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Preface

The second flowering of Frank Lloyd Wright's extraordinary career began in 1928 when he was sixty-one. In that year he married his mistress Olga Lazovich. Together they planned a future that, if it was to be successful, required the re-creation of Wright the active man, not the legend. With only a few architectural commissions since the early 1920s, Wright's image had to be reconstructed and revitalized. The fabled life of his first golden age had to be reevaluated and the nightmare of the recent past put behind. All was exposed in an autobiography.

The second life of the newly active man was anticipated in a number of ways but primarily by the formation of an institute for young people. Here the Wrights practiced their notions of *paideia*, work, and thought united in a community of apprentices they called the Taliesin Fellows. The Wrights had developed a holism that revolved about their idea of an organic architecture. They vigorously promoted both the idea and the fact that their daily lives, in concert with the Fellows', were devoted to its practice. Their concerns were not just for buildings in cities but for new villages in and on the North American landscape; not just villages but an organically complete life; not just complete personal lives but a healthier, refurbished, and philosophically unified America. The means to these ends were focused on Wright's talent and life as paradigms incorporating an interpretation of the great American dream of individual liberty. The Wrights therefore argued against the doctrines that supported European hegemony, against traditional prejudice, and against the political left.

As lord and lady they broadcast their ideas from a manor, a modern castle moated by grain fields and psychological privacy. The word also went forth from lecture platforms, in exhibitions, and onto the pages of magazines and books. The Europeans, the English, and the Soviets were impressed and intrigued, but fellow Americans soon became confused. In emphasizing his philosophy Wright's rhetoric seemed to damn everything American—history, cities, home, and nearly all else. Wright could not be ignored.

Finally he acquired two architectural commissions. For them he composed two seemingly opposite concepts of architecture for dissimilar sites. When the buildings were complete, the world again took note. The first commission became one of the most beautiful houses of any century, the Kaufmann country home Fallingwater on Bear Run Creek in Pennsylvania; the second was the Johnson's Wax Administration Building at Racine in Wisconsin. Both were theoretically brilliant. So

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too was Wright's second solitary castle Taliesin West, built on a pediment overlooking the Arizona desert, a place in the West: the frontier. Wright's new summer lasted from the late thirties until his death in 1959.

The 1930s was a period of turmoil in the Soviet Union and rising political tensions and threats of physical conflict in Europe. The Wrights became involved in those social fractures only parenthetically and with no meaningful satisfaction. During difficult and often blood-letting times in the USSR, he was invited to a convention of Soviet architects held in Moscow and gave a speech to those gathered. During the tension-filled months at the end of 1938 and before the British entered what became World War II, he was invited by the prestigious Sulgrave Manor Board to give a series of lectures in London. Almost immediately thereafter, during the early years of the war, British architects presented him with their highest honor, a Gold Medal. He was honored at other places at other times but these three occasions were unique and therefore intriguing. The evidence revealed by this research justifies that fascination.

If we accept art historian Norris Kelly Smith's observation that our perceptions of Wright have been determined by his "evaluation of himself," determined from his perspective, with his formulations of biographical and artistic truth, and without "reference to the shape of the American world at large," then this series of essays will go some way toward balancing evaluations as well as exposing myths and correcting legends.

The only way to appreciate the greatness of an artist and his products—of Wright's architecture—is not by blind adulation or by intolerance but by seeking a fuller critical knowledge of the person and his work. It is important to know that Wright's architecture was a manifest expression of his philosophy, which when matured linked the man to his country, to his place, to his family.

I have asked only a few basic questions. To paraphrase Leonard Eaton, until 1936 it took intelligence to hire Wright but only money thereafter. Correct? and if so, why? Or, to repeat Reyner Banham's question and emphasis, why did Wright "change from simply a very good architect to the Greatest American Genius?" Wright's son John once said that his father "was an American idea that pressed irresistibly toward fulfillment": was this correct? Why were the Soviets so interested in Wright? Why the British? Why did his architecture of the 1930s appear so different from his previous work?

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Like most answers to simple questions, responses are complex and interdependent. In this instance they involve ideas like utopia, urbanism, transcendentalism, education, socialism, service . . . war; and particular things like a speech, a medal, a book, a letter . . . a visitor.

Though it pays close attention to the architect's life and thought, this book is not a eulogy but a critical study of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural career in the 1930s.

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Kangarilla/Seattle

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Architecture is beginning, always beginning. It was not made by the Greeks nor by the Romans. It wasn't even made in the Georgian Period. It is something that has to be made afresh all the time, as life, as opportunity, as growth changes.

FLW, 1940

Not only do I intend to be the greatest architect who has yet lived, but the greatest who will ever live. Yes, I intend to be the greatest architect of all time, and I do hereunto affix "the red square" and sign my name to this warning.

FLW, 1928

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The 1930s

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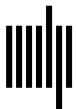

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