

BASICS

ARCHITECTURE

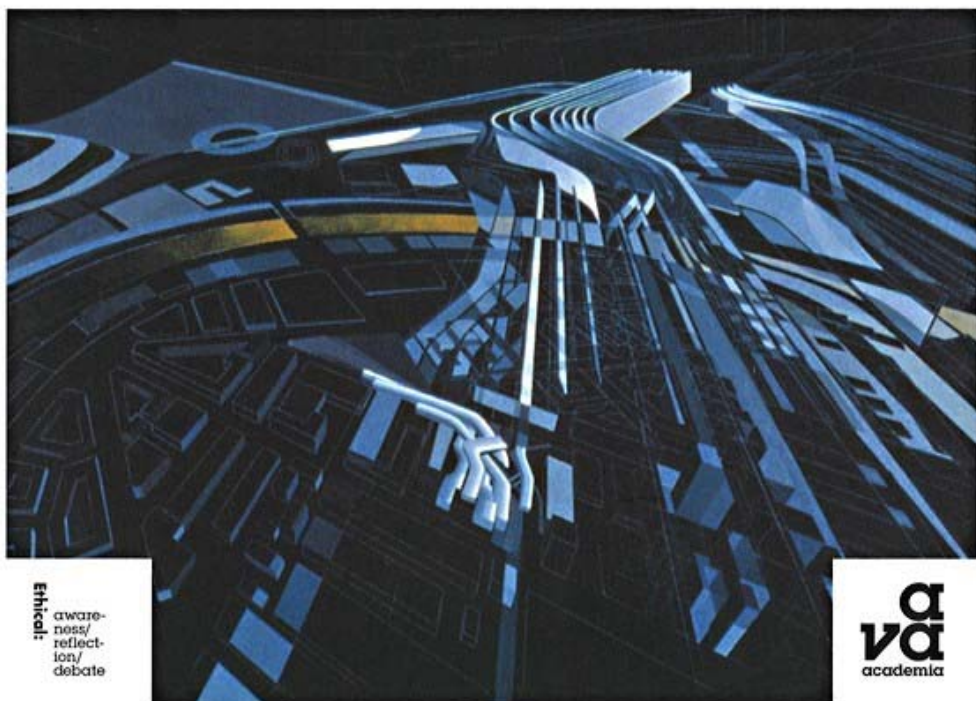
Jane Anderson

C3

architectural design

adj
relating to the art or
practice of designing and
constructing buildings

n
a plan or drawing
produced to show the
look and function or
workings of a building



Ethical:
aware-
ness/
reflect-
ion/
debate

av
academia



Project: Hudson House
Location: Navan, Ireland
Architect: O'Donnell + Tuomey
Architects
Date: 1998

right:
 Pencil sketch of elevation oblique
 projection showing the volume of
 the building.

far right:
 Coloured pencil sketch of floor
 materials.

O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects

O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects are based in Dublin, Ireland. They have been involved with urban design, educational and cultural buildings, houses and housing projects in Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands. They have represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale. Both Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey teach at University College Dublin and lecture internationally. Their work is characterised by the responsiveness of its form to the site, its expression of a sense of that place, and a materiality that emphasises the shell of the building. The ambiguity of a shell – it could be either an unfinished or a ruined building – communicates what the building is now and also suggests what it could be in the future. This expresses the process of architectural design itself, where an idea is always restless and will continue to evolve until the architect must fix it into form.



Project: Killiney House,
'The Sleeping Giant'
Location: Killiney, County
Dublin, Ireland
Architect: O'Donnell + Tuomey
Architects
Date: 2007

Watercolour sketches of site by
Sheila O'Donnell.

Interview with John Tuomey of O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects

What has changed after you have visited site for the first time?

When you come from site you have some kind of hunch formed in your head of the character of the project that you will propose. We would often be saying, 'This should be a garden or this should be an outpost or this should be a house dug into the site.' We would have some first thought independent of the technology or independent of the scale even. Actually, I don't think our first thought is material. I'd say that it is more to do with a kind of locational idea, like an anchoring idea that fixes the thought of the place.

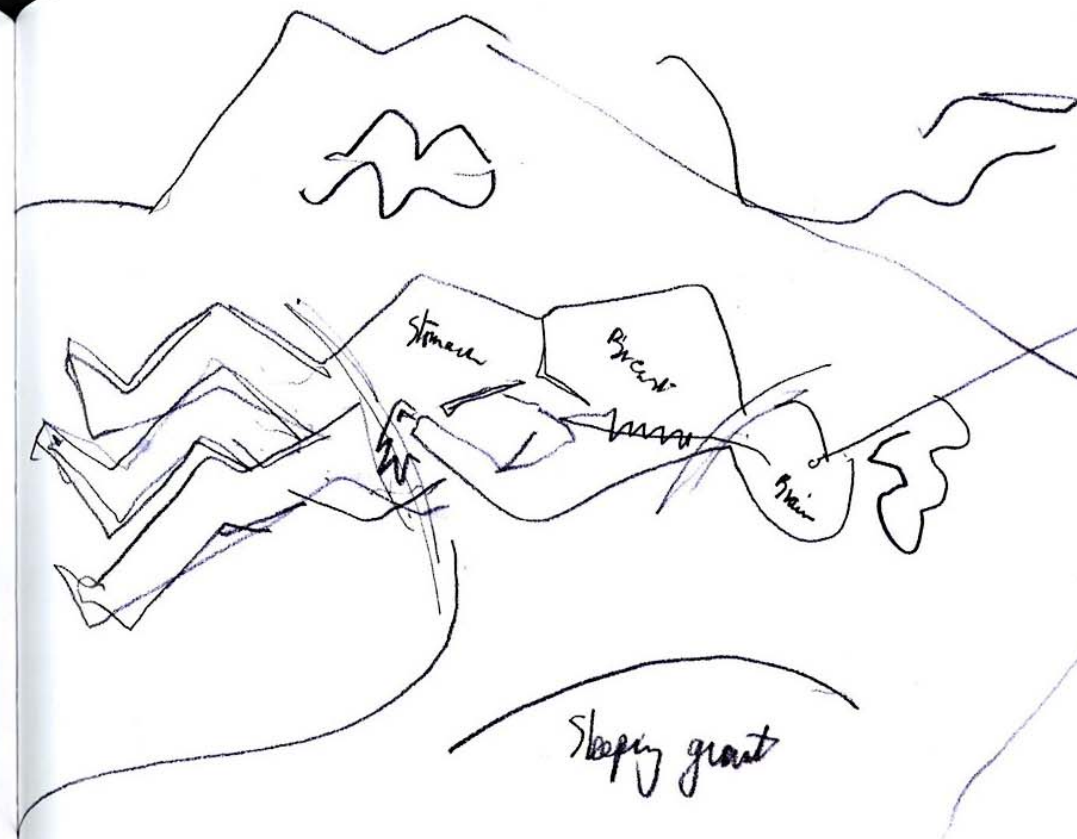
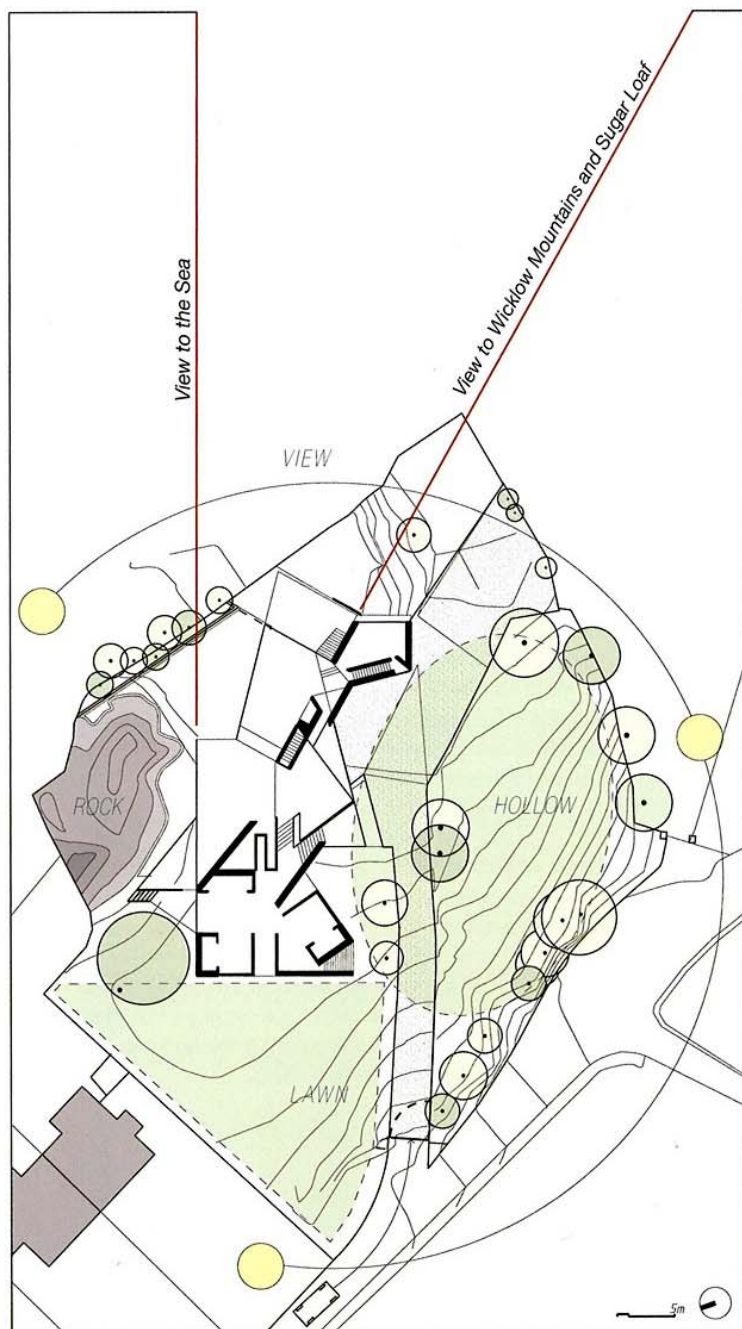
So you give your projects names?

They are as useful to us as any diagram or any skeletal scheme or any type of conventional encapsulating motif that an architect will use. And we don't sit down and think, 'Now, what's the name of this one?', it's just that by the process of our conversation it emerges that something gets captured. I think Sheila and I are both interested in the idea that we'll discover something that we hadn't quite expected to discover.

We're actually both of us very analytical people but we're also using things like memory, analogy, intuition: thoughts that can't be legitimated objectively. There is some resonance that you wait for between the subjective interpretation and the actual conditions. To be satisfied you have to feel that not only do you feel it but it feeds back into itself and it becomes productive: 'If we are looking at it like this then that could lead us in this direction and that would be a useful way to go.'

How do you draw clients into this conversation?

I very often find that when we are coming to make a presentation of very early ideas, the work that is on the table is only the base layer to the understanding that is being communicated. You are trying to draw all of the participants into the possibility of what this project might be, which will speak back to their aspiration for it. So, if we suggest to the client that the project is a 'sleeping giant' and that doesn't resonate back, then it's not working.



Project: Killiney House,
 'The Sleeping Giant'
 Location: Killiney, Ireland
 Architect: O'Donnell + Tuomey
 Architects
 Date: 2007

above:
 Concept sketch showing the rocky
 landscape as a reclining figure and
 locating elements of the house
 within it.

left:
 Site plan showing the relationship
 between the building and the
 landscape.

Project: Sean O'Casey Community Centre
 Location: Dublin, Ireland
 Architect: O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects
 Date: 2008

top right:
 Site sketch showing the massing of the surrounding buildings and the relationship between the two landmarks, the church and the community centre.

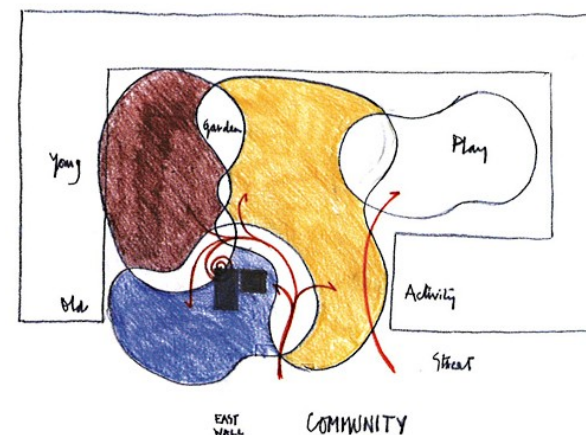
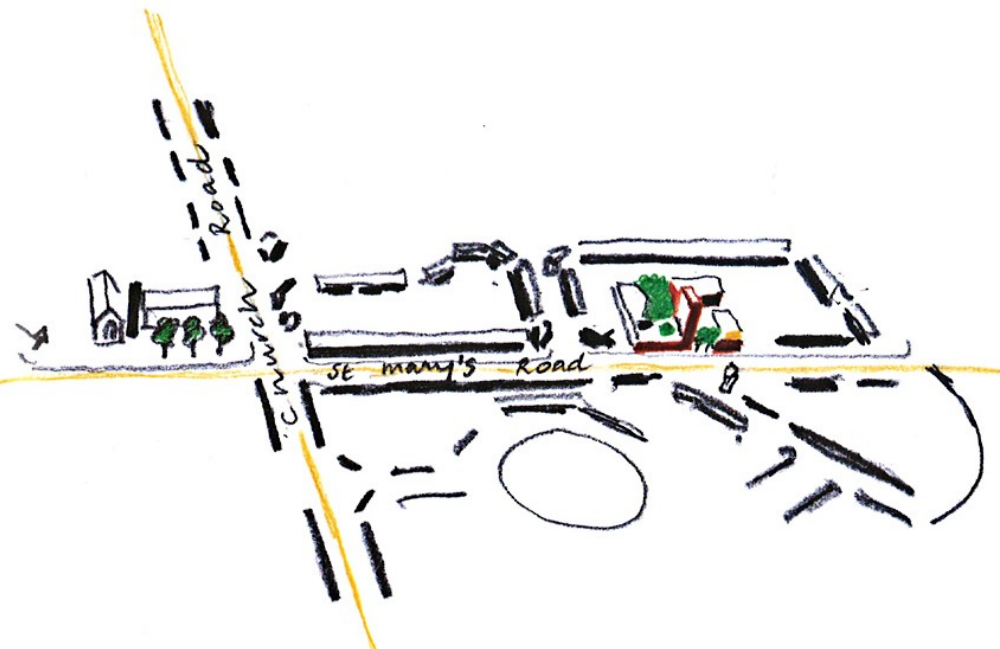
bottom right:
 Diagram showing the relationship between different community functions (play/activity), building users (young/old) and the circulation routes between them (street/garden).

How did it work with the Sean O'Casey Community Centre?

[There are] people who are very active in their own community – people who run the drama, sports and arts teaching and people who have a political sense of what a community centre should be. We have to meet them all and bring them into the idea of the project to help us to get the idea for the project. Somehow, the thought in the Sean O'Casey Community Centre was that the building would come down to the ground and be experienced by the pleasure and legibility of gardens. People could immediately begin to associate and identify with that. There are 1,800 houses in the East Wall, and they are all two-storey and they all have gardens. We were saying, 'Why wouldn't there be a garden in the house that belongs to everybody?'

We just came in with a white card model with four little volumes on it: a sports hall, a theatre, a plant room and an administration tower. They were four solids and then there were four voids, which we painted green; that is, four equivalent gardens. It is like we took these volumes out and the gardens got made. Now, it was a model about this size [palm-sized], you can put it in your hand. No evidence in it of anything to do with scale, windows, building, appearance.

It's a simple volume. We put that on the table, I promise you, everyone left that meeting knowing exactly what they thought they saw in that. Nobody asked 'What will it look like?'. Nobody asked any kind of end-result type questions. They all just wanted to know, 'Where does the idea come from and how will it feel?'



Project: Sean O'Casey Community Centre
 Location: Dublin, Ireland
 Architect: O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects
 Date: 2008

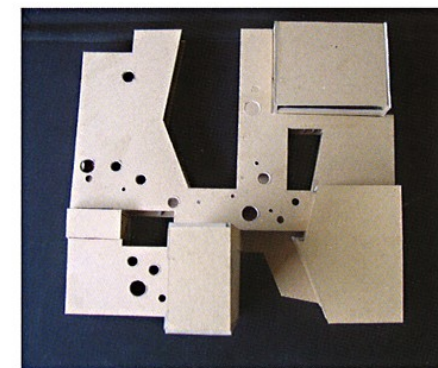
right:
 Tower and wall on St Mary's Road.
 bottom right:
 Palm-sized sketch model explaining
 the relationship of solid to void within
 the courtyard building.

How did the idea for the tower emerge in that project?

Their brief to us was, 'We want a big building'. We kind of came around the back of them a few times and said, 'Well, pretty much everything that we understand about what you want this building to be belongs on the ground. If we were thinking about this from first principles it would be a single-storey building.' For us, the breakthrough came with this idea about voids: that we would make the gardens and replace the removed areas into volumes and that one of those volumes would be tall, like a little thumb sticking up. We would put their committee room, their powerhouse, at the top so that six storeys up they would have this view out and it would be as if they were in a very big building, but in fact the plot of that building is just the plot of a single house.

In your book, *Architecture, Craft and Culture*, you talk about architecture being a slow process.

We don't think slowly. We certainly don't act slowly. We make jumps but certainly sometimes you can be hanging around waiting for that click to happen. One moment of clarity is when you feel you've caught it: either named it or drawn it or diagrammed it or some way encircled it or captured it in your head. This is slightly precedent to having it solved but you know that you've got it. And then there's the satisfaction of going through a sketch design that begins to develop its own set of rules, where at a certain point you think, 'OK, it's not up to me to think this up any more. Now it's only up to me to follow the directions that are coming out of the thing itself.'





Project: Sean O'Casey Community
Centre
Location: Dublin, Ireland
Architect: O'Donnell + Tuomey
Architects
Date: 2008

View of entrance foyer and courtyard
garden.

Project: Glucksman Gallery,
University College
Location: Cork, Ireland
Architect: O'Donnell + Tuomey
Architects
Date: 2004

View to river with gallery above.
The gallery is placed high among the trees and appears to be tethered to the walkway below. This was inspired by an image from a Seamus Heaney poem about a celestial ship snagged on an alter rail.

At the Glucksman Gallery in Cork you have said that you had to work very quickly and with only an outline brief.

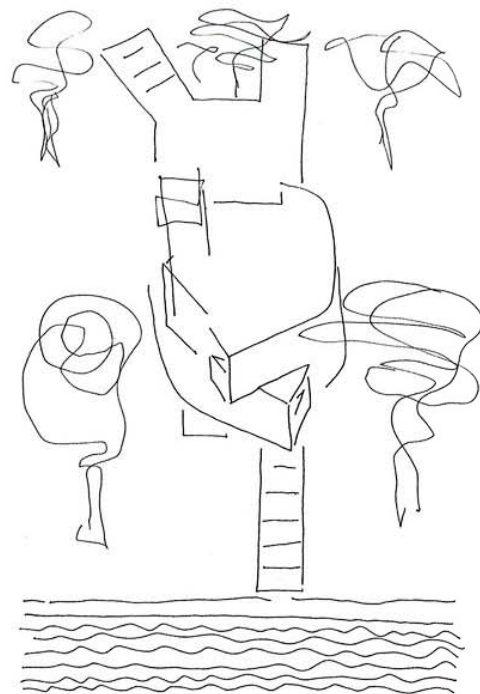
They knew that they wanted an arts and culture building in that setting. They didn't actually know what the building properly contained. So we were participatory in the selection of the specific siting of the building. And in its programme and in its size. We moved so fast on it that actually it became very much led by its architectural idea. The invitation was: 'Build us a cultural building that will become a gateway between town and gown.'

I don't think that I'm being in any way disingenuous when I say that I think that it's only a re-reading of the site. I think that the take that we made on it is that this is a jump and this is interesting. So we said, 'We have to build it here because this is tarmac and everything else is grass. We won't disturb any living creatures. Then we will lift up into the trees.' And then we thought, 'How will we measure the space between the trees? Well, maybe then the building should be free within those trees, as if it is turning or something.' And that's where this idea came from about upriver and downriver and back to the college. It's like the building turns to see the city and then it turns again, and then it turns again.

Is there a connection between the free thought of the daydream or creative reverie and the architect's need to also make rapid decisions?

Deadlines! You wait until the last possible moment because you are afraid: 'If I do something today then I have taken away the possibility of starting it tomorrow.' As soon as you do something you've closed it down. Sometimes it's better to let it collect itself a little bit. But now I know it's very difficult to do that and it's impractical. Maybe through accumulated experience you have a feeling of knowing about something a little bit quicker. But I must say, I still enjoy the idea of having this thing in front of me that I'm only looking at sideways.





Project: Glucksman Gallery,
University College
Location: Cork, Ireland
Architect: O'Donnell + Tuomey
Architects
Date: 2004

above right:
Concept sketch showing the
connection between the ridge,
the gallery and the river.

far right:
View from the river.

How and when do you record ideas?

By drawing with pencil on paper continuously. Even to the point that drawing can be removed from the paper, in the sense that you draw it in your head or you draw with your hands. But whatever you are doing in your head or with your hands, it is drawing. Even making models is just drawing. You're not drawing something that you've thought of already, you're interested in seeing what comes out of the drawing. In the process of that exploration the form emerges. There's an exchange process, which is fascinating because the drawing speaks back to you. That's the craft. It takes a long time to learn that.

At a certain point you have to pull your head out of the conflicting or insistent demands. Ask yourself what it's going to be and what you're going to make of it. And actually, sort of forget the problem. Fluency, as it is in language, is almost below the level of consciousness. It's instilled in you and it flows out of you because you have mastered it.

