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The Nature of Retreat

These four texts, edited from lectures given at the University of California, Berkeley, College of Environmental Design, in March, 1991, are about persistence, about ideas reflected on, carried on, through time.

We take persistence to mean not only that ideas persist in the *Three Generations* ❶ way, in which the three generations of people at work at the same time learn and absorb from each other,¹ but also that ideas persist from deep time and work within a single long work-life. For example, in the fourth text, “Phenomenon in Parallel,” the 1947 work-life connection between Charles and Ray Eames and Mies van der Rohe records a sudden *Three Generations* insight.

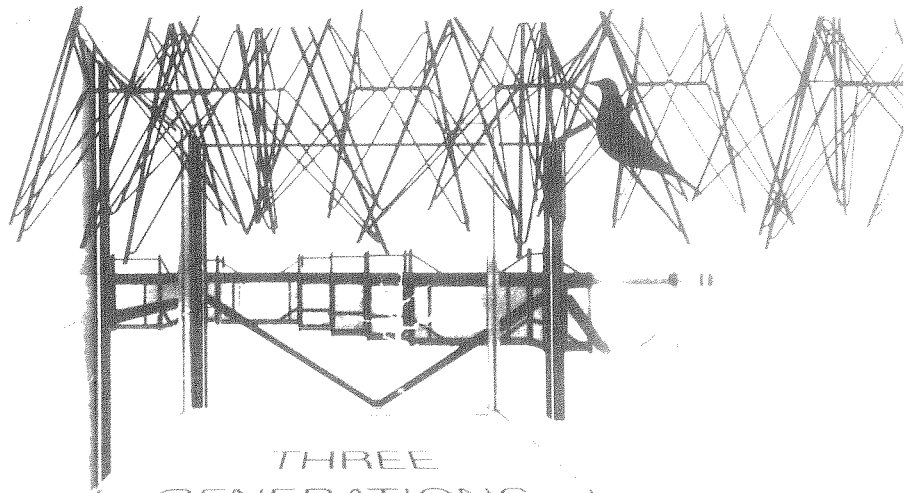
It might seem extraordinary, the comparison implied in the third and the fourth texts, among the nature of the two habitats, *study* and *desert*, of St. Jerome; the way the Eameses thought in 1949 about their site in the Santa Monica Canyon; and the objectives of our *Patio and Pavilion* exhibit at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1956. ❷ The real St. Jerome lived in the fourth century, and the painters of the allegories of his life, the idylls of inhabitation, worked between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. We follow on, it would seem, an idea and an ideal persisting from deep time.

And to discover within our own work an unconscious persistence of “the track,” as a binding element, an essential part, of the mechanism of “conglomerate ordering,”² is an example of observing persistence within a work-life.

The *random aesthetic*, the “*as found*,” the *Cluster*, persist in our work in response to place; they have to do with appropriate place making. Through all four texts runs a concern for the way we should act in the present, and for us, the texts are pointers towards what we will do next.

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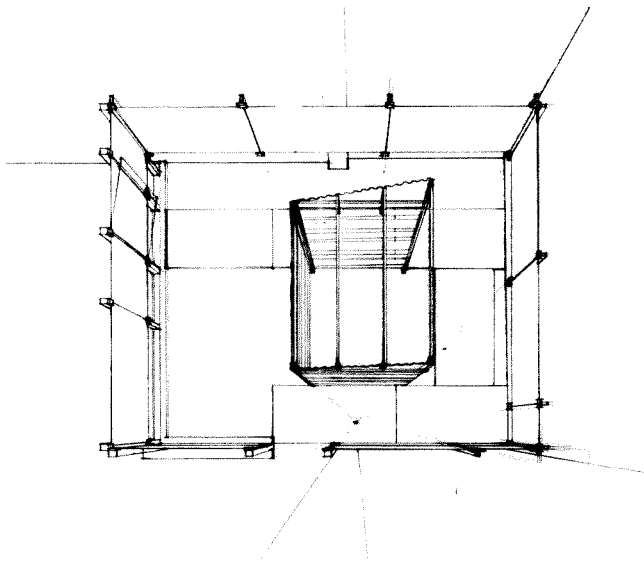
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THREE
GENERATIONS

Outline drawing of *This is Tomorrow* exhibition, 1956.
Pencil on tracing paper drawing
by Peter Smithson.

①

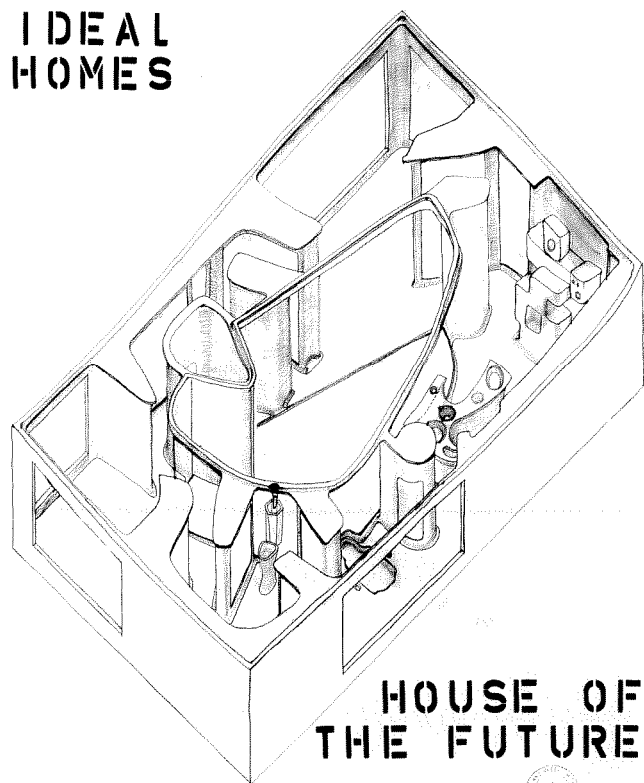


House of the Future, Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, 1956.

Pencil axonometric by Alison Smithson.

②

IDEAL HOMES



HOUSE OF THE FUTURE

HF 5502 1/2"

PATIO AND PAVILION, 1956, RECONSTRUCTED U.S.A. 1990

The 1950s are recalled by the reconstruction of our Patio and Pavilion in The Independent Group exhibition that is being installed in four art galleries in the U.S. during 1990-91.

The year 1956 happened to be incredibly rich for us in terms of built-ideas.

Many of the ideas in the *Patio and Pavilion* section of the *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition had already been explored in the spring of that same year in a different form in the *House of the Future*, part of the *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*. ① ②

Patio and Pavilion was a pavilion in a patio.

The *House of the Future* was a patio encapsulated by its pavilion.

Both speak to a portion of the sky, for this was also the period in which we had created our "Private Sky" diagram that would allow dwellings their right to address a portion of the sky with its, as yet, unbreathed air. ③

The change in thinking, in attitude, that both of these 1956 exhibition buildings effected — and still represent — was our beginning of a response to climate, a response that sought to enhance the quality of life in the house and protect the house from the disadvantageous effects of a northern island climate. This reflected a consciousness of the house that celebrates the material pleasures of being in a specific location, a part of its response to place; an extension of the idea of the house as a vehicle for the celebration of the life lived within it, decorated by its use for the day-to-day celebration by its inhabitants.

Our 1950s attitude was a change from the venerable pavilions that we inherited from the Modern Movement. The "pavilions" of our architectural grandparents, such as Le Corbusier's *Esprit Nouveau* and Mies' *Barcelona Pavilion*, belong to a world innocent of machines and technology. All our projects, from our Team 10 housing clusters to the houses and housing we managed to build, try to protect the occupants and position them so they can appreciate the seasons, enjoy quiet and feel protected.

Mies could take quietness for granted in the first half of the century. He could be sure of the individual rights of the undisturbed, inhabited place situated away from industry until almost at the end of his life, when the new

state highway was built directly opposite his last pavilion, the Farnsworth House. (A mobile home camp grew on the other side of the river; the tree screen had to be left so dense one is barely conscious of the river when in the house or on the property.) Society in its great numbers, its machines and technologies, now penetrates everywhere and impinges on everything.

Starting to work in the 1950s we never could make the innocent assumptions available to the *Heroic Period of Modern Architecture*. In the American magazines of the 1940s and 1950s we could foresee the consumer-oriented society that would, through advertisements, change all our lives. But, primarily, World War II had acted as the great divide between ourselves and our grandparent architects, who built for the few tall cars and for the genteel who shopped for rarely replaced objects. Similarly, other realities must divide us from those of the generation that follows us, those who feel the need to reconstruct pavilions.

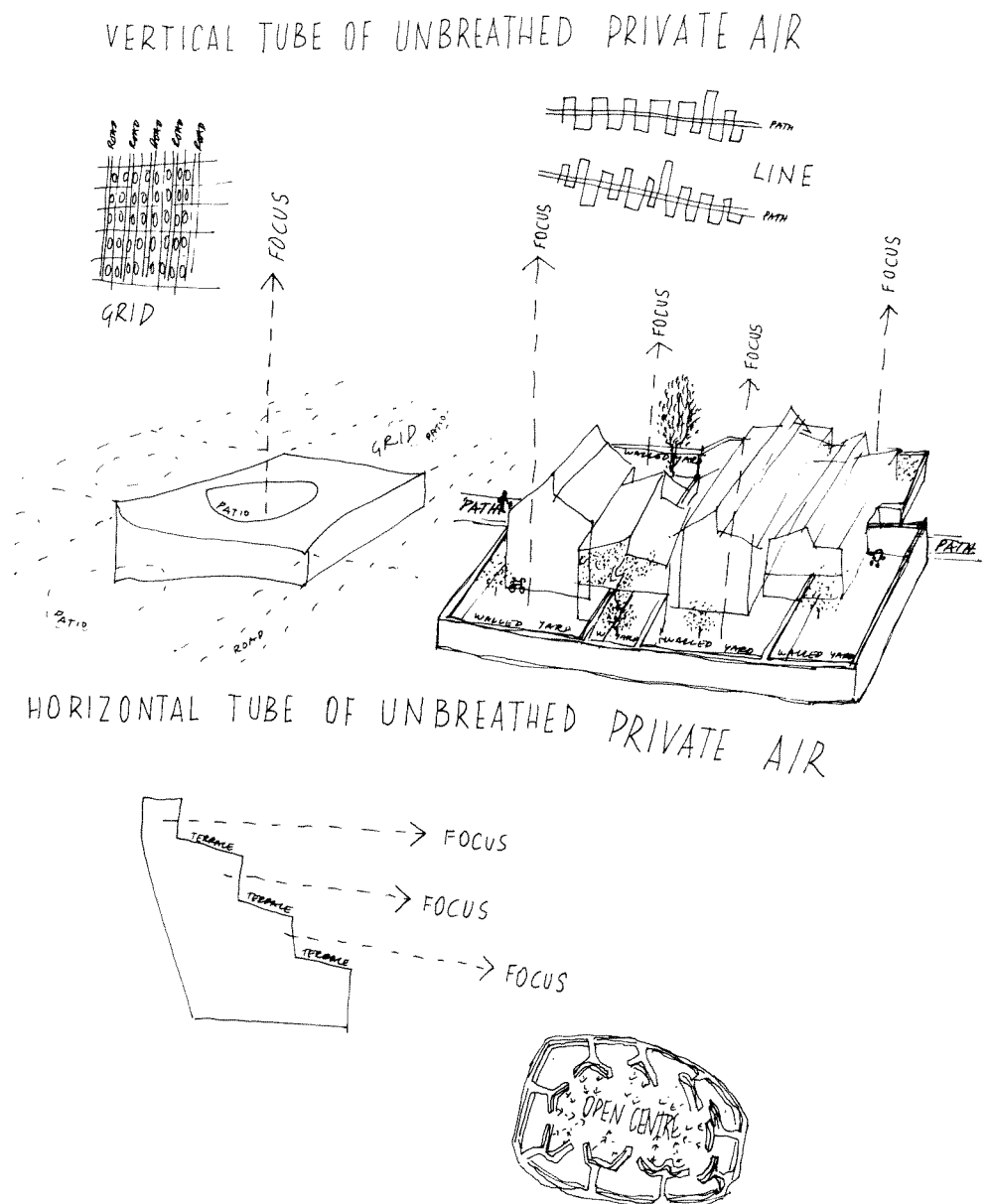
Here I must make a slight digression to do with this seemingly universal need to represent a previous actuality. I both value memory and am frightened of my own uncalled-for remembering (by this I mean, when something I see recalls something I do not want in my head). What I can remember is composed of things seen and heard; I consider my

memory a sampler of European and British Empire history. I work with memory, and it allows me to make connections to the past, interpolations of the present and gives foresight — a most valuable facility for an architect — as to a possible future.

Take a working example. I visit a site in England or Europe for the first time. I am a first time visitor to a place that has been living many years, has been

mutated by many hands. (Even a green field site in Europe has been worked over for anything up to a thousand years.) I am an intruder and, as such, instinctively respect place. Learning about previous patterns of use of a place allows me to understand how the all-around of the site came about. This knowledge is part of the richness of information necessary to my thinking about how meaningfully

Diagram of unbreathed private air.
Ink drawing by Peter Smithson.
E



to extend the existing built fabric and how to insert the new so that people may better appreciate the existing all-around of the place. As architects we are involved with the history of people's use of places.

Memory is also valuable to me because my mind is able to turn history into an energy to create new things, which people can then use without having to think about how to use them; or new places that people can feel fit their needs, in the same way they feel comfortable in their choice of clothing. Remembering is therefore an enabling device. Presumably the generation that follows ours feels that the reconstruction of pavil-

ions is an enabling device. What I do not understand is, what for?

I have to go on about this will-to-reconstruct, because it is a happening of our time. I was in and out of Barcelona during the 1985-86 reconstruction of the Mies Pavilion and I enjoyed watching it go up, for we knew Mies and when the Pavilion's working drawings were first displayed in London in the 1970s we met the man who did them and so on. Our initial attitude was that reconstruction destroys a dream and that, by way of recompense, it cannot recreate for a subsequent generation the excitement, or the impact, experienced by architects of our third

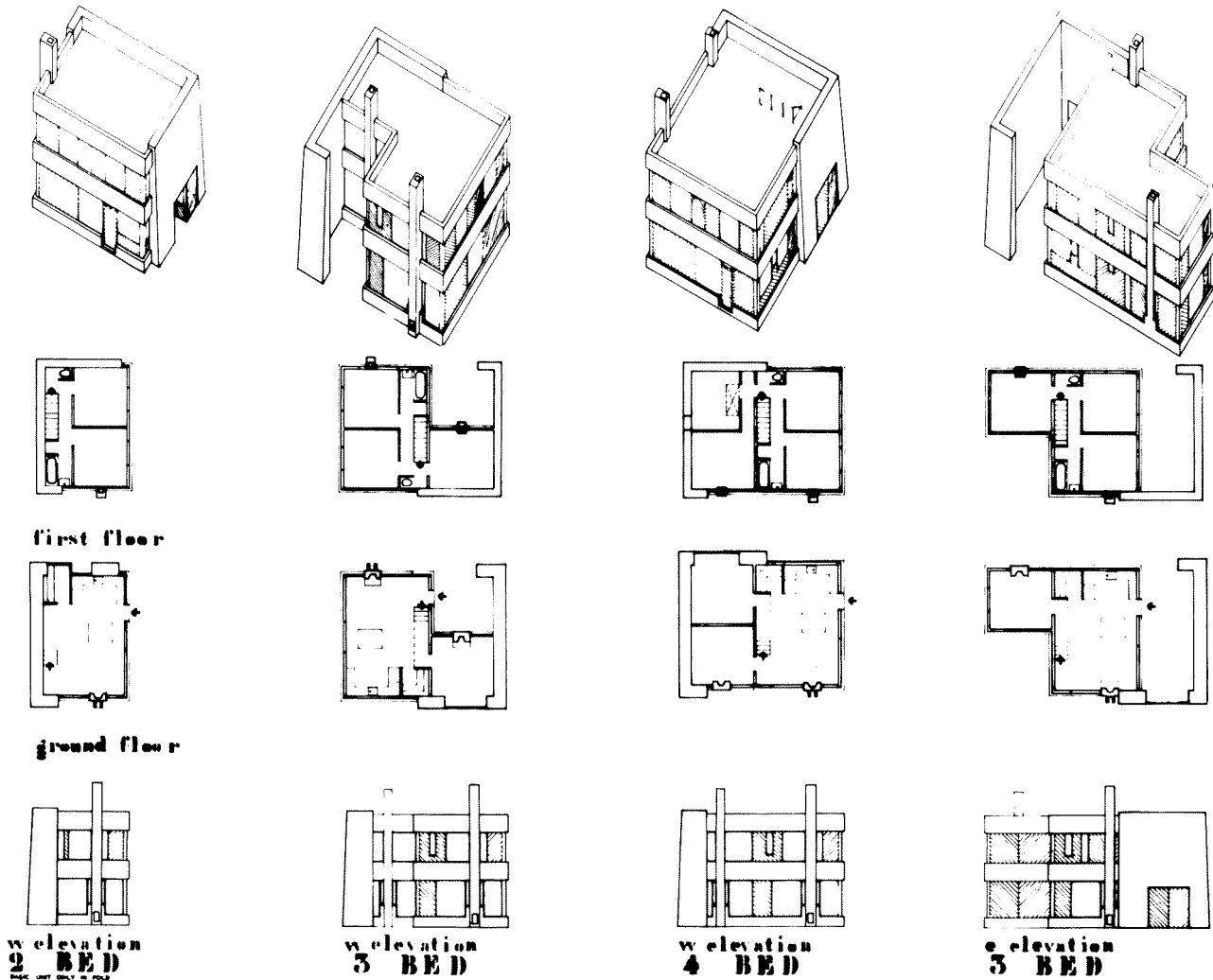
generation on first discovering photographs of a lost *Heroic Period of Modern Architecture* pavilion.

Therefore, my attitude toward reconstruction remains ambivalent, as does my attitude toward the formation of so many reconstructions of "what life was like." This activity is not as creative as that of the nineteenth century, which invented a new type of building in which to view painted panoramas of cities (which were then still containable within an overview): Our century has only been able to add sound to this experience.

Since I cannot believe that those walking into the reconstructed *Patio and Pavilion* this year in the

Fold Houses, 1955. Project taken to CIAM 10 at Dubrovnik.

4



U.S. (even if they know our writings) can feel the impact of that original time of 1956, or see in it the promise of so many of the ideas and attitudes that we are still unfolding, extending, let my quote from two initiatory manifestos of ours of winter 1955 prior to the *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition:

At the Whitechapel Gallery from August to September 1956 there will be introduced a new order of art manifestation. Its object is the exploration of a new field, that of large-scale art work; the border between architecture and the plastic arts.

The whole exhibition can be considered a kind of art proving-ground. Our own group interprets the general aim of the exhibition in a rather special way, for we believe that we are concerned in our separate disciplines with satisfying different aspects of man.

We try in all our collaborations to establish contact between the individuals at a level of ideas, not as a collaboration devoted to an aesthetic movement.

In this instance we have worked at a kind of symbolic "Habitat" in which are found in some form or other the basic human needs — a piece of ground, a view of the sky, privacy, the presence of nature and of animals when we need them, and symbols of the basic human urges — to extend and control, to move.

The architect's work of providing a context for the individual to realize himself in, and the artist's work of giving signs and images to the stages of this realisation,



meet in a single act, full of inconsistencies and apparent irrelevances of every moment, but full of life.

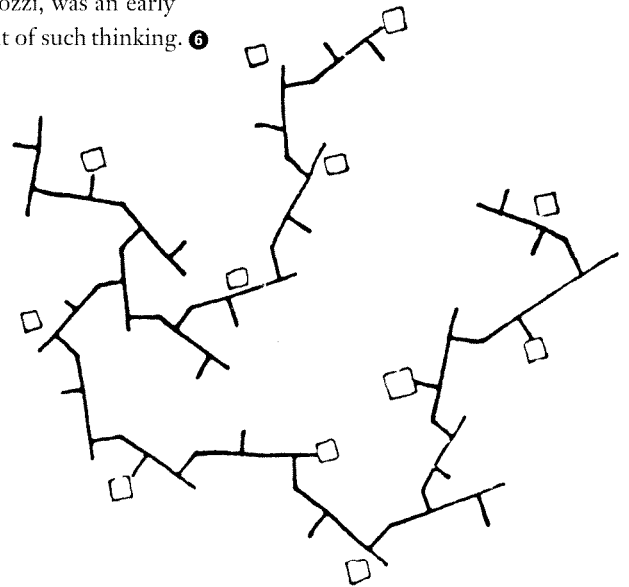
The 1950s was a period of exploration of appropriate forms for grouping together buildings, principally housing. The *Fold Houses* of 1955, intended for infill of a Yorkshire village, are an example. They were offered at the start of our Team 10 thinking at La Sarraz and taken to CIAM 10 at Dubrovnik, 1956, to answer the theme of "Habitat." ④

Starting in 1951 we made a series of cluster diagrams ⑤ and cluster-mats that Peter Smithson explored in watercolor images.

At that time we spoke of a *random aesthetic* that sometimes entailed a "free-fall" of ideas that allowed

things to take up their own intrinsic patterns. The arrangement of the photographs in the *Parallel of Life and Art* exhibition, which we made with Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, was an early result of such thinking. ⑥

⑥
Parallel of Life and Art, 1953.
By Alison and Peter Smithson,
with Nigel Henderson and
Eduardo Paolozzi.



⑤
The cluster district of a city.
Drawing by Alison Smithson.

Related to these ideas was our attitude to the *as found*, the serious consideration of what existed, an attitude toward used things, built places and landscape that I have already described. This attitude was inherent in the act of the inhabitation of our *Patio and Pavilion*, for we came back from camping on our way to and from CIAM 10 at Dubrovnik in September, 1956, to find *Patio and Pavilion* built to our drawings and “inhabited” by Nigel and Eduardo.

Let me quote a document of the period:

With the transparent roof of the Pavilion made to display Nigel's arrangement of the “as found”; the sand surface of the Patio chosen to receive our collaborators' tile

and object arrangement; the reflective compounding walls to include every visitor as an “inhabitant”; the “art of the as found” was made manifest. ⑦

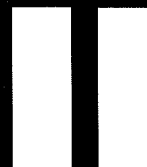
Our exhibit for *This Is Tomorrow* was to do with “light-touch” inhabitation of the Earth; with the transient, which, along with the permanent, we wrote about in the early 1950s (before the hippies, before the restlessness of people was obvious through the constant movement and migration we have seen this last quarter of a century). You could say that the nomads' dream is an instinct of our time, still unrequited: perhaps this is one good reason why we should be reminded of “light-touch” inhabitation by the reconstruction.

—A.M.S., 1990



⑦

This is Tomorrow exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, 1956. Photo by Nigel Henderson.



PATIO AND PAVILION RE-BUILT: A GOTHIC AFTER-THOUGHT

I have recently written that we in Europe are ready for another architectural ordering that is in a way “Gothic”; that is, non-compositional, non-theatrical — an ordering we are calling “conglomerate.”

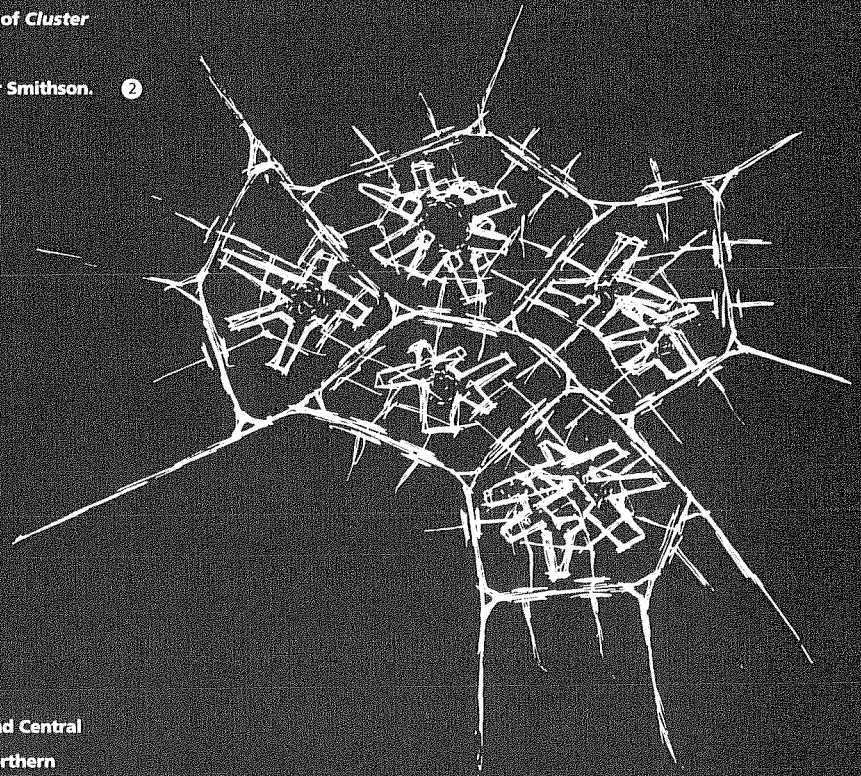
Looking to the period of the *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition when *Patio and Pavilion* was first shown; to the time of one's first knowledge of American freeways from books (especially Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture*, the single most formative academic book for those who were students in the 1940s); to the experiences in the 1950s of the reality of those freeways serving New York, Boston, Los Angeles; and to the realization that only in those freeways had we something capable of ordering a modern city, of providing a system of reference to which one can relate (as to a range of hills or a stream) with all one's sensory equipment — in that period one could say Gothic sensibilities began to grow again.

The argument of that long sentence is that in medieval times the relationship with the land, a range of hills, a river, or the sea was taken in with all the senses and gave the ordering and placement of houses and streets. This sort of relationship is re-established by the "geographic nature" of the freeways. One does not see them, one lives them in the same way as one lives with the sea: They have their seasons, their smells, their festivals. One's relationship to them is Gothic. ❶

In the early 1950s we began to work with this idea, to consider freeways as an urban structuring device. ❷ I now perceive (as a consequence of this 1990s rebuilding of *Patio*

Follow-up study of *Cluster City*, 1961.

Drawing by Peter Smithson. ❷



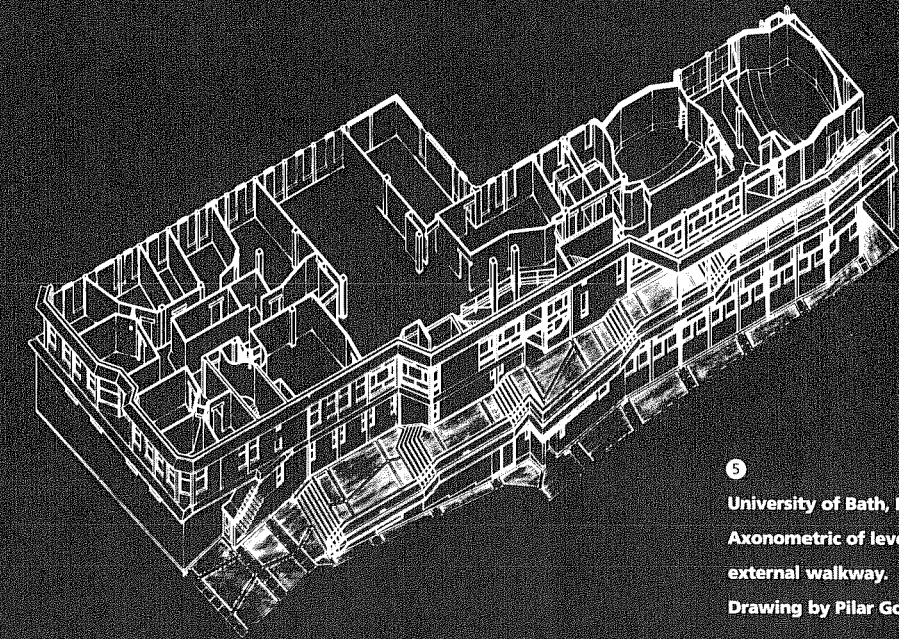
Junction of Grand Central Parkway and Northern Boulevard, New York City. "One's relationship to them is Gothic." ❶



and Pavilion) that in the original exhibit, put together before I had directly experienced the American freeways, we had made a small domain structured by the track around the pavilion, which held together a miscellaneous assembly — a mode of organization that is essentially Gothic. ③ ④ It is a mode we have followed, more or less, ever since. ⑤ ⑥

In *Patio and Pavilion*, the size of the enclosure, the number of persons that can be contained within, exactly suits the activity and that, too, is Gothic. Gothic space is net to activity. ⑦

By this reading *Patio and Pavilion* can be seen as a recovery of sensibilities that had been laid dormant by the overwhelmingly theatrical and graphic



⑤ University of Bath, Building 6E. Axonometric of level 2, with external walkway. Drawing by Pilar Gonzales.

characteristics of Italian Renaissance architecture.

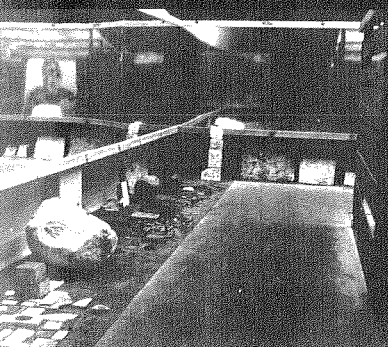
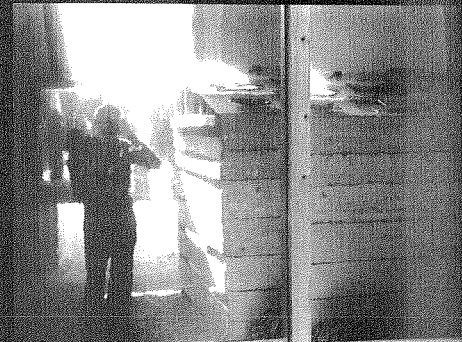
In England, the sensibility, the language, of Italian architecture overwhelmed the native mode in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We are now ready, I believe,

for another architectural ordering in which fragments of the Gothic sensibilities are recovered. The rebuilding of *Patio and Pavilion* is a pre-signal of an important happening.

—P.S.

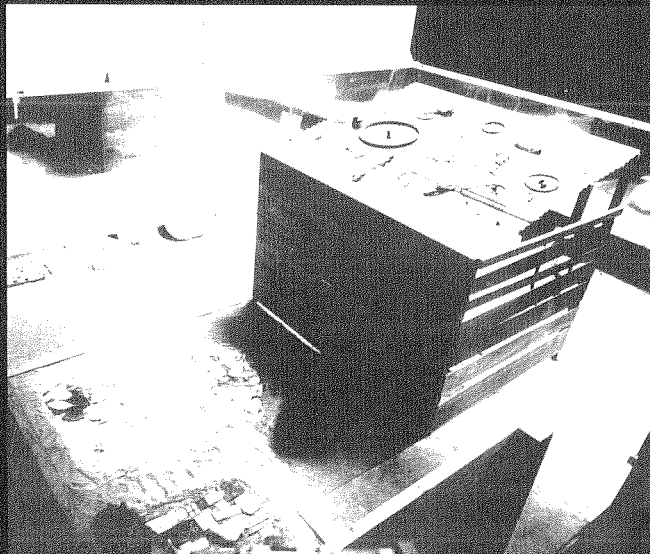
Patio and Pavilion, reconstructed at I.C.A. London, 1990. "Gothic space is net to activity." Photo by Peter Smithson.

⑦



④ "... the track around the building, which held a mysterious assembly ..."
Photo by Nigel Henderson.

Patio and Pavilion, view from above.
Photo by Nigel Henderson.



③



6
Walkway next to Building 6E,
University of Bath.
Photo by Peter Smithson.

THE IDYLL AND ST. JEROME

The fashion during the last decade for the reconstruction of seminal pavilions of the *Heroic Period of Modern Architecture* has included a simulation, a partial and a total reconstruction, of our 1956 *Patio and Pavilion*, the last being in the Independent Group exhibition. These various reconstructions have caused us to rethink our position as regards pavilions representative of the *idyll* of inhabitation.

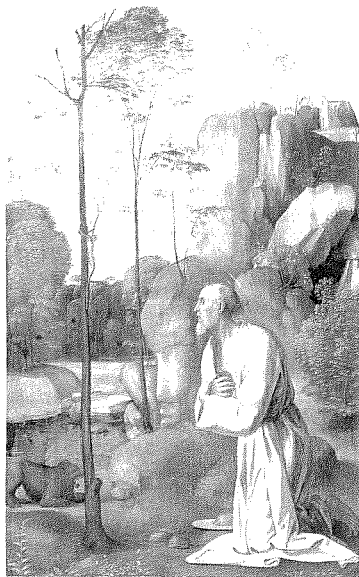
The allegory of the two alternative *idylls* inhabited by St. Jerome was brought to Europe's notice by Renaissance paintings (as if their contrasting-yet-connected subject matter particularly suited the humanist ideal). This recognition came more than a thousand years after Jerome's actual life; that is, the painters were painting between the years 1400 and 1700 and Jerome lived between 342 and 420. Renaissance paintings of Jerome can be used to think about the European *idyll* of inhabitation and what constitutes today the

idyllic setting of the *retreat in unspoilt nature*.

Our most recent thinking related to pavilions-as-idyll concerns *the fragment of an enclave*. I will try to explain the insight that generated this thinking and its implications for form giving.

The Energizing Cell and the Restorative Place in Nature: As Found in the Life of St. Jerome

The life of St. Jerome offers two alternative *idylls* — in the *study*, with books, with possibilities for communication with the world; and in the *desert*, a life of kindly asceticism in unspoilt nature. These two ideals are connected by a certain integrity, if not self-indulgence, of remaining one's own person in apartness, in quietude. Throughout European history, these connected alter



① **St. Jerome in the Desert.**
Tempera on panel by Baccio della Porta (called Fra Bartolommeo).

natives seem to have re-energized each other, in a way that people have been able to use the idea of one or the other to revitalize their sense of well-being; even to the extent of thereby reverifying the meaning of their lives.

St. Jerome in his *study* represents the ability of one to dedicate oneself to work at a self-appointed task, the calm of an inner peace, the ideal of a world at peace. ②

St. Jerome in the *desert* represents a human desire for the freedom that seems to exist in nature and the undiminishable freshness of its cycle of renewal — nature so immutable, omnipresent, overbearing that humans are relieved from responsibility for its complex order and balance. ①

Jerome's *study* can stand for the desire to enjoy built order, to be supported by civilized services, to be able to shut out the weather and temper the climate, to have, for our well-being, a perfected sufficiency in our place of work, with the tools of our profession, trade, housekeeping, at hand. Whereas the true *desert* of sand — where man stands alone between the ground and the sky, ringed by horizons that might be infinite — can be an allegory for the burning clarity that some minds achieve, for the dream of self-sufficiency, for an environment that makes no demands on social behavior, for nature taking responsibility for all decisions, everything.

As architects, seeking a balance between response to climate and our responsibility to extend appropriately our architectural inheritance, we can again treat Jerome's life as if it were some kind of ideal brief for a creative life in the city; for a life compatible with a renewed respect for nature. In this *idyll*, Jerome's *study* is an allegory for *idyllic inhabitation*.

We see in Jerome's *study*, as depicted by the painters, all modern conveniences: cool water and even wine, a beautiful wash bowl and a clean towel, flowers, books, cupboards, writing materials, animals as companions, warm clothes and an amusing hat. Taken together, these elements signify all the benefits of an "urban," civilized domain.

The *study* is also an allegory for easy, written communication; for perfection, the perfected object; for choice in objects and thereby for trade. Jerome in his *study* reaches out to the world of the student because the form of the European college is inherited from the teaching monasteries that gave form to the need for quiet within the cell and the need for easy connection to books. In Renaissance painting it seems as if Jerome's *study* is also an allegory for the freedom to choose the country in which one works, something the Roman world offered, something that we like to do today.



②
St. Jerome in His Study,
 1514.
 Engraving by Albrecht Dürer.

**The Study Within a
 Fragment of an Enclave**

In Bethlehem Jerome probably took to his cave as a *study* because of the knowledge he gained in the *desert*, that such a place offered effective protection from the climate. Thus the encapsulation of *study* within *desert* has already been accomplished.

In an urban setting or nature, all creative activity relies on being cocooned, on its fragment of space being within an enclave, a protective territory. A piece of territory of one's own that society respects is the *idyll* of the pavilion in the defensible enclave. When there is outside a supportive, civilized, or natural framework, creative activity can happen inside. It might be that the only easily defensible enclave is again the *desert*. We will have come full circle.

—A.M.S.

IV

PHENOMENON IN PARALLEL: EAMES HOUSE, PATIO AND PAVILION

In 1945, the year World War II ended, Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen made their initial proposal for *Case Study Houses Eight and Nine*. The proposal was for a house and studio for the Eameses and a separate house for John Entenza, the sponsor of

the *Case Study Houses* and the editor and owner of the magazine *Arts & Architecture*, in which the proposals were published.

The site, in Santa Monica Canyon, was a real one. Describing it, Eames and Saarinen wrote, "This is grounded in meadow and hill, protected on all sides from intrusive developments, free of the usual surrounding clutter, safe from urban clutter; not, however, removed from the necessary conveniences and the reassurances of city living."⁴

The Eames House sat on "the hill" at one end and over "the meadow" at the other on two thin, cross-braced supports, with a cantilever beyond, The Eameses (Charles and Ray) called it the *Bridge House*. ① ②



①
Eames' house.
 Photo © Julius Shulman.

According to our notes from a visit to Ray Eames in 1983, she reported looking back to this time:

... John Entenza thought of buying plateau/shared Plateau known about for long time but Will Rogers would never sell ... Family sold ... "bridge" first scheme and structure on site when price went up and became worth three times as much therefore thought why be so wasteful and survey found trees in straight line ... all plateau impenetrable at time ... idea to excavate/cut into cliff behind and see how much space could be built with same amount of box section steel with zig zag beams: result 3 times as much space nearly and more reticent idea of building ... the bridge a young idea.

Between the publication of the initial project in December 1945 and the start on site in early 1949 there was a three-year interval.

In 1947 Mies van der Rohe made an installation of Eames' furniture for the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *One Hundred Useful Objects of Fine Design*. Certainly it is unlikely that Charles Eames was innocent of the American work of Mies, whose "Sketch for a Glass House on a Hillside, c. 1934," is the probable base source for the 1945 *Bridge House*. The notion would have trickled through to Charles Eames via the architecture culture generally in the way things happen.

Mies' built work at the Illinois Institute of Technology — especially the Minerals and Metals Research Building (1942-43), with its coolness, its regularity and its standard steel-window sashes — was something different. It had a quality that somehow opened the gate to another way, a way that was

retreated from, or not regarded, by Mies but was followed by others.

So, somehow through Mies, through a rejection of much of Mies, but still through Mies, or so it seems to me, we get the 1949 house — something wholly original, wholly American. What is extraordinary is how, at a time when American culture in its art-propaganda stance was very Europe-oriented; this house in Santa Monica seemed wholly free.

The house was an Eames-defined territory, established by the pavilions set into it that reinforced the line of trees, with, on occupation, an Eames content. Seen from Europe, it was something wonderful.

The framing, the skin, of the pavilions are a notation against which was played a content. ② Both house and content are perceived in graphic terms, an American phenomenon in contrast with the very concrete, very European, *Patio and Pavilion*. The Eames' House and *Patio and Pavilion* can be considered as phenomenon in parallel.

Patio and Pavilion

A text that was written at the time defined our group's objectives for *Patio and Pavilion*:

The actual form is very simple — a patio, or enclosed space, in which sits a pavilion. The patio and pavilion are furnished with objects which are symbols for the things we need — for example, a wheel image, for movement and for machines.



Eames house.

Photo © Julius Shulman. ②

*The method of work has been for the group to agree on the general idea and for the architects to provide a framework and for the artists to provide the objects.*⁵

To understand the interpretation we are giving here you must imagine *Patio and Pavilion* as originally realized at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1956. The “content,” the “objects of occupation” made or discovered by Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, was of a richness and authenticity that no facsimile can catch. 4 5 6 7 The vagueness of the images



3
Eames House. “House and content seen in graphic terms.”
Photo by Peter Smithson, 1978.

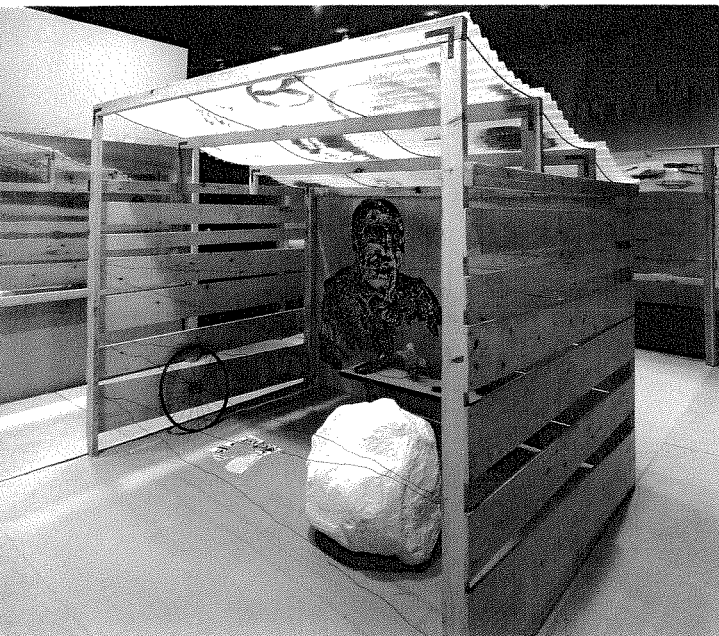
Jenkin's Room, Alison and Peter Smithson with Eduardo Paolozzi, 1952.
Photo by Peter Smithson.



4



5
Patio and Pavilion, 1956.
“A richness and authenticity no facsimile can catch.”
Photo by Nigel Henderson, 1956.



⑥ *Patio and Pavilion*,
reconstructed at University
Art Museum, Berkeley, 1990.
Photo by Ben Blackwell.
Courtesy University Art
Museum.

⑦



that were reflected back from the enclosing patio walls allowed a multitude of interpretations.

Patio and Pavilion presented a sense of completeness — territory, pavilion, objects of occupation — complete in the sense of walking into a house abandoned by the owners during the course of the evening meal, or into a ruined mine shut down by impending disaster and never re-opened.

Patio and Pavilion is a picture of the art-processes of the period of Samuel Becket, Jean Dubuffet, Jackson Pollock and Berthold Brecht.

The Eames House is a picture of the Eames.

—P.S.

Afterthought: Eames and the Seamed Glass Skin

In the tradition of the Crystal Palace, the surface is a regularly seamed glass skin that has no representational function as to structure, or arrangement, or determination of the thing it covers. The decision about the size of the unit of repetition for a seamed glass skin is similar to any other decision about the unit size of sheet material. With stone facings or glass it is traditionally related to the whole of which the unit forms part, but with plywood or patent-glazing the unit is almost certainly in practice that of the standard economic size (or sizes). When a building is made of standard pieces it would seem that it should be thought about in terms of the standard sizes of those pieces — the whole would be derived from the part in some way — an inversion of the Classical tradition. When the skin of a building is glass or tinted glass what is inside is explicit. That inside can be the carrier of the formal idea in the traditional way, or the scaffolding of a graphics of occupation in the Eames way. That is, it can be part of a visual conversation between the immovable inside, the seamed glass skin and a graphic equivalent of the occupiers' activities.⁶

Notes

1. In the 1980s Peter Smithson gave three lectures at the International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design that argued, *inter alia*, that because of the long work-life of architects, within the three generations at work at the same time, the younger learn from the older, the older from the younger, in the old artisan way. See Smithson's essays, "Three Generations," *ILAUD Annual Report, 1980* (Siena: ILAUD, 1980); "The Masque and the Exhibition," *ILAUD Annual Report, 1981* (Siena: ILAUD, 1981); and "Parallel Inventions," *ILAUD Year Book, 1983* (Siena: ILAUD, 1983).
2. See "Conglomerate Ordering," *ILAUD Year Book, 1986-87* (Siena: ILAUD, 1987); "Think of It as a Farm," *ILAUD Year Book, 1988-89* (Siena: ILAUD, 1989); and "The Recovery of Parts of the Gothic Mind," *ILAUD Year Book, 1990-91* (Siena: ILAUD, 1991).
3. Both the illustrations are solar pavilions. The solar pavilion that was built and inhabited was our own Upper Lawn, 1959, whose whole story was told in Folly, *UPPER LAWN, Solar Pavilion* (Barcelona: University of Barcelona, 1986).
4. *Arts & Architecture* (Dec., 1945).
5. Written for BBC Third Programme.
6. This passage was adapted from Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1973).