

## The Production of the Commons: Mies van der Rohe and industrial standardization

*Mhairi McVicar*

In a 1924 article, applauding but rejecting traditional handwork, Mies van der Rohe declared a vision of elevating industrial methods to an art. Industrial methods promised to override what Mies termed the 'irresponsibility' of the individual by producing architectural components within standardised systems. Employing a precisely controlled materials palette and detailing system which had been systematically developed at the IIT campus over the preceding twelve years, the 1956 Commons Building by the Office of Mies van der Rohe should have exemplified this promise. The correspondence, sketches, drawings, and shop drawings, however, of even one detail – a pressed steel window frame - reveals that this standardised component required over a year of negotiations between numerous individuals. No matter how standardised the components or precise the instructions, the processes of architecture are inevitably shaped by the individual personalities who draw, write and build the work, a fact which continues to challenge expectations of absolute certainty and control in architectural production.

### Biography:

Mhairi McVicar is a Senior Lecturer and Director of Engagement at the Welsh School of Architecture. Her research investigates the pursuit of precision and its consequences in architectural practice. Recent publications include 'Specifying intent at the Museum of Childhood' in *ARQ* and 'Passion and Control: Lewerentz and a mortar joint' in *Quality Out of Control*.