

## THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BOX

Frank Lloyd Wright

I think I first *consciously* began to try to beat the box in the Larkin Building—1904. I found a natural opening to the liberation I sought when (after a great struggle) I finally pushed the staircase towers out from the corners of the main building, and made them into free-standing, individual features. Then the thing began to come through as you may see.

I had *felt* this need for features quite early in my architectural life. You will see this feeling growing up, becoming more apparent a little later in Unity Temple: there perhaps is where you will find the first real expression of the idea that the space within the building is the reality of that building. Unity Temple is where I thought I had it, this idea that the reality of the building no longer consisted in the walls and roof. So that sense of freedom began which has come into the architecture of today for you and which we call organic architecture.

You may see, there in Unity Temple, how I dealt with this great architectural problem at that time. You will find the sense of the great room coming through—space not walled in now but more or less free to appear. In Unity Temple you will find the walls actually disappearing; you will find the interior space opening to the outside and see the outside coming in. You will see assembled about this interior space, screening it, various free, related features instead of enclosing walls. See, you now can make features of many types for enclosure and group the features about interior space with no sense of *boxing* it. But most important, after all, is the sense of shelter extended, expanded overhead, and which gives the indispensable sense of protection while leading the human vision beyond the walls. That primitive sense of shelter is a quality architecture should always have. If in a building you feel not only protection from above, but liberation of interior to outside space (which you do feel in Unity Temple and other buildings I have built) then you have one important secret of letting the interior space come through.

Now I shall try to show you why organic architecture is the architecture of democratic freedom. Why? Well . . .

Here—say—is your box: big hole in the box, little ones if you wish—of course.

What you see of it now is this square package of containment. You see? Something not fit for our liberal profession of democratic government, a thing essentially anti-individual. Here you may see (more or less) the student architecture of almost all our colleges.

I was never ambitious to be an engineer. Unfortunately, I was educated as one in the University of Wisconsin. But I knew enough of engineering to know that the outer angles of a box were not where its most economical support would be, if you made a building of it. No, a certain distance in each way from each corner is where the economic support of a box building is invariably to be found. You see?

Now, when you put support at those points you have created a short cantileverage to the corners that lessens actual spans and sets the corner free or open for whatever distance you choose. The corners disappear altogether if you choose to let space come in there, or let it go out. Instead of post and beam construction, the usual box building, you now have a new sense of building construction by way of the cantilever and continuity. Both are new structural elements as they now enter architecture. But all you see of this radical liberation of space all over the world today, is the corner window. But in this simple change of thought lies the essential of the architectural change from box to free plan and the new reality that is space instead of matter.

From this point we can go on to talk about organic architecture instead of classic architecture. Let's go on. These unattached side walls become something independent, no longer enclosing walls. They're separate supporting screens, any one of which may be shortened, or extended or perforated, or occasionally eliminated. These free-standing screens support the roof. What of this roof? Overhead it becomes emphasized as a splendid sense of shelter, but shelter that hides nothing when you are inside looking out from the building. It is a shape of shelter that really gives a sense of the outside coming in or the inside going out. Yes, you have now a wide-spreading overhead that is really a release of this interior space to the outside: a freedom where before imprisonment existed.

You can perfect a figure of freedom with these four screens; in any case, enclosure as a box is gone. Anything becoming, anything in the nature of plan or materials is easily a possibility. To go further: if this liberation works in the horizontal plane why won't it work in

the vertical plane? No one has looked through the box at the sky up there at the upper angle, have they? Why not? Because the box always had a cornice at the top. It was added to the sides in order that the box might not look so much like a box, but more classic. This cornice was the feature that made your conventional box classic.

Now—to go on—there in the Johnson Building you catch no sense of enclosure whatever at any angle, top or sides. You are looking at the sky and feel the freedom of space. The columns are designed to stand up and take over the ceiling, the column is made a part of the ceiling: continuity.

The old idea of a building is, as you see, quite gone. Everything before these liberating thoughts of cantilever and continuity took effect, was post and beam construction: superimposition of one thing upon another and repetition of slab over slab, always on posts. Now what? You have established a natural use of glass according to this new freedom of space. Space may now go out or come in where life is being lived, space as a component of it. So organic architecture is architecture in which you may feel and see all this happen as a third dimension. Too bad the Greeks didn't know of this new use for steel and glass as a third dimension. If they had known what I am trying to describe here, you wouldn't have to think much about it for yourselves today, the schools would long ago have taught these principles to you.

Be that as it may, this sense of space (space alive by way of the third dimension), isn't that sense, or feeling for architecture, an implement to characterize the freedom of the individual? I think so. If you refuse this liberated sense of building haven't you thrown away that which is most precious in our own human life and most promising as a new field for truly creative artistic expression in architecture? Yes, is there anything else, really? All this, and more so, is why I have, lifelong, been fighting the pull of the specious old box. I have had such a curious, controversial and interesting time doing it that I myself have become a controversial item. Suspicion is always in order.

Now to go back to my own experiences: after this building of Unity Temple (as I have said) I thought I had the great thing very well in hand. I was feeling somewhat as I imagine a great prophet might. I often thought, well, at least here is an essentially new birth of thought, feeling and opportunity in this machine age. This is the modern means. I had made it come true! Naturally (I well remember) I became less and less tolerant and, I suppose, intolerable. Arrogant, I imagine, was the proper word, I have heard it enough.<sup>1</sup>