

## History as a Dialogic Process: the Case of Frank Lloyd Wright

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*Annotation.* This theoretical essay elaborates an approach to historiography using dialogic concepts to construct histories, noting that some utterances are more important than others depending on context and continuously open to revision; as Bakhtin argued, there is “no final word.” My analysis elaborates the role of *re-enlightenments*, which I define as cognitive, historical, personal, and cultural transformations of understandings replacing old with new. In this scheme, re-enlightenments function as keystones celebrating events, which demarcate and shape both *downstreams* and *upstreams*. Downstreams concern the consequences of re-enlightenments, including the impetus to construct histories. Upstreams are about the foundational events that are said to memorialize the event. Dialogically histories are generated in these upstreams; they may be identified/selected downstream as noteworthy events in the past, but their selection and treatment occurs upstream after the fact. A case study follows tracing the re-enlightenment of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright from Oak Park (Illinois, USA)’s *bête noir* to recognition as America’s greatest architect, not as chapters of a career but rather a sequence of competing narratives.

*Keywords:* addressivity, dialogism, re-enlightenments, history, upstream, downstream.

### Introduction

Dialogic processes were the focus of Mikhail Bakhtin and his colleagues Valentin Volosinov and Pavel Medvedev, in a group that has come to be called the Bakhtin Circle and whose work together in the early twentieth century, has come to be known as Dialogism. Bakhtin came to be regarded as a Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar who worked on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language. His writings, on a variety of subjects, has inspired scholars working in disciplines as diverse as literary criticism, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, pedagogy, rhetoric, composition, and psychology.

The core of Bakhtin’s work was best captured by his principle there is “no final word.” For Bakhtin, every utterance is a response to another utterance. Discourse itself unfolds in time in a sea of competing voices in a process he called heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1934). And though Bakhtin worked extensively with language and literature, he never explicitly theorized history as fully as he did discourse.

There are several reasons for this gap. In 1928, he was arrested for political reasons but was then moved in 1930 for health reasons to Kostanay where he worked as book-keeper and wrote several important essays and books, including *Discourse in the Novel*. In 1938 he devoted himself to a book on Goethe with important ideas believed to include historical processes. In 1940 this work suffered near total destruction when his publishing house, which was preparing the manuscript for publication, was destroyed in a Luftwaffe bombing. Little survived, and he is said to have used the remaining paper, in the desperate times of World War II, to roll tobacco into cigarettes, which he smoked.

In any event, many of Bakhtin’s ideas about historical processes may be gleaned or inferred from work published before his arrest and exile. It is possible for example to envision history as sequences of utterances, particularly remembered utterances. To make such an approach work, however, requires recognizing that some conversations and utterances are more memorable than others, and understanding that just what is remembered can decline or become salient over time. To use Bakhtin’s utterances in this way requires a particular refinement I explain in my theory of re-

enlightenment, which is the central focus of this paper.

Re-enlightenments are cognitive, historical, and cultural transformations of understanding in which the new replaces the old. It applies to everything from personal life-changing events to historical shifts. For example (and my main example in this paper), Chicago suburban architect Frank Lloyd Wright's transformation from Oak Park's *bête noir* to his characterization as America's greatest architect (and all the events in between) a series of historical and cultural re-enlightenment. It is re-enlightenments (plural), not enlightenment, because, like Piaget's schemata (plural), re-enlightenments are continuous, one setting the frame for those that follow.

In this way re-enlightenments function as keystones or remembered and celebrated events demarcating and shaping both "downstreams" and "upstreams." Downstreams concern the consequences of the re-enlightenment, including the impetus to construct histories, as well as related recollections, stories, commemoratives, recollections, documentarians, legends, myth, gossip, and awards. In Wright's case, for example, these include the denigration of his character related to his European assignation with Mamah Cheney as well as departure from Oak Park to build Taliesin in Wisconsin, USA. Upstreams are always constructed in the downstream after the transformative event, such as construction of Wright's design for Fallingwater, and recognition of certain events as seminal in his identity as a pioneer in his field, including the recognition of the Prairie School of Architecture. Ironically, the upstream, as meticulously supported by a record, is constructed downstream of a re-enlightenment, memorializing what was and is to be remembered. In this mix, the transformative event is primary, both defining and configuring upstreams and downstreams. Histories are to be understood as generated in these upstreams; they may be identified /selected downstream as noteworthy events in the past, but their selection and treatment occurs upstream after the fact.

In this paper, we begin by reviewing central concepts of dialogism and noting some of its limits in dealing with history and historiography, as noted by scholars such as Brandist (2004), Lindsey (1993), and Sempere (2014). I then propose new uses of Bakhtin's and Vološinov's concepts to address these issues and present a case study of the re-enlightenment of Frank Lloyd Wright as an example of such an approach. I close with a summary of additional re-enlightenments.

## **Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle's Dialogic Semiotics**

Bakhtin's fundamental unit of language (i.e., discourse) is the utterance ranging "from a short (single-word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel or scientific treatise... A given utterance is preceded by the utterances of others, and is followed by [ends with] the responsive utterances of others" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 72). Yet discourse is dialogic not because the speakers take turns. Discourse is dialogic, rather, because it is continually structured by reciprocity and tension – indeed even conflict – between and among the conversants, between self and other as one voice "refracts" another (Nystrand, 1986, 1997). It is precisely this tension – this relationship between self and other, this juxtaposition of relative perspectives and struggle among competing voices – which for Bakhtin gives shape to all discourse and hence lies at the heart of understanding language as a dynamic, sociocognitive event. And the meaning of an utterance is partially determined by the voice it is answering, anticipating, or even striving to ignore. Speakers' voices and writers' texts have potential for meaning which unfold and are realized by listeners' and readers' responses.

Which is to say, an utterance/word is marked by "addressivity" and "answerability" (Vološinov, 1973; Bakhtin, 1986). Addressivity means an utterance is always oriented to a listener/reader whom the speaker/writer assumes will process a sentence into a meaningful exchange. Answerability means that speakers/writers always address their utterances to someone who they assume can generate a response and anticipate an answer. The speaker/writer talks/writes with an expectation for a response, agreement, sympathy, [or] objection. Or as Rommetveit (1974) puts it, "We write on the premises of the reader and read on the premises of the writer" (p. 63).

*Discourse in the Novel* provides Bakhtin's examples par excellence of addressivity and answerability where characters continuously interact face to face. Vološinov (1973) extends this conception to written texts: "A book... is also an element of verbal communication. It is something

discussable in actual, real life dialogue, but aside from that, it is calculated for active perception, involving attentive reading and inner responsiveness” (Volosinov, 1973, p. 95).

This concept of discourse is fundamentally different from the common view that utterances are independent expressions of thoughts by speakers, an account that starts with thoughts and ends with words. For Bakhtin and Volosinov, a given utterance is always already embedded in a history of expressions by others in a chain of ongoing cultural and political moments. History is at the root of dialogic refractions.

### **Bakhtin and History**

We now examine dialogic takes on history, noting particularly the challenges of dialogism in formulations of Great Time. Working with Bakhtin Circle, for example, Vološinov argued for a contemporary interaction of the conversants. In a famous passage he poetically argued that:

*Word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between the speaker and listener, addresser or an addressee. Each and every word expresses the “one” in relation to the “other.” I give myself a verbal shape from another’s point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of a community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown down between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor. (Vološinov, 1973, p. 86)*

For Vološinov, particularity of meaning hinges on “interindividual territory,” which requires the two individuals to be a socially organized group (a social unit). One might imagine Vološinov’s conversants were contemporary colleagues or conversants, though his inclusion of “purported addressees,” i.e., readers, extend the utterance in time. In the end, however, Vološinov argued that “forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction” (Vološinov, 1973, p. 21). In this formulation, we may understand the scope and time frame of a concrete utterance and how it responds to previous utterances while anticipating subsequent utterances. In effect, Vološinov’s concrete utterance rooted in its immediate social situation and the broader social milieu (Vološinov, 1973, p. 86) inflates the scope of histories to be told.

For his part, Bakhtin expanded the scope of addressivity by referring not to conversants but rather the discourse itself, viz. “already uttered,” the “already known,” the “common opinion” and so forth (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 279).

Related to these distinctions, scholars have recently noted uniquely dialogic difficulties in writing histories, in particular due to the unfinalizability of history. For example, William Lindsay (1993) notes in his incisive essay, “‘The Problem of Great Time’: A Bakhtinian Ethics of Discourse,” that for Bakhtin, history is boundless: “There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 170). Every word is but one in a chain of utterances stretching back to the beginning of human time and forward to its end. Lindsay asks, if history is unfinished, how does one deal with “the brute reality of past and present”? The short answer by this logic one can’t.

And finally Julio Peiró Sempere notes, Bakhtin warned us that to enclose a literary work within the boundaries of a single epoch, even if it is its own, may fail since “works break through the boundaries of their own time, they live in centuries, that is, in *great time* and frequently (with great works, always) their lives there are more intense and fuller than their lives within their own time” (Sempere, 2014, p. 152).

### **The Case of Frank Lloyd Wright**

We now proceed with a case study of Frank Lloyd Wright, including some notes based on an autobiographical narrative inquiry of the author, laying out in dialogic terms the dynamics of re-

enlightenment.

To undertake an account of history as a dialogic process, we look closely at the life and career of Frank Lloyd Wright in case study. Wright is ideal for such a study for several reasons. First, he had a very long and productive life stretching from the time of the American Civil War (born 1867) to World War II and beyond to the America-Russia space race, dying in 1959. In all he published twenty books and many articles and was a popular lecturer and widely quoted in the United States and Europe.

Oak Park, Illinois was the site of Wright's home and office where, in this earliest phase of his career (1898-1909), he produced a third of his life's work. Surviving a turbulent biography and many harsh architecture reviews, Wright was nonetheless recognized in 1991 by the American Institute of Architects as "the greatest American architect of all time." Since 2012, Wright's work has been archived by the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library at Columbia University, New York City. His oeuvre clearly resides in Bakhtin's Great Time, noted for such works as Taliesin (1911), Fallingwater (1937), Robie House (1908), Prairie style houses (1930s), Oak Park's Unity Church (1905), Darwin Martin House (1904), First Unitarian Society of Madison (1941-1951), and New York City Guggenheim museum (1959). These are regarded as the great works now. This is to say, using Bakhtin's contrast between official and unofficial discourse, these works are part of official architecture; most of Wright's early work was unofficial architecture though many of designs eventually became regarded as official. As Bakhtin wrote, "There is no final word."

In his early career in Oak Park, he was locally celebrated at the time – at least among some neighbors – for early works in Oak Park, e.g., the 1905 Unity Church and several homes on Forest Avenue in Oak Park – these artifacts did not gain wide or official recognition as seminal work until much later. This early period in Wright's career was frequently controversial with vibrant, even intemperate exchanges of views about Wright and his work. Large numbers of Oak Parkers detested him (Frank Lloyd Wrong!) while a small but loyal circle of neighbors celebrated him and hired him to design their homes. This process continued for decades and helps us understand history as a dialogic process. In dialogic terms, the early works of Wright from this time may be understood as unofficial architecture whereas key sites e.g., the Robie House built in 1908, but not recognized until 1963; Taliesin, built three times starting in 1911; the Darwin Martin house (1904); and even some of his Oak Park houses on Forest Avenue, e.g., the Winslow house (1893-94) – are now routinely recognized as official architecture. This analysis of Wright's early efforts in Oak Park may largely viewed as a crucible affording a dialogic view of how unofficial architecture can become official.

Parts of this paper are autobiographical. I grew up in Oak Park and was a sophomore in high school when Wright died. His home and office were at the time boarded up, and his presence had dwindled to a quiet controversial echo of earlier times. Decades later, I also came to experience Wright's Taliesin first hand when my wife and I hired Charles Montooth, one of Wright's original apprentices, to design a Usonian house for our family when we were living in Madison, Wisconsin. Meetings with Montooth at Wright's Taliesin gave me considerable insight to Wright's studio and architectural development Oak Park, Illinois.

When I graduated from Oak Park and River Forest High School in 1961, I already knew – and savored – the curious fact that the town's very own world-famous writer Ernest Hemingway had received a D in English within those same walls, and that he had described our mainly Protestant and white upper-middle-class suburban town as suffering from "wide lawns and narrow minds." I can still construct with perfect clarity in my mind's eye Wright's house and office (now Home and Studio) and above all his Prairie-style Unity Temple, now a Unitarian Universalist church. As a boy, I also recall visiting Wright's Frederick House then under construction in nearby Barrington Hills, Illinois. My parents and the owners had been close friends, and we were invited to see the architect's vision take form.

And yet, this celebrated icon of architecture became part of the official memory of Oak Park only much later, a development that struck me when I returned to the town for my fiftieth-year high school class reunion in 2011. Wright's buildings had been in the neighborhood for a century. I had walked past some on my way to and from high school, but fifty years later they were celebrated

destinations for countless sitors. His house and office had become the Wright Home and Studio, a gift shop and tourist center, and busloads of international visitors toured Wright's structures along Forest was Avenue. Oak Park had re-enlightened him.

Wright had been canonized, and his Oak Park legacy was firmly established for future generations. Oak Parkers had died or conveniently forgotten, suppressed, or let fade the memory of the local genius whose reputation had in its day been marred by his bohemian inclinations. In 1909, he had been ostracized for having abandoned his wife and their six children, and running off to Europe with Mamah Cheney, the wife of one of his clients. Tensions among Oak Parkers ran high between Wright's design gifts, on the one hand, and his bohemian proclivities, on the other. Many of his former neighbors would cross the street rather than say hello or even acknowledge him. Even before his affair with Cheney, his untraditional buildings were controversial. A vintage (1905) Oak Park post card featuring his house and studio and labeled only as "The House Built Around a Tree" – no mention of Wright.

By the time of my high school reunion, Wright's bohemian ways had become a footnote in an extensive legacy. This clash of reputations perplexed me as I recalled my daily walks past the Cheney house to and from high school. Wright's inappropriate conduct earned him the status of pariah on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune*, and put an end to his Oak Park architecture practice. He left town in 1911, returned to Wisconsin, where he was born, and with the Villa Medici in Fiesole still in mind from his European escape with Mamah, built Taliesin in Spring Green (Secrest, 1992, p. 209).

After Wright escaped Oak Park for Wisconsin, Wright's abandoned wife Catherine used to say that she "kept" the Oak Park house and office; terms like "preserved" or "conserved" might have implied some lingering affection. Yet the house and office were all she had after his moving away in 1911, and the place was no doubt marred in bitterness. She refused her husband a divorce because she knew that Wright would never pay alimony or child support. Indeed, the townsfolk were aware that this was a man who had not only abandoned his family but also left them an unpaid grocery bill of over \$900, the equivalent of more than US\$27,000 today in 2022. For Catherine the house had little to do with Wright's legacy – indeed, 1912 was too early to speak of Wright's legacy. Catherine hung on to it because it was her only asset. She sold it for a song in 1930 when she remarried. By the 1960s, it was in serious disrepair, and if not for a local builder, Tuscher Roofing, this important historical site might have crumbled into oblivion. Tuscher took control of the property in 1974 and began a thirteen-year restoration, reinforcing the common wisdom that fixing up a Wright building starts with the roof.

Wright's Home and Studio were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 and declared a National Historic Landmark four years later. This period marked the re-enlightenment of Wright's rehabilitation in Oak Park; he was no longer regarded simply as Oak Park's *bête noir*.

This brief account of Wright's early career, starting in Oak Park and culminating in his construction of Taliesin in 1911 (and twice reconstructed after fires in 1914 and then 1937) ultimately helps us understand history not as an accretion of facts (cf. Carr, 1961, 1987) that ends with an official history of consummated truths about the way things were, but, rather in dialogic terms, a series of conversations about his architectural gifts and subsequent narratives about his liaison with Mama Cheney, their abandonment of their families, and their voyage to Italy. In Bakhtin's terms, official histories are "monologic" and closed off.

By revisiting our cultural, intellectual, and moral beliefs, both shared and personal, we may come to see that we sometimes live according to temporarily convenient truths. As a high school graduate from Oak Park, Illinois, later as a teacher and scholar, and now as a professor emeritus and author I have grown increasingly conscious of this phenomenon.

## **Oak Park Rediscovered Frank Lloyd Wright**

Wright died on April 9, 1959; his wife Catherine had died only two weeks earlier. His sudden passing, fifty years after he left Oak Park, found the community largely unresponsive. The old-timers who had known Wright's scandals firsthand were mostly gone, and only a few admirers who

had actually known him were still living in Oak Park. The local newspaper, *Oak Leaves*, noted Wright's death on Thursday, April 16, 1959, in an article titled "1888–1916." Written by Leith Scott, who knew Wright and had interviewed him on several occasions, the article mainly recounted Wright's Oak Park career. The title's dates are somewhat puzzling, given that Wright was born in 1867 and died in 1959. It is true, however, that Wright moved to Oak Park in 1888. And though the year 1916 is unexplained, after Wright's departure with from Oak Park with Mamah Cheney in 1911 – which Wright called "voluntary exile" – several of his associates continued what architect and Wright colleague Marion Mahony Griffin called the "Chicago group" traditions, and the year 1916 is sometimes cited as the end of this period (Pfeiffer, 2001).

It took yet another week in 1959 for the local newspaper to publish an official obituary. Titled "A Great Villager," it began tepidly: "These villages, like any community, are what they are because of the influences of individuals, past and present." The article's penultimate line probably best captures the tipping point when Oak Park could acknowledge Wright's eccentricities and at the same time celebrate his towering contributions to the local community and to art and architecture internationally: "All of us can mourn his death, remembering his brilliance and making allowance for his human weaknesses."

History, it would seem, can indeed be changed. When I was in high school, Wright's houses and community were all there as apparently unchangeable "facts." But change history we do. As we engage events and individuals in the context of contemporary circumstances – as we look back to a past we never experienced. An individual once blighted can become recognized as a genius or a "man about town" (or both), and it's a few contemporaries and increasingly others that follow who make this happen.

Sabrina Tavernise examines the selectiveness of memory giving such examples as "Turkey's blank spot where the Armenian genocide should be." Or Japan with its squeamishness about its aggression and mass murder in China." After the fall of the Soviet Union as more sources documented Stalin's atrocities, Russians nervously papered over accounts of their past by celebrating Stalin as "the man who led the Soviet Union to victory in World War II and industrialized a peasant nation" (Tavernise, 2017).

Oak Park's rediscovery and rehabilitation – re-enlightenment – of Wright happened in the 1970s and 1980s when enough people who detested him died or had left the scene and a few, mainly from beyond Oak Park, discovered, rediscovered, and celebrated his work. It would fall to later generations to fix "the way it was," reconfiguring current understandings. Or in dialogic terms, remembering brings the past into the present by recreating or revising it. As Judith N. Shklar writes, remembering is "drawn out of a general, cultural, not a private consciousness, and made explicit" (Shklar, 1976, p. 50). In Wright's case, the concept of a "Prairie School" of architecture and design was coined at the same time that the house and office became the Home and Studio. As Gary Taylor (1996) tells us, history is ultimately "not what was done but what is passed on."

In short, we best understand history not as the cumulative accretion of "the way things were." Carr rejected this empirical view of the historian's work as "an accretion of 'facts' that he or she has at their disposal as nonsense" (Carr, 1961, 1987 2nd ed. New York: Vintage,). See also Aaron's (1961) refutation of histories as the "aggregate of little facts" (*Dimensions de la conscience historique*, Plon, 1961). Rather than history as fulsomely footnoted and commonly shared, Bakhtin's framework of utterances may be used to treat history as personal and official narratives unfolding in contemporary settings, including both past and present interactions.

Wright's homes in Oak Park have been there since they were built, but through the process of re-enlightenment their status and currency have been revised. Memory along with history, personal, communal, and organic, morphs over time.

A more recent example of this re-enlightenment is Monona Terrace, a convention center on the shore of Lake Monona in Madison, Wisconsin, which Wright first designed in 1938. At the time, the city council vilified Wright and his proposal, which was rejected by one vote. In 1959, the state legislature passed a zoning ordinance prohibiting the construction of any buildings along Lake Monona taller than twenty feet, a regulation motivated solely to stop construction of Monona Terrace.

It was only in 1992 that Madison finally resolved to build the Monona Terrace Community and Conference Center. Tommy Thompson, Wisconsin's pro-business Republican governor at the time, became a vigorous Wright supporter after a trip to Japan, where he learned that Wright was Wisconsin's favorite son in that country. In other words, Wright was good for Wisconsin business in Asia. In the end, Wright's proposal to build Monona Terrace had bipartisan support from the governor and the state legislature to the city council and the mayor of Madison at the time, Paul Soglin. Construction began in 1994; doors opened in 1997.

I have followed Wright's career and evolving identity with great interest from my youth in Oak Park to my present in Madison, but I didn't always see him as I do now. Like many of my high school classmates, I was aware of Wright and could point out his buildings. But my understanding and regard for him changed; I too have participated in Oak Park's re-enlightenment of Wright. When I travel on business, I make sure wherever possible to visit nearby Wright houses, and over the years this pursuit of Wright has become as much about my personal journey as about his memory – a parallel narrative about the development of my understanding of Wright's architecture and the evolution of my own sensibilities.

My oldest childhood memory is that of a preschooler building a "wall" of Cheerios in a window sill of my home. In time my fascination morphed into woodworking and a walnut end table in a high school course in woodworking (my work was always late but graded A). Today – 62 years later – this little table is my unfailing loyal companion for morning coffee and daily news sources. When I was a high school teacher, I rehabbed every apartment I rented. Later as a beginning professor, I took to rehabbing houses I lived in, but it wasn't until I reached the University of Wisconsin-Madison that I rediscovered Wright. His seminal first Usonian house (Jacobs I) was within walking distance of my home and was opened to the public for tours. I was soon under his spell, learning many of his secrets by building replicas, for example, of the Jacobs screen door and discovering the logic of his designs. At the same time, my wife inherited a southern Wisconsin woodland, which led to our discovery of Wisconsin prairies and their foundation for Wright's Prairie Style. As one thing led to another we hired one of Wright's still living apprentices to design a house for us in our woodland. (For a view and tour of the house we did build, see [Nancy's Shangri-la](#)). By this point I had no difficulty agreeing with the consensus that Wright was America's greatest architect.

The novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden, published in 1997, usefully delineates Wright's Japanese tours, from the first journey when he bought Hiroshige woodblock prints for pennies and later sold them for thousands of dollars in the US – they were a main source of income in the 1920s when Wright could barely scare up commissions here – and his work in Japan, particularly the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. Japan was where Wright advanced his use of cantilevers and learned the spirituality of horizontal lines, and where he learned to trim roof fascia with dentils. Wright stole a lot from Japan – as Picasso said, good artists borrow, great artists steal – but barely mentioned its influence beyond a general admiration for Japanese aesthetics and the Hiroshige woodblocks he hawked.

In 1961, the day before I went off to college at Northwestern University, I gave a cello recital at the River Forest Women's Club, designed in 1913 by William Drummond, who had previously served as Wright's chief draftsman. Today it's a private home, and it couldn't be more Wright-like (even if it's now painted green). For me, in 1961, it was just a place I gave a recital. It was only on a recent visit, in the midst of my own re-enlightenment, that I registered Wright's influence, including banded casement windows with extended eaves and the dramatic opening from a small lobby into the auditorium. It was a duh moment – it had been there for 60 years. I played my recital there in 1961. But I didn't understand Wright's clear influence until 35 years later. I was particularly impressed at my 50<sup>th</sup>-year high school reunion to note the extent of Wright's rehabilitation. Signs at every major intersection with major streets entering the village pointed to his Home and Studio. Tour busses lined up at his Home and Studio on Forest Avenue, including many international visitors. Wright was Oak Park's most prominent tourist draw. Amazing. Re-enlightenment.

## Frank Lloyd Wright's History

So just what is the dialogic history of Frank Lloyd Wright? How did an untrained architect originally from rural Wisconsin who had been shamed by his previous suburban Chicago clients go on to become known as the world's greatest architect? Clearly this history is complicated, with many competing, even combative narratives and has been told in many variations in different forms with endless revisions, starting, for example, with Wright's early Oak Park presence when he designed several houses on Forest Avenue and other local sites. Then his history was bits of gossip as his clients buzzed about (and hired) the young, new architect from Wisconsin. That was Wright's history from the first decade of the 20th century. After Wright returned from Europe with Mamah Cheney in 1910, any account of his activities would have been local in renewed gossip and, more widely, in inflammatory newspaper stories.

His local 1959 obituary, published when I was in high school, perhaps marks a tipping point in his reputation, and by the 1970s, his homes and career were celebrated as events marked by long lines of visitors and tourists at his Oak Park Home and Studio.

This history dates circa 1972 when he was declared principal architect of the Prairie School, a term Wright himself never used, and when his house and office became re-enlightened as the Wright Home and Studio, this account minimized his scandal with Mamah. Indeed, by the 1990s, more than three decades after his death, in addition to scores of books, articles, and exhibitions about him, Wright was the object of unique hagiographies in opera, drama, and fiction, all of which refracted the understandings of their time. Finally (at least for now), the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library in New York City – the final resting place of Wright's drawings and models – collaborated with the Museum of Modern Art to produce yet another major exhibition, *Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive*, which ran from June 12 to October 1, 2017. These numerous re-enlightenments, each with its own story, thus constitute more than a narrative history. Together they form a dynamic history of histories, which is to say history as a dialogic process.

## History as a Dialogic Process

One might argue that these episodes are but “chapters” in Wright's biography. However, re-enlightenments not only elucidate people and events; they also recontextualize transformative events, such as the scandal that forced Wright to abandon his practice in Oak Park. A dialogic history of Wright's career derives not from a process of accretion excavating facts, persons, and events from archives and other sources. Over time, the story of Frank Lloyd Wright shifted significantly with many ups and downs. In this example we can see that history is a dynamic narrative continuously re-enlightened and revised by contemporary events, leaving behind trails of multiple, often competing histories. Each account re-enlightened Wright in the eyes of the public, recasting both a downstream (personally scandalous identity when he returned to the United States with his client's wife and ultimately architecturally heroic by the time of Fallingwater) and an upstream addressing its foundation at every turn.

History is normally understood and practiced as the investigation of the past as it is described in written documents. In their research, historians examine memories, make discoveries, collect data, and organize the results for presentation of information about these events. The resulting interpretations tell stories, i.e. histories, of these events, but their accounts do not involve the addressivity Bakhtin viewed as the core of writer-text engagement. In short, historians read nondialogically, and, when this is so, the resulting histories may be regarded as monologic Official Histories (here's the way things were).

By contrast, history as a dialogic process singles out chains of utterance that generate re-enlightenments and so gain currency. In the resulting accounts, some utterances are more important than others. The dialogic historian's analysis, furthermore, is bifurcated. For events illuminated by re-enlightenment and so deemed worthy of remembrance, e.g., the crucifixion and resurrections, there



is a downstream traced by the responses, e.g., Christianity and the Holy Roman Empire, that unfold from the re-enlightenment itself. Dialogic histories then focus on the utterances and their responses that are properly understood upstream as foundational to the re-enlightenment itself. These dialogic histories take the form of narrative; there is no history without a narrative.

Such transformations shape our everyday experience. One day I meet someone I didn't know – someone who previously was “nothing” to me – but who today is “my best friend” or “someone I had rather never met,” i.e., a “someone.” Today, retired, with time to probe family scrapbooks as well as high school yearbooks and the “junk” (i.e., “nothing,” at least for now) in my basement, with plenty of leads to follow up on Google, I understand in retrospect how high school classmates – my tennis mates and the girlfriend I haven't seen in fifty years – were keys to my formative development. Likewise my senior-year Expository Writing teacher sparked an entire academic career, including thirty years of funded research.

One day a no-one, Frank Lloyd Wright, was Louis Sullivan's draftsman. Six decades later, when most of his detractors had died and his fame had spread worldwide, he emerged by wide consensus as “the greatest of all American architects,” and, along with Ernest Hemingway, a major tourist attraction for the village of Oak Park. As Wright and Hemingway came to be canonized, “nobodies” became “somebodies.”

One day, a carpenter called Jesus of Nazareth preached to followers in Galilee. He lived and died a Jew and never knew he was a Christian. This “someone” we all know didn't coalesce for two hundred years after his death, and largely because the preacher's reported rise after death came to be sanctified as the Resurrection. Today our secular calendar is predicated upon his birth, and most of us don't give it a second thought as we date our checks and schedule appointments.

In the sixteenth century, René Descartes founded modern philosophy, famously announcing, “I think, therefore I am.” Nearly three centuries later, Edmund Husserl (1970, 1979) revised this argument, insisting that we never just think, but rather we always think of “something.” Herewith, Husserl posited consciousness as the key mechanism that routinely and daily transforms “nothing” into “something.” Science proceeds accordingly, though in a more systematic and rigorous manner. Nonetheless, both everyday experience and scientific investigations are interpretive activities routinely yielding new and revised somethings as they come to be consciously apprehended by humans. Our consciousness is the “hermeneutic workspace” (Straight, 1977) that enlightens, or “re-enlightens,” as the case may be, everything we encounter. We normally take these illuminations for granted, assuming they connect us directly with the “real” world – compelling us to believe in “the world as it is” – yet research in psychology and science and their histories routinely show this not to be the case. We continuously conflate the world and people beyond us with our interpretations and understandings of them. It is our consciousness that continuously and actively transforms “nothings” into “somethings,” as well as “nobodies” into “somebodies,” and re-enlightens our previous somethings.

“Something” and “nothing” are neither objective facts nor the absence of them, except in an inquiry such as “why nothing becomes something,” which is to say, “something” and “nothing” are tightly linked constructs in this formulation. Aside from which, “something” is a characterization of whatever it is we think is “something,” yet we never describe it simply as “something,” but rather something interesting, important, portentous, etc. Analogously, aside from the formulation inquiring, “why nothing becomes something,” “nothing” is a characterization of what we may deny (God, climate change, the claims of “right-wing nuts,” evolution, etc.). “Nothing” is either our vision of the past, or own lack of understanding, or our vision of the past or a putative denial of what someone else (less attuned than we!) may countenance as “something,” something even important or sacred.

This is not to say, of course, that the physical world does not exist apart from our consciousness or awareness of it – it does. Rather, we can only process and confront our world in the here and now, in terms of our consciousness-mediated perspectives, all of which are continuously subject to change. The sun revolved around the earth until Copernicus and then Galileo persuaded us that it was the other way around. The discovery of Neanderthals in Europe transformed “nothing,” at least for Europeans, into “something” and “somebodies” (even if we don't know their identities):

stodgy, brutish, barely sentient creatures. More recently scientists have revised these somethings into sentient, tool- and language-using creatures whose DNA is part of most Europeans and their descendants, most likely including you, my reader, and me (Cochran, G. & Harpending, H., 2009, pp. 710–722).

Nothing is no longer “nothing,” even in physics and cosmology. In particular, the discovery of the Higgs Boson has revised our understanding of intergalactic space. Long regarded as the Biblical Void, eternal empty space from which the universe emerged or was created, depending on the respective perspectives of the Big Bang theory or God’s creation, “nothing” is no longer understood as nothing. According to theoretical physicist and cosmologist Lawrence Krauss, the modern universe is a “boiling, bubbling brew of virtual particles popping in and out of existence on a timescale so short you can’t see them... Empty space is unstable” (Rincon, P. (2010)). It was a remarkable accident that ignited the Big Bang; according to Krauss, ours is “a universe from nothing” (Krauss, 2012). Historical inquiry – typically referred to simply as history – is evidently a case of transforming and retransforming nothings and nobodies of the past into somethings and someones from the perspective of the historian.

We never know as we read today’s news reports whether we really are reading what will become regarded as first drafts of history, even if subsequent accounts reveal that there are no true first drafts. Nor are there final revisions: there is no final word. Some stories have legs; most quietly disappear beneath waves of subsequent reporting and reported events that compete for space in the world’s media outlets. Reports that persist may subsequently gain influence as official accounts of past events. It is noteworthy that canonized events and individuals, contrary to the stereotype of the lone genius, tend not to be isolated or randomly distributed across time and place. They tend to cluster, at least in our (western) memories, into schools of thought and movements. Hence, to mention only a few familiar schools and movements as we remember them today, we can note clusters of:

- Fifth-century Athens dramatists (including Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes)
- Fourth-century Athens philosophers (including Plato and Aristotle)
- Fifteenth-century Medici Florence artists and sculptors (including Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Botticelli)
- Late sixteenth-century Elizabethan dramatists (including Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Jonson)
- Eighteenth-century classical composers (including Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven)
- Late nineteenth-century French Impressionists (including Cézanne, Degas, Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, and Sisley)
- Early twentieth-century American Jazz performers (including Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, and Duke Ellington) and 1960s American black intellectuals, including James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Albert Murray, Romare Bearden, and Ralph Ellison, who together articulated and propagated news ideas about black identity and black political power (Watkins, 2013, p. 1).

To these we may add scientific paradigms organized in retrospect around famously great scientists, including Ptolemy, Galileo, Newton, Einstein, and many others. In all these examples, revolutionary art and science punctuate normal art and science, not unlike Stephen Jay Gould’s account of evolution as “punctuated equilibria” (Eldredge & Gould, 1972). Or as Randall Collins (2000) puts it, “creativity is not a one-shot event, but a process stretching around the persons in whom it manifests itself, backwards, sideways, and forwards from the individuals whose names are the totemic emblems thrown up by their networks” (p. 621).

These movements all arose amidst key cultural, economic, and political networks, sponsored by powerful patrons from Pericles to the House of Medici and, starting in the Renaissance, wide-flung and prosperous international empires. Changing external conditions of social life, including large-scale political and economic changes, even military dominance, can spark periods of cultural and intellectual change. Shakespeare scholar Gary Taylor (1996) writes, “The English did not colonize so much of the world because they had Shakespeare. Shakespeare was like a local parasite

– attached to a species that eventually dominated its own niche and migrated out into others, taking the parasite along and introducing it into new ecosystems that had, often, no defenses against it” (pp. 97-98). The rise of the Elizabethan theater benefited from the humanist Renaissance, which opened a rich vein of ancient models, texts and other materials, e.g., histories. Gutenberg’s invention of movable type substantially reduced the cost of print, and as the Industrial Revolution unfolded, concentrated urban changes in London provided markets dense enough to support a capital-intensive leisure industry. Such receptive contexts harbored tipping points resonating, kindling, igniting, and fixing (i.e., valorizing) influence.

Consider America’s role in World War II. The 1941 Pearl Harbor attacks are continuously remembered – Franklin Roosevelt’s “a day that will go down in infamy” – largely because the United States won World War II; the Japanese attack of December 7, 1941, came to be the initial event in a narrative ending in American victory over Japan and, along the way, Germany. And “World War II,” we now understand, was “The Good War” (Studs Terkel) fought by the “Greatest Generation” (Tom Brokaw), displacing “the Great War” and relegating it to lesser status as “World War I.” History, properly understood, requires a narrative. As Claude Lanzmann (1996) argues, with reference to the Holocaust, “The words that are thus written take the place of the past; these words, rather than the events themselves, will be remembered” (p. 83). Following Eldredge & Gould (1972), we see that more than biological evolution is governed by contingency. The succession of events in our lives is always accompanied by biographies shaped by contemporary contexts and highlighted in retrospective narratives.

Front-page events more typically fade from public memory in a few news cycles; with today’s Internet, this can happen in mere hours. The Hurricane of 1900, which hit Galveston, Texas, on September 8, 1900, was the deadliest hurricane in US history, killing as many as 12,000 people (Gibson, 2006), far more than the attacks on Pearl Harbor or the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Yet September 8th typically passes without adieu or any official commemoration. And whether or not 9/11 remains the momentous event it seems to most Americans today – whether it was a Pearl Harbor or a Galveston Hurricane event – will depend on what part it plays in future narratives. Nor can we predict which hurricane, if any, might become a climate change tipping point event.

The December 14, 2012, Newtown, Connecticut, Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre of twenty second graders and six teachers and school administrators was the 346th American school shooting since 1900. Recent notable school shootings include #300, the April 20, 1999, massacre at Columbine High School, where two students killed twelve students and one teacher and wounded twenty-one others before committing suicide; and #318, the execution-style slayings of female students at West Nickel Mines School in a rural Pennsylvania Amish community. While the Newtown murders momentarily propelled new efforts by gun control advocates, reform remains as elusive as ever; the killings continue unabated.

Columbine has come to be known as a student-planned massacre, while the Amish incident is remembered for the willingness of the parents to forgive the attacker. Whether any mass shooting will become a tipping point in American gun laws depends on the story, the storyteller, and the consumers of the narratives: Did twenty-six- and seven-year-olds die in vain, viciously denied the American promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Again, while history is about the past, it comes about only “after the fact.” We cannot recover the past, though we can re-enlighten it.

The foundational level of historical data is not the “facts,” but rather what is not thrown away (for me perhaps the “junk” in my basement), and the commemoration requires a death, at least one survivor who remembers, and a struggle and competition among survivors and memories. And – I shall call it Taylor’s Rule – at least two cycles of death-survivor-struggle – typically two different, and not necessarily succeeding, generations – must elapse as generations of detractors die and the survivors pass on their memories, which compete to be settled in ensuing contexts and perhaps revised in subsequent contexts. Ultimately the accounts and narratives of the survivors fix “the way it was,” at least for a while. And the more successfully such events and seminal figures enter the cultural mainstream, the more durable and commonplace they become; as historical awareness of original events attenuates – stories begetting stories begetting stories – they become “normalized”

(Rosenfield, 2015, p. 11) sometimes trivialized, sometimes forgotten, but always transformed. History is indeed “made.”

Plato and Aristotle are commonly recognized as the great philosophers of ancient Greece. Plato’s reputation endured (Collins, 1998, pp. 89–90) whereas Aristotle’s influence evaporated soon after his death, virtually collapsing in only a few generations. It was only with Averroës (1126–1198), an Islamic philosopher known as Ibn Rushd born in Córdoba, Spain, that Aristotle achieved the recognition on a par with Plato familiar to us today. Averroës’s famous commentaries on Aristotle influenced Christendom starting around 1250, particularly through thirteenth-century European translations of his works from Latin (Grant, 1996, p. 30). These translations launched the popularization of Aristotle and were responsible for the development of scholasticism in medieval Europe (Sonneborn, 2006, p. 89).

Yet another figure widely celebrated today though not always is Martin Luther King, much like Frank Lloyd Wright, was once met with widespread loathing and disapproval. But no more. As Jason Somali writes, every year in January, Americans of all races, backgrounds, and ideologies celebrate the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He is rightly lionized and sanctified by whites as well as blacks and by Republicans as well as Democrats. It is easy to forget that, until fairly recently, many white Americans loathed Dr. King. They perceived him as a rebel rouser and an agitator; some rejoiced in his assassination in April 1968. How they got from loathing to loving is less a story about growing tolerance and diminishing racism, and more about the ways that Dr. King’s legacy has been scrubbed and re-narrated. But Dr. King’s legacy – the meaning of “Martin Luther King in the popular mind began to change as soon as the man himself left us... We have molded him into a gentle champion of color blindness” (Somali, 2017).

In these many examples, we see that history and influence happen only downstream from the events and individuals whose identities are transformed and constructed in a process of objectification Bakhtin (1990) called consummation. As utterances gain meaning only in the response of a conversant, an individual’s identity is also constructed downstream by others. Hence, just as Jesus never knew he was a Christian, we can never know ourselves.

Pioneer status is conferred by succeeding generations, not accomplished entirely by the pioneers; as with Oedipus’s curse, seminal figures do not know nor can they fully anticipate their identities. Hence, Aristotle had no idea of his subsequent influence by way of an Islamic scholar writing in Latin. The French Impressionists only learned that they were Impressionists when art critic Louis Leroy (1874) published a satiric, derisive review titled “The Exhibition of the Impressionists,” not unlike the opposition Tea Party Republicans renaming the Affordable Care Act (ACA) “Obamacare,” a name President Obama himself adopted. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven had no idea they were key figures in Western “classical” music. Bach didn’t know he might be a Baroque composer. Had his contemporaries known he was a great composer, half of his scores would not have been lost after his death. Beethoven didn’t know he might be a Romantic composer. All these categories bleed. Alex Ross (2004a) puts it this way:

I hate “classical music”: not the thing but the name. It traps a tenaciously living art in a theme park of the past. It cancels out the possibility that music in the spirit of Beethoven could still be created today. It banishes into limbo the work of thousands of active composers who have to explain to otherwise well-informed people what it is they do for a living. The phrase is a masterpiece of negative publicity, a tour de force of anti-hype. I wish there were another name. I envy jazz people who speak simply of “the music.” Some jazz aficionados also call their art “America’s classical music,” and I propose a trade: they can have “classical,” I’ll take “the music.”

Ross (2004b) goes on to narrate a charming tale of the cultural development of classical music:

The rise of “classical music” mirrored the rise of the commercial middle class, which employed Beethoven as an escalator to the social heights. Concert halls grew quiet and reserved, habits and attire formal. Improvisation was phased out; the score became sacred. Audiences were discouraged from applauding while the music played – it had been the custom to clap after a good tune or a dazzling solo – or between movements. Patrons of the Wagner festival in Bayreuth proved notoriously militant in the

suppression of applause. At an early performance of Parsifal, listeners hissed at an unmusical vulgarian who yelled out “Bravo!” after the Flower Maidens scene. The troublemaker was the man who had written the opera. The Wagnerians were taking Wagner more seriously than he took himself – an alarming development.

Consider the Holocaust. For hundreds of years before the Nazi program of exterminating European Jews during World War II, the word holocaust was commonly used in English to denote great massacres. Starting in the 1960s, holocaust became “the Holocaust,” largely restricted by scholars, writers, and others to reference the Nazi genocide (Niewyk, D., 2012, pp. 191–248). The term genocide, coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin (Oxford English Dictionary 1944, pp. ix, 79) was used to indict Nazi leaders at the Nuremberg trials after World War II, and was first codified in international law at the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG).

All accounts of the Holocaust focus on victims, perpetrators, and survivors. But since 1948, each of these groups has changed. Victims have expanded from Jews to include Slavs, Gypsies, the handicapped, homosexuals, and certain political and religious groups. The inclusion of these other groups has expanded the canonical Six Million to 11-12 million victims of the Nazis, including Russians. Recently published research from The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945* documents 30,000 slave labor camps; 1,150 Jewish ghettos; 980 concentration camps; 1,000 prisoner-of-war camps; 500 brothels filled with sex slaves; and thousands of other camps used for euthanizing the elderly and infirm, performing forced abortions, and “Germanizing” prisoners, or transporting victims to killing centers. Researchers have documented some 3,000 camps and so-called Jew houses in Berlin alone, while Hamburg held 1,300 sites (Lichtblau, 2013, p. 1). Perpetrators have expanded beyond Nazi officials to include many “ordinary Germans,” (Goldhagen, 1997) as well as Estonian, Vichy French, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian collaborators (Gaunt, D, P. Levine, & L. Palosuo, 2004). Heroes include rescuers, notably Oskar Schindler of *Schindler’s List*, and resisters to the tyranny of Fascist rule, including many Germans, notably the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, who led a failed assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, 1944. Survivors include camp survivors as well as Jewish heroes and avengers.

As historical narratives evolve, they re-enlighten, or, in Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) account, they “refract” the original event, transforming details, terms of reference, and the identities of the participants. “In these and other cases,” writes Alvin Rosenfeld (1915) “hermeneutical disputes about how the ‘story’ should be told or not told, even about whose ‘story’ it is and who, therefore, has the right to tell it, are not arcane matters but, in fact, issues of considerable cultural, political, and even national consequence” (p. 8).

And so we see that because histories of prior events and people are written after the fact, they are as much about the times in which they are written as they are about the past. Histories celebrate, commemorate, and/or “correct” our understandings of past events; they work not by recovering the past but by historicizing and re-enlightening it. As we have seen, each event so historicized entails an upstream and downstream. The downstream concerns the consequences of the event, for example, the recognition of the US dollar as the major international currency; the recognition of events as seminal and of individuals as pioneers in their fields; the rise of Christianity; the recognition of the Holocaust; or the formation of schools and -isms. The upstream is about the foundational events that are said to have enabled the event, for example, American victory in World War II; Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection; or the Nazi persecution of European Jews. In each case, the upstream, even if meticulously supported by a record, is constructed downstream.

## Final Remarks

Not all re-enlightenments are social or generational, but regularly unfold over the years (World War II), decades, generations (Frank Lloyd Wright), and centuries (Aristotle, classical music, Christianity); many and potentially all, for example the massacre of children at Sandy Hook, are still

playing out. Other potentially significant events are more transitory – an engaging conversation, psychotherapy and other forms of counseling, confession. Everyone can look back upon their lives and identify a particular episode – summer camp, a special high school class, the unexpected loss of a friend or relative, coming out, a change in medical condition – or relationship (first date, close friendship, mentor) that made a difference in their lives and so transformed them. Even such fleeting and episodic events have their own re-enlightenments, histories, and development.

Some re-enlightenments can be of more than one type. When Wright returned to Oak Park with Mamah in 1909, Oak Park quickly re-enlightened what we can now understand as an episodic event, as were each of the many subsequent re-enlightenments occurring over the course of his life and afterwards. In this example and others, we can understand that some re-enlightenments are seminal, meaning they change life and identities in fundamental, lasting ways. The most typical such transformations are technological and scientific, for example, the Industrial Revolution or the decoding of DNA. Seminal figures include Jesus, Darwin, and Einstein.

In this paper, we have noted that while history always tells us about the past, it remains a fundamental irony that because histories of prior events and people are written after the fact, they are as much about the times in which they are written as they are about the past. Histories celebrate, memorialize, and/or “correct” our understandings of past events; they work not by recovering the past but by historicizing and re-enlightening it. As we have seen, each event so historicized entails an upstream and downstream. The downstream concerns the consequences of the event. The upstream is about the foundational events that are said to have enabled the event. In each case, the upstream, even if meticulously supported by a record, is constructed downstream. These are the main features and concepts of history as a dialogic process.

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## История как диалогический процесс: кейс Фрэнка Ллойда Райта

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*Аннотация.* В данном теоретическом эссе разрабатывается подход к историографии с использованием диалогических концепций для построения историй. Отмечается, что некоторые высказывания оказываются более важными в сравнении с другими в зависимости от контекста и постоянно открыты для пересмотра; как утверждал Бахтин, «последнее слово еще не сказано». Представленный анализ раскрывает роль рефракции, которая определяется как совокупность когнитивных, исторических, личностных и культурных трансформаций понимания, заменяющих старое новым. В данной схеме рефракции функционируют как базовые принципы выделения событий, разграничивающих и формирующих как *нисходящие*, так и *восходящие* потоки. Нисходящие потоки

ориентированы на последствия рефракции, в том числе как стимул для конструирования историй. Восходящие потоки ориентированы на выявление истоков событий, о которых говорят целью увековечения памяти о них. Диалогически истории генерируются в этих восходящих потоках; они могут быть идентифицированы/отобраны на основании оценки последствий прошлого события как заслуживающего внимания, но их отбор и обработка постфактум предполагает обращение к их истокам. Кейс-стади прослеживает этапы рецепции творчества американского архитектора Фрэнка Ллойда Райта из Оук-Парка (Иллинойс, США) до признания его величайшим архитектором Америки, рассматривая их не как ступени его карьеры, а скорее как последовательность конкурирующих нарративов.

*Ключевые слова:* адресность, диалогизм, рефракция, история, восходящие потоки, нисходящие потоки.