

Movement Has Stances Too; or the Terribly True Tale of an Émigré, a Mobile Home and How (the) Movement Got Fixed

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"The reception of Gropius and his confreres was like a certain stock scene from the jungle movies of that period. Bruce Cabot and Myrna Loy make a crash landing in the jungle and crawl out of the wreckage in their Abercrombie & Fitch white safari blouses and tan gabardine jodhpurs and stagger into a clearing. They are surrounded by savages with bones through their noses- who immediately bow down and prostrate themselves and commence a strange moaning chant. The White Gods! Come from the skies at last!"
- Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981)

At one point, not too long ago, the modern movement, *moved*. That is to say, (and we all know this tale) the epicenter of European modernism, perhaps modernism itself, known as the Bauhaus, lost its ground. It tried to hang on (and Mies gets uncomfortably implicated here), but in the end, the revolutionaries in Dessau, the very spirits of the *esprit nouveau*, had to abandon their home. From there, eventually, they jumped across the pond to the welcoming arms of the United States where in Tom Wolfe's words, they were treated like "white gods." Following the success of the so-named International Style show, and the subsequent support of major institutions including another show at MoMA merely entitled, "Bauhaus 1919-1928," the émigrés were heralded into positions of aesthetic authority – taking the helm of prestigious schools like Harvard and the Armour Institute and receiving major press from *Architectural Record*, *Pencil Points*, *Progressive Architecture*, and others. To continue with Mr. Wolfe,

"Within three years the course of American architecture had changed, utterly. It was not so much the buildings the Germans designed in the United States, ...It was more the system of instruction they intro-

duced. Still more, it was their *very presence* [sic]. The most fabled creatures in all the mythology of twentieth-century American art – namely, those dazzling European artists poised so exquisitely against the rubble- they were ... here!...now!...in the land of the colonial complex...to govern, in person, their big little Nigeria of the Arts."¹

This is understood now with a bit more temperance, of course. In some versions of the re-telling, the émigrés came with their modern aesthetic, but faced a rather overwhelming popular rejection, especially after the war. So, while they enjoyed a great deal of professional success (they built some 70 buildings in 15 years, as opposed to the 20 or so that they had done in the prior 15 years in Europe), had a number of great museum shows, and strongly altered the mode of architectural instruction at flagship schools away from a more pastoral and scenographic colored-pencil drawing approach to that of the more diagrammatic and systematic schematization of plan and section; their work was also increasingly seen as "elite" and out-of-touch with the warm hominess of the American Dream. High brows and rich bohemians bought Barcelona chairs (always two) and lived in "cold" glass houses. Regular folk did not. Even the Dean of the Harvard GSD admonished the émigrés's international style.

In his 1945 essay, "The Post-Modern House," Hudnut offered up the tired, heroic GI as the client for what should have been architecture's goals and aspirations.² In speaking of soldiers and their desires gleaned "from letters to me", Hudnut urged modern architects to consider how to make a house that is "universalized, socialized, mechanized, and

standardized", and at the same time "invulnerable against the siege of machines." Hudnut referred obliquely to the experimental quality of the earlier work by Buckminster Fuller, when he tells of the typical soldier's fears that the house would be suspended "from a tree or pivot on a mast or give it an outward shape of an aluminum bean..." but he curiously took this into the realm of the émigrés when he made the following dig at Sigfried Giedion, "[H]e is unwilling that my enthusiasm for technological absolutism should carry me that far. He would have mechanization but would not, in the phrase of a distinguished art historian, allow mechanization to take command."³ Hudnut was openly critical of "a cold and uncompromising functionalism" stemming from what he sees as direct translations from "economic necessity and technical virtuosity .. the slide rule [and] the machine". In other words, architecture could be "modern," but that came with an incipient stylistic choice – modern was mechanical, and that was ok, if you were into that sort of thing. A war-weary populace would not be.

In another more critical, more contemporary, retelling, the émigrés themselves get implicated – not just as aesthetic arbiters to be reviled, but as the agents of the entire undoing of architectural meaning. In this version, told most beautifully by Colin Rowe in his introduction to *Five Architects*, the émigrés came to America whereupon receiving their plum positions, they sold out. They continued to make Europeanish, modernish stuff but it was "devoid of ideological content." No longer for the goals of housing (and thereby saving) a proletariat, modern architecture "lost some of its original meaning." In jumping the pond, and these are Rowe's words, "the hoped for condition did not ensue."⁴ Now, we could take this version in two ways. On one hand, there is the way in which Rowe intended, which is to say that the physique/flesh of modern architecture was, and is, separate from its morale/word; and so loosely bound that a simple act of pond crossing is capable of rendering one or the other void. On the other is that very convincing narration by Joan Ockman that suggests a more scandalous role played by American capitalism, as in not so much "selling out" as being "co-opted." The émigrés, it is understood, may have participated in their own loss of content, but they were also helpless in the face of overwhelming postwar sentiment and control over the culture industry.⁵ They, and their products, i.e., modern architecture, became Americanized.

Either way (and I am not here to refute these particular versions even if I find them problematic), one message remains perfectly, ironically, clear: *movement is seen as an interregnum between stances, understood as the change itself from stance a to b, from idea to idea, from ideology to ideology. The act of moving is believed therefore to exist as a neutral territory, groundless, placeless, homeless – and as such supposedly untethered to particular attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and gestures, even if it may result in an eventual tethering....*

...But, what if were not movement versus non-movement, or *place*, but rather valences of movement, calibers, and velocities? What if movement was in itself a progenitor of attitudes, perceptions and beliefs, a maker of gestures, the active face of the tether? What if we could imagine that movement has stances too? Could we begin to examine these constructions more closely to unveil the workings of a modern architecture, in all of the above perceptions? Could we not address the politics of movement, for a movement, the behaviors, stresses, operations, and how those might themselves *move*? It might get messy, but I wish to elucidate here some of ways in which these stances can be drawn out. I will try to stay on track by offering a single case study.

THE WOLFSON HOUSE

This is a house by Marcel Breuer, completed in 1949. It is called the "Wolfson House" for Mr. Sidney Wolfson, the client. And, yes, that is a trailer, and yes, it is attached.

This is the only published page of this work. That little unarticulated capsule is the trailer. The trailer houses the alimentary functions of the house – the kitchen and a bathroom – as well as a small guest quarters. It is connected to the box via a narrow "bridge" with the front and back doors. The box volume has this rather over-scaled rock fireplace separating a living room from a bedroom. And, the stairs lead to a carport, another bathroom and a small office. And, again, it is done by Marcel Breuer, even though I once had the chance to interview Harry Seidler before his passing, who told me repeatedly, that "Lajkos never did a trailer house!"

Seidler was somewhat correct, in that Breuer did not design the trailer part. This is a fairly rare ver-

sion of the popular Spartan travel trailer, based on one commissioned by J. Paul Getty, that well-known tourist. These were a little more expensive than the typical version, and they had molded maple finishes in the galley as well as brass fixtures, and this quite spotless chromed exterior shell.

Sidney Wolfson was an artist. He had studied plein air painting, and had earned some money showing in Betty Parsons gallery in New York after the war. He had lived in this trailer for about a year when he spotted Marcel Breuer close to his home, while Breuer was finishing the Ferry Cooperative Dormitory at Vassar College in 1948. Records are scant but it appears that Wolfson invited Breuer to this site, and simply asked him to add a house onto his trailer. It is unknown if they knew each other in New York, nor if they knew of each other as artists. Regardless, Wolfson's own (proto-Rothko) paintings emblemize much of what is at stake in this discussion of the house: two similar but different colors paired and contrasted with each other, seemingly simple but terribly complex. The Wolfson House is understood as both dual and contradictory, tense like conjoined twins, mobility permanently yoked to permanence, but it also compounded by the facts of the trailer, the émigré and the very status of the Modern Movement after the war. On one side, it is an industrial product of the machine age; on the other, it is Machine-Age architecture. On one side, it is vernacular, common, even if it's a rare Getty trailer; on the other, the work of a famous International Style architect. On one side, a mass-produced and serial object; on the other, a single project done by a signature hand. The trailer's materials are new, shiny, and technological, the box's materials are rough-hewn, cypress and local stones. The trailer is foundation-less, the Breuer volume is foundation-full. A tube is squared off against a box. The mobile object against the Modern Mover.

EUROPE/AMERICA

The three versions of the tale of modern architecture above – modernism triumphant, modernism tempered, modernism co-opted – in the end all belie the true floppiness (or maybe agility) of the modern architectural agenda. It was not all triumphant, but nor was it a simple “us and them” of class and taste. Instead, research into the immediate postwar era, leading to the Wolfson House, suggests an alternative of dynamic interaction –

one that might seem like a model of demise and rise, but perhaps is more accurately read as a complex series of negotiations and inclusions. The fact is that there were numerous articles in leading architectural journals contemporaneous with the Wolfson House entitled some version of, “What Is Happening to Modern Architecture?” or “After the International Style, Then What?”. Usually accompanied by an explicit recognition of the turbulence of the previous decade, the underlying message of these articles was that modern architecture had reached a stage of crisis and necessary redefinition, and that much of the crisis revolved around the relationship between Europe and America.

It is indeed difficult not to map the tensions of the Wolfson House onto the tensions that pervaded this crisis point, since it may serve as an instructive paradigm for detailing the many contradictions at stake in the re-vamping of modernism after WWII. At the simplest iconic level, it would appear that the trailer is “America” while the Breuer volume is “Europe”. However, if one follows the logic of the postwar rhetoric – and the eschewing of the cold functional machines of the Europeans in favor of the warm, open living spaces of postwar American modernism – then the roles are either missing a “prewar” (as in the trailer is prewar America and the Breuer volume is prewar Europe) or are oddly reversed. The trailer should be the cold machine (Europe) and the Breuer volume should be the comforting domestic space of a New England cottage (American).

Furthermore, there are the tensions between the cultural currency of each. On one hand, the trailer, a disparaged sign of the lowest income group, is poised against what could be seen as a European import, brought to America by the upper class (or at least the upper-middles) and placed in the garden at MoMA and within the hallowed halls of Harvard University. The two sides, or the “legs”, of the H-plan can then be read as a geographical tension between high and low, mapped onto the Europe/America relationship. As a kitchen and guest wing, the trailer is devalued as mere service quarters, provided extremely inexpensively, while the Breuer volume reflects the refinement of gracious living advocated since European modernism reached the U.S. shore. In this view, the Breuer portion was emblematic of an increasingly bourgeois version of modern architecture that was emerging in the postwar period. Unfortunately, this view is made

multivalent by the former socialism of the Bauhausers and their explicit claims towards worker housing before the migration. Implicit in the post-war formulation is the idea that the Bauhausers had sold out, or lost their ideological edge – just as Rowe, et.al. suggest – but the Wolfson House instead exemplifies a more problematic relationship, that (albeit eccentrically) attempts to “have it both ways,” that is, sold out but still revolutionary.

In addition, the tensions between cultural currency expressed in the two volumes is further compounded by the immigrant architect’s conflicted position of informing and being informed by Americana. By the time the Wolfson House was completed, Peter Blake had described Breuer as a link,

“...between the turbulent days of the early twenties, when many of the esthetic and technical ideas that have produced this new architecture were first formulated, and the present day with its increasingly widespread acceptance of those ideas in this country and abroad.”⁶

This is indeed a very strange statement – for it seems to suggest not only was Breuer the link, one of the first truly global architects, but also that the modern movement had been made more acceptable after Europe migrated to America. What this statement also elucidates is that the legible tension between the trailer and the Breuer portion may be located within architectural origins and the subsequent movements of projects and ideas. Thus, even if the trailer had once served as an inspiration for the production of a machine-based version of European modernism, its gross materiality in this context, in this time, could no longer be abided. Instead of unifying art and technics under the same aesthetic gesture as his Bauhaus training had taught him to do, Breuer kept the trailer whole, and the other volume organic. Despite the imitation of the monococque construction through the use of the panelized box, the trailer does not appear to have inspired the design of the Breuer volume in any way. Compounded by the extension of the brise-soleil over the trailer, the trailer appears not as a seed-germ for modernism but as an after-thought of good-life modernization – the trailer is incorporated into the house, but at the same time, retained as a gleaming object of consumer desire. Had modernism come so far at this point to be able to dismiss the machine-like aspects of the trailer as a model for architectural design? Or, was this rather an expression of the frustrations felt by the

immigrant architect in a “real” encounter with an object that had been heretofore only an image of a time, place and promise?

Although it seems fundamental, there is surprisingly little work on an “American” version of architectural design and its characteristic distinctions from the European side, prewar or postwar. Instead, pervasive myths have superceded scholarship in this area. One of the most persistent myths is that there was an American version of modernism that was developing on its own from Wright and Sullivan and that its development had been interrupted by the influx of the émigrés in the pre-war era. Through writers like Tom Wolfe, whose severely under-researched and knee-jerk polemic, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, seems to echo consistently many of the sentiments of this version, the turning point is attributed to the International Style show in 1932, and may be one reason why this exhibition has been magnified in the architectural imagination. Implicit in this myth is that American design had been halted, either abruptly stopped because of the arrival (and celebration) of the European émigrés, or preserved according to notions of indigenous historic conservation. The “Prairie” and the “Ranch” are in this case, holdouts, bulwarked against global forces to the benefit of American pride.

Another and more recent myth revolves around a more critical understanding of the American/European conversion. In this version, the story is much better researched and analyzed in favor of an idea that the Europeans had actively transformed the American architectural scene to suit their design ideals while simultaneously sacrificing their polemic. In this version, the deciding factor is generally the war itself and the point of contention is control over the dominant design paradigm. Probably beginning with Colin Rowe’s “Chicago Frame” essay, the basic critique is that either the American potential was incorporated and turned into design by European avant-gardism, or that Americanization ultimately blanded the potential from the European designs. In later essays, especially by Joan Ockman and Donald Albrecht, while the focus shifts remarkably from a primarily formal argument, the message has remained the same. The powerful influence exerted by European modernism after the war and its subsequent shaping of American corporate culture and the global city is indicative of

its victory, no matter how pyrrhic it may be in the memory of avant-gardism.

Keeping these myths in mind, I would argue that what may be discerned as profound difference at one historical point – for example, the difference between white modernism from the regional types – it is in actuality almost impossible to discern the European from the American by 1949, even with the barest minimum of criteria such as the free plan or the cubic volume. The Wolfson House is a nice example, but it is not the only one. We could examine the Eames House along the same lines – mentored by Saarinen and certainly influenced by the bridge design of Mies – but designed and built with a much more American sensibility of infinite expansion (the kit-of-parts) and ready-made pragmatism. Or, the exquisite tensions between the Farnsworth House and Glass House by Phillip Johnson – the which-came-first discussion already points to an America/Europe face-off – but it is made far more complex by a consistent thread on the presence of Frank Lloyd Wright. The Farnsworth site in Plano, Illinois, was probably in homage to Frank Lloyd Wright (Mies in fact mentions this possibility). And in the same year as the Glass House was completed, bare moments after the Wolfson House, Philip Johnson wrote a piece on Wright. In “The Frontiersman”, a title that should not be lost in relation to Nikolaus Pevsner’s “Pioneers”, Johnson asserted that Wright himself was “a product of an uncertain architectural heritage.”⁷⁷

AN UNCERTAIN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The tales and myths of American versus European design probably stem from a modernist (and all too human) impulse towards the maintenance of holism and integrity, if not identity itself. If there had been such a thing as an American or European modern architecture in the first place, they should probably be considered together with the politics of national identity (which are similarly bound to notions of holism and integrity). The noted hissing of the “International Style” epithet as early as 1945 is certainly instructive here, if not outright alarming. However, in my terribly true tale, I wish to suggest that there may be another theoretical model, one that sees design as a highly complex and varied field of activity, that may retain certain sensibilities, but does not possess organic identities. Seen in this way, it could be that the best aspects of postwar modern design, the ones valued as “good”,

had been material, formal, and combinatory – in effect, stylistic. Furthermore, it is, and continues to be, not a controlled struggle over stable identities but rather a symptom of an already-modern condition of complex mobility.

In the 1930’s travel trailers were an accepted part of American life. In his 1941 dissertation on mobile homes, Donald Cowgill reasoned that the popularity of travel trailers and “the wanderlust of the people was being stirred by the dissatisfaction due to the Depression,” but was not the sole cause of a rapid and total turn to full-time life in a travel trailer. Through a survey of 130 “trailerites”, Cowgill learned that the vast majority were middle-class (earning between \$100 and \$200 per month), white-collar (usually traveling salespeople), fairly well-educated, and with small families. This survey led him to differentiate between the continuous mobility of migrant workers in which there was no permanent home or residence, and migration as a “movement” towards a “new” kind of domesticity. Cowgill concluded that,

“[T]he trailerite is something new – is something of a hybrid. He is constantly on the move through geographic space and thus typifies the trend to greater mobility, but he takes his residence with him. This may be viewed as an adjustment to permanent mobility – a step ahead which may relieve some of the maladjustment which sociologists have found to accompany mobility wherever it has been found heretofore.”⁸

This hybrid trailerite, located somewhere between permanence and greater mobility, to which *Time* magazine attributed the term “rootlessness” in 1936, presented two major formal challenges to the mere camping apparatus in the preceding generation. First, it meant that the travel trailer had to assume all of the functional characteristics of a full-time home: separated sleeping quarters for children, modern and hygienic kitchens and baths, hard-top roofs and comfortable “living rooms” for receiving guests. Second, it instantiated the need for this full-time house to not only be capable of moving as a road-registered vehicle, but also, like the automobile, an attunement to the most advanced design of its day. In the 1930s, this sensibility ran in two general directions: cubic massing made from homebuilding materials such as plywood and homasote, exemplified by William Stout’s folding houses and do-it-yourself kits for sale in the back of *Popular Mechanics*; and curved

forms shaped by metals and plastics more associated with automobile bodies, such as Corwin Willson's designs, and of course, Wally Byam's Airstream. In both cases, the emphasis was placed on shape rather than ornamentation, and on spatial planning rather than figural space, which were in fact common attributes of high modernist (European) design. Although Willson cited Le Corbusier's 1919 essay, "Mass Production Houses" in his sales literature, it is unlikely that the American mobile home was inspired by the heroic goals of egalitarian machine a'habitiers. Rather, the modernist aspects of the travel trailer may be seen as an expression of a more homegrown mobility, inspired by the same autos, trains and ocean liners that inspired the Europeans, but tinged with democratic, not revolutionary, ambitions.

Given the interest in cars and all things pragmatically American from dams to grain silos, we have every reason to believe that the Bauhausers, among other avant-gardist brethren, admired the American travel trailer. It was small. It was made in a factory. It was affordable. It was everything that the *existenzminimum* promised to be. And yet, while the Modern Movement became thoroughly dedicated to prefabrication using standardized, mass-produced modules, it never appears to have been lulled into the gross vehicularity, the overt machine-y machinism, of the travel trailer.

So, just as the American travel trailer was surely inspired by the European modernists, so too the Europeans must have reconciled their attitudes towards movement and mobility in reference to the travel trailer. This was not the accelerated future of the Futurists – who clearly differentiated between the running car and the stark stillness of the monumental form. Nor was it as simple as Banham's formulation at the end of *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, in which he accuses the Modern Movement of a kind of "blindness" to the American technologized style (Banham's phrase: "standing on French soil discussing French politics and still speaking English"). Rather, theirs can be located halfway, in motion – the émigré reading and translating a sort-of already mobile vernacular.

By the time of the Wolfson House, Breuer had often demonstrated his devotion to regional vernacular forms and styles. In early sketchbooks, there are many drawings of peasant houses, laid out in

a Ruskin-like typological diagram, that note variations in cladding, patterning and support structures. After the dissolution of the Bauhaus, according to William Jordy in a protracted chapter on Breuer and "new regionalism," Breuer traveled to France and sought out Le Corbusier's Le Mandrot House as a source for design inspiration.⁹ Even the trips to the Mediterranean where he penned his main polemic "Where Do We Stand?", attest to his interests in what may later be termed regionalism. Breuer's selection of materials – of stones and wood – but also his principles of cladding and orientation – sun and shadow – signify a conscious adaptation to local and site specific conditions, and were indeed part of his repertoire long before he ever became "Americanized". It may have been the one lesson he taught to Gropius. In their practice together in America, in prewar projects such as the Chamberlain Cottage, Breuer urged Gropius to use what would later become Breuer's regional trademark, such as local stones for the foundation and pressed spruce panels.

As early as 1945, in the *The House and the Art of its Design*, Robert Woods Kennedy seized on Breuer's ability to bring tradition into modern architecture, when he wrote,

It is also in this work that Woods Kennedy gave a first glimmer of the crisis over modern architecture and the way that it would be manifested in architectural design discourse. It begins with a sociological study distinguishing between different types of housing according to different class levels.¹⁰ "Dwelling units" referred to government-sponsored minimal public housing. "Homes" referred to products by "Home Builders" designed and built en masse for the middle class:

"The shopping client may ask for 'traditional front, modern behind'; trying to have his cake and eat it too, ...It is for this reason that both camps lay claim to traditionalism. One of the most radical modern architects claims his houses are in the 'American Tradition' because they have fireplaces in the living room. Others make the point more subtly. Marcel Breuer is quoted in the *New Yorker* as follows:

'Mr. Breuer hopes his house will show how different modern architecture is from the stark-white concrete cubes that most people think of when the term is used. 'Modern architects don't like severity in a house,' he said, 'Perhaps we did once, but we don't anymore. Little by little, we've learned how to use the old natural materials – stone, unpainted wood – in fresh ways. We've

learned to make houses that grow gently out of the land and will weather and become more beautiful with age.”¹¹

“Houses”, the third category, were largely individual and singular and thus built by architects. To clarify this category, and thus address the design portion of the study, the “house” group was further subdivided into strata of the upper classes – upper-uppers who inherited their houses, lower-uppers who sought old upper-upper houses for purchase, and the upper-middle who either built traditional houses (the “conservatives”) or hired architects to build modernist houses (the “innovators”). Interestingly, this is where the study turns from the sociological to the aesthetic, as the rest of the study is devoted to the differences between the conservatives and the innovators in terms of style. It is here that Woods Kennedy makes the claim that the upper-middles who hire architects are not altogether traditionalists, and that instead, many fall into the category of the “Semi-Modern.” The Semi-Moderns, according to Woods Kennedy, correctly identified the staleness of tradition, but at the same time did not want to risk the “insecurity” of the avant-garde position, thus demanding “traditional front, modern behind”. Woods Kennedy then expands this preference set into a deep commentary on the differences between the “Internationalists”, “Empiricists”, and “Traditionalists” in a rather amusing and comprehensive chart of responses (e.g. “the master = Le Corbusier, Wright, Viollet-Le-Duc”, or “the house = a machine for living, shelter, a good investment”).

This study outlines the difficult position of the emerging picture of modernism after WWII. First, the argument is made on behalf of a deeply stratified society in which the layers are associated with specific tastes and varying levels of modernness and more importantly, that this society was supervising, through commodity selection and consumerism, architectural design. Second, it describes a conflict in modern architecture that would be emblematic of the next few years of architectural discourse – the conflict between what might be described as “old modern architecture” versus “new modern architecture”. Finally, because Woods Kennedy used Marcel Breuer as an example of an architect working to resolve these differences, it readily situates Breuer in an outstandingly pivotal position in the development of postwar American modernism.

Robert Woods Kennedy was a known promoter of Breuer. As the editor of *Architecture*, the journal of the AIA, he often featured Breuer’s houses, and was instrumental in generating much of Breuer’s publicity. However, even in 1945, Woods Kennedy was not saying anything about Breuer that anyone in the field did not already know and recognize. Splitting from Gropius to begin his own practice in 1942, it only took a few years to secure his reputation as the resident residential architect of the European émigrés, a reputation that spanned the entire postwar era. From 1945 to 1950, over 22 of his 40 house designs were built, including the award-winning Geller House, the Robinson House, and the Tompkins House. In less than 6 years of independent practice, he had been invited to exhibit his work at MoMA, and design a model house for the museum garden. To accompany the exhibition, MoMA even commissioned a monograph for Breuer edited by Peter Blake.

In this monograph, Blake comments that Breuer’s emergence as a premier designer of American postwar housing was largely due to his ability to converge modernism with persistent strains of American traditionalism. While this may seem exaggerated, Breuer was at least able to negotiate a difficult architectural scene. Even the American consumers that valued the efficiency and hygiene of modernism were also dismissive of anything overtly European. Seeming to bridge the cool open spaces of European modernism with materials and shapes more associated culturally with “warmth and comfort”, Breuer occupied a unique and desirable position as an architect to enlightened yet wary consumers. In a 1940 *House & Garden* article titled, “Tell Me, What is Modern Architecture?,” the position was clearly forecasted. Although attributed to both Gropius and Breuer, it is Breuer who wrote the text and is acknowledged for it. Indeed, it bears his what would become his stamp. It begins by addressing what “others” have said about the “new tradition”. He claims that instead of understanding the “new architecture” as either functionalism (a reference to Le Corbusier’s still pervasive influence on the discourse and the damnable catch-phrase “a machine for living”); as a material reincarnation of painting (a reference interestingly enough to Gideon – and one that will be addressed later in this section); or as a symbol of social order (which might be traced to Mumford); it should be understood as technique, material, forms and expression coalescing into the elements of modern architecture. Oddly, no matter

how abstract are Breuer's conclusions that, "space may complete color, mass may complete nature, and materials complete idea...", Breuer crowned his understanding of the new tradition as the "direct approach". And nowhere, according to Breuer, was a more appropriate venue for the "direct approach" than residential design, where the personal ideas about home make the "new" almost surely conflict with the "tradition".

In the Wolfson House, what appears as a straightforward form of difference between the two sides is actually a tricky set of maneuvers according to this "new tradition." The Wolfson House is basically composed of two monocoques. The trailer is of course a monocoque, that is, a volume in which the body and the chassis are continuous. Using metal ribs attached under and around the floor plate, the ribs also defer the load to the skin, or shell, of the trailer. In the Breuer volume, the common expectation would be that it is a typical balloon-frame construction. However, because of Breuer's fondness for the cantilevered box, both the trailer and box are basically a 360-degree construction of skin to rib. In the Breuer volume, the floor is supported with a main beam, across which the box is cantilevered. By having it supported this way, the box itself could be considered a monocoque. Seen thusly, it may be that Breuer actually set out to imitate the construction of the trailer in wood, and indeed "imitation" is the correct term. Breuer could have absorbed the beam more fully into the floor slab, and thus attained an actual monocoque, making the parallel more complete, but this would have been a very costly endeavor. Instead, the skin comes down over the beam end as if to simulate the monocoque, giving the volume an equalized appearance to the hidden wheels of the trailer.

This should alleviate some of the tensions between the two volumes but in fact does not. The brise-soleil that covers the trailer, and visually unites the two volumes, does not follow through to the southern porch side as it would in the spider legs of Richard Neutra or the classical columns of Mies. The trailer thus appears not as an equal volume compositionally, but as a supplement: anchored into place by the skeletal arms of the trellis popping out somewhat arbitrarily from what is now "the main space". And, even though the use of materials – homosote, cypress, plywood and local stones – may suggest that a handyman had done a pretty

nice add-on, it is also clear that capital-A architecture had not only moved in, but taken over. The trailer is carefully contained, meticulously joined to the bridge and anchored by the brise-soleil. In scale, it's much smaller than the Breuer volume. At the same time, the trailer is disassociated by the bridge, and muted by the blankness of the façades, left out in the cold like the family car by the very house it supposedly inspired.

This particular H-plan composition leads to a general feeling of limitation. In the Breuer volume, the fireplace, a traditionally grounding element, is enormously overscaled. Moreover, the fireplace – placed as if it were a barrier wall between the living quarters and the bedroom – severely restricts movement. It is almost incomprehensible as it cuts the space into puny rooms, making a mockery of the celebrated free plan. But, in this incomprehensibility, the fireplace mimics Breuer's placement of the trailer – an oversized object, weighing the modernist box down to the ground – as if in direct contention with Breuer's own ideas of space:

"Today...we change our lives more rapidly than in the past. It is natural that our environment must undergo corresponding changes. This leads us to installations, rooms, buildings, all or most of whose components can be converted, moved or recombined. The furnishings, and even the walls of the rooms, are no longer massive, monumental, apparently rooted to the spot, or literally bricked in. Rather they are airily perforated and, as it were, outlined in space; they obstruct neither movement nor the view across the room."¹²

If freedom of movement was Breuer's goal, then the Wolfson House is a curious outcome, one that attests to the strange status of movement and mobility in modern architecture. The bi-nuclear plan of the Wolfson House has been altered such that one nucleus is a vehicle hopelessly tethered to the other nucleus which has imitated its construction, even if it had not imitated its form. An uncertain heritage, to be sure, can be ascribed to both sides – but in the end, both are products of a varied mobility: one could, but doesn't; the other can't, but seems like it would like to.

WHICH MODERNISM?

"Place" is itself a critical concept, one that finds its ground in the 1960s, most obviously in the writings of Norberg-Schulz, but certainly echoed throughout the halls of architectural academics for many years

prior and hence. One could claim a heritage to the sensorial immediacy of that critique understood as phenomenology. Or, one could start to make a case for a more pragmatic sense of the built environment, emanating out of the sociological studies of Louis Wirth and the Chicago School - both of which date to the earlier part of the 20th century. Wherever its provenance (and I do intend the pun), "place" is offered as a critical answer to a seeming placenessness of the modern - as if the modern was a kind of roaming imperialist without itself a mother country, which is itself problematic, to say the least. But to stay with the original concept (and again, I intend the pun...): "Place" is supposed as opposite to "mobility." This is the construction: "Mobility" moves around, it doesn't stay in "place." Moreover, it probably didn't have a place to begin with. Mobility has no origin. It is the flow, not the source.

So, with now a post-critical assessment at hand, we have before us an idea that mobility disrupts place, dislocates the original, undoes the hegemonic primacy of the original through a kind of automatic belying of the autochthonic, and the indigenous. Mobility disrupts identity, disrupts ontology. And of course that all seems very sexy right now.

Certainly, this is not the first time that mobility or movement has been imagined as antidotes to the moorings of place. However, I wish to stress that the movement is in itself not neutral, not a mere disruptor but the very progenitor, the formative aspect, of modern identity. Indeed it is at the essence of modernity - one can only imagine that Walter Benjamin called on Baudelaire's Painter of Modern Life for the very reason that it depicted an itinerant character (Guys) who through his movement constructs the presence of the modern, capitol of the 19th century, city. The Futurists, film, the speed of daily life - all of these reacted to a sense of stillness, but reacted with a complex and varied vitality, utterly immersed in ideology and meaning. The term "Modern Movement" itself implies this. It dreamed a dream of mobility on foreign shores, and then it moved - and in the moving, when it had a fair shot at the actual, vehicular movement inspired by America *in situ* - it rejected that movement in favor of more stylistic gestural movement, regional or of an uncertain architectural heritage. The Wolfson House still stands. But not for long.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981), 47, 49.
- 2 Joseph Hudnut, "The Post-Modern House", reprinted in *Roots of Contemporary American Architecture*, ed. Lewis Mumford, (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 306-316.
- 3 This was one of many not-so-oblique references to the dramatic title of Sigfried Giedion's 1948 book. It is peculiar in that 1) it shows up in print three years before the book is published (a probable sign of their familiarity through Harvard), and 2) that it is a profound misreading of Giedion's intentions for the book. Hudnut must have assumed that Giedion would was in favor of mechanization taking command. He was mistaken.
- 4 Colin Rowe, *Introduction to Five Architects*, (New York: Wittenborn, 1972).
- 5 Joan Ockman, "Toward a Theory of Normative Architecture," in *Architecture of the Everyday*, S. Harris & D. Berke, eds., (Princeton Architectural Press, 1997): 122-152.
- 6 Peter Blake, *Marcel Breuer*, (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1949): 4.
- 7 Philip Johnson, "The Frontiersman", *Architectural Review* 106, (August 1949): 105-110.
- 8 Donald Cowgill, *Mobile Homes*, unpublished dissertation, (University of Pennsylvania, 1941).
- 9 William H. Jordy, *The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century, American Buildings and their Architects*, Vol.5, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Robert Woods Kennedy, *The House and the Art of its Design*, (New York: Robert F. Krieger Publishing Company, 1945): 386-387.
- 12 Marcel Breuer, "Metallmobel und moderne Raumlichkeit," *Das neue Frankfurt*, (January 2, 1928).