

Regionalism, Position, Expression

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Morgan Residence

By way of reanimating a theory of making which once proliferated throughout American architecture schools and has since been discarded, it may be worth considering our work at Coscia Day Architecture + Design within the framework of Critical Regionalism. Kenneth Frampton, in his benevolence, likely assumed that in formulating his Critical Regionalism, such an architecture would necessarily reflect or propose positively on its cultural and geographical location. But if one were to take him at his word, that Critical Regionalism is a way of place making critical (or perhaps suspicious) of that place's content, it becomes clear that such an operation may not yield an architectural example of regional boosterism. Such is the case in Los Angeles, whose capacity for nurturing regionalism was presumably lost when, following rampant development and the deaths of Neutra, Schindler and Gill it was transformed from a cohesive region to an abstract cartographic concept. How, it could be asked, could regionalism exist in a city of indeterminate

boundaries and manifest culture in a widely acknowledged cultural desert?

This, we propose, is the case with our work at Coscia Day. It is an architecture which acknowledges, as Banham did, that smog is as sublime as it is horrific; and that the counterpoint to senseless expanses of mini-malls, drive-bys and drive-thrus, is the intimate body-centric ergonomics of the car through which it is experienced and rendered bearable. Spaces are simultaneously Los Angeles urban—the ambiguous space of Lautner combined with Schindler's humanistic intimacy; inspired by Deleuze and detritus on the side of Venice Boulevard...body shops...deformed metal.

Our work comes out of a generation that discovered quantum uncertainty, the development of the chaos theory and global communication. Major sociological shifts have occurred. What was once thought of as private interaction is now an interconnected global web. Practicing in Los Angeles enhances these stimuli by living in fluxion. Space as a generator of experience is a *position*, i.e. an ideology, that we feel compelled to take. We look at architecture, not as objects, but of a union between volumetric, voidal and metaspace.

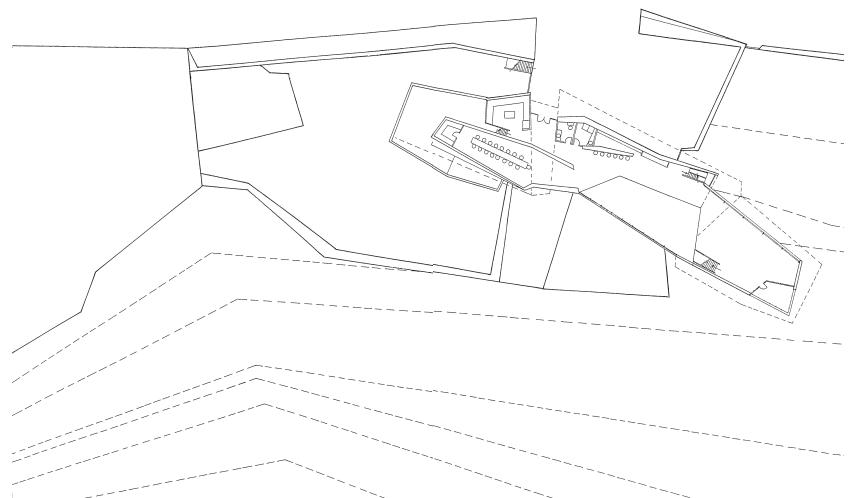
The *position*, i.e. location, of our architecture plays a decisive role. Our work embodies topomorphic and anthropomorphic conditions to create

a connection between built form/existing site and built space/natural space where transparent walls blur exterior and interior limits. The projects reconfigure topography of pre-existing sites through the formation of a complex of building components linked directly to the site through latent topological relationships. The resultant LandForm Architecture is a synthesis of the natural landscape and built form, growing from the site albeit inherently new.

The *position*, i.e. arrangement, of the building components both one and many simultaneously, are not a collage of disparate pieces but a complete whole with distinct yet similar parts. We have developed a figural architecture relating to the human body/movement. Architectural forms,

inherently connected through body geometry, produce space through relational alignments. From FigureForms built using straight lines set within a logic of curvilinearity in both plan and section, an architecture of movement (fast and slow) emerges. An early example of the architectural language we are developing is the Hillside House featured in *GA #52* located in Topanga Canyon on an uphill site at the toe of the slope that we excavated and recreated architecturally.

The created space is uniquely defined by program, episodes, nature and human interaction. There is no classical hierarchy of space nor a modern homogeneity of space, but a movement through a dynamic spatial condition allowing for programmatic episodes. Interiors of spatial residue are created

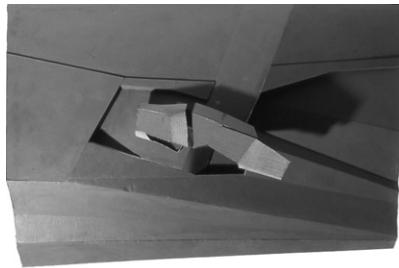


by the super imposition of site fractal solids set within the complexities of the folded wall/roofs' section geometries. These monoliths, sometimes rendered as built voids, take on individual programmatic interpretations allowing architectural flexibility to the user to change functions within the space at will. Our projects attempt a multiple overlapping spatial experiences redefining human notions of *position*.

For the past several years Coscia Day has been exploring the housing types possible in Los Angeles and the surrounding under-built areas. Much of the empty land left to build on is unbuildable hillside lots in the canyons such as Topanga Canyon and the Hollywood Hills. There are two major tendencies for houses designed for down slope sites in Los Angeles. The first being the cantilevered box positioned out over the hill precariously held up with expressed structural steel supports. Although, popular in the sixties and seventies they have a relatively small fan base today including Los Angeles architects practicing Modernism. Clients went full circle in the eighties and nineties thinking bigger is better and craving stability after being made fearful from disaster movies depicting a false fragile nature of the "box on stilts" as these houses were nicknamed. Such a movie was *Lethal Weapon*, whose main character played by Mel Gibson pulled down one of these iconic Hollywood Hills houses by pulling out one of the supports struts with a rope tied to a truck. The second major type, basically a reaction to above, can be classified as the tower on the hill. Viewed from across the canyon as a four- to five-story pink or green colored box or portrayed as a Mediterranean castle albeit white. Unfortunately the lower floors are a mere illusion of space as the walls only function is to mask supports and unexcavated.

Being for lack of a better term Neo-Modern expressionists, we could

neither revive the simple Modernist box on seemingly anemic vertical supports of local cultural memory; nor mimic the square tower dropped onto the hill, even without historical imagery, since it has no association to the chosen site. Instead, for our clients the Morgans, we set out to combine the spatial exhilaration of a cantilever into space with the security of a structure firmly rooted to the ground. To achieve this hybrid we have as in other projects employed two distinct

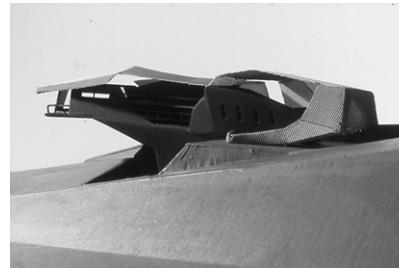


architectonic elements separate but connected to create a whole related by the theoretical philosophy and physical technique of the fold. The house is a mannerist structure derived by our sculptural approach utilizing the design language that we have been developing for the past eight years.

The project, a four thousand-square foot residence designed in a linear organization, is a duality of building expressions resulting in unique spatial progressions intersecting in plan. These two spatial conditions serve the separate coexisting functions of the house, i.e. public and private. We utilized this technique on a design for a music industry couple's home located on a slightly sloping secluded area far into Topanga Canyon named the Canyon House featured in *GA* #55. In the Morgan Residence our clients, a married couple with two daughters, want to run a talent agency out of their home and entertain there with dinner parties. The house's program is another example of live/work includes a large semi-separated work area, a large living room for public and private

use, a grand dining room and private spaces adjacent to bedrooms.

The project has simultaneous readings due to its dual architectural building systems. As in other of our projects alternate views produce different readings made possible through the opposing natures of the dominant compositional elements. One such project is our Kansai Kan Diet Library Competition entry which juxtaposes Modernist rational form and technology against topomor-



phic folded form and isolated nature. Polarized glass boxes (reading rooms) are suspended against a continuous five-story architectonic wall (circulation) of stone and moss sculpted to allow mass dominant landform readings from the main street view. An opposing reading when the building is viewed from the side at the parking entrance is spatially different with an orthogonal layering somewhat referential of open books standing upright on a table. The Morgan residence viewed from driving on the main road parallel to it appears as a silver cloud tethered to the hillside covering a glass room floating over the void. This reading is due to the stainless roof/wall skin wrapping around a monad body structure. Viewing the project from across the canyon the house's form that is anchored to the earth seemingly grows out of the strata producing a topomorphic reading. The monolith is clad in stone and stucco the color of the existing stone of the canyon walls to enhance the connection to site. Furthermore, the house viewed from the opposing direction possess an anthropomorphic reading hinting of reptilian stillness, i.e. movement. This

referential attribute is common to our expressionistic design language which creates an architecture of movement. The complex's form is tied to the site through trace relatable recollection due to its body geometry relating to the local animal life of 5-inch lizards seen daily in the area recorded unconsciously by the local inhabitants.

Programmatic elements are contained within the monolith (which has a blank non-developable surface) spaces



carved out of the mass. Other program is housed within the occupiable voids of the tented forms resulting from the metal plane acting as roof and walls folding in upon itself. The interstitial space formed by the solid figure of the house and folded plane of the metal roof/wall allows for programmed and unprogrammed spaces existing within the spatial residue as both interior and exterior spaces. [In the Hillside House-*GA* #52, interstitial space was formed by the placement of the FigureForms of the house against the articulated site and retaining walls producing a series of exterior zones; terraces, courtyards, a pool and gardens.

The Morgan residence is a house on a hill in Los Angeles with multiple readings due to a duality of form simultaneously understood as one object while retaining a separability of parts. Moreover, it is an integral part of an ongoing exploration employing the method and mindset of *The Fold* to examine the concepts of space and form making altered by program and site i.e. location on a macro and micro level with conscious and subconscious criteria.