

EXPLORATION OF CREATIVITY

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EXPLORATION OF CREATIVITY

LINDSAY JOHNSTON

Two Californian architectural practices have been widely published during the 1990s, Morphosis and Eric Owen Moss. Thom Mayne, the remaining principal of Morphosis, and Eric Owen Moss were interviewed by Lindsay Johnston at their offices in Santa Monica and Culver City.

Both architects have produced a body of work that has been generally associated with the 'deconstruction'¹ movement the subject of an elaborate overlaying of philosophical theory and rhetoric — derived from Jacques Derrida — by Jencks, Norris, Glusberg² and others. Nevertheless, the works of Mayne and Rotundi of Morphosis,³ and of Moss,⁴ have been widely influential internationally.

The interviews were part of a research program studying the design inspiration and methodology of eminent architects with a view to exploring what Darke has called "the primary generator" of a design idea in the context of the work of Bryan Lawson.⁵

As the interviews demonstrate, the roots of the work of Mayne and Moss is not consciously centred in deconstruction philosophy. Mayne refers to architects of his student days, particularly James Stirling, and cites Stirling's three dimensional drawings as a new way of seeing architecture. Moss challenges the arrogance of the 'masters' and refers to more diverse influences, particularly the writings of James Joyce. This has led Lindsay Johnston to elaborate (elsewhere) the influence of Joyce on late twentieth century architecture.⁶

INTERVIEW WITH ERIC OWEN MOSS*

LJ - Where are you coming from intellectually and how is this reflected in your architecture ?

EOM - My interest in a way — this probably starts to sound a little sanctimonious - is not to be in a position which insists that I have a position. So not only don't I trust you — I for sure don't trust you — but I also don't trust myself. Part of the idea for me is that whenever I start to think I know how to do it - how to design it, what it should look like, how we should build it — I raise the hypothesis "That's not right." Nobody could live that way, of course, you could never take a step because every step you took, you would have to take back, and I understand that. The premise is to be suspicious of what you do.

You remember in the Odyssey, Odysseus had a wife called Penelope ? Odysseus went to fight a war in Troy, and his wife was home and all these guys wanted to marry her because they said Odysseus was never coming back. She said, "Yes, but in case he does, I will make this robe, and when I get done

*Interview at 8557 Higuera St, Culver City, California. 9 June 1993.

making it, I'll pick one of you idiots." So she made it during the day, very carefully, and then at night she took it apart, and then the next day she made it, and then during the night she took it apart. I am interested in that process, metaphorically, where there is some conviction, some strategy, some idea, for making things and simultaneously some doubt about the ability of anyone to really understand and to say "This is the way things are."

This didn't come from me, it came from Nicholas of Cusa, it came from a lot of other people, it came from some of your Irish guys, it comes from Mr. Joyce, it comes from Mr. Beckett, who do a couple of things simultaneously in very different ways. What Joyce is trying to do — this is my reading of it — is to wrap his arms round the whole fucking thing, this is what a life is, this is what it means to be alive, it includes everything — like you and I are talking, you are thinking about your girlfriend who you are going to meet in two weeks in Bolivia, and meanwhile you hear a car driving by, and the air conditioner goes on, and a baby cries, and your foot itches — all these complicated things go on simultaneously. So somebody tries to write that, to put that into the process of a narrative in literature which is no longer linear — I got out of bed, I got dressed, I went to the office, I went out to lunch, I went to a conference, I came home, I watched a soccer game — this is one line. Someone like Joyce, has many lines, and they are running in all directions, and the lines aren't necessarily sequential in time — so that noise you hear while you're talking to me, reminds you of when you were three years old, and you fell out of the crib and bumped your head — all these things go on simultaneously. It is so infinitely complicated and Joyce tries to find a way of giving that a sort of structure.

It's like trying to put almost everything into a piece of art. You can't do that because almost inevitably you leave out almost everything. But the attempt is to put in many, many, many things. So this is something that interests me. There is an opposite thrust, intellectual thrust, artistic thrust - which is old but also recent. Mark Rothko, the painter, he killed himself. Rothko tried to paint nothing, in a way, to strip everything down — sometimes this is attributed to Mies, but Mies never got close — to go down to what was underneath everything .

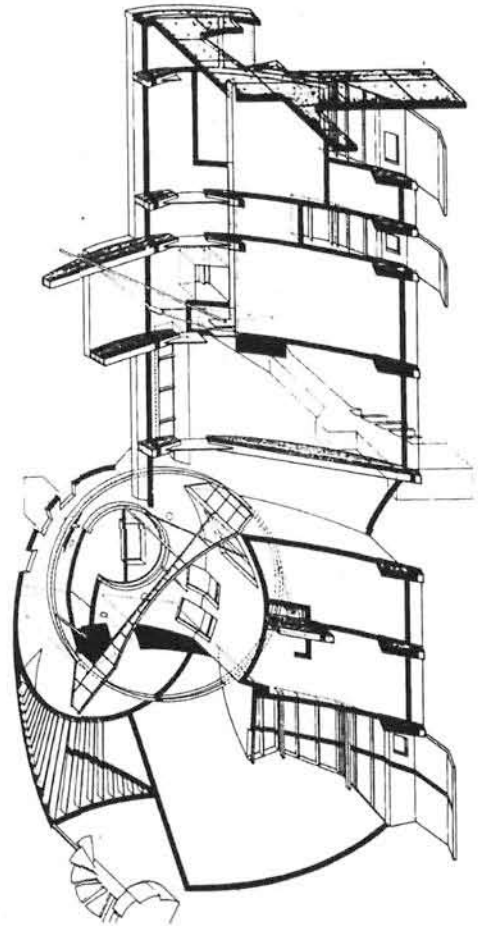
So here, on one side, is the Joycean side which is to try to put everything in and, on the other, the Rothko side which is trying to strip everything down. I think everything we do — we, meaning people wandering around on two legs — is covered by one side or the other in this discussion. It has to do with trying to understand the problem of being alive, the problem of living.

So architecture is about putting down the issues of living in the form that is available to you as an architect - be it concrete, steel, glass, whatever it is — and since you never can resolve, or solve, or explain that problem or that dilemma, then everything you do is tentative, that's why I have said you have to come back and rethink it, you have to come back and rework it, and you have to have both enough conviction to put it down, and be suspicious of the fact that you had enough conviction to put it down. Maybe this sounds like double-talk to you, or bullshit, but it makes sense to me. It's like the problem of always wanting to know, of always wanting to understand, in a way people are like that, they always want to have some explanation.

I think I had some Babylonian drawing of the sky. So why did the Babylonians draw the sky? They look at all of this, and all of this is too big, it's too impossible, people go in and out of it, it goes on, but the people start and stop. So something goes on—continuously—something, and something starts and stops—and the thing that starts and stops is YOU. So this is automatically tension. This is the basic tension of living. This is the way Joyce writes, he's trying to get a handle on that somehow, he's trying to explain it. But it's like grabbing chocolate pudding—sometimes you think you got it and then it squishes away.

For me, being an architect, or being anything, it's like being disingenuous, I'm interested in those problems and I'm trying to find a way of saying what I have to say about the difficulty in dealing with those problems. Not please pity me, or you, or the human race. Not please feel sorry for architects, nothing like that. What's the problem? Look at the problem, let's see if we can see what the problem is. Can we build it, can we build the circumstances in a precise enough way, or in a poignant enough way, to get to this sort of split, tension - you're finite, something else is infinite?

Most of the people, who are not contemporaries of ours, the people who are considered to KNOW - Aalto (I went to a lot of Aalto's stuff recently), Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Lou Kahn, people like that—so they KNOW, this is the way it is. So these people have good intellects, are good architects sometimes, but are very smug—this is in a way an architecture of the smug—THIS IS HOW IT IS. But anybody who reads a history book knows, THIS IS NEVER HOW IT IS. This is only how it is in this period, these guys defined it this way and then it dissipated, and then something else came, and then this went away, and then something else came. So please don't tell me this is the way it is. This is the way YOU think it is THIS WEEK. Once you realise that that ephemeral quality is so much of what makes opinion—and it doesn't have to be architecture, we could talk about how to build a wall, or we could talk about the Berlin Wall coming down—all these idiots said "History ended"—that is the most arrogant remark anyone could make—George Bush—nobody could be that stupid—and you can see how ridiculous it is—the Russian empire is collapsing—so what's going to happen when the Russian empire is collapsing—I don't know—are the Germans



1. Axonometric: Kate Mantilini Restaurant, Beverly Hills, LA, by Morphosis

going to run back —are the Chinese going to hook up with the Japanese and take over — history is not over, I guarantee you.

What architecture can do is to point to those kinds of dichotomies, those kinds of splits, that kind of tension, that kind of pain — not only pain it may be some kind of joy in seeing that and accepting it. I'm reading a book at the moment called *The End of the Twentieth Century and The End of the Modern Age* by John Lukacs, (Ticknor and Fields. New York. 1993) and I get the feeling the reason he wrote the book, was his great love for how strange it all is, how strange the cosmos is and how it can't be calculated, and can't be understood. Especially now, everyone is running around with computers, it is thought that people are driven by technology and history follows along, but it may be the reverse — technology is driven by the history and no one knows what drives history.

LJ - When you are building a building, you are freezing all this at a point in time, presumably. You have to stop designing and build the building. How do arrive at that point in a project ?

EOM - You mean, how do you know when to stop? How do you know when it's done ? When is the poem finished? The client throws you off the site?

LJ- I mean when do you stop designing, build the bloody thing and let the clients live in it ?

EOM- I think — probably it is different for each project — one knows, or I know, at a certain point in time, what issues a project could take on. Architecture doesn't solve problems, this is a big mistake in conception, it raises problems, it makes issues. Maybe I'll make an issue and you'll pick up the issue. You can see that within a certain series of issues, on a certain site, with certain programmatic discretions, then you can see the range of possibilities laid out in front of you in a particular project and you come to know what they are and how they would be stated, and when that statement is completed. You see this isn't the end of the book, but it's the end of the chapter. So you can stop and then you can go to the next stage.

You've been to see the Lawson-Westen House. Well I was invited to do some housing crap in an exhibition in a fine art museum in Cincinnati. They invited some international architects which included ... Meier and others, a very strange group of people ... well I was looking at the Westen House and trying to decide whether I would take it and remodel it, whether it would make sense to take that house and rework it. So I decided not to do that, not because I couldn't have done it, but it seemed to me in a way resolved — although this contradicts what I said in principle — but those issues in this form had been resolved.

LJ - A very pragmatic question. Take the Lawson-Westen House - you meet the clients, you get the brief, where do you go from there ?

EOM- Whatever brief you get you immediately put in the shredding machine and then put it back together again — I mean that euphemistically. What I did in this case — when we got the job I told them

I would do this — I sat down with Lynda alone and we talked for a long time, I made some notes, and asked some questions. Then I sat down with Tracy for a long time — by a long time I mean an hour, a couple of hours - and then I sat down with them together. Then I wrote it all up and we passed it back and forth to see if any more points came up.

They are unusual people — they are art collectors, he is an Oxford scholar, she was involved in transcendental meditation — so they're identifiable people, they're not just a kind of cardboard cut-out of the generic consumer at the end of the twentieth century buying an affluent society house in west Los Angeles. They are more than that. So life is personal, it always is personal when you get down to talking to people, so we talked about it. They never prescribed issues of form, of space, any of that. We never discuss it as MY house, it is OUR house. Architect's vanity is always involved in these discussions, and although there are things that belong to me, the point is that out of these notes and discussions and sketches came an idea of, let's say, a sensibility. Lynda used to say it, and she's been quoted this way in a few articles, she looked at the stuff I'd done and she loved a lot of it and she hated a lot of it, both.

So this is a nice quality, first it's nice of her to say, and second it shows that there is a kind of dichotomy in the work. She wanted certain things that would reassure her, that would be home, that would be complete, that would be resolved, that would be reconciled — all in those kinds of emotions, based on the feeling that the world outside didn't always represent that. For me, I wanted to show that it was possible to do this, but it was also possible to do THIS. The tension between this and this is part of what's in the house. You could argue about how that was built into the building, or whether that was built into the building - it's a kind of duel between the known and the unknown, or between the understood and the attempt to understand, in a spatial way, in an experiential way, in the way the light goes into the building.

I think there are still things about the building that make her uncomfortable. That was part of the game of the building — to be comfortable being uncomfortable, to be able to tolerate both sides of this thing in a kind of tension. To me, the building, at the time that it was done, is a sort of translation of the



2. Interior: Lawson-Weston House, Brentwood LA by
Eric Owen Moss

qualities in architecture that I was talking about. Those are fundamental qualities of living in this time. Maybe they are qualities of living in every time, or maybe they are qualities of living for certain people who live in every time. Maybe there are periods of time when people can say "Okay, we understand" — but I think now, so many potential connections between people have been shredded, values, perceptions ... there are people who look at that house and think it's lunacy, and there are people who look at it and think it's spectacular, but they don't know what it's about. You get almost as many reactions as you get Japanese tour buses.

LJ- Now tell me, expose yourself, tell me what you do? How do you go about translating all those requirements, your thoughts and their thoughts, into a building? Do you start making models, or do you sketch?

EOM- You mean, what is the process? There is a big book of the drawings of that house, that I can show you some time, a big pile of my drawings. Then there is a whole series of hard line drawings, there is a whole series of models that were done. I think the building started, and they always start here, out of a series of drawings which are not plans and sections, although they are about plans and sections, they are more about objects, they are more about spaces, they are more about forms. So it is not like in the traditional way, going from a plan and a section to a space or to a solid. It has more to do with a conception of the space or the solid, which then has to be understood as a plan and a section.

I can show you a little model of a building which is just started, which is a planetarium and observatory and lecture hall, and there is no plan for it, you never can find in this office a plan or a section for it, and yet there is a model and it comes from a whole series of drawings — they are very ugly drawings, it's a very ugly model — and out of that process, it's very intricate, and there still isn't a goddamned plan of that building and there still isn't a section. It might be in my head, I think it is. So it starts out as these volumetric conceptual drawings of mine and then works its way forward.

LJ- Do you get a picture in your mind's eye of what the project is going to be, early on, or is it something that is a long process?

EOM- That's a very interesting question. I think the answer to that is yes and no. We are currently doing a project in Spain, and on that project, intentionally, I didn't start out with — it's going to look like THAT. I think now, in the office, if I know it, I only know it vaguely, but not that vaguely. The Ibiza project was done step by step - as you took a step, then the step suggested ways of going to the next step — and the issues might be raised — conventional issues such as access, site, views, or wherever you pick up the trash. It might be more esoteric stuff like what pieces might be for various reasons. As you went through a series of steps, and there were probably about fifteen or twenty steps, the thing began to gnarl around itself, it's a fairly complex piece on one level, although I think I could argue that the pieces are put together so incisively that it has both complexity and precision, and both logic and illogic. If it has that, then it's successful — that's what I would like it to have.

In my head, I don't want to say it was amorphous, what it would look like, I had a kind of goal. Now,

when I look at all the sketches, it's interesting to see how it developed. It wasn't as if it was like a Robert Stern house in Cape Cod, already he would KNOW what it would look like, so I wouldn't say that, I wouldn't say the process of what something should look like is up for discussion.

I don't think somebody should run to an art museum and see what is the latest in the art museum and try to turn that into architecture. I think that's very defensive. To tell anyone that architecture when it's serious is art, architecture when it's serious is architecture. Art is something else. I'm not saying there can't be things passed back and forth, and there are, but to rip something out of the avant garde in art, of which there's nothing left anyway, and stuff it into architecture, is another defensive action. Architecture has to turn on itself.

LJ- Do you have a conversation with your drawings and your models ?

EOM- You know there are a lot of conversations that aren't conversations. In some conversations, you can finish the sentence, because you already know what the guy is going to say. In most cases, people don't even have to talk, you already know what they are going to say. Having been around a few people, it's all been mostly a waste of time.

So when you're working with yourself, or certainly with people who you know a little bit, or have worked with a little bit, you come to know, in a shorthanded way, what the intentions are without having a full blown discussion meeting — every sentence doesn't have to start with a capital letter and have a noun and a verb and a period in it — it's not that kind of discussion. It's a kind of struggle.

LJ- It is said that some architects work it out in their heads and then they draw it. Others, myself included, need to manipulate the drawings and the models in order to explore what they are thinking.

EOM- I think it's both. I don't think that any building with depth and with content is done, click, like that. The instinct for it, or a particular sensibility, or a particular image which might hold, in one way or another, or which might inform a lot of the other decisions, might come very quickly. Maybe this has to do with different talent in different people, but I think there also is another role in this, which is like anything else — whether it's picking up papers, cutting down trees or inventing the cure for AIDS — it takes a lot of work. It's just a matter of time and of patience to make these things happen.

So it's not what instantly comes out of your head, because buildings don't instantly come out of your head. You don't instantly see the light, and you don't instantly see the door jamb - we're experimenting with a lot of those things, a lot of the questions of assembly and meaning. What's a room ? What's a wall ? I'm not saying, necessarily, that the window should be a door, and the roof should be a wall, but I don't know that every roof should be shingles and every wall should be brick — maybe the roof should be brick. I don't know that a distinction should be made between the roof, where it stops, and the wall where it starts — although I can certainly tell you the traditional way, and why that was done. So there are a lot of questions that have to be asked now about the language of buildings and the meaning of buildings and the form of buildings, which seem to be up for grabs, they can be debated.

What's the form of a building? So at least that gives the architect a lot of freedom, but on the other hand, it requires the architect to take an awful lot of responsibility, in the end to be, probably, extremely arrogant and self-confident while, simultaneously, being extremely suspicious of yourself — you've got to be suspicious of yourself and as arrogant as hell. I think it takes both of those qualities, in order to be able to build the kind of world I think I am advocating.

It's not going to come to you from outside, now. There were times in the history of architecture when it might have done, but not now, especially in this city (Los Angeles). This city, because of its weakness as a city, because of its ephemeral qualities as a city, doesn't give itself back to you in terms of obligations, you have to invent these obligations. I showed the Lawson-Weston house in a lecture the other day to a group of European architects, and a guy in the audience asked me "How can you make a house like that in a neighbourhood which is quite clearly about something very different. How do you justify that?" As if the obligation was homogeneity. As if the question couldn't be asked about what are the differences — what belongs to these people and this architect? The suggestion was that by doing something that tested the assumed values of the rest of the neighbourhood, you were, ipso facto, hurting the neighbourhood rather than adding something to it. I, of course, argued that it was adding to it.

LJ- Philip Johnson, in the introduction to the book on your work published by Rizolli, refers to you as 'a jeweller of junk'. What is your comment on this?

EOM- It's bullshit. I like to think that there is much, much more to my work than that. The putting together of the buildings, the crafting of the materials is important, but it is only the last part of a long and complex process. I didn't see that introduction before the book was published. I have since told Philip Johnson what I think and he has agreed to re-write this introduction for the next edition.

INTERVIEW WITH THOM MAYNE*

LJ You have said that James Stirling has been an influence on your work. Stirling is quoted as saying, in 1965, "...I think architecture at the moment is rather static because I think architects are cynical about the society which they have got. It seems to me that in the twenties and thirties Corb, the Constructivists, Futurists, and others, had an intense vision of society ... which gave then a consistent plastic inventiveness, something which is lacking now. A new culture will, in time, become apparent, quite unlike what we know now." That was now nearly thirty years ago, do you think that he was prophetic and that your architecture is part of a new emerging culture?

TM This makes the assumption that there is a direct connection between architecture and society. I think it is more complicated than that. Within any artistic discipline there is a vast amount of territory that is autonomous — absolutely disconnected from society and the broader political, economic situation. You wouldn't find many architects that would have any kind of interest or invention, or any type of optimism, if they didn't work detached from those situations because we don't live in a world that has visions. We live in a world of realities and the realities of the twentieth century have turned

*Interview at Morphosis, at 2041 Colorado Avenue, Santa Monica, California, 9 June 1993.

out not to be the visions that came out of these (early twentieth century) manifestos. For myself, it is a completely different situation than that implied in the quote of Jim Stirling.

If anything, what has taken place in my generation has been the necessity for the detachment of one's discipline from society — but this represents many problems in the profession, it represents the marginalisation of much of my generation in terms of the realisation of one's work, the realisation of what would normally be considered the major public projects of an architect connected to society's program versus the smaller scale private work.

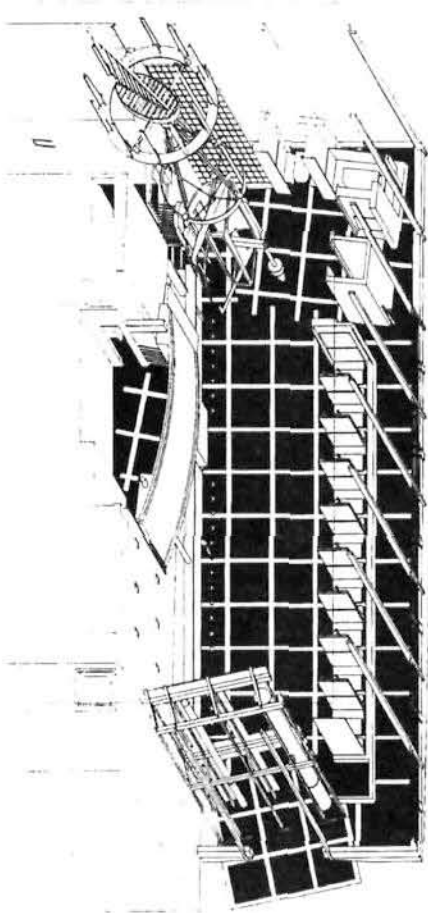
LJ Do you, as a result, derive your influences, not directly from society, but from other disciplines such as philosophy, literature, art, sculpture.

TM Yes, of course I do, but something that has changed has been influences from other architects. For myself, it is less being influenced by a single person or series of people or a particular generation. The generation before me, or the generation before that, were looking directly at Mies, Corb, Aalto, Gropius, etc. When I entered, pedagogically, the world of architecture, in the middle to late sixties, there had been a great dispersal already of the first salts of modernism. There was Stirling and, in particular, Archigram who were, in a broad sense, probably my largest influences — in some ways they showed what the whole notion of architectural practise means and how one goes about it, having to deal with experimentation, having to deal with visions, having to deal with clearly broader societal problems, but within a much more conceptual framework, one that was much more realistic that was coming through people like (Richard) Hamilton, etc.

With that comes a whole dispersal of one's influences. So it's a dispersal architecturally, your are interested in a large range of characters which include Wagner, and you go right through the Moderns, up through Archigram and Stirling and including a diverse set of influences philosophically and in literary terms, in terms of broader interests in geography, particular aspects of science, the relationship of scientific invention as it relates to artistic invention, the whole discussion between science and art as a discourse, which is coming much closer together.

I'm not sure what it means it's more complicated, look at a previous generation — look at Tange, the sources were absolutely clear. Today, the people I would look at — Steve Holl, Moss (Eric Owen Moss) — you would, I think, find little bits and pieces of stuff ... it's a lot more complicated. If you look at the work, the work develops in that way too. It's a lot to do with the way the work develops in terms of thought and act, act and thought — the traditional notion is thinking and acting , thinking being theory, acting being manifestation of theory — a Karl Popper type of debate.

Much of our work, in the beginning, when we were extremely young was thinking/action reversed, one acted and worked within the discipline, within the materials of that discipline, within the rule structures and various mechanisms of that discipline and out of that came bits and pieces of fragments of idea structures, theories in the loosest sense of the word, which went back and stimulated discourse which worked with other projects. For myself it has been a continual fifteen years of working, and I could still



3. Worm's eye view: Lawson-Weston House.
Brentwood LA by Eric Owen Moss

go back to the first project and, it's like any architect, you can make a connection, absolutely literally, from project to project, but it's not that it's a straight line, it's anything but that, it zigs and zags, it is an enormously circuitous line, and it places things, elements come in, and all of a sudden you become interested in a theoretical discourse and it moves you in one direction, and one minute it might be poetic, it could be T.S.Eliot or E.E.Cummings, another minute it could be a particular theoretical discourse. Even placing yourself within it, if you are not coming out of it, like the current stuff with deconstruction, which in itself is an interesting conversation because I don't think most people have come through it.

IJ - You have been placed under the umbrella which is called deconstruction and linked to the writings of Derrida and that whole philosophical and literary movement. Were you aware of and influenced by this movement or was it something with which you made the connection afterwards?

TM - It's difficult not to be aware of prevailing intellectual thought, whether it's Derrida, Foucault or Lacan. No, that's not where it comes from at all. The work comes from a series of interests which are much more connected to work that comes out of the work, work as a verb, that comes through the work and through a set of interests that have been

explorations, that have been much more phenomenological, in my case.

I would think — again you would have to look at these various characters - there are really only a few of them, maybe only one actually — Peter (Eisenman), who comes through that route. If you look at the other characters — if you look at Zaha (Hadid) clearly it comes from her beginning looking at the Constructivists in Russia, interested in sheared space; — Koolhaas, just about historically modern, twenties; — the California guys, I would think would all be, if anything, more at a phenomenological level, Eric (Owen Moss), Frank Gehry, myself, it all is much more rooted within the work itself.

I think it is a misconception today, the separation between theory and manifestation in architecture, it is ultimately much more integrated. One doesn't go out and spend six months or a year working on projects and then turn round and say this work is about this idea.

LJ- Daniel Liebeskin appears to have come from theory first and then into the practice of architecture.

TM- I've watched Daniel develop over the last ten years, and I would say it is a much more integrated search and is very much connected through his investigations of drawings, and making processes, and the work. The essence of what the work is all about is not just connected to his literary and intellectual interests but, in fact, comes directly out of the investigation of drawing and a belief in those methods.

LJ- Can I bring you back to James Stirling. In the early sixties, the design process of the Leicester Engineering Building seemed to release a new technique or way of drawing, a new way of looking at buildings. The axonometric, the exploded axonometric—some of the drawings that were done for that project seem to have a generic relationship to the drawings that you do. Could you elaborate this—did it open a door to a way of seeing architecture, a three dimensionalising.

TM- Absolutely. When you're younger, you are much less inclined to attempt to intellectualise it, to put things within conceptual frameworks. You are inherently interested in something and pursue it. When I was first looking at that work (Stirling/Archigram), as I was coming out of college, you intuited it, because there was something about it that you sensed was important. Over the years you come to grips with it and you can, maybe, articulate it theoretically to some degree. At this point I am more aware of what that work was about.

There are aspects of Stirling's work that have always fascinated me—there is a lack of facility in it in some ways, he was not an enormously facile architect, there's a clumsiness in his work, his hand did not have what the Germans call *fingerspitzengefühl*, there was a nineteenth century Victorian attitude. He studied Le Corbusier, but he was never a Corbusian character—Corbusier was always a subtractive character while Stirling was an additive one. If you take Stirling's trio—Leicester, Cambridge, Oxford—there was something clumsy about this work, something very strange about it, which is ultimately what attracts me to it. There was something a-aesthetic, it was hard to grasp, because it didn't follow conventions in terms of beauty.

LJ- "Dynamic juxtaposition" has been used to describe aspects of Stirling's work, which puts surprise into the projects. Do you see this as a feature of your work?

TM- I didn't really see it that way. It's possible. Surprise, is something I admire in his work. There was an idea that always interested me as a strategy for multiple works. In Leicester, the relationships of the pieces all have their own rules and there are points where they collide. His strategies, both in terms of his architecture and, later, in his urban projects, have been extremely useful to me, something that I have learned from.

LJ- Could we talk about the individual project in your work—where do you start and how do you develop the design?

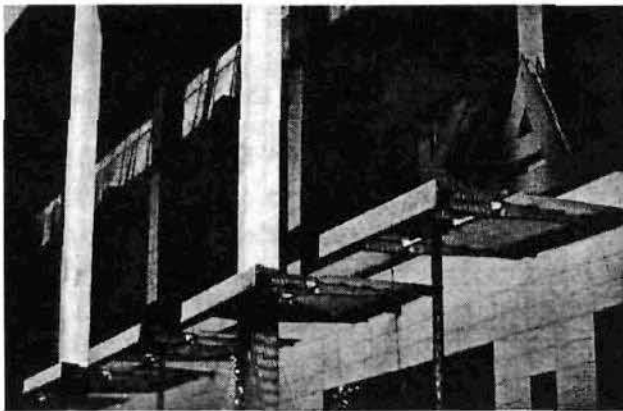
TM- I've always attempted to focus on the idiosyncratic, each work is on its own terms. It deals with some aspect of the problem, the site, something that is unique to that situation and that is where the general thrust of the work is established. At the same time there is an attempt for a 'ground zero' approach, not coming from another work. There are impulses, it's a series of questions and struggles to define what the work is about. It is not some sort of visions of drawing or images, that is very rare. Each one has its own history, characteristics and personality. They derive from an investigation - question asking, in an heuristic sense, attempting to define the nature of the problem, so you are not working with the solution, you are working with the problem. Then they work from very early manifestations of possible resolutions of those problems to more specifics. It is clear if you look at the models and the drawings that we are slow, the projects go through a very long gestation and we are very much involved in the use of drawings as a mechanism of investigation and the use of models as a mechanism for investigating space, investigating various potentialities in these questions.

LJ- So you specifically do not develop any kind of physical manifestation or vision of what the project is going to be ?

TM- I'm very ambivalent about that. I am very ambivalent even in having an interest in what it looks like. I'm not even that interested.

LJ- I wasn't meaning so much what it looks like, but the shape of the project and how it will fit together.

TM- I'm always interested, of course, in what you don't know, what you can't envisage. So it is most interesting when you don't know what it is until you go through the process. It is rare that we have any idea what it is going to be until it goes through that process. I'm ambivalent about being too focused on its visionomic. It goes back to the discussion on Stirling, perhaps Oxford, or the three projects we discussed, in that you can never imagine those buildings being drawn the way, say, Michael Graves or



4. exterior detail: Kate Mantilini Restaurant, Beverly Hills LA by Morphosis

(Robert) Stern would draw them. They would draw an elevation and then they would work on the rest of the scheme. It is more like a helicopter or a lunar landing module, something that comes out of an inventive process that you could never have invented, a priori, it could only come out of a series of questions. Whether I do it or not, that's another issue, but that is my aspiration, that's what I am interested in doing. That's why I give a lot of power to, and am very optimistic about, the various

processes and the mechanisms of making architecture. This is clear from the drawings as they move from extremely abstract - at first they are extremely abstract and sometimes we are looking for things in these drawings, and they are not always literal. Sometimes we will stop and move into a more abstracted territory, free from the demands of program, just with the objective of looking for a direction, before it is burdened with the tremendous number of tasks with which architecture is burdened, which put demands on it that make it more or less normative.

LJ- It seems unusual that three influential architects, in world terms, such as yourself, Gehry and Eric Owen Moss, are all so close together in Santa Monica. Can you give any reason for this. Is it something in the schizophrenic frenetic culture of Los Angeles which has bred this mental approach?

TM- Moss would definitely say it was schizophrenic, that's his interest. I think Los Angeles is an interesting place for young architects to develop. It is in search of culture with a capital C. It doesn't have an authoritarian structure in place and it has a tremendous number of one off situations, which allow for the type of exploration I think is necessary when you are a younger person. As you get older it is a lot more difficult, because then you are looking for another type of client. Up until recently it has been a place with a fairly robust building activity, there are opportunities, there is a series of good academic institutions, there are four schools of architecture. There is a better than average process of communication with juries and academic situations that allows for discourse. Then there is probably a bit of chance involved.

LJ- Can I ask you about cities. I see from the models in the office that you are now working on larger projects. Can your type of architecture work on the big scale or is it something for rich aesthetes and smaller projects ?

TM- Most of our projects have been done on fairly slim budgets. I think it is just the other way around. We use strategies that are about large scale work. If you look at the large scale work the same strategies are being used and they are more compatible for the large scale complex projects than for the smaller projects. A lot of the density, maybe even a reading of cacophony in the small work, comes out of the hyper series of relationships, because the work is always focused on strategic organisation. I am extremely interested in the various organisational issues of the city and it is a territory that is somewhat untouched right now. We have so few mechanisms for organising our larger constructs. There are so few people even thinking about this problem — Bernard Tschumi, Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, to an extent, Coop Himmelblau, I couldn't think of too many more. This is one of the largest areas for architects today.

LJ- In the quote from James Stirling in 1965, he concluded "A new culture will become apparent, quite unlike what we know now. Maybe an entirely interior one. It won't be anything to do with Bloomsbury Square or piazzas or anything like that." Can you interpret what he was saying ?

TM- Sure, we no longer live in a world where the notion of piazzas is relevant. The whole notion of communication has changed radically from face to face localised conditions to electronic global

conditions. I think what he was implying would be of interest to any number of people today having to deal with the rewriting of urban constructs of space, methods of communication, having to do with our architectural projects, that discuss an interpretation of the contemporary condition, all of which involves observing and documenting a vision of 'the now' rather than a vision of the future. Today's problem is to come to grips with the contemporary situation, forget thirty years from now. It is difficult enough to figure out what is going on today. The notion of space, the notion of the organisation of the city, become major elements of that exploration. There seems to be new possibilities for expression having to do with the shifting status of society.

LJ- Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future ?

TM- Both — ying yang ! I think to produce the work you have to be, within yourself, ultimately optimistic. Creating something architecturally or artistically is essentially, in psychological terms, an optimistic act. On the other hand, it's hard to be optimistic intellectually, or as a stance, at this time. It is a balancing act, coming to grips with the tensions of the conflictual status of the world, and the answer to that conflictual status, is coming to grips personally with this notion of positive and negative which is one of the more difficult tight-wire acts to negotiate these days.

- ¹ *Deconstruction in Architecture*, London: Academy Editions, 1988. *Deconstruction I*, London: Academy Editions, 1989. *Deconstruction III*. London: Academy Editions, 1995.
- ² Jorge Glusberg, *Deconstruction: a Student Guide*, London: Academy Editions for UIA, 1991
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- ⁴ Eric Owen Moss, *Eric Owen Moss*, New York: Rizzoli, 1991; Eric Owen Moss, *Eric Owen Moss*, London: Academy Editions, 1993; James Steele, *Lawson-Westen House — Eric Owen Moss*. London: Phaidon, 1995; *Eric Owen Moss*, Tokyo: GA Document, available 1997.
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- ⁶ B. Lawson, *How Designers Think*, London: Butterworth, 1990: *Design in Mind*. Oxford: Butterworth, 1994.
- ⁷ L. Johnston, "Was James Joyce the Father of Deconstruction," *Tirra Lirra Literary Review*, 6, 1, (Spring 1995): 11-17.