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INTRODUCTION.

This thesis is an exploration of the commodification of architecture, where the matter of a building has been reduced to the status of an object, and an exploration of the neglected space that lies between such objects. This is most often seen in the architecture of speculative development, and is symptomatic of how architecture has been treated by its close association with the market economy. The prevailing mode of the construction industry is one of economy, and the capitalist system in which architecture works now demands revenue. This has resulted in the need to drive 'newness', an almost inbuilt obsolescence created from the need to sell new buildings, resulting in an unchecked process of generative form'. Adam Caruso decries what he calls 'The Tyranny of The New', the condition of novelty that undermines the cultural continuity of architecture. The ever changing form of the architecture of late capitalism has been driven by the market's demand to exaggerate the obsolescence of existing structures. Newness and expansion are driven by the needs of the market to sell floor space. Such buildings are usually insular, acting as singular objects which rely purely on image. They are framed by the spaces between them, spaces which are neglected by the objects’ lack of engagement with the outside world. Their architectural qualities are purely image, in keeping with the requirement for novelty.

The profession of architecture now seems to bow unequivocally to economic demand. Commercial projects most often rely on a formalism, the qualities of which are primarily visual, and applied after the fact as a 'compensatory facade’, according to Kenneth Frampton. This is an image applied to a building simply to put a friendly face on the universalist system of architectural objects, which are predicated entirely on production. The economy of means present in such projects renders any other qualities of the architecture as distantly secondary.

Theorist Paul Ricoeur, in *History and Truth* speaks of the cultural reduction that is tied to the universalist approach to architecture.

“It seems as if mankind, by approaching en masse a basic consumer culture, were also stopped en masse at a subcultural level... There is the paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive a dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization”

The perceived heightened value of the newest and boldest forms is indicative not only of the wishes of those who sell the product of architecture, but also of the architects who currently declare themselves as the avant-garde. In seeking a theoretical basis for their work they speak in contradictory terms, using for example the concept of parametrics to describe an architecture that is in reality unconstrained by parameters, without regard to anything but itself. Such buildings created by the new generators of form, be they architect or computer, are intentionally self-centered and willfully distinct from the environments in which they exist. Patrik Schumacher, principal of Zaha Hadid Architects praises a ‘global style’, reminiscent of Modernism’s International Style, which could be placed anywhere - an object to which geography is irrelevant. The erosion of the concept of place in this attitude to architecture results in the loss of much of its cultural value.

Throughout the Modern movement and to today’s digitally created architecture, the visually biased approach has neglected the space between buildings. As the self-centered object does not engage with its surroundings, the spaces between the objects are forgotten, and so become leftover space. In urban terms this has resulted in fragmentation and discontinuity of city space. In the Irish context I intend to look to Limerick city’s development over the last fifteen years, and how it has been affected by the proliferation of an objectified architecture. What now can be done with the leftovers by means of a regenerative healing? Currently in the midst of a populist backlash against speculative developers and their follies, what must be realized is that Limerick requires more development, not less, and it needs it in a responsible way. Much has been said about the regeneration of Limerick City, as proposed by the city council. Meanwhile regeneration has become a jaded term, perhaps now meaning the stitching together of a few empty city blocks or simple refurbishment of social housing. Reconfiguring the leftover and forgotten space, however, can provide a valuable way of working within the context of what has been left behind by the architects of the Celtic Tiger.

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OBJECTS.

As material ‘things’ with quantifiable mass, volumes and edges, all architecture can be read to a certain extent as objects. What I believe is damaging in certain contemporary ideas of architecture is the reduction of thickness to surface, of engagement to self interest. ‘Object’ buildings deny any engagement with their surroundings. These self-centered objects do not give their environment any regard, and set up an immediate dichotomy between themselves and their user. Japanese Architect Kengo Kuma argues in Anti-Object that in current architectural culture there is a renewal of formalism not seen within architecture for decades. Buildings that stand in contrast to this, that do not behave as objects are those that engage with their surroundings and mediate between each other - they are not singularities, or simple figures set against a background.

Since the behaviour of architecture is really its effect on the behaviours of those who experience it, I would now say that architectural space and form are the result of designed relationships - transitions and mediations made with meaningful intent. Carlos Ferrater said "The architect’s work lies in the act of moving from geometry to space", I would agree with this statement but see it as only a partial truth, for the simple act of creating a geometrical space leaves one with an enclosure, or an object, but it falls short of creating architecture. Architecture seems to need relationships to thrive.

Our initial experience of architectural form is of geometry, and of volume; form in the sculptural sense. Sculptural form, however, relies on surface, and though our emotional responses to sculpture and architecture may be equally multifaceted, the physical form of architecture is inherently more complex. A building has joints and connections, which in traditional sculpture are denied insofar as possible, but a building also must be inhabited. A building has a utility, which art does not, and so its form, and our response to it, cannot be fully quantified in visual terms alone. The form of the building is its total material assembly, and we experience a wholeness of space, content and meaning simultaneously. Our response to architecture is intrinsically complex, and layered. What, then, is the precise nature of the relationship between a building and its user in visual terms?


7 Carlos Ferrater, Synchronizing Geometry: Landscape, Architecture and Construction Barcelona: Ac- tar, 2006
Are they two distinct entities with the building as object and the user as subject? Classical architecture, for example, was ruled by a rigorous geometric order, independent from the subject. By the renaissance however the dichotomy of object and subject had been exposed, according to Kuma. The Renaissance technique of perspective introduced a singular and highly subjective viewpoint into an otherwise ordered and geometrical architecture. When a subject was introduced into these spaces, the geometric effect was revealed to be illusory - at ground level, where the experience of the subject was concerned, geometries lost their effect. As architecture became aware of the human viewpoint it then became more subject-oriented, moving away from geometry and towards the realm of perceptual effect. This was seen in the Baroque, and the primary question became how best to distort and exaggerate the perceptual qualities of architecture for the subject. As the Baroque was superseded by Neoclassicism, architecture moved back toward an object-oriented point of view. In the neoclassical a building was most often a freestanding object in the midst of an environment, an objective effect based on distance, as seen in the design of follies. Architects of this period knew that the perceptual effect relied on the distance of the viewer and that up close the effect could not be maintained.

The effect of objects in architecture were at no point attendant to use, and remained visual. As the visual is only one facet of our experiences in architecture, so relying on an objective approach negates the other sensory experiences. The touch and feel of a material, the sense of passage through an enclosure, qualities of material and space, are either not present or overwhelmed in an architecture of purely visual effect. Current architectural culture has at its Avant-Garde an overriding interest in objective form making, to the detriment of the richness of possibility in architectural space. A visual experience must be engaged with the other human senses to be fully effective in architecture, rather than to have buildings act simply as icons.

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For us to visually experience architecture, the first thing that has to happen is for light to fall upon it. As the light then reflects and refracts away from the architectural object, it projects with it the image of architecture. This is an inescapable physical reality to which architecture is bound. So architecture must always project an image, though this image has no need to be within the realm of simple aesthetics. Visual form making and the mere application of facade onto structure creates a disconnect between the image and the programme, boundaries between use, substance and environment. Whether the cloaking of an ‘ugly’ programmatic system or just formal virtuosity on the part of the architect, the reliance purely on the visual is neglectful of the experiential potential of architecture. It is, as Juhani Pallasmaa says, an inherently pessimistic approach that “projects retinal images for the purpose of immediate persuasion.” The over reliance of the visual effects of architecture, guided by how it is represented in media, creates a perception of architecture as a freestanding tool of imagery, one which does not need to engage the subject.

From the early part of the 20th century onwards, communication in the media has increasingly featured as a large part of the impact of architecture, and it became concerned with how best to represent itself. Visual communication fit perfectly with the messages of Capitalism, and as Modernism grew to emerge as the predominant architectural style of late capitalism, so too did the amount of visual bias in architecture. The issue then became how to relay architectural novelties through the mass media, for the so called ‘purpose of immediate persuasion’. Kuma has written about this condition as it relates to the Modernist architects Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe.

They created extremely photogenic works of architecture that were sufficiently new and individualistic to be recognized as such in a single, decisive, black and white photograph. To be decisive, the photograph had to show the entire building. To permit such a view, there had to be sufficient distance between the subject (i.e. the photographer) and the building. The building itself had to have forms and details that were predicated on being viewed from a distance. It could then be recorded on photographic paper as an easily recognizable thing, that is, an object.

9 Pallasmaa, Juhani. Hapticity and Time. RIBA Lecture. 1999

Corbusier and Van der Rohe, as leaders in the architecture of high Modernism, relied on simple and pure geometric shapes, presenting easily recognizable and coherent forms - putting forward a singular and unambiguous image. Subtleties of detail and materials were superfluous and so were suppressed, as they would not be seen from a distance. Beatriz Colomina states in *Privacy and Publicity* that Corbusier even went to the lengths of painting over shadows in photographs to give the impression of pristine white walls. A building wishing to give such an immediate impression of itself to be relayed in the media could not be deeply contextualized into its environment, it had to be removed. It had to be a freestanding object, the character of which could be easily grasped in a decisive image. Corbusier's piloti, his ground level columns, quite literally removed the mass of the building from its environment, as at the Villa Savoye. The piloti were proposed as a means of reclaiming ground space, but one wonders if the true intent was not the visual effect. They elevated the building, increasing its visibility and prominent forms. Perhaps this was a subversion of the podiums on which classical buildings were placed, however it created the postcard image of the building, a quickly established visual that persists today.

Van der Rohe and Philip Johnson's Seagram Building, built in New York in 1958, is similarly placed on a podium. The building is removed from the ground plane and set back from the street with a plaza in front. This break in the building line of Park Avenue was heralded at the time as a democratic way of providing privately owned public space. The 1980 film *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* studied the plaza. It found that it was not working as the architects supposedly intended, that people inhabited the edges but not the centre of the plaza. They used the fringes of the plaza to sit, gather, to eat lunch and to talk, but the centre remained uninhabited. What the plaza was effective in achieving is the visual separation of the Seagram Building from its context, establishing it as immediately recognizable and iconic at the expense of its expressly programmed use. The plaza is under used, but has served its purpose since the building looks good spread across the glossy pages of an architecture magazine.


The subjective viewpoint of perspective, in contrast to an objective approach, carries with it an inherent distortion. This distortion depends on the size of the object within the frame of the viewpoint. Whether a human viewpoint, a drawing or a photograph, the size of an object in the viewpoint is a function of the distance between the object and the subject. The object requires distance to be legible, just as the Seagram building is distanced from the street. At the centre of the viewpoint the distortion is negligible, its forms and geometries can be rendered as intended. At the edges, however, extreme distortions occur - exaggerations of form that render an objective viewpoint useless. If the subject begins to move around, then proportions and relationships of the viewpoint change - a parallax occurs. We must remember that the perception of three dimensional space is a complex entity that does not happen statically, we are continually moving through space. This arrangement of forms within a framing device is key to the visual representation of architecture, most notably in the photography that appears in the mass media.

Juhani Pallasmaa recognizes that this first impression of architecture is a visual one, but in order to arrive at a more holistic and experiential architecture he calls for a weakening of the architectural image. He talks about the language of matter taking over from the visual image. Such an architecture, has its “arrogant image of perfection replaced by a humanizing vulnerability.”

A language of matter, in which a holistic approach is taken to image has potential in that its form is a function of the built work itself, not as an appliqué simply rendered onto the already functional system of a building. In such work, the image, haptics and poetics of architecture can function and express together at the same time.

13 Pallasmaa, Juhani. Hapticsity and Time. RIBA Lecture. 1999
FRAMES.

The arrangement of form within frame is not only central to the representation of architecture’s image, as in drawing or photography, but is a key to understanding how to use image in a beneficial manner. If the spatially conservative but formally outward architecture of Mies Van der Rohe, for example, was easily photogenic, it should follow that a less objectified architecture would be less photogenic. The compression of three dimensional spatiality to the two dimensional plane of a photograph seems to happen easily for Van der Rohe, in contrast to works which make their presence felt more so than their image.

Certain photographers consciously avoid representing architectural form in an objective way and instead introduce their own subjective viewpoint. Acting on the premise that the qualities of space cannot be adequately represented in an image, that a photograph is never an objective truth, Helene Binet photographs the works of Peter Zumthor, Caruso St. John and others. She is most often commissioned directly by the architects.

If space cannot be adequately represented in an objective way, then the frame lines of her camera are used as a new organising principle, used to tell a particular story. This organising principle is used to effectively reprogramme space in a highly subjective and experiential way. In contrast to the additive act of building, where individual elements are brought together to form a whole, photography is a subtractive act. A photograph happens with the entire world in front of a camera, multitudes of viewpoints are possible and so an act of subtraction is required for a single story to be told effectively. A photographer works from chaos towards order. In this stripping back to achieve visual clarity, Binet chooses to exclude space. Her act of framing rearranges forms, altering the relationships given by the architect within the frame lines of her camera. Her policy of stripping back extends to the suppression of technique - her photographs are most often square format and black & white. The square format shows an intent to keep the four organising


Photographs by Helene Binet.
lines of the camera equal so that no hierarchy or new directionality is implied by the photographer. The exclusion of colour allows a focus on the interrelationship of light and volume. The lack of visibility of her techniques means that the emotional capacity of the image is immediate. It is an image of presence. Her photographs often concentrate on shadow - an absence of information, akin to silence.

“We need more silence, more reduction to penetrate the complexity of the world, our world.”

As a subjective representation of architecture, Binet’s work is sensitive, emotional and far more generous than the brash architectural photographs in the mass media. In the wider architectural media colour is often used in a hyper-real manner, and spaces are photographed wholly at an extreme wide angle. Tilt-shift lenses are used to correct the inherent distortion and create an image of space as it would never be experienced by a human. This approach is a reliance on a fatuous visual rather than an attempt at documenting the experiential capacity of architecture. Long exposures are used, not to introduce the effects of time, but to eliminate the movement of people; As a photograph taken at a long exposure will not record anything transitory, and the human element is lost. This is a further removal of the subject from the order of contemporary architecture.

A sensitive approach to image provides a means of escape from the attacking visual currently seen in object architecture. It would be a useful mode of working for architects, not only in representation but also design, to be more selective with the visual aspects of architecture. The image, though by no means an unmediated experience, can define the architecture. One has to think only of the photographer Julius Shulman’s images of 1960’s California Modernism to see the defining aspects of how that architecture was represented. The photograph is not a truthful entity, rather a subjective mediation of all the elements that make up the built reality of an architectural work. In Shulman’s case, that may include even the pink flamingos. If the frame through which we view architecture so subjective, then the absolute frame is an impossibility, and so it follows that an absolute space is as well. The notion of a tabula rasa condition is irrelevant, as we do not experience space in stasis, our experience is dependent on movement, entwining ourselves with the existing circumstances of a place.
Framing depth study model.
In Limerick city object, image and movement are woven together into an interesting and unique condition. Ostensibly Limerick is a small city, with a population of just over 90,000 people, and against its Georgian core in the last fifteen years it has taken on a new geography. Although reasonably central large areas of the city are fragmented, disconnected. The contemporary development of the city has thus far been defined by busy roads, fractured edges, and objective commercial buildings that poorly serve the public domain. The city centre is not considered a viable place to live on a large scale. Densities remain low, both in the city and suburbs. Blurred with the suburban condition is the edge city - the string of shopping centres, retail units, and leisure complexes that ring-fence the city. They are connected to each other by the largest scale infrastructural intervention the city has ever seen - the recent motorway network that encloses the East. The built reality at the edge of Limerick City is objective and fragmented. A distinctly Irish anti-urban bias pervades, where it is seen as desirable to live in this quasi-suburbia: In the repeated units of low density housing nestled between the motorways and industrial estates. Despite the jarring proximity of these varying programmes the suburban condition remains monocultural - buildings are programmed for a singular use and are physically disconnected. Housing is largely homogenous, and inward looking. The environment, landscape or public realm on which the buildings sit are not considered. They move along the land toward ruralness and blur the boundary between city and landscape, but they are stopped, fenced and divided by the motorway. Limerick city has attempted to sprawl, and failed.

At the periphery of Limerick exists a zone where, as Steven Holl would describe, “City and natural landscape overlap, existing without choice or expectation.” These pieces of the city on ill defined ground have the potential to give shape and meaning by virtue of what is placed in between. The interstitial spaces - the leftover slivers of land that have escaped development or meaningful use thus far could bring a legibility, and give the city back to the subject. The intent, or at least the expected effect of objective commercial architecture has been a separation of matter over consciousness, object over subject. With the economic failures to which architecture unwittingly attached itself, the language of the object in the city has failed, and what is needed is a return to an emotionally engaging architecture.

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Map of Limerick City’s core along the river. An increasing density of commercial and industrial buildings has blurred with the suburbs.
MOVEMENT IN BETWEEN.

In contemporary Limerick the greatest source of movement in the city has changed - what was once given by the river is now given by the road network. The roads are the new source of movement, flow and commerce. The energies of the entire city and wider region are funneled along the roads, and now the motorway system. The previous movement about a grid of Georgian streets has morphed into a linear movement along the road, at a much higher speed. Previously disconnected programmes of the city are now linked at greater distances than ever before. Meanwhile, programmes that were previously at the core of the city have now been pulled apart and strung along the roadways. The road is now a new kind of city street to be travelled at a high speed. The high speed dictates that from the in between space of the road the only way by which the buildings at the edge of the new street are experienced is the visual. This solidifies them as necessarily objectified architecture, to draw the eye and attract the motorists. In Limerick you experience the city by moving from housing to retail to leisure as discrete objects, often at opposite edges of the city, in a vehicle.

The form of the city has now been constrained by the roads. The motorways and dual carriageways are defined by a harsh boundary, to the point where they become a dividing mechanism. It cannot be easily crossed, and so it is the point where previously connected ground is broken. The city cannot develop over or through the motorway, so the form of the city is now to be morphed and guided along it. Where does Limerick City now begin and end? Where are its borders? At the point where the real city begins to fizzle away, the built landscape of Limerick is indistinct. Primarily suburban, the surrounds of Limerick have adopted an ‘edge city’ condition in the last fifteen years, the fundamental development years of the Celtic Tiger. An edge city is defined as a concentration of business, shopping, and entertainment outside of a traditional downtown in what had previously been a residential or rural area, first coined in Edge City: Life on The New Frontier by Joel Garreau.

As the density of development along the motorway increases, the edge thickens, and cross connections are broken. The ground is now divided. Along the length of the motorway, the edge of the ‘new street’ is broken by the distances involved: Where in a traditional city, along a traditional street the buildings would be stitched together, here buildings are set far apart and they act singularly.

These objects and the spaces between them are the new nodes along the path - the new courtyards and stopping places. A system of infrastructure intended to be a conduit is now increasingly inhabited to become a destination.

Movement is central to how we experience space, and to the articulation of an emotional architecture. This is true whether landscape between city, street between building or passage between rooms. The in between space is used for movement, as we transfer from one object to another. When in movement there is always a threshold at the boundary between the conditions of object and in between. The way in which these spaces are inhabited holds power in the emotional capacity of architecture, elements of psychology that happen strongly at the interstitial point - the space in between. The boundary layer, the threshold through which we pass raises a critical awareness of ourselves physically as we move along a route. The control of the in between space - the treatment of the relationships between the interstitial space and the object, and between the inside/outside conditions at the boundary are moments of huge potential. According to David Leatherbarrow, the nature of this mediation of space and how we move through it controls the psychological experience.17

“Border crossings are always necessary for entry and exit, ventilation and views, and other involvements with the vicinity, but they must be controlled. The beauty and intelligence of a project are largely determined by the refinement and suitability of these controls.”18

For Leatherbarrow, whether this boundary or border crossing is soft or hard, thick or thin is a control on the experience of that layer. Careful use of the in between space, and of the boundary that defines this space is an important source of energy. The movement through all of the architectural space charges this energy.

In a city, such as Limerick, the feeling of space is framed by vertical buildings.19 As we move through the city, the architectural devices of plan, section, and shifting ground plane continually frame and reframe our spatial field. Our experience of the city comes not from its buildings, but from the space between. Whether on street or road, the buildings are a framing device for the life of the city to happen. As a generality, we inhabit the ground, not the figure. Steven Holl, in Edge of a City declares “In the modern city the voids between buildings, not the buildings themselves, hold spatial inspiration.”20

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Movement Study: Space Around a Static Object.
Limerick, September 2012.
Movement Study. Time and City Layers.
Along one of the main routes of movement in Limerick, the N7 road from the city to Castletroy and onward to Dublin, sits the ruin of the Parkway Valley Shopping Centre. The centre, as planned in 2004, shows the context in which the architectural cultures of commodification, objectification and simplification have played out in Limerick. At the high water mark of the Celtic Tiger, it is the culmination of all the conditions of commercial object architecture in the city. The centre was designed to accommodate 78 retail units and 2,000 car parking spaces, just off the M7 motorway and a kilometer from the city centre. It now sits abandoned during its construction on a previously greenfield site. It has done so for the last five years in an elemental state; Concrete stair cores protruding like turrets woven with steel reinforcement, and 14,000 tonnes of steel columns and beams spanning between. The serpentine roadway stretches past it, as the funnel for the shoppers that were to be brought to this object. The scheme for which construction began was gargantuan, pressing at one facade against the roadway and at the other against a housing estate. The horizontal plane of the ground was given to cars, with a small section of greenery as a necessary developer contribution. Joseph Rykwert in Common Ground speaks of the horizontal plane of ground being a commonality, claimed and appropriated unconsciously as we walk along it\(^2\).

This appropriation cannot happen on a ground plane given to the scale and intensity of vehicles as opposed to people, as at the Parkway Valley. The vertical plane, meanwhile was a jostling combination of glittering facade and advertising signage, the geometries of which were intended only to catch the eye as it moves along the road at high speed.

The skeleton that now stands, in its rawness and in-betweenness is what Kuma would call an anti-object.\(^2\) It is deeply connected to the site it inhabits, though unwittingly, and is a structure inseparable from its environment. It is materially free of rhetoric, it bears no advertising message or nod to consumerism. As the opposite of an object, it is the antithesis of what it was intended to become. This is the site I have chosen for my thesis project.


Parkway Valley, Photographed November 2012
Parkway Valley, Photographed December 2012
Parkway Valley, Photographed April 2013
The Parkway Valley has been used as a symbol for Ireland’s economic collapse: Images of it were broadcast on national news at the time of the country’s bailout from the IMF. An image of distress, of outrageous folly and naivety was projected. That is certainly a valid image, but what’s more powerful is its material presence, what Gio Ponti would term “its silence, in which lies its voice”. Its material quality is heavy and raw, and every element that has been built was borne out of engineering necessity. It is measured, efficient and controlled. Considering the excessive visuals of consumerism in which it was to be cloaked, it almost seems like a separation of intended form and content. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, however, states that “absolute separation of meaning from factual existence in every region of experience is in fact impossible.” Donald Judd, writing on visual presence agrees. Material and experience are inseparable just as thought and feeling are. There is a myth of dichotomy between what is known and what is felt, but to feel we must invoke memory. To feel we need to recall things that we know. At present the only way to experience this site is through the framing device of a car windshield, moving along the road at 60 kilometers per hour. This framing and movement is a separation of any potential engagement with the place. The speed of the car reduces our impression of the scale of the place, a kind of parallax as we move past. Mixed with what is known and what is felt is what is seen - its presence and its visual are working together, facilitating an emotional experience. It recalls an imagery which could be the cast concrete stair cores relating to the castles and tower houses dotted around the Irish landscape. They too are now primarily viewed from the frame of a car windshield, along a passage given by a constructed roadway. The castles and tower houses on the landscape are artifacts of heritage, in opposition to the commodity of object architecture.

From a distance the shopping centre recalls the vista of an Italian hillside town, San Gimignano perhaps. It does this through the physicality and weight of its construction. It is a built reality allowed to project itself, without an overbearing message applied. In this way it has a power, but it lies in a state of in betweenness. It is in the space at the fringes of Limerick between urban and rural, between commercial and residential, road and landscape, sky and ground, and ultimately between completion and decomposition. It is between the twin fluxes of the N7 and the river at Reboque Meadows.


This site is a culmination of the attitude of commodity architecture in the Irish context, with all its attendant isolation and failures. It is the contemporary ruin of the Irish landscape, partially constructed and without a history of use. Brian Dillon discusses the idea of ruin in architecture.

"The ruin is a site not of melancholy or mourning but of radical potential - its fragmentary, unfinished nature is an invitation to fulfill the as yet unexplored temporality it contains. Ruins are freightened with possibility, even with utopian promise."

It is a ruin, but not in decay. It is not yet a building allowed to decline, but something paused during construction, a snapshot of a particular point in time. Unfinished and uninhabited, its energy lies solely in its potential. It presents a moment to re-examine, and offers two divergent futures: One future is that its current state is just a pause in time, and that it will be completed according to plan, a model of development that has failed in a grim and spectacular manner. The alternative future works with the existing condition and re-aligns to accommodate new uses. It finds a new spatial order from the existing constructed order of the ruin. It accepts absence and makes adjustments. It can show that with small investment and limited points of intervention, this place can be turned into a culturally and economically productive landscape, without giving itself to the domination of typical consumer architecture.

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Potentials.

“The territory of architecture has been reduced in many cases to maximising size and density on a given site, and achieving some vague sense of compatibility with a context. Against this background we try to maintain ideas about the public realm, but they seem to manifest themselves most frequently as choreographed retail opportunities for office workers of leisure shoppers.”

Kenneth Frampton articulated the idea of an arriere-garde, a counterproposal for architecture that would stand as a bulwark against the cultural erosion of the avant-garde globalization. The avant-garde approach to image and object has now trickled down, diluted into easily packaged, comprehended and consumed projects as seen at the periphery of Limerick. As the financial market suddenly dictated that such ongoing projects were unprofitable, and so useless, sites like the Parkway Valley have been left to lie unused on the landscape. As a leftover space on the edge of the expanded boundary of Limerick City, the parkway site holds a power of reconciliation. It has the potential to mediate between the metropolitan plan and the agrarian plan of the wider landscape. It provides an opportunity to view the landscape from the point of view of city, and vice versa. It can mediate between the experience of city and visual immersion of landscape. Steven Holl speaks about how the major metropolitan cities such as New York derive their energy from the programmatic diversity and juxtaposition - multitudes of programmes and uses brought together as a social condensers. As a site of in-betweenness, the parkway holds a power to overcome the condition of singularity that dominates the suburban monoculture. The object architecture on the fringes of the city is typically of singular use, and individualist. A reenergizing and reprogramming can bring about a new order, a new set of relationships. Viewing the Parkway as a landscape rather than a discrete building, with adjustment it can act as a hub and a stitch of the neglected in-between. Reconfiguring the visual field of the edge of the city has the perceptual ability to invoke useful imagery, subject matter and programmes. This can reconcile the objects and in between spaces.


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SITE SURVEY

In conjunction with a photographic account, I conducted a close architectural survey of the Parkway Valley site exactly as it stands in 2013. This included its concrete stair cores, steel frame, excavations, materials and leftovers that currently lie on this landscape.

The total land covered is 33,000m².
Initial model of possible rearrangement of the Parkway's steel frame.
PROPOSED 2004 SCHEME
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Limerick City  N7  Parkway Site  Castletroy
I am fascinated by this photograph, taken in 1958 at a drive-in theatre in Utah. LIFE photographer J.R. Eyerman photographed motorists, brought together over the hills of Salt Lake City to see The Ten Commandments. It was taken roughly 20 years after the American Dream took to car culture, and shortly after the post-WWII road building program changed the pace and intensity of life. Society was rapidly becoming individualistic, and the car was a cultural expression of that. Cars were aspirational, yet affordable. They signified a better life for the individual.

Here stood a cultural place given to the scale of the automobile. The enthral of an image flickering in the dark brought to each windshield, and sitting against the natural topography. Isolated from the ground and from each other, the people here are nonetheless brought together by the car into a shared cultural experience, above a shared landscape.
The collective experience of cinema acted as a social condenser in Limerick before life became governed by the car and by corporate entities. From the 1930s to the 1970s, 14 local cinema houses operated in Limerick, all are now closed.

A cinema is proposed at the Parkway Valley site to create a place of shared cultural activity for the inhabitants of the surrounding suburban housing. Such housing is individualist, in which interaction with neighbours happen along your walk from the front door to car - half glimpses through the fence or hedge as one comes and goes.

Image, frame and projection interact at 24 frames per second, creating a shared, local and willingly intimate experience for those who come here. Object and subject are questioned as the roles of performer and spectator.
Twenty Four Frames per second is the minimum speed still images need to move at to trick the brain into thinking it is seeing movement.

You move along the road, past the Parkway site’s towers and frames at 60 kilometers per hour, elevated 1,400mm above the ground. Speed and perspective distortion enter into a kind of parallax, where each reframing of your visual field nullifies your sense of scale to the site. The physical connection is broken and the visual connection is only fleeting. The speed of passage on axis with the hard boundary of the road is the control on your psychological experience.

Distance and speed are high, time is shortened. At 24fps at 60kph you may catch a split second glimpse of the response of this ruin to time.
“We understand the science of shopping and our approach embraces the simple philosophy that the longer a shopper spends in a store, the more they will buy.”

- Architects of the Parkway Valley Shopping Centre.
IT MAKES \- SO-CALLED VOLT ARCHITECTURE \- REMIND US OF THE MORE HOMME Ethical and Psychological Possibilities of Design and Place

FROD of columns, constructs and water. Vertical of columns + reeds

POND BED/WATER GARDEN

FRAMING \- THEORICALLY FRAME THE SCENE WITH A NEW ARTIFICIALITY

OTHER WATERS\- CHASE UNDERSTOOD CLAUSTRI BUREBRAE DIALECTICAL OF CONSTRUCTION AND WILDLANDS

Picturesque?
Turning & Obliqueness.
As you drive past, a parallax occurs. This reduces your sense of scale and connection to the place, with the constant reconfiguring of your visual field becoming the predominant sense through which you experience a place. The world folds and turns as you move around the objects.
March 2013
Proposal for disassembly of the steel frame. New connections provided into the site. Limited interventions to allow the site to grow into a piece of social infrastructure in time.
Beacon.

The image of the building is projected by light rather than facade. It does not present a singularly legible form, it’s image is not fully understood from a single viewpoint. It uses the existing towers as beacons of light to signify that this is now a place, rather than purely a location for the system of commerce to happen. The beacons attract the eye and mark themselves as a destination when viewed from the road in a passing car. From the opposite side of the flood plain, the collection of towers appear high on the hillside as a city, shining outward.

Artificial light shines from boxes made from weathering steel, which house plant rooms for lifts, and provide enclosure for the belvedere on tower no.8.

Path.

On the ground beneath the steelwork, paths cross to break the disorienting rigor of the frame. The paths provide a horizontal plane for people to appropriate the wet, marshy ground. They branch out into the landscape, mediating between the conditions of rigid order within the frame, and chaos outside of it. They are in dialogue with the hedgerows and drainage channels, providing a human scale, rhythm and metre for the land. They follow the topography, and in times of flood become partially or fully submerged, acting as a highwater mark against which the water level is read. They entwine with and respond to the natural processes - they grow or shrink with the ebb and flow of water and time.

Paths are made from the precast concrete units removed from the upper floors of the steel frame and used to make a new constructed ground.
Bridge.
To provide an infrastructural connection into the site at a slower speed in counterpoint to the road, and to negotiate the floodplain.
Belvedere.
One tower is used to provide a Belvedere, a departure from the ground from which one may view the conditions of between road, river, industry and housing.
Theatre.
First proposal for the performance space within the parkland.
April 2013
Site layout for parkland with market space, outdoor cinema and belvedere.
### Schedule of Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Size (m²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parkway Valley Site</td>
<td>102,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebogue Meadows</td>
<td>496,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance Pavilion 1</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance and Theatre Seating 1</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance and Theatre Seating 2</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Plaza</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walled Gardens</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Cinema Screening</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Stalls</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilets and Storage</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footbridge</td>
<td>1271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Combined theatre seating and entrance into the parkland made from reused steel. The entranceway compresses and releases as you move through, reframing your spatial field from the speed of the road to the speed of the parkland. Inside the steel the compressed space presents you with the dual choice of moving through, or staying within the cinema seating.
In this proposal, much of the existing steel frame is removed, revealing the site as a landscape of concrete towers. Connections are made by new paths and a footbridge - a new infrastructure to allow the site to grow into a productive landscape, socially and economically. An outdoor cinema is proposed within the new parkland, to create a place of shared cultural activity for the inhabitants of the surrounding suburban housing. Such housing is individualist, in which interaction with neighbours happen along your walk from the front door to car - half glimpses through the fence or hedge as one comes and goes.

In Limerick, the collective experience of cinema acted as a social condenser before life became governed by the car and by corporate entities. From the 1930s to the 1970s, 14 local cinema houses operated in Limerick, all are now closed. Image, frame and projection interact at 24 frames per second, creating a shared, local and willingly intimate experience for those who come here.
End pieces fabricated off site, butt welded to 10mm plate steel on site to form structural monocoque.

10mm plate steel reused from existing on site stock.

25mm Corten top plate tapered structural pier fabricated from 25mm Corten steel. Exposed stiffening fins.

25mm Corten base plate through bolted to concrete foundation.

Pile cap on 600mm dia pile compression piles.

Fabricated onsite in 1800mm long sections welded closed at both ends. End pieces form lateral stiffening ribs when attached to the next section.

Backrest canted to form structural upstand and resist torsion, solid back screens to the North.

50mm stainless steel handrail fixed to stainless steel flat bracket bolted between uprights.

Corten steel uprights.

50x75mm steel angle fixed between uprights to prevent items rolling off deck.

LED strip lighting deck surface.

150 x30mm iroko hardwood boarding screw fixed to 30x50mm iroko grounds bolted to steel angle bolted to steel brackets welded to steel deck.

Iroko boarding fixed with 10mm gaps to allow rainwater to drain to steel deck and discharge off steel deck edge.

Boards machined with non slip surface.

Form steel downstand as weathering drip.

Articulated connection - adjustable for forward, lateral and height.

Brackets formed in mild steel to engineer’s specifications.

150x22mm iroko hardwood boarding screw fixed to 25x50mm hardwood battens fixed to steel.

261 X 276mm steel I section re-used from steel frame to form retaining wall. Splayed 20 degrees from vertical, laid flange faces outward, 50mm gap between each section.

120mm dia. perforated PVC drain.

Folded metal gutter tray folded over eaves and capped with new in situ concrete stair.

Terrim geotextile membrane.

Plan of structural pier.
THANKS

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Thank you to Brendan Williams for the ongoing support, both financial and otherwise.

And thank YOU for reading.