Parting with our Past

Post Nostalgia

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Acknowledgements

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“Man’s image of place, particularly of home, seems to me instinctually and explicitly sensual and his demand to satisfy this image a normal expectation. Event and place, in memory, are inseparable and so action and environment are inseparable. It is equally true that environments designate actions... [by] sensory perception I do mean bodily perception – I have been moved to throw my arms about the Parthenon's columns and if I can love Amiens and love the Pantheon, can one not love place, isn’t that what an understanding of site, interaction with site, means?” 1

Days go by and everything changes. The weather controls our emotions, and our emotions control us. We control everything else. This is a natural occurrence, like the tide changing the water levels. By ‘everything’ I mean the inanimate, the living, and the landscape. Landscape is the largest example of something that is a direct result of the actions of our society. The moment humanity feels apathetic towards the land and pushes its used gum into the pavement; we are allowing this gum to become part of our landscape, and with it, our apathy. This power to change the landscape is a form of authority which I feel begs further exploration in the design world.

While architects are trained to make positive impact on the built environment, there are restrictions to what they can do. These include various regulations such as; planning regulations, building regulations, and fire safety regulations etc. The realisation of the architect's work comes after a project is designed, carefully considered, gone through planning, constructed, and then finally open for use. Contrasting this, a citizen's input is realised immediately after the gum is stuck on the pavement. Reflecting on this led me to an exploration of nostalgia. Nostalgia is an emotion responsible for our society's reluctance to change the existing landscape. It seems that we make systems to control and limit the impact an architect can have on the landscape, meanwhile the landscape is forever changing, one piece of gum at a time. We are conditioned to give things that were there before us the privilege of being part of our everyday world. Time gives these things power.

Juhani Pallasmaa once stated "We are what we remember". It is this thought that protects every disused farmhouse, shed, ditch, water tower, well, castle and alls for a medium/form/an architecture that represents who we are now, and how we came to be. The aesthetic of the built fabric in Irish towns and cities is predominantly historic; however we have not been as precious with the building behind the facade. Therefore the aesthetic of the street's buildings represent the identity of its city as a whole, rather than the individual buildings. If the facades of historical buildings are favoured and the architecture that the facade once represented is disregarded, does this mean the meaning of the facade has changed, or that we are clutching onto the aesthetic of an architectural era that no longer represents our society?

With these thoughts in mind, my thesis is an architectural exploration of our society's nostalgic relationship with the Irish landscape. I hope to identify a contemporary solution that allows for architects of today to achieve their full potential in designing contemporary architecture, while allowing for the continuity of this nostalgia towards landscape. The thesis has two parts which discuss two Irish landscapes. The first is Kilkee, county Clare; a small beach town in the west of Ireland. The second is New Town Pery, Limerick City; the Georgian quarter that currently houses the city's central business district. Exploration and analysis of the two sites will act as a foundation for the argument of my architectural thesis.
While writing on the topic of nostalgia, I felt it suitable to begin at the place I am most nostalgic of. Kilkee is a holiday town in Ireland where I have spent most of my summers. To truly interact with my topic, I felt it necessary for me to take on a site where I find myself blinded by nostalgia, and attempt to look at it objectively, to explore the society’s relationship with architecture. In this part of the thesis, I will give a description of the history of the development of the town, and how that transpires to the town today. After this I have written two fictional accounts based in Kilkee. The first is set in the summer of 1890, and the second is set in the winter of 2014. The first text is based on travel writer’s accounts of the time as seen in Samuel Lewis’ “County Clare: A History and Topography”, while the second text is based on my own perception of living in Kilkee today. From these pieces of writing I hope to give a broad insight to the different ways in which the town can be perceived by society, how the development of the town plays a role in these perceptions, and how architecture may play a role in the town’s future.
Kilkee is a town of two tales. The first is of a Victorian holiday town that spans almost three miles following the horseshoe shape of the bay. The town clusters at the mile long sandy beach which is at the midpoint of the bay. The sea wall was constructed as a post famine project, completed in 1865. It runs two miles in length round the bay, and has become the edge where the town meets the beach and sea. Following the entire sea wall, Victorian holiday homes face the Atlantic Ocean. The town was developed as a holiday resort for the upper-class society, and was traditionally visited by people from Limerick. Like many Victorian towns, Kilkee seems it had been developed around the belief that the size of the town and population would grow with time. With wide streets and the extensive amassment of holiday homes, we can understand the scale of the town that had been envisaged. The town was built in an identifiable system in which further development was imagined to follow. However this did not happen.

Kilkee did not see another building boom until the 1950s. This decade saw the beginning of the suburbanisation of state-owned houses, and a culture of suburban terraced neighbourhood developments. These developments did not follow the sprawling pattern of the Victorian developments. The 1950s housing developments took place on the outskirts of the town centre. This era also saw the introduction to “mobile home” or “caravan” parks. Tenants would privately own a caravan or mobile home and would rent a plot of land from the land owner on an annual lease. These mobile home and caravan parks were also developed on the outskirts of the town centre. The caravan gave an opportunity for working class families to holiday by the beach, rather than strictly middle and upper class as seen the century before. More recently the Celtic Tiger boom had a major impact on the town from 1998-2008. Developments such as hotels, holiday homes, apartments, and “holiday villages” were built on the edges of the town. These were built in a fashion where a field typically on the edge of the town would be sold to a developer, and considered in isolation from the rest of the surroundings. This scattered production of suburban holiday homes changed the town’s landscape, and therefore the experience vacating and living in the town, thus creating the second tale of Kilkee’s history.

Today Kilkee has a population of 1,024 people during the year, while throughout the summer sees up to 36,000 people at peak times. This annual population change results with most of the residential housing to be vacant for the majority of the year. The public spaces in Kilkee were mostly developed in the Victorian era, and are therefore located in the centre of the town. This has created a suburban condition where people live (permanently and seasonally) on the outskirts of the town centre, and are therefore detached from the public arenas.

With regards to nostalgia, memories are made in the public realm where abnormalities occur. You met an old friend for the first time on the promenade, when you were nine years old you jumped off the high rock into the ‘freezing’ sea, or the strong wind caused you to lose your kite the day of that terrible storm... these things are all very normal memories for someone in Kilkee, and they all happen in the public realm. This means that our collective nostalgia of the town is based in the public spaces located in the Victorian town. This investment of nostalgia is why the built fabric of the town centre has changed very little over time, causing the present social condition where we live in residential areas that are disconnected from where our memories are set.

It seems that while we individually acquire our own personal memories in a place, overtime these become collective memories passed down through the years, and turned into legends and shared memories. These memories come alive in the place they once happened. And so it seems that by conserving the place, we conserve the memory.
My First Trip to Kilkee

22nd August 1890

We had finally arrived in Kilrush port. The steamboat was more crowded than Aunt Carol had described it would be. She seemed a little unnerved by the density of people on the deck, but I could sense was the excitement that filled the air. Children ran laps around the deck playing catch, their mothers attempting unsuccessfully to grab them as they passed by, and all the while shouting reprimands. Others gathered and dotted on a new born asleep in a white perambulator, wrapped in what was undeniably a Limerick lace throw-over. It appeared more worn than the doilies in Aunt Carol’s house, but still managed to retain its intricate form. Men stood by the bags, smoking their pipes. Laughs and cheers were exchanged while one told a story animatedly. These passengers were going on holidays. On that Friday evening in late August, it seemed like the deck held half the city. Aunt Carol made me sit inside the small lounge were all freshly painted white, while each front door was painted a different colour. We had finally arrived in Kilrush port. The steamboat was more crowded than Aunt Carol had described it would be. She seemed a little unnerved by the density of people on the deck, but I could sense was the excitement that filled the air. Children ran laps around the deck playing catch, their mothers attempting unsuccessfully to grab them as they passed by, and all the while shouting reprimands. Others gathered and dotted on a new born asleep in a white perambulator, wrapped in what was undeniably a Limerick lace throw-over. It appeared more worn than the doilies in Aunt Carol’s house, but still managed to retain its intricate form. Men stood by the bags, smoking their pipes. Laughs and cheers were exchanged while one told a story animatedly. These passengers were going on holidays. On that Friday evening in late August, it seemed like the deck held half the city. Aunt Carol made me sit inside the small lounge that looked out onto the happenings of the deck. I half heartedly played bridge with her as she suggested. She did not like the noise on the deck. I was glad to see that the boat was being docked at Killimer, glad and relieved to leave the lounge.

I carried the suitcase along with my book bag filled with my things I would need for my trip away. Mammy had packed it for me. Aunt Carol walked quickly along the same road we had come on the evening before. The wall was huge and stretched the length of the whole beach and town. It was brown in colour and warm from the morning sun. Noreen allowed me to walk on the wall as long as I was careful, as we passed the part of the wall that I had decided was safe for walking on, but I wouldn’t dare ask to walk on it while with Aunt Carol. As we walked down the Strand Line people began to salute Aunt Carol. She engaged them with pleasant small talk about the beautiful day we were having, how long was she planning on staying, and get the dinner started.

We arrived at Clifton House moments later. It was the first house after the sharp corner on the West End. The carriage drove up the lane way towards the stables which made Aunt Carol protest scornfully that we would be using the front door. I carried the luggage and my book bag down the rocky lane way and was greeted with a small black gate into a small front garden. The house was white in colour; with two storeys, four bays and tall sash windows. Aunt Carol knocked on the door. It was opened promptly by a housemaid who appeared to know my Aunt Carol quite well. I followed, and the maid took my bags and told me to go into the sitting room on the left. The hallway was large and bright. The evening light flooded through a tall sash window that stood on the landing of the staircase. I went into the front room which was darker. The room was filled with bookshelves lined with books, and a suite of furniture that looked like it came straight from a London. The fire was lit and the room was warm. Aunt Carol was in conversation with an older lady who sat on a Queen Anne chair by the hearth. I stood at the door and took in the room. The cornicing on the ceiling was like that of Aunt Carol’s new house on O’Connell Avenue at home. Mammy always said she would like a sitting room like that. Aunt Carol called me forward and introduced me to Mrs Sikes. She said that Mrs Sikes had been kind enough to allow me to stay in her summer home for the week, providing that I was on my best behaviour. Mother had warned me of that too. Mrs Sikes smiled and said that I would of course be. She had a kindness about her face. I smiled back at her.

The next morning, I could hear the sea from my bedroom window. It swooshed calmly below the sea wall adjacent from the house. The maid came in dreap the drapes. She said she was to have me dressed and ready for breakfast promptly. Her name was Noreen. She took out the short pants and jumper Mammy had packed for me from the hardwood wardrobe and left them at the end of the bed. Aunt Carol bought them new in town for me after she told Mammy that I would go with her. The short pants were itchy, but once I washed my face in the basin and combed my hair the way Mammy showed me, I could see that I looked smarter like she and Aunt Carol had hoped I would as I joined her on this adventure.

After breakfast Noreen took me down to the shops in the town, which was a short walk along the same road we had come on the evening before. The wall was huge and stretched the length of the whole beach and town. It was brown in colour and warm from the morning sun. Noreen allowed me to walk on the wall as long as I was careful, but I felt it was too high to begin with. As we got closer to the town it became smaller, as did the danger of falling. It was late morning time now, and I could see that people were going to the beach for the day. Women and children were dressed in swimsuits, with baskets full of picnics and a blanket to sit on. After visiting the butchers I asked Noreen could we go on the beach but she had to bring the food back to Clifton House and get the dinner started.

When we arrived back at the house Aunt Carol greeted us in the hallway. The light was dimmer than I had remembered. It softened her features. She leaned down to my eye level and whispered that she was going for a long walk and I was to join her. The sky was a light blue and the sun was shining. It was windy but it didn’t bother me. The wind, it occurred to me was like the sound of the sea; it made its presence known, but it wasn’t disturbing. Aunt Carol was wearing a day dress I had not seen on her before. She had a softer presence. She spoke sweetly, with a smile that made her shine. We passed the part of the wall that I had decided was safe for walking on, but I wouldn’t dare ask to walk on it while with Aunt Carol. As we walked down the Strand Line people began to salute Aunt Carol. She engaged them with pleasant small talk about the beautiful day we were having, how long was she planning on staying.
and who I was with her. I didn’t recognise anyone. Some were dressed in fine clothing, suitable for Sunday mass even, while others were dressed in swimwear, or their clothes more worn like those worn by the people I saw on the deck on the steamboat. To my surprise she greeted them equally.

We ventured passed the edge of the town on the East End, up as far as George’s Head. It was a cliff, high above the sea, concealed from the town. It was only us, the wind and the horizon of the sea. Suddenly our structured walking pattern was interrupted by Aunt Carol who broke into a run on the high grass, bouncing up and down. I was shocked but excited to see her in such high spirit, however out of character it seemed. A strong gust took her hat along with it down the hill and I tumbled down after it. After I grasped the hat from the ground I took a moment and ran my fingers through its violet felt lining. Aunt Carol followed shortly and seemed lightheaded from all the running around, but in such a way that made her silly, and uninhibited. She thanked me for retrieving the hat, she moved more fluidly than before. There was a pause. She was smiling at me. I didn’t know what to do. As I was about to shrug my shoulders hoping that it would end it, she pulled me into a hug. Was this the same Aunt Carol I knew in Limerick; the lady that lectured Mammy about our house, my clothes, and my haircut? She was just so different, so much nicer, I thought to myself. After the hug she rustled up my hair and we walked back towards the town. The east sky was a darker blue now, and when I looked out towards the sea the sky was a light orange towards the low sun. Viewing the town from the East End was different to watching it from the West End by Clifton House.

From here, I could see the sea wall in its entirety, holding up the town.

I searched for the sandy beach beneath the wall hoping that we could walk along it on the way home, only to see that it was covered by high tide. The tired waves fell at the end of their journey to land, almost reaching the sandstone wall. When we reached the Strand Line once again, Aunt Carol held my left and said “jump,” signalling that I should leap onto the brown sea wall. I walked on it the whole way back to Clifton House, never letting go of her hand.

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John Hinde’s postcard design of view of Kilkee from the East End. circa 1960.
It's milling rain again. I haven't got out of bed yet. I can hear it pelting off the tiles in the roof above me. I slept on the top bunk last night. I forgot that I hadn't redressed my bed, and by the time I came home from Senan's last night I wasn't bothered. I am on my own in the house today. Mam is at work in the shop and Dad said he was visiting Gran's in Quilty. I open my eyes and the room is still dark; too dark to be morning, you would think. There is a grey-blue light coming in through my rose patterned curtains that illuminate the room. So far the bleak light only allows me to define the surface of my wardrobe, my door and my desk. I see the silhouette of my books in the pile I had put them in after school yesterday, putting off my homework until today. I close my eyes and wonder if I could get back to sleep and avoid the day for another while, until I hear Scotty barking downstairs. It's a lost cause. He doesn't like the rain. I vaguely remember Mam asking me this morning to bring him for a 'good walk' today. It could have been a dream, but I should do it to be safe. What else would I be doing? I climb down the ladder, put on my dressing gown and go down the stairs. I open the kitchen door and the sound of the rain immediately amplifies from the big glass window in the kitchen. No wonder Scotty was barking, the racket was unbearable. I put on the kettle and bend down to give him a rub. We've had him coming up to a year now. We got him last Christmas. He had settled in nicely but needed to be walked regularly. He wasn't used to the cul-de-sac yet, and if he got onto the main road he would be knocked down. I don't know if I preferred walking with him during the summer season or now. During the summer there is barely room on the footpaths for walking your dog because all of the 'Limericks' come down here in the numbers they do. The weather is better than it is now, but that isn't just here. The whole country has the same weather. Would they not go to Lahinch where they can go surfing? Or Castlegregory where they can go waterskiing? All you can do here is go for walks and swim and go to the pub, and you can do that everywhere. I look out and all I see are the same things Mam saw when she grew up here; the same houses owned by the same families, the same empty pubs, the same people in the same shops. Nothing ever seems to change here... but the wall. I look at the wall in a way I haven't ever looked at it before. It has been the exact same since it was built when the Famine ended. It stands there, towering over the beach, holding up the town so it doesn't fall into the sea. But this February something changed. The east end of the wall fell down. It is no longer the same, and the town has closed off the ruins as if it were evidence of the end of town's immortality. But it isn't the end, it is just change. The wall had seen every storm, every summer, every full moon this town has had. It had seen the town through the turn of two centuries. It was there, just watching us. It seems that the destruction of the wall is an opportunity of a new chapter for the town. But for this place to see true reform we need to change what we know; move the shop to a new location, turn the pubs into café's and jazz clubs. We need to shake up the town. We need to embrace the change of the wall.

From here, I can see the sea wall in its entirety, holding up the town. The rain is falling diagonally with the gusts of wind coming in from the Atlantic. I am glad to be out of it. I look out at the town and shake my head. I wonder why the 'Limericks' come down here in the numbers they do. The weather is better than it is now, but that isn't just here. The whole country has the same weather. Would they not go to Lahinch where they can go surfing? Or Castlegregory where they can go waterskiing? All you can do here is go for walks and swim and go to the pub, and you can do that everywhere. I look out and all I see are the same things Mam saw when she grew up here; the same houses owned by the same families, the same empty pubs, the same people in the same shops. Nothing ever seems to change here... but the wall. I look at the wall in a way I haven't ever looked at it before. It has been the exact same since it was built when the Famine ended. It stands there, towering over the beach, holding up the town so it doesn't fall into the sea. But this February something changed. The east end of the wall fell down. It is no longer the same, and the town has closed off the ruins as if it were evidence of the end of town's immortality. But it isn't the end, it is just change. The wall had seen every storm, every summer, every full moon this town has had. It had seen the town through the turn of two centuries. It was there, just watching us. It seems that the destruction of the wall is an opportunity of a new chapter for the town. But for this place to see true reform we need to change what we know; move the shop to a new location, turn the pubs into café's and jazz clubs. We need to shake up the town. We need to embrace the change of the wall.

I put on my jacket and my runners and attached Scotty's leash. Both of us brace ourselves before I open the front door; neither of us wanting to get wet. When I pull the door open we look out and there are white sheets of rain falling right outside the porch. The world looks grey outside, almost like a backdrop from an old movie. I take the first step and Scotty steps into the puddle at our doorstep. We cross no-one as we walk towards town. I look up as we cross the road at the roundabout and there isn't a person in sight. The shop's lights are on, but the door is closed. We turn our fast walk into a light jog. Scotty is soaked to the skin at this stage. I can feel the water soaking up through my shoes. We go to the beach where I know there won't be any puddles for sure. I look up and out towards the sea. The horizon is blurred with moving waves and wind. It is very choppy by George's Head. 'Full of white horses', Dad would say. We walked the length of the beach towards the East End. We pass the part of the sea wall that fell down in the storm last February, and then we finally reach the end of the beach. As I climb the big steps that line this end of the beach, I avoid the puddles in the rough concrete surface. I think about how strange it is that people were sun-bathing here a few weeks ago. It seems too hostile, too inhabitable to ever want to sit here now. We arrive to the pier car park, (my shoes feel like drenched sponges by now) and sit under the viewing shelter. We need a break from battling through the weather.

Kilkee Today

17th November 2014

It's milling rain again. I haven't got out of bed yet. I can hear it pelting off the tiles in the roof above me. I slept on the top bunk last night. I forgot that I hadn't redressed my bed, and by the time I came home from Senan's last night I wasn't bothered. I am on my own in the house today. Mam is at work in the shop and Dad said he was visiting Gran's in Quilty. I open my eyes and the room is still dark; too dark to be morning, you would think. There is a grey-blue light coming in through my rose patterned curtains that illuminate the room. So far the bleak light only allows me to define the surface of my wardrobe, my door and my desk. I see the silhouette of my books in the pile I had put them in after school yesterday, putting off my homework until today. I close my eyes and wonder if I could get back to sleep and avoid the day for another while, until I hear Scotty barking downstairs. It's a lost cause. He doesn't like the rain. I vaguely remember Mam asking me this morning to bring him for a 'good walk' today. It could have been a dream, but I should do it to be safe. What else would I be doing? I climb down the ladder, put on my dressing gown and go down the stairs. I open the kitchen door and the sound of the rain immediately amplifies from the big glass window in the kitchen. No wonder Scotty was barking, the racket was unbearable. I put on the kettle and bend down to give him a rub. We've had him coming up to a year now. We got him last Christmas. He had settled in nicely but needed to be walked regularly. He wasn't used to the cul-de-sac yet, and if he got onto the main road he would be knocked down. I don't know if I preferred walking with him during the summer season or now. During the summer there is barely room on the footpaths for walking your dog because all of the 'Limericks' come down here in the numbers they do. The weather is better than it is now, but that isn't just here. The whole country has the same weather. Would they not go to Lahinch where they can go surfing? Or Castlegregory where they can go waterskiing? All you can do here is go for walks and swim and go to the pub, and you can do that everywhere. I look out and all I see are the same things Mam saw when she grew up here; the same houses owned by the same families, the same empty pubs, the same people in the same shops. Nothing ever seems to change here... but the wall. I look at the wall in a way I haven't ever looked at it before. It has been the exact same since it was built when the Famine ended. It stands there, towering over the beach, holding up the town so it doesn't fall into the sea. But this February something changed. The east end of the wall fell down. It is no longer the same, and the town has closed off the ruins as if it were evidence of the end of town's immortality. But it isn't the end, it is just change. The wall had seen every storm, every summer, every full moon this town has had. It had seen the town through the turn of two centuries. It was there, just watching us. It seems that the destruction of the wall is an opportunity of a new chapter for the town. But for this place to see true reform we need to change what we know; move the shop to a new location, turn the pubs into café's and jazz clubs. We need to shake up the town. We need to embrace the change of the wall.

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Leaving Kilkee

The above texts present two vastly different experiences of the same place, set in two different times, by different people. Kilkee has become the host of memories for these characters. For the character in the first text Kilkee will resonate as a place where he and his aunt shared the mutual joy of being on holiday, thus strengthening their relationship. In contrast for the character of the second text, Kilkee will resound in her memory as a place where she felt herself to be underappreciated and misunderstood. While the town is fashionable and well received by the boy on holidays in the first text, the latter story shows how living in an environment that does not fulfil the needs of the community (in this case, defining itself as a seasonal holiday town, rather than a full-time locale) can be oppressive. Both texts feature an account of the sea wall that dominates the strand line. It is what the young boy walks on top of to experience the vibrancy of the town, whereas in the second text, the wall personifies a seemingly permanent structure that had embodied the emphasis that history has in the town.

The second text makes reference to how the town has not changed over time. I believe that this reluctance to change is society’s attempt to preserve people’s memories, rather than to conserve the actual landscape. However, it is as though the hesitation to reconstruct or make any advances on the damaged wall she mentions has created a vacuum of time where people can for the first time realise the mortality of the wall. They are forced to ask the question “What if the wall wasn’t rebuilt the way it was before?”... And it gives them the opportunity to dream of something new. Questions like ‘why can’t her hometown be contemporary?’ and ‘why memories made in the future cannot be set in a contemporary place?’ give the character power. It gives today’s society the power to change the town.
Part Two

New Town Pery, Limerick

Limerick city is the fourth city of Ireland, located on the south-west of the country, at the Shannon estuary. The city is comprised of three historical towns; the Medieval Irish Town, and English Town, and the Georgian city known as New Town Pery. Today New Town Pery is seen as the commercial centre of the city. Since the recession in 2008, the city has seen the demise of the Georgian quarter with much of the city’s fabric empty, and edging closer to dereliction. People’s pride of the city dwells within the nostalgia they have for its history. The city’s public image has suffered in recent years due to gangland violence, and earned itself the infamous nickname ‘Stab City.’ This also adds to why the position of pride within its people lays in the city’s past. The name tarnished the pride of the present city. However, in 2014, Limerick city was awarded the title of Ireland’s first “National City of Culture” which was a government funded project that aimed to promote the arts, craft, and music through many projects at large and small scales. This was an opportunity for Limerick City and County Council to hold events in the city centre that would encourage the people of Limerick to occupy the city, and be part of the exciting new culture of the city. This initiative gave Limerick a platform to establish a positive identity nationally, and to instil pride of the present city within its people.

The city is at a moment of change. The city is growing; shops and cafes are opening, the third level colleges have announced plans to extend their campuses into the city, and since the City of Culture in 2014 there is a noticeable pride in the city as documented online (#LimerickandProud). While commerce, education and the minds of people are changing at a pace, I feel the architecture of the city is less inclined to change at such speed. For the architecture to reflect the positive growth of the city, it requires critical thinking of the past and of nostalgia. It is my understanding that while we used to rely on nostalgia of the city’s past to host some pride in the city, we have a new-found pride for the present. This is an era that gives us the opportunity to analyse how we inhabit with the city’s fabric, and how that could change for the #LimerickandProud generation and its future.

In this section I will be discussing our society’s understanding of conservation, and how this has an immediate effect on the architecture of the city. I will be analysing the Georgian typology and facade as found in Limerick city; its history, and our interaction with it at present. Finally, I will deliberate on how architecture can be a fundamental part of Limerick’s journey towards its positive future.
Conservation is defined as the "preservation or repair of archaeological, historical, or cultural sites and artefacts". While not immediately referenced, I would debate that architecture is in the vein of this definition. Conservation has become a term that means design restriction for architects. However I believe that it is us as a society that has made the word a restriction and limitation to possible design solutions. Conservation exists to protect the ideologies of the past, but what we have done is made it so that it protects the built remnants of the past, some of which are merely vernacular, aesthetical, and perhaps do not really represent the intelligence of its era. All the while it is restricting the possibilities design could offer it to become of use to our society. To be truly respectful of our ancestor’s, would we not edit their architecture to make it fulfil our needs of our society? By making it relevant to today, it gives the architecture a longer life-span. Is this not what conservation architecture should mean?

One of Limerick’s positive public images is “The Georgian City”. It has shown an attempt on a small scale to re-inhabit the Georgian buildings that are predominant on the city’s streets. Small businesses and creative spaces have moved into the once empty ground floors and basements. In doing this, the city strives to manifest a new image that would attract young creative professionals in search for a space to rent with cheap rates. Potential bars and cafes could create an ambience in the buildings with the character of old and new. To me, it seems like a fast and economically friendly way to improve the street life of the city. However, I cannot help but wonder if this will really be the catalyst to Limerick’s successful future. If this was a long term plan, could the city ever grow out of the Georgian grid that sustains its restraints and borders? If we were to objectively examine the Georgian city, I wonder what benefits it offers for the city’s future. I think the collective population of Limerick need to ask itself: is it more important to revive the historical built fabric for the sake of obstinate pride, or is the revival of Limerick city as a functioning metropolis of greater value?

This is not suggestive that we ignore the important role nostalgia has in society. Nostalgia gives people the opportunity to escape from the flaws of today, while reflecting on a positive time that they are no longer a part of. The problem this brings (and the initial thought which led this thesis) is that this tendency of feeling nostalgic, along with the growing stagnation of historic architecture, will result with an apprehension to dream and long for a future that’s better than the past. This is a condition of society that has brought parts of New Town Pery near dereliction.

I do not propose that we design an entirely new city, with a new archetype, infrastructure, and aesthetic. I believe we as architects have an obligation to be part of the architectural continuity of the city; one that objectifies urban strategies from the past and co-ordinates them to a contemporary urban solution. Nostalgia for the history of the city can prevail within intelligent contemporary architectural design.

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Conservation, not Protection.

The Power of Aesthetic

It seems relevant that I acknowledge the Georgian facade that we feel is intrinsic to the city’s image. When considering the iconic facade that border the rectangular city blocks, I wonder the possibilities of building behind it within the city block. However when one considers the facade of the single Georgian building in a terrace, I find a complication. The house’s facade may be designed as one in a terrace; however its singularity restricts the possibilities of threshold into something larger. The house facilitated a family, and therefore the scale of a Georgian door evokes an impression that one is entering the space of the singular, that once you pass through the entrance you are no longer in the city, but in a contained individual space with a rectilinear perimeter. It is therefore hard to suggest that a Georgian building can become the "front door" to a larger complex piece of city in the city block. Does this jest that when analysing architectural urban opportunities in this scenario, it is more appropriate to consider the Georgian terrace as one singular building, rather than individual buildings in a terrace?

New Town Pery may have been envisioned as a new city; however in its heyday it was considered a privileged suburb rather than the new city. This may have been because of its separation to the English Town which housed important civic buildings such as the courthouse, and St. Mary’s Cathedral. The grid of New Town Pery was not filled with the Georgian terraces as it may have been planned. As plots of land in the projected grids were sold, granaries and mill buildings were erected bringing industry to the new town. These buildings gave the anticipated red brick streets a new grey limestone aesthetic, representing a new function for the town, as well as a new scale of building in the grid. This is an example of how the ideal Georgian terrace had to conciliate with an industrial scale (mill building), one which was bigger than its own, and threatened the imagery of the street. These mill buildings were not part of the original aspirations of New Town Pery, but are credited as important culturally and historically to the city’s heritage. Does this suggest that we hold the Georgian typology in too high a regard, relative to the catalogue of building typologies the city holds?

The Georgian facade dominates much of the streets of New Town Pery, and because the aesthetic has lasted so long, it has become hard for a citizen to imagine how the city could move on from this rigid vernacular. The National City of Culture gave Limerick City and County Council the opportunity to engage with the city's thirst for artistic expression. One notable project that went ahead included large scale commissioned street art appearing on the gable walls of buildings throughout the city. To support an art form that is usually attached with negative connotations may have been a brave move by the council, however these pieces of art were well received by the media and the public throughout the summer. They have perhaps opened the minds of citizens to a new chapter for the city. It is as if this artistic movement was an introduction for a new cultural image to Limerick city. By radically interrupting the aesthetic of the Georgian facade, it is as though Limerick people could now claim a contemporary ownership to the city’s streets. They no longer belong to the Georgian heritage.
I want to end this thesis comparing the maps of Limerick and Kilkee that I have made during this research (seen on previous page). On the top left of the first image, we see the projective map of New Town Pery, as drawn in 1769, followed by the right image which depicts how the city came to be in 2014. The two show similarities, but also we see that in the 2014 map, far less public spaces that interrupts the grid exists than the 1769 map shows. Similarly, on the left of the second image we see a map of Kilkee’s development in the nineteenth century, followed by a map of the town’s development in the twentieth century. The latter map shows almost no public space developed, while the town grew in size. These studies show that our ancestors were much better at building civic space, shared by among the people of the town/city than we have been in the last century. This brings me to think that we need to rethink our contemporary cities and towns; do they offer us a quality shared space? It is in the public realm where memories are made; where places become timeless. Therefore the future of contemporary architecture depends on the development of public space. Furthermore, I believe it is fundamental that we as architects consider the historic development of a place when designing its future. I believe this is a technique that absolutely will reassure the sense of belonging and relevance that a contemporary development will have on its landscape.

Kilkee and Limerick city have both played key roles in my education and understanding of architecture. While they are both vastly different, there are great parallels between the two that have formed this thesis that strives to communicate the complication with designing contemporary architecture in the Irish landscape. Both sites are at a time of change. Kilkee’s sea wall falling could equate as the street art movement in Limerick, both bringing people to imagine more than what has been in the past, and longing for a better future. Social history is immersed in the vestiges of our cities and towns all over our country, and there is a fear of losing this history. I believe that this fear no longer can be the reason for dereliction and disuse. We must start to believe that design is the collaboration between our history and our future, and that this post-nostalgic movement is one in which we must invest in today.

Conclusion
Bibliography

Throughout the first semester I found it helpful for myself to translate the ideas I was writing about into projective collages. These illustrated the tensions our cities and landscape had between mediating its historic architecture to the contemporary expectations of our society has today. While these images appear playful, I believe they are addressing a serious theme and makes one wonder what we expect of these environments in these scenarios.

Satirical Imagery

How does Limerick’s “Crescent” respond to the society's expectations of the city?

How can the roads of west Clare keep up with demand of “Wild Atlantic Way”??
Georgian house, Upper Harstonge street, treated like cathedral.

What opportunities lay behind the protected Georgian facade?

What would Edmund Sexton Pery of 1769 plan for Limerick in 2015?
After researching the two sites through the thesis writing, two possible briefs became very apparent, but both with the same approach to an example of historic architecture. I decided to continue the thesis by having the design project based on the sea wall in Kilkee. The brief was apparent: to develop a public space at the East End of the beach (namely where the sea wall was mostly damaged). The public space should give this part of the beach an identity, give access from the street to the beach, allow for the everyday activity that the beach provides already to the summer population, and lastly to project a new use of the wall that would be of use to the 1,100 permanent population.

The architecture of the project must be a contribution from our generation to the existing sea wall. While the project must cater for the needs of today’s society, it must acknowledge the integrity of the existing wall, and work with it. It must be part of the architectural continuity of the town.

I began by surveying the existing sea wall, and recording the ways in which it had been constructed. I began to realise that the wall while originally built stacked local sandstone, the wall has had numerous layers of reconstruction at a small scale since its conception.
In the accompanying maps of Kilkee we see growth and suburbanisation of the town from 1900 (top) to 2015 (bottom). However the public space shown in dark grey developped on the edge of the horseshoe bay in the top image does not continue with the growth of the town in the bottom image. This shows that while the town grew in size, the town is still very much centred on the edge between land and sea.

The site for my project is highlighted in the dark grey colour in the bottom map, on the East End of the beach. The shape of the site is left over green space that is lined by a busy road junction that splays towards the East Cliff of George's Head, to the town Centre, to the Kilrush Road, to the north coast road to Dunbeg.

It is my view that due to the busy road junction, this end of the beach has suffered from under-development unlike other parts of the beach that joins the urbanity of the town to the sandy beach seamlessly.
In the accompanying images I overlayed family photographs that were taken on Kilkee beach. The images how four generations of different peoples memories can be blurred together to create a single composition that shows a single memory of a place. In the foreground of each image are the people, and with that the activity they are doing, (making sandcastles, windsurfing, going for a walk, horseback riding, sun bathing, swimming, picnics etc), and in the background you can see layers of horizon overlayed (sand/sea/sky, sand/wall/town/sky).

What became apparent from this exercise was that these activities will forever be the foreground to my project. The architecture will simply be in the background of the memory, blurred into the horizon, like the wall, like the sea.
The site plan to the left shows how the project became a series of walls, kinking with geometries of the town around the existing sea wall which curves with the horseshoe shaped bay.

If one was to approach the project from the south (from the town centre on street level), the foot path condition (which is currently inbetween the existing sea wall on the left, and a one-way road on the right) meets a junction where the wall breaks and can ramp down into large concrete steps below the sea wall, or the pedestrian could continue passed this junction where the footpath condition changes. As it ramps up slightly, a low sandstone wall borders the pavement on either side. On the left, you have the familiar view of the bay and down to the beach, and on the right your view is no longer edged with traffic, but people traffic. A prominade mediates the edge between the busy road junction and the beach, making this a much more accessible part of the beach.

On the right of the wall, the prominade includes a series of slow concrete ramps and small steps to allow for the contour change of the site. With this, there are sunken open-air handball courts (shown in the dark grey), long communal eating and cooking areas, and also a green area, sheltered by short walls, for camping which is an activity that occurs on the site today.

On the left of the wall, the beach is met with predominantly sandstone construction to continue existing material condition the old wall provides to the beach. These two metre high walls from the beach make baths that will fill at high tide, creating a safe environment for children to swim at high tide. Behind the baths is a sandstone surfaced pavement that is intended to be a changing or sunbathing area for the users of the baths. This level continues into the existing concrete stepped context beyond the immediate site. This level will bring you to the end of the bay, to the 1989 insitu concrete pier.
This plan is an aerial view of the project. From here you can see the contemporary continuation of the exiting foot path that interrupts the cross sections dividing the urban promenade to the beach. The foot path becomes the space that interacts with both of these conditions.

The foot path ramps slightly higher than the existing and leads you to an entrance of the community hall. A room that opens south towards the town. Walking passed the community hall, the path begins to overlook the sunken handball courts that are concealed from the beach, and have the opportunity to act as performance spaces, as much as they were intended for sport, they were intended to be outside rooms that can be viewed like stages.
Beneath the new foot bath are rooms within a wall that act as the junction between the urban and maritime environments, both equally belonging to the public but used in different ways. The rooms under the foot path amenities such as wash rooms for the campers, or indeed the swimmers, public toilets, and a series of ramps that connect the sunken handball courts to the sea water baths, and the upper promenade level above.

This plan on the left cuts through the handball courts and the rooms beneath the foot path. This plan shows the strategy in its beach context, as opposed to the previous plan which addressed the project in its urban context. The project intentionally knots these two contexts to make spaces of tensions. Here are the spaces that memories occur.
This cross section cuts the proposed sea water baths, and the existing concrete steps that are currently used as picnic areas. The material of this section again shows the sandstone being at the beach front and the water front. Reasons for this were to continue the current material palette that the beach has, but also because this local sandstone is a good retainer of heat, making it dry fast from rainfall and high tide, and also makes a softer surface to sit on.

This cross section cuts through the proposed community hall that opens towards the water, and the raised foot path above the sunken handball courts. Although the building could be read as a large volume at first, it was my intention that there would be an element of transparency so that people from the outside could see into the activity inside the community hall, but also see through it towards the sea and town.

This cross section cuts through my proposed concrete steps that are a gesture to the existing ones on the far side of the baths, while also acting as a further protection of the town from the sea. Beyond the sea front are small steps that complement the existing contour of the site towards the road junction, and here are urban facilities like long concrete picnic benches, barbecue areas, benches, and bicycle parks.
This is an image of the splayed staircase that runs from the road side, through the handball courts, under the foot path, and down towards the beach facing directly east, catching West Clare’s famous sun sets.
This is a detail section of an example of the sandstone wall. Cutting through the wall of the wash rooms that face the beach, it shows how the material of the sandstone wall ties into the concrete slab, how the concrete lintel frames the long window and casts into a long link. All the while the wall acts as a seat at the level of the baths, and as the handrail at the foot path level above the wash rooms.
In this image I projected how I perceive the memories that will be made in my project would be recorded. Photo albums and postcards are mediums that I interacted with in this thesis, as they were how memories of this place have been recorded in the past. I felt to conclude the part of my project, and Instagrammed image of someone using the spaces in my project was necessary.
In these three images I am trying to evoke the different perceived images of picturesque for Kilkee throughout generations. The photo on the top was taken circa 1900, the middle image is a John Hinde postcard taken 1960, and the bottom image is my own. Its a depiction of a person from Kilkee, experiencing the place during the off peak season. My project in the background, gives the sea wall a contemporary use, and a new visual. One that represents activity and ownership among the locals.

I believe the question of determining the contemporary picturesque of this place is one that has driven the project to work with these ever changing conditions. Like the tide, the weather, the seasons, the population, and the people, perception of the architecture is in constant motion.