

Taking place

O'Donnell & Tuomey exorcises the genius loci, says Robert Bevan

It was always rather too neat to categorise Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey simply as "Irish rationalists", despite ongoing concern with Aldo Rossi – although it rather suited buildings like the Irish Film Centre.

Now it seems far too simplistic a description: "The focus has shifted," says Tuomey. The concerns with "rootedness" and analysis of place and intention are still there but: "The shift has been towards architecture itself; it's less to do with the symbolic role. The focus is clearer on the actuality."

Their projects continue to demonstrate a strong response to context and to working within the continuity of Irish architecture – as evidenced in the much feted Ranelagh Multi-denominational School (see page 2). This also recalls the memory of the previous much-loved school on the site and reflects a desire to

engage in built form with the social life of the classroom.

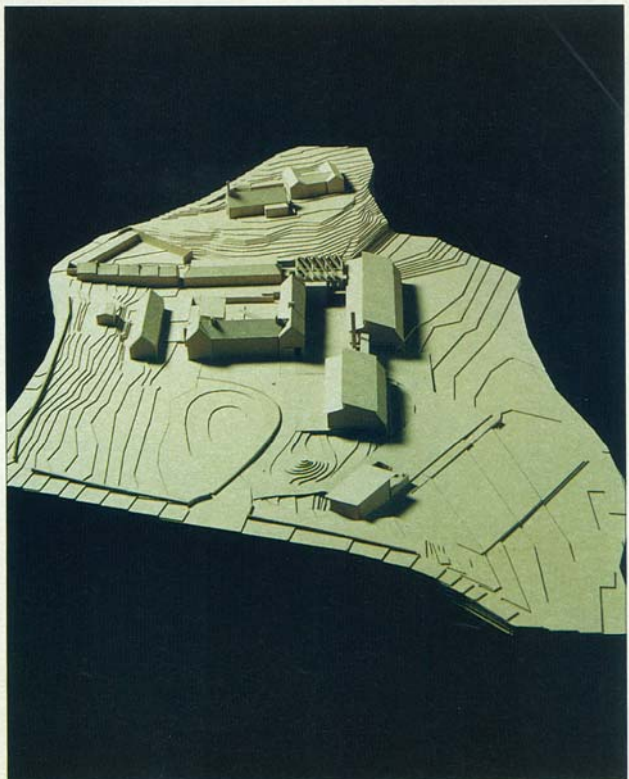
What you do, however, about a sense of place that is not to be cherished but is disturbing? O'Donnell & Tuomey's scheme to create a furniture college out of a former industrial school (a reform school) run by Christian Brothers in windswept Connemara has just this problem. The project will house a café, a library, a machine hall and a restoration workshop as part of the college. It will also make use of a structural timber frame – a rarity in Ireland.

The aim has been to integrate what was a repressive institution into the life of the nearby village and to foster contemplation rather than rigid discipline. Through the careful placement of new-build elements near the village, forming a connection and by a shifting of axes, its austerity will be softened

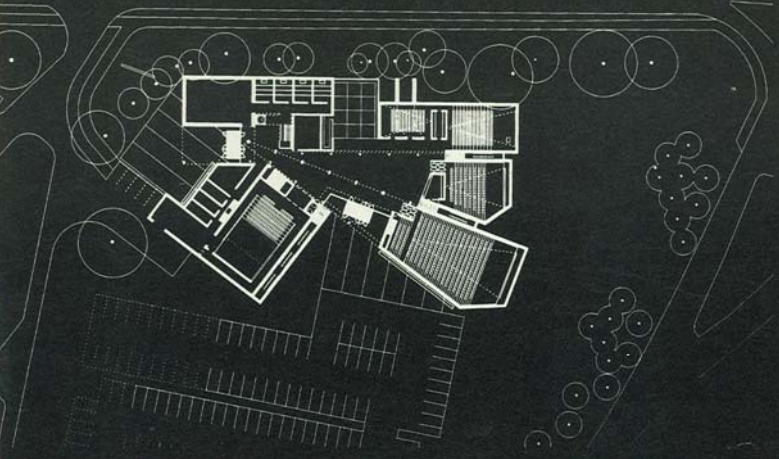
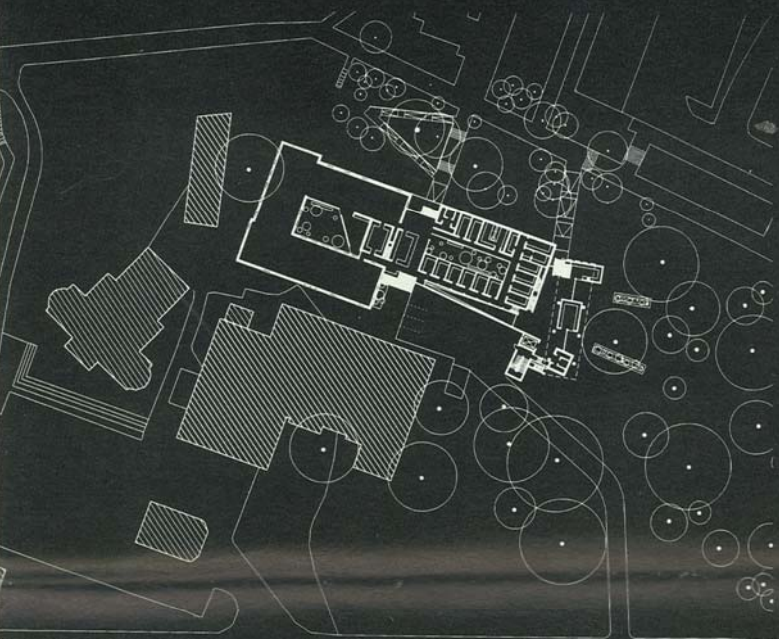
without history being erased.

The symbolic still has its place, however, as is clear from O'Donnell & Tuomey's Hudson House in Navan, Co Meath. It is conceived as cave, courtyard and a tower and evolved in an almost archaeological way out of the carcass of an old workshop which was dug into the ground below its neighbours.

The house results, in part from a fascination with Irish tower houses, as well as a timely visit to the courtyard house at Pompeii. As important, though, is the almost narrative way in which the structural concrete house has evolved to suit the life the clients were seeking – whether this means walking across a courtyard between the bedrooms and the living area or framing views of the sky. Untreated cedar external joinery adds to the elemental qualities – perhaps the shade of Rossi is lurking after all. ▶



Above left: Courtyard of Hudson House, Navan. Photo: John Searle. Above, from top: Long section and ground floor plan; north elevation and first-floor plan; perspective. Left: Connemara West Furniture College, with new workshops (right).



Contrary to appearances, Scott Tallon Walker does not have an exclusive right to build at University College Dublin. The practice's three decades' worth of design will shortly be joined by two substantial new competition-winning projects by O'Donnell & Tuomey.

The first, a new National Centre for Film & Drama (pictured immediately above and on lower part of site plan) close to the campus's main entrance, will be both

an educational facility and a cultural resource for the community.

It has been conceived as a Cor-Ten and terne-coated steel-clad forum where students, staff and the public meet. To foster these interactions a single concourse directly serves both public and teaching spaces. The administrative offices above look into this central space. Entrances for students and visitors, who approach from opposite directions, are designed in counterpoint.

A new Centre for Research into Infectious Diseases and a Virus Reference Laboratory (VRL) are planned for the sloping site opposite (pictured top, and upper part of site plan).

In this scheme there is a similar desire to create sociable space for the exchange of ideas alongside areas for concentrated work. The project extends the existing single-storey VRL and introduces a new testing laboratory for the Blood Transfusion Services Board.