

## Bates' Burrows Lea Farm: la arquitectura del humo de Alison y Peter Smithson. // Bates' Burrows Lea Farm: the architecture of smoke at Alison and Peter Smithson.



La expresión "*historical parallel*" fue utilizada por los arquitectos Alison y Peter Smithson para establecer un diálogo entre la propuesta *Bates' Burrows Lea Farm* (1953) y la torre-fortaleza de *Castle Rising* (1183). La obra será definida por los arquitectos como una forma compacta, aislada, elevada por encima del territorio y protegida gracias al movimiento de tierras en torno a ella. Sin embargo, analizando ambas propuestas, la relación no parece acabar en esa primera descripción. La presente investigación trata de desvelar a través de un análisis comparado, como su concepción espacial se conciben a partir de un mismo arquetipo formal. Un arquetipo protagonista indispensable en la conformación y evolución de la casa inglesa: *el hall*. Un espacio que adquiere unas características muy específicas en el caso de la construcción normanda y cuya esencia sabrán reconocer y trabajar los arquitectos como espacio adaptable a la vida moderna.

Arquetipo, Hall normando, structuring spaces, entramado, formas de vida



The expression "*historical parallel*" was used by architects Alison and Peter Smithson to establish a dialogue between their proposal for *Bates' Burrows Lea Farm* (1953) and the tower-fortress of *Castle Rising* (1183). The work was defined by the architects as a compact, isolated form, elevated above the land and protected by the earthworks surrounding it. However, upon analysing both buildings, the relationship does not seem to end with this initial description. This research aims to reveal, through a comparative analysis, how their spatial conception was based on the same formal archetype. An archetype that is an indispensable protagonist in the formation and evolution of the English house: *the hall*. A space that, in the case of the Norman construction, takes on very specific characteristics and whose essence the architects would try to recognise and reinterpret on as a space adaptable to modern life.

Archetype, norman hall, structuring spaces, framework, ways of living



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## Introduction

At CIAM X in Dubrovnik (1956), the Smithsons present their proposal *Housing Appropriate to the Valley Section* (1954-56). Where they conceived various forms of association based on the theoretical diagram proposed in the *Doorn Manifesto* (1954). In their panels, the forms of association (*Isolate, Hamlet, Village, Town and City*) produce different forms of occupation: *Bates' Burrows (Isolate), Galleon Cottages (Hamlet), Fold House (Village), Close House (Town) and Terraced Crescent Housing (City)*. The aim was to explore new urban forms based on the density of clustering and the mode of appropriation of place. In other words, clustering and place merge into a single entity, giving each projects its own meaning and character. To illustrate these ideas, the architects did not hesitate to use images linked to tradition, the vernacular or historical forms, which implied not only their direct referencing but also a theoretical revision of their conception and validity<sup>1</sup>.

In *Bates' Burrows Lea Farm* (1953-1955), the model used by the Smithsons was the tower-fortress of *Castle Rising* (1138) in the county of Norfolk in the east of England. The choice not only shows a personal interest in the forms of the past , but also that the architects were to adopt the ideas of Castle Rising under the heading of "*historical parallel*" (Smithson 2000). A compact, isolated fortress, raised above the land and protected by the earthworks around it (Smithson 2000), Castle Rising would be later used for their *Ground notations* (Smithson 1999)(Casino Rubio 2013), yet the parallelism also exists in the conception of the interior, where both are structured on the basis of the same formal archetype: *the Hall*.

The Hall is, as Bonet has written, the space of smoke (Bonet 2007), the essential protagonist of the English house and the one that best identifies the English way of life, capable of adapting and evolving. For the Smithsons, "*life cannot be forced behind an imposed (mathematical) pattern*" (Smithson 1970), thus the house needs to be an expression of a cultural and social context in which tradition and modernity intersect.

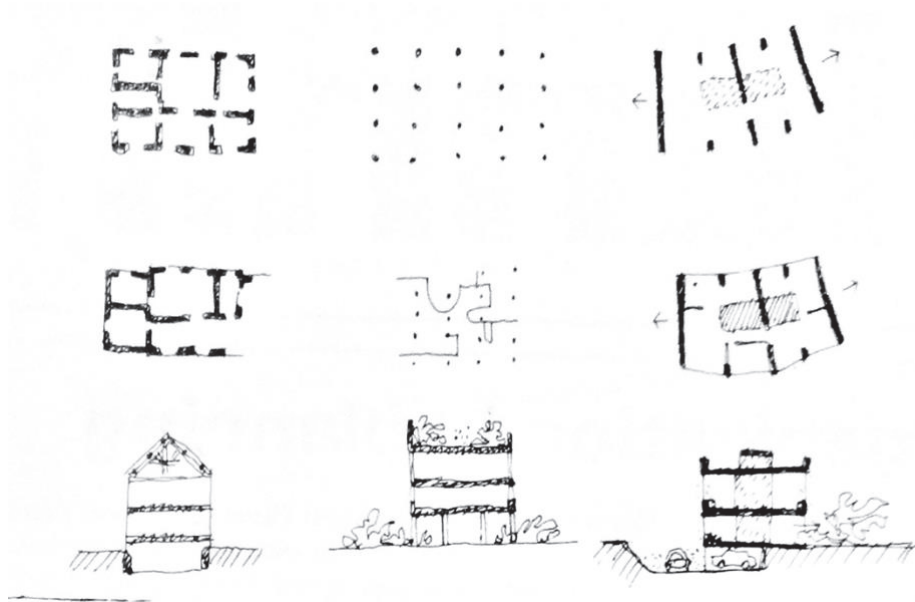
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## Bates' Burrows as a response to the principles of modern architecture

The Bates' Burrows proposal is unique in that it is the only one of all the houses designed by the Smithsons that is detached from the ground. As Max Risselada points out, this inevitably leads to a comparisons with Le Corbusier's Villa Savoie. As Risselada explains that the similitudes may have been favoured by two circumstances: the possibility of visiting the Savoie villa on the occasion of CIAM IX in Aix-en Provence and the recent publication of *Le Corbusier's Oeuvre Complète* (1946-1952) (Heuvel y Risselada 2007). Both circumstances considered, the architects' first drawings, together with their words, made it clear that the need to elevate the house come from a triple condition.

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<sup>1</sup> The book *Ordinariness and Light* contains articles between 1952 and 1960, with many historical references: Edinburgh Castle, Castle Rising, Maiden Castle in Dorset or Mount Grace Priory in Yorkshire...etc. Soraya Smithson confirms Alison's great interest in collecting images of Saxon, Norman and medieval English halls, barns and fireplaces, collected in *the Scrapbook*.



**FIGURE 01** » Drawings by PS, extracted from the article "Lightness of Touch," *Architectural Design*, 1974.

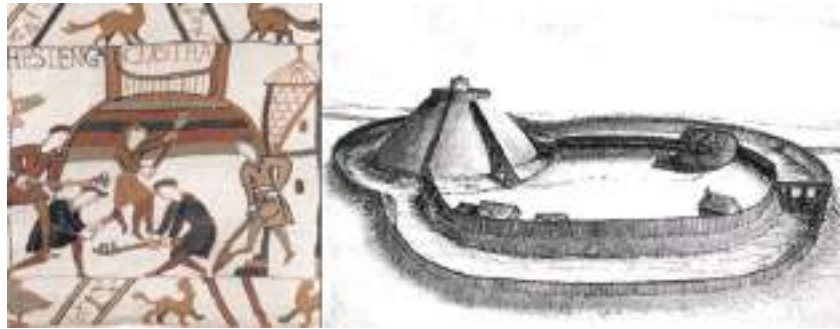
Firstly, the need to look over the *Surrey Downs* landscape. Secondly, the attempt to reduce the footprint of the house as much as possible, interfering as little as possible with the land. Finally, the client's requirement to allow car access to the heart of the house. The solution undoubtedly came close to Villa Savoie but the connections to Castle Rising, as the Smithsons point out, are even stronger.

In fact, the architects were committed to a different way of living and sought to propose a model far removed from modernist orthodoxy, a body of work they considered certainly heroic and to which teachings they were indebted:

*The ideal house is that which one can make one's own without altering anything...What we would seem to be looking for is the gentlest of styles, which whilst still giving an adumbration of the measures of internal events and structures (rooms, activities, servicing arrangements, supports), leaves itself open to - even suggests interpretation, without itself being changed. (Smithson 1972)*

The Smithsons worked away from prejudices towards a certain way of making or a certain style. For them the idea of style is simply a form of language, while form acquires value when it shows "how the thing is" and "how it can be used" (Smithson 1972). In other words, the form must outline the internal structure necessary for the development of internal life, offering the inhabitant the possibility of making it his own, without altering anything. This debate on form would develop over several decades, and in 1972, the Smithsons' ideas on form became the focus of their inaugural lecture at the *Harvard Graduate School of Design*. Two years later, in 1974, they were published in *Architectural Design* under the title "*Lightness of Touch*"<sup>2</sup> in the *Collective Design* (Smithson 1974) series. Although Bates' Burrows is a house designed in the 1950s, its formal structure, spatial conception and relationship to place are necessarily linked to them. This paper explores the three principles that constitute Bates' Burrows form: *part-cellular structure, living spaces (or structuring spaces) and separating out "noisy" from quiet* (Fig. 01), which also have significance in earlier forms such as the Castle Rising model.

<sup>2</sup>the title "lightness of touch" and subtitle "Notes from a lecture given at the opening of Gund Hall, Harvard, 16 October, 1972.". P. Smithson defined Heroic Aesthetics: hard, definitive, demanding, pure (colour).



**FIGURA 02 »** Fragment of the Bayeux Tapestry – Scene 45 – showing the Norman defensive model "motte and bailey." Example of Annesley Castle, extracted from the book *English Medieval Castles* by R. Allen Brown, 1954.

For the Smithsons, the *five points* of Modern Architecture represented the idea of a finished, hard object, produced by a continuous process of abstraction through the use of right-angle geometry, pure colour<sup>2</sup> and an idealised interpretation of human activities (Smithson 1974). To this, one needs to add a calibrated *mise-en-scène*, and even a technical effort to use or produce materials yet to be discovered, in an attempt to create an architecture that was primarily intended to be admired. However, the Smithsons wanted to move away from categorical expressions, rejecting both sentimental attitudes towards the past and technocratic expressions of the future. Bates's Burrows stands in opposition to modernist orthodoxy as a reevaluation of past ways of living, whose constructional, organizational and contextual principles exemplify a new aesthetic.

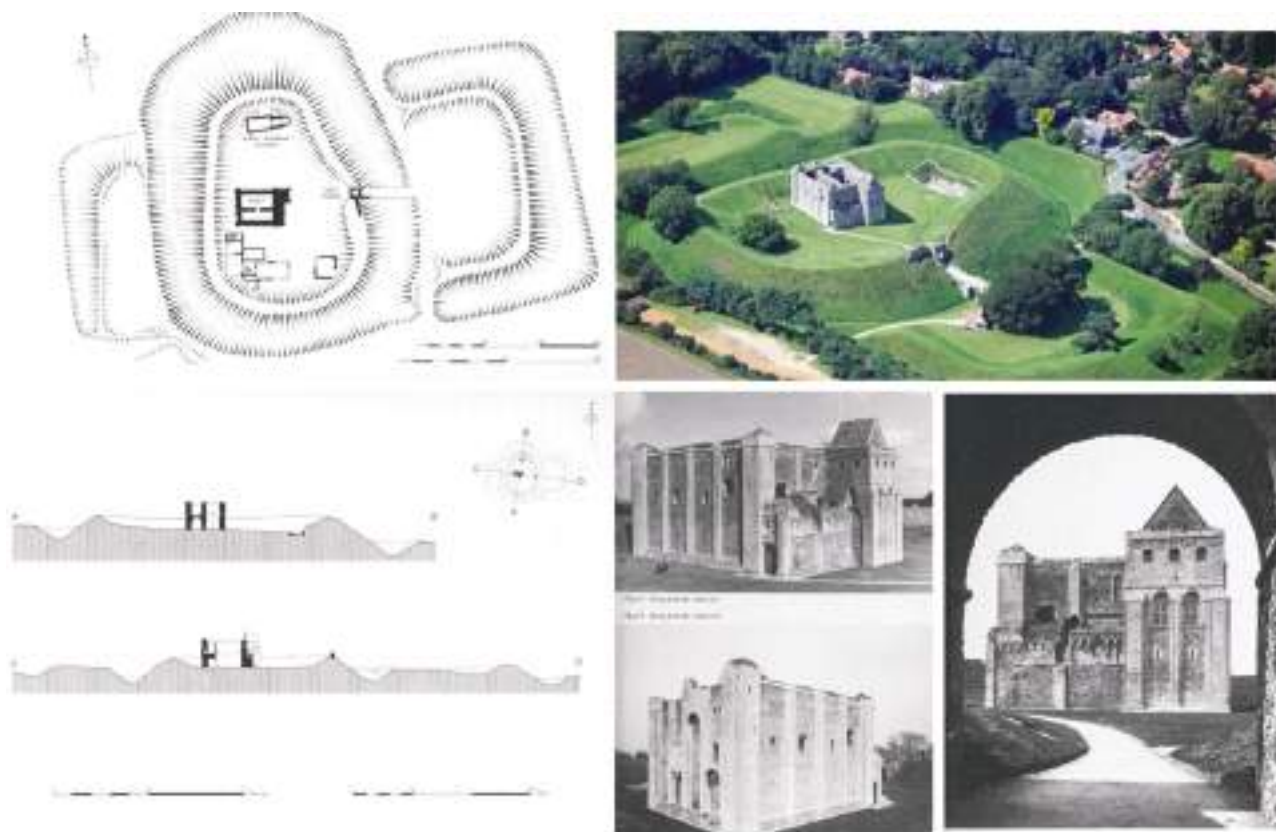
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#### Castle Rising

Why the choice of Castle Rising? Before the arrival of the Normans, the preexisting model was of Saxon heritage, presenting a very different way of connecting with the place. As we have previously indicated, the Norman fortress is a direct statement of a time and a way of life tied to the primordial space of the Hall. The earliest recorded images of such a way of life appear on the *Bayeux Tapestry*, a large embroidered cloth about 69 meters long and 50 centimeters high, depicting events and customs in England between 1064 and 1066. Scene 45 (Fig. 02) shows the Castle of Hastings, a typically Norman defensive structure known as a "*motte and bailey*". It consists of a tower placed atop a mound of compacted earth layers at least 5 meters high, called the "*motte*", accompanied by a courtyard or "*bailey*" where the remaining structures are located, all projected by a ditch and an earth embankment. While the Norman hall is always elevated above ground level, the Saxon model remains in direct contact with the ground.

The consolidation of the conquest was slow and, in response to continuous Saxon uprisings, the Normans built powerful fortresses. By 1078 there were more than 500 castle-fortresses in England. Alison gathered numerous images of such Norman constructions in her *scrapbook* such as *Manorbier Castle* in Wales or *Corfe Castle* in Dorset or *Richmond Castle* in North Yorkshire (Alison Smithson's *scrapbook* 1945-2002).

The Norman fortress comprises the keep, the bailey, and a robust perimeter defense. Castle Rising meets these requirements. Built around 1138 by the Albini family of Rising - Aubigny - the complex consists of the central courtyard

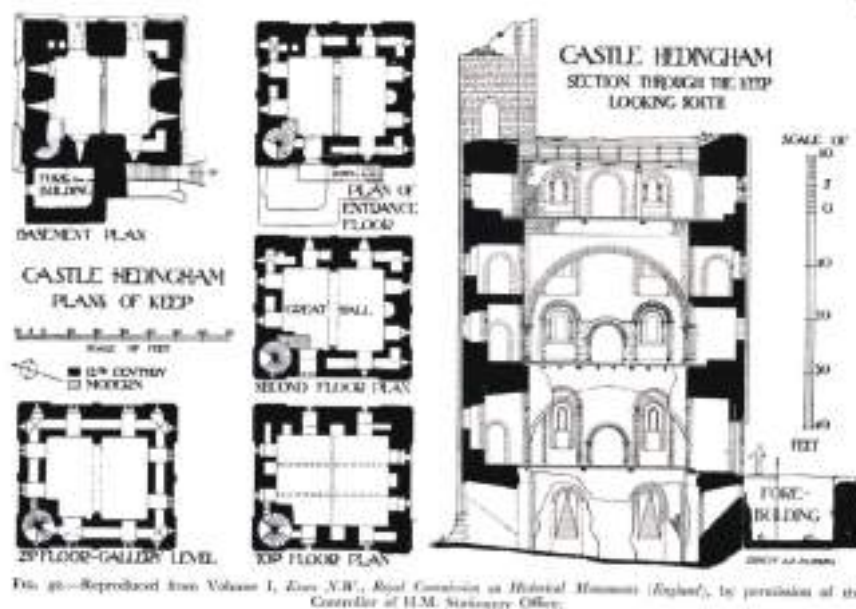
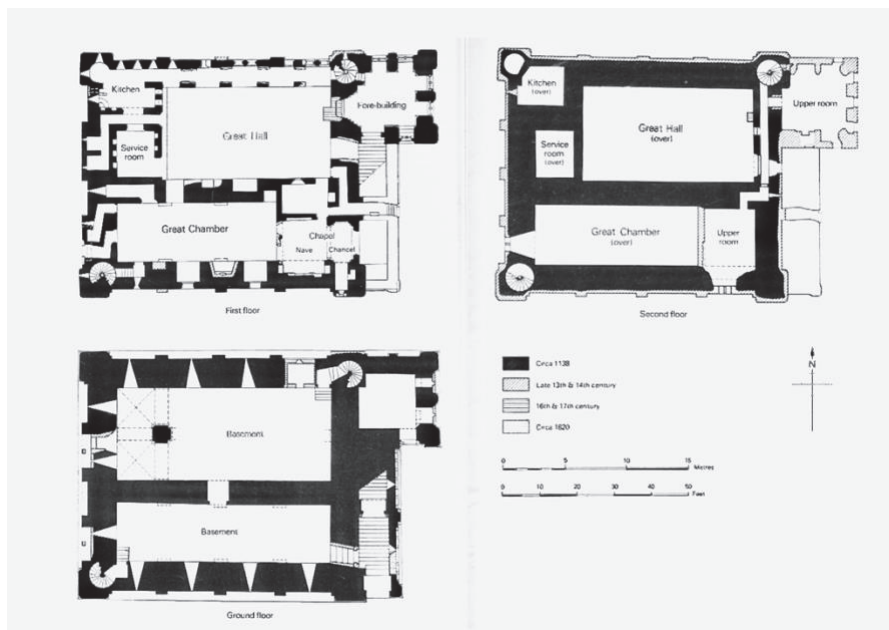


**FIGURE 03** » Plan, section, and views of Castle Rising, extracted from the book *Castle Rising* by R. Allen Brown, 1983.

and two smaller enclosures located to the east and west covering a total area of 5 hectares (Fig 03). The central oval measures approximately 80 yards (73 meters) from north to south and 70 yards (64 meters) from east to west. To define and protect this primary space, a moat and mound were constructed with a crest perimeter of about 350 yards (320 meters). This earthwork was not always uniform, as the historian R. Allen Brown suggests (1983 p.35), by the late 12th century, the inner mound was raised to its current height of 60 feet (18 meters) from the bottom of the moat and 30 feet (9 meters) from the surface of the inner surface. Above this moat and mound, there are archaeological remains confirm that the upper wall was made of stone. Only a small portion of this wall remains, adjacent to the sole entrance to the enclosure, the gatehouse.

The keep, the lord's residence, was rarely placed at the centre of the bailey, rising vertically above the the subsidiary structures. At Castle Rising, the keep consists of three levels (Fig 04) with a stone volume measuring 78 ½ feet (24meters) east to west, 68 ½ feet (21meters) north to south, and a height, of approximately 50 feet (15 meters) from the lower plinth, excluding the now missing battlemented parapet. One can imagine how these solid structures became, for a long time, the great architectural landmarks that populated English territory. Its elevated position allowed the lord of the manor to oversee his lands and to contemplate his territories. Together with the strong visual control required for defense, the inhabitant also developed an emotional bond with the place. A relationship that gradually shaped the distinctive English affinity for the landscape.



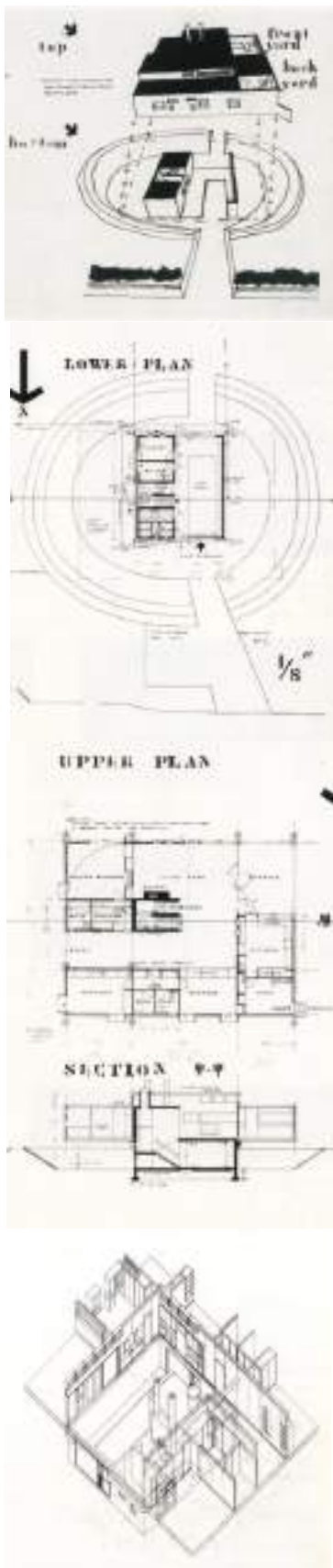


In the tower, the *Great Hall* is located on the first level. This feature distinguishes it significantly from the Saxon Hall, as the definition of a primarily stone base introduces, a new space below it, known as the *cellar*, a concept inherited from the *bassis* of the Carolingian villa. This is why these Norman constructions are also known as "*hall and cellar*". The construction of the base began in the 11th century with barrel vaults, replaced by groin vaults and Gothic arches in the second half of the 12th century, ribbed vaults at the end of the 13th century and, in the 14th century, with Gothic at its peak, *lierne* or *tierceron* vaults. In the case of *Castle Rising*, the base was of wood, of which no traces remain. The cellar's function was to serve as service quarters and storage space.

In other examples, such as *Castle Hedingham* (1130) (Fig.05), the floor plan is smaller and lacks any internal framework, so the segregation of uses is mainly vertical, resulting in a slender tower. At *Castle Rising* (fig. 04), life is organised not only vertically but also horizontally.

**FIGURE 04** » *Castle Rising* extracted from the book *Castle Rising* by R. Allen Brown, 1983.

**FIGURE 05** » *Castle Hedingham and A History of the English House from Primitive Times to the Victorian Period* by N. Lloyd, 1931.



**FIGURE 06** » Diagram, ground floor plan, and first floor plan of Bates' Burrows and axonometric of ground-floor and first-floor by Luiz Breda Neto and Peter Salter, extracted from the book *Charged Void: Architecture* by A.P. Smithson, 2000.

The structural framework on the ground plan -*Part-cellular structure*- enables the configuration of distinct domestic spaces -*Structuring spaces*-. The rectangular Great Hall, measuring 47 by 23 feet, adheres to the standard 2:1 ratio. On its northern side, the passage or gallery serves a dual purpose: to open up the space to the landscape and to provide access to the service area - *Kitchen and service room*- which is located behind it. On the southern side, behind the thick wall housing the large fireplace, lies the private or solar chamber -*Great Chamber*- accompanied by a small anteroom and the *Chapel*. Both the Great Hall and the private chamber feature double-height ceilings, each equipped with its own fireplace. Strategically positioned staircases at each corner provide access to the lower cellar space and the upper towers.

Accessing the tower and the Hall is a ceremonial act, since, as Brown observes, "*the act of entering the house is the way to enter a culture*" (1983 p.42) and here, the rite of "*ascension*" has a strong spatial and formal component. On the eastern, in direct connection with the gatehouse, an independent structure known as the forebuilding extends the tower by 20 feet to the north face and 9 feet to the south to the tower as a whole. This volume houses the grand linear staircase and a vestibule that functions as an antechamber. The journey, along with the waiting area, undoubtedly adds to the symbolic and representational character of the arrival at the Great Hall.

One aspect often observed in medieval works is this interplay between *similarity* and *difference*. That is, *similarity* in the type of construction and the way it is positioned within the territory, and *differences*, in the structuring of the floor plan or the details of its finishes, such as mouldings and ornaments.

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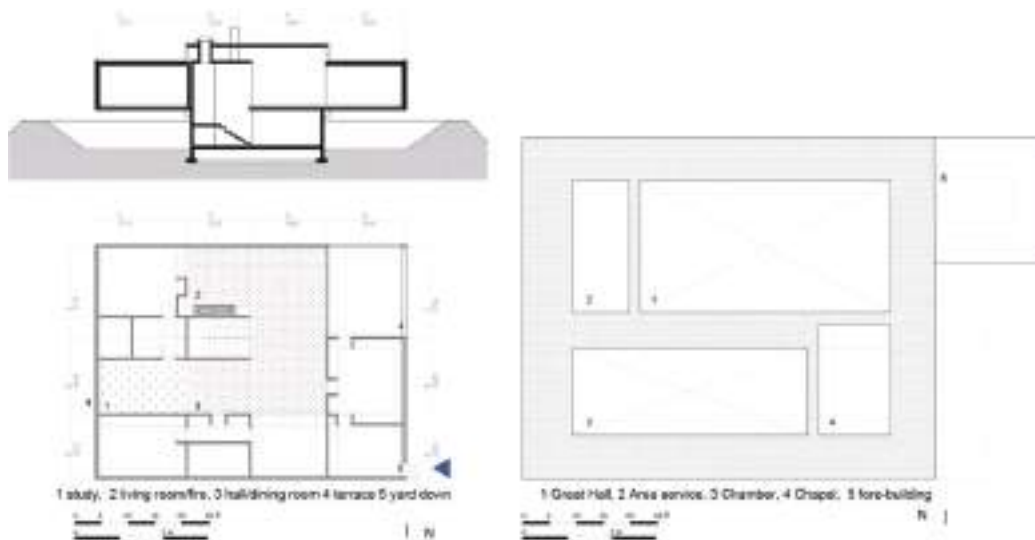
**The modern analogy: Bates' Burrows as an evolution of the Castle Rising model.**

#### *Living spaces. Structuring spaces.*

The free plan advocated by Le Corbusier in the Villa Savoye made the external form possible, but not its internal characterization. The box was the result of eliminating the concept of mass and working with an interior void defined by surface planes which, through their free plastic configuration, allowed the space to adapt to the dimensions of the ideal inhabitant. In their spatial definition, the planes were capable of meeting any functional, aesthetic, or lighting demands the architect was able to imagine. However, for the Smithsons, the complexity of any interior should be based on providing the inhabitant with a container that was "*the direct result of a way of life*" (Smithson 2023).

The first thing one recognizes in Bates' Burrows is a fortress house. This is because it unfolds elevated above ground level, with all domestic life located on the first floor, including the hall as the main double-height space. Below this level, the basement or cellar is used for storage and service functions: stores, cloaks, boiler, laundry and car port. (fig. 06).

The construction of the modern stereotomic cellar allows modern living to



**FIGURE 07** » Comparative floor plan schematics, Structuring Spaces, of Bates' Burrows and Castle Rising. (Drawing by the author).

reach the very heart of the house with the car. The way to access the upper area is through a compressed and enclosed entrance, an autonomous volume that houses the staircase and acts as an anteroom leading directly to the main double-height space of the house, the Hall.

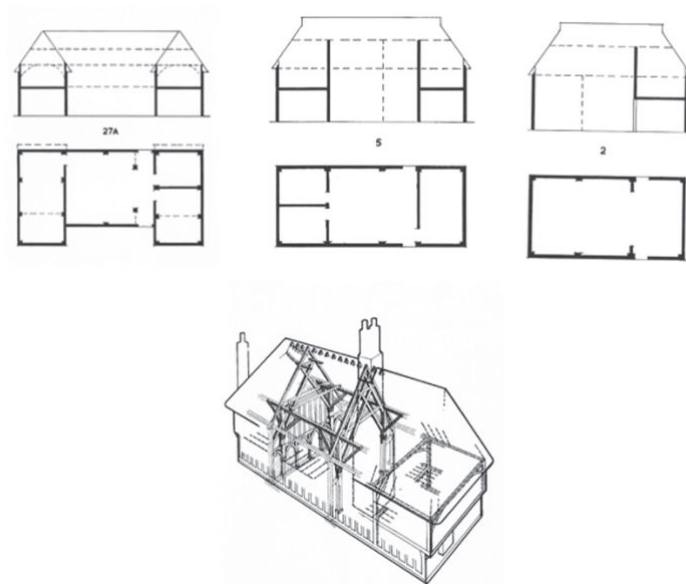
The Hall in Bates' Burrows Hall is similar to the Norman Hall at Castle Rising: an elevated space above ground level, protected, taller than the rest of the rooms, and illuminated from above. Reflecting on this change in the cross-section, Alison notes how the architect Norman Shaw was among the first to "...break with the tradition of the classical series of rooms of identical height (...), he provides the particular form and ambience for each individual function" (Smithson 1967). This principle is evident here. From the central void, formed by the living-room, dining-room and study, one moves to the rest of the domestic areas, conceived as three independent functional units: children's quarter, the master bedroom and kitchen-terrace-front yard. Between these, boundaries are defined by thick walls designed to store the necessities of domestic life. (Fig.07) Alison's interior drawings and axonometries perspectives evoke her words for the article "*Beatrix Potter's Place*": an orderly whole with "objects and utensils of daily use conveniently placed", and even with "those things which are necessary for domestic life", and even "those things of secondary use (...) that need long-term storage, are in special storage cubicles whose shapes define the space itself" (Smithson 1967) (Fig.06). This is the "decoration" that such "simple" spaces require. Ultimately, basic needs are elevated to a poetic level: *simple living, well done*. (Smithson 1967).

In the Hall lies the place where the protective fire is located: *the fireplace*. Here, the grand fireplace, symbol of the economic power and social status in the Norman fortress, has regained the essence of the *inglenook* from the Arts and Crafts dream. Positioned at one end of the living-room, it recreates the intimate Victorian space. At the opposite end, the terrace takes us above ground level with a renewed view of the Surrey Downs landscape.

### **Part-cellular structure**

The modern neutrality promoted by Le Corbusier and his *dom-Ino* system (1914) constituted a construction system that intentionally rejected or concealed the expressiveness of the joints and the relationship between pilotis and slabs. This atectonic definition, enhanced by the use of white, is described by James Stirling during his visit to the villa in Garches:





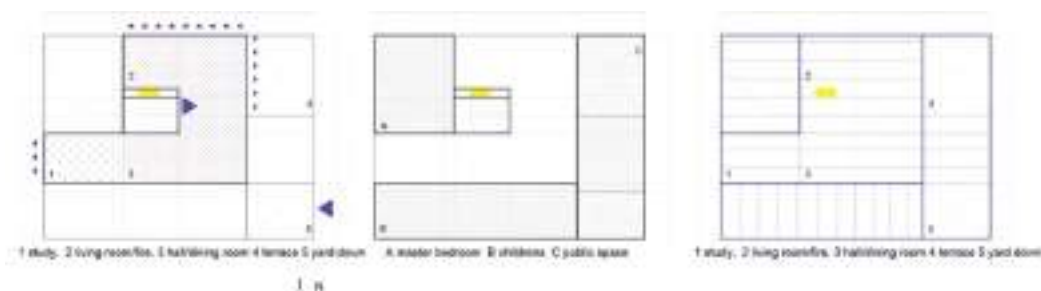
**FIGURE 08** » Timber house construction system, extracted from the book *Framed Buildings of England* by R.T. Manson, 1974.

*(...) The body of the house, built according to entirely conventional methods for its time, has concrete block walls plastered to achieve a monolithic, fluid or powdery effect, an aesthetic in keeping with a structural system that did not yet exist. (Stirling 1955).*

For modernist orthodoxy, the definition of a neutral and independent support entailed both material and constructive inexpression in favour of maximum spatial expression. In opposition to this aethetonic system, the Smithsons opted for a tectonic framework that maximally expresses materiality and its constructive syntax. This approach was connected to the precise modern forms of Miesian structures, but also to the tradition of timber houses.

Timber framing is a structural system defined by either *crucks* or *boxframes*. The design and positioning of the framework preconfigure the forms of habitation or, in other words, the “bay” —the distance defined between the main support elements— was never a fixed dimension and could vary from approximately 5 to 20 feet in length. This dimension was determined by available timber’s length and the “desired” dimensional needs according to the uses of each space; conditions that ultimately defined the final shape of the house. Therefore, the freedom in size and the tectonic construction system allowed for many variations, as numerous as the inhabitants’ needs. R.T. Manson (1975 p.28) defines the *timber house type* as a structure formed by three cells and four bays (fig. 08). If we look at the drawing, we can see that what is defined as a “cell” involves not only the position of the main framework, but also the boundaries that organize the house’s functions and areas.

In the Middle Ages, domesticity accounted for a limited number of functions and elements. The lower level was often defined by only three cells: the Parlour, the double-height Hall, and the service areas (buttery and pantry), whereas the upper level was composed of two private areas on either side of the double-height Hall. Variations also reveal how the size of the “bay” was adjusted to organisational criteria, such as the passage tangent to the Hall, clearly defining the medieval “screen”. The significance of the system lay not only in its constructive capacity, but also in its ability to outline future domestic needs or to transform in accordance with changing the requirements.



**FIGURE 09** » Timber house construction system, extracted from the book *Framed Buildings of England* by R.T. Manson, 1974.



**FIGURE 10** » Axonometric of first-floor steel structure by Luiz Breda and Peter Salter, extracted from the book *Charged Void: Architecture* by A.P. Smithson, 2000.

This approach is also present in the concept defined by the Smithsons. The upper volume is constructed with a metal structural framework, a *balloon frame*, supported by reinforced concrete bracket beams that are embedded in the lower walls of the base. This design is conceived accordance with the areas that would organize life within the house, as can be seen in the comparative analysis (fig.09) and the axonometric drawing of the metal framework (Fig.10). As a final solution, the framework would be clad in plywood, both internally and externally, a technique previously used in ships building during World War II.

### **Separate out “noisy” from quiet**

The rectangular upper volume, measuring 43 feet in width by 56 feet in length, seems to levitate above the ground plane. Between the house and the surrounding moat and mound boundary, the idea of the interval as a place emerges. This is transitional space between two realities, where the air is trapped and adheres to the pre-existing structure. The Smithsons skilfully identified the apparent spatial duality that arises when addressing the theme of transition the *space between*. On one hand, there is the need for the building to breathe and extend, embracing the space immediately around it. On the other, the air adjacent to the house works as a space of protection and interior continuity “(...) will also need inevitable-seeming extensions or “antennae” (...), these antennae will be a building's, reaching into the air, to signal possession of its “adherent aire” (Smithson 1975) . This dual perspective expands the concept of the boundary, transforming the crystalline limit of modernity into a thick layer available for inhabitation. It creates a new margin with spatial depth that gradually takes on character as the various layers of habitation are added. This new spatial realm becomes tangible only through the definition of the moat and mound, elevated enough to obscure visibility and featuring two access points: one vehicular and one pedestrian. One connected to the infrastructure and the other to the landscape

Moreover, the garden was not meant to be on the roof, but rather in a “quiet place immediately accessible from the living spaces” (Smithson 1974) . Here, the open veranda to the southwest - the front yard – becomes an extension of the house. Its construction as an enclosed space is also reminiscent of the garden terrace of the Villa Savoie. Opposite to this elevated piece overlooking the landscape, the back porch—the *post yard*—provides a secondary access to the

## Conclusion

If there is something remarkable about the Smithsons' working process, it is their constant questioning of what the appropriate form for inhabiting should be or, as they themselves asked: "*if there are new uses for which there is not yet a traditional formal language or any previous style (...) then how do we proceed?*" (Smithson 1975). In Bates' Burrows, form engages in dialogue with history without relinquishing its modernity. As the Smithsons expressed, places captivate us through a deeper recognition that transcends the senses. Perhaps for this reason, this is the house they would have liked to build, a suburban, isolated home that proposes, as a form of occupation, ideas drawn from a contextualised reinterpretation of English medieval architecture.

As Luigi Pareyson (1988 p.35) puts it, the process that takes place in Bates' Burrows is due to the "*fruitful solidarity*" between "*the exemplary character*" of the work used as a model, its exemplarity, and the "*spiritual affinity*" of its continuation, its congeniality. In other words, tradition is established and maintained by innovation, and innovation does not advance if there is no continuity with the past.

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Figure 01. Drawings by PS, extracted from the article "Lightness of Touch," *Architectural Design*, 1974.

Figure 02. Fragment of the Bayeux Tapestry – Scene 45 – showing the Norman defensive model "motte and bailey." Example of Annesley Castle, extracted from the book *English Medieval Castles* by R. Allen Brown, 1954.

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Figure 08. Timber house construction system, extracted from the book *Framed Buildings of England* by R.T. Manson, 1974.

Figure 09. Drawing identifying the correlation between the double height of the Hall, the organization of domestic areas, and the metal frame of Bates' Burrows. (Drawing by the author).

Figure 10. Axonometric of first-floor steel structure by Luiz Breda and Peter Salter, extracted from the book *Charged Void: Architecture* by A.P. Smithson, 2000.



## Rediscovering the fridge. Journey through artworks and spatial proposals featuring the refrigerator // Redescubriendo el frigorífico. Recorrido por obras de arte y propuestas espaciales protagonizadas por el refrigerador



This investigation recognises the identity of the fridge as a symbolic object in the contemporary life through the work of artists and architects from different means and moments of the 20th and 21th century. The discussed works move from food voyeurism to the mutability of this appliance into a construction element, demonstrating its enigmatic nature. Considering an esthetic value in this device, which was originated as functional, the quantity of works of art featured by it manifests an intimate connection between our digestive tract and the machine.



Esta indagación reconoce la identidad del frigorífico como objeto simbólico en la vida contemporánea a través del trabajo de artistas y arquitectos de distintos medios y momentos de los siglos XX y XXI. Las obras comentadas viajan del voyerismo alimentario a la mutabilidad del electrodoméstico en elemento constructivo, poniendo en evidencia la naturaleza enigmática del mismo. Contemplando un valor estético en el aparato originado como utilitario, la cantidad de obras protagonizadas por él manifiestan una relación íntima entre nuestro aparato digestivo y la máquina.

fridge, postmodern art, contemporary art, architecture, food

frigorífico, arte posmoderno, arte contemporáneo, arquitectura, comida



Notwithstanding that the fridge hasn't awoken an aesthetic interest in the artistic production as vibrant as other domestic inert items like the window, the chair, the bed or the bath, it seems to be the most frequent appliance in visual arts.

Before being refilled, the refrigerator is a vacant residence. A series of rooms sized according to the food pyramid categories and positioned depending on the thermal demand of each group. It was designed to fit among the rest of the kitchen furniture, and its height cannot surpass the range radio of an adult's arm. Made to be suitable for the domestic culinary size and for the capacity of our stomach, it is flexible with our purchasing power, as it's able to chill a scarce and an extensive amount of products. Its dimension adapts to that of an human adult's body just as the bed in which we lay does, and the orifice in the wall that we cross from one room to another, or the same way a coffin takes us in precisely.

Something in the way it looks, the content or the meaning of the domestic refrigerator has drawn the attention of photographers, sculptors, painters and conceptual artists of the 20th and 21st century around the world. Hereunder, some of their work will be commented. For that matter, they selected works will be grouped in three typologies differentiated among them based on the contextualisation of the appliance at issue. In the first section, works that portray domestic fridges in its most habitual location, the private residence, will be remarked. Next, the perspective will be shifted to the interior of the refrigerator with a couple of works that suggest the incarnation of the human body into the machine. Lastly, other two initiatives will be presented that pay tribute to the fridge once it's constituent purpose has ceased. This journey aims to confirm an aesthetic collective interest in the domestic refrigerator, as well as to discover the possible motivations underneath this tendency.

### 1★

#### At home

Kitchen innards, the physical place where food is conserved at home, prolongate the life of our sustenance. Introducing this device, apparently a petty one, the discussed works in this section lead to both individual and communal reflections. The work of the three authors are carried out at home, uncovering an aesthetic value in the everyday life. From pictorial portrait to documentary photography, they evince the emotional bond that can be originated between an object and a subject when what they share is the nourishment.

Being the sixties the moment when fridges began to be manufactured more often and to become popular in Spain<sup>1</sup>, it's possible that *Nevera de hielo* (1966) by Antonio López García is the first spanish pictorial portray of one (fig. 1). This master has celebrated more than one refrigerator and it's contents by painting it.

<sup>1</sup> The first electric cool-boxes where imported from other countries, and so they were accessible just for a few homes. It wasn't until the 1960 decade that they started to be manufactured at a bigger scale and, therefore, to be popular in Spain (MONTESINOS, 2013, 164).



FIGURE 01 » Diptych: [left] Antonio López, *Nevera de hielo*, 1966, [right] Antonio López, *Nevera nueva*, 1991-94, oil on canvas, 240 x 190 cm.

Previously, in 1963, he had painted and engraved a fragment of a cool box and its surroundings. That ice cupboard was often located in the coolest place of the house, just as a cellar. It was once of the predecessor of the electric refrigerator we know today. Both images, *La fresquera* with the nuts, the soup dish and an oil tin above it and *Nevera de hielo* with one of its doors open and traces of an ingestion over it, show modest daily rations that are also deserving of the iconographic reverence. It was in the ultimate decade of the last century, when we've gotten accustomed to its presence in our homes, when he painted another one, this time wide opened. López look at this wrapper generating a suggestive image of it. Allied to the style of other of its personal paintings, he framed this place exalting its relevance: the fridge is something more than an inert item. In *Nevera nueva* (fig.1), this kitchen skyscraper erects itself lonely in an empty room, with only the fresh products preserved in it.

The empty rooms of López's refrigerators are inhabited. The warmth that *Nevera nueva* instills is partly caused by the relief of discovering that the painter and its family, not only could afford a new refrigerator with freezer, but could also fill it up. In the same way, the warm light that lights up from the right top corner in its interior, oxygenates the room like a heart pumping blood to a whole organism. The chromatic coldness that dominates the surface of the canvas it's compensated with the filled up shelves.

Getting closer to the gastronomical portraiture of still lifes, López open refrigerators show one's own diet. The unease that often arises when checking other people's food, also appears in these scenes causing the same wonder as the classic still life painting, but in an icy and lethargic version. If Clara Peeters would have known the 20<sup>th</sup> century appliances, perhaps she would have portraided the lunch boxes and would have placed the vegetables in polystyrene drawers. In a casual encounter between a fridge and the Belgian artist's still lifes, the following collage gather an intimist contemporary self-portrait with her plentiful compositions of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 2).



FIGURE 02 » *Leaning out a fridge containing Clara Peeters still lifes*, 2024, collage, author's photography.

Moving about towards photography, seems pertinent to give a space to the distinguished North American photographer William Eggleston, pioneer in the use of colour photography in visual arts, and specially interested in mundane actions and objects. He was one of the first artists who collect the inside look of a refrigerator. Specifically, a 1970's Memphian freezer (fig. 3). It seems that Eggleston, just as López did in painting, crystallised the refrigerator as a place for introspection.

<sup>2</sup> (WATKINS, 2008, 204)

«Brought into the home, incorporated into daily life and socialised to perform a particular role, refrigeration shifted category from 'novel' to 'normal' and from 'luxury' to 'necessity'»<sup>2</sup>. Once established as ordinary appliance in the North American house, when pre-cooked frozen edibles were on sale, it prepared itself to abandon the fashionable status to be neglected for the rest of the century and beyond. It was then when Eggleston beaten triviality by seeing in it a gastronomic cave.

FIGURE 03 » William Eggleston, *Untitled (Freezer)*, 1971-73, dye transfer print, 11 x 17 in.



By way of a biographical portrait, he left proof of the foresight ability of its owner, or his interest in cooked products, characterising the inhabitant in a deeper way than freezing its countenance. In this case, the artist found a bigger interest in the frozen compartment, perhaps for being a miraculous novelty tat of storing food for months. To paralyse rottenness, the same way that it can be done with a photographic camera, is a quarrel against the fleeting nature of our matter. The fascination of this image goes beyond its peculiar secrecy and its pale colour palette. It lies in the powerful ability to battle with the deterioration, within the fridge and on the photo paper.

A decade later and in Japan, Tokuko Ushioda also showed interest for open refrigerators. Her project *Reizōko* in Japanese and *Ice Box* in English collects fifty seven kitchens in about thirteen years, from 1981 up until 1994 (fig. 4). Its single edition from 1996 includes black and white photographs arranged in pairs in a one hundred and twenty eight pages book, in a way that each pair of images show the same refrigerator with its door closed and open.

FIGURE 04 » Image composition with two gelatin silver print dyptych by Tokuko Ushioda: [up] 46A/46B Hayama Kanagawa, *Ice Box* project, 1994, [down] 11A/11B Shibuya Tokyo, *Ice Box* project, 1994.





The idea of the project emerged when Ushioda shared room with a fridge in the apartment she inhabited with its child and the also photographer and the author's husband, Shinzō Shimao. In about twenty three square meters, the new machine stood out for its size and resonance. In conversation with the Canadian Center for Architecture, the artist reveals the impressions that lead her to start this project,

I wondered why three people needed such a big thing. But I thought okay, even if it was half-broken, it's usable. For two or three years we used it and it was so strong that our vegetables froze immediately. The motor made a lot of noise, especially when I was sleeping. When I looked at the refrigerator, it made me wonder what kind of life I was leading. We slept right beside it and the loud sound it made above my head at night made me sit awake wondering what would happen to me in the future.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> CCA, Canadian Center for Architecture. "Familiar Observations. Tokuko Ushioda in conversation with Stefano Graziani and Bas Princen". 2022.

Other noteworthy documentary works that have looked over foreign kitchens exposing the its owners lifestyles are *Fridge Food Soul* by Oliver Degorce, *Refrigerators* by Mark Menjivar or *Show me your fridge* by Sandra Junker (fig. 5), this last one including portrait of the owners in their home environment. Those projects take on the portrayal of people through the food they choose to consume, their quantity, how they organise it in the different partitions or the state of their conservation. As the close-up of a digestive system, the refrigerator is the stand, the siege that delimits and that goes unnoticed and the food it accommodates narrate the story that the observer reads. One thing that is essential and that make a distinction between Ushioda's process and those other approaches, is that Tokuko includes the exterior appearance of the machine and its surroundings. The framing of her images covers more than just the appliance's door. This is facilitated by the use of a 6x6 inch camera, Zenza Bronica S2 model, with square aspect ratio. Within the fifty six homes, not all the fridges are situated in a kitchen and not with the same arrangement. The refrigerator can be found in a transit place, in the threshold that differentiates one room from another, between an atrium and a living room, indiscretely in a dining room or closer to the laundry room than to the oven. Often it rests on wood floors, inappropriate for a wet room like the kitchen. It was also seen with its back turned to a glass door and with an unusual orientation in relation to the adjoining furniture.

FIGURE 05 » Triptych composed of: [left] Oliver Degorce, *Fridge Food Soul*, 1993-2017, [centre] Mark Menjivar, *Owner of Defunct Amusement Park. Alpine TX, Refrigerators series*, 2007-2012, [right] Sandra Junker, *London, Show me your Fridge series*.



It was also established in an office, or next to a clothes line, transferring the warmth that it emits to the damp fabrics. In many cases, the cold cupboard is hugged by bottles and jars that await outside for space to be liberated in its interior. If its roof has free height, it is oftentimes occupied by food bags, magazines or vases. Some family uses two nearly identical fridges, one next to the other, both brimming with products. Other machines that are out of the norm, have a unusually extended width. Thus, as a typological catalogue, the work gathers up a variety of refrigerator designs.

Generating that twofold sequence, a veil is lifted in a way that accentuates the nudity sensation. Initially, with the refrigerator door closed, it draws the attention to the context, when it's only one more facade in the kitchen scenery. In that moment, the glance searches for information in the furniture and products around them, paying attention to the objects and graphics that hung and lay in the surfaces. When the door opens, as entering in an unfamiliar bedroom, all the attention goes to its contents. This *Goyarian* effect of *The Clothed Maja*, *The Naked Maja*, emphasise the impression of accessing a confidential space. Uncovering culinary private universes, each image that those artists produced including the freezing closet, ensue as a biographical report when they are isolated, and as an anthropological research as a whole.

## 2\*

### In the body

The refrigerator has also participated as a habitable facility in the arts. As coffin where to introduce the body, or as machine with which to connect some human organs. In relation to the interactions between the architectural object and the human body, is worth mentioning the research carried out by the architects couple Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, expressed in the text titled *Flesh. Architectural probes* (1994). Among other issues, in it they reflect and invent on the encounters between the organic and the artificial, enriching the synergies that can be produced with the human postures and actions and the forms and uses of architecture and its quotidian objects. In *The Mutant Body of Architecture*, the analysis by Georges Teyssot which introduces *Flesh*, he encourages to the redefining of the relationships between human and artificial bodies: The first task architecture ought to assume, therefore, is that of defining and imagining an environment not just for "natural" bodies but for bodies projected outside themselves, absent and ecstatic, by means of their technologically extended senses. Far from assimilating the tool with the body according to the mechanistic tradition of Cartesian dualism, we must conceive tool and instrument "like a second sort of a body, incorporated into and extending our corporal powers" (Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 179). It then becomes possible and even necessary to logically invert the terms of our proposition on the role of architecture. The incorporation of technology is not effected by "imagining" a new environment, but by reconfiguring the body itself, pushing outward to where its artificial extremities encounter "the world".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> TEYSSOT, Georges. "The Mutant Body of Architecture". In: DILLER, E. and SCOFIDIO, R. *Flesh, Architectural probes*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, Inc, 1994, p. 16.

In accordance with Teyssot's posture, which he interprets that Diller and Scofidio have, architecture must fix the attention towards the evolution of the human body to adapt to it. To work on discovering how to equip it to «inhabit the world», as he declares in the following paragraph.

In this context, the «natural body» can be interpreted with the concept of the ciborg, that is a living being that interacts uninterruptedly with artificial tools, or that incorporate prothesis, merging together with the machinery. This way, the machine and the human entities share functions inside or outside of themselves.

The work that more accurately exemplifies an earthly bond, nearly prosthetic, between the human body and a refrigerator, appears in *In the Kitchen* performance by Helen Chadwick, presented in 1977 at the Chelsea College of Art & Design of London (fig. 6). It's a series of interactions in which the artist fuse together with different devices, putting together a kitchen formed by an oven, a washing machine, a fridge and a sink. These four furnitures are meticulously built with PVC fabric and metal structures that give it shape. The result is a set of pieces of volatile appearance although realistic which can be worn. In a carnal act, the human figure of the artist incarnates with the refrigerator.

A female body is contained in the rectangular prism, which pretends to be into operation through a lighted bulb in its interior and a suspended wire that comes out from it. The artist bring to light that which remains hidden in the daily movements of routine. That which is perceptible, although not visible, the hetero-patriarchal roles that sustain, in certain moments and places, familiar unities. To this effect, Chadwick combines the body and the machine to reveal, in an illustrative and direct way, how the living organism of women and their functions merge with those of the kitchen. How the identity of the housekeeper is blended with the kitchen tools. The appliances, specially commercialised in their origins by means of sexist gender discourses that baptised them as the work machinery for her.

This way, just as the human rush around operating synchronically with the electrical devices, the proximity between the biological body and the technological one narrows. The products purchasing, their conservation, storage and their preparation got optimised thanks to the studies around ergonomics that started to be applied to product and architecture design in the beginning of the 20th century in the domestic space with the purpose of mediating between the space for the human body and the new space for the machines<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, a correspondence among subjects and objects of different nature occurs and one cannot complete a task without the other, getting trapped in a common functioning to serve their purpose.

Case of our body, what the fridge harbours ends up being a part of the matter we are made of, and the artist makes it evident bringing our palate closer to the human flesh. She suggests that her own being is available as manageable stock for the consumption. The colours of her figure stand out on the white box. Her skin tone recalling a cooked chicken thigh, her eyes some eggs, her lips a chili pepper and her pubic area a chocolate sponge cake.



FIGURE 06 » Helen Chadwick, *In the Kitchen (Fridge)*, 1977, colour archival pigment print, 29.9 x 20 cm.

<sup>5</sup> Eduardo Prieto talks about the mecanisation and, specifically, of the ergonomics of movements and equipment of the domestic kitchen, in the North American context of the beginning of the 20th century (PRIETO, 2019, 95).

Suggesting an act of cannibalism or a severe feminist denunciation, Chadwick sacrifices herself to satiate our intellectual appetite. Another way of making the soma uncomfortable with coldness is generated with the project *Fresko* by the Berlin studio lead by Sam Chermayeff with the collaboration of Arno Brandhuber (fig. 7). By a need of incorporating fresh food for its direct sell, the design office decided to convert the establishment in a fridge.

They materialised this concept with various resources. In the first place, including a refrigerating room inside of the store, occupying about a ninth part of its surface. This way, the cold enclosure stayed in the centre of the room to be visited by the clients through a glass door. In the second place, a metallic and grey appearance was applied to all of the interior surfaces, covering the whole establishment up with the usual look appliances have. This is achieved by using grey tonalities, similar to that of the refrigerator façade, in the carpentry, shelves and other surfaces, as well as with an ashen floor. In the third place, an interior vertical finishing of projected grey insulation evokes the frost that gets accumulated in the bottom of fridges and freezers at times. This brings the sensation that there is a thermal layer that protects its interior from the external conditions. In addition, the glazed façade allows it to be perceived from the street as an industrial refrigerator.

In this Italian shop with fresh and ready-to-eat products, the clients get to experiment the environmental conditions where the product they are interested in, need to be kept. For a moment, they share that space. They need to cross a first threshold towards a space with hermetic look with respect to the urban space. After that, a second verge needs to be traversed to get to the fresher products. This way, the visitor is pushed to circulate inside of an electric device. The body needs to endure the new conditions, abandoning its comfort temperature to access the ambrosia. This way, the project alters the definitions of habitable space and temporary room. It shakes up the segregation between the back room and the window display, as well as amid the management and the purchase of the product. Therefore, the notions of intimacy and publicness dance, disrupting the traditional shopping ritual.

**FIGURE 07 »** Diptych: [left] Sam Chermayeff Office and Arno Brandhuber, axonometry of the *Fresko* establishment, 2021, [right] Sam Chermayeff Office and Arno Brandhuber, *Fresko* interior establishment, 2021. Oliver Helbig photography.



To reach the bottle of a sparkling wine, a creamy Robiola or a gianduja chocolate and nuts bar, requires of that type of meddling to finally celebrate, with greater satisfaction, the reward of its enjoyment. Paradoxically, the act of buying becomes more intimate. The consumer enters an otherwise inaccessible place to fulfill its needs.

Coming closer to Teyssot standpoint, we can look at the practices brought here as dispositions where the human body adapts its system to the electrical cooler and its processes, and vice versa. The following works also scour, deliberately or not, the cyborg notion. Of different means, aesthetic and purposes, both examples demonstrate and cause an intimate relationship with the refrigerator, in a way that the object inserts itself in our daily routine and, more discreetly, can also penetrate our collective identity.

### 3\*

#### Out of kilter

When the refrigerator is dedicated to its function in an effective way, it goes unnoticed, so we don't normally spare an expense on the matter that it constitutes it. Yet, that reinforced shelving occupies a volume that becomes excessive once it stops cooling down our food. When it leaves our feast neglected, the presence of an object that was completely acceptable, turns into a dead weight that we need to get rid of. The works presented in this section show fridges out of kilter, meaning, liberated from its original mission, agitated and disrupted.

One of the posothumous identities that the refrigerator has acquired is that of the menhir, in the art work *Stonefridge: A Fridgehenge* by Adam Jonas Horowitz (fig. 8). With the aspiration of carrying out an architectural satire of the Stonehenge, in 1997 the artist started a bureaucratic fight to be allowed to build a cromlech in the technological waste era. Located in a landfill at the northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico, from 1998 until 2007, the even arrangement was about five meters high and had around thirty meters of diameter. Not being all the appliances exactly the same design, colour and height, they were very similar to each other. As sculpted stones, they were erected like columns linked by lintels. Mass production and planned obsolescence could favour the access to the required quantity of similar refrigerators that ended up shaping a new portrait of the end of the 20th century society.

<sup>6</sup> (FARB HERNÁNDEZ, 2014)

The artist had to start all over again after seeing her first composition of used appliances shattered by the public services. Then, he saw himself as a Sisyphus with a fridge on his back, trying to raise a futuristic structure, at the same time primitive, that symbolised the wastefulness of machines, of the food they shelter as well as of the Freon they function with and that itself consumes the atmosphere.<sup>6</sup>



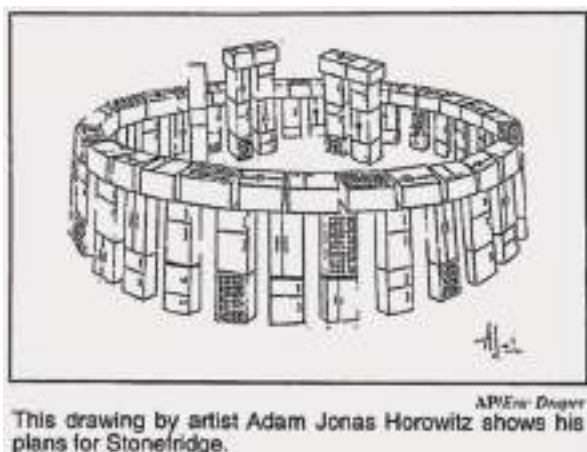


FIGURE 08 » Diptych: [left] Adam Jonas Horowitz, *Stonefridge*, design sketch, 1997, [right] Adam Jonas Horowitz, installation photography, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Capitalocene term is used here according to the definition that scientific like Jason Moore or Donna Haraway have given. Moore describes in a few words as «the “Age of Capital” in-nature» confronting it with the Antropocene notion as «the “Age of Man” and nature» (W. MOORE, 2014, 39), which is less suitable for what we are trying to refer to here, as the era in which the humanity has established complex relations with the Earth's resources and ecosystems. When asked about the Antropocene, Donna Haraway manifests her preference for this other term to define the last centuries, «Very much a part of that [the industrial humanity] are the exchange networks, the financial networks, extraction practices, wealth creations, and (mal)distributions in relation to both people and other critters.(...) The mass extinction events are related to the resourcing of the earth for commodity production, the resourcing of everything on the earth, most certainly including people, and everything that lives and crawls and dies and everything that is in the rocks and under the rocks» (HARAWAY, 2015, 233).

Disturbing a natural piece of land with about one hundred and thirty artificial cavities perceived as trash, Horowitz brought to the forefront the consequences of our supposed-to-be technological prosperity. A harmonious display of one of the attributes of the idiosyncrasy of the Capitalocene.<sup>7</sup>

In the New Mexican landfill where it was erected, guided towards the dawn in the summer solstice, the organic waste coexists with the artificial. The piled up food remains with those arranged by Horowitz, which held up their shape, impassible in the face of electricity lack and the absence of calorific energy of the foodstuff. Dry and vacuous, retired if not deceased, they bade farewell with no beat and no other light than that of the sun.

We observe this massive, comical and critical intervention without the affection that artists in the first section were bringing with their occupied homely fridges. The inactivity of each of the heaped refrigerators dissolves the connection that normally exists between our willpower and its content. Even so, this is also a social portrait of us, this time focusing in that which endures more than flesh, the skeleton of our repasts.

Another artist that has been dedicated to include out of service refrigerators in his installations is the German author Thomas Rentmeister. Covered up in Penaten baby cream as well as with Styrofoam or polystyrene, Rentmeister has introduced them spread or arranged as a tower, gathered in nature or in an art gallery. As matter volumes, they give shape to compositions of a magnetic immaculate appearance.

This recycling effort give rise to sculptures that the artist leaves spotless, coating the refrigerators in skin cream for neonates, providing them with a new birth with another identity. Every time, he displays them with their doors closed and even sealed together with an insulation component. Their previous usage remains obsolete then. Only their exterior surfaces, their external volume, interact with its surroundings. Braced to slabs and walls or mutually supporting each other, they form a neat cemetery of appliances.



The air-tightness the machines procure seems to be meant to inter the prior life they had, standing now untouchable in front of us. In constructions like *Muda* (2011 and 2012), the sculptor induces an imposing ambience where the refrigerators strike as beautiful. They reveal against our gastric appetite, shut to our mouths.

In *Untitled* (2012) (fig. 9), Rentmeister employs part of the interior components of the refrigerators, their shelves. Working as lines, they draw a prism to assemble a room. It is another reconfiguration of the fridge, this time delimited by its interior partitions, lighter and more permeable. The mounts that used to save the products are converted, altogether, into a self-supporting framework. The empty shelves transform their use and they annul its identity as nourishment bearers.

Both, the monumental *Fridgehenge* by Horowitz, and the works by Rentmeister, in addition to alluding to the consumer society and the growing quandary of their residues, discover another identity for this appliance. In *Nearly 100 fridges in a corner* (fig. 9), each unit is a pilaster. Forming steps, it's an amphitheatre custom-made for the Australian Greenway Art Gallery in a changing ascent, with potential to be transmuted into a place of stay and game.

In any of those building hypothesis, those fridges have been completely devoided of the responsibility of providing us with edible food. The attentive look we give when a refrigerator opens up with a hopeful hunger is nullified by Rentmeister. He breaks the brain connection we establish between fridge and food, and give them an identity beyond the alimentary altar.

With their transformations, the two artists pervert the aesthetic and ethic that is usually given to monuments. In that exertion, rather than generating a waste burial, as it could be expected from the premise they are based on, they create sepulchres with compositional and political strength.

**FIGURE 09 »** Diptych: [left] Thomas Rentmeister, *Untitled*, 2012, refrigerator shelves, cable ties, 190 x 210 x 210 cm, [right] Thomas Rentmeister, *Nearly 100 fridges in a corner*, 2008, refrigerators, Penaten baby cream, Styrofoam, 705 x 536 x 370 cm.

## Conclusions

The analysis undertaken highlights the private and personal nature of the object in question. Therefore, the artists intervene with a lurid desire to violate a personal space and make it public. Those art works that unfold the appliance's doors, access a private property. In a different way, those which show fridge in abandonment, down the street or in a public room, also turn it into a morbid object, as they decontextualize an individual fragment linked to a digestive system. That aggression is uncomfortable at the same time that seductive, since it reveals an intimate place we frequent although remains, as our stomach, hidden.

Each of the commented works belongs to different movements. While López and Eggleston are close to intimist art or even confessional art, Ushioda documents a reality with a voyeuristic approach. Different paths are those traced by Chadwick or Horowitz, who bring reflections with a social connotation. At the same time, Sam Chermayeff Office project might not have the experimental intentions attributed to it in this text. Standing in another line is the surrealism and minimalism of Rentmeister, who express in a unique language.

Despite of some works being parallel to an intimist outlook and others pursuing beauty or activism, they all share an identification of the fridge as an organic object, in the sense that it takes part in the biological processes of those who owned it, and in the sense that is part of us, of our collective identity. All of them assume, intrinsically, that it is an organ (or device), who plays a role in the chain of action of our maintenance activities. An abundant number of art works are featured by the refrigerator, from which only a few have been mentioned here. Because of its frequency, it could be appropriate to recognise this as an artistic tendency in the contemporaneity.

Embracing the appliance aesthetic, which tends to come off as vulgar and less noble than a marble worktop or wooden furniture, the artists brought in this journey have confessed certain vulnerability at the refrigerator's feet. In an act of humbleness and acknowledgement, they kneel before it. As a visual ode to conclude this text consolidating the symbolic meaning of the protagonist of the analysis, a series of photographs have been produced revering the current pre-stomach of the author of this research (fig. 10). This physical nearness is also intended to identify the emotional proximity we sometimes keep with habitual gadgets, as well as recognise our current technological dimension.



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FIGURE 10 » Diptych: *Reverence and hug to a double door domestic refrigerator*, 2024, author's photographs.

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