effect of music. And its responsibilities are as great as those of music also, for just as a popular song sticks in the mind and obsesses you, so man cannot escape from an inferior, tormenting architectural environment. The architect's responsibility is enormous, his work can enhance the whole appearance of a town or ruin it for centuries. We are now beginning to grasp this responsibility once more, but we are afraid of the consequences, of the difficulty of embodying this responsibility in rules and regulations. What then is architecture? In Paul Valdys's Eupalinos, or, On Architecture, a dialogue between Socrates and Phaidros in Hades, Phaidros says:

Have you not observed in walking round this city that among the buildings of which it is composed, some are silent, while others speak, and others still - strangest of all - even sing? This extreme animation does not arise from the function of the buildings, or from their general form, any more than does that which makes some of them silent. It is something which comes from the talent of their builder, or even more from the favour of the muses. Now those of the buildings which neither speak nor sing deserve nothing but contempt. They are dead things, lower in rank than those heaps of rubbish discharged by contractors' carts, which at least attract the inquisitive eye by the arbitrary patterns which they take on falling. As for the monuments which only speak, I have nothing but respect for them so long as their speech is clear. They say for example, 'This is where the traders meet. This is where the judges hold their deliberations. Here, prisoners sigh. Here, those who love debauchery can ...' (at this point I told Eupalinos that I had seen some quite remarkable examples of this last kind. But he did not hear me.) These markets, these law-courts, these prisons speak a most explicit language when those who build them know what they are about. The first kind visibly attract a jostling, ever-renewed crowd, offering them vestibules and entrances; they invite them to enter through their doors, to mount their easy accessible flights of stairs into their roomy and well-lit halls, to form groups and abandon themselves to the ferment of commercial intercourse ... The residences of justice, on the other hand, should impress the severity and justness of our laws upon the eye.

Throughout this fine profound dialogue there is not a word about technology, even in the old sense of craftsmanship, and not a word about economics!

Therefore render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things which are God's! It would be laughable, falsely romantic and quite counterproductive to bury our heads in the sand and try to brush aside the demands of technology and economics - they must be given their due, but they must not enslave us. Our works must transcend the demands of technology and economics and not offer an abrupt but short-lived impact, which does not shout loudly for attention, but speaks, or even sings, in a way that will still be understood by posterity. Posterity, after all, will have forgotten all the surprises which we have been given by new technological discoveries, and will only understand whatever portion of that eternal melody we have managed to capture in our creations.

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30 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Cardboard House, 1931

Any house is a far too complicated, clumsy, fussy, mechanical counterfeit of the human body. Electric wiring for nervous system, plumbing for bowels, heating system and fireplaces for arteries and heart, and windows for eyes, nose and lungs generally. The structure of the house, too, is a kind of cellular tissue stuck full of bones, complex now, as the confusion of Bedlam and all beside. The whole interior is a kind of stomach that attempts to digest objects - objects, 'objets d'art' maybe, but objects always. There the affected affliction sits, ever hungry - for ever more objects - or plethoric with over plenty. The whole life of the average house, it seems, is a sort of indigestion. A body in ill repair, suffering indisposition - constant tinkering and doctoring to keep alive. It is a marvel, we its infestors do not go insane in it and with it. Perhaps it is a form of insanity we have put into it. Lucky we are able to get something else out of it, though we do seldom get out of it alive ourselves.
But the passing of the Cornice with its enormous ‘haggage’ from foreign parts in its train clears the way for American homes that may be modern biography and poems instead of slanderous Liars and poetry-crushers.

A house, we like to believe, is in statu quo a noble consort to man and the trees; therefore the house should have repose and such texture as will quiet the whole and make it graciously at one with External Nature.

Human houses should not be like boxes, blazing in the sun, nor should we outrage the Machine by trying to make dwelling-places too complementary to Machinery. Any building for humane purposes should be an elemental, sympathetic feature of the ground, complementary to its nature-environment, belonging by kinship to the terrain. A House is not going anywhere, if we can help it. We hope it is going to stay right where it is for a long, long time. It is not yet anyway even a moving-van. Certain houses for Los Angeles may yet become vans and roll off most anywhere or everywhere, which is something else again and far from a bad idea for certain classes of our population.

But most new ‘modernistic’ houses manage to look as though cut from cardboard with scissors, the sheets of cardboard folded or bent in rectangles with an occasional curved cardboard surface added to get relief. The cardboard forms thus made are glued together in box-like forms – in a childish attempt to make buildings resemble steamships, flying machines or locomotives. By way of a new sense of the character and power of this Machine Age, this house strips and stoops to conquer by emulating, if not imitating, machinery. But so far, I see in most of the cardboard houses of the ‘modernistic’ movement small evidence that their designers have mastered either the machinery or the mechanical processes that build the house. I can find no evidence of integral method in their making. Of late, they are the superficial, badly built product of this superficial, New ‘Surface-and-Mass’ Aesthetic falsely claiming French Painting as a parent. And the houses themselves are not the new working of a fundamental Architectural principle in any sense. They are little less reactionary than was the Cornice – unfortunately for the Americans, looking forward, lest again they fall victim to the mode. There is, however, this much to be said for this house – by means of it imported Art and Decoration may, for a time, completely triumph over ‘Architecture’. And such Architecture as it may triumph over – well, enough has already been said here, to show how infinitely the cardboard house is to be preferred to that form of bad surface-decoration. The Simplicity of Nature is not something which may easily be read – but is inexhaustible. Unfortunately the simplicity of these houses is too easily read – visibly an attitude, strained or forced. They are therefore decoration too. If we look into their construction we may see how construction itself has been complicated or confused, merely to arrive at exterior simplicity. Most of these houses at home and abroad are more or less badly built complements to the Machine Age, of whose principles or possibilities they show no understanding, or, if they do they show such understanding to the degree of assimilating an aspect thereof, they utterly fail to make its virtues honourably or humanly effective in any final result. Forcing surface-effects upon mass-effects which try hard to resemble running or steaming or flying or fighting machines, is no radical effort in any direction. It is only more scene-painting and just another picture to prove Victor Hugo’s thesis of Renaissance architecture as the setting sun – eventually passing with the Cornice.

The Machine – we are now agreed, are we not – should build the building, if the building is such that the Machine may build it naturally and therefore build it supremely well. But it is not necessary for that reason to build as though the building, too, were a Machine – because, except in a very low sense, indeed, it is not a Machine, nor at all like one. Nor in that sense of being a Machine, could it be Architecture at all! It would be difficult to make it even good decoration for any length of time. But I propose, for the purposes of popular negation of the Cornice-days that are passed and as their final kick into oblivion, we might now, for a time, make buildings resemble Modern bath-tubs and aluminium kitchen-utensils, or copy pieces of well designed machinery to live in, particularly the liner, the
aeroplane, the street car, and the motor-bus. We could trim up the trees, too, shape them into boxes – cheese or cracker – cut them to cubes and triangles or tetrahedron them and so make all kinds alike suitable consorts for such houses. And we are afraid we are eventually going to have as citizens Machine-made men, corollary to Machines, if we don’t ‘look out’? They might be face-masqued, head shaved, hypodermically rendered even less emotional than they are, with patent-leather put over their hair and aluminium clothes cast on their bodies, and Madam herself altogether stripped and decoratively painted to suit. This delicate harmony, characteristic of machinery, ultimately achieved, however, could not be truly affirmative, except insofar as the negation, attempted to be performed therein, is itself affirmative. It seems to me that while engaging cardboard houses may be appropriate gestures in connection with ‘Now What Architecture,’ they are merely a negation, so not yet truly conservative in the great Cause which already runs well beyond them. Organic simplicity is the only simplicity that can answer for us here in America that pressing, perplexing question – Now What Architecture? This I firmly believe. It is vitally necessary to make the countenance of simplicity the affirmation of reality, lest any affectation of simplicity the affirmation of reality, lest any affectation of simplicity, should it become a mode or Fashion, may only leave this heady country refreshed for another foolish orgy in surface decoration of the sort lasting thirty years ‘by authority and by order’, and by means of which Democracy has already nearly ruined the look of itself for posterity, for a half-century to come, at least. Well then and again – ‘What Architecture?’ …

When ‘in the cause of Architecture’, in 1898, I first began to build the houses, sometimes referred to by the thoughtless as ‘The New School of the Middle West’, (some advertisers’ slogan comes along to label everything in this our busy woman’s country), the only way to simplify the awful building in vogue at the time was to conceive a finer entity – a better building – and get it built. The buildings standing then were all tall and all tight. Chimneys were lean and taller still, sooty fingers threatening the sky. And beside them, sticking up by way of dormers through the cruelly sharp, saw-tooth roofs, were the attics for ‘help’ to swelter in. Dormers were elaborate devices, cunning little buildings complete in themselves, stuck to the main roof slopes to let ‘help’ poke heads out of the attic for air …

The whole exterior was be-devilled – that is to say, mixed to puzzle-pieces, with corner-boards, panel-boards, window-frames, corner-blocks, plinth-blocks, rosettes, fantails, ingenious and jigger work in general. This was the only way they seemed to have, then, of ‘putting on style’. The scroll-saw and turning-lathe were at the moment the honest means of this fashionable mongering by the wood-butcher and to this entirely ‘moral’ end. Unless the householder of the period were poor indeed, usually an ingenious corner-tower on his house eventuated into a candle-snuffer dome, a spire, an inverted rutabaga or radish or onion or – what is your favourite vegetable? Always elaborate bay-windows and fancy porches played ‘ring around the rosy’ on this ‘imaginative’ corner feature. And all this the building of the period could do equally well in brick or stone. It was an impartial society. All material looked pretty much alike in that day. Simplicity was as far from all this scrap-heap as the pandemonium of the barnyard is far from music. But it was easy for the Architect. All he had to do was to call: ‘Boy, take down No. 37, and put a bay-window on it for the lady!’ So – the first thing to do was to get rid of the attic and, therefore, of the dormer and of the useless ‘heights’ below it. And next, get rid of the unwholesome basement, entirely – yes, absolutely – in any house built on the prairie. Instead of lean, brick chimneys, bristling up from steep roofs to hint at ‘judgement’ everywhere. I could see necessity for one only, a broad generous one, or at most, for two, these kept low down on gently sloping roofs or perhaps flat roofs. The big fireplace below, inside, became now a place for a real fire justified the great size of this chimney outside. A real fireplace at that time was extraordinary. There were then ‘mantels’ instead. A mantel was a marble frame for a few coals, or a piece of wooden furniture with tiles stuck in it and a ‘grate’, the whole set slam up against the wall. The ‘mantel’ was an insult to comfort, but the integral
fireplace became an important part of the building itself in the houses I was allowed to build out there on the prairie. It refreshed me to see the fire burning deep in the masonry of the house itself.

Taking a human being for my scale, I brought the whole house down in height to fit a normal man; believing in no other scale, I broadened the mass out, all I possibly could, as I brought it down into spaciousness. It has been said that were I three inches taller (I am 5 ft. 8½ in. tall), all my houses would have been quite different in proportion. Perhaps.

House-walls were now to be started at the ground on a cement or stone water-table that looked like a low platform under the building, which it usually was, but the house-walls were stopped at the second storey window-sill level, to let the rooms above come through in a continuous window-series, under the broad eaves of a gently sloping, overhanging roof. This made enclosing screens out of the lower walls as well as light screens out of the second-storey walls.

Here was true enclosure of interior space. A new sense of building, it seems. The climate, being what it was, a matter of violent extremes of heat and cold, damp and dry, dark and bright, I gave broad protecting roof-shelter to the whole, getting back to the original purpose of the 'Cornice'. The undersides of the roof projections were flat and light in colour to create a glow of reflected light that made the upper rooms not dark, but delightful. The over-hangs had double value, shelter and preservation for the walls of the house as well as diffusion of reflected light for the upper storey, through the 'light screens' that took the place of the walls and were the windows.

At this time, a house to me was obvious primarily as interior space under fine shelter. I liked the sense of shelter in the 'look of the building'. I achieved it, I believe...

The house began to associate with the ground and become natural to its prairie site. And would the young man in architecture ever believe that this wall was all 'new' then? Not only new, but destructive heresy – or ridiculous eccentricity. So New that what little prospect I had of ever earning a livelihood by making houses was nearly wrecked. At first 'they' called the houses 'dress-reform' houses, because Society was just then excited about that particular 'reform'. This simplification looked just like some kind of 'reform' to them. Oh, they called them all sorts of names that cannot be repeated, but 'they' never found a better term for the work unless it was 'Horizontal Gothic', 'Temperance Architecture' (with a sneer), etc., etc. I don't know how I escaped the accusation of another 'Renaissance'.

What I have just described was all on the outside of the house and was there chiefly because of what had happened inside. Dwellings of that period were 'cut-up', advisedly and completely, with the grim determination that should go with any cutting process. The 'interiors' consisted of boxes beside or inside other boxes, called rooms. All boxes inside a complicated boxing. Each domestic 'function' was properly box to box. I could see little sense in this inhibition, this cellular sequestration that implied ancestors familiar with the cells of penal institutions, except for the privacy of bed-rooms on the upper floor. They were perhaps all right as 'sleeping boxes'. So I declared the whole lower floor as one room, cutting off the kitchen as a laboratory, putting servants' sleeping and living quarters next to it, semi-detached, on the ground floor, screening various portions in the big room, for certain domestic purposes – like dining or reading, or receiving a formal caller. There were no plans like these in existence at the time and my clients were pushed towards these ideas as helpful to a solution of the vexed servant-problem. Scores of doors disappeared and no end of partition. They liked it, both clients and servants. The house became more free as 'space' and more liveable, too. Interior spaciousness began to dawn...

The main motives and indications were (and I enjoyed them all):
First— To reduce the number of necessary parts of the house and the separate rooms to a minimum, and make all come together as enclosed space – so divided that light, air and vista permeated the whole with a sense of unity.
Second—To associate the building as a whole with its site by extension and emphasis of the planes parallel to the ground, but keeping the floors off the best part of the site, thus leaving that better part for use in connection with the life of the house. Extended level planes were found useful in this connection.

Third—To eliminate the room as a box and the house as another by making all walls enclosing screens — the ceilings and floors and enclosing screens to flow into each other as one large enclosure of space, with minor subdivisions only.

Make all house proportions more liberally human, with less wasted space in structure, and structure more appropriate to material, and so the whole more liveable. Liberal is the best word. Extended straight lines or stream-lines were useful in this.

Fourth—To get the unwholesome basement up out of the ground, entirely above it, as a low pedestal for the living-position of the home, making the foundation itself visible as a low masonry platform on which the building should stand.

Fifth—To harmonise all necessary openings to ‘outside’ or to ‘inside’ with good human proportions and make them occur naturally — singly or as a series in the scheme of the whole building. Usually they appeared as ‘light-screens’ instead of walls, because all the ‘Architecture’ of the house was chiefly the way these openings came in such walls as were grouped about the rooms as enclosing screens. The room as such was now the essential architectural expression, and there were to be no holes cut in walls as holes are cut in a box, because this was not in keeping with the ideal of ‘plastic’. Cutting holes was violent.

Sixth—To eliminate combinations of different materials in favour of mono-material so far as possible; to use no ornament that did not come out of the nature of materials to make the whole building clearer and more expressive as a place to live in, and give the conception of the building appropriate revealing emphasis. Geometrical or straight lines were natural to the machinery at work in the building trades then, so the interiors took on this character naturally.

Seventh—To incorporate all heating, lighting, plumbing so that these systems became constituent parts of the building itself. These service features became architectural and in this attempt the ideal of an organic architecture was at work.

Eighth—To incorporate as organic Architecture — so far as possible — furnishings, making them all one with the building and designing them in simple terms for machine work. Again straight lines and rectilinear forms.

Ninth—Eliminate the Decorator. He was all curves and all efflorescence, if not all ‘period’.

Standing here, with the perspective of long persistent effort in the direction of an organic Architecture in view, I can again assure you out of this initial experience that Repose is the reward of true simplicity and that organic simplicity is sure of Repose. Repose is the highest quality in the Art of Architecture, next to integrity, and a reward for integrity. Simplicity may well be held to the fore as a spiritual ideal, but when actually achieved, as in the ‘lilies of the field’, it is something that comes of itself, something spontaneously born out of the nature of the doing whatever it is that is to be done. Simplicity, too, is a reward for fine feeling and straight thinking in working a principle, well in hand, to a constituent end. Solomon knew nothing about it, for he was only wise. And this, I think, is what Jesus meant by the text we have chosen for this discourse — ‘Consider the lilies of the field’, as contrasted, for beauty, with Solomon.

Now, a chair is a machine to sit in.
A home is a machine to live in.
The human body is a machine to be worked by will. A tree is a machine to bear fruit. A plant is a machine to bear flowers and seeds. And, as I’ve admitted before somewhere, a heart is a suction-pump. Does that idea thrill you? ... 

Therefore, now let the declaration that ‘all is machinery’ stand nobly forth for what it is worth. But why not more profoundly declare that ‘Form follows Function’ and let it go at that? Saying, ‘Form follows Function’, is not only deeper, it is clearer, and it goes further in a more comprehensive way to say the thing to be said, because the implication of this saying includes the heart of the whole matter. It may be that Function follows Form, as, or if, you prefer, but it is easier thinking with the first proposition just as it is easier to stand on your feet and nod your head than it would be to stand on your head and nod your feet. Let us not forget that the Simplicity of the Universe is very different from the Simplicity of a Machine ...

Truly ordered simplicity in the hands of the great artist may flower into a bewildering profusion, exquisitely exuberant, and render all more clear than ever. Good William Blake says exuberance is beauty, meaning that it is so in this very sense. This is for the Modern Artist with the Machine in his hands. False Simplicity – Simplicity as an affection, that is, Simplicity constructed as a Decorator’s outside put upon a complicated, wasteful engineer’s or carpenter’s ‘Structure’, outside or inside – is not good enough Simplicity. It cannot be simple at all. But that is what passes for Simplicity, now that startling Simplicity-effects are becoming the fashion. That kind of Simplicity is violent. This is for ‘Art and Decoration’.

Soon we shall want Simplicity inviolate. There is one way to get that Simplicity. My guess is, there is only one way really to get it. And that way is, on principle, by way of Construction developed as Architecture. That is for us, one and all.

31 Victor Horta, Reminiscences of the Maison du Peuple, (undated)

I was greatly moved when a deputation of three delegates arrived to ask me to take charge of the plans ... I was weighed down by quite enough responsibilities as it was, but rubbish! I was young. I could easily take on this as well ... Anyway, it was an interesting commission, as I saw straight away – building a palace that wasn’t to be a palace but a ‘house’ whose luxury feature would be the light and air that had been missing for so long from the working-class slums ...

As the shape of the site was extremely irregular, when I produced a feeling of regularity in all this chaos with my design for the ceiling joists [of the Café], it seemed like pure fantasy. Similarly, people approve from the decorative point of view of elements that arise directly from constructional needs, such as the brackets on the stanchions transferring the load to a greater or lesser height. Elements that the design had put in the second rank in allocating the premises gave way to elements that were reckoned to be more important from the functional point of view. Thus the auditorium that was to be used for special occasions took a back seat in favour of offices in which people were to work every day. The original plan was to site it on the first floor, but now it was transferred to the upper floors ... It was essentially one vast attic, but it was not to look like one and the acoustics had to be satisfactory. The result was a complete success – a whisper can be heard from the back of the auditorium ...

There are two main reasons for this – the horizontal ceiling, and the sharply sloping floor raised at the far end to break the reverberation of the sound. This delighted the audience, who thought that this arrangement was designed solely to enable them to see the stage better. Breadthwise the cross-section corresponded to the man-