

THOM MAYNE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Note: This interview was conducted June 22 at the Morphosis studios in Santa Monica, CA. The text in bold is the voice of ARCHI-TECH Managing Editor Maureen Patterson. The text not bolded is architect Thom Mayne. This transcript is the property of Stamats Communications Inc., and cannot be reproduced or excerpted without the express, written permission by Stamats Communications Inc.

Yeah, and this is great talking to you, too, because your career, you know, you're such an innovator in blending architecture and technology, which is exactly what we write about.

So, one of my first questions is, you talk about change a lot, I've seen you talking about change throughout your career, why do you push the boundaries, why change, why not just go with the status quo or make a better version of the old?

Because, change is the medium of the 20th century, to start with. It is the subject, to some degree, of the 20th century and certainly it's accelerating. *[laughter]* I'll tell you, it's so basic, I've... it's so... I... I... it's not even something... it's so accepted now...

Right.

Well, if you look at it, say, in cultural terms today, I would have said that the complexities that are taking place in our country right now culturally and politically *[seem]* to be dividing, fairly equally, two different visions

Umhmm.

of the world that are, the question you asked. And one is a conservative status quo position, which is in some cases even worse than status quo, it's looking nostalgically at some past

Umhmm.

and is yearning for that past, and it's somehow connected to a *[usefulness?]* for dealing with current problems. Or it still has to deal with the world as it exists. And there's another group of people that see the world *[as it is]*. So the first one, the first vision, clearly operates off of fixed narratives, philosophy,

Sure.

mostly religious narratives and sees the world in more transcendental fixed terms – that the world is given certain, the outlook of the human character is somewhat fixed, and it's been fixed for 2 or 3,000 years, if you start with the first or second *[testament? or wherever you]* want to go. And there's another group that believes in a *[complete]* different, in a general trope, a system of things. It would be I guess a set of ideas that were set in place in the middle to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, and it'd be the major characters that started redefining our world – Darwin and Freud and Marx, and literally all of art, no matter where you *[want to be]* in the 20th century

Sure.

whether it was Brecht in film and Picasso and Duchamp, and no matter where you go, Le Corbusier would be

Sure.

representing this new view, Einstein of course within physics, Freud within the mind. And they reinvented the world.

Right.

And everybody is educated to some degree

Right.

[connected] to education.

Sure.

THOM MAYNE

It'd be impossible to read the paper today - if you're reading about carbon dating, if you're looking at the relationship of anthropology, geology, paleontology, any of the sciences, medicine of any type, it begins with these ideas.

Right.

And they're radically invested in the ephemerality of philosophy, the ephemerality of what we know, and where the unknowable becomes equally interesting to the knowable - does that make sense?

Hmm.

And as an architect, you can't escape idea structures, because all architecture is, is it's a departure point that starts from asking questions and some sort of interrogation, investigation,

Umhmm.

research, and it concretizes those, the conclusions of those ideas.

Right.

We just

Right.

make permanent notions of world views. And, well, I think today you realize that because the ideas themselves, the theories themselves, the premises we use to guide our lives, are malleable, flexible, changing, evolving, it completely affects your outlook on your day-to-day life, your politics, your own work within your discipline. So that within architecture, you realize that, actually like the business world today, one has to be agile, alert, aware, awake, always looking for the shifts taking place that you are corresponding to, and of course in the last even two decades, the shifts in my discipline have been tremendous - with computation, with radically different kind of possibilities having to do with the way we produce things through computational methods, the computer, etc. And through the advance of thinking that's parallel to that, that would be parallel to a complexity theory or any number of things taking place in biology, the sciences, the shift in cultural perspective [into] a broader,

Sure...

more heterogeneous kind of world versus a monolithic world. So again, you start with an idea of beauty, or the notion of an aesthetic. Well, the first discussion is: Whose is that? By which culture?

Right.

It's not a singular.

Right.

[So], well, that leads you to kind of question: Is beauty kind of an operational idea in architecture?

Umhmm.

So I'm going to say no, it's not, because I'm going to immediately say, well, if the beauty is, then who's the decision-maker in beauty? And it's going to lead you someplace else. And again, this is having to do with the types of questions you asked, a kind of an investigation into that, what do you think architecture is or isn't.

Right.

And [I'm going to say], no, actually you're going to start an investigation and what you're going to do is, you're going to locate architecture to a particular project, and it's going to be much more specific and idiosyncratic to a particular piece of work, meaning the work isn't coming out of a stylistic idea, [which is] part of this. You don't start with style or formal idea, you start with first principle questions. And so [one of] the first questions is - by the way, how does architecture participate with education, what's our role, [what do we do?]

Umhmm.

THOM MAYNE

We're not assuming we're going to build a building in a certain style or, that's not what it, that's not the most interesting problem.

Right.

It's like, how do we participate? Education starts with some ability to project inquiry

Umhmm.

[in] a process of thinking that's going to be with you for the rest of your life.

Umhmm.

Other than just memorizing rote stuff that you, ok, you know, and you know Lincoln and you know history to a certain degree, and you know certain subjects.

Sure.

But more important is actually the process it begins in terms of the method of inquiry and investigation that stays with you, and, of course - advancing even - curiosity. Well, so, we look at, well, that's interesting, [because] architecture

Right.

[can] participate with that

Sure.

[and] we can automatically start looking at a work that challenges certain conventions, and *intentionally* challenges or provokes thinking. And it is fascinating, [because I remember] going through that. A lot of the teachers we were presenting to, thought we were overshooting the students; and I went back to myself and said, actually, we're overshooting the teachers.

[laughter]

The students are fine.

Right.

Twelve-year-olds are great clients for architecture. They're still open. A house doesn't look like a Spanish, neo-Spanish, it doesn't, they're not already preconditioned culturally.

Right.

They're completely open.

But []...

It can look like a stealth fighter, it can look like nothing, it looks like something they invent - a stegosaurus - it's irrelevant. And so we ended up with a kind of a landscape, an architecture which [mimics] landscape, and which was part of the landscape, and nothing was vertical, every line had to be bent, and it had a certain logic... And the point being, it led us to a direction of an architecture, but it started from a broader issue [of] the participation of architecture. [If] we look at, hmm, funny, I look at this container, uhh [table noise] - if I was going to show that to a group of students and say, we're going to redesign that container, what's our first step? And a lot of them would just start saying, it's this shape or it's this shape or we're going to come up with a more sexy thing, or that would be one group of people.

Umhmm.

[And it] would be the largest group. Another one could say, instead of answering the question, they would ask questions.

Hmm.

And they would say, well, how many of these are made?

THOM MAYNE

Umhmm.

Oh, a billion a year, easily a billion. All right. How many times is it used? Once. Oh. How much total material is involved in it, what's it made out of? Oh, X amount of tons of blah blah blah. When it gets discarded, where does it go?

Right.

When you discard it, how many square meters of space does it take for that three billion containers a year?

Sure.

How long does it take to de-evolve naturally, and does it emit anything, are there toxins? - [a] *really* different way of approaching the problem.

Right.

The first one, most of the public would think that's what architects do - style, restyle.

Right.

I'm interested in the second one.

Umhmm, and you're []...

And then out of that - let me finish.

Go ahead.

And then out of that comes a new cup.

[]

You're still going to develop it, it's still going to look like something, it'll have formal properties, you're going to design it, but, it's an example of a deeper notion, of a real notion, of the location of an architecture, of a designed object. And that talks about the relationship [of] how all work starts with the nature of the investigation and the types of questions you ask.

Umhmm.

Because again, you can look across the street, and just a typical - whatever this thing is over here, the condominium - and then the questions start with kind of, how do I, what color's the façade, and how do I shape proportions on a façade, and [*finger snap*] - done. [Leads you to that?], right?

Umhmm.

[And I] could have started with, well, what does it mean, urbanistically, to place a building in the city

Sure

and should I think about the nature and

Right.

how it relates to the street, or should I have public spaces, and [you can] talk about the nature of what does it mean to design a residence today for a certain kind of demographic, and by the way, who's the demographic? Radically different demographic than it was even two decades ago, over 51 percent of women work, a huge amount of the workforce is women that have children [and work] and on and on, we can just start penetrating and find out, well, it leads to a kind of a different kind of environment,

Sure.

different set of needs, and again, it would lead you to a different project.

Right.

THOM MAYNE

[And] finally it would look like something, but it's going to look different than this, but it would be much more fundamental

Right.

[to an] organizational idea, and to really fundamental notions to kind of what the problem is. [Versus], if you start with a cake decoration

Right.

[and don't] care about the cake.

Right.

[That's a great one, actually]

[laughter]

Yeah.

All you do is kind of decorate it and that's what you think architecture is. And I go no.. Today, anybody knows that the culture of food is completely changed, and again, in the last couple decades. Start with Alice - where are you from?

I'm from St. Louis; I live in Iowa

Ok, do you know Alice Waters?

No.

She's in Berkeley, has a famous restaurant, Chez Panisse. Alice Waters kind of completely shifted the culture of food

Umhmm.

and from kind of an American - oh, it's a, it's all borrowed from Europe, more or less, French, German, English, whatever, right? - and from kind of the heavy sauces and in terms of the top food restaurants.

Umhmm.

She's from California, totally reinvented the lighter, smaller, completely fresh, simple, clean, closer to maybe to some Italian kind of ideas, a new idea, it became nouvelle or something, and completely changed the notion of food having to do with health.

Umhmm.

Food that is actually, is useful for your body, that's up to date with what we know, about the relationship with our culture of food and how it acts on us chemically, right, biologically. And she's given huge credit for promoting and educating huge numbers of people that have now become kind of connoisseurs of both good food.

Right.

They eat well, and a food that actually is useful for you

Right.

[and that] it takes in account

Sure.

proper contents of fat and calories, etc.

Right.

And, well, she's a designer. *[laughter]* That's what we all do, right?

THOM MAYNE

Yeah.

But it includes something that's kind of deeper, and she actually changed the culture of food, which is a much bigger project than just her own

Right.

status as a chef,

Right.

right, or whatever, [I mean], she has huge kind of status. The bigger thing is, she changed the culture. And, well

Yeah.

That's the interesting [part of it/project?], isn't it?

Yeah, I gave a speech and I asked, I was asked to give a speech to a company, and I said what is a building? Half the people probably looked at me like I was an idiot, but, what is a building? You know, if you start asking those kinds of questions, you're not going to answer it the same way you did 100 years ago.

Of course not.

Five years ago.

No. You wanted to talk about San Francisco.

Yeah.

Exact same example. We show up in San Francisco, [we're in] a competition, and one of them was a well-known San Francisco firm, SOM in San Francisco, and probably the most, the kind of best-known firm there.

Umhmm.

And, well, there's a huge rivalry between the two cities.

Umhmm.

And most of it just, I'm not sure if there's any reality in it at all, but it's one of these rivalries that you never know kind of how it started

Yeah.

but I'm not sure kind of how much reality it is, but it doesn't matter, it's incredibly real. And so, there are already articles in the paper, the word was out - "Aggressive, radical" -because we're still labeled, again, you guys kill us. You guys being the press

[laughter]

put labels on us - like the "bad boy" thing won't go away and I'm still, I'm 63 years old, and now I'm enjoying it, at 63.

[Kris Sullivan calls you]...

If I'm a bad boy, I'm like, well, my kids joke at me and say, dad, we're proud of you. They,

Now you're cool.

[they're still calling you a] "bad boy" and you're 63, you must be doing something right.

And [Chris Sullivan] calls you the good guy. *[laughter]*

And they stay with you.

Yeah.

THOM MAYNE

But anyway, here we show up and we're known as this kind of aggressive design firm, and a kind of radical firm, which is, I guess, taking the language, [and they, they] represent, so whatever we do looks like something, and that's really what gets talked about. For instance, what we're talking about, by the way. Most people look at the final thing and just categorize it, and put you in a category. That's where the nature of the result of the work is not just contemporary, but is fairly aggressive in a contemporary sense. which I think is [a major?] difference from the norm - if that's a word - just away from the norm, is really what they're saying.

Sure.

Which is also an interesting subject, why people don't talk, is that "radical" even a useful term? Because I think it's a totally useless term.

I don't know what it means.

Radical meant something at the beginning of the century - it means *nothing* today.

[We use a lot of terms]...

[None of us are radical,] we're using

[We use a lot of terms that no one]...

[We're actually] all trained and are embedded with ideas that come from Marinetti and Le Corbusier and Loos and all the people that established these ideas. They were truly radicals in the '20s. And the discussion should be, for me it started with, like, it's a distance from some norm, and what does that mean if you move out of the norm. And in a lot of things, it's a good thing. It's a good thing in science - you move the norm way over here, and it's considered the best thing. In fact, the further where you put the norm, if it follows an advance in new logic, I think you're even honored - you get Nobels for that, all right? And so I would have said with architecture, no, of course not. [Move...it's] something, a more nuanced discussion of what it means to move the norm - by the way, how are you moving it? It's just not by the look. Is it a good thing or a bad thing? - would be the first conversation. Anyway, [you look at] San Francisco, so, here we come and we have all these articles: The bad boy radical firm invades San Francisco.

[laughter]

Conservative cultural town - not politically, which is interesting. LA in some ways more conservative politically, but more adventurous formally and artistically; and San Francisco, this, probably center of liberalism in the United States - Berkeley is just kind of, it's kind of a unique city in that you can smoke a joint walking down the street and the police won't,

Yeah.

it's a really unique, kind of lovely place in the whole country - and, umm, but conservative culturally. Well, we heard all this. We already had decided here, we sat down and decided strategically, tactically, never [to] discuss design; it will never be talked about. We're going to take three things - they were just obvious, on this kind of building. It's a generic office building, really, that houses various departments of the government, a fairly large building. To begin with, we're going to challenge the assumption of "genericness" - why is the building generic? Why is an office building generic? It's generic because people accept it as generic, and we're going to challenge that. And then the three basic areas [we're to look at], [we're going] to look at the building as an urban generator

Umhmm.

[producing?] urban space which is obvious to San Francisco, and would be the way to differentiate San Francisco and LA. It's a place that still is connected to European urbanism, let's say. The plaza and pedestrian [world], which LA is not, and we were going to look at that and promote that. We were going to look at the culture of the workplace, which in our estimation had to do with challenging the "genericness" of the space. And a place now where you would have a majority of your awake life, and we were going to look at what that meant, to kind of look at that in social terms, and connective, interactive terms that has to do with the way people work within institutional cultures. And we were going to challenge the notion of resources - how the building uses energy, and responds to that. And that's something that we [were already] working with for a couple of years on several buildings with double skins and all that. And we went to work on those three areas, and the aesthetic was going to be

THOM MAYNE

a byproduct, a result of [those]. And knowing, that was going to be the most difficult area, and we would never win battles on aesthetic terms, if we were going to, like, really pursue [them] purely on either philosophical or conceptual or artistic terms, but that would not be a place we would want to make a battle. That's not where you want to draw the lines. And it became really interesting because with that, of course, there was something that was really lovely. We knew that our positions on these three things were going to be in complete alignment with the liberalism of the city.

Right.

So, I was smiling all the time knowing I'm going to put these people in a really tough place.

Right.

Because I'm going to give them, within these three territories, arguments that I *know* they're going to agree with.

Right.

[They'll] be impossible to disagree with, based on my own comfort with their positions on these issues.

Sure.

And so I'm going to make it very difficult on them to reject the aesthetic, because now they're going to have, they're going to have to develop some argument, and I had no idea where they would go, because I just gave them a very clear argument within these three territories, and all the things they're looking at are a result of that.

Right.

So, you take the most obvious - so the building is thin

Umhmm.

and tall. Well, the thin and tall building is a five-story, well, several things happened. First of all, I was there at a weird time when the homeless had taken over a lot of the open spaces, and the open space they didn't want. And I'm going, whoa, this is really weird, here I come to San Francisco to give you a plaza which is part of the city, and they wanted a kind of a five-story building, on the building, and we took the five-story building and just kind of tipped it up, and gave them the space. And then of course, we're next to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

And so we take the plaza and put the plaza in front of the court, and I'm going, well, that's the way it should be. Well, that's the way it's been since 2,000 years of Western architectural history. And [then we're going to shore] the façade. Well, they just put in \$200 million and completely renovated the building, and it's one of the most beautiful, it's one of the icons of San Francisco, and it's both an icon as a building and as an institution.

Sure.

And the Ninth Circuit is infamous.

Sure.

It's been overturned the most, it's the most liberal, and it's well-known

Sure.

representing San Francisco, so it's really, at a nuanced level, very interesting.

Yeah.

And we put a plaza in front of it. So we, [and we tipped the building up], well, we brought with us European [standards], and, we'd been working in Austria, and the buildings are narrow, and they're narrow because you get light and air

Umhmm.

and they just, it's not the mechanics of the building, it's the shape of the building that really affects performance.

THOM MAYNE

Ok.

And so by making the building narrow, it's 55 feet wide, it worked with the performance of the building urbanistically, and it automatically gave us a floor plate where we knew we had natural light and we had the potential of using air. And it started an idea of, the urban idea. Well, then we looked at the performance, and again it goes back to the earlier conversations when we were with our mechanical engineer, our consulting team, he just asked the question, because you know San Francisco, you know, it's kind of a benign climate, and zero degrees or whatever, if that was in Vienna, it would look like that, this being the winter, being summer, except it's even more, whatever, it was like that.

Right.

I was looking at San Francisco and I'm going, you know, I'll bet it looks kind of like that.

Umhmm.

All right? Very, very little change, and [working with] Ove Arup engineering, a very, very good design firm, really, engineering firm, and the next time we meet, a couple days later, [he's] going, the answer was - and [the] question is, could we take the air-conditioning out, could we just use the air and just move it around, and the answer was, possibly, actually.

Because of ...

Then why hasn't it been done? Has it been done before? No. how come? Don't know, No one has done it. [We] start that question going. Ends up the answer was, actually, we can do it.

Right.

Strangely enough, all we're doing is opening windows - really complicated - insanely complicated.

Yeah? *[laughter]*

It took two years, worked with Lawrence Berkeley labs,. They worked with Ove Arup, it took them two years, and their windows are opening top and bottom to control temperature [at a] performance range [on] a concrete building. The slab - you've seen it, right? The slab looks like this

Yeah.

and it directs air through it

Right.

has to be concrete for thermal mass, it cools down at night, we have radiance during the day.

Right.

[The outside] has a double skin.

Right.

The skin opens and closes, and even with low breezes, it pulls the air through, through the south face, and it gets warm, and the warm air pulls it up, and then we have the fins on the back side, and they help guide the air in

Right.

and they also protect from incident light in extreme summer

Right.

solstice, like yesterday, and today, at sunset and sun-up, because at sun-up you don't want the building to warm up still, you want to keep it cool. And the north façade, the south façade, the building - the depth of the building, the concrete, the ceiling, the raw concrete can't be covered.

Right.

It has to be raw, because if you're using the concrete, it has to be exposed

THOM MAYNE

Sure.

to the air. And so, all of a sudden, they look at the concrete - of course, I think it's quite beautiful, and it's this beautiful kind of rolling thing and it's raw concrete. And then, we said, well, we don't want anything added. So the only thing you'll see are little tiny sprinkler holes, and so it's completely clean. So there are no lights - meaning the lights have to go up, or they should go up anyway. So [it's almost like], the ceiling is what it is. And again, we go back and say, ooh, concrete ceiling, uhh, it looks like an architect's ceiling. Well, it's actually, it's performance.

Right.

And then you look at the façade that is metal and you go, ooh, wow, this is a really modern stainless steel [perforated] metal - well, you have to see through it, for the view

Right.

and it's actually 58 percent open

Umhmm.

so it takes out 45 percent of the sun, because we don't want incident energy. But you can see through it, like the blinds we have, actually more so than the other rooms, it's like a Meco blind, and so it doesn't take out the view. And then the other side, you can see straight through the windows, because it's north, but they have the fins. And so both those elevations are what they are. And [so they said], like, well, they want brick or stone or marble. And I go, well, umm, they move, they're very lightweight, they open and close, you can't move stone

So performance was []...

right? So you look at it and go, well, what else could you use? There's nothing.

Yeah.

It's some sort of a punctured metal, or, we could have done something much higher tech.

Right.

And it could have been a high-performance material, a Kevlar, but now we're talking about money, and we built it for very little money. We built it for the standard government budget.

Right.

So we had no money, which is the actual medium, low-medium, just about, building. And that's even more important, because we weren't given an endless budget to

Yeah.

[build a] prototype, we were given a standard budget and we had to keep on our budget. And so again, and then what happens, which is really, really fun because the same thing happened with the courthouse in Oregon, with the very conservative judge

Yeah, there's [a story].

is that actually I can win over people.

Right.

And so in a way, have you ever seen the lunar landing module that we put on the moon? At the Aerospace?

Yeah, oh yeah.

I remember the first time I saw that. I was completely blown away. I was born in '44, and I grew up with Flash Gordon, and a rocket looked like kind of a bullet, with stuff coming out of it.

Yeah.

And you look at this thing and of course it has no aerodynamic shape because it doesn't have to resist; it's a capsule, it doesn't have to resist anything. And you look at it - do you remember how funky it was?

THOM MAYNE

Yeah.

There were pieces stapled on. And I was just flabbergasted - they made it 250,000 miles, each way - first shot. This is Christopher Columbus.

Yeah.

Actually made it the first attempt

Yeah.

and didn't kill anybody.

I'm a space buff, so I ...

And you looked at this thing and it was, it had the computer power. I remember Bill Clinton talked about it, and he said it had the computer power of a Taurus car, and this was a while back.

Yeah.

Meaning, it was like a Quadra, it was when computers first came out, I mean, nothing. And I was just totally taken aback. Well, my notion is, is that your - again, we were talking about the culture of aesthetics?

Umhmm.

Culture, if you understand aesthetics as [a cultural phenomena.]

Umhmm.

It's based on, your educational [level/mode?] and your awareness based on that culture. Well, culture can be ethnicity - it's China versus Thailand versus Russia versus England. Or, it can be based on your education today, which is not geographically based, it's information based. And it doesn't matter where you come from, if you actually have certain access, if you know who Picasso and Braque are, if you read about them, it has no, it's knowledge based and not geographically based.

Right.

Well, [he] looked at that, you had that piece - like maybe a helicopter or something that's a little bit clumsy looking - it's not whether it's beautiful or not beautiful, it's more about it being compelling. Which already in the art world was being understood by people like Duchamp back in the '20s, when his work no longer was challenging beauty, because again, that's a hundred-year-old discussion now, just about. The notion was, no, architecture [isn't even] based on beauty, and he was already articulating that argument, as were the Dadaists and the whole notion of, [again], what was going on in art.

Sure.

[And he's] saying no, it's about the "compellingness," it's about the way something speaks, it's about the intelligence of an object. And things, objects, which all designers are interested in, what we're interested in is the, Diderot's encyclopedias of the 19th century, encyclopedia of all kind of things, it was about the intelligence of objects

Hmm.

[they] convey. And again, to me, that's really what we do - we produce, we instill them, we embed them, with knowledge, and with logic, and then they re-radiate that knowledge, and that's what people read and it's no longer about I like it or don't like it, because that'd be like me talking about your jewelry or

Umhmm.

we could go back and forth with the nature of [this suit]. It's meaningless. It's infinite today, given the kind of possibilities. It has much more to do with something more essential than that.

Right.

THOM MAYNE

All right? And so again, here I am in San Francisco and now it's really lovely because I'm in a position in my own sensibility towards the lunar landing module, because all of a sudden I found it incredibly compelling and I'll never forget it, and I find it one of the most interesting objects I've ever seen.

Uh-huh.

Based on what it did, how it was developed, how many people it took to make it, and on and on, right? And the fact that there [were really] human beings inside this thing landing on a, on another, on the moon's surface, I mean, it's just, it's just about impossible to comprehend these guys.

Right, yeah.

They were in this incredibly primitive thing with staples in it, I mean, I got totally carried away by the staples. It just

[laughter]

never occurred to me they [had to staple some] tinfoil to deal with light radiation, is all it was about, and use a staple. And

I spent about five years obsessed with the space program.

so finally I'm going up there and it's been fascinating, because a building that's kind of tough

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1]

[] about architecture.

Umhmm.

And, now, we haven't even started on any number of the conversations. I can constantly go back to the performance

Yeah.

and it changes.

[Is performance the...]

It changes people's opinion.

Is performance the driving factor in all this?

Yeah. So I could go back to, I said, well, why don't we connect the look of it - because you haven't seen it before, because I developed something that you've never seen before, so part of you not liking it, very possibly is, is that you're used to something, and you're somehow; there's some convention that guides you towards what do you think architecture is or isn't. And when you see something that's outside of that realm, well, now we're talking about different personalities. It seems like a huge amount of people don't like things that are not part of their world, and other people are totally fascinated, but

Sure.

the second category is probably more like 10 percent, unfortunately, and the first one is more like 90. But, then, my role as an educator, or now you've kind of articulated the problem, and luckily other people articulate it, writers, etc., because they, I talk to you and then you talk to many more people, so that's

Yeah.

the way it happens. But now it's fascinating, because, and we didn't talk about the skip-stop elevator in the Federal Building, by using the skip-stop elevator system you get exercise and it's a social space

Sure.

THOM MAYNE

and it's a tearoom, and you can meet there, and it's hybridized - it's like a hotel lobby and not like an office lobby, because you can sit down and have informal meetings. And one of the issues we're interested in, in our research, was in large institutions they get Balkanized, and we try to constantly instill meeting places. And then you look at the skip-stop - you get off and it's extremely efficient, you move to five floors, and that's where the social spaces are; for three floors, you get to walk a little bit, which is, we have an office in Europe, I walk five floors up and down every day, and the joke of the office is, we all come back, lose a little weight, eat more, and that's the way it should be. We shouldn't be moving mechanically [every] space, and then I'll get complaints from it, and I'll go, well, actually, you know, this is actually good for you, and do you go to the gym or well, you just, we're going to kind of

[Well, how]

push you a little bit.

But your architecture, then, is influencing social behavior.

Oh, that's, that's the only place architecture is interesting. If it doesn't do that, [it's doing] nothing - it's just benign. [Now], why bother? You're back to cake decoration.

Uh-huh.

And that's all architecture does. If you're not shaping behavior, and if behavior isn't shaping you, you're not doing your work. And so here we are, we have a, and you have these huge opportunities to also ask questions. Because I'm not saying, there will be aspects of this building that work better than others, and we'll find out in two years. And so [I'm hopefully] I'm shaping architecture itself

Umhmm.

as we move forward and we affect other buildings. Because finally, and probably equally important, is how we have pushed architecture forward, that many of these features get used now and they become standard - they're no longer at all kind of odd. Well, the skip-stop I took from Le Corbusier, and, I didn't invent it, I'm just

Right.

reusing it, and it's been around since 1930.

Right.

And the social space idea came from Harvard, *Harvard Review*, that were doing analysis of large complexes as we put the, part of the thin building, we have no, there's no offices that face views, and there's no corner offices.

Right.

In fact, management's in the middle

Right.

and the staff gets the views on the outside. Well, that came from the flow of air. And then, well, so, we look at the narrowness of the building and a smaller floor plate, meaning you're moving vertically more, and the Americans are used to huge, horizontal floor plates which are incredibly inefficient environmentally. Because, by the way, the narrow floor plate took out light altogether - we don't need light - because a cloudy day, on the north side of the building at 4 o'clock, you don't need to turn the lights on. In fact, with computer environments, you still have to put the shade down, depending on where you are.

Sure.

So we also got rid of the light, and it gives us - we're just doing the study now - it's going to be using something like 20 percent - the tower? - ...

Umhmm.

20 percent of the energy of a normal, of a Title 24 building, meaning a modern building using Title 24, the [] standards. It's going to be someplace in that range. And, so, talk about shaping behavior, it's not just shaping

THOM MAYNE

behavior, [because] if you look at a gestalt, and each of these things reinforces the other things, so the narrow building really came from environment, and then with the environment, that automatically shaped the way we could use the space inside, which changed the relationship between management and staff, and reversed it. So again, they're all going, umm, hierarchically - corner, window, inside - I go, whoop, that reverses.

Right.

Right? And then you read the *Harvard Journal* and they say, no no no, today that's a complete old model, you don't want management on the corner office, you want them in the middle of the whole complex, because they're the ones you want interacting with everybody, and you don't want them isolated, you want them in the center of the organization.

Right.

And then, it was hilarious. Right in the middle of this, they changed surgeon generals - I can't remember his name now. It was the Bush administration, Bush-Cheney. Which - I'm really proud of my kids at home - at the dinner table, I said, your dad built this building with this energy idea under the Bush-Cheney...

That's amazing, yeah.

[and I'm going] to be proud of that.

[laughter]

In spite of those guys.

That's right.

This is going to come out, and we did it at this time in history. And it's good news for democracy, and proves that we operate on many

Something's working.

many levels, it's not as simple as just

Sure.

federal level, it can happen both individually and through different

Right.

levels of command, whether it's an Ed Feiner - he's an amazing guy, he came under his Design Excellence program to start with. But, ... the energy, the light, the change in the culture

Yeah, [and who are the influences, when you]...

[Hold on,] the surgeon general came out and they said, the best form of exercise is stair-climbing. And I think - [didn't they "statisticize" it?] - I have to go back, I'm not sure about this, but it seemed [they might have "statisticized" it], and we quickly decided if you worked there for 30 years, entered, left for lunch, entered again, and made one other trip, under his statistics, you'd live like 4 days, 7 hours, and 3 minutes longer or whatever, and kind of made a joke out of it. But, we're going, no, this is the perfect kind of notion [for] buildings - it connects with health, it connects with social institution, it connects with the efficiency of [operators], and everything is kind of adding up.

Right.

Right, and then that's also kind of a lobby, because there are different departments?

Right.

So it made sense hierarchically - you come into the big lobby, which is the formal lobby of the building, and then when you come out, there's another lobby, and that's the lobby for health and human services, or for agriculture, or for whatever, and we can also identify those. And then if we put the park,

THOM MAYNE

Umhmm.

[the] open space in the top, it's actually a public park.

Right.

You can go up there and read a book, and also, it makes a very urban building, which is part of San Francisco, so the people on that end of the building literally walk across the ramp, walk across an open space to get to their space, and it can be made a vertical, kind of social space [with that]. The entry space is WPA and

Yeah.

ridiculously romantic. It's my Wim Wenders moment

[laughter]

of, uhh, in the middle of Cheney, I'm going, I'm going to honor the U.S. government, I'm going to build an immensely powerful - I thought it was quasi-religious, it was looking at Chartres and Amiens more than it was

Yeah.

[modern] architecture, and the stairs in the back, and all I need is an altar.

Yeah.

And, I was purposely looking at WPA and FDR, an era when government was [seen within] completely different terms within

Sure.

within the cynicism that,

Right.

of course, our own political class has promoted. It's just weird now we have a,

Yeah.

[what's been going on] since Reagan, that we have a political class that itself trashes government [but are] presidents.

Umhmm.

Right? It's really bizarre. That condemns as cynical a government - Cheney being, of course, the supreme character

[laughter]

[but is] vice president. It's a,

Yeah.

an oxymoron.

Sure, yeah.

[They] keep getting elected, by basically saying there's too much government, and then they promote more and more government, and

[] **[Bush-Cheney]...**

somehow the public buys that argument, and it's just, today I'm just startled, how you could, I think the notion is, why would you even get in politics? It's [like, you stay] in the business world, and everybody doesn't have to be in the political world. If you're so cynical about it, it seems like you should stay out of it. Honest argument. It's very American. Only in this country could you kind of operate by saying, we should have less government, deconstruct government, and become president as a, use that as your campaign slogan. But anyway, going back to San Francisco, so everywhere they turn, I really enjoy this. It's like, well, what don't you like?

THOM MAYNE

Yeah.

Well, we put the daycare center in the [most]... [not a] gallery, not a formal space.

Right.

The daycare center is on the lobby, next to the lobby. Well, that's a [no-brainer, literally.] I think they have like 53 or 54 percent of women have children, the children are right there, they can come down on breaks, they can come down on lunch, we gave them outdoor space to have lunch with their kids, they can go to the piazza outside, and, and so it's not a Shell Oil Company or a corporation,

Sure.

it's a government, it's very pragmatic..[Each] space has a skylight - ...

Sure.

you've seen the kids' rooms? Each [of the] classes - they're all different colors, and they all have skylights that look back at their moms or dads through the, they see the building [above them]

Right.

and then they have the space next door, and it follows a very kind of realistic social model. When it's on premises, and it's right, you see on the ramp, it's literally, you can come right down the elevator [to it]

Yeah.

and all that.

When you go out to design...

One more thing - they've always put internal cafés, where you never get out of the building. We put it on the piazza and said no no no, you know, because the building they have now, you never leave, you come in this huge, huge building and never leave it.

Umhmm.

[] The facility is inside. We took that and put it out in the plaza, and said no no, this is going to activate the city. You come out of work, there's outdoor benches in the summer and spring, and nice [walls?] etc., and it both activates the space - and, by the way, it's open to the public - you can mingle with other people, and you can meet people there, they don't have to come into your office.

Right.

Again, it promotes

Right.

kind of a broader social activity, and also connecting to San Francisco.

Sure.

And it acknowledges, again, the characteristics that so much make San Francisco such an enjoyable and such a wonderful urban environment, that's so treasured in this country, because I think most people see San Francisco as quite unusual, in terms of its publicness

Right.

and of the nature of the cosmopolitan kind of aspect of the city. And so, basically, just about everything I described to you is quite conservative

Umhmm.

It's just the architecture that reflects an idea that isn't made out of brick...

[But what...]

THOM MAYNE

...[], [we could punch] windows in it, but it goes back to the lunar lander - you couldn't have made it, look, if you were demanding it look like something else?

Right.

[You couldn't have done it.]

So you don't start with the looks, you start with the questions, but then, how much do things like performance and technology influence those questions? I mean, do you reverse-engineer? How do you get...

They're completely integral. You can't take it apart. The performance, the engineering, the thinking, the method of investigation, and the formal work, are all singular, finally. Like they are in any design [project]. I don't think it's very unusual, really, for anything that's really a serious design [project], where it's not an integral process.

Right.

You can't really divide them. [I think it'd] be impossible

Right.

[] to even separate even the process by which we worked, in this case computation and three-dimensional design, with the modeling [that... they're] part of the modeling processes which were all

Umhmm.

generated off of machines. The method of thinking, which is augmented by the computer, and the three-dimensional nature of the modeling

Umm.

[because] we didn't do drawings, the skin was made off of three-dimensional modeling - you were talking to Marty Doscher, who was the head of that, and, and the work is

[]

[] singular, I can't []....

So you don't, you, you don't set out saying, the building's going to look like this, you set out saying, [the building's going to do this]...

Oh, no no, [], in fact

[The building's going to do]...

that's another really,.

Yeah.

it's not a subject people know much about or because it's not part of our educational system - versus Europe, who teaches it. I could talk to a, the son of one of my clients in Austria was 16 - he could talk about Mies, Le Corbusier, Alto, Kahn, he knew Breuer, he could talk, he knew who these people were, they were part of his education.

Sure.

And there's nobody in this country, and I think, [maybe, only right, maybe], because [he's an] American, and they - I think most people's conception is, you come in, and it is a priority, you have some vision, and it's somehow from you, personally as an artist?

Right.

Totally ridiculous - nothing, empty.

Right.

THOM MAYNE

To me, it would be more like asking a biologist or an astrophysicist, if you can give me an idea of what something looks like, and

What's your [role]...

[] they're going to look at you, like, what are you talking about [*laughter*], just, I'm observing the world, I'm not inventing the world. I observe it and I put it within some logic, and that logic keeps leading me to more knowledge of who we are and what we are, right?

[Right.]

How we're constructed, as a universe. And, now, do certain *a priori* ideas enter some projects? Yes. It's more complicated than that.

Sure.

This one, no. At certain times, yes, there's a certain project, and you can start with certain ideas, but it's still going to be a departure point, and the notion would never be to build that.

Right.

It'd be to attack it.

Right.

It'd be Karl Popper.

Right.

It'd be the false solution.

Right.

And sometimes that's a method [in] simpler problems, or problems that are somehow repetitive, that you come in and you have to work very quickly, and you put an idea down very quickly, which is just some sort of an assimilation of everything you know at the moment, and you put it together in physical form. But then the notion will be not that you have a solution that's there as a default condition.

Right.

It's there as a beginning position, and the notion now is to use that to attack and use as a critique

Right.

to go somewhere.

Right.

And it would be impossible to think you'll end up with []... it'll never happen. It never has

Right.

happened in this office.

Where's your role?

It'll turn into something as you question it, because the questions now are going to be, ,specific and idiosyncratic to the particular place, program, personalities, all the circumstance that surrounds that problem,

Right.

and by its nature will have to be differentiated.

Right.

Right?

THOM MAYNE

Right. What's your role then in that process?

[Project leader.]

[] leader?

Yeah, the one that, I'm the director.

Right. [You just]...

And I'm kind of hands-on guy.

...challenge your team to come up...

But, but more, [the way we're talking]

Yeah.

starts the discourse.

Right.

What's the problem, what are we going to talk about, where should we go, and it's going to go back and forth a little more because we're working together - it depends on the team, depends on the nature of the team. By the way, the process is also going to be differentiated, which is, again, a more nuanced conversation, depending on the team, of a young team. It's going to be a different. I have to establish a different discourse, because I have a different set of characters in the team. A person with me for 20 years maybe may have a very different discourse, much quicker, shorthand, I've got someone that I'm working with

Sure.

and it's going to be tuned to the characters in the room.

Right.

Right?

Right.

And you're going to come at it a little differently

Right.

in terms of the particular - it might not be the [broad inquiry] itself, but the way you're approaching that would be a little different based on the team.

Right.

And that adjusts continuously based on the characters you're working with.

Right.

But again, it's going to go back. I just started with a very young person that's been here six months, and we were discussing a particular project.

Umhmm.

Because she went down to the project location on her own, met with the project team, and looked at the site, and [got all the data], came back, and then in the discussion, we immediately started opening up the problem - macro, micro, the political problem, all the kind of issues, and that was the example of that. We

Umhmm.

[started] interrogating, and so we left the table - - we left the table with the decision that we would pursue the project, because we didn't agree with the, I remember we didn't agree with the broader idea that they had [been developing]. And part of the dialogue, within an hour, was whether or not we should even do the project.

THOM MAYNE

Umhmm.

[It was] not the project for us. Because we, how could we start a project if we don't believe in the broader ambitions? And then we kept going

Right.

and said, well, maybe we can actually do [both/and]

Right.

and we'll do their project, but do it under these terms, *and* write a discourse how they should not develop this area.

Right.

[This] should be a small village with [and it should be] more provisional

Right.

[for] the people that are absolutely part of this community, that as generations move on, these self-sustaining houses are like trailers, they just leave

Right.

and they're also pragmatic. There is no infrastructure, they won't have the building infrastructure, we'll take care of that problem so they don't have, they're not looking for \$300 million to service three houses. And that all came out, and so we left the room. I don't, I try not to stop the conversation until we've reached some sort of a conclusion.

Umhmm.

The conversation goes until we've done that.

Right.

And so we left the room, we said, yes, we had a broader [approach to the project]

Right.

and she, the three of us

Right.

[these guys], were clear, yes, we're going to pursue it, and we even [started doing] ideas. We'll put a base on it, and it'll float, so it'll be like a, it'll be like a houseboat, and so [if it does flood], it just comes [], we'll make it out of foam covered with concrete

Right.

and then in that big piece of foam we'll put our gas, we'll put some infrastructure, and then [we came out with the words], it'll be a chassis - so we're going to build a chassis, and then on top of the chassis is a house, and it won't be [formal?].

Umhmm.

They don't want modern architecture. These are [citizens of the community []]...

Yeah, and then that's what's great []...

...[and knows nothing about] architecture, so [we're going], we're going to build a little, it'll have a hip roof on it

Right.

or a gabled roof, and then we even talked about, very personally I said, probably you couldn't do that - I can do that.

THOM MAYNE

Right.

I'm old enough now that I know who I am,

Yeah.

that I can get by with doing that and not be seen as a horror, or

Right.

even seen as somehow going against my beliefs and building, all of a sudden, kind of conventional houses.

Umhmm.

And I'm going, no, that's not what the project's about. The project first will be about the broader discussion, where we're going to write about what things should be, and by the way, the first thing you want to do is go back and tell me how it went from a marsh to a subdivision - [this was only] 20 years ago, and it was the Army Corps of Engineers that closed it off and drained the marsh, and cleaned up all the landscape

Right.

and then made it available for a subdivision.

Right.

And I want to know the history of that so we're going to discuss and remind us, remind the city, the community, the federal government, the state, whoever we're talking to - by the way, this only was excavated 30 years ago, and by the way, the army did it, and this is how they did it, [in] this grouping, and we're going to line up everything saying, it's still moving down and will continue to do that, so the condition's getting worse. [So] this is Holland. And as it gets lower, by the way, the water starts penetrating underneath and comes up anyway, and that's what's happening in Holland. They're starting to

Right.

bail out on some of their, ,farming land, it's costing so much money. [It's] already subsidized, but [as] it lowers, they're finding now they're getting salt-water filtration that comes under

[Right.]

the dykes, and it's getting so expensive that they can't grow the crops.

Right.

They're just saying, turn back the water.

Sure.

And it's no longer an investment. The dyke stays out because [you could] flood the whole [] country

Right.

but they're not going to produce, etc. And so we're going to develop now an argument for the macro discussion of how to develop the area, and at the same time do our little house. The point being, when we left the meeting, we left with a broad approach to the problem. These are things we should be looking at for more information, this is how we're going to pursue the problem, this is where we're going to head with the house.

Yeah.

We're still going to do the house, we even had kind of a beginning idea of it, and that'll lead us to kind of looking at more ideas

Yeah.

and, that's my role.

Sure.

THOM MAYNE

That's the beginning.

That's freeing. I mean, it's freeing to approach it like that, because you're not married to a particular style or a particular way of doing this, and this is going to be my style, and everyone's going to know when they [look] down the street, that's my building.

Right.

That, you're []...

You find you're using certain exp, some of it's experiential. I was down there, I was asked to do a jury for Global Green's competition, Brad Pitt supported this competition. They invited X amount of firms to do a housing complex, and I had pushed - and they were either [super-vernacular] schemes or modern schemes - and I pushed a modern scheme, and the jury, which was composed of a lot of community members, as well as Brad Pitt and a whole group of people that were green people, well,, none of them were interested in modern architecture. And we promoted, I think, six of them for the next stage, where they would work on the project and then come down and give presentations, and I pushed for one modern scheme - a Chicago firm, I do not know the firm - but it was a very beautiful scheme and a very, very contemporary scheme. And they, none of them were interested in it, but they finally just tipped their hat to me and said, ok, [you've made one].

[laughter]

And then [??] with the other five. Well, then they presented, and I was in the presentation again as a peer review, and I was just, and then that one, they had more people come, it was a public presentation with the community, and without any question, *nobody* was going to be interested in that scheme.

....

Look, I'm, we're an architectural firm of a certain kind of status, people know us, and

Right.

I have, part of it is continually assessing

Right.

again, the definition of [a problem] and what is the [problem]

Right.

we're going to solve.

Right.

And this isn't the place to come in and start pushing

Right.

the formal

Right.

aesthetic, artistic concerns of architecture, which is,

Right.

...[] plenty of our work we could do that.

Right.

And it doesn't mean that all these other things won't become part of it,

Sure.

because it's not that it's either/or, but the work will be clearly a straight-[up] piece of architecture

THOM MAYNE

Right.

[and there's nobody] that they want [they] hadn't expected.

Right.

And here again, I'm going, it's actually a, it's a, it's a deficit.

Right.

It's a problematic, and it's not about lang - in fact, the language is about some sort of continuity, but [it could] be an incredibly modern,

Right.

super intelligent, and then again, it's a forest and trees thing. The house is nothing, it's the

Right.

big problem that's the issue.

Right.

It's turning it back into the swamp, which by the way, was a huge ecological importance, as mediating the hurricane.

Umhmm.

That's what the purpose was.

Right.

It uses up energy.

Right.

Right? And that's the big discussion.

Right.

The house is minor.

Sure.

And so it's, again, it's, I think what's taking place is definitely a shift in this office, and a shift in me in the last decade, and [it's] had to do with my planning work and my academic work, is that the work is getting more "strategical" and it's looking more and more at macro issues, and become the relationship of micro-macro. It's the cup discussion, is the best, that's why I use that, it seems to be the best metaphor, right?

Uh-huh.

It's not the cup.

Right.

It's the three billion cups that get used once, that finally are buried in a site, and then looking at it environmentally, economically, culturally, right? And then finally you go, and actually the solution isn't even redesigning the cup, it's doing an ad campaign - use porcelain cups.

Right. What []...

[You clean] them and then you, now the discussion is the detergent you use to clean them.

Right.

And is that a better solution, because you can use a porcelain cup for 10 years, or it goes from 3 to 10 years, and you can study how many of them get broken or how many of them get used, and - right? - and when

THOM MAYNE

Yeah.

people get tired of them, and some people never get tired of them, they want to use the same bloody cup for 50 years, and other people want a cup every year - you see?

Right, yeah.

You're now expanding the conversation to

Sure.

broad issues, and it seems like today that we're at a place where, that our knowledge of the implications of our world are global, and it's no longer the car. Because look at LA - 50 years ago, the car was the future; no one could think about a car that way today.

Umhmm.

The car is now seen only in its negative terms. Of course, we accept the fact it gives us

Sure.

freedom and allows us to operate a certain way. But the only important issue of the car is the numbers of cars and their impact on the environment, which is now at a global status.

Sure.

And [so the] issues with the car no longer become, let's make a faster, sleeker, prettier, whatever the [obsession] is - not counting a cup-holder and a radio, which become more important. That's another thing - nobody cares about an engine transmission any more; it's given that they last 100,000 miles, you never do anything [with them]. I use my wife as a great example. She would never open a hood, she would never ask a question about power or the efficiency of the engine, anything like that. She wants to know where the cup-holder is, and it's got a good radio, and it's comfortable - which is the questions she should ask.

Right.

Because those are issues that were only interesting maybe in the '50s.

Right.

Right? But they're all equal now. Every car has more or less the same transmission, same engine, it operates under the same rules; the [percentages,] like a good sound system, you're dealing in the

Right.

last 98 to 100 percent, and the issues change. Well, then, it changes again after the cup-holder, and the much bigger issues, of course, are now, if we can have the export of carbon dioxide,

Sure.

blah blah blah, right?

Right.

Or, its implication of why we're in Iraq.

Right.

We're importing oil, and we got people

Right.

using double the energy we use per capita - just about twice, last time I read, of Europe. And then so you read the paper and no one has a clue why we're seeing this glutinous [] - well, duhh, go to Europe, talk to anybody

Yeah.

and they'll say, yeah, you use just about double the per capita energy

THOM MAYNE

Sure.

and then 300 million people, that's a lot of energy.

Right.

Right?

Right.

And you're not in alignment.

Right.

And again, here we go again. The discussion politically is alignment.

Umhmm.

You're not in alignment with the global culture.

Right.

And there's one group of people that see it globally, and there's another group of people which are much more myopic, and still are provincial and can only see it within their own culture. And today that's impossible.

Right.

You have to see it within global terms.

Yeah. What's the role of technology in that? You know, because you're talking about this integrated [process] []...

See, I think it's less. I think it's less [than] technology than it is. I mean, all design starts with desire. The capability of technology today - this is your territory, I guess,

Umhmm.

is limitless. It's the desire for the technology. Like the automobile industry, chances are, [we'll] not be producing an automobile in 10 years.

Umhmm.

In a decade, there will be no automobiles produced here. And why - because there doesn't seem to be a desire or an understanding or a capability to pursue technology in a direction which is relevant to make automobiles that are commensurate with the changes. Going back to change,

Sure.

the changes taking place in our society in terms of how they operate and what [terms] an automobile is, like we're talking about. And strangely enough, even in a conservative culture, the population here is ahead of the industry, in that they understand energy. So here we have the three characters still producing enormous SUVs, that they actually got stuck with this year - they should have - and enormous cars which are completely out of sync. And I was at a conference with Richard Koshalek in Pasadena at the art center two years ago, and it was, is it who's the head of Chevy, head designer?

No, I don't know.

[It'd be interesting to you,] I'm sure you must have done some articles on it. He had brought all of his cars, they were all retro

Umhmm.

cars, all looking back, and he gave a lecture saying the development of the car was over, and he used one of the jet airplanes as an example, and he was paralleling airplanes and cars and saying, the heyday was in the '40s, and it ended its development, and, like the F14 or something. And it so startled the audience, and it so startled the people that hadn't talked, including me, that I completely dropped my lecture

THOM MAYNE

Right.

and gave a rebuttal, and was very blunt in my criticism, basically saying this guy, you know - 'What just took place? He has absolutely no clue what's going on. Did I hear that he was the head of GM?'

Umhmm.

'No wonder they're going to be out of business.'

Hmm.

And I told the audience, 'This guy will not have a job in 10 years.' I was really, it just, flipped me. 'This guy will not have a job in 10 years.' He just, I saw in the paper the other day, and they were [ribbing] him because he's now supporting some energy car, and they even said in the article, this is the guy that supported, this is new to us, it just happened last year. Well, he's one of these non-leaders that only comes up with ideas after the whole world has found them, and has no [sense of]...

Yeah.

...[] kind of anticipating, that's why they're not going to be in business. Anyway, the notion was quite the opposite. The automobile is beginning a new life

Umhmm.

where they're going to kind of reinvent what an automobile is, and it's going to completely reinvent the automobile - what a chassis is, what an engine is, where its location is, how you sit in it, the weight of it, the materials of it, how the headlights work - it's going to be completely reinvented. It's going to weigh half the, it's going to weigh half as much, it'll be carbon fiber, it'll be all new materials, the engine's going to be the size of a typewriter

Umm.

where there'll be four of them on every wheel, [and they won't even exist], they'll be the size of a brake, it'll just completely disappear, which will give you a complete chassis

Sure.

[that's as] flat to the ground, it'll do that, or you won't be in business.

Right.

Because someone else will []...

[END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1]

...[] some sort of a differentiation in some product, [in] something we can articulate, and we can articulate somehow how that thing has to change - it becomes more efficient, it becomes safer, whatever these things are, right? And then it sets technology loose. Because if there's an issue in this country, it's not our ability to produce technology - we're probably still, even at this time in history, one of the most inventive, more or less well educated, we have the capability of producing these things, and we're a service industry, that's what we do. What is a, a service industry is intellectual and creative capital. That's another problem, we only fill half of our scientific positions in college, and that's another kind of tragedy that somebody should be focusing on a little more.

Sure.

Federal government, instead of doing all this... [I mean, we're] off here, and what we need is modern infrastructure. You should be able to get to, when I'm in Paris, I can get to Marseilles in the second-generation

Sure.

TGV in two and a half hours - two and a half hours. I could [live there,] just about. You should be able to go to Washington, D.C., and [to] New York - in a modern TGV, it'd be under an hour. We should be working on our infrastructure [just] to promote our business world and keep us active in the world, and it goes on and on. We should

THOM MAYNE

be filling our colleges with American students so we don't have to look at the world to fill half the positions [??], right?

Sure.

We should be dealing with that, but that's a whole other []. But, you first establish the desire, which is coming out of what, the political class of the business or something, and then you set technology loose. And we have that capability.

What are your...

We certainly have the capability of completely reinventing an automobile, but it takes, prior to the technology, comes a commitment to that technology, and that's taking place on a cultural basis.

Right.

[Wouldn't] you agree?

Yeah, yeah.

I don't know how your magazine supports or talks about the bigger issues, but it seems like what's necessary here is a clear articulation of the necessity of change and the [necessity] of innovation to deal with realities.

Right.

Because, again, we start with change as being really the subject, and it has been

Right.

in the 20th century to, and we're hugely off. I mean, when the paper's filled with discussions of schools that are challenging Darwin, you know we've got problems.

Umhmm.

You couldn't have a bypass - you talk to a doctor, he would laugh at you hysterically. It's not evolution, it's gotten so,

Right.

this is 150 years ago. The notion of evolutionary processes, [which is] embedded in biology, they couldn't do any research that leads to the simplest - which are now a standard operation, the bypass surgery, etc., etc., you can go on and on, and all, literally all cancer research, and you look at the conversations with stem cell, which are leading back to religious narrative discussions, and you've got schools actually teaching as an alternative. I mean, I walked through the Children's Museum, and I'm walking through paleontology, and they tell you that it's... you're in - it's 250 million years ago - well, all scientists of all cultures to the best they know, using carbon dating, etc., say that, [and I'm] only looking at the stegosaurus, is it's about 210 million years ago.

Umhmm.

Well, there's another narrative that says it all happened at once and they're on a boat and it was 3,500 years ago - it's so absurd, that you can't take it even seriously.

Umhmm.

I mean, you're looking at, these are, lock them up.

Right.

They belong in insane asylums.

Right.

But you can't say that because it's the president of the United States, and it's actually, it actually eats up space in the *New York Times*. And this is absurdity going on in this country right now.

Right.

And the strange thing is, forget the bloody theory stuff, move it back into reality - do you want a better... do you want a more sustainable culture? Does it increase the quality of your life? - in terms of whatever that means - but somehow you're keeping pace again with the world. And do you want this culture to still have some sort of a dominant role, in its role in the world. And again, that's got to go back to an intellectual creative capital because we're going to only deal in ideas - we don't produce things and we don't make, farming and industry are not, we've evolved past that as a culture, as has most of the Western world and has Japan, and it seems to be the trajectory of the world, and India and China are now replacing us as industrial centers, and Indonesia. And, it's really an odd kind of period in history where we both have infinite potential and

Right.

[where] the counterrevolution taking place

Sure.

but the counterrevolution is actually strong enough and organized enough that it's really slowed things down a bit. Because I'm going back to the issue, it's not the reality of technology intelligence; it's the will to activate that, which is going to be a cultural/political conversation.

What's []...

Do you agree with that?

Yeah, yeah, but what's it going to look like? I mean, how does it, how does it evolve? You know, when we, what is a building and how does this evolution, where is it going?

You don't know.

I don't.

That's what's so [].

That's why I'm asking you. [laughter]

The answer is, you don't know, and you shouldn't know, you can't know. If there was a consciousness in dinosaurs, did they know how the world would evolve 250 million years later

Sure.

or what the plant species look like? Of course not. I mean

But you're doing []...

It's certainly, the notion of unknowability is part of this, and we have a culture that's not even kind of, they're probably not interested in Nietzsche or whatever, but part of it is being, why can't you be completely excited and captivated, and part of that captivation is unknowability. That you recognize that part of your finite self is incapable of understanding the complexity of our universe. And in fact, extremely intelligent people, maybe even you and I, it'd be impossible to understand certain terms or many terms within biological, physical, mathematical. So we're doing an

Sure.

astrophysics building at Caltech in Pasadena, and I'm working with extraordinary people. Every one of my clients is a Nobel guy, and they, as they try to explain to me their work, it's not accessible to me. I have to take it at another level, and, because they operate within a world of mathematics which is beyond me,

Sure.

which is completely standard to them, like aspects of my discourse which are

Sure.

private to my language, and, I don't have to replace that with some other narrative that I understand

THOM MAYNE

Right.

because I have to understand it - that's about ego, or some other need in the human being. And I think the discussion we're having with technology, and with the relationship of how we use various types of intelligences to solve problems - which is about certain types of logics, because technology represents various methods of logic, really, to solve problems - again, it seems like the issues today are going to be more the social/cultural and the kind of understanding of those capabilities within philosophical/cultural terms. because it seems like the problem today is more political than it is within your or my area.

Umhmm.

Because I would have said right now, if you look at architects, the output of architects in this country compared to Europe, you're going to find [is so] much second-rate. Well, why is that? And I'm going to tell you, we have probably the finest education, architectural education universities in the world.

Umhmm.

And in fact, the majority of people in China, Japan, and Europe come to our graduate schools, and they're my students, they're at UCLA, they're at Harvard, they're at Yale, they're at Princeton, they're at Penn, or Columbia. And they're filled with, half of them are from around the world. They go home to work. Why? Because we don't, at this point in time, have a huge desire to produce architecture at a certain level, like probably most of your clients. I mean, anybody in technology ...

Sure.

requires some sort of [patronage], and again, it becomes the articulation of the problem precedes the solving of that problem.

Right. Well, give me an example of what they're, of how they're at a higher level in Europe.

Just looking at the output, looking at the work, if you look at kind of the most interesting work. I'm going next week, [all week] I'm in Cincinnati and Philadelphia and New York, [and then I'll leave for, over the weekend to a friend in Tuscany for a birthday], and I'm going to go up to look at the BMW center which we were originally competing for, we took, we were third place in the competition. The building that won is just an amazing building. And I'm going to go over and look at the project for Mercedes by UN Studio, a Holland architect, because I just want to see them, and then I'm heading back to work in Paris and Madrid for my work and then coming home.

Yeah.

...you make your own decision.

Yeah.

You're looking at a certain level of exploration, innovation, use of materials, the use of ideas, that you've got clients that are interested in exploring those, that want to be state of the art, and again, [this derives from desire. BMW wanted [it] and absolutely [went to the] fence. They chose people they thought were the best people in the world,

Right.

put them to work on a competition, and went out and built a building that's going to be a really unique building, and the proof will be its status in the 21st century. I mean, architecture's kind of simple in a way. Because [finally] you make a building and it, you have to live with it, it's completed, and it is what it is, and now it's free of my invention and it gets evaluated.

Right.

And so finally it's, it's self-defining.

Right.

So if ... you look at... the architecture, you can make up your mind - where [is architecture?] Look at the buildings and make your own decision.

THOM MAYNE

Right.

And it becomes clear to you

Right.

what it is, right?

What []...

And so it's not, it doesn't become a kind of incredibly intellectual conversation, you just look at the work and you can quickly kind of ascertain what that project is about, what they were able to do, what areas they're exploring, how it's moving architecture. And again, you're evaluating it from some norm. It's moving out of that norm and it is exploring territories

Right.

and you can quickly look at how,, kind of the sophistication even

Right.

of the thing. But it'd be like the car. I've never had an American car except when I drive a rent a car.

Umhmm.

There's not even a comparison.

Yeah.

There's not one car that can match a Volkswagen.

Yeah.

I've had a bunch of Passats, and my son got mine, and there's nobody here that can make a car that's as good as a Passat, which is actually made by Audi and it's 80 percent Audi. And then you drive - I have a hot rod now - you drive a BMW; I have a 600

Yeah.

race car. I can't believe America could make that car - we can't. Not even,

[], yeah.

not even something 30 percent [to] that level. []...

But now... [but now you're in Paris.]

[??] just like a, a really well-made precision that it does everything to the extreme.

Sure.

Right? And, they decided that. Again, it's not your, it's not the technology,

Right.

it's the decision that you're going to produce that,

Right.

[that] produced the car. We could do that car,

Right.

[for sure,] and we could make that car. And they could make it for a cost that people will buy it. It's not a

Sure.

dream.

THOM MAYNE

Right. But now you're working in Paris, the [Phare Tower]. Do you get []...

Opportunity - I do indeed.

[laughter]

I do indeed. I'd work there forever. Absolutely. They want to do something and they said do it, and we did a very aggressive building, a very complicated building on a very complicated site, used the complications of the site to make the building. The building's all about just solving the [problem of an] insanely weird site on top of rail and subway and roadways, a piece of public space that cuts through right in the middle of the building that's 100 feet tall, 100 feet wide, so the lobby ends up being 110 feet up in the air.

Wow.

And everything about it is a direct response from solving these unique kind of non-site conditions.

Umhmm.

What's funny, I remember several people talked to me when we were [doing] the competition to do the site, wrote me saying that this is the perfect problem for you - this is a Morphosis site.

Yeah.

And what they meant by that is that it had lots of constraints, and people that know me understand that this office loves problems that come [with] constraints. I'm not a [bean-field] guy. If you give me a complete empty site with nothing, that'd be the hardest problem. I need stuff to work off of, both in discourse - I need pushback, I need someone to argue with, and that's where the ideas come from; and I need that on the reality,

Right.

I think can respond to. I can respond to pieces of city, and it's, it's much more [about] a dialogue than it is about the self. But Morphosis - I had somehow intuited that when I was young.

Umhmm.

That's what Morphosis is.

Right.

It's not Thom Mayne Associates.

You know, that's exactly what I was...

It's Morphosis.

Yeah...

[] from the very beginning, I had, I was borrowing from Archigram and some things that were going on in the '60s, and I very much felt that architecture was a collective, collaborative experience, not about the self. And the process we're talking about, the collaborative nature of the work, the lack of any priority, are all in some ways attacking the idea of architecture as a reflection of the self,

Umhmm.

[the privatized] self. And I'm, of course, there's parts of that that you can't escape, your personality...

Sure.

...[], but that's not the focus of the work at all.

Right.

It's a collective practice. But I have to run now.

One more question?

Umhmm.

THOM MAYNE

Ok, [I'm the editor of a] technology magazine for architects - what do I need to know, what do I need to do, for my readers?

In what sense?

Yeah, where should I take, what do I need to never forget every day when I go to work, about architecture and technology?

Uhh, that's a broad question. Because technology is everything with architecture. I mean, we work with civil, with mechanical at all levels of mechanical, with structural with all types of material practices, with light, with acoustics. We, our world is gathering together multiple technologies and technological disciplines and integrating them into a single force, like a film, and giving it some singularity and continuity and coherency and meaning, and then probably putting that within the cultural realm, the artistic realm, that it speaks humanistically.

So []...

It's not, it's not the spacecraft finally, it has humanistic, it discusses the history of architecture within humanistic terms. And it's, it's the utilization and integration of those things. It's nothing on its own.

Right.

It's only the connection with things as they all are somehow symbiotic. They represent some sort of synthesis, and the total is always larger than the

Right.

aggregate parts.

So don't look at projects, don't just write about a project in its, in its self. Look at it in relation to the entirety.

Right.

Yeah.

[Absolutely]. And San Francisco actually is a great project in that way

Yeah.

because when I look at giving credit, wow, you have to look everywhere. There's so many people - the structure's very complicated, and the mechanics are everything, and, I mean, everywhere you turn, everybody had kind of a role in it.

Yeah.

Because as I described it, it had a diverse trajectory, and it wasn't, again, architecture's never about one thing. Much simpler [] the... analogy of the [] water container, although, I quickly expanded that out to be about quite a few things.

[laughter] **Yeah.**

But it's quite infinite in the subject matter, and it's, I don't know, in some ways it's, architecture - and I can give you an example, the simplistic thing across the street?

Umhmm.

[In some way] it could be defined by kind of how much can you get your arms around it, would be part of the way of defining it, and how much are you able to deal with. I think as you mature, and as the firm matures, the culture matures, you start being able to absorb more and more, right? And then it starts moving, especially in the trajectory I've been taking you, into the micro-macro, it starts moving out and it starts becoming more prototypical to even larger issues.

Umhmm.

Because today it's a very short leap from the energy savings to Iraq.

THOM MAYNE

Umhmm, yeah.

You build X amount of these buildings, I'm [going to] want to know what's the total aggregate, and I can tell you there's like 500 homes or more [we can]...

Yeah.

...[power in the delta of energy saved by the initiatives in the building, so just the delta in savings, I can get 500 homes [powered]. And so if you build 100 of them, you can get blah blah blah, there's a whole community now, ...

[Right.]

...[right,]... and... ...

[So architecture does have a social responsibility...]

[And then] if you look at the cost of oil,

Yeah.

the cost of oil is extremely, I would have to put in the cost of the war,

Yeah.

when you buy oil, because why are we in Iraq? - if there was no oil problem, we'd definitely not be there. It's not for humanitarian reasons. And again, [if] you, I think today the most interesting attitudes of technology aren't just within itself, which are particular discussions [which are], of course, always important

Right.

but the bigger issues have to do with the culture of technology and its relationships to our political system and social and etc., ethical - again, we could go ethically and that'd be a whole other conversation [but] probably more maybe in medicine or biology or another area [kind of area, right?]

Right.

And it's, it seems like the broader kind of philosophical gestalt questions are maybe the most, where we should start.

Umhmm.

Don't you think?

Yeah.

[That] lead us to the more particular

Right.

questions.

Yeah.

And again, I think, the automobile, before you get into the actually particular discussions, the very specific discussions, the electrical, various operational, motor-generated, power generation, all the kind of subsets, you have to have a bigger idea

Right.

of the goal or the aspiration or the desire of where you want to

Sure.

[move] the automobile. What's the problem

Right.

THOM MAYNE

and how do we define the problem, right?

Right.

And that's what starts the whole trajectory of the design process.

Right.

And of the whole need for why do we need - that'd be another way to say it - why do we need technology?

Right.

Well, we need it to solve problems, but what [are all] those problems and who's articulating them?

Umhmm.

Right?

Right.

And, there we go.

Well, thank you very much.

[laughter] My pleasure.

This has been wonderful. And I'll probably see you at Greenbuild - Greenbuild you're keynoting, I understand?

What's that?

At Greenbuild? You're going to be speaking at Greenbuild this year?

It's so far away . That is right, I'm going to do something in Chicago?

[]

I'm going to actually, it's a long ways away. I'm going to try to put something together on the bigger issues.

Yeah.

And not just about our work; I'm going to put

Yeah.

[] slides together on what I think the issues are, and I'm going to probably politicize it.

Yeah. Do.

And I'll show a picture of Iraq, or I'm going to probably take it []

Yeah.

and I'm going to have somebody do some work on [], when I do some statistical stuff. Is Gore speaking there?

Not that I've, I haven't heard. He spoke at AIA this year.

Yeah, []... I had to go in one day and I missed him.

Yeah, []...

I want to meet him. I haven't met him.

Yeah, yeah.

Ok. []

THOM MAYNE

Ok, thank you very much. I appreciate you taking the time.

This is going to be part of a magazine article?

Yeah, yeah, in our September issue, which is our...

[]

...great issue. Thanks.

Uh-huh, thanks so much.

Bye bye.

Ok.

[END OF TAPE]