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Possession:

Frank Lloyd Wright and the Project of America

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture

Brigid Boyle

2022

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2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Possession: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Project of America

by

Brigid Boyle

Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Sylvia Lavin, Co-Chair

Professor Michael Osman, Co-Chair

This dissertation is an investigation of the ways Frank Lloyd Wright came to be a portrait, model, and architect of the American self during the twentieth century. I argue, contrary to the dominant hagiographic narratives of Wright-as-genius, that Frank Lloyd Wright cannot be understood according to the biographical arc that he personally established—an isolated arc that begins in mythic predestination and ends with a singular cultural hero—that has become the epistemological foundation for understanding Wright’s role in American and architectural history. This dissertation is structured around different notions of Wright’s self in three specific sites in order to show the inextricable relationships between his evolving consciousness, the evolving consciousness of the nation, and the role the professions of architecture and architectural history played in connecting them. Those three sites—Nature, Business and Education, and Government—are also the sites that defined American exceptionalism, sites

wherein America's own narrative was crafted and her subjects created. In each case, a particular notion of the self gets mobilized in the context of professional practice and in service to an ideology of American identity. In this dissertation's narrative arc, Wright moves from embodied self—a self that is possessed—to a disembodied self—a self that is dispossessed but no less real—that parallels the historical narrative of the nation's own self-construction. It examines how the twentieth-century constructions of both Wright and America are predicated on and also reproduced the idea of American exceptionalism. This is an investigation of that conjuncture of architecture, self, and nation—revealing, in the process, how Architecture became American, how an architect became a genius, and how a nation became a self.

The dissertation of Brigid Boyle is approved.

Dana Cuff

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University of California, Los Angeles

2022

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INTRODUCTION

"It is impossible to separate Wright's work from America, while in turn, America, through him, received the patent of leadership in cultural endeavor."¹

Possession is such a strong word, overwhelming and also still a bit ghostly, desperate but also controlled. Perhaps, like a bequeathed heirloom, I clutch it too tightly, saying *it just means so much to me*, despite its really quite-clear denotation. And yet, in the strangely specific intersection of an architect, a country, and a self that make up this dissertation, this word does in fact mean so much and do so much. It describes vectors of relationships—to possess and to be possessed; it undermines agency and it turns ideas into objects; it is both idealized and aestheticized and it has a hint of the archaic despite participating in—defining, even—a contemporary and pervasive legal structure: that it is always still about property. At its most fundamental, *through ownership*, possession implicates a concept of the self, a notion that underlies this project.

This dissertation is about the intersection of one self, in particular—American architect Frank Lloyd Wright—with those two qualifiers that nearly always surround his name: America and architecture. It describes a progression of the narrative of Wright's embodied self—a self that is possessed—to a disembodied self—a self that is dispossessed but no less real—that parallels the historical narrative of the nation's own self-construction. It examines, in a particular historical moment, how both identities, of Wright and of America, are predicated on and also reproduced the idea of American exceptionalism—a concept that has demanded to be

¹ George Kastner, one of Frank Lloyd Wright's apprentices, in a letter included in the January 1938 edition of *The Architectural Forum*, dedicated to Wright and his work.

understood on its own terms. This dissertation is an investigation of those terms as they have emerged in the conjuncture of architecture, self, and nation—revealing, in the process, how Architecture became American, how an architect became a genius, and how a nation became a self.

Wright's person in these pages appears as both a portrait and a model of the American self. As a portrait, Wright offers authentic testimony of the American character. Despite others' claims of his anachronism (Philip Johnson's, most famously), Wright was inescapably of his time and not exempt from the economic, cultural, and social currents of American forces as they swept over millions of citizens. Simultaneously, he is also understood to be not average at all: an idealization of what is best in Americanism, a personification of whom Americans should strive to be. As an innovative genius, he is the country's model citizen, as an imaginative architect, a model of the profession, as a creative individual, a modern subject. In all cases, he is singular, individualist, and heroic. He represents America as equally as he does architecture; it is therefore unsurprisingly to note that his exceptional genius corresponds to the idea of American exceptionalism, both unfolding in "the American century."

In the twentieth century—the century of Wright and the century of America's rise to international power—a new discourse on the American project emerged. Aimed at an idea of a cohesive national identity, it was preoccupied with the "Americanness" of the young country's intellectual and cultural traditions. This was hardly a new argument: ever since the first settler-immigrants arrived, the organization of the country as we now know it was entangled with the

mission that they had ascribed to the land: a provided refuge for all who sought freedom.² The country had never been imagined as anything other than the “City on a Hill” John Winthrop described in the seventeenth century: a country that, due to its exceptional “birth,” developed differently than other nations and therefore must be understood differently. This mythical destiny was seemingly confirmed and amplified by the country’s position after the first world war: economically and militarily dominant, with the majority of its citizenry awash in abundance.

This belief that there was something unique and better about America—its economic system, legal protections of private property, the egalitarian premise underlying the idea of democracy—or “American exceptionalism,” as it came to be known, also justified the mindset of the “American Century,” the twentieth-century notion that America had an obligation and duty to spread its ideological vision of democracy. Under the guise of national self-interest, the American government had put into place regulations that protected its key assets and the reasons for its success: American industry, American consumers, and swaths of public lands. Already in control of its own hemisphere, the US entered World War I on the grounds of moral idealism, a judge and jury of international countries and their relations.³ The American systems were the spaces in which the American subject was made; at each point, exceptionalism defined this narrative arc.

² This “mission” was applied selectively, obviously: namely *not* to those who were forced to come to the continent involuntarily, nor to those who had already inhabited the continent for thousands of years. That it still underlies many of the myths of the United States as a relevant concept should indicate which people those myths support and protect.

³ William Chafe’s *The Rise and Fall of the American Century* offers a thorough account of the development of the idea of the “American Century.”

American exceptionalism was equally applied to those American subjects, based on an assumption that even outside of the economic, proprietary, educational, and governmental systems, there were certain traits in the American psyche that were markedly different from those of citizens of other nations.⁴ This, particularly in the decades before the government's overhauling immigration restrictions of 1924, was as much a lure for new immigrants attracted to American opportunities as it was a regulation of their assimilation. These traits, not unpredictably, were mostly defined by white men with power and influence—editors, politicians, historians—who, in so doing, were also outlining the possibilities for the country's future. One article published by the New York Times Magazine in 1932 compiled a composite image of the “new American” based on interviews with eight men who were “students of our national traits.” Historian James Truslow Adams, who had coined the phrase “The American Dream” the previous year in his book *The Epic of America*, contributed his part by identifying the general trait of Americans as one of youth. Free from the complex burden of history and tradition, the American was curious, energetic, and pragmatic, he asserted. Others pointed to the American way of speech, literature, art, and laws, to their sense of adventure, and their respect for an honest living. Sociologist William Ogburn was quick to acknowledge that the identifying characteristics were of American culture, not of the American race, and as such had

⁴ On the myths, strands, and repercussions of American exceptionalism, see Byron Shafer, Godfrey Hodgson, and Seymour Martin Lipset. On the American people's exceptionalism and also their “general” traits, certain texts have maintained influences despite the context in which they emerged, for instance, Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis on the frontier, Vernon Parrington, Charles and Mary Beard, Henry Nash Smith, Daniel Boorstin, Perry Miller, David Potter, Henry Commager, David Riesman, Max Lerner, Walter Susman, and William Whyte.

no sense of finality about them.⁵ The title of the article alluded to the same sentiment of this constant and recursive flux of experience: “The American Now in the Making.”

This ongoing discourse of American identity and the exceptional traits of American-ness was narrated in near real-time. It was the product of a search for a national history—a new historical objective when, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American history became a professional discipline and moved into the university system. Historians working in the mid-to late-twentieth century, like John Higham, have tracked how the historiography of the country had been tied to the subjective position of its historians: first written by clergy, amateurs, and hobbyists, the earliest narratives of the country reflected the religious overtones and personal stakes of their authors, taking the form of local and regional histories and the histories of great men. Once professionalized in the university, Higham noted, the discipline and its practitioners moved away from the genteel intellectual interests encouraged by the standard curriculum; newly organized in national associations and societies, historians undertook new scales of narrative that recognized the nation was in a constant state of growth and change. For a short-lived period in American history, historical narratives were written of and for the nation, establishing a cohesive national history and national identity. Forced to reconcile the present with the past in the first half of the twentieth century, history became also a critical examination of the present, thoroughly immersed in the vitality of immediate

⁵ *The New York Times Magazine*, January 17, 1932, p125ff.

experience.⁶ History, therefore, produced its own reproduction, the discourse consumed its own object, the nation was possessed by its own self-narration.

This recursive narrative arc happens also with Frank Lloyd Wright, whose personal life and career track the main currents of twentieth-century American history to an almost uncanny degree. He embodies the modern American subject *par excellence*. This begins with his own frequently-cited prehistory: the product of Northern European immigrants seeking religious freedom and the fulfillment of his mother's fateful predestination that her son would be an architect. His 1887 move from the countryside to the city would have been one of many thousands doing the same thing; his decision, along the way, to change his name from Frank Lincoln Wright to Frank Lloyd Wright is nothing less than an indication of his own self-awareness as a subject. Once in Chicago, Wright's professional role continues to shape the narrative: just like the idea of the country was absent a dogmatic sense of traditionalism, so too was Wright's idea of architecture, crafted under the self-professed influence of Louis Sullivan and Sullivan's own dismissal of the European traditions of the École des Beaux-Arts. As a businessman—an attribute rarely acknowledged of or by the architect—his career as a sole practitioner in Oak Park, then as an "incorporated" entity in the 1920s, and finally, as a larger, corporate Foundation in the 1940s exemplifies the country's transition from proprietary to corporate capitalism. His mid-century designs of wallpaper, furniture, and fabric for

⁶ Higham argued that American history's preoccupation with the present was due to the reverberations of the Progressive movement and its societal implications. See John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America*, p71-72. On American historiography, in addition to Higham, see Edmundo O'Gorman (brother of architect Juan O'Gorman), *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the historical nature of the New World and the meaning of its history*, who argued that the idea of America was invented through its history; and Jill Lepore, *This America*, which offers a history of American nationalism in service of a new, liberalist way of thinking about American ideals.

Schumacher and Heritage Henredon—"And now Frank Lloyd Wright designs home furnishings you can buy!"—were timely consumer goods produced for the new mass culture.⁷ He was a media savant, one of the first to recognize the power of image-making and popular culture. By the last decade of his life—which corresponded to the production of "consensus history" narratives and the creation of the new ideological discipline of American Studies—Frank Lloyd Wright was deemed "by almost *universal* acclaim...the most original architect the United States has produced, and—what is even more important—he is one of the most creative architectural geniuses of all time," "a pioneer American architect," "the greatest architect alive," and even "incomparable: he is a kind of personification of an ideal America, rising out of the prairies, with all the raw and elemental power that has characterized the best in our country."⁸

As much as Wright enacted the average American experience, he was also considered its exception: a creative genius. The figure of the architect *already* adeptly reconciled so many of the country's identity crises: architecture was artistic and cultural, yet still commercial and productive; the combination provided an opportunity to address the "whole man" of American culture.⁹ It simultaneously put forth an imaginative idealism with a respect for lived experience,

⁷ Such was the announcement of the forthcoming collections at Schumacher, Karastan, Heritage-Henredon, Martin-Senour Co., and Minic Accessories, included in the November 1955 issue of *House Beautiful* devoted to Wright's work.

⁸ Respectively: Lewis Mumford, "The Sky Line," *The New Yorker*, November 28, 1953 (emphasis mine); "Broadacre City: An Architect's Vision," *The New York Times*, March 20, 1932; "Meet Frank Lloyd Wright," *House Beautiful*, June 1946.

⁹ The "whole person" was an ideal figure who emerged in America in the mid-nineteenth century and indicated the presence of "culture," another new notion, which replaced the previously esteemed "virtue." Tied to the art of self-improvement, culture was more aesthetic and less political than virtue, and was a counterbalance to the material improvement and commercial gain the country was becoming known for. See Lewis Perry, "The Cultivated Class in the late Nineteenth-Century."

a synthesis of symbols and their material existence. Every building, even the most humble, was assumed to be “improvement,” blending the values of Puritan- and republican moralism with the spirit of industrial capitalism. And Wright, by any measure, was not an average architect. His “peculiar ideas” and “bizarre” “houses of unusual character,” as *The Chicago Tribune* called them, were signs of a new type of architect—one full of “intense personality,” wrote the reviewer in *The Architectural Review*, and one who was beginning to challenge the kinds of work produced by an “American” architect.¹⁰ Wright’s perceived exceptionality served the narrative of both a model citizen and a model architect, especially after the publication of his portfolio in Germany in 1910. The circulation of the *Wasmuth Portfolios* introduced Wright to an audience beyond his home country and established an international reputation of which his home country was proud. Wright’s name was thereafter followed by “world-famous architect.” But it was in America that this was most important. Alexander Woollcott, a critic at *The New Yorker* and friend of Wright’s, wrote that if he “were suffered to apply the word ‘genius’ to only one living American, I would have to save it up for Frank Lloyd Wright.”¹¹

Many of these narrative anecdotes likely sound familiar to even the most cursory readers of Wright or of American architecture. Told as if an objective and explanatory history, they are points on a biographical line that produce the contour of Wright: like the identity of

¹⁰ *The Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1909; *The Architectural Review*, Vol. VII, No. 6, June 1900. In *The New World Architecture*, Sheldon Cheney described an encounter with the “American Style” in the Netherlands in the early 1920s, and remembered that the attribute would have been quickly dismissed by east coast professionals producing Beaux-Arts designs.

¹¹ “The Prodigal Father,” *The New Yorker*, July 19, 1930. Though Woollcott announced his pride, most other media companies settled for the “World-famous” epithet without any further exploration. Wright’s popularity in the United States was limited to the profession and the Midwest until the more productive years of his career began in the mid-1930s.

the nation was produced by the discourse of American history, so too was Wright's produced by the discourse of his own history. His historians are numerous: during the span of Wright's own life, the list included Robert C. Spencer, H. Th. Wijdeveld, Lewis Mumford, Henry Russell Hitchcock, Catherine Bauer, Baker Brownell, Frederick Gutheim, Grant Manson, and Vincent Scully, among others. Wright's work was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art twenty times between 1932 and 1959, and many more posthumously. The relationship between the historian and his or her object, as Mark Jarzombek wrote, is "conditioned by modernity's own historicizing narratives."¹² But Wright, as the object of history, had already established the narrative of his own historical context; his first and best historian was Frank Lloyd Wright.

His own history, offered in equal parts as self-narration and interpretation, served as an advertisement for the kind of architecture he designed. It was the subtext of the articles, lectures, and portfolios featuring his work. In the early years, these were intended to procure more work, like the *Wasmuth Portfolios* of 1910. But after two slow decades of lost commissions, and a new sense of precarity induced by the stock market crash, Wright used his history not simply as the means to an end, but as an end in and of itself: a book, titled "*An Autobiography*," and published by Longmans, Green & Co. in 1932. This was, after all, the age of the biography, when public interest in the vivid depictions of the personal lives of successful men was at a peak. Charles Lindbergh's *We*, Henry Adams' *The Education of Henry Adams*, and editor Edward Bok's *The Americanization of Edward Bok* all captured the fascination of the American public, as did Chaplin, Coolidge, Gertrude Stein, and Andrew Carnegie: each a

¹² Mark Jarzombek, "The Saturations of Self: Stern's (And Scully's) Role in (Stern's) History," p8.

portrayal of the American spirit and its various manifestations, and a few so successful that they topped the best-seller list.¹³

Wright was not nearly as materially successful as those men. It was his wife Olgivanna Milijanov Lazovich who had originally encouraged the idea of the autobiography, and it came out of pure desperation—"the plant has wilted to the last leaf," Wright wrote. Both Wright and Olgivanna, in exile from their home, wrote prodigiously, hoping for publication and the resultant paycheck.¹⁴ Wright was connected to a New York publicity agent, George Bye, whom he hoped would be able to make the necessary connections to magazines and editors. The couple sent out scores of articles, the titles of which indicate their frantic financial reach: Wright's series called "The Man Who," which included "The Man who kept his hat on," "The man who liked his fried," and "The Man who wanted Fame"; Olgivanna's included "Behind George Washington's Back," "A First-Rate Shampoo," and a first-hand account of writer Katherine Mansfield's death, "The Last Days of Katherine Mansfield." Met with a few polite refusals and a few polite acceptances, Wright realized that his best opportunity to capitalize on the zeitgeist was to write about architecture: "psychologically, the moment is here for a book from me, properly illustrated as I would illustrate it, and the format of the book designed as I would design it."¹⁵ He sent Bye a description of the book and asked him to send it to Payson and Clark, the publishers of Paul Frankl's recent book, *New Dimensions*, for which Wright had written the introduction. But Bye had already interested Longmans Green in Wright's work after

¹³ See Ben Yagoda, *Memoir: A History*.

¹⁴ Wright to George Bye, June 20, 1932.

¹⁵ Wright to Bye, August 06, 1928.

it had published Sheldon Cheney's *The New World Architecture*, which upheld Wright as a great imaginative genius. Bye claimed that he turned the staff at Longmans into worshippers of Wright's work.

Even still, Longmans passed on Wright's original version of the book—a collection of essays narrating earlier projects, including the Imperial Hotel's survival of the Tokyo earthquake, the "Tale of the Midway Gardens," La Miniatura, Hollyhock House, and Taliesin. Frank Hill, a Longmans editor, proposed an alternative: a text that was, in his words, unified, related wholly to art and architecture, and of real significance in what it has to say on these matters.¹⁶ Wright agreed to write the book on modern architecture, tentatively called "From Generation to Generation," and also managed to secure an option for a second book, nearly 150,000 words of which he had already written years prior, the subject of which was more personal—a trilogy of Family, Fraternity, Freedom, and "not much concerned with architecture." Wright, however, missed the implications of Hill's response to his proposal for the second book, which rather directly encouraged Wright to combine the two books into one, "carrying personal and architectural themes as one narrative," and to leave open the option for another, second book, after the publication of the first. Hill offered 2,000 dollars for the combination book, half submitted on the signing of the contract, 500 dollars on submission, and the remaining \$500 on publication; another 1,000 dollars were reserved for the second book. Wright carried on, eventually sending what he thought were two books to Longmans, and claimed to be working already on a third to "throw in." His confusion, and Longmans, was understandable, based on Wright's descriptions of the two submitted books: the first, on Modern Architecture, was

¹⁶ Hill to George Bye, November 25, 1930.

“concerned with work as synonymous with Life,” and the second, the Autobiography, “concerned with Life as synonymous with work.”¹⁷ Longmans won out and published the combination as *An Autobiography* in March of 1932. It comprised three “books” of text—Family Fellowship, Work, and Freedom—and one additional section of photographs. Wright designed full-page spreads to separate the sections, where the subtitle of his original manuscript appeared, “From Generation to Generation.”

The autobiography was a success for Longmans and for Wright, even if its immediate impact was only a quick financial bandage to his rather dire situation. In combination with a publication of Wright’s lectures at Princeton University, the Autobiography attracted a marked increase in attention and Wright received more than a few commissions on account of the two texts. The autobiography, a combination of biographical anecdotes, narratives of specific building projects, and Wright’s personal philosophy of architecture, immediately reverberated throughout the press, in a reproduction of its content and of its author’s self-image. Reviews, such as the one in the New York Times Book Review, “The Autobiography of a Fighting Architect,” deployed Wright’s own anecdotes to describe Wright’s lifelong struggle to bring architecture into the service of man, noting that it was “inevitable and right that the architect should justify and explain himself as a man.”¹⁸ Wright’s narratives, some of which were fabricated, started their endless repeat, each recursion a tighter circle around the myth and history of a genius.

¹⁷ Wright to George Bye, March 19, 1931.

¹⁸ “The Autobiography of a Fighting Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright tells the story of his battle for a human functionalism in building.” *The New York Times Book Review*, April 3, 1932.

As an object, the autobiography described something akin to “an American in the making”: the process of Wright’s self-becoming. But, as the 1932 version was not the only version of Wright’s autobiography—re-sorted, edited, and added to in 1943, and partially repackaged again in 1954—the *autobiographies* attest more to the repetition of discourse than to a particular conclusion. This was so aptly described and emphasized by that also “distinctly American” branch of philosophy, Pragmatism: John Dewey, Charles Peirce, and William James all foregrounded the relentless flux of experience. For Wright, that flux of new experience took the form of a newly re-released edition of the Autobiography published by Duell, Sloan & Pearce, Inc. in 1943.¹⁹ The original three chapters, re-sorted, became five: Family, Fellowship, Work, Freedom, Form. A sixth, on Broadacre City, was published independently the following year.

The autobiographies are emblematic of the historical recursion—of being possessed by own’s one narrative—that was also happening at the scale of the country’s history. In addition to Wright’s other prolific production, they are the origin point for so many of the anecdotes that have become reified by scholars, critics, and their readers as objective “history.” Taken as fact from an assumedly authentic source, even though he undermined their own truthfulness—“Writing these pages trying to be honestly autobiographical, telling only what is true, I see why all autobiography is written between the lines... does this fluid nature of life, I wonder, really allow nothing to be wholly had?”—the historiography has folded in upon itself, freely

¹⁹ Duell to Wright, September 15, 1939.

duplicating both history and myth, eliding the distinction between the two.²⁰ Wright's belief in his own genius and its self-evident appearance in the story of his life was all he offered to be "wholly had"; his biography, therefore, became inseparable from an understanding of his work.

Wright's history functions as a foundational epistemology for all of the histories of his work that follow, establishing a precedent that asserts Wright's biography is an apt narration of his work. These parameters privilege the anecdote, which fuels narratives with convenient proofs and re-establishes Wright's own hierarchies by overemphasizing clever quotations of quotations: how many docent scripts include a joke about a genius and a leaking roof? These biographical references are precious, deployed as evidence, but revealing, in such sanctity, the ultimate goal: to *more fully know* the figure of Wright. This underlies even the most contemporary approaches to Wright—for instance, the Museum of Modern Art's 2017 exhibit *Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive*, wherein even the sale of Wright's legacy was narrated, dramatized, and reproduced in the service of his genius.

Just as defining the American nation "on its own terms" was a teleological trap—albeit with very real and material consequences—so too is defining Wright on his. Histories, unable to break out of this narrative, solidify a static understanding of Wright—one that is rapidly losing relevance in an ever-expanding discipline. And though he is regularly dismissed by academics in architecture for being too personally expressive, anachronistic, or Romantic, Wright is still beloved by many other publics and continues to define an idea of American Architecture and

²⁰ Wright, *An Autobiography* (1943). The original text, from 1932, is slightly different, more concerned with the task of writing an autobiography than the facticity of it. There have been many scholars who have dedicated their efforts toward "correcting" the record on Wright and pointing out his own exaggerations or false memories; see for instance Thomas Hines, "The Search for Frank Lloyd Wright: History, Biography, Autobiography."

the figure of the American architect for a non-professional audience. His legacy—as this dissertation will hopefully show—has become so pervasive as to become invisible. It is in between the recursive repeat of his biographical narrative and the threat of his total irrelevance that lies the opportunity to reframe the narrative. Here, we can question the embedded and *unconscious assumptions* of American exceptionalism in his historiography, the linearity of his development, and the unity of his figure. Here, the goal is not *to know Wright better* but to understand how and why he came to perform the role he did, and the implications of it.

This dissertation is a study of the selves of Frank Lloyd Wright and how different notions of the self were mobilized both in the context of the profession and in service to an ideology of national identity. I argue that the readings of self, profession, and country are inextricable from the other; they are the embedded and unacknowledged narratives that uphold the cultural values of genius, exceptionalism, and American ideology.

“Possession” functions as both a theoretical and thematic conceit. It is first and foremost, a way to describe the patterns of historical narration and the relationship of discourse to its object. The result, for Wright certainly, and arguably also for the American self, is a total entrapment within the confines of their own history and in a faulty argument wherein the appearance of self-evidence is accepted as fact. This characterizes much of Wright’s legacy, where we can see that Wright is possessed by his own narrative. A critical reading of this recursive self-narration also shows just how much the myths of America are embedded in his life and work: Wright also possesses America, and in exchange, as a sort of cultural heritage, America possesses him.

In each chapter, possession appears in various guises, each time in service to narratives that elucidate Wright's parallel arc to the narrative of the American self. Each chapter is therefore grounded in an area historically pertinent to both Wright and his country and has been used as a signal of their exceptionality: nature, in Chapter one; business and education, in Chapter two; and government, in Chapter three. These three sites are the foundational timeline of the country's history—perhaps more recognizable as land, institution, and law—as well as Wright's; they are, additionally, when framed more generally as site, program, and authority, the narrative timeline of *all* architecture. These subject-making sites have been acknowledged as “exceptional” in American history and as sustaining the particularities of the American psyche. The narratives in each chapter are focused on specific aspects, periods, and projects in Wright's career: Wright's clients, the founding of the Taliesin Fellowship, and Wright's reputation.

The first chapter shows how, borrowing the multivalence of “capital-N-Nature,” Wright established himself as both exceptional and “natural.” Nature functioned as a substitute for the country's lack of ancestral tradition, and thereby justified an architecture without tradition; its rules and laws governed a new visual sense of order. Wright absorbed this idea of nature in his own Emersonian descriptions of organic architecture, but it was Wright's clients who reified the concept. In looking at the letters of clients asking Wright to consider designing them a house, the bulk of which arrive after the publication of the first Jacobs house in 1937, the site is highlighted as the most important feature and is often described with the same romance of nature as Wright. In assuming that the site was Edenic, that Wright was the only one able to access its challenge, and that a house of matching character would “complete” the private

parcel of land, Wright's clients reproduce the relationship Wright himself had claimed for himself in the prairies of the midwest circa 1893.

Wright often called these clients "pioneers." In previous scholarship, this identifier has been assumed to be a metaphor, a clue to understanding the assumed like-mindedness of a group of people who each hired a radical young architect to design for them an unusual home.²¹ It is also uncritically accepted as a sign of the avant-gardism of the architectural profession. However, I argue that "pioneer" is not a metaphor, and as such perpetuates the narrative of the American pioneer self, and must, therefore, be understood as having long-term implications in our understanding of settler-colonialism. In this context, Wright used nature as the elision between looking right and assuming *rights*: the reception of the Winslow house, his "first" house to embody the ideas of the prairie, noted the house's similarity to the old elm on the site, each having as much authority as the other to exist in that site. As a technique of settler-colonialism, Wright's aestheticization of the house's relationship to nature confers propriety to his clients vis-a-vis the site. He creates, in effect, an aesthetic of possession. This has been folded into the *profession of architecture* in the ways architecture facilitates turning land into property, in our understanding of how architecture "makes" a site, and how aesthetics is deployed as a technique in private land ownership.

²¹ Leonard K. Eaton, Robert Twombly, Edgar Tafel, and Eugene Streich studied Wright's clients as a group. There are many studies of individual clients and their relationships with Wright, often detailed in books devoted to the construction narrative of a single house: see Steven Reiss on the Pope-Leighey house, Donna Grant Reilly on the Grant House, Herbert Jacobs on the Jacobs House, the Hannas on the Hanna House, Edgar Kaufmann on Fallingwater, Frederick Robie on the Robie House, as well as Kathryn Smith, and Joseph Siry.

In the second chapter, I attempt to offer a more thorough and critical history of the Taliesin Fellowship. The idea of this institution—not quite a school and not quite an office—emerged at the height of the country’s business boom, when the intangible idea of trust offered more capital than even its paper counterpart, and everyone seemed to be operating from equal parts scarcity and surplus. Wright, who had no work and only two underutilized assets—his own potential and an abandoned school—was at the depths of financial ruin. He was forced to turn the speculative trust of his own friends and family into capital, literally, when he agreed to incorporate himself as a barter against bankruptcy. The conflict between the individual and the business is played out through the story of the founding of the Taliesin Fellowship: originally proposed as an “experimental way station” for the University of Wisconsin, it was then recast as an International Fellowship before it commenced, in 1932, as a reorganization of Wright’s personal domestic economy.

The Fellowship was always a business, and businesses in the early twentieth century in America were run by personalities. Not only did the Fellowship bring in its own income, but it also capitalized on the surplus of the old school and the surplus of Wright’s personality. At the same moment education is recognized as the key to business success as well as the key to self-possession and self-fulfillment, Wright offered a unique combination of the two, veiling his own business venture within the aura of culture and the esteem of education. And though the Fellowship in many ways was unsuccessful, it was through the execution of the Taliesin Fellowship that Frank Lloyd Wright modeled a new addition to the model of the American businessman: the economic value of creativity.

Historiographically, Taliesin is the epicenter for understanding Wright's life as well as his legacy. It is the site where successive generations were trained, where the Wright-ideology is preserved and assumed to be most authentic. It is not new territory for scholarship. But because it is so central to the American understanding of Wright, I have found that the historical narrative has been told against the facts of the case, as they were. The Taliesin Fellowship has previously provided opportunities for scholars to discuss Olgyanna Lloyd Wright's contribution to her husband's work, to acknowledge and admire the work of the apprentices (although always in service to the brand of Wright), and the role of a "learn-by-doing" pedagogy. It is often idealized as its own small-scale agrarian community—utopian, even, by the standards of some—and remembered, usually fondly, in memoirs of former apprentices.²² Many architects and historians outside of Wright's scholarship view the Fellowship as a failure for its inability to produce anything but Wright during the decades of its operation; it also appeared under a more critical lens in sociologist Roger Friedland and architect Harold Zellman's *The Fellowship*. But the appearance of the court case I end the chapter with—a 1954 Wisconsin Supreme Court decision about the non-profit status of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation—is rare, except for accounts of surprise and dismay it

²² The literature is abundant, but examples include: Roger Friedland and Harold Zellman, *The Fellowship*; Myron Marty and Shirley Marty, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin Fellowship*; Myron Marty and Thomas Hand, *Communities of Frank Lloyd Wright*; Randolph Henning's *At Taliesin*; Robert Twombly, "Organic Living," and Grant Manson, "The Wonderful World of Taliesin." Memoirs of former apprentices were written by Cornelia Brierly, Edgar Tafel, Edgar Kaufmann, Kamal Amin, Curtis Besinger, photographer Pedro Guerrero, Lois Davidson Gottlieb, Frances Nemtin, Earl Nisbet; Priscilla Henken published the diary she kept while at Taliesin, which was less effusive than the others.

generated among Wright's social circle.²³ The facts of the case, reproduced here from the original court documents, demonstrate how ad-hoc the design of the Fellowship was, how much of the individual was embedded in the business, and how the economics sustained the brand rather than the community.

Finally, chapter three tells the story of the Marin County Civic Center, a rarely featured project in Wright's portfolio, one of his last designs, and one of only a handful of projects for a government client. The Civic center is fascinating for many reasons, but most of all for its timely depiction of American ideology. Set in an idyllic California county north of San Francisco, the history of the building's approval, construction, and opening, from 1956–1962, depicts the anxious drama of the individual in an anonymous mass society, the threat of erasure of subjective genius that was posed by new preferences for teamwork and collaboration, the management of self-image and reputation amid cold-war rhetoric and suspicion, and the country's stake in American ideology combatting communism.

It is mostly a story about Wright's reputation, and how Wright and others managed it in the media environment of newspapers, radio, and film. There is a moment, in 1957, wherein Wright realizes his reputation is unconnected to his physical, embodied self. Then over 90 years old, the architect physically stormed out of the room; his reputation, however, remained in his vacated place with equal authority. It is the same story on another scale when Wright died

²³ This is the case in the popular press, particularly *The Capital Times*, edited by William Evjue, who was a close friend of Wright's. It was the theme of architect Ralph Walker's tribute, "Frank Lloyd Wright: His Contribution to Our American Culture," which was published, among other places, in the journal *Land Economics*. Walker argues that Wright's "long and successful search for beauty" is a testament to the possibilities in a world otherwise ruled by science, otherwise lacking heroes. The editor of the journal agreed, citing the Wisconsin spirit Wright shared with the founder of the journal, Richard Ely, and his contemporary John Commons.

before the groundbreaking and chaos erupted, some demanding to see the drawings exactly as “the master” left them and to renegotiate the fee with The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in the absence of Wright’s personal genius; others demanding that the building proceed as planned, a posthumous “monument” to its famous architect. All of the drama of the individual genius and the subjective and singular expression that the California county had hired Wright for was resolved by a transference of his reputation: that, under the law, The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation had the authority and license to proceed *as Wright*. This was an important step in the transformation and dissemination of Wright’s physical presence into an exceptional aura.

Together, the three chapters exfoliate the character of Wright against the currents of history and myths of the United States. What emerges from their juxtaposition is the dissolution of the idea of a unitary, singular and coherent self. Whereas the first chapter begins in the rhetoric of singularity—Wright’s exceptional access to nature and his unique ability to interpret it—the second chapter shows how, through the structuring and regulation of business organizations, especially under American law, this singular figure is doubled in the form of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. The corporate entity is granted equivalency to its eponymous person, given nearly all the same rights and autonomy under a new set of laws. In the last chapter, I show that by emphasizing his own singularity—with the apprenticeship system, the Foundation, and Wright’s media savviness—Wright facilitates the multiplying of his own self and that, like reputation, these selves move independently of his person. It is a new environment, defined by circulation—of images, of media, and of reputation. It is inevitable, after this moment, that the pervasiveness of this multiplied disunity dissolves entirely into a reified concept of American heritage, reaffirming those original myths.

In addition to offering a new understanding of both this particular American self and the American self in general, this narrative arc challenges the standard depictions of the figure of the professional architect. In so many ways Wright was—and still is—seen as a model of the profession: a singular and subjective genius, an individualist, heroic and rebellious, an outsider speaking truth to well-established institutions. Wright's career modeled the multiple different incarnations of the figure of the architect that Andrew Saint and Spiro Kostof described in *The Image of the Architect* and *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession*, respectively. Historians and scholars have often periodized Wright's career, for the sake of clarity: "The first Golden Age," as Grant Manson called Wright's years as a young professional in suburban Chicago, established Wright as a modern innovator in midwestern architecture. The next decade, 1910-1922, was characterized by Anthony Alofsin as "The Lost Years," and by Reyner Banham as the beginning of "The Wilderness Years," each as an expression of the same surprised sentiment at Wright's thwarted potential. "The Heroic Years" were so named by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Wright's own archivist, to describe the decade of the abandoned but visionary projects of the 1920s. In a final incarnation that lasted nearly three decades, Wright's "third career" began in the 1930s with Edgar Kaufmann's Fallingwater, the S.C. Johnson Wax Administration Building for Hib Johnson, and the Jacobs House, the first of many Usonian houses that Wright hoped would transform the landscape of America.²⁴ This periodization—a convenient technique to define a career that lasted over seven decades—actually stages a

²⁴ Banham described Wright's final period in "The Wilderness Years": "the last Mr. Wright—the cloaked and be-bereted pseudo-bard, instant grand old man, architecture's gift to mass media, one-man Victorian revival and creator of plaster monuments to American provincial self-esteem..."

creative rebirthing every few years, much like the Richard Bock sculptures outside of Wright's first home studio: a seemingly full-scale man reemerging from the trappings of stasis.

To read Wright as a linear, unified self is to reaffirm his narrative by excluding important intersections and influences, and ignoring the myths already embedded in his performance of singular genius. In this dissertation, I argue that in order to understand Wright's legacy as America's architect, it must be read alongside the project of America. To read the two in parallel is to read their evolving consciousness in the construction of a self in terms of the other.

CHAPTER 1

The Natural Self and the Pioneer: Wright, his clients, and their sites

*The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed,
an extraordinary amount of human history.¹*

Introduction

“American Architecture” is an anachronistic concept, now, in the twenty-first century: the borders of contemporary visual landscapes are no longer limited by their relation to a physical space; many materials and many people have gained new mobilities, no longer tied to a specific place; expressions of nationalism are no longer a desirable, reasonable, or possible goal. It is, perhaps, as anachronistic to think that the identity of the United States results from its unique and interminable—as it once appeared—land and its perpetual closeness to nature, as historian Perry Miller once described it.² That these two historical concepts co-existed—the Americanness of architecture and America as “Nature’s Nation”—and even strengthened each other should be unsurprising. As a historical concept defining building styles that emerged in and expressed the “character” of the continental United States, American architecture is

¹ Raymond Williams, “Ideas of Nature,” *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso, 1980.

² Perry Miller, one of the founding historians of American Studies, saw American association with nature as distinctly Christian: nature protected Americans from the artificiality of the city by its ubiquitous instructional presence. See *Nature and the National Ego*.

dominated by the narrative that it is inextricably related to nature.³ And more than any other American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright is responsible for the aesthetic of that relationship, an aesthetic still very much present even if representative of an outdated ideology. This chapter shows the ways in which Frank Lloyd Wright used nature—as advertisement, metaphor, aspiration, and aesthetic—and the history of its embedding in three particular areas: Wright’s historiography, Wright’s relationship with clients, and Wright’s approach to the site.

Though this historical narrative begins in a grounded reverence for nature, it—like many of the histories of the United States—quite quickly becomes a narrative about pioneers and land. And these narratives are necessarily and rightfully implicated in current discourses of settler colonialism. As an object of study, Wright is not exempt from this current critique; he was aware of the contemporary political issues involving native nations, African-Americans, and migrant workers. Scholars are beginning to analyze his work under this new lens: Jennifer Gray has shown how Wright and others in his professional circle perpetuated ideas of nativism as a reaction against the threats undermining Anglo-Saxon majority culture; Mabel Wilson analyzed the only project Wright designed for African-Americans, a Rosenwald school; Charles Davis historicized the concept of “character” in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates

³ Warren Susman’s text *Culture as History* tracked how character was a mobile concept popularly deployed until the turn of the twentieth century. It implied Puritan virtue, a sense of moralism, and outer expression of an inner nature; however, Charles Davis, in *Building Character*, showed that the concept also harbored racial and nativist values which were therefore embedded in architecture. The relationship of American architecture to nature is directly addressed or indirectly assumed in most histories of American architecture written before 1970, and even many after; for instance, the opening line of John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown’s 1961 book sponsored by AIA *The Architecture of America*, is “First there was the land.” That Adrian Forty saw Nature as underpinning all architectural thought but cited mostly European references, might show his and my cultural bias. See his entry for ‘Nature’ in *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*.

in architectural style; Elizabeth Hawley critiqued Wright's creation of a figurative and non-existent, monolithic "American Indian."⁴ Each of these situates Wright within his specific historical context, revealing the architect, who by the end of the nineteenth century was already well-known in his professional and social circles as a radical, to have had disappointingly average politics.

Despite these attempts to add new layers of interpretation to Wright's historical legacy, Wright, as a writer of his own history and careful cultivator of his image, had established the tone and terms of its narrative that have proven difficult to dislodge: genius, architecture, aesthetics, and, as he described it, their contribution to democracy and American culture. As a form-giver to this intention, he has since been called a pioneer by critics and historians, but in truth, Wright believed every American a pioneer: "In America," he wrote, "each man has a peculiar, inalienable right to live in his own house in his own way. He is a pioneer in every right sense of the word."⁵ That Wright's career mostly comprised residential designs means that the idea of the American self as a pioneer underlaid the fundamental practice of his design work, and necessarily changes the way we think about Wright's relationship to nature, land, site, and property, but also the ways in which it has profoundly impacted the profession, establishing an identity of "American architecture," as well as its audience.

⁴ This list is by no means exhaustive, but indicative of the new and worthwhile scholarship. Jennifer Gray's "Pattern behind the Realism: The Jensen Graphic," Mabel O. Wilson's "Rosenwald School: Lessons in Progressive Education," and Elizabeth Hawley's "'Playing Indian' at the Nakoma Country Club" all appear in Barry Bergdoll and Jennifer Gray, eds., *Unpacking the Archive*; see also Charles Davis, *Building Character: The Racial Politics of Modern Architectural Style*.

⁵ Frank Lloyd Wright, *Studies and Executed Buildings*. Berlin: Wasmuth, 1911. Wright wrote the introduction to the *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe* portfolios.

Historiographies of Wright and Nature: Personal, Professional, Philosophical

Wright's relationship to nature has long been a rich source of analysis and scholarship; its ubiquity makes it a nearly unavoidable topic. It is usually upheld by critics, admirers, and certain historians as a component of Wright's genius—that he had an especial relationship with nature and was, therefore, an insightful interpreter—and the presence of nature in his work not only offered a cohering aesthetic but was also evidence of this special access. In terms of Wright's historiography, scholars have investigated the origins of his idea of nature, or as he often described it, "Capital N-nature," through its biographical, philosophical, and religious underpinnings; others have used nature to explain the formal relationships and symbolic referents in Wright's work. Much of the scholarship relies on and reproduces three explanatory categories: Wright's personal background, his professional background, and the philosophical context attempting to define American identity. Though this historiographical discourse of Wright and nature is used in order to more fully understand the historical person of Frank Lloyd Wright, it functions as the grounding of his own American-ness, each aspect of it told *unconsciously* in parallel with a collective idea of the American self.

Wright's biography has been told in many forms, not least of which was the 1932 publication of his autobiography, originally titled *From Generation to Generation*.⁶ For Wright,

⁶ There are many biographies about Wright, each of which emphasizes his exceptional love of nature in order to also emphasize his singularity. Those written by Meryle Secrest, Brendan Gill, Ada Louise Huxtable, and Farr Finis are some of the most widely read. Though ostensibly not biographies, many monographs, articles, and chapters referencing Wright do the same. The 1988 edited volume *The Nature of Frank Lloyd Wright*, is one of the first looks at Wright after, as Vincent Scully described in the introduction, he had become a historical figure. It includes texts by many Wright scholars, including Joseph Connors, Neil Levine, David Van Zanten Gwendolyn Wright, and Donald Hoffmann. See Carol R. Bolon, Robert S. Nelson and Linda Seidel.

and for the historians studying him, his biography served as evidence of the love of nature that was an inheritance from his Welsh ancestors—literal pioneers, in this case—who had been driven out of Wales due to their religious convictions. His attention to these ancestors and their settling of Wisconsin’s Helena Valley explained how he inherited the physical land and also, albeit intangibly, the spirit that condoned command over it. Like so many others, Wright’s grandparents arrived in America in the early nineteenth century. Their transformation of the “virgin soil” of the “Valley of the God-Almighty Lloyd Joneses” offered Wright a fractured model of self-reliance, equally rewarded and punished by the bounties and whims of nature. Wright’s own self-image was born on this same soil, years after his actual birth in Richland, WI, in spent summers of hard but transformative labor. Wright’s youth, characterized in his own retelling by a naive susceptibility to beauty—a mop of curls, and countless hours of outdoor idylls—was turned into a shorn, muscled and capable man. This identity was earned from direct experience, grown in and on the dirt, yielding reciprocity between self and midwestern land. It was an identity many Americans stepped into, as historian Richard White observed: a knowledge of nature gained through the labor they performed.⁷

It was also on account of his family, Wright and his historians have contextualized, that the architect was immersed in a spiritual understanding of the world, of which nature was both a symbol and manifestation.⁸ Evidence of this is offered through descriptions of his father and maternal grandfather, both preachers, and more importantly, Wright’s uncle, the Reverend

⁷ See Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*.

⁸ For instance: Donald L. Johnson, *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Early Years: Progressivism: Aesthetics: Cities*; Maginel Wright Barney, *The Valley of the God-Almighty Joneses*; Jerome Klinkowitz, *Frank Lloyd Wright and his Manner of Thought*.

Jenkin Lloyd Jones. Each of these figures emphasized a commitment to individual morality more than conventionalized creed, as seen in the family motto Wright would carve above his family's fireplace, "Truth against the world." Though Wright rarely admitted it in his own writings, Jenkin was particularly influential, having welcomed Wright to Chicago in 1887 and introduced him to his circle of acquaintances and parishioners, many of whom became Wright's first clients.⁹ In Jenkin's Unitarian church, nature was sacred, its lessons applicable to a rising middle class confronted by declining urban morals. With nature as a guide, he encouraged his congregants to a spiritual way of life through a sense of "simplicity and repose." By making their own worlds beautiful, Jenkin advocated, and by surrounding themselves with physical beauty, these parishioners would inspire their own inner moral beauty, in a sort of organic exchange between environment and inhabitant. These lessons were circulated by Jenkin's colleague and friend, William C. Gannett, in his sermon redefining beauty for a non-aristocratic class, "The House Beautiful," which Wright illustrated and printed with his client W. Herman Winslow in 1896.

Wright's appreciation of nature, however, was also a professional philosophy, and the historiography of this professional preoccupation reaffirms Wright's ties to new traditions in American architecture, particularly through his "Leiber meister" Louis Sullivan. Thomas Tallmadge was one of the first to announce the importance of this national lineage, in 1927. It was repeated, with various additions—expanding the genealogy of nature's influence to John Ruskin, Viollet-le-Duc, Ruprich Robert, Frank Furness, and H. H. Richardson, sometimes also

⁹ Wright, with Dwight Perkins, also participated in the design for Jenkin's All Souls Church, on Chicago's South side. Architectural historian Joseph Siry writes of this commission and Jenkin's philosophies in "The Abraham Lincoln Center in Chicago."

William Ware and John Endelmann—and transformations, including those by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Sigfried Giedion in the 1940s, by Carl Condit, H. Allen Brooks, and Vincent Scully, as well as new scholars outside of the disciplinary boundaries in the 1960s and, with new philosophical implications, by Lauren Weingarden and Mark Mumford, among others, in the 1980s.¹⁰ Wright also readily admitted his indebtedness to Sullivan's teachings: as his lead draftsman, he heard Sullivan's poetic musings and existential expressions often, and they reverberated in the younger architect's work. Sullivan published his own ideas about nature and its role in architecture, declaring that nature was the primary school for the artist, providing instruction in the invisible processes that were efficient design solutions: inexhaustible rhythms that were vital, organic, coherent, and logical, flowing uninterrupted from cause to effect; the architect was the poet called upon to interpret this life.¹¹ Art, therefore, became a new nature, created by humans. This was a very different understanding of the essence of nature compared to the one Wright received at his previous office, headed by Joseph Lyman Silsbee. It showed up in Wright's later critique of Silsbee's process, wherein the architect would sketch an image and hand it to the draftsmen to figure out the plan. Silsbee was skilled at the renderings,

¹⁰ Thomas E. Tallmadge, *The Story of Architecture in America*. On the influence of Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc, see Lauren Weingarden, "Naturalized Nationalism: A Ruskinian Discourse on the Search for an American Style of Architecture" and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials*. On Ruprich Robert, see Barry Bergdoll, "Of Crystals." Nature in the American lineage is discussed in James Dennis and Lu B. Wencker's "Ornamentation and the Organic Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright." See also Mark Mumford, "Form Follows Nature: The Origins of American Organic Architecture." After Grant Manson's book came out in 1958, Wright became much more available to scholars outside the discipline of Architecture and Art History, particularly those in American Studies and historians interested in intellectual history.

¹¹ Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings*, p119. For a thorough examination of Wright's early life in Chicago, see also Donald Leslie Johnson, *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Early Years: Progressivism: Aesthetics: Cities*.

designing pretty picturesque arrangements of Shingle-style houses. Nature was what was left after the site had been cleared—the background to the building’s mass. Wright described it as “just making pictures.”¹²

It was from Sullivan, many historians have noted, that Wright began to understand a concept of the “organic” in architecture, an idea that would come to define Wright’s practice and was already embedded in Sullivan’s own design theories: that each problem holds its own solution, that form should follow function.¹³ These were the lessons of nature; there was a relation between parts, an honest transparency in the requirements of a building and its form, and thereby a “rightness” to its expressive character. But Sullivan also believed in an organic life force that, in a properly designed building, provoked an emotional, aesthetic response. This was most visible in his use of ornament—the appearance of filaments and florals signaling nature as a symbol—which functioned as a token of humanity’s spiritual unity with nature as well as a corrective to the pessimism of practical and technological conditions, which many saw in the steel frames transforming the sky.¹⁴ Ornament was Sullivan’s naturalizing and optimistic solution to the problem of how a lofty building, made possible by inspired engineering and new materials, might “rightly” express the condition of its time, place, and character.

Both structure and ornament... each enhancing the value of the other. And this, I take it, is the preparatory basis of what may be called an organic system of ornamentation... as though by the outworking of some beneficent agency it had

¹² Wright, *An Autobiography*, p70.

¹³ Like many other biographical narratives, *Frank Lloyd Wright: His Life and His Architecture*, by Robert C. Twombly, attributes the “flow” in Wright’s work to lessons he learned from Sullivan. See also Naomi Uechi, “Emersonian Transcendentalism in Frank Lloyd Wright’s Unity Temple.”

¹⁴ Sullivan, “Ornament in Architecture” and Weingarden, p68.

*come forth from the very substance of the material and was there by the same right that a flower appears amid the leaves of its parent plant.*¹⁵

In Sullivan's office, Wright also heard ideas about the architectural connections between nature and democracy, ideas Sullivan would later write down in *Democracy: A Man-Search*. A relationship between nature and democracy was already assumed, of course, albeit unequally applied, as a founding principle in the United States and its "self-evident" natural law, and in the moralities embedded in Jefferson's agrarian ideal, but Sullivan saw the failings of a society unable to grasp its relation with nature. Democracy could be realized, he thought, only when every man recognized and acted on behalf of his own inherent and individual self. And it was beauty that brought out this best side of individuals: physical beauty strengthened moral beauty and reflected a harmonious environment in which integrity, fairness, and fortitude prevailed.¹⁶ Echoes of Walt Whitman pervaded Sullivan's prose. He is the seer, the poet who "sees things rhyme; for rhyme is but the suggestion of harmony; and harmony is but the suggestion of rhythm; and rhythm is but the suggestion of the superb moving equilibrium of all things."¹⁷

Beyond Adler and Sullivan's office, Wright's extended professional circle in Chicago was, by his own admission, ad-hoc. Despite associating with many clubs and societies, his name rarely showed up on their rosters. Upon starting his own office, he found a group of like-

¹⁵ Sullivan, "Ornament in Architecture," p4.

¹⁶ The scholarship on Louis Sullivan is immense. For his specific relationship to nature, see Narciso G. Menocal, *Architecture as Nature*; his situatedness in Chicago, Robert Twombly, "Beyond Chicago: Louis Sullivan in the American West"; for his relationship to the transcendental tradition, see Edward H. Madden, "Transcendental Influences on Louis H. Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright."

¹⁷ Menocal, p96.

minded young architects that became an informal group of colleagues, many of whom shared the office-loft of Steinway Hall. This group of midwesterners, including Robert Spencer, Myron Hunt, Dwight Perkins, William Burley Griffin, George Dean, the Pond Brothers, and George Maher, was inspired by Sullivan's call for a new national style and was encouraged by Chicago's geographic and cultural independence from East Coast traditions. Inspired by middle-Western regionalism, they proposed an architectural identity that was rooted in characteristics of the "West."¹⁸ Their designs reaffirmed the qualitative attributes of the expansive prairie and its contents in horizontal massing, gabled roofs, casement windows, and decorative glass. They poured over Owen Jones, learning his techniques of "conventionalizing," and the theories of "pure design."¹⁹

Wright did join at least one organization; he was a charter member of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society, dedicated to the ideas of Morris and Ruskin, and based in Jane Addams' Hull House. The Society was the main means by which the eponymous English movement made its way to the United States, hosting various lectures and co-sponsoring exhibitions and events. Along with many of his informal colleagues, Wright broadened his scope of interest to include new architectural considerations: the use of the machine, art's relationship to industry,

¹⁸ Importantly, the use of the word "Prairie" to describe a local organization was common, since the early nineteenth century. It appears often in *The Chicago Tribune* and other papers that Wright's name often appeared in, *The Oak Park Vindicator* and *The Oak Leaves*. "Prairie" was the name of Chicago's cricket club, a cycling Club, and, later, an Oak Park social organization, of which Mr. John Farson (owner of "Pleasant House," by architect George Maher) was president. It also featured heavily in the literature of Wright's good friend Hamlin Garland, who wrote "Prairie Folks" and "Prairie Songs" at the same time Wright was designing the Winslow house. "Prairie" is not singular to nor representative of only Wright. For the general context of Wright's group of companions, see H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and his Midwest Contemporaries*.

¹⁹ On the midwesterners' ideas of "Pure Design," see Marie Frank, "The Theory of Pure Design and American Architectural Education in the Early Twentieth Century."

and a respect for the nature of materials.²⁰ The latter implied an inherent essence of materials, or the combination of their beauty plus their use, and would eventually become synonymous with Wright's own inherent abilities: "In the Nature of Materials" was the title of Henry-Russell Hitchcock's 1942 monograph.

Underlying these different vectors of nature's influence on Wright, from the personal to the professional, historians have recognized a philosophy of nature that emerged from the American Transcendentalist movement, which, though small, had an outsized impact on the country.²¹ The writings, lectures, and poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Theodore Parker, and, later, Walt Whitman brought a challenge to the dominant American views of nature: the industrialists' identification of raw materials to be transformed and the empiricists' understanding of nature as useful knowledge.²² Both of these assumed an inherent separation between humans and nature, within a clear hierarchy. In response to the ever-expanding reach of industrialization and awareness of the ravaged landscape left in its wake, a new question of nature's possibilities and metaphysical meanings emerged: nature as the opportunity for personal renewal *and* national identity. Emerson's 1836 text "Nature" tied a

²⁰ The relationship between the Chicago Architectural Club, the Arts and Crafts Society, and the English Arts and Crafts movement is documented in the scholarship of H. Allen Brooks. Brooks also identified Joseph Twyman's interactions with the Chicago clubs as a main source for the emerging tenet of respect for the nature of materials, coupled with a plea for simplicity. Twyman, an Englishman, was a designer and decorator with the Chicago-based Tobey Furniture company, which was a sponsor of Club exhibitions. Oscar Lovell Triggs founded the Industrial Arts League in 1899; Wright sat on the board for a short time, but his well-known 1901 essay read at Hull House was directed at Triggs and Zeublin.

²¹ For instance, Jerome Klinkowitz, *Frank Lloyd Wright and his Manner of Thought*, as well as Uechi, Madden, Dennis, and Mumford.

²² See John Opie, "Romantic America and Utopianism: Laying Claim to Paradise" in *Nature's Nation: An Environmental History of the United States*, p186ff.

Romantic notion to the American continent, unifying what had been considered separate by claiming that the natural world was the key to understanding the unified cosmos and the manifestation of a single force or energy pulsing through humans and nature alike.²³ It was, therefore, necessarily ubiquitous and necessarily permeating. It was "essence unchanged by man," a symbol of and access to the divine, and knowable only through direct experience.²⁴ And though it was present in urban centers, particularly in the idea of "Culture," it came with great risk.²⁵ It was rural nature, absent of materiality, that had a moralizing influence. Since individual morality was the basis of all religion, according to Emerson, rural nature was also the site where humans could become their best selves.

The poet, or artist, held an esteemed position in Emerson's ideal society: he was "a new nobility... conferred in groves and pastures, and not in castles, or by the sword-blade, any longer."²⁶ The poet, like Sullivan, had identified in Whitman's work, was a step closer to nature, an interpreter of the symbolic language of the divine order. Nature "offers all her creatures to him as a picture-language. Being used as a type, a second wonderful value appears in the object, far better than its old value, as the carpenter's stretched cord, if you hold your ear close enough, is musical in the breeze."²⁷ The poet reattached the real to the spiritual, intellect with experience, and, for those who heeded his call to look at the world with new eyes, man to

²³ Robinson, p82.

²⁴ Robert Lee Francis, "The Architectonics of Emerson's Nature."

²⁵ Robert Gross, "Transcendentalism and Urbanism: Concord, Boston, and the Wider World."

²⁶ Emerson, "The Poet."

²⁷ Ibid.

himself. Wright inhabited the intersection of these historical moments—suspended in the constant flux of nature’s direct and indirect encounters—and architecture offered the opportunity to redefine the physical and poetic manifestation of the American experience.²⁸

Wright’s historiography, however, despite its potential, is trapped by his own, assumedly authoritative, interpretation of his life and work. Scholarly attempts to contextualize his work—not just his relationship to nature—therefore appear to more fully understand the historical person of Wright than the implications of such a looming and complicated figure. Anecdotes fill the contours of his person as defined by his biography and reaffirm the depths of his creativity, imagination, and reverence; critical attempts to correct Wright on his own “palpable errors and smoke screens of the autobiography” are reproached by other writers as an overreaction, having “lost sight of the poetry.”²⁹ In these ways, nature can only have been understood superficially, as a generator and philosophy of design, as a visual presence or

²⁸ Emerson’s poetics of Nature dissolve the boundaries between architecture and the world: *Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature, is the absence of spirit; to pure spirit, it is fluid, it is volatile, it is obedient. Every spirit builds itself a house; and beyond its house a world; and beyond its world, a heaven. Know then, that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon perfect. What we are, that only can we see. All that Adam had, all that Caesar could, you have and can do. Adam called his house, heaven and earth; Caesar called his house, Rome; you perhaps call yours, a cobbler’s trade; a hundred acres of ploughed land; or a scholar’s garret. Yet line for line and point for point, your dominion is as great as theirs, though without fine names. Build, therefore, your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit.* From “Prospects” in Emerson, *Nature*.

²⁹ This, for example, was Thomas Hines’ take in his 1992 *New York Times* book review of three books: Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer’s *Collected Writings* Vol. I and II, Meryle Secrest’s biography, and Carla Lind’s coffee table book, *The Wright Style*. Hines, in this short review of fewer than 3,000 words, offers his own version of Wright’s biography, from birth to death, full of the same anecdotes of scandal, rebellion, and triumph. He cites Kenneth Frampton’s introduction to Pfeiffer’s edited volumes as evidence that the “cultish hagiography” is lessening. Yet, even in the review, the commitment to Wright’s historical person implies that it has not, in fact, subsided. See Hines, “The Wright Stuff.”

symbol of a visual presence, and as a static scene-set to the unfolding narrative of architecture and American life. Against the figure of Wright, nature is understood as self-evident, his impressionistic and poetic musings on nature repeated ad infinitum as if they alternately are self-revealing or simply too profound to be knowable, as evidenced in the first line of Donald Hoffmann's book: "Nature must have meant more to Frank Lloyd Wright than we shall ever know."³⁰

And yet, this reading of nature in Wright's work as a superficial appearance, both self-evident and self-justifying, results in a reaffirmation of the same nationalist myths that the writings of the Transcendentalists did: that the United States of America is Nature's Nation, a new Garden of Eden, and its people were chosen and destined for greatness.³¹ America's greatest characteristic, its immense, diverse, and seemingly uncultivated land stood in for the absence of other, more traditional histories. For Americans, nature was the site of a morally perfect order, but materially, it was physical land, and thus the future of the country was

³⁰ Donald Hoffmann, preface to *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architecture and Nature*.

³¹ The literature that has shaped American ideas of nature is immense and shared by historians, literary critics, and popular writers. From eighteenth-century doctrines of the sublime (Wordsworth, Thoreau) to nineteenth-century pleas for conservation (Muir, Roosevelt) and nostalgia for individualism and primitive living (Turner), American nature has always reflected the ideas of its settler inhabitants and their laws, oscillating between wilderness, garden, civilization. Perry Miller, who wrote the epithet "Nature's Nation," wrote profusely on the religious undertones of Americanism, wilderness for him a substitute for Christian cathedrals; Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) pointed to the disparity between the symbol and reality of the American west; Leo Marx's 1964 *Machine in the Garden* announced an end of nature and the pastoral ideal in the American imagination; T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace* (1981), described escapist reactions to industrial modernity. New ecological and environmental histories emerged in the middle of the twentieth century, establishing the field of Environmental History (Aldo Leopold's 1949 *Land Ethic*, Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, The National Environmental Policy Act 1969); Donald Worster's *Nature's Economy* shows that nature and humans have a mutual impact; William Cronon has always argued for nature to be considered in concert with, rather than separated from, humans.

grounded in the possibilities of the landscape itself. Space, not time, defined American history, and the cultivator of space became its mythic hero.³² This obviously paved the way not only for the cultivation of the “garden,” but also for the mentalities that went with it: expansionism, opportunistic optimism, and exceptionalism. Americans were defined by their interactions with and mastery over the wilderness: their optimism, strength, inquisitiveness, practicality, invention, and freedom; all described by Frederick Jackson Turner in the same year and the same city that Wright opened his personal practice.³³

This all-encompassing concept of nature is part of the reason Wright’s legacy has dominated American architecture. Not only does it serve to justify the “American” in American architecture, but also perpetuates the idea that there is such a thing as particularly American. And yet there is more to understand about the role of nature in Wright’s architectural practice than simply its appearance and influence on and in designs. Nature functioned in Wright’s work in a way that, despite being present for the duration of his career, fulfilled different requirements at different periods. In the early years of his practice, “nature” was a way to justify novel designs in a language that was accessible and desirable—morally as well as stylistically—for middle-class white men moving to the Chicago suburbs; it was the means of access to a new kind of site that was neither urban nor countryside. The architect was the interpreter of nature, thereby offering a resolution to the dramatic antagonism between nature and

³² “America’s primeval forests, lakes, and mountains provided both a record of the nation’s past and the setting for its future growth,” wrote Lauren Weingarden in “Naturalized Nationalism: A Ruskinian Discourse on the Search for an American Style of Architecture.” See also John McDermott’s “Nature Nostalgia and the City: An American Dilemma.”

³³ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.”

civilization unfolding in the American imagination. Wright's rhetoric, culled from a combination of these aforementioned sources, emphasized the vitalist forces weaving between organic matter and between site and inhabitant in a way that justified reciprocity between the two.

By the time Wright started receiving commissions for the smaller, single-family houses he called "Usonian," this rhetoric was mirrored back to him, not unlike the way historians have mirrored back Wright's own biographical interpretations. Many of Wright's later clients used nature in order to appeal to Wright as an architect, using their unique and exceptional sites to attract Wright's "virtuosic" abilities, thereby reaffirming his artistic and professional identification with nature. These abilities were not only performed on the design of the house, but also on the clients. Wright's ideas of organicism confirmed his clients' uniqueness and exceptionality *through* the site, resulting in a new relationship between client and site that was, and, because it is grounded in private property, perhaps still is, distinctly American.

Oak Park Years: Architect as the Natural Self

Wright was fired from Sullivan's office in 1893, three years after he had begun designing homes—the so-called "bootleg houses"—outside of the parameters of his employment contract, and also corresponding with the economic downturn that hurt Adler & Sullivan's practice. Indignant, Wright hung his architectural shingle from one of Sullivan's own designs, sharing an office with Cecil Corwin in the Schiller building. It was there, and shortly after opening, that he received his first official independent project, a house for his friend and suburban neighbor, William Herman Winslow. There is not much surviving documentation of the early years of Wright's career, but many scholars have been fascinated by Wright's early suburban clients, and Winslow

has often been portrayed as a prototype. He was a successful business owner, and a member of the Cliff Dwellers Club and the Union League Club. He and his wife were also, like many contemporary middle-class Chicago families, interested in the arts and their appreciation; both were members of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society.³⁴ Edith Winslow participated in the Nineteenth Century Woman's Club and River Forest Woman's Club and served as President of the Chicago Woman's Club, where she headed a committee dedicated to the material and spiritual growth of children.³⁵ The Winslow family home was the site of family musicals as well as Herman's amateur printing company. Wright designed a stable to contain the workings of "Auvergne Press," where the architect and client collaborated on several printing projects, including the 1896 reprint of William Gannett's "The House Beautiful."

The commission of the Winslow house is coincident with the occasion of Wright's first public lecture, read to the University Guild in Evanston, Illinois in 1894. In accordance with the guild's mission to advance the development and appreciation of the fine arts, Wright's lecture promoted home design and decoration and, not incidentally, his own role as an architect.

³⁴ This is an interesting albeit inconclusive discussion among Wright scholars: some, like Leonard K. Eaton and H. Allen Brooks, assume that Wright's clients were particularly brave to have hired such a new and radical young architect. Robert C. Twombly counters their assertions by demonstrating that Wright's clients were notably average and that their combination of mechanical and artistic interests was quite widespread. See Leonard Eaton's *Two Chicago Architects and their Clients*; H. Allen Brooks' *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and his Midwest Contemporaries*; Robert C. Twombly, "Saving the Family: Middle Class Attraction to Wright's Prairie House, 1901-1909." For other work on early clients, see also Edgar Tafel's *Frank Lloyd Wright and his Clients*; T.A. Heinz's "The Role of the Client"; Eaton's "The Early Years: Twenty Years After"; and Paul Kruty's "Heurtley to Bluemner: Early Impressions of Frank Lloyd Wright." Wright's *Letters to Clients* covers many of the later client relationships.

³⁵ Local papers made note of the first time "Auvergne Lodge" was sold, in 1919, for approximately \$40,000 to John Mills. The Winslows were moving to Chicago, where Edith Winslow's work at the Woman's Club required her daily presence. The papers note that the house was sold to Mills by Edith H. Winslow, but no other documentation of her role in home ownership survives. *Oak Leaves*, December 6, 1919, p45.

Speaking directly to his audience, Wright, in recognizably Emersonian fashion, conflated vitalism and moralism, describing the permeability between the environment and its inhabitant, and therefore the importance of “your own little world within the great world.”³⁶ He offered what he called “well-established” principles for a beautiful environment, most of which were directed at exactly the moral and aesthetic response that Gannett had advocated in his “The House Beautiful” sermon: simplicity and repose. Many principles were related to nature, some literally: the house should appear to be a part of the site, not a foreign element; it should learn from the ways of nature, quiet, substantial, and organic. Other principles were metaphorical: it should be simple, avoid the unnecessary and the non-functional, and embrace the comfortable; it should have “character” rather than style because there should be as many types of houses as there are types of men.³⁷

Wright’s lecture, like Gannett’s sermon, was a response to the surprisingly imitative trends of the rising middle class. Both were attempts to redirect social aspirations away from the posturing toward an aristocratic taste, often enabled by professional architects distinguishing themselves among a crowd of builders.³⁸ Wright and his fellow young architects of the Midwest were eager to redefine the role of the architect outside of the forces of professionalization; this meant away from those architectural “styles” which were considered

³⁶ This and the following quotations come from Wright’s speech, labeled in the archives as “The Architect and the Machine.” Included in Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Vol 1, p20-26. For more on the University Guild and its mission, see theuniversityguild.com

³⁷ Charles Davis ties typology to physiognomy in *Building Character*, revealing “character” to be much more multivalent than its literal translation.

³⁸ On these changes in the domestic interior, see Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior*, and Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*.

inappropriate to the ideology of the new young country and its inhabitants, despite their dominance in academic architecture. Stripped of “style,” the American house was a fitting complement to a new type of midwestern inhabitant: honest, transparent, practical, “natural.”

Many of Wright’s and Gannett’s “well-established principles” show up in the Winslow house. There is simplicity in the broad brick facade, quietly accented by ornamental foliage that demonstrates the influence of Sullivan’s Ruskinian vitalism. The low hip roof that extends beyond the exterior walls resolves the distinct horizontal bands of the first two stories by overemphasis on its presence, presenting a reductive idea of shelter. The interior is oriented to the fireplace, which, according to another one of Wright’s principles, need not be an inconsequential piece of furniture. There is no parlor, and the furniture is mostly built-in. The house was—and often still is—described in a comparison between its measured front facade, dignified and stoic and scaled to the street, and the rear facade, picturesque and intimate, its formal complexity a hint of a rich interior program. The Winslow house was certainly a marked change from its River Forest neighbors, which were defined by the complicated masses of English Tudor, French châteaux, and Dutch Colonials, but it was rather quickly admired as a suburban ideal, combining the sophistication of an urban dwelling with the opportunities of a large rural lot.³⁹

After the initial surprise of its novelty, the reception of the Winslow House was guided by Wright’s own design intentions, either correctly inferred or accurately transcribed by his

³⁹ Wright remembered the Winslow house in different terms, more revolutionary, radical, and ridiculed, than Robert Spencer’s compliments implied in the article. In his autobiography, Wright described a business meeting with another neighbor, Nathan Moore, in 1895, who specifically requested an English Tudor house for his Oak Park property so that he would not have to go out of his way to avoid being laughed at on his way to the Chicago train like Winslow did.

friend and colleague Robert C. Spencer. Spencer's 1900 article, "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," was the first long interpretive article on Wright's work and portrayed the architect as a young radical whose work in the Chicago suburbs was notable for two important reasons: that it served as a much-needed counterpoint to the contemporary architectural trends of "transplanting exotics," and that through his architectural manipulations, Wright was able to redefine an American sense of beauty through a middle-class home. Like Wright, Spencer was motivated to see a new American style of architecture, one that "must not be the forced fruits of an artificial civilization, but must be the natural bloom of a hardy native growth with its roots deep in the soil."⁴⁰ Spencer was also threatened by the tastes of the rising middle class, so many of whom were willing to accept and adopt—or feign, as much as possible—old-world aristocratic values. He praised Wright's "modest" buildings precisely on account of their modesty: their simplicity was a transparent expression of "certain ideals of home and of quiet, simple home life," and at the same time "solutions of problems which have been developing loosely among our people of the intelligent middle class".⁴¹ The ideals of home were accomplished through "poetic translations of material into structure": the measured walls, which exuded a satisfying feeling of solidity and depth; the pared-down interiors that were connected through thoughtful consideration and interior effects of perspective; the wide eaves that were practical, as well as pleasing and private; and the decoration that was specific to each building and equally integral to it, a natural outgrowth. The houses were, Spencer asserted,

⁴⁰ Spencer, p62.

⁴¹ Ibid., p62.

channeling his own Ruskinian vitalism, “full of life.” Spencer, like Wright, validated the works with analogies of organic nature.

Of the many works discussed and illustrated, the Winslow House’s full-page spread signaled its status as Spencer’s favorite, particularly for how it depicted Wright’s characteristic inventiveness in a specific realm. It was, Spencer wrote, the only beautiful site in itself, where “Nature has been at work for years,” and it, therefore, allowed Wright the most latitude in demonstrating architecture’s ability to engage with nature. Marked by an old elm with “spreading arms and feathery sprays,” the site was mirrored in the character of the building, a visual sympathy “felt,” Spencer wrote, “by the cultivated and uncultivated,” or in other words, by inherent and natural inclination.⁴² Linked to the ground by its broad approach, the artifice of the building “fraternized” with the natural environment, merging until there was “no painfully hard and fast line between nature and art.” Categorically, the house was not unlike the elm, Spencer declared: it had “a certain simple power of an organic nature that seems to have as much right to its place and is as much a part of the site as the tree.”⁴³ This was emphasized and undermined by one of the accompanying photos of Winslow’s rear stable, where another tree was left undisturbed, the roof line literally built around it. (Figure 1.1)

More importantly, in this article, Spencer established Wright *himself* as natural and implied that this was what was required for an architect-poet of the new age. Wright was intuitively gifted, Spencer wrote, his “natural sympathy developed by early training, the wise accentuation of early tastes and tendencies by his mother, and seasons of young manhood

⁴² Spencer, p65.

⁴³ Ibid., p65.

spent at Hillside farm among the woods and fields of Wisconsin; a sympathy which subsequent technical training in civil engineering failed to impair.”⁴⁴ Spencer also emphasized—albeit indirectly—the many ways Wright was also admirably unextraordinary: his knowledge was manual, produced by labor and by experience, by handling materials and moving soil. Not only did Spencer value this type of knowledge more than the technical knowledge of books and numbers, he believed that it was a necessary requirement of the democratic artist. Channeling Sullivan, he wrote: “it is beyond question that the homes of the people should receive the best thought and effort of those who have not yet been drugged by material success into a state of *blasé* indifference to small things.” Wright’s own home and studio, also discussed in Spencer’s article, amplified Wright’s relation to country life and the people who chose it. Wright had recently relocated his office to the “charming, rural environment” of Oak Park, absconding from the nervous frenzy of Chicago’s loop. The “delightfully quiet, restful and beautiful” studio was attached to Wright’s own family home, which thereby extended its implications of intimate and humble domesticity to the commercialism of business dealings. And it was decorated with the same arrangements that illustrated the reprinting of “The House Beautiful”: summer blooms and autumnal sprigs gathered from the midwestern countryside, reminders of the simple sources of beauty that came at no cost, and reminders of Wright’s ability to reveal beauty from even the most humble weed.

The Winslow house hinted at the arrival of Wright’s new design for the Middle West, but it was officially announced the following year in *Ladies’ Home Journal*. “A Home in a Prairie Town” was Wright’s contribution to editor Edward Bok’s call for model suburban houses that

⁴⁴ Spencer, p66.

could be built for an affordable price. It was based on three concurrent projects in the studio—the Willits house and the Bradley and Hickox houses, in Highland Park and Kankakee, IL, respectively—and presented the ideas that came to be called the “Prairie house” to Bok’s large audience of 800,000 subscribers. In the text adjacent to the spread, Wright made particular note of the project’s recognition of and relation to its site and suburban setting, describing how the broadness and quietude of the prairie were duplicated in the building’s massing and accentuated in its eaves.⁴⁵ An interior perspectival view emphasized the width of the view: someone standing directly in the center of the living room could see the surrounding canopy and clear sky to his right and to his left, the one connected to the other by the purposeful and free-flowing interior plantings decorating every straight edge. The exterior perspective showed a modest two-story building, lengthened by the extension of the first-floor roof covering an exterior terrace and carport. The silhouette of the cement mass was softened by what were described as “extremely informal masses of foliage and bloom” and its gradual, perspectival retreat into old-growth trees.

For the most part, this prairie house and the ones following were novel in general ways unrelated to the particularities of site and setting, except for the general opportunity that a spacious lot afforded. Wright set a minimum size dimension, idealized in the *Ladies' Home Journal* piece as appropriate for a small community: four houses that shared a block 400 feet in each dimension meant a 10,000-square-foot lot per house. He rarely assisted in finding lots for

⁴⁵ Wright, “A Home in a Prairie Town,” in *Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1901. See also Leland Roth, “Getting the Houses to the People: Edward Bok, the Ladies' Home Journal, and the Ideal House,” p188. Despite reaching so many subscribers, Wright received only one commission from the submission, the Sutton house in McCook, NE, and that was for a remodel of an existing house, rather than the purchase of the “prairie house.”

his clients in the early years, although the 1906 Boynton house in Rochester was an exception, and Wright required Boynton to purchase an additional twenty-eight elm trees for the selected property.⁴⁶ He could, therefore, design a ground plan—"which is intended to explain itself," Wright wrote—that was open and legibly efficient. It offered "the least resistance to a simple mode of living, in keeping with a high ideal of the family life together."⁴⁷ Of the sixty-four homes that Wright built in the period between the design of the Willits house (often recognized as the "first" prairie house) and his departure to Europe in 1909, the same grammar repeats: a solid base below a plain wall, a horizontal band, usually made of casement windows, below the extended eaves of the roof. The plan was organized either in a cruciform or parallel configuration, maintaining a hierarchy of the public main floor—living room, library, dining room—supported by service spaces—kitchen, entry—and sleeping rooms on the floor above. The houses had built-in furniture, grouped casement windows decorated with art glass, warm, muted color schemes, and distinct ceiling volumes.

If the house stripped of style was not inherently American, the incorporation of a legible "nature" in it was. Compared to the historical traditions of European countries, which included land use patterns that were wholly unfamiliar to inhabitants of the "wild" country, nature was the most dominant characteristic of America. This nature is symbolized in the "extremely informal" but highly calculated plantings of Wright's interiors and a view, if present, of the surrounding site through the exterior windows. The patterning of "nature's" placement is

⁴⁶ Eaton, *Two Chicago Architects*, p113. Boynton met Wright through his business partner, another Wright client, Warren McArthur.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p17.

readily seen in the drawings of the prairie houses: on street-facing facades, foliage is planted in front of windows, wild-looking but quite cultivated; the rear is enveloped in mature trees.⁴⁸ In exterior perspectives, like the one in *Ladies' Home Journal*, the vantage point is low and off-center, placing emphasis on the building's emergence from or recession into the background forest: coming from nature and returning to nature were one and the same. (Figure 1.2) The small-scaled, geometric outline of the foliage is duplicated ("conventionalized" was the word architects used at the turn of the century) in the articulations of the art-glass, the hatched grain of a tree trunk is matched by the shadows under eaves and wood trim; these markings blur the distinction between plan and elevation, offering a visual depiction of the vitalist animations. The thin frame of elevation drawings is often interrupted or offset by an untamed bush, and the abstract rear forest frames the front facade. The plan is softened by the clumping of informality in each negative space. "Nature" in this very general sense of accumulated trees and plants, framed the building, both for the individual looking in as well as the inhabitant looking out.

Like many of his "Prairie School" colleagues, Wright captured a sense of open space in the interior. This was partially due to the new capacities of mechanical heating, which no longer required the enclosure of individual rooms to maintain and contain temperature, but Wright later relabelled this as a revolutionary design decision: the "destruction of the box." The result was a retelling of the frontier drama of open space and movement, the sensation of crossing open plains without the struggle of territory, threat of exposure, or labor of cultivation. With

⁴⁸ This is a manifestation of Wright's "democracy": that the view of nature was more pleasant *for others* than the view of a building: "when we insist that our neighbors shall daily look on barrenness or deformity just because we happen to hold a deed to the property, and fill what was before at least decent empty space with shapes of ugliness, we are bad citizens and brutal neighbors."

wide vistas in each direction, combined with the massiveness that implied the house “grew from the site,” Wright reaffirmed the inhabitant’s rightful place at the center of the environment. The house becomes an intermediary, an appropriately scaled private environment, a domestication of America’s pioneering myth transformed into “simplicity and repose.” Arthur Heurtley, for whom Wright built an Oak Park house and remodeled a cottage in Michigan, described the feeling of happiness that resulted from his central point: *From my seat as I write, I can look over the waters of the bay, lying still as an island lake, and reflecting in this mirror like surface, the wooded shores, and islands, and the tints of a sunset, that even you, gentle painter, could not successfully copy.*⁴⁹ The architect’s role as interpreter of nature did not undermine the authenticity of nature, as the painter may have, but resulted in its domestication, changing the hierarchy that had defined the countryside, making architecture that *assumed* rights because it *looked* right. (Figure 1.3)

The Usonian Houses: Transforming nature into land into site

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, though his architectural stance had not much changed since the Oak Park years, Wright’s career was in an entirely different place. The novelty of his earlier work had worn, and his relevance in the field was waning. The past two decades had not offered him many opportunities on American soil, partially due to the displacement of his professional life by the newsworthiness of brash infidelities in his personal life, all the more damning for an architect who had cultivated a clientele that valued the “harmony” of their

⁴⁹ Arthur Heurtley to Oscar Bluemner, 1908. See Paul Kruty’s article, “Heurtley to Bluemner: Early Impressions of Frank Lloyd Wright.”

homes. After the stock market crash, Wright lost what few projects he had. He was, again, threatened by European influence on the changing tastes of the American public, which this time came in the form of “International Style.” Rather than accept the role that was offered him—a sort of predecessor of this “modern” style—Wright reintroduced himself to whomever would listen in two new publications: “Modern Architecture, Being the Kahn Lectures,” a transcription of six lectures he gave at Princeton University in 1930, and *An Autobiography*, a recounting of the previous sixty-five years of his life.⁵⁰ The lectures and memoir circled around each other: the first, ostensibly addressed to the “young man in Architecture,” described a state of the field of American architecture—or lack thereof, in Wright’s opinion—and a better set of architectural principles; the second, which Wright wrote to his publisher, was “not much concerned with Architecture,” but served as evidence of the kind of life made possible by following those principles.⁵¹ Together, they offered a blueprint for architecture’s relation to daily life in America, or to the values that titled each of the three chapters of Wright’s autobiography: Family Fellowship, Work, and Freedom.

He was still hopeful, if not optimistic, that his new decentralized design for the country (what he called “Usonia” and which would be presented as the design for “Broadacre City” in 1935) would be adopted and transform both the American landscape and its people. The low-density design was dichotomously opposed to the principles of International Style architecture, which proposed centralized and dense cities comprising flat and abstract buildings. Wright

⁵⁰ The “role” was offered to him by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock for their 1932 MoMA exhibition “International Style.” It had previously been acknowledged by many architectural leaders in Europe, including J.J.P. Oud, who was originally asked to give the Kahn Lectures.

⁵¹ Letter from Frank Lloyd Wright to Frank Hill (Longmans, Green & Co.), January 26, 1931.

excoriated their proposals in his lecture series, offering (again) his work (and his newly conceived “Taliesin Fellowship”) as an alternative to what he saw as the “immediate problem” of the architect:

How to mitigate... the horror of human life caught helpless or unaware in the machinery that is the city? How easiest and soonest to assist the social unit in escaping the gradual paralysis of individual independence that is characteristic of the Machine-made moron, a paralysis of the emotional nature necessary to the triumph of the Machine over Man, instead of the quickening of his humanity necessary to Man's triumph over the Machine?⁵²

In the early lectures of the Oak Park years, when Wright used “nature,” it was an identifier of American culture, and particularly targeted at the rising and untrained middle class attempting good taste. Nature was an alternative, authentic and autochthonous, even if ambiguous, permitting disengagement from the pattern book options of European imports; recognition of its presence defined the new type of site in the suburb. By 1930, Wright's protests had increased in intensity. Wright's resolution to the deadening effects of the city was no longer simply *influenced* by the horizon but *demanding* it—transforming, in the process, what was “Nature” into land. He answered himself:

*Measured over great free areas, the living interest should be educated to lie in the contact of free individualities in the freedom of sun, light and air, breadth of spacing—**with** the ground. Again we need the stress of encountering varieties on a scale and in circumstances worthy the ideal of democracy and more a part of External Nature than ever before seen—more so because of internal harmony. ... In charming homes and schools and significant public gathering places... [sic] architectural beauty related to natural beauty. Art should be natural and be itself the joy of creating perfect harmony between ourselves and the birthright we have all but sold.⁵³*

⁵² Wright, *Modern Architecture: Being the Kahn Lectures*, p112.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p112. Wright's emphasis.

In between these lines of the Princeton lectures was the vitalist reciprocity Wright had absorbed from Sullivan, Emerson, and old Uncle Jenkin. Architecture had become the means of this exchange, an opportunity for the natural beauty of “External Nature,” evident in the freedom of sun, light, air, and space—“the birthright”—to pass to an inner “individuality.” Clients came calling.

One of the earliest potential clients to reach out was Nancy Willey, who sent a letter to Wright via his publisher after reading the *Autobiography* “cover to cover.” Willey and her husband Malcolm, a professor of sociology and an administrator at the University of Minnesota, were interested in building a house, and both had been inspired by the ideas presented in Wright’s memoir. She wrote Wright, inquiring of her chances of an eight-thousand dollar “creation of art.” Yet rather than describing her and Malcolm’s programmatic requirements or personal interests, a common starting point, Nancy Willey offered Wright a description of the “intriguing” lot they had purchased, which offered “seventy-five percent of the horizon” and was adjoined by “acres of railroad and city property and a grove of white oaks.” The setting, she wrote, afforded “the privacy, expanse and beauty of a country home—on three sides.” The lot had a “feel”: “it is decidedly of the city; the view consists of the lights of the city, the bridges, the winding river, the curving tracks, grain elevators—yet it is sufficiently apart from and above the city and neighbors (on three sides) to afford the joys of seclusion, retreat, freedom and breadth of outlook.”⁵⁴ She concluded the letter, already convinced Wright

⁵⁴ Nancy Willey to Frank Lloyd Wright, June 27, 1932.

wouldn't deign to take on anything so "trivial, that was also not near you," but hoped that her description of the lot might interest him enough to offer a suggestion or recommendation.

Wright responded within a week of Willey's letter, with a magnanimity that belied his current financial stakes: "nothing is trivial because it is not 'big.'"⁵⁵ Wright's first design for the couple, however, was in fact too big, and also too expensive. But while he was working on two other small and affordable houses, Wright began to codify a solution to the problem of the small house in a decentralized America—what he called "Usonia"—and the Willey house was the first attempt at a "Usonian" house.⁵⁶

Another university couple, Jean and Paul Hanna, sent Wright a "fan letter" after reading the Kahn Lectures in 1931; they thanked him for his articulation of concepts they had always felt and asked him to design them a house. It was not until the Hannas had relocated from Columbia University in New York City to Stanford University in Palo Alto that they began the process in earnest. When they stopped at Taliesin during their 1935 cross-country trip, they left with an "evolved set of requirements" for a house and site, foremost of all: land on the brow of a hill, with a view and drainage, large enough for gardening, playing, and privacy.⁵⁷ Wright visited the Hannas in March of 1936, and the Hannas showed him three potential sites, one flat lot, and two sloping lots that they had not yet convinced Stanford to allow them to build on. The Hannas were desperate for a southern-facing open hilltop, but the plans—based on a new hexagonal module that suggested "mobility" in Wright's opinion, in much the same way the

⁵⁵ Wright to Nancy Willey, July 5, 1932.

⁵⁶ As with most definitive statements about Wright's work, this is debatable. Two early projects, the Lusk House and the Hoult house, both unbuilt, are also considered the "first" Usonian.

⁵⁷ Paul and Jean Hanna, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Hanna House: The Clients' Report*, p18.

openness of the Prairie houses did—were drawn for the only legally available option, the flat lot. To their delight, Stanford leased them the Frenchman Road site in July 1936. The Hannas wrote Wright immediately:

And now to come to the romance of the hill. The place fairly reeks with romantic tales of long ago which have sufficient basis in fact to make them worth capitalizing on. It seems that years ago before Stanford was built, a frenchman by the name of Peter Coöts came over here and started to build the greatest estate on this side of the water. He erected great barns and outbuildings to care for his huge dairy business down on the flats and was to build a great castle on the top of the hill. On two sides of our hill, he had constructed two artificial lakes with bridges, fantastic fountain and banks bordered with trees. To feed these lakes it was necessary to tunnel thru the hill to reach a stream. So at great expense and more labor, he attempted to tunnel thru this hill, starting from either side. At the foot of the hill, almost directly under where our house will presumably be located, is the entrance to one of the tunnels. It is a good size cave which branches off in several directions. This cave has furnished excitement and adventure for the youth of the country even up thru college years. Many romantic stories of buried treasure have gone into the historical records of the place... So now you have the romance of the place. O yes, the frenchman was obliged to return before he constructed his home, so nothing was ever done about it. However, the barns, library, and other buildings such as stables still stand, and below the hill is the bridge he built across the lake, the remains of a fountain, and a tower. Stanford has preserved these ruins to give the eastern visitors a thrill.⁵⁸

Wright changed the plans to accommodate the entirely new site:

The revised plans are with you by now and you have had time to realize "what a virtuoso" your architect had to be to arrange all so completely on a fast slope when it was originally intended for a very slow one. Not easy—but I like the lot, however, and I like the house as well now as before, or better, with the changes in level. The exterior has gained... We lose the old tree that is about lost anyway but the others come in so well that it looks as though we built them with the house.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Jean Hanna to Frank Lloyd Wright, circa July 1, 1936. Volume II, Hanna House Collection.

⁵⁹ Frank Lloyd Wright to Paul and Jean Hanna, August 28, 1936. *The Clients' Report*, p27.

Standard kit, standard contract, standard detail, unique house

The Hanna house was quite large to be considered a deployable solution to the small house, but it was designed at the same time as the Jacobs house, which did herald a formulaic solution. Herb Jacobs, a Madison-based newspaper reporter for *The Capital Times*, asked Wright to design a house for him, his wife Katharine, and their daughter that would cost no more than \$5,000.⁶⁰ They purchased a lot in an undeveloped tract of suburban Madison, sixty feet wide and twice as deep. Wright prepared and sent a set of drawings, even as he tried to convince the Jacobses to purchase a lot in the country, “in order to provide a suitable setting for the house.”⁶¹ His design was exactly the width of the Jacobs’ lot, despite setback restrictions, and the Westmoreland Realty Company refused to permit it.⁶² In exchange, Jacobs offered their current lot for the two adjacent ones across the street, flanked by the intersection of Birch and Toepfer Avenues. Wright’s design was mirrored and pushed to the inside edge of the setback of the double lot, with the remainder incorporated as a garden.

Forced to control costs, Wright reused many of the experiments first deployed in the Willey house, thus establishing a standard grammar that is visible in over three hundred

⁶⁰ The Jacobs met Wright through Katharine’s cousin Harold Wescott, who had spent a summer at Taliesin. Recounted in Jacobs, *An Illustrated Memoir*.

⁶¹ Jacobs, *An Illustrated Memoir*, p17. Both the Jacobs and the Lusks, a preceding unbuilt Usonian project, were denied a loan from the FHA due to the unfamiliarity of the design. The Jacobses eventually got a loan from Harry Haley and his Building and Loan firm.

⁶² Though likely unrelated, Wright had asked Jacobs to look up his own building requirements, which Jacobs never did. The story told in Jacobs’ memoir suggests that the Jacobses preemptively sought other land, but a handwritten note cites the refused permit. See *Memoir*, p38.

projects designed during the next twenty-five years.⁶³ This grammar was compiled on the “Standard Detail Sheet,” and included board-and-batten construction assemblies, masonry piers, slab on grade with radiant heat, and a “service core” in an otherwise open floor plan. Usonian houses had pared-down roof structures; basements and gutters and finish surfaces like plaster were rejected in favor of the characteristic and “natural” appearance of wood, brick, cement, paper, and glass. Each was furnished with a set of built-in furniture specially designed for the house. Many houses also had designs integrated into the material—perforated boards and blocks—that turned the patterns of daylight into a temporal form of decoration.

Wright standardized his building contract as well, which set the schedule of his ten-percent fee and also included a new stipulation: “dwelling-houses upon urban lots will not be accepted. Acreage is indispensable.” Clients were required to send a topographical survey of the property, “showing all natural slopes and features such as rock outcroppings, trees, etc., roads, neighboring buildings and service lines for water, sewer, gas and light...”⁶⁴ Wright had always emphasized that the site was integral to the idea of organic architecture, a necessary component of the building’s *right* relationship to the ground. It was also an extension of the house: most Usonian houses were sited close to the street but their large expanses of glass faced away from it. Experientially, the site was the view, the extension of the living room, reaffirming the privacy of the center. With this addition to the contract, the site was also physical land.

⁶³ “From 1936 to 1959, Wright designed 308 of these modest cost homes and saw 140 of them built all across the country.” Donald Kolec, “The Jacobs House I,” in Paul Sprague, ed., *Frank Lloyd Wright and Madison: Eight Decades of Artistic and Social Interaction*, p91.

⁶⁴ “The Personal Architectural Services of Frank Lloyd Wright,” included in Sergeant, Appendix B.

News of the affordable Jacobs house spread quickly—an entire issue of *Architectural Forum* was dedicated to Wright in January 1938, quickly followed by a *TIME* Magazine cover and article—and led to many more inquiries. Building commissions, most of which were for single-family homes, rushed into Wright’s office, hardly subsiding for the duration of his life. The Jacobs house, even though published alongside the spectacular—but expensive—Fallingwater, garnered over half of the inquiries the publication received. “Within two years,” Jacobs remembered, “the journalist noted with the pleasure of a pioneer, more than half the ‘modern’ dwellings pictured in the architectural and home magazines seemed to be echoes, faint or strong, of his own home.”⁶⁵

Wright’s career began another ascent, and as more clients appeared, the worthiness of each project—and client—became more pronounced. Many, like the Willeys, described a site raw and deserving; others, like the Hannas, added descriptions of their affinity with Wright and his organic philosophy. Prospective clients attempted to lure Wright to their projects by bolstering the persona he presented in the autobiography and his lectures, constantly giving it more definition. Loren Pope, a newspaperman like Jacobs, first met Wright in his hotel room after a Washington, DC lecture to the Federal Architects Association. In response to Pope’s question at the event, Wright told him that he only built houses for those who deserved them. Flattered, Pope wrote Wright not a year later, with a site in Falls Church, Virginia in hand that he described in measured detail: a lot 120 feet wide by 470 feet deep, sloping 11.64 feet, with a slight crown and tiny stream. The potential house, he wrote, might be a “Jacobs style

⁶⁵ Jacobs, *Memoir*, p135.

house,” shaded by the tulip poplar tree, optimizing a view away from the “bad traditional house” on the west.⁶⁶

More importantly, Pope heard and repeated what Wright had been claiming for so many years: that Wright himself—“the great creative force of our time,” wrote Pope—was essential to the intangible organicism of the house. He wrote

*... some of the reasons I long so for a house created by you, even aside from the unapproached beauty of those you have built. A home, besides being a thing of beauty and a place for living, is to me, a spiritual concept, and a thing of the spirit isn't created by a plan and labor and materials of themselves. There must also go into it the creed and soul of the creator, if it is to be a home. That makes it a sort of temple for and a part of living; not just a place for existence.*⁶⁷

Wright sent drawings based on the site survey to the Popes at the end of 1939, of a design that had accommodated Pope's original impulse: shaded by the poplar, oriented to the east, in a language standardized by the Jacobs house. The following May, Gordon Chadwick, Wright's apprentice assigned to supervise the construction, discovered the inaccuracies of the prepared site plan, which necessitated nearly a full rotation of the building on the site, reorienting the main view to the north rather than the southeast, and a shift of thirty feet. The tulip tree, in the distance, was no longer a functional source of shade, but subsequently, recast as the marker of the fourth corner of the house's extension. (Figure 1.4) Wright approved the re-siting, writing with the same affirmations he had given the Hannas, that it had “much better orientation with sunlight and a less formal attitude—throughout. More our stuff, I believe...”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Loren Pope to Frank Lloyd Wright, August 18, 1939. Included in Steven M. Reiss, p12.

⁶⁷ Ibid. In comparison, Pope wrote “another architect might be able to plan or design a house. But only you can create one that will become for us a home.”

⁶⁸ Frank Lloyd Wright to Loren Pope, July 9, 1940. Included in Reiss, p40.

Seven years later, Pope published an unsolicited piece in *House Beautiful* magazine, which had become an advocate of Wright's genre of design precisely on grounds of its American-ness.⁶⁹ "The Love Affair of a Man and his House" was Loren Pope's first-hand testimony of the organic absorption that came with living in a Wright house. The author described the house with a clarity rarely found in Wright's own writing; the functional prose mirrored the transparent and logical function of the house. And though he paid extra attention to how the house "flowed" through changing levels, planes, and proportions, a semantic sign that he had internalized organicism, he emphasized that the appreciation he and his wife—whom he clarified were neither "arty nor dilettantes"—had for the house was because it had a presence and a soul, the "only kind of habitation fit for a man." This was the intangibility of the house, Pope attested: its beauty, which came from the quality of naturalness; its warmth, simple and natural; its sense of repose, which came from being tied to the earth; its sense of release and shelter, much like walking under the leafy limbs of a forest, provided a sense of protection without being closed in. The outdoors, he wrote, were so much a part of the living scheme "that the dweller breathes as deeply as in a meadow in spring," unburdening the worries of life. "It is like," he wrote, "living with a great and quiet soul. Some of its peace and calm carry over to you."⁷⁰ The house became a site of becoming, and the flow of the house, imbued with

⁶⁹ The origins of *House Beautiful's* aspirations grew from the content of William Gannett's 1895 sermon, in much the same way Wright's early ideas did. Elizabeth Gordon became editor the same year the Pope house was built; she was a great supporter of Wright, dedicating the magazine's 50th anniversary to his work and his role as the magazine's spiritual leader, part of her American-ist agenda. See Monica Penick's *Tastemaker* and Kathleen LaMoine Corbett's 2010 dissertation, *Tilting at Modern: Elizabeth Gordon's "The Threat to the Next America."*

⁷⁰ Pope, "The Love Affair of a Man and his House," *House Beautiful*, August 1948.

Wright's creed and soul, facilitated a transfer from the site to inhabitant: it was "free and open and gives a sense of space and release a free man responds to."⁷¹

Many more clients wrote to Wright after reading the *House Beautiful* piece seeking the same "good, spiritually rewarding life" that Pope wrote of, and their site was an often incentive. Mary Palmer, of Ann Arbor, wrote in 1950 "... We feel that it is as interesting a building site as this part of Michigan offers. This property includes gentle curves, a rather steep sloping south hillside, and some fine trees—all of which will challenge the architect."⁷² Louis Penfield, the following year, wrote similarly about a site in Ohio, including not only a hand-drawn map but also photos and a viewing device. (Figure 1.5)

*Enclosed are some color photos and a viewer — these will give the quality of the valley and selected site. The site is about 15 feet higher than the bottom land. While parts of the bottom land are flooded in the spring, the site location never is. The site is flat but a natural drain from the north and east will not permit the water to stay on the land after heavy rains... I don't think a better building site can be found in Ohio — I think after looking at the slides, you and Mr. Wright will agree with us. From the north front of the site it is possible to see both the north and east clay-shale banks, which have a lot of visual character. The south end of the site is flat and has clumps of small trees, blackberry bushes and shumack [sic] groves.*⁷³

Though each site had specific qualities of physical land, dear to each client, Wright's treatment of it was—and always had been—more rhetorical than it was precise and material. This is seen not only in site preparation—losing some trees, like at the Hanna site, adding

⁷¹ Pope, "The Love Affair of a Man and his House."

⁷² Mary Palmer to Frank Lloyd Wright, April 17, 1950.

⁷³ Louis Penfield to Gene Masselink, Wright's secretary, November 17, 1951. Penfield, a 6'-8" man, included a note that he inserted himself in the images "for scale."

others, as at Boynton—but also in the buildings’ siting: encircling trees at Winslow’s stable, Isabel Roberts’ living room, the hallway at Wright’s Oak Park house, and the Rebhuhn house in Great Neck (each time undermining the hierarchy it was meant to serve when the intervention destroyed the tree), or relocating a building away from the specifics of its site-generated design intention, as at the Pope house.⁷⁴ That his appreciation for site specificity was more general than it was technical did not change the necessities of its function in his role as architect. Once an interpreter of nature, using the idea of the open prairie to convince his Oak Park clients that it was the site of free, and American citizens, he became a natural “virtuoso,” convinced by his clients to transform the identity of their physical land into a spiritual identity they could step into. This process of aestheticization, in Pope’s words, was to give it a soul.

“We Chose the Country” (and the Country chose us)

Despite their love for their houses—or, rather, *on account of* their love for their houses, the Jacobs family and the Pope family both sold their Usonian houses after living there for five and seven years, respectively. Each family wanted to move further into the country; each family also contacted Wright to build a second, larger family home on a new site. They anticipated the declaration that Wright, ever confident about the potentialities of the automobile, would make

⁷⁴ Wright was, of course, aware that his interventions had material consequences. In his archive is a letter from Hugo Birker, the Vice-President of Davey Tree Experts, out of Kent, Ohio, who wrote: *Trees, of course, have long been associated with homes, but it is unique to so intimately incorporate a large tree within the home itself. Naturally, your technique intrigues us, particularly since we take care of the trees for Mr. Edgar J. Kaufmann at Bear Run, Pennsylvania. Your artistry bespeaks your love of trees and I feel, therefore, that you might be interested in perusing the attached booklet, ‘Safeguarding your trees,’ which describes in an interesting way the comprehensive service we are prepared to deliver.* September 06, 1938. Birker’s engagement was specific and technical, and portrayed a sense of obligation to the “natural” landscape rather than a sense of “rights,” inverting Wright’s hierarchy.

in his 1954 book, *The Natural House*, on site selection: go ten times further from the city than you think, and when, inevitably, you are surrounded by houses, move again. Even for those unable to build their own house, Wright had the solution: Wait, he urged in the article "Buy Privacy with Home," wait, wait, and wait, until you find a house that has some space around it and you are in a position to buy it.⁷⁵ For Wright, privacy, physical land, and the ability to use it manifested freedom.

Herbert Jacobs documented his own manifestation process in his 1948 book *We Chose the Country*. Peppered with the self-deprecating humor of a city-bred newspaperman surrounded by his own optimistic misgivings of fowl and feed, the book detailed the adaptation process of "adjusting to the primitive life" and becoming "countrymen."⁷⁶ It was, in fact, their Madison house that had inspired the move: the banks of windows "made nature a great part of the house" and renewed their love of the outdoors. Compounded by the presence of new neighbors, whom Jacobs described as "people with whom we had no more in common than a back fence," the family sought out what they thought the country provided. For them, it was everything the city did not: time, qualitative friendships, space, privacy, fresh air, no noise or city dirt, a bounty of food and freedom.

"Countrymen," and not "farmer," was a distinction Jacobs repeated often over the course of his book. He admitted the meaning of its self-awareness: he was, after all, still employed by the *Capital Times*, and not solely reliant on the farm and its products, which

⁷⁵ "Buy Privacy with Home, Wright Urges: Noted Architect Assails Mass Housing" in *The Stars and Stripes*, European edition, undated.

⁷⁶ Jacobs, *We Chose the Country*.

allowed him, as he wrote, to have free time to think about other things, “like aesthetics,” apparently the mark of a non-farmer. Certainly, this self-aware writer must also have meant the other meaning of the epitaph: men of a specific, American, country, defined by the individuals in it and their relationship to the land. Thus, while living in a dilapidated farmhouse, they hired Wright to design a new house for their fifty-two-acre parcel of land in 1943 and accepted the second, rather unconventional scheme, shortly thereafter. Jacobs II, as the second house is known, is what Wright called a solar hemicycle, a truncated half circle, his “answer to the problem of what to build on a hilltop exposed to the full sweep of the wind.”⁷⁷ Wright complimented Herbert and Katharine on their willingness to build “another first” for a second time. The exact location came after the drawings, chosen by Wright on a windswept day in June. Jacobs recalled his sense of wonder:

Wright has a wonderful sense of the dramatic, and a simplicity that should disarm any critic... The cane struck forth at a militant angle from beneath his cape as he marched to and fro across the clover, describing undulations toward the horizon three miles away, and the oak woods, looming so close to the east. At last he chose the spot, and his cane pointed to the ground, where the faithful apprentice tried, largely in vain, to pound in a random stick with a rock. It was a magic moment, and Wright seemed to have chosen well - we were at the very center of concentric waves of an unfolding panorama.⁷⁸

When friends of the Jacobs family—the same friends who thought the retreat to the country was traitorous to the “righteous, self-satisfied city life”—came to visit, they often pointed out the strange siting of the house. The better view was on the opposite side, next to

⁷⁷ Jacobs, *We Chose the Country*, p297.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p298-299.

the road, of the lake, each visitor said. Jacobs agreed: "to be sure, the most dramatic outlook is at the edge of the road, over fifteen miles of valley and lake," in other words, a view of nature and its expanse, but to Wright and Jacobs, the road meant people and commotion and discord. Further in, Jacobs wrote, "where Wright has wisely decided to place us," is freedom. Wright had explained why, when he sited the house atop the hill: "the house creates its own site and its own view."⁷⁹ The view is related to its property.

From his earliest lecture to his last book, *The Natural House*, Wright assumed an organic reciprocity between the environment and the inhabitant. In the early years, the environment of America was only a concept, an idea, and could be symbolized in the informal interventions of nature and also domesticated in a simple suburban house inspiring simple living. Wright's early clients were sold the idea of nature as a non-style fitting the modern and natural man, the pioneer in the Middle West who was without artifice or pretense. By the 1930s, through his own writing and other popular media, Wright had become well-known for his ideas about "organic" architecture and his claim of its relation to a free and fulfilling life, ideas which were documented in the intertwined appearance of nature and architecture, in the dissolving line between the house's end and the garden's beginning. Wright's later clients, most of whom had a site in hand—the best site in Ohio, the most interesting one in Michigan—turned to Wright in order to formalize their love of nature, of the idea of America rooted in ground and soil, despite the country's larger turn toward urbanization. Through Wright, his interpretation of their sites, and the houses he uniquely designed, later Usonian clients were

⁷⁹ Jacobs, *We Chose the Country*, p297.

reaffirmed of their own uniqueness and exceptionality, of their own participation in a specific idea of America.

In the change of lot size from the suburban site to the essential acreage is embedded the American myth of expansionism, of movement toward a new frontier, and the “natural” right to do so, condoned by the perpetual closeness with a sacred nature.⁸⁰ This is mirrored in Wright’s architecture: the walls of the Prairie house enclosed a new center redefined by the client’s own movement; in the Usonian houses, the center moved outside of the house itself, an abstract point located in real property, between the imaginary extensions of the low eaves of the L-shaped building. The house, as Wright said, made its own site. In both the Prairie houses and the Usonians, that site, defined by the house’s relationship to its immediate environment, becomes a synecdoche of American nature, of living harmoniously with nature. It is *justified* by Wright’s own (virtuosic, perhaps) abilities: the house’s appearance of looking like it grew from the site, of looking as if it rightly fits, is offered as evidence of the house’s—and its inhabitants—*rights*: to the site, to the land, to the country. This is part of an architectural philosophy: Sullivan’s “by the same right that a flower appears amid the leaves of its parent plant,” or embedded in the unconscious argument of the Winslow House, which had “as much right to its place... as much a part of the site as the tree.” The technique of aestheticizing the building’s relationship to the site became its own self-evidence. Wright’s work defines an American aesthetic of possession, in which his tendency to call clients “pioneers” proves not to be a metaphor.

⁸⁰ Perry Miller makes this argument about Nature’s perpetual closeness in “Nature and the National Ego.”

What is taken for evidence in Wright's work, particularly with regard to his ideas of nature, is the self. Wright's biographical self dominates the historiographical narrative: that furniture carved with abstract plant patterns was due to his love of nature; flat roofs and buildings not on but of a hill were his formal techniques approximating nature; that "nature must have meant more to Frank Lloyd Wright than we shall ever know." His romantic musings about nature are ambiguous enough to be easily molded into an argument that relies on the self as evidence and becomes, like the presence of nature, self-evident. Nearly every interpretive contribution becomes another recursive circle, and Wright becomes more defined, more orthodox, and a harder narrative to change. Yet understanding Wright in his own exceptional terms precludes the possibilities of his continued relevance, a reason that Sigfried Giedion had dismissed the scope of his influence in *Space, Time and Architecture*: "But what he built was only for the individual client... But they have had no influence on the country; they have not become an impelling creative force."⁸¹ Giedion's 1941 assessment is true only if Wright is understood—as he wanted to be—as a genius sui generis, and his work—as he wanted it to be—as unique, singular, and sited. But in practice, despite his claims of the unique and specific, Wright's approach to single-family homes was founded on an assumption that American nature itself was not specific and did not have material consequences—it was an idea. This allowed designs intended for one site to be only slightly modified to fit another.⁸² It also perpetuated a conception of nature that while implying its immense power, evacuated its

⁸¹ Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, p425.

⁸² This includes changes to the site, as demonstrated at the Hanna, Pope, and Jacobs I houses, as well as designs duplicated for other clients; see, for instance, the Barton House, the Ralph Jester house, the original Willey design, and their subsequent variations.

own possibilities by erasing a sense of human obligation—possibilities implied by its actual, physical materiality, of architectural interventions that require technical expertise, and on a broader scale, of environmental policy that understands nature to be more than an idea—in favor of its place within an aesthetic hierarchy. In this way, though understood as individual clients and their unique sites, the influence of Wright has become an impelling national, unnatural force.⁸³

⁸³ Perry Miller also writes of how nature in America was conceived more broadly than in Europe because it functioned as an assuaging of national anxiety, a substitute for history, and an optimistic promise that Americans could not be contaminated by artificiality.

CHAPTER 2

Enterprises of Self-Made Men: The Taliesin Fellowship and the Value of Creativity

I am not a businessman, I am an artist.
- Warren Buffett¹

Part I: 1927, California, Wisconsin, Minnesota

The Los Angeles Times headline topping the short August 31, 1927 article read “Wright, Architect, Incorporates Self.” Like many outlets, *The Times* made note of the Wisconsin Secretary of State granting permission for “Wright, Inc.” to sell \$75,000 of stock. (Figure 2.1) It was one of the frequent mentions of Wright’s name in the press, though these were less for admiration of his architecture—usually noted by the epitaph “internationally known architect”—and more for the frequently scandalous displays of his domestic entanglements. It was in the same pages, and only five days previous to this notice, that news of Wright’s divorce from Miriam Noel had been announced in the same pages. The two events were not unrelated: his failed marriage to Noel was only one of the many problems in Wright’s life, and the self-incorporation was a desperate attempt to save what he could.

By 1927, Wright had lost ownership of his beloved “Taliesin,” the familial property purchased for him by his mother in 1911 on which he built his home and studio, and its annex—the estate and buildings of Hillside Home School, the country boarding school operated by his aunts since 1887 that was bequeathed to him in 1915. He and “his housekeeper-companion, Mme. Olga Milanoff,” had been the subjects of a regional police search, evading a writ of deportation, kidnapping warrants, and a warrant citing violation of the moralizing Mann

¹ Quoted in Micki McGee, p111.

Act in the fall of 1926. He and the housekeeper—a convenient, more than accurate description of the Montenegrin dancer who had come to live with Wright at Taliesin in 1924, Olgivanna Milanoff Lazovich Hinzenberg—her daughter Svetlana, and their newborn daughter Iovanna were attempting to live in secluded anonymity in a cottage on Lake Minnetonka. Upon discovery, the quartet was held in a Minneapolis jail until they posted \$15,000 bail, loaned by the local surety company.

The decade of the 1920s hadn't been as kind to Wright as it had been to other Americans, particularly those accumulating successes from the new business platforms of the United States. Wright had returned from Japan in 1922, hopeful to share in this abundance, and expectant that the triumphant accomplishment of his Imperial Hotel building would accompany him back to the States, attract new commissions, and reaffirm his position as the head and future direction of American architecture. The reception—of both Wright and the building—was disappointing. The enormous and ornate masonry hotel, which Wright believed was “progress” for the wood-reliant country of Japan, was criticized from progressive and conservative perspectives alike, simultaneously an unfortunate monstrous thing that proclaimed an originality “so antiquated that it embalms and mummifies the brains of the beholder” as well as a crude and “flagrant example of the folly of departing from certain known and true forms of architecture.”² Wright turned to Louis Sullivan—suffering similar pains of irrelevance—to help recast the project in more understanding light. Sullivan wrote a generous twenty pages

² A review by California architect Christian Louis Mullgardt in *Architect and Engineer*, “A building that is Wrong,” was reaffirmed by *The Washington State Architect*, published in a subsequent issue as “More Anent the New Imperial Hotel at Tokyo, Japan.” For the history of the Imperial Hotel, see Kathryn Smith, “Frank Lloyd Wright and the Imperial Hotel: A Postscript.”

in *Architectural Record*, calling the building a noble prophecy, and its architect a poet.³ A year after the publication, and thirty years after their argument and separation over the bootleg houses, Wright paid for the funeral expenses of his bankrupt and forgotten friend.

Wright had balanced the construction of the Imperial Hotel alongside the construction of Aline Barnsdall's Hollyhock House, 5,500 miles and another world away in California. Compounded by a lack of work in the Midwest, it made practical sense that Wright set up an office in Los Angeles upon his return, rejoining ranks with Rudolph Schindler, then supervising the Hollyhock construction, and his eldest son Lloyd, who had been cultivating his own career in California for over a decade. Another relocated Chicagoan, Alice Millard, asked Wright to design a second home for her, having left the 1906 Highland Park residence. Wright called the house "La Miniatura." It was a small house, made of concrete blocks, materially and visually lightened by geometric perforations, perched in a picturesque Pasadena ravine; Wright, although confounded by Los Angeles, described the house as the "genuine expression of California in terms of modern industry and American life." More commissions followed—the Storer House, the Ennis House, the Freeman House—and each was an opportunity for Wright to perfect his new contribution to modern industry, a construction system made of one fundamental component, the textile block. A modification of his early Prairie-style unit system,

³ Louis Sullivan, "Concerning the Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan." Wright's letter to Sullivan dated Sept. 9, 1923, stated "... this ought to have publicity, but upon my word, I don't know how to go about it. Perhaps you know someone."

the textile block was a standard-sized, patterned, pre-cast concrete unit that Wright designed to function as a mono-material building: floors, walls, and ceilings all made of the same.⁴

That Wright permanently returned to the midwestern confines of Taliesin within only two years was less an admission of defeat on the textile block venture—despite plenty of evidence of its flaws in the last three houses—as much as it was a reaffirmation of disillusionment with what he saw as the inauthenticity of Los Angeles. There, Wright claimed, everything was for sale, everyone was selling; admittedly he, self-possessed as he was, worried that he could be persuaded to even sell his own self, “knocked down cheap to the highest bidder,” had he stayed any longer.⁵ The young block business was not the only unexpected loss of the early 1920s. Professionally, Wright had invested 6,000 dollars into the Millard house and was embroiled in a three-year lawsuit at the Barnsdall house. Personally, his mother’s death in February of 1923 was compounded by Louis Sullivan’s the following year, and though he was finally granted a divorce from his first wife, Catherine “Kitty” Tobin, from whom he had separated in 1909, and was therefore allowed to officially marry his second wife, Miriam Noel, he almost immediately separated from her early the following year, convinced that she was suffering insanities due to her drug addiction and “disordered libido.”⁶ His dejected return to

⁴ For many architectural scholars, Wright’s role in the “invention” of this system is debatable. Walter Burley Griffin, a former employee from the Oak Park studio, had developed a patented system called “knitlock blocks” in 1916, which Wright allegedly heard about from Schindler (see Donald Leslie Johnson, “Design Espionage”); Lloyd Wright had already attempted a version of the block system in his 1922 Bollman House; William Nelson patented a similar product. If Wright were not already aware of the latter, he became so when Nelson threatened a lawsuit against him.

⁵ Wright recounts his selling campaigns and resulting dismay in his autobiography, page 252 in the first edition, further developed in the second edition (1943), p254.

⁶ This should show the increasing influence of psychiatry in the United States at this time. For a description of Noel’s morphine addiction, see Meryle Secrest, *Frank Lloyd Wright: A Biography*.

the Midwest was, however, also the occasion of his first encounter with Olgivanna, who would become, rather quickly, his third wife and the mother of his seventh child.

Another loss accrued on Wright's tally, or the same loss repeated: shortly after the pregnant Olgivanna moved to Taliesin, in April of 1925, the house caught fire and was burned to ash. Amid the rubble were the Japanese artifacts Wright purchased with his Imperial Hotel earnings, which he had hoped to sell at a better market price. At the time, they were in storage, uninvested, uninsured, permanently priceless.

Wright committed to rebuilding a third iteration of Taliesin. He was still tied up in legal entanglements over the Olive Hill construction and was facing even more over past-due amounts at Taliesin. He was paying Kitty Tobin a divorce settlement of \$10,000 and a \$150 monthly maintenance allowance. He had few projects—a cottage for his reluctant but reliable patron Darwin Martin, the Gordon Strong Automobile Observatory "Sugar Loaf," the National Life Insurance building for "business mystic" A.M. Johnson, and a steel cathedral for New York Reverend Norman Guthrie—but even less time to devote to them, as he was quite literally evading the anger of his soon-to-be ex-wife: on the run from New York to Puerto Rico, Wisconsin, the little cottage on Lake Minnetonka, and even out to California. When Noel finally agreed to the divorce in August 1927, Wright was instructed to pay \$6,000 immediately, to set up a \$30,000 trust fund, and to send monthly alimony of \$250. Despite having sold a set of Japanese prints at auction in New York, he didn't see a dime of the proceeds, which repaid the gallery's loan; the bank, out of patience, foreclosed on the Taliesin mortgage and sold it under fire sale.

Wright's humor may have been shaken, but his confidence was not. The ingenious scheme of incorporating himself as Wright, Inc., was a way to raise the necessary immediate cash against the promise of his future earnings. It was not out of step with the currents of corporate capitalism in the United States, which had transformed valuation systems so much that even subjectivity was implicated in the price system.⁷ Though Wright was reluctant to redefine his selfhood in terms of a corporate entity, his lawyer, Levi Bancroft—former attorney general of Wisconsin—and Philip La Follette, his newly minted corporate attorney—and future governor—willingly tracked down creditors to offer dimes on the dollar. Wright and his kindly friend Ferdinand Schevill, who agreed to be president of the Corporation, sought “subscribers” to the company, each paying \$7,500 for a share of the company, effective upon a total collection of \$75,000. Included in the first list of shareholders were Wright's two sisters, Jane Porter and Maginel Barney, architect Joseph Urban, Helen B. Sulzberger, Professor Schevill, and former clients, Darwin Martin and Queene Ferry Coonley. Subsequent reconfigurations

⁷ Wright's understanding of his relation to his own personal labor, the product of his labor, and the speculative trust he asked of his friends and family in his incorporation follows quite closely the story of the American economic system from proprietary to corporate capitalism. Corporate capitalism, writes James Livingston, commodified personality and selfhood: the “self-determining personality” became a consumer good, the elements of which were advertised and for sale. Wright's reluctance was a moral reluctance, his transparent relations of the household economy were transformed into commodities and consumer goods in an abstract market. By the time this chapter concludes, Wright happily accepts the incorporation of the Fellowship as the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. This transition from proprietary to corporate capitalism is the subject of James Livingston's “The Politics of Pragmatism,” wherein he shows how American Pragmatism provides an alternative narrative framework for understanding the politics of the twentieth century in a participatory and unfinished way (comic, not tragic, using Kenneth Burke's framework from *Attitudes toward History*). Many of Livingston's protagonists are part of Wright's social circles, John Dewey and Lewis Mumford, above all. Mumford's argument, not dissimilar from Wright's especially when the architect was not feeling successful, pointed out the contradiction between the development of capitalism and the development of character, or that the genuine self only exists outside of capitalist social relations. See Livingston, “The Politics of Pragmatism.”

also included Harold McCormick, George Parker, and Ben Page, who had married Wright's first wife, Kitty.

Upon its 1927 authorization, the corporation took control of all of Wright's finances and assumed ownership not only over Wright's personal property and the deed to Taliesin but also over Wright's architectural services. As dictated by the terms of the contract he signed, everyone involved was assured that his affairs would be run "on definite business principles."⁸ Clients were to sign contracts with the corporation, and Wright awarded a monthly stipend—a salary, in other terms—of five hundred dollars. Wright's friends thought it a new, promising start, "a new possible dawn for your little family," which would relieve Wright of the stress of management and permit him the resources to focus on his work, which they believed held great promise, "for the sake of the whole country as much and more" than for himself.⁹ La Follette was more direct in his description of the business, which was primarily to account for present circumstances: "first, to make it possible for Mr. Wright to have his freedom from Mrs. Wright, and second, to put Mr. Wright upon a financial basis which will enable him to continue his work, and, therefore, cash in on his earning power."¹⁰

Wright, Inc. secured the mortgage on Taliesin which allowed Wright and Olgivanna to move home in October of 1928, shortly after they were finally permitted to marry. Yet there was no "cashing in": Wright's earning power, as the head of the office, had suffered due to the disrepute, he claimed, of his quite public domestic entanglements. Known and hired primarily

⁸ Philip LaFollette to Wright, August 03, 1928. "Definite" must be in contradistinction to Wright's previous practices, which were lacking in both strategy and result.

⁹ Schevill to Wright, December 19, 1926.

¹⁰ La Follette to Joseph Urban's lawyer, Scrugham & Arbuckle, August 06, 1927.

for residential work, Wright's frequent appearances in the paper—love triangles, divorces, accusations of infidelity, destruction of property, and general uncontrolled chaos—undermined his authority to create and maintain harmony in the home. The lack of earning power was felt even more acutely, however, by Wright in relation to the subject of the corporation, a body feeling keenly his relation to the disembodiment of an abstract legal entity:

*... so far as any corporation now goes and for some months past and maybe all time to come—I could sink or swim, freeze or starve for all it knows or cares so far as any evidence reaches me out here on this hill... The corporation can't lift itself by its boot straps. It hasn't got any boots and can't walk. If I am not its boots — who will be?*¹¹

The constant exchanges between Wright and officers of the corporation quibbled over every cent's authorization—noticing the five extra cents of postage on a letter, counting the number of days Taliesin would need coal for heat and how many yards of gravel and at what predetermined price, assuring that studio expenses and operating costs were audited and reimbursed such that nothing was charged on credit—gone were the days Wright could walk into a department store, broke, and out with a handful of exquisitely tailored suits.

This was the atmosphere of the roaring 1920s in America. The country was being reconfigured—literally and figuratively incorporating—around the image of the self-made

¹¹ This particular complaint is taken from Wright's letter to LaFollette, December 07, 1927. Interestingly, the corporation was Wright's idea, first named "Frank Lloyd Wright, Incorporated," conceived before the divorce negotiations and viable enough that even the bank subscribed. It was reorganized when LaFollette came aboard and renamed "Wright, Inc.," and the divorce settlement and creditors became the first priority; corporations were thought of as investments, along the lines of the Liberty bonds that afforded the war. Wright bemoaned the name change, imagining his clients' expectations of "Wright, Inc.": a truck backing up and dumping something dead in the backyard, instead of something with sensibilities very much alive on their behalf. Wright describes this in a letter to LaFollette, August 13, 1928.

millionaire and the optimistic promise of business success. The industrialization of America had laid the groundwork for the emergence of men like Rockefeller, Carnegie, Charles Pratt and Peter Cooper, who embodied the industrious adages of Benjamin Franklin, arguably the country's first and best-known self-made man; their appearances in print replaced those of the military and statesmen heroes of the nineteenth century.¹² "The chief business of the American people is business," proclaimed Calvin Coolidge in 1925, which rang true as much to the top ranks of American capitalists as it did to the newly immigrated wage earners. Shortly thereafter, Coolidge was succeeded by Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, who brought a managerial attitude to the Presidential office. American industrialization proceeded largely unchecked, and business enterprise, as the main path to wealth, redefined the notion of success in America.

Though the form of the corporation in America can be traced to the late eighteenth century, its increasing scale and ubiquity in the 1920s created new complexities in the understanding of capital, labor, and even property itself.¹³ Wright—used to the transparency, as most Americans were, of unincorporated forms of business like individual ownership—found that his ingenious idea came with unforeseen complications masked behind the apparent clarity of centralized ownership, administration, and limited liability. As the American landscape

¹² Thanks in no small part to a burgeoning self-help culture and a new sense of publicity invested in the private lives of successful Americans, resulting in publications like "Who's Who in America." See also popular literature, like Horatio Alger, Russell Conwell, and Elbert Hubbard. Edward Bok, publisher of *Ladies' Home Journal* was a "self-made man" himself: an immigrant from Holland who also published Wright during one of the architect's less successful periods. For a more thorough approach to the "incorporation of America," see Alan Trachtenberg; for more on business culture and the self-made man, see Warren Susman, and Irving Wylie, *The Self-Made Man*.

¹³ Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of America* is the cultural history of the corporate form and its societal implications in America. See also Gomory and Sylla, "The American Corporation."

was transformed from the personal and singular marks of possessive individualism to those abstractions of large-scale corporations, so too did this evolution appear in the smaller scale of Wright's personal relation to Wright, Inc. His letters to Darwin Martin, Ferdinand Schevill, and Philip LaFollette became more and more frustrated—petulant, Darwin Martin called them—when he felt he was losing his prized sense of his individuality to the business. He even began referring to himself in the third person—"I see very clearly how the incorporation of FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT could be beneficial to his work and his life and a gratification to his true friends..." This struggle was not dissimilar to the country's transition: Wright's authority had been in his self-possessed independence, his dynamic personality, and in the personal relationships that survived these traits. The demands of the contract—protocol and personal accounting, checks payable to Wright, Inc.—turned Wright into a wage-earning employee, governed by technicalities and middle management, while still demanding of him the monumental commissions and capital that would reverse his fate.¹⁴ "Clearly, under this contract, I cease to exist as an individual either personally or in relation to my work." And in closing, "I am, of course, legally dead already so far as any rights, even to myself, are concerned."¹⁵

Part II: 1928–1932 Three iterations of the Taliesin Fellowship

1. 1928 *Wisconsin*, "An Educational Center for Creative Art"

¹⁴ See Trachtenberg's description of the impassable gulf between labor and capital, p99.

¹⁵ Wright to La Follette, May 18, 1929.

When an architect didn't have work in the late 1920s, the first path of recourse was usually to seek out a building project or, alternatively, though perhaps easier, a wealthy client. It was rare that an architect turned to a private venture in order to redeem his earning power, but that was exactly what Frank Lloyd Wright attempted to do when he could find neither a sustainable enough commission nor patient enough client. The Taliesin Fellowship was Wright's "experimental school of the free spirit, in purpose and in deed," inaugurated in 1932; as an idea, it developed almost in tandem with the corporation. Starting a school was an unconventional path for an architect. Private education was traditionally a type of female labor, a business model particularly for those women who had to find a way to support themselves financially, like Wright's mother, his aunts Jenny and Nell, or his first wife Kitty, who had hosted a kindergarten in the Oak Park house. Additionally, by the 1920s, the private venture school, supported solely by tuition, was losing its prevalence in all but the new commercial courses, as the public school curriculum began to address the demands of the marketplace the private school had otherwise fulfilled. New types of public schools and public educational outreach—manual, vocational, correspondence, lyceums, chautauquas—filled in the gaps left by the traditional course of education, which was criticized for being too theoretical and irrelevant for an industrial culture.¹⁶

Yet Wright's education project was another business proposal: the school was the product. It was the transformation of two hundred rambling acres of arable property, what he called "his best asset," which included the home and studio building as well as the complex of

¹⁶ Changes to the American curriculum at this time were sweeping and contested. As apprenticeships declined, and with them, on-the-job training, more was expected of educational institutions, and the demand was for practical training, rather than theoretical knowledge.

buildings of the Hillside Home and School, from fallow ground to productive place.¹⁷ The Hillside buildings had begun to fall into disrepair after the school's closing; the cost of rehabilitation and maintenance was immense. Wright had begun to discuss the future of the property with Franz Aust, an eager landscape architect in the Department of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.¹⁸ Aust was a frequent guest of Taliesin, often bringing students with him, and in the summer of 1927 offered to bring Mrs. Marietta Johnson, founder of the School of Organic Education in Fairhope, Alabama; she was on her summer lecture tour, and he thought she might have some suggestions regarding the use and development of Hillside.¹⁹

The education project that became the Taliesin Fellowship reflects the convergence of various influences in Wright's world in 1927–1928. In the summer of 1928, he was already working on a school project, secured by Darwin Martin—who was anxious to see Wright's block construction system become a viable revenue stream—for Rev. James Edgar Gregg, then president of the Hampton Institute.²⁰ In his letters to Wright, Martin made note of Hampton's own "Building" course, which was an old industrial training course modified by suggestions of recent graduates to include math, bookkeeping, and material studies. Not long after Wright

¹⁷ His best asset was described in a letter to La Follette, December 07, 1927.

¹⁸ Wright may have met Aust through Jens Jensen, a Chicago landscape architect who traveled in similar circles as Wright in his early career. Aust and Jensen were both members of "Friends of our Native Landscape."

¹⁹ There is no documentation of the actual visit, but Johnson's ideas executed in Fairhope would have offered insight into the project Wright developed.

²⁰ Hampton Institute was a Normal School for African-Americans, and Martin made note of the fact that it had an architecture course. Wright's Rosenwald school was never built. See Mabel O. Wilson in *Unpacking the Archive*.

dispatched his summer sketches, when he was allowed to return home to Taliesin in October of 1928, he was visited by P.M. Cochius, director of the Leerdam Glasfabriek in the Netherlands. Cochius was visiting Wright in order to persuade him to design a line for his glass company, eventually offering Wright a “lifetime contract.” Though little came of the collaboration, Cochius’s visit demonstrated the viability and desirability of architecture and design’s leading role in industrially produced goods.

During the month of the industrial leader’s visit, Wright committed to two things: one, reopening Hillside as an art school, and two, attempting to convince the University of Wisconsin to be a part of it. There was an announcement in the *Wisconsin State Journal* about the former life of the Hillside Home and School and prospects for its future educational endeavor, although admittedly “there are few definite plans to be announced, Mr. Wright told The Journal.” He also sent a proposal to the University, his own alma mater—of sorts, as he only spent a couple of semesters there as a “special student” before heading to Chicago in 1887—detailing a plan for turning the Hillside buildings into an educational art center for the University. The University of Wisconsin assured an opportune structure of financial support for Wright, but it was also, conveniently, already invested in experimental education. This was demonstrated through its egalitarian state-wide outreach programs—often called “The Wisconsin Idea”—effected by the university’s land grant mission, as well as through the contemporaneous “Experimental College,” an isolated program within the university that provided a freer atmosphere of study and of instruction. The latter program was spearheaded by the President of the university, Glenn Frank, and executed by Professor Alexander Meiklejohn.

Wright reasoned that an appeal to the University was on “behalf of the many young men and women” who were writing him to inquire how and where they might share in the work of his own principles, but also, in the same breath, to “ask recognition and approval and help to make more useful in behalf of our state and country this work that has already changed the thought and remodeled the forms of the entire European modern world.”²¹ The often contradictory rhetoric masked Wright’s original purpose: that the proposed center was a personal business, and he sought a partner not only to share accountability but also to elevate it with the stamp of approval from a recognized authority, lending to it the desired values of “permanence, continuity, and faith and recognition of industrial leaders.”²² The proposed partnership was not without reciprocal benefits, however. Wright’s center of creative art addressed a significant and relevant problem: the gap between American education and that which was beginning to define America’s international reputation—industry. For Wright, this was and always had been a source of patriotic embarrassment, that American culture defined itself by importing styles from Europe, dated and tasteless. But for the University of Wisconsin, the problem was curricular, and a national issue in higher education. This gap in education had been identified and explained by Aust in a report on Art Education at the University of Wisconsin, written for President Frank. Aust conducted a study of how a serious-minded art student might secure a well-rounded education and thorough background in art and called attention to the difficulties students encountered in their attempts to do so, including the lack of coordination between departments and programs, the lack of cooperation between adjacent

²¹ Letter from Wright to Franz Aust, December 16, 1929.

²² “Memorandum” December 13, 1929.

fields (an advertising artist's ability to study economics, for instance, or the architect, sculptor, or painter interested in sociology, philosophy, and psychology), and the demanding departmental requirements that had no bearing on a particular student's planned or desired job.²³

Aust was key to Wright's success at the University, and through him, Wright met a group of interested faculty members in order to discuss and develop the proposal and its implementation at Madison.²⁴ The group attempted to define the nature of creativity—which, though latent in every historical era, was then gaining a new emphasis in the American experience and social life—but were quite unable to move past its inherent amorphous nature.²⁵ The value and scope, they projected, of the "Educational Art Center" would

²³ Franz Aust, "A Report on Art Education at the University of Wisconsin with Special Reference to the Field of Landscape Design" for President Glenn Frank. University of Wisconsin Madison Archives, President Glenn Frank papers. Series 4/13/1, Box 55.

²⁴ The faculty members and staff included: Howard Giles, Max C. Otto (Prof. of Philosophy), Alexander Meiklejohn (Experimental College), Alanson. H. Edgerton (Prof. of Education, author of *Industrial Arts in Our Elementary Schools*), Vivian A. C. Henmon (Prof. of Education), James D. Phillips (Business Manager of UW), Albert F. Gallistel (Superintendent of Bldg. Dept., Chaperone of UW's Summer "Tent Colony"), F. W. Roe (Dept. of English, Ruskin scholar), J. R. Hart, Walter R. Agaard (Experimental College, Dept. of Classics), James G. Moore (Dept. of Horticulture), Roland Stebbins (Art Professor), G. W. Longenecker (Dept. of Horticulture), Franz A. Aust. In addition to Wright and Jensen, others were solicited for their advice: architect (and designer of Cranbrook) Eliel Saarinen, sculptor Carl Milles, Henry Suzzallo from the Carnegie Corporation, and sculptor Lorado Taft.

²⁵ From the memoranda in preparation for the meeting on December 13, 1929, in the Beef Eaters' Room at the Memorial Union. Frank papers, UW Archive:

1. *It has to do with that which is unique in artistic expression*
2. *It has about it that which is original, yet values which are eternal*
3. *Creative effort picks life to pieces, "takes life apart, one's own mental life included, and puts it together again" in the form of a new expression, unified, important, and dynamic.*
4. *Creative power finds its greatest field of expression in the Arts—Sculpture, Painting, Music, Architecture, and Literature.*
5. *"Creative power in individuals varies only in degree."*
6. *Up to the limit of one's personal endowment, creative tendencies may be invigorated and enobled [sic]."*

challenge the hegemony of its corollary scientific institute and their uncontested claims to truth and objectivity, by offering to the student with creative ability the broadening advantages—that had already been established for the student of science—inculcated by education. Faculty studios would serve as laboratories for the student. The University would administer the funding, choose the faculty, and coordinate the matter of degrees and credit. In exchange, it “would gain much by the broadening influence of such a center, i.e. exchange of viewpoints, instructions, and staff.”²⁶ In this proposal, the University of Wisconsin was even not required to fund the project, which would have been accomplished with contributions by industrial leaders—like P. M. Cochius—who were ready to produce better commercial products that promoted original—and American—designs.

To some, the proposal might have resembled Wright’s then-current operations at Taliesin: a small studio producing the drawings for A. C. Chandler’s San Marcos in the Desert, comprising a handful of draftsmen and a few foreigners intrigued by Wright’s reputation in their own countries.²⁷ (Figure 2.2) An article describing a day in the Taliesin life stopped short of calling this assorted group of draftsmen a school but was headlined “Study Architecture at Taliesin” and described them as students rather than workers or employees, “held together by the power of Wright’s personality.” The routine, however, was more work than study: after

²⁶ “Memorandum” December 13, 1929.

²⁷ Wright’s office: George Kastner (German, arrived Nov. 1928), Cy Jahnke (Milwaukee), Vladimir Karfik (Slovenian), Henrich Klumb (German), Donald Walker (Kentucky), Cecil Tomblins, Frank Sullivan. In Spring Green, also: Takehiko Okami (Japan), Michael Kostanecki (Poland), Rudolph Mock (Switzerland), George Cronin (Oak Park). For descriptions of Wright’s studio at this and other times, see Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, *Collected Works Vol. 3*, Anthony Alofsin, *Wright and New York*, Myron Marty, *The Communities of Frank Lloyd Wright* and Edgar Tafel, *About Wright*.

sharing “honest country meals,” the draftsmen worked on the large property clearing landscapes, spending only a few hours in the studio but gratified by the time spent with Wright, the “master of Taliesin.”²⁸ On Aust’s advice, Wright broadened his written proposal to more closely fit and encompass the university’s mission. Instead of an exclusively artistic program, he added “the matter of philosophy and the closer related subjects,” like religion and psychology. He downplayed both his own role and the role American industry might have played in the enterprise, allowing that the faculty, the very best artists selected from their field, and the director, who “should be an educator of the broadest art sympathies rather than a producing artist,” would determine the policies of the center. This final proposal, which may have been more indicative of Aust’s authorship than Wright’s, was discussed at a noon-time luncheon at the Beef Eaters Club in December of 1929.

Based on the letters that survive the culminating—and immolating—conversation of the “Educational Center for Creative Art,” little effort is required to imagine what took place at the Beef Eaters Club. Even with the broadened scope, Wright’s proposal, it was decided, was still in the service of a singular idea, which emerged from his own singular philosophy; his presence was inextricable from every aspect of the project—as Ferdinand Schevill had optimistically advised from its first conception, writing “You must be the center and inspirational head of the enterprise.”²⁹ Schevill saw the project as a cultural contribution—Wright bringing his message

²⁸ Keith McCutcheon, “Study Architecture at Taliesin,” *The Capital Times*, September 22, 1929. It is important to note McCutcheon’s emphasis on “personality,” which was a sign of the new American type, later defined by Warren Susman; also, “personality” will play a key role in the various incarnations of the Taliesin Fellowship.

²⁹ Schevill to Wright, November 26, 1928.

to the younger generation. The University of Wisconsin was less concerned with Wright's legacy, and though the experimental station may have been compatible with The Wisconsin Idea, to them it was Wright himself who was incompatible; his prospectus was dismissed on account of the idea "that Wright or anyone else should dominate the school as chairman."³⁰

Wright was incensed, in a not-uncharacteristic way, and sent the University president a letter filled with accusations of neglect, cowardice, and politicking. He spurned the University and all it stood for—what he saw, he wrote, as a "business man's civilization"—and doubled down on his insistence that President Frank misunderstood not only the potential of the school but also the cultural imperative of it that he, as the "helm of the cultural-organ" of the state, should nurture. He also minimized the nature of his request, turning the educational art center into a "small workshop for the young." Against the concerns that the school would be dominated by a singular or central figure, Wright argued—perhaps with Wright, Inc. in the back of his mind—that such singularity was fundamental to this type of creativity: it was "inspiration," he argued, not "domination."³¹ Wright had sent a letter to Aust the previous day, in much the same state of pique, declaring that Aust's role in changing the proposed school was "too much apiece with the ignorant-prejudice of the academies to deserve more than contempt."³² He declared his project strong enough to go on, alone.

³⁰ Friedland and Zellman, *The Fellowship*, p146. Wright's proposal was not summarily dismissed; he closed the door on it himself, stating that if no action were taken by April 1, 1930, he was not interested in a UW partnership. The complaints, from the UW side, imply that there was interest enough in the prospectus, but that it need become more "impersonal," before it could be seriously considered. The matter was effectively closed at the meeting, as the faculty realized they would not be able to summon enough support for either this or a modified proposal by Wright's deadline.

³¹ Wright to Glenn Frank, December 17, 1929.

³² Wright to Aust, December 16, 1929.

The episode between Wright and UW evinces the transitional state of American culture at the height of the 1920s, particularly as defined in the intersection between education and industry. In the postwar boom, American identity became synonymous with business success and a newfound abundance: Americans produced more and consumed more; people, goods, services and ideas moved with new speed; they were obsessed with personality, which became the “source and inspiration for the new modal psychological type” ideal for the new culture.³³ More people, encouraged by profiles and pamphlets of the self-possessed personalities of successful men published by a rampant self-help industry, became “self-made,” each transition from rags to riches providing proof of America’s supposed exceptional and classless society. Those who had already been “made” turned family businesses into large-scale, centralized, and complex corporate empires. But despite the roaring success of the 1920s, it was also, for many, defined by anxieties that had resulted from the unforeseen consequences of this national business success. Industrialization, urban densification, and the instability of labor compounded the ambiguous vision of America’s future, raising newfound questions about what defined American “culture.”

Education was seen as the answer to many of those problems. Education was a means of controlling the future path of culture, an antidote to the uncontrolled successes of American business, and it was also the site of the conversations about immigration, labor, psychology,

³³ These characteristics define Warren Susman’s “Culture of Abundance,” which displaced what he categorized as the older, Puritanical culture of pre-industrial America in precisely this decade. See Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. For a discussion about the impact of personality on American culture, see also Jeremy C. Young, *The Age of Charisma*.

and childhood.³⁴ But the forces that had produced the self-made man naturally found their way into public education as well. Most “self-made” men had scorned education for its production of what they saw as intellectual and ineffective minds, especially in comparison to their own breed, recognizable by commanding personalities and learned in the ways of instinct and intuition rather than books and lectures. Most had no more than an elementary education, which was heralded by many as the reason for their success rather than incidental to it. But eventually, in need of specialized managerial assistance, many of these successful men proclaimed the value of education’s democratic opportunities while also proceeding to hire its output.³⁵ Education became another vehicle to achieve the promised successes of America. Through education, an individual could realize his best self, and subsequently shape the American personality and character.³⁶

Wright proposed a business to President Frank, culturally shrouded under the veil of education, and was dismissed on business terms: too dominating a personality. That Wright wrote to Frank accusing him of putting the University in the service of only a business-man’s civilization, by which he meant impersonal and apolitical, while portraying the very characteristics that defined the current business-man’s civilization—an uneducated and

³⁴ By the 1920s schools were expected to “assume some responsibility for the pupil’s physical welfare; shall give him a taste for music, art, and literature, to prepare him to use his leisure time worthily; shall Americanize him and prepare him for citizenship; shall give him experience with the materials and tools of industry; and shall offer some training for the activities of the home.” Sibley, “Planning Schools for Educational Purposes.”

³⁵ This is to highlight the informal and reckless attitude prevalent in the first generation of American self-made men, perhaps due to their lack of formal education, which may have tamed their natural instincts.

³⁶ See Wyllie, *The Self-Made Man in America*; Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*; Grizzell, *Education: Principles and Practices*.

instinctual personality—indicates that Wright’s ideas of business, culture, and personality were misaligned. Wright was caught in a double bind: his individuality threatened by the corporate business, and his business threatened by an educational institute fearing for its, and the country’s, future. So ended the discussions about the possible partnership between Wright and the University of Wisconsin, and so went Wright and Olgivanna, alone, nonetheless determined to create an art school aligned with American industry and values.³⁷

2. 1929 *International*, “Hillside Home School of the Allied Arts”

The sting of rejecting his proposal on account of his singular personality would have been exacerbated by Wright’s own observation of the rising tide of anonymity in architecture, which was accompanying the maturation and promotion of what would soon be labeled ‘International Style.’ Not only was “the sterility of the individual its end if not its aim,” the movement, in its geographic scope, also threatened Wright’s position and ideology in American architecture.³⁸ With renewed energy, Wright spent the next few years attempting to reestablish his prominence and relevance, particularly in opposition to his European colleagues. What he lacked in construction, he made up for in publicity, launching a new exhibition of his work called “The Show,” penning an autobiography, and lecturing around the country. He reworked the proposal along the way and used the public lectures as an opportunity to promote the idea.

³⁷ Wright’s corporation was transferred to Ben Page’s lawyers, E. C. Kroon, Harry M. Kroon, and J. Karlin, in September of 1929, reincorporated as an Illinois corporation called “Frank Lloyd Wright, Inc.”

³⁸ These qualities of sterility and anonymity are described in Langmead and Johnson, p121.

At every opportunity, Wright was championing the cause of what he called an “interior native” American culture: those things that were “interpretations of the internal content of America’s own Nature” but had been “commercially exploited” by European countries and reimported into America as fashion or taste.³⁹ This “interior native” culture would have been, in Wright’s opinion, exactly the outcome of his proposed school: it was “designed to sow the seeds of creative art, of culture, that tremendously important part of life which America has largely ignored.”⁴⁰ America, he declared, a nation rich beyond its bounds, was a land of abundance; its people ingenious, inventive, scientifically, and commercially progressive, and yet it awaited the arrival of “culture” as if it were a matter distinguishable from the everyday.

The country had no superstructure guiding its behavior, commerce, industry, politics, and its “an unsure taste for objets d’art”; this was seen in the picture houses of American landscapes, in the ready acceptance of the ready-made, in the uncritical importing of European styles and, architecturally, in the American embrace of both eclecticism and what Wright called “French propaganda.”⁴¹ In many ways, Wright was mirroring the general position of the United States in the postwar era, aspiring to international super-power status by delivering a new world order defined by American ideas. For the country, it was the promise of peaceful

³⁹ Brochure, *The Hillside Home School of the Allied Arts*, 1931. Included in Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, *Collected Writings Vol. 3*, p39–49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p39-49.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Wright positioned himself unambiguously opposite to the Europeans: “The coming Architectural war in our provinces will have to be fought, but I hope not so unfairly as is usual in similar wars.” Wright’s correspondence often contained references to European architects, particularly “The Frenchman” (meaning Le Corbusier), because Hitchcock, Johnson, Haskell were writing often about European architecture, and isolating factors like surface and mass in their analysis. Wright’s January 07, 1931 letter to Lewis Mumford calls it French Propaganda; the prophecy of Architectural war was directed at Lee Simonson, editor of *Creative Arts*, January 11, 1929.

democracy, but not for Wright, who scorned “the sentimentalized singing to Demos as a god” and redefined democracy to mean the entitlement of each man to the growth of his true individuality.⁴² In his vision, it was this man, “strengthened and restored to sanity” by the consciousness of creative power, who would emerge when art took the lead in education. Natural character, he wrote, would be the natural consequence. Wright’s America he renamed Usonia.⁴³

Wright had been this man, this leading figure imbued with creative power, upon the publication of his 1910 Wasmuth portfolio. The publication of his work had captured the attention of European architects—even more than it did their American counterparts—and established Wright as a predecessor to the plastic forms of contemporary European architecture. But by the end of the 1920s, Wright’s star was fading, as he was told by a sympathetic German critic, and he turned to his allies for assistance.⁴⁴ He resumed his correspondence with Hendrikus Theodorus Wijdeveld, a Dutch designer and publisher who was instrumental in establishing Wright’s European reputation by dedicating all seven issues of *Wendingen* magazine to Wright’s work in 1925. Wright had named Wijdeveld, unbeknownst to him, as the director of the Hillside School of the Allied Arts in the early prospectuses, saving for himself the Chairman of the Board position. Wijdeveld, however, was also working on his own educational project, an art-work atelier “*werkgemeenschap*” modeled on the medieval guilds,

⁴² HHS Brochure, 1931.

⁴³ Though Aylesa Forsee writes that this was in response to Wright’s trip to Rio de Janeiro, 101, which was October of 1931, he uses it as early as 1929 (Letter to Werner Moser, July 25, 1929).

⁴⁴ “There is at present a very apparent ‘baisse’ in Wright appreciation.” Siegfried Scharfe to Frank Lloyd Wright, October 16, 1929.

which he called the “International Fellowship.” He was much further along than Wright, but when the American wrote in the fall of 1930, simultaneously offering Wijdeveld the director position and asking him to shepherd “The Show” exhibition in Holland, Wijdeveld agreed to both. Bringing the European aboard allowed Wright both short- and long-term achievements: in the short term, Wijdeveld’s promotion and celebration of “The Show” and Wright’s work increased his visibility, and the visibility of American design, in a country that had long admired him; he was also afforded, once Wijdeveld, with his own prospectus in hand, arrived in Wisconsin in November of 1931 “to discuss details,” an opportunity to improve the Hillside School project, which still lacked funding despite Wright’s efforts. Wijdeveld’s presence and contribution would allow Wright to be at the helm of an important center bridging American and European interests in industry and design.⁴⁵ Wijdeveld, in characteristic and tireless devotion, believed that his and Wright’s ambitions were coincident and that the Hillside project might simply be an alternate location for his international fellowship.

In the discussions that followed, Wright and Wijdeveld recreated the curriculum and constitution of the project newly named “The Taliesin Fellowship,” a melding of the two previous proposals: the prospectus Wright sent to potential financiers in April of 1931, and Wijdeveld’s “An International Guild,” published at the same time. Wright’s ideas for the school project changed to accommodate some of Wijdeveld’s better ideas.⁴⁶ The Dutchman’s project was declaratively not a school, but a working community “in which and by means of which

⁴⁵ For a history of the relationship between Wright and Holland, see Donald Langmead and Donald Leslie Johnson, *Architectural Excursions: Frank Lloyd Wright, Holland and Europe*.

⁴⁶ Friedland and Zellman argue that Wijdeveld’s proposition was better, and even more Wright-ian than Wright’s own, p160. Wijdeveld’s prospectus is reprinted in Langmead and Johnson, Appendix C, p199ff.

contact with the new movement [was] established.” In returning to the workshop system of the medieval guild, he emphasized the mutual aim of the community and their vision of a common ideal, inspired by the work of the creative artist. Wright’s 1931 prospectus was still tied to the ideas in the 1928 University of Wisconsin proposal: a school wherein art takes the lead and that is tied to America’s industrial system, producing products and wares as well as research and inventions, all in the name of American culture. With Wijdeveld aboard, Wright’s field of vision broadened, and he boasted of the international appeal of the developing school, claiming that “applications have been received from people in Japan, China, Switzerland, France, Holland, Russia, and Germany, among other countries.”⁴⁷ Wijdeveld’s return to Holland was meant to be brief, arriving on the first day of 1932 to prepare for his family’s return to Wisconsin and the subsequent commencement of the Fellowship.

Wright was swayed by Wijdeveld’s ideas—enough that when he shortly thereafter issued a mailing for the Taliesin Fellowship, it had taken on a new work-based character described as “an extension of the work of Taliesin”—but not, however, by Wijdeveld himself. “I am going to have to say no to your coming to join me in America,” he wrote to his would-have-been partner in Europe. Wright blamed the precarity of the financial outlook as reason enough to pause the venture, adding secondarily a need to choose an American. Separately, Wright had written Lewis Mumford that he was “growing suspicious of ‘internationalism.’”⁴⁸ Later letters suggest that Wijdeveld’s use of International Style in his own design work annunciated

⁴⁷ Wright spoke with *The Capital Times* after Wijdeveld gave a public lecture, December 09, 1931.

⁴⁸ Wright to Mumford, February 2, 1932.

irreconcilable differences in his architectural approach compared to Wright's.⁴⁹ It was, however, the inevitably unsustainable relationship between Wijdeveld as "leader" and Wright's uncharacteristically quiet roles of founder and Chairman that the American architect could not bear. "You are yourself too far developed to succeed in any such position—as I see you," Wright concluded, "... you would not be happy."⁵⁰ For a community committed to the idea that the individual ego should be strengthened and allowed "natural scope," Wijdeveld was proof that this intention was not evenly applied. Wright's rejection, perhaps coincidentally, corresponded to the closing of his exhibition in Europe; Wijdeveld had dutifully shipped Wright's work back to Wisconsin with the expectation he would be following it across the Atlantic in short time. The week after it arrived home in Wisconsin, Wright canceled the partnership.

Wright sent out a revised prospectus to friends and potential financiers even before he officially canceled Wijdeveld's involvement in the project. Plans were underway for the Fellowship to begin in the fall of the same year, 1932, but Wright had difficulty trying to fill the leadership position adjacent to his own. Lewis Mumford, who had just facilitated Wright's involvement in the MoMA International Style show, said no. Alexander Woollcott, a critic and writer at *The New Yorker*, also refused, as did artist Georgia O'Keefe and the head of the University's Experimental College, Alexander Meiklejohn. The three positions for associate directors, a sculptor, a painter, and a musician, also remained unfilled. Wright turned to his

⁴⁹ Langmead and Johnson, in Chapter 10 of *Architectural Excursions*, give a nuanced reading of Wright's 1932 response and his 1947 reminiscence of the partnership's end: namely, each had a large ego, their disparate worldview led to divergent goals, and their personal aesthetics were incongruous.

⁵⁰ Wright to Wijdeveld, February 13 1932, quoted in Langmead and Johnson (Wijdeveld archive), p145.

wife, Olgivanna, as a willing partner in their new project; she, having trained with Georgi Ivanovich Gurdjieff at the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, came to the project not only with the ability to manage the school's organization but also with spiritual, Gurdjieffian, ambition. It is unsurprising, then, that the Taliesin Fellowship picked up some of the language and philosophy that Georgi Gurdjieff used in his esoteric teachings. The new basic aim of the Fellowship was "the well-correlated, creative human being."

With Wijdeveld gone, the curriculum turned inward, its pared-down simplicity more easily accomplished and more proportional to a smaller sphere of influence that hoped to grow "gradually but spontaneously from within."⁵¹ Less emphasis was placed on the school's relationship with industry—partnerships that had not yet been established—and more was spent on the daily life in the Fellowship, describing a simple life with meals in common, fixed hours for work and recreation, and "the spirit of cooperation felt and practiced by fellowship members."⁵² Each apprentice would be required to work four hours each day in the upkeep and care of the grounds and farm buildings—gaining practical farm experience in exchange for the "privilege of participation in experimental work in the studios and shops and in the productions of art-objects and practical exemplars for industry and building or for exhibition

⁵¹ Taliesin Fellowship Brochure, 1933.

⁵² Ibid. In an undated but seemingly early version of the brochure included in the archive, Wright specified the uniforms that apprentices would wear: "a loose smock over black trousers and a soft white shirt with suitable underwear. Flexible shoes of the 'moccasin' type, over which light rubbers could be drawn and discarded." This was crossed out with the word "IDIOTIC" written over it—my assumption, based on the strict tone he often took with Wright and the general disposition of the comments, is that this was Jens Jensen's copy of the prospectus and his handwritten marginalia. The idea of tuition was also crossed out in this copy, "No Tuition" written in the margins, and the statement "A school of this nature should be international in its resources" changed to "principally national." Included in the Manuscript microfiche at the Getty Research Institute, Frank Lloyd Wright Collection. In 1935, Jensen opened "The Clearing," a folk school of sorts, in Door County, WI.

and, perhaps, sale." Taliesin, in the previous proposal, was described as a tributary atelier; in this proposal, the school was described as an extension of Taliesin.

Though Wright had been refused by the University of Wisconsin for being too much an individual, and he dismissed Wijdeveld on much the same grounds, individuality was precisely the currency of the Fellowship, and Wright tasked himself, much in the same way he "built better buildings," as the *Wisconsin State Journal* declared, to "build better people."⁵³ Veiled in the language of self-improvement, Wright promised that his institution would cultivate creativity, "training the imagination to action as a form of direct experience."⁵⁴ For him, and the apprentices to whom it was directed, it meant the production of a better version of their own individual selves. It was a business of making self-made men.

3. 1932 Wisconsin, "The Taliesin Fellowship"

In late October of 1932, twenty-six men and women arrived in Spring Green, WI, with bed linens and toolboxes under arms. Many came from or in exchange of well-established architectural programs across the country: Yale, MIT, University of Virginia, NYU, University of Cincinnati. They sent in deposits of two hundred dollars each with the applications describing their makeup, simplified enough to render it malleable: name and address, age, weight and height, the religious affiliation of parents, previous education and occupation, a list of references, and "predilection" for which art expression. These arrivals had heard Wright on the radio, read about him in the papers, found him through family, or had been romanced by his

⁵³ *The Wisconsin State Journal*, Aug. 07, 1932, p5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p5.

recently published Autobiography, breathless in its urgency and unrelenting inspiration. Some were disillusioned with the traditional Beaux-Arts education and sought something, anything, else; others were drawn to Wright's rhetoric—the words like “dignity,” “the individual,” and “nature” that described his kind of architect's scope—which worked as magnets on the formulaic patterns of intellectual homogeneity typical in east coast institutions.

To have chosen the Taliesin Fellowship was not an inexpensive option for these young men and women, especially in the still early years of the Great Depression. The remainder of the tuition, another four hundred and fifty dollars the first year and increasing quickly thereafter, was more than the tuition at New York University and a multiple of that of standard vocational education. Even though Wright was often lenient with the fees, anxious to get more “willing spirits” in the door with whatever amount they had on hand, the students who arrived were culled from a specific demographic: white, from the emerging middle and upper class, with a strong belief that education was the way to develop their unique, inherent, and creative selfhood.⁵⁵ They were the ones who had benefited from the curricular changes in American schools in the early decades of the twentieth century; though Wright grouped everything under his heading “knowledge-factory-education,” many public schools had changed their focus from traditional subjects and rote pedagogy to one that adapted to the particular needs of the child, intending to encourage the development of the “whole child.”⁵⁶ Many of these students had

⁵⁵ Wright described the potential students in a letter to Elizabeth Bauer, one of the first apprentices, and sister of Catherine Bauer. See Wright, *Letters to Apprentices*, p14-16.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Herbert Kleibard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958*; Margaret Mathieson, “English Progressive Educators and the Creative Child”; Sol Cohen, “Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education”; Dorothy Swaine Thomas and William I. Thomas, *The Child in America*; Dewey, *The School and Society*, and *The Child and the Curriculum*.

gone to Montessori schools and lived in utopian communities; they had learned to think of childhood as the site and source of creativity, and experience as a better teacher than knowledge.

Despite all the preparation and design of the planned art school, it proved to be not much more than a plan by the time the first students arrived, and they rather quickly acclimated to the reality of Taliesin as it was, albeit different from their expectations. They joined the ranks and schedule of Wright's employees—those who had worked on "The Show" following the collapse of the Bouwerie and San Marcos projects and were currently working on the Capital Journal Building and the House on the Mesa—who had been folded into the school roster as "Honor Men."⁵⁷ Apprentices arose at 6:30 a.m., cared for their rooms, and met for breakfast at 7:00. Thereafter they began their daily "outside" work, which had been assigned to them by the apprentice in charge (later, this position ceased to rotate, and was held solely by the senior associates), and nine hours later, they gathered for tea in the studio, working there until supper at six. The studio had a great draw among the apprentices, but a lack of commissions meant that it required none of them. The first few years in the studio were spent studying Wright's early work, copying detailed drawings of the Imperial Hotel. Time was purportedly equally divided between the three realms comprising the characteristics of well-roundedness and a sense of responsibility: the farm, the studio, and the kitchen. There were no lectures of

⁵⁷ Many of these employees were not paid, having earlier asked Wright to come and "study" with him. Room and board were furnished in exchange for maintenance work on the property and some drafting work. They included: Mendel Glickman (Tri-State U), Robert Goodall (U of IL), Karl E. Jensen (Copenhagen, Denmark), Heinrich Klumb (Cologne, SHB), Michael Kostanecki (T.H. Danzig), Rudolph Mock (Basel ETH Zurich), Isamu Noguchi (Guggenheim Fellowship), Takehiko Okami (Tokyo Imperial U), Samuel Ratensky (UPenn), and Manuel Sandoval (Nicaragua).

instruction: Wright's philosophy, like his Aunts' and John Dewey's, insisted on the pedagogy of experience, or "learn by doing." Apprentices spent their time "felling trees, sawing them into lumber, quarrying rock and burning lime...plastering walls, frescoing them. Digging ditches, working in the fields with the ground. Washing dishes, caring for their own rooms. Planting and harvesting. Making roads. Farming, planning, working, kitchenizing and philosophizing in voluntary co-operation..."⁵⁸ (Figure 2.3) There was unstructured time for optional "collateral" work in music, cultural exercises, pottery and weaving before the lights went out at ten.

Wright was not alone in his attempt to develop the well-correlated, creative human being. Olgivanna took charge of many of the personal, interpersonal, and domestic aspects of the Fellowship, demanding decorum from apprentices and offering subtle assistance in navigating the closed circle of their community. She "trained and groomed" apprentices, often more through intimidation and discipline than by affection.⁵⁹ She was also considered the spiritual center of the Fellowship, bringing with her the philosophic training she received from living in a community with another, different, magnetic personality, George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. She "taught" philosophy and ethics, and eventually also Gurdjieff's rhythmic exercises called "Movements," which made knowledge corporeal and conscious existence harmonious and were thus considered sacred. Whatever individual unruliness each apprentice brought to the Fellowship, it was disciplined into the Wrights' contours of well-correlation.

⁵⁸ Wright, "The Taliesin Fellowship 1933," *Collected Writings Vol. 3*, p162-163.

⁵⁹ The phrase "train and groom" was Susan Lockhart's. See Marty and Marty, p97. Friedland and Zellman's *The Fellowship* narrates many of these intimidations.

The first years of the Fellowship were unorganized and spontaneous, combining Wright's ideas of organic living and Olgivanna's organization of the domestic scene with the maintenance and construction needs of the expansive site and farm. There was no routine—the embrace of individuality was applied equally to the day itself—except for the bells that marked the passed hours as they called sweating apprentices to meals. (Figure 2.4) On the weekends, the Fellows put on clean clothes and manners, in preparation for the social events that both marked the end of one week and commencement of the next. The two days were filled—the guest quarters with visitors, the living room with performances, the Playhouse with film showings; talks by Wright and Olgivanna, trips to Unity Chapel to hear sermons for or by the apprentices, conversations, music, good food, good company, countryside excursions. Seasons were marked by produce, by the annual requirements of operating a farm—harvest, canning, the county fair—and, beginning in January of 1935, cross-country trips to Arizona, near the site of what would become Taliesin West.

Of the students who arrived in the first few years, many departed after a year or two, but many more settled into the Wisconsin countryside and their new roles at Taliesin. Unlike a traditional education, there was no diploma after four years, no clear option for the completion of training, and not even a strategy for an exit not otherwise demanded by the conflicts of personality. This was a consequence of Wright's intention to condition the mind; "learn by doing" was a limitless pedagogy when the Fellowship became a daily apprenticeship to work itself. The Fellowship was becoming a way of life. The apprentices embraced it, choosing instinctual and intuitive physical labor over intellectual studying. "And so we are working instead of studying," Bob Bishop wrote in "At Taliesin," the Fellowship's weekly column in the

Wisconsin State Journal.⁶⁰ At Spring Green, the concept of the “self-made” was displaced from the mythic robber baron of private profit into a harmonious and organic approach to production, the making of the creative self, the making of a creative life, and resulting in the notion of the creative worker.

Part III: 1940 *Wisconsin and Arizona*, The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation

Commissions slowly followed the steady stream of apprentices: first the Willey house, then a Planetarium, research for Broadacre City, a little weekend cabin called “Fallingwater,” the S.C. Johnson Wax Administration building, and the first Jacobs house in nearby Madison. Wright’s career, on its third incarnation, was ascendant. He was on the cover of *Time* magazine, had an entire issue of *Architectural Forum* devoted to him, and permanently expanded Taliesin’s reach by buying property for a second location in Arizona. Apprentices began to spend more time in the studio, which functioned in many of the same ways other architectural offices of the time did: Wright sketched a design scheme and then gave it to draftsmen to work out with dimensions and details. The apprentices measured each of Wright’s marks and proportions, which were often non-standard and relative only to the specifics of that particular detail, with meticulous precision.⁶¹

With the assistance of the apprentices, the operations of Taliesin became almost efficient. The Fellowship continued to draw students, who maintained the property while also producing drawings for Wright and supervising construction of his projects. Wright, however,

⁶⁰ Bob Bishop, “At Taliesin February 16, 1934,” in Henning, p23-25.

⁶¹ Johnny Hill’s recollection. See Marty, *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin Fellowship*, p80.

was still poorly managing the monies. Though the nearly 650 acres he occupied in his ancestral Valley were productive for body and mind, a source of inspiration, romance, and recreation, they were swamped in unpaid property taxes. The autarkic Fellowship, its pride and perseverance at odds with the world it was attempting to rebuild, had never mobilized the institutional structures that were created to support it: incorporation papers were unsigned, property taxes were unpaid, Wright hadn't applied for tax exemption, or registered with the superintendent of schools, and Darwin Martin was still owed over \$40,000 on the mortgage that was held by the Bank of Wisconsin. Though more work was coming into the office, and therefore generating more architectural fees, the money was always used for present concerns, rather than those wishfully beyond recollection. With the money he had, Wright purchased the mortgage from the bank and put it in his wife's name. William Wesley Peters, married to Olgivanna's daughter Svetlana, paid back some of the Martin family debt with money he inherited after his father's death, staving off a Martin family lawsuit. Olgivanna, in turn, deeded the property to him, though this agreement was not recorded for nearly another decade. By 1936, Frank Lloyd Wright's beloved land of Taliesin was in the name of William Wesley Peters.

Ever since its beginning, the Wrights and their apprentices described Taliesin in anti-institutional rhetoric: "It is true that the Fellowship would be a very odd school, if it meant to be a school at all. It doesn't."⁶² In many ways, it resembled a company town: a singular authority, remote location, a scarcity of labor that was placated with room and board and entertainment. For the most part, it didn't matter how the Fellowship was defined. But, as it became more streamlined, defining it had legal—and financial—implications, and in November

⁶² Bob Bishop, "'At Taliesin' February 16, 1934," in Henning, *At Taliesin*.

of 1940, the Taliesin Fellowship was restructured, incorporated (again) into a larger entity called the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Inc. Its mission, "to encourage the fine arts by the education and teaching of the art of architecture and collateral crafts," all but declared the organization a school, though not much changed in the day to day operations of the Wisconsin and newly added Arizona properties. At the first and only official meeting of the Board of Directors, Wright was named as President of the Foundation and, surprisingly unrelated to his skillset, Treasurer; Olgivanna became Vice-President; their apprentice-cum-son-in-law, owner of the Taliesin tract and neighboring farm, William Wesley Peters, was named Secretary. All were voted in with proper procedural performance, noted by the meeting minutes: "there being no further nominations...and the vote being canvassed, it was ascertained that [Frank Lloyd Wright, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, William Wesley Peters] received the unanimous vote of the Board."⁶³ Randolph Connors, a Madison attorney, filed the papers and explained that "the incorporation merely confirms the educational features of Taliesin. It gives legal identity to what might be open to argument."⁶⁴

Incorporating as a Foundation in the state of Wisconsin facilitated several things, but most of all it established a tax benefit for the organization, which was acquiring more land and more equipment (executing a small-scale instantiation of Wright's rural vision of Broadacre City), and had a relatively steady stream of income. Though originally denied, Wright was subsequently awarded an exemption from federal income tax under the provisions of IRC

⁶³ Meeting Minutes of the first meeting of the Directors of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Taliesin, Iowa County, WI, November 20, 1940. Included in Respondent's Appendix, p265-266.

⁶⁴ *Wisconsin State Journal* November 21, 1940, p18.

101(6), a statute that also freed him from employment taxes and classified all donations and contributions to his Fellowship as tax-deductible, as long as the character of the organization continued to operate exclusively for educational purposes. Wright, his family, and selected senior apprentices donated their time and talent to the Foundation, constrained by its articles of incorporation to financial limits: “non-stock and no dividends or pecuniary profits shall be declared or paid to the members thereof either in the form of current dividends or payments in liquidation”. In return, the Foundation paid for their living and professional expenses, and for the senior staff—a handful of dedicated apprentices—a “salary” of one dollar per day. Wright no longer had his own private practice, private income, or, technically, private gain. These were folded into the Foundation, which had an exclusive right to the architectural services of the self-possessed man who claimed he was past the age when “personal gain and personal advancement were any longer attractive.”⁶⁵

The Foundation legally erased the boundaries that had supposedly but not tangibly separated the Fellowship from Wright’s architectural practice. All monies coming in—tuition payments from the approximately forty apprentices per year, architectural fees equalling ten percent of construction costs, farm income, lecture fees, book royalties, donations, and other uncategorized income—were equally considered income, and all monies going out—living quarters and expenses, travel expenses, school supplies not provided by students, office supplies, building supplies and expenses, farm supplies and expenses—were considered disbursements. Whatever was left over between the two columns went back into the reserves of the Foundation. As a non-stock, non-dividend entity dedicated to the encouragement of fine

⁶⁵ Appellant brief, p25ff.

arts, the financial arrangement that had sustained the Fellowship and now defined the Foundation was newly eligible for the tax benefits under Wisconsin statute 70.11, describing general exemptions:

1) Personal property owned by any educational institution having a regular curriculum and offering courses for at least six months in the year... and the real property necessary for the location and convenience of the buildings of such institution or association and embracing the same, not exceeding ten acres; 2)... the lands reserved for grounds of a chartered college or university, not exceeding eighty acres; 3) ... the endowment funds and the real and personal estate of any corporation formed solely to encourage the fine arts, organized under the laws of this state, without capital stock, and paying no dividends or pecuniary profits to its members...

Wright's lawyers described the Foundation as "startingly simple and entirely unselfish."

Wright—the individual—no longer owned personal property; Wright—the incorporated Foundation—owned the office, the farm, the school, and all the equipment. Both were committed to the encouragement of the fine arts. Neither paid taxes. On multiple occasions throughout the years 1942–1948, representatives from the Foundation visited the Town of Wyoming, the municipal jurisdiction for Taliesin, and stated their claim of tax exemption, throwing small stabs of protests against the mounting tax deeds levied on the property by the county.

Though the tax exemption was the most obvious and favored result, the creation of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation was also an acknowledgement of the growing success of the Fellowship. More commissions were coming in, and in return, more apprentices were sent out to the field, acting as remote stand-ins for Wright amid the construction sites. What had started as an ad-hoc education and romantic philosophy of work turned into a modern organization with hierarchies, workflows, remote management, and organizational, rather than individual,

goals, policies, and personality. The incorporation of the foundation served as a patent of sorts, a way of institutionalizing "learn by doing": the pedagogy that worked.

Part IV: 1951–1954 *Wisconsin, The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, a corporation, Plaintiff and Appellant, versus Town of Wyoming, a municipal corporation, Iowa County, a municipal corporation, Elizabeth Mitchell and Frances Chappell, Defendants and Respondents*

The Foundation's mission statement was almost a verbatim quote—a non-stock, non-dividend corporation formed to encourage the fine arts—of the section of Wisconsin tax code assuring real and property exemptions. This was ostensibly the new "legal identity" that had been otherwise open to argument, as Connors explained in 1940. Though it had been accumulating property tax bills since before its incorporation, the Foundation was forced to clarify the argument and its identity in 1949, when Wisconsin state law was amended to repeal the tax provision for institutions dedicated to the encouragement of the fine arts, and additionally limited the estate allowance to only 80 acres of ground used for a chartered college or university, or 10 acres for buildings of an educational institution. A representative of the Foundation paid a visit to the Iowa County board, claiming that they were indeed an educational institution, and thereby entitled to an exemption of 80 acres of real estate. They provided a map of the Taliesin tract, then nearly 800 acres.

The county was less convinced of the clarity of the Foundation's exemption. What, in exchange for forfeiting real estate taxes on hundreds of acres of "very fine farm land," did the county receive? Taliesin had been a private home since 1911; to the outsider's view, it hadn't

obviously changed from the home-farm-office it had always been, even though Wright had, over the course of those four decades, gradually replaced the hold of his old reputation as a point in a tabloid love triangle with the fame of architectural accomplishments, and even though his “employees” may have appeared markedly younger, with new ones arriving regularly. To those neighbors, most of whom were generationally tied to the valley, what was happening on Wright’s estate would have looked quite different from the beloved farm-home-school of his aunts that had closed in 1915, and it certainly didn’t serve the community in the same way. Wright and his apprentices were constantly extending local credit, infamously forgetful in paying it back; the compensatory taxes would also become the neighbors’ burden. The county was undeterred. The Foundation filed suit in August of 1951 to halt the taxes and accompanying penalties.

The trial, however, took two more years to get underway. This was partially due to the ability of the lawyers to gather testimony, partially due to the Foundation’s record-keeping—which arrived in a cardboard carton entered into the record as Exhibit 13, an assortment of canceled checks, bank statements, deposit slips, VA vouchers, and memoranda—and partially due to the similarly organized list of assets, which included over sixty years’ worth of “donations” ceded by Wright upon incorporation. Attempting to short-circuit the discovery process, attorneys from both sides agreed to a stipulation of facts establishing the inarguable considerations of the case.

Wright’s lawyers, Frederic Sammond, Randolph Connors, and Frederick Hillyer, argued that the Foundation was entitled to the tax exemption because it was “in fact a genuine benevolent institution designed and devoted entirely to the art of architecture and to the

education of architects.”⁶⁶ They described the character and operation of the Foundation—that Wright, whose worldwide reputation as a leader in the field of architecture was included in the stipulation, donated his services and talents to the non-stock, non-dividend Foundation, that the land in question supported a school of about forty students who paid tuition, that the Foundation provided architectural services all over the world, and that all excess income after disbursement was funneled back into the Foundation coffers. The latter point was settled law; precedent had established that surplus income or profit of an exempt institution that was devoted to said exempt purposes, and not used for pecuniary profit nor to benefit any individual, should not interfere with general tax exemption. Sammond, Connors, and Hillyer reminded the court that because Wright had no private practice, he did not benefit from the Foundation’s excess income. The only benefit Wright received was “seeing the success of the Foundation in its inspired purpose to add beauty to the world and to give knowledge and inspiration to a revolving group of forty young men...”⁶⁷

Despite the mission statement, the county’s defense attorneys challenged the status of the Foundation, not only under the current and effective legal requirements—either a chartered college or university or, alternately, an educational institution with a regular curriculum for six months of the year—but also under the repealed provision, their argument hinging on the word “solely.” As part of the stipulation of facts, the Foundation entered its

⁶⁶ Appellant Brief, p24. Wright’s son Robert Llewellyn Wright, an attorney in DC, also consulted on the case. Much of the trial’s proceedings are documented in the briefs of the appeal, submitted in the 1954 term of the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

⁶⁷ Appellant brief, p29-30. The oversight of the women of the Fellowship is frequent and pervasive and indicative of the hierarchies it upheld. Friedland and Zellman document this, as does Priscilla Henken, who published the diary she kept during her time at the Fellowship.

fourteen compulsory courses as proof of its regular curriculum. Days that had previously been described as spontaneous and without routine were slotted into schedules and the learning-by-doing into distinct categories. The fourteen courses included "Nature of materials and men, principles of construction of organic building, philosophy and theory," with lectures on Saturday night and Sunday morning by Wright; "Structural detail, engineering and detail, specification writing, working drawings, and office practice," taught by Wes Peters; Jack Howe's "Planning and rendering in various media.... Preparation of presentation drawings showing the general and detailed picture of a contemplated structure"; "Building construction; masonry, carpentry, plumbing, plastering, mechanical appurtenances," co-taught by Peters, Ken Lockhart and Curtis Besinger; and Johnny Hill's class on "Furniture design and interior furnishings." The other regular courses were mostly outside of the studio: "Domestic services and sciences including the preparation, preservation, planning and serving of meals, maintenance and decoration of kitchen and dining room," which was taught by Olgivanna and Mrs. Besinger [sic; likely it was Kay Davison]; "Philosophy, sociology and ethics," with lectures weekly by Olgivanna; "Music, Rhythm, physical coordination," a thrice-weekly class led by Iovanna Lloyd Wright; "Relation of building to site, elementary surveying, drawing of plat and contour methods," with Peters and Lockhart; "Music, choir, instruments, and chamber orchestra," taught by Besinger; "Crafts, weaving" taught by Olgivanna; "Printing, composition and abstract design," with Eugene Masselink; and "Gardening, vegetables, flowers, and orchard," led by Allen Lape Davison.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ There were also "electives," which Wright mentioned in his adverse examination, including a strangely specific "Broadacre City Philosophy." He also mentioned that his son Robert, the youngest from his first marriage, was on faculty as the attorney.

The defense countered that farm work, which comprised one-third of student time, elemental craftwork, and the required domestic service of life at Taliesin was “menial” work, and therefore incongruent with higher-level collegiate learning. Unlike Wright, who believed the architect was the midwife to culture, the attorneys upheld a stricter interpretation of the architect’s scope, arguing that though “architecture itself” may be a fine art, the *practice* of it was not, nor was farming, nor was an alleged architectural school. In their logic, if none of these aspects of the corporation constituted a fine art solely in and of themselves, it certainly followed that any combination of them hardly made them so.⁶⁹ Assessing the corporation on its actual purposes, uses, and objectives rather than on its stated ones meant the fine arts clause dissolved into its pieces. Additionally, the attorneys argued, the courses mentioned were insufficient representations of the standards and conventions of full-time traditional education—lectures, textbooks, classrooms, grades, prerequisites for admission, and the like—administered in a college. Wright’s “learn-by-doing” technique was not innovative pedagogy, as it had been for Dewey’s kindergartens, but a necessity for the success of Wright’s practice and the farm program. They continued: without grades or any prescribed method of completing the course, Taliesin Fellowship credits would not transfer to other schools, if so desired by the student, and no credits from other schools would be accepted. Not one of the Foundation’s officers had a college degree, let alone a teaching certificate. Only two members of the faculty were licensed architects; only one of these licenses was approved in Wisconsin. The student had no predetermined requirements or expected duration for completion and, if and when they decided they were done, their “diploma” was a letter of recommendation from

⁶⁹ Respondent’s Brief, p87.

Wright, which, the defense asserted, did not qualify them to practice as an architect in any state. As of the commencement of the trial, nearly 800 students had passed through the doors of Taliesin; only about fifty left with Wright's letter.

Finally, it was argued, the Foundation corporation failed to comply with the two other necessary requirements for exemption: the test of ownership and the requirement that the exempted property was not otherwise used for profit. The creative transferring of mortgages and deeds that had left the Taliesin tract in Wes Peters' name meant that the Foundation was attempting to exempt property it did not have the legal title to. Peters, perhaps in a last-minute attempt to resolve this, introduced a warranty deed into evidence the morning the trial began; it was deemed ineffective because the deed had not been delivered and it remained unrecorded. The last point was about Wright's personal relationship to the abstract entity, recalling the complaint he made twenty-six years prior—that he was no longer in possession of his own self, that he "ceased to be an individual" when he was replaced by a corporation. In 1953, the relationship had completely inverted: his individuality, his self, entirely defined the Foundation. Entered into the stipulation of facts was an acknowledgement of Frank Lloyd Wright's greatness, his worldwide reputation, and his leadership in the field of architecture. Both parties agreed to this and agreed that Wright, his reputation, and his professed philosophy of organic architecture were the primary attractions for student enrollment. They were also, said the defense counsel, the primary reasons Wright was asked to design buildings, write books, and lecture extensively, and therefore they were the primary source of funding, supported by his ability to maintain headquarters at the Foundation and utilize the personnel and students there. And yet, there was nothing legally binding Wright to the "contract" he

held with the corporation, granting it “exclusive right” of his services. Wright was bound to the corporation, the defense argued, because there was absolutely no separation between the two entities: he was the corporation and exercised complete control over it, ideologically, operationally, and financially. With over seventy-five-percent of the Foundation’s income coming from the architectural practice and associated payments and, in the records assembled from the past five years, over \$80,000 in excess income, all under the sole authority of Wright, the defense claimed that the predominant activity of the plaintiff corporation The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation was to conduct the extensive practice of Frank Lloyd Wright.

On September 11, 1953, Judge Arthur Kopp rendered the Court’s decision in favor of the defendants. His judgment reasoned through the three potential exemptions defined by Wisconsin law, finding that the Foundation’s pedagogy of treating each apprentice as an individual unit, trained by “haphazard individual contact,” and spending only one-third of his time in the assumed instructional space of the drafting studio did not meet the definite meaning of “regular curriculum” nor the time requirement of six months of the year for an educational institution; neither, he argued, was it a college, which by definition had the power to grant a degree and maintained a standard of formalized training that is synonymous with “higher branches of learning.” Kopp further dismissed the corporation’s claims on account of their negligence: the corporation did not file its educational paperwork with the state superintendent, as required by law since 1866. And finally, because Wes Peters’ warranty deed reserved a life estate in the name of Frank Lloyd Wright, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, Iovanna Lloyd Wright, and their survivors, Kopp saw a personal interest that disqualified the property from public benefit. The judge called the plaintiff a “one-man corporation,” established by evidence

that Wright alone makes every decision as to its operation. Wright decided who entered as an apprentice, and which ones left with a letter of recommendation. There had been no meetings of the directors, no bookkeeping maintained, no reports filed. The fact that Wright, as treasurer with total control of the Foundation's purse strings, was able to purchase—and did—everything he or his family desired, and that he expressed a desire to his faculty to "give them each a dividend to enable them to build a little home on a piece of ground we will give them...." led Kopp to declare that Frank Lloyd Wright showed no conception of the actual meaning of a non-stock, no dividend and no pecuniary profit corporation.⁷⁰ Wright, the decision asserted, treated the corporation as an extension of himself, entirely controlled and "completely dominated in every detail of its life by Frank Lloyd Wright the individual."⁷¹ The judge's conclusion was damning, having recognized that Wright's school was not an ad-hoc community of like-minded individuals, but a *plan* designed on the benefits of unpaid labor and the alibi of the corporation:

In the Court's opinion, from a very careful consideration of the evidence, the main purpose of the incorporation of the plaintiff was to relieve Frank Lloyd Wright of the responsibilities of caring and accounting for a large income which he was receiving from his profession as an architect, from his lectures and his book royalties and to have his business affairs as an architect, lecturer and farmer taken over and conducted by a corporation,—he and his family being assured of all their needs,—and receiving the benefit of the services of his associates, at a minimum cost, and the services and assistance of his apprentices for little or nothing,—most of them in fact paying a substantial sum yearly to receive the benefit of contact with, and knowledge of the plan of activity, of a noted architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. That the plan attempts to avoid the employment of architects, engineers and assistants by Mr. Wright, who thereby

⁷⁰ Appellant appendix, p143.

⁷¹ Appellant appendix, p143-144.

*receives his needed assistance at a nominal cost from the associates and apprentices and that any idea of a school is merely incidental.*⁷²

Wright responded to Kopp as he had to Glenn Frank back in 1929, with a fit of individual anger and indignation so pronounced that it reverberated beyond state lines. *The Los Angeles Times* announced it: "Frank Lloyd Wright to Quit Wisconsin Over Tax: Architect to Tear Down His Studio After Court Rules It Is Subject to State Levies." Wright said he would destroy Taliesin and leave the ruins "as a memorial to his pioneer ancestors." It was an argument between the individual and the state—what was due to whom—and Wright decided to relocate to more sympathetic environs, declaring that Wisconsin did not (and perhaps, remembering the reaction of the University, never had) appreciate the importance or cultural value of his school. The four old men of the Supreme Court who upheld Kopp's opinion, Wright decried, were more interested in money than merit; perhaps, if—as the *Wisconsin State Journal* had suggested—Taliesin fielded a football team, it would have been more quickly recognized as a school. Wright broadcast his imminent departure for upstate New York. Illinois resoundingly offered to take him. Hurriedly, Wisconsin's public representatives responded. Carl Thompson and Sylvia Rachel authored a new bill in the State legislature providing a special exemption on the Foundation's property tax. Proponents claimed that the bill would be "a token to a very distinguished gentleman," and that Wright's pride was more of an issue than the "small loss" in revenue.⁷³ Opponents called it the height of special legislation and claimed that the implications of the bill meant that "an individual or group teaching 'needlework, the

⁷² Appellant appendix, p143-144. This decision was appealed and upheld by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1954.

⁷³ *The Wisconsin State Journal*, June 14, 1955, p1-2.

brewery art or what have you might also qualify for exemption.”⁷⁴ Frederic Sammond, Wright’s lawyer, wrote a letter in support of the bill, adding that his firm believed that Wright’s institution was a valued public enterprise, so much so that they had charged him less than half the usual rate of a commercial enterprise.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the bill was defeated by a majority.

More notably, the general public of Wisconsin also ran to Wright’s defense. Nearly 400 guests braved the Madison winter on a cold February evening, arriving at Memorial Union for a quickly convened testimonial dinner in Wright’s honor, called “Frank Lloyd Wright Night” in the paper. (Figure 2.5) The architect’s resentment of his treatment at the hands of the state was soothed by a dinner of shrimp cocktail, roast beef, apple pie, and a litany of compliments and tributes dedicated to his contributions to American culture. He was called a hero, a genius, an inspiration. He was celebrated for his past and future contributions to the state: on display was his proposal for Monona Terrace, Madison’s new civic center and auditorium, which was slated to be his first public commission in Wisconsin. He also spoke, calling for the architect’s role as form-giver, a man of vision, a man of action, to be recognized above the egalitarianism of America. All men are created equal, he said, only before the law, before the opportunity for self-improvement. At evening’s end, Cary Caraway, a former apprentice who had organized the fundraiser, presented Wright with a check for \$10,000 to pay off the back taxes on the property. Wright, touched by this display of public appreciation, decided to keep the Foundation in

⁷⁴ *The Wisconsin State Journal*, June 14, 1955, p1-2.

⁷⁵ The Sammond and Hougen letters are in Harold Groves’ papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Wisconsin. Ralph Walker, attending the gala from New York, prophesied “Some future day without doubt Taliesin will be made a shrine by the people of this state and of our nation.”⁷⁶

Conclusion

Wright’s education venture was a failure in many respects: it fell short of its original expectations to transform American industry and redefine the products of American culture; it never acquired the international scope Wright originally had desired for it; the desire to “build better people” never supplanted Wright’s desire to build better buildings. As a school, it had a dismal graduation rate, had anyone bothered to keep track. It has also been viewed as a failure in the sense of an architectural lineage, having never produced, Vincent Scully was the first to point out, a worthy successor to Wright. Scully attributed this to the fact that Wright didn’t actually teach: so keen was the architect to produce magical masterpieces, he never revealed the process of his design inspiration and development.⁷⁷ Even though succession was never stated as an intention of the school, Wright’s promise to inculcate the imagination and creativity of individuals and to facilitate their becoming fully realized selves—self-possessed in other words—similarly never stated that the “self” the apprentices were progressing toward was Wright’s.

⁷⁶ *The Wisconsin State Journal*, February 11, 1955, p1.

⁷⁷ Scully, Introduction to *The Nature of Frank Lloyd Wright*, edited by Carol R. Bolon, Robert S. Nelson, and Linda Seidel.

As a business, however, the Foundation could be considered successful, having supported Wright, his family, and many apprentices for decades. That it was held together, as Keith McCutcheon so presciently wrote in his early announcement of the school, by Wright's personality rather than his abilities to teach, points to the ways it continued an American tradition of business leadership in the first half of the twentieth century. And while professing, on the one hand, that American business was culturally bereft, a source of international embarrassment, he was also, on the other hand, a full and willing participant. What Wright offered, from his bankrupt desperation behind the Educational Center for Creative Arts—undoubtedly a “vulgar” business buoyed by the cultural aura of education—was a combination of the two by promising to help “make” the whole man, the grown-up version of the whole child, the cultural version of the self-made man. The Fellowship was never, in Wright's eyes, purely education, just a vocational school, in preparation for the doldrums of industrial employment, nor was it the intellectual rigor of “dead knowledge” that might have described some of the programs at the University of Wisconsin. Modeled after his own life, and combining his own and only two assets, land and self, Wright created a business of the self and added what was missing in the commodity of the self-made: the economic value of creativity. The value of creativity was made explicit upon Wright's threat of departure from Wisconsin: one creative leader's presence was considered a greater good than his tax contribution to the public good. Even more, the American entrepreneur was redefined, as Warren Buffett's quote

at the head of this chapter attests: to be an entrepreneur was not to be savvy, strategic, or calculating, but creative.

The doubling of Frank Lloyd Wright, once so distinguished by the appearance of his singular and individual possessed self, into the formal organization of The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, exemplified the direction of American business in the twentieth century from possessive individualism to corporation-as-person. And though the trial court's judgment acknowledged the personal dominance of Frank Lloyd Wright over his corporate entity, it also acknowledged the foundation's own rights and regulations. Under the law, Frank Lloyd Wright became both self and non-self, each recognized as an incorporation of Frank Lloyd Wright's personhood, but with varying degrees of authority and autonomy.

In his article "Corporate Abstraction," John Harwood criticizes the fact that the discipline of architecture has not yet come to terms with the corporation; architects and architectural historians, he claims, have avoided their responsibility to investigate and engage with the material realities produced by this "modern business enterprise" by dismissing it as an abstraction.⁷⁸ Harwood's pragmatist bent is after John Dewey, who, in 1926, wrote "The Historic Background of Corporate Legal Personality" and effectively side-stepped the problem of corporate personhood. Person, Dewey wrote, signifies whatever the law makes it signify. In

⁷⁸ John Harwood, "Corporate Abstraction." Harwood's article, which demands that architecture deal with the corporation instead of hiding behind its abstraction, does a number of things: it traces the historiography of the architect's displacement by the corporation through John Summerson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock; it explains how architects like Wright and Mies were called upon to domesticate the abstraction of the postwar world; and it demonstrates, through a detailed explanation of the three main theories of corporate ontology, why the corporation has evaded a singular definition for so long.

other words, understanding the ontological abstraction of the corporation was a theoretical problem, and it was less important than understanding the social consequences of granting it certain rights and duties. What mattered, according to Dewey, were the material consequences of material facts; a corporation is, therefore, what it does.⁷⁹

In terms of Wright's corporation, the defense attorneys' investigation into its nature did actually illuminate the otherwise black-box abstraction of the American corporation. If Judge Kopp's verdict had been handed down against Wright, Inc., in 1927, it might have served as evidence of the struggle to understand the nature of a business enterprise made up of multiple individuals and a shared goal. But after Dewey's consequential essay, the nature of the corporation was no longer at issue.⁸⁰ Kopp's 1953 judgment against The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, nearly a decade after Peter Drucker's *The Concept of the Corporation* had popularized a new sociology of the enterprise, was not an attempt to settle a theoretical question but rather to assess it in terms of its material facts: the nature of the corporation was a functional extension of the person of Frank Lloyd Wright, not a distinct and separate entity with a distinct and separate legal personality. In fact, though the lawsuit is rarely cited in architectural histories, it is often used as a legal precedent to ensure exactly what Dewey argued for in 1926: that in "deciding whether or not an organization meets the requirements

⁷⁹ See Harwood and also John Dewey, "The Historic Background of Corporate Legal Personality."

⁸⁰ The "real entity" theory of corporations was widely accepted, Margaret Blair writes in "Corporate Personhood and the Corporate Persona," from 1920–1980, at which point legal scholars began to use economic arguments to offer new interpretations to legal questions and established a new theory of "contractual devices." See Blair, p807-808.

for exemption, the assessor must look to the actual activities or dominant purpose of the organization. The assessor should be more concerned with what the organization actually does rather than what it says it does in its constitution or bylaws.”⁸¹

The material consequences of the still-extant Foundation are important because the Foundation mediates our contemporary understanding of Wright. The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, which outlived its most dominant and eponymous member, is the current owner of both of the properties Wright considered headquarters: Taliesin in Wisconsin, and Taliesin West, in Arizona. Until the 2017 sale of Wright’s archive to the combined resources of the Museum of Modern Art and Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University, it also organized, managed, and facilitated the use of Wright’s personal papers, drawings, models, and intellectual property. It holds the trademark for the names Frank Lloyd Wright and Taliesin, and copyright to all of Wright’s designs, as well as rights of publicity associated with his name, likeness, voice, signature, and visual representation. It also maintains a licensing program that promotes “beautifully designed products” that “inspire people to discover and embrace an architecture for better living through meaningful connections to nature, the arts, and each other.”⁸²

⁸¹ Citations are numerous; this quote is taken from “Kickers of Wisconsin, Inc., Plaintiff-Appellant versus City of Milwaukee, Defendant-Respondent,” WL18237405, February 21, 1995.

⁸² The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation maintains a website, www.franklloydwright.org, that details the many programs for preserving Wright’s legacy.

In the years before his death, Wright expressed a desire for the Taliesin Fellowship's dissolution after he was no longer around to lead it. But when he died in 1959, his will instructed the opposite.⁸³ His wife Olgivanna took over responsibility for its operation, and the senior apprentices—Wes Peters, Jack Howe, John de Koven Hill, John Rattenbury, Tom Casey, and Kenn Lockhart—maintained the practice as "Taliesin Associated Architects." Perhaps it is an unsurprising result to the unfolding of this narrative of education that the Foundation is no longer in charge of that particular component of the Taliesin Fellowship. The Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture at Taliesin, as it was known after Wright's death, was renamed The School of Architecture at Taliesin when it partially split from the Foundation, and is now known, having no relationship with the Foundation, as the School of Architecture. Not unlike Wright's own biographical story, the school was unable to remain at Taliesin and Taliesin West—the Foundation did not renew its lease—and the program has repaired to another site in the desert. Its future as a product of Frank Lloyd Wright's learn-by-doing pedagogy remains uncertain.

⁸³ The offhand reference of Wright changing his mind is referenced in Friedland and Zellman; their understanding of his change of heart is based on assumptions of Olgivanna's interference.

CHAPTER 3

The Marin County Civic Center, Reputation, and the Public Creation of Wright

Introduction

*"... And we felt it was okay to have Mr. Wright take care of the design. We didn't realize how costly it would be, or what it would look like. But then we thought he would be a good man because he, he's real famous."*¹

In Henry-Russell Hitchcock's 1947 analysis of the transformation of modes of postwar architectural production, "The Architecture of Bureaucracy & the Architecture of Genius," Frank Lloyd Wright serves as a model for the latter genitive. Hitchcock's piece was published the year after Peter Drucker's *Concept of the Corporation*, which described the new patterns of organizations and institutions in society. Both Hitchcock and Drucker were interested in how modes of production reconfigured long-accepted traditions; Hitchcock drew a categorical line between the work of someone like Frank Lloyd Wright, whose architecture was defined by Wright's own personal expression and singular vision, and the work of a firm led by someone like Albert Kahn, whose personal expression had no place in the production of the large-scale, complex, and efficient machine-like buildings the office designed.² It was an error of logic, in Hitchcock's opinion, to compare a work like the Guggenheim to an airplane hanger, traditionally assessed according to its temporal alignment with "modernity," as each was

¹ Oral History with Marin County resident Wat Takeshita, reporter for the *Independent Journal*, April 12, 2004. Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.

² Henry-Russell Hitchcock, "The Architecture of Bureaucracy and the Architecture of Genius," pp. 3-6. Hitchcock's analysis is based on the distinction between beauty and amenity in architecture; the first a monumental and singular expression, the second imitating the fractured specialization of the postwar world. It is a specious distinction, and Hitchcock admits that all architecture after WWII is corporate architecture. For descriptions of relations between office organizations and their output, see Michael Osman, "Regulation through Paperwork," in *Modernism's Visible Hand*.

operating under a different notion of authorship. Hitchcock's admonition never quite took hold—as many historians have noted, history favors the individual—replete with biography, monograph, personality.³

In architectural history, as well as American society, the corporation was viewed with skepticism. Its lack of identifiable personality was a sign that it had co-opted individuality and forced it into assimilation for the greater pursuit of commerce. It was somehow against the national system of beliefs, which privileged so profoundly the interests and purposes of the individual, while also a direct result of that same system more loosely understood as free enterprise. It had become, Drucker pointed out, the representative social institution of America, a privately-owned, for-profit condition of the competitive market of "Big Business."⁴ But the organizational method of the corporation was outmatched by its values, held dear in American society: how the corporation, run by average people and notable for its dispersed responsibility, and its acknowledged—foundational, even—self-interest, namely profit, was simply a scalar manifestation of what was good for the country. The founding principle of individualism was rendered obsolete by means of its own pursuits of freedom, replaced by a soulless but organized mass society of capital production.

Though Wright was not exempt from this pervasive current of consolidation, he "performed" the role of the individual, to use the theory of Erving Goffman, so convincingly that even his own corporation, the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, was legitimized in court as

³ See, for instance, Timothy Hyde, Michael Kubo, and John Harwood.

⁴ Drucker uses the term "Big Business" extracted from its colloquial and emotional overtones: "the physical and technological unit of production, whether organized in a privately-owned corporation under a competitive free-enterprise system or as a government-owned trust as in Russia." See Drucker, p4.

an extension of his own selfhood.⁵ Goffman's sociological lens analyzed the presentation of the individual as he or she attempted to convince people around them of the character they played; these are characteristics that are important to Wright's narrative, as evidenced by their repetition therein: his capes, canes, and caps, his "honest arrogance" about his skill and limitless creativity, his ability to "shake a design out of his sleeve," the reciprocal mistrust between Wright and established institutions of architecture. At every turn, Wright's own characterizations confirmed the values of his individuality, his genius—often relying on those archaic symbols passed down through collective memory. The performance was convincing: even Hitchcock, who *also participated* in the production of Wright's image—against Wright's persona in the curation and catalogue of MoMA's 1932 International Style show and then, after reconsideration, on behalf of it in the 1942 book *In the Nature of Materials*—was unable to see the relation between personality and means of production.

Of course the production of architecture is not as reductive as Hitchcock wished. But what the genius and the bureaucrat shared was a reliance on their reputation: as validation, as advertisement, as ego. The disciplinary importance of reputation is substantial: often it serves as an alibi of genius, as it did for Brunelleschi, known for his *ingenium*; its lack, or total anonymity, is deployed as evidence of the inherent perils of mechanization recognized by Sigfried Giedion.⁶ Reputation is often thought of as a professional judgement, or assessment among peers, but among architects, it is with clients that reputation has value. Yet its language is slippery, especially with regard to agency: it is gained, protected, made, secured, spread;

⁵ See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*.

⁶ Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, 1948.

something owed but not owned. The noun points outside of itself, outside of its referent, and to a larger audience: to a client, certainly, or to the public of a building, or even to the media, which is responsible for the means of its circulation. It is therefore in a constant state of re-definition and multiplicity, informed by inputs, weighted by mediation and management. It is, as shown in the above quote, a disembodied and recursive self, a constant flux of fame and reputation judged to be intrinsically good.

Wright was never in front of his reputation, despite—or perhaps because of—the symbolic power he and others had granted his performance of personality. Though he had shown both skill, the basis for architectural reputation, and novelty, as noted in accounts of his sometimes “bizarre” Oak Park designs, his *fame* hinged on the extra-disciplinary accounts of his personal life: that he let his children choose their own names; that his affair with Mamah Cheney was “simply a case of a vampire”; the headline describing a murder at Taliesin “Mrs. Cheney and Five Others Slain”; and countless appearances of hapless and lovelorn affairs, including infidelities, deportation, destruction of property, etc.⁷ Rather than relying on the visual appearance and function of public buildings to determine how the image of the architect was publicly recognized, Wright’s public had to reconcile the asymmetry between the domestic private sphere of his personal home and his designed domesticities—a fascinating incongruity.

Wright’s dense portfolio contains only a few public buildings, a fact he bemoaned often, and especially while working on Broadacre City, his decentralized and idealized design for a

⁷ The *Chicago Tribune* was the newspaper in which Wright’s name frequently appeared, usually not for his architectural accomplishments, which were more often published in architectural journals. These descriptions of Wright’s life were pulled from the *Tribune*, respectively: August 3, 1910; November 7, 1909; August 16, 1914. On the relationship of fame to reputation in architecture, see Williamson, *American Architects and the Mechanics of Fame*; Wright tops her “Index of Fame.”

democratic American landscape. American democracy and the roles of both architecture and the architect in an American democracy were constant and consistent topics in his writing and lectures. He regretted his lack of opportunity to demonstrate these designs, and so too have his devotees, wistful to have seen these ideas in built form, and to have seen Wright's individual contribution to a national mass culture actualized. Despite the frequent moniker of "most famous American architect," Wright's proposed contributions to the American public sphere had often been cancelled, and his reputation therefore relegated to and by individual clients.

One project got past the drawing board: the Marin City Civic Center, in Marin County, California. Not only was it one of few public buildings, and therefore arguably subject to public criticism, it was also one of Wright's last designs; groundbreaking occurred less than a year after his death. Though not as popular as some of his other large-scale projects, the history of the Marin County Civic Center has mainly been transcribed in two books: *The Bridge and the Building*, by Evelyn Morris Radford, and *An Architecture For Democracy*, by Aaron Green. Both of these have shaped the complicated and contentious story of the building, and both offered a story of Wright's triumph for democracy. Radford's text exalted the exceptionality of the individual—Wright, certainly, but also the woman who shepherded the building into approval and construction, Marin County supervisor Vera Schultz. Green's text attempts to reconcile Wright's lengthy statements on democracy with the functional and aesthetic design of the civic center. Green, a former apprentice of Wright's who lived in the Bay Area, was instrumental not only in the acquisition of the commission, but also in its execution.

The construction of the civic center, however, also marks a fascinating intersection of Wright's career and American public sentiment. As Hitchcock revealed in his isolated architectural argument, a new tension over the role of the individual and his or her place in an increasingly anonymous, technocratic society defined the postwar period in America. Where did the exceptional individual belong in this society when the infrastructure appeared to preclude such expression? But also, what kind of influence was individuality when conformity seemed to offer economic and social satisfaction? These questions framed Marin County's selection of an architect in 1957, when the US was on high alert for any Soviet influence, including any and all subversion that could be attributed to Communism. Wright's name, in fact, had already appeared in a number of reports sent to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and its affiliated branches over many decades of his career. Reputation took on outsized importance.

When Wright was hired by Marin County, there was a faction of resistance to his selection, precisely on account of the issue of reputation. Many members of the county organization—bureaucrats desiring to be and to be seen as economical—still preferred Wright for his representative performance as an individual, demonstrating the persistent value of the individual as an “ideal type” in America. The opponents of Wright's selection as architect argued their case under the alibi of the taxpayer: Wright's accepted fee, ten percent, was much higher than the average for a municipal contract. Underlying the resistance, however, to profligate financial decisions was also a resistance to the values that Wright appeared to uphold. In Marin, aims for the planned civic center were few: to provide enough space to consolidate city offices; to create something modern that would accommodate the urbane

professional choosing to live in the county as well as represent the role of progressive county services; and to be flexible enough to accommodate unknown futures. But Wright, as those who became branded as “reactionaries” claimed, was too much genius and not enough bureaucrat: they resisted his individuality as well as his exceptionality—and its moral and financial costs. His plans, one Marinite claimed, were “the Rolls Royce type,” and the people should be able to choose if they want those or “a Buick-type, or even a Chevrolet-type.”⁸

The previous chapter showed how Wright’s corporation was both self and non-self, subject to rules and regulations accordingly, an extension of his individual person but with varying degrees of authority and autonomy. This chapter looks at a moment when the idea of Wright, namely, his reputation, takes on authority in spite of Wright’s own physical presence. Untethered, reputation as self becomes a sign of the condition of a new world, a new media environment—a hyperreality, as Jean Baudrillard described it, where the line between the real and the imagined is not only erased but shown to be a specious distinction from the start. Like Wright’s posthumous role in American architecture, the self of reputation is mythic, stubborn, multiplied.

Marin County and a New Civic Center

The hilly and picturesque peninsula of Marin County sits north of San Francisco via the Golden Gate Bridge and south of Sonoma County, catching fog passing between the Pacific Ocean and San Pablo Bay. The county is home to the Golden Gate Bridge, the redwoods of Muir Woods, San Quentin Prison, and the old mission of San Rafael. Its sandy beaches, mountain

⁸ “On Wright Plan Vote,” *Daily Independent Journal*, May 9, 1958.

trails, and hidden canyons had long offered quiet green solitude to those disinclined to San Francisco's density. Prior to the 1940s, the east side of the county was home to artists and ferrying newspapermen and second home to the vacationing wealthy, all of whom were attracted to the beauty of the land and ethic of the semi-rural life. The culture of Marin emerged from its garden and hiking clubs, outdoor performances and art clubs, each of which emphasized the protective ethos of natural conservation; Marin's major resource, as was oft-repeated, was the beauty of its environment—the climate, scenery, wild moorlands, rocky cliffs, and rolling grassy hills. By the 1950s, however, after a new wave of residents followed jobs to its naval shipyards and even more San Franciscans had opted for the semi-urban lifestyle, the county underwent a demographic change; new voices emerged, necessitating a new way of thinking about Marin's identity. As the population increased, so did the demand for county services, and soon, Marin's decentralized administration, housed in twelve different locations and well known for its way of "cracker-barrel" politics, appeared inefficient and antiquated, an anchor of frustration for the newly arrived and modern sophisticate.

In early 1952, the Board of Supervisors—the group of five administrators who oversaw the county's governance—authorized a study of public buildings, including an assessment of the need for a new civic center, and a comparison of two potential options: either a proposed addition to the then-present courthouse in the county seat of San Rafael, or the selection of a new site and new construction. The Courthouse block was already dense and traffic and parking already congested, but a plan had been drawn up for proposed additions of 80,000 square feet split in two wings. The alternative option, a new government center, would group together various municipal services. According to the report, the latter was economically and

functionally advantageous and, through “imposing architecture” and landscaping, could express the civic consciousness that would be an inspiration and source of pride to the community. The report also included a proposed master plan for the new government center, prepared by Hammond, Woodbury, and Smith: a campus comprising two- and three-story steel and glass boxes, its contemporary modern aesthetic a sign of the “flexibility, expandability, and convenience to be expected of modern office buildings,” as desired by the Planning Commission. The language of the comparison revealed the Commission was obviously in favor of new construction, particularly on account of the aesthetic of contemporary modern architecture. Their findings were submitted with a recommendation to retain the Courthouse for judiciary functions and select offices, but to consolidate all other county programs in new construction. They recommended that the board consider one of four sites, select a supervising architect, put the financing program before voters in November and, once secured, authorize individual architects to design and prepare drawings for each building.

Two months later, the issue went to a vote, and both proposed bond measures for the civic center—a \$1,500,000 addition to the Courthouse and the scheme for new construction in excess of \$2 million—failed in the November election. But Vera Schultz, who had campaigned for a new kind of government in Marin, one that was future-oriented and representative of the exceptional culture of Marin, won a seat on the Board of Supervisors as the third district representative. She had campaigned on a platform of better roads, more flood control, better planning needs and building codes, fair assessments, and a more efficient county administration. When she joined the four other men on the board—Chairman William D. Fusselman, a candy maker from San Anselmo, Walter Castro, William Wright, and James Kehoe

—centralization of the county's scattered and outdated facilities was high on the agenda, and a site committee was appointed in early 1953.

By mid-year, the committee had found a site and the board had authorized a “pay as you go” financing scheme, but the formal offer on what was known as the Scettrini Ranch was not finalized until three years later, after new elections replaced supervisors Wright and Kehoe with William Gness and James Marshall. The ranch, 140 acres of rolling hills northeast of the city of San Rafael, was selected for its central location and accessibility, affordability, its ability to accommodate both the civic center and the county fairgrounds as well as required parking, and because its geography was an expression of Marin County’s own natural diversity—“a beautiful combination of hills and marshes going down to the water.”⁹ For three years, however, William Fusselman, the board supervisor representing the second district, in office since 1942, had stalled the Scettrini purchase. He questioned the legality of leaving the municipal boundaries of the county seat, redirecting attention back toward the Courthouse block and the proposed courthouse wings. He offered new proposals constructing commercial properties that would finance the purchase of the old San Rafael military academy, or, alternately, constructing a new high rise office building in San Rafael. Fusselman was known for his old ways of personalized government; he and his constituents were hesitant to adopt the new identity of the county and its requisite pace of growth and modernization. His dissenting vote on the April 1956 Scettrini Ranch purchase hinted at the way the new civic center would be constructed, and the reason why this configuration of the board came to be known as the “4 to 1” board.

⁹ Caroline Livermore, “Civic Center Plan Good Government,” *Daily Independent Journal*, April 25, 1958.

Designing the Designer

The site committee was replaced with a newly appointed Civic Center Committee, charged with the task of selecting an architect. Again Fusselman proposed the Board wait until further financing was worked out as a concession to the county taxpayer, but he was also adamant that the project, whatever its pace, stay local. Within a month of the property acquisition, nearly thirty local architects gathered to offer their services. One local architect, Henry Schubart—who had worked with the county on the courthouse—did not apply for the job. Instead, he urged the Board to hire an architect “of national stature” to be the supervising architect for the project. He felt his firm, despite its notable portfolio, was not qualified to take on such a large endeavor. “Someone of great experience and judgement is needed as a guiding light,” he said, and could then hire individual architects for individual buildings to ensure variety, interest, and opportunity for the center to become “an attraction for the whole Bay Area.”

By July of 1956, over Fusselman’s objections, the Board had accepted more than two dozen RFQs from architects interested in the project. Most were local to the Bay Area and had assembled teams to offer comprehensive planning and engineering: Donald Hardison, collaborating with structural engineer Michael Pregnoff, civil engineer William Moore, and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin; Hammond and Woodbury, who had proposed a master plan campus for the Public Buildings Report, teamed with Gromme, Mulvin & Priestly, Eugene Crawford, Paul Overmire, and Katy and Paul Steinmetz as “Associated Marin Architects and Land Planners”; San Francisco firm Malone & Hooper paired with two local firms from San

Rafael, architect Gordon Phillips, and civil engineers Wilsey & Ham.¹⁰ In addition to detailing the scope of the program and procedure of the master plan phase, each submission emphasized the teams' capabilities, professionalism, flexibility, and accessibility. And though collaboration was assumed to be the preferred, if not necessary means of project design and management, many of the submissions also described the personal investment individual designers felt toward the Marin project. They had intimate knowledge of the county, many wrote, and as private citizens, "a sincere personal interest in the program."¹¹

The RFQs also highlighted accomplished portfolios of government contracts and public buildings. Most included photos of recently built work that acknowledged architecture's role in image-making: sleek, boxy, modern constructions that conveyed not only an awareness of contemporaneity—particularly in comparison to the Neoclassical courthouse in San Rafael—but also those modern tenets of transparency, economy and efficiency. Proposals listed choices of fireproof materials favored in postwar construction—structural steel, reinforced concrete, aluminum sash, sun-screened glass and porcelainized panels, noted the Jenkins, Mooser, and Sanders proposal—for their low maintenance cost and non-ostentatious appearance. Those that described interiors imagined low-ceilinged spaces—more cost-effective for heating and

¹⁰ Other applicants included William Wurster, the Dean of UC Berkeley, and his partners Bernardi and Emmons; Mitchell Van Bourg of Berkeley; Jack Buchter and Edward Schwabel; Wilsey and Ham; San Francisco architects Clyde Trudell, John Clay, John Reid, and John Warnecke; Malone and Hooper; Oran Jenkins, William Mooser, and S.E. Sanders; Callister and Rosse. See William Fusselman papers, Marin History Museum, and Board meeting notes from *Daily Independent Journal*, July 1956 and following.

¹¹ Associated Marin Architects and Land Planners RFQ. William Fusselman papers, Marin History Museum.

cooling—and office-like configurations assembled from demountable partitions, a shell of endless flexibility.

The Board of Supervisors interviewed those designers who passed the original screening of the Civic Center Committee, including New Yorker Walter Jacobs, of Michael Saphier Associates, an east-coast firm known for new methodologies in office planning.¹² The local suspicion to an outside specialist was recounted in the paper: “wouldn’t it be better to hire local architects and planners sympathetic to Marin County’s particular problems and character?”¹³ A sense of homogeneity emerged: the search process and consistency among applicants presented a clear aesthetic of contemporaneous “modern” government work—clean and straight lines that announced efficiency as well as the county’s awareness of future-oriented values—as well as its ethos—the product of a collaborative team of local and economically minded architects. By September, the board had passed a seven-step planning procedure that included site engineering, departmental relation and existing space analysis, and determining a method of financing construction. The vote, not unexpectedly, was 4 to 1.

Frank Lloyd Wright

Though many of the proposals seemed to offer the new sophisticate of Marin exactly what they were looking for, the civic center committee was uninspired. Mary Summers, who, in addition to her role as director of Planning, headed the committee, had asked many of the candidates their opinion of the site. Many responded—not atypically—with the suggestion of grading the

¹² Saphier, Lerner, Schindler was rebranded as SLS/Environetics in 1960, a combination of interior environment and cybernetics, and is known as ENV today.

¹³ “Civic Center Space Expert Hiring Rapped,” *Daily Independent Journal*, September 13, 1956.

hillside to a new level ground, a tabula rasa. Summers was also surprised by the responses she received to the question "Who on your staff will be designing this project?" Though the desired outcome of the search committee was a modern solution to a complex program, and though a workflow producing this implied efficiency, competence, and specialized labor, she could not understand the indefinite answers, that the particular designer would be allocated to the project contingent on his or her availability rather than their suitability to the particularities of the job. The search process revealed that it was important for the Marin committee to have a singular individual, rather than a corporate identity, responsible for the civic center, someone with modern aesthetics and efficiencies but also the specificity of the sole practitioner, who would match Marin's own uniqueness with their own interpretation. But Summers never articulated those distinctions. Instead, Frank Lloyd Wright's name first came up in response to a desire that she and Vera Schultz did articulate: that Marin County should have *the best*, and the best, according to the *House Beautiful* issue they had both recently read, was Wright.

Schultz wrote a letter of inquiry to Aaron Green, an architect in San Francisco who had recently been hired to design a low-rent housing project in Marin City with John Warnekce. Green was also a former apprentice of Wright and had an unusual arrangement with him, acting under the ambiguous title of "Frank Lloyd Wright's West Coast representative." In February of 1957, Green described the Marin project to Wright; it was an opportunity for Wright's first executed governmental design, also a five million-dollar, multi-phase project. Wright's interest in the project, however, came with terms, and after the committee met with Green, their letter of recommendation to the Board made clear that "Mr. Wright would be interested but not in the capacity originally considered by the committee and presented to the

board.” Wright would only enter talks if and when the Board had concluded talks with other architects—he did not compete—and he would design not only the master plan but also all of the buildings, the engineering, and the landscape. And his fee, they noted in their recommendation, was ten percent of this construction, two percent higher than the usual fee charged for the design of a public building.

The recommendation report was tabled for months, though when Wright came to town to lecture at the University of California Berkeley, four supervisors and four members of the civic center committee came to meet with him in Green’s San Francisco office. Summers recalled the meeting: “He sat down at a drafting table, looked at the Board of Supervisors, and began teaching; he couldn’t stop teaching.... He started out by telling us what architecture was, what it could do in expressing the culture of Marin County, how it should fit in with the landscape we had...”¹⁴ Immediately, the group was convinced they had found their architect. But, unwilling to be persuaded by his performance alone, they performed their own due diligence. They asked who in the office would be designing the plans and were guaranteed that “if it was our desire to have the unique architecture of Mr. Wright, we were assured of this through his organizational setup.”¹⁵ Each building idea was his own, declared Wright, and he turned a project over to his draftsmen only after his design concept was complete. They also asked if it were true that he was “irascible” and unable to stay within a budget. To both, Wright responded that he had no unhappy clients. With a concluding flourish, Wright promised the

¹⁴ Mary Summers, Oral History, <http://contentdm.marinlibrary.org/digital/collection/ohp/id/1465/rec/5>.

¹⁵ Mary Summers, letter of recommendation to Marin County Board of Supervisors, July 30, 1957, Frank Lloyd Wright & the Marin County Civic Center Collections.

Board that the civic center would be something unique to and expressive of the personality of Marin.

Only one of the Board of Supervisors balked at the idea of hiring Wright. Fusselman had not gone to the meeting in San Francisco, irritated that Wright did not travel to the supervisors as all the other candidates had done. He reminded his fellow board members that Wright was everything they had not wanted—not economical, not local, and most of all, not affordable; there were plenty of local architects, he countered, who were willing to work for 8 percent. He suggested that a competition would allow the right candidate to emerge. But he went on, pointing out that Wright's age "might cause him to be unable to complete the project if he were selected," and that Marin had been looking for "good, solid arrangements for county offices," and not "an architectural showpiece."¹⁶ Fusselman's multi-faceted argument was mounted, supposedly, on behalf of the taxpayer, whose concerns were echoed by others in the local paper, protesting any sort of payment of an extra fee for Mr. Wright's reputation.¹⁷ Not only was Wright's reputation intangible enough to warrant extra payment, it was also the wrong kind of reputation. The local veterans chapter, for instance, which had been allocated a county tax for a building of their own at the site, refused to allow Wright's name and contestable war record to dishonor their building.

Perhaps as a counterpoint to Wright, or simply motivated by free-market competition, Fusselman suggested other "top architects" be considered, and in early June he personally

¹⁶ "Fusselman Objects to Frank Lloyd Wright," *Daily Independent Journal*, March 6, 1957, p1.

¹⁷ Joseph E. Murray, Letter to the editor, "Beware of Wright Architect Deal." *Daily Independent Journal* March 8, 1957, p8.

reached out to Richard Neutra. A former employee of Wright's, Neutra was known for his clean lines and attention to clients; the local paper described him as "one of the seven most prominent architects in the world," and, more importantly, noted that he had recently re-established a collaborative agreement with San Rafael architect Robert Severin.¹⁸ In mid-June, Neutra and his partner Robert Alexander made a deferential visit to Marin to appear before their potential client, who, they offered, "more than the architects... are responsible for the success of outstanding projects which bring happiness to the people." They pitched an approach to the civic center that would preserve Marin's best and specific assets, much like Wright had promised; in every other way their bid was ostensibly a counter-argument to hiring Wright. "Since successful and reliable building design depends these days so much on an organization," the introductory letter from Alexander stated, "rather than on one individual as it once did, we thought you would be interested in the details about our organization and the ideals and principles which motivate it." They claimed they would build the "project which will help put San Rafael on the map" with as much participation from local architects as possible, all for an 8% fee. In addition to meeting the supervisors, Neutra was invited to speak at the sixth annual San Rafael service luncheon at Hamie's Chuck Wagon, where he encouraged residents of the growing county to offer their own participation and collaboration in determining the vision of the county's future.

Neutra's RFQ highlighted his firm's experience, efficiency, and collaborative methodology, richly illustrated by a select but diverse portfolio of proof: civic buildings, master

¹⁸ *Daily Independent Journal*, June 6, 1957, p25. For a report of Severin's collaboration, see *DIJ* December 13, 1956, p9.

planning projects, residential developments, educational facilities. Neutra's submission was adeptly assembled for the board of supervisors, asserting capable and transparent professional services. While promising "advanced" design, the architects also acknowledged the unexpected dividends that accompanied it: the value that recognition and accolades brought to their clients, which was "worth far more than the cost of design." While the clients were the obvious beneficiaries of these awards, the laborious preparation of submitting the design fell to the architects, conveniently included in their services.

The civic center committee made a formal recommendation to hire Wright at the end of July with a letter demonstrating deep reflection on Marin, its needs, and their offer of a solution. Wright, they claimed, was the one who could acknowledge Marin's natural beauty and particular characteristics of the county, who could create an architecture that was progressive, unique, and timeless—and also an appropriate symbol of the civic center's mission: convenient and economical public service.¹⁹ Not only did Wright start with the importance of land—a methodology the committee made particular note of, because, after all, the beauty of the land was Marin's "natural resource"—he also had a proven track record of designing for the future, of anticipating practical needs and enclosing them in "inspiringly designed buildings," the committee described. Board members voted 4 to 1 to authorize contract negotiations with the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

The committee also addressed the independent criticisms that had been levied against their choice with evidence gathered through personal verification. Wright's age, they

¹⁹ Mary Summers, "Memo, from Civic Center Committee to Marin County Board of Supervisors," July 30, 1957.

acknowledged, was not indicative of the “mentally alert, physically active, vital man,” who read blueprints without glasses. As a concession, though, they included in the contract a stipulation that the county retained the rights to the master plan and could proceed accordingly, should Wright’s services become “unavailable.” As if a checklist, they addressed each of Fusselman’s claims: though the contract was with the Foundation, they acknowledged, Wright alone would be the designer of the civic center, not a member of his staff; his fee, 10%, was not actually more than the 8% of other architects considering what was included in terms of service and also in terms of experience; his slow pace of design was determined not to be the case, as Wright did not have to wait “for endless conferences of subordinates” to review proposals, and because his dedicated staff lived on site, they were therefore available “for night and weekend work to meet deadlines.” Wright’s tendency to go over budget was similarly disproven by the committee’s direct contact with clients, who attested to the fact that Wright was “easy, not difficult” to work with, and that they were satisfied with his work—this was perhaps related to Aaron Green’s terse telegraph to Gene Masselink requesting a “list of happy clients, with asterisk next to the happiest ones.”²⁰

Fusselman was still unconvinced by Wright—and also his whole operation. He pointed out discrepancies that had been smoothed over by his colleagues’ enthusiasm: how could Wright legally sign a contract on behalf of the Foundation that owned his individual services? He assumed, as Wright had intended, that the corporation of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation was separate and distinct from the person of Frank Lloyd Wright. The Board of Supervisors reached out to the Foundation to quell Fusselman’s doubt, and asked for written

²⁰ Green to Masselink, May 28, 1957.

confirmation from the foundation—in the form of its bylaws or a resolution of the board of directors—that Wright was legally allowed to sign on its behalf. Though the requested documentation was not provided, and likely did not exist in the expected form, Wes Peters did send a copy of the articles of incorporation, describing the mission of the Taliesin Fellowship to “encourage the fine arts.” It satisfied most of the Board and its legal counsel, but Fusselman heeded the language (and not, as Judge Kopp concluded, the actions of said corporation), and continued: “How does that give the foundation the right to engage in commerce—to contract for a man’s services and charge for it? This says it was formed to teach.”²¹ In each case, as if to convince themselves that there was a higher order of truth, the civic center committee avoided the hearsay of reputation and personally tracked down verifiable proof.

Wright meets Marin

Wright arrived in Marin County for a ceremonious contract signing and site visit at the end of July. Nearly 600 residents gathered in the auditorium of San Rafael High School to hear Wright’s personal remarks on his “mission to save Marin County,” as he described it. His presence was understood as confirmation of Wright’s personal participation in the civic center project—that he, in his dark suit, continental cross necktie, and shock of white hair, was not simply an abstract entity hired for professional services—an attribute more likely of his stage companions, in understated flannel suits, striped ties and polite pocket squares. Having long since perfected the performance of his individualistic persona, he controlled the dais with

²¹ “Fusselman Casts New Doubt on Validity of Wright Pact,” *Daily Independent Journal*, August 28, 1957.

exceptional irreverence, constantly condoned by the laughter of the audience. He addressed some of the issues he knew to be contentious in the civic center problem: the traffic problem and the need for space; Marin's natural beauty and how to preserve it; his clients' satisfaction with his work; the need to build for the future and the importance of architectural experience in assessing these needs. He offered his unique approach as a solution: his philosophy of organic architecture would address these needs by building from the inside out. Captivated, the audience was convinced by the credibility of this persona. Wright had successfully managed his public image.

Tensions between those charmed by Wright and those not came to a head the following day at a board meeting that was meant to be the occasion for the supervisors to sign the contract. Fusselman, who had not attended the meeting at the High School the previous night, and who had voted "no" on Wright's agreement, was adamant that "the people have their say," and advertised the board meeting as a public hearing. That a contingent of the American Legion showed up, therefore, was unsurprising to Fusselman. That Bryson Reinhardt stood up as the meeting commenced with a letter detailing Wright's communist activities also appeared unsurprising to Fusselman. The rest of the board, however, and Wright himself, were stunned.

Reinhardt, a resident of Mill Valley, had days before sent a letter to the *Independent Journal* editor, objecting to the price of Wright's employment and the "starry-eyed dreamers" who were "victims of a psychotic obsession that they have at last found the indispensable man" in Frank Lloyd Wright. Not only should the Marin taxpayers not be forced to pay for Wright's services when there were plenty of good local architects, Reinhardt wrote, but Marin

could certainly not afford to employ an architect “so lacking in the quality of humility. No person lacking this quality could possibly create anything of enduring beauty.”²² At the meeting, County clerk George Jones began to read Reinhardt’s letter:

Frank Lloyd Wright, America’s best known architect, now in his 89th year, has a record of active and intensive support of communist views and enterprises. He belies the popular notion that youth alone is beguiled by the appeals of radicalism and subversion.

Wright expounded the Communist line on television. In the Daily Worker of October 20, 1953, on page 7, Frank Lloyd Wright was featured under the line ‘How a Celebrated Architect Shocked Jinx on Ike and Russia.’ This authoritative journalistic mouthpiece of the Communist conspiracy had good reasons to gloat over Wright’s performance on the television program (WNBT, Channel 4) of Jinx Falkenberg on October 16, 1953.²³

If the accusations sounded familiar to Wright, it’s because he had heard them countless times before. They were assembled for distribution by J. B. Matthews, a former investigator on McCarthy’s Un-American Activities Committee, deployable as necessary when Wright’s patriotism was a convenient issue. Reinhardt, amid chaos, was not permitted to continue beyond his opening lines. Wright, forced to confront the trappings of his own reputation, waved an angry cane at the insulting party. “I am what I am,” he said. “If you don’t like it, you can lump it.”

There is a recognized relationship between power and physical presence; Wright understood—if not also choreographed—this through decades of physical performance.²⁴ Wright ignored Reinhardt, and ignored the reputation Reinhardt had summoned by reading the

²² “Wright Dispute Still Hangs On,” *Daily Independent Journal*, July 31, 1957, p11.

²³ “Red Charge Stirs Wright to a Boil,” *The San Francisco Examiner*, August 3, 1957, p3.

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard described the relationship between power and presence, reality and simulation in “The Precession of Simulacra.”

Un-American report. He attempted to reconcile this public image with his inner moral character in a letter to the supervisors, dated two weeks later, dismissing the constituents of public opinion, the "common-man," and the ignorant voter. "We shall not try to placate the malice of the ignorant, however disguised, nor please the jealous," he wrote, "but do the best our 'know-how' can visualize in the remarkable circumstances."²⁵ What Wright did not understand, as evidenced in his refusal to stay present in the face of a contradictory image of himself, was that the lack of physical presence did not correlate to the lack of power. Each facet of his reputation, untethered to his physical presence, took on its own authority, its own reality. Effectively, Wright was dispossessed of a self: the authority of his public image became a product of the view of others.

The apparatus of reputation

Reputation exists in the sphere of information and travels independently of its referent. In this case, it crossed paths with Wright mid-air, as the architect returned home to Wisconsin, and Carroll E. Metzner, a lawyer from Madison, flew to Marin on vacation. Metzner was a representative in Wisconsin's state legislature and had been following Wright's appointment in Marin with personal—albeit "on behalf of the public"—interest. Metzner was a Fusselman of a different sort; since his appointment to city council in 1951, he had unsuccessfully opposed Wright's commission to design Monona Terrace, the civic center for Madison's waterfront. Having found a sympathetic confidant, Metzner reached out to Fusselman and was invited to discuss his dealings and feelings on Wright with the Marin supervisor on KTIM radio. (Figure

²⁵ Wright to the Board of Supervisors, August 16, 1958.

3.2) He could not, like Fusselman, claim that the reasons for his dislike of the architect were due to a sense of local obligation since Wright was commissioned to build Monona Terrace in his home state, but Metzner did claim that the structure, which looked “like Mickey Mouse ears,” was financially irresponsible and immediately over budget. He and some fellow Madison legislators took issue with Wright’s fee, which began at 10 percent and was compromised to 8%, still two points higher than the average city contract. Metzner mounted a campaign against Wright’s project, writing a bill that limited the height of buildings on state-owned property to twenty feet—eighty-two feet lower than Wright’s semi-circular design. When Governor Thomson signed Metzner’s bill into law in 1957, it effectively terminated Wright’s Monona Terrace design: one more foiled government contract.²⁶

The technology of the KTIM radio broadcast multiplied Metzner’s and Fusselman’s ability to create a different public image of Wright, but other technologies were deployed in his favor, like the “Citizens’ Committee for the County Center Association,” a new organization formed solely for its eponymous purpose. Co-chaired by engineer Harold Stockstad, of Tamalpais Valley, and William A. Steward, a San Francisco ad-man from Almonte, the organization prided itself on its own modernity. The group quickly launched a counter-campaign dismissing Wright’s critics as fossils and reactionaries, while clearly enumerating its own principles: to support the Board; to encourage acceptance of Wright’s plans; and to

²⁶ The bill was repealed two years later, but Monona Terrace was not constructed until 1993, with substantial changes from the first-proposed project. See Mollenhoff and Hamilton, *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Monona Terrace* for an account of similar dramas playing out in Madison. Monona was not the only failed government project and not the only time legal action prevented a Wright design from construction. Granted a contract for defense housing in Pittsfield, MA, Wright was fired through a change of policy, the Lanham Act, which he was told, in 1942, was “a neat device to get rid of you.” See Zenia Kovtal, “Opportunity Lost.”

disseminate correct information with a constructive advertising program. What resulted from the efforts was a slide show entitled "Marin's Greatest Hour," which crossed the county and was showcased at every available opportunity: PTA meetings, special interest groups, Junior League, and various village associations.²⁷ The show was slick—not unsurprising considering Steward's advertising talent—and was accompanied by a voice-over that gave "every conceivable argument for a Wright-designed government center," with views of the civic center site, the current crowded conditions of county offices, Wright's preliminary drawings, and images of designs already executed.²⁸ The campaign appeared to be successful; many meetings concluded with a favorable, albeit not unanimous, show of hands approving the design.

The controversy among Marin's scattered communities was played out in the local papers. When Wright's plans were displayed in March of 1958 and the public was invited to see them in the San Rafael auditorium, the offices of *The Daily Independent Journal*, the *Mill Valley Record*, and even the Attorney General were overwhelmed with letters. "Let's not Forget, Wright Works for the People of Marin" offered counter perspectives to "Marin's Overboard for Wright Plans" and "Wright Must Go"; "Marin's Taj Mahal" was published alongside "Cheapness Always 1st Consideration?" and "Amazing Frank Lloyd Wright Does it Again—For Marin." Citizens who were flabbergasted by the hydraulic lifts that turned the Fairground pool into a ballet stage were drowned out by the ecstatic neighbors who thought that Wright's

²⁷ "Citizens Group for Wright Plans Formed," *Daily Independent Journal*, April 26, 1958. Some accounts describe this slide show traveling the county in a bookmobile. During the controversy of 1961, this slide show was edited and relaunched as "Civic Center!"

²⁸ *Daily Independent Journal*, May 6, 1958.

design blended a dignified Roman aqueduct with a vision of life on Mars. A group of the disgruntled banded together under the name "Marin County Taxpayers Association" and led a charge to cancel Wright's contract via public election. Their direct addresses to "Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer" appeared regularly in the *Independent Journal*. (Figure 3.3)

Images of Wright showing off his plans appeared in the paper, captioned with multiple incarnations of the architect. (Figure 3.4) "Wright the visionary" showed Wright describing the simplicity of his design; "Wright the workman," was Wright pointing out details, holding papers under his arm; "Wright the comedian," was Wright as an everyman, cracking jokes to Vera Schultz and Walter Castro's laughter in the front of the room. The media environment surrounded Wright, imbuing each image, every utterance with fractured autonomy. His presence was managed by the media but also multiplied by it, transformed, in the process, into one of many realities, each representing a different authority, reproducible, irrational, and operational.²⁹

Death of the Architect

Wright died in April of 1959, about ten months before the scheduled groundbreaking of the first phase of Marin County's Civic Center, the Administration Building. The preliminary plans for the project had been approved the year before, and both the Foundation and Aaron Green's office were preparing working drawings for the first and second phases of the development, which were due at the beginning of July 1959. As designed, the Administration

²⁹ See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* and Timothy Hyde, "Some Evidence." Hyde quotes Hazlit in this piece: "the reputation ultimately, and often slowly affixed to works of genius is stamped upon them by authority, not by popular consent or the common sense of the world."

Building was a giant ship-like building, more than two hundred meters in length, three stories tall, with Wright's characteristic detail work—here, an exercise in circles, doubling as sun shading; the chiaroscuro of the interior void, lit from above; the rhythmic pattern of circles and arcs breaking up the length of the exterior and framing the views of the hills. Wright's design was what the Civic Center Committee had imagined, a unique and singular vision that was defined less by its predictable relation to current architectural trends and more by its personal interpretation of the program's specificity. Chosen for his reputation of genius, Wright delivered what was desired.

But was it Wright whose personal hand was behind the design? Upon the news of his death, the agreement he had signed with Marin County was called into question. Though the 1957 contract stated the county's relationship to Wright and the Foundation in no unclear terms—

... it is understood by the parties hereto that County is particularly desirous of obtaining the special talents and personal services of Frank Lloyd Wright because of the unique and progressive nature of the design work performed by him. The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation has been made a party to this Agreement for the sole reason that said Foundation has represented to the County that it is the exclusive owner of the services of Frank Lloyd Wright and that such services are available to County only if the Foundation is made such a party. Notwithstanding this fact, both Frank Lloyd Wright personally and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation do hereby represent and agree that the personal services of Frank Lloyd Wright shall be devoted to this contract in the same fashion and to the same extent as would be the case if this Agreement were solely between County as owner, on the one hand, Frank Lloyd Wright as architect on the other. Frank Lloyd Wright, personally, shall be responsible for all work performed under this contract and shall devote his personal services to preparation of the Master Plan, designs of the various building and structures,

*conferring with the County's Board of Supervisors, preparation of plans and specifications and over-all supervision of construction...*³⁰

—a number of issues were raised upon the architect's death. The execution, if not also the design, of the development's later phases was questioned; only those projects that Wright had designed were protected under the contract—the Administration Building and the Hall of Justice, which would be constructed during Phase II and was designed to connect to the dome at the end of the Administration Building. The supervisors and their counsel were unclear if the Foundation still existed upon Wright's death, and if so, who would fulfill his role in the organization. Fusselman, who had voted against nearly every item related to the new Civic Center, not only questioned the validity of the contract since Wright's signature had been the authorization for both his work and that of the Foundation, but also the authority of the development drawings. He expressed "considerable doubt" that Wright had had a personal role in the designing of the projects thus far, and he raised a motion to stop the work immediately in order to assess the current state of the drawings. Though Fusselman had never acknowledged Wright's special status like others had, his inspection of the plans implied his desire to differentiate authorship of the design, perhaps which parts were genius and which parts bureaucratic. None of his fellow supervisors, however, seconded.

In his will, Wright had made preparations for the Foundation to continue his work. Wes Peters, Jack Howe, John de Koven Hill, John Rattenbury, Tom Casey, and Kenn Lockhart took

³⁰ "Agreement for Architectural Services" between The County of Marin and Frank Lloyd Wright and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, jointly referred to as "architect," signed on July 30, 1957. Frank Lloyd Wright & the Marin County Civic Center Collections at the Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library.

over the practice, newly renamed The Taliesin Associated Architects.³¹ But, Fusselman argued, Taliesin Associated Architects were no different from the other firms who had applied for the job; he used Wright's death as an opportunity to reassert his challenge to the ten-percent architectural fee. Though he had never wanted to pay Wright the extra two percent, Fusselman *certainly* didn't see the value in paying extra for the services of a non-Frank Lloyd Wright entity. Why, he offered, should the county continue to pay a premium to Wright's successors when *in Wright's own words* the design capabilities of the men and women at the Foundation were lacking? He penned a letter to the Board, plucking bits of evidence from the many obituaries circling about in order to question the use—seemingly put toward an excessive lifestyle—and the value—seemingly for the capabilities of one man—of the extra two-percent fee:

... Around them were 65 apprentices, who happily farmed the vegetables, waited on table [sic], and washed the family laundry for the privileges of having a bench in Wright's drafting room. Draftsmen found themselves singing in the a cappella choir of 30 voices, playing in orchestra and quartet, performing with dance groups. Wright treated them all as extensions of his hand, told them... "You can stay here for years and never touch the bottom, sides, or top of the great principles at work here"... They say I am the world's greatest architect. Perhaps I am. But who else is there? If architecture is what I conceive it to be, there has never been another architect"...³²

Fusselman concluded that the abilities of the Foundation members filling the void Wright left behind were insufficient to warrant an above-average fee and, on top of it, that the Civic

³¹ Wright had originally planned to discontinue the Foundation and Fellowship when he was no longer able to act as its head and brand. Friedland and Zellman offer an interpretation that Olgivanna changed his mind. She became President of the Foundation upon Wright's death. See p534-539.

³² Fusselman to Board of Supervisors, May 25, 1959. Fusselman also suggested in the same letter—a recounting of his statements at the previous board meeting—that the funds accumulated for the Civic Center project would be better used fulfilling the immediate needs of the county, a Juvenile Hall and a Hospital. William D. Fusselman Papers, Marin History Museum.

Center itself was not necessary enough to warrant the increase of forty cents on residents' tax bill.

Though Fusselman was able to convince the Board to ask the Foundation for reassurance in the wake of Wright's death, the outcome was not what he had hoped for. The Board received clarity that the project would proceed as intended and confirmation that a single architect would be placed in charge of the civic center. After inspection of the contract by Marin counsel Leland Jordan, the Board agreed to sign a continuation with Wright's apprentices.³³ With four ayes and one nay, a contract between Marin County and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation was re-signed a few weeks after Wright's death; the four affirmative votes were still convinced that the Frank Lloyd Wright Civic Center, as it was sometimes called in the paper, would be a tourist attraction in Marin, increasing the county's own reputation by borrowing from the architect's. The negative vote, bolstered by many vocal taxpaying dissenters, was convinced that they had just purchased a new Imperial Hotel—which, despite its early favorable publicity, was, in 1959, attracting publicity for being at the dangerous point of "rapid obsolescence."³⁴ Both the ayes and the nays preserved the static and coherent authorship of Wright, even in his absence: one a monument to genius, the other, his folly. The death of Frank Lloyd Wright confirmed that a public image was not dependent upon a continued physical presence.

³³ See "Wright Center to be told of Pact Approval," *Daily Independent Journal*, April 22, 1959, p5.

³⁴ "Who's Being Kiddled Now" *Daily Independent Journal*, May 26, 1960, p26. The Imperial Hotel was mostly demolished in 1967, although a portion of Wright's original construction was reconstructed at Meiji-mura.

Stop Work Plebiscite

The groundbreaking ceremony took place in February of 1960; Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, Wright's third wife, described the delight her late husband had seen in the project. As four shovels dug into the Santa Venetia site, she announced that Marin County would "'go into the record as the most illuminated county in America' for inviting her husband to design the center."³⁵ Edward Durrell Stone proclaimed that, like Michelangelo's Rome, Marin County would become a place of pilgrimage for generations to come. In her campaign ad for that year's elections, Vera Schultz called it "inspired design" and predicted it would be a "noble heritage for future Marin." (Figure 3.5) The civic center altered Marin's sense of time, future-based but already nostalgic, dependent upon the precarious whims of reputation.

Schultz, however, whom many thought responsible for the construction of the new civic center—for better or for worse—did not win her re-election bid. She was replaced by J. Walter Blair in the June elections. Fusselman's seat was in a less contentious race than Schultz's had been, but his nay-saying role in the civic center debates certainly helped win the election that had largely been dominated by tax issues. Fusselman described the process of building Wright's civic center "gratifying a man's whimsical fantasy." The building was a monument, yes, he wrote, but one to ego, particularly of its architect, whose contribution was nothing more than a mail-order job: he was never on site but for a few hours and Aaron Green did most of the labor, yet all the glory went to Wright. He chided Wright's organic philosophy and pointed

³⁵ "Ground Broken for Construction of Marin Civic Center," *Daily Independent Journal*, February 15, 1960.

at the ship-like design, asking “Have you ever seen a ship springing organically out of a hillside????”³⁶

Fusselman was not done fighting the civic center, even as the shell of the Administration Building took shape. When the new board took office in the beginning of 1961, they took a vote to dismiss the civic center committee and stop construction on the building. Castro’s and Gness’s votes were overruled by Fusselman and the two new supervisors, Blair and George Ludy, and the 3-2 board issued a stop-work order to the General Contractor, Rothschild, Raffin, and Weirick, and The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. *The Daily Independent Journal* announced it the following morning: “County Board Votes to Halt Work on Civic Center Site.” Fusselman, Blair and Ludy demanded time to assess the cost of converting the current plans of the county offices into a much-needed county hospital. The supervisors hired Crawford and Banning, AIA, to conduct a feasibility study converting Wright’s design to a nursing home and rehabilitation center. Over 125 construction workers were laid off, re-bar was left exposed to the elements, a retaining wall was left without backfill.

The publics of Marin County erupted, exasperated by the continuation of the saga and infuriated at the unilateral decision-making. Threats of lawsuits and recalls, an organized besiegement of letters, and calls for grand jury investigations inundated the Board of Supervisors. A new organization, “Citizens for the Civic Center,” was formed by the angry citizens protesting the stupidity—and cost—of the stop-work order. Lines were drawn: on one side, citizens who thought Marin could not afford the monument to Frank Lloyd Wright,

³⁶ Fusselman’s “County Comment” appeared in the *Independent Journal* the week before Vera Schultz and James Marshall were up for re-election. June 2, 1960, p34.

because “we can’t pay bills with beauty and good wishes of tourists,” and on the other, citizens who thought the Wright project said something about the county and the value of beauty: “a building designed by a man of Frank Lloyd Wright’s stature speaks eloquently for an enlightened government and a progressive community.”

The tools of public opinion were put to use. In the days following the stop-work order, the *Independent Journal* hosted an informal plebiscite and printed a one-question straw ballot on its pages. (Figure 3.6) Over 9,000 responses were sent back in, voting, by a margin of seven to one, in favor of resuming work on the civic center. Outside the supervisors’ meeting, picketers marched on the San Rafael steps, carrying signs of protest. (Figure 3.7) But it was Crawford and Banning’s report on the “ill-advised” conversion of the office building to what would only ever become “an inefficient and unsatisfactory” medical facility that convinced the five supervisors that the stop-work order should be rescinded. Work resumed on January 17, 1961.

Conclusion

Wright’s performance of singularity was also the reason for its dissolution into self-multiplication. He had cultivated those aspects of his life that presented individuality—a cadre of apprentices surrounding him, a ubiquitous presence in popular media, the costumes, gossip, and hubris, hiding his considered design process behind the guise of “shaking designs out of sleeves”—so convincingly that the exceptional singularity of his life and his art were never in question. Though he knew it to be a role, Frank Lloyd Wright never doubted his performance of genius. Because they believed it to be true, this was also the reason that Vera Schultz and

Mary Summers wanted to hire Wright for the Marin County Civic Center, as opposed to any of the other modern collaborative teams that had sent in RFQs. But it was the last moment of believability: the role of genius was beginning to seem archaic. As Neutra's partner wrote, it was the collaborative firm that was responsible for successful and reliable building design, not the single individual.

The drama that attended the construction of the Marin Civic Center was embedded in myths of the exceptional individual. And yet, this drama demonstrates how the power of reputation, when viewed as legitimate, was transformed into authority. This happened not only with Wright's reputation of genius, when much of Marin accepted his approach to the site and the design without question because, as reporter Wat Takeshita said, "he's real famous," but also its opposite: the charges of Wright's communist sympathies and anti-American ideology. Each side mobilized around a particular idea of Wright's self and participated in its public construction and dissemination: organizations, committees, mobile slide shows, newspapers ads, and radio broadcasts.

Doubt, however, came from both sides upon Wright's death. Despite the fact that each side had recognized that Wright's reputation was not dependent upon his physical presence—his design, Marinites said, either with pride or scorn, came to him after twenty minutes at the site; his representative, Aaron Green, served as his local stand-in—his permanent absence seemed to reframe questions of his authority. The Board of Supervisors, unlike Judge Kopp, did not recognize the equivalence between Wright and the Foundation, which no longer had an "identifiable persona" to domesticate its organized operation. The reputation of Wright's singularity was not, to them, responsibly the same as the reputation of the apprentices left in

Wright's wake. Importantly, as Fusselman pointed out, this imbalance was due to Wright's own admissions that his apprentices would "never touch" the "great principles" of work at Taliesin.

It was the law—again—that reconciled the discrepancy of the architect's singularity and the supposed non-transferability of his reputation. County Counsel Leland Jordan, tasked with the investigation of the Foundation's legality after Wright's death, found that it had adopted a resolution in 1957 that acknowledged "the contract as a binding obligation of the foundation."³⁷ And though Fusselman's objection to the Foundation as architect—how, as an educational institution, did it have the license to engage in commerce—had already been resolved in the Wisconsin Supreme Court, the 1957 contract had already acknowledged its stature: its contract was with "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, hereinafter jointly referred to as 'Architect.'"³⁸ Under the law, Wright's personal intangible reputation was linked to his business.

After Wright's death, The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation—later, Taliesin Associated Architects—was not only permitted to carry on the Frank Lloyd Wright brand, it was the legal signature of Frank Lloyd Wright, interchangeable with the figure who had once led the firm. The work of the architect—the notion of his responsibility and the authority of his reputation—*had already been* the work of the corporate entity, but it was only recognized as equal under the implications of license. Legally, his signature was the possession of the Foundation; the figure of the architect was no longer held together by a solitary, unified figure. His reputation, which Wright had chased his entire life, succeeded him indefinitely.

³⁷ "Wright Center to Be Told of Pact Approval," *Daily Independent Journal*, April 22, 1959, p5.

³⁸ "Agreement for Architectural Services," July 30, 1957.

EPILOGUE

The cover of *House Beautiful*'s October 1959 issue was a photograph taken by Maynard Parker. A cruciform cutout floats above red brick piers and soft wood-paneled walls; it is vaguely religious and yet clearly domestic, a hint of program implied by a basket on the kitchen counter. Two adjacent doors, one open and one closed, upend the clarity of the camera's position inside or outside of the space. Through the open door, the view of the interior is suspended in multiple, contradictory directions. Above the photograph, the issue's title announces: "Your Heritage from Frank Lloyd Wright." (Figure 4.1)

"Your," in 1959, was ostensibly a personal address to the nearly 900,000 readers of *House Beautiful* magazine.¹ Next to "heritage," however, the underlying assumptions of the use of second person imply a wider audience: that this heritage—a possession by birthright that is contingent upon the citizenship of the recipient—belongs to *you Americans*. The informative tone of the title presumes not only its own authority, but also its readers' unawareness. Though it was not a new idea in 1959, "heritage" had not yet expanded into popular consciousness.² It did, however, within an alternative value system, offer a way to assess the new changes to the American landscape introduced by urban renewal, highway infrastructures, and residential developments. For the young country without a past, recognition of a shared heritage displaced the search for a shared identity of the American self.

¹ Circulation data retrieved from the Center for Open Science, see Brooks Hefner and Edward Timke.

² The demolition of Penn Station in 1962 was one of the first visible controversies over the fate of buildings that played a role in American history; "World Heritage" was coined at the White House Conference on International Cooperation in 1965; Lydon Johnson signed the National Historic Preservation Act into law in 1966.

And, like the ideas embedded in American exceptionalism, some felt a moral duty to spread the ideological vision of heritage. Still unapparent enough that it warranted narration, heritage, too, was a work-in-progress.

This is what Wright offered to the readers of *House Beautiful*, and to the country at large. Even posthumously, Wright was recognized as portrait, model, and then—literally and figuratively—architect of the American story and its heritage. Scores of articles presented Wright’s work—“The Stature of a Genius”; “Shelter that Encloses without Confining”; “How Frank Lloyd Wright used Music”—in a way that tied his exceptionalism to the reader’s own way of life, in their quotidian domestic setting. And yet, when attempting to describe his specific essence, Frank Lloyd Wright was undefinable: “The Essence of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Contribution” by editor Elizabeth Gordon, detailed how Wright, despite the “millions of words” that have been written about him, was still “hard to encompass... overflowing the boundaries of categories to which critics and commentators had assigned him.”³ Gordon, like so many other historians and critics—many of whom were mentioned in Chapter 1—saw Wright as he saw himself: the summation of art and life, the possibility of an individual in democracy. In other words, Frank Lloyd Wright was an idea. She used those tropes that tied Wright to the American idea—nature, his dismissal of “style,” the self-reliance taught at Taliesin, the motivation of working toward a shared purpose—and inscribed his agency.

Understood as an idea, Wright becomes infinitely accessible, infinitely mobile. This is how certain houses, supposedly placed so specifically in the unique landscape of their site, are entirely relocated: the Gordon House, from Wilsonville, Oregon, to Silverton, Oregon, in four

³ Gordon, “The Essence of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Contribution,” *House Beautiful*. October 1959, p208.

pieces on flatbed trucks; the Bachman-Wilson house, dismantled piece by piece and shipped from New Jersey to Bentonville, Arkansas; the Pope-Leighey house, moved first from Falls Church, Virginia to Alexandria, and then again, another thirty feet. Other houses have been “preserved” through a process of precise reconstruction, substituting a modern replacement for every material suffering neglect or age. The Robie House, for instance, on Chicago’s south-side, was nearly entirely rebuilt by the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust, which was intent on restoring the building to its “peak” 1910 appearance. Known for its horizontal, freckled red Roman bricks—attributes that were a direct result of the specific clay fired in a specific, coal-powered, beehive-shaped kiln in St. Louis—the Robie House restoration required a reactivation of long-dormant beehive kilns found in Ohio; because the company was only able to manufacture a Norman-sized brick, a concrete firm in Chicago was hired to cut each brick in half to approximate the dimensions of the original Roman brick. Despite the lengths of recreation, the authenticity of authorship is unquestioned; in fact, the authenticity becomes even more precious: “Each person who [touches parts of the house] gives it a little less of a life” was the official response upon the re-opening of the Bachman-Wilson house.⁴

Once the historical figure of Wright is no longer necessary to contain all of the authorities of “Frank Lloyd Wright,” entire industries and economies are mobilized to perpetuate the idea of Wright. Contemporary art-glass restorers have the license to reproduce turn-of-the-century window designs; masonry companies specialize in historic mortar; paint specialists recreate historic colors; color precision technology and digital patterning enable

⁴ Victoria Stapley-Brown, “Frank Lloyd Wright house reopens 1,200 miles away,” in *The Art Newspaper*, November 10, 2015. The quote was provided by Niki Stewart, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art Chief Engagement Officer.

contemporary textile companies to manufacture replicas of historic fabric. Likeness elides into authenticity. Pushed further, this explains the phenomenon of the gift shop selling products—glassware, home decor, and apparel, among other items described as “Wright inspired designs for you and your home!”—and the broader creep of these signifying products into functional accessories, like the faucet and bath collection designed after Fallingwater (“His Vision Lives On”): new heirlooms in the name of old heritage.⁵ (Figure 4.2)

The house pictured on the front cover of *House Beautiful's* October heritage issue was not, in fact, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. His former apprentice Jim DeLong designed and built it for his parents, in Altadena, California. DeLong's historical proximity to Wright may account for some of the material and spatial similarities, but it, like *countless* houses and products designed in the past century, falls into the category of Frank Lloyd Wright-esque, or Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired: a category which has since become entirely unrelated to style, material, construction, and principle; it is another architectural discourse that has consumed its object. Loosed from the material obligations of authenticity, your heritage from Frank Lloyd Wright, the cover implies, *is Frank Lloyd Wright*, and is everywhere.

In so many ways, Frank Lloyd Wright appears self-evident; he appears to offer his own selfhood as evidence for argument. What I hope to have shown in this dissertation is that these notions of the self are constructed, embedded with myth, and also, as accepted fact,

⁵ Andrew Calcutt offered the most succinct and accurate take on the branding of products by corporations: he describes, in an inversion of the Frankfurt school's take on the commodification of culture, the phenomenon of the culturalization of commodities. In this model, commodities are “drafted” into the realm of culture and its system of symbols through branding. See Calcutt, “Countercultural Corporations.”

uncritically and unconsciously reproduced in Wright's historiography. I hope I have succeeded in writing a new narrative in this historiography: one that functions outside of the standard epistemology of Wright's genius and questions the appearance of the self-evident and the truthfulness of rhetoric. I tried to privilege instead, like Judge Kopp and the Pragmatists, the material consequences of Wright's impact: rather than his love of nature, how it functioned in discourse and practice; the details of his business of education rather than its utopic domesticity; the implications of his reputation of singular genius; and how, together, these become ways to think about our "heritage from Frank Lloyd Wright."

As Chapter one showed, Wright's portrayal of his own closeness with nature—already exploiting the Edenic myth of America as Nature's Nation—gets reproduced not only by his clients, when they turn to him with unique pieces of property, but also by the profession, through techniques of aestheticization that change our view of the site, specifically, and of land, generally. In Chapter two, despite his own claims of disinterest in the "vulgar" business of business, a more thorough history of the Taliesin Fellowship reveals that Wright was desperately aware of the need to turn culture into a business. Literally capitalizing on the new modal types of the "whole man," Wright sold the opportunity and discipline to become self-made men. Through the vehicle of the Fellowship and the Foundation, Wright effectively doubled himself, and was thus able to choose different rights and regulations for different modes of the self. Chapter three shows the continuation of this doubling—how Wright's carefully cultivated reputation gets transferred under the law to his architectural practice and, from there, circulates as license. His authority is no longer tied to an embodied self; different notions of Wright are enough to encourage others to mobilize on their behalf. This transforms

into an idea of Frank Lloyd Wright that gets folded into American heritage: he becomes the country's possession for exactly those embedded ideas he had constructed his identity around.

This is the order by which Wright is able to establish his own particularity of self—site, institution, and authority of reputation. It is *also* the narrative arc of the country as defined by its historians, editors, politicians and, eventually, its citizens. The twentieth century—the “American Century,” when ideas of exceptionalism were so motivating yet also so unconscious—is the moment when these notions circulate around the ideas of the self, and the only moment when it was possible to think that the *country* had a “self.” This is why, I argue, Frank Lloyd Wright has to be read in conjunction with his country and with his profession. His notions of selfhood could not have happened at another time; they could not have emerged within another profession.

I hope this dissertation will challenge the idea of Frank Lloyd Wright as a unified, stable, and singular subject, as he—and all individual architects—are so often portrayed in architectural history, particularly in texts like Andrew Saint's *The Image of the Architect*. This study, using Wright as a model, shows that even the most individualistic of architects is defined by his own disunity and multiplicity of selves. It is not a feature of Wright's *becoming* that he was in a state of continual remaking and redefining; it is a feature of his *performance* that he appeared—and has previously been seen—as a figure who held together these disparate selves. He has been accepted as a stable reference, someone whose peak coincided with a new idea of “consensus history”; in this tradition, his position is static, unproblematic, and

increasingly irrelevant. To dislodge this stability is to invite other critical histories to engage in the new discontinuities.

In the introduction, I criticized the inseparability of Wright's life from his work. For me, the biography's role in Wright scholarship, appearing, so often, in the form of the anecdote, is the sign of the recursive narration, the epistemological trap. It is the piece of evidence that inserts Wright's life into his work; so often a way to more fully know Wright—as if that is the point. Because Wright's ninety-two years of life are so well-documented, the anecdote allows him to mean anything and everything to everyone; he is infinitely moldable and every apparition is supported by evidence, however vague the result: "Wright's approach to architecture can never be reduced to rules, for that can only produce clichés. Yet he had general lines of thinking which he followed. But he did not hesitate to deviate from them. This is, in general, 'the drift.'"⁶ But the anecdote is also the device that, like his reputation, makes Wright mobile and yet still tied to material realness: a way out, in fact, of privileging the individual narrative.⁷ Taken together, my use of anecdotes, I think, makes for a richer and more complex whole and, importantly, offers these ideas to a wider audience drawn more to the private, particular and personal qualities of a rich and complex character than to the abstract theories and arguments about him. This choice, however, to participate in the anecdotal and

⁶ A description of Wright's process included in the October 1959 issue of *House Beautiful*, p258.

⁷ Like it is deployed in narratives of New Historicism, to avoid the grand narrative of singular subjects. In this case, the anecdote serves both kinds of histories: in hagiography as evidence of essence, in narrative as materiality. In addition to Hayden White, *Metahistory* and *The Content of Form*, and Gallagher and Greenblatt, "Counterhistory and the Anecdote," see Lionel Gossman, "Anecdote and History."

biographical histories implicates my role in the same possessing narratives that initiated this project.

Most importantly, I hope this investigation offers new questions about the material consequences of heritage. What underlies the values in deciding what things constitute a shared national past? What myths are already embedded in our national narratives and in the objects of American culture? This is the continued project of America.

Figures

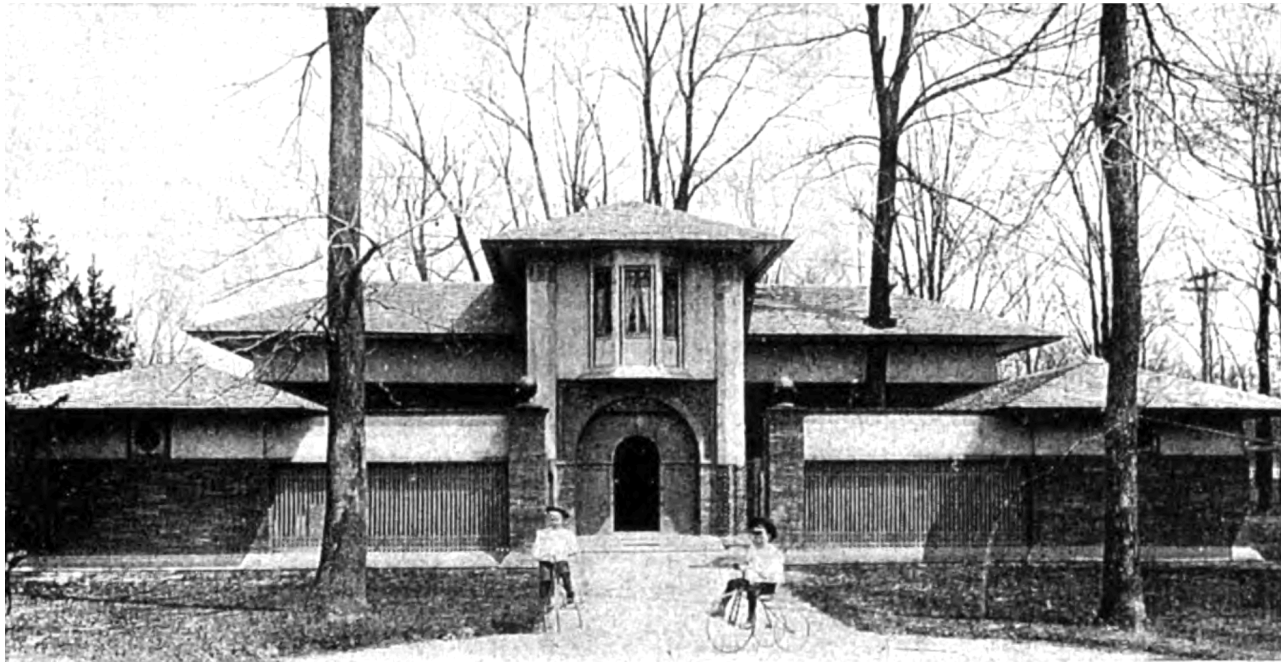


Figure 1.1 The photo included in Robert Spencer's article in *The Architectural Review*, which shows the eaves of the Winslow stable built around an existing tree.



A Home in a Prairie Town

By FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

This is the Fifth Design in the Journal's New Series of Model Suburban Houses Which Can be Built at Moderate Cost



CITY man going to the country puts too much in his house and too little in his ground. He drags after him the fifty-foot lot, soon the twenty-five-foot lot, finally the party wall; and the home-maker who fully appreciates the advantages which he came to the country to secure feels himself impelled to move on.

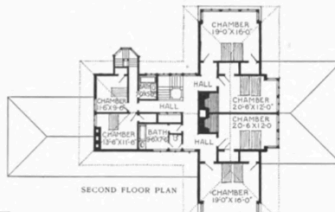
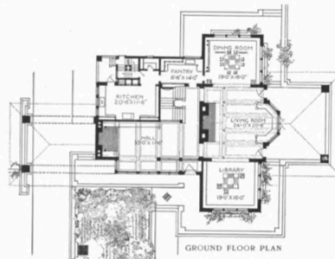
It seems a waste of energy to plan a house haphazard, to hit or miss an already distorted condition, so this partial solution of a city man's country home on the prairie begins at the beginning and assumes four houses to the block of four hundred feet square as the minimum of ground for the basis of his prairie community.

The block plan, to the left, at the top of the page, shows an arrangement of the four houses that secures breadth and prospect to the community as a whole, and absolute privacy both as regards each to the community, and each to each of the four.

THE perspective view shows the handling of the group at the centre of the block, with its foil of simple lawn, omitting the foliage of curb parkways to better show the scheme, retaining the same house in the four locations merely to afford an idea of the unity of the various elevations. In practice the houses would differ distinctly, though based upon a similar plan.

The ground plan, which is intended to explain itself, is arranged to offer the least resistance to a simple mode of living, in keeping with a high ideal of the family life together. It is arranged, too, with a certain well-established order that enables free use without the sense of confusion felt in five out of seven houses which people really use.

The exterior recognizes the influence of the prairie, is firmly and broadly associated with the site, and makes a feature of its quiet level. The low terraces



and broad eaves are designed to accentuate that quiet level and complete the harmonious relationship. The curbs of the terraces and formal inclosures for extremely informal masses of foliage and bloom should be worked in cement with the walks and drives.

Cement on metal lath is suggested for the exterior covering throughout, because it is simple, and, as now understood, durable and cheap.

The cost of this house with interior as specified and cement construction would be seven thousand dollars:

Masonry, Cement and Plaster	\$2800.00
Carpentry	3100.00
Plumbing	400.00
Painting and Glass	325.00
Heating—combination (hot water)	345.00
Total	\$6970.00

IN A HOUSE of this character the upper reach and gallery of the central living-room is decidedly a luxury. Two bedrooms may take its place, as suggested by the second-floor plan. The gallery feature is, nevertheless, a temptation because of the happy sense of variety and depth it lends to the composition of the interior, and the sunlight it gains from above to relieve the shadow of the porch. The details are better grasped by a study of the drawings. The interior section in perspective shows the gallery as indicated by dotted lines on the floor plan of the living-room.

The second-floor plan disregards this feature and is arranged for a larger family. Where three bedrooms would suffice the gallery would be practicable, and two large and two small bedrooms with the gallery might be had by rearranging servants' rooms and baths.

The interior is plastered throughout with sand finish and trimmed all through with flat bands of Georgia pine, smaller back bands following the base and casings. This Georgia pine should be selected from straight grain for stiles, rails and running members, and from figured grain for panels and wide surfaces. All the wood should be shellacked once and waxed, and the plaster should be stained with thin, pure color in water and glue.

1901

EDITOR'S NOTE.—As a guarantee that the plan of this house is practicable, and that the estimates for cost are conservative, the architect is ready to accept the commission of preparing the working plans and specifications for this house to cost Seven Thousand Dollars, providing that the building site selected is within reasonable distance of a base of supplies where material and labor may be had at the standard market rates.

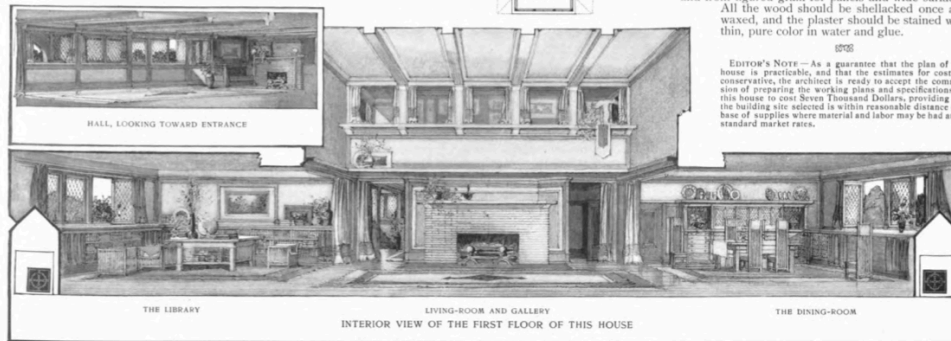


Figure 1.2 Wright's spread in *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1901.



Figure 1.3 The Heurtley Cottage in the Cheneaux Islands, remodeled by Frank Lloyd Wright, where Heurtley was "most happy." Copyright Allen Heurtley.

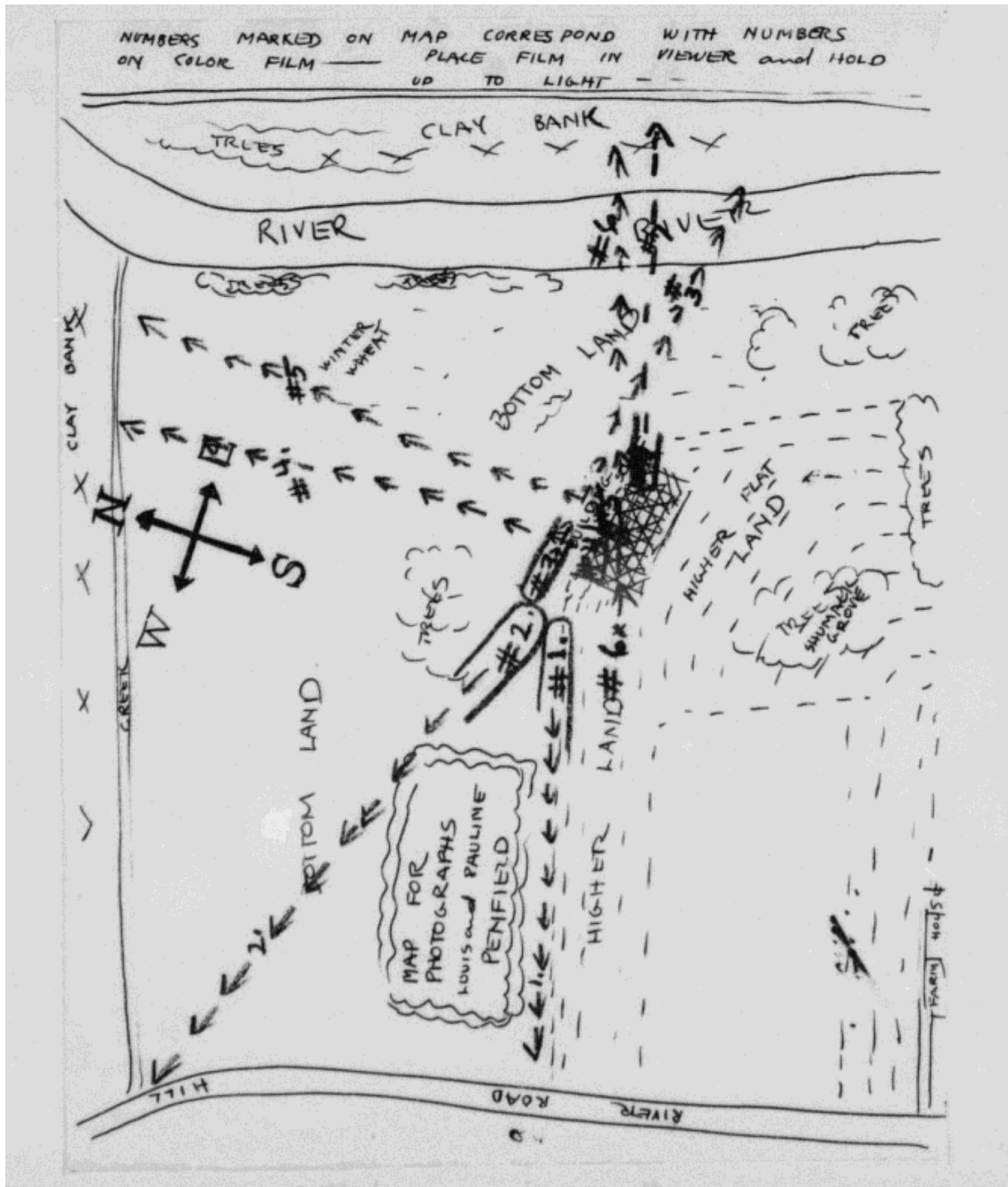


Figure 1.4 Enclosure of site drawing included in a letter sent by Louis Penfield to Gene Masselink and Frank Lloyd Wright, November 1951. Frank Lloyd Wright Correspondence, Getty Research Institute.

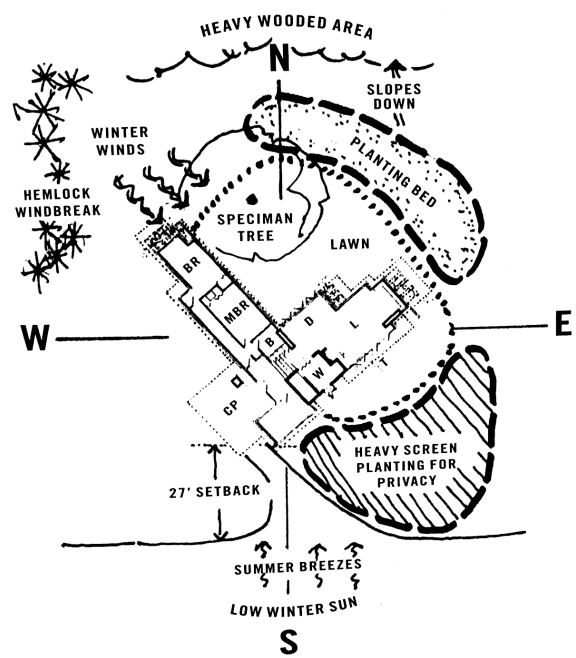
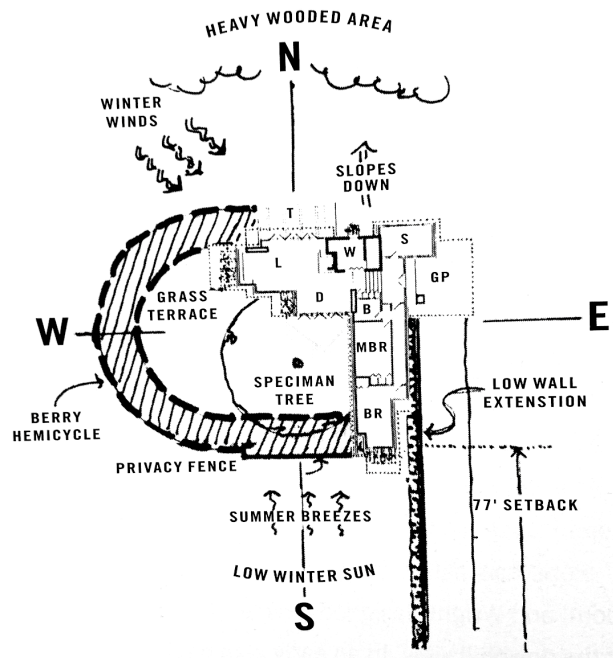


Figure 1.5 The Pope House site plan, as designed (left) and built (right). The tulip poplar tree was meant to shade the house in the original design; in the executed design, it approximates the fourth corner of the house's implied site. Assembled from Steven M. Reiss, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Pope-Leighey House*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014.

Genius, Inc.

Strange and condoned has been the existence of Architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Erotic and impulsive, he deserted his wife and six children to live with a Mrs. Mamah Bostwick Cheney and her two children, family of a Chicago businessman. For himself and them he built a splendidly



© P. & A.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT
Who's Who dropped him.

Figure 2.1 "Genius Inc.," *TIME* Magazine, October 7, 1929.



Figure 2.2 Members of Wright's office "staff" circa 1928. (L-R) George Kastner, Henry Klumb, unknown visitor, Cyril Jahnke, Vladimir Karfik. Reprinted in Marty, *Communities of Frank Lloyd Wright*. Copyright The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.



Figure 2.3 Taliesin Work. Cornelia Brierly, Bitsy Gillham, Jack Howe, Maginel Wright Barney (Wright's sister), and Blaine Drake threshing oats, 1936. Copyright The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.



Figure 2.4 Early days of The Taliesin Fellowship, with apprentices (L-R) Jack Howe, Noverre Musson, Blaine Drake, Hulda Brierly Drake, and Burt Goodrich in the foreground; Master Builder Hans Koch in the background. Copyright The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.



"If I were suffered to apply the word 'Genius' to only one living American, I would have to save it up for Frank Lloyd Wright"

Alexander Woolcott

Wisconsin



YOU

ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

THE FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT TESTIMONIAL DINNER

As you probably know, the Wisconsin Supreme Court has recently ruled that the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation does not constitute a tax exempt educational institution in accordance with its interpretation of the current Wisconsin tax laws. The issue is not Mr. Wright's real estate and personal taxes (which he willingly pays) but the tax status of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, an educational institution, which is legally separate. Mr. Wright has construed the court action to mean that Wisconsin has little understanding or appreciation of him and his work.

To express our gratitude for the great contribution he has made to our culture, a Testimonial Dinner will be held in Madison, Wisconsin, on February 10th, 1955 at 7:00 P.M. in the Great Hall of the University of Wisconsin Union Building.

The objectives of the dinner are:

1. To take advantage of this unique opportunity to honor a very great man.
2. To emphasize the need for revising the Wisconsin Tax Laws so that educational institutions such as the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation will be tax exempt.
3. To have an attendance of at least 400 people at a minimum of \$25.00 per plate plus contributions from 400 (who cannot attend) at a minimum of \$25.00 each. This will raise sufficient funds to take care of the taxes and penalties of over \$18,000.00 which the Foundation must pay as a result of the Supreme Court Decision.

The funds raised, together with an appropriate testimonial, listing all the contributors, will be presented to Mr. Wright as a token of esteem and appreciation.

Invitation Committee

F. LL. W. TESTIMONIAL DINNER

Cary Caraway, Secretary

Figure 2.5 Invitation to the Frank Lloyd Wright Testimonial Dinner, February 10, 1955. Copyright Douglas M. Steiner, Edmonds, Washington.



Figure 3.2 William Fusselman (right) and Carroll Metzner discussing Wright. August 30, 1957. Copyright *Daily Independent Journal*, San Rafael, CA.

Mr.
and
Mrs.

TAXPAYER

Sometime ago, the majority of the Board of Supervisors appointed Frank Lloyd Wright Architect for Marin Civic Center at an extra cost to the taxpayers and waste of 25% more public funds than top-flight, cost-conscious local architects charges would have been.

Mr. Wright's contempt and disregard for saving of other people's money is well known. In spite of this, the board over-rode all protests and made the appointment.

Original estimate of the project was \$5,-500,000.00. It was then upped to \$6,500,-000.00 on presentation of the first sketches, now (a few months later) up goes the estimate to \$9,000,000.00. Does that estimate include Mr. Wright's fee of \$900,000.00?

Landscaping, furnishing and how many other costly items will be added?

Don't let us fool ourselves. After this happy start, who can tell what the final cost will be?

Wright says it will be "a cornerstone in the culture of the nation". Are Marin County taxpayers rolling in money, that they can afford to build outstanding national monuments?

The Supervisors are worried about raising \$25,000.00 to rehabilitate the County Farm to shelter the poor.

Marin County needs roads, schools, flood control and many other things first.

Do not stand idly by and let this happen.

You will soon be informed of your new assessments. The total amount for the county will be a material increase over last year.

THIS MEANS AN INCREASE IN TAXES

There is strength in numbers. Join now and help us to help yourself. Write, come in, or phone GL 3-1356, Room 15, Masonic Building, 1010 Loutens Place, San Rafael. Office hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Closed Tuesdays.

Join Now! Membership: Individual \$3, Man & Wife \$5, Small Business \$10, Large Business \$25

The Marin County Taxpayers Association, Inc.

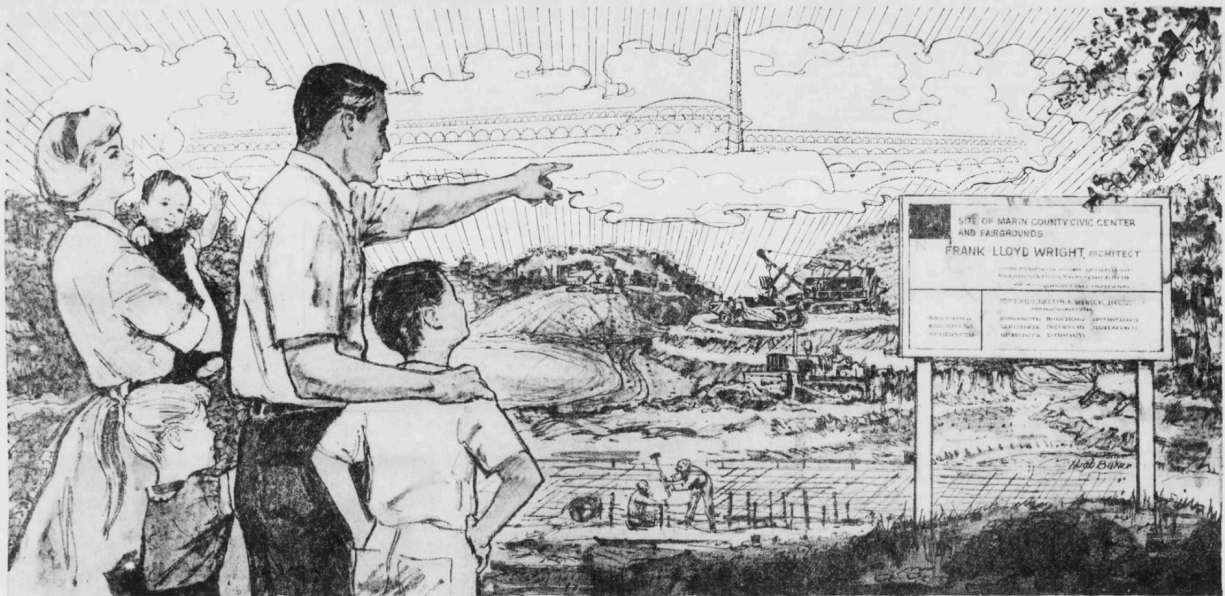
A single purpose, tax conscious, non-political group
SAM DURAND, Executive Secretary

Figure 3.3 Advertisement addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer, taken out by The Marin County Taxpayers Association, Inc. in the *Daily Independent Journal*, March-April 1958. Copyright *Daily Independent Journal*, San Rafael, CA.



Figure 3.4 The multiple authorities of Wright. March 26, 1958, p6. Copyright *Daily Independent Journal*, San Rafael, CA.

For Your Children and Your Children's Children!



Marin County Civic Center Under Way

Figure 3.5 Advertisement for Vera Schultz 1960 electoral campaign, June 1960. Note the many myths of progress in the sketch. Copyright *Daily Independent Journal*, San Rafael, CA.

Independent Journal
SERVING ALL OF MARIN COUNTY

STRAW BALLOT

(As suggested by Supervisor William D. Fusselman)

Do you approve the supervisors' order to
stop work on the county civic center?

☐ YES, I approve

☐ NO, I do not approve

Name

Address

.....

To be counted, each ballot must carry a legible
name and address and must be mailed to:

Dalton, Graupner & Barber,
(Certified Public Accountants)
P. O. Box 497
San Rafael, Calif.

Letters containing ballots must be postmarked
by midnight, Saturday, January 14.

Figure 3.6 Straw Ballot printed in the *Daily Independent Journal* newspaper, January 1961.
Copyright *Daily Independent Journal*, San Rafael, CA.



Figure 3.7 Picketing outside Marin County Board of Supervisors' Meeting. January 16, 1961, p1. Copyright *Daily Independent Journal*, San Rafael, CA.

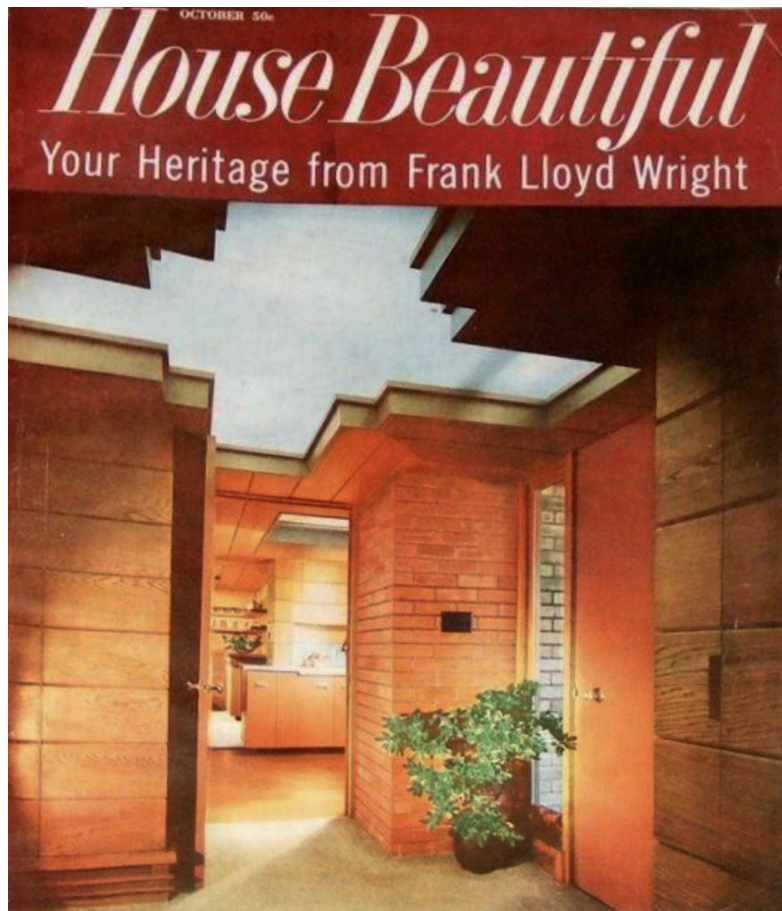


Figure 4.1 "Your Heritage from Frank Lloyd Wright," *House Beautiful*, October 1959.



Figure 4.2 "His Vision Continues": The Frank Lloyd Wright Bath Collection from Brizo, in partnership with The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Advertisement seen in *The New York Times Style Magazine*, Oct. 27, 2021.

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