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A review of Caruso St John Architects' much-lauded Brick House casts a critical eye on the ambivalent relationship between construction and domesticity which is intrinsic to its identity.

Questions of authenticity: brickwork and 'found space'

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Our paper examines the Brick House, completed by Caruso St John Architects in 2005. Nearly invisible from the street with its unusual form and 'brick' nomenclature, this clearly is no ordinary house. Despite or perhaps because of its elusive character, which confounds expectations, the house has won universal praise from commentators but has prompted little deeper analysis. The architects set out their agenda for the project in an allusive text that, despite intriguing contradictions, has remained largely unquestioned.

Reviewing what has been written about the project and the development of the design, we confront the underlying ambiguity in their attitude towards what it means to build in brick and towards the 'idea' of home. A replacement for the London house already owned by a family based in New York, its introverted character and austere luxury defer a habitual identity. We investigate whether the architects' apparently subversive interpretation of convention contributes to its celebrity status. Is it the case that Caruso St John satisfy an appetite for wilful difference, and if so what are the cultural implications of their mildly dissonant practice? What is 'performed' in the constitution of the house, and what is the relationship between the relative deception assumed by critics about its construction and the reality of its occupation and use?

Faced with the choice of taking the main entrance, following the architects' lead, or entering by default via the rear courtyard (with an insider's knowledge), we have sought a different tack, exploiting a chink in the brickwork – between what the architects say initially and what they later reiterate. The house has attracted considerable attention, and a critical consensus has emerged about its status and value. Wary of complicity in assuming that the nature of the house is reflected in the explanations offered for it, we consider this meta-language and its associated critical aura.[1] Approaching the Brick House circumspectly one is confounded by an explicitly 'directional' experience of entry; movement is funnelled through an existing 'passage'; yet the destination may also be characterized 'as found' – a vestigial space located somewhere between convention and a fictive imagination.

An existing archway under the adjacent end-of-terrace house provides the armature for the 'altered' entrance to an ambiguous space. This is variously described as a 'corridor'; 'ramped passage'; 'labyrinthine hallway', or more generally as a threshold to an inner realm.[2] Characterising the irregular shape of the site (and house) as a 'horse's head'[3] the architects lead and critics follow in describing the hallway as 'comfortably accommodating a rider on horseback'.[4] The inaccurate notion elides cultural status, historic connotation and a certain English gentility.[5] A familiar trope produced within a largely self-serving thicket of received opinion.[6] Our intention was to survey the house objectively (as form) and experientially (in its occupation), testing the doors *[1]*, the integrity of the walls and the artifice that has grown and adhered to them.

'Brick' on brick

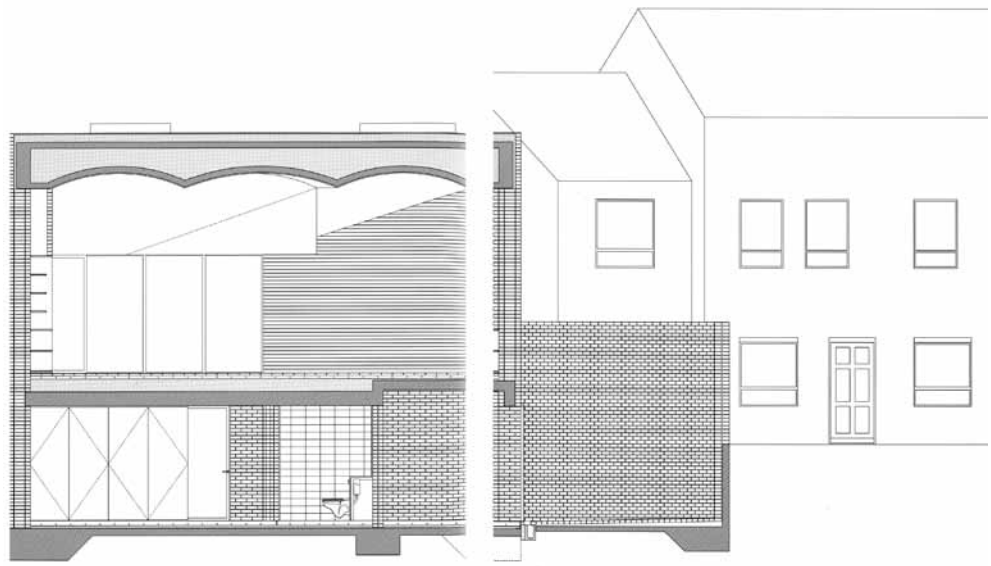
Two accounts of the Brick House, written by the architects before and after construction (illustrated with detailed drawings and photographs of modelled interior spaces or the completed building) *[2–5]* reveal a significant slippage between what is said and what is done:

> *The house is built from a sandy red brick inside and out, roof and ceiling, floors and walls. The use of one material binds the building into an enveloping body, emphasizing a skin-like character over any tectonic expression. The arrangement of the bricks within the mortar shifts as surfaces stretch, bend and twist, making them appear elastic.*[7]
> (*Knitting Weaving Wrapping Pressing*, 2002)

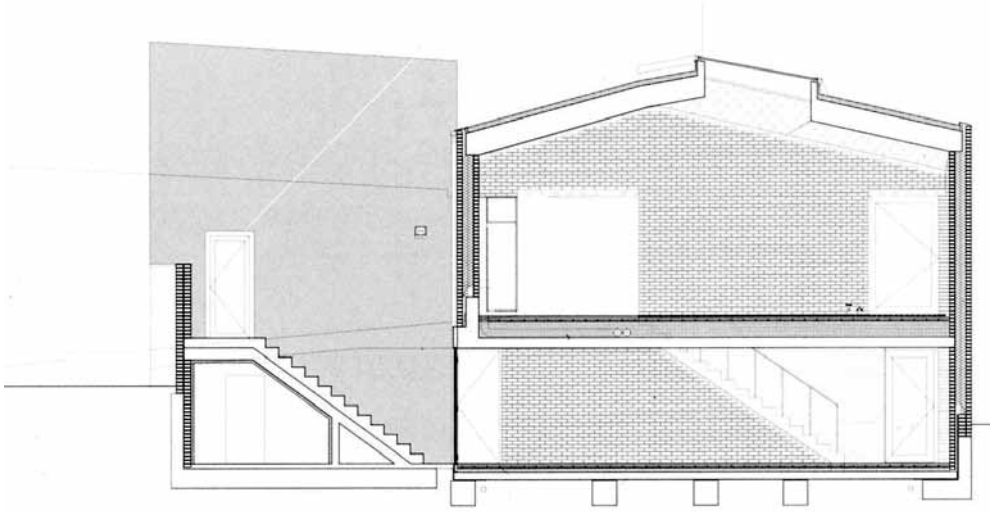
> *The floors and walls of the house are built of brick, inside and out. The use of one material binds the whole building into an enveloping body, emphasizing a skin-like character over any tectonic expression. The arrangement of the bricks within the mortar shifts as the surfaces stretch, bend and twist, making them appear elastic.*[8]
> (*As Built*, 2005)

1 **Hallway: inside out**

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2 Living room section (in *Knitting Weaving Wrapping Pressing*)

3 Living room section (as constructed)

4 Initial model: view of dining and kitchen areas

5 Dining and kitchen areas

The initial description 'of one material' has not been revised, perhaps in an attempt to retain the singularity of the initial conception: a house constructed only from brick. Retaining this earlier drift, the polemical clarity of the project is sustained, though it has been modified and possibly diluted during the process of execution. These changes suggest a shift in rationale, or reveal a degree of ambiguity. The architects seem caught between the candour of Lewerentz's 'medieval' brickwork[9] and the 'pre-architectural' expression of the enclosing wall's 'textile' origin promoted by Gottfried Semper.[10]

In the later account there is no mention of the brick colour – the earlier reference to 'sandy red' is omitted. As constructed, inside, the bricks and flush lime mortar pointing exhibit a creamy, solid monolithic character.[11] Outside, they are darker in tone and more variegated, presenting the vitreous blotches and crusts of their firing.[12] In contrast to the mortar the brick is emphasised as the primary tectonic element.

The sectional elevations accompanying the earlier description show every brick laid out in regular stretcher bond, with half bricks at the termination of walls and no shifting of the bricks within the mortar.[13] The description of the completed building however retains the references to 'shifting' bricks, and 'brick' floors and walls, but the roof and ceiling have been omitted from the list of brick surfaces. Even though brick has been omitted from the courtyard ground surface, kitchen floor, ramp and main stair, the polemical consistency of the earlier account persists despite its dilution. As built, the only concession to the description of bricks shifting in the mortar occurs where the floor and walls of the main living space and the side of the main stair incorporate a raking edge. Cutting the bricks on an angle is eschewed in favour of leaving a (considerable) triangular mortar fillet. More accurately the mortar stretches while the brick remains fixed in the location prescribed by the bond. This is very different from Sigurd Lewerentz's brickwork where perpends vary wildly as a consequence of the architect's obstinate refusal to cut bricks. Does the gap between description and execution reflect a shift in constructional syntax? The fiction is of a 'brick house' formed exclusively from the surfaces of uncut bricks.[14] Does the divergence between narrative explanation and built form reflect a

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conscious development or simply a dilution of the architects' conceptual schema?

Elsewhere, however, bricks have been cut to achieve a sharp-edged and homogenous brick surface. Cut and glued bricks *[6]* were introduced to form the angles of the walls. This detail wraps the surface of the wall around the angle, avoiding a visually disruptive zipper joint of perpends alternating between the adjacent wall-planes. Similarly the whole brick is sacrificed to create a precise visual effect at the junction between the angled brick walls and the windows; the wall stops short of the window and the end bricks are cut at an angle (their surface parallel to the window plane). The frame is then concealed to affect the condition of a ruin: raw brickwork framing the voided openings *[7]*.

In parallel, a skin-like effect is compromised at the 'ends' of internal (partition) walls where the exposed thickness of the masonry is unambiguous (conspicuously at the walls flanking the stair:

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alternately of a single and half-brick thickness). 'Headers' and half-bricks (respectively) are permitted and the consistency conveyed by the visually dominant brick surface seems undermined by the actual thickness *[8]*. The condition is absent in the external courts, where an evident whole-brick thickness is contradicted by the stretcher bond: aesthetically satisfying but only achieved by tying the parallel half-brick 'skins' together with mechanical ties in place of conventional headers. Inside brick diaphragm walls are also expressed in stretcher bond with ties used in lieu of bonding. Ironically, the use of headers would have created a 'stitched' pattern, albeit one conveying a thicker construction. The absence of brick bonding manifests Caruso's casuistry:

> *The insistent, but perverse use of brick and structure was also important, we often worried that the house was becoming didactic like a brick structure by Le Corbusier or Kahn.*[15]

Walls are handled differently in the two sets of drawings. Initially the thickness of the diaphragm wall varies to accommodate alcoves for built-in storage and kitchen units but also to compensate for the irregularity of the site *[9]*. Later, fixtures are butted against walls, tethered on the spatial periphery creating an awkward juxtaposition between the rough, 'unfinished' surface of the brick and the refinement of 'furniture' (as if located before the walls were plastered).

The construction of the roof reveals a more overt revision where the faceted, exposed in-situ concrete ceiling of the built scheme[16] replaces an earlier proposal for a double-skin concrete structure incorporating three flattened vaults of variable width (described in the text as lined with brick slips).[17] Unapologetic, the earlier description notes: 'the formation of the ceilings came out of a judgment about spatial character. It does not act structurally in the way that one would expect it to'. This statement is omitted from the *As Built* account (but often reiterated). Consequently the main ceiling becomes a self-evidently heavy and unmediated mass concrete construction, candidly revealing how it was made.[18] This directness contrasts with the walls – where the surface is articulated in the bland stretcher bond of (in principle) non-load-bearing masonry – although they are constructed as diaphragm structures, and brick ties must be used to prevent headers from disrupting the even pattern.[19]

The architects' description of the finished project neatly summarises their contradictory 'expression' of construction, emphasising the skin-like quality of the walls yet also seemingly concerned to express the singularity of individual bricks. The walls constitute 'representative' construction, while the ceiling (or roof) manifests a more direct expression of material fact and the process of building; two divergent approaches which are ultimately irreconcilable.

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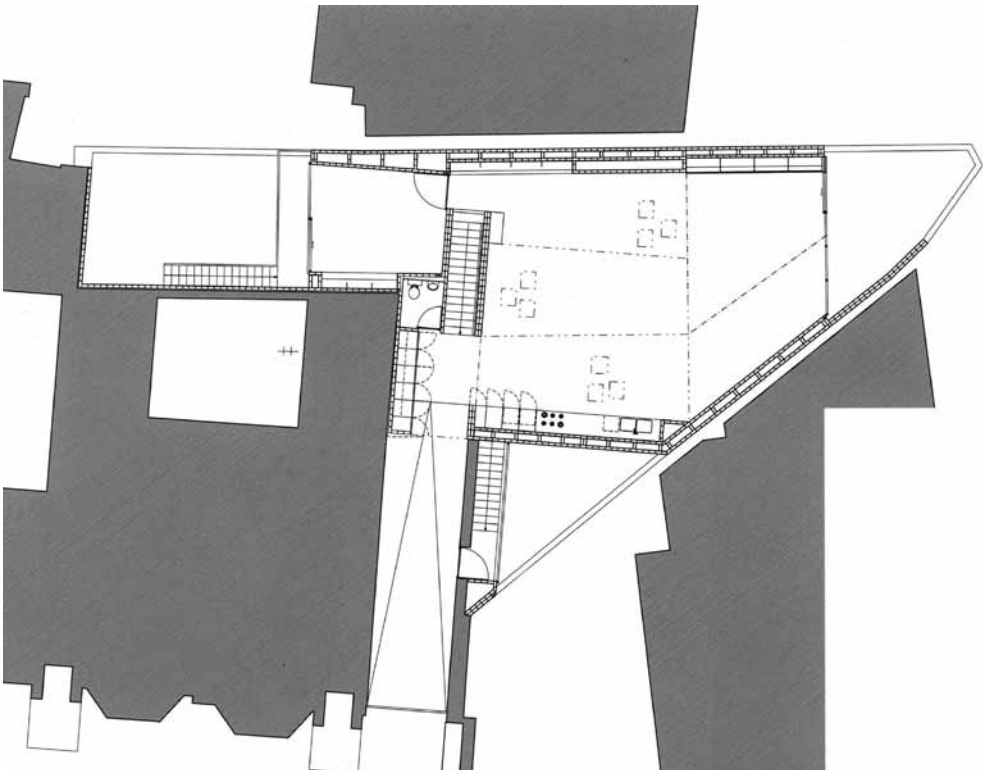
6 External glued brick angle

7 Living room window detail

8 Wall dividing main stair and living room

9 Initial upper ground floor plan (in *Knitting Weaving Wrapping Pressing*) showing *poché*

10 Ceiling over dining area



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Reception and projection

Several lines of thought promoted by the architects are taken up, reiterated or developed in the writing on the house, as project and as completed building. The nature of the site and its conception as a 'found-space'; the notion of a domestic but monumental dwelling; the explicit materiality of a house made of brick inside and out, and the formal characteristics of the concrete roof structure, all contribute to a rhetoric that attaches 'value' to the house.

The search for a suitable site and its 'backlands' nature, become associated with different aspects of the building. Conceived of as an accident in its formal shape and location, the site is viewed as determining both the envelope and geometry of the interior of the house.[20] The 'expression' of this idea is questionable. A 'dynamic' constitution for the house is envisaged rising up inside the static and constricting envelope of the surrounding buildings (as if the brickwork is in continuity with the concrete floors, stairs and ceiling).[21] Whether this fiction serves to anaesthetise the restrictions of the building regulations and planning controls, whereby they acquire aesthetic consequence, is unclear.[22]

A tension between opposing qualities informs how the house is read as a paradigm of materiality, associated with its brickwork but imbued with an animate quality. The fiction of an unbound and soft internal force is seen to 'pressure' the walls and roof into their eventual configuration, going against the grain and 'thinness' of an enveloping 'skin'. While homogeneity is assumed, brickwork is finally differentiated inside and out, and viewed ambivalently both as a 'skin' and a 'gritty' texture. A Semperian connotation is endemic to brickwork 'knitted together' in a 'consolidated surface',[23] where ordinary 'material' acquires the patina of a theoretical concept.



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A similar ambivalence is associated with the development of the concrete roof. Emerging conceptually from a set of vaults (brick, then concrete), it is habitually held to embody 'folded-plate' construction, identified with a topological condition. Yet, and this is typical of the ambiguities prevalent in writing on the house and inherent in its construction, the multiple pours of the concrete exhibit stratification and a 'geological' character which contradicts the repeated conflation of the angular structure with the notion of a dome *[10]*. A 'folded' rather than 'cast' surface condition would suggest edges and joints expressing a contrary 'craft' of construction.[24] Caruso's contention that the roof embodies a conceptual duality of cave and tent[25] promotes the journalistic banality of a 'fortified tent'.[26] These archetypes of cave, tent and dome locate the geometry of the folded plate roof within the gravitas of a surrogate authenticity.

In the discourse on the house, materialisation of constructive form becomes a rhetorical figure where

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construction is held 'to embody thought'. An arcane philosophical drift concerning the ontology of construction, characteristically 'without rhetoric' in deference to the Smithsons, produces a house celebrated in a progression of superlatives.[27] Hyperbole and the culture of celebrity are no fault of the architects, but the efficacy of their thinking is as much projected into, as manifested within, the building, prompting misconceptions about the authenticity of the house built of brick.

Deferred arrival

In the first of many paradoxes, the public face of the Brick House is restricted to a glazed front entrance set into a former service entry under a nineteenth-century end-of-terrace house. Viewed obliquely, the existing entrance arch casts shadow onto the recessed screen of translucent glass panels. The visitor steps over a granite kerb onto an inclined concrete surface towards the offset front door (and its integral frame). Faced in black steel plate, it is planted firmly against the frameless glazed 'surface' (alluding to Lewerentz).[28] The threshold belongs both to the street and the domain of the house, 'domesticating' the original service access. The uneven ramped surface acts as an extension of the road, raised by a kerb as if 'pavement'. This threshold initiates a rite of passage; conventions of city, street and house are left behind for an exclusive domain of austere luxury.

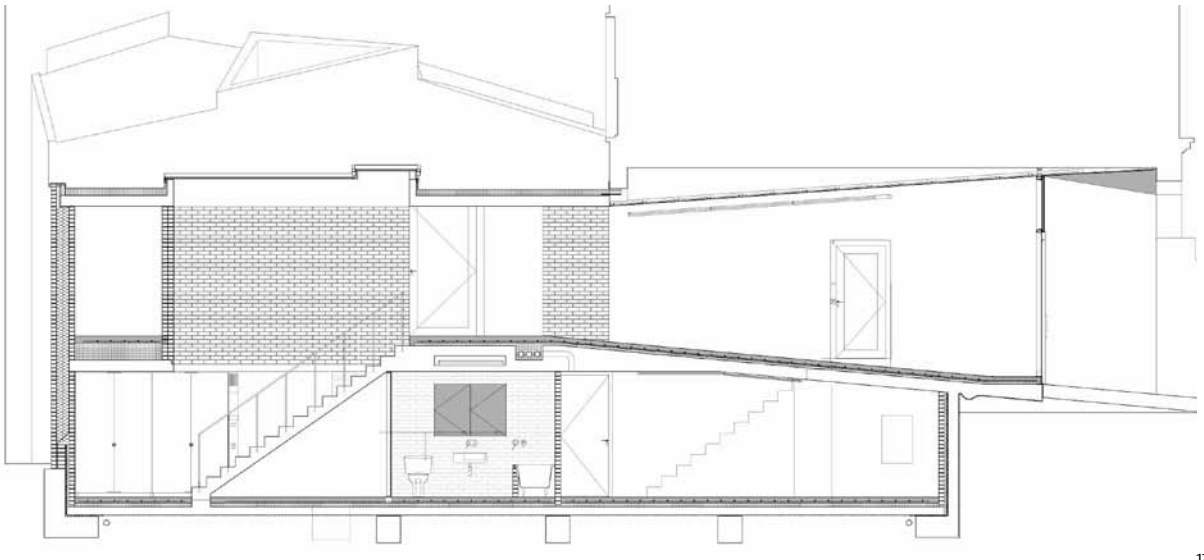
Inside, the floor rises towards the prospect of a brick-lined slot, top-lit above the main stair descending to the bedrooms below *[11, 12]*. Detailing of the rendered walls, ceiling and screed floor is reductive, but neither workmanship nor junction details exhibit the precision of a Minimalist aesthetic.[29] Contrary to the uni-directional emphasis of the published plans and sections, the interior hallway is experienced as an extension of the space to which it leads, opening laterally and somewhat unexpectedly to the right into the main living area. Finally reducing in height to correspond with its width, this is neither exactly a passage 'through', nor a lobby 'within', interstitial *poché*. A 'space between walls', it incorporates a second threshold where the render applied to the 'existing' walls and ceiling ends, and the 'new' exposed brickwork begins. An absent hierarchy between access to the stair and living space points to the omission of the sliding screen originally envisaged for the latter. Here, at the transition into the warm brick-lined angular salon or living space, a veiled reference to Semper's paradigm of the 'moulded' hearth may be read in the constitution of the screeded concrete ramp and kitchen floor.[30]



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11 View of hallway on entry

12 Section through entrance ramp and main stair



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Transitional space and its occupation

The house challenges received conceptions of domesticity, identified as it is by the architects with a novel manner of 'dwelling in the heart of the city'[31] *[13]*. They claim the building to be neither a 'town house' nor a 'loft', their client's desire for something 'loft-like' was identified with prioritising 'communal space'. A contemporary 'loft' apartment may be conceived 'under' a roof or located 'within' the open domesticity provided by a warehouse. However it still suggests a material contrast with the 'mass' of a cellar below or the solidity of an industrial structure. This dialogue between openness and solidity may be seen to be intrinsic to the perceived grandeur and ambivalent aura of the Brick House. The notion of a 'refuge' for the New York client mutates into the architects' allusion to the 'sanctuary' of a Baroque chapel,[32] where otherwise a celibate austerity elides with a token domesticity. This ambiguity thrives on unresolved oppositions between archaic and refined, solemn and informal, and rough and smooth. Reconciled in the conception of a 'contemporary ruin' the lighting conduits read as 'vines', 'unfinished' brickwork evokes abandonment, and an insipient archaism takes up residence.

The main living space is entered laterally from the hallway presenting a full-height volume towards an internal gable *[14]* but also an oblique view through the dining space to the prospect of an irregular courtyard below (and beyond). Above, a monolithic, but also abstractly dynamic, faceted concrete ceiling is differentially pitched towards either side of the space. The planes from which it is formed exhibit a 'ground' surface, whereas 'cuts' through its depth are 'polished' and capped in frameless double-glazing.[33] While the space aspires to singularity in the hierarchy of occupation (reinforced by the 'continuity' of its brick floor and angled corners), it is partially split and diagonally inflected. A heavy concrete soffit is 'dropped' over the dining area beside the glazed screen fronting the courtyard. The integral floor is paved in brick slips experienced as flattened and attenuated by foreshortening, whereas the brickwork of the walls is lit obliquely from above, highlighting a coarser texture *[15]*.

The 'weight' of the concrete monolith bears onto the surrounding walls, regardless of the lime-washed 'surface' effect applied to the uneven, and otherwise tactile, cream brickwork. Rhetorical effort has apparently gone into enforcing this condition, but the junction between wall and ceiling (or floor) presents an extended and uneven mortar fillet rather than cut brick, unforgivingly illuminated at the roof-lights *[16]*.[34] For the wall to read a-tectonically, the brickwork requires to be disengaged from the weight of the concrete ceiling above.[35] In fact, the roof visually bears onto the inner leaf of the diaphragm wall enclosing the main body of the house despite the 'representative' condition of the internal brickwork 'skin'. Conversely the 'ground' concrete surface of the upper enclosure, the tactile equivalent of the walls in exhibiting a rough 'lightness', is also applied to the sides of the lowered ceiling. Suspended halfway across the glazed opening to the



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13 Upper and lower ground floor plans

14 Living room

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15 Brickwork: junction of wall and floor

16 Cement fillet between wall and roof-light

17 Lighting conduit wall detail

18 Bedroom lighting

19 View from master bedroom



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court its form defies visible support, encouraging an ambivalent perception of the main enclosure as a 'heavy' canopy – as if its joints were folds.

The illusion of a contingent or 'found space' is retained in the presence of three courts attached to the corners of the site. But there is nothing 'residual' about the enclosure of the main space or the figural manipulation of its roof (explored in a sequence of models as the design developed). Indeed, the articulated ceiling might be seen to substitute for the lack of an explicit geometric *parti* inscribed in plan.[36]

The 'otherness' of the interior is emphasised by the absence of habitual domestic services. There is no visible form of heating and few sockets or switches. Essential services are provided but their appearance is censored. Under-floor heating is invisible beneath the brick paviors. Electrical sockets are recessed flush with the brick wall-face, as are controls in the black door sets. Wiring conduit is concealed in the cavity of the enclosing diaphragm wall *[17]* and pipes from the upper level are hidden by dropping the ceiling slab below. The one exception is the expressive ceiling lighting, where lights and their conduits are exposed, elevated in status and fabricated from carefully jointed and supported stainless-steel tube.[37] Tungsten bulbs produce a warm glow akin to candlelight.[38] The 'assembly' has a curious character, nostalgic for industrial or utilitarian unselfconsciousness but fetishistic in its execution of something otherwise denied *[18]*.

What of domestic occupation? The client evidently aspired to the post-industrial informality of a warehouse 'loft', at odds with conventional domestic typologies. But, as below in the private realm of the bedrooms, the living space is introverted and the external spaces are experienced less as 'external rooms' and more like 'voided' extensions of interior space (as if light-wells). There is nothing to suggest the robust character of their enclosure will serve as a prompt for domestic appropriation beyond the bounds of their 'visibility' *[19]*.[39] In everyday terms, the main volume reads as a shared communal space. Lacking the directional focus of a hearth the owner has occupied the sitting area with classic modern furniture: chairs arranged facing inwards from the corners of a large carpet. Is this a convivial space for the (visiting) family, or their reception 'salon' (incorporating a kitchen and dining area on its periphery)? The general atmosphere appears non-hierarchical, though the television is banished to a separate 'study'. Yet, while the 'upper' level has views over two courts, the domain of the house remains proscribed by their enclosure (albeit dispersed to the extremities of the site). The volumetric configuration of the main space inflects a centripetal social spatiality against the stolidity of its material constitution. The single length of kitchen worktop – in white Corian matching the backdrop of glazed bricks, differentiated from its dark surroundings – and the fittings attached to the periphery of the open space seem utilitarian but lack a monastic robustness.[40]

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Inconsistent detailing may be seen to betray the ambiguity of the house as cultural project. In both kitchen and dining spaces, the fittings sit incongruously against 'unfinished' surfaces. Given the luxury of a generously proportioned but austere space, heavier freestanding joinery would have reinforced the unmediated character of the space. Elsewhere in the entrance passageway; study and bedroom floor below; full-height cupboards and shelves – recessed into alcoves or set between flanking half-brick walls – assume a 'built-in' status.[41] The architects' desire to allow the raw character of 'constructed' space to predominate conflicts with a need to accommodate the clutter of domestic life.

The social issues raised by occupation (short-stay though that may be) challenge the aesthetic mores of the house. Formal irresolution may or may not prompt social generosity, but the ambiguity bound up in the house is created by a displacement of the formal into the social, precisely it seems because its particular austerity 'requires' occupation.

Undercroft

The photogenic quality of the main living space distracts journalistic attention from the cellular floor of bedrooms below. Its 'communal' status prevails against the 'matrix' of private rooms. Tension between a 'soft' domesticity and a spartan austerity is negotiated in the occupation of the two 'bedrooms' facing the irregular court. One is a narrow unmediated 'space between walls', where black cupboards are relegated to the rear (and occupation is of a nomadic teenage character) [19]; the other in 'temporary' use as a storeroom, feels appropriately unfinished. For different reasons each retains an everyday atmosphere of domestic familiarity. Elsewhere the two other bedrooms are provided with external access to the street via their respective courts. In that adjacent to the main entrance, an external 'escape' stair [20][42] – also accessed via the court from the communal passage between bedrooms – leads up to the entrance passage. The master bedroom opening into the larger rear court is provided with access to a rear external doorway leading to the street.

Exposed brickwork is necessarily overt and tactile when experienced close-up in these small spaces with their low, insistently bare, concrete ceiling (which is more present as a 'surface' than the brickwork). This feels more extreme in proximity to naked bodies in the bath and shower rooms. Doors and frames retain their placement 'against' the wall-

20 'Ghosted' external stair

21 Bedroom corner: door/mirror detail

22 Textile hanging detail: living room



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plane, juxtaposed with matching mirrors at re-entrant corners of the bedrooms. In contrast the full-width glazed external 'openings' are provided with two layers of curtains; the first acting as a diffuse screen and the second on a more substantive rail, acting as blackout. Only here in the basement do we experience, in mirrored glimpses and the perception of depthless brickwork beside the glass, the reality of a brick 'surface' *[21]*. Conversely the presence of curtains – and a textile rug hanging against bare brickwork in the living space – reminds us that Semper's paradigm of textile enclosure is not only to be experienced in fictive terms *[22]*.

Virtual surfaces and curtain 'hangings' – in contrast to 'close encounters' with rough brickwork – are distinctly present below, while fictive 'surfaces' and monumental suspension prevail above. Consequently, there is perhaps a forced consistency to the construction and finishes unifying the contrasting 'private' and 'social' floors of the house. Loft living above an inhabited cellar below inverts habitual practice. Similarly, the conventional hierarchy of a series of constituent spaces has been excised, leaving cellular service space to be inhabited in an ad hoc manner. A practised aesthetic restraint blurs these everyday distinctions, while the triple access to the private accommodation presents social permeability in a house otherwise quite solidly of brick and concrete.[43]

Typological ambivalence

The hybrid character of the central social space is elusive in terms of architectural precedent, tending to be seen as an anomalous one-off design. Caruso St John emphasise the influence of the Smithsons on their *oeuvre*, and the notion of a bunker (or safe-house) associated with Alison and Peter Smithson's House of the Future of 1955 (a product of Cold War culture) may be more pertinent to the Brick House than a general association with the New Brutalism or a 'modesty without rhetoric'.[44] Typologically, the arrangement is an unusual form of courtyard house, and comparison with a Roman atrium might seem far-fetched, since the plan is not centralised but triangulated with courts at each corner. Yet, as James Madge notes in his paper 'Type at the Origin of Architectural Form':

> *Terentius Varro, writing in the first century BC, described the atrium – 'the hollow of the house' – as 'the roofed over area inside the house walls which is left open for the use of everyone'. The outstanding quality* [...] *is its relentlessly inward focus* [...] *the built perimeter* [...] *invisible and without architectural definition, while the space 'left open for the use of everyone' is defined with the greatest architectural clarity.*[45]

Varro's description of his 'hollow' correlates, to a degree, with the nature of the social space in the Brick House, and if the *impluvium*[46] has been dispersed to the corners, the opening above (constituting, Madge argues, 'that prism of light [...] held between the rectangle of visible sky and the pool beneath') may be associated with the three frameless roof-lights. Does this substantiate ambivalent associations with liminal space, even if the centre of the Roman atrium was 'not a space for human occupation'?[47] Madge notes, later on in his text, that 'Hannah Arendt finds no trace in the ancient world of that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance that we call "society".' Yet, here, the Brick House's transformation of an atrium typology – displacing Caruso's association with a Baroque chapel, with its 'dome' and unambiguous sacred connotations[48] – antithetically celebrates Arendt's 'hybrid' social space.

Building, dwelling and otherness

Adam Caruso's inclinations suggest that the house may be understood in terms of a phenomenology of building and dwelling. The concept of a 'found space' developed in a reciprocal conception of building and dwelling, is reminiscent of Heidegger who Caruso quotes in his essay on Lewerentz in *The Feeling of Things*.[49] Indeed the architects talk of 'intimate rooms deep inside' and of 'a place of escape and dreams', which provokes a phenomenological drift.[50] Setting aside tendentious aspects of this thinking, a more direct link might be sought with Heidegger's hut, cogently theorised by Adam Sharr in his book on the subject, since it too was in transitory occupation between urban and provincial lives:[51]

> *The hut manifests this tension: it appears at one with the landscape; its study, kitchen, and dining area have the compressed utility of a place where life is lived intensely; yet always apparent are the shutters and bars, provisions made for the building to be locked up and left behind.*[52]

Certainly this description echoes aspects of the Brick House. In London, the particular compression and intensity is necessarily different, but it does (if the inference is to be believed) constitute a 'liminal' withdrawal from the 'profane' public realm of the city at large. Sharr's conclusion ruminates on the urban equivalent to the philosopher's hut, and its role as a datum 'centering' his life:

> *The hut's memory suggests strategies for making such a datum. It might frame in rich and multiple ways itself, its inhabitants and their relationships, its equipment, its social context ... the sun and tracking shadows, glimpses of the sky, breeze and wind, rain and snow* [...] *It might be neither too big nor unnecessarily flexible* [...] *It might encourage reflective moments thought at a slower pace* [...] *the challenge posed by the hut's memory, particularly for architects, is how so powerful a datum might be achieved – without exclusion – in urban conditions.*[53]

If aspects of the Brick House coincide with this perception, it does also project 'exclusive' detachment. The interior provides a 'safe haven' in the city redolent of Bachelard's 'poetic' of intimacy and enclosure[54] but also of a psychology 'secured by design' (in a microcosm of a 'gated community').[55]

The virtue of disenchantment

Ellis Woodman identifies 'an interest in the potential of construction to embody thought' as intrinsic to Caruso St John's architecture.[56] Caruso's essay 'Towards an Ontology of Construction' proposes something along similar lines:

> *An architecture that takes advantage of the unprecedented separation of construction from technical*

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limitations and rhetorical discourses. This difficult work attempts new kinds of material spatial conditions that take full advantage of the idea of construction as an aesthetic judgment.[57]

Some-such aesthetic judgement informs the sculptural nature of the house, positioned at the interface between Semper's categorisation of the origin of the 'wall' and Lewerentz's manifest agglomeration of bricks constituting the materiality beyond the semblance of brickwork.[58] The concept of surface woven into the textile analogy contrasts with the animate presence of constituent mass. Selected photographs, by Hélène Binet published in Phillip Ursprung's *Caruso St John: Almost Everything*, highlight both conditions, the first through 'virtual' reflection and framing and the second as a 'tactile' presence enhanced by light and shadow. The accompanying text by Ursprung describes something else – a transparency of intent:

They [Caruso St John] *are more interested in showing exactly how a window works, or how a layer of bricks meets the floor, than in speculating about overall appearances.*[59]

He continues:

[...] *one can literally sense the way the bricks were laid on top of one another, next to one another, juxtaposed and superimposed – from the wall of the spacious living room to the small details in the bathrooms.*

The argument casts a shadow of literalism on the house as if its construction was self-evident, the argument veering in the direction of an embodied social realism:

The traces of human labour, of the design, of the decisions, of the considerations are still visible in the smallest details [...] *Caruso St John do not rely on the effect of expensive materials, but rather on the fact that a piece of alienated labour is captured in the materials and in their treatment, and thus can be returned to the user.*[60]

This lies strangely with his subsequent assertion that the house: 'is more about pictorial inscription than about tectonic solidity [...] It is about surface, not about essence'. The polemical drift of his argument applies the idealistic gloss of an 'honest' social realism to the house but Ursprung's reference, on the contrary, is to William Carlos Williams' plea for facticity: 'Say it! No ideas but in things!' [61] He moves on to questions of space:

[...] *the spatiality of Caruso St John is the product of cultural and economic pressure, an appearance in which ideas and matter intertwine, somewhere between a thing and an idea. Spatiality, in their view, is not something naturally given – that is, framed – but something that is performed.*[62]

What is performed 'in' the house is down to narrative experience and its particular occupation as a second home. What is performed 'by' the constitution of the house, is ambivalently contradictory: one thing in fact, another as a fictive ideal developed in the mind of the architect. There is nothing surprising about this; but there is something surprising in the way the material contradictions of the construction defuse the self-consciousness of the explanation offered for the house. Gone is the sacred aura, gone is the obsession with surface, but instead, in the presence of disenchantment, this second home provides a matrix of seemingly 'found' spaces that accept short-term occupation and contingent familial relations with an engaging directness; and very largely despite the aesthetic qualities claimed for them.

Notes

1. Adam Caruso notes somewhat disingenuously: 'I suppose you could write about our buildings in very complicated ways. It's possible [...] it's not contextualism [...] what remains consistent is our channelling of the neuroses and our rigour.' Adam Caruso in interview with Adam Sharr and Allison Dutoit, 'Landscapes of Experience', *Quality Out of Control*, eds Dutoit, Odgers and Sharr (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 13.
2. See: Catherine Szacka, 'A House of Brick', *Canadian Architect*, 52: 7 (2007), p. 20; Ellis Woodman, 'The Brick Layers', *Architecture (New York)*, 95/5 (2006), p. 47; Kenneth Powell and Cathy Strongman in *New London Architecture 2* (London: Merrell, 2007), p. 160, and Caruso St John Architects, *Knitting Weaving Wrapping Pressing: Caruso St John Architects* (Basel: Birkhauser, 2002), p. 62.
3. Associated with its past use as stables.
4. Identified with a *demeure aristocratique* that preoccupied a French critic. *Le Moniteur AMC*, 153 (2005).
5. Parodied in Richard Hamilton's 'interior' collage of 1964 where a young woman leads a horse towards St John Wilson's Cambridge School of Architecture extension. Its moderate Brutalism has associations with the Brick House.
6. Caruso distances himself from 'opinion' and 'didacticism'. In a recent conversation he concludes: 'I love taste. Erudition. That's what I want to have: good taste. Because how could I do something for a client if I don't have this judgement ... why wouldn't you want to be able to make correct judgments?' Sharr and Dutoit, 'Landscapes of Experience', p. 17.
7. Caruso St John Architects, *Knitting Weaving Wrapping Pressing*.
8. Caruso St John, 'Brick House', in Aurora Fernández (ed.), *As Built: Caruso St John Architects* (Vitoria-Gasteiz: A+T Ediciones, 2005), p. 165.
9. Not perhaps entirely candid. Peter Blundell Jones observes about the church at Klippan: 'Pointing is long and painstaking [...] Lewerentz's alternative was to overfill the joint, wipe off excess mortar with a rag, and sandblast to leave a continuous flat surface. But when he started to do this on an earlier building, he found that the wiped surface had qualities of its own, despite smearing, so he left it.' Peter Blundell Jones, 'Sigurd Lewerentz at Klippan Church', *Architecture Today*, Brick Bulletin (Summer 2010), p. 21.
10. '(*Decke*, *Bekleidung*, *Schranke*, *Zaun*) All of the above refers only to pre-architectural conditions, whose practical interest for the history of art may be doubtful. The question now is what became of our principle of dressing after the mystery transfiguration was complete; as the essentially material, structural, and technical notion presented by the dwelling assumed monumental form, from which true *architecture* arose.' Gottfried Semper, *Style* (LA: Getty, 2004), p. 248.
11. 'Cambridge "Edwardian natural

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cream" bricks (Furness Brickworks Cumbria)' highlighted by pressure washing and 'embedded in colourless lime mortar and sponged.' Dominique Boudet, 'Brick House', *Le Moniteur AMC*, Supplement Terre Cuite/Brick Architecture (2007), p. 59 and Raymund Ryan, *Gritty Brits: New London Architecture* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie MoA, 2006), p. 42.

12. This preoccupation with materiality is close to that of the heritage industry: 'Bricklaying, regarded in the C19th as one of the lowlier of the building crafts, distinctly inferior to that of the mason and only doubtfully conferring artisan status, becomes the proof of authenticity. The bricks themselves – hand-wrought, hand-thrown, hand-fired, and varying in colour, texture and shape – are treated as art objects ...' Raphael Samuel, 'The Return to Brick', *The Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 119/120.
13. Effectively brick wallpaper.
14. The flattened vaults represented in the earlier drawings, contrary to the accompanying description, were not explicitly clad in bricks or brick slips (otherwise applied to the ramp, stair and main floor level).
15. Adam Caruso, *Gardens of Experience* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2010), p. 71.
16. Described questionably as having a 'domed profile' associated with the later parallel, 'a Baroque chapel in Rome'. Caruso St John, 'Brick House', p. 165. Ellis Woodman defers, referring rather to a 'distorted dome'. Woodman, 'The Brick Layers', p. 47.
17. Caruso has retrospectively clarified that originally the Brick House 'had vaults that were brick' (Adam Caruso et al, 'Landscapes of Experience', p. 17), but the early drawings evidence either a shift in thinking or ambivalence about a brick totality.
18. 'Caruso St John show the effort and beauty of the way the concrete roof is made, exposing the rawness and thickness of the material.' Phillip Ursprung, *Caruso St John: Almost Everything* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2008), p. 78.
19. Notably, however, more pragmatic than Lewerentz's apparently naive use of reinforcement in his brickwork. See Peter Blundell Jones, *Modern Architecture Through Case Studies* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2002), p. 224.
20. A product of 'the will of the clients and their determination to make a new home in this particular part of the city.' Caruso St John, 'Brick House', op. cit., p. 164.
21. In reality their static weight was countered by an upturned concrete substructure at the perimeter of the excavated site.
22. It led one critic to comment on the 'liquid' quality of the site (*Lotus*, 133 (2008), p. 45), but this aqueous metaphor is confounded by a conception of the house inhabiting *poché* space between surrounding buildings, as a series of 'cavities'. Akos Moravánsky notes Semper's primary conception of the 'wall as boundary' but also his reading of stereotomy: 'Semper emphasizes that the root of the word construct, *struere*, implies the filling of hollow spaces'. Andrea Deplazes (ed.), *Constructing Architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2005), p. 27.
23. Rather different from the 'lightness' of 'the unfurling of a room', which seems developed from Caruso's initial concept of an 'enveloping body' by Kenneth Powell and Cathy Strongman in *New London Architecture 2* (London: Merrell, 2007), p. 160.
24. As the brickwork the concrete also acquires ambivalent qualities in its alternately bush-hammered texture and velvet-like finish.
25. Caruso quoted in Powell and Strongman, *New London Architecture 2*. Notably however: 'Semper dismissed the wooden hut as the formal origin of the Greek temple, and rejected Quatremère's "fairytale" of the cave and the tent.' Mari Hvattum, *Gottfried Semper and the Problem of Historicism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), p. 64.
26. When the presence of the concrete in fact projects a more visceral solidity. The 'tent' metaphor nevertheless appeals to a contemporary sensibility as 'a shelter for a family of global nomads'. Sabine von Fischer, 'Fortified Tent', *Werk Bauen + Wohnen*, 4 (2006), p. 42.
27. A 'rarefied act of patronage' where the architects have produced a house described variously as 'brave', 'intelligent' and 'stunning' and 'one of the most celebrated of the New Millennium'.
28. Blundell Jones suggests Lewerentz's 'profane' doors bolted on the surface of the wall contrast with the recessed representative entrance at Klippan. Peter Blundell Jones, *Modern Architecture Through Case Studies* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2002), p. 226. That hierarchy is lost here. The substantive black formality of the steel-clad front door opens outwards to reveal its timber constitution. Brick is absent at the threshold and at night white render reflects light from a halogen security fitting. The particular formality adopted recurs in the house: setting thickness against surface and reflectivity against opacity; exploiting 'angular' concrete and a selective absence of applied colour (highlighting the texture of materials).
29. To one side a small table provided for unopened mail teeters on the incline, behind which a half-brick stub wall bookends full-height cupboards beyond.
30. 'The idea of a moulded plinth, initially necessary to raise the hearth above the dampness of the soil, in early times became associated with terracing.' Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture*, trans. Mallgrave and Herrmann (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 24.
31. Caruso St John Architects, *Knitting Weaving Wrapping Pressing.*
32. Later given the 'local' credentials of a City of London church. George Demitri, *Building*, Brick Bulletin, 270/8406 (2005), p. 7. This atavistic tendency becomes associated with the freestanding kitchen worktable though the client's artwork observes to the contrary: 'there will be no miracles here'.
33. A rotational aspect animates these 'voids' (or roof-lights attached to each of three re-entrant sides). The openings provide views of the brick walls flanking the neighbouring houses. They are glazed, but frameless, reinforcing a disconcerting sense of incompletion.
34. Essential for it to read as a cave. Otto Wagner's paradigmatic archetype (following Semper) is present here but without the sophisticated dialogue between suspension and support evident in his banking hall ceilings. Otto Wagner, *Modern Architecture* (Santa Monica: Getty, 1986), p. 92.
35. As in the auditorium of Louis Kahn's Rochester Church (and School), New York: see David Brownlee and David Long, *Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), ill. 301, pp. 200/201.
36. Alluding to fashionable topologies it has more in common with German Expressionism, or the mediated Brutalism of the Cambridge School. Sublime qualities and the virtues of inconsistency may be redolent of the Picturesque but are not characteristic of the stolidity of the house. Caruso's choice of a landscape paradigm to characterise his own architectural sensibility leads him to declaim: 'The interior is a set of sensual and overlapping experiences. It is like a

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Romantic landscape.' Caruso, *Gardens of Experience*, p. 71.
37. Hidden at their junction with the brickwork, this alternate expression and suppression mirrors the ambivalence found elsewhere.
38. Now a relic of a high-energy consumption culture.
39. They read as a 'virtual' extension of the interior space but early on are described as 'gardens'. Caruso St John Architects, *Knitting Weaving Wrapping Pressing*.
40. 'The precedent for the modern living room was, in fact, the parlor found in medieval monasteries [...] By the late C14th, the parlour had become a part of the house, functioning as an informal receiving area as well as a place to sit or to eat ... the early parlor may be the forebear of the large, open-plan living rooms ... popular some five centuries later.' Akiko Busch, *Geography of Home* (New York: Princeton UP, 1999), p. 153.
41. The mute presence of monochrome joinery is contradicted by the idiosyncratic placement of doors and windows, which draws attention to this pervasive sobriety.
42. In the initial design, this was enclosed by glazing.
43. Two stairs and entry from the rear court, belied by the restricted access to the living space. More so as originally planned where a third (external) stair accessed the study balcony from the rear entrance-court.
44. Identified with the 'movement' (without a name) from which Caruso St John emerged, along with the practice's mentor Tony Fretton. Anthony Vidler notes of the Smithsons: 'As Colomina points out, how else can we look on the House of the Future design by Alison and Peter Smithson [...] except as a form of safe house [...] cave dwelling, like bomb shelters, submarines, and spaceships, corresponds to a time of extreme danger outside. Caves are all interiorized spaces, the first bunkers', characteristically similar to the Brick House's bare surfaces and occasional occupation. Anthony Vidler, 'Air War and Architecture', *Ruins of Modernity*, eds. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), p. 36.
45. James Madge, 'Type at the Origin of Architectural Form', *The Journal of Architecture*, 12/1 (2007), p. 13.
46. 'A pool in which water was collected' (Madge, 'Type', p. 14), something that might have animated courts that remain definitively empty.
47. Madge, 'Type', p. 14.
48. Akiko Busch argues that: 'Whereas there was once a rigid division between the public and private areas of the house, there is less of a distinction between our public and private lives today.' Not in the divide between the levels of the Brick House; but the replacement of 'the formal living room' in American houses with a contemporary 'Great Room, a kind of all-purpose gathering space, a hybrid of the medieval great hall and the fifties family room' is certainly apposite. Busch, *Geography of Home*, p. 155.
49. Caruso, *The Feeling of Things*, p. 77.
50. Caruso St John Architects, *Knitting Weaving Wrapping Pressing,* op. cit.
51. In Heidegger's case between Freiburg and Todtnauberg, and here between New York and London.
52. Adam Sharr, *Heidegger's Hut* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006), p. 105.
53. Sharr, *Heidegger's Hut*, p. 112.
54. '[La Maison Onirique] Specifically it is a building of three stories at least, since it is a Jungian necessity that it should progress vertically from cellar, through everyday rooms to an attic; it is full of nooks and crannies, heavy draperies, a welcoming lamp on the window sill and a "faithful old servant" somewhere in its recesses' (James Madge, 'Gaston Bachelard: The Poetics of Space', *Issue* (Polytechnic of Central London), 4 (March 1984), p. 33). This parallels a French description of the Brick House as: 'L'auberge à l'ancienne et la chartreuse'. Dominique Boudet, 'Adam Caruso et Peter St John: Brick House Londres', *Le Moniteur AMC*, 153 (2005), p. 65.
55. Anna Minton comments in *Ground Control* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 81, that 'safe havens, which substitute physical security and complex technological systems to meet emotional needs' create 'the false illusion that life is "psychologically snug" and perfectly safe.' While the Brick House may be a 'product' of its backlands site, it also conforms to a psychology where Raphael Samuel notes: 'the return to brick dovetails with contemporary social phobias [...] The ruling fears today are those of insecurity, and the grand specific, vigorously canvassed since the early 1970s, is that of "defensible" or "protected" space.' Samuel, 'The Return to Brick', in *Theatres of Memory* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), p. 130.
56. Woodman, 'The Brick Layers', p. 47.
57. Adam Caruso, 'Towards an Ontology of Construction', *The Feeling of Things* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2008), p. 31.
58. As Blundell Jones puts it: 'more like concrete than traditional brickwork'. Blundell Jones, *Modern Architecture*, p. 227.
59. Ursprung, *Caruso St John: Almost Everything*, p. 78.
60. Ibid., pp. 78/9.
61. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1995).
62. Ursprung, *Caruso St John: Almost Everything*, p. 79.

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