

reveal their origins in nature and which weather gracefully. These materials have a past and a future; they are not flimsy, cold or slick man-made materials that only deteriorate visually with denting, dirt and discolouration. There is a desire for windows in walls that suggest that people may lean out of them, and not for smooth, tinted glass skins that sever the street from the life within where people are either oblivious of or desperately trying to ignore those outside. And they want decoration that distracts and delights, intrigues and informs, and not a blank reflectivity—even if it duplicates buildings around it and the clouds scudding by.

Concessions to such demands made so far by developers and their architects are, as often as not, grotesque and disconcertingly paper-thin rather than substantial. But the demands remain reasonable and are bound to intensify. Inevitably architects are going to have to learn to think about, understand, design and detail facades that are neither boring nor bombastic, that are neither mere mimicry and parasitic pastiche nor meaningless collages of random historical elements or those replicated or abstracted from neighbours. Instead, facades will have to have a character and coherence of their own and each will have to acknowledge, if not kowtow to, conventions in order to enter as an equal into a dialogue with its neighbours beside it and across the street.

In desperation some architects will play their trump card and say that such facades cost too much. But this argument is a con. Compared with traditional construction that out-performs and outlasts them, metal and glass skins are extravagantly expensive, as are the workmanship and shuttering costs of unadorned, no-detail, Modernist construction. As proof of both parts of this assertion, look behind many now shabby metal or concrete main elevations to the subordinate side ones: built in cheap block or brick, they are still immaculate.

Big Bang blocks

Certainly the cost and the thickness of the facade were often critical factors in tall, shallow office towers with their huge external wall area. Yet these towers have largely been rejected as an urban solution and rendered obsolete by technological change and the demand for larger floor areas. The post-Big Bang office blocks are reinstating street lines as they hug the perimeters of the block and fit into allowed areas within a reasonable cornice line. And because the external wall to floor area is so small and the interior

so highly serviced, huge increases in the cost of the facade constitute a proportionately small supplement to the total cost. Facades that are rich in material detail and even craftsmanship are now affordable. More than that, several factors are combining to insist that architects exploit this opportunity.

Inside, the office building has become simply a stack of structural trays placed at intervals sufficient for packing in an ever-burgeoning profusion of electrical and mechanical services. The 'people spaces' between the trays belong to the specific culture of each tenant, and are designed by others. The developers' architects can only display their flair on the exterior. With very fluid, high-interest finance, the considerations of early preletting and the quick enclosure of the frame within a high-profile exterior are of more concern to developers and funding institutions than the actual capital building costs. Hence the adoption of what has been called 'the fiscal facade' of factory-made panels fixed, already glazed, on a scaffoldless site. Traditional materials and construction, though much cheaper and not necessarily extending total construction time, are rejected because they do not offer such speed in the creation of an advertising face unmarked by scaffolding.

Creating an outdoor room

But facades, whether fiscal prefab or trad-built, carry responsibilities beyond furnishing buildings with an image and identity. They should also impart these to the outdoor spaces they face and help to create some sense of place there. And as so many contemporary buildings offer little sense of interior or place within, architects should feel compelled to seize the opportunity offered by the recontainment of the street, and by the ample budget for facade-making, to reestablish some sense of place in streets and squares without. Facades must once again face up to their dual role of not just enclosing and expressing the interior, but also of addressing and articulating external space, making outdoor rooms.

That facades should have these two roles is so obvious that it is extraordinary that reductive Modernism recognised only the one and ignored even the purely functional responsibilities to exterior space. Such reductionism was fuelled by the silly charge of formalism (extraordinary, too, that this is still heard today) that was levelled at anything of sufficiently arresting composition to play a commanding role in external place-making. At an extreme, much evident in avant-garde and academic circles,