

Classical Architecture is no Saviour

A Conversation with Quinlan Terry

It exists everywhere in the modern world: the conflict between progressive and conservative, between the shock of the new and the continuity of tradition. But nowhere, and certainly not within architecture, is this struggle fought so vehemently as in England, where, on the Modernist as well as on the traditional front, the form of architecture is taken as a manifesto of an attitude to life, one that is either vital or not. The traditionalists, in this case the Classicist's, gained unexpected and overwhelming support from Prince Charles. The Prince of Wales's *Vision of Britain: A Personal View of Architecture* (1989), a vision of a pacified, corporate Britain deserving once again of the adjective 'great', touched a sensitive string. For in England, a land of extremes – its combination of modernist marching forward, economic decay, isolationism and unassailable traditions –, there are many who have lived through the *juggernaut* of modernisation. Nowhere has industrialisation taken place faster and more thoroughly than here, but nowhere else arose such a strong tradition of resistance as well. It was here that the *Luddites*, the destroyers of machines, the personification of the dialectic of the Enlightenment, originated. 'God made the country, man made the town', wrote the poet Cowper in the eighteenth century, thereby setting the tone for a fundamental dividing line through the culture which is also a division between two characters: of the man who respects the world as it is, and of the man who only endures the world if it is altered. The one aims at preserving the things of value that are already present, the other concentrates on the things of value that still have to be made real.

Quinlan Terry is clear-cut in his architecture and in his words; since the fetishisation of the new our civilisation has gone downhill. There is no place for noncommittal irony in his work, no time for frivolity. A rare exception in the contemporary pluralistic spectrum, Terry makes pronouncements of high moral calibre. What is especially noticeable is that the scorn of colleagues doesn't bother him at all; he just perseveres indefatigably with his investigation into the spiritual energy of a 'personal' Classicism. An ability to discriminate, quite unknown in modern terms, is naturally part of this morality. Anyone who waves the flag for God is obliged to damn diabolical modernity. And Terry does just that. What is very unusual is that he also remains faithful to his vision in the organisation of his practice. No absenteeism, no computer screens and rattling printers constantly spewing out the master's sketches which are then elaborated on by well-trained, highly educated architects. In the small office in rural Dedham there are only a few assistants who work according to the traditional principles of common sense, and under the maestro's continual direction.

If we examine the discussion of his work more closely, then it appears that one of the major reproaches levelled against Terry consists in the supposed static nature of Classicism which is seen as being insufficiently flexible for contemporary (commercial) programmes, and certainly not expressive enough of the fragmentary and nomadic qualities of contemporary culture. Besides an imperturbable belief in the futility of such *Zeitgeist* ideas, Terry counters with a flexible Classicism, as exemplified by the Richmond Riverside commercial complex, where it appears possible to combine the solidity of a traditional wall with the endlessly extendible space of the commercial office landscape. Classicism, whatever that may be, can dress up the anonymity of money apparently without any problems. Separating function and façade in such a way without any scruples, Quinlan Terry shows himself to be an architect bent on turning back the maelstrom of modernity with universal and timeless values. It is a matter of applying the eternal to the scale of the historical, however transitory that may appear to be. Terry seems to consider that only architecture is able to perform this noble work. But what would happen if he were to test his moral reductionism against the amorality of large-scale urban development and the periphery, where is it difficult to maintain the objective criterion of theological purity?

You are one of the most controversial architects in England. You have often clashed with colleagues on your opinions and buildings. Could you describe a concrete situation in which the reason for this confrontation becomes very clear?

Well, let's talk about competitions and the control over taste by the architectural establishment. A competition is only as good as the assessors. If the assessors are chosen by vested interests, you get Modernist architecture; so they make sure that Modernism continues and you will never break that influence. It's time to escape from that system. The architectural establishment is similar to the former communist establishment in Russia: it looks after itself. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries marvellous cities were built



Cottage, Frog Meadow, Dedham, 1979



Quinlan Terry with bishop of Brentwood



Brentwood Cathedral, 1991



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without having qualified architects. There was no planning authority. All there was was a good system of law and order; people worked their way up into an office, they didn't start by winning a competition. By the time they were forty-five they would be recognised and receive major commissions, if they had any talent. Nowadays the system is so doctrinaire that it's very hard for anyone with talent to survive. By the time students have been brainwashed for five years in an architectural school, by the time they have gone in for competitions and found out that all the assessors are institutional partymen, by the time they have gone in for various awards and found out that the gold medals are only given to the good boys, they will have given up the pursuit of excellence. Anyone who dares to criticise the system is persecuted. But their absolute control since the war is beginning to crack, in places. Critical books have been written and people have even said that they hate architects. That's at least something. When you are doing something which is classical and traditional and you say that what architecture has been doing for the last fifty years has been a complete waste of time, they will do everything to stop you.

When a poll was taken on favourite buildings, respondents reacted favourably to your Richmond scheme.

Does this mean democracy, and will it result in democratic architecture?

I do believe that architecture reflects the society and the age. There's something about St Paul's in London which says 'England is a great country, the Protestants are as good as Roman Catholics, we stand for good values, honest living and beauty'. Of course you can envelope a building with an idea which wasn't intended. St Paul's was bombed but not destroyed in the Second World War, so everybody felt that was what they fought for. Nevertheless there is no doubt that architecture, like art, does reflect. Modern art in all its pluralism reflects a pluralist society that has no real principles, apart from a belief in progress. It seems it has something to do with the theory of evolution, which has taken away the old belief that we are created by God; that we come from some primeval slime and evolved by chance. So we have no purpose in the world, and we came to pass by accident. This differs totally from the view I take: an orderly world which was created in a certain way, mankind was put upon the earth with a certain task to do, and life will only come to an end when the Lord chooses to return. It is a very different conception of life, and somehow or other I hope my architecture expresses that. In that sense it is a political art and, if people support it, that must be a sign of the perseverance of a moral consciousness which enhances the quality of democracy.

If art reflects the state of affairs in society, do you believe then that if you could improve architecture you could improve society?

I think that is too simple. Some very good buildings were built during the era of decadence in the Roman Empire. You might say that in comparison with the age of Augustus the buildings were decadent in the Constantinian era. But the Arch of Constantine is a very great building; even Raphael copied it. I don't honestly think you can improve society by improving architecture. It is the other way round. If there is anything that really will improve society, it is in the end the spiritual reawakening of the Christian faith. Not emotional excitement of the charismatic sort, but a genuine revival on the scale of the Reformation in the sixteenth

century. In Holland the whole country was changed by Calvinistic teaching. And though some would denigrate it, crime, adultery, homosexuality, all that sort of thing was reduced. The country was cleaned up; so was this country. When this belief really takes root again in a country, then all sorts of good things result. People will not work just for money, but they will work because they like to work. They work because they are working, *as unto Christ*. Of course they are working for money as well. But their honesty is watched by their conscience. If you have people, self-motivated to live clean and honest lives, you are bound to get a country which is powerful and strong. And then, little by little, architecture will improve, art will improve. I think most of these blessings will come from a new Reformation.

How can we escape from the repressive order you have described, other than to wait for a new Kingdom of God or hope that one day everything will be all right. Are there some hints we can already discover? Are there some signs from which you can derive hope?

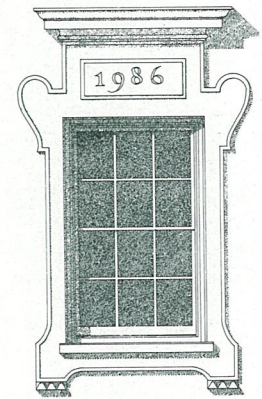
I don't see many encouraging signs at the present time. Of course there are some very great men alive, men who are very inspired even today. And in spite of all the awful things, there are opportunities to practice one's architecture and to enjoy doing it, although every time I build a building it seems to lead to a pitched battle. It's a fight against planning officers, the architectural establishment, the media. Not against my client; my client just wants a beautiful library, cathedral or a house; they can see things like the ordinary man. But once I start to do a design, particularly if it is in a public place, all the party members scream their heads off and say this mustn't be allowed, it's shocking, it's backward-looking, it's derivative, it's turning its back on the present; it upsets all their expectations of how the world should be developed. They do what they can to stop it. What I do is, I suppose, an act of defiance against this age of permissiveness where anything can be built, except, for some illogical reason, what I design.

Well it's quite natural that a small section of the pluralist spectrum which challenges this permissiveness should be expelled; banned from the scene. So it's a compliment that you're not accepted as just one element along a spectrum. Because at least it seems to imply that you are taken seriously.

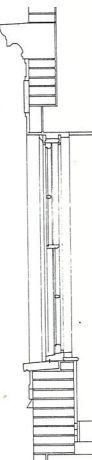
It's not a matter of taking me seriously, I would like to think that I'm a threat. They fear that if this sort of architecture is actually allowed to happen at the end of the twentieth century, it'll catch on and if it catches on people will then realise that you don't have to be a Modernist to build. Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor, Gibbs, all the great architects of the past, went to work for another architect as an apprentice. The official course is unnecessary. Architecture isn't an academic subject. It's something that you're born with, which can be trained under the old apprenticeship system. So the only way to improve architecture is to get back to the sort of condition in society which we had before these nineteenth-century institutions came along. Now if traditional architecture were to catch on in a big way, the whole architectural establishment would collapse because the public – that is the developers and the clients – would begin to realise that **good architects do not have to be Modernist union members.**

But this is one of the main lines of modernisation, the institutionalisation of the profession. You are suggesting a traditional situation in which isolated master-apprentice workshops offer a few designs to a few other people and this in a quite recognisable unit. But what the professionals want, or rather reflect, is the nationalisation or even internationalisation of commerce. So that's another reason why you are not accepted: it is not only the meaning of your designs but also your suggestion of how to reorganise the craft in an anti-commercial way.

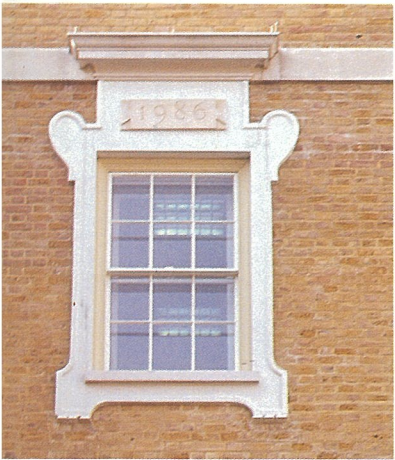
The professionals have replaced the craftsmen completely and so they never talk about beauty. Party men architects never say 'What I want is to make this building easy on the eye'. They want it to look twentieth century, or powerful or brutal. We don't respect that eye which we all have in us, which appreciates beauty. We don't talk about beauty because nowadays we don't see that carving, plasterwork and stonework is the way to express something we actually enjoy looking at. We have now invented all sorts of other Gods which come before it: it must be economical, it must be built on time, it must have lettable area which sells, it must fit into the marketplace, financial equation. But these are not the only things in real architecture. The important thing is that you erect a sound structure which is easy on the eye and which makes you feel good. For example the village Dedham where I live. You walk down the street and you think 'What a peaceful world'. None of the buildings was built by an architect; they were just ordinary builders, but they did



Richmond Riverside, second floor window



Richmond Riverside, second floor window over West Gate

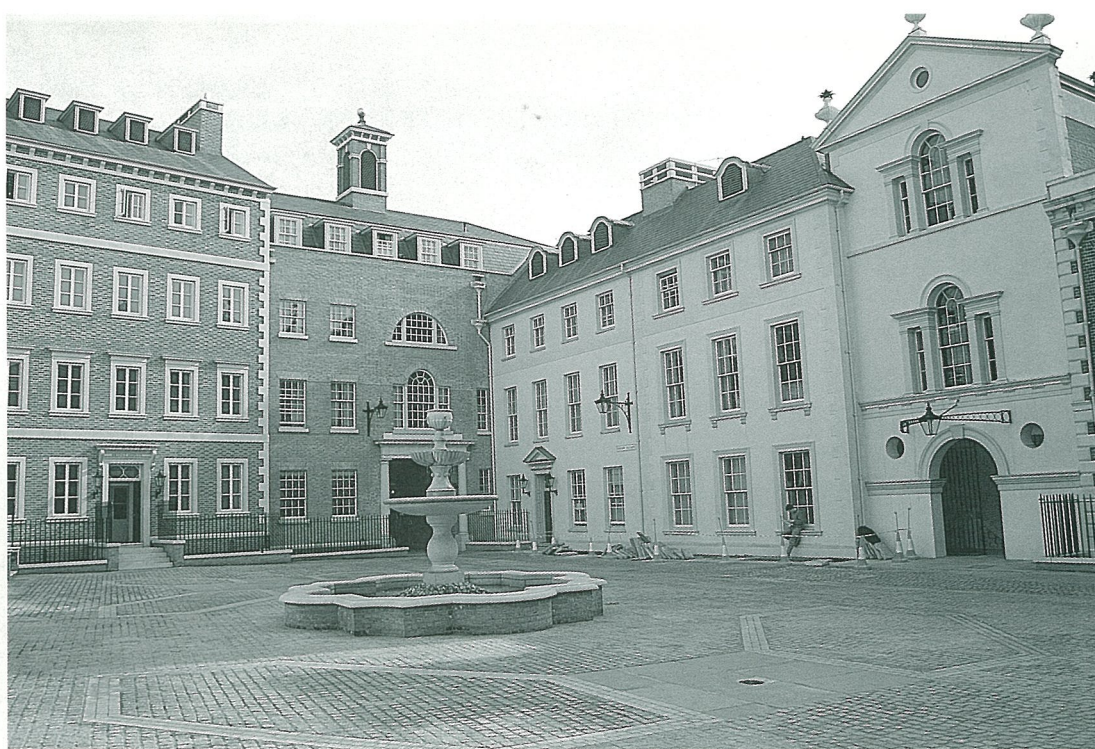


Richmond Riverside, office space



Richmond Riverside Development, 1986





Richmond Riverside Development, 1986

have an eye for what worked. I work with people in my office who have never been to an architectural school. They can look at a roof and say 'That roof doesn't fit well on a building'. They have that sort of natural appreciation of common sense in art which country people have and which can be properly developed in a right society. But if you put these people in the middle of the city, into the architectural schools, and then brainwash them for five consecutive years, they will come out and say whatever you tell them to say.

You think the way everybody expresses and appreciates beauty is context-bound?

I wouldn't quite say it's entirely context-bound, because a lot of people who have been brought up in a concrete jungle hate it and want to get out into something which is more pleasant. My late partner Raymond Erith was born and brought up in a particularly ugly part of suburbia and when he came out to East Anglia he just could not believe it could be so beautiful. So he wasn't that context-bound to the world in which he was born. There is a certain independence of what's really important in all of us, but the problem is that we are not able to define this independence independently. However, we are not going to get very far by trying to establish fundamental principles about life out of architecture. A building – however beautiful – is not going to help you in your search for the Truth, which is the first thing that you ought to be interested in. Otherwise you are just talking about society. But what is society without the person who made society? You have to follow the argument right to its logical conclusion. Why am I here? Who has put me into this world? Why do I live such a short space of time? Why do I suffer so much and then die? Architecture may move our emotions but it will never help us to answer the important questions about life. In that search, architecture is an irrelevance.

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So you will never believe in art or architecture as a legendary challenge to heaven, the genius and the hero as competitors to the gods? I don't only mean an anthropocentric architecture as such, but also the heroic architecture which denounces the old metaphysics of architecture, gravity, shelter, occupation, foundation, and the like.

Anyone who challenges God is bound to lose. The laws of gravity must be obeyed. Anyone who disobeys the laws of gravity falls down. He can appear to defy the laws of gravity, but he will never succeed.

Going through the history of architecture you perceive many examples of Promethean, if failed, challenges to the divine. Can't one even be inspired by these failures? It is not only success which inspires.

Yes, but inspire to do what?

To new Promethean acts.

In fact to insult God more?

Well, defy Him, at least. The insult is His projection.

Really! If that's the purpose of your life, it is a bit unequal, you, one little man, taking on the law of universe.

You don't think this legend, this myth of Prometheus, is of any value for Western thought?

Of course it has historical value, but it has no moral value. And it may be so that the whole drift of the Modern Movement is ultimately blasphemous. One of the greatest men I ever knew (a great preacher with a huge regular congregation of over 1,500 people) was very interested in architecture. I asked him 'what do

you think about architecture?', and he said 'I don't know anything about it, all I can say is that it is blasphemous.' He saw something about it that is defying God and blaspheming and insulting. He felt it was an attack on an ordered discipline, on a loyal civilised society which recognises that God is in control of our destiny. That is in a way how I think the older ages were trying to live, although they failed in many ways. Then there comes this revolution, Marx and Darwin and Nietzsche, and all those nineteenth-century philosophers who really turned the whole thing on its head. Architecture following that revolution is Promethean. ***The Modern Movement is Promethean in its concept, and in that sense it is blasphemous.***

Therefore you blame it. But it is not always that conscious. For example, the improvement of building techniques and the corresponding technology-push in modern times almost automatically led to flexibility and transparency. New systems of construction at the end of the nineteenth century suggested we could forget about the wall and use only columns. This was a revolution because the notion of the wall has always been a very strong mental concept, if we may believe the phenomenologists of Architecture. Now this concept has turned out to be obsolete.

I always like the walls to be thick, solid and load-bearing. If you have a load-bearing wall, you will get architecture without trying very hard because you have to put the windows in the right places and when you come to the top of the wall you will need a cornice to keep it dry. And if the cornice is to scale, it will need to project by so much. But you can't project a cornice if the wall is too thin; it will fall off. So either you have a lot of metal cramps holding it in place, which is a sham, or you build a wall thick and properly. If you have a solid wall, you have a perfect solution for elegant architecture. This is all you really need to know. We never talk about spiritual things during work, it just isn't in the repertoire of the people in my office. They talk about brickworks, sash-windows, roofs, slates, getting the building done on time. But these deeper things, you can leave them to the King of kings.

Maybe this is the third reason why you are isolated and not accepted; these thick walls represent an Epimethean world-view, as if you are saying you shouldn't steal the fire from the Gods. Wait, don't make everything transparent! Of course Prometheus always considered his brother a bore and a stumbling block.

Yes, but don't you think we have opened Pandora's box? Once the box is opened, we have nuclear energy, nuclear bombs, drugs, the technology to keep people alive as vegetables. We invented all this and now we think it would have been better if we hadn't. Certainly, I think the world would be a great deal better off without half the things we have invented in the last fifty years.

Probably we are now touching on the insolvable incommensurability between les Anciens and les Modernes. If you are an Ancien, the standards of the past are sacred and in a way you are paying daily tribute to the eternal values of Classicism. Is it these values which represent the durée in architecture for you?

Respect for the long term in architecture simply involves constructing a building to last. One of the great advantages of Classical architecture is that it produces buildings that endure for hundreds of years. The cathedral I have just built replaces a building that was built in 1973. The building only lasted seventeen or eighteen years. That cannot be of much use to the client. The man in the street wants a building to last so his great-grandson can live in it. Traditional architecture can do that, always has done it. But Modern architecture is like a car, the turnover time is too short. The materials in it are so unsuited to changes in weather, temperature and moisture that each year it's progressively nearer the end of its life. So a Modern building – quite apart from the philosophy behind it – will collapse in one generation, just because it's made of steel and concrete which, once the moisture gets to the steel reinforcement, will fail. Traditional architecture is built for hundreds of years, Modern architecture is built for decades. The developer gets a financial return for twenty years, after which it has paid for itself in rent. At Richmond the walls are thick, it has slate roofs, so there is little to go wrong. I admit that there are also concrete slabs with car parking underneath and as a modern construction I think that will be the first thing to go. But the actual buildings themselves are built on traditional architectural principles. That's what I am saying about *durée*.

It's quite remarkable that in the discussion about durée as one of the secret layers of architecture, people often refer to it in terms of anonymity. Usually it is more about the mass of urban texture than individual Classical architecture. It's about the imperceptible slow mutations in the urban fabric. The Classical way of building is very persistent and durable but also very charismatic in a way. It gives a place a name, stands out from this anonymous urban fabric in its self-confident built rhetoric. So as a Classical architect you put 'time' in the durée.



Thomas Gainsborough, Hon. Mrs. Graham, 1777

B. Sperry, Port Cergy, Paris, 1991



The Classical architect doesn't put time in a building consciously. It happens accidentally. When I design I think of the Romans, of Palladio or of all sorts of eighteenth-century precedents, but I don't really intend to make an eighteenth-century building. In fifty years time you will pass that building and it will look like 1990. You don't think 1990 can be expressed in Classical terms but it can, because the age in which a Classical building is built will never be confused with another age.

Why then are you so very keen on telling the public that Richmond's from 1986?

Because I want to emphasise it's nothing to be ashamed of. At the moment it may look like eighteenth century to some people. But I'm sure in one generation it won't look like that. Lord Burlington was copying Palladio as carefully as possible when he built Mereworth Castle, which he thought was really a pastiche of the Villa Rotonda. But Mereworth Castle is absolutely the hallmark of the English eighteenth century. There is nothing of the Veneto about it, nor the cinquecento. Palladio himself, in his *Quattro libri*, says about a number of buildings that these should look like Roman houses. But they do not look like Roman houses at all, it's the Veneto and the cinquecento. The age and the place goes into the building – particularly Classical building – whether the architect does it consciously or not. What the architect wants is one thing. What it appears to be is obviously different. On one building in Richmond I added a little bit of Venetian Gothic to break the monotony of the Classical. But now it begins to look Victorian. I don't know what it is, it's just part of the age we live in; we can't help but put our own age, our own character, our own nationality into what we do. So it's a contemporary work which will have the qualities of the age, whether we like it or not.

Compared to your work the National Gallery extension of Venturi and Scott Brown is more obviously designed today, though it has many Classical details and motives.

You are talking about Post-Modernism, which has all sorts of hang-ups. It comes after, whereas I'm just doing what architects already did long before Modernism. Post-Modernists are terribly worried about misleading the public; they are always talking about the dangers of falsifying history. They have so many *-isms* running around in their brains that they can't just rely on themselves to build a simple extension to the National Gallery in a sensible way. I think it's just irritating. They are also too worried about the architectural critics who are here today and gone tomorrow. What will remain in 200 years time is the building.

And the Classicism in your architecture escapes from this erosion and matches the true standard? Where is the limit beyond which you don't agree with specific solutions any more?

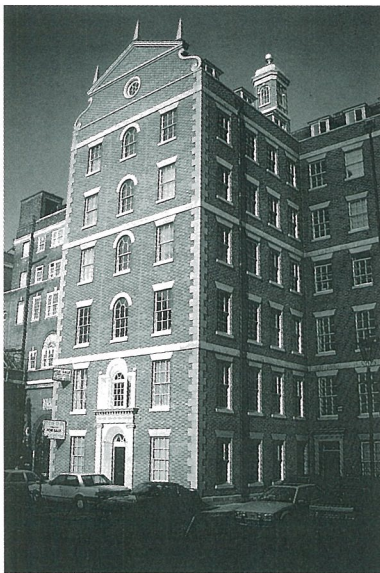
Classical architecture, properly handled, is a living thing.

Each single building is slightly different, and when you use Classical principles you have to make many judgements. The Doric columns for example won't always fit exactly as they do in Palladio's book. So you may have to reduce the columns. Coming up to the frieze one will have to arrange triglyphs and metopes to fit between the columns. Another problem. Then you want an order above it which is perhaps Ionic, with modillions in the cornice; these have to correspond mathematically with the triglyphs below. Actually, you will start a three-dimensional game of chess trying to combine the lower with the upper order and you can't get that to fit without the triglyphs not meeting. So you reduce or widen the column. After you have been working on the thing for hours, perhaps weeks, you have little by little made a whole lot of intellectual judgements in terms of material, of texture, of proportion, of architectural detail, which is your contribution to the Classical tradition. It's your game of chess. You have to know the gambits, you have to move out your castles and bishop and knights. That's what architecture is. If you are good at playing the game, you will give a good performance; if you are an amateur, it will be obvious to everybody. It isn't a pastiche, it's a living tradition; that's where the limit lies. There are a million answers to the problem and yours will be different to mine, and therefore they will always be interesting to look at because not only will yours show a country and a century but it will also show whether you are foolish or clever. We can't help being derivative or being born into a world where we have things in our mind which we work out in our practice. But we shouldn't make this insight an alibi for pastiche without paying tribute to the tradition from which pastiches are derived. I think we have established one thing during this conversation: that Modernism and Classicism are opposites. This is important, because now in England everybody tells you that this debate has gone on far too long and it's about time it stopped; that it's not really a debate at all, it's a question of two sides of the same coin. That Norman Foster or even Robert Venturi does a thing one way and Quinlan Terry does it the other way, and they are just showing us the depth of Classical architecture. They say it's all the same thing. I don't know if Norman Foster thinks that, but I certainly don't. ***The Modernists use the word Classical to make themselves more respectable!***

But don't they say that the Classical is in the measures and not in the orders?

Yes, they say that classicism is clean lines, grain, texture, careful thought, but they eschew ornament and mouldings and the orders. Having raised a fierce debate, they now say that it has gone on too long, and we should just stop this argument because it is not helpful; it is like a schism in the church, and we mustn't have the archbishops fight against each other. With tremendous effort a great blanket is put on top of all architectural debate. They say 'We like Quinlan Terry as long as he likes Foster', and when I say 'I'm sorry I don't see the point of it' they say 'shhh, it has been for too long'. In fact the Modern establishment is going to win. The points that have been raised have been swept under the carpet. Healthy debate, that's all right, but don't actually say that the one is the opposite of the other. That's the point, they fear the consequence of opposite world-views.

Why are you so ambivalent? On the one hand you have emphasised the irrelevance for architecture of finding the meaning of life; on the other hand you are very fierce in defending the Classical as a super category with social implications.



Dufours Place, London, 1983

That's because it's a very complicated problem. I have been pondering the relationship between classical architecture and the Christian faith for a long time. The question is in what sense architecture is a way to truth. I've not quite worked it out yet. In the Old Testament God told the children of Israel that they must worship before a building. He designed the building, for Moses was given instructions about what this building should look like. Later, when David and Solomon took over the kingdom, they erected the temple in Jerusalem, an unbelievably beautiful building where His people should meet with God and bring their sacrifices. Worship then was architecturally bound. The whole history of Israel is connected with the destruction and rebuilding of their temples and all their zeal and all their fighting was centred around the temple. At that time architecture (and music and priesthood and all the trappings) was theological. When Christ came he said 'I shall destroy this temple in three days and rebuild it', referring to the Christian faith. He removed all that architecturally oriented worship which He required in previous ages. The temple was destroyed in 70 AD and was never rebuilt. From then on the apostles talked about the temple being the body of believers. So the Christians had to change their approach – from an architecturally oriented type of worship which was legitimate and proper until Christ came, to a way of thinking in metaphorical terms. The temple is just a metaphor for the New Testament, a church is not a building but a body of believers. A tremendous mental change is required; the building is no longer of any help to a man seeking God. The word church, *ecclesia*, means 'those called out', called out of the world, whereas we tend to think of a church as a building. In the Old Testament church, architecture is the handmaid of worship, but in the New Testament church the whole thing was revolutionised into a metaphor for the believers and the individual soul. Church history shows a return to that Old Testament idea that God is best served by bricks, by stone, by art and by music, and they have re-created the architecturally bound worship. The buildings got more and more lavish and they returned to this primeval feeling that you have to serve God in a particular place, with a particular art, in a particular building. In the Reformation Luther and Calvin had to say again that it isn't the building, it's actually a belief in certain doctrines and truths which are contained in the New Testament. Dedham church was built in Roman Catholic times, but the Reformation removed all the offending items, the stained glass, the altar, the idols. In the eighteenth century there would have been a simple Protestant church, with a simple service, whitewashed walls and a pulpit in the centre, thus returning to the Old Testament pattern. It would have been fine if it had stopped in the eighteenth century, but not a bit of it! In the Victorian Age all the sacramental things were put back. Now you have stained-glass windows again, a great big altar at the east end, the pulpit pushed away to the side, which is a return to the Middle Ages. In the mind of men there is a tension between a vague idea that God must be served through architecture and a conviction that God is served in the mind and the heart, through an understanding of the Bible. This tension we still have today and this is why I can't say that architecture is related to theology. The Bible gives the right answer. However, we still feel that buildings reflect truth; that's where our difficulty lies.

Perhaps this is the reason that you strongly emphasise the irrelevance of architecture for finding truth.

Since your architecture is very material and durable, it would be Old Testamental if it was suggesting a way to God. Instead of bashing the spiritual meaning of architecture, the Moderns chose to upgrade the concept of space as an alternative to the godly substance expressed in material which was a standard in Classical times. Is the moulding of space a major concern for you?

In Richmond there are various squares within various buildings and one can feel that the proportion is more or less what you envisage.

In the same way that in a room you design a certain height, a certain length with a certain space running out of it. Yes, it is very important; the whole thing is enclosing space. It is the space that you enclose and the way you enclose it that is fundamental to what you are designing.

Okay, but now when I ask you you admit it is important. But do you often use the term space in your conversations? Is it a concept you are fond of?

No!

But you still use Modern space in projects like the Richmond scheme, where behind the façade you are just offering the isotropic space of any office-building, with open-plan floors, columns, modern lighting, air-conditioning, etcetera. Inside there is absolutely no Classical identity in your sense of the word. What's your opinion of such use of your buildings?

I'm in business to design office buildings. I have a particular client who believes, perhaps quite wrongly but economically he's right, that space can only be sold if it is open plan. That is what all the funds insist on; and all Modern buildings have this type of internal planning. If the client listened to me I would not have any air-conditioning at all, and because the windows are no more than six metres from the wall I would not think it necessary to have artificial light all day. A lot of things I could improve, but I have to follow instructions like everyone else.

So in Richmond you are forced to show your ideas on the façade and not at the level of the programme, even though you would like to do that.

We are always forced to compromise in some measure. But it is not just the façade, because in fact the span of all the buildings is no more than twelve metres, which Modern architects never do. So if electricity fails, you could live and work in these buildings without air-conditioning. You could open the windows. You would have enough light. All roofs are pitched. It's based on common sense. But it's true, it lacks consistency inside. The entrance halls are an indication of how the space could have been done. It's unfinished, an incomplete building. If a tenant were to ask me to design the partitions, we could do it with the greatest of ease. But the partitioning is always a subcontract, carried out by the tenant.

In your ideas we see a very exclusive dimension, one that doesn't fully correspond with your pragmatic approach as a professional. There is an intrinsic paradox in building a scheme like Richmond, which has inside it a programme which is in the end antagonistic to the message being told on the outside. It's a bit depressing that the message you want to advocate, extrapolated in your opinions about the thick wall, can also cover up the effect of money in making your own darlings transparent.

We have to realise that money as an end in itself is obviously destroying everything. But money as a servant is necessary for all of us. It's a matter of proportion. I had a client who asked for 100 square metres. And I said I wanted thick walls. Now the walls are at least about one and a half metres thick; most Modern walls are less than half that in thickness. If you make the wall thick, you can't provide so much extra space, which makes the building less profitable. However, good space can be let for a higher rate. This is what I can do within my competence. I'm not competent to change the brief.

However, it is strange to see you, an architect working under the banner of Cowper's famous assertion that 'God made the country and man made the town', working on an unspoiled form as a screen before the monetary forces of the city.

What you should realise is that I'm not a latter-day prophet. I'm not telling anybody that if they live the way I would like, the world will be saved, which some people tend to think. I believe that there is a length of time for the history of this world and as evil increases on the earth there will come a point when God will tolerate it no longer. The evidence as we look around us seems to suggest that something like that could happen. It could happen next year, it could happen in 100 years time. I live in the knowledge that these things will happen sometime, but at the same time we do an ordinary job. There are indications that there is a right way for man to live on earth and a wrong way. Since the nineteenth century, with progressive technology, the wrong way has been made available, whereas previously it just wasn't so easy. Now we have more ways of living in an unnatural environment. You might say that we live further from God. But Classical architecture is no saviour. It's common sense.



Matfield Robinson Library, Downing College, Cambridge, 1991