American Modernist and Postmodernist Architecture: Frank Lloyd Wright and Frank Gehry
Bachelor’s Diploma Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author's signature
Acknowledgement

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1. Introduction

This thesis deals with the works of two world-wide famous American architects, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867 – 1959) and Frank Gehry (1929 - ), each of them a significant architect of a different time period.

Wright began his career in Chicago at the time the city was still recovering from the Great Fire of 1871, when new fire-proof technological developments such as iron beams, glass, concrete, and not less important electric invention of the elevator, became available. Later on, Wright was doing what is known as organic architecture, an architecture that develops naturally out of the context, especially out of the relationship between the site and the building and the needs of the client. Houses in wooded regions, for instance, were built mainly from wood, houses in deserts were designed with rambling floor plans using a lot of stone, and houses in rocky areas such as Los Angeles made heavy use of cinder blocks.

On the other hand, Gehry came to the world of architecture at the time, when Modernism was being overtaken by new styles. The new era of computer design, made available very different shapes of buildings rather than the highly repetitive architecture of Modernism. The distorted forms of Frank Gehry's structures are classified sometimes as being of the deconstructivist school of postmodernist architecture, at least he holds such inclinations. However, the architect himself denies any links with this movement and does not fit into any particular architectural category.
2. Modernism and Post-modernism

In general, Modernism “is a trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve, and reshape their environment, with the aid of scientific knowledge, technology and practical experimentation” (Berman 16). It is a trend that is thought of as both progressive and optimistic. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century various political, cultural and artistic movements originated in the changes of the Western society. Marshall Berman, a philosopher whose discourse focuses on issues of modernity, depicts it as:

In the twentieth century, the social processes that bring this maelstrom into being, and keep it in a state of perpetual becoming, have come to be called ‘modernization’. These world-historical processes have nourished an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own. Over the past century, these visions and values have come to be loosely grouped together under the name of “modernism.” (Berman 16)

In his 1979 essay “Modern and Post-Modern” Clement Greenberg states that modernism is not a breaking trend, but lives up to the past:

What can be safely called Modernism emerged in the middle of the last century. And rather locally, in France, with Baudelaire in literature and Manet in painting, and maybe with Flaubert too, in prose fiction. (It was a while later, and not so locally, that Modernism appeared in music and architecture, but it was in France again that it appeared first in sculpture. Outside France later still, it entered the dance.) The “avant-garde” was what Modernism was called at first, but this term has become a good deal compromised by now as well as remaining misleading. Contrary to the common notion, Modernism or the avant-garde didn’t make its entrance by breaking with the past. Far from it. Nor did it have such a thing as a program, nor has it really ever had one -- again, contrary to the common notion. Nor was it an affair of ideas or theories or ideology. It’s been in the nature, rather, of an attitude and an orientation: an attitude and orientation to standards and levels: standards and levels of aesthetic quality in the first and also the last place. And where did the Modernists get their standards and levels from? From the past, that is, the best of the past. But not so much from particular models in the past -- though from these too -- as from a generalized feeling and apprehending, a kind of distilling and extracting of aesthetic quality as shown by the best of the past. And it wasn’t a question of imitating but one of emulating -- just as it had been for the Renaissance with respect to antiquity. It’s true that Baudelaire and Manet talked much more about having to be modern, about reflecting life in their time, than about matching the best of the past. But
the need and the ambition to do so show through in what they actually did, and in enough of what they were recorded as saying. Being modern was a means of living up to the past. (Greenberg, 7th par.)

In this excerpt, as Greenberg says; “Modernism or the avant-garde didn’t make its entrance by breaking with the past. Far from it. … And where did the Modernists get their standards and levels from? From the past, that is, the best of the past. … And it wasn’t a question of imitating but one of emulating” (Ibid). He relates us that even though artists had a strong intention to come up with a very new trend, it basically only emulated the best from the past in order to reflect the present. In essence, the modernist movement implied that people should adapt their world view to the new industrial and mechanized age. It argued that the new changes were permanent and equalled the good, the true and the beautiful.

The Modernist movement has been perceived as controversial, namely for its rejection of tradition. Conventional expectations were substituted by the accentuation of freedom of expression, experimentation, radicalism, and primitivism. Sometimes this meant frightening audiences with effects, such as unseen motif combinations in Surrealism or the use of dissonance and atonal sounds in modernist music. In literature this was often reflected by using other than traditional intelligible plots; in poetry new forms without clear interpretation emerged (Baker 93).

Interestingly, modernism flourished mainly in capitalist societies, although its proponents often rejected consumerism itself. However, modernism began to integrate with consumer culture after World War II, especially during the 1960s. In Britain, a youth subculture even called itself “modernists”, though usually shortened to Mods, following such representative music groups as The Who and The Kinks. Musicians such as Bob Dylan, Serge Gainsbourg and The Rolling Stones combined popular musical traditions with modernist verse, using literary features borrowed from James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, James Thurber, T.S. Eliot, Guillaume Apollinaire, Allen Ginsberg, and others (Weston 93). The Beatles
emerged similarly, creating various modernist musical effects on their albums, while musicians such as Frank Zappa, Syd Barrett and Captain Beefheart were even more experimental (Weston 93). Modernist features continue to appear in music videos and in popular cinema. Modernist design began to influence the mainstream of popular culture, as simplified and stylized forms became popular, often connected with dreams of a space-age high-tech future.

The fact that consumer culture had merged with high versions of the modernist movement led to a significant change of the meaning of “modernism”. It implied that a movement based on the rejection of tradition had become a tradition of its own and, furthermore, showed that the difference between elite modernist and mass consumerist culture had lost its precise distinction (Weston 94). Criticism emerged that modernism had become so institutionalized that it was now “post avant-garde”, suggesting that it had lost its strength as a revolutionary movement (Weston 94). For some this transformation led into new interpretation. This can be perceived as the beginning of the trend that became known as Post-modernism. For others, such as, for example, art critic Robert Hughes, post-modernism represents an extension of modernism:

Postmodernism was originally a reaction to modernism (not necessarily “post” in the purely temporal sense of “after”). Largely influenced by the disillusionment induced by the Second World War, postmodernism tends to refer to a cultural, intellectual, or artistic state lacking a clear central hierarchy or organizing principle and embodying extreme complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, diversity, and interconnectedness or interreferentiality. (Hughes 48)

Postmodernist ideas in the arts have had a great influence on philosophy and the analysis of culture and society, significantly affected works of literature, architecture, and design. The trend expanded the importance of critical theory, as well as being visible in marketing/business and the interpretation of history, law and culture, beginning in the late 20th century. These re-evaluating changes of the entire Western value system (love, marriage, popular culture, shift from industrial to service economy) that have been around since
1950/1960, with the escalation in the Social Revolution of 1968 — are described by the term postmodernity, as opposed to the “-ism” referring to an opinion or movement. As something being “postmodernist” would be part of the movement, “postmodern” would refer to aspects of the period of the time since the 1950s, a part of contemporary history; still both terms may be synonymous under some circumstances:

Postmodernist scholars argue that a global, decentralized society such as ours inevitably creates responses/perceptions that are described as postmodern, such as the rejection of what are seen as the false, imposed unities of meta-narrative and hegemony; the breaking of traditional frames of genre, structure and stylistic unity; and the overthrowing of categories that are the result of logocentrism and other forms of artificially imposed order. Scholars who accept the division of postmodernity as a distinct period believe that society has collectively avoided modern ideals and instead adopted ideas that are rooted in the reaction to the restrictions and limitations of those ideas, and that the present is therefore a new historical period. While the characteristics of postmodern life are sometimes difficult to grasp, most postmodern scholars point to concrete and visible technological and economic changes that they claim have brought about the new types of thinking.¹

Various opinions have been pronounced about whether recent technological developments and cultural changes mean a new historical period, or only an extension of modernism. Some have even argued that also the post-modern era is already over, with some analytics saying culture has entered a post-postmodern period. In his essay “The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond,” Alan Kirby has argued that we now inhabit an entirely new cultural landscape, which he calls “pseudo-modernism” (Philosophy Now (58): 34-37). A. Carlill and S. Willis have extended this idea with the latter describing postmodernism as “more the rough outline of a set of self-referential ideals than a genuine cultural movement” (Willis 43).

The linguist Noam Chomsky has suggested that postmodernism is meaningless because it adds nothing to analytical or empirical knowledge. In one discussion about Postmodernism he asks why postmodernist intellectuals will not respond as “people in

¹ http://www.tutorgig.com/ed/postmodernism
physics, math, biology, linguistics, and other fields are happy to do when someone asks them, seriously, what are the principles of their theories, on what evidence are they based, what do they explain that wasn’t already obvious etc? These are fair requests for anyone to make. If they can’t be met, then I’d suggest recourse to Hume’s advice in similar circumstances: to the flames.”

However, Postmodernists do not wish to formulate precise thoughts about what is right or wrong, true or false, good or evil. In general, they believe that nothing such as absolute truth exists. “A postmodernist views the world outside of himself as being in error, that is, other people’s truth becomes indistinguishable from error.” For this reason, no one should have the power to define truth or give his idea of moral right and wrong to others.

In this section I contrasted modernism and postmodernism as general trends of thoughts; modernism being progressive and optimistic with its fairly definable form compared to postmodernism which is a term of much broader characteristics harder to define. One of the reasons surely is the fact that postmodernism is still, according to some, present. In the next section I am going to present modernist characteristics on the work of a significant American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867 – 1959) who is considered to be a great example of a modernist, innovative architect with the influence on the modernist era in architecture throughout the Western world.

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2 http://www.cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/chomsky-on-postmodernism.html
3 http://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/postmodernism.htm
3. Frank Lloyd Wright, the Modernist

During his London lectures in 1939 Frank Lloyd Wright said: “Every great architect is--necessarily--a great poet. He must be a great original interpreter of his time, his day, his age” (Wright 1939, 242). Wright himself was exactly that, as he well knew when he said it. The prose of architecture, the background buildings that are happy to serve as neutral settings for any kind of human thought and action, did not interest him. Instead, it was his “life-long intention to form human life into rhythmic patterns which seemed to him poetic and to embody those patterns in buildings which were in every case specific and unique poetic works themselves” (Scully Jr. 11). In this respect he was a child of his time, but his exceptional ability to carry his intentions through made him in fact the “great original interpreter” (Wright 1939, 246).

As a well-known architect, Wright worked in two utterly different cultural periods, where the second - mid-twentieth century - was the more significant. Although many unique inventions already existed, the values of the former period still prevailed. Wright was a great master in expressing in architecture “his time, his day and his age” (Ibid 246). For the late nineteenth century, Wright reflected the present attitudes: “its supreme confidence in the common future, and […] its desperate, complementary yearning for pre-industrial, sometimes pre-civilized images and symbols to root itself upon” (Scully Jr. 11). These two attitudes had been characteristic for the late eighteenth century in general and for the immigrant Americans in particular. As such, Wright was the heir, in architecture of a tradition, “in part Jeffersonian, which had previously found its best expression in the works of Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, and Mark Twain” (Ibid 11). As they, in their writing, had celebrated “the flux and flow which characterize modern times and the compulsion toward unity which is the democratic will, so he, in his architecture, sought to make the images of flow a fact, to
celebrate continuous space, and to bring all together into shapes which were unified by his will” (Ibid 11). He himself stated the basic principle well: “Space. The continual becoming: invisible fountain from which all rhythms flow and to which they must pass. Beyond time or infinity” (Wright 1953, 106). This image of “continuous becoming,” as of the river, the sea, or the prairie, was a constant in Wright’s work, as it had been in that of his literary predecessors. Many streams of nineteenth-century thought, historical, biological, and philosophical, fused in it as well. To its pursuit Wright brought another nineteenth-century quality, a kind of “Nietzschean individualism” (Palante 9th par.), not unknown in Whitman and certainly intrinsic to Wright’s friend and respected master, Louis Sullivan. This characteristic, combined with an arrogance Wright freely admitted, and revealing a loneliness he did his best to hide, finds expression in one of the quotations from Whitman Leaves of Grass which Wright most admired and upon which he formed his life:

Going where I list, my own master, total absolute, listening to others, considering well what they say, pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating, gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me. I inhale great draughts of space. The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine . . . Beware of the moral ripening of nature. Beware what precedes the decay of the ruggedness of states and men. Beware of civilization (Wright 1938, 37).

This is the mobile individual, isolated from all that is not himself, who must go forward forever, continuously forward alone, beyond both nature and civilization, which are the two major “holds” upon him (Camus 1951). It is a most persuasive image of a modern man.

But Wright was an architect, and there were certain solid things that he loved. First, he loved the land. An examination of his work must lead us to believe that he loved it not in Whitman’s way, primarily as a vast setting for the display of one’s own questionable “virility” (Browne 1882), but for itself, in its variety and its fact. In this love he faced a special
problem, because, as Sybil Moholy-Nagy has pointed out, he was the first architect in history who was required to take on a whole continent alone (Moholy-Nagy 321). Such projection of the individual into the necessity for making many and massive identifications with the world was itself appropriate and special to Wright’s time. As in this excerpt from Whitman’s *Song of Myself*:

> Space and Time! Now I see it is true, what I guess’d at,
> What I guess’d when I loaf’d on the grass,
> What I guess’d while I lay alone in my bed,
> And again as I walk’d the beach under the paling stars of the morning.

> My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,
> I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,
> I am afoot with my vision. (Whitman v. 33)

Whitman here mentions “my palms cover continents” expressing how superior to the world he feels, how the world is small to him.

In the end, Wright built almost everywhere on the North American continent without receding from his attempt to celebrate in architectural form the specific landscapes with which he was involved. Characteristically, “he attempted this through methods which related in principle to those which had been pursued in Bronze Age Crete, in Japan, and in Pre-Columbian America, and he admitted his admiration for the architecture of those cultures. He disliked the Hellenic way and its principles, which he refused to regard as architectural” (Scully Jr. 12). That is, he tried, though in abstract form, to echo the shapes and dominant rhythms of the landscapes in which his buildings were set. He avoided introducing into the landscape that especially lucid image of human isolation in the world which was one of the elements of Greek architectural expression and which only a few modern architects of a later generation, most particularly Le Corbusier, have understood (Ibid 12). The Hellenic method grew out of a complex set of religious speculations concerning the laws of nature and the life of man - a
tragic perception for which Wright, along with the rest of his generation, was not prepared: “It involved a recognition of separateness between things that was alien to Wright and to his time as a whole, which, as noted above, preferred to view men and nature as flowing together in a kind of evolutionary flux, like the semi-Darwinian “morphology” that Sullivan loved so well” (Egbert 336).

Wright’s own way was complex enough: “He would at once merge with nature like a Cretan or a Japanese while, at the same time, like a Mayan, he marked off and built up abstract platforms and sculptural masses which compacted nature’s shapes through human geometry and numerical control” (Scully Jr. 12). Late in life, also, when his drive to encompass the whole of things had accelerated with getting older, he seems to have come to understand the objectives and methods of Roman Imperial space and of the whole non-Greek Mediterranean tradition that lay behind it (Ibid 12).

Wright’s work was directly and indirectly influenced by all the architectures mentioned above, but, unlike LeCorbusier with his own influences, Wright consistently refused to admit that fact. His refusal to do so was partly based upon his own tragic need, which was “to keep the romantic myth of the artist as isolated creator and superman alive in himself” (Ibid 13). It also had something to do with his dislike of the generally uncomprehending and superficial use of forms from other periods (or from the magazines) which was practiced by most of the architects around him throughout his life. Yet, more deeply, “his refusal to admit the help that came to him from across time grew out of his own profound loves as an architect, ideal loves which made it difficult for him to admit that he could not engross them entirely alone” (Ibid 13). Among these we have already noted his respect for the landscape which seemed to him to mean that each building should, ideally, be uniquely suited to its special place. This also involved his above-mentioned desire to give
precise and appropriate abstract form to the human action of his time. To these preoccupations should now be added another: his love for materials and for their expression in structures ideally appropriate to their specific natures. In this realm, which has received so much attention in the critical appreciation of Wright, he actually experienced some of his greatest difficulties, and knew that he did so.

This occurred because of a certain system of priorities, certainly not fixed, but present all over, which seems to have directed Wright’s process of design. Looking at his developed buildings and reading his writings, we may feel that his primary interest was abstract: first, usually, in the abstraction of the space, “taking shape as it did out of his double will to embody its use and to form it into a rhythmically geometric pattern” (Scully Jr. 13). Secondly, he wished “both to enclose the hollow so created and to extend it or the expression of it to the exterior through the sculptural massing of the building as a whole” (Ibid 13). Sometimes, as in the earliest works of his several phases, a concern for the exterior massing may have preceded that for the interior space. Having made his building visually integral in both its voids and its solids, he then wished to build it of such materials and in such a way as to make it structurally integral as well. In some of his later projects “the structural principle may come first in the process, but when we survey his work in general we find that structural integration tended to come last at any stage in his development and that he himself was most specifically pleased with any building when its structural rather than simply its spatial and sculptural aspects were intrinsic to the whole” (Ibid 13). This helps explain Wright’s admiration for buildings such as the early “Romeo and Juliet” windmill and the Imperial Hotel, which otherwise seem either of small importance or of doubtful success. Conversely, he was always willing to force or hide the structure when he had to in order to achieve his spatial and sculptural ends. Yet he never relinquished his ideal of integration, and his pleasure at his successes is indicative of his deepest intent. He clearly believed that, “when a building built by men to serve a specifically
human purpose not only celebrated that purpose in its visible forms but became an integrated structure as well, it then took on the character of an organism which existed according to its own complete and balanced laws” (Scully Jr. 14). In this way it honoured by its wholeness and integrity the purely human intellect and hand which had created it. This is what Wright meant by “organic.” Only a few architects have attempted so much and have been willing to ignore so little in order to achieve it.

As noted above, Wright has included the sense for rule and order and newest inventions in his designs while achieving highly modern constructions according to the needs of his client and the environment of the construction. In the following section I am going to characterize the style of a 62 years younger American architect, at present still being an active professional, Frank Owen Gehry (*1929) whose works are world-wide known for his controversial approach to architecture – one will love it or hate it, but certainly not overlook it.
4. Frank Owen Gehry, the Post-modernist

“By definition, a building is a sculpture, because it is a three-dimensional object” (qtd. in Jodidio 63).

The distorted forms of Frank Gehry's structures are classified sometimes as being of the deconstructivist school of postmodernist architecture, at least he holds such inclinations. However, Gehry himself denies any association with the movement and claims no formal connection to any particular architectural movement in general. The movement with which he is usually associated can be defined as follows:

“The deconstructivist movement (DeCon) stems from a series of discussions between French philosopher Jacques Derrida and architect Peter Eisenman in which they question the utility of commonly accepted notions of structure alone in being able to define and communicate a meaning or truth about a creator’s intended definition (a definition of space in architecture, for example), and counterposes our preconceived notions of structure with its undoing; the deconstruction of that very same preconception of space and structure.” (Richter 34)

It is in this criticism or deconstruction of a given construct, in this case, a structure, that architecture finds its justification or its “place of presence”. In that sense, DeCon is often referred to as post-structuralist in nature for its ability to go beyond current modalities of structural definition: “In architecture, its application tends to depart from modernism in its inherent criticism of culturally inherited givens such as societal goals and functional necessity” (Richter 42). Because of this, unlike earlier modernist structures such as Wright’s, DeCon structures do not aim to reflect specific social or universal ideas, such as speed or universality of form, and they do not reflect a belief that form follows function. Gehry’s own Santa Monica residence is a commonly cited example of deconstructivist architecture, as it was so drastically divorced from its original context, and in such a manner, as to subvert its original spatial intention.
More than any other architect of his generation, Frank Gehry is an innovator whose vision reaches beyond the accepted aesthetic and technical constraints of twentieth-century architecture. His singular formal and philosophical stance developed slowly. In the late 1950s and 1960s (the earliest years of his practice) his work was well planned and handsome and those who knew it regarded him as genuine talent. But it was not until the 1970s that “the box began to break apart” (Friedman 8), and by the end of that decade he had ventured into absolutely unknown territory with his own “dumb little house” (Ibid 8), a small, pink Santa Monica bungalow. It became a laboratory in which it was possible to try anything, and he did. Since then, many barriers to self-expression have come down at his bidding. And in the years since 1989, computers, and the people who operate them, have given him the freedom that he hoped for so long to create ever more inventive ways to enclose space.

All of Frank Gehry’s adult years have been spent in Los Angeles (where he moved with his family from Toronto at the age of sixteen), with only two short breaks: Harvard’s Graduate School of Design, and a stay in Paris with the French firm of André Remondet. But it is Los Angeles, the unique city of slender palms and smog shrouded freeways, that spawned this rare imagination.

Gehry’s early influences were the great southern California modernists – Raphael Soriano, Richard Neutra, and Harwell Harris. All three were at the top of their form in the 1950s when Gehry was studying at the University of Southern California. But the freewheeling nature of his attitude toward materials and form matured in the 1960s along with those of a group of Los Angeles artists, including Edward Moses, Robert Irwin, Billy Al Bengston, Chuck Arnoldi, Ron Davis, Larry Bell, Edward Ruscha, and Kenneth Price (Ibid 12). As “the beauty of California’s extraordinary natural light is an essential element in the work of these artists, it is also a hallmark of Gehry’s architecture” (Ibid 12). But these
architects not only respond to southern California’s natural environment. In addition, a play on the characteristic “L.A. vernacular” (Friedman 12) is consistently present in their works, as it is in Gehry’s. What he refers to as the “urban junkyard” (Ibid 12) of disparate styles inspired his breakthrough architecture, in which stucco, plywood, chain link, and corrugated metal reflect the context of his city. Beyond the materiality of the Los Angeles cityscape there is the myth and mystery of Hollywood. For although Gehry has never worked in the film industry, many of his friends and clients are part of that world, and inevitably, in subtle ways, he responds to its presence, and expresses its influence in the exuberant cinematic movement that often animates his work.

In the 1980s Gehry’s horizons expanded, as did his awareness of artists outside of Los Angeles and his references to diverse environments. In New York, his friendships have evolved into memorable collaborations with Richard Serra, Claes Oldenburg, and Coosje van Bruggen (Ibid 12). At the same time his office walls are covered with magazine clippings and postcard images of great historic works by such masters as Claus Sluter, Gentile Bellini, and Constantin Brancusi, artists who inspire him and, in subtle ways, influence his architecture (Ibid, 12). Figuration, which began with Gehry’s famously bizarre fish fascination in Barcelona, is a growing aspect of his work. It is present in the dancing figures in Prague, the horse’s head first found in the Lewis house and later realized in the DZ Bank on Berlin’s Pariser Platz and, less specifically, in the “organic baroque characteristic” (Ibid 13) of all the recent work.

As Gehry has gradually developed his own increasingly daring sculptural forms, his collaborations with artists have been fewer. However, his enthusiasm for old and new art has not disappeared and occasionally he demonstrates his profound understanding of works of art in exhibition installations for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles’s
Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Guggenheim museums. Exhibition projects and his design of furniture and lamps provide Gehry with something architecture cannot: “instant gratification, quick nourishment – what he has called ‘fast food’ – a diet he enjoys when its substance captures his imagination” (Friedman 15). Memorable early installations for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art included *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930*, in 1980, and *German Expressionist Sculpture* in 1983. In his book, Casey Mathewson writes on Gehry’s entering into the world of the world’s top architects:

His built-works elicit diverse responses, both critical and quotidian. Some people are uncomfortable with the formal aspects of the work, and never get beyond them to examine the ways his buildings work; thus, in earlier days, he sadly remarked that, ‘Being accepted isn’t everything’. But with the opening of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao he seemed to have crossed an invisible line and in L.A. became a reluctant celebrity. He is an inspiring father figure to many young Los Angeles practitioners, and although there is definitely not a FOG “school” as such, many aspiring designers train in his office, and he regularly passes projects along to the courage ones who venture out on their own. (Mathewson 64)

But success has not spoilt Frank Gehry; rather, it has given him the self-assurance he needed to last with his singular experiments with materials and form. He chooses materials both for their formal qualities and their associations. His decision to work with plywood, galvanized metal, lead, cardboard, and the much despised, ever-present chain-link fencing can be traced in part to the constraints of small budgets, but more significant was his desire to demonstrate that chain link, despite its negative associations, can be a positive design element, as he says about his style:

“My artist friends, like Jasper Johns, Bob Rauschenberg, Ed Kienholz, and Claes Oldenburg, were working with very inexpensive materials – broken wood and paper – and they were making beauty. These were not superficial details, they were direct, and raised the question in my mind of what beauty was. I chose to use the craft available, and to work with craftsmen and make a virtue out of their limitations. Painting had an immediacy that I craved for in architecture. I explored the process of new construction materials to try giving
feeling and spirit to form. In trying to find the essence of my own expression, I fantasized that I was an artist standing before a white canvas deciding what the first move should be.” (Jodidio IV, 32)

This description is in many ways faithful to the appearance of the built work of Gehry. As Thomas Fisher wrote: “Not only do his buildings assert the fundamentally artistic nature of architecture, but their forms draw almost literally from other arts, sculpture and theater especially” (Jodidio II, 18). The combinations of the forms and materials he uses sometimes project an impression of “chaotic disorder, or inherent transience” (Jodidio I, 31).

The seeds of much that was to come are in that small, pink California bungalow. For example, in the eccentric form of the kitchen window, one can see the first instance of implied motion in Gehry’s architecture, in this case derived perhaps from cubism. The recent renovation of the house, “a controlled effort on Gehry’s part to create a more comfortable, accommodating environment for his wife and grown children, lacks, by his own admission, the gentle madness of the effort” (Friedman 16). Still, the house retains a monumental quality; it is a tribute to individuality, perception, and creativity.

Over the years, as his project budgets have grown, Gehry’s choice of materials has become “more diverse and esoteric” (Ibid 16), - as in Bilbao, where motion is realized in the building’s fluttering titanium skin. For the American Center in Paris, Gehry’s effort to be contextual was decisive in his choice of the limestone walls, quarried, appropriately, in France. “I love the stone of Paris, It is like the stucco of L.A.” (McGuigan 18), he maintains. The Center’s zinc roof is his homage to the Hotel de Ville, and the canopy on the park side of the building conjures a melting mansard roof. Cast glass, a material new to Gehry, will be used to define the seating areas in the Condé Nast Cafeteria project in New York City (Mathewson 51). Kurt Foster asserts that, “At his best, Gehry manages to free his projects from typological constraints, enabling his buildings to assume shapes of unprecedented kind
and configuration” (Forster 28). In that regard, Gehry explains that “you cannot redo old ideas. The only way to gain is to go forward and not look back. You can learn from the past, but you cannot continue to be in the past” (Friedman 12).

The past section elaborated the development of Gehry’s unique experimental style. His postmodern tendencies are present in his deconstructive approach in architecture, which is supposed to, and often does, amaze and shock the beholder. In the next section a closer look on particular buildings representing the distinct styles of the two architects takes place. The two distinct styles can be clearly distinguished by observing such features as the outside shape of the building, the choice of materials, and namely the elaboration of the inner space. The two pairs of selected buildings serve the same purposes: the first two are Guggenheim museums and the latter two private residences.
5. Buildings analysis:

5.1. The Guggenheim Museum in New York

Originally called “The Museum of Non-Objective Painting,” the Guggenheim Museum located on the Fifth Avenue in New York, is Wright’s last major work, designed between 1943 and 1956 and opened in 1959. From the street, the building looks approximately like “a white ribbon curled into a cylindrical stack” (Time Mag. 21), slightly wider at the top than the bottom. Wright enjoyed the appearance of the museum so much that he claimed that his museum would make the nearby Metropolitan Museum of Art “look like a Protestant barn” (Ibid).

The viewing gallery inside forms a gentle spiral “one great space on a continuous floor,” as Wright described it, “carrying within more than one-quarter mile of continuous ramps sloping upward six stories to a great glass dome 92 ft. above the ground” (Time Mag. 21). About the ramp, Bruce Pfeiffer comments:

When asked why he chose the ramp instead of level floors in the conventional stack, Wright explained that he felt the museum-goer would find it far more convenient to enter the building, take the elevator to the top ramp, gradually descend around an open court, always have the option, as the ramp touched the elevator stack at each level, to either go back, or skip down to further levels, and finally, at the end of the exhibition, he would find himself on the ground floor, near the exit. Wright further reasoned that in so many conventional museums, the public traverses long galleries of exhibitions only to have to retrace its steps to get back to the beginning in order to leave. (Pfeiffer 151)

The Museum’s paintings are displayed along the walls of the spiral and also in viewing rooms found at stages along the way.

The building consists of the Main Gallery, the Justin K. Thannhauser galleries, the Monitor (a smaller three-story secondary mass), an underground auditorium, an exhibition wing, a restaurant, and a bookstore. There are two vertical masses in the building. The large mass is the Main Gallery and the other is the Monitor.
Features of modernism can be traced in Wright’s Museum. For example, the intersection of the masses is clear and readable from all points of view. Also, the surfaces of the masses do not have any ornamentation. Then, the representation of the surfaces and edges are continuous throughout the interior and exterior of the museum.

Criticism of the structure focuses mostly on the fact that the building attracts the visitors mostly by itself rather than by the pieces of art inside. The shallow windowless exhibition niches are another target of criticism, for they are thought of as quite dark, and left to be lit mainly by the artificial light. The reason is that the niches are heavily shadowed by the walkway itself; therefore, the large skylit in the middle of the spiral is not enough. Also, canvasses must be mounted proud of the wall’s surfaces, because they are neither vertical nor flat. The limited size of the walkway within the niches means that sculptures are generally placed to plinths in the middle of the main spiral walkway itself. Before the museum was to be opened, twenty-one artists signed a letter protesting the display of their work in such a space. As Wright comments on this feature of his building:

Why do you think the walls of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum are gently sloping outward? They gently slope because the donor and his architect believed that pictures placed against the walls slightly tilted backward would be seen in better perspective and be better lighted than if set bolt upright. This is the chief characteristic of our building and was the hypothesis upon which the museum was fashioned. This idea is new but sound, one that can set a precedent of great value. (qtd. in Pfeiffer 151)

Wright faced strong criticism, especially from artists, for building a museum that might overpower the art inside. “On the contrary,” he wrote, “it was to make the building and the painting an uninterrupted, beautiful symphony such as never existed in the World of Art before” (Ibid). On the web pages of the New York Museum, Matthew Drutt writes about the ever-young building: “In conquering the static regularity of geometric design and combining it with the plasticity of nature, Wright produced a vibrant building whose architecture is as
refreshing now as it was 40 years ago.”

The Guggenheim is arguably Wright’s most expressive presentation and certainly the most important building of his late career.

5. 2. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao

“Where run-down factories once created an urban wasteland, the new museum now mirrors the heavens in its sculptural forms” (Mathewson 277).

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is a building of superlatives. Beginning with its “scale and intricately ramified setting, and ending with one of the most complex spatial experiences to be had anywhere,” (Forster 49) its architectural qualities are virtually unique in our time.

The museum completed in 1997 is the result of a collaboration between the Basque Country Administration, which finances and owns the project, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, which operates the museum and provides the core art collection. The museum represents the first step in the redevelopment of the former trade and warehouse district along the south bank of the Nervion River. The Bilbao writer and illustrator Asun Balzola describes how the city has changed after the revitalization: “The district where I spent my childhood has changed beyond belief. Then it was a noisy industrial area, today it’s a very peaceful place. Bilbao was a grey city like . . . well . . . Manchester perhaps. Now it’s white, luminous” (41). And she adds her feelings about the museum itself:

When you’re inside the building, the light, and the spirals of the architecture almost make you forget its contents. You would almost be willing to visit it if it was empty. The Guggenheim has made Bilbao a much more attractive city. You can see it from many parts of town. You walk along a street and suddenly there is this great titanium-clad mountain in front of you. It plays tricks on you. (Iglesias 41)

Further Robert Campbell, a correspondent of the Boston Globe, describes the attractions of the museum in the *Boston Globe*:

But people don’t go to the Gugg -- can we call it that, as New Yorkers name their Guggenheim? -- for the art exhibits. They go for the architecture. The architecture is the art. For most people, the Gugg is something entirely new in the world. Seen from outside, the building is a random pile of free-form curving shapes that are clad like fish in scales of shining titanium. The titanium reflects every nuance of the changing weather and light. Shafts of glass spike up through this skin like crystal formations. Seen from inside, the Gugg is a maze of spectacular galleries, some of them in free shapes that writh like eels, and almost all of them illuminated, as in a cathedral, by daylight that spills down from above. (Campbell 6)

The Puente de la Salva Bridge, which connects the nineteenth-century city center with its outlying areas, passes over the site at its eastern edge, transforming the museum into a gateway to the city. The main entrance to the museum is through a large central atrium, where a system of curvilinear bridges, glass elevators, and stair towers connects the exhibition galleries concentrically on three levels. A sculptural roof-form rises from the central atrium, flooding it with light through glazed openings. The scale of the central atrium, rising more than 150 feet above the river, is an invitation to monumental site-specific installations and special museum events. A noted critic of Postmodernism, Charles Jencks wrote about the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao:

Rarely does a building capture the imagination of both architects and the public. Le Corbusier’s Ronchamp and Utzon’s Sydney Opera House did it in the Sixties and Seventies and now Frank O. Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum, in the Basque city of Bilbao, becomes another of these rare events... one is reminded of Charters cathedral proclaiming itself in the landscape and the city… Coincidently, it also epitomizes a trend which has been under way for thirty years – the museum as cathedral.” (Jodidio 18)

The museum’s largest space is a large boat-shaped gallery, completely free of structural columns, measuring 130 meters by 30 meters, permitting the museum to stage large-scale art installations that would otherwise not be feasible. Most gallery ceiling heights are 6 meters or more, which together with the spectacular atrium, “gives a feeling of space akin only to cathedrals” (Ibid 19).
The Guggenheim Foundation required gallery spaces to exhibit a permanent collection, a temporary collection, and a collection of selected living artists; in response, three distinct types of exhibition spaces were designed. The galleries for the exhibition of the permanent collection are relatively conservative in design. This collection is housed in two sets of three consecutive square galleries stacked on the second and third levels of the museum. The temporary collection is housed in a more dramatic, elongated rectangular space that extends to the east. This space passes underneath the Puente de la Salva Bridge and terminates in a tower on its far side, integrating the bridge into the overall composition of the museum. The exhibition of the work of selected living artists is housed in a series of eleven distinct galleries, each of unique spatial quality and generous ceiling height. Back-of-house functions, such as loading, art staging, storage, and conservation, are housed in the lower level of the museum.

The major exterior material on the rectangular buildings of the museum is Spanish limestone, while the more sculptural shapes of the building are clad in titanium panels. The interior walls of the galleries are a smooth-finish plaster. “A sculptural metallic roof-form reminiscent of a metallic flower, designed with the assistance of the CATIA three-dimensional aerospace computer-modelling program, unifies the project into a single architectural composition” (Jodidio 21).

Coupled with a new subway line designed by Sir Norman Foster, and a bridge and airport by Santiago Calatrava, the Guggenheim Bilbao announces the faith of the city, region and Spanish government in the renewal of this industrial city through the force of contemporary architecture and design: “Just as great cathedrals in the past often proclaimed the wealth and power of the cities in which they were located, so the museums and other culturally oriented projects of today stake similar claims. It, of course, remains to be seen if these strong signals are enough to transform public opinion or to modify the structure of a
city’s activities” (Mathewson 53). In any case, the authorities of Bilbao have not gone about this project in a modest way. They have invested heavily, and the results they obtain may well have an impact on the future development of cities throughout the world.

5. 3. The Modernist and Post-modernist Guggenheims

“A leading role has been assigned to the spiral. This image is associated with the idea of the labyrinth in an age-old tradition. The Guggenheim Museum by Frank Lloyd Wright is the extreme manifestation of this association” (Francesco 82) – the result being that visitors find themselves in an utterly natural condition in which their bodies respond to the force of gravity. It is this natural condition that makes it difficult for them to use the museum space in a conventional way. This deviating movement, guided by the architecture, becomes “similar to that of dance, marked by a rhythm that is transmitted to the body without the aid of senses” (Ibid, 83). Inside one of the greatest architectural masterpieces of the twentieth century, the visitor is faced with a condition well known to cultural historians, who are aware of the many versions of correspondence between the maze and the spiral, but also “the association between labyrinth and dance represents an invocation of order and salvation” (Doob 156). In spite of the temporal distance, this precedent explains the symbolic character of Wright’s Guggenheim: an allegory, such as those that took place in the Middle Ages, about the “triumph of order, whether in the aesthetic or the moral sphere” (Ibid 156) and thus of the greatness of the architect.

The same spatial characteristic is accentuated in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. One enters this imposing building, whose metal surfaces reflect the actual light of the sky, then descends a wide staircase, a sloping plaza. The visitor experiences “a strong compression” (Francesco 83), which only serves to intensify the sense of respect once the visitor enters the entrance hall where he can observe the “flow of the facings and the
contortions” (Francesco, 83) of the structure. Each human movement appears to be absorbed by the “spatial tumult” (Ibid, 83), a confirmation of the space’s labyrinthine nature.

Both Wright’s and Gehry’s Guggenheims are unconventional and spectacular architectural masterpieces. They both had to cope with not being able to use the most desirable locations, which they both managed fabulously. Good for or bad, they both struggled with the “idea” of a museum in the way that their buildings came to overshadow the actually exhibited paintings or other art-pieces because of the unconventional designs of the museums – especially Wright’s “Ziggurat”, which does not even have upright walls. The spiral functions as a gallery certainly more naturally in the way that the visitor knows how many more steps he will make to the exit and he will not miss one single part of the exhibition, unless he wants to. Concerning this aspect, Gehry’s museum plays with the visitor without any order, the visitor is absorbed by the inner space itself and is surprised that he has found the exit not knowing how much of the exhibition he has missed. Gehry’s “metallic flower” still performs perfectly as the main attraction of the vast revitalization project of the city, being an example of successful investment into public architecture. Both museums serve as cathedrals of the present age, which is suggested by their immense ceiling heights and their innovative designs which are completely different from their surroundings and thus attract millions of visitors coming not only for the sake of the art inside.

5.4. Wright’s Fallingwater

One of Wright’s masterpieces is the Kaufmann House, usually referred to as “Falling Water,” built across a stream called Bear Run, in Connellsville, Pennsylvania, in 1935. In a talk to the Taliesin Fellowship, Frank Lloyd Wright said of this house:

Fallingwater is a great blessing – one of the great blessings to be experienced here on the earth. I think nothing yet ever equalled the coordination, sympathetic expression of the great principle of repose where forest and
stream and rock and all the elements of structure are combined so quietly that really you listen not to any noise whatsoever although the music of the stream is here. But you listen to Fallingwater the way you listen to the quiet of the country. (Pfeiffer 120)

This building is considered an amazing piece of residential architecture for its relation of man to nature. This important aspect is Wright’s typical one. What he did in this house is to put the occupants in close relationship to the glen, the trees, the foliage and the wild flowers of the area: “Wherever one is within the building, the glory of the natural surrounding is accentuated, brought in and made a component part of daily life” (Ibid, 120).

The house is integrated with the landscape to the smallest details. For example, the window-glass meets stone walls without any metal frame; rather, the glass is caulked directly to the stone. The stairways from the house lead directly down to the water. The house has small rooms, some even with low ceilings. This, again, can be perceived as accentuation of the outer space, such as the decks and the outdoors. The main floor offers views in three directions, with terraces leading out in two. One terrace opens upstream, the other views over the rocks and cascades. Each bedroom on the second level has its own terrace, and the study and gallery-bedroom on the third level have access, as well, to another outdoor terrace. The walls of the house are built of native stone, “with ‘stick-outs’ or slightly projected stones to give a more sculptural quality to the stone masses” (Ibid, 120). All the decks are constructed of poured concrete. The floors in Fallingwater are paved in stone, the same stone as the walls, and the woodwork is “a sap grain walnut, executed at an extremely fine level of craftsmanship” (Ibid, 120). A semi-circular covered walk connects the main house to the guest house further up the hill.

The natural stream - which the residents hear constantly throughout the house – the immediate surroundings, the locally quarried stone walls and the cantilevered terraces (resembling the nearby rock formations) were intended to suggest harmony, corresponding to
Wright’s interest in making buildings that were more “organic” and which, thus, seemed to fit perfectly into their surroundings. Although the waterfall can be heard throughout the house, it cannot be seen, unless the residents walk outside. Broad expanses of windows are incorporated into the design of the house, and the balconies are off the main rooms, providing a feeling of the closeness of the surroundings. No one has explained its magic better than Wright historian Neil Levine: “This is a house,” he writes, “about stone, water, trees, leaves, mist, clouds, and sky” (58).

5. Gehry’s house in Santa Monica

“He insisted he was practicing architecture, not doing art, and that insistence was critical to his claim of originality” (Giovannini 32).

Frank Gehry’s own house was originally an extension, designed by himself and built around an existing house. He set out to remodel the house by using unconventional materials that would not be too costly, such as chain-link fence and corrugated steel. Sometimes it is considered one of the earliest deconstructivist buildings, although Frank Gehry denies this.

Gehry’s house is located in Santa Monica, California. In 1977 Gehry and his wife Berta bought “a two-story pink bungalow” (Friedman 19) that was originally built in 1920 and reconstructed the house for the first time in 1979. Gehry wanted to experiment further with the materials he was already using: metal, plywood, chain-link fencing, and wood framing. He decided to wrap the outside of the previous house with a new exterior, while still leaving the old exterior visible. Without touching the rear and south facades, he attached tilted glass cubes to the other sides of the house. The kitchen floor remained blacktop, since it used to be the driveway. Gehry describes his architectural process:

I could not say, this is what I was trying to do and this is what I did. I started to do something and then I followed the end of my nose. … When Arthur Drexler came here for dinner one night, he thought the house was a joke. Berta told me
afterward that he asked if the peeling paint was intentional. That’s what was strong about it. What he was laughing about was what made it. You were never sure what was intentional and what wasn’t. It looked in process. You weren’t sure whether I meant it or not. There was something magical about the house. And I knew that the thing a lot of people hated or laughed at, was the magic. (qtd. in Friedman 54)

In his article “The Dialects of Seeing”, Walter Benjamin presents his view of the “wrapped” 1920s house:

The house consists of a corrugated metal shell wrapped around three sides of an existing pretty pink shingled 1920s house in a way that creates new spaces between the shell and the old exterior walls. The result, of course, is that certain rooms, glassed in from above, are located on the former driveway and lawn. They effectively dismantle the opposition between inside and out and constitute an ironic commentary on the cherished sense (or illusion) of interiority seemingly sustained by the 1920s house, which the space between it and the “wrapper” or “shell” in every sense englobes. (Benjamin 5)

Gehry seems to have understood the environment he came to in Santa Monica so much that he just responded to the “normal mess”. However, the way he reconstructed his bungalow was not particularly appreciated by the other residents living in the area:

At that time Santa Monica was a retirement city. Most of the people there had bought their houses for $15,000. It was a middle-class group. They fixed their cars on the lawn, they had trailers with boats. It was messy, but it was normal messy to them. I picked up on their normal messy and took that language into my house and played it back to them. I freaked them out with the aesthetic of their normal messy. They got the connection, but they didn’t like it. It was like holding a mirror up to them. They would say to me, “This is not normal.” If I’d crashed a boat into the wall it might have been more normal. (Bell, 8th par)

5. 6. Fallingwater retreat & Santa Monica residence

With his Fallingwater, F. L. Wright reached the peak of his attempt to integrate man and nature, with its setting right on top of an active waterfall. His horizontal poured concrete cantilevers and native stone verticals became the dominant aesthetic feature of the house, an organically designed private residence intended as a nature retreat for its owners. On the other hand, Gehry’s Santa Monica residence was the beginning of Gehry’s unique style, in which he just “follows the end of his nose”, while using cheap, often recycled materials that are
rarely seen as building materials, responding to the environment of his own neighbourhood in an untraditional, and for many a shocking, way. Gehry was establishing his own “chaotic” style and his own position among the architects, a position that has developed since. His rejection of constructional principals could not have been used much earlier, e.g. in Wright’s time, partly because of the necessity of technological advance and partly because of a lack of the cosmopolitan and tolerant culture that has become encompassing in the last decades.
6. Analysis:

6.1 Wright’s Modernism

Wright’s work is based on what is known as “organic architecture” which emerges naturally out of the context, most importantly for him out of the relationship between the site and the building and the needs of the client. Houses in wooded regions, for instance, were built mainly from wood; houses in deserts were designed with rambling floor plans using a lot of stone; and houses in rocky areas such as Los Angeles made heavy use of cinder blocks. Wright’s projects actualized his “organic architecture” concept down to the smallest details. When designing his larger commercial commissions or his relatively modest Usonian houses, Wright designed virtually every detail of both the external and the internal features, including furniture, doors, windows, carpets, tables and chairs, light fittings and decorative elements. He was one of the first architects to design custom-made and purpose-built furniture and fittings that became integrated parts of the whole project. He also often returned to earlier commissions to redesign internal fittings. His Prairie Houses use coordinated design with themes, often based on plant forms that are repeated in windows, carpets and other elements, or else he embraced the requirements of the very modern age in which he lived: “He was the first builder using new building materials such as precast concrete blocks, glass bricks and zinc came (instead of the traditional lead) for his leadlight windows, and he famously used Pyrex glass tubing as a major element in his Johnson Wax Headquarters” (Scully Jr. 83). Wright was also one of the first architects to design and install custom-made electric-light fittings, including some of the very first electric floor-lamps, especially his very early use of the spherical glass lampshade (which was, until then, not possible, due to the physical restrictions of gas lighting).

Alongside Wright’s career-growth, the mechanization of the glass industry was developing. Wright used glass in his houses and realized that it worked well with his
philosophy of organic architecture. Glass seemed perfect for viewing of the outdoors while still protecting the interior from the elements. In 1928, Wright wrote an essay on glass – “The Meaning of Materials” - in which he compared glass to the mirrors of nature: the lakes, the rivers and the ponds. One of Wright’s first uses of glass in his projects was to “string panes of glass along whole walls in an attempt to create light screens to join together solid walls” (Scully Jr. 83). By using such a large amount of glass, Wright wanted to achieve a harmony between the airiness and lightness of the glass and the solid, hard walls. Arguably, Wright’s Prairie style is the most well-known art-glass design: “The simple geometric shapes that yield to very ornate and intricate windows represent some of the most integral ornamentation of his career” (Scully Jr. 84).

Wright responded by developing homes with gradually more open plans fitting well the changes in American life that were happening at the turn of the twentieth century, when servants became less frequent or completely absent in most American households. This enabled the woman of the house to prepare meals in her “workplace”, as he often called the kitchen. She could still keep an eye on and be available for the children or, at the same time, be in the company of her guests in the dining room. Many features of modern architecture, including those of the early works of Mies van der Rohe, can be found in Wright’s designs.

The modernist design of houses and various fittings emphasized simplicity and clarity of form, an absence of ornament, and the dismissal of clutter: “Modernism reversed the 19th century relationship of public and private: in the 19th century, public buildings were horizontally expansive for a variety of technical reasons, and private buildings emphasized verticality—to fit more private space on more and more limited land” (Scully Jr. 84). In the twentieth century, public buildings began to grow upwards, while private households became organized horizontally.
The Guggenheim Museum in New York, Wright’s masterpiece which, according to some, overshadows the works exhibited inside, functions as a perfect example of a modernist building. Wright designed a spiral, making the verticality an advantage by letting the visitor get to the top of the spiral and then descend on the ramp while seeing all the exhibited objects, assuring the visitor that he will not miss anything, and that he knows where and when he will approach the exit. He designed a building which was a clear and simple form, and used unseen masses of a new material - poured concrete – to create a museum building that New Yorkers are aware of and proud of even today.

### 6.2 Gehry’s Post-modernism

The Gehry’s Guggenheim in Bilbao is something entirely new in the world.

Seen from outside, the building is a random pile of free-form curving shapes that are clad like fish in scales of shining titanium. The titanium reflects every nuance of the changing weather and light. Shafts of glass spike up through this skin like crystal formations. Seen from inside, the Gugg is a maze of spectacular galleries, some of them in free shapes that writhe like eels, and almost all of them illuminated, as in a cathedral, by daylight that spills down from above. (Campbell 6)

Since Gehry always seeks creative dialogue with other artists, he uses their devices, especially the sculptor’s, “to imbue his buildings with a holistic depth that never derails into rigidity. His is an architecture that elevates the chaos, fast lane superficiality and eternal sunshine of his home town, Los Angeles, to poetry” (Mathewson 15). The Bilbao Guggenheim is a building, often perceived of as a sculpture, that encapsulates Gehry’s unique style. It fits into the city neither with its form nor with its shining surface, but it definitely serves its purpose as a magnificent building that still attracts thousands of people not only for the sake of the art inside but for the building itself. The city seriously needed effective revitalization; and, by building this “metallic flower”, it surely succeeded.

Gehry’s reconstructed bungalow in Santa Monica shows a rejection of all rules that would be set by the culture of the area. Gehry decided to extend the house by wrapping it in
corrugated metal, in such a way that he created new spaces between the shell and the old exterior walls. By using often recycled materials that were, by that time, not appropriate for building houses, Gehry demonstrated his intention to experiment and to reconstruct the present house according to his actual aesthetic feeling and his financial situation. Furthermore, he says his design is based on the inspiration he had had from his neighbours’ lawns. The result was a “mirror” being held up to them, a mirror which they dislike. Gehry seems to be pleased when a visitor has doubts about which details of the house - such as the paint that is peeling off - are intentional and which are not. The house is still in process, and that is postmodern magic.

In an otherwise carefully cultivated landscape, the architecture of Frank Gehry appears on the horizon like something that surely does not belong there: “One can simply disregard it and turn instead to more familiar buildings, or one might react passionately to its startling and rebellious appearance, but one is not likely to overlook it” (Forster 5). Gehry’s buildings strike some as alien intruders in the landscape, and others as “homegrown hybrids springing from the very seedbed of our culture” (Forster 9). Either reaction is a result of significant aspects of Gehry’s work. To gain these reactions, he transforms the familiar in such a way that estranges it estranges it for the viewer.
7. Conclusion

From today’s perspective, Wright has brought a more valuable influence into the world of architecture than has Gehry. Compared to Wright, Gehry has not been, even could not have been, evaluated historically, given the lack of the distance in time which is present in terms of Wright. Another aspect of their difference in approach is that mostly private residences made to measure were Wright’s domain, while Gehry designs mostly public buildings with which he is already expected to shock and draw attention to. Gehry’s buildings will have more difficulties to change their function if necessary, for they were designed as “sculptures” with their present function to be the only and not interchangeable one. However, he can dare to do this, because today’s “architecture of public buildings” is not meant to last as long as it was meant to last in Wright’s time. The investor (often a city) already expects this, since Gehry’s public buildings have one thing in common: they are all recognizably created by Gehry.

Frank Lloyd Wright is a great example of an American modernist architect. He used modern technological devices in his designs, many of them as the first builder ever to use them, while keeping a simple and clear form for his buildings. Since he was a highly modern builder, he put an emphasis on rationality - when building a house in a wooded region, the house was made mainly from wood and made to measure to the needs of his client - a concept that became known as “organic architecture”. Wright developed homes with gradually more open plans, fitting well the changes in American life that were happening at the turn of the twentieth century, when servants became less frequent or completely absent in most American households. This enabled the woman of the house to prepare meals in her “workplace”, as he often called the kitchen. She could still keep an eye on and be available for the children or, at the same time, be in the company of her guests in the dining room.
When designing the Guggenheim museum in New York (App: Fig. 01, 02) Wright embraced the form of an inverted “Ziggurat” – a clear and simple form that served its function perfectly in a modern way. Wright designed a spiral, making the verticality an advantage by letting the visitor get to the top of the spiral and then descend on a ramp while seeing all the exhibited objects, assuring the visitor that he will not miss anything, and that he knows where and when he will approach the exit. Even today, 49 years after its opening, the Museum attracts thousands of people desiring to experience an untraditional approach to a gallery space.

On the other hand, Frank Owen Gehry has developed an individual style through experimenting with materials such as metal, plywood, chain-link fencing, and wood framing, though today he experiments with costly materials such as titanium plates on the façade of buildings, always adjusting the cost to the budget. Gehry designs mainly public buildings that are already expected to be an extreme contrast with their surroundings, which make the passerby/visitor question, “How could this have been built? Why has it not fallen down yet? Is this beautiful or ugly?” His buildings have no rules; no repetitions, no right angles – they are sculptures. Gehry uses modern computer software to assist his construction formulas, in order to tell which designs are physically possible and which are not. This chaotic deconstructive approach clearly demonstrates rebellious, postmodern design qualities.
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Wright’s Guggenheim Museum, “Inverted Ziggurat,” 1959, New York, USA

Fig. 01

Fig. 02
Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum, “Metallic Flower,” 1997, Bilbao, Spain

Fig. 03

Fig. 04
Wright’s “Organic” Fallingwater, 1935, Pennsylvania, USA

Fig. 05

Fig. 06
Gehry’s Santa Monica Residence, 1979, USA

Fig. 07

Fig. 08