Landscape with the Passing of Cars

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‘Landscape with the Fall of Icarus’ by Bruegel depicts peasant farmers tolling on the land in spring, not noticing Icarus falling from the sky.
Landscape with the Passing of Cars is a reflection on the motorway, uncovering the latent opportunities within this complex piece of ground.
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INTRODUCTION
Context for Architectural Thinking

(NON) PLACE?

A collection of images grouped together under the heading of ‘line’ was the starting point for my thinking as a fifth year thesis student in architecture. These five images included a river edge, a road, field patterns, the shoreline and land edge (Figure 1). When considered at quite a far out scale, they appear as lines in the landscape. Movement along these lines, the human experience of these conditions, was also something which I was considering. This notion of moving relative to these lines incurred another thread between these images. We sail down rivers, or walk along their banks. In rural areas we are guided by borders of hedgerows. We stop and contemplate the edge of the sea as it moves in and out, constantly reshaping itself. We take pleasure in occupying the edge of land, whether it is a natural cliff top edge or man-made promenade. All of these types and conditions of movement are familiar to us and are familiar around the world. There is however, a method of movement which Irish people have only relatively recently become accustomed to, that of uninterrupted cross-country driving at high speeds. Pole-position driving at a speed of one hundred and twenty kilometres per hour across the length and breadth of Ireland has been afforded to us by our expanding motorway network. It is something so recent to some parts of the country that television ads demonstrating how to drive correctly on the motorways are shown on RTE.

The expanding network, as seen in Figure 2, has in a way radically changed the scale of our island. It is now so much quicker to move from one city to another than ever before. The M6 which connects Dublin to Galway traverses practically the entire width of our country from east to west. It allows people to move between the two cities in only two hours, over half the time it might have taken on the pre-motorway, main national roads. Most of our main roads, and indeed our rail lines, lead to and from Dublin, but there has been so much development in the last decade that other parts of the country are in the process of becoming connected by motorway. Ireland almost has an actual ‘network’ of motorways. Over half of the ‘Atlantic Corridor’ linking Cork to Sligo has been constructed. Our country as the small island that it is, is becoming ever more obvious with direct routes and increased speeds.

The positive effects of these motorways cannot be doubted. The problem of connecting cities directly has been solved. The solution however has come with consequences and problems, suffered by rural landscapes.

Motorways have transformed and reshaped the land in quite a dramatic way. Rural places outside of cities have been fragmented, bisected and imposed upon by these rivers of asphalt which stretch across the land. This non-place which drivers enter at the beginning of their journey has consequently had quite an effect on the actual places it touches.
Motorways are built for speed, movement and fluidity, with drivers experiencing little or no engagement with the land they are passing through, with Figures 4-6 as an example of this. Towns are bypassed in minutes, villages in seconds and fields are a blur. None of these may even be noticed at all by a driver. The road obviously must interact physically with the land, however this is minimal and happens in a crude manner. Roads sit on top of man-made mounds or cut through existing topography, (Figure 3). Townlands are bisected and become disconnected from one another. Existing field patterns are interrupted and are left with poor edge conditions to the motorway. Farms are divided or reduced, having lost land through compulsory purchase orders. This consequence goes unnoticed by anyone except the people of that immediate locality.

The creation of a non-place has taken priority over place in this instance. Places have had to make way for placelessness. Any point along a stretch of motorway may be considered as the middle of nowhere to a driver, yet these points or stretches are places, and places are important. Countless places, whether they are parishes, townlands, villages or small towns lie forgotten and ignored alongside motorways, passed by thousands of people on a daily basis.

Places are whole entities. They consist of natural and man-made processes and elements. They harbour activity and function and are full of meaning and intention. How basic the importance of place is is described by Lukerman, quoted by Edward Relph in his book ‘Place and Placelessness’; “The study of place is the subject matter of geography because consciousness of place is an immediately apparent part of reality, not a sophisticated thesis; knowledge of place is a simple fact of experience.” At no point along the road from entry to exit are you given any inclination of the place you are momentarily in. The most information that is given to drivers is the name of the town off an upcoming exit. This is placelessness. “Placelessness describes both an environment without significant places and the underlying attitude which does not acknowledge significance in places.” The motorway as an example is joined by airports, railways, shopping centres and supermarkets. In all of these modern man-made landscapes placelessness manifests itself and is aptly described by Stephen Kurtz’s account.

\[1\] Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976) 4

\[2\] Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 143
of Howard Johnson restaurants (an American chain of motels and restaurants), quoted by Relph, “nothing calls attention to itself; it is all remarkably unremarkable... You have seen it, heard it, experienced it all before, and yet... you have seen and experienced nothing.”

Our roads serve their primary purpose well, but should they be doing more? Is there a whole other level of consideration needed during the design process of a motorway regarding the problems of forgotten place and placelessness? High speed roads exist the way they do because of engineering logic, the considerations of the car at speed, safety, fluidity, coherence and clarity. The design of a different type of motorway, the surface, angles at least, could end up quite similar as presumably it would be difficult to stray from the regulations and standards that exist. This leaves the edge condition to consider and this is where the problems are apparent.

The lack of connection or relationship between motorway and landscape is evident at the edge, where grass slopes, fences, gates and tracks are lost in some sort of no man’s land. There is an opportunity for the redesign of road edges so that land and road can regain some sort of connection which is lost when a national primary route gets upgraded to a dual-carriageway or a motorway. Older roads offered moments of exchange quite frequently, as roads developed with or because of place, or place developed along roads. Motorway verges could be redesigned in such a way that clues about landscape, place or topography are given to passing motorists. The geology of a region for example could become apparent through more place specific roadside barriers or verges.

Something should happen along this edge which allows the landscape to work right up to motorway edge, tidying up the mess left behind after the construction of a major road through a rural landscape. Such a development or rethinking has the potential to recreate the drive as an experience, or set of experiences, rather than just a passage through time. A rethinking of the edge considers both the road and the land, and the interface between the two as a consequence of motorway construction.
TEMPORARY EXILE
The disengaged nature of the motorway experience

At the beginning of researching my thesis idea and in order to explore the series of images of ‘lines’ I had collected, the first, and quite obvious move was to question what the word line can actually mean. In his book, “Lines”, Tim Ingold, discusses the world as a place where everyone and everything is made up of interwoven and interconnected lines. He questions; “What do walking, weaving, observing, storytelling, singing, drawing and writing have in common? The answer is that they all proceed along lines of one kind or another.”1 The concepts of walking and observing were each something which sparked interest for me. Almost by a process of elimination this immediately revealed a focus of interest and narrowed the exploration to notions of movement along these lines, and the experience of that particular movement.

Ingold describes how one can draw lines in a manner which echoes movement. He uses words such as threads, traces, paths, routes, trails, place in relation to the movement of people while line, fragment, series and dots are used when referring to the drawing aspect of this line of movement. What was interesting to me and what reflected my own thoughts was the point that in modern society, whilst our world may consist of lines, we no longer move continuously along them, for reason that the line is now broken. We continue to move along them physically, but the experience is not a continuous one, it is fragmented and somewhat absent. Ingold describes how, “Once the trace of continuous gesture, the line has been fragmented - under the sway of modernity - into a succession of points or dots. This fragmentation has taken place in the related fields of travel.”2

One of the reasons why I had initially chosen the image of the motorway was clear to me. New roads which connect our cities, which move us faster across the country than ever before, are not lines, but connectors. The important aspect to us is not the road, the thread, but the destination, the dots. Society’s obsession with always moving faster has led to huge stretches of landscape which have been taken over by mostly quite straight and regular roads, which allow us to travel from A to B quickly and without confusion. The only focus is on destination and arrival time, meaning any sort of experience, sense of place, progression and perception are lost.

The speeds at which we now pass through landscapes do not allow for any observation or registering of detail. The motorway which runs across the landscape has now become the dominant feature in our minds. A change in pace makes an incredible difference on one’s ability to observe. The work of Tim Robinson is evidence of this. He explores the land just by walking and observing. The experiences of exploration which he writes about are an extreme contrast to the experience of the landscape while driving on a stretch of motorway. By investigating all of these places on foot he can deeply understand the landscape he is passing through. As he walks along a stretch of Connemara shoreline he realises its “incredible complexity”.3

As well as the in-depth physical description of the territory he is walking along, he offers other observations. One point in relation to the effect of roads on the rural area of Ros a Mhíl is that they have pulled habitation inland, away from the once dominant shoreline, leaving it “a lonely place, a long graveyard for the black skeletons of the wooden boats that used to throng the waterways.”4 He does not, however, allow the roads, cars or any other imposing elements to intrude on his observations of the working way of the land. In his considerations he writes about the land always as if it is the element in control, as if it is active and moves around him. As he attempts to walk out to an island along a tide-dependent causeway, the sea dictates his movements,

“I planted my foot in the current, which pressed against my wellington boot and rose in a silvery bow-wave that warned me to withdraw, to be patient. And over the next ten minutes stones added themselves onto the length of the causeway, appearing like dark mushrooms growing up through the water.”5

This contrasts to the static version of landscape one perceives from a moving car and also to the territory of the motorway where the land gives way to the road and loses control.

What Robinson acknowledges also is the meeting of two zones along the Connemara coastline. There is an accommodating transition between land and sea, where the two elements “not only entwine their crooked fingers but each element abandons particles of itself temporarily or permanently to the clutch of the other.”6 This could be viewed as an

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1 Tim Ingold, Lines : A brief history (UK, Routledge, 2007), 1.
2 Ingold, Lines, 75
4 Robinson, “The Tangled Tightrope”, 7-8
ideal situation, where one condition slowly gives way and allows for another condition to flow into it, the rich in-between space is flexible and adapting to either side. This is a stark contrast to the poor edge conditions set up all over the country with the building of motorways over once inhabited land. Through the countryside, Ingold describes how roads “are inclined to ride roughshod over the lines of habitation that are woven into it, cutting them.”7 On a larger scale the road will connect two points, but in its immediate environment it divides surface and has a massive physical impact on the existing landscape. It ignores any features or qualities, both physical and social, which were present before its construction.

The writings of Tim Robinson and work by landscape artist Richard Long give evidence of the opportunities we have to observe our surroundings when we move at a slower pace, as opposed to sitting in a metal capsule which transports speedily through a landscape. Long writes how;

“Walking is a way of engaging and interacting with the world, providing the means of exposing oneself to new, changing perceptions and experiences and of acquiring an expanded awareness of our surroundings. Through such experiences, and through a deeper understanding of the places we occupy, we acquire a better understanding of our own position in the world.”8

Richard Long, like Robinson understands and works from a physical exploration of different landscapes. He has observed so many places in detail by walking through them. One of his diary entries from a twelve day walk in Ecuador shows how he discovers land and nature, something we miss out on as we speed past fields, bogs, forests, hills, losing any ability to locate ourselves.

“Day 4
Good sleep. Warm gaz in sleeping bag. Very heavy dew, frozen. Try and wait for sun on tent to melt the frost. Over the ridge and up the shoulder. Decide to keep to the ridge, on the left side of big valley. Find water on top! Fantastic 360 views of horizons. Keep going over ridge hills. Rest on bluff. Swooping birds of prey. See water, campsite etc.

Down to lunch, fresh water. Snooze on moss. On to great camp-site, crystal cool water. Leave rucksac, up and along ridge. Stay one hour, facing Antisana. Great cloud day. Down to pitch tent in P.M. sun. Dry socks. Sheltered, mossy place. Tea.”9

In daily life we see a similar experience of finding and observing a place through people enjoying walks along a river bank or sea front. To walk everywhere is not what I am suggesting. I am acknowledging the huge contrast in experience there is between travelling along a motorway, bypassing surroundings and actually being in a place. In recent years with the development of larger roads we have created for ourselves huge stretches of a new type of space all over the country which are continuously populated. The entire stretch of road from your entry onto it until your exit off it is an in-between space where geography loses out to time concerns. It is a non-place lacking any of the social, physical, historical or environmental aspects which may make up a ‘place’, yet it must still be acknowledged due its strong physical and social presence. Society’s attachment to the private car also establishes this.

Los Angeles is famous for being the home of the ‘freeway’ and Reyner Banham writes about the car-obsessed, freeway orientated way of life there. Banham recognizes the freeway as one of the four ecologies of Los Angeles and many of the points he makes can be applied elsewhere.10 The private car and the public freeway offer L.A. citizens “door-to-door movement on demand at high average speeds over very large areas”11 There is a degree of freedom and convenience available to them that they would not give up for any public transport system. In this country there is a similar preference of convenience of the car over public transport. There is a particular experience to be had when driving on these freeways due to their vastness and constantly bustling topography, and according to Banham “as you acquire the special skills involved, the L.A. freeways become a special way of being alive”. The freeway system is said to work very well and cannot be faulted in that regard. Its occupants do not think of the journey on these roads as a “limbo of existential angst”, but a familiar and oddly ordered place where they spend a couple of hours a day. With this notion of the freeways and the huge acceptance that the city has for them it means that “the freeway system in its totality is now a

6 Robinson, “Walking Out to the Islands”, 12
7 Ingold, Lines, 81
single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life, the fourth ecology of the Angeleno.”12

In Ireland, Dublin’s M50 is probably the equivalent, but this is certainly not viewed in the same warm manner by its occupants as the L.A. freeway is thought of by its own users. “Existential angst”, as described by Banham, is much more appropriate. It seems there may be a similar acceptance of our motorways, but while the freeway is thought of as its own ‘comprehensible place’ with certain qualities and experience, the motorways between and around our cities are not.

The freeway system in L.A. is necessary to move people across the huge spread of the city, and so it almost involves the city. It serves the city well and the particular culture found in L.A. is content with this way of moving. Ireland’s main roads serve its inhabitants in a different manner. This distinction could be due to differences in scale and culture. Our motorways stretch between two points, cutting through land that was probably previously farmed in some way, ignoring all of the rich landscape that runs along it, by-passing all of our small towns and villages. I feel that by using these roads with the attitude we have, we are losing more than we are gaining, which is essentially time. While on these roads, its occupiers are not actually moving themselves, but being transported. Ingold describes this travelling experience as being “temporarily exiled”, and so “every destination is a terminus, every port a point of re-entry into the world.”13

What is interesting here is to wonder where is the traveller before arrival at the destination point? Physically when using a cross-country motorway, one passes through a number of counties, but is the territory of the motorway part of these places? Or does it exist independently of where it lies, belonging to something else, a system? The point here is that once we leave one place and before we have reached the end point of our journey, or perhaps until we reach the edge of that place, we are nowhere. To try to locate oneself at any point along a motorway is quite difficult, unless there is an exit sign looming ahead. This would inform of a nearby town, from which you can establish an approximate location, but can you even locate that town on a larger scale, on a map of Ireland? Where are we when we are on a motorway?

In ‘Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity’ Marc Augé registers these roads as non-places, along with railroads, airports and large commercial centres. He writes that supermodernity and its change of scale and spectacular accelerations of travel lead to the multiplications of these spatial typologies, lacking in any culture or sociological notion of place. In these ‘non-places’ people “communicate wordlessly, through gesture, with an abstract unmediated commerce, a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral.”14 Roads can be densely populated spaces and generally when a space accommodates individuals coming together, it could be thought of as a place. It shows then how strange these new places are when they only work for individuals (customers, passengers, drivers), and not the mass of people flowing through them.

Another strange aspect related to these non-places, roads specifically, is the manner in which they are ignoring place; by-passing more and more towns as they stretch further. Main roads no longer pass through towns, and this is a relatively new occurrence in Ireland. On a trip from Galway to Limerick one no longer passes through Gort, Crusheen, Ennis, New-Market-On-Fergus or Bunratty. Soon Clarebridge, Kilcolgan and Ardrahan will no longer be on the route either. Many of these towns have been moulded to work around and along the main road. What is to happen to these towns now that they do not have the passing through traffic? Will they become smaller with less business from the passers through? Or could some grow in size as commuter towns, now that they have a convenient location at an entry point onto the now longer motorway? What will happen to the once national main road now that it is not needed in the same way? It could happen that the town becomes forgotten, and amounts to nothing more than a name on a big signboard on the nearby dual-carriageway. There is no longer a need to pass through small towns or even linger in them. The sign on the motorway informing us of its notable features is enough for us. “In a sense the traveller is absolved of the need to stop or even look.”15

We drive by places in the same manner we pass by landscapes, we catch only a partial glimpse and have no deep understanding. There is so much unknown territory that lies on either side of a motorway. In the rural areas we accidentally ignore landscapes, towns, and villages. Physically these elements can be distant enough. When approaching a

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12 Ingold, Lines, 77.
14 Augé, Non-Places, 77.
city however the relationship to the bordering territories should begin to become more intimate. Physically places are built right up alongside the road edge, but mentally drivers are still as oblivious to what borders them. The edge of a city is something which is very difficult to define. Along the sides of the motorway at the edge of the city, there is confrontation between different scales, that of the city, industry and the rural. The city begins to fade to the rural and everything built struggles to organise itself in relation to anything else. This space, like the space experienced on a motorway is in-between, transitional and struggles to be defined. It is certain however that this transitional zone will have some large road present, be it classified as a motorway, a dual-carriageways or a ring road. It is probably along this stretch that the territories on either side of the car passengers are the strangest, but are ones that should not be ignored. These should be the first impressions of the city that the traveller gets, but the road is not set up in this way. Like every landscape or place you have passed already, you will pass these in a similar manner. This means two things; that the edge of cities become fragmented and moulded to work off the road which will link you to the appealing part of the city, and that these territories along the edge are not actually part of the city.

Iain Sinclair, in his book 'The London Orbital', explores this zone in London by walking along the London ring road, the M25. Along his walk he explores the areas outside of the city centre, bordered by the huge road. The atmosphere described in the book is so far from the image Banham conjures of the L.A. freeway. Sinclair’s depiction of how London’s ring road works, is much closer to what exists in this country. In his walking he explores the edge of the actual motorway but also the places found along it. They are found to be “amorphous nowheres”\(^\text{16}\), strange worlds in the shadow of the M25, not urban, rarely really suburban, barely rural. These areas have probably been made ‘nowheres’ by the development and domination the road. Just like rural towns and villages the territories in this zone are being by-passed, are being regarded as unimportant and perhaps are losing any identity may have once had.

Our obsession with always moving faster has created a world where we choose to spend time in non-places, content with ignoring our surroundings and allowing areas to be forgotten, existing in the shadow of the motorway.

The construction of a stretch of motorway in Ireland begins with a basic outline, route selection and confirmation and the buying of private land by the state, helped by compulsory purchase orders. Over the next number of years this road is built on the newly acquired land. Once the construction is complete the contractors move off site and the new stretch is open to the public.

Not every square metre of the CPO land is used up by this road however. A strip of land along the length of the new road lies between the crash barrier of the road and the next field, (Figure 7-8). Parts of this land become the grass verges adjacent to the hard shoulder. Alongside these verges many stretches have lengths of gravel paths which were planned as ‘access tracks’ leading to roadside attenuation ponds or laid down for farmers to reach their now divided land. Attenuation ponds take up entire fields. The rest of this land is leftover, without function. Who does it belong to? Presumably the state.

The intention of this project is to make productive this leftover forgotten land. It will allow for a new activity which extends off the secondary infrastructure of the motorway into the landscape and local communities. It works directly off the consequences of motorway construction, positively affecting local landscape and hinterland, as an indirect consequence. These productive verges intend to reengage the landscape with these CPO stretches, ensuring that the landscape works right up to the edge of the road. Over passes and underpasses, existing and proposed will physically connect both sides, in a stitching together of fragmented landscape. The project will allow for points of exchange between road and land, local people and those that are passing, along the interface between the two very different conditions.

The project is the designing of this productive and engaging stretch. More specifically it is the design of a Food Research and Education Centre and its land, on a motorway edge site in Co. Galway. The brief of the project is a rethinking of the motorway’s edge. The brief is intended to reactivate and engage the land with its locality, while also providing a new experience or moments of interest to passers by. The project is giving new meaning to this CPO land, (mapped in Figure 9), providing an example of what could happen along other stretches of motorway across the country.
While developing the thinking and context described so far, an architectural exploration through three primer projects helped to expand on my original thoughts. These projects, along with researching, reading and writing, helped to develop my project from considering a series of images to focusing on the motorway and its consequences and opportunities.

**LINE : SNN+ Primer**

SNN+ was a brief for cold storage facilities. The site was Shannon Airport and its adjacent disused circular harbour. The project culminated in a large walkway connecting the airport to the centre of the lagoon. The interest in line was very literally investigated. A path would connect two very different conditions, with various moments where exit or entry was possible, much like the system of the motorway. This gangway was inhabited with programme, above and below. The gangway was to act at both human and industrial scales where the programme underneath would consist of cold storage units and accommodate large trucks, while the timber boardwalk above offered benches, shelter and some small pavilions for pedestrians. The elements of the programme were to be nothing more than moments where an extension of the walkway edge would rise slightly higher to protect from wind and rain, or would fold to become a bench, or would completely disappear allowing for steps down to the landscape. The elements would become less frequent and the occupier would become more exposed as one moved away from the synthetic landscape of airport and carpark and into the natural site of the lagoon’s reeds and mudflats. The model in Figure 10 shows the lagoon end of the boardwalk.

This project was an initial attempt to explore how to allow or design for the ‘essential consumption of a space’ and for a basic testing of ‘a line’. During the project my intent was to try to combine the two. The ‘line’ connected two points, allowing for two main functions, one structurally supporting the other. Through connection and exposure I was attempting to create this ‘essential experience’ by physically exposing people to the elements of the place and eventually allowing people to immerse themselves in the land.

**ROUTE : Berlin Workshop**

I felt at the end of the first primer that the scale of the SNN+ project was contradicting the notion of an economy of means or essential experience. In the Berlin workshop, keeping this contradiction of the primer project in mind and the idea of providing a human scale within a very large and vast site, the intent of the project was to provide small pavilions along a route for the park of Tempelhof. These new vertical elements would act as reference points in the flat landscape. Here I tried to push the straight line, fragmenting the axis route into a series of nodes or points of collected energy and activity. It was to be a series of pavilions with the common elements of form and distance tying them together. This allowed them to act individually while remaining part of a collective. The altering of the linear SNN+ boardwalk was furthered through ideas of kinking and distorting the straight line and through manipulating the ground around each of these pavilions in various ways.

After two projects I felt that I needed to move away from the literal idea of the line along which a programme would happen and had come to a point where I was thinking about transition and transitional spaces. In terms of my original thesis statement, at this point I was more inclined to revert to the collection of images than the written statement. The idea of transition was something which I was relating back to the image of the motorway and so my intention was to pursue this further.
TRANSITION: UL Primer

In the third and final primer project in UL I wanted to try to ground what I was thinking. Taking the concept of transition which I had arrived at after the Berlin workshop, I wanted to explore a moment of transition through a building.

The site I chose was on the lawn in front of Plassey House by the river, at the particular point where the land begins to slope up from the bank towards the campus. My project was a building located at this point, set into the landscape, which encompassed two different conditions of the natural, open river edge and the formal, fixed college campus. I proposed a new ‘Clubs and Societies’ headquarters which was to be made up of two forms; one formal and rigid block on the campus side to accommodate offices and the fixed functions, and another organic, open and adaptable form on the lower river bank which could be used for any type of gathering for any club in the college.

The concept which I would have carried further in this project had I had more time was the point in the building where one form met the other and how this might happen in a way that each one encompasses the other within this ‘transition’ space. The UL primer certainly clarified my thinking and led me onto a deeper exploration of the initial collection images and the motorway in particular.
The Oakland Museum
Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo

During the primer projects we had a parallel precedent study which we were exploring.
The architectural precedent I chose was The Oakland Museum by Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo. Initial reasons for choosing this particular project was for its intention to act as a space for the city as well as fulfilling its function as a museum. I chose it also because of its form and arrangement which allows for a permeable block where spaces seamlessly flow into one another. The roof acts as a walled, terraced garden which covers four city lots. The project provided a new public space and ultimately played a vital part in downtown renewal.

As I was exploring the motorways and considering ideas of transition I realised that this project had much more to offer than I had originally thought. The various scales and methods of movement was something which I wanted to explore. Busy roads on all sides of the block deal with high speed traffic. The terraced roof garden caters for people moving through the block from one side to another as part of a bigger route. Its permeability allows people to stroll or wander within the complex, passing from inside to outside. Its function as a museum then provides ample opportunity to stop, observe and think, always moving at a very slow pace.

There is a seamless passage from foot path into the centre of the block and through to the other side. The block has a large, welcoming entrance on each side of the block. At one point along the north side, the walls break down allowing a wide set of steps to bring you up into the block, and onto one of the higher terraces, see Figures 13 and 16. The west wall similarly breaks down at a point along its length and a set of steps leads you down off the footpath, through a covered space and into the main garden space on the lower level of the complex, as described in Figures 14 and 15. The south entrance similarly leads you into the same garden space, from a small car park but without any level change. The site is bordered to the east by a large road and then Lake Merritt. This side facilitates vehicular entrance to the block through a slip way off the main road into an underground car park. The main internal spaces all have direct access to the exterior. This access, along with the various entrances from outside the block, ensures the permeable nature and flow of space within the project.

I saw the success of this project being in how it imaginatively fulfils its brief and simultaneously gives so much back to its context and locality. The way that the project caters for so many different types of movement, allowing itself to become both destination and a point along a larger route was something I wanted to take forward.

Figure 13; Sketchs of North Entrance
Figure 14; Sketch of West Entrance
Figure 15; Section through West Entrance from footpath to enclosed garden
MOTORWAY STUDY

After the third primer project, the motorway and the idea of transition were at the forefront of my thinking. So I started into an exploration of roads, movement, motorways and their effects on Irish society and landscape.

This exploration began with thinking about the section of motorways and how they work. Across its long section it connects two points, predominantly two cities, moving people from A to B. Its cross section however is quite different in that it does not connect either side of the road. The motorway here is a divisive line. A series of models show typical cross section conditions through roads, where they are bordered by fields, housing and industrial estates, bog. This cross section, and the basic construction of the road mean that there are very poor edge conditions set up alongside roads.

The motorway, particularly because it is so new in Ireland, is certainly something to celebrate. There is something exhilarating about the high speed driving, taking us through parts of the countryside we have never seen before, affording us views of landscape and time to think. The positives of the motorway are something I’m certainly not arguing against. What made way to put this road in place was what I was more interested in, and the effects that this road has on the land it passes through. It connects cities at either end, and some towns it passes connect onto it, but what about all the places in between?

M18

In order to really consider these questions I felt it was necessary to understand exactly what these effects of motorway construction are. At this point I began my study of the M18, the recently completed Gort-Crusheen by-pass, see Figure 19. At first a lot of my information came from the Galway County Council website who oversaw the project. I wanted to map out different aspects of the area that the road passes through. I found that the E.I.S (Environmental Impact Statement) which was compiled prior to the construction of the road was very useful in obtaining information, but also in understanding the kinds of things that are considered when planning a road. The E.I.S was prepared in order to “assess the potential impact of the proposed N18 Gort to Crusheen”.

19 Babtie Pettit, technical and management consultants, Galway County Council, N18 Gort to Crusheen Scheme, Environmental Impact Statement, Volume 1, Non Technical Summary (Galway County Council, 2006) 1

This report is a study of the area under headings which include the following: Human Environment, Flora and Fauna, Hydrology and Hydrogeology, Water Quality and Aquatic Ecology, Geology and Soils, Air Quality and Climate, Noise and Vibration, Landscape. Considering these headings I wanted to map the area. One I referred to as the Human Condition map, while the second one was Local Environment.

The human condition map, Figure 22, detailed the settlement patterns of the area, the local roads, the field patterns and the townland boundaries, naming each townland. This route passes through a predominantly rural area with the exception of Gort and Crusheen. Development is therefore mainly residential, clustered along the Gort-Tubber-Crusheen Road. It traverses twenty-three townlands, crosses one hundred and three farms while one farm house, two farm buildings and one residential building were demolished.

The second map, Figure 23, shows water, land and documents geology, soils, flora and fauna. An aerial image of the existing field patterns, overlaid with the motorway route and a mapping of rivers.

Figure 19; M18 in context of Irish motorway network
lakes and forested areas. The geology study of the area showed that there are two predominant rock types; limestone and old red sandstone. The limestone bedrock reaching from the Burren sets up the hydrology of the area, meaning that streams disappear and reappear due to the porous nature of the limestone and that turloughs are present in the area.

Thirteen habitat types exist along the route corridor. Animals identified in the area include otters, pine-martens, badgers, Irish stoat, foxes, hares, rabbits, butterflies and bats. Amphibians include the frog, viviparous lizard and the common newt.

In an undulating topography grasslands and fens are widespread. Scrub and wetland also exist along the route with some examples of limestone pavement. This was a very factual study but was very helpful in understanding what kind of things a new road may impact upon.

During this study I also wanted to document the new additions to the area as a consequence of the road construction. I mapped out the access tracks, and constructed wetland sites that have been put in place. Ten kilometres of side roads and twelve kilometres of access tracks were laid down, these are mainly gravel pathways alongside the motorways edge where new access to fields was required. The attenuation ponds are necessary to hold and filter surface water from the road given the sensitivity of the environment into which the surface water will discharge. Fifteen different sites have been allocated for these attenuation ponds along the route. All of this new infrastructure was established within the boundary of the land bought in the beginning of the process.

One hundred and seventy two hectares were originally bought for the construction of the road. The road, now that it’s open takes up approximately half of this amount of land, and that’s including the few metres of verges on either side given over to planting. Constructed ponds take up entire fields at fifteen points, five metre wide gravel paths also exist in places, but what happens the rest?
Old Red Sandstone is one of the two dominant rock types of the region. This rock is mainly found to the east of the area surrounding the route, making up the Slieve Aughty Mountains. The range spreads over both County Galway and County Clare. The highest peak in the Slieve Aughty Mountains is Maghera in Clare which rises to 400m (1,314 ft). The mountain range consists of two ridges divided by the Owendallaigh river which flows west into Lough Cutra, which lies just east of the old Gort to Crusheen road.

Here and there are scattered ruins of whole villages and isolated houses and the abandoned schools remind us of the many families who worked their small holding and cut their turf on the many bogs in the villages between the mountains. The Sliabh Aughty hills contain vast tracks of some of the most desolate landscapes in Ireland.

Carboniferous Limestone is the most common rock type and underlies the entire length of the M18 Gort to Crusheen route. This landscape can be characterised by underground drainage, and by the exposure of limestone pavement, which occurs at some points along the route corridor but most examples would be found to the west of the M18, along the edge of the Burren. Other features of the limestone lowlands are the turloughs, or transient lakes, which appear and disappear with the rise and fall of the water-table.

23 Ecological Sites were identified along the route, 11 of which are fragmented by the new route 13 Habitat Types exist along the route corridor. Animals identified in the area include otters, pine martens, badgers, Irish stoat, foxes, hares, rabbits. Amphibians include the frog, viviparous lizard and the common newt. Badgers and otters are common all across the area. The otter is widely distributed along the rivers in the area, especially the Moyree River. Scrub and wetland habitats exist along the route and there are some examples of limestone pavement, one of which occurs within the route corridor. Grasslands and fens are widespread. The area is low-lying, and is bounded to the east by the Slieve Aughty Mountains and to the West by the Burren. The topography is undulating and is made up mostly of poorly drained bog, and wet marshlands or turloughs.
Geology/Soils/Flora/Fauna

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13 Habitat Types
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Scrub and wetland habitats exist along the route and there are some examples of limestone pavement, one of which occurs within the route corridor. Grasslands and fens are widespread. The area is low-lying, and is bounded to the east by the Slieve Aughty Mountains and to the West by the Burren. The topography is undulating and is made up mostly of poorly drained bog, and wet marshlands or turloughs.
The site chosen for the project is the remaining CPO land which runs alongside one of the newest stretches of motorway in Ireland, the Gort-Crusheen by-pass. There exists a 22km stretch of newly constructed motorway running N-S between the town of Gort in Co. Galway and the village of Crusheen in Co. Clare. All of this land was bought by the NRA in order to further develop the Atlantic Corridor connecting Cork, Limerick, Galway and eventually Sligo and Donegal. This amount of land was bought for the purpose of having a site to physically lay down the route, but also because it was what could be agreed upon with previous owners. As well as being site for the road itself, it was necessary to site a construction base for the road, from which the process could be managed and organised and where materials to the road could themselves be manufactured. It was also necessary for access, drainage and ensuring that the construction had as little impact as possible on the local environment.

The road opened in November 2010 and so is no longer a construction site. What is left of the land, now that the road is un use, is the site for the secondary infrastructure which comes with road construction. It contains a fragmented network of access tracks all connecting to the existing local roads and fifteen sites for attenuation ponds which deal with the careful drainage of surface water from the road.

The site varies in width from its narrowest at eight metres wide lying between a crash barrier and a field to becoming the width of an entire field at points. The level of the site in relation to the road is also continuously changing. It alternates between lying above or below the road, and occasionally exists at the same level. It all depends on the original topography and how the road was constructed through it.

This is the site for the project at its large scale. The specific site for the design project exists within this stretch of land, six kilometres south of Gort. It is the largest pocket of CPO land along this road. This site is envisaged as the knot which ties together strands of movement and land, acting as the point of infrastructure from which the entire stretch is organised.

The site was used during the construction of the motorway and contains a newly constructed overpass which reconnects the Gort-Tubber road which was interrupted by the motorway. Parts of the old Tubber road now lie as disused, abandoned pieces of tarmac. The northern part of the site in the townland of Ballybaun was the base for construction workers and some materials, and sits on the eastern edge of the motorway. The second half of the site in Caherbroder was the site of an asphalt producing plant, lying on to the west of the road. Stone was brought here from a nearby quarry and asphalt was produced on site for the road’s construction. This particular site was chosen because it is the largest piece of leftover land along this particular stretch of motorway, because of its siting on both sides of the road and also because of its former role as the site of temporary infrastructure necessary to make the larger, more permanent infrastructure.

Choosing this site as the main site from which the rest of the land is controlled and organised reinstates its infrastructural role for the programme, allows a relationship to exist across the road, and deals with access tracks, an existing attenuation pond and fragments of road which are no longer in use.
The brief for the project is for this land to become a productive landscape, for food research. With the land currently being owned by the state, the entire stretch is to be open to the public, creating a new type of countryside productive parkland. Wildlife is also to be an element of programme within the land.

The fifteen sites of the attenuation ponds are to become intensified focal points for local wildlife. These sites are attractive to wildlife as they are, so the brief is only to enhance this by allowing and encouraging them to develop naturally. These points can then become resting points for public users of the paths, or people working the land. Additions to some of these sites would include bat houses, particular areas given to butterflies and apiaries for the breeding of bees. The breeding of bees is now very important for the industry of horticulture. Recent studies have shown a massive decline in the population of bees. Without the pollination provided by bees, a huge proportion of the crops grown in Ireland will no longer be possible.

All of the existing access tracks are to be connected so that a continuous public pathway and linear park exists alongside the high speed motorway for walkers, joggers and cyclists. The linear path will also provide direct access to all of the proposed productive land. As well as being connected with each other, the access tracks are to be connected back to the main Gort-Tubber-Crusheen road continuously, so that smaller loops exist, connecting into the length and emphasising the existing local road as the main artery within the scheme. (Figure 26).

The more specific brief for the project is to design the infrastructure for this productivity, housing various different activities accommodating both the local community and the community of the motorway. The 'head-quarter' building from which the land is organised is located within the chosen site near Gort and is to act as one point where all the users of the land and various activities are concentrated.

The brief for the land is that it will be organised across the length in some way. The programme on site includes classrooms and a workshop, a slow food restaurant, a processing and packaging area, research spaces, an administration section and viewing terraces. Storage sheds are also included, as is basic hostel-like accommodation above these sheds. The inclusion of accommodation comes after the study of caravanserais. A caravansera was a roadside inn where travellers could rest and recover from the day's journey. They were dotted along the network of trade routes across Asia, North Africa and South-Eastern Europe, and in particular along the Silk Road. Caravanseras supported the flow of commerce, information and people and were points of trade, rest and gathering, (Figure 26).

The accommodation is to be used by people taking short courses during the year, but also by temporary staff which are employed during the busy harvesting months. This gives the programme a transient, seasonal nature, as well as a more fixed one. It is also to be used for short stays by cyclists or hikers who use the tracks to connect into the rural landscape, specifically connecting to the Mid-Clare Way, Burren trails to the west and the Slieve Aughty Mountains in the east. Changing and shower facilities are also included in the brief for users of the tracks.
LANDSCAPE

The organisation of the land works off the Gort-Tubber-Crusheen road, in order to keep the emphasis on the locality as opposed to the motorway. Fields in the area are organised and sized differently within each townland, but where there is a road, all fields are organised off it. Along the Tubber road there is an obvious pattern of field organisation prioritising road access. In order to echo the existing grain and field pattern, all of the productive land is organised in plots varying in size, depending on townland, with the plot lines all running perpendicular to the Tubber road, as shown in Figure 27.

This image also shows the suggestion of the productivity extending beyond the boundaries of the CPO line, where the plots take up the entire space between motorway edge and the Tubber road. The idea here is that local farmers could begin to buy into the scheme of food productivity in some way, or where a small village or town exists the plots could belong to the community. In this way the CPO land could be absorbed by the local landscape, tying the two back together again and eliminating the boundary set up when the land was purchased by the state.

BUILDING

The original concept for the building was that it should be one point in the landscape where different users and activities are wrapped up into one point. One static form amongst the different scales of movement. A study of the Irish Tower House developed this further, as did a study MVRDV’s Hannover Expo building. The concept taken from the tower house was the height, strength and form, which when seen from a distance immediately implies that it commands the land around it. Stacking, form and circulation were the main points of focus in the study of the Hannover Expo building.

After working through the design for the building, the final concept was a stacking of landscapes. The building is almost a cube in its dimensions (31x31x37), but has no skin. It is a rudimentary building open and exposed to the elements, with the ability to be closed off in certain parts. It acts as trays of landscape stacked above one another. The growing and productivity moves up through the building on the outer edge of each shelf. Some internal spaces can be made on each floor, depending on the programme on each level.
Figure 31; Extent of CPO land on site
Field Patterns run perpendicular to local roads

Figure 32; Continuation of existing grain of field patterns perpendicular to Gort-Tubber Road.
Drainage lines fall along plot lines, connecting with drainage system of motorway
Plot sizes across the site are determined by the townland in which they exist

Figure 33; A hard surface accommodates a lay-by and car parking echoing the curve of the bridging road
It continues along the line of the old Gort-Tubber road and a new underpass connects to the other side of the motorway

Figure 34; Built elements sit along the main axis of the site; the restored Tubber Road
LAND
Figure 35: Ground Plan
Building raised off the ground, with land allowed to continue underneath. Only the four cores, and the beginning of the external route which wraps around the building touch the ground.
The sandstone paving extends off the path to the elevator, stair core, and small reception.

WORKSHOP
Figure 36: First Floor
Workshop with large concrete workbench, two smaller informal classroom spaces.
Glass screens can be pulled across to semi-close off the workshop space from the elements.

SLOW FOOD
Figure 37: Second Floor
Restaurant space. Glass screens can be pulled to close off space completely. Large concrete banquet tables, open kitchen, garden terrace surrounds so when screens are open, floor acts as one space.

PROCESSING
Figure 38: Third Floor
Processing/ Packaging/ Storage space. Larch grill surrounds so its open to the air but slightly protected from direct sunlight and wind.
Large industrial sized sinks for washing. Everything works off pallets, with a large factory sized lift to take forklifts.
RESEARCH
Figure 39, Fourth Floor
Research and testing space, meeting room and informal gathering space or classroom. Spaces can be closed off completely from one another or act as one. Floor plate extends in the SE direction for added space on the growing terraces.

RESEARCH
Figure 40, Fifth Floor
Research and testing, informal classroom, growing terraces, extends to SW on this level.

ADMINISTRATION
Figure 41, Sixth Floor
Shard offices, large meeting room, staff room. This is the only floor where the outer space is not open. Here the admin. spaces are pushed to the edges of the floor plates in order to get light into rooms. A cut out of the floor above also brings light down into the centre of the floor.

ROOF TERRACE
Figure 42, Seventh Floor
Viewing platform, open to the sky. Cut outs along each side frame views in each direction.
The building is a concrete structure. Concrete floor slabs with the edges turned up to strengthen structurally and four structural cores. Concrete beams run between cores. (Figure 43). The edges come up 500mm above the slab, becoming a seat with balustrade behind. Two of the cores also accommodate vertical circulation. The services are to also run down through the cores, with toilets always located beside one of the cores.

Thick slabs of 700mm are needed to span between the cores and where services or insulation is needed, the depth of the slab thickens.

The finish on the concrete varies depending on the floor and its programme. The workshop, processing and lab floor have a smooth, factory floor like finish. The restaurant and administration floors are exposed aggregate, using the particular aggregates of limestone and sandstone, the bedrock of the area. The roof terrace is polished in order to reflect the sky when wet.
Figure 46: Site Plan
Building sits along old stretch of the Tubber Road.
A low lying broken and permeable bar sits on the opposite side.
These spaces are storage sheds and classrooms. Changing rooms, toilets and bicycle parking are opposite the building, while a small shop fronts the bar and meets the car park.
Similarly the second bar beside the wetland is made up of storage, a house for the apiary and the hostel like accommodation.
Landscape with the Passing of Cars

Sinéad Mac Mahon

Extent of CPO land on site
Field Patterns run perpendicular to local roads
Continuation of existing grain of field patterns perpendicular to Gort-Tubber Road
Drainage lines fall along plot lines, connecting with drainage system of motorway
Plot sizes across the site are determined by the townland in which they exist

Balllybaun
Sheeaun
Caherbroder
Ballysheedy

A hard surface accommodates a lay-by, echoing the curve of the bridging road
It continues along the line of the old Gort-Tubber road and a new underpass connects to the other side of the motorway

Built elements sit along the main axis of the site; the restored Tubber Road
Landscape with the Passing of Cars

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