RMIT
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THE PURPOSEFUL FRAME

Architecture, Sociality and Space Formation

A Project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Denis Byrne

Bachelor of Architecture (University College Dublin)

School of Architecture and Design

College of Design and Social Context

RMIT University

November 2017

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DECLARATION

I certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Denis Byrne   20 November 2017

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and Tadhg	

In memory of my parents, Vinny and Rita, children of the lost city.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Architecture and Society – Main Concepts – Key Words – Timeline – Key Projects – PRS Review Process

'Before the performance of a tragedy the Greeks listened to the plot summarised in a prologue and so could follow the denouement of the play without that element of curiosity which is alien to the contemplative serenity and aesthetic judgment.'

(Unattrib.)

ARCHITECTURE AND SOCIETY

This critical practice PhD dissertation, by focusing on my work through the prism of the Practice Research Symposium process, frames the twin concepts of architecture and society and examines their relationship to each other. It particularly focuses on the architect's role in society, as an active agent in space formation, what opportunities that role might offer, and identifies activities and ideas where the architect may make a contribution to a bridging of the twin concepts. With that in mind and firmly noted as the ground of this PhD, it explores my work and ideas and aims to show where these contribute to a greater understanding and wider appreciation of the social engagement possibilities inherent in the profession of architect.

The PhD introduces several concepts that constellate the two powerful human ideas of Architecture and Society and places them within, what I have called **The Purposeful Frame**. The concepts introduced include three main ideas:- **Significant Movement, Social Attitude** and **Social Potential**, with other spin off thoughts, and these will be explored more fully later in this document, through an examination of my work and ideas, and those of other people.

MAIN CONCEPTS

Encapsulated thoughts and ideas or a short summary on The Purposeful Frame.

       Significant Movement – Distilling and framing the essential movement within a project.

       Social Attitude – Ways of being, embedded within the project. Firstly, opportunities for representing certain social formations, and secondly, possibilities for communality within the programme.

       Social Potential – Valency, a conceptual attempt at calibration of social potential; and tactics and tectonics to improve potential for social occasion; fit, right size, thresholds, mood, etc.

KEY WORDS

Act, Adjacencies, City, Encounter, Epiphany, Figure, Frame, Ground, Hinterland, Movement, Occasion, Proximities, Relationships, Revelation, Ritual, Sacralisation, Serendipity, Social space, Society, Transcendent, Transformation, Valency.

TIMELINE

DENIS BYRNE an Architect in private practice; also Teacher and Curator.

DUBLIN	1976-1982	School of Architecture, University College Dublin - B Arch
	1982-1983	Professor Cathal O'Neill Architect, Dublin - Asst Architect
LONDON	1983	Move to London
	1983-1985	Beardsmore Yauner Architects and Designers, London- Asst Architect
	1985	Becomes member of RIBA
	1985-1991	Beardsmore Yauner Byrne Architects and Designers, London- Partner
	1987-1990	Ben Kelly Design – Architect
	1989-1991	U2 Offices, Dublin with Felim Dunne – Architect
DUBLIN	1991	Move to Dublin
	1992	Becomes member of RIAI
	1992	Starts teaching studio at DIT School of Architecture, Dublin
	1992-1995	National Building Agency, Dublin – Senior Architect
	1995-1998	Richard Hurley Architect, Dublin – Associate
	1998	Forms Denis Byrne Architects
	2006	Stops teaching studio
	2006-	Visiting critic to various schools of architecture in Ireland
	2008	DBA wins competition for Gas Networks Ireland building
	2009	**darc space** gallery of architecture opens in Dublin
	2013	Starts PhD process
	2016-	Visiting Examiner at School of Architecture, Waterford IT

Denis formed Denis Byrne Architects in Dublin in 1998. He had previously been a partner in the London practice of Beardsmore Yauner Byrne from 1987 to 1992, during which time he also collaborated with Ben Kelly (on Dry Bar and Factory Records HQ, Manchester; Quincy Shop and HQ, London and various domestic projects) and Felim Dunne, most notably on the U2 management offices at Sir John Rogersons Quay, Dublin. Having trained and qualified as an architect in Dublin during the early 80's, he returned there in the early 90's to work, teach and generally hold forth.

KEY PROJECTS

A brief introduction follows to the projects that will be referred to within the current document.

1996 27 North Great Georges Street
– Denis Byrne and Maggie Moran
A self-funded development of a listed house-warehouse building to provide 2 apartments, on a historic street in central Dublin; where the main character lives with his wife and son.

2004   Cigar Box
– Denis Byrne Architects
A mixed development of apartments and offices, beside the above building, where the main character has his offices and gallery. The front doors are 9 ms apart.

2005   Annaville Housing
– Denis Byrne Architects
A residential development of 50 apartments and four houses in suburban Dublin.

2006 Housing, Cunningham Road
– Denis Byrne Architects
A project for 15 houses and 9 apartments on a sloping site, overlooking the sea, in south County Dublin.

2006 36 North Great Georges Street
– Denis Byrne Architects
A mixed development of residential and medical consulting rooms in a listed Georgian building in central Dublin.

2009 House at Breeogue
– Denis Byrne Architects
A single-family house on a small site near an estuary in County Sligo.

2009 darc space gallery
– Denis Byrne and Maggie Moran
A gallery, exhibition space and forum for architecture and the related arts in the offices of Denis Byrne Architects.

2012 Gas Networks Ireland Building
– Denis Byrne Architects
A 5,200sqm corporate building for a gas company, at the outer edge of Dublin, just within the orbital motorway; won in international competition in 2008.

2013 The National Diaspora Centre
– Denis Byrne Architects
A project for the Irish National Diaspora Centre, a building of 15,000 sqm, set in a wooded area within the curtilage of two national monuments, in County Clare.

2016 The Marconi Station
– Denis Byrne Architects
The provision of visitor and interpretative facilities at the historic Marconi Telegraphy Station and Alcock & Brown transatlantic landing site on a bog near Derrigimlagh, County Galway.

2017 Carrig Primary School
– Denis Byrne Architects
A large extension (classrooms and assembly hall) to a small rural school in County Tipperary.

PRS REVIEW PROCESS

The PRS programme was initiated by Professor Leon van Schaik at RMIT University. The methodology and intent of the programme is outlined by Leon in 'The Pink Book: By Practice, By Invitation: Design Practice Research at RMIT - The Evolution of the Invitational Program of Design Practice Research pp 15-35 (Schaik, L van and Johnson, A (Eds.) sixpointsixone Melbourne 2011), as follows:

'The PhD Programme in Architecture at RMIT is housed within the model of creative practice research as established and developed by Prof. Leon van Schaik AO and others at RMIT over the last 30 years. The RMIT creative practice research is a longstanding program of research into what venturous designers actually do when they design. It is probably the most enduring and sustained body of research of its kind: empirical, evidence-based and surfacing evidence about design practice. It is a growing force in the world, with a burgeoning program of research in Asia, Oceania and Europe.

The research question for everyone involved in this reflective practice research, despite differing titles, is the same: what is the tacit knowledge that enables a creative practitioner to practice? The methodology comprises of the following: forensic examination by candidate of own existing creative products and comparison with some works from a defined community of practice; close observation of own works in progress using diaries, mappings of the mental space drawn on during a project and of the processes used; documentation and analysis.

Every six months all candidates come together in a Practice Research Symposium to present their reflections, investigations and discoveries. Dissemination of the work post- PhD is through published PhDs, websites and books. And of course, the programme relies on peer-reviewed creative works as evidence, as well as the esteem that comes from being a curator or editor or instigator of creative practice events.'

SECTION 1   Hinterland

The Purposeful Frame – The foundational aspects of sociality - Towards a new anthropology – Motives and concerns – Key research questions – The box of tools – Paradise lost – Inner city - Atmosphere – Mental space – Serra's parables of gravity and architecture – Life and practice - Awakening

Le Corbusier, La Tourette (Pieter Morlion)
Epiphany in the significant delivery of light to a place of action.

THE PURPOSEFUL FRAME
Architecture Sociality and Space Formation

Architecture is a frame; it frames human activity. It does this purposefully, with intent. It seeks to define the fundamental needs of human habitation and to organise space and light to serve these needs. This framing moreover, at its best, seeks to be giving and to make much more of human actions than they may at first appear to require, or indeed even deserve. Framing seeks the depth of ritual, which operates as the intensifier of the act, in order to surface and crystalise inherent meaning. The frame presupposes an architecture of generosity, one which thinks more of man than he may think of himself.

Ritual may include the habitual – the necessary everyday repetitiveness of actions without which human life is impossible and even meaningless – sleeping, eating, playing, etc. For my purposes, these quotidian actions provide the common *ground* of life against which I observe man – the *figure* – enact his particular and unique narrative.

I will not here go into the supposed differences between architecture, as high art, and building, as low, discussed at great length by various commentators[1], suffice to say I think that there is only good architecture and bad architecture.

THE FOUNDATIONAL ASPECTS OF SOCIALITY

Being human means being fundamentally a social animal, rather than an individualist. We create social formations beyond the individual, from families and groups to cities, civilisations and cultures. These social formations emerged in conjunction with neural and hormonal mechanisms to support them because the consequent social behaviours helped humans survive, reproduce and care for offspring sufficiently long for them too to reproduce. Our behavior is chemical based, influenced by the endocrine and nervous systems. We are creatures of a primeval social bond, which has ensured our survival long enough to eventually sustain the formation of a sheltering architecture capable of the purposeful framing of human actions; architecture is an intrinsic part of our evolutionary destiny as a social species.

Architecture may be thus considered as, to impertinently paraphrase Le Corbusier, the *'masterly, correct and magnificent'* [2] framing of human activity through physical means.

TOWARDS A NEW ANTHROPOLOGY

*'Both the curriculum and the student work that I have seen at Bergen School of Architecture points towards **an anthropological and ecological architecture**, which is the most important direction that I think architecture should take advance in the current phase of western culture. A culture threatened by false techno-economic rationalism, consumerist materialism, shallow internationalism, and detachment of architecture and life at large from their mytho-poetic essence.'*
(Juhani Pallasmaa, Bergen Architecture School website 1993)

Architectural education generally tends to content itself with studies of aesthetic judgment (composition, scale and the artistic '*vision*') and professional techniques (the law, physics and business). Usually missing from this core is the study of the human condition and the associated long history of social formations, an understanding of which is essential for the germination and growth of potent architectural ideas, ideas that are firmly rooted in the rich soil of human experience.

Dealing mainly with the trappings of the professional person, I believe rather misses the point of the exercise, being more the study of the bathwater than the baby. This is not to deny the value of architectural composition nor of the necessary professional virtues; it merely seeks to re-assert the primacy of the baby over, at times, a highly self-regarding bathwater.

[1] *"A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture. Nearly everything that encloses space on a scale sufficient for a human being to move in is a building; the term architecture applies only to buildings designed with a view to aesthetic appeal."* An Outline of European Architecture, 1943. Nikolaus Pevsner p23
"The architect is a builder who has learnt Latin, however modern architects seem more at home with Esperanto". Adolf Loos Ornament and Education 1924 p177
[2] *"Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light."* Le Corbusier "Vers une Architecture [Towards an Architecture] "(1923) p

MOTIVES AND CONCERNS

Archimedes supposedly said *'give me a place to stand, and with a lever, I shall move the earth'.* One of the main motives in undertaking the PRS programme is contained in that passage, in my desire to fashion a sufficiently sturdy place of stance through the Design Practice Research process.

I was also resonantly struck by Leon van Schaik's writings in *'Reflections 13 - Design Practice Research: The Method'* of the reasons why someone, or a practice, might undertake this research programme. It was especially encouraging for me given that I am a practicing architect not strictly in need of academic qualification. It is therefore worth quoting in full:

'Why do practices do Design Practice Research?
Because it surfaces the deep structures of their intuition, transforms their ability to access their interiorized knowledge, clarifies the research questions that motivate their practice and greatly improves their ability to communicate with clients and meet the needs of their clients – to the benefit of the community, the environment and the practice. Practices become able to give a full account of their design approach(es) and are thus more able to differentiate themselves from their peers and more able to target the projects that suit their approach(es)'　　　Barnacle 2002

This PhD dissertation presupposes that Architecture has ethical dimensions (Jeremy Till, Architecture Depends MIT Press 2009) and as a result is fundamentally a critical activity (R Blythe *'A Terroir of Terroir'* PhD 2008). Whether this criticality leads to an increased agency, or even urgency, in the work is a matter for the individual architect. My particular perspective is that of a practicing architect engaged in the stuff of professional life. I am seeking to frame a theoretical viewpoint that will more effectively harness interests and impulses of social engagement that drive the work, in an effort to better engage with the society in which I live. The architects' eye may never be innocent, to paraphrase Lefebvre's criticism in *'The Production of Space'* (Blackwell 1991), but it must certainly be informed.

Wishing to steer clear also, as far as possible, of the rocks of solipsism - though by definition it is a self-referential voyage - this dissertation is intended as an act of a revelatory nature. Through the close observance of my practice and the following gathered critique, I hope to transform my future work and to communicate architectural and societal thinking more cogently, not least to myself.

The process began in November 2012 at the Sint Lucas campus in Ghent, where I gave an introductory lecture on my work and my practice, before being formally invited to join the Reflective Practice Research programme, instituted by Leon van Schaik at RMIT University. Since then, I have participated in 7 Practice Research Symposia (PRS), in Ghent (3), Barcelona (3) and London (1) in a bi-annual format. These are detailed and discussed more fully in Section 5.

Over the course of this period the focus of research, scattered and barely evident at first, has clarified and gained in depth through the rigors of the PRS Peer Review system. It is a system of various layers of reflection; one reflects on other's reflections of your reflections, and so on, in an iterative process, until the ideas begin to cohere and crystallise. The 6 monthly cycle of reflection and return provides a stately rhythm to the gradual unfolding of that-which-is-to-be-revealed, leading eventually to *'the PhD moment'.*

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

People are profoundly social beings and if architecture can be described as *'the purposeful framing of human activity',* then…

> • What are the spatial conditions under which this framing best occurs?
> • What factors help in this framing process?
> • What is the relationship of my architecture to social formation?
> • How is this present in my current work?
> • How can this research assist in my future work?
> • What relevance has this to a wider architectural community?

The surfacing and articulation of these questions led me through the PRS process.

The key research focus is the documentation of this dynamic – the appropriate purposeful framing of human activity and related concepts – and how these appear in my work. The research interest is in the way people behave and how they occupy space, how they adapt space when not suited to need, how indeed the specifics of space in turn may shape the activity and/or its psychological perception and last, but not least, the control mechanisms latent in all space formation.

The focus has been progressively refined over my journey through the PhD process to encompass larger issues of society, social dynamics and human interaction evident within the body of my work and thoughts.

THE BOX OF TOOLS

'A theory is exactly like a box of tools' (Gilles Deleuze 'Language, Counter-Memory, Practice' Ed. Donald Bouchard, Cornell 1977)

In Aristotelian thought, contemplation, or Theoria, is one of the three forms of human activity, the other two of which (Poiesis, Praxis), if I understand it correctly, I have probably been engaged in more or less my whole professional life. I will resist the temptation to draw out the three-legged-stool-stability analogy, though it does contain some element of truth, but suffice to say I believe theory and practice are not mutually exclusive. Theory brings the right tools to the workplace, though as Deleuze's theory exhorts us *'It must be useful, it must function'.*

1. Theoria	Truth, contemplation of that which is eternal, unchanging	Theorising
2. Poiesis	Production, a purposeful bringing into being	Making
3. Praxis	Action, activity in the realm of the contingent	Practicing

As a corollary to forming a Theoria from amidst the hinterlands of Poiesis and Praxis, this particular research seeks to add its voice to the community of independent research-practitioners committed to the continuing relevance of the architect as 'master-builder' or as master of space. All too often architectural practice seems to be reduced to the role of mere interpreter/custodians of increasingly complex construction legislation. As Leon van Schaik puts it, *'architects must reclaim the province of spatial intelligence as their specific body of knowledge'* (*'Spatial Intelligence: New Futures for Architecture',* L van Schaik 2008). This research is dedicated to that cause.

I find echoes of this dynamic also in 'The Reflective Practitioner' by Donald Schon. Herein, Schon notes (and laments) the hierarchical separation of research and practice *'in the normative curriculum of the professional school'* and goes on to point out that *'The dilemma of the professional today lies in the fact that both ends of the gap that he is expected to bridge are changing so rapidly; the body of knowledge that he must use and the expectations of society that he must serve. Both these changes have their origin in the same common factor… technological change…This places on the professional a requirement for adaptability that is unprecedented.'* (*'The Dilemmas of Engineering Education'*- Harvey Brooks, as quoted in *'The Reflective Practitioner'*- Donald Schon)

These shifts drove the impulse for me to sharpen the key resources at my disposal, those of architectural thought and judgement, rather than attempting the Sisyphean task of outrunning the onrushing waves of technology and legislation. This PhD is the place that I have made for myself in order to retreat and reflect (contemplation) on the universal qualities that underpin all our creative endeavors.

PARADISE LOST

I can still hear my grandfather's little chirping caged bird in the large kitchen almost filled with an enormous table, over which I, a very young child, can barely see. I can also hear and smell the gas (town gas, made from coal as I was to later learn; smelly-sulphurous) from the hob above my head. The fridge, a perforated metal box fixed to the wall outside, was got at by opening the window and reaching around for the meat, milk or butter. The windows were high up in the building, far above the ground. The cills were low enough for me to see the back garden, full of vegetables and wire runs for chickens and rabbits. I could hear the schoolboys at play in the school over the rear wall, a noise of tense excitement that lasted for a short time before mysteriously disappearing. This was my grandparent's house in the middle of the city.

An early outing   William & Kathleen 1921

It was not a house exactly, but a flat. My mother grew up here with her parents, her sister and two brothers. They rented the second and third floor rooms of a Georgian house, though I have no memory of ever being on the third floor, as the small staircase was very dark and I was afraid of it. I played in the hallway, riding on the gate at the top of the stairs, out over the abyss and swinging back before terror took hold completely. I was three.

Like Arletty - in Marcel Carné's film *Hotel du Nord*, who, when her lover declares he wants to leave the city (and her) for a change of atmosphere, sneers '*atmosphère, atmosphère est-ce que j'ai une gueule d'atmosphère*' - my mother was a true city girl. She would have understood Arletty's attitude if not her language.

She was never entirely reconciled living in the suburbs where she moved with my father when they got married. *'What are you doing out there, in the back of beyond?'* I remember Granny endlessly asking, rhetorically of course. I suppose my mother could truthfully have answered that there was no housing in the city, all the old buildings in their part of town were being pulled down and people were being moved out to the new estates at the city edges, out of sight.

Nevertheless she returned to do all her shopping in the city – '*getting the messages*' it was called – and, from my low perspective, I remember many butchers sawdust floors and women's Saturday morning legs. She met all her friends there; we could never move more than a few minutes without stopping to talk to someone, a most annoying state of affairs for a child. We visited her parents many times and in the slow rhythms of the pram wheels I sensed my mother's never-voiced resigned weariness at the slow return uphill back to the semi-detached house in the new suburb to the north of the city.

North Dublin suburban 1960's

Corner of Dorset Street and Granby Row

Henrietta Street   *Social Occasion*

INNER CITY

My mother grew up in a house behind the cinema shown here above (The Plaza), converted from a Methodist Chapel (The Bethesda) in a change of use astonishing for its chutzpah. My grandfather was reportedly '*a divil*' for the Saturday morning film shows here, and I was told would disappear for hours – Laurel and Hardy being particular favourites.

Perhaps it may be my mother felt more comfortable here in this place and that transmitted to the child. I know when I spoke to her about it, when she could remember (she had Alzheimers for a number of years before she died) it was obvious that she loved the city and had many fond memories. She had gone to the local school and it had a rooftop playground, which, when we heard, seemed to us suburban kids like something out of Arabian Nights – '*a playground….on the roof?*' we would ask incredulously, as if this was the most impossibly exotic thing we had ever heard of (and it was).

She told me she used to play with some of her friends in the tenement houses on Henrietta Street, one of the cities earliest Georgian Streets with some of its largest houses, one or two of which are still amongst the lost palazzi of Dublin. The photograph above is of this street, and I cannot help but wonder sometimes about the children depicted.

ATMOSPHERE

My grandparent's house in Dorset Street, the memory of shadowy stairs and bright tall rooms,
of the chirping songbird inside and chickens in the yard.
My mother's return to her childhood home, to her mother;
then home to her new home, not home.
And me, a small passenger with her on this repeated voyage of loss and return.

My mothers mother, a grandmother, her house a room, the kitchen, big and full of light.
There was a bird there, and a big table and gas hob, the fridge outside the window, a metal box on the wall,
called the safe; concealing the milk and meat, also butter.
She gave me that butter on the back of a spoon handle, with sugar.
A tenement treat.

Tenement was not a word I knew then, that came later, with knowledge.
Emotions come before knowledge, as the act comes before architecture.

My grandparent's house and 12 others in the Georgian Terrace that constituted a part of Dorset Street Lower was demolished in the 1960's to make way for a Council apartment block. That tremendous distantly-remembered spatial container of steps, doorways, hall, staircase, backstairs, rooms, lobbies, gardens, vegetable patch, animal runs, yards, areas, lanes, mews was destroyed to be replaced by an access-deck slab block with freestanding

external staircases; the retrospective criminality of the act is still shocking. The photograph of the aftermath of demolition fills me with utter sadness and anger.

It formed a part of the great hollowing out of the north inner city, a part of Dublin portrayed so vividly by Joyce in Ulysses, which was commenced by the Government in the 1960's to eradicate the so-called slums. It displaced thousands of people living in established communities and deposited them on the periphery, in the disemboweling of the urban working class. This dynamic was international, as displayed in the United States and other countries, and was intended to weaken the power of the urban proletariat, feared as the '*mob*' or '*organised labour*', by dispersal to the edges and tying down to a mortgage, thus making assembly and any hint of political agitation difficult and hard to organise. Memories of James Larkin and the Dublin workers lockout of 1913 were still well-remembered. ('*Rights of the City*'- Lefebvre, Harvey)

No 27 on the left   Desolation

MENTAL SPACE

'We build up a spatial history for ourselves composed of memories of room upon room, garden upon garden, street upon street, farm upon farm, field upon field. From the same capabilities we slowly construct diverging assumptions about the nature of the spatiality of the world, and differing preferences for how to inhabit it and move through it.'

(P 40 Spatial Intelligence: New Futures for Architecture, L van Schaik 2008)

'Spatial images are the dreams of society' (Siegfried Kracauer)

I first came across the theory of mental space through the teaching and writings of Professor Leon van Schaik of RMIT. I had met Leon in Dublin before my first presentation in 2012 and, amongst the things we spoke about at that time, was his idea that we all carry with us an early memory of some type of space, one that we dream of and about and that forms the basis of our spatial intelligence.

This seemed an intriguing proposition but I was not sure at the time how relevant it might be to an analysis of my work and thoughts. It didn't seem immediately obvious, at least to me, that I had any spatial baggage, beyond a dis-affinity for suburbia. I had grown up on the outskirt horizons of Dublin and could not wait to leave; what spatial memory could possibly have remained of this; I knew of no other, or did I?

On reflection, early memories emerged of both my parents' backgrounds. My father had also grown up in the city, close to the docks area, and though we visited there less, particular memories returned to me of his parent's house, of river ferry trips and my uncles dental laboratory, with its Bunsen burners and strange chemical smell. I began to understand the deep connection to and relevance of this hinterland exploration for my life and work. I discovered then where my mental space was situated, and I wondered how this was not previously obvious to me. This was clearly where my previously unarticulated, deep affinity for the city and city living originated.

It was something of an epiphany for me to realize, that these early memories, though few and somewhat vague, were potent and rich in atmosphere. It is almost certainly the reason that, when the family moved back to Dublin from London, it was to this area that we gravitated, familiar yet intensely urban. I have no doubt that this is as a result of a powerful memory of city, of mental space, of mental atmosphere.

I now live and work near where my grandparents lived and where my mother grew up. When she used to visit, my mother would sit at our top floor windows on North Great Georges Street, just around the corner from her old street, looking out at people and remarking on their activity, assigning them motive and purpose, her favorite expressions being *'what's he doing?'* and especially *'what is she wearing?'*

'Better than television' she would say, and she was right.

SERRA'S PARABLES OF GRAVITY AND ARCHITECTURE

I have few clear memories of that early time, mostly sensations and a sense of atmosphere, but what does remain is incredibly potent, and these have become, or I have made them become, the reservoir from which I draw my attitude to the city, and from thence to architecture.

I serendipitously discovered similar feelings in Richard Serra's description of an early very powerful memory. I will reproduce it in full here, as it is so compelling for me.

'One of my earliest recollections is that of driving with my father, as the sun was coming up, across the Golden Gate Bridge. We were going to the Marine Shipyard, where my father worked as a pipe-fitter, to watch the launching of a ship. It was on my birthday in the fall of 1943. I was four.

When we arrived, the black, blue and orange steel-plated tanker was in way, balanced up on its perch. It was disproportionately horizontal and to a four-year-old was as large as a skyscraper on its side. I remember walking the arc of the hull with my father, looking at the huge brass propeller, peering through the stays. Then, in a sudden flurry of activity, the shoring props, beams, planks, poles, bars, keel blocks, all the dunnage, was removed, the cables released, shackles dismantled, the come-alongs unlocked. There was a total incongruity between the displacement of this enormous tonnage and the quickness and agility with which the task was carried out.

As the scaffolding was torn apart, the ship moved down the chute towards the sea; there were accompanying sounds of celebration, screams, fog horns, shouts, whistles. Freed from its stays, the logs rolling, the ship slid off its cradle with an ever-increasing motion. It was a moment of tremendous anxiety as the oiler enroute rattled, swayed, tipped, and bounced into the sea, half-submerged, to then raise and lift itself and find its balance. Not only had the tanker collected itself, but the witnessing crowd collected itself as the ship went through a transformation from an enormous obdurate weight to a buoyant structure, free, afloat and adrift.

My awe and wonder of that moment remained. All the raw material that I needed is contained in the reserve of this memory, which has become a recurring dream."

(Richard Serra, 1988: *'Serra's Parables of Gravity and Architecture'* - Dave Hickey Catalogue The Drawing Center)

The description by Serra of this event, the instantaneous visible transformation from weight to buoyancy, contains for me all I need to know of the possibilities of architecture to frame occasion and to invite **epiphany**.

EPIPHANY

a (1) : a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something (2) : an intuitive grasp of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking (3) : an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure b : a revealing scene or moment.

Middle English epiphanie, from Anglo-French, from Late Latin epiphania, from Late Greek, plural, probably alteration of Greek epiphaneia appearance, manifestation, from epiphainein to manifest, from epi- + phainein to show

(Merriam Webster online Dictionary)

Image Courtesy of Earl and Elaine Buras, 1999.060.007

LIFE AND PRACTICE

The two are interconnected, of course mentally, but also geographically, and as I mentioned earlier, I live in an old warehouse building beside my office in the Cigar Box. I have clearly ended up not having moved very far from my mother's street (my mental space), as the map shows; both house numbers are a somehow satisfying 27.

The old warehouse is a rare remaining example, in Dublin, of a shop-house-warehouse hybrid. In the early 1990's we managed to buy this corner of Dublin, with, rather unbelievably for us, the proceeds from the sale of a modest London flat. This part of the city was at that time practically unsaleable; the north inner city was at that time, as far as estate agents and money-lenders were concerned, a wasteland. I spent the mid 90's working on the building, sometimes for 6-month stretches between jobs, and sometimes an early morning shift before starting work. Having returned from London, we were determined on city living, and we had found the perfect project for that.

The front Georgian building of 4 stories over basement was built in 1767, and contained a shop with living accommodation over. About 1810, the then-shopowner felt compelled to build a five storey over basement whisky bonding warehouse on his back garden, with window security bars on all 5 floors! The photo below shows the building as we first saw it, before the Cigar Box of course and adjoining buildings; the north inner city had been hit hard during the 1960's and 70's by depopulation, dereliction and demolition. Times were about to change however, though there were still some years to go before the first roar of the 'Celtic Tiger'.

Live   Work

elevation to north great george's street
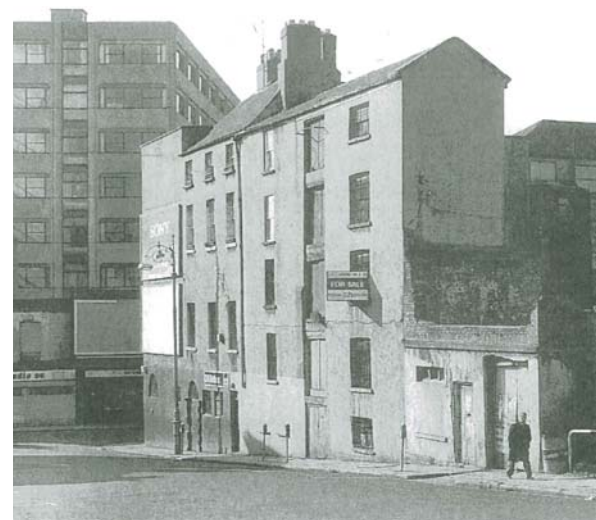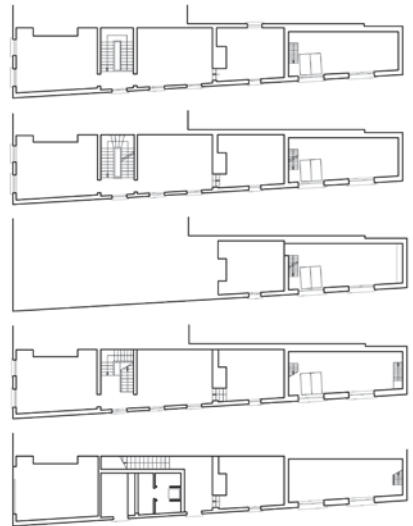
Existing Floor Plans – Ground to
fifth in ascending order

On best behaviour – top floor
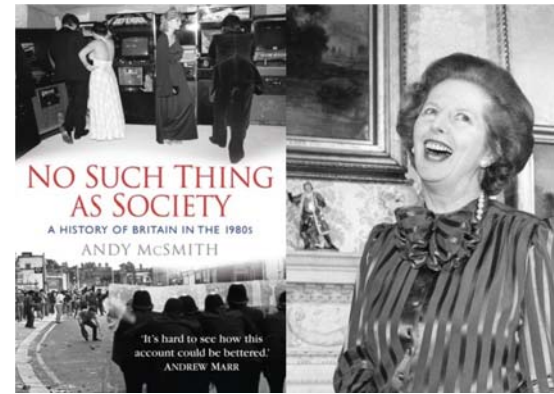
AWAKENING

'They are casting their problems at society. And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours.'

(Interview with Douglas Keay, Womans Own 1987)

No such thing as society; I wasn't sure about much in politics at the time but I was sure about that. Living in London then, it was a shockingly clear expression of a political philosophy that I was completely unused to; in Ireland, political discourse is generally tribal, not based on class or social issues, and certainly not expressed as an ideology. It was quite exhilarating to finally have a position in relation to something, rather like discovering a landmark in desert.

I was not sure what society was exactly, but if Margaret Thatcher feared its power enough to deny it's existence then I thought it must be something intrinsic, implicit and worthwhile, like common law or the social contract, then burgeoning concepts for me. It was easy to be against this, but rather harder to define what one was actually for. At the time, it was a powerful motive for me to define my position on a lot of things, on politics, on ethics and on architecture; not that they are in any way separable as they may be part of the one philosophy, but each has their own particular landscape.

I define my position on many things in relation to this ideology; it is my north star, a guiding light and I find it reassuringly locates me, in whatever context I find myself; I consequently owe a very great deal to Mrs Thatcher. Thank you.

SECTION 2 The Main Concepts

SECTION 2   The Main Concepts

A

SIGNIFICANT MOVEMENT   Framing the Essential

Thoughts on figure and ground – Movement – James Stirling – Alvar Aalto – Simpler movements – Patrick Schumacher and the architecture of movement – Significant movement in my work – The Cigar Box – The National Diaspora Centre and thoughts on Newgrange passage tomb –The Diaspora Centre as poetic response – Gas Networks Ireland – Hill housing – The Georgian piano nobile - Coda: Where things find themselves

'As we communicate and use language, we show ourselves to one another in our difference, and it's in this disclosure that action is generated: we can do something to change the world'.

Zoe Williams, on Hannah Arendt's *'The Human Condition'*
(Guardian article Feb 2017)

THOUGHTS ON FIGURE AND GROUND

Ground first or figure? All is ground first.

Ground then figure; becoming figure from ground, symmetry-cemetery, we return to ground; figure then ground.

Figure perceptually emerges as a corollary of significant or habitual movement against ground. Significant movement distills the foregrounding tendency or essence inherent in place to produce figure. Any movement, by itself, if sufficiently purposeful, may propel this dynamic; or as is equally common, movement is encouraged and framed by some character of place, either natural or artificial, to stimulate occasion. The emergence of the landmark-in-landscape or the monument-in-the-city, formed psychologically (*found*) in the case of the former and constructed (*made*) in the case of the latter, are the most clearly defined examples of this relationship.

However, without significant movement this figural aspect of place becomes merely an interesting local condition of ground, having no clarifying catalyst or actor; but with significant movement all found or made ground has the potential to become instantly figural. Without movement there can be no figure, all is ground, and ground becomes figure through the act.

This latent potential for ground to become figure, through movement is a tremendously powerful architectural tool.

MOVEMENT

Significant movement may be formal, as in ritual; habitual, as in commute or routine; or occasional, as in wandering. It may be a mix of all or any two. There are, of course, interesting hybrids; I am thinking here of a combination of different movement types in the Tarkovsky film '*Stalker*', that of significant informal traversing of landscape, where the movement is a mix of ritual and wandering, like a walk in a minefield, being formed of subtle, purposeful, crab-like manoeuvres across a psychologically hostile terrain, a landscape of anxiety, with a view to reaching a '*holy*' destination, The Room, all the while evading a nebulous doom (which never happens; it's quite a film). Geoff Dyer grippingly describes this existential journey in his book '*Zona: A Book about a Film about a Journey to a Room*' (2012).

My research in this strand explores the proposition that that each project contains a purposeful human movement at its heart, one that captures the projects essence and that establishes a context for meaningful social encounter. Sometimes explicit in the brief but more often not, once detected, the appropriate framing of this becomes fundamental to the architectural success of the project - the human experience of purposeful movement through a socialised space architecturally framed. Space becomes potential in time.

Space does not exist without time,
time cannot exist without movement,
time is movement through space.
Movement through space without human experience - the tree in the forest, did it fall?

Increasingly, I find my work method follows from the premise that each project contains within itself a significant socialised movement that awaits an architectural framing. This applies even, or especially, if this is not specifically announced in the brief. At the start of a project this movement must be first deduced and then addressed in an appropriate architectural solution.

The movement or action is closely related to the type of building but it can also be suggested by specific site conditions or, very occasionally, by a mixture of the two. In the rare cases where I have worked on buildings with overtly ritualized settings - Glenstal Monastery Library and Guesthouse (1997-99), or the new Cemetery at Kellystown (2017) -

Glenstal Monastery Library, Co Limerick – First Floor Plan (*with Richard Hurley*)
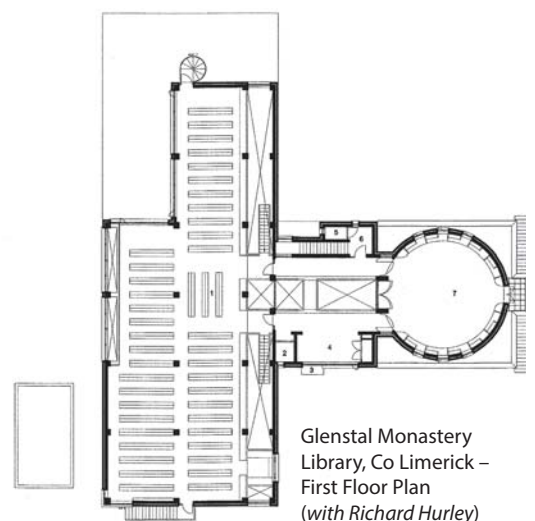
then the potential, or even the imperative, for this surfacing and framing dynamic is rather more obvious, but that is not strictly what is under discussion here.

I am talking of a latent dynamic, or the possibility of a purposeful movement that can exist, in parallel with, surrounded by, and embedded in the architecture of the building. It is often merely suggested in a buildings description and can be perceptually peripheral to its stated main purpose but, when it is enacted in social space, becomes substantive and memorable. It then begins to engage with the wonders of epiphany to transform the reading of the building from a mere container of programme to a socially active organism. It surfaces and reveals the buildings poetic essence to the activator who begins to understand more of the *place* in which the building is positioned, and of the *occasion* of this moving insight.

This method has, I believe, rich architectural possibilities as it premiates the dynamics of movement over more static qualities of visual aesthetics, which I take to be a thoroughly modern and optimistic viewpoint. My allegiance here is with Jeremy Till in the contention that '*First, because architecture is engaged primarily as a spatial experience, it follows that the focus of ethical attention should be on the dynamics of social space not on the statics of vision.*' (Jeremy Till, '*Architecture Depends*', MIT Press p188)

This is one of the core aims of this PhD, and I therefore posit that, with this research, among the first questions of an architectural project must be '*what is the significant movement here?*' and '*what social dynamics are at work?*'.

JAMES STIRLING

The impulse for this in my work I think stems from an early admiration for the buildings of James Stirling, and in particular the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, which I visited during construction in the early 80's. The extraordinary gesture here is a public route across the site, through the building, not as a functional shortcut but as a celebratory act of urban procession, one that not only provides the citizen with access to the buildings main space, the great Schinkel-esque central drum, but provides a *privileged* access to this space, one not enjoyed by the users of the building.

This was a rather sensational, almost revolutionary, idea to me and had a profound effect on my understanding of the boundaries of architecture. The possibility was suddenly revealed of having completely extra-curricular social ambitions for a project, in addition to those of conventional aesthetics that sit alongside the routine professional duties and responsibilities.

The door for an architectural expression of society and social interests was suddenly thrown open. While this transgressive intrusion of public space into an essentially private domain may have been flagged by previous projects, such as the Carpenter Centre by Le Corbusier or some of the other Stirling German projects (Cologne, Dusseldorf) none had been achieved with such exceptional nobility and grace.

The Staatsgalerie diagram expresses institutional space as being the ground for an expression of social space and urban movement, in a profoundly democratic tectonic statement. The significant movement celebrated here is that of the ordinary citizen ascending the hillside from one street to the other, an urban routine repeated endlessly worldwide, here inscribed within and framed by the architecture of the institution, in a gesture of social solidarity and respect.
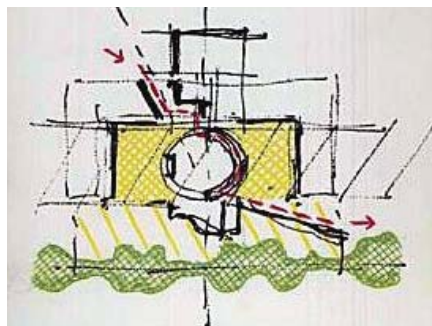
(James Stirling)
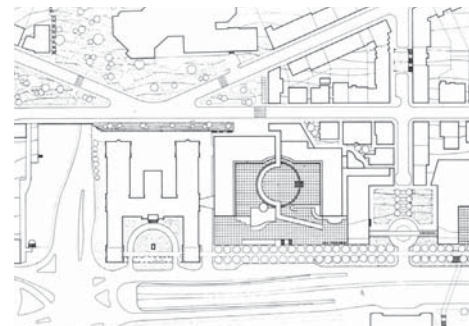
ALVAR AALTO

This insight or epiphany allowed me to detect other instances of this dynamic at play. A good example of this occurs in the work of Alvar Aalto, where a movement expressing a civic gesture of democracy occurs at the Saynatsalo Town Hall project.

The route from the external courtyard - symbolising community (of course), and raised above the surrounding forest – rises internally in a stately fashion around the debating chamber to emerge at the public gallery, where the debate may be looked upon, listened to and where participation is encouraged. The public gallery occupies the highest accessible level of this small civic building, in a phenomenological expression of hierarchy made manifest. The chamber is loftiest but it may be overlooked.

The thematic roots of the building are within the humanist Italian Renaissance - the competition entry was entitled '*Curia*', meaning '*a place of assembly*' – displaying a deep commitment by the architect to the democratic process, in its most resonant humanist meaning. The route symbolising this primacy of community access is clearly expressed externally by a projecting processional of circulation, top-lit by clerestorey windows, that winds around the tall council chamber, thus demonstrating to the populace the way in, embodying the acts of entry and participation through an anthropomorphic abstraction in brick. In winter mode, the windows act as lanterns to signal assembly within the dark forest.

Saynatsalo – Alvar Aalto (Laura Smith)

OTHER MOVEMENTS

Stuttgart and Saynatsalo are prime examples of significant movement concretised into architectural expression. Other emblems of this concretization that I was aware of and influenced by are the Casa Malaparte by Adalberto Libera and the Villa Savoye by Le Corbusier. Both are domestic works and capable therefore of certain liberties of spatial and programmatical manipulation that may ordinarily be denied larger projects, such as the above two symphonic examples.

Casa Malaparte *(photo David Ibáñez Núñez)* The Glacier Museum The Jantar Mantar, Jaipur and the ascent to the heavens. *(photo Unesco)*

The Malaparte example is quite explicit in its visually upfront reference as a mechanism by which the movement from the finite to the infinite may be expressed, similar to the great astronomical machines of Jaipur (and elsewhere) and the Glacier Museum by Sverre Fehn. These iconographically extreme examples, notable certainly for the immediacy of their dynamic expression, are diagrammatic and of rather limited use in the general canon. A similar examination of extreme positions, though in other areas, is notable in the work of American academic architects, most memorably by John Hejduk, in his series of Diamond and Wall Houses. These have the status of études in order to exercise technique and not as performance pieces.

At the Villa Savoye, on the other hand, the ramping movement to the rooftop terrace is imbedded within the body of the building is experienced as somewhat of a surprise, being half inside and half outside the building. The movement diagram however highlights the undeniable primacy of the ascent to the rooftop, with its strategically placed framed view of the suburban landscape from the lifestyle-defining solarium. This embeddedness of concept is closer to the reality of most architectural projects and therefore of a more general instruction.

These various expressions of significant movement, framed and set up by the supporting architecture are, at best, as apparent (or as hidden) as the theme of a piece of music or the atmosphere of a novel.
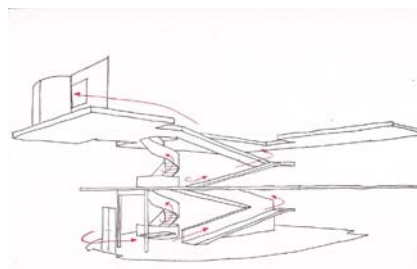
Movement diagram - Villa Savoye (*Rainis A Tebicis*)   Villa Savoye ramp

PATRICK SCHUMACHER AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF MOVEMENT

This concept of movement under discussion here is emphatically not to do with the movement that is the subject of what Patric Schumacher has called '*The Architecture of Movement*' (P Schumacher 1996, Arch+ 134/135). This article opens with a question '*Is there an alternative tradition, an alternative paradigm of space or at least the theoretical possibility of defining space through movement alone, without an independent and prior system of reference?*' The article goes on to posit 2 possible recent examples as works of alt-architecture where this '*architecture of movement*' may occur, they being Ben van Berkel's multi-storey housing project for Borneo-Sporenberg (built) and Zaha Hadid's Villa for The Hague (unbuilt). The movement described therein is fetishised as a hypermodern weapon with which to envision the destruction of architecture as we know it, or at least to gain notoriety from the position of appearing willing to do so, as in certain Futurist stances.

The Villa at The Hague, in a series of drawings where domestic interior elements undergo streamlining to image a dynamic movement, appears to be an etude, or a legitimate expression of an artistic exploration, as movement-as-representation. This is in contrast to the Van Berkel project that appears to concretise a mysterious in-between realm, described as burrow-geometry and seemingly not easily conceptualised from either within or without the building; one that '*radicalises the dissolution of the stable, modular framework of orientation that would locate one's home within the structure*,' and one that is moreover '*a continuous labyrinth of interstitial spaces*', which, while operating as access and lighting space, allows for a strange '*promenade architecturale*', and '*A potentially liberating space, that comes as surprise within a multi-storey building, a type that has hitherto been the paradigm of modularity*'. Stirring stuff indeed, but not pertinent to what we are about here.

Another of Mr Schumacher's quotations from the essay is of much more relevance to us; '*The picturesque garden was a labyrinthine, mythically charged space, without visual boundaries, impenetrable by the controlling gaze, only to be revealed through movement*'. (Schumacher)

This is real movement through space he speaks of, not representational.

SIGNIFICANT MOVEMENT IN MY WORK

Over the course of the PhD, as these thoughts of the concept of Significant Movement evolved and began to crystallise, I began to sift through my work in earnest for traces of this dynamic. I discovered that some were more conscious than others, but it was clear that the urge to frame this identified movement was present in hitherto unrealized places.

Hadid- Villa at The Hague

For example, looking again at the Cigar Box project (Dublin, 2004), through the lens of significant movement, powerfully surfaces for me the civic ascent of the staircase, held in the gap between buildings, up to the living spaces and moving therein to the front window with its views over the city. This urban go and return is framed by the timber enclosure of the gap, much as a stage setting shorthand for an exposition of an intense inner city drama.

THE CIGAR BOX The ascent in the gap

Cigar Box - The Ascent in the Gap

'Stairs hold the body captive in movement more completely than any other element of architecture'
(Robin Evans *'Translations from Drawing to Buildings'*)

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING
5 CIGAR BOX
6 LIVING SPACE
7 WINDOW
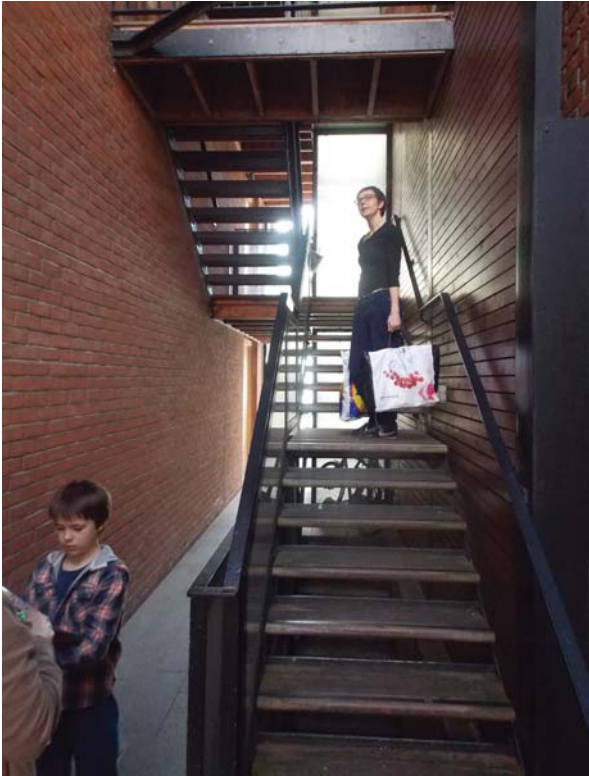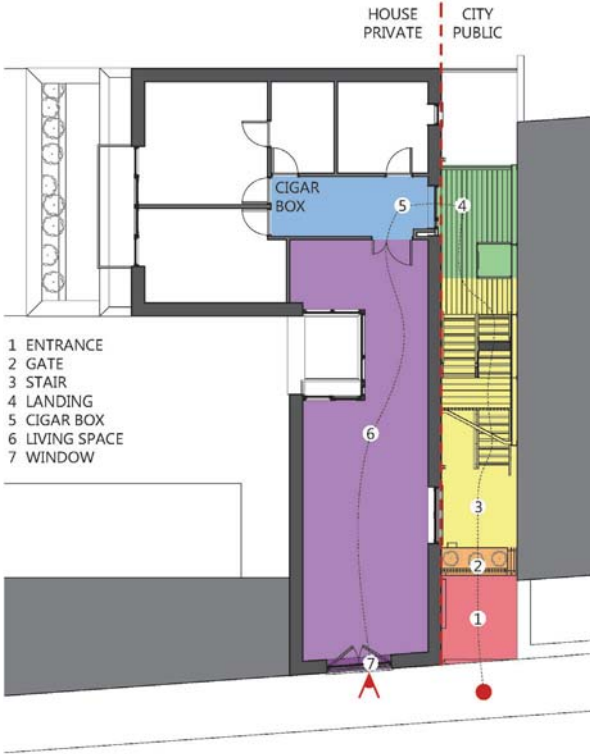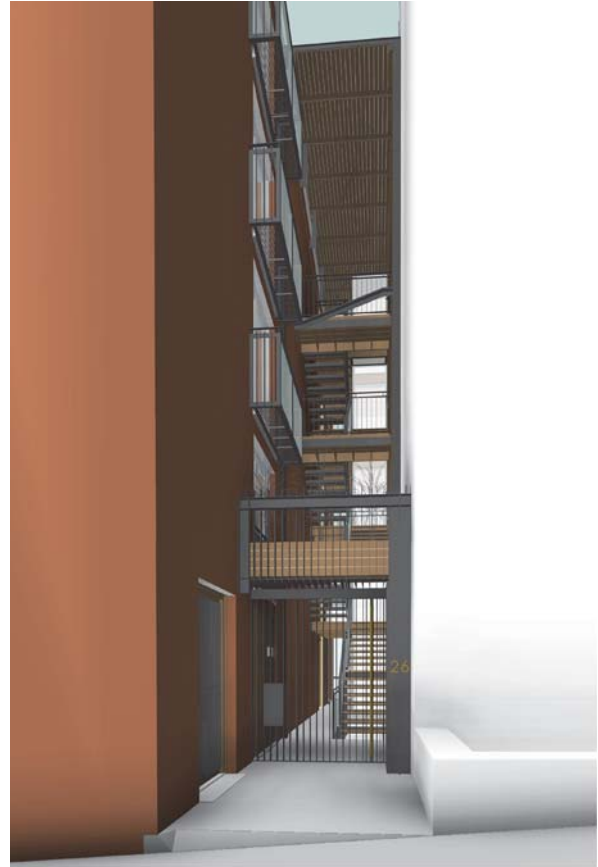
The staircase is a framed figure, held poised in the space between two buildings. Here, the act of urban habitation is celebrated by a ritualised ascent within city-space. The movement has a slow rhythm, almost monument-solemn and yet the space is enclosed, intimate and domestic. The to and fro dynamic ascent produces a scenography of intensely urban images framed by the apparatus of living - plant pots, balconies, bicycles- which inhabit the gap.
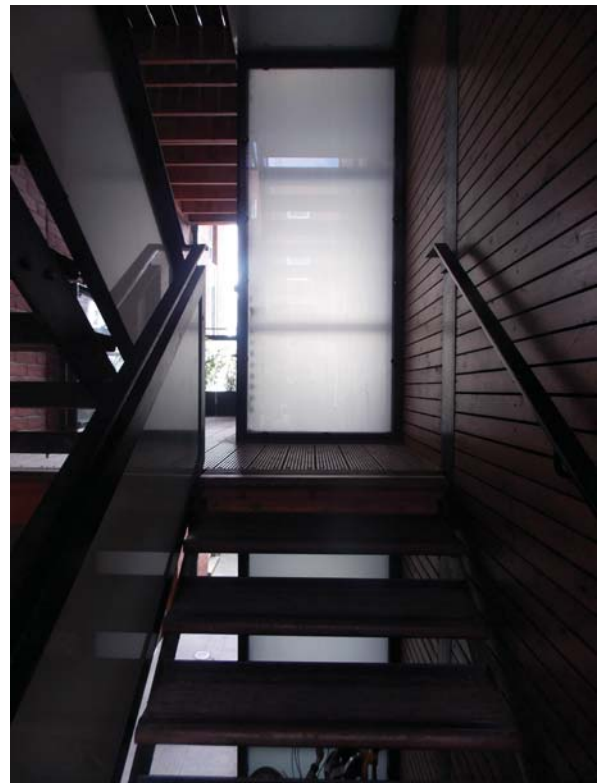
Go and Return

Richard Blythe outlines a similar spatial dynamic in his description of the Tolman's Hill House (Hobart 2003), by his practice Terroir;

'The Terroir design discussion for this house revolved around the relationship of the journey from the city up the hill to the site and (re)-presentation of the occupants to the valley and city through an experience of the house. The architectural delight happens at the moment when the valley appears before the occupants as they enter the main space of the house, and the route, or journey, from city to house is re-presented to the occupants in its complete dimension. Up until that point, the journey is experienced as serial fragments.'

(Richard Blythe PhD Thesis 'The Terroir of Terroir' 2008)
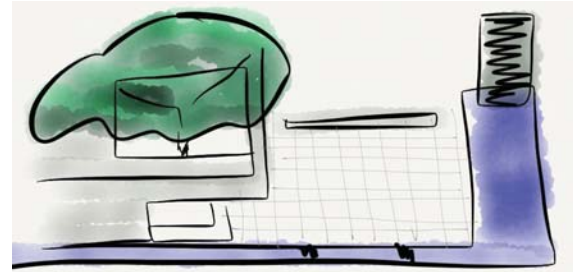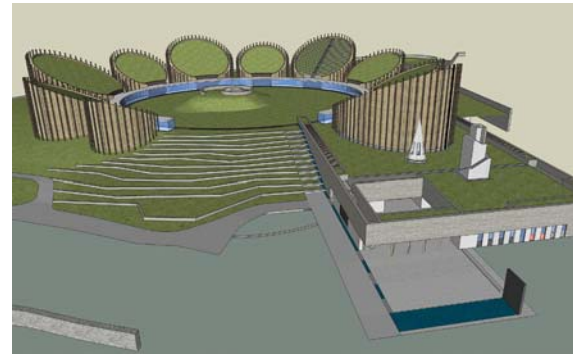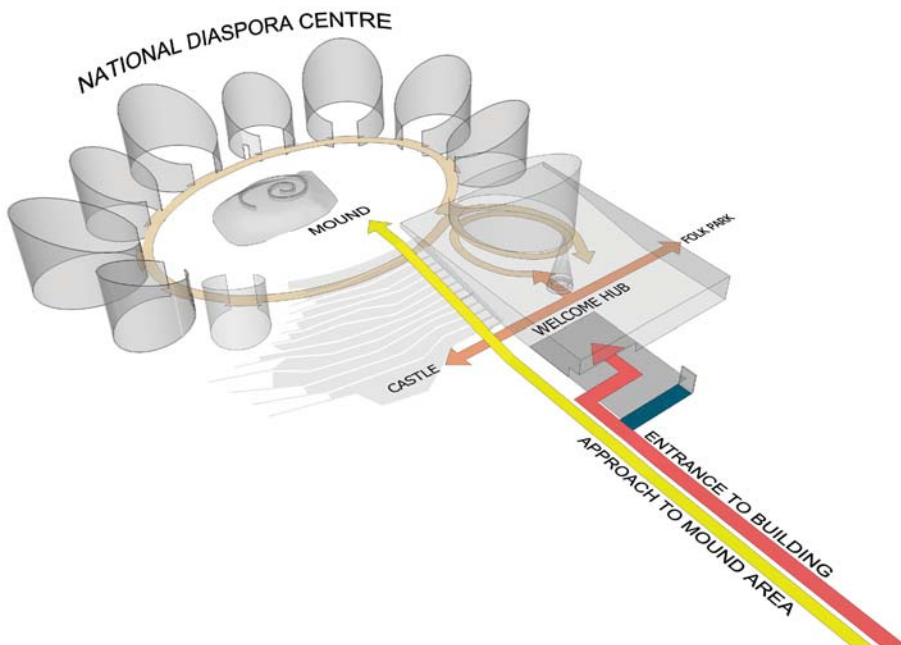
THE NATIONAL DIASPORA CENTRE
and thoughts on Newgrange Passage Tomb

The building houses reception areas and exhibition halls over two levels, with the main access being at the lower level. There is a separate processional route that rises up to a clearing framed by the upper levels of the building. The clearing is centred on the Mound, a National Monument, which contains the remains of a Neolithic ringfort. The liberation of this ancient feature, heretofore hidden behind clumsily placed buildings (now to be demolished), will be seen as a significant collateral cultural gain of the project. The Mound, it is proposed, will stand resplendent in its new setting, a jewel within the ring. Separate from the building, alongside and within its architecture, a new measured ascent is proposed to this elevated space.

This ascent, which may be enacted on commemorative occasions to provide non-religious ritual, is accompanied by the sound of water, trickling down beside the steps. The water has been collected from the encircling roofs, flows around the ring before descending with the steps to a pool at the main entrance; visitors to the building need to '*cross the water*', repeating as they do another significant movement in Irish history.

Water Diagram

Threshold Diagram
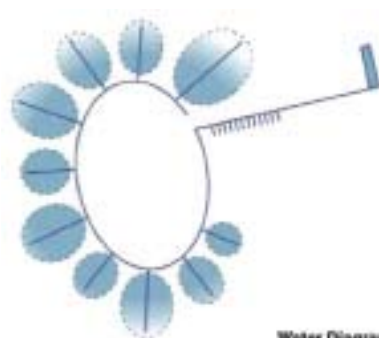
THOUGHTS ON NEWGRANGE

The potentially sacralised nature of this movement arose from considerations of another ancient monument, the 5,000-year-old passage tomb at Newgrange. Here the significant movement is annual and performed by light fom the sun at Winter Solstice; Newgrange is actually a mechanism for precise calibration of the solar year at this location. It is thus a most profound contextual construction. It has been organised so that the first rays of the solstice sun illuminate the chamber at the heart of the mound complex – at no other time does this occur – thus signaling the death of the old year and the birth of the new.

'Dawn light began stealing
Through the cold universe to County Meath…….
To send first light like share-shine in a furrow
Steadily deeper, farther available,
Creeping along the floor of the passage grave
To backstone and capstone, to hold its candle
Inside the cosmic hill.'

('A Dream of Solstice', Seamus Heaney)
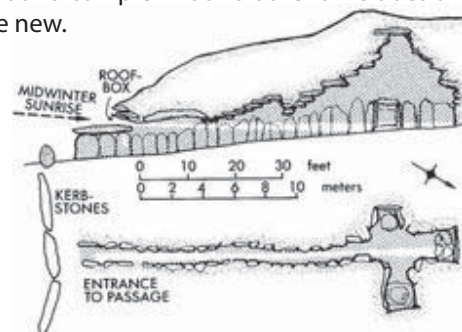
This beautiful astronomical instrument is surrounded by other, more everyday, functional stuff, and returns to being an '*ordinary*' passage tomb (there are hundreds) for the remainder of the year. The instructive thoughts here, for me, are not only of the epiphanic potential of light for the creation of occasion, but also of the latent nature of the embedded ritual, revealed only with significant movement, and at a cosmic level.

The Diaspora Centre project was a feasibility study for a local authority, and it was most unlikely to ever be built. I used it therefore as a mechanism for exploration, with the other usual architectural considerations (economy, brief, etc.) turned down low, to investigate some of the ideas that were forming as a result of the PhD, most notably that of significant movement but also considerations of metaphor and allusion.

It had been strongly suggested to me, by **Jo van den Berghe** (at the end of PRS 3), that a speculative project of just this nature would be very useful in surfacing these dynamics. The vehicle duly arrived and I therefore wholeheartedly embraced the poetic aspects of the project and, if occasionally a little over-cooked in places, it re-introduced me to the validity and power of the poetic response that I have since found to be a rather liberating influence on my thoughts and ideas.

Diaspora Centre Site Plan

GAS NETWORKS IRELAND   Journey to the roof

In the Gas Networks project (Dublin 2012), the journey to the rooftop garden celebrates the interstitial condition between the countryside and the city.

Entrance

Staircase

Journey to the roof via….

….The Spanish Steps
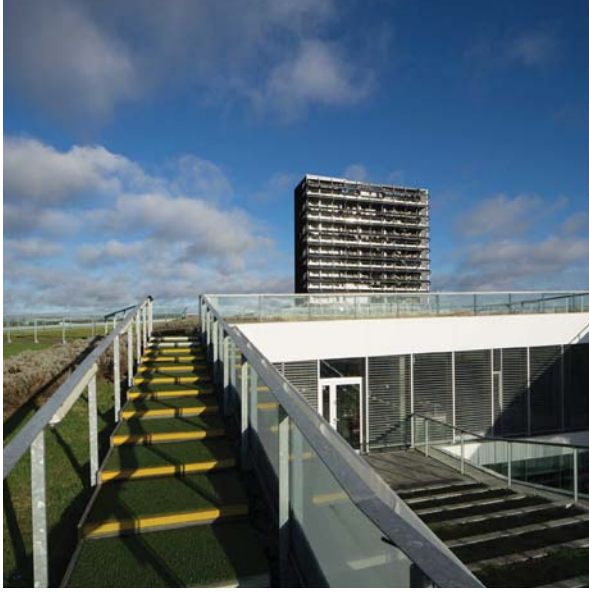
Ascent
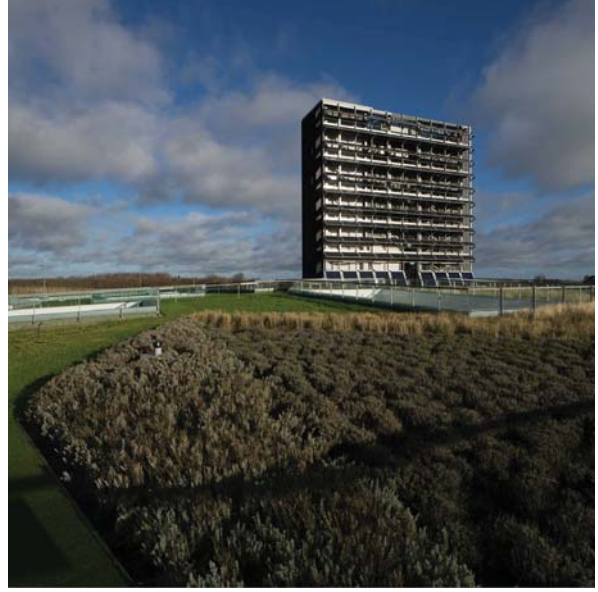
Roof

Rus in Urbe…

…Urbe in Rus
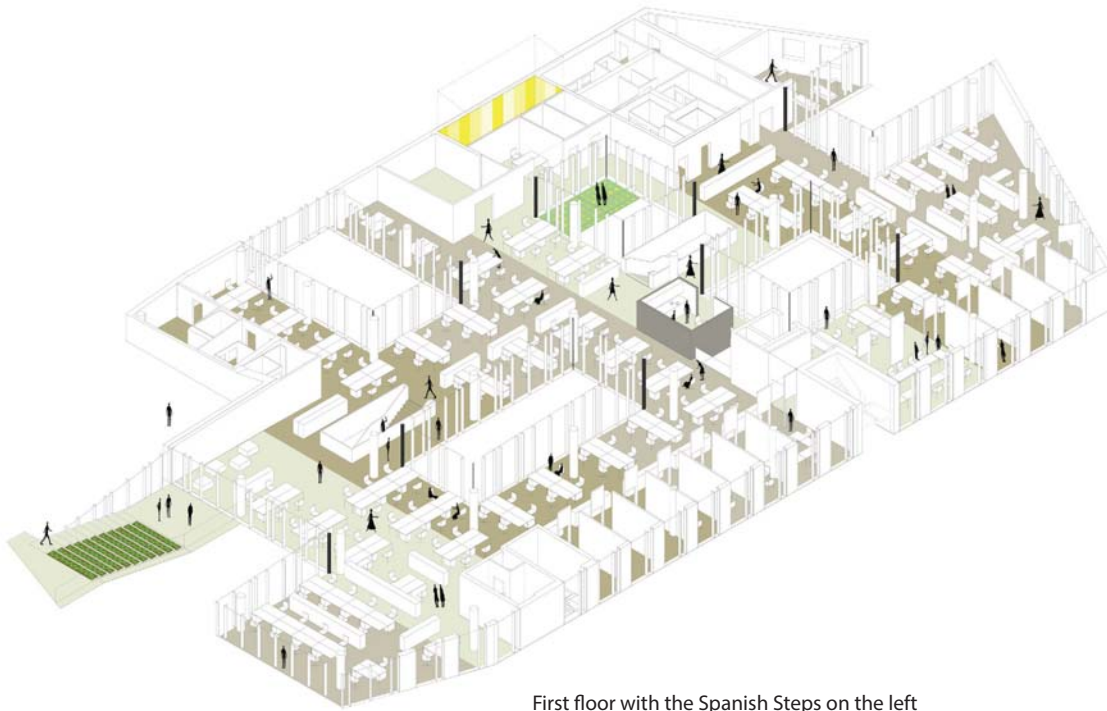
First floor with the Spanish Steps on the left

Roofscape

The Public Staircase to the top of the hill- Plan (*image DBA*)

HILL HOUSING   The hill, the sea and the staircase

In the Cunningham Road Housing Development (Dublin 2006), an unbuilt project, the movement consists of climbing the hill by means of a communal staircase up towards the viewing platform, at the rear of the site, that privileges the public view back over the city to the sea. The staircase is the linking element in this community of houses-within-a-garden and expresses the natural human desire to climb a hill for a better view.

The view from the top over the city and coast (*image DBA*)

The proposed ascent to the top of the hill (*image DBA*)
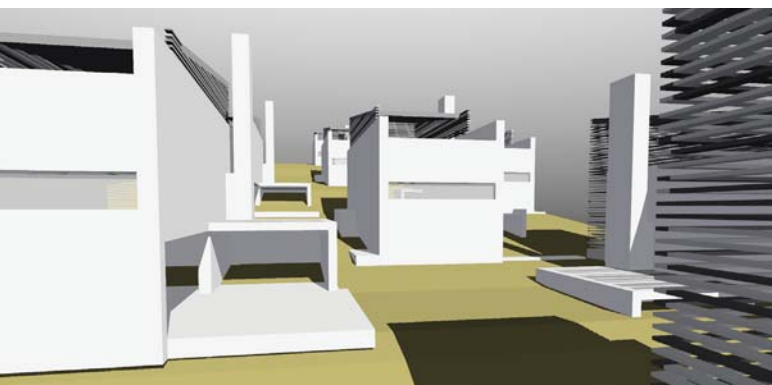
An early image without the great stairs makes clear the disconnectedness of the forms as they occupy the hill.

The key early image of the proposed route up the hill that connects the houses and leads to the viewing platform – the reward at the end of the climb.

The Street

The Staircase

Piano Nobile

36 North Great Georges Street, *Denis Byrne Architects* – A mixed development of residential and medical consulting rooms in a listed Georgian building in central Dublin.

Inauguration of the Paris Opera in 1875
(*Édouard Detaille*, 1878)/ Public Domain

THE GEORGIAN PIANO NOBILE

The classic Georgian townhouse was designed to accommodate a significant movement from the street to the room (Salon), a place of semi-public assembly. This is re-enacted daily although many of the houses have been institutionalized and the movement has little of its former social power. It originated in the domestic sphere and portrayed a civil society independent of parliament, church or monarch. This was one of the great social spaces of the Western Enlightenment.

The quasi-public nature of the staircase is exemplified in Joyce's '*The Dead*', and it becomes an arena of society every bit as compelling as an Opera House.

'Miss Kate and Miss Julia were there, gossiping and laughing and fussing, walking after each other to the head of the stairs, peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come.' (J Joyce, '*The Dead*')

CODA: WHERE THINGS FIND THEMSELVES

A kitchen is like a society; it is a community of objects and essences. Objects are self-explanatory and are the tools of the kitchen, the pots and pans, the mortar and pestle, the toaster, the kettle, the microwave, the blender and all the other utensils and gadgets that the land of the kitchen may now possess. What I call essences are those things that are not objects but are almost concepts (though not quite, as they are real), such as oil, vinegar, salt, pepper, rice, pasta, spices and other citizens of a good larder.

What I find so compelling about kitchens is that habitual movements (ritual, routine, significant) design the space over time; they decide where things go and what happens where. My own kitchen is a case in point; I designed it maybe twenty years ago, and the layout works well. Superficially it has not changed much, but it now has a rich inner life of position, hierarchy and utility that I could not have dreamt of when starting out to design.

For instance, the salt and pepper have managed to find a home for themselves on top of the little wooden egg holder, against the wall at the end of the work counter, under the cd rack. They are always here, located just outside the larder, where the less everyday seasonings live, close enough to the table for convenience but distant enough for them to be considered '*away*'. You can readily imagine that each object or essence in the kitchen has had never-ending negotiations like this over countless repeated movements, over numerous food preparations, meals and other activities, so that over time the kitchen has become almost a natural landscape, not something consciously designed but formed by powerful forces, not of geography in this case, but of habitual and significant activity.

This thought, for me, encapsulates the beauty, the mystery and the unknowableness of architecture and it's relation to the human condition. What I am trying to do, in architectural terms, is to better anticipate where the sugar might go, or where the butter should be or which surface will be more successful where. Movement and habitual use will eventually decide whether the design has anticipated well or not. Time, and activity, will always tell.

SECTION 2 The Main Concepts

B

SOCIAL ATTITUDE   or 'How to be in a Place'

The In-between Moment – Ways of being – What and why – Social exemplars – Social attitude in my work – The Cigar Box – A template development – Gas Networks Ireland – A closed form – Other projects

'Architects design relationships'

(Harry Charrington, PRS 7, Barcelona, April 2017)

Much of my work has been shown, throughout the PRS, to exhibit an attitude to society, chiefly demonstrated by a fascination with particular social organizations. This fascination is explored within projects such as Hill Housing, Cigar Box, the Gas Networks Ireland building and others.

THE IN-BETWEEN MOMENT

This impulse in my work was detected at an early PRS presentation (PRS 2, April 2014) by Michael McGarry, who correctly identified what I had called *'delayed entry'* as a more important concept, that of in-between space. He observed that these in-between spaces in my work, *'are being occupied in a very particular way and are crucial to the work - those spaces are very significant for you'.* I think this insight was the moment where I felt I had the beginning of a purchase on the shadowy back-thoughts that lay behind my creative activity.

Michael went on to divine my *'interest in a series or a set of human activities that sits somewhere between public and private'* and advised I re-read *'Van Eyck's writings rather than look at his buildings'.* This was good advice and very encouraging for me at the time, even if not immediately fathomed, and was a crucial intervention for me on the journey to this destination.

WAYS OF BEING

I have come to the understanding, through an analysis of my work, that within each architectural project, I find there lays the potential for an attitude to society. It is there, inherent and naggingly insistent, waiting patiently for the designer to recognize it, to express an opinion on its character, to assess its relative importance or even to merely acknowledge its existence. All too often I have not been attuned enough to this potential and missed the opportunity of expressing to its fullest the social landscape intrinsic to a given project.

Society in this context may be represented (as a synecdoche) by its greatest artifact, the city; and while information on the city has long been a fundamental part of architectural education – it is clearly essential to the architectural DNA – the formation of an *attitude to this information* has rarely been pursued in schools.

The study of the city is conducted almost exclusively in formal and aesthetic terms, with generally little more than a cursory analysis of the complicated dynamics of social conditions that underpin all urban spatial formations. Greek cities expressed very clearly a certain attitude to society, not entirely above criticism but a reasonable start, yet architectural discourse is dominated by the aesthetics of its monumental buildings, and not looking beyond the *'column and entablature'.* The *'why'* is just as important in these respects as the *'what'.* Why did the Romans, or the Victorians, build like they did? And why do we build like we do?

'WHAT' AND 'WHY'

As an example of *'what'* following *'why'*, take two domestic staircases from roughly the same era, one in Amsterdam the other in Georgian Dublin. The Dutch merchant's house was essentially a warehouse on the lower floors with living accommodation over. The stairs were therefore utilitarian and no more than ladders to access the private quarters; they were intensely private means of circulation and intended for family only, no visitors came this way. Social movement would have been too difficult here and was thus confined to the business quarters where visitors
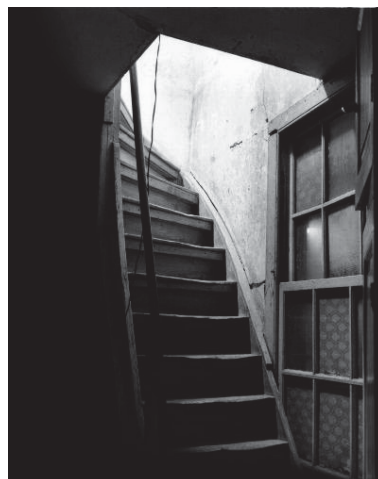
Amsterdam Merchant Staircase

Georgian Staircase

were received and entertained. The Dutch social sphere lay elsewhere, at the meetinghouse and on the Bourse, and the puritan ethic discouraged other interactions as frivolous, having little social or political need of them, the merchants of Amsterdam being the pre-eminent power base of their time.

The Georgian staircase, on the other hand, was a vehicle for the stately transport of the visitor to the salon at first floor level- the piano nobile. The salon was a room for conversation and discourse and a city composed of such rooms could form a society powerful enough to act as counterweight to traditional invested power centres (monarchy, church, aristocracy). The appearance of this 'third space'* in Western Europe, the formation of a new social power, documented so comprehensively in Jurgen Habermas 'The Transformation of the Public Sphere' had a profound effect on the domestic architecture of its time. The realm of the house could now accommodate a forum of ideas. This, and the following, topic was discussed in PRS 3, Barcelona November 2014.

* Most definitely not to be confused with what Starbucks eerily call their commercial premises, the "Third Space" (they allow the first two "spaces" to be home and work).

Robin Evans delivers a seminal and stunningly beautiful argument in 'Figures, Doors and Passages' that is based on comparing paintings and architectural plans in order to gain insights into the relation between spatial organisation and social arrangements and social formations. He distinguishes between the Italian medieval matrix of connected spaces and a social context based on closeness, carnality and accidental social encounter, and the British corridor and cellular room model and a social context based on privacy, distance and segregation. He completes his accomplished discourse by asking why the corridor model is today still the predominant spatial organisation and questions its enduring relevance vis-á-vis today's prevailing social patterns.

Movement diagrams from PRS 3

(Robin Evans - 'The Projective Cast: Architecture and its Three Geometries; Figures, Doors and Passages')
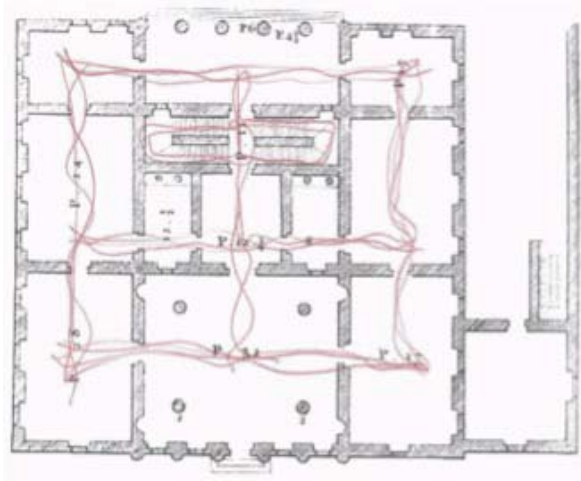
Matrix of Connected Spaces
Palazzo Antonini- Palladio 1556
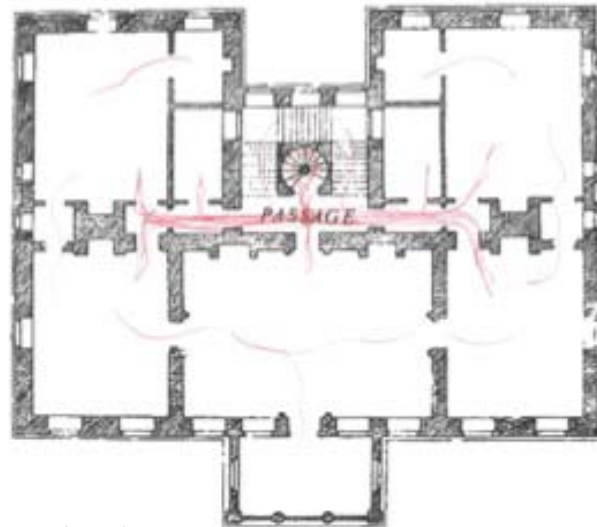
Corridor and Rooms
Amesbury House- John Webb 1661

SOCIAL EXEMPLARS

Phalanstery – Self-contained utopian community of 500-2,000 (France, USA)

Tulou – Enclosed communal housing with up to 800 people (China).

Shikumen Lilong – Lane Living, a community centred on a lane (Shanghai)
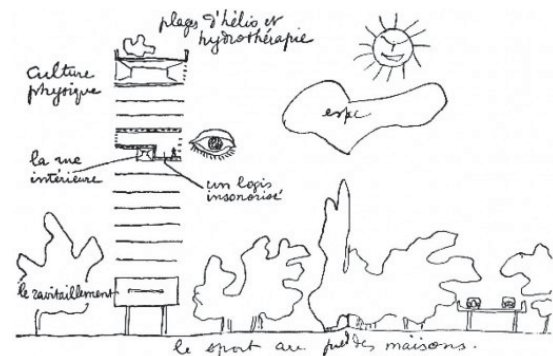
Unité d'habitation – A semi-autonomous community in the air (France, Germany)

SOCIAL ATTITUDE IN MY WORK

An architectural expression of an attitude to society is necessarily influenced by contextual, cultural and political values and would as a result be varied in different places and at different times. However, the fundamental universality of human relationships and the eternal character of the human condition remain immutable, whether in Ireland or Iran, and these variations would remain within a relatively small bandwidth. For me, through the clarifying process of the PhD programme, an articulate expression of '*attitude*' is now a considered part of the initial decision-making, and will come before other considerations, whether of programme, budget, or the technical design of particular building elements; *attitude* before tectonics.

In my work to date, this expression may be categorized under three categories (i) a search for suggestions of communality in the programme, (ii) in the quest for an opportunity of representing a social formation based on the collective as an ideal system of human organisation, and (iii) the framing of the urban condition. These categories are explored in the projects that follow.

THE CIGAR BOX   A new way to live in the city

Form: The tenement, soviet, commune
Content: The Gap: Dwellings share external communal space between 2 buildings
Models: Side lanes, external fire escapes

The Cigar Box was designed as a modern version of a tenement building, with an emphasis on the staircase as a physical and social connection, as a way of being in the city; firstly, as a connection between the residents and each other, and secondly, between the residents and the city. It is a vertical communal space that touches each apartment entrance door, containing a balcony space for each apartment, an intermediate space at the dumb waiter and the staircase itself. It is structured as a community with a shared social space to the side of the building and it is posited as an ideal method of communal living in the city.

TEMPLATE DEVELOPMENT
The project has been cited as a model by the local authority for an initiative (Open House) to bring groups of people together to develop and occupy unused Council land. Its economically manageable size, the developed floor area is 500 sqm, plus its planning flexibility allows it to adapt to many different sites. The proposal would involve a grouping of no more 3 or 4 separate parties in order to become a viable development.

Dublin has many small sites of about this size that are economically too much to handle for a single family but not of sufficient scale for a speculative developer to consider profitable.

Site Plan Existing and New

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING
5 CIGAR BOX
6 LIVING SPACE
7 WINDOW
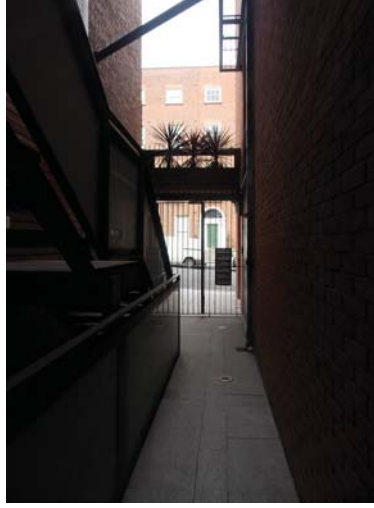
Building and Gap

Side lane
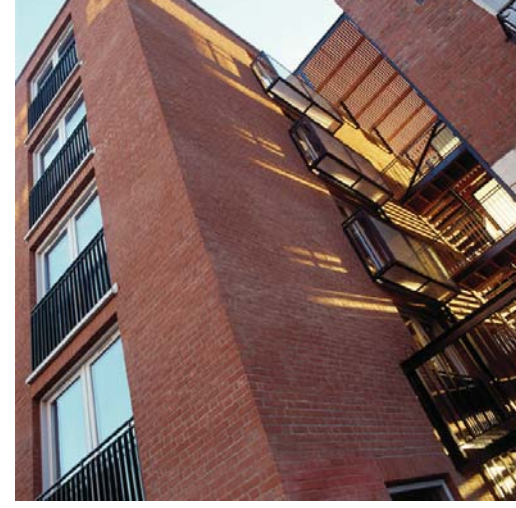
Building and Gap

The staircase is accommodated within the gap between two buildings and is analogous to a side lane, a space that, in this context, may be taken to be either public or semi-public.

36 North Great Georges Street and side lane

Cigar Box and side lane

The Cigar Box frames the communal space of the building within the urban semi-public space of the side lane, in an attitude of solidarity towards the social potential of the city.
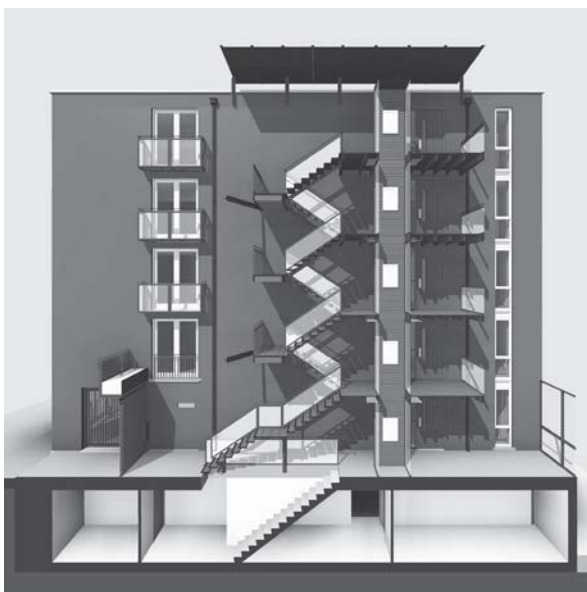
Life in the Gap
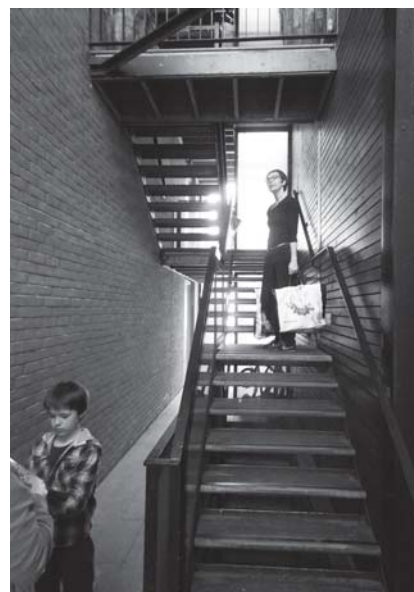
The Staircase in the Gap

Tenement Staircase

GAS NETWORKS IRELAND   Community in Landscape

Form: The compound settlement, the space ship
Content: Egalitarian space gathered under one roof
Models: Niendrum, Fortified cities

How does one occupy peripheral space at the edge of town, hemmed in by infrastructure and big boxes, out where the signs are scaled for distance and velocity. The Gas Networks building occupies such a position. A project won in competition, it proposed a compound settlement at the edge of the city, and looked to find appropriate references; local, such as the adjoining agricultural settlements across the motorway; national, such as the Niendrum ring-fort settlement, and science fiction, as in the Millennium Falcon.

'The new building is set in a reconditioned landscape reaffirming the rural settlement pattern of compound and landscape at the fringes of the city. Taking its inspiration from industrial and infrastructure buildings and combining it with a sophisticated office environment, the building forms a utilitarian landmark providing a common base for its diverse operational activities.

Organized over two levels with sheltered gardens, office areas, emergency control centre, training facilities, stores and circulation woven to an informal fabric, the building enables a highly flexible and inter-departmental work environment'   (PR Blurb)
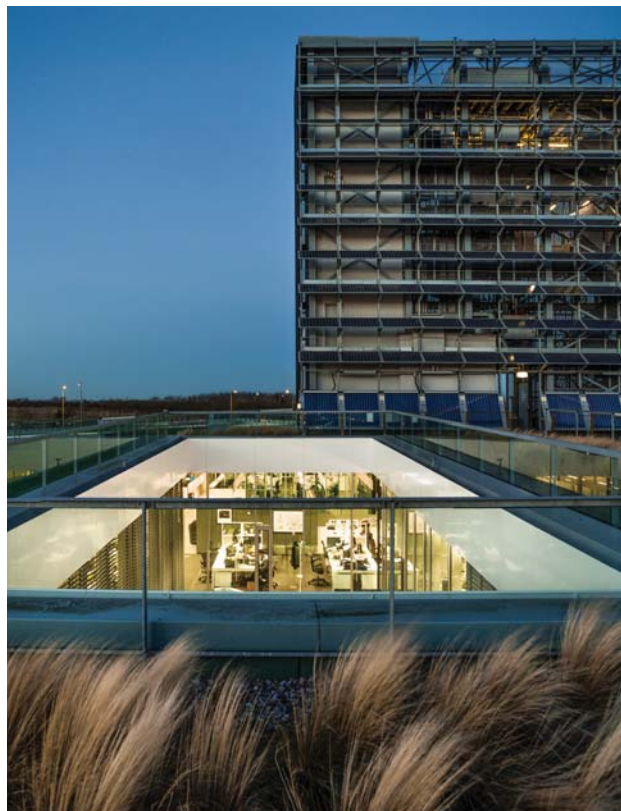
Aerial View North (site indicated)

M50
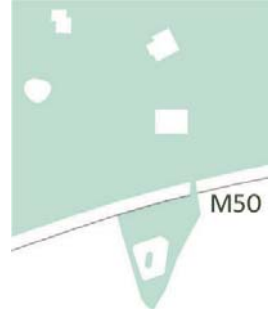
Site Strategy *Compound settlements*
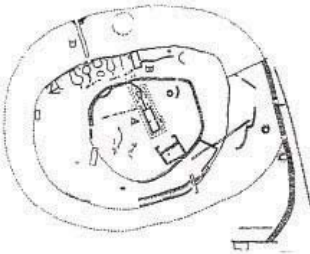
Niendrum Ringfort, Co Down
Inner ring – Community and sacred buildings
Middle ring – Habitation
Outer ring – Animals and gardens
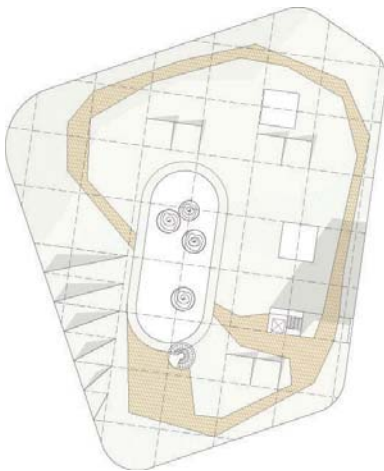
Early roof plan

Erbil

A CLOSED FORM

The building process, according to a Gas Networks Ireland statement, was founded on a vision that would produce centralised facilities in a workplace *'that has a real sense of community and place, at a time when the business was undergoing significant change – and one that set out to invest in its people, systems and facilities to sustain its future'.* (GNI 2016)

Responding to this aspiration, it was quite clear to us from the start that this would not be a building with an office typology or a workplace hierarchy. The brief included space requirements for van drivers, fitters and office workers, workshops, training areas and offices, in a building of approximately 5,000 sqm, to accommodate a working population of 300-320 people, including a permanently open 24/7 National Gas Emergency Centre.

The gathering of these into one form was of crucial importance to the project concept, and in this there were very clear, resonant architectural possibilities – a building that had no prescribed formal or spatial identity, to be as mute from the outside as city walls, or a piece of infrastructure. The single compact volume would also be easy to insulate, and would be typologically ambiguous – a sense that it seemed industrial or at least infrastructural; but what was it, actually?

In considering the workplace qualities of the scheme, we focused on developing 2 stories of open plan space interconnected by courtyards and staircases to promote an informal, inter-departmental, cross-discipline egalitarian work space of great spatial and social flexibility.

Courtyards, of varying sizes, introduce light and air into the deep open plan, but also introduce landmarks and orientation. This consequently produces a very interesting spatial flexibility unknown to the *'Bürolandschaft'* open plan office layout. There is no sense '*of workspace as floorplate',* as Jay Merrick noted in his AR review of the building (Architectural Review February 2016).

There is here a particularity as to where one is situated in this field; a particularity in relation to the perimeter wall, encased in an aluminium veil, and a particularity to the various courtyards, each of different size, colour and planting arrangement. There is a constant assessment of position in relation to the constellating landmarks, and a feeling of being within a benign landscape of great spatial, and social, possibility.

'The label 'office' evaporates, giving way to something more intriguing: this is a hybrid interior – workplace meets indeterminate settlement.'
(Jay Merrick AR´)

The arrangement of office and non-office workspaces is treated equally. Non-office workspaces constituted 40% of the brief include a training room for underground fitting work, teaching rooms and a boiler-training unit fitted with more than 20 historic, but still functional, boilers.

Natural light also dominates here – in a further confirmation of the shared workplace conditions.
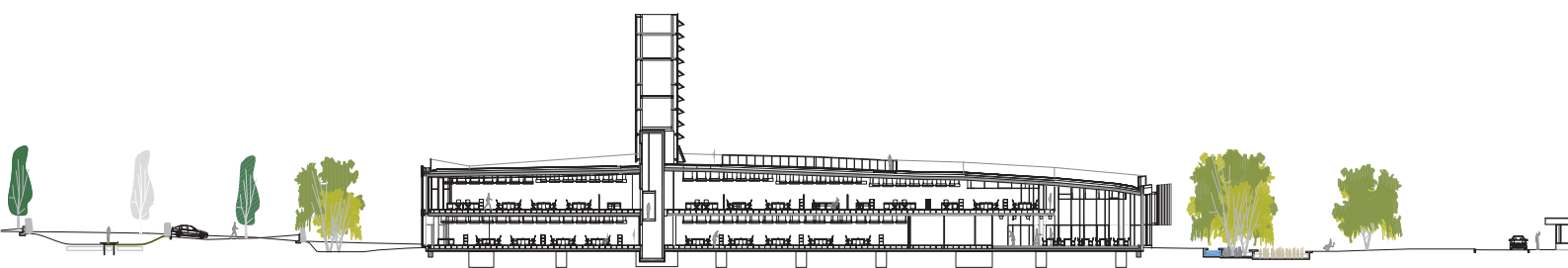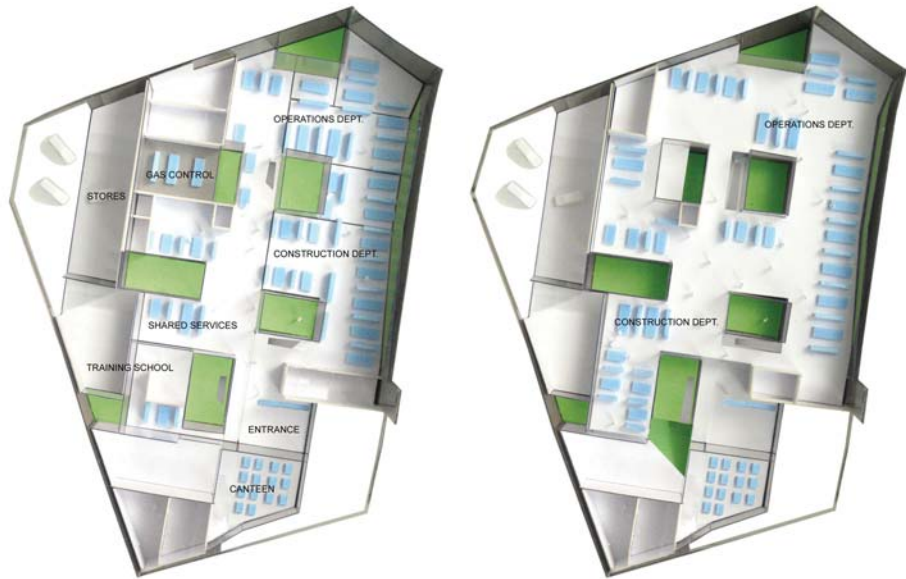
Early organisational studies showing departmental adjacencies and connections, as well as work station positioning in relation to courtyards and perimeter.

Stores, Workshops

Offices

Canteen, Social space

'Two storeys, two staircases, one lift, so everybody can see everybody else moving through the building.'

There is little or no sense of spatial or professional demarcation: three-quarters of both floors are open plan across their central areas, with low-level section dividers. The double- height restaurant at the building's south-east corner can be looked down on from the first floor, and open entrance courtyards cut into both ends of the plan's central axis. The main entrance, the stores entrance and the training school entrance are all equally represented on the wrap-around façade, hierarchically indistinct.

Main Entrances

Stores

Training School

Returning to work

'MORE ISLAND COMMUNITY THAN OFFICE'
Gas Networks Ireland Services Centre Dublin by Denis Byrne Architects

WINNER

ANNAVILLE HOUSING

Form: The ocean liner, the phalanstery
Content: Dwellings with generous communal spaces
Models: Unité d'Habitation, The Printworks (Dublin)

The circulation section diagram shows the 'gangplank' access to the main block. The gangplank manifests the '*boarding*' process, as if entering on to a vessel or a settlement typology. Inside (or on board) and outside are distinctly defined to emphasize the collective form and social autonomy within the suburban landscape.
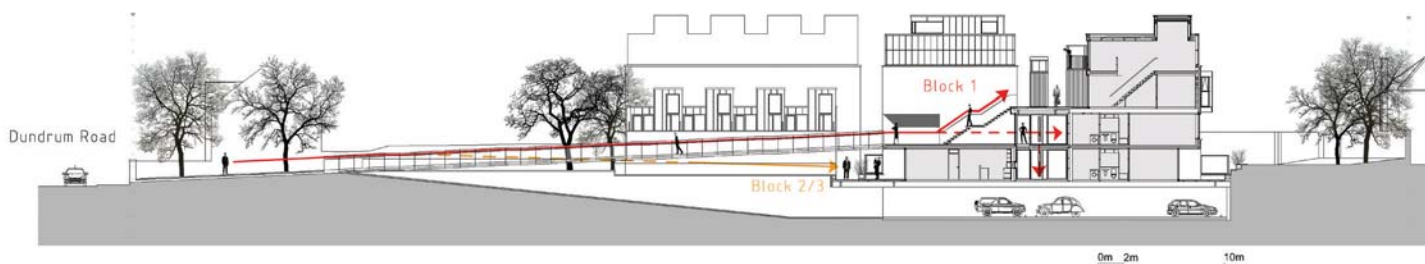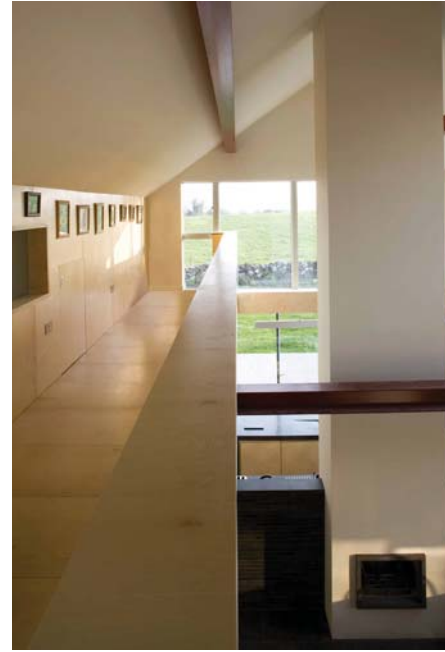
SLIGO HOUSE

Form: The Barn
Content: Individual rooms off a large shared space
Models: The manor-house

A main space for family life enclosed by smaller more private rooms expresses an attitude to lifestyle and social openness of a family of six in Co Sligo. The living space acts as the family forum and gathering place, whilst opening out to the garden and the wider landscape, in an ancient paradigm of considerable continuing relevance.
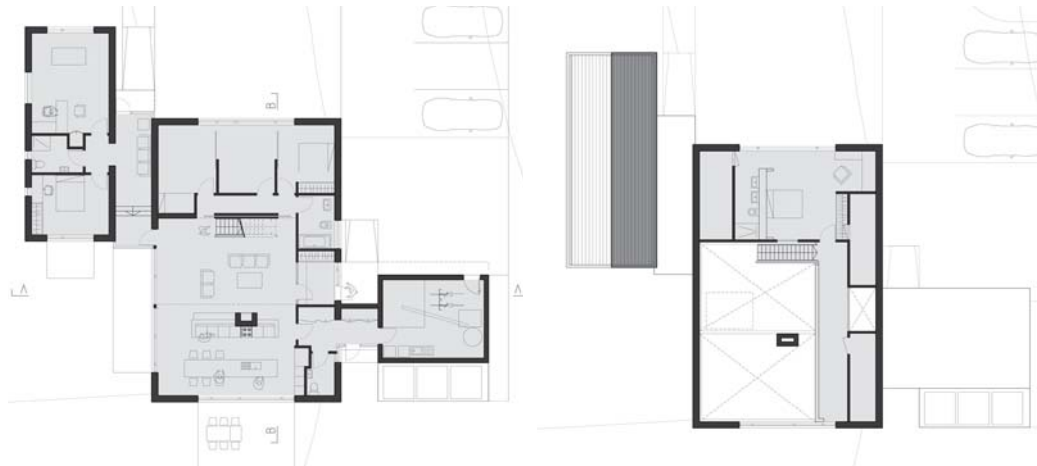
House *by Mackenzie Ellwood*

Stairs to parents room and gallery

Kitchen- cooking and fire places back to back

View from parents room
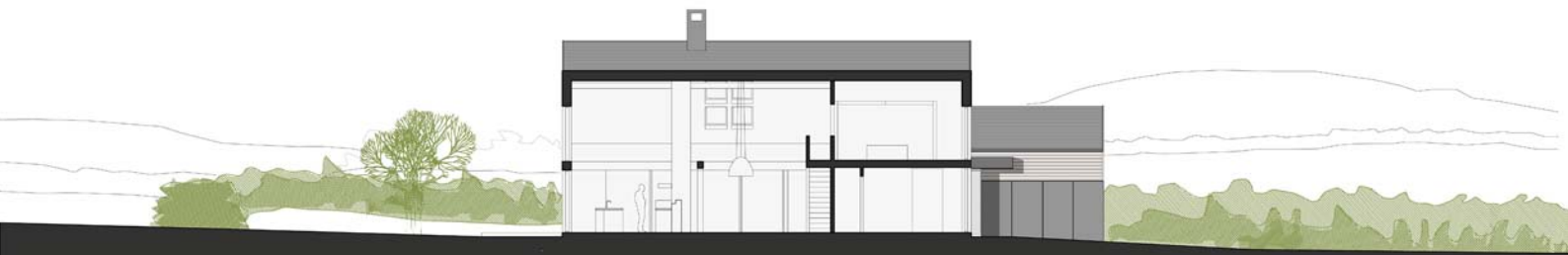
house 54n 08w

section AA and BB 1:200

SECTION 2 The Main Concepts

C

SOCIAL POTENTIAL   Social Valency

An anthropological digression – Social Valency – Chess: strategy and tactics – Frankenspace – Proxemics – Right size – Mike Gold's dolls house – The modern institution – Colour – Mood / Atmosphere – Nested spaces

'Space in the image of man is place and time in the image of man is occasion'.
(Aldo van Eyck – p50, 'The Child, The City and The Artist', 1962)

A related strand to social attitude, this area of research surfaces and highlights the means, within my current work, whereby design consciously seeks to increase the potential for social encounter. This strand is supported by an in-depth essay on the Cigar Box –'*The Seven Thresholds of the Cigar Box*' (Section 3).

We return now however, to the stated primacy of this research, the study of the human act, earlier called a figural concept, and the contention that a rich architecture is no less than the proper framing of this figure. On these terms, all buildings are ground in relation to the figure (the act, or social encounter). However, on occasion elements of ground have the power, or are empowered, to become figural on interaction with the figure. The making of good ground, ground that is capable of prompting and receiving the figure is the fundamental root of all good architecture at any scale, whether that of the city or of the detail.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIGRESSION

I discussed, in **Section 1**, the anthropological advantage of sociality to the survival of humans. However, it is well-known that not all human species survived, only we Homo Sapiens are alive today, not Homo Neanderthalis nor Homo Denisovis, nor any of our sister human species. Our more developed culture, language, and superior social skills apparently gave us a Darwinian edge, and the other species gradually died out, or were pushed out. It is intriguing to wonder, had these near-relation human species survived to today, what their culture might have been like, or how they would have approached the idea of settlement, or what kinds of social formation they would have constructed and how they would differ from us. Within these differences I believe would lie fascinating and highly illuminating insights into the mystery of our own type of humanity.

Aldo Van Eyck – City Orphanage Amsterdam, child-centred spatial diagram

Our behavior, being largely chemical-based and hormonal, makes of us creatures of some caprice and pronounced sub-conscious sensitivity. We sense before we see, using all our sensory antennae, the product of our long habitation in landscapes that held considerable danger due to our position in the middle of the food chain. This primeval sub-conscious attunement holds tremendous potential for the better practicing of a framing architecture and it provides the shadowy background for the following discussions.

SOCIAL VALENCY

The social potential of a space, good ground, may be augmented or detracted from by the decisions of the designer. The readiness of the ground to become figure, its level of attractiveness to significant movement, and its consequent potential to encourage meaningful social encounter I have called its **valency** – with apologies to our chemistry and linguistic professors from whom I borrow the term. I lay claim to this useful concept as it has not, to my knowledge, been used in a purely architectural context previously, though I stand open to being corrected on this point.

Valency is a term that means, in chemistry, the combining power of an element, and, in linguistics, the number of grammatical elements with which a particular word combines in a sentence. It is a general gauge of combinative power and I will use it here to describe an aspiration for openness or receptiveness in architectural and social terms.

A sense of this idea is contained in the root meaning of the French term '*polyvalente*' which rather prosaically translates into English as '*multi-purpose*', a translation that rather robs the French meaning of its poetic depth. The words Salle Polyvalente to me conjure images of a kind of a spatial-social Velcro-type mechanism, one that sticks occasion firmly in place.

All space is potentially social space. However, some spaces will have more social combinative power (**valency**) than others, depending on the intended activity to be housed in the spaces and of their proportions or size. Each human activity has a right size for its purpose, and designed spaces, if they are hoping to be truly
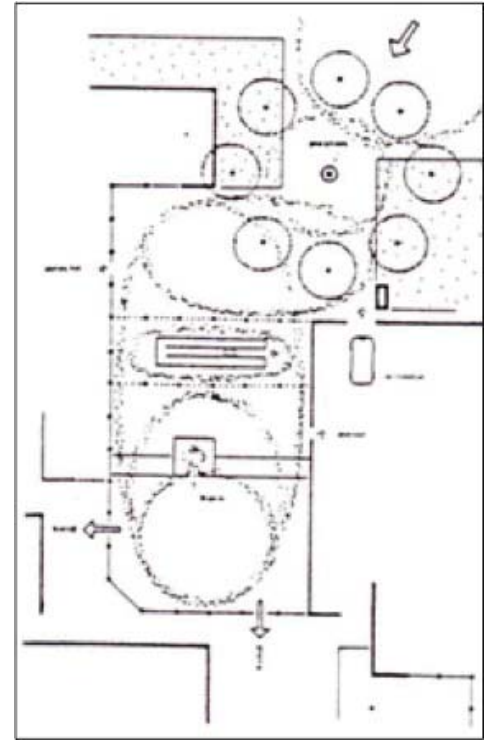
'*polyvalente*', of being open or receptive to all, must ideally operate in a symphonic register, as a concert organ rather than a tin whistle. The fine-tuning of these spaces will then become the work of the *maestro di spazio*.
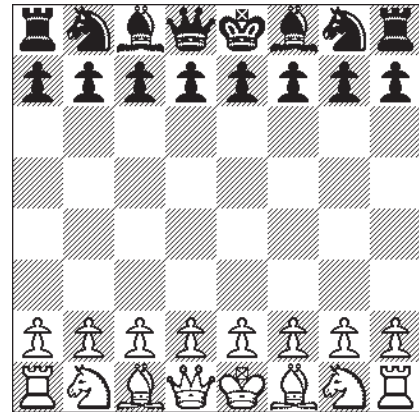
The practical framing of this conceptual interest would ideally occur naturally within the office during each project. At the relevant point, generally quite early on following the organisational resolution, the primary focus tends to view the proposed architectural spaces as a system or collection of controlled valencies, each undergoing a fine-tuning in order to be alert to the combinative possibilities of social potential.

CHESS: STRATEGY AND TACTICS

In this, it is reminiscent of chess, of which I am an enthusiast, in that this dynamic is necessarily tactical, it operates within the game. The ideas on Social Attitude, discussed previously, operate at a strategic level and, in chess terms, are what the player brings to the game - each player will have a style or way of playing (**attitude**), be it a positional or more of an attacking style. This background strategy or attitude, alive to possibilities and

CHESS
Heuristic thought process, used to speed up the process of finding a satisfactory solution via mental shortcuts to ease the cognitive load of making a decision.

Post-strategy, pre-tactics

opportunities, directs the operations on the board through tactics, as calibrated responses to changing conditions, to reveal possible advantage. This attitude moreover, speeds up the heuristic thought process, by discarding all moves not aligning with the strategic principles, thus easing the cognitive load of making a decision amongst many alternatives. This operation becomes almost instinctive and is characterized by chess players as having a '*feel*' for the position, a sensing of potential amongst the contingent many.

Returning now to the central discussion, an increase in the valency of a space may be arrived at, depending on circumstance, either by the conception of the space(s) as positive entities that may be volumetrically composed (*nested spaces*), or as a system of discrete elements organised such that they cohere within a given context (*object community*) or a mixture of both. The success of the space may be measured by the multiplicity of actions or encounters that it either supports, prompts, or positively demands.

The architectural project, of whatever scale, provides a potential frame for social interaction. These interactions may happen anywhere, in either public or in private spaces, and at any time. The work of the architect, in this understanding, is to anticipate and maximize the possibility for these interactions to happen within their projects to produce vibrant social spaces.

A calibration of the valency of spaces, one that can reckon capacity of a space for social interaction, may possibly be attempted intellectually by means of a sliding scale, based on '*5*' at one end on the most intimate of spaces - confessional, a room for two - and by '*1*' at the other by places of transition - airport (the architecture of the digestive tract) or bus station - or of retreat - hermitage or charterhouse.

It would thus be theoretically possible for the usefulness and success of space, at least in social terms, it to be measured by its position relative to these extremes of Social Valency. This scale, though imaginary, I have nevertheless found to be a useful guide as a conceptual design tool. It demands a focus on the improving, or perfecting, of spaces for social occasion. In my head, the social calibration is performed by something akin to mathematical logarithm tables, of a kind yet to be invented.

A superficially similar concept is discussed by Christopher Alexander in '*A Pattern Language*', that of an '*intimacy gradient*' (p 610). He states that '*In any building- house, office, public building, summer cottage- people need a gradient of settings, which have different degrees of intimacy*', moving from a bedroom to a sitting room to common areas to the front porch and so on. This deals with the relative positioning of each area, and their sequencing, in relation to the public zone, and is thus proposed as a planimetric organizational device, and not as a method by which the social potential of each space may be analysed and improved.

Following the research into my previous work and the consequent surfacing of this interest in the dynamics of social potential, my increased awareness of architectural space as a system of controlled valencies, each attuned to the combinative possibilities of place and occasion, has contributed to new ways of thinking about the efficacy of architecture at the point of use.

FRANKENSPACE

Some supposedly public spaces may score quite low on our imaginary scale, as they are not very conducive to social activity; Tiananman Square for instance or the unforgivable wastelands of the kind seen around badly designed housing estates (SLOAP or *space left over after planning'*), joined up scraps of space which I call *Frankenspace*. This is what usually results, very often at an urban design level, when a scheme is cobbled together from bits of *'what-worked-elsewhere'* to approximate a plausible design solution, without at all understanding or taking time to explore the specifics of place and occasion. The otherwise honourable disciplines of collage and mash-up are all too often debased and subverted by ill-thought execution.

Alienation

I can now move on to talk about some of the concepts that constellate the idea of Social Potential. These concepts originate in the overlapping of the fields of anthropology, architecture and phenomenology, and include Proxemics, Nested Spaces, Mood or Atmosphere, Right Size or Fit and Colour, amongst others. I will introduce examples of these from my body of work in the following pages.

PROXEMICS

Edward T Hall, the cultural anthropologist who coined the term in 1963, emphasized the impact of proxemic behavior (the use of space) on interpersonal communication. Hall believed that the value in studying proxemics comes from its applicability in evaluating not only the way people interact with others in daily life, but also '*the organization of space in [their] houses and buildings, and ultimately the layout of* [their] *towns'*. Proxemics can be defined as '*the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture'.* (Attrib.)

Proxemics deals with our radiated zones of personal space and the strict limits we all have as to what may be considered acceptable within each zone. We know when a zone is being transgressed and we are uncomfortable as a result; our evolution has hard-wired us for this.

PROXEMICS

The study of set measurable distances between people as they interact.

EDWARD T. HALL, Anthropologist

4 TYPES OF SPACE

* *Intimate* distance for embracing, touching or whispering
  o Close phase – less than 6 inches (15 cm)
  o Far phase – 6 to 18 inches (15 to 46 cm)

* *Personal* distance for interactions among good friends or family members
  o Close phase – 1.5 to 2.5 feet (46 to 76 cm)
  o Far phase – 2.5 to 4 feet (76 to 120 cm)

* *Social* distance for interactions among acquaintances
  o Close phase – 4 to 7 feet (1.2 to 2.1 m)
  o Far phase – 7 to 12 feet (2.1 to 3.7 m)

* *Public* distance used for public speaking
  o Close phase – 12 to 25 feet (3.7 to 7.6 m)
  o Far phase – 25 feet (7.6 m) or more

As a corollary, as Hall suggests, we may readily imagine a situation whereby architectural space is designed by these measures to produce, by scientific means, the intended multiplicity of proxemically correct spaces. This imagined space would allow a socially symphonic response, or at least a chamber piece, in order to provide a range of overlapping spaces of differing social potential, ranging from the most intimate (15-46 cms) to the most public (3.7-7.6 ms and more), in a carefully calibrated mechanism for human interaction. This possibility, once highlighted, has become a compelling and assisting concept for me in attempts at finding the **right size** or fit in spatial composition.

RIGHT SIZE

This man is snug in his corner. He chose this breakfast table every morning at the hotel where I stayed during PRS 7 (London). I can understand the attraction; the slight recess, in a corner with the light fitting overhead conducive to reading, the table just big enough for one, being able to survey the room surreptitiously, appearing just social enough so as not to appear unsocial. The space is therefore a good fit for this activity for this person; it is the right size.

Pub snugs have a similar fitness for purpose; they are designed to promote intimacy, where there is none, or sustain it, where it exists, often well beyond closing time. Snugs are separated small rooms off larger rooms where the proxemic effect of intimacy and alcohol may, and usually does, enormously enhance the Social Potential.

Man in Breakfast Room
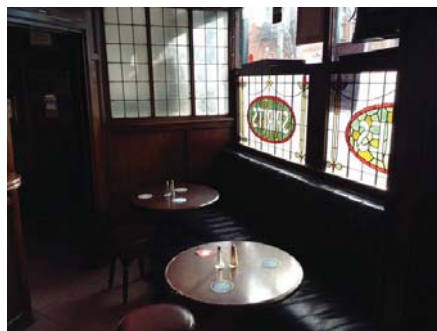
Snug

'In a small room with just another person what you say you may never have said before'   Louis Kahn

MIKE GOLD'S DOLLS HOUSE

Won in an early 1980's design competition in the Architectural Design magazine for a contemporary take on the dolls house, the Mike Gold project is the epitome of fit and right size.
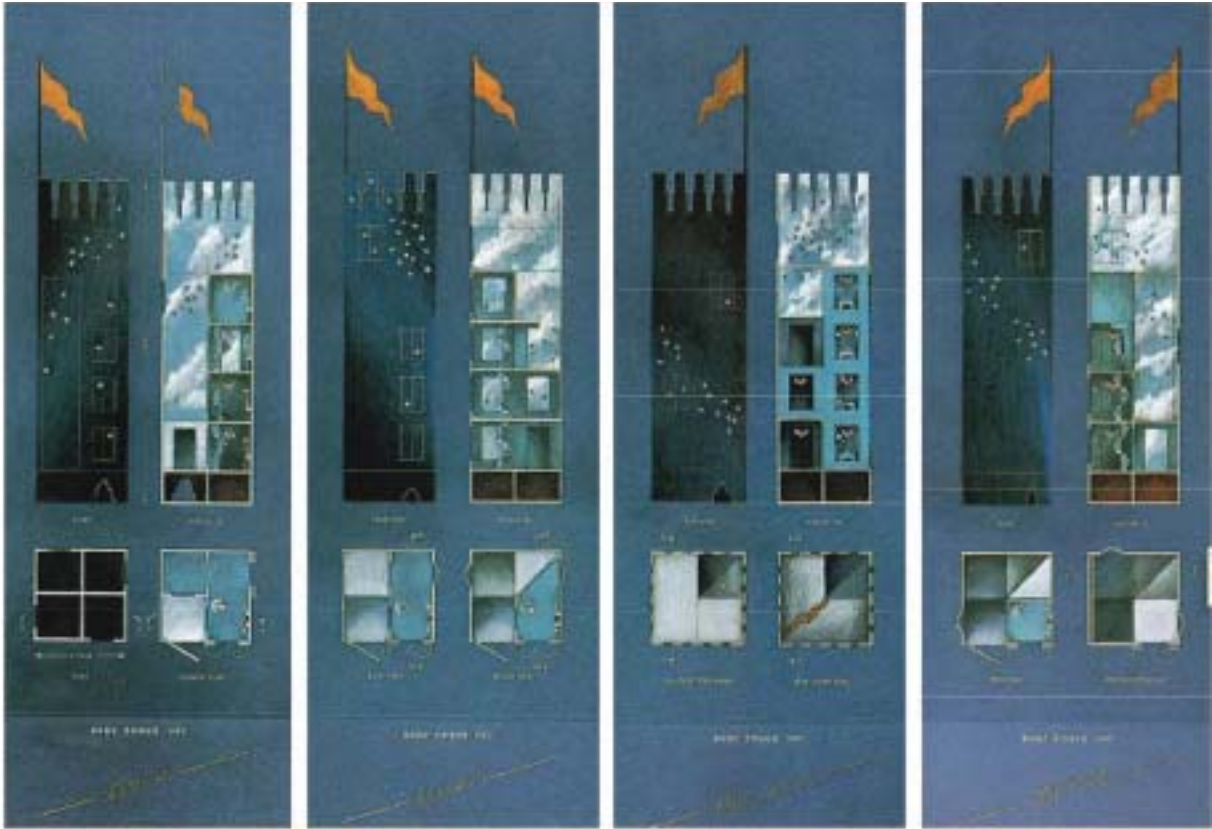
Designed as tower, spatial container and storage it allows access to its interior to persons of the right size, who may climb the internal staircase, discovering rooms as they go, to reach the top floor in order to survey the surrounding space. I can think of no more beautiful example of fit, utility and poetics - except maybe that of Beuys' womb-like wrappings of fat and felt; it has a dream-like, haunting quality and it never entirely leaves my mind.
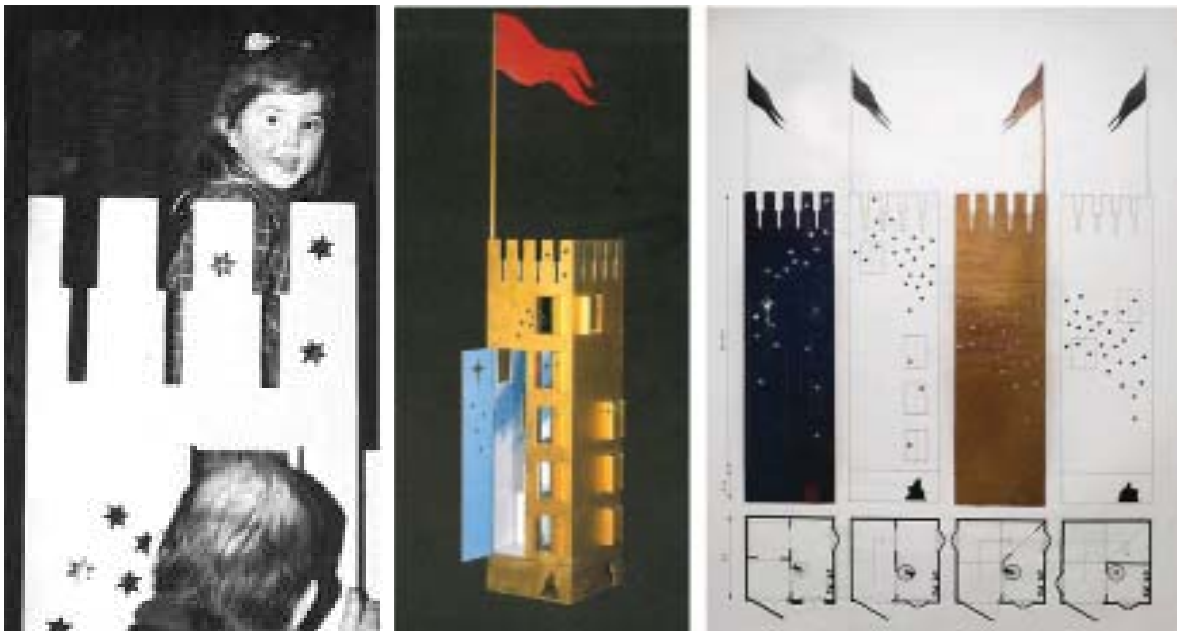
I tried to capture some of this quality in a project involving the internal connection of two floors in the Cigar Box. Essentially, a made hole in the floor accommodates a new staircase connecting the two levels. Here the staircase was embedded within a wardrobe-like construction, which contained a bookcase, a desk-space for computer work, a kitchen pantry and a space for the display of artworks. One enters the wardrobe on the lower floor, ascends within its interior lined with books and art, to emerge as if to a different world on the upper floor, in an Alice-in-Wonderland-like oneiric movement.

THE MODERN INSTITUTION   Fit in the Gas Networks building

The Gas Networks building is a loose fit spatially, and it is neither Bürolandschaft (non-determinate space) nor cellular rooms (determinate), though it has elements of each. It describes a third way of organizing space, where the fit is appropriate for a determinedly hierarchically non-specific institution. The plan is composed of an open plan ordered by informally arranged courtyard insertions, that provide not only light and air to a deep plan but also orientation and a sense of place. This is not to be confused with the formally composed '*informal*' arrangements that one may see in offices of the newer technology companies, which are interior fit-outs of conventional office buildings.

Gas Networks Ireland –
Corporate informal layout under one roof   Google Offices, Dublin

The plan may also be discussed as a series of **nested spaces**, each of which is sufficiently large to accommodate from 8-16 workers within a local cluster. Each cluster has access to openable windows, though the building is supplied with fresh air in a displacement-type system, on either a side of a courtyard or the exterior wall, in a large variety of possible situations. The idea of right size here is one of mental ease and a certain spatial comfort.

The big discovery with the Gas Networks plan is how functionally non-specific it can be and how it may easily be appropriated for a variety of uses; it appears to be an excellent fit for a modern social institution (school, hospitals, etc) or progressive corporations in that it is non-hierarchical, promotes informal social groupings and downplays overt typological references and expectations.

The open space

Gas Networks interior

COLOUR

'Color stimulates certain moods in us. It awakens joy or fear in accordance with its configuration. In fact, the whole world, as we experience it visually, comes to us through the mystic realm of color. Our entire being is nourished by it. This mystic quality of color should likewise find expression in a work of art.'
(Hans Hofmann '*Search for the Real and other essays*' MIT)

I do not think I know very much about colour, but I do know of its importance. Listening to Siobhan Ni Eanaigh, at the various PRS's, and her potent descriptions of colour in her work, gave me fresh impetus to try to understand its language. Siobhan is a fellow Dublin-based architect, also undertaking the PhD course, whose projects, especially schools, use colour in a significant and thoughtful way.

Since these instructive presentations, my first willful use of additional colour, where I may not previously have considered it in such an integrated way as Siobhan, is in the School at Carrig, Co. Tipperary, currently nearing completion. It is a small existing country school, a historic building, essentially being quadrupled in size. We have used 4 bright colours throughout the school to signify entrances (4) and classroom dyads (4). The 4 colours come together in the new Assembly Room ceiling at the heart of the building, in a celebration of community.

Unité corridor, Marseille

We have used colour also to signal intervention. Some windows, salvaged from the demolition stage, are positioned along corridors but with colour film on the glass in order to modify the light. This gives a character to the particular corridor and a sense of place and atmosphere, which will hopefully prompt moment if not actual occasion.

Corridor and existing window re-used

The colours are also used to link the adjoining church building into the overall school building composition, after the church committee approached us to advise on their new painting scheme. The school and church are historically linked and are listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage as - *'Carrig Church occupies a prominent position on Carrig Hill… and it forms an interesting group of structures with the parochial house to the north-east and national school to the south-east.'* (NIAH Reg No 22401439). This is a rare chance to link the two institutions thematically to underpin the idea of a community of buildings.

Sketch-up of hill grouping

Current views

MOOD / ATMOSPHERE   The Cigar Box Staircase

The staircase, open and external, yet covered, is the shared open space at the heart of the building. It was born of an interest in movement spaces, spaces where people move out of personal space into the space of social potential, spaces that are between the private and the fully public, and spaces where one is still on home turf but within an informal zone of social possibilities- one enters an architecture of social potential and possible occasion, open to encounter.

The importance of stairs and spaces of transition for encounter potential, of viewing and being viewed, is exploited to its fullest in the great staircase hall of the Paris Opera (Garnier 1861-75). Here the dynamic Opera stairs is the real star of the show, and the performance is essentially a pretext for the peacock display of Belle Époque society.

Inauguration of the Paris Opera in 1875 (*Édouard Detaille*, 1878) / Public Domain

NESTED SPACES   The Cigar Box

Spatially indeterminate, composed of multiple overlapping possible domains, the Cigar Box plan maintains a fictive completeness even when partitions have been introduced, or removed, for programmatic reasons.

HOUSE | CITY
PRIVATE | PUBLIC

CIGAR BOX

Original Plan

2006

2010

First floor

Cigar Box- Space Formation
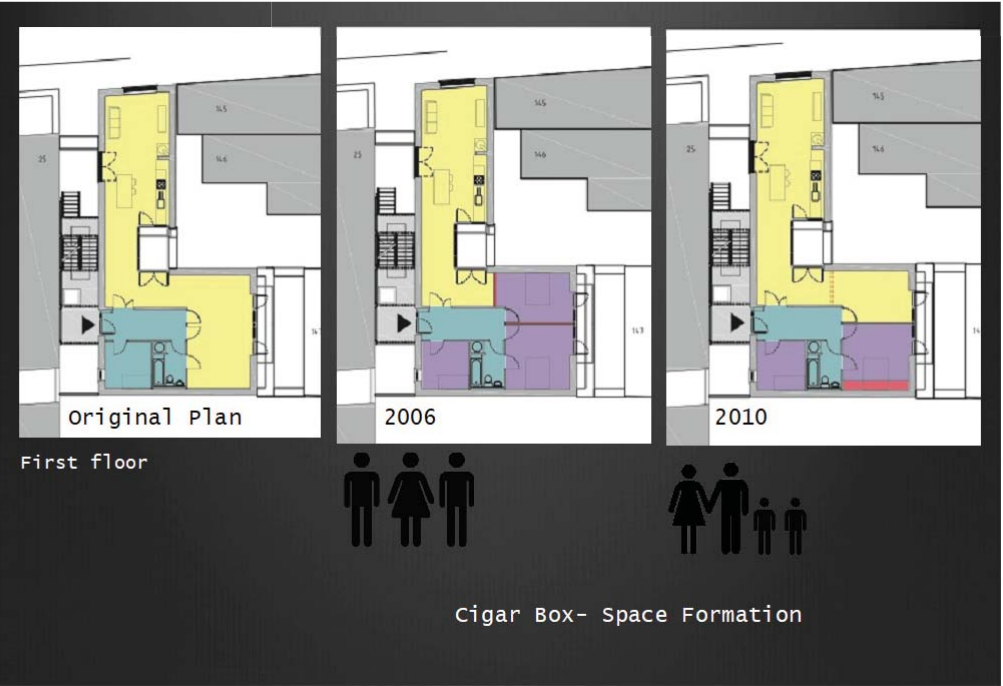
Potential

darc space gallery

SECTION 3   Exposition I

SECTION 3   Exposition I

A

THE SEVEN THRESHOLDS OF THE CIGAR BOX
The Inflected Step and other steps – The gates – The staircase in the city – The balcony – The Cigar Box – Nested spaces – The shuttered window

HOUSE PRIVATE | CITY PUBLIC

CIGAR BOX

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING
5 CIGAR BOX
6 LIVING SPACE
7 WINDOW
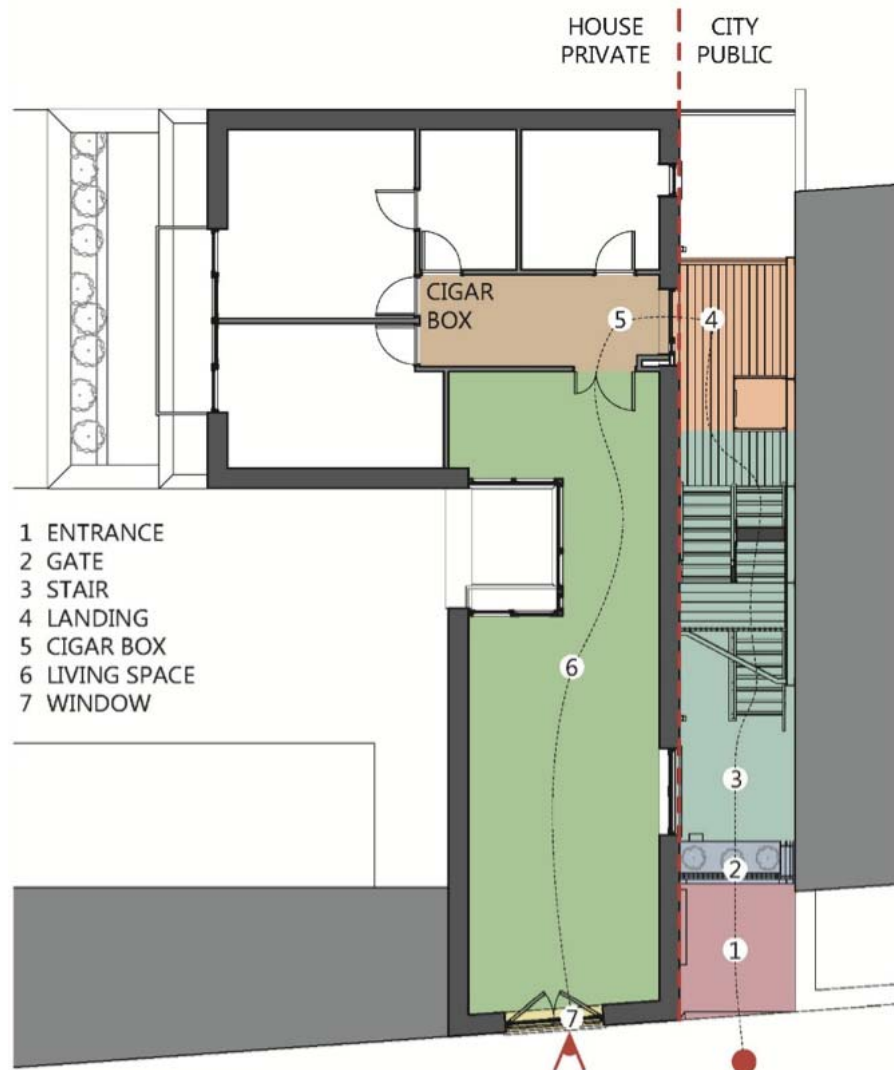
1. **The Inflected Step** and other steps
2. The Gates
3. **The Staircase in the City**
4. The Balcony
5. The Cigar Box Lobbies
6. The Loft Space
7. The Shuttered Window

An illustrated description of the thoughts and processes underlying the design, and reflections-on-design, of the building known as the Cigar Box.

CIGAR
BOX

1 ENTRANCE

THRESHOLD 1. – THE INFLECTED STEP   and other steps

At the junction of the building with the city, lies the inflected step, connecting circumstance and absolute on old Archdall's Hill. At the crossing of this junction one is transported from the particularities of the city at this place (a sloped, historic, mainly residential street) to the enclosed Euclidean world of the building, with its discipline of horizontality, plumbness and the laws of physics; a discipline against which, even the most exceptional designers will need to work hard to sustain contrary arguments.

The inflection at the threshold signals invitation, seeks to befriend the wheel, and makes manifest, within its taut compactness of stone, the resolution of geometries necessitated by the meeting of nature - the given angle of the sloping hill – and artifice – the building. No other buildings in the historic area make this accommodation; each come crashing to the street in a clatter of platform and steps, oblivious of and indifferent to what it finds when it gets there. The resolution is usually blunt and pragmatic, with none of the nuanced refinement to be found elsewhere in these structures. The inflection is thus an oddity, a small signal of invitation, at the same time both a recognition of boundary and a petrified threshold, holding the same position in relation to the ship and pier as the gangplank, another connector of different physical

realms, and like the gangplank it gives occasion for a momentary pause before transit. It provides an element of slight resistance, an interruption in the field, which prompts a subliminal conversation (What foot do I lead with? Shall I, or my friend, take the thin end of the wedge?), a result of its unusualness. The step provides a highly particular transfer from the continuous uneven ramp of the sloping street up on to the level datum of the buildings ground floor plateau, while also reassuring local accessibility legislation.

It is a curious thing that the Georgian townhouse, now a paradigm of the urban in many ways, is clumsy at actually meeting the city. Its terraced autonomy is inept at stopping to make corners, and it struggles to cohere in landscapes of other than table-like flatness. Its refusal to distort the model form to accommodate differences of context, unlike say, the Parisian Hotel, renders it on occasion an air of awkwardness. The Georgian town in fact does not deal at all well with contour, its premier representatives being almost topographically dull; even in the eventful geography of Edinburgh, the New Town quarter found a safe plateau, away from the surrounding treacherous hills with their chaotic collage of urban fragments ('*no set-pieces to be found here, citizens'*), determined to be refined, composed and above the mob.

FRONT ELEVATION

END ELEVATION

PLAN

Entrance granite
1 no.

2500

slope to match site angle 3.7 degrees
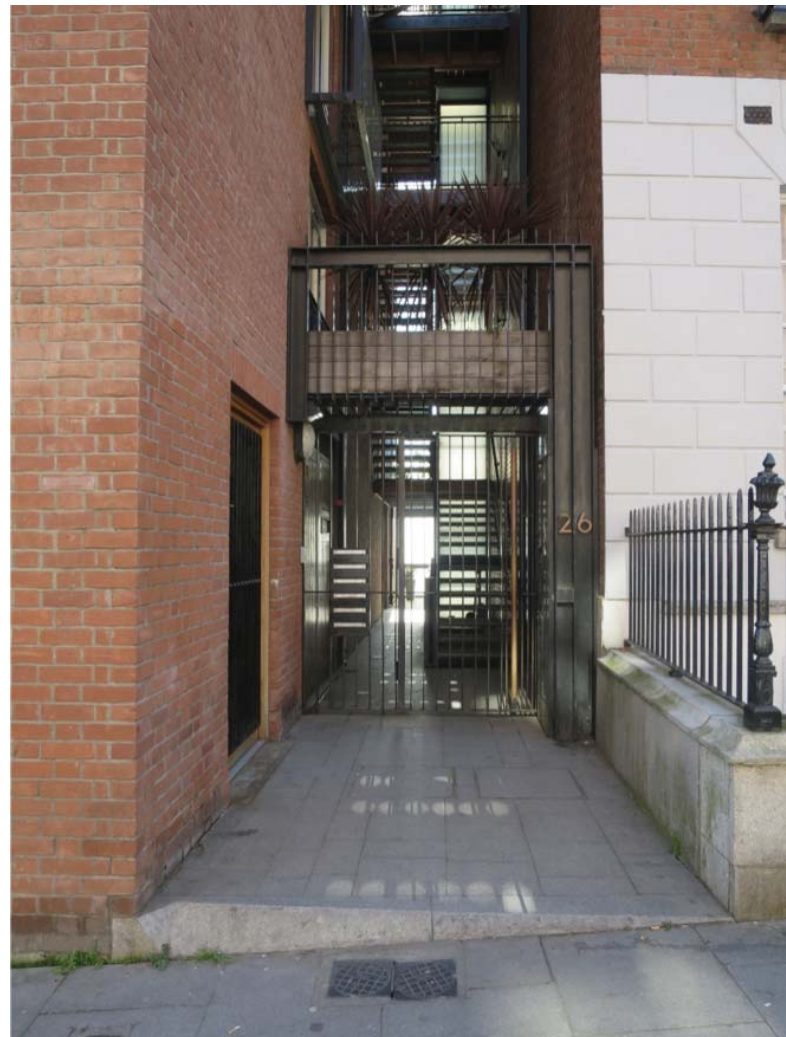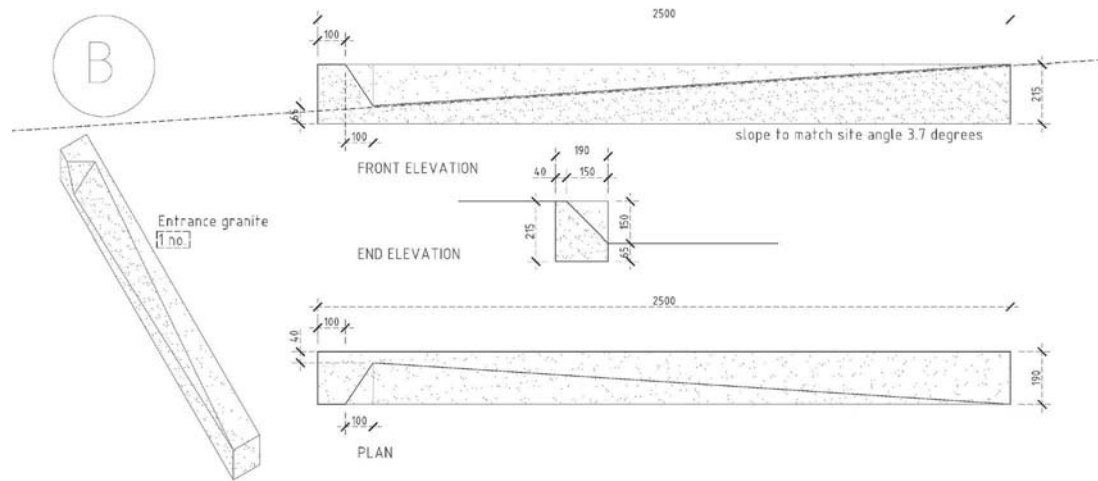
The stone is Granite (from Latin Granum- a grain); this is a rock that is felsic (feldspar and quartz rich), intrusive (forming within the earth's crust), igneous (formed from the cooling of magma or lava), that constitutes the basement of all land continents and that is a source of natural radiation (radon formed from uranium decay). Cleopatra's Needle, of Red Syenite Granite, quarried at the First Cataract, survived 2,00 years in arid desert conditions, but very quickly suffered a drastic deterioration when brought to London's semi-toxic atmosphere.

The granite is from China. From deep inside the mountains of Fujian province, it expresses within its new disciplined shape a description of a part of the earth's surface half a world away. The knowledge of that particular gradient, contained in a set of short instructions, found its way to a stonecutters yard in southeastern China, and directed the purposeful fashioning of a singular piece of stone (a horizontal obelisk), amongst the other countless pieces of generic stones destined for world-wide dispersal.

The step suggests an architecture of admittance or at least potential; the door is half open, and the invitation is neither demonstrative nor patronising. The inflection mimes something of the rubbed arris edge of the more ancient neighbours, as centuries of foot traffic have eroded the original chiselled sharpness of the quarry, or even something of the adjacent historic foot-scrapers, emblematic of the act of preparation for entry, now charmingly vestigial perhaps but not entirely useless. The slowly-returning soft, foot-worn form tells of the stones ancient origin as a slowly cooling liquid rock, expelled long ago from the planets inner depths, destined for eventual fashioning aeons later as a facilitator for the passage of human feet.

The architect (me) was at pains here to signal thickness and heft, aiming to add a visual weight to the welcoming carpet of stone at the buildings initial threshold with the city. The stone is solid, not cladding, thus to better offer a reading of thickness and volume rather than a modern planarity of tread and riser visible in recent nearby attempts at giving good threshold, the thinness of thought signifying a casual indifference to both form and substance.

The Steps of North Great Georges Street

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	29	30	31	32

CIGAR
BOX

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE

THRESHOLD 2. – THE GATES   On the Knocking at the Gate

The metal gate demarcates the publicly accessible area. It is a valve to control access and has been designed to signal a welcome but also be defensively secure. The welcome is provided by the planted overhang that protects one from rain when pushing the access codes for entry, an activity formerly known as '*searching for keys*'. The defense is signaled by (i) weight, both visual and actual, (ii) the spikiness of the planting and that of the supporting metal bars (see photo over).

HOUSE   CITY
PRIVATE   PUBLIC

CIGAR
BOX

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR

THRESHOLD 3. – THE STAIRCASE IN THE CITY   Life in the Gap

Between 2 grids, the historic Georgian and the irregular corner, the gap describes and separates both to provide a way in to both the building and the interior of the block. It is a space of the city in which the communal life of the building is enacted. The business of getting from the gate to ones front door becomes an engagement with the urban condition, a vertical ascent in cityspace. It is analogous to the tenement staircase of my memory, that of my grandmother's house, a semi-public space connecting the various tenancies (it was my grandfather's job to shut the big front door in the evenings), a place of play and adventure and a quintessential piece of city.

The gap enables the inner workings of the building, outside of the apartments, to be viewed from the street. This space, in more conventional apartment buildings, is called landlords space, and is usually hidden from view. It usually contains an internal no-mans-land of dull, low-maintenance stairs and corridor, an area of no distinction to be traversed as quickly as possible. No meetings are encouraged or wanted here, and social encounters are actively avoided. As critique of this received notion, the staircase was conceived as a vertical public space reveling in the childlike joy of a visible ascent within the city.

It is a space for casual encounters, for the serendipity of the in-formal social meeting; it provides a frame for coincidence and an opportunity for chance sheltered interaction with others.

The space has been observed to be used for:

the parking and washing of bicycles,
the growing of plants,
relaxing,
meeting the postman,
storing rubbish,
waving at neighbours through their windows,
hailing friends on the street,
greetings and conversations,
play,
sitting and thinking,
handstands,
skipping,
football,
the training of kittens,
drinking alcohol in the summer,
smoking cigarettes and other things,
resting between floors,
looking at the city, and
opening of front doors.
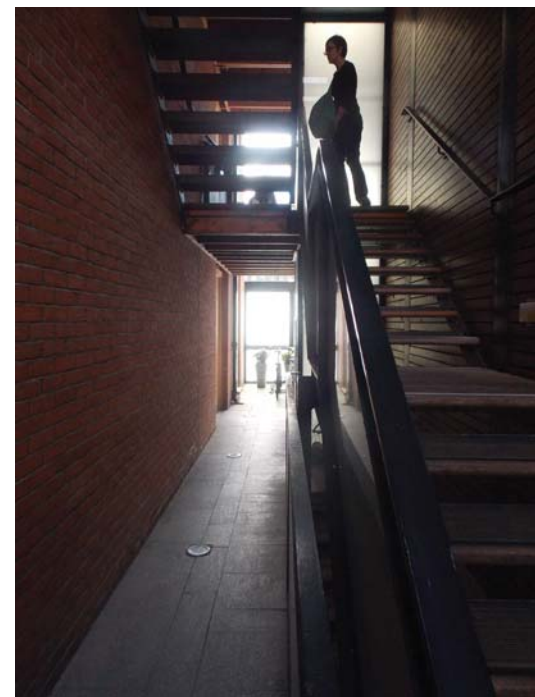
The space is part of the Architecture of Potential Occasions. From the casual observer's point of view the Cigar Box building is ground and the gap is figural; the gap contains a sculptural, or at least a modeled object – the staircase, explicit in the movements and encounters of its inhabitants in their comings and goings, a guts-out version of the tenement house and organized on not dissimilar social principles. It is a no-need-for-Xray-specs type of building element.

The sectional hierarchy of the traditional Georgian house, with above and below stairs is replaced with stacked and differentiated spaces, each a variant on the other, though all with their own particular advantage. The equalising mechanism in this case is dependant on the y-axis, being the height at which one is above the level of the ground floor datum; though the lower floors are larger and closer to the ground (bringing to mind the Parisian hierarchy of '*étage sans ascenseur*') the upper floors receive more light due to the mechanics of the stepped section – they can therefore grow better flowers.
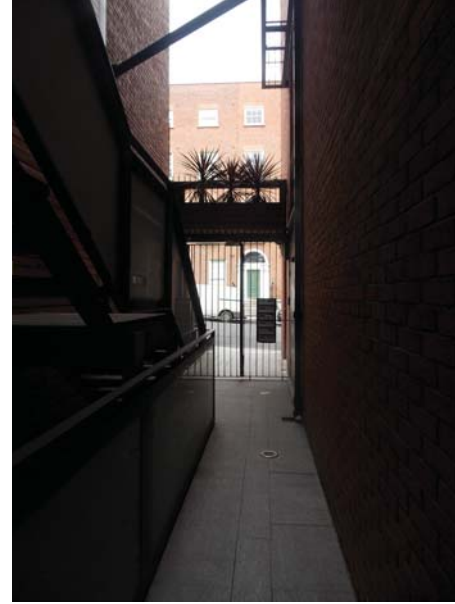
Moreover, despite or as a consequence of being smaller in area (being more elevated) they enjoy prospects of the city across rooftops, of rotundas, of spires and steeples, of distant mountain and a double sense of the sea. Besides the occasional salty whiff of sea air, few parts of Dublin City are far from the sea, the upper floors are the beginning of the realm of the sea-birds, forever present, circling and calling, imperious in their chimney pot perch and intolerant of interlopers, especially during nesting season, when you had better watch your head. Their presence reminds us that the urban world of height and vantage echoes that of their natural habitat of cliff and perch; they see no difference, all is serendipitous in the end.
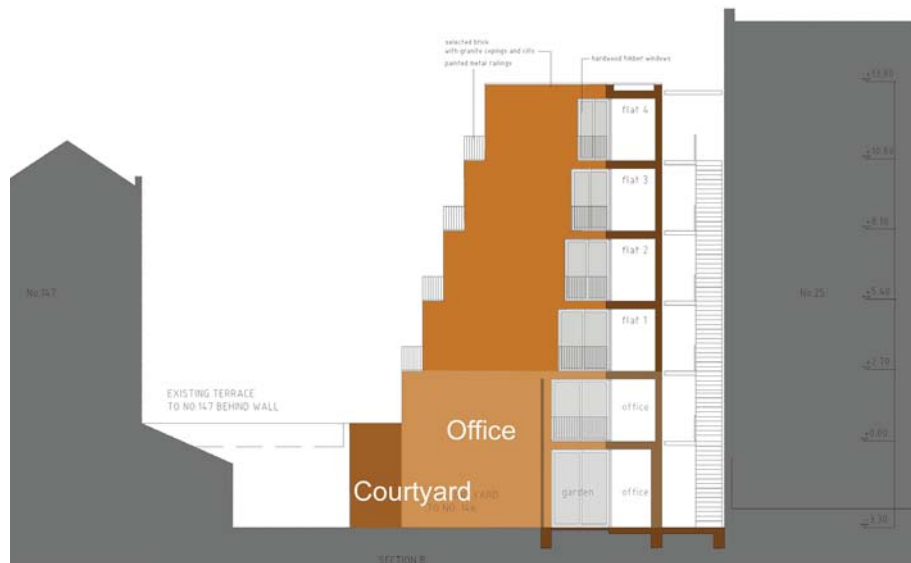
This threshold to a different element (the air) qualitatively differs the upper floors from those below and encourages the notion of the staircase ascent as a privilege and not a chore. The view over the city also allows the middle-distance to predominate and this slight remove favours a reserve and detachment that may best be the preserve of the artist, or at least the artistic temperament.

Appropriately, a Photographer lives here on the top floor, famous now and in demand for his street photographs of people normally not seen, though in

Himmel über Dublin

full view and ubiquitously present – ordinary people going about their daily life but framed with a wry eye for the absurdities inherent in the human condition (another example of figure gloriously emerging from ground). One is tempted to speculate, or at least I am, that this recent success has been informed by life at a certain height, being at a certain distance and thinking certain thoughts about the city, and, by extension, human existence. The photographs are of the unnoticed, the lost, the absent, and capture the routine of the forgotten in a celebration of the stubbornness of the human will to be alive; Beckett would have recognized the seriousness of their artistic intent. The top apartment, I would say, would present the ideal conditions for this impulse to germinate, be nourished, grow, bloom and propagate – being proximate and distant of the city, at the same time.

HOUSE PRIVATE | CITY PUBLIC

CIGAR BOX

4

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING

THRESHOLD 4. – THE BALCONY

The balcony concludes the spaces of the Gap, it is the most private, yet is still visible to neighbours on the staircase, though the glass-lined small lift provides a discrete element of screening. Here, one can have a barbecue, or park a bike, or have a flower and/or kitchen garden. The vertical view (portrait) of the staircase and gap resolves here into a horizontal view (landscape) of the city.
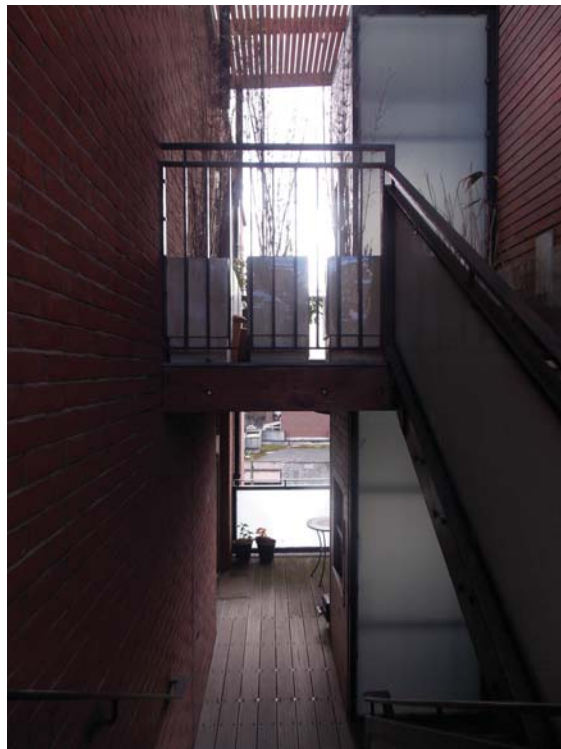
Portrait

Landscape

A place of repose, where one can relax, even with one's brother.

HOUSE   CITY
PRIVATE   PUBLIC

CIGAR
BOX

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING
5 CIGAR BOX
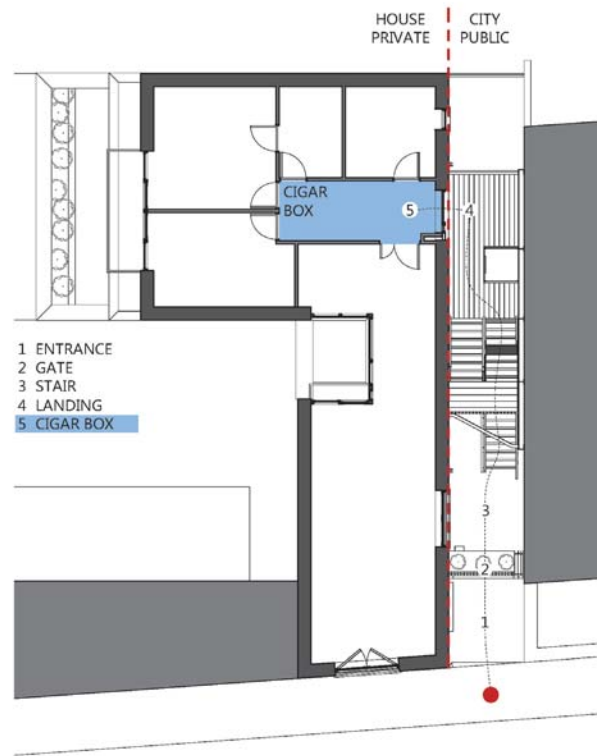
THRESHOLD 5. –
THE CIGAR BOX
Entrance lobbies

The lobbies to each apartment are in-between two domains; you have left the city but have not yet entered the house. This interstitial nature is underlined by the use of rich red oak on all surfaces, to feel like being on the inside of something away from the world, to feel like being inside a cigar box – quiet, protected, constant.

CIGAR BOX

CIGAR BOX

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING
5 CIGAR BOX
6 LIVING SPACE

THRESHOLD 6. - NESTED SPACES The room

The room offers an open floorspace, but it is not undifferentiated. It is spatially activated by the lightwell at one end, which invites certain uses, and by the windows on to the street at the other, which provide both a visual stop and an invitation to look out. The room is composed of a series of nested spaces. These are spaces that feel of a certain size but are ambiguous as to actual edges and boundaries; the living area is composed of four or five of these spaces, depending on the activity or use.

HOUSE
PRIVATE | CITY
PUBLIC

CIGAR
BOX

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING
5 CIGAR BOX
6 LIVING SPACE
7 WINDOW
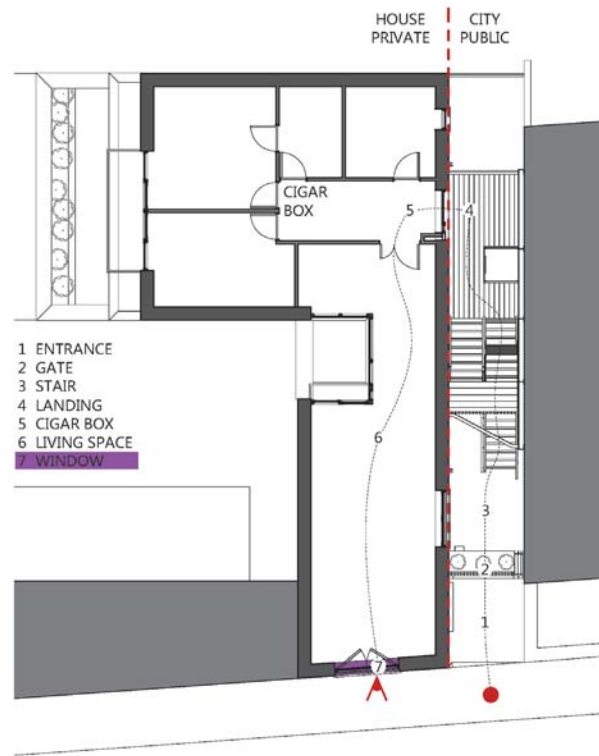
THRESHOLD 7. – THE SHUTTERED WINDOW

The shutters provide an additional layer of threshold to the city, reminiscent of those in Georgian houses (or tenements). They provide an element of control in the presentation of the building to the city, as they avoid soft furnishings at this critical interface. The lower part of the shutter glass has been sandblasted, for privacy, and the upper part left transparent so that even when closed they provide a view, either of the weather or the buildings opposite.

mastic
screw
hardwood strap

blockwork

37,5 12 25
50

HAFELE – Door pivots Cat. No 940.00.594

HAFELE – Crimestall Soss hinge Cat. No 927.50.107

1 Detail – Plan
8.15 2.01 15

50 frmm corner blockwork

50 frmm corner blockwork

equal   equal   equal   equal

hardwood frames glazed shutters

2 Window shutters – Plan and Elevation
8.15 2.01 120

stack bond

100x44mm oak

clear glass over

sand blasted glass

Oak frames

75x44mm oak   75x44mm oak   75x44mm oak

250x44mm oak

The shutters may be activated as spatial, valve-like objects to modify and condition interaction with the city beyond, in a nuanced choreography of social representations.

B

DARC SPACE GALLERY OF ARCHITECTURE DUBLIN

darc space as social space and social tactic – Farming, hunting and netting – Exhibitions and events – Sample writing – Sample year overview

darc space – Dublin Architecture Space - was founded in 2009 in the offices of Denis Byrne Architects by Denis Byrne and Maggie Moran. The aims of the gallery are: to promote an innovative and energy-efficient architecture, to advocate new possibilities for the building industry and to intensify the debate about the future of the built environment in Ireland. The subject matter ranges from art and architecture to urban design through to landscape; the connecting themes of environmental concerns and sustainability are a common thread through these varied disciplines. It has a track record of presenting architecture and architectural ideas to the wider public, as well as to other professionals in related areas.

DARC SPACE AS SOCIAL SPACE AND SOCIAL TACTIC

Having bought the two office spaces on the lower floors of the Cigar Box building two years previously, and just as the Great Recession of 2008 began to bite hard (with tenants being suddenly a rare species), Maggie and I decided to use the empty spaces to open a gallery of architecture. This was initially started as (i) a displacement activity to compensate for the reduction in commissions in the office, a sort of mental gymnasium, (ii) as a mechanism to sublimate the rage of wasted productive years and (iii) as a social-professional forum to meet potential clients and like-minded individuals. It was also a place that would enable Maggie, whose London background was in books and publishing, and I to collaborate on projects that interested us.

In London, our practice offices were in two shopfronts beside the pub on the Prince of Wales Road. My partner, Brian Beardsmore opened a print gallery in one of the shopfronts and I discovered that this was a rather nice way of meeting interesting people. Some of the artists became clients, David Royle, Norman Ackroyd – in fact, I worked on Norman's warehouse conversion with Kathryn Findlay, later of Ushida Findlay.

Beardsmore Yauner Byrne Offices – Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town, London

I was also aware at that time of the 9H gallery in London, opened for a period of time during the 1980's in David Chipperfield's office in Soho.

The gallery as an idea functioned as a salon, or a type of forum, similar to the spaces of society I had described at PRS 3. The space became an extended threshold between the city and the practice. Architectural practices tend to hide away, and be back of house or an upper room activity, which is fine if the work comes to you; however, that is not always the case, and especially not then, in the '*downturn*'.

FARMING, HUNTING AND NETTING

Some months previously we had discussed our practice, or at least, the practice of architecture, with a management consultant employed by the Irish Development Association, an organisation charged with developing Irish trade overseas. We had managed to arrange an interview with his person on the pretext, true at the time, that we were thinking about opening an office in the UK and were looking for strategic advice. The consultant, who – as it turned out – dealt only with companies of 500 employees and over, came to our

offices and gave us a starter course in basic business analysis, and introduced to us the concepts of hunters and farmers. Heretofore, we had been farmers, or people who had cultivated clients to produce a steady stream of work without much too wasted energy. We needed now to become hunters in the new dispensation if we wished to survive; we had now to stalk prey.

In terms of the PhD, these were interesting concepts and ones that I introduced in the PRS 3 presentation, and from that discussion, other anthropological positions raised themselves as potential architectural possibilities; along with farming and hunting, these were considered to be gladiatorial (competitions), fishing (procurement) and netting, the **darc space** gallery model.

Thus was conceived the idea of **darc space** as a resource, not unlike a tidal estuary, wherein ideas and people flowed back and forth, and where we could possibly net the best of each to advantage. The gallery was of course an investment in cultural capital but more importantly it was a vessel of hope, at that critical time. The thought was with me of Richard Serra's description, mentioned earlier in this document, of the ship, when hitting the water, '*as obdurate weight suddenly transformed into buoyant object*'. The gallery was our buoyant object, and this was a sustaining thought during those tricky times.

Tay and Earn Trust

The early exhibitions at **darc space**, being overtly recessional in nature, were of the combative and contingent kind, they talked of aborted work, lost possibilities and documented a kind of resistance (Pause and Shadowlands 2010) – though the first exhibition '*Becoming*' documented five then-recent Irish architectural competitions (2008), four of which went on to be built, including our own Gas Networks Ireland building – a significant percentage given the funding difficulties of the times.

Later shows and events, when the gallery had settled down somewhat, were concentrated on exhibiting artists, those working with architectural subjects whose work we liked, and on events that we found compelling or would allow us to meet interesting people. Indeed, several people we met over the **darc space** years are now clients, several more are collaborators, and many are now good friends. Conversations initially begun here led to some very engaging ideas and initiatives, not least amongst them this PhD journey, which was initially conceived at a **darc space** event.

The first **darc space** exhibition invitation Exhibition formally opened by Ali Grehan (Dublin City Architect) and Niall McLaughlin Architect

EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

SAMPLE WRITING FOR DARC SPACE
Made and Considered: Dorothy Smith - May 2016

'Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.'
Philip Larkin *'I remember, I remember'*

For an understanding of the city – a construct that we consider to be the supreme work of art- we must necessarily be aware of the many invisible forces – political, social, cultural, legislative, etc. – that caused it to be and continue to shape it into what we actually see. Dorothy Smith is an artist who works back from this 'what we actually see' in order to ask questions of and about the forces active in city creation. Her work interrogates and critiques the city while also delighting in the sudden beauty of an objet (or scène) trouvé. These moments of intensity, or urban epiphanies, are captured- generally separated from context – by her unsentimental eye and rendered with superb technique. These are matter-of-fact images that knowingly dance between the dichotomies of local/global, memorable/forgettable, ordinary/extraordinary – images that thoroughly celebrate inherent urban ambiguities.

One is reminded of the broader cultural context within which the work resides- from the Situationists (Debord, etc.) with ideas of the spectacle and dérive, or urban drift, to the Psychogeographers (Sinclair, Self), profound proponents of place and locale, to the painters and photographers of the mosaic that is the modern city (the Georges Shaw and Grosz, Atget, the Bechers, among many others) – and furthermore, is struck by how well it holds its own in this company. This is the work of surfacing urban moments, of focussing on the things in cities that we don't see because we see them everywhere or we see them every day. This focus and subsequent representation prompts a '*seeing for the very first time*' reaction that causes a visual re-evaluation about the objects that surround us; some of which are temporary and functional (Arrangement, see image), others of which are temporary but abandoned (Made and Considered), others again are permanent but about to undergo change (Underpinning), while others still are permanent but fragmentary (Procession). All of these urban conditions, and more, exist within the small area of Dublin's north inner city that is the focus of Dorothy's intense scrutiny and we are all indebted to her for collecting so assiduously, and we can say almost scientifically, this evidence of the wealth of local urban taxonomy.

We are happy that Dorothy Smith approached us to hold a show here at **darc space** – '*taking it out of an exclusively visual art context*', as she told us. This art has many things to say in many contexts and we hope that it will have additional resonance and reach within these walls.
darc space was set up in the dark days of 2009 as a forum for discourse on the built (and unbuilt) environment. We set it up in part of our office – we are mainly architects – initially with a focus on architecture (drawings, models, talks, etc.). This later expanded to include exhibitions and events concerned with the related arts of painting, photography, etching, movies, even, on occasion, fashion; but always centred within the evolving constellation of environmental issues.

Denis Byrne
darc space gallery   26 North Great Georges Street, Dublin 1

MADE AND CONSIDERED
Dorothy Smith
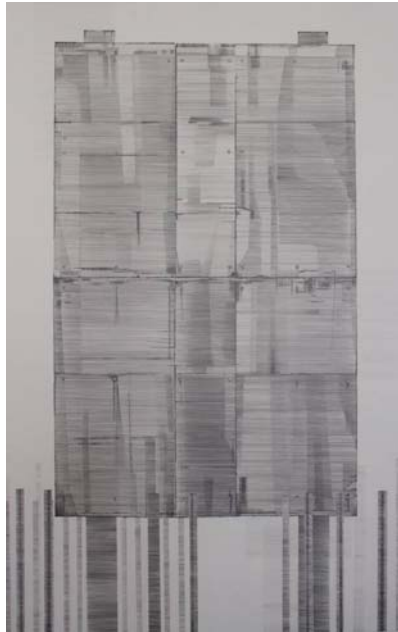
Made and Considered
64 x 102cm, pencil on paper

Procession
76 x 56cm, pencil on paper
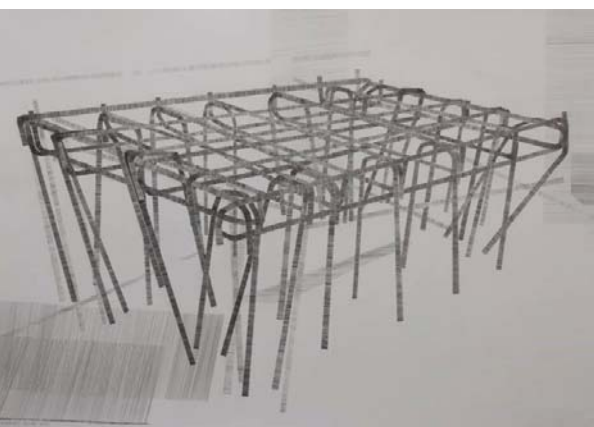
Underpinning
76 x 56, pencil on paper
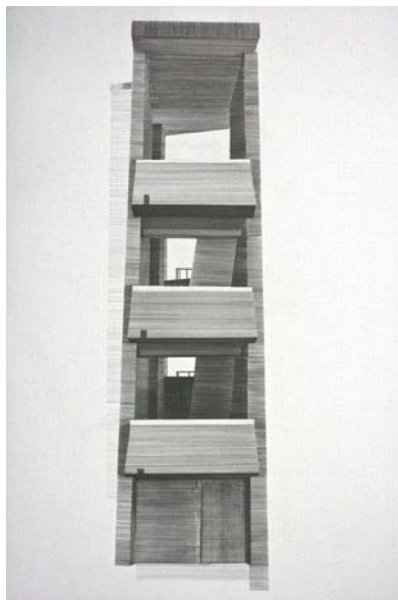
Come and Go
64 x 102cm, pencil on paper (AXA Collection)

About Time
56 x 76cm, pencil on paper

SAMPLE YEAR OVERVIEW
darc space - Autumn 2010 to Autumn 2011

EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

EXHIBITIONS

1. SQUARE   November - December 2010

An exploration of Mountjoy Square and Environs by students of the School of Architecture, UCD. '*Ventilate Week*' has seen students working on location in Mountjoy Square and in **darc space** preparing individual and group proposals and surveys in the form of models, drawings, photos, videos and sketches.

2. THE VENICE PROJECT   January- February 2011

A celebration of Venice by DIT School of Architecture, 5th Year

3. PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION & 'SILENT AUCTION'
March 2011

darc space donated the gallery to a group of 3rd level art & photography students raising funds for St Vincent de Paul, Zambia, all proceeds to the charity.
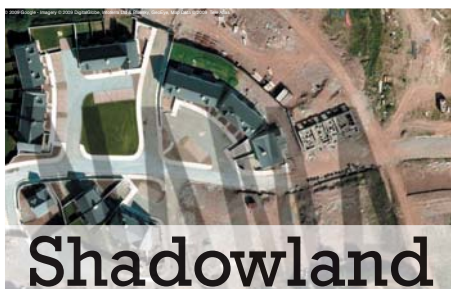
4. 'SHADOWLAND RE-VISITED'   April - May 2011

'*Shadowland Re-visited*' picked up where the original 2009 exhibition left off and explored these questions and outlines the current critical environmental choices facing the country as it tries to recover from the excesses of the recent past and move forward to a sustainable future. Two years on, nothing much has changed for the future of the built environment in Ireland, or has it? Will NAMA work, is it already working?

Contributors included FKL Architects, MacGabhann Architects, Boyd Cody Architects, Dominic Stevens, Bucholz McEvoy, Alan Mee and Wish Architects.

5. ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND AWARDS 2011   June 2011

Launch and exhibition of the "*AAI Awards for Excellence in Architectural Design*"

darc space presents Eugene Langan's
Bleak Beauty
Part of PhotoIreland Festival 2011

From 1 July until 23 July 2011
at darc space, 26 North Great George's Street, Dublin 1
Opening Hours:
Monday to Friday: 10.00am - 5.00pm
Saturday: 12.00pm - 3.00pm

6. BLEAK BEAUTY   June – July 2011

As part of Photo Ireland Festival 2011 '*Bleak Beauty*', a series of evocative photographs of Bull Island and its environs by renowned photographer Eugene Langan.

7. LIAM MCCORMICK'S DONEGAL CHURCHES
September-October 2011

Book launch and exhibition of Fleming Rasmussens photographs of McCormick's churches.

The architect Liam McCormick (1916-1997) lived all his life in Greencastle and operated his architectural practice from the city of Derry. In his lifetime he designed and built more than 25 churches in Ireland and England, seven of which are in his home county of Donegal. Carole Pollard's set of books entitled '*Seven Donegal Churches*' celebrates these wonderful buildings, which include McCormick's best work.

8. PARNELL STREET EAST: A VISION FOR AN HISTORIC CITY CENTRE STREET   October - November 2011

Opening on 20th October and running until November, as part of Innovation Dublin, the exhibition of the Dublin Civic Trust's Study of Parnell Street East

EVENTS AND DISCUSSIONS

THURSDAY LUNCHTIME 'CONVERSATIONS'

darc space hosts a monthly lunchtime discussion chaired by an invited guest based on a topic of their choosing. The discussions in 2011 have been;

January 2011 - MEET THE PRESIDENT OF ACE
The first lunch of the year was with the President of the Architects Council of Europe, Selma Harrington. Having completed a first year of the ACE Presidency, Selma led the conversation on issues for the profession at European level and how ACE could support Irish architecture.

February 2011 - 'IS THE ARCHITECT DEAD?'
Bruno Herbots, a construction law expert and partner in Beauchamps Solicitors, who, under the title '*Is the Architect dead?*', spoke about ways of ensuring the architect's continued relevance to the design team.

March 2011 - 'WHAT LIES BENEATH?'

spatial planner Conor Skehan discussed the creative use of infrastructure in urban planning. The conversation was an examination of the problems of infrastructure-led development in Ireland and asked *'Is this because of bad planning - or because infrastructure was developed in the wrong locations'*?

And a special, additional lunch event in March:

23 March 2011 - 'THE ABUNDANCE INITIATIVE', WITH THE CAAD DEPARTMENT OF ETH ZURICH

who visited Dublin with architecture students. Professor Ludger Hovestadt and Dr. Vera Bühlmann led the conversation and discussed their radical research project on energy.

May 2011 - PROCUREMENT AND THE SMALL PRACTICE

with Michelle Fagan. Michelle conversation exposed the challenges facing the small practice and the issues around procurement in the current climate.

June 2011 - NAMA

The final Thursday lunch discussion before the summer break was led by Dermot Boyd and 5th Year Students at DIT, who had mapped and researched NAMA sites in Dublin, leading to a series of innovative design projects for their final thesis project.

OTHER EVENTS AND DISCUSSIONS

GREEN BUILDING WEEK

The IGBC (the Irish Green Building Council chose **darc space** as the venue for all their events during Green Building Week in early October 2011; **darc space** hosted three lunches and an evening networking event of the IGBC's behalf.

CULTURE NIGHT

darc space was also part of Culture Night and stayed open until 10pm, when large numbers of people visited the gallery to view the Liam McCormick exhibition while enjoying a glass or two of wine.

OPEN HOUSE

2011 was the sixth year that the '*cigar box*' (the building that is home to **darc space**) had been part of Open House and the gallery has been a venue in this special weekend since its opening as part of Open House in October 2009.

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS FOR 2012

LANDSCAPE PROJECT WITH UCD SCHOOL OF LANDSCAPE & THREE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DUBLIN 1 FOR EXHIBITION EARLY 2012

Students are currently surveying three city centre schools (O'Connell's School, D1; Mt Carmel School, D1; Belvedere College, D1) and liaising with students and staff on design requirements. The exhibition is planned for early 2012.

FASHION & ARCHITECTURE

An exhibition that looks at the work of six prominent Irish fashion designers within architectural spaces that relate to their work visually and conceptually; a beautifully crafted exhibition that brings to light the parallels between the two art forms.

THE PAPER TUBE PROJECT

A project developed in the Dublin School of Architecture by a research group investigating the implications of using computers and fractal geometries in the process of architectural design.

GREEN BUILDING – THE STORY SO FAR

Currently being planned for spring 2012 to review the achievements and progress to date and prompt a discussion of the future possibilities.

SECTION 4   Exposition II

SECTION 4 Exposition II

A

SACRED SPACE

Sacred Space – Thoughts on '*Sacred Space*' – Discussion with Marcelo Stamm on '*Sacred Space'* and the Marconi Station

SACRED SPACE

Eluctable modality of the invisible *(with apologies to J Joyce)*

'Isn't it a characteristic of religion to produce distinctive, emotionally charged places – sacred places? Yes, it is. But only one kind of religion, albeit one that most of humankind embraces.' (Yi-Fu Tuan, *'From Place to Placelessness'* 2009) [1]

We are dealing here, firstly, with religion –that ancient, shadowy concept, notoriously shy of the light of common agreement – and secondly with place, the here that is the city of Dublin and the now that is recent, memorable and still anecdotally rich. This period has seen extraordinary changes in Irish life; in the economic area certainly but also in the social, demographic, political and intellectual spheres and Dublin bears the marks (or scars) of this the most dynamic era in its history. Part of this dynamism has seen the arrival of new communities, with their ways, customs and religions seeking a new home.

In the telling of the story of religion and place we are also cognisant - as the humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan points out in his meditative book on geography and religion '*From Place to Placelessness*' - that not all religions require sacred places for their existence. For some the sacred exists, not in the '*magical and concretely specific but in the rational and abstract*' [2], in the elsewhere of placelessness.

Most of the stories the subject of this exhibition document religions that deal with the '*magical and concretely specific*', the kind generally associated with the concept of place, the kind moreover that leaves telling tracks on the landscape of the city. Religions such as these rely on the making of a significant space through the act of marking off as separate for the purposes of ritual and occasion, however informal they may appear to be to the outsider. The root sense of sacred (*sacer*), has the meaning of '*separate or set apart*' and it is this formal act of setting apart, by various architectural and/or mood control mechanisms, that conventionally constitutes sacred space or a sacred place. It is the presence or absence of these mechanisms that we, like the scientist, observe and annotate.
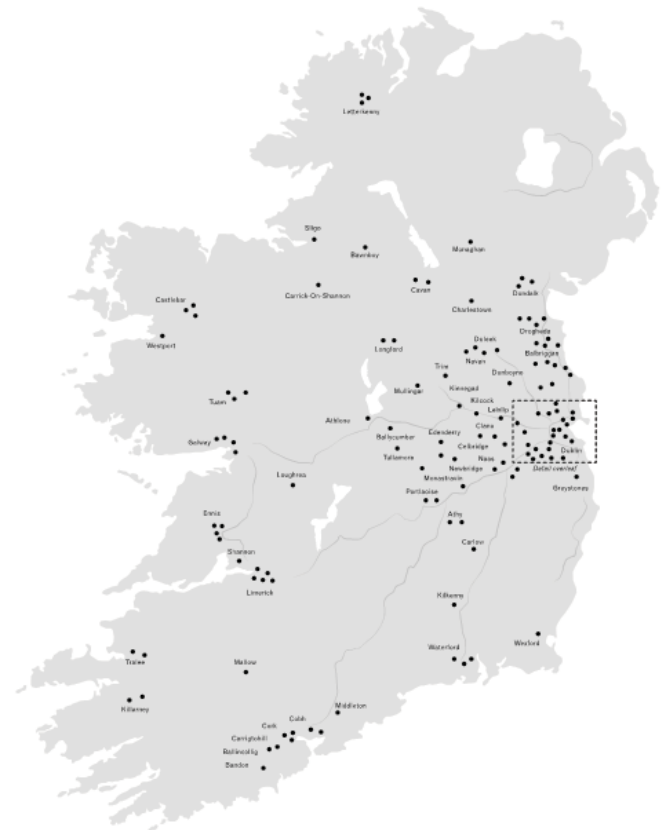
The main focus of the exhibition is concerned with the making and unmaking of sacred space in Ireland over the last decade of the century just past and the beginning of the one coming. The unmaking of this type of space and its transformation to other (profane) uses is inherent in the life-cycle of the sacralised process. Eoin O'Mahoney tells us, in his perceptive essay '*A Changing Map of Faith*' that '*religious places are as subject to negotiated change as all other produced space*' - buildings are, after all, mere containers and *hierophanies* (manifestations of the sacred) occur in mental space only - and we document this sacral transformation with a study of two noted recent examples.

We conclude the exhibition with a short history of Dublin's Jewish community by Melanie Brown. Differing from other religions, sacrality in orthodox Jewish religious services, she notes, depends on temporal not spatial significance. The ritual must be enacted at specific times, with the actual location being unimportant; the only legitimising requirement is that 10 men are present. Notwithstanding this gender-specific modal distinction, Melanie traces the presence, however ephemeral, of the Dublin Jewish community in both essay and photographic form.

[1] Yi-Fu Tuan, '*From Place to Placelessness*' 2009, p x
[2] Ibid, p ix

I. MAKING   The ground that receives the figure

For recently arrived communities in Ireland, looking to pursue and continue their religious traditions and practices, it has typically meant the appropriation of the available and existing rather than the construction of new space, just as the early Christians in ancient Rome adapted existing space to their use.

Bruno Zevi describes in '*Architecture as Space*' how '*Christians had to select the forms of their temple from the lexicon of Hellenistic and Roman architecture*' [1], and chose the Roman basilica as the most suitable available building type. The basilica was mostly a kind of market hall, or in today's retail terminology, a shopping centre. This they adapted by reducing the size and proportions of the imperial space and emphasising the longitudinal axis of the building, thus creating a directional space for purposes of human procession.

Zevi remarks that 'such an innovation constituted an architectural fact of tremendous importance' in that, for the first time in history '*the entire planimetric and spatial conception…had only one dynamic measure: the observer's trajectory through the building*', and which had only one object, to produce '*a humanly conceived setting… celebrating the dynamic character of man*' [2]. This innovation was to spread throughout the world, in the transformed basilica typology, as the basic template for all Christian churches for almost 2,000 years.

The fact that similar possibilities still exist in our cities for the creation of dynamic new entities within old elements, by giving them a new spirit and function, is shown by the many religious communities that have made home here. Occasionally, the newly arrived communities in Ireland have, if sympathetic in doctrine, brokered a sharing arrangement in existing church buildings, but many have tended to search out available, cheap, functional spaces and adapt them to their needs. Very often this search has lead to the light industrial/warehouse areas at the edges of Irish towns and cities or to the many unnecessarily empty rooms above the ground floors of our retail streets.

This process has been repeated in Dublin, and indeed in Ireland during recent times. Interesting new urban hybrids have been constituted, such as the '*church in the warehouse*' (cf. Cherubim and Seraphim, Ballycoolin) and the '*mosque above the shop*' (cf. Talbot Street), and a new vibrancy may be detected in the peripheral and marginal spaces of our urban centres.
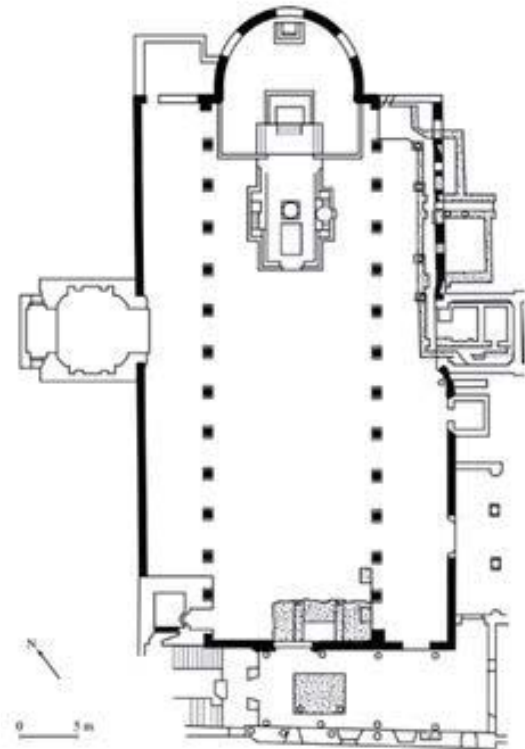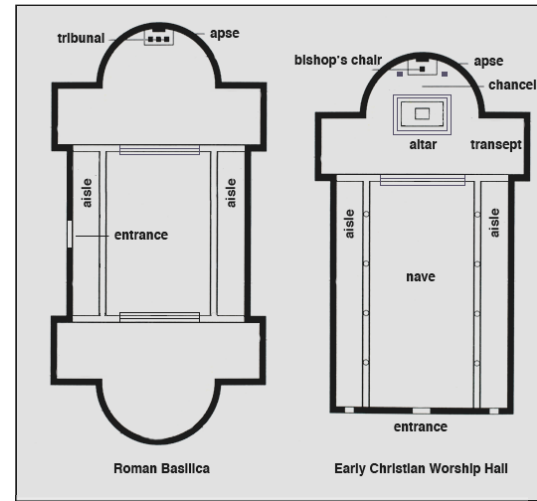
Santa Sabina, Rome -The earliest extant Basilica Church; a transitional typology

[1] Bruno Zevi, '*Architecture as Space*' 1957, p 82
[2] Ibid, p 83

Though generally not involving architects at the layout or detailed levels, the conversions reviewed here nevertheless possess an irresistible attraction due to the dynamism inherent in the urgency of the intensely felt communal act. Where engaged, professional construction consultants are generally delegated to negotiating the tricky path through the planning, regulatory and legislative requirements for modern places of assembly.

The existential urge to create sacralised space within the homogeneous expanse of profane space is well documented by Mircea Eliade in his book '*The Sacred and the Profane – the nature of religion*'; in this, he suggests that, for religious man '*if the world is to be lived in, it must be founded*' [1] and we thus, on these terms, improbably found ourselves with apparently no less a project on our hands than a cosmological study of the founding of worlds (assistance from NASA may have been indicated).

The architectural conventions normally followed in the making of sacred space are not found important here, or even desirable; natural light generally plays no part in the articulation of these spaces, which may be considered as '*black boxes*' or almost-theatres. The idea of threshold is minimally observed, with most layouts displaying sudden abrupt transitions from profane to sacred. Iconography, at least in the traditional sense, is restricted to the minimum necessary though the main space perhaps in part-compensation tends to be highly decorated.

In this context, significance or the sacralisation of space is achieved by several functional means: by artificial light, by the positioning and richness of linings, by colour, by the directional placement of furniture, occasionally by stage and PA systems but always it is accompanied by the complete under-standing of the procedures of the ritual by the con-gregation. The intensity of the religious experience contained within is acontextual and completely independent of the architecture of the container.

The containers indeed are nondescript and generally, at the urban level, unflagged; we only need view the photograph of the entrance to the Al-Mustafa mosque in the Masjid Community Centre to understand this. They do not seek to dominate surroundings nor com-mand vistas; they may be considered analogous to the position of the Irish non-established churches in the 18th and 19th centuries, often found hidden down side lanes and buried deep within urban blocks, seeking only to practice faith near their congregation, quietly and unobserved. The older catholic churches bear witness to this uncertain early time, before the triumphal emergence of later days.

This section of the exhibition is inevitably people -centred, being demonstrably less to do with the buildings themselves, and the photo-essay form reveals the spirit of this quiet revolution most appropriately. The photographs shown here are the

[1] Mircea Eliade '*The Sacred and the Profane – the nature of religion*', 1957, p 22

result of long hours by the photographer, of talking with communities, of gaining trust sufficiently to allow full camera access to places of worship during worship. It is of immense credit to Eugene Langan and symptomatic of his patience, professionalism and profound interest in the human condition that he managed to win the acceptance and trust of the various communities the subject of his exceptional photographs. Great thanks are also due to the communities for their courage in accepting and welcoming the curiosity of outsiders.

In addition to this type of space making, we have also considered the intensification of existing established religious uses. Though much less common in the city now than heretofore, a significant example has been completed recently; the re-modelling of a small prayer room in the city-centre Clarendon Street church complex for the Carmelite order. Designed by architect Niall McLaughlin, in a process of re-making, a timber inner lining (an Irish ark- '*firmly and tightly fastened together*') was inserted into the existing second floor room to re-adjust the room's proportions, conceal secondary elements, and control the entry of natural light to produce an intimate space '*conducive to prayer*', in marked contrast to the monumentality of the adjacent church. Fr Nicholas and Niall have kindly contributed illuminating essays for the exhibition, in addition to the drawings, photographs and model.

II. UNMAKING   The ground that tells of the figure's passing

As a corollary to this making process we also observed, within the same timescale, the reverse phenomenon of unmaking. The process of the dismantling of previously sacralised space was observed most closely in the buildings of the established native churches (see Charles Duggan's comprehensive essay '*Places of Worship in Dublin*' for the historic facts and figures). As congregations dwindle the substantial size and scale of these purpose-built containers of sacred space becomes a burden and must be, in some way, either reorganised or transformed. The former is evident in many Dublin catholic churches, to some extent reorganised to meet new demands (Vatican II, community use, etc.) though still struggling with a diminishing flock; but it is their transformation to other uses, indeed their functional resurrection, which mainly interests us here.

As stated by Martin Colreavy in his foreword, it is government policy that, in recognising the importance of heritage-led regeneration, '*adaptive design needs to be applied by skilled practitioners*'. Just as architects had a leading hand in their very precise making, architects generally have a close involvement in their successful transition to a new use. This is a by-no-means easy task, being one that requires of the architect a thorough knowledge of the whole and the spatial significance of the parts in a complete gestalt understanding of the religious mechanism.

We show two recent examples of this; firstly the transformation of a provincial 19th century church near Dublin into a public library by McCullough Mulvin (Rush Library- '*world within a world*'), and secondly by the conversion of a former urban meeting room of the Society of Friends to a cinema, as part of the Irish Film Institute complex of buildings, by O'Donnell and Tuomey (Quaker Meeting House- '*a secret place in the city*'). Revealing essays by the architects of the projects' hinterlands accompany the drawings, photographs and models.

In conclusion, this exhibition seeks to explore the changing landscape of faith in Dublin and the hitherto barely documented re-use, adaption and re-appropriation of existing space to meet this need.
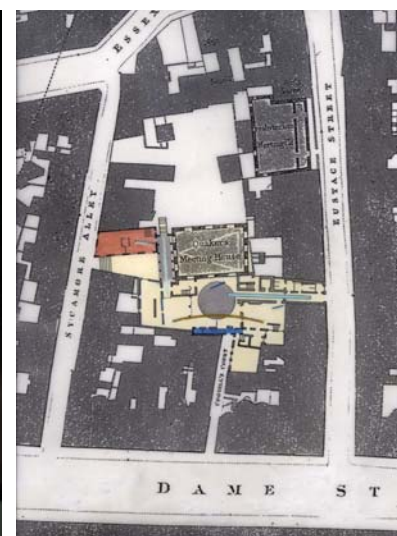
It portrays the city as a place of dynamic change, of human ingenuity and of tremendous community spirit, against a background of economic turmoil and uncertainty. In her encompassing essay '*The Inclusive City*' Ali Grehan states '*the exhibition is a timely contribution to the general discussion throughout Europe, while rooted in the particular experience of people in Dublin; making homes, seeking work, raising families and finding the sacred here*'

The fundamental aim of our work has been to document and transmit part of the message that cities carry, and have always carried- that of hope for the future.

Denis Byrne
darc space gallery, Dublin, January 2015

THOUGHTS ON 'SACRED SPACE'

Among the things that interested me most about the events and the dynamic represented in the 'Sacred Spaces' exhibition was the thought that we were witnessing social space formation at an early stage of evolution. I feel humbled in the presence of origins. It seemed to me that this would be similar, for a physicist, to a study of the Universe just after the Big Bang, when all was in flux and space/time was in formation. I had an urge to study and document this process, having first encountered it properly in 2009 and prepared it as an Irish entry to the Venice Biennale 2010.

This dynamic I find echoed in the words of Patrick Pye, the Irish artist/engraver, in the following quotation from an article entitled 'Revelation in the Work of Patrick Pye'. In it he talks of an 'anonymous tradition before art became art'; I was searching for a similar moment **before the act became architecture**.
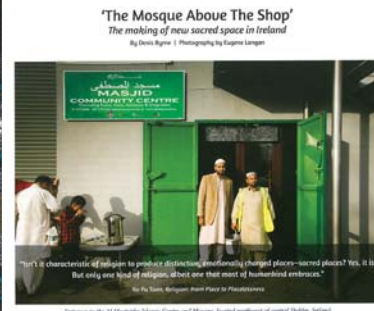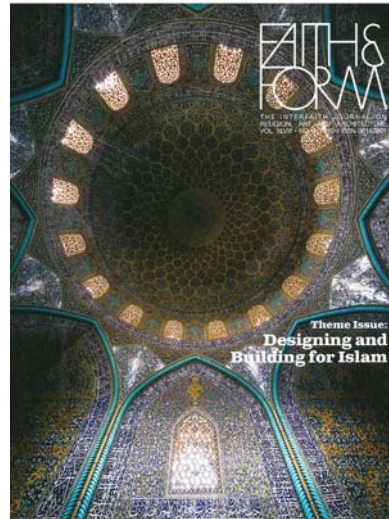
Sacred Space article published in 'Faith and Form Vol XLVIII No 3 2015' (US Magazine) as 'The Mosque above the Shop'

Patrick Pye: 'The first big influence on my work, apart from the poetry of T. S. Eliot, which was an enormous influence ... the first painter who really got under my skin was El Greco. I realized that for El Greco painting was revelation, and if painting could be revelation, what an enormous thing this was, just enormous. And then I realized that El Greco was so sophisticated, his way of being eastern and western was something so extraordinary and unique, that I couldn't learn from this or cope with this at that stage, and I must look at the primitives, which I did, and look at my contemporaries, which I also did. Then, of course, **I gradually became aware of the anonymous tradition before art became art.** I was very moved by that. I still think that is probably the most authentic Christian art that there is and in that way I would sort of be close to the anxieties of Eric Gill that the artist is not a special sort of man, but every man is a special sort of artist.'

A Conversation with Patrick Pye - Don Briel and Paul Murray, O.P

Easter Week in Spain - *Patrick Pye*

DISCUSSION WITH MARCELLO STAMM ON SACRED SPACE AND THE MARCONI STATION   Ghent, 16th April 2015

After my presentation at PRS 4, at which I presented the book and exhibition on 'Sacred Space' and discussed my reasons for having embarked on this piece of research, Marcello discussed with me what he felt were sacralising moments, or instances of sacralised space, within my work. The most notable of these, he thought, was apparent in the Marconi Station, which was then on site and which I had introduced briefly towards the end of the PRS.

He detected a similarity of language and thought process that I had not consciously considered, even when describing parts of our treatment of the landscape as 'cathedral without building'. His perceptions gave me food for thought and led to an epiphany of sorts that contributed greatly to the first, conscious, integrated linkage of the PhD research to the practical work, a deeply satisfying linkage of Theoria to Poeisis and Praxis.

The result of this discussion, the surfaced thought processes that produced The Marconi Station now follow.

B

EPIPHANY'S RAINBOW: THE MARCONI STATION
The landscape of a departed idea – Epilogue: Epiphany and James Joyce

EPIPHANY'S RAINBOW
The landscape of a departed idea

'Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way that the architect put them together. The stones, the green roof with its patina, the woodcarvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely.'
(Niels Bohr to Werner Heisenberg at Kronberg Castle, Denmark – Yi-Fu Tuan *'Space and Place'*)

What makes certain places special? What sets them apart from surrounding space? When crossing the relentlessly flat, rather dull Flanders landscape one's pulse inevitably quickens at the sudden confrontation with small villages and obscure features of the countryside – Passchendaele, Messines Ridge, the Ypres Salient – the sounds of which transform the everyday provincial scene in front of us, through thoughts of sacrifice and horror beyond comprehension, to an exalted state of manifestation. This transformation usually occurs in the presence of a rich mix of experience, memory, knowledge and context.

GROUND BREAKING

A similar dynamic governs the place that is the Marconi Station in Connemara, the awareness that this was where a powerful idea germinated, took root, bloomed, faded and then evanesced back into the living bog that had initially prompted and supported its growth. The physical remains of the Station are slight and unimpressive in themselves, consisting mainly of scattered rough concrete forms – functionally mute, ambiguously sited and appearing as erratics in the bog landscape – interspersed with the crumbling masonry foundations of long-departed huts and sheds, like the aftermath scene of a great nomadic camp, or some remnant of a lost civilization (the Ozymandias moment). No, the real transformative magic here is in the realisation that this is where human thought first contrived to jump the great divide by invisible means, completing the fulfillment of an ancient yearning and laying the foundations for all modern information technology.

The Marconi Station endured from 1905 to 1922, and during these years it housed the slowly evolving epiphany of modern wireless communication, presenting a supreme example of a sequential transformative process over a sustained period of time. The Station was a laboratory and a test site as much as a place of business. Constant experimentation led to continual improvement in the practical applications of the then emerging, largely unexplored but immensely exciting scientific field of the electro-magnetic spectrum. The work here attracted the finest engineering minds of their generation and, through this dynamic, became the Silicon Valley of its day, an avant-garde of the western world.

Having failed to attract any public investment for large-scale experimentation with this untried technology, the Station was an entirely commercial enterprise. Marconi, a child prodigy and a gifted businessman from a privileged Italian-Irish background, spent much of his time raising private funds, mainly from members of his mother's family (the Jamesons of whiskey fame) and their friends, very few of whom, of course, received dividends. The Station, thus seeded, was eventually to become a microcosm of modernity encompassing in its time, a railway system, a powerhouse for the generation of electricity, an enormous condenser house for electricity storage, a vast aerial field for spark transmissions, and, at its height, a working community of 400 souls.

The contingencies of place can explain the siting of this heroic scientific endeavor in a West Connemara bog. While the presence of almost unlimited fuel for energy production – the turf reserves – and a willing local work force certainly gave it candidate status, its longitude and latitude in relation to the New World made it the preferred choice in the Venn diagram of researched locations.

Marconi, arriving at Derrigimlagh for survey in 1905, authorised the purchase of the huge site soon after and by 1907 the Station was commercially active. The '*tuning*' of the operation, involving experimentations and improvisations with wavelengths, aerials and other equipment, and with circuit design – the perfecting of the idea – would be the constant obsession of the Station's workforce until its unplanned cessation in 1922. In 1909 Marconi was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work and his subsequent Nobel Lecture featured the innovations and ideas that were being developed at the Clifden Station.

The ideas were reliant on the production of enormous amounts of electricity in order to produce a spark discharge, of long wavelength (usually 4-6 km), that could be detected over great distances. The sister station
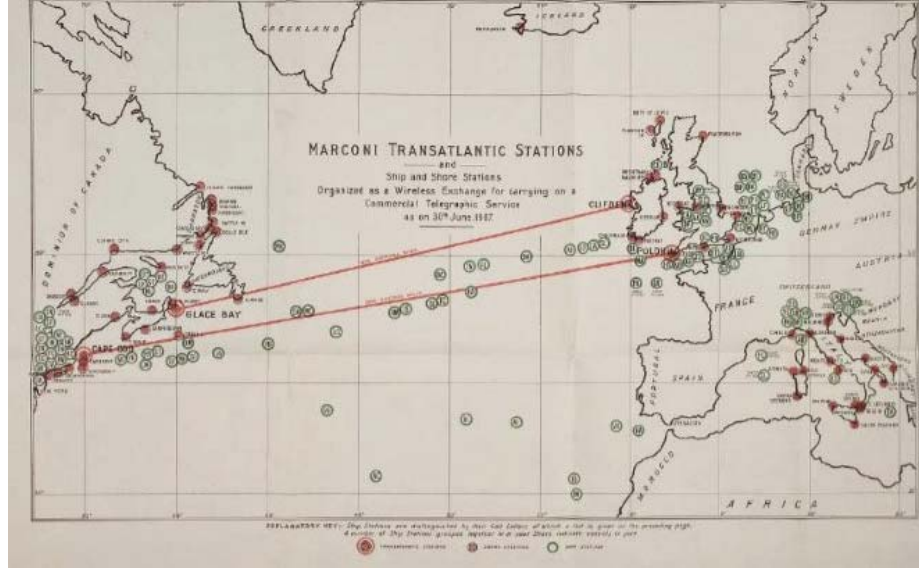
in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia received these signals as bursts of static noise, full of message and intent. The signals travelled parallel to the surface of the earth to describe an arc, a rainbow of communication and coded intelligibility, whose chord at midway was 160 km in height.

Under-pinning the concept was the mineral exploitation of the landscape at hand, the classic bog resource of turf or peat. Ireland has 8% of the world supply of blanket bog and this organic matter ('*brown coal*') has been used for centuries as fuel. The turf was harvested by gangs of local workers and burnt in the boilers of the Powerhouse, providing steam to turn generators that in turn produced electricity. The electricity thus produced was stored in the vast Condenser House, in its day the largest storage battery in the world, consisting of 1,820 enormous steel plates of size 9 x 3.65 ms spaced 0.3 m apart with air as the insulating medium, rudimentary and inefficient perhaps, but reliable.
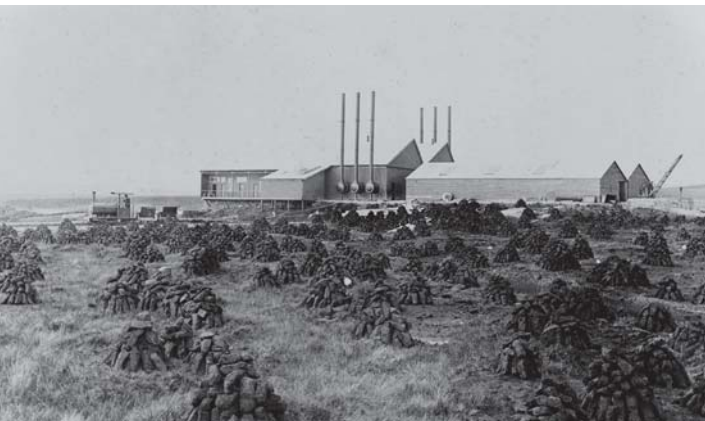
The Powerhouse
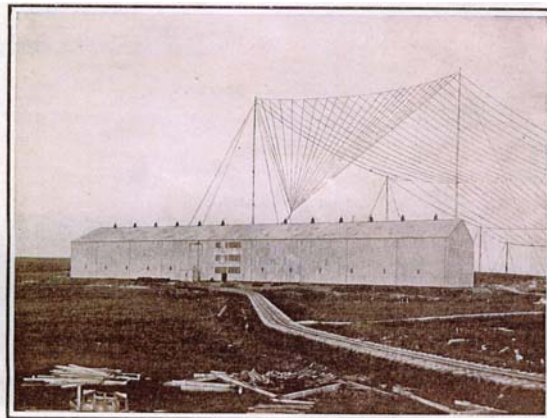
Condenser House and Antenna Grid.

The Condenser House Interior

The electricity thus stored was released, under the hand of the operator, to spring from a monumental aerial and wire system, covering a huge area and at times over 60ms above the ground, in sparking sequenced bursts of energy that conveyed the coded information through the atmosphere to the sister station in the New World.

'The heart of the Clifden Station was a whirling 5' spark discharge disc, with studs on its perimeter; each time a stud passed through electrodes, a 15kV spark jumped the gaps. The regular spark rate was about 350 sparks per second; the awesome size of the station and the din of the transmitter must have been something to behold. The power consumed by the station was in the range of 100-300 kW and the spark was a display of raw power… that could be heard several kilometres away.' (Unattib. near-contemporary account)

MISSION

As architects, we were asked to facilitate the development of the Marconi Station site as a tourist stop (a Signature Discovery Point) on the Wild Atlantic Way, the state's broad, and broadly successful, tourism strategy for the Irish western seaboard. Our brief was to provide interpretation and visitor facilities, to include the provision of a car park, shelters and the design of a memorable walk through the historic site.

The primary objective of the new interventions was to surface in an engaging way the fascinating stories of this remote place, while being true to and resonant with its essence and spirit. We conceived of a great looped route with a series of stops that marked points of intensity in the field of discovery at which we positioned 'hides', small containers of shelter and information – with text, sound and images. We sought most of all to reanimate and recall for the visitor the extraordinary power of this coincidence of abstract thought (the idea) and particular circumstance of local geography (the place).

This intention was underpinned by immersive reflection on the archaeological remains of the site; the mission was thus clearly revealed to us as the authentication of remembrance, by the purposeful framing of surviving relics of the departed idea. The conceptual mechanisms by which these new interventions looked to achieve this are explored in the following chapters.

SACRALISED SPACE

In an earlier essay, in the catalogue for the Sacred Space exhibition, I wrote that *'the root sense of sacred (sacer) has the meaning of separate, or set apart and it is this formal act of setting apart, by various architectural or mood control mechanisms, that conventionally constitutes sacred space or a sacred place.'* The separateness of the Marconi Station from the undifferentiated expanse of the surrounding blanket bog, the largest of its kind in Western Europe, was of course physically visible and enforced by the necessity of a manned security perimeter but more importantly it was set apart by the intellectual perimeter of an idea, that of a great enterprise on a journey of momentous scientific discovery.

This sense of conceptual separation was pronounced by the physical scale of the constructions and by the nature of the operations, which were clearly audible and remarkably visible from outside the perimeter – it was a local evening's entertainment to climb the hill behind Clifden to view and hear the monstrous workings of the Station.

These workings would have been extraordinarily new and inscrutable anywhere in the world but must certainly have seemed almost supernatural in the rural Ireland of this time, a time when fairies, banshees and magic still held a mesmerizing power. The scale of the new buildings, colossal cathedrals dedicated to the science of power and capacity, and the nature of their storm-like workings, with thunderclaps of electrical release accompanied by the lightning sparks of the aerial transmissions, were the shock and awe of their day. What dread and terror must this have inspired during those early 20th century Connemara winter's evenings?

In a place where pagan practice and local superstitions still mattered, this was operatic certainly, terrifying obviously – all components of the romantic sublime – but most of all, for our purposes, it was a physical manifestation of the sacralising process, an almost theatrical experience relying heavily on supernatural elements of the Gothic melodrama to set a space apart in order to become a place. That this was merely a by-product of the Station's reason for being is no less instructive for these purposes; it becomes a version of countless local legends forbidding inappropriate or unauthorized access to a significant site unless preceded by acts of propitiation or ritual cleansing.

The Singing Wires at the Marconi Station

INTERVENTIONS – INTENTIONAL SEPARATION

This process of sacralisation or intentional separation is celebrated at three key points in the new Looped Walk. Firstly, in the new entrance sequence at the Station; the movement from car park to concrete walkway to the orientation point is halted at the viewing platform, an island expanse of textured concrete, where one is surrounded by landscape – pure landscape, no Marconi yet – the ordinary world left behind, a sacralised moment of exaltation before the coming processional movement through the historic site.

The second pause on the journey occurs at the memorial to the pioneer aviators Alcock and Brown, built in the 1950's of rubble stone and whitewash. Here the climb to a new stone and concrete plinth, topped with a handrail discretely etched with commemorative text and images, commands the bog horizons in a 360 degree crow's-nest of poise and reflection. This point marks the southernmost part of the route and overlooks the place where the transatlantic flyers thought to land '*on what looked like a big field*', claim victory and then fly on to London, little realising the bog had other, deeper ideas.

The third moment is activated by the ascent to the incised concrete horizontal slab of the Powerhouse, more akin to an ancient land rune or Nazca landline than the prosaic floor of a ruined boiler house. The elevated platform, between nearby lake and distant mountains, feels elemental and sacred-in-itself. Our task was merely to let it be by relegating the explanatory text and images off the plateau to a subsidiary position, while above, on two existing concrete upstands we placed a great slab of rusted steel (50mm thick), an industrial altar on which was displayed the only remaining metal pieces of the original Station, two generator driveshafts. These venerated relics are held aloft to the western skies, in propitiation to the gods of technology and as *hommage* to Guglielmo Marconi, whose surname is cut through the thickness of the steel slab, to allow sunlight spell his name across the floor of his great, departed machine.

EPIPHANY AS DESIGN TOOL

To return to our earlier description of sudden transformation, or epiphany, as a product of a complex mix of knowledge and memory, we can describe further mechanisms at work in the new interventions of interpretation and shelter at the Marconi Station.

The imparting of interpretative knowledge is a delicate balancing act; it must be just sufficient to engage, as too much will deter, the ideal being as much as a curious 14 year old can assimilate in one 5 minute session. The story of the Station is told in episodic fashion along the trajectory of the route at 7 main stop points. At each point, we provide the curious visitor with carefully calibrated textual and visual information, each adding layers to that which has gone before, until hopefully, they begin to see in the new interventions certain affinities with what has gone before – a new understanding that brings a realisation of a conscious rhyming with the past.

This is the moment when metaphor and allusion can come into full play, a potent moment that allows us to prepare the way for epiphany – that what is new, and suddenly seen in a new light, is conceptually a fragment of what has departed – the new entrance orientation point as the richly incised floor of the Powerhouse; the construction of the Corten hides as folded parts of the absent massive steel plates of the Condenser House; the hides themselves, with their opposing platforms of timber boarding, as the small locomotive engine that carried people and freight throughout the site; the new raised boardwalks as old bog '*toghers*' – all of these new linkages constellate the essence of place and spark, for the receptive, an enriched remembrance.

Of importance for us with the new interventions, was their positioning within the mood or spirit of what remains of the Marconi Station – an overtly contextual approach certainly, but one that seeks to capture a conjunction of atmosphere and not merely a banal visual fit. For instance, the new concrete walkways are rough-textured, with incised gaps and robust upstands to convey substance and a utility beyond the immediately apparent, suggesting that their real function belongs somewhere in the past and what we see now is a remnant – the broken column of a ruined Greek temple.

Most interventions are horizontal, being the architecture of ground and passage, and therefore unseen until traversed. However, the question of the hides – the figures in the landscape – was, for us, a real problem of scale and appropriateness of material. Researching, we found clues in old photographs; the small short-gauge locomotive that was used to transport people and freight around the site intrigued us. It had a toy-like size, but it also possessed a powerful presence within the expanse of landscape. Its relation to the human figure seemed to somehow mediate the enormous differentials of scale and it provided us with a dimension and '*feel*' for the hides. These were then designed as parked locomotives – weathered steel chassis' on rails that spread the load, with platforms of rough timber disposed either side, like dormant stations on the historic line of the old railway.
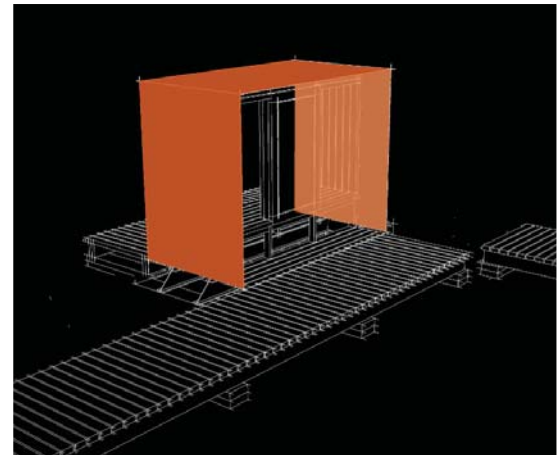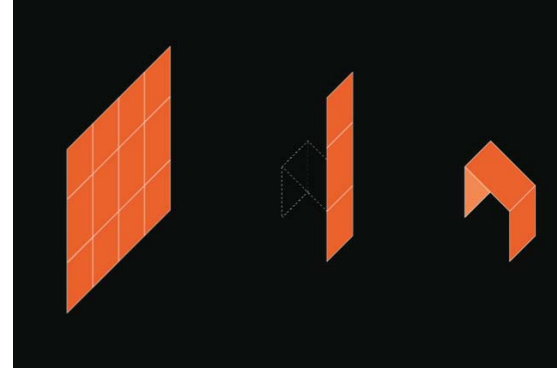
The inside of the hides, sheltered by the enclosing Corten steel envelope, takes cues from photographs of the buildings that once occupied the site. These were basic sheds, improvised and provisional, built using the materials to hand – galvanized metal, painted timber siding – blunt, pragmatic volumes yet, incredibly, decorated carefully with white painted window surrounds, a conjuring of the domestic from the industrial. This detail directed the placing of the text and images; these posters of visitor information are set within the blackened timber of the hide's lining like windows – and the hides are thus transformed to small sheltering buildings. They are spatial objects having 3 small '*entrances*' for sitting and viewing through; children play '*house*' here and the local sheep (uncounted) seem to be intrigued by the ability to voluntarily enact the familiar sensation of enclosure and release.

The hides, self-contained and compact in form, slowly disclose their interior secrets; they are approached gable on, remaining silent until the moment of arrival. The visitor is invited to linger for a conversation with the memories of the site and to experience a sense of atmosphere - the evocative smell of stained rough-cut timber and the sound of footsteps on the raised timber platforms registering above the noise of wind. A little drama and theatricality in the service of function certainly, and Marconi, ever the showman as much as the inventor, would, I think, have approved.

Of further interest for us was their shifting relationship with the ever-present line of horizon, a spatial result of movement across the land; sometimes silhouetted against sky, sometimes buried deep in landscape, this dance of vertical relative movement adds a dynamic that can only truly be found in architecture at the scale of landscape. It is a profound and ancient knowledge, known to the great orchestrators of land art – Brown, Le Notre, Kent, Serra, Smithson, etc.

Through these various mechanisms we have hoped to provide visitors with the means to enrich their experience of the Station. They may thus choose to participate in a journey of quiet revelation in the company of a departed idea, or, indeed, may just pre-fer to enjoy an uninterrupted walk in the Connemara bog, and leave the Marconi Station to the sheep and the wind.

MARCONI STATION, CLIFDEN, CONNEMARA - 3350 W.L.
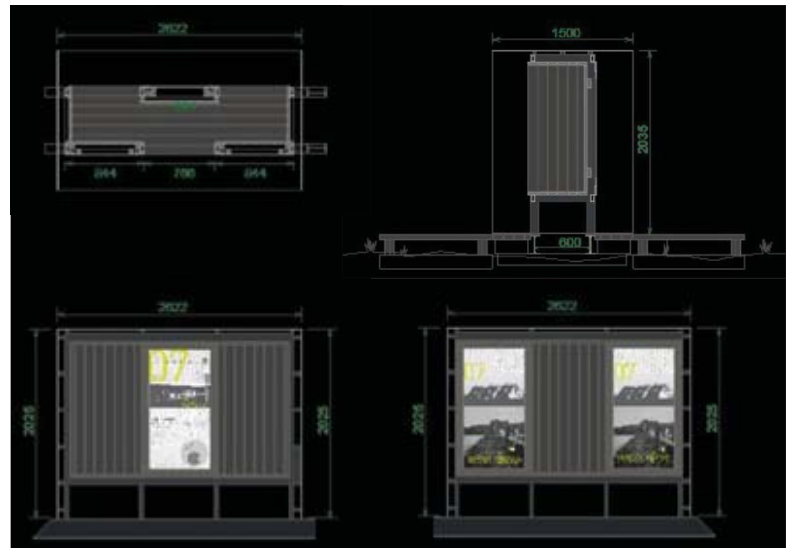
CODA

'Marconi's long career was suddenly interrupted, ended by his death in Rome on 20th July 1937. A two-minute silence of wireless stations throughout the world was observed as a fitting tribute to his massive contribution in conquering the airwaves. In those two minutes the ether returned to silence, as it was before Marconi's invention.'

Excerpt from 'The Marconi Story' (The Clifden and Connemara Heritage Society)

IRELAND 1907

5 January	the first motor show under the auspices of the Irish Automobile Club opens at the Royal Dublin Society
26 January	the first performance of JM Synge's play 'The Playboy of the Western World' at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin triggers a riot
May	publication of James Joyce's poems 'Chamber Music'
4 May	the Irish International Exhibition opens in Dublin at Herbert Park
6 July	the Crown Jewels of Ireland valued at £50,000 are stolen from the safe in Dublin Castle
10–11 July	state visit of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra to visit the Irish International Exhibition in Dublin
3 August	Sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, born in Dublin to a French father and an Irish mother, dies
4 September	an Irish Parliamentary Party meeting in the Mansion House, Dublin is disrupted by Sinn Fein who hold a demonstration outside.
17 October	the Marconi transatlantic wireless telegraphy service between Galway and Canada opens. Messages are exchanged without a hitch.
9 November	the Irish International Exhibition ends after six months. An estimated 2.75 million people visited, including a large number from abroad.

MARCONI TALKS ACROSS THE OCEAN?

Clifden-Glace Bay Wireless Suspended While He Makes Experiments, Reported Successful.

Epiphany and James Joyce

*'Through his education at the Jesuit schools at Clongowes Wood and Belvedere College, Joyce was steeped in Catholic religious ideas. He even suggested that there was a certain resemblance between the mystery of transubstantiation in the Catholic mass and what he was trying to do as an artist, **changing the bread of everyday life into something with permanent artistic life**. In making this claim, Joyce envisaged himself as an artist/priest of the eternal imagination through whom the flesh becomes word. It's no surprise, then, that he adapted the idea of epiphany to suit his own artistic ends.'*

(The James Joyce Centre, Dublin)

SECTION 5 CONCLUSION

Epilogue: Paradise Regained –Conclusion – Appendices: Bibliography - Chronology – PRS 1-7 synopses - The office – Denis Byrne Architects staff (since 1998) – Awards – Publications – Image Credits - Record of Viva Presentation

EPILOGUE: PARADISE REGAINED

This dissertation set out to examine the relationship of architecture to society as represented in my work. It explored my background and in particular the autobiographical foundation 'myth' of the city of memory, the lost city of my parents. In many ways it is a text of displacement, telling of displaced spaces and of displaced people, and this has undoubtedly profoundly informed my intelligibility antennae and thought processes.

The arc of this particular trajectory however does not end in an elegy or nostalgia for the '*blue remembered hills*' of the past (AE Housman: '*A Shropshire Lad*'), it seeks to convert this remembrance into energy for the creation of future social space formations that may better describe our innate commonality as humans, in a transubstantiation of the sort that Joyce envisaged (see earlier '*Epiphany and James Joyce*' in Section 4).

'Architecture, perhaps more than other arts, presents an invitation to philosophical reflection. Like philosophy, it begins with, and continually returns back to, the Socratic question 'How should one live?'

(Karsten Harries, '*The Ethical Function of Architecture*' Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998)

It is this precise opportunity that architecture offers, a practical and active response to the question of how one should live. I have described here in this document three concepts that assist me in this response to that eternal question. However, these concepts are merely highlighted as points of intensity in a field of social networks and not as discrete and separate elements in themselves. They inter-relate in many complex ways to produce many different possible social responses, just as the many ways in which, musically, a piano and violin may creatively inter-relate. Their strands may be woven together into a project to produce an appropriate social texture or atmosphere against which the human drama takes place. The language of music may again be used to describe more powerfully the mechanisms by which the architect, either consciously or sub-consciously, manipulates the unfolding of human activity to reveal meaning, as like music, this revelation will at its best resonate at a visceral level, having bypassed an initial engagement with the intellect.

CONCLUSION

It is my hope that this critical practice PhD dissertation has contributed to the body of knowledge in two ways. Firstly, in the surfacing and framing of the three main concepts discussed here of Significant Movement, Social Attitude and Social Potential, and secondly, in the integration of these concepts with existing knowledge.

It is the intention also of this PhD dissertation to clarify and reconfirm the architect's role as facilitator of the processes that constellate social interaction and social discourse. Its aim is to set out the opportunities that that role might provide, and to identify and highlight those activities and ideas where the architect can make valuable contributions to Architecture and Society. In this respect, I can only wholeheartedly agree with the following sentiment:

'Architecture is full of romantics who think that even relatively small changes to the built environment create the aspiration for a better society. It sounds hokey, but there is in every architect the thought that things could be better. This is a kind of professional optimism. And that leads to an expertise.'   *(Mark Wigley 2014)*

…even though I am also only too well aware of the truth lurking within Krysztof Wodiczko's observation '*that it is impossible today to be optimistic and intelligent at the same time.'*   *(p147, Critical Vehicles, MIT Press, 1999)*

Aside from that vexing duality, this has been a most wonderful and enjoyable PhD journey for me. It has indeed been a privilege to share the trip with so many intelligent and generous people as I have met at the various PRS gatherings; ideas can not help but bloom in this encouraging atmosphere of thought and openness and I hope that this work has in some way adequately harnessed the energising effects of that society.

Denis Byrne
Architect

Dublin , September 2017

The PhD and the City

APPENDICES

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Dunbar, Robin: *'Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language'* (1996)
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Zevi, Bruno: *'Architecture as Space'* (1957)

Zumthor, Peter: *'Thinking Architecture'* (2010)

CHRONOLOGY   Denis Byrne Architect

DUBLIN   1976-1982   School of Architecture, University College Dublin – B Arch
         1982-1983   Professor Cathal O'Neill Architect, Dublin – Asst Architect

LONDON   1983   Move to London
         1983-1985   Beardsmore Yauner Architects and Designers, London – Asst Architect
         1985   Becomes member of RIBA
         1985-1991   Beardsmore Yauner Byrne Architects and Designers, London- Partner
         1987-1990   Ben Kelly Design – Architect
         1989-1991   U2 Offices, Dublin with Felim Dunne – Architect

DUBLIN   1991   Move to Dublin
         1992   Member of RIAI
         1992   Start teaching studio at DIT , Dublin
         1992-1995   National Building Agency, Dublin – Senior Architect
         1995-1998   Richard Hurley Architect, Dublin – Associate
         1998   Denis Byrne Architects formed
         2006   Stop teaching studio
         2008   DBA win competition for Gas Networks Ireland building
         2009   **darc space** gallery of architecture opens in Dublin
         2013   PhD starts

Denis Byrne Architects were formed in Dublin in 1998. Denis had previously been a partner in the London practice of Beardsmore Yauner Byrne from 1987 to 1992, during which time he also collaborated with Ben Kelly (on Dry Bar and Factory Records HQ, Manchester; Quincy Shop and HQ, London and various domestic projects) and Felim Dunne, most notably on the U2 management offices at Sir John Rogersons Quay, Dublin. Having trained and qualified as an architect in Dublin during the early 80's, he returned there in the early 90's to work and teach.

PROJECTS

1980's

1985
Photographic Studio – Hurlingham
Lodge, London
with Beardsmore Yauner Byrne

1986
House Ullswater Road, London
with Beardsmore Yauner Byrne
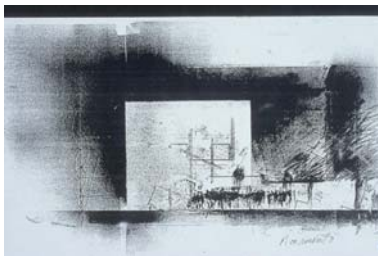
1987
Florence Competition (commended)
with Beardsmore Yauner Byrne

1987
Dry Bar, Manchester
with Ben Kelly Design
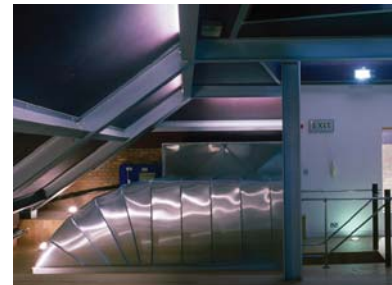
1989
Factory HQ , Manchester
with Ben Kelly Design

1989
Quincy HQ, London
with Ben Kelly Design
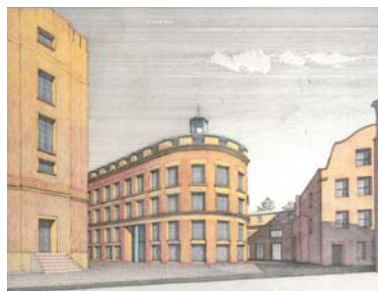
1989
Assetts House, London
with Beardsmore Yauner Byrne

1990's

1990
U2 HQ, Dublin
with Beardsmore Yauner Byrne
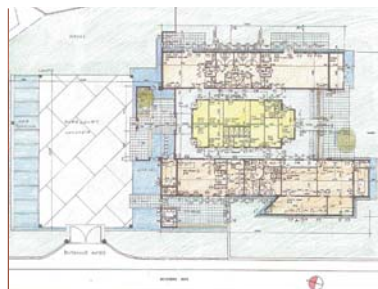
1995
Day Care Centre, Wexford
with the National Building Agency

1997
Guesthouse Glenstal Abbey,
Limerick – *with Richard Hurley*

1998
Library Glenstal Abbey
With Richard Hurley

2000's

2002
Mews House, Dublin
Denis Byrne Architects

2003
Corkagh Park Dressing Rooms
Denis Byrne Architects

2004
Cigar Box, Dublin
Denis Byrne Architects

2005
Mixed Development Eblana Avenue,
Dublin – *Denis Byrne Architects*

2005
Annaville Housing, Dublin
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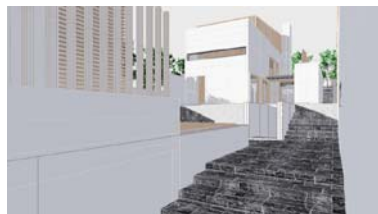
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2006
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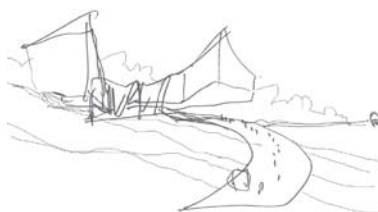
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Wexford CC Offices, Wexford (Competition) – *Denis Byrne Architects*

2007
Residential Tower, Manchester
Denis Byrne Architects

2007
Masterplanning 320 Houses,
Co. Meath – *Denis Byrne Architects*

2008
House in a Field, Mullingar
Denis Byrne Architects

2009
A Wall for the Queen, Dublin
Denis Byrne Architects

2009
House at Breeogue, Co. Sligo
Denis Byrne Architects

2009
darc space gallery of architecture,
Dublin – *Denis Byrne Architects*

2010's

2010
House at Leabeg,Co. Wicklow
Denis Byrne Architects

2010
Sharavogue School, Dublin
Denis Byrne Architects

2012
Gas Networks Ireland, Dublin
Denis Byrne Architects

2013
Sweeney Library and Theatre,
Co. Clare - *Denis Byrne Architects*

2013
National Diaspora Centre, Co. Clare
Denis Byrne Architects

2014
House at Rush, Co. Dublin
Denis Byrne Architects

2015
The Pacemaker- Dublin
Denis Byrne Architects

2016
The Marconi Station, Co. Gaway
Denis Byrne Architects

2016
Carrig School, Co. Tipperary
Denis Byrne Architects

2017
Gardens International, Limerick
Denis Byrne Architects with Carr Cotter Naessens Architects

2017
Dominick Street Social Housing, Dublin - *Denis Byrne Architects with Carr Cotter Naessens Architects*

PRS SYNOPSES

PRS 1. GHENT APRIL 2013 AT SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, SINT LUCAS, GHENT

Becoming: Denis Byrne Architects – evolution in practice
Etiology: a commencement.

Panel: Richard Blythe (chair)

ABSTRACT

Following the preliminary presentation in November 2012, when a jumble of projects and autobiographical details were introduced, there now began a more detailed examination of the work of the practice, involving a study of the economic, social and cultural conditions within which it operates and an exploration of its motives, shortcomings, ambitions and achievements.

PRS 1 acted as an overview; it attempt to map the parameters of future investigations and to initiate a mode of enquiry whereby themes, influences, intuitions, strands of thought and ways of thinking that occur and re-occur throughout the work may be identified and critically evaluated, with the intention that the resulting close observations would not only provide the basis for a better understanding of the processes of *'natural selection'* impacting on the practice but would also inform both the future research plan and the future work.

OVERVIEW

This first presentation was in two parts; the first attempted a chronological cataloguing of the work to provide an overview leading to the second part, a focus on certain key works at different points in my architectural development. Unfortunately, I spent too long going through the chronological cataloguing and woefully misjudged the time. I did not get to talk about any of the connective issues in the work; only slightly better than a disaster.

PRS 2. GHENT APRIL 2014 AT SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, SINT LUCAS, GHENT

Examination of Recent Work or 10 years afloat

The context- economic, political, social, philosophic; the forces- commission, client, praxis, work types; the outcomes.

Panel: Richard Blythe (chair), Boris Berman, Jo van den Berghe, Michael McGarry

ABSTRACT

The practice of architectural design is performed against an often oppressive background of economic, political, social and philosophical factors and takes place within a complex set of competing forces involving the gaining of commissions, the ambitions of the client, the legislative and regulatory environment and the types of work available.

PRS 2 will look at the effects of the factors outlined above on the recent work of the practice, the success, or otherwise, of the outcomes and seek to trace the creative pathways chosen.

Three housing projects Annaville, Cigar Box, Cunningham Road, presented under headings Fit, Recurring Tactics, Playing with Typology, Delayed Entry and concept of architects as farmers and hunters.

KEY JURY COMMENTS

M McGarry, *identifies the in-between space, what I had called* 'delayed entry', *as being occupied in a very particular way and as crucial to the work-* 'those spaces are very significant for you' : *semi-public, semi-private,* 'interest in (urge) a series or a set of human activities that sits somewhere between public and private' **darc space** *as gallery to Bord Gais office space issues of privacy, Van Eyck's writings rather than his buildings*

J van den Berghe, *potential focus of research, positioned in relation to Aldo van Eyck, David Adjaye (seepage- public space gradually penetrates into the private, transition zones), hunter-farmer what do you want?*

B Berman, A*cademics (all) are now hunters, what kind of ideas and special knowledge do we have? Importance of constraints for Danish movie-makers Dogme*

R Blythe, *visited Cigar Box underselling delayed entry, beautiful images of outside spaces in Cigar Box, material choreography of that set of experiences, a very careful fitting in of the work, of surface articulations managed, dealing with nested typologies, rich set of public-private spaces, situate the work within a field of fascinations and show the field, further than private-public relationship, buildings unbelievably robust in terms of wall positions, what drives the work?*

KEY PRESENTATION IMAGES

Delayed Entry   Threshold- Passage- Staircase- Private outdoor space- Entry

OVERVIEW

The first appearance of the concept of in-between space, which was to grow into the main themes of the research; an important moment.

PRS3. BARCELONA SATURDAY 29TH NOVEMBER 2014 AT CALLE MINERVA

Public - Private
The Space Between and thoughts on Serra's Parables of Gravity and Architecture.

Jury: Richard Blythe (chair), Michael Dennis, Jo van den Berghe, Felicity Scott

ABSTRACT
Building on discussions of last PRS to explore hinterland of the projects especially in terms of '*a set of human interactions that takes place in-between public and private*'. During the current phase of research I am exploring three strands of investigation that weave around and into each with a focus on the liminal spaces that exist between the public and private realms.

1. The Public Sphere

The first of these is a study of the various transformations of the public sphere, from the seventeenth century when it first emerged in its modern guise, to its relative decay in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The central authority in this area is the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas and I am studying his powerful early work '*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*'.

This seminal text was written in 1962 and was one of the key contributions to social and political thought in the postwar period and is still very much relevant today. I am looking particularly at the spatial organisations that precipitated the emergence of this sphere, the Salon, the Georgian piano nobile and coffee-rooms; spaces recognisably within the domestic/private sphere yet with latent ambitions of encouraging contributions to public thought. The 3 spaces shown are the salon, the coffeehouse and the Georgian piano nobile, each in their own right powerful vessels for progressive thought and children of the 18th century. It was in rooms such as these that the '*Enlightenment*' took root and blossomed.

It called to mind a powerful early motivation for me; in 80's London the polemical position adopted by the dominant political party expressed by Margaret Thatcher that '*there's no such thing as society*'. Whether meant to be taken at face value or not, the clarity of the position it hoped to attain is breathtaking and I have used the anger felt ever since as fuel for the work.

Salon

2. The In-Between Realm

The second area involves the writings of Aldo van Eyck, particularly his work '*The Child, the City and the Artist*' which formalised his collected writings and thoughts on the importance of what he called the '*In-Between Realm*'. The book is about an original view of architecture and the city, underpinned by the key concepts of '*the city is a big house and the house is a small city*' and '*place and occasion*' as opposed to '*space and time*' and most notably his theory of '*thresholds*'- '*The doorstep symbol is rich enough to sustain a kind of architecture*'. Other writings in this strand include Herman Hertzberger's '*Space and Learning*' and Martin Buber. Aldo van Eyck- The In-between Realm acquiring form, according
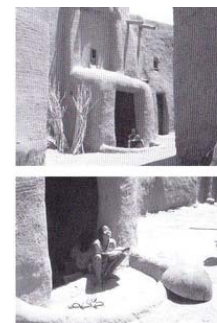
Van Eyck
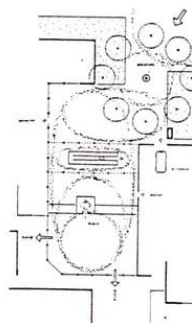
to Martin Buber, '*on the other side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow borderline where you and I meet lies the in-between realm.*'
'*Place is the realm of the in-between.*' (Aldo Van Eyck, famous Dutch mid-century playground designer.)

3. Spatial Configurations and their Nature

The third area of study during this semester has been in the area of the relation between spatial organisations and their concomitant social arrangements throughout history. The texts I am studying for this strand are '*Architecture as Space*' by Bruno Zevi and an influential article by Robin Evans '*Figures, Doors and Passages*'. Zevi documents the history of spatial organisations as reflections of societal transformations and changes in human interactions. Evans charts the rise of the corridor as a domestic spatial connector at the expense of the '*enfilade*' and the profound change in human relations it expressed.

Another interesting aspect of this strand I am pursuing in my research is the theory of '*Proxemics*', a term coined by cultural anthropologist Edward T Hall in 1963, and which may be described as follows:
'*Proxemics is one of several subcategories of the study of **nonverbal communication**. Prominent other subcategories include **haptics** (touch), kinesics (body movement), **vocalics** (paralanguage), and **chronemics** (structure of time). Proxemics can be defined as "the interrelated observations and theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture". **Edward T. Hall**, a cultural anthropologist, emphasised the impact of proxemic behavior (the use of space) on interpersonal communication. Hall believed that the value in studying proxemics comes from its applicability in evaluating not only the way people interact with others in daily life, but also "the organization of space in [their] houses and buildings, and ultimately the layout of [their] towns"*.'

KEY JURY COMMENTS
Michael Dennis – *About figural space 'Court and Garden'*
*Court and Garden: From the French Hotel to the City of Modern Architecture (Graham Foundation Architecture Series) Hardcover – June, 1986 by **Michael Dennis** (Author)*
Marc Girouard- French Country House, script generates the plan; space as solidified social convention; Gianbatiste Afali (?) English Country House; Herman Muthesius – The English Terraced House.

Diagram of Edward T Halls personal reaction bubbles (1966) showing radius in feet.

J van den Berghe – *Diagonal movement, Adolf Loos – moving from space to space, a speculative act of design as a method of research (Hejduk's houses); Landscape and transformative society space, the early Tuileries Gardens, Architecture of possible occasions, Leon B Alberti Villa Madama – Raphael, Antonio da Sangallo the younger, different plans. Prepare a speculative design.*

Felicity Scott – *Charles Moore text 1967, aspatial electronic realm, bored.*

Richard Blythe – *Annoying, slipping out of holds, contrary, not over-committing.*

KEY PRESENTATION IMAGES
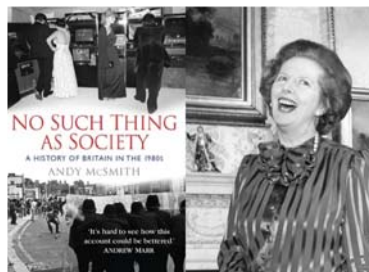
OVERVIEW
The discussions were perfunctory, with the exception of Richard who correctly challanged the non-committal presentation. Truth is I was struggling to find a way into the heart of the research and the PRS was a not particularly well-handled holding exercise. We discussed the various remedies afterwards, and this spurred the work.

PRS 4. GHENT SUNDAY 16TH APRIL 2015 AT SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, SINT LUCAS
Some Thoughts on Current Work

Jury: Paul Minifie (chair), Marcelo Stamm, Jo van den Berghe, Richard Blythe

ABSTRACT
Following on from previous presentations, which looked at past work (**reflections on**), PRS 4 now turns to look at current work (**reflections in**) in the light of understandings and insights gained so far.
- Sacred Space: an Exhibition and Publication
- National Diaspora Centre: a Study and Report
- Other Projects (The Marconi Station)

INTRODUCTION
PRS 4 framed three projects currently occupying the practice; one, of recent completion and a long-time-in-coming, the exhibition and book known as Sacred Space; another, an ephemeral thing of chance and circumstance – a charrette proposal for the Irish National Diaspora Centre; and the third, incipient and full of promise – visitor facilities for the Marconi Site in the West of Ireland.

Seen through a lens darkly polished by recent PRS discussions, these projects, from one point of view, were bathed in the light of Big Concepts (faith, community, identity, technology) and yet, when seen from another, were actually slyly composed of ordinary everyday things assuming importance and intensity, as of everyday prose aspiring, and occasionally attaining, to poetry. The projects are linked by themes of loss, identity, displacement and the equivalence of human experiences across cultural, spatial and temporal conditions.

The pieces of text were written during the period of the work, either as a polished thing for publication (Sacred Space, see above) or as part of the dryer descriptions for a limited number of invigilating third parties (Diaspora Centre, Marconi). The former should stand unrevised while the latter may well bear re-visiting at some future point, and was the case indeed with The Marconi Station (also above).

The presentation for PRS 4 began the Reflecting in the Work module, following the previous 3 PRS presentations that constituted the '*Reflection On*' module, based on Dr Marcelo Stamm's terminology describing the 3 modules/stages of the practice-based research PhD course (*Reflection on*, *Reflection in* and *Reflection for*).

1. Sacred Space: An Exhibition and Book
The first is a self-generated research project (initiated through the medium of **darc space** gallery) on the twin subject of the making of sacred spaces by the newly arrived immigrant communities to Dublin and the parallel unmaking of sacred space within the established churches; this research formed the basis of an exhibition '*Sacred Space*', which opened in Dublin in February 2015. The book was released to coincide with the exhibition and contained text, drawings and a photo-essay, and is discussed earlier in this document.

The exhibition primarily documents the transformation of profane into sacred space (and vice versa) by new communities in Dublin, by exploring the power of the idea of assembly. Everyday spaces become sacralised by processes of negotiated human agreement. In this way, the figure and ground of the city are altered; the ground becomes figure, or manipulated to receive the figure.

It is also a study of origins – '*first the act and then the architecture*'…

The initial impetus and idea for the exhibition came from the **darc space** entry (unsuccessful) for the 2010 Irish pavilion at the Venice Biennale '*The Church in the Warehouse*'. The idea had lain dormant since then and was revived by a grant from The Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under their '*Policy on Architecture 2009-2015*'.

2. The Irish National Diaspora Centre, Blarney Castle, Co. Clare
The second is a commissioned feasibility study by a regional public authority for a proposed new national institution. This involved considerations of building in a historic Irish landscape. We were asked, as part of a larger multi-disciplinary team, to make the architectural case for the authority's bid for the proposed new Irish National Diaspora Centre, a process involving up to 10 other competing regional and national public bodies. We provided architectural design and interpretative services for the bid, leading to the preparation of the Bid Report and it's presentation to central government. The nature of the brief demanded that the building engage on a poetic level and was thus a most useful exercise.
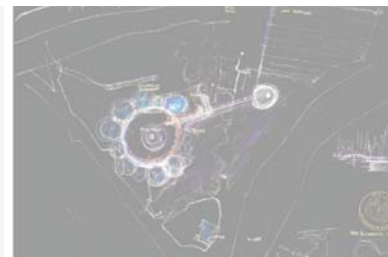
National Diaspora Centre
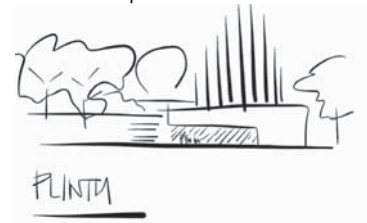
Text Excerpts from the Bid Document:
Building in the Irish Landscape (extract)
'*The story of Ireland is the story of a particular landscape and the people who have occupied it through countless centuries and against many odds. It is the story of a small island situated at the cusp of ocean and continent, influenced by the turbulences of both, but sufficiently insular to retain a profoundly rugged identity informed by a sense of the splendour and advantage of isolation, as exemplified by the stone dwellings of Skellig Michael clinging to the side of an Atlantic rock.*

The Irish landscape brims with evidence of the occupation of place by people engaged in the constant struggle against the elements, and each other. It has resulted in the formation of a mentality essentially defensive, territorial and dedicated to the autarkic ideals of tribe and clan. The identification with, and fierce devotion to, the home-land is the stuff of Irish legend and is the foundation of our creation myths. It is almost the urtext of the Irish psyche, that elusive, dark/light, semi-fictional entity.'

The Form of the Building (extract)
'*The lower level of the new building – the plinth, a suppressed volume, buried in landscape – contains the main welcome and support spaces for the new visitor campus, consisting of the NDC, the Castle, and the Folk Park. The upper level – the rounded forms, seen as objects on the hill and constituting the external expression of the new building – contains the main exhibition spaces.*

The rounded forms are intended to express the idea of meeting; they consist of a community of like spaces gathered around a clearing in the woodlands, joined by a common thread – the Ring. The clearing is centred on the Mound, a National Monument, which may contain the remains of a Neolithic ringfort. The liberation of this ancient feature, heretofore hidden behind clumsily placed buildings (now to be demolished), will be seen as a significant collateral cultural gain of the project. The Mound, it is proposed, will stand resplendent in its new setting, as a jewel within a ring.'

3. Visitor facilities for the Marconi Radio Telegraphy Station at Derrigimlagh, Co Galway
        Derrygimlagh: Great Inventors and Adventurers
        The Marconi Wireless Radio Telegraphy Station and the Alcock and Brown Landing.

The Marconi site may be considered as a sacralised landscape, due to its very separateness as a place on the edge of Europe and the evocative presence of the remaining detectable echoes and traces of powerful early modern human actions. It has now become a place of commemoration and the project explores the tension between the framing of memory and the respect for landscape. For a brief time in Irish history, at the beginning of the 20th century, a thriving rural industrial community was established on the Derrygimlagh blanket bog at the most western edge of Europe. This was, at that time in Ireland, a most singular occurrence – an island of industry and innovation in a sea of agriculture.

OVERVIEW: KEY MOMENT
I think this was a **key moment** for me in the research, a breakthrough: a point when consideration of concepts introduced by the PhD began to have a real influence on the work.

PRS 5. BARCELONA NOVEMBER 2015: THE MARCONI PROJECT
A Work in Progress - The Archaeology of the Recent Past

Jury: Richard Blythe (chair), Tom Holbrook, Jo van den Berghe, Michael McGarry, Kim Fossell

ABSTRACT

Continuing the '*Reflections in the Work*' module introduced by the previous PRS (PRS 4- Ghent, April 2015), this presentation examines the project currently consuming the attention of the practice. In 2015, following an open call the practice was commissioned to provide basic tourism facilities and interpretative information for the Marconi site; these are currently on site, and scheduled for completion in early 2016.

The project is a new departure in the work of the practice, and involves a multi-disciplinary collaboration with – amongst others – artists, archaeologists, landscape architects, industrial designers, interpretative designers, metalwork fabrication specialists, tourism consultants and local historians. The site itself is within one of the largest areas of intact blanket bog in Western Europe and is designated as being a Significant Area of Conservation (SAC).

PRS 5 had previously been intended to provide a space for meta-reflection and refinement of the research. This has been somewhat overtaken by the commencement, in summer 2015, of the practice's involvement in the fast-track construction phases of the Marconi project, currently on site and scheduled for completion in spring 2016.

The PRS presentation will seek to observe and report on the processes at play within the work whilst its dynamics are still in motion and its outcomes not yet determined. A fuller examination I hope will await another time (see '*Epiphany's Rainbow*' earlier in this document).

KEY JURY COMMENTS
Not recorded.

OVERVIEW
Distracted, disjointed; my mother had died the week before.

PRS 6. LONDON NOVEMBER 2016 AT WESTMINSTER UNIVERSITY

Sociality and Space Formation: Notes on a Social Animal

Jury: Richard Blythe (chair), Leon van Schaik, Arnaud Hendryx, Jo van den Berghe

ABSTRACT

Previous PRS discussions centred on issues of social space, the public realm and the in-between (amongst other terms and concepts); the focus of current study has broadened to include the underlying scientific and artistic processes that inform space formation in modern society.

Areas of investigation include the psychological foundations of human development, modern theories of the city and current critical issues relating to phenomenology, social justice and modes of practice.

Their aim is to surface and frame existing embedded interests in the dynamics of social spatiality, to form a more critical sensibility for an increased agency within my work, while also contributing to current urgent discourse on the wider responsibilities of the architect in private practice now.

KEY JURY COMMENTS

Too little time spent on describing the work.

OVERVIEW

I spent much of the time discussing the background reading material that I considered essential for a piece of research. My elaboration of the research direction came slightly after this PRS, a mis-timing by me.

PRS 7. BARCELONA APRIL 2017
The Purposeful Frame: Sociality and Space Formation

Jury: Leon van Schaik (chair), Arnaud Hendryx, Marcello Stamm, Harry Charrington

ABSTRACT
The research to date has constellated ideas in my work that mediate the interface between architecture as artifact and the dynamics of human involvement. The current research position is one of conclusion, of distillation and refinement, in anticipation of the completion process. At the PRS, I'll discuss some of the main ideas within the work, and describe how they may be incorporated, through publication, exhibition and public lecture, within completion cycle.

IDEAS SYNOPSIS
   • On Social Attitude or '*How to be in a Place*'
     A fascination with particular social-collective organisations is explored within various projects.
   • On Social Potential or Thoughts on Figure and Ground
     A closely related strand studies how the design process consciously seeks to increase the potential for social occasion.
   • On Significant Movement or Framing the Essential
     This explores the proposition that that each project contains a purposeful movement at its heart. Sometimes explicit in the brief but more often not, the appropriate framing of this becomes fundamental to the architectural success of the project.
   • On the Seven Thresholds of the Cigar Box
     An illustrated description of the thoughts and processes underlying the design, and reflections-on-design, of the building known as the Cigar Box.

OVERVIEW
The **PhD moment** presentation, all the key ideas had arrived since the previous PRS and were presented here.

THE OFFICE

Maggie and I have been the constants in the office since its inception in 1998. Over this period, Maggie has managed the office, which means dealing with everything around the work (HR, Finance, PR, etc basically 3 or 4 company departments) allowing me the space to deal with the work itself. This boundary of this polarity has in more recent times been blurred, as we have been able to find suitable projects (in tourism, exhibition and interpretative design, e.g The Marconi Station) that allow us to work together in a more integrated way. This satisfying dynamic has largely been enabled by the **darc space** gallery, which both of us enjoy immensely and which kept us sane during difficult economic times.

I am told, and I feel, that people in the office are generally happy to work here. Currently there are 8 people, beside Maggie and myself, including 3 architects from Spain, 1 each from France and Nigeria and even 3 from Ireland; at its height in 2008, there were 15. The office is situated in the 2 connected lower floors of the Cigar Box building, which also contains the darc space gallery, next to where we live at no 27.

I open the office in the morning at 7.30 - 8.00 and close it at about 20.30 in the evening, generally; staff hours are 8.30 to 17.30 from Monday to Thursday (though people generally do stay longer) and 8.30 to 13.00 on Fridays, a half-day for all. We have an office meeting every fortnight, at which we go through all the current projects and any office issues. I use a weekly work sheet to plan the week and set targets – most of which are subverted by me.

There are generally 2 or 3 projects on the go in the office at any time, and I would generally talk to the people involved once or twice a day. My desk is in the downstairs office space with everyone else, and the meeting room is at ground floor level, open to the office below. There are no doors in the office, confidential discussions are held in the gallery space at ground level. Other than remuneration, I like to give people responsibility in return for commitment and the sharing of their talent. This will generally mean them being project architect for the first time, meeting clients, planners, builders and, with support, dealing with all the normal project procedural issues.

DENIS BYRNE ARCHITECTS

Staff since 1998, current staff in **Bold**

Anello, Manfredi	Fay, Jenny	Percori, Margherita
Arnold, Jack	Fernadez de Arévalo, Teresa	Pena Rodriguez, Carlos
Attley, Sean	Flynn, Paul	Peralta, Veronica
Bastianelli, Serena	Godskesen, Stefan	Reid, Marcus
Bird, Attracta	Griffin, Andrew	Robertson, Sarah
Blanco, Miriam Garcia	Grygier, Helena	Rodriguez Blazquez, Celia
Bosbach, Roland	**Guillan, Olatz**	Rohrmoser, Martin
Bowe, Helen	Holubowicz, Gosia	Sabato, Cesar
Burdon, Andy	**Izaguirre, Gurutz**	Sapina, Gustavo
Byrne, Denis	James, Kristin	Scaife, Hannah
Calamai, Francesca	Jardine, Robin	Sheridan, David
Callan, John	Kramarczyk, Anna	Spohr, Jakob
Campbell, Conor	Leavy, Florian	Todorov, Todor
Camuset, Julien	Lennon, Niall	**Travers, Henry**
Castelli, Nadina	Maharg Bravo, Rodrigo	**Vasquez, Antonio**
Cherubini, Enrico	Marchal, Sergio	Zanotelli, Nicoletta,
Clavin, Louise	Martin, Felix	Zewdie, Susy
Convertini, Giani	Meder-Baumann, Gosia	
Corrigan, Caroline	Mignemi, Giuliano	
Cosgrave, Peter	**Moran, Maggie**	
Daly, Emma-Jane	Moriano Roldan, Elena	
Dawson, Susan	Nigro, Filomena	
Di Ciancia, Alessandro	Novo Menéndez, Diego	
Echeverria Carranza, Luis	**Odunlade, Ola**	
English, Dave	O'Neill, Shane	

AWARDS

2017 • RIAI Awards, Winner *'Place of the Year'* The Marconi Station, Galway.
  • CMG Design and Building Awards, Shortlisted for Best Cultural Building The Marconi Station, Galway
  • Architectural Association of Ireland Awards, Special Mention The Marconi Station, Galway

2016 • Architectural Review Award - Work (International Category), Gas Networks Ireland Services Centre, Dublin

2013 • RIAI *'Best Sustainable Building'*, Gas Networks Ireland Services Centre, Dublin
  • RIAI *'Best Commercial Building'*, Gas Networks Ireland Services Centre, Dublin
  • CMG Design and Building Awards – *'Building of the Year'* – Gas Networks Ireland Services Centre, Dublin
  • Irish Concrete Society, Gas Networks Ireland Services Centre – *'Best Building Award'* and Sustainability Commendation
  • Green Awards – *'Building of the Year'* Runner-up, Gas Networks Ireland Services Centre

2011 • Irish Georgian Society's *'Best Conservation Project'*, shortlisted for *'Wall for the Queen'* building, Dublin

2010 • CMG Design and Building Awards – Winner – *'Small Architectural Practice of the Year'*
  • RIAI Awards – Winner *'Rural Design Award'* New-build category – *'House in a Field'*, Westmeath
  • RIAI Awards – Winner, *'Rural Design Award, Refurbishment'* – *'House at Ballyfid'*, Westmeath
  • Westmeath CC Building Awards - Winner *'Rural Design Award'* New-build category – *'House in a Field'*, Westmeath
  • Galvanising Association, London, *'Duplex Award'* – Winner – *'Tolka Rovers Clubhouse'*, Dublin
  • RIAI Awards – *'Building of the Year'* Award, Shortlisted – *'Wall for the Queen'* building, Dublin
  • RIAI Awards – Conservation Commendation – *'Wall for the Queen'* building, Dublin

2008 • Competition for new Networks Services Building for Gas Networks Ireland, Winner

2006 • Competition for new civic offices for Wexford County Council, Finalist
  • RIAI Awards – Regional Award – *'House in a Field'*, Ardivaghan, Mullingar

2005 • Opus Architecture and Construction Awards – *'House in a Field'*, Ardivaghan, Mullingar

2004 • Architectural Association of Ireland Award for Design Excellence – The Cigar Box, Mixed Development, Dublin

2002 • RIAI – Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland, Regional Award – Glenstal Abbey Library (with Richard Hurley Associates)

2001 • Joinery Awards, First Prize – Glenstal Abbey Library (with Richard Hurley Associates)

1995 • Europa Nostra Prize for Urban Design – Shops and apartments, Sligo (with the National Building Agency)

1992 • European Colour in Architecture Award – Factory Communications HQ, Manchester (with Ben Kelly Design)

1991 • Designers Journal, First prize for Interior design – Dry Bar, Manchester (with Ben Kelly Design)
  • IDA Europa Forum Design Awards, Runner Up – Dry Bar, Manchester (with Ben Kelly Design)
  • Architectural Association of Ireland, Award for Architecture – Offices, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin (with Felim Dunne)

1990 • Royal Institute of Architects Regional Award – Offices, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin (with Felim Dunne)

1987 • Sante Croce Urban Design Competition, Florence, Commended

1985 • Brickworks Awards, Finalist – Hurlingham Lodge, London

PUBLICATIONS

2017   Denis Byrne, '*Epiphany's Rainbow*' – Sparking Modernity, edited by Denis Byrne, Barbara Ebert, Maggie Moran & Dr Sandra O'Connell, **darc space**, pp 32-50.

2016   Denis Byrne, '*Made and Considered*' – Made and Considered by Dorothy Smith, **darc space**, pp 4-5

2015   Denis Byrne, '*Eluctable modality of the invisible*' – Sacred Space, edited by Denis Byrne, Barbara Ebert, Maggie Moran & Dr Sandra O'Connell, **darc space**, pp 17-23

2015   Denis Byrne, '*The Mosque qbove the Shop*' - in 'Faith and Form Vol XLVIII No 3 2015 (US Magazine, theme issue 'Designing and Building for Islam'.)

2010   Denis Byrne, '*Foreword*' – Pause, Gandon Editions (with **darc space**), Cork, pp 4

2009   Denis Byrne, 'Bord Gais Networks' – Becoming, Gandon Editions (with **darc space**), pp 16-23

2005   Denis Byrne, '*Assessors Reports and Comments*' – New Irish Architecture, AAI Awards 2005, AAI & Gandon Editions, pp 24-25, (& throughout).

IMAGE CREDITS

P.2   Cortile of the Uffizi - The Architectural Review, May 1992 (unattrib.)
P. 7   (i) Office and Warehouse, North Great George's Street, Dublin 1- Dublin City Council Archive (ii) Cigar
            Box – Eugene Langan (iii) Housing at Annaville - Eugene Langan
P.8   (i) Housing Cunningham Rad - Denis Byrne Architects (CGI) (ii) 36 North Great George's Street -
            Eugene Langan (iii) House at Breeogue – Paul Tierney (iv) darc space gallery - Denis Byrne Architects
            (v) Gas Networks – Paul Tierney (vi) The National Diaspora Centre – Jonathan Weston (CGI) (vii) The
            Marconi Station – James Shields (viii) Carrig Primary School – Denis Byrne
P.10   Cigar Box – Eugene Langan
P.12   Le Corbusier, La Tourette – Pieter Morlion
P.15   (i) An early outing - Byrne Family Photograph (ii) William and Kathleen - Byrne Family Photograph
            (iii) Ordnance Survey Ireland
P.16   (i) North Dublin suburban 1960's – Dublin City Council Archive (ii) Corner of Dorset Street and
            Granby Row – Anonymous (Public Domain) (iii) Henrietta Street, Dublin 1 - Anonymous (Public
            Domain)
P.17   (i) No 27 – Dublin City Council Archive (ii) Desolation – Dublin City Council Archive
P.18   Courtesy of Earl and Elaine Buras, 1999.060.007
P.19   (i) North Great George's St – Dublin City Council Archive (ii) Aerial view of Corner of Parnell Street
            and North Great George's Street, Dublin 1 – Google Earth (iii) Ordnance Survey Ireland (iv) Office and
            Warehouse, North Great George's Street, Dublin 1- Dublin City Council Archive
P.20   (i) Drawing – Denis Byrne (ii) Montage – Denis Byrne (iii) Floor Plans – Denis Byrne (iv) On Best
            Behaviour – Barbara Egan
P.21   (i) Book Cover, No Such Thing as Society - Andy McSmith (Permission applied for)
            (ii) Margaret Thatcher – Getty Images (Permission applied for)
P.22   Cigar Box Photograph – Denis Byrne
P.25   Glenstal Drawing – Denis Byrne
P.26   Staatsgalerie diagrams – James Stirling (Permission applied for)
P.27   (i) Saynatsalo – Alvar Aalto (Laura Smith) (ii) Casa Malaparte - David Ibáñez Núñez (iii) The Glacier
            Museum - S Fehn (iv) The Jantar Mantar, Jaipur – Unesco
P.28   (i) Movement diagram, Villa Savoye - Rainis A Tebicis (ii) Villa Savoy Ramp - Architetturaviaggi.it (iii)
            Villa at The Hague – Zaha Hadid (Permission applied for)
P.29   Photographs and drawings – Denis Byrne
P.30   Photographs and drawings – Denis Byrne
P.31   Photographs - Denis Byrne
P.32   All images by Denis Byrne Architects except Newgrange - OPW (Permission applied for)
P.33   All images by Denis Byrne Architects
P.34   All images by Paul Tierney
P.35   (i) and (ii) Anthony Coleman (iii) Paul Tierney
P.36   All images by Anthony Coleman
P.37   (i) Gas Networks Ireland Building, drawing – Denis Byrne Architects (ii) Gas Networks Ireland
            Building, photograph – Gas Networks Ireland
P.38   (i) Cunningham Road, drawings & image – Denis Byrne Architects (ii) CGI – Denis Byrne Architects
P.39   (i) Denis Byrne Architects (ii) (iii) and (iv) 36 North Great Georges Street – Eugene Langan
            (v) Inauguration of the Paris Opera - Public Domain
P.40   Photograph – Denis Byrne
P.42   (i) Amsterdam Merchant Staircase - Public Domain (ii) Georgian Staircase – Eugene Langan
P43   (i) Matrix of connected spaces Palazzo Antonini - Public Domain (ii) Corridor and
            rooms Amesbury House - Public Domain
P.44   (i) Phalanstery- Anonymous/ Public Domain (ii) Tulou- Enclosed communal housing – Billy Trout
            (iii) Shikumen Lilong – Public domain (iv) Unité d'habitation – Le Corbusier (Permission applied for)
P.45   Drawings – Denis Byrne
P.46   (i) Photograph – Denis Byrne (ii) Building and Gap – Eugene Langan (iii) 36 North Great Georges
            Street and side lane – Eugene Langan (iv) Cigar Box and side lane – Eugene Langan (v) and (vi) Life in
            the Gap – Denis Byrne
P.47   (i) Staircase drawings – Denis Byrne (ii) Gas Networks Ireland – Paul Tierney

THE PURPOSEFUL FRAME
Architecture, Sociality and Space Formation

PROLOGUE

Before the performance of a tragedy the Greeks listened to the plot summarised in a prologue and so could follow the denouement of the play without that element of curiosity which is alien to the contemplative serenity and aesthetic judgment.'

CAST
Main Character and Narrator
Denis Byrne   Architect, Teacher and Curator

London 1980's
Beardsmore Yauner Byrne
Ben Kelly Design

Dublin 1990's
Teaching at DIT School of Architecture

Dublin 2000's
Denis Byrne Architects formed
darc space gallery of architecture opens
Starts PhD process

SET
A Table with 4 chairs
A Light Fitting (ordinary)
A Wall, for still images
A Curtain, for videos
Found Objects

London 1980's

PROLOGUE   SUPPORTING CAST

1996 27 North Great Georges Street
– Denis Byrne and Maggie Moran

A self-funded development of an old house/ warehouse building to provide 2 apartments, in central Dublin.

2004 Cigar Box
– Denis Byrne Architects

A mixed development of apartments and offices.

2005 Annaville Housing
– Denis Byrne Architects

A residential development of 50 apartments and four houses.

2006 Cunningham Road
– Denis Byrne Architects

A project for 15 houses and 9 apartments on a sloping site, overlooking the sea.

2006 36 NGGSt
– Denis Byrne Architects

A mixed development in a listed Georgian building in central Dublin.

2009 House at Breeogue
– Denis Byrne Architects

A single-family house on a small site near an estuary in County Sligo.

2009 darc space gallery
– Denis Byrne and Maggie Moran

A gallery, exhibition space and forum for architecture and the related arts in the offices of Denis Byrne Architects.

2009 Sacred Space Exhibition
– darc space

An exhibition of the formation of new social and religious spaces in Dublin.

2012 Gas Networks
– Denis Byrne Architects

A 5,200sqm corporate building for a gas company, at the outer edge of Dublin.

2013 National Diaspora Centre
– Denis Byrne Architects

A project for the Irish National Diaspora Centre, a building of 15,000 sqm in County Clare.

2016 The Marconi Station
– Denis Byrne Architects

Visitor and interpretative facilities at the historic Marconi Telegraphy Station and Alcock & Brown transatlantic landing site near Derrigimlagh, Co Galway.

2017 PhD Exhibit, Barcelona
– Denis Byrne

A completion examination in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

PROLOGUE   PLOT OUTLINES

ARCHITECTURE AND SOCIETY

The PhD introduces 3 main ideas that constellate the powerful human concepts of Architecture and Society and places them within, what I have called **The Purposeful Frame**.

Significant Movement – *Distilling and framing the essential movement within a project.*

Social Attitude – *Ways of being, embedded within the project. Firstly, opportunities for representing certain social formations, and secondly, possibilities for communality within the programme.*

Social Potential – *Valency, a conceptual attempt at calibration of social potential; and tactics and tectonics to improve potential for social occasion; right size, colour, mood/atmosphere, etc.*

KEY WORDS

Act, Adjacencies, City, Encounter, Epiphany, Figure, Frame, Ground, Hinterland, Movement, Occasion, Proximities, Relationships, Revelation, Ritual, Sacralisation, Serendipity, Social space, Society, Transcendent, Transformation, Valency.

PROLOGUE   STRUCTURE

Threshold I
Hinterland

Threshold II
3 Concepts

Threshold III
7 Thresholds
darc space gallery

Threshold IV
Sacred Spaces
Marconi Station

Threshold V
Epilogue

Threshold I   Hinterland

Mental Space

Serra's Parables of
Gravity and Architecture

The Purposeful Frame

Fascinations and Motivations

Threshold I
Hinterland

Mental Space

VIDEO 1

North Suburbs   City

Threshold I
Hinterland

Serra's Parables of Gravity and Architecture

"It was a moment of tremendous anxiety as the oiler rattled, swayed, tipped, and bounced into the sea, half-submerged, to then raise and lift itself and find its balance Not only had the tanker collected itself, but the witnessing crowd collected itself as the ship went through a transformation from an enormous obdurate weight to a buoyant structure; free, afloat and adrift.

My awe and wonder of that moment remained. All the raw material that I needed is contained in the reserve of this memory, which has become a recurring dream."

'Richard Serra 1988:
Serra's Parables of Gravity and Architecture' - Dave Hickey

Epiphany
(1): a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something (2): an intuitive grasp of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking
(3): an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure b: a revealing scene or moment.

Threshold I
Hinterland

THE PURPOSEFUL FRAME   Architecture, Sociality and Space Formation

Architecture is a frame; it frames human activity. It does this purposefully, with intent. The frame presupposes an architecture of generosity, one that thinks more of man than he may think of himself.

Key Research Questions

People are profoundly social beings and if architecture can be described as 'the purposeful framing of human activity', then...

- *What are the spatial conditions under which this framing best occurs?*

- *What factors help in this framing process?*

- *What is the relationship of my architecture to social formation?*

- *How can this research assist in my future work?*

- *What relevance has this to the wider architectural community?*
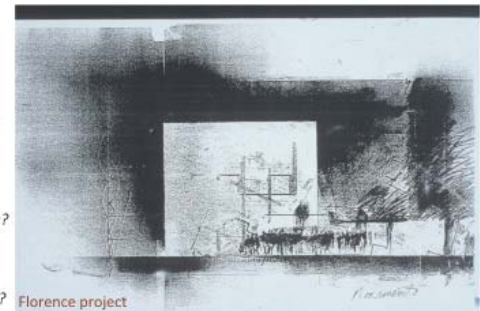
Florence project

Towards a New Anthropology

The study of the human condition and its associated long history of social formations, an understanding of which is essential for the germination and growth of potent architectural ideas, ideas that are firmly rooted in the rich soil of human experience.
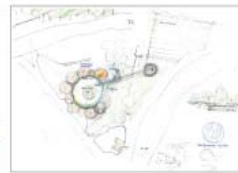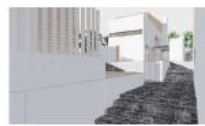

Ramon y Cajal
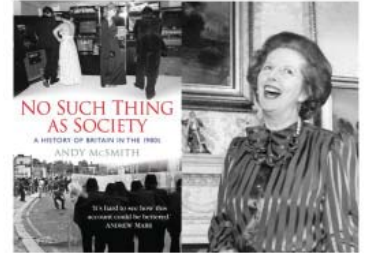
Fascinations and Motivations

Threshold II   3 Concepts

Significant Movement
Coda: Where Things Find Themselves

Social Attitiude

Social Potential

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1 Significant Movement

Proposition: Each project contains a purposeful movement at its heart, one that captures its essence; the human experience of purposeful movement through a socialised space architecturally framed.

Space becomes potential in time through movement.

Significant Movement
Gas Building – Ascent to the Roof

VIDEO 2
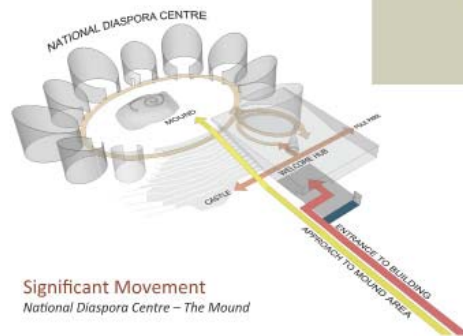
Significant Movement
National Diaspora Centre – The Mound

Significant Movement
Annaville – The Hidden Space

Significant Movement
Cunningham Road – The Hill, the Sea and the Staircase

Significant Movement
Marconi Station – A Walk in the Bog

Coda: Where Things Find Themselves
The Kitchen, a natural landscape formed by movement.

Desire Lines

2 **Social Attitude**
Ways of being

Opportunities for representing certain social formations,
and possibilities for communality within the programme.

Lane living - Space

Phalanstery - Organisation
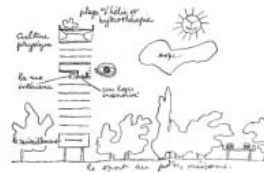
2 **Social Examplars**
Ways of being

Tulou – Object in Landscape

Social Attitude
Ways of being

Cunningham Road

Form	Content
Hill Town	*The Great Staircase*

SITE SECTION

Viewing Point
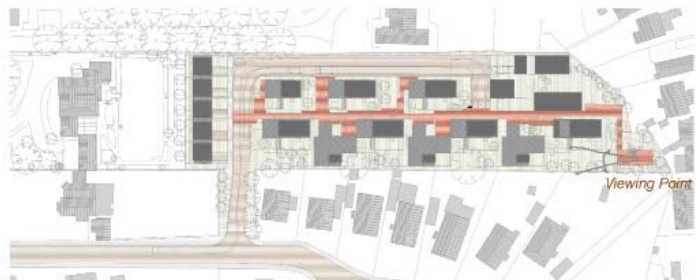
The Great Staircase

Key Early Image – *The Great Staircase (with and without)*

Social Attitude
Ways of being

Gas Building

Form
Compound, Settlement

Content
Egalitarian space gathered under one roof

Site Diagram
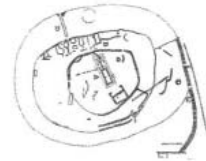
Early roof plan

References

Gas Networks Building- *Compound, Settlement, Community*

Main

Stores

Training School
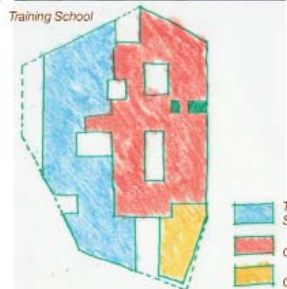
Entrances and Gardens
Gas Networks Building- Organisation

Canteen and pond

Training School, Workshops, Stores

Office

Canteen

Social Attitude
Ways of being

Cigar Box

Form
Tenement, Phalanstery

Content
The public / private space (The Gap)

Social Attitude
Form - Tenement, Phalanstery   *Content - The Gap*

HOUSE PRIVATE | CITY PUBLIC

CIGAR BOX

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING
5 CIGAR BOX
6 LIVING SPACE
7 WINDOW

Tenement staircase
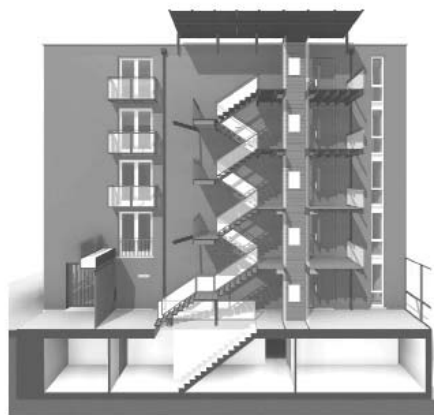
Social Attitude *Life in the Gap*

Cigar Box- The Wardrobe Staircase

Gas Building

3   Social Potential

Social Valency
Proxemics
Mike Golds Dolls House
Movement, Attitude and Potential in the Gas Building

SOCIAL VALENCY

The social potential of a space, its level of attractiveness to human engagement, and its consequent potential to encourage meaningful encounter.

Espace Polyvalente

The Mechanisms– Fit, right size, mood, colour, etc
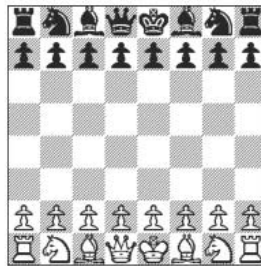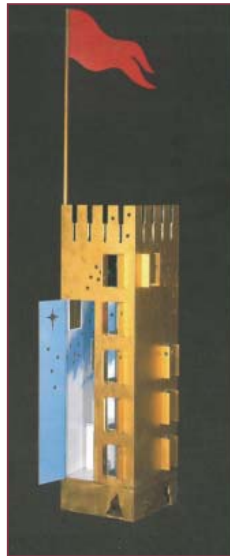

Strategy and Tactics

The 2 Person Room

PROXEMICS

The study of set measurable distances between people as they interact.

EDWARD T. HALL, Anthropologist

The Meeting Room Table
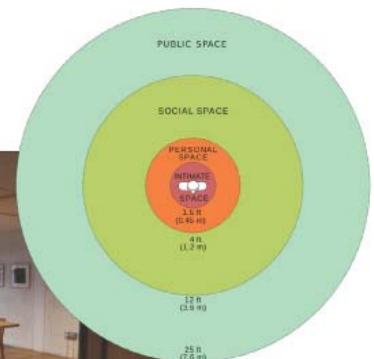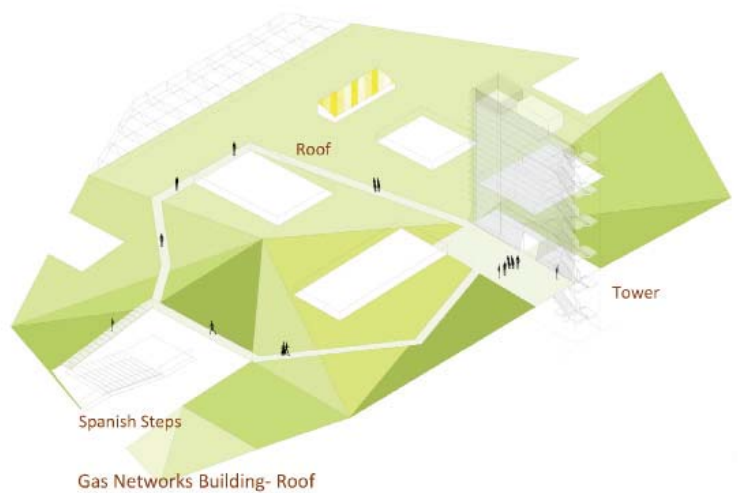
RIGHT SIZE
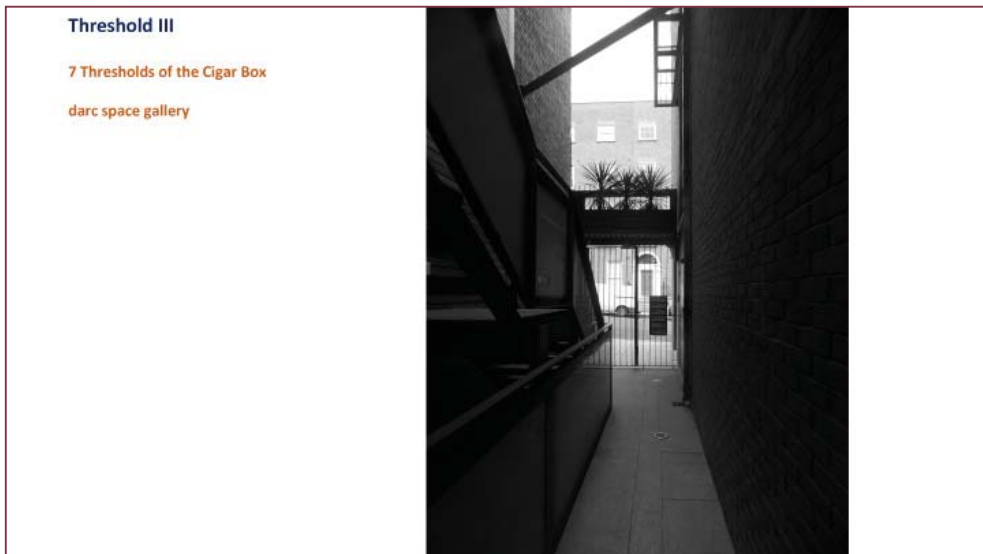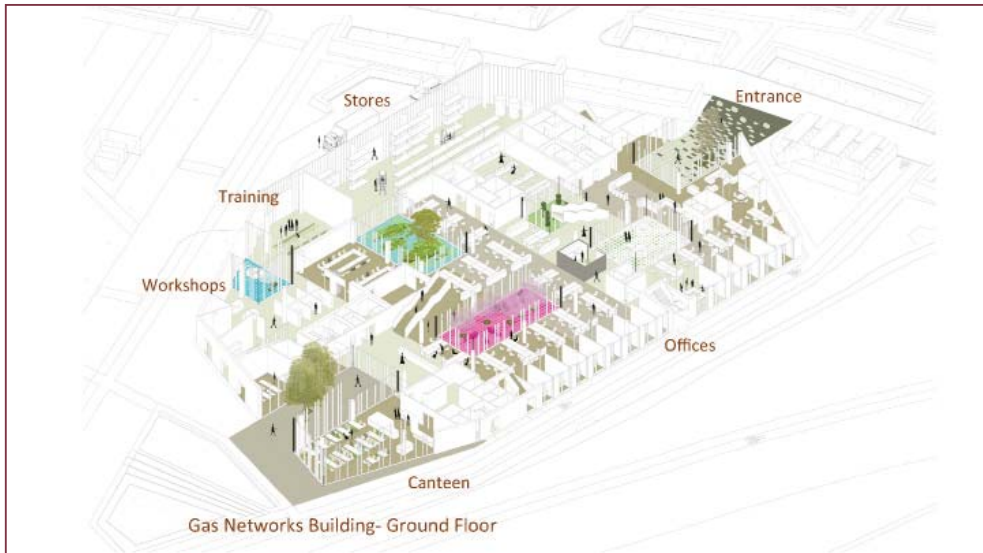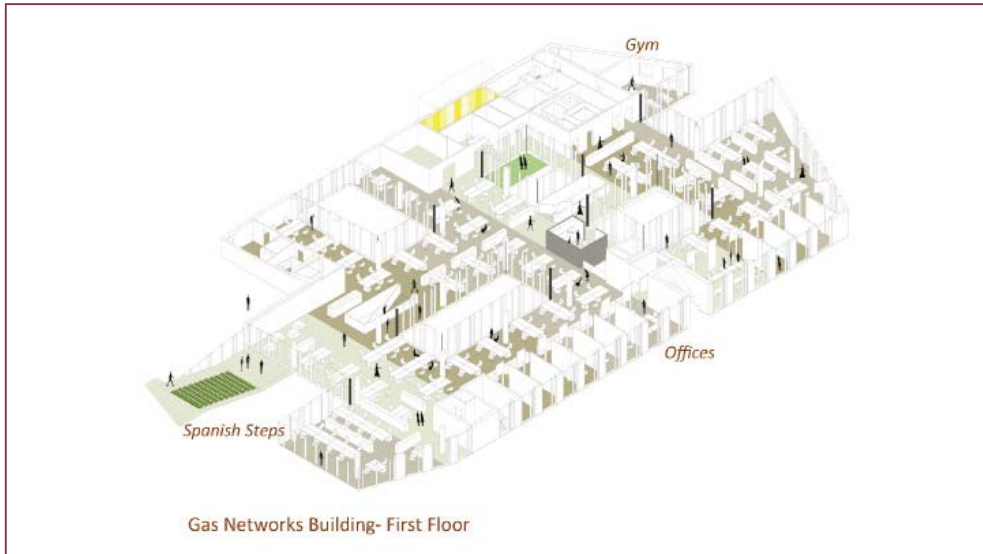Mike Gold's Dolls House

VIDEO 3

The Wardrobe Staircase

Gas Building

Social Potential
Movement, Attitude and Potential in The Gas Building   **VIDEO 4**

Roof

Tower

Spanish Steps

Gas Networks Building- Roof

Gas Networks Building- First Floor

Gas Networks Building- Ground Floor

Threshold III

7 Thresholds of the Cigar Box

darc space gallery

7 Thresholds of the Cigar Box   VIDEO 5

1 ENTRANCE
2 GATE
3 STAIR
4 LANDING
5 CIGAR BOX
6 LIVING SPACE
7 WINDOW

darc space gallery

VIDEO 6

Threshold IV

Sacred Space

The Marconi Station
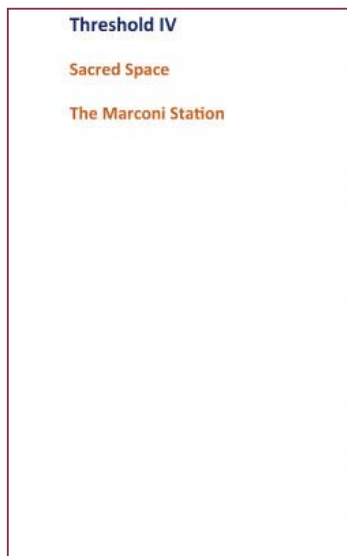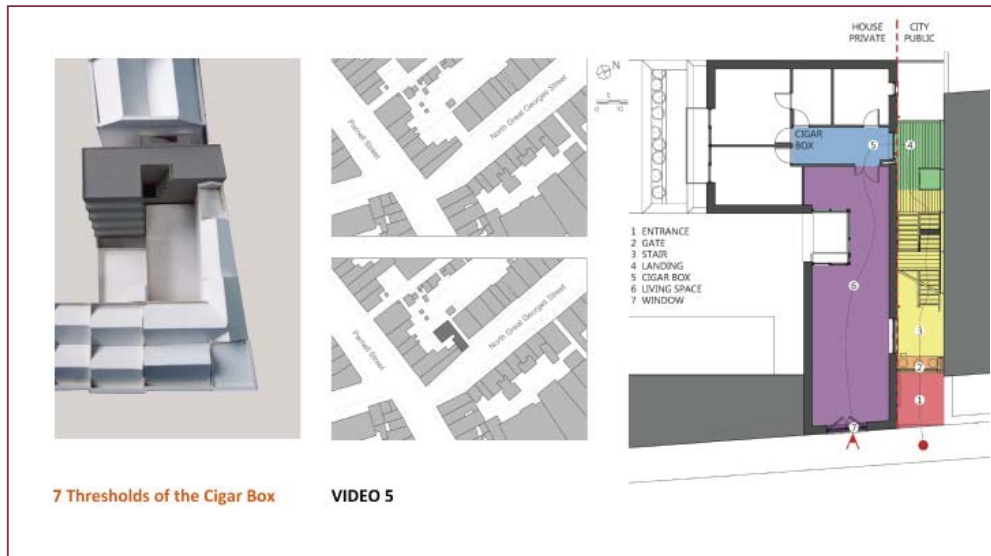
Sacred Space Exhibition   VIDEO 7
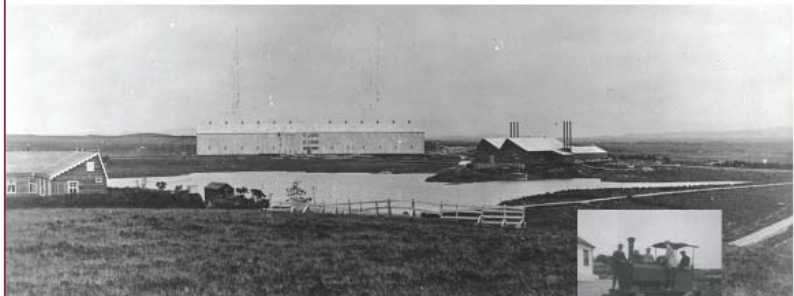
The Marconi Station – Project and Exhibition   VIDEO 8

Threshold V   Epilogue

Threshold V   **Epilogue**

Movement Attitude Potential

Uncertainty

The Room in the City

Occasion

Denis Byrne   B Arch MRIAI MRIBA
A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2017