

The Intention behind the Spatial Representation of F.L. Wright's Wasmuth Portfolio

Introduction

For an architect since the media age, it became crucial problem how to represent their works in two-dimensional plane especially to those who have not experienced their space in real life. In some cases, two-dimensional representations, free from the restrictions of reality, are better means to express architects' thoughts more clearly than the actual buildings, as Beatriz Colomina discussed the manipulation of architectural photographs by Le Corbusier as an issue of architectural spaces as mass media¹. This paper focuses on the drawings from *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright*, or so-called Wasmuth Portfolio, as an earlier example of the edited two-dimensional representations by an architect. Through the scrutinization of the intentional manipulations on drawings by Wright, this paper aims to study the reflection of his spatial ideas on drawings in comparison to his text.

The Selection of the Subject

Wasmuth Portfolio² consisted of two folios, which together contain a hundred loose leaves. It represented 65 projects, mostly in Prairie Style, between 1894 to 1909. Introducing Wright to Europe for the first time, it is said to have given a strong impact on the European Modernist Architects who had never seen the actual buildings by Wright, through its innovative presentation³. Wright himself was deeply involved in the design and editing process of the

¹ Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1994.

² Since the original *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* is scarce and not easily available, this research used the reproduction of the original, 2/3 of its size. Wright, Frank Lloyd. *Studies and Executed Buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright*. Ernst Wasmuth Verlag. 1998.

³ While it was widely believed that Wasmuth Portfolio accelerated the Modernism Movement in Europe, Anthony Alofsin argued that its influence was not as large as it has been conceived in his detailed study on Wright's European years. Nonetheless, Alofsin's claim does not undermine the importance of Wasmuth Portfolio in Wright's career and its powerful messages. Alofsin, Anthony. *Frank Lloyd Wright The Lost Years, 1910-1922*. Chicago – London / Austin: University of Chicago Press/ InnerformsLtd.com. 1993.

portfolio, thus the presentation of the drawings directly reflected his ideas. In spite of the publisher's wish to issue a photo book, Wright insisted on using drawings to represent his work. Though he was an amateur photographer himself, he was not satisfied with the quality of photographs. He claimed "Photographs do not adequately present these subjects. A building has a presence, as has a person, that defies the photographer..."⁴

Although Wright had a clear preference to drawings over the photographs, some of the eye-level perspective drawings are produced by tracing the photographs⁵ but with some alterations. Since the time to prepare for the publication was limited, tracing was a fast way to produce drawings, but another reason was to make adjustments how the buildings should appear according to his own vision, which may not have been expressed fully by the realized works. Wright was certainly conscious of how his works should appear in the media and manipulated them using the method that was available to him: drawing. This paper closely compares the perspective drawings with the original photographs, and clarifies the Wright's intended vision represented in two-dimensional media through the analysis of the reconstructed drawings.

Wright's Text

Two years prior to the Wasmuth publication, Wright had an opportunity to publish his works extensively in *the Architectural Record*, featuring 87 pieces of photographs and drawings as well as his manifesto, "In the Cause of Architecture"⁶. Wright, however, was not satisfied with the representation of his works in this issue. The portfolio was the another chance for him to illustrate his philosophy in the essay, "In the Cause of Architecture," as many of the drawings were tracing the photographs in *the Architectural Record*. He wrote in a letter to his friend in 1910, "The monograph (Wasmuth Portfolio) giving the office-ideal—the architect's rendering of his vision—his scheme graphically proposed in his own matter—"⁷,

In the essay, Wright emphasized the importance of "integrity" between Function and Form. Then, he formulated six prepositions that represented the architectural ideal not only for his own works but also for the entire architectural professions. Table 01. shows the main theme of the prepositions and key words. Especially the first and third prepositions gave concrete examples the design of architectural elements that could be represented through the drawings.

⁴ Wright, Frank Lloyd. "In the Cause of Architecture". *The Architectural Record*, Vol. 23. No. 3. 1908. 3. p. 159.

⁵ Brooks, H. Allen. "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Wasmuth Portfolio". *The Art Bulletin*. Vol. 48. No.2. 1966. p.193.

⁶ Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture". pp.

⁷ Wright's letter to Charles Robert Ashbee dated on July 24, 1910. Alofsin. p. 338.

Table 01. Six Prepositions in "In the Cause of Architecture."

No.	Theme (Overall Theme: Integrity, Nature)
I.	Simplicity and Repose
	1. A building should contain as few rooms as the conditions allow.
	2. Openings should occur as integral features of structure and form.
	3. Less use of ornaments and decorations
	4. Assimilate appliances and fixtures into the design of structure.
	5. Picture should be incorporated in the general scheme of decoration.
	6. The furniture should be built in as a part of the whole building.
II.	A man had a right to his individuality through his house.
III.	A building should appear to grow from its site and harmonize with surroundings. i.e. gently sloping roofs, low proportions, quiet skylines, suppressed heavyset chimneys, sheltering overhangs, low terraces, outreaching walls sequestering private gardens
IV.	Use colour schemes to fit the nature.
V.	Bring out the nature of materials.
VI.	A house with character will be more valuable as it grows older.

Source: *The Architectural Record*. Vol.23. 1908. pp. XXX-XXX

Table 02. List of Drawings Produced by Tracing Photographs.

Pl. No.	Name of Buildings	Year	Interior/ Exterior	Source of Photograph
XXII	Bradley House	1900	Interior	The Architectural Record ⁸ . p.180
XXIV	Hickox House	1900	Exterior	The Architectural Record. p.179
XIX	<u>Fricke House</u>	1902	Exterior	In the Nature of Materials ⁹ . PL
XXXIII	Larkin Company	1903	Exterior	The Architectural Record. p.167
XXXIII	Larkin Company	1903	Exterior	The Architectural Record. p.173
XXXIII	Larkin Company	1903	Interior	The Architectural Record. p.169
XXXV	Tomek House	1905	Exterior	The Architectural Record. p.187
XXXI	Dana House	1904	Exterior	The Architectural Record. p.174
XXXIa	<u>Dana House</u>	1904	Exterior	The Architectural Record. p.175
XXXIb	<u>Dana House</u>	1904	Interior	The Architectural Record. p.174
XXVI	Barton House	1903	Exterior	The Architectural Record. p.206
LVI	<u>Coonley House</u>	1907	Interior	The Complete Works ¹⁰ . p.289
LVIa	<u>Coonley House</u>	1907	Interior	The Library of Congress ¹¹

⁸ *The Architectural Record*, Vol. 23. No. 3. 1908. 3. pp. 155-221.

⁹ Hitchcock, Henry-Russel. *In the Nature of Materials The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright 1887-1941*. Trewin Copplestone Publishing Ltd. 1973.

¹⁰ Pfeiffer, Bruce Brooks; Goessel, Peter. *Frank Lloyd Wright Complete Works 1885-1916*. Taschen. 2011.

The Selection of the Subject

Brook's paper lists 8 drawings, which were produced by tracing the photographs. In 100 leaves of Wasmuth Portfolio, there are 83 perspective drawings. 53 exterior and 6 interior perspective drawings have the standing point at eye-level. Among those 59 drawings, 38 depicted the realized buildings. After searching the photographs of those buildings taken before 1910 in the architectural magazines and books, 5 more photographs, used as the base image of the perspective drawings, were found, so the subjects of the analysis are 13 drawings (8 exterior and 5 interior drawings) in total (Table 02, the images not listed in Brook's paper are underlined).

Extraction and Analysis of the Altered Elements

13 drawings were superimposed onto the original photographs in order to clarify which elements Wright made alterations. The drawings, which were produced by tracing the photographs generally follow the overall angle of the photos, but many subtle modifications were made. The changes in each drawing were categorized into the 8 groups, and Table 03 shows the total sum of categorized alterations in 8 exterior drawings (Hickox, Fricke, Tomek, Dana, Martin and Larkin Company).

Analysis of the Altered Elements – Exterior Perspectives

As for the overall composition of the drawings, all exterior drawings have the layouts wider than the original photographs. The drawings are composed to be either square or landscape orientation, emphasizing the horizontality which is the characteristics of prairie and in accord with his Proposition III, "harmony with the surrounding Nature".

In the exterior drawings, the altered elements were categorized into three types, according to what they represent: architecture, natural vegetation, and surrounding environment. The "architecture" type had the most numbers of alterations, among which the wall fence, windows and eaves tend to be drawn differently from the original photographs. The wall fences are often newly added or stretched horizontally as the overall composition is widened. There are also cases where the heights of the walls are lowered, possibly in order to show more of the architecture behind. The windows are often stretched vertically or the decorations were added onto them.

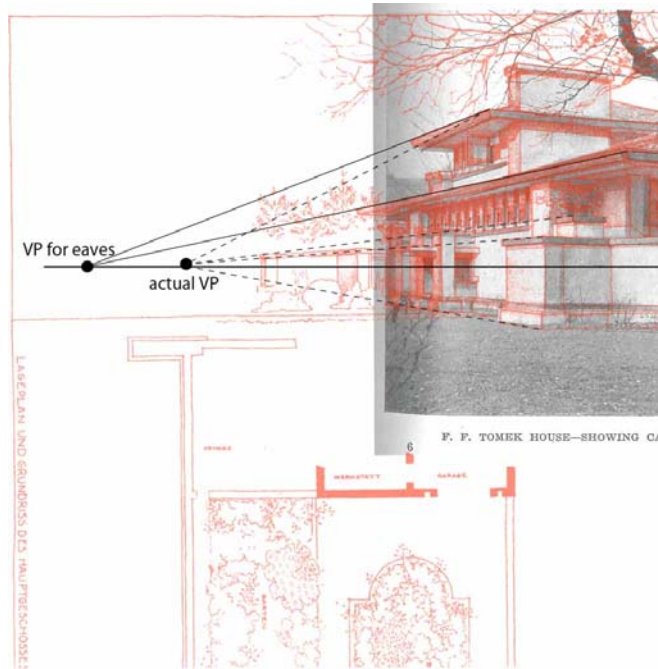
¹¹ Photocopy of Photograph, plate #121 Two Views: Detail of Rear and Interior, West Stairwell – Avery Coonley House, 300 Scottswood Road, 281, Bloomingbank Road, Riversice, Cook Country, IL, Prints & Photographs Online Catalogue, Library of Congress, USA.

Table 03. Categorized Changes in 8 Exterior Drawings

No.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	
Check Points		Newly Added	Deleted	Enlarged/ Emphasized	Reduced in size	Decoration Added	Design Change	Location Change	Angle/vanishin g point change		
Overall	Vertical			3	1					4	
	Horizontal			8						8	
Elements	Architectural Elements	Window		2		5	3			10	
		Window frame			1			2			3
		Column					1				1
		Roof			2		1	1		2	6
		Eave			6	1				3	10
		Chimney			2	2			1		5
		Porch			3			3			6
		Fence Wall	4	1	3	3					11
		Fence		1	1						2
		Ground Fl.				1					1
		Bldg. Shadow	1	2				1			4
	Natural Vegetation	Tall Tree	5	3	2	1		1	3		15
		Short Tree	3	4	1	1		1			10
		Leaf	5								5
		Branch		4							4
		Lawn	1			1			1		3
		Tree Shadow		4					1		5
		Flower Pot	1	1							2
		Plant on bldg.	4		2						6
	Surrounding Environment	Neighbor Bldg.(L)	4	4							8
		Neighbor Bldg.(R)	3	2		1					6
		Sidewalk	1					2	5		8
		Approach	3		1	1			1		6
		Topography			1			2	1		4
		People		2							2
		power pole,fire extinguisher		3							2
Total		35	31	41	12	7	16	13	5	158	

Source: by Author.

Fig. 01. Superimposition of Tomek House drawing onto the photograph.



Source: *Photograph-The Architectural Record Vol.23;*
Drawing- Studies and Executed Buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright.

As in Proposition III, “gently sloping roofs” and “sheltering overhangs” achieved by eliminating attics were emphasized by stretching eaves horizontally. In some cases, Wright shifted the vanishing point of eaves more outwardly than that of the rest of the elements in order to emphasize the horizontality (Fig. 01). In the essay, he considered that such exterior appearance was the most radical break-off from the previous houses, and wished to emphasize it even more than how his actual works appeared.

The “natural vegetation” type had the second most alterations in the exterior perspective drawings. In many cases, trees were added behind the buildings to create more natural and lively atmosphere. While “Nature” was the element Wright repeatedly stressed in the essay, however, the Nature or surrounding environment he admired was not wild and untouched nature, but tamed and sophisticated one. Influenced by Japanese Woodcut Prints, notably Hiroshige, Wright adopted stylized representation of trees and leaves in order to create uniformity between architecture and Nature. The vegetation interfering with the buildings were intentionally removed or trimmed to show up the buildings, and the suburban landscape was more formal and trim than it actually was shown in the photographs. The plants on the buildings on the windowsill and balcony were often added or enlarged. The integration of vegetation with buildings was intentionally rendered, to make an emphasis on the Proposition III of “harmony with the surrounding Nature”.

Table 04. Categorized Changes in 4 Interior Drawings

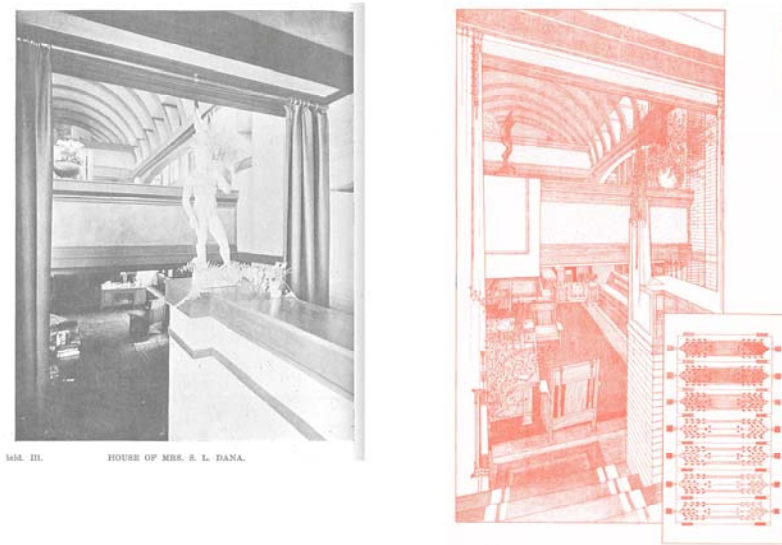
No.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	
Check Points		Newly Added	Deleted	Enlarged/ Emphasized	Reduced in size	Decoration Added	Design Change	Location Change	Angle/vanishing point change		
Over all	Vertical			4					1	5	
	Horizontal			3	2					5	
Elements	Architectural Elements	Window,		1	1		1			3	
		Curtan, rail					2	2		4	
		Stairs	1				1	1		3	
		First floor					1			1	
		Beam, ceiling					2	1	1	4	
		Bldg. shadow	1							1	
		Door					1			1	
		Material joint		1	2					2	
	Furniture Elements	Desk	2								2
		Chair		1				1	4		6
		Carpet						3			3
		Fablic	4	1				1			6
		People		1							2
		Boosshelf	4								4
		Desk Items	1					2			3
		Ornament	1	1	1			1			4
		Flower vase	6	3				1	1		11
		Flower pot		2	1						3
		Cushion		1					1		2
		Document	1	1							2
Total		21	12	12	3	7	12	8	2	77	

Source: by Author.

Analysis of the Altered Elements – Interior Perspectives

Of 6 interior perspective drawings in the Portfolio, 5 of them were produced by tracing photographs. The drawings of Bradley and Coonley Houses living rooms and corridor have almost exactly the same composition as the photographs, while those of Larkin Company and Dana House boldly narrowed the composition of original photograph. For example, in the drawing of Dana House depicting the view of gallery through the stairway, the vertical composition was emphasized by adding the steps which were trimmed off in original photograph (Fig. 02). Suggesting the location of the viewer's standpoint, this pictorial manipulation and vertical composition helps to make one feel as if being in the space and take viewers' eye into the depth of interior space.

Fig. 02. Dana House photograph and drawing.



Source: Photograph-*The Architectural Record* Vol.23;
Drawing- *Studies and Executed Buildings* by Frank Lloyd Wright.

In the interior drawings, unlike the exterior perspectives, few architectural elements were altered while many furniture elements were manipulated by addition and deletion. As in Proposition I 3-6, Wright aimed to make harmonious interior with simple and geometrical furniture, but in actuality, many clients brought their own furniture against Wright's will. The drawings deleted and replaced those furniture with the ones designed by Wright.

The interior space in the drawings, however, were not just made simple by reducing the number of items, but Wright also added elements he designed. Especially, tapestries and bookshelves were often added. It shows that Wright considered not only architecture, but also those furniture elements to be important factors to create the uniform and harmonious atmosphere in the room.

Conclusion

In Wasmuth Portfolio, Wright attempted to visually illustrate the ideas in "In the Cause of Architecture" in the *Architectural Record* in 1908. One of the major reasons why Wright insisted on using drawings for the Portfolio was probably that he could treat "Studies (unrealized projects)" and "Executed Buildings" equally in order to achieve "integrity" of his thoughts and projects. Also, the act of tracing allowed him to select the elements that "he wished to see" from the photographic images and reconstruct the "Executed Buildings" to adjust to his vision. Drawing was the process to elevate the built projects to the integrated architectural philosophy, which was what Wright wished to present through the Wasmuth Portfolio.