

Ernest Fenollosa and the Universal Implications of Japanese Art

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Among the many Westerners invited to Japan to teach at the various new academic institutions established during the early years of the Meiji administration was the young Harvard philosophy graduate Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), who in 1878 accepted the post of Professor of Philosophy and Political Economy at the newly founded Imperial University in Tokyo.¹ Fenollosa's brief was to teach the future leaders of the new Japan the basis of Western thinking; however, his personal interest soon turned towards Japan's own culture, and to its arts in particular, so much so that after making the first survey by a foreigner of Japanese temple art, he rapidly became one of the leading Western authorities.²

Fenollosa's name first came to the forefront of Japanese art scholarship on an international level in 1884, with the publication of his review of the chapter on painting in Louis Gonse's *L'Art japonais* (1883). Gonse's account of Japanese graphic art had been based mainly on the limited examples which had reached Europe by the early 1880s, and while Fenollosa was generally appreciative of his efforts to highlight the merits of Japanese art, he felt that Gonse's presentation of its pictorial media was eccentric in its emphasis on woodblock prints at the expense of the classical schools of Japanese painting. In a review which first appeared in the *Japan Weekly Mail* in July 1884, Fenollosa dismissed Gonse's account of Japanese painting as a 'Hokusai-crowned pagoda of generalisations',³ and took the opportunity to set out what the British orientalist Laurence Binyon later described as 'the first adequate survey of the development of Japanese art in its true perspective and proportions ever published in a European tongue'.⁴

Fenollosa's preoccupation with Japan's traditional arts was spurred on by what he perceived as the tragedy of the Japanese abandoning their artistic traditions in the rush to modernise which followed the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867. By the early 1880s Fenollosa felt sufficiently concerned to begin attempting to draw the dangers of this trend to wider attention. To this end, in May 1882 during a now famous speech to the influential *Ryuchi-kai*⁵ – an aristocratic art association dedicated to the promotion of traditional Japanese arts and crafts – Fenollosa made an impassioned plea for Japan to preserve its traditional painting, which he praised in

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particular for its quality of aesthetic idealism – in marked contrast to most Western art of the time – explaining:

Painting is an art that expresses Idea by means of lines, colours, and shading done in perfect harmony, and Japanese art . . . excels universally in this expression of Idea. . . . Japanese art is really far superior to modern cheap Western art that describes any objects at hand mechanically, forgetting the most important point, of how to express Idea. Despite such superiority the Japanese despise their classical paintings, and, with a deep adoration for Western civilisation, admire its modern paintings which are artistically worthless and imitate them for nothing. What a sad phenomenon it is! The Japanese should return to their nature and its old racial traditions, and then take, if there are any, the good points of Western paintings.⁶

The *Ryuchi-kai* speech marked the beginning of what became a crusade by Fenollosa and a small group of Japanese artists and enthusiasts to convince the Japanese government of the value of Japan's traditional arts. Early in 1884 Fenollosa and several of these colleagues – notably his former students at the Imperial University, Okakura Kakuzo (1862–1913) and Ariga Nagao (1860–1921)⁷ – were instrumental in founding the *Kanga-kai*, an art society devoted to the preservation of *kan-ga*, the traditional Chinese-style of painting which had been championed in Japan by Zen-inspired artists such as the celebrated classical painter Sesshu (1420–1506), and which was later combined with indigenous Japanese styles in the famous Kano school based in Kyoto.⁸ Fenollosa was even adopted into the historic Kano family under the artist's name of Kano Yeitan, and so successful was the ensuing campaign that the goals of the *Kanga-kai* soon gained official recognition. In late 1885 the Japanese Ministry of Education appointed Fenollosa, together with Okakura and the respected painter Kano Hōgai (1828–1888),⁹ to a commission charged with examining the future of art education in Japan. On the basis of their report, in late September 1886 Fenollosa and Okakura were decorated for their services to Japanese art by the Emperor Meiji himself, and a few days later, on 1 October, they left Yokohama for America, together with the government's Director of the Bureau of Colleges Hamao Arata (1849–1925),¹⁰ as members of an Imperial Fine Arts Commission on a fact-finding tour of Western art institutions.¹¹

In his official report to the Japanese Ministry of Education on his return to Japan in the autumn of 1887 Fenollosa declared that not only had the commissioners concluded that Japanese artists had little or nothing to learn from Western methods of art training, but they actually had much to teach the West, and should therefore concentrate their energies on developing their own traditional methods.¹²

Fenollosa's subsequent efforts to re-establish training in Japan's traditional arts were to play a major part in preventing their disappearance from Japan's educational system – in direct opposition to the general tide of Westernisation which characterised Meiji Japan. And after returning to the United States in 1890 to take charge of the newly established Japanese department at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Fenollosa was to embark on a similar campaign to enlighten his own people on what he believed to be the 'universal' aesthetic ideals exemplified by Japanese art. As a philosophy undergraduate at Harvard the young Fenollosa had been an

enthusiastic founder of the University's Herbert Spencer Club. However, primarily under the influence of two of his professors at Harvard, the Emersonian aesthete Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908) and the Unitarian theologian Charles Carroll Everett (1829–1900), Fenollosa's interests gradually widened to include art and religion, and in the process his philosophical allegiance also shifted – towards Emerson and Hegel.¹³ In line with this developing interest, after graduating Fenollosa initially followed in Emerson's footsteps by attending Harvard's Unitarian Divinity School, of which Charles Everett was then dean, and after finally leaving the University in January 1877 he began teaching at Boston's new Massachusetts Normal Art School while continuing his own painting studies under Emil Grundmann at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

By the time Fenollosa took up his post at the Imperial University of Tokyo in September 1887, according to Lawrence Chisolm, his personal philosophy encompassed a blend of 'Emersonian pantheism, Spencerian mechanism, and Hegelian metaphysics',¹⁴ and this agenda was to be reflected in his teaching in Japan over the following decades. During his early days at the Imperial University, for example, Fenollosa lectured mainly on Herbert Spencer. However, as his preoccupation with Japanese art developed during the early 1880s, the emphasis of his classes gradually shifted towards aesthetics, and to those of Hegel in particular. And finally during his second period in Japan – between 1898 and 1900 – he taught Emerson to his advanced students of English at the Tokyo Higher Normal School.¹⁵

As a product of Charles Norton's classes at Harvard, and fresh from teaching at a progressive art school in Boston, Fenollosa's views on art and society reflected the general tone of 'democratic aestheticism' which had developed among Boston's artistic community during the 1870s. Through figures such as Norton and the art critic James Jackson Jarves (1818–1888), by the late 1870s an Emersonian belief in the democratisation of art as a positive means of social development had become a central theme in the American Aesthetic Movement, in Boston especially. Similarly, by the early 1880s, Herbert Spencer's social philosophy, and particularly his views on self-reliance and the minimal role of government in the life of the citizen, had become popular in the United States, where they were widely regarded as fitting the American democratic ideal of a nation of freely co-operating individuals unhindered by an interfering state.¹⁶ There were also a number of popular translations of Hegel available in America by this time, notably in the Midwest, where his ideas were particularly well received. In St Louis, for example, committed Hegelians such as Henry Conrad Brockmeyer (1826–1906) and William Torrey Harris (1835–1909) presented Hegel as a spokesman for a kind of natural state of *laissez-faire* democracy, and as such, ideally suited to the mediating role between East and West which they saw as the destiny of Midwestern culture.¹⁷

Yet, while Emerson and Hegel were widely read in American artistic circles during this period, the young Ernest Fenollosa was to be the first to apply their ideas to *Far Eastern* art. Initially this took the form of an Emersonian campaign for Japan to expand the popular base of its traditional arts, and following Fenollosa's return to America in 1890 this was combined with an essentially Hegelian interpretation of the universal principles exemplified by that tradition.

Fenollosa's approach to Far Eastern art was encapsulated in his epic poem 'East and West', in which he foresaw a conscious blending of oriental and occidental ideals as a means of raising the level of human civilisation generally. Convinced that both the West and the Far East could each gain what they lacked from a mutual exchange of complementary values, he declared: 'Within the coming century the blended strength of Scientific Analysis and Spiritual Wisdom should wed for eternity the blended grace of Aesthetic Synthesis and Spiritual Love'.¹⁸ In Fenollosa's view, it was the facility of 'aesthetic synthesis' which was lacking in the majority of contemporary Western artists, and they could best regain this lost sense of the essentially formal nature of art through a careful study of traditional Far Eastern examples. What made Fenollosa's particular approach to Japanese art unusual for its time, then, was the fact that he did not simply understand it as a historian, or merely appreciate it as an aesthete, but actively sought to interpret it in terms of general principles which could be practically applied beyond Japan, and more specifically in America. In May 1891, he summed up his perception of his role:

1st. I must remember that, however much I may sympathize with the past civilizations of the East, I am in this incarnation a man of Western race, and bound to do my part toward the development of Western civilization.

2nd. I must also remember that my career must not be the narrow one of a mere scholar or antiquarian, or a historian who burrows in the past for mere accuracy of fact. I must cast [aside] my desire to compete with European authorities as a great scholar in the history of Japanese art. I must feel that all my knowledge of art, theoretical and practical, and of its history, is only so much capital for realizing actual production now in the present and here in the West.¹⁹

For Fenollosa, the single most important principle exemplified by Japanese art was an emphasis on expressing purely formal ideas, rather than realistically representing subjects. In an early talk on 'The Lessons of Japanese Art', he explained:

The mere representation of an external fact, the mechanical copying of nature, has nothing whatever to do with art. This proposition is asserted by all oriental critics, and is a fundamental canon with all Japanese painters. . . .

. . . Lines and shades and colors may have an harmonic charm of their own, a beauty and infinity of pure visual idea, as absolute as the sound idea in music. The artistic element in form is . . . the pure simple music of a form idea. . . . The fact that such a line organism *may* represent natural fact does not interfere with its purely aesthetic relation as line. . . . Now such line ideas, apart from what they represent . . . are exactly what the Japanese conceive to form the basis of all their art.²⁰

Fenollosa held that the aesthetic appeal of these *purely formal* ideas was due to their peculiar quality of 'organic wholeness', which derived from the mutual interdependence of each contributing part. As he explained:

When several things or parts, by being brought into juxtaposition, exert a mutual influence upon one another, such that each undergoes a change, and as the result of these simultaneous changes each becomes melted down, so to speak, as a new constituent of a new entity, we have synthesis. . . . Here the parts are not left

behind; they persist altogether transfigured by the organic relation into which they have entered. Such a synthetic whole is never equal to the sum of all its parts; it is that plus the newly created substance which has been formed by their union. Such a whole we cannot analyse into its parts without utterly destroying it. Abstract one of the units, and the light which irradiated it is eclipsed; it is like a hand cut off, limp and lifeless.

. . . A true synthetic whole cannot have a single part added or subtracted without destroying the peculiar character of its whoelness, without disturbing the perfect equilibrium of the mutual modifications. Thus such a synthetic whole is an individual, a separate entity, [with] a peculiar organic nature, an unchangeable possibility, a foreordained unit from all eternity. Now [the] Japanese feel that every case of artistic beauty is just such an individual synthesis.²¹

Though not inaccurate, Fenollosa's analysis of Japanese art was none the less unashamedly occidental. Indeed, in many respects it reflected the general idealism of late-nineteenth-century Western aesthetic theory, having derived from a combination of the Kantian concept of the purely formal 'aesthetic idea' exemplified by the organic whole,²² and Hegel's metaphysical explanation of the unique appeal of the organic form as the most complete material manifestation of the spirit or metaphysical 'Idea'.²³

However, the central message of Fenollosa's lectures in the United States centred on the same Emersonian plea which he had been making to the Japanese over the previous decade: that local artists should resist the temptation to import fashionable foreign styles, and look instead to their own culture for the seeds of an indigenous art. In the case of America the essence of that culture was seen as democracy – the maximum free expression of the individual consistent with the coherence of society as a whole. It was Fenollosa's intention, then, that Americans should not simply admiringly imitate the forms of Japanese art, but rather that they should apply its underlying aesthetic ideals as a means of developing a new 'democratic' art of their own; that is, an art which was not defined abroad, or handed down from above, but one which was rooted in democracy itself – in myriad combinations of unique individuals interacting with a commonly held set of *universal* aesthetic ideals. To this effect he suggested that the 'Kingdom of Art', *i.e.* the popular creation and appreciation of beauty, was not something which would be achieved primarily through external means, but rather by each individual simply nurturing their own underused instinctive aesthetic sense.²⁴ So while aesthetic idealism and the democratisation of art were both popular themes in late-nineteenth-century American art theory, Fenollosa's particular form of democratic aestheticism encompassed what at the time was an unusual synthesis of Emersonian populism, German aesthetics and traditional Japanese art.

For Fenollosa then Japanese art in itself was less important than what it had to teach about the nature of art in general. Indeed, as if to emphasise this point, large tracts of his early lecture on 'The Lessons of Japanese Art' were transferred verbatim into his general treatise on 'The Nature of Fine Art',²⁵ in which he expounded a thesis to the effect that artistic beauty was based upon 'organic' form-ideas which stimulated a spiritual resonance in the observer which transcended rational understanding – in

the same way as our appreciation of music does not necessarily require any knowledge of its content. To this effect, Fenollosa concluded his essay by declaring:

By an empirical comparison of the several fine arts, I found that their most fundamental attribute was their power to express a pure, individual, non-ratiocinative idea in peculiar combinations of sensuous terms. Musical ideas were its types, groups harmonic and organic. . . .²⁶

After Kant, then, Fenollosa believed that the art idea was essentially a formal one, and to this effect he declared: 'The Idea in art does not primarily conceive subjects at all, but the pure form or language of their expression'.²⁷ For Fenollosa it was Japanese art which had confirmed the fact that representation was merely a secondary issue in art generally, and in his view one which had been grossly over-emphasised in the West in particular. Yet Fenollosa's other philosophical hero, Hegel, believed that in the best art the rational and the aesthetic were inextricably married, and this was also the conclusion of Fenollosa's investigation into 'The Nature of Fine Art', in which he declared:

The truth of art, the truth which makes true and noble music pure and noble, is the inner harmony and beauty of a pure idea within whose perfect sphere what is true in subject and what is beautiful in form have been melted together, and become as one.²⁸

Following Fenollosa's return to America in 1890, his former colleague and principal collaborator during his surveys of temple art, Okakura Tenshin, continued the campaign to preserve and develop Japan's traditional arts. In 1889 Okakura was appointed Curator of Fine Arts at the Imperial Museum in Tokyo, and the following year he became director of the newly founded Tokyo Fine Art School (*Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō*), the government art college which had been established the previous year based largely upon Fenollosa's recommendations. Okakura was eventually to become Japan's foremost art historian, and after successfully drawing Japanese attention to the value of their traditional arts he later proceeded to join in the task of educating the West on the principles underlying oriental art, becoming an adviser on Chinese and Japanese art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1904, and publishing several influential books on Far Eastern aesthetics aimed specifically at foreign readers, most notably his famous *Book of Tea* (1906).²⁹

However, it was to be another of Fenollosa's erstwhile colleagues, the American painter and art teacher, Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), who was to turn his 'synthetic' theory into a practical system of art instruction. Dow had first met Fenollosa in March 1891 while on a visit to the new Japanese department at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in search of work by Hokusai. Having returned from Japan the previous summer, Fenollosa was attempting to develop a general theory of art based on the aesthetic interpretation of Far Eastern examples described above, and Dow was sufficiently impressed to offer his help. Fenollosa welcomed him as an assistant, and within a short time Dow too was lecturing and writing on the lessons of Japanese art. Within 2 years Dow had moved on to take up a teaching post at the Pratt Institute in New York. But he remained in close contact with Fenollosa, with whom he co-taught several classes, and by the time Fenollosa himself left the Museum of Fine Arts under something of a cloud in 1896 Dow had already developed a teaching

course based upon his ideas. The following year Dow took over the vacant post of Curator of the Japanese Department at the Museum of Fine Arts, and in 1899 he published a comprehensive course of art instruction based upon a graphic interpretation of Fenollosa's aesthetic theory. Dow's book, *Composition*,³⁰ which immediately went into the first of numerous reprints, was to have a major impact not only on the teaching of art in American schools during the early part of the twentieth century, but also on the work of several leading modern artists.

America's architectural community in particular was especially taken with Dow's work, since it was in accord with the concept of 'pure design' – a reduced emphasis on historical styles in favour of a 'neutral' vocabulary of simple geometric forms – then beginning to become popular in the United States. Indeed, the concept of pure design began life in Boston, and was at least partially inspired by Dow's work.³¹ The well-known architect and connoisseur of Japanese art Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) for one, had been familiar with Ernest Fenollosa's ideas from early in his career.³² And as I hope to demonstrate, when these were translated into a series of graphic devices in Dow's book they seem to have had a direct impact on several of his own designs.

In his introduction to *Composition*, Dow warmly acknowledged his debt to Fenollosa's aesthetic theory, and he described how he was using primarily Japanese examples to illustrate what were considered *universally* applicable principles:

He [Fenollosa] had had exceptional opportunities for a critical knowledge of both Eastern and Western art, and as a result of his research and comparisons, guided by a brilliant mind's clear grasp of fundamental ideas, had gained a new conception of art itself. He believed Music to be, in a sense, the key to the other fine arts, since its essence is pure beauty; that space-art may be called 'visual music', and may be criticised and studied from this point of view. Following this new conception, he had constructed an art-educational system radically different from those whose corner-stone is Realism. Its leading thought is the expression of Beauty, not Representation. I at once felt the truth and reasonableness of his position, and after much preparation in adapting these new methods to practical use, I began teaching a class in Boston, with Professor Fenollosa's co-operation. Here for the first time in this country, Japanese art materials were used for educational purposes.³³

As we have seen, Fenollosa believed that the quality of mutual interdependence of parts, or 'wholeness', was central to the purely formal idea essential to art, and Dow took this up as a primary theme in *Composition*, where he described this concept in relation to simple arrangements of lines, explaining:

Every part of a work of art has something to say. If one part is made so prominent that others have no reason for being there, the *art* is gone. So in this case; if one line asserts itself to the detriment of the others, there is discord. There may be many or few lines, but each must have its part in the whole. In a word, *wholeness* is essential to beauty; it distinguishes Music from Noise.³⁴

In the early pages of *Composition*, Dow illustrated the concept of the mutually interdependent organic whole in the form of a series of simple line patterns or

'synthetic line-ideas', which, while displaying an aesthetically pleasing purposiveness, had no actual purpose beyond their coherence as a purely formal 'whole' (Figures 1 and 2).

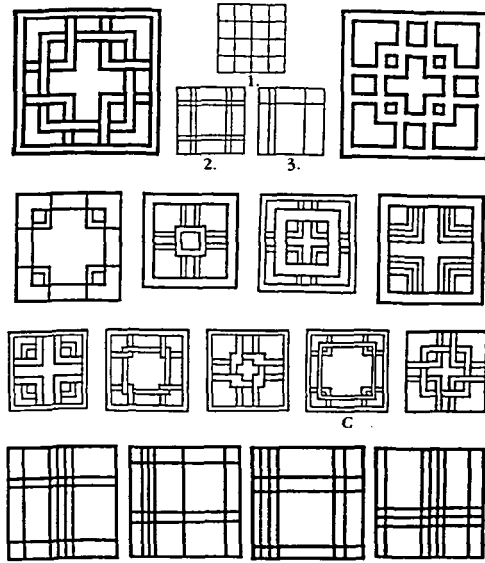


Figure 1. Arthur Dow's graphic interpretation of the internally purposive organic whole in the form of aesthetic 'line-ideas', *Composition*, 1899.

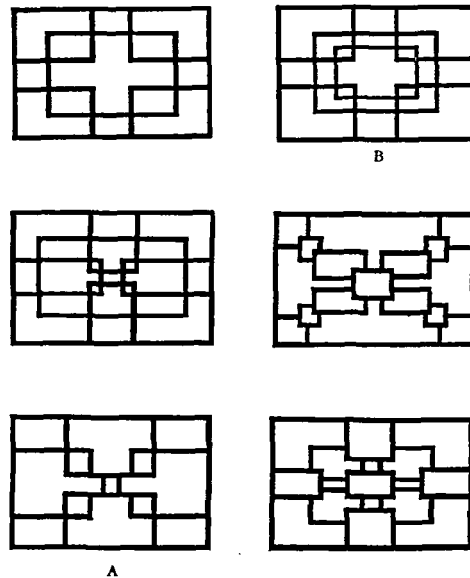


Figure 2. Aesthetic line-ideas, *Composition*, 1899.

In accordance with Fenollosa's theory, Dow regarded all the visual arts, including painting, as 'space-arts' concerned with essentially the same kind of aesthetic division of space – irrespective of the content which they might also convey – and to this effect, he declared: 'The picture, the plan, and the pattern are alike in the sense that each is a group of synthetically related spaces'.³⁵ Frank Lloyd Wright would appear to have taken a very similar approach to these elements in his own work. Indeed, just as Dow had suggested, Wright treated the plan drawing, for example, as an aesthetically pleasing organic form in its own right, independent of its practical implications,³⁶ as he confirmed when he explained: 'There is more beauty in a fine ground plan than in almost any of its ultimate consequences. In itself it will have the rhythms, masses and proportions of a good decoration if it is the organic plan for an organic building with individual style . . .'.³⁷

In fact, it seems that several of the plans which Wright produced in the period following the appearance of *Composition* may have been directly inspired by Dow's interlocking 'line-ideas', as for example those of the Darwin Martin house (1904) and the main hall of Unity Temple (1906) (Figures 3 and 4). In Dow's interlocking line-

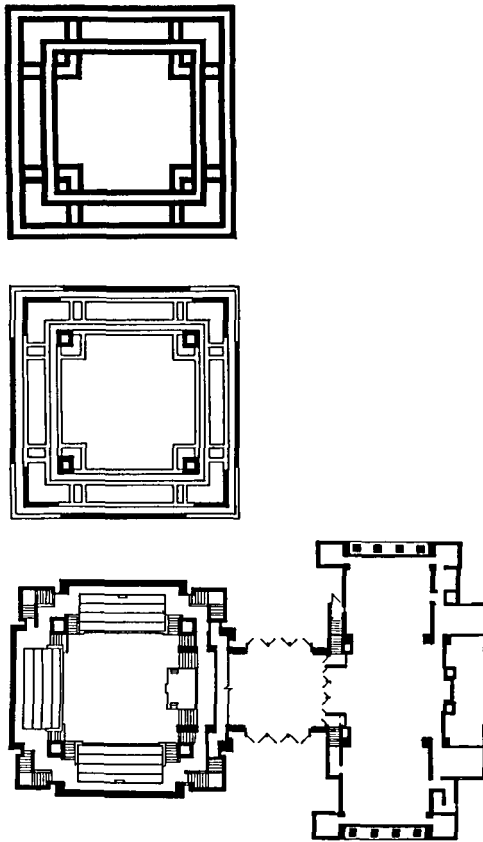


Figure 3. Line-idea C and the main hall of Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois, 1906.

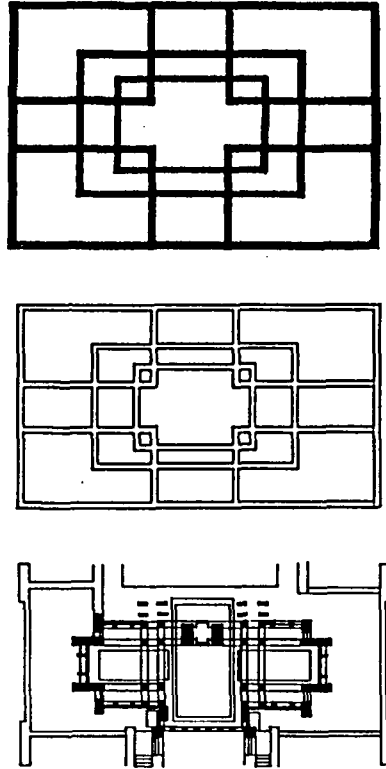
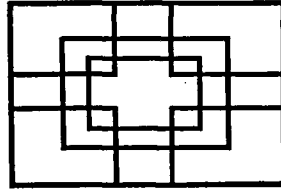
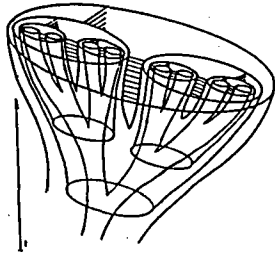


Figure 4. Line-idea *B* and the core of the Darwin D. Martin house, Buffalo, New York, 1904 (see Figure 2).

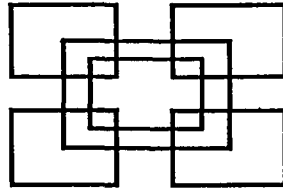
ideas, then, it seems that Wright may have found the basis for several of his earliest so-called 'organic' plans, and, in the process, possibly the inspiration for the overlapping spaces which came to characterise his mature work.

As well as plan forms, it seems that Dow's line-ideas might also have inspired a number of Wright's decorative designs, particularly that used on his Storer concrete block house in California, which appears to have derived from a combination of two line-ideas (Figure 5). Interestingly, if Dow's line-ideas are analysed according to modern scientific criteria they are in fact found to exhibit several of the fundamental geometric characteristics of biological order, which suggests that Wright's use of these patterns as the basis of 'organic' plan and decorative forms would have been more than simply artistically justified (Figure 6).

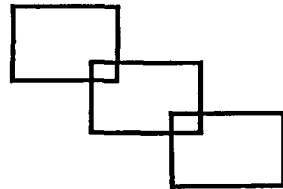
Dow made a special point of illustrating the rich variety of aesthetically pleasing patterns which could be generated from *irregularly* spaced lines, having demonstrated how, as one gradually removed lines from a uniform grid, the degree of choice, and with it the creative possibilities, progressively increased (Figure 1). The simple uniform grid (1) was seen as presenting no choice, and therefore as holding little or no artistic potential. On the other hand, the symmetrical tartan grid (2) was shown to offer several alternative design permutations; and finally it was suggested



Traditive inheritance (tradition)



Interdependence



Hierarchy



Standard part



Figure 5. The four primary characteristics of biological order reflected in one of Dow's 'organic' line-ideas (see Figure 2). (Illustrations on the left are from Rupert Riedl, *Order in Living Organisms*.)

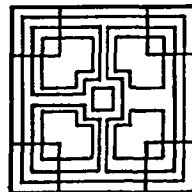
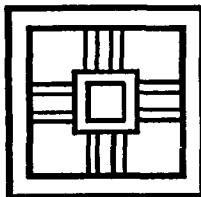
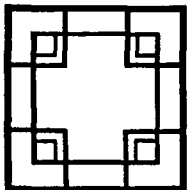


Figure 6. The combination of two line-ideas underlying the decorative design used on the Dr John Storer house.

that the asymmetric grid (3) afforded the greatest degree of free play, and therefore presented the most creative possibilities.³⁸ Interestingly, asymmetric grids – similar to those illustrated in *Composition* – provided the basis for several of the decorative window designs which Wright employed in his early Prairie Houses (Figure 7). And indeed, in highlighting this characteristic in traditional Japanese art, Dow would seem to have pre-empted an important feature of much modern art in general, as exemplified by Piet Mondrian's famous 'Compositions' for example, which it has been suggested may have been directly inspired by Dow's aesthetic 'line ideas' (Figure 8).³⁹

Dow's central theme in *Composition* echoed Fenollosa's belief in the essential unity of abstract design and pictorial art, and to this effect he explained:

The designer and picture-painter start in the same way. Each has before him a blank space on which he sketches out the main lines of his composition. This may be called his Line-idea, and on it hinges the excellence of the whole. . . . A picture, then, may be said to be in its beginning actually a pattern of lines.⁴⁰

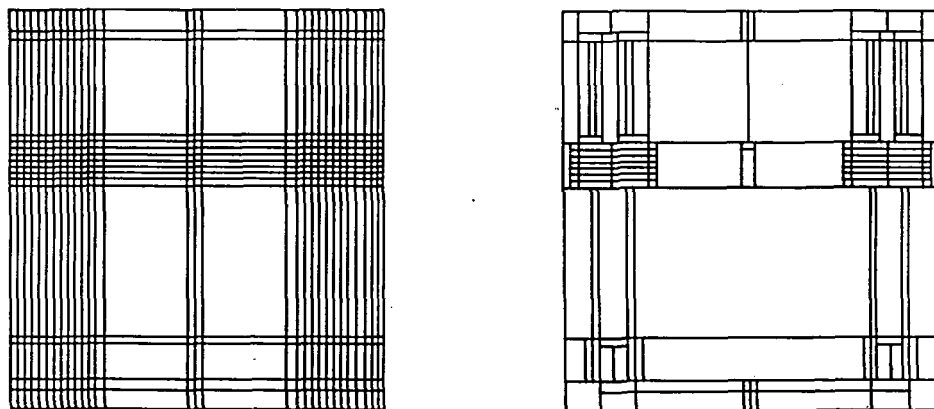


Figure 7. The plaid grid underlying the decorative window design used in the Ward Willits house, 1902 (grid drawn by author).

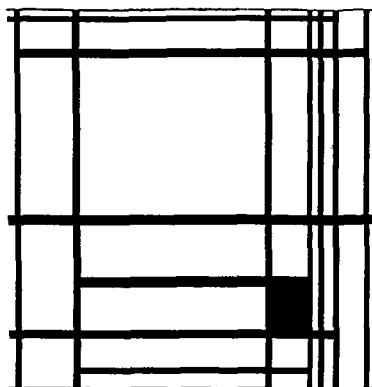


Figure 8. Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Blue*, 1937.

In his own book *The Japanese Print* (1912), Wright described the woodblock print in virtually identical terms, as an abstract 'pattern' in its own right irrespective of its subject matter, having explained: '... these prints are designs, patterns, in themselves beautiful as such; and, what other meanings they may have are merely incidental, interesting or curious by-products'.⁴¹ In fact, Dow had cited the work of one of Wright's favourite print artists, Ando Hiroshige, as providing an ideal illustration of the use of simple 'rectangular line-ideas' as an aesthetic framework for pictorial compositions, and had even suggested that in this respect Hiroshige had something in common with several great architects.⁴²

Dow illustrated the type of hidden geometric structure which he argued underlay many Japanese woodblock prints with several examples of simple landscape compositions of his own design, each based upon a few irregularly spaced grid-lines (Figure 9), of which he wrote:

Returning now to our premise that the picture and the abstract design may show the same structural beauty, let us see how the simple idea of combining straight lines, as so far considered, may be illustrated by Landscape. Looking out from a grove we have trees as vertical straight lines, cutting lines horizontal or nearly so. Leaving small forms out of account we have in these main lines an arrangement of rectangular spaces much like the gingham and other simple patterns.⁴³

This, it seems, may have given Wright the idea of composing his own *architectural* pictures on the same kind of aesthetic framework, as for example his Wasmuth rendering of the Como Orchard project, which appears to have been based on a similar underlying grid structure (Figure 10).

It would seem, then, that the Fenollosa–Dow conception of traditional Japanese art in terms of 'synthetic line-ideas' may well have played its part in encouraging several leading modern artists to take a similarly abstract approach to their own work, in which a pictorial composition, or even an architectural plan, could be regarded as an

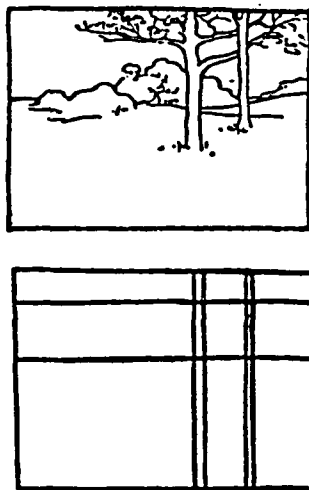


Figure 9. Landscape composition based on an underlying aesthetic structure, *Composition*.

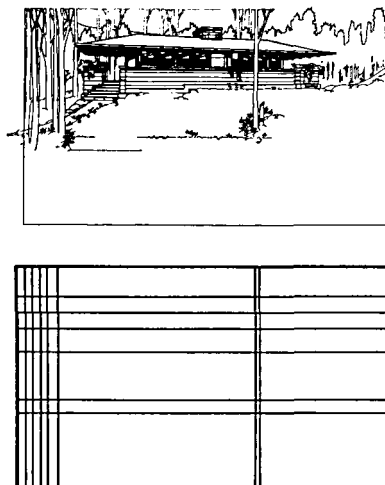


Figure 10. The aesthetic structure underlying the Wasmuth rendering of the Como Orchard project, Darby, Montana, 1909 (*grid drawn by author*).

aesthetically pleasing ‘organic whole’ in and of itself, quite apart from any rational content which it might convey.

Notes

After completing this paper, I visited the recent Whistler exhibition at the Tate Gallery, and was struck by the parallels between Whistler’s descriptions of harmonious ‘arrangements’ of line, tone, and colour, and the ideas later promoted by Fenollosa and Dow. While living in Paris and London during the 1860s Whistler was among the earliest Western painters to begin collecting Japanese art, and although his interpretations were undoubtedly shared by several fellow painters and critics of the time, his rarity as an American effectively interpreting Japanese art to a Western audience would have made his ideas of particular interest to the younger Fenollosa, who had very similar – if more scholarly – aspirations.

1. For biographical details of Fenollosa I have relied primarily on Lawrence Chisolm’s comprehensive *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1963, and on the advice and publications of Yamaguchi Seiichi, in particular his *Ernest Francisco Fenollosa: A Life Devoted to the Advocacy of Japanese Culture*, 2 vols. Tokyo, Sanseido, 1982. For Fenollosa seen in the context of the general intellectual milieu of Boston in the early 1890s, see Van Wyck Brooks, *Fenollosa and His Circle: With Other Essays in Biography*. New York, E. P. Dutton, 1962, which charts Fenollosa’s connections with Edward Morse, John La Farge, and other Boston notables such as Henry Adams and Isabella Gardner.
2. Fenollosa was assisted in his surveys of temple art by several Japanese colleagues, notably his former students Okakura Kakuzo and Ariga Nagao, who are both discussed later in this paper.
3. Ernest Fenollosa, ‘Review of the Chapter on Painting in Gonse’s *L’Art japonais*’, reprinted from the *Japan Weekly Mail*, 12 July 1884. Boston, James R. Osgood, 1885, as quoted in Chisolm, *Fenollosa*, p. 60.
4. Laurence Binyon, ‘National Character in Art’, *Littell’s Living Age*, No. 259, 5 December 1908, pp. 627–629, as quoted in Chisolm, pp. 59–60.
5. The *Ryuchi-kai*, which in 1887 became the *Nihon Bijutsu Kyōkai* or Japan Fine Art Association, was founded in 1879 primarily at the instigation of Sano Tsunetami and the Vice-Minister of Education and former diplomat, Kuki Ryuichi (1852–1931). As the Director of the Tokyo National Museum from 1888, Kuki was closely allied with Okakura Tenshin in support of the bias towards traditional

- Japanese art at the Tokyo Fine Art School. However, the two later fell out for personal reasons, precipitating Okakura's resignation from his official posts in 1898. For more on this topic, see Horioka Yasuko, *The Life of Kakuzo: Author of the Book of Tea*. Tokyo, Hokuseido Press, 1964, pp. 36–38.
6. Ernest Fenollosa, 'Truth of Fine Arts', address delivered to the *Ryuchi-kai*, Tokyo, 14 May 1882, translated into Japanese by Omori Tadanaka as 'Bijutsu Shinsetsu' in *Meiji Bunka Zenshū* [Collection of Works on Meiji Culture], ed. Yoshino Sakuzo, 12 vols. Tokyo, Nihon Kyoronsha, 1928–1930, Vol. 12, pp. 168–170, English quotation as retranslated by Kotakane Taro in 'Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, His Activities and Influence on Modern Japanese Art', *Bulletin of Eastern Art*, No. 16 April 1941, p. 22.
 7. Ariga was mainly interested in the relationship between the arts and social history, and assisted Fenollosa in interpreting Chinese and Japanese philosophy. He later helped Fenollosa's widow, Mary McNeil Fenollosa, in preparing the posthumous publication of Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design*, ed. Mary McNeil Fenollosa, 2 vols. London, Heinemann, 1912.
 8. Although initially producing *kara-e*, restrained Chinese-style paintings, the Kano school later incorporated aspects of *yamato-e*, the more decorative native Japanese style championed by its principal rival, the Tosa school, which had enjoyed the patronage of the Imperial court in Kyoto. The Kano school fell into rapid decline following the restoration of the Emperor in 1868, not just because of the increasing interest in Western styles of painting, but also due to its close association with the Tokugawa shogunate, of which it was the only officially recognised school.
 9. It was originally intended that Kano Hogai should be the first director of the Tokyo Fine Art School, but he died shortly before its establishment in 1888.
 10. Hamao Arata was instrumental in the founding of the Imperial University of Tokyo in 1877. He was also closely involved with the organisation of the new Tokyo Fine Art School in 1889, and in 1897 became Minister of Education. For general information on him and other leading figures from the Meiji era, I have relied primarily on *Shinsen Dai Jinmei Jiten*, 8 vols. Tokyo, Heibonsha Ltd, 1937.
 11. The imperial commissioners were accompanied on their Pacific voyage by the artist and Japanophile John La Farge and his friend, the writer Henry Adams (1838–1918), who had been visiting Japan and had stayed near the Fenollosa family's summer home near Nikkō. During their visit La Farge had become a close friend of Okakura Tenshin, and later dedicated his book based upon this trip – *An Artist's Letters From Japan*. New York, The Century Company, 1897 – to 'Okakura san', who reciprocated by dedicating his own celebrated *Book of Tea*, Boston, Fox Duffield, 1906 to 'La Farge sensei'.
 12. See Fenollosa, 'Report of Fine Arts Commission'. [n.d. ca. 1887] bMS. Am 1759.2 (86) Compositions by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa 1853–1908, the Ernest G. Stillman Papers, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard. Also, *idem*, 'Lecture to Kangawakai'. [n.d. ca. November 1887] bMS. Am 1759.2 (52). As we have seen from his assessment of Louis Gonse's chapter on Japanese painting, Fenollosa had initially been critical of the Western vogue for woodblock prints, which, in line with most traditional Japanese scholars, he felt were far from representative of mainstream Japanese pictorial art. Indeed, it was only on seeing the effect which the prints were having on the painters of Paris during the summer of 1887 that Fenollosa himself was finally convinced of their artistic merits. However, he returned to Japan in the autumn of that year an ardent convert, and on arriving back in Tokyo he wasted no time in building up a sizeable personal collection of *ukiyo-e*. In fact, it took the encouragement of Western enthusiasts such as Fenollosa – who eventually became a keen advocate of *ukiyo-e* – to finally convince the Japanese art establishment that this genre was of genuine artistic merit. Prior to the turn of the century *ukiyo-e* were widely looked upon in Japan itself as primarily a form of popular entertainment, and certainly not *bijutsu*, or 'fine art'.
 13. The influence of Norton and Everett is suggested in Chisolm, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–28, 114–116. While first and foremost a Unitarian, Everett had studied in Germany and his views on art and religion blended Emerson and Hegel in their metaphysical tone. He defined religion, for example, as a 'feeling toward a spiritual presence manifesting itself in Truth, Goodness and Beauty . . .'. See Charles Carroll Everett, *Theism and the Christian Faith: Lectures Delivered in the Harvard Divinity School*, ed.

Edward Hale. New York, Macmillan and Co., 1909, p. 489. For Everett's views on the 'supernatural character of beauty', see *idem*, *The Psychological Elements of Religious Faith*, ed. Edward Hale. New York, Macmillan and Co., 1902, p. 199.

14. See Chisolm, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
15. On Fenollosa's teaching syllabus at Tokyo Imperial University, see *ibid.*, pp. 35–45. Chisolm reports, for example, that Fenollosa used *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. William Wallace. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1874. See Chisolm, *op. cit.*, p. 99, note 16.
16. Spencer believed that the prime function of government should merely be to ensure the freedom of individuals to fulfil their chosen functions in the 'organism' which was a society. For an indication of his social philosophy, see Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*. New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1884. Spencer's ideas were sufficiently popular in America for him to lecture there in the early 1880s. On the impact of this visit, see *Herbert Spencer on the Americans, and the Americans on Herbert Spencer* (1882), reprinted edn. New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1883.
17. Although Brockmeyer published little, as a charismatic German-speaker he exercised a powerful influence on William Harris' interpretation of Hegel, and as the Superintendent of Public Schools in St Louis and editor of the influential *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Harris was to play a central role in popularising Hegel's ideas in the United States. For an indication of Harris' interpretation of Hegel, see William T. Harris, *Hegel's first Principle: An Exposition of Comprehension and Idea (Begriff und Idee)*. St Louis, Printed by G. Knapp and Co., 1867, which was one of the first American commentaries. On the general spread of Hegelian ideas in the United States during the late nineteenth century, see J. H. Muirhead, 'How Hegel Came to America', *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 37, No. 217, January 1928, pp. 226–240. On the competition between Platonic and Hegelian idealism during this period, which was personified by Emerson and Amos Alcott (1799–1888) in New England and Harris and Brockmeyer in the Midwest, see Henry A. Pochmann, *New England Transcendentalism and St Louis Hegelianism: Phases in the History of American Idealism*. Philadelphia, The Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1948, reprinted New York, Haskell House, 1970.
18. Fenollosa, *East and West, The Discovery of America, and Other Poems*, Preface, p. vi, as quoted in Chisolm, *op. cit.*, p. 97. Chisolm describes the theme of 'East and West' as a 'Buddhist, Hegelian, and Emersonian . . . unfolding of the Spirit', see *ibid.* Fenollosa's interest in the Far East would actually have received direct encouragement from Hegel, who had urged that America, as 'the land of the future', should turn away from the Old World and look instead towards the East, having declared: 'Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning'. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree. London, George Bell and Sons, 1867, pp. 90 and 190, as quoted in Chisolm, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
19. Fenollosa, 'My Position in America', manuscript, 1 May 1891, bMS Am 1759.2 (60), typescript copy, p. 1. Compositions by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa 1853–1908, the Ernest G. Stillman Papers, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard.
20. Fenollosa, 'The Lessons of Japanese Art', manuscript, November 1891, bMS Am 1759.2 (54), pp. 5–7. Compositions by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa 1853–1908, the Ernest G. Stillman Papers, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
22. Kant argued that the aesthetic appeal of forms stemmed from a perception of their wholeness or *apparent* purposiveness: an ordered arrangement of mutually interdependent parts which appears purposeful but which can in fact stem either from genuine adaptation to objective functions or be purely formal. On this basis he explained the special appeal of the organic form thus: 'In such a product of nature every part not only exists *by means of* the other parts, but is thought of as existing *for the sake of* the others and the whole, that is as an (organic) instrument'. '. . . *An organised product of nature is one in which every part is reciprocally purpose [end] and means*'. Kant, as quoted in *Kant's Kritik of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard. New York, Macmillan and Co., 1892, pp. 277 and 280.
23. Lawrence Chisolm describes Fenollosa's approach as 'a formal Hegelian interpretation of traditional Sino-Japanese artistic canons', Chisolm, *op. cit.*, p. 201. Hegel had suggested that when we perceive beauty in a form we are intuitively recognising its inner idea, its particular manifestation of the

Absolute Idea – God. The more of the Idea manifested in material form as the Ideal the more beautiful the form appeared. The particular appeal of the organic form was therefore explained on the basis that it was the fullest material manifestation of the Idea. To this effect, Hegel suggested: ‘The inorganic bodies . . . exhibit but a group of mechanical and physical properties, which are found equally in any detached particle of the same. That mutual interdependence which is the characteristic of an organic body does not exist. . . . Such is the first mode of the existence of the Idea. . . . The Idea does not attain its ultimate and true existence except when all the parts and elements are so united that the whole represents all the interior reciprocal relations, when each element loses its particular existence and is what it is by virtue of the sum of relations. This ideal unity constitutes the *organism*, and thus only in *life* does the Idea find its realization’. Hegel, as quoted in John S. Kedney, *Hegel’s Aesthetics: A Critical Exposition*. (1885), 2nd edn. Chicago, S. C. Griggs and Co., 1892, pp. 29–30.

24. Fenollosa declared: ‘If each man dared to be true to his inner instincts, he would hasten the coming of the Kingdom of Art’, ‘The Nature of Fine Art: II’, *The Lotos*, Vol. 9, No. 10, April 1896, p. 762.
25. See Fenollosa, ‘The Nature of Fine Art: I’, *The Lotos*, Vol. 9, No. 9, March 1896, pp. 663–673, and *idem*, ‘The Nature of Fine Art: II’, pp. 753–762. Part one consists of a process of elimination leading to the identification of the Kantian purely formal ‘aesthetic idea’ as the fundamental essence common to all the arts. Part two is an essentially Hegelian explanation of the metaphysical nature of this synthetic, or ‘organic’, whole. The *Lotos* had previously been the Women’s Club magazine, the *New Cycle*, but had been re-launched under its new title in early 1896 with a more educational content, and with Fenollosa as one of its editors.
26. Fenollosa, ‘The Nature of Fine Art: I’, p. 672.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 673.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Okakura’s two most important English publications on Far Eastern aesthetics were Kakuzo [printed as Kakasu] Okakura, *The Ideals of the East: With Special Reference to the Art of Japan*. London, John Murray, 1903, and *idem*, *The Book of Tea*. Boston, Fox, Duffield and Co., 1906.
30. Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: A Series of Exercises Selected from a New System of Art Education*. Boston, J. M. Bowles, 1899. For details of Dow’s career, I have relied primarily on Frederick C. Moffatt’s *Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922)*. Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977.
31. Dow was actually invited to address the third annual convention of the Architectural League of America held in Philadelphia in May 1901, a conference which was dominated by the topic of pure design. Although he was unable to take up the invitation, he did contribute a paper, a brief extract of which was reprinted in the June 1901 edition of Chicago’s *Inland Architect*. See ‘Architectural education’, by Prof. Denman W. Ross and Prof. Arthur W. Dow, *Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. 37, No. 5, June 1901, p. 38. Also see Robert C. Spencer, Jr (President of the Chicago Architectural Club), ‘Should the Study of Architectural Design and the Historic Styles Follow and be Based upon a Knowledge of Pure Design?’, in *ibid.*, pp. 34–35. On the general interest in pure design among Chicago’s architectural community, see H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*. New York, W. W. Norton, 1976, pp. 39–40.
32. Wright’s first employer in Chicago, the Shingle Style architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee (1848–1913), was also Fenollosa’s cousin, and in his autobiography Wright admiringly describes Fenollosa’s efforts to preserve Japan’s traditional arts. For more on this relationship and its implications for Wright’s own work, see Kevin Nute, ‘Frank Lloyd Wright and Japanese Art, Ernest Fenollosa: The Missing Link’, *Architectural History, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain*, Vol. 34, 1991, pp. 224–230.
33. Dow, *Composition*, (1899 edn), p. 5.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 38. Fenollosa had earlier made the same point: that it was the aesthetic quality of wholeness which differentiated music from mere noise. See Fenollosa, ‘The Lessons of Japanese Art’, manuscript, Nov. 1891, bMS Am 1759.2 (54), p. 15. Compositions by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa 1853–1908, the Ernest G. Stillman Papers, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard.
35. Dow, *Composition*, (1899 edn), p. 24. More specifically, in relation to painting, Dow suggested:

'Painting is a space art. It is concerned with the breaking up of a space into parts which vary in shape, depth of tone and color'. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

36. In this respect it may be significant that Dow, like Fenollosa, expressly classified architecture as a non-representational art. See for example Dow, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*. Garden City, NY, Doubleday Page and Co., 1913, p. 49.
37. Wright, 'In the Cause of Architecture, I: The Logic of the Plan', *Architectural Record*, Vol. 63, No. 1, January 1928, as reprinted in Frederick Gutheim, ed., *In the Cause of Architecture: Frank Lloyd Wright*. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1975, p. 153.
38. This was illustrated most clearly in Dow, *Composition* (1913 edn), p. 32.
39. See for example Moffatt, *Arthur Wesley Dow*, p. 60, and also Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University, 1984, pp. 58–59.
40. Dow, *Composition*, (1899 edn), p. 24.
41. Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Japanese Print: An Interpretation*. Chicago, The Ralph Fletcher Seymour Co., 1912, p. 12.
42. See Dow, *Composition*, (1899 edn), p. 27.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 25.