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Sheila O'Donnell, A scuola da Jim, 2023

ITA

➔ Ho lavorato per Stirling e Wilford nel 1980 e nel 1981 e ho ricordi molto belli di quel periodo. Quando eravamo studenti, per me e per i miei colleghi di allora Jim Stirling era una figura di riferimento, un eroe. I suoi disegni e i suoi edifici erano impressi nella nostra mente, soprattutto i tre Red Buildings. Il legame con Stirling e Wilford, però, era iniziato già prima del mio impiego ufficiale. Il mio partner John Tuomey aveva lavorato lì dal 1976 al 1980: all'epoca l'ufficio contava solo cinque dipendenti così di tanto in tanto venivo chiamata – insieme ad altri di Colquhoun & Miller o del Royal College of Art – per “riempire lo studio” quando venivano in visita clienti importanti o potenziali committenti. Ci sedevamo ai tavoli con i disegni dei progetti in corso, matite e squadre a portata di mano, e fingevamo di essere molto occupati, sperando che i visitatori non ci facessero domande difficili sui lavori che avevamo davanti. Jim temeva che i clienti di Stoccarda pensassero che lo studio non fosse all'altezza dell'incarico.

Nel periodo in cui ho lavorato lì, l'ufficio si trovava ancora al piano terra e nel seminterrato un po' malandato del 75 di Gloucester Place, proprio sotto l'ambulatorio di un dentista. All'epoca il disegno al computer non era ancora entrato nella pratica lavorativa di Jim: si procedeva esclusivamente con correzioni scritte a mano e sovrapposizioni di lucidi sulle tavole eliografiche. Revisioni e modifiche continue. Lo studio era ancora piuttosto piccolo, e tutti erano al corrente di cosa accadeva nei vari progetti in corso. Tutti partecipavano alla preparazione dei disegni per i concorsi. Quelle incredibili assonometrie a inchiostro appese alle pareti e i modelli sospesi al soffitto erano una fonte costante di ispirazione per tutti noi. Durante il mio periodo lì, tra i collaboratori c'erano anche i fratelli Schaad, Crispin Osborne, John Tuomey, Werner Kreis, John Cannon e Russell Bevington.

Tutti noi sentivamo di lavorare per Jim, poiché ogni questione progettuale veniva discussa con lui. Michael aveva un ruolo più gestionale. Di certo non si occupava mai della colorazione. Jim sedeva nel suo ufficio al piano terra e correggeva le stampe con la sua celebre biro rossa, oppure colorava i prospetti e le proiezioni assonometriche. Man mano che si avvicinavano le scadenze passava sempre

creativity house – a surprisingly ideal combination for her use of. The architect's intention was – she was not here from her garden either, you must design – but finally he was forced into the modern because modernism and then modern – the very most modernism possible. They reacted at – if we followed your advice, they would have followed along the side – he was looking up by British postmodernism, conventional taste and style.

They “killed” him at least twice at the beginning of his career with Le Corbusier, and then with another one of his late modern buildings, the Riverside House. For this scheme I witnessed Prince Charles checking him at the grand Mansion House dinner of 1981, in front of the architectural and City establishment, a humiliating and insensitive thing to do it. Like the Prince, you are trying to win over architects to your vision for Britain. One of the things Jim said to me, was – if I was the competition for the House of Commons House in Los Angeles which Frank Gehry ultimately won, I will migrate.

Not getting the commission for Prudery, House One in the City, and in the center of all that architecture – was it Mary Whitworth by his great professor – was his wrong turn up until he moved down right opposite the Mansion House. When someone comes to visit about this, the visitor will be worthy of Jonathan Swift or Evelyn Waugh. For Prince Charles again checked the new Wilford scheme, for looking like a “little window” but he was the father of the British of the Public Inquiry. The scheme is a great book example of that Modernism construction, but may look like an art house window from a Royal building.

Stirling moved suddenly for Prudery 1 Prudery, especially in the competition stage, was right after another, intending to make it a negative performance, a house in the British, or Stirling “the movement” as John Reynolds called his difficult architecture about at showing the British how to do the right thing. Jim is effectively saying – after 50 years of modernism I am getting over, by producing a superb “system building” in my late Post Modern, striped style – Of course, he liked some of these striped fabric, which all did apply, and did enjoy working up his office – even sympathetic over the way.

In 1980, Stirling suddenly said (paraphrasing the Wolf by the way – I have never been and I am not now a member of the postmodern party) – And Jim said more or less the same thing to me which I quoted on the back of Post Modern (Olivier, 1980). Like Corbusier Wars, Jim and Stirling – would never join a club that would have been – They were both attacked by their followers – that is why they did not like the label.

He denied that he was a postmodernist. I attacked the winner of the label a lot myself, and I can see that when Stirling produces his allegiance to the modern tradition, is a sense he is going back to something that he has in his imagination about Modernism, which is important to him.

There is no question that Jim has a personality with the Postmodernism, he is the father of the move.

most, the Postmodern, and you cannot write history 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020. That is a big move for Postmodernism, which usually does not get the right attention. By then Jim is part of a world movement, of “big one.” There is a sense, as always, that the style is commercialized within ten years and it is a catastrophe. In the arts and architecture, every movement since 1980 has been corrupted, because successful it is.

Stirling's influence is an all too human frailty. This is also true of architects, as part of movements, who refuse to admit their influence, because it is watered down and vulgarized while it should be accepted with a certain amount of grace.

Of course by the time Jim was doing, Pop Art was happening, and he was on the edge of the movement. And he also realized that reality, for instance Princess Diana, could be a negative occasion. It had become completely conventional to wear a tie and a suit and a jacket, and a jacket and a tie. This post modern British – calling was modern since the 1970s, since Robert Rauschenberg's art and the Independent art Group started it all which Jim used to offend. Nothing was there.

With the demolition of Prudery 1 in 1975, you can say Postmodernism starts in architecture and you could say it does finish with Prudery in 1980. That period really opens as a wonderful work with Timothy's thoughts of 1980, and Jim's building Prudery 1, for me, the greatest early building of Postmodernism and in Britain that stage. In Prudery there is a struggle between Stirling and Prudery. The struggle, the feeling for the look and the form, the nature of the post and the future. Jim, the acknowledging of time is extremely important in Jim's work and he understands it. But, just as Timothy has understood the quality of time in his book *The House of the Future* – and Jim was architecture to explain it.

Stirling
Prudery 1, 1975-1980
London, UK

più tempo seduto in mezzo a noi nello studio con la sua biro e le matite. Nonostante l'alto livello di perizia grafica dei collaboratori, soltanto Jim era autorizzato a occuparsi della colorazione. In realtà c'è stata un'unica occasione memorabile –lui era gravemente malato di peritonite e avevamo una scadenza importante– in cui mi è stato permesso di colorare la pietra e i rivestimenti, seguendo scrupolosamente il metodo che lui aveva usato per i disegni precedenti. Ma non il cielo... il cielo mai: quello era il suo regno.

In un'altra occasione, durante la preparazione del progetto per la scuola di musica di Stoccarda, Jim si accorse che ero in grado di disegnare dei puntini a inchiostro con un pennino da 0,13, graduandone l'intensità per sottolineare le curve sui prospetti. Le tavole tornavano dal suo ufficio con una sola secca istruzione: "Sheila, puntini".

Quel coinvolgimento così diretto con la natura profonda dei disegni era una caratteristica fondamentale del suo lavoro; ha insegnato a tutti noi che un architetto deve saper padroneggiare ogni singolo aspetto della propria attività e seguirlo fino alla fine. È una lezione che ancora oggi applico nella mia pratica professionale.

Quando io e John Tuomey abbiamo aperto il nostro studio nel 1989, abbiamo basato il nostro metodo lavorativo su ciò che avevamo imparato da Stirling; l'unica grande differenza era la realizzazione dei modelli –assenti nello studio Stirling Wilford– che divennero parte integrante del nostro iter progettuale. Per il resto, il nostro modo di lavorare è ancora molto simile: schizzi iniziali a matita, sovrapposizioni multiple di lucidi, elaborazione di numerose opzioni e continue revisioni, prima di giungere alla definizione di un progetto. Poi, disegni tecnici d'insieme in scala 1:200.

E poi quelli a 1:50.

L'intera costruzione veniva sempre disegnata in scala 1:50 sia in pianta che in sezione. Questi erano i disegni cruciali. A 1:50 si riusciva a mostrare tutto: le linee di impostazione, la struttura, le finiture, gli impianti e al tempo stesso si poteva ancora osservare la configurazione spaziale dell'intero edificio, sia in pianta sia in sezione.

I disegni venivano sempre realizzati a matita su carta da lucido, con scritte a inchiostro eseguite con il normografo. Ed è stato esattamente questo il metodo che abbiamo portato avanti da O'Donnell + Tuomey, con il normografo a inchiostro e tutto il resto.

Quei disegni erano perfetti per lavorare con i consulenti: non nascondevano nulla e i tecnici degli impianti potevano aggiungere direttamente i percorsi delle canalizzazioni sulle piante e sulle sezioni. Abbiamo interrotto questa pratica, con riluttanza, soltanto quando il disegno computerizzato ha fatto il suo ingresso nel nostro mondo.

Di recente ho notato che finalmente la tecnologia informatica ha quasi raggiunto il livello dei nostri disegni a matita in scala 1:50. Oggi progettiamo tutto usando il BIM (Building Information Modeling) ma mi rendo conto che all'epoca avevamo già il nostro sistema di rilevamento dei conflitti: si chiamava piani e sezioni in scala 1:50!

Oltre alle proposte per i concorsi ho lavorato principalmente allo sviluppo progettuale della Clore Gallery alla Tate. Ho trascorso molti mesi sui disegni in scala 1:50 e, prima ancora, sullo sviluppo dei prospetti.

Lavorare su quei prospetti è stata un'esperienza istruttiva, stimolante e talvolta frustrante. Jim voleva che il suo team impostasse e disegnasse facciate ordinate e ben equilibrate, in sintonia con gli spazi interni e con il sito. Poi le prendeva e le stravolgeva, utilizzando una tecnica simile al collage; tagliava e incollava, giustapponendo elementi in un modo apparentemente casuale che spesso offendeva il team. Aveva un talento speciale nell'individuare una composizione troppo ordinata o un velato riferimento al primo Le Corbusier. Al suo occhio critico non sfuggiva nulla, lo scovava senz'altro. Ma in questo modo ci dava anche una lezione di collaborazione e lavoro di squadra. Non avrebbe mai lavorato a partire da prospetti eseguiti in maniera grossolana. Credo che in realtà gli piacessero i riferimenti a Corbu e i tentativi di perseguire il rigore razionale; li apprezzava, forse lo hanno anche ispirato.

Ho l'impressione che questo tira e molla sia continuato anche quando l'ufficio è cresciuto e si è trasferito a Fitzroy Square, e quando il disegno al computer è diventato la norma.

La facciata principale [della Clore Gallery] è stata concepita come il fronte di un giardino: un enorme traliccio in pietra di Portland, tranquillo e simmetrico, affacciato su un cortile con una vasca di ninfee rettangolare, ora purtroppo lastricata. L'ispirazione veniva da una cartolina che tenevo sulla scrivania, con il giardino all'italiana di Harold Peto sull'isola di Garinish, nella contea di Kerry. Jim ne era rimasto affascinato, aveva preso la cartolina ed era tornato poco dopo con il progetto del piazzale d'ingresso, fedelmente ispirato a Garinish. Era una "gazza ladra" fenomenale.

Dopo aver lasciato lo studio sono tornata in Irlanda, ma John e io siamo rimasti in contatto con Jim, che seguiva con interesse la nostra carriera. Qualche volta è venuto a Dublino, ha visitato e ammirato il primo edificio di John in città, progettato quando era all'Ufficio dei lavori pubblici. Abbiamo trascorso una giornata indimenticabile nel castello di Lutyens sull'isola di Lambay. Jim ne rimase talmente affascinato che fu difficile trascinarlo via per fargli prendere il battello di ritorno a Dublino e non perdere il volo per Washington, dove avrebbe ricevuto il Pritzker Prize.

Per noi era una specie di "zio architetto", un mentore, un amico, una figura di famiglia. Pensavamo che sarebbe stato sempre con noi.

Quando abbiamo avuto l'opportunità di partecipare al concorso per la Liverpool School of Architecture, la sua alma mater, abbiamo progettato un edificio che per molti versi è un omaggio a Jim Stirling. Abbiamo lavorato con molto impegno alla nostra proposta, creando disegni carichi di passione e carattere in una sorta di dialogo postumo con il nostro grande maestro. Ci piace pensare che parte di quello che abbiamo imparato da lui viva ancora nella nostra pratica quotidiana dell'architettura.

ENG

➡ I worked for Stirling and Wilford in 1980 and 1981 and I have very fond memories of my time in the office. Jim Stirling was a hero to me and my contemporaries as students. His drawings and buildings were printed in our minds, especially the three Red Buildings.

But my connection with Stirling and Wilford started before then; my partner John Tuomey worked there from 1976 to 1980. There were only five employees so I was called on from time to time –along with others from Colquhoun and Miller or the Royal College of Art– to "pack the office" when important clients or potential clients were visiting. We would sit with drawings of live projects on our boards, pencil and set square to hand, looking very busy and hoping that the visitors wouldn't ask us a difficult question about the project in front of us. Jim was worried that the Stuttgart clients would think the office wasn't up to the job.

In my time there, the office was still in the slightly shabby ground floor and basement of no. 75 Gloucester Place, under a dentist's surgery. Computer drawing had definitely not entered Jim's work practice: it was all about mark-ups and overlays on dyeline prints. Iterations and reiterations. It was still a pretty small office with everyone knowing what was happening on all projects, with everyone joining in competition draw-ups. Those amazing ink axonometrics on the walls and the models hanging from the ceiling were a constant inspiration to everyone. The collaborators in my time included the Schaad brothers, Crispin Osborne, John Tuomey, Werner Kreis, John Cannon and Russell Bevington.

We all felt that we were working for Jim, because all design issues were discussed with him. Michael's role was more managerial. He certainly never did the colouring-in. Jim would sit in his office on the ground floor marking-up prints with his famous red biro, or colouring-in elevations and axonometric projections. And as the deadlines approached he would spend more time sitting among us in the studio with his biro and pencils. Despite the sophisticated level of graphic finesse among the employees, no-one but Jim was allowed to do the colouring-in. Though there *was* one historic moment – he was very ill with peritonitis, and we had a big deadline – when I was allowed to colour the stone and render, following closely the method he had used on previous drawings. But not the sky... never the sky: that was his territory. There was another occasion on the draw-up for the Stuttgart music school when he realised that I could draw ink dots in a 0.13 pen, graded in intensity to show the curves on the elevations. The dyelines came down from his office with the curt instruction: "Sheila dots."

I think that that close engagement –with the very stuff of the drawings that the office produced– was an essential aspect of his work; it taught us all that an architect must own every aspect of his or her work and stick with it to the very end. That's a lesson I carry with me in how I make my own work. When John and I started our practice in 1989 we based our studio process on what we had learned in Stirling's, the only big difference being model-making, which

is an integral part of our design process but wasn't used as a design tool in Stirling Wilford. Otherwise our way of working is very similar: making pencil sketch drawings, multiple overlays, drawing up many options and iterations before a project is fixed, then general arrangement drawings at 1:200.

And then the 1:50s. The whole building was always drawn at 1:50 in plan and section. These were the critical drawings. At 1:50 you could show everything: setting out lines, structure, finishes, services and you could still look at the spatial configuration of the whole building in plan and section. It was always drawn in pencil on tracing paper, with ink stencilled lettering – that was the exact process we carried forward into O'Donnell+ Tuomey, ink stencilling and all. They were fantastic drawings for working with consultants –nothing could be hidden– you could get the M+E people to add the actual duct runs onto the plans and sections. We only, and reluctantly, stopped this practice when computer drawing entered our world. It occurred to me recently that computer technology has, finally, *almost* caught up with the pencil 1:50s. Now that we're modelling everything in BIM I realise that back in the day we had our own form of clash-detection: it was called 1:50 plans and sections!

Apart from competitions I worked mainly on the design development of the Clore Gallery at the Tate. I spent many months on the 1:50s and, before that, the development of the elevations. Working on these elevations was an educational, exciting and sometimes frustrating experience. He needed his team to set up and draw orderly and balanced façades that responded to the rooms inside and to the site. Then he took them and disrupted them, using a kind of collage technique; cutting and pasting, juxtaposing elements in an apparently random way which often offended the team. He was eagle-eyed at spotting an overly orderly composition, or a hidden reference to early Corb. It would not survive Jim's scrutiny; he would wrinkle it out. But this was a lesson in collaboration and team-work too. He would not have been happy with unrefined elevations as a starting point for his working over. I think he liked the Corb references and attempts at rational rigour; he appreciated them, maybe they even inspired him. I get the sense that that push and pull continued when the office got bigger and moved to Fitzroy Square, and when computer drawing became the norm.

The main façade was seen as a garden front; an oversize trellis in Portland stone, calm and symmetrical facing onto a courtyard with a rectangular lily pond, now sadly filled in. The inspiration for this was a postcard I had over my desk, of the Italian garden by Harold Peto on Garinish island in Co Kerry. Jim loved it and borrowed the card from me, and came back later that day with the forecourt garden design closely based on Garinish. He was a great magpie.

After I left the office and moved back to Ireland, John and I kept in touch with Jim. He followed our career with interest. He came to Dublin a few times, visiting and admiring John's first building in Dublin, designed while in the Office of Public Works. We

had a particularly memorable day out at Lutyens' Lambay Island. Jim was so entranced by it that it was hard to drag him away to catch the boat back to Dublin and his flight to Washington to receive the Pritzker Prize. We thought of him as an architectural uncle. A mentor, a friend, family. We thought he would always be there.

When we got the opportunity to participate in the competition for Liverpool School of Architecture, his alma mater, we designed a building which in many ways is a homage to Jim Stirling. We worked very hard on our competition entry, making drawings with intensity and character in a posthumous conversation with Big Jim. We like to think that we carry some of what we learned from the great man into our daily practice of architecture.

da / from
S. O'Donnell, testo della conferenza tenuta all'inaugurazione della mostra *Stirling, Wilford & Associates, 1980-2000*, Irish Architectural Archive, Dublino, 1° giugno 2023.

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