James Stirling has done three good things here. He has provided a set of galleries, traditional in form and positionally, in which the whole of the Turner bequest now gloriously hangs. He has built a building which is contextually right, at once deferring to and sharply mocking the Victorian sugar-merchant’s palaces of art. In between these two accomplishments, he has exercised his invention in a way peculiar to his eccentric genius, which does not ask for gallery but is full of high spirits and dangerous play.

The Clore building consists of two arms, one joining the Tate gallery just behind one of its lateral pavilions, the other turning at right angles from this towards the river and coming within a few yards of another nearby building, the ‘Lodge’, formerly part of the Military Hospital but now a permanent part of the Tate complex. The first and longest of these arms contains the nine Turner galleries on the main floor, with the auditorium, education department and usual offices below. The second contains the entrance hall and main staircase, followed by the ‘social room’ with, above, various technical, administrative and study rooms. In the angle between the two wings is a landscaped garden.

Summersoon sees Stirling’s Clore extension to the Tate Gallery as a kind of surrealist college of the recent past and history within which the architect re-invents with great originality—and which offers a set of rooms in which the Turner bequest has been gloriously hung.

Sibbey Smith’s Tate building of 1974 is a coarse-grained derivative of the Beaux Arts school. It stands on the inherent dignity of its style and on a basement level which contains some of the more enjoyable things about it. No building could be more restlessness than Stirling’s but the Tate Smith leave it unembarrassed. Smith has two orders: the Corinthian of the portico and a secondary order which is less but a way of suddenly turning Doric. Stirling has taken Smith’s Ionic/Doric cornice and run it continuously, with a blocking course, along both arms of his new building. More by chance, one supposes, than by design, the Gibbsonian exercise of the red-brick Neo-Grecian Lodge strikes exactly the level of Smith’s. Between the Old Tate and the Lodge, nothing is easier than the blocking course, except a brief attic storey at the Lodge, containing the curator’s office.

This self-restraint as to height leaves Smith paramount. It also means that whereas you climb a crenellated wooden staircase to the Tate, you enter Clore on the flat. Indeed a stride below, the basement floor of the Tate being a few feet underground. This modified level is a stone-flagged terrace with a pool of water, gently bubbling (there will be waterlilies, and a pergola with vines dressed against the Clore Gallery block. Here the Tate pavilion corner exactly opposite is the public entrance to the Clore and both are simply reflected in the pool. Tate, grand and proud, pedimented above and windowed only in its rocky base, looks across at Clore with monumental anonymity. Clore, putting the shapes in reverse, out-faces Tate a yawp and a wink.

For this rather shocking device I can think of no precedent. It is cut out of a virgin sheet of Portland ashlar stretched across the width of the hall. This is Stirling’s ‘frontpiece’. The shape of the opening is best conceived if you imagine a primitive temple protected through a stone wall and then made to vanish. The entrance is the ‘trave’ of a low, gabled (or pedimented) building which is not there. The masonry joints take no notice of its absence; they just stop where the vanishing temple has cut them, with a rough sharpness in a raven.

My first reaction to this was that it was a rather joyous conjuring trick in the spirit of Magritte. But I prefer to see it now as something less trash—a gesture of spatial primitivism—and this is confirmed for me by the lunette above, which goes with, for example, Dance’s lodges at Newgate, Sowa’s primitivism (or was it Dance again?) in the old Bank of England ruins and a good many other Neo-Classical versions of the primitival image. The ghostly Simon is partly exercised by the bright green metal grid which fills the opening and clamps the revolving door.

Pass now to the adjacent elevations. Picture galleries, like prisons, museums and power-stations do not ask to be windowed. If they look at all, they look towards. The Classical masters played Classical games on hill-sides. Sowa’s game with the Tivoli order at the Bank, Dance’s formidable rusticated niches at Newgate. Oconner’s delicate arctas at the Astronomical are familiar instances. Sibbey Smith dodges the problem simply by blocking up Venetian windows. Stirling has found his own answer in a different mode—a system of ‘gridding’. A grid of Portland stone ribs starts from the front of the building (the ribs are on the same plane) and wriggles the whole building. The ribs contain square panels filled either with buff stucco or with red brick. These grids have nothing to do with the structure (the actual structure is a reinforced concrete frame, unseen) and they are disposed in such a way as to make this self-evident. The verticals never come at the corners and in the one case where an opening breaks the system—the corner window of the social room—the horizontal rib is embellished away, leaving the brick panel in an apparent state of imminent collapse. One thinks of Ghika Homen’s slipping mushrooms on Mars, in the gallery block all the panels are filled with buff stucco. In the other block partly with stucco and partly with red brick to match the Lodge, the