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Ernö Goldfinger and 2 Willow Road: inhabiting the modern utopia

Ernö Goldfinger y 2 Willow Road: habitando la utopía moderna

Hampstead, London

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This paper is based on an essay written as a part of the author's MA program in Architectural History, Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London. The course in question, Architecture in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Britain was given by Professor Adrian Forty.

Abstract

1-3 Willow Road, houses built by Ernő Goldfinger facing Hampstead Heath in London, stand out as a paradigmatic example of Modernist British Architecture. Displacing traditional notions and ideals of a modernist house and of modernist inhabitation, what they 'are' goes somehow against to what they represent. Domesticity as well as concepts such as private and public, or exterior and interior are dislocated. Considered as one of the most distinguished manifestations of Modernity, in 2 Willow Road Modernism is suggested, but also disrupted by postmodern gestures. In a lifelong process that fills the space with collected objects, modernity is replaced by a more bourgeois environment: the atmosphere experienced in the interior is that of an inhabited collage closer to a nineteenth century dwelling. The heterogeneity of random order and arbitrary juxtapositions is, for this case, an aesthetic procedure that most likely legitimates Goldfinger's beliefs and understanding of what life is. What 2 Willow Road actually testifies is about the romantic utopia of Modern inhabitation.

Keywords: Ernő Goldfinger, modernism, domesticity, inhabitation.

Resumen

1-3 Willow Road, casas construidas y diseñadas por Ernő Goldfinger frente a Hampstead Heath en Londres son reconocidas por ser ejemplo paradigmático de la arquitectura moderna británica. Al desplazar nociones tradicionales asociadas a la casa y al habitar moderno, lo que son va en contra de lo que representan. En ellas, el concepto de domesticidad, junto con conceptos como público y privado, y exterior e interior se encuentran dislocados. 2 Willow Road es considerada como una de las manifestaciones más claras de la modernidad, aun cuando en realidad revela facetas posmodernas. Testigos de un proceso de vida que llena los espacios con objetos coleccionados, el concepto de habitar moderno es reemplazado por un ambiente mucho más burgués: lo que se puede experimentar en el interior es en realidad un *collage* habitado cercano a las 'viviendas' del siglo XIX. La heterogeneidad de los órdenes aleatorios y sus arbitrarias yuxtaposiciones son, en este caso, un procedimiento estético que legitima tanto las creencias de Goldfinger como la manera de entender su vida. 2 Willow Road es un testimonio vivo de la romántica utopía alrededor del habitar moderno.

Palabras clave: Ernő Goldfinger, movimiento moderno, domesticidad, habitar.

2 WILLOW ROAD

Location: Hampstead, London

Year of construction: 1939

Architect: Ernő Goldfinger

Text: Catalina Mejía,

Photographs: Catalina Mejía © National Trust,

Claudio Leoni, © National Trust, Sydney

W. Newbery / RIBA Library Photographs

Collection.

1-3 Willow Road, Hampstead, London: The street façade. ©Photograph: Sydney W. Newbery / RIBA Library Photographs Collection ©.





Figure 2. Willow Road, London: Interior. Goldfinger Studio. Photograph: Catalina Mejia, © National Trust.

A young architect ought to be made to build his own house first. It is the only way to learn. And at his own expense. I don't know in all cases, but he ought to have the chance to show what his ideas really are.¹

1 In: Kent, "Goldfinger's: Britain's Most Consistent Modernist", 34.

Houses, 1940

1-3 Willow Road NW3

Erno Goldfinger

Closest tube: Hampstead

Built by Goldfinger for both himself and other private residence, this pleasant row of houses looks as if it is one big villa. The projecting frames around the top-floor windows and the single frame uniting the windows of the first-floor living rooms both became clichés when imitated by other architects. Nevertheless, the houses have worn better than most other stucco-modern English designs, perhaps because the imagery is as much Georgian as it is Modern. They were built in spite of opposition from the local authority, which was overridden by the LCC. In 1994, 2 Willow Road (Ernö Goldfinger's residence), was bought by the National Trust and is now open to the public.²

2 Jones & Woodward, *A guide to the Architecture of London*, 57.

The following is an entry in Jones and Woodward's *Guide to The Architecture of London* that I read the first time I saw the 1-3 Willow Road houses when ending up by mistake in Downshire Hill, after a winter walk on Hampstead Heath. As surprising as the chance encounter were the entries regarding the buildings on the opposite page: Isokon Flats (Wells Coates, 1933) and Kent House (Connell, Ward and Lucas, 1936), which, similarly to Goldfinger's house, are examples of Modern Architecture, however, are more specifically 'English modernism' or 'pre-war modern architecture'. They are described in the guide as follows: "With their white stuccoed walls, metal window frames and exaggerated cantilevered balconies, they come as close as anything

in London at the time to the Heroic modern style”³ (Kent House) and also “the white-stuccoed Isokon flats were prototype dwellings for the mobile intelligentsia of the ‘new’ society”.⁴

3 Ibid. 56.

4 Ibid. 56.

It is clear that 1-3 Willow Road is a pleasant example of Modern Housing, which lacks the white stuccoed walls expected of Modern projects. It is precisely due to this detail that the building reminded me both of Bogota with its 50's Modern architecture, and more specifically of some projects undertaken by a group of architects who, as Goldfinger, studied in Paris but worked with Le Corbusieris instead of Perret. As with 1-3 Willow Road, their modern language was not white stuccoed walls, but instead stone, brick and concrete. It was this familiar aesthetic, as well as the fact that the house was designed and built by an architect, for himself and his family, that triggered my interest in this hybrid project. Since the first moment I encountered the Willow Road houses, I realised their significance goes beyond their apparent Modern appearance.

From a distance, it could be considered as a sympathetic building, and almost a counterpoint to its surrounding three and four stories Georgian and Victorian Houses. Its colours and materials, the brick as well as the white concrete frames provoke its immediate neighbours. Gavin Stamp stated that, “[the building] is the most distinguished Modern manifestation of that return to more intelligent building methods evident in England at the end of the 1930s and it has weathered much better than many of the famous white boxes so extensively illustrated in the journals”.⁵ Evidently, this was not a commonly shared idea in the thirties when the house was built.⁶

5 Stamp, *Goldfinger-The Early Years*, 9.

6 Having the Froggnal 66 house (Connell, Ward and Lucas, 1938), and the Sun House (Maxwell Fry, 1935) in the background, it is not difficult to imagine that 1-3 Willow Road could also be rejected in a neighbourhood such as Hampstead. In an article published in the *Evening Standard*, 22nd December 1937, Mr. Henry Brooke, secretary for the Hampstead Protection Society stated that the LCC had been urged to exercise their powers “to prevent in the Downshire Hill Neighbourhood any building so disastrously out of keeping with its present character as a modern angular house of reinforced concrete”. To which Goldfinger replied: “I think the opposition to these houses is based on misapprehension. They are designed in a modern adaptation of the eighteenth century style, and are far more in keeping with the beautiful Downshire Hill houses around the corner than their neighbours in Willow Road”. (Newsprint. *Evening Standard*, 22nd December 1937. Found in: Goldfinger 1-3 Willow Road Educational Box. RIBA Drawings Collection.)

It is quite astonishing that references to Willow Road houses are mainly related to its exterior appearance. Pevsner is one of only very few who dares to look beyond the facade in order to illustrate some determinant interior aspects of the building. “It is complemented by a notable collection of modern art”⁷ he states. Considering the interior as part of the architectural project or as an architectural construction is a recent approach.⁸ Not even Goldfinger considers this point:

7 Pevsner and Cherry, *The Buildings of England*, 227.

8 Seminar: Material Culture, Representation. MA Architectural History, 2009. Professor Jane Rendell, Professor Adrian Forty.

These houses are a landmark. They have been copied since by everybody. They are not eccentric, what I call Casbah architecture - that very early international style, white walls and horizontal lit windows. [...] I really tried to build a late Georgian or Regency terrace in a modern way. These houses have a classical feeling. [...]The middle one is the biggest and we have lived in it since August 1939. They have a reinforced concrete frame and a completely open plan, which can be subdivided at will. The only fixed point is the staircase with a plumbing duct in the middle. Certainly the facade should not be altered ñ that is fundamental - but it would be rather peculiar if we were not allowed to alter the inside. What is alteration in a modern house?⁹

9 “Historic pioneers. Architects and clients”, 597.

Maybe alteration is exactly what 2 Willow Road reflects today. Spaces that were originally considered to be inhabited in a modern way, wha-

tever the meaning of this phrase may be, can no longer be entitled modern due to their long lives of inhabitation.

In December 1941 and January 1942, Goldfinger wrote three articles for the Architectural Review Magazine: "The sensation of Space",¹⁰ "Urbanism and Spatial Order",¹¹ and the "Elements of Enclosed Space".¹² These three essays constitute his theoretical statement about architecture by focusing on the relationship between the human experience of *enclosed space*; one of the most interesting contributions to his analysis of how space is experienced.¹³ His principal statement is that architecture is a way of enclosing space. The way in which it is enclosed has a psychological impact on anyone *within* that space. This sensation, which we, as human beings are subjected to, is determined, says Goldfinger, by the *enclosed agent* and the *enclosed space*. He also affirms that:

The sensation of space cannot be experienced by simple visual contemplation. It cannot be experienced by any organ alone. [...]One of the most important agents of its perception is nevertheless visual. So is the perception of pictorial and plastic phenomena, but while the essence of perception in these two is conscious, that of spatial perception is subconscious. [...]Plastic and pictorial visualisation is *estático* while spatial visualisation is 'kinetic'.¹⁴

He then concludes, "When space is enclosed with the skill of an artist, when the purpose is to move, then the *espacial sensación* becomes spatial emotion and enclosed space becomes ARCHITECTURE".¹⁵

- 10 Goldfinger, "The Sensation of Space", 129-131
- 11 Goldfinger, "Urbanism and Spatial Order", 163-166
- 12 Goldfinger, "Elements of Enclosed Space", 5-8
- 13 In relation to this he states, "It is not necessary to elevate aesthetic emotion on to a special pedestal of its own, to make it the sublime phenomenon it is. It is part of other natural phenomena, and as such can and must be scientifically analysed". Goldfinger. "The sensation of Space". 129
- 14 Explanation: when considering a *pictorial phenomenon* (a painting), which basically consists of a bi-dimensional surface, it needs to be contemplated (at a necessary distance). No sensation will be derived from this experience if it is not done consciously. In order to consider a *plastic phenomenon*, which by nature is three-dimensional, a different method of perception is required. In this case it would be stereoscopic. Here again, the effect is created by conscious contemplation, even though this time the subject has to go around the object in order to appreciate it in its entirety. An evident characteristic of these two forms of perception is that the action occurs outside, *without the object*. *Spatial order or spatial perception* implies that the process occurs *within* the object being contemplated. This third method of perception, spatial, is in a way a more complicated process because it does not depend on a specific organ (the eyes), unlike the previous cases. Memories, experience, sounds, the atmosphere, touching, and smelling all become part of the spatial sensation. As one moves through the building, one is aware of the space in which they have been enclosed, and the natural human response is an emotional one. Goldfinger, "The sensation of Space", 130.
- 15 Goldfinger, "The sensation of Space", 131.



Figure 3. 1-3 Willow Road, London: The street facade. Goldfinger's house. Photograph: Catalina Mejia, © National Trust.

A modern architect's rationalisation of the way space is felt and architecture conceived is an interesting topic. The aforementioned quote is Goldfinger's method of understanding architecture, and as such I would use the structure to analyse his house. Primarily I would explore the house pictorially and plastically from the outside, from *without*. Subsequently, the house would be explored from *within*, as a spatial phenomenon. What I am looking forward to demonstrate, pictorially and plastically, is that the house has a dwelling shell, which can be interpreted as being in-between modern and postmodern standpoints. Contrastingly, the spatial phenomenon *within* the house is that of a nineteenth century bourgeois dwelling that includes some modern traces as part of its determining nature; this is due to the uncontrollable and unpredictable issues life brings into an inhabited space. Goldfinger planned an extremely controlled space, which provided an arena for family life as well as for social entertainment. However, in a lifelong process that turns neat space into an area where things are collected, (collage of paintings, objects and all sort of material memoirs), modernity is replaced by a more bourgeois environment.

Pictorial and plastic: the enclosing agents

"The striving for plasticity is already very evident in Goldfinger's pre-war work, such as the facade of the Willow Road houses of 1938,"¹⁶ This is evident in the outside layer of brick that was perturbed by recessed windows, and the two garages that were 'pulled out' from the body of the building. The presence of four concrete columns in the centre of the composition draws one's attention to house number 2. They explicitly show the nature of the building's structure, even though their continuity on the upper floors is confusing. On the first floor they change to thin iron columns corresponding to the modulation of the windows' glaze. On the third floor they disappear and become embedded in the facade wall. Goldfinger's desires were not only concerned with plasticity as these devices are to some extent negated and confused by the smoothness of a brick shell envelope around the houses, and the formal composition which disguises the nature of the terrace as three separate dwellings. The facade, as well as the entire volume shows some explicit alterations to the 'international style', which creates an external perception that is in-between the modern and post-modern. According to Jameson:

Modernism also thought compulsively about the New and tried to watch it coming into being, [...] but the postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same; for the *ëwhen-it-all-changedí*, as Gibson puts it, or better still, for shifts and irrevocable changes in the representation of things and of the way they change.[...] Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and its nature is gone for good.¹⁷

At Willow Road, Modernism is suggested, but it is also disrupted by postmodern gestures. Even on the first floor construction plans, a

¹⁶ Dunnet, *Ernő Goldfinger in England*, 76.

¹⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*, ix.

double line represents the *enclosing agent*: with white representing plywood, and red representing brick. This line symbolises a shell, which covers and surrounds the entire house, (like a wallpaper covering). Inside this shell lives the domestic interior; it is the house's *enclosed space*.

Spatial: the enclosed space

“Our understanding of domestic experience as shared is formed from the sorts of associations that indexical images produce in their denial of direct access to the space of domesticity”.¹⁸ This is probably why seeing inside Willow Road is a revelation. The reconstruction of the interior was based upon existent pictures of the house, recently built and occupied, and a perfect illustration of how a modern interior should look: clean, efficient, and clear. Undoubtedly, reality tells a different story.

The design process that the house underwent is fascinating. While the plans for houses 1 and 3 did not change since the first proposal, number 2's were constantly evolving. The house became to take shape after many drawings and sketches. It was October 4th, 1937 when an important change definitively moulded the houses' spatial interior. A one step difference appeared between the studio and the living room and the walls dividing areas on the first floor were removed.

Since then, folding walls connected one space to the other. Changes were noticeable inside only and the street facade remained unaltered. 'Form', 'space', 'design', 'order' and 'structure':¹⁹ the presence of modern language is explicit in each drawing and even in every publication made of Willow Road, although these five categories fade as one enters the house.

Enclosure and opening: three red doors in the stair landing

There is a small entrance hall with a particularly low ceiling, and on the right, the stairs; a concrete and cantilevered, cork surface with dark blue paint in each step rise; narrow and thin. A light shining from above points the way up. A sculptural brass handrail shines as a spiral ribbon asking to be followed. Unexpectedly, on the first floor landing, evident but hidden and contrived in that narrow space are two bright red corners and three doors that await. The staircase, masked, suggests a double interior as well as a double concealment. You are not *within* the house until you have been invited to pass through these doors, even if you are one floor above. When on the staircase you still feel yourself *without*, still outside. Beatriz Colomina states that in every Loos' house there is a point of maximum tension that always coincides with a threshold or a boundary. This is Goldfinger's one. You are not invited to come in, but once slightly opened the doors frame scenes of everyday life, and when completely open, the light pulls you in, displaying a surprising world inside.

18 Rice, *Reading gender and Loos interiors*, 295.

19 Mentioned by Adrian Forty as, “instantly recognizable”, although “frequently defined by each other”. Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 19.



Figures 4 and 5. Landing at the second and first floor. Photographs: Claudio Leoni, © National Trust.

“The first floor is constructed on two different levels. [...] By means of the spiral staircase the planning of the living-rooms on the first floor and children’s floor on the second floor is left free of intersections and enables partitions to be provided so that rooms can be thrown open”,²⁰ states Goldfinger when describing his house rationally and practically as a neat architectural operation. Far from describing the house’s occupant and designer, he abstractly frames the realities within the house.

When crossing the threshold, one arrives at one’s grandparent’s house; even the smell is reminiscent. The severity of the architecture immediately fades away between the impressive amount of modern paintings and art pieces, papers and objects. It is a cosy and confusing atmosphere. Time stands still, as in Sir John Soane’s House.²¹ Mystified and surrounded by information, one perceives this area as a space for collections. Even though the two houses differ slightly (in the nature of their architectural and construction development) ironically Soane’s house was developed as a ‘studies of Architecture and the Allied Arts’,²² and Goldfinger’s ended up being so.

“The most important thing about a house is the views from its windows,”²³ said Goldfinger, probably when referring to the drawn and re-drawn ribbon window that faces the street. Its scale, proportions, and

20 Goldfinger, “The decline of the street - and an attempt to restore it”, 130.

21 Constructed between 1792 and 1823.

22 Pevsner and Cherry, *The Buildings of England*, 296.

23 Dunnet, “Roots of Goldfinger’s Design”, 26.

24 'This is tomorrow'. Exhibition held at Whitechapel Gallery in which he participated. 9th August - 9th September 1956.

framed views are outstanding. One of its concrete frames is now a wooden shelf full of keepsakes and small objects. The white folding doors between the spaces initially appear to be folding white surfaces, but act as extra-hanging space for more paintings. Surfaces were thought of as surfaces, not as upholstered canvases as they actually are: Ozenfant, Leger, Duchamp, Ernst. The studio is ambiguous, seemingly neither his, nor hers. Goldfinger's designed furniture evokes memories of other modern architects such as Le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto. Several cases embedded in the walls hide more objects. A poster acts as a premonitory but apparently contradictory statement: *This is tomorrow*.²⁴

"It is hard to believe that a woman lived here too" said a young lady when observing a drawing of Ursula made by Man Ray and hung on the waxed oak plywood wall, which once folded completely between the studio and the living room. Two smoothly painted concrete columns stand clear from the glazing. Behind, a heavy white silk curtain inhibits the view of Downshire Hill gardens. It hardly reminded of the picture taken by Sidney Newberry in 1939 in which the windows appear completely open, satisfying another modern ideal. In between the interior and the exterior there are two chairs; one faces *within* and the other *without*. A clock, four white switches and a door handle are positioned on a wall. His presence is felt in every detail, in every decision and in every assembly.

The atmosphere in the interior is that of a collage which is inhabited. This somehow goes against the modern logic of standardisation and reproducibility. Just like a work of art made of pieces of the everyday world, he uses the concrete and tangible reality as a mean of expression, just as any of the Max Ernst paintings around.

Dislocations: the existence of doors

In the upper floor a skylight fills the open space, inviting you to the more private part of the house: the bedrooms. Not crowded, but instead, like the floor below, almost unoccupied by objects. It appears as though private and public spheres displace one-another. To access the public sphere you have to be invited, but surprisingly, privacy invites you to come in.

As with private and public areas, the traditional notions of inside and outside are also dislocated. When talking about Möller House, Beatriz Colomina states that Adolf Loos splits the interior and the exterior: the interior as the intimate sphere, the realm of the unspeakable, and the exterior as the outside, the realm of exchange. In Goldfinger's house, this splitting occurs *within* the house, and is directly related to the dividing walls. When they are folded, the exterior appears to be a single space, like a stage in a theatre where entertainment and landscape become dissolved one in the other. Once again, in the interior, subdivisions appear and with them their individualities as well as the framing



Figure 6. Living room and dividing wall. Photograph: Catalina Mejia, © National Trust.



Figure 7. Door entrance to dining room. Photograph: Catalina Mejia, © National Trust.

devices of an 'outside' that is waiting to return inside again. This first floor is a frame for action, (the exterior), as well as an object in a frame (the interior). They are split but at the same time cohabit.

An interior speaking: the dwelling

Charles Rice states that the bourgeois domestic interior emerges historically in the nineteenth century through the accumulation of traces, and in relation to occluded meanings.²⁵ He also states, that it emerges as a *doubled interior*: as both image and spatial condition. Even though referring to a different time, both arguments seem to suit 2 Willow Road. There is however, one radical difference: Goldfinger's 'modern' house double interior was born from a modern ideal image of a twentieth century inhabited interior, but with a twenty-first century bourgeois spatial circumstance.

25 Rice, "Rethinking histories of the interior", 278.

The accumulation of traces in Goldfinger's interior suggests a dwelling inside a shell, which in this case is the facade that mediates between the body and the outside world.

The original form of all dwelling is existence not in a house but in a shell. The shell bears the impression of its occupant. In the most extreme instance, the dwelling becomes a shell. The nineteenth century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwellings interior, that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet.²⁶

26 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 220.



Figure 8. Dining room window. Photograph: Claudio Leoni, © National Trust.



Figure 9. Entrance floor. Photograph: Claudio Leoni, © National Trust.

Ernő Goldfinger and Ursula Blackwell were evidently attached to the items that surrounded them. According to Bruno Taut, the issues of 'emotional matters' talk about 'affective moments', and that the 'affective moment' led to the profusion of objects in the house²⁷ generating a cosy atmosphere. Just as "if you enter a bourgeois room of the 1880's, for all the cosiness it radiates, the strongest impression you receive may well be, 'you've got no business here'. And if you have no business in that room, for there is no spot on which the owner has not left his mark".²⁸

27 Van Herck, "Only where comfort ends", 129.

28 Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty", 734.

Eliminating cosiness was rather typical in the 20's. This reaction against the bourgeois notions of domesticity found its expression in the interior. When concepts such as cleanliness, simplicity or other hygienic and aesthetic considerations became more important, the notion of cosiness came under attack. Corbusier referred to it as a 'sentimental hysteria', rooted in feelings of loss caused by modernity. Bruno Taut instead considered the cosy practices of the inhabitants as an almost primitive or neurotic ritual of 'rugglueing', and Hannes Meyer as something that should find its place in 'the heart of the individual' and not on 'the wall of his home'.²⁹ Probably even Goldfinger would have attacked it as well when the house was constructed, but it is evident that he enjoyed it some years later.

29 Ibid. 124.

Conclusion

"To live is to leave traces". With this sentence Beatriz Colomina begins her writing on the Interior.³⁰ I would like to add another quote that I believe to be pertinent; one of Benjamin's statements that reinforces the experience of being within Goldfinger's own 'enclosed space': "the collector proves to be the true resident of the interior."³¹

30 Colomina, *Privacy and publicity*.

31 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 19.

One of the notions that I have been trying to prove so far is that Goldfinger's interior in Willow Road displaces some traditional notions and ideals of a modern house and the ideas of inhabitation. Concepts such as what is private and public, or exterior and interior are dislocated as well as domesticity in its modern conception. The collage atmosphere evidences that this house, unlike those of Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe does not annihilate the traditional domesticity that was born in the nineteenth century.

The exterior aspect of the house, apparently modern, distracts the unaware viewer. This is probably one of the reasons why it is still today considered as one of the most distinguished manifestations of Modernity, together with the fact that it's interior is either ignored or still unknown. Its exterior, visibly postmodern, testifies against its modern constructed discourse. What 2 Willow Road actually testifies to is the romantic utopia of Modern inhabitation. As Adrian Forty says, the modern notion of comfort that appears within the Modern discourse is absurd "for we can hardly be expected to believe that the domestic interior has an end condition and that when that end is reached, all further change would ease".³² If the building is truly modern, it should

32 Forty, *The comfort of Strangeness* In: 2G Magazine. Sergison Bates. No. 34. August 2005.

33 Benjamin, in heynen, "Modernity and domesticity". 18

34 Ibid. 18.

35 Gray, Eileen and Badovici, Jean. *Description' In: L'Architecture Vivante*, Winter, 1929. Quoted in Constant, Caroline and Wang, Wilfried. *Eileen Gray. An Architecture for All Senses*. Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1996, p. 23. Taken from: Van Herck, "Only where comfort ends, does humanity begin".

speak as its initial photographs, the bare interiors, open and rational plans which would ideally "teach people that material belongings are less important than social spirit, they would liberate women from the burden of heavy duties and that they would act as perfect accommodations for a life more mobile and flexible".³³ Instead, it represents a nineteenth century dwelling, which for Benjamin was "deeply ingrained with capitalist commodity culture and corresponded to an oppressive, patriarchal, individualist, and unjust social system".³⁴ The house's interior is a collage that evidences the reality of two polar opposites. Both have been constructed and, unbelievably, occur simultaneously: a shell rooted in postmodern discourses as the *enclosing agent*, and a nineteenth century bourgeois interior as the *enclosed space*. Both together determine the *architecture*, in Goldfinger's terms what was experienced in 2 Willow Road was an architecture in which only traces of modernity can be felt.

Finally, as a collage, Goldfinger's house redefines itself as the construction of meanings based on the arrangement of objects, things and even architectural notions: interior and exterior. The heterogeneity of random order and arbitrary juxtapositions is in this case, an aesthetic procedure, which legitimates Goldfinger's individual independence, and most likely, his beliefs:

Even if lyricism can lose itself in the play of volumes, in the light of the day, the interior should still respond to man's needs, and to the exigencies and needs of individual life, allowing for repose and intimacy. Theory is not sufficient for life and does not answer to all of its requirements. [...] Architecture is not about constructing beautiful ensembles of lines, but above all else, constructing habitations for man.³⁵



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