

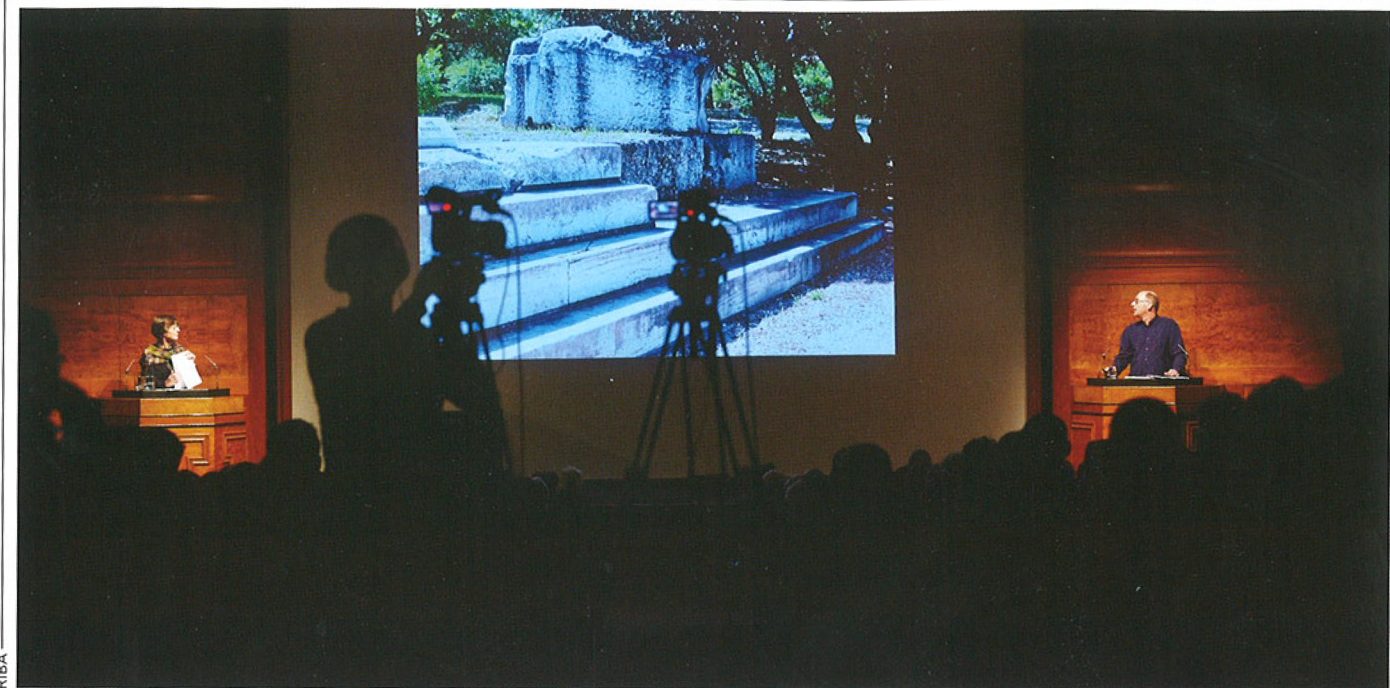
ONLINE

Read Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey's Royal Gold Medal lecture in full. Go to: TheAJ.co.uk/Spaceforarchitecture

Read Gold Medal citations for O'Donnell and Tuomey by Niall McLaughlin and Joseph Rykwert. Go to TheAJ.co.uk and search for 'The pleasures of dissonance'

ROYAL GOLD MEDAL LECTURE SPACE FOR ARCHITECTURE

Highlights of Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey's lecture, given at the RIBA on 2 February



By Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey

1. EVERYTHING ACCUMULATES

This is a very special moment for us. We feel that we should account for ourselves. So we will talk a bit about where we have come from and about where we are going. We have chosen six headings to structure our thoughts.

Each project contributes something to the way we approach our work. Projects accrue and build one on another; they are not discrete. Ideas and methods pile up, we hoard them – nothing is wasted. The starting point for each new work builds on all the work already done. It's a slow continuous, enfolding business.

On the one hand architecture is a clearly defined discipline with its own rules and inherent logic. But it is so complex and so much a part of life and living that it is influenced by and accommodates and maybe even contains many other aspects of human creativity and ingenuity. It extends beyond itself in a number of ways.

2. ARCHITECTURE AND SACRIFICE

Last year, at Joseph Rykwert's gold medal lecture, we learned that John Ruskin, on being offered the Royal Gold Medal by the RIBA, reacted with a prompt refusal. Ruskin, according to Rykwert, at least on this occasion, chose sacrifice.

Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* was the book my father gave me when I was at the beginning of my studies in architecture. In the opening chapter, 'The Lamp of Sacrifice', Ruskin makes every effort to

distinguish mere building from the meaning of architecture.

He reasonably admits that 'there can be no good architecture which is not based on good building'. Well, we would agree with that. But then, he goes on to say, that to keep our ideas of building and architecture distinct from each other, we must 'understand fully that architecture concerns itself only with those characters of an edifice which are above and beyond its common use'.

We couldn't agree with him there. Ruskin believed that architecture can be measured only by that which is useless and unnecessary. And we would aspire towards an architecture of useful beauty.

3. THE WORLD OUTSIDE (PUBLIC REALM)

In our world the work of making architecture always includes making the public realm. This applies as much to houses as it does to institutional buildings.

We like buildings that are not hermetic, sealed, smooth objects separated from their context or from the ground around them. We try to make buildings that don't hover or stand in distinct contrast; that have more complex relationships with ground and air; where there is an exchange between place and

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building, inside and outside, old and new. This phenomenon exists in time as well as place, in spirit as well as fabric.

4. CRAFT AND CONSTRUCTION

We want to make our buildings feel permanent, to make a lasting thing, robust and ready for a long and useful life in the world. I think that's why we like to work with raw materials, with the archaic stuff that will weather naturally and wear out slowly. Brick, concrete and timber seem to offer some sort of aesthetic resistance – resilient as they are to time and season.

But for the builder, this makes his life a little more difficult. Because the structure is the first thing to be made – in the mostly wet and often windy outdoor conditions of a building site – and then these primary elements have to be protected through all the messy stages of the process of construction, eventually to emerge intact as a precious finish. The first thing made becomes the first thing visible in a world where final finishes don't conspire to cover up early work.

5. BUILDING GROUND

Plans have always been the starting point for our work. In a way our plans have become more complex, but maybe they are also getting simpler and more intuitive.

We started out with order and geometry and rigour; with absolutes. Those things are still there, but now the plans are also about movement, direction and balance and always about use and occupation. Life, experience and building have all worked

on and over the order; have stretched and pulled the geometry. We are not afraid to bend and angle walls in response to the multiple forces acting on us – of place, climate and programme.

We like to use words to clarify design ideas. We try to pin down complexities by capturing them in carefully chosen phrases.

Driving through a Finnish forest on a pilgrimage to see Aalto's work, John started one of his many Aalto limericks with the lines:

*'In his late church work Aalto was anti
Any walls that were straight; he liked slanty'*

Sometimes silly words are actually very serious. The material quality and responsive spatial character of those churches and houses of Aalto's had a profound effect on us. TS Eliot says that:

*'The Naming of Cats is a difficult matter,
It isn't just one of your holiday games'.*

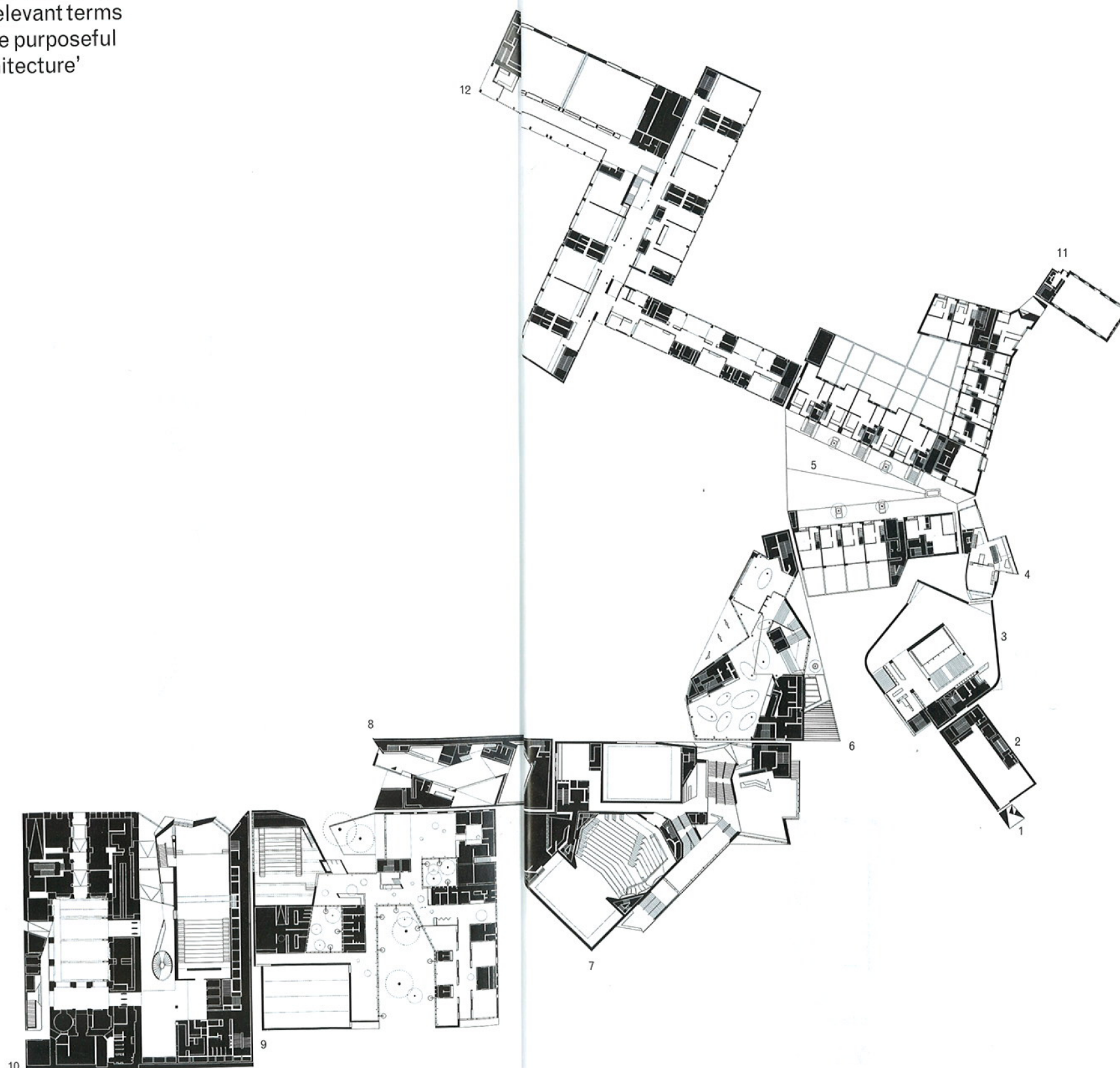
6. FUTURE PERFECT

Even the grand old Pantheon must once have seemed disruptively new in ancient Rome. And we have seen the contemporary archaic drama of *Happy Days* brought to new sense via an Arcadian engagement with ancient architecture and living nature. New and old are not really adequate or relevant terms to describe the purposeful vitality of architecture.

The future perfect is a progressive tense, a useful position from which to fortify the proposition of a particular design, and to rehearse some of its more difficult parts, or perhaps to seize the moment, to change your mind and start over again, to fail again, fail better.

We should not be persuading ourselves into a fool's paradise of an impossibly perfect future. We should be reminding ourselves, again and again, by way of the future perfect, of the more complex dimensions of what will have been ... of the imperfect reality of this continuous and living present.

'New and old are not really adequate or relevant terms to describe the purposeful vitality of architecture'



DRAWING COMPOSITE FUNCTIONS, COMPATIBLE PLANS CONNECTED

This drawing shows a selection of our projects all at the same scale, write Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey. Like in the song, *Dem Dry Bones*, where the hip bone's connected to the thigh bone, we wanted to bring different schemes together to see how they might link up and make some continuity between themselves.

Starting at the bottom right, the Vessel (1) is a seeing device lodged in the cyclops' eye of the Photographers' Gallery (2) and the Gallery is spliced back-to-back with the Glucksman Gallery (3) whose river-viewing window is hooked up with the sea-viewing window in the Howth House (4). And the gable of this private house is attached to the gable of the Timbryard Social Housing (5) and at the other end the LSE Student Centre (6) continues the brick wall around the corner until its café flows over into the café of the Lyric Theatre (7), whose own backstage is now back-to-back with the backstage of the Irish Language Cultural Centre (8), etcetera ... making one continuous city out of these different buildings.

And somehow the LSE sits happily at the centre of all this interactivity – as London itself has always been central to our own working lives in architecture.

Also included: Sean O'Casey Cultural Centre (9), Central European University, Budapest (10), O'Donnell + Tuomey's office, Camden Row, Dublin (11) and Cherry Orchard School (12).

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