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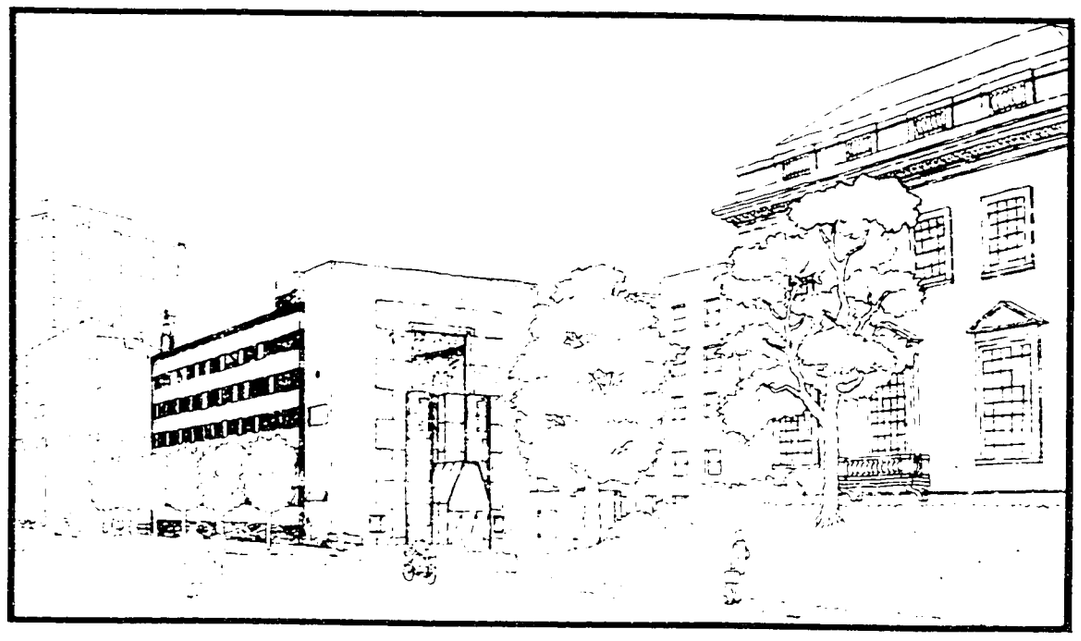

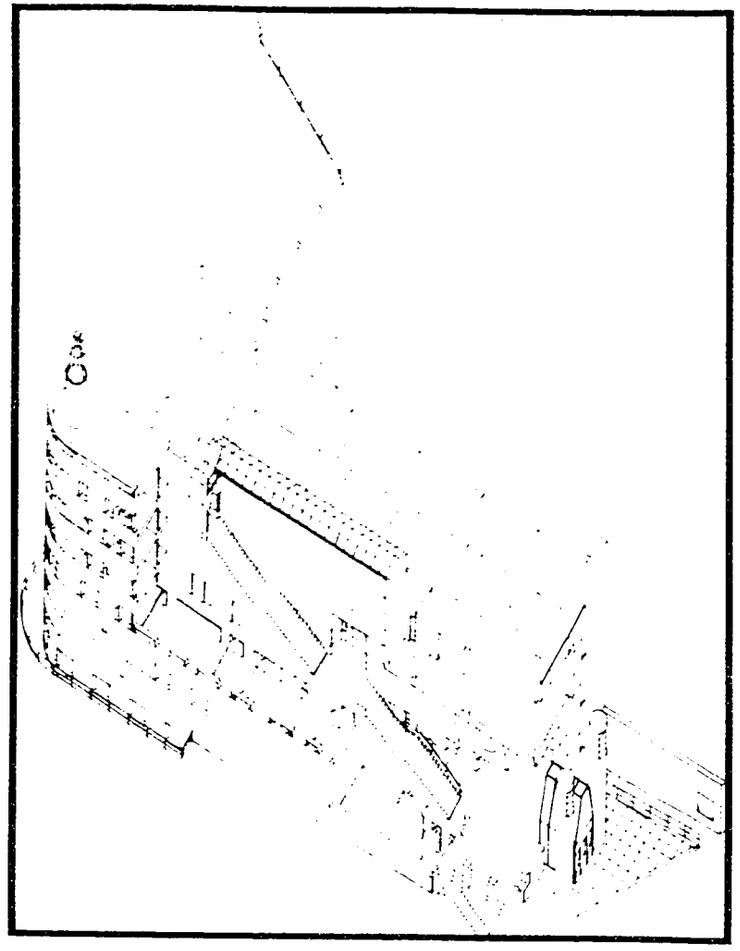

ARCHITECTURE VIEW

ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

A Style Crystallized in the New Fogg Design

The creative processes in architecture have less to do with the muses of inspiration than with the painstaking resolution of site, program, structure and plan. That procedure can be understood fairly easily; what is less clear are the esthetic and cultural impulses that account for those very personal decisions that give the solution its specific shape and style.

For anyone interested in both aspects of the process, two small but important exhibitions on view this month have been particularly illuminating. The New York showing of the drawings for Le Corbusier's Church at Firminy supplied remarkable insights into the evolution of a work of architecture from the accommodation of physical and programmatic requirements to the expression of the deepest convictions about art and space. Equally revealing is the exhibition of James Stirling's drawings for the expansion of Harvard's Fogg Museum, on view at the Fogg through June 7.

The Fogg Museum expansion is the architectural event of the 1980's, which parallels Le Corbusier's Carpenter Hall as the architectural event of the 1960's. A great, gray concrete presence that bursts from its site near the Fogg with monumental exhuberance, the Carpenter Center represented the arrival on American, or Harvard, soil of the work of one of the great architectural talents of the 20th century.

There are those who see the British architect, James Stirling, as a member of that same exalted company. Now 55, and the recipient of this year's $100,000 Pritzker Prize for outstanding architectural achievement, his firm of James Stirling, Michael Wilford & Associates has three commissions under way in this country — an addition to the School of Architecture at Rice University, a chemistry building for Columbia University, and the Fogg, which is being carried out with Perry, Dean, Stahl & Rogers of Boston. Two other projects are nearing completion in Germany.

Stirling has not been a prolific builder, but structures like the Engineering School at Leicester College and the History Faculty Building at Cambridge, in England, are already viewed as landmarks that have had notable international repercussions. Some of this earlier work is as remarkable for the functional flaws of its experimental structure as for its much-copied stylistic trademarks. A high priest of High Tech in the 1950's and 60's, Stirling has moved on to explore historical and classical sources in a radically personal way that would set academicians spinning in their Beaux Arts tombs. With his switch from less-than-tried-and-true technology to more traditional methods and materials in recent years, the buildings seem to be holding together much better.

Today's innovators are a more numerous and diversified group than they were in the High Modern period; introspective rather than heroic and universal in their ambitions, they are moving closer to a human scale and context. The new work is not only literary and eclectic, it is often obscure

Exterior and interior design drawings of James Stirling's new expansion of the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, Mass.— "emphasizing myth and monumentality"

and puzzling in its use of symbols and historical references. It favors image, style and language over social and structural concerns. Nothing could be more instructive about these changes in architectural theory and practice than the two Harvard buildings. When the Fogg is completed, the dissertations will flower.

With hindsight, it becomes obvious that this has been a steady, ongoing, evolutionary transformation. It is also evident that the changes have crystallized into a new architectural style. Call it an attack, or merely an advance, but what is on the line now is the kind of modernism in which an abstract concept of geometric beauty was reduced to its simplest visual and structural terms, carefully detached from the traditions and restrictions of the past. It was an architecture that made a bold, revolutionary statement about art, technology and the perfectability of the world. We have become a sadder and wiser society. But even the miscalculations of modernism are impressive.

The fact is that life and art tend to be messy and lacking in moral consistency. This is a truism that turns out to have certain architectural virtues, as Robert Venturi has reminded us, since the mess is a rich accumulation of cultural acts and accidents. The espousal of messiness, under the names of inclusiveness and complexity, has followed. But what has also followed is that the architect still creates order, by the very process that organizes and resolves the problem and its parts. Show me ad hoc architecture by an architect and I will show you relationships that may be subliminal or subversive, but they are there. Or it is not architecture — but that is a serious matter for another time.

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James Stirling has dealt in a very high kind of order and organization in the design of the Fogg; this is a dense, tight plan on a small, restricted site that brilliantly solves administrative and gallery needs. The building is remarkable for the creative virtuosity with which its functions are accommodated while suggesting a monumentality that belies actual dimensions. Stirling was lucky to have as a client the director of the Fogg, Seymour Slive, who understood this achievement immediately. Professors John Coolidge and Neil Levine, who arranged the show of drawings that trace the evolution of the project, complete a formidable triumvirate of sympathetic experts.

But if there is functional clarity here, there is also a great deal of esthetic complexity. Stirling's current preoccupation is with oddly scaled and strangely evocative elements of archaic and classical periods, with fragmentary historical references wrought large and mysterious; he displays an attachment to the tomb and the crypt and the monuments of the distant past. But he has not lost his infatuation with the trappings of technology. In fact, he has put the two together for an extraordinary classical-technological eclecticism that creates a startling imagery. The classical elements are deliberately distorted and stripped of their

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