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Frank Lloyd Wright in Moscow: June 1937

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In June 1937 Frank Lloyd Wright attended the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architects held in Moscow. His visit at the request of the Union of Soviet Architects is known mainly, in fact almost exclusively as a result of the American's own frenetic promotions, including his autobiography. The nature of his visit has not heretofore been objectively reported. As well, a paper he delivered has remained obscure in the absence of knowledge.

CURIOSLY, THE episode of Frank Lloyd Wright's participation in the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architects¹ has not been discussed by observers or historians beyond borrowing Wright's own published impressions and descriptions. It was an extraordinary occasion, not only for the man of the mid-west prairies, but also for his hosts. As well, he gave a talk to a consortium of colleagues gathered in Moscow at the same event. His text has not heretofore been published outside Russia or translated into English. This paper presents his speech in translation and then argues answers to two fundamental questions: Why was he invited, and why did he accept? It will not examine incidents resulting from his tour and paper, or closely study preliminary events leading to the Congress. Yet it seems necessary to provide a brief explanation of why the Congress was held.²

It is important to acknowledge the assistance of Sonya Hasselberg-Johnson, Philip Lockwood, Elizabeth Beck, Irena Pavlovs, Rod Lawrence, Margaret Choong, the Research Committee and Library staff of Flinders University, the staff at the Wright Memorial Foundation Archives, and the encouragement of David Gebhard and Frederick Zuckermann.

1. The Congress has been usually called something similar to an international or world conference, which of course it was not. See Frank Lloyd Wright (hereafter FLW), *An Autobiography*, 2nd ed., New York, 1943 (hereafter *Auto43*), 541; Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, *Our House*, New York, 1959, 37; or Robert C. Twombly, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, New York, 1973, 217; 2nd ed., 1979, 292. The text for *Auto43* was completed soon after events discussed in this essay. There was another publication of the 1943 edition, reset, Faber & Faber, London, 1945.

2. The need for a concise description of FLW's Moscow adventure is exemplified by Giorgio Ciucci's contribution to *Socialismo, città, architettura URSS 1917-1937*, 3rd ed., Rome, 1976, where all arguments and impressions are based on FLW's published views. My study of the historical position of related events in the U.S.S.R. to

In 1932 the Seventeenth Conference of the Communist Party proclaimed "that within five years socialism must be achieved within every sphere of Soviet life."³ Among other areas of regulation, it was necessary for the Party to control all aspects of literary and artistic life and, therefore, direct all stages of architectural production. As a result, "architects were forced into one Union of Soviet Architects," and then, according to architectural historian Milka Bliznakov, "a controlling organ, *Arplan*, was established to review and approve each design before acceptance for construction. Thus the aesthetic canon of Socialist Realism [when defined] was easily enforced and is reflected in Soviet architecture" of the most recent decades.⁴

Two of the Union's—therefore, the Congress's—roles were implicitly prescribed as early as 1932. The first and most important was the outwardly visible and verbal acknowledgment of allegiance by the profession's individuals to Stalin's rule. In view of the chilling climate and the acts of terror orchestrated by Stalin between 1932 and June 1937, this simple statement had special meaning. The other role was designed to demonstrate that, as artistic and professional spheres within the Soviet republics, architecture and city planning were in tune with and executing the ideals of Soviet socialism as determined by the Party and, therefore, the Union.

Naturally, after the heady years of c. 1922 to c. 1932 an enforced bureaucratic control was unacceptable. Similar Party proposals were bitterly fought on principle by writers (the more immediately obvious propagandists) in 1932 without

Soviet modern architectural history, and to FLW's professional career, tentatively titled "FLW in London and Moscow," is nearly complete.

3. S. Frederick Starr, *Melnikov: Solo Architect in a Mass Society*, Princeton, 1978. On events in U.S.S.R. during 1930s see Marshall S. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, 1980; Nikolai Tolstoy, *Stalin's Secret War*, London, 1981; Joel Carmichael, *Stalin's Masterpieces*, N.Y., 1976; Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1964; I. Deutscher, *Stalin: a Political Biography*, Oxford, 1949, cf. 2nd ed., 1967; Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, London, 1968.

4. Milka Tchernova Bliznakov, "The Search for a Style. Russian modern architecture in the U.S.S.R.," Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1971, 3, 209. The Union was formed in July 1932, (O. A. Shvidkovsky, ed., *Building in the USSR*, London, 1971, 18). Cf. Paul Willen, "Soviet Architecture: Progress and Reaction," *Problems of Communism*, 2 (1953), 24-33.

success. For architects, factions remained divided for many years. Their Union could not effect amelioration by informal means. Resolution of many ideological questions was not achieved, especially those of artistic will and definition of an appropriate socialist architecture. The Party called on the architects' Union as a *de facto* agent of government to exercise its real power in June 1937. However, a fundamental problem persisted: The Party, the Union, and Soviet architects did not know how a new—or old—architecture could be in fact explicitly socialist. Biographer Frederick Starr provided a summary: "The congress was, by its own standards, premature," he said.

[The] leaders of the Union of Soviet Architects had no choice but to celebrate the triumph of a program that did not exist. Unsure of what they could affirm, they concentrated their attention instead on what they could safely deny. Of all the various tendencies in Soviet architecture since 1917, formalism best fit this need, the more so since it had already been linked with Trotskyism. Accordingly, the congress turned into a kind of orgy of denunciation of formalism. . . .⁵

Official prescriptions were issued by the Party the day before the 1937 opening, when *Pravda* explained the role and defined the purpose of the Congress. The directives were diverse and can be paraphrased like this. The Congress was important because, in its long history, architecture had never been so closely associated with the masses as in the Soviet Union. American architecture, by contrast, served the bourgeois and not the people. Soviet life creates artists, while in bourgeois countries their lifestyle only degrades architecture. In a socialist country the architect is a participant in creating a new society. The contrast between beautiful areas and the slums is an undeniable fact in capitalist towns. (The rhetoric of conflict, especially in the 1930s, was a prevalent mode.) Thanks to the love and attention of Stalin and Lenin, Soviet architecture and many other artistic fields are showing results of which one must be proud. (And then the ordinances became more precise, almost as ominous warnings.) Stalin's role in construction is a concern for the people, and while some architects realize this, they are not cooperating. It is the duty of architects to free architecture from formalism, trickery, or routine. Divorced from life, many architects do not pay attention to the needs of the people, and therefore they must be criticized at meetings (another particular reason for the Congress). Planning must be performed in an unselfish way (and Moscow housing was an example). A failure to understand politics and to follow Party lines explains many failures in architecture and building. (And then the task at hand was announced.) Tomorrow the opening of the architects' Congress must bring about the complete destruction of formalism and falseness. The Congress will create a Soviet architectural style whose sole responsibility will be the needs of the people of our time. (Molotov's speech stressed the Party's will to arbitrate rules governing architects.)⁶ "Greetings to the first Soviet Congress of Architects."⁷ As well, "the great architect Comrade Stalin"⁸ also welcomed delegates.⁹

5. Starr, *Melnikov*, 221.

6. Kathleen Berton, *Moscow. An Architectural History*, London, 1977, 222.

The stage was set. In June 1937 the Constructivists took the brunt of criticism, denunciations, and demands for confessions of waywardness. So too did individualists such as Mosei Ginzburg, the Vesnin brothers (Victor and Alexandr), and Konstantin Melnikov.¹⁰ Yet, one outspoken individualist was invited as a foreign guest of the Union.

I

Exactly how or when Wright was invited is unknown, but it was effected through diplomatic channels. When first approached he refused, probably because he was in the throes of pneumonia. Then he changed his mind and accepted by telegram (a copy is in the Wright Archive) on 22 May to the Soviet New York Consul: "Sir: Felt I must refuse the kind invitation of the Soviet being extremely busy . . . but circumstances have changed so now pleased to attend. . . . My sympathy with Russia's need in architecture impels me to go."

Wright's trip to Moscow began two weeks later, in early June 1937. Apprentice Edgar Tafel drove Wright and his wife, Olgivanna, from Taliesin North, through dull Racine, and on to Chicago.¹¹ The Wrights then traveled by train to New York City, where they boarded the *Queen Mary*. At Cherbourg they disembarked and traveled by train to Paris (where they saw Iofan's Soviet Pavillion for the Paris Exhibition¹²), then, following a short stay, on to Berlin.¹³ On part of their journey they were accompanied by the English architect Clough Williams-Ellis.¹⁴ After a brief time in the German

7. "Soviet Congress of Architecture," *Pravda*, 15 June 1937, 1. It was also announced in *Architecture of the U.S.S.R.* (hereafter *ArchR*), (May 1937), 2–6. (*ArchR*, official organ of the Union of Soviet Architects, July 1933 onward; 1933–1941 called vols. 1–9. Titles etc., are translated herein.)

8. *Pravda*, 19 June 1937, 4.

9. *ArchR*, (July–August 1937), 5.

10. For studies of Soviet architecture see Anatole Kopp, *Town and Revolution*, New York, 1970; Arthur Joyce, *Russian Architecture*, New York, 1948; Berton, *Moscow*; Shvidkovsky, *Building*, and its predecessor, "Constructivist Architecture in the USSR" (where Oleg Shvidkovsky was guest editor and all authors are Russian), *Architectural Design*, 2 (1970), 71ff; Berthold Lubetkin, "Soviet Architecture. Notes on Developments from 1917 to 1932," *Architectural Association Journal*, 71 (1956), 260–264, and its companion, "Notes on developments from 1932 to 1955," 72 (1956), 85–89 (Lubetkin emigrated from Russia, not as an emigré, to the west and finally to England). See esp. Starr, *Melnikov*, passim.

11. William Chaitkin, "Frank Lloyd Wright in Russia," *Architectural Association Quarterly*, 5 (1973), 55. The Wrights arrived in Moscow on 20 June (*Moscow News*, 21 June 1937, 4).

12. FLW, "Architecture and Life in the USSR," *Soviet Russia Today*, 6 (1937), 18.

13. *Auto43*, 541.

14. Clough Williams-Ellis, "A Retrospect," *Town Planning Review*, 30 (January 1960), 266. Some of C.W.-E.'s views are outlined in "Architect's Vote Congress High Success," *Moscow News*, 7 July 1937, 10. English architect W. Townsend may have attended the Congress, see "British Architect . . .," *Moscow News*, 30 June 1937, 9.

capital, then Hitler's seat of power, they were off again by train for the Russian border. Upon arriving in Moscow, they were welcomed by architects and their spouses, who presented Olgivanna with bouquets of flowers. It was soon after these greetings that the American Ambassador ("Joe Davies. . . a Madison U. boy,"¹⁵ said Wright) privately informed the Wrights of the latest execution, that of Marshall Tukhachevsky, subject of one of the Soviets' more publicized purge trials. Once the Wrights entered Russia, everything was paid for by "the Soviet."¹⁶ Such generosity could not suppress the obvious. In a fleeting, almost parenthetical thought for his 1943 autobiography, Wright sombrely and succinctly summarized one lasting impression of Russia: "Too much going into building up the defense which would inevitably have to be used," he said, "and perhaps just because it was built up to such proportions! It was a subject of which no one spoke. I don't know. The world was in a jam. Great changes coming. And there was something in the air then—May [June], 1937—that made everyone afraid of something he couldn't define."¹⁷

Guests at the Congress were divided into language groups and provided with two interpreters who alternated in translating proceedings. The English-speaking group consisted of Harald Hals and Edvard Heiberg from Norway, Sven Markelius from Sweden, B. Garrett and Williams-Ellis (who sat with Wright) from England, and Simon Breines and Wright from the United States. The French-speaking group included the Spanish government architects Manuel Sanches-Arcas, J. Martin, and J. Vaamonde; the Frenchmen Francis Jourdain, André Lurçat (who was then designing a large hospital group in the U.S.S.R.), and Marcel Lods. Also present were architects from a few other European and Mediterranean countries; Turkey, Belgium, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia were mentioned.¹⁸ Major papers and discussion resumés were made available in French to all guests.

The papers presented at the Congress were routine and repetitive. They dealt with praising Stalin, with achievements in various states and cities in the U.S.S.R., with tasks for Soviet architects, with reports on the Palace of Soviets, with city

planning, especially for Leningrad and Moscow, and with "reconstruction" for housing, industrialization, and education.¹⁹ The first day set the pace, style, and tone.

In his keynote address, Karo Alabian, also general secretary of the organizing committee of the architects' union, "plunged directly into the question of the hour" when he asked, "What is the social function of architecture in the U.S.S.R. and what form shall it take?"²⁰ He did not spell out answers, finding it easier to list those architects who failed "to serve the interests of the people": Melnikov, the individualist, and Nikolsky and the Vesnins, the Constructivists, "who adhered to the 'modern' or 'functional' style."²¹ Manuel Sanches, head of the Spanish delegation, gave his speech that first evening of 16 June.

Pravda noted in its post mortem that architectural styles and ideas as well as architects themselves came under scrutiny. They were praised or damned. The newspaper continued its resumé: The only true realistic architecture is that which has been formulated by the Party. Are ideas of present-day Europe and America of use? We have to learn from them. "We must catch up," said Aleksei Shchusev.²² Soviet architects must learn to express truth. Ancient architecture should be a source of ideas but not copied mechanically. Technology will be a key to success. Among our architects are enemies of the people (and they and their works were "exposed"). True Party lines have not been achieved by academic architecture; i.e., the schools are not providing a proper education (Ginzburg, Viktor Vesnin, and Melnikov were professors). One of the most important aspects of Soviet architecture, said N. J. Kolli, was the influx of Constructivist architectural ideas in the 1920s. The French architect Le Corbusier was one of its promoters and, emphasized Kolli, his style became a basis of Soviet architecture.²³

The Congress papers were as prescribed by *Pravda*.²⁴ As well, factory workers, Red Army personnel, writers, painters, sculptors, and artists participated, or performed publicly, or criticized architects and their buildings. Architects, planners, and bureaucrats from all the states and major cities attended,

15. *Auto43*, 542, an interesting slip. FLW's father attended Madison University before it was renamed Colgate University. The slip was corrected in FLW, *An Autobiography*, 3rd ed., New York, 1977 (hereafter *Auto77*), to University of Wisconsin "boy" (568). See Donald Leslie Johnson, "Notes on Frank Lloyd Wright's Paternal Family," *Frank Lloyd Wright Newsletter*, 3 (2, 1980), 5–7 presently being revised. In my opinion *Auto77* is the least reliable. Since he died in 1959, many readers will assume Wright did not rewrite the text or was not its editor. I have assumed that he was not the only editor.

16. *Auto43*, 542.

17. *Ibid.*, 542.

18. Simon Breines, "First Congress of Soviet Architects," *Architectural Record*, 82 (1937), 63. See also, "Foreign Guests . . .," *Moscow News*, 16 June 1937, 5.

19. *ArchR* (May 1937), 2. There was an exhibition, for participants, about "Soviet Architecture," including urban reconstruction ("Soviet Art Notes," *Moscow News*, 23 June 1937, 7).

20. Breines, "First Congress," 64.

21. *Ibid.*, 64.

22. *Pravda*, 18 June 1937, 4. See also "First Congress of Architects Opens," *Moscow News*, 23 June 1937, 3.

23. *Pravda*, 18 June 1937, 4. See also S. O. Khan-Mahomedov, "M[oisei]. Ya. Ginzburg 1892–1946," Shvidkovsky, *Building*, 90–96. Ginzburg was the leading theorist for the modernists in the 1920s.

24. See relevant sections of various issues of *Pravda* from 15 to 27 June 1937, and *ArchR*, (July–August 1937), double issue devoted to the Congress.

with representatives giving papers. The good and the bad in their realm were exposed. A desire for regional identification was a noticeably positive contribution. Some architects confessed the error of their ways and pledged closer adherence to Party ideas. Viktor Vesnin pointed out that, while it was true that many post-war architectural ideas from the West had been adopted without sufficient criticism and with an incorrect ideological approach, it was equally true that Constructivism contained much of value.²⁵ But, he said, "the way to overcome Constructivism is through the application of socialist architecture" and by a scientific method which he left undefined.²⁶

After summarizing papers, the Party took the architects to task in the pages of *Pravda*. For instance, Viktor Vesnin was old fashioned. He and Moisei Ginzburg followed individualism and did not disclose their own mistakes in their speeches (their confessions and new pledges soon followed this). Lead by Alabian, the Congress purged Melnikov from the profession and eliminated his teaching position; he was ostracized. Then resolutions were passed, including a demand to overcome formalism and, oddly, eclecticism. Medals were given, and new pledges of solidarity were offered.

The Congress closed on 25 June. On that day, and before the closing ceremony, Wright's paper was read.²⁷

II

Wright's June 1937 contact with the Soviet Union and *Pravda* was not his first. In response to an initiative of *Pravda* in 1932, Wright replied to some short, very general questions about how the "economic crisis" affected American architecture. He avoided economics in preference for disparaging remarks about "bad" decoration. He exclaimed that "Capital will only spend money to make money." Asked his view of the U.S.S.R., he described Soviet endeavors as "heroic" but failed to note which endeavors. He also talked of economics again. He used his word "organic" in the context of a new society. It was left to his readers' imagination, perhaps, to discover exactly what his word organic meant and then how to apply it, unless, of course, *Pravda's* audience (its staff, more than likely) had read Wright's most recent writings. If so, then

his brief polemic would have made just a little more sense. He added that he believed a nation should be ruled by its "own bravest" and "own best," appending a peculiar but provocative qualification, "whether from within or from without."²⁸

A year later *Pravda* again approached Wright, this time asking how American intellectuals were coping with the Depression. He responded by stating that there was little "visible change," that the "Capitalistic system is a gambling game" anyway (he equated capitalists with intellectuals), that America's education breeds inertia and was for middle-class minds, and that no radical changes were noticeable, only "tinkering and adjusting" by Roosevelt's New Deal. He called for a "repeal of special privilege." As was usual with his writing, the reply wandered. A cursory survey failed to discover the publication of the brief response.²⁹ Perhaps the Party was merely collecting information.

There was another brief contact via the mails. In 1933 he was asked by the professional journal *Architecture of the U.S.S.R.* to respond to another set of questions. Editor-in-chief David Arkin wanted to learn something of the way Wright approached his architecture, his "Method of Architectural Designing."³⁰ Wright responded relatively tersely to nine questions. First, architectural problems are solved within themselves. Second, architectural composition "is dead"; architects should proceed from "generals to particulars" in a natural way. Third, drawings and sketches record and clarify ideas and are a means of communication only between the architect and his client and builder. Fourth, the study of classical or contemporary monuments can only serve the architect if he learns how they were "serviceable or beautiful in their own day," but their architectural forms can only be "harmful" in respect of today. Fifth, great works of art can be achieved through the creativity of one man who "conceives and another executes." That is the only reasonable collaboration. Collectives and committees at best produce compromise. Sixth, sculpture and painting should be sympathetically embodied in architecture by the composer who orchestrates the concept, the architect. Seventh, completing a harmony by appropriate details is the final design work. Eighth, only the architect can supervise construction on the site. And ninth, corrections and

25. Breines, "First Congress," 65.

26. *Pravda*, 26 June 1937, 51. There were three brothers, all architects. Leonid died in 1933. See *Who was Who in the USSR*, New Jersey, 1972, 569–580, and A. Chinyakov, "The Vesnin Brothers," Shvidkovsky, *Building*, 42–56.

27. Breines, "First Congress," reports that other foreign guest (apparently the official term was "delegate") papers were read; in his view Francis Jourdain's was the most important. Heiberg also spoke. Breines reports that FLW "always impressed architectural thinkers in the U.S.S.R." (94), and see Williams-Ellis, "A Retrospect," 266.

28. Ms copy, FLW Memorial Foundation, Archives, Taliesin West, Arizona (hereafter FLW Archive).

29. Ms copy, FLW Archive. The 1932 response to *Pravda* should be dated about October. The second manuscript is a letter, FLW to M. Olgin (*Pravda*, New York office) and dated October 1933. FLW and Frederick Gutheim misunderstood the manuscript, combined and only partially quoted them in *FLW on Architecture*, New York, 1941, 171, where the correct dates should be as noted above, 1932 and 1933.

30. Letter, D. Arkin to FLW, no date, but it refers to events which date it sometime in 1933, FLW Archive. The Union's journal was running a series; the same questions were asked of Melnikov.

additions as work proceeds should be limited.³¹ Very little was revealed about his design methodology. In most respects he offered opinions which conflicted with the eclecticism of Soviet Socialist Realism, or at least the Soviet orthodoxy then present. His belief in the supremacy of the individual over collective action would not have been appreciated.

In June 1937, Wright's relationship with the Soviets was not as speculative nor as vaguely esoteric as those rather fleeting moments via the mails in 1932 or the quick easy words for the Soviet architects' journal in 1933.

There were four versions of Wright's speech at Moscow in 1937. Two were Russian: one by *Pravda* and one by the journal *Arkhitektura SSR* (or *Architecture of the U.S.S.R.*); two were by Wright. Each version served a different purpose. Not one wholly agreed with the others, and for good reasons. The first version was prepared by the editors of the newspaper *Pravda* as a resumé for public consumption, especially Russian. The other was prepared as a quasi-record of proceedings for professional consumption by architects and city planners throughout the Soviet Union. This second version and the *Pravda* resumé are close in content, different in length. Two were prepared for Wright's public, one version in 1943 and another in 1977.

As previously noted, *Pravda* published a running account of the major events at the Congress a day or two after they occurred. The resumé of Wright's speech was short and, as was typical, accompanied by a photograph portrait. The summary was not an exact transcription, with one result being a loss of much of Wright's flavored and elliptical prose. Another result was a dry presentation of detail suitable for a non-professional audience. The *Pravda* account follows.

Speech of American Architect Frank Lloyd Wright

My dear comrades. I come to you from afar having crossed the borders of five countries to get from America to the USSR. I find that thanks to Soviet aviation the USSR and USA are the closest neighbours.

I am happy to be among you as I am already aware of your countryman's struggle for an architecture worthy of your new Soviet life.

Due to our need for new architecture we in America have followed the wrong path. The path of imitating fallen or dead cultures and our official architecture is a disgrace to a free country. Our highly acclaimed achievements—Skyscrapers! What do they represent? No more and no less than a victory for engineering and the defeat of architecture.

Hidden by their facing of stone which are attached to steel frames the skyscrapers imitate the stone masonry of feudal towers. They are

stunning but they are false, as false as the economy that made the building of them possible in dull urban districts.

The left wing of the so-called modern architecture did not proceed beyond smooth walls, flat roofs and corner windows while the right wing was satisfied in advancing ornamental buildings. Both are signs of the death of modern Western architecture.

Organic architecture knows (and America is slowly and painfully realising it) that grandomania is not greatness.

It seems to me that the Soviet Union must concentrate their efforts on good planning and construction and refrain from attempts to impart to them unneeded farfetched shapes. I am sure that your architecture will find a way of expressing your new Soviet life. The USSR will justify the hopes of the world by not creating a false architecture and I hope that the USA will learn this too.

F. L. Wright further dwells on planning of towns.

America is far behind, says he, from correct town planning. Her economic system interferes with this and private ownership makes planning impossible.

Addressing the young architects of the Soviet Union Wright says:

I call upon you to gradually achieve the heights of building which we call architecture. Learn construction and structural principles which have their basis in technology and organic architecture and having mastered these principles create architecture harmonious with your Soviet life.

Country of freedom, such is the Soviet Union. It must leave a treasure for the future.

I take home with me brilliant impressions of your achievements and the greatest hope I have ever nourished for the wonderful future of life on this earth.³²

The extracted and edited selections by TASS for inclusion in *Pravda's* resumé were what one might expect. They were items about Soviet achievement in aviation (Wright acknowledged the just-completed flight of the Soviet air force over the north pole from Russia to Seattle, which had been proudly announced to the Congress),³³ about problems in America, and even a note about freedom in the Russias in spite—or be cause—of the persistent revelations during the mid-1930s of conflict, purges, and death. But a more careful examination of Wright's speech can be made only when the full text is known.

Chronologically the *Architecture of the U.S.S.R.* version was next with a publication date of July 1937. It may or may not be a verbatim transcription. As a congress of importance to the professional body and to the profession as a functioning, pragmatic serving group, it seems reasonable to assume that a record of words spoken would be essential. The recording of speeches is one reason to suppose that the *Architecture of the U.S.S.R.* version is closer to that spoken at the Congress than

31. Ms copy, FLW Archive, dated December 1933. Incorrectly dated 1937 in Gutheim, *On Architecture*, 216–218, which differs slightly from the manuscript. Slightly revised and published [“How I Work”], *ArchR*, February 1934, 70–71, the date of which helps confirm the date of Arkin's letter in note 30.

32. *Pravda*, 26 June 1937, 4. The translation is not copyright, but please acknowledge DLJ and Sonya Hasselberg-Johnson.

33. Speech by architect Karo Alabian, *Pravda*, 20 June 1937, 4.

the other three. There are other reasons. One cannot think of a credible reason for the Soviets to dramatically alter Wright's speech. It was relatively praiseworthy of Russian efforts. As will be discussed, it supported the political and theoretical—architectural—stance of the Union organizers. Also, it would come under the scrutiny of the journal's overseas subscribers, and the Wrights probably would see the publication (it is unknown if either did).

Of the two Wright versions, he altered the 1943 text to form the 1977 account, so one can assume he made changes to the 1937 original to form the 1943 text. This assumption is supported by changes to a suspect manuscript held by the Wright archive. In fact, articles written by Wright and published in the 1930s were changed by him for their republication in his 1943 autobiography! There are, for instance, alterations to his article "Architecture and Life in the U.S.S.R." which appeared previously in both *The Architectural Record* and *Soviet Russia Today*. In any event he states in his autobiography that he prepared the Moscow text which was then translated into Russian by *Pravda* correspondents.³⁴ Such a process could have allowed a tempering of language and structure. Then that translation was vetted by his wife, whose second language was Russian. The fact that the speech was prepared was unusual in Wright's long career as an off-the-cuff speaker, something he was rather proud of.³⁵ The obvious but unanswerable question is: Why did Olgivanna not provide the initial translation? Anyway, Wright spoke a few introductory and concluding words in English to his Moscow audience, the first and last paragraphs below, which are not part of either Wright version. His text as prepared and translated was read in Russian to the Congress by Nicolai J. Kolli³⁶ of the Union of Soviet Architects.³⁷

34. According to *Auto43*, 544. Perhaps architect David E. Arkin did the translation. Wright believed Arkin was the "editor of *Pravda*," but he was in fact an architectural critic who may have written for *Pravda* but was foundation editor of *ArchR*.

35. E.g., *Auto43*, 437.

36. Wright's closest friend in Moscow according to Starr, *Melnikov*, 223, and according to Wright in *Auto43*, 544, his personal interpreter.

37. *Auto43*, 544, last paragraph. The number of errors in just part of the paragraph about his speech in *Auto43* is amazing. For instance, Wright was not the "Honored Guest"; he was not a guest "of the Russian People"; and the Congress was not held in the Hall of Soviets but rather in the House of Unions; the "infamous purge trials" were not held in that building or in the Colonnade Hall, where the speeches were given; Kolli (or Kolly) was not translated by Russians as Collé, and he was not a member of the Institute of Architects but of the Union of Soviet Architects and not its president; and Wright implies the hall was overflowing with spectators just to hear his speech, which of course was not so. There were 418 delegates plus other guests and participants at all sessions. Most of Wright's mistakes are repeated in *Auto77*, 571–572, while some are compounded: e.g., the hall "was packed with architects from all over the world," and later it is stated

Frank Lloyd Wright (USA)

Before embarking on the essence of my address, I should like to express my sympathetic admiration and to point out that I have seen your country's quite remarkable achievements. Architecture is a very complex matter; it represents a distinctive interpretation of life. Hence one has to approach the solving of architectural issues with very careful forethought and attention.

Dear Comrades, I came to you from afar having crossed on my way here the borders of five countries. I have arrived from the USA, a country which is the great hope of the world, to the USSR which is equally a country of great hope for the world. But since I arrived here it has turned out that, thanks to Soviet aviation, the USSR and USA are very close neighbours indeed, living almost side by side in the centre of the northern hemisphere! . . . [*sic* ellipses].

I am happy to be among you—already I have had time to acquaint myself with the struggle you lead for the creation of an architecture worthy of your new Soviet life.

I understand you better since, in that struggle for new technique, my country was at one time in the same situation you presently find yourself. We too were faced with a choice—either crawl back into the shell of an old culture, or bravely go forward and create our own social order. With this obvious direction before us, however, we made a mistake—we proceeded on the wrong path, that of imitation.

The rapid growth of science, industrial technology and mechanical means, applied to the exploitation of huge natural resources of our country, suddenly presented us with great wealth. These advances considerably surpassed our knowledge of the basic principles of art. Developing an extensive and great building activity, we were guided by architectural samples from the arsenal of dead or decayed cultures. Hence our official professional architecture is a disgrace to a free country. Our official buildings indicate, at best, merely the achievement of our very considerable triumphs in the field of science and industry.

Only now, in ours as well as some other countries, from the standpoint of modern needs, there is beginning to break through a genuine architecture to replace the artificial ornamental style with which we previously adorned our cities. This new growth of a genuine culture emanates from the people and is based on a truly national culture.

The fact that our buildings excel in top quality workmanship is a poor consolation for us architects. Our highly acclaimed architectural achievement is the skyscraper. But what does it really represent? The skyscraper is no more and no less than a victory for engineering and the defeat of architecture.

This rising, steel framework of a skyscraper is generally hidden behind a thin facing of stone blocks imitating the masonry of feudal towers.

Skyscrapers are stunning, but they are false and artificial, like the economical structure which gave rise to their emergence in dull congested urban areas.

In some of your buildings, constructed to serve the people, I noticed architectural motifs created in the old days by the aristocracy's culture. The adornment of this very hall speaks of that idle life-

that the place was not overflowing but "overwhelmed" by people; and there is a new one, that he, FLW, went from his London Watson lectures (1939) directly to Russia (1937). I doubt if FLW would have allowed these last errors.

style and of a considerably lower standard than the level of that which we call organic architecture.

It is difficult to overcome the palatial style. The tendency toward grandomania when prevailed upon in one place, sometimes becomes apparent in another—and where it is least expected. Aspirations for such magnificence at times become popular because it becomes apparent that there is difficulty in finding another, more refined expression of life in architecture.

Just at present, with the day of a new freedom dawning for mankind, we are imbued with new ideas, loftier than those ideals which occasionally inspired the old cultures. The old cultures were able to create only the outward signs of well-being, whereas a flourishing new culture springs from the basis of internal growth. Such growth develops slowly, but I am convinced that this is the only right and safe course to genuine growth.

The USSR must now construct buildings on a scientific basis, guided by common sense and making the most efficient use of high-quality building materials. The left wing of the so-called “new” architecture also advocated the principles of creating an organic architecture but, to all intents and purposes, did not proceed beyond plain wall panels, flat roofs and ornamental corner-windows; and the right wing of said “new” architecture turned the buildings into ornament. Both tendencies are generated by decaying old cultures. The correct path to the creation of organic architecture consists of the scientific organization of building activity and animating it with a genuine spirit of humanity.

In the USA, slowly and painfully we are beginning to realize that megalomania does not stand for greatness. That exaggeration is alien to organic architecture.

Architects of the Soviet Union must now concentrate their efforts on good planning and sound construction, refrain from superficial decoration on their buildings and from attempts to impart to them forced and far-fetched shapes, until your young architects find new technical forms and the images expressive of the new ways of Soviet life, in the same manner as the architecture of the Kremlin similarly expressed old Russia. Under these conditions, the USSR will doubtlessly justify the hopes of the world, and create in it a new genuine architecture. I hope that some day the USA will learn this too.

Do not squander your talents on trivialities; do not be carried away by superficial “taste.” Architecture is more and more coming into the spheres of science and philosophy.

America is far behind from correct town planning. Its economic system interferes with this. Private property ownership makes correct planning impossible. Soviet Russia, however, came to the realization of the value of correct planning ideas. Organic architecture will not only express such ideas of a new free life but also ensure, in the USSR, the possibility of living one’s life better than anywhere else. Ideas of Soviet Russian organic architecture will spread to those other countries on the continent if they continue their insular way of life in those continental countries.

Young architects of the Soviet Union, I call upon you to continuously improve so you may reach the very heights of architecture. Overcome all difficulties. Study your design meticulously, thoroughly master construction and structural principles which have their basis in technology and, inspired by your Soviet vision, you will create a worthy architecture which will be in harmony with your Soviet way of life just as the Kremlin was in harmony with the social environment which gave it birth.

The Kremlin, when relieved of its later decorations, represents

one of the greatest treasures of all times and nations. Soviet Russia must honor its great architectural monuments, but not imitate them. Genuine architecture retains its significance eternally. But new principles of freedom, embodied in the Soviet Union itself, will generate other great art treasures.

I take away with me from the USSR many impressions of brilliant achievements, and the greatest hope I have ever nourished—the hope for mankind and the future of life on earth.³⁸

Wright thought his speech was splendid. “I have never had so great an ovation in my life,” he said. “Again and again I had to go back, the applause continuing until I reappeared to take my seat beside Olgivanna. . . .”³⁹ The facts as revealed by *Architecture of the U.S.S.R.* and *Pravda* are otherwise. Response to Wright’s speech was controlled. There was more-or-less spontaneous applause after he said that the skyscraper

38. FLW, “Frank Lloyd Wright (USA),” *ArchR*, (July–August 1937), 49–50. The translation is not copyright, but please acknowledge DLJ and SH-J. FLW’s prose is difficult at best. It has vague allusions and esoteric terminology as well as imprecise grammar. Russian prose is active yet repetitive and, in the 1930s, replete with pet Soviet terms like “social order.” Translation from FLW to Soviet Russian and then back to English (or rather FLW) is dicey business. It needs to be remembered that the *ArchR* text was prepared for Russian consumption.

There is an edited ms in FLW Archive that does not correspond with any published version and is only somewhat similar to *Auto43*. However, it was useful in assisting translation.

For those who may wish to compare the 1937 and 1943 texts, the following chart indicates relatively comparable paragraph numbers.

<i>Auto 1943</i>	<i>ArchR</i>
pp. 545–548	pp. 49–50
—	1
1	2, 3, 4
2	5
3	5
4	7, 8
5	9(?), 10
6	11
7	12
8, 9, 10	13
11	15
12	16
13, 14	—
15	—
16, 17	17
18	18
19, 20	19
—	20

In *Auto43*, paragraph 15, he mentioned television, a knowledge of which he gained not in Russia but while in London, May 1939. Alterations of the *Auto43* version to make the *Auto77* text are of equal magnitude, therefore comparison of *Auto77* with *ArchR* 1937 is unreasonable. Cf. FLW, “Architecture and Life in the USSR,” *Architectural Record*, 82 (1937), 59–63, followed by Simon Breines’ article on the Congress. FLW’s ms was unsolicited (*Architectural Record*, 82 [1937], 5). A comparison of *ArchR* and the FLW archive ms is too difficult.

39. *Auto43*, 544.

rather than being a triumph for architecture was its defeat. And a rather sustained and vigorous ("stormy") but polite applause at the end. By comparison the Spaniard, Manuel Sanches-Arcas, received many (ten) almost intrusive "cheers" and applause and a "standing ovation" on a few occasions.⁴⁰ But then he was highlighting the few successes of Soviet supported troops and the role of architects in and out of uniform in Spain. With such optimism Sanches-Arcas concluded his paper: "No pasarón [they will not pass]!"

The three themes in Wright's talk were technology, aesthetics, and new societies. His approach to them in 1937 was not too different from that of previous years. It is not technological achievement in itself that is important, he argued, but how it is applied. For architecture it is not enough, for instance, to be able to build skyscrapers; they must first be necessary in the grand scheme of things and, second, not be sham masonry. It is not correct to achieve these technological breakthroughs with concomitant changes in theories of art, in aesthetics. To apply technological advances to buildings which look like those of the old "dead cultures" is wrong. New societies demand new aesthetic responses in architecture and town planning. The thread that runs through and knits the speech is Wright's vision of an organic architecture—the complete theory.

Some interesting points were made by Wright which now seem rather obvious in their support of the revisionists, especially as laid out by *Pravda* on 15 June. Skyscrapers in general reflect capitalist ventures, with resulting slums. The "left wing" to Wright were the Central Europeans and their internationalism. To the Soviets the "left wing" represented naive followers without a proper ideological knowledge of Lenin. They were formalists. To both sides they were wrong. It is not clear what or who represented Wright's "right wing," but one suspects those styles similar to or less modern than Art Deco—ideas and ornament derivative of the past. To the Russians the right wing approached the old traditionalists. Both advocated technology and science as necessary. Both were discouraged by certain aspects of American society and its architecture. It is difficult to explain what Wright meant by "official" architecture, perhaps governmental or that which is generally accepted by fashion or by the American Institute of Architects. (It is not clarified in the 1943 or 1977 editions of his autobiography.) "Grandomania" was in reference to Iofan's winning design for the Palace of the Soviets—an apt term. And, as previously mentioned, Wright encouraged a search for an architecture worthy of modern Soviet aspirations. That

was one of the terms of reference for the Congress as set out by *Pravda*.

All these and other issues in the speech had been raised and argued by Wright before. He almost certainly was not aware of the ideological and hierarchical battles within the Soviet architectural profession that had preceded the Congress and was therefore ignorant of those lingering within the course of the Congress. His reading of articles in the Philadelphia architectural magazine *Shelter*, for instance, where the discussion of the Palace of the Soviets competition was reported, would not have given him proper insight into those problems, only an awareness of an on-going discourse. The heat of that debate would have eluded him. But the Soviets were most certainly aware of Wright, as outlined above. His speech, therefore, must be seen in two lights. First, it was only a courtesy that they asked him to speak. Note that his talk was in the evening of the last day. This courtesy can be interpreted as one means of publicly acknowledging the presence of the patriarch of 20th-century architecture. The speech was not meant to set the tone of the Congress or to be something similar to a keynote address, for such a paper is given at the beginning of sessions, not the end. Wright's was rather like an after-dinner speech. So, they allowed him to sit through six days of proceedings. Second, as revealed by *Pravda* and the absence of further discussion, to his Soviet audience the speech was somewhat confusing (organic, grandomania, etc.), very short, and rather naive professionally, yet it fitted nicely into the Union leaders' schemes. All things considered, it was somewhat disappointing to Wright's hosts, the architects rather than Union leaders.

And again some interesting questions arise. Was he invited in the hope that he would reiterate his well-known dislikes of aspects of American politics, economics, and architecture; utterances which would strengthen the position of the Union and the Party? Or was he asked to talk about those subjects after his arrival? Or did he respond to some of the issues raised at the Congress, those that fitted his ideas? Or did he prepare his manuscript before arrival in Moscow? Or what? Perhaps a comparison of his responses to *Architecture of the U.S.S.R.* in 1933 with his talk in 1937 may help to define the nature of the problems if not adequately answer the above questions. His replies in early 1933 were straightforward and uncompromising. Eclectic compositional planning and its façades were dead. So too formal drawing which, he might have clarified, was merely Bèaux-Arts composition. It was important to understand why monuments of the past were created, for the process might lead to the discovery of "the same characteristics" to make great buildings today. But these "would be necessarily very different." And, most importantly, the individual conceives, creates, and controls the construction of great architecture, not committees, unions, or collectives. A further comparison of his brief answers to *Pravda* in 1933 is

40. "Manuel Sanches-Arcas (Spain)," *ArchR*, (July–August 1937), 45–56. FLW was not mentioned in the brief preliminary program contained in the May issue of *ArchR* (1937, 2–4), probably because he had first refused and later changed his mind.

similarly instructive, especially where he wrote that a nation should be ruled "from within or from without" or that American education breeds inertia for middle-class minds. For the audience at the 1937 Congress too many of his previously uttered subjects or themes of personal importance were either ignored, politely suggested, or reduced to banality.

III

We know that Wright was aware of the social and political upheavals taking place in the U.S.S.R. during the thirties, but was he aware of the struggle between the architectural formalists, to use their vernacular, and revisionists? To ask the question another way around: Why was he invited? Additionally, why did he accept the invitation? Speculative and conjectural answers immediately and provocatively assert themselves as obvious reasons for the Russians to invite Wright, as well as other foreign architects. The struggle, to again use their term, of world communism would be given a new life in spite of the notorious difficulties of the mid-1930s. In any case, the next meeting of the Comintern and the Party was due in less than two years. The internal problems of the U.S.S.R. would seem less officious if emphasis could be shifted to positive world development. As well, people from countries girdling Hitler's anti-Soviet Germany were invited. It was one manner of signaling a unified international communism. But more than this, the Soviet architects' Congress organizers would wish to be seen not only as accountable to the Party and its government, but also as acceptable to the U.S.S.R.'s various constituent countries and it was hoped, the rest of the world. If foreigners participated, the Union of Soviet Architects would be seen as fulfilling its proper roles. Many, in fact most, of the foreign architects were Party members in their own countries or fellow-travelers. But why specifically Wright, who was not even a fellow-traveler and who was the *only* internationally eminent foreign architectural figure present in Moscow?

One problem in looking at this issue is that we do not know if he was the only eminent foreign architect invited. Others may have refused invitations, even architects with known communist sympathies such as Le Corbusier in France and Oscar Neimeyer in Brazil. But in the mid-1930s Le Corbusier was seen as an initiator of a new formalism, Constructivism. As the Congress progressed it was noted that he was judged passé, his followers as enemies. Neimeyer and Le Corbusier had been collaborators on at least one project in Brazil, the Ministry of Education building in Rio de Janeiro, begun in 1936.⁴¹ Neimeyer was also tainted. But what of other leading architects in England or the Americas? What of Central Euro-

pean émigrés? Perhaps we shall never know whether or not they were invited. Yet, in trying to discover why the Soviets were interested in Wright, we might come to understand why they may or may not have been interested in other architects or why the others might have refused, given the opportunity.

The Soviet Union was not ignorant of ideas and practices in architecture in Europe and other areas of the western world. Theoretical treatises and architecture as manifest were well published and, in Franco-Slavic Russia of the 19th and early 20th centuries, eagerly read. Until 1917 Russian architects came from the ranks of the aristocracy. After 1919 they came not entirely from the remnants of the aristocracy but in any event were literate and necessarily knowledgeable in a Western language. Even in the 1930s parts of Russian architectural journals were in both French and Slavic.⁴² Moisei Ginzburg mentioned that, while a student in pre-war Milan, he studied one of the famous German Wasmuth editions of Wright's architecture.⁴³ We know that Wright's work was studied, not only the Wasmuth books but later works,⁴⁴ especially by those who believed that art was not objectively determined: those architects, therefore, who in 1937 were more susceptible to the heresy of individualism. In fact, as early as 1912 Russian architect Panaleimon Golosov had built his own version of Wright's prairie style Warren Hickox house of 1900.⁴⁵ In any event, there is no record of translations of books and articles about Wright into Slavic languages.

Information about Wright was getting into Russia, but were the ideas and products of the Soviets getting out? Although there was not very much, it was enough to intrigue. Konstantin Melnikov's 1925 pavillion at Paris was followed in 1927 when he was the only Soviet architect given his own section at the Machine Age Exposition in New York. Again, in 1933 he was the only Soviet architect selected by the jury for the Milan Triennale as one of the 12 great contemporary architects. The only American architect selected was Wright. The others were Sant'Elia (Italy), Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier (Switzerland and France), August Perret and Lurçat (France), Adolph Loos and Willem Dudok (Holland), Josef Hofman (Austria and Holland), and Erich Mendelsohn, Mies van der Rohe, and

41. Lucio Costa was associated and Le Corbusier was a consultant. See Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 3rd ed., Harmondsworth, 1969, 519–521.

42. E.g., the scholarly *Academy Architecture* (Moscow), and serving the professional, *ArchR* (Moscow), with contents and photo captions in French.

43. Starr, *Melnikov*, 23. On Ginzburg, see Bliznakov, "The Search," 142–143, 212–213, and *Moisei Ginzburg Style and Epoch*, intro. and trans. A. Senkevitch, Jr., Cambridge, Mass., 1982. Cf. FLW, *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright*, Berlin, 1910; and FLW, *Studies and Executed Buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright*, Chicago, 1910; FLW, *Ausgeführte Bauten*, Berlin, 1911.

44. Starr, *Melnikov*, 242.

45. *Ibid.*, 23.

Walter Gropius (Germany).⁴⁶ Four of these greats, Gropius, Mies, Mendelsohn, and Dudok, have confessed to being greatly influenced by Wright prior to 1925. Loos had shown a stylistic knowledge of Wright, and we now know that Le Corbusier modestly imitated the American's early work,⁴⁷ an admission he was personally unwilling to offer. The fact remains that Soviet architectural ideas, their many competitions, and even completed architectural works were seldom published in English prior to the 1930s. Still, Wright's main source of information would have been English language magazines and journals. He would have been aware of the dramatic Russian work promised in writing and by architecture as published, if only sporadically, up to about 1933. That was during the period when so many idealists from the corners of the world were helping build a modern U.S.S.R. For instance and only typically, there appeared in the American professional press Roderick Seidenberg's review of modern architecture in 1930, "Symmetry and Ornament Discarded as Russia casts off the Past," in *The American Architect*.⁴⁸ In the British press the entire May 1932 issue of the English periodical *The Architectural Review* was devoted to Russian architecture, with one part written by Berthold Lubetkin. Not typical was a book by Wright's friend, Erich Mendelsohn, *Russland, Europa, Amerika*, in 1929. Only suspicion suggests a copy was sent to Wright. As well, *Shelter*, a newly named publication of the T-Square Club in Philadelphia (formerly *T-Square Club Journal* and then just *T-Square*), published a series of articles about Soviet architecture and American architects in the Soviet Union in November 1932. The American O. K. Fulmer talked of being "An Architect in Russia"; one "M.M.R." wrote a letter from Moscow which elicited a response from Theodore Larson (then editor of *The Architectural Record*); Matthew Ehrlich wrote a note from Sverdlovski, Siberia; and a confessed former employee of Wright's (name unfortunately withheld) challenged the magazine to publish an article by S. T. Woznicki, Managing Editor of the Polish magazine *Architektura i Budownictwo*.⁴⁹ The article about the proposed Palace of the Soviets, titled "USSR—on the problems of architecture," was published and a copy was sent to Wright. Certainly none of the professional journals contained information about political events within the profession in Moscow during 1934 to 1937.

In the early 1930s an architectural competition for a Palace of the Soviets was intended to signal a new architectural awakening in Russia. In the obvious and intense light of totalitarian

Soviet Russia, the design or style (if there was to be one) would be enormously influential. Architect B. M. Iofan's project eventually won and was accepted by the adjudicators—but construction was never begun. As a predictable, staged, and therefore cynical result, Iofan's gargantuan pile was nonetheless designed to help determine Socialist Realism. It was not a style but a grandiose eclectic collection of enormous size that was to be persuasive for many years.

As noted, articles in English about Soviet architecture were few in number, more of a persistent trickle. After 1933 the trickle dried up.⁵⁰ The dearth of information was emphasized in 1937 when *The Architectural Record* noted, perhaps reflecting a view of editor Larson, that "architects of the U.S.A. have followed the fragmentary account of recent trends in the architecture of the Soviet Union without obtaining a clear picture of what is going on there."⁵¹ If Wright received any information during those four years, it would have been whatever was allowed to sieve through propaganda channels or appear in the pro-Soviet press and magazines such as *New Masses* or *Soviet Russia Today* (after 1951, *New-World Review*). As might be expected, not even the Western socialist or communist press was kept abreast of—let alone fully aware of—actual happenings in the U.S.S.R. during the purges of 1934 to 1938. Certainly art and architecture were accorded a low priority.

In the past, just after the turn of the century and in the mid-1920s, Europe had responded enthusiastically to Wright's theories. In the 1930s there was a mild revival. An exhibition of drawings and photographs traveled around European centres in 1931;⁵² the same exhibition was first held in Seattle and then in Eugene, Oregon.⁵³ During the period 1930 to 1936 Wright's architecture and/or his writings were published in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Australia, Japan, and England, but not east of Poland.⁵⁴ No other individual architect from America had received so much attention in Europe, not even New Englander Henry Hobson

50. Cf. the exception, "Art in the U.S.S.R.," a special number of the London magazine *Studio*, Autumn 1935, where the authors were Russian.

51. "Architects in the U.S.S.R. Meet to Consider Architecture," *Architectural Record*, 83 (1937), 59.

52. See, for instance, Dora Landau, "An American Architect Exhibits in Berlin," *The American Magazine of Art*, 23 (1931), 165; W. L[eotze], "Unter der Lupe, Frank Lloyd Wright and die Kritik," *Die Form*, 6 (1931), 356–58; and Harry Adsit Bull, ["Wright"], *International Studio*, (August 1931), 54, and, "Wright in Berlin," *The Art Digest*, 5 (1931), 12.

53. Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Frank Lloyd Wright at the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Metropolitan Museum Art Bulletin*, 60 (1982), 5.

54. From my evidence, but also cf. Robert L. Sweeney, *Frank Lloyd Wright: An Annotated Bibliography*, Los Angeles, 1978, where entries must be verified.

46. *Ibid.*, 10.

47. Paul Venable Turner, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Young Le Corbusier," *JSAH*, 42 (1983), 350–359.

48. *American Architect*, (1930), 48ff.

49. Perhaps Michael Kostanecki, cf. letter, FLW to MK, 2 January 1933, FLW Archive.

Richardson in the 1880s.⁵⁵ The New York firm of McKim, Mead and White was well known at the turn of the century but not the individuals as practitioners. In fact, no 20th-century architect of any nationality received as much attention outside his own country, propagandist Le Corbusier perhaps being the exception.

While some of Wright's writings were meant to disarm in order to gain attention, some must also have been intrinsically attractive to the Russians. In the early 1930s his distaste for the Central European's 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. This exhibition was followed in 1932 with another in which Wright also participated. It was organized by Alfred Barr, Lewis Mumford, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., and MOMA curator Philip Johnson. Included were many Americans associated with the style (Raymond M. Hood, George Howe and William E. Lescage, Richard Neutra [expatriate Austrian], and the Bowman Brothers—Irving and Monroe), as well as the now usual Europeans (Le Corbusier, J.J.P. Oud, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe) and Wright.⁵⁶ There was a catalogue, *Modern Architects* (MOMA and Norton, 1932), and a companion book on aesthetic principles by Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*.⁵⁷ By being included with the cubic white box crowd, Wright believed there was in implication that he was in some way associated, even identified with the style and therefore, as he reasoned, with the corollary, communism's international ambitions. The exhibition was opened in February, and Wright quickly responded in publication in April:

I find myself standing now against . . . the so-called international style.⁵⁸

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. . . .

55. Cf. Leonard K. Eaton, *American Architecture Comes of Age. European Reaction to H. H. Richardson and Louis Sullivan*, Cambridge, Mass., 1972.

56. Announced in, e.g., "Exhibition of Modern Architecture," *The Architectural Record*, 71 (1932), 29. Of the better known German architects, only Mies van der Rohe and Erich Mendelsohn drew Wright's praise. When Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier visited the University of Wisconsin in the 1930s (at different times), they asked to visit Taliesin. Wright refused.

57. New York, 1932. See reprint edition, *The International Style*, New York, 1966. For an indication of how close American architects Howe and Lescage were to Russian Constructivists, see Alison Sky and Michelle Stone, *Unbuilt Americas*, New York, 1976, pls. 195–198.

58. FLW, "Of Thee I Sing," *Shelter*, 2 (1932), 10.

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.⁵⁹

Words anti-communistic to a very large degree, yes, but the main thrusts of his arguments were not only anti-capitalistic, but that the architectural style was foreign, "imposed," not American, rigid, a stale formula. It was not just a second manneristic eclecticism; the new architecture from Europe threatened to become culturally colonialistic. Of the selections available to his country as displayed at the exhibition, why should the American architect who was creating an American architecture not be the obvious American choice? The fact that in the 1930s the popular choice became the Central European International Style deeply hurt Wright. With paranoid insight he believed America tended not only to ignore but to dismiss him.

After 1933, Wright's observations no doubt intrigued Soviet regulators. The Party revisionists believed the Soviet architecture of around 1930 was wrong; therefore, Le Corbusier was wrong; therefore, Constructivism and concomitant formalist ideas were wrong. From a test, a destructive negative test of what was wrong, could what was right be found? Perhaps from the remnants? Not the best way to begin anew. Yet Wright's own polemic was to verbally destroy in the hope that rebuilding would be to his ideas.

There is an allusion in much of what Wright says, but it is relatively clear that he was not anti-American, quite the contrary, or even an anti-capitalist. When 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."⁶⁰ For emphasis he said, ". . . Money—the System that is destroying us" in America.⁶¹ In other words, only the American version, the one he had to work with and around and through, the one which in 1929 caused such sudden consequence, was wrong. 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 very clear. Alexander reviewed the ideas of Broadacre City, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Utopia," then came to what he believed was a logical conclusion. "The significance of Mr.

59. FLW, "Of Thee," 11. See also FLW, "To the Students of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, All Departments," *Architecture*, 66 (1932), 230, and FLW, "Opinion in American Architecture: 1. Architecture of Individualism," *Trend*, 2 (1934), 55–56.

60. *Auto43*, 560. In *Auto77*, the words "in our own country" were added, 589.

61. *Auto43*, 560.

Wright's project," said Alexander, "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."⁶² Was the Left on Wright more right than wrong? And surely the Soviets were aware of Alexander's observations.

In the 1920s and early 1930s the Russians saw the technical achievements of the skyscraper as monumental, something to be emulated. In the mid-1930s it was a sign of capitalist gradiosity and human degradation. As noted at the Union Congress, the revisionist view was of skyscrapers casting long capitalistic shadows over the people's homes, therefore creating a dark breeding place for slums. Wright's attacks against the skyscraper, in support of his Broadacre City, were well known.⁶³ "Ruralism as distinguished from Urbanism is American, and truly Democratic," he once said with Jeffersonian clarity.

If there was any doubt that Wright was flirting with the idea of socialism, if not its practice, then his association with Baker Brownell should have dispelled that doubt. Together they produced a book entitled *Architecture and Modern Life*. They shared some chapters and independently wrote others. Its publication in 1938 (although its copyright date was 1937) was too late for consideration by the Russians. Brownell described himself as liberal but quickly qualified his liberalism as not falling into "that snare" called communism. He acknowledged that the "social evils that have given rise to Communism must be faced."⁶⁴ Wright and Brownell were promoting their own—yet not entirely separate—themes within the one book, themes of a social philosopher⁶⁵ with strong ideas about participatory democracy that approach traditional socialism

(but fell short) and an architect with strong ideas about individualism that did not fall short in words or practice. For Brownell and Wright, Broadacre City was the exemplar of an ideal that would fuse city and country, a place for urban refugees. Those urban products, socialism and a liberal communism, were seen synonymously.⁶⁶ "Highly organized society, in a word, is a disintegrating influence on persons," they said. "It moves towards impersonal ends. It gains in power and fluidity at the person's expense." And further, "In fascist Italy, in [Nazi] Germany, in communist Russia this of course has happened."⁶⁷ After arguments against "extreme concentration and governmental ownership," they concluded, "The socialist assumption that centralization in all fields is itself the natural and best pattern of economic and social life is by no means justified."⁶⁸

They were against socialism as then defined and exemplified by the Soviet interpretation. The two authors were attempting to redefine socialism—if by another name—and place it in the hands of the people. They wished to disarm the inherent centralizing nature of the single party system (one party on a long-term basis as in Russia or on a short-term basis as in the English parliamentary system). They wanted to decentralize, to regionalize government, and spread democratized socialism. In this way, it was hoped that the evils of modern industrialized urbanism might be less pervasive and eventually dissipate. Villages would abound. Land, work, and home would again unite.

It was now clear. While Wright's writings were elliptical, if punchy, Brownell, with Wright's overt agreement, clarified for Wright his position. His interest in socialism was dialectic, passive, and as suggested, flirtatious. And it was hardly a desirable mode for him to practice. Wright's life-style and urban and political theories were contradictory. Indeed, he tended to apply those ideas which had some practical application to his architectural practice as well as supporting his anarchistic individualism. Yet what could have been more highly organized, less a place for individual expression, than The Taliesin Fellowship? Contradictions.

IV

Young people had always worked with Wright for experience. "Not so much as students," he said, confessing "I am no teacher. No, they came more as apprentices, beginning with

62. Stephen Alexander, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Utopia," *New Masses*, 15 (1935), 28.

63. FLW's attitude towards the skyscraper shifted over the years. Before c. 1932 he saw the tall building as an architectural problem to be solved. He said of Louis Sullivan's Wainwright Building, "The skyscraper is a new thing beneath the sun, an entity imperfect, but with virtue, individuality, beauty all of its own . . . was born. Until Louis Sullivan showed the way tall buildings never had unity, . . . the tall building . . . its height triumphant." See FLW, *An Autobiography*, New York, 1932 (hereafter *Auto32*), 267, slightly altered in *Auto43*, 270. In c. 1941 FLW recalled his daughter Iovanna's remark about the New York Empire State building: "'Daddy,' said she, 'they could have made it higher—couldn't they? . . . Then why didn't they?' You see that is really all 'height' can really 'mount to.'" (*Auto43*, 316, where the description was dramatically altered from *Auto32*.) After c. 1932 his thesis was aimed not at the architectural problem but, like the Soviets, at social and economic implications.

64. *Twentieth Century Authors*, New York, 1955, 134.

65. Brownell's ideas about a participatory democracy, a linear fluid society (to know his phraseology), is nicely set out in later works. See, e.g., *The Human Community*, New York, 1950, which contains a short eulogy of Wright's prose style. For an application of Brownell's ideas, see two books by Richard Waverly Poston, *Small Town Renaissance*, New York, 1950, and *Democracy Is You*, New York, 1953.

66. Intentionally; see their index and compare pages.

67. Baker Brownell and Frank Lloyd Wright, *Architecture and Modern Life*, New York, 1937, 87. FLW lectured to Brownell's classes at Northwestern University (cf. letters, FLW Archive, late 1935), and it was Brownell who proposed they collaborate on a book already begun by Brownell. See letter, Brownell to FLW, of December 1935, FLW Archive.

68. Brownell, *Architecture*, 243.

no pay—except their living at Taliesin—or with small pay if more competent to help. As they grew helpful they received a small salary in keeping with the work done, or to be done in the office or in the garden, over and above their living.”⁶⁹ That concise description was of his Fellowship. It inherited ideas from many sources but not, as historian Norris Kelly Smith believes, from various communitarian societies of the 19th century. The basic inheritance, Smith suggests, was one of philosophic constancy, “the ever present tendency of romantic thought to exalt the virtues of a quasi-monastic brotherhood of craftsmen.”⁷⁰ In Wright’s case, if not others, such an opinion is itself flimsy romanticism. Collectivism was abhorrent to him, as were the barracks of last century’s communitarians, and crafts were excluded from the Fellowship. The inspiration for his “school” resulted from an accumulation of experiences and practical needs and examples. There was his own dissatisfaction with formal schooling and success under his mother’s teaching with the Froebel Kindergarten system. There was his lack of success at university and his accomplishments under private, perhaps privileged, tutelage, so to speak, with his employers Joseph Silsbee, Dankmar Adler, and Louis Sullivan. With a floundering architectural practice coupled with the Depression there was the most practical incentive: a desperate need for money.

As well, there was his aunts’ Hillside Home School, located about three-quarters of a mile from his grandparents’ house on the family’s Wisconsin estate. The private school was rather progressive and attended by children of upper-middle-class clients. Wright helped Silsbee with one of the buildings in 1887. By all accounts it was quite successful until it closed with the retirement of his aunts around 1915. When formed, the Fellowship moved into and renovated the old buildings. There were, therefore, Wright’s familial, childhood, adolescent, and early professional experiences.

There was the general character and practical aspect of Elbert Green Hubbard’s Roycroft School in East Aurora near Buffalo, New York. Wright’s mother and sisters visited Roycroft in 1913, he before 1915,⁷¹ and he and Olgivanna in May 1930, shortly before the Fellowship was established.⁷² A visitor to Roycroft made the following observation in 1912. The Roycroft School “teaches boys and girls something from books. The pupils are taught to work in the open. . . . They groom horses, shear sheep, feed the hogs, milk the cows,

plant potatoes, pick currants. . . . They do the toil that fills the larder of the Roycroft Inn. And they pay Elbert Hubbard for the privilege of doing it. Isn’t that lovely?”⁷³ Well . . . it was a loveliness attractive to Wright.

There was Ralph Borsodi’s well-known “Experiment in Creative Living on the Land” of the 1920s—described in his family’s *Flight from the City*.⁷⁴ Wright would have been interested in how they were self sufficient through an elaborate household industry (livestock, weaving, food preserving, building construction, etc.) and in Borsodi’s ideas for a fundamental need to decentralize cities.

The philosophic ideal was found in applications of the Greek notion of *paideia*: physical development, attention to body; mental development, attention to the intellectual needs—all united by discipline exercised in work. Practice was found in toil: in the fields at Taliesin farm, in constructing buildings at both Taliesin North (and the old Hillside School) and West (outside Scottsdale, Arizona); in helping cook and serve meals and in cleaning and scrubbing buildings, as well as performing drafting, and filling, and . . . and listening to Mr. Wright. He not only needed an audience but adoring, malleable young minds who would be their “master’s comrade,” to use his words.⁷⁵

The role of Olgivanna at the conceptual level is not fully understood. It would be silly to assume too much but also remiss to suppose that she played no role at all. Certainly her experiences at George Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man must have been persuasive to the overall character and working aspects of the Fellowship. As early as 1931, before the Fellowship was announced, she briefly described Gurdjieff’s philosophy and applied routines, and said in part: “Just to be a completely developed human being, to have our mind, emotions, movement, body, mechanism, in well-proportioned order is a difficult task. . . . [We reached our development] by way of ordinary life: in the gardens, in the kitchen, doing housekeeping, farming, until the day’s work to keep up the Institute was done. In the evening we worked in movement, exercises, memorizing, concentration.”⁷⁶ And, “some evenings were spent in building the study-house; we were all anxious to finish it soon.”⁷⁷

73. As quoted in Smith, FLW 136. The visitor was William Marion Reedy, *A Little Journey to East Aurora*, East Aurora, New York, 1912, 33.

74. First published in 1933. See reprint, Borsodi, *Flight*, New York, 1972.

75. FLW, “Apprenticeship-Training for the Architect,” *Architectural Record*, 80 (1936), 210.

76. Olgivanna (Mrs. Frank Lloyd Wright) [sic author line], “The Last Days of Katherine Mansfield,” *The Bookman*, 23 (1931), 6.

77. *Ibid.*, 12.

69. *Auto32*, 236. Oddly, these and other observations on education were written in c. 1931 and not significantly altered in *Auto43*, although Taliesin was then ten years old. FLW seemed intrigued by the idea of education rather than the actual process of educating.

70. Norris Kelly Smith, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, New York, 1979, 136.

71. Hubbard died on the *Lusitania* in 1915.

72. Edgar Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, New York, 1979, 137.

The parallel—sans movement and meditation—between practices of the Fellowship and the above description of Roycroft and Gurdjieff's institute is remarkable.⁷⁸ Wright learned the Gurdjieff ways-and-means from Olgivanna, who was a student in Russia, at Constantinople, and later an instructor in France.⁷⁹ Wright found "much in common" between Gurdjieff's philosophy and his "own practices."⁸⁰ Edgar Tafel, one of Wright's apprentices from 1932 until 1941, observed that "her experience with Gurdjieff did influence the form of the Fellowship and some of the activities envisioned from the beginning. Mrs. Wright was the force that kept the Fellowship in working order, from the very start. . . ."⁸¹ By 1981, more than 20 years after Wright's death, she proclaimed herself in *Who's Who in America* as co-founder, a term probably close to the truth. The Taliesin Fellowship more closely approximated Olgivanna's belief in *paideia* and her pedagogical experiences than any of Wright's. In application his philosophy was the more pragmatic. One suspects he gladly tolerated her prosaic management.

In the mid-1930s the many contradictions of purpose, fact, practice, philosophy, or whatever were almost of no substantial concern. The Fellowship was touted as a self-sustaining work-shop. It was not meant to even approximate a socialist or communitarian experiment. In its semi-isolation in farming country it was to be a means of achieving freedom from "fashion," from "sham," from the "vile gods of trade," and freedom from the old bugaboo, European cultural imperialism, "the old human expressions already dead or dying around us."⁸² This in itself would have been attractive to those who had defeated the Czars.

However, in its most fundamental organization and ideas as promoted, not only in circulars, but in the press from 1932 to 1936, the Fellowship might have been seen as the beginning of something loosely akin to a soviet, a cadre of similarly modelled people: soviet and cadre not in title but in type. Or more reasonably it might have been seen as a kind of *kolkhoz*, a collective farm community, or a *kibbutz*. The reality was otherwise. It was closer to an English manor.

78. A remarkability not agreed to by Mrs. Wright (letter, FLW to Gutheim, 14 February 1941, FLW Archive).

79. Based on interpolation of evidence in Tafel, *Apprentice*, 138; Thomas de Hartmann, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, San Francisco, 1983, 106ff; and P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, London, 1950, 371ff.

80. Letter, FLW to Kenneth Bayes, London, 17 July 1939, FLW Archive.

81. *Ibid.*, 139. The Wrights' daughter, Iovanna, studied with Gurdjieff in Paris (Tafel, *Apprentice*, 135). The apprentices' most lasting memory of Gurdjieff was his recipe for sauerkraut (Tafel, 139). FLW offered Gurdjieff refuge during World War II.

82. *Auto43*, 291, slightly altered in *Auto77*, 419.

There remains one argument, somewhat less practical, aligned with both the idea of organic and the affirmation of modern. Modern means of the present, therefore not of the past. 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. The present, therefore, is something positively contemporary and nothing less. *Esprit nouveau*. 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. The present lives. Living—organic. Vital. Contemporary—new. Radical—root. Flowering—spring—newness. Sentiment notwithstanding, spring is renewal and therefore cyclical. Hence, Marx could argue that the principles of Grecian architecture were due for re-evaluation.

It can be seen that there were practical, substantive, and philosophic reasons for the Soviets to invite the architect from the midwest American prairies.

V

It is not clear why Wright accepted the invitation. Again, reasons provocatively assert themselves as to why. Some are interesting individually, while collectively they are quite persuasive. Wright was titillated by exotic places, he needed an environmental complement for revitalization, he loved to travel and then to write and talk of those places and the people he met. By traveling to Russia, Olgivanna would return to a place where a culture and language would stimulate childhood memories. Perhaps she could visit her family.⁸³ They both enjoyed things, whatever they might be, which were outside of or a challenge to their view of the Establishment. A trip to Russia was such a thing. They enjoyed showing foreign films to the young people of their Fellowship and some, if not many, were Russian. This proved to be disturbing to rural Wisconsinians. Historian Twombly discovered that: "To accusations in 1936 that he [Wright] showed too many Soviet films . . . he replied that Russian movies were no more propagandistic than American westerns, and that as citizens of the world the Fellowship had an obligation to explore the cultures."⁸⁴ The above indicates one or two levels of interest in the Soviet Union, but there are more substantial reasons.

83. Mrs. Wright's older sister remained in Russia. During the 1950s and 1960s she was made uncomfortable by the KGB when letters arrived from the U.S. Therefore, there was little correspondence.

84. As observed by Twombly, FLW, 216–217. By 1943 they had viewed 70 or 80 films (letter FLW to D. Arkin, Moscow, 20 January 1943, FLW Archive, also published in FLW, *Letters to Architects*, Fresno, 1984, 103). His films were rented from the Soviet controlled Amkino Corporation in New York City and began at least in 1935. Cf. letter, Amkino to FLW, 4 September 1935, FLW Archive.

Wright saw the Russian experiments of the twenties and early thirties as a challenge to “dead cultures,” to use his words, therefore to dead architectural styles. He shared at least a portion of the *Zeitgeist* theory then so prevalent in Central Europe and Russia, especially with the revisionists. He believed that the Russia of the 1930s should be the Russia of the 1930s, just as he argued that American should—must—be similarly motivated. To the Russians he prophesied, “You will create a worthy architecture which will be in harmony with the Soviet way of life, just as the Kremlin was in harmony with the social environment which gave birth to it.”⁸⁵ He saw the established academic roles played by architects and art theorists in Europe and European-based cultures—like the U.S.—subjected to needed evaluation and scrutiny in Russia. He believed that reappraisal, even revision, was necessary, but not those elements traditionally national. “I see no necessity for Russia to die that the Soviet Union may live,” he said.⁸⁶

And it was not only architecture but American nationalism (his interpretation) that dominated his writing, at least prior to 1950. Wright’s thoughts and ideas conjured during the late 1920s, written or otherwise, were brought together and packaged into three books. First, in 1931, *Modern Architecture, Being the Kahn Lectures for 1930* (six lectures delivered at and published by Princeton University), then his autobiography, and third the short and alarmingly vague *The Disappearing City*, (New York), the last two of 1932. More than 50 percent of the published material—reviews, excerpts, and so forth—by or about Wright from 1931 to 1939 relate to these three books. Much of their content was critical of or extolled virtues of America.

Russia’s possible interest in Wright has been noted. His knowledge of those interests must have intrigued. Although there is no direct evidence in his writings prior to 1937, he must have been reciprocally interested. He knew, of course, that Europe had been thrilled with his ideas and his architecture. He believed that they believed; therefore, surely the Russians believed there was something correct in his theories and practice as revealed in his architecture. Perhaps, he might have reasoned, he was outspoken and said what he believed, he was

forthright. So he said more about more. Did opportunity offer a new platform to proselytize? Did they invite him because they needed him, that is, his ideas about architecture but more importantly, about his vision for an organic life? When he confirmed his intention to attend the Congress, he said his “sympathy with Russia’s need in architecture impels me to go.”⁸⁷ A study of Wright’s written works in the 1930s, particularly in collaboration with Baker Brownell, indicates that he was not enamoured with American capitalism, so what was the practice of Communism’s socialism really like? Was the Taliesin Fellowship, his and Olgivanna’s notion of a working school, professional office, and farm community, similar to a communal *kolkhoz* or, less likely, a local soviet? He wanted to see, to observe for himself rather than accept vicarious explanations. And what of those highly praised engineering works, dams, railways, and those new cities and housing projects, underground railways, theatres, and convention halls? How did Russian Constructivist architecture look in reality, in its environment?

In the 1930s, for someone disappointed or, in Wright’s case, despondent over aspects of the American system as highlighted and exaggerated by the Depression, a trip to Russia was an irresistible proposition. For a man needing a lot of publicity and heaps of aggrandisement, the opportunity was heaven sent. In any event the trip was free.

Wright’s need to be a popular figure, to be newsworthy, cannot be glossed over as a superficial part of his personality. Rather, it was a dominant feature. And if one looks at his manuscripts or literary output after his visit to Moscow, one cannot help but be swayed to the opinion that he wanted to become a voice knowledgeable about Russia and only secondarily about Soviet architecture. Indeed, his and later Olgivanna’s views, praiseworthy and cautionary about Russia and its communism, were voiced in writings that began in 1937 and carried well into the 1960s.

However it worked out, Wright served Soviet purposes by his appearance in Moscow, not just the profession’s internal battle but also the prestige and propaganda gained by his presence.

85. FLW, “Frank Lloyd Wright (USA),” *ArchR* (July–August 1937), 50.

86. FLW, *Soviet Russia Today*, 15.

87. Letter, FLW to U.S.S.R. Consul General, New York, 22 May 1937, copy FLW Archive.