

you had to be able to support your arguments; with Scharoun, you had to activate your spiritual and creative powers. Eiermann's department was concerned with the light of reason and eloquence; Scharoun's studio was dominated by darkly hinted-at secret knowledge, well in keeping with the thick clouds of smoke emanating from the master's cigar. Eiermann answered the telephone with a very un-professorial "Hi there!"—something Scharoun would never have dreamed of doing.



SE 67 steel tube chair, without seat,
1950

Better Good than New That works by Scharoun and his pupils are more easily identifiable than works by the Eiermann school is the result of the idiosyncrasy practiced in Berlin. What Eiermann and his followers created met the general standards of modernism; his unmistakable artistic stamp only revealed itself at second glance. Scharoun has been called an "established outsider."² By contrast, Eiermann was a man of the world, witty in conversation with colleagues, clients and students, not posing as a great artist although evidently enjoying his star status.

It was others who sought to wrap Eiermann in the mantle of the artist-architect. In a 1952 conversation noted down by Alfons Leitl, editor-in-chief of the architectural journal *Baukunst und Werkform*, Eiermann explained his belief that technical perfection in the design was a necessary condition for the completed structure to have an acceptable and convincing appearance. A concerned Leitl said he knew Eiermann better than that and was convinced that for him, the technical side of architecture was not paramount, adding that the most important thing was what one made of the technical possibilities.³ To illustrate this point, Leitl published a full-page picture of the three-legged steel tube chair SE 67 on the frontispiece of the relevant edition of his maga-

zine. The picture shows the chair without the seat mounted on it, so that the curves of the chrome-plated steel tubes give the appearance of an abstract metal sculpture. The message is clear—Eiermann is an artist, too.

When Eiermann himself defined his role and that of the architect, he stuck to the solid, rational, comprehensible, and provable. Think straight and act clearly was his maxim. While architects from the organic school of building such as Scharoun and Hugo Häring sought to grasp what was unique about every project, Eiermann was more interested in the general validity and usefulness of the result. You do not have to create anew if something tried and tested already exists. But you can improve upon it. Logic and clarity have a lot in common with truth and beauty. In this, Eiermann was in clear agreement with Mies van der Rohe, who did not feel the need to invent a new kind of architecture every week and preferred to be good instead of interesting. "Are we here to keep doing new things, or are we here to bring existing things ever closer to perfection?"⁴ That could have been said by Mies himself, whom Eiermann considered "an architect at the pinnacle of artistic and human perfection."⁵

Eiermann was spared the experience of postmodernism. He would not have liked the way some architects would have answered his question only a decade after his death. As the son of an engineer, Eiermann believed that every invention could be improved, and that all things could be driven to perfection, to an optimal state of design. To him, the perfect solution was the perfect form. Paul Jordan, director of the AEG electric company, is reported to have said that