A Space of Encounter

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

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November 2017
BOOK ONE : CHOREOGRAPHIES
A CHOREOGRAPHY OF FIGURES

The following illustrated essays and video describe a new understanding of our design process whereby a series of figures, drawn out of conversation into space, are set in motion only coming to rest in the completion of the project. The video and one of the illustrated essays describe a project for the extension of a house at Albany Road, Dublin. Our most recently constructed project it embodies much of the nascent understanding born of this PRS process. The second drawn essay attempts to test this new understanding of our work by mapping it onto the project that established the practice, Two Houses at Slievebawnogue, our first commission. While the final essay outlines a resulting fragmentary working process for a current project in detailed development, works to At Cost Shed 1 & 2 at Shatwell Farm.

I have named these drawings choreographies given that the emergence of these figures captures a dynamic process of the arrangement of figures in space. In doing so I am particularly thinking of Rudolf Von Laban’s Labanotation, which has become one of the primary systems for notation in modern dance. The original,
graphically wonderful, script drew a description of movement and form that intentionally left space for the gesture of the individual performer. This is close to our intention as designers.

In a brief, somewhat droll, text titled ‘Building a House’  the Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza describes the process of designing a home. In it he claims the design of one house as being almost the same as any other. After all, they all have walls, windows, some doors, a roof. The individual design only becomes unique in the transformation that occurs when each of these elements comes into relation with the other. Crucially it is in the development of these relationships that he describes the critical moment the project becomes animated, when it takes on a life of its own. In our studio it is this moment we are constantly seeking out. Tellingly Siza suggests it taking the form of an “unpredictable animal”. Not quite wild but with “shifting eyes and restless feet”!

Maybe our choreographies are intended for such restless feet. Yet while the design process is dynamic in its genesis, ultimately, in its constructed form it describes a static performance. In this sense design as an act of choreography might be understood as a return to

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2. Clancy Moore sketch
the Greek origin of Chorography², defined as the art of describing a 'place'. Much like a map outlines the primary features in a landscape, or a journey through it, these drawings describe the primary characters, the players, in the development of a project - an emergent terrain. When read collectively these various choreographies could be considered as an atlas outlining the broader territory of our practice.

In his text of the Geographia (2nd century CE), Ptolemy defined geography as the study of the entire world, but chorography as the study of smaller territories, provinces and regions. Unlike our current understanding of cartography its goal was to merely make “an impression of a part”. With this impressionistic quality its aim was to capture “the qualities rather than the quantities of the things that it sets down”. Here definition and measurement are understood as being situational and contingent.

Pursuing further this sensing of space leads us briefly to Chorology which refers to the study of the causal relations between geographical phenomena occurring within a particular region - reminding us that the relationship in space between our characters, their placement and the tension created in adjacencies, becomes as important to us as the

² From khōros; “place” and graphein, “writing”
figures themselves.

Finally, and understanding it as a bit of a stretch, if we take one further step back from Chorology simply to its root Khoros (Greek for ‘place, space’) and the enigmatic Khôra we arrive at a definition that is close to the essence of these choreographies. Khôra is defined as the territory of the Ancient Greek polis outside of the city proper. A sort of place between. In his Timaeus Plato describes the Khôra as a place from which all things derive, the receptacle and the nurse of all becoming and change\(^3\). In such a place we return to the birth of Siza’s restless animal who’s shifting eyes describe the design of a dwelling as a desire for intelligence, and the making of each project as an intense search for life.

The following choreography drawings should be read as a series of ‘film stills’

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3 Plato, Timaeus Verses 49-51
ills 4. Clancy Moore sketch
A RUIN
A PROFILE
A CHOREOGRAPHY : HOUSE SLIEVEBAWNOGUE
A ROOM
A FIGURE FOUND: CONCRETE PORTAL FRAME
A FIGURE FOUND: A COMPANION
A FIGURE FOUND: THE SMITHSONS OBELISK
A FIGURE FOUND: ALVARO SIZA’S COLUMNS
THE FOUND FIGURE FRAMED: A STRATEGY OF OFFSET
THE FOUND FIGURE FRAMED: A NEW GROUND
A NEW FIGURE: AN AEDICULE
THE FOUND FIGURE FRAMED - A FAMILY OF ROOFLIGHTS
FURTHER FIGURES: A FAMILY OF ROOLIGHTS
FURTHER FIGURES: A FAMILY OF ROOLIGHTS
FURTHER FIGURES: BRACES TO THE FOUND FRAME
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