



An Organic Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy

Frank Lloyd Wright

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In May 1939, when London's architecture could only wait helplessly before the coming destruction and man's spirit—and spiritual claims—were at a low ebb, Frank Lloyd Wright delivered four talks to some young British architects. In these talks he affirmed his belief in the future with a positive conviction that was reinforced by the derision with which his acidulous wit reacted against the sterilities of the past. Wright on this occasion was as ever the conscious radical jeffersonian whose message resonates with every "younger generation":

At the outset I may as well confess that I have come here with a minority report: an informal Declaration of Independence. Great Britain had one from us, July 4, 1776: a formal Declaration of Independence which concerned taxes; this one, May 2, 1939, concerns the spirit. Am I, then, a rebel, too? Yes. But only a rebel as one who has in his actual work, for a life-time—or is it more—been carrying out in practice day by day, what he believes to be true.

This book is the verbatim text of those four talks, which a champion of Wright's has called "one of the best statements of his principles and his ideas." The talks, like all of Wright's productions, are free-ranging and spontaneous in inspiration, solid and workmanlike in execution.

In speaking to Londoners at this point in their history and at this point in his own development, Wright is prompted to universalize his concept of organic architecture. Perhaps more than this in his other books, the emphasis shifts from an American—Usonian—architecture growing indigenously from the soil of the American heartland to a more general concept of an architecture than can take root in many landscapes as an honest expression of both the nature of diverse materials and the nature and living needs of diverse populations.

What is architecture anyway? Is it a vast collection of the various buildings which have been built to please the varying tastes of the various lords of mankind? No. I think not. I know that architecture is life; or at least it is life itself taking form and therefore is the truest record of life as it was lives in the world yesterday, as it is being lived today or ever will be lived. So architecture I know to be a great spirit. No, it is not something that consists of the buildings which have been built by man on his Earth. Architecture is that great living creative spirit which from generation to generation, from age to age, proceeds, persists, creates, according to the nature of man, and his circumstances as they both change. That really is architecture.

Three of the talks open with Wright's narration of films showing examples of his recent work and life with his apprentices at the Taliesins. Here Wright is at his informal best, and the visual references are supplied in the book by the photographs of finished buildings, models, and plans at the end of the volume, dating from projects of the 1930s and roughly paralleling the content of the films. A bibliography and a list of buildings and projected works through 1939 round out the volume.

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