

BEING THE MOUNTAIN PRODUCTORA

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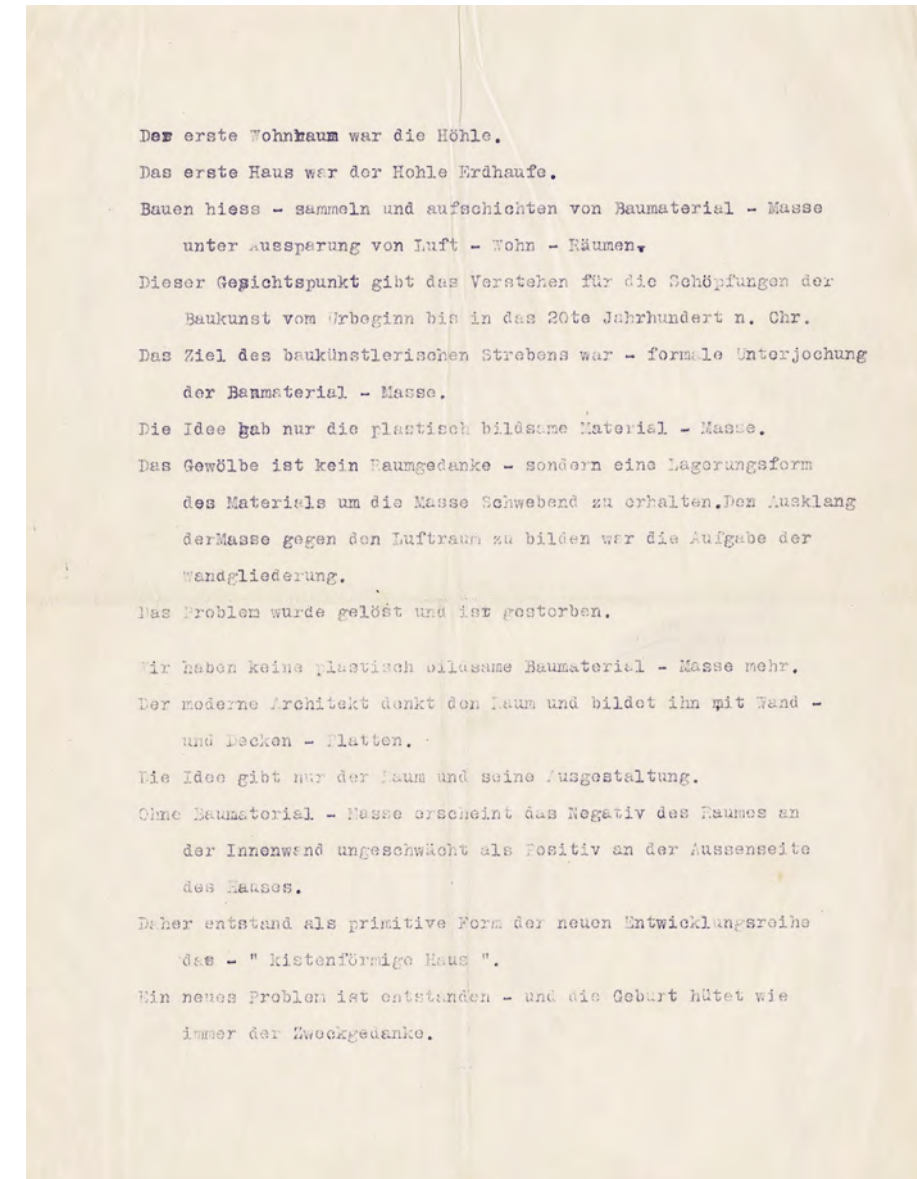
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"The first space for living was the cave. The first house was the hollow mound of earth. To build meant: to gather and layer building material [and] mass, around voids for air [and] living [and] space. ... The technique of architect and sculptor was similar. ... The architectural design concerns itself with 'space' as its raw material and with articulated room as its product. ... The architect has finally discovered the medium of his art: SPACE."¹



The original, German version of R. M. Schindler's "Moderne Architektur: ein Programm," 1912.

This text was written in parallel to the preparation of "Critical Regionalism Revisited," OASE 103, ed. Tom Avermaete, Véronique Patteeuw, Léa-Catherine Szacka, and Hans Teerds (2019).

1 Kenneth Frampton, "Critical Regionalism Revisited" (lecture, University of Washington, Seattle, May 15, 2013).

2 It is no coincidence that Frampton published his seminal book *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, a plea for a critical examination of modern architecture, the same year he resigned from the Biennale. See Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980).

3 Frampton to Portoghesi, letter of resignation, April 25, 1980, Biennale di Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, fondo storico, b. 658. For a more thorough analysis of Frampton's position, see Léa-Catherine Szacka, "Criticism from Within: Kenneth Frampton and the Retreat from Postmodernism," OASE 98 (2016): 110-16; and Stylianos Giamarellos, "Intersecting Itineraries beyond the Strada Novissima: The Converging Authorship of Critical Regionalism," *Architectural Histories* 4, no. 1 (2016): 1-18.

4 See Szacka, "Criticism from Within."

5 One could argue this sequence started as early as December 1971 with the publication of "America 1960-1970" in "The City as an Artifact," *Casabella* 359/360. See Marine Urbain, "Ecllosion d'une pensée. Le régionalisme critique de Kenneth Frampton, 1983" (master's thesis, Université libre de Bruxelles, 2017).

6 Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983).

7 Kenneth Frampton, "Towards an Agonistic Architecture" (lecture, SCI-Arc, Los Angeles, December 4, 2013).

8 See Kenneth Frampton, Agni Pikioti, and Hannele Grönlund, eds., *Dimitris Pikionis 1887-1968: A Greek Architect* (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1993).

9 See Nicholas Kehagias, "Paving a Greek Path to a Western Monument," personal website, accessed January 8, 2019, <http://www.nicholaskehagias.com/the-acropolis-pavement/>; and Dimitris Pikionis, *Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968: A Sentimental Topography* (London: Architectural Association, 1989).

10 Frampton, "Towards an Agonistic Architecture."

11 Frampton discusses the work of Konstantinidis in Kenneth Frampton, "The Isms of Contemporary Architecture," *Architectural Design* 52 (1982): 60-83.

12 Konstantinidis elaborates on such connections in his 1975 book *Elements of Self-Knowledge: Towards a True Architecture*, using his own photographs to supply a series of examples.

13 For further discussion of this dialectical tension, see Frampton, "Critical Regionalism Revisited."

14 Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism," 26.

15 Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism," 26.

16 Kenneth Frampton, "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism," *Perspecta* 20 (1983): 151.

17 Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism," 26.

18 Frampton, "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism," 152-53.

19 For more on Frampton's interest in the periphery, see

"Place, Production and Reality," *Architecture in Greece* (1977); "Mario Botta and the School of the Ticino," *Oppositions* 14 (1978); *A New Wave of Japanese Architecture*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1978); "Works of Panos Koulermos," *Architecture and Urbanism* (May 1979); "Notes on the Architecture of Panos Koulermos," *Architecture in Greece* 17 (1983); Kenneth Frampton, ed., *Tadao Ando: Buildings Projects Writings* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984); "Tre opere di Panos Koulermos: Una mostra allo studio Marconi a Milano," *Casabella* (July-August 1984); "Entre el racionalismo y el regionalismo: la obra de Martorell, Bohigas y Mackay, 1954-1984," in *Martorell, Bohigas, Mackay* (Barcelona: Xarait Ediciones / Electa, 1985); Kenneth Frampton, ed., *The Architecture of Hiromi Fujii*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Rizzoli, 1987); Kenneth Frampton, ed., *Kengo Kuma: Complete Works* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013); "The Work of Rogelio Salmona," *A + U: Architecture and Urbanism* (March 2008): 28-33; Kenneth Frampton, "Plan Form and Topography in the Work of Kashef Chowdhury," in *Kashef Chowdhury: The Friendship Centre, Gaibandha, Bangladesh* (Zurich: Park Books, 2016); and Kenneth Frampton, "The Architect as Amateur: The Studio of Wang Shu and Lu Wengyu," in *Wang Shu Amateur Architecture Studio* (Zurich: Lars Müller, 2017).

20 Frampton, "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism," 149.

21 See Giamarellos, "Intersecting Itineraries," 2.

22 It is important to note that one critique of this aspect of critical regionalism is readily apparent: while Frampton made a case for an architecture of resistance to an imposed power from above, and situated architectural approaches outside the center, his Western concept was imposed upon the architecture he highlighted, often limiting the varied architectural production of the above-mentioned countries to singular practices.

enclosures of the fourth walls), anticipating two distinct positions in the architecture of the coming century.

The connection between nature and architecture was central to modernism. Two distinct strategies exist: buildings that, like those of Neutra or Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, extend architectural elements out into their surrounding landscapes, ultimately controlling their sites, and buildings that draw the surrounding landscape into the architectural space.

In many cases, the dialogue in the latter approach is abstract: Schindler, for example, would at times stain the plywood of his built-in furniture in tones that matched the surrounding greenery. More surprising examples can be found in the house that Charles and Ray Eames built for themselves, Case Study House 8. The house, as much a “tent” as was technically possible at the time (the Eameses speak of a “kite,” a delicate structure with the thinnest possible enclosure⁵), is precisely set between the toe of a slope and a row of eucalyptus trees, planted when the species was introduced from Australia to Southern California as a possible source for railroad timber. Two unexpectedly romantic

38 was to give each person his own room—instead of the usual distribution,” he explained in a letter to his parents-in-law in 1921.³ He elaborated on this atypical arrangement in an article in the journal *T-Square*, published in 1932, in which he describes the house as “a cooperative dwelling for two young couples . . . [where] rooms for specialized purposes [have] been abandoned.” “Instead,” he continues, “each person receives a large private studio; each couple a common entrance hall and bath. Open porches on the roof are used for sleeping. An enclosed patio for each couple, with an out-of-door fireplace, serves the purposes of an ordinary living room. . . . One kitchen is planned for both couples.”⁴ Architecturally, Schindler combines in his house the idea of the “cave” (the concrete floors and walls on three sides of the spaces) with the idea of the “tent” (the delicate wood, glass, and canvas

long voyages to Japan. He was in Los Angeles supervising the construction of Wright’s first and most significant commission there, the Hollyhock House, built for the oil heiress Aline Barnsdall. He had also traveled throughout the American Southwest, reporting to Richard Neutra back in Vienna that “the only buildings that testify to any true feeling of the earth from which they spring are the ancient adobe buildings” there.² The house he would design for himself, constructed between February and June 1922, is a building as radical today as it was almost a century ago. “The basic idea

Written in Vienna in 1912, a place and time marked by some of the most radical cultural shifts of the last century, Rudolf M. Schindler’s “Moderne Architektur: ein Programm” describes the origins of architecture and offers two directives for the architecture of that moment: first, that architecture must concern itself not with the object, but with space; and second, that architecture is to be from and of the earth.

Ten years later, Schindler built his own, seminal house in Los Angeles. He had moved to America to work with Frank Lloyd Wright, and had overseen Wright’s studio during the master’s



Above and right: The entry and living space of Geoffrey Bawa’s Polontalawa Estate Bungalow. The main roof structure is supported by boulders. Near Nikarawetiya, Sri Lanka, 1963–65.



The entry to the cave-like Elrod House (1968), seen from the street. John Lautner, architect. Leland Y. Lee, photographer. Palm Springs, California, 1977.

moments connect the house to its site. A solid panel facing the living room terrace that at first appears to be cement board with vertical streaks is, in fact, an atmospheric photograph of the site depicting the surrounding trees. Inside the house, the large two-story wood wall in the living room is Australian tallowwood (*Eucalyptus microcorys*)—a machined echo of the row of trees in front of the house.

Other examples are more direct. In his early Textile Block houses, in Los Angeles, Frank Lloyd Wright mixed soil from the project sites into his concrete, an effort to unite earth and

building with technically disastrous results (this severely weakened the concrete). At Fallingwater, the rock—from which the house grows and to which it is anchored—is the actual hearth of the fireplace, the literal and physical center of the house. The rock rises slightly above the stone floor to connect the fire to the famed waterfall. At Oscar Niemeyer's Casa das Canoas, the rock is a more central element, organizing not only the house's plan and section but also the thin, white, amorphous roof, the curved solid and diaphanous glazed walls, the greenery, and the views. The second house

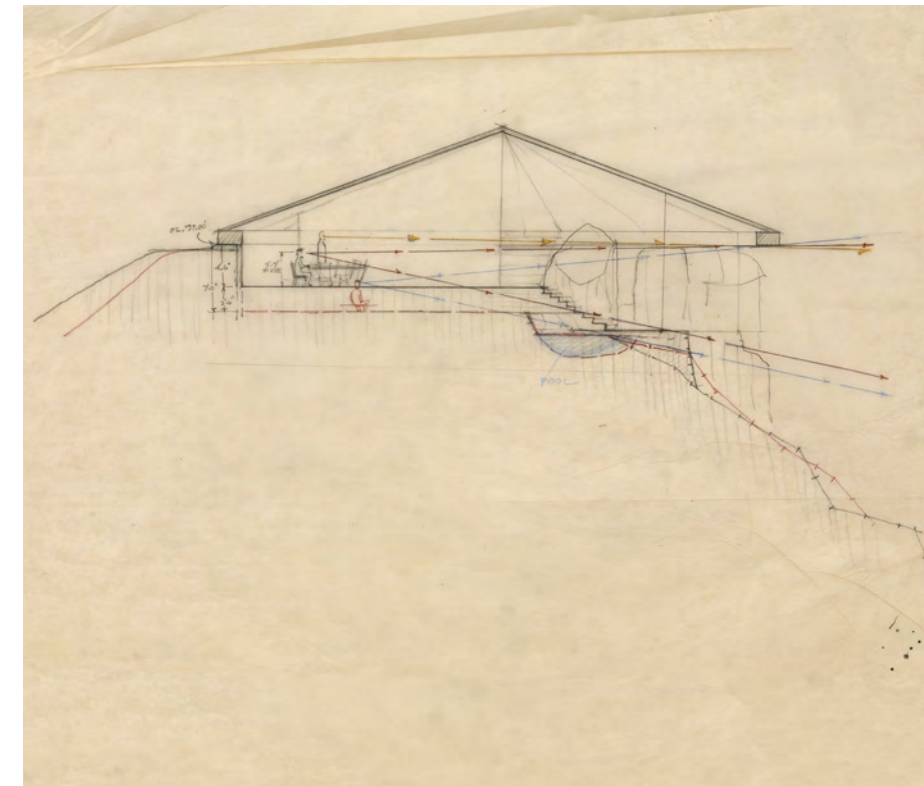
Albert Frey designed for himself is the smallest imaginable pavilion set amid the rocks above Palm Springs, California. It is also organized around a massive boulder, separating areas on different levels for sleeping, dining and working, and living. The lightness of the structure—a most delicate steel and glass enclosure carrying a thin roof of corrugated steel—belies the harshness of the desert climate in summer and winter. Built around the same time as Frey's house, Geoffrey Bawa's Polontalawa Estate Bungalow is one of the great Sri Lankan architect's most unusual projects.⁶ Bawa's

buildings generally show an affinity with their sites that reflects his interest in landscape architecture—his career began with him reshaping his own large country estate, Lunuganga, before he decided to study architecture at the Architectural Association—as well as his respect for the land, rocks, and trees that are part of the culture he was born into. At Polontalawa, public areas are set between a simple plinth, which grows from the ground, and an expansive, protective roof supported by massive, sculptural concrete beams, which in turn rest on a series of extraordinary boulders, around which flows the space. The rocks are of the site and of the house.

It is unclear if John Lautner knew Bawa's Polontalawa project.⁷ Lautner was famously an apprentice and respected collaborator of Wright's from 1933 to 1938, in the years that Wright worked on Fallingwater and while he extracted his Taliesin West from the Sonoran desert. Lautner also knew and respected Schindler and



The rugged terrain that inserts itself into the Elrod House. John Lautner, architect. Leland Y. Lee, photographer. Circa 1970.



John Lautner. Sectional study of view lines, roof, and site, Elrod House, 1968.

sky. The house certainly is one of the most interesting “caves” of the twentieth century, to return to Schindler’s terminology. Frey, however, was convinced that his own house, a “tent” sitting lightly on the ground a few miles away, was the right approach to such a site, and that Lautner’s was not. “It doesn’t make sense to have heavy concrete overhead,” Frey complained. “Why lift all that heavy stuff up there? ... I always liked the lightness of things.



The main living space of the Elrod House in its original condition. Leland Y. Lee, photographer. 1968.

ground about eight feet (2.4 meters) to fully expose and integrate these into his building. Thus, the site’s geology is almost violently thrust through the floor and into the circular space. A concrete wall encircles the perimeter; the roof is a shallow concrete cone, with a massive concrete tension ring that supports nine wide concrete blades radiating from the center. Between these blades, various skylights open to the mountains, the horizon, and the

Lautner used his camera in the way that other architects use a sketchbook, and his archives house thousands of these nature studies. The seismographic reading of his sites, registering their every subtlety, would shape each of his projects. Lautner’s efforts to incorporate elements from the surrounding nature into his architecture are visible in projects as distinct as the Pearlman Mountain Cabin, where he used tree trunks as the building’s structure, echoing the surrounding forest, and the celebrated Arango House, in Acapulco, Mexico, where the continuous edge of water surrounding the main, open living space visually merges with the water of the Pacific Ocean below.

Lautner’s Elrod House is built in the mountains above Palm Springs. Early in the project, Lautner noticed the tops of boulders emerging from the site and proposed to excavate the



Above and right: Boulders feature as interior commodities in the Elrod House. John Lautner, architect. Leland Y. Lee, photographer. 1977 and ca. 1970.

his writings and would have been familiar with Schindler’s article “Space Architecture,” published in February 1934 in the *Dune Forum* (edited at the time by Schindler’s estranged wife, Pauline Schindler). In this article, Schindler articulates many of the thoughts first expressed in his 1912 text. Lautner also knew Frey and visited Niemeyer in Brazil, though not until the late 1980s, after Niemeyer returned from his European exile in 1985.

Lautner’s formal language, and in particular his later, fluid work, is shaped equally by twentieth-century developments in structural engineering (including the work of Eduardo Torroja; Félix Candela, with whom Lautner collaborated on the Hope Residence; and Frei Otto, with whom he corresponded) and his almost obsessive photography of forms of nature—landscapes, rock formations, clouds, lakes.



Above and right: Boulders feature as interior commodities in the Elrod House. John Lautner, architect. Leland Y. Lee, photographer. 1977 and ca. 1970.

The sheet-metal people put up the roof (of my house); it took them a day. And then I put these panels up on the insulation myself. If you have concrete, they actually have to build a whole structure to support it. It doesn't make sense. Concrete is fine in relation to the ground. It's an earth material."⁸

A few years later, in the early 1970s, Lautner worked on various unbuilt schemes for a small vacation house for himself in Three Rivers, California, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The site was on the banks of the Kaweah River and strewn with massive boulders. Though the house has a different relation to its rocky site—in one scheme, the small house is lofted on massive concrete pillars above the rocks; in another, the house is precariously perched on top of a tall boulder—the boulders are the foundation and starting point for his design. Here, Lautner may be the furthest away from Schindler's 1912 dictum, well outside the "tent" and "cave" polemic. But his project, nevertheless, begins and ends with his site, the ground, the earth.



Above and right: At the Frey House, a boulder seems to interrupt, rather than support, the building's tent-like steel frame. Albert Frey, architect. Julius Shulman, photographer. Palm Springs, California, 1964.

The doctoral thesis of Luis Moreno Mansilla, written while he was a fellow at the Spanish Academy in Rome, retraces the travels of a series of famous architects during their grand tours of Italy. Walking through Villa Adriana, for example, the young Mansilla would compare the drawings made by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, Le Corbusier, or Álvaro Siza, and would make an effort to see the place through their eyes, to understand their different concerns and the way they experienced and conceptualized these sites and, by extension, the world.¹

Despite elaborating on the obsessions of a diverse group of architects, Mansilla's thesis, like most dissertations, is indeed a compendium of his own preoccupations; like any of us, when writing about others, Mansilla is ultimately writing about himself. In that regard, it is telling that the thread that resurfaces most consistently, perhaps because many of the sites revisited are ruins, is the blurred boundary between the natural and the artificial. Mansilla's interest in this threshold is



The process of ruination softens the forms of the Baths of Caracalla to a point where they become akin to nature. Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. View of the Baths of Caracalla, Ruins of the Frigidarium, Rome, 1836–37.

¹ The original manifesto is held in the R. M. Schindler papers, Architecture & Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara. Author's translation. Schindler's 1912 text underwent many changes. Schindler himself made notes on the text for a series of lectures he gave in Chicago in 1916 and Los Angeles in 1921, and he translated it to English around 1932, making it more technical, more prosaic, and less poetic than the original (the mound, for example, is no longer of "earth"—*Erde*—but of "adobe"). Over the years, this 1932 English version became known as the Schindler manifesto. According to Judith Sheine, "Schindler's 1932 translation was made in light of his later experiences. His attack on 'functionalism' and focus on 'space' were emphasized in his 1934 article 'Space Architecture,' in which he contrasts his work with that of the International Stylist branch of modernism." Judith Sheine, letter to the author, 2014.

² "Die einzigen Bauten, die von wirklichem Gefühl für den Boden der sie trägt zeugen, sind die alten Lehmziegelbauten (der ersten Einwanderer)." R. M. Schindler, letter to Richard Neutra, December 1920 or January 1921. Translated in August Sarnitz, *R. M. Schindler, Architekt, 1887–1953* (Vienna: Christian Brandstätter Verlag & Edition, 1986), 204.

³ R. M. Schindler, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Edmund J. Gibling, November 26, 1921, quoted in Kathryn Smith, *Schindler House* (Santa Monica, CA: Hennessey + Ingalls, 2010), 19.

⁴ R. M. Schindler, "A Cooperative Dwelling," *T-Square 2* (February 1932), quoted in Robert Sweeney and Judith Sheine, *Schindler, Kings Road, and Southern California Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 15.

⁵ For example, a 1950 *Architectural Forum* article describing the house is titled "Life in a Chinese Kite."

⁶ The Polontalawa bungalow was done in collaboration with the Danish architect Ulrik Plesner, a longtime associate.

⁷ The Polontalawa bungalow was published for the first time in February 1966 in the *Architectural Review* ("Ceylon - Seven New Buildings"), and again in 1965 in the Danish magazine *Arkitekten* ("Arbejder på Ceylon"). Further, in 1967, the Hawaii Chapter of the American Institute of Architects awarded Bawa the Pan Pacific Citation; at the time, Lautner was working on various, mostly unbuilt projects for the Hilo Campus of the University of Hawaii.

⁸ Albert Frey, interview by Jennifer Golub, in Jennifer Golub, *Albert Frey / Houses 1+2* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 78–79.