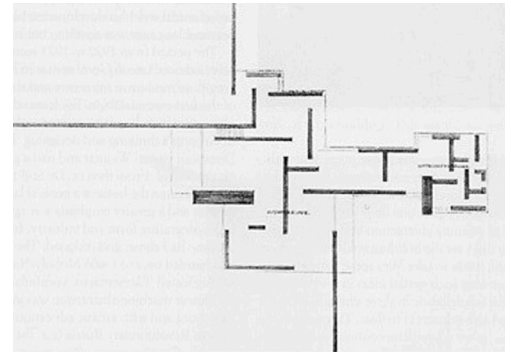


Figure 2.9. Floorplan Brick Country House by Mies van der Rohe. From "Architect," by G. Garvin, 2015.

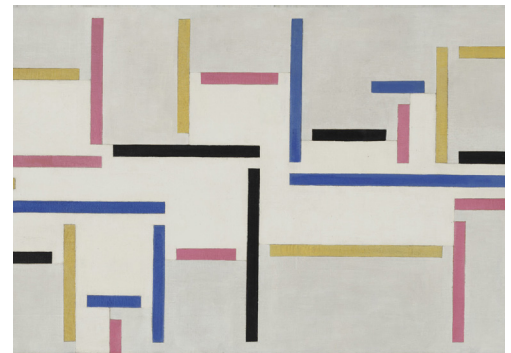


Figure 2.10. Painting *Rhythm of a Russian Dance* by Theo van Doesburg. From "The Museum of Modern Art," by T. van Doesburg, 1918.

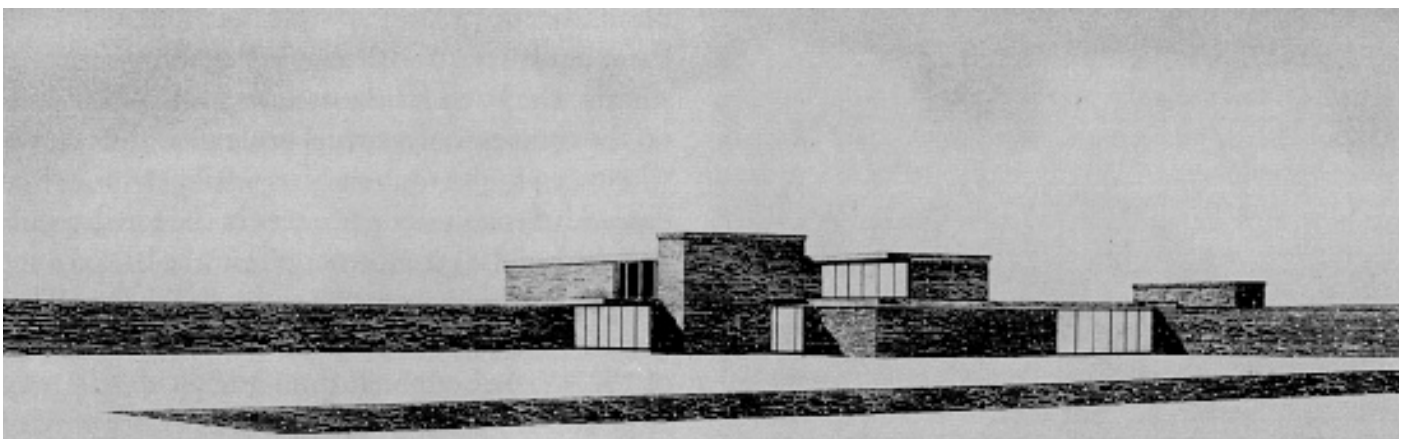


Figure 2.11. Perspective sketch Brick Country House by Mies van der Rohe. From "Architect," by G. Garvin, 2015.

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### **2.3 COMPARISON OF THEIR DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS**

Although Reich and Mies came from different design fields, their designs share some similarities. Both used geometric forms, simplicity and avoided unnecessary ornamentation. They valued materials for their structural and aesthetic qualities and appreciated craftsmanship. Each created movement and experience through composition. Reich achieved this through arranging objects, guiding visitors and Mies through open floor plans and sightlines.

Nonetheless, there are also clear differences. Reich focused more on sensory experience, educational presentation and combining textures and materials, whereas Mies worked on a larger scale with spatial abstraction. Reich used strong colour contrasts for visual hierarchy, while Mies used a more restrained colour palette defined by natural material tones. Although both valued high-quality materials, Reich favoured refined, handcrafted textiles, while Mies worked more with structural materials such as concrete, brick, and glass.

The following chapter explores how their individual design approaches reconciled in their collaborative projects and to what extent Reich's design characteristics can be identified in works traditionally attributed to Mies.





Figure 3.1. Linoleum Hall, Die Wohnung in Stuttgart. From "The Museum of Modern Art," by M. McQuaid, 1996.

### 3.1 HOW THEIR COLLABORATION STARTED

Reich and Mies met through the Werkbund. In 1926, Mies asked Reich to help organize his first exhibition, *Die Wohnung* (The Dwelling) in Stuttgart, due to her expertise in modern design and her successful exhibitions like *From Fiber to Textile* [1].

The exhibition included the Weissenhof Estate, an experimental housing development outside the city, and nine thematic exhibition halls in the city centre. Mies designed the masterplan and the only collective housing block. Reich was responsible for eight of the nine halls and the interior of an apartment in Mies' block [2]. This shows a clear division of roles, where Mies focused on architecture and Reich on interiors and exhibitions.

Although these distinct roles, Reich and Mies's first designs with shared authorship were exhibition halls 4 and 5: The Glass Hall and the Linoleum Hall. Both halls served as advertisements for material manufacturers. Unlike the more production-oriented halls, these two used materials, colour, light, and movement to create an architectural experience [1].

Hall 4, the Glass Hall, was arranged as a living environment where coloured glass walls visually connected different housing zones (see Figures 3.2-3.4). A white floor and an olive-green glass wall led visitors to a darker, presumably red linoleum floor, visually linking to hall 5 [1]. The contrasting materials reflect Reich's style, merged with Mies's earlier glass experiments. In hall 5, linoleum samples were displayed by hanging them on the walls, as shown in Figure 3.1. Space and material were integrated into a fluid entirety [2]. The spatial language reflects both Mies and Reich, but the material is a clear connection to Reich.

### 3. DURING THE COLLABORATION

These halls were highly innovative because the materials themselves took centre stage, without additional decorative elements. This closely aligns with Reich's approach, who saw material as a way to give a space structure and atmosphere without unnecessary ornamentation. Colour in the floors and glass walls guided visitors and created transitions between the spaces, while keeping a clear layout [1]. Visitors' movements casted shifting shadows and reflections, which gave the spaces a magical effect [2].

Their design was well received by critics, with both Mies and Reich being praised. Particularly, the remarkable interplay of light, material, and movement made a strong impression. Reich's design approach was described as independent but coordinated; she designed in her mind and built models, while Mies worked from sketches. Reich would sit across him and offering critique and suggestions. This method of working first emerged during this exhibition, marking the start of Reich's exclusive collaboration with Mies. She became his confidante and business manager and played a crucial role in his life for many years [2].

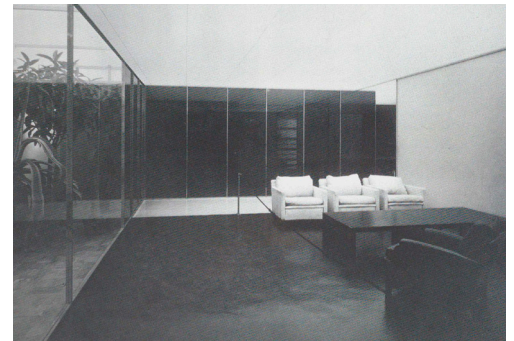


Figure 3.2. Glass Hall living area, Die Wohnung in Stuttgart. From "DASH | Delft Architectural Studies on Housing," by J. Zeinstra, 2018.



Figure 3.3. Glass Hall living area, Die Wohnung in Stuttgart. From "DASH | Delft Architectural Studies on Housing," by J. Zeinstra, 2018.

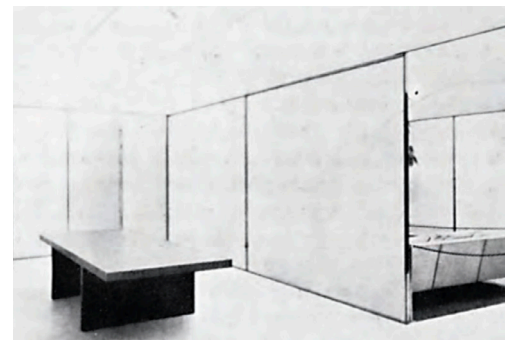


Figure 3.4. Glass Hall dining area, Die Wohnung in Stuttgart. From "DASH | Delft Architectural Studies on Housing," by J. Zeinstra, 2018.

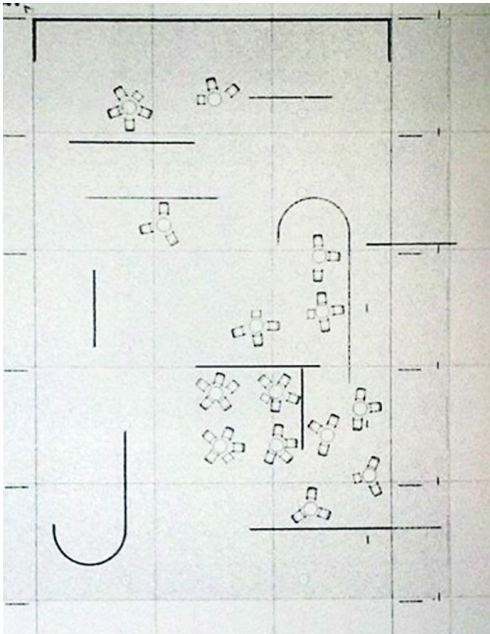


Figure 3.5. Floorplan Cafe Samt und Seide. From "Socks Studio;" by M. Fabrizi, 2016.

### 3.2 THEIR JOINT PROJECTS

*Café Samt & Seide, Die Mode der Dame exhibition, 1927*

After the Stuttgart exhibition, Reich and Mies designed Café Samt und Seide (Velvet and Silk Café) for the exhibition *Die Mode der Dame* (Women's Fashion). This involved showcasing the textiles of Vereinigte Seidenwebereien AG in an industrial building. This space was shaped using the materials themselves, where fabrics defined the exhibition space while simultaneously exhibiting themselves, as seen in Figure 3.6 [2]. The design featured large textile walls that hung freely in the space, suspended from curved metal rods. The curtains together formed a straight linear pattern, interrupted by two gracefully curving curtains [1].

The composition of the space used these textiles placed parallel and perpendicular (see Figure 3.5) creating smaller spaces that flowed into one another, remaining visually connected, but partially defined. This recalled the Glass Hall, except that textiles were used instead of glass [1]. The resulting open, continuous space reflects Mies's evolving idea of an endlessly flowing space, already visible in his *Country Houses* [7]. Reich's influence is also recognizable as she also explored the concept of a continuous route in her design for *Kunsthandwerk in der Mode*, where the freestanding panel guided visitors to experience the materials. This interplay of openness and subtle distinction shows how their ideas merged here. Reich's influence was especially clear in the use of materials and colours. The walls featured silk and velvet in contrasting colours like black, orange, red and lemon yellow (see Figure 3.7), typical of Reich's refined sense of colour and material combinations. The contrasting curtains that defined the space during their exhibition reflect Reich's typical approach, where she lets materials determine the spatial layout, shaping both the routing and the display [1, 2].

Although the design aligned with Mies's vision of open, flexible space, the use of textiles as the primary medium, the spatial route, and the bold colour choices strongly point to Reich's influence. Still, the press at the time attributed the entire authorship exclusively to Mies [2].



Figure 3.6. Cafe Samt und Seide. From "Socks Studio;" by M. Fabrizi, 2016.



Figure 3.7. Cafe Samt und Seide in colour. From "Arcguide," n.d.



Figure 3.8. Interior living area Villa Tugendhat. From "Villa Tugendhat," n.d.



Figure 3.9. Interior dining area Villa Tugendhat. From "Villa Tugendhat," n.d.



Figure 3.10. Openable windows Villa Tugendhat. From "Villa Tugendhat," n.d.

### *Tugendhat House, Brno, 1928-1930*

Mies and Reich designed the Tugendhat House in Brno for the Tugendhat family [6]. Built on a slope, the villa appears as a single story from the street, while two additional floors are integrated into the hillside, as seen in Figure 3.11 [7]. The lowest level contained utility spaces, above were the living areas with a conservatory and a terrace, and the top floor accommodated the main entrance, the hall, and the bedrooms [8].

The villa's form relied on a steel skeleton structure, allowing walls to define the spaces within a strict grid [7]. The building volumes and the interior layout were shaped by geometric forms and straight lines, interrupted by a few curved walls, a recurring feature from Café Samt und Seide. The open, transparent spatial composition featured long, intersecting sightlines that allowed the space to be perceived almost at once. Walls and furniture defined the space in a balanced composition [3, 7].

The floor plan (see Figure 3.12) was precisely arranged, with furniture placed opposite, side by side and occasionally rotated 90 degrees. A curved backdrop framed and emphasised a round table, reflecting Reich's compositional style [3]. Material and colour shaped the spatial experience. Large glass walls blurred interior and exterior boundaries, with electric windows that lowered into the floor, reflecting Mies's earlier explorations of glass to connect indoor and outdoor spaces [7].

The interior, as seen in Figures 3.8-3.10, featured luxurious materials like a honey-toned onyx wall, curved Macassar ebony, a curved milk glass wall for soft light, white linoleum floors, and wool rugs for brightness and texture [7]. Like Café Samt und Seide, curtains of black raw silk, black velvet, and beige raw silk could divide or enclose the space, reflecting Reich's earlier use of textiles to define spaces functionally and visually [7].

Several pieces of furniture, including the famous steel frame Tugendhat chair, were specially designed for the villa. Although traditionally attributed to Mies, it was likely co-designed with Reich because she designed an entire series of tubular steel furniture herself [1, 2]. The furnishings featured bright contrasting colours like silver-grey wool, emerald green leather, and ruby red velvet that are typical to Reich's style and taste [1].

Until far into the 20th century, Reich was not acknowledged as an author of this project, despite her clear influence, especially in the interior design and material choices. Principles from their earlier collaborations are also visible here.



Figure 3.11. Hillside Villa Tugendhat. From "Villa Tugendhat," n.d.

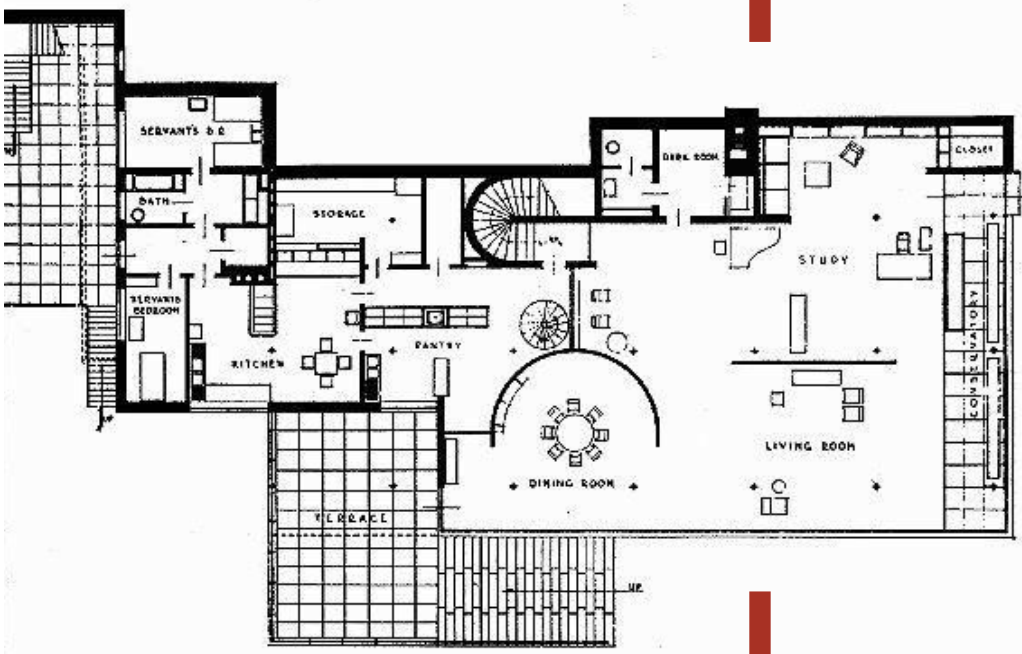


Figure 3.12. Floorplan second floor Tugendhat. From "Archigraphie," 2011.

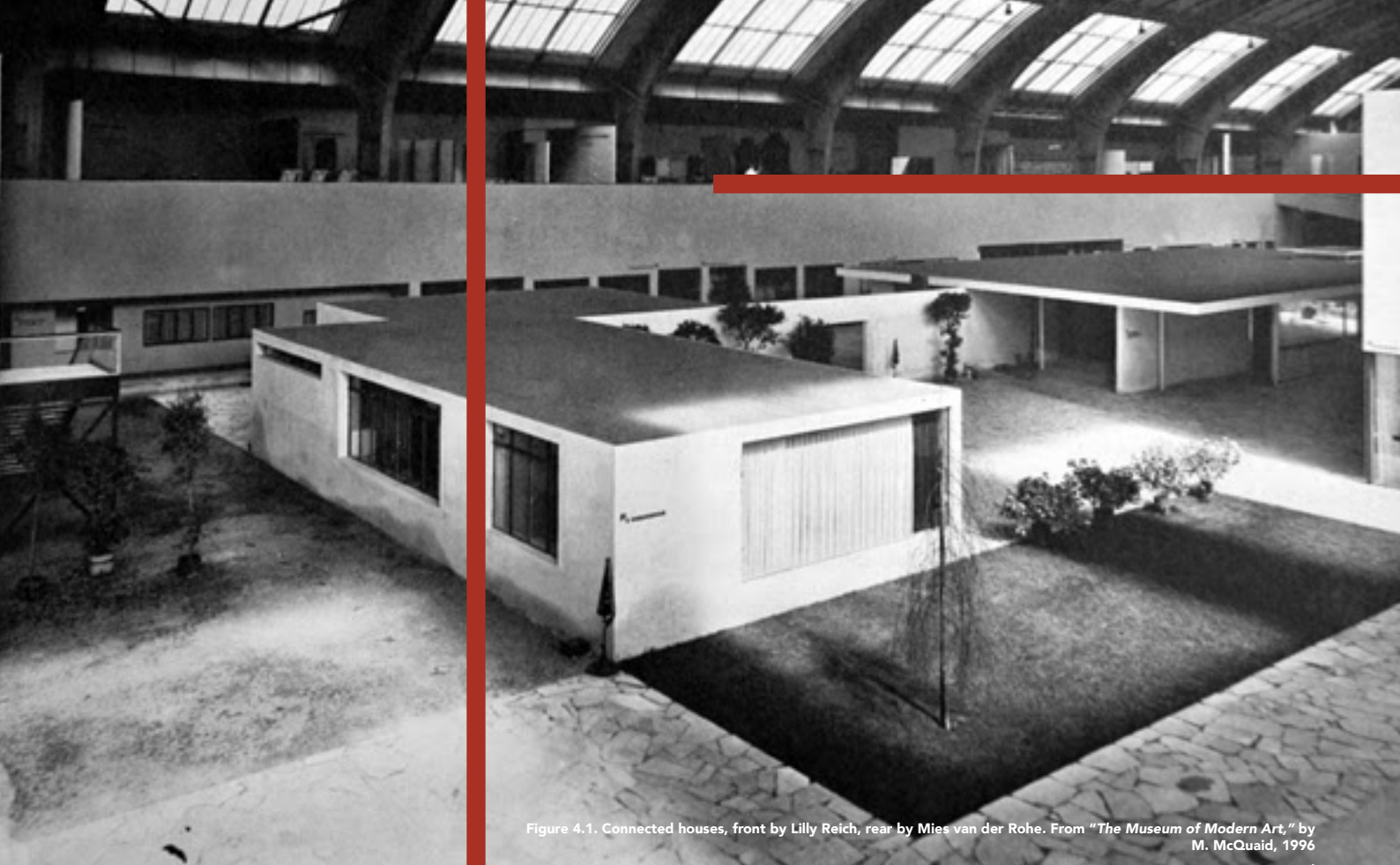


Figure 4.1. Connected houses, front by Lilly Reich, rear by Mies van der Rohe. From *"The Museum of Modern Art,"* by M. McQuaid, 1996

#### 4.1 THE EXHIBITION

In 1931, Reich and Mies were involved in the exhibition *Die Wohnung unserer Zeit* (The Dwelling of Our Time), part of the *Deutsche Bauausstellung* (German Building Exhibition) in Berlin. This exhibition included eight halls in which international participants presented the latest developments in architecture and the building trades [1].

Reich designed several interiors and directed the material display on the mezzanine of Hall 2 (see Figure 4.4), arranging groups of interior finishes (see Figure 4.2). Variations in height, positioning, and the honest presentation of raw materials created a clear spatial structure in an open fluid space [1]. The display emphasized visual qualities like colour, texture, and malleability over practical function. Reich showed how finishing materials, often considered superficial, could shape architectural design through the relation between object and space [9].

From the mezzanine, visitors viewed life-size apartment and house models on the ground floor (see Figure 4.3). These, along with Reich's display, emphasized that spatial experience begins before construction [9]. The models, mainly by *Deutscher Werkbund* designers, were organized by Mies, who again took on the "more architectural" role [2, 9].

The exhibition showed contemporary housing needs and solutions. Mies argued that homes no longer reflected shifting social relations and that interiors had become essential to architecture, shaped by movement and experience. Furniture guided movement and was modular to suit personal needs. The exhibition emphasized that dwelling involved not just construction, but the creation of human-scale living spaces [9].

# 4. THE DWELLING OF OUR TIME

Reich designed her first and only architectural design for this exhibition. Her house was connected through a wall to the House for a Childless Couple by Mies (see Figure 4.1) [2]. This offers a unique opportunity to compare the two designs directly and distinguish their individual contributions. The next paragraph analyses and compares their design features.

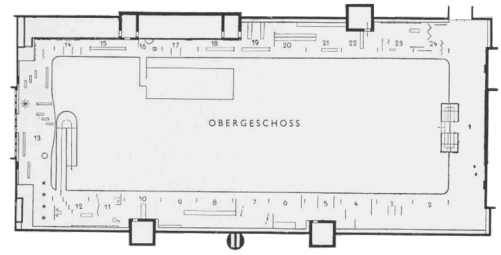


Figure 4.2. Floorplan Hall 2 "material show" mezzanine. From "The Museum of Modern Art," by M. McQuaid, 1996.

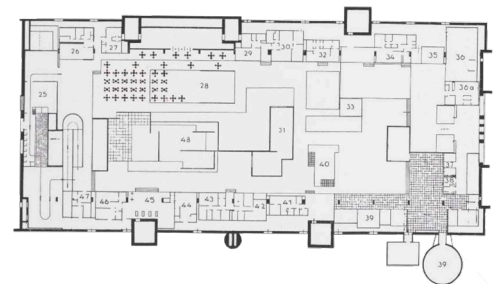


Figure 4.3. Floorplan Hall 2 ground floor. From "The Museum of Modern Art," by M. McQuaid, 1996.

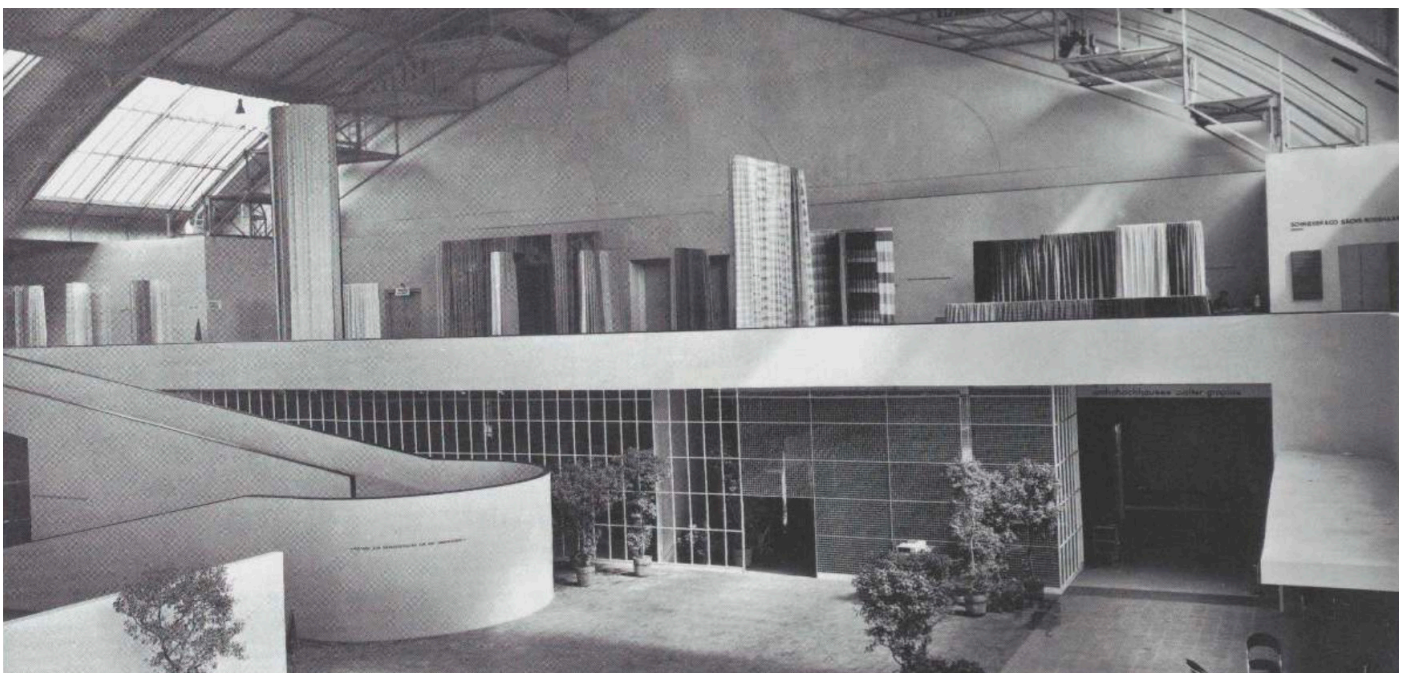


Figure 4.4. Hall 2 exhibition Dwelling of Our Time. From "The Museum of Modern Art," by M. McQuaid, 1996.



Figure 4.5. Interior Mies van der Rohe's house. From "Partners in Design," z.d.



Figure 4.6. Interior Mies van der Rohe's house. From "Drawing Matter," by P. Johnson, 2020.

## 4.2 COMPARISON

Like the other model buildings, Reich's and Mies's houses had white walls and black columns, creating visual cohesion. Meanwhile, the interiors showcased rich textures and materials, standing out against the exterior's calm, uniform appearance [9].

Mies's house for a Childless Couple consisted of open, fluidly connected spaces with freestanding walls extended outward, as shown in Figure 4.9. Only the bathroom and service rooms were enclosed. The living and dining area were mainly surrounded by glass walls, one being electrically retractable, seamlessly blending with the outdoor space. The living area featured Reich's furniture, including a three-tiered table serving as both space divider and storage. Even the bedrooms were not separated and overlooked a terrace with a sculpture [1, 7].

Reich's house was much simpler and conventional, with clearly defined interior spaces [3]. It was described as realistic, functional, simple, limited and featuring cozy furniture [2]. Extended walls created a compartmentalized floor plan (see Figure 4.10), yet the interior still felt open due to visual connections from a central point. Furniture sometimes blocked sightlines to ensure privacy. The interior was sparsely furnished, mostly with Reich's own designs, except for some pieces by Mies, especially in the man's bedroom [1].

The two designs share similarities but also differences in their architectural principles [2]. Both houses have compact, efficiently organized floor plans and Figures 4.6-4.8 show a sober, minimalist interior style. Both used extended parallel or perpendicular walls to define space and incorporated each other's furniture as spatial elements.

The differences are already in the scale. Both houses explore openness and outdoor connections, but Mies emphasizes this more

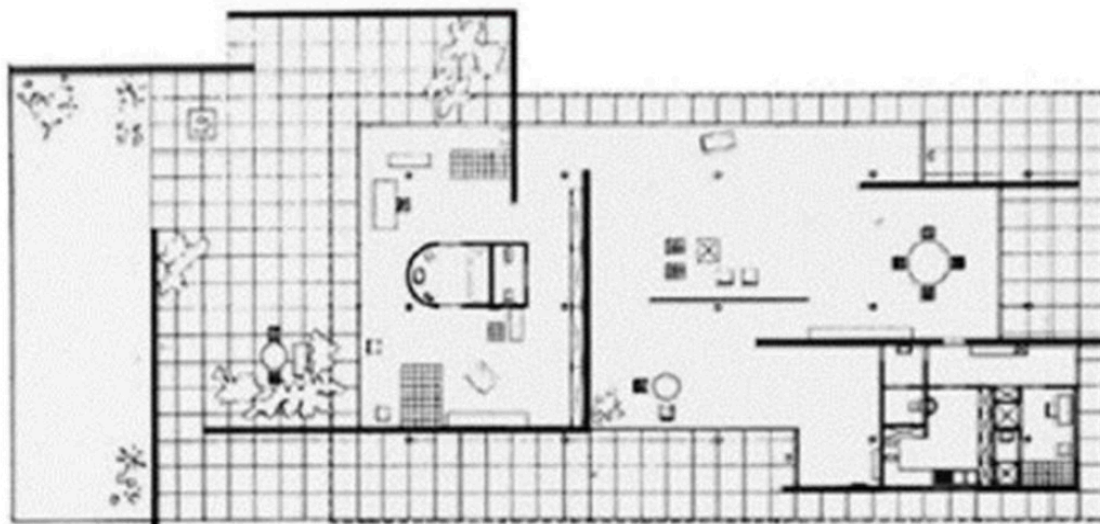


Figure 4.9. Floorplan Mies van der Rohe's house. From "UVaDoc," by A. Balbás Martínez, 2024.

with open façades, and an overhanging roof. Reich's house is more compartmentalized and enclosed, with the roof directly aligned to the façades, creating an introverted and compact character [1]. This is also reflected inside. Almost all of Mies's spaces are open and flow fluidly into each other and the outdoors, while Reich prioritizes privacy, using walls and furniture separating areas.

Mies's design can be seen as radical and spatially experimental, while Reich's design was more realistic, conventional, and contained [7, 10]. The connecting wall between their houses almost symbolized their collaboration and suggests an ideal living scenario for them: independent, yet still close to one another [10].

### 4.3 CRITICS

During this period of their collaboration, their joint projects were almost entirely attributed to Mies. In this exhibition, Reich was largely assigned a secondary role, even in the material show that she solely designed [2]. As architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock wrote:

"The main interest of the exhibition was to be found in Room II, which had come into being entirely under the direction of Mies van der Rohe. From the kinds of marble on display, woods, and fabrics –which were selected by Mies and arranged by Lilly Reich– to the Mies house at the center of the composition, everything is arranged with a clarity of vision that can only be achieved by a single positive taste control" [2].

Reich's interior design for two apartments was praised for its compact layout [1]. However, her ground floor house was viewed as realistic and functional but also architecturally rigid and lacking the elegance of the expert [3, 11].

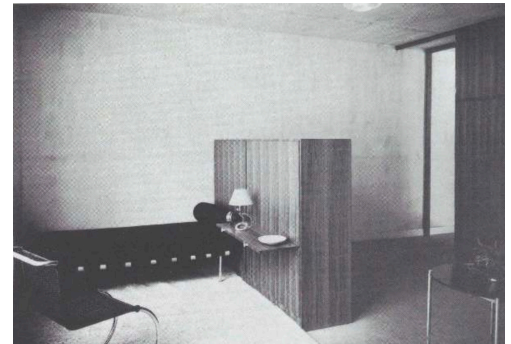


Figure 4.7. Interior man's bedroom, Lilly Reich's house. From "The Museum of Modern Art," by M. McQuaid, 1996.



Figure 4.8. Interior living room, Lilly Reich's house. From "The Museum of Modern Art," by M. McQuaid, 1996.

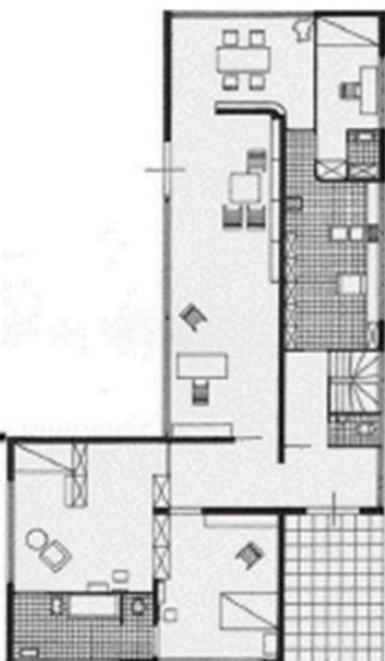


Figure 4.10. Floorplan Lilly Reich's house. From "UVaDoc," by A. Balbás Martínez, 2024.

In contrast, Mies's house received highly positive reviews. Both Hitchcock and architectural historian and architect Philip Johnson called it the most successful individual submission of the exhibition [7].

Although criticism of Reich's house could be justified by her design choices and limited architectural experience, it is remarkable that her other well-received contributions were largely attributed to Mies. Combined with the similarities between their houses, this raises questions about the role of gender in the evaluation of her work. The phrase "lacking the elegance of the expert" further suggests that she was not considered as a fully qualified architect. It seems likely that criticism of her house was influenced by Mies's status as a celebrated architect, while Reich, as a female designer, was taken less seriously, leading to unequal recognition.

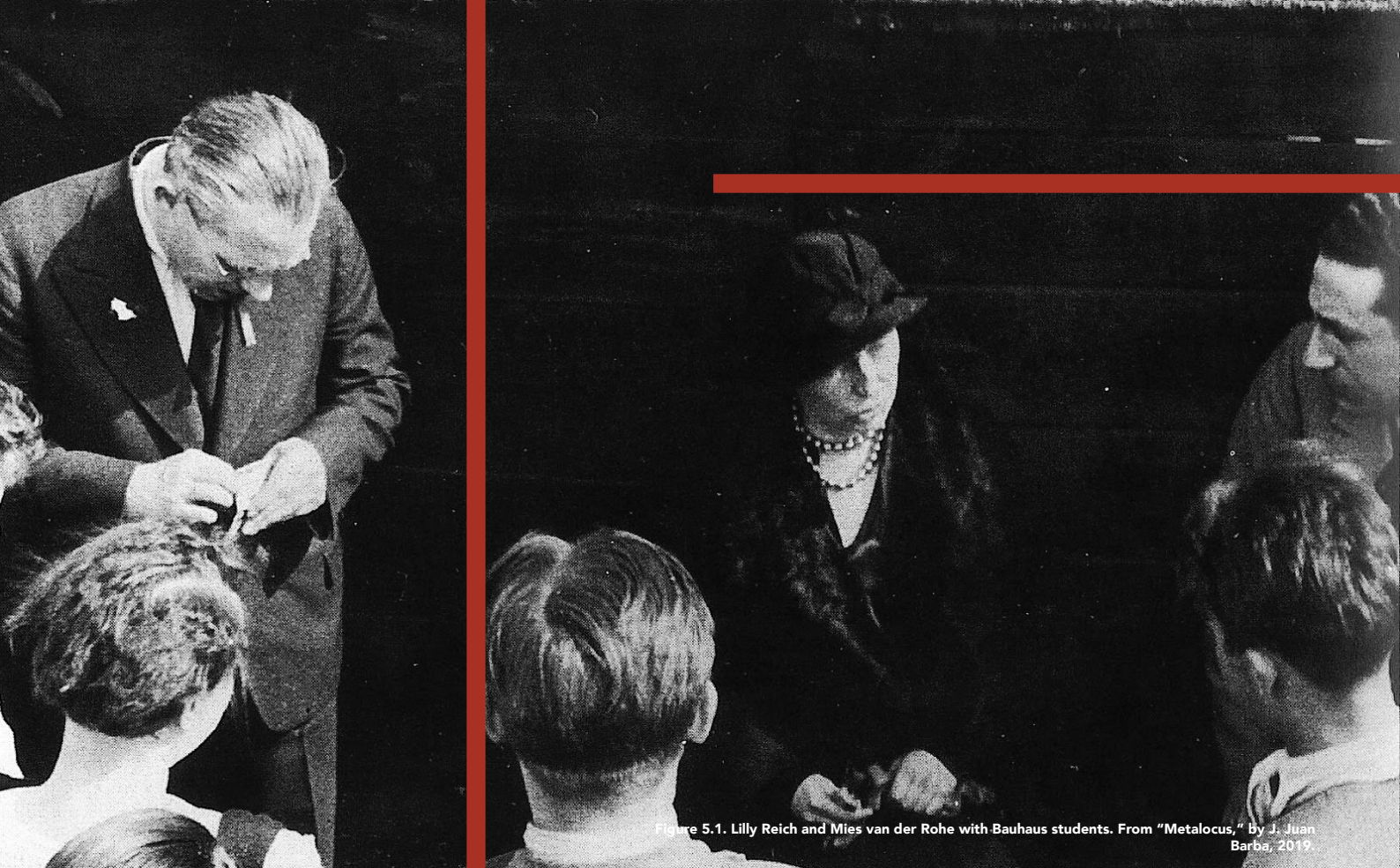


Figure 5.1. Lilly Reich and Mies van der Rohe with Bauhaus students. From "Metalocus," by J. Juan Barba, 2019.

Despite Reich's influence and close involvement, Mies never publicly spoke about their collaboration during or after this period. Reich (Figure 5.1) was often called his "closest assistant", a designation Mies never disclaimed. Her close role alongside Mies gave her access to influential projects but also led to structural under-recognition of her independent achievements [2].

This issue extends beyond Reich. As Julie Willes (1998) argues in her article *Invisible Contributions*, the invisibility of female designers arises from how architecture history has been constructed. It largely focused on the individual creator, whereas in reality, architecture emerges from collaboration. This narrative simplifies attribution and leads to the contributions of others going unrecognized. Designers who were not seen as prominent, especially women, were excluded as (co-)authors [12]. Controversies emerged about her authorship and influence in the late 20th century when several female architectural historians began investigating her work [2].

During that period, feminist historians sought to recover the work of "pioneer women" such as Lilly Reich, Eileen Gray and Charlotte Perriand. The aim was to establish their capabilities and authorship alongside with their male colleagues in the historical narrative. These women were mostly white, privileged practitioners and able to defy the gender norms and expectations through formal design education [13]. Reich, for instance, came from a middle-class family, allowing her to study in the Viennese ateliers [2]. However, these "exceptional women" do not represent the entire experience and history of women in architecture. Later, a broader approach emerged, focusing also on the diverse ways in which women contributed to the development of architecture, including less visible roles [13].

# 5. ATTRIBUTION AND AUTHORSHIP

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Despite the value of these approaches in rewriting architectural history, they have also faced criticism. Women's work is still assessed according to standards shaped within a male-dominated discipline that views the architect as the sole author, ignoring the social, political, and professional contexts of collaboration. This leaves questions about the nature of architecture and how authorship is defined unanswered [13].

Reich and Mies's collaboration also raises such questions. Was Reich just an assistant or a co-author? And how can contributions be distinguished in projects resulting from collective efforts? Feminist architectural historians argue that the "solo author" idea not only privileges men but also presents a distorted image of the actual architectural process, which consists of collaboration, mutual influence, and interdependence. This also leads to the question of what the profession of an architect truly means. Architecture is more than just designing buildings; it also involves the social production of space and involvement in other creative and social domains [13].

Reich had broad expertise in textiles, interior, and exhibition design. Domains that historically are considered as "feminine" and "less architectural". When architecture continues to be defined by the building as the final product created by one author, such contributions remain overlooked [13]. To truly do justice to women designers, it's necessary to reconsider not only who is recognized as an author, but also how we define architecture and authorship itself. Only then we can acknowledge and value the diverse roles and contributions of women within the architecture field.



Figure 6.1. Portrait Lilly Reich. From "ArchitekturalBiznes," by A. Bas, 2024.

This thesis explored Reich's influence on Mies during their collaboration and how her contributions can be identified in their joint projects. Before collaborating, Reich (Figure 6.1) worked on interiors and exhibitions, creating functional designs with material- and colour contrasts, geometric forms, and spatial compositions where objects defined space. Mies developed his practice within architecture, focusing on open floor plans, structural materials and the transition between interior and exterior. Mies also used geometric forms but a more restrained colour palette.

During their collaboration, their design characteristics merged. In projects like the From Fiber to Textile exhibition, Café Samt und Seide, and the Villa Tugendhat, Reich's influence is clearly visible in the use of textiles, colour contrasts, and spatial composition shaped by furniture and materials. Through their partnership and shared design principles, Reich and Mies developed a common design language, with recurring elements across projects. As in many collaborations, they influenced each other's style and development, making it still difficult to definitively attribute specific design decisions to either one.

One project where authorship can clearly be distinguished is the exhibition The Dwelling of Our Time. Here, Reich and Mies each designed a separate house, displayed side by side. Mies continued to experiment with open floor plans and visual flow, while Reich used a more compact and functional approach. Still, both designs shared similarities in layout, lines, style, and even incorporated each other's furniture. This highlights how their design visions became intertwined, evolving into a mutually reinforcing partnership.

## 6. CONCLUSION

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Despite the similarities, Mies's house was highly praised, while Reich's was seen as rigid and lacking elegance of the expert. This unequal recognition, and her invisibility in their joint projects, reflects how deeply the idea of the 'solo author' was rooted in architectural history. Feminist historians have shown that architecture arises from collaboration and mutual influence, yet focusing on a single, usually male, figure simplifies the attribution of authorship, leading to the systematic overlooking of others' contributions. Mies also never publicly acknowledged Reich as a co-author, deepening this neglect. Feminist historians also argue that the issue lies in how architecture itself is defined. Reich's work in textiles, interiors, and exhibitions shows that architecture extends beyond buildings and that her contributions were broader and fundamentally architectural.

This thesis shows that Reich influenced many designs traditionally attributed to Mies. Her material sensitivity, spatial organization, and functional aesthetics appear across several key projects. The Dwelling of Our Time revealed their shared design language but also how differently their work was recognized. Reich's contribution not only highlights her architectural significance but also exposes broader mechanisms of exclusion in architectural history. True recognition of female designers requires more than simply adding their names to existing narratives. It calls for a redefinition of architecture and authorship as collective and broader practices, in which less visible contributions are also included. Only then can architectural history be written more fully and more justly.

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