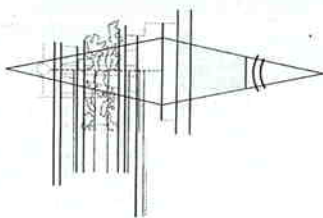


THEORY ■ Modern legacy: collecting the baggage of tradition

To coincide with the completion of his Paternoster building, Richard MacCormac takes issue with modernist theories that neglected tradition. Photos: Peter Durant.

In June 1957 John Summerson gave a lecture at the RIBA with the title *The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture*. He concluded that what distinguished modern architecture from the architecture of the past was that 'the programme was the unifying principle'. In other words relationships between functions and their technological realisation were the new and sole determinants of architectural form. To look for other kinds of expression, he insisted, would be to fall back upon history.

This 'exceedingly vulnerable thesis' (as Summerson himself called it) is a reminder of where we have come from and what has largely characterised modern architecture in Britain. This is not because Summerson established a guiding theory but because he was prescient.



Top Warwick Court and Paternoster Square from St Paul's cathedral.

Above Colin Rowe's analysis of Le Corbusier's League of Nations design, from his essay *Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal* (1963).

Opposite Warwick Court, entrance from Warwick Lane.

For what he was describing was an architecture of omission – its single unifying principle being unable to engage history, allusion, context, or aesthetic sensation and its corollary being an absence of architectural discourse.

Summerson developed his argument with characteristic historical scholarship, tracing a rationalist lineage through Laugier, Lodoli and Viollet-le-Duc. This rationalist ideology required architecture to be objectively accountable: aesthetic characteristics, in so far as they appeared, had to be consequences rather than generating principles. This was the dominant ethos in British architectural schools which had accepted the tenets of modernism by the 1960s. This was true even of the Cambridge school which was distinguished by Leslie Martin and Colin St John Wilson's affinity with the organic functionalism of Aalto, Scharoun and Häring and opposed the technological imperatives of most UK schools. Colin Rowe also gave the school a special ideological independence.

This was a time when 60 per cent of the profession was employed in the public sector and Summerson's theory, in which the individuality of 'expression' was subordinated to the objectivity of the 'programme', offered an idea

of architecture thoroughly acceptable to state socialism. It was only a few years later that the Young Fabians produced a booklet entitled *Architecture: Art or Social Service*. The assumption was that art would subvert the social obligations of architecture and the inevitability of objective design. This readily translated into a commercial equivalent in which the art of architecture was perceived to work against the client's economic interest.

So architects during this period developed a form of presentation to clients, actual and potential, in which all issues could be reduced to function, technology and economy. The evolution of 'high tech' had much to do with this ethos and fitted nicely into Summerson's theory. For here was a proposition which seemed to have cast off all the cultural baggage of architectural tradition to create purely technological solutions to social and business needs. Of course this was not really what was going on. What was brilliant about high tech was that it appeared to forge an irreducible synonymy between aesthetics and technology. Its technological accountability, in a sense, protected aesthetic intentions which did not need to be declared.

It was in relation to this ethos that Rowe's position as theorist and teacher was so important. In particular, his essays *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa* (1947) and *Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal* (1963) set out arguments about the relationships and tensions between the conceptual ideas embodied in a plan and our perceptual understanding of those ideas. Rowe was concerned with the actuality of architecture and its language rather than the contingencies of its genesis, which is really what was at the root of Summerson's position. There was a critical milieu in the Cambridge school, where I studied in the early 1960s, in which it was permissible to discuss the mannerists, Hawksmoor and the work of James Stirling in the same terms.

It was also permissible to be excited by Frank Lloyd Wright. For here was an architect who could not be fitted into European modernism. Wright's idea of architecture is fundamentally at odds with Summerson's definition, because its content is both independent of, and greater than, any precise fulfilment of the programme. There is an autonomous architectural language, a 'unifying principle' of interpenetrating spaces and structures ruled by geometry, which developed more or less consistently from the early Prairie houses in Oak Park through to his masterwork, Falling Water, and the beautiful Usonian houses of the 1940s.

Summerson's position anticipated that adopted under Llewelyn Davies at the Bartlett (where I also studied) and it was here that its weakness was demonstrated. The difficulty, which architectural education highlighted, was

References

- John Summerson, 'The Case for a Theory of Modern Architecture', reprinted in John Summerson, *The Unromantic Castle and Other Essays* (Thames & Hudson 1990)
- Colin Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa' (1947), reprinted in Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (MIT Press 1976)
- Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, 'Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal', *Perspecta* 8 (1963) pp45-54
- Paul Thompson, 'Architecture: Art or Social Service' (Young Fabian Pamphlet 4 March 1963)

that the 'programme' did not translate in some readily objective way into a design. What was missing was the realisation that there had to be an architectural language to mediate in this process of translation and that good design was itself aesthetically motivated.

The architects who now hold our ideological attention – Gehry, Libeskind, Hadid and Foreign Office – do so, in part, because they have successfully challenged the rationalist position. But what may be most important about the break they have made is not the exuberance of their inventions, but the reminder that the expressive potential of architecture can go beyond the literal representation of function and construction, even in the most commonplace building types.

One of the flaws in Summerson's theory is that there are many types of building in which the programme demonstrably does not determine building form. For example in the design of student residential buildings for Oxbridge colleges we have found that rooms can be aggregated around the shared elements, stairs and kitchens in many different ways. Consequently each scheme has its own architectural language and compositional idea, triggered by the character of the site and the historic context.

In contrast, in the design of the BBC redevelopment at Portland Place in London, more than 90 per cent of the space requirement above first-floor level – the production area – is conventional office floor plate where the relationship between 'programme' and form is tight. What makes it possible to complement the convexity of Broadcasting House with the concavity of the new public space behind All Souls are the 'loose' residual areas such as catering, circulation and break-out spaces.

A conventional speculative office building like Warwick Court at Paternoster is even tighter and more prescribed; but this building, located close to St Paul's cathedral, carries very special obligations to its historic site. While it has no direct relationship with the architecture of Wren and Hawksmoor, the design explores themes that may be resonant: the status of the window as entity or cavity; the sense of the primary surfaces as projections or as excavations; and, in a modern sense, the contrast between the suspended and weightless elevations and the compressive elements of the structure. Within the constraints of the building type it also proved possible to address in entirely different ways the formal character of the new Paternoster Square on one side and the more disparate character of Warwick Lane on the other. Similarly the narrow alleys to north and south, which impose oblique views, invited an architecture of rhythmical projection and incision – a parallel perhaps to that of these distinguished forbears.





Jeremy Estop and Richard MacCormac write:

The Paternoster masterplan sets larger buildings (mainly nine storeys) along the north side of the development, with lower buildings (five to six storeys) along the southern edge facing the cathedral. Warwick Court lies in between and its building form has to mediate between the two scales. To achieve this, the main body of the 28,250m² building comprises five storeys, terminated by a large projecting cornice. Above this are two 'attic' storeys, set back from the building line, which enjoy exceptional views towards the cathedral and the river over the lower neighbouring buildings. The building is organised as two ranges of office accommodation on either side of a 9m wide atrium, in loose symmetry about the long axis. The main cores are at the east end of the atrium with secondary cores to the west.

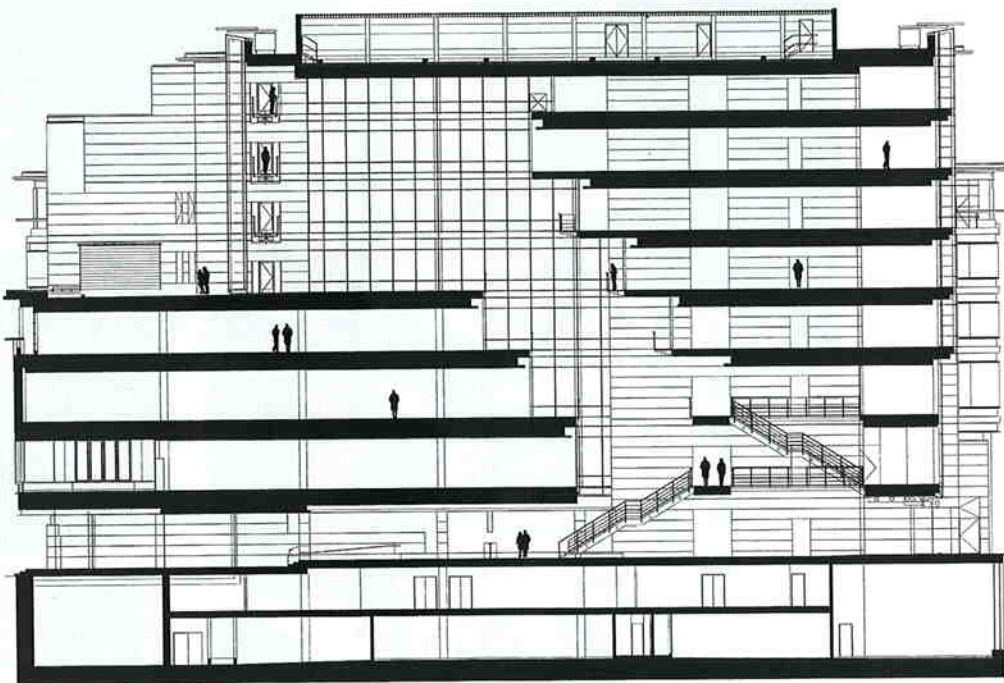
The five storeys below cornice level have a carcass of stone, strongly expressed as projecting frontages at each end of the long facades. Emerging through this stone envelope is a layered elevational composition of precast concrete, metal, glass and red sandstone, which sets up a complex syncopated rhythm. The composition is ordered by the primary structure of columns and beams, into which a secondary grid of metalwork and glass bays is woven. The fifth floor is fully glazed, set back behind a narrow balcony, accentuating the effect of the roof overhang. The secondary metal grid extends up to support the projecting balustrade at this level.

The glass bays are not projections but are revealed by recessions which create depth and rhythm, with overlapping symmetries within and across the 6m structural interval. The bays may also be read as a kind of weightless rustication, with a crystalline and volumetric quality distinct from the usual character of curtain walls. The organisation – classical in origin, but expressed in a modern way – responds to the building's very special location.

The elevation becomes more highly articulated on the west frontage, where the building has to respond to the domestic scale of the nineteenth-century Amen Court opposite. This was one of the most sensitive issues in the planning negotiations. The tripartite arrangement, punctuated by the powerfully expressed stair towers, secured consent while maximising the internal floor area.

The building is entered from the west through a covered court, with the entrance hall extending right

Left Warwick Lane and south facades; cross section; early sketch study of south-west corner.





through to a secondary entrance from the square to the east. The route is sustained by a series of contrasting spatial episodes, partly defined by changing floor surfaces – water, bush-hammered stone, carpet, honed stone. At the point of entry to the lift lobbies, the full height of the atrium can be viewed and the organisation of the whole building is apparent.

The atrium is the central social focus of the building, with terraces, balconies and bridges exploiting its potential beyond that of day-lighting. The diagonal section that



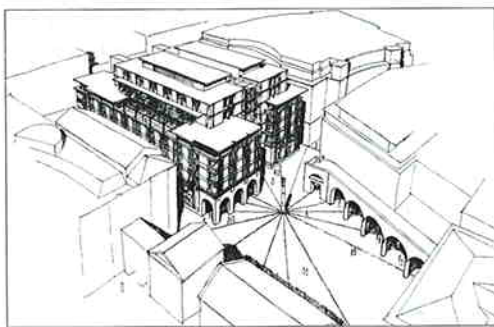
creates these terraces and balconies was generated by the need for the dealer floors which push deep into the plan. Architecturally, it is treated as a covered 'external' space, using materials which are comparable to the elevations, but with a more refined finish.

Top Entrance court.

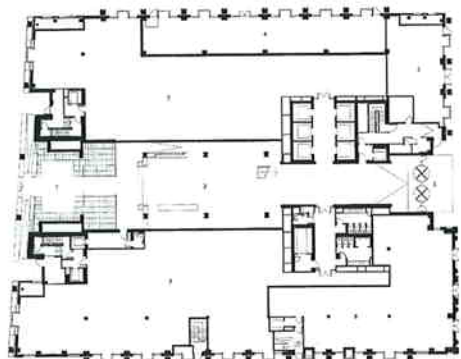
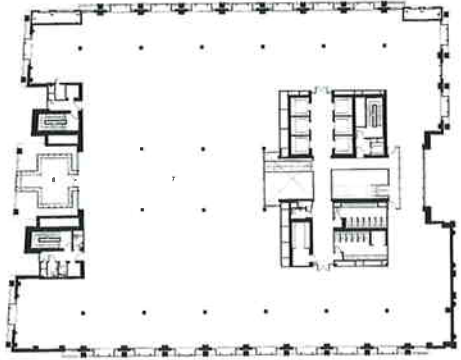
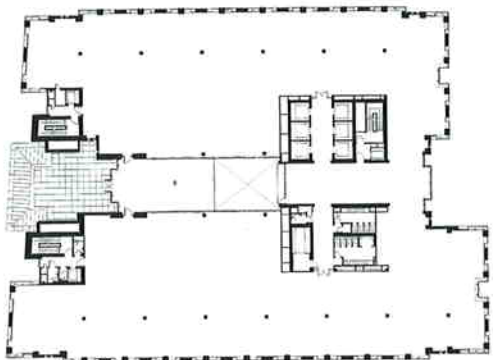
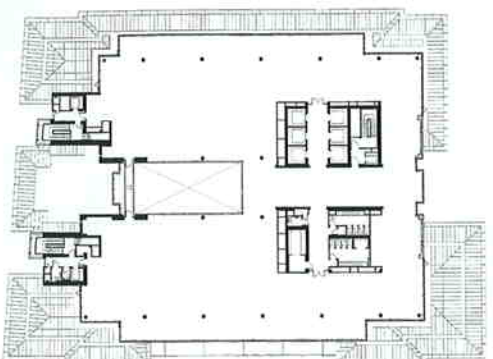
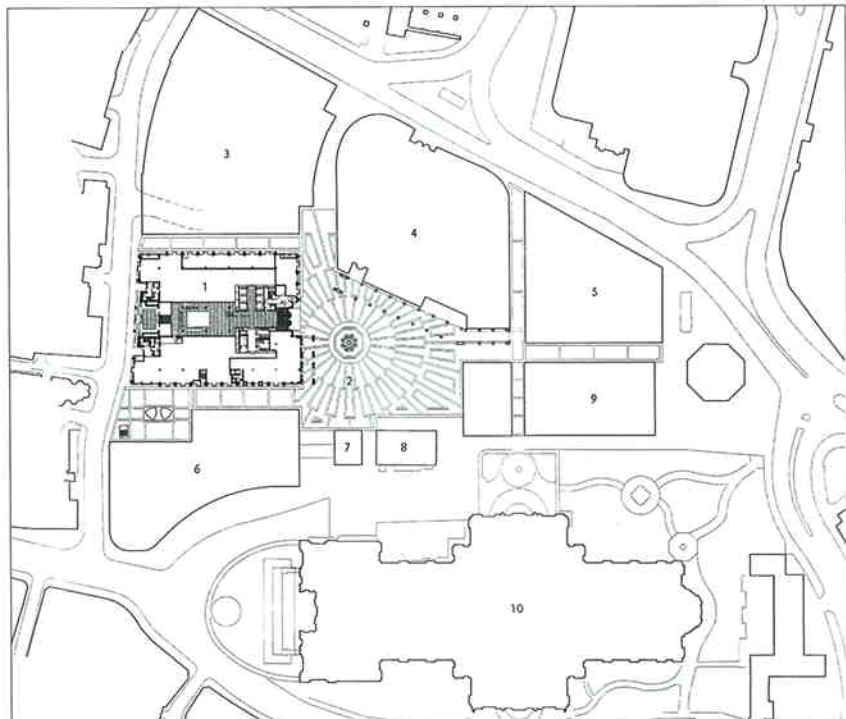
Left The entrance route includes a sequence of spatial episodes, including a 'bridge' crossing pools of water (to be installed) and a rich sequence of flooring surfaces.

Below Washroom; atrium views.

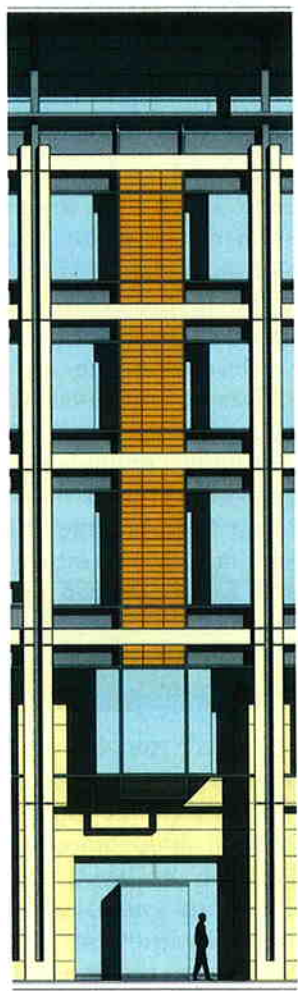
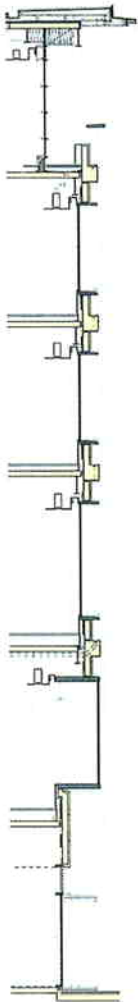




MacCormac Jamieson Prichard was appointed in 1996 to design Warwick Court as part of the redevelopment of Paternoster Square, write Jeremy Estop and Richard MacCormac. In total eight new buildings have been erected around the new square to William Whitfield's masterplan. Planning permission for all the buildings was obtained in 1998 and design work on Warwick Court resumed in



Plans Ground plus first, fourth and sixth floors. Key: 1 Entrance court, 2 reception, 3 Paternoster Square entrance, 4 gym, 5 retail, 6 cafe, 7 office, 8 meeting room, 9 atrium terrace, 10 bridge link.
Left Paternoster Square: (from top) part of facade to Paternoster Square; early sketch perspective by MJP of Warwick Court and Paternoster Square; Whitfield Partners' Paternoster masterplan. The masterplan replaces the Holford buildings dating from the 1960s with a series of new buildings arranged around a pedestrian piazza, with traffic access from below. Key: 1 Warwick Court (MJP), 2 Paternoster Square, 3 Christ Church Court (Rolfe Judd), 4 King Edward Court (Eric Parry Architects/Sheppard Robson), 5 St Martin's Court (Allies & Morrison), 6 Juxon House (Whitfield Partners/Sidell Gibson), 7 Building Six (Whitfield Partners/Sheppard Robson), 8 Chapter House, 9 One Paternoster Row (Whitfield Partners/Sidell Gibson), 10 St Paul's.



2001 after a tenant was found. Construction of the £45m project started at the end of 2001 and completed three months early in May this year.

Above ground level, there are seven full office floors (including dealer floors on the first and second floors) and one level of roof plant. The ground floor contains a restaurant, shop and fitness centre entrance, which enliven the frontages to the square and adjoining streets, together with the office reception areas and office space. Floor levels are aligned with the building to the north, allowing a potential three-level bridge link to give continuity of

the first to third floors. A typical floor plate will accommodate two sub-tenancies per floor, either side of the atrium. The escape route geometry was optimised to work with three staircases.

Legislation devised to protect St Paul's stipulates maximum heights and depths for surrounding buildings. Also, planning requirements proscribe visible roof plant and require that the roof be treated as a fifth elevation, visible from the dome of the cathedral. In addition, the building has no 'back' and the arrangement of plant and services apertures was therefore highly constrained. By suspending

the tall chiller plant over the atrium, covered by a grillage, the maximum number of office floors was achieved within the St Paul's heights. Louvre grilles in the deep fourth-floor set-back on the west allow the large air intake for the generators to be discretely accommodated. Below ground, there are two basement levels containing service yard, parking, a public fitness centre and plant. Access for vehicles is via an underground infrastructure which serves the whole development.

Above Elevational bay and (below) in the context of Paternoster Square.

Project team

Architect: MacCormac Jamieson Prichard; pre-planning design team: Richard MacCormac, Stephen Cherry, Gordon Fleming, David Franklin, Rob Burton, Neil Deely, St John Handley, Nick Marks, Chris McCarthy, Reza Schuster; post-planning design team: Richard MacCormac, Jeremy Estop, Matthew Dean, John Attwood, David Ayre, John Bloomfield, David Bulley, Alison Burns, Kate Carter, Sebastian Drewes, Ted Finn, Kathryn Grossman, Howard Hughes, Rodney Jack, Christina Johnsson, Ylva Kvist, Tom Kyle, Peter Mayhew, Chris McCarthy, Romed Perfler, Joann Tang, Natalia Traverso, Keith Whitworth; structural engineer: Waterman Partnership; services engineer: Waterman Gore; quantity surveyor: Davis Langdon Everest, Mott Green Wall; planning consultant: Montagu Evans; facade engineer: Arup Facade Engineering; fire: Arup Fire; acoustics: Hann Tucker; developer: BLS Warwick (Bovis Lendlease/Stanhope); client: Mitsubishi Estate Co.

Selected subcontractors and suppliers

Steel frame: Severfield Rowen; brick/block-work: Irvine Whitlock; cladding: Seele; stone cladding: Techrete; flat roof: Coverite; lead roof: NDM; loggia: Szerelmey; drylining, ceilings: BDL Group; metal doors, roller shutters: Amber Doors; architectural metalwork, stairs: J Rawlson; internal stone walls/floors: Grants of Shoreditch; wc fit-out/joinery: Swift Horsman; facade access: Cradle Runways; mechanical: Axima; insulation, fire stopping: Abbey Thermal Insulation; ductwork: Hotchkiss Ductwork; package plant: AC Engineering Services; sprinklers: Wormald Fire Systems; water feature: Watermark Hydronamics; loggia domes: Malling Precast; electrical: T Clarke; lift: Otis; lift fit-out: Sterling Lift Products; entrance screen: Rush Entrances; ironmongery: Allgood; roof membrane: Radmat; stone: Albion Stone; vanity tops, wall cladding: Burlington Slate; plaster-board: British Gypsum; polished plaster: Armourcoat; sanitaryware: Duravit; wall/floor tiles: Domus; glass: Eckelt; access floors: Kingspan; revolving doors: Blasi; insulation: Kingspan; lighting: Sill, Erco, Targetti.

