Tionchar ár d’Teorainn
- The weight of our Boundaries

Kristopher Ó Ceallaigh
I wish to thank the faculty at SAUL for the creation of a unique space to work and learn. I also wish to thank my classmates and friends throughout my time here for making it such a fantastic experience.
## Contents

- Abstract
- “The Station Gate”
- The Necessity of Bounding Conditions toward development
- In search of detachment from the weight of our decisions
- The emergence of a perceived culture
- “Bishopsgate”
- The role of industry in our cultural development
“The Station Gate”

The station gate is a discreet right of way connecting the upper village of Kilronan to the lower harbour area. It is now appropriately without gates.

Two cut limestone pillars stand atop a sharply inclined path of roughly laid concrete and stone steps. Flanked by a cliff, one of the large limestone terraces rising up to one side and a jumble of fields falling away on a lower tier on the other. As you ascend you are inclined to skip up the three stepped sections and walk the rough concrete, brushing off bushes and long grass as you go sometimes avoiding a stray briar’s limb.

When you arrive at the pillars the ground is level and you cannot ignore the instinct to turn and view where you have ascended from, You look down upon the harbour, a scene of activity and the lifeline of a small community. There is always an air of anticipation at this point be it arriving or departing. You sense that it has been a place to stand and watch as long as there have been people to do so.

The wind hits your face and you always feel awake.

You then pass through the threshold of the two pillars less than a metre apart and each a metre and a half in height. You are gathered in by the shoulder high walls which surround the grassland beyond.

This point of the journey is a reminder of the powers within a small community. Two walking paths converge at the pillars, one a perpendicular which leads to the residence of the local priest. The other is a continuation of the journey thus far which leads past the door of the local gárda station, hence “the station gate”.

As a child this walk was always one of excitement be it on arrival or the beginning of a journey away, my perception exaggerated by the scale of the walls and the pillars to my stature. This was and still is the sentinel of all my trips to and from home.
The necessity of Bounding Conditions toward development

When one alters the surface of the earth to suit one's personal needs this location ceases to exist as it has, forever. All of our human constructs create boundaries, the significance of which we alone rarely determine. This is done by following generations who's movement is determined by such constructs. People underestimate the power we as a species possess to create. For millenia man has been in a constant discourse with the physical elements which determine our inhabitation of space.

Upon encountering geological obstacles there emerges a basic instinct to traverse them and a relentless inner drive to discover a means of manipulating such areas. It is in our nature from birth to be curious, to question our limits, to push further the boundaries with which we are familiar. Man has always striven to question such issues and negotiate a path through perceived un navigable physical obstacles.

This curiosity has had peaks and troughs during our existence, I believe we are currently in a minor trough whereby the sheer amount of knowledge we can readily access has ironically narrowed our imagination and more disconcertingly our ambition. For the first time perhaps in the past one hundred and fifty years our ability is succeeding our aspirations. This is not a world wide phenomena however it appears to be increasingly evident among younger generations. There are major discoveries being made throughout the fields of science and technology however one cannot see such a drive for the creation of a future civilization, nor are there such dramatic shifts in cultural thinking presently as those which created the world of the past 150-200 years.

One must question whether we have succumbed to a specific method in the creation of the human artifact and if so why are we no longer demanding more from the ambition and the creativity of our planners, our political leaders, our architects? When one contemplates the civilizations of the future it often rests too much in the context of the present and even the past. Of course we must look to these examples for evidence of successful development yet as we design we must be prepared to venture completely into the unknown for it is only here that we can extend our capabilities even further.

If one continues to obey and abide by the limits and the boundaries of times past we will pause in our evolution. Often the boundaries created by the minds of once successful movements restrict development. It is necessary to respect such creations and to utilize these as information whence looking forward but one must refrain from becoming consumed by a single paradigm. We must seek a new model which is relevant to current and forthcoming circumstances.

Perhaps physical boundaries present man with an obstacle, an imposed limit on movement and building at a specific location. Boundaries and thresholds are among the most interesting even opportunistic moments for one to think creatively. Such moments allow one to explore alternative routes to our desires for what a space may become. Boundaries create structure, they provide a basis from which we can begin to imagine. Physical limitations are useful to architects as presuppositions are in the field of science. Without these pre-constructs one would have greater difficulty in commencing a design process.
We must encounter boundaries in order to overcome them for without any basis to begin how can one know they are moving with direction? Just as mathematics requires the axes, man requires a paradigm of inherited and created structural points of reference in order to fabricate a response. This is fundamental in the work of the architect. As one constructs, a new geography emerges it is the challenge of following designers to navigate this and hopefully improve upon it.

It is at a point of transition that an architectural move can become significantly interesting. One is faced with a number of choices akin to the first settlers by a riverside. Firstly there is the choice to cross the river or to build respectfully alongside. To build at a boundary requires a careful assessment of the impact a development will have, it may no longer be a limit but a threshold. It is important that we view boundaries for what they are, separations of space which evoke a great deal of thought in all who cross them. The bounding condition may be created naturally or by hand in numerous materials at a range of scales. What all boundaries contain however is a distinct psychological effect upon people. For some the experience of encountering such a moment arouses doubt, discomfort, even fear. There are those who embrace the discovery, for these people a boundary becomes a gateway to possibility. It holds a sense of freedom for at this point the conventions of two places are divided, there is a sense of adventure at such places. An area which offers change is always intriguing. Such moments need not be a limit to one's journey but a window into its continuation. At these thresholds perhaps we can think most freely.

In many of the most enjoyable spaces I have experienced there has been a sense of anticipation throughout. It is present as one ascends the escalators of the Pompidou unsure of what awaits at the summit just as when climbing a mountain or embarking on a seaward voyage. It is also present in less grandiose environments. As one walks through the meandering lanes of medieval towns or experiences the spatial arrangement of courtyard dwellings an anticipation builds within one's self. Such environments give the visitor brief glimpses of what lies ahead. On occasion expectation is constructed without the divulging of any secrets. It becomes apparent that a destination may not be necessary for the journey can be of greater importance due to the anticipation evoked.

Edmund Husserl claimed that: “In every action we know the goal in advance in the form of an anticipation that is empty... and seek by our action to bring it step by step to concrete realization”. It is upon such ideas that we live. Through the driving force of anticipation we are led through spaces. It is also upon such ideas that we build. We do not always bring our goals to “concrete realization” however through positive anticipation of goals we discover new paths and methodologies. All boundaries produce a sense of anticipation which only heightens one's curiosity and in my opinion makes these areas all the more compelling.

In search of detachment from the weight of our decisions

In our nation there exists a weight of history. I have not found a better analysis of our condition than in a passage by John Moss from “Invisible among the ruins”:

“The people of Ireland live among walls; the landscape and culture are inscribed with lines of stone, labyrinths of rearranged earth, proscriptions of denial and possession, sedgrows and hedgerows and relentless historical memories; and the often-rain of Ireland is a condition of life to be endured—of your lives for I am speaking to the world as if it were Irish, to Ireland as if it were the world. Coming from a perspective of invisibility, where to declare my difference from Ireland I must co-opt Inuit reality for my own, to make my own reality apprehensible even to myself. I furl my way through the maze of Irish walls while, deep within, a yearning for the absence of human design thrills in my veins. I come from a country a continent wide and so wholly indeterminate at its northern edges that tracing tens of thousands of shoreline miles on a global map would not articulate our upper limits: imagine standing on earth, trying to take in the illimitable depths of a clear blue sky; then just when you think you have its measure, it is winter, the sun sets, and your soul opens to the blue-black night. You can impose constellations, but these signify only the limits of imagination. You are reduced to transparency and at the same time vision connects you with the infinite. This is what it is to be consciously Canadian, in a place where rain is often snow and where walls are only fences, merely conventions, and there is no perceptible limit to the circumscribing universe.”

I question Moss’ conclusion that the experience of his description is to be “consciously Canadian” for I believe the sensations evoked by wilderness may be found elsewhere even in far smaller areas, on islands for example. I believe also that a desire for the absence of human design may be felt by inhabitants of Ireland and that we can free ourselves from the constraints of our history and our landscape whilst remaining true to our origins. It is my opinion that such feelings in fact make one consciously human.

We are a small island yet an influential one. Ireland in the context of the western world has long been inhabited yet in terms of development of inhabitation we are slow to catch up. This is determined by the assumption that the development of a nation is measured by the levels of migration to urban living and the scale of infrastructure. One must regard that we lie in the scope of great opportunity due to this also. We may view the many lessons of other states and use this information to progressively develop in an appropriate manner. The industrial revolution and the instant urbanization of recent pasts have not hit our shores to the extent of our neighbours. This may be seen as a contributing factor in our slow approach to change yet it may also be quite fortuitous.

We are in some respects stuck in a nostalgia for an imagined past with a reluctance to step forward. Taking current land divisions as an example one must think alternatively as to how we inhabit and govern this land. In some cases the preciousness with which certain man made borders are held is fascinating for they no longer contribute to their original purpose although they pose restrictions for contemporary progress, often due to ownership. There are boundaries upon which beliefs have grown which have withstood centuries and in doing so inhibited progression.

An interest of mine has been the fact that at a naturally formed boundary we build, we bridge or we burrow in order to pass, yet when a constructed boundary even in its most elemental form as a wall or a ditch has been imposed by the minds of humans it is not quite the case. People are reluctant to change conventions yet when change occurs we readily adapt, it is in our nature. To change is always exciting but never popular and it appears be a trait of mankind to only accept readjustment when circumstance makes it absolutely necessary. These may be economic, political or environmental. This is especially true of cultural shift. As a nation we take pride in our culture, it is our identity. Too often this identity is mistakenly considered to be our traditions and this along with our history weighs heavily on our ability to move forward.

Many believe that large scale changes to the structure of our society and of our land (a term of great significance in a nation without a great deal thereof) puts our culture at risk of disappearance. What has become a source of great pride is devoutly protected to the point where the possibility of positive alternatives are not readily accepted as a result. In order to progress cultural shifts are necessary, we must first examine how such a culture has emerged.
The emergence of our perceived culture

Growing up in the extreme west of Ireland one almost becomes an embodiment of the perceived culture with which the nation as a whole associates this region, furthermore this way of life has been for some time the primary national image projected to the world. The quasi-myth that is “the west” is often brought to the fore when searches for examples of true Irish culture. In reality the west does continue to exist as an area of raw beauty and ancient customs none as significant as our language. It has however been romanticized beyond recognition.

People travel here for detachment and enlightenment. Visitors come for creative inspiration and clarification that unspoiled territories still exist. The general perception is that regardless of national progress there remains here a link to our beginnings. There also exists a firm belief that the west must not change from the idyllic paintings of the mind, a montage of recent centuries and a handful of major cultural shifts primarily religious and governmental. This barren land considered untouched has been thoroughly manipulated by every generation to have passed and is in itself a construction of the people. The nostalgia for a period stretching over half a millennium is a culmination of a number of external forces. Perhaps the foremost of these is our recent history.

It is only in the past couple of centuries that the mass population of this Island have made the ascension from what Heidegger would deem “inhabitants” upon the land to become “dwellers” of our domain. Never have we had such rapid progress as that of the past century. It is therefore natural that many yearn for reminders of a time of less privilege for assurance perhaps that we are growing or for affirmation of our humility. This desire may stem from our collective observations of nations embroiled in the industrial revolution and is undoubtedly a result for our search for an identity in the post-colonial era. The desire to evolve with respect to our past is quite prevalent. It is admirable that we wish not to dispel with our history yet it must be considered that the myths which have grown are quite possibly the most detrimental influence upon our development particularly how we build and the manner in which our towns develop.

Often it is not what we construct which leaves the most significant impression upon a culture but the manner in which we build. The tradition of boat building on our shores has had a sporadic history however the techniques employed have long had an influence on our designs and have permeated our society in a less brutal manner than our divisions of land.
“Bishopsgate”

There exists a great moment of transition in East London along the road known as the A10, between Liverpool Street station and the district of Hoxton north of the main financial district.

As one ascends from the subterranean networks of London there is never a journey when the sheer release experienced at ground level is not a welcome relief, one's anticipation grows with every step toward the comfort of natural light.

The main station floor is a hive of activity bathed in light and noise. This is the final transitional space before we are thrown into the metropolis or so we are lead to believe by the advertisements and countless coffee stands all preparing us for the stressful world beyond the warmth of the old sandy bricks. London however is a city comprised of many villages each with their distinct character and each maintaining distinct boundaries. These are not always visible but their presence is undeniable.

As you exit the station through its main gated entrance you are greeted by a facade of small kiosks, bars and financial institutions. This is perhaps one of the most significant transitional moments in the city. East London peters off to the left while the towers of the new city loom ominously above one to the right.

This is the point at which thousands of Londoners turn right every morning without considering what lays beyond their realm of work and the ritual commute. As you walk North along the broad footpaths against the major flows of people you escape the long shadows of the commercial district and the distinction of two cultures is clearly defined.

For centuries this district has been especially diverse. East London for long periods was the engine house of the great city. This was an industrial district from the heyday of the East India Trading Company right up to the 20th century. The remnants of this former life are apparent throughout. For the past few decades it has been the cultural heart of the city attracting creative movements and nurturing many artists and designers as is the case with post-industrial hubs although none have been so vast.

The definitive moment of transition can be felt long before we look to the uses of the buildings or even consider their former lives, it can also be felt before we encounter those who dwell here and acknowledge their mostly laissez faire lifestyles. There are clues throughout the architecture of the district. The proportions of the lanes are considerable unlike the medieval alleys of the city centre while the public squares are informal and appear to have grown as opposed to being designed. These most likely have evolved from the trade yards and the distribution hubs of old. There exists here a moment of freedom I have rarely experienced.
This portion of the A10 is known also as Bishopsgate and marks the location of one of the eight original gates of London. Although unaware prior to first encountering this area the presence of a great threshold is undeniable. The initial construction of the gate has permeated throughout the built history of the area. Movements have come and gone in their own manner responding to this moment of transition and each in so doing have a had lasting affect on the culture of the surrounding districts. We alone do not determine the significance of the works we create that is decided by those who inhabit them but it must be considered that when one makes an alteration to the built fabric we are also forever altering the culture of that location. Perhaps more often than not we should consider the ruins of our buildings and attend to what we aspire to leave behind.

What has manifested here is a remarkable hybrid. Spaces of trade and labor have become the foundations of cultural evolution. This cultural boundary is a result of constructed geography on the part of architects and city dwellers alike which begs the question: Is our role to execute our visions to completion or should we conduct development of our built fabric through informative moments off which society can evolve?
The role of industry in our cultural development

In recent decades our towns have undergone major change. The location of industry has had a widespread impact on our way of life. In a nation once described as “first world with a third world memory” the location of one’s work is pivotal. It is not so long since the majority of the Irish population stemmed from a rural upbringing and a communal culture where not only was the respected form of work manual but one’s work was also an integral part of public life. Due to patterns of urbanization we are experiencing a growing disassociation with our houses of industry which in turn has permeated our culture and altered the respect toward one’s work.

In order for our society to flourish we must once again embrace industry and seek a means of mediating the growing divide between two fundamental aspects of life, the public realm and the workplace. This is as much the task of our architects as it is urban planners and governing bodies. Industry will forever be dominated by immediate efficiency, as a result our urban fabric often suffers. I believe our greatest contribution to industrial life may not lie in the alternative designing of work spaces but in the creation of a new industrial geography. It is the space between these buildings that creates the greatest social boundaries. The appropriation of land and the separation of workers and the general public is at the core of the current divide.

The transient nature of industrial life in an Irish context has had a lasting effect upon the land and its dwellers. Dereliction and decay are all too often associated with the now common place industrial estates. Ironically these sites though created from easily constructed lightweight materials do not tend to be torn down with any great haste. In reality many of these sites stand derelict for decades long after a particular industry has emigrated, such is the nature of a market driven by profit with little regard for the surrounding contexts nor the creation of spaces for social interaction. These sites often become infamous landmarks on the outskirts of our towns rarely reused and quite often have a prolonged impact on our collective memory. They not only permeate our culture negatively during their lifespan but long after.

The city of Galway has in recent times undergone significant growth and maintains a young educated working demographic however the physical evolution of the city is becoming increasingly detrimental to city life. Due to the location of three major industrial hubs the city has become ever-more reliant on the car. Long commutes are becoming commonplace in a city easily traversable on foot while large scale infrastructural development in the form of roads has for some time been emblematic of the city. We have come to a point however where the general public are now refusing to accept that an alternative cannot be created. Due to our ever expanding networks of communication we exist in an increasingly design-lead society.

I believe we lie in the scope of great opportunity where new paradigms have the potential to be tested. In order to do so we must consider the public realm and the significance of creating hybrids of use. An alternative infrastructure must be created which may be constructed from within our communities. When a people not only have a vision of the end product of construction but also the opportunity to impact its design this greatly enforces a mediating outcome. Perhaps our greatest task lays not in the design of these spaces but in our communication to the people who’s lives we aim to improve.
Project and Site

Having examined both the significance of boundaries upon our culture and the patterns of development we are currently in the midst of I decided to undertake a project based upon the civic responsibility of industry. The site I have chosen lies just North of Galway city in an area known as Terryland forest Park. The name given to the area is quite misleading as in reality what exists is a large expanse of underused farmland which acts as a major void in the ever-growing urban fabric of Galway. The area is circa 120 acres of land for the most part separated into private allotments although the City Council has acquired a relatively large portion of the southern tip.

The site is flanked on the east and west by Industrial estates and suburban housing respectively. To the south Galway city is edging nearer with every passing year while to the north lays the traditional rural village of Castlegar. There are four distinct typologies in the locale however the site is dominated by heavy infrastructure. Due to the nature of land ownership on this Island none of the diverse uses ever overlap to create a more diverse existence.

The proposal is a spine off which industry can hinge. By creating a linear structure one can house all of the utilities industrial units require whilst connecting the surrounding communities over a long period of time perhaps after many potential clients of the industrial facilities have come and departed. The intention is to bridge this void in the urban fabric but in so doing create numerous opportunities for the city to affect the evolution of the structure. The current longterm plan for this site is reforestation. This is a noble plan although I believe by introducing active industrial use in the short term it may pave the way for a more progressive mediating outcome. Our areas of labour must not be shunted nor hidden from public view. By creating the foundations of a hybrid one can create an alternative to our current views on urbanism potentially a more successful one.
Site model.
The extruded material demonstrates the severity of the man made boundaries upon this site. Roads, housing estates and field boundaries dominate the landscape.
This image depicts the structure in a post-industrial state. A human corridor has been created linking housing development in the background to the eventual forest park and neighbouring communities.
1:50 Birch Ply Sectional Model
- Fleming, Gerald. “Sustainable Shelter in our future climates.” Lecture, Lecture@SAUL from SAUL, Limerick, October 21, 2014.