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Fig 1.1
Class of 2015
Table of Contents

Introduction ________ 5
Fez Case Study: Responding to Present Needs with Present Ability ________ 6
Cultural Hybridity ________ 8
The Loss of Public Self ________ 9
Overlapping Space & The Virtues of Sharing ________ 10
Shannon Case Study: A Global Suburb ________ 12
Social Meandering ________ 14
Conclusion ________ 15
Shannon Mapping ________ 16
Primer Studies ________ 18
Site / Intent ________ 20
Early Work ________ 22
Project Description ________ 30
Design Development ________ 32
Bibliography ________ 62

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Introduction

As Tony Judt has observed, we are unwittingly veering towards a society of "gated individuals who do not know how to share public space to common advantage". With a rising tendency towards the privatisation of space and social life in the recent history of the city, an erosion of the public sphere has inevitably materialised. This loss of public life and in turn the public self have put the sustainability of Oldenburg’s “third places” in jeopardy; informal social spaces which situate themselves between the home place, workplace and marketplace, promoting interaction between different city users - unlike the relations produced by “non-places”, which encourage relationships between individuals based purely in utilitarian terms. In other words, we are forgetting how to use public space and are finding new ways to shield ourselves from otherness in a rapidly diversifying environment. This thinning sense of civic engagement is something which architecture and public space must address, but the question remains - how do we shift from a society which places such great importance and value on the individual?

Influenced by the conflict and contestation between different individual’s and groups in space, a more inward expression of identity is materialising. Expression indoors and in the private sphere has replaced an outward advertisement of difference, as though this disorder might threaten the notion of what we share in common - a potential threat to this coherent identity which we seem to have mutually agreed upon. But to deny the possible triumphs of these new challenges out of fear that tradition and identity may be corrupted, simply signifies the frailty of such notions of communal bonds as they currently exist. The public realm represents a prime site for the reconciliation between self and society, because it may be characterised as “the space, physical, and virtual, where social groups seek to construct identities... a place that is only possible through a conflict and a lack of essential identity, or a place where we act together without being the same, in the company of strangers”. It is an arena in which identity and co-existence is tested; how we define ourselves and our places without denying otherness.

How does architecture and public space influence integration between a number of different identities which exist in tandem? These are networks of people and processes which are hidden from one another, yet occupying the same space. Although the space doesn’t change, the meaning of this environment is totally different depending on the particular city client or group. Architecture and public space must act as a promoter of social interaction, as well as a host for different cultural identities, which should not merely exist side by side, hidden. It is in the overlap and hybridity of culture and experience, that the rich diversity of urban experience finds its roots.

The idea that our real physical, conditions both reflect and influence our social conditions is critical, to some of the arguments put forward by this thesis investigation. If the nature of public space is informed by changes in the structure of an urban society, I am arguing that a structural change in the way public space operates can re-inform and bring change to the society itself - a search for some sort of approach to place-making, which is not inspired by an aesthetic or image which becomes a hollow caricature of place, but rather a direct response to very local, and specific conditions which may begin to form a sort of authenticity of response.

While the thesis searches for meaning in the sharing and hosting of different identities, and the reflection of this in spatial terms, there is a desire to simultaneously find and articulate its own material expression related to the context of condition, time and place. Focusing on support, cultural diversity and integration, it is argued that all members of a given society be they local, or foreign, active or passive, should be afforded an interaction and engagement with people and place, through a spatially reflected, culturally open, collective society, which finds its meaning in the communal sharing of space and resources. Through the criteria which Oldenburg puts forward for spaces of collective engagement in the public realm, these spaces of contestation and rich potential must be re-examined with these social, and spatial, goals in mind.

Fez Case Study

Responding to Present Needs with Present Ability

In developing thoughts about identity and place, I have become magnetised towards the historic medina of Fez as a site of reference: a place which had perhaps the most profound impact on the way I think about people and places. If this fundamental relationship between space and society truly exists, how does a culture so far removed from Western thought form space differently? And in what way does architecture spatialise the local, values, traditions and beliefs? In order to investigate the relationship between the structural logic of the premodern Arab-Muslim city (medina), and the social, political and environmental context in which it originated, it is important to think about this architecture from within the culture that produced it.

At first sight, I was perplexed by this radically different visual and spatial environment. Fez is formed as a construct of walls which are divorced from elevations and facades so to speak. They demonstrate a completely inverted attitude towards the articulation of space, and the hierarchy of importance through such articulation. There are no “streets” in the Western understanding of the word, but rather passages through this dense grain which are the width needed for two donkeys to pass each other at one time. These are all interconnected in a labyrinthian maze where the structures forming stalls are simultaneously in conversation with an inside facing one side and an outside on the other; the direction of the grain is vague. Equally exciting is the vast scale of homogeneity in this urban environment - why are these buildings so coherent in their expression? Does this in one way symbolise a greater importance placed on collectivity rather than individuality?

While considering the medina of Fez in terms of Moroccan geography, it is here perhaps more useful to consider it at a different scale. This type of urban morphology was widespread throughout North Africa between the years 1400-1800 A.D., the common denominator being that these were all Islamic cities, which rigidly upheld the laws of Islam. In his study of Fez, author Simon O’Meara describes The Book of Walls: a part of Sunni Islamic law, which was based on gathered court records and opinions focusing on the Arab-Muslim architectural environment - a prescriptive outline to which the medina’s spaces were expected to conform. While the Book of Walls “established a legal, aesthetic by which medieval and premodern urban Arab-Muslim space was, in part, maintained and reproduced”, this document was to be seen as still being negotiable according to local needs and conditions - ones which account for the smaller regional differences between the Islamic medinas. Unlike the fortified urban complexes, or “ksur” of the Tafilelt region where pisé, mud brick and palm tree were still most commonly used, houses of Fez were commonly noted for their height of between 3-4 stories, often surrounded by a belvedere, or “menzeh”. Here unlike in the “ksur”, the architecture employed stone, brick and cedar as its main building materials - rulings which would have been applied legally based on the original discourse the Book of Walls presented.

Although these ancient rulings dictated much of these urban environments, it was a combined response to faith as well as real conditions of place which dictated the final outcome of such an architecture - a spatial reflection of this particular society. According to Islamic thought, the whole world is divided into different “houses”, such as the “House of Islam”, where Islam is practiced, and the “House of War” where it is not. The appropriating of one basic core element for different uses finds a reflection in this thought - the walled enclosure around a courtyard (“dar”) is repeated and multiplied throughout this cellular structure of the ancient city, a translation of Islamic thought into spatial form. Similarly, the wall becomes a tool to architecturally enact religious sentiments of segregation, veiling, and allowing or blocking vision; a parallel perhaps to the expression of these ideals in other forms, such as the veiling of women in their attitude towards clothing. The entirety of Fez’s built environment is based on the architectural embodiment of shame - the wall, representing separation and promise, and physically supporting the interiority which is prescribed by faith.

“[The walls of the medina] steer our changes of place; enclose, de-limit, and protect our activities, objects, and tools; receive us and make us pass from one location to another. They separate us and structure the architectural space, and by way of this they allow us to dwell”

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4. [ibid] 44
5. [ibid] 2
6. [ibid] 2
Despite being driven primarily by religious sensibility, the local typology of the inward-looking courtyard house also grows from very tangible problems associated with place. The actual dimensions of the street environment are informed by protection from the sun as well as what materials and processes are locally available or viable. Here an authentic response is based on the most effective methods of dealing with local forces, be they cultural, political, environmental, or otherwise. Fez shows how through space and architecture, the structure of a specific society has been expressed. It is a place in which image and aesthetic are very much discarded, replaced by these direct responses. The spaces of Fez have a direct relationship with the Islamic culture in which they are grounded and reflect the behaviours of people through the behaviour of space. In order to question the nature of architectural response to place, I want to compare this very real expression of place and condition with a virtual one; the city as described by Koolhaas in The Generic City:

“The Generic City breaks with this destructive cycle of dependency; it is nothing but a reflection of present need and present ability. It is the city without history. It is big enough for everybody. It is easy. It does not need maintenance. If it gets too small it just expands. If it gets old it just self-destructs and renews. It is equally exciting – or unexciting everywhere.”

There is a certain sense of liberation in the way Koolhaas describes this new form of city, a “post city” – one in which history is removed, and when something does not work it is simply destroyed and something is built in its place. It is a city of the present, not of the past or future. Fez in contrast has since 1981 been listed as a UNESCO world heritage site, a response to the decay of the medina after colonisation. The fact that the medina survived the forces of modernisation and industrialisation made a strong case for the legitimacy of this urban system – one in which the desire for urbanism by its inhabitants has kept it relevant. Physically however, it is danger of becoming a museum of past efforts – the fact that it is still actively populated gives it some legitimacy, despite its disregard of new technology and possibilities in favour of conserving the existing character and traditions about building. Ironically, the idea of conservation seems to align more with the way in which the medina inhabitants previously kept their city alive and current. If as Koolhaas writes, authenticity can only come through our engagement with “present need” and “present ability” and the layering of this over time, then perhaps the generic city speaks more of the dispersal of culture which we confront today – a perhaps more valid recognition of our collective efforts to achieve connectivity.


Cultural Hybridity

The implications of diversity however, need not have such dystopian connotations; cultural hybrids have always existed, and it is exciting to see what the overlap of very different cultures can teach us. We must also simultaneously accept that people are mobile, and place is (relatively) static. We are, and always have been, a differentiated group of nomads. While a built construct can deal with specific physical conditions, people can only be so connected to place, and it is always within the context of time. Just as once the region known as the “Sudetenland” was the home of ethnic Germans who had spread into neighbouring regions along the country’s eastern periphery, the territory now belongs to the The Czech Republic and a number of years previously, Czechoslovakia. These regions in themselves would not have been recognised as countries a few hundred years prior, but rather provinces: smaller regions of claimed ownership on land, themselves with ties to varying empires and states.

Such cultural hybrids exist at both the scale of the town and the metropolis. The part of Manhattan which became my home one summer is an area in Washington Heights in which almost no English is spoken - one made up of 73% Dominicans. Street life here relates more to Dominican customs, with the street becoming a form of living room to the overspilling life within the dense apartment blocks; people sit, chat and play board games in front of the small, locally owned fruit & veg. stores which line the street. They watch their young children turn the fire hydrants into a kind of play space, while the rhythms of Latin American music continue to reverberate late into the night. Street life is comprised merely of watching other people go about their daily life. The people who have made this their home are different than those here 50 years previously, the streets of Manhattan mapping and remembering these changes of cultural dominance and ownership - a city which acts as a model of the world in miniature. Similarly in an Irish context, the town of Gort, Co.Galway was recently transformed from a “sleepy little West of Ireland market town” into one which is now one third Brazilian.

“Outside of Brazil you can’t see a situation like you see here in Gort. We are so far away from home, but we feel at home because of the environment that we created in this town especially in Gort. Here is a little Brazil. We are in Brazil. Welcome to Brazil!”

The workers here mostly originate from the city of Anápolis, coming to Ireland to earn money working in some of the meat-processing plants in Gort. Most of these workers say that it is the people they are leaving behind rather than the place which makes it so difficult. It is no surprise then that it is through people, that a new microcosm of Brazilian life occurs here; identity and culture transfers itself through the people, before they try and project this culture into space. The Brazilian community in Gort now holds their own carnival each summer, and mass is said in Portuguese for the Brazilian Catholic community. Despite diversity here offering new types of experience from an entirely different part of the world, it is an example of how at a global scale, such relations can benefit everybody; the workers from Anápolis and São Paulo can earn enough money to return to Brazil and be self-sustainable, opening their own businesses. In parts of Anápolis, it is Irish money which is keeping this area from total collapse.

While traces of human habitation may remain, the geographical, borders of culture are constantly changing, and have always been; constructing identity within space has been a constant in the story of our movements, evolution and efforts towards placemaking.

9. Little Brazil, Gort, Ireland. RTE 2006, Documentary Film
10. [ibid.]
While the Polish community, as Ireland’s predominant immigrant population, seem to easily immerse themselves in all aspects of Irish life, others are less successful. Polish children for example, are now active participants in GAA at an underage level, and enjoy public life and public space in a visible way.

While Ireland symbolised an English-speaking country with favourable economic opportunities and a relatively large existing community of Polish people, it does not offer any answer as to why the adoption and integration of a culture could come so much easier to them than perhaps the Chinese population in parts of Ireland, who are arguably quite hidden and inwardly focused, in the way their interactions and engagement with society plays itself out in the public realm, and the extent to which they are able to adapt to our culture. The spatial articulation and translation of culture recognises universality as its greatest challenge – can we design spaces that allow for both interaction and anonymity, and the freedom in-between?

A part of the challenge of re-instating the public self lies in creating such a pluralistic vision of society and community through architecture. While public space is the prime site where such shared subjective experience can find its place, spaces of informal public life are rapidly being replaced by “non-places” - generic spaces of transience such as the motorway, hotel room or airport, which do not hold enough significance or emotional value to be regarded as “places”. While these “non-places” are rapidly appearing, urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg argues that the absence of informal public life stems from the privatisation of home life, something which public space should balance out. The author vocalises concerns about the sustainability of what he terms “thirdplaces” - neutral places in which we are neither hosts nor guests. These are places which are not work or home environments, but instead act as informal, communal places where civil society and democratic engagement between people can occur. While the Polish community, as Ireland’s predominant immigrant population, seem to easily immerse themselves in all aspects of Irish life, others are less successful. Polish children for example, are now active participants in GAA at an underage level, and enjoy public life and public space in a visible way. While Ireland symbolised an English-speaking country with favourable economic opportunities and a relatively large existing community of Polish people, it does not offer any answer as to why the adoption and integration of a culture could come so much easier to them than perhaps the Chinese population in parts of Ireland, who are arguably quite hidden and inwardly focused, in the way their interactions and engagement with society plays itself out in the public realm, and the extent to which they are able to adapt to our culture. The spatial articulation and translation of culture recognises universality as its greatest challenge – can we design spaces that allow for both interaction and anonymity, and the freedom in-between?

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Obligation to be there but can choose to come and go freely. Critical to Oldenburg’s description is how thirdplaces value this projection of the individual into shared space, while also providing a sort of rootedness and grounding in this Heideggerian sense of “dwelling”.

Oldenburg outlines a set of conditions for thirdplace to be able to occur. Firstly, barriers to entry must be relatively low whether financially or physically. Secondly, they must enable chance encounters which may become habitual over time in a welcoming and comfortable environment. Lastly, these environments should involve regulars as well as passers-by. These free, publicly accessible and open spaces aim to encourage a diversity in terms of inhabitants, as well as the development of cross-cutting networks and relationships. This form of civil integration is as Dr. Steven Vertovec has described, “the acquisitional and routinisation of everyday practices for getting on with others in the inherently fleeting encounters that comprise city life”.

In an age in which technology and social media are revolutionising social relations, can there still be a relevance to public space today? Could our new virtual connectivity be endangering our physical spaces? Technology has the ability to both segregate and integrate civil relations, for as Kumar and Makarova have observed, our smartphones and tablets, “...allow us to carry our private worlds with us into public spaces. We are cocooned from the environment of other people by this almost solipsistic technology. We might be walking side by side with a companion, and we might be talking. But we are not talking to each other, not conversing. We are holding separate conversations on our mobile phones with other people who are not here in bodily presence but in remote or virtual space”.

In his categorisation of different social ties, Ferdinand Tönnies proposed the dichotomy of Gemeinschaft versus Gesellschaft. While community life (gemeinschaft) represented emotional and ties between people, group life, or society as it translates (gesellschaft), was based on emotionally neutral, shared tasks. As Sennett has noticed however, such a limited polarisation of social ties cannot apply describe the complex nature of community solidarity, where people often frame for themselves a belief in social cohesion when their actual social experience is quite different. The myth of community here is merely another way to retreat from disorder, something which is supported by abundance in times of great social change and dislocation. In a diversifying environment, the notion of ‘community’ is threatened, and the need arises to represent it in the form of an image, a projected sense of homogeneity in the members of such a group. While abundance enables this separation from ‘otherness’ in real physical space, it simultaneously corrupts a sense of diversity. Sennett’s observation poses a fundamental question to how we occupy space: if ‘community’ today is in many cases based on what we have in common, how can it be fashioned and sustained when inhabitants of today’s city are so different? Rather than basing ‘community’ upon shared values and beliefs, architecture should prompt a sense of togetherness which arises from communal sharing and support, something which throughout time has not only created a value for diversity, but also allowed social life to develop informally.

In the Irish farming community for example, the sharing of labour and resources traditionally played a key role in the formation of such bonds. As a form of support network, the various farmers would informally exchange information about the Common Market, different forecasts, and commodity prices in the local pub – something which was beneficial to the management of the farm. Individuals from different families with access to a particular set of tools would often perform particular duties for neighbouring farmers in return for help with a different task on the farm, or where there was no need, payment. This sense of shared labour, and ties between farming families remained a critical part of rural Irish life – one in which there has always been an inescapable ethos which values individual endeavour and shared hard work. The sharing of resources for mutual gain appears to be a more sustainable way of generating togetherness, without necessarily relying on always sharing values in common.

As Sennett has noted, when we do not have the monetary or financial means to separate different things, they are forced to overlap and create a kind of energy and diversity – something which is not only crucial to the experience of place but also to the social interaction it hosts. Describing lower midtown Manhattan, Sennett argues that this diversity and “great teeming chaos” evident in the city is important for us to be able to return from these patterns of individualism and social
isolation which society inflicts on itself by choice. This enormous vibrancy and diversity comes from the physical diversity in the city’s borders, where the overlap between areas generates these new relationships:

"The garment district of New York, for example, spills into a district of offices which spills into a district of elegant townhouses which spills finally into the great shopping areas around Fourteenth Street [...] This diversity was created in the history of New York because none of these areas of activity had enough power to control its own limits as a community. None of them was rich and centralized enough to wall itself off, and so each suffered the intrusion of others by necessity."  

The overlap and interdependence of different people and spaces provide a solid foundation not only for a rich urban experience, but one which also highlights the importance of architecture as a mediator between public and private worlds. This version of coexistence provides a social and cultural education for the individual, one which promotes the construction of a more collective society, based on the ethics of sharing and support materialising in space.

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19. [ibid.] 46

Fig 1.9
**Shannon Case Study**

**A Global Suburb**

In order to understand the politics behind urban form, and the social implications which this can have, we take a look at Shannon Town, Co.Clare. Shannon as a town is an interesting case-study for both architecture and sociology; as Ireland’s first and only new town, it has had to negotiate many facets of the problems that are discussed within this essay. It is a place with no history and no roots, which has “grown up as an appendage to the airport and the factories”20, and grappled with the issues of identity and social integration as a result of its built fabric.

As a modernist construction Shannon’s earliest estates and indeed their layout, within the larger context of the town took on a machine-like form in plan. Based on the radical 1929 Radburn Plan which was first implemented in New Jersey as a response to the automobile, the town was formed as “sectors” with fingers of green space in-between. The Radburn planning concept emphasised the maximum separation between pedestrians and traffic and according to its original planners, each neighbourhood was defined as the “population for which one elementary school is ordinarily required.”21 The built realisation of this concept however led to a town plan which by the time of Dr. Liam Ryan’s 1968 social survey had materialised into “three villages” separate from one another. A 40 acre distance was left for the development of a town centre between the two hills of Tullyglass and Tullyvarraga, which were designated as areas where the first housing schemes were built.

In search of some of the qualities which Rowe and Koetter associate with the traditional city, the plan of the town was in many parts based on density as a generator of this urban experience. This density in turn, supported a number of problematic conditions in the older estates. The estates were not dense enough to support the amenities and services the residents desired, and left many questioning why space had been compromised in such a way without any visible benefit. Similarly, the estates lacked any kind of mediation between what was public and private. This physical problem led to a social one – since spaces were not properly defined, they were not properly utilised, the space in between the estates becoming a “no-man’s Land” rather than the amenity the planners had envisioned.

Similarly, the sparse layout of relatively high-density “sectors” made social life virtually impossible without the car. Some complained that the design of the estates themselves led to a feeling of isolation, since people found it hard to orientate themselves and could not see the main point of the estate. The order of importance between the different parts of the estates was a similar issue to that of the delineation between public and private– there was no “main” point which was focal, but rather an equal spread which was counterintuitive to the natural way street-life developed in the Irish town. The physical isolation between the different parts of the town led to social isolation, and as many of the residents described, the layout of the town made meeting people through chance encounters a rare occurrence – this planned nature behind all aspects of life at Shannon has been another important influence on the sociology of Shannon according to Ryan.

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aspects of these processes within Shannon, Ryan’s survey noticed a very high frequency of moves between different houses in estates, which he thought must stem from the lack of connection and ownership residents felt towards their homes.23

The only engagement which Shannon’s inhabitants have had has been the appropriation of front and back gardens, which has been a rather internal act; in two of the earliest estates, the “Drives” and the “Parks”, the Radburn plan led to a disorientating condition where front and back were no longer clearly legible within these square gridded plans. Ryan describes how many used their back gardens as their main entrance, due to the front being an entire block’s walk away, and there being problems with the sizes of the paths and doorways leading to the house. Shannon however, has proved to be a rather resistive structure to the additions and subtractions which the traditional city had been founded on.

The lessons from Shannon’s planning tell us that physical segregation can lead to social isolation. When amenities and resources are divided neatly and spread across the land, the physical proximity between different aspects of daily life becomes overwhelming to any pedestrian; the often harsh environmental conditions force certain aspects of life indoors, while these aspects leave no opportunity for interaction between different people and different spaces. The car becomes central to a daily life which struggles to support public space and social relations, however this should come as no surprise; from the outset, the car determined almost every aspect of how this new town operated. Shannon seems at every scale to act as a route rather than a destination, an experiment in making place out of space. Similarly, the town tells a story of how a sense of ownership at any scale is important in creating a sense of place – an involvement between inhabitants and their space must exist if they are to become truly successful.

Fig 2.1 Graphic detailing by colour, the various residential typologies within and surrounding the town.

“The intriguing thing about amenities is that people do not want them to be built as amenities but built as something else and have them grow into amenities. People like to discover amenities; they do not like them handed on a plate”22

While the physical form of Shannon influenced a certain amount of social problems, the nature of Shannon as a town in which everything was planned also had a significant impact on its residents; the social survey describes how any effort made to engage with community affairs felt forced, and aware of it’s own effort, which meant that any club meetings and gatherings felt artificial. This was compounded by the fact that Shannon represented a monopoly in many ways; the Shannon Free Airport Development Company (SFADC) was responsible for the construction of the estates, meaning that the already transient population in Shannon had very little say in how they were formed. Similarly, Shannon developed a monopoly of two-storey terraced houses and choices for residents was further narrowed. As a result, residents’ estrangement from all aspects of these processes within Shannon, Ryan’s survey noticed a very high frequency of moves between different houses in estates, which he thought must stem from the lack of connection and ownership residents felt towards their homes.23

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23. [ibid.] 53
Social Meandering

Despite Koolhaas’ almost apocalyptic view of place in the globalised world there is, paradoxically, still a diversity of experience to be found in his description of The Generic City. The same stretch of city can be experienced in “five minutes or forty,” shared with anybody or nobody; the navigation of the space in-between takes on a new relevance. The spaces of movement in both our buildings and cities have a profound influence on how society operates. These connecting realms negotiate scales between public and private; they channel and organise our movement, shaping where life occurs and where it has the possibility to occur. While they have a responsibility towards the logistics of place, these spaces in-between are venues for collective life and must equally serve their social function. On the scale of towns and cities, this in-between space should be an open invitation for the common person to roam, explore and interact – a space which encourages a feeling of ownership towards it. Then we can truly use this space, not as the “Locomotive realm” Koolhaas previously described, but rather as an extension of how we live at home and in private, an extension and projection of our lives into a shared and collective environment, where our atomised society can attempt to forge a more collective way of inhabiting space.

Historically the street has adequately performed this task of hosting both public and private life. Spiro Kostof recognises that rather than being merely a device for efficient circulation, the street has always held an obligation to the social life of the city: “The only legitimacy of the street is as public space. Without it, there is no city.” This circulation space recognises for the most part that the movement of people and goods is a secondary function. In the traditional city, the richness of the street stems from overlaps; moments when a public space has been penetrated by a private scene or when a private area is opened up for exploration. In Fez, for example, the narrow streets in the medina serve not only as a space for movement; they are simultaneously marketplaces, football pitches, seating for the adjacent restaurants, and many other things; they see the street as alleviating the overspilling life on either side – a form of public relief valve. They are not a places which make travel efficient, but rather places where all people and things can collide; places which contrast the Corbusian city of speed with an older type of city, the city of meandering.

The importance of wandering is noted by Michel de Certeau, whose influential, and arguably utopian essay Walking in the City argues that this act of navigation has “its own rhetoric” - the city users create the city as they roam, each one adding their own line to an “urban text” which they themselves cannot read – a narrative on the subjective use of public space.

“...Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of these real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city.”

Our built environment must seek to recreate this fluidity which it has lost; a fluidity of movement between public and private which can substitute distinct boundaries with a series of thresholds: spaces which invite control from both private and public function and empower the city wanderer. The city of social meandering must use our movements to mediate this fragmented public realm with spaces for people, for as de Certeau has noted, it is “the spatial practices [which] in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life.”

26. (ibid)
27. (ibid) 96.
Conclusion

Does the physical, material form of society have an impact on the social form of society? Just as chemistry describes at different scales the relationship between individual and group in terms of the material universe, society is at a fundamental level, a large network of very tiny parts defined by the formation of groups and ties and the manner in which this happens. At the atomic scale of the individual, through the molecular scale of the family unit and the world of compounds and mixtures which symbolise the larger communities and social groups one can belong to, these spheres of interaction define all known possibilities despite stemming from the same basic core elements from which all else originates.

In every period of human history it has been a key feature of urban societies to divide individuals and households, using a range of semi-private, semi-public and public spaces connecting these groups of people. While the use of public space differs, the economic and social value of public space for the city is universally undeniable, regardless of culture. If architecture is truly about bringing people together as Hertzberger says, perhaps globalisation is something we ought to celebrate.

To believe that architecture can re-inform a society in which we have isolated ourselves from one another, we must simultaneously subscribe to the notion that it can act as a catalyst for change, something which not only reflects our current habits of using space, but also can establish spaces which begin to change our behaviour. By stimulating the spatial manifestation of society, we can shape and direct the way in which that very society operates in the future. Architecture therefore has the opportunity to design space as a frame for the social interaction within it, an experience of the public realm which emphasises spaces for people along the way. Formed around these collective experiences and moments, architecture must encourage the life of the individual to project into shared space, an extension of this arena which hosts their day-to-day life. Our work should not force collective life, but instead provide a rich seedbed from which it can grow.
**Shannon Mapping**

*Relationship between Space, Route & Social Interaction*

This early study focused on mapping and recording the movements of people through a given space, at different times of day. The aim was to record the different scenes of daily life, and create a graphic representing the routes which some of the residents here would take on a typical day. This would go on to inform an urban proposal for the same space.

On the left are two drawings showing the hustle and bustle when school finishes, recorded at 2.30pm, and 3.30pm. One can identify patterns such as the size of the different groups and clusters of people waiting together for children finishing their day in St. Tola’s primary school (top). One can track some of the walks home through the estate, which appeared and disappeared from view as they were being recorded and are drawn in such a manner, dotted.

Below, a mapping of St. Patrick’s Comprehensive Secondary School which finished around the time of the survey at 3.30pm. Here we can see the choreography of car movement opposite the school, as well as more people walking, and on general tasks, such as a shopping trip up to the town centre. The plan of the estates which I used for the survey is represented at the very bottom.

On the right are more personal studies; that of the Senior Citizen’s Centre and of Jim Purcell, a local resident who I interviewed. The routes shown (top) are Jim’s daily journeys, on walks or errands and sometimes leisurely trips along the marsh. The coloured routes below show the routes taken by the various members of the club, when they meet Tuesdays and Thursdays.
Following on from my earliest mappings and recorded interviews, I carried out 100 surveys from children between 4th and 6th class in St. Tolas’s National School, where they drew their personal route to school, and any extra information about the journey on aerial images I had prepared and printed. These were scanned (two samples above left) and traced to create overlays of all the individual routes. Each line represents one student, the colour represents method of travel, and the opacity was 1%. This meant that an overlay of routes travelled would begin to form a graphic representation about the intensity of use. The final results of this survey are shown (above, right) and describe the following:

- overall (grey)
- car (blue)
- bike (orange)
- walking (red)
Primer Studies

Shannon Urban Proposal: Overlaps & Fragmentation

In response to the studied habits and patterns of Shannon town, I proposed an urban strategy for how the estate would develop its own forms of local, low density public space, based on the thresholds between private and public space. The proposal is shown on the right, as a form of Nolli plan for Shannon Town. The lighter areas represent the more public moments, showing how small hacks and repurposed elements throughout the estate could gradually lead to some of these opportunities explored in the written thesis.

Two of the conceptual “hacks” in the estate were developed at 1:50 as foam and timber studies (below and opposite page) where the character of the space and nature of its connections from private to public were explored.

The large brown card model (opposite) represents the public space and inbetween moments of the estate with its large areas of private space removed. The model describes the local typology of gable walls fronting onto these “squares”, which are car park areas for groups of the houses. The more conceptual models explore further ideas about public and private space, both in the estate and more generally.
The project tries to translate a more collective idea about society and space through architecture, focusing on the relationship between individual and group in terms of both people and the built environment.

While I have argued that architecture and spatial conditions affect and steer social conditions, I believe we can use architecture as something which is both projective and reflective; our work should respond to habits, patterns and typologies which are existing and can be studied, but should also project a new form of collective society through its spatial relationships. I am predominantly interested in moments of gathering and informal social encounters which are facilitated by these new relationships - when the prescribed use becomes ‘hacked’ by social functions.

We need a form of planning whose theory is not driven by the abundance Sennett refers to, but one instead in which architecture is a stage for life, hosting accidental scenes, shared uses, and cross-cutting networks and relationships. At the cost of urbanity and social space, suburban development along the city’s periphery has become the most natural way business and economics drive spatial development. The project therefore must seek to find a social value for density and proximity. Here, it is not about moving from A to B as fast as possible, but the goal rather is to enable Heidegger’s “dwelling”, through the conditions of “thirdplace”.

The project situates itself within the historic Georgian Quarter of Limerick city, on the junction of O’Connell St. and Mallow St. - a point of entry to the city. On a larger scale, the lane-ways and leftover, derelict spaces inside the Georgian blocks are to become gradually stitched together as a pedestrian network, a second layer to the city which inhabits these laneways and interiors with public spaces of varying type and size. The project proposes a new typology for Limerick City which is about, laneways, public space, and the way in which we can begin to use these in-between moments.
Early Work
These early models try to the nature of Limerick’s Georgian grid, where the street is rarely offered an opportunity to penetrate the inside of the block. The models speak about very specific and controlled moments where one leaves the street and moves from outside to inside, as well as an initial conceptual model about a form of support structure, weaved inside one of these blocks.

On the right are some test models exploring massing, volume and movement within the block, which formed some of the earliest proposals for the project.
The design treats the three local orders of Georgian differently in terms of access. On the O’Connell St. Edge, the existing returns are removed, with extra storage given to the Georgians on basement level below the covered courtyards. These returns are replaced by Corten steel cores which open into the block interior. On the Hartstone St. and Mallow St. edges, existing returns which can be appropriated are used, with timber walkways being constructed over time.

All Mews walls which are of historic value and are usable in the next stage of the block’s life are kept, with some isolated pieces of walls removed on the O’Connell St. side (existing site shown in survey plan opposite). The two edges of the block with small derelict buildings are opened up to create a more intensified moment of entry and arrival. One can see the inhabited “study facade” of the library fronting Mallow St. where the public can see users working in the building while they can overlook the activity and life of the street. Once one passes underneath this threshold, the eye is immediately drawn up into this large world. A dialogue between different city users is envisioned, where people using the building can see and experience all the many other activities happening in the Information Exchange.

The aim for the design strategy is to examine what communal space really means, and to create these dynamic, collaborative relationships based on the visual and physical access and fluidity which the project provides. The individual therefore must be allowed to become a part of the public space - a space which encourages and reinforces the idea that one can be at home in the company of strangers.
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
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