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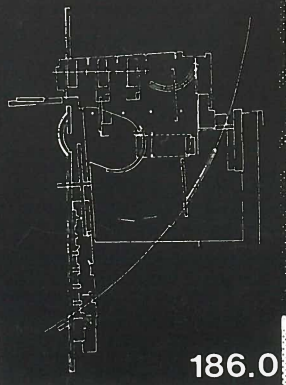
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1992-93 recipient of the
Plym
Distinguished
Professorship in
Architecture

M
THOM AYNE

School of Architecture
University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign

1990



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186.0

Notes on the Methodology

The statements composed in the centerfold section of this publication have been compiled from two lectures delivered at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign by Thom Mayne, recipient of the 1992-93 Distinguished Plym Professorship in Architecture. Professor Mayne delivered "Blips and Ifs" September 16, and "Recent Work" November 12, 1993. Exerpts from these public lectures have been (re)moved from context and (re)constructed into a new text by the editors.

P.A.

K.H.

A.L.

- 1968 Bachelor of Architecture
University of Southern California
- 1978 Master of Architecture
Harvard University
- 1972 Founding Board Member
Southern California Institute of Architecture
- 1975 Co-founder and Principal
Morphosis Architecture
Santa Monica, California
- 1986 Professor of Architecture
Columbia University
- 1987 Rome Prize Fellowship
American Academy in Rome
- 1988 Elliot Noyes Chair in Architecture
Harvard University
- 1991 Eliel Saarinen Chair
Yale University
- 1991 Visiting Master Teacher
Clemson University
- 1992 Professor of Architecture
Vienna Academy of Applied Arts
- 1992 Award in Architecture
American Academy and
Institute of Arts and Letters
- 1992 Plym Distinguished Professor
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Introduction

From Professor R. Alan Forrester's introduction to the first public lecture by Thom Mayne, the Distinguished Plym Professor of Architecture; Urbana, September 16, 1992.

This is not only the first important public event at the School of Architecture of the 1992-93 academic year, but it is a very special occasion being the first public lecture by the Plym Distinguished Professor in Architecture, Thom Mayne.

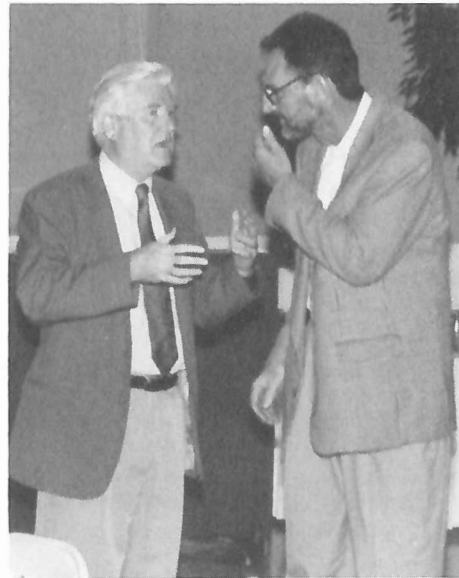
Before I introduce Mr. Mayne, I would like to say a few words about the Plym Professorship. For many years the name Plym has featured prominently in our annual awards program. Mr. Francis J. Plym was a 1897 graduate in architecture. After several years of practice he subsequently founded and later became president of the Kawneer Corporation. In 1911, with the University of Illinois Foundation, he endowed the Plym Travelling Fellowship in Architecture which is open to graduates of our school who attained a distinctive record of achievement in practice during the first decade or so since their graduation. This has become a renowned award and indeed is one of the finest post-graduate fellowships in the field of architecture in the United States. Over the years, Mr. Francis Plym added to his endowments and today at Illinois we have three major fellowships in his name for graduate study and a series of Plym Prizes for undergraduate design.

Mr. Lawrence J. Plym, Francis' son, continued the family tradition of generosity towards the University of Illinois and in particular towards the School of Architecture. In 1981 he established, in his own name, the first endowed chair in the School, the Lawrence J. Plym Distinguished Professorship in Architecture. Mr. Plym continues to be an outstanding benefactor of the School and two-and-a-half years ago donated one million dollars for an auditorium to be built as part of the proposed building named in honor of another of the School's distinguished graduates, Temple Hoyne Buell. This project, Temple Hoyne Buell Hall and the Plym Auditorium, is currently in the final design phase and will accommodate major portions of the School of Architecture and the Departments of Landscape Architecture and Urban and Regional Planning.

Returning to the Plym Professorship, it is important to note that this is not an annual appointment. The Professorship is a visiting type of position in the School to be held by a distinguished professional for a period or periods during one semester of the academic year. Mr. Mayne will be the sixth recipient of the Plym Professorship.

Thom Mayne received his Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1968 from the University of Southern California and his Masters degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1978. He is a founding member of the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SciArch) and has been on its faculty since 1972. Along with Michael Rotondi he established the practice *Morphosis* in Santa Monica in 1975. The partnership was dissolved last year but Thom Mayne continues with the practice with name *Morphosis* and he is the sole principal of the firm. Over the years he has been a visiting professor at innumerable universities, including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Washington, Cincinnati, Texas, and overseas as well, especially in Vienna. In the course of his professional career, Thom Mayne has received many AIA awards, including the National Honor Awards in 1986 for the Bergman Residence and in 1988 for the Kate Mantilini restaurant in Los Angeles. Almost on an annual basis, Thom Mayne has received Progressive Architecture awards ranging from a citation in 1974 to a recent award for the Vintage Car Museum in West Los Angeles. His work has been exhibited widely, not only in California, but also at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York, and the Deutsche Architect museum in Frankfurt. Examples of his work have also been exhibited in Japan. A major monograph entitled *Morphosis, Building and Projects* was published in 1989 by Peter Cook and Rizzoli.

I consider that we are indeed fortunate to have Thom Mayne as our Plym Professor this semester and I ask you to join me in welcoming him here, not only to his first lecture, but to his first session on campus at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



3

R. Alan Forrester

Director, School of Architecture

In all the work, which I didn't talk about at all, and I don't know how to talk about it, I'm just inherently interested in oppositions.



Observations

4

Thom Mayne's contribution to my thesis work has little to do with my project and has more to do with an understanding of what it means to be an architect who simply loves architecture. When we spoke of architecture, there was always an impassioned fervor in his voice, as if architecture were an almost religious pursuit that I as a student should completely immerse myself. He inspired me to see architecture not as a profession, but as a state of mind, as a passion and energy deep within that unexplainably drives us.

Sean Gallegher
Graduate Student

I have a hard time talking about it, cause no matter what I say about it I can say it's opposite. I'm just as interested in it's opposite. But all the work is dealing with oppositions, it goes without saying maybe. In every situation there's a

counter-situation. It's more or less intuitive I think at that level. It's just an impulse.

Several fourth-year students decided to take a weekend journey with Thom Mayne through unexplored design terrain.

Mayne acknowledged that the paths would be hard to follow.

Trails would not be marked clearly by the usual limitations, The first impulses were only arbitrary impulses. You start with an preconceptions, or precedents. Furthermore, the uncleared arbitrary movement, totally arbitrary. (It) doesn't mean any-paths would not necessarily lead back to better known avenues. The ways were to be appreciated not for what they something in the end. Because it doesn't. You just say it does would connect to, but for the aesthetic process of finding, something and you proceed on that. But you also challenge clearing, and marking the paths themselves. m-

it. That's probably the most important part, actually. If you just proceed with it you're probably going to continually get your- Throughout the weekend, Mayne, the Master Pathfinder, led self into problems.

the students surefootedly along trails which seemed almost

nonexistent. As the journeys progressed, some of the students My primary interest is, again, like just about all of our work, it's gradually began to see the paths under their feet. Others use as a departure point. I'm not at all interested in the notion turned back, confused and bewildered. Still others continued, of any idealized form in its original condition. I'm interested in unsure of their footing, but determined or trusting. Mayne's using that as part of the structure which becomes, in the end, strong and steady pace proved a powerful source of surrogate part of the subconscious structure of the work. energy for those who stayed with him.

I was there to see them off and to welcome them back. All that we're interested in is I was also there to hear the tales of the journeys as told by Mayne, and then retold by the Odysseans in the following weeks. finding a conflicted condition.

Jeffery Poss of the work is actually transcultural or it's allowed to move over time. In fact, it's reinterpretable through between something which is time given new paradigms, new philosophies. It

Fourth-Year Design invalidate the Pantheon or the Parthenon or reflexive and responding di- Palladio, it just gives one a different perspective. It's no logner attached to it's meaning system. To a rectly from its conditions to value system, to a philosophical system.

I think there's even an issue whether philosophical work is demographics, site conditions, grounded in meaning. My hunch, my suspicion is it's not in a very literal direct sense. It's wrapped up in its meaning but the meaning and physical conditons, is more inherent within the essence of the work.

It's now seen as detached from that. It doesn't alter the nature of the artifact, the fact that we see it as post-Capernicus, post-Darwin, post-Nietzchean, however you want to discuss it.

If a straight line is the shortest distance between two faded and inevitable points digressions will have to do with deconstruction, I think any of these are kind of grossly misunderstood. (Chaos) represent(s), in my mind, complex, so tangled and torturous, so rabid as to hide their own tracks, who knows, perhaps death may not find us. Perhaps mankind will lose its way.

And perhaps we ourselves can remain concealed
Thom Mayne participated in my studio during the development of the first two projects of the semester. His insight was fundamental in confirming and reaffirming what the students (in the scientifically elemental and reposes the problem which is beginning stages of their design curricula) had begun to suspect: that architecture is an enterprise that unescapably projects beyond its own (supposed) borders. you'll find work that has the nature of how one survives this world we live in. to do with essentially redefining our world in more complicated

Mayne shook the entablature of their constructions by systematically questioning every aspect of their projects, presenting the opposed point of view, a variance, an alternative, always opening new paths, new possibilities, new interpretations, always to destroy it. And by destroying it we test the pieces that survive and we test the pieces that don't survive. And that's a desire for architecture and an intensity of engagement that not only surprised the young students, but also motivated them to find their own architectural desires. reconfigured. It's the whole method by which we can

collectively move forward. There's still a privacy or an autonomy to the domain of the work. Somehow you're

working towards that domain, it's fuzzy, it's complicated, it's difficult. Because it's always difficult to articulate. You can articulate it through the mechanism of how you work,

because that's your language. That's ultimately how you can commit yourself.

I'm starting to sense that I actually have questions or I'm somewhat devoid of particular position philosophically. We could no longer kind of complacently talk about the design

of something as simple as a plaza or public space without asking questions; what these things mean in today's culture. to the work. There's a relationship between the vagueness

of the idea and the commitment and the explicitness and the procession of the execution. My commitment is to the define not idealized or platonic conditions but the interstitial work whether it means what I say it means, is becoming between-ness of objects which of both represent possibilities, more and more transparent to me that it isn't. You can say it (never returning to a) historic kind of traditional framework. means any number of things and it doesn't matter.

When asked to expound on his theory or ideology, Thom I don't draw perspectives. A few little pieces there. I'm somehow Mayne has repeatedly stated that he prefers instead to "speak totally disinterested in that. It's not because I'm trying to be nasty or to the object." The "object," after all, is the primary vehicle through which the architect expresses ideas, and consequently, the "object" must "speak" for the architect. Architect-

ture, therefore, is the crucible of architectural intent and ideology. Our interest is, in fact, a very primitive one and a very simple one; which is essentially organizing and giving coherence to the status

quo. The status quo is whether we term it chaos or cacophony, the The first, tentative steps toward a new design project are undifferentiated, whatever terms you want to put to it. Our interest is always taken with a certain amount of trepidation. Uncertainty, however, soon yields to exploration and inquiry, as I've become more aware of the somewhat ironic situation of its students push the limits of the program and "interrogate the object" through the design process. to this endeavor. And it'll absurdity of a compulsion to organize, to rationalize in the face of the essentially uncover the basic essences that are itself the work. magnitude, in the scope of the problem today having to do with The first-year design students' first encounter with Thom Mayne incoherency, was memorable. After listening to a presentation of the Inhab-

ited Wall and the Firewatcher's Tower, Mayne dramatically There's no such thing as typical because each project has its own turned some of the wall projects on end. "There," he said, "is the paradigm for the Tower!" The students were stunned. They

had been working on the Tower for two weeks, and Mayne had All the elements at some time are bilingual. They're all rejected every idea *carte blanche*. Mayne's criticism was that connected. They all talk to each other, students were relying too literally on familiar prototypes of (It is) the inner relationship of a series of strategies which produce towers (lighthouses, guard towers, windmills, oil derricks, etc.) more complicated series of inner relationships, the idea being that rather than exploring what their Tower might be. Each study, each strategy can operate within its own set of terms. model, in effect, circumvented the entire design process of

exploration and investigation by proposing a preconceived, a (It) has to do with allowing each of the systems to work within its own *priori* solution. The Inhabited Wall, on the other hand, had no terms and to develop the relationships of the pieces in between. This familiar typological associations. The students were required is something that's more at a level of an aspiration, it's a resolution in to deal with the project exclusively on its own terms without this case. recourse to conventional models. abstract of information. It has

to do with what you can bring to the work of your There are times where we virtually reach over and pull off the shelf Through his exhortations, Mayne confronted students with the another work and it has virtually nothing to do, literally, with the basic dilemma that faces every architect at some point in the project, but it has to do with an aspiration of the space. design process: How does the architect develop new ideas

from existing models? ideas to the task at hand, to your work. The discussion has to do with the conditions in a project. So that I can It was like china in a bull shop. that knowledge is only valuable leave this and say that the nature of that endeavor remains an when you're able to personalize it and bring it to bear aspiration. Paul Armstrong to the specific work at hand. It's the next place we'll take the work. Second-Year Design

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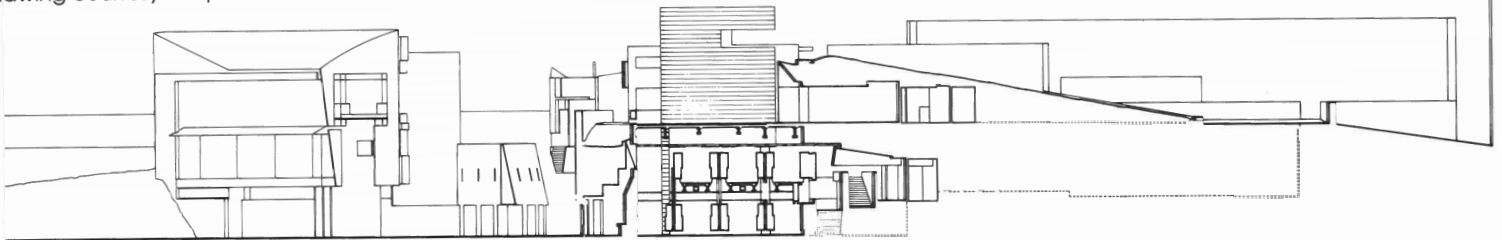
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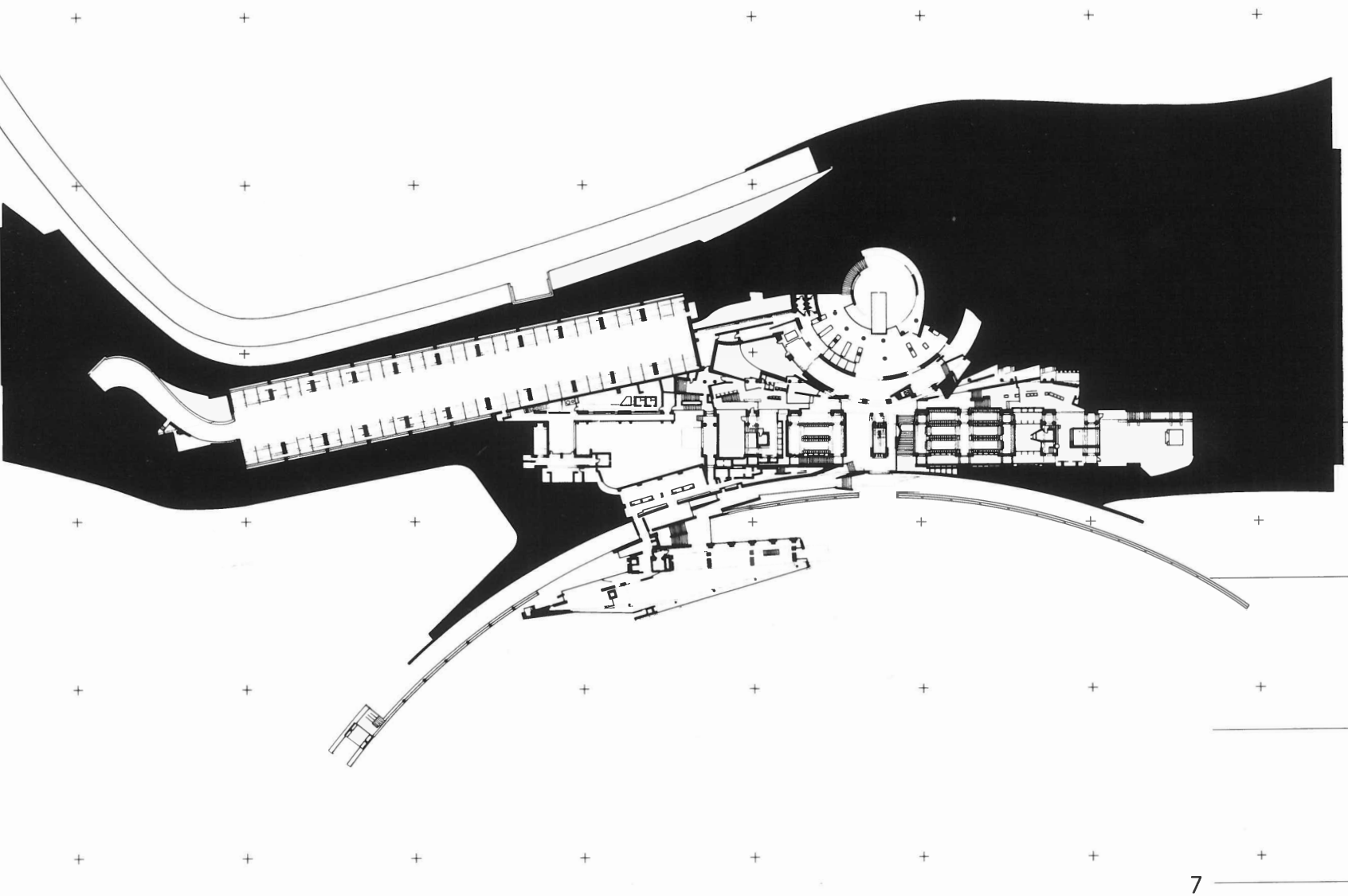
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Chiba Golf Complex

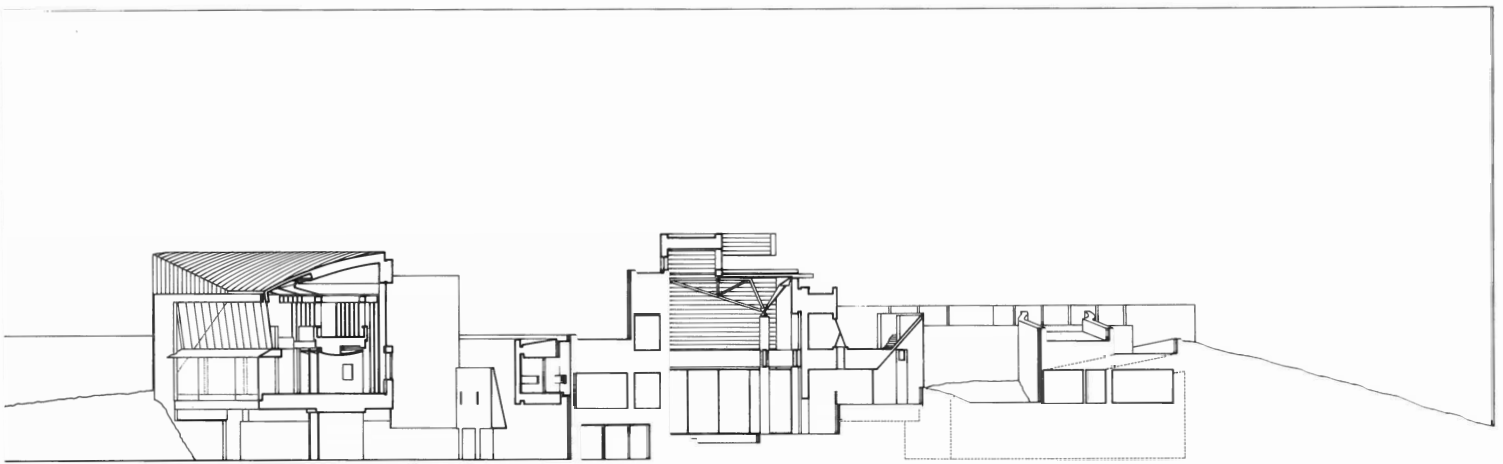
The Chiba Project: A Truce with Nature was exhibited at the Temple Buell Architecture Gallery, School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, from September 15 to October 2, 1992; and at the I-Space Gallery in Chicago, Illinois, College of Fine and Applied Arts/ University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, from November 3 to November 17, 1992.

Drawing courtesy Morphosis





7



Moe Berg, the multi-lingual catcher of the Boston Red Sox who in 1939 batted .273, was walking in Zurich five years later with a .32, but could not allow himself to assassinate Germany's leading Nobel Prize Winning Physicist — a scientist who was at work on the development of the Atomic Bomb. Heisenberg was the scientist who had earlier demonstrated the principle of uncertainty, that there can be no fixed point of perspective...a contribution to the stream of events which would erode the perception of a static world. *Concreteness of change* is the new given. What is expressed in this new value for the ephemeral, the transitory, and the celebration of the dynamic is the longing for an authentic present...one which a short time ago was the *avant garde* — exposing itself to the risks of sudden and shocking encounters, conquering as yet uninhabited futures and orienting itself in an as yet unsurveyed terrain. Concomitant with this is a more incremental and cautious sensibility which replaces the heroic aspirations, the hopes and dreams of our modern heritage with its pursuit of unity and salvation. We now join one another by joining in speculation of the unknown. We do not fear this essential condition of the world as it exists today. We have no option but to live in the present...it is clear that our comfort cannot be found in the past (Estragon's "don't let's do anything, it's safer" or Yogi Berra's "It's *deja vu* all over again").

A rejection of past paradigm's has led to an increase in work today which reveals itself as a means of satisfying self-inventions motivated by personal ambition within some theoretical framework of *freedom*. But what is required now are limitations — an understanding of our work as part of day-to-day ordinary activity, building on what Stravinsky called a "resisting foundation." Our freedom consists in our ability to establish and impose new frames of reference. Architecture rests upon the immutable givens that compose it; places, histories, characters, and the forces of our planet. One of the possibilities of our work is to investigate architecture's investment in the provisional and contingent circumstances of these conditions, which for us start with impulses regarding oppositions and conflicting relationships within our culture. Rather than reinforcing dominant values we seek recombinations and juxtapositions that might appear to be contradictory — allowing the unrepresentable to be perceivable. Our work moves away from stable alignments toward open-ended affiliations.

I have no interest in making this world perfect...rather, I am interested in contributing to, and sometimes preserving its imperfections while aspiring to make it somehow habitable and better. Because architecture is worldly and its meaning communal, no single view can dominate. What one alone thinks he wants it to be, it will not be. The forces are complex, there is no clear path and no fixed goal. The commitment required of architects today is to work and to continue to work in an authentic manner, It is through the experience of remaining in the game, of staying committed that the forms of our work will join us to our time and to its consequences. None of us knows with any certainty the fruits of our labor...we labor because we have no choice and because we have faith (faith which has nothing to do with what is normally called optimism) in the intrinsic qualities that are found in the work. We accept that those things we commit to will not always be pleasing, but by staying, and only by staying, we will learn something of the truth...and that the truth, maybe, is a good thing to know given that it is always both different and larger than we imagined.

Proximities to the Indeterminate

In all the work, which I didn't talk about at all, and I don't know how to talk about it, **I'm just inherently interested in oppositions.**

I have a hard time talking about it, because no matter what I say about it I can say its opposite. **I'm just as interested in its opposite.** But all the work is dealing with oppositions. It goes without saying, maybe. **In every situation there's a counter situation.** It's more or less intuitive, I think, at that level. It's just an impulse.

The first impulses were only arbitrary impulses. You start with an arbitrary movement, totally arbitrary. (It) doesn't mean anything. The whole endeavor is to prove that it does mean something in the end, because it doesn't. You just say it does something and you proceed on that. But you also challenge it. That's probably the most important part, actually. If you just proceed with it, you're probably going to continually get yourself into problems.

My primary interest is, again, like just about all of our work, its use as a departure point. I'm not at all interested in the notion of any idealized form in its original condition. I'm interested in using that as part of the structure which becomes, in the end, part of the subconscious structure of the work.

My sense is that the work is always going to be broader than the specifics of a philosophical position and that ultimately the aspect of the actual essence of the work is actually transcultural or it's allowed to move over time. In fact, it's reinterpretable through time given new paradigms, new philosophies. It doesn't invalidate the Pantheon or the Parthenon or Palladio, it just gives one a different perspective. It's no longer attached to its meaning system, to a value system, to a philosophical system.

I think there's even an issue whether philosophical work is grounded in meaning. My hunch, my suspicion is it's not in a very literal direct sense. It's wrapped up in its meaning, but the meaning is more inherent within the essence of the work.

It's now seen as detached from that. It doesn't alter the nature of the artifact, the fact that we see it as post-Copernicus, post-Darwin, post-Nietzchean, however you want to discuss it.

If a straight line is the shortest distance between two faded and inevitable points digressions will lengthen it. And if these digressions become so complex, so tangled and torturous, so rabid as to hide their own tracks, who knows, perhaps death may not find us. Perhaps mankind will lose its way. And perhaps we ourselves can remain concealed in these shifting hiding places.

I like this particular (statement), to take something that's so scientifically elemental and reposes the problem which is somewhat less scientific, less empirical, much more humanistic, and more realistic kind of framework, having to do with the nature of how one survives this world we live in.

You move to continually challenge the decisions you make. When we produce one of those pieces my interest is in taking it apart, not validating it. We sit around the table and try to destroy it. And by destroying it we test the pieces that survive and we test the pieces that don't survive. And that's how we get to the next model, because the pieces that don't withstand that inquiry are altered, challenged, reconfigured. It's the whole method by which we can collectively move forward. There's still a privacy or an autonomy to the domain of the work.

Somehow you're working towards that domain. It's fuzzy, it's complicated, it's difficult. Because it's always difficult to articulate. You can articulate it through the mechanism of how you work, because that's your language. That's ultimately how you can commit yourself.

I'm starting to sense that I actually have questions, or I'm somewhat devoid of a particular position philosophically.

I'm not in any way a philosopher. I'm completely committed to the work. There's a relationship between the vagueness of the idea and the commitment and the explicitness and the procession of the execution. My commitment is to the work, whether it means what I say it means, is becoming more and more transparent to me that it isn't. You can say it means any number of things and it doesn't matter.

I'm never really totally interested in how a work looks. To me it's already there on its own. It's there by itself. Because of that, in a way, I think after it's completed, after it's done, I'm very much a viewer and

I'm seeing it like you are.

At the same time, I think I'm a bit detached from the work. I think a lot of this has to do with a connection to a process and a methodology and that I have an interest and a belief and an engagement of that process. And understanding that process will propel and give thrust to this endeavor. And it'll essentially uncover the basic essences that are itself the work.

I think today, particularly, that it's not useful that we're all trained in seeing and experiencing the world within such a homogeneous, kind of linear, manner. I think it also has to do with the nature of the knowledge that you bring to your work, and that for myself, the data, the information is much more connected to direct experience. It's not an abstract of information. It has to do with what you can bring to the work of your experience today. It's an educational setting. It seems there's a separation between general knowledge, philosophy, ideas, concepts, and the relationship of those ideas to the task at hand, to your work. And for myself that knowledge is only valuable when you're able to personalize it and bring it to bear to the specific work at hand.

There's clearly a parallel track that deals with the pragmatic and utilitarian, the accommodation kind of aspect of the work as well as the conceptual framework of the work which has to do with really the questioning and exploring of the problem. All the thesis people I'm working with, it seems like the major goal is really to define the problem. That's the hardest thing, really. What's the problem? It's not what the solution is. How do you know what the solution is, you don't even know what the problem is?

Only at the time that you can define the problem can you ever actually attach yourself and engage yourself with that problem.

I suspect that in any activity that has a high degree of creativity, that requires decision making, that comes out of some type of heuristic process,

It's essential to develop methods of supporting and contributing to ideas of diversity and idiosyncratic characteristics of our world versus uniformity.

There's going to be a number of roots by which you can attack the problem. I'm not interested in proselytizing or telling anybody that I have any knowledge of knowing the way I do it. In my experience of teaching, I would actually say there are many roots and that I think there are relationships between these, and that very possibly what I'm talking about is useful or could possibly be useful to your own...nature of working.

I think there are a lot of different methods.

I think that the instinct...part of it is inbred and you're just born with it, and part of it is empirical, is knowledge-based. Your instinctual abilities increase with your increase of knowledge.

You shouldn't be producing something that takes twice the staff to maintain. It should be the opposite. You can use more of your resources for architecture. You're having those discussions continually. We're having a series of discussions with how we're violating the rules.

It has to do with the reality of producing work.
I don't think it's enormously simplistic to think that you operate under any one single kind of method.

Ultimately they're much more integrated. You work with any number of processes, maybe preferring or having preferences to particular (processes), because you could look at one architect and say, Well it's clearly an operation that comes out of topology.

Although the relationship to architecture, to its immediate context, its political and economic context is elusive and complicated, I think we have no choice but to frame it within the realities of our world.

Our association with our neighbors is no longer based on common interest within these physical and geographical localized domains, these conventional neighborhoods, but are based on this broader global condition.

I remember being in this little town below Marrakech, Morocco in the middle of nowhere and then observing this little boy coming out of this village house with a very up-to-date Walkman. As I got closer I could hear it kind of leaking out of his ears and it was, of course, Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones. That's extremely interesting to me because what Mick Jagger is talking about is probably a bit more influential than anything we'll do in terms of changing things.

You can go to the absolute remote place in the world and it's astounding to observe this kind of phenomenon.

I think we all suffer from a series of problems that has to do with the difficulty or the complexity in how we . . . the limited way in which we uncover problems.

All that we're interested in is finding a **conflicted condition between something which is reflexive and responding directly from its conditions** to demographics, site conditions, and physical conditions.

There's a lot of discussion today having to do with chaos, having to do with deconstruction. I think any of these are kind of grossly misunderstood. (Chaos) represent(s), in my mind, high levels of organization.

In chaos theory, it's a strange kind of word, because its colloquial means the opposite. Organisms that have orders move beyond our visual kind of appearances which represent more complicated orders. But really, no matter where you look today in science, medicine, etcetera, you'll find work that has to do with essentially redefining our world in more complicated orders. I think architecture is very much a part of this.

I don't draw perspectives. A few little pieces there. I'm somehow totally disinterested in that. It's not because I'm trying to be nasty or I don't want to show you, or I'm asocial, I'm just honestly not even interested in it. **It does not at all interest me what it looks like.**

Our interest is, in fact, a very primitive one and a very simple one; which is essentially organizing and giving coherence to the status quo. The status quo is, whether we term it chaos or cacophony, the undifferentiated, whatever terms you want to put to it. Our interest is to continually attempt to rationalize the irrational. Actually, recently I've become more aware of the somewhat ironic situation of its hopelessness. I'm vaguely aware of that. There's a kind of absurdity, absurdity of a compulsion to organize, to rationalize in the face of the magnitude, in the scope of the problem today having to do with incoherency.

There's no such thing as typical because each project has its own absolute personality.

All the elements at some time are **bilingual**. They're all **connected**. They all **talk** to each other.

(It is) the inner relationship of a series of strategies which produce a more complicated series of inner relationships, the idea being that each strategy can operate within its own set of terms.

(It) has to do with allowing each of the systems to work within its own terms and to develop the relationships of the pieces in between. This is something that's more at a level of an aspiration. It's a resolution in this case.

There are times where we virtually reach over and pull off the shelf another work, and it has virtually nothing to do, literally, with the project, but it has to do with an aspiration of the space.

The discussion has to do with the conditions in a project. So that I can leave this and say that the nature of that endeavor remains an aspiration. **It's the next place we'll take the work.**

We could no longer kind of complacently talk about the design of something as simple as a plaza or public space without asking questions: what these things mean in today's culture.

I'm very interested in notions of **redefining public spaces** that define not idealized or platonic conditions but the **interstitial betweenness of objects** which of both represent possibilities (never returning to a) historic kind of traditional framework.

All the drawings that I'm interested in, the models are all methods of unleashing the more irrational kind of forces that talk about a more active engagement of these elements.

The rational approach in itself, much of it is very much interested in analysis/synthesis. I work within that format. It's more complicated today. **I don't think you work under any single format.** I'm interested in type, I'm interested in grafting. I'm just part of all those notions of working. **I'm interested in more neutral phenomenological approaches.**

I think always, within competition, you're working on hunches and you're working on estimates of situations, especially when a pre-conceived idea will influence the future.

I would like to emphasize the nature of the strategy of building pieces, which I think really takes place and goes back to our earliest work, which has to do with an idea of departing from an idealized element to the periphery and using the periphery of element to talk about the specific situation of the site.

*Again, it's a condition which has been a preoccupation in a series of projects; this **in between condition** very much parallels the relationships of the earth structures and the various mechanisms which talk about the **edge conditions**, the **boundary conditions**.*

I work with these in a very detached manner from reality; it's not that I'm not connected to that reality, but it starts showing as I realize the slides I'm showing you. I somehow purposely detached them from slides of the actual fabric, etcetera.

**The way I'm showing the work is accurate.
It just talks about my interest.**

(There is) the need to define and interpret our time authentically. The question (is) what authenticity means. My suspicion is that architecture itself is participating always in defining (in) terms of that authenticity.

Maybe for myself, anyway, it's somewhat clear that architecture's recent intoxication with this literal historical precedent as kind of mechanism for making our world is somewhat hopeless and it represents the most regressive strategy at the time when we face the largest problems with the magnitude and complexity our students are challenging us to resolve these problems, and the past, and the use of the past, not the use of the past in terms of what it teaches, but the intelligence that allows us to have its abilities for us to understand that we're part of the broader, longer continuity. But it's the literalness of that task which is seeking safety, is a completely and totally hopeless condition. It's one, which for myself, is about the political situation of architecture.

*I'm extremely interested in the **nature of the vertigo** and the **nature of one's balance** within it; the **nature of light and pursuing the emptiness of the space** as one traverses it.*

In modernism, early proposals situated architecture's role within a social economic framework which very much advocated standardization and single production as part of the universal area. *I think today, again, we're in a very different position in that our society, which is subject to such enormously and complex stimuli, its erotic, political, economic life needs to deal with, to constantly counteract the codes ...of unity that have shaped our culture to cope with the importance of diversity.*

I think in the U.S. today there's essentially a general lack of will to confront our contemporary problems and to confront them squarely and clearly, and although the relationship of architecture to its immediate context, its political and economic context is illusive and complicated, I think we have no choice but to frame it within the realities of our world.

Los Angeles is within this new condition. It represents this collection of infinite events, movements, objects....We understand this metropolis as unstable and dynamic; always an enigma. We try to remember, but it's too complicated. Its identity is continually disappearing within its own presence.

I think it represents a modern metropolis and, in many ways, the prototype of the new city. And I'm not bragging. I'm just saying it just as a statement of fact in terms that it just (exists) the way it does.

We try to remember but its too complicated. Its identity is continually disappearing within its own presence. Most of us observe this city today with fascination and fear. At the moment, as our political campaign (makes) so evidently clear, the latter. Gone are the conditions of boundary, inside, outside, history, coherency. There's little consciousness of the virtue of public life; not the existence but even the need for it. Los Angeles has little memory and nothing to recollect. I think, in a specific way, it represents a unique place in that its the first major metropolis in history in which everyone is a minority. There is no majority culture. And because of this it's based on the conflictual condition of these various groups. Large parts of L.A. burn every 20 or so years. The repercussions are the existence of this conflict, which I think is otherwise so fundamental in a modern city. I'm still not sure it's that different than this place. The future (of) any place. It reminds us, at least this particular moment in time, of the difficulty of understanding and defining ideas.

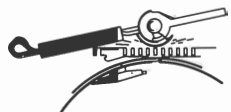
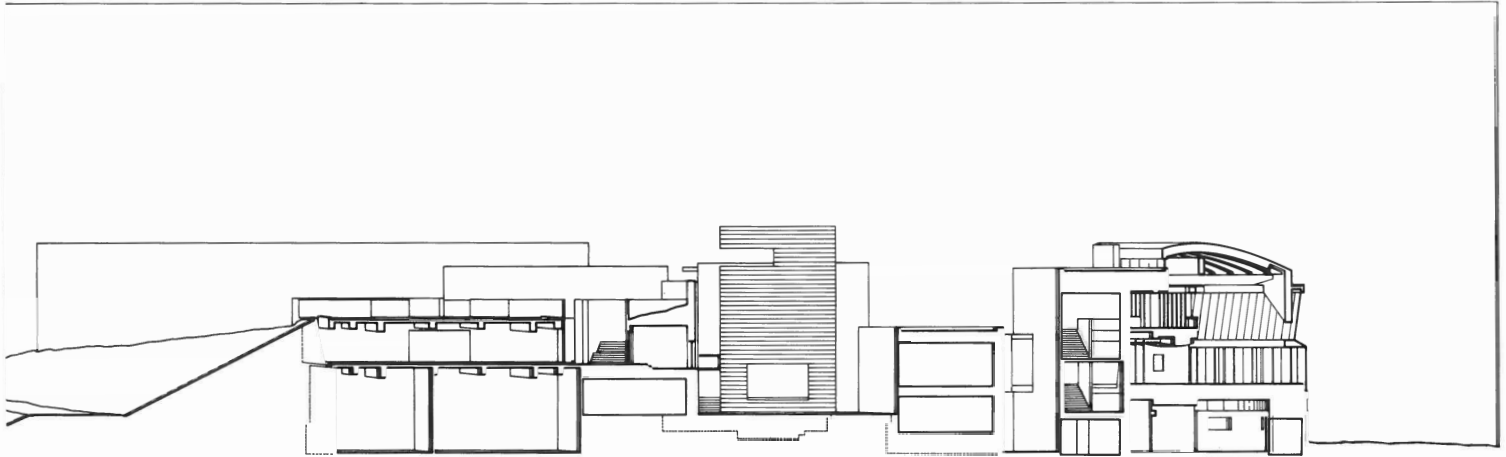
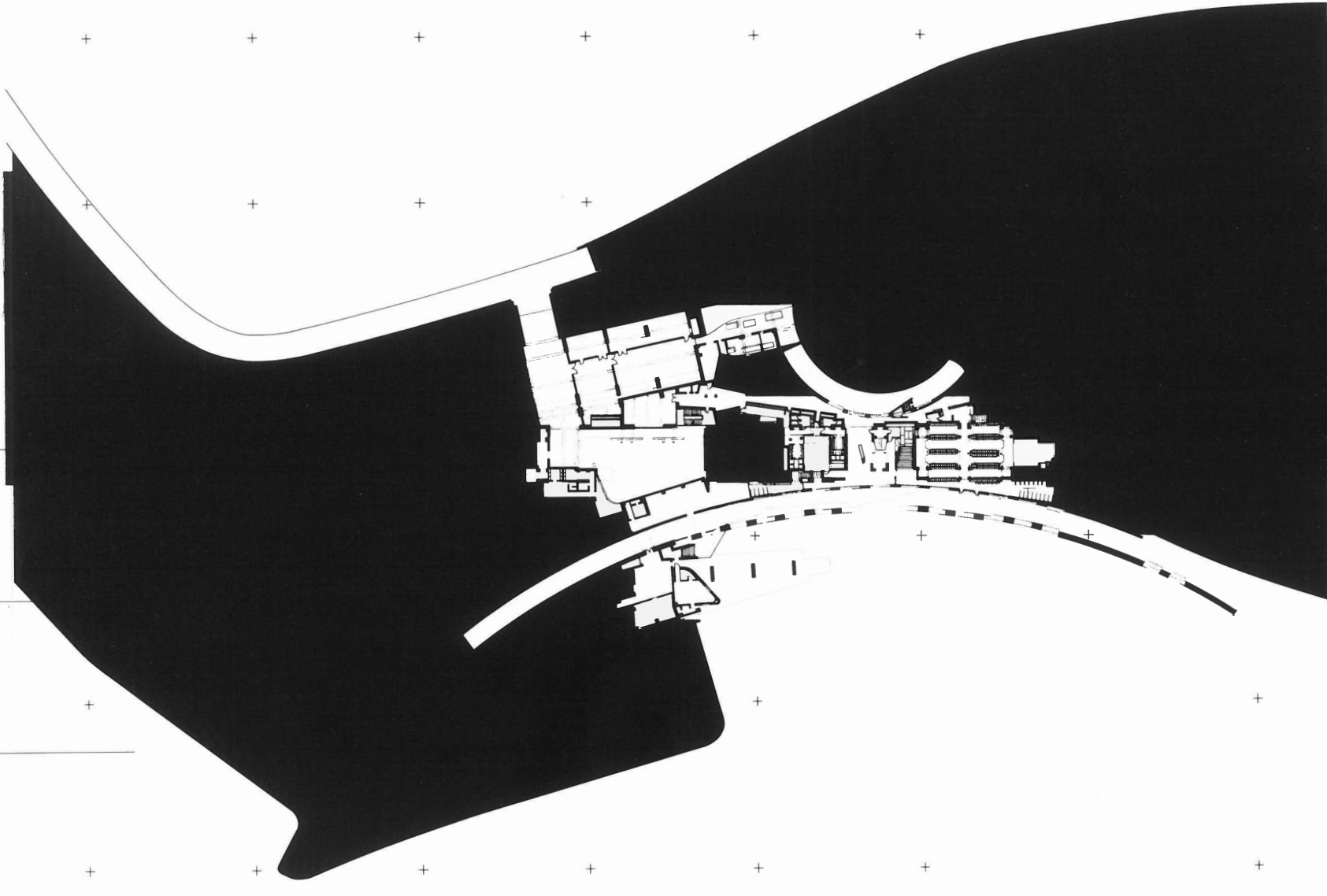


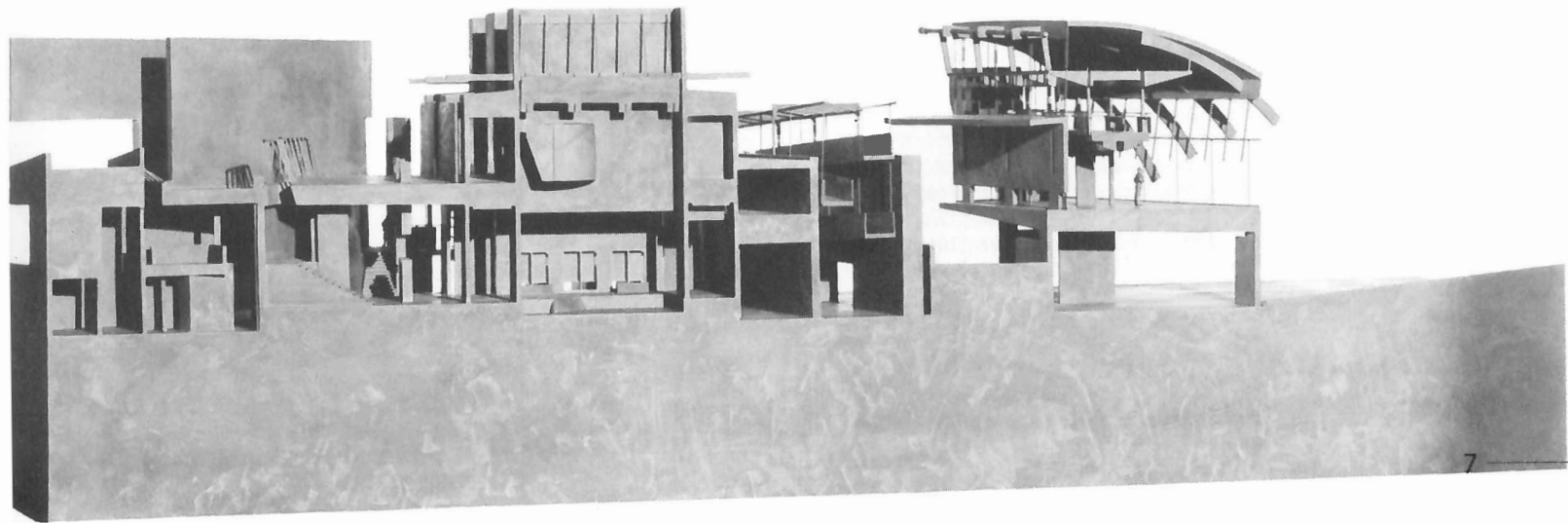
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Thom Mays

I'm just inherently interested in oppositions.





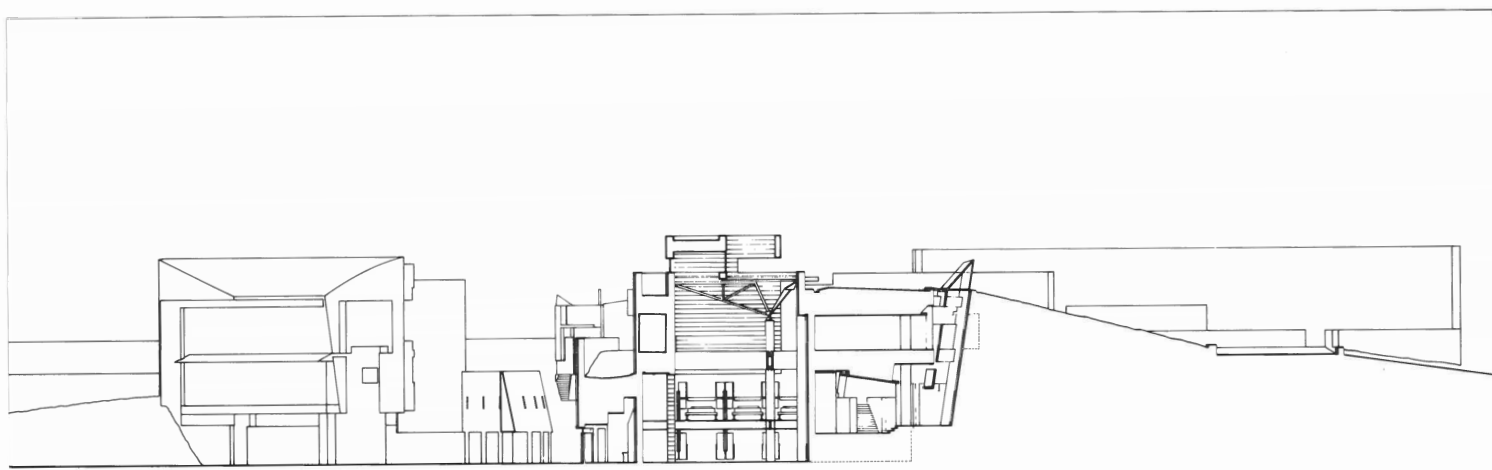
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Chiba Golf Complex



8

9



There's clearly a parallel track that deals with the All the drawings that I'm interested in, the models are all pragmatic and utilitarian, the accommodation methods of unleashing the more irrational kind of forces that

The first semester of the design thesis year was a time of talk about a more active engagement of these elements, treading jagged, unknown paths, venturing literally into the

realm of altered terrains. My investigation into the liberative and creative possibilities of movement went through a critical

time of analysis/synthesis. I work within that format. It's more time of establishing direction. It was a convoluted journey past complicated today. I don't think you work under any single peripheral issues—toward a clearer conceptual impetus and format. I'm interested in type, I'm interested in grafting. I'm just design method.

neutral phenomenological approaches.

what the problem is?

Only **Early in the project Plym Professor Thomas Mayne gave an**

essential critique which dynamically impacted the entire exploration. During the review of the full-scale steel stair, Professor Mayne made a convincing argument for continuing to design

and create full-scale pieces. This one-to-one method would

offer a certain intimacy and detail in the work, but moreover it

would allow for physical interaction and movement—an experiential testing by participants. It would provoke conceptual

questioning of the essence or notion of the thing itself, the

architecture. In the case of the steel stair, it was not only

movement sequences which were challenged, but also the

"stairness" of the stair. Its treads and risers are a continuous,

folded, vertical terrain analogous to a cliff, which offers the

climber phenomena of balance, risk, and security. Similarly,

conventional notions and uses of walls, floors, and apertures

could be questioned through the making of such constructions.

Mayne suggested that the final work might be an additive

installation of these testpieces, which could virtually present

itself.

your own ...nature of working.

attached them from slides of the actual fabric, etcetera.

I think there are a lot of different methods

I think that the instinct...part of it is inbred and you're **The way I'm showing the work is accurate. It**

just talks about my interest.

edge-based. You're instinctual abilities increase with

your increase of knowledge.

You shouldn't be producing something that takes (There is) the need to define and interpret our time twice the staff to maintain. It should be the opposite authentically. The question (is) what authenticity

means. My suspicion is that architecture itself is participating always in defining (in) terms of that authenticity.

with how we're violating the rules.

Maybe for myself, anyway, it's somewhat clear that

architecture's recent intoxication with this literal historical precedent as kind of mechanism for making

our world is somewhat hopeless and it represents the

Thom Mayne's emphasis on the linkage between making and

most regressive strategy at the time when we face

the largest problems with the magnitude and complexity our students are challenging us to resolve

thesis as it is now conceived.

these problems, and the past, and the use of the

past, not the use of the past in terms of what it

The design process has been further guided by Professor Mayne,

teaches, but the intelligence that allows us to have

whose emphatic directive was to build, react, design, and build

it's abilities for us to understand that we're part of the

— rather than the typical tracking of design, followed by

broader, longer continuity. But it's the literalness of

construction. This affirms a critical linkage between concept

and making.

totally hopeless condition. It's one, which for myself,

is about the political situation of architecture.

Finally, Thom Mayne was a strong proponent of the constrained

icehouse site. He supported the notion of an indirect potential

I'm extremely interested in the nature of the vertigo

which might be derived from a condition which initially seems

and the nature of one's balance within it; the nature

to contradict the objective of mobile freedoms. His conviction

strengthened my own, and his influence helped to open doors

for an atypical experiment in an improbable scenario. To

intervene in a lifeless void, to create possibilities in a catatonic

cavity — these are cliffs to scale: a proving ground for a thesis

on movement and liberty.

I don't think it's enormously simplistic to think that you operate

under any one single kind of method.

Benjamin Nesbeitt

Graduate Student

work with any numbers of processes maybe preferring or having preferences to particular (processes)

because you could look at one architect and clearly say well it's clearly an operation that comes

out of topology.

In modernism, early proposals were situated architecture's role within a social economic framework which very much advocated standardization and single production as part of the universal area. I think today, again, we're in a very different position in that our society which is subject to such enormously and complex stimuli it's erotic political economic life needs to deal with, to constantly counteract the codes ... of unity that have shaped our culture to cope with the importance of diversity

I should describe Thom Mayne's two visits to the studio as

architectural wake-up calls (calls some responded to enthusiastically, others sluggishly). Professor Mayne challenged students to think about architecture and its role in society as well as their own ideas with respect to the studio and their future profession. Professor Mayne wanted to challenge the complacencies into which people often drift.

Los Angeles is within this new condition. It represents this collection of infinite events, movements, objects... We understand this metropolis as unstable and dynamic; always an enigma. We try to remember but its too complicated. Its identity is continually disappearing within its own presence.

Professor Mayne encouraged students to think and take responsibility for their education.

I think it represents a modern metropolis and, in many ways, the prototype

of the new city. And I'm not bragging. I'm just saying it just as a statement of fact in terms that it just (exists) the way it does.

Kevin Hinders

Third-Year Design

We try to remember but its too complicated. Its identity is continually disappearing within its own presence.

Most of us observe this city today with fascination and fear. At the moment, as our political campaign (makes) so evidently clear, the latter. Gone are the conditions of boundary, inside, outside, history, coherency. There's little consciousness of the

virtue of public life; not the existence but even the need for it. Los Angeles has little memory and nothing to recollect. I think in a specific way it

represents a unique place in that its the first major metropolis in history in which everyone is a minority. There is no majority culture. And because of

this its based on the conflictual condition of these various groups. Large parts of L.A. burn every 20 or so years. The repercussions are the existence

of this conflict, which I think is otherwise so fundamental in a modern city. I'm still not sure it's that different than this place. The future (of) any place.

It reminds us, at least this particular moment in time, of the difficulty of understanding and defining ideas.

I had a unique opportunity to observe and experience Professor Mayne's participation at the school during his tenure as Plym Professor.

Although the relationship to architecture, to its immediate context, its political and economic context is elusive and complicated. I think we have no choice but to frame it within the realities of our world.

As a design teaching assistant I saw him thoroughly bewilder a class of sophomores with his carefully controlled diatribes on the future of the profession and their work as students. The results appeared to be mixed, some were incited, others

apparently indifferent. Many sophomores, at this first year of design, were continually challenged to understand where Mayne was coming from given their own rather limited architectural experience.

Our association with our neighbors is no longer based on common interest within these physical and geographical localized domains,

Observations

these conventional neighborhoods but are based on this broader global condition. As a student involved in my own thesis project, I found that Professor Mayne's critiques seemed to come at a point where I needed to make critical thesis decisions. They helped reveal

some deficiencies in my approach and also the strengths. When I appeared to be going nowhere, which seemed more

often than I'd like, he was very quick to suggest other directions, as he did in the case of many other projects. Mayne took the

role of inquisitor in critiques for many projects, revealing sometimes great weaknesses in their hypotheses. At many times our level of unpreparedness was similar to the sophomores'.

Whether some of us realize this or not is at times frightening. I remember being in this little town below Marrakech, Morocco in the middle of nowhere and then observing this little boy coming out of this village house with a very up-to-date walkman. As I got closer I could hear it kind of leaking out of his ears

and it was, of course, Mick Jagger and the Professor Mayne took his role of advocate and inquisitor very seriously on a lot of different levels, and he managed to shake things up quite a bit here before, during, and after his presence.

His long-term effect is uncertain, definitely positive, and definitely memorable. Mayne's intensity is inspiring, especially when you consider his role as practicing architect as well,

riding the line between intent and execution. To say that he gave hope to a few cynical students about to go out into the profession seems a little extreme, but still . . .

Ged Trias
Graduate Student

You can go to the absolute remote place in the world and its astounding to observe this kind of phenomenon.

M

Thom ayne

1992–93 Recipient of the Plym Distinguished Professorship

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Credits

12

1. Thom Mayne/Ron Schmitt
(Patty Okyne)
2. Reviews
(Kevin Hinders)
3. Thom Mayne and
Professor R. Alan Forrester
(Louis Vavaroutsos)
4. Ray Lytle/Thom Mayne/Jeffrey Poss
(Patty Okyne)
- 5 and 7. Chiba Golf Complex, Japan
(Courtesy Morphosis, Santa Monica, CA)
6. Thom Mayne
(Patty Okyne)
8. Temple Buell Architecture Gallery
(Alejandro Lapunzina)
9. I-Space ,
College of Fine and Applied Arts Gallery, Chicago
(Mary Antonakos)
10. Thom Mayne/James Warfield/Students
(Patty Okyne)
11. Kevin Hinders/Thom Mayne/Students
(Patty Okyne)
12. Kevin Hinders/Thom Mayne/James Warfield
(Patty Okyne)

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1993

The Plym Distinguished Professorship in Architecture

The Plym Distinguished Professorship in Architecture has been endowed through a gift made to the school of Architecture in 1981 by Mr. Lawrence J. Plym of Niles, Michigan, past President of Kawneer Company and formerly director and officer of other companies and institutions prior to his retirement. Mr. Plym and his family have a long association with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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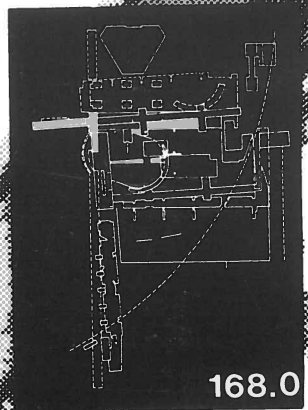
In Memoriam

Lawrence J. Plym, 1906 — 1993

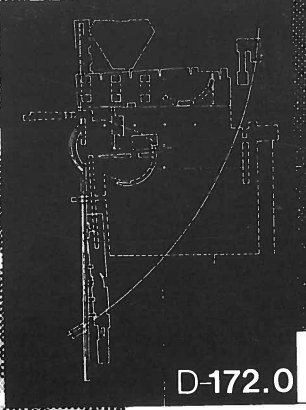
This book is dedicated to the
memory and generosity of
Mr. Lawrence J. Plym,
friend, alumnus, and benefactor to
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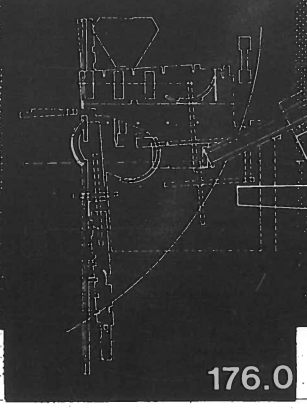
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