

but hardly any with the later Law Faculty Library at the University of Cambridge. Equally there may be some echoes in Nîmes of Foster's much earlier Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts at the University of East Anglia (1978) outside Norwich yet few of his later buildings could be said to resemble the Carré d'Art. Innovation is given precedence over continuity. There is arguably a greater difference between successive buildings which come from the office of Norman Foster and Partners than there is between a great many Roman temples in Europe and North Africa built over more than one century. It has, for instance, been argued that 'a dozen fragments, with the dimensions of the foundations, may enable a trained investigator to reconstruct with certainty the main features of a temple of which nothing had remained above the soil' (Robertson, 1943, p.2). Such reconstructions of temples, but not of other building types, are only possible because of the almost invariant repetition of the form.

Many of the design determinants of the Carré d'Art stem from the existence of its classical neighbour across the square. Principal among these was the decision to keep the roof of the new building as low as possible. This resulted in very considerable excavation; there is more construction below than above ground. The placing of the library and other accommodation below street level in turn influenced the design of the open central core with its glass staircase which allowed daylight to filter down the lower floors. This luminous central space is now one of the memorable characteristics of the building.

Externally, the Carré d'Art has, like the Maison Carrée, a columnar screen and portico. It is also raised on a podium. It might be said that the two buildings rhyme though very different in appearance and meaning. The acknowledgement of the predecessor and of an existing skyline is not accidental but a very deliberate design act fully confirmed by the architect (Foster, 1996, p.22).

We believe that Greek temples were sited in relation to certain features in the landscape, and in particular, to the profile of hills (Scully, 1962). There was a kind of dialogue between the exterior environment and the building, between nature and the physical embodiment of the gods. Neither Greek temples nor Roman ones, however, altered their primary architectural form because of locality. The idea that we should do so – currently an accepted norm – was, it would seem, not relevant. Yet no-one at the time or, for that matter, now would suggest that Roman temples are less visually appealing because of their general similarity.

If we accept that architecture is the deliberate manipulation of space and materials on the basis of ideas, then a number of conclusions follow. One of these might be that it may be possible to discover some explanatory ideas in so far as they affect design and that, moreover, we might attempt to categorise these in order to clarify our understanding of the design process. Such an understanding might then have an impact on both the practice and the teaching of architecture.