

Wright's Organic Architecture: Latent in Hegel's Philosophy on the Arts?

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Philosophy 6340
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Wright's theory of organic architecture started to coalesce around 1908 when he wrote "In the Cause of Architecture," although there were traces before, and he continued to develop his theory in subsequent years (and decades). My approach in this paper traces Wright's theory of design as aesthetically driven in the pursuit of beauty and the expression of the inner spirit, the foundations of which was extensively produced by William Friedrich Hegel. Wright used material as the physical embodiment of spiritual essence. As such, my premise is that Wright's theory of organic architecture is either influenced from Hegel's Idealist-Romanticist theory of the arts or it was closely aligned with it if it did have an independent origin. It is beyond the scope of this paper to present the historical evidence for their connection and possible chains of influence on Wright from Hegelian-minded acquaintances. Rather, my focus here is on investigating what insights might be gained on Wright's organic architecture when seen through the lens of Hegel's theory on the arts, especially his Romantic stage. But the definition of Wright's organic architecture itself is full of ambiguity, whether as Wright originally intended it or even today. Wright was not a philosopher constructing a systematic philosophy on the arts or architecture. Might Hegel's theory on the arts lend systematic structure into Wright's theory of organic architecture? Might we give coherence to Wright's theory that is substantiated by his works? Might we also gain insights into Wright's theory by examining Hegel's

theory on the arts, in particular his concepts of Romantic art and architecture? In this paper, I will show that much of Wright's principles of organic architecture were already latent in Hegel's aesthetics, written and lectured on about 100 years earlier. This connection occurs not only in the sense of Wright sharing in the general nineteenth century romanticist-transcendentalist school of thought, but also in very specific point by point parallels between Wright's tenets of organic design and Hegel's description of romantic architecture discussed in Hegel's Aesthetics, Volume 2. In fact, Hegel's theory of Romantic art contain points missing from Wright's theory of organic architecture but that yet add richness and further depth of meaning to Wright's theory. With Wright being widely recognized as the most influential architect on the beginnings of modern architecture, his Hegelian leanings brings further insight into its continuation into the modern era in architecture.

PART ONE: DEFINING WRIGHT'S ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE

It would seem that there remains much ambiguity about what the term "organic architecture" means in the first place. Wright was not a philosopher constructing a systematic philosophy on the arts. Might Hegel's systematic theory on the arts lend structure to a coherent theory of organic architecture, at least as Wright practiced it? On the Taliesin website several definitions are given such as:

The Dictionary of Architecture and Construction defines Organic Architecture as architecture whose design is established in accordance with the processes of nature rather than based on an imposed design.

Yet, how does one design without imposing design on the architecture? Further, is this what Wright himself thought?

On the web site for Ken Burns PBS Special, "Frank Lloyd Wright: A Film by Ken Burns & Lynn Novak," Kimberly Elman describes Organic Architecture as:

A reinterpretation of nature's principles as they had been filtered through the intelligent minds of men and women who could then build forms which are more natural than nature itself. On the above quote, what does it mean to be more natural than nature? More specifically, how, or what, does one do to be natural? By definition, is nature something that is not manmade?

Or consider the following definition from an apprentice of Wright: In *A Living Architecture*, John Rattenbury writes that Organic Architecture is, "simply put, an intrinsic, natural, living architecture based on ideas." But isn't all architecture based on ideas? What exactly does it mean for architecture to be intrinsic, or natural, or "living"? Perhaps Wright himself will be more helpful:

I know that architecture is life; or at least it is life itself taking form and therefore the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today or ever will be lived.

So here architecture is life, presumably the expression of the life of nature as expressed through man in architecture. But does that hold true in regards to architecture generally, or just organic architecture? His indication of this being a past record would seem to indicate this principle

holds true before his own creation of organic architecture. This kind of definition from Wright, although perhaps sounding inspirational, doesn't bring us closer to defining exactly what organic architecture is nor how to create it.

In regard to Wright's "organic" or "natural" architecture, nature has been at man's disposal since the beginning. Its patterns, workings, design, beauty, and science have been available to observe and interpret also. Wright was an interpreter of nature who distilled certain observations from which he created the particular form of architecture that he did. This process is selective. It involves a weighting or prioritizing of certain qualities of nature more than others. Wright's own signature (seen over several "styles") is the result of the methodology he applied to design in reference to nature and other influences. Further, Wright was not the only practitioner of "organic" architecture. There were and are others such as Bruce Goff, Bart Prince, Fay Jones, John Lautner, and Ken Kellogg who practiced an organic architecture with very different results. Often, this other organic architecture is very amorphous and irregular, sometimes trying to blend in with its surrounding natural forms, and often using biomimicry in more recent work. And yet, never did Wright try to replicate nature nor fail to create a contrast between his architecture and its natural setting. With all Wright's talk about Nature, his own works are still very "man-made," in expression. In fact, when Wright used the word Nature, he didn't actually mean the nature of the external environment. He defines it himself as follows:

I would here again eliminate confusion too often caused by my use of the word "nature." So many years ago ...I used the word to mean "the interior essence of all cause and effect." ..thus took the inner nature of the poetic principle to be right in whatever it might consist or make manifest. ...This was to me the innate sense of origin. The original.¹

Wright's works have stood the test of time and remain more critically recognized than his followers or others pursuing the organic strain of architecture. Could it be that what distinguishes Wright's works is not that they are more organic than others in the sense of being more natural, but that they excel on some other aspect, perhaps such as its aesthetic import? If so, then what does Wright use to generate his principles of aesthetic design?

That there may be other valid interpretations of what it means to have an organic architecture is not in contention in this paper. However, my focus will be on Wright's particular form of organic architecture and the implications we can draw from that in light of Hegel's theory on the arts. While narrowing our focus then to Wright himself, it is instructive to see the various tenets of organic architecture he himself described throughout his career. Following is a summary of his core tenets as expressed over almost 50 years:

From *In the Cause of Architecture* (1908)²:

I. Simplicity and Repose are qualities that measure the true value of any work of art. This includes a "graceful beauty in its integrity from which discord, and all that is meaningless has been eliminated."

¹ Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer. *The Essential Frank Lloyd Wright: Critical Writings on Architecture*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, 397.

² Ibid, 35-36.

2. Individual Expression of style. There should be as many kinds of styles as there are kinds of people.
3. Buildings should appear to grow easily from their site and harmonize with its surroundings. For the Prairie that is gently sloped roofs, low proportions, sheltering overhands, etc.
4. Colors to fit with natural forms
5. The Nature of the materials, wood, plaster, brick, stone, etc. as themselves in their inherent nature
6. Integrity and character.

From *The Japanese Print Interpreted* (1912):³

1. Beauty. In an objects geometry and sensuous qualities it is an embodiment and expression of that precious something in ourselves which we instinctively know to be Life. A quality in the object which is in us which is our very life that we recognize there and so vibrates in us a sympathetic chord.
A work of fine art is a blossom of the human soul.
"It is this quality of absolute and essential beauty in the result of the artist's creative efforts that is the Life of the work of art.
2. Structural art. Organic form, and organization of parts into a larger unity—a vital whole. . .to build the Idea. Geometry is the grammar, of the form.
3. Symbolic value where the correlation between the geometry of form and our ideas.
4. Elimination of the insignificant and a consequent emphasis of reality.

From *The Natural House* (1954):⁴

1. Simplicity. Not plainness but as a perfectly realized part of some organic whole. Only as a feature or any part becomes harmonious element in the harmonious whole does it arrive at the state of simplicity.
2. Plasticity. As the expressive flesh covering of skeleton rather than the exposed skeleton itself. Form and function as one. Eliminate the separations and separate joints. Let walls, ceilings, and floors be seen as component parts of each other and their surfaces flowing into each other. A building growing up out of conditions as a plant grows up out of the soil. . .
3. The Nature of Materials
4. The new reality of Glass

³ Ibid., 66.

⁴ Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House*, New York, Horizon Press, 1954, 329-337.

5. Continuity: Steel is its prophet. (His description here overlaps Plasticity earlier.)
6. Integral ornament

From *A Testament, Book Two* (1957):⁵

1. Kinship of building to ground. Human scale, low to ground.
2. Decentralization.
3. Natural Character. Expressing its purpose.
4. Tenuity Plus Continuity: steel and glass, the cantilever.
5. The Third Dimension: Depth, not thickness. A penetration of the inner depths of the space in spaciousness becomes architecture and valid motif in design. Interpenetrating depths...the space within, to be lived in, going out." Lao-tzu's space within to be lived in as reality.
6. Space.
7. Form. An architect will never be content to design a building merely (or chiefly) for the picture it makes..." A new spiritual integrity.
8. Shelter.
9. Materials. The nature of materials.

As a consolidated working list of principles useful in this paper for comparison with Hegel's ideas, I propose the following nine-point list of Wright's idea of organic architecture:

1. Simplicity. The elimination of the insignificant.
2. The expression of the inner Idea, which sees beyond external literal form to the structural, geometric order lying beneath.
3. Part to whole integration and unity
4. Continuity and plasticity
5. The nature of materials.
6. Integral ornament.
7. Space as the interpenetrating depths and the idea of the space within as the reality of the architecture.
8. Relationship to the site and surroundings.
9. Concealing and revealing. This term isn't used by Wright, but would fall under his idea of Shelter and the flow of the outside to the within and the within to the exterior.

⁵ Frank Lloyd Wright, *A Testament*, New York, Horizon Press, 1957, 427.

PART TWO: HEGEL'S THREE STAGES OF ART

The German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel lived from 1770 to 1831, approximately one hundred years before Wright's time. He was a major figure in German idealism and influenced philosophy, politics, historicism, and the arts since that time. There is a very broad historical context of German idealism in the 1800s that influenced the Romantic age from which Wright would make his beginnings. The idea of the *zeitgeist* and the feeling that each age should have its own architecture, particular to the spirit of its own age and people was something Wright would espouse and make an American vision for a democratic culture. Viollet-le-Duc and Schninkel had been declaring the need for a new architecture of the age rather than continuing down the path of Greek classicism.

Of the many potential paths on which one could trace Wright's Romantic influences, however, I want to direct the focus toward Hegel's theory of art as it relates to Wright's own organic theory. Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, a compilation of lectures Hegel gave in Heidelberg and Berlin between 1818 and 1829⁶ have been assembled by one of Hegel's students, Heinrich Hotho and is now available in English as a two-volume set through T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). In Hegel's aesthetics, he describes three phases of art, the symbolic, the classical, and the romantic

⁶ Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel's Aesthetics," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition)

phases of art. After describing these, I will examine how the third phase of art, the Romantic, has very close parallels to Wright's own theory of organic architecture.

For Hegel, art is the embodiment of spirit in sensuous form. Art is not the imitation of nature but rather the expression of the idea or inner essence behind physical reality. The genius is one who can see beyond the accidental and contingent in the world and bring forth creative expressions of the manifestations of the Idea, which is beyond nature. As to the manner in which Idea is embodied, Hegel defines three progressive ways in which this occurs. Each of these systematic stages of art has different relations between meaning and form, which proceed from the Idea. As William Desmond describes it, these are the "three formations that progressively give more adequate realization, both in terms of the truth of art, and historically, relative to the requirements of the Ideal."⁷ According to Hegel, beauty decomposes into its particular determinations along these stages:

I. The Symbolic: The Egyptian pyramids are Hegel's prime example. In this first stage, art begins when the Idea is made the content of artistic shapes; however, while the object is thoroughly determinate in its shape, the Idea is still indeterminate and unshapable.⁸ Hegel gives the example of a symbol, the circle, which is taken as a symbol of eternity.⁹ Because a symbol stands in signification of

⁷ Desmond, William, 1999, "Gothic Hegel," in *The Owl of Minerva* 30, 2 (Spring): 238.

⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol I. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 76.

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol I. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 304.

some idea, it is not the full expression of the idea itself. The symbol also contains within its form yet other signifiers independent of the common quality being considered. And so, the circle may symbolize eternity, but it can also signify other meanings as well since a circular form is only a partial, or indeterminate conveyor of the Idea of eternity. Interestingly, Wright also discusses the symbol of the circle in his 1912 book, *The Japanese Print: An Interpretation*.¹⁰ Here, Wright is trying to convey where the “spell-power” of the artistic print comes from, and he states that it is due to the fact that the underlying geometry conveys its own symbolic meaning based on the platonic forms used in its construction. It is not clear with Wright’s thought here where this “spell power” arises since apparently he does not feel that platonic forms themselves so expressed carry special power except when they are the hidden forms underlying physical reality, not the tangible forms themselves. Wright says that the circle symbolizes infinity, the triangle structural unity (Hegel related the triangle to the trinity of the Godhead), the square integrity, etc. Whereas Hegel points out the limitations of the symbolic stage of art, Wright seems to construe this symbolic nature as the primary means by which his “conventionalization” process abstracts nature, but by this process of abstraction, he feels that he is bringing out this inner essence or idea that Hegel speaks of.

¹⁰ Frank Lloyd Wright. *The Japanese Print: An Interpretation*. New York: Horizon Press, 1967, 14.

Hegel sees architecture as a form of art that necessarily partakes of the beginning, or the symbolic form of art.¹¹ Even when architecture is Classical or Romantic in form, it is always still symbolic since it remains at the indeterminate beginning.

2. Classical: Greek sculpture is the prime example here. The Classical stage of art is where the unity of the sensuous with the spirit is complete and in balance. Here there is still a limitation on the expression of the spirit to the human spirit and figure. The idea of the infinite is completely proportioned to the human figure. This is where the purposive forms of purely practical building have become artistic by an inner transformation in the direction of the organic. “Where these two extremes of building—the purely independent (artistic) and the exclusively purposeful (functional)—meet and merge, we have the beginnings of genuinely beautiful classical architecture.”¹² One could say this in more contemporary terms as being the place where form and function are in balance.

3. Romantic: Here we are closest to the modern sense of defining art as an aesthetic phenomenon.¹³ The balance and unity of the Classical stage is broken, but in the opposite direction of the symbolic phase. Here the inner world constitutes the content of the romantic sphere and

¹¹ Desmond, William, 1999, “Gothic Hegel,” in *The Owl of Minerva* 30, 2 (Spring): 239.

¹² Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, and Henry Paolucci. *Hegel, on the Arts: Selections from G.W.F. Hegel's Aesthetics, or the Philosophy of Fine Art*. 2nd ed. Smyrna, DE: Griffon House, 2001, 72.

¹³ William Desmond, *Art and the Absolute. A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1986, 43.

celebrates its triumph over the external.¹⁴ Because of this, the external medium is accepted as something inessential and transient, and there is an inwardizing of the infinite in man himself. This “inwardized infinite” went hand in hand with creativity theories of art. The inadequacy of art to convey this inner infinite is why with Romantic art we see a pointing beyond itself. Hegel speaks of the “self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself.”¹⁵ Here, Desmond says, we see Hegel revealing that art is its own sphere but already within its sphere the transcendence of the merely aesthetic is already at work. But this transcending is not a simple negation or supersession of art but is rather tied up with its highest attainment and fulfillment. Art itself, as it were, sacrifices its own exclusively aesthetic form to open out upon a fuller religious configuration.¹⁶

Hegel introduces the transition to the Romantic stage of art as produced by the principle of subjectivity that breaks into the subject matter. This subjectivity he says is the essential nature of the spirit, which withdraws out of the external world into an inner existence that no longer maintains a unity with its body.¹⁷

¹⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 81.

¹⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 521-22.

¹⁶ William Desmond, *Art and the Absolute. A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1986, 44.

¹⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 792.

Wright did not specifically refer to Hegel's three stages of art, but yet his writings and works place him in the Romantic stage of art, which we will explore in more detail in the next section. However, it is worth noting here that he does give suggestions that would also show a connection to the first symbolic stage of art, which is coincidentally, where Hegel places architecture in general, even though particular forms of architecture may also fall in the Classical and Romantic categories of art. Even so, Wright's use of the symbolic in architecture was intended to be working within the Romantic mode of art rather than as a separate category. Again, on Hegel, architecture always maintains some degree of the symbolic, even if classified with the Romantic. Wright felt that the spiritual message transmitted through the great lineage of architecture from prehistory to Egypt, Greece, and Italy had come to an end and that a purified language of form was needed to convey it again.¹⁸ This would be accomplished through abstraction and conventionalization as mentioned above in reference to the Japanese print, but as he also applied it to his own architecture.

What Wright seemed particularly opposed to, however, was classical architecture. His evident disdain for classical architecture certainly had other reasons than what can be attributed to Hegel's philosophical characteristics of the Classical phase of art and architecture. Some of these other factors being stereotypical overuse of Greek revival architecture in America along with the

¹⁸ Anthony Alofsin, *Frank Lloyd Wright : The Lost Years, 1910-1922 : A Study of Influence*, New paperback ed. Austin: InnerformsLtd.com, 2009, 153.

Beaux Arts school of thought, which he rejected early on in his career. This disdain also did not arise from Hegel who was particularly appreciative of Greek art and architecture. Still, we might glimpse some of Wright's reasons for rejecting the Classical that have correspondence with Hegel's descriptive characterization of this mode. Wright says in regards to Greek art:

When this unfolding architecture as distinguished from enfolding architecture comes to America there will be truth of feature, to truth of being: individuality realized as a noble attribute of being. That is the character the architecture of democracy will take....Clearly this new conception will realize architecture as no longer the sculptured block of some building material or as any enfolding imitation. Architecture must now unfold an inner content—express "life" from the 'within'...An architecture no longer composed or arranged or pieced together as symbolic, but living as upstanding expression of reality. This organic architecture, too, would be so intimately a growth, all the while, as to make barbarous the continual destruction of the old by the new. American architecture, though both little and young, therefore conceives something deeper and at the same time more vital than the great Parthenon or even the beautiful Greek vase: an architecture no longer symbolic sculpture but a true culture that will grow greater buildings and grow more beautiful belonging true to the nature of the thing and more at one with the nature of man.¹⁹

Wright's distinction above between the "enfolding" vs. "unfolding" aspects of architecture reflect the difference he felt between the old Classical form and the new organic form of architecture. Enfolding implies an enclosure from without encasing the within. It imposes form from the outside, which confines the inner impulse of freedom from being expressed. However, the unfolding architecture is an architecture where the external expression of form is the result of inner forces expanding outward according to their free play and nature. This is how he felt buildings should be

¹⁹ Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer. *The Essential Frank Lloyd Wright: Critical Writings on Architecture*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, 187-88.

designed. Never was the architect to start with the external form and then fit the plan elements into it. Rather, they should start with the working out of the floor plan and let the external form derive from that. One consequence of this would be that it would give rise to asymmetrical forms rather than static, symmetrical forms, which generally typify Greek architecture. It He saw Greek architecture as too static as well as too archaic to be able to provide for the kind of freedom of expression our modern age required.

Not only did Wright feel it wrong to import an ancient architecture for America, but he was moving further away from Classical rules of composition in his own work also. While he began in his pre-1900's work often using symmetry and static compositions, he later almost exclusively designed very asymmetric forms with very dynamic balancing of composition, in much the same way that the Gothic was dynamic in form compared to the static, self-sufficient forms of Greek classicism. For example, we can see this progression in his work by comparing two well-known works of his, the Winslow house of 1893 and Fallingwater from 1936 (fig. 1 & 2) The Winslow house was his breakthrough house which began his Prairie Style of architecture. But as we can see in the front facade of the home, his composition is entirely symmetrical and very classically composed and balanced; overall, a very static, balanced composition.²⁰ Although lacking in the classic orders, this

²⁰ Note that while the front elevation of the house is very classically composed, the plan reveals an asymmetrical layout of spaces behind the front facade including more romanque protrusions at the rear of the house.

composition is very classical in character. In his mature period masterpiece, Fallingwater, many years later, we see a total dissolving of the symmetry in plan or elevation and yet in its asymmetry, there is a dynamic balance of forms, much as is the case with Gothic architecture. The Winslow house, to use Wright's words above, was more about an 'enfolding' architecture where the external form takes priority and the inner plan conforms to its static form, whereas Fallingwater expresses his idea of an "unfolding" architecture that is an outgrowing form of the life within. Through the ensuing transition between these two projects, we see here Wright breaking beyond Hegel's Classical stage of art where there is a perfect balance and unity of form and idea, towards Hegel's Romantic stage of art where the expression of the Idea within dominates the external form.

Hegel says that the true content of romantic art is absolute inwardness and its form is spiritual subjectivity in its independence and freedom.²¹ But as such it seeks the negation of everything particular and external. This raises the question as to how the spirit in the Romantic stage does interact with the sensual since it would seem then to allude art altogether and make itself only accessible to thought. Hegel's reply is that absolute subjectivity proceeds into external existence and then withdraws itself out of this reality into itself again, but not without first shaping itself and leaving an aspect that can be represented by art.²² In Fallingwater, Wright would seem to come closer to

²¹ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 519.

²² *Ibid.*, 519-20.

Hegel's notion of rational agency superseding the hold of external facticity, winning an autonomous existence.²³ It is in Fallingwater that the architect's subjectivity seems to attain a high level of autonomy as we find little here in the way of external classical balance that directs the design.

This gives explanatory power to Wright's dynamically asymmetric forms, always seemingly in motion, seemingly pointing to the just beyond, just beyond spaces, niches, partial framing devices that are not meant to focus on the frame but rather on the frame creating the figure-ground relationship to create a larger whole, not negating the frame, but the frame and outer view being an integrated whole, a symbiotic gathering. The "just-beyond" quality is a reference to the infinite and the spirit. If Hegel's Romantic theory of art connects the Romantic to the religious as Desmond alludes to, does Wright's works contain within them a sense of the sacred or symbol of the religious as well? Was his an attempt to bring into architecture the experience of the sublime and the religious experience?

Wright's architecture deals with the same issues Hegel raises with Romantic art and it also deals with the problems of modernism that Hegel foresaw. The Romantic stage of art is the stage most representative of the modern era with its self-understanding and where no sensuous appearance can fully capture the worth of rational agency.²⁴ Yet, as Richard Winfield points out, while there is a withdrawal into the inner dimension here, there is not a rejection of the engagement in the external;

²³ Ibid., 522

²⁴ Richard Winfield, 1995, "Hegel, Romanticism, and Modernity," *The Owl of Minerva* 27, 1 (Fall): 3–18, 6.

in fact, it is necessary to affirm and uphold the worth of their subjectivity in the same way that moral integrity may be an inner motivation that yet requires external action to realize right intentions.²⁵ The romantic disengagement of the inner subjectivity with the external allows for the modern break away from representational or mimetic forms of art, opening up the realm of the ironic, expressive, abstract, found art, etc. Because of this subjective inwardness, the romantic artist even more so now, must grapple with the boundaries of the content and form of art. According to Winfield, it is for this reason that Danto is not entirely off the mark by suggesting that modern (romantic) art converges with the philosophy of art.²⁶ While the romantic gives freedom not only to deny outward convention, it also allows for representation. Wright made clear distinctions between his theory and the European modernists. Wright was not willing to disengage into complete subjectivity as seen in modern art but held onto a connection to the natural world, but rather sought to express the Geist or “Idea” behind nature rather than a mimesis of nature itself.

Late in Wright's life, in 1957, he gave a talk on “The New Romantics.” In reference to the romantic idea in architecture, he says that it came to us from the eighteenth century but that it got confused in the nineteenth. He says, “We are trying to get it clear in the twentieth. And if we do get it clear in the twentieth, we will have an organic architecture, architecture being the last. We have had it

²⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

in literature, we have had it in music, but we have not had it in architecture.”²⁷ Although Wright’s use of the word romantic is not necessarily the same as Hegel’s use of it in defining his three stages of art, it is interesting how Wright pulls this notion of the romantic as being necessary to the proper expression of organic architecture.

PART THREE: HEGEL’S ROMANTIC FORM OF ARCHITECTURE

In the above section, the general implications of Hegel’s theory of Romantic art in relation to the symbolic and classical were described. In this section I will focus on the particular features of Hegel’s Romantic Architecture from his *Aesthetics Vol. 2* and how it closely parallels Wright’s own principles of organic design. Here, I will articulate congruencies between Hegel’s characterizations of Romantic architecture and Wright’s own architecture, even if Wright did not explicitly give theory to his praxis on that particular point.

Hegel introduces architecture as the “beginning of art.” This, not primarily from a historical standpoint but from a conceptual one. As such its first purpose is to give shape to the physical world of nature, to give it a meaning, which is not immanent in the objective world itself. Architecture is the beginning of art, however, not the fullest expression of it since it does not create “free beauty” as

²⁷ Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, *Frank Lloyd Wright : His Living Voice*, Fresno, Press at California State University, Fresno, 1987, 92.

sculpture is able to do, for instance. This is because architecture must first serve its functional purpose to house man or god as shelter, and this first task may occur without it yet becoming art. When architecture is imprinted with meaning outside its functional role through the Idea it begins to be art, according to Hegel.

Although architecture is first symbolic, he also states that architecture can take the Classical or Romantic forms as well. Because architecture is the art that is purely external, what distinguishes it as symbolic, classical, or romantic is whether its external form has its meaning within itself (symbolic) or its form serves as a means to an end other than itself (classical), or thirdly, whether in its subservience it also appears as independent (romantic). Romantic architecture uses the external as means of expression but it withdraws into itself allowing the objective element to be shaped independently.²⁸

If Greek architecture is Hegel's exemplar of the classical form of architecture, then the Gothic architecture of the middle ages is his representative for the romantic stage. Hegel describes nine (at least) characteristics of Romantic architecture in this section of his treatise that bear consideration in relation to Wright's organic architecture.

I. Enclosure: Enclosure is a defining characteristic in the romantic stage as compared to the classical.

The romantic interior does not have a box-like form, and its real character transcends any specific end

²⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 634.

and, as perfect in themselves, stands there on its own account.²⁹ Hegel says that enclosure here serves to forget the external world of nature and the distracting in order to create a contemplative environment. Hegel is giving a certain autonomy to this space, which doesn't need justification in functional necessity. There is clearly here the priority of the interior space within as the essence of the architecture, as opposed to the Greek temple, which stood as object with space external to it. This corresponds with Wright's great discovery of Lao-tzu where the essence of the building is not found in the walls or roof but in the space contained within. Wright's public buildings such as the Larkin building, Unity Temple, Johnson Administration, or Guggenheim had strong atrium-like spaces that likewise actually shut out the external world, contrary to Wright's expressed goal of blurring the separation of inside and outside, something he did do in most of his residential projects. This brings up an important question.

Did Wright's design sensibilities transcend his written prescription of architectural theory in these cases? Was there something more central to his intention in these public buildings than the free flow of space from within to without? Perhaps he knew that to open up and release these centralized spaces in these public buildings would have diminished the almost sacred quality of communal space contained within and its consequent contemplative character.

²⁹ Ibid., 684.

2. Purpose: Hegel states that in the romantic architecture of the Gothic “purpose disappears again and the whole is given the look of an independent existent... It has and displays a definite purpose; but in its grandeur and sublime peace it is lifted above anything purely utilitarian into an infinity in itself.³⁰ Here there is a glimmer of Kant’s “purposiveness without specific purpose”. In Wright’s time it was framed in the terms of form and function. When he does give written description of his design process in the *Natural House* book where he describes the Jacobs house³¹, very little mention is given to what he did to make the home a work of art and its formal composition while most of the discussion centered on the functional solutions to the problems at hand. Yet, as Hegel states above about being lifted above the purely utilitarian, purpose and function are necessary but not sufficient to elevate a work to the status of art. Though Wright may not have revealed the full extent of the priority actually given in the artistic struggle required to raise a building from mere functional necessity to work of art³², at least he did acknowledge the importance of raising architecture to art, something which actually ran counter to the European Modernists’ manifesto as expressed in the CIAM congress. Here, the priority lay on industrialization where presumably form followed function

³⁰ Ibid., 685.

³¹ For Wright’s full description of his design process for the Jacobs’ house see *The Natural House*, pg 79-91.

³² note, he perhaps came closest to this when describing his design breakthrough when creating Unity Temple in Oark Park, Il.

in a positivist sense; hence whatever function produced was beautiful, whether or not it was received as such.

3. Organic wholeness: For Wright this was the idea that the part becomes perfectly realized in the whole. He also referred to this as the part-to-whole unity, or the integrated whole.

Consequently, each part derives its meaning through its relationship to the whole, and the meaning of the whole is locked up in the constituent pattern of the parts from which it is composed. Hegel states that:

...everything is lost in the greatness of the whole. It has and displays a definite purpose: but in its grandeur and sublime peace it is lifted above anything purely utilitarian into an infinity in itself. This elevation above the finite, and this simple solidity, is its one characteristic aspect. In its other it is precisely where particularization, diversity, and variety gain the fullest scope, but without letting the whole fall apart into mere trifles and accidental details. On the contrary, here the majesty of art brings back into simple unity everything thus divided up and partitioned. The substance of the whole is dismembered and shattered into the endless divisions of a world of individual variegations, but this incalculable multiplicity is divided in a simple way, articulated regularly, dispersed symmetrically, both moved and firmly set in the most satisfying eurhythmy, and this length and breadth of varied details is gripped together unhindered into the most secure unity and clearest independence.³³

In this description is contained the idea of Wright's organic wholeness, or part-to-whole unity, and something significantly more that gives explanatory power to Wright's architectural works.

Hegel's self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere indicates a transition beyond art in the

³³ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 685.

Romantic stage. Just as Hegel uses the example of Gothic spires leading the eye up to the infinite, so

Wright's architecture embodies this idea of pointing beyond itself, beyond its material presence.

Although Wright abhorred such spires in architecture, he accomplished the same result in the

horizontal plane of extension as well as his spatial conception which created overlapping layers of

space that disappear around corners just outside of the line of sight leading the eye (and body) to the

just beyond. Wright's mature architecture reveals dynamically asymmetric forms, always seemingly in

motion, seemingly pointing to the just beyond, just beyond spaces, niches, partial framing devices that

are not meant to focus on the frame but rather on the frame creating the figure-ground relationship to

create a larger whole, not negating the frame, but the frame and outer view being an integrated

whole, a symbiotic gathering.

With Wright, it is not simply a matter of stained glass geometries reflecting larger geometries

of the floor plan, but the way these spatial frames layer into a greater whole, but in such a way that

they never come to an end in themselves but leave clues to the veiled infinite realm, which like the

horizon can be sensed but never arrived at. The "just-beyond" quality is a reference to the infinite

and the spirit. If Hegel's Romantic theory of art connects the Romantic to the religious as Desmond

points out, does Wright's works contain within them a sense of the sacred or symbol of the religious

as well? Was his an attempt to bring into architecture the experience of the sublime and the religious

experience into the secular realm of house and workplace?

4. Plasticity and Continuity: Hegel says that Classical architecture makes a clear and rectangular break between the beam and its support whereas in the Gothic this juncture is blurred as the column transitions into the arch in a continuous manner and is a defining characteristic of Gothic architecture.³⁴

Likewise, Wright made a great deal of his discovery of continuity in architecture with a similar basis.

He describes how the post and lintel has now been superseded by the idea of continuity due primarily to the new medium of steel, which allows for cantilevers. His example is the tree branch that organically grows off of the trunk, much like the Gothic arch does its support, even though the external appearance of the two is distinct.

5. From Within Outwards: In Gothic architecture “the external shape, the decoration and arrangement of walls, etc., are determined from within outwards, since the exterior is to appear as only an enclosing of the interior. . . . The interior is the already visible background in which the exterior is immersed. . . .”³⁵ Again, Hegel makes a distinction with the Greek temple and Christian church where the temple’s form is driven by its exterior appearance and perfect form, while the form of the church is not generated externally but first internally with the exterior taking its form from the interior space. This is exactly FLW’s idea, basically expressed in the same words, that organic architecture must proceed from within to without where the exterior form is the result of the inner outworking of

³⁴ Ibid., 686-7.

³⁵ Ibid., 693.

the floor plan being generated and extruded into the third dimension. Whereas Wright doesn't state any potential tensions in this idea, Hegel does point out that while this principle is true of the cathedral, there is an aspect where the exterior "acquires a form quite independent of the interior" when he refers to the vertical orientation of the exterior becoming the primary direction while the interior has a longer more horizontal extension. This point of course, does also apply to Wright's own architecture, and one could give examples of such. For example, Unity Temple, although primarily about its central space, also presents an autonomous exterior expression of highly disciplined and proportioned piers, cornices, windows, and rooflines. Many earlier homes such as the Hardy house likewise present more formal external forms, and it is hard to tell whether Wright first conceived the exterior appearance or the interior plan.

6. Differentiated Interior space Exists as enclosure for the spirit: Here Hegel states that Romantic architecture constructs a building which exists as an enclosure for the spirit whose purpose is to "make spiritual convictions shine through the shape and arrangement of the building and so determine the form both of its interior and exterior." The implications of this, he says are several. First, the space of the interior "must not be an abstractly uniform and empty one that has no differences. Rather this space must be differentiated in length, breadth, height..."³⁶ The reason for this according to Hegel is that the "movement of the spirit with the distinctions it makes and its conciliation

³⁶ Ibid., 687-8.

of them in the course of its elevation from the terrestrial to the infinite, to the loftier beyond, would not be expressed architecturally in this empty uniformity of a quadrilateral.”³⁷ This has strong parallels with Wright’s construction of space. As stated above regarding Wright’s endowing the secular realm with the sacred, there are similar purposes served by the church and Wright’s goals for organic architecture.

Hegel says that the “elevation of the soul above the restrictions of existence” is a purpose of the Gothic space. Hegel does not perhaps give adequate reasons or a complete explanation of why the movement of the spirit requires differentiated space rather than uniform space, but clearly there is an aspect of a transcendent pointing beyond that is suggested through material means. At this point, however, Wright’s complex architecture of subordinated partial framing devices and asymmetrical organization works to the same ends. Contrast Wright’s highly differentiated spaces with their niches and flowing spaces with the idea of Miesian “universal” space, or undifferentiated spaces as epitomized by Mies Van der Rohe’s Crown Hall building at the IIT campus to see the distinction between Wright’s transcendent spaces and the European modernists’ rationalist ones.

7. Concealing and revealing: Prospect and refuge is the duality usually associated with Wright’s space-making, but there is another associated duality that may shed additional light on this subject, the duality of concealing and revealing. Hegel also does not use these terms, but they are implicit within his idea

³⁷ Ibid., 687-8.

of the Romantic form of art. Hegel stated in his introduction to Romantic art that unlike in the classical mode of art, one of the distinctives of the Romantic is the notion of subjectivity that not only proceeds into external embodiment but also withdraws itself out of this reality into itself again. It is an expression of the Absolute where the new task of art brings before contemplation not the inner into external embodiment but the withdrawal of the inner into itself, the spiritual consciousness of God in the individual. The individual person in his inner life thus acquires infinite worth as the eternal moments of absolute truth unfold into existence and collect again.³⁸

Wright claimed Lao-tzu as a confirmation for his interiority of space. However, he did not say he derived it from Lao-tzu since he had already been practicing it before discovering him. Perhaps, here in Hegel, is another, and perhaps more central reason for the sacredness of Wright's inner spatial qualities. Wright believed, as did the nineteenth century transcendentalists he admired, in the spark of divinity contained within individuals and hence the value of individual creativity. Hegel explains something here more profound than the psychological value of prospect and refuge as explanatory power of Wright's architecture. Wright's space are neither about dissolving the distinction between inside and outside, even though he makes an important point about this, nor about pure containment of inner space disconnected from the exterior. The greatness of his space and architecture is the

³⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 520.

tension he creates between these two poles. From the exterior, there is always something revealed of the inner realm and yet still concealed so as maintaining the identity of enclosure. This tension or alternating between concealing and revealing symbolizes the external embodiment and then withdrawal of spirit to inner self. Revealing is the external embodiment expressed by spirit while the concealing represents the withdrawal to the inner self, or hiddenness of the same from external view. Hegel speaks of this revealing when he says “the interior glints also through the shape of the exterior and determines its form and arrangement.”³⁹

8. Materiality. The nature of materials is a key principle in Wright's idea of organic architecture. He believed that every material had an essential character and needed to be used appropriately and honestly in keeping with that character. So, wood was to be used as wood, not painted over, but the grain and richness revealed for what wood really is. Stone, concrete, steel, brick, etc. also were to be used appropriately to their essential character.

Hegel makes some reference to materiality in Romantic architecture in the following section:

*Now in architecture it is the visible, material, and spatial mass on which the inmost heart itself is so far as possible to be brought before contemplation. Given such a material, nothing is left to the artistic representation but to refuse validity to the material and the massive in its purely material character and to interrupt it everywhere, break it up, and deprive it of its appearance of immediate coherence and independence.*⁴⁰

³⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 687.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 696.

Desmond also refers to Hegel's idea of architecture as "most burdened with matter, and the weight of gravity itself weighs down the energy of spirit. The work of architecture has to struggle with matter as against an obstacle that is always only partially conquered."⁴¹ So there is this sense of materiality in Hegel as a prison that the spirit is trying to break free from whereas for Wright, the materiality is something to be celebrated and in unity with the larger formal idea. With the Gothic cathedral Hegel says that there is carving everywhere of the stone, which spoke of a certain breaking past the bonds of the heavy massiveness inherent in stone into the "character of lightness and grace."⁴² This carving served to negate the massive quality of stone into something that had the appearance of lightness and delicacy and in so doing was transcending stone's physical character in order to convey this higher Idea in the romantic sense. This was anathema to Wright who felt that stone's essence was to be heavy and to be used as representative of that weight whereas lighter materials such as wood and steel could be those materials used where lightness and grace were desired.

Perhaps at the point of the nature of materials one could claim that Wright did not take the romantic stance but rather the classical one where the form and content were in unity, even though classical architecture historically does not reflect that same sensitivity to the essence of materials.

⁴¹ Desmond, William, 1999, "Gothic Hegel," in *The Owl of Minerva* 30, 2 (Spring), 239.

⁴² G. W. F. Hegel, Translated by T.M. Knox. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 696.

That there seems to be a clear difference here between Hegel's and Wright's attitudes toward materials seems clear, at least in Hegel's romantic stage. What might be more significant is asking whether the modernist notion of materials having an "essential" nature is true, or whether, on Hegel, there is no essential nature, but what matters more is the idea imposed upon the material to express something beyond the material itself. If the latter is true, one of the major tenets of modernist architecture, its insistence upon the "honest" expression of materials, erodes. We might claim here that Wright was romantic when working with spatial and formal manipulation but classical when working with materials.

This sense of essence in materials is not resolved in a simple manner for there remain in materials used for construction certain characteristics inherent in each material. So stone and concrete are strong in compression but weak in tension while wood and steel are strong in tension while being relatively thin and lightweight. There are certain ranges of values where various materials may best be used and only stretched beyond that range with negative consequences; however, there is also overlap of these values where more than one material can serve a given architectural purpose. So to the modern eye, Gothic architecture's stone carving seems like excess and goes contrary to the "honest nature" of the essential heavy characteristics of stone. To the medieval, however, this very same carving is expressing subjectivity through the medium of stone while yet surpassing its given physical characteristics. There is an irony here in that this latter is actually more modern in terms of

the history of modern art's self-reflection, subjectivity and separation of form and content. Given the centrality of the use of materials in architecture, the answer to this question has far reaching effects on architecture.

CONCLUSION

We saw above how Wright's own theory of architecture changed through the years and how, even today, his proponents have conflicting notions of what organic architecture is. Wright was first an architect, a creator of form, and then he wrote his theory to support that praxis. His was not a systematic theory of organic architecture. Hegel had developed a systematic theory of the arts approximately one hundred years before Wright began practicing architecture. This paper did not explore any causal connections Hegel may have had on Wright directly, but proposed that a comparison of the two theories will lend insight and clarity into Wright's theory of organic architecture as well as coherence to architects pursuing design in the direction of the organic. Hegel's theory of Romantic art and architecture has compelling parallels to Wright's own theory and practice of architecture, even at points giving additional explanatory depth to Wright's architecture in ways Wright didn't express in writing. Perhaps this may present a fruitful direction for future research whereby Wright's theory of organic architecture can be further systemized and given new coherence.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1

Frank Lloyd Wright: Winslow House, 1893.

(http://www1.prweb.com/prfiles/2013/12/12/11418981/J SIR_Frank_Lloyd_Wright_Winslow_House.jpg)

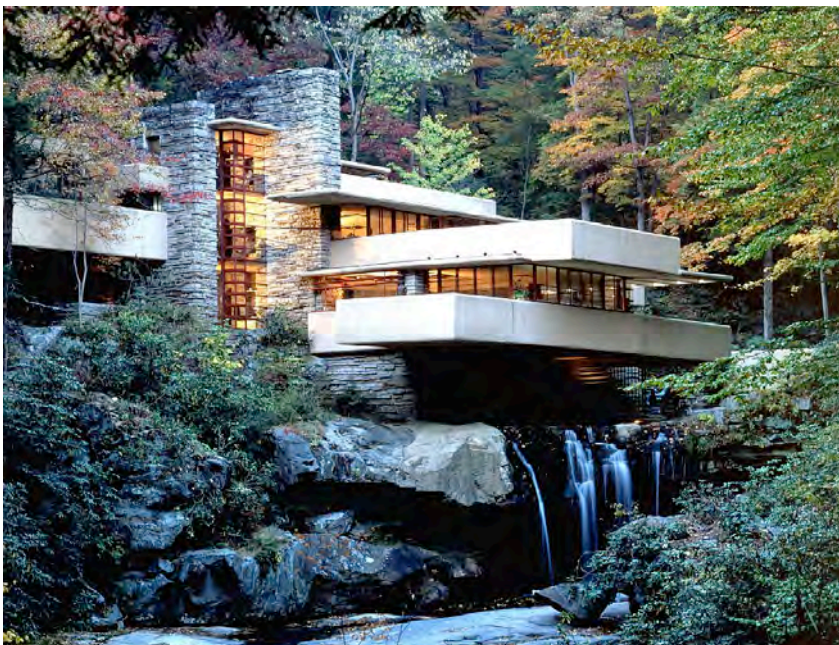


Figure 2

Frank Lloyd Wright: Fallingwater, 1936.

(<http://ideasgn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Fallingwater-by-Frank-Lloyd-Wright-003.jpg>)