Lost Armatures and Found Forms

Conversation and the Contingent in the making of work by Clancy Moore Architects

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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LOST ARMATURES AND FOUND FORMS

CONVERSATION AND THE CONTINGENT IN THE MAKING OF WORK BY CLANCY MOORE ARCHITECTS

ESSAYS
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.

Andrew Clancy
THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my partner in Clancy Moore Architects - Colm Moore for inspiration, restless interrogation, friendship and constant reminders of the essential and vital task of architecture.

To clients, teachers and colleagues who in diverse ways, from showing example to enabling through commission or providing space have placed their trust in the messy task of allowing us find voice in the world.

To Prof Leon Van Schaik for dreaming into being this incredible scaffold by which this voice might be productively interrogated and reflected upon, and so much more besides.

To MacDara and Luan for your joyful smiles in the face of an uncertain future.

Above all these to Muirne, for your love, and your generosity of spirit, insight and critique.
ABOUT THIS TEXT

This dissertation has been prepared as part of a PhD by reflective practice as part of the RMIT Invitational Design Practice Programme. The research is grounded in research strategies associated with the RMIT model which is described in detail in what has become known as “The Pink Book”. This research proceeds through reflection as an embedded part of practice - with the fruits of this reflection disseminated, discussed and focussed through a series of biennial Practice Research Symposia (PRS). This dissertation, combined with a public exhibition presentation and defence forms the work being assessed for consideration of the PhD award.

The dissertation is formed in 3 parts, which are to be considered as equally weighted in understanding the research:

- This text - which gives an overarching narrative to the structure of the phd and links a series of key essays together to demonstrate the substantive contribution to knowledge.

- A chronology of the work of Clancy Moore. This gives a summative overview and is to read as a companion to this collection of essays.

- Video case-studies of work process, with footnotes which contextualise and frame the work being discussed (link). All the work of the practice is jointly made by both Colm and I and so these case-studies are common to both our PhDs.

Key elements of the RMIT / Van Schaik model PhD by reflective practice route such as spatial history, touchstones and community of practice underlie all of the above and are threaded throughout the case studies and the texts.
Notes:

1 Van Schaik, L (2011) *The Pink Book: By Practice, By Invitation Design Practice*. Australia: Sixpointsixone

2 These events are symposia at which multiple phd candidates present research in progress, along with Phd exams, keynote addresses and a collegiate dinner. They essentially provide an opportunity to summate and reflect upon the evolving research, and to conjecture what the next steps might be. In our practice we undertook some events as a joint presentation by the two partners and others individually. A summation of each PRS undertaken as part of this research is given at the end of this document.
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ABSTRACT

Architecture is no longer confined to the making of monuments. Due to the complexity of contemporary construction technologies, and increased regulatory oversight, professional architects are increasingly involved in the making of fabric, and in working closely with existing structures. This process has been ongoing for the last 60 years and has profound implications for how architects operate. In these contexts the weight of the architectural intervention is slight in comparison to the external forces which bear on it. Contingency is the primary context. Modes of practice which allow an architect to act nimbly while still preserving their position must be developed in response.

This paper explores one such mode of practice as found in the studio of Clancy Moore Architects. In particular this research explores how the pursuit of a singular perfected idea can be counterproductive in these contexts. In response a more nimble attitude to what constitutes the ‘project’ is deployed, one based on a fragmentary approach. The value of conversation is highlighted as a literal and metaphorical technique for engaging with others, with sites, and the broader culture of architecture. The role of this conversation in allowing multiple fragmentary ideas be held in equilibrium is highlighted. This way of working is one that was latent in the practice prior to commencing the research, but understanding it has allowed the technique be deployed with more acuity and confidence.

While the explorations cited are specific to this one practice the observations made are of relevance to practice in general, and it is here that the contribution to knowledge is found.
MAKING GROUND

Consider the Grange Stone circle at Lough Gur. The circle, 45m in diameter, is marked by 113 stones placed about the perimeter. Other than several hearth spaces placed within there were no other built structures. Broken into segments with 12 diametrically opposed orthostats the structure was a calendar, with points aligned to the solstices. The largest stone *Runnach Croim Duibh*, weighs over 40 tonnes. But for me this is not the most impressive aspect of the construction. The entire ground defined by the circle, to a depth of some 60cm, is imported soil. Some 130 tonnes of material in all. There is nothing particularly special about the soil physically, it comes most likely from somewhere reasonably close to the circle. Ordinary ground somehow rarefied by the act of its transplantation. The placing of this layer of soil is to me the primary architectural act of the constellation. The soil would have been spread carefully, hollows filled and bumps smoothed. By its artificiality it makes the silhouette of the stones more profound, more defined. There is an aesthetic at work here, one that understands that sometimes the best way to understand a place is to make some ground from which to regard it from.

The archaeological record, so clear as to the physical constituency of the making and current state of the site is not explicit as to function. The presence of large amounts of deliberately broken pottery and two hearths mean that it is categorised under that broad and ultimately useless classification of ‘ceremonial’. Despite this, and in full awareness of our ignorance we can speculate.

The circle has a permeable boundary, admitting the surroundings to bear on those within. We know it was an observational device, allowing study of the stars, the seasons and perhaps of the landscape beyond, but I don’t
think that any of these were the principal thing being observed. Above all else on the occasion of ritual and in the gathering of people together it was a place for society to portray itself to itself. Perhaps the proliferation of these circles at this time represents a burgeoning but sophisticated societal self-awareness.

This is only speculation. An artefact outside the cultural situation that produced it cannot communicate the full weight of its original import and use on its own. We can only engage with it from our own time and perspective, confident that while we may not understand ‘correctly’ the uses, that some truths may be discovered in the attempt. As I set out to write this dissertation this observation seems like a useful place to start.

It is slightly strange to be writing at all as I was, and I remain, sceptical about the value of architectural practitioners writing. I am not sceptical about writing per se. I am sceptical of certainty, and of writing as propaganda, as a projective force. Perhaps in part this comes from my experience as a student, when I read voraciously and naïvely in search of answers. At that time theory seemed to have over-reached itself. Many of the practices producing the most significant work seemed more interested in their publishing arms, while text had conquered in another sense - a whole doomed movement had been spun out from the obsessive linguistic games of a particular branch of twentieth century French philosophy. This context and its subsequent frustrations led to a belief, in common with many of my peers, that the ultimate value of architecture is experiential. I grew sceptical of layers of meaning that can be applied to work of questionable value, and interested in how the thing itself might be well made.
Fig 1.3
I operate in a partnership\textsuperscript{2}, a form of practice common in architecture. The practice evolved a clear work methodology based on modelling, drawing and sketching. We were reluctant to give space to the value of anything outside these in early public descriptions of the practice, being all too aware of the illusory mapping of ideas onto work after the fact. Through the process of the PhD this position has developed, and I now understand the critical role of conversation in the process, as means through which ideas are discussed, but more critically as a means by which ideas can be made.

This conversation takes place primarily between the two partners, but also with others, an extended circle of people which includes architects, clients, makers and friends. The conversation extends also to places, objects, texts and spaces whose relationship continually presents a well to draw from.

Architecture is not as the physical sciences in that successive generations can act to advance knowledge in a linear fashion. For practitioners in those fields, broadly speaking, there is trust that the successive layers of deposited information are solid, that their disciplines in their arcane specialisms are traceable back and built upon discoveries made sometimes millennia ago. It is not necessary, or possible, to check all the decisions and discoveries in between to operate today. In architecture this linearity is not possible in the same fashion. While we add to the continuum of thought that is the built environment the culture of architecture depends on principles being discovered anew in each architect, and adapted to serve new societal and technological demands. This position is one that is in constant development, but it exists at a field broader than an individual project or site. Perhaps it is best described by what Siza calls “the difficult search for authenticity\textsuperscript{3}”. While the term ‘authenticity’ resonates with me, it remains elusive as to what is at work here.
The built environment is simultaneously a laboratory and an archive. Engaged with experientially, as a backdrop to the lives of those who inhabit it, it is possibly at once the most subtle and yet pervasive evidence of the complex social structures which sustain our civilisation. In its buildings we can see a society mapped. Its concerns, values and pressures made evident.

As architecture is called into being by forces external to itself there is a balance required between the contingency that inevitably results and the architects personal or collective position.

The Portuguese architect and educator Fernando Tavora wrote about his journey from being a young architect, a follower of the modernist tradition, to being the architect of the place specific and careful work he executed in his country.

“...The years rolled by. I saw buildings and I met architects. I understood that a building is not present in a beautiful plan nor in a fine photograph taken on a sunny day and from its best angle; I confirmed that after all, all the architects were people, with their greater and lesser qualities, and with their greater and lesser defects. I came to believe that architecture is overall an event like so many others that fills our life and like any other, is subject to the contingencies that this life implies. And the untouchable white virgin has turned for me into a manifestation of life. Lost, its sense of the abstract, I have found architecture like anything that I or any other man could create - better or worse - terribly dependant, so tied to circumstance like a tree through its roots holds on to the earth.”

Much thinking in architecture is contingent, made in the moment, drawing on both fast and slow thinking\(^5\) in ways not easily describable.
While not excluding other techniques the ability of conversation to make space for these pressures to be held in balance, for seemingly disparate forces to find some common purpose is worthy of examination. The manifestation of this process in the finished work, and the relationships that this holds for others might be what I am searching for above all else. This could be a way to pursue ‘authenticity’.

The process of reflective thinking about the practice and its work at once inside the practice and outside the normal pressures of project work has been invaluable. Indeed now when I return to thinking about the circle in Lough Gur it strikes me that perhaps I have been looking at it incorrectly all along. What I read as the interior was to those gathered there not the interior at all, rather it was the exterior of their world. Behind the stones they were outside the places and routines of everyday life, although they were still visible beyond. So it is with reflective thought, it is a means of taking everything and somehow holding it at arms length. Sometimes the best way to understand where you are is to make some ground from which to regard it from.

Notes:

1 National Monument #247

2 Clancy Moore Architects, established with Colm Moore in 2007


In April 1914 George E Moore arrived to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Norwegian retreat in response to several written invitations. To make the trip required considerable effort on Moore’s part, a journey involving road, rail and sea, and taking some days in itself. His arrival broke one of the more celebrated instances of abstraction and hermetic retreat in the history of philosophy. Wittgenstein had been living in his cabin in the small town of Skjolden in search of isolation and concentrated thinking in its beautiful landscapes. He had worked hard at avoiding any contact that might disrupt the purity of his thinking. ‘Go away! It’ll take me two weeks to get back to the point where I was before you interrupted me,’ he is famously reputed to have shouted at a local who had once greeted him. That this carefully guarded retreat was broken at Wittgenstein’s invitation speaks eloquently about the value of conversation as a means to articulate, explore and develop ideas.

Over the next two weeks Moore would act as a critical but supportive audience as Wittgenstein talked through the emergent ideas about logic which would eventually form part of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. While it is unclear exactly what transpired day to day Wittgenstein's subsequent letters to Bertrand Russell suggest that Wittgenstein did a lot of speaking, and that Moore questioned and took notes. In these same letters Wittgenstein says these notes by Moore are ‘essentially definitive’ as to his thinking at the time. So while the anecdote is commonly used to somehow reference Wittgenstein's primacy - in how he used his supposed superior as
Fig 2.2
a mere foil, summoning him to serve at his command (Wittgenstein was still an undergraduate at the time, while Moore was far more eminent), it is also inherent in the tale that there is something about the spoken word and the critically informed audience that allowed thoughts previously latent to cohere and make sense.

The anecdote is hardly surprising. Within philosophy the central role of certain conversations to articulate, explore and develop ideas is a well established method from its first documented appearance in Plato’s retelling of the dialogues of Socrates. The dialogue as a means of exploring an idea has had many appearances since, albeit mostly in the guise of a written, fictional conversation, used to build a position. But it seems that there is more to the dialogue than as a means to allowing a reader to understand the thinking of the author. In considering what this additional value might be it is necessary to describe what I mean by conversation. A first limit might be to note that any conversation by its nature involves more than one protagonist, and is unscripted. There are many ways that two or more people engage in discourse - all require a common agreement (mostly implied) as to what is being discussed, many can be interwoven in a single interaction.

In the simplest form of these exchanges there is little more at work than the conveyance of information, frequently relating to the logistics of daily life and work. These exchanges are instrumental, and therefore linear. If questions arise they relate to teasing out the exact nature of what is being said. The interaction ends or moves on to other topics once this task is complete. In other interactions this questioning becomes more central, and indeed becomes the primary act, and these are more interesting. In these interactions different sets of information held by the various parties
to the discourse are explored and tested. Frequently the nature of the information being tested comprises of many discrete elements, bound into a position which each protagonist articulates. The nature of this articulation and the questions that arise provides a possible description of two broad forms - argument and conversation.

An argument involves a discourse in which protagonists engage in an effort to prove their own position as superior to the other. The job of those so engaged is to reveal the weakness of the others position and to mask any weaknesses in their own. Questions are informed by a desire to reveal these weaknesses. Accordingly answers arrive in the form of a shield to deflect the impact of any critique and to allow space to make a response opening up a critique of the other. An argument can be ‘won’ by a protagonist with superior rhetorical skills which mask a weak position. Arguments therefore, being informed by a desire to convince another of our prior correctness, involve an implied objective to admit as little change to our position as previously established before the argument commenced. It consequentially requires a particular type of listening, one attuned to identifying the means to weaken the position of the other, and closed to acknowledging weaknesses in ones own. This forensic listening can provide insights which form the basis of powerful arguments, but also precludes much else. There are very many situations where this is a necessary and valuable approach, but this ‘closed’ nature has a clear effect on how we understand the issue being examined.

In contrast a conversation has a different objective, that of coming to some commonly understood position, one not held by either party in advance. A conversation is not about convincing another. The role of those engaged is to be open to the possibility that they do not know what the valid position might be. This openness affects the nature of its questions.
If it is to be valuable the purpose of questioning here is to respect and consider the weight of the others opinion. Similar to the process of argument, but acting in the opposite manner, conversation advances when those engaged are capable of recognising strengths in the other, in a process at once self-interested and empathetic. An implicit part of this is having an openness and willingness to identify weaknesses in ones own position. This process allows an internal logic to emerge in the conversation, one which explores the subject through a series of iteratively established positions and the testing of these in turn. The conversations’ trajectory is guided by this common territory. In this fashion certain forms of conversation represent a means of thinking, one whose purpose is to discover a communal understanding of that which is being discussed.

These conversations need not only take place between people, but also between people and texts, places and artefacts. They can be short and to the point, or can go on for years (such as in two partners engaged in a common creative enterprise). It is possible also to identify conversations which take place over generations, with the collected outputs of these conversations representing the cultural landscape of the territories of our world. What these all have in common is the protagonists informed position, which is put into play by its testing in the generative questioning of conversation.

Gadamer puts it well when he says “To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.” Otherwise why bother with a conversation in the first place.

My particular interest in the conversation as a technique for forming knowledge arises from architecture’s intrinsic nature as a socially engaged art. Buildings are called into being by needs that arise in the world. The
process by which buildings eventually become realised comprise in the main situations not under the control of any one agent. The availability of materials, the economy, the values of the client all form a role in shaping the design. Legislative approvals, regulation, procurement and financing all impact in various ways. The design team is made of people of diverse expertise, all of whom input into the discussion. Most architect’s offices themselves are made of more than one person, and partnerships where two or more people have an equal stake in the nature of the design are extremely common. Once built the building is experienced by its occupants as an experiential fragment of their life, one of many such, the nature of which are as varied as the occupants are themselves. Whatever else might be involved in making a building, it seems necessary to enter into a conversation with the world in an expansive manner, perhaps more now than ever before.

With the increasing complexity of contemporary construction techniques and regulatory frameworks architects are required in the making of the fabric of our built environments as well as the monuments. This process has been happening for some time and it increasingly places architecture in situations where the weight of the intervention is slight in comparison to the economic and legislative forces bearing on it. The ability to be nimble in this context, to be adept and fluid in bringing a sensibility to bear is essential, and is not best served by a practitioner wedded to apparent certainty, unaware of the sensibility underlying their work. Nor does it prosper with more traditional readings of concept and realisation. Ignasi de Sola Morales describes it succinctly as follows.

“Contemporary Architecture, in conjunction with the other arts, is confronted with the need to build on air, to build in the void. The proposals of contemporary architecture
are to be constructed not on the basis of any immovable reference, but under the obligation to posit for each step both the goal and its grounding."

In this fluid reading of how the building is formed and how it might be experienced, it is interesting that many of the more celebrated theoretical architectural discourses tend to concentrate on aspects which are abstracted and removed from these messy realities. The implication being perhaps that as all buildings are in their essence a negotiation, it is hardly worthwhile dwelling on this given it is a self-evident fact. Rather it is necessary to be highly precise and reductive in aspects in order to achieve anything worthwhile. While this may be true it is also true that this quality of being enmeshed in the vagaries of the world is precisely the aspect of architecture that allows the built environment to hold cultural meaning. In some sense a building is by its nature an encapsulation of the discourse which produced it.

Conversations move onward. They proceed by agreement, (or perhaps that is not quite right - for any agreements arrive not as final declarations, but as settlements) which iteratively build into a sedimentary ground. This technique of building the ground as it advances allows a reading of conversation that has resonances with Sola Morales’ insight. The conversation is the art of finding out what this new position might be, and using this as a ground for further exploration. It is this dialectic, or rather a small part of it as found in a modest form in my own practice, that forms the site for this research. How this conversation is navigated, and its particular character in the making of the work of our practice is a key concern of this text and its attendant case studies.
Speeches, debates, readings and performances for example are not conversation, at least not in the sense being described here. The work of a performer in adjusting the text being read in their acting of it can act in a conversational manner over time, accreting with other readings, other performances to an evolving understanding of the content of the original text.

Verschaffel, B. (2001) *Architecture is (as) a Gesture* Switzerland: Quart Verlag

Such as in the making of an argument within a formal legal setting.

Writing in Truth and Method (Gadamer, H.G. (1975) *Truth and Method* UK: Bloomsbury ) Gadamer points out that one of the greatest insights that Plato gives into Socrates methodology was his observation that it is harder to ask questions than to answer them. It is when those being questioned by Socrates seek to turn the table and take the supposed easier role of questioning instead that they most clearly come to grief. This failure arises as their questions are not based on any openness to the possibilities of the answer, but rather arise from a desire to prove themselves right.

Gadamer described the fundamental nature of the Socratic dialectic as arising from its embedded *docta ignorantia* - the knowledge of not knowing, For the purposes of a critical conversation the authentic question is one grounded in the indeterminacy of not knowing, and uses this as the basis of finding out. Gadamer proposes that the act of questioning is better understood as an art. This art form, dialectics, is valuable only when those asking the questions are able to preserve their attitude towards openness. Gadamer is eager to establish that there are clear limits to this - that of what he calls the horizon of the question being raised, which frames a common agreement as to the subject being explored.

While this is not true of all theoretical stances a quick consideration of some of the major critical stances of the last 100 years such as deconstruction, parametricism, minimalism, post modernism (as style), rationalism, modernism (as style) etc each depends on the achievement of particular aesthetic goals despite whatever the contingencies of the project might entail.

It is perhaps also true that the lack of any over-arching theoretical context to work in today arrives precisely because of this contingent reality.
Fig 3.1
PLACE AND PEOPLE

The degree to which climate, time and geography have influenced me continues to surprise. Ireland has not been background. The island landscape is a vital concern, a constant fascination. To quote Tim Winton "it has exerted a force on me which is every bit as geological as family, and every bit as familial as geography."

Ireland is not so much densely inhabited as densely remembered, densely imagined. Although it presents the customary European fabric of towns, cities and a productive landscape there are frayed edges and apparent wildernesses where the built environment seems very distant. But then you notice the corrugations of past productive landscape catching a slanting sun against the hillside, low walls in bogs that mark lost dwellings and towns, chimneys rising like stylae in the middle of a commercial forest to mark some lost village. There is something in these spaces larger than the actual spatial extent allows. Ireland is small physically, but vast temporally. It is all built.

Despite the repeated use of ‘natural’ scenery in the promotion of the island internationally the difference between the city and the rural condition is less than one might imagine, and certainly there are no gaps at all when it comes to thinking about making a building. The landscape’s militarised and agricultural grain is a quasi urban network of frequently contested territories where everything impinges on everything else.

Growing up my means of engagement with this landscape was through random and frequently ill-equipped walks. I have clear memories of tramping up misty hills which continually offered new summits as each rise was mounted, or having to ford across tidal inlets after getting trapped on
sand bars. These walks were by no means desolate however, but punctuated by conversations, many of which impacted on me. The primary spaces of my youth were these conversations, conversations with an archaeologist about spaces that once were, and conversations with an architect about spaces that frequently never would be.

My mother was trained as an archaeologist and maintained a deep interest in this world. Many of the walks I mention took in sites of interest to her, and their narratives were folded into the conversations in these places. Ireland's past monuments were frequently constructed in timber, and had long faded, other sites had been razed in acts of conquest or insurrection. In many cases all there was to see were ripples in the ground, many times only noticed when we were standing on them. It was easy in my child's mind to spin these past structures into existence as we stood there, and fully populate them. Harder today where habit has engrained the stubborn persistence of the present as fact. But at some point I was taught that these past presents were as much a part of the landscape as their present condition. Even though these structures were long gone I saw them as architecture not archaeology.

My experience with my architect father wasn't dissimilar. Here the fictive was not the 'used to be' but the 'never was' or the 'nearly was'. When he spoke about his life there were touchstones which continually reoccurred, 'the church' being one, Tangiers was another. These both, and there were others, were unbuilt projects, work he had undertaken with his friend Paul Moore³. Some were competitions he had won, others commissions awarded by private clients. Circumstances prevented any of this work being built⁴, and this first Clancy Moore did not endure, indeed never formally existed at all.
Fig 3.3
The dreams of this time became part of family mythology and it's background beat. My father I knew in his late career, where he had accepted a role with the state transportation authority, a job that gave him little pleasure, being mainly about the management of egos and the distribution of work to architects of questionable ability. The role offered stability however, important for a family of seven.

The rhyme of Clancy and Moore to my present position is coincidental but not without resonance. In an entry for a competition for a prototypical house we see an interest in an ordered plan, derived from classical precedents, and in the text the statement that "We believe that it is possible to utilise the tools forged in the workshop of history to produce an architecture for today without recourse to hackneyed traditionalism nor yet to mega technical solutions at the other end of the spectrum." Elsewhere in his church project a solitary, figurative column stands sentinel in an earthbound room, raising the roof to make a crack of light to the perimeter. Both these interests, in conversations with precedent as a generative device, and structural figures making an assembly explicit are central to the work of my practice.

As a student I was unaware of this side of his work. The tutors where I studied only knew the later work he was engaged in - and some were openly dismissive of him. This had the valuable effect of leaving me with an outsiders view of the school, incorrect and all as this belief was. I was lucky enough in my year to have a number of friends with a similar stance, and the conversations we had about architecture in this context of pulling against an implied orthodoxy were amongst the most valuable experiences the school offered. These conversations were how we navigated the subject, and while we studied the canon, and worked in the conventions of
model and drawing I frequently found that it was in conversation, while
describing something to another that I was able to make formative leaps in
project work. At the time I did not value these conversations as such,
indeed they didn't seem so much like work as an avoidance of it. This was
reinforced by advice from tutors, something I agreed with when they
raised it.

As a family our holidays were always in Ireland, and from my early youth
alternated between long visits to my mothers sister, in Loughatorick in Co
Galway and my fathers parents house ‘Finisterre’ in Wicklow. In my mind
they sit at opposite poles of a conversation about architecture.

When in their early fifties my fathers parents sold the family hotel and
retired. They bought an art deco villa on the coast near Wicklow town.
The house was caught between two eras, with edwardian interiors of
panelled rooms, and an exterior caught between modernist and art deco. It
was surrounded by a productive landscape of glasshouses, orchards and
lawns. The facilities were supported by numerous outbuildings in mass
concrete, painted white. It had been built by a local builder originally, an
enthusiast of architecture, but not held by any particular rigour arising
from a formal training. Somewhat esoterically in our child's minds the
house was reputed to have a fall out shelter, although we never saw it until
years later when we had to clear the house out after my grandparents death.
Fig 3.5
I never saw the house in its pomp. Even as it faded it had a robust elegance, its terrazzo and parquet worn to a high polish. Its kitchen was small on plan, but tall, walled in a grid of pale green tiles to head height. The painted walls rose above before curving gently in a small arris to the ceiling. The contrast between the gridded lower section and a softer line above the datum of tiles made the lower section feel like a room within the taller space. Its stretched proportions allowed heat and smoke to rise above and leave those at the small table undisturbed below.

The living room was made with vertical panels of mahogany, rising to the same height as the tiles in the kitchen. A fireplace in Kilkenny limestone dotted with circular fossils would warm up too hot to touch.

Upstairs in the main bedroom a slow curved bay window felt like being on the bridge of a ship. It was colder when you stood in its embrace, and the horizon of sea and the overgrown garden was as much a part of the room as any of the walls.

It was a place full of these precisely thought through and carefully made places, each felt timeless, neither new nor old. It was a collage of the expedient and the hopelessly aspirational.

The house filled up with furniture and junk, and my grandparents occupied progressively less of it as the years went on. Vines burst the glass of the greenhouses, and beehives full of swarms gone wild made any visit to the orchard perilous. I remember discovering the swimming pool as a concrete pit filled with dead foliage, and lost in undergrowth. It was a place where the enthusiasms of the long dead original builder felt like an archaeology of sorts.
His misremembered assembly of spaces and types were my first introduction to architecture in any serious sense - modernism was found as a palimpsest of the past in need of tending.

The other house was near Loughatorick. In the late 1970s my mothers sister and her family had moved to the west of Ireland, to this wild place on the border of Clare and Galway. They had bought a small mud walled cottage and had decided to live off the grid. We travelled there for extended stays every summer. Each time coincided with a new extension to the house. Nestled in a hollow, and out of sight, my uncle and aunt built onto the original form of the cottage in an opportunistic fashion, and without recourse to the niceties of planning or other legislative approvals.

The accretions they added were both expedient and wonderfully made. The hinterland, although bleak, was home to a wide variety of skilled makers, especially in the use of timber. These were mainly German or Dutch emigres who had emigrated to the west of Ireland after falling for its harsh romanticism.

In these extensions found objects such as salvaged doors and windows were combined with timber frame work bound with hand made joints. Plans were worked out at the kitchen table, a matter for communal discussion, and to which we were all welcome to contribute. Once work started anyone in the house was expected to help in the erection. Ground works might be laid years in advance for future projects making terraces and edges in which the tectonics of making a simple envelope were made explicit.
Fig 3.7
Mattie, my cousin, was my companion in this. He tried gamely to teach me the basics of wood working. I enjoyed the directness of the logics of this apprenticeship (in thinking, not making). The direct pragmatics of making a home seemed at odds to the abstracted metaphor driven work I was making in University at the same time. It was not until much later that I came to understand that these aspects did not represent competing ways of thinking.
Notes


2 Ireland is unusual in Western Europe in that its current population remains (despite population growth for the last 50 years) at a level far below the population of the island prior to the Great Famine of 1845-8. The current population is about 6.5 million, whereas the estimated population in 1844 was 8.5 million.

3 Paul Moore was a former associate of Marcel Breuer in New York, and a tutor in UCD with my father.

4 These experiments in setting up his own practice were concentrated in the late 1970s and early 1980s - a time of severe economic retrenchment, coupled to a closed political structure where work was frequently assigned on the basis of contacts than of skill.

5 Competition panel for entry to Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition 1980

6 Although present in my research the figure as element in our work is dealt with in more detail in the work of my partner in Clancy Moore, Colm whose PhD is concerned with the relationship between these figures and the bounding project.


8 As part of my fathers work with the state transportation company was a proposal he inherited to demolish the Temple Bar area of the city to make way for a transportation interchange.

9 One such was Steve Larkin who I sat beside in first year, and who I continue to share studio space with today. [www.stevelarkinarchitects.ie](http://www.stevelarkinarchitects.ie)

10 For example, I remember during my thesis year being told by a tutor ‘you talk too much, I don't trust someone who talks so much’. When this was said I agreed with him, and attempted to work on the project without complex verbal description, which was an interesting, if slightly frustrating experience. Somehow it was implicit (in me as much as the tutor) that talking was a way of avoiding the point, a way of not doing the necessary work of the architect, which was to understand and resolve the project to an essential concern, and to draw and present it beautifully.

11 My first flight for instance was when I was in university - our second year trip to Barcelona.
Clancy Moore’s first commission was the Slievebawnogue Quarry House in 2006. At the time Colm and I were both working for Shay Cleary Architects, a practice where we had been for some years. In agreeing to work together on the project it did not feel as if some decision had been taken to establish a business together, rather it felt like an extension of conversations that were already ongoing between us.

Of course this was not the case, but rather was a radically new undertaking. Until this time we had defined the common ground of our views on architecture based on conversations about the work of other architects, appreciative or critical, and it was quite another thing to have to make work ourselves.

We had been educated, as many architects are, to be the sole authors of our projects, defending them to the academic community as individuals. We were skilled in developing approaches, articulating these with drawing and models and in defending these. We were less assured in how we would be able to create an agreement together. Working on this project and the others that arrived around this time was in truth a process of working out what it was that we would do together, and how we would work. At this time we were unaware that this was what was afoot. Work proceeded fitfully and with many frustrations. Argument was as common as conversation, both with ourselves and others. Looking back it seems inevitable that this was not a straightforward process as this friction seems inherent to the task of developing a shared sensibility, held in common and not resting more with one partner or the other. This process is by no means complete, nor will it ever be, but it has become something we are more comfortable with. As time has past the resultant distance from the work has also helped. A temporal remove allows us to critically reflect on
the work without the pressures of the job. We have also benefited from the generosity of others, who have take the time to think about our work and to relate what they see with a disinterested eye. Every site, programme, and social context are different so each building is by necessity prototypical. The method and the sensibility are always in a process of emergence. Both are something we are continually finding out.

These themes were initially presented in our first PhD presentation ‘Building Practice’. The act of reflecting on our practice was something which had begun some years before this, when we had cause to give a number of public lectures. In preparing these we were dissatisfied with our inability to accurately and succinctly capture what was happening behind the making of the work we were talking about - and we found ourselves falling back into more comfortable descriptions which while honest were not the full story. Not knowing other ways of articulating ourselves we resorted to the standard monograph approach which resulted in presentations possessing a false certainty leaving little room for us to learn from the process.

These talks explored ideas we were comfortable with - our practice was established due to an agreement between us as to the nature of architecture. We were interested in architects who were able to make work which acted in continuity with the prevailing architectural culture where they worked, and informed by the spirit of their time. Educated in UCD, a school immersed in the ‘Critical Regionalist’ discourse this instinct was one that we had sought to explicate in our public conversations of the work. In preparing for the PhD presentation however what we found most surprising, confusing and ultimately valuable were the number of other seemingly competitive philosophies that were present in
the making of the work to this point. While we saw that concern for the practical requirements of detailing, and the resultant haptic qualities of materials were valued, these were juxtaposed with abstracted and distant methods by which these materials ended up in these situations. Similarly we could trace our interest in carefully working with the demands of a specific site and context being juxtaposed with other, competing ideas derived from the history of architecture, and sometimes manifest in quite abstract forms. The voice of the client or the craftsperson was often allowed to shape the work, while at the same time resisted elsewhere, often at the same meetings. Aspects of work which had been most valuable to us had been discoveries made on site as opposed to things we had specifically designed. Other times we found that aspects we had cared deeply about were in the end less critical than we had expected. At this time we did not have the language to summate this into an easily articulated position. One of the main reasons we engaged in the reflective nature of the phd was to understand how the constructive ambiguity we saw in the work might be better understood by us.

One of the first things that became apparent was that while many early iterations of a design might be produced and discarded, that we would readily agree and hold to very tight restrictions which would limit the potential range of a project almost without any debate at all. Prior to thinking about this process in depth we had frequently described these restrictions as inevitable forces which we had no choice but to accept - but this disregarded the fact that this inevitability more often than not arose due to decisions we had made. These agreed restrictions formed a common territory to work within, and which could bind seemingly diverse attitudes together for long enough to cohere. Sometimes these restrictions arose from legal requirements; in other instances they arose due to decisions on how something might be made; still other jobs find
the restriction in a desire to make the built form a threshold to some
greater space (by others\textsuperscript{14}); further projects used imposed geometries from
a literal take of aspects of the canon in a similar way\textsuperscript{15}. While I go through
how these restrictive devices were deployed in more depth elsewhere their
use generally allowed a common ground for a discussion to take place, one
where the task of the process was to find out how these overlapping
restrictions might be worked within and against. Once we started building
this became easier as we found in the making of the detailed construction
drawings another, richer layer of restriction. The thickness of matter
necessary to make inhabitation forced a productive relationship between
line and form, as did consideration of issues such as rain and thermal
breaks.

This oscillation between abstracted ideas and practical consideration
provided the territory of the practice, the shared horizon of the
classification\textsuperscript{16}. 
Notes:

1 Slievebawnogue Quarry Houses 2006 - 2012

2 Shay was a former partner in Grafton Architects, and a member of group 91, the collective of architects that won the competition to regenerate the Temple Bar area of Dublin.

3 Practice Research Symposium (PRS) held in Ghent in April 2013

4 ‘Concrete Elegance’ (2009) Building Centre London

5 University College Dublin


7 For example in our small project for new accommodation inside the existing church of St George and St Thomas. Here the form was thought of as a geometry based about the experience of entering the church, and as an abstracted object at the same time. The form is then tempered by its detailing in solid walnut such that the joints of its making, and the patina the timber might develop over time were all simultaneously present in our thinking.

8 Such as is evidenced by a wide variety of projects which explore classical 9 or 16 square plans, and tune these to their site by geometry (such as with the north lights in Albert Park Studios), adjustment to programme and orientation (such as in the Enniskerry villa, which is now the basis of the Long Island villas), or overlay and juxtaposition (such as with the competition for West Cork Arts Centre in which a 9 square plan is stacked above a 4 square public level).

9 There are many moments like this, but several such as the on site alterations made to the Lake House extension and Slievebawnogue Housing by our clients, and the lessons in detailing concrete and timber which also occurred in these projects have resonated as key lessons.

10 Such as the reveals on the doors in the Lake House project breaking the line of columns from hall to kitchen.
This term was used by Prof Richard Blythe in advance of PRS 2 to capture what he saw as a key aspect of what he saw in the work, and perhaps as a means to persuade us away from overly pat, or certain descriptions of what was at work. While not clear to us exactly how we might articulate this at the time the term resonated with us. Having a name allowed us to move away from seeking a holistic descriptor for the work of the practice, and allowed us instead to focus on the discrete aspects between which this ambiguity might be found.

Such as in the planning restrictions which pertain to the Slievebawnogue Houses.

Such as our decision to use Mattie O’Malley, a skilled timber worker, and my cousin, to build the St George and Slievebawnogue projects.

Such as the way St George and St Thomas, Slievebawnogue and Caragh Lodge are all deep thresholds to found conditions.

Such as our recurrent use of 4, 9 or 16 square plans in projects such as Albert Park Studios, Murray House, Enniskerry House.

These ideas and observations should be read in conjunction with the video case studies of work process which form part of this dissertation.
PRODUCTION & TESTING

In the restrictive field Clancy Moore defined in these early projects we worked (and still do) with multiple models, drawings and overlays to develop our approach. The significance of these artefacts in fuelling a productive conversation outside of rhetoric was invaluable. Each project would develop its internal logics, which we would seek to resolve into something that made sense, from materiality to form.

Valuable as this process is there are limits - which we only confronted once work started getting built. One example of such a limit arose in a very simple job to provide some additional accommodation in an existing brick church in Dublin. The design had evolved from an aspiration that whatever we added not disrupt the room of the church as found. To do this we tethered our additions around the entrance of the church, so that it was experienced as a threshold. A geometry was derived so upon entering the church the new work simply receded to frame the existing architecture. This gave us a set form to the doorway, but the decision to set the outer limits of the work proved more tricky. Initially, and to respect the the lines of columns that separated the two smaller side aisles, we proposed that it not intrude into the spaces between the columns. Similarly we set its top to sit at the same level of the line of the capitals. In finalising the tender set we taped this geometry out on site to explain to our clients what to expect. It was in this testing that we realised the assumptions learned in the drawing and models were not all working as we had hoped. In discussing the shape as we drew it out it became clear that the new piece would not feel ‘embedded’ in the space, it was clearly going to feel tentative and object like.
Fig 5.2
To counteract this it was necessary to increase the height so that it would break the line of the top of the capitals, and to push it wider so it crossed into the line of columns. Both these decisions made the new work more fully bound to the church, an embrace which allowed it to feel as background. The way it folded itself about the column allowed us to make the discovery that it was somehow necessary to get closer to the existing structure to be more respectful. This is a simple example from a simple project, but the lesson is a recurrent one that has run through working methods since then. The recognition of the problem happened when talking about the project to each other and to our client. Prudence might suggest that this is not a forum for anything other than conviction - to convince the client to instruct tender to be issued. The question that identified the issue arose before we understood the problem - as an idle musing rather than anything critical. It was in others recognising the substance of the issue once it was raised that it became an observation which had value.

The activity of talking about something is worth reflecting on again briefly. Without an artefact to talk about there is rarely any thinking happening in any meaningful way. Similarly the object alone does not always propel things forward. These objects that are discussed are most often drawings and models. This activity of saying simply what was in these representations allowed us to see aspects which we had been missing due to an initial blindness, a result of knowing the ideas which existed before the study was made. Frequently these observations were ‘dumb’ things\(^1\), or accidents in the making process\(^2\).
In talking together another type of study is produced - that of the conversation sketch, the site mark up, or the adjusted model. These sketch studies are rarely about the detailed resolution of something but rather tend to be expansive testing of the edges of the work being looked at. They frequently involve extensive use of references as a shorthand to pinpoint specific ideas in the work. These references are not just to the standard architectural canon, but can include ad hoc structures, archaeology, or art. This discussion is important as without it it can be possible to miss the peripheral possibilities of what is being worked on. As the church project showed us this tuning of the project is essential - even small adjustments can critically affect the whole.

By examining things discursively it is sometimes possible to see it in a new way, with a freshness that allows additional insights. In testing the idea through taking its qualities seriously it forces attempts to describe what it is. In these discussions we are learning to listen to ourselves as much as to each other. These are efforts to find a way of seeing.
Notes:

1 Such as the ‘skirting’ to the base of the walls of the Enniskerry House project which arose from a fundamental and necessary reflection of how this monolithic form would eventually be made - tested by the dumb action of actually casting it in concrete using the pours necessary. The kicker for the wall pours rising from the base was something we had wanted to avoid but it was painfully manifest in the finished model. The beauty of being forced to see this by talking about it allowed us to realise that these aspects (skirtings etc) should not be resisted, but rather harnessed. This process was articulated and identified in PRS 1 & 2 - a process that was described by Leon Van Schaik as ‘taking the model seriously, not as a representation alone’.

2 Such as in the Albert Cottages Studio project where a roughly made concrete model, photographed carefully, allowed an appreciation of the beauty of the chipped form, and allowing us to move from a previous position in which we had assumed the form would have to be very precisely constructed. This was also a process identified in these early PRS presentations.
MOMENTS OF RECOGNITION

To the human inhabitant the built world is a relational thing. It is “composed and recalled in fragments” with the rational experience a comparative rarity. This experiential condition is read with the body, and the eye, and therefore with the precise inexactitude of this device. Individual inhabitants will carry their own relational memories or observations and so their individual readings of things will vary.

While architecture relies on techniques in its production which can be logical and even mechanistic its built reality is not contained by the logics of its production alone. Buildings and spaces, like all artefacts, allow space for multiple legitimate readings. In the processes which might produce a work of architecture this oscillation is a significant one. Representations of the work allow the building to be abstracted and fully comprehended as a singular entity. A sketch and a conversation can capture in shorthand the strategy by which a complex plan might be arranged. This ability to fully capture the work is a powerful one, and one that we use ourselves. However we seek to temper this with the knowledge that the opposite is also worth considering, that once built the architect (or any inhabitant) is contained by the building in an immersive way. Many things operate differently. As the inhabitants are most frequently occupied by other things than examining the architecture it becomes background of a sort. Peripheral view and touch become as important to the success of the architecture as any centrality of study. The differences between the building and its representations might start with this observation - that any building once constructed and when being studied by an occupant can only be comprehended in a fragmentary way. Representations can on the other hand be fully grasped, contained in the frame of the page, the screen, or held in the hand.
Fig 6.2
If experience is fragmentary and process tends toward a holistic treatment of things the productive tension between the two is where our practice increasingly tries to situate itself. This was not always the case. Initially the practice sought to produce entire approaches to jobs and debate their value, generally resulting in one or other being selected for further iteration, debate and refinement. One aspect of the limits of this was outlined in my earlier anecdote about the overall form of the additional accommodation in St Georges Church. There are others, not least wasted debate on a strategic level when it is in considering how something might be realised that it can be meaningfully understood and critqued.

In the Slievebawnogue job there was a struggle between achieving some kind of resonant charge between the form of the house (constricted as it was by the site and its legal restrictions) and its occupation - which with great effort was set out as calmly ordered rooms that worked counter to this exterior. In the end one doorway, which was caught between the scale of the exterior and that of the interior became a way of identifying what might have been a more general thesis. A visiting architect pointed at it and said “this is the project”. While not denying much of what we had been proud of about the building it left the question of why this moment had not occurred more frequently in the interior. (This moment and its consequences are articulated in more depth in the phd of my partner Colm Moore.) In contrast the external form gave more joy in the way the building sat somewhat incongruously on its concrete feet, and how it inflected to the landscape beneath and beside. These were hard to describe but seemed replete with an ambiguous charge. Although unstated the challenge of how this might be achieved in more conventional sites, or in an internal condition became a core pre-occupation. In looking at the work of architects we admired such as Kazuo Shinohara or Kazunari Sakamoto there was a greater eloquence achieved with greater ease, a challenge which we knew we didn’t fully have the ability to address.
When Colm and I began teaching together this aspect was something that we interrogated, recognising these frustrations as worth airing with our students as a means to make explicit our position. In essence teaching became an outlet that allowed us both to focus on aspects of architecture that were broader than the jobs in the office, believing that a sincere engagement with the issues at the heart of our practice might allow empathetic insight in our students. Building a conversation with students became a way for us to recognise and consolidate core aspects of our practice. One of the more valuable briefs we developed was a process of researching and capturing key aspects of architecture in a series of books published under the Queens imprint. While ostensibly these were about building up skills in representation along with developing a collective deep knowledge of the history of architecture, this exercise was in truth an alibi for something more propositional.

Each of these studies focussed on what we saw as key aspects of the subject (light from above, stairs, windows, floor) studied with reference to precedents. These were interrogated on a level beyond the archetype alone, but as part of their spatial curtilage. These studies were made in a range of media, some of which were deliberately difficult to make well. Failures in the students process of capturing the reference literally were the basis for discovering their own intuitive attitude to architecture, with sensibilities discovered in conversations which viewed the references a-historically, and their representations as the first step in a new work. This means of engagement with reference was drawn loosely from our own working method, but the refinement and the means by which a reference might become generative of an intuitive response was new and remains of abiding value. Seeing the observations the students made and helping them navigate these became a way of developing an aspect of how we thought.
One memorable instance of this arose when one student, was asked to study the windows of the Blue Mosque. She initially made beautiful models and drawings of the window itself, but when trying to develop a plan which would place the window in its spatial curtilage she observed that to show the entire plan would not allow a true reading. So she made a plan of a part of the building about the window. The plan, although of a fragment, was composed in such a way that it presented itself as a completed whole. The vast column which is supporting the central dome of the space reads not as a column, but as a concave impression holding the orthogonal edges of the space. The observation was a beautiful one, and it was enjoyable watching this student develop her own spatial language from this, of concave form impressing against orthogonal order.

The reason that this process resonated was because in it I recognised the essential challenge we were seeking to address in our practice. In teaching architecture perhaps it is necessary that it has some urgency which might arise from this sort of enlightened self interest. In this case I learned that there are times when consideration of the fragment allows one to grasp a larger part of the field, and sometimes a deeper reading of what is being examined. This ability of a fragmentary understanding to make sense of something greater is a key way in how I see architecture now, and what I look for in the making of work in practice. The fragmentary approach allows for additive processes, and the acceptance of contingency and multiple authors. Continually asking what the fragment might mean for the whole allows this process to be open but focussed on recognising an emerging coherence. If this tension between fragment and whole is to be productive it is not about seeking to supplant one with the other, rather it is to trust the conversation to hold parts and whole in an equilibrium.
The goal is to produce work which gains its qualities by not seeing to resolve itself into a singular entity, but rather to be present as a contingent of different ideas, each coherently present with the spaces gaining their qualities by the resulting synthesis. The challenge was expressed by the critic Ellis Woodman who in examining the Slievebawnogue project noted that “…it is telling that the rigour of Clancy Moore’s past work has derived from an adherence to a self-imposed structural and spatial order rather than, as here, the commanding resolution of multiple contingencies. As such, the scheme may yet prove an anomaly within the practice’s body of work but it deserves to be judged a highly compelling one…” 

The Slievebawnogue project had made this moment possible because of the particular restrictions made but the site, as had the Church of St George and St Thomas. The challenge was that on other less productively restricted contexts it was far harder to know how to achieve this constructed ambiguity in a sincere way, divorced from picturesque collage.

Happily the world is full of built forms with these characteristics. Recognising and identifying these moments has become a constant preoccupation. Each has in common that there is an internal, slightly autonomous conversation within each work, one which invited questioning and in turn developed a way of seeing.
Notes:

1 MacNamara, S. (2012), *Constructing the View* Ireland: Irish Museum of Modern Art

2 The use of the diagram, derived from a programmatic arrangement literally deployed as the built form as used by architects such as Bjarke Ingels, certain works by OMA, is possibly the most succinct expression of the utility of this technique, albeit one that delivers a low resolution architecture.

3 Even a very simple structure, like a single room shelter, has at least an inside and an outside for example.

4 Even representations of fragments can be seen in this fashion.


6 A recurrent reference at this time was the Hotel Particulier

7 This aspect is dealt in more depth by a separate PhD being undertaken by Colm Moore.

8 Through our role as Teaching Fellows in Queens University Belfast 2009-2016.

9 Stair Rooms (2010); The Elaborated Window (2012); The Constructed Floor (2013)

10 Rachel Delargy

11 Sultan Ahmet Camii by Sedefkâr Mehmet Ağa

THE CASUAL BUTTRESS

During world war two the architecture students of UCD were unable to travel to Europe for the measured drawing study which had traditionally been set for them. In its place, they were sent to survey a different village in Ireland each summer. The work resultant from these studies is now housed in the archives of the Museum of Country Life. Amongst the measured plans and picturesque watercolours is this photograph taken by Robin Walker as a student studying the village of Curragh in County Waterford. It shows the gable of a cottage, with two buttresses and a trapped relieving arch propping the wall slightly off centre.

At first glance there is nothing remarkable about it. The cottage is run-down and the ground about it a mess of nettles and brambles. The buttresses appear to be later additions, a reaction to some failing of the gable, one caused perhaps by the fireplace against the wall behind. Without seeing the plan it is possible to make an educated guess about its make up. It would possess a simple plan of rooms spanning the full width of the building, and arranged in series. Indeed when the survey drawing is examined it shows that it is a direct entry cottage type and conforms with the broad characteristics of its classification.

At the time Walker took the photograph however these classifications were not formed. The students were carrying on from the work of Åke Campbell and Albert Nilsson, both experts in Swedish Traditional Architecture, who had been invited to Ireland by the Irish Folklore Commission to study the vernacular houses of Ireland in the early 1930s.

The grounding of the study in the Folklore Commission speaks of the unstated position that there exists a well of knowledge embedded in these structures, one that exists beyond their direct qualities as buildings per se, but rather as devices which enable us to understand a society. The
Fig 7.2
recognition of commonalities, of sorts of buildings which occur frequently, or in a discernible chronology or distribution allows for a reading of characteristics otherwise imperceptible. These groupings, or types, are frequently classified by plan arrangement, and emerge from multiple studies and surveys from which the predominant similarities can be recognised.

The titles of these types are evocative in themselves - ‘Bed Out-Shot’, Direct Entry’ or ‘Jamb Wall’. Simplified, abstracted drawings showing the predominant similarities are made to assist in communicating the primary characteristics. The folklorist or historian concerned with understanding across a wide swathe of time and space gains much from this work. For an architect while this process offers great utility there is much that it precludes from consideration. The distilled type can obscure other readings. It is this contradiction and its consequences that comes to mind when I consider Walkers photograph.

The use of the word type in architecture initially had two divergent readings, but both were concerned with discerning meaning from an examination of the history of architecture and emerged in the late 18th century. At this time the systemisation of knowledge emerging from the Enlightenment was being confronted by architecture for the first time. Although the word was first used by Quatremere de Quincy it was the work of Jean Nicholas Durand which gained most traction and which still defines much of what we understand by the word today. Durand sought to systematise architectural thought in a mechanistic fashion to produce a taxonomy of building much in the fashion that Carl Linneas had classified the biological world. His approach was not holistic, but rather was to edit back to a distilled essence. His first publication included highly abstracted drawn diagrams of plan types of various buildings distilled to show structure and order only, this was followed by a second volume which
Fig 7.3
used these diagrams and compositional devices to produce models for a wide variety of buildings. His goal was to produce a manual for architects engaging both with familiar buildings as well as programs never before encountered, and his works were instrumental in the establishment of systems for architectural education. Although this first work has been termed a “typological atlas of architecture” Durand himself never used the word type in relation to these genres, this association grew over time, and persists today. Type here is distilled from the formal plan organisation of precedents to produce models for architecture independent of style. While modernism rejected the historical grounding of type many of the ideas embedded in Durand's hypothesis, primarily that of an interest in the formal qualities of type, the abstracted plan-based classification of type and a direct read between type and prototype informed many of its practitioners and projects.

While type as understood on an urban level has received much attention since then, the use of the term for individual buildings remains relatively unchanged. The word is applied equally in manuals of plans of contemporary buildings to be used as models, and in the study of past structures. In the study of the vernacular type correlates with the diagrams described earlier, in effect Durand's system repeatedly re-adopted as the range of buildings open to study expanded. These diagrams represent an implied and unbuilt perfection that is the model or prototype to the variants studied and surveyed in the field. Frequently these diagrams are used in the stead of drawings of actual structures in the examination of vernacular buildings in particular. This narrow coupling of precedent to abstracted form is problematic. In the light of contemporary pressures of brief and construction these diagrams present little of value to build on. The post-modernists attempts to reconnect with a pre-modernist reading of architecture gives an insight into the results of this process.
So pervasive was the reductive read of precedent that this impulse in the hands of the broader profession ironically treated history and the built forms of the past as little more than stereotype.

In the context of an ever reduced reading of precedent there was little left other than a pale facsimile of some formal device. This is particularly problematic with regards to finding opportunities for continuity in the vernacular. There is more to these buildings than form or order and yet it is these aspects which are most commonly understood as being carriers of meaning. In Ireland the aspiration for continuity has become little more than the image of a gable, unrecognisable from the tradition of building from whence it has been extracted, or the sensibilities it represents. Perhaps it is worthwhile to speculate on the other reading of type, proposed by Quatremere de Quincy just before publication of Durand's first book. Building on Laugier's image of the primitive hut Quatremere sought to establish links to nature to inform architecture. Type here was a way to describe an abstracted idea that arises from the first (and repeated) confrontations between form and use throughout time. The meaning of the word ‘type’ was not to be confused with the idea of a ‘model’. He writes

“The model, understood in the sense of practical execution, is an object that should be repeated as it is; contrariwise, the ‘type’ is an object after which each artist can conceive works that bear no resemblance to each other. All is precise and given when it comes to the model, while all is more or less vague when it comes to the ‘type’”
This call to vagueness and the tie to Laugier’s primitive hut opens up a different reading of type, far removed from reductive formal categorisations. Type to Quatremere is a metaphor, and as such allows for connection with an essence of thought while not precluding variation and evolution by different authors and at different times. Quatremere’s link between architecture and language has received much attention, particularly in the late 20th century and although he is cited as the originator of the words type and typology in architecture it is Durand’s reductive diagrams that came to define the word entirely at variance with Quatremere’s nuanced take. However this offering of a metaphorical reading as a means to engage with a tradition of building bears consideration.

Impromptu accretions such as the buttresses in Walkers photograph are moments that are familiar in the architecture of the everyday. Indeed the buttress is a very common occurrence with these cottages in particular, their mud walls being poor at resisting concentrated lateral loading. While not always required the buttress emerges when requirements to create spaces to support inhabitation are at odds with the external form and construction of the buildings. These points of disjunction are resolved in an additive fashion externally. The location varies from structure to structure. Occasionally the buttress is used as a point of connection for further structures, becoming subsumed in outbuildings or walls. This preponderance to variety means that it is omitted from the reductive drawings of type that classify these buildings and yet it occurs in enough for it to have a transformative relationship to the understanding of the generality of cottages. What interests me therefore in Walkers photograph is not so much what these structures hold in common, but rather what differentiates them, their capacity for variety within a defined range.
The buttress is casual in the sense that it is not concerned with a formality of composition. It resists abstraction, being rejected by the drawing in editing the type to its essence. It does not seek to resolve problems into a coherent whole but to modify by addition. In its inflection to problems emergent from site or making it implies ownership, and the collective making of a place through the acts of many individuals over time.

If the type speaks of the social structure in which this building was situated. The buttress speaks of the individual who placed it there, and the site it stands on. To borrow an idea of Barthes\(^\text{18}\) the buttress acts as a punctum to the studium of type. It is the moment that the type is broken and a direct relationship is made between specificity and generality.

Many years after the taking of the photograph and now as an architect of considerable repute Robin Walker designed a holiday house for himself and his family. The centre of this scheme is a restored cottage found on site when he acquired it. About this he placed simple freestanding structures. With their floors elevated from the ground plane, and a clear read of structure there is much these owe to the characterful modernism that had underpinned his domestic designs to this point.

But these structures are more than that, simultaneously softer, their mono-pitches inclined with the slope, but also more radical in their pared-back construction, stark gables and elevated access path that requires constant maintenance as stones slip away underfoot. In their conception time as manifest in maintenance and collective care is placed to the forefront. Perhaps this results from how he found the site, while driving the roads of the area it was the ruin of the gable rising from the gorse that first gave him cause to stop.
Fig 7.7
In the casual buttress it is interesting to see that the act of drawing is inherently an editing of reality, which is more or less useful given the role it is deployed in. The recognition and classification of type generally emerges from survey work of many structures. Used in this sense the drawing is a device to extract information from the building. It is a shorthand, an abstracted means to communicate the essences of a space. It can be used to isolate the building from context, or to remove extraneous information, while other aspects are missed altogether. Second order drawings, which refer only to survey drawings produce reductive plans of types. Third and Fourth order drawings referring only to abstracted type drawings can push this further, to an extreme reductive diagram much in the manner that Durand did with his “typological atlas.”

The drawing is a key part of the connective tissue that transmits information about historic buildings, new works or proposed structures, and in its various guises it is also the means by which the architect advances work on a project. Unlike other graphic communication tools such as writing or musical notation (which can be rapidly tested through reading or playing) the drawing, an alibi for the finished building, is what is acted on to evolve a design\textsuperscript{19}. 
Fig 7.8
This is overlaid with the knowledge that drawing can be an end in itself, possessing its own aesthetic language and capable of being pushed for a perfection in its own terms as the primary thing been worked on. This shape shifting ability of the drawing to be simultaneously both end and means allows openings for lateral thought, exploration and play.

In the case of drawings produced with the intent of producing a physical space the reductive power of the drawing has long been of huge value. The fact that manipulation of lines on paper or code in a computer is easier and less costly than construction and modification on site liberates a design process and the design of progressively more complex structures. For the same reason the education of architects, springing from Durand's works also codified itself about the drawing. Multiple iterations of design through drawing allow for refinement and resolution. Moments such as the casual buttress are not conceivable in this process, without forced and stilted methodologies.

Which brings us to the key way in which the drawing is deployed - in the communication to the builder, to illustrate and establish the quantities, order and measure of materials to be assembled to create the building. In today's contract obsessed procurement system the confusion between the drawing and the building becomes even more complex. The range of drawings produced to construct a building 100, or even 50 years ago is considerably less than a building of equivalent complexity today. In place of the information omitted was the architect, a presence on site or with craftspeople to translate intention and use judgement. Over time this interpretive role has diminished, and the architect's role in site (ideally) is simply to monitor progress and spot errors.
In part this is due to the more complex nature of the current systems of construction, but it is also an attempt to fully describe the building, leaving no room for uncertainty in pricing or construction. This certainty, a legal requirement for a contract to be in place, is an arresting concept, for taken to its logical conclusion it means that if a set of construction drawings represents certainty then it is a full and complete description of the final physical building. The builders role is to deliver it exactly, and notionally any number of competent builders, given an identical set of drawings would produce an identical building. Processes such as BIM seek to take this one step further and present the building, fully built in virtual space prior to construction. Here the conflation between drawing and building is at its most complete. Any deviation from this ‘perfect’ model of the building is a diminishment, and the role of the design team is to restrict these deviations as much as possible. The drawn building is brittle, ill prepared for the processes of its construction. Perhaps it is as a compensation to this that physical model making remains a vital technique for many practitioners, indeed appears to be growing in its relevance.

While it will not be possible as we move onto larger work the ability to directly decide on the final status of something while on site is part of what I most enjoy. The primary value of architecture is in its actuality. There is as yet no substitute in the end for being in the space and engaging directly.

Abstraction is necessary in order to make the decisions, but this direct engagement is vital to tune them.
Notes:

1 These documents formed the basis of the exhibition ‘Whitewash and Thatch’ held at the National Museum of Decorative Arts, Collins Barracks in 2007. Curated by Rosa Meehan.

2 NMI acquisition number F 2006 283

3 NMI acquisition number to be confirmed

4 As stated by Rosa Meehan, in her preface to Whitewash and Thatch exhibition Catalogue, National Museum of Ireland 2004, Campbell and Nilsen were both principals of a group of scholars called the Swedish Folk Culture Mission whose work at the time formed the basis for all subsequent studies of the Irish vernacular house.

5 The work of Campbell and Nilsson was exhibited by the National Gallery in 1936, and the Museum were involved in the identification of the villages to be studied as part of the UCD Material Culture Study.

6 The clear diagrams and text of the FHA Allen’s ‘Houses’ Chapter of the Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape’ Second Edition edited by FHA Allen, Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout (pp212-232) are the latest concise summation of this process, although for true elegance and conciseness it remains hard to beat the succinct maps, plan types and accompanying artefacts drawn on page 91 in the Royal Irish Academy’s Atlas of Ireland (1979)

7 JNL Durand, Recueil et parallele des edifices de tout genre, Paris 1801

8 JNL Durand, Precis et Lecons d’Architecture XIII, Paris 1805


10 Durand made repeated reference to ‘genre’ however when seeking to describe specific classes of buildings by use.

11 Durand's mechanistic approach reached its most literal expression in the methodologies instilled by the Beaux Arts Education in architecture in the latter part of the 19th Century.

12 Corbusiers work on espace minimum linked to proposals for mass housing for example, or indeed his Maison Dom-Ino proposal.

13 For example contemporary typological atlases such as Peter Ebners, Topology+, published by Birkhauser.
14 Though mentioned by many from Vitruvius onwards the most powerful image of this metaphor for the origin of architecture comes from the frontispiece of Marc Antoine (Abbe) Laugiers Essay on Architecture, Second edition 1755.

15 Samir Younés, The Historical Dictionary of Architecture of Quatremère de Quincy, p. 255

16 It is argued by Sylvia Lavin in Quatremère de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture, MIT Press, 1992 that terms such as the ‘Vernacular’ or ‘Vocabulary’ of architecture owes much to Quatremeres de Quincy's position of architecture as a language.


THE PROPPED VAULT

While I continue to cite the buttresses in Walker's photograph I have in mind any number of similar incidents in other buildings, other types. Another slightly different example occurs in a 17th century stable in County Meath. This two story structure has a brick vaulted ground floor which contains four stalls for horses and a separate store room. The upper floor, under a pitched roof contained storage areas for straw and animal feed. Here there are two incidents worthy of discussing. The first is readily identifiable, two large buttresses sit either side of the entrance door. Their scale is such that their discoloured forms dominate the elevation. These buttresses occur because the first floor structure of brick vaulting is not resolved internally. Due to a disconnect between the internal quadripartite division which meets a tripartite external division of door and two flanking windows the forces are not guided evenly to the front elevation but arise erratically and at the weak point between the door and attendant windows. With a high loading from first floor bearing on this wall it would be overloaded at these points, and the buttresses resolve this issue.

In the same structure there is a separate store area at the ground floor which spans the full width of the plan. In contrast to the stable this is achieved in a single span vault from front to rear. The span is such that the natural geometry of the structure is stretched to the point that the central part is almost flat. Here, right along the centre a single beam runs from side to side, propping the vault, which would otherwise fail. What is remarkable about both the buttress and the beam is that on examining the construction it appears that both were not constructed post completion on the observance of a fault, but rather were placed at the time of construction, as part of the intended form of the structure.
Fig 8.2
Rather than amending the design to allow the wall to be quadripartite or the store to have a different form to allow the vault to operate as a pure structure the decision was to augment the structure in an additive fashion to allow the original, ‘flawed’ structure to operate.

Of course in this context the flaw is not one, the vault was always intended to bear on the beam, the front wall always had the buttresses in mind\(^2\). The assembly is a conversational one, with co-dependancy at its core. This quality is one which invites a sort of empathetic relationship to be established with the act of the barns conception and construction. This empathy is not based on any figurative presence. It is based on the decision making process being somehow made more explicit by its capturing in built form.

Notes:

\(^1\) This structure stands in the grounds of Parsonstown Manor, Parsonstown, Co Meath, beside my home at the time. It was a structure I was very familiar with, and forms a key part of my Spatial History - as dissected in PRS 4 as part of this PhD process.

\(^2\) The ‘Propped Vault’ is an inherently conversational assembly, its co-dependant structure establishing a two and fro within the structure of the vault itself.
THE EXTENDED PORTAL

On a farmyard in Somerset\(^1\) two barns stand side by side. The frames of both are precast concrete portal frames, made by Atcost\(^2\) in line with their standard profile and system which existed at the time. A central line of columns is shared between both barns. Due to differing spans the roof to both barns spring from different places along the column, creating a figurative arrangement, not unlike a branching tree.

When the barn was being erected, instead of cladding to the line established by these portals the decision was taken to continue the line of the pitch of the larger barn until it connected with the roof line of the lower. This overlap is created by means of a special pre-cast element which continues the form of the larger portal to connect with that of the smaller. The resultant overlap creates a moment where the portal of the lower barn spans free, catching a triangle of air between the structure and the enclosing fabric.

There is no clear practical reason for this which would have made it an imperative. There is a marginal increase in ceiling height, but not with any great utility as the portals break this. There is marginally less cladding used, and an easier gutter detail, but the need for the special portal extension more than compensates for these economic benefits. The portal extension is not worth analysing in these terms in any event as it is its qualities as an architectural decision which I am attracted to.

The exterior of the barn is radically informed by the resultant gable. It achieves a slightly ponderous and inflected wholeness which the two portals complete would not. Here the barn reads as a singular form, one which addresses and holds the primary yard of the farm.
LOST ARMATURES & FOUND FORMS
Andrew Clancy - PhD by Reflective Practice - Invited
By not expressing itself as a linear pitched roof form it breaks with the thinner linear structures which predated its construction, and yet respects the grain of the site. It is not concerned with elegance, but with heft, and in the making of form from minimal means. The obverse gable (to the north) increases the ambiguity, for here the line is broken, and the smaller portal extends past the larger by one bay. This means that on this flank the barns nature as two aligned portal frames is explicit, making for a further turn in the already blurred lines of the barns structure. Here the step allows the barn to capture a series of different spaces and to mediate a steep level change as the farm rises to the north west. The scale of the barn is broken and here it presents itself as discrete forms, against the larger span structures of the tractor shed and cow barn beyond. The barn acts as a sophisticated, quasi urban form, establishing a key relationship with its context on all sides.

Internally the larger portal structure reads as expected, with no great discovery beyond the patent beauty of large span structures filled with items long forgotten. In the smaller barn however the simple symmetry of the structure is radically disrupted by the fold in the roof which arises due to the overlap in the form of the two structures. Instead of closing to a restful completion on its eastern side the roof rises to be almost at its highest point by the time it reaches the central columns. The effect is to make the reading of the structure of the roof almost figurative. Below the rising roof the shoulder of the portal to the lower barn runs free, liberated and expressive. In the crook of the roof between the lower portal and the extended larger portal there is a gutter, holding a line that runs the length of the barn.
Fig 9.4
At the heart of the barn there is a rich and conversational ambiguity between the system, the form and the site. The portal extension respects the logics of the pre-cast structure and yet utterly transforms its architectural qualities in a manner which appears ad hoc, and yet was a carefully planned part of the original works. The portal extension changes its nature as we describe it.

It is possible to see the barn as two structures, as one form, and as system and inflection all at once. The term ‘ad hoc’ means ‘for this’ and implies exactitude as well as opportunism. The portal extension shows that ad hoc additions can be transformative of the entirety of the thing they are additive to. In this we can trace the difference between architecture and construction.

Notes:

1 Shatwell Farm, Castle Cary

2 Atcost Limited was established in the 1950s and continues to trade today, albeit under the ownership of the Faircloth group. http://www.atcostgroup.co.uk/about_us

3 The farm has a number of linear brick structures from the 18th and 19th centuries, one of which has been recently converted by architect Hugh Strange for use as an archive for the storage of a collection of rare architectural drawings.
FOUND FORMS

The stone chapel on St MacDaras island is a small pitched-roof structure, its interior barely 4.6m in length and 3.3m wide. The walls that bound this are almost a metre in thickness, and are projected forward on its gables. Its steeply inclined roof is expressed forward, congruent with the projection of the flanking walls mentioned above, and reaches to seven meters high, making the building present itself in side elevation as a square, or off square. Its plan is a single room, entered centrally on the gable.

The building is somewhat of a puzzle, too small and remotely located to have ever been a chapel of daily use. Its construction also is unusual. Most churches from this time were constructed in timber, and while the use of stone for walls was becomingly increasingly common, the roof would generally be made with timber rafters. In these structures the decision to express the walls forward on the gables were also normal (commonly referred to as Antae). The use of stone for roof as well as walls does survive in some exemplars, but these are generally simpler in form, monolithic and unadorned such as St Columbs House.

Consider for example structures such as Gallarus, built around the same time as MacDara’s, and which is very much celebratory of the form which arises from the compressive loading of the stone. A common theory is that the details of MacDaras chapel are skeumporphic in nature, a memory of an earlier timber structure which stood on the site prior to the stone chapel. This lost timber building would have been the common way of building at the time of the saints life, but which died out with the clearances of the forests and the subsequent disappearance of the timber buildings themselves.
Fig 10.2
The skeumorphic preservation of aspects of their construction in stone is the primary trace of this type of building in Ireland. In addition to the *Antae* to the walls and roofs, St. MacDara’s has carefully worked stonework to the roof surfaces such that these resemble shingles, while the gables to both ends are surmounted by carved crossed heads, all clear analogies to simple stave church types.

While broadly convincing this theory does bear some further consideration. The common reason given for the *Antae* and projecting roof was that these reference the corner posts and projecting eaves of timber churches, and that these projections arise in timber structures for pragmatic structural reasons - namely the corner posts which resolve the corners. However this does not make sense of the *Antae* as expressed in St MacDaras (and elsewhere in Irish churches of this time), which project to the gable side only, where they provide minimal restraint to the lateral loading of the roof, and indeed complicate the construction of the gables in what is otherwise a simple structure.

Tomás Ó’Carragáin traces another lineage, when he states that while it is probably true that the *Antae* reference early Irish timber churches, a more interesting question would be why these features were present on these timber structures in the first place, as they are not present in other stave architectures. Irish watermills and other non-religious timber structures of this time for example do not use them, although otherwise identically made. While this timber architecture pre-dated the arrival of Christianity there is something about the *Antae* in particular which appears to be a modification of the found forms of the vernacular to carry this new role. Ó’Carragáin points at an earlier reading of the *Antae* by Arthur Champneys who first gave the name to the features and did so to highlight what he saw as the link between these early Irish chapels and late Roman brick structures.
Fig 10.3
In these Roman structures *Antae* work as shallow buttresses or pilasters to strengthen the thinner brick walls and are deployed to give a subtle order to the structure. Irish monks would have travelled and seen these structures, and indeed may even have had a hand in work to preserve or rebuild them. In this reading *Antae* in Irish timber churches became a symbolic way of marking the structure as a church, with a lineage to the Roman origins of the faith. First translated to timber, and then to stone, these features became more monumental and expressive.

In this spirit other aspects of the building are worthy of examination. The history of architecture teaches us that it is common that the forms of past construction techniques are preserved when new technologies supersede the old. As mentioned in the Casual Buttress essay this process is the basis of Laugiers’ metaphor of the primitive hut, or by John Sumerson’s more direct addressing of the matter. In these examples the new technologies were embraced as they frequently offered advantages in the scale or costs of structure to be constructed. With MacDara’s this is not the case. The original timber structure was simple and small, the same size as the stone replacement, and would have been easier to rebuild in timber. A possible reason for this was that the chapel was reconstructed not as an operating church, but as an act of commemoration. It is a monument to both the man, and the community that he had built about him in this place. It is interesting too that the saint himself is reputed to be an amalgam of a real Christian monk, fused with other pre-Christian figures from the same part of the world. Like many other early Christian figures in Ireland his life is an embodied fusing of pagan and pre-Christian narratives with the miracle stories that proved his faiths bona-fides.
Here subsumed in this tiny red granite chapel, made in the same stone as the small island it stands on, we see the story of an imported thinking in architecture and programme finding territorial expression in its fusing with pre-existing local types. This process operates beyond the mere pragmatics of tectonics, and relies on memory and narrative as much as the consideration of available materials and their consequences. In MacDaras the projecting gables and the expressed banding of the roof stretch the capacity of the stonework, and something new is made - an articulated whole. The form speaks of several ways of thinking at once.

This technique repeats in representations from this time also. On the page of the Book of Kells, which treats of the temptation of Christ we are presented with a view of the scene, as illuminated by a monk in Iona or Kells in the late 7th century. The figure of the Christ is central, with Satan close by. What is of interest to me is not so much the narrative or the religious significance of the scene, but rather the temple he is standing on.

The drawing although small is very detailed and it is possible to determine much of the construction of the building from examining the image. It has a pitched roof, formed in timber, for we can make out the crossed posts at the gables, and indeed that they are decoratively carved. Eaves are held by a beam, and the roof clad in oak shingles. The building stands on a ring beam of timber, again carved and decorated. The whole is richly decorated with vibrant paint. It is clearly of stave timber construction, a simple chapel structure similar perhaps to the building the monk knew from his own monastery. It is reasonable to suggest that this may be the first drawing of a building in Ireland.
Fig 10.5
This was not the work of naïveté. The monks would have known the buildings in Jerusalem at that time differed in appearance from those they built. The image they made was not the literal portrayal of a scene, but rather the creation of a narrative, both within the image and between the image and the person viewing it. Just as the 24 figures in the foreground are a metaphorical portrayal of the peoples of the world, the temple building is a cypher for the role of the building. The scribe deliberately read back a form they understood and placed it there, representing not so much an actual building but the role of the building, the idea of a building. The form of this building is synonymous with this idea, to the point that they are completely interchangeable. The building is a text, open to being read and interpreted recurrently.

Could this also be true of the decision to remake MacDara’s original chapel in stone? Form in architecture arises from many things but once found can be transmuted both in time, material and use. Interestingly MacDara’s name translates as ‘son of the oak’. The chapel, like the saint, is derived from the same source - transmutation. Today the form persists, the resonant silhouette of the chapel on the island seen from the shore. From this distance the material it is made from has far less relevance than the presence of the gable breaking the hump of the land.

Perhaps this process tracks in miniature the making of an essential ambiguity in expression at the heart of Irish architecture. A benefit of our peripheral education. Our distance from the centre and comparative historic poverty makes it hard for any imported thinking to be ever manifest in a ‘pure’ sense. Somehow the enforced acts of translation and transmutation allow a process of distillation to simultaneously to be one of adulteration.
Fig 10.6
In our work I see our concern with identifying restrictive geometries or strategies as a means to find form. Form arises as a response to and also as an interrogation of these restrictions (such as in the church of St George and St Thomas, or the Slievebawnogue Houses). Other times a form is found by the nature of the brief (such as Shatwell farm) other times (such as the long house type in Donegal, Bohernabreena or the pavilion type in Enniskerry / Long Island) a form might be adopted for no reason than a typological response to site. In all these for much of the design process the form cannot be deeply interrogated. Its primary utility is as a means to bind disparities, to give coherence to the multiple actors simultaneously present in a process which needs the possibility of coherence in order for it to be resolved in fragments.

The relationship with the materials of which this form is made is one not unlike viewing MacDaras chapel from the shore. The shape is known but how it is made is not. It is only when this auratic silhouette is brought into a conversation with the fragmentary interior world that the critical questions of material and ultimately meaning can be engaged with in a manner which is fecund and generative. When the different orders of the project are caught in a conversation with different ways of making it becomes possible to embrace this ambiguity and to draw this out into something vital and present.
Notes:


2 St. Coumbs House (or St Columcille’s House) is an oratory and National Monument in Kells, County Meath.

3 The Gallarus Oratory is a chapel located on the Dingle Peninsula, Co Kerry. Its walls are formed in corbel vaulting, which curve gently to the ridge in a continuous form on all faces.

4 Leask 1955, 55-56; also Macalister 1928, 248.

5 While none of these survive in Ireland Scandinavian exemplars such as Haltdalen Stave Church in Norway which dates from 1170, have too many clear parallels for it to be mere co-incidence.


7 Champneys, A., (1910) *Irish Ecclesiastical Architecture With Some Notice of Similar or Related Work in England, Scotland and Elsewhere.* London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd

8 Essai sur L'Architecture (Essay on Architecture), 1755 - most famously remembered for its frontispiece by Charles Dominique Eisen.


10 An illustrated manuscript of the gospels from about 800AD. It was created in various sites around Britain and Ireland, with the finished work kept in the Abbey of Kells, County Meath.
THE THICKNESS OF PAINT

The Irish Tower house is part of an interlinked lineage of typologies across Britain and Ireland. In Ireland they are found everywhere, most commonly as ruins or subsumed into greater works which have accreted about them over time. These simple fortified and block like forms dot the landscape with a reputed 2000 extant of more than 8000 originally constructed.

The typology is one that is well known through their citation by Louis Kahn, by which he elaborated the distinction between ‘served’ and ‘servant spaces’, “with great central living halls and auxiliary spaces nestled into thick outside walls”. His plans that accompany this study have a powerful graphic quality in which the solid walls are drawn with a bold fill, emphasising the relationship between solid and void, and playing up the apparent heaviness of the walls, in which the stairs and other ancillary spaces were sited, as if carved. This reading of the type is of course legitimate and useful, and derives from a confrontation with these buildings in their current ruined or quasi-ruined state - where externally the stark stone form is reinforced by the presence of the same grey surfaces to all the interior spaces - the original white wash which would have covered these surfaces having been long since removed through the action of time.

Aughnanure castle stands a little more than 50km from Galway City, and sits on a strategic site on the south bank of the Drimneen River just inshore of Lough Corrib. It was a fortified tower house, and was seat of the O’Flaherty’s before becoming part of Sir Edward Fitton’s estates in his role of President of Connaught. As it was occupied as a fortified site for quite some time it has therefore gathered quite an accretion of structures about itself, including walls, ramparts, and bartizans.
In recent years the structure was purchased by the Office of Public Works and the tower restored.

Externally the tower presents itself as a tall rectangular limestone volume, stark and unadorned. Inside the restored rooms host a sparse exhibition about the tower and its times, but this is clearly of minor importance. Minimal furnishings mean that the primary thing being exhibited are the restored spaces themselves.

The most striking aspect is that the interiors have all been limewashed as they would have been when occupied. Lime wash is made from slaked lime mixed with water to allow it to be applied by brushes. Translucent when first applied it whitens over time as the lime carbonates in a similar fashion to how cement lightens with age. This reactive quality is also how it bonds with its substate - it does not sit on the surface of the stone it is applied to (as some paints would) but rather but is drawn into the stone, and is bonded with it to make a durable and long lasting finish. This whitewash thickens over constant application to something between a skin and a skim.

It had practical advantages not least of being convenient to make (the entire lake bed beside the site is a limestone pavement) but also that the resulting finish came with slight antibacterial properties. Its ability to hold and reflect light must have also been a key consideration - as the tower houses were defensive structures, and limited to having only very minimal external openings. The reflective quality is particularly strong with limewash due to refraction from calcite crystals which form as a natural part of its curing. The light is reflected off the surface, but also from within the surface. While it would darken with time the finish would have been frequently renewed as part of the habit of living in the tower.
Fig 11.3
The effect on the interiors is extraordinary. The major spaces of the central halls are lit through the niches and staircases which surround them (the servant spaces of Kahn's diagram). As the stone is undressed the effect is to suppress edges and to unite vault, wall, niche and reveal into a single diaphanous whole. It is modulated by the structural stone surface beneath and yet possesses its own independent texture and grain, its own surface tension. Rather than the feeling being that of being in a carved space, there is a light, almost cloud like atmosphere. The only surfaces not so treated are the stone frames to the windows and the fireplace, or the timber gallery which overhangs the main space. These read as figures against its soft white billow. Occasionally in the stonework there are gaps where mortar has come away, and here surface reveals its inherent tension - these read as a black punctuation, with no depth other than the absence of white. For all the typology might be about thickness the interiors are about the thinness of the lime-wash. The stonework is present, but as an afterimage on this surface.

This subtly divergent reading of space and structure is an essential tensile relationship. This final ‘tuning’ of an interior is not necessarily visible in an architectural drawing, and yet its role is profound in the making of spaces to support inhabitation. More than something that comes at the end consideration of this allows for discovery that is potentially transformative of the understanding of the entirety of the project being examined, without anything changing in the architectural scheme. Just as the discovery of an ethereal hall in an austere tower captures an essential quality that exists between the hall and the tower, so too can fragmentary discoveries be made in process, this can happen right up to the final moments on site. The testing and adjusting of this is an essential conversation at the heart of how we work.
Notes:


2 Kahn cited Scottish exemplars but these are a very close relative of the type found in Ireland.


4 This typological engagement of the work is one that we are interested in also, with the sectional hierarchy of these structures being a recurrent fascination (in section each floor presents a different structural approach - vaulted to the main floor, beamed floors to other levels and a pitched roof to the top). We have used this approach in many projects and it can be seen in the Donegal house video case study, but also in other projects such as the Sagapanock villas for example

5 National Monument #470

6 Sweetman, D.
TABLES TO SIT AROUND & TABLES TO PUT THINGS ON

Working with another involves a commitment to a conversation, loosely grounded around a common purpose. Individual ideas and responses have to be developed to be communally adjusted and agreed. Over time the thoughts accumulated in this process become part of the substrate to these discussions.

As a metaphor it might be useful to think about a practice as being based at tables where people work individually, tables to sit around to discuss things communally, and tables on which the accumulated artefacts arising from this thinking are stored. The three each involve an essential part of working.

When a practice is young one of these tables, that involving the collected agreements, is empty and it makes the process filling it something that one is unaware of. For us these points of agreement are shaped by this time in our practice. In Ireland, when you are a young architect, with no track record with which to gain trust the normal jobs by which a practice gets started are domestic or marginal. These are jobs that although small are very important to their commissioners, and possibly the least under the control of the architect. Deep consideration has to be taken of a client's practical needs, the careful stewardship of their money, and the vagaries of taste. Builders at this scale of work vary greatly in terms of skill and knowledge of construction, and in their ability to manage resources and time. The recession which dominated our practice until recently accelerated these external forces to a gale, in the face of which it is difficult to understand how we continued operating. In truth, we barely did.
Looking back on this time now it is fair to say that if we hadn’t had the Slievebawnogue project on site taking us into the recession (it was completed at the end of 2011) we would probably not have prevailed - the hope this project gave us allowed us to suspend our critical faculties about the broader economy and to trust that when complete it might become the means by which we would find more solid ground. This is not to say that we didn't have other work, with some new jobs passing through the office at this time, but many of these were so marginal in financing that few would ever proceed beyond early sketch stages. We worked hard on all these jobs, modest and all as they were, trying in each to find the kernel of something substantial to discuss and develop. There are jobs with incredible potential architecturally which died which needn't have, and others which went ahead productively without ever seeming promising.

The technique in dealing with all this flux appears not to have a single strong idea. More often than not it is these moments, when a singular version of the project arrived early, that the design process foundered. The ‘strong idea’ here denotes a clear over-arching concept that links all aspects of the project, and which admits no change, for it describes its own means and ends. Perhaps these strong ideas did not work as they were not inherently collaborative, belonging as they do to one author or another, and depending on their singular tending. Perhaps too the belief in an idea allowed us to ignore the actuality of what was happening, leaving us fighting blindly for a single version to prevail in a context we did not control or fully understand.

In contrast with this the weak force is a frame that allows us to start work. It is a loose bind of the restrictions of geometry and form mentioned earlier. Behind this is a comfort in knowing that things are arbitrary, and need to be if they are to act in a generative fashion.
Fig 12.3
The weak force gains its polarity through iteration and conversations around these iterations such that ideas can gently inflect and adulterate one another. Being weak, this force cannot bind things into coherency. It gives the space to allow ideas find their form, and accrete ideas about themselves. A weak idea does not define its ends, and so permits access to the design process to others. Knowing it is there provides a common ground for conversation, the exploration of the idea. The weak force is not tethered to certainty. In Truth and Method Gadamer addresses this exact point when he writes “To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.”

In English we must make one word, play, for a wide range of acts and conditions. Is it the same actions that are undertaken by a child, a footballer, a musician, an actor? These actions have in common a link between the body and the intellect which is non-hierarchical. This is in marked contrast to the nuanced terminology which addresses mental effort alone. Consider the subtle difference between pondering, musing, calculating, thinking, scheming, puzzling etc. This is a clumsy state of affairs not so present in other languages. In Irish for instance the play of the child is sugradh, that of the footballer is imirt, while that of the musician is senim. Intellectual playfulness does not preclude skill or consideration. A lightness of spirit does not indicate a lack of seriousness. It is not always necessary to wear ones knowledge like a cloak, sometimes it is better to try and keep it in the air with your foot.
Fig 12.4
In conversation it is the non-hierarchical link between what is being said and what is thought that is of value. For want of a better term the process keeps a soft edge to things. It allows for things to absorb, be picked up and be put down without risk.

The table of the collected ideas of the office has become one that allows for an increasing confidence of the seemingly weak or inconsequential to be the site of certainty in design process. Our work now frequently starts with a fragment and works out to the whole\(^5\).
Notes:

1 These can involve completed works, studies and other works arising from working process, and observations held in common.

2 This recession lasted from late 2008 to early 2015, and was precipitated by the sub-prime crisis in the US. Although part of a global recession its effects were particularly acute in Ireland, due to a series of strategic errors of governance which meant the economy here was incredibly brittle to any reduction in the availability of cheap credit. Over the previous 7 years cheap credit fielded a housing bubble which fed a building boom which had grown to dominate the economic profile of the country. Employment, government revenue, and the strength of banks balance sheets were all linked to this one sector. Once the credit crunch manifested itself Irish banks rapidly became insolvent. With no easy mortgage lending to sustain the market house prices collapsed, the construction sector dramatically reduced in scale, and government income reduced dramatically, at the same time that the need for social welfare payments ballooned with the increased unemployment. The inability of the country to resolve the matter internally eventually led to an IMF/EU bailout in November 2010, and imposition of austerity measures to try and redress the problem. Today the country, although no longer officially in recession, is still working through the social and economic consequences of this time.

3 See ‘Weak Architecture’ by Ignasi de Sola Morales

4 Gadamer, HG (1975) Truth and Method UK: Bloomsbury

5 This can be seen in the practice chronology with projects such as Shatwell, Belgrave, and many more.
Fig 13.1
LOST ARMATURES

“In order to understand the present we must link it to the self-transforming urges of the past. We must see it as an evolutionary urge towards a transformation of all traditional notions as a gradual process of growth in which several earlier currents have penetrated one another and this have changed their very essence.”

In the making of collective work a specific strategy or idea may only have the value of allowing other ideas accrete about it. Collective endeavour can be damaged by a misunderstanding of this. Fighting for an idea (my idea) precludes the judo move of going with the ebb and flow of the conversation and the design process. It also misses the fact that sometimes ideas exist only to allow other ideas to accrete about them. These lost armatures are introduced in the knowledge that they will not remain.

This term is a combination of two contrasting ways to make a sculpture - in clay modelling the use of an armature gives something to shape the clay about with this armature remaining under the clay of the completed work. In contrast lost wax casting uses wax as a form to make a mould about - the wax is ‘lost’ with the arrival of the molten metal to make the final piece. The lost armature is one that both supportive and lost in the process. Lost armatures are more than scaffolding, but rather are generative.

One example is the approach taken with the project for Shatwell Farm. This job was awarded by invited competition, with us set up in opposition to some far more eminent practices from the UK. The site was an existing pre-cast concrete barn (the barn described in the ‘Portal Extension’ essay) with the brief asking for a house which would form part of an ongoing masterplan on the site.
Fig 13.2
Learning from our experiences finishing second in a number of previous competitions we decided to make strategic decisions quickly, to allow us get as far into the design as possible, as we felt that it was in its making that our work might have a chance of winning. This decision also made sense given the limited time available. One of the earliest decisions was to decide whether to keep the barns structure or not. In discussing this we thought if awarded the brief our approach would be to keep the structure, but in a competition there was insufficient time to give the thought that would be required to get the relationship between the new work and the existing structure calibrated correctly. A coin was flipped with the result being that we would design the proposal assuming the existing structure would be removed. The design developed a language of elemental props and fragmentary enclosure, a product of the memory of the barns structure, but not its actuality. In presenting the design to the jury we explained that the design was undertaken to reveal a sensibility.

We were not awarded the commission initially. However some months later the clients re-engaged and asked us to have another go, but this time to keep the structure. We sat down with the clients and asked them to draw their ideal version of the house, and used this to set out very roughly the possible order of the plan. We focussed on getting a room right to begin with, and decided to think of a living room centred on the portal extension. By placing this branched form at the heart of the space the line between the two barns became even more blurred. The project would be sited with the particularity of the found structure as its central concern. We tuned the locations of the walls and the floor to reduce the apparent monumentality of the column and truss, and began working out from this fragment to a possible plan of the house.
Fig 13.3

Fig 13.4
In this process it was interesting that at no stage did we ask what the walls of these rooms were made of - it was when we were working on an aedicular staircase at the heart of the project that we realised why - the walls of the house were to be made from the language we had developed for the original competition entry, but painted white. Here the lost armature was the idea to remove the structure, allowing a language to develop robust enough to work independently of the existing structure. The entire project became a study of the offset in geometry between the existing structure, the found form of the barns, and our design for the house and the attendant gallery spaces.

In this the layering of contemporary construction becomes a way for us to see the entire project as a series of nested architectures, each in their own way complete and each in conversation with each other. Although the presence of the existing structure provoked this approach the majority of the elements in conversation are elements we have introduced. Some are systems of construction and others are bespoke.

We are learning to trust this process in a greater fashion, and are using it to drive projects of increasing complexity. The design process requires a building up of thick world of fragmentary ideas before their interrelationship can be understood.

Notes

1 László Moholy-Nagy - Text as part of Room of the Present (Raum der Gegenwart) Constructed in 2009 from plans and other documentation dated 1930 Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

2 The ‘Atcost’ structure described in the ‘Extended Portal’ essay.
THE FRAGMENT AS GENERATOR

“The function of the work of art is to lead us from the work to the process of creation which it contains.”

Perfection is defined as the absence of a flaw. The definition of a flaw is as an imperfection that mars an object. This circularity leads to a loose definition of a work being perfect when it establishes its own terms, and does not deviate from these terms. For something to be perfect it possesses an autonomy which other more contingent things do not. This self completion, where the work and the thinking behind the work are the same presents an elegance that presents its own attraction. In the search for the essential in a project the possibility of the work fully describing itself within its own terms will inevitably arise. This can be seen in many areas beyond architecture. In the work of our practice I am attracted to the precedent of the 9 square plan and other devices for precisely this reason. The only project where this purity was almost attained with the unbuilt proposal for 4 artists studios in Albert Park (North Dublin). Here the brief called for 4 rooms of differing scales. Given the tight budget a square plan was taken as the restriction, thereby minimising envelope. This was placed on the site and a serrated north facing roof light was run across the top. The angle of this roof light set up the proportional system of the plan, describing rooms of differing proportions (square, double square) and scales and in the process housing the brief in a simple and convincing way. This ‘perfection’ of the project exists in line drawing, where walls have no thickness. There would have had to have been a necessary adjustment of the corners of the room (these would have to be adjusted by curved fillet or angled bezel to thicken the corner) to avoid awkward junctions in the event of the project going to site.
Fig 14.2
It is a shame that the building did not progress as there would have been a lot to discover in the translation of this ‘thin’ idea into the form that would be buildable. Even though the variations would have been minor the work required them to develop the richness necessary to work as architecture. If it had been the curved corners mentioned above this would have given a spatial charge to the spaces, something subtle but meaningful that took the ‘flaw’ and used it to deliver an ambiguity at the heart of the project, allowing it to become something more than the built diagram. This process, whereby aspiration is brought into the conflict of context, produces opportunities for something new to emerge. Once accepted this allows the over-arching idea to become inhabited, to be nuanced and adjusted\textsuperscript{2}. To avoid this opportunity loses something essential for me, as the idea remains brittle and insistent. Perhaps this is an inevitable belief given the context of the building industry where I work in Britain and Ireland, where a tolerance for inaccuracy in the final building must be allowed for.

With this in mind it is perhaps no accident that the process of ‘perfected’ building today is perhaps best evidenced by Olgiati and other Swiss architects who seek that their work be a pure manifestation of a pure idea. These architects, whose work I admire, present their work outside of architectural culture, or of context. They are puzzles in a way, where structure and enclosure elegantly interweave in a single autonomous object. The work process is one of searching for and refining this idea, the moment that everything can be galvanised to this single line of thought. Inevitably there is a ruin-like quality to these works. Structure and enclosure are carefully controlled so as not to damage the read of the primary idea behind the work. There appears to be an anxiousness that these ideas be explicitly manifest to those inhabiting the structure. The ambiguity of experience has little space here.
It is almost as if the projects are seeking to be understood as clearly as they would be in an exhibition. The autonomy of the structures also derives from this desire, as any external adulteration of the work is in essence a diminution.

In our developing appreciation of allowing fragmentary architectures to be simultaneously present we are proposing an approach which thrives on addition rather than refinement. As such it admits the input of new ideas readily, and we find it easy to absorb inputs from clients and others. What we seek is to allow these inputs to build up to put pressure on the work, allowing misalignments and juxtapositions to become evident. This is an architecture of parts, where the inter-relationship between the elements allows something else to manifest. It is within these elements that where the grit of the project is visible. I am resistant to seeing the architecture as complete because at its heart is always this tension.

In the fully rational construct there is no room for difference, for creativity in reading. Perfection does not produce this, just as certainty or a desire to convince does not allow for a conversation. A co-dependancy can place flawed objects in a conversation, one where the whole is somehow richer, more complex, more ambiguous and yet more legible. It leaves the open question as to what comes first in this description - Is the architecture a vehicle for a conversation or is it a product of conversation?

Notes

1 John Berger, summating Max Raphael

EMPATHY

“Being that can be understood is language”

One of the items in the Drawing Matter collection is a notebook once owned by Alvaro Siza. In it is this sketch, made of the Royal Academy London, where he was asked to consider making some work for an exhibition. He has drawn the courtyard where the work is to be placed. In the foreground we see his hand poised over the page of a notebook which is open on a table. The page of this notebook is blank. Perhaps the sketch we are looking at captures the moment as Siza started to make it. There is a delay (the duration of making the drawing) between the blank sketchbook captured here and the actual sketchbook I hold in my hands. The more I look at it the more that this delay seems to outweigh all the other parts of the drawing.

The sketch holds time, and allows us to dwell in this moment, this act of purposive seeing. And so perhaps this is not a drawing of the Royal Academy courtyard at all, but rather it is a drawing of seeing the courtyard. We are invited to notice Siza noticing. He seems to be saying that the architect is part of the site they work on as much as any other aspect. I am reminded of Tarkovsky’s observation that poetry arises from an awareness of the world, a particular way of engaging with reality.

Looking at the Siza sketch we are in turns drawn into the process of drawing and back out again. The work contains the story of its making. In the various sensibilities I have attempted to trace in this document many rely on a similar oscillation, a drawing in and out of the building in response to an open question it poses.
Fig 15.2
It is possible to speak of a potential empathy in these moments. A reading into the building to those who made the building.

Empathy is “an inner limitation, or the lending of our humanity to forms without souls; the reading of ourselves, as it were, into inorganic matter.” I do not propose this empathy being grounded in any particular form with an anthropological resonance but rather in recognition of sensibilities through open questions left in the work.

Gadamer once described the process of reading texts in a similar way ‘the interpreter’s own horizon is decisive, not as the standpoint of which he is convinced or which he insists on, but rather as a possible opinion he puts into play and at risk.’ He went on to describe this process as ‘the consummatory moment of conversation in which something is expressed that is neither my property nor that of the author of the text I am interpreting, but is shared’.

I remember once, before we set up Clancy Moore, having a conversation with Colm. A question arose as to whether a person could be creative if they knew for certain that the work would have no onward life. That no-one else would ever see it, or read it, or think about it. For Colm this was no issue, and he thought that he would make work anyway. I guiltily knew that I probably would not.

Architecture is a collective noun. While it is possible to speak of individual works the word itself implies something greater. In each site of enquiry there are moments to catch a resonant glimpse of some previous insight and to use this to build a new conversation. Architecture expresses and articulates the intention of consciously and resolutely coming to terms with the world.
In working I am learning to dwell with the contradictions that inevitably present themselves, to allow things to gently elide while retaining their integrity. This process is a restless one, and can inflect itself at any stage to the voices shaping the work. Each project is an exercise sited in a particular time, and it is this as much as anything else that defines what gets built. The work even when finished is by its nature incomplete.

Sometimes, if we are lucky, we get to see these open questions embraced and carried forward by those who dwell in the spaces we have helped shape.
Notes:


2 https://www.drawingmatter.org

3 ‘Sensing Spaces’ curated by Kate Goodwin

4 This device of drawing himself into his own drawings is common in Siza’s sketches.

5 Casual Buttress, Portal Extension, Propped Vault


7 Although there are such moments in our work, these are more fully described in the work of Colm Moore, my partner in Clancy Moore as part of his PhD.

APPENDICES
A CHRONOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

In our first Practice Research Symposium (PRS) we set out the work of the practice, and identified a higher order concern at the heart of the practice which examined how abstraction and practical application are simultaneous concerns of the work. Questions were raised about the processes which underlay this, about sentimentality as being a quality of the work and a seeming strength of the work being in able to take forms of representation (such as models) seriously.

Our second PRS elaborated on this, and identified strategies or emergent desires which were deployed repeatedly. These were not processes that we used consciously but rather ideas we recognised as continually recurrent in the work. Our primary conversations remain oriented about the spaces we are making but these ideas act as devices which appear to be repeatedly deployed. We titled these geometry, figure, ad hoc, character, conglomerate and contingent. These are not words that we actually used in daily practice with great frequency, merely the titles of the actions we found. Identifying and naming the processes in itself proved valuable however, in particular I was intrigued by the word ‘contingent’ which we used in two senses, both a naming of how we appear to embrace contingencies as a means to inform or give a charge to work, and as a desire for how a project might feel once we thought the design work was completed - as a contingent of arrested forces, somehow held in equilibrium.

In my third PRS, which took place after some time away from the phd I laid out a series of different ways of understanding both my spatial history and public behaviours.
Fig 16.2
I tried to track the design process in two instances - the first with the design of a simple chair with my cousin Mattie O’Malley, this process revolved around a series of generative or sustaining conversations which informed the design, in a way richer and more generative than the drawings and more abstracted techniques which had initiated the process. I also attempted to document the equivalent processes in Clancy Moore by presenting an early sketch of our design process on a distillery project. It was interesting in this analysis how expansive and inclusive our initial approaches were, and how seemingly contradictory ideas were allowed to co-exist, without one being edited out. It was observed by the panel that aspects which were important in my description were frequently relational devices (nesting, stacking, adjacency etc) and not ‘essences’.

In PRS 4 I went through sketch and in-progress work from notebooks used since the previous PRS. This allowed for a deeper explication of the processes used. Of greatest value were what I called ‘Lost Armatures’ - these are ideas which are introduced solely to allow other ideas accrete about them, with the intention never being that this idea would be manifest in the end. It was conjectured that this technique, which frequently involved the use of fragments of other projects (references or other Clancy Moore projects) was how the idea of the contingent as a resolution of arrested forces might be achieved.

This event also involved a presentation of work Clancy Moore were doing collaboratively with Alice Casey, Cian Deegan and Steve Larkin in the making of ‘Big Red’. This collaboration was made possible in part by the PhD process.
Fig 16.3
In PRS 510 this lost armature idea was explored in a case study of Shatwell Farm - a project which we had lost at competition stage. This project involved an open competition to design a house and other facilities as a conversion of an existing pre-cast concrete barn. Our initial approach to the competition entry was to propose removal of the existing barn. This was not our serious intent, but was designed solely to show a sensibility and not as a specific design approach. There was a delicacy and fragility to the existing context which we believed would not be possible to address or understand in the short time both to prepare the competition entry and to present it to the jury. Although we lost the competition some months later we were asked back to re-examine the project, briefed that our original entry would not be supported, and that the existing structure should be kept. Now, having developed a language in the abandoned competition entry we found it easy to develop an attitude to how walls could be made and placed to capture and frame the existing columns. The first competition entry became a lost armature, traces of it is present throughout the final version, but without any one part of it directly realised. The insight that allowed the final strategy be identified is explored in depth in the ‘Extended Portal’ section of this document. This project was one which was directly affected by the PhD process and the discoveries being made in it, and a video case study of the process involved forms part of this dissertation.
In PRS 6\textsuperscript{11} I combined this technique with a detailed explication of the entire sketch design process in a house in Donegal. This project was one where external forces acted (and continue to act) in an incredibly disruptive manner. This constant need to re-address the design from base principals meant the the project went through countless iterations. Interesting in this was the way that certain relational essences were kept and populated radically different versions of the project. This case study in a more developed form is one of the video essays as part of this dissertation.

PRS 7\textsuperscript{12} summated the work to date, and sought to frame it through the over-arching interest in conversation that ran through all the aspects explored to date. It included a version of this dissertation in draft from, along with the video case studies mentioned above. This was the final PRS prior to examination.
Notes

1 Ghent, April 2013

2 This observation was made by Jo Van Der Berghe. The understanding of ‘sentimentality’ as being the process whereby we came to understand this as the desire to evoke personal feelings in those considering the work is explored in the ‘Empathy’ section of this document.

3 This point arose initially from an observation by Leon Van Schaik, and has proved fundamental in how we understand the value of a conversation to enable seeing.

4 Barcelona, November 2013

5 Barcelona, November 2014

6 The Carvel Chair

7 The same timber worker we used in the building of St George and St Thomas, Slievebawnogue Houses, and Big Red

8 This point was raised by Brandon Joseph, and expanded by Kester Rattenbury

9 Ghent, April 2015

10 Barcelona, November 2014

11 Dublin, April 2016

12 London, November 2016
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