

## From the figurative to the tectonic: Peter Wilson and the drawing process in the Clandeboye project

**Luiz Gilberto Silva Jr.**

luizjunior.04@hotmail.com

Architect, PhD student at the Department of Architecture of the Autonomous University of Lisbon (Da/UAL), Portugal.

**For citation:** JÚNIOR, Luiz – From figurative to tectonic: Peter Wilson and the drawing process in the Clandeboye project. **Estudo Prévio** 22. Lisbon: CEACT/UAL - Centre for Architecture, City and Territory Studies of the Autonomous University of Lisbon, 2023, p. 16-30. ISSN: 2182-4339 [Available at: [www.estudoprevio.net](http://www.estudoprevio.net)]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26619/2182-4339/22.2>

Received on April 5, 2023 and accepted for publication on April 29, 2023.

Creative Commons, license CC BY-4.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

---

### Abstract

Peter Wilson, while a professor at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, United Kingdom, developed, between 1983 and 1985, together with nineteen students, a project for the Clandeboye estate in County Down, Northern Ireland. The development of this project, in addition to training architects, resulted in an exhibition and a catalog. In this context, the present research focuses on understanding what Wilson wanted to teach his students with Clandeboye. To answer this question, the aim of the study is to evaluate how the development of Clandeboye contributed to the professional practice of the students who designed it. The investigation is based on the collection of drawings of the organization Drawing Matter, including 54 drawings of the project development process, as well as another 93 images of notes and drawings made in three sketchbooks. In addition to these sources, two semi-structured interviews were carried out with students involved in the project. With the analysis of this set of information, it was possible to verify that Clandeboye's drawings graphically illustrate the invention, confidence and constructive empiricism characteristic of the architectural thought that Wilson was developing back then, and had a significant impact on the professional lives of his students. The study also revealed that the perspective drawing methodology applied by Wilson in Clandeboye provides operative tools for teaching the discipline of contemporary architecture.

**Keywords:** Peter Wilson, Clandeboye, Architectural Representation, Architecture Teaching.

## Introduction

The project developed for the Clondeboye estate, between years 1983 and 1985, was an academic activity that involved Wilson and his 19 students from the Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture in London. The Clondeboye Estate is located in a Northern Irish landholding context with Neo-Palladian houses. In the "Clondeboye Report", Wilson (1986) states that the house and the site had unique characteristics, with beautiful landscapes and rich in history; however, he encountered a typical problem of important manor houses – that of finding a contemporary function.

In Clondeboye's case, the project was made possible given the personal relationship between AA president Alvin Boyarsky and Lord and Lady Dufferin, owners of the property (Dorian, 2021). For Wilson, this project would make it possible to investigate a series of regenerative strategies, which appropriate the environment and project a useful vision of the future, balancing private, public and institutional requirements.

The project program included a "Residential Center for Fine Arts and Environmental Studies," with the goal of promoting excellence in the arts and the enrichment of the cultural life of the community. In addition, its geographical location was ideal for training in horticulture and research on the preservation of rural space. The necessary facilities, therefore, would include laboratories, gardens, studios and a library. The proposed models were for a permanent population of 350 people consisting of 50 employees, four groups of 50 students from leading universities in Europe, Canada and India, and 100 students from Northern Ireland. The purpose of these experimental models was to measure the physical impact that these devices would have on Clondeboye, as well as to propose an inventory of optimistic and provocative architectural tactics (Wilson, 1986). In Clondeboye, it was hoped that Lady Dufferin could build one or two of the designed equipment, so, according to Wilson, in an interview with Mark Dorrian (2021), one of the guidelines of the activity was that the proposals had to be buildable. The question of being buildable was very important in the development of Clondeboye's design and goes against the architectural vocabulary that Wilson used at the time. According to the architect, "our subject was the figurative and the tectonic, so it was mandatory to show how things were assembled". In Figure 1 this idea is very evident, where through a cut in the drawing, Wilson divides it into two dimensions, one that explores constructive details and another that enhances the characteristic design of the project.

In this context, this paper seeks to uncover what Wilson wanted to teach his students with Clondeboye, and how this academic activity contributed to the professional practice of the students involved in the process.

To do so, the methods employed in this study have a qualitative character, that are (i) consultation and review of *Drawing Matter*<sup>1</sup> archives and (ii) semi-structured interviews with two former students of Wilson: Dominic Cullinan<sup>2</sup> (D.C.); and Richard Cutts Lundquist (R.L.)<sup>3</sup>.

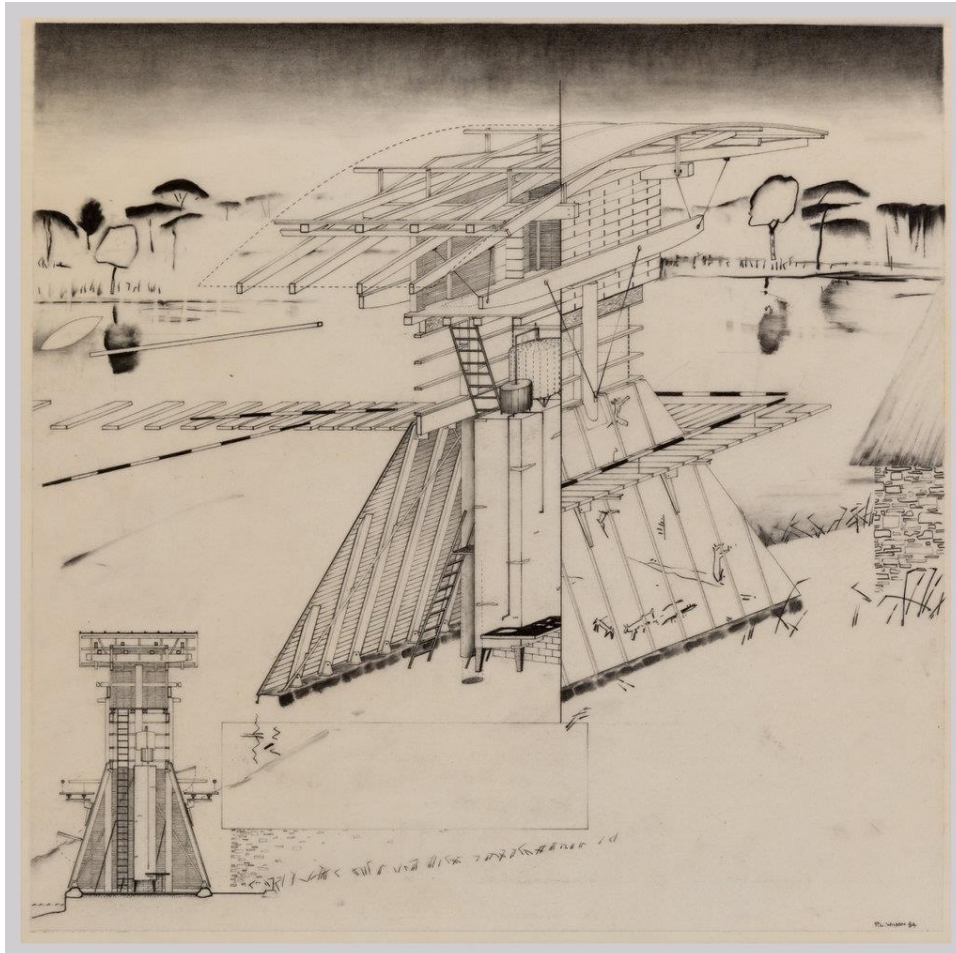


Figure 1 - Drawing of the "Artist's Retreat" tower, designed by Wilson (*Drawing Matter*, accessed on January 12, 2023).

The researcher found the interviewees through the catalog entitled "The Clandeboye Report: Contemporary Options for Clandeboye" (Wilson, 1986), which was developed by Wilson and gathered the projects for Clandeboye carried out by the students. The interview with Lundquist was conducted by e-mail. On the other hand, the interview with Cullinan was through a videocall, proving to be more productive, since it allowed the collection of a greater volume of data. Moreover, it facilitated the interaction between the researcher and Cullinan, providing an opportunity for a more open and in-depth dialogue.

### **Wilson's career path to Clandeboye**

Wilson is Australian and was born in 1950. His interest in painting led him to art school, but he later ended up switching to architecture, considering the teaching of art somewhat bohemian at the time (Dorrian, 2021).

After three years studying architecture at the University of Melbourne, Australia, an internship with Robin Boyd took him to the Architectural Association in London, UK, which he joined as a student in 1971. While still a pupil, he exerted a strong influence on

AA culture, which extended into his legacy as a teacher at the school (Wieczorek, 2021). Cullinan reports that back then (1982), the school of architecture encouraged the hiring of professionals with different approaches to architectural design. According to the interviewee,

"It was a famous time in AA; there was a lot of support for hiring different teachers, so we had Peter Wilson, Zaha Hadid, Peter Cook and Rem Koolhaas. They were making a career out while they were in AA, and during that time they became superstars. All with different methods and fields of study. Peter was the kindest and most generous to the students' imagination" (D.C., 2022)

In his architectural discourse, Wilson clearly invested in typological ideas, such as the bridges of ships that gain prominence in his work, because they could be thought of simultaneously as form and metaphor. This interest in situation and context echoes in the way Wilson developed his thinking about abstraction and figuration (Dorrian, 2021).

Figure 2 presents a time frame of the projects developed by Wilson between years 1975 and 1988; this timeline was very important to understand the context in which Clandeboye emerged. When analyzing Wilson's path in this period, one can perceive a persistent preoccupation with water, hydraulic technologies related to bridges, boats and submarines that flowed through his work (Hawker, 2021). Bridges and ships became figurative and tectonic references, from which Wilson derived significant components of his architectural vocabulary. These references are present in Clandeboye, and mark the period of Wilson's conceptual and unconstructed projects.

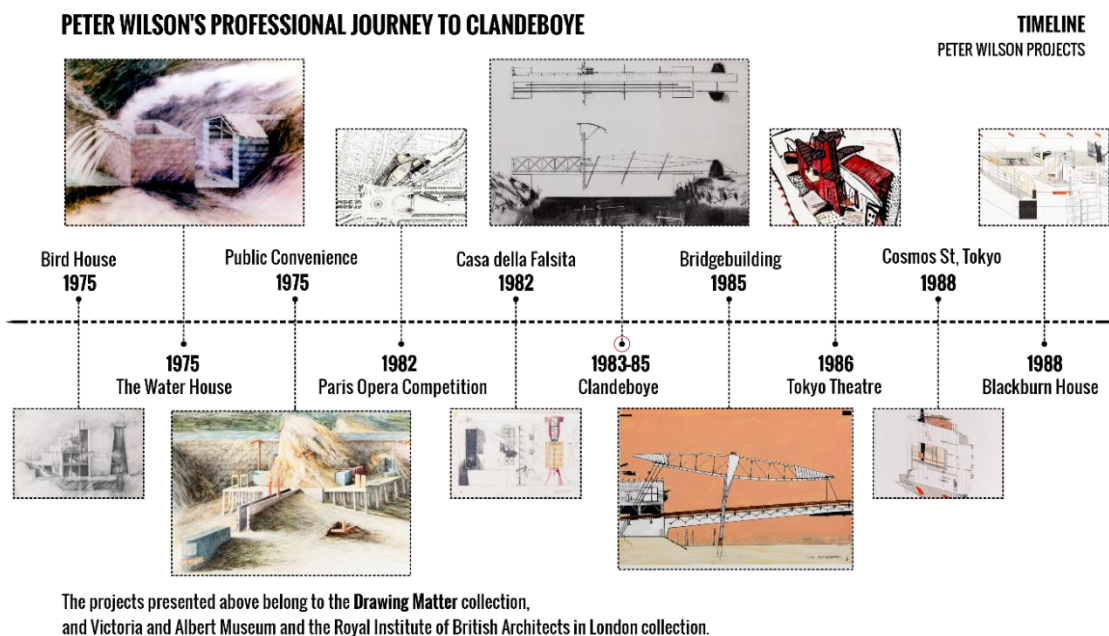


Figure 2 – Timeline bringing together conceptual and unconstructed designs of Wilson. (Composition of the a, 2023).

## The idea, the site and the program

Lord and Lady Dufferin, in conversation with Wilson (Wilson 1986), revealed that the Clondeboye project was initiated during a casual remark by then-president Alvin Boyarsky during a luncheon at the Architectural Association. Back then, the owners of the estate commented on their concern for the future of their property in Northern Ireland, UK, and described how large family estates across the nation and England, UK as well, were adapting to the contemporary world. According to the owners, large aristocratic estates throughout those two counties were doomed to sell land to create capital for agriculture, or to cede beautiful old forests to make room for commercial Christmas trees.

As Wilson already knew Lord and Lady Dufferin, he was called upon to develop a project for Clondeboye Estate. According to Wilson, the owners posed the question: "How can such a place continue to exist in times of change, and in what ways should it recreate its usefulness?". According to the interviewees in this study, this and other discussions were addressed during a weekend when Lord and Lady Dufferin hosted Wilson and his 19 students at Clondeboye House, situated in County Down, Ulster.

"We did visit to the Clondeboye Estate; Wilson had a good relationship with the owners of the property, so he negotiated that the students could go spend a weekend there" (D.C., 2022)

"We spent a few days in Clondeboye, discussing architecture, art, England and Northern Ireland with Lady Dufferin." (R.L., 2022)

When describing the visit to the site, Culliman presents a photograph he took during the trip (Figure 3). In the image the young architect is accompanied by his colleagues and stands in front of his car.

"That's me, and my beautiful car on the way to Clondeboye. I went with some colleagues, you can see one of them in the back seat. You know, it was not common to take pictures back then, not like today when we take millions of them, so when we took one, it was an important moment" (D.C., 2022)

Culliman mentions in the interview that Clondeboye was his second project in college, and that Wilson presented the activity proposal inviting them on a trip to Northern Ireland and that they would make some proposals for that place, "nothing more complicated than that". When asked if Wilson presented any specific theme about the activity or any guidance on what to look for in the place, the interviewee points out,

"I remember it was a very big house. They had an amazing breakfast and cheese; that's what I remember, because on that trip the project was the least important [...] The idea of being in a British aristocratic house in the middle of Northern Ireland was exciting and different, this was more important than the project itself.

On the topic of the study... I just remember Peter talking about having fun projecting Clondeboye" (D.C., 2022)



Figure 3 - Culliman on his way to Clandeboye (Personal collection of the interviewee).

Lundquist confirms this, and mentions how the allocation of the intervention areas occurred. According to the interviewee,

"I do not remember any specific instructions other than finding a location on the grounds of the house and designing a structure" (R.L., 2022)

The program implemented in Clandeboye was quite extensive and in the end proposals for 20 pieces of equipment were drawn up, distributed throughout the property (Wilson, 1986). When asked about how the program was defined and how the equipment was defined, the interviewees reported that the program arose naturally, from the conversations and discussions raised that weekend. Each student was free to define the type of equipment they would propose.

"I remember him (Peter Wilson) dividing the land into parts, so I was left with one of the sides that I remember not to like. I do not remember the program being something important; with Peter it didn't matter much the object, but rather the process of creation" (D.C., 2022)

Figure 4 presents a schematic plan with several design intentions highlighted. It is possible to see two divisions in the intervention area, zoning the equipment into institutional and private. It is also possible to perceive by the yellow line an intention to create an open path, which gives access to a public area, demarcated by an orthogonal



grid. It is interesting to note that the architectural interventions that Wilson carried out in Clandeboye were located precisely in the public area, demarcated in yellow.

### The development of the Clandeboye project

According to Wilson (1986), the analysis of the existing situation in Clandeboye led to the division of subsequent investigations into three distinct phases. First phase focused on strategies for new public uses on the property. The second one addressed a central issue: introducing new uses of the main buildings – the house and the courtyards of the stables. And the third explored large-scale interventions that would rival in importance the house.

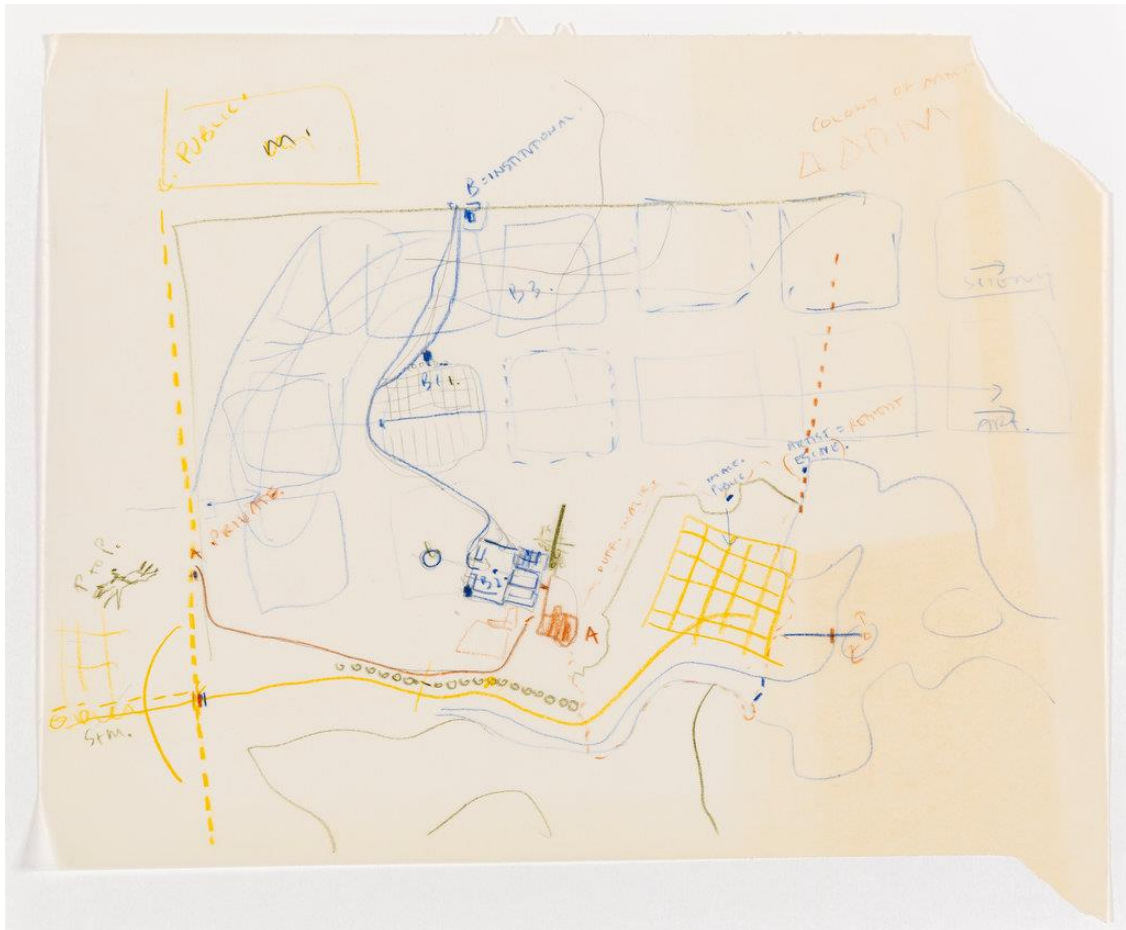


Figure 4 – Zoning of the intervention in Clandeboye, designed by Wilson (*Drawing Matter*, accessed on January 12, 2023).

But it is on two bridges on the estate that the architect focuses his intervention. Wilson<sup>4</sup> points out that it was during one of the expeditions around the lake that the Marquise de Dufferin mentioned two bridges that needed care. These two became the subject of three of the drawings the architect developed for Clandeboye, and later proved to be an opportunity that he seized to employ many theoretical concepts he was discussing back then (Hawker, 2021).

For Lundquist, before the Clandeboye Project, the interviewee's impression of Wilson's drawings was that they were picturesque, abstract and melancholic. This view changed when he developed Clandeboye, where for the interviewee the drawings had a more technical aspect, in an attempt to study very closely all the components and pieces that fit together to form a building.

"The design of the building pieces and how they fit together used to be unusual and inventive. Wooden models were used by Peter and me to design and present the work. There was always a figurative aspect to the work" (R.L., 2022)

When we analyze the Clandeboye estate present in the *Drawing Matter* archive, the images of the bridges designed by Wilson stand out for the way the architect communicates through drawing the fittings of the structure. In addition, there is a very characteristic feature in the representation of the landscape, where the architect makes a dialogue between the technical and the figurative, using Japanese techniques of clouds and smoke (Figures 5 and 6).

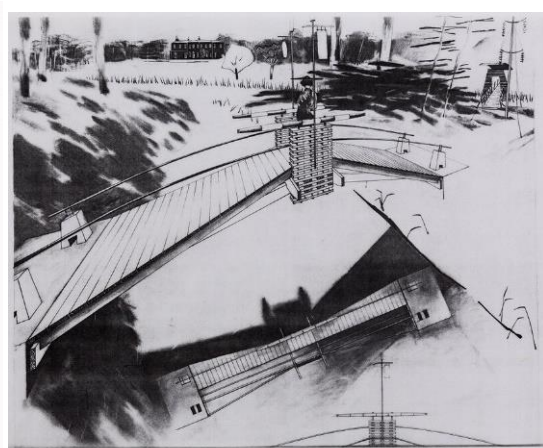


Figure 5 - Isometric perspective of the bridge, resting on the landscape (Authored by Peter Wilson. *Drawing Matter*, accessed on 12 January 2023). Figure 6 - Bridge number two in perspective, with defined landscape and reflection of the intervention in the water (Authored by Peter Wilson. *Drawing Matter*, accessed on 12 January 2023).

According to Wilson, the first bridge makes use of existing steel beams and concrete foundations. For reasons of economy and convenience, only the superstructure was proposed as new: a hybrid pair of handrails (one in tension and the other with classical pretensions) meet in a floating and covered portal. A phenomenological reading of 'bridge' that would not prioritize the function (crossing), but this moment of suspension. The second bridge, a few meters away from the first one, also draws its structural logic from the existing concrete buttresses. Here, sturdy wooden sleepers attach to a central station. The proximity of these perspectives to Japanese engravings is evident when one observes in the drawing the Marquise, hovering on the axis and in traditional robes of Eastern culture.

In addition to the design of two bridges, Wilson also developed a tower that he himself called the "Artist's Retreat". As Clandeboye was an academic proposal, it is interesting to understand what lead the teacher to design together with the students. When asked about this fact, the interviewees mentioned that Wilson used his bridge designs to teach students how to draw in perspective.



"He had a very good method of drawing in perspective, and he taught us that you can draw something small on the sheet, and from a certain perspective, that little mark comes to life" (D.C., 2022)

According to the interviewees, Wilson taught techniques of how to apply the design of elements through the drawing process, during the construction of thought. "In this design process you do not think about things that you will later discard, all design is thought of in the process" (D.C., 2022). This technique can be seen in Figures 7, 8 and 9, which bring together three drawings made by Wilson in different phases of detailing, and demonstrate the evolution of the project. In Figure 7, he presents a proposal for entry to Clandeboye. The design has figurative features and is a frontal view of the equipment.

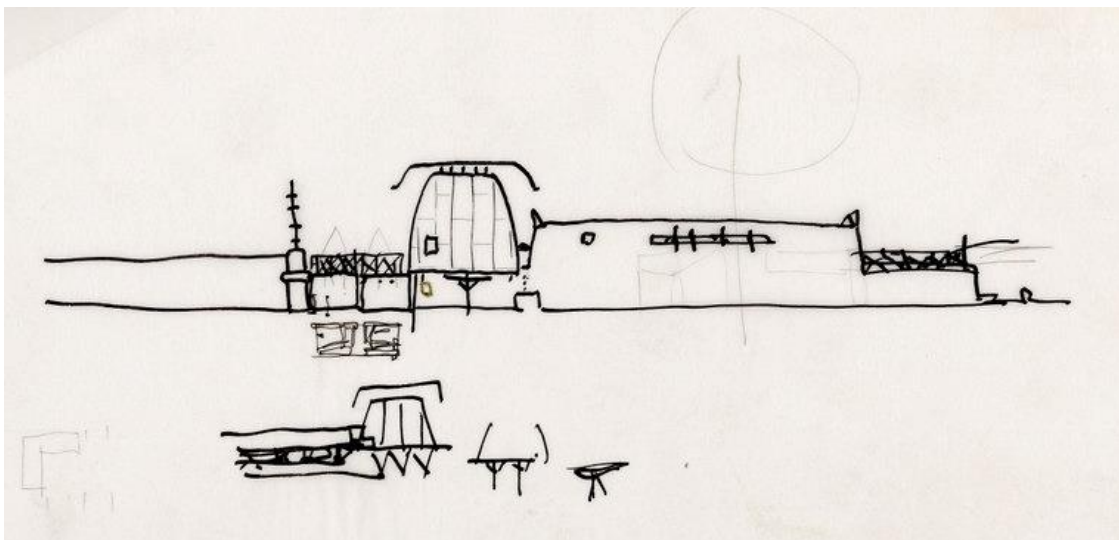


Figure 7 – Conceptual idea of the proposed entrance to the Clandeboye property, frontal view drawn in pencil (Authored by Peter Wilson. *Drawing Matter*, accessed on 12 January 2023).

In Figure 8 the same entrance proposal is drawn in perspective and through this viewpoint, Wilson adds landscape elements that contextualize the project on the ground, and advance in constructional and architectural detail.

In Figure 9, the perspective drawing presents several design evolutions in comparison with the previous ones, where it is possible to perceive changes in the paths and in the design of the proposal. Here, the design focused on tectonics gains more prominence, because in a landscape context with figurative features, architecture gains evidence.

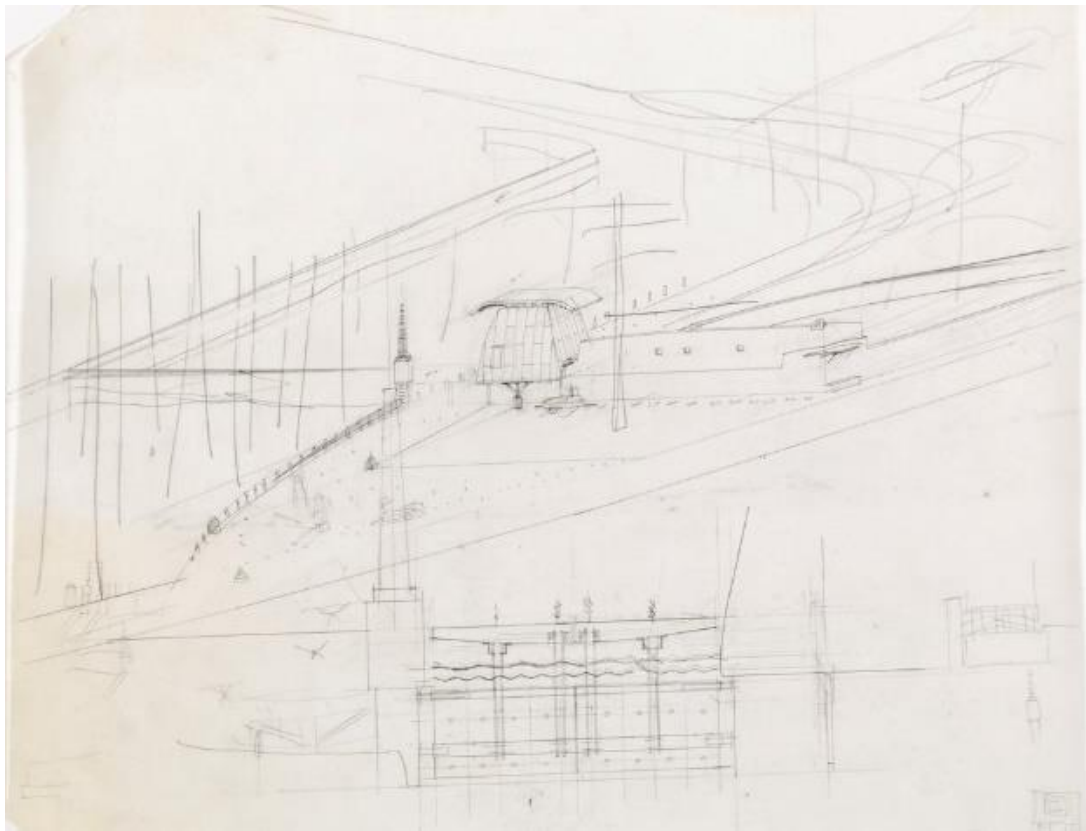


Figure 8 – Isomeric perspective and cuts that demarcate the relationship between architecture and landscape (Authored by Peter Wilson. *Drawing Matter*, retrieved 12 January 2023).

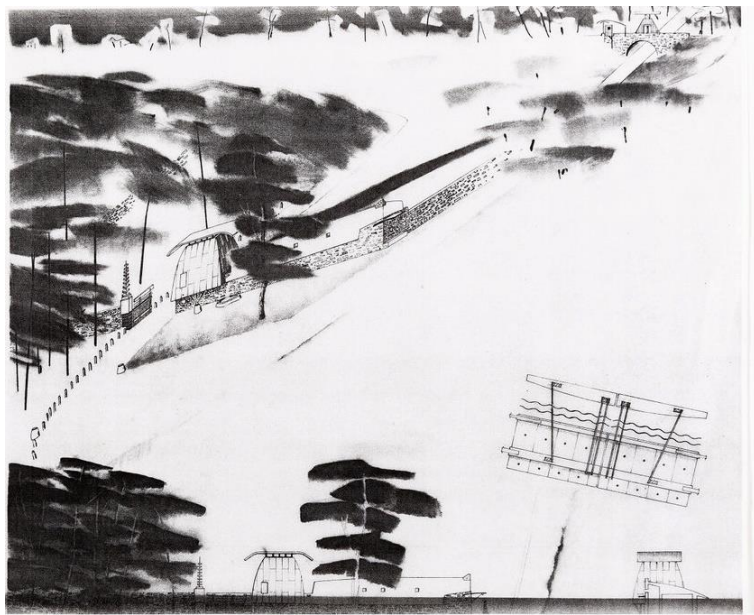


Figure 9 – Perspective demarcated by a strong stroke, which transitions between the figurative representation of nature and the technical detailing of architecture (Authored by Peter Wilson. *Drawing Matter*, accessed on 12 January 2023).

When asked about the project development process, the interviewees reported that there were no group discussions and that each project was developed individually, as well as the orientations given. This data is related to the methodology employed by Wilson in the classroom; however, it answers another question regarding the drawings of this project. A set of A2-sized drawings brings with it design details of several pieces of equipment in the program, which seem to be put together, to understand how each part relates to the whole (Figures 10 and 11).



Figure 10 – Detail drawings from an aerial point of view, all by Peter Wilson (*Drawing Matter*, accessed on 12 January 2023). Figure 11 – Aerial drawing of the landscape with indication of where the program is distributed. Authored by Peter Wilson (*Drawing Matter*, accessed on 12 January 2023).

Analyzing these drawings – and considering it was an academic activity – it is concluded that they were made in groups, because they represented with symbolic traits, various equipment of students. The interview revealed that the drawings were made by Wilson, while demonstrating to the students how to propose designs with figurative strokes in different perspectives.

### **The influence of Clandeboye and Peter Wilson**

To answer the research question, which aims to understand how the experience with Clandeboye contributed to the students' professional practice, the interviewees were asked what they learned from the project. Lundquist revealed that he became interested in the highly crafted pencil drawings, collages and wooden models, which were slightly absurd and hopefully provocative. He pointed out that he maintained an interest in this approach during his career. However, the interviewee reveals the following:

"Peter's greatest influence was on my teaching. He showed me how to mentor and teach in a way that supports and encourages the student's interests and inspirations" (R.L., 2022)



Culliman reports that, back then, modernism was punished by postmodernism, and that with Wilson being in the Architectural Association it made students able to put all the arguments of this dispute of architectural styles on one side of the drawing, and on the other side encouraged students to work with himself. Culliman also describes that Clandeboye had a greater impact on his practice as a teacher:

"Peter Wilson is very figurative, but it is not just about that, it is about a method where you do not look for precedents, you do not look for an intellectualization of the process, but rather establish a relationship with the page on which you draw [...] Peter taught me that learning does not have to be painful, and that was strong enough to impact my own way of teaching" (D.C., 2022)

### **Clandeboye and its place in contemporary architecture**

The designs developed at Clandeboye graphically illustrate the invention, confidence and constructive empiricism characteristic of architectural thought that Wilson developed while a professor at the Architectural Association (Figure 12). The proposals submitted by the students and their tutor responded poetically to the landscape of Northern Ireland and employed local materials such as stone, wood and stucco. When one considers the impact that this project had for the architectural making, it can be said that Clandeboye resulted in a manifesto for a contemporary architecture that has a descriptive and narrative dimension.

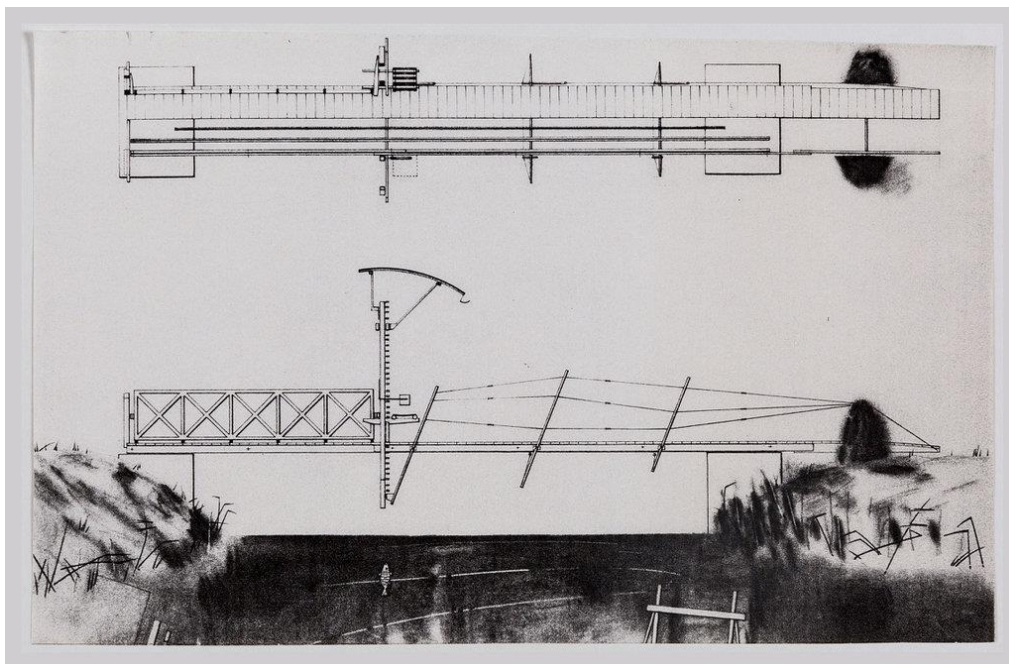


Figure 12 – Drawing of the 'Divided Bridge', by Peter Wilson (*Drawing Matter*, accessed on 12 January 2023)

Based on the interviews, it is concluded that the teaching methodology employed by Wilson in this activity was characterized mainly by experimentation. This characteristic is observed by the way he conducted the visit to the intervention site and when he did not specify a program. When teaching his students how to draw in perspective, Wilson demonstrated how to evolve the project and define design through the drawing process.



This was seen as something extremely positive by the interviewees, and both confirmed that this method had a strong influence on their way of thinking architecture. With the development of this project, Wilson showed that his drawing technique served both to evolve drawings of a symbolic and figurative nature, as well as to more technical drawings, which aspired to construction.

Although the semi-structured interviews provided a comprehensive overview of Wilson's teaching methodology in Clandeboye, some questions still remain to be inquired. These outstanding questions require direct consultation with the primary source, that is, Wilson himself, in order to obtain additional clarification and deeper insights. Aspects that can be explored in future research include: (i) the structuring of the classes taught by Wilson; (ii) how collaborations with other Architectural Association faculty were established; and (iii) Wilson's specific influence on the professional lives of the 19 students involved in the Clandeboye project. These additional questions are essential for an in-depth understanding of Wilson's pedagogical approach, and the impact of this teacher on the training and work of these students.

For the teaching of architecture, Wilson demonstrated with Clandeboye that the process of project conception has an empirical character. And in this sense, it points to a result that depends on the experience that is apprehended in each design phase. The study also revealed that the perspective drawing methodology applied by Wilson in Clandeboye, provides operative tools for teaching the contemporary architectural discipline.

## **Bibliography**

- DORRIAN, Mark – Peter Wilson and Mark Dorrian in conversation. *The Journal of Architecture*, 26(5), 2021, p. 599-638.
- DORRIAN, Mark – Introduction: architectural lineaments — adventures through the work of Peter Wilson. *The Journal of Architecture*, 26:5, 2021, p. 571-574.
- HAWKER, A. – Assisted/eccentric/adjacent: Bridgebuilding No. 4 Ponte Dell'Accademia. *The Journal of Architecture*, 26(5), 2021, p. 659-687.
- WILSON, Peter Wilson – *The Clandeboye Report: Contemporary Options for Clandeboye, County Down, Ulster. Projects by Students at the Architectural Association, London, 1983–85.* London: Architectural Association, 1985; Peter Wilson, *Informing the Object: Projects from Diploma Unit 1, 1981–5.* London: Architectural Association, 1986.
- WIEVZOREK, Izabela – Some reasons for talking about Peter Wilson, *The Journal of Architecture*, 26:5, 2021, p. 575-598.

## **Other resources**

Peter Wilson will be speaking at *Architectural Fictions and Other Stories: Dalí / Duchamp* at the Royal Academy on 17 November 2017.





---

<sup>1</sup> The *Drawing Matter Collection* is an institution dedicated to the preservation and study of architectural drawings and related graphic works. Founded in 2008 in the UK, the collection houses a wide variety of materials, including drawings, sketches, models and photographs, covering different historical periods and architectural styles (Drawing Matter Collection, 2023). Retrieved from <https://drawingmatter.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Dominic Cullinan was born in Arua, Uganda in 1960. He studied architecture at the Architectural Association, where he obtained his degree in 1987. During his career, he held the position of Professor from 1991 to 1994 at the Architectural Association and at the University of Cambridge, UK, in 1993. He has served as a visiting critic at several schools of architecture, including the Royal College of Art, Sheffield, Universities of Westminster, London Metropolitan and Hong Kong. Currently, Cullinan is involved in the collaborative doctoral supervision of the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge, UK (SCABAL, 2023). Retrieved from <https://scabal.net/>.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Cutts Lundquist attended the School of Environmental Design from 1976 to 1980. He subsequently joined The Architectural Association in London, UK, from 1981 to 1984. He taught at the Southern California Institute of Architecture from 1990 to 1997 and at the Department of Interior Architecture at Woodbury University from 1997 to 2000. Since then, he has been an adjunct professor in the Department of Architecture/Landscape/Interiors at Otis College of Art and Design since 2000. His experience in architecture has allowed him to develop specialized knowledge in various aspects of interior design, such as the relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces, use of materials, and lighting techniques, which are reflected in his work (Studio/RCL, 2023). Retrieved from <http://www.rcl.net/about>.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Wilson will be speaking at *Architectural Fictions and Other Stories: Dalí / Duchamp* at the Royal Academy on 17 November 2017.

