Coast (Blurred) Line:
When Productive Activity Meets Spectacle
at the Coast

Thesis By
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Abstract

Through investigations of local vernacular and historical building along the coast of Ireland, I’ve sought to add new value along the coastal edge. The thesis explores the impact of the natural condition on how manmade structures are constructed at the coastal edge. It investigates flora and fauna indigenous to the coastline whose metaphysics are influenced by the changes in the tide. The area about the coastline has been referred to as an in-between space as it neither belongs to land nor sea and I’ve used architectural precedents of in-between spaces, be they on the coastline or not, to explore this. As the tide moves in and moves out spectacular events occur on large and small scales that draw people to the seashore-this is where man can explore ocean life. The research suggests that by dealing very carefully with a specific natural situation and cultural condition, the identity of a place can be strengthened. The outcome of the thesis is to produce an architectural project particular to a degenerate area along the coastline of Galway City; Lough Atalia. Inspired by a history of harvesting seaweed and an abundance of it on the west coast of Ireland, I seek to enhance an area polluted by poor, stagnant water quality which historically has always been inhabited by those rejected by society.
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Image 2: Kilkee's Pollack Holes
Chapter 1: Introduction

Irish people as islanders must have a heavy occupation of the coastline and people do go out of their way to reach parts of it. The tidal nature of the shore allows the territory to alternately belong to man and then to the sea-this is where man can explore ocean life! Be it a sunny or cloudy day, here in Ireland, people inhabit the coastline for leisure. While on two photography excursions I observed the use of the shoreline. In Ballybunion, owners let their dogs scamper free while at The Pollock Holes in Kilkee, families meander through rocks, seaweed and mussels, and scuba divers snorkel in the pools. The tide at its lowest in thirteen years attracted a crowd to watch normally submerged land reveal itself.

I hoped to evoke childhood memories at the seaside and to emulate the idea of occupation of the edge in the photographs. Scuba divers as seen in image 1 take advantage of the low tide by exploring The Pollock Holes. Their hearth is the sea and they occupy it in movements of similar fashion to water creatures. The Irish coastline is a place appreciated by people on a recreational level but perhaps what lies hidden is its potential to be a productive landscape/seascape and that we become immersed in an idea that we need the coastal edge for basic needs.

I’m intrigued by the temporal quality of the coastline-mud build up, tides, erosion and unexpected effects of a man-made (or animal-made) building but how do you give something presence in a setting so altered at different times? As Louis Kahn says, “when you want to give something presence, you have to consult nature. And this is where Design comes in.” Our human actions are reactions to the specific environments around us. A building is probably not remembered for how long it lasts but its ability to condition itself to its site with a correct balance of durability and adaptability-I associate Ancient Greece with the white marble ruins of the Acropolis, yet in Ancient Greece bold colours, terracotta and timber were also frequently used. Is stone, therefore, and not timber, nor terracotta, nor colours, a material associated with nostalgic history? I propose a project demonstrating adaptability and durability against time, size and economy- a productive landscape focusing on the Irish coastline exploring its micro and macro connections and possibilities. The function, form and detail should be informed by an approach like Junichiro Tanizaki when he writes in ‘In Praise of Shadows’ that

Sometimes a superb piece of black lacquer-ware, decorated perhaps with flecks of silver and gold- a box or ... a set of shelves will seem to me unsettlingly garish and altogether vulgar. But render pitch black the void in which they stand, and light them not with the rays of the sun or electricity but rather a single lantern or candle: suddenly those garish objects turn somber, refined, dignified.
Here he has seen a value in looking at something so local and mundane and through the environment around it has described it as a very special element. It is not about filling a room with light but using an appropriate amount of darkness and light to produce spectacle.

(Endnotes)


Chapter 2: The Irish Coastline and a Comparative Study

The Irish coastline is “plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough” with scenes of a time gone by-Martello towers, stone piers, monastic settlements, field walls, disused lighthouses and yet at a time of economic prosperity, people were drawn away from fishing and the sea when construction jobs on the land proved to be more lucrative. Depleting stocks, strict EU quotas\(^1\) and the rise of price in oil also made fishing an unappealing career. AA Gill says that the EU’s solutions are actually damaging our relationship with the sea and remarks that “well-meaning environmentalists have come up with the worst possible outcome: most fish are thrown away for their own good”\(^2\) as fish exceeding quotas must be thrown back into the sea. In Ireland, from 1987-97, there was a Ministry for the Marine and from 1997-2002 it changed to Ministry for the Marine and Natural Resources. The role became even less significant when Marine and Natural Resources was combined with Communications from 2002-2007 and from 2007 the ministerial title was removed. Would it be fair to say then that perhaps in the fast paced economy of the last decade, we had forgotten the possibility of developing our coastal industries? Coastal industries, I believe, are the human desires drawing us to the edge of land such as energy sources; like wind, tidal action, gas and oil, food sources like fishing and sea plant cultivation, and, leisure like marinas, surfing and seaside culture. Now with a newly appointed Ministry for Agriculture, Marine and Food and at a time of poor economic growth, opportunity knocks for people to explore the natural resources of Ireland as an island. Standing on the edge of Europe with an ocean between it and America and with a diverse aquaculture, Ireland has the potential to manipulate the coastline and in doing so become a place that very much depends upon its seascape. Local efforts have been made to interact along the seashore like deBlacam’s Café on Inis Meain or Island Cottage Restaurant on Heir Island in Cork where the menus consist of the local ingredients caught and picked that day (mainly fish) with the menus changing daily to suit. Also on Achill Island, a turbot farm uses the mineral rich Atlantic Ocean water to produce a delicate flavoured fish, the bulk of which is exported to Portugal, Spain and Greece. What I see lacking in Ireland is somehow taking these initiatives to a national level. Alan Davidson, the food critic writes that:

One of the many paradoxes which bloom as freely as the shamrock in its native land is this; that the coasts of the Emerald Isle are rich in seafood, but that the Irish people have on the whole been shy of consuming it. One has only to imagine what would happen on these coasts, if the people of, say, Singapore were suddenly transplanted thither, to realise the extent of this shyness.\(^3\)

My interest in this topic probably came while in New York working alongside Koreans. I was amazed at their appreciation for cuisine, particularly seafood, and their knowledge of the sea’s food. Here in Ireland, seafood is not part of a daily diet yet in Korea, a country of similar size and coastline, seafood is part of each meal. There, the coastline is treated as one large piece of manipulated infrastructure. The mountainous landscape of Korea attracts people to the coast along the flatter land and interventions such as irrigated

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\(^{1}\) EU quotas: limits on the amount of fish that can be caught.

\(^{2}\) Well-meaning environmentalists: those who aim to protect the environment.

\(^{3}\) Alan Davidson: Food critic and writer.
and reclaimed land, paddy fields, seaweed farms, causeways, mussel farms, golf courses, beaches and ports are seen all around the coast as one continuous patchwork pattern as seen in Image 6 comparable to Ireland as seen in Image 7 where on many parts a belt of unused land separates the farmed landscape from the wild sea. Historically, Ireland’s most notable infrastructural system along the edge is probably the series of connecting Martello Towers. The towers were built as one single defensive arrangement during the Napoleonic Wars. Each one was built so that one could have a clear view, or shot, of sea invaders. While being close enough to alert its adjacent towers, they were separated by a distance of two canon shots (Image 4 and Image 5).

(Endnotes)


6 Alan Davidson, North Atlantic Seafood (Totnes, 2003), 468.
Chapter 3: In-Between Space, Between Landscape and Seascape

Architecturally speaking the in-between space is a space which can both connect and separate its peripheral spaces. It infers movement and gradual change through it from one point to another. Movement can mean in length; a bridge, going from public to private; a hallway corridor within an apartment block, in texture; colour change in the stone between pedestrian and car passages of a cobbled road, in condition; a pier connected to the land but worn at its head by the sea. The space between foyer and auditorium of the Philharmonie in Berlin by Hans Scharoun (Image 9) acts like the branches of a tree. It is a series of flows from large spaces to increasingly smaller and smaller ones until finally seated. This in-between space encourages clusters of people to gather around niches to view out onto the city. With many stairs and rails it is a comfortable place to casually lean and loiter for a short amount of time i.e. a twenty minute interval. Scharoun must have been influenced by the Palais Garnier in Paris. Its interior consists of a grand staircase followed by interweaving corridors, stairwells, alcoves and landings accommodating movement of large crowds while also allowing spaces to socialise before and after the opera (Image 10). In the Philharmonie one cannot but be at/around/on the staircase. What is striking is that while you might be uncertain of your exact position in the building or even in the city (unless you are looking out), getting to your seats is a seamless procession up and down varying shapes and sizes of stairs.

The in-between as Stan Allen notes in Points + Lines is “a theatre for production”? The form of space is not relevant but the form of the in-between, what can happen about this space. He says that “Form matters, but more for what it can do than what it looks like". Architecture, taking Image 8 of Rome as an example, performs as a sequence of moments intertwined through a series of spaces and routes occurring before, after and around it, subtly bringing about performance spaces- places to act in. Spaces are sequential moments tied together. Consequently, architecture is created by small sequential movements and is both instantaneous and sequential.

In Frank Lloyd Wright’s Johnson Wax building, he sought to make the interior space an interior world for both the workers and employers, creating a small community. The building appears hardy and solid on the outside while inside its spaces are much more open and fluid-like. The in-between spaces from being wholly outside to wholly inside are an intricate mix of subtleties for drivers, and pedestrians alike. The sculpted ceiling plan of a covered outdoor space wedged between two solid blocks acts as an entrance space guiding motorists off the street into the building while at the same time creating a buffer zone between a car park and offices. A procession of steps leads you through a wall of glass doors, and, once indoors, you are still anticipating destination entering into another buffer zone between the outdoors and workroom by a double height space separated from the rest of the hall through overhead galleries. The brick wall continues inside and reinforces the natural procession from outside to inside. Once inside, inside the Great Workroom that is (Image 11), you can see all the work taking place and have the feeling of being immersed within the Johnson Wax
community. Tubular glass screens an exterior view but still allows light to filter through. One of the most striking images of modern architecture is the column grid structure of the Great Workroom. The grid and the slender mushroom headed columns are found inside and out; once again blurring the edge condition. As the bricks do not explicitly carry the structure of the building, Frank Lloyd Wright could play with the apparent weight of brick on the exterior façade and its warmth on the interior. Having visited the Imperial Palace at Katsura, the architect’s buffer zone may have been inspired by the palace’s captured landscape; as seen in Image 12, punctures through walls may frame a view but pathways provide continuity beyond the palace walls out onto the landscape. This landscape which is neither wholly built upon nor wholly natural offers a procession of sorts from the natural to manmade. Another aspect at Katsura is that it appears to have been built from the inside out beginning with the hearth of a tea room and expanding out through a grid of human scale tatami mats and crossover beams.

For a primer project on Shannon this year, we were asked to design a cold storage unit in the now marshy flying boat harbour. I was reminded of a project I did in the port village of Foynes in 3rd Year where I proposed a whiskey distillery and coffee roasting plant. The dual aspect of the project meant that an economy based on producing and exporting food and drink on ships blended with Foynes as a stop-off point along the scenic coastline (a local history of the building revealed that Irish coffee was first served here). I questioned how I could marry architecture, geography and economics, again exploiting the many economies around Shannon Airport- air travel, sea travel, fishing on the estuary while also focusing on the first thesis steps of changeability, durability and adaptability. What arose from the project was an understanding architecturally of an in-between space and dealing with an edge condition.

In linking with my thoughts on Greek architecture; how it once looked and how it is seen now, I found a powerful image of the lost tradition of local fishing and craft making along the Shannon estuary (Image 15). The painting, made in 1799, shows one of the many weirs set up along the Shannon estuary and what I found particularly interesting was the use of the nets- the locally sourced woven materials carefully and strategically situated on a small sheltered inlet. The Shannon primer inferred dealing with an international setting but here in fact was an image showing something very particular to the area which could benefit the local community as well as a global one. I made a proposal to link sea and air travel making a sort of in-between space of fish markets and cold storage between water and land (Image 14). The in-between space served the locals of the harbour through the fishing and market space while on a larger scale a pier stretched out to a point deep enough for cargo ships. This infrastructural piece was made of cast concrete caissons and on top sat permanent/reusable pods (like Martello towers as points along a line). Between the pods of services and functionality was leftover space which allowed people and vehicles to move freely up and down the pier; the programme of spaces changed as required. Perpendicular to the pier were two weirs made of locally sourced woven wattle. As shown in Image 13, a lightweight wooden cross structure above helped spaces to adapt according to needs e.g. providing shelter or beams for hanging fish. It reminded me of the fish market in Aveiro, Portugal which programmed people through the town into the main square and streets while still allowing people to...
Image 15: Fishing Weirs at Bunratty, 1799
move freely through the covered area too where fish were sold.

Nature, as in the tides, are changeable and subject to unusual phenomena. It is impossible to express the line of the coast as something static or even straight. Tim Robinson says that it is “the conception of filling my mind of a strange map consisting of one line, and that so convoluted it visited every point of the territory”, an elusively blurred line that is. In The Edge of the Sea, Rachel Carson explores the general changeability and threads of the seashore zooming into minute detail of barnacles and seaweed that affect a much larger ecology. She writes that:

Nowhere on the shore is the relation of a creature to its surroundings a matter of a single cause and effect, each living thing is bound to its world by many threads, weaving the intricate design of the fabric of life.

The seashore is made up of tiny fragments of life producing colossal effects on the landscape and seascape. Nature, as in the tides, is subject to change as Carson remarks, “But neither the corals nor the mangroves, but the sea itself will determine when that which they build will belong to the land, or when it will be reclaimed for the sea”. A simple cell sheds its skin which in turn produces chalk. The chalk is washed onto the shore through tidal action in large amounts which many years ago created the awesome White Cliffs of Dover. While wave action erodes away the cliffs these natural wonders are eroding at an much greater rate than expected to due to…limpets! The small limpet leaves its home in the chalk to hunt and on returning, secretes an acidic cement which in turn dissolves the chalk (Image 16).

Barnacles depend on tidal action and can often be seen in large numbers on boulders by the seashore. In a built sense, the barnacle, as seen in Image 17, is a creature permanently housed in a six plated shell with four doorplates that open when the tide comes in so that they can feed, breathe and stay moist within their heptahedronical shell. Seaweed houses many of the seashore’s creatures-starfish, molluscs, limpets and worms. Seaweed is a network for things to nest in. It is a world/habitat in itself which must survive for its wildlife to exist, by growing and replacing its torn tissue. All it requires is adequate sunlight and seawater. It can live on the shore because of its adaptability and durability both to land and to sea. On land it is able to dry out and at the returning tide, it refLOURishes and moisturises. It endures the force of the tide through the tension in its stems and its air sacs that allow it to rise up and float within the water rather than being crushed downward by wave and water (Image 18).

Quite simply even a temperature difference affects the ecology. It acts as a hidden gate suggesting climatic barriers exist which cannot be seen and inhibit the growth of certain wildlife in a place- because of its warm current, the North Atlantic Drift towards Ireland attracts species of a subtropical climate up north to the Irish coast such as the leatherback turtle.
(Endnotes)


11 Carson, *The Sea*, 574
Image 18: Seaweed adapts in water and out of water
Chapter 4: A Landscape-Seascape Duality: Architecture and Critical Regionalism

“Every shell, fin, stone and scale, driftwood and all the flotsam of man’s manufacture is eventually whittled and worn into a pleasing aquatic beauty. And there are ships, built by men but designed by the element they live in.”

At a time of global economic hardships, I feel coastal opportunities lie open to be manipulated around Ireland. But what is Ireland’s shyness of the shore? A study of the coast in general reveals aspects which have historically drawn man to the coast, a maritime tradition, not marine as is often mistaken. Marine is that which belongs to or is produced by the sea while maritime is that which borders the sea. In the *Shallow Water Dictionary* by John Stilgoe, the etymology of the estuary hints at the long running tradition of man and the edge condition where land meets sea, and describes man’s way of defining the edge condition. Perhaps the declining importance of a coastal edge has arisen from aircraft travel- one does not need go to the edge of the land now to travel to further afield and so it becomes a place used by man chiefly for leisure and recreation (*Image 20*) while only some need use it for setting out to sea e.g. fishermen familiar with the original meanings of sea terms used in Stilgoe’s book.

As Stilgoe points out, the estuary is defined by seamarks and landmarks. Landmarks define clear amounts of dry land while seamarks outline the extents of tidal movement- “the sea-marks help the mariner determine his path -not his course- through the marshes”. Seamarks do not define what is always under water but rather the highest point at which the water reaches suggesting the in-between belongs to the sea, and for man to tread carefully, that this area although at times appearing as dry land is not wholly useable by man. The flats too, sometimes covered by the tide and then left bare appear to be an uncomfortable uninhabited ground. Culturally the in-between of the seashore has developed colloquialisms used in modern day language, developed from senses of the sea like the word, ‘guzzle’ describing the sucking sound of water seeping into a secret passage; or the word ‘gutter’ meaning secret passage. Not only is the etymology of the water’s edge inspired by nature but so are manmade objects occupying this in-between space. The skiff (small boat) and skeg (its fin) as seen in *Image 21*, shaped like a large fish, manoeuvres and drifts through the marshes pushed by the force of the wind and the tide up stream, steered by the skeg of the skiff, resting in the shallow water due to its curved back. Is the in-between therefore a learning ground? Or even a place for swapping ideas? Where have we found inspiration when building on the coastline?

Nietzsche says that an individual in “his more courageous and more genuine character, must at some point or other struggle against what will only be constantly repeated, relearned, and imitated. He begins then to grasp that culture can still be something other than a decoration of life”. The construction of Bagsvaerd Church by Jorn Utzon combines old (barn building) and new (concrete forms) technologies. Utzon draws inspiration from nature where a cloud inspires a running curved hanging vault (*Image 22*) The outer shell
of the building, while appearing industrial, masks a sensitive inside made from the same materials as farm buildings surrounding the church.

Kenneth Frampton calls this contemporary architectural interpretation inspired by a local culture/knowledge as Critical Regionalism where “only an ‘arrière garde’ has the capacity to cultivate a resistant, identity giving culture while at the same time having discreet recourse to universal technique”¹⁷. He mentions Jorn Utzon’s building as “a work whose complex meaning stems directly from a revealed conjunction between, on the one hand, the rationality of normative technique and, on the other, the arationality and idiosyncratic form….The vault signifies sacred space” and has “multiple cross cultural references”¹⁸ of such form in a sacred context, their precedents lying in Eastern culture.

In the book Cradle to Cradle, it says:

We begin to make human systems and industries fitting when we recognise that all sustainability (just like all politics) is local.

We connect them to local material and energy flows, and to local customs, needs and tastes, from the level of the molecule to the level of the region itself.”¹⁹

I began to study regional nuances of a coastline by taking six fishing villages around the coast of Ireland looking at both their physical and cultural conditions and discovered that the way in which the local man built inferred a specificity to the locality. In The Claddagh, Galway, a small boat with a deep bow known as the Galway Hooker (Image 23) could be used in a variety of ways- it could withstand a harsh sea and in the shallow waters was used for collecting shellfish. Its bow was large enough to carry cows, seaweed and turf. It was made of well spaced timber struts and covered in a leather skin as there was a scarcity of timber in the west of Ireland relative to the rest of the country. The wares would be sold by the fishermen’s wives at the market in Galway, a short walk from The Claddagh.

In Donegal (Image 24(a)), the cottages were made of stone and their thatch was pegged down to protect it from a harsh sea wind while the milder climate and a lesser rocky ground in the southeast of the country saw cottages made from mud and a greater deal of timber (Image 24(b)). The fishing villages of Schull, Co. Cork, Killybegs, Co. Donegal and Carlingford, Co. Down all share a topographical quality where they lie sandwiched between mountains and an inlet. The mountains provide wind shelter while the inlets contain calmer waters than harsher waters of the open sea.

From studies, the Irish coastline is now inhabited by the general public for leisure but there is a lost tradition or understanding of building at the water’s edge. The two must be combined, as Alvar Aalto says, by:
serious laboratory work with the mentality of play, or vice versa. Only when the constructive parts of a building, the forms derived from them logically, and our empirical knowledge is coloured with what we might seriously call the art of play; only then are we on the right path. Technology and economics must always be combined with a life-enhancing charm.20

(Endnotes)

12 Gill, The Sunday Times Magazine, 16.
19 William McDonough and Michael Braungart, Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things (New York: North Point Press, 2002), 123.
20 Alvar Aalto, Experimental House at Mauratsalo (Helsinki: Arkkitehtti, 1953).
Chapter 5: Spectacle and The Sea

If my thesis is to explore man’s occupation of the coastline, a blurred edge, ideally I would hope to find a piece of the edge undervalued or unnoticed and give it importance. John Stilgoe observes that:

Landscape, or seascape, that lacks vocabulary cannot be seen, cannot be accurately, usefully visited. It is not even theoretical, if theory means what the Greek root theoria means, a spectacle, a viewing. This means that the objects and naturally occurring happenings on the landscape and seascape have developed their wording through someone finding worth or beauty in them. You may find many unusual forms built along the coastline, perhaps one in particular embodies the idea of spectacular. Located between the industrial quarter and central Porto, on a piece of land probably not of much use to either district is a teahouse. It is too far from the city centre to be enjoyed and its rocky setting makes it of little use to an industrial zone. You are lead up a series of steps twisted amongst the rocky shore. A building is embedded in the rocks so formally it seems as if it is part of them. You are not quite sure what kind of space you are entering into and suddenly once inside you are pushed in the direction of a breathtaking framed view of just the sea, the horizon and the sky (Image 25). This is Alvaro Siza’s Teahouse, the concept for which was to make a piece of land special where once it was not. It’s certainly spectacular in experience in the sense that Siza heightens and draws attention to what is already there and frames it—an ocean view, scattered rocks, blue skies. At the same time sitting inside the cafe has a boat-like feel as if you are out at sea—a natural procession from land to sea, from centre to suburb. The spectacular is that which is already there but has been highlighted by the architectonics of Siza’s Teahouse. It’s not only a question of applying vocabulary (I am a teahouse) or vision (I can offer wonderful views from the building). It’s also about perception (I had never come to this part of the city as it was an industrial zone) and experience (I did not know it was such a wonderful place to swim).

A workshop earlier this year to reimagine the Tempelhof People’s Park in Berlin encouraged us to gain an understanding of why this former airport, a huge piece of open land, so close to the city centre, as seen in Image 26, is so important to the city. It felt similar to being at the seaside. But what is the connection between people and leisure by the sea? When talking to locals on the site they said Tempelhof was a place to get away from the city. The seashore is a place where you can turn your back on city living, hectic working lives, office jobs, and look out onto a vast spectacular expanse of sea with only the horizon in view. If what was happening at Tempelhof was similar to the seaside in a city with no coastline, why change it? I began to look at the site’s edge and noticed how unassuming the entrances were into this mass of land, and, that there were fewer people and smaller group numbers closer to the centre of the park. The space in-between, i.e. that at the entrances, is landlocked, a no man’s land unless the context of each gate permeate it.
in some way to give it character, a new energy while also energizing the space around it. I focused on an idea of being able to situate yourself within Berlin, some place between Berlin and Tempelhof, and, somewhere in Tempelhof, by creating new entrance spaces. A punctured wall proposal (Image 27) acted as both a frame and a reactivator of entrance spaces with rental shops, toilets and shelters contained within the wall at entrances which drew people in from train stations, residential areas, parks and public buildings onto the site. A wall need not be a barrier but in fact have quite the opposite effect. This small intervention was inspired by the thoughtful human detail around Berlin itself- herring-bone brick structures hidden under balconies, in U-Bahn stations, on ceilings, on paths, graffiti in the upper class as well as lower class areas and patterns on manholes. I looked at the unusual and interesting-the spectacular!

The architecture of Berlin has had to undergo much change after World Wars I & II. Because of this, it is clear there is an openness and acceptance to change. An old power station now houses an exhibition space and the infamous Tresor techno club. The Neues Museum makes the visitors routes through the building a readable human scale built detached from the historic, ruinous parts. This idea of exaggerating the scale of the old makes the old into something that is to be marvelled at (Image 28). How you proceed through a building can heighten the senses. Like Siza’s Teahouse, the manner of approach to a spectacle is part and parcel of the spectacle itself. Peter Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews encourages people to walk slowly down into the sculptural block (Image 29) until you find yourself totally immersed between heavyweight concrete masses and once again swayed out and up with the same ease.

Just as Junichiro Tanizaki’s description of plays on darkness (“the main hall will be brightly lit, and these garments of gold will seem merely gaudy”), Jorn Utzon plays with the spectacle of the spiritual in Bagsvaerd Church. The unknown light source and the curved ceiling hanging down from overhead creates a solemn ambience for spiritual reflection. The colours like the light are neutral bar the priest’s clothing, the focal point. There is an emphasis on making the ordinary spectacular; “Glory be to God for dappled thing”.

The way in which we eat our food can be spectacular too. The contrasts between Irish and Korean culture, as mentioned in Chapter 2, extend as far as the styles of sitting down and eating a meal. “Each culture places cutlery in such a way that the subsequent freedom of movement is already predetermined”. In Ireland, our westernised culture has burdened us with specific tools for each meal at a dinner setting and our dish is surrounded by several pieces of cutlery. In Korea, one item of cutlery, chopsticks, allows the user to make choices and freely navigate about the many dishes around the table. In a design sense, the spectacle involved in eating at a Korean restaurant was new to me. At the weekend, the Koreans I met in New York enjoyed travelling to the coast for the freshest fish and nights out implied sipping soju and devouring fish at a Korean bar. It was very much a group activity, the kitchens are loud, busy and can often be viewed into. The food, as seen in Image 30, when served was placed all around the table with a meat roast or a piece of fish in the centre kept warm by a stove underneath it:

a meal consists of dozens of atomised courses scattered all along the table, letting each guest choose the actual order, rhythm and
combinations of the meal. Sweet, cold, calm, sour, Kimchi, warm, roasting, Kimchi, cold, chilling, faster, tea, sweet… Every item – and every rest – plays the main character on stage.

(Endnotes)


23 Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Pied Beauty”, *Poems and Prose*, 31


25 Deconcrete:Everyday Urbanism Without Architects’ Architecture
Seaweed is a commodity unique to the in between space and plentiful throughout Ireland. It only requires sunlight and calm seawater to mature and it can yield a lot for something that requires such simple infrastructure. In the Philippines, for a farm one hectare in size, 1600kg can be harvested per year. This produces enough income for a family. The farms are built by placing stakes in shallow water and tying a rope between them. Seaweed seeds are hung from the ropes like you would a clothes line (Image 31). When the seaweed is fully grown, it is then cut away and allowed to dry. It then shrinks to one tenth its original size and is ready for long term storage, distribution, extraction and for use in biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. Compared to Asia the seaweed industry is very underdeveloped in Ireland—there is no harvesting culture, only a cultivation of naturally occurring seaweed. Eastern culture has embraced seaweed as a major food in daily diets, most notably as a wrapping for sushi. It is also used in Eastern medicine as a cure for problems of the lungs and liver. In preliminary testing, seaweed has been proved to kill off a form of cancer of the immune system. Studies have shown that it can also clean polluted waters by absorbing nitrates and phosphates, and, converting them into protein; it is a valuable bi-product.

And the seaweed farms in Japan, Korea and the Philippines are displays and spectacles in the sea of human productive activity (Image 33). The spectator sees man working and wading in the shallow waters. The orthogonal shapes, stakes sometimes covered, sometimes not are ambiguous and unusual marks in the in-between space; something I haven’t encountered on the Irish coast. We should be able to exploit our twelve mile limit of coastline protected from EU waters to make an economy. How in a country overflowing with seaweed and a strong tradition of using it, has it not taken on a more informed, advanced development?

The conditions of the mineral rich Atlantic Ocean allows an abundance of seaweed to grow along the west coast of Ireland. There is a strong tradition in Ireland of using seaweed for a whole variety of applications. Customarily it was used by local farmers along the coast for fertilising land. Each farmer had their own patch of coastline and the fate of the sea was a point of superstition, so much was the appreciation for what it could provide. In Mayo, local people placed rocks from the land onto the edge of the sea to encourage more seaweed to grow there. It had the advantage of improving the quality of the soil by making the land less rocky and the seaweed could be used as fertiliser. In Connemara (Image 34) where there are many islands close together just off the coast meant that the shallow waters surrounding them created perfect conditions for seaweed to grow. The locals would travel in small boats between islands collecting seaweed; and, because of its mineral richness it was used here as a source of nourishment and an alternative to the potato during famine times. The people of the mainland would trade with inhabitants of the Aran Islands exchanging seaweed for livestock in
currach boats. By the late nineteenth century, the new rail network saw an emergence of spa towns. But before this spas were originally places for treating chronic ailments. Experimental seaweed spas known as Roman-Irish baths were dotted around the coast and seen as places of healing and well-being.

Along the western coastline in Galway Bay is the city of Galway; regarded as a maritime city and home to the Irish Seaweed Centre. There was a strong tradition of cultivating seaweed; it is something particular and local to the area. Like the fishing villages mentioned in Chapter 4, its docks are sheltered from strong tides as it is sandwiched between two small islands-Mutton and Hare Island. The waters are shallow in this inlet and a new harbour has been proposed with 25 hectares of land reclamation so it can accommodate cargo and cruise ships (Image 35). This will ultimately affect the water flow into Lough Atalia, a large tidal lake in the city. The lake itself socially and naturally has been alienated from its surroundings. The slow movement of the tidal waters into it create a stagnant murky layer at the bottom where mullet feed on the residue of city waste. Mullet fish tend to feed in dirty waters on almost anything, including faeces; this is appropriately fitting for Lough Atalia as up until the nineties it was used as an unofficial sewer for the city. At one point water flowed through two channels into the lake but since the construction of a new train line in the early 1900’s, one of these channels was closed off due the train line embankment. The flow of water into the lake has now to navigate a difficult path, perhaps made even more difficult by the introduction of the new harbour proposal. Bar the fact that there is a Special Area of Conservation on the edge of the lake, there is very little information documented on it- with little information on its tides on the nautical charts and little information on the OSI maps of its contours, it suggests being neither sea nor land. The lake divides the city centre from its suburbs and, by car, the only way to the centre is to travel around it. Pedestrians can walk along the train line but this route is dangerous, particularly at night time, however, joggers and walkers use the north part in the evenings. While boasting spectacular views across the bay onto the Burren, historically, the southern end of the lake has always been a place for the dissolute and degenerate in society. All along this part of the coast are symbols characterising this- a Cromwellian fort, cholera and TB hospitals, murders, oil tanks, an army shooting range, and make-shift homeless shelters.

Image 35 shows that the trainline has affected building along the coastline of Galway Bay and what I considered making was an urban park that would invigorate this part of the coastline. This could be a seaweed demonstration park, a place where people could watch, grow and learn how to harvest seaweed, but that the park would also have other positive bi-products. By using seaweed as the source of healing for the area I looked at improving the water qualities of Lough Atalia, encouraging water flow through the lagoon again and seaweed lines would absorb pollution in the water. The productive activity would generate a spectacle unique to Galway City for those arriving by cruise or train, and that these people could come down onto the coastline themselves to enjoy seaweed baths and seaweed dining. The engineer, Alexander Nimmo, designed piers all along the coast of Connemara (Image 1 & Image 35) making each one specific to its local situation. I suggest an approach as sensitive and local as his pier designs be applied to seaweed farming all along the
Connemara coast. By building a distribution and extraction plant at the seaweed urban park, harvesters are encouraged to drop off their raw products in a place that can process, supply and distribute a useful commodity in large amounts around the globe.

(Endnotes)


While looking at spectacle and productive activity along the coastline, the thesis also explores the idea of dealing with a natural situation and cultural condition. The programme is made up of a bridge, seaweed farms and supporting building blocks.

The lagoon is reopened by turning part of the train embankment into a bridge. The bridge also has car and foot access providing a new secure connection from the suburbs to the city centre. The lagoon allows better tidal flow in and out of Lough Atalia making the water less stagnant.

Seaweed farms are placed in Galway Bay as demonstrations of the types of farms all along the Connemara coastline. They create spectacle of productive activity but also provide an experimentation ground for the Irish Seaweed Centre not far away. The farms continue into Lough Atalia and absorb nitrates and phosphates in the lake, converting them into proteins. The farms establish the salt lake as tidal and part of the coastline and encourage more wildlife in the Special Area of Conservation.

Like a Korean dinner table where cutlery dances about the bowls of food, three building types reactivate the spaces around themselves and support an economy based on seaweed. The buildings are of the same form—rectangular—and material—stone—so that they can be identified as part of the same project. The buildings are made of locally sourced limestone gabion walls. This allows the seaweed to dry in well ventilated conditions while also making plays with light and shadows.

The distribution and extraction plant is situated beside the main trainline and is strategically close to the new harbour trainline. It is the first building one sees approaching Galway after emerging from underground tracks. It is also at this point that one sees Galway Bay for the first time. As you move from city to suburb one has the option of moving through the building and viewing onto the process of seaweed extraction.

The seaweed bath and restaurant is located partly submerged in the lagoon. The ground floor contains seaweed baths and a sauna with a seawater plunge pool into the lagoon. Overhead the restaurant provides shelter and privacy for those bathing and offers views across Galway Bay and the Burren. The layout of the restaurant is such that everyone has views out but also views into the kitchen, celebrating the production of food.

The third building is more a series of rectangular shaped mounds of rocks along the coastal edge. They support seaweed growth and between them create small beached inlets to set down boats and collected seaweed.
Bibliography


