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Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture

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FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT ON ARCHITECTURE

By PAUL GOODMAN *and* PERCIVAL GOODMAN

AS is natural to a teacher and polemicist, a propagandist when he cannot build and a critic of what he has built, — and all this for forty-seven years! — the publications of Wright are voluminous, the more so since his larger conception of architecture as “organically” related to society and the cosmos leads him to talk of nearly everything. For the same reasons, however, these writings are so repetitious that it is possible in a brief essay to reduce them to a few headings and even to do justice to the main details: the polemicist hammers at the same points and this particular organic-philosopher soon comes home to his simple lesson.

What is lost in such a reduction is the character of Wright’s remarkably continuing activity, the unfailing energy and bold essays, loose connections and plenty of ignorance, and the faith in good principles.¹

I. Organic Architecture

“Architecture,” as used by Wright with a capital A, is a universal term. By this I mean that it signifies every object and subject-matter so far as it is excellent. Sometimes he distinguishes Organic Architecture from mere architecture, where Organic

¹ The numerous writings of Wright include: *Modern Architecture*, Princeton University Press, 1931; *Two Lectures on Architecture*, Art Institute of Chicago, 1931; *Autobiography*, Longmans Green, 1932; *Architecture and Modern Life*, Harper, 1937; *An Organic Architecture* (London), 1939; *On Architecture*, Duell Sloan and Pearce, 1941.

means "a structure wherein features or parts are so organized in form and substance as to be, applied to purpose, *integral*." But all organisms are architectural, and all purposes are spoken of as integral to the architecture of the Universe: "Architecture is whatever is organic. It is the organic pattern of all things. This remains the hidden mystery of creation until the architect has grasped and revealed it." Thus Organic Architecture is architectural architecture. Again, Architecture is something taken as the abstract structure of living, reality, etc.; but in the end nothing has significance except this structure, so that Architecture is the significance of everything: "Architecture is abstract. Abstract form is the pattern of the essential. It is spirit in objectified forms." It is the Good and, in fact, the Real. Thus, poetry is Architecture; Bach and Beethoven were the greatest architects, "the architecture of the future is the only hope for the painter and sculptor"; it is the keystone of Art, Science, and Religion; it is the Creative Spirit itself; "The Man of Galilee himself was an humble architect, in those days called carpenter"; the Universe itself is nothing but a grand Machine; Taliesin is a "research station toward—Reality."

Again, with respect to action: Statesmanship is Architecture; Economics is Architecture. And Architecture is the cure for War and conscription, as he told the British public in the summer of 1939. He therefore refutes the charge that the school at Taliesin is "escapist" by insisting that only there, through an organic architectural education, will young men come to grips with social problems.

The use of such universal terms is unobjectionable; they were used by Plato. And it is certain that Wright's way of conceiving Architecture has fortified him in his most valuable attitudes: for instance, in limiting himself to simply machined surfaces that do not do formal violence to the other surfaces of 20th Century life; in analyzing the *living* in the house, as when he opened the interior space; in combating the teaching of archi-

itecture as a specialty apart from social considerations; in relating form to site; in building-in the furniture and fixtures; in freeing the architectural imagination from axes and the other Beaux-Arts conventions. No doubt any of these might be arrived at by reasoning other than Organic Architecture; but Organic Architecture has certainly been Wright's way of explaining them to himself and his audiences.

Nevertheless, to handle language so freely demands in the end a mind infinitely flexible and astonishingly well-informed, for it is necessary to reach out into every field and do justice to the problems *of that field*, as well as merely to say "this also is Architecture." Otherwise, he will surely offend the experts who know their separate business; and he will come out, as always happens when the context of statements is not analyzed, with contradictions and loose talk. I don't mean to dwell on this master's weak points, but the mere mention of some of his "architectural" visions will show how vulnerable he is.

The architect-economist finds that Major Douglas has solved the problems of distribution. He imagines that rent can be abolished without political change. His ignorance of the financial structure is such that he imagines that gasoline, for instance, can be given gratis to the public without upsetting the ownership of "industry."

The architect-statesman finds that in Broadacre City there will be no police, but "it follows naturally from all this genuinely constructive way of life that in the administration of Broadacre City the county architect . . . has a certain disciplinary as well as cultural relationship to the whole; and since he maintains the harmony of the whole his must be one of the best minds the city has; and it will inevitably be the best trained." He finds that Organic Architecture will prevent war; but on the other hand, one reason why cities are *inorganic* is that they are vulnerable to air-attack!

The architect-theologian favors us with the observation: "Of

course there will be religion. Protestants, Catholics, Darkies, and the Synagogue will be with us"!!

The architect-educator has only contempt for classical education; but he avows that the students of his academy will work in close cooperation with private industrialists, so that they may at once be employed in private industry — as if the dangers of trade-schools had never been thought of. Is this the Research Station toward Reality?

The architect-painter most often writes as if all painting were mural-painting in a Wright house, as if easel-painting did not speak mind to mind precisely in a certain isolation in a frame.

These offensive observations could be multiplied a hundred-fold, and I assure the reader that they are not isolated slips, but seem to Wright to be as peculiar to his thought as the sentence "Form and Function are One."

(It is worth while to compare such loose talk of Wright's with the *Kindergarten Chats* of his Lieber Meister, Louis Sullivan. The *Kindergarten Chats* deal almost entirely with the themes of free imagination and cultural integrity, both dear to Wright. But Sullivan everywhere has an intimate sense of cultural atmosphere, whereas Wright's is more distant and schematic; Sullivan is a psychologist and an erotic, able to portray the genesis of imagination; and his flair for pedagogy is simply exquisite, as contrasted with Wright's authoritarianism. Then Sullivan's style, though often odd, is always graceful and witty; whereas when he is not energetic, Wright is affected, and blunders from violence to coyness. Yet it is Wright who says: "Language is comparatively easy to use; it will always be easier to phrase an ideal than to build it." But Louis Sullivan says: "If you are to use words, be careful that you understand their values, their form, texture, color, their literal, their figurative meanings, their in-born tendency to shift and transform themselves, and their inclination to gravitate toward other words. Words are alive. Drive them carefully . . . otherwise they will slip away." Lieber

Meister found plenty of truth in that wine he used to drink. In fact the only thing that prevents the *Kindergarten Chats* from being a major classic is — that there is no concrete discussion of architecture in them.)

Let me mention one shift of Wright's words extremely important for his later career. The climax of the Hull House Lecture of 1903 proclaiming the architecture of the Machine Age is a vivid vision of Chicago at night, its power and color, its pulsating life of almost physiological interrelations, "a magnificent truth with no guise of beauty," capable of unimaginable compositions. But when he comes to speak in England in 1939, every city in his eyes is a poor moribund thing; "all that is possible now in the buildings you build in your city is a kind of merciful mitigation"; "in any good organic structure it is difficult to say where the garden ends and the house begins"; this is the ideal of Broadacres, "an acre per person." Now either of these visions, or both, may be true; and it is easy to understand how — war, depression, and technological advance intervening — one might come from one to the other; but it is just this variation of contexts that Wright never seems to make clear to himself. Values that once seemed great are suddenly no values, yet without reconsideration or new proof. By this method it is always possible to say something different, but quite impossible to say anything wiser.

Through these changes, however, persists a developing architectural theme, continually absorbing more and more of Wright's theorizing; it is *the creation of domestic architecture for independent and increasingly self-subsistent people permanently attached to their own ground*. Wright says that it was by accident that in the firm of Sullivan and Adler the small houses were assigned to him; but as the years pass it is astonishing how few large buildings or even projects come from his board,—the Imperial Hotel, the Johnson Wax Building, Saint Mark's Towers, a few others. I am not referring merely to his success and skill

in domestic architecture, but to the cause of this success, an inward sympathy for a certain attitude and way of life, where the house is the castle. This sympathy is expressed in his Wisconsin progressivism, "capitalism broad-based on the ground"; Barsodanism and neo-agrarianism. He speaks everywhere of the new mobility, but architecture, as opposed to engineering, consists in repose; all values are at home. Broadacre City pretends to be a synthesis of all modern functions; but the fact is that on the subject of *community planning* he has absolutely nothing original to say (he does not even try), whereas in 1938 he is still able to prepare to plan 40 completely different small dwellings. Therefore, if I may advance an hypothesis, is it not permissible to say that what so fascinates him in Broadacre City is just the fact that the formula "an acre per person" seems at last *both to confirm his real interest as a domestic architect and to put to rest his dreams of a universal architecture?* As a community-plan it touches on all values, but it imposes on them the uncriticized standard of a domestic architect.

II. Domestic Architecture

In innumerable places Wright has listed and explained the characteristic excellences of his small houses.² These excellences are not merely the criticism of existent works, but are advanced as prescriptions for all building, for domestic houses and for buildings like the Imperial Hotel. It is reasonable to say that such a typical list is for Wright the general *poetics* of architecture, and the particulars are the *parts* of architecture.

These parts are the site, both geographical and historical; the living functions; what might be called the idea of the living functions; the surfaces; the structure; the "basic design idea"; the plan; the nature of materials; the technology; the

2. Relatively complete lists are given, e.g., in the paper *In the Cause of Architecture*, 1908; in the preface to *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe*, 1910; in the first of the *Two Lectures*, 1930; in the second chapter of *Modern Architecture*.

personalities of both architect and client. The order of these parts — I have roughly followed *Two Lectures* — is not crucial, because as Wright repeatedly and truly says, the art consists in the mutual expression of them all. You can tell the true artist by the way in which he brings his own formal parts, such as the plan and design, to the interpretation of the material parts, to constitute one whole.

(The excellent categories of Plasticity, Organic Simplicity, Individuality, Naturalness which Wright often introduces to describe this wholeness, belong rather to general aesthetics than to architecture especially.)

Now the glory of Frank Lloyd Wright is that *throughout this fundamental list* — fundamental because it is inconceivable that a great architect should omit expressing a single one of the points — *he has everywhere made strong and original contributions*. Contributions, moreover, in the teeth of almost universal architectural malpractice by his contemporaries, one of whom (like White) would be excellent in the façade, another (like Sullivan and Adler) in the structure, but none in the whole.

(There is one significant omission from all of Wright's lists up to the latest years; it is the Community Plan.)

1. *Site*. An example of appropriateness to the Site is the famous invention of the Prairie Style, the long horizontals of eaves, window-strips, balconies, and projecting base-course, adapted to the plain. The base-course projects so that the building is seen to rest on the ground rather than to spring from under it. (A tall city building, like St. Mark's Towers, is made smaller below than above.) The basement itself is above soil. The colors are prairie neutrals. (b) But this adaptation is not only to the formal appearance of the site, but also to its physical nature. The prairie-basement is dry, etc. The Imperial Hotel floats in mud which is the real basis of Tokyo rather than stands on the few feet of superimposed clay. (c) Now in Wright's later houses he comes more and more to *rely* on pecu-

liarities of the site for formal inspiration both in the plan and design (the Kaufmann house over the brook, the Oboler house on the peak). (d) But such reliance on the *peculiar* site is likely to lead, is it not, to domestic architecture for wealthy clients, for reasons of both real estate and construction. Here is an ironic contradiction between Wright's theory and practice: his sincere ambition is to build cheaply for every one; his most striking successes involve luxury expenditure. (e) The other buildings in the environment, Wright said in the early days, will take care of themselves without a general imposed plan, because the place, the individual needs and spirits, will have enough in common to insure community of style, *if* the buildings are built with integrity. In fact, of course, we find such a typical Wright house as that on Woodlawn and 58th in Chicago squatting alone in the midst of the Rockefeller-College-Gothic of the University.

2. Historical appropriateness means fitness to the mores and traditions: "I design a Negro schoolhouse in the South; make it theirs in point of life and color, form, etc. . . . I build a home for myself in southern Wisconsin, a stone, wood, and plaster building; make it as much a part of my grandfather's ground as the rocks and trees and hills." Thus in designing the Imperial Hotel, Wright was unwilling to import a purely occidental style, as had been done elsewhere in Tokyo; his idea was to design for the *transition* of Japan from "its knees to its feet" (surely he means from kneeling to sitting). Later he says, "All great architecture is transitional architecture." (b) The principle here is irrefutable, but Wright does not seem to realize the difficulties in the application. Let me point to a somewhat ridiculous contrast of paragraphs in *Organic Architecture*. Describing Taliesin West in Arizona he says: "Instead of sculpture we have used native rocks written on centuries ago by the American Indians and which we found on our own piece of ground. The camp has grown out of that ground, according to the spirit of environment and climate." In describing Taliesin in Wisconsin

he says: "Most of our ornaments at Taliesin are ancient Chinese They seem to have the modern spirit which characterizes modern buildings and the more ancient they are the more of that spirit they seem to have." (c) The fact is that the spirit of an environment is in large part given by the prejudice of the critic; the Internationalists too see their spirit everywhere. Wright is on much surer ground, when he relies for the *Zeitgeist* on the client's needs and his own feelings: "The building will be characteristic of those it was built to serve because it necessarily is a solution of conditions they make, and is made to serve their ends in their way The architect is their technician and interpreter . . . he is too keenly sensible of the nature of his client as a fundamental condition in his problem to cast him off, although he may give him something to *grow to* An architect is bound to educate his client to the extent of his true skill and capacity in what he as a professional believes to be fundamentally right." Wright has lived up to this program too. (d) In his early doctrine following directly after Sullivan, just what Wright saw as the spirit of the environment was the Machine Age. He was among the first to use the word *stream-line-design*; his houses were called "Dress-Reform Houses," as later he called the International Style "Cardboard Houses." It was mainly in opposition to the Internationalists that he later laid such verbal stress on parochial peculiarities. His present position seem to be: "The house must not seem incompatible with the motor car that drives up to the door," yet "the house itself is not a machine."

3. *Function.* We come next to the architectural abstraction of the Functions of Living, or at least of a kind of living of a kind of individual. It was Wright who broke down the interior partitions of multiple rooms and restored freedom of living-movement; and he has tried to destroy the box-room built on a major and minor axis. He talks in terms of the Zones of living: activity and repose. His intention in these changes was partly to give

himself freedom for handling the enclosed space; but this free handling in itself results in variety of perspective and the possibility of furniture and activity grouping according to more individual requirements. (b) He has opened up the inside to the outside by combining the windows and by extensive use of balconies; although, apparently temperamentally averse to flat roofs, he does not use terraces and roof-gardens with the lavishness of the Internationalists. (c) Again, he says "Always in the human scale in all proportions," so that he lowered the ceilings — leading to the criticism that if he himself had been 3 inches taller the proportion of all his buildings would have been different! But though the atmosphere is intimate, it is free and light, because of the extensive use of glass. A Wright house looks dark and is light, whereas a Le Corbusier house looks light and is light.

4. Nevertheless, Wright is not a functionalist; for along with the calculation of objective functions, he lays enormous stress on what we must call the *basic idea of the function*, as when he says: "I liked the sense of *shelter* in the 'look of the building' " and offers this as an explanation for the characteristic jutting eaves. This point is of capital importance. Wright's is the logical interpretation of Sullivan's formula "Form follows Function," for it is clear in the *Kindergarten Chats* that Sullivan conceived of a number of architectural genres, "to be a store," "to be a bank," etc., and it was these types of which the form was to be expressive. A simon-pure functionalist might, e.g., leave the lighting and plumbing exposed, but to Wright this would violate the proper repose of Shelter. (b) Similar is Wright's formula, "The horizontal is the line of domesticity." He himself sometimes dispenses with these horizontals in the interest of considerations of site or construction. Or again when he says of the Hanna or Honeycomb House: "The hexagonal is better suited to human movement than the rectangle" — he seems to be borrowing from Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House—if he real-

ly believes this, he must abjure every rectangular room he ever designed; but instead he has gone on to the curious *Circle House* in California. (c) The fact is that such formulae of horizontals, hexangles, or circles constitute the *basic plan and design idea* by means of which Wright feels that he is able to impose a unity on the manifold parts. The process is first to abstract from the functions some simple formal conception, and then to exfoliate this into the ground plan and ornament of the house. This is certainly architecture, but it is certainly not functionalism. (d) The bother is that even now Wright keeps disclaiming any intention of imposing a pattern on living; he speaks of the "Declaration of Independence from any imposition on life . . . the interpretation of life is the true function of the Architect." Must we then conclude that to him these few patterns exhaust whatever is possible in living? The *architectural* conception of "an acre per person" is nothing but the most grandiose, though least productive, of such imposed patterns. This is indeed the architect exercising a "certain disciplinary as well as cultural authority." What he means or at least should mean is that *any* creation is an imposition and the architect has a proper right to his own; but that architecture is *only* architecture and may impose itself only after taking due account of other things, never forgetting the warning of the poet,

"as I build, you move."

5. The same doubleness — of affirming the demands of the parts as absolute yet imposing an ideal upon them — runs through what Wright has to say of surfaces, plan, materials, construction, and technology. This doubleness is of course nothing but the tension of art itself, the medium and the imaginative solution fertilizing each other; but it is inaccurate to pass off as nature what is precisely art.

Surfaces. Wright was one of the first to fight for simpler machined-surfaces: he omitted the imitation hand-carving on the mouldings and sometimes the mouldings themselves. He re-

duced the number of materials and, following Sullivan, insisted that the surfaces should indicate and not conceal the underlying structure, as the flesh of the hand, to use his favorite simile, does not conceal the skeleton. He sought to achieve *plasticity*, "the quality and nature of materials seen as 'flowing' or 'growing' into form instead of as built up out of cut and joined pieces"; to "eliminate the insignificant" — e.g. he was in at the Passing of the Cornice — where by significance is meant just this property of one surface expressing another in appearance (quality) and structure (nature). The "perfect style" or ultimate success would be to use a single material; thus he often boasts of the Unity Temple as the first example of monolithic concrete. (b) A major invention to achieve plasticity was to build in the furniture and fixtures; and in general to design the furniture as part of the house. (He complains that the style of his early houses disappeared as soon as the client moved in his old junk.) Unfortunately the T-square dominates the furniture; Wright's furniture is square and bulky, not especially functional — "all my life I have been black and blue from contact with my own furniture." Certain shapes, elegant in themselves and graceful to the anatomy, are suppressed; Wright asks, for instance, that the piano-shape be concealed except for the keyboard. (c) When the furniture is architecturally designed the inhabitant is organically inseparable from his house: he must remain a long time. The alternative possibility for plastic furniture, that chosen by Le Corbusier for example, is to make both house and furniture so *un-individual* that it makes no difference in which house one lives. (d) Again, imposed on the whole is the one Idea: "The differentiation of a single simple form characterizes the expression of one building . . . from one basic idea all the formal elements of design are in each case derived The form chosen may flare outward, opening flowerlike to the sky, as in the Thomas house; another droop, to accentuate artistically the weight of the masses . . . or its grammar may be deduced from

some plant form that has appealed to me, as certain properties in line and form of the sumac were used in the Lawrence house at Springfield. But in every case the motif is adhered to throughout."

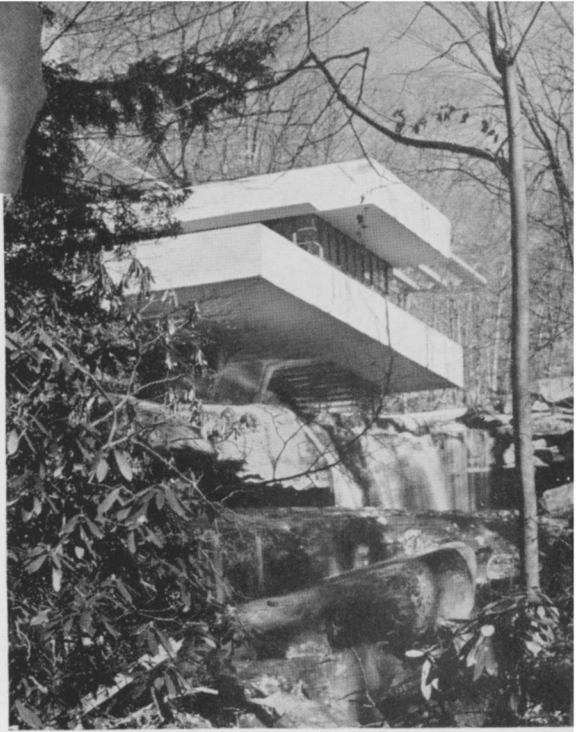
6. *Plan.* The analysis of functions into a few large zones gives clarity and simplicity to the Plan. In theory, not especially in Wright's practice, this is marked by the absence of connecting corridors, and therefore still more living space; and wardrobes in place of closets, relieving the plan from what is properly part of the furniture. (b) The zones of the plan may then become the chief elements of the exterior design, as in the house Wing Spread; and further, they may be marked by changes in material and construction, as from stone to wood, where the change in material not only satisfies a change in function, e.g. in the kind of lighting required, but may itself appear as part of the interior decoration. None of this would be possible if the plan were cut up into small parts. (Of course nowhere here, it must be said, does Wright achieve the interior openness and exterior clarity of the Internationalists who use screens instead of walls and often zone by furniture alone.) (c) Again, the logical expansion of small plan elements, such as windows or balconies, into large plan elements, such as window-strips and balconies that run the length of the wall, makes them automatically the chief elements of the exterior design. "The forms are complete in themselves and frequently do duty at the same time from within and without as decorative attributes of the whole." We thus, *from within*, escape the dilemma of "a wall punctured with holes." (d) It is in the Plan, finally, that the architectural imagination works under most tension, *for the Plan, the immediate expression of the functions, is in the best cases also the relation between the construction and the design.* That Wright grasps this is beautifully shown by his insistence on keeping the plan as far as possible in the fluid imagination: "If the original concept is lost as the drawing proceeds throw away all and begin

afresh. To throw away a concept *entirely* to make way for a fresh one, that is a faculty of the mind . . . few architects have What I am trying to express is the fact that the plan is the gist of all truly creative matter and must gradually mature as such." Would that Wright showed the same flexibility everywhere!

7. Lastly, let us lump together a few remarks about *materials, construction, and technology*. What he has added most, says Wright, to Sullivan's conception of function and form and function and construction, is the analysis of the nature of materials. Each material is to be finished and constructed according to its primary physical characteristics, as grain, crystal, or sheet; terra cotta must not imitate stone nor one wood be painted to look like another. Surface and ornament will then express material and construction. Thus, "the stick is the natural post. It is also the natural beam. Post and beam construction was, by nature, first wood"; the Greeks were in error to imitate this construction in stone. In separate discussions he takes up the "proper uses" of wood, brick, glass, metal. (b) An important consequence of the "honest" handling of materials is that Wright's buildings wear and weather well; he does not have to fear the moment when the veneer cracks and discloses the material beneath. (c) But in another sense, the nature of material is like the spirit of the environment in that the potentialities are very numerous and it is possible to see quite different properties as primary. Further, Wright is not always a careful observer. Thus, though indeed the Greeks imitated wood in ornamental details — and this perhaps largely for the sake of religious tradition — the total effect is always a graceful massiveness, perfectly appropriate to marble. Again, in what sense is wood "the natural beam"? The engineering of a tree seems to be more usually a system of cantilevers with members more and more in tension, rather than in units of compression and tension. (d) Further, he seems to have an aversion for certain materials. There is not much to say



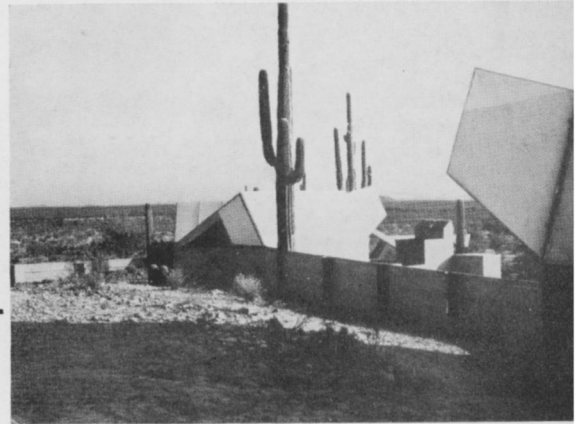
Appropriateness to Site



In the mountains



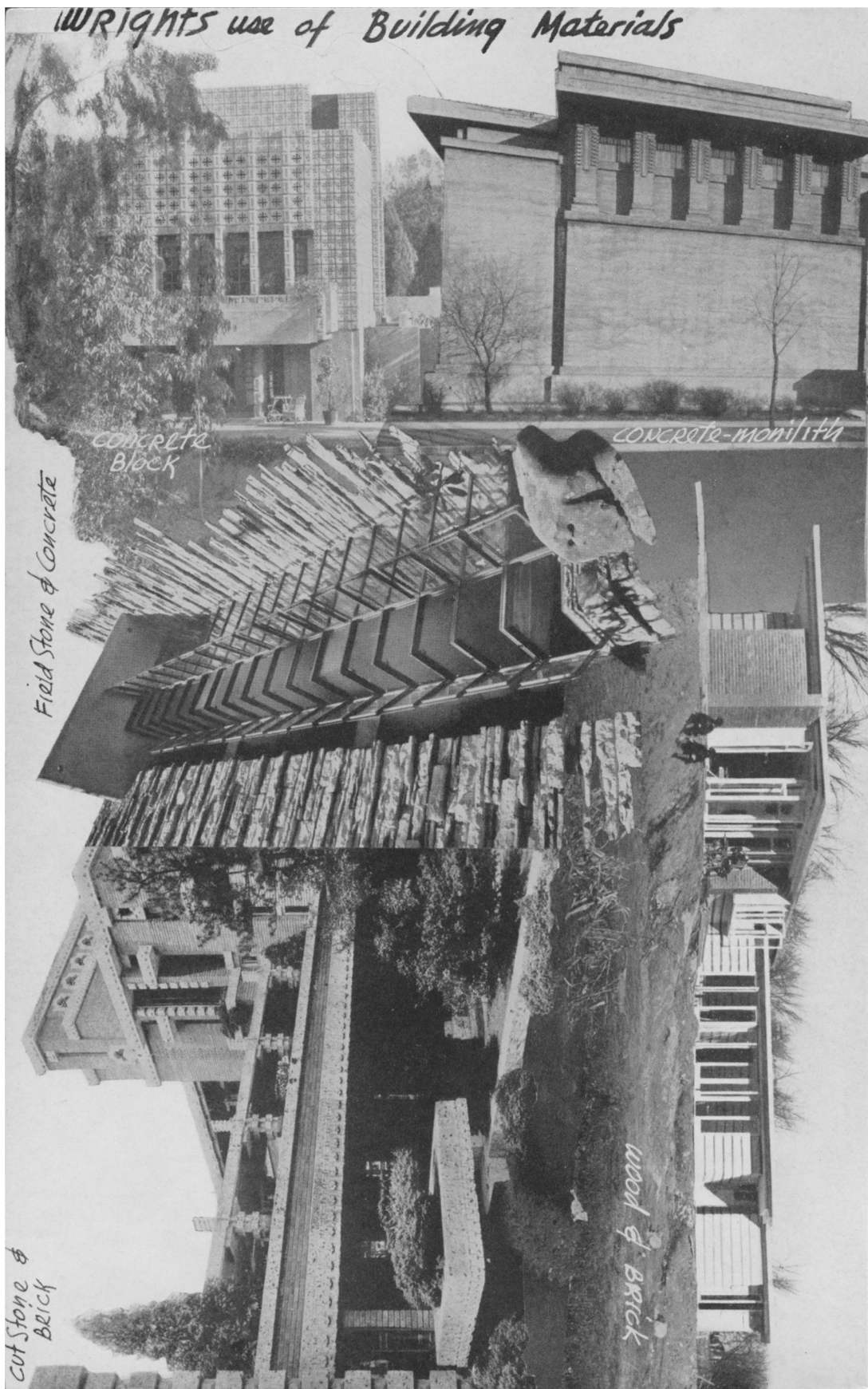
In the City



In the Desert



on the Prairie



about Wright on Steel, though this was so dear to Sullivan and Adler. (But even here he has the profound intuition that steel must be built "as a spiderweb," that is triangulated.) When the Internationalists expose the steel skeleton, he calls it "rattling the bones" and building "as a machine"; but why is such a structure less formal than exposing the wood beams of a ceiling in Taliesin West? Likewise, on the one hand when he analyzes the steel and concrete construction of St. Mark's Towers, he says "the outer enclosing shell of glass and copper is pendent from the cantilever slabs," and in a similar context, "the walls are mere screens"; but then he complains that the walls of the Le Corbusier houses are "artificially thin, like cardboard, bent, folded, and glued." It seems clear that he is here substituting temperament for analysis. (e) The same in his attitude toward machine-technology. On the one hand he was certainly among the first to celebrate simple machine-finish: "If I wanted to realize new forms, I should have to make them not only appropriate to old and new materials, but so design them that the machines that would have to make them could and would make them well." But this is a negative concept of technology; the affirmative concept would be to say, not "here are materials designed for machinery," but "here are machine-products to employ." This diffidence is fundamental in Wright because he is interested really in the integration and differentiation of rather small wholes, and to this enterprise mass-production is obviously a menace. The key to technology in architecture is pre-fabrication; but on this subject Wright says contemptuously, "Assembly-line houses." (How revealing that the moment he thinks in terms of a larger whole, the St. Mark's Towers, he says, "The building is a complete standardization for prefabrication." But pre-fabrication would be economical only if there were a number of St. Mark's Towers; then what becomes of Broadacres?) The issue is not, as Wright thinks, whether to make a house look like a machine, but how to use the machine as a tool according to its own poten-

tialities. These considerations cast a blinding light on Broad-acres and "an acre per person"; he is thinking (rightly!) of every single acre; but he is not thinking of all the persons in the City.

But passing by all objections, let us ask: What is architecture as learned from the practice of a master builder?

Architecture consists first in the analysis of the conditions: "the terrain, the native industrial conditions, the nature of materials, and the purpose of the building"; to these we must certainly add the community-life and the general economy. Next, from these we abstract "simple basic ideas," adequate to the conditions but also capable of combination and mutual expression. Lastly, these basic ideas are unified by the plan, the construction, the design, which add nothing material of their own (such as Axes or Orders), but are just the formal principles which combine the parts into a whole. For the first step knowledge is required; for the second, insight into the essential; and for the final step, imagination.

III. Organic Architecture and the International Style

Since the late twenties Wright has been obsessed by the polemic with Le Corbusier and his *Esprit Nouveau*; he returns everywhere to the attack on the Cardboard House, the Imitation Machine, and Modern: Latest of the Styles. The cause of the attacks is certainly partly pique at the enthusiastic reception that the younger men gave to ideas imported from Paris to which Wright had a claim not only of 20 years priority but of direct influence. But there are also the deepest differences both in social thought and in aesthetics between Le Corbusier and Wright, so that their contrast shows up the merits and demerits of each.

The pity is that these *complementary* positions do not exhaust the analysis of modern architecture, so that even adding Wright and Le Corbusier together we do not get an adequate

philosophy; yet apart from these two there is no modern articulate successful builder (so that my story here has no conclusion). This failure to exhaust the field springs perhaps from certain attitudes that both men *share*: they are both political messiahs (Le Corbusier's *Voisin Plan for Paris*, e.g., was to be a cure for war); at the same time the explicit purpose of both men is to preserve the political status quo and prevent revolution ("Architecture or Revolution" is the conclusion of *Towards a New Architecture*); for both, Architecture can solve all problems and pervades every subject (*The City of Tomorrow* sets out to insure that "the people of our city must never become bored"). These common faiths make it extremely difficult for either man to see building for just what it is in relation to society. At the same time certain other attitudes that they share have helped both men to become great planners: as, their forthright break with the Beaux Arts; the sense of architecture as involved in living problems in a social matrix; the understanding of part and whole, plasticity, and the elimination of the insignificant; functionalism; and the insistence on both reason and passion.

Wright's attack proceeds all along the line: The International Style neglects "the Nature of Materials, the Third Dimension, Integral Ornament . . . Surface and Mass are subordinate to this Trinity . . . they are a by-product." Then we are told that a house should not "outrage the Machine by trying to make a dwelling-place too complementary to Machinery." "The simplicity of these houses is too easily read, visibly an attitude, strained or forced." We need "heartfelt instead of head-made simplicity." The International Style, the Left Wing of Organic Architecture, is the "mere countenance"; it is not built from inside out. "Proportion is nothing in itself . . . Le Corbusier, hard as nails and sane as a hammer up to this point, here goes superstitious." "There is this essential difference between a machine and a building. A building is not an appliance nor a mobilization. The building as architecture is born out of the

heart of man, permanent consort to the ground, comrade to the trees, true reflection of man in the realm of his spirit Architecture expresses human life . . . appliances only serve life." Lastly, to Organic Architecture the City is dead, whereas Le Corbusier thinks it is the center of architecture.

My aim is not of course to answer these charges for Le Corbusier; I am writing about Wright. But the positive content of such answers show clearly the limitations of Wright's perspective; it is in this sense that Wright and Le Corbusier are complimentary.

Some of the argument is a matter of dialectical formulation. Thus, Wright does not believe cities will disappear, but he relegates them to Engineering; they cannot be architecture because they do not express the individual spirit in repose. To Le Corbusier, however, Engineering and Architecture, though not identical, are continuous; whatever can be put together can be beautifully put together. Again (to contrast their higher flights): for Wright, Architecture is nature, but not external nature; it is an abstraction of the organic principles of external nature. To Le Corbusier, "A city is a human operation directed against nature. It is a creation. All the poetry we find in nature is but the creation of our own spirit. . . . Nature presents itself to us as a chaos." Yet — "the spirit which animates Nature is a spirit of order; this we come to know." So that their metaphysics are compatible after all!

At the same time, such verbal and dialectical differences, even when they do not result in contradictions, never fail to correspond to profound differences in interest.

1. To Wright, the essential of architectural aesthetics is "space enclosed." Space is enclosed by gripping the site and by the substance of materials. This is three-dimensionality. From this point of view the "abstractions" of Le Corbusier are not 3-dimensional at all, they "ignore depth of matter to get effects characteristic of painting." To Le Corbusier, on the other hand,

Space is the universal which is abstracted from matter in geometry; to him we have 3-dimensionality when we have cubes, spheres, and cones. Mass, then, is the first principle of architecture; and surface is that which by its lines can reinforce the impression of the mass. To Wright, a house of Le Corbusier has no inside, therefore no real outside; but dealing in the universal space, Le Corbusier would say just that we must not enclose it, but let the eye pass freely from inside to outside. Therefore, instead of emphasizing the materials, he tries deliberately to negate them, by giving them all a uniform surface, surface color, etc.

Thus, speaking of the Parthenon, Wright at once points out that this is stone imitating wood; and being too heavy for the imitation it destroys the interior space. But the first thing that strikes Le Corbusier is the disposition of the Parthenon among the buildings of the Acropolis and the axial relation of the whole Acropolis to the sea and Mt. Pentelicon.

Again, for Le Corbusier proportion is the fundamental part of beauty: proportion is nothing but the animation and repose of the universal space. To Wright, *Integral Ornament* is "the heart of architecture so far as art is concerned," where again the integrity of the ornament is that it expresses the Plan or enclosed space, the structure, the materials, and the site. But to Le Corbusier, just what must be avoided is the expression of the site: we must "build on a clear site to replace the accidental layout by the formal layout." To Wright the final grace of a building is that it belongs to its soil; to Le Corbusier it is the silhouette ("profile") against the sky. And still again, the great tool of the designer for Le Corbusier is the "Regulating Line" — the length or angle whose simple products or repetitions measure out the whole space; but for Wright we have seen that it is the basic design idea, the upward flare, the wing-spread, etc.

Proceeding, we find that Le Corbusier's settled habit is to begin with the largest visible space, that is the whole environment. Then, in order to achieve form in this wide view, it is

necessary to count it off in identical parts: therefore he comes to Standardization *as a principle of design*; we must have variety in the whole, but standardization in all the parts. To Wright, standardization in this sense is the negation of organism.

2. Now if we turn from such purely formal considerations to the moral and the social, it is not surprising to see Le Corbusier interested in environment-plans, country-wide circulation, and mass-production, whereas Wright is interested in domestic architecture, reposeful life, and making every one of his 40 new small houses individually different. (In dealing with great artists there is obviously no sense in asking whether the aesthetics or the appropriate subject-matter came first, since they are artists because of their habits of thinking plastically and selectively about their subject-matter.) Viewed as a whole, the scheme for Broadacre City has no plastic interest whatsoever; but we know that every one of the 40 houses will contain a plastic discovery. But Le Corbusier's *Plan for Paris* or *Contemporary City* or *Plan for Algiers* are plastically remarkable in the view of the foreground against the horizon.

Both men are much concerned with the new mobility; but to Wright freedom of motion is the way to get home; it is there that life and architecture begin. Le Corbusier, on the other hand, is simply fascinated by traffic-problems, 3 and 4 level autostrades, grade-crossings, the place for straight and the place for curving roads; his architecture is essentially a matter of circulation. And where Wright, as we have seen, plans for his people to move in for a "long-long time," Le Corbusier announces: "We must arrive at the house-machine . . . designed for a succession of tenants. The idea of the 'old home' disappears, and with it local architecture, etc., for labor will shift about as needed, and must be ready to move *bag and baggage*. The words 'bag and baggage' . . . express the kind of furniture needed. Standardized houses with standardized furniture."

The moral interest of Wright, there is no doubt, is in individ-

ual ways-of-life. For the most part, to be sure, he is thinking of his own way of life and willing to impose this at large; but it is a good enough way, as is proved by the fact that for him no "problem of leisure" arises. We have touched on some of his inventions for living and might have multiplied them many times. But Le Corbusier's insights into personal habits are simply calamitous, from the exposed privies on; this is not the place to discuss them, but let me merely cite the passage where he declares that the differing desires within the "private cells" are precisely the "menace" to the architect. (To Wright they are theoretically precisely the opportunity.) Rather reticent about himself he leans heavily on social statistics. His great fear is that the people of his city may become bored with their leisure-time! To prevent this he provides sports and gardening. To provide a mean between the human-beings and the houses, it is necessary to plant trees: this is called "keeping to the Human Scale."

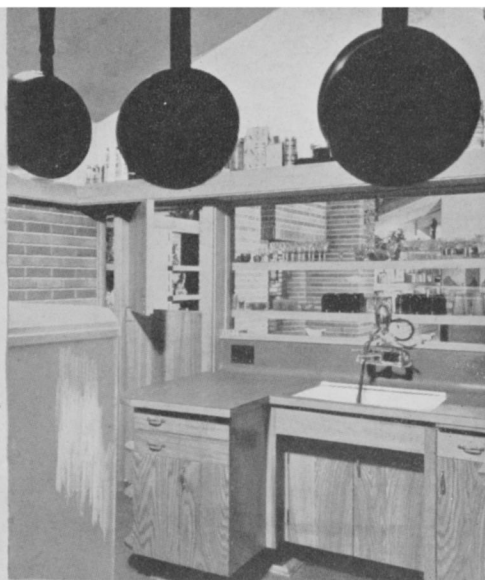
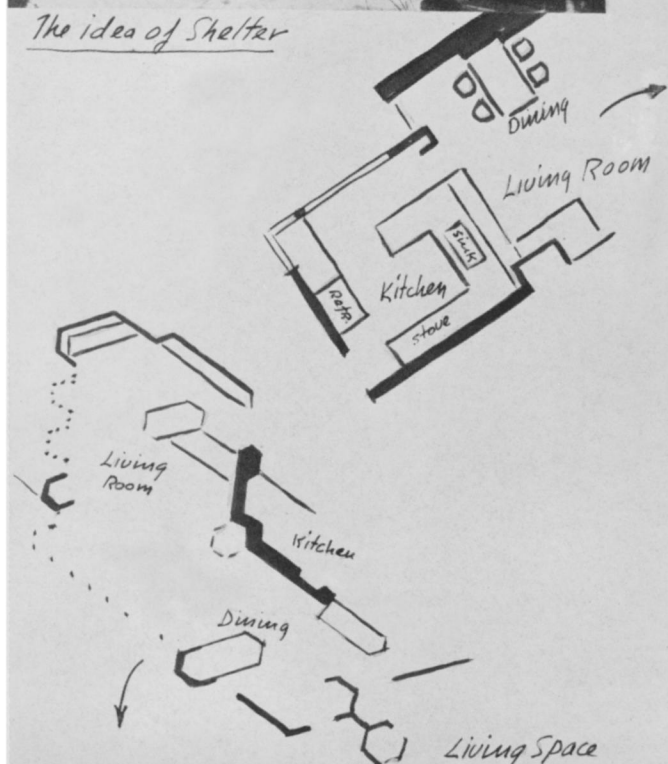
Though both are authoritarian, Wright is so in a more negative way, because what he wants ultimately to defend is the liberty of each inhabitant or at least *of each acre*; the meaning of living for him is what spontaneously occurs there; and the authoritarianism, when it crops up, takes the form of his individual caprice dominating every other life. Le Corbusier is affirmative; he realizes that vast enterprises require strong measures; and the meaningful enterprises for him are especially the vast ones, the steamships and skyscrapers. Therefore, though Broadacre is more capricious, unstatistical, and reactionary, it is much less conservative; whereas the Contemporary City attempts to rationalize just what we have at its most intense: this gives us, "The real Revolution lies in the solution of existing problems."

Wright is temperamentally opposed to class-stratification — though, if he is willing to preserve capitalism and the differences of wealth (the 1-car house, the 5 car house), he ought to make clear how the corresponding class-attitudes are to be avoided.

But Le Corbusier in a curious passage points out that just the differences of classes give the variety of standards that the community-planner requires for plastic manipulation. In general, Le Corbusier is, within very narrow limits, acutely aware of group attitudes, emotions, and peculiarities; in this sphere Wright is quite blank. It is reasonable to say that Wright everywhere expresses a group-attitude in his buildings and writings, the attitude of a relatively static fraction of the middle-class, professionals, etc., which still has real personal satisfactions but is increasingly suspicious; but no one would say that he is conscious of what he is expressing,—in fact this very unconsciousness is a property of his group. But Le Corbusier is a remarkable panegyrist of finance-capital — “the morality of industry,” he says, “has been transformed; big business is today [1923] a healthy and moral organism”; and he allows himself the phrase “Captains of Industry.” He imagines he has arguments to prove that private capitalists will make money by tearing down the center of Paris and rebuilding it according to the spirit of their other vast enterprises; he calls especially on international capital (this is the Paris internationalism of the devaluation of the franc.) But Wright does not think as a great entrepreneur; he merely rather hopes that Broadacres is inevitable. (In fact it must be said of him that throughout his long career he has never mixed in the schemes nor compromised with the tastes of his wealthy clients. It is mysterious in these circumstances how he has managed to get along — except that God takes care of his saints.)



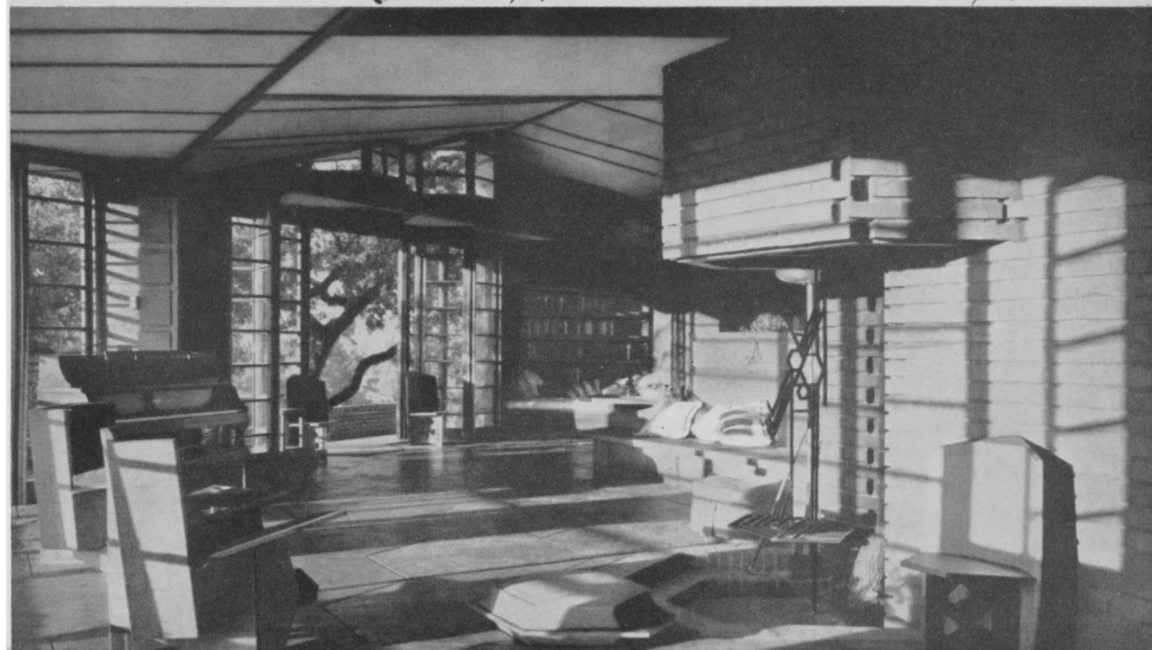
The idea of Shelter



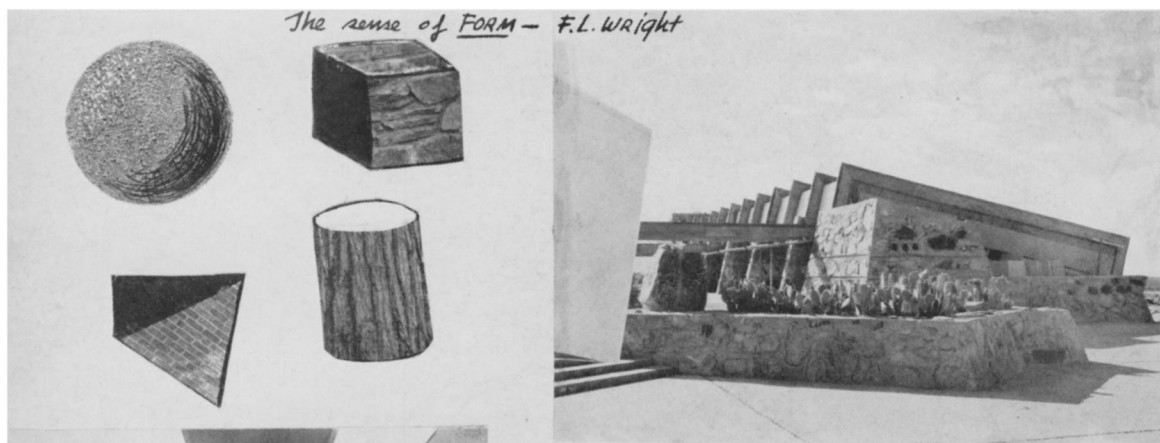
cooking space



WORKING SPACE



The sense of FORM - F.L. Wright



The sense of FORM - International Style

