



building material

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Architectural Association of Ireland,
8 Merrion Square North, Dublin 2.
www.archeire.com/aa/

t: 01 6614100

f: 01 6614150

editor: buildingmaterial@eircom.net



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This issue of *building material* is concerned with this subject - the perception (or position) of architecture in (contemporary) Irish society.

As architects, our understandings are always changing. We never stop learning architecture. Learning how to make architecture. Learning how to be architects. Learning about architecture.

As architects, we use the medium of architecture to come to new understandings about our surroundings. The “general public” is, likewise, involved in this process of learning, of developing new understandings. This issue of *building material* is concerned with this subject - the perception (or position) of architecture in (contemporary) Irish society.

It is often felt that an interface is needed between “architecture” and the “general public”, that a translation of language and of methods of communication is necessary. A middle ground, a commonality, is sought. These interfaces are often highly successful and generate much-needed and very worthwhile positive energy. But this meeting of architecture and the public need not always be translated or mediated by others; neither need it always begin with the domestic sphere.

This was demonstrated by the recent exhibition for the Carlisle Pier development in Dun Laoghaire. Aside from a discussion here on the various merits of the four short-listed schemes, for me, the most outstanding and exciting part of the exhibition was the reactions of the visitors comprising, for the most part, this “general public.”

The proposals were communicated through plan, section, elevation, model. No translation. No mediation. No problem. I found myself watching groups of people moving forward and back among the proposals, really working hard to fully understand each scheme and making relative comparisons. I found myself listening in on conversations about form, about scale, about movement. About relationships of the proposals to the walker, to the town, to the harbour, to the bay.

Conversation was serious. Architecture was serious. And these people were at the core of the issues. The opportunity [the challenge?] for real public engagement was presented, and was enthusiastically seized. As a result of such happenings, understanding continues to grow.

In 1948 Jorn Utzon wrote about this growing, this journey towards a real understanding of architecture. In short, he believed that "by being in contact with our surroundings, we find our way into architecture's innermost being." As a nation, we do have a particular (and perhaps peculiar) approach to land, and hence to our built environment. A number of the pieces gathered for this issue of *building material* attempt to understand the Irish approach to the physicality of our surroundings. Though perhaps at different stages of Utzon's journey towards a deeper understanding of architecture, the Irish public and Irish architects are not exclusive entities. We are learning together.



Architecture without Tears

ALISTAR ROWAN

The position of architecture in our contemporary society in Ireland lies uncomfortably between these two coordinates: most people can't read plans nor can they conceive what makes us tick.

'No its here', I said, leaning forward in the three-wheeled taxi to give our Indian driver the tourist map of New Delhi we had got in the Hotel. 'We must be in this sector. The cathedral is over there'. I pointed emphatically at the sheet. 'You are going in the wrong direction'. Our driver's dark eyes, the colour of new chestnuts, fell blankly on the plan of the city where he worked. He turned it upside down, then on its side, demonstrating in that act the sort of dumb show of activity that is such a part of Asian life. 'I know, I know. I take you there real quick', and off we roared again into the blue smoke traffic – still in the wrong direction. Twenty minutes later we gave up, paid the rupees required and walked off in the sunshine.

As our driver peered at the plan, it had suddenly dawned on me that to make a map of a city was a convention that he did not understand. It had no meaning for him. I might as well have given him a musical score or a carpet page from the Book of Durrow as an aid to finding his way. In India the visual language we take as given and on which we rely to explain our ideas and concepts as architects and planners was indecipherable to the taxi driver. It had no meaning.

Recently I gave a lecture on the architecture of Robert Adam to the Southern Region

Chapter of the RIAI in Cork. A friend from UCC came along and joined us for dinner after. 'Super lecture', her email ran the next day, 'I enjoyed meeting your architects. They are a race apart'.

The position of architecture in our contemporary society in Ireland lies uncomfortably between these two coordinates: most people can't read plans nor can they conceive what makes us tick. The architect is a strange being expressing unusual priorities in a language that is unknown and remote from the everyday concerns of normal people. Every profession has its norms and creates its own society. Medicine, Law, Finance, Accountancy, Commerce, the Church, Education – even Politics – each area of activity has its own procedures, its structure and its language. Architecture is the same, yet there is a huge difference in the impact that occurs when architecture is in retreat and buildings fail to meet our proper expectations. An incompetent doctor may kill the patient that another might have saved; the outcome of a government tribunal may be inconclusive; the value of a 'secure investment' can drop out of sight or canon law may be invoked to excuse what most would consider inexcusable. Professional failures such as these cause scandal but they

do not scar the face of the land nor leave it permanently damaged. That is where architecture is different. With architecture the public has to live with the physical consequence of bad design and poor decision-making. Failure is always evident and usually it is resented by the public. In Ireland in the twenty-first century architecture, and the architects who are its practitioners, must communicate their beliefs and value systems more clearly and more forcefully than they have done before. Why should this be so? The answer is simple. There is too much bad building in the world we inhabit. Moreover, if architects do not engage with Irish society it can only get worse.

Shall we blame the client? No great architecture can be created without an imaginative and understanding client. That is what often stands behind our greatest monuments: Pericles created the Parthenon; Suger gave energy to the Gothic of the Isle de France; Julius II called St. Peter's into being; Shah Jahan created the Taj Mahal; Richlieu, the University and Church of the Sorbonne; Lord John Beresford, the Dublin Customs House. An understanding client and an intelligent brief are the first essentials for strong architecture yet in our age each is exceptional. According to Christopher Hussey, the doyen of architectural writers in *Country Life* in the 1950s and 60s 'architecture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was aristocratic, in the nineteenth century it became plutocratic and it is bureaucratic now'. A plutocrat may build some opulent things but bureaucracy is rarely inspired. Edward VII and Queen Alexandra gave Dublin its last great public building in Aston Webb's richly articulated and cleverly contrived College of Science, now the Government Buildings. What has the state built since? Sam Stevenson's Central Bank - recently vulgarised by incongruous and pretentious railings that look as if they have strayed down the hill from Kilmainham - or the Financial centre at the Portland Docks. Do these rate the epithet great? There is, of course, Gordon Benson's theatrical extension to the National Gallery. The new buildings for Dáil Éireann? What else have we got?

Well, to be fair, we have lots of nice, intelligently conceived and carefully designed structures put up by corporate and private patronage and celebrated in the pages of *The Irish Architect* (now *Architecture Ireland*) and occasionally in a wider press. I could list a quantity of buildings of the 1980s and 1990s I enjoy. The early multi-storey atriums were fun, exhilarating internal spaces of light and shining surface. By now however, they have



Photo: Detail jupiter symphony



Photo: Detail jupiter symphony

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Photo: Fás Building from high street



Photo: Fás Building from grant street



Photo: Fás Building from high street

become a cliché and I am tired of what one architect friend calls 'shed architecture' – those tubular steel and glass rectangles that seem to abrogate the duty of thought that is implicit in good design. Fashions come and fashions go. I hope the fashion for these clean and clamorous enclosures, hard-edged and hard to use, will disappear. They illustrate, I believe, how far designers can be out of touch with their real clients, the people who have to use these buildings. It is not my purpose to finger any individual practitioner so let us move to the work of a new category of professional, a parasite of whom I think I disapprove, the interior designer. If architects were allowed to do their job properly, or had clients who understood a good plan when they saw one, there should be no need for an interior designer. The modern world imposes more and more design-and-build packages upon us and, when that happens, in comes the interior designer to improve or cover up what often, in reality, is a botched job.

What I object to in so many of these modern interiors, shoe-horned into a drab space, is the mindless repetition of an accepted aesthetic norm. We have all eaten in trendy restaurants where you cannot hear yourself speak or have a relaxed conversation because of the din that the design creates. Noise is everywhere. It bounces off the shiny hardwood floors, the glass and beech wood facias, the clean, uncluttered, clinical design that looks so good yet is appalling to encounter and de-humanising in its reality. Someone is teaching students to design like this and, to be honest, the Irish architectural profession is not entirely innocent of the crime of these creations. 'Looks before use' is a motto that premiates appearance in place of practical good sense. It is an old failing of the profession: tall people in Madison, Wisconsin, have banged their heads for 100 years on the low-slung eaves of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses and folksy churches – but they still *look* lovely. Peter and Alison Smithson always had their buildings photographed before the furniture, on in the case of their schools, the children went in.

As architects and architectural critics we are sometimes such purists that we forget – or ignore - poor Joe and Maireád who have to inhabit the buildings we design or discuss. This is why I admire, with an almost exalted awe, the soaring canopy designed by Norman Foster to bring logic and beauty to the turmoil of air travel at Stansted.

the elation that is generated by that wonderful roof and the soft diffused light that falls from it. There is a great building that works despite its purity.

Too often and to too many people the architect seems to be a person who is set apart. I use the present craze for 'hard' interiors to demonstrate this point. They do not work and are imposed by fashion and false argument. Perhaps it is time that architects got real. How many, working in professional practice, live in a house of their own design? How many are happier in an Edwardian, Victorian or even a Georgian home? Double standards? That, not infrequently, is what the public thinks though professionally we know that to suggest as much is a fallacy.

The greatest fallacy from the point of view of the public in Ireland today is that architecture is a matter of decoration. The popularity of 'make-over' programmes on television and of mindless post-modernist tat is not entirely responsible for this view. Even in the eighteenth century as great an architect as James Adam wrote of decoration as 'the nerves and sinews of our art'. John Ruskin in the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* thought the free expression of artistic invention one of the fundamental principles of design and by that he meant the artisan's entitlement to decorate. Robert Adam, the Mozart of European architecture, knew better. Great architecture depends on the interplay of mass and volume, the clear definition of space and the pursuit of a logical and practical outcome as the consequence of the design process. Great architecture is energised by an inner logic and is



generated in the plan. Get the plan right and the rest will follow. That is what Le Corbusier maintained, Julius II, Suger and the architects of Hagia Sophia. The plan may not be everything but it is in Corbusier's words 'the generator' and that is still true today. Here is the Gordian knot of our modern situation for the general public, as bureaucrats, corporate patrons, politicians, hospital and city managers, councillors, chairmen of boards, presidents of colleges and heads of schools, cannot read plans. They may understand them as diagrams – better than the Indian taxi man did in New Delhi – but they cannot *read* them in such a way as to comprehend the design any more that they can hear in the mind's ear the Jupiter Symphony of Mozart simply by looking at the score.

So the architect's primary design instrument is beyond the grasp of many, even most, clients. Sadly, I believe it is also beyond the grasp of most planners. In response to this situation the public asks 'what will it look like' and is shown an elevation. No one explains that that too, like the plan, is rooted in convention, a graphic diagram that must appear quite different in reality. So people think they get what they see. The planners don't think. They have not been trained to do so. It is not for them to ask what something will look like but whether the proposed design meets the regulations and answers a perceived sociological and planning need. No one, other than the poor architect is concerned about the interplay of solid and void, civic space and the primacy of sight lines or aspect in an urban environment. We are a race apart. What makes architecture special, distinguishing a fine building from something that is merely built, is missed by most people. This does not mean that the public does not engage with the built environment. The conservation movement and the popularity throughout the housing estates of the 1980s and 1990s of neo-picturesque homes – a bit of leaded glass here, a timber porch there, dinky gables and some fancy detail – demonstrates the contrary. Yet these modern enthusiasms of the Irish public confuse the shadow for the substance.

In the world of conservation, it is very often the case that people like old buildings simply because they are old rather than because of any intrinsic architectural quality. Often the enthusiasm for the past is because, as in the case of a mansion house set in its park or a Georgian terrace, these buildings can be understood as monuments to an earlier age, now gone beyond recall. What that age was like, the sort of society that brought the building into being and how the buildings worked may not always be fully understood yet people like to fancy that they are in touch with the national past when they encounter an historic building. The old building, despite the accretions of different times and the installation of up-to-date services – the light bulb that lets us see the dungeon – serves primarily as the launch pad for romantic notions, individual and often highly enjoyable but remote from historic

reality, or any assessment that is based on quality or aesthetic worth. For many Irish people, old equals good, equals lovely!

In late medieval Cork there were seventeen religious establishments of which one solitary belfry tower – the red abbey – now survives. In a country where so much has been ruined, if not totally destroyed, a responsible argument can be made for the whole-hearted conservation of the buildings of the past. Building technology has advanced so far, as have the wages of the work force, that we could not afford today, even if we wished to do so, to build the stone, brick and slate structures that were erected even in the recent past. These historic materials must be allowed a continuing place in our world since they define the character of many an Irish town and village and are irreplaceable now. They have therefore a value as vernacular architecture or as buildings which exhibit such a feel for their materials as to transcend the value judgements that might otherwise be made in terms of style, fitness for use or design quality. 'Old' need not signify that a building is lovely but it will often mean that there is a validity in its materials and that the structure is characterful.

The same cannot be said of modern housing estates or much of the new building in our towns. Here, when a picturesque idiom is engaged, the 'architecture' bears no direct relevance to the building it adorns. Often the materials are fake in the sense that they imitate the appearance of earlier construction techniques while their fabric is entirely modern: plastic window frames with imitation strip glazing bars sandwiched within the double glazing, tinted cement bricks, concrete tiles, artificial slates and extruded 'timber look alike' facias. For readers who are architects there can be no need to catalogue these ugly and imperfect things unless it is to underline the fact that most Irish people seem to find them perfectly acceptable. Of course the buildings and schemes I am describing now are not architect-designed any more than the vernacular architecture of Victorian and Edwardian Ireland but they seem to me to be a very great deal worse.

The dilemma facing architecture in Ireland today is largely a cultural matter. We lack an informed clientele to commission new buildings or even the education to allow people generally to enjoy, to criticise or to understand architectural design. We have put up, for far too long, with shoddy public

buildings. Who designed, if that is the right word, the 'Fás Building' that blocks the southern view down Grand Parade in Cork? We have accepted for far too long the malign effects of compromise, reduced budgets and even – a particularly Irish problem – the interference of elected representatives and Ministers in matters they do not understand. In writing about the public interface of architecture in 2004 it is hard not to sound elitist or to put oneself in the position of a person who comes from 'a race apart'. Yet why should we not think and write in these terms? Architecture is important. It is the sign of a civilized society and if, in a bureaucratic and morally compromised age, the agencies of state, realty investment and global commerce let us down, it is up to the profession to take once again the high ground and to assert its right to be heard. My recipe is to get talking, to engage in debate and, always, to use the vocabulary of the enemy!

Alistair Rowan trained as an architect in Edinburgh College of Art and as an architectural historian in the University of Cambridge. He was Professor of the History of Art in UCD from 1977 to 1990, Slade Professor of Fine Art in the University of Oxford in 1988 and Principal of Edinburgh College of Art, which included a major British School of Architecture, from 1990 to 2000. In 2001 he became the first Professor of the History of Art in UCC from which position he retired in September this year.

Transition and Transformation

DONOGH O'RIORDAIN

As recently as the 1950's Ireland was a very poor nation.. Construction development was slow, if non-existent. Ireland, a nation of manual workers (and scholars) crossed the Irish Sea and built England!

Regarding the perception of architecture in contemporary Ireland, attitudes vary widely on this subject from foreign nationals to Irish people, from lay-people to architects. Perhaps to view the subject from our recent historical background would help to understand how opinions can vary.

As recently as the 1950's Ireland was a very poor nation. The period known as the Emergency at the end of World War II was a period of food rationing and huge unemployment which led to massive emigration during that decade. Irish people had enough worries on their minds, not to be concerned with architecture. The economic status of Ireland at that time might not be accurately depicted in Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* - but he was not far from the truth. Certainly many Irish were on the poverty line and much of our housing was substandard. Construction development was slow, if non-existent. Ireland, a nation of manual workers (and scholars) crossed the Irish Sea and built England!

Under the leadership of Sean Lemass, Ireland grew in hopeful confidence during the sixties when the construction industry shook off the

mantels of the downtrodden and began building a nation of bricks and mortar. Alas however, our lack of appreciation and education in architecture, perhaps even our ignorance of architecture, came through in the poor quality environment and buildings that were constructed.

Prominent buildings, such as O'Connell Bridge House, Hawkins House, even Ballymun Flats, were perceived to be 'modern architecture'. Schools, hospitals and factories were built at this time on a quick-build, cheap-materials and poorly considered basis. As a result, the general opinion on architects and architecture was not enhanced. Perhaps that's why architects have had such a difficult challenge in recent decades, in winning the confidence of clients, planners and the general public. This lack of confidence stayed with us for a long time and, in some areas, still prevails today. The recession of the eighties spurred the government of the time into action as the collapse of the construction industry had once again flooded the dole-queues. Tax incentives were introduced to regenerate run-down areas of our cities and towns. Temple Bar is perhaps the best-known example of this initiative.



Towns such as Kilkenny, Clonmel and Ennis, cities such as Limerick and Galway, and many others all benefited hugely from these initiatives. This led us nicely into the early nineties when a booming IT industry and a rapidly rising Irish economy launched the country into a new spectrum in the eyes of the world. The Celtic Tiger had arrived and with it returned those many Irish graduates, intelligent, well educated, financially sound young adults, who had left Ireland out of necessity in the 'bad of' years'. They returned in their droves.

These changed circumstances of Ireland gave rise to more demand for development, both public and private. The better educated, more aware, more demanding, often wealthier Irish citizen now wanted what we never had before - quality in quantity. Architecture emerged from the rubbish bin of the sixties and seventies to be recognized as a vehicle to the 'good life'. Quality buildings give good vibes and great comfort, status and prestige. Ireland's construction industry had 'taken off' and from the mid nineties, construction consultants were travelling abroad, even as far as South Africa, recruiting staff to cope with the boom. Full employment was taken for granted - a huge step from ten years earlier.

While the booming economy had helped the standing of architecture in Irish society, quality projects didn't just happen. Architecture was marketed and exposed by comprehensive media coverage. Property supplements in newspapers, largely the preserve of the auctioneering profession, gave pages of coverage to new and refurbished buildings, emerging and admired architects, and the work of the architectural institutions. Television programmes devoted to building and architecture became 'must sees'. Initiatives of the RIAI and the AAI, such as architectural competitions, annual awards and exhibitions fostered this growing interest in architecture. An education of the public was taking place.

This 'marketing' of architecture has begun to pay handsomely in our built environment. While we have not yet achieved the charms of Paris or the wonders of Rome, we are reflecting our economic, cultural and educational standing in the world. While some (perhaps many) people in Ireland have no overt awareness of architecture (the opposite extreme to architects, who have many influences such as education, exposure and knowledge of the subject), the attitude to architecture in contemporary Ireland is generally positive and more appreciated than before, is seen as adding to the quality of life and is better understood. In our country, architecture is now perceived, not as the preserve of architects, but of the public as a whole.

Donogh O'Riordan is a graduate of UCD School of Architecture and Principal of O'Riordan Staehli Architects since 1972.



Communicating with the Public means using less jargon

ANNA RYAN

Even the way “architect” is pronounced in some parts of the country indicates a certain degree of suspicion, even of contempt.

All professions, as George Bernard Shaw once observed, are conspiracies against the laity - and architects are no exception to his dictum. Most of them talk in a language that is almost designed to exclude the public, even in *building material*. To give just one example: During the public consultation phase on the regeneration of Ballymun, one of the most deprived areas of Dublin, an architect involved in the project actually referred at a public meeting in the area to the “iconography of the chimney to denote a dwelling.” Well, imagine that? Inconography, indeed! What were the plain people of Ballymun-or, indeed, anywhere outside arcane architectural circles- to make of such jargonistic self-indulgence? I would have said they might have told the architect in question to “get a grip”, or whatever.

Communicating with the wider public is one of the real challenges facing architects. Some, of course, are better than others. Daniel Libeskind, for example, is a master salesman for his work, which is probably why he scooped the coveted commission for the World Trade Centre site in New York. Seán Ó’Laoire may not be as mesmeric, but he is probably as good in conjuring images of what is possible, using a language that would be comprehensible to lay people. The same is true of Jim Barrett, the

Dublin City Architect. But then, he needs to perform in a political milieu in order to get anything done.

Whatever architects may think, most people in Ireland - and that includes our clientelist politicians - still don’t value architecture on a par with, say, the Finns or the French. Even the way “architect” is pronounced in some parts of the country indicates a certain degree of suspicion, even of contempt. Asked to name an architect, people would be more likely to plump for James Gandon than any living architect other than Sam Stephenson. That’s the effect of notoriety. As Sam once said, “apologetic self-effacement should be left to public lavatories, VD clinics and the other necessary minutiae of society.”

In general, ordinary people have little or no direct contact with architects. The vast majority of one-off houses in the countryside are not designed by members of the RIAI, but rather culled from pattern books such as *Bungalow Bliss*. Most domestic extensions are also thrown up by builders.

But it’s not all bleak. There is a growing awareness of architecture and interior design, in particular. It’s



featured in numerous books and magazines, on television programmes such as Duncan Stewart's *Our House* or *Beyond the Hall Door* and in the Property supplement of *The Irish Times*. No doubt, some architects would prefer if discourses on architecture appeared in the Arts pages, instead of "slumming it" among all the houses for sale ads. But the truth is that there's a guaranteed weekly "slot" in Property with a short deadline, and the column is now quite well-established.

Shane O'Toole's contribution to raising the standing of Irish architects and their work in his bi-weekly articles in the *Sunday Times* must also be acknowledged. Like Emma Cullinan, he is a professionally-qualified architect who has learned how to communicate ideas to the wider public. They have managed to transcend the convention, or rule, that architects should not criticise each other's work - mainly, it must be said, by accentuating the positive. Negative criticism tends to be circumscribed, in any case, by libel considerations, which would include damage to professional reputations. *Architecture Ireland* (formerly *Irish Architect*), the official journal of the RIAI, is a consistently good shop window for members of the Institute. However, it should publish more critical assessments of the work presented- assuming that architects can circumvent their self-imposed convention.

Inevitably, architects - and architecture - are caught up in some of the planning battles being fought across the length and breadth of Ireland. Opponents of particular schemes have also become more adept at criticising the height, scale and bulk of proposed developments and at having their views heard. That's progress of a sort. It is worth remembering that the entire controversy over the Civic Offices at Wood Quay in the 1970s was all about what was underneath the ground - the Viking archaeological layers - rather than the merits or otherwise of what was planned to be built on the site.

It is a fact of life that people become more interested in and even engaged by art, design and architecture as they become more prosperous. That is certainly true of the Irish middle class and this can only be good for architects- provided they try to communicate their ideas more comprehensibly.

Frank McDonald is Environment Editor of *The Irish Times* and author of three books on Dublin.



Communicating Architecture - A Personal Perspective

ANNA RYAN

Architecture does have an image problem and we need to position the profession for the challenges of a world where products practically scream 'buy me' from the supermarket shelves.

We intimidate. We talk amongst ourselves, speaking a language that is often impenetrable to others. We learnt this language carefully through five years of College. Often we travelled to study regional dialects, and we incorporate subtleties, expressions and constructs from Catalonia or The Hague into our work. Communication can be as important as construction. Professions intimidate. Their members often spend too much time together, and nod sagely in agreement on issues of shared concern. Perhaps we should go back to school. We could start by learning how to speak with words that people use in everyday conversation. 'Space' is my pet hate. When I was a city councillor I used to dread the word. It came up at meetings when the architect attempted to explain their scheme to a crowded hall. Once the 'S' word was used it tended to be repeated. The eyes of the audience glazed over with each alliteration. They would frown and begin to stir. You could tell that people were upset with a discussion full of terminology that they were not familiar with.

Architects learn a language over the five years of study. It is important that we learn how to translate that language back into words that non-architects can understand. Instead we should talk about rooms, about walls or windows, even talk about the light, but treat the word space with caution. It is intimidating to those who haven't studied the concept. We're not unique in this. Doctors can be as bad; Lawyers even worse. We need to learn again how to communicate as well as build. Gerry Cahill has a story about the voice from the back of the hall that shouts out "we don't know

what you're proposing but we're against it!" This should make all architects pause for thought and contemplate how best to communicate their ideas.

A recent *Irish Times* sketch featured Donnchadha the up-and-coming architect. Riding a wonky bicycle and wearing a Paul Smith jacket he advises his client to install 'floor-to-ceiling toughened glass pivoted doors' in the garden room. Some years ago in an early issue of the UCD publication *Annexe*, Professor Dermot O'Connell illustrated a piece¹ about the profession with similar aloofness. It depicted the architect in a drafting smock looking over his spectacles at two older frumpily dressed clients, whilst precariously balanced on a tubular Bauhaus stool and addressing them: "Did I really understand you, Miss Wilson, to use the expression 'a cosy little nook' in connection with the house you wish me to design for you?" The profession appears to have had a long history of failing to connect with those who commission and use their buildings.

The legal profession's reputation suffers from the excessive fees charged by a minority of their members. With architects a single poorly designed building can contribute greatly to public disapproval for the profession. Perhaps we should be shouting louder about the successes. Heneghan Peng's recent commission for an Egyptian Museum should have received more acclaim, as should Grafton Architects for their Bocconi Building in Milan. The architectural profession should persuade the media to celebrate architectural successes more loudly.

Architects are learning that good design alone will not make the world employ more architects. We must spread the word, not just through building, but also by talking about architecture, and by making sure that buildings are talked about. Buildings may speak for themselves, but they often speak faintly, and require amplification and public discussion if they are to influence debate and the shape of the future. Churchill stated: “we shape our buildings: thereafter they shape us”, however our experience of memorable buildings is often dominated by the way we were treated there, rather than by the place itself. The public concourse^{II} in Michael Scott’s Busáras comes to mind. It is a magnificent room within an astounding building, but is rarely commented on favourably by the public.

Getting the discussion into the public domain is important. Articles in the property supplements and Sunday papers can contribute significantly to this debate. TV shows have a huge role to play. People want to know that a makeover for a home can be achieved for 1000, 10,000 or 100,000. Perhaps we should talk about significant public buildings in the same chat-show style. A suitable first programme could feature Dublin’s Civic Offices before and after the atriumed extension was added. Donnelly Turpin’s new office block at the corner of Townsend Street could be contrasted with the old Liffey House that housed Dublin Corporation’s Fire Control Section.

We need to sell our wares. Eason’s sell several books containing sets of house plans at an affordable price. The house plans come complete with 3D perspectives including the ’04 car in the drive and the Leylandii hedge. We ignore that sector of the market at our peril. Pattern books have a long and honourable history in architecture, and should be part of the marketing process for architecture today. *The New Housing*^{III} produced by the RIAI goes some way towards meeting this need, but if anything it shows the absence of support for good architecture in Ireland.

We should also ensure that those well placed to commission architects are familiar with what we can provide. The Coopers & Lybrand Report^{IV} on the Employment and Economic Significance of the Cultural Industries in Ireland put facts and figures on the value of Culture in Ireland. Cultural industries in Ireland give employment to 33,800 people. The value of the cultural industries amounts to 560 million per year. Perhaps we need a similar study on the added value that architecture gives to the economy. Such a study could encourage more commissioning, and could help convince unenthusiastic County Managers of the value of engaging an architect. The Geoghegans’ work on building in the landscape^V has reached a wider audience than architects traditionally engage with. The full implementation of the Government’s Policy on Architecture^{VI} could also assist in spreading the word.



Photo: Fás Building from high street

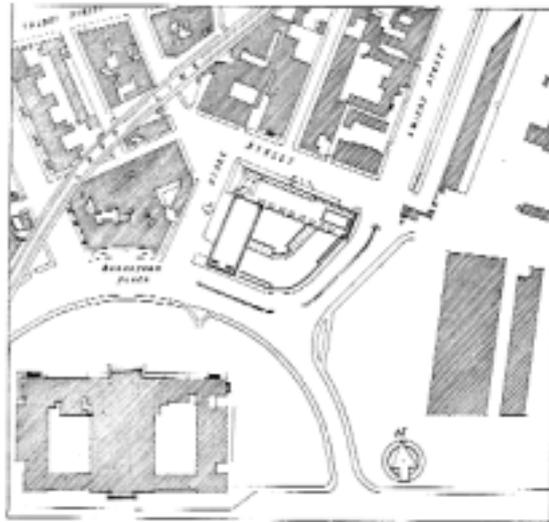


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People are nervous of change. The 1990's will be remembered as a decade of explosive transformation in Ireland. Such sudden change is intimidating. In tumultuous times people often take refuge in nostalgia. That appears to be why pastiche was allowed in certain quarters. The twelve pane neo-Georgian windows of Ha'penny Bridge House on Ormond Quay typify this. Perhaps the false chimneystacks on the Bachelors' Walk apartments by Zoe Developments represent the worst of this vacuous sentimentality. Architects should lead change, but they must also educate. The discussion of sustainability can be clearly focussed by using buildings as case studies. A discussion of what constitutes good design can bring the level of debate onto a more productive level. The recent rash of trophy buildings such as Gehry museums and Calatrava bridges doesn't help. It reeks of a 'must have' shopping list rather than a serious commitment to quality. There's a lot to learn from the advertising industry. People are attracted by tangible images that make them feel good. Although the purity of a hard line plan is admired within the profession it can be impenetrable to the general public. There is a need to flesh out our visions with colour and 3D modelling if our vision is to be understood by the general public. There is not enough good modern architecture out there for the buildings alone to sell themselves and the profession. Architecture does have an image problem and we need to position the profession for the challenges of a world where products practically scream 'buy me' from the supermarket shelves. As branding and advertising compete with design for the attention of the consumer, architects must reflect more on how others see them.

I am privileged to have an office located in a well-designed example of contemporary Irish Architecture. This building ironically is inaccessible to the general public, and is hidden behind the National Library, a Victorian building of mediocre value. It is troubling that few of my work colleagues comment on the quality of its design, however I am optimistic that the building's architecture will exert some benign influence over my peers during this Government's term of office.

David Mackay in the prologue to *Fiaschi*^{vii} (Failures) states that architects must also address urban design issues. In recent years in Dublin the Spire, Liffey Boardwalk and Millennium Bridge provide reassurance that architects can engage in, and contribute significantly to the image and substance of the city. These projects give me hope that architecture can play centre-stage in the debate about improving the quality of people's lives. I feel that it is perhaps at the urban scale, and by engaging at the level of the neighbourhood, that architects can improve their public standing. The perception of architecture in Ireland can be improved through providing buildings that work well, but also by speaking about architecture in accessible language and by using the media to sell our wares to a wider audience. Vitruvius's principles of commodity, firmness and delight are still with us, but a changing world demands that we take extra steps to ensure that architecture is on everyone's agenda.

Ciarán Cuffe is an architect and town planner, and is a Green Party TD representing the Dún Laoghaire constituency in the 29th Dáil.

NOTES

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- ⁱⁱ Luan P. Cuffe, (ed.), *Architectural Survey*, (Dublin: Parkside Press, 1953)
- ⁱⁱⁱ John Graby and Kathryn Meghen, *The New Housing* (Dublin: RIAI, 2002)
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The Role of the Professional Architect in an Evolving Society

ANNA RYAN

It is an interesting time to consider the role of the architect, given the forthcoming Bill for the regulation of the title of “Architect”. This title was not always clearly defined.

The architect has always been in a position that required a suitable response to changing economic and social circumstances. Just as a thriving economy can support an improving urban realm, so too, can a dying economy act as destructor of the built environment.

We can bear witness to this phenomenon in contemporary Ireland. Subsequent to the formation of the Irish Republic, with the exception of religious buildings, noteworthy construction was thin on the ground. Great Irish buildings had been constructed largely under the auspices of British Rule and/or patrons. By the late 1920's, the Irish economy was dead, mass emigration was rife and little architecture of merit was being produced. It is interesting to consider that the attack on remaining 'landlords' was exercised through assault on their homes – a physical confrontation with built form.

It is only in recent years with the Information Technology Revolution of the 1990's (the 'Celtic Tiger'), that Ireland's economic situation changed direction, in direct correlation with the quantity and standard of Irish architecture. This has brought with it a different set of problems, largely with the regulation of the title of 'architect', which, though not a new issue, is currently being addressed.

It is an interesting time to consider the role of the architect, given that the Bill for regulation of the title of 'Architect'. This title was not always clearly defined. In the mid-fifteenth century, the title of 'architect' was referred to for the very first time. Sir Thomas Eliot described the architect as '*architector or*

architectus – maister of the wrakes, deviser of buildying'. He outlined the qualities of the architect as a combination of engineering, science, surveying, carpentry and craftsmanship with artistic and aesthetical abilities. At this time, there was no formal training for architects. When John Shute described himself as an 'architect' in his book '*The First and Chief Grounds of Architecture*' in 1563, his training had been initially as a painter. This informal approach to architectural training became inadequate.

The Age of Enlightenment was one of revolution and a new world vision; it was a time of vast social change. Humanity was brought to a plateau of secularism, with a strong belief in the pre-eminence of material knowledge, an enthusiasm for technological and medical progress and a desire for legal and constitutional reform. The word 'profession' became identified with a learned vocation in the church, law, medicine and architecture.

In this new society, which rejected predestination and questioned the credibility of ancestral pedigree, no male was barred from following his aspirations automatically because of his social standing at birth. The aristocratic landowner, on whom power was previously conferred by birthright, was suddenly made redundant and needed to assert his status by some other means. Thus, the 'professions' became associated with the English gentleman during the mid 18th Century: because they involved intellectual rather than manual work, the professions suited gentlemen, who didn't wish to demean themselves by working manually.

A move in the arts from court and church to metropolitan spaces at large induced a new type public life, resulting in a rise in popularity of taverns and coffee houses. The coffee house was crucial to cultural networking, and served as a prototype to the club; it helped establish 'circuits of conversation'. These dynamic circuits of conversation evolved into formal clubs and societies.

By the 1830's, it was strongly felt that there was an urgent need for the formation of a professional architectural institute. This opinion was reinforced by a decline in noble patronage, a dramatic urban population explosion between 1800 and 1830 and the emergence of general contractors as financially interested designers. Exclusion and professional solidarity came in the United Kingdom in 1834 with the creation of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and Ireland followed suit to form the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland in 1839.

Through all the efforts to keep the profession singular, one could question whether the professional architect became, and continues to be, too exclusive in the mind of the lay person? If we look at the Græco Roman era, the advent of Pan European and Asian trade brought with it an urban vision. However, the basic individual had no 'need' of architectural services. Here, the architect was responsible for providing a solution to the needs of trade, expenditure of the profit from this trade to benefit the city, and to enhance the persona of the government and ruling classes. If we look at settlements in the Middle Ages, attack from migratory tribes was rife. Those who worked the land were defenceless against these raids except for the few walled monasteries and castles that existed. We entered a time where church and state ruled uncontested, a situation that continues in Ireland to some degree. The church exercised their power by constructing vertical Gothic cathedrals all over Europe. While whole communities were involved in the construction of these religious buildings, both financially and physically, the average domestic abode was not deemed to require specialist attention. That was automatically assumed for the powerful.

Post-Industrial Revolution, power was no longer the tenure of noble landowners, as people left the land to seek employment in the cities. The enlarging urban centre was the backdrop to rapid industrial construction and economic growth, which depended on consumerism filtering to all levels of social strata. However, problems of overcrowding and depravity in the urban realm were brought to the fore by sociologists, and not architects. The main concern of these landlords-turned-architects did not lie in finding solutions to these new dilemmas. The reluctance of the lay-person to approach an architectural practice with a domestic job should be questioned with this in mind. Education is now a democratic right, and has opened up architecture to people from all walks of life. The gentleman-architect has become extinct.

However, the belief that an architect is interested only in official or civic structures is still an image that endures in the public eye, and with a history such as the architect's, why should this come as a surprise?

The current proposals for regulation of the architect's title mirror the efforts of the early nineteenth century. To enhance the position of the architect and to separate the qualified from the unqualified (the good from the bad?), a Bill for the regulation of the title is being drafted and is expected to reach the Dáil in mid 2004. As a result of this government legislation, a person without the appropriate qualifications will not be able to describe himself as an architect.

While I believe this approach is a positive one, it should be questioned, or at least thought through. The initial formation of the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland was in response to the demands of the time. There are equally pressing issues at hand in the 2000's that I believe should also be addressed by the RIAI. Power of local authority planners who are not generally architects or educated in aesthetics should be queried. Likewise, increasing pressures on cities should be more of an architectural matter than that of transport engineers or planning surveyors: the role of the architect must expand. It is not enough to design great pieces of architecture that will stand alone in a city of mediocrity. At a time when we are seeking more power through exclusivity, should we not also consider more power through inclusion in debates regarding architectural and public welfare?

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Maria Donoghue is a graduate of Architecture from Dublin Institute of Technology and is currently studying Cities: Design and Regeneration (MA) at London Metropolitan University.

Work in Progress

CORBAN WALKER

These images are recent works from the past year; they look at urban vistas and surfaces from my point of view.

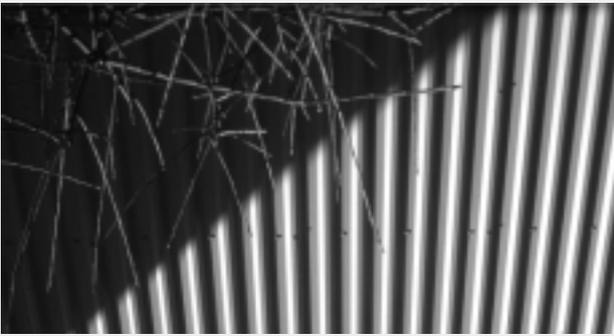


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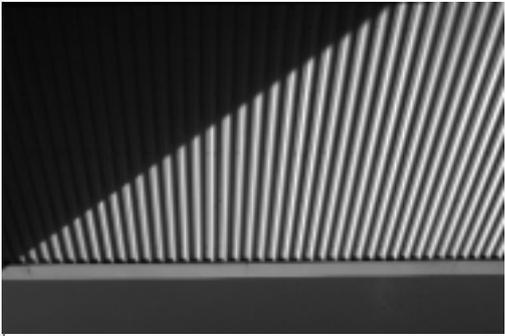


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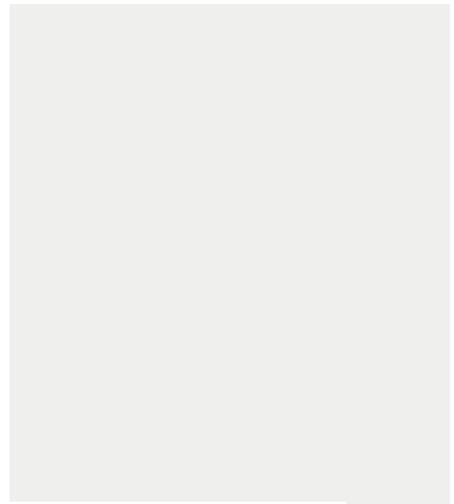


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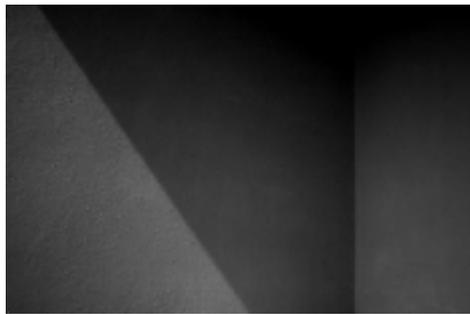


Photo: Detail jupiter symphony

Space for Politics

MICHAEL PIKE

In the spring of 2003 Barcelona was transformed into a city of protest. It was clear that as politics had shaped the city, the city now had the potential to shape politics.

*"The only indispensable material factor in the generation of power is the living together of people. Only where men live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them."*¹

In the spring of 2003 Barcelona was transformed into a city of protest.

For six consecutive weeks, at 10 o'clock every evening, the citizens would turn off their television sets, emerge onto their balconies and bang pots and pans. It was a huge collective protest, an expression of their outrage at the Spanish Government's support for the war in Iraq. This pounding and ringing sounded down every street, through every neighbourhood in the city. Walking through the narrow streets of the Barri Gotic, the noise came from everywhere, every inhabitant seemed to be partaking.

The whole city was politically alive. Rallies and protest marches were held every day. On the 15th February, the day marches were held throughout Europe, 1.5 million people filled the Passeig de Gracia. The Col·legi d'Arquitectes, the equivalent of our R.I.A.I., staged an exhibition and mounted a huge anti-war banner on its building which faces the Cathedral.



Photo: Detail jupiter symphony



Photo: Detail jupiter symphony

Coming from Dublin, this intense politicization of the city was a completely new experience. In Dublin, one rarely perceives the city as a political entity. The general level of cynicism in relation to Irish politics certainly contributes to this. In Barcelona, where they are still recovering from thirty-six years of uninterrupted one-man power, this cynicism has not set in. As Manuel Vazquez Montalban describes it, in his book "Barcelonas": "*Nobody will ever know what democracy is who hasn't lived through those times which came before the fall of fascism.*"ⁱⁱ

And yet, being in Barcelona during this period, it became clear that it was not just a lack of cynicism, but also the physical form of the city that energized this politicization. The sheer density of the city gave an immediate vitality to the protests. And the public spaces and squares, the focus of the whole regeneration project for the city since the death of Franco, provided the essential platforms for channeling this energy.

With the death of Franco in 1975, the Socialists gained control of the City Council, the Ayuntamiento. This administration was dominated by a group of like-minded Catalan intellectuals, who had attended university together, and who understood the significance of culture and the importance of creating public spaces. One of the most influential of this group was the architect and historian Oriol Bohigas, who became the head of the Culture Section of the City Council.

Bohigas and other influential architects realized that in attempting to reassert the Modern Movement in architecture in the city, their aims were essentially political. They needed to ally themselves closely with, and help to shape, the new Socialist agenda for opening up the city. This alliance helped to create an administration with an awareness of the social and ethical implications that exist behind the world of forms. There was a strong recognition of the city's historical heritage and a respect for the importance of social fabric and memory.

Through this close alignment of politics and architecture an approach to maintaining and developing the political and cultural nature of the city began to emerge. This approach was described by Manuel de Sola Morales as "*urban acupuncture*"ⁱⁱⁱ, where compact catalytic interventions were used to repair and restructure their immediate surroundings. These interventions mainly involved the redesign of the interstitial landscape, where run-down and shapeless areas were rejuvenated by new urban spaces or parks.

The policy was also defined by a move away from zoning, so prevalent in the Franco years, to a search for a city in which all activities coexisted. The mayor Pasqual Maragall^{iv} described the need for the city to decentralize, meaning that the centre should not be exclusively show-cased at the expense of the periphery. In this way the administration sought to reassert the claims of the neighbourhood, or "*barri*", as the city's traditional social unit.

The results and successes of this approach were clearly visible in the spring of last year. The neighbourhoods had sufficient cohesion to generate

a political movement in every part of the city. The new spaces and parks provided what Hannah Arendt described as the essential "*public realm and the space of appearance*"^v, to give a platform to this movement. It was clear that as politics had shaped the city, the city now had the potential to shape politics.

It is evident that Dublin has suffered greatly from a lack of recognition of the interdependence of politics and architecture. Irish architects have mostly sought to distance themselves from all things political. As a result it has been left to developers, estate agents and banks to determine the form, or lack of form, of the rapidly growing city. Any political agenda which has existed has been firmly in favour of the continued dispersal of the population and the continued absence of any adequate "*space of appearance*". Neighbourhoods capable of generating political action would be viewed more as a threat than an aspiration.

In Barcelona, the architects recognized the essential political nature of their aspirations for the city. They therefore set about forging an alliance with the administration and influencing policy in a direct way. This did not culminate in, or even aspire to, a general plan, but instead sought to engender an attitude to the development of the city, which then became embodied in a diverse array of individual projects. This stands in stark contrast to the current situation in Dublin, where there is no attempt to envisage a city of 2.5 million inhabitants, except to leave it to the real estate and home-building industries, already hugely responsible for the dispersed and totally chaotic disaggregation of the environment. With no coherent neighbourhoods and with such a dispersed population, the public are rendered powerless in influencing policy. Politics and the architectural profession need to engage with determining a direction for the city, a direction which seeks to re-empower the cynical citizens.

Michael Pike is an architect currently living, working and drinking a lot of coffee in Barcelona.

NOTES

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- ^v Arendt, p.204.

A House-buyer's Guide to the History of Ireland

GARY BOYD

The casual formal ironies of bungalow bliss pass largely by the Irish architectural literatis and Fitzsimons, hero-builder of the lower middle classes, drifts ingloriously into architectural obscurity.



The Media: In an average week the *The Irish Times* dedicates about 4 times more column space to property and the buying and selling of land than it does to critical issues concerning architecture and our built environment. Of this more critical writing, moreover, little refers to, or addresses the commodified nature of space. Indeed, as if to emphasise this point, most of this writing is actually located within the newspaper's property supplement. Only those who own, or have an interest in owning property are apparently deemed to have an interest in architecture.

Other statistics: Ireland has the highest number of home owners in Europe. Copenhagen, a city of high densities, shared, communal and public spaces and a good infrastructure, has approximately the same population as Dublin - but occupies only half the land area. The Irish capital, meanwhile, haemorrhages into its own hinterland, not only extending its suburbs into the western, southern and northern regions of county Dublin but also making subaltern commuter towns out of formerly autonomous villages in Meath, Kildare, Wicklow etc. Here, one can experience the joys of a quasi-rural, bucolic existence: two to three hour daily commutes and an existing small-town infrastructure unable to cope with the new influx. The pay off for poor education, health, employment, social and leisure

facilities is a mortgage marginally cheaper than in the city and in any case much more expensive than almost everywhere else in Europe. And, of the course, the opportunity to own a house book-ended by two insignificant patches of grass called a front and a back garden.

The middle-class obsession with property-owning trickles downwards into the poorer classes. Here, perhaps unsurprisingly after being the sometime recipients of social engineering and enforced communality, tenants are deeply suspicious of any notions of shared space or responsibility. Instead, domestic autonomy is desired. If economically unable to actually own property, then the trappings of privatisation must remain paramount - a house (not an apartment), with the ubiquitous front and back gardens and its very own front door.

Yet despite the apparent immutability of this process, the valorisation and primacy of private property and home-ownership in Ireland has not been a natural and inevitable occurrence. Instead, it is rooted in specific political and economic conditions. Indeed, to understand the culture of private property in Ireland, it is necessary to begin from the critical distance of history. The following are a few significant moments and personalities from that history.



Photo: Detail jupiter symphony

The Anglo-Irish: in Marxist terms perhaps the only revolutionary class Ireland has ever known. Consolidated in a position of power after the defeat of James II in 1690, the new Protestant Ascendancy effectively dissolves indigenous Irish social and cultural connections to land and replaces them with new ideas of ownership and property rights. Lest we think of this in narrow, nationalist terms, it is worthwhile remembering that a similar series of measures, facilitated by a device called 'enclosure', also took place in England. In both cases, the victims of these actions are defined not so much by their nationality, but rather by their class. Enclosure involves the forcible repression of common land which passes into the private holdings of the nearby landed estate. Meanwhile, 'improvements' transform landed estates from the locus of traditional feudal relations of obligation between the social classes to sites of capitalistic economic accumulation. Peasantry, a life of tithes and subsistence is effectively finished. It is replaced by wage-labour which, while emancipatory in that it negates the previous ties between master and servant, now compels the worker to sell his labour on the market in order to live. The simultaneous introduction of mechanisation to the countryside results in a surplus of workers. Many leave to form the burgeoning population of urban centres such as Dublin, Cork and Belfast. Housing them and their descendants becomes a problem for the future.

Colonial Presence: The Anglo-Irish manifest their dominance in the landscape. The fortified castle, symbol of colonial presence, is transformed into the country villa, symbolising, like those of the Venetian *terra firma*, a more active manipulation of land and territory. Like Palladio's villas, the radical nature of the new, capitalistic demesne is cloaked in a veil of architecture borrowed from classical antiquity. Indeed, many of these eighteenth century houses, located on the crests of hills and other positions of dominance throughout the length and breadth of the country, are built using pattern books. These portfolios of designs, imported from England or elsewhere, often suggest a kit of parts to

manufacture the ideal villa almost regardless of site or location. Upper class housing becomes emancipated from the particularities and vagaries of place. Lower class housing will follow.

Suburbs I: The Irish suburb is invented by the Anglo-Irish. As a counterpoint to the squalid density of Dublin's medieval core, enterprising eighteenth-century aristocrats such as Henry Jervis, lay out plans for wide-avenued, low density estates on lands expropriated from former monasteries on sites on the periphery of the old city. Here, one can enjoy a quasi-rustic existence surrounded by some of the comforts of the demesne in a location surprisingly close to the attractions of the Old Town. Designed for upper class single family dwellings these estates are developed speculatively: land is parcelled into orthogonal plots and sold-off individually to the highest bidder. Later in the century, Emily, Duchess of Leinster develops a *villa rustica* outside the city on the coastline at Blackrock. Acting as a catalyst for a subsequent flurry of upper class development, the Duchess not only determines the course of the future DART line, but also unconsciously invents Dublin 4.

Irish Nationalism I: The Irish fascination with owning property and deep mistrust of renting can be understood partly as a reaction to the bitter experiences of the colonial past. Here, in a national imagination somewhat justified by historical fact, the landscape is populated by callous landlords, conniving bailiffs, burning cottages and images of tenant families, either cast out on lonely byways or else vainly defending their cottages against the combined forces of the R.I.C. and the battering ram. The Land War in the last quarter of the nineteenth century transforms these localised acts of resistance into elements in a nationwide struggle as, under the figures of Charles Stuart Parnell and Michael Davitt, anti-landlord agitation, rent strikes and refusals are subsumed into the vocabulary of nationalism, self-expression and Home Rule politics. The subsequent mythology which has grown up

around the Land War, however, tends to obscure its complexities. It did not so much pit landlord against tenant *per se* (Parnell, after all, was a landlord) but rather cast a whole series of occupations and social classes into opposing factions. It is also worthwhile noting that the aims of the Land League (those, that is, that can be clearly discerned) were concerned with achieving affordable rents and security of tenure - in other words the rights of tenants. The transformation of renters into a class of property owners is never suggested as a solution.

Irish Nationalism II: In Standish O'Grady's 'History of Ireland', the mythical hero Cúchulain makes a visit to the city of Dublin. Appalled by what he finds there, his actions not only summarise the Gaelic Literary Revival's attitude towards Dublin, but also provide an ideal *modus operandum* for future generations unable to cope with the city's density, heterogeneity and contradictions: he leaves for the country. For a cultural elite besotted with all things rural, peasant, Irish and heroic, nineteenth and early twentieth-century Dublin represents a quasi-Satanic anti-thesis: urban, industrial, the seat of British administration and for the most part squalid. Despite the best efforts of Pádraic Pearse to 'make Dublin's name great again among cities', anti-urban ideology and distrust of the city pervades the nationalistic administrations of the new, post-independent State. Notwithstanding his more progressive policies concerning the break-up and redistribution of landed estates, Éamon de Valera's vision of an ideal Ireland is cast in sentimental, bucolic terms - a land 'bright with cosy homesteads, whose villages would be joyous with the romping of sturdy children [and] the laughter of comely maidens'. Only the detached family dwelling can possibly fulfil this criteria. The Catholic Church's contemporary exclamation that flats are 'vehicles of immorality' lends de Valera's vision a spiritual justification.

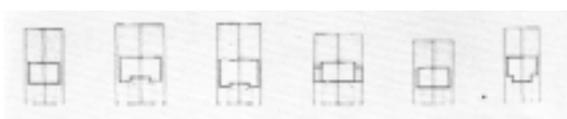
High Density: Irish mistrust of high density begins in the Dublin tenements of the nineteenth century. Here, in an act of working-class re-colonisation, an intense level of multi-occupancy is wrought in the former townhouses of the depleted Anglo-Irish aristocracy. Not designed for the purpose, the material fabric of these buildings inevitably breaks down and vast areas (most conspicuously on the north-side of the city) become slums. Yet the demonisation of the tenement does not emanate so much from those who inhabit them, but rather from middle-class visitors, who, in the guise of reformers, clerics, doctors and statisticians, begin to arrive mid-way through the century. Unable to fully comprehend working class society, their notionally scientific methods are coloured by their own subjective morality. Through this lens, shared spaces and communal living habits are deemed just as dangerous as broken latrines and inadequate sanitation, urban morality is compared unfavourably with that of the countryside, and disease is confounded with the threat of revolution. The solution they prescribe is as narcissistic as it is improbable: make the working class more middle-class. Architecture is central to this project: the house is reconceived as a didactic device. Here, in isolated units the proletariat will learn manners,

hygiene, respect for property, authority and the primacy of the nuclear family as the only acceptable social unit. From now on communal space will tend to be eschewed in favour of privacy and predictable domesticity prized above all.

Suburbs II: Ireland's second wave of planned sub-urbanisation and the first to be exclusively aimed at the working-classes begins in Dublin with the design of Marino in 1915. Here, the lessons of pseudo-scientific social reform, as interpreted by Messrs. Howard, Unwin, Geddes et al., are made manifest in a scheme consisting of low-density single family units arranged in a formal layout borrowed from the Beaux-Arts school of nineteenth-century France. Lent further justification by Abercrombie's unimplemented but much noted masterplan of sub-urbanisation and traffic management, the Marino project not only sets the trend for housing type in Dublin for the next sixty years but also the city's urban development: an incremental but persistent distending into its hinterland. The few dissenting voices, suggesting new, high density developments in the traditional working class areas of the inner city, are largely ignored. Decades later in 1974, the grim experience of Ballymun, that hybrid, high-rise experiment of so-called high density planning, moored, in splendid isolation to the city's northern extremities, will serve to confirm in the Irish imagination, the utter failure of communal facilities.

Bungalow Bliss I: First published in 1971, three years before Ballymun, Jack Fitzsimons' *magnum opus* borrows the techniques of the pattern book from the erstwhile Anglo-Irish and gives them to the masses. Other aspects of building are also passed down. While ostensibly vernacular in form - a modern equivalent of the traditional cottage - Fitzsimons' designs actually begin to mimic the houses of the upper classes. This occurs primarily and perhaps most conspicuously, in the nature of their siting. Despite no explicit directions from Fitzsimons, bungalows begin to appear everywhere on exposed sites on the tops of hills, almost always set back from, and parallel to the road allowing the creation of monumental, axial, entrance avenues. This contrasts directly with traditional vernacular building which, due in part to poverty, inadequate materials and construction techniques, tended to seek shelter in the lee of a hill or behind a stand of trees. The bungalow, with the aid of industrialised building techniques (prefabrication and mass-production: plans from Fitzsimons' office in Kells, blocks from Dundalk, tiles from Spain or wherever), has emancipated itself from a reliance on local knowledge and materials. No longer bound by the necessity of reacting to topography or climate, form is shaped strictly according to aesthetical demands, assuming more and more, not only the trappings of the gentry, but also other cultural reference points: prefabricated plaster columns, pediments and entablatures applied to Texan ranch-houses vie with arches borrowed from the haciendas of Baja-California. A future generation of suburban housing estates, with names such Oak Drive, Elm Meadow and Shady Willow, will also enjoy eclectic aesthetic referencing although here, the timbered *fachwerk* of Elizabethan manor-houses will tend to predominate.

Only those who own, or have an interest in owning property are apparently deemed to have an interest in architecture.



Bungalow Bliss II: View - Aesthetic demands proceed from the house outwards. Valorisation of the view, once again a legacy of the manor house, becomes a major design prerequisite. Bungalows, placed on windy peaks, are equipped with large picture windows, once more taking advantage of advances in design and material technology to allow a phenomenon hitherto impossible without servants, the visual appropriation of the landscape combined with a relatively warm house. In this way, the bungalow begins to exercise the same dominance over the landscape as the landlord's house of yore. Landlordism, it seems, has been democratised. This is borne out economically and socially. If they have not exactly become landlords, then, with the aid of public funds in the form of state mortgage relief and low-interest loans, a whole section of the rentier-class have become property owners. In the meantime, in a process described intricately by Henri Lefebvre, freely alienable, privatised parcels of exchangeable property are thrust abstractly on to the landscape in ever increasing numbers. The paradox is obvious. In seeking a rural idyll, they (bungalow dwellers) unconsciously urbanise the countryside.* In 1971, when the first edition of the book goes to print, land and property prices in Ireland are amongst the lowest in Europe.

*Curiously, despite the contemporary lionisation of popular culture and the everyday by architectural heavyweights like Venturi, Rauch and Scott-Brown and the Smithsons, the casual formal ironies of bungalow bliss pass largely by the Irish architectural literati's and Fitzsimons, hero-builder of the lower middle classes, drifts ingloriously into architectural obscurity. His legacy, dismissed by critics as 'bungalow blitz', stoutly endures.

Suburbs III: The suburbs serve an economic function. Clues can be discerned in the timing of their proliferation in America in the 1930s and 1970s: both periods of economic crisis. To take the latter, the 1970s is characterised by the oil-crisis. Contrary to popular myth this crisis, like others before and since, is not a question of scarcity, but rather more the opposite: overproduction and excess surpluses. Sub-urbanisation represents, in part, a 'spatial fix' for this problem - a built environment designed to absorb oil-products: petrol, plastics, asphalt and so on. In these homogeneous, low-density landscapes of homes, located just far enough from places of work and other facilities to require mechanised transport, the use of the private motor car becomes increasingly necessary. Other commodities such as washing machines and sundry household appliances are also required in increasing bulk as formerly communal tasks such as laundry are individuated to the level of the single family dwelling. Hereafter, homes will be increasingly bombarded by images of commodities proffering an ever-extending list of promises: to induce hygiene, ease drudgery, stimulate the family and so on. Sub-urbanisation becomes a site for the production of desire, a bridgehead to a new society

dominated by consumption. But before this can come to complete fruition in, one more ideological shift is required.

Margaret Thatcher: If the creation of the suburbs represented in part an attempt to replicate, in the working classes, the ethics and desires of the bourgeoisie, then, in early 1980s Ireland, the process is still incomplete. Despite the bungalow bliss craze in the countryside, much of the working population in towns and cities still live in rented dwellings owned by municipal corporations. These corporations, moreover, continue to produce a considerable amount of affordable housing stock for renting. In contemporary Britain, however, a similar situation is rapidly unravelling under the policies of Mrs. Thatcher's government. Here, all council housing will subsequently be available to be bought and sold, firstly by the occupants themselves and then on the open market. Meanwhile the production of affordable, rentable accommodation by local authorities will all but cease. This new radical policy is given an ideological gloss best represented by this statement, issued by the British Department of the Environment, which suggests the desire to own one's home is a universal and ahistorical desire, albeit one which is deeply embedded within the *British* psyche.

'There is in this country a deeply engrained desire for home-ownership. The government believes this spirit should be fostered. It reflects the wishes of the people, ensures the spread of wealth through society, encourages a personal desire to improve and modernise one's own home, enables parents to accrue wealth for their children, and stimulates the attitude of independence and self-reliance that are the bedrock of a free society'.

Hereafter, the provision of adequate housing will not be the responsibility of the State but rather will be left to the vagaries of the free market. In other words, the position is strikingly similar to the one, much criticised by subsequent Irish nationalist voices, adopted by the British colonial government with regards to the distribution of that other basic necessity, food, during the Irish famine. Despite this and the strained relationship between the Irish and British governments concerning Northern Ireland and other issues of national sovereignty in the 1980s, the Irish government chooses to adopt the British housing policy wholeheartedly and uncritically, offering similar financial inducements in the form of millions of pounds of tax breaks and mortgage relief, to convert public property into private property. Here as there, the spectre of

homelessness will haunt the city in the following decades.

Conclusion: The cult of home-ownership in Ireland is a complex phenomenon, a product of economic impulses and political motives where colonial and post-colonial legacies appear to merge with a culture of commodities and consumption to raise the subject to the point of obsession. In addition to the burgeoning indexes of prices in newspapers, on television one can watch a variety of programmes dedicated to some aspect or other of the single family dwelling: from rearranging its physical environment - home-makers, home-redecorators and home-breakers (who investigate the security of your home) - to the more ephemeral but real-life dramas staged in domestic dwellings like wife-swapping or the accelerated domesticity of Big Brother. This cultural emphasis on privately owned domestic space, however, perhaps has wider implications for its obverse, public space in the city at large. In recent times we have witnessed attempts to extend the predictabilities of the domestic realm into the city. As the city centre becomes more and more a site for consumption and the production of desire, other possible uses for public space are closed down or disallowed. A few years ago there was an attempt to limit or ban demonstrations in O'Connell Street and this year a large section of Dublin's centre, stretching from Parnell Street to South King Street, has been recast by the Corporation as the city's 'front parlour' (John Fitzgerald, City Manager in an interview with *The Irish Times*, October 2003). Here, the domestic connotations of this term - 'front parlour' - traditionally the best room in a private house where visitors are entertained - have been transplanted to the streets. As the zone is reconfigured as a beautified realm, shaped around the spending and entertainment habits of the 'six million visitors' it attracts each year, other, more contradictory aspects of public life in the city are being systematically removed. A policy of 'lower tolerance' is being applied to the homeless, for example, who are being moved from their begging pitches and sleeping areas to less conspicuous zones located elsewhere in the city

In other words, those excluded from the domestic realm of the home are now excluded from the newly domesticated realm of the city. Elsewhere security cameras watch our every move to ensure our behaviour does not disturb the ether or contradict the city's image. Increasingly, however, it is the marginalized in society who are the subjects of this surveillance for, as David Harvey, the Marxist geographer states in his seminal work *The Limits to Capital*, 'a worker mortgaged to the hilt is, for the most part, a pillar of social stability'.

Gary Boyd is lecturer in history and theory and a studio tutor at UCD. He has just finished a PhD investigating hidden histories in the development and use of certain key buildings and spaces in

Dublin city.

With thanks to Allan Atlee, Glasgow and the City Spectacular! fourth year seminar group at the School of Architecture, UCD.

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Comfort Zone

RUTH THORPE

It may be difficult to enthuse the general populace about designing public buildings, but cut projects down to the domestic scale - familiar and relevant to all - and instantly you have a large audience of novice architectural critics.

Architecture can be intimidating. Most people find it a difficult subject to discuss, best left, they believe, to architects who have the necessary repertoire of historical references and architectural terms. Glancing through the archives of *building material*, excellent journal that it is, it strikes me how mystified the average member of the public in Ireland might be to read some of the more esoteric articles, their suspicions confirmed that the rarefied world of architecture has little or nothing to do with them.

Cut to the news stands groaning with interior design magazines and the television schedules where programmes on designing, building, buying, selling and renovating houses dominate prime time. Anything to do with the home is clearly hot. From the vantage point of a consumer interiors magazine, interacting with both architects and readers, it seems that the domestic sphere offers a perfect opportunity to foster a wider understanding and appreciation of architecture. It may be difficult to enthuse the general populace about designing public buildings, but cut projects down to the domestic scale - familiar and relevant to all - and instantly you have a large audience of novice architectural critics.

Many Irish interiors magazines skim the surface, interspersing advertisements with pretty pictures and being content with producing publications that simply look good. A triumph of style over substance, and sometimes even the "style" is questionable. I believe interiors magazines have a more important role to play in inspiring and educating the public about the value of well-designed living spaces. From the mid-90s when I edited the annual publication *Select*, and more recently while at *IMAGE Interiors*, I have aimed to present the best of Irish domestic projects in a way that doesn't underestimate the

reader's ability to follow a description of the design process and how the end result was achieved. Ignoring warnings on the futility of including simple floor plans (the public wouldn't know how to read them), I started including them at *Select* and have found readers fully appreciate them as an aid to following the project, linking spaces on the plan to photographs, understanding where voids occur and how spaces relate.

Recognising that not everyone has well-proportioned period rooms and vast budgets, and aiming to reflect the diversity of readers' houses, projects featured have included new one-off houses in urban and rural settings, well-designed apartments, transformations of outbuildings and tiny terraced houses, re-worked interiors of semi-Ds and 60s tower block flats.

There are plenty of British magazines on the news stands so the Irish content is important - not just featuring products and services available in this country - but house types familiar in Irish cities, towns and the countryside. One of the most popular features recently in *IMAGE Interiors* was on extensions to four Dublin houses: a Victorian semi-D, a 1930s terraced house, an inner-city two-up two-down and a Victorian villa. In all but one, where the artist client collaborated with the architect, the clients (as they increasingly want to) remained anonymous and the brief became the angle for the story. Readers loved seeing how each practice tackled the problems many of them face: how to make older houses work as contemporary homes, how to get more natural light/space/storage, how to open the building up to the garden.

Extensions may be considered by most architects to represent the lowest form of their art, but features like these demonstrate what they have to contribute

to projects large and small. They make architects and architecture relevant to every building. Happy clients are good advocates for architecture in general. In a feature on the extension of a terraced house in Stoneybatter by Tom de Paor, the client, who had previously extended a similar house in the area, hiring a builder only, marvelled at the world of difference an architect could make and professed no-one should attempt even the smallest project without one.

Interiors magazines are also a useful medium for presenting in an accessible way more important architectural achievements. Commissioning an architectural historian, Ellen Rowley, to write a piece on the Goulding Summerhouse allowed *IMAGE Interiors* to present an informative article on an iconic Irish building many readers had not know existed and its Modernist influences. Other ways of generating and maintaining an interest in architecture include features on architects' favourite design objects/buildings; profiles on individual architects; snippets of information on exciting projects in Irish cities other than Dublin ranging from bar interiors to large-scale developments; features on 20th century design greats with a travel angle.

It's an approach that works, judging by the latest ABC figures (Audit Bureau of Circulations) available for *IMAGE Interiors*. The sharp and unprecedented increase - up 47% in the first half of 2003 on the previous year while the circulation of other main Irish interiors magazines decreased - indicates the general public like architecture presented in such an accessible way. They are interested in architecture as well as interiors, do want their architecture in visually attractive bite size pieces but also want to do more than look at the pictures. They want to learn about materials, design influences and issues like sustainability. They want to know more than where the sofa comes from. They want to be informed as well as entertained.

Encouraging Irish consumer magazines not to underestimate readers' desire for knowledge is one thing, encouraging more Irish architects to help to inform and inspire them through such magazines another. I know the architects whose work I have featured, particularly when I was at *IMAGE Interiors*, have enjoyed positive feedback, but there is more to it than raising individual profiles. Some are genuinely interested in fostering a greater interest in architecture through consumer magazines, but too many others, while feeling architects are often under appreciated and misunderstood by the public, still consider them irrelevant.

Having worked in Australia, where several magazines treat domestic architecture as a serious as well as enjoyable subject, I can see potential for a more proactive approach here. An associate

company of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects publishes not only its professional journal, but a quarterly glossy, *Houses*, a residential architecture magazine aimed at both architects and clients/home renovators and sold alongside interiors magazines. Presenting exciting projects with high quality photography, plans and articles by informed writers, it is an effective record of good design. It is not the only one, and these magazines have healthy circulations. In Ireland we are restricted by having a comparatively small market and fewer projects to feature, but if architects are genuinely keen to communicate with the general public, giving themselves and design education in general a higher profile, this is an approach worth considering.

Ruth Thorpe is a freelance journalist specialising in domestic architecture and interiors, edited *Select* magazine and is former Associate Editor of *IMAGE Interiors* magazine. rtmail@eircom.net

Reconfiguration of Villa, Rathgar Road. Donaghy and Dimond Architects.



The teenagers of today may not necessarily be the architects of tomorrow but they can realise that they are just as important in the process of shaping our built society, of shaping their own space.

One of the first images a child produces is that of a house – very often with Mum, Dad and siblings in the foreground. Yet with the hustle and bustle of growing up “my house” is soon forgotten. At most, you ever get is “my room”. The space in teenage years has many uses – sleeping, homework, sulking room, dumping ground etc. “The house” very often is a place they don’t want to be – they’d rather be with friends – “out” is the way of their world. Noticing this built up world is almost alien – whether it is the colour of the walls or the façade of an imposing building.

But if you can bring them back to those first images all is not lost. The teenagers of today may not necessarily be the Architects of tomorrow but they can realise that they are just as important in the process of shaping our built society, of shaping their own space.

I’ve been teaching *Shaping Space* for the past five years and found that once our teenagers get over a few barriers they love the idea of architecture, design and learning the basics of construction. The beauty of *Shaping Space* is that it is a programme that you can make your own. The possibility is there to run the whole Transition Year on the course content alone.

And so the challenge!! That by the end of a half year option – a complete novice would be able to be aware of their built surroundings, to be able to draw a basic but good plan that had been well thought out from a good design and ergonomic point of view in a scale of 1:50 and from this build a scaled model. But most importantly it had to be fun.

Using lesson 5 as a basis – we look at the kind of houses we live in and the types of houses in the area. I use brainstorming section here because it breaks the ice and begins to make the class “fun”

while learning is going on. They like this and actually need no prompting at all!! From this we go inside – again another brainstorming – “the kitchen” – How many electrical appliances would you find there? When we finish compiling a list from the class on the board – I then get them to work out how many sockets they have in their kitchen at home and think of the ‘juggling’ that goes on as well as the health and safety issue. This idea can be transferred any room. Basic but important!!

These two exercises really get the class thinking – observing the world they live in. The aim was to notice their built environment both inside and out. What goes into creating a building? What “space” do we need? How do we use our space? And do we use it wisely. For homework the students begin to become aware of “their space”. They must measure their bedroom – including width of doors, height of window (floor to sill etc) and the objects on that room. The idea behind this – simple - the art of measuring more specifically centimetres and millimetres. Measurements and the concept of size roll off the tongue so easily but the bottom line is that they have no concept of space and what we can fit into that space. Whether it be two metres or twenty-two metres means nothing.

What arrives in generally needs a lot of polishing! So I’ve refined it. We manage to draw a plan at 1:20 scale putting in all that would be found on a plan. Here they learn dimensions – changing centimetres to millimetres and then to draw a plan of the objects to scale. Learning to use the scale rule is valuable at this point. The objects are cut out and put on the plan. All this is done in readiness for “The Brief”.

“The Brief”

Design a Bungalow

Measurements 20m x 10m

Family of four – Mum, Dad, two children

Children - Ages & sex of your choice

Baby on the way

This is where the fun begins. The design must be imaginative, yet practical. The drawings must be to a scale of 1:50 on A2 paper. Layout is important. The students’ knee jerk reaction is to concentrate on the outer walls and just “fill in the space”. So how was this dealt with? Once groups were formed (choice of 2 – 4) their jobs are designated. They must sit down and discuss what is important for a family of this size and needs. When this is done the furnishings are chosen for each room and drawn to scale. This helps them measure the space wisely. Bringing a tape measure to school is important too. They can translate room size options into reality by measuring out floor space. Slowly but surely they realise that they are not dealing with “a rectangle” but “real space” one they are “shaping”. This is where imagination comes in. It’s amazing how the popularity of “snooker rooms” from the last few years have given way to “gyms” and “lap pool” rooms this year. And they say our teenagers are lazy!!

The students move to building their models. Everything is at the ready – scalpels, steel rules, corrugated cardboard, pins, glue etc. It means that once the student knows what’s going on there is a certain amount of independence. The students slowly but surely turn their 2D design into a 3D model.

The “panic” that occurs in the last two weeks is “fever pitch” – colours being traded, trees, garages being added on. Each group is encouraged by the work of the other. By the end of the half-year the “drudgery” of the early weeks is forgotten - millimetres and measurements are bandied about as if it was known forever. They are completely confident in their work and knowledge. They are so confident that the “open door” policy that I have in the classroom is not a threat. They will eagerly discuss any stage of their work and have done so with many a visitor. They are equally proud of their final work and love to show them off at the end of the academic year at Transition year graduation.

So are they more aware of their built environment, of architecture. Certainly the numbers opting for Construction Studies has increased. 2003/2004 was the best year yet. There is a greater enthusiasm in the Leaving Cert Projects in Construction Studies. As I said in the beginning the students may not choose the road of Architecture but they are definitely more aware of it. They have followed through from learning the basics of draughting to the constructing of a 3D model. Some will pick up more than others. Discussions will take place about construction detail. Nothing will be drawn or modelled that

would not be done in the real world. It’s a serious subject but with a lot of fun.

Maybe it’s best finishing with one or two of the students comments:

“I really enjoyed *Shaping Space*. We got to build our own little house and design it in any way we wanted. I picked the subject because I was interested in it and thought it would be a challenge.

“In *Shaping Space* you get to explore your imagination although it is hard work. I like the fact that we design our own house”.

The current Transition years are saying:

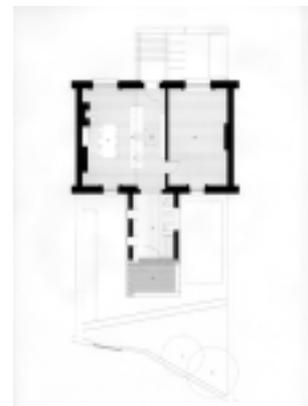
“I had no idea about space. We’re now using a measuring tape to work out our room sizes because in the beginning we thought we could take the easy way out and just put in the rooms. It makes more sense now and is more interesting”.

“I like drawing the plans, especially putting in the furniture – we can work out if we’re using too much space in a room and move walls if we are so we can give other rooms more space”.

“I’m keeping this plan – this is the house I want to build for myself.”

Pamela Burke has been a teacher in Collinstown Park Community College since 1984. Her degree subjects are History + Geography but always had a strong interest in architecture and design. She studied interior design in Ashfield College and Griffith College and completed AutoCad in Dublin Institute of Design. She spent two years teaching NCV Interior Design and now concentrates on *Shaping Space* with transition years.

Collinstown Park Community College in Clondalkin is co-educational VEC community college of over six hundred pupils.



Beginning at the Beginning

ANN MC NICHOLL

It had always been felt that if we wanted a public which had some understanding and appreciation of architecture, we needed to start with the children.

"Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space." Mies van der Rohe.

We would all probably recognize this as a fundamental truth, but it suggests some kind of blind, impersonal force rather than the cumulative effect of the actions of individuals or organisations. It is because it does involve real people making real choices that the public's perception of architecture is so important. Good architecture and a decent environment are more likely to be achieved where the community is well informed. And we are all entitled, as citizens, to know how we can influence the quality of what gets built around us.

Ireland, as it happens, has a Government policy on architecture that places public awareness in the core of a strategy aimed at achieving quality and innovation. Of the three strands of policy proposed in *Action on Architecture 2002 – 2005*, "promoting awareness and understanding of architecture" is the first. This is no accident, but the outcome of cooperation, persistence, timing and some luck.

Back in 1994 the RIAI decided to take a serious look at producing some sort of a package on architecture for use in schools. This was not the first time the Institute had investigated this possibility. It had always been felt that if we wanted a public which had some understanding and appreciation of architecture, we needed to start with the children. Earlier proposals had been frustrated by the costs of a well-illustrated pack, and by a school curriculum that seemed to leave no opening for architecture.

But by the 1990s the Irish education system had undergone a seismic shift. It was recognised that the arts were neglected, that scientific and

technological education was inadequate. There was agreement on the need to encourage critical thinking, expressive and creative abilities, and awareness of national and European heritage and identity. The benefits of cross-curricular activities and interdisciplinary projects were accepted, together with the notion of the use of the environment as a "...an integrating curricular principle and a pedagogically effective teaching method."

The other big change was the invention of the 'Transition Year', an educational breathing space between the Junior and Leaving Certificate Programmes for fifteen/sixteen year olds. There is no fixed curriculum for the Transition Year, which presented a huge challenge to schools but created an opening for curriculum materials supplied from outside the secondary school system. Architecture, because of its scope, seemed to present endless possibilities for learning experiences which fitted the aims and philosophy of the Transition Year. It was the obvious place to start.

However, it was also evident that both teachers and pupils were under pressure, with tension between rising expectations and limited resources. It was clear that the involvement of people working in secondary school education was critical. No matter how interesting the material might be to architects, if it did not meet the real needs of the teacher at the chalk-face it would never be used and the whole venture would be futile. At this stage Roadstone support allowed the RIAI to commission the Blackrock Education Centre to produce curriculum material based on the RIAI brief.

The result was *Shaping Space*, written and illustrated by a team of architects and

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The result was *Shaping Space*, written and illustrated by a team of architects and

teachers and published in December 1997. A book of almost 300 pages of lesson plans, worksheets, projects and homework assignments, it is structured around three modules, "My Home", "Neighbourhood, Village, Town City" and "Buildings through History" and includes advice on surveying, drawing and model-making. It was designed so that a teacher who knew nothing about architecture at the outset could take on a *Shaping Space* module with confidence, and it encourages collaboration between teachers from different disciplines. Teachers of history or geography, art or construction studies, mathematics or music, science, languages and literature, home economics, social, environmental, business, computer or media studies would all find opportunities.

In January 1998 the Department of Education's Transition Year Support Team included *Shaping Space* in their 'Training the Trainers' Programme, and between February and the end of the school year trainers emerging from this programme were able to run *Shaping Space* workshops for teachers in all twelve Transition Year Regions.

It had been the experience of the Department of Education that in schools where a Transition Year Programme had been running there were ripple effects up and down the school into the Junior and Leaving Certificate cycles. This is what has happened. Elements of *Shaping Space* are now used in primary schools, in Junior Cert and Leaving Cert Applied programmes. And it is being used in some teacher training colleges, to give primary school teachers the vocabulary they need to address architectural issues in the classroom.

In *Shaping Space* architecture is mediated by the teacher. On a parallel track the Arts Council was developing an architectural strand to its 'Schools' Shows' series, one in which the architect would speak directly to the student. The objective of the Schools' Shows series is to introduce the work of contemporary Irish artists to young people, which it does through the medium of commissioned exhibitions specially designed to travel to second level schools, arts centres and libraries in a designated county each year. *A Room of One's Own* positions architecture firmly in the realm of the arts and describes the process of making architecture. Six invited architects were asked to design a room for their teenage selves and present on three panels the concept, the drawings and a model for the imaginary place. It was launched in 2000, and if it follows the pattern of earlier Schools Shows, *A Room of One's Own* will still be touring ten or fifteen years from now.

Meantime the Government Policy on Architecture was getting off the ground. It had its origins back in 1995, when the then Minister for Arts, Culture

and the Gaeltacht, Michael D. Higgins, agreed to the RIAI's proposal to set up a working group to look at how the Government might support the production of high quality architecture. The result was the publication in 1996 of a discussion document, *Developing a Government Policy on Architecture: a Policy Framework*. This proposed a six-point policy statement in which the Government would undertake, among other things, to foster the demand for high quality architecture in the community as a whole.

The Government subsequently set up an Inter-Departmental Working Group to look at implementation and established three Task Groups to develop recommendations for the Government's policy objectives. These focused on Public Awareness, Architectural Quality in Publicly Funded Projects and Policy for Historic Buildings in Public Ownership. These three strands survive in *Action on Architecture 2002 – 2005*, published by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands in April 2002. The policy commits the Government to twenty-nine 'Actions' of which thirteen fall under the agenda for 'Promoting Awareness and Understanding of Architecture' - five Actions for primary and secondary school education and eight aimed at the general public.

Responsibility for each of the twenty-nine 'Actions' was assigned to specific agencies, and early in 2003 the Department of the Environment and Local Government, via the Department of Education, commissioned the National Council for Curriculum & Assessment (NCCA) to develop proposals for the introduction of architecture into the national primary and secondary school curriculum. This is the right moment, because a new primary school curriculum is just bedding down and the entire secondary school curriculum is about to be restructured from the bottom up. Already the new Leaving Cert Construction Studies course, re-titled 'Architecture and Construction Studies', has been substantially recast. The NCCA has completed its report and will be submitting it to the Department in late October.

Implementation of all of these actions was to be monitored by a permanent Inter-departmental committee serviced by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. With the recent Government re-organisation responsibility for the policy on architecture has shifted to the Department of the Environment. It will be interesting to see what develops.

In recent years other countries – Finland and Scotland are nearby examples – have developed government policies on architecture. All over the world there are teachers and architects working away on their own initiative, often in isolation, to bring architecture to children. Most have limited resources and, in the case of architects, limited time to commit to the task. The International Union of Architects (UIA) Built Environment Education Work Group, very conscious of this, has been developing guidelines on architecture in

schools programmes, curriculum and teacher training, to help the architectural profession in any country collaborate with the state or other interest groups in developing good architectural programmes for children. The guidelines were adopted in principle at the UIA Congress in Berlin 2002 and in November of this year the UIA Work Group will be meeting UNESCO in Paris to discuss the possibility of an international Built Environment Education Website which would link children, teachers, schools and architects and give them access to resources which no organisation could deliver on its own.

This story covers just ten years. Each step has depended on some people being willing to take the initiative, others prepared to listen, to offer support or to 'pick up the ball' and run with it. Timing and context have been important. For a wide variety of reasons Architecture has moved up the public agenda, which presents us with an audience that is more receptive, but also more challenging. Our response will need to match it.

Ann McNicholl is Education Director at the RIAI.

Shaping Space - An Approach - Maryfield College

FINOLA RYAN

As young people, who are often well travelled, there are spaces in this world which move them...The programme encourages the students to verbalise their feelings and translate their subconscious emotions.

Teaching and learning architecture in school is exhilarating! Last class on a Monday students are usually tired and thinking of going home. On this particular Monday I paused and observed a buzzing class. The project was to construct a lightweight bridge of balsa wood capable of supporting a brick. The students were consumed with enthusiasm for this project. Architecture stimulates, animates, motivates and enlivens the class.

The *Shaping Space* programme is a broad and extensive resource. Children will shape their own spaces in the future. To a certain extent they shape their microcosmic environment i.e. when they build lego, play with dolls and play games outdoors. When we were children we used to build little houses from anything such as broken furniture, a plank of wood, discarded cardboard boxes, even blankets. Our innocence and lack of inhibition allowed us to create free spaces. As we grow older we lose this sense of shaping our environment. The *Shaping Space* programme begins to reawaken our senses and allows us to see our environment with fresh eyes.

Shaping Space as a module fits perfectly into the ethos of transition year. Part of the philosophy of transition year is to draw out the varied talents and gifts of each pupil and to develop their multiple intelligences. Architecture is an exceptional area to introduce and expand multiple intelligences. Students are given the chance to develop inter-personal and intra-personal skills by exploring their thoughts and working in teams. They learn about influences in architecture coming from every area of life around them and they explore their logical-mathematical, special, linguistic and bodily-kinaesthetic intelligences.

The module allows freedom of teaching enabling the teacher to bring exciting methodology into the classroom in order to stimulate minds. Student experiences of practical classes are in the areas of

Art, Science, Technology, Woodwork and Home Economics to name a few. Transition Year and Fifth Year Architecture goes far beyond this. It is exciting, stimulating, enjoyable, pragmatic, dynamic and fun.

During each module the students are set a task to construct a model. Their experience of model making gives them a sense of accomplishment. I am often struck by the sense of creativity, of speed and urgency to get the task done and competitive energy and enthusiasm. The students are rewarded by the outcome of their labours. A field trip to Collins Barracks museum inspired the students to learn more about the architect and interior designer Eileen Gray. The students constructed a chair using global influences. Most of the students were impressed by the timelessness and beauty of Eileen Gray's designs.

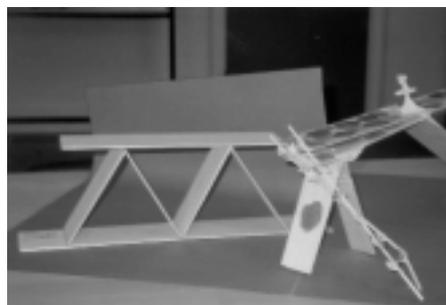
"We each planned and designed a chair which also brought the class together as a group. I found architecture to be a very welcome break from the normal school subjects as did most of the girls in my class." Cheryl Campbell (5th Year)

"The best part of our class was when we designed and constructed our own houses. Some of us worked in groups and others worked individually. The end results were both unusual and memorable. Either way we were proud of what we achieved." Paula Lohan and Catherine Madden. (5th Year)

By exploring their houses for functionality and design and then progressing to study their local communities and the environment they live in, the students realise they do know a lot about architecture, have opinions, likes and dislikes – they just have not formulated thoughts or ideas on this area of life.

Students begin to see a wider view of the world we live in, why planning is important and how spaces develop. Their sense of appreciation is heightened. Their knowledge and understanding of different materials, methods of construction, style and aesthetics is broadened.

As young people, who are often well travelled, there are spaces in this world which move them. They have a feeling of awe about structures, spaces, environs and other cultures they have visited. These are spaces which touch their emotions. The Shaping Spaces programme focuses their understanding of these spaces. Their experiences of these spaces are multi-sensory. The programme encourages the students to verbalise their feelings and translate their subconscious emotions.



The programme is about educating students to express themselves. Field trips and building models are just two ways to do this. Class discussions also open their minds.

“We liked our architecture class because we learnt about new things, there was a relaxed atmosphere in the class and we enjoyed sharing our ideas with each other.” Paula Lohan and Catherine Madden.

The idea of architecture is introduced through the concepts of light, space, design, function and influences from other disciplines. Students have not thought how English poetry or Social needs or Religion can inspire Architecture and Design. They learn about the historical influences and how we all, as individuals, have a responsibility to past and future generations. Another section I explore with the class is that of habitats in the world and the natural environment. Each student draws pictures, researches and collects materials from a variety of sources which they then record in their architectural notebooks. This brings about an awareness of other cultures and ethnic environments and encourages them to think about different people’s needs.

I teach students how architecture impacts on their everyday lives. *Shaping Space* provides many useful exercises and a fantastic list of cross-curricular activities at the end of each section.

One exercise I do is to get the students to close their eyes and visualise walking home. They use their senses to answer questions- what noises and sounds do you hear? What smells do you experience? What do you see when you look up, from left to right, in front and behind you? What amenities are there in the locality? What are the types and styles of the built surroundings? Are there green areas and public spaces?

Often this exercise leads onto a review of historical styles and types of buildings that are alongside each other- how have they come about? It is always a very successful exercise and generates interest, discussion and sharing of ideas.

We discuss the concept of light and its importance- their school is an excellent example as it has many large windows allowing maximum access to light and then alternatively contrasting shaded areas. The students often have not thought in detail about this very simple idea before!

What they have learnt is best expressed through their own comments.

“When I studied architecture I learnt what it stands for, how something looks, the design, the influences, the structure and the style. For example a house is a building built to live in, it must have facilities to cater for people’s needs. We looked at houses in different parts of the world – igloos, bungalows or shanty towns.” Fiona Bolger (5th Year)

“It was interesting to learn about plans, elevations, building materials, structure and layout.” Paula Lohan and Catherine Madden (5th Year)

“The aim of this course is to give the class a better awareness of the amount of effort that goes into designing a building. We went on a field trip around Temple Bar which I found very interesting looking at different types of buildings and the different ideas expressed through architecture.” Jessica Kavanagh (6th Year)

I know I have been successful in carrying out my aims and those of the *Shaping Space* programme when students express huge enthusiasm for the subject a year after finishing it. They have now an increased interest in their surroundings, environment, art, history and culture. “I look up, around me, at places I never would have thought about, places I passed by every day.” Jessica Kavanagh (6th Year)

What more can be done? The list is endless. I have taught architecture for five years now to both transition year and fifth year students and I have never run out of material as this is an area of vast and endless potential. I continually develop the course using *Shaping Space* as a resource. A fledging course such as this one can always benefit from personal contact with architects, extra teacher training and input from the Department of Education. The course is ultimately about architectural awareness and appreciation and it is a pleasure to teach!

Finola Ryan is a teacher at Maryfield College, Drumcondra.

Maryfield College, Glandore Road, Drumcondra is an all-girls secondary school of over six hundred pupils.

“I look up,
around me, at
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I walked back to the open city awed at being in a place that really looked like it might not have existed at all.

The primary focus of most architecture courses is the design studio where hypothetical projects form the basis for cultivating an understanding of what architecture is about. The canyon between this hypothetical world of esoteric language and the 'real' world we practice in becomes the graveyard for much idealism. It could be argued that architecture education therefore needs to improve interdisciplinary relations, and introduce reality to the design studio. Perhaps. Firstly however, real scale experimental building, which develops precedents and tests concepts, needs to become part of the architectural curriculum. If architects understood the potentials of the built form they would then be in a more credible position to defend their idealistic intent and use their education.

The Open City

About an hour north of the city of Valparaíso I was beginning to wonder if I was on the right bus when the spindly frame of the watertowers began to appear to my left, elegantly rising out of the stubbly sand dunes between the land and the sea. Four in the afternoon and the sun is low in the sky. Gradually other buildings, rooftops, walls, windows, objects emerged- Bartók-like staccatos punctuating the vast site of sand. Almost languid in places, delicate, light, striking, energy- charged. The growing cast of an architectural experiment. It took another mile to persuade the bus driver to rattle to a halt. I walked back to the open city awed at being in a place that really looked like it might not have existed at all.

The Open City is an area of 270 hectares of sand dunes, river, hills and scrubby grassland on the edge of the Pacific with some twenty buildings, sculptures and interventions throughout the site. It was created in 1970 by poets,

philosophers, sculptors, painters, architects and designers,ⁱ a group known today as 'Co-operativa Amereida' or simply 'Open City'. Most of this group of people still live, work and teach in the constructions they have built together with students of the school of architecture of the Catholic University Valparaíso over the course of the last thirty-three years.

The materials used are basic: often discarded local brick, reused windows and recycled wood; the construction methods experimental. Many workshops are conducted and prototypes developed during the building process. This releases a new expression and aesthetic from these potentially banal materials.

'Hospederías' translating literally as 'guesthouses' but more accurately as 'places of hospitality'ⁱⁱ are one of the main building types present. These homes are designed around a central area, usually the dining area where strangers, visitors and inhabitants of the city gather to exchange ideas. This concept of hospitality is fundamental to the Open City philosophy. There are also specifically public buildings: a music room, a chapel, a cemetery, a new amphitheatre and several agoras or open meeting spaces throughout the site. The arrangement of these buildings does not follow a strict pattern but rather evolves in relation to the site itself resulting in an intriguing kind of spatial entropy which settles easily with the site.

The teaching of the Valparaíso School is based on the unity of poetry and architecture. Each building and sculpture is created by first generating a poem specific to that site- the process of which is called the 'phalène' or poetic act.ⁱⁱⁱ This is a site-specific act and varies with each project. Each member of the design group

participates. The resultant poem is like a primeval, instinctual reading of the site by the group and forms an integral part of each design decision.

This pedagogy has its origins in 1952^{IV} when architect Alberto Cruz, poet Godofreddi Iommi, and a group of young architects, sculptors and designers began teaching in the school of architecture in Valparaíso. Radical changes were made to the ways in which architecture and design were taught and practiced. The concept of architecture as a collective endeavour was fundamental to their vision. A quest to discover the American identity and to understand the complex history which created its unique culture became the point of departure for the group's collective work. 'Amereida', an epic poem referred to as the *Aeneid* of America emerged from these discussions.

"Un poema que canta el regalo que es nuestro continente, su permanente posibilidad de ser original, su presente, pasado y destino propios. Un poema que es una visión acerca de lo que es en verdad América, de lo que significa, para todos nuestros oficios, ser americanos."^V

An expedition or *travesía* (crossing) across Latin America in August 1965 became the physical enactment of this poem. It was a voyage towards the discovery and penetration of what they term the 'interior sea', a voyage towards unravelling and stating an identity. The proposed route was decided by projecting the Southern Cross onto the map of South America^{VI}, marking a pathway from Cape Horn in the south to Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia. During this *travesía* many poetic acts took place: paintings, inscriptions, signs and sculptures were made – transient marks on the landscape – like physical fragments of a Latin American songline.^{VII}



From this travesia the co-operative *Amereida* was formed and the lands that make up the open city today were purchased soon after in 1970 as a space to enact and develop their philosophy.

The travesia still forms an important part of the school's work and each year students and staff of the school make a travesia into the 'interior sea' of Latin America and create a poetic act over the course of about a month. To date there have been more than one hundred such travesias.^{viii}

The Open City is a utopia. Unlike other architectural utopias it does not have a social or political agenda.^{ix} It aims to forward a way of living and making but in a decisively calm, non propagandistic way. Therein might lie at least part of the secret of its longevity throughout a turbulent national history.

As I travelled back to Santiago a week later I wondered if such a place could exist elsewhere. A true disciple of my time, the cerebral overdrive of negativity and reason set in. Surely not. Nowhere else. Only Chile. Only South America. Because. If. Besides. Anyway, I know we'd never get the insurance.

The perceived limiting factors in architecture today - economic, political, social, cultural, professional and functional all collude in asphyxiating the spirit of possibility. Nearly one hundred years later we could well be accused of losing our grip on the very essence of modernity as increasingly architecture is lapsing into a mimetic trance, oblivious to lost opportunity. That this is happening on a global scale is all the more alarming.

The chasm that exists between academia and the so-called 'real world' must also be implicated in this. An integrated approach where the built form and conceptual theories were experimented with on a real scale would increase the potential for sustainable innovation. The field of architectural research could then expand beyond the realm of academic papers and unbuilt theses and discover an onsite dynamic narrative. If architecture is about inventing buildings and spaces then there needs to be more Open Cities, more places where all these lost opportunities and ambitious philosophies can be gathered up, re-examined, discussed, explored, experimented with and built.

The buildings and sculptures of the Open City include:

Casa de los Nombres: was built in 1992 to mark the forty year anniversary of the Institute of Architecture and the New School of Architecture, Catholic University Valparaíso. Forty-nine people participated in the poetic act which created Casa de los Nombres- hence its name. The building was designed as a temporary structure to house the school's exhibition. The roof system consisted of prefabricated aerodynamic self supporting canopies which rested on concrete pillars. The hexagonal pre-stressed concrete pillars are now all that remain in the sand dunes.

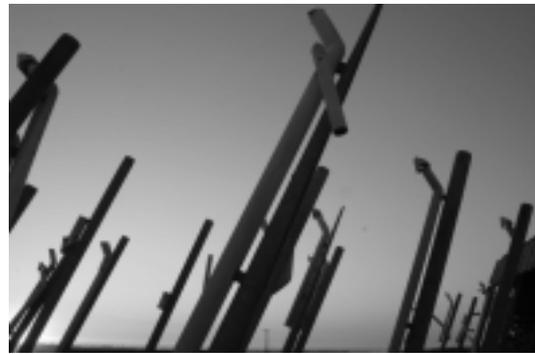
Hospederia de la Entrada: stands at the entrance to the Open City. Its design is based on a repetition of five skewed cubes, each forming a different room of the dwelling. It is raised above the ground on slender stilts which form the structural skeleton of the building. There are many doors and entrances as with all the hospederias, reinforcing the philosophy of hospitality and open-ness. The buildings at the Open City are very deliberately not oriented towards the pacific- "la casa no es un mirador" *- but rather the siting allows the building find its own expression on the site.

* in conversation with Alberto Cruz – "the house is not a viewing point"

Wind pipes: the wind pipes are situated in front of the Hospederia de la Entrada. They catch the wind as it blows across the site making a sometimes almost indiscernible whispering.

Water Towers: are a series of six interconnected towers which are visible throughout the site.

The Music Hall: is located in a hollow in the sand-dunes. A central wood framed column of light illuminates the building. The walls are clad in acoustic reed panels. The room is used for performances and Wednesday lunchtime meetings of the Open City. The exterior of the building is white, its planar surface reflecting the light and providing an unexpected contrast to the interior.

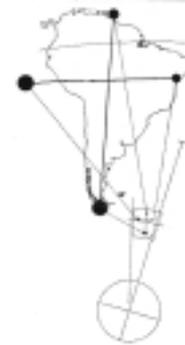


Notes

- i <http://www.arquitecturaucv.cl/pags/amereida/ca.html>
- ii Open City Group, "Alberto Cruz- Cooperative Amereida Chile" in *ZODIAC*, No. 8, February 1993, p. 195
- iii "phalène is a French word for a kind of butterfly . It was chosen at random, by opening a page in a dictionary to designate a special kind of poetic act." Fernando Pérez-Oyarzún, "The Valparaíso School" in *The Harvard Architectural Review*, Vol. 9 1993, p. 88
- iv <http://www.arquitecturaucv.cl/pags/escuela/hist.html>
- v "a poem which sings the gift which is our continent, its permanent possibility of being original, its present , past and destiny . A poem that is a vision about what America really is and about what being American means for our crafts."
- vi The Southern Cross: the thesis of the proper north- the Open City renamed the geographic south the new north.
"ellas abren en su cruz
todos los puntos cardinals
el norte la designa sur
pero ella no es el sur"

"in their cross they open all the cardinal points / the north names them south but they are not the south" Amereida, Vol 1, p.37

This approach of inverting the expected and questioning the accepted is intrinsic to the Open City's work approach.
- vii *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin, (New York: Penguin Books, 1987) describes the journey / walkabout that Aborigines take along the ancient 'dreaming track' of their ancestors. The invisible trace of these tracks on the land are known as songlines.
- viii <http://www.arquitecturaucv.cl/pags/amereida/trav.html>
- ix in conversation with Alberto Cruz, June 2003



Other publications include

Ann M. Pendleton-Jullian, *The Road That Is Not A Road, and the Open City, Ritoque, Chile*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996)

Rodrigo Pérez De Arce and Fernando Pérez- Oyarzún, *Valparaíso School / Open City Group*, ed. Paul Rispa (Montreal: McGill- Queens University Press, 2003)

Website of the Valparaíso School of Architecture : <http://www.arquitecturaucv.cl/>

I would like to thank the Open City for their most generous hospitality and wisdom, especially Alberto Cruz, Ricardo Lang, Ana María Ruz, Ivan Ivelik, and the archive library.

Majella Stack is a student of architecture at University College Dublin, currently studying at the University of California, Berkeley.

Credit photographs to Archives of the Catholic University of Valparaíso or to Majella Stack. Each photograph file name is labeled correctly.

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Other notes on bounding

ANNA RYAN

This essay presumes to explore the particularly Irish understanding of how urban space is defined and ordered through its boundary making and explain the cultural roots of this implacable need to bound.

There is something about islands that appeals to me, the sense of boundedness, I suppose, of being protected from the world - Ghosts, John Banville

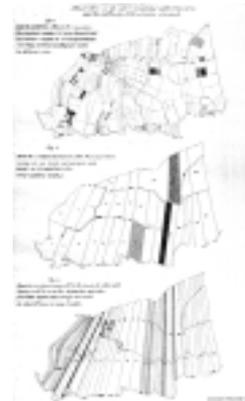
Banville writes as a fictional character looking for an elusive sense of security from the world but more perhaps from himself *in the world*. This need for distance suggests a psychological relationship between island culture and the need for definitive edges to mark one's territory. Does it then suggest that island dwellers would be lovers of bounded space? Perhaps, at a different scale, walled space? That the need to bound space is based on some cultural understanding, rooted in the physical nature of the land? Boundedness, the nature of boundary, the act of bounding is in fact an act of defining. In Banville's case the boundedness serves as a definition of the need for psychological distance. But boundaries can define many things and take various forms, many of which are not so very obvious as simple space. As for Banville's ghost.

By considering the boundary as definition, a definition based on the placing of marks, perhaps the underlying issues will become more apparent. The OED tells us "definition" means; "an exact description of the nature, scope, or meaning of something" or more clearly in our context; "the degree of distinctness in outline of an object or image". But the defining of a thing, be it a space, an idea, an essence, is often not so simple as the placing of a single marker. A word to define an idea for instance. The more complex the idea, or ephemeral, the more difficult the action to define through single words. Because the single word is too broad, too clumsy, too grey in tone to sufficiently clarify with precision. Thus the

accumulation of marks becomes necessary. In this case words, but in others not, though the idea still holds. And the method is not to place the markers on the thing to be defined but round about it, circumnavigating its perimeter, giving form to its elusiveness, and thus pinning it down into a steady place where it can mean just the thing it is and no other. Though the thing it is has no single word to call itself by. Thus boundaries, in this case created by an assemblage of words, create ever finer definition of meaning, or as the OED tells us, "the distinctness in outline or image". And as the idea contained within this field grows more complex or more elusive, the boundaries too increase in their complexity and mass, from single markers to complex and dense edge conditions.

So too perhaps with cities. With the space of cities. The physical boundaries with which we describe space could be discussed in related terms. So let us consider Irish boundaries. The Irish culture and history has left indelible, if not always entirely legible, marks on the urban landscape. As all cultures do. But this essay presumes to explore the particularly Irish understanding of how urban space is defined and ordered through its boundary making and explain the cultural roots of this implacable need to bound. A need so deeply rooted it takes to such perverse extremes as to bound a foot and a half of concrete apron at the front of a house with railings. This small act of bounding is but the edge of a much more entrenched and thorough going bounding of space in Ireland.

Walled parks, walled gardens, walled cemetery plots. Walls are ubiquitous in Dublin. Especially Dublin perhaps. Because property is so dear, and dearly possessed? But so it is in America where



bounded space is the exception rather than the rule. Is it cultural? Does it hark back to complex land inheritance and Brehon law? Or the plantations and the later penal laws when property was so abruptly seized and withheld? Is there a measure of fear or insecurity in these walls? Perhaps so. The space they contain is, tangibly, physically, no more complex than the parks, gardens and final resting places of North Americans. Nor are the programmes multiple and diverse. But perhaps they bound more than a simple idea of space or use, which could be achieved through simple, single marks. Perhaps they enclose a complex set of memories and associations, things not easily defined by single marks but requiring far more complex edges to define, clarify, make authoritative a thing which cannot be easily defined for it exists below the conscious, embedded in the psyche, derivative of a complex and troubled history. So we turn to the history of boundary making in Ireland—a rural history upon which the construction of space within the city is perhaps derivative.

Long before the occupation of Irish lands by others, whether English, Norman or even Viking, the Irish people were united and governed by a shared value system and societal structure. This structure evolved slowly through time in the first instance through an oral tradition which recounted the rights and duties that lent coherence not only to the existing social system but to patterns of land use as well. By the 6th century, when the oral tradition had been carefully inscribed to text, this tradition had evolved into the complex system now known as the Brehon Laws which contained, within its extensive text, a number of particular statutes regarding the proper bounding of space. These developed in response to the equally complex manner in which

land was divided equitably between sons on inheritance of their father's estate. Not equally, as a contemporary reading of inheritance rights would suggest, but *equitably* which demanded that each son would share in both waste land and fertile plots. A system which resulted in fragmented field patterns of discontinuous ownership to account for the vagaries and relative worth of the land.ⁱ Thus boundary becomes necessitated by complexity. And depending on the ambiguity of the division, the required markers could range from single reference points to entire enclosures.ⁱⁱ Or so we are given to understand from the texts. But in truth the Brehon laws pertaining to land evolved in to what is referred to as a rundale landscape. Certainly fragmented into diverse and discontinuous parcels of land. But parcels that were separated not by walls but demarcated by 'mearings' of unploughed strips, low mounds or stones placed at intervals.ⁱⁱⁱ Small marks of the limits of ownership, while the whole of this collective tillage could sometimes be bounded by the more significant marker, the wall or fence, to exclude the livestock from the tilled land and to mark, not personal property, but commonage. Very little bounding in truth given the complexity of use and ownership in the landscape. And this resultant form of cooperative landscape persisted well into the 18th century and even later until the 19th century in the north and west of Ireland.^{iv}

So despite the traditional concern and continued observance of land inheritance and division handed down from ancient Irish custom and law, the land of Ireland remained remarkably unbounded by the Irish themselves. In this communal manner of farming where each plot of tillage was actively used, the bounds of ownership were already clear and the need to

bound existed only in reference to control of animals. Thus any boundaries made were often temporal and of minor construction as they occurred seasonally to protect the crops from grazing herds.^v This intimate knowledge of one's land, and thus of one's neighbours' lands, combined with a deeply rooted sense of community or clan, is what secured the openness of the landscape.

Although the English had arrived long before, this understanding of the relation between land use and tenure was not to be extensively challenged until the agrarian land reforms which began in earnest in the late 18th century. Thus in a late 16th century map of Limerick^{vi} we can still clearly perceive the difference between the English and Irish sense of space and enclosure: that the Irish will defiantly cluster their buildings together to leave an open, common landscape beyond, even within the bounds of city walls, a form anticipated by the rural system based on an ancient and clan based understanding of land.

The earliest attempts to remake this traditional understanding of boundary by the English on the Irish landscape were the introduction of the estates. Although plantations had occurred earlier, and had some limited impact in land use pattern it was the massive confiscation of land in the mid to late 17th century after a series of rebellions and suppressions which led to the widespread establishment of large estates held by English landlords. This act of seizure, combined with the general absenteeism of the landlords in question, could conceivably bear some responsibility for the degree of enclosure which followed. Though the walling of these estates often related to the development of the land as deer parks one could also postulate that there was an equal element of assertion in this act. The assertion of ownership over large tracts of land which were not only underused but had been appropriated in an unpopular manner. So land ownership is made authoritative and binding by what the English common law calls 'signs of ownership', defined in order of legal regard as firstly *USE*, but if use is not apparent then by built markers.^{vii} Hence the walls of the English estates.

But the truly significant level of enclosure of the Irish landscape came much later when ideas concerning the economic use of land shifted and encouraged landlords to reorder the landscape in a seemingly more efficient manner. Although there was some movement to reorder the pre-existing landscape in the early years of the plantations, it was not until the early to mid 19th century that extensive disbanding of the rundale system was undertaken and a so called rationalization of the landscape occurred. And this continued beyond the landlord movement to the work of the congested districts board^{viii} always with the addition of boundary walls.

Why were these walls suddenly important in a

land that was, and continued to be, actively used? And was manifestly not about ownership as the Irish, for much of this history until the late 19th century, owned very little of this land? Perhaps because the change in pattern of use uprooted the common farmer from his emotional and, indeed, kinetic attachment to particular pieces of land a strength of association which ran so deep historically and emotionally, that only the authoritative division of the parcels with walls was sufficient to overcome the natural instinct to revert to one's prior pattern of use. After all, it was the Brehon Law and its insistence on equitable inheritance which had given rise to this landscape and with it a memory of family associations and personal lineage.

Perhaps also, on the other side of the confrontation, there existed a sense of insecurity on the part of the landlord regarding how likely this new pattern of use was to be accepted by the Irish tenant without the authority of the dividing wall. The transformation process of land usage and boundary patterns recorded in Glenfin, Co. Donegal⁹ and discussed authoritatively by Aalen in *Man and the Landscape of Ireland* attests to the level of tribulation and resistance experienced.¹⁰ When the landlord offered to reorder the apparently unwieldy existing system of ownership, as illustrated in the second figure, the tenants, "...would not hear of an equivalent of two bad acres being set against one good one, in order to maintain union or compactness."¹¹ and made a counter-proposal which combined elements of both their own understanding of the fragmented and equitable division of land with the landlords desire for land consolidation. Thus the walls which ultimately bounded these lands defined more than an understanding of tenure. They embody in their physical form an articulation of the conflict and the emotional significance attached to continuity with prior land use patterns and cultural attitudes. Common law history also attests to this phenomenon, that boundary walls most often occur in land which is contested or overpopulated as a result of divisions and disputes. This surely is an apt description of the overpopulated conditions of pre-famine Ireland in the throws of unwelcome reorganization schemes.

So if the advent of walls in the landscape is clear, and has been authoritatively documented and discussed by geographers for some time past, why do city dwellers, Dubliners in particular, put up walls? Often seemingly inconsequential walls as we see again in this bounded space of asphalt? Although English common law came late to the Irish country side (in fact anything beyond the pale continued to operate, excluding the English landlords, on the basis of Brehon law until a very late date in Ireland's history) Dublin has long been under the influence of English common law and its understanding of the relation between use and ownership. Thus a property which had no active or apparent use applied to it in a territory which

So it seems walls arise to
define conflict, to give manifest
form to emotional attachment
or trauma...or to defend a
position of insecurity based on
contrary absences.



was densely occupied would require, in this cultural setting, boundary marks to make its ownership clear. Resulting in seemingly abstract boundings of space which proliferate across the city. These marks bound, and thus define, the elusive and perhaps contrary idea of ownership unaccompanied by any apparent use or usefulness. A bounding of absence in fact, and perhaps insecurity. An insecurity of tenure and the right of possession in the absence of explicit use.

So it seems walls arise to define conflict, to give manifest form to emotional attachment or trauma or to defend a position of insecurity based on contrary absences. But why then should North Americans not be equally married to such extreme tactics of ownership marks, much of whose terrain is equally dense, particularly in urban and sub urban conditions? Why would Canadians with the bulk of their legal system firmly rooted in the very same English common law heritage, not feel the need to protect, mark out, define with the authority of the wall land which often has as little apparent use? Because of the timing of the advent of national surveys in their history. On the cusp of the 19th century the passion for surveying and the national survey (the ordnance survey as it is called in Ireland) arose with force not simply in England and Ireland but in western culture generally including the territory of North America. Particularly important is its relationship to nation making and national identity, perhaps most especially in North America, to make authoritative their claim to lands presumed to be unowned and unoccupied.

Only a small eastern seaboard edge of the continent had been homesteaded in any significant way, appropriated and subdivided in an irregular fashion based on the metes and bounds system¹², prior to the wholesale appropriation of the land through the agency of mapping. Assuming a vacant territory both Jefferson, with his national survey of American lands in the late 18th century, and later the Dominion of Canada through its Land Survey laid out national grids from which to establish plots for ownership prior to settlement by Europeans. This mapping exercise prior to occupation established the authority of the map thus undermining the influence which any mere physical boundary may have had under different circumstances. For the early settlers in these territories the appropriation of the land, and with it the understanding of its boundaries, was not based on landscape markers or intimate knowledge but was preceded by an abstract image of bounded space described by lines on paper. When confronted by the physical reality of the land itself this abstract image could be projected onto the landscape with no reference to orders of any other kind. Thus the efficacy of the paper landscape over physical markers was established from the outset and continues to prevail in the contemporary cultural mindset.

Physical marks on the landscape, would have little meaning or power in the face of this definitive bounding of the land.

But different circumstances prevailed in Ireland. While Ireland undertook its survey at a similar period in an effort to authoritatively establish boundaries from which to do valuation surveys, the timing of this effort came far too late in the development of the pattern of landscape and its association with the physical marking of territory to acquire the absolute authority which it attained in North America. It coincided with the bulk of the enclosure movement, which was already remaking the Irish understanding of boundary, and it could not prevail against this force. Neither perhaps, even if it had come at an earlier moment prior to enclosure, could any reordering of a landscape already intimately understood by its inhabitants have been feasible without the introduction of walls to assert authority. And certainly not through maps. For there was no common usage, understanding, acceptance or dependence on maps as authoritative registrations of territory. Despite the long history of estate mapping, this was not a vehicle of common use nor a representation of the land which would have been commonly or intuitively understood. Walls were the accepted authority, far outweighing the efficacy of the line on paper, and could not be displaced in the cultural mindset that prevailed.

In fact the earliest edition of the ordnance survey was, during its making, superceded by the vast physical reordering of the land. This was so significant that it was necessary to revise these maps immediately to account for these changes. Changes made not only to field boundaries but also to estate, township and parish boundaries.¹³ This exercise made clear that the map not only lacked authority but was in truth a mere representation of the true authority, that of the wall. And so it continues in the culture of modern Ireland. The need for physical marks of boundary persists in the face of the paper landscape, a virtual landscape which has failed to achieve the status of authority it has been granted in North America.

And what of our thesis regarding definition then? North Americans survive for the most part, emotionally intact, with mere virtual definitions of territory while the Irish continue to crave more tangible representations of the same territory. Yet it is not the same territory except perhaps in word. For the meaning and consequence of *territory*, together with all the word may imply, is first and foremost a mental construct and only secondly made manifest as a physical artifact. Are the implications and associations linked to *territory* as complex for North Americans as for the Irish? Undoubtedly not, nor is the understanding of the meaning of boundary; what can faithfully grant definition and clarity. Boundaries can define many things and take various forms after all. For the Irish the line on a

map is too simple, perhaps too singular, clumsy and imprecise and most of all too late to articulate and define, in fact *to bound*, the complex nature of territory, of use and non-use, of eviction and repossession, thus requiring an accumulation of marks in the form of walls.

Elizabeth Shotton is a practicing architect and educator from Vancouver, Canada and is currently teaching at the School of Architecture in University College Dublin. She is also a critic, writer, and an independent curator for exhibitions. Current research, which is partially represented here, explores the evolution of urban form and its relationship to conscious and unconscious modes of perception through an analysis of Dublin's evolving urban environment. This work has been generously funded by the Urban Institute of Ireland and the School of Architecture at University College Dublin.



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1: Dublin city centre housing, New Street, 2002, E. Shotton

2: Limerick City Map from Ceide O' Rahilly, "Medieval Limerick: The Growth of Two Towns" in H.B. Clarke (ed) *Irish Cities, The Thomas Davis Lecture Series* (Dublin: Mercier, 1995). Tracing based on a copy of original Hardiman map [MS 1209/57 Trinity Library, Dublin] held in Jim Kemmy Municipal Museum by Celie O' Rahilly, Senior Archaeologist, Limerick Corporation.

3: Analysis of land use pattern Glenfin, Co. Donegal from Devon Commission 1845, *Occupation of Land in Ireland, Evidence taken before Commissioners Part 1, Appendix to Minutes of Evidence*, p.59

4: Dublin city centre housing, 2002, E. Shotton

5: Dublin city centre housing, 2002, E. Shotton

ⁱ Dáibhí O' Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* (London, New York: Longman Group Ltd., 1995) p. 89-90

ⁱⁱ O' Cróinín, p.145. For more explicit detail see *Ancient Laws of Ireland, Brehon Law Tracts Vol IV* (1879) p.143

ⁱⁱⁱ F.H.A. Aalen, *Man and the Landscape in Ireland* (London: Academic Press, 1978) p.162

^{iv} Aalen, p.183

^v Aalen, p.163

^{vi} Ceide O' Rahilly, "Medieval Limerick: The Growth of Two Towns" in H.B. Clarke (ed) *Irish Cities, The Thomas Davis Lecture Series* (Dublin: Mercier, 1995) p.166

^{vii} v. Powell-Smith, *The Law of Boundaries and Fences* (London: Butterworth, 1975) p.80, p.94. For further reference see also T.M. Aldridge, *Boundaries, Walls and Fences* (London: Longman, 1992)

^{viii} Aalen [1978] see chapter 7 for more extensive discussion of process

⁹ Devon Commission 1845, *Occupation of Land in Ireland, Evidence taken before Commissioners Part 1, Appendix to Minutes of Evidence*, p. 59

¹⁰ Aalen, p.186-187, fig 18

¹¹ Devon Commission 1845, p. 59

¹² International Internet Genealogical Society University, *Lesson III The "Metes & Bounds" and "Township & Range" Systems of Land Measurement*, c.2002

¹³ For a fuller discussion of the history of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland see J.H. Andrews, *History in the Ordnance Survey Map: An Introduction for Irish Readers*, (Dublin: Ordnance Survey, 1974) or J.H. Andrews, *Shapes of Ireland: Maps and their Makers 1564-1839* (Ireland: Geography Publications, 1997)

From the Notes of an Unquiet Guest

JOHN MOSS

It is difficult as a Canadian at home in landscape to accept that in Ireland there is no respect for place.

For a full year from September 1997 I held the Craig Dobbin Chair of Canadian Studies at University College Dublin. During that time, my wife and I settled into a comfortable cottage near Wicklow. I wrote extensively about our experiences in a sequence of commentaries on what happens when culturally aware sensibilities are suddenly and wholly immersed in possibly the most self-referential culture on earth. Although these commentaries were delivered as lectures, they collapse distinctions between poetry and prose, documentary and fiction, postmodern cultural studies, personal confession, and old-fashioned fun. I invented a nineteenth century Irish poet, Declan Fitzwilliam, and gave a lecture on his life and works at a puzzled academic conference in England. The fictional, bisexual, Arctic explorer, Pádraig Ó Súilleabháin, of Merrion Square, is given a life of his own and expires in the Canadian Arctic. There is also, in the book ("Invisible among the Ruins: Field Notes of a Canadian in Ireland" UCD Press, 1999; Cormorant Press, 2000), a recurring expression of my perplexity at the curious notion in Ireland that there is a fondness for the landscape and the land, when in fact it struck me as the farthest thing from the truth. The following excerpts, reprinted with permission, articulate some of my frustration, selected by me for their possible interest to readers of building material, at the invitation of the editor.

Since arriving in Ireland last September, I have been reading a lot, on a quest to understand the connection between Irish landscape and language, a connection I have devoted much of my writing life to exploring in a Canadian context. But in Irish books the land has no presence, beyond a welter of adjectives, adverbial attitudes, and as a place of interment, the graveyard of an infinite history descending by geometric regression into the depths of the earth. There seems no love for the land but only for what it implies. Within landscape, here, I find myself literally beyond words, reaching to Canadian antecedents for language solid enough to articulate

Ireland, to inscribe on the echoing walls of a reader's mind, of my own, a sense of this place as a natural phenomenon.

Ireland as a landscape without words seems impossible.

And you have the poets. Ireland, you have the poets, the story-tellers, and you have the lawyers and priests. We do as well, but we have not the set of mind to listen. We turn to Ireland, I turn to Ireland, as we should—in Ireland there is poetry on the five-pound note, in newspaper columns, on television talk-shows; there is story in the language, built into the words and the grammar of everyday talk; there are 150,000 national monuments, more ruins than elsewhere are cemeteries, more burial sites than elsewhere are gardens, more walled garden sanctuaries than elsewhere are dreams. In Ireland, you dwell among words and history is the landscape of time; within ruins you find yourselves real.

Canada extends through six time zones. Ireland closes for lunch. From anywhere in Ireland you can go home for the weekend; Mammy and Da are never that far away. Canada's emblem is the stiff red leaf of a tree unknown through most of the land; Ireland's shamrock is useful to identify national monuments, to explain religious mysteries, a trefoil stained with blood. Green is the liturgical colour of hope. The red maple leaf is a flame, the brief colour of autumn; the white of our flag is the winter. Canadians are polite, arrogantly modest; the Irish are congenial and politically volatile. Canadians try to find and lose themselves in generalizations.

The people of Ireland live among walls; the landscape and culture are inscribed with lines of stone, labyrinths of rearranged earth, proscriptions of denial and possession, sedge-rows and hedge-rows and relentless historical memories; and the often-rain of Ireland is a condition of life to be endured—of your lives, for I am speaking to the world as if it were Irish, to Ireland as if it were the

There seems no love for the land but only for what it implies.

world. I come from a country a continent wide and so wholly indeterminate at its northern edges that tracing tens of thousands of shoreline miles on a global map would not articulate our upper limits. Imagine standing on the earth, trying to take in the illimitable depths of a clear blue sky, then just when you think you have its measure the sun sets, and your soul opens to the blue-black night. You can impose constellations, but these signify only the limits of imagination. You are reduced to transparency and at the same time vision connects you with the infinite. This is what it is to be consciously Canadian, in a place where rain is often snow and where walls are only fences, merely conventions, and there is no perceptible limit to the circumscribing universe.

It is difficult as a Canadian at home in landscape to accept that in Ireland there is no respect for place. Part of the problem is a matter of time. My experience in the Arctic, walking the tundra, skiing strange contours of snow, coursing whitewater-rivers in an open canoe, has admitted a visceral response to the natural world that has allowed me to feel native to the land, finding myself possible at the intersection of timelessness and time. This is as close to divine rapture as I ever wish to achieve. But in Ireland the landscape is inseparable in consciousness from history, the rocks seem real only as fences. There is much sentimentality about land as a context of duration; but not as a place, both immediate and beyond human reach. Rivers are boundaries, fields are the sights of ancient or recent glory or shame, trees are the bounty of ownership, animals are quaint or a nuisance. Place in itself has no existence except as a location of terrible beauty. Otherwise, how could there be such litter as there is, how could the Irish discard by the roadsides the empty wrappers of their lives?

Think of the continuity in Ireland between experience and memory, memory and history, history and legend, legend and myth, myth and primeval mystery, all in this place, superimposed,

layer upon layer, each layer poking through the ones laid over it, so there is a sense of it all as your personal past. Beneath the passage tombs of Knowth and Dowth and Newgrange, at the Bend in the Boyne, are remnants of clusters of circular homes which crumbled over the bones of your earliest forebears, whose blood through lust or affection beats in your hearts, bled through with the blood of builders of pit-circles surrounding the tombs in the early bronze age, absorbed in the blood of migrating Celts, and then Vikings, and Normans, Anglo-Normans, and what else besides, who pillaged and raped, built and farmed, and are still building and farming, all alive still in the twist of an Irish tongue around vowels as old as language itself. For us, it is different. Discontinuity and dislocation, the emigrant/immigrant experience, throw us directly for origins upon imagination. We make up Ireland, but it is not a real place. When finally we come here to visit, we look for ourselves among ruins, sort through the layers upon layers of your lives, and find ourselves absent. We were never here; this is your place. My ancestral bones lie buried not in the cemeteries of Munster or Leinster or Ulster or Connaught, or of Britain or Europe, Asia, or Africa, but in the landscape of home, the visceral, palpable, throbbing, unending Canadian earth.

Ireland, said the poet Alden Nowlan, is not my people's place of origin. It is their creation myth. For you, ancestral memory is rooted in the land that surrounds you, time is a dimension of human experience. For us, our place is where we arrived, by birth or by choice. It is up to our poets, our artists and architects, painters and dancers, to sing our place into being, to name the land ours. And it is up to the same cultural alchemists in Ireland to set the land free.

Professor John Moss is a writer and Canadian literature specialist in the Department of English at the University of Ottawa.

The basic principles that structure the LTL way of working are founded on a systematic reinvention of convention.

David Lewis

The New York firm of Lewis Tsurumaki Lewis is the young highly educated trio of David Lewis, Marc Tsurumaki, and Paul Lewis. They formed in 1993 through a common desire to create a new theory of practice as an architecture and research partnership. Aware of the odds against all architects today of being able to create something “new”, LTL chose to concentrate on the architectural process as opposed to the resulting object. The process is new with each project, each site, and each client. By making the process their *raison d’être*, and concentrating on the opportunities therein, they are able to become unburdened by the conventional set of preconceived ideas and problems one might traditionally be fighting against within the architectural project.

Snafu: A condensation of the phrase “Situation normal all fucked up.” Used in the early years of World War II by American soldiers to describe a condition of disorder that arose from an excess of conflicting Army rules and regulations. Now used in vernacular to mean a general state of confusion, disruption, or system breakdown.¹

An integral reason for inviting LTL to Dublin is to expose the architectural community to an extreme practice of “tactical architecture”, one that critically examines the architectural problem or “programme” and in turning it on its head, creating the art and architecture of the snafu.

Convention: “a rule, method, or practice established by usage; custom, accepted habit.”²

To introduce this alternative way of working David Lewis kicked off the 2003-2004 AAI lecture series by showing a series of familiar images. He then

carefully began moving away from the familiar until the audience was faced with images verging on the absurd. The basic principles that structure the LTL way of working are founded on a systematic reinvention of convention. LTL tactically undermines the conventional situation in order to create and expose the logic of the absurd found in the everyday. As taken from “Situation Normal” LTLs practice “employs tactics that seek to provoke the logically irrational by inducing plays and slippages between form, function, and program.”³ By employing these devices LTL continually expose the underlying basis of convention; the conventions of drawing, the convention of form making, and the conventions of program in order to overcome the ordinary.

Tactics: “the science or art of deploying military or naval forces and manoeuvring them in battle, any manoeuvres for gaining advantage or success.”¹

The firm’s emphasis is on the construction of the architectural thesis for each project. The process of arriving at an architectural solution is just as important, if not more so, than the solution itself. For LTL, this process is one of highly controlled experiments coupled with extensive research.

Scientific method: a method of research in which a problem is identified, relevant data are gathered, a hypothesis is formulated, and the hypothesis is empirically tested.²

The projects LTL investigate often look so carefully at the programmatic and contextual problems and data, that there is often no room for preconceptions of form or image to influence the process. By examining architecture through a strictly academic approach this process affords a very specific, highly

controlled result. One might liken their methods to those of a laboratory scientist when testing experiments. LTL question the norms, meanings of words, meanings of materials and surfaces, images and issues of context, tracing information all the way back to their origins. Using other fields and professions such as tourism, entertainment, even eavesdropping as a database for creating new ideas in architecture, LTL create an answer which is often heterotopic and absurd.

Tactics + Conventions = The Surrational

Granted, some of the project solutions created may be unrealistic in a conventional understanding of architectural practice, but these projects succeed in allowing further developments to take place from them on the basis that they have created a “new” situation/dilemma for the larger architectural community to be aware of, “Testing 1E.2E..3E.”

The lecture given became a small vignette into their practice at this moment in time. One could imagine, as inventions persist and problems of the urban dilemma prevail, how LTL will continue to pursue critical architecture within this established framework. Notions of horizontal cities that extend over the oceans as well as other surrational projects like the Tour Bus Hotel, Exquisite Corpse Clothing Store, and houses for New Suburbanism examine the dilemmas embedded within such normative programmes as the hotel, fashion house, suburban housing and the big box superstore store.

LTL recompose all things familiar to create an uncanny, unusual, and ultimately new architecture. The response of the audience reflected the highly critical, obvious, progressive and hilarious results.

Progressive: Advocating reform, employing more liberal ideas and new methods.²

The projects by LTL exemplify a variety of means and methods architects have the opportunity to use in today’s practice. Very often lecturers will speak of what they have made, rather than how they make. While the former produces a product, the later conveys a holistic approach the problematic profession of architecture today, whether it be within the workplace or as a teacher. The process by which LTL go about creating a project is lucid and rigorous. It can be described through methods and steps; a procedure which could be taught. All of the principals at LTL are teachers, which is evident in the way their work is framed; entrenched in academic discourse. Their way of practicing the profession provides a

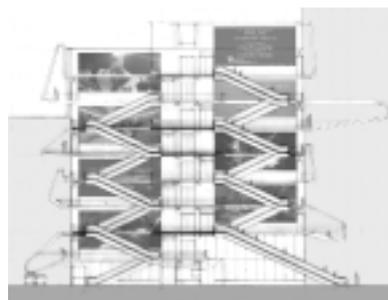
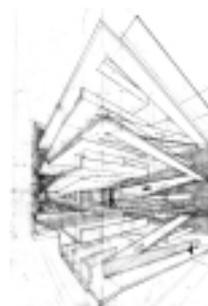
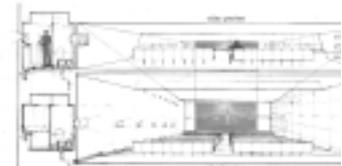
precise example to students of how to create a project founded on conceptual rigor, rather than simple formalism.

As the creation of the new becomes increasingly more difficult to achieve, it requires architects to invent, to question, and to explore alternative means for conceiving architecture. LTL have pioneered this process of practice, constantly finding the new through the distillation of the everyday.

Jennifer Boyer is an architect at Murray Ó Laoire Architects, Dublin and a Tutor at the School of Architecture, DIT, Bolton Street.

Notes:

- 1 Lewis Tsurumaki, Lewis, *Situation Normal...: Pamphlet Architecture 21* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998)
- 2 Costello, Robert B., *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1995)
- 3 <http://www.ltlwork.net>



The faintly scatological message was that the concept should be simple enough to piss it in the snow – “to define the essence”!

Ole Wiig

As an architectural process might refine and distil a physical construction to achieve purity of expression, so too must a *concept* be refined and distilled at the brief analysis stage so that it be absolutely appropriate. Ask what the problem is and the rigorous search for the answer will reveal a concept. Every place has a *genius loci* and should symbolism be required in a project, it should be derived from that *genius loci*. Icons are useless. Concept, specific to a brief, is everything.

This idea was central to Ole Wiig's lecture to the AAI in November 2003. He believes that architects and, more importantly, students should spend longer conceptualising and that a clear concept serves the designer more efficiently and provides a discipline further on in a project. He alluded to the clarity of expression of the simple two-dimensional watercolour concept sketches of Peter Zumthor for the Baths at Vals and of Renzo Piano for the Menil Centre and how the final form of the projects followed so obviously from these.

The emphasis of this principle was the thrust of the first half of the lecture and, for me, it became a little laborious however much I agreed with it. But the slight tedium was relieved by his pithy summary of the message. To the delight of an Irish audience who will always laugh when someone says “f**k” on the Late Late Show, the faintly scatological message was that the concept should be simple enough to piss it in the snow - “to define the essence”!

From that point, the architect who loves Dublin brought us to Norway to see many of his competition entries and completed projects. Wiig sees himself as an urban designer. He wants projects to respond to towns and, more importantly, he wants the towns to respond to the built projects. The proposals for Norwegian

towns which he showed were intended to change how inhabitants might view their geography and, indeed, their history. The potential for new arrangements of blocks and streets and the opening of - and proximity to - neglected views were all intended to achieve this.

The seventeenth century gridiron of Trondheim had been imposed on a medieval pattern. The proposal to impose some large organic forms and seemingly eroded solids in the centre of the city served to emphasise the gridiron by contrast and recall the medieval feature of large foci which abruptly break street patterns.

In Stavanger, he perceived that the natural continuities of pedestrian circulation were frustrated and proposed the framing of big views of the natural environment on the harbour side to act as events and destinations to draw people towards new civic buildings on that neglected side of the city.

Closer to home, he has made a proposal for improving pedestrian movement in Belfast based on the same principles. However, the exploited view here is of the built form of the city itself perceived from east of the river. This he sees as the *genius loci* which provides the focus for a proposed new composition of buildings in the docks area which sit on pilotis over a pedestrian route on the other side of the river alongside leisure boat berths. A proposed new bridge from this composition indulges the natural attraction towards the focus of the cityscape on the east bank of the Lagan.

In another Norwegian city, a little used island in a river was the site for a new hotel and there arose an opportunity to integrate the island into the fabric of the city by seeking a continuity of movement from berthed river craft to the hotel and across a new bridge to the city proper. The townsfolk were wary of the entire scheme but were swayed by the design of the bridge. What was proposed and built was an elegant, gently arching single span of about 80 metres with its parapets topped with flowers illuminated at night from below.

While the concepts behind his projects were clear to Wiig, many in the audience could not easily infer what those concepts were despite his dwelling on the importance of this snow-pissed clarity at the beginning of his lecture.

Wiig concluded with a long description of the process of providing adequate flowers for the aforementioned bridge. They are in custom shaped troughs rotated from a dedicated greenhouse to provide blooms all year. Wiig chooses them himself and his enthusiasm for the task was infectious. The flowers seemed an appropriate metaphor for his enthusiasm for urban architecture.

Terence Corish is student on an extended sabbatical from study. He earns a crust from architectural and planning consultancy work as well as mugging tourists on his bike. Other interests are spending a fortune on wine and learning how to play video games from his 6 year old son.

Limit, Archetype, Abstract, Materiality, Compression

SHEILA O'DONNELL

He chose not to show his larger finished buildings, but to use smaller works in progress in order to more clearly describe the work method of his studio.

Manuel Aires Mateus

There was a sense of calm continuity about the work shown by Manuel Aires Mateus, a kind of consistency in both senses of the word like a cake you could cut through and it would be the same all the way through.

The lecture moved from descriptions of two small bookshops through seven houses in the Portuguese landscape, mostly as yet unbuilt, on to an Arts Centre integrated into a historic city. This body of work served well to introduce two projects which the architect is currently designing in Ireland; a small house and a big hotel and apartment complex.

He chose not to show his larger finished buildings, but to use smaller works in progress in order to more clearly describe the work method of his studio.

The two bookshops, fit-out projects, introduced us to the preoccupation of the architect and to five keywords which were to recur throughout the talk: LIMIT, ARCHETYPE, ABSTRACT, MATERIALITY and COMPRESSION. In these works he strove to redefine the limits of the space offered to him, for example by introducing an archetypal form into a unit in a commercial shopping centre: It was clear that this is an architect who brings the same intensity of focus and struggle to all his work, however small. The small works are an opportunity to develop and refine ideas which will recur in other projects; he noted that they also provide a chance to achieve something quickly.

Abstract

The work is abstract, but not in the sense of being only theoretical, or a thing apart; rather in the sense of seeking to understand and summarise the conditions in which it is made – to form general concepts from consideration of the particular.

For the most part these conditions have been the culture, landscape and climate of Portugal. These he has thought about deeply and worked with intensely. The commission to design two Irish projects at this stage in his career, when he has a significant body of work in his home country, and an established way of responding to the local context, introduces a new challenge to him – and a frisson of excitement to the audience at the lecture, wondering what he would make of / bring to the Irish context.

Materiality

There was a dreamy quality to the section of the lecture that dealt with one-off houses in the Portuguese landscape. Here, in particular, that consistency of thinking and sensibility were evident and seemed to flow from one project to the next; orthogonal plans, carved out spaces, blocks of poché containing service rooms.

The method of plan making is somewhat reminiscent of Peter Zumthor's baths at Vals, but here it is used as a way of responding to the local climate and landscapes; it is a world of bright white, abstract rooms and patios, hot sun, blue skies. Interior and exterior spaces

have equal status in the plans, and this contributes to the eternal struggle to define the limit of each project. He spoke eloquently, in answer to a question, about the need to define what separates inside and outside.

He is striving to move away from the modernist position where a line of glass made the boundary between inside and out with no materiality. Perhaps the most important and interesting aspect of Aires Mateus' work is that attempt to use what he calls materiality to define architecture, to define and separate inside and outside. All of the projects work with a kind of thick inhabited enclosure, or at least a double wall separating inside and out and the results are often very complex and intriguing plans.

He uses the word materiality in the sense that defines a thing as having substance and bodily form, rather than as a way of describing the particular materials his work is made of. In the Irish context we are used to discussing materiality in relation to bricks, wood, metal, stone, etc. I really enjoyed the fact that all of these houses are made of white; they are abstract yet are obsessively engaged in using materiality to enrich the lives of their clients.

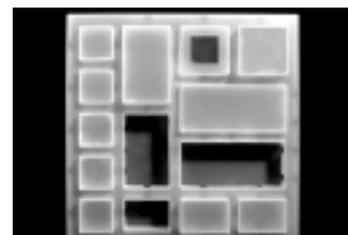
Limit

He showed five projects for very large one-off houses and two completed houses both of which are built within existing walls. In all of these he spoke of a desire to define the limit of the house, sometimes trying to use the landscape in this definition.

The house in Alenquer is a small holiday house built within 7m high ruined walls of an old house in a village. The angled old walls have been restored and painted white inside and out. The new house is orthogonal, narrow and compressed, a series of superimposed extrusions, no windows or doors except at the open ends of the extrusions. It is white too. The power of this project comes from the space between the old and the new, this complex in-between space is charged by the angled walls and small punched windows of the existing set against the cool orthogonal tubes of space and form of the new. The most important space in the house is the in-between, where space and time exist together.

In this case the limit is the old walls which are a given, not made by the architect. They make the final enclosure of the new house, and also act as a kind of filter between the abstraction of the new and the jumble of the village beyond, which is framed in the empty window sockets like pictures on the wall.

In the new houses, where both the inner and outer definitions of enclosure will be made by the architect, it may be more difficult to achieve the level of complexity and intensity achieved in the close dialogue between new and old.



Archetype

The house built into an existing winery at Brejos de Azeitão is almost complete. The winery was a single space building with a double pitched timber trussed roof; a ready made archetype ripe for reinforcement. The project doubles the thickness of the walls, excavates voids out of these walls to house the services in compressed spaces, and then cantilevers boxes at first floor level off the newly thickened walls to provide enclosed bedrooms which seem to float in the space independent of floor and roof.

Again in this case the limit is given by the existing form, and that form embodies the complexities and imperfections of construction and time which combine with the pure abstraction of the white floating volumes and poché walls to make a highly charged space. However here the existing shell was complete and unified – the archetype – so the new parts are fragmented and cling to the external enclosure in order to leave the central space legible.

This work shows an astonishing single mindedness and clarity of purpose; a determination to build the concept. Through aiming to preserve the unity and legibility of the existing space it delivers a totally new kind of space, a truly radical place to live.

Compression

One kind of compression was evident in the cultural centre in Sines in the south of Portugal, which builds a part of the city. The building is dug deep into the ground and the main street crosses it as a bridge so the building is both above and below ground and on both sides of the street. Heavy boxes are raised above street level and carved out below, a single storey slot of light cuts the building horizontally at ground level – This looks like it will be a wonderful building which feels completely contextual and completely new at the same time.

It was no surprise that when he came to work in Ireland he found inspiration from archetypal forms like Gallarus oratory. He described his search for a period of history to fix on, and his decision that it was a material: stone that best represented the culture of Irish architecture. The geology and topography of the Giant's Causeway and Cliffs of Moher were influences, in particular in the design for a luxury hotel and apartments in the Dublin Docklands. Being in a new area of the city there was an aspiration for the building to be a recognisable landmark. It is a simple rectangular form, with a grey stone façade that has the quality of a geological surface. This is a product of the plan idea, where service spaces, bathrooms, storage are

compressed into the walls between the rooms, producing cranked plan shapes in the bedrooms with the walls thicker towards the external facades where the bathrooms are.

The walls are angled in the plan and staggered on the elevation to give a kind of Giant's Causeway on its side – each element expressed, but also combining to make a modelled surface of stone and glass.

The cranking, carved out angular spaces of the plan are an exciting development from the more abstract manner of making space in the one-off house projects. It was also interesting to note the significant role of the stone in giving texture and scale to the elevation.

So, he did bring a fresh mind and the clarity of vision of an outsider to the Irish context. It seemed to me that the search for and discovery of a meaningful foothold in a strange context has also brought a development in his work with material quality now added to materiality, and an increased sense of modelling and compression in the definition of the limit of the spaces.

This hotel would be a building like no other built in Dublin. I sincerely hope that we get the opportunity to experience it as a building as well as a project.

Sheila O'Donnell is a partner in O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects and a studio lecturer in UCD School of Architecture



Does Dutch Design Matter?

AARON BETSKY

While in Ireland the domestic scale is important, domestic display stops at the garden or at most at the curtains, whereas Dutch homes show their living rooms and beyond.

Aaron Betsky

After the recent AAI Tegral Critic's lecture in early December, where Aaron Betsky discussed his forthcoming book *False Flat: Why Dutch Design Matters*, a group of foreign architects who work in Dublin met at a gathering to discuss the lecture.

There were architects from Italy, South Africa, America and Colombia. All had walked over the Erasmus Bridge in Rotterdam on separate occasions, and visited the well-known icons of modern Dutch architecture. All acknowledged the greatness of Dutch design; there was no question about it. In the silence that followed, there was not much more to reflect upon, other than Mr. Betsky's hypnotic and lyrical use of language. Mr. Betsky believes that Dutch design can save us, that despite the specificity of factors that allow design in the Netherlands to flourish, that these techniques can be exported. But can they?

As Mr. Betsky states, architecture and design are part of the central social debate in the Netherlands. In a country of only 16 million people, the Dutch government supports nine NAI architecture centres generously with a budget of 25-30 million p.a., allocated to exhibitions, research grants, and bursaries, not including actual building commissions. According to Mr. Betsky, the Dutch government must support architecture to this extent because not only is it one of the densest in the world (after Bangladesh), but also because so much of the land is reclaimed from water, and is below sea level. The artificial manmade environment is visible all around – and has

been for centuries. The Dutch continually arrange and rearrange their small country made up of polders, canals and tulip fields as needs change and there exist historical precedents for this. The Haarlemmermeer, for example, in the surrounding area of Schiphol airport, has been reclaimed twice from the sea.

Mr. Betsky identifies three key issues that face architects today – and that the Dutch successfully address these issues, creating “answers” rather than “solutions.”

Sustainability

The Dutch approach to sustainability focuses on designing for the moment rather than developing buildings “for the ages” that become outdated almost as soon as they are built. Instead, they build cheap, lightweight buildings that can be reused / reconfigured once their original function changes. This approach to sustainability hasn't yet been tested; can these buildings really be reconfigured or recycled? What if the building function outlasts the life of the building? In twenty years will the Netherlands be populated with decomposing buildings taped together like schools using temporary classrooms long after expected life span?

Code

Increasingly, it is not the brilliance of the designer or classical/modern language that determines what a building will look like, but rather building regulations, computer codes, value engineering codes and codes of behaviour. The Dutch have been successful

in manipulating and pushing these codes to create new precedents and prototypes of spatial usage, but it is surely easier in a tolerant liberal society. Historically, the influence of codes on building design is most clear in Manhattan where the shape of many skyscrapers are literal translations of the ziggurat setbacks written into the codes. In the lecture Mr. Betsky show the Wozoco senior citizen housing project by MVRDV where codes are clearly expressed. Individual apartments were cantilevered out of the façade like drawers to both preserve green space and to provide the required number of units within the zoning restrictions on building height.

Branding / Identity of an object

Dutch design can be identified as a brand; it is a marketable, exportable, recognizable, brand image. Schiphol airport as an autonomous body is a brand. Dutch design is a collage of mass produced goods in a constantly changing artificial landscape. Rather than hiding the artificiality of a building in a Disneyland manner, Dutch design emphasises and plays with the artificiality of the built world to create its identity.

Two aspects of Dutch culture influence this architectural phenomenon: the invented nature of the environment and the domestic orientation of Dutch culture. Mr. Betsky illustrates the importance of the domestic through Dutch painters like Jan van Eyck and Vermeer who painted not an idealized world, but a reflection of the world around them. The paintings mirror Dutch society – from the riches that Dutch traders brought back from the colonies to genre scenes of peasants, and quiet interiors, domestic in scale and orientation. Even now, visitors to Amsterdam are often amazed by the openness of ground floor windows. The domestic sphere is on display to the street, seemingly unselfconsciously. While in Ireland the domestic scale is important, domestic display stops at the garden or at most at the curtains, whereas Dutch homes show their living rooms and beyond. It is part of a social control of a tolerant community to be able to see into somebody's house, to see that nothing is hidden. Despite the high percentage of home ownership in Ireland, and the importance of the icon of the house and garden, the domestic image in Ireland seems external and abstract while in the Netherlands it crosses into the interior and the specific. The Dutch openness and individuality of expression at the domestic scale allows for much experimentation – and social housing provides many opportunities to build. Risks and experimentation are part of Dutch

Mr. Betsky believes that Dutch design can save us, that despite the specificity of factors that allow design in the Netherlands to flourish, that these techniques can be exported. But can they?

history. Mr. Betsky explained that traditionally the Dutch nation consisted of farmers & speculators. Speculators and inventive farmers are willing to push the codes to develop new types of space to constantly rearrange their man-made land. The invented nature of the whole environment, landscape and architecture, seem to prevent the preciousness of the icons of Dutch culture from stifling invention.

Maybe more can be learned from the psyche of a nation and their attitude towards design, by observing every day utilitarian designed objects. Mr. Betsky highlights the typeface found on the information boards at Schiphol airport, which was identified through research as the most rational typeface to effortlessly guide passengers at an airport. In *The Art of Travel* Alain de Botton, while travelling from the UK to Schiphol, describes his realization that a single item can signify much more than what the designer intended. The arrivals signage signified to Alain de Botton the “otherness” of Holland and foreign travel. He thought that in the UK the background to such a signage board would not have been that particular bright shade of yellow and a more nostalgic typeface would have been used. The perceived difference of design attitude between the two countries is illuminating. Mr. Betsky showed examples where mundane infrastructure service buildings were elevated to a high level of design, e.g. bridges and the harbour master control tower in Rotterdam. In their attempt to create more space in a densely populated country, ‘unfolding’ space has become a popular device. The Irish architect Don Murphy ‘unfolded’ the sidewalk to create more bicycle parking space on a continuous ramped structure at Amsterdam’s main train station. Similarly undulating concrete unfolded buildings exist, where green space is retained by creating park landscapes on the roof.

How relevant is Mr. Betsky’s lecture? The rise of Dutch design is well known and well documented. Despite the popularity of Dutch design, there is a certain discomfort with its success and emulation. Anecdotal evidence from architecture schools around the world show Danish architects identifying the “Dutch disease” when a student’s work displays too many similarities to famous Dutch architecture icons, while American students shake their heads as their classmates “go Dutch” with super slick graphics. German and Austrian architects point out that the building regulations are more relaxed in the Netherlands. Aside from copying “seamless hybrid” forms and slick graphics, the real value of Dutch architecture is the level of experimentation that occurs not only in the internationally known firms but also by less well-known firms. The opportunity to experiment and the public appreciation of design is what needs to be exported.

One can only admire a country where famous designers are household public figures as Koolhaas – where you can go for brunch in a place named after its architect like in Café Dudok in Rotterdam and barely find a seat. One of the authors of this paper cycled through Holland last year. By deliberately staying clear of the architecture icons, it was a joy to discover many extremely well designed anonymous buildings on the way.

Dirk Louw is an architect who has worked in offices in South Africa, Austria and Dublin. Julie Fisher is an architect who has worked in Boston and Dublin.



That land is valuable to the Dutch is an understatement. As Betsky wrote in *Landscrapers*, "Buildings replace the land. That is architecture's original sin!"

Aaron Betsky

Dutch architecture will save us, because the Dutch take their architecture seriously. So seriously it could get you killed. Pym Fortyn's murderer, an environmentalist, told police he had killed the right wing extremist politician because of Fortyn's support of MVRDV's 'Pig City' Project. The architects had police protection outside their office for a number of weeks after the incident.

With this anecdote Aaron Betsky grabbed the audience's attention and held them for over an hour with a barrage of ideas and images of current Dutch architecture and architectural theory. The flow of information only faltering for a brief moment as the batteries for the remote control of the slide projector could no longer keep up!

The strength of current Dutch architecture, Rem Koolhaas, OMA, MVRDV, Wiel Arets, UN Studio (Ben van Berkel & Caroline Bos), West 8, Erick van Egaart, VMX, Neutelings Riedijk etc is in part based on the level of real support for and understanding of architecture at a social, political and economic level. This support for architecture allows the Dutch to regularly pursue their architectural theory beyond research to construction, and allows a distinctly national architecture in era of increasing globalization.

Betsky began with an aerial view of Schiphol airport, sitting on a geometric carpet of twice-reclaimed land (Haarlem Lake was reclaimed, then turned back into a lake, only to be turned, once more, to polder). Schiphol exemplifies an all-encompassing artificiality, from the reclaimed land to the selection of the font type used in the signage. A world of nothing turned into a rational system. That land is valuable to the Dutch is an understatement. As Betsky wrote in *Landscrapers*, "Buildings replace the land. That is architecture's original sin."

One of the elements that makes the Dutch experience different is that their culture was not based around castles and fortifications, but dams. The geometry of dams was incorporated and translated into an urban form. The critical distinction is that this was an environment to live in, not to rule over.

With limited land resources and the highest population density in Europe, Dutch Architecture exists in a situation which is at once artificial and realistic. A realism reflected in an architecture, which is not one of idealistic creations but a rationalisation of urban form using mass production techniques. One of the more challenging theories posited was the nature of how this Dutch Pragmatism / Realism is reflected in their art. The familiar image of the "Arnolfini Wedding" by Van Eyck appeared as Betsky described the theory: where Italian art is like a window onto an ideal, Dutch art is a mirror of reality.

As to the question of identity / national identity, or what is 'Dutch'?, (in the context of the EU (or VI Reich?!)) Betsky contends that the Dutch understand that architecture is about people, and it is also about urban form. An excellent example of these elements is MVRDV's reinterpretation of the ubiquitous Dutch Row Housing. This scheme, the result of a competition, takes the typical row houses in groups of seven and slices and dices them, pushing them forward and backwards in groups to create a village style environment, even within this repetitive typology. Each house is treated with a different material giving the occupant a sense of individual identity within the collective.

The Dutch understanding of urban form was explored with the use of towers in the new Dutch architecture to replace the church spire of the historical cityscape. The value placed on land is also clear in MVRDV's VPRO House, the folding form of which begins at car-park level and



ultimately unfolds into a 'meadow' at the rooftop. A further curious example of this reverence for the land and nature was an installation of plastic tree stumps at a motorway underpass to commemorate the crime against the real trees previously removed.

West 8's Theatre Square in Rotterdam constructed over a car-park, becomes a found space, where people can enjoy an extra level of interaction by putting a Euro in a light fitting to light up a section. A practical function turned into a 'vital' space. This Dutch style 'practical monumentality' is special in that it does not commemorate the past or propose a future.



Betsky spoke of an architecture not new or monumental, but a regathering of what already exists. This relationship and reinterpretation of existing realities was exemplified by a series of products which included the following: shower tiles where the water droplets one expects are in fact the non slip finish; a garden fence which folds down to form a table-tennis table, a double function but also symbolically breaking the boundary between neighbouring dwellings and their occupants; a drainpipe turned into a shower. The most memorable example was a combined bathroom and kitchen which allows the host to bathe while entertaining!

Finally, as we were shown replicas of traditional Dutch buildings and cities in Japan, Betsky asked us to confront our reality and reveal the emptiness of our environment, IT'S ALL FAKE! "We hide in our boxes of absence, glued to screens, curing our fear and paranoia with security, could this be the end of architecture, the end of monuments?"

NOTE

Articles 19 and 20 are both reviews of Aaron Betsky's lecture, so the four images are to be shared between the two reviews.

All four images to be credited to Dirk Louw.

Erik Maher is an architect and Director with Collins Maher Martin Architects.

A journal such as building material has a responsibility to be provocative and educative, and in this it is succeeding – but somehow it seems that this is a topic which should not be compiled as a “special” issue!.it does not seem to fit comfortably.

The fact that there exists an issue of an architectural journal entirely devoted to the issues of “disability” and “access for all” is somewhat deflating when one would assume by now that the idea of “access for all” should be as fundamental a concept to the practice of architecture as “keeping the rain out” or “stopping the building from falling down”. Of course these latter two issues are so essential to the design and construction of buildings that without some imaginative, poetic or abstract interpretation of the idea of rain or reinforcement the editorial team of the AAI journal might indeed find it difficult to complete the issue. The ideas pertaining to access for all are still somewhat eager for observation, definition and debate, partly and, of course obviously, because it seems such issues are still considered “other” by those inside and outside the architectural profession. By “other” I mean that those of us involved in the construction and assembly of the built environment seem to be occupying a position whereby people with disabilities are thought to have no affinity or resemblance to ourselves. They are different. They have unique requirements, with handbooks (*Building for Everyone*), and guidance documents (Part M) – we still do not view ourselves as colours on the disability spectrum - a spectrum varied in tone and intensity yes - but one to which we all belong. This is of course a societal issue and architects as members of society, cannot be expected to remain unsullied by our widespread and ingrained discomfort with disability.

I believe that if architects are indeed occupying the above position, we have some cause for concern. The way that we work in practice serves only to intensify this “otherness”. As a result of the constructs of architectural practice

those with disabilities are often only included in the design process in an indirect and abstract way. The manifestation of architectural concerns with disability appears in what the architect can *measure*, i.e what we draw.

Architects draw to communicate intention and control process, and ultimately they draw to build. Disability “solutions” often only exist in architectural drawings as ramps, turning circles and leading edges, all valid in themselves, but these “solutions” form only a few of a broad range of issues pertaining to access for all, many of which are vague, fuzzy and immeasurable at the drawing board. In the past when faced with the housing and re-housing of the “poor” after the World Wars, European architects embraced the architectural opportunities offered by this social dilemma. They consciously aligned themselves with the Government, intensified their expertise in new construction technologies, formed co-operative companies to design and build the new houses required. Architects argued that architecture and good design could significantly assist the positive re-assembly of a disparate and war shattered society, that beautiful buildings and artful town plans would succeed in engendering a new social harmony.

There was however a latent sense of the poor being “other” and a belief that professionally educated, “middle class” architects could understand the nature of community and the structures of social and domestic space in a way which invalidated structures which had emerged naturally, freely, and as a result of “working class”, human endeavour. Again, the reasons for this were beyond the scope of architecture, but professional architects inadvertently emphasised this “otherness” in their work. In design drawings, architects

became fascinated with the abstract measure of man resulting in a consistent graphical inclusion and paper manipulation of the occupants of the homes they were designing and building. In the general absence of the possibility of any direct consultation process, the individual became universal and generic, the needs and requirements of the user abstracted and assimilated, the homes eventually built and occupied. The understanding of people and their occupancy of buildings and the built environment reached a point where the use of explanatory, graphical handbooks became intrinsic in day-to-day practice. The Parker Morris report was but one of many produced in Britain from the 1950s onwards, where the requirements of individuals in the built environment were deemed so complex, that endless handbooks were produced, giving optimum dimensions for eating, walking, carrying pianos, organising your table for the efficient use of your kitchen. Indeed several subsequent handbooks were required to explain the Parker Morris report, because the aspirations of the report, referred to by James Pike in his essay in *building material*, were too vague and onerous to be readily applicable in practice, without graphic translation and literal representation. Handbooks begot handbooks. All aspects of modern life were pinned down, described, prescribed – all the architect had to do was comply with these standards to ensure the construction of an environment fit for mankind's occupation. After all, if such documents were endorsed by the Government, how could they not have societies' best interests at heart? As the practicing architect reduced and abstracted the complexity of life into line drawings depicting a generic, sanitised society, he or she moved further away from the reality and the society architecture hoped to cater for.

The point of this is that today, the issue of access for all is being swallowed by design professionals in booklet form – and in *building material* we have been encouraged by the “non-architects” to overdose. The growing dependence on and support for documents such as *Building for Everyone* as the essential guidebook to meeting universal access requirements - legal, social, moral or otherwise – proves that the profession is not yet in a position where it is able to take for granted basic principles and parameters of universal access. It simultaneously provides the profession with a vehicle for quickly and apparently dealing with the issue, which in the context of what is outlined above, is hardly reassuring. The promotion of handbooks is no guarantee that someday the issues pertaining to universal access may be so well understood, so second nature, that we will, in fact, take it for granted.

The editorial team of *building material* are to be lauded for trying to focus the issue and for trying to move this conversation forward. Inviting two well established architects to respond to an article like by Rob Kitchin, requires architects to defend their practices – and there is obvious merit in this – but in the long term and with a long view, does this not simply trigger the profession's well groomed defence mechanism, pushing it to close ranks against any suggestion that the designs that we make do not meet the requirements of society? To accept such a thing would undermine the very premise of our professionalism, would bring to light the question that if architects cannot do it, perhaps there is another profession who can? At a time when the profession is under threat from other kinds of professions in any case, our resistance to any acceptance of our incapacity in terms of responsibility to society will inevitably be fierce. How can we be open and inclusive if we are retreating at the first sign of question, and resenting the perceived interference of others?

I think it is telling that in an architectural journal dedicated to access for all, only one architectural project is published. This is presented as an un-built project. It is also a one-off private home, and it is the client's comments that are printed, not the architect's account of what it meant to design this unique house. Presumably the project is being presented as a model of access for all principles? Without the rhetorical inclusion of a person in a wheelchair in the section, reading the drawings alone does not suggest this house caters for any one with a disability in any way. This of course could be the genius of the design, but it is not clearly stated and one cannot grasp the thesis. Without this, how can architects begin to understand and

learn from the example? The omission of built projects from *building material* would suggest that either there are no worthy built examples –which there are – or an assumption has been made that the readership of the journal would rather continue to abstract, aestheticise and conceptualise the issue, than actually dealing with it in built terms. Where are the examples of housing, cinemas, museums, car-parks, restaurants, schools – ordinary building types that we encounter every day, that can be held up as positive examples of buildings which aspire to be accessible? Can we make the action / reaction debate between Kitchin and the architects become building specific? Architects relentlessly learn from precedent – it must surely be a potent device in our continued education? And if precedent is a potent learning tool, as a profession we do need to realise, that we cannot expect architects to understand “access for all” if they continue to be educated in university environments that exclude all but the ablest of students. If it is not made a priority in the theoretical, educative world, how can it naturally be a priority in the practical environment?

A journal such as *building material* has a responsibility to be provocative and educative, and in this it is succeeding – but somehow it seems that this is a topic which should not be compiled as a “special” issue – this strategy suggesting that the topic is now dealt with, and next issue we move on to a new field of interest. While this is the consistent format of the journal, for a topic so critical to the betterment of architecture and society, it does not seem to fit comfortably. Should this not be something that is subtly and almost invisibly woven through every issue? Notwithstanding this, it will be a gratuitous waste of paper and ink if we, the readers, do not continue this discussion long after the journal is, like so many other handbooks, filed and shelved.

Emmett Scanlon is an architect working with Grafton Architects.

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