

admittedly was not presented too clearly); a chapel project in southern Wisconsin in 1937; and the Monona Terrace Civil Center—the scheme of 1938. Monona was an impractical and unresolved dream, but some of the concrete structural ideas reappeared from time to time. However, as a center with enclosed parking and related community functions, it should not be assumed that it was succeeded, if greatly enlarged and more satisfactorily resolved, in Wright's project called Crystal Heights for Washington, D.C., of 1940, or in the grandest and most prophetic of his urban proposals, Point Park, Pittsburgh, of 1947. Monona was imprecise and premature. Another aberration contemporary with Monona was the campus plan of 1938 for Florida Southern College, a project best left to another study elsewhere. The term "aberration" is not used carelessly. There must be inherent and linked qualities of plan, structure, form, proportion, or whatever that connect a work of art to the artist and his oeuvre collectively and in a manner that clearly demonstrates philosophic rigor and development. Aberrations stand obliquely in relative isolation, genetically sterile, even if they may be otherwise interesting—even brilliant—works. It seems that all great artists are allowed such extravagances from time to time.

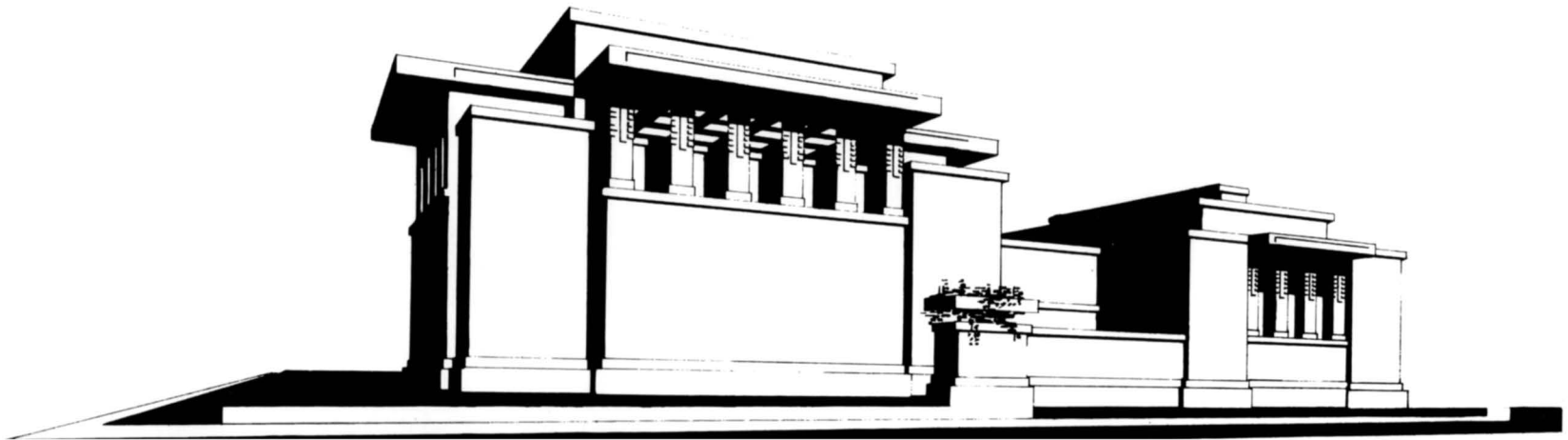
7 Prejudices Old and New

Art tends not only to discover the truth but to exaggerate and finally to distort it. And, maybe in this distortion lies the essence of art.

Matthew Nowicki

It is important to keep in mind the contemporary context and the prevalent and popular modes of architecture during the 1930s. Not only was there a continuation of traditional historical styles, pure (as in the Nashville replica of the Parthenon in concrete) or hybrids or amalgams, but there were step-back skyscrapers (usually with some historical content) and, as a growing phenomenon, modernism in a Central European idiom. The 1933–34 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago turned its back—more or less—on historical precedent in favor of various forms of modernism. Some of its buildings were peculiar blends of streamlining, art deco, constructivism, and Central Europeanisms. Their immediate popular influence was noticeable upon cinema design, but in the long term the exposition's architecture helped legitimize modernism in the United States. While it claimed to announce an American modern style, and in some respects it did (especially in industrial design), the buildings generally were much in debt to the Europeans, including at times an Englishness, and some were suggestive of a revived constructivism. Wright wanted desperately to be involved with

**7.1 Perspective of Unity Temple, 1904–06,
drawing executed in 1929, perhaps by
Takehito Okami. Courtesy and © the Frank
Lloyd Wright Foundation.**



the exposition but failed to gain the organizers' attention let alone agreement: they were Nathaniel Owings, Harvey Wiley Corbett, and Louis Skidmore.

Tied to these varied American architectural products were supporting polemics. The pages of most architectural journals from c.1929 to c.1935 especially not only showed pictures of the architecture in question but offered a discussion of the pros and cons of historicism and modernism. Authors not converted to the "new" architecture were most often represented. In 1932 architect Dwight James Baum summarized what might be termed the profession's view. He was tired of reading about functionalism and the need to meet economic conditions (especially, he suggested, as exposed in the pages of *Shelter*) and wrote that "Packing box architecture with misplaced color may be evidence of a striving for a new architecture but it is quite painful while it is being administered." Baum thought the Chicago Tribune building of 1922(!) to be "modern and new."¹ Architect and academic John F. Harbeson tried to explain modern architecture to readers of *Pencil Points* in a series of articles lasting through most of 1930. His selections were diverse and ranged from pure white boxes to some fanciful extremes (mostly French); nearly all examples illustrated or discussed were European. His very short discussion of the city concentrated on skyscrapers and included Wright's project for the St. Mark's Towers, Le Corbusier's "Freehold Maisonnets" and University Quarter, together with Hugh Ferriss's charcoal fantasies for a high-rise step-back urban world (all of his sketches lacked people).²

For the general or lay public, compilations in book form were essential forums for house and home design, offering ideas to inspire or mimic. With a modest recovery from the Depression in the mid-1930s many of these books were produced. The economic crisis also encouraged a flurry of prefabrication companies that also attempted to satisfy housing needs, and they too were presented in magazines. Invariably the compilations were meant to cater to all tastes. For example, in 1935 and 1936 *The Architectural Forum* edited and Simon and Schuster published *The Book of Small Houses*. It contained all sorts (Cape Cod to Central European), all sizes, all budgets, with a few aberrations such as a revived Southwest adobe (obviously aberrant if not exotic for it was not mainstream New England or Tidewater colonial). Another example was Harcourt Brace's *The House for Modern Living* also of 1935, where results of a competition were published. It too catered to everyone anywhere. So too did later editions of *The Book of Small Houses* in 1936, 1938, and two in 1940. And there were many many more. None of these book compilations or similar but shorter

reviews in magazines included Wright. He had accomplished so little through the mid-thirties that there was not much to publish. More to the point, it is doubtful that Wright wanted to be included in such publications. His desire not to be joined with other architects in exhibitions surely would have persisted in principle to other types of association, including magazine and book surveys.

Since Wright had little architectural work during the 1920s and early 1930s, it was his early architecture up to c. 1924 and especially his writing in the 1930s that received the greatest attention in America; and there was much in his writing that was attractive to the English, Europeans, and Soviets. Europe in the 1930s responded enthusiastically to his theories and architectural achievements as manifest, much as it did in 1912–13. A major exhibition of drawings, models, and photographs traveled around European centers beginning in 1931.³ During the period 1930–36 Wright's architecture and/or his writings were published in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Australia, Japan, England, and probably Latin America, but not east of Poland.⁴ No other individual architect from America received so much attention, not the New Englander Henry Hobson Richardson in the 1880s,⁵ nor the principals of the New York firm of McKim, Mead and White around the turn of the century. In fact no twentieth-century architects of any nationality, except perhaps Le Corbusier, received so much attention outside their own country during the course of their career.

Wright was popular; Olgivanna and Frank had done their job well.

While some of Wright's writings were meant to disarm in order to gain attention, in the early 1930s his distaste for the so-called modern movement was undisguised. In 1930 Wright shared the galleries of New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), then only one year old, with a Bauhaus exhibition. Wright's exhibition "arranged by himself" came under pointed criticism as "fragmentary and rather confused." Dimitris Tselos acknowledged that a systematic and "complete presentation" of the architecture would have given the viewer an "opportunity to temper the growing uncritical adulation of the architect and the proper perspective to define more accurately his achievements and his intellectual and architectural milieu." Also the exhibit as "arranged" was unsatisfactory. One label "speciously explains," it was said, that the roof plane of any of Wright's early buildings "tipped edgewise will give you the elevation characteristic of the so-called 'International Style'."⁶ This strangely imprecise comment of Wright's was given slightly more clarity and some emphasis when, in 1929, perspectives of Wright's buildings of around 1904 were redrawn. It was the idea of Henry Klumb who recalled the event in a letter to historian Donald Hoffman:

Assembled and sitting with F.L.W around a fire in the studio one winter day in 1929, . . . I suggested that we might try to reduce his delicate renderings of his best-known buildings to a two-dimensional black-on-white graphic presentation “Modern Architects” were addicted to. His answer: “Do it.” [Takehito] Okami and I went to work and produced several, including in addition to the Robbie House (drawn by myself) the Winslow House, Yahara Boat Club, Bock Atelier, Unity Temple and the Larkin Building. All were drawn in ink on roll-up window shades. Klumb thought the “stark graphic black-on-white” presentations “emphasized the depth of his [Wright’s] poetry and the power of the third dimension.”⁷ Thereafter the drawings were often used in publications, sometimes in a manner incorrectly implying that they were executed in, for instance 1903, when in fact they were done in 1929.

The 1930 exhibition was followed by the 1931–32 show and in 1932 by another in which Wright also participated. When first approached about the latter he refused because he disapproved of the emphasis to be given to the European style, but he relented and agreed to participate. This show was organized by Lewis Mumford, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., MoMA curator Johnson, and Alfred Barr who was the primary motivator for the exhibition. The main source, perhaps even the inspiration for the show was a number of publications of 1925–30 in Europe about the new internationalism. Included were many Americans associated with the style, Raymond M. Hood, George Howe and William E. Lascaze, Richard Neutra (expatriate Austrian), and Irving and Munroe Bowman, as well as the now usual Europeans (Le Corbusier, Oud, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe), together with Wright.⁸ There was a catalogue entitled *Modern Architects* (MoMA and Norton, 1932) and a companion book of strangely contrived aesthetic principles written by Hitchcock and Johnson entitled *The International Style*.⁹

By his inclusion with the cubic white box crowd Wright believed there was an implication that he was in some way associated or identified with—even approved of—the style and therefore, as he reasoned, with the corollary, Communism’s international ambitions. The exhibition was opened in February, and after seeing the catalogue Wright quickly responded in print in April: “I find myself standing now against . . . the so-called international style.”¹⁰ Actually, Wright’s first attack against promoters of the cubic white box occurred in 1928 in a review published in *World Unity* of Frederick Etchells’s translation of *Towards a New Architecture* by Le Corbusier. Of course Wright had no praise for Le Corbusier. Wright’s dislike of the Parisian architect may have resulted from Le Corbusier’s pretended ignorance of Wright and a refusal to participate in H. T. Wijdeveld’s 1925 anthology on Wright, *The Life-Work of the American Architect Frank Lloyd Wright*. Apparently Wijdeveld could

find no one to prepare new written material for the anthology, perhaps because of the short notice; so he reprinted previously published articles by H. P. Berlage, J. J. P. Oud, Lewis Mumford, Erich Mendelsohn, Louis H. Sullivan (at Wright's request), and Robert Mallet-Stevens, who might have been Wijdeveld's French choice after Le Corbusier. Wijdeveld may have transmitted to Wright Le Corbusier's refusal in 1925. Anyway Wright's general comments in the review of Etchell's translation were much like those made in response to the MoMA exhibition, which continues:

Do you think that . . . any aesthetic formula forced upon this work of ours in our country can do more than stultify this reasonable hope for a life of the soul?

A creative architecture for America can only mean an architecture for the individual.

The community interest in the United States is not communism or communistic as the internationalists' formula for a "style" presents itself. Its language aside, communistic the proposition is. Communistic in communism's most objectionable phase: the sterility of the individual its end if not its aim and . . . in the name of "discipline"!

But this communistic formula proposes to get rid of this constructive interior discipline's anxieties (and joys) by the surrender that ends all in all and for all, by way of a preconceived style for life—conceived by the few to be imposed upon all alike.

But for a free democracy to accept a communistic tenet of this breed disguised as aesthetic formula for architecture is a confession of failure I do not believe we, as a people, are ready to make.

We are sickened by capitalistic centralization but not so sick, I believe, that we need confess impotence by embracing a communistic exterior discipline in architecture to kill finally what spontaneous life we have left in the circumstances.¹¹

He believed that the European architectural "formula" was foreign, "imposed," not American, stale and rigid, that it clearly foreshadowed a second or modern manneristic eclecticism, yet another kind of cultural colonialism. Of the selections available to his country as displayed at the exhibition, why should the American who was creating an American architecture not be the obvious choice for America? The fact that in the 1930s the popular choice became the Central European International Style deeply hurt Wright. With egotistic insight he believed America tended not only to ignore but to dismiss him.

His fear of the effects of internationalism's formula, as expressed above, induced another response when associated publications, including articles, were released by the New York museum. He wrote another of his acrimonious letters, on this occasion to curator Johnson, expressing a

feeling of being “out of character” and “out of sympathy with the whole endeavor. I belie my whole cause by coming with you.” He said the only reason to agree to participate was in an effort to help Johnson. However, Wright found Johnson’s “promotion and propaganda” too “shameless and selfish.” He was not certain if Oud or Mies “would approve,” adding that Le Corbusier would agree for he was the “soul of your [Johnson’s] propaganda.” As to the planned national tour of the exhibition Wright was emphatic and final. He insisted that “every trace of my name in connection” with Johnson’s promotions be “removed when the show at the Museum of Modern Art closes,”¹² an extraordinary request. Later and to a friend Wright referred not unkindly to Johnson as “Little Philip J. . . . Not an architect—look for him in the international wastebasket.”¹³ And again, at a public occasion at Yale University Wright greeted Johnson with, “Why, Philip, I thought you were dead!” And later in that evening in 1955 he said, “Why, Philip, little Phil, all grown up, building buildings and leaving them out in the rain.”¹⁴ Perhaps these comments were encouraged by the fact that Johnson had become a registered architect and enamored with the post-1938 architecture of Mies van der Rohe.

The fact that the European style was popularly accepted by architect and client alike, and Wright’s designs were not, has been discussed quite often since 1930. Ignoring for the moment ethnic and regional differences within the United States, the usual arguments are much like those put by architect and educator Stanley Tigerman in 1986. In the years between the World Wars, Tigerman ventured, which of “architecture’s methods” could society accept? “Surely not that of FLW . . . he was too patently individualistic, what with his embarrassing taste in clothes, his unfortunate matrimonial record, and worst of all, an architecture that simply could not be copied. Idiosyncratic at its most normative, FLW’s work contained too many elements of unpredictability; it was not something one either could count on or worse, would want to represent stability.” If America were to select a style “by which to be remembered, it could not be the work of one arrogant architect alone—certainly not a self-announced eccentric genius such as FLW.” This was a good summary of some, perhaps most architects’ views and was indicative of perhaps a majority of other people’s attitudes. And Tigerman affirmed that even if Wright “could be copied (unlikely), it would be too demeaning for others to commit themselves to such an idiosyncratic original.”¹⁵ Are creative artists only selectors and copyists, as Tigerman seems to believe? Wright believed they should not be, but that too many of his fellow Americans were: they “beg or borrow or steal what we have and assume the virtue we have not.”¹⁶ Historian Reyner Banham was correct when he put the view that in their book (which excluded Wright), Hitchcock and Johnson did not present a “driving vision,” they did

not provide “ideological and theoretical support.” They “set aside the Utopianism, the zeal for social reform, the Messianic claims that drove the style in Europe, and without which most of us [now] would have difficulty in understanding what the movement was about.”¹⁷

In 1932 Wright carried on fighting. He took an initiative to respond to a circular issued by the New York–based Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, closely linked to the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts and the American extension of the educational system developed by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He wrote to the Institute’s students that they were “unreliably informed as to what modern architecture is. You are told that it is not going to become a style based upon Gropius, Wright, or Corbusier.” Wright continued: “But architecture is ‘modern’ and has a future only because these modern architects, from whom, I am sorry to say, the circular in question derives only language, are what they are and because they have done what they have done in the way they have done it. It is because of their work that the Beaux Arts is now ready to modify its programmes to ‘push’ all of you back.” It was not his choice that he was aligned with the Europeans and he wished to disassociate himself from that nexus. “I am a friendly enemy,” he said and then set out to explain that his work was singular, wholly American, and that Taliesin had “already established a living tradition and has good reason to know that youth everywhere is hungry for reality and is everywhere rocking an old boat no longer seaworthy.”¹⁸ The note was an attempt to set the record straight and to promote the Taliesin Fellowship to an anticipated eager young audience.

A professional associate and correspondent of only a few years, Ely Jacques Kahn, was then director of the Department of Architecture of the Beaux-Arts Institute. He was at first “warm under the collar” with Wright’s “diatribe” but soon cooled off, perhaps realizing that Wright could at times be too quick with unnecessarily sharp and often personal criticism. Kahn suggested that any student would find advantage and value in “personal contact” with Wright. Privately Kahn generously offered advice in the form of praise. “You would be surprised,” he said, “if you really knew how much you are liked by the various men whom you are at times inclined to jump on and, in spite of our shortcomings, we are all interested in seeing the vigor of a new endeavor [the Fellowship] . . . if it can show the way.”¹⁹ A lasting friendship developed thereafter, if somewhat more giving on one side.

It should be noted that in the 1930s those that set the socially irresponsible (or ignorant) design problems as determined by the Beaux-Arts Institute and its affiliated design schools were under siege from the Central European reformers. (An example of one such problem: an artist’s

studio on an island in the Nile River.) A serious threat to the Beaux-Arts system of education, however, did not occur until after World War II, in some schools not until well into the 1950s.

Politics, art theory, artists' will, architectural style, and nationalism continued to mix vibrantly—if confusingly—in Wright's view of the modern movement and of Le Corbusier as its protagonist and mentor. So too did individualism, for Wright saw this as the only means to the creative end: the point he argued throughout his life. The mix was understandable. In 1934, in preparation for an article, architect and author Percival Goodman asked Wright: "In a planned society would there not be a restriction of individual taste?" Wright responded yes, "and since individual taste is utterly insufficient to develop an architecture this would mean not so much loss so far as a creative architecture was concerned. But a formula would necessarily be substituted for individual taste and be enforced. Would any formula be nearer the desired source, creation? I think not. Russia is an example of the consequences *to date* [my emphasis]. Only as true sources of inspiration are open to artists and they are free to work upon the knowledge of principle they must possess can any people create a living architecture for itself. By way of taste would then mean not much more than personal idiosyncrasy." Goodman then addressed Wright: "Mass design of buildings exist (the tremendous habitable areas of our skyscrapers equal to many square city blocks of old type structures and mass designs of towns in Russia). Will not a few architects be sufficient to design the type-houses? Would architecture become a problem of engineering only, with the elimination of the individual as artist?" Wright responded that "mass design" is "no design. No such thing can live," he asserted. "So to eliminate artist individuality as [an] inspiring element in favour of the test tube and the mechanical laboratory would be to reduce art to an affair of the brain; music to mathematics, architecture to engineering, poetry to rhyme, philosophy to intellectual celebration, religion to ritual. . . ."

The last question put by Goodman was more specific: "if you believe that architecture is an individual expression—, what objection do you have to the works called 'International style,' especially those of Le Corbusier?" In response, "I still believe," Wright said, "that this mass product would only be seen as 'creative' were the effect of a style subordinate and subsequent to the individual perceptions that gave each building composing the whole its own great individuality: . . . Style should be the architect's aim, not a style." Wright believed that "into this category of individual works might fall Le Corbusier et al, until an attempt would be made to make Le Corbusier a style or the style. Then the growth of architecture would stop and such life as it had would depart from it. There was the case with the 'Style Internationale.' It soon became a formula any tyro could cliché

and it soon became abhorrent to the feelings of the free man everywhere.”²⁰ It is tempting to alter only one word in the last sentence: “It soon became a ‘formalism’ any tyro could cliché.” These views may have been rather repugnant to Soviet architects during the period from 1925 to 1932. In the 1930s, however, they would have intrigued Soviet regularizers, as will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

On another occasion he was asked if he was in favor of capitalism. He declared, of course! “I believe in a capitalist system. I only wish I could see it tried some time.”²¹ For emphasis he said, “Money—the System that is destroying us” in America. In other words, only the American version, the one he had to work with and around and through, was wrong: the one that had caused the economic depression in 1929 with such sudden disastrous consequences. To casual observers, therefore, he seemed to be against capitalism per se. To pro-Left observers like Stephan Alexander writing in the June 1935 issue of *New Masses*, Wright’s position was all too clear. Alexander reviewed the verbalized ideas of Broadacre City—“Frank Lloyd Wright’s Utopia”—then came to what he believed was a logical conclusion: “the significance of Mr. Wright’s project is that it points inexorably to the necessity for the removal of capitalism and the creation of a socialist society as the primary condition for the progressive development of architecture.” Surely the Soviets were aware of Alexander’s observations. Wright’s public reply to Alexander was to confess to being somewhat of a romantic and to suggest that his Broadacre City was “a bit Wellsian,” but that he had presented only preliminary thoughts about decentralization, “an anathema to Communism” he observed. And yes, he committed the “sin of ‘dreaming’” but this was intentional. Alexander was otherwise fundamentally wrong for in Wright’s mind Broadacres was anti-capitalistic, anti-communistic, and anti-socialistic “as far as current socialism goes.”²² In Wright’s mind socialism was an urban phenomenon, and therein resided another of its problems.

In the 1920s and early 1930s the Soviet Union saw the technical achievements of the skyscraper as monumental, something to be emulated. In the mid-1930s and concurrent with the rise of Stalinism it was not only a negative sign of capitalist achievement but of human degradation: the two always linked. At the Moscow architects’ congress in 1937 the Soviet view was of skyscrapers casting long capitalistic shadows over people’s homes creating a dark breeding place for slums. Wright’s attacks against urban congestion in support of his Broadacre City were well known.²³

Pronouncements like that offered in his Kahn lectures to Princeton University in 1930 abridge his writings: “Ruralism as distinguished from Urbanism is American, and truly Democratic,” he said with Jeffersonian clarity. It was during Wright’s formative years that William Jennings Bryan

succinctly put the case for practical responsibility in support of America's rural tradition: "Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will grow again as if by magic, but destroy our farms and grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country."

Two final observations may be made. The first is somewhat less practical, aligned with both the idea of the organic and the affirmation of the modern. There is a compelling thrust to reject historical influences. The past, as Russians are prone to exclaim (and rightly so with respect to their past), is decadent. Less so the English view. The present, therefore, is something positively contemporary and nothing less. Cleanliness is a wiping off of dirty past habits. "Clean" is therefore a common adjective of both the Central European architects and Wright, meaning both clean of line and clean of the past. Sentiment notwithstanding, spring is renewal and therefore cyclical. Hence, Marx could argue that the principles of Greek architecture were due for reevaluation: the principles, not the manners.

The second observation is more critical. It requires a similar oversimplification. Wright's architectural designs were always made in response to given problems: in the problem resided the solution. (There is some similarity between this organic notion and the Central European functionalist idea, but the interpretations are quite different.) Therefore, unlike the European modernists Wright seldom proposed responses to theoretical situations, as noted above, for they would at best be merely theoretical models. There could never be substance in or substantive reasons for their existence. There is no congruity with the Central Europeans on this issue: polemics, manifestos, propositions, abound in the absence of commission but in the vital necessity to persuade. It is true that during the prairie years Wright's buildings were of two types. First the house, the typical low, spreading prairie style; and second the nondomestic building in a proportionally square-volumed style. Of the second type the obvious buildings come to mind: the Oak Park studio, Unity Temple, the Larkin Building, and Midway Gardens.²⁴ He argued that a building reflects an organic or functional response to given programs. However, all appear rather similar within each of the two types. The same can be said of the buildings of the 1920s. They fall not only into a building type but into a geometrical type. However, beginning with Ocotillo and especially in the 1930s his architecture became a much more vital proposition. Each building was a unique architectural and social entity, each a different response to given social conditions (within the building or without) and, very importantly, to given site conditions.

The site was deemed precious and equal to all other requirements. It was this reality that distinguished his architecture of the 1930s. It also separated him from the Central Europeans and

eventually most of his American colleagues. Each anonymous white or glass box or rectangular slab could and did stand anywhere and everywhere, and generally fit any and all internal necessity or social condition. The implications of the Central European polemics were clear for architecture, and since it was an art form that expressed society as well as being totally within society, it too was threatened by the philosophy supporting the common and anonymous box.

Wright believed that a devolved commonality would lead to social disaster; the individual's individualism or ethnic characteristics would be lost through anonymity in collective absorption. His serious worry about internationalism's polemics, therefore, provoked in him a more complete, pragmatically full architecture. Indeed, his stance against "the so-called international style," as he put it, had philosophic premises (Americanism therefore nationalism, ethnicity, transcendentalism, democracy, individuality, etc.) that were almost instinctively grasped. The architectural reality of his position became abundantly clear: while his architecture of the prairie years was revolutionary, his architecture of 1929 to c.1939 was not only revolutionary but *complete* in a way he could not have imagined as a young architect around 1900 or even in the 1920s. The decade of 1929–1939 was his most *creative* period.

8 Broadacre City

Democracy . . . we have started toward a new integration—to an integration along the horizontal line which we call the great highway.

FLW, September 1931

Since it was first proposed much has been written about Wright's Broadacre City by many people who focused on planning or economic or political or social considerations. Perhaps to Wright's delight the result has been a marvelous diversity of opinion. For instance, some authors assessed it as a linear city while others said that it was a non-city or that it was the antithesis of Le Corbusier's Green City and similar centralized and authoritarian ideas. Some authors declared it to be the epitome of decentralized community planning or the ideal place for rural democracy or a release from centralized capitalism. Historian William Curtis synthesized some architectural opinion when he observed that Wright "imagined that architectural form could fashion a new, integrated civilization."¹ At one point urban sociologist Leonard Reissman believed Wright to be a prophet of doom (see Appendix D). Typically, most observers tended to believe that the written words might be more important than the city plan. More so than now realized, Broadacre City was widely discussed during the 1930s and into the early 1960s; it continues without consensus to be so to this day. But it does

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