building is beautifully cut into discrete scaled parts, the parts are not necessarily grammatical in a traditional sense. I would argue you've got a new grammar here because, not only do you have three different languages, but you've added a fourth which is your own and that is the square, neutral order. If you like, ok plaster and stucco or brick infills which is a very interesting order because it allows you to relate to two different types of Classicism, without mashing either. I wonder how you come to this new Beperante or new order?

JS

Well, in regard to this particular context, we have the Portland stone Tate on one side and the brick Lodge on the other and our garden facades are trying to mediate between the two. I think we'd made this facade only of Portland stone and/or red brick we wouldn't have been able to make the transition between the two buildings in a sensitive enough way, so we introduced a third element, which is the panelled stucco/stone, and this allows one to soften and weld the conjunctions and transitions between the Tate and the Lodge.

CJ

But why did you come to the square motif and its particular relation with the square pilaster systems?

JS

I felt it could produce more stable vertical/horizontal surfaces. It was less directional and allowed you to make transitions diagonally.

CJ

Yes, but Classicists are going to have troubles with this building. Let's go back to Alberti and Brunelleschi where the pilaster system of rectangular bays on the outside represented a mental order and, perhaps, a real structural order on the inside. In your case you have this square grid on the outside which is repeated on parts of the inside, but it doesn't correspond to anything in particular does it?

JS

I think when Alberti and Brunelleschi et al. were setting up the orders of the Renaissance they were doing it in a more abstract way. They were proposing orders and proportions for a movement in general. What we're trying to do here is to find a solution in particular. How do you make an extension to this symmetrical/Classical building? What we've done here we wouldn't necessarily do elsewhere. We might re-use the principle, but not in exactly the same way. You would probably have different circumstances. I found it necessary transitional device and would point out that the grid disappears when you get round to the service elevation at the back but reappears on the fifth facade which will eventually be the wall of a sculpture garden. So we are making distinctions between public facades and the service (functional) elevations, which you might describe here as low-cost, High-Tech.

CJ

You speak of it as a garden building, hence its informality, hence the trelis, the pergola and lilypond. But is it a garden building in another way? What generic type did you have in mind?

JS

Well it's also a garden wall containing the gardens of the Tate, and you will approach the new entrance by walking through these gardens. Moreover we wanted to make an entrance which was not competitive with the existing entrance of the Tate where you go up steps and through a central portal - symmetrical and monumental. So we turned our entrance side on to the Tate, deferential to the established entrance. Instead of being monumental ours is downscaled like the entrance to a cage, and an orangery when it is an extension to the country house. We also wanted to have the galleries in the new building at the same level as those in the Tate so that the public could go from one to the other without awareness of change, which principle we follow at Stuttgart and at the Sackler (when they build the bridge). It means, however, that the accommodation below, in this case the Entrance Hall, Auditorium, 'Lounge', etc, is pushed down below ground level. So we designed a sunken paved forecourt as a transition or doorstep to the new building; instead of going up monumental steps you go down into a paved garden.

CJ

Nevertheless, some of the public are going to have trouble with some of the allusions which are all of such a generic nature that you can't say the building is immediately reminiscent of anything. The only thing it reminds me of is a previous set of buildings you've done, except that, is the voided entrance pediment reminiscent of Mycenae; John Summerson finds this and the lunette window above like Newgate Jail, reminiscent to him of Dance.

JS

These elements relate to the immediate context and are up/down reversals of what happens on the adjoining corner of the Tate, where there is a pediment up top and a lunette window down. Across the sunken forecourt, we are trying to maintain a conversation between the new building and the old.

CJ

But the fact is that the voided pediment of Herculanum size makes one think of those other associations . . .

JS

Yes, the association of a tomb and then a memorial; also you go down into those sorts of places. Maybe all museums are like tombs - secure vaults containing things of great value.

CJ

But, coming back to the problem some people will have with your allusions - they'll certainly have a problem with that wonderful corner which echoes the grid just at the point where bricks usually get supported. Above this corner the visual support falls away and the bricks sit unsupported. Above the window the order is supported by the wall, which is a provocation not only to the Renaissance but to the Modern Movement and, indeed, the normal bystander who thinks that bricks should be supported. It's also an affront to Philip K. who said that things should look as if they're solid and can stand up.

JS

One may become a little anxious as to how that wall is held up and gets round the corner, which is a way of emphasising the bay window below as a major element of the interior overlooking the garden.

CJ

But, there's again a new rule here . . . you could have lowered the wall eight inches or so and had a transition with a frame on it - just as around the voided pediment entrance there could have been a moulding which would have been a Classical thing. The fact is, you consistently cut your rhythms.

JS

All these cuts - Summerson uses the reference to scissors - expose the reality of the construction. This building is not made of solid stone or structural brickwork as are the Tate and the Lodge; here the external surface is not a structural expression - the materials are all veneers onto an inarticulate concrete substructure. One is trying to indicate that these veneered surfaces are not structural - hence the scissoring of walls in strategic places.

CJ

Let's call it a philosophy of the expressed veneer. You express the veneer by showing it hanging in tension or by cutting it, which is a kind of grammar or rule.

JS

I think when using traditional materials in an untraditional way you have to make explicit that they are flippable. Here there's a kind of abstract slashing and cutting which can only mean that these materials and symbols are not as substantial as they appear.

CJ

Yes, but architects don't have to tell the truth all the time. There's still a residual Modernist thing in you that wants to tell the observer the truth.

JS

I wouldn't deny that.

CJ

You're quite didactic, like a schoolteacher who is using the scissors method and the ways of disjunction to get in his lesson.

JS

I dislike equally pastiche and revivalism and I'm puritanical enough to want to make clear that the building, familiar though it may look, is in fact made in a different way. How can one get back to using traditional materials like stone and brick and stucco in a way that is not false? Because one still wants to use traditional materials for contextual, urban and monumental reasons.

CJ

If we generalise and conclude, there are a series of new rules here which are exciting and stimulating and which push the history of contextualism a stage further. This is the most advanced building on that level I know of in the world and very provocative and enjoyable it is. Though, at first glance, one can experience it as being quite ugly and the tensions and disjunctions as overpowering, I wonder what you have to say to those people who will feel that it doesn't conform to any of their expectations.

JS

Well, I think they will have to come back a second time to see how they feel about it. It will take a year to settle down. Then I think its different way of doing things will become familiar and accepted.