



A profession worked along (unorthodox) spiritual lines: Marion Mahony Griffin and Walter Burley Griffin

Marion Mahony Griffin Lecture 2015 delivered by **Dr Jennifer McFarlane**¹
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I need to start with the disclaimer that I am not a Griffin scholar², I am just visiting because I have seen a gap in the field from my own small area of research into the relationship of art and the Theosophical Society. However as you will come to see it is not a simple gap.

I would like to start in the best of traditions with some poetry. On the screen is an excerpt from Bernard O'Dowd's *Bacchus* from 1907, a work that shares the big themes of democracy, Theosophy and millennial utopianism that this paper will explore. At the same time I have put on the screen the frontispiece of Christian Waller's book *The Great Breath* of 1932.³ I want to show you where I am coming from as a cultural historian. O'Dowd was a member of the Theosophical Society, Waller was not - although she was a member of the Melbourne Theosophical Library. I would describe her as a fellow traveller with the Theosophical Society. Her work can only be read with access to esoteric Theosophical teachings. Yet it was not published by the Theosophical Society and was only ever received in the press as the rather obscure work of a fine artist. Waller must have conceived the work to operate almost talismanically on its readers. In as much as you cannot understand Waller's *Great Breath* without knowing the Theosophical Society, I suspect that a discussion of the Griffins' work without referencing their spiritual trajectory - from Western Unitarianism, through the Theosophical Society and to Anthroposophy cannot really connect with their core project. I need to say out the outset that neither of the Griffins were members of the Theosophical Society. But, I hope to show that like Waller, they were fellow travellers with the Theosophical project.

I will begin by speaking very briefly about the Theosophical Society in Marion and Walter's time. The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 by Mme Blavatsky, William Quan Judge and the first President, Col. Olcott. It was enormously attractive to educated women - Jill Roe has shown that it attracted more educated women in Australia than any other religious grouping,⁴ and it was particularly influential for artists across the globe. It was not the only organisation of its type but it was the dominant organisation for artists in London, Paris, the Netherlands, Melbourne and Sydney and would become increasingly significant in Chicago after the 1893 World Parliament of Religions. In 1946

O come, Australians, maid and youth,
Enlist in our crusade !
From wan Gomorrhahs of untruth
Flock to the Bacchic glade !

Away, away from antique wraiths
And clammy deities !
On ! on ! to transcendental faiths
And Young Democracies !

'Bacchus' 1907 in
O'Dowd, Bernard. (1907). *Dominions of the boundary*. Melbourne : T. C. Lothian

¹ **Dr Jennifer McFarlane** is a Canberran and researcher into the influence of the Theosophical Society on Australian artists. She has often been asked if she explored the influence of the Theosophical Society on the Griffins in her book "**Concerning the Spiritual: The influence of the Theosophical Society on Australian artists : 1890-1934**", (Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2012). The response was, until now, it is too complicated!

² This essay is a much reduced version of a longer and more detailed document that resulted from research excised from my doctorate and associated publication of 2012; *Concerning the spiritual* (see above).

³ See <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/250.1975/>. For another picture of this and other work by Australian artists associated with the Theosophical Society see p.156 McFarlane, Jennifer. (2012). *Concerning the spiritual*

⁴ Roe, Jill. (1986). *Beyond belief : theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*. Kensington, N.S.W : New South Wales University Press p. 185

Frank Clune wrote that he did not need to introduce the Theosophical Society to Australia as it was well known. Today if I want to introduce the Theosophical Society I need to reference the Steiner schools - far better known, the Anthroposophical Society split from the Theosophical Society in 1913 under Rudolf Steiner.

In the same issue of *The Theosophist* as Walter Burley Griffin's own 1932 essay 'Architecture and the economic impasse', the Society was described as a

*band of students, in the broadest sense of the term, and we may study the writings or doings of anybody. There are no official teachers in the Society. The Society has no dogma or doctrine, except, what is indicated in its name, that we are trying to realize the Theos - call it the Truth, the Reality, the Beautiful, the Supreme Good, the Divine, the Beloved, God or what we will according to individual choice.*⁵

A crude summary of the three fundamental propositions of the Theosophical Society are truth in all religions, universal brotherhood and to research the powers latent in 'man'. Another important thread that runs through the Theosophical Society is the idea of a spiritual Darwinism that describes a spiritually evolving human type. Something of this can be seen in Waller and O'Dowd's work. It was understood that the conditions for the development of the new spiritually evolved human were most propitious on the east coasts of America and Australia. On Olcott's 1891 tour of Australia he posed the question - with Federation on the horizon, what sort of nation was being planned? He identified an emerging spiritual consciousness.

*The Australian temperament is evolving, like the North American, mystical tendencies and capabilities...I know it to be the fact by intercourse with many people in all the Australian colonies, I feel it in the atmosphere.*⁶

Edmund Barton, Alfred Deakin and Henry Parkes all chaired Olcott's lectures and Deakin even edited his memoirs. To complete the dramatis personae, Annie Besant succeeded Olcott as President in 1907 and CW Leadbeater was the charismatic clairvoyant who dominated the organisation during the period under discussion, settling in Sydney in 1914.

In her sprawling autobiography and memoir of her and her husband's work *The Magic of America*, Marion Mahony locates the formation of her professional practice in Western Unitarianism. This paper will explore whether the unorthodox spirituality she embraced in Chicago was something she left behind when she came to Australia or whether it remained a feature of her personal and professional trajectory. Western Unitarianism and the Theosophical and Anthroposophical Societies of the early 20th century shared an attraction for creative, educated, alternative thinkers who invested considerable energy in questioning the religious establishment. The Griffins' spiritual trajectories connect them to many Australian and international artists who took a similar journey.

In this paper I want to propose a way of understanding both Marion Mahony Griffin and Walter Burley Griffin's description of their work as a spiritual project, where the goal of that spiritual project was the building a new community and spiritualised future. When the Griffins' professional achievements are understood in terms of their spirituality, the spiritual project of Western Unitarianism, the Theosophical Society and the Anthroposophical Society becomes of interest. In this sense the Griffins' plans for both Canberra and Castlecrag can usefully be seen in the context of the Theosophical project in Chicago, Rotterdam, Melbourne and Sydney where the artist as seer had a unique role in the building of a new spiritual community. The Griffins' engagement with unorthodox spirituality finds expression in their very visible repeated struggles to build community rather than any obscure or semi-secret occult design. In my experience of the Theosophical archive Christian Waller's *The Great Breath* is a rare occasion where the

⁵ Ernest Wood 'Questions & Answers' *The Theosophist* vol. 54 1932 p. 183 (original italics)

⁶ Henry Steel Olcott, 'President Olcott's Convention Address, 1891', *The Adyar Bulletin*, 1926, p. 59

esoteric finds visual expression, far more frequently the influence in conceptual. One of my springboards is the apparent dichotomy posed by leading scholar James Weirick that

*the Griffins' strange architecture and powerful city plans date from a time when they had no known links with esoteric or occult or groups that from 1926 onwards both Walter and Marion Mahony were closely associated with esoteric groups— first the Theosophical Society and then the Anthroposophical Society, yet we see no change in their practice or expression to reflect this.*⁷

A more nuanced understanding of the context of alternative spirituality in which the Griffins and their artist peers moved creates space to see the Griffins as members of a diffuse unorthodox community in Chicago and in Australia within which there was real sympathy and movement between the leadership and communities of Western Unitarianism, the Theosophical Society and the Anthroposophical Society. Far from being hermetic, many experienced the Theosophical Society as a hub that enabled connections with people of similar convictions. The millennial utopianism of this community was united by a commitment to brotherhood and a conviction that there was a common truth to be found in all religions. The Theosophical Society distinguished itself from Western Unitarianism in its commitment to exploring the powers latent in 'man'. However in Marion's own trajectory and that of her family we see an openness to clairvoyant experience that is typically Theosophical and Anthroposophical.⁸

The complex, diffuse, unorthodox community in Chicago

Social and intellectual life in turn of the century Chicago was articulated by congregation and church. Marion's formation in Chicago owes nothing to the Theosophical Society, however, as I hope to show, her church found the Theosophical Society sympathetic. Marion and her church participated in a larger wave of dissatisfaction with orthodox religion. Marion's upbringing was defined by participation in this spiritually unorthodox community and while in Australia it seems clear that Marion's spiritual search was more messianic than Walter's, there can be no question that Walter moved to this spiritually unorthodox community in Marion's wake.

Until 1893 Walter's family were with the First Congregational Church, Oak Park, moving to Elmhurst and the nearby Congregationalist church that would later be named Christ Church in 1897.⁹ Eleazar Barton, who became pastor after the family left Oak Park in 1902 would praise the value of religious and artistic imagination to creatively imagine a better future to the remaining congregation.¹⁰ This commonplace is a useful point of comparison with Marion's church which was distinguished by a much more visionary and practical approach.

⁷ Weirick, James 'Spirituality and Symbolism in the work of the Griffins' in Watson, Anne. & Powerhouse Museum. (1998). *Beyond architecture : Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin : America, Australia, India*. Haymarket, N.S.W : Powerhouse Publishing p.58

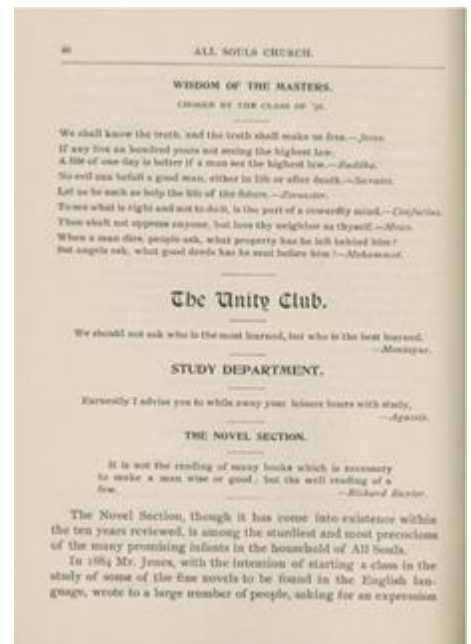
⁸ Marion saw undines amongst the Hawksbill flowers outside the Trinick House as Castlecrag, later confirming her sighting with others who could see fairies, she also records seeing salamanders. *The Magic of America*, Section III 'Municipal battle' p. 235 Earlier in the same chapter she wrote of artificial palm trees in Florida "To one who has seen the spiritual forces that bathe growing things, varying in color with the seasons," p. 22 <http://www.artic.edu/magicofamerica/moa.html>

⁹ Weirick, James 'Spirituality and Symbolism in the work of the Griffins' in Watson, Anne. & Powerhouse Museum. (1998). *Beyond architecture : Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin : America, Australia, India*. Haymarket, N.S.W : Powerhouse Publishing p. 62

¹⁰ Barton, W. Eleazar. (1910). *Acorns from an Oak Park pulpit*. Oak Park, IL: Puritan Press.. [Barton, William Eleazar, 1861-1930](#). p. 42 I would like to thank James Weirick for drawing the dates to my attention, and for critiquing an earlier version of my paper. My conclusions of course are entirely my own.

Marion's Chicago was shaped by Unitarianism, specifically Western Unitarianism. The contemporary characterisation of Unitarianism as the 'featherbed for falling Christians'¹¹ or the 'half way house to infidelity'¹² points to its position on the spectrum of orthodox Christianity. For many, Western Unitarianism stepped over that boundary and into the unorthodox. This was particularly true for the All Soul's community. Its very name is a reference to its separation from the eastern and more orthodox Unitarians. Jenkin Lloyd Jones (1844-1918) led the congregation of All Souls from 1885 to 1905. He appears to have been a man of organisational genius and during this time, from 1892 to the event itself in 1893, he was Secretary of the World's Parliament of Religions. Then from 1905-1918 his attention was focussed on his role as Director of the Abraham Lincoln Centre, Chicago. This is the Settlement House that would be designed by his nephew, Frank Lloyd Wright. So from 1902 All Souls was increasingly led by James Vila Blake (1842-1925). Marion and her family were active in the congregation of the All Souls Western Unitarian church from the 1890s, Blake was to become a great favourite and in 1904 when a new church for the community was constructed in Evanston, it was designed by Marion. In *The Magic of America* Marion references the extent to which her family and the Jones/ Blake Western Unitarian project were intertwined. One of Lloyd Jones' organisational innovations had been the introduction of Unity Clubs, Sunday Schools and Mutual Improvement Clubs. The picture Marion paints of intergenerational improvement classes held every night of the week at the Mahony family home points to Marion's mother, the future principal, as a lynchpin in this project. Jenkin Lloyd Jones also edited the *Unity* magazine for Charles H. Kerr (also a member of the All Souls congregation).¹³ This magazine published on such issues of the age as; evolution, social psychology, advanced biblical criticism, comparative religion, history and political economy.¹⁴ Lloyd Jones and the All Souls church represented such a radical edge of the Unitarian church that their Western Unitarianism came to be accused of 'de-christianising' the church in its pursuit of freedom from written dogma, favouring democratic or personal prophetic experience.¹⁵ This is very visible in Jenkins' volume; *A Chorus of Faith as Heard in the Parliament of Religions*, 1893 where Jenkins described his project as seeking the 'essential unity of all religious faiths' and 'the human reality of universal brotherhood.'¹⁶ The following year (1894) James Vila Blake penned this covenant with his congregation and concluded with the words

*We believe that we ought to welcome to our fellowship all who are of earnest and sincere spirit and humble lovers of the truth; that we should set the bond of Human Brotherhood high above that of creed or church, and that we ought not to hold theological beliefs as conditions of our membership.*¹⁷



All Souls Church Unity Club, Chicago

¹¹ Scott, Dorothy. & Unitarian Fellowship of Australia. & Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church. (1980). *The halfway house to infidelity : a history of the Melbourne Unitarian Church, 1853-1973*. [Melbourne] : Unitarian Fellowship of Australia and the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church p. 89

¹² Scott, Dorothy. & Unitarian Fellowship of Australia. & Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church. (1980). *The halfway house to infidelity : a history of the Melbourne Unitarian Church, 1853-1973*. [Melbourne] : Unitarian Fellowship of Australia and the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church

¹³ Ruff, Allen. (1997). "We called each other comrade" : Charles H. Kerr & Company, radical publishers. Urbana : University of Illinois Press p. 229 fn 16

¹⁴ Ruff, Allen. (1997). "We called each other comrade" : Charles H. Kerr & Company, radical publishers. Urbana : University of Illinois Press p. 32

¹⁵ Ruff, Allen. (1997). "We called each other comrade" : Charles H. Kerr & Company, radical publishers. Urbana : University of Illinois Press p. 31, Probably from 1897-1925 <http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/Heralds/John-White-Chadwick.php>

¹⁶ World's Parliament of Religions, & In Jones, J. L. (1893). *A chorus of faith as heard in the Parliament of religions*. Chicago: The Unity Publishing Company. pp.11,13

¹⁷ James Vila Blake Covenant in James Vila Blake Covenant in Unitarian Church (1939) *100th Anniversary History 1839-1939* Quincy, Illinois http://uuquincy.org/history/books/1_1839-1939.pdf

Through this covenant Blake positioned the source of spiritual authority in the self, what Marion Mahony would describe as a democratic position. He and his congregation embraced 'human brotherhood' and comparative religion over any specific church or creed.

While Jenkin's role as Secretary at the Parliament of Religions clearly positions Western Unitarianism as the principle coloniser of the community of unorthodox thinkers in Chicago, the Theosophical Society was also anxious to address the same community. Annie Besant spoke at the Parliament of Religions in 1893, and returned to speak at Steinway Hall in 1897 and again in 1907¹⁸ on Olcott's death when she spoke to an audience of about 2500 with Claude Bragdon and Louis Sullivan in the audience¹⁹ presumably while Marion and the 'Steinway Group' of architects laboured upstairs. That year (1907) the American headquarters of the Society moved to Chicago. In 1902 the Theosophical Society Annual Convention had been held in Steinway Hall and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* opined that the fact that every one of the 850 seats was filled testified to the high level of interest in the Society and Leadbeater.²⁰ This was followed in 1903 when the hall was again booked out in advance every Sunday night for six months and Leadbeater's talks on *Some glimpses of occultism ancient and modern* "packed the theater to the extent that would-be listeners regularly had to be turned away at the door"²¹ By 1909 the National Journal, the *Theosophic Messenger* had a circulation of 10-12,000 and the Chicago Theosophical Society was a major operation.



Fluidity

Both Western Unitarianism and the Theosophical Society appealed to that same educated, socially progressive community, dissatisfied with orthodox religion and there was real fluidity within both audience and leadership. When Jenkin Lloyd Jones' commitment to pacifism in 1915 (you will recall Marion's similar stance at the time) drew unwelcome attention to *Unity Magazine*, he published in the Theosophical press. Another instance of mobility between the Unitarians and the Theosophical Society is to be found in the trajectory of Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826-1898); antislavery campaigner (with the Unitarian minister Samuel J. May), organizer and officer of the National Woman Suffrage Association, and Editor of its newspaper *The National Citizen*.²² Matilda's daughter Maud married Lyman Frank Baum from Matilda's front parlour in 1882 in a Baptist ceremony. Nevertheless that same year Matilda joined the Rochester Lodge of the Theosophical Society (the same lodge that architect Claude Bragdon was to join in 1907) and Maud and Frank followed Matilda joining the Chicago Ramayana Lodge in 1892. Frank Baum's biographer Evan I. Schwartz reads *The Wizard of Oz* as a Theosophical tale and in this respect it is perhaps a curiosity to compare Baum's Oz and Marion's Canberra. The first volume

¹⁸ <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1897/09/07/page/12/article/big-dog-and-bear-wrestle>

¹⁹ Massey, J *Crystal and Arabesque: Claude Bragdon, Ornament, and Modern Architecture* University of Pittsburgh Press 2009 p. 122

²⁰ Chicago Daily Tribune, September 29 1902 p. 7 reproduced <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1902/09/29/page/7/article/occult-world-disclosed-at-theosophist-meeting>

²¹ Chicago Daily Tribune, September 29 1902 p. 7 reproduced <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1902/09/29/page/7/article/occult-world-disclosed-at-theosophist-meeting>.

Something of the allure of Leadbeater's message can be gleaned from the published version of this lecture series. Leadbeater's own clairvoyant experiences were often the subject of his lectures. Of Chicago he wrote; "... remember that a clairvoyant can see the vast hosts of animal souls, that he knows how strong are their feelings of horror and resentment, and how these recoil at all points upon the human race. They react most of all upon those who are least able to resist them — upon the children, who are more delicate and sensitive than the hardened adult. That city is a terrible place in which to bring up children — a place where the whole atmosphere both physical and psychic is charged with fumes of blood and with all that means". Leadbeater, C. W. (1909). *Some glimpses of occultism : ancient and modern*. Chicago : Rajput Press (March 1 1903 -chapter 10)

<http://kg.vkk.nl/english/organizations/lcc.gb/lcis/scriptures/liberal/leadbeater/someglimpsesofoccultism/someglimpsesofoccultism.htm>

²² *History of Woman's Suffrage* was written by Matilda Joslyn Gage, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony. Gage wrote chapter 1, "Preceding Causes" Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. & Anthony, Susan B. & Gage, Matilda Joslyn. & Harper, Ida Husted. (1881). *History of woman suffrage*. Rochester, N.Y : Susan B. Anthony : Charles Mann'

of *The Wizard of Oz* was published in 1900. The sixth book in the series, *The Emerald City of Oz* was published in 1910, the same year that the Baums left Chicago for California. Both cities were planned in the context of unorthodox spirituality from Chicago and both promised an alternative utopian vision.

A more extreme instance of congregational fluidity occurred across the world in Sydney, where Unitarian Rev. George Walters' spiritual trajectory led him to temporarily disband his Sydney Unitarian Church in 1897 to form a Sydney chapter of the Australian Church (headed in Melbourne by Charles Strong) before returning to the Unitarian fold.²³ A decade later Walters, a long-time supporter of Annie Besant,²⁴ turned hundreds away from his church door when he invited Besant to speak during her 1908 Australian tour.²⁵ The proximity of the unorthodox communities of Chicago and Australia is again demonstrated by Catherine Helen Spence's (1825-1910) visit to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions. She spoke at the associated Unitarian Conference (it was held in parallel with the Theosophical conference) and sent home a copy of Lloyd Jones' sermon on 'Not institutions but homes' for publication in the *South Australian Register*.²⁶

Another interesting Theosophical thread runs through the Chicago based Women's Trade Union League journal; *Life and Labour*, edited by Australian, Stella Miles Franklin.²⁷ The journal carried illustrations by the well-known Theosophist and patron of the arts, Katherine Dreier (1877-1952), sister of the Editor, Margaret Dreier Robins (1868-1945).²⁸ The Dreier children had been raised as Theosophists by their parents and the influence of the Society would shape Katherine's work and her advocacy throughout her life especially in connection with Marcel Duchamp and the Société Anonyme.²⁹ There is no reason to believe that either Stella Miles Franklin or the adult Margaret Dreier Robins were sympathetic to the Society, only that the circle that these new professional women moved in found the Theosophical Society attractive.

One more! Jane Addams, the famous social reformer and founder of Hull House. Addams was a member of the All Soul's congregation during Marion's time in Chicago and would later correspond with Annie Besant and the Theosophical Society, visiting Adyar, the Headquarters of the Society in Chennai, India in 1923. In 1929 the clairvoyant and vegetarian Theosophical Lecturer Margaret Cousins recorded staying at Hull House where she was deeply distressed by the

*awful blood-stench that the wind brought from the stockyards, and the noises in the street that were associated with the traffic in animal slaughter, the agony and murder, the brutalising of the murderers, that the proximity of the stockyards brought so close to me.*³⁰

So distressed was she at the proximity of residential and industrial, abattoir and hospital that she did not sleep. Margaret Cousins's experience of a city where attempts to improve living conditions and plan for a spiritualised future were compromised by poor town planning would hardly have been news for Marion Mahony. Addams and her progressive social welfare community had much in common with Annie Besant's vision of social reform in the context of

²³ Badger, C. R. (1971). *The Reverend Charles Strong and the Australian Church*. Melbourne : Abacada Press on behalf of the Charles Strong Memorial Trust p.118

²⁴ 'Unitarian Church' *Evening News*, Sydney, NSW Monday 8 October 1894 p 3

²⁵ 'High Priestess of Theosophy' *Evening News*, Sydney, NSW, Monday 6 July 1908 p.8

²⁶ 'Not institutions but homes', *South Australian Register* 7/11/1893 p. 6

²⁷ Miles Franklin arrived in Chicago in 1906 and stayed for nine years meeting other radicals at Hull House. After hearing of his death in Lucknow, India, Franklin wrote Griffin's obituary for the *Bulletin* magazine 'I first met him in his offices high above Lake Michigan in Chicago, where he and his wife showed Alice Henry and me the plans for the dream city of Canberra' *Bulletin* vol 58 no. 2977 5 March 1937 p. 2 quoted in Roe, Jill. (2009). *Her brilliant career : the life of Stella Miles Franklin*. Cambridge, Mass : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press fn 108 p. 630

²⁸ Katherine Dreier *Women's Coronation Parade in London* Frontispiece *Life and Labour* December 1911

²⁹ Bohan, Ruth L. (1982). *The Societe anonyme's Brooklyn Exhibition : Katherine Dreier and modernism in America*. Ann Arbor, Mich : UMI Research Press p. 75

³⁰ April 1929 see Cousins, James Henry. & Cousins, Margaret E. (1950). *We two together*. Madras, India : Ganesh & Co. p.490

the spiritual. Marion, her cousin Dwight Perkins, Frank Lloyd Wright and others of the Steinway Hall group were charter members of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society which from 1897 met at Hull House. Frank Lloyd Wright's famous lecture on *The art and craft of the machine* in 1901 was given there. Although I have no evidence that Hull House had connections with the Theosophical Society before 1911 it is likely that this home to progressive and forward thinking professional women discussed the Theosophical Society before then.

Closer to home, the daughter of Marion's beloved cousin Dwight Perkins wrote that from 1904 both her mother Lucy and father Dwight ceased church going altogether and Lucy began sharing her spiritualist experiences, that

*... she remained a seeker and carried her quest for certainty into psychic research, and into Christian Science and a wide range of philosophy. The true aspiration of her spirit and her gift of expressing her mind vividly enabled her to comfort and guide other seekers who came to her in numbers for help.*³¹

Lucy's personal spiritual quest led her not towards orthodoxy but further in the direction pointed to by Blake. Of those most closely associated with Marion it is Lucy's spiritual explorations that are most likely to have brought the Theosophical Society to Marion's immediate attention. While there is no implication that Lucy was a member of the Theosophical Society, as a 'seeker' and psychic researcher, ready to guide other seekers, she was part of the larger community that was colonised by the Theosophical Society.³²

Architecture as a spiritual (democratic) project

I hope I have been able to demonstrate that there was real fluidity within the spiritually unorthodox community in Chicago and Australia. However, while based in Chicago Marion and her immediate family were strongly committed to the Western Unitarian project. This undoubtedly contributed to Marion being asked to design the new All Souls Church in 1902-4³³ — her first commission. In 1938 Marion would credit Blake's early influence as critical to her direction as an architect;

*This was my first job and the foundation therefore of my life's work with the help he thus gave me enabled me for the rest of my life to work on spiritual lines in my profession.*³⁴

Marion would later describe her work as democratic architecture; but for her democracy was a spiritual project.

*... democracy is a fundamental world principle which is simply a belief in authority from within instead of from without. It depends on the superiority of the spiritual element: that one element which lifts human beings out of the animal kingdom*³⁵

Marion's understanding of democracy as a spiritual project may have sprung from Blake's Western Unitarianism, but she would find fellow travellers in this project in the writings of Louis Sullivan, and with her fellow architect Claude Bragdon who although he had strong Unitarian ties, found that the Theosophical Society was the most fertile place to explore this project.

³¹ Perkins, Eleanor Ellis. (1956). *Eve among the puritans; a biography of Lucy Fitch Perkins*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin P. 219

³² <http://uuquincy.org/talks/20040118.shtml> http://www.artic.edu/magicofamerica/supplementa/moa_sect-IV.xml

³³ It would be interesting to know whether there were any link between the timing of the Perkin's departure from the Church and the completion of Marion's commission

³⁴ Letter to Mrs Brough from Marion Mahony Griffin 30 June 1938 Griffin, Marion Mahony. ([1937-45]). *The magic of America*. <http://digital-libraries.saic.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/mqc/id/48620/rec/20>

³⁵ quoted in Weirick, James 'Spirituality and Symbolism in the work of the Griffins' in Watson, Anne. & Powerhouse Museum. (1998). *Beyond architecture : Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin : America, Australia, India*. Haymarket, N.S.W : Powerhouse Publishing p. 63

Anna Rubbo writes that from 1894 Marion Mahony discussed transcendental and Theosophical ideas with her professional colleagues including her cousin, Dwight Perkins, her future employer, Frank Lloyd Wright and Allan and Irving Pond.³⁶ This seems likely as the Society was a subject often discussed in Australian artistic circles ‘after the lamp was lighted’³⁷ and the Society was regularly lecturing to packed theatres on the ground floor of the Steinway Groups’ own building. Wright’s family connection with Jenkin Lloyd Jones and future openness to the theosophical Gurdjieff (1866 –1949), who he would later describe as Whitmanesque, would have added an interesting dimension to these discussions. The Griffins’ profound admiration for Louis Sullivan (1856-1924) is well documented, as is the value they placed on his transcendental writings, notably his comments that architecture was spirit made material.³⁸ For Anna Rubbo Louis Sullivan’s influence on the Steinway Hall group of architects was particularly important because his writing supported Mahony’s emerging ideas of the architect as prophet.³⁹

Louis Sullivan was committed to effect change through architecture and it was in this context that he wrote ‘Form ever follows function’. His *Kindergarten Chats on architecture, education and democracy*, first published in serialised form in 1901, explored the idea of an organic architecture. Sullivan insisted that architecture had to embody the human connection with nature and to democracy, while still accepting the most modern functional needs and materials. He railed against the prevailing architectural practitioners for failing to take these principles into account.

Democracy is a moral principle, a spiritual law...not as you might infer from superficial observation merely a modern notion of a government by and for the people; it is a force latent and as old as the earth; a force for whose fulfilment the ages have been preparing the way.

For Sullivan this was “an impulse ever at work, ever tending to imbue [humanity] with the power to stand upon his feet, morally, and this force we call democracy.”⁴⁰ In a 1904 letter to Claude Bragdon, Sullivan wrote:

*With me architecture is not an art but a religion, and that religion but part of the greater religion of democracy*⁴¹

The most obvious professional link between the Griffins and the Theosophical Society is the architect Claude Bragdon (1866-1946). Bragdon married from the Unitarian Church in 1902 but the death of his wife and his reading of Unitarian Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Conduct of life*⁴² led him to the Theosophical Society. He took Louis Sullivan and his wife to Besant’s 1907 lecture. Besant was popularly acknowledged to be the best orator of her age, her audiences joined the Society in droves and Bragdon joined the Rochester Lodge in 1907.⁴³ As a practicing architect

³⁶ The Pond brothers worked on buildings associated with Hull House in 1899 Deegan, Mary Jo. (1988). *Jane Addams and the men of the Chicago school, 1892-1918*. New Brunswick (U.S.A.): Transaction Books

Irving K Pond and his brother Allen also worked on the Theosophical Society building in Wheaton, Ill. (completed in 1926). They got the job on the recommendation of Claude Bragdon who was invited first but turned the job down. Bragdon described Irving K Pond as a friend see Massey, J *Crystal and Arabesque: Claude Bragdon, Ornament, and Modern Architecture* University of Pittsburgh Press 2009 p. 115

³⁷ Steinway Hall was similarly home to a collegial group of architects who identified as innovative. William Moore, *The story of Australian art*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1934. p. 80

³⁸ Weirick, James ‘Spirituality and Symbolism in the work of the Griffins’ in Watson, Anne. & Powerhouse Museum. (1998). *Beyond architecture : Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin : America, Australia, India*. Haymarket, N.S.W : Powerhouse Publishing p. 81 see *Architecture*, vol 19, no 12, December 1930, pp 567-68

³⁹ Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin: A Creative Partnership’ *Architectural Theory Review Volume 1, Issue 1, 1996 pp 78-94* p. 86

⁴⁰ XXIX *Democracy* Sullivan. L. in *Kindergarten chats and other writings* 1947 p. 97

⁴¹ Sullivan to Bragdon 2/1/04 published in Bragdon *My architectural life* 1917 in Bragdon, C *More lives than One* Cosimo NY 2006

⁴² Robert M. Crunden, *Body and Soul, Art Music and letters in the Jazz age 1919-1926*, Basic Books, NY, 2000, p. 379 <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=7Yvu1PieyhYC&pg=PA379&pg=PA379&dq=bragdon+%22kindergarten+chats%22&source=bl&ots=32Bp77nwXV&sig=z6elj6Bph6wOf0Af9JvPxE-zt8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=XNL1UJmxLcmTiQeHI4DAAQ&ved=0CGAQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=bragdon%20%22kindergarten%20chats%22&f=false>

⁴³ Theosophic Messenger 1907 v9 i3 December p63 - Review: ‘Chicago Lectures, 1907’ by Annie Besant – anon and Theosophic Messenger 9 10 August 1909 and Massey J, *Crystal and Arabesque: Claude Bragdon, Ornament, and Modern Architecture* University of Pittsburgh Press 2009 pp. 122, 127

Bragdon published extensively on both Sullivan and the connections between the Theosophical Society and architecture in the Society journals. It was Bragdon who would later publish and edit Sullivan's *The autobiography of an idea* in 1924 and gather the serialised copies of Sullivan's *Kindergarten chats* for publication in 1934. By 1910 Bragdon was already an architect of national repute and President of the Rochester Lodge. It seems unlikely that the Griffins would have been unaware of Bragdon's major series of eight articles expounding his ideas on architecture and Theosophy published between May 1909 and January 1910 in the *Theosophic Messenger*.⁴⁴

By late 1911 when Walter and Marion were working on the Canberra design, the Society was an important part of Chicago's community,⁴⁵ sharing the same physical and intellectual spaces. Although not a member of the Theosophical Society, both Marion and to a lesser extent Walter were members of that broader community which was the core demographic for the Society's membership and exchange of ideas, as Lucy Fitch Perkins, Matilda Jocelyn Gage and Jane Addams' trajectories evidence.

But I have not yet spoken of the single factor which would galvanise the opinions of the Chicago community in relation to the Theosophical Society. In 1906-9 the Theosophical Society in Chicago was shaken by scandal around Leadbeater's teachings regarding masturbation by young boys.⁴⁶ This would spill over into the broader community, especially a community dedicated to progressive education and probity in educational practice such as would closely concern a principal, her daughter, and her extended family and friends. You will recall that Marion's mother, Clara Hamilton Mahony, was the daughter of a doctor and Principal of Komensky School and family friend, Ella Flagg Young, was on her way to becoming the first female Superintendent of Chicago Schools. The reformers and social benefactors Anna (later Ickes) and Mary Hawes Wilmarth were also close family friends. Marion's cousin Dwight Perkins, was active in school architecture, his wife Lucy Fitch Perkins published her famous children's book series of twins around the world through educational publishers. Imagine their response to this proposal for the public school curriculum:

*During the winter of 1906-7 the Editor was in Chicago and in order to combat the widespread tendency to uphold self-abuse on the lines indicated by Mr. Leadbeater, a series of lectures on the psychology of sex was given. ... One person declared . . . that this system would, before many years, be taught in our public schools. Still another insisted that by self-abuse humanity was to return to the hermaphroditic type and that this practice would be universal among Fifth Round Humanity.*⁴⁷

Anyone with connections to educationalists and the progressive social welfare community in Chicago would have known Leadbeater's name and have become wary of his teachings. It is important to note that the editor, Dr Eleanor Hiestand-Moore's anti-Leadbeater campaign was led from within the Theosophical Society and demonstrates that in Chicago the Theosophical Society was larger than Leadbeater.

There can be no question of Marion and by extension Walter being ignorant of the Theosophical Society in Chicago at the time of the design of the Canberra plan, they shared the same alternative unorthodox community. The key question is why Marion and Walter had anything to do with the Theosophical Society in Australia at all. The only answer can be that in Australia, as in Chicago, the path between Western Unitarianism and the Theosophical Society was well

⁴⁴ The art of architecture from the standpoint of Theosophy, The Theosophy of architecture, Architecture and Theosophy, Theosophy and architecture 1,2,3,4 (a serialisation of *The beautiful necessity*) finally the journal published a review of Bragdon's book 'The Beautiful Necessity: Seven Essays on Theosophy and Architecture'

⁴⁵ see *Theosophic Messenger* July 1911 vol 12 no 10 recto

⁴⁶ It is worth remembering that at this time a commonly recommended alternative to masturbation was the use of prostitutes and Annie Besant had taken a very strong position on this.

⁴⁷ Dr. Eleanor M. Hiestand-Moore (M.D.), Editor *Theosophic Voice* (Chicago), August 1908

trodden. Connecting with the Society in Melbourne and Sydney was a logical rather than an aberrant step. Only in the Theosophical Society could the Griffins expect to reconnect with the spiritually unorthodox community that Marion had left behind at All Souls. A community that was at once socially progressive, moneyed, intellectual, and committed to building a new spiritually enhanced community. Moreover the Griffins' ability to sure-footedly negotiate Theosophical politics and avoid direct association with Leadbeater in the wake of this scandal is among the clearest evidence of sound knowledge of the Theosophical Society in the time leading up to the design of the Canberra plan.

Recreating an unorthodox spiritual home in Melbourne

From his first arrival in Australia on 19 August 1913 Walter Burley Griffin identified his Canberra Plan with unorthodox religion. At a Sydney dinner for architects, engineers and surveyors in October 1913 he spoke about the future in terms reminiscent of Olcott, foreseeing a future with more in store for the new country than orthodox religion anticipated.

The future, he added, was the property of architects and those who could stimulate the imagination of the people, whose natural tendency was to look backwards instead of forwards. The future was vastly more important than their orthodox religion was leading them to believe.⁴⁸

In this passage Walter clearly identifies forward thinkers with unorthodox religion, repeating Marion's description of architecture as a spiritual project. It is clear that this relationship of his professional practice, especially the Canberra plan, with unorthodox religion predates his arrival in Australia.

The Griffins' base from 1915-1924 was Melbourne, shuttling to and from Canberra, famously waging a losing battle with the Canberra planning bureaucracy in uncertain financial and political times. Miles Franklin had written a letter of introduction from Chicago to Henry Hyde Champion, a Fabian socialist who had worked with Annie Besant on the famous Match Girls Strike in 1888, and was a supporter of the single tax concept.⁴⁹ In Melbourne the Fabian Societies were dominated by Champion, Ernest Besant Scott (Theosophical royalty as the husband of Annie's daughter Mabel), Tom Mann and the Unitarian Rev. Frederick Sinclair. Champion was positioned at the heart of spiritually unorthodox Melbourne, having been married in 1898 by the Rev. Charles Strong to Elsie, sister of Vida Goldstein. At the time of their marriage Elsie's mother and sister Vida had been members of the Theosophical Society and Strong's Australian Church was the preferred church for Theosophists and others similarly disenchanted by traditional religion (the Champions later migrated to Christian Science).⁵⁰ Champion wrote in 1913 that he

... sought out Mr Griffin as soon as he arrived in Melbourne and was very pleased to meet him. I did what little was possible to introduce him to the men of brains in the city ... I must say that those who met him were immensely struck by his new ideas. His wife is an architect too and... He says with a suspicious twinkle in his eye, that he has always contended that the ideas of his plan for the building of the new city of Canberra are more than half due to his wife and that she ought to have much more than half the credit for winning the competition.⁵¹

⁴⁸ 'Town planning, Mr WB Griffin on the future' *Sydney Morning Herald* 3/10/13 p. 12 On the same occasion he reportedly took credit for Marion Mahony Griffin's drawings, not correcting praise for 'his' drawings, a gesture which also points to the difficulties in distinguishing the respective roles of the husband and wife team.

⁴⁹ Mathews, Race. (1993). *Australia's first Fabians: middle-class radicals, labour activists and the early labour movement*. Cambridge [England] ; Melbourne : Cambridge University Press, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/cam027/92045211.html> p. 2

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Serle, 'Champion, Henry Hyde (1859–1928)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/champion-henry-hyde-5548/text9457>, published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 12 November 2015.

⁵¹ Quoted Griffin, Walter Burley.& Van Zanten, David. (1970). *Walter Burley Griffin, selected designs*. Palos Park, Ill : Prairie School Press in 22 p. 160 *The Booklover A literary review* 16 no 173 Sept 1913

The Melbourne men (and women) of brains included those who were members or fellow travellers with the Australian Church and Theosophical Society including Bertha Merfield, Max Meldrum and Adela Pankhurst Walsh (who would later speak on Sydney Theosophical station Radio 2GB perhaps on Marion's introduction) and perhaps O'Dowd and Waller. The Griffins' ambition to build community was never far from their thoughts as evidenced by Walter's lecture on "Community living rather than communal existence" with lantern slides on 12 July 1915.⁵² They may have connected with the Unitarian Church in Melbourne, perhaps through Frederick Sinclair however the records no longer exist. Certainly there was no one of the calibre of Lloyd Jones or Blake in Melbourne at this time. Again I want to make clear that participation in the Theosophical Society was not exclusive and, as we have seen with Vida Goldstein or Alfred Deakin, did not carry any stigma. Rather identification with this community was generally prestigious and certainly would not have precluded being considered for the Newman College project.

Sydney

In 1920 Walter's position as Federal Capital Director of Construction terminated and in 1924 they relocated to Sydney where Leadbeater's Mosman home, the Manor, had been the heart of the Theosophical Society since 1914. The Manor was described by Mary Lutyens, as the "greatest of all occult forcing-houses."⁵³ Her mother, ardent Theosophist Lady Emily Lutyens was as public a supporter of the Society as her husband, architect Sir Edwin Lutyens was critic. In 1922 the Manor community had seen the reoccurrence of the Chicago scandal and at the time of the Griffin's arrival was still reeling from the fallout.⁵⁴ In Sydney the Griffins were to conspicuously engage with the Society outside Leadbeater's orbit. In 1926 George Arundale arrived in Sydney with his very young wife, the dancer Rukmini. His time as General Secretary of the Australian Section from his arrival until 1928 coincides with the Griffins' peak period of engagement, although both the Griffins and Arundale continued to be involved with the Australian Theosophical Society after that date. From 1926 the Griffins found the Sydney Society both a safe place to share their ideas, vent their frustrations and establish significant friendships. They would design the Radio 2GB furniture, and the van der Lay house on Iluka road, across the street from the Theosophical commune at the Manor. Some indication of the credibility of the Theosophical Society in Sydney can be gleaned from the high-profile, if short-lived, Crusade for a Beautiful Australia, which was launched with the visiting dancer Anna Pavlova as figurehead. The launch was presided over by sculptor Bertram MacKenna at Adyar Hall on 22 July 1926. Thea Proctor, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony, and the students of the Sydney Art School and Dattilo Rubbo's Art School were all key signatories.⁵⁵

James Weirick tells the story that it was Dr JJ (Koos) van der Leeuw who brought an issue of the Dutch architectural magazine *Wendingen* dedicated to the work



Annie Besant, daughter (Mabel) and granddaughter 1894

Talma and Co. Photographic Studio,
Melbourne (est. 1893-1942)

(Reproduced in *Cosmos* 20 October 1894 p.78)

⁵² 'Walter Burly (sic) Griffin will deliver an address on "Community living rather than communal existence" with lantern slides to the Health Society NSW Sydney Town Hall 12 July' *Sunday Times* 11/6/15

⁵³ Lutyens, Mary. (1975). *Krishnamurti : the years of awakening*. London : J. Murray p. 191

⁵⁴ Independent Theosophical Society was formed Oct 1923

⁵⁵ William Moore, 'At home and abroad', *Art in Australia*, 17/1926, pp. 66-67 In terms reminiscent of 'reminiscent of Lucy Perkins' Beautification of Chicago the Crusade was intended to 'promote beauty in every possible avenue – in the arts, in manners and modes of living and in the planning of a city'. There is an interesting link from Pavlova who encouraged Rukmini's dance career to Louise Lightfoot who was similarly inspired by Rukmini.

of Frank Lloyd Wright from the Netherlands in mid-1926.⁵⁶ The trajectory of this magazine from Amsterdam to Sydney is itself an interesting microcosm of the international network of people and ideas that characterised the Theosophical Society at this time. Hendrik Wijdeveld had founded the magazine on the inspiration of Mathieu Lauweriks (on the Editorial Board, Lauwericks had co-founded the Vahana artists' lodge in Amsterdam in 1896 with Karel de Bazel.) De Bazel's cover design for the first issue announced *Wendingen's* theosophical interests. It was not surprising that in the relatively close world of Dutch Theosophical architects the current issue of *Wendingen* found its way to the van der Leeuw's and then to Sydney. Theosophist Ula Maddocks displayed the issue in the Kuringai Lodge shopfront and through this conduit Walter Burley Griffin met and began to participate in Theosophical activities.⁵⁷ In the circle which included Arundale, Maddocks and van der Leeuw, Walter Burley Griffin found a safe place to express his views. It is widely agreed that the three articles Walter would subsequently write for the Australian Theosophical press under Arundale's editorship are the most important expositions of his architectural philosophy. In 1928 Walter Burley Griffin was invited to speak at the Annual Theosophical Convention.⁵⁸ He felt comfortable enough to express his views freely and his talk was reported in the popular press as a scathing indictment. He later published this talk in two parts as "Building for nature" and "The outdoor arts in Australia" in *Advance! Australia* edited by Arundale for the Theosophical Society. A third article was published in 1932 while Arundale was General Secretary of the Indian Section for the international journal, *Theosophist* as "Architecture and the Economic Impasse".⁵⁹

I want to look closely at one moment in the text of Walter Burley Griffin's "The outdoor arts in Australia", notably the quote he takes from JJP Oud's article (1890-1963) on Frank Lloyd Wright, published in that *Wendingen* issue. This was the reconnection of colleagues and philosophies stretching across the continents of Europe, America and Australia, reaching back to the Griffins' early days in Frank Lloyd Wright's studio. The Theosophical Society was the link. Although not a Theosophist, Oud would have been known to Koos through his brother CH (Kees) van der Leeuw. Kees, a wealthy Dutch industrialist and Director of the van Nelle factory was an influential patron of the radical Dutch Theosophical architects including Karel de Bazel and Michiel Brinkman.⁶⁰

This connection with the Rotterdam Theosophists is significant. Architectural historian, Ken Lambra describes the architects of the Rotterdam Lodge as locating in their work "an opportunity to reveal oneself and be exposed to other people. This unveiling [of the self to

Page 266 ADVANCE! AUSTRALIA May 1, 1928.



PLAN OF CANBERRA.
To illustrate certain references to Canberra we have prepared from official sources a plan indicating the locations of the works carried out up to the past year. It also displays various blanks where the streets and blocks are unplanned, giving a disjointed appearance to the city design. About a dozen settlements are discernible scattered miles apart, the effect of which must be more disconnected possibly than the dismembered planning. The principal shopping centre, referred to in Mr. Griffin's address as "Eastlake," has been renamed Kingston, and is indicated by "K" on the plan. It is about three miles from the Civic Centre (marked C) and six miles from Queenbeyn. The residential subdivisions most recently altered to eliminate the neighbourhood parks, whose function is explained by Mr. Griffin, are shown in alterations to the planning at Northbourne where marked by "W."

⁵⁶ Weirick, James 'Spirituality and Symbolism in the work of the Griffins' in Watson, Anne. & Powerhouse Museum. (1998). *Beyond architecture : Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin : America, Australia, India*. Haymarket, N.S.W : Powerhouse Publishing p. 79

⁵⁷ Weirick, James 'Spirituality and Symbolism in the work of the Griffins' in Watson, Anne. & Powerhouse Museum. (1998). *Beyond architecture : Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin : America, Australia, India*. Haymarket, N.S.W : Powerhouse Publishing p. 79

⁵⁸ 'Canberra, Scathing indictment' *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 April 1928 p. 6

⁵⁹ Griffin, WB 'Architecture & the Economic Impasse' *The Theosophist* 1932 v54 November p186

⁶⁰ CH (Kees) van der Leeuw was a Theosophist from 1914 in Holland, There may also be a Chicago connection as, like his brother, CH van der Leeuw joined the Theosophical Order of the Star in the East (established to support Krishnamurti) in Chicago in 1912 (after the Griffin's plans were handed in). Perhaps he may even have met Bragdon in this context

"...it is their balance with esoteric (spirit) and exoteric (reason and intellect) that is most important. Lambra, Ken *Abstraction and Theosophy* V7 no. 2 1998 p. 9

<http://corbu2.caed.kent.edu/architronic/v8n1/v8n104.pdf>

JJP Oud was not a member of the Theosophical Society however he had joined De Stijl in 1917, a movement which had its roots in Mondrian's Theosophical ideas. While Oud and Mondrian later differed, much of Oud's work was built on Mondrian's theoretical work. I would like to thank Marty Bax for her insights here into the details of the relationship of the Theosophical Society and Dutch architects of this time. See also Karina Moraes Zarzar Use and Adaptation Of Precedents In Architectural Design: Toward An Evolutionary Design Model 2003 p.33ff

others was] a precondition to 'brotherhood'.⁶¹ Lambla argues that Brinkman's celebrated high density housing complex, the Justus van Effenstraat, commissioned in 1918, was a conscious effort to transform society through a new relationship of the individual and community mediated by architecture. He distinguishes in Brinkman's work a tension between the independent, self-realisation of the individual and the impulse towards unity, community and social involvement. For Lambla the influence of the Society on Brinkman was in the commitment to the creation of community through a recognition of human brotherhood. This strikes a chord with my own research into the influence of the Theosophical Society in the visual arts where the influence has repeatedly proven to be conceptual rather than formal.⁶²

Leadbeater's 1902-3 lectures on occultism in Chicago at Steinway Hall, later published in 1905 as *Some glimpses of occultism ancient and modern* were not the revelation of the meanings of arcane diagrams to the initiated but rather offered a reading of human history as a pattern of searches for a spiritual community. The influence of the Theosophical Society on the Griffins lies in the Society's support for their extant project to create an ideal community, a manifestation of the ideal of brotherhood, through town planning. We have seen that the Griffins advocated an architecture that was a spiritual project. Their spiritual project was the production of a spiritualised community such as Marion lived as a child. The city plan for that community saw the form follow the function, enabling the individual to connect with the community in new and transformative ways. In this there are clear links with the Rotterdam Lodge architects for whom Oud was a staunch advocate. The quote that Walter uses appears at the point where Oud distinguishes Wright's ambition from the reality of his practice.

*An architecture based on the needs and possibilities of our times, satisfying the general economic feasibility and universal social attainableness ... must result in compactness, austerity and exactness in form, in simplicity and regularity.*⁶³

Both Oud and Griffin felt Wright's failure to achieve this goal. What the 'needs and possibilities of our times', meant to Griffin's audience at the Theosophical Convention or the readership of the mystical/theosophical *Wendingen* in 1926 could only mean the development of a spiritually advanced community. This project was specifically but not exclusively Theosophical, but as Cecilia Helmboldt, exiled vice president of the Russian Theosophical Society, wrote in the same issue of the *Theosophist* as Griffin's 'Architecture and the Economic Impasse';

*The creation of communities is in the present time one of the tasks of Theosophists who should be the vanguard of humanity.*⁶⁴

This ideal of a transformative community was not displaced by the Anthroposophical Society because it was not exclusive to either Society, any more than it was exclusive to the Western Unitarian project, Sullivan or Bragdon. As early as 1903 (the year before she began her own program of spiritual research) Lucy Fitch Perkins wrote on Municipal Art and attributed a similar definition of the town planner's role as springing from the Unitarian poet Emerson;

*The key to the study of Municipal Art is the conception of the city as an organism, as something more than a mere aggregation of units. There is a common life, which expresses itself in different function.*⁶⁵

⁶¹ Lambla, Ken *Abstraction and Theosophy* V7 no. 2 1998 p. 2

⁶² See McFarlane, Jennifer. (2012). *Concerning the spiritual : the influence of the Theosophical Society on Australian artists : 1890-1934*. North Melbourne : Australian Scholarly Publishing

⁶³ JJP Oud 'The influence of Frank Lloyd Wright on the architecture of Europe' *Wendingen* 1925 pp.85-89

⁶⁴ Cecelia Humboldt 'The problem of communities' *The Theosophist* v54 November 1932 p. 192

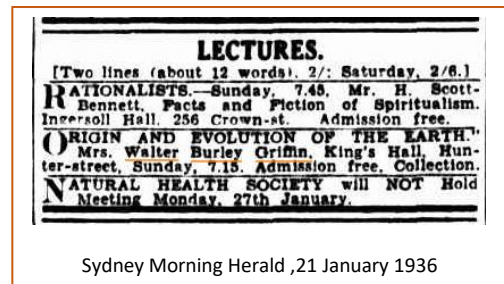
⁶⁵ Lucy Fitch Perkins *Municipal Art The Chautauquan* 36 (February 1903):516- 527.

<http://urbanplanning.library.cornell.edu/DOCS/perkins.htm>

Lucy Fitch Perkins describes the city as more than an aggregation of units, but rather an organism, and connected this organism with Emerson's transcendentalist impulse where beauty in municipal art came from ethical and appropriate municipal administration.⁶⁶

Anthroposophy

Walter Burley Griffin later spoke of the Theosophical Society as something one graduated from.⁶⁷ The Griffins' engagement with the Anthroposophical Society appears to have been a gradual process. Marion recalled in *The Magic of America* that she read Rudolf Steiner's *Occult Science* in 1926 while active in the Theosophical Society.⁶⁸ She discovered Anthroposophy through Edith and Robert Williams when they joined the Castlecrag community in 1928⁶⁹ and then in 1930 and 1931 respectively Marion and Walter joined the Anthroposophical Society.⁷⁰ It should already be clear that membership of the Anthroposophical Society at this time did not mean a rejection of the Theosophical Society. Most Australians associated with the early Anthroposophical Society, like Edith Williams, were drawn from the Theosophical membership and retained significant ties to the parent organisation. Edith Williams would lecture on Anthroposophy with Theosophist Evelyn Grieg providing musical support at the Independent Theosophical Society venue, King's Hall, in 1928 presumably on the understanding that Theosophists would be a sympathetic audience for Anthroposophy. Edith Williams' ongoing relationship with the Theosophical Society was not isolated. Ula Maddocks whose life was so closely bound with the Griffins in Castlecrag, was Leadbeater's Secretary, visiting Adyar in 1931⁷¹ and her husband Edgar was organist at the Liberal Catholic Church. Amy (1891-1962) and Edward Rivett were married with Liberal Catholic Church rites two years before buying into Castlecrag. Marion herself lectured at King's Hall in 1936 on what seems to have been a favourite evolutionary theme of hers at this time on 'The origin and evolution of the earth.'⁷² Nor did commitment to the Anthroposophical Society mean a separation from the Arundales as Rukmini Arundale danced at Castlecrag,⁷³ and Walter of course would publish in the *Theosophist* in 1932.



Sydney Morning Herald ,21 January 1936



(c1932). Walter Burley Griffin with Ula and Deirdre Maddocks in the garden at Castlecrag, New South Wales, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-150433021>

⁶⁶ Lucy Fitch Perkins *Municipal Art The Chautauquan* 36 (February 1903):516- 527.

<http://urbanplanning.library.cornell.edu/DOCS/perkins.htm>

⁶⁷ 18 December, 1935, Lucknow. Walter Burley Griffin to Marion Mahony Griffin in Griffin, Marion Mahony. ([1937-45]). *The magic of America* p. 49

⁶⁸ Roe, J 'The Magical world of Marion Mahony Griffin' in Fitzgerald, Shirley. & Wotherspoon, Garry. & Sydney History Group. (1995). *Minorities : cultural diversity in Sydney*. Sydney, Australia : State Library of New South Wales Press in association with the Sydney History Group p. 96

⁶⁹ Gleneaon Rudolf Steiner School, Steiner Education in Australia: Maintaining an Educational Theory Given the Necessity of Practice, 1957-2000 Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney, 2004 p.31

⁷⁰ Roe, J 'The Magical world of Marion Mahony Griffin' in Fitzgerald, Shirley. & Wotherspoon, Garry. & Sydney History Group. (1995). *Minorities : cultural diversity in Sydney*. Sydney, Australia : State Library of New South Wales Press in association with the Sydney History Group p. 85

⁷¹ Ula Maddocks signed the visitor's book at Perth Lodge in 3/4/31.

⁷² Advertisement Sydney Morning Herald 25 January 1936 p. 23

⁷³ Griffin, Marion Mahony. ([1937-45]). *The magic of America* p. 139 Louise Lightfoot would later study under Rukmini Arundale in 1937

For both Marion and Walter membership of the Anthroposophical Society would become a major part of their reading and community life. The international *Anthroposophic News Sheet* of 1936 reports that Marion spoke on *The four ethers in the races and civilisations* and *The formative forces* and Walter gave a talk on *The Trichotomy in land planning*.⁷⁴ Trichotomy is a central Anthroposophical platform where humanity is understood as essentially threefold; body, soul and spirit. This is clearly a reprise of Walter's 1915 statement of architecture as a spiritual project. The title is a tantalising glimpse into the substance of Walter's paper which may perhaps have explored how land planning could be made to service the needs of these three aspects of the individual in their community and built environment.



(c1932). Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, with a group of people in backyard, Castlecrag, Sydney,

Both Marion and Walter continued to value Theosophical texts after formally joining the Anthroposophical Society.⁷⁵ In an article written by Walter from India in about 1936 Walter quoted James Cousins, the Irish Theosophist, writer on the arts, and husband of the sleep deprived visitor to Hull House, Margaret, as support for his own philosophical position;

*For architecture according even to Herbert Spencer is essentially a religious production or as in the profound statement of Dr Cousins, omitting his particular qualifications, all art is the extroversion of what in religion is introversion.*⁷⁶

Only two years later in her letter to Mrs Brough, preserved in *The Magic of America*, Marion described her life's work as having been developed along spiritual lines. By 1938 she had moved through Jenkins' and Blake's Western Unitarianism and the Theosophical Society to a final 'home' within the Anthroposophical Society. Trevor Lee has already demonstrated this evening that Marion's practical engagement with her local Anthroposophical Society continued as an active force after her return to Chicago and was the final resting place of her philosophical library.

Conclusion

Together with the Western Unitarians, the Theosophical and Anthroposophical Societies the Griffins saw themselves as architects of humanity. The Griffins' democratic, spiritually inspired project was to construct a new community. Their theories as published in the Theosophical press from 1926 to 1932 did not represent a change in their practice or expression for the simple reason that they had been part of the Griffins' intellectual environment since Chicago. Their democratic spirituality, forged in Western Unitarianism, that halfway house to infidelity, inevitably led them to the Theosophical Society and then to its off-shoot, the Anthroposophical Society. This is why there is no apparent shift in their practice associated with their most intensely Theosophical period. The intellectual framework that informed the Griffins' plans for both Canberra and Castlecrag is consistent with the encouragement Marion took from Blake to commit to a profession built on spiritual lines, and Walter's 1913 forecast that the future promised by unorthodox religion was vastly more important than commonly believed.

⁷⁴ *Anthroposophic News Sheet* no 13 29 /3/1936 p. 50 I would like to thank Laura Summerfield and Trevor Lee for sharing this document and supporting my explorations in this field.

⁷⁵ See Paul, John 'Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, Architects of Anthroposophy' *Journal of Bio-Dynamics Tasmania* Issue 106 2012 pp. 20-30 for a careful exploration of the Griffins' Anthroposophical thinking.

⁷⁶ Walter Burley Griffin 'Architecture in India' (published in Lucknow's *The Pioneer* V17 no. 19 17 Jan 1937) reproduced in Griffin, Marion Mahony. ([1937-45]). *The magic of America* p.174

Research into the relationship of the Griffins' professional practice and unorthodox spirituality reveals not a hitherto unknown source for an occult plan with Theosophical symbols embedded in the roundabouts of Canberra, but rather something both more ordinary and much more remarkable; an understanding that both Canberra and Castlecrag were part of a larger project, the construction of an utopian community organised around the ideal of human brotherhood. Both cities were conceived and planned as seedbeds for a more advanced form of humanity, articulated by social structures which promoted ethical and independent thought, encircled by a natural environment which supported a healthy body and by extension a healthy mind.

Walter's 1936 description of his professional practice in Theosophical language as the extroversion or manifestation of what in religion is internalised is a repetition of Marion's reference to a profession built on spiritual lines. Describing the town plan in Anthroposophical terms as responding to the full human, the trichotomy of body, soul and spirit leads inevitably to a reading of Walter's sense of town planning as a spiritual project. The Griffin's project to transform society through a new relationship between the individual and community mediated by brotherhood was manifested in their life work in step with the great millennial community building projects of All Souls, Western Unitarian Church, the Theosophical and Anthroposophical Societies.

Jenny McFarlane
October 2015

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